



Explanation, and suggestions for standardized world definition.

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# Cannibalism in the Prehistoric American Southwest: Occurrence, Taphonomy, Explanation, and Suggestions for Standardized World Definition

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Intentionally-damaged human skeletal remains indicating cannibalism and/or violence have been found scattered on room floors and deposited in pits in more than 40 archeological sites in Arizona, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico. Most of the bone assemblages were in Anasazi sites. Using five standardized taphonomic criteria (perimortem cut marks, intentional breakage, burning, anvil/hammerstone abrasions, and many missing vertebrae), 32 assemblages meet our minimal requirement for proposing cannibalism. In the 32 cannibalized series, the minimal number of individuals (MNI) ranges from 1 to 35. The average MNI is 9.2 per site. The total MNI is 295. All ages and both sexes are represented. The earliest grouping of sites with evidence of cannibalism date around A.D. 900; the latest single site, A.D. 1700. The average date for the 32 sites is ca. A.D. 1100. Two proximate explanations involve social pathology and/or Mesoamerican influence. Prehistoric Southwest cannibalism has been explained by starvation (3 sites), social pathology (several sites), and recently, as a violent form of institutionalized social control associated with the post-A.D. 900 rise of the highly complex Chacoan social and religious center in New Mexico, its regional road system, and the linked outlier multi-storied Great House communities that were built elsewhere in New Mexico and also in Colorado, Arizona, and Utah. There is no identifiable direct connection with cannibalism in Mexico. When considered with the sites evidencing extensive violence, Southwest cannibalism appears to be part of a socially-pathological and chaotic development that began in the Anasazi area, possibly triggered by Mesoamerican influences such as Mexican traders.

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