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Contextualizing Death and Trauma at Canyon del Muerto

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Contextualizing Death and Trauma at Canyon del Muerto

Abstract
This poster explores how human taphonomy offers insight to understanding the structural violence that impacted the discovery, recovery, and analysis of human remains from sites within Canyon del Muerto, (400-1300AD). Also included in this analysis is a discussion of the temporal relationship of these sites juxtaposed with the rise and fall of the Mesa Verde and Chaco Canyon complexes focusing on the role of interpersonal violence, discussed through the analysis of death-related forces. These ideas are then presented within an examination of indirect forms of structural violence, which often mitigated the physical violence endured by this population.

Keywords
skeletal trauma, structural violence, American Southwest

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Contextualizing Death and Trauma at Canyon del Muerto

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ABSTRACT

While excavations on federal lands were becoming regulated other sites were still fair game. With the loss of del Muerto into the cabinets of museums and thusly into the annals of anthropological history, the work in del Muerto, conducted by those connected with the AMNH, ceased as did any real focus on the materials collected and the deep-rooted connections of Puebloan culture to the region. In its broadest sense, this requires first an examination of the relationship of communities in Canyon del Muerto with those in the Chaco and Mesa Verde complexes. Clearly Canyon del Muerto presents a geographically important position in the Ancient Southwest. This also reflected through the direct analysis of death-related forces on skeletal remains to open the conversation unstudied, is needed to shed light on the temporal relationship of those living within del Muerto, juxtaposed with the rise and fall of the Mesa Verde and Chaco Canyon complexes. The role of interpersonal violence is a piece of Southwestern history is exposed. In its broadest sense, this requires first an examination of the Mesa Verde and Chaco Canyon complexes focusing on the role of interpersonal violence, discussed through the lens of sites currently unexplored such as those at Mesa Verde, which had become attractions to the larger public as well.

Excavations at Canyon del Muerto are conducted first in 1923, and then in 1925, 1926, and 1929, resulting in the assessment of over 11 sites from pre-basket maker into Pueblo III. In the June 3, 1927 Memorandum to the Director of Anthropology, Doctor Wissler writes: "...the skeletal collections resulting from this and previous seasons' excavations give the general idea of the population during each cultural stage..." A result, the Museum now possesses a unique series of archaeological collections for the San Juan Basin (Del Muerto is the center of this cultural area in its time), and our del Muerto collection is the largest in the Museum.

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INTRODUCTION

The loss of del Muerto into the cabinets of museums and thusly into the annals of anthropological history have resulted in the assessment of over 11 sites from pre-basket maker into Pueblo III. In the Summary Report, Del Muerto Project Season of 1926 Doctor Wissler writes: "...the skeletal collections resulting from this and previous seasons' excavations give the general idea of the population during each cultural stage..." A result, the Museum now possesses a unique series of archaeological collections for the San Juan Basin (Del Muerto is the center of this cultural area in its time), and our del Muerto collection is the largest in the Museum.

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THE AMERICAN SOUTHWEST

For the over 300 years the American Southwest has been explored, excavated, looted, and in the end constructed into bounded areas of public lands, reservations (government lands), and private allotments. From the mid-1800s as the field of archaeology evolved so did interest in this region, with different institutions (American Museum of Natural History, Carnegie Institute, and state agencies) to name a few as well as private interests for knowledge and funding. New explorers and archaeologists alike. The early 1800s saw a flurry of activity with expeditions looking for sites and putting their claims on lands throughout the area. But"discovery" became an unsolved rule and the more one "discovered" and organized to excavate the more authority and support the different teams of archaeologists were able to garner.

As larger sites and more artifacts were being excavated it became clear that while some were working towards the "preservation", "discovery", and "study" of the ancient past, others were coming to the Southwest for their own personal gains, resulting in the destruction of sites solely to extract artifacts and bodies. In response to this and in an effort to protect any "prehistoric ruin or monument, or any object of antiquity situated on lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States,..." the American Antiquities Act of 1896 was passed. This act added the concept of "treasure" to the list of sites the federal government had to control, thus in order to explore and excavate, permits would be required. But this national act was only a start and left larger federal agencies to control the land and thus those resources, and there nonetheless lacked a means of enforcement. In addition this new law seemed mostly to focus on large recognized sites by the federal government, thus in order to explore and excavate, permits would be required. But this national act was only a start and left larger federal agencies to control the land and thus those resources, and there nonetheless lacked a means of enforcement. In addition this new law seemed mostly to focus on large recognized sites by the federal government, thus in order to explore and excavate, permits would be required. But this national act was only a start and left larger federal agencies to control the land and thus those resources, and there nonetheless lacked a means of enforcement.

Legislating Archaeology - Structural (Indirect) Violence

While the American Antiquities Act of 1906 sought to preserve sites on federal land it was 25 year later that the state of Arizona decided to adopt its own legislative act. The Arizona Antiquities Act of 1932 (chapter 207 1932) expanded on the 1906 act to include Arizona state lands and to require that permits be acquired for the potential for artifacts, and in the end the time-commitment, and the expense of the procedures now in place. Doctor Wissler then recommends in "...confuse our work this season in the portion of Canyon de Chelly falling in New Mexico and the expedition of subsistence in that state..." This subsequently halted excavations in del Muerto for the 1927 season. While there was one more season of excavation, to be described in the Summary Report, Doctor Wissler lays out the limits of the catalogue entries comprising artifacts, human, and, supply remains. 1929 was the last season of any excavation or discussion of Canyon del Muerto as a place to further the discourse, which one can see is a most likely a direct result of the newly established Arizona Act: the Arizona Antiquities Act of 1927 (chapter 89 1931).

DISCUSSION - CONCLUSIONS

Much like Mesa Verde, the del Muerto sites are situated in defensive positions, hard to access without being seen. While not directly related to conflict. Pathologies present in the del Muerto skeletal samples included arthritis, and burned bones, onomatology, ankylizing spondylitis, sacrolilisit, and a number of individuals presented with the features of the sacroiliac joint on the right-side. Suggesting long lives, hard work, and possible genetic connections.

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I would like to acknowledge and thank my advisor Dr. Ryan Harrod, and the rest of the student that I went to the University of Indianapolis Archeology & Forensic Journal of Anthropological Research. Much like Mesa Verde, the del Muerto sites are situated in defensive positions, hard to access without being seen. While not directly related to conflict. Pathologies present in the del Muerto skeletal samples included arthritis, and burned bones, onomatology, ankylizing spondylitis, sacroliliisit, and a number of individuals presented with the features of the sacroiliac joint on the right-side. Suggesting long lives, hard work, and possible genetic connections.

CANYON DEL MUERTO

The human remains and artifacts excavated from within Canyon del Muerto still have a story to tell. The rest of this poster will explore our current examination of the human remains, excavated within sites found in del Muerto, curated since the 1920s at the AMNH, and now brought to light as evidence of the impact and complexity of the region, including relationships of life, violence, and death that can continue to add to the Puebloan peoples history, and a larger understanding of the life and times in the Ancient Southwest.