

Man Corn: Cannibalism and Violence in the Prehistoric American Southwest

By Christy G Turner II

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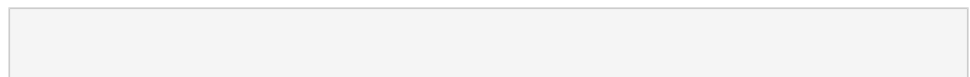
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This study of prehistoric violence, homicide, and cannibalism explodes the myth that the Anasazi and other Southwest Indians were simple, peaceful farmers.

Until quite recently, Southwest prehistory studies have largely missed or ignored evidence of violent competition. Christy and Jacqueline Turner's study of prehistoric violence, homicide, and cannibalism explodes the myth that the Anasazi and other Southwest Indians were simple, peaceful farmers. Using detailed osteological analyses and other lines of evidence the Turners show that warfare, violence, and their concomitant horrors were as common in the ancient Southwest as anywhere else in the world.

The special feature of this massively documented study is its multi-regional assessment of episodic human bones assemblages (scattered floor deposits or charnel pits) by taphonomic analysis, which considers what happens to bones from the time of death to the time of recovery. During the past thirty years, the authors and other analysts have identified a minimal perimortem taphonomic signature of burning, pot polishing, anvil abrasions, bone breakage, cut marks, and missing vertebrae that closely match the signatures of animal butchering and is frequently associated with additional evidence of violence. More than seventy-five archaeological sites containing several hundred individuals are carefully examined for the cannibalism signature. Because this signature has not been reported for any sites north of Mexico, other than those in the Southwest, the authors also present detailed comparisons with Mesoamerican skeletal collections where human sacrifice and cannibalism were known to have been practiced. The authors review several hypotheses for Southwest cannibalism: starvation, social pathology, and institutionalized violence and cannibalism. In the latter case, they present evidence for a potential Mexican connection and demonstrate that most of the known cannibalized series are located temporally and spatially near Chaco great houses.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

"The primal command," writes anthropologist Christy Turner, "is, do not eat people." Historically, cultures across the world have violated this prime directive, some regularly and without apparent afterthought, some only under harshest duress. Turner has uncovered what he considers to be incontrovertible evidence of human sacrifice and cannibalism in a part of the world once thought to have been free of such horrors: the American Southwest. There, Turner maintains, thousands of burned and broken human bones, sometimes buried en masse, have been uncovered, most in sites ranging from a thousand to a few hundred years old. In one such site, the Arizona village of Awatovi, dozens of suspected witches were massacred by their fellow Hopis; in another, the great mountaintop city of Mesa Verde, Colorado, several pits containing the remains of cannibalized murder victims have been excavated. Turner suggests that the great Anasazi city of Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, may have been a center of violent ritual and cannibalism, which helps explain why modern Indian residents of the region shun it as a place of bad medicine.

Turner and his coauthor, the late Jacqueline Turner, are careful not to conjecture too widely on the whys of prehistoric Southwestern cannibalism, perhaps having guessed that the whats and hows would be controversial enough--and their book, challenging received wisdom as it does, is sure to generate significant controversy among archaeologists working in the region. --*Gregory McNamee*

Review

"The Turners make their case convincingly and methodically, but not at the cost of producing an interesting and thought-provoking book. The renegade anthropologists have advanced a theory that has breathed life into a moribund debate, while producing a book absolutely worth reading even for those outside the field."—*San Francisco Bay Guardian*

"A fascinating theoretical glimpse into the collapse of a great civilization."—*Los Angeles Times*

"Sure to be one of the most controversial books on Southwestern archaeology of our generation."—*American Archaeology*

"A remarkable achievement, a joy to read, and a sobering learning experience. This book is one of the few that truly belong on the shelf of every Southwestern archaeologist."—*Kiva*

“The first detailed account of cannibalism and violence on a regional scale in the prehistoric American Southwest, especially in the Chaco Canyon area. It’s a shocker.”—*High Country News*

“A major contribution to understanding taphonomic signatures of human violence and cannibalism and to Southwestern prehistory. Debates over interpretation aside, the Turners’ legacy of objective reporting of the evidence will endure.”—*Journal of Anthropological Research*

“Presents solid research, with all the information required for critical independent testing by other scientists. An important book for southwestern and American archaeology. Presents significant scientific research that cannot fail to focus the factions of the ‘science wars’ on archaeology, and the relative values of data and discretion in archaeology’s search for truth.”—*The Journal of Arizona History*

“Both provocative and encyclopedic.”
—*Latin American Antiquity*

About the Author

Christy G. Turner II is regents’ professor in the Department of Anthropology at Arizona State University. The late Jacqueline A. Turner was a ranch manager in Dragoon, Arizona.

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