

Public Abstract

First Name:Lauren

Middle Name:Wislow

Last Name:Downs

Adviser's First Name:Christine

Adviser's Last Name:VanPool

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term:FS 2015

Department:Anthropology

Degree:MA

Title:Habitual Postures of the Medio Period Casas Grandes People: A Comparison of Visual Representations and Skeletal Markers

The Medio period (A.D. 1200—1475) Casas Grandes culture was a distinct cultural and religious system in northwest Mexico, southern Arizona, southern New Mexico, and western Texas. The economic and political center of this Casas Grandes region was Paquimé. One of the most distinctive forms to come out of the Medio period Casas Grandes ceramic tradition were human effigy vessels. These vessels exhibit primary and secondary sexual traits, and the males and the females are seated in different postures. The males are usually seated in a squatted position, whereas the females typically sit with their legs straight out. To see if these vessels reflected real-life habitual postures, Medio period skeletal remains from Paquimé were examined. Human bone is adaptable, meaning that it changes its morphology based on the loading regimes under which it is put. Habitual actions leave markers on the skeleton, and one such marker is squatting facets. These facets occur on the tibia and talus, and as the name suggests, are indicative of habitual squatting. Given the postures of the male ceramic vessels, it was expected that the male skeletal remains would have a higher frequency of squatting facets. This is not the case. Instead, the female remains have a significantly higher frequency of squatting facets. This is likely due to the posture assumed when grinding corn, a traditionally female activity. I suggest that the positions assumed by the ceramic vessels are the typical postures for social or ritual activities (not day-to-day activities), and that the ceramic effigy vessels represent specific individuals or specific subsets of the population. Iconography of the past is often difficult to interpret; this research provides a new methodology for interpreting prehistoric iconography by comparing iconographic depictions of humans to the habitual actions of their real-life counterparts.