

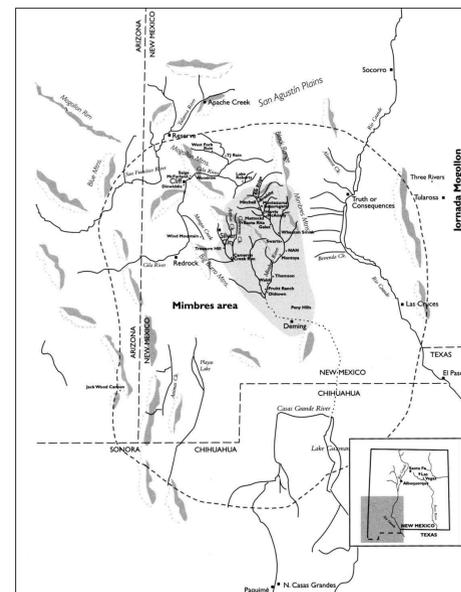
Mimbres Seated Burials: Indicators of Social Memory and Family Land Tenure

KATHRYN M. BAUSTIAN, MA and BARBARA J. ROTH, PhD
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

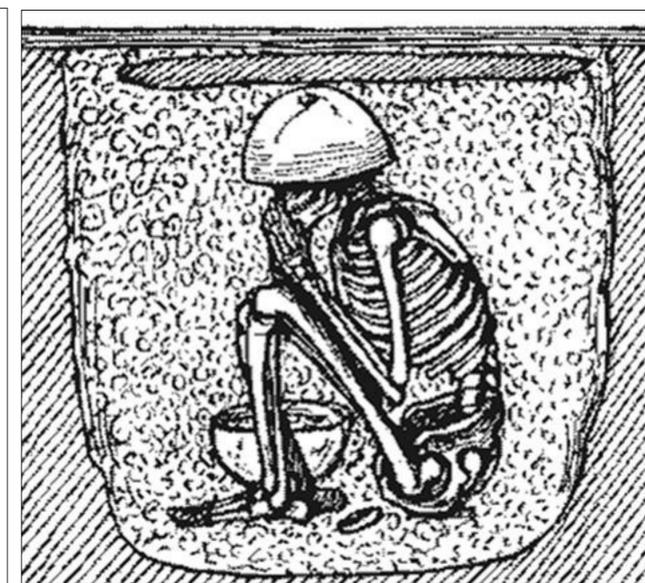
INTRODUCTION

The Mimbres region of southwest New Mexico has been thoroughly excavated over the past century yet bioarchaeological analysis of burials has been inconsistent or lacking. Mortuary data presented in site reports are inclusive of basic information pertaining to location, body position, and grave goods but interpretation is often absent. This research seeks to understand patterns in mortuary contexts observed among Mimbres communities.

The Harris Site is a Late Pithouse period (AD 550-1000) community in the heart of the Mimbres River Valley. Early excavations by Emil Hauray in 1934 provided data used to define the Mogollon cultural tradition and recent excavations by Barbara Roth (2007-2013) have investigated aspects of Mimbres community social organization. Excavations in 2011, 2012, and 2013 encountered burials with atypical mortuary patterns: individuals buried in an upright, seated position. The context of these and other seated burials in the region indicates important social significance among Mimbres communities.



Brody 2004



Fewkes 1914

RESULTS FROM THE HARRIS SITE

Hauray Excavations:

- 4 burials
 - Young Adult Female (Burial 22)
 - Adult Male (Probable) (Burial 26)
 - Adult Male (Burial 29)
 - Adult (Unknown Sex) (Burial 32)

Roth Excavations:

- 3 burials
 - Middle Adult Female (Burial 11)
 - Middle Adult Female (Burial 16)
 - Old Adult Female (Burial 19)

Case Study:

- Burial 11 (Roth excavations, 2011)
- Middle Adult Female (35-45 years)
- Buried through superimposed pithouse floor (PH 41) and seated on floor of earlier pithouse (PH 47)
- Grave goods: 3 ceramic vessels and a broken pendant
- Social memory and land tenure indicated in this intentional mortuary position in superimposed houses



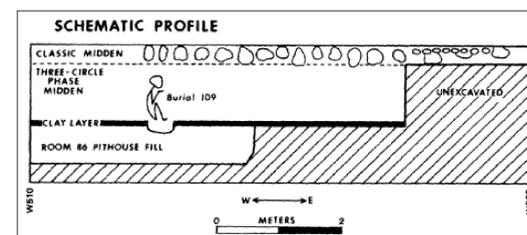
RESULTS FROM THE MIMBRES REGION



Cosgrove & Cosgrove 1932



Shafer et al. 1989



Shafer et al. 1989

Seated Burials:

- 44 currently known, possibly over 60
- Documented in:
 - Site reports
 - Published literature
 - First-hand experience/excavation
- Most are from the Classic Mimbres period (AD 1000-1130/1150)

Case Study:

- NAN Ranch Burial 109
- Middle Adult Male (35-40 years) Shafer et al. 1989
- Buried through Classic period midden into Late Pithouse period midden
- No artifacts associated with the burial
- Coprolite associated with the skeleton

CONCLUSIONS

Mortuary patterns among Mimbres burials tends to feature the body in a flexed or semi-flexed position on the back or side. Burial in a seated position has been documented at several Mimbres sites yet the significance of this uncommon mortuary practice has not been investigated. Ethnographic accounts of this body position attribute it to medicine men among the Pima Indians (Russell 1975/1908) so again, social significance in the community is indicated with this practice.

Family lineages representing possible corporate groups are indicated at the Harris Site. Superimposed pithouses suggest ties to land tenure and social significance of place. The placement of a burial with the body in a seated position touching the floors of both houses indicates important social memory of this woman. Ongoing investigation of burial data at Swarts Ruin has indicated that numerous seated burials (among the 1,009 excavated) represent some kind of social significance. Future exploration of this phenomenon will focus on identifying patterns in demography and mortuary goods to better understand the nature of what social roles these individuals may have held in Mimbres communities.