

A talk presented by the IU Department of Anthropology:

“Peeling Back the Skin: Studying Social Networks and Ideologies of Meat in Zooarchaeological Data”



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Via Zoom: meeting ID 872 5608 9556

<https://iu.zoom.us/j/87256089556>

Ethnoarchaeological research conducted over the course of a year on the island of Unguja (Zanzibar) suggests that data concerning faunal exploitation and consumption also encode complex social networks and subtle ideologies of meat. Ethnoarchaeological data collected at as fine a scale as possible reveals how social networks such as those based on kinship, locality, market forces, and gifting condition zooarchaeological evidence of subsistence. In addition, ideologies of meat play out with subtlety, and create complex and likely unarticulated systems of rules about what meats are edible when, how, and by whom. Human networks encoded in faunal data and the ideologies in which they are embedded must then be placed in the context of ecological (in)stability. Ethnozooarchaeological data collected taking into account social networks, ideologies, and human responses to ecological conditions reveal new hypotheses that can be tested using archaeological evidence. This, however, requires standardization of practice and method to create uniformly comparative ethnographic and archaeological datasets. Finally, I will also argue that ideologies of meat and social networks embedded in meat-related behaviors can be used to recreate zones of common practice and interaction. Vast regions like the Indian Ocean basin that have thus far been seen as united in some ways by ideology, climate, and exchange, can also be studied to ascertain the degree to which they are united by the meat-related behaviors of the human communities they hold.