Dillman Artifact Collection

Introduction

At the request of Dan Dillman and Brandon Fugal, Bighorn Archaeological Consultants LLC. has analyzed and researched an artifact collection of prehistoric origin. This research is part of ongoing work and analysis of prehistoric cultures by the Ancient Historical Research Foundation (AHRF).

Initial analysis of the artifacts suggests these artifacts date to the Formative period, or a time period lasting from approximately 200 B.C. to A.D. 1400 (Geib 1993, 1994; Janetski 1993; Wilde and Newman 1989). The term "Formative Period" describes a time characterized by a significant reliance on agriculture, permanent or semipermanent habitations, and pottery production. Within the central and southern Utah area, this period is represented by different cultural complexes known as the "Fremont" and "Anasazi." Specifically, the Dillman collection is considered to be dated to the Fremont occupation. This is due, in part, to the location from which the artifacts were collected, as well as the type of artifacts recovered. Therefore, an introduction in the next section will provide a brief description of the Fremont culture.

Fremont

Knowledge about the Fremont began to accumulate before 1900 (Jennings 1978:155), but it remained for Noel Morss (1931) to recognize, describe, and provide a name for the complex he discovered in central Utah in the Fruita area. In his original description of the Fremont, Morss (1931, cited in Jennings 1978:155) states:

> Although the culture was partly and perhaps predominately agricultural, the inhabitants of the Fremont region were also dependant in good part on the game supply.....Finally, in its time lag, in the modifications of its Southwestern traits, and most strikingly, in the substitution of moccasins for sandals, the Fremont culture shows that it is not an integral part of the main stream of Southwest development.

Recognition of Fremont distinctiveness was delayed because of the resemblance to the Anasazi and was not considered a separate culture until the 1960's, mostly by scholars at the University of Utah (Jennings 1978). Since then, continuous research has provided a general description of basic Fremont traits.

There are several cultural remains that are associated with the Fremont complex. The village settlement pattern is consistent over a large area, being composed of two or three dwellings, usually pithouses, and a series of surface storage or dwelling structures of jacal, coursed adobe, or stone masonry. Often these “rancherias” (Jennings 1978) are on low eminences overlooking arable lands. Other characteristic Fremont elements include stone balls, hide moccasins, incised stone tablets, grayware pottery, clay figurines, one-rod-and-bundle basketry, anthropomorphic figurines, bell-shaped storage pits, and use of the bow and arrow (Jennings 1978, Marwitt 1986).

During the Fremont occupation, the exploitation of a variety of available resources is separated by three temporal sequences, including Early (200 B.C. to A.D. 500), Middle (A.D. 500 to 900), and Late (A.D. 900 to 1400). The Early Fremont is a consequence of a transition from an Archaic settlement subsistence system moving toward a horticultural based subsistence strategy (Janetski 1993; Wilde and Newman 1989).

During the Middle Fremont, exploitation of a variety of available resources appears to be common, as it had been in the Early Fremont. Although a hunting and gathering strategy seems evident, the significance of horticulture probably was increasing. Architecture at this time consisted of shallow pit structures, circular or slightly oval, and perhaps the introduction of cliff or rockshelter granaries built with stone masonry. Development of decorative ceramics takes place in the Middle Fremont with incised, punctuated, and painted graywares (R. Madsen 1977).

The transition from Middle to Late Fremont is characterized by population shifts. The major population growths occurred in the transition zone between the Colorado Plateau and the Great Basin, from the narrow strip of fertile lands called the Wasatch Front on the north, to the wider central valleys on the south (Talbot and Wilde 1989). Architectural change is also a major characteristic in the transition to Late Fremont. Pithouses became quadrilaterally shaped and deep. Rectangular storage structures within sites are made with coursed adobe and masonry. The appearance of corrugated pottery is the most noticeable change in ceramics (Simms and Madsen 1998).

Analysis

All of the artifacts examined in the Dillman collection were perishables. Seven of the artifacts consisted of bones, some of which are prehistoric human remains. The twelve remaining artifacts are perishable plant remains, mostly corn cobs and wood/vine fragments.

Because of the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, a specific dated analysis of the bones cannot be given through such means as radiocarbon dating. This law, referred to as Public Law 101-601, or by its acronym, NAGPRA, protects Native

American burial sites and Native American remains on federal lands and regulates the removal of human remains, burial objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony.

However, it can be noted by observation that the submitted mandible (lower jaw bone) contains three incised and worn (ground) teeth. This phenomenon is associated with the processing of food with tools, including manos and metates, that leave behind small sand particles that wear down the teeth. As previously noted, the Fremont shifted to a reliance on horticulture which lead to an increased use of grinding tools that were used to crush the hard exteriors of seeds to make them more palatable and digestible.

The corn cobs included in this collection are also very characteristic of Fremont agriculture. First, corn and other cultivated plants (called domesticates), initially developed in what is now Mexico, then diffused northward throughout the greater Southwest and were added to the wild food subsistence base of native people sometime about 2,500 to 2,000 years ago in areas on either side of the southern Wasatch Plateau. The earliest Fremont corn, radiocarbon dated to 2,340-1,940 years ago, comes from a cache near Elsinore, Utah (Janetski 1998). Although the Dillman collection of corn does not seem likely to be dated to this time, it does suggest that farming was well established in the area it was collected by 2,000 years ago.

The other bone remains in the Dillman could have been material for manufacturing tools, jewelry, gaming pieces, and other kinds of objects. The majority of bone used by the Fremont came from large animals such as deer and mountain sheep. The multiple used of the bone from these animals, not to mention the hide for leather, is another reason why deer and mountain sheep were important hunting targets.

Finally, the wood/vine artifacts may have several uses. One use is in construction of granaries. A granary is built into a natural alcove in a cliff face using adobe and some small wood branches. The wood/vine artifacts from the Dillman collection appear similar to materials used in the building of Coyote Granary in Clear Creek Canyon. The roof was elaborately made from several mats of woven twigs all of which had been sealed with a layer of adobe (Figure 1).

Figure 1. A close-up of roof construction from inside Coyote Granary. Adapted from Joel C. Janetski, Archaeology Ruins of Clear Creek Canyon (Museum of Peoples and Cultures, 1998), 29.

Few research topics offer more promise than the study of complete collections to distinguish human populations and their interaction with the environment. Although the Dillman collection provides good information relating to period-specific issues, data from this collection was primarily from an uncontrolled excavation and artifacts were not clearly documented and given proper context. Consequently, data recovery for future projects from this area where the Dillman collection was obtained require proper documentation for the information to be of greater value and comparison with various other sources of research.

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