

# **Ethnozoarchaeology in the Sudan**

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Ethnozoarchaeology is the study of present practices of animal management as a tool to understand the past. This project, in the Mahas region, Sudan, seeks to determine the relationship between the social and functional contexts of animal husbandry, butchering and food preparation and presentation. The focus is on three main variables: 1) gender, 2) ritual context and 3) domestic structure and production.

Because women are responsible for the cooking and presentation of food, butchering patterns may be dictated by decisions made by women. Observations of cattle slaughter in Ethiopia and elsewhere have noted a ritual division of the carcass among the members of society. In contrast, smaller stock are slaughtered within a domestic context and consumed within one household.

From the observation of several butchering episodes, both in a domestic and commercial setting, as well as the taphonomic data, it can be argued that women have an invisible but strong effect on the butchering practices of the men. While men are clearly solely responsible for the act of butchering, something we both witnessed and was reported to us in interviews, it is the cooking processes of the women that dictate the practice. This type of data lends itself to examinations of feasting events that have been linked with socioeconomic competition and status but also introduces a gendered consideration into such investigations. One must ask the question, status of who? Males identified as leaders and hosts of the feast, or the females who have not only prepared the food but also dictated its preparation from the living beast.

Additional factors affect the variable distribution of food resources. For example, the production objectives for livestock herds can vary depending on a household's structure. A household with young children will try to maximize milk production, while a family with older children may try to maximize marketable slaughter animals. Interview questions focused on human household composition and number and type of the domestic animals kept by the household. Other questions focused on products obtained from the animals, such as meat, cheese and yogurt and the details of obtaining these products, such as how often animal were milked. The one thing I will choose to highlight here as it impacts what I want to suggest in my conclusions for this paper is the different answers you can get when you speak to men vs. the women. When asked what the most important animal in the household is, women will generally say the cow (or the goat, depending on what is present for milking) while the men will say the donkey, as it does the most work. The impact of these practices on the production and discard of faunal remains and their entry into the archaeological record is considered.

A full discussion of these issues is forthcoming in the proceedings of the Ethnozoarchaeology Session, International Council of Archaeozoologists 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference, Mexico City, August 23-28, 2006.