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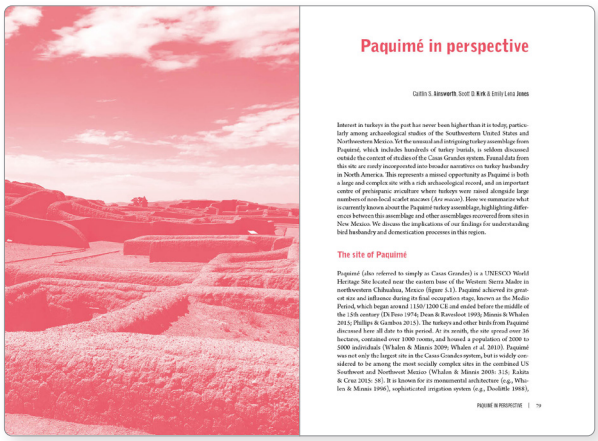

Paquimé in perspective

Caitlin S. Ainsworth, Scott D. Kirk & Emily Lenz Jones

Interest in turkeys in the past has never been higher than it is today, particularly among archaeological studies of the Southwestern United States and Northwestern Mexico. Yet the unusual and intriguing turkey assemblage from Paquimé, which includes hundreds of turkey burials, is seldom discussed outside the context of studies of the Casas Grandes system. Faunal data from this site are rarely incorporated into broader narratives on turkey husbandry in North America. This represents a missed opportunity as Paquimé is both a large and complex site with a rich archaeological record, and an important center of prehispanic sculpture where turkeys were raised alongside large numbers of non-local scarlet macaws (*Ara macao*). Here we summarize what is currently known about the Paquimé turkey assemblage, highlighting differences between this assemblage and other assemblages recovered from sites in New Mexico. We discuss the implications of our findings for understanding bird husbandry and domestication processes in this region.

The site of Paquimé

Paquimé (also referred to simply as Casas Grandes) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site located near the eastern base of the Western Sierra Madre in northwestern Chihuahua, Mexico (figure 5.1). Paquimé achieved its greatest size and influence during its final occupation stage, known as the Medio Period, which began around 1150/1200 CE and ended before the middle of the 15th century (Di Peso 1974; Dean & Ravesloot 1993; Minnis & Whalen 2015; Phillips & Gamboa 2015). The turkeys and other birds from Paquimé discussed here all date to this period. At its zenith, the site spread over 36 hectares, contained over 1000 rooms, and housed a population of 2000 to 5000 individuals (Whalen & Minnis 2009; Whalen et al. 2010). Paquimé was not only the largest site in the Casas Grandes system, but is widely considered to be among the most socially complex sites in the combined US Southwest and Northwest Mexico (Whalen & Minnis 2003: 315; Kelsey & Cruz 2013: 56). It is known for its monumental architecture (e.g., Whalen & Minnis 1996), sophisticated irrigation system (e.g., Doolittle 1988),

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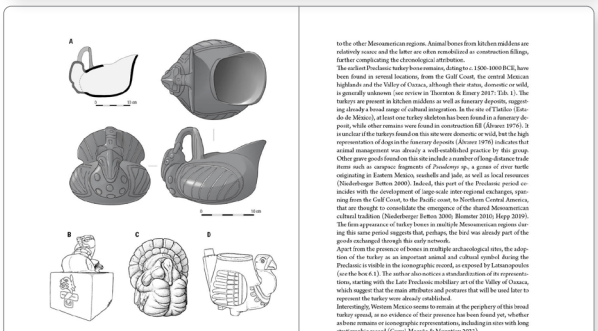

figure 6.2
The MOO turkey effigy vessel and Zapotec and Mixtec depictions of the turkey (drawings by Nicolas Latimerpoulos). A, front, dorsal, upper and section view of the MOO turkey effigy vessel; B, ceramic box with turkey modeled on the lid, Zapotec culture, Monte Albán (300-500 CE), Etnografiska Museet, Stockholm, no. inv. 001584 (according to photographs, courtesy of the museum); C, travertine sculpture, Zapotec culture, Museo Frissard de Arte Zapotleco, Mitla (Gonzalez 1970: 181, fig. 7b3b); D, travertine vessel, Mixtec culture, Museo de las Culturas, Oaxaca (no. inv. 7125 (Lorenzani & Bello Cipolla 2007: 757, cat. 519).

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to the other Mesoamerican regions. Animal bones from kitchen middens are relatively scarce and the latter are often remodelled as construction fillings, further complicating the chronological attribution.
The earliest Preclassic turkey bone remains, dating to c. 1500-1000 BCE, have been found in several locations, from the Gulf Coast, the central Mexican highlands and the Valley of Oaxaca, although their status, domestic or wild, is generally unknown (see review in Thornton & Emery 2017: Tab. 1). The turkeys are present in kitchen middens as well as funerary deposits, suggesting already a broad range of cultural integration. In the site of Tlatilco (Estado de México), at least one turkey skeleton has been found in a funerary deposit, while other remains were found in construction fill (Álvarez 1976). It is unclear if the turkeys found on this site were domestic or wild, but the high representation of dogs in the funerary deposits (Álvarez 1976) indicates that animal management was already a well-established practice by this group. Other grave goods found on this site include a number of long-distance trade items such as marpacc fragments of *Pseudoneys* sp., a genus of river turtle originating in Eastern Mexico, seashells and jade, as well as local resources (Niederberger Betton 2000). Indeed, this part of the Preclassic period coincides with the development of large-scale inter-regional exchanges, spanning from the Gulf Coast, to the Pacific coast, to Northern Central America, that are thought to consolidate the emergence of the shared Mesoamerican cultural tradition (Niederberger Betton 2006; Blomster 2010; Hepp 2019). The first appearance of turkey bones in multiple Mesoamerican regions during this same period suggests that, perhaps, the bird was already part of the goods exchanged through this early network.
Apart from the presence of bones in multiple archaeological sites, the adoption of the turkey as an important animal and cultural symbol during the Preclassic is visible in the iconographic record, as exposed by Latsanopoulos (see the box 6.1). The author also notices a standardization of its representations, starting with the Late Preclassic mobiliary art of the Valley of Oaxaca, which suggest that the main attributes and postures that will be used later to represent the turkey were already established.
Interestingly, Western Mexico seems to remain at the periphery of this broad turkey spread, as no evidence of their presence has been found yet, whether as bone remains or iconographic representations, including in sites with long stratigraphic record (Copa-Magaña & Momtjoy 2023).

Classic period (150-900 CE)

During the Classic period, turkeys become more widespread in the zooarchaeological record. In Western Mexico, turkey bones are found in the Classic occupations of sites from Guanajuato (El Mesquital-Los Azules; Manin

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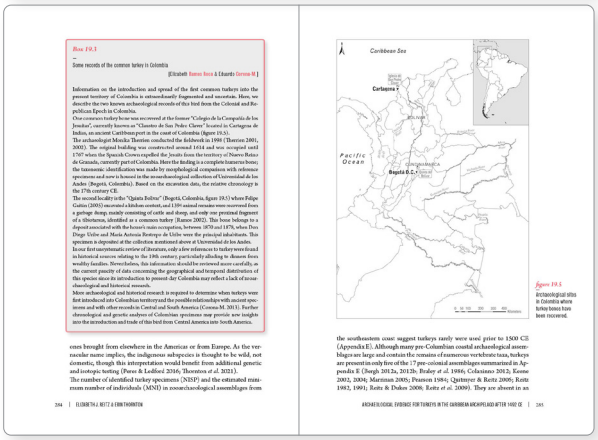

Box 10.1
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Some records of the common turkey in Colombia
[Elizabeth Ramos-Arce & Eduardo Corona-M.]

Information on the introduction and spread of the first common turkeys into the present territory of Colombia is extraordinarily fragmented and uncertain. Here, we describe the two known archaeological records of this bird from the Colonial and Republican Epoch in Colombia.
Our cinnamon turkey bone was recovered at the former "Colegio de la Compañía de los Jesuitas", currently known as "Claustro de San Pedro Claver" located in Cartagena de Indias, an ancient Caribbean port in the coast of Colombia (figure 10.3).
The archaeologist Monika Therrien conducted the fieldwork in 1998 (Therrien 2001; 2002). The original building was constructed around 1614 and was occupied until 1767 when the Spanish Crown expelled the Jesuits from the territory of Nuevo Reino de Granada, currently part of Colombia. Here the finding is a complete humerus bone; the taxonomic identification was made by morphological comparison with reference specimens and now is housed in the zooarchaeological collection of Universidad de los Andes (Bogotá, Colombia). Based on the excavation data, the relative chronology is the 17th century CE.
The second locality is the "Quinta Bolívar" (Bogotá, Colombia, figure 10.3) where Felipe Gutiez (2005) excavated a kitchen context, and 139 animal remains were recovered from a garbage dump, mainly consisting of cattle and sheep, and only one proximal fragment of a tibiotarsus, identified as a common turkey (Ramos 2002). This bone belongs to a deposit associated with the house's main occupation, between 1870 and 1878, when Don Diego Uribe and María Antonia Restrepo de Uribe were the principal inhabitants. This specimen is deposited at the collection mentioned above at Universidad de los Andes.
In our first macroscopic review of literature, only a few references to turkey were found in historical sources relating to the 19th century, particularly alluding to dinners from wealthy families. Nevertheless, this information should be reviewed more carefully, as the current paucity of data concerning the geographical and temporal distribution of this species since its introduction to present-day Colombia may reflect a lack of zooarchaeological and historical research.
More archaeological and historical research is required to determine when turkeys were first introduced into Colombian territory and the possible relationships with ancient specimens and with other records in Central and South America (Corona-M. 2013). Further chronological and genetic analyses of Colombian specimens may provide new insights into the introduction and trade of this bird from Central America into South America.

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figure 10.3
Archaeological sites in Colombia where turkey bones have been recovered.

the southeastern coast suggest turkeys rarely were used prior to 1500 CE (Appendix E). Although many pre-Columbian coastal archaeological assemblages are large and contain the remains of numerous vertebrate taxa, turkeys are present in only five of the 17 pre-colonial assemblages summarized in Appendix E (Jorgh 2012a, 2012b; Braley et al. 1986; Cofasinos 2012; Keene 2002, 2004; Marsman 2005; Pearson 1984; Quitmyer & Reitz 2006; Reitz 1982, 1991; Reitz & Dukes 2008; Reitz et al. 2009). They are absent in an

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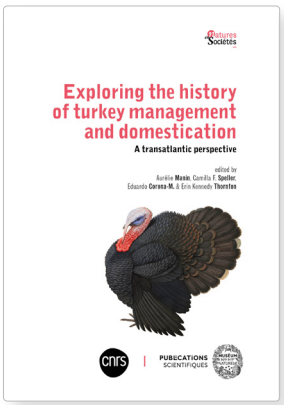

Collection Natures en sociétés
tome **10**
165 x 240 mm broché
texte en anglais
406 pages, 95 figures
ISBN 978-2-38327-026-3
37 € TTC | 35,07 € HT

Distribué le 26 juin 2025

Exploring the history of turkey management and domestication

A transatlantic perspective

sous la direction d'Aurélie **Manin**, Camilla F. **Speller**, Eduardo **Corona-M.** & Erin Kennedy **Thornton**

LE LIVRE

Le dindon (*Meleagris gallopavo*) est un animal emblématique, largement associé aux repas de fête en Europe, en Amérique du Nord et en Amérique Centrale, et largement élevé dans le monde entier. Pourtant, nos connaissances sur ses interactions à long terme avec les sociétés humaines restent éparses, avec des déséquilibres régionaux significatifs dans la recherche. Le rôle du dindon en Amérique du Nord a été largement étudié, tandis que sa dispersion suite à la colonisation de l'Amérique et l'importance de sa signification culturelle dans le monde ont retenu moins d'attention. Ce volume réunit des spécialistes qui explorent la paléontologie du genre *Meleagris*, les premières étapes de la gestion et de la domestication du dindon en Amérique du Nord, et son expansion mondiale ultérieure. Suivant une structure chronologique, la première partie examine les interactions entre le dindon et les groupes humains dans les Amériques avant le contact avec les Européens (il y a environ 500 ans), avec des chapitres sur des régions bien étudiées (sud-ouest des États-Unis, nord du Mexique et Mésoamérique) et des régions moins connues (sud de l'Amérique centrale et est des États-Unis). La deuxième partie retrace les 500 dernières années de l'histoire du dindon, en explorant les représentations artistiques, les récits historiques et les preuves archéozoologiques provenant de plusieurs pays européens, de l'Europe occidentale à l'Europe centrale en passant par les pays baltes. Elle examine également la diffusion mondiale du dindon domestique, sa réintroduction dans les Amériques par le biais de l'économie coloniale et sa dispersion dans le Pacifique.
Alliant des synthèses exhaustives à des études de cas originales, cet ouvrage offre de nouvelles perspectives sur l'histoire du dindon, sa gestion, sa domestication et sa symbolique culturelle jusqu'au XXIe siècle.

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