Eating yourself into being: diet, gender, and age in ancient China and Colombia

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The human body is shaped by both biological and cultural experiences unique to each person, and the skeleton records traces of these experiences over the lifetime. One of the most fundamental aspects of everyday human life is eating, and what a person can feed their body is the product of complex circumstances within a cultural context. Dietary practices are deeply intertwined with biocultural factors and can reveal aspects of human experience obscured in other archaeological or historical sources. Stable isotope analysis of human tooth and bone samples allow bioarchaeologists to study human diet from discrete periods of life and can provide fine-grained dietary histories of individuals. Using two archaeological case studies from Colombia and China I will show how the simple act of eating created socially meaningful bodies for the ancient Muisca and Eastern Zhou peoples. For these communities, the foods people consumed were tied to aspects of their age and gender, and show the dynamic, personalized experiences of people living in the past.

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Location: Archaeology Center conference room

Anthropology Colloquium