



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

**ARIZONA
STATE MUSEUM**

MORTUARY FEATURE DOCUMENTATION FORM

GUIDANCE & DEFINITIONS

Definitions compiled by:

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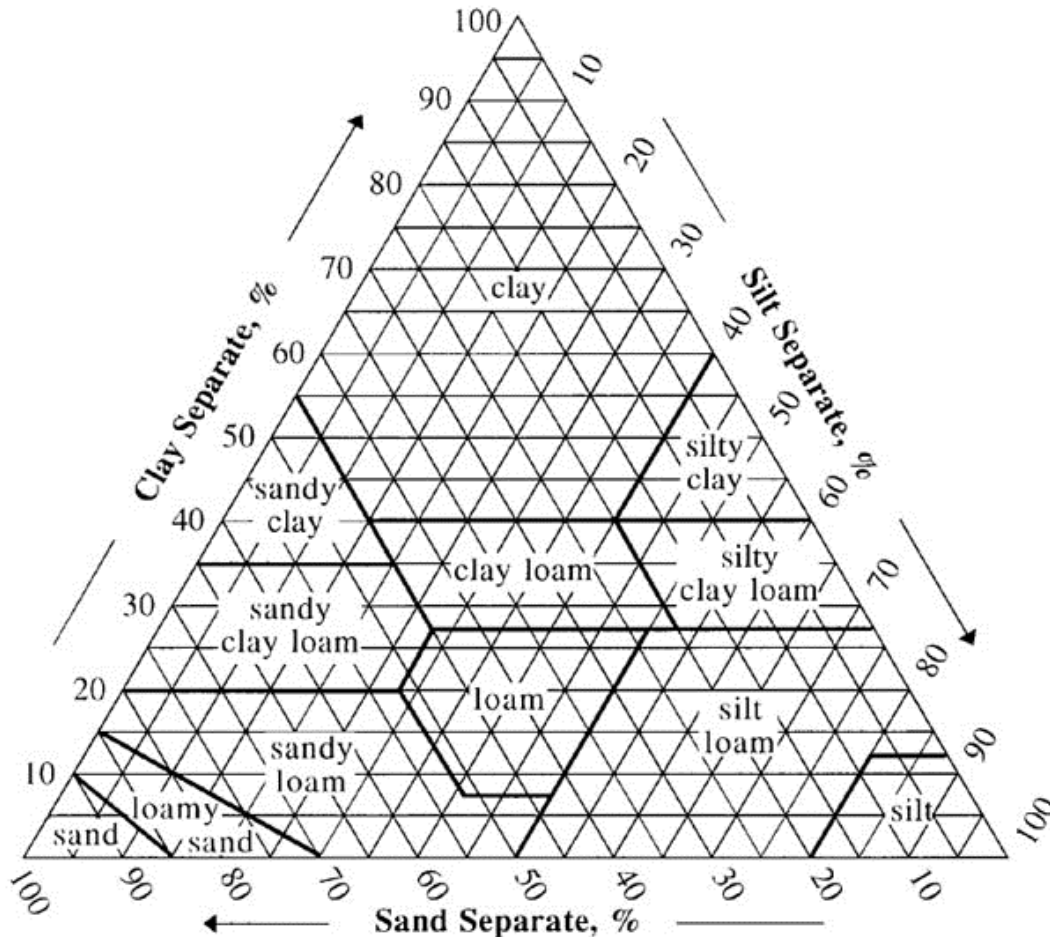
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DESCRIBE LOCATION AND STRATIGRAPHY

Soil Texture

Reference the USDA Soil Texture Calculator [here](#):



Consistency¹

Very weak: Very few pedes are discernible; the rest of the matrix breaks down incoherently.

Weak: About half of the matrix breaks down into discernible pedes

Moderate: About half of the matrix breaks down into discernible pedes.

Strong: Most of the matrix breaks down into discernible pedes.

Very strong: the entire matrix breaks down into discernible pedes.

¹ Vogel, Greg (2002). *Handbook of Soil Descriptions for Archeologists*. Arkansas Archeological Survey technical paper Vol. 11. Arkansas Archeological Survey.



Structure²

Granular: Resembles cookie crumbs and is usually less than 0.5 cm in diameter. Commonly found in surface horizon where roots have been growing.

Blocky: Irregular blocks that are usually 1.5-5.0 cm in diameter.

Prismatic: Vertical columns of soil that might be a number of cm long. Usually found in lower horizons.

Columnar: Vertical columns of soil that have a salt “cap” at the top. Found in soils of arid climates.

Platy: Thin, flat plates of soil that lie horizontally. Usually found in compacted soil.

Single grained: Soil is broken into individual particles that do not stick together. Always accompanies a loose consistence. Commonly found in sandy soils.

(www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/mauisoil/images/a_factor_ts02_clip_image001.gif)

Color

Record in accordance to the wet Munsell system.

Evidence of Burning

None: No evidence of burning is present within the fill.

Charring: burned black or minor soil consolidations

Burned earth present: nodules or rind

Mixed: Indicators of both oxidation and reduction are present within the fill.

² University of Hawaii at Manoa Soil Management.

www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/mauisoil/images/a_factor_ts02_clip_image001.gif.



FEATURE DESCRIPTION

Interment Type

Inhumation: remains deposited in the flesh.

Cremation: remains burned.

Commingled: elements from multiple individuals mixed in a single feature context.

MNI: minimum number of individuals present, represented by the greatest number of repeated elements (e.g., three left radii).

Interment Context

Primary: remains articulated from initial deposition event.

Secondary: remains partially articulated or disintegrated into individual elements.

Mixed: interment contains both primary and secondary type remains.

Indeterminate: Unable to determine interment context.

Individuality

Fragmentary: portions of skeletal remains; not a complete individual(s).

Single: One articulated individual.

Multiple-Contemporary: more than one individual interred as a singular event.

Multiple-Consecutive: individuals interred at different times.

Indeterminate: Factors present that render number/sequence of burials unable to discern. Note that this does NOT pertain to burials which can be labeled by multiple categories present.

Flexure

Hyperflexion: >180° joint angle

Extended: ~180° joint angle

Semi-flexed: 180°-90° joint angle

Flexed: 90°-45° joint angle

Tightly flexed: <45° joint angle

Indeterminate: amount of flexure unable to be determined.

Body Position

Supine: Such that the ventral side is facing up, and the dorsal side down.



Prone: Such that the dorsal side is facing up, and the ventral side down.

Right side: Such that the individual is laying on their right side.

Left side: Such that the individual is laying on their left side.

Seated: Such that the individual appears to be in a semi-supine position, appearing as one would while seated.

Indeterminate: Disarticulation or degradation of bones obstructs the formation of a conclusion, or the individual fits none of the above categories.

Axial/Cranial Orientation

Written as the degrees from True North as determined by the straight line made from the pelvis to the cranium.

Facing

Direction the face is oriented in relation to the cranial orientation axis, and the location of the vertebral column. The default is the face being oriented “straight ahead”: the base of the skull creates a 90-degree angle with the cervical vertebrae in the sagittal plane and is designated to be 0 degrees in a transverse rotational plane.

Location

Intramural space, non-intrusive³: located within habitual space, isolated from other structures.

Intramural space, intrusive into feature: located within habitual space, intermingled with other structure(s).

Extramural space: located outside of habitual space.

Underlying a feature: the burial is completely or almost completely located underneath a feature, such as a hearth or wall.

Cemetery: an area set aside specifically for the purpose of burying the dead in arrangements of individual burials.

Crematorium: cremations of multiple individuals in concentrated area.

Ossuary: a space used for multiple, typically secondary, inhumation.

Indeterminate: Location characteristics unobservable, or inconclusive. Note that this does NOT include instances in which multiple labels may be applicable.

Feature Type

Bone Scatter: loose concentration of bone.

³ Sprague, Roderick (2005). *Burial Terminology: A Guide for Researchers*. Alta Mira Press: Lanham, MD.



Pit: intentionally constructed opening into subsurface

Cist: a grave, the sides of which are typically formed of stone slabs set on edge, but may be constructed of rubble or brick, and which is covered by stone slabs.

Vessel: hollow utensil used as a container

Niche/alcove: recessed or partly enclosed portion of a room/feature

Bench: elevated structure within a room/feature

Trench: elongated pit

Coffin: long, narrow container in which remains are interred.

Indeterminate: Feature such that type is unclear.

Location of Bone

Surface: Bone present on the surface of the fill, with little or no coverage.

Dispersed in fill: Bone located, evenly or unevenly, throughout the fill; not clustered.

Clustered in fill: Bone concentrated into specific areas within fill, found in clusters.

Dispersed on floor: Bone located, evenly or unevenly, distributed on the floor of the feature.

Clustered on floor: Bone concentrated into specific areas on the floor, found in clusters.

Within a container: Bone located in a container such as ceramic or stone vessel.

Indeterminate: Bone location is inconsistent and unable to be identified. Not that this does NOT include burials such that multiple bone location categories may be present.

Feature Definition

Absent: No discernable outline/definition

Intermediate: Vague outline at level of burial

Defined: Distinct outline at/just above level of burial

Feature Shape

Circular/oval: the feature is intended to be round in shape, with no sharp corners, clear sides, or indentations.

Sub-rectangular: the feature has an overall rectangular shape, but with rounded corners.

Rectangular: the feature is intended to be a clearly four-sided figure, with apparent right-angled corners.

Irregular: the feature has a clearly intentional shape that cannot be described with circular, sub-rectangular, or rectangular.

Indeterminate: Presence of a feature shape's existence is unable to be discerned.



OSTEOLOGICAL DATA

Skeletal Completeness

Complete skeleton present: Primary field assessment of remains determines that entire skeleton is likely present.

Mostly complete: >75% skeleton present.

Partial: 25%-75% skeleton present.

Fragmentary: <25% skeleton present.

Body Articulation

Completely articulated: >75% articulation present.

Partially articulated: 25%-75% articulation present.

Disarticulated: <25% articulation present.

Bone Preservation

Good preservation: >75% bone material per bone is preserved.

Moderate preservation: 25%-75% bone material per bone is preserved.

Poor preservation: <25% bone material per bone is preserved.

Varied: Bone preservation inconsistent throughout sample.

Mineral/Staining

Skull: Any anatomy of the skull.

Post-cranial axial: Bones of trunk and thorax, including vertebrae, sacrum, ribs, and sternum.

Appendicular: Bones of pectoral and pelvic girdles, exclusive of limbs.

Extremity: Bones of upper and lower limbs only.

Entire skeleton: Bones of the skull, post-cranial axial, appendicular, and extremity anatomies ALL affected.

On objects: mineral or staining is present on associated objects.

In burial matrix: mineral or staining is present within the burial matrix.

Color

Report according to Munsell system.



Age group

Fetal: <birth

Infant: birth-3yr

Child: 3-12yr

Adolescent: 12-20yr

Young adult: 20-35yr

Middle adult: 35-50yr

Old adults: >50yr

Indeterminate: Factors significantly impact the ability to place the individual's age group. Note that this does NOT include individuals who can satisfactorily be placed within more than one category. For example, an individual who is definitely at least 20 years old but possibly as old as 50 years is NOT considered indeterminate.



ASSOCIATED OBJECTS

Object Class

FS (flaked-stone), GS (ground-stone), PP (projectile point), bone, ceramics, glass, metal, etc.

Orientation

Describe how the object is oriented in the feature (e.g., convex up, convex down, or upright).

Location within the Feature

Skull: Surrounding anatomy of the skull.

Post-cranial axial: Surrounding bones of trunk and thorax, including vertebrae, sacrum, ribs, and sternum.

Appendicular: Surrounding bones of pectoral and pelvic girdles, exclusive of limbs.

Extremity: Surrounding bones of upper and lower limbs.

Within fill: Artifact situated distantly enough from skeletal remains such that it has no clear relationship to one part of skeletal anatomy, or such that there are not enough human remains with which to associate a relationship strongly.