

Ancient walls reveal evidence of mass gazelle slaughters

April 19 2011, by Deborah Braconnier



Black-tailed, Goitered or Persian Gazelle. Photographed in Gobi Desert, southern Mongolia. Image: Wikipedia.

(PhysOrg.com) -- A report published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* details the proof found that "desert kites" were used as slaughter structures for civilizations as long as 6,000 years ago in the Middle East. Scientists have long believed these structures had been used to herd and slaughter animals, but until now, no concrete evidence had been found to support that theory.

Desert kites were so named because of their triangular shape. They were low stone walls essentially creating a funnel to herd animals into what was assumed to be the slaughter pit. It is believed that animals were herded into the kites by a few dozen hunters and then slaughtered. This was basically just a theory as no other kites had revealed any skeletal

remains.

Located at a site known as Tell Kuran in northeastern Syria, a team led by zoo archaeologist Guy Bar-Oz from the University of Haifa has found the remains of some 100 gazelles. The bones recovered were varied in age and gender, suggesting it was a normal migrating herd that had been driven into the pit. The bone findings were primarily the non-meat bearing lower legs and suggest the animals were slaughtered and butchered in the pits with the remaining carcasses and meat taken to another location. Estimates on the bones age date them back 6,000 years.

It is their belief that these slaughters happened on a yearly basis and probably held some sort of ritual or religious significance. Given the amount of meat that would have resulted from one of these mass slaughters, and the lack of refrigeration, a large assembly of people would have been necessary to consume the meat.

More than 90 desert kites have been located throughout northeastern Syria so this indicates it was a widely used practice at the time. The rocks on the walls of the structure also show religious art, again suggesting the killings were of religious or symbolic importance. These mass killing of entire herds also explains the near extinction of these gazelles in the area.

More information: Role of mass-kill hunting strategies in the extirpation of Persian gazelle (*Gazella subgutturosa*) in the northern Levant, *PNAS*, Published online before print April 18, 2011, [doi:10.1073/pnas.1017647108](https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1017647108)

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