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Modified Predator Mandible and Maxilla Artifacts and Predator Symbolism in Illinois Hopewell

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Species reidentification and burial-context analysis of 34 artifacts made from the cut-and-drilled mandibles and maxillae of coyotes, wolves, cougars, and bears recovered from Illinois Hopewellian mounds over the past century provide new perspectives on the variety of forms, mortuary associations, species-specific uses, and symbolic significance of these artifacts. Fragments of eight modified canid and felid “predator jaw” artifacts, including those from five canids (three probable coyotes and two wolves), a cougar, and a bobcat, are also documented from four west-central Illinois Middle Woodland habitation sites. Correcting the distressingly common species misidentifications of these artifacts in the archaeological literature has also led to new interpretations of the modification and use of 14 black bear-maxillae artifacts, many of which are identified here for the first time, found in Illinois Hopewellian mortuary contexts.

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