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[52] *LIZARD TAPHONOMY & ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR HUMAN BEHAVIOR IN THE ARGENTINE SOUTHERN PUNA: A CASE STUDY*

Archaeological surveys and excavations in the Chaschuil area, a high altitude desert in northwestern Argentina, have been carried out since 1994. Excavations at Rockshelter 12 provided a large number of small vertebrate bones, mainly lizards, plus some birds and rodents. These microfaunal remains were analyzed to distinguish how they entered the rockshelter deposits. Four possible agents or processes of accumulation were considered: humans, carnivores, predatory birds and catastrophic death. The bones show no clear evidence of human or nonhuman deposition or postdepositional modifications, and

suggest the lizards probably died as a consequence of a volcanic eruption while hibernating. This paper discusses the significance of the lizard bones, as well as of other significant geoarchaeological information, in terms of human behavior in the past, in this highly demanding environment.