

**THE FORENSIC SIGNIFICANCE OF IDENTIFYING
THE RITUAL USE OF HUMAN REMAINS**

by

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ABSTRACT

For law enforcement officials, encountering a ritual scene involving the use of human skeletal remains may lead to the incorrect assumption that the bones belong to the victim of a homicide. Due to the presence of human bones, a forensic anthropologist may be called to the scene to analyze and determine their significance. However, most law enforcement agencies and many forensic anthropologists may not recognize the additional ritual artifacts, nor their significance or symbolism. The focus of this thesis is to explore the forensic significance of the use of human skeletal remains in religious rituals. Included are the rituals of the Afro-Caribbean religions of Santería, Palo, and Vodun. Recognition of associated ritual artifacts and taphonomic modifications of human skeletal remains allows for correct interpretation of these ritual scenes, providing law enforcement officials with the necessary tools to conduct proper scene investigation and analysis.