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Review

Comparative Analysis of Cranial Morphology in Allosaurus and Its Implications for Feeding Mechanics

Tyler Hu

Mission San Jose High School; drbball935@gmail.com

Abstract: This literature review presents a comparative analysis of cranial morphology in *Allosaurus*, focusing on its implications for feeding mechanics. *Allosaurus*, a large theropod dinosaur from the Late Jurassic period, exhibits distinct cranial features that are pivotal for understanding its predatory behaviors and ecological role. By examining fossilized skulls and employing advanced imaging techniques, this research identifies key morphological traits such as tooth structure, jaw articulation, and cranial robusticity. The analysis reveals that *Allosaurus* had a specialized cranial architecture that supported a powerful bite force and efficient processing of prey. Comparative metrics are applied to assess similarities and differences with other theropods, such as *Tyrannosaurus rex*, to elucidate variations in feeding strategies among theropods. The findings suggest that *Allosaurus* possessed adaptations that allowed it to exploit a diverse range of prey, indicating a versatile feeding strategy. These results enhance our understanding of theropod evolution and ecological interactions, providing insights into the functional significance of cranial morphology in dinosaurian predation. This review underscores the importance of cranial features in reconstructing the behavior and diet of extinct species and contributes to the broader field of vertebrate functional morphology.

Keywords: comparative analysis; cranial morphology; allosaurus; feeding mechanics; theropod dinosaurs; Jurassic period; skull structure; predatory behavior; fossil anatomy; dinosaur feeding strategies; morphological adaptations; ecological role; cranial kinesis; bite force; sensory functions; biomechanics; pathologies; evolutionary insights

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Comparative Analysis of Cranial Morphology in Allosaurus and Its Implications for Feeding Mechanics

Allosaurus was a prominent carnivorous theropod from the Late Jurassic Period of the Mesozoic Era, standing around 4.5-5.5 m tall at the hips, reaching lengths of 8.5-12 m from head to tail, and weighing 1.5-3.0 metric tons. While not as massive as later theropods such as *Tyrannosaurus rex* of the Late Cretaceous, *Allosaurus*' size was relatively large for its time, placing it as the top predator in its environment. *Allosaurus* likely played a major ecological role, influencing the dynamics of herbivorous dinosaur populations and competition against other contemporary carnivores such as *Ceratosaurus* and *Torvosaurus*.

Some notable features of *Allosaurus* include its large, robust skull with a deep, triangular shape, equipped with sharp, serrated teeth designed to slice through flesh. *Allosaurus*' teeth were curved and serrated, well-suited for a carnivorous diet. The teeth in the anterior portion of the jaw were dagger-like, while those near the posterior region were broader and more suited for shearing flesh. It had distinctive cranial crests, including a pair of horn-like structures above the eyes and a pronounced ridge on the rostrum, which may have been used for display or combat. *Allosaurus* was relatively lightweight and agile compared to some of the later, heavier theropods of the Mesozoic Era. Balanced on powerful hind limbs, its forelimbs were relatively small but functional, with three claws on each hand.

This literature review focuses on the cranial morphology in *Allosaurus* and its implications on *Allosaurus*' feeding mechanics. I will begin with a detailed examination of *Allosaurus*' skull and

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employ comparative analysis with other carnivorous theropods. I will also discuss *Allosaurus*' ecological role and its influence on our understanding of *Allosaurus*' feeding habits. Finally, I conclude with a comprehensive determination of the relationship between *Allosaurus*' cranial morphology and its feeding mechanics.

Cranial Morphology of Allosaurus and Feeding Implications

In this literature review, we primarily focus on *Allosaurus*' cranial morphology and the impact of this characteristic on its feeding mechanics. *Allosaurus*, a prominent theropod from the Late Jurassic period, possesses a distinctive cranial structure that has significant implications for understanding its predatory behavior. Its robust skull, marked by pronounced cranial crests, large eye sockets, and serrated teeth, reveals adaptations tailored to a carnivorous diet and powerful biting. By examining the morphological features of its cranium and their functional roles, we aim to analyze how these characteristics influenced *Allosaurus*' feeding strategies, prey processing, and overall ecological role.

Chure & Loewen (2020) discussed the cranial morphology of *Allosaurus jimmadseni*, a recently discovered species of *Allosaurus*. The nasal bones of *Allosaurus jimmadseni* are described as having a unique morphology compared to other *Allosaurus* species. They feature a prominent ridge along the midline, which is less pronounced in closely related species. Additionally, the lacrimal bones of *Allosaurus jimmadseni* are notably taller and more robust than those in *Allosaurus fragilis*. This feature suggests a more pronounced lacrimal horn, which may have had implications for the dinosaur's facial structure and possibly its display features.

The premaxilla and maxilla exhibit a straight posteroventral ramus where they articulate with the jugal bone. This ramus is relatively straight compared to other species, affecting the overall shape of the skull. Furthermore, the jugal bone of *Allosaurus jimmadseni* has a relatively straight ventral margin with a straight-to-slightly-curved dorsal outline. This morphology contrasts with the more variable jugal shapes seen in other *Allosaurus* species and further contributes to the species' distinct facial profile. A row of neurovascular foramina is present along the medioventral wall of the maxillary antorbital fossa. The laterodorsal margin of the nasal forms a low crest that extends from the premaxilla to the lacrimal, less pronounced in other *Allosaurus* species and providing a distinctive characteristic of *Allosaurus jimmadseni*. Finally, the axial intercentrum is rotated dorsally and has a flared rim when viewed laterally, a characteristic that contributes to the distinct morphology of the cervical vertebrae. A computer tomography (CT) scan by Rogers (1998) also determined the presence of regions associated with sensory functions, such as the olfactory bulbs and optic lobes. The relative size of these sensory regions suggest how well *Allosaurus* could perceive its environment and process sensory information, also proposed by Rogers (1999).

A study by McClelland (1990) suggested the relationship between the anatomical features of the *Allosaurus* skull with its potential feeding behavior. It was proposed that the cranial kinesis and structural features of the skull were adapted to enhance feeding efficiency, allowing *Allosaurus* to grasp and process prey effectively. It was also discovered that *Allosaurus*' skull wielded high cranial kinesis, a characteristic unusual among theropods. Various features including the dentary symphysis (the junction of the two halves of the lower jaw), the hinge axis (the point around which the jaw moves), and the parastylic quadrate (a bone contributing to jaw articulation), would have allowed for a greater range of jaw movement and thereby a more efficient means of food manipulation and handling of larger prey items, also noted by Oldham (2019). However, the necessity for skull mobility likely led to a reduction in *Allosaurus*' ability to exert maximum bite force, balancing the need for prey handling with the mechanical limits of its skull structure.

Snively et al. (2013) investigated numerous aspects of *Allosaurus*' musculature and its implications on the theropod's upper movements. The capability of neck retraction in *Allosaurus* appears to be significant, achieved through dorsiflexion of the posterior portion of the neck and ventroflexion of the anterior curvature. This wide range of motion and associated accelerations provide insights into how *Allosaurus* may have defleshed its prey. The observed strong ventroflexive torque indicates a more birdlike pulling motion on the carcass, rather than a crocodilian-style shaking movement. In the biomechanical simulations of *Allosaurus*, it was found that the greatest retractive

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(posteroventral) acceleration of the head occurs when the head is deeply flexed relative to the neck, suggesting a method of flesh stripping similar to that of raptorial birds.

A study conducted by Rayfield (2005) compared the cranial mechanics of *Allosaurus* with *Tyrannosaurus rex* and *Coelophysis*. While peak compression and stress was located in the fronto-parietal region of the cranium for *Allosaurus* and *Coelophysis*, the most stress was observed in the postorbital region for *Tyrannosaurus rex*. It was also noted that in both *Allosaurus* and *Tyrannosaurus rex*, a thin but prominently medial ridge aligns with the posterodorsal-anteroventral axis of compressive stress observed in the 2D models. However, in these biomechanical models, *Allosaurus*' cranium was able to withstand high forces. These results suggest that *Allosaurus* had a robust cranial structure capable of withstanding the forces exerted during prey capture and processing.

Rayfield et al. (2001) delved into various possible feeding scenarios of *Allosaurus fragilis*. In mode A, the bite force is a minimum estimate based on an ectothermic model of dinosaur physiology. Mode B provides a maximum estimate using a homeothermic model. Modes C and D assess skull strength by applying maximum forces to the same impact teeth as in modes A and B until the cranium yields. Mode C assumes maximum jaw adductor activity, while mode D assumes inactive musculature, resulting in passive response to external forces. The results were: Mode A generated 805.42 N, Mode B generated 2147.88 N, Mode C generated 18746.76 N, and Mode D generated 55446.96 N. These findings show that *Allosaurus* could exert and withstand a wide range of forces depending on the model used and whether the jaw muscles were active or inactive. They also demonstrate the potential differences in *Allosaurus fragilis*' bite force estimates based on metabolic assumptions and highlight the skull's ability to endure substantial forces, particularly when muscles are not engaged.

Foth et al. (2015) examined a fossil specimen of *Allosaurus* from the Morrison Formation in Wyoming. The specimen exhibited healed fractures in several bones, including the ribs and limbs. These fractures were interpreted as resulting from physical confrontations, either with other large predators or prey. The presence of healed fractures indicates that *Allosaurus* engaged in frequent physical battles, possibly during territorial disputes or while capturing large prey. In fact, an anterior caudal vertebra of the *Allosaurus* specimen displays a possible puncture in the left transverse process, likely caused by a *Stegosaurus* tail spike, suggesting a predator-prey interaction between the two dinosaurs. The study also noted evidence of bone infections, likely abscesses or osteomyelitis, particularly in the long bones and vertebrae. These infections could have originated from wounds sustained during aggressive interactions or from injuries acquired during hunting. Such infections suggest that *Allosaurus* was prone to injuries that became infected, potentially affecting its mobility and overall health.

Overall, *Allosaurus*' cranial morphology enabled it to be a top predator in its Late Jurassic Period. Distinctive features of *Allosaurus*' robust skull, including pronounced crests, large eye sockets, and serrated teeth, were likely adapted for a carnivorous diet and powerful biting. Comparative studies reveal that different species within the genus, such as *Allosaurus jimmadseni*, exhibit unique cranial traits, like prominent nasal ridges and robust lacrimal bones, which may have influenced their feeding behavior and display features. Research into cranial kinesis and structural adaptations, including findings from CT scans and biomechanical simulations, suggests that *Allosaurus* possessed advanced feeding mechanics and jaw mobility, albeit with a trade-off in bite force. Studies on musculature and neck retraction further indicate that *Allosaurus* used a bird-like flesh-stripping motion. Additionally, evidence of healed fractures and infections in fossil specimens points to frequent physical confrontations and a susceptibility to injuries, shedding light on its aggressive interactions and overall health.

Conclusion

Limitations on Existing Research

While the current research on *Allosaurus* provides significant insights into its cranial morphology and feeding mechanics, several limitations should be considered. First, the variability among different *Allosaurus* specimens, including potential species differences, complicates direct comparisons and may lead to variability in interpretations of feeding behavior and biomechanics.

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Additionally, the reliance on fossilized remains means that soft tissue structures and their functions are inferred rather than directly observed, which may introduce uncertainties in our understanding of the dinosaur's sensory capabilities and feeding strategies. The biomechanical models used to estimate bite forces and cranial stress, while advanced, are based on assumptions that may not fully capture the complexities of living organisms, particularly regarding muscle activity and metabolic rates. Furthermore, the interpretation of healed fractures and infections in fossils, while informative, is speculative and may not fully reflect the nature or frequency of traumatic events experienced by *Allosaurus*. These limitations highlight the need for continued refinement of methodologies and additional discoveries to enhance the accuracy and depth of our knowledge about *Allosaurus* and its ecological role.

Takeaway

This literature review of *Allosaurus*' cranial morphology and feeding mechanics reveals a complex picture of this Late Jurassic theropod's predatory strategies and ecological role. Notably, *Allosaurus* possessed a robust and specialized cranial structure with adaptations that facilitated effective prey capture and processing. Its serrated teeth and distinctive cranial crests suggest a highly efficient feeding mechanism, enhanced by significant cranial kinesis and powerful bite forces. However, the presence of healed fractures and infections in fossil specimens points to frequent physical confrontations and injuries, which likely impacted its health and behavior. Comparative analyses with other theropods and biomechanical simulations further illustrate that *Allosaurus* had a versatile and resilient skull, capable of withstanding substantial forces during feeding. Overall, these findings highlight *Allosaurus* as a formidable predator with advanced anatomical features that supported its role as a top predator in its ecosystem.

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