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Guest Editorial

Archaeology of coastal hunter-gatherer occupations in the Southern Cone



1. Introduction

This issue of *Quaternary International* contains 13 papers which are the results of a Symposium “Arqueología de ocupaciones litorales de cazadores recolectores del Cono Sur” (Archaeology of coastal hunter-gatherer occupations in the Southern Cone) held in April of 2013 at the XVIII Argentine National Congress of Archaeology in La Rioja Province in the Northern Argentina. In this symposium, 17 papers were presented covering a vast spatial frame within Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, and different temporal scales, from middle Holocene to historical times and actualistic studies. This symposium was the continuation of another one already held in 2010 in the XVII Argentinian National Congress of Archaeology in Mendoza, and became an interesting space to exchange methodological approaches to the archaeological record in the Southern Cone coasts. In that case, we have edited some papers which were published in the year 2011 in a special Dossier of *Revista de Estudios Marítimos y Sociales*, an Argentine peer referred journal.

Different topics were presented and discussed in this Symposium, among which we can highlight the human occupations of the northern and central Chilean coastal during the middle and late Holocene, a regional synthesis of the human use of birds and fish and different types of lithic and faunal studies in coastal Patagonia, anthracological, and phytolith analysis. In those papers, other topics discussed were the characteristics of coastal archaeological record and the particularities of their prospection, analysis and materials obtained.

In this volume, we pretend to offer different types and examples of the archaeological researches conducted currently in regards with the use of the coast by the hunter gatherer populations of the Southern Cone. In this sense, we believe that the archaeology of coastal hunter-gatherer societies has had a strong growth worldwide in recent decades. This process has also been recorded in the Southern Cone of America, although its beginnings are relatively recent. This increase is evidenced by the large number of research groups working on continental and lacustrine coasts. These coasts have specific resources, among which may be mentioned fish, seals and shellfish (fluvial and marine). These areas have begun to be considered as particular environments where it is possible to find evidence of a broad spectrum of behavior and ways of life, ranging from intensive use of coastal environment and their resources through the use of specialized technologies, up to an occasional use of some specific resources. We hope that this volume will be of interest to academics, graduate and undergraduate students of archaeology and quaternary geography.

2. Contributions in this volume

In this volume, some papers presents and discuss the archaeological record of various sites and areas in several regions of the Southern Cone such as the Atacama desert (Olguin et al., 2015), central Chile (Campbell, 2015), Tierra del Fuego (Borazzo and Borrero, 2015), Patagonia (eg., Hammond et al. 2015; Banegas and Goye, 2015; among others), Southern South America (Zangrando and Tivoli, 2015), Buenos Aires province (Aldazabal and Eugenio, 2015) and La Plata river (Erchini et al. 2015). These publications cover the three countries of the Southern Cone (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay) (Fig. 1).

These papers have different approaches, as some present new archaeological sites. Olguin et al. (2015) discuss the results of the archaeofaunal remains of Copaca 1 archaeological site located on the arid coast of Northern Chile. This site is an extensive shell midden made by specialized marine hunter-gatherers between ca. 7800 and 5000 cal. BP. According to the results presented in this paper, marine and terrestrial fauna (among this, mammals, sea birds, pelagic and oceanic fish, mollusks, crustaceans and echinoderms) were extensively used during the Middle Holocene, not only for food, also to manufacture different instruments. The work of Ambrústolo and Ciampagna (2015) is also oriented to presentation of a site, in this case the rock shelter Alero 4 site from Torcido canyon, a site located in the vicinity of the northern edge of the Deseado River in Argentine Patagonia. In the excavation, stone artifacts, bones, malacological and anthracological remains were recovered. The authors discussed some general features and functionality of this type of site, suggesting that hunter-gatherer groups who occupied the lower basin of the Deseado estuary and its vicinity during the late Holocene have used rock shelters in a complementary and synchronously manner with the occupations with shell middens on dunes. Aldazabal and Eugenio (2015) compared a cup shaped hearth combustion structure in La Serranita archaeological site, dated from 5300 BP and with another combustion structure from Las Olas 5 site, dated from 500 BP, both of them in the southern part of the Buenos Aires province in Argentina. The aim of this paper is to assess activities that could have been carried out in relation to the combustion structures, using different physical-chemical analysis of sediments, and quantification of micro remains, discussing the intensity of use of the fire structures. The last site is presented by Erchini et al. (2015), and is located in the Uruguayan coast of the La Plata River. The authors characterize the prehistoric sites in an area that has been scarcely studied before and which little is known from an archaeological viewpoint, and

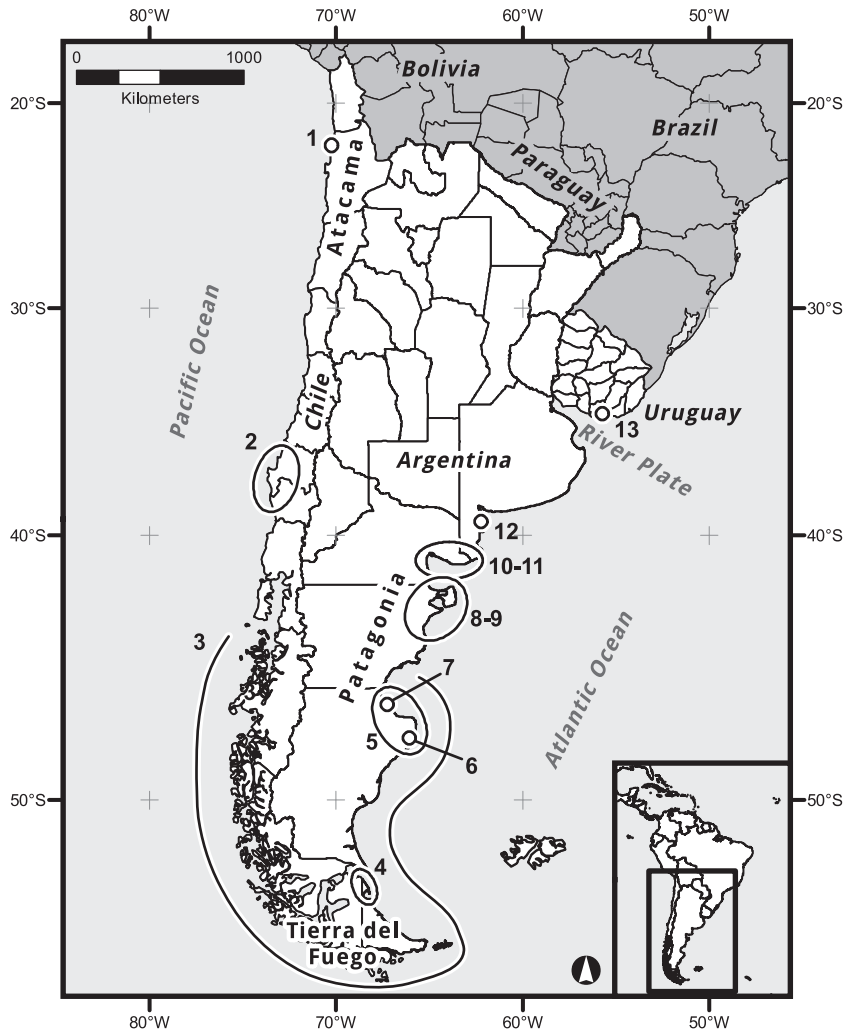


Fig. 1. Location of sites and areas studied in this volume. References: 1) Olguin et al. (2015); 2) Campbell (2015); 3) Zangrando and Tivoli (2015); 4) Borrazzo and Borrero (2015); 5) Hammond et al. (2015); 6) Ambrústolo and Ciampagna (2015); 7) Zubimendi (2015); 8) Banegas and Goye (2015); 9) Gómez Otero et al. (2015); 10) Alberti and Cardillo (2015); 11) Scartascini et al. (2015); 12) Aldazabal and Eugenio (2015); 13) Erchini et al. (2015).

nowadays is affected by coastal dynamics, spoliation and explosive urbanization. In particular, they present the MT site, characterized as a residential site from the analysis of the archaeological material recovered in excavation, and they also complement this study with the analysis of surface collections made during the 20th century.

The remaining papers are characterized by a broader spatial context, some considering a comparison of various sites, and others with a regional scale. Hammond et al. (2015) make a comparative study of lithic artifactual assemblages recovered from systematic excavations of shell middens on the northern coast of Santa Cruz (Patagonia Argentina) in order to discuss functionality and integrity of the archaeological sites, and also to evaluate general trends of the technological organization, and specially the activities that hunter gatherers carried out on shell middens and the exploitation of lithic raw materials on this part of Patagonia. Banegas and Goye (2015) discuss the existence of changes in the selection and use of raw materials for flaked stone tools during the Late Holocene in the north of Chubut Province (Argentina), considering two temporal blocks; meanwhile Alberti and Cardillo present a first description of lithic raw material sources (primary and secondary), and the particular geological and geomorphological characteristics of the southern coast of Río Negro province, discussing the procurement and exploitation strategies for these raw materials and the existence

of temporal and spatial variations in raw material availability across different sectors of space. Gómez Otero et al. (2015) analyze certain discrepancies between the archaeofaunal remains recovered in the northern coast of Chubut province (Argentina) and the human stable isotopic record, specially the high value of sea resources of high trophic level and terrestrial plants. In this sense, they use diverse methodological approaches to inquire into the role that fish and plants would have played among the native populations of the area through time. Their results show up that these resources were more important in the subsistence of the native populations of the study area than what was estimated decades ago. Zangrando and Tivoli (2015) make an extensive review of the zooarchaeological representations of birds and fish in archaeological sites along the Argentinian and Chilean coast of southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. They analyze specially the spatial and temporal variations of this faunal record in order to understand their contribution in human subsistence in different geographic and cultural settings along Medium and Late Holocene.

Borrazzo and Borrero (2015) employ a regional taphonomic perspective to characterize and discuss the main taphonomic modes recognized in the northern steppes of Grande Island of Tierra del Fuego (Argentina and Chile), concerning preservation and other patterns of bones and lithics artifacts. Their research

shows the key role displayed by the interaction of several agents and processes in producing some trends recorded at a smaller spatial scale and puts forth the valuable contribution of applying a regional taphonomy approach to discuss and understand the past human use of coastal environments. A regional archaeological distributional approach is used by Zubimendi (2015) in the study of a zone of the north coast of Santa Cruz province, in particular in the San Jorge gulf. He contrasts a series of archaeological expectations about the archaeological record derived from availability and variability of existing resources in this sector of the coast and the immediate hinterland. In this way, a complementarity in the artifactual record between different landscape units is proposed, where those inland have been used by small groups almost exclusively for a limited range of activities while the coast shows residential occupations, higher artifactual densities with a probable reduction in mobility. Meanwhile, Campbell (2015) discusses the archaeological models, concepts and assumptions typically used today to approach initial human occupation and colonization of islands. He presents the case of the archaeological evidence from three Araucanian islands (in Southern Chile), and states that each one of them experience a different and particular trajectory in regard to their use by hunter-gatherers populations along the Holocene. Finally he highlights the importance of considering a complex and varied set of interacting factors to explain the human dynamics leading to islands' occupation and colonization. Finally, Scartascini et al. (2015) present preliminary results of a seasonality study on white croaker (*Micropogonias furnieri*) otolith, using modern otoliths from a reference collection, providing an interpretative framework of otolith ring model which allow authors to split the year into two blocks of six months each. They use this to analyze otolith from ichthyo-archaeological fish remains collected from different archaeological sites along the northern coast San Matías gulf in Argentine Patagonia.

Finally, we hope that this volume will be of interest to academics, graduate and undergraduate students of archaeology and Quaternary geography.

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Miguel Angel Zubimendi*

Paseo del Bosque s/n, La Plata 1900, Prov. Buenos Aires, CONICET;
Departamento Científico de Arqueología, Museo de La Plata, UNLP &
Unidad Académica Caleta Olivia, UNPA, Argentina

P. Ambrústolo

Paseo del Bosque s/n, La Plata 1900, Prov. Buenos Aires, CONICET,
Departamento Científico de Arqueología, Museo de La Plata, UNLP,
Argentina

E-mail address: pambrustolo@hotmail.com.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: mikelzubimendi@gmail.com,
mikelzubimendi@yahoo.com.ar (M.A. Zubimendi).