

## Guest editorial

### The archaeology of South American hunter-gatherers

The archaeology of South American hunter-gatherers is not very well known. However, in recent years these studies have entered into a new and dynamic phase (Dillehay 2000; Politis 2003; Scheinsohn 2003), of which the four papers that follow constitute a good sample.

In the first place, some of the papers present an awareness of the difficulties of interpretation of the archaeological record. Consequently they include taphonomic and site formation perspectives as an aid in the process of interpretation of the archaeological record. This inclusion constitutes an important step toward the construction of a robust South American archaeology.

The study by Mondini of modern carnivores in the Puna, including the distribution of its material remains, constitutes a necessary first step for a project dealing with human populations that use caves as part of their settlement systems. There are many reasons, including that many times carnivores and humans alternately select the same places to live, or that abandoned sites are attractive for carnivores. In previous years, many sites with long and important sequences were interpreted without the benefit of taphonomic insight (ie, Fernández Distel 1974; Hurt et al 1976). In the future is going to be more and more difficult to proceed in that way.

Biogeography is basic to the papers authored by Muñoz and by Neme, Gil and Durán. The former is focused on the archaeofaunal record of the island of Tierra del Fuego, discussing possible peculiarities derived from insularity. Neme, Gil and Durán, on the other hand, explore some significant differences in altitude for human subsistence in southern Mendoza, near the Andean Range. Both explore the effects of barriers on human populations, and try to assess ways of dealing with their archaeological analysis.

The paper by Aceituno Bocanegra and Castillo Espitia concentrates on the efficacy of mobility for hunter-gatherers living in tropical rainforests. This efficacy is derived, at least in part, from the requirements of the maintenance of biodiversity. In this light, they suggest that these societies only changed toward a more sedentary lifestyle as a result of the necessity to maintain territories.

As a whole, these four papers share more than a focus on South America, and they testify to the wider interests of the South American community of archaeologists.

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