
Bird bones as raw materials: the production and use of awls at the end of the world (Tierra del Fuego, Argentina)

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Résumé

For more than 6000 years BP, littoral hunter-gatherer-fisher societies lived along the coasts and channels of the southern tip of South America (current territories of Chile and Argentina) (Orquera et al. 2011). Bone technology was abundant and very diverse in these societies and bones from different animals were selected for this purpose: cetacean, pinnipeds, guanacos and birds. In this paper we focus on the use of bird bones to manufacture awls from a perspective that integrates zooarchaeological, technological and ethnographic information of manufacture and use.

In this paper we present information of these artefacts from nine sites located along southern coast of Tierra del Fuego. Regional trends are comparatively evaluated following a west-east transect including Beagle Channel, Moat, Península Mitre and Isla de los Estados. Ethnographic information about these artefacts is integrated to the analysis, in order to discuss data about their functions as well as the gender of their producers/users.

Results show predominance in the use of long bird bones from wings and tibiotarsus for awl manufacture. Selection of specific taxa as shearwaters/small petrels, cormorants, and geese/ducks (small Procellariidae, Phalacrocoracidae and Anatidae) is also recorded in the archaeological assemblages (Scheinsohn 2010, Tivoli 2013, Christensen 2016). Ethnographic data confirm that these taxa were selected for consumption by these societies. They also inform that the production of tools with bird bones was primarily a female task, and that the use of these tools was oriented to weaving baskets and hide processing.

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Mots-Clés: Bone technology, Coastal sites, Middle and Late Holocene