
Sítio Saco da Pedra: A Recently Submerged Shell Midden

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Abstract

Early on researchers focused on the archaeology of coastal sites and resources face the dynamic nature of such areas. However, most often than not the time scale for understanding changes in the coast is in the order of centuries or millennia. Recently our team were shocked by the partial destruction of a shell midden, Saco da Pedra, located in Alagoas state, northeastern Brazil. In a matter of five months the opening of a bar resulted in more than half of the midden's area to be taken by water. Such a situation is one example of the drastic changes that can occur in a short-term time scale. Despite the loss of part of the site, the opening fortuitously revealed remnants of a shell workshop. This is the first recognized as such within a shell midden in Brazilian territory. In this paper, we discuss the preliminary findings from Saco da Pedra and how the site fits in the previous research done in shell middens located in Northeastern Brazil. Witnessing the dramatic dynamics that is currently affecting this midden may lead to new possibilities to understand the low density of shell sites on Brazil's northeast coast. An issue that has for some time troubled specialists seeking to understand the history of human occupation in South America and the many parts played by the rivers and the ocean in it.

Keywords: sambaquis, shell middens, coastal adaptations, seascapes

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