
RITUALITY AND LANDSCAPE IN THE TANDILIA HILL RANGE (PAMPA GRASSLANDS OF ARGENTINA) DURING THE LATE HOLOCENE

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Résumé

The Pampa grassland of Argentina is a vast plain only interrupted by the Tandilia and Ventania hill ranges, located in the central east of Argentina. Since the early peopling of the region, during the end of the Pleistocene, these ranges have had a spiritual connotation for pre-historic hunter-gatherers. One example is the deliberated abandonment of particular lithic tools such as fishtail projectile points in particular buttes. Along the Holocene the hills were also used as support for rock art and their abundant primary and secondary outcrops constituted the main areas for the acquisition of raw materials for manufacturing stone tools. In this paper, we present and discuss the main results of Calera, a ritual site located in a high valley in the north-western sector of the Tandilia hill range. This context has been interpreted as a place where a series of ritual activities were performed by hunter-gatherers during periods of band aggregation between ca. 3400 and 1700 14C years BP.

The Calera site consists of four intentionally excavated pits filled with a large amount of offerings and ceremonial trash. This thick deposits were separated by two levels of slabs indicating persistent events of occupation. Among the offering material, some are of a high symbolic value such as a carved plaque, a polished axe, a shell bead, a decorated guanaco bezoar stone, and potsherds with figurative motifs. Bones from some carnivores species, rarely found in Pampean sites, were also recovered. Moreover, skeletal parts from at least 22 different species, with evidence of human exploitation, were found. These includes the bones of guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*, NMI= 54). Other materials buried in the pits comprises hundreds of knapping and ground stone tools used to process different resources such as wood, bone, soft vegetables, and skin, abundant mineral pigments of different colors, and sherds form large ceramic vessels used to store and/or serve foods and drinks. One of the

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remarkable characteristic of the site is the presence of items coming from long distances. Calera is interpreted as a Late Holocene locality with a great symbolic significance, due to its strategic location in the landscape. Several lines of evidence support the idea that the north-western sector of the Tandilia hill range was a place where hunter-gatherer bands from different territories performed meeting and ceremonies, which involved different generations and groups through time.

Mots-Clés: ritual activities, hunter and gatherers, offerings and ceremonial trash, late Holocene