
Ritual sites in hunter-gatherer societies

Maria Estela Mansur*^{†1}, Vanesa Parmigiani*², De Angelis Hernan*², Maria Celina Alvarez Soncini*², and Anna Franch Bach*²

¹CONICET-CADIC and Tierra del Fuego Nat. University (CONICET-CADIC and UNTDF) – B. Houssay 200, 9410 Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, Argentine

²CADIC-CONICET (CADIC-CONICET) – B. Houssay 200, 9410 Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego, Argentine

Résumé

The identification of ritual spaces of hunter-gatherer societies is not easy an easy task, at least from the archaeological point of view. To do so, we usually require indicators, such as the presence of rock art, or special or different objects of which the function is unknown, which have been qualified as potentially "ritual". However, this attribution does not necessarily rest on its ritual character but many times on our ignorance about its function.

Years ago we studied a ritual site located in the mountainous region of Tierra del Fuego, in the geographical area where Selknam society lived. The site was investigated with archaeological methodology, in a Spanish-Argentine project, which allowed us to study it and finally date it from the spring-summer of 1905. In that frame, the main questions we asked ourselves were: What are the particular characteristics of a ritual site? What kind of sites do we identify as ritual? What are the archaeological indicators of a ritual place? The results of that project let us make a series of propositions regarding the differences between ritual and domestic sites in Fuegian hunter-gatherer's societies.

At present, based on the results of that research, we seek to go further, deepening the study of ethnohistorical and ethnographic documentation. We are interested in reflecting on the conception of mountains in the Selknam worldview and from there, discussing the particular role of ritual sites for hunter-gatherer societies in the mountains, and how were ritual and sacred sites integrated with other dimensions of human occupations in mountain landscapes.

Mots-Clés: Tierra del Fuego, Selknam, ceremonial

*Intervenant

[†]Auteur correspondant: estelamansur@gmail.com