
Warm it up! Using experimental archaeology to test a shark teeth extracting hypothesis

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Abstract

Shark teeth are common archaeological elements in coastal site around the world. Used by precolonial groups for different purposes, it must be first extract from the jaws, which is an uneasy task when the bones are still fresh. During processing of shark carcasses to develop a faunal reference collection, teeth showed an association between the heat of the boiling water and its spontaneous avulsion from within the alveoli. This is an interesting data when inserted in the context of zooarchaeological studies of the Rio do Meio site (southern Brazil, 500-700 years calBP), which presents a high frequency of 695 (30%) shark teeth with thermal alteration marks. In spite of the large amount of this type of material in the Brazilian coastal sites, it has not been discussed until now how they were removed. On the other side, burn marks observed in some of them have been associated with feeding practices. The present work presents the results of an experimental archaeology experience based on the use of fresh shark heads submitted to the heat by cooking in water inside clay pots, and by direct and indirect heating on campfires. Time and temperature have been monitored, shark teeth adhesion within the alveoli have been regularly checked, and the ashes were carefully screened to recover all fragments. It was also done the spatial distribution of this material in the site, in association with the combustion structures. From these data we intend to discuss the possibility of the presence of shark teeth in the site from a new perspective. It would be the scrap or the result of accidental loss during the processing of the carcasses for the pullout. The objective was to use it in the manufacture of artifacts, quite common among the groups that occupied the studied region.

Keywords: Zooarchaeology, Experimental archaeology, shark teeth, Coastal site, Brazil

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