



The construction of hunting sceneries: Interactions between humans, animals and landscape in the Antofalla valley, Catamarca, Argentina

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ABSTRACT

Through the history of human occupation in the south-central Andes, the interactions between south-American camelids and human populations were essential in the social reproduction, being hunting one of the appropriation modes of greater long term. In this sense, the way in which encounters between hunters and their preys were materialized becomes a relevant subject in order to understand these interactions. That is why in this paper I pretend to show the way in which the landscape were constructed where the encounters between hunters and their preys were given. For this, I shall focus in the information obtained from the intensive and systematic survey developed in the Antofalla valley, located in the Antofagasta de la Sierra Department, Catamarca Province, Argentina. This information has allowed me to identify a series of structures build with the aim of propitiate the encounter of herds by means of anticipating the movements of the animals, searching to obtain near and fixed targets in order to materialize the attack.

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Introduction. The story of hunting in South-central Andes

Through history of human occupation in the south-central Andes, the interaction between camelids and human populations were central in the social reproduction, in relation with the obtaining of a series of resources such as meat, leather, bone, tendons, wool, and transport. Among the strategies practiced by human populations in order to appropriate these animals (*sensu* Ingold, 1987), hunting results the most important strategy because of its realization in the long term of human occupation of the area, and also because of its relevance in different social, economic, politic and historical contexts. A multiplicity of investigations has provided information about these populations and the relevance of hunting in this long historical process which covers approximately the last 10,000 years. In this sense, these investigations have proposed that during the early and middle Holocene, human populations were characterized by an economy based in camelids and rodents hunting and in the exchange of vegetable resources from lower areas, principally the mesothermal valleys (Aschero, 2000; Elkin, 1996; Martínez, 2003; Yacobaccio et al., 1997–1998). The archaeological investigations were able to advance in the characterization of hunting strategies, as well as on the patterns of settlements and the mobility of these groups. Among these studies it is the one carried on by Aschero and Martinez (2001) who assure that “the hunting of camelids was the principal subsistence activity, including during late moments under the full establishment of agricultural

practice (although) hunting and gathering dominated the strategies of subsistence of most of the history of men in the puna desert, until herding and agriculture, as productive ways of subsistence, started to become preponderant in these economies” (Aschero and Martinez, 2001, p. 216, author’s translation. Also see Martínez, 2003).

In the same way, Elkin (1996) analyzing the archaeofaunal remains of Quebrada Seca 3 (Antofagasta de la Sierra, Catamarca) shows that the camelids were the principal resource of this zone in the puna of Catamarca (Fig. 1). This author proposes the relevance of hunting camelids without selecting ages nor sex of the preys. An important conclusion she arrives at is that “the camelids populations of the Antofagasta de la Sierra basin seem to have supported a hunting pressure through several millenniums without the need of protecting the animal’s reproduction rate, systematically preying over family groups, the most vulnerable part of the population” (Elkin, 1996, pp. 134–135, author’s translation).

These authors, together with other investigations in the South-central Andes, have proposed the realization of camelids hunting, being a very important resource due to its caloric input as well as the use of secondary products such as wool, leather, and bones. In this way the mobility of human populations would also have been related with the mobility strategies of troops of camelids in moments of climate changes, occupying lower or higher ecological levels (Fernández Distel, 1974; Gambier, 1981; Núñez, 1983; Yacobaccio, 1991; Yacobaccio et al., 1997–1998).

Around 5500 BP, the process of domestication of plants and animals should have begun, which implies an important modification in economic, social, political and religious contexts in the local

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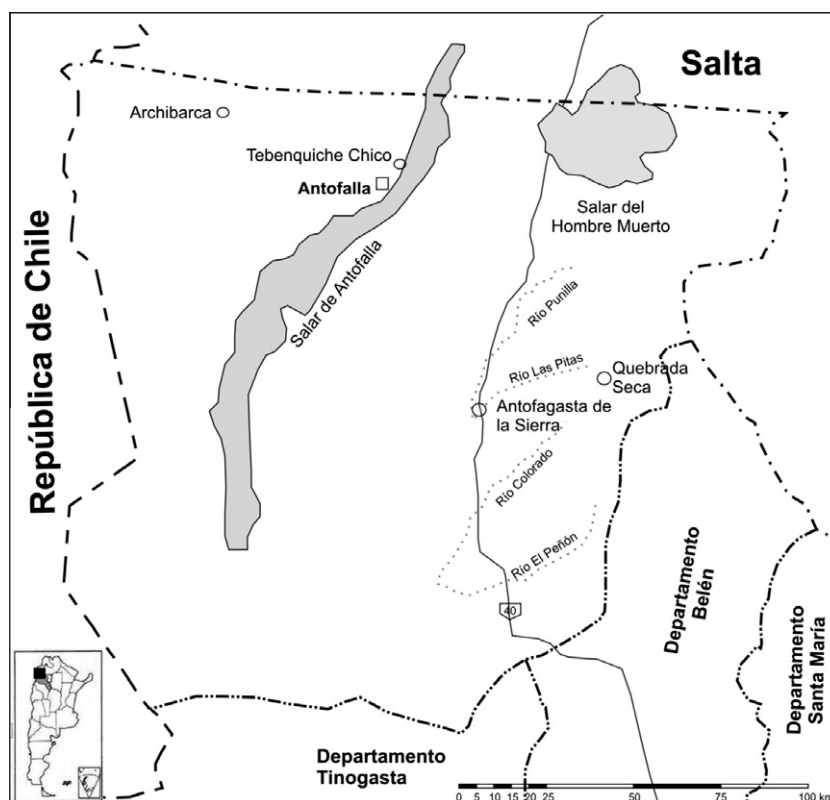


Fig. 1. Antofagasta de la Sierra department map where the Antofalla valley is located as well as other sites named in the text (Modified from Aschero, 2000).

populations. This period shows a progressive decrease in the importance of hunting camelids which Yacobaccio et al. (1997–1998) proposed as a process beginning with a hunting-gathering economy, passing through hunting-domesticating, hunting-herding until reaching a time of herding-hunting. This modification would be given in the predominant strategy which is defined as the one that determines the organizational structure over which different economic activities are planned and realized. This process implies a complexity of the hunting-gathering societies, characterized by aspects such as the reduced residence mobility, territorial behavior, high population density and presence of bigger groups of residents, intra-group inequalities, development of ritual practices as a form of social cohesion, as well as a marker of the inequalities and hierarchies (Hocsman, 2006; Yacobaccio, 2001).

Around the start of the 1st millennium a.C. the agricultural-herding societies are definitively established, which conform the “formative period” inside the chronology established by the regional archaeology (Olivera, 2001). These societies, in the case of the Puna, have been characterized as small populations dedicated to herding, with a differential grade of agriculture development and with the input of hunting wild camelids (*Vicugna vicugna* and *Lama guanicoe*) and rodents. In this way the economic organization and therefore the reproduction strategies of human groups were based around the control of the herds, subjecting the other practices to the development of these activities (Yacobaccio, 2001).

However, information obtained in diverse archaeological investigations, show that this situation was more flexible, where there can be noted a diverse economical organization, where different economical strategies had a relevant importance at the moment of reproduction of the every day life. Regarding agriculture, Quesada (2001, 2007) has developed an investigation in the Antofalla area, where he shows the agricultural development and the social scale of work associated to these practices, remarking the importance of this activity. On the other hand, investigations centered

in the archaeological remains have shown a relative preponderance of the exploitation of wild camelids, specifically vicuñas, in relation to the already domesticated llamas (*Lama glama*). These are the cases, among others, of Tebenquiche Chico 1 (Haber, 2006; Revuelta, 2005), Quebrada Seca 3 (Elkin, 1996) and Real Grande 1 (Olivera, 1997), in the puna of Catamarca and Huachichocana III (Yacobaccio and Madero, 1992) in the Puna of Jujuy. This allows me to reflect about the role of hunting of wild camelids in the agricultural-herding period, being an economy based on diversified economic strategies. In this historical context, the relevance of wild camelids, particularly of vicuñas starts to modify, particularly because of the quality of its wool and its role in the regional articulation and in the reproduction of social hierarchies.

Following this imaginary timeline, in the *Inka* period and according to what the historical chronicles show, the vicuñas would have recovered an important “economical-ritual” role by taking part of the celebrations of the *chaku* in honor of the *Inka* (Puló, 1998, 2000; Ratto, 2003). This ritual consisted in the preparation by the participants of a great circle, in which a troop of vicuñas was entered and then they were hunted and the flesh and wool were given to the *Inka*. It seems that this practice had a strong control by the *inka* state as it is shown in several chronicles and ethno-historical investigations (Cieza de León [1553], 1984; Murra, 1978; Polo de Ondegardo [1571], 1990).

Later on, during the colonial period (XVI and XVII centuries), the vicuña would have turned in one of the principal resources to accomplish the payment of tribute by the local populations due to its characteristics (possible to be changed for metals, raw material to be transformed into manufactures which could be placed in the market or object which would be accepted as “money of the earth”) (Lema, 2004; Yacobaccio et al., 2007). However this is referred in the narrative construction of travellers of the zone from a deterministic view, where the unique economic option for local populations was the subsistence through the vicuña and it was

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