



Harpoon technology and large marine prey hunting in the Atacama Desert Coast (Northern Chile)

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Figure 1. Seal skin inflated craft with two seafarers, one of them using a harpoon device for hunting, navigating near the port of Cobija in 1830, (D' Orbigny 1945:664).

For hunting prey, such as like whales, dolphins, swordfishes, sharks and marlins, in open seas, a highly specialized maritime technology is necessary, including some type of craft to access the environments where these animals live, as well as a harpoon device to capture and drag them to the coast. Coastal landing sites are required for butchering and facilitating distribution of the meat, blubber, sinew, bones and other products supplied by these animals.

We know that those who lived on the Atacama Desert coast before European arrival used to hunt large marine prey employing a sophisticated seal skin inflated craft and a harpoon device, dating back to as early as ca. 6500 Cal BP (Figure 1). Nevertheless, archaeologists still know very little about the harpoon technology, its component parts, functioning, type differentiation, designs and method of use. For these reasons we are now implementing different research programs (FONDECYT 1110702, FONDAP 15110006) to



Figure 2. Archaeological remains of a harpoon device from the Atacama Desert coast: upper row, harpoon heads; middle row, foreshafts; lower row, hunting lines made of seal skin.



search, identify, register, inventory and classify harpoon heads, hunting lines, and foreshafts from museum collections. We are also conducting excavation to add to our knowledge of the device (Figure 2). The program employs ^{14}C dating (more than 40 samples) to order harpoon types over the coastal occupation sequence. Preliminary results suggest different harpoon devices can be linked to different marine species. There are some changes in the design of harpoon heads over the sequence, but the principal purpose of the device is maintained, demonstrating strong technological traditionalism and conservative hunting practices.

References

D'Orbigny, Alcides.

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CITIZAN (Coastal and Intertidal Archaeology Network)

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During the Quaternary, England's coastline has receded and transgressed in line with the fluctuating climate of this epoch. Hominids have utilised this dynamic coastline since the colonisation of England, which currently stands at ca. 800,000 BP (based on evidence from Happisburgh). As the coastline transgresses, more of England's history is being washed away by winds, waves, tidal scour and storm events. CITIZAN (Coastal and Intertidal Zone Archaeology Network) is the first

national response to this coastal threat. With grants from the Heritage Lottery Fund, The Crown Estate and the National Trust, MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) is working with the support of Historic England, the Council for British Archaeology and the Nautical Archaeology Society.



Figure 1. CITIZAN Archaeologists carrying out initial walk over surveys (image taken by the author).

CITIZAN will bring together a national network of volunteers of different ages and backgrounds who will be provided with the training and support needed to identify, record and monitor sites in this ever changing environment. A mobile app is being created which will allow any smart phone users to easily record the condition and location of archaeological sites in the coastal and