

Regional expressions of ways of life

HUNTERS OF THE MEGAFUNA

Evidence of the megafauna hunters who colonized the territory of what is now Chile has come from a handful of archeological sites distributed around the country. The earliest sites found to date include Monte Verde, a hunters' camp near the present-day city of Puerto Montt that was first occupied around 14,000 years ago, and Quebrada de Maní, deep within the Tamarugal Pampa, where human groups lived around 13,000 years ago near a small forest that is now only arid desert. Other sites tell us where these ancient humans hunted and butchered their prey. One of them, located on the ancient shore of the Tagua Tagua lagoon in Chile's Region VI, contains the remains of mastodons; another is located in the rock shelter of Palli Aike, near the present-day city of Punta Arenas. Many of these early inhabitants of our territory can be identified by the style of hunting dart they used, which had a stone point in the shape of a fishtail.

HUNTER-GATHERERS OF THE FAR SOUTH

Once the large herbivores of the Pleistocene had disappeared, the hunter-gatherers that lived in the far south shifted their subsistence activities to hunting guanaco and ñandú, while complementing their diet by gathering edible wild plants. These early groups led a nomadic life, traveling through the large open spaces of the Patagonian steppe and Tierra del Fuego, with brief incursions into the mountain forests. They often used the same caves as their megafauna-hunting ancestors, such as the one found at Cerro de los Onas in Tierra del Fuego. The terrestrial hunter-gatherer way of life lasted longer in this part of Chile than in the rest of the country: In the early 20th century the Tehuelche people were still living this way on the mainland while the Selk'nam did the same on Tierra del Fuego.

HUNTER-GATHERERS OF THE SOUTHERN ZONE

Continuing a tradition begun at Monte Verde, the oldest site occupied by megafauna hunters in Chilean territory, the hunter-gatherers of southern Chile specialized in making use of the resources they found in the forests that blanketed these lands, which provided them with food as well as raw materials for tools, weapons, shelter and medicine. Evidence of these groups has been found in the Marifilo rock shelter near Calafquén Lake, from whence they could access the lowland valleys or travel to the eastern side of the Andes. With the introduction of horticulture and ceramic making around 600 A.D., their way of life became a more sedentary one centered on growing food.

During the final stage of the Pleistocene-Holocene transition, a few herds of huge herbivores still roamed around parts of the Central Valley, especially near bodies of water such as the now-disappeared Tagua Tagua lagoon. While groups in the rest of the territory evolved towards hunting and gathering modern resources, the megafauna-hunter way of life remained as a relic in these ecological refuges until around 9000 B.C. By that time, the newer hunter-gatherer groups had expanded throughout the territory. Their remains have been found in large cemeteries such as Las Cenizas, located in Lago Peñuelas National Reserve, in the mountain rock shelters of the El Manzano ravine in the Maipo Valley, and in open air camps, such as those discovered at Montenegro, north of Santiago. Around 300 B.C., these groups witnessed the arrival of horticulture and ceramic making, but not all of them changed their way of life as a result. Thus, some bands of nomadic hunter-gatherers coexisted and interacted with the more sedentary horticulturalists such as the Lolléo and Bato peoples, at least until around 1000 A.D. After that time, groups practicing that earlier way of life remained only in the highest reaches of the Andes Mountains, although some eventually made their way down to the Central Valley as late as the mid-19th century. Curiously, evidence available to date shows that during this period there were no groups on the coast of this region that subsisted on the extraction of marine resources.

HUNTER-GATHERERS OF THE SEMI-ARID NORTH

Archeological investigations into the hunter-gatherer groups living in the inland valleys of this territory have been limited, although evidence of these peoples has been found in places such as the Pichasca rock shelter, located in the National Monument of the same name, northeast of the city of Ovalle. Owing to their mobility, these groups would no doubt have come into contact with groups from across the Andes, with whom they share several cultural traits. This contact would very likely have made them aware of innovations such as horticulture and ceramic making around the beginning of our own era, leading to a profound transformation in their way of life that ultimately led to the emergence of a new semi-sedentary horticulturalist tradition, called the El Molle.

HUNTER-GATHERERS OF THE ARID NORTH

At the end of the Pleistocene, the hunter-gatherers of the arid north had a way of life based on their regular movement from the lowlands to the edge of the pampa, already completely arid, passing through foothill ravines to reach the Altiplano or Puna. These groups specialized in extracting the resources of the Andean upland meadows, especially when environmental conditions were most arid. The lack of resources in this land led them to adopt a highly mobile way of life, and kept their population density low, though their close relationship with camelids prompted them to begin domesticating these animals around 1000 B.C. This development has been demonstrated clearly in ancient sites such as the settlement of Tulan 52, on the southern edge of the Atacama Salt Flat.

From very early on, the rich bounty of the Pacific Ocean attracted some inhabitants of the Arid North, and over time these people developed a marine hunter-gatherer culture focused on coastal resources. Their way of life was quite simple, technologically speaking, but it was very well adapted to their needs. These groups gathered shellfish, hunted sea lions and trapped fish from the shore. But their simplicity applied primarily to the tools they used for survival; in the ritual sphere they developed the most complex funerary techniques imaginable, the most elaborate expression of which is found in the mummies of the Chinchorro tradition. This complex treatment of the dead would have been in the hands of skilled experts and was practiced on virtually all members of the society. They buried their dead in cemeteries such as those found at the foot of Morro de Arica, some of which contain entire families, which seems to indicate that these hunter-gatherers were less nomadic than other groups of their time, perhaps owing to the abundant resources available to them from the Pacific Ocean. Around 3000 B.C., these coastal groups were living in small settlements such as Caleta Huelén 42, at the mouth of the Loa River.

MARINE HUNTER-GATHERERS OF THE SEMI-ARID NORTH

The semi-arid north was home to the earliest marine hunter-gatherers in Chilean territory, and those groups appeared at virtually the same time as the last hunters of the megafauna finally disappeared. One of their original settlements has been found at Punta Ñagué, north of the city of Los Vilos, and dated at around 11,000 B.C. They share some cultural traits with other early Pacific coast groups, raising the possibility that this way of life may have been present in the Americas since it was first settled. At first these groups had an economy based on gathering mollusks and hunting marine mammals, but around 4000 B.C. they began to gradually incorporate fishing, especially in the northernmost sector of the territory, as the shell fishhook became part of their technological repertoire. Descendants of these early cultures would continue practicing this way of life as late as the 18th century, when they were known as the Changos and inhabited virtually the entire Chilean coast between Arica and La Serena.

MARINE HUNTER-GATHERERS OF THE SOUTHERN ZONE

In the Southern Zone of the territory that is now Chile, as early as 8000 B.C., another kind of marine hunter-gatherer culture emerged. These groups not only extracted mollusks in large quantities but also developed certain fishing technologies that were unknown—or not nearly as popular—in other lands. A case in point is their use of nets to trap fish in shallow waters, a practice that has been inferred from the many stone weights of different shapes and sizes they left behind, as the nets have disappeared over time. These groups also took advantage of major tidal variations, especially in the extreme south, with a simple but very efficient technology—fishing weirs, stone walled enclosures into which fish swam at high tide then remained trapped when the tide went out. This technology was still being widely used in colonial times among communities on the island of Chiloé.

West of the steppe that covered much of the Patagonian Andes was a vast region of archipelagos, fiords, and islands covered with temperate rainforests. Owing to its remoteness, this territory remained unsettled by humans until the arrival of the first marine hunter-gatherers, who apparently derived from the same cultural tradition as the groups that settled on the northern Chilean coast. One of their earliest southern settlements was found on Otway Sound, west of the present-day city of Punta Arenas. Canoes were an essential element of their way of life, enabling them to travel the intricate coastal waterways and subsist on fishing, gathering shellfish and hunting marine mammals. So much were canoes an integral part of daily life that these groups were known as “canoeists,” and their modern-day descendants—the Yámana and Kawashkar peoples—still journeyed along those southern waterways in the early 20th century.

MARINE FISHER-HUNTER-GATHERERS OF THE ARID NORTH

Given their already intimate knowledge of marine resources, the introduction of the fishhook prompted a major turning point in the lives of the marine hunter-gatherers of the Arid North region. From that point onward, fishing took on a central role in their economy. Later, the invention of the sea lion skin raft would further enhance that economy by enabling these groups to fish on the open ocean, using their harpoons to hunt whales, turtles or swordfish directly on the water. Fishing was especially productive, providing a surplus that enabled these groups to trade some of their catch with inland groups of the desert oases and the Altiplano, who sent their traders down to settlements on the coast such as those located near the present-day city of Taltal. In exchange for dried fish, the desert caravans traded corn, quinoa and camelid yarn, as well as manufactured goods such as textiles, ceramic wares and metal items. The effectiveness of the marine fishing, hunting and gathering way of life, coupled with the fact that other groups showed little interest in this territory, allowed these groups to flourish even into the 19th century in some parts of the northern coast, where they were known as the Chango people. Indeed, a similar way of life is still practiced today by *mestizo* populations living in localities such as Caleta El Fierro, which was once inhabited by those ancient fishing peoples.

HORTICULTURAL-PASTORALISTS OF THE ARID NORTH

In the highlands of the Arid North, in places such as the Tulan ravine and the Atacama salt flat, the pronged contact that human groups had with native fauna species, and the intimate knowledge they developed as a result, led to a process that would become a hallmark of groups living in this area—domestication of wild animals. The first animals to be domesticated were guanacos and vicuñas, followed by llamas and alpacas, giving rise to a way of life in which herding these animals was a central feature. Around the same time, these groups adopted new technologies as a result of their interaction with groups from the Altiplano and Northwestern Argentina. These innovations—notably quinoa and corn horticulture and ceramic making—laid the foundation for the emergence of sedentary societies such as the Tilocalar and the Azapa. As the populations of these groups steadily increased, we see the first indications of social hierarchy. Their clustered settlements appear in all of the oases and many of the ravines of the Arid North, with notable examples from later periods including Tulo, in San Pedro de Atacama, and Guatacondo, east of Iquique. Both of these villages were situated close to oases with abundant *algarrobo* trees, the pods of which the locals collected to make flour and *chicha* (a fermented beverage).

By all indications, both ceramic making and horticulture seem to have been imported to the semi-arid North as innovations from outside the region; regardless of their provenance, however, the introduction of these new technologies gave rise to the horticulturalist way of life that characterizes the El Molle culture. This culture was closely linked to developments in San Pedro de Atacama and northwest Argentina, as evidenced in the similarity of ceramic styles and horticultural crops and the importance of *algarrobo* pods. Despite their similarities, however, there were some major differences that set the El Molle people apart. The most notable of these was that the adoption of horticulture did not go hand in hand with camelid herding, in contrast to the situation in most of the horticulturalist groups of the Arid North, whose way of life relied on both activities. The El Molle occupied many of the so-called “transversal valleys”—those that ran between the Andes Mountains and the sea, in the semi-arid North—establishing both small settlements such as those in Valle del Encanto, near Ovalle, and large villages such as El Torín in the Copiapó Valley.

HORTICULTURALISTS OF THE CENTRAL ZONE

Cultivated crops have been in evidence in the Central Zone of what is now Chile at least since 1500 B.C., when hunter-gatherers of the Central Andes obtained quinoa grown by early horticulturalist groups on the other side of the Andes. But it was not until around 300 B.C. that the first crops, primarily quinoa and squash, were first grown locally. At first these products were a minor source of food, and groups living at this time, such as the Bato, continued to subsist much like their hunter-gatherer ancestors did, though unlike their predecessors adopted ceramic making on a large scale. Over time, however, and especially after corn was introduced, groups such as the Llolleo became almost completely sedentary, although as they had no domestic livestock their protein continued to be supplied by hunting. This way of life enabled these early horticulturalist groups to coexist despite a few notable cultural and economic differences, and that is why contemporary Bato and Llolleo settlements have been found on the *El Mercurio* newspaper grounds and around the Quinta Normal, both located in the present-day city of Santiago.

HORTICULTURALISTS OF THE SOUTHERN ZONE

As part of the same spread of ideas that brought ceramic making to the El Molle and Llolleo peoples, the lives of hunter-gatherers in the south underwent a transformation that would lead to the emergence of the “Pitrén” culture. Here, ceramic making went hand in hand with the introduction of small-scale horticulture, especially corn and potato crops, though these groups would continue to rely heavily on hunting and gathering wild resources from the forests, lakes and rivers of this region. Most of the evidence we have of these groups comes from cemeteries, including one discovered during the construction of a highway bypass in the city of Temuco. According to this evidence, around 1100 A.D. the Pitrén gave way to the El Vergel culture in the northern part of the region, while in the far south the former remained until 1400 A.D. This is most likely why it is possible to discern elements reminiscent of the Pitrén in the Mapuche culture, especially in its ceramic tradition.

The sustained growth of the population and its interaction with an ideology that spread into the region from the North around 1000 A.D., prompted a dramatic shift among the Llolleo way of life, prompting these people to increasingly focus on corn farming, an economic activity that demanded a much more sedentary way of life. The production of corn also required communal activities such as irrigation works and greater control over the territory. Over time, these changes led to the emergence of a new cultural tradition, the Aconcagua, though as in previous times there was a continued reliance on hunting wild animals to provide the required animal protein, as the domestication of camelids only came to Central Chile with the Inca expansion into the territory. Aconcagua settlements were distributed in the valleys, along the coast and in the mountains of what is now Central Chile, in places such as La Dehesa, in present-day Santiago, El Manzano in the Maipo Valley, and near the coastal lagoon of Matanza, in Region V.

AGRICULTURALISTS OF THE SEMI-ARID NORTH

Around 900 A.D., the El Molle people, who were the traditional inhabitants of the semi-arid North, would feel the need to shift from a horticulturalist to an agricultural way of life centered on the large-scale cultivation of corn. Along with this change, these groups' longstanding relations with societies of northwest Argentina would bring new cultural influences to their land that would eventually cause the emergence of the Diaguita and Copiapó cultures. These changes would also impact societies living further south, notably the Aconcagua and El Vergel. Over time, their agricultural focus would cause the Diaguita and Copiapó to adopt a completely sedentary way of life, with most groups living in villages located near their farm fields. One such Diaguita settlement has been unearthed in downtown La Serena, while a Copiapó site has been discovered at Punta Brava, upstream from Tierra Amarilla. Nevertheless, unlike their counterparts living further north, these groups did not raise camelid herds; that activity would only begin in this territory under the Inca expansion. Unfortunately, studies of these groups have focused on their extensive cemeteries—including the Diaguita one at Altovalsol, at the mouth of the Elqui River, and the Copiapó burial ground located at Huasco Bajo—rather than on their settlements, so there is much still to learn about their way of life.

AGRICULTURAL-PASTORALISTS OF THE ARID NORTH

As a result of their own technological developments and their intense interaction with groups from around the territory, around 500 A.D. the horticultural-pastoralist groups that inhabited the Arid North of what is now Chile became increasingly complex economically and socially, a process that would change their way of life from horticultural-pastoralist to agricultural-pastoralist. This development would reach its height around 1000 A.D., by which time most of these groups were living in clustered villages such as Likán, on the Salado River, or the Codpa ravine settlement, and would eventually come to be known as the Arica, San Pedro or Pica-Tarapacá cultures. Their way of life relied heavily on water works that enabled them to irrigate their extensive farm fields, which they often constructed as terraces covering the slopes of the valley walls. Livestock raising also occupied much of their time, as they managed large herds of llamas and alpacas. Both farming and herding required a great deal of collective labor, which in turn led to the emergence of a more complex social structure in which the existence of local authorities became the norm.

Around 600 A.D., the highlands and northernmost valleys of the Arid North would capture the economic interest of Tiwanaku, one of the first states to develop in the southern Altiplano of the Central Andes. From their central settlement at the monumental site of Tiwanaku, they deployed two separate strategies to access resources and interact with groups on the western side of the Andes: In the northernmost valleys they established colonies of their own people, who lived alongside and interacted intensely, both culturally and socially, with the local population. Such Tiwanaku settlements have been found dotted around the Azapa Valley, where cemeteries such as Cabuza bear witness to their presence. In the highlands and oases further south, however, and especially around the Atacama salt flat, the Tiwanaku state established economic and political ties with local authorities, cementing them with valuable gifts from the Altiplano such as pieces of gold discovered in the tombs of Larache, thereby forcing a bond with these peoples.

AGRICULTURAL-PASTORALISTS ABSORBED BY THE INCA STATE

Beginning in 1400 A.D., the societies inhabiting virtually all of the territory in the northern half of Chile, whether agricultural-pastoralist or nomadic hunter-gatherer, faced a dramatic change in their ways of life—their forced incorporation into *Tawantinsuyu*, the powerful Inca Empire that emerged from Cusco to expand across the continent and ultimately stretch from southern Colombia to central Chile. Imperial rule meant that economic activities that previously had been structured around self-sufficiency or small-scale exchange now were planned around the interests of the Inca State. The Incas' greatest interest in this future Chilean territory appeared to be its mining resources, and they constructed many production centers to this end, including a smelter at Viña del Cerro in Copiapó and a gold panning site on the Marga Marga ravine, which flows into the ocean near the modern-day city of Viña del Mar. They also operated the San Bartolo copper mine, north of San Pedro de Atacama. To sustain this mining industry, groups of laborers were brought from around the region to perform different tasks. These workers had to be fed, of course, and so local agricultural production was intensified through large scale farming operations in places such as Socaire, in the Atacama salt flat.

POLYNESIAN HORTICULTURAL-FISHER-GATHERERS

Far removed from the traditions of the Americas but linked closely to those of Polynesia, the people of the tiny South Pacific island of Rapa Nui are a unique case in humankind's cultural evolution. From the first small group of settlers that arrived on the island around 8000 A.D. to their high point some 400 years later, the Rapa Nui people became a society capable of carrying out large-scale, technically complex collective works. Their legacy includes huge ceremonial platforms, called *ahus*, upon which they erected great stone sculptures, *moais*, as well as the ceremonial village of Orongo. They achieved these great feats with an economy based on marine resources and horticulture. They irrigated their crops with rainwater, as there are no rivers on the island. Upon this economic foundation and despite their circumstantial limitations, the Rapa Nui people developed a highly complex social structure comprised of different social classes and clans that often came into conflict with each other, even to the point of inter-communal war. While their way of life flourished for some time, the frequent disputes, coupled with the pressure exerted on the island's limited resources ultimately led to its collapse, and the once-thriving population that had numbered several thousand at its high point had fallen to a mere one hundred individuals by the time the island was annexed by Chile in 1887.