

## **Hunter Gatherers of Central Chile      11,500 BC – 1000 AD**

### **Archaic Period**

#### **Environment and Geography**

These groups occupied the lands of Central Chile from the high Andean ravines to the Pacific coast. The first occupations attributed to these Archaic Period groups dates from the early Holocene, a time of great climatic change, when temperatures rose and the ice from the Pleistocene glaciation melted. As the period wore on, environmental conditions stabilized and have remained relatively similar to the present day.

#### **Economy**

These highly mobile groups had a meat-based diet. Their prey included guanaco, huemul, fox, birds and rodents, which they hunted with stone-pointed darts. As their hunting techniques evolved, their hunting instruments also changed to some degree. They also began to focus more on gathering wild plants, which they ground up in stone mortars, which they carried with them from place to place. On the coast they extracted marine resources—fishing ocean species, collecting mollusks and hunting sea birds and sea lions.

#### **Art**

No art has been identified for these hunter gatherers, although it is possible that they continued the tradition of decorating their darts and other artifacts by carving geometric designs into them, as did their predecessors from the PaleoIndian period.

#### **Social Organization**

The hunter gatherers of Central Chile lived in small nomadic bands that moved around their territory in search of seasonal food supplies. As their hunting techniques became more specialized and the plants they gathered became a larger component of their diet, the people probably began to move around smaller and smaller areas, while maintaining their ties with other similar groups.

#### **Beliefs and Funeral Rites**

Several forms of burial have been identified for these hunter gatherer groups. In the Andes Mountains, the deceased were usually buried in rock shelters, which sometimes held several bodies. Some of these sites were also used as dwelling places and transitory camps. On the coast, individuals were buried in middens, heaps of waste shells left over from the extraction of mollusks. In the inland valleys, especially in the southern part of the territory, a more complex burial pattern

has been found that includes large man-made earth mounds containing the remains of several bodies. These sites were occupied for an extended period of time, probably up to the first millennium of the present age. In all these different forms of burial, however, the bodies are placed in a highly flexed position and surrounded by stones.

### **Settlement patterns**

Given their highly mobile way of life, the hunter gatherers of Central Chile did not establish villages, but for centuries in their seasonal nomadic circuits they used the same sites over and over, establishing small encampments. In the mountains, they took shelter in rock overhangs and caves, some of which they used as sleeping places, others as work places. On the coast they left piles of shell waste, known as middens. In the final part of the Archaic period, new occupations began to appear at previously uninhabited sites, pointing to a possible increase in population, which could be due to the successful adaptation of the hunter gatherer way of life.

### **History**

While those in Tagua Tagua still practiced a Paleo-Indian way of life that was based on the hunting of large game (megafauna), in the mountains of Central Chile the hunters redirected their subsistence activities to emerging species, which were smaller and faster. This led to some profound changes as they adapted their hunting techniques and weapons. At this time they also incorporated local wild plants into their diet. Around 400 BC, a new way of life emerged in most parts of the region, based on horticulture or small scale farming. In a few zones, however, some groups continued the hunter gatherer way of life, occupying the same sites as their ancestors before them. These two types of societies coexisted until at least around 1000 AD.