

### SAMBAQUIS AND LANDSCAPE: MODELING CULTURAL AND NATURAL RELATIONSHIPS AT THE BRAZILIAN SOUTHERN SHORES, SANTA CATARINA

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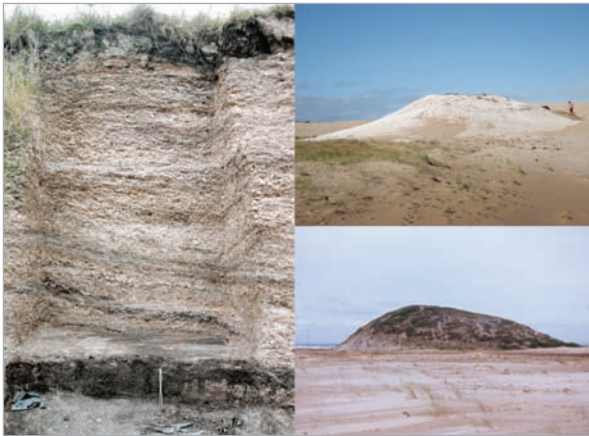


Figure 1. Sambaquis from southern Santa Catarina coast and their stratigraphy (photos by Paulo DeBlasis)

Sambaquis (a word from the native Tupi language, literally meaning “shell mounds” or *concheiros*) are archaeological mounded sites distributed all over the Brazilian coast, mainly in ecologically patchy areas involving brackish waters, mangrove and forests, such as lagoons, bays and coastal island areas. These sites achieve impressive dimensions, especially at Santa Catarina’s southern coast, where they may reach 70 meters in height and 500 meters in width (*figure 1*). In general, they exhibit heterogeneous stratigraphic sequences, such as thicker shell layers irregularly intercalated with smaller dark strata and richly composed of organic materials, including abundant funerary structures ritually disposed in specially prepared places and frequently accompanied by artifacts, food offerings and hearths.

This project aims to develop a regional occupation model for the sambaqui (shellmound) societies at the southern coast of Santa Catarina, Brazil. Interdisciplinary approaches articulate the geographical scope and environmental quaternary dynamics of this lagoonal region for human occupation patterns that took place between 7,000 and 800 calibrated radiocarbon years before the present (C14 cal years BP), contributing a long-term perspective on natural and social processes in landscape construction. In spite of this ever-changing scenario, structural landscape characteristics have not been profoundly modified, indicating significant “stability in change” in environmental terms and, apparently, in long-term social configuration. Aspects related to human occupation dynamics are investigated to evince the presence of territorial organization structures, which show an articulated pattern around the lagoon. This system expanded greatly from approximately 5,000 to 2000 cal years BP, when the construction of monumental sambaquis, which remain notable landmarks today, increases. The distribution of these impressive sites reflect their importance in the symbolic creation of a cultural landscape. They serve as representations of the territorial and social organization of the fishing communities that settled around the lagoon area.

The study area comprises parts of the Laguna, Tubarão and Jaguaruna districts, an extremely flat area among elongated hilly promontories where remaining lakes and lagoons are integrated by canals along drenched areas filled with recent sedimentary deposits. This area displays a complex mosaic of inter-related marine, lagoonal and eolian depositional processes. These processes are juxtaposed as facies in space and time in terms of different depositional systems related to the Holocene relative sea level oscillations as well as subsequent sedimentary processes, which mingle with archaeological structures in complex situations (DeBlasis et al 2007).

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS TO DATE AND PERSPECTIVES

The regional chronology indicates permanent and long-lasting sambaqui occupation in this ever-changing bay/lagoon environment for at least 5000 uninterrupted years (6000-1000 cal years BP, *figure 2*). Funerary areas used continuously for hundreds of years indicate sedentary living patterns. The sambaquis emerge as monumental representations of a long and stable territorial occupation as well as a strong symbolic relationship between the sambaqui people and the familiar flat, open, mostly aquatic habitat, a landscape perfectly incorporated into their culture. This distribution of sambaquis around the lagoon separates interaction and articulation as fundamental aspects of these communities, suggesting that each of these large mounds represents, in both social and economic terms, a nuclear focus of shared patterns of cultural identity and communal territoriality on a regional scope.

The homogeneous distribution in the area points to a circular interaction model across the lagoon involving considerable demographic density and a highly socialized landscape characterized by intense production, circulation and interaction. This occupational model displays non-hierarchical indications of the regional territorial and political organization of the sambaqui society. Sambaquis themselves seem to represent landmarks associated with specific social unities (perhaps extensive family clans or lineages) whose demographic and territorial expressiveness may justify the construction of the same sambaqui along many generations.

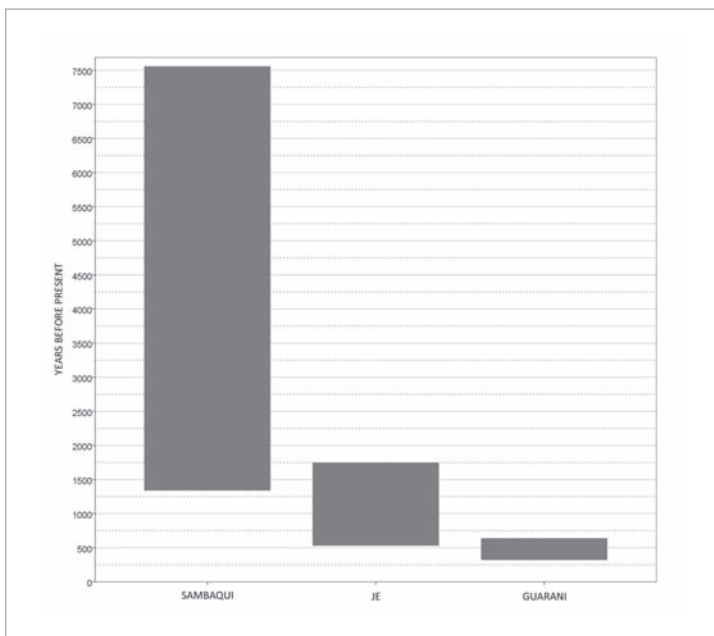


Figure 2. Chronology of the sambaquis from the southern Santa Catarina area

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