

JE LANDSCAPES OF SOUTHERN BRAZIL

The project *Je Landscapes in Southern Brazil* (JLSB) has been developed as a partnership among the Museum of Archeology and Ethnology of the São Paulo University (MAE-USP) and the University of Exeter (UK), under the joint coordination of Jose Iriarte (Exeter) and Paulo DeBlasis (USP). Sponsorship has also integrated the British agency Arts and Heritage Research Council (AHRC) and Fundação de Auxílio à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP). Besides these main institutions, several others have taken a role into this project, such as the University of Reading (UK), UNISUL and UNESC in Santa Catarina, UFPel and UFPR, among other partners. In addition, a number of students from different universities have participated intensively, and several academic grades (masters, PhDs) have been produced, some still on the making.

This project examines historical territories of the Southern Je speaking peoples, aiming to unfold the cultural processes involved in creating and transforming the social landscape of the southern Brazilian highlands. The construction of ceremonial features into outstanding physical landmarks or geographical epicenters reflects the emergency of complex social relations and power structures towards large territories and transitional ecological scenarios.

The project has focused along a transect crossing four main environmental domains in Santa Catarina, southern Brazil, from the Atlantic coast towards the La Plata (Paraná river) basin, a large territory traditionally occupied by Je speaking societies. Into this area archaeological evidence for the presence of Je speaking peoples goes way back to around 2000 years ago, across this wide and ecologically diversified territory. Je speaking societies (Xokleng and Kaingang) are still living into this area, opening space for meaningful cultural connections between archaeological scenarios and present day societies, a deep perspective of indigenous history which this project aims to contribute.

Past Je landscapes are highly structured in social terms, with local communities organized around ceremonial and funerary architectural complexes built in strategic locations, usually centralized as regards communities distribution, and taking advantage of scenic natural features. Settlements include large and well-planned pithouse villages, open-air locations and rock

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS

PAULO ANTONIO DANTAS DE BLASIS
Museum of Archeology and Ethnology (MAE) /
University of São Paulo (USP)

JOSÉ IRIARTE
The University of Exeter

ABOUT THE PROJECT

FAPESP Process 2012/51328-3
Term: Feb 2014 to Dec 2018
Thematic Project
UKRI – AHRC

CONTACT

✉ deblasis@usp.br

shelters with distinctive engravings and paintings on the wall. Another research focus is the much discussed relationship between the distribution of prehistorical Je sites and the *Araucaria* forest, supposedly expanded by means of anthropic management.

Field research has focused in three different and regionally diversified areas of the Santa Catarina state (figure 1). The plateau, a flat and elevated planate extension trimmed by deep valleys where open grasslands (*campos*) and *Araucaria* forest patches predominate; the *Encosta* (piedmont) area with wide valleys among elongated mountain ranges, occupied by dense Atlantic tropical forest; and the coast, where sandy and boggy environments predominate, and the forest mingles with coastal vegetation.

Sites studied into these areas represent a culminant moment of the expansion of Je speaking peoples across the southern Brazilian plateau and adjacent areas, thus propitiating an excellent setting for investigating Je social and cultural diversity as regards the ecological variability along them. Integrating archaeology, ethnography and paleoecology, the main questions for this approach are:

- how did the Je peoples organize themselves in regional scale, taking into consideration the ecological patchiness along these areas?

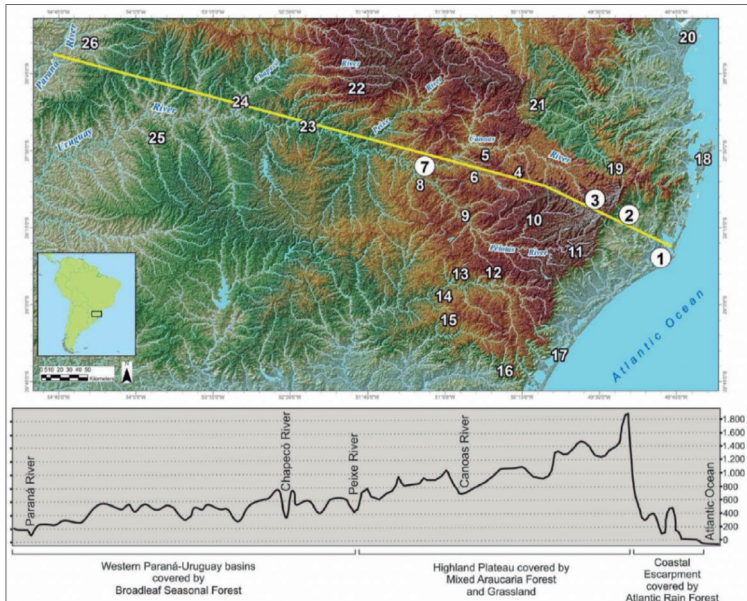


Figure 1. Transect across the areas of interest of the Je Landscapes of Southern Brazil project, highlighting the areas where fieldwork has actually taken place: 1 coast, 2 encosta, 3 Urubici e 7 Campo Belo do Sul, among other areas of the Je territory.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

This project has produced a consistent chronology for Je occupation during the late prehistorical times (1200 years ago approximately) to present times, establishing a reliable connection between prehistorical evidences and ethnographically known Je speaking societies, even to the remaining Je peoples to this day, allowing for deep indigenous history approaches. In addition, spatial correlates for sophisticated social structures have been documented in the past, allowing for modelling the existence of enduring social organization and cultural patterns.

The enduring occupation of specific and important sites has been enhanced, both residential and ceremonial. Large villages have documented a sedentary way of life, reinforced by the documented presence of domesticated plants. Excavation has exposed residential configurations including pithouses, organized kitchens with plenty of ceramic ware, and spatially integrated open activity areas. In some sites, both residential and ceremonial, spatial disposition vividly suggest the dual social organization patterns described ethnographically, making a strong connection between past and present day Je societies.

To conclude, Araucaria forest dispersion seems indeed to have been deeply connected with Je dispersion, a product of human management along the last two thousand years.

- what is the role played by environmental managing in such a population expansion, considering the intensification of plant domestication and food production but, also, the coeval Araucaria forest expansion that has taken place around a thousand years ago?

- are there social and spatial patterns (or principles) for these groups that can be perceived across the diversity of environmental domains and their extensive chronology, including the historical and ethnographic record available for them?

- finally, how did they interact with former populations on these territories, and also among themselves?

MAIN PUBLICATIONS

Robinson, Mark José Iriarte, Jonas Gregorio De Souza, Rafael Corteletti, Priscilla Ulguim, Michael Fradley, Macarena Cárdenas, Paulo DeBlasis, Francis Mayle and Deisi Scunderlick. 2017. Moieties and mortuary mounds: dualism at a mound and enclosure complex in the southern Brazilian highlands. *Latin American Antiquity*. **28(2)**:232-251. doi:10.1017/laq.2017.11.

Robinson, Mark, Jonas Gregorio de Souza, S. Yoshi Maezumi, Macarena Cárdenas, Luiz Pessenda, Keith Prufer, Rafael Corteletti, Deisi Scunderlick, Frank Mayle, Paulo DeBlasis, and José Iriarte. 2018. Uncoupling human and climate drivers of late Holocene vegetation change in southern Brazil. *Nature Paper* #SREP-18-01368A.

Souza, Jonas Gregorio de, Mark Robinson, Rafael Corteletti, Macarena Lucia Cardenas, Sidnei Wolf, Jose Iriarte, Francis Mayle, Paulo DeBlasis. 2016. Understanding the chronology and occupation dynamics of oversized pit houses in the southern Brazilian highlands. *PlosOne*. **11**, e0158127 (D-15-47625R2).