Abstract

We present a review of the life styles that characterized the human groups inhabiting northernmost Chile between 9,000 to 3,500 yrs. B.P. We propose: (a) to expand the "chinchorro" concept to designate not only a mortuary practice, in particular, but the manifestation of a life style that included economic, technological, mortuary and ideological traits, which evolved through time to cope with internal pressures as well as with the extreme environment wherein they were embedded; (b) that there are sufficient records to correlate coastal adaptations identified in shell middens and camp sites with Chinchorro cemeteries; (c) the artificial mummification techniques were not applied to all individuals, which is correlated with the great diversity of mortuary practices applied to defunct individuals, even within the same cemeteries, which reflect social and status related differences within groups; (d) the cultural and technological adaptation developed by the chinchorro groups, was successful, which is evident in its 6,000 yrs of duration and development, however the analysis of skeletal remains point out to severe biological dysfunctions; (e) cultural data better support the hypothesis of a completely coastal origin, against DNAm evidence that suggest migration of an ancestral population from the tropical forest.

Keywords

Coastal adaptations, Archaic period, Chinchorro Tradition, life of style, subsistence, mortuary practices