



Sclerochronological implications for seasonal settlements on Haida Gwaii, British Columbia (Canada) during the late pre-contact era

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Zusammenfassung

*Ethnografischen und historischen Quellen zufolge war das Leben indigener Völker entlang der pazifischen Nordwestküste von saisonaler Mobilität gekennzeichnet. Zu verschiedenen Jahreszeiten beschafften sich diese Bevölkerungsgruppen lebensnotwendige natürliche Ressourcen wie Lachs an unterschiedlichen Lokalitäten. Dieses stereotype archäologische Interpretationsmodell entbehrt allerdings stichhaltigen naturwissenschaftlichen Daten, aus denen sich etwa saisonale Besiedlungsmuster und saisonale Ressourcennutzung tatsächlich belegen ließen. Basierend auf modernen sclerochronologischen Methoden konnte die Küchenabfallhaufen-Archäologie kürzlich nachweisen, daß in dieser Region bereits 5000 Jahre vor dem Kontakt mit Europäern permanente Besiedlungsmuster existierten. Mit vorliegender Studie untermauern wir diese Einschätzung durch weitere sclerochronologische Daten (Zuwachsmuster, Isotopendaten) gewonnen aus Muschelschalen der Art *Saxidomus gigantea* von Haida Gwaii, British-Kolumbien (Kanada). Wie an anderen Lokalitäten entlang der Küste Zentral- und Nord-Britisch-Kolumbiens zeigen die neuen Daten, dass Buttermuscheln zwischen 898 und 1438 cal yr AD ganzjährig gesammelt und als Proteinquelle genutzt wurden. Die untersuchten archäologischen Stätten auf den Queen Charlotte Inseln waren folglich ganzjährig besiedelt oder sind zumindest ganzjährig aufgesucht worden. Mithilfe hoch aufgelöster Zuwachsmuster- und Isotopenanalyse kann die Küchenabfallhaufen-Archäologie Einblicke in saisonale Besiedlungsmuster indigener Bevölkerungsgruppen im pazifischen Nordwesten vor Ankunft der Europäer liefern und rein auf ethnografischen Daten fußende, oft widersprüchliche Erkenntnisse durch naturwissenschaftliche Fakten widerlegen.*

Introduction

The antiquity of ethnographically described seasonal settlement systems of the First Nations people from the Pacific Northwest Coast of North America has been under debate for more than thirty years. According to ethnographic and historic data assembled since the early European contact era, beginning in AD 1774 in Haida Gwaii (also known as Queen Charlotte Islands), it was noted that people moved on a seasonal basis to maximise the acquisition of important resources, such as salmon. The premise for seasonal-settlement patterns focused on the presence of an assumed »seasonal round« (Ames 1981), which was based on the need to

Abstract

*According to ethnographic and historic data, First Nations people from the Pacific Northwest Coast moved between resource procurement sites on a seasonal basis to maximise the acquisition of important resources such as salmon. This pattern of residential mobility has permeated archaeological interpretations without using a precise measure to interpret patterns of seasonal site occupation and resource acquisition. However, through modern sclerochronological techniques shell midden archaeology has recently challenged this generalised view of seasonal-settlement systems and suggested that permanent village sites were in place in some regions of the coast at least 5000 years prior to European contact. In the present study, we provide sclerochronological data (growth pattern and stable isotope data) of bivalve mollusk shells, *Saxidomus gigantea* from Haida Gwaii, British Columbia (BC; Canada) that further support this interpretation. Similar to recent interpretations from central and northern BC, our data indicate a year-round collection of butter clams between 898 and 1438 cal yr AD which suggests that sites may have been occupied, or at least visited year-round. The new combined high-resolution growth pattern and isotope approach has taken shell midden archaeology to a new level and has shed new insights into settlement practices of First Nations people from the Pacific Northwest Coast prior to arrival of the first Europeans; many of which are contradictory to low-resolution seasonality studies and the ethnographic record.*

procure and process food in the late summer and autumn to sustain village populations through the winter months. This pattern of residential mobility, where people moved between areas, has been generalised for most of the Pacific Northwest Coast and is heavily influenced by the ethnographic and historic record (Ford 1989). After European contact, residential mobility was frequently noted (Barnett 1938; Mitchell 1983; Mitchell/Donald 1988), and this model of the »seasonal round« has permeated archaeological interpretations (Ford 1989) without using a precise measure to interpret patterns of seasonal site occupation and resource acquisition.

A generalised »seasonal round« indicates that people moved between resource procurement locations through