

# Daily practices and the constitution of village landscapes in Northwest Argentina.

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## **Daily practices and the constitution of village landscapes in Northwest Argentina.**

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Early village landscapes constituted new contexts for human life. Sedentism, agro-pastoral labor, demographic growth and aggregation of people set up new ways of establishing, changing and managing social relationships. The first sedentary villagers were confronted with a wide range of entirely novel social economic and ecological challenges: nothing in their cultural traditions had prepared them for this new social, adaptive and ideological milieu. Life in these contexts was *provisional, improvisational and innovative* and in a real historical sense the social developments that took place in these societies were *generative*. The varying institutions and habits of thought and action that came into being around the world, that were the medium and the artifact of becoming villagers, could be understood as different historical responses to similar crosscultural conditions.

The earliest village settlements in Northwest Argentina started to grow after 2500BP. Along the first millennium of the Christian Era, several sedentary agropastoral settlements systems were founded, expanded, transformed and abandoned, in the process defined as Formative or Early period. As in many regions worldwide, there are clear archaeological evidences that this process implied a rapid demographic growth, as well as the development of intensification strategies and a high degree of landscape domestication. Nevertheless, in several south Andean cases, residential sites tended to spread out along the landscape keeping considerable distances between houses, and fields. Nevertheless, this process did not finish in the formation of really large and clustered village settlements, but rather on the development of densely inhabited regions but with scattered and spaced layouts.

One clear example of this particular setting was recorded on the Tafí valley where our team has been researching for the last 8 years. Surveys, mappings, collections and excavations in household, productive and public contexts allowed to recognize a *continuity* on the use of a *fragmented* landscape. Continuity is defined by a high overall occupation of the land, absence of limits or borders between settlements, recurrence of

the dwelling compounds as the main features constructing landscape. Fragmentation is characterized by a sustained spacing between houses, absence of public spaces ordering the spatial distribution and fragmented and identifiable crop growing plots. It appears that these clusters were spontaneously reproduced by autonomous households organized around distinct roofed residential and non-roofed courtyard spaces.

This paper discusses comparative data on daily practices, household materiality and settlement patterns coming from Northwest Argentina addressing the problem of early village formation, growth and abandonment from the perspective of social actors engaged in this process. This historical approach, that takes into account the recursive relations between objective structures and practices, sheds light on the agents and social scales articulated in the process of village life expansion in the South Andes, but also contributes to understand the similarities and variations with other cases in a global scale.