

Ancient Brazilians occupied the same homes for centuries

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New research has shown for the first time how oversized pit houses in the southern Brazilian highlands were used for centuries thanks to careful repairs by generations of owners.

This is the first evidence that these oversized pit houses in region were continuously occupied.

Academics have demonstrated one house was occupied for more than two centuries.

People had assumed the proto-Jê pit house villages of the southern Brazilian highlands had been abandoned and then occupied again throughout history. But this was based on an insufficient amount of data provided by radiocarbon dating.

Academics have now carried out further tests using comprehensive AMS radiocarbon dating and Bayesian modelling of an oversized pit house used between 1395 and 1650 in Campo Belo do Sul, Santa Catarina state, Brazil.

They found twelve well preserved floors, five of which were covered by completely burnt collapsed roofs. The research shows the house was occupied for over two centuries, and that communities built big pit houses, but the smaller homes continued to be inhabited.



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The homes was never abandoned, but constantly extended. The occupants built new floors on top of the old ones, showing a single family or group lived there for centuries. As time went on they used different types of ceramics and techniques to renovate and update their home.

Lead researcher Jonas Gregorio de Souza said: "Our research shows the disparity in domestic architecture in the southern Brazilian highlands. We have highlighted that it is important to use radiocarbon dating on individual structures to understand how and for how long homes were occupied.

This research shows experts more about how the southern proto-Jê groups lived, and suggests there was a moderate degree of social inequality and the land was used more intensively than previously thought. Experts have found the land was used to bury people, and the mortuary rites were different for a few individuals.

Some inhabitants of those houses grew a range of plants, contradicting previous assumptions that they didn't stay in one place long enough to cultivate horticulture for the whole year.

Mr Gregorio de Souza said: "We now know more about the way these groups lived, and are able to challenge the view, dominant until relatively recently, that these were marginal cultures in the context of lowland South America.



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The research was carried out in collaboration with academics from the Universidade de São Paulo in Brazil, University of Reading, Reading, Unisul and Centro Universitário Univates in Brazil.

Understanding the chronology and occupation dynamics of oversized pit houses in the southern Brazilian highlands is published in *PLOS ONE*.

Provided by University of Exeter

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