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# Ko Aswál

*Al día siguiente*

Contenido Sala en el  
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# Primer muro: territorio

Kawésqar Culture and the ancestral territory

## 1. Community

The Kawésqar today are indigenous inhabitants of the southernmost region of Chile, who have inherited the cultural heritage and territory of the ancient canoe nomads, who have populated channels, fjords and archipelagos of this southern corner of the continent for more than 6,000 years. This pre-Hispanic culture, which European navigators first called Alacalufes or Fuegians, was recognized by the Chilean State at the end of the 20th century as the Kawésqar People, one of the 10 indigenous cultures and communities within the vast territory that share different origins and ethnic groups in current Chilean society.

The Kawésqar presence is attested in the toponymy that includes all this territory: channels, hills, fjords, islands, islets, rivers and other geographical features. Each of them has its own name, from the Gulf of Penas to both sides of the Strait of Magellan.

The first contacts with Western navigators date from the 16th century, and these encounters are documented in explorers' travel chronicles, as well as in publications by naturalists and from hydrographic expeditions of the 19th century.

Kawésqar by definition describes people or humans, among other living beings. Etymologically it is composed of two words – Káwes = skin and Qar = bone. That is why people, human beings or Kawésqar can all be them. Although another word was coined to describe foreigners who arrive or visit the territory, those who come from afar – Jemmá – which instantly came to describe people or objects that do not belong to Kawésqar culture.







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# Primer muro: territorio

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## 2. Wæs: territory

Western Patagonia is a territory characterized by a huge number of islands and islets, full of channels, fjords, intricate passes, isthmuses, glaciers, mountains, rivers, peat bogs and impenetrable cold jungle. The ancestral territory is considered to be that which extends from the Gulf of Penas in the north, to the Strait of Magellan and the north of Tierra del Fuego Island.

Ancestrally, this territory has been recognized in four large areas where canoe nomads have lived permanently to this day. These four areas of the territory indicate family groups that lived there in the past, from north to south. These were not limits for the groups of canoeists, since they travelled freely throughout the territory, but rather it indicates the origin of the Kawésqar, who grew up in an environment with differences which were reflected, for example, in their language or way of expressing themselves.

The Kawésqar Wæs, according to the Kawésqar geography, is divided into two large portions: jáutok and málte, from east to west, and vice versa.

Jáutok encompasses all the inland channels and the continental territory with its fjords and snowdrifts belonging to the North and South Ice Fields. The coasts are very different from those of the sectors that face the Pacific Ocean, since they are abrupt, with cliffs and few ports in many sections along the channels. The beaches are generally stony and short. The vegetation is characterized by being impenetrable jungle. The flora and fauna is also different in this sector, for example, it is here where there are deer, not in the western part.







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# Primer muro: territorio

## Kawésqar Culture and the ancestral territory

Málte includes all the places close to the Pacific and its outer coasts. In this part of the territory there is little impenetrable jungle, there are peat bogs and extensive plains. There is a great diversity of birds and it is a birthing area for sea lions. The beaches are sandy and very extensive. There are a large number of islets and islands with sandy beaches. The coasts are commonly hit with great force and vehemence by large waves. Even so, the ancient Kawésqar sailed along these coasts for seasonal hunting, as they are rich in marine fauna and birds.

Apart from the formation of the waves, the configuration of the beaches, the conformation of the mountains and the different ecosystems that exist in those areas, there is another element that allows us to separate jáutok from málte: the cochayuyo.

Jáutok itself corresponds to the eastern part of the territory: interior channels and eastern coast. Meanwhile, Malte is the western part. The other cardinal points that intervene in the designation of the Kawésqar space are aqáte for north and seté for south. These have as synonyms árka, up, and séjep, down (cf. Aguilera: 2008).





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# Primer muro: territorio

Kawésqar Culture and the ancestral territory

## 3. A presence of 6,000 years

We know that the canoe nomads lived here for thousands of years, thanks to the archaeological record that they produced, generation after generation, especially with their traditional way of eating.

Since these hunter-gatherers were in the habit of accumulating the shells and animal bones that they did not use, burying or covering them in the ground, repeatedly for millennia in the same places, today we can use these sites as a reference to measure the age of these sporadic but permanent sites of the nomads, layer by layer underground.







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# Segundo muro: presencia

The worldview of the ancient Kawésqar

## 1. The origin of the world

"The Kawésqar did not leave large monumental constructions, such as temples, pyramids, etc. However, they have a great wealth of oral tradition, which is known as "the art of word"; there are two types of narrations, which in a generic way is known as "eik'óse", which means precisely story or narration" (Oscar Aguilera).

According to the oral tradition that the ancient Kawésqar explain through their stories, there were three ages in the formation of the world: the first age was that of Chaos, where the winds blew against each other, and the world had not yet been formed. The second age was the one that is best shown in mythical tales, in which humans, animals, monsters, spirits, etc. all shared the earth together; passing into the third age, which is that of the current world, where there are no more transformations and the world seems stable.

The mythical world was inhabited by humans, animals, spirits, monsters, and also by person-animals. People and person-animals do not differ in their physical appearance, they look the same. An ordinary human could not distinguish a person-animal, so what differentiates them? The person-animals are people whose physical form is equal to that of humans, but whose "os", which is their soul, is animal. When a person-animal dies, they transform into an animal and their "os" remains in the world of the living inside a new body, but when a human-human dies their "os" goes to Houk'a Álowe (beyond the horizon). It can be said, then, that the person-animal is reborn in other forms, while the human-human is not. Neither the person-animal nor the human can remember their past, neither knows about the existence they had before nor who they left behind.

It is necessary to clarify how a human is conceived. This has a visible, concrete external form: the body (káwes). The body houses the aksémhar or vital force, which is the energy that makes the body move, that means the person has strength and can perform tasks; the third component is the os, something similar to the soul, as mentioned above.





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# Segundo muro: presencia

The worldview of the ancient Kawésqar

## 2. Inwardness

As we can see, this conception of creation lacks any divine presence, because the Kawésqar were animists. When people do not have a god, it does not mean that they do not believe in things, beings or spirits. In this case, animism encompasses various beliefs in which both objects and any element of the natural world are endowed with movement, life, soul, or their own consciousness. This can simply be expressed as the belief that everything is alive, conscious, or has a soul.

Hispanic America was strongly marked by the evangelization of Christian missions which, thanks to the progressive colonization of great powers, were in charge of "converting" the natives into Christians; which meant rejecting their own traditions and customs that formed the fabric of their social life. These activities that sought, among other things, to civilize and propagate Western culture, caused a profound change in their lives that transcended the generations, creating ignorance and a strong disconnection between many indigenous youths and adults from the beliefs of their ancestors.

Martín Gusinde maintained that the Kawésqar have a supreme god, Xolas. Gusinde thought that all the peoples of the earth had a supreme god, so he insisted on looking for something similar among the Fuegians. However, none of the Kawésqar acknowledge the existence of this god. Gusinde was among the Kawésqar of the Strait of Magellan in 1924, when almost no one spoke Spanish and he did not speak Kawésqar either, so it is very likely that if he tried to find out about some divine being, he resorted to gestures and misinterpreted what he was told. The word that comes closest to Xolas is qolák, which means seagull.

Today the Kawésqar celebrate Christian rites and have a single faith, which was imposed during the colonization.





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# Segundo muro: contacto

A vast territory explored by Europeans in the last 500 years

The most famous explorers, sailors, pirates and missionaries who had contact with the Kawésqar (also called Fuegians and Alacalufes) wrote about their experiences with the natives over the centuries.

## Ferdinand Magellan

The first written testimony about the Kawésqar comes from the first Portuguese navigator:

"And these are the most miserable and poorest people in the world. They have no houses, but live on the land under trees or in huts made of branches. They have no clothes, but skins of sea animals that are tied around their bodies. They eat nothing but raw meat and raw fish. They are very fearful and cowardly, and they run away as soon as they see us." His diary of October 21, 1520.

"The following Wednesday [October 24, 1520], the canoers who had fled from us came again, curious to see our ships and to trade with us. They brought with them some nets and hooks to exchange for our nails and other things. They sailed very well, and they seemed to understand our gestures and signals. They brought with them a fire lit in a clay pot to keep warm, because it was very cold. They seemed very happy with the exchange and promised to return the next day with more fish."

This shows that, although Magellan had an initially negative view of the Kawésqar or Alacalufes, he also noted their skills as navigators and their ability to trade with Europeans.





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# Segundo muro: contacto

A vast territory explored by Europeans in the last 500 years

## Sarmiento de Gamboa

The second European record of the Kawésqar or Alacalufes is attributed to Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa, who sailed through the Strait of Magellan in 1579 and 1580: "They [the Alacalufes] navigate these little canoes, and they are so expert in handling them that it seems as if they are playing, even when the sea is very rough. With skill and courage, they traverse the most turbulent and dangerous waters, keeping always their balance and without fear of the dangers of the sea". (History of the Incas, Kings of Peru).

## Jacob Le Maire

"They are very simple people, however, not lacking in skills. They live in canoes that they build themselves, and are very skilled at navigating and manoeuvring in them. They are also excellent fishermen and hunters, able to obtain food and other resources from their environment. Their lives are very different from ours, but at the same time they are admirable for their skill and adaptability in their natural environment. (1616).

## Martin Gusinde

"For the Alacalufes, the canoe is an extension of their body, a part of their being. It is their only and most precious possession, their home, their transportation, and their livelihood. The skill and knowledge necessary to manage and maintain it are acquired from childhood and passed down from generation to generation." (Men from the end of the world: Los Alacalufes 1928).





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# Segundo muro: contacto

A vast territory explored by Europeans in the last 500 years

## Charles Darwin

"The Fuegians are short in stature, dark-skinned and thin-bodied, with brightly painted faces. They are completely naked savages, but very kind and hospitable. Their language is very difficult to understand, and their way of life is extremely primitive, but they seem content and happy with what little they have." (Diary of a Naturalist's Voyage Around the World 1839).

"It is interesting to observe how the Fuegians, who inhabit such a desolate and cold region, have developed an incredible ability to survive in their hostile environment. They are able to obtain food from scarce sources and face extreme weather conditions. Despite being considered 'primitive', the Fuegians have managed to adapt impressively to their environment and deserve our admiration and respect." (The Descent of Man 1871).

## Joseph Emperaire

"The Alacalufes were a nomadic people highly adapted to their natural environment. They lived in close harmony with the sea and the coasts, and depended on them for their subsistence. Their ability to navigate the turbulent waters of the region and their expert knowledge of the local marine life were essential to their survival. For them, the canoe was much more than a means of transportation; it was an extension of their body and a vital tool for hunting and fishing." (The people of Tierra del Fuego 1948).





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# Segundo muro: estado

The greatest National Parks throughout the Kawésqar territory

The vast territory, covered by canoes rowed by ancient nomads for six thousand years, is today the largest natural refuge in Chile and, in recent decades, with the creation of national parks and marine reserves, the State has protected a portion of land four times the area that covers all of Switzerland.

The most beautiful and pristine landscapes are home to hundreds of species of birds, mammals, reptiles, fish, plants, and fungi in this territory mostly covered with forests, wetlands, and glaciers, but above all the sea, an ocean that floods with its waters the countless fjords where life finds refuge, nature in its purest form. This has always been the home of the Kawésqar, and the way we see it today is how it was left behind by the last generations of nomads in the 20th century, when they converted their way of life to that of the cities, but always looking at the sea and always hoping to come back and find it just as pure and pristine.

The Kawésqar indigenous communities have spent years trying to participate in decision-making at the governmental level with the national parks, since one of the greatest threats that this territory faces today is abandonment. Creating parks without administration, regulation, financing, development strategies and management plans puts the conservation of these places in serious danger, both environmentally and culturally.

That is why informed participation is very important, especially when there are more than 500 Kawésqar descendants still living in this region of southern Chile. Just as it is also very important to collaborate with the permanent presence of the Kawésqar in their territory, giving them the opportunity to sail again, to practice their traditional life, to visit the places where their ancestors lived and how they lived to keep nature so well preserved, among other good practices that the Pueblo Kawésqar Foundation seeks to promote.

There are 7 most important and extensive protected wild areas in the Kawésqar territory, along with other smaller and less known, but equally considerable ones. Here we mention the most relevant:





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# Segundo muro: estado

The greatest National Parks throughout the Kawésqar territory

Laguna San Rafael  
National Park

1,742,000 hectares

Katalalixar  
National Reserve

674,500 hectares

Bernardo O'Higgins  
National Park

3,525,901.2 hectares

Kawésqar  
National Park

2,842,329.1 hectares

Kawésqar  
Marine Reserve

2,628,429.2 hectares

Francisco Coloane  
Marine Park

1,506 hectares

Alberto de Agostini  
National Park

1,460,000 hectares





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# Tercer muro: modo de vida

Kawésqar livelihoods

## The portable dome house

The Kawésqar developed their nomadic life around a camp, which was set up on land and had as its center the temporary dwelling called an at, which is usually built further up the beach. The beach itself is a taboo place where you cannot make a fire and, at the same time, placing the at higher up prevents the tide from flooding it.

The at is built in the shape of a dome, with curved rods that give it its shape. This structure of rods is called an atqe. The size of the house depends on the number of occupants. If it is for a family made up of only the father, mother and two or three children, the dimensions are not very big. It is only larger if other family members and/or some other individuals, not necessarily related, are added.

The structure of sticks was covered in antiquity with wolf skins and branches; later they added tarpaulins, remains of boat sails or other covering materials. In modern times they began to use plastic that the Kawésqar call "nylon", a term borrowed from the Chilotes.

The at had a front entrance and many times a smaller rear entrance. The floor was covered with ferns, which allowed for a good isolation of the humidity and a softer surface for the bedding. In the upper part there was a hole for the smoke outlet that was only covered with branches so that the rain did not penetrate, although it always dripped.

All the Kawésqar, as a nomadic ethnic group that roamed the territory, needed complete knowledge to assemble their homes. In the normal chore of nomadism, each time a camping site was reached, the house was set up and all the individuals witnessed how this activity was carried out. In this sense, it can be affirmed that the knowledge gained to carry out this work was acquired from the empirical, since individuals were eyewitnesses of the way the houses were constructed.





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# Tercer muro: modo de vida

Kawésqar livelihoods

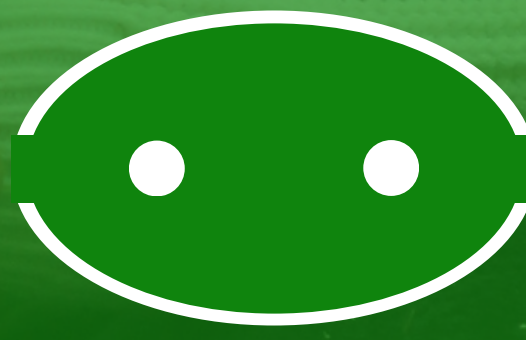
## The portable dome house

part from this temporary housing, the Kawésqar also built ceremonial houses that were larger than residential ones and were elongated, but always curved. Their construction was limited to men only, since women were not allowed to leave until they was finished. They were told that the spirits had built the ceremonial houses and that they had appeared unexpectedly. This type of ceremonial house is called a čeló or jenčiháwa. The ceremonies stopped being practiced and the current Kawésqar elders remember the only time they saw one when they were still very young, and that was when they found a beached whale. Every time this happened, a whale party was held and for this reason a ceremonial house was built.

The ceremonial house was a much larger construction than the temporary at dwellings and was used only on certain occasions when special rituals were performed, such as initiation ceremonies (kalakái, according to Gusinde) or the "festival of the whale", on the occasion of the encounter with a stranded whale that provided a large amount of food. The size of this ceremonial house varied according to the number of participants in the event. Skottsberg (1913: 598-599), mentioned a construction 12 meters long by 4 meters wide and 3½ meters high. Another, seen in Cuarenta Días Bay, would have been between 15 and 18 meters long and had six entrances.



At



Čeló





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# Tercer muro: modo de vida

Kawésqar livelihoods

## The evolution of navigation

The Kawésqar's movements by sea on trips of different lengths were made in various types of boats over time. An early type of canoe was made of bark, similar to the yaghan canoe made of the same material. In the second half of the 18th century, a plank boat was registered, according to the model of the dalcas of Chiloé, which would have replaced the bark boats. Wooden boats were more common in the 19th century, their use disappearing in around 1915. The hollowed-out canoe dates back to the beginning of the 20th century and is the one that the current elders of the Puerto Edén community knew and used until the 1990s. They are made from a trunk which is hollowed out with an ax and burned inside. Boards were added to the gunwale to raise it (afqála), making a type of boat called a kájef, which is also the common term for boats of a similar size, although speakers use separate terms for the different types of boats when they want to be more specific. Subsequently, the Kawésqar adopted the western chalupa boats. The first ones could have fairly large dimensions and were called serró. These boats replaced the log canoes and were originally purchased from sealers and otter hunters who sometimes provided them to the Kawésqar gangs that went out on this type of hunt.

The use of a sail was widespread in both ancient and modern vessels. At first it was made of wolf skin and was later replaced by canvas. At present there are no boats among the Kawésqar. The use of boats was generalized, and they were gradually equipped with outboard motors. Some Kawésqar also specialized in the construction of modern vessels such as the aforementioned boats.





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# Tercer muro: modo de vida

Kawésqar livelihoods

## Tree bark canoe

The Kawésqar's most traditional boat was the *dalca*, a light and agile bark canoe that was used for navigation. These canoes were built from the bark of the Canelo tree (*Drimys winteri*), which was carefully selected and worked to give it the desired shape. They were long and narrow, averaging about 6 to 7 meters in length and about 50 to 60 centimeters in width. Unlike other Kawésqar vessels, such as sea lion skin canoes, the *dalcas* did not have a keel or rudder. Instead, a pair of sticks called "tormentines" were used to control the canoe's direction and keep it balanced. Wooden oars were also used to row with when necessary.

## Pyrite and obsidian

Pyrite and obsidian were minerals that the Kawésqar used in their daily lives. The pyrite was used to make fire, since when hit against a stone it produced sparks that ignited the dry wood. They also used it to create tools and weapons, as it was easy to carve.

On the other hand, obsidian was used to make tools and sharp weapons, such as knives, spearheads, and arrows. Obsidian is a volcanic stone that is produced from the rapid cooling of lava, and is extremely sharp when broken into pieces.

The Kawésqar were highly skilled at carving and working these materials, using specific techniques to extract and prepare the pyrite and obsidian for use. These minerals were essential for their subsistence and their culture, and their knowledge about their use and management was transmitted from generation to generation.

Today, although modern technology has provided more efficient alternatives for making fire and tools, some Kawésqar still practice pyrite and obsidian carving as a way of keeping their tradition and cultural heritage alive.





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# Tercer muro: modo de vida

Kawésqar livelihoods

## Fire

Fire was essential for the Kawésqar in their daily life. They used fire for cooking, heating their tents, lighting their homes at night, and drying their wet clothes and tools. They were experts in the technique of making fire from dry wood and other materials available in their natural environment, such as dried moss, mushrooms, tree bark, and dry grass.

Furthermore, fire was an important part of the Kawésqar's ceremonies and rituals. For example, the "Sacred Campfire" ceremony was a spiritual practice in which a bonfire was lit and offerings were made to the nature spirits. The bonfire was also used to play musical instruments and to sing and dance around.

Today, many Kawésqar have embraced modern technology and use gas or electric stoves in their homes, although some still uphold the tradition of making fire and consider it an important part of their cultural heritage.

Afčar  
-Fire-



The Kawésqar had a subsistence economy and their main activity was hunting and gathering, which provided them with the means to feed themselves. The hunting areas were well defined and this knowledge was shared by the entire ethnic group. Although it is true that they temporarily occupied areas within the extensive territory, the displacements throughout it were carried out by all the groups. There was a seasonal hunt, a period that coincided at a certain time with the birds' egg-laying season, which provided them with this type of food, followed by a period of egg hatching and then the chicks season.





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# Tercer muro: modo de vida

## Kawésqar livelihoods

The hunting methods were individual and/or group. In the case of groups, sea lions were hunted using a club (eikuák), harpoon (sálta) and a special net (feic'éttqal). The method using a stick was carried out exclusively in summer, when the wolf pups were very small so their limited mobility made hunting easier. The other forms were carried out after the summer season, when the wolves were adults and had a great capacity to swim and move. These activities were carried out throughout the year except for the summer.

Deer hunting was also a group activity. Deer are very sensitive to seasonal changes: in winter, valleys and peat bogs were completely covered by snow and possible food was hidden beneath it; consequently, the deer descended to the edge of the coast where the snowfall was of little magnitude. Under these circumstances, in the winter it was easy to hunt these animals.

Fishing did not require elaborate technology, as it made use of elements provided by the environment, such as branches and stones. The branches were interwoven to build small fishing pens (jetaqájes-ho or ačepqájes-ho), leaving an opening like a door so that the fish could enter at high tide. As the tide began to ebb, the opening was covered with branches. At low tide the corral was dry and the fruits of the fishing could be collected.

In addition to hunting and gathering wild fruits, shellfish play an important role in the Kawésqar diet. There are two molluscs that are always collected and constitute the most usual source of their food: mussels (akčáwe) and mauchos (at'álas). Other shellfish usually collected are limpets, sea urchins and abalone.





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# Tercer muro: modo de vida

## Kawésqar livelihoods

Barter also existed among the Kawésqar. Some precious goods, such as pyrite to make fire, were obtained through exchange. They also practiced this with neighbouring peoples, the Selk'nam and probably with the Aónikenk in the southern part of the territory. Bartering continued until modern times, as it was the only way to obtain items. When European and Chilote wolves were incorporated into their territory, barter became the Kawésqar's main means of exchange, both for Western implements and food. Many Kawésqar were unaware of the value of money until the 1960s, when paper money began to circulate.

Currently they have fully acquired the modern way of life, although the practice of *čas* still persists by the elderly, and partly by the younger generations. This consists of the following: in ancient times, every time someone arrived at a camp they had to deliver a present to the at they were visiting in the form of previously-obtained hunting pieces. No one could come empty-handed to these meetings. Likewise, if there were several at in a camp and someone went hunting for birds or fishing, when they returned they would distribute what they had caught to the entire camp. This distribution of resources is called *čas*.

# Čás







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# Tercer muro: modo de vida

## The material culture

The material culture among the Kawésqar is based on utilitarian objects. They are not made by themselves, behind them there is a manufacturer who has a whole universe of knowledge to manufacture them, who knows the materials, who knows how to obtain them and how to work them to give them shape, and for this reason they can exhibit their skill and mastery in the final product.

In Kawésqar, the word WAL means "thing" and is used to designate any object. However, it has another special meaning: "thing of value" and "valuable thing". This means that an object that stands out from all the others, because it is unique among them, can be difficult to obtain, to manufacture, or because only some people have the ability or skill to make them. That is why perhaps they are irreplaceable pieces. They are also unique because they can only be found in distant places, are not easily accessible, or because, due to special circumstances, they lose their character as a common object to become, for example, an exchange good.

How can we see and understand these objects? The objects themselves, taken out of context, are just museum pieces, part of a list of items belonging to a certain ethnic group. From such a vision we could only conceive of them as "things that they used" and "appropriate for them". From the start, this establishes a distance between "us" and the "cultural other", which prevents us from understanding the objects and the world of those who created them. The Kawésqar were sea nomads and obviously used a means of transport: the canoe; as hunter-gatherers, they used harpoons, spears, and baskets to collect things. And those who observe the objects in a museum or after reading some anthropological or archaeological work remain with that vision and impression. However, for each object you have to consider the object itself, the context of the object, its making and use. Behind each object there is a story and, if that is known, we will have a better understanding of it.





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# Tercer muro: modo de vida

## The material culture

Objects have names that, in many cases, give some information about them. For example, the Kawésqar bead basket is called a c'apasjetána, which is a compound word of c'apás = bead and jetána = made, manufactured. Thus, the name refers to the material used in its preparation.

"the recognition and enhancement of our knowledge allows the culture to survive for the next generations"

The types of ancient baskets were different from those that are marketed as crafts today and had various shapes, depending on their use. Some more elongated ones were used to obtain shellfish when the women submerged them to extract cholgás, they were open, without a lid and had a different fabric. Circular baskets were also used to store valuable objects, such as needles, stones to make fire and, later, matches. Round bark boxes were used for this.

The material used in the manufacture of baskets is jonquil. The basket was a utensil used mainly by women, who were the ones who collected the shellfish, but both women and men could make and use them. When and how they made each basket, how they used it, and every other aspect, is part of the object's history.





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# Cuarto muro: patrimonio

Basketry, language, family

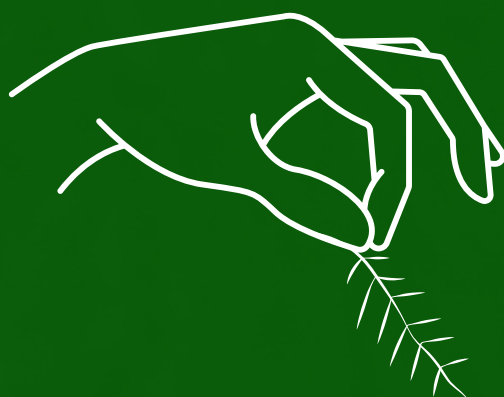
## Rush Plant Basketry

The junquillo, or rush plant, was used for the manufacture of food containers, tools and objects in general, as well as for the framework of ornaments and ties. The Kawésqar use this plant for various purposes, however its use stands out in the elaboration of basketry, with three different types of knotted and, above all, the ancestral knowledge transmitted orally from generation to generation, preserved today by a group of twelve Kawésqar artisan masters. To make a piece of basketwork out of rush plant takes at least three or four weeks, here we briefly describe the process in three steps.

### 1. Collecting the raw material

The environment where the rush plant is found abounds in the Kawésqar territory. But the inhabitants of this culture that today represent a minority group in southern Chile, the current Kawésqar families, live in distant cities more than 70 kilometres away from these natural environments where they can collect it. It is not a plant that can be grown at home, since it requires the nutrients and climate provided by the wetland. So getting to these places is the first challenge faced by artisans today.

Once at the collection spot, several hours are dedicated to the labour of carefully selecting and removing the plant that grows in association with the moss forest known as peat. Depending on the use that is in mind, either the thickest or the thinnest stems of the plant are chosen. Each handful is tightly but delicately tied before moving on to the next stage.







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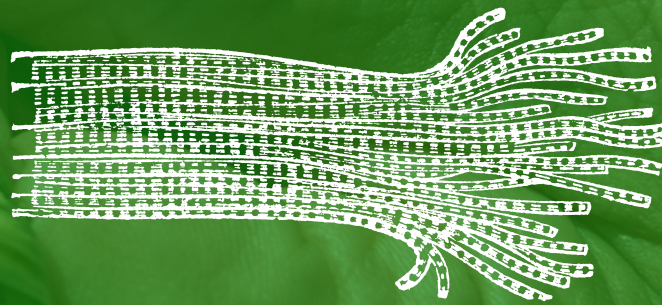
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# Cuarto muro: patrimonio

Basketry, language, family

## 2. Resting the fibre at home

The junquillo or rush plant has a light and brittle texture that makes it impossible to weave immediately after harvesting. That is why the Kawésqar have always known that the plant must rest. During this process, the oil that the plant itself has naturally gives it a malleable vegetable fibre character, which is obtained after 3 or 4 weeks of horizontal rest in the dark.



## 3. Knitting

Rush plant basketry basically originates from knotting the flexible fibres, a technique perfected for millennia by ancient canoe nomads, which does not require scissors or glue. The art of simply tying the plant turns it into resistant and useful objects for the Kawésqar subsistence lifestyle. These were the only containers they knew until they met modern navigators, and which today they refuse to lose as heritage despite the new materials in their territory.

Today this ancestral technique is even being suggested as a natural replacement for plastic objects that so badly pollute the Kawésqar environment and the planet.







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# Cuarto muro: patrimonio

Basketry, language, family

## What language do Kawésqar speak?

The Kawésqar language was spoken throughout the entire territorial extension of the ethnic group, with a dialectal variant known in the southern part of the Kawésqar Wæs.

The number of fully competent speakers has been decreasing dramatically, and today it is in a critical situation. There are only four people who speak Kawésqar as their mother tongue and primary language in their daily interaction in Puerto Edén. In fact, the generation born in the 1960s is the last to inherit the Kawésqar language as their mother tongue, but since they have moved to the cities in the north and south of Chile, they use it only when in contact with their older peers.

The Kawésqar who live in Puerto Natales, as well as some of the last generation who live in Puerto Edén, have actively participated in some ongoing programmes to revitalize the Kawésqar language.

It was during the second half of the 1970s that a growing academic interest in the ethnic group arose. Both anthropological and linguistic work was carried out in Puerto Edén, and the Kawésqar began to see a cultural value in their language that they did not have before, especially due to the devaluation of the language and culture by those who had more interaction with them.

The government's vision for Chile's indigenous languages was also detrimental. Spanish was considered the only language of the country so indigenous children had to have a mastery of it, to the detriment of their mother tongues, in order to access personal development and education opportunities.

Some Kawésqar from Puerto Edén collaborated intensively as consultants in obtaining linguistic data. All of this work was done with an academic interest focused on the preservation of data, considering the members of the speaking community only as study subjects and not beneficiaries. The idea was that, if the language became extinct, at least the information obtained would guarantee that its documentation would be preserved, thereby achieving a successful "cultural salvage".





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Basketry, language, family

In the Kawésqar language there is no word to greet someone for a cultural reason but, given the insistence of society on repeating Kawésqar basic or initial words, the language council has had to invent expressions of greeting:

## Kuosa K'iaha-as

Hello

Bye

## Aswaláf Jewél atæel

Good morning

Good afternoon

## Ak'iaawe Jat jéksor

Good night

See you soon

Phonemically, Kawésqar has 6 vowels (a, æ, e, o, i, u) and 19 consonants:

- occlusivas (p, t, k, q)
- ejectives (p', t', c', k', q')
- glottal (h)
- fricatives (f, s)
- affricate (č)
- nasals (m, n)
- lateral (l)
- vibrate (single, multiple and retroflex r)
- and approximants (j, w).





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Basketry, language, family

Kawésqar is basically a SOV (subject-object-verb) language, that is, the verb occupies the final position in a sentence's word order. Morphologically it is an agglutinative and moderately synthetic language. The morphological processes found in it are composition and suffixation. The first allows the existence of compound nouns (for example, *nóus-kstai* nose + canal = nostrils), and the second the derivation (for example, *kiúrro-wálak* dog + female animal = bitch; *akčáwe-jeké* cholga - diminutive = little cholguita), and by marking case (*jemmá-s* white man + genitive); verbs in the plural (-atál) and suffixes of tense, aspect and mood (for example, *áltqar-sekué* = rise + future).

One of the most important features of the language is the abundance of so-called deictics or indicator expressions, such as here or there, among others. These deictics in Kawésqar make it possible to express spatial location with great precision. For example, there are 32 ways to express "here", by adding different spatial descriptors to the pronominal form *æs* that indicates an "I", that is, the speaker, so that an *æs-asé* "here" can be expressed. For instance, [give the Kawésqar] "here [in this fjord]", *æs-k'ólaf* "here [on this beach]" or *æs-tqal* "here [in a bay or on a flat place with a rounded or semi-circular surface]".

The Kawésqar language has a deep relationship with the environment and topography plays a very important role, since it is omnipresent in all kinds of discourse. This is how geomorphology and geometry find expression in the language.

Unlike other languages where parts of the human body are used in the names of geographical features, such as "arm of a river" or "eye of water", in Kawésqar the geographical terms are used for parts of the body: *k'élaf-astál* = neck, literally "the isthmus of the neck"; *k'íawe-kstai* = ear canal, lit. "the ear canal"; *tamá-asé* = interdigital fold, lit. "the fjord of the fingers". Parallel or parallel line designations correspond to "channel", while a circle or semi-circle is a "bay"; verticality is expressed by the word that means "ravine".





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# Cuarto muro: patrimonio

Basketry, language, family

## Kinship ties

The Kawésqar kinship system is patrilineal. Different terms are used to distinguish between the paternal and maternal parts. The word *-sélas* transforms the terms of kinship into feminine, except for father and mother, who each have their own word, and in the case of a paternal uncle, who changes the feminine "ey" to "ás", that is, *Jersás-sélas* (paternal aunt).

Apánap

paternal grandfather

Kéwes

maternal grandfather

-sélas

paternal grandmother

-sélas

maternal grandmother

Čæčár

father

C'ac'ap

mother

Aihiól

son

Sekuéjok

grandson

-sélas

daughter

-sélas

granddaughter

Jersey

paternal uncle

Jerwétak

maternal uncle

ás-sélas

paternal aunt

-sélas

maternal aunt





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# Cuarto muro: patrimonio

Basketry, language, family

## Knowledge & learning

The transmission of knowledge among the Kawésqar occurred during navigation; mainly children, youth, and, in some cases, adults were taught. In the case of children and young people, as they navigated through the channels, the elders taught them place names, the shape and relief of places, and the usefulness and feasibility of obtaining certain types of animals and shellfish in specific areas. The teaching of geography was strongly marked by the process of survival, which was inculcated in young people by indicating which were the appropriate places for safe hunting and which were not.

During these trips, children were taught everything about climatic factors, as one of the essential abilities, apart from hunting, is the ability to forecast the weather, since greater safety at sea and navigation depended on that to be able to arrive at port safe and sound. To do this, all knowledge was transferred from a very young age through social situational learning and children constantly internalized, for example, the shape of clouds and the different shades of grey that usually occur at a certain time of day, since each hue means a particular climatic event (storms, showers and others).

Today the family plays a fundamental role in ensuring that this teaching and culture remains alive, that is why we live, it is our purpose and project as a family.

## Future

Valuing the knowledge of the elderly, generating spaces for conversation with the next generations to talk about their experiences, trips, territories and reflections on the future, is the challenge that drives the Pueblo Kawésqar Foundation to constantly develop initiatives that make visible the culture, the legacy of this heritage and, above all, the people who keep it alive.

All the Kawésqar who are participating in this international encounter with Kawésqar culture are related, and represent the four living generations of this indigenous culture from southern Chile.





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# Quinto muro: mar

The maritime life of the Kawésqar

The Kawésqar from the north, centre and south of the territory all share the same cultural pattern. In the past, they came together in their territory's maritime communication routes, they sailed together sharing hunting groups, separated or, sometimes, in crews from one side or the other. They would frequently change boats, depending on where a group or an individual canoe was going. Therefore, they shared this transport and also their stories.

The current Kawésqar of the entire territory still navigate — not in canoes, but in modern boats — they work in fishing and in other activities related to the sea. Their connection with the sea has not been interrupted and they are constantly defending their maritime rights and their ecosystems because, as an old Kawésqar man said many years ago:

"Kawésqar are children of the ancient people and that I myself have rocked, and these other children who are here, just like everyone around us who navigates these places, including me."

The historical elements that unite them are their ancestors and the protection of the territory. In this sense, they have requested marine coastal spaces for indigenous peoples and to claim the right of access and use of the sea.

There are still some living Kawésqar who are members of these communities and who were born in the channels, particularly in the Muñoz Gamero Peninsula, in Seno Skyring, in San Isidro, and in Bahía el Águila, this being the last place where they were found. He saw them leave with their canoes.

For these communities, their connection with the territory and trying to preserve those memories is very special, since, in this way, they are protected and will endure so that the next generations can also preserve their identity for the future. Otherwise, they will not be able to have a marked identity. For this reason, the current representatives of these communities express that: "We always have to know where we come from and where we are going to".





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# Quinto muro: mar

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Within the territory there are places that are important because they preserve stories, for example, the fishing corrals and the old camps, which were also exchange points. In Puerto Ramírez, on the Muñoz Gamero Peninsula, there is a sector where many Kawésqar were, because it was a place where there was plenty of food.

Currently, maritime trips are shorter, because the way of doing them has also changed. Today navigation is for subsistence, as is the case with fishermen, although the entire territory is no longer ploughed through as it was before. In fact, ancient navigation as it was known no longer exists, it is not practised. However, a story that accounts for this has been preserved.

This relays the navigations made by Inés Caro Pérez, who is considered by some Kawésqar communities one of the last Kawésqar women to row to the territories that are further north, and who, therefore, represents them symbolically. She made a first stop in Puerto Edén, accompanied by her son and a newborn child, however, she later continued touring and embarked from the Muñoz Gamero Peninsula to Puerto Natales, among other places.

In Kawésqar history, these groups have been made invisible, since the story tends to focus exclusively on the memories of Puerto Edén, due to it having the most existing documentation. This is precisely why it is important to record those memories – to prevent them being lost and to make these communities visible, so that this can be written down and used to try to take advantage of the opportunities for its members to participate, so they can demonstrate that there is a willingness to progress in different subjects.

For the Kawésqar communities, territorial knowledge is held in the memory of their ancestors and they are trying to recover it as a living and active purpose of their identities.