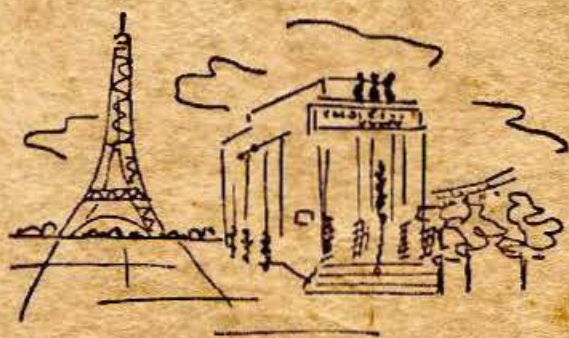


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PRESENT STATUS AND FUTURE PROBLEMS
OF
ARCHEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN ECUADOR

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FROM THE 16th century when rumors reached the first Europeans in the New World of the great civilizations to the south, explorers have been attracted to Peru. Its romantic fascination and seemingly inexhaustible treasures, now sought more for their scientific value than for monetary wealth, exert a strong lure even today. This is evident in the fact that there have been more professional archeologists working in Peru in the past decade than in all the rest of South America put together. A great deal still remains to be learned in Peru, both because the aboriginal cultures reached a high peak of development, and because the excellent preservation on the dry coastal deserts makes the record remarkably complete. Many more decades of intensive research will not fill in all the details of Peruvian prehistory. However, the science of archeology does not derive its sole, or perhaps even its major significance from the filling in of local historical details. It aims at retracing paths of migration and cultural diffusion, reconstructing and explaining the origin and development of culture on a continental scale. To accomplish such an end, knowledge of the area separating the high cultures of Peru and Bolivia from those of Mexico is critical.

As the chronological position and cultural context of certain traits in the Mesoamerican and Andean sequences become better known, the question of their origin is raised. The difference in the relative antiquity of such things as tall tripods and metallurgical techniques suggests a Mesoamerican origin for the former and a South American one for the latter (Willey, 1955, pp. 44-45). However, other traits like platform mounds, and pottery features like rocker stamping, negative or resist-dye painting and mold-made figurines seem to appear almost simultaneously in both places. Most archeologists interpret this as cultural diffusion rather than independent invention, but support-

ing evidence from the intervening area is meager. Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua and Honduras were marginal to the major centers of cultural development in the New World during aboriginal times, and have remained marginal to the interests of most archeologists today. However, without more specific knowledge of what happened in this region, many questions about where inventions were made and how they were spread will remain unanswered. An example of the possibilities that research in some of these countries holds for archeological interpretation can be furnished by consideration of the present status and potential significance of archeological investigations in Ecuador.

The study of Ecuadorian archeology started more than 75 years ago, when Federico González Suárez began work on the archeology and history of the Cañari Indians. His *Atlas Arqueológico Ecuatoriano* was published in 1892 and his *Prehistoria Ecuatoriana* in 1904. These contain valuable descriptions of archeological sites and specimens, as well as ethnohistorical information, and laid the foundation for all later work in these fields.

The first North American to conduct investigations in Ecuador, George A. Dorsey, visited La Plata Island in 1892 for the Field Museum of Natural History of Chicago. He found predominantly ceremonial remains, indicating that the site had religious significance for people who apparently lived on the mainland. The results of his study were published in 1901 under the title, *Archaeological Investigations on the Island of La Plata, Ecuador*.

In the years from 1901-1906, Paul Rivet made extensive ethnological and archeological surveys in many parts of the country, the results of which were published in collaboration with Verneau in a 2 volume work, *Ethnographie Ancienne de l'Équateur*. The first volume, comprising the text, appeared in 1912, and the second, containing the majority of the plates, in 1922. This detailed account summarized the evidence bearing on the reconstruction of the ethnographic situation in Ecuador immediately preceding the Spanish conquest, derived from historical documentation and archeological data. In addition to discerning areal differences in Ecuadorian aboriginal cultures, the authors concluded that the country as a whole had received influences from considerable distances. In their words:

"Nous estimons que les anciens Équatoriens ont subi l'influence plus ou moins accusée de populations habitant parfois

à des distances considérables. Pour nous, il ne fait pas de doute que nos Indiens ont eu jadis des relations avec des tribus de l'Amazone, de l'Amérique centrale et même de l'Amérique du Nord" (*Ethnographie Ancienne*, vol. 1, p. xi).

Immediately following Rivet's survey, Marshall H. Saville undertook extensive fieldwork, particularly in the Provinces of Manabi and Esmeraldas under the auspices of the George G. Heye Expeditions of New York. The two large volumes on *Antiquities of Manabi*, which appeared in 1907 and 1910, are copiously illustrated and form an excellent introduction to the archeology of this important part of Ecuador.

In 1909, a disciple of González Suárez named Jacinto Jijón y Caamaño began a series of investigations that continued until his death in 1950. Jijón y Caamaño's extensive excavations, particularly in the Provinces of Imbabura and Chimborazo, were the basis for numerous publications on Ecuadorian archeology. To him goes the credit for establishing the first stratigraphic sequence in the country, described in the report on *Purubá* (1927). By taking this sequence as a guide, he distinguished chronological periods in other parts of the country, making possible a broad scale reconstruction of Ecuadorian prehistory attempted in *Antropología Prehispánica del Ecuador* (1952).

In addition to his own work, Jijón y Caamaño encouraged others to come to Ecuador. At his invitation Max Uhle, a famous German archeologist who had worked in Peru, carried out investigations from 1920 to 1935 in the highlands and on the north coast. Uhle was fascinated by what he felt were Mayan and Chorotegan influences in Ecuadorian ceramics, but developed his theories without supplying adequate supporting evidence with the result that much of his work has been ignored by more recent scholars. However his site and artifact descriptions are useful for comparative purposes.

Until 1937, little attention was paid to the Santa Elena Peninsula, which constitutes the most westward projection of the coast. At this time Geoffrey H. S. Bushnell conducted a series of excavations, reported in *Archeology of the Santa Elena Peninsula in Southwest Ecuador* (1951). Several periods were established on the basis of stylistic differences in the pottery, with detailed descriptions of the ceramics and other artifacts. This work was followed by stratigraphic excavations at La Libertad, part of a 5 year program of archeological research in Ecuador sponsored by the School of American Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico and the Academia Nacional de Historia of Quito, and

conducted by Edwin N. Ferdon and John M. Corbett. Unfortunately, only brief notices of these results have been published so far.

In 1941, as part of the large-scale program of anthropological research in Latin America conducted by the Institute of Andean Research, Donald Collier and John Murra spent 3 months in survey and excavation in Chimborazo, Cañar, Azuay and Loja. Their stratigraphic excavations at Cerro Narrio, reported in *Survey and Excavations in Southern Ecuador* (1943), provide a basic sequence for this part of the highlands. Additional investigations in Azuay Province by Wendell C. Bennett in 1944, published in *Excavations in the Cuenca Region, Ecuador* (1946), defined important pottery types and tended to verify the sequence reported by Collier and Murra.

For years preceding World War II, Carlos Zevallos Menéndez of Guayaquil excavated archeological materials from the Province of Guayas and on the Island of Puna, but unfortunately to date his collections remain unanalyzed and unpublished. Since World War II there has been little systematic research undertaken in Ecuador, in contrast to Peru, which has seen a number of archeological expeditions of considerable scope. In 1952, Emilio Estrada of Guayaquil began to conduct extensive survey and excavations in the coastal provinces of Guayas and Los Rios, both almost completely unknown. One publication, *Ensayo Preliminar sobre Arqueología de Milagro* (1954), has already resulted from this work, and the continuing researches will eliminate this large gap in our knowledge of Ecuadorian archeology. On Estrada's invitation, we spent several weeks conducting stratigraphic excavations in the Guayas Basin in 1954. This work has established the existence of Formative Period remains heretofore not reported in coastal Ecuador. These materials show early and rather specific relationships to the Formative Period cultures of both Peru and Mesoamerica.

This, briefly, is the present status of archeological investigations in Ecuador. Few unpublished materials have been mentioned because what is unpublished is for all practical purposes unknown. The listing of reports is far from a complete bibliography, but it indicates the type of information available and mentions some of the major scientific contributions. Most of the work was done before the newer techniques of archeological excavation and ceramic classification were developed, and consequently it is inadequate by modern standards without a scientifically derived framework into which it can be fitted. The establishment of such a chronological skeleton is a task that urgently needs attention. Because of its geographical position on the mainstreams of

cultural movements, from the first peopling of the continent up until Spanish times, what the record shows in Ecuador is of great importance for the interpretation of the prehistory of many other parts of the New World. Without specific knowledge of Ecuadorian archeology, we are left with tantalizing clues to elaborate into guesses about what *might* have happened. Five of the problems that seem to focus on Ecuador for their solution can be cited for illustration.

Formative Period Development

In analyzing the local sequences of cultural development, represented at various sites principally in Mexico and Peru but also in scattered spots in the intervening region, archeologists have noticed that there came a time when the simple life of the people was transformed. Pottery became more elaborate and distinctive, villages became larger, temples and earth mounds indicated more formalized religious activity, and some of the population became divorced from the daily routine into specialized governmental or priestly functions. The time when this development took place is termed the Formative Period in New World archeological sequences because it appears to be the critical period of differentiation and consolidation of cultural features that reach greater elaboration in later times. It might be compared with the stage in the biological maturation of an individual when the simple cell multiplication changes to cell differentiation and the basic structures of the body are formed. The fascinating thing about the Formative horizon in New World archeology is that it shows striking identities of detail in sites as widely separated as Tlatilco in the Valley of Mexico and Ancon in Peru. What made cultures originally so different suddenly become so much alike? Or did it happen suddenly? How were the new ideas transmitted? Where did they come from and which way did they travel? We would like to know the answers to these questions and many more. We should find some of them in Ecuador.

Ecuador is between Middle America and Peru, the two extremes where the most work has been done in the identification and analysis of Formative Period remains. There are many similarities but certain differences between the cultures of these two areas, and these have made it anyone's guess as to where individual Formative Period traits appeared first. Without accurate determination of calendrical dates, which even Carbon 14 analysis cannot supply as yet, other evidence

must be used. Our own investigations on the coast of Ecuador in 1954 illustrate the kind of information that can help solve this problem. A Formative Period site on the Rio Babahoyo produced a complex of early traits, some of which have been found in Peru and others of which have not previously been reported from South America. All, however, are known from the Formative Period in Mesoamerica. This situation suggests that there was a diffusion of the complex southward, with the filtering out of some traits along the way. More work is needed in the intervening area before this conclusion can be stated as fact, but the evidence derived from these limited excavations suggests that the whole area would repay more intense investigation.

Andean-Amazonian Relationships

Ecuador is located not only on the mainstream of cultural flow between Middle and South America, but also on the intersection between the highlands and the lowlands. A glance at a map of South America is sufficient to show a multitude of rivers, great and small, that feed the Amazon from the eastern slopes of the mountains. As the archeology of the vast lowland forests becomes better known, we find that throughout most of the area the cultures remained on a simple level comparable to that of the Andean and Middle American pre-Formative. However, there are scattered remains of more highly developed cultures, with artificial mounds, elaborate and skillfully made pottery and other advanced features. Certain details of these cultures duplicate those on the cultural mainstream along western South America, and to all appearances must have come from that part of the continent. This is a guess, however, and awaits the test of proof. Geographically and culturally Ecuador seems in a favorable position to have funnelled these cultures from the highlands to the lowlands and down the Amazon. A concentration of many of the significant cultural traits lies within its borders, making it seem logical that this area was the source of the lowland spread. Furthermore, the geographical situation, with several rivers leading eastward into the Amazon, suggests ready routes of transmittal. The archeology of this part of Ecuador is almost completely unknown at the time of this writing, but an expedition is being planned to conduct survey and excavations along the Napo and some of the other rivers in 1956-7. The results should show whether the hypothesis that Ecuador is the immediate source of the lowland intrusions is correct or not.

Mexican-Andean Connections

One of the most striking and best known archeological areas of Ecuador is that of Esmeraldas and Manabi on the north coast. The beautifully made and highly artistic pottery figures from sites in this region have long been admired. Being unlike anything else in Ecuador, they have also evoked a certain mystery. In searching for their origin, it has been found that they are strikingly like certain styles of pottery art in southern Mexico. Immediately the question of relationship is raised. Since the style is more widespread in Mexico, presumably that is the place of origin. If so, does the Ecuadorian appearance represent a colony or an exodus that cuts all ties with the homeland? If contact was maintained, we would have to inject into our interpretation of the development of Mexican and Andean cultures the fact of an organized path for the exchange of ideas, at least in post-Formative times and abandon our present concept of relatively independent development. In any case, when did this contact occur? How often might it have been repeated elsewhere? Detailed work is needed in Esmeraldas and Manabi before these important questions can be answered.

Origin of Negative Painting

A problem of a different sort is the origin and diffusion of a technique of pottery decoration that has been called resist-dye or negative painting. By this process the elements of a design are drawn after firing with a temporary material, probably a fine thin solution of clay. Then the vessel is dipped in a paint and held over a flame, causing the material with which the design was drawn to peel off and the paint to blacken. The result is a "negative", in which the background is painted but the design elements are not. Negative painted pottery is widespread in the Americas and makes its first appearance in the latter part of the Formative Period. Since it is a relatively complex technique, it is presumed to have a single origin. The question is, where? A number of sources have been suggested, but the evidence for priority is not convincing. Negative painted vessels are very common in Ecuador, and for this reason, as well as the relatively central location, an Ecuadorian origin has been suggested. This conclusion had no more standing than others until recently, because no one had shown that negative painting was any earlier here than elsewhere. However, our work on the coast has shown that negative painting is early in Ecuador and has in addi-

tion brought to light a possible ancestor. The problem is now being investigated by ceramic technologists. It may turn out to be a false lead, but more research should produce the correct answer. In any event, knowledge of the history of this trait in Ecuador will put the problem of the origin of negative painting in a little better perspective.

Culture and Environment

There is one more problem worth mentioning here, in which a better knowledge of Ecuadorian archeology could lead to conclusions of general importance. It has often been pointed out that there is little similarity between the archeological sequences in Ecuador and those in Peru. The empires that rose and fell a little to the south seem not to have left an appreciable mark on Ecuadorian soil. Even the Inca domination is attested by only a few stone buildings and ceramics, mostly in the highlands. What kept Ecuador from being drawn into what has been called "the Peruvian co-tradition?" In the Formative, the two areas appear to have been essentially the same culturally; after that they went separate ways. A study of Ecuador prehistoric development and of the differences in the environments of Ecuador and Peru should supply some of the answers. If environment is the underlying explanation, this conclusion will be of considerable importance not only in American archeology but in the general theory of cultural development.

Other problems that impinge upon Ecuadorian archeology might be mentioned, but these are sufficient to demonstrate the importance of more extensive and intensive fieldwork in this relatively unknown region. Not only Ecuador, but Colombia and the countries of Central America are fertile ground for the archeologist's spade, and all these places need careful investigation. The justification for putting primary emphasis on Ecuador lies in the multiple problems of immediate concern in the reconstruction of South American cultural development and diffusion, whose solution seems to depend on knowledge of Ecuadorian archeology. It is appropriate to point out that many of the points made here were made years ago by Rivet, who noticed both the favorable geographical and topographical situation, and the cultural resemblances between Ecuadorian prehistoric remains and those of Central America and the Amazonian lowlands. Little heed has been paid to this analysis and Ecuadorian archeology is still poorly known almost

50 years after the publication of Rivet's *Ethnographie Ancienne*. However, the more that we learn, the more we must acknowledge the probability that however Ecuador may rank among the American republics in other respects, her significance in the future of American archeology is unsurpassed.

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