

# DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHEOLOGICAL INFORMATION IN THE DEPARTAMENTO DEL VALLE

## Introduction

Colombia has several characteristics that give it potential significance for understanding the development and dispersal of precolumbian cultural elements and complexes. It is located at the «entrance» to South America linked by land with Central America. Thus, it is the first region to receive influences from the north, before passing them on to adjacent parts of the continent. It incorporates a variety of habitats but lacks the extremes of altitude and aridity that prevail in the Andean countries to the south. The intermontane valleys offer conditions similar to those of the eastern lowlands, and the cordilleras are not formidable barriers to movement, facilitating adaptive radiation by precolumbian populations.

Archeological investigations on the Caribbean coast have permitted reconstructing a sequence of pottery making groups that extends from about 3000 B-C to European contact. It has been suggested that the coastal river valleys and cienagas may have provided conditions favorable for the domestication of manioc and other tropical cultigens. The characteristics of the early archeological cultures and the environment have led many investigators to propose that Colombia was a major source of cultural innovations for Venezuela and Brazil throughout the precolumbian period.

Except for the Caribbean coast, little is known about precolumbian cultural development in Colombia. Most of the information comes from tombs, and most of these were not excavated scientifically. As information has increased in Venezuela and Brazil, the lack of data from Colombia has increasingly hindered understanding of the origins and dispersals of peoples and cultures into the lowlands, and possibly from the lowlands into the Colombian valleys. It has also been suggested that the earliest ceramics on the Caribbean coast, at Puerto Hormiga, are derived from the Valdivia culture of coastal Ecuador. In order to evaluate this hypothesis, intensive investigations are needed on the Pacific coast of Colombia. The Río San Juan represents a potential route of movement northward to the Caribbean coast, but nothing is known of the archeology along its margins. Other rivers provide access to the basins of the south highlands and may have served as routes of communication. The presence on the highlands of a few elements characteristic of the north coast of Ecuador indicates that communication existed, but the intensity and antiquity of contacts and their effects on the populations of Colombia and Ecuador remain to be established. Another important problem is the relationship between the northern highlands of Ecuador and the southern highlands of Colombia. Pottery from Nariño is very similar to that from northern Itighlaid Ecuador. There appears to be a rather sharp transition to the north, however, and it is important to establish the geographical limits of the distribution of this southern tradition and the reasons for the apparent absence of influences toward the north.

## **Research**

The Departamento del Valle is a very favorably located for obtaining information relevant to these problems. No sites of paleoindian or Formative (prior to 1500 B-C-) age have been reported, although paleoindian sites exist on the altiplanicie de Bogotá. No sites of Formative age are known in Colombia except on the Caribbean coast. Intensive investigation here should produce them unless the ecological conditions in the highlands were very different than at present. Unless rock shelters exist however, finding early sites will be difficult.

Intensive survey of the Pacific coast should receive priority both because of the importance of the results for evaluating the role of the region in precolumbian times and because experience on the coast of Ecuador indicated that archeological sites should be relatively easy to encounter. A systematic multi year program in this region would be very valuable.

In addition to formal projects, continuing attention should be given to salvage of archeological remains prior to their destruction by development projects (construction of highways, dams, housing, expansion of agriculture, etc.)

## **Education**

Several kinds of activities should aid in realizing the archeological goals. Efforts should be made to establish relations with government and private institutions engaged in construction and to encourage reporting any archeological remains encountered. It is important that the archeologist work rapidly so as not to delay the construction, since this fear often prevents revealing the information. Experience in other countries indicates that officials can be persuaded of the public-relations value of this kind of cooperation, and in some cases have offered not only facilities but also funds for publishing the archeological reports.

Another means of encouraging cooperation is by education. The program of regional museums already underway by INCIVA is excellent and should increase awareness of the importance of archeology for understanding the roots of modern Colombian culture. Increasing appreciation should also encourage reporting sites encountered by the local population.

A third possibility is the publication of articles in newspapers and magazines, and of pamphlets explaining aspects of archeological cultures in a manner understandable to the general reader.

## **Staff**

INCIVA is fortunate to have an excellent archeologist, Carlos A. Rodríguez who has accomplished a great deal during the short time he has been on the staff. It is clear, however, that he cannot do all of the things that would be desirable. If rescue archeology is to be done, as it should, a second archeologist will be needed. Otherwise, the research programs cannot be carried out systematically.

It appears that volunteer collaboration by artists and persons with other abilities has been obtained for preparing exhibits and this should be encouraged in the future. Particularly in the regional museums, participation by the local population increases their identification with and interest in the results. If popular leaflets or article are undertaken however, it may be necessary to hire someone to coordinate and oversee their preparation.

### **Scientific publication**

Archeological investigations are of little value if the data remain unpublished. Fortunately INCIVA has an excellent publication CESPEDESIA, in which preliminary reports can be made available. Since this journal has (and may continue to) emphasized biology, it may be useful to run off additional copies of archeological papers for separate distribution to individuals and institutions that would not have use for the complete issue, or for issues not containing archeological reports.

### **Collaboration with other institutions**

A fruitful interchange with other archeologists working in the Depto. del Valle exists, and promises to continue.

Other kinds of collaboration should be undertaken most urgently the initiation of interchange of publications with the principal archeological institutions in adjacent countries (Ecuador, Perú, Venezuela) to increase the library resources.

### **Conclusion**

During the week I have been able to observe the activities being conducted I have formed a very favorable impression of the capacity of the personnel and the directions that are being followed in research and public education. As the programs develop, need for particular kinds of assistance may become evident.

The contacts already established with the Smithsonian (STRI, NMNH) and with British archeologists of the Pro calima Project will permit identifying the best ways to obtain what is needed. I shall be happy to offer any aid that I can personally and on behalf of the Smithsonian.

I am extremely grateful for the opportunity given to me to see the archeological sites in the Depto. del Valle, to talk at length with Carlos A. Rodríguez and to see the various kinds of activities, particularly the regional museums. I have learned a great deal and look forward to maintaining close relations during the coming years.

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