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Thomas Athol Joyce

Excerpt

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# South American Archæology

## INTRODUCTION

CERTAIN of the early chroniclers who wrote of South America, when they did not take the Flood as their starting-point, prefaced their remarks with a disquisition on the existence of the antipodes. Though, at the present date, either of these topics would hardly be regarded as relevant to the subject, a short summary of the physical history and geographical features of the continent is necessary for a proper understanding of its archæology. Shaped rather like an inverted pear, South America lies with the great bulk of its territory within the tropics, but with its southern extremity within measurable distance of the antarctic circle. Though it forms at the present time a single land-mass, it must, at an early period of geological history, have been a group of large islands, separated by a wide inland sea. The greatest of these in extent lay to the east, and is represented to-day by the Andes, stretching in an unbroken line from Panama to the Straits of Magellan, and sending an off-shoot eastward along the north coast of Venezuela. Greater in area than this, but occupying fewer degrees of latitude, was another island, which constitutes at the present time the highlands of Brazil, and bore a striking resemblance in outline to the entire continent of which it was destined later to form a part. A third island, smaller than the other two, lay to the north of the last, where the highlands of the Guianas

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attain their greatest elevation. The great sea which they enclosed, a sort of American Mediterranean, was thus separated from the Pacific by the long Andean chain, but communicated with the Atlantic by channels represented to-day by the basins of the Orinoco, the Amazon, and the Rio de la Plata. As time went on, through the gradual elevation of the Andes and the deposits of alluvial soil washed down from the great islands, this inland sea gradually disappeared, leaving as its only traces the mighty river systems above mentioned, and the swamps about their water-sheds. Even at the present time these river systems are connected at their sources, the Orinoco with the Amazon, and the Amazon with the Parana ; and at the divide between the two latter, the so-called lake Mojós, at certain seasons of the year the country becomes inundated to such an extent that it presents in miniature a picture of the primeval inland sea. As the ground appeared above the surface of the waters, it became covered with vegetation, still existing in the great forest of the Amazon basin. Even the Patagonian plateau, now desert, or covered only with grass and low scrub, must have been wooded, since the remains of great sloths have been found there, animals which are forest-dwellers. But here, as the land continued to rise, a process of desiccation set in, which, combined with the more southerly latitude, proved fatal to the larger forms of vegetation and the fauna which sought their shelter.

But Patagonia is not the only region where this has occurred. The narrow west coast of South America, between the Andes and the Pacific, is for the most part a waterless region. Here rain is exceptional, and beyond the range of the few short rivers which empty themselves into the Ocean on this side, the country is desert. The cause of this lies in the fact that the easterly trade-winds, after supplying with rain the eastern portion of the continent, deposit their remain-

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ing moisture upon the Andes, which thus rob the coast of its rainfall. But there is reason to believe that at one time the Andes were several thousand feet lower, and did not offer an insurmountable barrier to the rains. At this period the coast must have been wooded, and a forest must have stood where now is the waterless desert of Tarapaca, a forest of which the only traces are the numerous skeletons of anteaters which once it harboured. Further evidence of the gradual elevation of the country is afforded by the presence of beaches now raised many feet above the sea-level and some miles from the coast ; while it is evident that this elevation has been proceeding since the advent of man, since traces of his settlements have been discovered in these raised beaches. At points along the coast, however, a good deal of erosion has taken place and the victory has sometimes rested with the sea.

The history of the Brazilian highlands has been in the main the converse of the Andean region, since they seem to be the remains of mountain country which once attained a far more imposing elevation than at present, but which has been greatly reduced by atmospheric agencies. The coast, too, seems to have sunk in places, so that the Tocantins, which was once a tributary of the Amazon, now communicates direct with the Atlantic. But along the more southern coast of Brazil the land has encroached locally upon the sea, a fact to which the presence of great shell-heaps at some distance from the coast bears witness. Where such variety of physical features prevails, a similar variety of climate must necessarily follow. Within the tropics, on the low-lying coast and in the forested plains, the temperature is extreme, and aggravated in the latter region by the excessive moisture ; but in the uplands, especially the valleys of the Andes, conditions more akin to those of the temperate zone prevail ; while on the loftier plateaux the cold is often intense and cereals

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cannot ripen there. The open plains of the extra-tropical region are in the main extremely healthy, but the country, as we proceed south, is more suited for grazing than agriculture.

Such, very briefly, is the environment, and the question of man now arises. The earliest traces of man are found in the southern portion of the continent, in Buenos Aires and Patagonia, and certain of these date back to quaternary times. Along the coasts of Peru, Chile, and Brazil are found the remains of a very early population, who lived chiefly on shellfish, and who were probably related to, and even contemporary with, the early inhabitants of the country further south. All these tribes were long-headed, and had no knowledge of metals, but used rough implements of shell, bone, and stone. Later there came another wave of people, distinguished by round heads, who, with the Andes as their principal home, gradually drove the early population from the eastern half of the continent, until the inhospitable regions of Tierra del Fuego and the dense forests of the Amazon alone afforded them shelter. Whence the two types of man came is a question which cannot be discussed with profit until geologists are agreed as to the relation of America to the other continents; but it is possible that the long-headed race travelled *viâ* Greenland from Europe, and that the round-heads crossed the Behring Straits from Asia. But both these immigrations must have occurred at a time so remote that the invaders brought with them no implements, customs, or even language, that was characteristically "European" or "Asiatic," in the cultural senses of the words. The evolution of the various forms of culture characteristic of the different regions of South America was, as always, in accordance with environment. In the stifling forests but little progress was made, and some of the tribes remained at the lowest ebb of culture, without knowledge of weaving or pottery.

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Here agriculture was impossible, and hunting the only means of subsistence. The inhabitants of the open plains were more advanced, though they were compelled to lead a nomadic existence in search of the game on which they lived ; and the conditions of a nomadic life preclude the formation of organized communities in which alone a high state of culture can be evolved. In fact, the only environment suitable to be the birth-place of a civilization are the fertile valleys of the Andes, where the temperature of the tropics is tempered by the elevation, the soil is fertile, and water-supply constant. Here man can provide himself with means of subsistence, not indeed with the fatal facility of the tropics elsewhere, which seems to discourage all enterprise, but without having to expend the whole of his energies on providing the necessary food-supply, and so being left with no leisure to apply to the perfection of arts and crafts. And, in fact, it is just in this region that South American culture reached its zenith, culminating in the organized empire of the Inca, which the Spaniards found upon their arrival. The exact position of the Inca class, the people originally dominant in the valley of Cuzco, has often been misapprehended. There is a tendency to regard this people as the *fons et origo* of all advanced culture ; as the creators of an elaborate and thoroughly efficient form of imperial government and the inaugurators of a communistic social system admirably suited to the needs and characters of their subjects. As the rulers of the empire they have been viewed as in some way antithetically opposed to the tribes which they conquered, and the fact that they were originally merely one of a large number of similar tribes has been often overlooked. Neither the form of government, nor the social system, nor the religion of the empire were invented by them, but were common to all the Andean tribes from Colombia to the Argentine highlands, and the rapidity of the Inca conquest

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was due chiefly to the fact that a general homogeneity of culture and beliefs underlay all the local differences which might be expected to exist between tribe and tribe. The picture afforded by the Colombian tribes who lived in the highland valleys of Cundinamarca is remarkably illustrative of this fact, and it is well known that the Inca never penetrated so far north; and, to the south, the Inca empire stopped short where the nomadic tribes began, that is to say, where the common Andean culture ceased. The genius of the Inca statesman lay not in the creation of new forms of government, but in the adaptation of a constitution devised for small states to the needs of an extended empire.

From the cultural point of view, therefore, the peoples of South America may be divided into three—the dwellers in the Andes, the nomads of the plains, and the inhabitants of the forests; and the order in which they are named is their order in the scale of culture.

In the use of the term “Archæology” as applied to America far greater latitude must be allowed than when the Old World is under discussion. Though American archæology goes back to quaternary times, and deals with many remains which are prehistoric in the sense that they have no history, yet it is usually allowed to include within its sphere all those manifestations of higher forms of culture which the European discoverers found flourishing in the sixteenth century, and which in so short a time became obsolete. This being so, it is obvious that a work such as this must deal principally with the inhabitants of the Andean region. Here alone we find an advanced form of culture, and here alone was preserved any traditional history of the times prior to the discovery. For the rest the archæologist must gather what evidence he can from pottery fragments and stone implements. As will be seen in the later chapters, this evidence does not amount to very

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much, partly owing to the fact that scientific exploration of vast areas has not yet been effected, and partly because so many of the finds do not from their position afford any indication of their date. A great deal, however, remains to be done in the way of investigating the traces left by the tribes of lower culture, but it is not surprising that archæologists should have turned their attention principally to those regions where the arts and crafts had reached a higher stage of development, and where historical evidence could be applied to the elucidation of the remains and *vice versâ*.

The present book deals only with the archæology, as defined above, of the actual continent of South America. From one point of view it should also include that of the Isthmus of Panama and of the Antilles. The tribes of the Isthmus seem to be connected culturally with those of Colombia, a connection which appears especially in the pottery and gold-work of the Chiriqui. But Antioquia and Chiriqui are separated by forests which probably at no time sheltered a population of any numbers, and when we reach the Chiriqui Lagoon we come in contact with another influence, that of the Nahua tribes of Mexico. In the Antilles are found traces of an early population who seem to have been a branch of the South American Arawak, and who were exterminated, as far as the Lesser Antilles are concerned, by later Carib immigrants, also coming from South America. But for reasons of space it has been considered desirable to confine attention to what is geographically the continent of South America.

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## CHAPTER I—COLOMBIA

THE north-western corner of the South American continent, known to-day as Colombia, affords a picture of great geographical diversity. The twin chain of the Andes, shortly after entering Colombian territory from Ecuador, divides into three branches. Of these, the eastern branch continues for some distance unbroken, but later splits up into several chains which extend through Venezuelan territory to the sea. The western branch runs parallel with the coast until it reaches the gulf of Darien; while the central branch dies away in the marshy plains of the two northernmost provinces of Colombia, Bolivar and Magdalena. These three chains or *cordilleras* confine, not, as throughout the greater part of Peru, a series of tablelands, but two deep valleys along which run two important rivers northwards, to the west the Cauca, to the east the Magdalena. The courses of the two are approximately parallel, until, after the disappearance of the central cordillera, the Cauca joins the Magdalena, which is the larger of the two, being, indeed, the fourth longest river in South America. East of the eastern cordillera is a vast series of plains sloping gradually to the Orinoco and Amazon.

Corresponding to this geographical diversity, Colombia possesses an equal diversity of climate. In spite of the tropical latitude the temperature of the tablelands is extremely pleasant and uniform; in the valleys and the eastern plains the heat is excessive, with a mean of 86 or 88 Fahr.; on the coasts, the temperature, though lower, is still very high, and is aggravated by the damp-



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ness attendant on a tremendous rainfall. Amid this variety we may safely seek for the remains of such culture as existed among the early inhabitants, not in the torrid regions of the coast and eastern plains, where the conditions are more favourable to vegetable than human development, but on the elevated slopes and tablelands of the cordilleras.

The Spaniards on their arrival found the country peopled by a large number of tribes differing considerably in language, and representing various stages of cultural development. Of the vast majority of these little or nothing is known save the name alone, and as no systematic attempt has yet been made to explore the country from an archæological point of view, it is impossible to speak with certainty as to the inter-relation of the more advanced sections of the population. From the scanty materials at hand in museums and from the indications given by early Spanish writers, four culture centres may be distinguished, all situated on the higher ground bordering the valleys of the Cauca and Magdalena rivers. The first and most northerly of these lies in Antioquia, where the Tamahi and Nutabi tribes had developed agriculture and attained some proficiency in the weaving and dyeing of cotton; the second is found to the south, in the country around Cartago, where lived the Quimbaya, the most skilled of all the gold-working tribes; the third, around Popayan, of which the Coconuco may be taken as the representative tribe; and fourthly, the highland region on either side of the modern provinces of Boyaca and Cundinamarca to the east of the Magdalena, where the Chibcha or Muisca people had attained a political development far in advance of the rest of the Colombians.

Though the respective cultures of these tribes differed in detail, yet underlying the differences was a very strong similarity, a similarity which extended also to the culture of the Peruvian highlands. In fact, when due

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allowance is made for the difference in environment, we may take it that the more advanced Colombians afford a good illustration of the condition of the various tribes of Peru before the Inca welded them into a single empire.

Surrounding the peoples of higher culture were many tribes, some possibly as advanced as they, but the majority more primitive, some even in the lowest stages of savagery. A long list might be given of the names of these, but it would be of little interest to the general reader, especially as it would, for the most part, be unaccompanied by any details concerning their manners and customs; it will be better to concentrate attention on the more civilized peoples concerning whom most information can be gathered from the accounts of early historians and from the remains in museums.

Little can be said of the respective origins of the Colombian tribes; the gold-work of the Cauca valley and some of the pottery show considerable similarity to the corresponding manufactures from the Chiriqui people of the Isthmus (see Pl. IV); it is stated also that a language akin to that of the Chibcha was spoken by the early inhabitants of the high ground on the sea-coast, east of the mouth of the Magdalena river; but the Chibcha, to judge from their traditions as recorded, seem to have regarded themselves as indigenous. Certain tribes, such as the Quimbaya, and the Muzo and Colima, western neighbours and enemies of the Chibcha, claimed definitely to be immigrants from the north,<sup>1</sup> and it is said that a certain tribe called Achagua settled near Popayan after wandering all the way from Venezuela. Further evidence of the westerly and southerly

<sup>1</sup> Further evidence of this is contained in the fact that two hills, sacred in the eyes of the Chibcha, were situated in Muzo territory; thither the Chibcha would make secret pilgrimages by night to perform certain rites, even at the risk of being killed by the hostile Muzo. The explanation would seem to be that this tract of country belonged originally to the Chibcha, but was seized by Muzo invaders.