

Notes on the pre-Columbian past of the Ecuadorian Amazon Region

Written by Geoffroy de Saulieu

Friday, 16 February 2007 12:22 - Last Updated Thursday, 06 October 2011 15:59

The archaeological and historical analysis of the data currently available on the Peruvian and Ecuadorian Amazon relativizes from the beginning that the classification of these regions makes an excellence example about "simple tropical cultures" (1948) as well as the ratings on the basis of a supposed ecological adaptation of inter-fluvial societies (like those of Meggers, 1971, retaken by Roosevelt, 1980); understanding these regions as areas not suited to complex social developments. This double reading of the past leads to a large number of investigators to question the model of an itinerant agriculture on slashing and burning "(often cited as a typical lifestyle of Upper-Amazon) to be largely the combined effect of a survival strategy of indigenous societies which face the persecution from the western world due to the introduction of steel tools to facilitate large-scale deforestation. The review of current data also shows that the study of the area is confined in a comprehensive regional area where it is appropriate to emphasize not only on contacts with the Andean area in the broad sense of the word, but also on the middle and lower Amazon Region.

The archaeological information currently available to the Upper Amazon at the northern part of Marañón allows to rebuild a scenario of the two major pre-Columbian times. The first period from the fourth millennium A.C. to the eighth century D.C. represents a close cultural and commercial link between the Andean region, the Pacific Coast and the Upper Amazon region. The second period runs from the eighth century AD to the Spanish period and would be marked by the old system disappearing and a cultural cut between the Andes and the Upper Amazon region as well as between the interfluvial and fluvial Amazon region. The cultural and social characteristics and the reasons for the gap between the two major periods are not known yet. That is why, this should be a current priority.

Critic and Proposal:

The prehistoric times of the Upper Amazon are still slightly well-known and it is an object of numerous speculations. Two big positions face, the first position supports that the origin of certain cultural, Andean, ancestral, as the birth of the agriculture or the appearance of the Chavin Horizon in Peru must be investigated in the tropical forest (for example Lathrap 1970), another position affirms a preeminence be of the part of the Andes or of the Coast of the Pacific Ocean in the social pre-Columbian processes (for example Burger 1995). Concerning these two currents three reservations can be expressed:

1. the archaeological and paleoenvironmental information are very insufficient;
2. the majority of investigators apply consciously or unconsciously, but always very strictly, taken social or ecological models of other periods and of other regions; and

Notes on the pre-Columbian past of the Ecuadorian Amazon Region

Written by Geoffroy de Saulieu

Friday, 16 February 2007 12:22 - Last Updated Thursday, 06 October 2011 15:59

3. On the same way, the investigators have in consideration neither the most recent information nor the weight of the distinguishing conservations, giving probably an incomplete vision of the Amazon past and of his diversity.

Generally there splits the history of the pre-Columbian Ecuador into three periods: the Formative one (4500 to. C. - 300 B.C.) that there is marked by the first societies agriculture - potter, the Regional Development (300 B.C. – 500 A.D.) that is characterized by the diversification of the cultures, and the period of Integration (500d. C.-1532 A.D.) that supposes a tendency to the cultural homogeneización that Inca would reach with the conquest.

For certain investigators - especially J. Guffroy who worked during long time in the south of the Ecuador and in the north of Peru (Guffroy, 1995, 2004)-, costs to insist on the continuity between the Formative one and the Regional Development and the rupture that happens to the beginning of the period of Integration. In this sense, the prehistoric times of the south of the Ecuador would have known two big moments of sociocultural development, the first one with the Formative one and the Regional Development, and the second one with the period of Integration.

In the first moment, a strong integration is observed between the coast of the Pacific Ocean, the Andean plateau and the oriental slopes of the Andes, which would have caused an excellent and precocious development of the Ecuador, although strongly unequal. Jean Guffroy goes so far as to raise the hypothesis according to which the origin of the culture Catamayo A (the first formative culture of the south end of the Ecuadorian Andes) comes from the Amazone (Guffroy et to., 1987:236). This hypothesis can be verified by the discovery done in 2002 of a new agr-pottery culture in the eyebrow of oriental mountain of the south of the Ecuador. The dates C14 associated with this material place it as one of the most ancient cultural declarations of the whole region, for what she could be a precursor in many aspects of the Peruvian Horizon of Chavín (Valdez et to., 2005). If this is the case, there appears the possibility that the Upper Amazone to the north of the Maranon has played a leading place.

The second moment would be characterized by a rupture and a sociocultural repairing. It seems that the origin of several American Indian current populations is in this period. In Loja, in south of the Ecuadorian Andes, this period would be marked by the arrival of groups belonging to the linguistic set Jíbaro-Candoa from the Amazone (Guffroy et to., 1987; Guffroy, 2004).

This script emphasizes the relations with the Upper Amazone. It seems to me that it is possible

to apply this hypothesis to the Ecuadorian Amazon. Undoubtedly it is a question of an imperfect and hypothetical stage. Let's enunciate the archaeological information:

The first Period:

During the first period, from the Formative up to the Regional Development (3500-300 AC), the cultures of the Upper Amazon would be a part of a system that integrated them clearly to the North and Central Andes (Lathrap, 1970; Myers, Dean, 1999; DeBoer, 2003). His relatively precocious origin and his role are still badly known and they are an object of numerous speculations. The precocious presence of the corn (from 4000 AC up to 2700 AC, according to the regions) has been supported by several investigators (Bush et al., 1989; Itzhas et al., 1991), but it keeps on being hypothetical, moreover if the size and the number of grains of this ancient corn, known only by any polens and phytoliths, have not still been defined.

The little we know about iconography is characterized by the presence of the dualism and in one of the cases by the affiliation feline / snake / lizard, affiliation that will turn to find along the Andean developments, but that will disappear of the oriental grounds in the following period. The Formative badly-known, it seems nevertheless relatively ancient in certain zones (Valdez et al., 2005), which suggests the existence of a sociocultural development at least so precocious as in the Andes and on the coast of the Pacific Ocean. The insufficiency of field investigations does not allow to give a precise idea of the social evolutions. In spite of it, the ceramic sets of the Formative and of the Regional Development, although very diverse, have typical forms such as bottles with handle (asa de estribo) (Guffroy, et 2003, Valdez et al., 2005; Bludgeons, 1978; Shady Solis, 1987), bottles with asymmetric neck and handle in bridge (Fung, 1981; Myers et al., 1999; Mulberry trees Chocano, 1998; Bludgeons, 1987; Ravines, 1981), bowls sometimes decorated with a lot of care (engobe, thin incisions, excisions, Saulieu, 2006), and pans (Bludgeons, 1979; DeBoer et al., 1977). If there are really cultural renewals and unequal developments, the ceramic sets remain for the most part in the logic begun in the Formative, since they are a testimony of interactions or exchanges supported with the Andes and the Pacific Ocean.

In the second part of this first period, the Ecuadorian societies of the foot of Amazon mount produced a monumental architecture (under Zamora, Upano, Puyo) comparable to that of other Andean regions. In the Amazon, settlement patterns are still very little well-known: one of the

Notes on the pre-Columbian past of the Ecuadorian Amazon Region

Written by Geoffroy de Saulieu

Friday, 16 February 2007 12:22 - Last Updated Thursday, 06 October 2011 15:59

only domestic sites proves to have a stratigraphy of 90 cm (Athens, 1986), suggesting that these populations were not necessarily constituted by itinerant horticulturists as the indigenous current populations (Petersen et al., 2001).

The second Period:

The second moment sees the collapse of the previous system and an accentuation of the cultural differences with the Andes. This accentuation had its origin, on one hand in the human adaptations and in the other, in the cultural composition of the Upper Amazon that is known in modern times across ethnohistorical and ethnographic sources. It is in this period that the Upper Amazon becomes amazonian, for saying it somehow, by taking a typical form marked by the preeminence of animic cultural forms (as Descola describes it, 2005) and socially acephalous. It is translated by two stages.

It is stated first of all, the rapid expansion of a ceramic horizon 1, called Corrugated, in the zones that do not meet directly in contact the big fluvial axes formed by the Napo, the Marañon, the Ucayali and the Huallaga. This horizon is characterized by a ceramic of relatively coarse pasta which basic decoration is constituted by the use of bands of mud put on top in the neck and shoulder of the vessels. From a material point of view, our hypothesis lays on the fact that from the VIIth and VIIIth centuries is stated, in numerous regions (for example in the Upano, cf. Rostain 1999th and 1999-b, Loja, cf. Guffroy 2004):

- the disappearance of the most typical forms (especially the bottles with or without handle, with one or more necks) and of ceramic traditions of the previous period;
- a superficial homogenization with decorative ways that privilege the corrugated decorations, whereas the local characteristics seem important;
- the disappearance of the monumental architecture;
- a clear decrease of the interactions at long distance, both as for exotic materials (Spondylus, turquoise), and to stylistic and ideological features. (Rostain, 1999th; Guffroy, 1995, 2004; Guillaume, Guffroy, Valdez, Saulieu, 2003)

The settlement patterns allows to formulate the hypothesis that the social structures seem more parcelled up and temporary than during the previous phases, which corresponds relatively well

Notes on the pre-Columbian past of the Ecuadorian Amazon Region

Written by Geoffroy de Saulieu

Friday, 16 February 2007 12:22 - Last Updated Thursday, 06 October 2011 15:59

to what is known of the practices of the indigenous current populations belonging to the linguistic rustic group (horticulturists of slash and burning , acephalous societies). Another stage that happens, shows along certain navigable rivers and in certain sectors of the Andean slopes (valle of the Quijos), the disposition of social systems complexes based on the commercial exchange. The Polychrome Horizon proceeding from the alluvial flatness of the lower Amazone colonizes, about the Xth and XIth centuries, the Napo (Evans and Meggers, 1968) and a part of the Marañon up to the Putumayo, and is articulated by the Panzaleo-Cosanga-Píllaro on the Andean slope. The ethnohistorical data allows us to recognize the diverse ethnic groups and often his distant origin, which have operating social and hierarchical complexes, with specializing systems of production (particularly the gold, the ceramics and the cotton textiles). The exchanges across big distances concentrate on some big axes formed by the Napo, the Marañon, the Ucayali and the Huallaga (selt, curare, gold, cotton, oil of turtle, etc.) and they seem controlled by these populations who have a strong inclination for the navigation and the fluvial habitat.

Conclusion:

Even though the comprehension of two periods must be worked out, it proposes already serious questions about the reasons of change. It is clear that it is not a question of an ecological determinism, since in the Formative and in the Regional Development, the Upper Amazone would have developed in symbiosis with the Andes and the coast of the Pacific. In what concerns us, we would be touched by the hypothesis according to which this would have corresponded to a deep reorientation in the types of social developments in this tropical humid region, for still enigmatic reasons but maybe partly tied to big populations movements.

Philippe Descola (2005) shows that the perception of the environment that have the current populations of the Upper Amazone obeys to animistic schemes . This peculiarity separates them very clearly from the areas of the big civilizations known historically, especially Andean. We incline for to think so much that not always it has been like that, and that before the big rupture of the beginning of the period of Integration, the societies of the Upper Amazone were working largely otherwise, a way that it was allowing them to be able to articulate perfectly with the Andean and coastal societies. There is only one step for thinking that it was a question of societies who were working for the most part with analogical schemes.

References

Athens S., 1986, "The site of Pumpuenta and the Pastaza phase in Southeastern lowland Ecuador", *Ñawpa Pacha*, 24, pp.111-124.

Burger R., 1995, *Chavin and the Origins of andean Civilization*, Thames and Hudson, Londres.

Bush M., Piperno D., Colinvaux P., 1989, "A 6,000-Year History of Amazonian Maize Cultivation", *Nature* 340, pp.303-305.

DeBoer W., 1975, "Two ceramic collections from Rio Huasaga, Northern Peru : their Place in the Prehistory of the Upper Amazon", Queens College Laboratory of Archeology, CUNY, n.d.

DeBoer W., 2003, "Ceramic Assemblage Variability in the Formative of Ecuador and Peru", *Archaeology of Formative Ecuador*, J. Scott Raymond and Richard Burger ed., Jeffrey Quilter general ed., Dunbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington DC, pp.289-336.

DeBoer W., Ross E, Ross J., Veale M., 1977, "Two ceramic collections from Rio Huasaga, Northern Peru : their Place in the Prehistory of the Upper Amazon", *El Dorado*, 2, (2), Museum of anthropology of Northern Colorado, Preeley.

Descola P., 2005, *Par-delà de nature et culture*, nrf, Gallimard, Paris.

Echeverría J., 1981, *Glosario Arqueológico*, Colección Pendoneros, IOA, Otavalo.

Notes on the pre-Columbian past of the Ecuadorian Amazon Region

Written by Geoffroy de Saulieu

Friday, 16 February 2007 12:22 - Last Updated Thursday, 06 October 2011 15:59

Evans C., Meggers B., 1968, *Archeological Investigations on the Rio Napo, Eastern Ecuador*, Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington.

Fung R., 1981, "Notas y comentarios sobre el sitio Valencia en el Río Corrientes", *Amazonía Peruana*, IV, 7, pp.99-137.

Guffroy J., 1995, "L'influence des conditions environnementales sur le peuplement et le développement dans un secteur intermédiaire des Andes. Critique d'un certain déterminisme écologique", *Milieux, Sociétés et archéologues*, sous la dir. d'A Marliac, Orstom, Paris.

Guffroy J., 2004. *Catamayo precolombino. Investigaciones arqueológicas en la provincia de Loja (Ecuador)*, Tome 164 des "Travaux de l'Institut Français d'Etudes Andines", ed. IRD-IFEA-UTPL-BCE, Loja.

Guffroy J., Almeida N., Lecoq P., Caillavet Ch., Duverneuil F., Empeaire L., Arnaud B., 1987, *Loja préhispanique. Recherches archéologiques dans les Andes méridionales de l'Equateur*, IFEA, Synthèse 27, Ed. sur les civilisations.

Guffroy J., Valdez F., 2001, *Resultados de la etapa de reconocimiento (1999-2000) y proyecto de investigación arqueológica (2001-2004) en la provincia de Zamora-Chinchi. Informe preliminar*, INPC, n.d.

Guillaume M., Guffroy J., Valdez F., Saulieu G. de, 2003, "Découverte d'une ancienne civilisation en Amazonie occidentale", *Fiche d'actualité scientifique de l'IRD, n°177*, www.ird.fr/fr/actualites/fiches/2003/fiche177.htm

Lathrap D., 1970, *The upper Amazon*, New York, Praeger Publisher.

Mc Ewan C., Cristiana Barreto C., Neves E., ed., 2001, *Unknown Amazon*, The British Museum

Notes on the pre-Columbian past of the Ecuadorian Amazon Region

Written by Geoffroy de Saulieu

Friday, 16 February 2007 12:22 - Last Updated Thursday, 06 October 2011 15:59

Press, London.

Meggers B., 1971, *man and culture in a cunterfeit paradise*, New York, Aldine Atherton.

Mora S., Herrera L., Cavelier I., Rodríguez C., 1991, *Cultivars, Anthropic Soil and Stability, A preliminary report of archaeological research in Araracuara, Colombian Amazonia*, University of Pittsburg, Latin American Archaeology Reports 2, Pittsburg.

Morales Chocano D., 1998, "Chambira : una cultura de sabana árida en la Amazonía peruana", *Investigaciones sociales*, año 2, 2, pp.61-75.

Myers T., Dean B., 1999, "Cerámica Prehispanica del Rio Chambira, Loreto", *Amazonía Peruana*, XIII, 26, pp.255-288.

Netherly P., 1997, "Lomas y ribera : patrones de asentamiento prehistoricos en la Amazonía ecuatoriana", *Fronteras de Investigación*, I, 1997, n°1, pp.33-54.

Ortiz De Villalba J., 1981, *Antiguas culturas amazonicas ecuatorianas. Fase Napo (1188-1480 d.C.)*, CICAME.

Petersen J, Neves E., Heckenberger M., 2001, "Gift of the Past : Terra Preta and Prehistoric Ameridian Occupation in Amazonia", *Unknown Amazon*, ed. By Colin Mc Ewan, Cristiana Barreto and Eduardo Neves, 2001, The British Museum Press, London, 50-85.

Porras P., 1975-a, *Fase Pastaza. El formativo en el oriente ecuatoriano*, Separata de la Revista de la Universidad Católica, año III, n° 10, Quito.

Notes on the pre-Columbian past of the Ecuadorian Amazon Region

Written by Geoffroy de Saulieu

Friday, 16 February 2007 12:22 - Last Updated Thursday, 06 October 2011 15:59

Porras P., 1975-b, *Fase Cosanga : Estudios Científicos sobre el Oriente Ecuatoriano*, Centro de Publicaciones de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, Quito.

Porras P., 1978, *Arqueología de la Cueva de los Tayos, Pontifica Universidad del Ecuador*, Quito.

Porras P., 1987, *Investigaciones arqueológicas en las faldas del Sangay. Tradición Upano*, Quito.

Ravines R., 1981, "Yacimientos arqueológicos de la región nororiental del Perú", *Amazonía Peruana*, IV, 7, 139-175.

Renard-Casevitz F.-M., Saignes T., Taylor A.-C., 1986, *L'Inca, L'Espagnol et les Sauvages*, éd. ADPF, Paris.

Roosevelt A., 1980, *Parmana, Prehistoric Maize and Manioc Subsistence along the Amazon and Orinoco*, Studies in Archaeology, Academic Press, London.

Rostain S., 1999-a, "Secuencia arqueológica en montículos del valle del Upano en la Amazonía ecuatoriana", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Etudes Andines*, 28 (1), pp.53-89.

Rostain S., 1999-b, "Occupations humaines et fonction domestique de monticules préhistoriques d'Amazonie équatorienne", *Société suisse des américanistes*, Bulletin 63, 1999, pp.71-95.

Rostocker A., 1996, An Archaeological Assemblage from Eastern Ecuador, San Francisco State University, *Treganza Anthropology Museum Papers*, 18.

Notes on the pre-Columbian past of the Ecuadorian Amazon Region

Written by Geoffroy de Saulieu

Friday, 16 February 2007 12:22 - Last Updated Thursday, 06 October 2011 15:59

Rostocker A., 2005, Dimension of Prehistoric Human Occupation in the Southern Ecuadorian Oriente, Dissertation submitted to the graduate Faculty of Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, City University of New York.

Salazar E., 1998, "De vuelta al Sangay – Investigaciones arqueológicas en el alto Upano", *Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Etudes Andines*, 27 (2), pp.213-240.

Saulieu G. de, 2006, "Revisión del material cerámico de la colección Pastaza (Amazonía ecuatoriana)", *Journal de la Société des Américanistes*, 92, Paris.

Shady Solis R., 1987, "Tradición y cambio en las sociedades formativas de Bagua, Amazonas, Perú", *Revista Andina*, año 5, 2, pp.457-483.

Steward J., 1948, « Tribes of the Montaña », *Handbook of South America Indians*, vol.3, pp.507-534

Valdez F., Guffroy J., Saulieu G. de , Hurtado J., de, Yépez A., 2005, "Découverte d'un site cérémoniel formatif sur le versant oriental des Andes", *Palévol*, Vol. 4/4, pp.369-374.