



History of Colombia

Ben Ellis

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Due to its location, the present territory of Colombia was a corridor of early human migration from Mesoamerica and the Caribbean to the Andes and Amazon. The oldest archaeological finds are from the Pubenza and El Totumo sites in the Magdalena Valley 100 km southwest of Bogotá. These sites date from the Paleoindian period (18,000–8000 BCE). At Puerto Hormiga and other sites, traces from the Archaic Period (~8000–2000 BCE) have been found. Vestiges indicate that there was also early occupation in the regions of El Abra and Tequendama in Cundinamarca. The oldest pottery discovered in the Americas, found at San Jacinto, dates to 5000 – 4000 BCE. By 10,500 BCE, the territory of what is now Colombia was inhabited by aboriginal people. Nomadic hunter-gatherer tribes existed near present-day Bogotá (at El Abra and Tequendama sites) which traded with one another and with cultures living in the Magdalena River Valley. Between 5000 and 1000 BCE, hunter-gatherer tribes transitioned to agrarian societies; fixed settlements were established, and pottery appeared. Beginning in the 1st millennium BCE, groups of Amerindians including the Muisca, Quimbaya, and Tairona developed the political system of cacicazgos with a pyramidal structure of power headed by caciques. The Muisca inhabited mainly the area of what is now the Departments of Boyacá and Cundinamarca high plateau (Altiplano Cundiboyacense) where they formed the Muisca Confederation. They farmed maize, potato, quinoa and cotton, and traded gold, emeralds, blankets, ceramic handicrafts, coca and salt with neighboring nations. The Taironas inhabited northern Colombia in the isolated Andes mountain range of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. The Quimbayas inhabited regions of the Cauca River Valley between the Occidental and Central cordilleras. The Incas expanded their empire on the southwest part of the country.

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