
This summary of Costa Rican archeology begins with the geographical setting. Three regions are recognized: the Nicoya and Diquis areas on the Pacific side, and the Atlantic watershed. A chapter is devoted to the prehistory of each region. Discussion follows a uniform format, beginning with a review of the earliest investigations, outlining the cultural sequences from 300 B.C. to European contact, and concluding with information from early historical documents. A map showing the locations mentioned accompanies each chapter; ceramics, stone sculpture, and other kinds of artifacts are abundantly illustrated.

In spite of its position on the frontier between the Mesoamerican and South American spheres of cultural influence, Costa Rica has received little attention from trained archeologists. Any attempt to reconstruct its prehistory is handicapped by the meagerness of reliable data. This largely accounts for the author’s emphasis on details of ceramics in tracing time-space distributions. Although each chapter is divided into several periods, the material is not systematically presented. Rather, architecture, burials, and artifacts are described by site with occasional comments about their social, economic, or religious significance. Evidence for influences from Mesoamerica is noted, but more stress is placed on traits of presumed Ecuadorian origin without adequate critical evaluation of alternative interpretations. Although this is the most up-to-date summary available in English, those able to read Spanish should consult the more balanced and complete synthesis provided by Luis Ferrero in Costa Rica precolumbina.

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