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Rock Art Studies: News of the World V

edited by

Paul Bahn, Natalie Franklin, Matthias Strecker and Ekaterina Devlet

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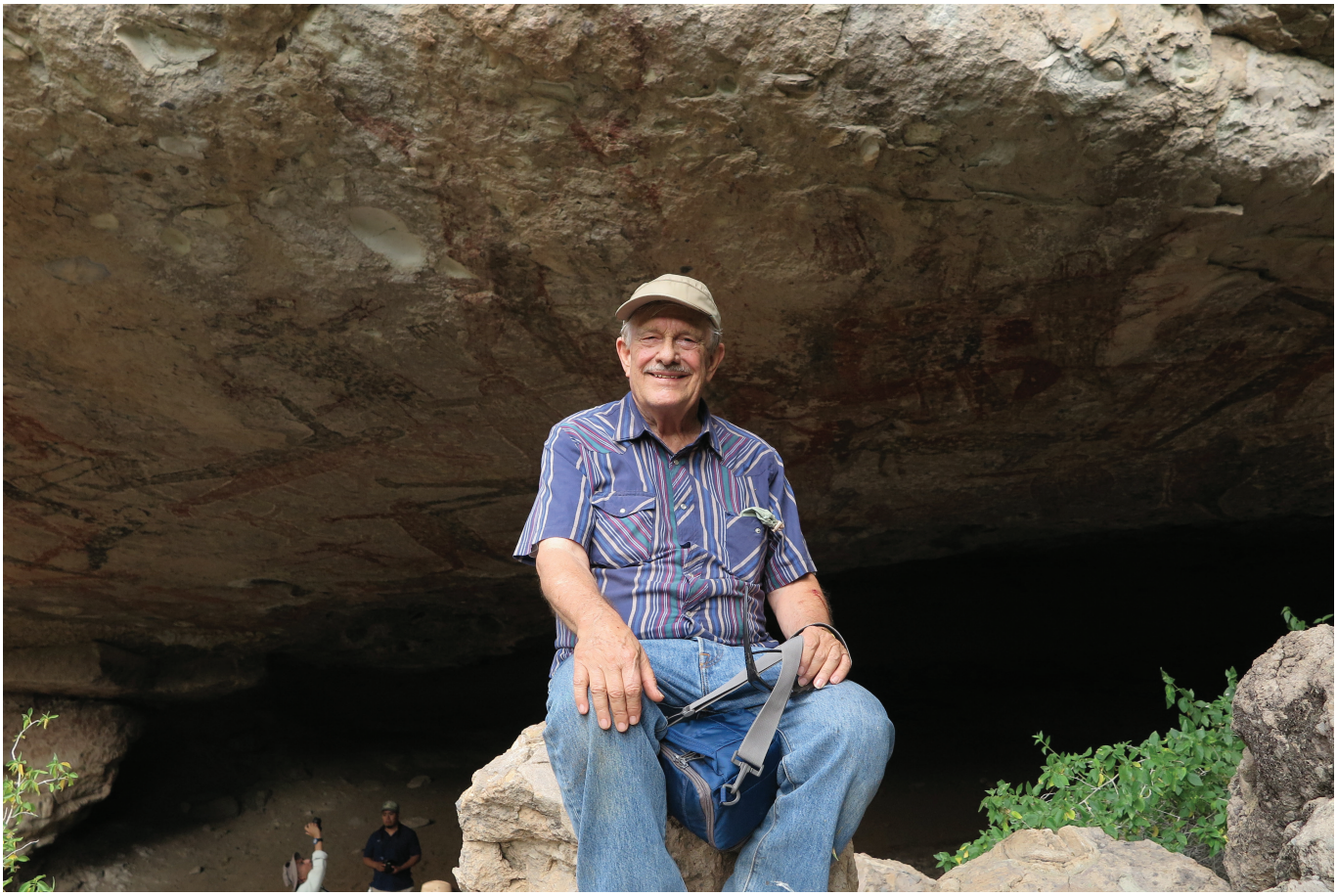
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Rock Art in Ecuador: Research 2010-2014

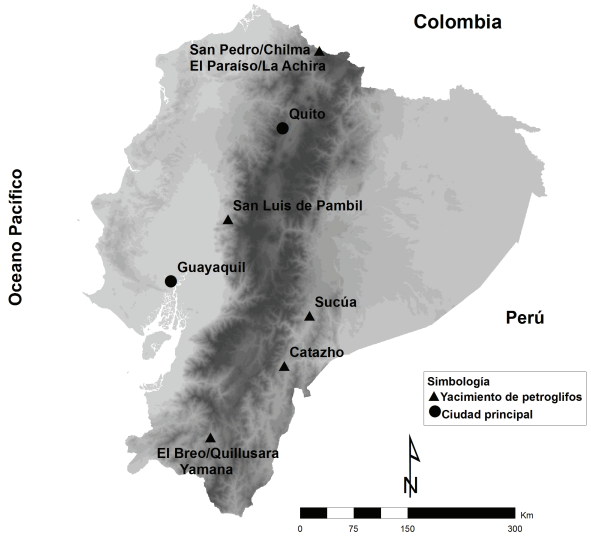
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Introduction

Up to the present, all rock art found in Ecuador consists of petroglyphs. The absence of documented rock paintings may be due to conservation conditions. Rock art sites exist in three of the geographic regions – the coast, the Sierra (mountains) and the Amazon lowlands – and are only missing on the Galapagos islands. Nevertheless, reports on these cultural heritage sites are scarce. A publication by Pedro Porras (1985) on the petroglyphs of Napo province in the northern Amazonian region is still considered an important reference on rock art in Ecuador. Regarding research in the years 2010-2014, only three projects have been published, two of them by the author (Ugalde 2011a, 2011b) which concern petroglyphs in Amazonia; and one by González and collaborators (2014) which provides a summary of petroglyphs in Loja province, in the southern region of the country, that were partially published on earlier occasions and were presented in a previous volume of this series (González 2008). However, some unpublished reports on other research carried out during the last few years show a growing interest in this cultural heritage by the State and local administrations which provided funding for rock art recording projects (Bravo and Vargas 2011; Constantine 2014), as well as by archaeology students who devoted their theses to rock art (López 2009; Granja 2014; Mosquera 2014; Toscano 2014).

Research carried out in the last five years

I will begin by presenting my own work, as this has helped to bring about two publications, as well as several *Licenciatura* theses. The complex of petroglyphs known as 'Catazho' is located in Morona Santiago province in south-east Ecuador in the Amazonian basin. Before my study no archaeological work had been undertaken in that region, although several historians had presented preliminary rock art inventories and interpretations of some engraved rocks in a non-systematic approach (Quichimbo and Galarza 1997; Ortiz 2011). My work started in 2010 and was sponsored by the National Institute of Cultural Heritage (INPC) and PUCE University (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador). I undertook a survey of 7.42 km^2 in the Catazho river basin which is marked by the Catazho mountain in the South and Indanza village in the North (Ugalde 2011a, 2011b). The Catazho mountain, with its particular form, played an important role for the local Shua as their



Map 1. Location of sites mentioned in the text.

mythological stories show. As it is such a notable natural site, I believe it is very probable that this mountain played a similar role in former times, before the arrival of the Shuar (Figure 1). A total of 122 engraved rocks were recorded which carry between 1 and 43 motifs, with a total of 887 petroglyphs, a significant result considering that in 2008-2009 the National Institute of Cultural Heritage listed just 13 rocks with petroglyphs in the same region for the National Heritage Register. I also carried out experimental recording with the students in a workshop on Amazonian rock art in Ecuador (Dept. of Anthropology, PUCE) in order to find the most adequate technique of recording the petroglyphs without damaging the rocks in any way, and taking into account the particular characteristics of the local rock art. We concluded that night photography with artificial lighting is the non-invasive technique which reproduces the engravings in the best way.

The lack of other archaeological research in the areas with petroglyphs makes it impossible to define their cultural associations or chronology. That is why we consider iconography and stylistic studies the only way to assess these engravings in a preliminary way. In 2011 we began in PUCP a project of iconographic analysis (Ugalde 2011c) which led to a *Licenciatura* thesis (Mosquera 2014). We established the presence of stylistic evolutions and motif abstractions as part

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Figure 1. View of the Catazho petroglyph site; note the Catazho mountain in the background.



Figure 2. Catazho, engraved spiral design.

of several types of a 'grammar' of compositions, and assume that at least two different groups were involved in the production of the rock art or that the art stems from two different time periods. Among the principal motifs I wish to point out spirals which occasionally clearly relate to serpents (Figure 2), other zoomorphic figures, especially monkeys (Figure 3), and the existence of scenes with interaction between anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures, as well as other elements hard to define (Figure 4). For lack of space in the present article I cannot depict all the respective motifs, and refer to a previous publication (Ugalde 2011b) that includes more illustrations. During my research I established that Panofsky's method (Panofsky 1955) is not adequate for the study of the rock art iconography as the 'basic forms' – which would have to be clearly established with three steps according to Panofsky – do not exist in the expected way. The overall majority of motifs are not figurative or do not appear to be so according to our typology. A semiotic approach taking into account the elements of compositions has proved more suitable for establishing this iconography in a systematic way (Ugalde 2011c). The *Licenciatura* thesis by Andrés Mosquera (Mosquera 2014), a member of the workshop mentioned above, follows the methodology and interpretation proposed in my project; it expands the iconographic analysis of a sample of the rock art. On the other hand, Estefanía Granja presented in her *Licenciatura* thesis an approach to the Catazho petroglyphs from the perspective of landscape archaeology (Granja 2014).

Another *Licenciatura* thesis, also from PUCE, presents the study of petroglyphs in Bolívar province, central highlands of Ecuador (López 2009). Although this research was concluded one year before the time period covered in my review, I include it here as it has not been considered in any synthesis of rock art in Ecuador. Juan Andrés López recorded 7 engraved rocks and interpreted them from the controversial neuro-psychological viewpoint (Lewis-Williams and Dowson 1988, see

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Figure 3. Catazho, zoomorphic representation with monkey features.

critical observations in the annex of their article, as well as, for example, Bahn 2010). López also documented some artificial mounds as well as artifacts (fragments of ceramics and lithic instruments). The rock art site is located at San Luis de Pambil, on the border of Bolívar and Los Ríos provinces, between the highlands and coast in the so-called *Premontano Subtropical*.

The motifs represented are principally non-figurative (spirals, concentric circles, alignments of dots), but there are also anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures including an abundance of representations of apparently human faces. Normally designs are not isolated, they form complex compositions that cover the rock faces completely (Figure 5). Considering the iconography of anthropomorphic figures, López relates the petroglyphs at San Luis de Pambil to the Milagro-Quevedo culture that belongs to the so-called Integration Period, the last pre-Inca phase in Ecuador, dated to approximately between AD 500 and 1500.

In 2014 López published a new study of the same rock art complex which concentrates on its technological aspects. Using the concept of the production sequence, and taking into account the doubts about the missing empirical evidence on the process of production of the petroglyphs as expressed by Fiore (1999), López tries an interpretational approach to some lithic artifacts found in the direct vicinity of the 'La Libertad' petroglyphs (Parroquia San Luis de Pambil, Bolívar province). These



Figure 4. Catazho, composition of engravings which seem to indicate interaction between several people.

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Figure 5. San Luis de Pambil, engraved composition covering the entire rock surface (photo: Juan Andrés López).

andesite and basalt objects present wear marks indicating their use predominantly on one of their ends. The author concludes that these tools, found in a concentration at the side of the engraved rock, were principally chisels used to produce the rock art images in direct percussion, though at the same time a second type of instrument may have been used with the same technique, as grooves present non-uniform profiles (López 2014).

Elizabeth Bravo and Marco Vargas carried out a project to record petroglyphs in Los Ríos and Bolívar provinces, funded by the National Heritage Institute (Bravo and Vargas 2011a). Fieldwork took place in parts of the regions of Caluma, Chillanes, Chimbo, Echendía, Las Naves and San Miguel in Bolívar province, and in the regions of Montalvo, Puebloviejo and Quinsaloma in Los Ríos province. A total of 19 engraved rocks were found, the majority in Bolívar province, including the petroglyphs of San Luis de Pambil that were recorded by López (see above) and analyzed in his *Licenciatura* thesis (López 2009). The survey by Bravo and Vargas covered various climatic zones and altitude levels; they concluded that the concentration of the petroglyphs lies along the montane forest ridge ('ceja de montaña'), a zone characterized by humid tropical and sub-tropical climate. The dominant motifs among these engravings are spirals, lines, rectangular figures, concentrations of dots, and, with certain frequency, a motif which the authors call an element in the form of a rectangular 'horseshoe' with an incised line in the centre. They assume the rare figurative motifs to be an indication of stylistic relations with the Milagro-Quevedo culture, as López had already suggested previously, including anthropomorphic figures and schematic representations of faces, sometimes revealing traces of a headdress



Figure 6. San Luis de Pambil, representation of human figures with headdress (photo: Iván Toscano).

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Figure 7. Sucúa, posible zoomorphic figures (photo: Angelo Constantine).

(Figure 6). The authors' principal interpretation of the rock art refers to its location; they assume that it could have been used as territorial markers: 'The majority of petroglyphs are located in places of a certain altitude (between 154 and 1162 m altitude) which are very visible. This fact is very interesting and in a preliminary way we suggest that they could have served as territorial markers or indicate the presence of roads' (Bravo and Vargas 2011a: 90). However, the altitudinal variation indicated seems to be too large to be considered a significant factor in choosing the locations.

In his *Licenciatura* thesis Iván Toscano (a student in the workshop on rock art of the Amazonian region of Ecuador and a member of the Catazho project team) attempted an analysis of the same region from the viewpoint of landscape archaeology. He stated that this zone was influenced in prehispanic times by the coastal Milagro Quevedo culture and the Puruhá from the highlands (Toscano 2014); however, this conclusion was not based on style or iconography of the rock art. On the other hand his interpretation of the distribution of motifs on the rocks is interesting: he suggests that concentric circles played a major role in the organization of the panels (ibid.: 62ss.; the interpretative model can be seen in Figure 7 of his study). Finally, Toscano relates this interpretation to topographical and altitudinal data, and suggests the existence of four rock art sites (*sensu* Troncoso 2002), with different stylistic variations.

Bravo and Vargas (2011b) carried out an archeological survey in Carchi and Esmeraldas provinces (highlands and north coast of Ecuador), as requested by the National Heritage Institute. They worked in the regions of Tulcán, Mira and Espejo (in Carchi province), as well as San Lorenzo, Eloy Alfaro, Quinindé and Muisne (in Esmeraldas province), and recorded sites and archaeological objects in collections with the aim of contributing to the national heritage register. Petroglyphs (some already known and others that had previously not been mentioned in the specialized reports) were located in the following sites: 1- Chilmá (region of Tulcán, Carchi province), 6 engraved rocks, which are dominated by spirals and concentric rectangles; 2- Chilmá (region of Tulcán, Carchi province), 3 engraved rocks, interconnected circles and representation of a hand; 3- Finca El Paraíso (El Placer sector, region of Tulcán, Carchi province), 2 petroglyphs in a bad state of conservation; 4- La Achira (region of Mira, Carchi province), 7 well preserved petroglyphs, principally spirals and lines. In Esmeralda province no rock art was registered during this survey (ibid.).

In south-east Ecuador, in the region of Sucúa (Morona Santiago province), some petroglyphs were found in an archaeological rescue project by Ángelo Constantine (2014); they complement the 'Petroglifos del Abuelo' reported by Arthur Rostocker in his Ph.D. thesis (Rostocker 2005). In the iconography of Petroglifos del

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Figure 8. Petroglyphs at Santo Domingo (photo: Diego González Ojeda).

Abuelo anthropomorphic and zoomorphic motifs exist. Nearby, at the Yaunchu site, Rostocker and Constantine observed cultural material. Rostocker's excavation uncovered cultural contexts that were dated to the time period between AD 70 and 650 (ibid.: 124). Other petroglyphs recorded by Constantine present above all compositions of lines and zoomorphic motifs (Figure 7).

Finally, I wish to mention the publication by Diego González which presented information about petroglyphs in south Ecuador (González 2008); in 2014 he published a new book in which he not only presented again a summary of the rock art of Loja (cf. González 2004), but also some new data from the same province. Apart from the sites already known – Quillusara, Barrial Blanco, Santo Domingo de Guzmán, Yamana, La Rinconada, Mishkillana, Buena Vista, Anganuma and El Lumo – in this latest publication there is a complete recording of engraved rocks at the following sites: El Café, Barrial Blanco A, Guajalanche and El Breo (González *et al*. 2014). Special features can be observed in some Loja petroglyphs with regard to the use of space: single motifs (for example, at Guayural and Santo Domingo de Guzmán) may extend over the whole panel in contrast to compositions or a group of motifs found elsewhere. Among the rock art designs recorded by González, some figurative motifs differ considerably from those of the Amazonian region, for example anthropomorphic faces from which radial lines stick out that have been interpreted as solar representations by the author (petroglyph at Santo Domingo de Guzmán, Figure 8);



Figure 9. Petroglyphs at Yamana (photo: Diego González Ojeda).

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other figurative motifs are similar to those found in other regions of Ecuador, for example faces connected by lines at Yamana (Figure 9) which remind one of some petroglyphs in Catazho.

Conclusions and outlook

Rock art research

Rock art research in Ecuador has made progress in the last five years. Although few publications exist, research has increased in two ways: 1- for the first time the State has funded some projects devoted to rock art recording. 2- Students in academic institutions are showing more interest in rock art research, which is reflected by a number of *Licenciatura* theses focusing on different petroglyph sites from several archaeological perspectives.

A major limitation exists in these studies regarding chronology and cultural association of the rock art. There is a need for stratigraphic excavations in rock art sites. I consider that it is particularly important to investigate the chronological sequences of datable archaeological material at Catazho and San Luis de Pambil and to establish links to rock art at these sites.

Furthermore we need iconographical comparative studies. As I have pointed out, there are rock art motifs found all over the territory of Ecuador, but there are also regional characteristics that have not yet been defined in depth. With the exception of Catazho, there have been no systematic approaches to rock art iconography.

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