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### BURITACA 200 - LOST CITY IN THE JUNGLE

BY ERICH VON DANIKEN\*

Using his hands as a megaphone, Hernandez, a mustachioed pilot in the Colombian Air Force, shouted something at me, but I could not understand a word. The continuous roaring of the helicopter engines had deafened my left ear. Holding my cameras ready, I stared down at the green inferno below, which was marbled with clouds of fog. As far as the eye could see, nothing but mountains covered with impenetrable jungle.

I knew that the pilot was afraid of two possible complications: Before we took off, Hernandez told me that he had to find the "Ciudad perdida" (lost city) at first try - he had never flown to the mysterious ruins before. The weather was bad; greyish clouds cloaked the steaming ridges of the Sierra Nevada like huge, dirty cotton swabs.

Moreover, Hernandez knew that the jungle was a hideout for marijuana growers. "Santa Marta Gold" is in high demand on the drug market. The peasants were likely to feel threatened by the Air Force helicopter, and ours would not have been the first one to be shot down and disappear. The jungle devours everything; whatever is left over by the animals is overgrown by jungle vegetation.

Our Hughes helicopter was a small single-engine craft, with half-open plastic doors and no seat belts. As clouds and trees flew by like shapeless cotton balls, I remembered the tragic history of the "Ciudad perdida."

In the 16th Century, the Spanish chroniclers Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo y Valdes, Juan de Castellanos and Fray Pedro Simon wrote about enigmatic cities in the jungle - cities which they called "Betoma", "Taironaca" and "Pociguelca". Later, nobody really believed these stories, although it was known that the Spaniards destroyed large communities in the jungle of the Sierra Nevada in 1599, thereby slaughtering innumerable Indians. Even Juan de Castellano, although accustomed to brutalities, was highly disgusted when a certain Captain Pinol gave orders to cut off the "nose, lips and ears" of all the prisoners.

Protected by wild animals, venomous snakes, monkeys, vultures, eagles and jungle vegetation, the

\*The author of Chariots of the Gods?, Erich von Daniken now has ten books published in the ancient astronaut field. His latest book in English is now available in the US in hardcover from G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, under the title Pathways to the Gods. His latest book in German will be available in English later this year under the title The Strategy of the Gods. Mr. Von Daniken will be one of the speakers at the Ancient Astronaut Society's Tenth Anniversary World Conference in Chicago on August 6-7, 1983. His address is Baselstrasse 10, 4532 Feldbrunnen/SO, SWITZERLAND.



Aerial view of central plaza of BURITACA 200

lost city endured in its dormancy until the treasure hunter and amateur archaeologist, Florentino Sepulveda met an old Indian from the tribe of the Kogi in September 1940. The old man told Sepulveda that the jungle was sheltering the temple cities of his ancestors, the Tairona Indians.

Although convinced that the story was nothing but Indian legend, Florentino told his son, Julio Cesar Sepulveda about it, and in the spring of 1975, the latter stumbled over a terrace of the lost city. Unfortunately, Julio Cesar did something a tomb robber should never do: he talked. After a seven-day ride from Santa Marta, Julio showed his discovery to some sinister colleagues. Whether for jealousy, greed for gold, or for some other reason, Cesar was shot. His body is buried not far from the terrace over which he once stumbled.

As if a modern helicopter landing pad had been prepared for us, our aircraft landed on a terrace right in the middle of the jungle. Because he had no confidence in the prevailing weather conditions, Hernandez wanted to take off immediately and did not stop the rotors.

"I'll be back in five hours; same place," the pilot shouted at me through the funnel of his hands. I nodded and showed him with the five fingers of my

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right hand that I had understood.

Looking down on my camera cases on the ground, I discovered the cast-off skin of a venomous snake nearby. Mounting in a steady curve, the helicopter disappeared behind the next mountain ridge. As the rumbling of the rotors ebbed away, the jungle became silent for a few seconds. Suddenly, I became aware of the sounds that filled my ears: the buzzing of mosquitoes flying around me; the shrieking of monkeys which mingled with squeaking sounds and the cackling of birds.

Although I was still on the platform, every fiber of my clothes was soaking wet. Every jungle is also a sauna. I felt the wild desire to dress like Adam, but the swarms of mosquitoes reminded me in an unpleasant way that I was not in paradise. Leaning against the steep slope behind me was a wooden hut surrounded by giant jungle plants: cedars, ivory-nut, avocado; huge gum trees, various species of palms, and ferns in different shades of green. I assumed that this was the camp of the excavation team, but my calls remained unanswered.

Four days earlier in Bogota, Colombia, I had had a long conversation with the chief excavator of the lost city, Prof. Dr. Alvaro Soto, who received his PhD in archaeology from a California university. Dr. Soto is the Dean of the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the renowned University "de los Andes." Crouched on the arm of his chair, the amiable, 38 year-old professor was joyfully inhaling the smoke of his cigarette as I asked him:

"Why is the lost city called BURITACA 200?"

"Several small rivers originate in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta and at least eleven of them flow northward to the Caribbean Sea," he began. "The Rio Buritaca is one of these small currents, and the city BURITACA 200 is located on the banks of this river."

"200? What does the number mean?" I asked.

"It is the 200th community we have found in these jungles so far," he answered.

"Do you mean that the jungle once sheltered numerous communities and urban cultures?" I pressed.

"Yes. The territory is immense. Maybe you can get an idea of the proportions if I tell you that up to now, we know of more than 1,250 miles of roads and paths paved with stone slabs and stairways. We have been doing excavations since 1976, and there is no end in sight. BURITACA 200, for example, is ten times larger than the Inca fortifications of Machu Picchu in Peru."

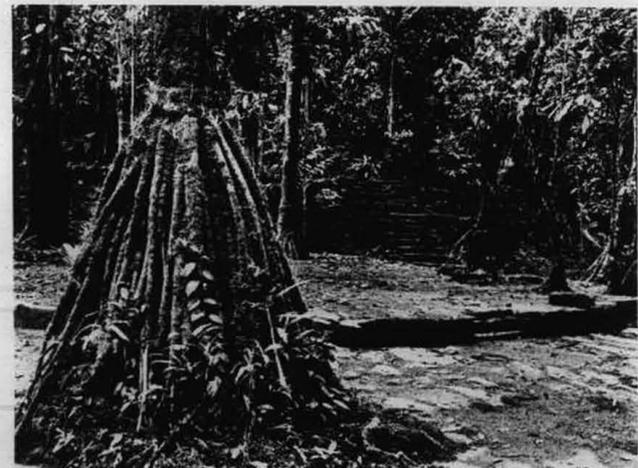
"Who built these cities, and when?" I inquired.

"BURITACA 200, like all the other jungle cities, belongs to the so-called "Tairona" culture. This name is somewhat absurd since Taironas have never really existed. The Spanish conquerors called all the Indians living in the Sierra Nevada "Taironas". It is a strange name: "Tairo" means "casting metal" and metal was exactly what the greedy Spaniards were after. "Tairona" thus does not name a particular tribe, but the term is applied to all the archaeological sites found along the northern and western mountainsides of the Sierra Nevada. The people who built the various cities were all members of the large family of the Chibcha Indians. The Carbon 14 method of archaeological dating suggests that BURITACA 200 was constructed about 600 to 700 AD."

In the course of our conversation, Prof. Alvaro Soto willingly informed me in detail about BURITACA 200. The mysterious city is located in the narrow canyons of the Cerro Corea (10,000 ft) and is cut in two by the small Rio Buritaca. The buildings consist of multi-storey terraces facing a main path. The main entrance to the city is 2,950 feet above sea level. Mounting at an angle of 50 degrees at the end of a canyon, a steep, broad staircase leads up to the large, graded terraces. These higher parts probably represented the center of the city. Up here twenty-six terraces of varying sizes are piled up like a labyrinth of boxes; some connecting, others

overlapping. The terraces measure between 540 sq. ft. and 9,500 sq. ft.

The complicated topographical conditions of the steep slopes forced the architects to grade the terrain carefully in order to provide enough space for the horizontal buildings. The mountainsides were cut open and filled with earth, stones and wall-like supports. The height of these walls varies between 20 feet and 312 feet.



Platforms and terraces of BURITACA 200

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Excavations have revealed an intricate system of drains hidden in the walls and terraces. This drainage system helped to keep the giant constructions dry in spite of continuous humidity and torrential tropical rainfalls. Yet, unlike the constructors of some other pre-Columbian cities, the people of BURITACA 200 did not use any mortar. Their superior technique for piling up the stone slabs assured protection against earthquakes and water damage.

Depending upon the purpose of the objects found, archaeology distinguishes four different sections at BURITACA 200: devices for daily use, like stone mills for grinding corn; ceramic pots, vases and plates; ceremonial objects, such as small, skillfully-worked clay flutes; and finally, cultic objects such as rings for priests, figurines representing various gods, and sepulchral gifts.

In spite of all the findings, the archaeologists, and among them the chief excavator, Dr. Alvaro Soto, are still mystified. Nobody knows what BURITACA 200 really was. A monumental sanctuary oriented with reference to the firmament or to the calendar? A city for priests in which only a group of chosen people was allowed to live? Quarters for the night for thousands and thousands of Indians who worked somewhere else during the day? Or, even a kind of military fortress? One thing is for certain: the constructors of BURITACA 200 were engineers with foresight and diverse skills. The cities in the Sierra Nevada do not represent the work of one single generation. The gigantic proportions and the intricate composition of BURITACA 200 suggest that the entire city was planned in detail before the first stone was even moved. Moreover, the constructors must have had a sound knowledge of astronomy. It has already been ascertained that some of the terraces are oriented in exact relation to certain stars. Thus, the "Tairona" Indians were capable of determining the precise minute of summer and winter solstices.

Three hundred thousand Indians lived in various intercommunicating urban communities in an ideal ecological system. Although little space was available for agriculture, the inhabitants raised corn, beans, manioc, potatoes and even fruits. All this without causing damage to the environment. To be able to appreciate this achievement it is necessary to know what happened in and around Santa Marta before 1975, that is, before the Sierra Nevada was put under government protection. As the population around the exclusive ocean resort at the Caribbean Sea increased steadily, people started to move out to the ranges of the Sierra Nevada. The consequence? The jungle vegetation was burned down to make room for banana and coffee plantations on the clearings. A few years later the farmers moved on to new areas, leaving behind the scars of civilization. Now, as it rains almost every day in these regions from April until November, the topsoil is eroded and washed away. Within a short time the ground dries up and becomes barren due to the lack of cover from trees and the lack of roots to hold the ground.

Although the "Taironas" lived in their cities for almost a thousand years without clearing the jungle, they were able to raise crops in large quantities. How did they solve this ecological problem?

Dr. Alvaro Soto: "To achieve something so extraordinary, the "Tairona" Indians must have had a social system differing from all the others. They must have known something very special and must have lived accordingly. These people were not at all primitive - our modern world can only learn from them. We destroy tropical rain forests through unreasonable clearing and thus create additional problems for the environment. The people of BURITACA 200 have demonstrated that there is an alternative."

Now here I was: standing all alone on the top platform of the lost city, wondering what would be next. Somewhere in the jungle, only heaven knew where, hundreds of people worked on 1,250 miles of roads in an attempt to fight the jungle's fierce attack

on the road constructions.

Two dark-brown heads appeared below the first terrace. Soldiers in jungle overalls dotted with red, brown and green spots, they were armed with rifles and pistols. Upon seeing me, they halted.

"Buenos dias, Senores!" I called out to them, but they did not react. I fished two cigars in metal cases out of my bag and gave them to the soldiers. They said, "Gracias" and walked on. They certainly were not very talkative.

On a paved path covered with moss I met two girls, members of the excavation team, who accompanied me on my tour through the ruins. We walked down an endless staircase of about five feet in width. I turned around repeatedly, wondering why the top platform on which the helicopter had landed stayed in my range of vision for such a long time. The farther down we got, the more obvious it became that the highest platform was built on top of a second one, this one again on top of a third, and so on. Terrace after terrace mounted towards the sky, and for me, it meant endless terraces on my way down. The steep slope turned out to be a single, grotesque "layer cake" of terraces piled on top of each other interminably.

At first, I thought that the ellipsoidal shape of the main terrace had developed accidentally when individual stone slabs were heaped up. Yet I soon discovered that I was surrounded by a bizarre landscape of circles, rounded walls, ellipses, small turrets, stairs, paths and doorways. It was indescribable! Behind every turn of the path, behind every giant gum tree leaf brushed aside, I came upon the ruins of enormous constructions spreading in every direction. Above me, below me, down to the Buritaca River, up to the next slope. A crazy place! Astonishment and respect seized me in the face of this unappreciated achievement. Semiramis' hanging gardens are one of the seven wonders of the world; to me, BURITACA 200 is the eighth!

My thoughts drifted back to the past, to those long-ago times when priests in colorful robes venerated their gods, when thousands and thousands of brown Indio bodies stood on these stone slabs, when light clouds of smoke rose to the sky from the various platforms to mingle with the prayers of the people. In my imagination I saw BURITACA 200 without the jungle vegetation which grows on the platforms today; a utopian picture, bizarre like the work of a modern artist; steep mountainsides crowded with terraces piled up on top of each other, turrets, layer cakes, ellipses oriented with reference to the stars. And I remembered Dr. Alvaro Soto saying: "The whole construction follows a plan, a gigantic plan. We just don't know what of!"

Prof. Alvaro Soto and his teacher, the famous archaeologist, Prof. Gerardo Reichel-Domatoff, believe that the Kogi Indians are the direct descendants of the "Taironas", the constructors of BURITACA 200.

Today, the Kogi live in the valleys and on the coast of the Sierra Nevada. They still build their villages on paved round platforms. Their huts, which have a diameter of 33 feet, are clustered around the large men's house to which women and children have no access.

In spite of their material poverty, the Kogi have reached a high standard in terms of religion and philosophy. They are deeply religious. Their faith is closely related to their traditional knowledge of a cosmic order. They see the universe as an ovoid space determined by seven reference points: North, South, West, East, the zenith, the nadir and the center. Nine worlds, comparable with nine layers, are located within this limited space. Our world represents the fifth world, the center. All the temples and cult places of the Kogi are oriented with reference to cosmic constellations. The Indians see their buildings as miniature models of the cosmos. Even ordinary huts are divided into four round sections. The ground floor on which people live is the fifth layer - the world. The Kogi

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imagine that their huts reach four layers deep into the ground; thus symbolizing the egg-shaped universe.

Prof. Reichel-Domatoff has developed an example to illustrate the sophisticated astronomical orientation of the Kogi temples. On the front side of the roof of the men's house, a pole points up vertically to the sky. The ridge of the women's house is equipped with two beams crossed in the manner of a fork. On the day of the vernal equinox, the twenty-first day of March, the "male" pole casts its shadow on the ground and slowly moves towards the center of the fork-like shadow created by the beams of the women's house. The symbol is clear: the phallus enters the vagina - the beginning of spring! The time to sow the seeds.

A Chief exercises the political power in a Kogi village, but the real power rests in the hands of the priests, the so-called "Mamas". The Mamas are not medicine men. They are educated priests; sages, who pass on the secrets of the cosmos from one generation to the next.

The temple cities of the Kogi, those places where the Mamas celebrate their cosmic ceremonies, are high up in the Sierra Nevada, close to the limit of perpetual snow. A rope hangs down from the mushroom roof of the main temple, symbolizing the umbilical cord to the universe.

The Kogi believe that they are the chosen people and see themselves as "older brothers" to all mankind. All human beings are the Kogi's "younger brothers". Since the Kogi are fully convinced of a nearing world-wide catastrophe, they have stopped spinning wool and weaving cloth. It is not worth the effort anymore. Consequently, their outward poverty does not bother them in any way. They say that the gods have given the "younger brothers" the ability to invent technological toys such as cars, airplanes, and cannon. Yet the "younger brothers" do not know how to deal with all this - in the end, their toys will destroy them.

Without being conceited, the Kogi are convinced that they will preserve mankind after the next world disaster.

BURITACA 200, the lost city of the jungle, will not become a tourist attraction within the next fifteen years. The terraced city in the jungle is still reserved for the eyes of a few scholars.

Dr. Alvaro Soto: "The few visitors who make it out here should learn from this fabulous achievement of a past culture, and above all, they should draw the necessary conclusions for our present difficult times."

## THE MIRACLE OF FATIMA

During the months of May to October, 1917, some incredible events occurred in a rocky field called the Cova da Iria, near Fatima, Portugal. Three shepherd children, Lucia Santos (aged 10) and her two cousins, Francisco and Jacinta Marto (aged 9 and 7 respectively) were witness to several visits of a beautiful Lady, dressed in white, surrounded by a great dazzling light, who came from the sky in a radiant luminous globe. During the events, the Lady talked only with Lucia Santos. At the final Apparition on October 13, 1917, seventy thousand people had gathered to witness the event.

Immediately following the last appearance, the faithful began to visit the Cova da Iria and a shrine was built in honor of "Our Lady of Fatima." Since 1917, hundreds of millions of people have visited the site, with as many as one million having assembled at one time.

Many books have been written about the "Miracle of Fatima," but Father John DeMarchi, I.M.C. is the recognized authority on the Apparitions of 1917, having spent many years at the site interviewing eyewitnesses, and his book entitled The Immaculate Heart is described by the author as the "full and documented" account of the events. Father DeMarchi

emphasizes in his introduction that the account is "full and complete" and that everything in the book and every quotation are 100% accurate and the absolute truth. Accordingly, it is interesting to note the following (page number references are to the English version published by Farrar, Straus and Young, New York, 1952):

1. Jacinta Marto, the youngest of the three children who witnessed the events, told her mother, Olimpia, the details of their first encounter with the Lady. She described the Lady's dress, her beauty, her radiance and the dazzling light, and, according to Olimpia, Jacinta said: "When she went back into Heaven the doors seemed to shut so quickly that I thought her feet would get caught..." (page 51)

Jacinta lived for less than three years after the Apparitions and before she died, Olimpia took her for a last visit to the Cova da Iria where Jacinta told her mother "when Our Lady went away she passed over those trees and afterwards she went into Heaven so fast I thought her feet would get caught." (page 205)

When the Second Apparition ended, Lucia Santos, the ten year old, said as they watched the Lady depart: "There, now we can't see her any more. She has gone back into Heaven, the doors are shut." (page 63) This was described by Maria da Capelinha, an eyewitness to the event.

What doors could the children have been referring to? Does Heaven have doors? Could there have been a space vehicle into which the Lady stepped just as the doors were being closed?

2. At the Fourth Apparition, a large crowd had assembled at the Cova da Iria and Maria da Capelinha who was there, described the event. The people were milling about and then they heard a loud clap of thunder, which shocked them. Then, "Just after the clap of thunder came a flash of lightning, and then we began to see a little cloud...which stopped for a few moments...and then rose in the air until it disappeared. As we looked around...our faces and clothes were reflecting all the colors of the rainbow." (pages 93 and 94)

It is certainly strange that the thunder preceded the lightning, which is contrary to the laws of nature. Could a spacecraft have created a sonic boom (thunder) and then streaked down as a flash of light (lightning)?

3. Monsignor John Quaresma, an eyewitness to the Apparition of September 13, 1917 wrote: "With great astonishment I saw, clearly and distinctly, a luminous globe, which moved from the east to the west, gliding slowly and majestically through space..." Thousands of eyewitnesses saw the globe and also witnessed "the sudden freshening of the atmosphere that had attended prior Apparitions..." (pages 114 and 115)

These passages and others in the book give one considerable cause for wondering what really happened at the Cova da Iria near Fatima, Portugal in 1917. Gene M. Phillips.

## COMING EVENTS:

10TH ANNIVERSARY WORLD CONFERENCE - AUG. 6-7, 1983  
MEMBER EXPEDITION TO SOUTH AMERICA AND EASTER ISLAND, SEPTEMBER 2-25, 1983

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