



History



A Brief History of Zuleta

The prehistoric period

Little is known about the earliest inhabitants of the wider Zuleta region before the archaeological period known as ‘the Late Period’, from around AD700. Deep excavations in the valley where one of the main groups of mounds are located have, however, afforded tantalising glimpses of the earlier past. Here, peat from an infilled lake is overlain by several ash fall horizons from nearby volcano Cayambe, with a C14 date of 1745 BC. Pollen analysis of the peat indicates there was extensive forest clearance for this period, with few tree species present, but with much charcoal indicative of burning. This, in turn, suggests that there were settlements here with cultivation. Nearby at Lake El Cunrru, close to Angochagua, information taken from the coring of lake sediments have identified abundant *zea* (maize) and other cultigens such as quinoa between 3100 and 1500 years before present, confirming that agriculturally active settlements were in this immediate locality. Further south, on the northern flanks of Cerro Cayambe, the early ceramic site of La Chimba puts the settlement data of this region back to 2640 to 1700 B.P. Given these findings of early settlement and agriculture in

the locality, it would be surprising not to find equivalent settlement data at Zuleta.

From around AD 700, large earthen mounds began to be constructed in different locations throughout the northern highlands, probably including at Hacienda Zuleta. The ethnic group associated with this mound building culture has been called ‘the Cara’ by ethno-historians and archaeologists, later becoming ‘Caranqui’, after the town of the same name, situated further north near Ibarra. The people in the greater Zuleta region are still called ‘Caranquis’ today. Along with



large occupation mounds, evidence of extensive systems of raised or ridged fields called ‘camelones’ has also been found, a form of intensive horticultural practice which would have supported the year-round production of crops such as maize and potatoes and sustained high regional populations. Excavations within the Zuleta ramp mound site have also found these field systems buried under the modern pasture.

Archaeologists understand that these early societies functioned through complex social dynamics. Each social group or *llajta* was headed by a *cacique* (chief) or ‘principal’, but with one *cacique* in overall dominion of a larger region of lesser chiefs, who owed him allegiance and tribute. Warfare between competing groups would not have been uncommon.

The Ecuadorian sierra is seismologically volatile and subject to regular eruptions from the region’s volcanoes. One such eruption of Quilotoa volcano at around AD 1260 is thought to have caused such a major displacement of peoples north from the Quito basin, that it acted as a driver of socio-political change, leading to the appearance of the large ramp mound sites, of which around 60 are found in the northern region. These larger hemispherical, rectangular or quadrilateral mounds, some with ramps, frequently contain re-deposited ash from Quilotoa volcano, therefore clearly post-dating this event. Sites with larger ramp mounds, including Zuleta, probably functioned as elite residences for a region’s paramount chief and the ceremonial foci for its scattered communities. The period associated with the appearance of these large mound sites is referred to by archaeologists as the Late Period.

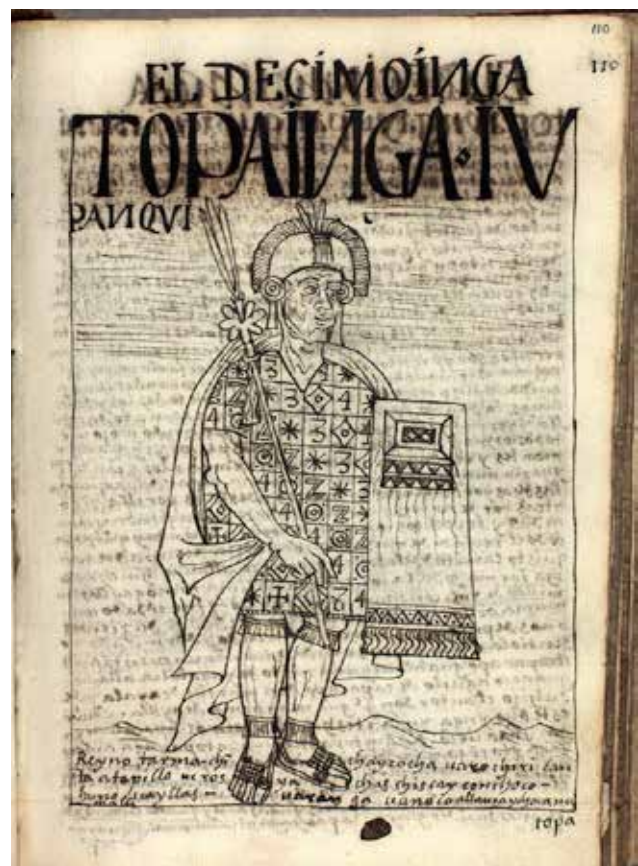
The Incas in the North

The Late Period in the northern sierra lasted until sometime towards the end of the 15th century, when Inca forces under Tupac Inca Yupanqui arrived from the south, intent on extending their empire ‘Tawantinsuyu’ northwards. The different Caranqui peoples, once in competition with one another, allied in an attempt to forestall the Inca advance, but eventually capitulated in the famous battle of ‘Yuharchocha’ –the Lake of Blood– when up to 50,000 of their warriors were said to have been killed. Inca domination of the northern region was then comprehensive, as can still glimpsed from the many strategically located

pucarás, or hillforts. An Inca palace and temple was constructed at Caranqui, near Ibarra, over an existing Caranqui ramp mound site. Little but a few place names survive of the original Caranqui language and culture, and it is likely that the ramp mound site at Zuleta was abandoned at this time, reverting to the scrub and wetlands that the first Spanish travellers of the time recorded.

The Conquest by Spain

In 1534, a mere generation after the Inca conquest, Spanish conquistadores arrived, also from the south following their own conquest of the Incas at Cusco in Perú in 1532. Unknowingly they followed in the wake of a vanguard of invisible



and deadly allies brought with them from the Old World: the epidemics of smallpox, measles, influenza, typhus and plague that between them were to further decimate the indigenous Amerindian populations.

In the first decades following the conquest and pacification of the region, rights to the labour and tribute of the Indian peoples were given as gifts to those conquistadores who had fought in the wars of conquest (known as ‘encomiendas’), and were the means through which they amassed great wealth for themselves. We know from the Spanish records of the time that some of the original Indian ethnic groupings gave their name to these ‘encomiendas’, which in some cases afterwards became towns. So there was the rich encomienda of Otavalo (the name of a paramount chief here), and the smaller one further north named ‘Carangue’. Later in the 16th century, surviving remnants of the scattered Caranqui peoples, their numbers greatly reduced by the Inca and the Spanish wars of conquest, and by the influence of the epidemic diseases to which they had no immunity, were forcibly resettled into newer Spanish style townships called ‘reducciones’, where they became more amenable to enumeration for taxation and tribute. So large tracts of a once populous land fell vacant, and, in time, into this territorial vacuum the great landed estates –the haciendas– developed and little by little the region began to take on more the appearance that it has today.

The colonial period and Jesuit occupation

From the end of the Zuleta paramount chiefdom and the brief pax Incaico, the early colonial origins of the hacienda are shadowy. It seems likely that a Spanish establishment of some kind was founded here by the second half of the sixteenth century, where it would most likely have functioned as a livestock ranch (estancia) raising cattle and sheep; there are references to large flocks of sheep in the region by 1599, and also to an early textile mill (obraje) being located here. European methods of farming, Old World crops, cattle and sheep ranching had been introduced immediately in the wake of the conquest and colonisation of the Americas by the Spanish, changing aboriginal land management practices and the landscape completely.

In the late 16th century, the legal land title of this region was likely given by the Spanish Crown in a

process called ‘composición’ wherein absent land titles from Spanish land seizures and de facto occupation was regularised in return for payment of a fee. The large old stone cross in the outer courtyard suggests the influence of a religious order like the Jesuits, who at this time owned extensive tracts of land and many haciendas throughout the Viceroyalty of Peru, but there is little other firm evidence for this. By 1691, the main buildings around the principal courtyard, the granary and chapel, were completed. Out in the valley, the finding of a small piece of Panamanian polychrome majolica pottery, probably imported from Lima, offers a transient glimpse of the early Spanish colonial settlement here.

Private Ownership of Zuleta

The religious influence may have derived from one Canon Gabriel Zuleta, who apparently took the property over in 1713, and from then the farm became known as Cochicaranqui de Zuleta. It is probable that the name Cochicaranqui is, in fact, much earlier, and may therefore be the earliest surviving name for this region we have. Upon the Canon’s death, the farm passed to the Posse family, in whose hands it remained until the end of the 19th century.



The Plaza-Lasso Family

In 1898, the farm was sold to one José Maria Lasso, the first ancestral link to Hacienda Zuleta's present family. At this time it was still operating as a traditional working farm, as diaries of the period show, with records of livestock and goods, and sales of products such as milk and cheese. In time it passed through two more generations to Galo Plaza Lasso, the ex-President of Ecuador, bullfighter and diplomat.

A farmer at heart, Plaza Lasso was an ardent supporter of modern agriculture and through this conviction he was the first to bring Holstein cows, systematic seed selection and tractors to Ecuador, which revolutionised farming here. Zuleta was his flagship, the place where each of these technologies was showcased.

Present day

The fortunes of the Plaza-Lasso family are intimately linked with those of the descendants of the Caranqui peoples whose forebears had once occupied the ramp mound site on the hacienda's land. Land reforms introduced during Galo Plaza's office as president of Ecuador devolved substantial tracts of land back to the Indian peoples, whilst the infamous 'huasipungero' land peonage system was abolished. Today the peoples of the region enjoy independence and some prosperity. Many are still farmers, whilst local women are productively engaged in the local cottage embroidery industry. Many of the hacienda's employees are people from the Zuleta community. Folkloric traditions retain important links to their ancestral past, with the annual celebration of the Inty Raymi –the fiesta of Juan Baptista– the midsummer harvest festivities which interweave community and hacienda, blending the cultural traditions of pre-Spanish, colonial and the present day in a richly evolving cultural fusion.

In relatively recent years, Hacienda Zuleta has moved from being just a dairy and a stud farm into country hacienda-hotel, offering guests and visitors homemade Andean cuisine, a wonderful historic setting, and a wide range of outdoor activities.

