

Carlos Fausto. Os índios antes do Brasil. Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor. 2000.

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Carlos Fausto is an anthropology lecturer at the National Museum of Rio de Janeiro and author of several studies on Brazilian native peoples. This book is an attempt to introduce the reader to Indian societies before the arrival of the Europeans, in the late 15th century AD. The author starts by studying the interpretation of the subject as stated in the five volume *Handbook of South American Indians*, edited by Julian H. Steward in the late 1940s. Fausto then turns to the Inca Empire, as “nowhere else in South America did happen a comparable development” (p. 16), and explain how Steward interpreted colonial documents to oppose political societies in the high lands to natural societies in the low lands. Betty Meggers and her *Amazonia: man and culture in a counterfeit paradise*, published in 1971, spread the idea that low land rain forest environment constrained social life, leading to so-called simple, egalitarian, and small social units.

Fausto reminds that archaeologists such as Donald Lathrap and Anna Roosevelt challenged these ideas, as pottery is eight thousand years old in Amazonia, at least one thousand older than elsewhere in South America and, as a consequence, in the 1980s and 1990s Meggers paradigm lost influence. Instead several authors admitted the existence of chiefdoms in the low lands and the field work by such archaeologists as Michael Heckenberger, Eduardo Neves, and James Peterson has contributed to a deeper understanding of large sites in the Amazon basin, with 90 ha or more. Heckenberger noted that several common features at the Xingu area, such as hierarchy, regional links, sedentary life and ethnic accommodation, were usual in several Arawak areas in South America.

Turning to the savannah, Fausto draws on Irmhild Wüst’s work and considers that the Jes featured apparently contradictory characteristics, as they were itinerant but lived in large villages, used basic subsistence technology but also elaborate personal attire, had no supreme chiefs but

there was also a prestige economy, there was a clear development of social institutions but they were non-hierarchical. The author interprets this as evidence that social complexification processes were not those prescribed by traditional socio-political models.

Fausto then pays attention to the Tupinambás and Guaranis and the latest period before the arrival of the Portuguese. The author accepts the now standard frontier between Guaranis to the South of the Tietê and/or Paranapanema rivers and the Tupinambá to the North. Fausto quotes Francisco Noelli's stand for a North/Sul expansion of the Urtupinambá, but prefers to consider that they expanded from the Tietê basin to the coast, northwards. War was the main feature of these ethnic groups and the essential aim of war was the capture of prisoners not to be enslaved but devoured.

The volume includes several useful maps and figures, including the classification of natives languages, followed by a chronology (from 9000 BC to AD 1621), a commented list of references and sources, and reading suggestions. Overall, the book provides a very useful introduction for students wishing to understand the current discussion on several aspects of the native inhabitants of Brazil before the Europeans and it is thus a most recommended volume.

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