

ON PUERTO RICAN ARCHAEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Historical sources corroborated by archaeological research demonstrate that the Antillean area was inhabited by people of three cultural traditions. Puerto Rico, because of its intermediate position between the Greater and Lesser Antilles, is of great importance in determining the chronology and the distribution of West Indian aboriginal cultures. Recent radiocarbon dates demonstrate that Puerto Rico was first populated by a preceramic people who arrived before the Christian era. A relationship between these Indians and certain preceramic groups of Venezuela has been postulated, although neither the chronology of the sites nor their distribution correspond. Other radiocarbon dates from Puerto Rico establish a clear relationship between the different pottery styles of the island and those of the Lesser Antilles and Venezuela.

THE geographical position of Puerto Rico is of great importance in understanding the succession of peoples who occupied the West Indies in pre-Columbian times. Archaeological research provides us with a general view of the different "cultures" in Puerto Rico and their relationships with other aboriginal cultures of the Antilles and the neighboring continents.

Puerto Rico was first populated by a pre-agricultural people, and the period of occupation is here designated by the term Archaic, which corresponds to Rouse's Period I or Meso-Indian period. The best data on this culture come from the María de la Cruz cave in Loiza, a town on the northeastern coast (Alegría and others 1955).

The West Indian Archaic tradition in Puerto Rico is characterized by the absence of agriculture and pottery, seminomadic living in small bands, frequent use of caves for shelter and burial, extended burials, absence of cranial deformation, use of hematite or red ocher, and crude artifacts made of conch shell, flint, and other stones. In these traits the Archaic Indians of Puerto Rico show their relationship with other pre-agricultural and preceramic Indians of Cuba, Hispaniola, and the Virgin Islands. Evidence of these early inhabitants corroborates the leading historical sources of the conquest, which mention or describe the last survivors. In the late 15th century these Indians were inhabiting the Peninsula of Guanahatabeyes (Guanacabibes) on the extreme western coast of Cuba and the Peninsula of Guacayarima in western Hispaniola.

Although all sites of the West Indian Archaic have the above basic traits in common, there are local differences. In Cuba the tradition is characterized by hammer-grinders, shell gouges, stone balls, shell vessels, and the peg-shaped stones called *gladiolitos* by Cuban archaeologists. In Hispaniola the characteristic artifact is a large blade or "dagger" of flint that is re-chipped along the edges. In Puerto Rico the Archaic is represented by pebble-grinders, pitted hammerstones, and pebble choppers (Alegría and others 1955, Fig. 37). In the Virgin Islands this tradition produced long, narrow celts or adzes (Hatt 1924). There is no evidence of preceramic sites in Jamaica, the Bahamas, or the Lesser Antilles. These trait differences among the Archaic people of the various islands are, we think, the product of island specialization and chronological differentiation, and all of the findings can be grouped under the West Indian Archaic tradition.

One of the main problems connected with this tradition is that of its origin. Although Harrington (1921), upon discovering the first preceramic site in Cuba, postulated a South American origin, later discoveries led Osgood (1942), Rainey (1940, 1941), Rouse (1941, 1942), and others to consider southeastern North America as the point of origin. Nevertheless, recent discoveries in Venezuela have made it possible to think of an origin there for the West Indian Archaic.

In addition to the Paleo-Indian remains of El Jobo in western Venezuela, Cruxent and Rouse (1958-59) have found preceramic remains — bone points, shell gouges, bipointed stones, hammer-grinders, and milling stones — at the site of Manicuare on the Peninsula of Araya. The same cultural traits have been found on the islands of Cubagua and Margarita off the coast of Venezuela. Other Meso-Indian sites are reported at El Peñon east of Cumana, and at Carupano and El Conchal on the Peninsula of Paria. The last-mentioned sites are related by Rouse (1960) to the Ortoire and St. John sites on the island of Trinidad, which are characterized by stone chips and stone hammers. In western Venezuela other Meso-Indian sites occur at Pedro Garcia in the vicinity of Barcelona, at Cabo Blanco near La Guaira, and at El Henreal

in the state of Falcón. These last three sites are linked by the presence of an edge grinder (Cruxent and Rouse 1958-59).

These recent discoveries of preceramic sites in Venezuela and on the offshore islands have stimulated thinking about the origin of the West Indian Archaic (Meso-Indian) tradition. Although Rouse (1960) now seems more inclined toward a South American origin, he sees the possibility of more than one entry into the West Indies from other neighboring areas, such as Florida and Central America. We are still dubious about the South American origin, since there is no evidence of Archaic existence in the Lesser Antilles. It is difficult to believe that these early people migrated from the South American continent and its offshore islands to the Virgin Islands-Puerto Rico region without passing through the Lesser Antilles. Although we must accept the fact that the archaeology of the Lesser Antilles is not well known, the distribution of preceramic sites in the Greater Antilles tends to show that the migratory movement was from northwest to southeast instead of otherwise. It is well known that preceramic sites are abundant in Cuba, the westernmost of the islands. In the case of Hispaniola, southeast of Cuba, preceramic sites are more rare. In Puerto Rico, the most southeastern island of the Greater Antilles and the best known archaeologically, there is only one site with conclusive evidence of preceramic people. Further southward there is only one such site in the Virgin Islands. This distribution seems to show that the trend of migration was not from south to north.

Although historical sources (Vázquez de Espinosa 1942) describe pre-agricultural people at the southern end of the peninsula of Florida, archaeologically we have no definite preceramic sites there. Other preceramic sites on the banks of the St. Johns River in the interior of the peninsula show only a few traits in common with the Cuban sites.

The possibility of a Central America origin should be carefully considered. Willey (Alegría and others 1955) has called attention to the Monagrillo site in Panama, which has yielded edge grinders similar to those found in Cueva María de la Cruz in Puerto Rico. Other Monagrillo traits which suggest a relationship with the West Indian Archaic are rectanguloid hammering or grinding stones and stone flakes. The possibility of an Archaic migration from Central

America to Cuba and from that island to others to the southeast must be kept in mind. We need more archaeological research along the coasts of Yucatan, Honduras, and other Central American coastal areas.

Recent carbon samples obtained in the María de la Cruz cave in Puerto Rico (Rouse and others 1963) have yielded a date of A.D. 40 ± 100 years. This date would put the entrance of Archaic Indians into Puerto Rico at the beginning of the Christian era. For the Krum Bay site in the Virgin Islands, Bullen and Sleight (1964) obtained dates of 450 and 225 B.C. For the preceramic site of Ortoire on Trinidad, Rouse (1960) reports a date of 800 B.C.; for the island of Cubagua, 2200 B.C.; and for Manicuaire on the Peninsula of Araya in Venezuela, 1600 B.C. A recent date obtained by Cruxent (personal communication) for the Marban site on Azua in the Dominican Republic is 2170 ± 160 B.C. This very early date for the northwestern part of the area, along with the absence of dates for Cuban and Haiti sites, makes us disregard for the moment radiocarbon dates as an aid to understanding Archaic migratory movements in the Antilles.

At the Hacienda Grande site, in the town of Loza on the northeastern coast of Puerto Rico and relatively close to the preceramic site of María de la Cruz, I discovered in 1948 what seemed to be the earliest agricultural and pottery site on the island. This site is characterized by pottery that is technically the best in the area. Sherds are thin, hard, and fine-grained. Shapes are varied, but bell-shaped bowls and flat-based bottles are characteristic. Other traits are D-shaped handles vertically attached, perforated knobs, and flat griddles. Decoration consists of white-on-red painted designs, painted modeled head lugs, and fine-zoned crosshatching (Fig. 1 *a, b, d*). Associated with this pottery was a great abundance of crab remains. Shell and shell artifacts are very rare, especially in the lower level. In general, this site corresponds to what Rainey (1940) has called the "Crab culture" and to what Rouse (1951, 1952) describes as Period II in his West Indian chronology. The pottery of the Hacienda Grande site belongs to the white-on-red style termed Cuevas by Rouse (1952). Other sites with similar white-on-red vessels have been found in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, the Lesser Antilles, Trinidad, and the Orinoco region of Venezuela,

The importance of the Hacienda Grande site lies in the presence of certain pottery traits which seem to indicate that it represents the earliest immigration of pottery-making Indians into the island. The fine-zoned crosshatched decoration (Fig. 1) and fine-carved designs filled with paint, which are not present in the other Period II sites in Puerto Rico, establish a relationship with the Saladoid sites in northeastern Venezuela. The Saladero site is considered to be the oldest ceramic site in eastern Venezuela and has been dated by radiocarbon as 900–600 B.C. (Cruxent and Rouse 1958–59).

There is clear evidence of the movement of the white-on-red pottery style from the Orinoco to the island of Trinidad, where it is present at the Cedros site. In the Lesser Antilles we have two radiocarbon dates for this style: A.D. 180 ± 80 at the LaSalle site in Martinique and A.D. 220 ± 70 for the bottom of the Morel site in Guadeloupe. In the Virgin Islands, Bullen (1962) correlates the Hacienda Grande pottery with his Early Coral Bay period, although fine crosshatched incising is absent at the Virgin Island site. Last summer (1963) Rouse and I collected carbon samples at the Hacienda Grande site, and these have been dated by Struiver (Yale University Laboratory) at A.D. 120. The later Cuevas site in northern Puerto Rico, which Rouse used as the type site for his Cuevas style, has been dated at A.D. 510 ± 80 (Rouse and others 1963).

We do not yet have evidence that the white-on-red pottery style ever passed north or west of Puerto Rico. What happened to the Igneri Indians who manufactured this pottery? Did their ceramics evolve into the later pottery styles or were they conquered by another Indian group with different pottery techniques and decorative styles?

With respect to Puerto Rico, Rouse (1952) considers that his Cuevas pottery style evolved into the Capa style, which represents the latest pottery of the island. According to him, the Ostiones style was an intermediate stage between the Cuevas and the Capa. The differences in techniques between Cuevas and Ostiones pottery, and Capa as well, make us doubt this possibility. The radical changes in pottery forms and in decoration between Cuevas and Ostiones seem to indicate something more than an evolution. Along with these differences in pottery, we also note a radical change in food habits among the sites where the Cuevas pot-

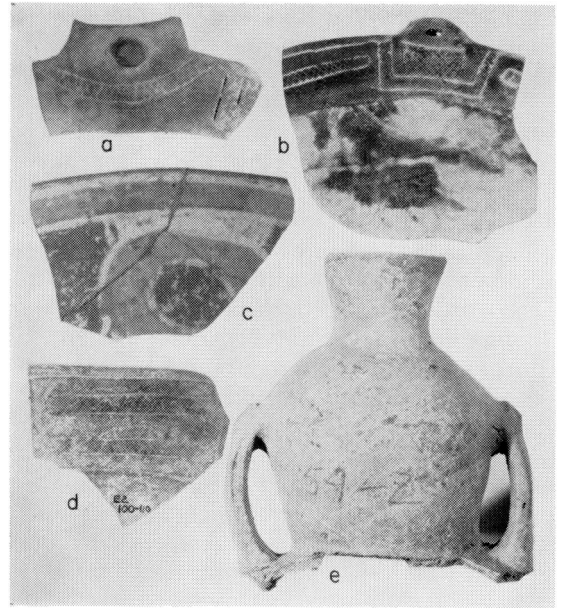


FIG. 1. Pottery from the Hacienda Grande site, Cuba. a, b, d, fine line crosshatched incised; c, polychrome sherd painted in red, dark yellow, and white; e, fragment of bottle.

tery is found (Hacienda Grande, Cuevas, Canas, and Monserrate) and the Ostiones and Capa sites. Associated with the white-on-red pottery we find large quantities of crab remains and, in the case of Early Cuevas (Hacienda Grande), large hermit crabs, while clams and large shells are rare. In the Ostiones, Esperanza, Santa Elena, and Capa sites, on the contrary, crab claws are almost absent, and the sites are easily detected by the great abundance of shells of different types. Except for shell cups and spoons in the Late Cuevas sites, the use of conch shell for artifacts is rare. In the Ostiones, Esperanza, Santa Elena and Capa sites, the abundance of shell artifacts is characteristic.

This evidence suggests that the Igneri Indian immigration into the Greater Antilles was stopped at Puerto Rico because of a new invasion of people from South America who came by way of the Lesser Antilles, conquered the Igneri, and prevented their movement westward to the other islands in the Greater Antilles. The new invaders could have received some influence from Igneri women, which manifested itself in the Ostiones pottery, although the ceremonial white-on-red pottery was totally abandoned. Further research in the Lesser Antilles will clarify the entrance of these new-

comers into the area and their influence on the late pottery styles that moved from Puerto Rico toward Hispaniola and Cuba.

The latest pottery in Puerto Rico is the Capa style. This pottery is associated with the elaborate ceremonialism which characterized the Taino Indians who inhabited Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, and eastern Cuba at the time of the Spanish conquest. Basic elements of their culture were fine stone sculpture and ceremonial ball courts. There is no evidence of a South American origin for these elements. Up to this moment we do not have anything similar in the Orinoco region or in the Lesser Antilles. The ceremonial ball game and its courts link the Taino culture with Middle American cultures, but how such influences arrived at the center of the West Indian area (Puerto Rico-Dominican Republic) is still a challenge in West Indian archaeology.

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