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Arqueología en la línea noroeste de la Española, Paisaje, cerámicas e interacciones

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SUMMARY

This dissertation addresses the cultural diversity of northern Hispaniola, one of the most archeologically interesting regions in the Greater Antilles. It examines the circumstances affecting intra-regional and local interaction between the indigenous communities which populated the area in different periods.

The aim is to gain insight into the social phenomena associated with interaction taking into consideration that interaction can take many different forms, including the exchange of materials, ideas, beliefs and information between members of different groups. These various exchanges were mediated by identities/agents, and we can gain access to their characteristics and transformations through material culture, especially pottery styles, and the use of the landscape and settlement patterns developed by each community within the regional landscape.

This dissertation evaluates the cultural diversity and types of interaction expressed through pottery styles in relation to geographic/environmental and landscape characteristics and its impact on the form, locations, and contexts in which these phenomena developed. With this in mind stylistic variation and its manifestations over time and space were analysed in the northern region of Hispaniola, as well as some of the factors and motivations that might be associated with them. In particular, this study emphasizes the ecological diversity of the region responsible for the discontinuous distribution of certain resources, especially marine resources, and how this might have stimulated or generated negotiation or competition to ensure access to them. The setting in which this study unfolds includes the northern-central and northwest region of the present-day province of Puerto Plata and the extreme northeast of the province of Montecristi in the Dominican Republic.

The dissertation also underscores the necessity of contributing to archaeological studies on a regional scale in the Greater Antilles. For this reason it is critical of the prevalence of approaches which highlight the concept of *culture area* as an analytical model to explain phenomena associated with cultural and social change in the Caribbean, as well as to explain the appearance of some of the main cultural entities identified in the study of the indigenous communities of this area of the Antilles. It also assumes a critical position towards the predominance of studies of isolated settlements, which has helped create the false image of areas or places with more *interaction* (centres) and areas with less *interaction* (peripheries), in which the former generally become the focus of cultural diffusion which explains the emergence and development of certain cultural phenomena within a specific region. Criticism of this approach demands a re-evaluation of the paradigm which views migration as the sole or primary mechanism of cultural change in northern Hispaniola.

Another aspect discussed in the dissertation is the historical significance of the northern region of Hispaniola, and how the region's status has been traditionally linked to its role in the events related to European colonization. This is something which has had an influence on: the selection of research topics and how they should be addressed, the definition of issues considered historically important, and the basic context for their research. As a result, archaeological studies in the region have prioritized the early European colonial villas over the study of indigenous cultures and sociopolitical and economic dynamics, the latter being fundamentally reduced to a single moment in the region's history. By the same measure this dissertation also analyses the misuse of ethnohistorical and archaeological data in the creation and formalization of interpretations of the cultural landscape and socioeconomic dynamics of northern Hispaniola, as well as the adoption of linguistic, political and religious descriptions of that region as the standard by which to understand sociocultural processes and actions of indigenous individuals and communities in other parts of Hispaniola and the Greater Antilles.

Critical evaluation of the above issues forms the preamble for an analysis of the social and cultural landscape of northern Hispaniola with an emphasis on the pre-Columbian period. This discussion is

vital to understand the nuances in expressions of material culture within this region, especially pottery styles. For this reason the structure of the dissertation flows from the general to the particular, from analysis of the trends and concepts which have defined the Caribbean, through the important challenges which face archaeology in the Greater Antilles, to arrive at the author's archaeological investigations in northern Hispaniola. This structure positions the research within the different approaches to mobility, interaction, and their social implications across various regions of the Circum-Caribbean taken by the Caribbean Research Group at Leiden University. Even though the focus is on interactions on a regional scale, this dissertation analyzes the implications of new data obtained for the north of Hispaniola to understand the socio-cultural dynamics and cultural landscapes in other contexts in the westernmost part of the Antilles (Cuba, Jamaica and Bahamas)

Consistent with the above, the integration of available information on the archaeology of the Greater Antilles with new data obtained from northern Hispaniola creates ruptures in the common schemes used to address pre-colonial history of the Caribbean area. The main purpose of this is to show the complexity and diversity of populations who based on traditional historical or archaeological criteria have been designated as isolated "local cultures". Furthermore, the integrated approach also readdresses the traditional approach to the so-called "Meillacoid cultural phenomenon", which is one of the most commonly studied cultural expressions within the study region and the western Greater Antilles.

The importance of context is one of the essential elements considered in the dissertation, and this is linked to the perspective of *agency* as a way to comprehend the development of ceramic styles. From this point of view, the dating and changes in ceramic expressions are interpreted in relation to the socio-economic and strategic importance of settlements within the social dynamics of the region. A basic consideration is the location of settlements with respect to their importance for relations between different cultural groups.

Related to this link between landscapes and settlement patterns, the groups using different styles or ceramic traditions are examined in relation to the cultural and natural landscape in which they were immersed. This perspective allows understanding of the coexistence, mixing and transformations of styles, reflecting competition, needs, and actions of subjects in relation to a specific historical and cultural situation in the study region. The following research questions and objectives are posed with this in mind:

Questions

What are the archaeological characteristics of indigenous occupation in the northwest Dominican Republic?

How can ceramics, settlement patterns and their deployment across the landscape be characterised for the groups that inhabited the northern area of Hispaniola?

What kinds of interaction are manifest through ceramics and the archaeological landscape of northwestern Hispaniola?

What impact does interaction have upon the identities expressed in the ceramic styles of the region?

What distinguishes the processes of transformation and sociocultural change occurring in northwest Hispaniola from other areas of the island and in the Greater Antilles?

Objectives

Expand the existing data on ceramics, settlement patterns and landscape use of the indigenous groups who inhabited northern Hispaniola.

Characterize the ceramic expressions and archaeological landscape of a region of northwest Hispaniola to generate an interpretation of the dynamics of social interaction characteristic of the region. To identify the material impact of interaction, especially in pottery.

Develop a regional scale study in the context of Hispaniola in the Greater Antilles which goes beyond the traditional perception of ceramic styles or ceramic traditions as homogeneous and isolated entities incapable of reflecting the interaction or mixing of communities with different cultural traditions.

Reveal the processes of transformation and cultural change occurring within northern Hispaniola through interaction, and the similarities or differences with other areas of Hispaniola and the Greater Antilles.

Show that the historical significance of this region goes beyond the events of early European colonization in the Americas, and that the challenges related to complexity, dynamism and diversity of the pre-Columbian cultural landscape, deserve greater archaeological research efforts.

Contribute to a national database of cultural heritage in the Dominican Republic to ensure mechanisms for protection of archaeological contexts vulnerable to development plans, natural phenomena or illegal looters.

Main results

This dissertation contributes new data obtained by various specialist methods for the island of Hispaniola. These include the identification of plant species used by indigenous communities through the analysis of starch grains from tools; the use of GIS to study the deployment of settlements across the landscape; the acquisition of radiocarbon dates for the archaeology of Hispaniola and the Caribbean. In addition this dissertation develops specialized techniques to study ceramic technology, fabric characteristics and mineralogical composition of the distinctive pottery styles and traditions in the region. Added to this is the identification of clay sources and their suitability for use as primary raw material by the indigenous communities of the region.

The study also shows that the existence of a high density of archaeological sites in north Hispaniola corresponds to a significant nucleus of indigenous inhabitants, which implies the coexistence of communities with different cultural expressions. This situation led to a particular cultural landscape in which the development of different types of interactions are reflected through ceramic styles.

The character of interactions reflected in the ceramic repertoire shows that technological changes was no important modified in the northern Hispaniola ceramics. However, decorative attributes inherent in other styles are executed in the technological style of each group of the region. This indicates that technical execution and vessel forms were maintained for generations, and constituted important aspects in the identities expressed by indigenous communities in this area. Also one can talk of the existence of ceramic traditions with imitation or assimilation of other styles, but without changing specific production or finishing techniques.

The above elements indicate that stylistic changes in northern Hispaniola were related to processes of acculturation and syncretism, manifested through the acquisition or imitation of external cultural attributes which were adapted and recreated according to one's own cultural criteria. This is something which from a material culture perspective has helped to shape the characteristics of the plurality of distinct cultures referred to as the *Taíno* cultural phenomenon in different regions of the Greater Antilles.

The dissertation also shows that some of the processes of interaction which took place among communities with Meillacoid and Chicoid ceramics in northern Hispaniola were linked to emulation to gain access to certain areas with important resources, especially marine resources. This meant that in some settlements occupying strategic locations with access to these resources, stylistic transformations or changes were more pronounced, whereas in others changes were less visible. This fact shows that stylistic changes were not a uniform phenomenon in terms of time or space in northern Hispaniola.

This last issue also points to the importance of cultural plurality and the natural landscape in the region as aspects which affected interactions and intensity of interaction. Both factors fostered change which, from the stylistic point of view, was expressed in the appearance of encoded attributes of a specific style within a style. This ranged from minor changes or assimilations of isolated attributes from another style, as in the case of groups with Meillacoid or Chicoid ceramics, to the fusion of attributes inherent to two different styles, as in the case of groups with Meillacoid and Ostionoid ceramics. This generated the emergence of particular features in the same style in different areas of northern Hispaniola, a distinguishing feature of the regional cultural diversity in the Greater Antilles.

In essence, the importance of the natural and cultural setting in which interactions unfolded is related to a process of emulation (peer interaction) in which a flow of information, symbols, materials, and possibly economic resources between groups that inhabited the region existed, but above all, in which interacting communities experienced changes in their way of expressing identity through ceramics.

From this point of view the dissertation shows how the natural environment affected interaction, and its close relationship to the location of settlements in the regional landscape. There was a tendency for settlements of communities with the same ceramic culture (Chicoid or Meillacoid) to be located near to others of the same cultural affiliation, characterising the settlement preferences of each population within the region. Settling a particular place within the natural landscape could limit or expand access to marine resources within the territory, especially given the existence of nodes which connected two or more environmental zones, as well as linking sites through lines of visibility, and enabling potential economic specialization. In short, this landscape stimulated interaction.

This perspective shows that the interactions in northern Hispaniola were closely related to differences in settlement patterns of their respective populations. Additional factors which influenced the size of the settlements were the altitude of sites and their proximity to the coast. These characteristics were also closely related with the function of the settlements, and issues such as possible economic specialization and social complexity. It was possible to identify sites which were important nodes in the network of regional interaction, and precisely where stylistic coexistence and mixture was more evident. Furthermore, this type of node settlement is not only an important feature of northern Hispaniola, but also in other regions or islands of the Greater Antilles and the Bahamas.

The dissertation reveals the existence of a settlement model common to Meillacoid populations in northern Hispaniola as well as other areas of the Greater Antilles, in Cuba, Jamaica and the Bahamas, which implies the existence and perpetuation of a strategy of landscape exploitation with cultural roots, and not the result of mere fortuitous adaptation to the Greater Antilles. This settlement pattern meant that areas with similar characteristics were inhabited, such as fertile soils and an intermediate position for easy access to marine resources and the faunal resources of higher elevations and mountains.

Finally, it is important to highlight some aspects which are raised by the methodological approach and archaeological data in this dissertation. First, this study of northern Hispaniola breaks with prevailing analyses which focus on individual or sites or isolated settlements. Instead, this dissertation provides a comprehensive regional approach which in turn connects to other parts of the island, especially the north of present-day Haiti, and the western islands of the Greater Antilles. This standpoint integrates information produced by different researchers, obtained using diverse methodological approaches, and analyzed using diverse interpretive frameworks.

Another contribution is that this dissertation shows the importance of the landscape and economic and social needs as important motivations for interaction between indigenous communities in northern Hispaniola. Coexistence, interaction and transculturation are vital phenomena when explaining the particularities and cultural transformations that occurred in the region, and how these were not just a result of migration processes. A central aspect in this regard is that processes of mestizaje, cultural

mixing, and interactions in the north of Hispaniola did not begin with the arrival of European colonizers, as has been put forward in traditional historiography. The historical significance of this region is rather linked to its status as a meeting place for different populations at different times. This made it the setting for multiple transculturations and ethnogenesis before the arrival of Europeans.

The dissertation also raises new questions about the survival and complexity of so-called “Archaic” groups in diverse contexts. This relates to the traditional single origins theory of the Meillacoid cultural phenomenon, as well as its development based on monodirectional migration. In that sense the dissertation opens a new avenue to assess the origins of the Meillacoid cultural phenomenon linked to the development of “Archaic” communities, who were a significant presence in those areas where the Meillacoid predominated, and where Ostionoid cultural components are absent or scarce. This contradicts traditional ideas based on migration to justify the origin of the Meillacoid phenomenon. It also shows that overarching cultural schemes, such as the so-called subseries, are incapable of envisioning the complexity and cultural dynamics common to the Greater Antilles, and moreover that colonization, expansion and migration are insufficient to explain the cultural complexity inherent in this space.

Given the above, this dissertation shows that the processes of convergence and cultural mixing, community interactions and encounters between communities of diverse backgrounds, are more likely explanations of the features described for the Macorige region of Hispaniola in the early chronicles. More than a close relationship between style and ethnicity, or the vision of a space inhabited by an homogenous ethnic group, archaeological details revealed in the study of northern Hispaniola, indicate that the so-called Macorige region was a mosaic of distinct cultures, perhaps something which led to the particular linguistic features and a distinctive material culture which characterized the region.

The dissertation also shows that ceramic styles are not pure, but are used as externalized social referents in competitive situations or other social situations between different groups. Women as artisans could play a mediating role, acting as a link between communities through marriage. On a stylistic level this emerged as modifications within a unified style, modifications that could be used to communicate in a number of ways. In the case of groups of neighbouring communities in northern Hispaniola this manifests itself sometimes in a practical merging, and at other times in milder influences. This suggests differing circumstances, contexts, and alliances. As well as reflecting identity boundaries, styles also reflect different mutual influences between communities.

Finally, this dissertation provides the authorities and institutions responsible for the protection and study of archaeological heritage of the Dominican Republic a tool to carry out future recording, monitoring, and mitigation of impacts on archaeological sites. In particular it provides a comprehensive and detailed way of registration which can be used to locate other settlements in the region. In addition it provides information on settlements hitherto unregistered which helps mitigate the effects of future impacts related to development, for tourism or otherwise, in the area.

Implications of the study for future research

In closing, it is important to raise certain points which contribute to future archaeological studies in the northern region of Hispaniola.

Relating to settlement patterns and the importance of visual and territorial control by groups with different cultural affiliation, this raises the need for further study and comparison of dietary evidence in each settlement. Such studies would help to determine economic distinctions between different communities, and the relationship to location within the landscape. This comparative analysis could be conducted using a combination of several methods, including analysis of stable nitrogen and carbon isotopes in human remains, and studies of starch residues. This would throw new light on the exchanges between different communities in the area, as well as social processes linked to social and political alliances as well as competition generated by resource exploitation in different environments, or economic specialization.

More precise ways to establish the relationship between the geological composition of the clays of the region and the fabric of the ceramics recovered in settlements would yield data on the mobility and exchange of people in relation to the locations of raw materials (clays), the use of different clay sources through time, as well as the exchange of objects or vessels, and people (potters), not only

between culturally distinct communities, but between communities of the same cultural affiliation. It would also provide new data on intercommunity relations regarding the use of space and resources.

Another important element to consider regarding settlement layout is the presence of mounds and their location within settlements. It is essential to determine whether there is a relationship between the shape and location of the mounds, and the layout of the settlement and house structures, and whether this in turn has a link with other aspects of social and cultural differentiation.

Another important factor in future research of the region is the acquisition of concrete data on the pre-Arawak or "Archaic" occupation in the origins of the Meillacoid cultural phenomenon of northern Hispaniola. These data would help break the traditional view on acculturation which has defined the relationship between the so-called "Archaics" and the Arawaks, and otherwise help to refine the perspective on the processes of cultural interaction that took place at different times in the region.

Finally, new archaeological research conducted by Leiden University in northern Hispaniola considers the transformations and cultural changes generated by the European incursion in the region. This will be addressed in the project *Nexus 1492: New World encounter in a Globalising World*. This project will continue research of the issues discussed in this dissertation, which from an archaeological perspective, will investigate changes in regional indigenous dynamics in post-Columbian times. In particular, aspects in which these changes may be visible are transformations in styles and technologies of ceramics, settlement patterns, and the motivations and mechanisms related to interaction due to the introduction of new objects and the disruption of traditional indigenous economic and social mechanisms in the region.

In general the issues raised throughout the entire dissertation underscore the idea that social groups in a region or particular place cannot be constrained to a static set of social and cultural categories, but that these groups should be viewed as actively created and transformed. From this perspective, the history of the northern region of Hispaniola, particularly with respect to its ceramic styles, are the result of a patchwork of practices that are dynamic and continuous, both influenced and influential, and related to ecological, political, economic and ideological aspects which are constantly emerging and transforming before the European invasion, and therefore not only linked to one moment in history.