



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

La biographie d'un paysage. Etude sur les transformations de longue durée du paysage culturel de la région de Fort-Liberté, Haïti

Jean, J.S.

Citation

Jean, J. S. (2019, September 10). *La biographie d'un paysage. Etude sur les transformations de longue durée du paysage culturel de la région de Fort-Liberté, Haïti*. Sidestone Press, Leiden. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/77744>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/77744>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/77744> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Jean, J.S.

Title: La biographie d'un paysage. Etude sur les transformations de longue durée du paysage culturel de la région de Fort-Liberté, Haïti

Issue Date: 2019-09-10

Abstract

This study explores the Fort-Liberté region in Haiti, examining the archaeological traces of different social groups that shaped the cultural landscape of the region over an extensive chronological period. The Fort-Liberté region contains exceptional archaeological heritage in the form of Amerindian settlement sites, the remnants of early Spanish colonial towns, and of subsequent French colonial plantations. The region has been inhabited since approximately 3000 BC, and has experienced profound changes over time, particularly during the colonial invasion of 1492, which led to the collapse of indigenous Amerindian communities. The general objective of this research is to formulate an understanding of the substantial developments within the Fort-Liberté region from Amerindian settlement, through the Spanish colonization, and to the French colonial period. Another pivotal objective is to understand the importance of this heritage in the contemporary context. Other specific aims are added, such as:

- Evaluate Amerindian and colonial archaeological discoveries in northern Haiti.
- Explore landscape changes through cultural traces of different human groups during historical developments within the region.
- Analyze the social meanings of archaeological sites located within the contemporary landscape.

In order to reach the objectives of this project, several questions are explored, such as: what do archaeological traces relating to the dynamics of long-term settlement tell us about the landscape biography of the Fort-Liberté region? What are the cultural characteristics of the Amerindian and colonial landscapes? What are the transformations of Amerindian landscapes following Spanish and French colonial manifestations? What do Amerindian archaeological traces and colonial ruins mean to community members today?

The theoretical and methodological underpinning of this study is embedded within landscape archaeology and uses multidisciplinary and diachronic approaches in combining archaeological, ethnographic and historical data. The primary methods for collecting archaeological data consist of unsystematic archaeological surveys. Ethnographic data were gained from observations and interviews with community members. In order to understand the cultural landscape, which is dynamic and changing, a landscape biography approach is the most relevant. Indeed, it reveals the historical developments

of the region by taking into account settlement dynamics of different cultural groups that shape the landscape over time.

In addition, the study demonstrates the dynamics of pre-colonial settlements as strategies for the appropriation of space. From a few settlements, they evolved into more numerous settlements resulting from cultural fragmentation that occurred in the insular Caribbean around 600 AD. The emergence of complex spatial dynamics is manifested through grouped and isolated ceramic sites located on the coasts and in the hinterland. This more nuanced description of spatial dynamics leads to a redefinition of the traditional vision of the Amerindian village, which considers a village more as a cluster of sites, at the expense of a single site characterized by its extension. The idea of complex social organization does not belong to a specific cultural affiliation; on the contrary, it takes shape in the different strategies implemented by the Amerindians to create a social space. This social space is the result of continuous and intensive spatial settlements that was drastically impacted by the colonial invasion of 1492. Archaeological evidences from the Spanish settlements of Puerto-Real and Bayaha suggest that the colonial transformation of the landscape took another radical and dramatic form, both materially and conceptually. Thus, it led to the collapse of the cultural, political and economic strategies of the island's first inhabitants. Unlike the Spanish colonial landscape, which is strongly marked by small-scale urban settlements and cattle ranching, the French colonial landscape is characterized by the distribution of large-scale colonial habitations, located in alluvial and arid areas of the Fort-Liberté region. This is a form of reorganization and redevelopment of the space that manifests itself in the slavery of Africans and the introduction of new functions and forms of social, economic and political activities.

The long-term transformations of cultural landscapes in the region corresponds to various strategies implemented by cultural groups in the natural environment as a part of the process of substantial landscape development. Each dynamic establishment of a settlement required reorganizations and new strategies for interaction with the space. Archaeological finds reveal that some previously inhabited areas have been remodeled by other subsequent cultural groups. Some archaeological remains have been re-appropriated and reintegrated into the current landscape, thus contributing to perceptions and meanings within the contemporary cultural horizon. The study of the transformation of the landscape over time suggests that activities of cultural groups are considered as events that were connected to each other, not just as superposed layers or isolated events. The archaeological sites dispersed in the natural environment express the idea of a complex palimpsest of the region's history.

This study of the Haitian cultural landscape illustrates the need to consider the multi-layered nature of the landscape in order to avoid the dichotomy between pre-colonial and colonial in this context of long-term landscape transformation.