

From the Guanahatabey to the Archaic of Puerto Rico: The Nonevident Evidence

Reniel Rodríguez Ramos, *Universidad de Puerto Rico-Utuado*

Abstract. Some of the early Spanish chronicles make reference to the presence of cave dwellers inhabiting the westernmost section of Cuba as well as the Guacayarima Peninsula in southwestern Haiti. These people, who supposedly lived marginal to Taino society, were named the Guanahatabey or Ciboney culture. The different descriptions of those groups shared elements that were later adopted uncritically in the construction of the social and cultural aspects of the so-called archaic culture tradition of Puerto Rico. Although half a millennium later the tendency to assign every aceramic deposit to the Ciboney or Guanahatabey culture has been overcome, most of the notions implicit in these descriptions remain current in the generalized vision of these societies. In this work, I analyze the implications that these early accounts have had on the development of our perception of the archaic culture of Puerto Rico and contrast them against the archaeological data generated thus far, which tend to indicate a much more complex scenario than that originally proposed.

On Columbus's second voyage to the New World he sailed along southwestern Cuba, where Diego, his Lucayan translator, established contact with "savages" whose language was unintelligible to him. This has commonly been considered the earliest encounter with what later came to be known as the Guanahatabey or Ciboney culture. Additional early Spanish accounts about the existence of these groups, inhabiting both the western section of Cuba and the Guacayarima Peninsula in southwestern Haiti, provided more detailed and suspiciously consistent depictions of these peoples. Although the descriptions were limited to groups inhabiting Cuba and Haiti, it is often assumed that they represent all of the pre-Arawak groups of the Caribbean.¹ In this sense they have been instrumental in the

construction of the current perception of the so-called archaic culture of Puerto Rico.

In the present work I revisit some of the concepts adopted from those early accounts and from ethnographic models imported from other localities to construct the first chapter of Puerto Rican history. While some critics have suggested that at least some of these pre-Arawak societies were more complex than initially established, the general conception among Caribbeanist researchers is that they were “hunters-fishers” (La Rosa 2003: 143) who “did not make ceramics or practice agriculture” (Callaghan 2003: 324). The few cases that did posit higher degrees of social complexity for these peoples (e.g., Curet 2003; Keegan 1994) presented no hard data to support such an assumption. Thus the present work will provide a historical overview of how the current imagery of pre-Arawak societies came to be constructed to provide a context on which to build a new perspective about the first inhabitants of Puerto Rico based on recently generated archaeological data.

The Early Spanish Accounts

It is commonly accepted that the earliest contact with non-Tainian groups was registered during Columbus’s second voyage. This episode was described by Andrés Bernaldez (1896: 658) who noted that during Columbus’s journey along the southern coast of Cuba, near the area of Batanabó, they “no hallaron villas ni lugares en la costa de la mar de ella, salvo pequeñas poblaciones con la gente, de las cuales no podían haber fabla, por que luego huían como los vian” (did not find villages nor places in the coast, except for small groups of people with whom they could not speak because they ran away).

Diego Velázquez (qtd. in Alegría 1955: 4) provided a more detailed description in a 1514 letter to King Fernando de Aragón regarding the conquest of the island when he noted that “al poniente están que la una se llama Guaniguanico e la otra Guanahatabibes, que son los postreros indios della; y que la vivienda destes guanahatabibes es a manera de salvajes, porque no tienen casas ni pueblo, ni labranzas, ni comen otra cosa sino las carnes que toman por los montes y tortugas y pescados” (on the western side there are some that are called Guaniguanico and the Guanahatabibes; and these guanahatabibes live as savages, because they have no houses or villages, no cultivated lands, nor do they eat anything besides the meat that they get in the mountains and turtles and fish). This information was also recounted by Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (1927: 169), who described the presence in western Cuba of “unos indios que están dentro de Cuba, en una

provincia al cabo della, los cuales son como salvajes, que en ninguna cosa tratan con los de la isla, ni tienen casas, sino están en cuevas continuo, sino es cuando salen a pescar” (some Indians that are in Cuba, on a province on its western side, who are like savages and do not interact with those from the island, nor do they have houses and are always in their caves, except when they go fishing). He identified these people as the Guanahatabeyes.

The existence of similar groups occupying the Guacayarima peninsula of southwestern Haiti was initially reported by Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo (1959: 276):

Después de lo cual, se hizo la guerra á los indios de la Guahava é la Savana é de Amigayahua é de la provincia de Guacayarima, la qual dera de gente muy salvage. Estos vivian en cavernas o espeluncas soterrañas é fechas en las peñas e montes: no sembraban, ni labraban la tierra para cosa alguna, é con solamente las fructas é hiervas é rayces que la natura de su propio é natural oficio producía, se mantenían y eran contentos, sin sentir necesidad por otros manjares ni pensaban en edificar otras cosas, ni aver otras habitaciones mas que aquellas cuevas, donde se acogían. Aquesta genta fué la mas salvahe que hasta agora se ha visto en las indias.

[After which war was made with the Indians of Guahava and Savana and Amigayahua and those of the province of Guacayarima, which were very savage people. They lived in caves or sinkholes on the mountains: they did not cultivate anything or work the land for anything else, and they sustained themselves and were happy with the wild fruits and roots that nature produced, without feeling the need for any other dishes, nor did they think of making other things or building other houses beside those caves where they lived. Those were the most savage people that I have seen thus far in the Indies.]

Las Casas (1927: 169) questioned Oviedo’s description of Haiti’s “savages,” basically calling the latter a liar (“ripio”). Las Casas understood that, if Oviedo had not completely invented the encounter, it should have taken place with Xagüeye people who had escaped their villages because of the siege of the invading Spaniards and taken refuge in the most inaccessible areas of Haiti. If that was the case, this would constitute the earliest reference to a disenfranchised society in the New World, which is the topic of revisionist hunter-gatherer literature (e.g., Headland and Reid 1989).

Notwithstanding Las Casas’s comments, Pedro Mártir de Anglería (1944: 541) in his *Décadas del Nuevo Mundo* also claims the existence of these groups inhabiting the Guacayarima Peninsula on the basis of oral

accounts provided by returning colonists: “En la última región del Occidente, que es Guaccaiaria, dicen que en el territorio de Zauana viven unos hombres que no tienen más que las cavernas de los montes, sin asiento fijo, sin sembrar ni cultivar nada, como se lee de la edad de oro; se dice que no tienen idioma cierto; alguna vez se les ve, pero no han podido dar con ninguno” (In the last region of the west, which is Guaccaiaria, they say that in the area of Zauana live some men that have nothing more than the caves in the mountains, without a permanent place, without growing or cultivating anything, as is read about the golden age; it is said that they have no known language; some say that they have seen them, but have not established contact with any of them).

Strikingly, a marked consistency in the descriptions of these groups emerges from the accounts provided by the different chroniclers (Keegan 1989). In part, the homogeneity of the reports could result from the preconceived ideas about cave-dwelling societies on which they were based, ideas derived from Greco-Roman thought available in the literature of the time (José Oliver, personal communication, 2003). Winter (1992) observed that some of these writers (i.e., Oviedo and Mártir de Anglería) participated in the humanist circle of the Roman Academy and that the descriptions of newfound cultures might thus have subscribed to preconceived literary concepts. This seems to be confirmed by the constant reference to societies living in the *Edad de Oro* (Golden Age), a literary concept describing a time when people lived in abundance “without enforcement of the laws in the peaceful ‘goulden worlde’ of which Owlde writers speak so much” (ibid.: 22).

Not only were the chroniclers’ ideas likely based on preconceived notions, but Europeans’ direct encounter with these groups per se has also come under suspicion. Lovén (1935) and Keegan (1989) argued that none of the conquerors reached the areas where these people were supposedly living. Furthermore, based on the published radiocarbon dates from those areas (Rouse and Allaire 1978), none of which extends up to the early colonial period, Keegan (1989) indicates that the archaeological evidence collected thus far does not necessarily prove the existence of the groups in either Cuba or Haiti at the time of contact. He also suggests the great likelihood of Taino societies existing in western Cuba at the time of contact, as indicated by Las Casas in his visit to Havana. Keegan’s arguments seem to be corroborated by Bernaldez’s (1896: 658) account about the initial encounter with the “savages,” in which he said that after the Spaniards’ lack of success in establishing contact with the indigenous groups, the former decided to disembark in a nearby bay, and that on their inland incursion they found

“infinitas poblaciones de madera y paja, todas con gente sin número” (infinite villages of wood and straw, all with many people). This might indicate a similar situation to that in Haiti, in which the cave dwellers described were probably also groups gathered in secluded areas because of external forces, perhaps even as a result of the havoc created by the European invasion (Wilson 1993). In fact, all the names with which they were identified have Arawak roots, suggesting the possibility that these were indeed disenfranchised Arawak societies. The argument that these groups were ethnically distinct because of their linguistic differences (Alonso 1995: 8) is based on the initial encounter with one person, who, by all accounts, did not want anything to do with strangers and ran away, a behavior that might denote persecution or fear rather than a lack of linguistic understanding.

Notwithstanding all the aforementioned limitations and contradictions, the accounts provided in the early Spanish chronicles came to use four centuries later as the basis for the initial research conducted on aceramic deposits first in Cuba and then in the rest of the Caribbean. These descriptions served as the foundation on which most interpretations of pre-Arawak societies in the West Indies have been constructed in terms of the terminology used to refer to them, their settlement patterns, subsistence economies, social organization, the nature of their interactions with later Arawak immigrants, and their eventual fate. I will revisit each of these elements in the following sections, putting special emphasis on how they have been treated in the archaeology of Puerto Rico.

The Initial Construction of the Archaic: From Cuba to Puerto Rico

One of the first uses of the early ethnohistoric accounts was in the adoption of cultural names to designate archaeological deposits devoid of pottery. The first to assign the term *Ciboney* to aceramic deposits was Cosculluela (1918) after his excavations in the Ciénaga de Zapata in Cuba. A few years later, Harrington (1921) adopted the term to assign the aceramic remains usually identified in the interior of rock shelters and in coastal shell middens. For him the Ciboney “were ‘very simple’ primitive people who had occupied the whole island of Cuba from the same unknown date in the distant past, were often cave-dwellers, were contemporaries of the *Megalocnus*, and probably descendants of Montane’s ‘Homo Cubensis’” (ibid.: 411).

More than two decades later Cosculluela (1946) himself ironically questioned the applicability of the term *Ciboney* and insisted that the correct name should be Guanahatabey, as the groups were originally identified

in Velázquez's account. Even though the term *Ciboney* seemed appropriate, Coscolluela argued, because it contained the prefix *ciba*, which meant "stone" in Arawak (Arrom 2000), the name's use in the accounts of Las Casas made specific reference to enslaved Taino subgroups (Coscolluela 1946: 14).

To this day we witness a markedly inconsistent application of the cultural terms used to make reference to the peoples inhabiting the islands prior to the Arawak migration(s). While some scholars still use *Ciboney* to refer to the cultures that were "relics" of the first inhabitants of the islands (González 1995; Lalueza-Fox et al. 2003; Osgood 1942), others use that term to refer to Taino subgroups in Cuba (e.g., Alegría 1981), to identify the latest manifestations of this culture (e.g., Cayo Redondo manifestation; La Rosa 2003), or as a generic concept to refer to all the indigenous peoples of Cuba (e.g., Coll y Toste 1897). The term *Guanahatabey* has also been used as a general reference to pre-Arawak cultures (Alonso 1995), but other works have limited it to that culture's earliest manifestations (e.g., Guayabo Blanco manifestation; La Rosa 2003). As noted by Alegría (1981), these inconsistent uses of nomenclature have led to great confusion in the archaeological literature on the islands.

While debates regarding the nomenclature and phases of pre-Arawak deposits began in Cuba in the first half of the twentieth century, the study of aceramic deposits in Puerto Rico had stagnated partly as a result of a lack of reference to the presence of cave-dwelling societies on the island in the ethnohistoric accounts. Fewkes's (1907: 41) comment about the presence of these groups in Puerto Rico implied as much: "While the existence of cave dwellers in the neighboring islands, Cuba and Haiti, might lead to conjecture that there were also cave people in Porto Rico, when Columbus discovered the island the majority of the inhabitants were not troglodytic, but lived in the open country and resorted to the numerous caves only for sepulture of the dead or for religious rites."

In the late 1930s, Rouse (1952) conducted a survey in Puerto Rico and worked on several deposits lacking ceramics, which he identified tentatively as those of the Coroso culture. At the time he thought that if this culture indeed existed, it should have occupied the island between approximately AD 849 and 929 based on the rates of accumulation of refuse and on the average depths of the middens (Rouse 1952: 564–65). He remained cautious, however, in assigning such deposits to a pre-Arawak culture because the presence of indigenous ceramics and colonial materials in the middens suggested the possibility that they represented activity areas of later societies (Rouse 1952: 562, 557; Rouse and Alegría 1990: 25). Even so, Rouse (1952: 568) hypothesized that "the preceramic (Coroso) Indians of

Period I—if they existed at all—were probably hunters and fishermen, like the Ciboney Indians of Hispaniola and Cuba. They can be assumed to have entered Porto Rico from Hispaniola, settling only in the parts of the coastal area in which conditions were best suited to their mode of life.”

It was not until the work of Ricardo Alegría at Cueva María de la Cruz in northeastern Puerto Rico in the late 1940s that a formal discovery of pre-Arawak life on the island was made. This led him to structure the first synthesis of what he termed the “Archaic cultural tradition of Puerto Rico” (Alegría 1955, 1965; Alegría, Nicholson, and Willey 1955). Alegría (1965: 246) indicated that this tradition was 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 on conch, shell, flint, and other stones.” He further added that “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 de Guanahatabeyes (Guanahacabibes) on the extreme western coast of Cuba and the Peninsula of Guacayarima in western Hispaniola.” Thus a direct historical connection was asserted to the cave-dwelling societies described in the early ethnohistoric accounts and to the aceramic archaeological record of Puerto Rico.

Furthermore, the initial characterization of the earliest societies of Puerto Rico was nurtured by evolutionary models in vogue at that time, specifically the one developed by Phillips and Willey (1953), in which the constituents of the so-called traditional archaic culture were defined (Alegría, Nicholson, and Willey 1955: 113; Dávila 1985: 6). Those models, based on cultures that occupied continental settings, provided most of the elements that remain current to this day in the construction of most of the interpretations generated about these societies.

Settlement Patterns

One element of pre-Arawak life most often described in the ethnohistoric accounts was the societies’ settlement patterns. Regarding the indigenous people of the Guacayarima Peninsula, Oviedo (1959: 276) indicated that “estos vivían en cavernas o espeluncas soterrañas” (they lived in caves of sinkholes) and that they “ni pensaban en edificar otras casas, ni aver otras habitaciones mas que aquellas cuevas, donde se acogían” (thought of building neither other things nor other houses beside those caves where they lived). A similar comment was made by Mártir de Anglería (1944: 541) who noted that these groups “no tienen mas que las cavernas en los montes” (have nothing more than the caves in the mountains) and that, therefore,

they did not have an “asiento fijo” (permanent place). Las Casas (1927: 169) presented this same perspective; in his description of the Guanahatabeyes of western Cuba he indicated that they “no tienen casas, sino que están en cuevas continuo, sino cuando salen a pescar” (have no houses and are continuously in their caves, only coming out when they go fishing). Velázquez (qtd. in Alegría 1955: 4) also claimed that these people “no tienen casas ni pueblo” (have no houses nor villages).

These descriptions do not veer much from the view held of settlement patterns for pre-Arawak societies in Puerto Rico. Scholars commonly argue that they established their residences primarily in natural shelters and that these were not permanent refuges but transitory spaces as “they moved from place to place to perform different activities” (Rouse 1992: 66). Open-air middens are commonly regarded as areas indicative of the subsistence activities of groups whose residential base was located elsewhere (e.g., Dávila 2003; Espenshade et al. 1986; Figueroa 1991; Tronolone, Cinquino, and Vandrei 1984; Veloz et al. 1975).

Scholars claimed that these groups resided primarily in natural shelters because they believed, based on the early ethnohistorical accounts, that they lacked the technological ability to construct formal living units. When the existence of open-air abodes was suggested, it was in the mere form of expedient windbreakers (e.g., Rouse 1956; Sanoja and Vargas 1999). Yet an analysis of the extant archaeological evidence establishing the residential patterns of these societies makes evident that such propositions are unfounded: excavations in open-air sites aimed at exposing features outside midden areas that might provide some information about permanent residences simply have not taken place. This fact has also restricted our ability to establish the internal configuration of these sites, so that we cannot fully determine if they resulted from domestic activities or are indicative of transitional spaces or specialized activities. The need for open excavations is warranted following the discovery of several postmolds in the Maruca site of southern Puerto Rico (Rodríguez López 2004), which indicates that these societies indeed had the technological ability to construct formal residential units.

Also, the residential contexts have commonly been considered short-lived based on the notion that people needed to move their residences constantly to exploit shifting food sources. This type of pattern is derived from models of land-based hunters and gatherers who inhabited continental settings, in which the demands imposed by the movement of their protein sources or by seasonal changes required them to relocate constantly. However, Pantel (1996) has noted that the insular landscape of the Antilles lacks marked seasonality and macrofauna and also contains ecotonal areas in

which several habitats intersect, thus providing the opportunity to exploit a variety of food sources from a single locality. The exploitation of resources from mangrove strands, lacustrine environments, and the sea also provided abundant and predictable sources of protein in permanent locations. These natural features of the islands provided an environmental matrix that could have sustained higher degrees of residential stability, even without the benefits of agriculture (Hayden 1994).

Some of the excavation sites exhibit multiple middens, which could indicate extended occupation rather than repeated visits for exploiting specific resources, as has been argued thus far (Ayes Suarez 1993; Espenshade et al. 1986). It is interesting to note that the only trait that seems to differentiate some of these sites from others commonly identified as villages or homesteads is the absence of ceramics. However, just as the absence of ceramics does not mean that a site dates to pre-Arawak times (Lundberg 1985), a mere lack of pottery should not necessarily indicate impermanent residential areas. Higher degrees of territoriality and/or sedentism might also be indicated by the presence of multiple burials in some of these sites. For instance, in the sampled area of the Maruca site, researchers have uncovered eleven burials of both adults and children, some of them communal, others individually interred (Rodríguez López 2004). These burials suggest a sense of territoriality among at least some pre-Arawak groups.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the choice of settlement locations observed in pre-Arawak sites on the island. Previously it was thought that the earliest inhabitants of Puerto Rico established residence in coastal rock shelters and, for a short time, in coastal locations that lacked attractive agricultural qualities (Rouse 1956). Yet the available evidence seems to suggest that at least some of the earliest occupations of the island took place in active alluvial valleys. This has been the case for sites at Maruca (Rodríguez López 2004), Angostura (Ayes Suarez 1993), Coquí (Alvarado 1992), and Paso del Indio (García and Maurás 1993; Walker 2005). Unfortunately, it is difficult to find such sites due to the sedimentation regime dominant in such contexts, which tends to result in deeply buried deposits. This became apparent at Paso del Indio, where three distinct pre-Arawak occupations that occurred from 2.5 m to 4 m below the surface have been identified (Walker 2005). We might thus have a very partial view of these early sites due to a lack of deep excavations on the island.

The effects of eustatic sea level changes on the Puerto Rican shoreline may also have contributed to bias concerning the number and distribution of sites. Vega (1990) has noted that the retreating nature of the island's northern shoreline might have resulted in the burial of some coastal sites under almost six meters of water. He argues, based on a model of "esti-

mated shoreline migration,” that this should have affected not only pre-Arawak sites but Ceramic Age ones as well, something he observed during his excavations of a submerged Ostionoid site on the northern coast of the island (Vega 1981). In the south of Puerto Rico, however, the opposite seems to hold true. In that portion of the island, a prograding coast has resulted in the location of sites in areas that are now more inland than when they were occupied. This could be the case for sites in the coastal plain such as Jobos and Maruca, which are now located up to 1.5 km inland. Thus we need to consider the dynamic nature of some of the environments inhabited by the earliest people of Puerto Rico when making statements about their choice for settlement locations or giving population estimates.

Subsistence and Material Culture

Another notion that should be revisited is that these societies lacked techniques for plant management or cultivation, as most early ethnohistorical accounts claimed. For instance, Oviedo (1959: 276) mentioned that the cave dwellers of the Guacayarima Peninsula “no sembraban, ni labraban la tierra para cosa alguna, é con solamente las fructas é hiervas é rayces que la natura de su propio é natural oficio producía, se mantenían y eran contentos” (they did not cultivate anything or work the land for anything else, and they sustained themselves and were happy with the wild fruits and roots that nature produced).

Such descriptions have led to the notion that “subsistence was by way of food gathering rather than agriculture” (Rouse and Alegría 1990: 27). However, recent evidence from Puerto Rico shows the possibility that some level of plant management was carried out prior to the arrival of Saladoid societies (Newsom 1993; Newsom and Pearsall 2003; Pagán 2002). Pollen profiles taken from northern Puerto Rico and Vieques indicate the presence of human-induced forest fires, possibly related to swidden agriculture, as early as 5300 BP (Burney and Burney 1994; Sarah, Ortiz, and Newsom 2003; Siegel et al. 2005). Also, macrobotanical evidence of plants imported from extra-Antillean sources, such as yellow sapote and sapodilla, has been documented for pre-Arawak Puerto Rico. According to Newsom (1993: 322), these plants are indigenous to the Caribbean coast of Central America. Pagán et al. (2005) have recently recovered starch grains of cultigens from plants such as manioc, maize, and sweet potatoes (all of which were previously thought to have been introduced to the Caribbean by the Arawak migrants) from edge-ground cobbles and irregular manos uncovered from pre-Arawak contexts in Puerto Rico dating as early as 3200 BP. This replicates findings in other related circum-Caribbean areas, where similar cultigens were manipulated with a comparable toolkit as early as 7000 BP

in Panama (Piperno and Holst 1998) and 6680 BP in Colombia (Piperno and Pearsall 1998). Thus, when viewed in a circum-Caribbean context, the possibility for horticultural practices in pre-Arawak societies should not be surprising (Pagán et al. 2005; Rodríguez Ramos 2005b; Wilson, Iceland, and Hester 1998).

The lack of agricultural practices by pre-Arawak societies has also been correlated with their supposed lack of pottery production. However, ceramic evidence has been recovered from the Dominican Republic (Veloz, Ortega, and Pina 1974) and Cuba (Ulloa and Valcárcel 2002) from deposits dating as far back as 4110 BP, proving that pre-Arawak peoples made and used pottery long before Ceramic Age peoples arrived on the islands. Regrettably, in Puerto Rico the finding of ceramic artifacts in sites that supposedly present preceramic assemblages has usually been considered intrusive, even in cases without evidence of ceramic-making peoples in the uppermost strata, and where site formation processes do not indicate evidence of natural or cultural transformations that might have promoted the translocation of pottery into those deposits (Rodríguez Ramos 2005a). For instance, in the Verdiales 1 and Yanuel 9 sites in Vieques, ceramics were found in contexts that go as far back as 3500 BP but were considered intrusive without any explanation (Tronolone, Cinquino, and Vandrei 1984). If such finds can be demonstrated in additional Puerto Rican pre-Arawak contexts, we would have to acknowledge that ceramic production predated the arrival of Saladoid and Huecoid populations. This technocomplex would thus have resulted either by independent invention and/or by contact with other circum-Caribbean societies, for which ceramics have been uncovered in contexts as early as 5940 BP in Colombia (Oyuela 1995).

The evidence seems to suggest that at least some pre-Arawak groups operated in systems of delayed returns (Woodburn 1988), rather than on immediate return economies as has been argued thus far. This has implications for the way we visualize their social organization, the topic of the next section.

Social Organization

The type of social organization envisioned for these societies is also based on the accounts of the chroniclers. Few ethnohistoric accounts consider this aspect, but Oviedo (1959: 276) indicated that “todo quanto tenían, eso era de cualquier genero que fuese, era común y de todos” (everything they had, whatever it may have been, belonged to everyone). This description fits perfectly with the structural systems of acephalous bands, in which social transactions were based on reciprocity and in the symmetrical access and distribution of goods and power.

The assumption that all pre-Arawak peoples were organized in band societies has led to the implicit adoption of other social characteristics such as relative population sizes. For instance, Espenshade et al. (1986: 101) state that “Lithic/Archaic people (as Rouse suggests) were living in a fishing/gathering mode of high mobility. Population density was probably very low in this period throughout the island.” However, the parameters for making such estimations are not clear, especially when one considers that some pre-Arawak sites have dimensions indicating village-sized populations, based on the site-size criterion established by Tronolone, Cinquino, and Vandrei (1984). In fact, Espenshade et al. (1986) indicate that one of the sites they surveyed had a spread of 116 acres, with four “archaic” middens, which is a much larger size than some of the bigger Ceramic Age village sites documented on the island. Also, the Angostura site is composed of four middens that expand across more than sixty-two square kilometers (Ayes Suarez 1993), which is also much larger than some other residential Arawak sites. Rather than drawing on hard data, the suggestion that these groups had small population densities has been based on the notion that the “size of the Ciboney population was limited by its primitive mode of subsistence” (Rouse 1956: 167), which also required high degrees of mobility.

Other models have been advanced to address the variability in the lifeways of pre-Arawak populations. One of these is the so-called *modos de vida* (ways of life) framework developed by Marcio Veloz (Veloz and Pantel 1988). Even though this model offers the most careful attempt to define structural variations in early Caribbean societies, it is social typology based primarily on distinct adaptive strategies within a single hunting-and-gathering mode of life, as expressed in the differences in the protein sources exploited, the variability in the artifact repertoires, and the location of sites. Nevertheless, the structural configuration of those societies and their levels of complexity are deemed to be similar in this model, all being considered groups of “stable bands” with systems of “reciprocal solidarity” that shared the “collective product” (Sanoja and Vargas 1999: 148).

So far no real attempts have been made to address systematically these societies’ level of social complexity. This is understandable as it is impossible to make precise inferences about the issue from the evidence collected thus far. Yet some preliminary ideas might be put forward and revised with future evidence.

One aspect that might denote the sociopolitical articulation of some of these groups at the regional level is suggested by the presence of intra- and interisland exchange networks. For instance, the Maruca site yielded raw materials from Antigua and probably from the Dominican Republic (Febles 2004: 1.4; Rodríguez Ramos 2002), while at Paso del Indio

the poll end of a radiolarian limestone celt was recovered, a raw material that occurs on Saint Martin (Rodríguez Ramos 2003). In Angostura, Ayes Suarez (1993) noted a marked shift from the procurement of local resources to that of extraneous raw materials for flaked tool production in the latest occupations of the site, which might indicate the consolidation of trade partnerships and/or higher degrees of political integration at a regional level. As I have argued previously (Rodríguez Ramos 2002, 2005a), these exchange networks may have reached continental circum-Caribbean contexts through transoceanic voyages, a point that seems feasible according to Callaghan's (2003) modeling of navigational routes in the Caribbean.

Another circumstance that might have promoted the development of higher levels of complexity is the relatively rich environment of Puerto Rico and of the rest of the Greater Antilles. If, as Hayden (1994) and Wiessner (2002) argued, higher levels of complexity tend to be reached in areas of resource abundance and predictability, then the presence of food-rich areas such as mangrove strands, lacustrine environments, reefs, large rivers, and the ocean might have provided a suitable context for the emergence of social asymmetry in pre-Arawak times. In combination with the previously discussed horticultural capacities, this shows that food intake did not necessarily constitute a limiting factor for these peoples.

Also, if we look at these societies' technological organization, it is evident that at least some pre-Arawak groups manufactured artifact repertoires whose protocols of production were as demanding technically as those observed in later Ceramic Age societies. The production of tanded implements such as fishnets may serve as an example: they are evidenced indirectly by the presence of net weights, which markedly increased the amount of protein captured per catchment. These net weights also serve as indirect evidence for the presence of some sort of basketry production, although the complexity of that technology is unknown at present. The production of ground stone and shell tools, which has been documented in Puerto Rico since the earliest occupations (Ayes Suarez 1993; Febles and González 1999; Rodríguez Ramos 2005a, 2005b), followed similar operational sequences as those observed in later contexts, from the procurement of the raw materials to the reduction strategies utilized in their production. Some of the products created by grinding include ones that could be considered prestige items such as the conical manos, stone bowls, butterfly adzes, and stylized beads, for example. In Cuba and Haiti, other prestige items such as stone daggers and engraved batons have also been documented (Rouse 1992), which seems to indicate that some degree of vertical social differentiation was in place, at least in some pre-Arawak groups.

The presence of ground materials most likely produced for heavy-duty

woodworking tasks could be related to their manufacture of canoes. Currently, the notion is that archaic people had simpler canoe-making abilities than their Arawak counterparts and that they basically constructed rafts for ocean transport (Rouse 1952). Yet as Vega (1990: 32) has noted, there is no reason to assume such a thing as the tool kits associated with the construction of wooden vessels found in pre-Arawak sites are as complex as those produced by the Arawak inhabitants of the island. Furthermore, Callaghan (2003: 326) has indicated that rafts could not have made the crossings necessary to reach the islands from South or Central America. Irrespective of the specific type of canoe that those people used, their construction required elaborate technologies that promoted a complex number of relationships among the individuals participating in their construction, which in many cases also have strong ritual meanings attached to them (Robiou 1993: 90; Vega 1995: 118).

Even though these are preliminary observations, they might show that higher levels of complexity operated for at least some groups in pre-Arawak times. Curet (2003) has argued that we should start considering updated models for addressing the complexity of hunters and gatherers in Puerto Rico and the rest of the Caribbean. Among other possibilities, he mentions the “complex hunters and gatherers” concept as defined by Arnold (1996). Yet when one considers that the organizational requirements established by Arnold are indistinguishable from those characterizing chiefdom-level societies, it becomes evident that such a model, although plausible, is well beyond the reach of the current data. In line with Woodburn (1982) I would argue that we could be facing a situation for which no ethnographic parallel exists and that we should thus start building models commensurate with our particular situation.

Interaction Dynamics

The short early accounts have also influenced our understanding of the way pre-Arawak societies interacted with the later South American immigrants. Only few mentions of these interactions occur in the chronicles, but they are significant. Mártir de Anglería (1944: 541) stated that the Guanahatabeyes “jamás se han amasado ni tenido nunca trato con otros hombres” (have never submitted themselves to anyone nor have they had contact with anyone else), and Las Casas (1927: 169) offered the same perspective when he established that these were “unos indios que están dentro de Cuba, en una provincia al cabo della, los cuales son como salvajes, que en ninguna cosa tratan con los de la isla” (some Indians that are in Cuba, on a province on its western side, who are like savages and do not interact with those from the island).

This idea of marginality established in the Spanish accounts ties in with those addressing the contact situation between pre-Arawak societies and the Saladoid invaders. For instance, Rouse and Allaire (1978: 473) indicated that those Ciboney not eliminated by the Saladoid immigrants from South America were pushed to the most inhospitable and infertile parts of Cuba and Haiti, “where Columbus eventually encountered them.” In fact, as Mártir de Anglería (1944: 541) noted, the non-Tainian people of Haiti lived in Guacayarima, which in Arawak meant the “anus of the world.”

These conceptions largely resulted from the view that pre-Arawak groups in the Caribbean remained fossilized through time until their eventual acculturation, elimination, enslavement, or displacement by the pottery-making immigrants from South America. This, in combination with the notion that these people were organized in small band societies, has resulted in relations between the Saladoid societies and the pre-Arawak groups being described as unidirectional; due to their inferior level of development, the latter group in these analyses always fare worst. Scholars also believe that these interactions were of such magnitude and speed that they left pre-Arawak societies little room to contribute to the sociocultural scenario that developed later in Puerto Rico. This idea is best exemplified by Rouse and Alegria’s (1990: 80) statement that “since the Corosans were a relatively small population, they may have been absorbed by the Hacienda Grandes who replaced them in Puerto Rico. Alternately, they may have been pushed into Hispaniola and assimilated into its El Caimito population. In either event, they would have contributed little to the subsequent peoples and cultures of the Greater Antilles.”

Descriptions of the nature of this contact situation have further been influenced by a view of the Caribbean as a bidimensional space, which stems from the lineal migration model dominant in West Indian archaeology. In this view the Saladoid invaders moved without impediments northward through the islands, while the so-called archaic groups, described as “sitting ducks” (Rouse 1992: 70), had no other option but to either surrender or move west. Yet if one takes into consideration that pre-Arawak groups were the first to settle the interior of Puerto Rico, especially in northern Puerto Rico (Ayes Suarez 1993; Dávila 1981; García and Maurás 1993; Martínez 1994; Walker 2005), there was no reason for them to abandon the island when the earliest Saladoid peoples occupied only the coastal plains. Unfortunately, the scarcity of radiocarbon dates for interior pre-Arawak sites does not yet offer a clear solution to this issue. But if one takes into consideration that the latest date for a pre-Arawak context in Puerto Rico comes from the Paso del Indio site, located in an inland river valley, one might argue for the possibility of an inland incursion of at least some pre-

Arawak groups, as Dávila (1981) and Martínez (1994) originally suggested. In such a case, it would be interesting to document inland pre-Arawak sites to determine their date ranges and to see whether there is evidence for a late incursion into the interior.

If we accept that some pre-Arawak groups had already developed the ability to produce ceramics, horticultural techniques, complex methods of woodworking and basketry production, and extensive exchange networks, among other things, then, following Woodburn (1988), we could hypothesize that the political pressures imposed by the arrival of Saladoid and Huecoid populations, instead of leading to pre-Arawak disappearance, promoted intensified productivity, thus transforming into these groups societies of higher levels of complexity. That some pre-Arawak societies may have developed even further after their contact with Saladoid and Huecoid populations could explain why some of the styles observed in the Ostionoid series show the survival of many elements traditionally considered archaic, as has been postulated by Chanlatte and Narganes (1990). This persistence of pre-Arawak elements in post-Saladoid contexts was observed first by Rainey (1933: 32), who noted that “a comparison of both ‘Ciboney’ and ‘Tainian’ artifacts with Shell Culture artifacts from Puerto Rico indicates a common pattern of traits with many duplicating specific and detailed types.” I have been able to corroborate Rainey’s observation based on diachronic lithic studies, which have documented the persistence of stone manufacturing traditions in the post-Saladoid contexts of the islands (Rodríguez Ramos 2003, 2005a). As Wilson (1999) has suggested, this raises the need to evaluate the effects that a multiethnic scenario had in the Ceramic Age political landscape, as it might prove to be an important agent in the eventual development of chiefdom-level societies in Puerto Rico.

Concluding Remarks

As I have established throughout this work, the group of accounts provided by the early Spanish chroniclers, which indicated the existence of “savages” inhabiting western Cuba and southwestern Haiti, have had repercussions for the construction of our perception about the early pre-Columbian period of Puerto Rico. These images of cave dwellers, nurtured also by unilineal evolutionary models imported from continental contexts, have limited the possibility of exploring the development of earliest societies that ventured into the Antilles toward ones of more social maturity. I hope to have shown that available evidence does not necessarily support the commonly held view of Puerto Rico’s pre-Arawak landscape, suggest-

ing instead the possibility that at least some of these societies operated at higher levels of complexity than traditionally argued.

Moreover, as a result of the discourse of marginality imposed on these early societies, we have not been able to assess their relative influence on the articulation of the post-Saladoid cultural scenario of Puerto Rico. So far, it has invariably been stated that the path to social complexity on the island has resulted from the Saladoid and/or Huecoid migrants, who brought with them ceramics and agriculture. In this sense, either the Saladoid developed in isolation (Rouse 1992) or led to the development of archaic populations (Chanlatte and Narganes 1990). However, the evidence generated thus far raises the possibility that these and other technological advances were registered on the islands prior to the Arawak migration and that at least some of the societies facing the Saladoid immigrants were not cave dwellers but people who were manipulating their environment and who were knowledgeable of the particular contingencies of living in an insular setting. The pre-Arawak landscape of Puerto Rico and of the rest of the Antilles was not necessarily homogeneous socially or ethnically. More information needs to be generated to come to grips with that diversity and to be able to address the social and cultural dynamics possibly extant in those times (Lundberg 1991; Rodríguez Ramos 2005a).

Furthermore, archaeological studies in the Caribbean should not continue to be divorced from the evidence generated elsewhere in the circum-Caribbean region. As noted by Watters (1982), the ocean for precolonial societies in the West Indies constituted not a barrier but a bridge. The fact that the peoples who inhabited the Antilles were navigators from the earliest periods onward should stress the need to look further into the levels of interaction that these societies may have had with the inhabitants of other islands or with their continental neighbors. In this sense, the circum-Caribbean sphere should no longer be viewed only as a source of migrations but also as the context of interactions.

All the arguments presented make evident that until we begin to conduct studies whose theoretical and methodological base is emancipated from the normative perception of Puerto Rican pre-Columbian history, we will not be able to decode the patterns and divergences in the archaeological record that should definitely exist, but that we are not recognizing.

Notes

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- 1 I will use the term *pre-Arawak* to make reference to the people that inhabited Puerto Rico prior to the entrance of Saladoid (Arawak) immigrants. This term in no way pretends to homogenize the cultural landscape of Puerto Rico before the Saladoid migration; at this point we have no clear idea about the cultural variability that existed on the island during those times. Rather, I use the term to avoid the structural and cultural features that *archaic* has traditionally imposed on our understanding of the first people to occupy the island. See Goodwin 1978 for a detailed discussion of this issue.

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