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DOMESTIC STUDIES IN THE NEW WORLD

Viewpoints of Caribbean Household Archaeology in scholars' work



Linen Market in the Caribbean/ Credit: Wikipedia

Household Archeology issues about the identification and study of homes' structures and its occupancy during the development of colonial society are of great interest and can create an extensive debate among the investigative perspectives of scholars' work.

The socio-development of colonies through interdisciplinary literature has adopted the simple monolithic definition of "home" with different types of domestic arrangements that simply do not have a more precise or useful term definition for history or archaeology.

Household Archaeology studies the household as a social unit, including its dwelling and other relevant architecture, material culture, traits, and wider sociopolitical systems connected with a particular civilization. Sites with complex archaeological findings have evident traces of material culture, including processes of culture interaction that can determine social relations, their intimacy and emotions.



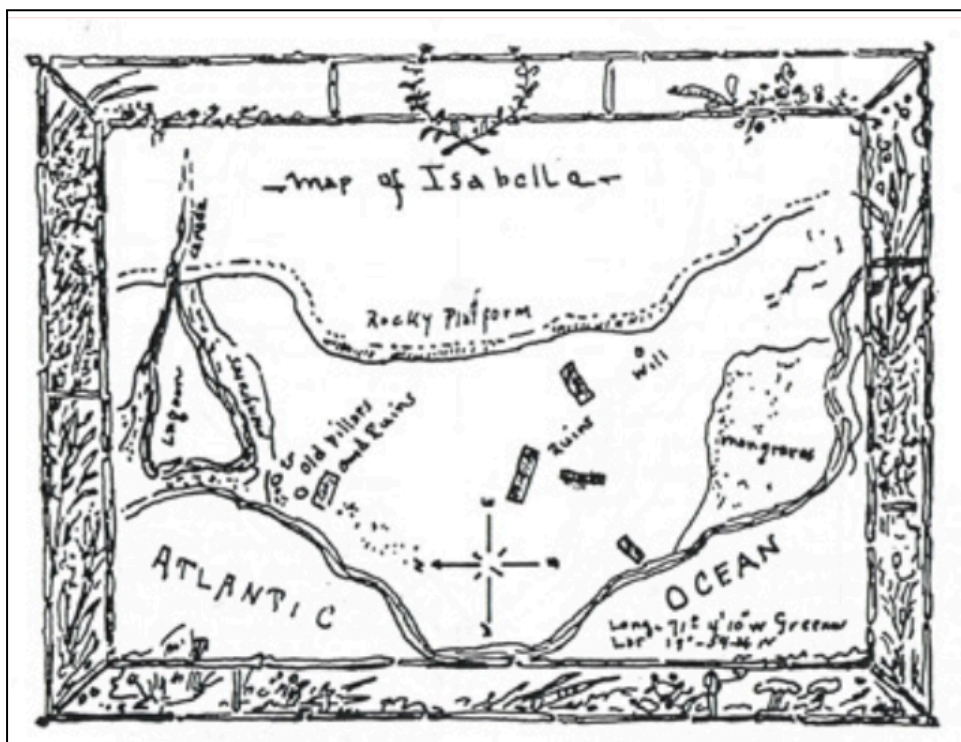
Plantation in the Bahamas/ Credit: Middle Cay

Historical archaeologists in the United States have not been able to determine exactly the date of the development of perspectives on Africans as slaves and/or as free individuals. The conceptual framework of "*nested families*" as a contrast to present the complex nature of social relations on plantations in the **Bahamas** could lead to a composition of the real and genetic boundaries between households.

Plantations were often agricultural and industrial estates whose women's "housework" was a subversive form of relationships within the family, between the home and the outside world. Working class notions of domesticity differ from the bourgeois ideal of separate spheres, making it necessary to examine the material culture of working class life.

The potential of Household Archaeology studies can offer a range of ideas and insights that researchers bring to the understanding of family life and homes through houses, the artefacts used in the conduct of everyday life and through the use and perception of space and landscapes. Archaeological studies explore the complexity and ambiguity in racial, class, ethnicity, and gender variables.

La Isabela site was different from other towns of the 15th century according to the data that comes from the archaeological record. Established in 1493, La Isabela in the Puerto Plata Province, Dominican Republic, is commonly known as the place where colonization efforts helped contribute to the first expansion of the Kingdom of Spain in the "New World".



Plan of La Isabela by Frederick Ober/ Credit: Adolfo José López Belando

However, this was a community with many household units and its community chores were evident everywhere, such as everyday activities such as cooking, eating, household organization, health and sanitation, religious life, personal appearance, social hierarchy, leisure activities, and personal economy. The absence of women transformed domestic life, and the men who formed the city's households had to provide food, clothing, lighting, sanitation, and other necessities.

The diet and cuisine in La Isabela were elements related to food consumption, the types and proportions with food and the archaeological artifacts do not differ from those found in the kitchens, dining rooms and rooms of the late 15th century in Seville.



A reconstruction of a shelter used for cooking, with utensils inside. Credit: 50 MEGS

At the moment, there is no archaeological evidence as to whether the Spanish in La Isabela adopted indigenous cooking pots, but there are indications that they learned to make **casabe** using Taíno technology. Some inhabitants of other colonial Spanish sites in the Americas produced pottery from India and it was used for cooking, with the production and availability of Spanish cooking items and eating dishes being considered a high priority in La Isabela. The historical data from La Isabela have descriptions of abundant fruits and food of the Taínos (bread and potatoes) while there was no food and the settlers were dying of hunger. The possibility in the archaeological record that the inhabitants of La Isabela had nothing to eat is not compatible with the technology of food preparation.

The furniture in the settlers' houses and huts with dirt floors were undoubtedly primitive archaeological evidence of La Isabela. Most of these were equipped with mats, logs, chests and locally made tables or benches. Copper tacks are among the few remains and were used to fasten fabric or leather to chairs or logs.



La Isabela ruins/ Credit: 60 MEGS

The social importance of men's clothing represented a varied spectrum of social classes in Spain (peasants and farmers) and illustrated some typical forms of Spanish clothing of the time. Furthermore, no thimbles were recovered at the site as early Spanish sewing accessories. Together with the small number of pins found, the absence of thimbles suggests that tailoring and sewing were not important activities in the life of the predominant male community in La Isabela. Jewelry, like clothing, was worn by men and women of almost all social classes. A series of popular Jewish items were recovered in La Isabela and this created great social weight at the end of the 16th century. The importance of clothing was highlighted in **Las Casas'** derogatory comments about men who were considered common exploiters of Indians. However, racial cleansing was considered a basic criterion for social acceptance in the New World.



Distinguished Woman with her Slave/ Credit: Vicente Alban; Quito, Ecuador, 1783

The Spanish had developed a high level of tolerance with Spanish legal systems and had extended civil rights to enslaved citizens. Although many categories of Spanish cultural material were found to be present with the Spanish assemblage material, these were not recovered archaeologically. The distribution of these specialized goods were possibly restricted and many of these were very prone to breakage.

However, examples of material culture in Puerto Real, Haiti, demonstrate that the majority of the colonizers who emigrated to the New World during the first decades of the 16th century were from **Andalusia** and, especially, from **Seville**. Spanish material culture of the 16th century was the product of seven centuries of Arab occupation and influence, in which it resulted largely from a material tradition dependent on ceramic objects.

Additionally, utilitarian goods included cooking pots, carrying and storing urinals, and multi-purpose cups. The way these utilitarian ceramics were embedded in Spanish tradition back then is evidence of how the same basic forms prevail in Spain today, and after five centuries later. **Majolicas** were presumably more expensive than utilitarian pottery, but were nevertheless in great demand in the colonies.



Santo Domingo Blue on White is part of the 15th-16th century Sevillian “Morisco” majolica tradition, representing a largely utilitarian aspect. Credit: Florida Museum

The local indigenous ceramic tradition provided forms as substitutes for **Spanish Earthenware**, and there were no pre-existing counterparts for glazing ceramics. The categories of material culture in glass (or **glassware**) had to be imported at great cost due to their fragility, the types of glass most recovered in residential areas being transparent, green and glass-making glass materials. *lattice*.



Venetian glassware from Puerto Real's elite households/ Credit:Florida Museum

The domestic archeology investigation in Puerto Real provided strong investigative evidence regarding the Spanish colonial experience with indigenous culture and the development of Creole culture. It is likely that Creole culture was composed in the first years of the colonization process and was not considerably permuted in the following decades. The homes were made with traditional Spanish materials and their adaptation process appears to be the result of the 'demographic makeup' of Puerto Real which, as in other colonies of the New World, was composed primarily of men. Domestic archaeological research has been able to demonstrate that the pattern of development of Creole culture was not gradual, but that the Creole phenomenon appeared in the first years of the colony, remaining that way for years to come.