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# San Felipe del Morro Castle

Social, Political and Technological Influence according to  
historical Archaeology



*Fort San Felipe del Morro is a powerful Renaissance defensive structure that faced stories of epic imperialist battles. As a massive monument, El Morro stands as a reminder of the Empire once ruled by Spain and was later used by the United States military. Linguistic boundaries, insularity, and the residue of colonial political divisions, including the fact that many relevant documentary materials are found in European archives, have served to limit the ability of scholars to carry out studies.*

By Nichole Bodin on November 27, 2024

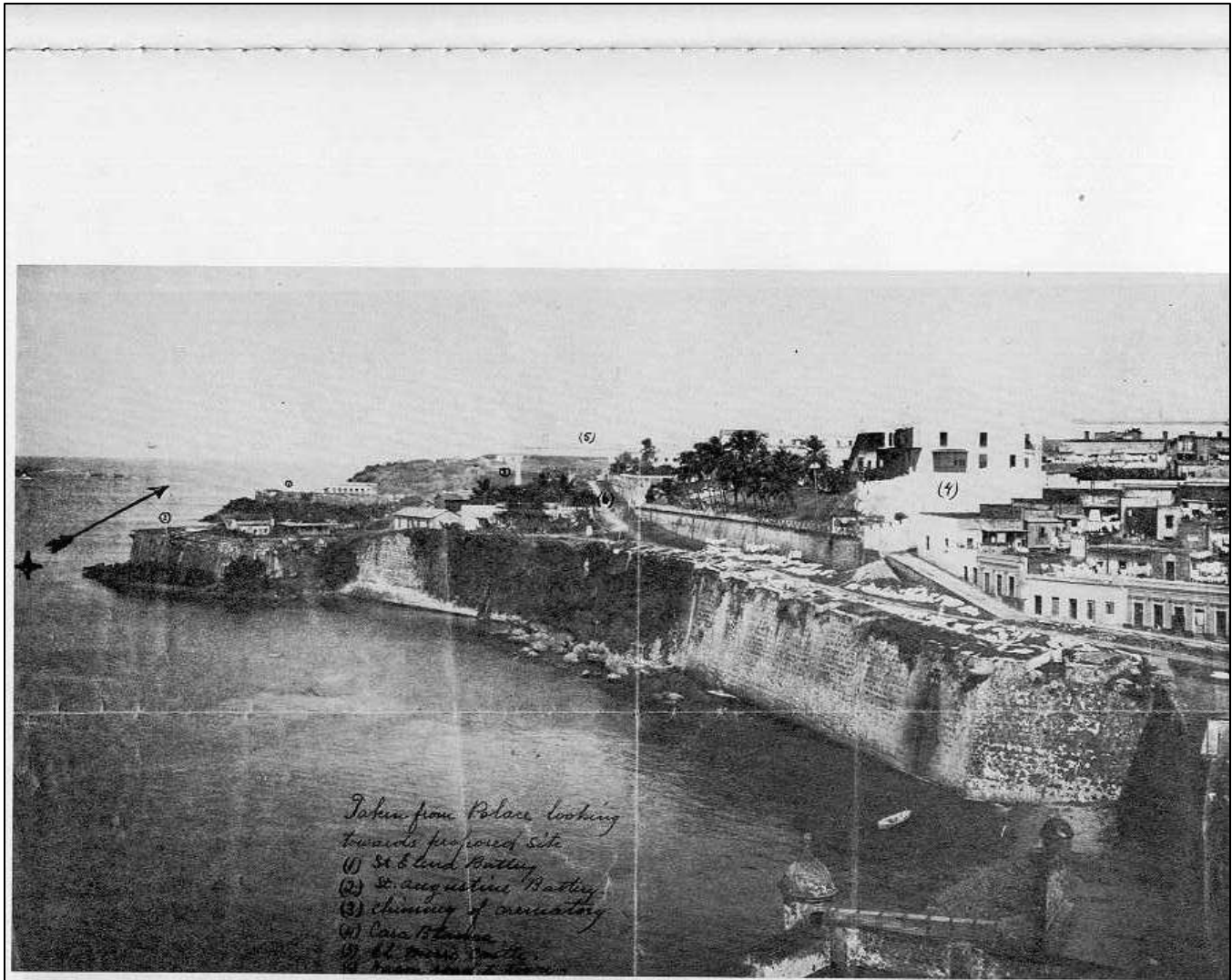
Historical Archaeology, as a focus of study of the modern world, is basically interested in excavated materials, written texts, and important topics that include the creation of gender roles, the use of racist theories, the interaction of indigenous people with colonizers, and the emergence of material aspects in the growth of capitalism. The methodological and analytical materials present in the archaeological task of the Caribbean are based on the interpretation of the chronology and the geographical areas affected.

Archaeologists have carried out research at sites related to the discovery and conquest, which presents the topicality of the topic and the novelty of some of these case studies. The consolidation of the capitalist system with the new global social order created an acceptance of the ways of approaching modern society and colonialism, as well as the expansion of capitalism.

## The Academia

The dominant theoretical model of the Anglo-Saxon academic world explains the formation of modern society and the acceptance of different geographical contexts. Many abandoned fortresses have been redefined as public parks and consecrated as historical monuments. Fortresses, their role in world trade and regional economy, define these various large-scale colonial enterprises. Within the different studies in the archaeological branch, historical evidence indicates that the arrival of Europeans in 1493 to Puerto Rico marks a new period in the archaeological record with the establishment of the Spanish conquistadors, who intended to maintain the European lifestyle in the discovered territories.



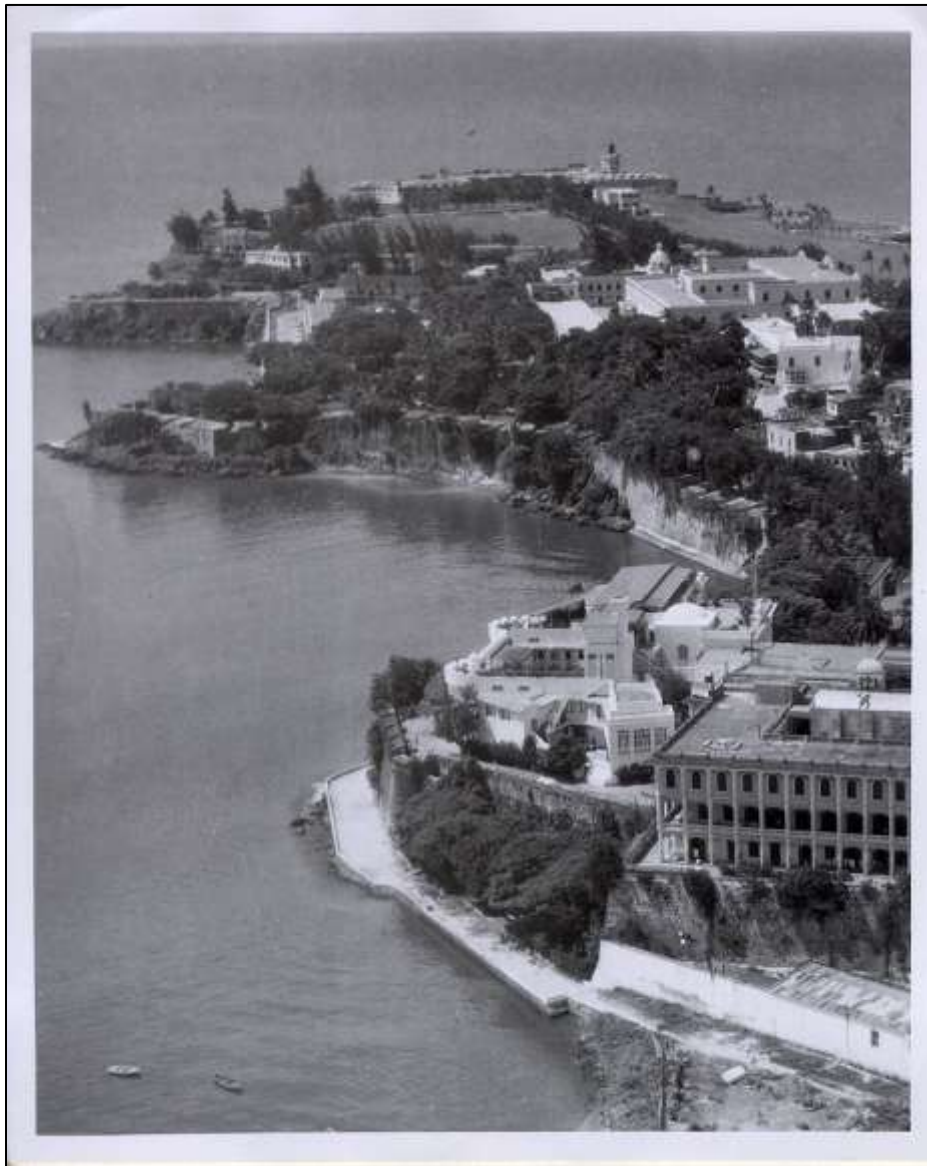


El Morro is a multilevel masonry structure built over a period of four and a half centuries, being one of the largest and most important fortifications in the New World. The Morro fort is a triangular bastion that developed capitalist relations with the new order for the emergence, with a dispersion and maintenance of new social practices that involved different aspects of daily life in San Juan Bay. Masonry was used as a rubble construction method for a building that was not fortified on the interior walls and thus filled the granite construction from behind.

The construction materials of El Morro consist of sandstone, calcareous matrix, sand, clay, brick and local wood (ausubo) in its doors and shutters. Ventilated cut fortified walls were built in stone, varying between 43 to 56 cm high, of stucco over masonry, rubble and filled stone until the 1890s. All of its walls and other masonry surfaces (with the few exceptions of some decorative elements) were covered with stucco or lime plaster, clay or both as a matrix. The new ideological patterns of capitalism emphasize standardization as part of industrial production, related to mass patterns and the idea of consumerism.

With the greater the availability of material goods, the better the result of the forms of production, circulation of goods and changes in the forms of relationship between people and things through new consumption patterns. The limitations in adopting thought schemes produced in the centers of power in the face of the legitimization of academic discourses evade simplistic interpretations due to lack of homogeneity with the large academic centers.

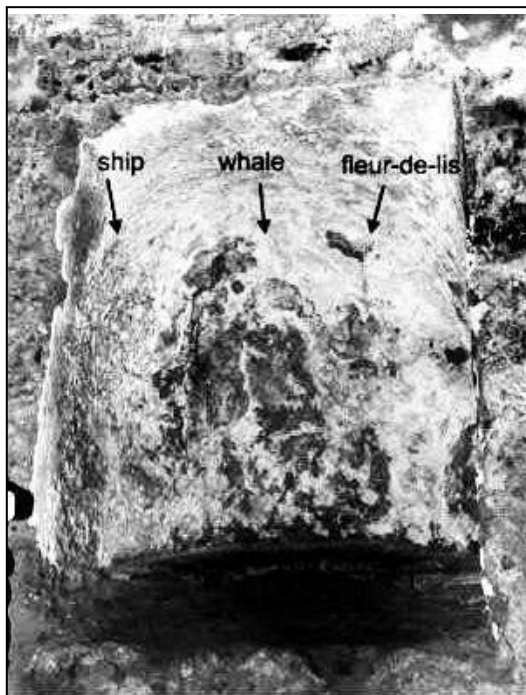
Material evidence, such as archives, is vitally important in understanding how available collections of artifacts and documents were created and curated in order to understand the potential to represent the past and sustain complex relationships in the present. According to the structural evidence of the Fort, variations in sequences occur throughout the construction phases.



Very little is known about the kitchen area (located on the third level) due to the lack of plans or maps showing the topographical conditions and the promontories in work begun in 1539. The documented information is fragmented and contradictory in relation to the nature of the buildings erected during the course of the centuries. Accurate and reliable maps appeared in the second half of the 18th century, already when the Morro structure was partially built. In the year 1539, its foundations were raised and construction work on this six-level fort was not completed until 1787. Construction of a massive wall around the city of San Juan began in 1634, with the southern section of the city being the first to be walled. The process of guarding the entrance to San Juan Bay took around 450 years to complete its development. Archaeological recording techniques have their own theoretical construction based on geological principles of superposition or stratigraphy. In the case of colonial enterprises, record keeping was a crucial component in the mentality of governing.

The orally transmitted records kept were not literate and the concepts of record keeping were progressively devalued. Their reproduction was abandoned over time or were "lost" because they were conventionally interpreted as trustworthy information. Many of the political-social aspects in the ups and downs of European politics and its geographical location transformed the Island into a colony of great strategic importance, becoming a coveted piece by the enemies of Spain.

## GRAFFITI



The documentation of the motifs among the historical complexes in the Spanish Defense System of San Juan has shown that the walls, forts and bastions are full of graffiti and drawings that evidence the representation of vessels whose shape have been analyzed through historical research.

The expression of graffiti seems to have been the same artistic expression that transitions from historical times to the present. They were mostly found in areas where soldiers stayed for a long time. However, almost all of the sentry boxes of the Spanish Defense System were rebuilt and modified mainly during the period of military presence of the American Army.

Figure 1: Niche in El Morro Tower, Graffiti of a ship, a whale and a fleur de Lis.

The identification of evidence through historical figurative graffiti in these military posts records moments dating from the mid-19th century and the early and mid-20th century to the present. Many of these writings create a particular interest with interdisciplinary projects that would open interpretive spaces for conservation. Black graffiti was made with charcoal, metal, black paint or some other object that left this type of trace.

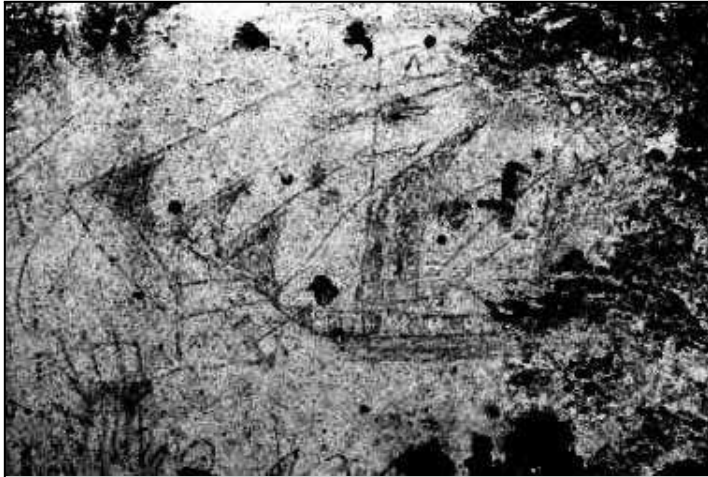


Figure 2: 19th-century schooner and boat with oars, Santa Bárbara Bastion, El Morro dimensions 32 × 18 cm, and EM143, dimensions 5 × 9 cm. (Isabel Rivera)

They are identical to other graffiti, varying in color and drastically in their counterpart. The motifs that have been inventoried include boats, soldiers, fauna, and identifying frigates in El Morro among the inventoried specimens. Evidently, the origin of Morro's goods is less certain to sustain. Socio-economic and commercial aspects divided the material into non-local Hispanic wares, Hispanic and non-Hispanic local wares, since ceramics offered the best diagnostic proof of origin for fragmentary artifacts.

## CERAMIC

Analysis of assemblages recovered from Old San Juan indicates that ceramics in Puerto Rico in the 18th and early 19th centuries was oriented toward socioeconomic status, and that the three markets were used by the socioeconomic strata.

Ceramic assemblage analysis ignores categories such as glass bottles, metal artifacts, and/or clothing, whose provenance may not be firmly determined. The ceramic paste found in the Fort is compact, made of sand and lead varnish, and was applied to the inside of merchandise and rarely appears on the outside.



Figure 3: Ceramic vessel of unknown origin, found in the kitchen courtyard. Height 22.5 inches, greatest diameter 14.5 inches.

El Morro was redefined by Hale Smith through excavations at the historic Fort San Juan. The analysis coincides in postulating that these ceramics were manufactured locally, although Kathleen Deagan points out that their presence in San Agustín suggests that they were manufactured in Puebla or Havana. This in turn suggests that the origins of these located supplies are more of a Caribbean product. The nature of the political organization in El Morro as a highly interwoven institution had been formed in the urban tactical centers to serve as a bridge for clandestine sectors between official sectors with the support of public opinion from the sectors with greater economic power.

The investigation of human society reveals a historical, and therefore, transitory character in the development of humanity. Archaeological interest directs the study of economic characteristics, types of settlement, social relations, housing, weapons, utensils for daily use, clothing, ornaments, religious ideas, bones, artistic monuments, buildings, aspects of life, material remains, relationships between climate and vegetation and the duration and intensity of the settlement stages.

However, there may be variations in El Morro on the distinctive representations of local ceramic production that existed on many of the Caribbean Islands. The similarity of the paste in the Morro sherds and the Afro-Caribbean merchandise that was recovered

could suggest a continuity that represents a variant of Afro-Caribbean lead-glazed ceramics. In fact, El Morro is considered to have local Hispanic merchandise.

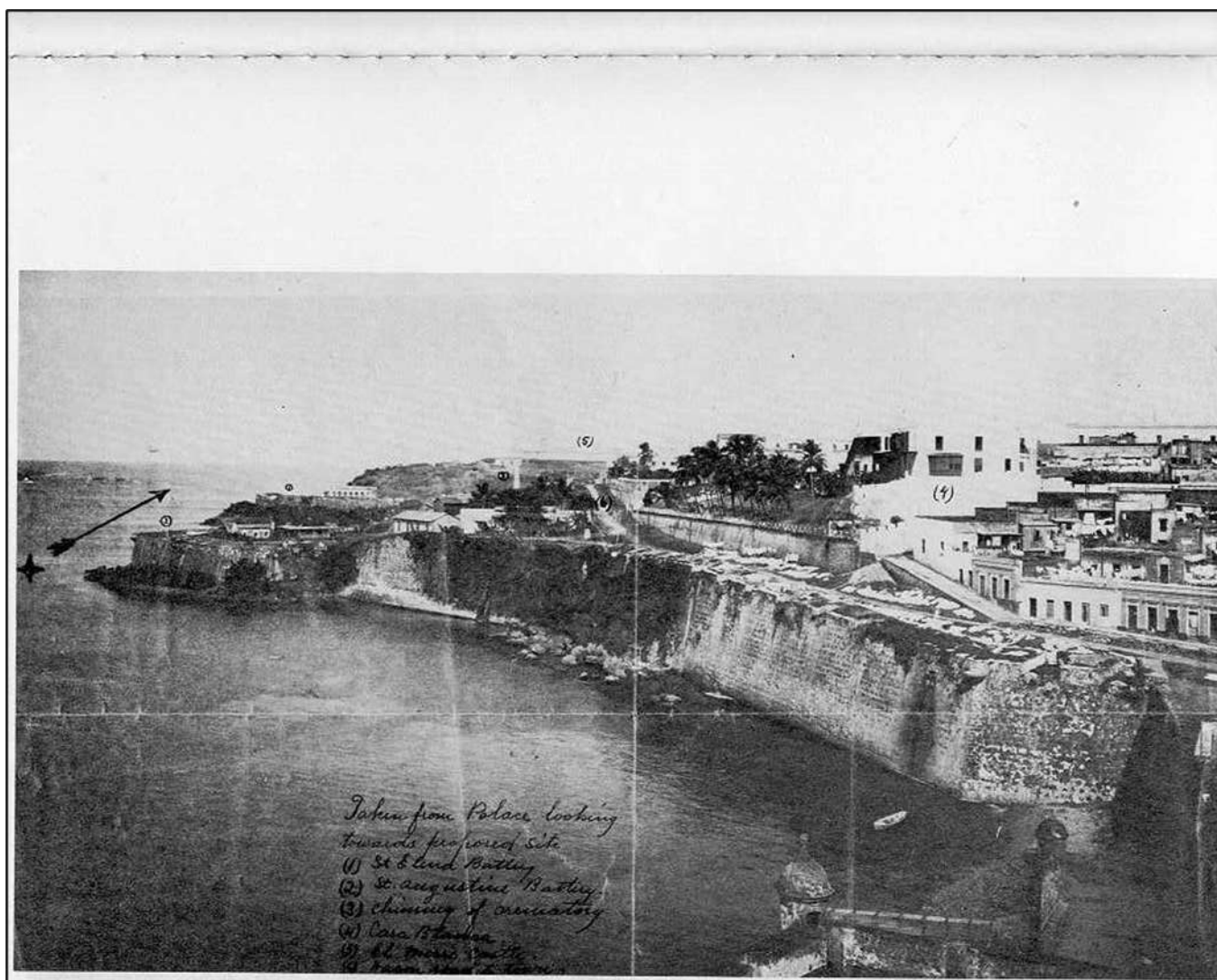
Afro-Caribbean and Morro ceramic goods (assuming that 'Rey Ware' is a French or British type introduced to Puerto Rico) were manifested mainly after trade embargoes had a corresponding increase in this ceramic that could be predicted. K. Deagan notes that 'King Ware' bears a strong resemblance to 'Red Ware' and it has been noted that 'King' wares are found mainly in those colonies engaged in the Triangle trade.



Figure 4 Glass: A-F: Bottle necks. G: Bottle lip, H: Piston, I, J: Bottle stoppers, K: Bottle kickup, L: "Tear glass", M-P: Tumblers.

It is suggested that the wares may be of non-Hispanic ceramics and that within Puerto Rican contexts, 'Rey Ware' must be found in deposits dated to 1785 or later or could have been smuggled. With the opening of trade relations in 1815, Puerto Rico entered the market of international industrial trade and ceramics could compete with local and non-local Hispanic goods in terms of cost and quality. Ceramic artifacts are not unique or distinctive, nor are they particularly reflective of the materials that are generally associated with the military.

The archeology of architecture serves to refer to the materials within architectural contexts. For this reason, the investigation of the social aspects derived from these constructs has fundamentally conceived a two-dimensional perspective. Non-Hispanic merchandise represents important components of all status groups. A stratigraphic sequence was not obtained in any of the excavated areas of Morro. In the pit and kitchen, disturbances were caused by structural changes that occurred over time. Furthermore, we observed that relatively few fragments of majolica ceramic in El Morro were recovered in comparison with other excavations in residential locations such as Florida.



Morro's Wall of Defense, Circa 1930

The spatial conditions built contain an architectural and individual analysis. Cultural structures such as politics, economics, class, generality, and religious systems reflect a perspective that reveals an opinion in continuous analysis. The cultural material conceived as an element with legible significance is involved with a determined cultural context. The social structures include systems of varied meanings that require a complete architectural-spatial design to actuate as the expression of verbal and non-verbal meanings. The architectural and urban studies demonstrate a materialization of social and cultural significance that creates an analytical perspective useful for documenting the spatial configuration of the constructed environments and their relationship with the conduct or cultural principles of human beings.

The dramatic socio-economic changes of the 19th and 20th century buildings have been abandoned by a great number of sites, many of them are visible in the landscape, and others are hidden, there is sea below the regrowth of tropical forests or behind murals of the rapid expansion of cities. There is an enormous potential for the recovery of new information and interpretative perspectives from these sites, although many of the Caribbean archaeological sites have been brought into greater danger of destruction due to rapid development.



Aerial photo, Circa 1983

The archaeological work of the preserved sites offers the use of the comparative method of data related to flora, fauna, and other important aspects that establish an ethnographic contribution to improve the understanding of the interpersonal and cultural relationships of our time. If this is a fundamental tool for the production of knowledge, the areas of greater architectural sensitivity within the limits of San Juan must be avoided, minimized, or mitigated to minimize any impact that may cause the socio-cultural resources of Puerto Rico. The range of resources in Puerto Rico for the detailed historical analysis can be an explosive one that allows you to recognize this information for specialists in archeology and naval history at an international level to study, publish, and analyze (chronologically) the information in archaeological forums.

New technologies in the development of some sectors of historical archeology are adapted to the exploration of large areas with satellite images that can be found to be most useful for the study of our techniques, period, ambient changes, etc.

Within the specific social context, the historicity and the individual experience are not always interesting and important to understand the significance of the time for those who experience these local factors. Without exception, these provisions are subject to the need to clearly define and agree on the scale of the investigation (individual, social, cultural, intercultural, or global) in interdisciplinary collaboration.



Main gate and the lighthouse in 1933. (Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington).

The projects of the Caribbean region pose a rich diversity within the cultural contexts that relate to a complete historical landscape in local arguments. Therefore, global trends mark unique material expression within the range of social themes and intellectual problems that include colonialism, contact, globalization, power, and the complexities of slavery and freedom. A dynamic conception of the historical-social development of El Morro confirmed a degree of architectural validity and amplification of the means of dissemination and disclosure with a comparative exegesis through logic and congruence.



1. As one comes into San Juan by air one sees El Morro as shown in this photograph. The photograph, taken prior to the 1928 hurricane, shows the old fortress as it was in 1898 when the Americans took it over. Construction of Morro castle was begun in 1554 when a tower, battery, and a tower were built. The plan of the present structure was completed by Enriquez de Guzman de Sotomayor in 1559 and the fortress was finished about 1630. It has been besieged twice, once by the Dutch and once by the British.

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