



NICHOLE BODIN

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# PROCESSES OF COLONIZATION AND EXPLOITATION

Contributions of 4 historical sites and their colonial planning manifestation



Place where Caparra moved to the Island/ Rodrigo de Figueroa (1519)/ Wikimedia Commons

The archaeological contribution at the early Spanish sites of **La Isabela**, **La Navidad**, **Puerto Real** and **Caparra** has offered a source of information that is not widely known, being these related to the precise configurations of provisions regarding the colonial experiment that caused abrupt circumstances during the first stages of colonial social transformation.

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## LA ISABELA

The Spanish community in La Isabela and its organization in the military spatial framework goes beyond merely trying different methods in a complex study area, lacking specific material culture evidence and relevant characteristics pertaining to the site. This allows in a way to question the secondary aspects of the archaeological debate and the geographical form of the site under investigation, the alignment of the structures, and the distribution of the patterns already established in these early Spanish sites.



La Isabela National Historical and Archaeological Park, Dominican Republic Wikimedia Common/ Mario Roberto Durán Ortiz

La Isabela, located on the east bank of the Bajabonico River in the Dominican Republic, represents an important chapter in the history of European colonization in the New World. Being the first deliberately established European colonial town in America, it signifies the onset of a new era. The property spans 2 hectares and sits atop a limestone

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cliff overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, at the base of the northern mountain range, to the northwest of the Dominican Republic (north of the island of La Hispaniola) and nestled between the towns of Puerto Plata and Montecristi, along the east side of La Isabela Bay. In 1493, Admiral Christopher Columbus selected this location surrounded by natural borders to establish the first European “villa” in America, with the intent to conquer and colonize these regions, which were motivations for his second expedition to the “New World.”



Remains of the foundation of the Casa de Colón in the National Historical and Archaeological Park of La Isabela, Dominican Republic/ Wikimedia Commons Mario Roberto Durán Ortiz

The archaeological site features the remains of five key structures: a **Tower** (watchtower), a **Royal Warehouse**, a "**Tesorería**", a **Church**, and the **residence** of Admiral Christopher Columbus (his sole home on the continent), all of which are the first built by Europeans in America. In broader terms, the urban morphology is scattered, lacking a particular distribution pattern, except for the geographical shape defined by structures,

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characteristic of a medieval town. In the north, specific functional ties between the warehouse and the "Tesorería" indicate a civic-military-administrative axis in the south, while the church and Columbus's house outline a political-religious axis.

La Isabela marks the crucial location where the conquest of America begins, serving as the site of the initial colonizing efforts that extended the Kingdom of Spain in the "**New World.**" European technologies arrived, alongside the introduction of various fauna and flora. Instead, from this point originated the initial samples of American wildlife and plants to the old world, a trade that altered the way natural resources were utilized and impacted the diet of the Western world. It serves as the initial site of exchange between Spanish and indigenous languages, integrating into Spanish words that are still in use today such as: *canoa*, *huracán*, *maíz*, *guanábana*, *yuca*, *casabe*, among others.



Panoramic, La Isabela/ Wikipedia

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## LA NAVIDAD

En Bas Saline, the location is of a sizable traditional Taíno settlement that existed from around AD 1200 to AD 1530. It is believed to have been the main town of the cacique Guacanagarí, where Columbus founded his small settlement of La Navidad in 1492, following the sinking of the Santa María.

*La Navidad*, being the first European colony established in the New World, has perpetuated a vast documented information regarding what is believed to have been an indigenous population. The settlement of La Navidad offers throughout its history a significant presence of European archaeological artifacts, providing evidence of limited European occupation. One of the biggest enigmas in global archaeology, La Navidad is the initial settlement established by Christopher Columbus during his first voyage to the Americas in 1492. Recognized as located on the northern coast of today's Haiti, it has been the focus of research by numerous scholars from different nations since the 1780s, beginning with the French historian and geographer Moreau de Saint-Méry and continuing with explorer Barry Clifford in recent times.

Additional notable researchers consist of Samuel Eliot Morison, an American historian and Columbus specialist (1930s); Dr. William Hodges and Clark Moore, hobbyist archaeologists residing in the Limbe, Haiti region (1960s - 2000s); Clark Moore and Dr. Kathleen Deagan, an archaeologist from the University of Florida (1980s, 2003). It's important to mention that archaeologist Irving Rouse conducted work along the northern coast of Haiti, although he concentrated primarily on the pre-contact communities of that region.



Excavation work at En Bas Saline/ Credit: Florida Museum

Excavations at En Bas Saline have located a very large burned structure on a mound near the center of the site where nearly all of the European artifacts (including a lead musket ball and Spanish pottery) and European animal bones (rat and pig) have been found. Radiocarbon dates verify also that the structure was present in 1492, and this is the most likely candidate for La Navidad, and the brief Spanish occupation in 1493.



Aerial view: En Bas Saline site/ Credit: Florida Museum

The neglect of the Spanish Crown, the evacuation of troops and the failed attempt to establish a mining colony in Puerto Real manifested an intellectual interest in the research of archaeologists, giving space to examine and understand the geographic limits of the city and the different chronological perspectives on the historical events of this region. The continued decline of the economy in Hispaniola hastened the abandonment of the town of Llares de Guahaba and the relocation of its citizens to Puerto Real, creating a significant population increase in this region and a population decline in the towns in the northern area of the Island.

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## PUERTO REAL

The identification of elements of Columbian trade in Puerto Real are documented through the excavations carried out and the collection of data that allow an ideal study of the conditions of commercial exchange in these areas. Puerto Real has been the main topic of colonialism in the Americas and the Hispanic-American cultural tradition. Between 1503 to 1578, the city (which was populated by Spanish, American Indians, and Africans) was an outpost of the Spanish empire located on the northern shore of what is now Haiti. An unseen but palpable archeological relic of a very early period in European-American history (the rise and fall of the Spanish empire in the Caribbean) Puerto Real has been abandoned for nearly four centuries and is now surrounded by agricultural and grazing areas close to the town of Limonade.



Yayal Majolica Ceramic tablewares (1503–1578 ) Puerto Real, Haiti Credit: Florida Museum



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Still an attractive place for systematic study, the issues of the formal and informal implementation and intervention of nature in domestic life manifest a space for study in the material consequences of multicultural, multiracial interaction and the ecological changes introduced by the arrival of the Europeans and their impact on the New World. In addition, the interpretation of historical events has an explanatory basis related to the voyages of exploration on the island of Hispaniola, where the processes of exploitation, resources and the 'division' of indigenous lands forced social processes to be distorted by genocide and conquest.



Iron rapier hilts (1550-1578) Puerto Real, Haiti Credit: Florida Museum



Excavation in progress, 1980 Credit: Florida Museum

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## CAPARRA

The ruins of Caparra possess architectural details that provide particular data on the construction works of the time of the Conquest. Some of the earliest indications of the Spanish presence in the "New World" can be found in the Caparra Archeological Site, a National Historic

Located in the northern municipality of Guaynabo, Puerto Rico, the settlement remains the oldest-known relic of European presence in what is now United States territory. The city, initially known as *La Ciudad de Puerto Rico*, was built on a spot that was renowned for its flat terrain, good ventilation, and mild winds. *The Casa de Tapias*, named for the horizontal bands, or *tapias*, utilized in its construction, was the first permanent structure in the new city. This somewhat uncommon construction technique is still used by builders in various regions of Europe and Spain. Because of its ongoing use, archaeologists are able to imagine what the Casa de Tapias would have looked like in the 1500s. More striking structures with outdoor patios and stone walls soon followed. They used Seville-imported tiles in ornamental patterns on their façades.

In 1512, a small chapel built at Caparra became Puerto Rico's first Christian cathedral. The original population of 175 had almost doubled to 320 at the time of the chapel's construction, and it is likely that Ponce de León intended to expand the city's architectural appeal based on regulations stipulated by the Spanish Crown. By 1518, the development of Caparra was coming to a sudden close. Settlers were not convinced that the site was a good location for the island's capital. Attacks by Indigenous people were frequent, and the city remained cut off from the sea by a thick and dangerous mangrove region that separated Caparra from the San Juan Bay.

Understanding early building materials and methods in Puerto Rico as well as Spanish colonization in the Caribbean Island region has been made possible thanks to knowledge gleaned from the Caparra archeological site.



Ruins at Caparra Archaeological Site, Puerto Rico Credit: Wikimedia Commons Frederic Gleach

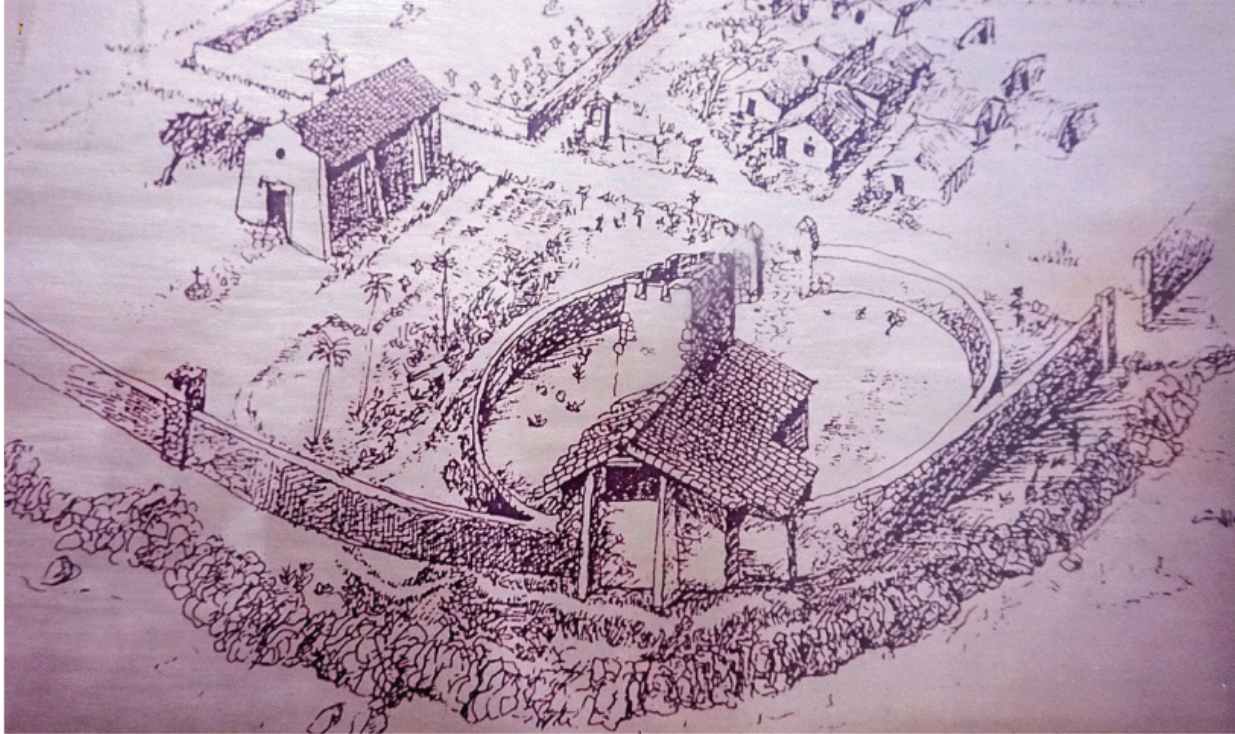
The materials found in this place provoke a genuine concern for archaeological studies, questioning the comparisons already established about the place of origin in relation to the construction materials. The determination of the origin and date of the materials found in the findings of the previous excavations, such as the tiles, came to demonstrate the complexity of the aesthetic and architectural planning of the place.

The Caparra terrace and its Sevillian origin presented a texture, color and other physical properties that establish that they come from Seville, manifesting an artistic sophistication and distinguished elegance.

The archaeological contributions offered by these historical sites project the complex and high colonial planning manifested in these areas, emphasizing the

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implementation of European materials, customs, economy and ideologies to the Caribbean area through processes of colonization and exploitation of resources.



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Artist concept of Town La Isabela, Hispaniola

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