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CREATING COMMUNITY ON 19th CENTURY SAN SALVADOR: SHIP GRAFFITI AND IDENTITY IN THE BAHAMIAM PAST

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ABSTRACT

One of the most subtle and common forms of material culture at former plantation sites in the Bahamas and elsewhere in the British Caribbean are individual images of ships etched into standing buildings. What is remarkable about these images is the perpetuation of a singular motif and technology of manufacture across such a widespread area. Previous research on this "ship graffiti" has focused on the descriptive documentation of individual images and the identification of the various types of sailing crafts represented in the etchings. This paper presents an overview of the ship images identified at some of the historic period sites on the island of San Salvador. Systematic surveys of buildings at plantations have revealed a much larger assemblage of these images than previously known on the island. Using approaches from archaeology and anthropology it is possible to come to more nuanced understandings of when, why, and by whom these images were created.

INTRODUCTION: AMBIGUOUS IMAGES AND BAHAMIAN SHIP GRAFFITI

Quite some time ago, Chistopher Hawkes devised an analytical rubric for archaeology that he entitled, "the ladder of inference" (Hawkes 1954). The ladder is used as a metaphor depicting the relationship between evidence and interpretation: as one climbs the ladder one's archaeological interpretations become less certain. The bottom rung of the ladder involves the study of technology, in other words the study of the functional properties of archaeological evidence, and the rungs subsequently ascend through behavior, social relationships and organization, and finally cosmology, or the world views and belief systems of those people living in the past. Many have critiqued Hawke's idea, particularly noting that ambiguity is an inherent part of any interpretive enterprise (Sullivan 1978). Others have expressed the concern that this schema can lead to a devaluing of analyses that seek to learn about some of the most interesting and significant questions about life in the past; particularly the largely intangible elements of culture that rendered meaning to people's life experiences (Evans 1998).

Ambiguity in archaeological interpretations is, perhaps, most obvious in the discussion of artwork in its varying forms in the past. As with art in the present, it is impossible to definitively state the purpose, meaning, and symbolism present in artwork in the past, but archaeologists working in these areas, particularly in rock art studies, have developed rigorous methodologies and cogent theories that guide work with such artifacts and landscapes (David and Wilson 2001, Chippendale and Tascon 1998, Chippendale and Nash 2004, Mithen 1999, Quinlan 2007, Whitley 2005). It is through such method and theory that archaeologists strive to reach the top rung of Hawkes' ladder.

Across the Bahamian archipelago and throughout the British West Indies, artwork is found in archaeological contexts from the historic period as well as prehistory. The historic period images are of sailing ships, which are incised into building walls and generally referred to as "ship graffiti". In the Bahamas, these images have been identified in three contexts: in cells at historic gaols on San Salvador and in New Providence, at Fort Charlotte on the island of New Providence, and at former plantation sites throughout the archipelago (Turner 2004, 2006). While consistent

in motif and technique of manufacture, these three contexts are thought to represent very different cultural phenomena. The images known from prison cells are highly detailed, and may have been a strategy for individuals to pass away the time during periods of incarceration (Turner 2004). Images of ships at Fort Charlotte are juxtaposed with other types of graffiti, including names, dates, military images, and possibly African symbols, and are situated along a parapet where soldiers likely stood watch for hours on end. These images were probably a way for soldiers to pass the time and to leave a record of their tour of duty at the fort as they moved around the Caribbean as part of the British West Indies Regiment (Goin 2005).

Ship graffiti at former plantation sites is the most widespread context for these images, as it is known from virtually every plantation where archaeologists have spent enough time to carefully examine the extant buildings. This graffiti appears in all types of plantation buildings, particularly those that would have been associated with the planter families during the plantation-period occupation of these sites. This graffiti is also thought to be the result of distinctly different cultural practices than those at the Fort or in the gaols, and has been considered appropriate to analyze these images as a distinct phenomenon (Turner 2006, Baxter 2010).

The earliest work on Bahamian ship graffiti was undertaken in the early part of this decade, and was a broad scale survey of images from across the archipelago (Turner 2004, 2006). This work was very descriptive and generated a comprehensive catalog of known images and also recorded the manufacturing process and location of each image. The types of sailing vessels depicted were also identified, where possible. This work revealed two important features that are characteristic of graffiti from the 19th century Bahamas.

The first noted feature is the singularity of motif in the images and the common method of their creation. The only figures depicted in graffiti are individual ships, and all are made by incising images into limestone. While there is diversity in the types of ships depicted, there are no recorded instances of other figures appearing either independent of, or in association with images of individual sailing vessels.

The second feature is the widespread nature of ship graffiti across the archipelago. Initially, it was thought that the geographic range of this ship graffiti was confined to the Bahamas (Turner 2006), however, the influence of Turner's work throughout the Caribbean has resulted in the subsequent identification of ship graffiti throughout the British West Indies (Scudder personal communication). Regardless, it is noteworthy that ship graffiti, consistent in imagery and construction, has been identified in the northern, central and southern Bahamas. This uniformity in motif and technique of manufacture speaks to population movements or other communications among the islands of the Bahamas at a time when scholars have characterized these islands as relatively isolated.

This initial research on ship graffiti also resulted in three primary interpretations regarding their function and meaning of these images. The first interpretation suggested that because ship graffiti is not found in traditionally symbolic contexts, particularly on gravestones, that the ships depicted in the graffiti at former plantation sites did not serve any aesthetic or decorative purposes. The second interpretation was that ship graffiti represented records of "wrecking", or the practice of salvaging goods from trade ships that ran aground in the shallow waters of the Bahamas. The final interpretation was that the creators of ship graffiti were males who were intimately engaged in ship building or nautical work, and that the males were of African-decent. This interpretation was predicated on the determination that the ship drawings were very complex and required intimate knowledge of shipbuilding in order for them to be rendered in such detail.

RECORDING SHIP GRAFFITI ON SAN SALVADOR

These observations and interpretations of Bahamian Ship Graffiti were based on a total of 73 individual images recorded on 13 islands and cays (Turner 2004:66). Twenty-five of these images were on the island of San Salvador at Pros-

pect Hill Plantation, Sandy Point Plantation, and the gaol in Cockburn Town.

This study took an alternative approach to the widespread survey undertaken by Turner (2004, 2006) and instead focused intensively on archaeological sites where ship graffiti could be studied in the context of broader archaeological investigations (Baxter 2007, 2008, 2010). Over the course of a year, multiple visits were made to the four most accessible plantation sites on San Salvador at different times of day and with different weather conditions prevailing. A series of variables were recorded in this study that focused less on the content of individual images (sailing vessel type) and more on the context of the images as consistent with contemporary analyses of archaeological rock art (Chippendale and Nash 2004, David and Wilson 2001, Quinlan 2007). These variables included: (1) The total number of images per building, (2) The number of images that were found in isolation and the number occurring in clusters with other ship images (3) The location of the images on each building including the height from the ground and the horizontal position on the building (4) The relationship of the images to the architectural features of the buildings (windows/doorways), and (5) The quality of the image.

This final variable is indeed subjective, but was done by the establishment of three heuristic categories: high, medium, and low quality. *High quality* images were those that were clearly depicting a specific vessel. Details of rigging, hull proportions, mast positions and sail types were clearly discernable as a specific sailing vessel (Figure 1). *Medium quality* images had the constituent images of a ship design; a hull, masts, and sail but lacked detail of design and would not be discernable as a particular vessel, but could possibly be interpreted as a general type of vessel (sloop, schooner etc.) (Figure 2).

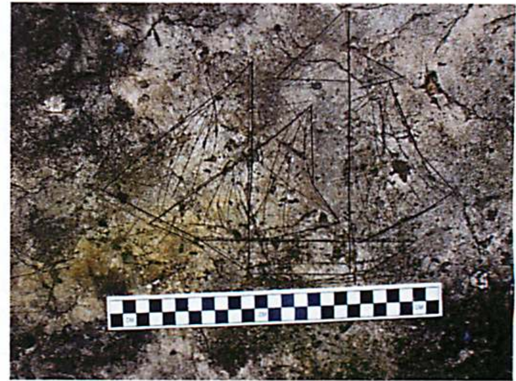

Figure 1. An example of a High Quality Image of a Ship from Polly Hill Plantation. This image has been digitally altered by superimposing black lines to highlight some of the main features of the ship as illustrated by the artist. Note the presence of distinct sails, masts, and dimensions as well as rigging.

Figure 2. An example of a Medium Quality Image of a Ship from Sandy Point Plantation. This image has been digitally altered by superimposing black lines to highlight some of the main features of the ship as illustrated by the artist. Note the presence of a hull, mast, and sail, but the relatively generic configuration of all these constituent elements of a ship.

Low quality images were those that captured the idea of a boat or ship, but which lacked any detail or proportion. Low quality images often had fundamental flaws in executing the design or medium (Figure 3).

Figure 3: An example of a Low Quality Image of a Ship from Fortune Hill Plantation. This image has been digitally altered by superimposing black lines to highlight the main features of the ship as illustrated by the artist. Note the absence of detail and the issues of proportion and the lack of joined lines.

Recording ship graffiti in the field is not without its challenges. Images are often difficult to "find", and variables including light and shadow, depth of etching, and the material used as the etching surface all affect the ability to identify and discern features of ship graffiti (Turner 2004). When considering the relationship among images and between images and architecture, the collapse of buildings, the intentional dismantling of buildings and the erosion of original surfaces limits any current study to those structures that are standing and in relatively good condition. There are also issues of accessibility that affected this particular study. The slave quarter at Sandy Point and at Fortune Hill were not visited as part of this study. Three structures in the slave quarter at Prospect Hill were visited, and as Polly Hill does not have a slave quarter, only two domestic structures for enslaved families were examined.

Despite these caveats and limitations, this intensive survey of the four San Salvador Plantations yielded a large number of images for analysis. A total of 301 images of ships were found among the plantations: 47 at Sandy Point, 131 at Fortune Hill, 108 at Prospect Hill, and 15 at Polly Hill. It should be noted that graffiti has also been found at Hard Bargain, and other unnamed plantations on the island and these images, while increasing the number of known images in the Bahamas by 300% does not represent the complete population of these images known on San Salvador. Rather than pondering this assemblage of images on an island-wide scale, it is more fruitful to consider the images at each plantation individually.

Sandy Point

Sandy Point plantation or Watling's Castle is one of the dominant features of the historic landscape of San Salvador. Archaeological work at Sandy Point was undertaken in the 1970s under the direction of Kathy Gerace (Gerace 1982, 1987, 2003) and graffiti was documented here in Grace Turner's original survey (Turner 2004). This plantation is also relatively well documented in the historical record (Burton 2004), and had a long post-emancipation occupation as well (Gerace 1987). This site is also frequently visited by tourists and student groups, and its accessibility has resulted in a deterioration of the site's condition, including the known removal of graffiti panels by tourists (Turner personal communication).

Variable	Eastern Storage	Manor House	Kitchen	Western Storage
Total Images	21	4	4	18
Number of Image Clusters	1	1	1	2
Single Images	3	0	0	1
Window/Doorway	12	0	0	0
Interior Wall	9	0	4	0
Exterior Wall	0	4	0	18
Height from Ground Range	1.15m to 1.8 m	1.05 m to 1.6 m	.4 m to 1 m	.45 m to 1.45 m
High Quality	2	0	0	1
Medium Quality	13	2	2	13
Low Quality	6	2	2	4

Figure 4. Table summarizing the graffiti at Sandy Point Plantation by building and across analytical variables used in this study.

As one walks up the hill from the Queen's highway, there are four buildings encountered on the trail to through Sandy Point. Ship graffiti was identified on all four of the buildings: 21 on the eastern storage building, 4 at the manor house, 4 at the kitchen, and 18 in the western "complex" of

storage buildings. The distribution of the graffiti images across the recorded variables is summarized in Figure 4.

Fortune Hill

The site of Fortune Hill is also well known from the archaeological work done by Kathy Gerace (Gerace 1982, 1987, 2003). Fortune Hill was owned by a prominent British Planter, Burton Williams, and while little is known historically about the day to day operations of this plantation, the history of the owner and later tenants is documented. The post-emancipation history of this site is less well known. The site is today a very popular site for tourists and students and more contemporary graffiti can be found on the walls of structures alongside the historic ship graffiti.

Variable	Manor House	Office	Latrine	Industrial Building 1	Industrial Building 2
Total Images	32	5	10	74	10
Number of Image Clusters	4	1	3	2	1
Single Images	4	0	0	1	2
Window/ Doorway	2	0	7	1	1
Interior Wall	27	5	0	6	0
Exterior Wall	3	0	3	67	9
Height from Ground Range	.4 m to 1.4 m	.9 m to 1.65 m	.4 m to 1.5 m	.4 m to 1.9 m	.5 m to 1.7 m
High Quality	3	0	5	9	1
Medium Quality	20	5	5	37	7
Low Quality	9	0	0	28	2

Figure 5. Table summarizing the graffiti at Fortune Hill Plantation by building and across analytical variables used in this study.

The manor house at Fortune Hill has 32 images, the majority of which are clustered on the interior wall of the northeastern veranda support (Figure 5). The two octagonal buildings, the office and the latrine, have images of ships incised in and adjacent to their respective doorways although the placement is notably different between the two buildings (Figure 5). The most notable graffiti feature on San Salvador may be found at Fortune Hill, which is the assemblage of 67 images on the back, exterior wall of the first industrial building encountered on the circular path through the site. This back side of the building is generally not visited today, but was clearly an important location for 19th century artists as the largest known concentration of images in the Bahamas is found here.

Prospect Hill

Variable	Manor House	Kitchen	Bakery	Latrine	Slave Quarter
Total Images	11	88	0	9	0
Number of Image Clusters	1	5	0	2	0
Single Images	1	1	0	2	0
Window/ Doorway	1	0	0	1	0
Interior Wall	0	56	0	1	0
Exterior Wall	10	32	0	7	0
Height from Ground Range	1 m to 1.4 m	.4 m to 1.56 m	0	.5 m to 1.07	0
High Quality	2	3	0	0	0
Medium Quality	2	46	0	6	0
Low Quality	7	39	0	3	0

Figure 6. Table summarizing the graffiti at Prospect Hill Plantation by building and across analytical variables used in this study.

Perhaps the best known plantation in all of the Bahamas is Prospect Hill, also known as "Farqharson's Plantation" for its owner Charles Farquharson, whose 1831-2 journal survives a unique and indispensible source about Bahamian slavery (Farquharson 1957). Additional source material, in the form of family papers and letters, documents post-emancipation lifeways at the site and on San Salvador generally (Burton 2006). The presence of this documentary material has drawn two generations of archaeologists to the site, and work by Kathy Gerace (Gerace 1982, 1987) is

currently being augmented by a new research project at Prospect Hill (Baxter, Burton, and Marshall in preparation). Prospect Hill was one of the plantations visited by Grace Turner in her initial survey of Bahamian ship graffiti and she recorded 21 images at the site (Turner 2004).

This graffiti survey project identified 108 individual ship images at Prospect Hill on three different buildings (Figure 6). Prospect Hill illustrates, in a very obvious manner, the selective nature of image placement. The building identified by Kathy Gerace (1982, 1987) as the kitchen is covered in graffiti with clusters of images being found on every exterior and interior wall faces. The building identified as the bakery, however, has no graffiti images on its walls. Likewise, the slave quarter structures visited had no ship graffiti. These structures are all fully intact and provide a reasonable basis for comparing the presence/absence of graffiti among buildings at the site.

Polly Hill

Polly Hill plantation has no direct documentary record, but is perhaps the most thoroughly archaeologically tested plantation on San Salvador (Baxter and Burton 2007). This anonymous plantation is known only through its vernacular toponym and it is not clear if this plantation is the place recorded in historic deeds and land grant records. The site is rarely visited, but archaeological investigations have show the site to have a very long post-emancipation occupation into the 1930s.

There is also relatively little graffiti at Polly Hill, but this small assemblage has been used to develop many of the interpretations in this paper (Baxter 2007, 2008, 2010). The 15 images at Polly Hill are found on two buildings: a plantation office that was later converted into a residence and on the exterior of one of the slave houses. The other buildings and their collapsed debris have no indication of incised images. Polly Hill also provides the best evidence for dating this graffiti as the office building was replastered, covering the ship images, sometime around 1860 giving us a *terminus ante quem* date for the images.

Variable	Manor House	Kitchen	Slave Houses	Office
Total Images	0	0	1	14
Number of Image Clusters	0	0	0	2
Single Images	0	0	1	2
Window/Doorway	0	0	0	3
Interior Wall	0	0	0	10
Exterior Wall	0	0	1	1
Height from Ground Range	0	0	.6 m	.8 m to 1.4 m
High Quality	0	0	0	2
Medium Quality	0	0	1	7
Low Quality	0	0	0	5

Figure 7. Table summarizing the graffiti at Polly Hill Plantation by building and across analytical variables used in this study.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS: ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF IMAGES IN THE PAST

It is tempting to imagine that people in the present might be able to unlock the meaning of images created in the past. The tendency to impose contemporary values and ideals onto past civilizations is a danger well understood in archaeology, and particularly working in the historic period one cannot make the mistake of conflating recognition with understanding.

Indulging in this type of analysis is often likened to a type of "Rorschach Test" where the interpreter's experiences, values, and ideas are placed onto the images and objects of the past (Feder 2001). Perhaps most famous in this analytical genre is the work of Erich Von Daniken, who believes that images and artifacts from the past provide irrefutable evidence for regular alien visitation to earth and alien intervention in the construction of most early civilizations (Von Daniken 1999). He reports the presence of astronauts and aliens in ancient artwork based on his experiences with the images. Credible scholars consider him to be the paragon of pseudoarchaeological study.

More benign, but in a similar vein, were the reactions of some audience members to the images I showed at the Natural History Confer-

ence of ship images from Polly Hill Plantation. These individuals confidently stated that only a person who had intimate experience with 19th century sailing ships could have rendered the details in the drawings, and that it was more likely the ship owners and not emancipated slaves who were making the drawings. These comments were interesting because the commentators, who themselves were not sailors or owners of 19th century ships, obviously felt they could unequivocally determine a detailed and accurate illustration of particular vessels. These types of ad hoc interpretations say much more about the perspectives of the commentators on a host of issues, including race, gender, history, and politics than they do about the images themselves or their 19th century creators.

So, how do we avoid these types of analytical pitfalls in a genuine study of images from the historic and prehistoric past? Or, in other words, how do we climb to the top of the inferential latter with the greatest certainty possible in an endeavor inherently fraught with ambiguity? In short, archaeological approaches to the study of images involve placing images into broader cultural contexts. Historical information about who was on San Salvador during the time in question, archaeological studies about local lifeways, and historical insights about broader cultural spheres of interaction can provide us with useful frameworks to try to understand these images in relationship to the times and places they were created.

For these images particularly, approaches from rock art studies have been particularly fruitful in developing an analytical framework for this information. Ship graffiti has been so named because they are found human-made rather than natural surfaces. However, these images possess virtually no characteristics associated with graffiti as an analytical construct (highly public, highly individualized, reflecting the subaltern). The very low population density on the island (approximately 200-400 people over 30 square miles) suggests these images would not have had the types of anonymous, impromptu social function typically associated with graffiti.

From a theoretical perspective, literature on rock art, which is defined as images carved or painted on natural surfaces, offers a far more fruitful framework for the analysis of these images (Baxter 2007, in preparation, David and Wilson 2001). Rock art would have been a broad "genre" of symbolic expression familiar to most members of the diverse community residing on San Salvador. Rock art would have been familiar to enslaved individuals coming from Africa as both painted and engraved rock art images are common across the continent, including areas of West Africa from where most enslaved populations derived (Conlson and Campbell 2001). Rock art likely would have been known to slave populations coming from the Southern United States with their Loyalist owners as well, as a widespread tradition of prehistoric pecked boulder art is found throughout the region (Loubser 2005). Analytic frameworks from the archaeology of rock art paired with the knowledge of the community on San Salvador offer several different ways to interpret the "ship graffiti" at on the island and elsewhere in the Bahamas. This approach also minimizes the biases of researchers who may inadvertently (or deliberately) try to impose their views onto the past.

WHEN, WHO, AND WHY? : PLACING SHIP GRAFFITI INTO HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

Analytical frameworks from archaeology suggest that we need to dispense with our own preconceptions and instead try to place images from the past in their appropriate context. In doing so we can incorporate these images into other context to try to answer some basic intermediate questions that help inform larger, anthropological interpretations.

When?: A Question of Timing

Dating images in the past is always an archaeological conundrum (Whitley 2005). In cultures with well developed artistic traditions, such as ancient Egypt or Greece, it is possible to study iconography, symbols and images as a cohesive body of art. The abundance of these materials and ability to cross-date the images with other sources makes it possible to date images with relative con-

fidence. Images like ship graffiti occur in relatively low numbers, were not related to historic sources at the time, and do not contain images of particular events or individuals (that can be readily discerned in the present). As such, ship graffiti in the Bahamas, while from the relatively recent past cannot be dated directly using historical methods. While many dating techniques have been developed to date prehistoric rock art, including the studies of patina development and other signatures of chemical weathering, these methods are highly debated and considered controversial techniques (Whitley 2005). Bahamian ship graffiti is not of an age where these techniques can be applied, and as such cannot be dating using historic or prehistoric techniques.

Grace Turner's initial work on graffiti did not postulate a date for these images, noting they could be from either the period of enslavement, post-emancipation, or both (Turner 2006). The high quality images clearly represent 19th century sloops and schooners (Turner 2004) which are the types of vessels that are mentioned in most historic sources (Burton 2006). Work at Polly Hill plantation suggests a date range for the images on the office building as between 1810-1860 based on the time of planter abandonment (approximately 1810) and a time when artifacts tell us the building was reoccupied and replastered (approximately 1860) (Baxter and Burton 2007, Baxter 2007, 2010). This second coat of plaster is now eroding away, exposing the ship images it once covered. The early end for this date range is based on the assumption that buildings that were under the direct control of the planters during their residence were unlikely to be "defaced" by the addition of ship imagery. The date range from Polly Hill is supported by the presence of ship graffiti in the San Salvador gaol, which began operation in the 1830s. These indirect inferences all suggest that the graffiti a 19th century phenomenon. They also suggest that the opportunity to begin creating graffiti may have been different at each plantation depending upon its particular history. The reason people stopped creating these images is unknown.

Who?: A Community of Artists and Audiences

Much more can be said about who created this graffiti than when it was created. A reasonable place to begin with the historical record that can tell us who was present on the island at the time graffiti was being created. The white planters had largely abandoned the island by the first decade of the 19th century, leaving a slave community under the direction of overseers. Slave registers for San Salvador suggest that slaves resided in nuclear family units with relatively balanced sex ratios and experienced natural population growth (Burton 2004). Adults as old as 70 or more years and children of varying ages give clues to the community that was becoming established around these nuclear households. These individuals were not property owners, did not work in the shipping industry or own ships, did not have the economic cache or connections to summon ships on their own, and the appearance of ships was a notable event on the island. It is this population that present on San Salvador to create ship graffiti in the 19th century.

It is best to then review what we know about Bahamian ship graffiti and each element can tell us about its creation. 1) *Ship graffiti is found across the archipelago and is consistent in form and method of creation throughout the islands.* The presence of a uniform artifact type suggests communication, interaction, and shared meaning. There is a mechanism for the idea of ships to be moving across the islands and communicating these ideas to local communities. 2) *Ship graffiti is highly variable in quality even at the same site and in the same cluster or panel.* Variable image quality suggests a variety of artists engaging in the practice of creating art. Only 1% of the identified images are high quality images that have detailed depictions of rigging, sails, and hulls suggesting the intention of illustrating a particular vessel (Figure 1). The majority of the images (55%) are of medium quality having all the constituent elements of a ship, but lacking in detail. A large number of images (44%) are low quality demonstrating fundamental flaws in perspective and execution. Some of the low quality images are seemingly incomplete which may mean drawings were abandoned or were drawn in

stages (Turner 2004). 3) *Ship graffiti is found in clusters or panels 99% of the time.* The overwhelming majority of ship images are found in relationship to other images. This certainly does not mean that entire clusters were created at once, but it does indicate that different artists and audiences were returning to the same location to repeat the act of drawing a ship. These panels range in height from nearly 2 meters to less than .5 meters off the ground.

Combining this information we can posit the following about the creators of these images. First, they were Afro-Bahamian artists making and using these images as originally suggested by Turner (2004, 2006) as white planters would not have been on San Salvador at the time or in the locations where images were being created. Second, there were multiple artists making these images and this fact helps reconcile what we know about these images.

Ships arrived on San Salvador a few times a year, although their arrival was unpredictable (Farquharson 1957, Burton 2004, 2006). These ships stayed on the island for several days and were staffed by crew members of African descent. It is clear that slaves and emancipated peoples regularly moved around the island (Baxter and Burton 2007, Burton 2004, 2006) during the 19th century and it is easy to imagine that the crew members would have taken shore leave and visited with friends and families in local communities. These individuals may have been the artists who drew highly detailed images of ships reflecting their intimate knowledge of nautical craft and telling stories and sharing knowledge of life on other islands (Turner 2006). This knowledge would have helped maintain connections across the archipelago and helped form a sense of community identity across distances. Ship images would be a lasting reminder of these visits and knowledge. Once the artist departed others would draw ships, perhaps repeating stories and sharing information at different times to different audiences. These individuals would not necessarily know what details were the most salient to replicate for a sailor, but could replicate key elements of ships and sailing vessels. Children as well as adults likely made some of these images because as many low quality images may represent novice adult artists as well as children the variations in height suggest some very small people were also carving images into the building walls (Baxter 2010). The occurrence of clusters, the presence of images at variable heights and of varying quality suggest the entire community may have participated in the drawing of ships as artists and audiences as they replicated the work of master artists and sailors who stayed only briefly in the community.

Answering the "Why" Part 1: Emblematic Images and "Rock Art": Images, Origins, and Identity Formation

Interpreting Bahamian ship graffiti as "rock art" has involved both the analysis of individual images and images in the context of landscape. The interpretation of rock art often emphasizes the content of individual images and symbolic imagery has been studied widely among anthropologists. One critical concept that was originally identified by Ortner (1973) was the cross-cultural tendency towards key or dominant symbols organized along a continuum of expressive modes. Recently, this continuum has been categorized as ranging from emblematic symbols to instrumental symbols (Fennell 2007:29). Emblematic symbols are associated with abstract ideals of group identities, and are used in "summing up, expressing" and "representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful way what the system means to them" (Ortner 1973:1339). These images stand for a vast array of ideas, both actual and metaphorical all at once. These are in contrast to instrumental symbols that have more practical and immediate purposes and tend to emphasize individual actors and actions. Fennell (2007 33:34) has argued that in context of the African Diaspora the primary use of emblematic symbols was for the communication of social group identities and membership, and that the use of instrumental symbols that emphasize individual interests or intra-group competition were downplayed or absent.

The single motif of the ship in Bahamian "rock art" is a strong example of a key, dominant,

or emblematic symbol, which is analogous to other single recurring motifs in artistic traditions that have been used to convey origin myths in many different cultures (Basso 1996). The placement of these images onto a fixed landscape can be an important part of "placemaking" where diverse and contested ideas are embodied in a single unifying symbol (Baker and Biger 1992, Wilson and David 2001).

The idea of ships being tied to an origin myth for a population brought to an island against their will fits well with this type of interpretation. African populations were taken from Africa on sailing ships. They and their descendants were taken from the United States to the Bahamas via ships, and it was ships that brought them to their new homes on Bahamian "out islands." Their owners left the island on ships, leaving them behind. Ships were a mode of transportation that they did not have the economic means or social connections to procure for themselves so that they, too, could make choices about where they were to live. Ship imagery may also be tied, then, not only to origins, but also to their importance and their rarity in the day to day experiences of people on the island (and out islands in general), as ships continued to represent a critical and unpredictable lifeline to the world beyond San Salvador during the 19th century (Mithen 1999).

The appearance of ships as a singular motif in these images fits well with Mintz and Price's persuasive argument that members of the African Diaspora likely forged new social relationships by focusing on common cultural and cosmological assumptions and through the creation of innovative forms of expression in their new settings (Mintz and Price 1976: 6-7, 21). Among the most poignant common experience, Mintz and Price argue, was the Middle Passage, as it was this single experience that unified an otherwise diverse population (Mintz and Price 1976). These are among many possible meanings that ships could have had for these populations, and other meanings may have ties to broader realms of religious and cosmological belief systems (Raboteau 2004, Baxter in preparation).

Another intriguing element of these combined interpretations occurs in the perpetuation of symbols over time. Symbols relating to origin stories often persist across generations long after the actual stories associated with the images are gone (Basso 1996). What is left, however, is a strong symbol of cultural identity that extends into the distant past. It is worth noting that in the early 1970s an American from New York started a Boy Scout troop on San Salvador. Fifteen boys were given markers and paper and given the opportunity to draw. All 15 drew ships, and only ships. None of them could say why, and when asked they said, "that's just what you draw". (Donald and Kathy Gerace personal communication 2006).

Answering the "Why" Part 2: Ships in Place: Transgression and Appropriation

Another element of rock art analysis includes a consideration of rock art within the context of landscape (Chippendale and Nash 2004). The association between the images and the physical environment, both natural and cultural, often allows archaeologists to move interpretations beyond the meaning of individual elements to how images gained meaning in the context of landscape (Wilson and David 2001, Quinlan 2007).

The location of the ship graffiti at sites on San Salvador is not consistent, but it does suggest that artists and communities were acting selectively when choosing where to make their artwork. At Polly Hill and Prospect Hill entire buildings were not selected as locations for image placement, while others had an abundance of images. At all four plantations, images were not spaced evenly around the structures on which they were found, but instead generally occur in clusters where images were placed in close proximity to one another. Less than 1% of the ship images occur outside of these clusters. As all building surfaces are equally suitable for drawing ship graffiti from a technical standpoint, these differences in placement must be attributed to other factors.

The tendency of images to cluster suggests certain locations were important and preferred over others. Window and door space is much smaller than large exterior or interior walls and a total of 1% of images were found here. Fifty

three percent of images were found on building exteriors and 46% were found on interior walls. As a general trend this is not very compelling, but there are patterns that are not suggested by this qualitative summation.

First, graffiti tends to occur in areas with limited viewsheds: the areas where the largest panels or clusters were created are areas that offer some degree of privacy and are not easily overlooked. Some smaller clusters of 3-5 images appear in more open areas, but the largest clusters of images are all in building interiors or, in the case of the storage building at Fortune Hill, along a large solid wall that blocks the area from view from the remainder of the plantation yard. Privacy seems to have been important, at least for the areas where images concentrate in the largest numbers, and in the areas where all the high quality images appear. No high quality images appear in small clusters or in areas that are highly visible. This could mean that not everyone present at a site was supposed to engage in the drawing and viewing of graffiti, but with such small populations and with evidence for wide community participation this emphasis on privacy may suggest that areas where ship graffiti was drawn and viewed were to be set apart from the spaces of daily life and activity.

There also seems to be an emphasis on entrances/exits and openings to doorways as well as the interiors of structures. While only 1% of images occur in doorways and windows, the ratio of available area to graffiti presence (not calculated) would be relatively quite high. Nearly half of the graffiti is concentrated on interior walls. Of the exterior graffiti, 80% of these images are directly adjacent to doors and windows.

There also may be a preference to place graffiti on buildings associated with the planter family rather than on slave dwellings. Only one image is found on a slave dwelling on San Salvador and the remainder are found on buildings that would have been associated with the planter family.

These choices of image placement is also characteristic of the placement of images as described in Turner's (2004) survey of images from across the archipelago. Placing images predominantly on the interior walls and in and around entrance/egresses to structures may represent the symbolic appropriation of a landscape designed by white planters by an African-derived population who were left to occupy the site. The landscape created by planters at Bahamian plantations emphasized the social inequality between slaves and owners and reinforced the association of slaves with property (Baxter and Burton 2007). At this time, slaves would have had very different access to and experiences of the plantation landscape. Upon planter abandonment, African-derived populations, both enslaved and emancipated, were able to exert control over the landscape and imbue it with a new set of meanings. Marking planter-owned structures with cultural symbols and making them spaces to transmit cultural knowledge would have altered their meaning for a community creating its own origins in a particular place.

CONCLUSIONS

The archaeological study of ship graffiti is an exercise in uncertainty. Careful documentation of images and a consideration for methodological limitations combined with theoretical insights from rock art studies and particularistic historical information from documentary and archaeological sources can bring us closer to understanding the creation and meaning of these images. Undoubtedly, ship images meant different things to each individual, were interpreted differently in local communities, and provided a sense of unity among a widespread diasporic community in the Bahamas. The practice of creating, copying, and viewing these images was undoubtedly an important part of early community life on San Salvador.

It would be foolish to discount these images simply because a concrete and certain interpretation cannot be obtained. Unlike the broken ceramic vessels and glass bottles that provisioned people with their daily needs, these ship images provide a rare glimpse into the social and symbolic worlds of people who are not represented in the documentary record. Images of ships may be ambiguous, but they were certainly important to their creators and provide an engaging platform to

contemplate the lives of 19th century residents of San Salvador in all of their complexity.

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