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A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF SAN SALVADOR'S PLANTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Archaeologists and historians often study plantations as a particular type of site, and it is assumed that all plantations share some fundamental characteristics. Research has shown, however, that plantations do not represent a homogenous category, but rather are characterized by their diversity in social, economic, and material organization. From 2004-2010 DePaul University undertook excavations at three different plantation sites on San Salvador: Polly Hill, Kerr Mount, and Prospect Hill. During the course of those seasons, artifacts from Kathy Gerace's work at Prospect Hill and Sandy Point were analyzed as well. There is a growing record of information from individual plantations on the island, but a comparative, synthetic approach towards plantation archaeology on San Salvador has not been undertaken since the 1970s. This work presents a comparison of artifact assemblages, and to a lesser degree, plantation architecture from these four plantation sites on the island. These plantations all had overlapping periods of occupation, and many have known historical connections. It is clear that certain historical circumstances affected all island residents, but the choices made by individual landowners determined other aspects of life. Integrating analyses from multiple plantation sites facilitates a greater understanding of the diverse community that existed on the island during the early 19th century, and allows a consideration of the broader social networks, tensions, and realities that characterized plantation life on San Salvador.

INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTS FOR COMPARISON

San Salvador Island was the location of numerous Loyalist land grants that changed hands with some frequency. Not all of these land grants resulted in the building of actual plantation infrastructure, but at least eight plantations were constructed on the island. The construction of buildings on San Salvador has continued since the plantations were initially established, with the same local materials being used exclusively for nearly 200 years. As such, former plantation landscapes change significantly over time, and it is essential that plantation period buildings be distinguished from later construction through a very careful review of the available evidence (e.g. Baxter and Burton 2006b). In other words, not every ruin or old building on San Salvador was initially created as part of a plantation landscape.

Many people have interpreted Bahamian plantations on San Salvador and other islands by comparing them to plantations elsewhere in the Caribbean and the Southeastern United States (Baxter and Burton 2007a). These types of comparisons have been used to make basic field determinations, such as building function, as well as broader interpretations such as social dynamics of plantation communities. For example, earlier work on San Salvador's plantations explicitly compared materials recovered at three sites: Sandy Point, Prospect Hill, and Fortune Hill (Gerace 1982, 1987). This comparative endeavor ultimately concluded that differences in artifacts and architecture among these three plantations reflected the relative wealth and prosperity of each owner: "In comparing the three plantations any differences seem to be the result of the varying wealth of the estate owners…" (Gerace 1987:20).

This interpretation drew on models that were popular in Historical Archaeology in the United States at the time. Since then, however, ideas in Historical Archaeology have shifted and a better historical understanding of the Bahamas has emerged that enables a more culturally situated interpretation of plantation communities. Given the interdisciplinary nature of this volume, I will focus primarily on the latter issue and present reasons why comparisons on San Salvador must be done in a more particularistic fashion.

It is perhaps obvious to state that the social, economic, and geographic conditions of the United States in the early 19th century were dramatically different from those in the Bahamas. It makes sense, therefore, that models for understanding plantation communities should not be taken from the former context and transplanted to the latter. There are three issues that can be highlighted to summarize some of the salient differences between these two geographic areas and to create a more nuanced basis for comparing plantations on a Bahamian Island.

Community Size and Composition

In the relatively crowded world of early 19th century America, issues of wealth and status were paramount, and many lines of difference were present in social society. Planters were able to distinguish themselves based on differences in property holdings and wealth, and were able to display those differences to a larger community using architecture and material goods. These planters were surrounded by a larger community of white Americans that also participated in consumption and display of goods, and infrastructures for their support and protection, such as militias and law enforcement were available in their local communities. These circumstances made the Southern U.S. a relatively secure setting in which social difference could be elaborated and allowed to flourish.

In the British Caribbean, plantations often had absentee owners who had agents operating their plantation enterprises on their behalf (Draper 2011). The remaining planters on the islands found themselves in a very small society of people who they considered their equal, and planters were outnumbered by enslaved peoples by very large numbers (Smith 2008). In these societies, social differences were primarily between the enslaved people and the slave owners, and the small population of slave holders had more of a reason to band together along that line of difference than emphasize distinctions in their own community (Smith 2008).

The Bahamas are no exception to this broader Caribbean type of plantation system, and in fact, the archipelagic nature of the Bahamas led to even greater isolation of planters on geographically distant islands (Craton and Saunders 1992, 1998, Burton 2006). The majority of planters on San Salvador abandoned their plantations very early in the plantation period for a life in Nassau and left their estates in the care of slave overseers. During this period, planter control over slaves on the island was tenuous (Craton and Saunders 1992) and planters and slave overseers socialized in a very small community (Burton 2006).

The use of material goods as displays of status requires an audience to receive those messages. Status competition requires a type of security where less pressing concerns of safety and survival are not paramount. It is unlikely, then, that the small, isolated community of planters on San Salvador were actively constructing social difference amongst themselves, although it is quite likely they would have used material goods to differentiate themselves from the enslaved peoples who were the majority population on the islands (Baxter and Burton 2006b).

Multiple Plantation Holdings

Another important factor in the comparison of plantation sites is where and how planters were investing resources. In the Southeastern United States, most planters had a single plantation and expansions involved the purchasing of additional lands in the region. Islands have finite quantities of land, and in the Bahamas expanding one's landholdings often included buying land on multiple islands. It is important to recognize that some plantations were secondary and even tertiary properties for an individual landowner, and not

every property would be developed and/or furnished in the same manner. The idea of any particular plantation representing the wealth of its owner becomes particularly problematic in these conditions.

For example, Nicholas Almgreeen was the owner of Polly Hill Plantation on San Salvador (Watlings Island), but it is unclear that he ever set foot on his lands there. His primary residence and plantation holdings in the Bahamas were in the Exumas, as noted in his will and death notice in 1792 (James 2011). "His will specified his wife to receive "four of the best negro slaves" and the rest of his belongings- household furniture, plates, linen, and wearing apparel. His plantations on Exuma and Watling Islands with the dwelling houses plantation tools, stock, and cattle were to be divided between his wife and four children. One-third was to go to his wife (with the provision that she forfeit if she remarries) and the other two-thirds to the children with the wife as sole executrix…" (James 2011:144). Arguably Almgreen's wealth was invested primarily in his residential plantation in Exuma, or at the least was divided between the two properties. This division of wealth among landholdings makes it difficult to interpret any one plantation as representing the wealth or status of a plantation owner.

Market Access and the Availability of Goods

A final factor affecting comparisons is the access to markets and the ability of planters to acquire material goods. In the Southeastern United States, planters had many options for ordering, purchasing, and receiving materials to construct and furnish their homes. Even in Nassau, residents had direct access to a marketplace with multiple merchants, stores, and shipping companies to provide them with goods (Wilkie and Farnsworth 2005). Outer islands, such as San Salvador, did not have a local market place and provisioning an out island plantation was a very different endeavor. Paul Farnsworth conducted research on Crooked and Aklins Islands and found that planters there were receiving "mixed crates" of ceramics that were essentially the left over place settings held by merchants in Nassau (Farnsworth 1997). Choices were limited, or were made by someone in Nassau rather than the recipient on the outer island. As a result, plantations on outer islands were not receiving goods in the same manner as households on New Providence where direct access to merchants was possible.

On San Salvador, in the mid-19th century, the Farquharson family used family connections in Nassau to have goods shipped to San Salvador. Once these goods arrived on the island they were sold and bartered to other island residents, distributing the goods across the island (Burton 2006). Limited choice and no direct market access meant that goods were coming to San Salvador in larger, mixed lots that did not allow individual owners the same agency in choosing the goods with which they furnished their plantations. This factor further complicates associating artifacts found at a particular plantation with the wealth or status of the owner.

Given these factors, it is necessary to reconsider the artifacts and architecture of San Salvador's plantations. Reassessing the archaeological evidence considering local community dynamics, the split wealth of many landowners, and the restricted access to a full range of consumer goods is an important change in how comparisons are constructed. These ideas are enacted using archaeological evidence from four plantations: Sandy Point, Prospect Hill, Polly Hill, and Kerr Mount.

THE AVAILABILE DATA: A SUMMARY AND CONTEXT

Considering the specific historical circumstances of the Bahamas and the planters on San Salvador is one aspect of creating effective comparisons among plantation sites on the island. The other main consideration is the nature of the available evidence.

Polly Hill (Baxter and Burton 2005a, 2005b, 2006a 2006b, 2007b, 2007c; Baxter, Burton and Frye 2009) Prospect Hill (Baxter and Burton 2011, 2012; Burton 2013), and Kerr Mount (Baxter and Burton 2009; Baxter, Burton and Wenkemann 2009) were investigated using the same methods to enable effective comparisons

(Figure 1). These projects all used a combination of systematic surface transects, shovel probes and controlled 1x1 meter excavation units around standing architecture to recover artifacts. It is possible for these sites to calculate a ratio of surface artifacts recovered to area surveyed and the ratio of artifacts recovered to the cubic area of soil excavated.

This same data is not available for earlier investigations on the island (Gerace 1982, 1987). Without such data to establish ratios, quantitative comparisons among sites are impossible, as one cannot discern whether larger quantities of artifacts correlate to the amount of area investigated or an actual difference in artifact assemblages.

Figure 1: Comparing artifact assemblages among plantations requires selecting comparable contexts from each site. Top: Students screening for finds at Kerr Mount in 2008. Bottom: Students conducting shovel probes at Polly Hill 2005

The ability to use quantitative analyses is further restricted because accessible areas of plantation sites have been subject to looting and collecting by site visitors (Baxter 2013). The undocumented removal of artifacts at these sites has created a bias in the materials available for study, and generally diminished the quantities of artifacts in many parts of sites frequented by students and tourists.

While it is impossible to conduct a reliable quantitative comparison among plantations, a more qualitative comparative analysis is possible. Susan Wiard, former laboratory supervisor at Colonial Williamsburg, identified all artifacts for this study. In addition to analyzing the materials from the DePaul excavations, she conducted a reanalysis of artifacts found by Kathy Gerace at Prospect Hill and Sandy Point from 1973-1976. Fortune Hill was eliminated from this study because the majority of artifacts recovered were from a trash disposal feature at the base of a cistern (known as the privy or latrine) making the data incomparable to the surface and sheet refuse that comprise the data from other plantations. Further, most of the material from Fortune Hill is curated in Nassau with the Antiquities Museums and Monuments Corporation and not on San Salvador. While quantitative comparisons are not possible, it is useful to summarize the materials found by basic material type to offer a general characterization of each plantation assemblage (Table 1).

Artifact Type	Prospect Hill	Polly Hill	Kerr Mount	Sandy Point
Glass	848 (46%)	720 (29%)	373 (62.7%)	1236 (51.4%)
Ceramic	584 (32%)	986 (36%)	129 (21.7%)	363 (15%)
Metal	94 (%%)	137 (5.95%)	3 (0.5%)	155 (6%)
Plastic	25 (1.5%)	7 (0.03%)	0	0
Shell	254 (14%)	799 (29%)	89 (15%)	10 (.05%)
Fauna	23 (1.5%)	3 (0.02%)	1 (0.2%)	662 (27.55%)
Total	1828	2722	595	2426

Table 1: Summary data for the four plantations compared in this paper. Each artifact type is presented as a count and then percentage.

AN ISLAND WIDE ECONOMY

A presence-absence analysis was done for the ceramic and glass types found at these four plantations. Ceramics and glass are the easiest to categorize by date and type due to visual distinctiveness, and offer a more robust way to evaluate decision making by consumers than objects like hardware or the remains locally procured comestible items (Mullins 2011). The results of this analysis can be found in Table 2. What is striking about this analysis is the high degree of overlap in the types of artifacts present among plantations.

In the case of glassware, it was possible to identify the remains of wine and gin bottles at all plantations, and the presence of amber glass at all four plantations suggests beer consumption at each as well (Figure 2). While remains are fragmentary, the overwhelming majority of glass in the assemblage is from alcoholic beverage consumption, suggesting that drinking was a regular pastime at all plantations (see Smith 2008). Other bottle types include fragments of non-alcoholic beverage bottles, and medicine bottles, which appear at all four plantations as well. One variation in the assemblages is the absence of window and plate glass at all plantations except for Polly Hill, where these items were likely brought in as part of a very intensive late occupation of the site in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Baxter and Burton 2006b, 2007c; Baxter, Burton and Frye 2009). The other variation is the absence of white, blue, and manganese solarized glass types at Kerr Mount Plantation. Kerr Mount was abandoned entirely by its owner early in the plantation period, and only glass types that would have been present in the very late 18th and early 19th centuries were recovered (Baxter, Burton and Wekenmann 2009). In other words, the two notable variations in the glass assemblages are due to the particular histories of individual plantations, not variations in wealth or status display necessarily.

In terms of ceramics, there is also a high degree of overlap among plantations (Table 2). In general, plantations had the same ware types, which were decorated using the same techniques and in the same color patterns (Figure 2): a type of continuity that is not typical of US mainland plantations.

Figure 2: Top: Gin and wine bottles from Sandy Point Plantation. Bottom: Ceramics from Prospect Hill Plantation.

Widespread similarities in food preparation and storage wares is to be expected, as these types of ceramics were relegated to kitchen use and were not part of dining activities or social display (Table 2). The extensive overlap in food consumption wares, or wares that would have been used in the dining area of homes, is more surprising. Typically, these wares with their distinctive decorations and known variations in value would have been used to differentiate social

standings of households, as suggested in Gerace's (1982, 1987) original analyses. However, in this case, rather than particular wares and decorative types being associated with different plantations, the same types of wares and decorative motifs are found at most or all plantations.

This pattern also suggests replenishment of household goods among the longer-occupied plantations of Polly Hill, Prospect Hill, and Sandy Point with the earliest ware types (Creamware) being replaced by newer ware types (Pearlware) and again by even newer ware types (Whiteware, Ironstone, Yelloware). As with glassware, the ceramics at Kerr Mount reflect the limited time period of occupation at the site, with later wares (whiteware, yellowware) being absent or minimally represented in the assemblage.

This pattern of distribution further suggests that wares were coming to San Salvador in a similar manner to those described by Farnsworth (1999) for other out island plantations, with 'mixed crates' of wares arriving and being distributed among plantations. This pattern could also reflect movement of peoples among plantations, particularly among members of the enslaved population, where goods would move with individuals from household to household. Certainly, by the late 19th century, historical records from San Salvador indicate a single individual, Christina Farquharson, was procuring goods through family connections in Nassau and then selling those goods to others on the island (Burton 2006). Archaeologically these can be seen in very specific overlaps, such as identical chamber pots being used at Polly Hill, Prospect Hill, and Sandy Point.

THE OCCASSIONAL OUTLIERS

Many of the differences in plantation assemblages may be explained by particular historical circumstances of an individual plantation or planter. Others, however, are not readily explained by the occupational history of a site. These include unique types of stoneware at Polly Hill and Prospect Hill (Table 2), the presence of soft paste Porcelain, Mocha decorated Pearlware, and tin enamel glaze at Polly Hill, the presence of sponge decorated whiteware and graniteware at Prospect Hill and a piece of lead glaze Jackfield at Kerr Mount (Table 2). Each of these ware types is represented by less than five sherds, and in some instances by a single sherd. It is likely, therefore, that these unique items were not part of large sets of objects, but rather individual items brought to San Salvador by each planter family. There are several more likely explanations for these outliers than a major effort to display class, wealth, and status among plantation households. These include the following possibilities: (1) An object may have been an heirloom or family possession, (2) An object may have met a particular need or requirement of a household that was unique to that household, (3) The object may reflect the place of origin or cultural heritage of the owner, or (4) The object was simply something that an individual liked or preferred over another.

These types of individual preferences or needs can be seen in the personal items found at each plantation. A part of a pair of sunglasses was found at Polly Hill. Amber beads were found at Kerr Mount. A bottle of Vin de Bugeaud was found at Prospect Hill: a mixture (according to the Western Medical Reporter Volume 4 Issue 5 1892) of wild Bolivian Cinchona, Spanish Wine and cocoa powder that claimed to cure anemia, chlorosis, intermittent fever, chronic diarrhea, and gastralgia, and, "to combat constitutional or accidental debility no matter from what cause arising." At Sandy Point there were several decorated shell buttons, and a bottle of J. Wray and Nephew rum from Jamaica. These types of small variations more likely reflect likes/dislikes, history/heritage, and perhaps simple serendipity in acquisition than a systematic differentiation of households through consumer goods.

A FEW NOTES ABOUT ARCHITECTURE

It should be noted that this type of personal preference also can be seen in the design choices of each individual planter when developing their plantation architecture and landscape. Originally, Gerace (1987) included the size of individual planter residences or main houses as a

Figure 3: Differences in plantation architecture are notable, and reflect the personal preferences of each planter family. Bottom: the manor house at Polly Hill. Top: The manor house at Prospect Hill

variable in determining the relative wealth and status of owners.

While these residences do vary in size, what is notable is how distinct each residence is in design (Figure 3). For example, Polly Hill had a main house built of tabby, with a large patio at ground level, a shallow basement, and a large upper story as living quarters (Baxter and Burton 2006b). The main house at Sandy Point had a large storage and work area at the ground level, and a living area on the second floor fronted by a large raised veranda (Gerace 1987). Kerr Mount's main house appears to be a combination work building and residence with multiple functions contained in a single structure (Baxter, Burton and Wenkemann 2009). And, Prospect Hill's main house has a distinctly Scottish building design, and an exterior treatment that was used on all plantation buildings to create the look of a unified, Scottish farmstead (Baxter and Burton 2011).

In short, these main houses actually vary very little in size, but do reflect highly individuated designs. This variation suggests that each planter selected a building design that met his needs, circumstances, and wants rather than erecting a structure to make a statement about wealth or status.

CONCLUSIONS: INTERPRETING DIFFERENCE

Comparing plantations on a remote island is a very different endeavor than comparing plantations on the U.S. mainland, where many different channels for the acquisition of goods existed and a more stable social environment for white slave owners was present. The Bahamas varies from U.S. mainland models of plantation ownership due to a lack of access to diverse markets, the small planter population, and the tendency for owners to have land and property holdings on multiple islands. These factors all combine to make it impractical to interpret wealth or status using the archaeological remains of out island plantations without a great deal of context, which is not available for San Salvador.

Methodological challenges and the heavy looting of plantation sites compound these issues, which further limits comparative possibilities. A qualitative analysis of archaeological materials in the context of historical documentation and architectural evidence suggests little social differentiation along the lines of wealth or status among San Salvador's planters. Instead, small differences in artifact assemblages suggest that each planter family exercised personal preference and/or expressed family history through certain choices in consumer goods. In addition to indicating a highly connected island-wide economy, this analysis serves as a cautionary tale for directly importing ideas about plantations, slavery, and 19th century community life from the mainland US or elsewhere in the Caribbean into Bahamian contexts.

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