

PUERTO RICO AND THE CARIBBEAN
PRE-SALADOID "CROSSHATCH CONNECTION"

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In 1986, Punta Candelero, a new archaeological site, was discovered in the vicinity of a private resort center on the eastern coast of Puerto Rico. Following conversations with the owners, the Turabo University Museum began limited excavations of several test pits. It was our intention to determine the nature, extent and the importance of the site.

Preliminary results indicate the presence in Punta Candelero of a large aboriginal habitational site, representative of a single cultural component. Its principal characteristic is the exclusive presence of good quality plain pottery sherds, some of them decorated with fine zoned incised crosshatched designs (Figs. 1, 2, and 3).

The majority of the fragments are part of simple hemispherical vessel forms with flat bases. There are also segments of jars with rod-shaped vertical handles (Fig. 4), effigy vessels, cylindrical burners, inhalatory bowls, cassava griddles and numerous zoomorphic head lugs (Figs. 1 and 5).

Punta Candelero site seems to be unique, since no white-on-red or polychrome designs, nor inverted bell-shaped forms, three diagnostic traits of the Early Saladoid Hacienda Grande Style (Rouse 1964; Alegría 1965), are present in our samples.

Pertaining to non-ceramic aspects of the site, there are miniature amulets carved on semiprecious stones (Fig. 6), cylindrical microbeads (Fig. 7), mother-of-pearl ornaments, lithic debitage, and beads and amulets in most stages of elaboration.

Faunistic remains of the site mostly belong to land crabs (*Cardisoma guanhumí*), reef mollusks (*Cittarium pica*) and fishes, small reptiles, dogs, and "hutia" of the *Heteropsomys insulans* species. In addition, we located at least one human burial that will be excavated during our next field season.

In spite of the limited testing, the results show a surprising similarity between Punta Candelero and La Hueca findings on the southern coast of the island of Vieques. The discovery of La Hueca was made public through the excavations and writings of archaeologists Luis Chanlatte and Yvonne Narganes of the University of Puerto Rico Museum. The apparently pre-Saladoid cultural component of La Hueca has been named in the literature as: La Hueca Cultural Complex, Agro I Migration, Guapoid Ceramic Tradition and Pre-Saladoid Ceramic Horizon, among others. It has been differentiated from the main Saladoid tradition in terms of its basic cultural elements, migration routes and ancestral origins by Chanlatte and Narganes (1980, 1983, 1984), and other earlier authors, such as Lathrop (1969, 1970).

According to a charcoal sample, the dating associated to artifacts from Punta Candelero is 70 ± 80 B.C. (I-14,978). A shell sample, on the other hand, indicates an earlier date of 170 ± 80 B.C. (I 14,979).

We know of at least four early Before Christ datings obtained in Puerto Rico which may be also related to fine crosshatched pottery. In 1979 two samples were taken from the Convento site in Old San Juan, on the north coast of the island. This has been defined as an Early Saladoid site with a strong, yet minor, crosshatched component (Pons Alegría 1973). A shell sample indicated a date of 270 ± 80 B.C., while a charcoal sample registered 140 ± 80 B.C. A third charcoal sample obtained previously by Ricardo Alegría (pers. comm. 1980) in another section of the site showed a date of 90 ± 80 B.C. Finally, a date of 110 ± 80 B.C. was obtained by Peter Roe in 1985 from a section of the Hacienda Grande site, northeastern Puerto Rico, where the crosshatched component seemed highly present.

Initially, the dating of the Convento site findings, because of its antiquity, was taken with caution. But with a combined total of six dates, which proved to be consistent with the first ones, the cultural and chronological association seemed to gather validity. However, the dates obtained by Chanlatte and Narganes (1983) from the closely related La Hueca deposits on nearby Vieques Island do not reach the early time period registered by those from the island of Puerto Rico.

In conclusion, the arrival of the first agriculturalists and pottery makers to the Caribbean islands seems to have taken place several centuries prior to what previous archaeological investigations have shown. New probable migratory routes, parallel or alternate, such as the one suggested by Zucchi (1984), between the Venezuelan coast and the Greater Antilles, should be considered.

Early ceramic dates from Puerto Rico are closely related to the cross-hatched cultural component described in this paper. This component presents differences, as far as cultural production, technology and food procurement strategies, if compared to the principal and better documented Saladoid migration. In both situations, the incursion to the Caribbean islands seems to have propitiated a cultural and social development superior to the level reached by those groups on the continent.

Also, the presence of mutually exclusive cultural elements between sites, and "hybrid" or "plural" styles (Rouse 1985) within the same site, is a possible indicator of social interactions that have not been thoroughly studied to this moment. The phenomena previously suggested could have had an effect on the later cultural developments of the Lesser and Greater Antilles.

Punta Candelero site seems to be part of a vast, yet understudied, pre-Saladoid "Crosshatch Connection" throughout the Caribbean. Other related sites are Río Guapo, on the north-central coast of Venezuela; Cedros on Trinidad; Morel I on Guadeloupe; the island of Montserrat; Prosperity on St. Croix; and La Hueca on Vieques.

The ancestral origins of this pre-Saladoid cultural component appear to have extended thousands of years in time, and thousands of kilometers in space. Although more research should be conducted, a tentative definition of a Crosshatch Cultural Horizon, ranging between the tropical regions of the Upper Amazon Basin, Western Surinam and the north-eastern Caribbean islands, should be considered.

With these and other questions in mind, we expect to continue our research in Punta Candelero, Puerto Rico, and other sites in the Caribbean region.

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Figure 1. Pottery sherds, some of which feature fine zoned incised crosshatched designs.

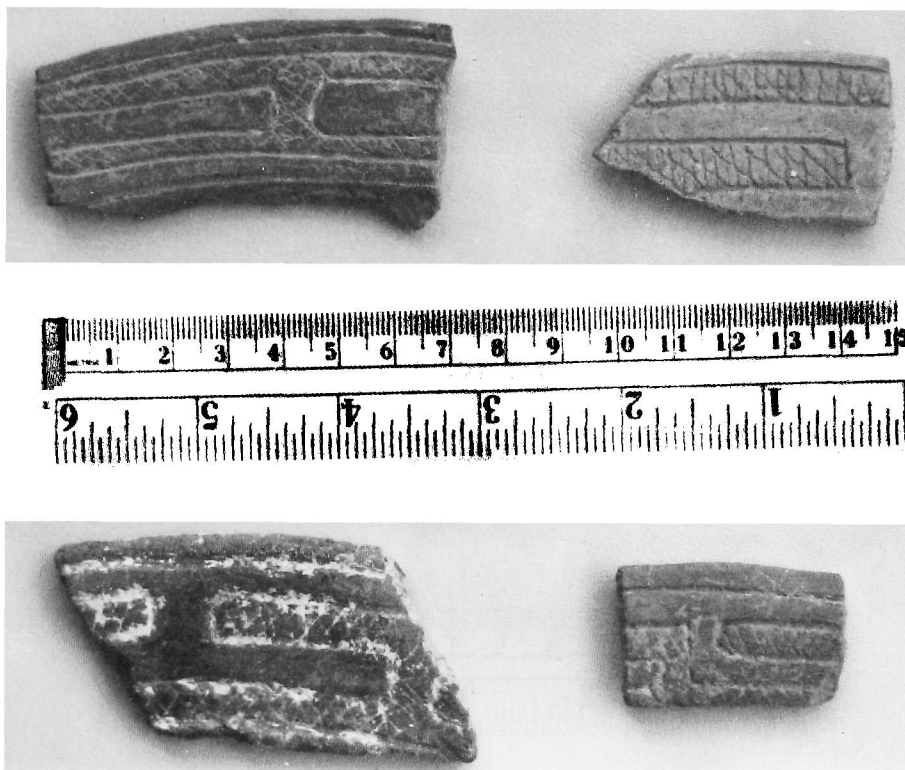


Figure 2. Sherds decorated with fine zoned incised crosshatched designs.



Figure 3. Sherds decorated with fine zoned incised crosshatched designs.



Figure 4. Segments of jars with rod-shaped vertical handles.

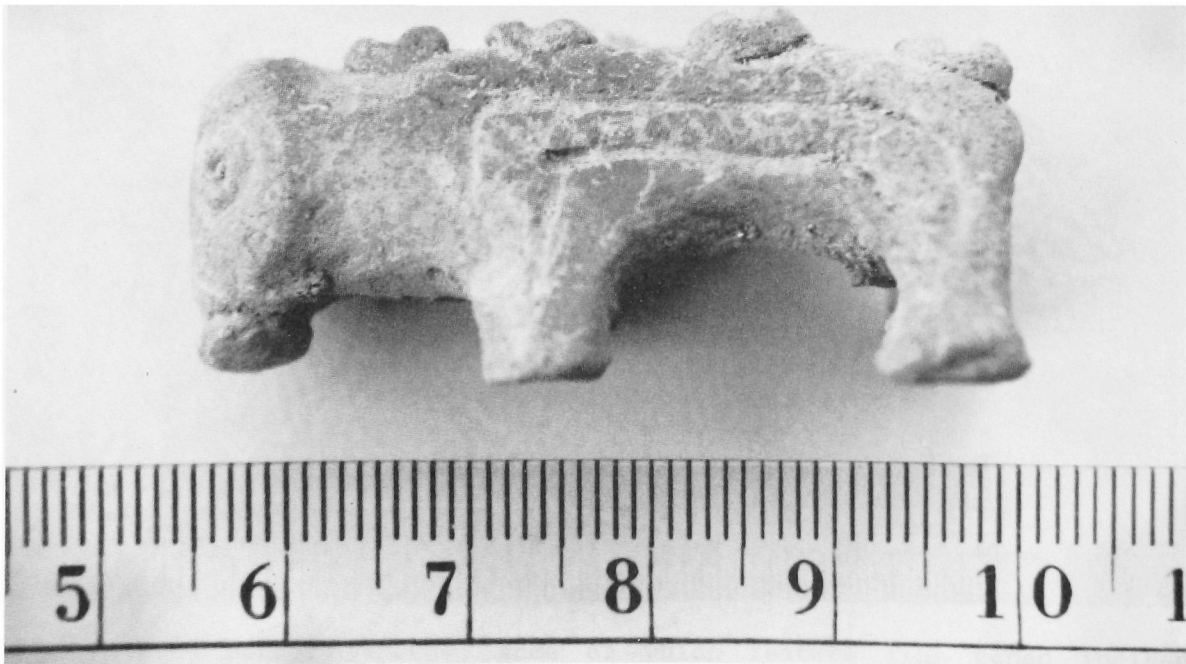


Figure 5. Zoomorphic head lugs.



Figure 6. Carved semiprecious stones.



Figure 7. Cylindrical microbeads.

