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Native Cuban peoples at the time of European contact are well represented in ethnohistoric accounts and in archaeological investigations. The existence of the Guanahatabeys, purported hunter-gatherers in the westernmost region of Cuba, has been called into question by suggesting that their legacy is the result of inaccurate Spanish documentation and perhaps irresponsible interpretation of the archaeological record. A brief re-examination of the ethnohistoric, archaeological, and linguistic data reopens the question of the existence of the Guanahatabeys. Especially, empirical analysis of the distribution of late prehistoric Ceramic-Age sites supports the conclusion that ceramic-using peoples did not occupy westernmost Cuba at the time of contact, despite other evidence that the region was inhabited.



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Las poblaciones nativas de Cuba en la época de contacto europeo están bien representadas en las versiones etnohistóricas y en las investigaciones arqueológicas. La existencia de los Guanahatabeyes, supuestos grupos de cazadores en la región más occidental de Cuba, ha sido cuestionada sugiriendo que su legado es el resultado de una documentación española inexacta y quizá una interpretación irresponsable del registro arqueológico. Una breve reexaminación de los datos etnohistóricos, arqueológicos y lingüísticos vuelve a abrir la cuestión de la existencia de los Guanahatabeyes. En especial, el análisis empírico de la distribución de los yacimientos prehistóricos tardíos de la Era Cerámica apoya la conclusión de que pueblos que usaban cerámica no habitaron la parte más occidental de Cuba en la época de contacto, a pesar de otra evidencia que señala que la región fue habitada.

Le peuple indigène cubain lors de ses relations avec les Européens était bien représenté dans les récits ethno-historiques et dans les enquêtes archéologiques. L'existence des Guanahatabeys, des soi-disant groupes de chasseurs de la région la plus à l'Ouest de Cuba, a été mis en doute ; on a insinué que leur héritage est le résultat d'une documentation espagnole inappropriée et peut-être d'une interprétation irréfléchie d'archive archéologique. Un réexamen bref des données ethno-historique, archéologique et linguistique revient sur la question de l'existence des Guanahatabeys. Surtout lorsque l'analyse empirique de la distribution des derniers sites préhistoriques de la période céramique soutient la conclusion que le peuple qui utilisait la céramique n'occupait pas la région la plus à l'Ouest de Cuba au moment du contact en dépit du fait qu'elle était habitée.

Introduction

Ethnohistoric accounts in the Caribbean both hinder and benefit archaeologists, and questioning their validity is a necessary enterprise. One case in which the relationship between the archaeological record and the ethnohistoric accounts has been called into question is that of the Guanahatabey, purported aceramic hunter-gatherers that existed in the westernmost region of Cuba. They are mentioned in numerous accounts but their existence was challenged by suggesting that their legacy is the result of inaccurate Spanish documentation and an inappropriate reliance on the ethnohistoric accounts by archaeologists (Keegan 1989). This paper re-examines the Guanahatabey in light of new linguistic and archaeological data, suggesting that it is too early to close the book on the *preagroalfarero* peoples that inhabited western Cuba.

The Ethnonym: “Guanahatabey”

In Caribbean archaeology, specialists often refer to linguistic families, ethnic groups, and archaeologically defined cultures as if they were interchangeable units. These terms allude to specific models or characteristics and utilizing them imprudently dilutes archaeological interpretation. When considering the additional point that using a specific term in archaeology often reflects a position

within a debate, the interchangeable nature of linguistic families, archaeological units, and ethnonyms seems even more inappropriate. In order to avoid unnecessary imprecision, the names of ethnonyms and linguistic families should be more carefully invoked and archaeological units should be designated with ethnically neutral terms. To be truly productive, any term with an existing connotation in another domain should be avoided.

What is meant by the ethnonym “Guanahatabey” must be clarified because scholars have repeatedly used different terms to refer to the same concept or idea. For example, the Guanahatabey of Pichardo (1945) and Coscolluela (1946) equate to the Ciboney of Harrington (1921) and Osgood (1942). In both cases, the ethnonyms refer to archaic hunter-gathering populations identified in the archaeological record. According to ethnohistoric documents, however, the ethnic Ciboney were ceramic agriculturalists, presenting a contradiction in the nomenclature (Las Casas 1951). As utilized in this presentation, the term “Guanahatabey” specifically refers to an ethnic group of purported nonagricultural, nonceramic, hunter-gatherers inhabiting western Cuba at the time of contact.

There are three well-known ethnohistoric references to the Guanahatabey. The first reference refers to an encounter during Columbus’ 2nd voyage in which his Lucayan interpreter could not communicate with a man in the Cabo San Antonio region of western Cuba, presumably due to a language barrier. The second reference is contained in a 1514 letter to the King in which Diego Velazquez mentions a group of Indians living in the manner of savages in westernmost Cuba, existing without houses, villages, or agricultural fields and subsisting on nothing more than hunted game, turtles, and fish. The third reference was made by Las Casas, who asserted that there were Indians living like savages at the Cape of Cuba. He goes on to state that they have no relation with other Indians of the island, and that rather than houses, they live in caves, which they do not leave except to fish.

Ethnohistory and Linguistics

Although the ethnohistoric accounts should be taken with the proverbial grain of salt, neither should they be discarded entirely. The suggestion that the region was never explored may not be true. There was an expedition in 1513 from Xagua to La Habana in which Pánfilo de Narvaez went further west than his companions, leading him presumably into modern-day Pinar del Rio (Wright 1916) (see Figure 1). The account of this expedition, which completed the conquest of Cuba, has been lost or misplaced. There is a possibility that an archival search would yield information. Discounting similar accounts as retellings of Velazquez’s letter is also unwise because similarity does not necessarily equal mimicry. Las Casas, for example, was living in Canareo near present-day Cienfuegos, during 1513–1515. Although the report is not first-hand, the natives knew enough of the neighboring group to locate them geographically and provide the exoethnonym by which they are known. Additionally, the scattered 17th century references referring to groups living in western Cuba who speak a different language (Documentos inéditos) are of utmost importance.

A recent linguistic analysis of the Pre-Columbian Antilles by Granberry and Vescelius (2004) presents evidence that there were seven extant speech communities at contact: Ciboney Taíno, Macorix, Ciguayo, Guanahatabey, Classic Taíno, Kaliphuna or Eyeri, and Karina Carib. Since written accounts do not exist for all of these speech communities, as is the case with the Guanahatabey, the distinctions are based on ethnographic texts and toponymic analysis. The Guanahatabey and Macorix speech communities are identified as Waroid, a distinction supported by some Cuban scholars (Guarch 1973). Other Cubans have assumed that the Guanahatabey language was simply non-Arawakan (Pichardo 1945) or that all Cuban natives spoke Arawakan languages (Coscolluela 1946, Valdés 2004).



The Waroid Classification of the Guanahatabey

The Waroid classification of the Guanahatabey language was based on information gleaned from the ethnohistoric accounts and the presence of non-Arawakan toponyms in Cuba. Typical Arawakan toponyms are named in reference to a central point or place. In contrast, Waroid toponyms instead refer to specific “geographical or zoogeographical” characteristics of a place, a practice still present among modern-day Warao speakers. Waroid-like toponyms have been found in western Cuba. Additionally, some morphemes of the toponyms may have possible correlates in modern-day Warao spoken in the Orinoco River Delta (Granberry and Vescelius 2004).

The distinction made between Ciboney Taíno and Classic Taíno must also briefly be discussed. These two speech communities can be loosely correlated to, respectively, the Western Taíno and the Classic Taíno as defined by Rouse (1992). Ciboney Taíno is unique because it is Arawakan with a Waroid component, making it a dialect of Classic Taíno in the true sense of the word. Based on this classification, prehistoric speech communities would have existed as follows: a purely Waroid language in Western Cuba, an Arawakan language with a Waroid influence from the Habana to the Santiago province, and an Arawakan language with no Waroid influence in the easternmost province of Guantánamo.

This classification requires an extant Waroid-speaking population when Arawakan groups began infiltrating the Antilles. These Waroid speakers would have interacted with Arawakan speakers or responded to their migration in some way. They could have been forced into marginal positions as the migration advanced or assimilated into Arawakan speech communities. Both of these situations may be represented in the gradient of Warao influence evident in Cuba, as well as in the so-called marginal positions of the Macorix speech communities in Hispaniola & the ethnic Guanahatabey in Cuba (Granberry and Vescelius 2004). These should have archaeological correlates.

Archaeological Correlates

Granberry and Vescelius suggest that Ortoiroid peoples speaking a Waroid language were pushed further into the Greater Antilles by migrating Saladoid peoples. Although the Ortoiroid-Casimiroid frontier occurred across the Mona Passage and direct interaction with Ortoiroid peoples is not evidenced in Cuba, the artifactual similarity between Cuban Archaic-Age cultures and Ortoiroid peoples has not gone unnoticed. In their treatment of this issue, Cuban archaeologists have considered a number of possibilities. They accept that migrants carrying other traditions interacted with extant Archaic-Age cultures, but which tradition or traditions is debated. Migrants carrying an Ortoiroid-like Lithic tradition interacting with extant Archaic-Age peoples in Cuba is a possibility but based on similarities in the shell industry in the forms of gubias, picks, points, and plates, a Manicuaroid influence has been accepted by some (Alonso 1995) and noted but disregarded by others (Tabío 1951). Additionally, based on the presence of gubia-like tools, the possibility of a Florida connection has been promoted but is considered entirely implausible in this paper.

Attempts to link the historic Guanahatabey with archaeological cultures have been numerous but less than fruitful since their material culture was never described. Their archaeological association has been based on whether the Guanahatabey are considered to be the terminal expression of an immediately preceding culture or whether they are considered to be the remnant population of Cuba's initial inhabitants. They have been associated with many Archaic-Age cultures defined in Cuba, including the Ciboney aspect Cayo Redondo and the Ciboney aspect Guayabo Blanco, which are both encompassed within the Redondan Casimiroid subseries under Rouse's systematics (Rouse 1992). According to the systematics utilized by Cuban archaeologists, the Guanahatabey have most recently been associated with the *preagroalfarero* Cultural Variant Guanahacabibes, belonging to the



pescadores-recolectores phase (Alonso 1995). This set of systematics was solidified by Guarch in 1990 and is just now being productively applied to archaeological investigation, allowing time-space relationships to be truly fleshed out. At times it seems to be slightly unclear whether new distinctions are being made or whether existing cultures are being reorganized and renamed, but Cuban archaeology is moving towards a synthesis that previously did not exist.

Distributional Data

The Archaeological Census of Cuba completed in 1995, resulted in a sample of 975 archaeological sites throughout the island and provided the data analyzed here. Archaeological investigation has continued and thus this sample is slightly outdated, but the 1995 census may represent a substantial amount of the prehistoric archaeology conducted in Cuba.

Radiocarbon dates in Pinar del Rio range from around 1050 BC (Dacal 1970; Tabio y Rey 1984) to a slightly sketchy date of 1300 AD (Granberry and Vescelius 2004), possibly placing *preagroalfarero* peoples in Cuba within 200 years of contact. More sites will have to be reliably dated or have unmistakable associations with contact-era goods, which will be difficult since western Cuba wasn't subject to the rapid Spanish settlement seen in other areas. Aligning the historic Guanahatabey with an archaeological culture is, for the moment, implausible, although a number of statements can be made about the *preagroalfarero* peoples and their presence in western Cuba.

First, there are *preagroalfarero* sites through the island but there is a clear concentration in western Cuba, especially in Pinar del Rio (see Figure 2). This is not due to a survey bias, as evidenced by comparing the number of *preagroalfarero* sites in each municipality to the total number of sites in the province. These concentrations are found in coastal municipalities, but the sites themselves are typically located further inland and are often in or near caves. Other areas like the Holguin province also have high concentrations, but their numbers are not comparable to the high density of sites in Pinar del Rio (see Figure 3).

Secondly, the distribution of *preagroalfarero* sites differs from the distribution of *agroalfarero* sites, which are found from the Habana province to the eastern tip. The important factor is that no *agroalfarero* sites are found in Pinar del Rio, reflecting the limit of agriculture in Cuba. There appear to be areas of concentration around present-day Cienfuegos, Banes, and Santiago (see Figure 4). Again, these high densities reflect the actual distribution of *agroalfarero* sites and the same concentrations appear when comparing the number of *agroalfarero* sites in each municipality with the total number of sites in the province, controlling for a survey bias (see Figure 5). The conceptual map of the so-called "Neolithic" or agricultural societies (Domínguez et. al 1994) can be compared with the map showing the actual distribution of *agroalfarero* sites (see Figure 6). Although the pathways are not as clear, the various areas of concentration are mirrored.

Summary and Conclusion

Agricultural peoples never made it to Pinar del Rio, in spite of the large number of sites known in the region. In fact, 32% of the sites catalogued in the archaeological census are *preagroalfarero* sites in Pinar del Río. Petaloid axes have been found, leading some to conclude that ethnic Taínos inhabited the region (García 1930), but the fact remains that no *agroalfarero* sites have been found and thus this interpretation cannot be accurate. There are a few situations that could explain this. Many of the sites are cave sites, providing better preservation conditions, but a fair amount are open-air and thus we must look to other causes. Two different models could account for the disproportionately high number of sites in Pinar del Rio: either a very large *preagroalfarero* population existed or there was a long period of occupation. The radiocarbon dates span a substantial 2,350 years, but deciding this is beyond



the scope of this presentation.

In sum, South American migrants speaking a Waroid language migrated to or were forced into Cuba at some point before 1,050 B.C. A Manicuaroid influence seems to be preferred by the Cubans based on shell assemblages, but a combination or an Ortoiroid connection is not considered impossible. Based on the linguistic analysis, the ethnic Guanahatabey would have been the historical remnants of this migration. And while some Waroid communities may have been pushed further into the Greater Antilles, having little or no contact with the migrating Saladoid peoples, closer groups may have had more interaction, perhaps explaining the difference between the Waroid Guanahatabey and the Waroid influence suggested for Ciboney Taíno. The linguistic differentiation mirrors the ethnic classifications as described in the ethnohistoric accounts, which may be reflected in the distribution of *preagroalfarero* and *agroalfarero* sites. The Guanahatabey cannot be aligned with a specific archaeological culture at this moment, although the region was most assuredly populated by *preagroalfarero* peoples whose survival into the Contact era is more than likely. As further research in Cuba more clearly outlines the various *preagroalfarero* cultural variants and as their chronologies become more reliably established, perhaps the demographic nature of *preagroalfarero* peoples will be understood. Linguistic evidence and a strong *preagroalfarero* presence in Pinar del Río at least can assure that the legacy of the Guanahatabey is more than inaccurate Spanish documentation or inappropriate reliance on ethnohistoric accounts, even if their archaeological existence has not been indisputably extended into the contact-era.



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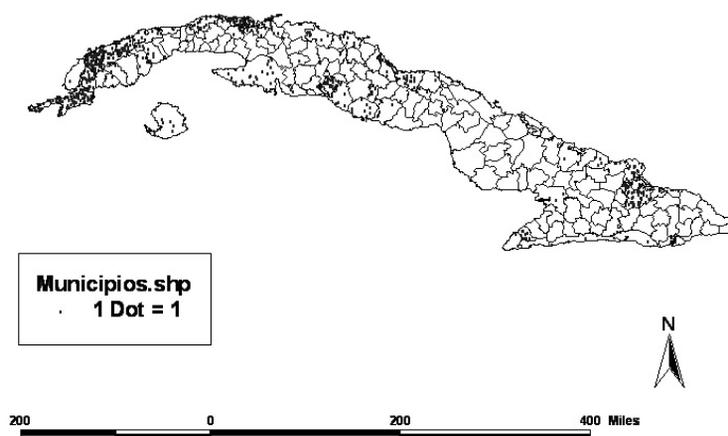
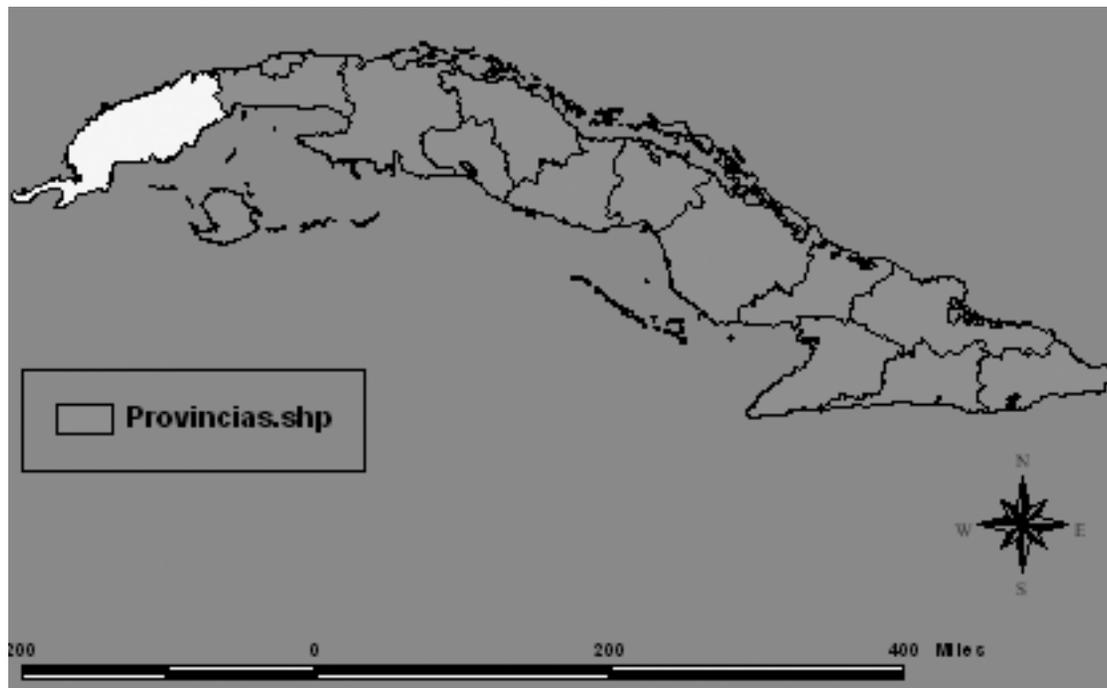


Figure 2: Frequency of Preagroalfarero sites by Municipality

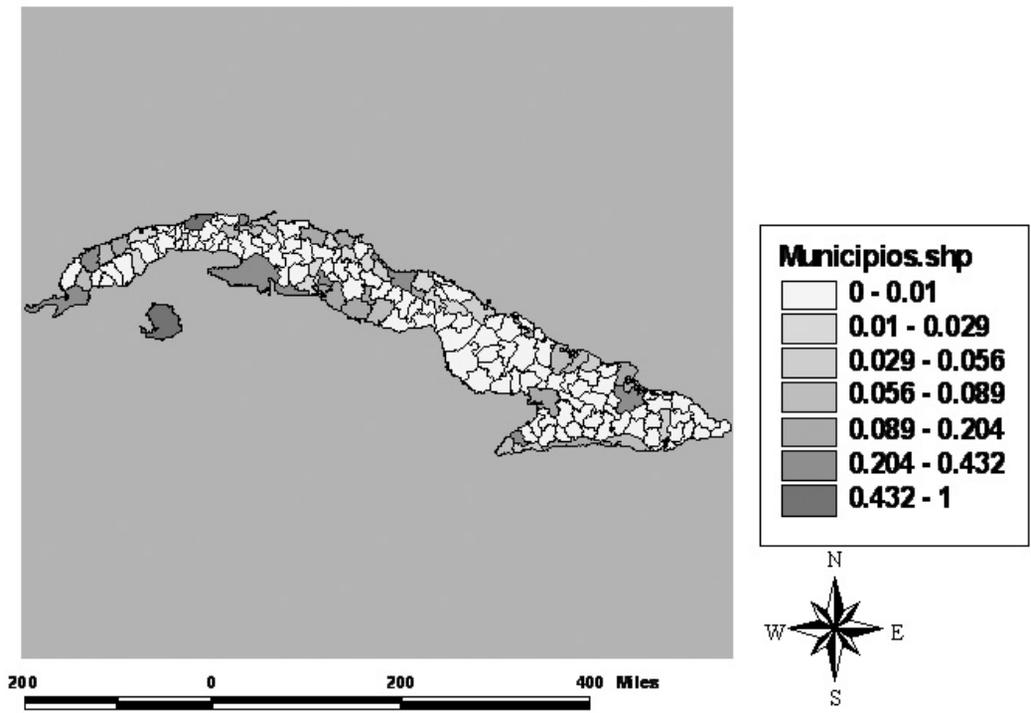


Figure 3:
Ratio of Number of Preagroalfarero sites in Municipality to the Total
Number of Sites in the Province

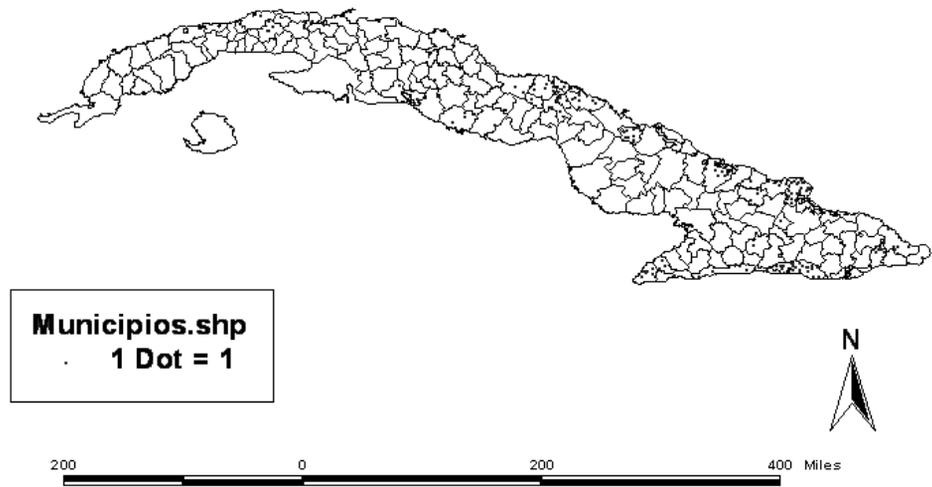


Figure 4:
Frequency of Agroalfarero sites by Municipality

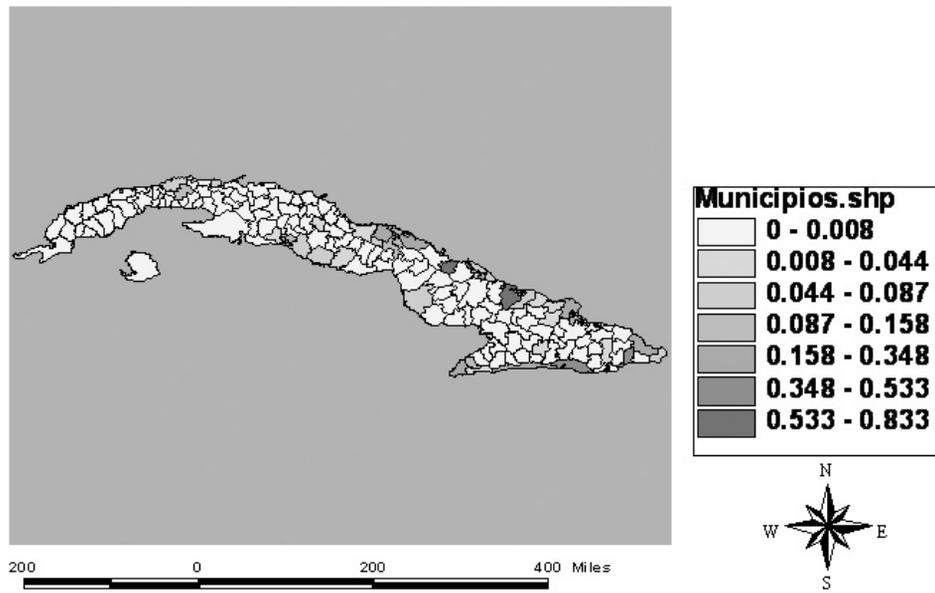


Figure 5:
Ratio of Number of Agroalfarero sites in Municipality to the Total
Number of Sites in the Province

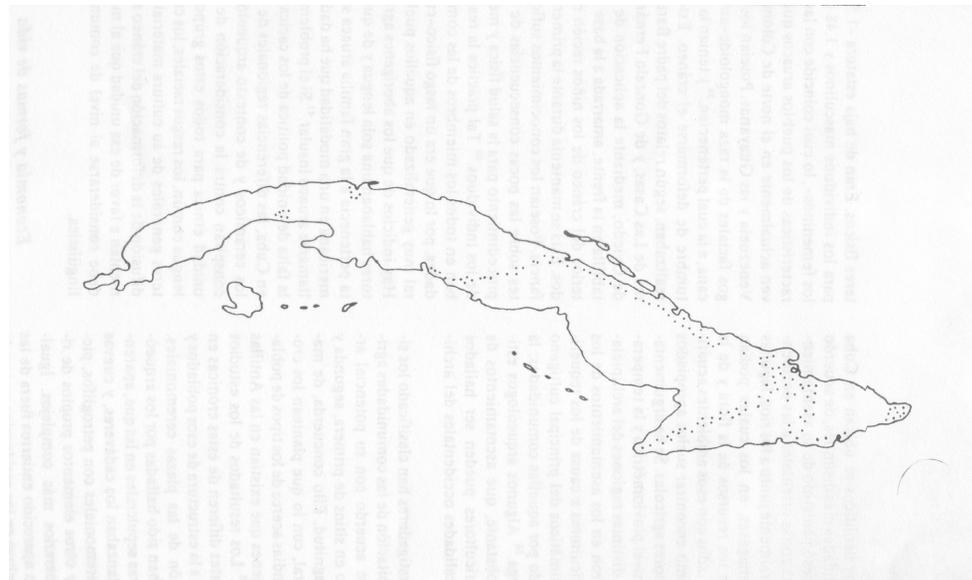


Figure 6: Conceptual Map of Neolithic Communities

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