ANCIENT BORINQUEN

Archaeology and Ethnohistory of Native Puerto Rico

Edited by Peter E. Siegel

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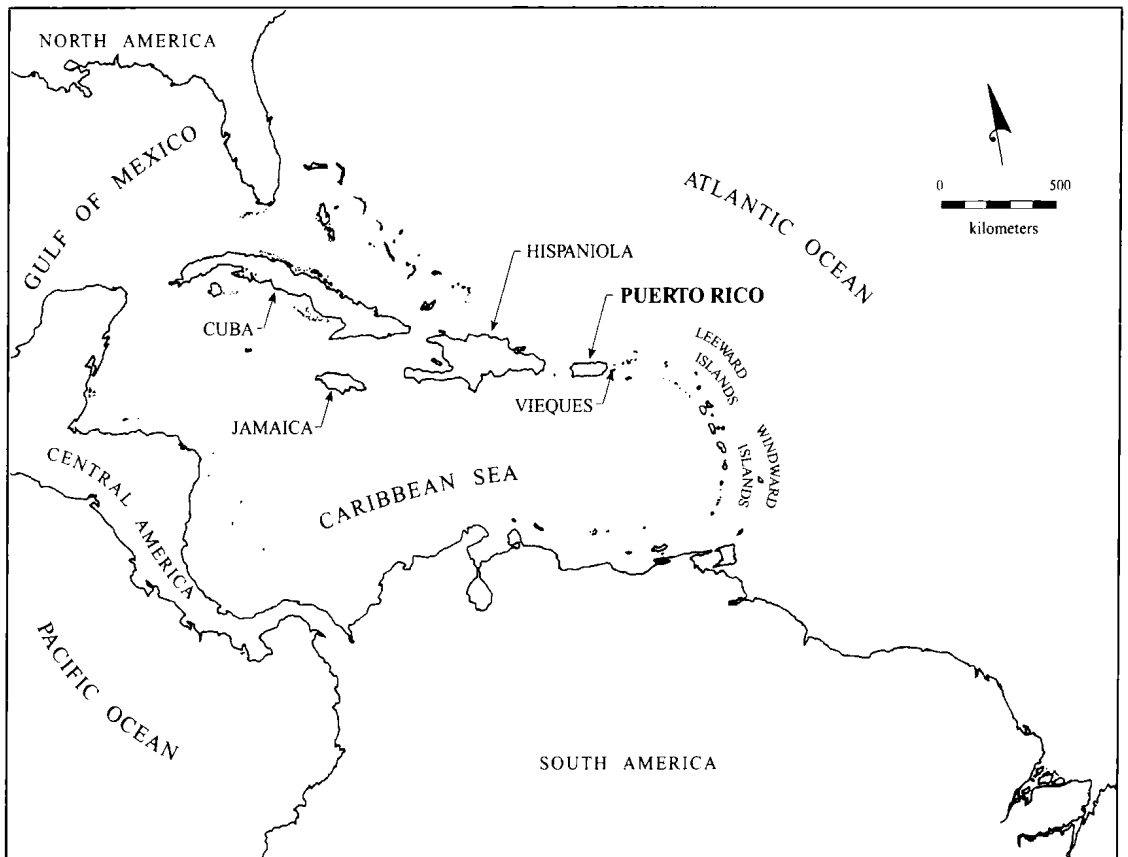

Map of the Caribbean Basin.

To Ricardo E. Alegría and Irving Rouse,
Caciques of Puerto Rican Archaeology

PREFACE

A book on the prehistory and ethnohistory of a modern geopolitical entity is artificial. It is unlikely that prehistoric occupants recognized the same boundaries and responded to the same political forces that operated in the formation of current nations, states, or cities. Yet archaeologists traditionally have produced such volumes, and they generally represent anchors for ongoing research in a region for years to come. A book on the prehistory of Puerto Rico may be especially contrived. How do we separate events and processes that occurred in the past on Puerto Rico from immediate neighbors, the wider Caribbean Basin, lowland South America, and, perhaps, Central America? We don't. To varying degrees, all of the chapters in this book at least address issues and in some cases draw on data from beyond the boundaries of Puerto Rico. As Irving Rouse observed long ago, often the passageways between islands were the logical units of analysis and loci of intense cultural activity (Rouse 1951).

The intensity and quality of archaeological research on Puerto Rico has skyrocketed over the past two decades. Compliance-driven cultural resource management investigations combined with ongoing academic studies have resulted in a body of data that may be unique in the Caribbean. Visits to the archives and site files of the State Historic Preservation Office and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, both located in San Juan, reveal thousands of survey and excavation reports and documented archaeological sites. In addition, graduate students and researchers from Puerto Rico and abroad have been keeping apace with innovative methods of analysis and theoretical perspectives.

Archaeologists actively addressing a broad range of topics were invited to prepare chapters for this book on the prehistory and ethnohistory of Puerto Rico. The book is not meant to supplant previous synthetic studies of the island. Rouse's two-volume survey will always be a crucial source of information (Rouse 1952a, 1952b). However, ideas about what happened in the past are constantly changing as theoretical frameworks change, methodological advances are developed, and new data are recognized and acquired.

These three domains of research have been progressing in tandem at a rapid pace in Puerto Rico. Others and I felt that it was time to take stock and to evaluate a range of issues and datasets currently positioned at center stage in the archaeology of the island. Most of the authors invited to contribute to this volume are known for their long-term involvement in Puerto Rican archaeology. Others are relatively new to the field but are actively conducting cutting-edge research. In total, this book provides a comprehensive overview of recent trends in the prehistoric archaeology of Puerto Rico. The substance of the volume offers a combination of new data, synthesis, and new insights on topics that are of fundamental importance in current Puerto Rican archaeology. And, issues that are crucial to Puerto Rico both reflect and illuminate similar concerns elsewhere in the West Indies, lowland South America, and Central America.

This book concentrates on issues and data of the ceramic age. Although researchers use different beginning dates for the ceramic age in Puerto Rico, it is generally agreed to be around 200 B.C. (Rouse 1992; Siegel 1991a). Early ceramic-age groups began colonizing the Caribbean islands by approximately 400–500 B.C. (Siegel 1991b). These people originated in the Orinoco Valley of Venezuela. As a group, the colonists are recognized by a distinctive material culture tradition, including thin-walled elaborately painted, incised, and modeled ceramic vessels and figurines and carved and ground shell, bone, stone, and coral objects (Roe 1989a; Rouse 1992). Similarities in material culture across sites and through time provide the basis for assigning the groups to a single series of Saladoid cultures, named after the Saladero type site excavated by Rouse and Cruxent (1963). A source of considerable debate is the nature and extent of interactions between the resident Archaic populations of the West Indies and the Saladoid colonists (Chanlatte Baik 1995; Siegel 1989a). Further, it has been suggested that some Archaic groups, especially on Hispaniola, may have developed pottery prior to or in connection with the arrival of the Saladoid colonists (Rouse 1992:90–92; Veloz Maggiolo et al. 1974). New information, some of which is explored in this book, indicates that Archaic people may have been managing and modifying the landscape more than what was traditionally recognized. Another book will be

needed to explore the dynamics and complexity of the Archaic cultures of Puerto Rico.

The 16 or more centuries of ceramic-age occupations on Puerto Rico reveal dramatic shifts in how people related to one another, the environment, and the cosmos. The earliest Saladoid colonists, referred to as the Hacienda Grande complex (ca. 200 B.C.–A.D. 400), occupied large seemingly self-contained villages dispersed around the periphery of the island in coastal or near-coastal settings. All evidence indicates that these people were egalitarian horticulturalists, who brought to the West Indies a conception of the universe derived from Amazonian cosmology (Alegría 1986b; López-Baralt 1985; Roe 1982, 1997; Siegel 1997; Stevens-Arroyo 1988; Wilbert 1981, 1987). By late Saladoid times (Cuevas complex, ca. A.D. 400–600/700), groups began occupying mid to upper drainage locations. The trend toward settling the interior foothills and mountains continued during the post-Saladoid, or Ostionoid, occupations (Monserrate [ca. A.D. 600/700–900], Santa Elena [A.D. 900–1200], and Esperanza [A.D. 1200–1500] complexes). By approximately A.D. 700, formally designed ball courts and ceremonial plazas were included in the repertoire of village or settlement types constructed by the occupants of Puerto Rico (Alegría 1983; Siegel 1999). The idea for formally recognized ceremonial spaces was deeply rooted in the early Saladoid period, apparent in the structural organization of many early ceramic-age sites on Puerto Rico and the Lesser Antilles (Chanlatte Baik and Narganes Storde 1983; Rainey 1940; Rodríguez López 1991; Rouse 1974; Rouse and Morse 1999; Siegel 1996; Versteeg 1989).

During the Santa Elena period, there was a significant increase in the number and variety of sites documented for Puerto Rico, compared to earlier periods. This observation has generally been interpreted to be a product of demographic factors, although recently social and political considerations have been evaluated (Curet 1992a; Rodríguez López 1990; Siegel 2004). Demographic, social, and political factors have also been reviewed in the context of increasingly competitive and territorial chiefly polities, most notably during the Santa Elena and Esperanza periods (Siegel 2004). Culture change during the ceramic age of Puerto Rico has been investigated from a range of perspectives, broadly subsumed within the realms of subsistence, ecology, social and political organization, and cosmology. In one way or another, all of these realms are addressed in the current book.

The chapters in the volume are generally organized by scope of analysis. Studies of artifacts and individual sites are presented at the beginning and more general thematic overviews at the end. Reniel Rodríguez opens the book with his careful analysis of lithic distinctions between early and late ceramic-

age groups as represented in the large stratified Paso del Indio site. Rodríguez addresses the venerable crab-shell "dichotomy" using a line of evidence heretofore not considered. Jeff Walker then examines the larger context of Paso del Indio, reviewing the excavation history and major classes of data collected from this large intensively occupied late Saladoid and Ostionoid village. A few kilometers to the north of Paso del Indio, situated on the Atlantic coast, is the Maisabel site. This site was the center of considerable research during the 1980s and early 1990s, resulting in numerous publications and theses, one of which was my dissertation (Siegel 1992). John Jones, Deborah Pearsall, Daniel Wagner, and I present results of a sediment coring project that we conducted in the environs of Maisabel and offer suggestions into Late Archaic and ceramic-age land-use history and cultivation practices. Susan deFrance and Lee Newsom provide an island-wide summary of subsistence research, from the respective disciplines of zooarchaeology and archaeobotany. Anne Stokes addresses dietary patterns during the ceramic age by examining carbon and nitrogen isotope ratios in a series of human skeletons. Her study was performed within the framework of biogeography and thus she evaluates skeletal remains from other sections of the Caribbean in addition to Puerto Rico.

Joshua Torres reviews changes in the social landscape of south-central Puerto Rico. Combining data generated from compliance-mandated investigations with academic research Torres traces settlement patterns from the early to late ceramic periods and constructs models of political and social organization for this region. José Oliver addresses political and ideological organization using settlement and iconographic data in Caguana and the surrounding landscape. Peter Roe reviews the current state of rock art studies on the island. Rock art is a particularly difficult medium to address beyond simple description. Roe presents a good balance between tight description and interpretation, offering an example of how explanatory research may proceed using rock art. Karen Anderson closes the book in her discussion of Taíno life during the century following Spanish colonization, thus marking the end of prehistory in Puerto Rico.

The title of the book, *Ancient Borinquen,* acknowledges the indigenous name for Puerto Rico. When the Spanish arrived, they observed that the Native American occupants called the island Borinquen (variously Boriquén, Boriquen, Buriquén, Borinquén, Burenquén) (Arrom 2000:131–145). Many of the early Spanish accounts refer to the Native Americans of Puerto Rico as *borinqueños.* Today, residents of the island frequently refer to *Borinquen* to evoke a link with the past and to assert a sense of independent identity.

This book came to fruition because of the hard work and support of many

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