

The religion of the Nicaraos (1350-1550 AD)



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The religion of the Nicaraos (1350-1550 AD)



OSCAR PAVÓN SÁNCHEZ

Arqueólogo, Mi Museo

The information analyzed in the document “The Spiritual Conquest of Spanish America: 200 documents of the sixteenth century” tells us that our ancestors living in the Pacific Nicaragua region professed a religion involving the worship of many gods. Everything covered in this paper is derived from the record of an examination made by the Spanish colonizers of different native people, to find out how their faith was developing.

The religion of the Nicaraos was transmitted from one generation to the next. They had no system of writing to record their religious beliefs; it was customary to

memorize and communicate these ideas orally to future generations.

In their religious doctrines, the native people Aborigines declare that the creators of the sky, the earth, the moon, the stars, man, woman, and everything else, were the gods Tama-gostat and Cipattonal, also Oxomogo, Calchitguegue and Chicociagat. These were the most important gods, who were called “teotes”. In the interview with chief Avagoaltegon, he affirms that Tama-gostat personifies the male and Cipattonal personifies the female type. (Abya-Yala, 1992).

The Nicarao legends say that the gods have no father or mother. The native people nourished their gods by sacrificing and offering the blood and the hearts of those taken prisoner in wars, as well as those who were enslaved. The use of incense was another way to feed their gods, through burning resins and aromatic plants.

The legends also describe a catastrophe which occurred to the first generation of people. The earth was covered with water and everyone who was present drowned. The gods Tamagastad and Cipattonal re-created the race of men and women after the deluge.

In their religious festivals, the Nicaraos offered many honors to their various gods, including: Agat, Ocelot, Oate, Coscagoate, Olin, Tapeocat, Quiauit, Sochit, Cipat, Acat, Cali, Quespal, Coat, Misis-te, Macat, Toste, At, Izquindi, Ocomate, Malinal, Acato.

Our native people invoked the gods Macat Deer and Toste Rabbit to ensure good results in hunting of these animals. The hunter of rabbits hung their heads on the door of his house, and the deer hunter had in his house a hanging basket with cloths soaked in the blood of a deer.

Mixcoa was the name given to the god of trade; to honor him, men drew blood from their tongues before beginning to buy or sell.

The god of hunger was named Bisteot. When making a long trek, the people prayed to him asking not to feel tired or be overwhelmed by hunger. In reverence they threw herbs on special stone mounds by the roadside.

The god of water was named Quiateot, and was the creator of rain, thunder and lightning.

The god of the air was called Chiquinaut and Ehécatl.

Their temples and houses of worship

The temples were used as a place to burn incense when they prayed to their gods for health in sickness, or pleaded for rain to get good harvests. The most important cacique (leader) spent one complete year inside the temple alone in prayer. At the end of the year, the major cacique left the temple and a celebratory party was held, with singing and distribution of food. This commemoration took place each year. The cacique was decorated on the nose with a distinguishing mark or sign, perhaps an earring. This ceremony took place in the main temples. In another ceremony, each father could place his son in one of the houses of prayer. All men could chose to enter the house of prayer, as long as they were not married and did not sleep with women.

There was also an area called tescuit, which was a mound with steps. In the center of the mound was a stone. The father or the priest, called tamagast, went up the steps and used a flint knife to behead a man sacrificially. The priest smeared the blood on the stone idols of the temple. This very special place of sacrifice was in front of the door of the main temples in the square.

The chiefs and the priest consumed the body of the person who had been sacrificed, cutting off his head. The body was chopped into small pieces and boiled in

a large pot, salt (axi) was added. After stewing the meat they brought ears of corn, which the chiefs joyfully and eagerly shared with their partners. They ate the flesh and drank cacao. The head was not cooked or consumed but rather was displayed on some sticks in front of the temples.

They also offered young men and women to the god of rain, but the bodies of these young people instead of being eaten were buried.

In their religious festivals, they drank a lot of liquor, and during these times the men did not work; they slept outside their



Figure 1: Vallejo Polychrome type vessel, Mombacho variety (1200-1550 AD). It is decorated with the plumed serpent motif. Collection of Mi Museo.

home and women slept inside. If they had sexual contact with their wives during major festivals, the gods would punish them by sending diseases and death.

According to their beliefs, good people would go to heaven with the teotes (gods), including, for example, those who took an honorable part in wars, and those who remembered to care for their gods, temples or houses of worship. However, those who did not live well, those who died at home, or did not practice their religion would go to the underground, to a place named Miktant-eot.

Our native people did not have a writing system to describe these cultural and religious activities in detail, but some religious features can certainly be found depicted on pre-Columbian pottery, iconic of Mesoamerica. Mi Museo displays these types of ceramics where one can see multiple religious designs, including ones of Quetzalcoatl (figure 1), Ehécatl, and Tlaloc.

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What is archaeology?



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Throughout our lives, since grade school days, we have also known that those remains are the only source that will allow the people of Nicaragua to know their ancient history. Given the lack of a written language we can only know that history indirectly through study of the archaeological finds.

As in every scientific discipline, the primary effort of the student in the field of archaeology is understanding, applying and developing the scientific method to resolve a specific theoretical problem. In the empirical phase of this process, the student should analyze tangible evidence and facts for use in structuring an interpretation or inference. When the student has fulfilled all the requirements for his field, he receives a degree accrediting him as a professional archaeologist, or for another field of study. This makes it possible for him to take up the profession to which his title refers but not any other, for any reason.

As everyone knows, the subsoil of our country is rich in archaeological remains. These relate to an unknown history lasting at least 3500 years, from 2000 BC, the date of the oldest pottery found in Nicaragua, on Ometepe Island, until the time of the conquest. However, other signs suggest earlier dates: for instance, the Huellas de Acahualinca, footprints made by the first people to populate Nicaragua, are believed to be 6000 years old, thus suggesting 4000 years BC in the Pacific region and possibly 6000 BC on the Caribbean coast for the beginning of this history.

In Nicaragua, the profession of archaeologist has now existed for more than a decade and since there have been various improvements in its practice, it's now time to begin studying the archaeological record comprehensively, from a scientific perspective, abandoning the traditional practice of gathering artifacts without context, with a history that only describes an item as coming from the Chorotega people, or the Nicarao. The time has come to begin writing the ancient history of Nicaragua, from the peopling of the continent until the moment of the conquest, and even inclusive of the socio-cultural process since the conquest.

As for scientific study of the Nicaraguan archaeological record, this began in 1959. At that time, more than a century had passed since the dawn of interest in archaeological remains. In 1852, E. G. Squier was the first, publishing his description of the difficulties suffered to know, observe and describe statues from Ometepe Island and La Marota in the Isletas of Granada, and others from the islands of Lago Xolotlan and Sutiaba. The Spanish language version published by Editorial Nueva Nicaragua in 1981 was followed by a dozen or more from other specialists in different branches of learning. These are the only sources of knowledge today about many sites which have since disappeared.

In 1959, Gordon Willey and Albert Norweb, from the University of Harvard and under sponsorship of the Instituto Andino de Estudios Arqueológicos, developed

a program of exploration and stratigraphical surveys to determine the chronological process of socio-cultural development of the pre-Hispanic society established in the Pacific Region, which includes Ometepe Island.

The scientific practice of archaeology continued with a study carried out by German archaeologist W. Haberland. Through this study he found pottery remnants believed to be the oldest discovered in Nicaragua. Richard Magnus, an American doctoral candidate, was the next researcher to work in Nicaragua. He studied the archaeological record in the coastal section of the Autonomous Region of the South Atlantic, from northern Laguna de Perlas to southern Bluefields Bay.

In 1982 one of the first comprehensive laws relative to the protection of the cultural heritage of the nation was promulgated: Law 1142 of 1982. At that time, many foreign researchers arrived to do fieldwork and also write doctoral dissertations or masters' theses. Among those researchers, these stand out: N. C. Hughes (1981), Goodstein(1989), S. Bursey Wyss (1983), the French researchers F. Gorin (1990) and D. Rigat (1992), Salgado (1992, 1996), Fletcher et al. 1993, L. Van Broekhoven (2002), K. Niemel (2003), D. E. Cornavaca (2003), Dickau (1999), Gassiot et al. (1998, 1999), Baker y Smith (1987), Haberlandt (1993 a, b), the Archaeological Project of the Metropolitan Zone of Managua, by various authors (1995, 1996), and other

researchers. The results of their work will be summarized in the following issue of this review, thus completing the twentieth century with respect to archaeological information created through study of the archaeological record.

The first decade of the 21st century has been productive, with a new direction and topics of research not seen previously in Nicaragua, although the projects carried out by Salgado 1996, Niemel 2003, and Cornavaca 2003, provide only a small sampling of the diverse objectives of modern archaeological research. However, the most outstanding accomplishment is the first long-term project carried out by G. McCafferty, of the University of Calgary, Canada, a ten-year project. Another long-term project still ongoing is directed by A. Geurds, of the University of Leiden, the Netherlands.

What should stand out here is the fact that all this research was, and continues to be, supported directly by universities, from which these students came to carry out their work, the majority from the United States, against the national reality in matters of archaeological research, which was nonexistent until 2001, because there were no professional archaeologists, nor career in archaeology, nor foreign researchers who could take a leading role in archaeological investigation.

This article's purpose is to advance the scientific practice of archaeology and contribute to the recovery, knowledge and promotion of our cultural roots,

through serious research which can aid in developing and strengthening the socio-cultural identity of the Nicaraguan people. For that purpose, it's necessary to define the meaning of certain concepts. If archaeology is to enjoy the status of a science, then there is no reason why adding to the archaeological record, called archaeological rescue, should contribute to the destruction of this with no gain other than the gathering of a few remains without context, because enterprises ignore the law.

Archaeology is a science dedicated to puzzling out the cultural and social history of humanity throughout its unwritten history, usually called pre-history, establishing time segments or periods relative to major inventions and innovations of a cultural nature, the social, economic and sociopolitical characteristics developed in each period, and the processes leading to social change, through study and analysis of the components of the archaeological record, commonly known as the Archaeological Heritage.

Archaeology is also one of the social science disciplines, for which there is only one method. To the extent that archaeology has widened our horizon of knowledge, it has at the same time developed areas of specialized theoretical knowledge drawn from specific geographical areas, with specialized fields arising within archaeology whose object of study is a specific society over time, for example, Egyptology, medieval archaeology, or classic archaeology (of Greece

and Rome) among others. The other differentiation is with respect to where archaeology is carried out, on the surface of the earth or under the water, submarine. The archaeology of rescue (rescate) simply does not exist as a specialized branch of archaeology.

Until now, rescue archaeology is what is carried out when a specific area becomes subject to agricultural production, ranching, urban planning, or other infrastructure work involving removal of soil and subsoil or simply is affected by erosion caused by climactic factors. When the archaeological record is at risk of destruction through development, the law considers those involved in that development responsible for the costs of archaeological studies. The studies are often avoided completely, and those undertaken are half measures, because the study is only completed after the impact has been created and the archaeological context lost.

This destruction is easily avoidable. It would suffice to comply with the law which requires archaeological impact studies prior to infrastructure work which will alter the surface, horizontally or in depth. But carrying out prior studies does not guarantee their scientific nature in practice, only the possibility of analyzing different remains with tests developed by physical and chemical science. These include, for example, analysis of residuals, of signs of use, of the chromatology of gases, chemical analysis of artifacts to know their geochemical sources, DNA

analysis, Carbon 14 dating, and dating through thermoluminescence. These tests and others will allow the creation of a more detailed picture of the artifacts and their uses, and their placement in historical context. When these tests are omitted, rescue archaeology lacks a scientific nature; and one need not pursue a university degree for five years or more in order to simply gather up pots and describe what existed at the point of their collection. Nevertheless, the enterprises omit these analyses.

Thus, the pretext used to justify continuing practicing an evil called "Rescue Archaeology" is a false one, all the more so since there is a cohort of archaeologists who have graduated from our universities, able to guarantee adequate provision for the archaeological record and with that the ability to more effectively protect the archaeological record. To maintain and even justify this difference is rather to legalize the destruction of the archaeological record, usually with no gain other than collecting fragments and remains without context which will go to a museum warehouse, many times without knowledge of what is being stored.

Besides this, the destructive enterprises place restrictive time limits on any activity other than salvaging the fragments of the affected pieces and other objects which once made up the archaeological context. Insufficient time is allowed to classify materials and document the finds through comparison with other deposits, much less to compile general

information from other projects, information which could be very important in providing context for the impacted remains, information which is the basis of doctoral dissertations.

It's necessary for each archaeologist to know the documentation generated by all the projects carried out by universities as well as by individual foreign students. Since these are mostly doctoral dissertations or master's theses, although there may be a few by undergraduates, they have provided a great infusion of a scientific nature and constitute the point of departure for achieving greater depth in the knowledge of our ancient history. This would lead to better options for the effective, scientific practice of archaeology and for protecting the archaeological record.

In this article, the reasoning on the scientific nature of archaeology is based on Archaeology: the Science of the Human Past (Mark. W. Sutton and Robert M. Yohe) and Archaeology: Methods, Theories and Practice (Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn). The latter is the preferred source for teaching archaeology at UNAM-Managua. The purpose is to foster the scientific nature of archaeology as opposed to the poorly understood practice of rescue archaeology now employed in Nicaragua despite the existence of professional archaeologists and the status of science which archaeology enjoys.

Archaeology is a science which is as much empirical as theoretical, with its own methodology, its purpose for study

and work. To learn about the past, the archaeologist seeks to reconstruct and understand past human activities, to understand what, who, when, where and why. To do this, archaeologists look for and recover facts about the past, organize them in coherent systems of hypotheses and models, and then test and revise these constantly with the help of research plans.

Humanity's past makes up the object of study of archaeology, this being the social behavior of humans in various social groupings and, in our case, of aboriginal society prior to the Spanish conquest. Archaeologists generate information about the past through the discovery, description and classification of artifacts and sites, permitting the establishment of historical sequence and cultural chronologies needed to develop explanations and inferences from what has been observed, contributing to understanding human behavior.

Archaeologists seek to understand as much as possible about people of the past, including their diet and subsistence patterns, the size and complexity of their societies, how they organized their settlements, the technology, political organization, kinship, religion, symbolism, health, human genetic variability over time and space, and how and why societies changed over time. Archaeologists do more than just ascertain facts about the past; they also interpret the information to create an understanding, a history of the past.

The subject of their work is the archaeological record, that is, all the tools made by human beings, and also things used in their natural state without modification, to satisfy a society's needs for production and reproduction in accordance with the level of development reached at different historical stages.

Thus, evidence of the past exists in the archaeological record. This includes physical remains (artifacts, ecofacts, and features) of past human behaviors and activities, geographical locations (sites) where these materials are found, the relationships among the materials (stratigraphy and distribution) and the patterns shown by those materials in accordance with the relationships in which they were involved.

Artifacts are objects made or used by a people to carry out work, and make up a large group with different types and forms. The artifacts contain a wide range of information about a society, including human experience, knowledge, symbolism and diverse activities in which their use is seen.

Ecofacts are those remains which are not artifactual, but rather are used by a people without any modification and are commonly found as part of the archaeological record. The bones of animals, seeds and other parts of plants are ecofacts; the charcoal remains of ancient fires are also ecofacts, as is pollen.

Features are things which are not portable, used or constructed by a people for

a specific purpose. Examples of features include hearths, houses, walls and other things such as tombs, roadways, and walls.

Artifacts, ecofacts, features and other aspects of the archaeological register are found at sites. The archaeological sites are specific places where a people lived, worked or visited. The sites can vary in size, from very small to as large as a city. The sites take many forms and reflect the full range of human behaviors.

To accomplish this, archaeological research prioritizes the study of archaeological contexts. These are nothing else but the association of different archaeological remains found in a specific deposit, which can be a house whose roof caved in and was not rebuilt, remaining buried until a business development took place a thousand years later, permitting its knowledge, or could be all the objects found in a tomb, artifactual as well as natural.

This association is what tells the story of how things were used, and of the spatial distribution of different activities carried out inside a dwelling, the types and forms of tools used, and the potential social relations developed at this point in human history, at this geographical location. All the information generated by their study, beginning with the initial official report and subsequent additions also forms part of the archaeological record of the specific site or region. Thus, the known archaeological record consists of all the information obtained about the

past, the location, the condition of the sites, all the artifacts and ecofacts collected and removed from the sites, and all the research records, results of various analyses of the archaeological materials and the publications of the archaeological studies.

It is as important to keep the records of past research as to physically maintain these, which requires that the materials coming from various interventions be well cataloged, and that the reports generated be as descriptive and detailed as possible, with essays and articles prepared for publication, so that the interpretations and inferences will be comprehensive, permitting other researchers to create their own interpretations and thus enriching the information generated. Scientific research requires passing to the second phase of research, for which the career of archaeology was created and archaeologists trained.

Responsibility should be shared by professional archaeologists and the authorities to achieve true protection of the archaeological record and make archaeological practice scientific. It is necessary, imperative and urgent to begin abandoning the traditional practice of gathering together fragments, since through that practice, professional archaeologists consciously contribute to pointless destruction of the archaeological record.

In this way every archaeologist should know all the details of information set forth in various theses generated by additions

to the archaeological record. Since these were mainly written by students working on M.A. or doctoral degrees, the information obtained and set forth should have a highly scientific nature, making it worthy of confidence, knowledge and further analysis, so that these studies constitute a point of departure for a new understanding and new information.

The authorities responsible for protecting the archaeological record should likewise draft a strategy of the national objectives, knowledgeably directing the scientific practice of archaeology, and by this measure professional archaeologists can count on the suitable tools to require the scientific practice of archaeology. Without a national strategy, a national plan for archaeological research in Nicaragua, its protection is only a dream.

From now on, the word ARCHAEOLOGIST should be understood to mean an archaeologist with a degree, not an amateur but a professional who can be required to respect scientific requirements in research. The amateur may know all the techniques used in the empirical phase, but not having studied for the career of archaeology, lacks adequate theoretical training to generate valid interpretations and coherent inferences.

From this it follows that any addition to the archaeological record, be it in the form of archaeological rescue or study of archaeological impact, should be reported to the Dirección de Patrimonio Cultural (Office of Cultural Heritage) and

rely on official authorization, as the most appropriate way to control additions and qualifications of the archaeological record of a specific region. The level of scientific technique applied, the information recovered to systematically put in place the national plan for archaeological research, among other things.

Society in general and all its different sectors are the beneficiaries. The knowledge of our ancient history is necessary to be clear about where we come from and where we are going, from the perspective of defense of our national nature, of the Nicaraguan socio-cultural identity, this being neither Indian nor Hispanic. In the formative process of today's society, the most adequate socio-cultural practices of both are reclaimed to forge a new society from the beginning, although in this process the Pre-Hispanic socio-cultural part is what loses out. Archaeology can help us fathom this process, to the extent that our archaeological heritage is truly protected.

Garden Cities of Pacific Nicaragua



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Pacific Nicaragua featured a remarkably high population density upon first-contact with Europeans in 1522. “Urban” centers were non-centralized, and have become known as ‘garden cities’ because residential clusters were generally surrounded by fields and orchards. Pacific Nicaragua is defined as that geographical region around Lake Nicaragua and Lake Managua, especially between the lakes and the Pacific Ocean. Ethnohistorical sources describe the colonization of Pacific Nicaragua by migrants from central Mexico beginning about 800 CE. Nahuat- and Oto-manguanean-speakers dominated the region at the moment of European contact, and continued as the major indigenous

groups into the 20th century, though little of their native culture has preserved to the present. Extensive details of late pre-hispanic culture were recorded by Oviedo, and these have been mined by culture historians to characterize indigenous culture as essentially mesoamerican, with Nahua religious practices, calendrical system, political organization, etc. The Oto-manguanean Chorotega were less thoroughly described, but have also been considered mesoamerican based on linguistic affiliations to southern Mexican groups such as the Mixtec and Zapotec.

Pacific Nicaragua was one of the most densely populated regions of Central America at Spanish contact, with a population of about 500,000. Sources indicate that population was generally dispersed, with centers of as many as 40,000 inhabitants in what Larry Steinbrenner describes as ‘garden cities’ lacking in urban centralization in favor of scattered clusters of house compounds surrounded by gardens and groves of trees. Some of the larger sites stretched for several

leagues along the lakeshore. For example, Oviedo described Contact-period Managua as “a beautiful and populous village [of 40,000] ... composed of isolated houses, at considerable distance from each other”. Such aboriginal communities appear to have been organized around numerous widely dispersed plazas surrounded by elite longhouse ‘palaces’. Public architecture was limited to earthen platforms surmounted by pole-and-thatch superstructures for rituals, including sacrifices. Elite architecture was relatively simple. The most detailed account is provided by Oviedo, who visited the Nahuatl town of Teçoatega in northern Nicaragua in the 1520s (Figure 1). He described the ‘palace’ of the ruler as a plaza bordered by several long structures known as buhios. The main structure was about 100 m in length, with only a single small door, and was used as a sleeping area by the ruler and his wives. A second longhouse on the opposite side of the plaza was used by courtly retainers. Additional structures around the plaza were used as storage and for daily activities divided by gender.

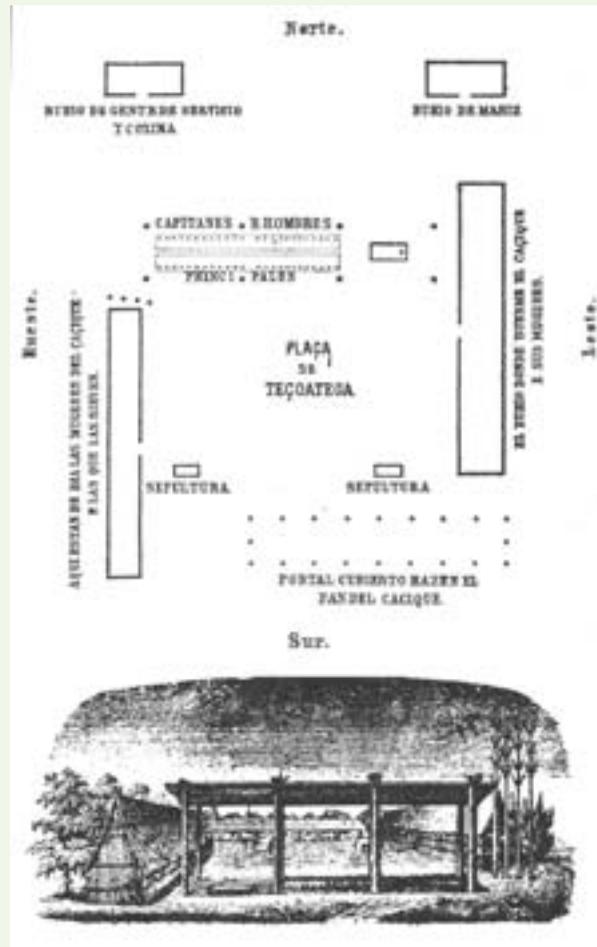


Figure 1: Plan and drawing of elite compound (from Oviedo).

Intensive excavations at several Early Postclassic/Sapoá period centers since 2000 provide a glimpse of life and social organization in these garden cities. Santa Isabel on the shore of Lake Nicaragua featured a dense cluster of residential mounds, and offers a rich cross-section of domestic material culture. Tepetate, located about 70 km up the lakeshore, was a regional center with possible civic-ceremonial architecture that adds a socio-

political dimension to community organization. Nearby El Rayo also provided insights on commoner domestic practice, but was most notable for the variation in mortuary practices found in two discrete cemeteries. Contemporary in time, relatively close spatially, and all provisioned

by lacustrine resources; these three sites offer varying insights on ancient Chorotega community organization, raising the question of the degree to which time, space, and environment participated in the production of cultural similarities, and in the significance of variation. This paper considers both the commonalities and dissimilarities that have been encountered to argue for the consideration of ancient Chorotega practice.

The rise of household archaeology as a research focus in Mesoamerica in the 1970s shifted attention (to some extent) away from monumental architecture, elite residences, and normative behavior – and toward a consideration of commoner behaviors and daily practice. Unfortunately, lower Central American archaeology has tended to remain stagnated in the paradigms of the early 20th century, with only rare attempts at more processual research. Household archaeology is almost non-existent, and no attempt has ever been made to understand integrated communities. These concepts are operationalized at the important sites in Pacific Nicaragua: Santa Isabel, Tepetate and El Rayo.

Communities of Practice in Pacific Nicaragua

Santa Isabel, Tepetate, and El Rayo were contemporaries during the Late Sapoá period between about 1000-1250 CE, were located in similar environmental settings on the shore of Lake Nicaragua and less than 100 km apart (Figure 2). They were likely occupied by the Chorotega ethnic group (albeit mixed with possible autochthonous Chibchans), and both Santa Isabel and Tepetate were at the apex of their respective settlement hierarchies while El Rayo was probably a second-tier settlement with specialized mortuary significance. From these perspectives all three communities could be considered expressions of a similar habitus group operating under shared structuring principles.



Figure 2: Map of Nicaragua showing locations of sites near Rivas and Granada (after Steinbrenner).

Yet there exist numerous differences in the material culture between the three communities, which also indicate distinctive strategies as the ancient occupants adapted to localized environmental factors (Figure 3). For example, residents of Santa Isabel lacked easy access to building stone and consequently their domestic architecture consisted of packed earth floors and wattle and daub walls (and presumably thatch roofing), while at both Tepetate and El Rayo stone was much more accessible and was incorporated into residential and civic architecture.

Both Santa Isabel and El Rayo inhabitants subsisted on wild plants and animals (especially fish), and while the

preservation of faunal remains was very poor at Tepetate the high incidence of netweights among ceramic objects again indicates that fish were likely a staple of the diet. The Sapoá period kitchen 'tool-kit' of Sacasa Striated and Rivas Red utilitarian wares and varieties of Papagayo Polychrome serving wares is fairly consistent in all three sites, with some local variation of minor types (Figure 4). The ceramic database from these excavations suggests an active exchange network linking the different communities.

Other aspects of material culture indicate both similarities and distinctions between the different sites that may relate to status differences or even resilience among the native Chibchans in the region. One strong difference is in



Figure 3: a) Plaster floor at Santa Isabel; b) Stone foundation at Tepetate; c) Stone floor pavement at Tepetate.



Figure 4: Ceramics of the kitchen 'tool-kit': a) Rivas Red ovoid urn; b) Papagayo periform vase; c) Papagayo Alfredo variety tripod bowl.

the use of the small raspadita scrapers that were so abundant at Santa Isabel yet almost completely absent from Tepetate and El Rayo. If these were used for processing a root crop such as manioc then there was a considerable difference in vegetal foodways across the region. Manioc is more clearly associated with Chibchan groups, though there is growing recognition of its use along the southern Mesoamerican frontier. Curiously, no evidence for maize has been found at any of the sites under investigation, in strong contrast to the expectations of a 'mesoamerican' migration.

Another difference between the three communities is in mortuary practices. Whereas the importance of Sacasa Striated ovoid 'shoe-pot' urns is common across the region, clear distinctions were found (Figure 5). At Santa Isabel, only infants were found in the Sacasa urns (with

occasional teeth of older sub-adults), while two adolescents and one adult were found as primary, direct interments. These were located on and around the residential mounds. Two isolated burial clusters of poorly preserved adult skeletons were found within and over nested urns at Tepetate Locus 3, while a slab-lined burial crypt (looted) was found within Mound 1. El Rayo features the greatest number and variety of mortuary remains. Four clusters of Sacasa Striated urns were found at Locus 1 over an earlier level of Late Bagaces period primary, direct burials. Several other Late Bagaces period burials were found among domestic remains at Locus 2. The most elaborate burials were found at Locus 3, including a large cluster associated with a small shrine, and some of the most exotic grave goods.

The multi-component site of El Rayo also allows some observations about a

community of resilience. Stratified deposits at Locus 2 demonstrate continuous occupation between the Late Bagaces period (500-800 CE) and the Sapoá period (800-1250 CE), albeit with a dramatic change in diagnostic ceramics at the interface between the two time periods. In comparing other aspects of the material culture from the two components, however, the changes are less dramatic. Food technology remained essentially the same, items of adornment were comparable, and figurine forms were also related. In contrast to the settlement pattern maps for the transition which demonstrated wide-scale relocation, inhabitants of El Rayo continued to occupy the same area. Perhaps the significance

of the Locus 1 cemetery was an anchor to the specialized community, and social memory of the burial ground helped residents maintain their connection to symbolic landscape.

Excavations at Santa Isabel, Tepetate, and El Rayo represent a long term, integrated investigation into Sapoá period communities along the shore of Lake Nicaragua. This is a time period which is widely believed to have been associated with the arrival of migrant groups from central and southern Mexico based on ethnohistorical accounts and some shared iconographic elements, but probably also witnessed the integration of mesoamericans with autochthonous Chibchans.

As much through luck as research strategy, all three sites are contemporaries with one another, but provide slightly different windows onto Chorotega community organization. Through these projects we can infer social practices at different scales: domestic, civic, and ritual. Despite the contemporaneity, however, we are not finding homogeneity between the different communities, and so a clear cultural norm is not obtained. Some overarching structuring principles, such as the importance of the Sacasa Striated ovoid 'shoe-pots,' may be present, but more research is needed to better understand the ideological significance of these objects.

What can be deduced from these investigations is that Sapoá period Pacific Nicaragua was a complex cultural mosaic with various factors present. Simplistic models of Mexican invasion, as presented in traditional historical reconstructions, are inaccurate and blur interesting differences. The possibility of resilient Chibchan inhabitants is an innovative development from our recent research that needs to be clarified using bioarchaeological studies. Future research will continue to explore the 'communities of practice' from the Greater Nicoya region, including communities leading up to and into the early Colonial period when ethnohistorical sources can provide additional insights.



Figure 5: a) Burial in Sacasa Striated shoe-pot urn from Santa Isabel; b) Burial cluster from Tepetate.

Archaeology, Archaeology Rescue - Public Archaeology

JORGE ZAMBRANA FERNÁNDEZ

This article asks readers from the general public and archaeologists graduating after 2001 to reflect on the exceptional importance of archaeological heritage as the only source of knowledge of ancient history in Nicaragua, and consider how to contribute to its effective protection.

With respect to such protection, in 1982 an official attempt was made to protect the archaeological record through enactment of Law 1142, the national law of protection of our cultural heritage. Through its broad reference to the entire cultural heritage, Law 1142 provided less protection to its archaeological heritage. This law would become the first effort to develop truly scientific public archeology as opposed to the destructive practice of traditional rescue archeology, which currently plays the role of public archeology.

In 2006, an effort was made to control and create standards for archaeological research, with official publication of the Archaeological Research Regulations, which is the same as the teaching of archeology with the status of science, precisely to

foster use of scientific methods in protection of the archaeological record involving research, analysis and study of the same, aimed at the reconstruction of our ancient history.

In any case, the national reality in archeology is characterized by the simple collection of containers and usually only the remains of these once the archaeological deposit has received an impact. This has been and continues to be the reality of archaeology practiced in Nicaragua by Nicaraguans. This practice at best can be termed an emergency response, but not a “rescue”. The word rescue as used in archaeology means retrieving facts in order to resolve problems and identify new ones, and thus propose answers to these questions, although others may arise in the process. Rescue is also the term for the result of an investigation led by a university professor of archaeology, but this rescue differs greatly or entirely from a rescue due to an “accidental” impact.

This could once be justified because until 2001 there were no archaeologists, nor career in archaeology. However,

continuing to destroy the archaeological record through the practice of rescue archeology can no longer be justified, especially since there have been several developments in Nicaraguan archaeology since 1996.

With respect to this, it is urgent to reform or create a law that expressly controls, creates standards, regulates and guides scientific archaeological research. This law must take into account each and every professional archaeologist so that they can make their contribution in accordance with their theoretical knowledge and field experience gained so far.

Every addition to the archaeological record should face the test of scientific methodology, but due to this situation, a practice at odds with truly scientific practice has prevailed. Through neglect of the law, this has allowed the destroyers of our national heritage to impose their own standards, from a financial perspective, as to where, when and how they should bring in an archaeologist to document and collect the remains of archaeological items when they themselves have created the impact affecting them.

The reports generated by these interventions do not incorporate even minimally, or from any point of view, the past archaeological research that has been carried out in the area, usually unknown to our national archaeologists, posing a serious limitation to the scientific practice of archaeology.

There have been many archaeological sites that have been impacted by public and private works necessary to avoid slowing the national development process. It is also true that these developments have allowed us to know important archaeological features making up sites which can be placed on the list of the socio-political hierarchies that may be established nationally. But if these features are not studied, not individually, much less comprehensively, then to know them means nothing, because there was no opportunity to study them thoroughly. What is documented is only the process of getting to them, that is the description of their excavation, what was collected, its age, and very little information allowing interpretation and inference. Besides this no site is compared with others, even though the distance from one site to another may be only one kilometer. To know and describe the location of a site is not the same as to study the site.

We need to include graduate archaeologists in management bodies and the decision-making process, to ensure that the protection of the archaeological record is a reality and begin writing Nicaraguan history. That history remains unknown, hidden, distorted. We must give life to the artifacts, ecofacts, and features, so they can communicate to us the events in which they were involved, and we can know the socio-cultural dynamics of each native group, and how they managed to survive in circumstances which, it is said, were more demanding than those today.

The regulations on archaeological research in Nicaragua officially set forth the difference between an Archaeological Project, a Study Project of Archaeological Impact and an Archaeological Rescue Project. This regulation was officially published in 2006, at which time the field of archaeology was already fully functional and well-developed. However the wording was apparently drafted by everyone other than professional archaeologists, and for this reason needs to be reformulated.

The key difference is simply that an archaeological research project is planned by a professor of Archaeology, often to provide a place where students can develop empirical practice, and also takes advantage of projects sponsored by universities outside the country so that Nicaraguan students can take part, and thus get more experience, especially in the techniques of evidence collection and the laboratory process, but the objectives and theory guiding the research are not known. And that is all that the amateur archaeological knows, so that lacking theoretical knowledge they can't carry out or direct archaeological research.

But as for public archeology, it's possible to draft and get a Republic of Nicaragua Project of Public Archaeology going. This means that a university is not in charge of conducting any archaeological study of the same size as those the state can run. The government has an advantage in this respect because the law requires that any company building a public or private

work must include in its budget the cost of archaeological studies, both prior to and during the execution of the work, whenever the importance and complexity of the remains and features will oblige them to spend more time than in other contexts. The additional advantage is that the state can then develop several investigations simultaneously in the whole area where development projects will take place. But there must be the will to comply with the law.

The creation of a new law, or reformulation of the current one along with the 2006 research regulations in order to include a number of concepts, categories and principles of archaeology as a science is necessary, if there is a serious desire to have a positive impact on the protection of archaeological heritage and scientific practice of archaeological research, in keeping with what one of the first articles of the law states: that Nicaraguan archaeology has a scientific, educational and social nature.

For example, you cannot formalize the difference between three types of archaeological research, since this provides a norm allowing the continuation of the traditional practice of rescuing things and avoiding what it's really important to save: the archaeological context, made up by each and every one of the constituent items, not individually, but as a group, and individually only as the methodology for documenting specific features.

Public archaeology would focus almost exclusively on sites that were judged to be directly or indirectly threatened by the construction of infrastructure for development. Until now it's been thought that rescue occurs when a request is made to the Office of Cultural Heritage for an archaeologist to be present to gather the fragments of a vessel, or skeletal remains, or other object that was hit accidentally by the backhoe.

But the law also empowers the Office of Cultural Heritage and the National Museum to run archaeological projects, one of these projects being the preparation of archaeological maps for cities and counties. This information should not be just a simple inventory of places where archaeological evidence can be found geo-referenced to a coordinate only, but should include the precise delineation of its boundaries, the geo-referenced charting of the concentrations when these can be observed, the description of the different features, and in general should document an overview of each site. The Office of Cultural Heritage should draft the official forms that must be completed for each type of archaeological remains. This is a measure designed to prevent the destruction of archaeological sites and features, and provides protection. If possible theodolites or transits should be used.

But accidents can be avoided, and thus one can reject that postulate of rescue archeology. One way to avoid accidents is to establish agreements between the Office of Cultural Heritage and the municipal

governments. The municipalities are the only authorities with the power to issue permits to remove the soil and subsoil for both public and private works. The General Planning Office, for example, should require the presentation of the document "Archaeological Impact Study" endorsed by the Office of Cultural Heritage, and only then issue a removal permit.

Companies have enough time to carry out this study because some time passes from the point when a building site is chosen before they request a permit. From the moment when an idea is conceived, budgets must be made, gains calculated, expenditures for depreciation of machinery or costs for rental figured, calculation made of the number of workers and salaries. If all these can be carried out in a day or in a week, then the impact study could not be done properly, let alone when the machines are already in the area, and for example, have already removed the surface and gone on to the process of surface compaction, as has sometimes happened.

It's generally believed that the researching archaeologist from the University can count on having time to write a research project, and properly plan the different stages of the research. But the authorities have had over 15 years to develop a national project to prevent the pointless destruction of the archaeological record, and to provide more adequate and effective protection of our archaeological heritage, which is no more than the archaeological record.

However, archaeological research in its empirical phase includes the examination of the surface or exploration and excavation. An excavation can never proceed without prior surveying or sampling, unless the emergency operation is caused by erosion runoff accidentally leaving a vessel or other remains exposed. Nevertheless, in this situation, surveying still takes place, though it may be within a very limited area, and without identifying other possible locations for rescue of vessels. But when the impact is caused by the construction of a housing development, the rescue cannot from any point of view still be called an Archaeological Rescue Project.

From this perspective, the draft impact study can not in any way be regarded as a project in the true sense of the word. It is instead the first phase of the research, knowing what will be impacted, if the work proposed is done or completed. This study will then allow preparation of a research project which should be submitted to the Office of Cultural Heritage, along with the application for authorization to proceed.

This course of action would be another way to ensure the protection of the archaeological record, from the perspective that the written documentation, photography and graphics, are also part of the archaeological record, not only from a physical perspective. And it would be another reason to stop talking about and practicing traditional rescue archeology. In the surveying phase relevant data is retrieved to define areas within the archaeological

site most suitable to retrieve the data needed to clarify any problems with respect to knowing a specific topic, according to the characteristic of the surface material collected.

The survey included in the Archaeological Rescue Project developed by the university, in the case of a public archeology study would be the phase prior to archaeological impact. The survey is not only of the surface, but also of the nearby subsoil. For example, if a buried archaeological site is assumed to exist in an area because of its environmental and landscape features, surveying is done directly with a shovel, with the only object being to either verify or disprove the idea that given the environmental and physical conditions, a deposit or archaeological site may exist. The depth of such surveys could be a maximum of one meter, because usually archaeological deposits are barely covered, and vegetation is often all that prevents their being seen, especially in ranching areas.

The survey indicates the most promising areas for the recovery of relevant data, since it is impossible to excavate an entire archaeological site, given financial and time limits. In rescue archeology, collection of fragments is carried out in the area where the construction will take place. Surrounding areas which are omitted are also directly affected by the continual passage of equipment to be used, such as backhoes, bulldozers, caterpillars, and trucks, among others which as they come and go open ways or improve the existing ones.

It has sometimes been the case that in the area where the work would be built, there was no archaeological evidence or deposit on the surface or underground, but one was found at a certain distance and was impacted by the work of expanding access roads to the site of actual construction. The documentation, survey and excavation should also include these surrounding areas which, if they contain archaeological evidence, constitute an integral part of the site in question, and the effect on the protection of the site immediately and later.

The project developed by one of more universities foresees use of different types of analysis for different artifacts, depending on what they are made of, and ecofacts and features, as well as organic remains such as coal, using Carbon-14 analysis, thermoluminescence, obsidian hydration dating, DNA analysis, nutrition, diet, and ethnicity, among others. The law states that companies that will run public or private works must pay for the necessary archaeological studies, apportioning for the purpose 1 to 10 percent of the total project cost. The laboratory process is indispensable for the two interventions and should be anticipated and paid for by the company. To be scientific, archaeology requires the application of various analyses of the archaeological materials recovered.

Each research project, whether directed by a university or the government, should include in its historical summary information about past research, especially how it relates to the site that will be affected,

and much more so if it is close by because the written documentary record of everything done previously on the site, or area where the site to be studied is located, is also part of the archaeological record. Information about past work allows reasoning about the importance of authorizing the project, and why the information generated by the new project will expand, enhance and enrich the knowledge already gained before launching the new project.

A wealth of information exists for certain geographic areas in several parts of the country, beginning with the conquest. In this regard Oviedo and Valdez report that Managua was made up of scattered population groups, from Mateare to Tipitapa.

Very recently, as a product of “accidental” impact, we have come to know at least two of these population centers, or possibly three: Ciudad Sandino, the Chureca-Los Martinez, and Las Delicias, all on the banks of Lake Managua.

A site with mounds was studied in the 1980s, located where the INTA facilities are, about 3 kilometers south of the international airport, which confirms the information Oviedo provided. This shows the falsehood of saying that an archaeological deposit is destroyed accidentally as much by natural factors as by anthropogenic factors, the latter being the most common. Chance is only a pretext and the society that believes it.

Juigalpa, May 15, 2013

Incorporating technology



MANUEL BERMÚDEZ MOREIRA

Responsible computer. Peder Kolind Projects.

As of December 2012, the “Mi Museo y Vos” magazine had published 22 printed editions, covering topics which included these among others: How were our ancestors buried?; The Indigenous Market; The last days of the Chorotegas in Nicaragua; Tattoos, hairstyles and dress of our ancestors, Natural paints used on indigenous pottery.

Since its founding, Mi Museo has offered 300 exhibitions, drawing display items from its collection of more than 7,000 archaeological pieces. Every three months a new exhibition is presented, focusing on a particular topic of pre-Columbian indigenous culture.

Mi Museo staff, eager to provide specific information to the public about our ancestors, has also prepared a print magazine in conjunction with each exhibition. The magazine has included articles based in archeology, an article that explains the details of the current exhibition and a report on the number of visitors that Mi Museo received in the last quarter.

In January of 2013, seeking to increase outreach, reduce costs and join the new information era, Mi Museo decided to stop publishing a print edition of the Journal and instead distribute it in electronic form only, using the email provided by each visitor or group of visitors after their tour of the museum.

In the five months that this method has been used, we have sent informative emails to more than 700 people, of the 5,000 visitors shown to have visited Mi Museo in 2013.

All issues of the magazine “Mi Museo and You” also appear in digital version on our website (www.mimuseo.org).

Visits to Mi Museo



SARA NAVARRO MENDOZA

Mi Museo guide

In this quarter from March 28 to June 30, 2013, Mi Museo received visits from 1404 foreigners, 710 nationals and 1056 students, for a total of 3170 visits. We are happy to welcome visitors from different countries and provide a tour of the museum's facilities without cost to them.

The following is detailed information about the countries whose citizens visited Mi Museo:

Nicaragua 710	Germany 39	Colombia 9	Uruguay 1
E.E.U.U. 597	Panama 37	New Zealand 9	Russia 1
Canada 103	Denmark 21	Brazil 5	Malaysia 1
Costa Rica 91	Argentina 20	Venezuela 5	Korea 1
Honduras 64	Switzerland 19	Chile 5	Puerto Rico 1
England 60	El Salvador 18	Scotland 2	Bolivia 1
Australia 46	Belgium 15	Finland 2	Poland 1
Mexico 44	Italy 29	China 2	Israel 1
France 41	Guatemala 12	Latvia 1	
Spain 39	Holland 11	Portugal 1	

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