CENTRAL PLAZA BURIALS IN SALADOID PUERTO RICO:
AN ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE

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Some Caribbean archaeologists have assumed that the individuals buried beneath the central plazas of Saladoid sites in Puerto Rico lived in those villages during their lives. They interpret these central place burials as providing immediate access to the ancestors during ceremonies performed in this public space. The central plaza is viewed as the axis mundi, and through ancestor veneration the dead were called upon to intercede with the gods on behalf of the living. However, cross-cultural studies indicate that burial practices often are determined by descent, and those clan members whose post-marital residence was in communities other than their clan villages often were returned to their clan village for burial. It is argued here that central place burials do not reflect ancestor veneration, but rather social solidarity among widely scattered villages.

Algunos de los arqueólogos que trabajan en el Caribe han asumido que los individuos enterrados en las plazas centrales de los sitios Saladoides de Puerto Rico habitaron estas comunidades durante su vida. Dicen que los enterramientos en los lugares centrales proveían un acceso inmediato a los ancestros durante las ceremonias realizadas en este espacio público. Esta plaza central es vista como el axis mundi en donde, a través del culto al ancestro, el difunto era llamado para interceder con los dioses por los vivos. No obstante, los estudios en diferentes culturas indican que las prácticas funerarias eran comúnmente determinadas por descendencia. Entonces, aquellos miembros del clan cuyo patrón residencial post-marital era en aldeas distintas a su aldea de origen comúnmente fueron retornados a la aldea de su clan natal para su entierro. En este trabajo se argumenta que estos enterramientos en los lugares centrales no reflejan un culto al ancestro, sino la solidaridad social que existía entre aldeas dispersas.

A rchaeologists working in Puerto Rico have noted that early ceramic age, Saladoid (*circa* 400 B.C. to A.D. 500) settlements tend to have circular, oval, or horseshoe-shaped community plans, and that human remains often were buried in the central clearing or plaza (e.g., Maisabel, Tibes, Tutu, and Punta Candelero sites; Curet and Oliver 1998; Righter 2002; Siegel 1992, 1996, 1999). Beginning about A.D. 600 there were significant changes in cultural practices, which are used to define a new culture-historical period, called Ostionoid (Rouse 1992). These changes included substantial modifications in the production and decoration of pottery vessels, a shift from large extended-family domestic structures to smaller nuclear-family households, the construction of stone-lined courts and plazas, and a shift in burials from the central plaza to the interiors of houses (Curet and Oliver 1998). The archaeological sites discussed in this article are indicated in Figure 1.

Saladoid burials in the central plaza have been interpreted as evidence for ancestor veneration (Siegel 1992, 1996, 1997). It is implied that these individuals lived in the community in which they were buried, and that by burying them in a central place they were present in spirit, especially during the rituals and ceremonies that were held in this public space. Thus, the living members of the community could look to the ancestors for supernatural intervention, and maintain spiritual ties to those who lived before them.

The notion that central place burials reflect immediate access to revered ancestors as part of a system of ancestor veneration seems logical. The image of the central plaza as the *axis mundi*—

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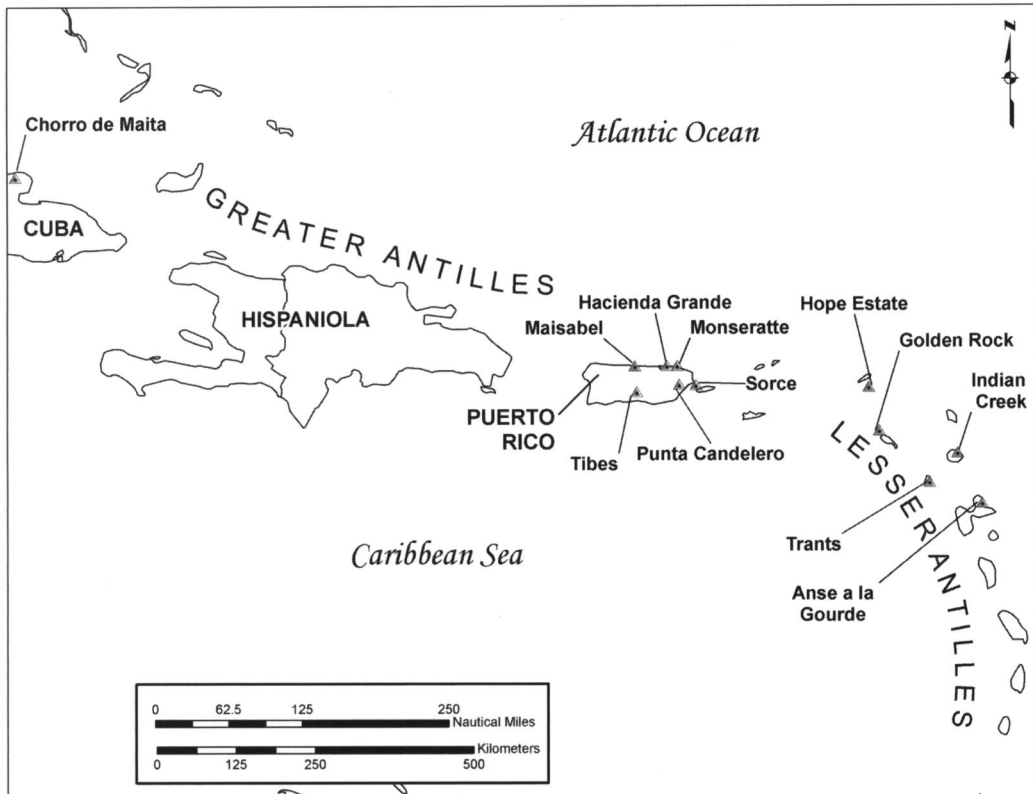
Figure 1. Map of the Caribbean islands showing site locations mentioned in the article.

represented as a tree that ties the underworld where the ancestors are buried to the land of the living and the sky world of the spirits—is a compelling image (Siegel 1992, 1996, 1997). Yet, the issue explored here is why the Puerto Rican Saladoids adopted the practice of central place burials, and what this practice meant in terms of social organization.

The issue here is not whether or not the Saladoid peoples practiced ancestor veneration. Siegel (1992) makes compelling arguments that they did. The issue is whether or not central plaza burials were exclusively an outcome of this practice. This commentary presents an alternative explanation for Saladoid central place burials, and their apparent disappearance at the beginning of the Ostionoid period. The alternative presented here is that individuals who lived their adult lives in other communities were returned to their natal or clan community for burial. Yet I also recognize that this reason probably is not universal. The current trend in Caribbean archaeology is to move away from monolithic notions of singular cultural identities

(e.g., Rouse 1992) to recognized cultural diversity throughout both time and space (e.g., Curet 2003; Keegan 2004).

I begin by reviewing the conclusions presented for ancestor veneration because these are the contexts in which central plaza burials have been interpreted to date. I then turn to the alternative model of postmortem mobility, and argue that this practice better explains central plaza burials in Saladoid Puerto Rico in particular contexts. It is hoped and expected that other alternatives will be forthcoming.

Ancestor Veneration: The Model

Peter Siegel (1992) was the first Caribbean archaeologist to emphasize that Saladoid community plans reflect prevailing concepts of cosmology. He recognized that these settlements typically had circular or semicircular arrangements that seemed to reflect a concentric worldview in which the central plaza represented a sacred space, that the circular

arrangement of domestic structures and mounded middens reflected secular (profane) space, and that the natural world (including various spirits) held sway in the surrounding forests.

Siegel (1992, 1996, 1997, 1999) then used a number of ethnographic examples from lowland South America along with ethnohistoric reports for the contact-period Taínos to flesh out his model of Saladoid cosmology. In addition to the horizontal expression of concentric zones that extended outward from the village center, he also recognized a vertical expression in which the central sacred space was the *axis mundi* that tied the village to the celestial dome and underworld.

Finally, he interpreted the discovery of human burials in the central plaza as one form of evidence for ancestor veneration (Siegel 1992). In other words, these burials were placed to provide immediate access to the ancestors during ceremonies conducted on the plaza. He went on to propose that ancestor veneration involved ceremonies in which individuals were buried in the central plaza and ritual objects were buried in the surrounding mounded middens.

Siegel developed a well-conceived and logical model of Saladoid cosmology. However, the assumptions and speculations on which the model is based deserve more careful scrutiny, with special emphasis on the possible reasons for central plaza burials and the fact that these are found almost exclusively in Saladoid sites on Puerto Rico.

Ancestor Veneration Reconsidered

I agree with Siegel's conclusion that the layout of communities reflects cosmology (Keegan 2007). However, my first issue is that none of the sites he uses to support his concentric model have a perfect concentric plan and distribution of mounded middens (Siegel 1996:Figure 3). Indian Creek is circular but the middens are sequential and not simultaneous; Golden Rock (although not completely defined) and Sorcé appear to be semicircular; Punta Candelero is oval; Maisabel seems to have two open plazas; Monserrate has a mounded midden near the middle of the plaza; and Trants is circular, but lacks central plaza burials (Figure 2). In addition, central plaza burials are not limited to the Saladoid; El Chorro de Maíta site in eastern Cuba has central plaza burials in a proto-historic

context (Valcárcel Rojas and Rodríguez Arce 2005).

This diversity of community plans indicates that the concentric model may not adequately capture the cosmological intentions of the people who built and occupied these settlements. One possibility is that astronomical alignments also influenced the placement of the mounded middens when these communities were established (Alegría 1983; Castellanos 1981; Keegan 2007; Rodríguez Álvarez 2003; Sullivan 1981). In addition, Ensor (2003) has suggested that circular villages reflect patterns of kinship.

A second issue is the assumption that the all of the mounded middens at a site are contemporaneous. Yet at least some of the sites seem to have developed through the sequential construction of middens over a long period of time (e.g., Indian Creek, Antigua). Although the outcome may appear to represent a roughly concentric distribution, this distribution may be the final product of centuries of occupation and not reflect accurately the layout of the settlement at any particular time. In other words, the village itself was never a concentric arrangement of structures.

One of the beauties of Siegel's model is the substantial number of ethnographic cases from lowland South America that he cites (Siegel 1992, 1996). However, and despite an extended discussion of the proper use of ethnographic analogy in archaeology (Siegel 1992:376–381), it should be asked whether the ethnographic and ethnohistoric cases that he uses are directly applicable to the data (see Maclachlan and Keegan 1990). Circular and concentric settlements occur throughout the world. There is no reason to assume that this community plan only reflects native Amazonian notions of cosmology, or that all lowland South American groups shared the same worldview.[1]

Siegel's model of Saladoid community plans and cosmology is based on the assumption that all lowland South American societies shared very similar conceptions of cosmology and space. This is a problematical assumption. Heckenberger (2002) provides some support for Siegel's model in his recognition that circular or concentric villages probably are characteristic of the Arawakan peoples who first colonized the Caribbean. In addition, he concludes that "Arawak peoples reproduce a *habitas* predisposed to perpetuate (a) an ethos of
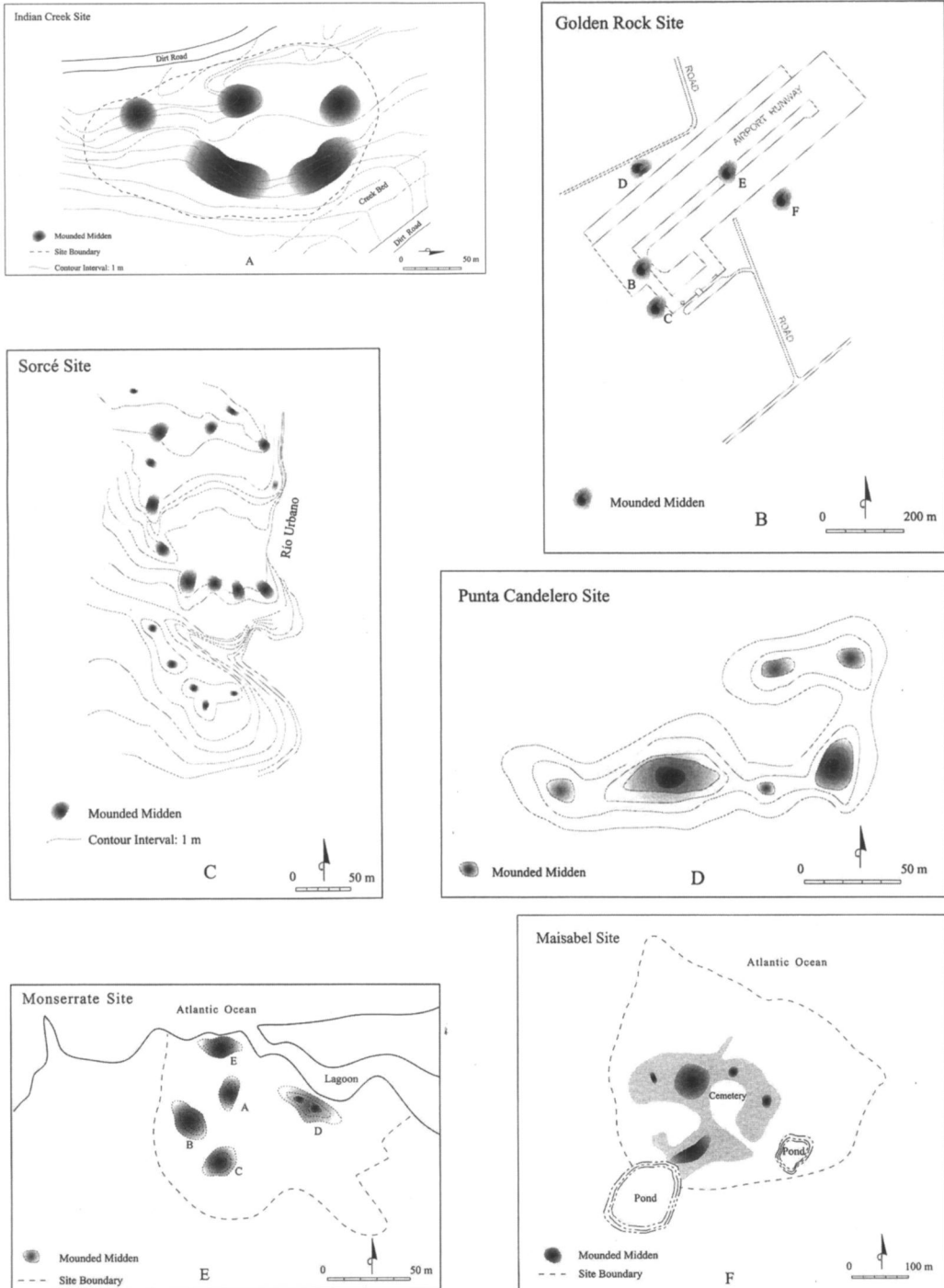
Figure 2. Settlement layouts for Saladoid sites (based on Siegel 1996).

settled village life, commonly coupled with large, fixed populations, fairly intensive subsistence economies, and landscape alteration (rather than mobility and low impact); (b) institutional social ranking based on bloodline and birth order; and (c) regional integration (particularly coupled with a social preoccupation with exchange and a cultural aesthetic which places great symbolic value upon foreign things) and a foreign policy commonly characterized by accommodation and acculturation of outsiders" (Heckenberger 2002).

Heckenberger's (2005) research among the modern Arawakan Xinguano suggests that Saladoid peoples were not egalitarian (*contra* Siegel 1996), and that their social organization can be characterized as cognatic and nonlineal. Moreover, ancestor veneration is most common in ranked societies and rare in those described as egalitarian (Paula Rubel, personal communication 2006). Heckenberger also concludes that Gê-speaking groups, which Siegel (1992, 1996) uses to support his model, are not appropriate analogs for the Arawakan Saladoids (Heckenberger et al. 2005).

Siegel's use of ethnohistoric accounts recorded primarily among the Taínos in Hispaniola also can be questioned. Curet (2003:19) recently noted, "Hispañolan and Puerto Rican polities used significantly different ideological foundations, a reflection of differences in the nature of the political structure and organizations." He continues, "Judging from the striking differences mentioned, they likely developed from distinct types of ancestral societies, and/or through different and divergent historical processes" (Curet 2003:20). I have reached a similar conclusion and have suggested that the Taínos of Hispaniola are the product of Archaic cultural and social foundations (Keegan 2004, 2006a). Thus, Taíno ethnohistory may not be directly applicable to cultural developments outside of Hispaniola.

Furthermore, Siegel (1999:214) states, "Father Ramón Pané...made the most accurate and detailed account of Taíno religion." In fact, Pané reported that the information he collected about religious beliefs was related to him in the Macorix tongue (a non-Taíno language; see Granberry and Vescelius 2004). After making his initial report, Christopher Columbus then asked Pané "to go and live with another leading cacique, named Guarionex, the lord of many people, since the language

[Taíno] of these folk was understood throughout the land." Pané countered: "Lord [Christopher Columbus], how is it that Your Lordship wishes that I go live with Guarionex without knowing any language other than that of Macorix?" (Stevens-Arroyo 1988:76). It is *possible* that the Macorix and Taínos shared similar religious beliefs, and it is *possible* that Pané added information that he collected in the Taíno province of Maguana, but these assumptions have not been proven. Archaeologists have been too eager to accept Pané as an accurate accounting of Taíno religion (Keegan 2007). We also need to keep in mind that "Las Casas also says that Ramon was ... a simple-minded man so that what he reported was sometimes confused and of little substance" (Bourne 1906:314).

With regard to the notion of an *axis mundi* (e.g., Eliade 1963), Siegel specifically cites the case of the Makiritare (Yecuana), a Cariban-speaking group of the upper Orinoco of Venezuela. Yet the Makiritare (Yecuana) associate this concept with their house structures and not the central plaza. It is appropriate to ask whether this cosmological concept is only associated with man-made constructions, and whether open plazas or central open spaces were similarly designated in Arawakan cosmology.

In sum, it is not enough to say that because some lowland South American societies had particular concepts of cosmology that these can be extended to the Saladoid peoples of the Caribbean. There must be test implications and archaeological correlates that can be discerned in the Caribbean in order for the ethnographic analogies to be relevant.

The final issue concerns burial practices. Archaeologists working in Puerto Rico have proposed what seems to be a straightforward dichotomy between central plaza burials during Saladoid times and a shift to burials beneath domestic structures during the subsequent Ostionoid (Curet and Oliver 1998). However, burial practices are far more complex. Saladoid burials also are common in middens (Siegel 1992), and post-Saladoid burials are found in caves, mounds, and beneath house floors (Curet and Oliver 1998; Siegel 1999:217).

The Maisabel site presently is exceptional with regard to the continuation of central plaza burials into the Ostionoid, although the Tutu site on St. Thomas also has central plaza burials that continue

into the Ostionoid (Righter 2002). Unlike other Saladoid sites that either were abandoned or had their central spaces converted to stone-lined courts at the beginning of the Ostionoid period (Curet 2005), Maisabel continued unchanged and burials continued to be placed in the central plaza during Ostionoid times. The fact that Maisabel seems to be unique raises questions concerning the degree to which this community plan, and conclusions based on ethnographic and ethnohistoric analogy, can be generalized to the rest of the Saladoid Caribbean.

What concerns me here is why some Saladoid burials were located beneath the central plaza, and why central plaza burials are reported only for Puerto Rico. What follows is an alternative explanation for central plaza burials in Puerto Rico.

Postmortem Mobility

In an unpublished paper (cited with permission of the authors), Paula G. Rubel and Abraham Rosman (2009)[2] note that: "Archaeologists considering the question of the social structure ... have dealt with the relationship between mortuary practices and societal definitions of the social person, as well as the relationship between mortuary practices and the rank system (Binford 1971; Saxe 1970). Thus far they have not usually been able to deal with the question of descent" (cf. Hodder 1979).

In societies that practice exogamy every community is composed of natal residents and in-marrying spouses. One result is that individuals who trace descent to the same apical ancestor are widely scattered among different communities. Rubel and Rosman (2009; also see Rosman and Rubel 2009) note that individuals often are returned to their natal or clan village for burial in societies that practice patrilineal, matrilineal, or cognatic descent reckoning. Although the conditions under which an individual would be returned to their natal or clan community for burial have not been formalized, one measure seems to be the degree to which an individual was incorporated into the clan of their postmarital residence. From the examples given by Rubel and Rosman (2009), it appears that men are more often returned to their natal village, and that women, especially those who contribute offspring to their new community, are less likely to be returned after death.

An interesting case concerns avunculocal residence, which Keegan and his colleagues have suggested for the prehispanic Caribbean (Keegan and Maclachlan 1989; Keegan et al. 1998). Rubel and Rosman (2009) note: "avunculocal post-marital residence results in a situation in which a woman is usually born in her father's village (among his clansmen), on marriage moves to the village of her husband and his matri-kin, and at death is carried to the cemetery of her own clan. Throughout her life, she never resides in the village of her own clan. Only in death is she surrounded by her own clansmen."

In sum, the main issue is the connection between postmarital residence and where spouses are buried. It cannot be assumed that the individuals buried in a community were life-long residents of that community. The possibility that individuals who lived elsewhere during their life were returned to their natal or clan village for burial must be considered.

Saladoid Burials: An Alternative Perspective

Saladoid culture was a long-lived and widespread phenomenon. Archaeological sites with Saladoid ceramics are distributed from northeastern South America, throughout the Lesser Antilles, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. If ancestor veneration was a significant component of cultural practice, then we would expect to see evidence for it throughout the Antilles. Continuing this logic, if central plaza burials were a component of ancestor veneration, then such burials should be evident throughout the Saladoid region. Yet burial in the central plaza seems to be unique to Saladoid sites in Puerto Rico. Similar sites from the same time period on Vieques and in the Lesser Antilles (e.g., Sorcé, Trants, Hope Estate, Morel, and Golden Rock sites) and South America typically do not have burials in the central plaza (Rouse and Cruxent 1963). However, Heckenberger (2005) notes that individuals were returned to their natal village for burial in the southern Amazon (Xingu area), and he believes that this practice was part of the cultural inventory during the Arawakan diaspora that led to the colonization of the Antilles (Heckenberger 2002; Heckenberger et al. 2005). The question remains, why was the Puerto Rican Saladoid unique?

One reason that Puerto Rico is unique is that it

was colonized very early in the ceramic age settlement of the Caribbean. The earliest dates for Saladoid sites come from Puerto Rico and the northern Lesser Antilles (ca. 400 B.C.). The available data suggest that the initial ceramic age colonization of the Caribbean occurred as either a direct jump from Central or South America to Puerto Rico and the neighboring Windward and Virgin Islands or as movement through the Lesser Antilles during which most of these islands were bypassed during the initial episode of colonization (reviewed in Keegan 2004; also see Rodríguez Ramos and Pagán Jiménez 2007).

The only early Saladoid site identified in the Windward Islands of the southern Lesser Antilles is Fond Brûlé on Martinique.[3] Radiocarbon dates of circa 480 B.C. and four other dates ranging up to A.D. 135 have been reported. Is it a coincidence that Fond Brûlé, the one early Saladoid site in the southern Lesser Antilles, is almost exactly half way between Puerto Rico and the South American mainland (about 500 km from the northeast coast of Venezuela and 450 km from eastern Puerto Rico)? If the Saladoid migration had progressed in a stepping-stone fashion through the Lesser Antilles, then there should be similar early sites on other islands. To date, these have not been found.

The need to maintain social ties over very long distances would have promoted an emphasis on clan solidarity—an emphasis that may not have been so critical once additional colonies were established throughout the Lesser Antilles after A.D. 200 (see Fitzpatrick et al. 2010; Haviser 1997). New settlements, especially when they are a substantial distance from the parent community, face a variety of economic, demographic, and social risks (Keegan 2004). Catastrophic events can lead to subsistence failure, appropriate spouses must be found to maintain demographic viability, and the full range of statuses and positions must be filled to ensure social reproduction. These factors form the basis for the "lifeline" model in which a colony maintained close ties to its parent community (e.g., Kirch 2000). In addition, Moore (2001) has shown through simulation studies that a colony has a significantly greater chance for survival and success if it maintains ties to at least one other community.

The social glue that binds one community to another is marriage. Alliances between families, clans, and villages are formalized through the exchange of spouses. Thus, the return of a deceased spouse to their clan village completes a structuralist complementarity. Moreover, in some societies the death of a spouse must be resolved by providing a new spouse to the widow/widower (see Schneider and Gough 1961). The death of a clan member provides an occasion for feasting in which clan members from different communities gather to send the individual to their afterlife, and it also might involve a marriage ceremony in which a new spouse was provided to reaffirm social alliances. In this regard, burial practices reflect regional social alliances, and not simply local connections to the ancestors and gods through deceased members of the community.

Second, Saladoid material culture emphasized regional connections. Keegan (2004) has interpreted the widespread sharing of iconography as a *veneer* that served to unite widely scattered communities.[4] The notion of veneer comes from the low frequency of shared motifs in concert with their wide distribution across the Antilles from South America to Puerto Rico. In other words, while the majority of artifacts in Saladoid sites reflect local activities, there also are highly decorated ceramics and exotic lithic amulets that share virtually identical iconographic messages and that served to reinforce ties among widely scattered communities (Watters and Scaglion 1994). The expectation is that other cultural practices, including burials, should reflect this regional focus.

The shift to a more local focus is evident during post-Saladoid times (Curet and Oliver 1998; Keegan 2004). A wide variety of local pottery styles emerged, and the emphasis on long-distance connections in order to ensure social reproduction and procreation was no longer crucial. The abandonment of central place burials in favor of burials beneath domestic structures, and in other contexts, is a symptom of the emerging localization of social identity.

Third, individuals who moved to the village of their spouse at marriage may lack ties to specific households in their natal or clan village. Although they were born in a particular structure, the movement of their siblings at marriage, death of their parents, and other factors can obliterate specific ties. Over time they are no longer associated with one household, but are instead members of a wider clan. This situation is especially true in the avunculocal

case cited above. As a result they should be buried in the clan cemetery and not beneath the floor of a domestic structure.

At least in Puerto Rico, Saladoid cemeteries seem to be located in the center of the village. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that these cemeteries contain clan members who resided in the village and those who lived elsewhere during their adult lives and were returned for burial. The centrality of burial would serve to reinforce ties among clan members who were dispersed among widely scattered villages. After death, the return of a clan member would be the focus of grieving by the descent group as expressed in a feast that brought together the widely scattered members of the clan. Such clan solidarity was essential for ensuring survival in the risky milieu of the colonial enterprise.

Fourth, if the individuals who were buried in the central plaza were indeed revered ancestors, then we would expect to find some indicators for this status. Yet Saladoid burials contain few grave goods, and there is little to indicate that these individuals were imbued with any special status. Moreover, it is not clear whether the mounded middens represent a community dump, or whether they belonged to particular social groups. We do know that exotic artifacts were buried in these middens, perhaps during mortuary rituals associated with the deceased. If this was the case, then the ritual burial of objects in the midden affirmed social alliances and group solidarity rather than the significance of particular individuals. This interpretation makes sense because less complex societies tend to trace descent to a mythical ancestor and not to living individuals.

In my opinion, the characteristics thus far used to define the Saladoid are emblems of regional identity that served to unite a diversity of cultural groups. The wide distribution of ceramics and lithics with virtually identical forms and modes of expression reflect the strong integration of widely scattered communities that needed inter-community cooperation and support to ensure their survival. In this situation the focus would not be on individuals (i.e., revered ancestors) but rather on the social relations that bound communities to each other. This is exactly the situation in which we would expect the dead to be returned to their natal or clan village for burial. In other words, the deceased individuals represent regional solidarity,

and not individuals who intercede with the gods on behalf of the living.

Fifth, it may be possible to test the notion that burials reflect the postmortem mobility of clan members by analyzing strontium isotopes in the bones. In a recent study, Booden et al. (2008) measured strontium isotope ratios in 19 individuals buried in the cemetery at Anse à la Gourde, Guadeloupe. They concluded that a number of the individuals had "nonlocal" Sr isotope signatures. What is intriguing is that these individuals often were buried on the periphery of the cemetery. Their study suggests that individuals who did not live at this site were buried in the cemetery.

Finally, the issue of cultural diversity in the pre-Columbian Caribbean is only now being addressed.[5] New evidence suggests that the Saladoid cultures may have had closer ties to the isthmo-Colombian area of South America than to the lowland Amazon and Orinoco River basins (Rodríguez Ramos 2005; Rodríguez Ramos and Pagán Jiménez 2007). Thus the notion that lowland South American ethnographies can be used to interpret Saladoid cultures is in question. Moreover, Taíno societies exhibit substantial diversity (Hulme 1993), and recent interpretations suggest significant differences between the Hispaniolan societies that were described by the Spanish chroniclers and the Puerto Rican societies that have been interpreted using these records (Curet 2003; Keegan 2004, 2007). Thus, the use of ethnohistoric evidence recorded among the Taíno of Hispaniola and Cuba should not be used to justify the notion of ancestor veneration in Saladoid Puerto Rico (see Machlachlan and Keegan 1990).

Conclusions

To his credit, Siegel develops a logical argument for the role of cosmology in structuring the layout of Saladoid communities. However, in order to support his model he homogenizes Saladoid culture, lowland South American societies, and Taíno ethnohistory. In fact, none of the settlement plans that he illustrates are exactly the same (Siegel 1996:Figure 3), the ethnographic cases that he uses come from societies with diverse cultural practices (including significant language differences), and not all Caribbean archaeologists are willing to accept that accounts of the ethnohistoric Taínos in

Hispaniola and Cuba are applicable to Puerto Rico or the Saladoid period (Curet 2003; Keegan 2004, 2007). Finally, the fact that central plaza burials are found primarily in Puerto Rico indicates that the notion that these burials are evidence for ancestor veneration should not be extended to other Saladoid groups in the Caribbean.

Siegel's (1992, 1996, 1997, 1999) model implies that Saladoid burials in the central plaza reflect the interment of individuals who lived in the community throughout their lives. Cross-cultural studies indicate that this may not be the case (Rubel and Rosman 2009). It is equally likely that clan members were returned to their clan village for burial, and that these burials were located in clan or community cemeteries some of which were situated in the central plaza.

Moreover, ancestor veneration, as defined by Siegel (1992, 1999), places primary emphasis on the local community and its deceased residents as providing access to the gods. In contrast, the recognition of postmortem mobility places emphasis on clan solidarity among widely scattered communities. Because Saladoid material culture emphasizes a regional identity, it is here argued that Saladoid burials in the central plaza more likely represent regional integration and not homage to the people who lived and died in the village.

Finally, the disappearance of central place burials is viewed as reflecting a shift to a more local identity (albeit on a smaller regional scale). The need to reinforce long-distance social ties disappeared as the number of settlements and the density of population increased. As a result, mortuary practices shifted to a more local focus by the beginning of the Ostionoid period. Had access to the ancestors been important—and Siegel argues that ancestor veneration was an important component of Taíno ideology— then central place burials should have continued even if these were restricted to members of the emerging elite (see Curet and Oliver 1998; Siegel 1999).

The selection of the central plaza as the location for the village cemetery may reflect a decision to inter the dead in a focal place. In this regard, the notion of ancestor veneration remains a viable working hypothesis, and there is no reason that burial practices based on clan affiliation could not also reflect the identification of these individuals as ancestors. However Siegel's speculations fail to consider the broader implications of social organization, and he ignores the possibility that individuals who were not resident in the community during their adult lives were returned to their natal or clan village for burial. Given the exigencies of colonizing groups, it is more likely that social solidarity was the primary emphasis of mortuary practices.

My goal in writing this article is not to show that Siegel's ancestor veneration is wrong and my clan burial is right. Both hypotheses require further elaboration and testing. The central issue is that the Saladoid is far more complex than previously acknowledged, and that our models of cultural behavior must embrace this complexity.

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Notes

1. Siegel's model of ancestor veneration is based on selective sampling from ethnographic reports regarding South American societies that existed two thousand years after the Saladoid peoples, and on ethnohistoric reports that the Taínos of Hispaniola practiced ancestor worship through the curation of human remains. Careful reading of Siegel's numerous publications on this topic leads one to believe that ancestor veneration was an unquestionable component of Saladoid culture, and that archaeological evidence is not needed to demonstrate this point.

2. Citing unpublished papers as the basis for an argument is less than satisfying. However, Rubel, Rosman, and I are revising and combining their two papers for publication. In the interim, we are happy to provide the original versions of their papers to anyone who requests them.

3. Here I am faced with a dilemma. One reviewer, citing personal communication with Benoit Berard (an archaeologist who has lived and worked on Martinique for years), claims that the early dates for the site are inaccurate, and that there is no evidence for the colonization of the southern Lesser Antilles before A.D. 100–200. A second reviewer claims that the early dates from this site point to the early settlement of these islands. In either case, most (if not all) of the

southern Lesser Antilles appear to have been bypassed during the initial ceramic age colonization, and that the earliest sites are located on Puerto Rico and neighboring Windward islands.

4. One of the anonymous reviewers questioned my use of the term "veneer," which I use in conformity with the first dictionary definition—"a thin finishing or surface layer of wood ... bonded to an inferior substratum." In the same way that a wood veneer conveys a particular outward message, the use of identical symbols on pottery and lithics conveyed a sense of regional identity to the widely scattered Saladoid peoples of the Antilles. Although most of their artifacts were made to facilitate local/domestic activities, they also manufactured a relatively small percentage of artifacts (circa 10 percent) that conveyed social and cultural meanings. In this regard we can identify similar symbolic messages that are consistent across the Antilles (called Saladoid), but this thin layer of shared meaning masks variability at the local level. Similar conclusions have been proposed for the Adena/Hopewell and Southeastern Ceremonial Cult in eastern North America.

5. For more than fifty years Caribbean archaeology has been structured by the debate between those who believe that the Antilles were colonized by peoples from the lower Orinoco (Rouse 1953, 1992), and those who view Antillean societies as belonging to what Julian Steward defined as "Circum-Caribbean Chiefdoms" (Steward and Faron 1959). Those who take a traditional view of normative culture history probably have not recognized this debate and the ways that it was contextualized in Caribbean archaeology (based on the fact that they never cite these publications). Peter Siegel represents the former, while I recently have become convinced that the latter is more accurate (although it is not possible that Andean cultural developments are the source of the Taíno social formation). What is at issue is the degree to which Amazonian ethnographies and Taíno ethnohistory can be applied generally to early Caribbean societies (see Maclachlan and Keegan 1990).