A CUBAN ORIGIN FOR GLADES POTTERY?

A PROVOCATIVE HYPOTHESIS REVISITED

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Archaeological interpretations invoking prehistoric contact or migration between Florida and the Greater Antilles have a long history. Noteworthy early claims of such contacts include those by Fewkes (1904), Harrington (1921), Gower (1927), and Lovén (1935). More recent archaeological evaluations of possible Florida-Antillean contact, including those by such luminaries as Stone (1939), Griffin (1943), Rouse (1949), Willey (1949), and Sears (1977), have continued up to the present, and have involved several time periods and categories of material culture. Sturtevant (1960) has considered the problem from an ethnological point of view.

In this paper we restrict our comments to a highly specific connection first proposed in the 1940s. It is based on an intriguing similarity between geometrically incised pottery of the Glades tradition of southern Florida with the incised pottery of the Cantabria tradition in south-central Cuba. Pertinent similarities between the Glades and Cantabria pottery traditions include open bowls incised near the rim with designs consisting of arches and zigzags. Regarding these similarities, the most profound position offered to date suggests that Glades material culture owes its existence to a northward migration from central Cuba. Our purpose in revisiting this suggested connection is to evaluate it based on improved chronologies in both areas.

The Glades and Cantabria Traditions of South Florida and Cuba

Pottery of the Glades tradition was formally defined by John Goggin, expanding on a term first used by Matthew Stirling (1936) and fleshed out by Goggin’s own fieldwork (Goggin 1940, 1941, n.d.). Portrayed as an entirely indigenous Florida tradition (Goggin 1949), the Glades chronological sequence was initially developed based in large part on Goggin’s 1944 work at Upper Matecumbe Key (Goggin and Sommer 1949). Despite refinements and
clarifications based on an extensive series of subsequent radicarbon dates and additional excavations at other sites, Goggin’s early estimates of chronological boundaries between ceramic phases and sub-phases seem to have been no more than a century off the mark (see Widmer 1980:75; Griffin 2002:141-144; and below).

At roughly the same time as the Glades tradition was coming into focus as a result of Goggin’s work, the earliest publications illustrating pottery of the Cantabria tradition of south-central Cuba appeared. Beginning in 1930, three major late-period agricultural sites in the Jagua Bay area, near Cienfuegos, were explored by the Grupo Guamá, consisting of a number of dedicated amateurs under the direction of professional scholars Oswaldo Morales Patiño and René Herrera Fritot. The first site explored was Cayo Ocampo, on an island of the same name in Jagua Bay, during five expeditions between 1930 and 1946 (Morales Patiño et al. 1947). In 1944 the same pottery complex found at Cayo Ocampo was discovered at the important Cantabria site, located on a prominent hill overlooking the Arimao River Valley (González Muñoz and Avella 1946). A third site with similar material culture, El Abra de Castellon, was documented in the upper Arimao Valley in 1950 (Sanjurjo 1950). Prior to this time, agricultural, pottery-producing sites were known only for eastern Cuba. Consequently, these Jagua Bay area sites were announced as the westernmost expression of a pottery-making culture on the island (and by implication the closest to Florida). Line drawings of characteristic sherds by Herrera, showing incised, appliqué, and punctated rims, were published in the reports on Cayo Ocampo and Cantabria. Since that time, some 30 sites yielding this pottery style tradition, now known as Cantabria, have been documented in south-central Cuba (Angelbello and Delgado 2003).

Initial Comparison of Glades and Cantabria Ceramics
In the first direct comparison of Glades and Cantabria pottery, in 1949 Irving Rouse called attention to the similarity of incised designs by publishing Herrera’s illustrations of Cayo Ocampo rim sherds together with photographs of corresponding Glades rim sherds from Florida. While Rouse felt that the similarity was worth following up, nonetheless he fell short of invoking direct contact, taking the position instead that the differences between the two pottery complexes outweighed the similarities. He noted, for example, that the Cantabria complex involved considerable appliqué decoration that was completely missing in Glades. As an alternative explanation for the similarities, he suggested that the similar incised designs in the two areas were due to borrowing from a shared Archaic background (Rouse 1949:130-131).

With serendipitous timing, in December of the same year John Goggin visited Cuba with the intention of pursuing comparative studies. During that visit Goggin was able to visit with Herrera and view first-hand the pottery from Cayo Ocampo and Cantabria then in the Museo Guamá, toward which he reportedly showed the greatest interest (anonymous 1950; Herrera 1964:20).

Some years later Ripley Bullen, together with Don D. Laxson, published further side-by-side comparisons of incised Cantabria and Glades rim sherds, the latter from the Laxson’s excavations in the Hialeah midden near Miami (Laxon 1953a, 1953b). Bullen and Laxson noted that the pertinent Glades material came from a Glades II horizon, which at that time had an estimated end date of A.D. 1125, whereas the Cuban material had an estimated beginning date of A.D. 1200. Although these dates were merely rough estimates, Bullen and Laxson (1954) concluded, at odds with Rouse, that the dates were “too close to each other to rule out the possibility of communication between Florida and Cuba at about 1200 A.D.” In a broader
treatment of cultural contacts between Florida and the West Indies published in the 1970s, Bullen twice reiterated his earlier comparison of incised designs, calling the similarity “tenuous but a little persuasive,” and implying that contact was made “on a fairly simple level technologically or, perhaps one should say, aesthetically,” perhaps the result of casual contact by fishermen (Bullen 1974:156, 1976).

Rouse himself revisited the issue in 1958, pointing out that the pottery of central Cuba (which he then equated with his Baní culture) did have “certain highly specific resemblances” to Glades pottery. On this occasion he again expressed his doubts by noting the mismatch in the level of cultural development between the two areas, early Glades belonging in his opinion at the Marginal (i.e., Archaic) level.

From the Cuban perspective it was René Herrera Fritot who took up the matter of resemblances between Cantabria and Glades traits. Herrera, the leading light in the Grupo Guamá, had discussed the matter with Goggin in Havana in 1949. Having reviewed publications on Glades material by Goggin, Willey, Rouse, Laxson, and Bullen, Herrera saw convincing evidence of direct culture contact with central Cuba, including shared elements going substantially beyond pottery motifs (Herrera 1964:19-21, 27-28). For Herrera, the list of common elements included arch and zigzag pottery motifs, crisscross incising oblique to the rim, wide-mouthed shallow bowls with serially punctated rims, simple button-shaped and horn-shaped lugs, shell gouges, *Oliva* beads, thick conch shell picks, petaloid celts of stone, and longitudinally grooved stones.

Based on this evidence, Herrera grouped the Cantabria and the Glades traditions together as “Early Taíno,” based on the simplicity of their pottery design features, with a beginning date in Cuba as early as 350 A.D. (Herrera 1964:Fig. 1). As to the primary direction of the migration
responsible for this positive relationship, Herrera deemed it still to be determined, although he particularly favored a migration from the islands toward peninsular Florida for reasons he said were largely geographical (1964:27). As far as we know, this provocative challenge to the North American orthodoxy, that the Glades tradition is essentially an Antillean transplant, has gone without comment from the North American side until now. In our opinion, it deserves a review in the light of improved descriptions and chronologies in both Cuba and Florida.

Chronology of Glades Tradition Decorated Pottery

During the past half century, regional temporal sequences for Florida have become far more clearly defined and delineated, both from a spatial and chronological point of view (e.g. Widmer 1988: 67-89; Cordell 1992; Milanich 1994: 301; Griffin 2002: 73-93, 123-160). The initial appearance of a variety of incised ceramic decorative types during the Glades I late sub-period (ca. A.D. 500-750) was followed by a flourescence of such decorations during the Glades IIa and IIb periods (from A.D. 750-1100). Decorative types included Gordon Pass Incised, Sanibel Incised, Fort Drum Incised, Cane Patch Incised, Opa Locka Incised, Key Largo Incised, Miami Incised, and Matecumbe Incised, marked by a wide range of incised geometric patterns including line-filled triangles, arcades, and chevrons, in addition to a number of punctated and linear-punctuated decorative types as well. These diverse decorative styles, which co-existed for a while with late Weeden Island and Englewood ceramics to the north along the Gulf coast, largely disappeared after A.D. 1100, however, and after a century without decoration at all (Glades IIC), they were only replaced by a more limited range of simple parallel-line incised decorations (Surfside Incised) which persisted from roughly A.D. 1200 to 1400 (Glades IIIa). Not only are
the incised decorations from this period markedly dissimilar from the earlier florescence of geometric designs between A.D. 500 and 1100, but shortly after A.D. 1400 incised decoration disappeared once again from South Florida assemblages, never to return as an important element of indigenous ceramic assemblages. Vessel decoration after this point was normally restricted to the rim notching characteristic of the type Glades Tooled, which itself bears similarities to the Pinellas assemblages of the Safety Harbor region to the north along the Gulf coast.

Chronology of Cantabria Tradition Decorated Pottery

As to the dating of the Cantabria tradition in south-central Cuba, we now have the benefit of a chronological sequence afforded by the excavation of a stratified site, Loma del Convento. This important site was discovered in 1974 by Cuban archaeologist Alfredo Rankin on a high ridge overlooking the Arimao River Valley. Since its discovery, Loma del Convento has seen three rounds of excavation, the first by Rankin in 1974 and 1975 (Rankin 1980), the second by Lourdes Domínguez in 1985 (Dominguez 1991), and the third by a joint Cuban-Soviet team from 1986 through 1988, headed on the Cuban side by Jorge Calvera and on the Russian side by Vladimir Bashilov. It is Bashilov and Golenko’s paper, “The Periodization of Subtaíno Culture in South-Central Cuba,” published in the journal Russian Archaeology (1992), that together with four laboratory dates secured by Cuban archaeologists, gives us the clearest picture of pottery change within the Cantabria tradition.

The time span involved, following Rodríguez Matamoros’s (2004) interpretation of the laboratory dates, is approximately A.D. 1300 – 1550, or about 250 years. Miriam Celaya and Pedro Pablo Godo (2000) have argued, on stylistic grounds, that Cantabria tradition is intrusive
in central Cuba and reflects a migration history having its origins in earlier agroalfarero-stage settlements in Granma province in eastern Cuba. In South Florida, a post A.D. 1300 dating aligns the Cantabria tradition in part with Glades IIIa and IIIb. Bashilov and Golenko describe three stratigraphic horizons, labeled Horizons I through III. In general, modeled decoration is dominant over incising in the earliest Cantabria pottery, whereas in the latest horizon, at a time contemporaneous with early Spanish contact, the trend is reversed and incising is overwhelmingly dominant over appliqué decoration. Ignoring the manner of decoration and focusing just on the two dominant motifs, arcades and zigzags, we find that the two have complementary distributions over time. In the earliest horizon, decoration is almost exclusively arcaded, whereas zigzags, which are arguably a stylistic simplification of the arcades, are dominant in the latest horizon.

Conclusions

Returning to the original comparison made during the 1940s, it is now abundantly clear that the Glades material selected for comparison, with its incised arcades and simple chevrons, dates to the Glades IIa and IIb periods of ca. A.D. 750 – 1100. In this dating, Bullen and Laxson’s assessment in 1954 was essentially correct. However, the material that inspired the comparison on the Cuban side, being from the Cayo Ocampo and Cantabria sites, we now know dates to the latest horizon in the Cantabria tradition, El Convento III, essentially contemporaneous with early Spanish contact in the sixteenth century. If we look for the earliest appearance of incised arcade and zigzag designs in south-central Cuba, according to the Russian data we find that the former does occur in minor amounts and the latter in trace amounts in El
Convento I, which nonetheless does not appear to predate ca. A.D. 1300. Thus, Herrera’s assessment of the Cayo Ocampo and Cantabria pottery as “early Taíno” on a par with comparable Glades pottery was considerably in error in the light of dates available today. Over time, it has become increasingly evident that the heyday of geometrically-incised ceramics in deep southern Florida was considerably earlier than that represented by the Cantabria ceramic tradition in the Arimao valley in southern Cuba. At least two centuries, and perhaps as many as four or five, separate the sherds that were illustrated together in the initial comparison.

In any consideration of the potential Antillean origins of Glades material culture, in whole or in part, it seems pertinent to point out that in south-central Cuba, the pottery with which we are concerned is associated with Arawakan speech communities, intensive *montones*-style agriculture emphasizing bitter manioc, sweet potatoes, and maize, specialized root crop processing equipment including clay griddles and *Codakia* shell scrapers, and generically Taíno ritual gear including *zemi* effigies. All of these features are foreign to the Glades tradition at a date of A.D. 750 – 1100. In Cuba, Cantabria pottery is widely thought to have broader affiliations with the Meillacan subseries with origins in Hispaniola (Celaya 1995).

Before entering a final verdict we must report a loose end. Entirely apart from the similarities reported in the incised decoration on the exterior of bowls, Ripley Bullen has called attention to certain incised tabular lugs found especially in the Florida Keys. Regarding these, Bullen suggested that they are more reminiscent of pottery from the Greater Antilles than to anything else in Florida (1974:157). The incised lugs in question are chronologically later than the geometrically incised bowls of the Glades tradition already discussed, pertaining to the type Surfside Incised of the Glades IIIa period, which dates to circa 1200-1400 A.D. Bullen could not find any close Cuban equivalents for these incised lugs, however, and neither can we.
Nonetheless, we must report that in the time that has passed since the initial comparisons were made in the 1940s, another late ceramic culture has been reported on the north Cuban coast, farther west and much closer to peninsular Florida than the Cantabria phenomenon of the south-central coast. This Cuban archaeological culture is called El Morillo, and has been documented at four sites in Matanzas and Havana provinces. The type site has yielded a single radiocarbon date in the fourteenth century, contemporaneous with Glades IIIa, and much to the point, its ceramics do include incised lugs. However, based on the published illustrations of El Morrillo incised lugs, they have a strongly curvilinear aspect and do not provide a convincing prototype for the Surfside Incised lugs from the Keys. According to Godo (2005), El Morillo lugs are zoomorphic in character, relating to frog effigies unlike anything so far reported for South Florida.

To return to the comparison that initiated this discussion in the 1940s, what is perhaps most important to recognize is that regardless of any visual similarities between the incised geometric designs on Cuban pottery in the Cantabria tradition and Florida pottery in the Glades tradition, current archaeological evidence suggests that the two are separated in time by two centuries at minimum. By the time that indigenous Cuban populations began to craft their ceramics in the elaborate Cantabria tradition after A.D. 1300, South Florida groups were no longer making comparable incised decorations on their vessels. Had a fifteenth-century Cuban Indian walked into a typical South Florida village at that time, he would have seen virtually nothing familiar in the typical household assemblage of a Florida Indian, in which the pottery was essentially undecorated below the vessel rim. Conversely, had a Florida Indian visited Cuba during the fifteenth-century, he or she would have found nothing even remotely similar to the Glades Tooled rim decorations among the bewildering diversity of Cantabrian incised, rim-
modeled, and especially appliqué decorative styles (the last of which shows not even the remotest similarity to anything at all in the entire South Florida prehistoric chronology). Viewed in the proper temporal context, therefore, ceramic traditions from South Florida and Cuba appear to have essentially nothing in common, providing no reason to posit any degree of direct or sustained cultural contact across the Florida Straits. Only after the arrival of the Spanish in the early sixteenth century did direct visitation and migration begin to occur, and more often than not on Spanish sailing vessels instead of oceangoing canoes (e.g., Worth 2004). Thus a Cuba-Florida connection was forged in the colonial era, but not, as some have suggested, much earlier on a Glades II horizon.

Our disposal of one detail does not, of course, rule out the possibility of occasional contact between Florida and Cuba at other times in prehistory, perhaps especially, as Rouse (1949) supposed, during the Archaic. Given the frequency with which Cuban archaeologists invoke southeastern North American connections in their discussions of Cuban flaked stone industries (e.g., Dacal and Rivera 1996; Febles 1991), much remains to be settled on this issue and it invites further review. We leave that, however, for future deliberation.

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Figure 8. Comparison of incised pottery from Cayo Ocampo, Cuba (top) and Upper Matecumbe Key, Florida (bottom).
Glades IIa - IIb incised pottery

Key Largo Incised

Miami Incised

Matecumbe Incised

Images courtesy Ann Cordell, Florida Museum of Natural History
Florida vs. Cuban lug handles, ca. A.D. 1300s

Surfside Incised lug handles

El Morillo lug handles

8.1. Examples of turtle theme handles from El Morillo

Image courtesy Ann Cordell, Florida Museum of Natural History