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CARTOGRAPHIC TRANSITIONS: GUANIHANI TO SAN SALVADOR

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ABSTRACT

On October 12, 1492 Christopher Columbus made his historic landfall on the Lucayan island of Guanihani. After bestowing the name of San Salvador on the island, Columbus departed with his ships and crew, never to return. Columbus failed to provide comprehensive charts of the New World landscapes he encountered on his first journey to the New World leaving us to forever ponder the true locale of the island of discovery. Through the 16th century and well into the 17th century the Bahamas Archipelago languished in relative obscurity. The archipelago was not a primary destination for expeditions to the New World. At their best, the islands acted as landmarks by which to steer. At their worst, they served as shipping hazards to be avoided. Consequently, comprehensive surveys and maps of the islands of the Bahamas Archipelago were forestalled until the British established permanent colonies in the region in the 17th century. This paper examines the evolution of the cartographic portrayal of contemporary San Salvador Island over time, from its initial depiction as an indistinct and unnamed island territory, to its identification as an island named Triangulo, through yet another transition to its identity as Watlings Island, and finally the island's reacquisition of the title of San Salvador, the Island of Discovery, in 1926.

INTRODUCTION

As expected, early maps of the Bahamas Archipelago lacked detail and accuracy.¹ Six-

¹ Maps used in this paper were culled from a number of museum, library, private, and commercial digital map collections. Reasonable efforts were made to access as many of these collections as possible. Other options may make addi-

teenth century cartographers lived in exciting, yet daunting, times. Each ship returning from the New World brought back evidence of new discoveries. Cartographers were faced with the task of inserting these newfound landscapes into the evolving puzzle of the map of the New World. New maps were generated at a rapid pace but European cartographers had to operate under the constraints imposed by the inherent limitations in navigation capabilities and chart making techniques of the era.² These limitations included:

- The problems associated with the conversion of information from one set of national standards to another, such as:
 - standards of measurement
 - map projections
 - map scales
 - language and/or spelling conventions
- Making a determination of whether or not reported new discoveries were indeed new or if they were simply displaced landscapes portrayed at a different locale in previous mapping efforts
- The uncertainties involved in portraying graphic, two dimensional, bird's-

tional resources available with time and other historical maps may provide further evidence of the evolving character of known areas of the Bahamas Archipelago during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

² Navigation issues were significant during the era of exploration and colonization of the New World and would remain so well into the 19th century. The problem was of such importance that the British government established a Board of Longitude which was authorized to award prizes of £10,000, £15,000, and £20,000 for the development of longitudinal navigation systems that were accurate to distances 60, 40, and 30 nautical miles, respectively (Taylor, 1971).

would have been far more likely to appear on early navigational charts of the New World.

GUANIHANI

One of the problems associated with the evaluation of 16th and 17th century map products lies with the discrepancy in the number of islands depicted as being a part of the Bahamas Archipelago and with the subsequent application of name labels to those islands. Over time a number of different names have appeared as labels on the islands of the Bahamas. Some of these variations are attributed to language differences as opposed to identification issues. For example, the Quad map produced in 1600 (Figure 3) labels modern-day Eleuthera as Gamima while the Mercator map of 1578 (Figure 4) uses the term Limana to identify the same island.



Figure 3. Quad, 1600, *Novi orbis pars borealis*, (Courtesy of the University of Georgia, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library)



Figure 4. Mercator, Gerardus, 1578, *Americae sive novi, nova descriptio*, (courtesy of the University of Alabama Library System, <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu>)

The term Guanihani appears in many different manifestations on 16th and 17th century maps of the Bahamas. Language and location account for some of the differences in the portrayal of the island or in the spelling of its name. One of the first maps to use the term Guanihani was produced by Ioannes Deutecum in 1578 (Deutecum, 1578). The term Guanaami is used on a map published in 1590 by Jacques Dousaigo (Dousaigo, 1590).

Certainly one question confronting students of historical mapping efforts in the Bahamas Archipelago lies with the absence of an appropriate number of islands along the eastern flank of the archipelago. Abraham Ortelius produced one of the more detailed maps of the region in 1579 (Figure 5). While the islands representing Grand Bahama, Abaco and Eleuthera are clearly outlined on the Ortelius map, the island southeast of Eleuthera lacks the necessary length to correspond with Cat Island. The shape of the island fails to replicate the shape of either Cat Island or San Salvador. Ortelius clearly labels the island Guanahany. Samana is identified as the island southwest of Guanahany.

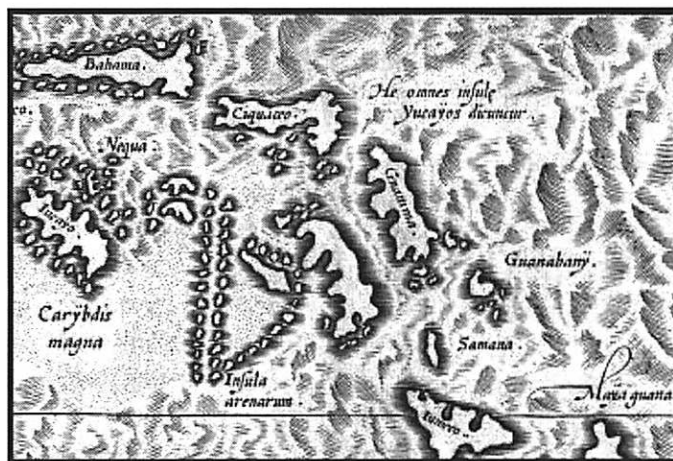


Figure 5. Ortelius, Abraham, 1579, *Culiacanae, Americae Regionis, Descriptio. Hispaniolae, Cubae, Aliarumque Insularum circumiacentium, Delineato*, Antwerp: Ortelius. (Courtesy of the PALMM Digital Collections and the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries, www.palmm.fcla.edu/map)

Ortelius' Guaniany is set relatively far to the southeast of the island he labeled Guanima. This pronounced eastern location more accurately reflects present-day San Salvador's eastern orientation within the archipelago than it does other islands such as Cat Island. However, navigational issues again preclude making a definitive declaration of identity based on this one map fragment.

As the 17th century progressed cartographers shifted focus and started to consistently use the term Gamima, rather than the label of Guaniani, to identify the island we today identify as Cat Island. Willem Blaeu produced a map in 1635 that jointly labels Cat Island as San Salvador and Guaniani (Figure 8). Blaeu's use of the San Salvador label is apparently a forerunner to more widespread use of the term and ultimately the Guaniani identity is dropped as a map label. The Hondius map of 1640 employed the San Salvador label and the Guaniani label was not used at all.

TRIANGULO

While cartographic convention moved towards applying the term Guaniani, and then San Salvador, as labels for the territory now known as Cat Island, cartographers were faced with the problem of developing identities for islands that had not appeared on earlier maps of the archipelago. One such island appeared in a location to the south and east of Cat Island. The label of Triangulo eventually became affixed to the island landscape located southeast of Cat Island.

Identifying the heritage of the term, Triangulo, is as much of a mystery as that surrounding the naming of many of the islands of the Bahamas Archipelago. One of the more intriguing 16th century maps of the archipelago was produced by Hieronymus Cock in 1562 (Figure 6). A unique element of the Cock map is the use of the term Terryango to identify an island to the south of the island he identified as Gaunima (present-day Eluthera). Cock pairs the Terryango label with another label for Samana. He placed the Samana label to the north of Terryango. The two names ap-

pear in the vicinity of three dots and one more substantial island landscape. It isn't clear from Cock's map what specific islands are intended to be identified by the two labels.



Figure 6: 1562 map showing Terryango in the vicinity of Samana. Cock, Hieronymus, 1562, *Americae sive quartae orbis partes nova et exactissima description*, Antwerp. (Courtesy of the U.S. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/g3290.ct000342>)

Another interesting element of the chart by Cock is that he distinctly portrays two large islands at the south end of Guanima (Eluthera). It is one of the few 16th century maps to show a pair of islands south of Eluthera. The relative placement of the island he labels Vitta would correspond to the contemporary locale of Cat Island while the island east of Vitta would more appropriately hold a position comparable to contemporary San Salvador. The relative disposition of the two islands at the same latitude reinforces observations made about potential navigational issues for mariners transiting the region and the problems arising from inaccuracies in longitudinal navigation.

The Terryango label is not used again however, early 17th century maps employ the term Triango or Trianga to identify an island south of Gamina (Eluthera). These terms are likely derivations of the Terryango term employed by Cock. The island associated with the Triango terminology is small and lacks shape and substance. In a 1609 map produced by Jodocus Hondius, the Bahamas Archipelago is depicted with a limited number of islands along its eastern flank (Figure

7). The island labeled Triango lies at the extreme southern end of Eluthera. A later map by Goos (1626) displays a very similar arrangement of names and islands within the archipelago. The Triango terminology appeared on maps produced well into the 17th century (Jacobz, 1654).



Figure 7. Hondius, Jodocus, ca 1609, *America*, Amsterdam: Jodocus Hondius, (courtesy of the University of Alabama Historic Map Archive, <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu>)

A variation on the Triango terminology, Triangulo, was introduced on a chart by Willem Blaeu in 1635 (Figure 8).⁴ The term Triangulo eventually became accepted cartographic convention for identifying the island that lay south and east of Cat Island. The Triangulo terminology was used consistently throughout the 17th century and was still being employed by cartographers on early 19th century maps of the region (Darton, 1811).

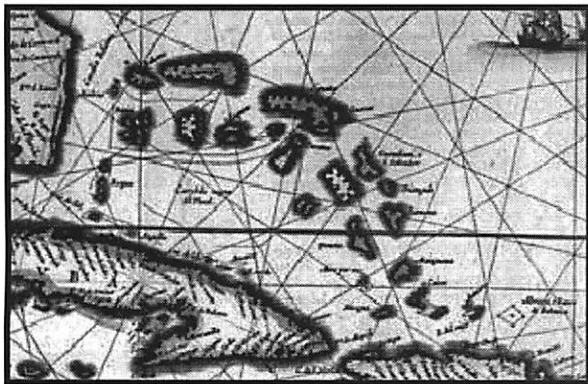


Figure 8. Willem Blaeu. 1635. *Americae Nova Tabula*. Amsterdam (Courtesy of the University of Alabama Map Library, <http://alabamamaps.ua.edu>)

The Triangulo terminology may also have become associated with the presumed shape of the landscape feature it identified. In many of the maps using the Triangulo designation the island is shown with a pronounced triangular shape (Figure 9).



Figure 9: Moll, Herman, 1732, *A chart of Ye West Indies or the Islands of America in the North Sea*, London: Thomas Bowles and John Bowles (courtesy of the PALMM Digital Collections and the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries, www.palmm.fcla.edu/map)

An alternate explanation might be derived from the geographic disposition of a number of small islands in the vicinity of San Salvador. In some cases the placement of the name implies the geographic arrangement of the three islands is the source of the identification accounting for the juxtaposition of San Salvador and the neighboring islands of Conception and Rum Key (Figure 10).

⁴ The Blaeu chart is also one of the first maps to use the terms San Salvador and Guanihani to identify Cat Island.

lacks substance when one considers that accurate delineations of the island's north/south orientation did not appear on charts until well into the 18th century.

The 18th century marked a period of transition for the identity of San Salvador. Maps early in the century predominantly used the Triangulo designation. By mid-century the Watlings Island identity was more commonly accepted and the term, Triangulo, had largely disappeared.

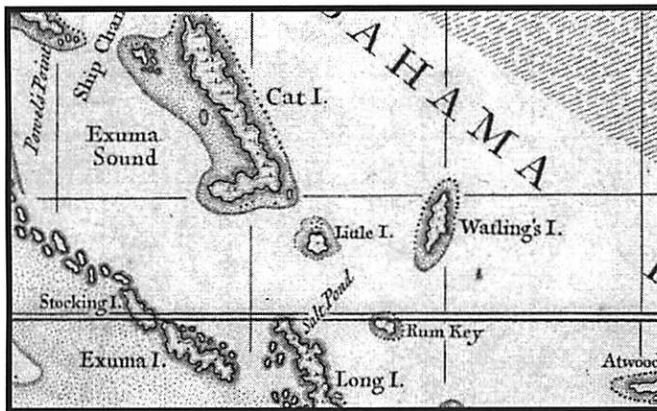


Figure 13: Popple, Henry, 1733, *A map of the British Empire in America*, (Courtesy of the David Rumsey Collection, www.davidrumsey.com)

An important transition occurred in the cartographic heritage of San Salvador with the publication of a map produced by Henry Popple in 1733 (Figure 13). Popple's map marked a key departure from previous mapping efforts. His map is the first to accurately depict the size, shape, and north-south orientation of Watling's Island. North Point and Sandy Point are clearly delineated on the Popple map which implies that a true survey had been conducted for Watling's Island prior to its publication.

RETURN TO SAN SALVADOR

San Salvador continued to be identified as Watlings Island through the middle of the 19th century. In the 1850s British geographers and cartographers revisited the issue of the identity of the Island of Discovery. In 1851, an atlas produced by

Adam and Charles Black proclaimed Watlings Island as the true San Salvador and baldly labeled Cat Island as the "False" San Salvador (Figure 14). A study supporting the claim of Watlings Island as San Salvador was published by A.B. Becher in 1856 in the *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* (Becher, 1856). From that point on British cartographers and geographers used the San Salvador designation for Watlings Island and dropped the label from Cat Island. The terms "False San Salvador," or "Supposed San Salvador," continued to be used through the transition period (Johnston, 1861).

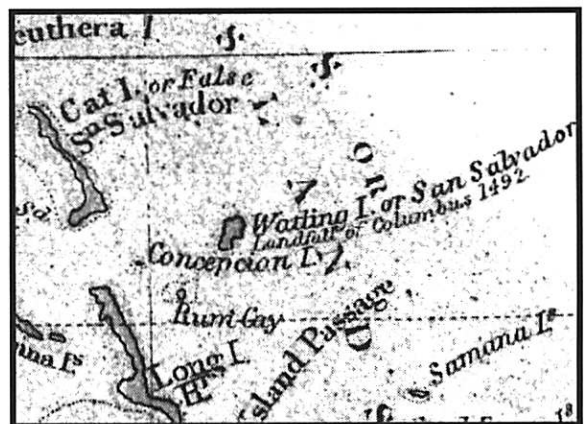


Figure 14. Black, Adam, and Charles Black, *West Indies from Black's General Atlas of the World, 1850-1851*, (Courtesy of the PALMM Digital Collections and the University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries, www.palmm.fcla.edu/map)

Watling's Island was officially redesignated as San Salvador Island in 1926. Today, the island is identified as San Salvador on most world maps. However, there continue to be those who champion other locales as the site of Columbus' first landfall in the New World and who will continue to insist that present-day San Salvador is a pretender to the title of Island of Discovery.

CONCLUSIONS

Tracing the cartographic history of the Bahamas Archipelago makes for a fascinating journey through time. Early maps of the New World illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of 16th and 17th century navigational techniques as

well as the strengths and weaknesses of the cartographic methodologies of the same era. Unfortunately, any effort to use these historical documents to 'prove' the location of Columbus' Island of Discovery would be a futile one. Estimates of the locations of island landscapes were simply that, estimates. The mariner who successfully navigated a return journey to Europe or to the New World would find a familiar landscape and use that landscape as a marker to plot a course for their intended destination. Given the vagaries of ocean currents and wind and weather patterns and their impacts on navigation capabilities, it is unlikely that any ship was able to successfully navigate a point-to-point trans-Atlantic journey without employing a few minor course corrections along the way.

Given the limitations of 15th century navigation techniques it is ludicrous to presume that the route of Columbus' first voyage to the New World can be replicated using 20th and 21st satellite and computer technologies. The 21st century technology isn't flawed, but the 15th century navigational techniques were. The issue is further complicated by the use of an abridged, second-hand account of the voyage.

So, we are left to rely upon the results of archaeological research to ascertain the pathways Columbus followed during his voyage into and through the unknown territories of the New World. To date, those researches favor contemporary San Salvador as the Island of Discovery. It should remain so until alternate proof, rather than alternative theories, can once again bring the identity of the Island of Discovery into question.

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