

# The historical archaeology of black people and their descendants in Cauca, Colombia

## Abstract

This historic-archaeological study examines the settlements of Africans and their descendants in Cauca during the Colonial and Republican periods. Given that this line of research has never really been pursued by archaeologists, we have tried to address Afro-Colombian issues by examining the abundant archival resources; Afro-Colombian archaeological sites in both urban and rural contexts; and oral tradition in territories occupied historically. This information has been used to analyse the slave trade, daily life, servitude, resistance, emancipation and ancestry, an approach suggesting great cultural affinity between these communities and their ethnic African roots. Studies of this kind in Colombia are scarce by comparison with Brazil, the United States, Argentina and the Caribbean region. We have focused on studies of African descendants connected with social movements for the restitution of rights, memories, traditions and cultural heritage within the African diaspora in the context of Colombian and Latin American society. Examples will be presented from Popayán, a colonial centre of slavery, as well as from the Afro-Colombian past in northern Cauca.

**Keywords:** past, historical archaeology, Afro-Colombian communities, diaspora, Cauca, Colombia

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## Introduction

This study in historical archaeology examines communities of Afro-Colombians and their descendants in Cauca. Analysis of these societies depends on the role they played during the period of European colonialism and development of capitalism which began in America in the sixteenth century. Historical archaeology is concerned with documenting the cultural, social and political life of ethnic groups, whether black, indigenous, white or other, whose developments are analysed with reference to European colonial contact in America. Popayán, in southern Colombia, was an important colonial centre for Spanish aspirations in this region. Over the centuries it attained prestigious status as an administrative capital, comparable to cities such as Cartagena de Indias, Santafé, Tunja and Quito. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries its power increased as a result of mineral exploitation, agriculture and cattle-ranching; its political and economic networks extended over great distances to America and Europe via the Pacific and Atlantic, and within the South American continent via the Cauca and Magdalena rivers. Merchandise arriving and departing along these routes including African slaves, foodstuffs, textiles and various luxury domestic goods such as European and Chinese ceramics.<sup>1</sup>

Around the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, black men and women from Africa were brought into the territory as slaves, to work in the city, the haciendas and the gold mines. It has been shown that only shortly after the conquest and introduction of colonial rule; the indigenous peoples were decimated by infectious diseases and work in the mines and haciendas, leading to the economic, political and social transformation of their populations. As a result of the demographic reduction of the indigenous population, black slaves were introduced at the request of certain clerics (F. Anuncibay) forming a new ethnic component in America and

destined to be incorporated into the colonial economy of mines and haciendas. The processes of acculturation, Creolization and *mestizaje* (miscegenation) date from this period.<sup>2</sup>

The study of Afro-Colombians in Cauca is linked to the economy and social politics practised by the Spanish in the Colonial period. The arrival of Africans in this region is recorded from the sixteenth century, escalating rapidly in the eighteenth, until the middle of the nineteenth century when a new Republican political and social order proclaimed the liberation of slaves. For the purposes of this study we draw attention to two important areas in Cauca with an Afro-Colombian presence. The first is Popayán: the city itself and its neighbouring haciendas such as Yambitará, Calibío, Pisojé and Coconuco. Within the city we mention the following sites: Casa de La Moneda, Casa Sánchez, Casa Mosquera, some ancient city streets, the convents of El Carmen and La Encarnación and the Jesuit Missions School, all of which employed slave labour. The other area of interest to this study is northern Cauca, an important region for the development of the Reales de Minas (Spanish colonial mines exploiting alluvial gold) with settlements for gangs of African slaves. Sites known from oral history with archaeological evidence are Santa María, Domingillo, Jápío and La Bolsa (Villa Rica) in the region of Quilichao and Caloto. European landowners and merchants in this area did not stint in their purchase of African slaves, buying hundreds of men and women to work in the mines and agricultural and ranching haciendas.

## Theory and method

Studies in historical archaeology are of importance in connecting cultures or ethnic groups with multivocality. This area of anthropology and archaeology is closely related to recurrent contemporary themes such as the reconstruction of culture and the ancestral memory of communities from an historic and archaeological past.<sup>3-5</sup> In some

ways historical archaeology is opposed to the traditional concepts of history, directed at statistical and economic analysis at the expense of the participants in ordinary life and their day-to-day experience. By contrast, various authors have worked on these topics from the perspective of critical, social and postprocessual archaeology, particularly derived from the approach of I. Hodder, D. Miller, M. Shanks and C. Tilley, which in turn followed the parameters of critical theory set by M. Foucault, P. Bourdier and A. Giddens.<sup>6,7</sup> Equally, historical archaeology tries to interpret existing relationships between peoples and various manifestations of their material culture in such a way as to clarify the ordinary, everyday life of these social groups. This kind of archaeology therefore needs to be interdisciplinary and may or may not complement history. The archaeology of recent events and narratives has to offer a better and broader conceptualization of these societies and their culture, emphasizing social change, strategies for adapting to the natural environment, social differentiation and of course their place in the economy and politics of the capitalist system.<sup>8–11</sup>

There is a growing interest in obtaining first-hand knowledge of ethnic groups—whether indigenous peoples, African descendants, Rom or others—through archaeological, historical and ethnographic analysis. In other words, there is a move to reconstruct the cultures of human groups which faced exclusion and discrimination with no opportunity to record their history, thoughts, customs and cultural developments; though their cultural traces are evident in material and immaterial contexts such as music, poetry, festivals, etc. This is the case with the subordinate social groups who were an important part of the implantation of the capitalist system in America throughout the colonial process in New Granada and later in the Republic of Colombia. Historical archaeology is deeply concerned with these forgotten stories, repressed and/or despised throughout history by the elites with their capitalist power: hierarchical societies founded on private property, servitude and tribute.<sup>10,12–14</sup>

Furthermore, the role of archaeology as a tool of memory and identity should become part of the drive to validate the rights of ethnic social groups, responding to the challenges of constructing and defining those societies as real and living political entities. For more than a decade, work in communities of African descendants has been particularly concerned with the African diaspora. This has made it increasingly possible to conduct anthropological and archaeological fieldwork directly related to these communities, who in turn are those most interested in the results of any studies undertaken, in this case concerning their archaeological and ancestral past. To this end it is also important that archaeology and anthropology should work together, with researchers committed to the community and their findings serving a dual purpose of relevance both to the people and to scholarship.<sup>15</sup> It is not a question of defining what is archaeology and what is not, but rather a move to link communities with scholarship in order to understand different forms of identity. This can be affected by studying the past and memory in an attempt to transcend the means of exclusion, domination and subordination imposed by regional or national powers. Archaeological studies should therefore be directed towards analysis of material and immaterial elements in order to shed light on the cultural dynamics affecting the knowledge and resistance of these societies.<sup>4,16–19</sup>

## Antecedents of African American studies in Colombia

Historical archaeology began sporadically in Colombia in the 1980s, with contributions relating to studies conducted in historical

centers and heritage sites. While their importance was clear from the outset, it is only during the last decade that this work has been augmented by various topics including the analysis of social class, the economy of haciendas and colonial mines, architecture, urban heritage, industrial processes and material culture (e.g. pottery, earthenware, porcelain): areas of study which have led us to re-think the social, political and economic dynamics of the Colonial, New Granada and Republican periods of our country.<sup>18,20</sup> In the south-west, historical archaeology is even more recent; indeed, we may say that this kind of research is quite new in its application to social groups, culture and heritage. A few historic-archaeological studies have been conducted in Popayán for the Colonial period: particular mention should be made of excavations in the Casa de la Moneda and the Convent of San Francisco; and graduate studies by anthropology students of the University of Cauca in the haciendas of Calibío and Coconuco, and regarding cultural contact in Popayán, based on archaeological material and historical documents. However, the study of Afro-Colombian groups was not the subject of any of these projects.<sup>4,21,22</sup> Historic-archaeological studies specifically relating to communities of Africans and African descendants do not exist, and those which touch on these topics do so from very general viewpoints. Among these we could include some graduate theses such as those mentioned above; and another regarding the Bateas and Tune haciendas near Neiva in Huila, which employed slaves. Perhaps the project most notable for its interdisciplinary character is one carried out in the Cañasgordas hacienda in Valle del Cauca, a site which is still being analyzed. Another important site is Palenque de San Basilio, studied mainly by historians and anthropologists, much less by archaeologists.<sup>1,23–34</sup>

With the arrival of African men and women a new social and ethnic structure came into being in this part of the American continent, under the auspices of European domination.<sup>2,23,35–39</sup> The Afro-Colombian communities of the Pacific coast, Valle de Patía and northern Cauca in south-western Colombia, who were subjected to the processes of European colonization, have their origins in West Africa. The Afro-Colombian cultural contribution, material objects, settlements, resistance, communities of escaped slaves (*palenques* or *quilombos*), everyday life and social relationships are themes waiting to be researched by historical archaeologists. At an international level the most notable studies along these lines are found in Brazil (e.g. Quilombo Palmares, Mato Grosso) as well as in Cuba, Barbados, Dominica, Jamaica and other islands with abundant archaeological and historical sites of sugarcane, cotton and tobacco plantations. They are also found in the south-eastern region of the United States, with its port of entry at Charleston, South Carolina and its agricultural plantations, in all of which black male and female slaves constituted the primary source of labor. Today, following emancipation, social movements of the African diaspora rely on archaeological and historical studies to combat racism and discrimination and vindicate their ancestral past, traditions and collective memory as civil rights.<sup>38–44</sup>

## Forced migration of Africans to America in colonial times

The slave trade began in 1600 and lasted more than two hundred and fifty years. During these centuries the ships of unscrupulous traffickers and pirates laid waste to the coasts of West Africa, penetrating Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Zambia, Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, Congo and Angola, then no more than sketches of nations in the process of organization. Whole populations living along the rivers and in the plains that made up the great empires of Mali, Jolof, Songhai, Akan, Benin and Congo among others were decimated by the English, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Dutch who traded in everything but

fundamentally in men and women. Whether Ashanti, Mina, Balanta, Fauti, Yoruba, Ibo, Popo, Ararat, Lucumí, Yolof, Walof, Fulani or Mandingo, they were brought to a new world of unknown lands where colonial justice and greed without limits would plant an insuperable landmark on the history of mankind.<sup>38,45</sup>

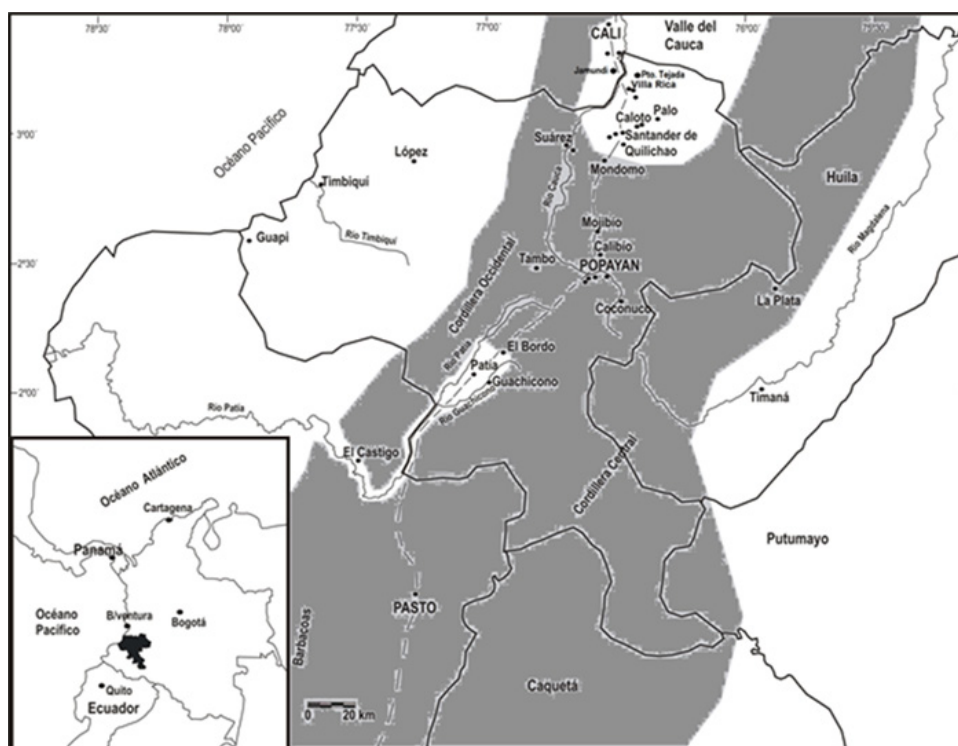
The routes followed by the slave trade towards America can be determined from settlements and historical documents. It is known that one route travelled from West Africa to the Caribbean and North America, while another went from Africa to Brazil in South America, both triangulating with European ports in England (London, Liverpool and Bristol), Portugal (Lisbon), France (Bordeaux) and Spain (Cádiz and Seville) from the sixteenth until the middle of the nineteenth century. In the last centuries of colonization, it is evident that direct routes also existed between Africa and America, indicating an increase in the slave trade to supply the demand for labour in the haciendas, mines, plantations and other concerns of the European colonial economy. Black men and women who survived the Atlantic crossing were sold in America's principal ports: Havana, Santo Domingo, Panama, Cartagena de Indias, Charleston, Baltimore, Savannah and New Orleans.<sup>14</sup>

### Afro-Colombians in Cauca: servitude, slavery, manumission and resistance

The historical archaeology of the African diaspora is a recent

topic for fieldwork in Colombia, although the theme is familiar from historical research based on written documents concerning the African presence in Colombia and Latin America.<sup>16</sup> More has been done in anthropology, where studies take account of colonial documents, ethnographies, territories and sociocultural research on Afro-Colombian themes.<sup>25,46</sup> It is also true that little is known from the perspective of historical archaeology about the settlements, daily life, resistance and emancipation of Africans and their descendants in the country and the rest of Latin America. We know that each region underwent its own development as a result of Spanish, indigenous American and African influence; this was not only cultural but also in the field of biogenetics as regards white, black, Creole and *mestizo* populations, largely related to the *mestizo* and *campesino* societies living in our countries today.<sup>2,47</sup>

The significant black presence in south-western Colombia can be seen in the regions of Valle del Patía, northern Cauca and the Pacific coast (Figure 1). Popayán and its *gobernación* (administrative unit) was one of Spain's most important colonial regions. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the city owed its power to the *encomienda*, with black and indigenous slave labor employed in the gold mines and haciendas. G Colmenares<sup>23</sup> aptly described it as a 'city of slave-owners' in colonial times. Slaves were a commodity—*piezas de esclavos*—to be bought, sold or inherited by the Spanish and Creole families of Popayán.



**Figure 1** Areas with African presence in Popayán and northern Cauca (Source: SIGAC. Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi, 2003).

In all these places slave men and women were working in different capacities, whether in institutions (both lay and religious), in the mansions of wealthy families, or in the outlying haciendas. In the colonial period the *manzana* or blocks near the central square were allocated to members of the Spanish government: individuals working as administrators, military or religious leaders. Further out lived the

merchant class and in the peripheral areas were the less favored groups engaged in various kinds of work: artisans, carriers, farmers, jewelers, etc. The poorest social groups were located in the south and west of the city; their houses, despite being built on large plots, had no luxury fittings or elaborate architecture, but they had space for gardens and domestic animals. There was no part of the city occupied exclusively



by free black people; it is thought that some of these families may have lived in the suburb of Bolívar. Slaves worked for their masters and were important for their commercial value (up to 500 *patacones*) and their labor in the city mansions, haciendas and mines. Most of the indigenous people were given in *encomienda* to the Spanish, who exploited them almost to excess. By the seventeenth century racial mingling had produced the combinations known as *mulatos* (black and white), *zambos* (black and indigenous) and *mestizos* (white and

indigenous). The population was on its way to becoming today's multiethnic nation of white, black, indigenous and *mestizo*.<sup>36</sup> At Hacienda Yambitará in Popayán, certain objects such as ceramics and ornaments seem to have belonged to slaves working on the hacienda. It appears that African objects were not abundant at this site, most of the material being colonial European, Creole and indigenous (Figure 2).



**Figure 2** Left: Hacienda Yambitará, rear patios. Right: Kitchen and kitchen garden (Photo authors).

Slaves usually occupied thatched huts near the hacienda and worked with the animals or in the tile and brick kilns; some women were employed in domestic service in the mansion. Near this site, at a farmstead by the bridge over the river Cauca, a stone sculpture was found with distinctively African characteristics. Such figures in wood or stone, used for ritual purposes, are known in Nigeria (Figure 3).<sup>48</sup> L. Helguera encountered various historical documents relating to Hacienda Coconuco, 20 minutes from Popayán. These concerned the economy of the hacienda—its production, livestock and crops—and

also specified the slaves' occupations as 'tanners, millers and cheese-makers'. They were made to get up at 5 am and to recite the Ave Maria before embarking on their day's work, which lasted till 5 pm; they had two free days a week; and their transgressions were punished with the whip and the birch. In 1823, when the owner, Tomás C. de Mosquera, was issuing instructions to José María Agredo, the major-domo of the hacienda, there were 33 slaves, both men and women. In a list of African slaves their family names appear as Mandinga, Carball [*sic*], Lucumí and Tapia.



**Figure 3** Left and Centre: African-style sculpture from Popayán (55 cm). (Photo: M. Hernández, 2015). Right: Nok statuette – Ife, Nigeria. ([www.co.pinterestes.com/Consulted January 2019](http://www.co.pinterestes.com/Consulted January 2019)).

Archaeological investigations were conducted in the service areas where the slave men and women worked. There is no mention of huts or cabins for the slaves, suggesting that they lived in the mansion in rooms adjacent to their workplaces. It is possible that two large rooms in this part of the house served this purpose. Information on the material culture of the house was gathered from a rubbish deposit near the kitchen, where many local ceramics of indigenous type were found as well as some African influenced sherds, in addition to china

and porcelain imported from Europe. These were associated with the bones of wild animals, cattle and horses. Colonial and Republican objects included such items as bricks, tiles and forged nails. Other signs of African influence included the sculpted head on the water spout, and marks on the kitchen door including an engraved heart, symbol of the African power known as Sankofa. Large letters engraved in the hardwood of doors in the kitchen area are similar to marks used by slaves (Figure 4).<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 4** Hacienda Coconuco. Signs of Afro-Colombian influence in the service area. Left: Afro-Colombian sculpture on the water spout of the hacienda, and detail. Right: Symbolic marks on wooden doors in the kitchen (Photo: Authors).

At another site, the Casa Sánchez in Popayán, parts of the kitchen and patio were excavated. The mansion was inhabited by members of the social elite who employed servants and slaves for domestic work. Many fragments of pottery were found at the site, apparently of local manufacture, some with clear Afro-Colombian influence indicating the presence of slaves and/or free black men and women in the mansion. This pottery, associated with the cookery of the period, was exclusively for domestic use, with jar forms for liquids and food preparation as well as globular vessels and bowls with traces of soot. The pottery is rarely decorated, but there are examples of incisions, curved lines, digital impressions, triangles and dots. The pottery features smooth surfaces, sometimes burnished to give a shine on the outside. Decoration of vessels with small incisions resembles scarification of the skin, a common practice among Africans to show the ethnic affiliation of their peoples. Other patterns are also evident in these Afro-Colombian ceramics, such as X's (symbol of Bakongo<sup>1</sup> cosmography and Muntu philosophy in Africa), letters or signs (Figure 5). These decorations relate to the cultural and social resistance of enslaved groups under the colonial regime. The presence of clay pipes is another characteristic of African pottery during the periods of slavery in the Colonial and Republican eras.<sup>40,49-51</sup> The pipes found, used for smoking tobacco, were made from dark brown clay

and decorated with incisions and dots on the upper part of the bowl. Remains of animal bones found in association with rubbish deposits indicated the consumption mainly of cattle, sheep, goats and pigs, reflecting the importance of a protein-rich diet in the Casa Sánchez.

In addition to bone refuse, archaeological refuse deposits at the site also provided evidence of the use of vessels made of porcelain and other imported ceramics, such as bottles for beverages, cosmetics and medicines. Fragments of gold were also found. All these materials tell us that the distinguished families of Popayán were consuming certain sumptuary elements which set them apart from others on the colonial social scale. Their wealth was founded on the economic boom in mining, trade in merchandise and employment of slave labor throughout the whole region of New Granada.

It is evident that senior clerics in the convents and monasteries of Popayán also benefited from the purchase and sale of African slaves. While little analysis of this topic has been conducted, the historical archives hold hundreds of ecclesiastical documents referring in detail to the buying and selling of slaves by monks and nuns, who while practicing evangelism on the one hand, were engaged in slavery on the other. Black men and women were acquired for their churches, convents, haciendas and gold mines. Africans were also appreciated for their culinary skills when working in the kitchens and waiting at table in the convents (ACC. Sig. 19959; 2150; 8550). A case in point was the Company of Jesus (the Jesuit Missions) and its many agricultural haciendas employing slaves in the New Kingdom of Granada during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The expropriation of this

<sup>1</sup>The African Bakongo cosmogram is represented by an X or by four quadrants in a cross (+), representing the cycles of the sun. It also represents the world of the living (sun), the world of the spirits (moon, darkness) and the transition between the worlds of the living and the dead, separated by water or kalunga (Ferguson, 1992, 116; Fennell, 2003, 4-8; Matthews, 2010, 183-185; Silva, 2013, 226-227; Torres de Souza & Pereira, 2009, 539).

wealth occurred in 1767 at the instigation of Philip V of Spain with the Bourbon Reforms.<sup>23</sup> At convent sites such as El Monasterio, El Carmen, San Francisco and La Encarnación, recorded items of material culture have included European, local Creole and African-influenced pottery found in the rooms and domestic areas of these huge religious buildings.

The archaeology of the convents of La Encarnación and El Carmen in the center of Popayán includes the remains of African-influenced ceramics. These are dark-colored vessels, used in the kitchen for the preparation of food. They have slightly burnished surfaces and are decorated with dots and short incisions, reminiscent of African facial or corporeal scarifications.<sup>40,51</sup> The letters RF and T also appear, possibly indicating ownership or the potter who manufactured the vessels (Figure 6).

The other area of interest to Afro-Colombian archaeological research is northern Cauca, where visits have been made to Santander

de Quilichao and Villa Rica. For these regions too the archives hold abundant historical documentation including different aspects of the daily life of the African men and women purchased and enslaved for the haciendas and mines. Research has been conducted at the *haciendas* and *Reales de Minas* of Dominguito, Santa María, La Bolsa, Jápío, Caicedo, Villa Rica and Quintero, where archaeological surveys were undertaken in areas occupied by slaves employed in mines as well as the agricultural and ranching haciendas. The data collected at these sites, combined with archival information, was of interest in the analysis of daily life, Afro-Colombian material culture, working conditions, settlements, resistance and other cultural aspects of relevance to black communities in the past. These sites provide a case-study in historical archaeology which illustrates not only the conditions of slavery suffered by African descendants in the past, but also the way in which these communities, through their culture, beliefs, ancestral heritage and bid for freedom, continue the struggle against oppression begun in colonial times.



**Figure 5** Casa Sánchez, Popayán. Left: Jar; bowl with curvilinear design. Right: Afro-Colombian clay pipes: the example at far right bears the African X symbol of the Bakongo (Photo: Authors).



**Figure 6** Ceramics with Afro-Colombian influence. Above: Letters, incisions and impression. Convent of El Carmen, Popayán. Below: Sherds with textile impression and dots (Photo: Authors). Lower Right: Sherd from a bowl with three incisions; compare with Yoruba figurine with scarification, Nigeria (Preston, 2012, 85).



At the Real de Minas of Santa María the first town was founded: Quilichao, a colonial site for the exploitation of gold. The settlement included a marketplace, houses, paved streets, church, cemetery and quarters for the slaves who worked in the mines (Figure 7).<sup>37</sup> Several placer mines for the extraction of alluvial gold were concentrated within a small area. The most notable were Cerro gordo, Domingullo, Agua Blanca, Cimarronas, San Bernabé, Ahumadas, Vética and Convento, all with wealthy owners from nearby Popayán including the Arboleda, Prieto, Salazar and Valencia families; some belonged to the Church through the convents of Las Carmelitas and La Encarnación in Popayán.<sup>37</sup> For the colonial mines to be exploited the acquisition of black slaves was essential, given the quantity of sites and the interests of the Popayán owners. There was a large-scale and thriving trade in slave men and women, who once acquired could be moved from one site to another, as well as to the haciendas to work on sugar cane syrup production or with cattle. They were also shuttled between the mining zones of the Andes and the Pacific coast. There is a list of 30 slaves from the mines of Juana Del Campo Salazar in 1743-44; they include

pure Africans, mulatos and Creoles, their families being of the Congo, Conga and Mina nations (ACC. Sig. 9908). Cases of Afro-Colombian resistance are also recorded for this area, for example the escape of a black man named Pedro Gualimvio (*sic*) who fled the mines of Quinamayó with ‘an iron on his foot’ (ACC. Sig. 8575). When we visited Santa María, the ruins of the settlement could be seen. The site of the church was identified and although the building no longer exists it is still possible, from a high hill to the west, to make out parts of its stone wall, forming a rectangle with two entrances. The marketplace, according to local oral tradition, is believed to have been where four tall palm trees now stand in the middle of the site. As to the cemetery, the local inhabitants believe it to lie to the north, on another hill; a visit to this place did not however produce any superficial evidence. Fragments of stone and tile are scattered over some four hectares of uneven terrain; many of these have been reclaimed and used as the foundations for present-day houses, farm buildings and roads (Figure 8).



**Figure 7** Site of Quilichao at the Real de Minas of Santa María (Photo: Author).



**Figure 8** Site of Santa María. Left: Site of the chapel and remains of the stone walls of the Real de Minas. Right: Tiles and fragments from the chapel (Photo: Authors).

Surface collection of artifacts produced fragments of old pottery vessels of simple construction in red to brown fabric with little decoration. The pottery was made by pinching or coiling and fired in an oxidizing atmosphere; common forms were globular jars, bowls and plates. Decoration is sparse with applied, incised or finger-impressed designs, especially on borders. Also, as at other Afro-Colombian archaeological sites, the X symbol appears on a pottery vessel, indicating its relationship to the African Bakongo cosmogram. These are ceramics with African influence made by slaves living and working in the Real de Minas and neighboring areas, washing gold for their masters and cultivating plantains for their sustenance. The sherds are found in association with lumps of mud from walls, tiles, rocks and stones which sometimes served as foundations in the construction of family houses. Certain documents refer to the huts or cabins which were used at haciendas and mines to accommodate slaves at a distance from the main buildings (ACC. Sig. 11286; 11495). Imported European ceramics were scarce, but there were some glazed sherds of local majolica and china, as well as glass, animal bones, querns and grinding stones.

On our visit to the neighboring site of El Palmar, on the west bank of the river Quinamayó, we found the remains of the chapel (*capilla doctrinera*) and the cemetery for black slaves, the latter still in use until the twentieth century. Most of the graves are marked with a Christian cross, but at the same site two Afro-Colombian burials featured different symbols, particularly the Bakongo cosmogram.<sup>2</sup> One iron marker stands 50 cm high, in the form of a cross enclosing four spaces; three arms terminate in small circles and in the center is a six-pointed star, perhaps representing the religious syncretism practiced by these Afro-Colombian people. A second grave marker is also quadrangular, but double: a cross is formed of two iron bars, horizontal and vertical, terminating in three open circles; a rhombus is created by shorter bars placed diagonally, the whole enclosed in an iron semi-circle around the upper part; finally, the rectangular cement plinth is marked with an X. In all these forms the Bakongo cosmogram<sup>3</sup> can be seen as a symbol of African beliefs and spirituality translated to America (Figure 9). The Afro-Colombian artists who created these 'crosses' in the twentieth century were representing the symbolism, religiosity and spirituality of the African diaspora, still present among the members of this community. Despite the imposition of Christianity on the region, they managed to conceal their African deities in the guise of Catholic saints.<sup>27,48</sup> Similarly, in modern times, the syncretic star of David (symbol of the Judeo-Christian world) is related to the Rastafarian culture of Ethiopia, whose members believe their king will free all the black people of America and take them to the Promised Land.

At the site of Santa Barbara de Domingullo, not far from Santander de Quilichao, the *capilla doctrinera* still exists. It was used by black slaves working the gold mines exploited by nuns of the Carmelite community among others (Figure 10). A document dated 1739, when the mines belonged to the priest Ignacio de la Concha, states that rations of fresh meat and salt were issued to slaves every 15 days, in addition to an *almud* (measure) of maize and plantains

every eight days. Bernardo Condá, a black man, was named as captain (ACC. Sig. 8175). An inventory of 1750 for the mines of Domingullo lists the following family names: Mina, Chamba, Congo, Arará, Setré, Longu, Conga, Carabalí, Luango and Combo. Tools, cattle, settlements and plantain plantations were also listed (ACC. Sig. 8244).

The land belonging to Rosa Angola, her sister Eulalia and her brother José Fabio yielded a significant quantity of African influenced ceramic material as well as glass, china and a gaming counter. As at Santa María, a bowl fragment was incised with an X, representing the Bakongo cosmogram present at various sites. A surface find was also recorded of a pottery pipe with dotted and incised decoration and the stylized figure of a snake, another mythical African symbol of power and fertility (Figure 11). Juan Mina, a neighbor, stated that clay vessels had been made for many years by women potters who fired them in pits in the ground, providing an oxidizing atmosphere. Today this practice has almost disappeared and is only found among the black community of Santa Rita in Caloto. In the Domingullo area there is evidence of traditional alluvial mining techniques used by gangs of black slaves. This comprised long piles of stones, in sections of 10, 15 and 20 meters, along both banks of the river Páez-Quinamayó and its tributaries. The slave men and women used this method to open channels or canals where they washed the gold-bearing sand (a procedure known as *tambar*) with iron implements (bars and *almocafres*) and *bateas* or wooden trays, in the process known as *mazamorreo* or panning (Figure 12). It is evident that some of these canals, for example on the Quebrada Ratón, diverted the water of the streams. Minor works of engineering were also undertaken, such as stone bridges giving access from one bank to the other. These techniques and practices, together with traditional gold mining methods, continue among present-day black communities.

The sites visited are located near the cemetery in the area of the Quebrada Ratón, on the farms of Damaris Campo and Walter Lasso. At the latter site, in addition to piles of stones on the bank of the stream, we found a rectangular stone enclosure, 11x9m, with a surrounding wall 1.2m high and an entrance in the south-west corner (Figure 13). The low walls suggest that it may have been a corral for animals. Historical documents of the region confirm that slave families lived close to their domestic animals, garden plots, plantain plantations and places of work.

Hacienda Jápío in Caloto district was one of the most important haciendas during the Colonial or Republican era. It seems the Jápío estate was created in 1588 for the military founders of Caloto. Later it became one of the great possessions of the Jesuits (Company of Jesus, School of Popayán) in the New Kingdom of Granada around 1722. Part of the colonial farming economy was controlled by this religious institution and capitalist enterprise. In the mid-seventeenth century lands in Quilichao and Jápío were acquired by the order, which had already purchased the mines of Jélíma in 1651. Over time the hacienda became rich in cattle, sugar cane and slaves, serving as a link between Popayán, the Upper Cauca (e.g. Jélíma and Coconuco) and the Valley of Cauca (Hacienda Llanogrande, Sepulturas and Zabaletas). Around 1787, when it had already been expropriated from the Jesuits and was under the transitional administration of Temporalidades, Jápío passed into the hands of the Arboleda family, slave-owners from Popayán with experience of the black communities of northern Cauca. In the next century it was visited several times by Simón Bolívar during his actions and campaigns for liberation (ACC. Sig. 7489).<sup>23</sup>

Historical documents link Jápío to the mines of San Nicolás, worked by black slaves who dug ditches close to their huts and garden

<sup>2</sup>In this funerary context the Bakongo cosmogram can be interpreted in terms of passage from the material world of the living to the spiritual world of the dead. In Cauca the dead are sent on their way with songs—alabaos and jugas—to the sound of drums, cununos and guasáes.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>3</sup>At vigils for the dead on the Pacific coast of Colombia, drums are played and the lumbalúis sung, recalling the customs of the Bantu people of the Congo and their Muntu philosophy. Kalunga is identified with water, home of the spirits of the dead, which in turn is represented by a horizontal line separating life and death in the Bakongo cosmogram.<sup>46,49</sup>



plots. In an inventory of 1776-77, when the Jesuits were dispossessed of the hacienda, 139 slaves were listed with family names such as Congo (the captain), Mina, Carabalí, Mulato, Guaguí, Forí, Guereche, Maragoto (the master carpenter) and Guasambo (ACC. Sig. 11495, Junta Municipal de las Temporalidades). The document also reveals that slaves were transferred to other mines; for example, a black man named Manuel was taken to the Jélina mines, while others were brought from Pasto or Popayán. It also specifies the price and age of each slave, notes their illnesses and injuries and, on the left-hand side of the list, a cross (+) indicates that a man or woman had died. In addition, all tools are listed for agricultural and mining work; the kitchen appears with its 'thatched roof and wooden door'; and the sugar-cane press with its wooden *massas*, its furnace and metal pans or *fondos*, its pottery sugar molds and troughs for syrup.

At Hacienda Matarredonda, which also belonged to the Jesuits, 97 slaves were under the command of Manuel de Jesús, the black captain

general. The African names recorded are Mandinga, Mina, Forí, Vilongo, Sundé, Braba and Carabalí. In the same bundle of papers is a description of the slaves' thatched huts, built 'willy nilly' in a group of 20, with their *mangas* (paddocks) and animal enclosures. Close to these were the plantain and sugar cane plantations; there was also a kiln for firing bricks and tiles. In addition, there were hundreds of cattle and horses to be taken care of on the hacienda. Archival sources document various cases of Afro-colonial resistance, with black men and women escaping to form communities, known as *palenques* or *quilombos*, far from the mines and haciendas. These appear to have existed at various points along the then wild and inhospitable river Cauca, for example at El Cucho de Angola, and in the hills of Cocoró and Puerto Tejada. Accounts of these communities in Afro-Colombian myths and oral history are confirmed by documents from the archives.<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 9** Afro-Colombian cemetery at El Palmar. Left: Marker on the earth grave of FRV, 1952. Center: Marker on the earth grave of María Obdulia González, 1975 (Photo:Authors). Right: Bakongo cosmogram used to represent the cycle of life and death (Matthews, 2010, 184).



**Figure 10** Chapel, Santa Barbara de Dominguillo (Photo:Authors).



**Figure 11** Left, center: Sherds marked with the Bakongo cosmogram X. Right: Pottery pipe with snake symbol, found at the Dominguillo site (Photo: Authors).



**Figure 12** Dominguillo, Eulalia Angola and her *batea* of mango wood (Photo: Authors).

The mansion at Hacienda Jápío has undergone transformation over the centuries and exists today as a reconstructed building in the colonial style with large rooms on the ground floor and bedrooms upstairs. It once had a *capilla doctrinera*. The service area and kitchens were located in a separate building away from the house; this contained a sugar-cane press for the production of syrups and *aguardiente*, much in demand in the town and city markets. We know that there were huts or quarters where the black slaves were accommodated, but no traces of these buildings are visible at the site due to the effects of modern agriculture. On display in the mansion is a vessel of African style and decoration: a sub-globular form with incisions (scarification) below the neck (Figure 14). The site of Caicedo was part of the hacienda lands dispersed during the Republic which became small farms for free black people who used to work at Jápío. According to the local community, Caicedo began as a few thatched houses of *bahareque* (wattle and daub). The people have retained some pottery forms such as jars for fresh water, or globular jugs with narrow necks and

lids. Villa Rica, the last site we visited, is a community of people of African descent located close to the banks of the river Cauca. The terrain is flat, and the town is virtually surrounded by the sugar cane monoculture supplying the industrial mills of Cauca and the Cauca Valley. The history of Villa Rica and its Afro-Colombian settlement is closely linked to the colonial hacienda of La Bolsa. This belonged to the Jesuits until their dispossession in the eighteenth century; it then passed into the hands of Francisco and Julio Arboleda from Popayán, who also owned gold mines in Quinamayó and Quilichao. La Bolsa is also connected to the haciendas of Quintero, Pilamo and Perico Negro (Puerto Tejada), located in the flat area of the river Cauca valley and known for their cattle and the production of sugar cane syrup. According to Afro-Colombian oral tradition, Villa Rica was first founded at a hamlet called La Cecilia, settled by free black men and women after the abolition of slavery in 1851. Later it was moved to the site called El Chorro, where thatched houses of *bahareque* were built; on the first farms they grew *pan coger* (plantains, yuca, cocoa and maize) and kept animals. They too have an oral tradition of Afro-Colombian resistance and mention a community of black people who had fled La Bolsa and other places. This was probably a *palenque* settlement known as El Cucho de Angola, on the banks of the San Jorge stream near the river Cauca. Today Villa Rica is located in the former lands of La Bolsa known as the Llanos del Terronal, where the royal road from Jamundí used to pass through. It was relocated here after flooding in 1932.

The mansion of the hacienda has three large rooms on the ground floor, a service area with a modified kitchen and an upper floor with four spacious bedrooms (Figure 15). Afro-Colombian oral tradition maintains that the ground floor included a punishment room, where slaves were beaten if they neglected their duties or were caught on the run. To the west of the house was the *capilla doctrinera*; this had stone foundations, walls of brick and adobe and a tiled roof. Historico-archaeological research has linked the ruins of the chapel to certain cultural materials. Archaeological traces of the African slaves at Villa Rica have been found in the mansion of the hacienda, the chapel and the Afro-Colombian cemetery. The finds, which are not very numerous, consist of pottery used for cooking, associated with china, metal and glass; there are also grinding stones in the kitchen. A stone-paved path was recorded, linking the mansion with the chapel. One of the most memorable places in the Afro-Colombian oral tradition of Villa Rica is the slave cemetery -*cementerio de los esclavos*- (Figure 16). This was the resting-place of the oldest ancestors, along with those of subsequent centuries, until the new cemetery was built to the north-east of the town. Alfredo Viveros told us, 'That was the



graveyard where they buried the slaves, though after that sad time was over it was still the community graveyard, and there are lots of people in there who weren't slaves but still got buried there; later the community bought the land over there, in – I don't know, the sixties

– they bought a plot to make the present cemetery. The old graves of the slaves must be there and they were buried in the earth, wrapped up in mats in pits, and after filling them in they used to put up a wooden cross; that's why you can't see them when you look'.



**Figure 13** Dominguillo Mines. Left: Stream with piled stones used in mining. Right: Stone corral. Quebrada Ratón (Photo:Authors).



**Figure 14** Left: Hacienda Jápío. The mansion in the mid-twentieth century (Photo: D. Poveda). Right: Pottery vessel with African characteristics (Photo:Authors).



**Figure 15** Left: Hacienda La Bolsa. Entrance (Photo:Authors). Right: Oil painting of the chapel of La Bolsa (Lucy Rangel, n.d.).





**Figure 16** Hacienda La Bolsa. Left: Slave Cemetery-Cementerio de los esclavos- (Google Earth, 2018). Centre: The cemetery with its ancestral silk-cotton trees. Right: Some twentieth-century graves (Photo: Authors).

## Afro-Colombian presence at the dissolution of the colony and the establishment of the republic

At the time of Independence in northern Cauca hundreds of enslaved black human beings, who worked in the haciendas of Quintero and Jápío and the mines of Caloto, Timbiquí and the Chocó, were controlled by the families of Popayán. Most of them took up arms and machetes for the revolution alongside Bolívar, Tacón, Obando and López, or anyone else who spoke the Abolitionist language of liberty. The Hacienda Jápío survived all the depredations of the revolution and wars of independence, though during the decades of war from 1840 to 1870 it was occupied, seized and raided by a succession of leaders who enjoyed its spacious rooms, its hundred-year-old aqueduct, the syrup from its presses and the aguardiente from its distillery.<sup>52</sup> Wars in the south were bloody between the Spanish, Creoles and slaves. Independence was declared in 1810, though the process of emancipation was to take several decades longer. While the Freedom of Wombs law (*Libertad de Ventres*) freed children born from slaves, liberation was only consolidated in 1851 under the government of José Hilario López. Today the colonial haciendas symbolize power and authority, not only of the past but also of the present, in that they were acquired by Cali and Popayán families as architectural heritage for tourism or holiday retreats; their industrialized lands are developed for sugar cane monoculture. The descendants of black slaves occupy villages, small subsistence farms or artisanal mines where they face racism, displacement, illegal mining and the irrationality of conflict between various illegal groups and the state. Today negotiations for peace are under way with the guerrillas and other illegal groups, but this tortuous process is barely beginning in Colombia.

## Conclusion

As we have shown, studies of African Americans in America tell a fragmentary tale, usually written by those wielding power and domination. Only since the creation of the Colombian Constitution in 1991, specifically Law 70, have our ethnic communities been legally recognized; their stories, memories and cultures await discovery from within, from below. To this end historical archaeology, archival documentation and Afro-Colombian oral tradition are important tools for understanding the past, memory and history of the diaspora of communities of African descendants. Equally importantly, historic-archaeological studies of black populations can help to solve the problems of exclusion and discrimination faced by these social groups for centuries. This is possible thanks to both academic involvement and to black social movements concerned with the culture and territory of these communities. Immersion in Afro-Colombian studies is a challenge for the discipline as regards these communities forgotten

by history, with their past of marginalization and exploitation under American colonial and capitalist economic models. Archaeology needs to turn its attention to understanding these societies with their African past, whose descendants today make up an important part of the population in the inter-Andean and coastal regions of the Pacific and Caribbean. Their history and memory are vital to the recognition of their contribution and social restitution. We hope our work will contribute to the understanding of African Latin-American culture, especially in relation to the diaspora, in its search for the cultural and moral recognition and reparation of black communities and their ancestry within the multicultural order of the nation-states.<sup>53–61</sup>

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## Conflicts of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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