Towards the Construction of a Hypothetical Map of Santa Maria de la Antigua del Darién (Colombia), The First Spanish City in the American Mainland. An Overview of Ten years of a Communitarian and Multidisciplinary Archaeological Project

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Abstract. The archeological site of the city of Santa Maria de la Antigua del Darién is located in Colombia, within the municipality of Unguía, in the Chocó Department, on the western coast of the Gulf of Urabá. In 1510, Santa Maria de la Antigua del Darién was the first Spanish city to be founded on the American mainland. A multidisciplinary community archeology project supported by remote sensing and geophysical prospecting has been underway since 2013. Here the preliminary results are presented, also focusing attention on their social consequences.

Keywords: Santa María de la Antigua del Darién · Archaeology · Geomatics · Geophysics · Community Archaeology

1 Introduction

Santa María de la Antigua del Darién, in the north of the Chocó Department of Colombia (Fig. 1a), was the first city founded by Spanish on the American mainland. In its fourteen years of existence (1510–1524) it went from a fortress ruled by Vasco Núñez de Balboa to a city with a bishop, a cathedral church, a second church, a hospital, a Franciscan monastery, a trading house, a foundry house, a prison, and everything a Castilian city needed in the early 16th century [1]. Santa María constitutes a milestone in historical and archaeological studies of the Americas for several reasons [2, 3]:

– It is the missing link of the first Spanish colonial urban planning, in a chronological space between Santo Domingo and Panama, with completely peculiar characteristics such as having been created by an indigenous village.

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- It is the starting point from which the main directions of the Spanish conquest were launched, with the European discovery of the Pacific Ocean, the foundation of Panama, Acla and Nombre de Dios and the expansion towards Peru, Nicaragua and Costa Rica.
- In its stratigraphy, the example of the contact between the Spanish world and the Amerindian world is evident, and almost unique, with the diachronic overlap between the pre-Hispanic settlement and the Spanish city, but with the synchronous alternation of spaces lived by masters and servants, as well as evidence of an indigenous presence following the abandonment of the city.
- It is a perfect example of the failure of a project of conquest conceived in a European court and tested in a tropical environment. Captains and advisors experimented with completely inadequate forms of confrontation in the new lands and quickly led to the near extinction of the Cueva-speaking people, the first population to receive the European impact on the American continent.
- It is an example of indigenous resistance, since the massacre of the last Spanish inhabitants and the burning of the city in 1524 are an emblematic point of the opposition to the Spanish conquest of the region, which began in San Sebastián de Urabá in 1509 and was maintained until the beginning of the 20th century by the indigenous Guna.
- It is a turning point, one of those key moments in history in which we can say that there is a "before" and an "after", with continental and regional consequences that continue today.

Today the area where Santa María de la Antigua del Darién was founded is located in the north of Chocó in Colombia, about 500 m from the Tanela River, a tributary of the Atrato, through the Marriaga Swamp (Fig. 1b). This area of low hills, the last offshoots of the Darién mountain range, is today characterized by the presence of large cattle ranches, evidence of territorial occupation by a few large landowners, sometimes a direct or indirect consequence of conflicts and violence lived in this part of the country between 1997 and 2005 [4]. The state presence in this part of the country is minimal and in fact the area is still under the control of armed groups, called BaCrim (Criminal Gangs), which represent the continuation of the paramilitary groups that preceded them. The appropriation of lands in the region by families linked to paramilitary groups generated serious phenomena of violence and displacement between the end of the 1990s and the first decade of this century. Many of the inhabitants of Tanela and Santuario, where the archaeological site is located, were direct victims of these dynamics [5].

Carrying out archaeological research work in this socio-political context, where the social problems are very serious and the lack of basic services in most of the villages and townships is absolute, has involved trying to understand how, from a process linked to archaeology, contribute to the social development of this place. There are currently 10 settler communities in the region, including cities and villages, made up of settlers originally from Córdoba, Chocoana, Antioquia and Old Caldas: five Emberá Dobida communities, one Emberá Katío community, one Gunadule community, three coastal Afro-descendant communities and two Afro-descendant wetland communities.

In this socio-political context, the Santa María de la Antigua del Darién Project promoted by the Ministry of Culture of Colombia and the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History (ICANH) was launched in 2013. The initial objective was to locate and

delimit the city, and then propose to the Ministry a Special Management and Protection Plan that would protect the first Spanish city in continental America and promote serious and lasting scientific research. The research activities involved different Institutions (see Acknowledgments) with expertise in different disciplines and the following workflow was considered: study of historical sources, collection historical plans, archaeological survey, remote sensing, photogrammetry using drones, geophysical prospections, archaeological excavations, restoration, community archeology, community museology and museography. In this paper, an overall view of the main results are presented.

During ten years of activity, has effectively identified and located the colonial city (2013–2014), coming to formulate a Special Management and Protection Plan (2014), to achieve the recognition of Santa María de la Antigua as an Asset of Cultural Interest of the Nation (2015), to carry out the creation of the fifth Archaeological Park of Colombia (2016), the construction of the Heritage House (2017), the inauguration of the Museum (2019), the creation of the Community Hall with the temporary community exhibition "Maternidades" (2020), the realization of three museographic routes in the Archaeological Park with a strong community presence (2020–2023) and the creation of four museographic structures in the Park and two temporal community exhibitions, "Caminos de Agua" and "Cimarronajes" (2022–2024).

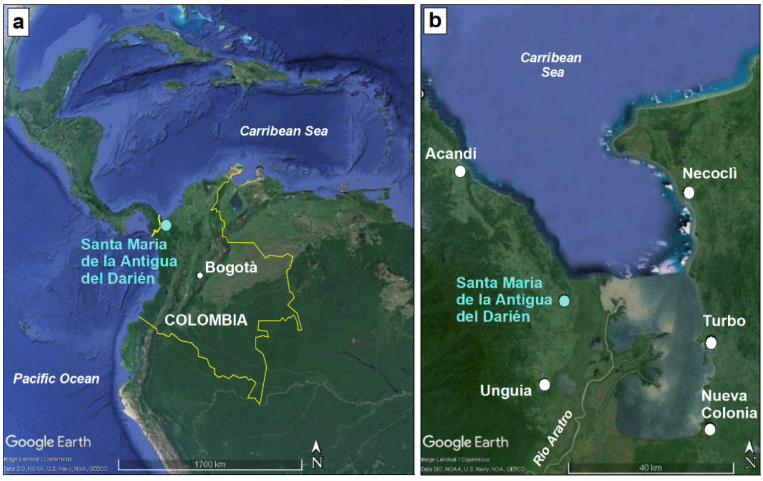

Fig. 1. Location of Santa Maria de la Antigua del Darien (4554450 E, 2467300 N) in northern Colombia (a) and a detailed view of the Gulf of Urabà on the Carribean Sea (b).

2 Historical Background

The expansion of the first stable colony in the mainland of América was carried out towards the west, in the direction of the new sea, the South Sea. It was discovered by Balboa in 1513 precisely from Santa María de la Antigua, where at that time he was the mayor elected by the inhabitants of the settlement (which became a city the following

year, when Pedrarias Davila arrived with 2,000 Spanish colonists). Acla (1515), Nombre de Dios (1519) and Panama (1519) are "daughter" cities of Santa María de la Antigua, founded and populated by its inhabitants who gradually moved into them following the course of the new routes of conquest. At first with the conquest of Nicaragua and then with the exploration of the Pacific and the conquest of Peru, the new axis of the trans-oceanic trade between Nombre de Dios and Panama were determined. Santa María de la Antigua became the first Spanish "foot" in the new continent, the first foundation that managed to survive in a lasting way from where those who would be the protagonists of the early conquest passed through.

However, the "first city in continental America" was founded in a territory densely populated by people who had the same language and similar customs; a territory that stretched from the Gulf of Urabá to the Chame River in the Gulf of Panama. This population, with a strong inclination towards exchange, had wide connections, reaching at least as far as the Mompox depression to the east, the Dabeiba mountain chain and the Gulf of Cupica to the south and Nicaragua to the west and north-west, although it is quite possible that their range reached the Mesoamerican and Peruvian areas. We know very little about this population, as it disappeared very quickly in the first twenty years of the Spanish conquest, decimated by disease, slavery and forced labour. The little we know is thanks to the descriptions of chroniclers such as Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo or Pascual de Andagoya, who lived in Santa María de la Antigua for several years. In seven years of archaeological work in Santa María de la Antigua, we have been able to identify around 30 archaeological sites in the region, belonging to different chronological periods, from the pre-ceramic to the 17th century, only two of which have been known and studied previously [6–8]. In general, the region has been little studied, by both the Colombian and the Panamanian side, due especially to the difficulties of access caused by the jungle environment and the control of the area by armed groups, since it became a site of illegal routes far from the institutional centres of the two countries.

The short time that the Darien was the centre of the new colonial empire was followed by a period of abandonment by the Spanish, with the destruction of Santa Maria de la Antigua in 1524, the abandonment of Acla in 1552 and Nombre de Dios in 1596. The abandonment by Spain did not mean in any way a generalized abandonment of the territory, quite the contrary. The very end of Santa María Antigua is testimony to an indigenous tenacious resistance struggle, which had begun since the Spanish had set foot on the eastern coast of the Gulf, in San Sebastián de Urabá. Since 1600, the Kuna or Guna-dule groups, as they call themselves, have been continuing this anti-Spanish resistance, based on the Atlantic coast of the Darien, the Chucunaque River, parts of the Tuyra River and the Gulf of Urabá, in other words, a territory almost as large as that formerly occupied by the Cuevas. This transition between Cueva and Guna-dule is unclear, always due to the lack of exhaustive research (archaeological, historical, genetic, ethnographic). In addition to the indigenous resistance, there was a strong fight for freedom by several groups of African Maroons, who were fleeing from the slave labour of the gold mines and the pearl harvest. Between 1550 and 1600, wars broke out between the Spanish and their former slaves, who settled in the mountains of inland Panama, especially in the area of the Gulf of San Miguel, the Chepo River and the surroundings of Nombre de Dios. The Darien region, particularly on its Pacific side,

but also in the area of the Gulf of Urabá, also became a territory of African palenques, inhabited by people of various origins attested to by their surnames, such as Congo, Mandinga, Biafara, Yolofo, Mozambique, Bran and some born free, on American soil, in these decades of flight and resistance [9, 10]. Both the African Maroons (at least in the initial stages between 1550 and 1579) and the Guna-dule made alliances with English and French corsairs in an anti-Spanish function. In the 17th century, Franco-Guna communities were not uncommon, just as it was not uncommon to find Guna chiefs visiting Jamaica in the 17th and 18th centuries [9].

In 1700, there was a Scottish attempt to colonize the Caledonian Bay where the Cueva chiefdom of Careta and the city of Acla were formerly located. The Scottish fort of New Caledonia was settled near the important Guna settlement of Sasardi, with which it had friendly relations. The Spanish reaction, the environmental difficulties and the lack of support from the English, caused the project to fail and led to the rapid abandonment of the new colony, with disastrous consequences for the mother country.

The Guna-dule managed to maintain control of the territory, at the cost of an almost uninterrupted war, until the end of the 19th century when the new colonizing impulse of the post-colonial nation of Colombia, managed to get there where the Spanish had not managed. The new markets for wood, tagua and caucho encouraged new entrants from the departments of Atlántico and Chocó, followed by the people of Córdoba and Antioquia, when the old gold market and the new cattle market were retaken. In this movement of people that made the Gunas withdraw from much of their territory, the Embera also moved from the south, occupying part of the old Guna territory. However, the Gunas managed to keep at least part of their land, thanks to their incredible strength of resistance that was evident in the 1925 "Tule revolution" against the Panamanian authorities who were threatening the very existence of their communities [11]. Today the Guna-dule maintain a semi-independent territory in the Panamanian regions of Guna Yala, Wargandi and Madugandi. In Colombia, only the communities of Arquía and Caimán Nuevo, located on both sides of the Gulf of Urabá, remain.

3 Methods

The first phase of the project involved the study of historical sources starting from the study of the historical cartography of the maps of America. The research was concentrated in the search for the toponym "Darien". In the cartography of the new American lands, there is a genesis of the name, which appears in different forms in nine maps drawn up from 1531 to 1764. Subsequently, the results of previous archaeological expeditions were analyzed with particular reference to the expeditions of King Leopoldo in 1956 [12] and by Graciliano Arcila in the period 1948–1977 [5]. Both provide general plans with the location of the excavation trenches and pits but the precise location and identification of the city and its limits was not detected.

Since the official cartography of this region is not very detailed, in 2013 high definition satellite images were acquired [13]: Panchromatic (0.5 m World View 1 and 2; 0.6 m Quickbird) and multispectral (1.8 m World View 1 and 2; 2.4 m Quickbird) images. In the early stages of the project, they were used as a basis for georeferencing the information that was progressively collected in a Geographical Information System (by

using the software QGIS). This ensured the possibility of performing spatial analyzes and obtaining thematic maps. The satellite images were studied and interpreted in order to identify archaeological traces over an area of about 45 km. Particular attention was given to the mapping of principal paleohydrography, agricultural divisions, soil and crop marks present across the area.

In 2013 and 2014, a systematic archaeological survey was started over an area of approximately 8 km^2. Since the area is not affected by intensive cultivation, the collection of surface materials was inhibited. For this reason, it was chosen to carry out hand-dug test pits, measuring 1 m × 1 m with a maximum depth of 1 m, for a total of 980 units. For each test, archaeological materials were detected, cataloged and studied distinguishing indigenous materials from Spanish ones. The investigations involved eight areas around some modern points of interest shown in Fig. 2 and allowed to drawn a map of the density of the findings, according to the quantity of pottery shards/artefacts found per test pit.

In 2016, a photogrammetric survey carried out via drone was carried out with the aim of obtaining a high-resolution orthophoto and a Digital Elevation Model (DEM). Data processing of images was performed with Agisoft Metashape software (LLC. St. Petersburg, Russia) using the Structure from Motion (SfM) technique [14]. Thanks to the topographic survey, it was also possible to approximately georeference the plans of previous excavations, taking the heights indicated therein as a reference.

In 2016, considering the areas with major concentrations of finds, geophysical prospections were planned in order to produce an extensive map of hidden structures to guide future archaeological excavations. In the early stages of the project, the strategy of integrating methods was adopted implementing the resistivity tomography, the induced electromagnetic method and the Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) technique. Since the archaeological evidences (cobblestone pavements, post holes, canalizations) were found to be very superficial and characterized by low contrast from a geophysical point of view, in 2017 it was decided to proceed only through GPR prospecting. All possible areas of the village of Santuario, under which approximately one third of the ancient city lies, are being studied. During data acquisition, measurements were performed using a SIR-3000 GPR (GSSI) in grids in which GPR profiles are half meter equally spaced.

For each grid, ground control points were surveyed using a GNSS antenna in RTK (Real Time Kinematic) mode. All sections were processed together in order to obtain 2D horizontal maps at a different range of depth (GPR-SLICE 7.0 software) [15] using standard methodological approaches: data conversion subtracting out the dc-drift (wobble), timezero correction, bandpass filter, background removal, application of the automatic gain function. Thus, horizontal sections were processed and data were gridded using the inverse distance algorithm, using a fixed radius of interpolation of 0.75 m, a smoothing factor of two, and grid cell size of 0.01 m.

Since 2013, considering the results of all the research applied to the project, nine stratigraphic excavations have been carried out.

During the project, the relationships with local communities was crucial. In 2013, only few families from two settler communities supported the work, a community from Emberá Dobida and a community of Afro-descendants from the coast, in a general lack of interest on the part of the other indigenous communities and the hostility of the main organization of Afro descent. Activities were conducted only with local workers and

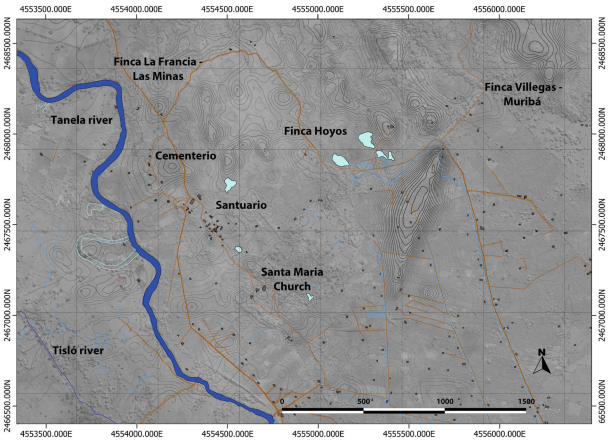

Fig. 2. Location of the surveyed areas with the main places of interest [3, 13].

finds were left on site, kept by the inhabitants in a cabin rented for this purpose. It is necessary to highlight a significant presence of women in archaeological work (more than 50%), which is unusual in the area, where women generally do not work outside their homes or farms.

From 2014, courses on archaeological and restoration techniques were organized for local workers, strengthening awareness of the work carried out and a greater sense of belonging to heritage and the past. The collaborative work with the community and the archaeology classes continued until today, involving more than 150 people from 5 communities and managing to create a group of at least 15–20 local people trained in stratigraphic excavation techniques, graphic documentation and photography in the field, in the design of ceramics, in the collection of plant macroremains and in the restoration of ceramics. This occurs in a place where school offerings are basic.

4 Results

In the cartography of the new American lands, the name of the site appears in different forms in nine maps drawn up from 1531 to 1764 [3]: “El Dariem” places the city in the port map of the Hergoz Bibliothek (before 1531) (Fig. 3a); “Dariem” locates it in Alonso de Chaves’ Map of the New World (1533) (Fig. 3b); “Darien” defines the city in the Map of Diego Gutierrez (1562) (Fig. 3c); “Rio Darien” is reported in the map 329 of the Indias Archive of Panama (1597): for the first time the city is not indicated but only the name of the river; “Rio Grande del Darien” is used again to locate the river in the map 23 of the Indias Archive of Panama (1600); “Rio Darien” is also in the map of Choco (1610); “Darien” places the city in the Atlas of Janssonius (1646) (Fig. 3d); “S. Maria la Antigua” indicates the city and “Darien” locates the region in the map of the Isthmus of Panama and the Gulf of Darien (1730) (Fig. 3e); “S. Marie l’Ancienne” defines the location of the city and “Darien” and the “Golphe de Darien” respectivetly define the region and the gulf in the map of Isthmus of Panama and the Povinces of Veragua (1764) (Fig. 3f).

The analysis of historical maps shows that the city was initially indicated in cartography up to forty years after its abandonment. Then it disappears and the name Darien is often associated with the River. Afterwards, the toponym is used to indicate the region or the Gulf until today and the name S. Maria de la Antigua begins to appear with a meaning of cartographic memory of a place of historical importance. In any case, historical maps do not provide an exact and univocal location of the city even though they always place it west of the Gulf of Urabà.

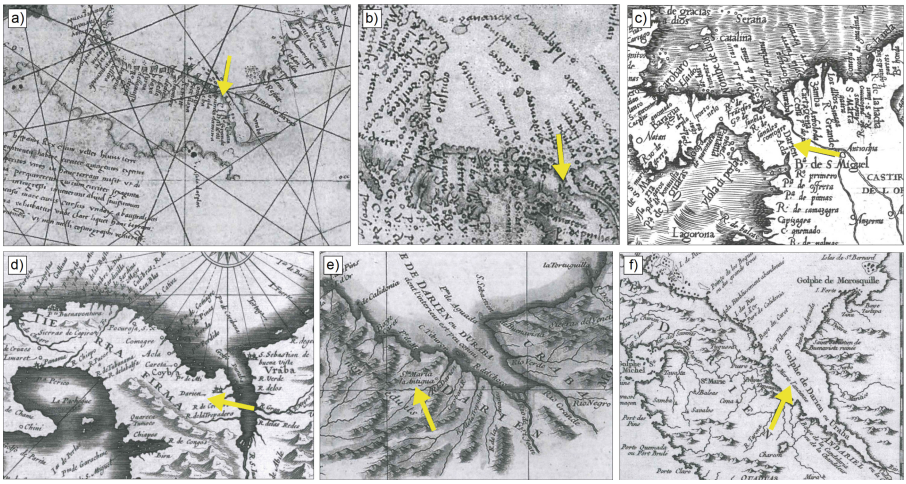

Fig. 3. The Toponym "Darien" in historical maps: map of the Hergoz Bibliothek (before 1531) (a); Alonso de Chaves' Map of the New World (1533) (b); Map of Diego Gutierrez (1562) (c); Atlas of Janssonius (1646) (d); map of the Isthmus of Panama and the Gulf of Darien (1730) (e); map of Isthmus of Panama and the Povinces of Veragua (1764) (f) (Modified by [3]).

The study of satellite images, supported by fieldwork over an area of about 45 km, permitted to reconstruct the principal paleohydrography, particularly regarding the original course of the Darién River (today the Tanela) (Fig. 4a), and to distinguish the regular grid agricultural divisions (Fig. 4b).

The most recent documentation relating to archaeological excavations constitutes effective proof of the identification of the city. The plans indicate the passage of the current Rio Tanela, the heights and the location of the excavations (Fig. 5a,c).

The topographic survey carried out in 2016 allowed the production of a high-resolution orthophoto, the basis on which to implement all the data in GIS (Fig. 6a). The area was limited to a strip of land west of the river Tanela, in the center of which the village of Santuario is located. As a further processing, a DEM was produced from which the topography was derived (Fig. 6a). Thanks to the highlighting of the hills, it was possible to georeference the plans of Arcilla Velez [5] and Verlinder [12], specifying the sites where excavations were carried out in those years (Fig. 6b,d). From this, it was possible to understand that the two archaeological expeditions concentrated on the southern part of the city, thinking that it was contained to that area. In return, the current

investigations have been able to define the real size of Santa María de la Antigua, which is about twice the size assumed by the two scholars.

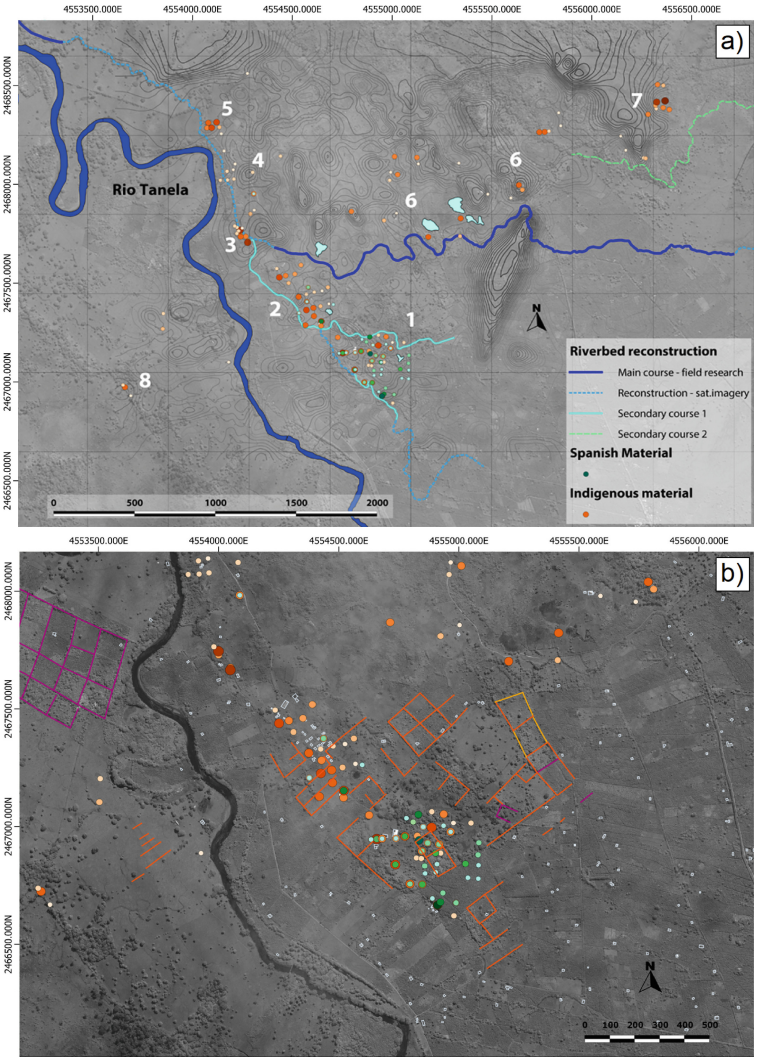

Fig. 4. Reconstructive hypotheses of paleohydrography (a) and agricultural divisions in the Santa Maria/Darién area. In the figures, the numbers indicate the following places: 1. Santa Maria de la Antigua; 2. Darién; 3. Cementerio; 4. Tanela Viejo; 5. Las Minas; 6. Hoyos; 7. Muribá; 8. Tisló (Modified by [13]).

In Fig. 7, the density of the findings of the archaeological prospections, according to the quantity of artefacts found per test pit, is reported. The circles with shades of green indicate Spanish finds, the circles with shades of orange indicate indigenous, pre-Hispanic finds, negative tests (lacking archaeological material) are marked as black

triangles. In the figure, two large main areas with high densities of materials, one near the Catholic church (1 in Fig. 7) and one in the inhabited area of Santuario (2 in Fig. 7), can be observed. Indigenous archaeological material was present with a great degree of density in whole areas in which surveys resulted positive. Spanish material instead appeared to be concentrated in these two areas with higher density. In addition, other archaeological pre-Hispanic sites in the analyzed territory can be clearly distinguished: the area of Los Laureles, investigated in 2016, which proved to be an indigenous, short-lived site from a post-abandonment phase of the colonial city (3); the Las Minas area, in the territory of the La Francia Estate, a site probably related to a settlement (5); the Muribá area, in the territory of the Villegas Estate, with a very high materials concentration, almost certainly related to a pre-Hispanic settlement (7); a vast area in the territory of the Hoyos Estate, in which the findings were more scattered, evidence of small housing units strewn on the heights of the zone (6); the area surrounding the Tisló river, on the western bank of the Tanela river, where a layer of anthropogenic origin, about 0.94 m deep and 0.4 cm thick, was found (8). In the remaining parts of the western area of the Tanela river, surveys have had little effect, probably because of the high levels of relatively recent alluvial origin; the area of the old village of Tanela Viejo, probably to be related to the ancient Guna Dule village of the 17th–19th century (4).

Based on these indications, geophysical surveys were planned. A first area was investigated in the village of Santuario. The GPR result highlights a series of very shallow NEE-SSW aligned anomalies within half a meter of depth (Fig. 8a). Subsequently the archaeological excavation (Tests B and F) linked these anomalies with canalization of the indigenous period (Fig. 8b). On the upper levels, Hispanic material and post holes from a probable house were found.

From 2014 to 2021, stratigraphic investigations have been carried out in 9 large areas and 31 sections (2 m × 2 m) in which several places in the colonial city and important features of the pre-Hispanic phase have been revealed (Fig. 9). From the colonial phase, of which the sub-phases of foundation (apogee, pre-abandonment and destruction) were recognized, the following elements were found: patios in boulders of Spanish houses (Área M17 2019), the western street of the city (Area J 2017–2018 and Area L9 2019), a house for indigenous servants next to a Spanish lot (Area F 2015), a water intake site (Area C 2014), a workshop for the preparation of bullets for firearms (Area H 2016), a blacksmith's workshop (Area K2 2019) and the southern River Wharf (Área A 2014–2023), with a large number of material culture objects.

From the pre-Hispanic phase a foundation phase, dated to 1106 AD. ±/−78, was recognized. Homes and family gardens, a long phase of movements and seasonal presence, a pre-contact phase and a contact phase characterized it. Three important burials from this phase (Areas F 2015, I 2016 and M1 2019), a house and some channels for water control (Areas B 2014 and F 2015) were excavated. A typology of pre-Hispanic ceramics also began to be generated based on stratigraphic excavations. The post-abandonment phase, characterized by ritual offerings with a "cleansing" nature, was recognized in Areas A 2014 and H 2016, as well as in the nearby Los Lureles site (Area G 2016).

Subsequently, the museum building was built in the area surveyed by geophysical prospecting and interested by B and F test pits. The geophysical research, starting from the feedback obtained at this point, continued in the northern and eastern areas. In Fig. 10, the first results are presented inserting dotted lines to facilitate interpretation. From the analysis of the anomalies, a regular distribution of the maximum amplitudes of the detected electromagnetic signal emerges. In the figure, considering the archaeological data coming from the excavations carried out beneath the current museum, two typologies are distinguished: in yellow medium-sized anomalies attributable to the pre-Hispanic phase (1100–1400), in red large-sized anomalies attributable to the colonial phase (1500–1524). This consideration derives from the comparison be-tween the features identified and the orientation and distribution of the archaeological evidence. In particular, the pre-Hispanic phase is characterized by the presence of shallow canalizations, as demonstrated by previous excavations (Fig. 8).

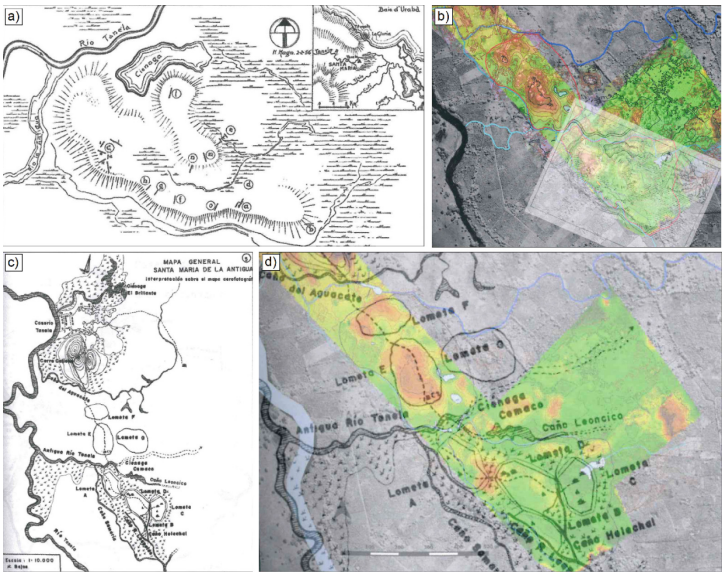

Fig. 5. Plan of archaeological excavations conducted by Arcila Velez (a) and Verlinden (c) and their overlap on the DEM (b and d) (Modified by [3]).

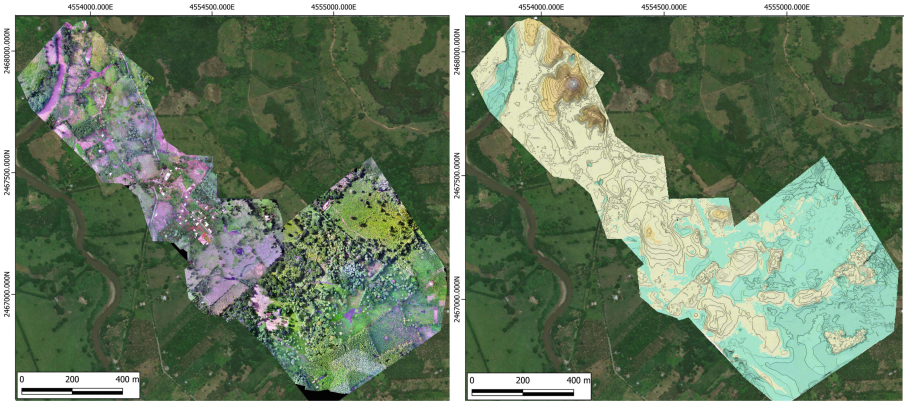

Fig. 6. Orthophoto (a) and Digital Elevation Model (b) produced in 2016.

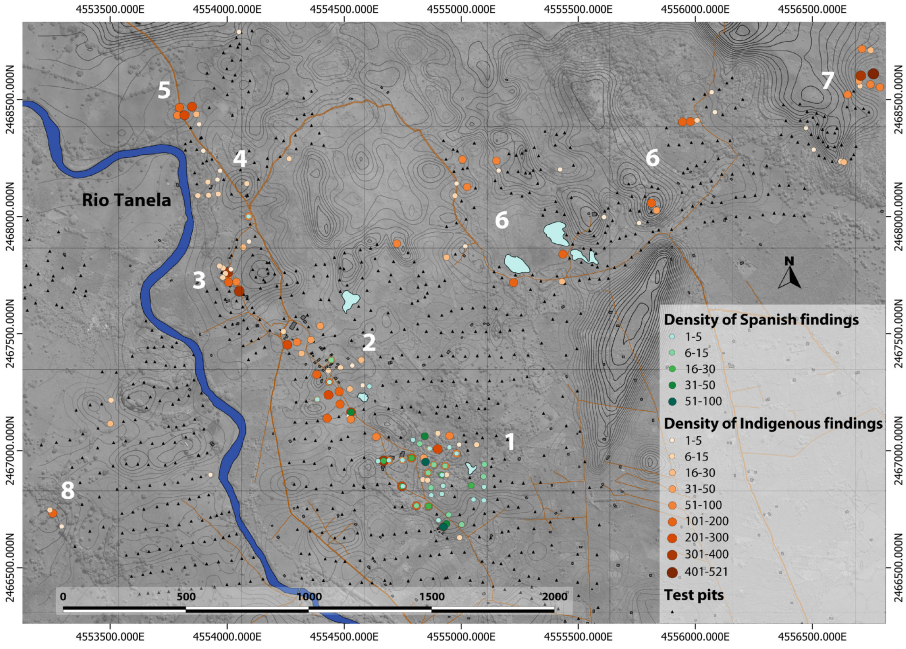

Fig. 7. Density map of archaeological finds (Modified by [3, 13]).

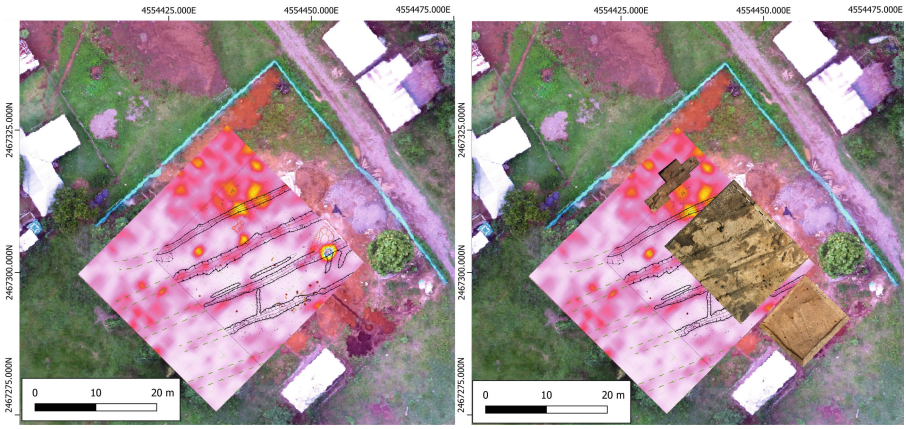

Fig. 8. GPR results (a) and orthophoto of archaeological excavation in test pit B and F (b).

5 Final Remarks

In the last ten years, since its beginning in 2013, the project has succeeded first of all in the important achievement of creating an Archaeological Park, thanks to the support of the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History. This happened in one of the most complex regions of Colombia, recently further complicated by the passage of thousands of migrants on their way to the United States, giving permanent employment opportunities to nine men and women workers and three guards, in addition to the hundreds employed in the archaeological excavations.

The Museum and the Archaeological Park have had a considerable impact at regional level, constituting "the Museum" of the area, meaning the point of reference for reporting finds or donating objects encountered by inhabitants on their land, which has greatly expanded the archaeological collection contained in its storehouse.

Thanks to state funding and the support of international cooperation projects (see Acknowledgements), an almost constant level of research has been maintained, which the recognition of important parts of the colonial city, its phases and the pre-Hispanic phases that preceded it has enabled, through different forms of investigation, including the use of technology applied to archaeology.

In addition, the research also extended to the region, with the aim of clarifying the chronology of cultural and social events in the area, trying to answer important questions, such as the apparent disappearance of the "bays society", which formerly settled on both sides of the Gulf of Urabá, but by the time of the arrival of Europeans had long since abandoned most of the coastal sites where it had developed.

Among the most important results of the project, however, the gradual rapprochement of the communities and its increasingly strong integration into the activities must counted transforming this experience more and more from an institutional to a community project.

The completion of the Archaeological Park (2016) and, above all, the construction of the Heritage House (2017), a place of storage and exhibition of archaeological finds and a place for community meetings and gatherings, have given new impetus to relationships with communities. Here we began to support community projects that sometimes

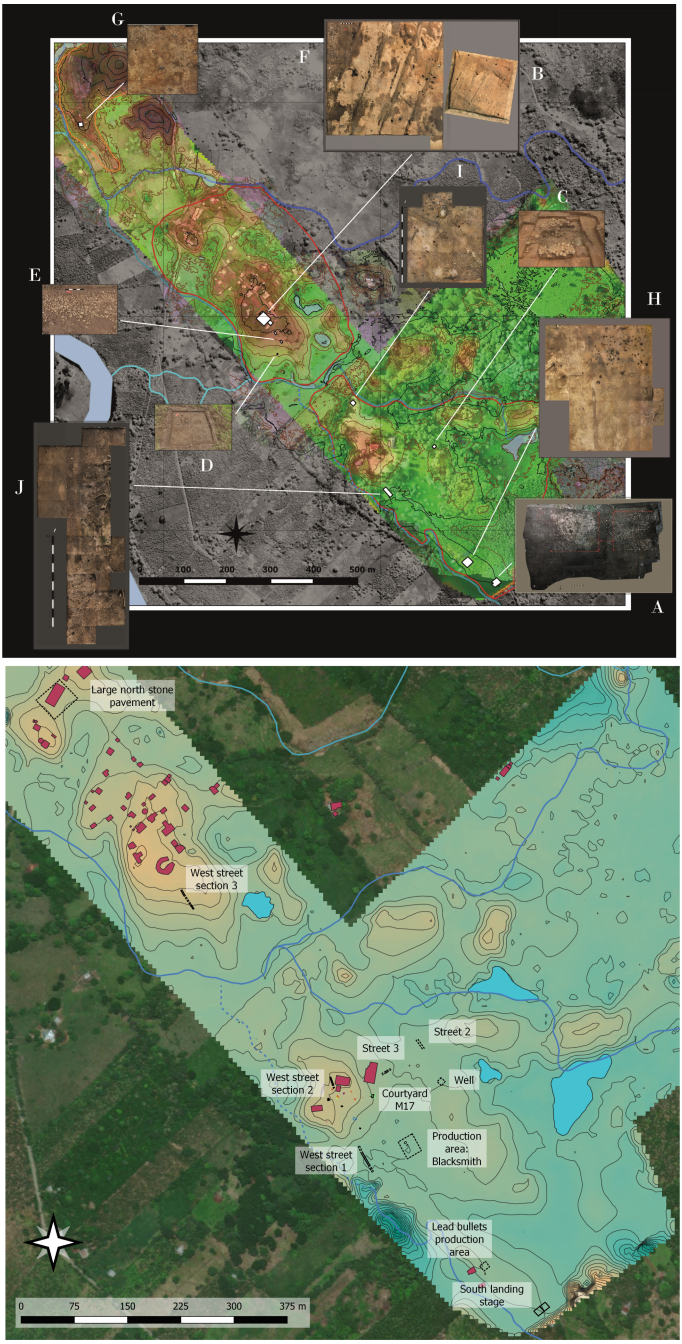

Fig. 9. Stratigraphic excavations carried out from 2014 to 2017 in the archaeological areas of Darien (B, D, E and F), Santa Maria de la Antigua (A, C, H, I and J) and Laureles (G) [3] (top) and preliminary archaeological map (bottom).

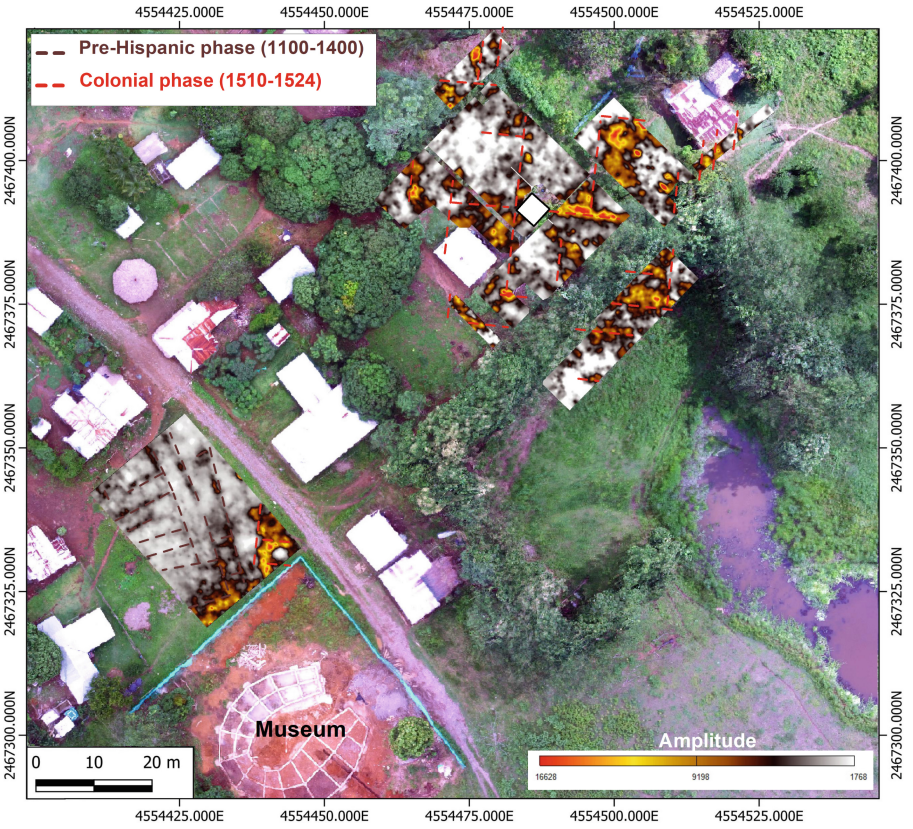

Fig. 10. GPR slice relative to 0.3 m in depth.

went beyond the institutional scope of ICANH, but which were nevertheless vital for the community, such as the rural housing project of cultural interest or the Territorial Development Plans. This openness, this ability to leave the institutional track and to listen to and support the concrete needs of the communities beyond the cultural proposals that are part of our mission, has brought even more families from the two villages in which the Park is located to the project.

The intuition that radically changed the relationship with the communities was the constitution of a Cultural Proposals Committee for the Heritage House and the Park (which was later simply called the Darién Cultural Committee). The idea was that the cultural events would not be organised from the capital, but would have a local root and matrix, conceived by a group of local representatives interested in the cultural aspects of the region. In 2018, the first meeting of the Committee was held, where most of the participants arrived without a clear understanding of what it was all about.

As time went by, the Committee gained strength, always maintaining a horizontal, equal and democratic form of relationship between the participants. Very quickly, even communities that had always been distant or opposed to the project, such as the Afro-descendants of the Major Council of Bajo Atrato or some of the Embera communities

and the Guna Dule community, approached the Committee. Talking about the culture of the communities and working to value it, in a territory where violence and paramilitary control incline people to lock themselves in their homes and villages instead of meeting and exchanging the different forms of their knowledge, proved to be a powerful trigger that has brought together most of the communities of the region in the Committee. From an initial participation of 9 communities, today the Cultural Committee comprises 21 communities in the region, belonging to the Embera Dobida, Embera Katio, Gunadule, Afrodescendent and settler populations.

The Committee is a meeting place between communities that rarely meet to dialogue. Culture is a neutral territory, in a context where paramilitary control prevents daily and normal forms of expression in other parts of the country and the world: talking about culture, creating and managing cultural spaces, is a form of rapprochement and mutual recognition that can open previously unexpected relationships.

For us it has been important, from the beginning, to move towards a decolonising archaeology, from research to musealisation, integrating all the communities of the territory in an integral multivocal approach. This is especially true for a site like Santa María de la Antigua, which represents the first step on the American mainland of the European colonising conquest at the expense of indigenous peoples and African populations transported as slave labour. A territorial reality such as an Archaeological Park, a Museum or an Archaeological Protected Area cannot be unrelated to all the communities that inhabit that territory, to their history and to their interpretation of the archaeological site and the findings. To paraphrase Iñaki Díaz Balerdi, we want to go beyond the physical limits of the Museum and the Archaeological Park to speak of territory [16]. In the case of Santa María de la Antigua, which with its colonial history encompasses indigenous, Afro-descendant and settler communities, there are different degrees of rootedness in the territory starting with the Guna, who have been present for at least 400 years (and probably much longer), the Embera, who arrived in the south of Darién around 1700 and in the Santa María area around fifty years ago, the Afro communities of the coast who arrived from the department of Bolívar in the late 1800s, those of the ciénagas, who arrived from the south along the Atrato around the early 1900s, and the Cordovan and Antioquian communities who have also been present for around fifty years. Each of these communities has a story to tell, a point of view as valid as the others.

By the way, those of Santa María de la Antigua del Darién are neither a community museum nor a community park, since "a community museum is created by the community itself: it is a museum of the community, not elaborated externally for the community" [17]. An archaeological park and its museum, in Colombia, cannot be, at least at this time, created and managed by the community. Our Park and our Museum have a community voice, they have community spaces, they carry out the community creation (and partly the management) of cultural events, but for the moment they are not a community Park and Museum.

The Santa María de la Antigua project was born out of an initiative that was previously a university initiative (the initial elaboration of the project is due to historian Paolo Vignolo of the National University, former ICANH director Ernesto Montenegro and the archaeologist Alberto Sarcina), on the part of the National University, and later a state initiative, on the part of ICANH and the Colombian Ministry of Culture. Likewise,

those of us who were leading this process were always clear about the importance of multivocality in all phases of the project. The empowerment by the communities of their own heritage, in our case, is a process that took and will take some time, and it is desirable that at some point a shared management of the Museum and the Park between ICANH and the communities, through the Cultural Committee, will be achieved.

Our proposal is to bet on archaeology, on the valorisation of the archaeological site as the detonator of a process of dialogue, of redefinition of a common territory based on the study of its history, of its ancestral roots, of the critical and proactive discussion of a history that has been divisive and violent since the arrival of the Spaniards. Undoubtedly, the Darién is a space where the memory of conflicts is reflected in the stories of indigenous resistance and Spanish atrocities, passing through the permanent war between the Guna and the Government of Panama, until reaching the current conflict, with an incredible continuity.

There is no doubt that in Santa María de la Antigua, peasant memory, indigenous memory and Afro-descendant memory are probably antagonistic to each other, on the one hand, and surely minority and excluded from the national historical narrative, on the other. We could define these narratives as "marginalised memories" (what Moshenka defines as "sectional memories" in [18]) as opposed to the national hegemonic memory.

The site of the first Spanish city founded on the continental land of America cannot exempt itself from being a stage for the articulation of all the stories and all the forms of memory present in the territory, and to place them on an equal footing with the hegemonic narrative. Our endeavour is to create the space, as welcoming and open as we can, to accommodate these stories and harmonise them in a decolonising narrative that is as multivocal as possible, while at the same time trying to generate a cultural fabric for peace.

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