

## THE CLIFTON PIER ROCKSHELTER, NEW PROVIDENCE, BAHAMAS

By John H. Winter

Julian Granberry (1955: 140-143) reports that nine cave sites from New Providence, Bahamas, have yielded archaeological material, although the exact location of most of these caves is no longer known. I was fortunate enough to have been shown yet another such cave on New Providence by Mr. Pericles Maillis, in August, 1977. The location of the cave is southwest of Clifton Pier, coördinates 25°00' N and 77°34' W, and it faces toward the ocean some 15 meters from the water's edge. The cave is divided into two sections. The front section has a maximum depth of 5.01 meters and a maximum width of 5.53 meters. There are three pot-holes in the ceiling. The rear section is separated from the front section by a narrow corridor and is 1.54 meters in diameter with a pot-hole in the ceiling. No pictographs or petroglyphs were noticed on the walls of the cave. The interior of the cave showed evidence of having been disturbed.

As archaeological evidence from the northern Bahamas is scarce, I decided to dig two one meter by one meter test squares to see if any material remained in the cave. Even though the cave had been disturbed, I excavated in arbitrary 10 centimeter levels, screening the earth through a ¼ inch wire screen. From the first square, two pottery sherds, fish and mammal remains were screened out. The pottery sherds were uncovered at depths of 9 cm. and 12 cm. Bedrock was reached at 15.2 cm. The second square was dug into a circular pit area in the cave. The bottom of the pit was reached at 70.1 cm. A complete conch shell (*Strombus gigas*) with a circular hole opened at the apex (a characteristic technique of the Indians of the Bahamas) was uncovered at a depth of 22.9 cm. Six fragments of pottery were found between 56-58 cm.'s depth.

As the unearthened material was probably disturbed prior to excavation, this analysis will be based on the pottery and conch shell. The fish and mammal remains will not be analyzed in this report.

The six pottery fragments from the second square are all shell-impregnated. The outer surface is smooth and slightly polished. The outer surface varies in color from orange-red to brown. The interior surface is smooth and brown in color. The fragments are remnants from the body of a vessel. As for classification of the fragments, they could fit either the San Salvador Plain Red variety (Granberry 1952: 13), or the Palmetto Plain variety (Sears and Sullivan 1978: 12), depending on whose model one chooses.

The pottery fragments from the first square were rim sherds, which were

also shell-impregnated, but grey in color. The outer surfaces were smoothed, but contained incised decorations of diagonal parallel lines (figures 1 and 2). This decoration bears a close resemblance to the Meillacoid Series. Again, depending on whose classification one chooses, one could call them San Salvador Incised Red (Granberry 1952: 14), or Palmetto Punctate Incised (Sears and Sullivan 1978: 13). The vessels from which the rims came were estimated to have diameters of 12.7 cm. and 13.1 cm., respectively. Dissimilar vessel fragments often can be associated in the same vessel (Winter 1978a and 1978b), however, based on design, profile, and size, I believe that these two sherds could also be from different vessels.

The conch shell from the cave was sent to the University of Georgia Geochronology Laboratory for radiocarbon analysis. A reading of  $805 \pm 55$  B.P., or A.D.  $1145 \pm 55$  (UGa-1930) was given for the shell. This date precedes the dates from the McKay site, Crooked Island, Bahamas, which average about A.D. 1250 (Winter 1978b: 239).

Although the cave had been disturbed previously, it appears that some useful information was retrieved regarding the habitation of the northern Bahamas. It is believed that the shell-impregnated pottery styles, whether San Salvador or Palmetto, were established between A.D. 900 and A.D. 1100, and that this pottery style spread throughout the Bahamas reaching the northern islands near the end of this time period or afterward (Sears and Sullivan 1978: 16; Granberry 1973: 32). It should be noted that the Meillacoid styles were in existence in the Hispaniolan region between A.D. 800 and A.D. 1500 (Rouse 1964; Veloz Maggiolo *et al.* 1973), which should have allowed plenty of time for a migration into the Bahamas. If 100 years were allowed for the migration of Meillacoid influence, then the date given for the conch shell could be the date when the incised rim sherds were in use at the cave near Clifton Pier. This would then show that the Lucayans of the northern Bahamas were under Meillacoid influence by A.D. 1145, and that perhaps even earlier influences or occupations of the northern Bahamas may exist.

## Bibliography

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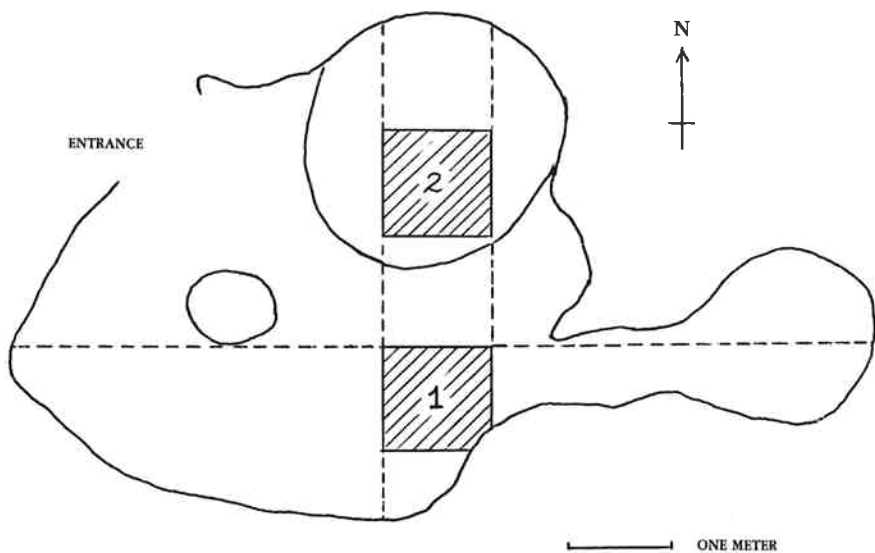


FIGURE 1  
Clifton Pier Rockshelter: Ground Plan

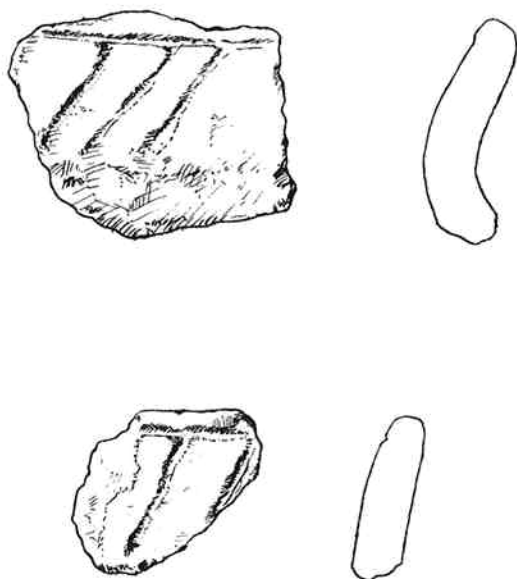


FIGURE 2  
Rimsherds from Clifton Pier  
1:1  
*Drawing by Jeffrey M. Gross.*

**Veloz Maggiolo, Marcio, Elpidio Ortega, and Plinio Pina**

- 1973 Fechas de radiocarbón para el período ceramista en la República Dominicana. *Boletín del Museo del Hombre Dominicano*, no. 3, pp. 138-198.

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- 1978b Preliminary work from the McKay site on Crooked Island. *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress for the Study of Pre-Columbian Cultures of the Lesser Antilles*, pp. 237-242.

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