

REVIEW ARTICLE

## ARCHAEOLOGISTS, BANANAS, AND SPIES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN NORTHERN COLOMBIA

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*«Suddenly, as if a whirlwind had set down roots in the centre of the town, the banana company arrived, pursued by the leaf storm» (Gabriel García Márquez, Leaf Storm, 1955).*

**ABSTRACT.** *Archaeology in northern Colombia, from the perspective of social history, was developed by American archaeologists after the First World War, when the United States began an expansion in Central America and the Caribbean through banana plantation operations. The United Fruit Company (UFC), a Boston-based company, owned large tracts of land in Central America and some areas of South America, including the Magdalena region in Colombia. Many archaeologists, associated with various museum institutions, used the banana company's networks to conduct archaeological expeditions alongside their espionage efforts attempting to stop what was considered German and Bolshevik expansion. This paper explores the emergence of archaeology in northern Colombia within this political framework.*

**KEYWORDS.** *Colonialism; archaeology; Caribbean; United States; politics; history.*

### ANALYSIS TOOLS

In the mid-1980s, Patterson published a troubling article questioning the social and political conditions determining the development of archaeology in the United States in the twentieth century; he called this approach *Americanist Archaeology* (1986). Patterson remarked that his social and political history of archaeology was alternative and even critical and revisionist, compared with most disciplinary and self-congratulatory readings, which showed the development of archaeology in the United States as a consequence of trajectories of progressive success, ignoring the social contexts that imposed disciplinary issues or trends (Patterson, 1986: 7). Patterson, taking a critical perspective that evoked the reflections of the social sciences in the previous decade (Clements, 1972), pointed out that it was possible to understand archaeology as an expression of the imposition of a dominant narrative by groups that, in the capitalism of the last third of the

twentieth century, did not necessarily represent homogeneous positions. The logic and scope of archaeology could be interpreted as an ideological project trying to set trends in the ways of doing and thinking; such an ideology was conceived by the critical social sciences emerging after the epistemic and political revolution of May 1968 (Susen, 2014).

Patterson was one of the first to call attention to the fact that archaeology created historical narratives concerning the civilising projects of the United States; this was done, not from the crude vision of an ideological imposition hiding reality as, for example, the Nazis intended (Arnold, 1990), but from a cultural production that creates in the public an experience designed by the narrative. Undoubtedly, Patterson shares with Augé (1995) the idea that the cultural experience in late modernity is designed, which does not mean it is false. Unlike the traditional place of anthropology, a locality now lost to the interconnectivity of globalisation, the non-place as a new anthropological place is expressed

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as the space of intentionality. As Augé points out, a non-place promotes a consumable view of history, functional to the commodification of culture.

In this way, Patterson, familiar with the post-structuralist analyses of the 1970s, found in the social history of archaeology in the United States, two tendencies of dominant groups trying to impose their narratives: on the one hand, a trend based on the international monopoly and financial capitalism that he called *Eastern Establishment* and, on the other hand, a trend based on national capitalism that he called *Core Culture* (Patterson, 1986: 8). For Patterson, *Eastern Establishment* is related to a foreign policy approach seeking to influence the design of the societies in which the United States intervened through the installation of military industries and occupations, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean. *Core Culture* reflects a more nationalist tendency, that of the cultural centre including internal politics as a priority. For Patterson, Henry Ford expressed a version of *Core Culture* in the restoration of the Greenfield Villa and the construction of the Henry Ford Museum, evoking the old days of a rural republic characterized by harmonious relations, without signs of the participation of the elite in crafting these stories. In contrast, John D. Rockefeller Jr. represented the internationalist vision, one example of which can be seen in the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, which evoked the plantation elite as a mobiliser of true American values (Patterson, 1986: 11–12).

These capitalist formulations, one based on promoting local culture and the other on expansionist projects, involved an agenda extending beyond the borders of the United States. Consolidated in the last decade of the nineteenth century, these involved, whether for internal or external politics, the creation of specialists and funding agencies to achieve their objectives (Patterson, 1986: 8). After 1918, at the end of the First World War, the expansionists began to finance archaeological research by individuals and museums, consolidating the research agenda of the Carnegie Institution of Washington and creating the International School of American Archaeology and Ethnology in the National Research Council (Patterson, 1986: 10–11). With the Mexican revolution of 1911 and the growing fear by US investors of losing their possessions in northern Panama, military interventions in Veracruz (1914) and northern Mexico (1916) soon followed. This context surrounded the research projects on Mayan cultures directed and planned by Sylvanus Morley in 1915 and conducted under the auspices of the Carnegie In-

stitution of Washington (Patterson, 1986: 12). The first part of the project, lasting a decade, focused on Guatemala and was supported by the United Fruit Company (UFC). The tense relationship with Mexico meant Morley would not arrive at Chichen Itza until 1924 (Patterson, 1986: 12). Regarding the Carnegie archaeological programme, Patterson says:

“The Carnegie archaeological program was not value free and neutral, for it carried a subtle political message to the revolutionary government of Mexico and to the peoples of Central America. By focusing on the Maya, *the most brilliant culture of the pre-Columbian world*, the archaeologists were implicitly questioning the unity of the Mexican state and the cultural attainments of the ancient societies of central and northern Mexico – the regions that controlled the modern state” (Patterson, 1986: 12).

This situation was not exclusive to this period, nor was it limited to works focused on the Mayan culture. The delegitimisation of local cultures through archaeology has been a constant in Latin American countries. In the case of Colombia, the establishment of the archaeological research agenda of the north of the country replicated this approach because the first archaeologists arriving in Colombia, from institutions in the United States, indicated the local tribes were pale and blurred reflections of what once were great centres of civilisation. There is even more. These first archaeologists belonged to the traditions founded by the expansionist capitalism of the United States; therefore, it is possible to trace in these researchers their ascription to the colonialist companies of the United States and their roles as spies in the service of the US Navy. These contours of the history of archaeology in northern Colombia are very interesting because the historical development of this discipline has been presented, most of the time, as a progressive triumph through the accumulation of data, with little reflection on the means of collection and use of the same data to feed dominant narratives.

As this article shows, when looking at the social context of the beginnings of archaeology in northern Colombia, we find its development was not due to men of science disconnected from interests; on the contrary, it was driven by individuals with specific missions assigned by intelligence agencies and transnational companies attached to the wing of expansionist capitalism of the United States. To understand the development of pre-Hispanic dominant narratives, the trajectories

of two academics, John Alden Mason and Gregory Mason, who came to Santa Marta to conduct archaeological research at the beginning of the 20th century will be used. In their narratives, we find clues to the prevailing historical narrative.

### JOHN ALDEN MASON AND THE SEARCH FOR THE TAIRONA

The first American archaeologists based their work on a purely positivist approach (Patterson, 1986: 12). This is fully understandable in a colonial expansion agenda, as the primary objective was to exalt archaeological cultures as expressions, naturalised in these stories, of the existence of dominant elites around the globe. Obviously, the American archaeologists and the institutions they represented were evidence of that tendency for certain elites to seem destined, by nature, to govern. To a certain extent, as Patterson expressed, the monumental cultures sought were reflections of the culture of the United States showing itself as the last link in an unbroken evolutionary chain (Trigger, 1992: 271–306). Positivism allowed the archaeological record to serve as proof of the inexorable tendency to form dominant groups throughout the history of humankind. In this way, archaeology was the practice of accumulating evidence of monumentality serving to express the domination of centres of power. Therefore, in these early stages of Americanist archaeology, archaeological investigations and amassing collections were concomitant practices, two sides of the same coin.

According to research by Harris and Sadler (2003), Sylvanus G. Morley, remembered for his work in Mexico by the Carnegie Institution of Washington, was a spy on the payroll of the Office of Naval Intelligence of the United States (ONI). His main job was to report German activity on the east coast of Central America and Mexico. To achieve this goal, Morley recruited other archaeologists assigned to different regions from Panama to Mexico on the Atlantic coast. The payroll handled by Morley included John Alden Mason, considered the pioneer of archaeology in northern Colombia, as he was the first professional archaeologist who collected archaeological data from the coastline of Santa Marta.

As Houston and Sadler report, John Alden Mason, agent 157 of the ONI, began to get involved in spy networks the same year, 1917, he agreed to be the assistant curator of the Mexico and South America sec-

tion of the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago (Harris & Sadler, 2003: 50). Mason's role was not insignificant; he received direct orders from Josephus Daniels, secretary of the United States Navy. The assignment involved using his role as an archaeologist to report movements of potential enemies in Mexican territories. In April 1917, John Alden Mason, together with William Mechling, a Harvard anthropologist who had worked with Franz Boas in Mexico a few years earlier (Browman & Williams, 2013: 345), were commissioned to go to Veracruz to document and sabotage German missions in that region. Mason had strict orders to destroy the evidence of his mission, *Mission Impossible* style, but was discovered and arrested for his intelligence work. Mason appealed to his friend, the prominent Mexican archaeologist Manuel Gamio, to intercede for their release (Harris & Sadler, 2003: 52). The Veracruz incident caused the ONI director, Captain Roger Welles, to ask for Mechling's head, leading to the official end of Mason's career in the ONI at the end of 1917. It is clear that Franz Boas knew about the intelligence work of Mason and Mechling (Browman & Williams, 2013: 346). Boas knew Mechling from his days as director of the International School of Mexico, which allowed him to establish ties with the country and eventually resulted in the opportunity presented to Manuel Gamio to train at Columbia University with Boas and Marshall H. Saville (Gamio, 1942), Columbia professor, Boas' colleague, and one of the first archaeologists-spies (Bonomo & Farro, 2014: 141). We will deal with Saville later because he was the PhD thesis director of the second researcher who conducted archaeological investigations in northern Colombia, Gregory Mason.

An interesting fact is that the intelligence work by the ONI was supported directly by the UFC; this was a state secret. Such cooperation clearly implies seeking control of the Atlantic from the southern United States to Colombia (Harris & Sadler, 2003: 183). Although Colombia was not as high a priority as other parts of Central America, the port of Santa Marta was covered, in 1917 at least, by an agent responsible for reviewing the movements of the growing German population in the Colombian Caribbean (Harris & Sadler, 2003: 177).

With this background, knowing John Alden Mason was a spy working for Morley and given that ONI, through the UFC, had spies in Santa Marta, we must understand John Alden Mason's arrival in Santa Marta in 1922. Santa Marta was not an unknown region for

Mason, despite not having visited the place beforehand. Mason's arrival in Santa Marta had similarities with his trip to Veracruz five years before. From Chicago, he boarded a UFC ship from New Orleans to Panama and, from there, took another UFC ship to Barranquilla, where he travelled, by rail, to Santa Marta. As happened in Veracruz, Mason looked for coffee plantations that, in this case, did not hide German clandestine centres but were owned by Americans who had begun to invest in the region (Mason, 1931: 11–22). In this way, Mason used the UFC networks to arrive in Colombia and to obtain logistical support and safety. It is not surprising that he commented, after travelling along the coast of Santa Marta, that he went to the UFC hospital because of a possible gastrointestinal infection (Mason, 1931: 21).

Following the tradition inaugurated by Morley, Mason became interested in the monumental archaeological record in Colombia, which had been popularised by the works of Francis Nicholas in the early twentieth century (Nicholas, 1901). Through this anthropologist, Mason learned about the goldsmith manifestations and village systems associated with the *Tairona* indians, considered extinct. Without a doubt, Mason's idea was to recognise manifestations of monumentality that evidently did not compete with the Mesoamerican complexes and that had not been studied by professional archaeologists (Mason, 1931: 11). Mason thought the Colombian Caribbean could help to explain the connections between the Mesoamerican complexes in the north and the Andean complexes in the south. Migration and dissemination were thus the ingredients of a story, based on positivism, intended to describe the monumentality of the region and enlarge pre-Columbian collections in the United States (Mason, 1931: 12), while simultaneously showing the region was full of uneducated and less industrious people; these were the metaphors with which the folklore of the Colombian Caribbean was built. Because of this, Mason did not hesitate to discredit Santa Marta, presenting it as a place without interest; although, he did note that it was the oldest settlement in Colombia (Mason, 1931: 12). In the introduction to his doctoral thesis in 1931, Mason's disdain for the region and its people is evident, and in the background of his trip, he continues to exalt the UFC as the light illuminating the permanent darkness of these abandoned regions. Morley's Mexican script was repeated: disqualifying local cultures through the exaltation of the indigenous people of the past.

A non-trivial fact is that Mason, upon his arrival in Barranquilla—a city full of Germans—devoted himself extensively to undisclosed business matters (Mason, 1931: 14). Therefore, there is clear evidence his archaeological research was not the priority or was complemented by a personal business or perhaps intelligence orders, which we will never know. While we cannot conclude Mason was spying, at a time when war tensions had ceased, it is clear that he maintained his networks associated with the UFC and that this company maintained its colonisation project in this part of Colombia, as in other parts of Central America and the Caribbean. Mason, in a few lines, describes the context of his arrival in Colombia and then dedicates himself to show evidence of what he considered the *Tairona*, thus inaugurating the idea the archaeological record of northern Colombia had belonged to a powerful ethnic group, today extinct. This supports Patterson's idea that this expansionist archaeology delegitimised local cultures being stripped by UFC projects, which ultimately represented the expansionist colonialism of the United States.

Although, from the United States, the UFC is represented as an achievement or a contribution to global civilisation, the truth is that the arrival of the UFC in Colombia brought dispossession and exclusion. In his first novel, Colombian literature Nobel Prize winner Gabriel García Márquez describes the arrival of the UFC:

“Suddenly, as if a whirlwind had set down roots in the centre of the town, the banana company arrived, pursued by the leaf storm. A whirling leaf storm had been stirred up, formed out of the human and material dregs of other towns, the chaff of a civil war that seemed ever more remote and unlikely. The whirlwind was implacable. It contaminated everything with its swirling crowd smell, the smell of skin secretion and hidden death. In less than a year, it sowed over the town the rubble of many catastrophes that had come before it, scattering its mixed cargo of rubbish in the streets. And all of a sudden that rubbish, in time to the mad and unpredicted rhythm of the storm, was being sorted out, individualized, until what had been a narrow street with a river at one end and a corral for the dead at the other was changed into a different and more complex town, created out of the rubbish of other towns” (García, 1974: 4).

As Gabriel García Márquez writes, the installation of the UFC took place in Colombia after the last civil

war of the nineteenth century, which allowed the establishment of a conservative regime that initiated a process of dispossession of land from peasants and the establishment of a Catholic style latifundia system (Arocha, 1984).

Colombia entered the twentieth century with retrograde reforms allowing alliances between the elites of the United States and those of Bogotá and the region. Through this, Colombia lost Panama and allowed the establishment of the UFC with questionable contracts, such as determining the UFC as the only company allowed to grow and export bananas (Bucheli, 2013).

Undoubtedly, the work of John Alden Mason represents these first archaeologies complacent to the regimes of neo-colonial representation when American financial capital was making significant investments to form archaeological collections, in a dynamic of constructing, not just historical narratives, but heritage landscapes (González, 2014).

Concomitant with the formation of collections, the exhibitions spreading the UFC's image of Latin America began to become popular. It is not a secret that the UFC was not only a company producing and exporting bananas but also an institution with a propaganda system promoting a worldview it hoped would be shared on a global scale (Chapman, 2014).

Having reviewed the first archaeologist who worked in Santa Marta, let us consider the work of his successor, Gregory Mason, also an American, recognised in the collectors' circles of the United States.

## GREGORY MASON AND THE RECYCLED SEARCH FOR THE TAIRONA

Following the tradition of the *Eastern Establishment*, a decade after John Alden Mason's visit another archaeologist-explorer, named Gregory Mason, arrived in Santa Marta. G. Mason was a public figure, well known in the eastern United States, not only for his work in Central America as an explorer and archaeologist but as a promoter of American interests abroad. In 1923, for example, G. Mason had published a newspaper article in which he urged New Yorkers not to worry about competing with Germany or England for the accumulation of archaeological objects of Hellenic classical cultures. He said that, instead, attention should be drawn to American riches, *our own Egypt* south of the border (Mason, 1923: 43). This idea had as a corollary the disqualification of internal processes taking place

in Latin America, notably the suppression of trade unions and indigenous and Afro-descendant struggles by local armies in collusion with US businessmen, especially UFC officers (Bucheli, 2013). There was cooperation between the UFC and the dictatorial governments of Central America; the company accounted for over 50% of exports in countries such as Guatemala and ensured important royalties to corrupt dictatorships, using those resources to perpetuate their power (Dosal, 1993).

Gregory Mason arrived in Santa Marta in 1931 and took field trips over the following five years (Mason, 1938). His interest in the *Tairona*, he comments in his introduction to his doctoral thesis, was fueled by the suggestions of the spy and archaeologist Marshall H. Saville (Browman, 2011) who by 1927 was considered one of the experts of pre-Hispanic Native American goldsmithing (Mason, 1938: VIII). Saville urged Mason to continue research on the *Tairona* and to study two ethnographic tribes, the *Guajiro* and the *Kágaba*, because it was possible there were still descendants of the *Tairona* among them. Unlike John Alden Mason, Gregory Mason was familiar with the region from reading books about the conquest of Santa Marta, such as the famous book *Forest of the Holy Cathedral Church of the city of Santa Marta* (De la Rosa, 1820). These colonial readings allowed Gregory Mason to recognise the landscapes and tribes mentioned by the Spaniards, which led to his research being a comparison between what was said by the conquerors and colonisers and what he observed in the field. Gregory Mason, following the archaeology prescriptions of the United States colonialist project, spared no effort in pointing out that the region lacked the *vivid colour and rich variety* that could be between the tropics of Capricorn and Cancer (Mason, 1938: X). This idea of a forgotten region where time does not exist was produced from the perspective of the coloniser, in this case, not the process of conquest in the sixteenth century but the processes of subjection orchestrated by the United States in the 20th century.

It is clear that, in Mason's vision, the *Tairona* were a society of goldsmiths inhabiting various areas surrounding the city of Santa Marta. He mentions a review by Lucas Fernández de Piedrahita, from a 1688 text, that proposes the existence of a Valley called *Tayro*, a name translated as *forge* (Mason, 1938: XIV). Using the Spanish documents as reference points, G. Mason and Saville agreed on three research objectives: 1) research on the *Tairona* culture by excavating cities and cemeteries; 2)

ethnological study of the *Guajiro* to determine their relationship with the human remains excavated in the *Tairona* tombs; and 3) ethnological research with the living *Kágaba-Arhuaco* tribes whose villages are located in the peripheries occupied by the *Tairona* (Mason, 1938: XVIII–XIX). Although it has been said that Gregory Mason established that the *Kágaba* were the descendants of the *Tairona* (Ulloa, 2004: 185), Mason (1938: IX) considered the *Kágaba* less close to the description of the *Tairona* provided by people like José Nicolás de la Rosa than were the *Guajiro*, given their size, pride, and disposition to war. From what Mason (1938: XIX) wrote, he recognised, from a somatological perspective, the *Guajiro* should be considered the descendants of the *Tairona*; however, from the perspective of the *Kágaba-Arhuaco* religion, continuity was clear in the use of artefacts for cults, as many objects he excavated were used by the *Kágaba*, and others were appreciated by the spiritual leaders of that ethnic group for their libations and ceremonies. Some pages above, in his doctoral thesis, G. Mason points out, definitely, that the *Guajiro* are not descendants of the *Tairona*, either because they did not allow measurements as he wanted or the *Guajiro* themselves stressed they had nothing to do with those pre-Hispanic tribes. In this way, he could not make comparisons with the human remains associated with the *Tairona*, which had been excavated mainly at the San Pedro Alejandrino estate, where Simón Bolívar died.

G. Mason's doctoral thesis suggests that the *Guajiro* did not pay much attention to their possible relations with the *Tairona*, but the *Kágaba* used many of the ornaments commonly found in *Tairona* archaeological sites. Therefore, G. Mason, assuming the *Tairona* are an extinct tribe, devotes most of his analysis efforts to differentiate what is *Kágaba* from what is *Tairona*, establishing a dichotomy to neutralise any possibility that the *Kágaba* might be understood as a society with a profound historical depth that was nonetheless, at the time he visited them, being subjected by the Colombian State through the Catholic Church. Social movements were a taboo topic in the news coming from the Caribbean to the United States. Given the prohibitions of wearing indigenous clothes and other material culture elements and the condemnation by the church of indigenous religious traditions, imposed after 1830 when Simón Bolívar abolished the legal category of *indian* or indigenous, which was inherited from the colony, to impose the category of citizen as the foundation of the republic (Londoño, 2003), it is understandable that

G. Mason found the *Kágaba* disconnected from their sacred sites and the material culture of their religion.

Something deserving attention and showing the scope of characters such as G. Mason is related to an indigenous mask suspiciously obtained by G. Mason in Palomino, a *Kágaba* population at the time located 70 kilometres north of Santa Marta. As G. Mason relates, he received clear instructions, in 1931, to acquire ceremonial masks such as those obtained for the Philadelphia Museum and the Heye Foundation of New York in *Kágaba* territory (Mason, 1938: 171; Preuss, 1993). Recall that the United States competed with Western Europe for the formation of Native American collections and that G. Mason was urged not to collect classic antiques but American ones. G. Mason, aware of the need indigenous people had for certain pre-Columbian artefacts, such as small polished quartz rocks, proposed an exchange in which he delivered some gold frogs he had excavated, plus these rocks, in exchange for the desired mask of the same type as that documented by Preuss. The proposal was not fully accepted, and he was told he would be given a ceremonial dance including the use of masks in exchange for some small rocks needed for libations. The leader with whom G. Mason spoke refused the exchange because the masks were ancient and the *Kágaba* did not know how to manufacture them (Mason, 1938: 172). G. Mason reports, since his negotiation failed, he continued on and arrived at the town of Palomino, which was holding a celebration. In this context, a *mestizo* named Venancio Mamatacan (town commissioner) sold the mask to G. Mason. In his account, G. Mason is ambiguous and purports to be a victim of Mamatacan; but he had previously made it clear he had the mission of obtaining these objects. For people who know the story of G. Mason, it is disturbing to know why he returned the mask, and how he took it out of inventory.

According to what G. Mason recounts, after fraudulently obtaining the mask, he realised the mistake of having taken stolen ceremonial objects. Therefore, he decided, on his second visit, to return the mask. But his reception was not what he anticipated. Various *mamos*, the *Kágaba* spiritual leaders to whom the stolen mask was returned, said they did not want it because it represented the devil (Mason, 1938: 175).

Without a doubt, when the *Kágaba* spiritual leaders saw the masks in the hands of G. Mason, they provided an answer operating within the colonial encounter. Since the church had banned any indigenous ritual, under penalty of physical punishment, it was under-

standable that objects were not accepted, as this could imply severe sanctions. Capuchin monks had been present in northern Colombia since the end of the 18th century, and at the beginning of the 20th century they had expropriated indigenous lands both in the north and south of the country and instituted a policy of destruction of local cultures by various prohibitions, such as speaking the language or conducting rituals to the spiritual beings of local cosmogony, thereby cutting off the transmission of belief systems (Londoño, 2003). Only in the 1960s did the indigenous people of northern Colombia break with the Capuchin hegemony commissioned by the Colombian State responsible for indoctrinating the indigenous people (Friede, 1963). It is clear that the *Kágaba* visited by Mason were subjected to colonial occupation in which the UFC played a leading role, as this company, together with the Colombian State, was responsible for the 1928 massacre of UFC workers asking for better living conditions by the Colombian army a few kilometres from Palomino (Archila & Torres, 2009). The UFC was afraid of losing its monopoly; therefore, its subsidiaries had peacekeepers, such as George Bennett, whom G. Mason recognises as a great help in doing his job in Santa Marta (Mason, 1938: 142). It must be remembered that Bennett had been in Honduras in the early 1920s, defending the interests of the UFC through economic and armed support to the governments useful to them (Beaulac, 1980: 64).

The case of G. Mason follows the same trajectory as that of John Alden Mason. He is an explorer travelling to unknown lands to document lost civilisations while having to deal with colonial subjects. While doing this, he tries to fill the showcases of metropolitan museums to feed the fascination caused by colonialism. This process generates the idea of the existence of a historical culture known as the *Tairona*, whose vestiges will be used to tell the narrative of goldsmiths submitted by the Spaniards, which were later displaced by *mestizos* that the UFC now tries to civilise.

## THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TAIRONA ARCHAEOLOGICAL CULTURE

At the end of the 1930s, Colombia experienced a small liberal boom that was a kind of oasis in a Catholic country. This is how international agreements were signed to promote the protection of indigenous communities and facilitate their insertion into the *mestizo* world. This

shaped the role of the professional anthropologist in emerging Colombian academia (Echeverri, 1998). In the 1940s, the National Ethnological Institute, an entity responsible for ethnological research in Colombia, was founded. Its founder was Paul Rivet, who stayed in Bogotá while fleeing the Nazi occupation of Europe (Pineda, 1984). Rivet had met a young artist in Paris who upon arrival in Colombia called himself Gerardo Reichel-Dolmatoff. Today it is known that Reichel-Dolmatoff had been a Nazi hitman who had to flee from Germany as a result of outstanding accounts with the National Socialist party (Oyuela-Caycedo, 2012). Once he arrived in Colombia, he became an anthropologist, marrying a wealthy Colombian who would be his research partner in the future, Alicia Dussán. Upon his arrival in Colombia, Reichel-Dolmatoff went quickly to Santa Marta, and in the mid-1940s he founded the Magdalena Ethnological Institute, an entity with the mission of investigating local cultures (Reichel-Dolmatoff, 1947). In view of the need to document archaeological sites and ethnographic societies, Reichel promptly assumed the work of John Alden Mason and Gregory Mason as research background. There, two very doubtful premises, so far unquestioned, were assumed. The first was that in pre-Hispanic times, the region was dominated by a powerful culture of goldsmiths called the *Tairona*. The other premise was that this tribe had disappeared and, following G. Mason, that the *Kágaba* were their closest descendants. This cultural relationship only aimed at documenting the collections; in no way could it help the *Kágaba* establish claims to territories or acquire political privileges. Recall Marshall H. Saville had suggested the idea of this relationship to G. Mason; the idea of succession between pre-Hispanic and contemporary cultures was of his own making. These premises were a product of the vision of archaeologists tied to the expansionist projects of the United States; yet they soon became unquestioned research paradigms (Gnecco, 1999). Questioning those ideas meant remaining outside the academic community that had been gaining strength in the United States through the American Archaeology Society (Browman, 2011).

In the 1960s, Reichel founded the prestigious anthropology department of the University of Los Andes, in Bogotá, where he began to teach and popularise the starting points of what Thomas Patterson calls *Americanist Archaeology*. In this way, in the 1970s, after the arrival in northern Colombia of several anthropologists trained at that university, the prejudices built at the

beginning of the 20th century were used as the basis for anthropological and archaeological descriptions. Because in this decade the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta was being destroyed by the planting of cannabis and the looting of archaeological sites, the Colombian government authorised the presence of anthropologists and archaeologists to help restore order. This agenda allowed the creation of foundations, such as the Pro-Sierra Foundation, in force until today, whose task was to study from an archaeological perspective the *Tairona* settlement patterns and *Kágaba* subsistence practices to provide farmers with non-predatory alternatives for respecting the environment. As the anthropologist Margarita Serje, who took part in these initiatives, writes, these anthropological projects were based on a utopia constituted by the ideas of the *noble savage* (Serje, 2008). At the end of the 1970s, the utopian projects ceased and the region plunged into a bloodbath caused by drug traffickers, affecting mostly the *Wayuu* indians of the Guajira peninsula, who suffered violent processes of cultural change from which they have not thus far recovered.

At the beginning of the 1980s, several graduates of the University of Los Andes, notably Oyuela-Caycedo (1986), used the Reichel-Dolmatoff precepts, which were recycled proposals of John Alden Mason and Gregory Mason. These researchers focused on continuities between the *Tairona* and the *Kágaba*, providing additional data such as the unsupported idea that current indigenous people of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta derived from a mixture of societies including the *Tairona*, and who acquired their particularities after the 18th century (Oyuela-Caycedo, 1986: 40). One great exception, Langebaek (2005), has always suggested the unfeasibility of these generalisations, not only due to the millenarian depth of Macro-Chibchan languages spoken in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta villages but also problems such as the absence of chronologies supporting the alleged disintegration and integration. One could add to this criticism, following Clarke (1984: 9), that archaeological data are archaeological, and modelling translations of archaeological sequences into ethnic expressions is at best complex and likely worthless as an archaeological operation. The truth is that United States colonialism imposed an interpretive framework on the archaeological record of northern Colombia, such as the idea that the village system is evidence of the extinct *Tairona*. As late as 2010, a Colombian archaeologist published a doctoral thesis at the University of Chicago titled *Lords of the Snowy Ranges: Politics,*

*Place, and Landscape Transformation in Two Tairona Towns in the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta* (Giraldo, 2010). What draws attention to this important and rigorous research is not the content of the document itself but the pressing need to use the *Tairona* signifier to express a complex of archaeological data, the meaning which could be named in any other way. On this matter, Clarke (1984: 9) said the problem of archaeology in the United States was that it did not understand that archaeological data are not anthropological data, as argued by Binford (1962), but archaeological data. Without a doubt, if this Colombian archaeologist had deviated from these precepts, still valid in the archaeology of American archaeologists, surely he would not have been able to earn his doctorate and he would not have been able to obtain funding. Therefore, in this case, what can be appreciated is the continuity of the stories and fictions of American expansionist archaeology, now turned into the dominant narrative, which are expressions of the neo-colonial imaginary.

## CONCLUSIONS

Following Thomas Patterson's analysis scheme, set out above, it is clear how the *Eastern Establishment* project constituted an archaeological research agenda that cannot be separated from the colonisation of Central America and the Caribbean by the United States and its multinational companies. The data available confirms that before World War I, the United States, through the UFC, mobilised men and resources throughout Central America and the Caribbean to monitor the movements of Europeans, especially Germans, while colonising local political systems through bribery of corrupt landowning elites. This policy was rightly called the *banana republic*, as these democracies appeared in the eyes of the United States as gross imitations of their political systems. What this image did not show was that these elites were often supported by the United States, through weapons and money used to suppress rural populations seeking better living conditions in their territories. By the beginning of the 20th century, the natives of Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta were controlled by religious orders, notably Capuchins, who had the mission of civilising the indigenous people through the prohibition of speaking their languages and suppressing the practice of their religions. This policy was funded by the Colombian State and served the UFC in its expansion purposes. The first archaeologists,



such as G. Mason, who sacked sacred sites and stole objects, did so within the framework of a process of neo-conquest now not exercised by the Spaniards but by the collusion between American companies and Colombian landowners. In this regard, it should not be forgotten that although Patterson did not have the information that would prove the suspicions about the espionage tradition of the anthropologists of prestigious universities such as Columbia and Harvard, he did turn his gaze to understand the bonds of Americanist archaeology with the colonisation projects carried out by the United States in Central America and the Caribbean.

This did not occur in a cultural vacuum, but imposed a vision constructed by the United States, which can serve as a framework for understanding the contemporary world. In an era where xenophobia is expanding and is part of the agendas of the world's democracies, including that of the United States, it is pertinent to remember the United States' support for the extermination of leftist movements in Latin America. The case of Colombia is exemplary. The UFC dominated the city of Santa Marta from the beginning of the 20th century until it left in the 1960s. In the 1920s, Colombian oil unions promoted trade union autonomies, and in the banana zone of the province of Santa Marta, an organisation of workers demanding better working conditions began to take shape. This movement was violently repressed in the *banana plantation massacre*, a wound from which a territory that has always been a resource extraction pole has not yet fully recovered and which made Magdalena an impoverished region. This economic and cultural impoverishment was intentional and reflected the overseas policies of the United States; it is an example of the Chichen Itza effect, which highlights the monumental to delegitimise current societies opposing the colonialism of the United States in action. Today, the banana company has left, but the *whirling leaf storm* remains.

Finally, these ideas are presented to encourage a more solid reflection on archaeology in northern Colombia, to make it relevant, and thus a political tool, because at present, the neo-colonial vision is intact and is reproduced in its usual matrices, such as the academic traditions or in the patrimonialisation of archaeological sites, which are represented as *Tairona* evidence.

At present, this matter is of great importance because the Colombian State has allowed the *Kágaba* to manage specific areas of what was considered the Pueblito Chairama Archaeological Park, in the Tayrona National Natural Park. After initiating legal action, the *Kágaba* obtained their rights over areas of the village, which until 2017 were administrated by the Colombian Institute of Anthropology and History (ICANH, for its acronym in Spanish) and National Natural Parks. After the closure of these areas, it became clear the *Kágaba* sought to recover libation sites necessary for the replication of their clans (Londoño, 2019). What has become clear is that the *Kágaba* were separated from their territories and that the colony presented them as non-entities in their own land, hence the need for the *Tairona* as another entity serving these narratives.

Given the rights recognised to local communities, the need for a review of the architecture of historical narratives constructed by the propaganda system used by the UFC is clear, hence the need for an analysis such as that presented here.

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The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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