Arch/Phys Lunch Talk
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Soc Sci I, 261

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The Archaeology of a Black Runaway Slave Reducción in Colonial Mexico

In 1769, the reducción Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de los Morenos de Amapa was constructed in colonial Mexico. Reducción was a widespread Spanish colonial civilizing practice that was both a process to create Christian colonial subjects and a physical town in which to achieve this production. Although reducciones typically targeted indigenous groups, this colonial experiment was focused on runaway slaves of African descent, or maroons, who fled from sugar plantations in central Veracruz. According to colonial officials, the Amapa reducción was “to reduce the barbarous blacks or maroons to a political and Christian life.” Through archaeological investigations, my work compares the reducción’s material and ideological ideals with its execution in practice. Drawing from ethnographic, archival, and Amapa’s present-day above ground ruins, I also examine the process of ruination and the ways in which the ruined landscape intersects temporally and spatially with the present. I argue that while above ground ruins denaturalize the landscape, these ruins are themselves naturalized by Amapa residents. More palpable to townspeople than material ruination is their town’s social and moral decay. In 1769, Amapa was established on the grounds of the moral redress of savage maroons and anxieties over moral and social ruination have been constant since the town’s founding.