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## **Women's Spaces: An Ethnoarchaeological analysis of gendered spaces at the site of El Flaco, Dominican Republic (AD 900-1500)**

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**An Ethnoarchaeological analysis of gendered spaces at the  
site of El Flaco, Dominican Republic (AD 900-1500)**

**BA Thesis**

**by Szymon Jazowski**

**Archaeology (56703)**

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines the viability of the reconstruction of gendered spaces at the site of El Flaco in North-Western Dominican Republic. It endeavors to set a foundation for a methodology that could facilitate further research into the topic based on previous studies. It also examines ethnographic studies to determine whether comparisons between the Amazon region of South America are helpful in understanding gendered spaces at El Flaco. It examines Ethnohistorical sources on the subject of gender from both the Amazon region and the Lesser Antilles and Greater Antilles to provide a useful comparative study. It also uses an Ethnohistorical source based on oral tradition of the indigenous people of Jamaica to gain some information on the gender division of labor and how it relates to gendered spaces. It was found that the potential for such reconstructions is possible but in the case of the site of El Flaco still more research is needed to make any conclusive assumptions about gendered spaces in the archaeological record.

## **Acknowledgments**

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# Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
1.1. Gender in archaeology	4
1.2. Research Question	4
1.3. Problem Statement:	4
1.4. Scientific and social relevance	5
2. Background on the Site of El Flaco	6
3. Methodology	9
3.1. Introduction to the Methodology	9
3.2. Gender Theory	9
3.3. Gendered Spaces	10
3.4. Temporality of Landscape	11
3.5. Ethnohistory	12
4. Results	14
4.1. Amazonian Ethnoarchaeology	14
4.2. Ethnohistory	16
4.3. Archaeological Evidence	21
4.4. Conclusion	25
5. Discussion	27
5.1. Ethnohistorical Comparisons	27
5.2. Archaeological Comparisons	28
5.3. Modern Ethnography	30
6. Conclusion	32
6.1. Closing Remarks and Future Research	32
Works Cited	34

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Gender in archaeology

Gender in archaeology has been a topic of research since the 1980s and by the 1990s it gained more popularity and credibility. One of the aspects of gender theory are gendered spaces, these are defined as spatial arrangements that affirm separation of genders and gender roles (Spain, 1993). This thesis aims to investigate these spaces at the pre-Columbian site of El Flaco in the Dominican Republic. This task will be accomplished with the use of archaeological evidence, mainly the reconstructed house plans on the site, as well as ethnological and ethnohistorical sources regarding such divisions.

The theoretical difficulties of this task are many. The concept of gendered spaces is less explored within archaeology than some of the more staple concepts, and this work will make a case for their legitimate use in reconstructing past societies. Another issue with the approach of this study is the need for critical assessment of both the ethnohistorical and ethnographic approach. The former is in need of critical examination due to its colonial lens and the latter because of the different time period and region than the focus of this study.

## 1.2. Research Question

The methodology that is to be discussed will be used to answer this research question:

- To what extent is it possible to reconstruct gendered spaces based on the floor plans of El Flaco, and other ethnohistorical and ethnoarchaeological evidence?

The following sub-question will be used to answer the main research question:

- To what degree are the house layouts at the site of El Flaco analogous with the house layouts of traditional groups in present-day tropical South America.

## 1.3. Problem Statement:

The Site of El Flaco is a settlement site in the highlands of North-Western Dominican Republic dated between 900-1400 AD. This investigation will mostly focus on the occupation associated with Chicoid cultural remains. The approach that will be used to

answer the research question will use Western gender theory and as it is applied to archaeology based on the works of Brenda Bowser, Kathleen Deagan and Margaret Conkey. Ethnological studies will be utilized, especially Brenda Bowser's case study of a village in the Ecuadorian Amazon where she takes a gendered approach to the domestic spaces. This study is scientifically relevant because this perspective has not been yet applied to the site of El Flaco and the area of the Caribbean at large is under researched through the lens of gender archaeology. Kathleen Deagan's book on the Taino settlement, En Bas Saline will also be utilized to provide a framework for this thesis.

#### **1.4. Scientific and social relevance**

Societally this research is important because understanding of gender relations in the past can help us to better understand the gender relations today, and open up new possibilities and perspectives on the topic of gender today. It's also important to understand the changing dynamics of gender during the colonial period, and see the response of the indigenous people of Hispaniola to colonialism.

## 2. Background on the Site of El Flaco

The site of El Flaco is a habitation site located in the North-West Dominican Republic, in the Valverde province. The settlement is dated to 990-1452 AD. The material cultures associated with the site are of the Mellaicoid, Ostionoid and Chicoid series. It is located at the foothills of the Cordillera Septentrional 300m above sea level and 20km away from the coastline. It is part of the network of settlements along what is known as *Ruta de Colon* since colonial times. Goods that made their way to the site from different coastal and inland areas and were later found during the excavations, evidencing the interconnectedness of the community that inhabited the site. In Oviedo's *Historia general y natural de las Indias* the area in which the site of El Flaco lies is described as the Chiefdom of Magua, Oviedo writes that chief Guarionex ruled it during the period of Spanish contact (Oviedo, 1959; Kulstad-Gonzales, 2020, p. 57). The site was initially researched during the 1980s as part of a project of Museo del Hombre Dominicano headed by Fernando Luna Calderón and Glenis Tavarez. El Flaco was investigated further starting in 2013 as part of the Nexus 1492 project (*Informe de Trabajo*, 2016). These archaeological investigations led to the identification of many mounds. These mounds are attested at other sites in the region but they are not standard. The mounds were created through the build-up of occupational debris, by the deposition of waste from the households. Further investigations of the leveled areas of the site, through excavations, revealed post holes of the houses and made it possible to reconstruct layouts of the dwellings. (Hofman, Hoogland, et al., 2020). The mounds and households from leveled areas cannot be understood in separation from each other, they are both a part of the household, as activities such as food production, cooking and even burial take place in both of these contexts tying them together conceptually into a single household space.

The site was occupied between the 990-1552 AD calibrated and, it was inhabited on several different occasions within that time frame (*Informe de Trabajo*, 2016). The earlier habitation of the site left less archaeological traces and is characterized by a mixed tradition of Ostionoid and Meillacoid pottery. The later phases of the site yielded more finds and the

pottery found shifted to be mostly part of the Chicoid mode (Pagán-Jiménez, 2020). The leveled areas and two clear house structures were revealed both with a diameter of 9m. The layout of these posts suggests a continuous cycle of building and demolishing of these houses on the same locations. The leveled areas also contained roofed cooking spaces and kitchens associated with the households, these too were cyclically rebuilt, and as suggested by the thin diameters of the post holes they were more temporary than the houses associated with them (Hofman, Hoogland, et al., 2020).

The site yielded a number of hearths as well as some burials associated with hearths. The settlement was rather small and is often referred to in the literature as a hamlet (de Mooij, 2018). The settlement was mostly sustained from the gardens that were kept by the inhabitants, as well as gathering and management of wild plants and trees. The local people grew a wide variety of foodstuffs like cassava, corn, sweet potatoes and many types of legumes. Cassava was the staple crop of the area and the people occupied themselves with its processing and baking into breads (Deagan, 2023, p. 167). They had an intimate grasp of their ecosystem and used it to create reliable foodways (Pagán-Jiménez, 2020).

The site of El Flaco was not only extensively excavated but Emma de Mooij also conducted a conceptual analysis of the site. The analysis focused on the features that were associated with habitation activities. Her thesis focused on three types of such features as the subjects of the study. These were post holes, hearths and mounds (de Mooij 2018, pp., 8-10). The study by de Mooij uses the concept of the *taskscape* developed by Ingold as a large part of the theoretical framework used to interpret the activities and the landscape of the site of El Flaco (de Mooij 2018, pp., 53; Ingold 1993, p. 157). The aforementioned features in their context are interpreted as taskscapes. The mounds were a space where tasks vital for the life of a household took place, such as gardening, refuse disposal and sometimes burial. The hearths in the context of El Flaco deserve a special amount of attention in understanding how life would operate in these habitation areas, as kitchen areas were found in ancillary structures outside of the main structures of the house (de Mooij 2018, p.

101). This analysis provides a great conceptual foundation for this study, as it also deals with the same kinds of evidence (archaeological, ethnoarchaeological and ethnohistorical) as the ones that will be used in this thesis (de Mooij 2018, pp., 11-13). Though it lacks any discussion of gender divisions of spaces within the domestic landscape, it still is a great basis since it deals with the same site and more broadly uses similar evidence and theoretical concepts to this thesis.

# 3. Methodology

## 3.1. Introduction to the Methodology

Gendered spaces are possible to reconstruct through archaeological evidence, as proven by previous case studies on this topic (Lee, 2019). Households are a good space to attempt engendering in archaeology. Engendering archaeology in a non exhaustive definition means reclaiming women's role in historically androcentric archaeological narratives, and redefining the category of woman within them (Conkey & Gero, 1981, p. 4). Domestic spaces in prehistory are spaces of craft production, food preparation and processing and more. These activities can be engendered especially using ethnographic evidence in conjunction with archaeology. As evidenced by the study by Brenda J. Bowser and John Q. Patton, it is common in tropical South America to have the household space divided among genders. Houses often have two separate entrances on either side for women and men. The houses are divided in half among the two aforementioned genders, this division is especially important in the public sphere when the hosts receive visitors at home (Bowser & Patton, 2004). In line with the Western gender theory this division is less enforced in the private setting, as described in the case study "Family members often sit together in the house, engaged in domestic activities. A husband may join his wife at her hearth as she roasts food that they will share as they discuss the events of the day." (Bowser & Patton, 2004, p. 173). Traces of the aforementioned activities like food processing and craft production leave traces in the archaeological record. Together with ethnographic studies these traces of production can be associated with gendered division of labor.

## 3.2. Gender Theory

Archaeology is the study of past human activity through material remains. To study these human activities one must reconstruct their societies. When reconstructing human societies gender relations become impossible to disentangle from the projected image of the society. When prehistoric societies are reconstructed through a default archaeological approach they often end up being presented genderless (Kelly & Ardren, 2016). That is why gender archaeology developed as a way to reconstruct gender relations of past

societies. Household archaeology is especially difficult to disentangle from gender relations. Household as a space but also a social unit is specifically tied to gender relations that's why the gender archaeology approach is necessary to this research (Lee, 2019). Reconstructing gender through archaeological remains is not an easy task, though the activities performed within a household leave material traces. These material traces are the only pieces of evidence left by prehistoric societies that archaeologists have to go on, so to begin making sense of the material a comparative approach with anthropological evidence is employed. These comparisons have to be examined critically to be effective. Anthropological studies often contain androcentric biases in the first place, so then to use them to shed light onto the archaeological material evidence is counterproductive (Conkey & Spector, 1984, pp. 3). This critical approach to anthropological sources is important for this research especially since it utilizes ethnohistorical sources. Since they come from the European early colonial perspective it is important to recognise their androcentric perspective. An important theoretical component of this critical view of gender in archaeology is understanding the concept of gender itself. It is an act that is continually in production among society and individuals themselves (Conkey & Gero, 1991, pp. 9). This means that gender has no rigid material fixture meaning that firstly it cannot be equated with sex and secondly it fluctuates between the different contexts. This means that every case reviewed by archaeologists needs to be treated within its own context and transferring assumptions between different regions and time periods, or even between different classes and groups within a given society can be detrimental to understanding of gender ((Conkey & Gero, 1991, pp. 9-10). As mentioned previously there is often no other way than to look for commonalities between anthropological and archaeological evidence to find gender in the archaeological record. This research also will employ anthropological evidence but it will be restricted only to the Amazonian region of South America.

### **3.3. Gendered Spaces**

Gendered Spaces as described in the introduction are defined as spatial arrangements that affirm separation of genders and gender roles. Gendered spaces are a concept that's utilized in gender archaeology as well (Lee, 2019). These spatial divisions



can be visible in archaeology thanks to specific material associated with the activities of different genders as they are found in the different areas of the house. Rigidity of these spatial relations can also be assessed by the degree to which the places where the residue of these activities are located around the house structure. For example in the case of Mumun Period Houses discussed by Rachel Lee, spindle whorls and their location are located in relation to other tools to determine whether there are discernible gendered spaces. In the situation of this study the spindle whorl's gender association has to be somewhat assumed although not without evidence (Lee, 2019). In the case of this study it is possible to make use of Ethnohistorical sources, and ethnographic comparisons to make more concrete statements on gender associations of certain activities that would be visible in the archaeological record. An important facet of identifying gendered spaces in archaeology is the consistency of the areas of activities, there needs to be solid evidence that the spaces of one activity do not overlap with another associated with a different gender to make a compelling argument that such division has been identified in the archaeological record.

### **3.4. Temporality of Landscape**

The concept of Temporality of Landscape was proposed by Tim Ingold in his paper of the same title. His work proposes to approach the landscape in archaeology beyond the "sterile opposition between the naturalistic as a neutral, external backdrop to human activities, and the culturalist view that every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space" (Ingold, 1993, p. 152). He instead presents a view where the relationality between humans and landscape are central, one where the landscape is shaped by people and their stories and the other way around (Ingold 1993). This concept is crucial in tying all of the previous theoretical frameworks that were discussed in this chapter back to archaeology. The view of relationality is central to Gender Theory, Amerindian Perspectivism and to Temporality of Landscape. It creates the common ground where all of these theories can be in dialogue and can fit into this analysis. Temporality of Landscape is also important specifically to gendered spaces in archaeology as these two theories can work in tandem in archaeological interpretation. Specifically

Ingold's view that more we learn about an archaeological landscape if we have new ways of looking at the archaeological record. As these new methods and ways of looking at the archeological landscape are used to understand it we can learn more about it without adding on our own layers by following the same theoretical framework and in turn obscuring the image of the landscape itself. Gendered spaces and gender theory in general is one such tool that can identify clues that would be otherwise invisible.

### **3.5. Ethnohistory**

The book *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians: Chronicles of the New World Encounter* by Fray Ramón Pane illustrates well the fact that colonial period European sources were written with a preconceived notion and often omit or misunderstand the material they are depicting. Pane's work deals with the beliefs and myths of the Indigenous people of Hispaniola during the initial decades of colonization of the Island. The author marks his intentions very clearly at the beginning, where he states that he is writing by the order of the Governor of the Indies and he is attempting to describe the "idolatries" and "superstitions" of the inhabitants of the island of Hispaniola (Pane, 1999/1498, p. 3). This signals that he is writing from a Christian perspective. This perspective inevitably would have influenced his perception of gender, as written by Kathleen Deagan ethnohistorical sources mention only the female and male gender (Deagan, 2023, p. 249). It is important to remain critical of these purely binary interpretations of Taino gender conceptions, but with the limited evidence it is the best interpretation that wouldn't impose additional bias (Deagan, 2023, p. 249). As presented by the example of the work of Fray Pane, ethnohistorical sources need to be assessed in terms of what lenses and biases they are written from. Le Breton's account *Historic Account of Saint Vincent the Indian Youroumayn the island of the Karaybes* is an important source to discuss in methods. This account is part of 5 manuscripts by Le Breton, written at the end of the 17th century. It focuses on the indigenous people of Saint Vincent and Martinique, describing their customs, beliefs and society (Roux, 2017, p. 343). The aforementioned islands are part of the Lesser Antilles while El Flaco which is the subject of this study lies in the Greater Antilles. These two groups of islands not only differ geographically but they are different

cultural regions as well. So this account is distanced to the subject of study by geography, cultural circle and time period. This makes the comparison especially strenuous, but at the same time it is one of the very few ethnohistoric accounts in the Caribbean that recounts in detail women's and men's spaces. It will be used in consideration of these many limitations and assessed critically, as any direct comparison is very difficult to make.

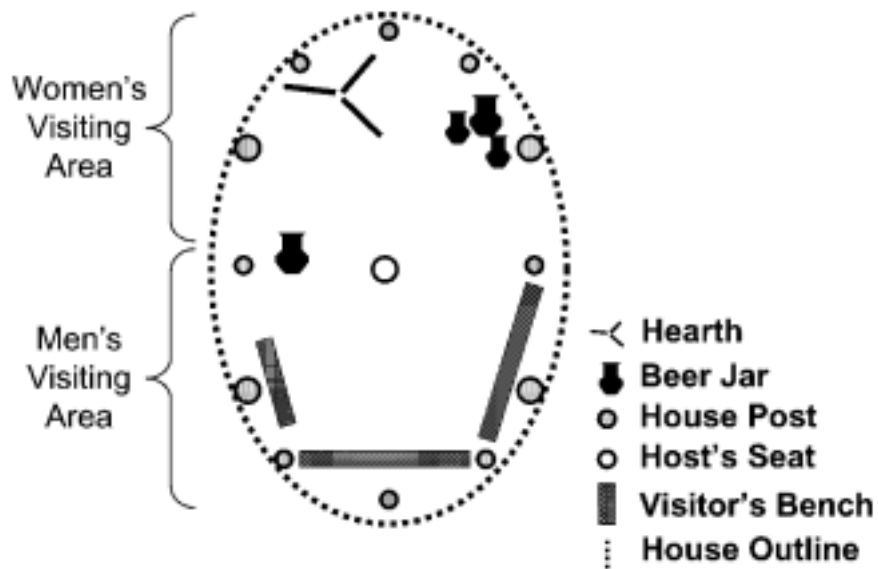


Figure 1. A schematic depiction of gendered spaces of an Achuar household

(Bowser & Patton, 2004, p. 171)



Figure 2. A view of a household

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Amazonian Ethnoarchaeology

Ethnoarchaeology seeks to study modern peoples for the sake of finding suitable comparative material that would help in understanding archaeological studies (David & Kramer 2001). Case studies relevant to this research will be presented here in order to understand what type of house plans from the Amazon can be compared to the house plans of the site of El Flaco. Brenda Bowser and John Patton conducted a study of Conambo, a village in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Their study sought to understand how houses in the village express the political organization of the village, as well as how gender is expressed in the households and how that is relevant to the politics of the inhabitants. They found that the houses were divided into a private area and a visiting area. These two areas would be adjacent to each other, and the private area was a raised rectangular hut, while the visiting area would be an open roofed structure (Bowser & Patton, 2004). The private space is not strictly gendered and the husband and wife perform their tasks and rest freely in the walled hut. This setup of the private and visiting area is visible on the photo (Fig. 2)

On the other hand the visitors space is more strictly gendered, it consists of a larger men's area and smaller woman's area. The men's area is arranged in a semicircle, there are benches arranged around the perimeter of the structure, the benches are heavy and immobile necessitating the arrangement of seating among the guests. On the opposite side of the benches the host's seat is located, it is the largest stool in the house marking the host's status. The stool also sits at the border between the men's and women's area (Bowser & Patton, 2004). The woman's area is smaller and does not hold any benches making the seating arrangement much more fluid. The area contains a hearth and *chicha* (a local beer) jars. The women prepare food, and pour *chicha* there, but they also hold discussions and conversations in their area. Since the women also serve the food and drink to the men's area they have access to the conversations of the men. The fact that the men do not have access to the women's area and the proximity of the women allows for quieter speaking means that men do not in turn have access to what the women are discussing

(Bowser & Patton, 2004). This dynamic can be visible archaeologically, as the woman's area is clearly recognizable as the food preparation space with the hearth and chicha jars, and the men's area contains food waste as it is customary that food waste is discarded directly by the person eating beside them (Bowser & Patton, 2004). Interestingly the study observed that these gender divisions would dissolve when the guests have left and the visiting area would become like the private area. Husband and wife would share the space and sit beside each other, and most importantly for the analysis discuss the day's events and hold conversation (Bowser & Patton, 2004).

James A. Zeidler conducted a study of a household in the village of Pumpuenzla in the Morona-Santiago province of Ecuador (Zeidler, 2014). The household that was the subject of his inquiry was inhabited by Achuar people. The study focused on the patterns of discarding waste to better understand artifact deposition in terms of archaeology. The household as he observed was divided in half into a men's space and a women's space. These two are called *tankamash* and *kent* respectively (Zeidler, 2014). The women's section, much like in the previously discussed example, was used to prepare food and drink, and subsequently they would be served to the guests in the men's area. The author of this study does acknowledge the importance of these gendered spaces but he does not put as much weight on them as the study by Bowser and Patton. Although it is clear that a roughly similar arrangement exists in an Achar household and in Quichua houses.

The previously discussed study is most useful to this study as it focuses on the gendered spaces and politics and how they relate to the house architecture itself. But there is more data that is useful in comparisons between house archaeology of the Caribbean and the Amazonian ethnographic record. There are a variety of types of dwellings and living arrangements that can be observed in Amazonia. Large houses that are inhabited by whole communities and single family houses both exist, floor plans range from circular, oval to rectangular (de Mooij, 2018, p. 28). Both communal large house configurations and ones with many smaller houses exist within the same regions as well, for example in Guiana both of these are common (de Mooij, 2018, p. 29). The architecture can depict

cosmological conceptions of the people who built them, like in the previously discussed study by Bowser and Patton (2004), where the house separation reflects the gender division of society. There are other cases of architecture representing important concepts like the “house of tapir” among the Nukak people of Amazon, these rectangular roofed structures are used as storage houses but it also serves as a resting place for the spirit of the tapir an important ancestor figure in their beliefs (Politis, 2016, p. 122).

Regular sweeping of habitation and storage spaces is attested among the people of Amazonia. Such spaces could take the form of large central plazas as in the case of the Yanoama, or as previously discussed spaces like the “house of tapir” (de Mooij, 2018, p. 101). This is relevant as this same practice took place at the site of El Flaco. This topic will be furthered discussed in the archaeological evidence section

## 4.2. Ethnohistory

Ethnohistory is a study of written sources, oral traditions, maps, music, paintings, artifacts and language from the colonial period to gain more understanding of the culture of peoples of South America. It seeks to reconstruct the ethnographic past of a given culture by use of these sources. The sources written by the Western colonizers require a large amount of scrutiny (Axtell, 1979). This is important because all of the sources discussed in this work will be written from the Western Perspective.

The houses in which the Taino would inhabit were described by Gonzalo Fernández Oviedo (1951) and Bartolomeo de Las Casas (1875). These houses were said to be circular or rectangular resembling tents made of straw. Rectangular houses were associated with elite members of society while circular



Figure 3. A drawing of Taino houses by Oviedo (Oviedo, 1951)

ones with ordinary people. They were also depicted by Oviedo (1951) as seen on figure 3. This depiction is consistent with the archaeological findings at the site of El Flaco. Though it is important to remember these descriptions do not represent the whole Taino architecture through its history, it is representation of what the aforementioned chroniclers witnessed during the early decades of Spanish colonization. Nevertheless as scant as these accounts are, they remain extremely valuable especially when they can be compared to the archaeological record. Taino gender relations were also described by Spanish chroniclers which will be explored in further paragraphs of this section.

Power structures within the Taino society are described in ethnohistorical sources from the early colonial period. Already starting with the journal of the first voyage of Christopher Columbus we get a reference to a king whom Columbus encountered and paid his respects to (Ochoa, 2021, p. 2). Later on these kings would be referred to as caciques more often than kings. Caciques would not be the only term with which the rulers of the taino would be referred to in the writings of European colonists, because the term cacica would also be present referring to the female equivalent of this position.

Women holding these positions is not a simple topic to discuss as not all academics agree on what was the nature of women holding these positions or if women traditionally even held these positions at all. Wilson (1990, p. 119) presents the situation as unclear, he calls upon Algeria and Sued Badillo. These two authors argue that the Taino cacicas recorded by Spaniards were the result of the societal collapse spurred on by the colonization, or that the institution of cacicas was common among the Taino respectively. Wilson (1990, p. 119) himself yields to say that this confusion is a result of the many statuses that had to be obtained and inherited in order to obtain the position of the cacique, but doesn't confirm or deny the validity of female cacicas.

In more modern sources this debate persists in Deagan (2023, p. 20) she states that caciques could be both male and female, but she also does say that male caciques were noted more frequently. On the other hand Ochoa (2021, p. 3) makes a claim that the Spanish chroniclers made no reference to female rulers whatsoever. She then proceeds to explain

that Anacaona is the only female figure prominently featured in the account who herself was a wife of a cacique and not a cacica herself. Ochoa (2021, p 3) does not deny the existence of cacicas in Taino society she does deny the existence of them she does deny the existence of a record of them in direct opposition to Deagan (2023, p. 20). Deagan is right here in the sense that the Ethohistorical record does mention Anacaona as a cacica, for example Oviedo (1959, p. 9) mentioned the rule of Hispaniola was passed down to her. It is also important to remember when thinking about gender and hierarchy in Taino society that all of the available evidence comes from Spanish colonial sources. This puts the accounts in a position of the late medieval European mindset. So the question of the dominant records of male caciques, also carries the question of whether this is how the power structures were perceived by the European authors. The question of the intricacies of how exactly the institution of cacicas worked in Hispaniola at the time of European conquest remains unresolved and is impossible to answer definitively here. What can be inferred with a good degree of certainty based on the sources mentioned in previous paragraphs is that female individuals in positions of power existed in Taino society at the time of European conquest.

In the lower strata of society the roles of males and females were also non exclusive among the Taino (Deagan, 2023, p. 250). Though it is important to remember that the evidence for gender division of labor is scant and the details are not well understood, there are very few instances of tasks that would be relegated exclusively to men or women (Deagan, 2004, p. 601). The subsistence tasks were mostly done by women, that includes tending to the crops, harvesting and processing the yield, this was noted by de Cuneo (1963, p. 221) as he described the men as rarely working outside of fishing (Deagan, 2023, p. 250). Although chroniclers reported both women and men as participating in fishing, whether certain fishing practices exclusive to women or men is unknown. (Deagan, 2023, p. 250). In general the division of labor between Taino men and women was loose and non-exclusive, this is very important when discussing the concept of gendered spaces and will be expanded on in the next chapter.



The Drake manuscript, as it is known today, was originally titled *Histoire Naturelle des Indes*. It's a natural history most likely compiled from the voyages of Sir Francis Drake, by two authors that took part in the journeys. It was most likely written in 1590, and contains descriptions of plants and animals of the Caribbean and the Americas, but most importantly a description of life of the "Indians" that the authors encountered during their travels (Klinkenborg & O'Brian, 1996). The most relevant part of the book to this study is the description of an Indian courtship and wedding. It is difficult to discern exactly where the scene of described events is set but judging by the depiction of the house, which is rectangular and divided into two sections, it is most likely that it is set in the Amazonian region of South America. The ceremony described includes the male suitor approaching the father of his love interest at his house and asking for his daughter's hand in marriage. The father then instructs the young man to prove that he can procure food for the household and asks him to perform the required tasks. The suitor sows seeds in the garden, goes fishing and hunting, and gathers fruits and vegetables in the woods. After the father is satisfied with the work the young man has performed he speaks of how his daughter also is proficient at making bread and dressing meat and the marriage between them is made official (*Histoire Naturelle des Indes*, 2019). This description of the tasks expected by the different genders in Indigenous society matches what was discussed in the Ethnography section. The women's area as described in the Bowser and Patton study contained a hearth and chicha brewing jars, all the necessary equipment for the processing of food, while the men's area contained hunting equipment, and machetes (Bowser & Patton, 2004). The book also describes how the newlyweds would live in the bride's father's house and they would provide the father with food. This description cannot be taken wholesale of course as we do not even



Figure 4. Depiction of a suitor approaching the house of his love interest in the Drake's Manuscript (*Histoire Naturelle des Indes*, 1490, p. 113)

know exactly what peoples, or even what specific area the authors of Drake's Manuscript are describing but it most likely is mainland South America. This whole process differs in significant details from what Patton and Bowser (2004) report in their study as well as what was observed in Taino society (Deagan 2004, p. 600). This will be further exploited in the discussion section.

*Historic Account of Saint Vincent the Indian Youroumayn the island of the Karaijbes* is a book written by Reverend Father Adrien Le Breton, between the years of 1662-1736. In this work he describes the customs and lives of the people of Saint Vincent. He goes into detail about the political institutions and organization of the inhabitants. He describes similar customs in regards to the division of labor when receiving guests as described by all the previously mentioned sources, in his account the preparation of food firmly remains a woman's task. The author describes that they were given suspended seats, presumably hammocks, and were served food by the women, he also mentions that it was the men's job to procure food while women processed it (Le Breton, 1662-1736). This aligns with the account discussed in *Histoire Naturelle des Indes (Histoire Naturelle des Indes, 1490)*. Although he mentions another instance of the role of women in the Indigenous society. He describes that the decision to remain on the island to defend or go raiding themselves is taken by a popular vote that is preceded by much discussion, and the decision requires unanimous agreement. The women of the community would also participate in the vote, to the author's surprise because he describes them as "otherwise especially shy" (Le Breton, 1662-1736, p). This is really interesting in the light of all the evidence previously described. The impression that Father Le Breton had of the women as especially shy might have been due to the gender divisions seen in the sources previously discussed. As he was a visitor and a man he would be constantly received in the men's area, having little interaction with the women outside of being served food and drink. What is most interesting about this situation that it proves that the same as in the case of Patton and Bowser study, even though within the setting of receiving guests there was a strict division between women and men this does not mean that women did not participate in the political process of these societies (Bowser & Patton, 2004). But in respects to the Taino no such strict division

of space and tasks exists. As mentioned at the beginning of this section men's and women's tasks would often overlap. So overall this source is important because it is the only description of a gendered division in the Caribbean like the one that can be observed in the ethnographic record of mainland South America. Though its comparative value to the situation in Taino society remains low, which will be further explored in the discussion section.

### **4.3. Archaeological Evidence**

The site of El Flaco as described in the introduction is a settlement site on the Island of Hispaniola. The site contains many mounds and house and ancillary structures. Although this study will focus only on the house and ancillary structures. Structures that will be analyzed will be drawn from the RMA thesis by Emma de Mooij "*Conceptualizing the Caribbean Archaeological Record. Interpreting features from an ethnographic perspective at the Late Ceramic Age site of El Flaco in the northwestern Dominican Republic*" (2008). The post hole features from the unit 2/9 of the site will be discussed. The ancillary structures found at the 2/9 unit will be discussed as well. Unit 34 containing hearth remains will be discussed as well.

The explored sections of the site of El Flaco consist of flattened areas with post hole remains, mounds and earthen walls. These flattened areas were landscaped purposely by people in the pre-colonial period to facilitate construction of structures, This is evidenced by the fact that only these flattened areas contain postholes (de Mooij, 2018, p. 93). Unit 2/9 contains a multitude of postholes; these post holes have been interpreted as the largest structure on the site (de Mooij, 2018, p. 94). The structure as interpreted by Hofman and Hoogland served a habitation purpose. It consists of two concentric rings of postholes, the diameter of this structure would have measured 6 m within the inner ring and 9 to 10 m within the outer ring (de Mooij, 2018, p. 94). The floor plan was calculated to 56.74 square meters by Vroom (2018), this would have allowed approximately 9 people to use this structure as their house (de Mooij, 2018, p. 94). Within the concentric rings of post holes a number of larger ones were discovered, these were dug down deeper than the outer post

holes all the way to bedrock, some of them were observed having packing stones to reinforce their base. These were interpreted as posts supporting the roof of the building, hence their depth and reinforcement (de Mooij, 2018, p. 96). Post holes found alongside the inner ring of the structure were spaced about a meter apart and also dug deep into the bedrock, and several of them were found to have packing stones at the bottom. These would have borne the brunt of the weight of the roof and walls, alongside the aforementioned central posts (de Mooij, 2018, p. 96). The outer ring consisted of shallower post holes with a smaller diameter, they were also embedded in the bedrock but to a shallower depth, these were interpreted as supporting the overhanging roof and were built lighter as they didn't support as much weight as the previously described posts (de Mooij, 2018, p. 97)

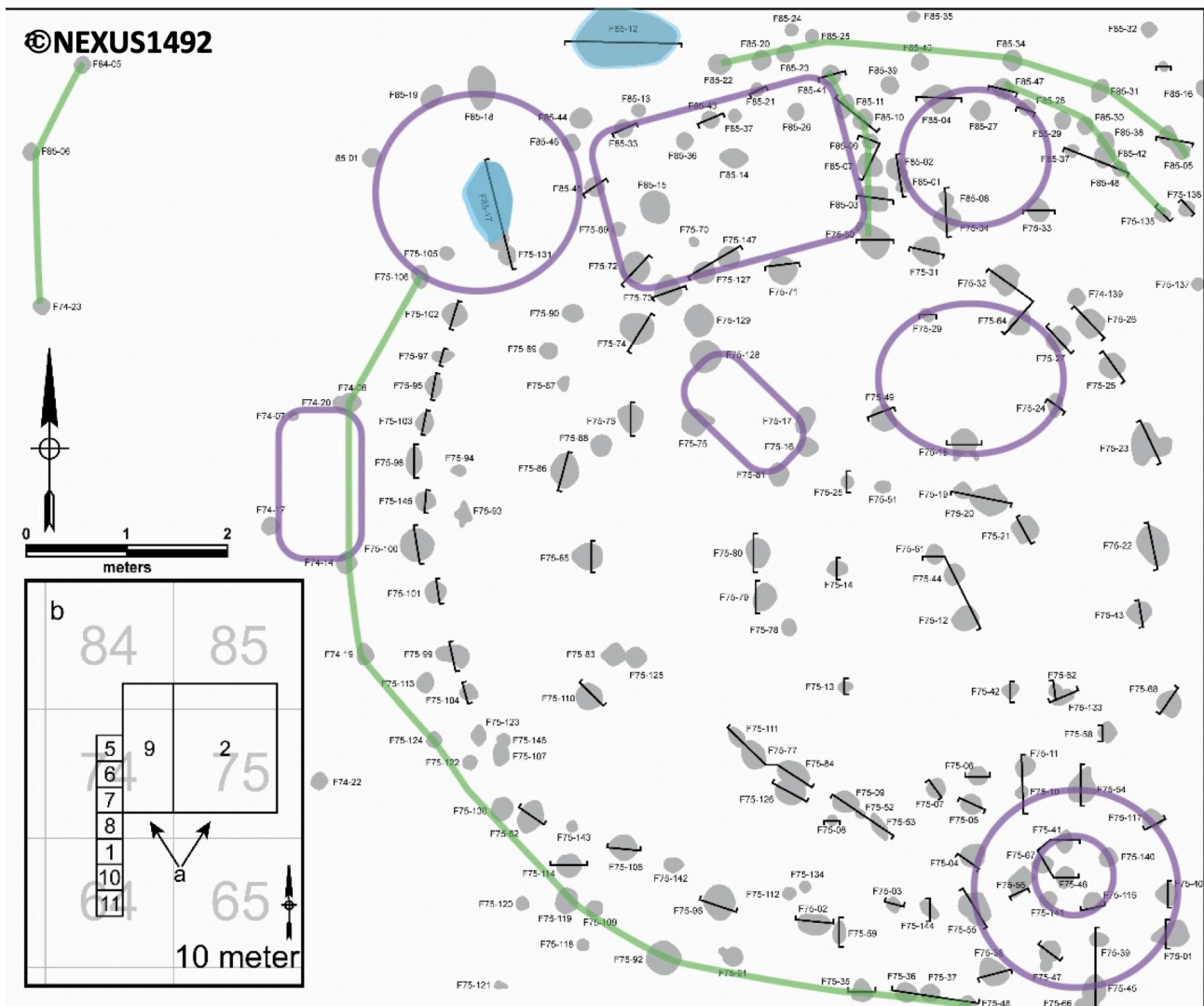


Figure 5. Digital schematic of the posthole features making up the house structure from unit 2/9 with ancillary structures highlighted. (De Mooij, 2018, p. 98)

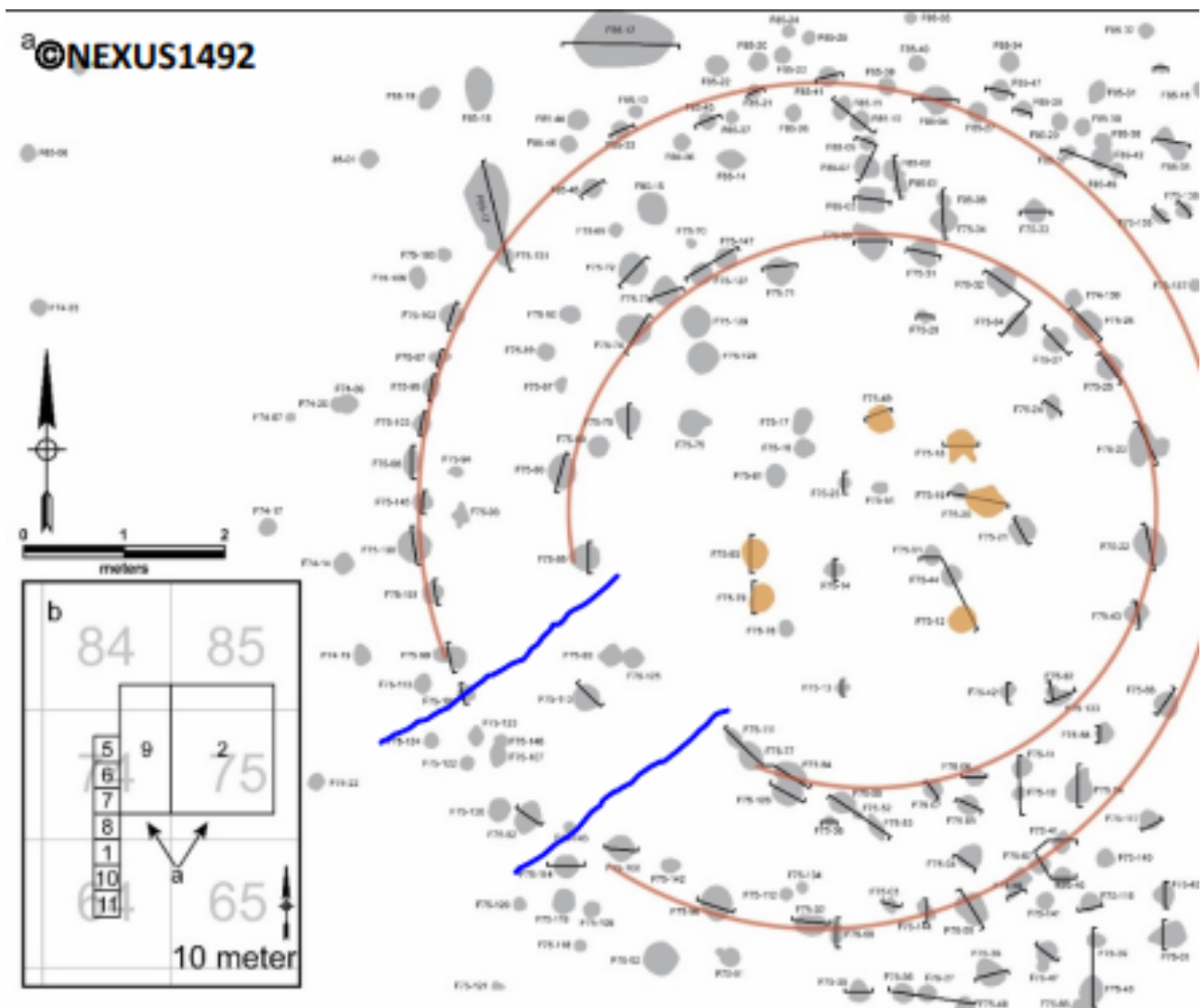


Figure 6. Digital representation of the house structure from unit 2/9 of El Flaco with the possible entrance highlighted in blue.

(De Mooij, 2018, p. 95)

There were also possible ancillary structures identified within the 2/9 unit. These possible structures overlap with the house plan of the previously described structure. Total of 6 structures were identified. It is likely these structures were storage spaces, drying racks and animal enclosures, though it is difficult to interpret them accurately as the patterns are obscured by the number of overlapping post holes as seen on figure 5.

Many of the postholes of the possible ancillary structures overlap with the post holes that were interpreted as part of the habitation structure. This interpretation is based on the fact that these postholes aren't as deep as even the outer ring post holes of the habitation structure. This means that these structures could have preceded or superseded the main



house structure making them less relevant to this study that is focused on the larger structure, there is also a possibility that they were part of the house structure, but this is rather unlikely (de Mooij, 2018, pp 98-99). Feature F85-12 was also identified within the structure. It is a pit that is too large to be identified as a post hole, but it also shows no evidence of being a hearth. There is no evidence of burning but that does not necessarily remove the possibility of it being a hearth as it could have been dug out and cleared after the house was no longer used (de Mooij, 2018, p. 99). Very few artifacts were found in this unit, due to the cleaning habits of the inhabitants, all of the waste was deposited at the mounds found at the site which are artifact rich (de Mooij, 2018, p. 101). The lack of artifacts and evidence for a hearth makes it difficult to interpret this structure for the purpose of the study of gendered spaces.

Hearth features have been identified at the site of El Flaco at unit 34. Specifically 6 of hearth features were identified (de Mooij, 2018, p. 103). These features were found alongside post holes, altogether consisting of a complex most likely associated with cooking activities, the breakdown of this complex is visible on figure 7. Additional structures except hearths include windbreaks and ancillary structures that similarly to unit 2/9 can be interpreted as drying racks, hammock posts or storage posts, it is likely these were the purposes as the post holes that make these possible structures up are rather shallow and narrow (de Mooij, 2018, p. 106). Even though these features yielded few finds they were still possible to be identified as hearths due to fragments of griddles, heat damage to the stones and presence of charcoal in the hearth pits (de Mooij, 2018, p. 106). Alongside this evidence for cooking activities in this area small fragments of bone and shells were found, further pointing to the purpose of these features (de Mooij, 2018, p. 103). What is also worth noting is that many of the hearths found in unit 34 were associated with post hole features suggesting some kind structures that would have been built in combination to them. It is possible these would be roofed structures covering the cooking spaces (de Mooij, 2018, p. 102). The fact that these cooking spaces were located outside of the habitation structures presents a challenge in interpreting gendered spaces which will be further explored in the discussion section.



Figure 7. Drone image of unit 34 with windbreaks highlighted in green, hearths in blue, structure in red and ancillary structures in purple. (De Mooij, 2018, p. 106)

#### 4.4. Conclusion

The evidence of Gendered spaces in both the lesser Antilles and the Amazonian South America is strong. A common thread runs through all the discussed sources where the model of a household divided into the women's and men's space is most prevalent. The house plans are rectangular or oval in Both the Amazonian region and Lesser Antilles, while the house plans discovered at the site of El Flaco are on the plan of a circle. The cooking spaces at El Flaco were discovered outside of the household, the hearths seen in the ethnographic record of the Amazonian region consistently are present inside the household space. In the Ethnohistoric record the hearths are both described as being inside and outside the house in Lesser Antilles and the Amazonian region introducing some confusion, but it can be assumed that in general it's more typical for it to be inside for

these regions. The relation between this evidence and what can be concluded from it will be discussed in the next chapter.



## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Ethnohistorical Comparisons

The Ethnohistorical record provides little evidence for strictly gendered spaces like the ones in Carib or Mainland South American societies in the case of the Taino. The description of the courting process in the Drake manuscript carries a crucial difference to the Taino marriage customs. In the manuscript (2019) it is described that the man moves into the fathers residence and has to provide for him and his new wife after the marriage. This is fundamentally different to how the Taino customs were described. They practiced avunculocal residence and were materlinnear (Deagan, 2004, p. 600). The depiction of the house from Drake's manuscript (Fig. 4) that depicts the gendered division becomes impossible to use as comparative evidence for such practices among the Taino.

The other source which depicts gendered spaces is the Account of Le Breton showcased in the previous section. This account describes the Carib people of Saint Vincent, a society quite different to the Taino of the contact period. One important difference is that in the society Le Breton (1662-1736) describes the procurement of food was a men's job while among the Taino the procurement of food was a mixed task (Deagan, 2023, p. 250). An interesting detail is the vote on raiding among the indigenous people of Saint Vincent, even though the strict gender division is present in social matters the women also participate in the vote in equal position to the men of the community (Le Breton, 1662-1736). Why this is interesting is in relation to the Taino, is their society this lack of gendered division was also evident though to a lesser extent as most caciques were male (Deagan, 2023, p. 20). This could suggest that such strict division between the male and female spaces did not exist as their political spaces were non-exclusive. This assertion would be clearly wrong considering the social and political organization of the indigenous people of Saint Vincent, that was even more open politically to women yet still strictly separated in space (Le Breton, 1662-1736). Though one has to be very careful making straight comparisons between the Taino and Indigenous people of Saint Vincent, these two societies are far removed regionally but more importantly in time.

To come back to the point of the division of labor, as described earlier the Indigenous people of Saint Vincent had a strict gender division of labor as according to Le Breton (1662-1736) while Taino people did not have such division with most tasks performed by both men and women and some associated more with men like fishing though not exclusive to them (Deagan, 2023, p. 250). This is very important to note while discussing the strict division of gendered spaces, as the daily lives of people include some kind of labor and division of this daily activity facilitates this division of space. Though this is not entirely true either, in the Achaean society described by Bowser and Patton (2004, p. 162) women and men are associated with different tasks, men's responsibility is fishing and hunting, while women are responsible for tending to the gardens, though both of these tasks are often done cooperatively, like in the case of Taino. These customs around gender relations differ from the ones of the Taino, but it is also important to remember that current knowledge of their gender relations is poorly understood, many of these assertions like that women and men both had access to rulership positions are based on very scant evidence like a passing mention in Oviedo's work about Anacaona succeeding to the position of cacica, this scant evidence was also written in time of severe societal collapse among the Taino. So it is difficult then to make assertions based just on these Early Colonial works, just as done here they are often compared to Ethnographic studies but that does not prove sufficient either. Based just on this evidence it is impossible to say whether the Taino practiced strict division of gendered space in households and official settings. There are many similarities between Taino societies and societies of Greater Antilles and Mainland South America as discussed in previous paragraphs, but there are also great differences that do not permit a conclusion that these gendered spaces existed in the same capacity among the Taino. Although archeological evidence may prove helpful in answering that question.

## **5.2. Archaeological Comparisons**

As described by Tim Ingold (1993, p. 158), the relation between sociality and technical activity unlocks a possibility of a deeper understanding of both social dynamics and economic activities of prehistoric societies. To define this concept he came up with the

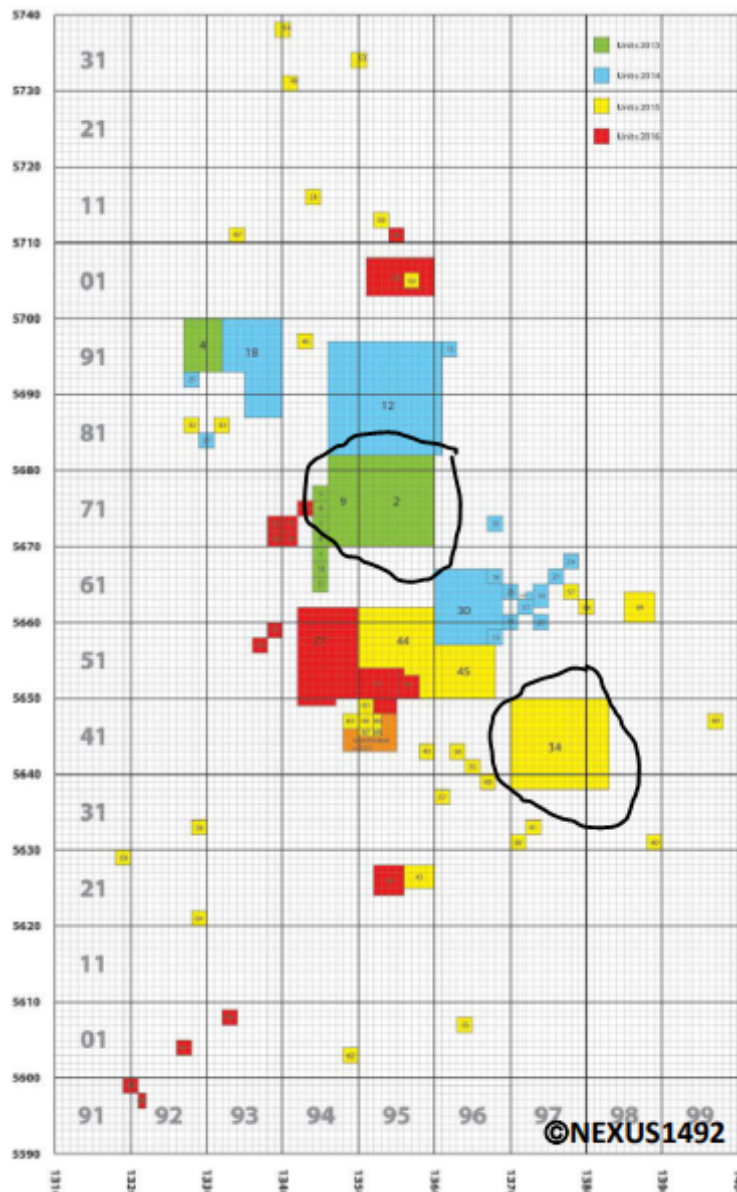


Figure 8. A schematic representation of the excavation units at the site of El Flaco with unit 2/9 and 34 highlighted in black. (De Mooij, 2018, p. 92)

term “taskscape” an array of interlocked activities that create a whole image of society’s operation much like landscape creates a relational whole of a given land (Ingold, 1993, p. 158). Such a view of tasks also allows for an analysis of gendered division of labor, which is a significant part of the taskscape itself. In the case of the Indigenous people of El Flaco as discussed in previous paragraphs there is some literary evidence during the European contact period but it remains inconclusive alone in answering the question whether gendered spaces as observed among the Carib people and Indigenous people of Amazonia can be observed. Archaeological evidence can be used to answer this question as in the case of the study of Korean houses during the Mumun period in Korea by Rachel Lee. She

used archaeological remains found within house floors to identify activity areas (Lee, 2019, p. 81). These activity areas were identified by artifact rich areas using the Average Nearest Neighbour statistic (Lee, 2019, p. 81). This is a very useful method in combination with tools that were found within the houses in identifying the different tasks and their areas within the house. If applied to the house structure from unit 2/9 at the site of El Flaco it would allow for a model of different activity areas, much like the one produced by Bowser and Patton (Fig 1) of a Achuar house, which then could be compared. Unfortunately this is not possible at the site of El Flaco due to the sweeping of remains towards the mounds by the inhabitants of the settlement (de Mooij, 2018, p. 101). This poses a huge difficulty in recognising gendered spaces within house structures at El Flaco because it provides no data to work with.

Placement of the hearth inside the house is also another important piece of archaeological data that can be used. Lee (2019, p. 87) describes the centrality of the hearth in Early Mumun households, which if the hearths were gendered would put women at the central position of a household. In the case of Bowser and Patton (2004, p. 162) they describe the hearth as the point at which the women's and men's spaces meet and also the point at which in the private setting of a households these divisions dissolve and husband and wife would share their space and events of their day. This again is not something that can be utilized in the analysis of the house structure from unit 2/9, as previously mentioned there was only a pit that possibly could have been a hearth but there is not enough evidence to conclude that (de Mooij, 2018, p. 99).

The hearths found at the site of El Flaco are away from the households in unit 34 as seen on the schematic representation of the site (Fig 8). This presents a big issue, it is possible to examine if these hearths were gendered but this does not answer the question whether the houses themselves were divided among women's and men's spaces.

### **5.3. Modern Ethnography**

Hispaniola was the first island on which the Spanish founded their first colonies, for this reason there's frustratingly little ethnographical sources from the time. The

chroniclers and writers at the time were mostly preoccupied with the political organization of the Indigenous people, and the current affairs in the newly founded colonies (Paton & Smith, 2021). Hence all there is left are colonial period ethnographic sources that describe the societies of Lesser Antilles and the Amazon region. The *Histoire Naturelle des Indes* aligns with the ethnographic sources on the gender roles in the Amazon region, it does not explicitly mention the gendered spaces in the households but it can be assumed that they followed the same lines based on the gender division of labor. The houses were built in the same way as in modern Amazonia as evidenced by Figure 4 discussed in the 4.3 chapter. The situation remains much the same when one looks at the Ethnographic account of Le Breton about St. Vincent island in the Lesser Antilles. This creates a frustrating situation in regards to the people of Hispaniola, because the gender division of labor among the people of Greater Antilles was not the same. We know that women in the Greater Antilles participated in the tilling and sowing and other tasks required to take care of the gardens, this is a dramatic difference as all the food procurement in the Amazon and Lesser Antilles was done by men, including gardening (Neeaganagwedgin, 2015).

To understand a bit more about the labor division among genders one can turn to the modern Taino people, like it was done in *Rooted in the Land: Taíno identity, oral history and stories of reclamation in contemporary contexts*. Here one can learn that the preparation of the cassava root into bread was a job passed down by women to women, though activities like fishing are done by both men and women (Neeaganagwedgin, 2015). This paints a picture of much less restrictive gender roles in terms of division of labor, and since the division of labor and the division of the household in the Amazon region and Lesser Antilles was inextricably tied together one could come to the conclusion that such division didn't exist in the society that inhabited El Flaco. This of course is a very precarious position to take as that would make the Greater Antilles an exception in the superregion of the Caribbean and the Amazon South America. Though there clearly is substantial difference between these societies it is impossible to make such a conclusion within this study.

## 6. Conclusion

The research question guiding this research was: To what extent is it possible to reconstruct gendered spaces based on the floor plans of El Flaco, ethnohistorical and ethnological evidence? As this research found there is a strong ethnographic precedent for such practices, though the problems with identifying such divisions among the Taino already appear while reviewing the Ethnohistorical record. The division of the house among the Amazonian people is based on tasks to which all the members of the household are assigned and these are differentiated by gender ( Bowser & Patton, 2004, p. 162), there is also record of such practices among the people of the Lesser Antilles (Le Breton, 1662-1736). The Taino in the Ethnohistorical record are recorded as having more fluid gender roles, women and men aren't associated with many specific tasks, except gardening associated with the women in the community and earthworks and construction associated with men. Although these tasks could be often done in cooperation (Deagan, 2023, p. 250). The lack of archaeological evidence, with few artifact finds in the floor plans of house structures and the hearts identified outside of them makes it impossible to distinguish these spaces at the site of El Flaco. It is almost tempting based on the less rigid division of labor of the Taino to make a conclusion that such division of house space between men and women would not exist in their society but the lack of this evidence is not evidence in itself to draw such a conclusion. Different methods would have to be applied to understand gender space relations at the site to answer this research question.

### 6.1. Closing Remarks and Future Research

Very important but unfortunately, still lacking in the extent of research in comparison to the Amazon region, sources of information in the interpretation of gendered spaces are Ethnohistorical sources based on oral traditions of the Taino people. The *Rooted in the Land: Taíno identity, oral history and stories of reclamation in contemporary contexts* study by Erica Neeganagwedgin is a great example of such study and a great deal of information on the people of the Greater Antilles was drawn from it. More projects of this kind will no

doubt illuminate the question of gendered spaces in the Greater Antilles, and it will become more attainable to reconstruct them at archaeological sites like El Flaco. Further research into gendered spaces at the site of El Flaco would have to include the site as a taskscape, and a rephrasing of the research question. A question for a larger study would have to include not just floor plans and the house structures at the site but they would have to include the site as a whole much like the RMa thesis of Emma de Mooij used so often in this study. That would still not answer the question of whether the house gendered house division so prevalent among the Amazonian people was a component of Taino society, to answer that question one would have to find a collapsed and quickly abandoned house structure with the waste and tools still in their original place, though it still seems an approach like the one of Emma de Mooij would be better to better understand gender relations among the Taino.

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## Figures

Figure 1. A schematic depiction of gendered spaces of an Achuar household (Bowser & Patton, 2004, p. 171)

Figure 2. A view of a household in the Conambo village (Bowser & Patton, 2004, p. 162)

Figure 3. A drawing of Taino houses by Oviedo (Oviedo, 1951)

Figure 4. Depiction of a suitor approaching the house of his love interest in the Drake's Manuscript (Histoire Naturelle des Indes, 1490, p. 113)

Figure 5. Digital schematic of the posthole features making up the house structure from unit 2/9 with ancillary structures highlighted. (De Mooij, 2018, p. 98)

Figure 6. Digital representation of the house structure from unit 2/9 of El Flaco with the possible entrance highlighted in blue. (De Mooij, 2018, p. 95)

Figure 7. Drone image of unit 34 with windbreakes highlighted in green, hearths in blue, structure in red and ancillary structures in purple. (De Mooij, 2018, p. 106)

Figure 8. A schematic representation of the excavation units at the site of El Flaco with unit 2/9 and 34 highlighted in black.  
(De Mooij, 2018, p. 92)