

# Close to the Bone: Certain Poetic Considerations & Analyses Pertaining To The Lives Of The Enslaved Based On Archaeological Investigations From A Multiethnic 15th–17th Century Burial Population From The Canary Islands, Spain

***Seré una tumba: Ciertas consideraciones poéticas & el Análisis pertinente a la vida de los esclavos basado en las investigaciones arqueológicas de la población Multiétnico de los siglos XV-XVII entenada en las Islas Canarias, España***

Ralph Hoyte 2016 <http://www.ralphoyte.com/>

**KEY WORDS:** unwholesome; incomplete; stable isotopes; assalaamu ‘alaykum; me nkwaso; Holocene; Dies Irae; Gran Canaria; attitude; incomprehensible soul; enamel hypoplasia; herniated disc; a skirt stiffened

## BACKGROUND<sup>1</sup>

The Canary Islands are considered one of the first places where Atlantic slave plantations with labourers of African origin were established, during the 15th century AD. In Gran Canaria (Canary Islands, Spain), a unique cemetery dated to the 15th and 17th centuries was discovered adjacent to an ancient sugar plantation with funerary practices that could be related to enslaved people. In this article, we investigate the origin and possible birthplace of each individual buried in this cemetery, as well as the identity and social status of these people.

**Materials and Methods:** The sample consists of 14 individuals radiocarbon dated to the 15th and 17th centuries AD. We have employed several methods, including the analysis of ancient human DNA, stable isotopes, and skeletal markers of physical activity.

**Results:** 1) the funerary practices indicate a set of rituals not previously recorded in the Canary Islands; 2) genetic data show that some people buried in the cemetery could have North–African and sub-Saharan African lineages; 3) isotopic results suggest that some individuals were born outside Gran Canaria; and 4) markers of physical activity show a pattern of labour involving high levels of effort.

*Footnote 1: the original paper on which this poetic treatise is based is entitled ‘The Early Colonial Atlantic World: New Insights on the African Diaspora from Isotopic and Ancient DNA Analyses of a Multiethnic 15th–17th Century Burial Population From the Canary Islands’, Spain. Authors: Jonathan Santana,<sup>1,2\*</sup> Rosa Fregel,<sup>3</sup> Emma Lightfoot,<sup>4</sup> Jacob Morales,<sup>5</sup> Martha Alamon,<sup>6</sup> Jose Guillen,<sup>6</sup> Marco Moreno,<sup>6</sup> and Amelia Rodriguez<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup>State University of Peninsula de Santa Elena, La Libertad, Ecuador <sup>2</sup>G.I. Tarha. Department of Historical Sciences, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain <sup>3</sup>Department of Genetics, Stanford University, Stanford, United States of America <sup>4</sup>University of Cambridge, Cambridge, United Kingdom <sup>5</sup>University of the Basque Country, Vitoria, Spain <sup>6</sup>Tibicena, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain.*

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Discussion: This set of evidence, along with information from historical sources, suggests that Finca Clavijo was a cemetery for a multiethnic marginalized population that had being likely enslaved. Results also indicate that this population kept practicing non-Christian rituals well into the 17th century. We propose that this was possible because the location of the Canaries, far from mainland Spain and the control of the Spanish Crown, allowed the emergence of a new society with multicultural origins that was more tolerant to foreign rituals and syncretism.

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## PRELUDE

I am incomplete. What am I? I am That One.  
The Outside One. Outside in life, outside in death.  
I am the adjuvant for all the King of  
Spain's rotten venturers.

I am That One. The One bugged up something rotten, done  
over, turned sideways, stitched up,  
stitched together

forsaken, unwhole, unwholesome, incomplete,  
declared broken, found of molecular structure  
laid in a hole in the ground outside of.  
Outside.

## SONG

Lay me SW-NE  
Lay me to rest  
Lay me W-E  
Just like a beast.  
Lay me NW-SE  
Am I welcome at Christ's Feast?  
Lay me W-E  
Assalaamu 'alaykum wa rahmatu-Allah

## DIVERSION

Let aqueous sodium hypochlorite acetic acid PCTFE  
washer carbonate  
VPDB to carbonate SMOW rinse;  
their ashes

The oxygen isotopes of precipitation  
change by  
0.3% with every 100 m increase in

Altitude

Attitude

Altitude

Attitude

Inflicted of test-tubes, wracked my  
incomprehensible soul  
who will sing me  
Brotherhood  
Who?

Of Ashanti, Asantefone, the Golden  
Tree, Nyame Dua of Nana  
Ameyaw Kwaakye, the soul washing ceremony  
the Golden Stool of Takyiman  
of which the Forokuromhene speaks,  
regardless my silkily-lined corpse shuddered  
into death

Of Guanche, tabaiba, Tacoronte, sticky padded perenquén,  
Of tree-browsing baifo,  
glorious Acentejo of the Running Waters,  
of the sun god Maijec, the Earth goddess  
Achguayaxiraxi.  
Of Guajota, lone volcanic demon dog, 'ware the  
barrancos del Caldera de Bandama.

## Individual 2

Designation: Sugar-mill worker

Justification for designation: bones evidence work in stressful environment

## ORATION

Man. I jest - Man. I am a woman, why I callin' 'man'? Jingoistic inexactitudes. Wherefore. And the jingles. In stripes of white and blue. Woman. Stick a pipe up it. Nah, born we are two-handed. Mine. One. Didst hear the shrieks? Mine. I said: mine. I fell asleep whilst feeding cane into the sugar mill. I was drawn into the mill. My hand was squashed in the mill. The dumb beast which rotates the circular walk as the sun and moon do rise. Man. Wo-man. The horned moons of Inanna Ishtar, Bashtet, overarching Nut of the squabbling breasts. Ad infernum. Vade retro. Out of which jumps the Joker. Both hands. My hands were drawn into the mill and crushed. Didst hear the shrieks? Armless I lie in the clay. You know those rollers which crack the cane open to release its life sap? Them. They cracked my bones open to relieve my life's sap. The sugar cane's sap is golden, of life. The human being's sap is red, of death. Every sugar cone since then is cursed with my blood. The red tinge was noted by the archaeologists Jonathan Santana Rosa Fregel Emma Lightfoot Jacob Morales Martha Alamon Jose Guillen Marco Moreno Amelia Rodriguez State University of Peninsula de Santa Elena La Libertad Ecuador G.I. Tarha. Department of Historical Sciences Las Palmas de Gran Canaria Spain Department of Genetics Stanford University Stanford United States of America University of Cambridge Cambridge United Kingdom University of the Basque Country Vitoria Spain Tibicena Las Palmas de Gran Canaria Spain. Buy three tons of Tate & Lyle granulated sugar. Pour it on the pavement through the park. Walk on it. Hear it crunch.

#### Individual 4

Designation: House slave

Justification for designation: a lot of bending

#### ORATION

She turn her back and pray. Yes I lay out the mistresses  
figured silk dress with the fashionable pomegranate motif  
for the ball

her very long hair in a knot at the back with a tail wrapped in black cord or ribbons a  
single braid studded with pearls and a  
long loose lock looped over the braid her

neckline lower and squared  
1478–80 a verdugada or  
farthingale a skirt stiffened

with reeds set in casings flaring chemise  
sleeves of striped or embroidered fabric small cap  
and wrapped braid of hair sheer pointed  
partlet

worn over the gown V-necked  
high-waisted gown with hanging sleeves over a floral silk  
gamurra with a square neckline

and chopines or platform  
shoes

her long black hair smoothed  
over her ears and  
pulled back into a  
braid

her  
sleeves tied to her evening gown the chemise  
beneath  
pulled out in puffs  
between the ribbon ties sometimes

she gives me clothes which are out of  
fashion or she has got tired  
of

I stole her old, blue earrings  
She thinks she lost  
I keep them in a box under my bed

I live in the big house I do not speak to the dutty field

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slaves I bathe every day and dress in  
white I

must look civilized and presentable to the master and  
mistress  
and their friends and neighbours maybe  
I will grow old maybe  
I will

maybe  
I will grow old maybe  
If my back let me

But I have the earrings  
I am a person  
I dress in white

When I go down to the slave huts for fruit and  
vegetables the men  
try to take liberties with me

I call the overseer on them

I must lay out my mistress's figured silk dress  
fashionable  
pomegranate motif must be laid out

for the her very long black black hair  
in a back in knot at the  
tail wrapped  
cord oh my back

my back

her ribbons a single braid studded  
with pearls  
and a long loose lock looped over  
the braid

## Individual 7

Designation: Healer

Justification: earrings/blue glass beads (indicator of status) / fragment of metal of circular shape / No skeletal problems indicative of special status (?)

## ORATION

Call me then wary, moon-led, pitted;  
I call thee then, grasses, vines, roots  
Call thee then leopard, monkey, cheetah  
I call thee then eternal snake who swallows the earth;  
stars

I ask the beads  
They tell  
I sacrifice to the beads  
they tell  
the beads they call me, call me  
the beads, blue, they call me

Chosen I am to serve  
Chosen to serve I am  
This burden laid upon me I cannot sidestep  
To my people am I bound

Call me then wary, moon-led, bitten  
I call thee then the one above  
I call thee then the one below  
The beads they bind me on my travels  
On my brow a diadem

I call upon thee ye wandering ghosts!  
I call upon thee my sisters!  
I call upon thee my brothers grim!  
I call upon thee the mothers!

The beads in their depths are blue  
In their depths a blue light shines  
They call to me of water, I am their mother, sister  
They call me to sink and rest

But chosen I am to serve  
Chosen to serve I am  
This burden laid upon me I cannot sidestep  
I must return  
To my people am I bound

I enter the dream of flame and fire  
I enter the dream of fire

My water beads they protect me  
On my way I fly

Oh call me then wary, moon-led, pitted;  
I call thee then, grasses, vines and roots  
I call thee then oh leopard, monkey, cheetah  
I call thee then oh snake, earth, stars

To regions must I travel far  
Beyond the earth, beyond the stars  
Hazardous the journey, not without price  
Blue the colour of heart's surcease

I call thee then ye hateful ghosts!  
I call thee then strange sisters!  
I call thee then the brothers grim!  
I call thee then foul mothers!

The evil eye has found and bound us  
Has found and bound my people  
My people I am bound to serve  
Whilst evil around us deepens

Evil then with evil fight?  
In soul's deep darkness in soul's dark night?  
I lay a circle around me thrice  
And drink the gall of bitterness

Call me then wary, moon-led, bitten  
I call thee then the one above  
I call thee then the one below  
The beads they shield me on my travels  
On my brow a crystal bright

Nothing on this earth comes without its price  
Nothing on earth or in heaven  
You pay the price whether you will  
or nill  
But pay the price you must

Their harvest is of savage oppression  
Their wyrd is rape and torture  
Their blood-sucking faces sully the earth's heroic places  
Their principality that of Hades

Blue-shielded fly I high  
Blue as pure, clean water  
Reflected the sky I do or die  
Gibbering shades haunted or vaunted

Asubonten gye nsa nom



Odekuru se ne nsa ni  
Mma asem bone biara  
Mma 'kuro yi mu

Come then, brief life  
Come, come!  
With my life untainted I beg thee, the sainted  
Protect me, heal my brother  
Come come!

Ishtar, Astarte-Inanna  
In soul's doom in desperate plight  
Circular, of the moon, I beseech thee  
– a boon!

The blue beads' depths are blue  
And blue  
Their azure depths are blue indeed

Oh sun and moon  
Oh blood oh sweat  
They crush our men  
And rape and break the women  
To the clear blue water am I sister-brother  
Required I am to drown

And hell and bastards and slavery  
They break our men  
To be mended, mended, mended  
To mend is beyond my powers  
And sun, and moon, and serpent-breath  
And morning brings its showers

Mother of a people  
I have been a porcupine  
Ram that has horns  
I have been a porcupine,  
Agyiman

I sleep at the cross-roads  
It is as a leopard I walk

The god Twumpuduo, has come  
Tano Twumpuduo has come

Osee! Yei!  
Yei!  
Twiaduampon e e e!

The old one who was melted in the furnace  
That one of the spotted hide

She does not confer with the queen  
Her spirit it passed into me, tho' unwilling  
Her spirit it passed into me

Required I am for my people  
Required I am to drown  
My people are not my people, no  
But as I'm all they have – I go

Swive me ancient sisters!  
Swive me and bury me in onyx  
I am too young to remember when  
Kwatakye Atiko  
Was reborn of the leopard  
Who springs from the left  
I am too young

I am too young to go  
It takes my life to go  
To gather from far moon's reach  
That which will keep my people alive

The blue beads' depths are blue  
And blue  
Their azure depths are blue indeed

Nothing on this earth comes without its price  
Nothing on earth or in heaven  
I pay the price with an astonished heart  
As into the depths I go

## CODA

### AFFETTUOSO MA NON TROPPO

I am that one, glorious the one-of-many who overarches continents; I arise spat out  
seraphim, cherubim; who rightfully stands upon the shoulders of the Elders, I, and  
they upon the Elder Ones, and they; completely incomplete;  
I am angel, father,  
mother, aunt, uncle unto the living;  
sister, brother, first cousin unto the dead,  
unto the taken, the enslaved; in their formaldehyde pickled  
brains I plant a seed.

On whose word shall this be taken,  
Who decant the mitochondrial DNA  
on what test-rig, in whose thesis shall I be  
ground down; what forest will sprout me anew?

I am that one who is wary moon essence, egg-shell, pitted;  
re-assembled by angels who with welding torches  
of flame fuse my epiphyses in a new land where greater angels  
fuse my tectonic plates, sutures of the earth.

Hens will bend their ears to hear; empurpled coxcombs wither away  
into blue ... blue ... Atlantic Ocean;  
laugh, then, laugh, for there is no beyond-pain which  
I cannot endure;

I will arise, wrapped in gold I arise,  
testified the vulpine John Crow  
dem, breadfruit to raas my supreme eye.

This rough beast comes round at last, my  
half phalanges wrapped around Africa,  
my brazen teeth locked on the new World.

Azure lies the sea  
Deep lies the sea  
Over the sea I came  
Over the sea I remain

## END

Ralph Hoyte 2016  
<http://www.ralphhoyte.com/>  
[ralphdhoyte@gmail.com](mailto:ralphdhoyte@gmail.com)