

□ Material Life Histories of the Missile Crisis (1962): Cuban Examples of a Soviet Nuclear Missile Hangar and US Marston Mats

- Anders Gustafsson
University of Gothenburg
anders.gustafsson@archaeology.gu.se
- Javier Iglesias Camargo
University of Pinar del Rio
lirio@princesa.pri.sld.cu
- Håkan Karlsson
University of Gothenburg
hakan.karlsson@archaeology.gu.se
- Gloria M. Miranda González
Museo de Los Palacios, Cuba
Violeta.325@nauta.cu

Abstract

This article presents new findings from a contemporary archaeology project that has been exploring the Missile Crisis (1962) and its material and immaterial remains in Cuba

Keywords: contemporary archaeology, Cuba, life histories, Marston mats, Missile Crisis, reuse, Soviet nuclear missile hangar

since 2005. The project is a cooperation between Swedish archaeologists and Cuban archaeologists, anthropologists and historians, and its primary aim is to complement the dominant narrative of the crisis with material and immaterial remains and memories in a way that approaches and explains the event “from below”. The current text focuses on the life histories of a Soviet nuclear missile hangar located at El Cacho, one of the former Soviet nuclear missile sites located in Los Palacios, and of the US Marston mats that can be found at a number of locations in farmsteads and villages surrounding the former missile sites in the Los Palacios and San Cristóbal areas. The life histories of these objects in western Cuba present the reader with new insights concerning the crisis that until now have been more or less concealed and unknown, contributing new complementary dimensions to the understanding of the Missile Crisis while also challenging the stereotypes constructing the dominant narrative.

A Brief Introduction to the Missile Crisis

“The Missile Crisis”; “The October Crisis”; “The Cuban Missile Crisis”; “The Caribbean Crisis” — the political and military crisis of October 1962, Cuba being the epicentre, has different names depending of the national/political context of the writer. Despite this, however, it is agreed that the crisis was one of the most dangerous moments of the twentieth century and the Cold War, and perhaps even in the whole history of humanity. Suddenly, the unthinkable—a total war between US and the Soviet Union, and the nuclear holocaust that probably would have been the consequence—was a real possibility. The prelude to the crisis can be found in US acts of aggression against the Cuban Revolution following the removal of the US puppet government headed by Fulgencio Batista at the start of January 1959. The US launched a number of activities which were more or less of a state-organised terrorist character to overthrow the new revolutionary government led by Fidel Castro; activities escalated during 1960–1961 within the framework of a trade embargo, bomb attacks and the destruction of parts of the Cuban sugar harvest, and were then crowned by the landing of c. 1800 US-trained exile Cubans at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961 with orders to start a military counter-revolution. This operation was a total failure, both militarily and politically, being swiftly defeated by the Cuban forces (Diez Acosta 2014; Jiménez Gómez 2015).

This last act of aggression, along with the knowledge that a new invasion plan would be launched in 1962, led the revolutionary Cuban government to accept the military assistance that was willingly offered by the Soviet Union. A military accord between Cuba and the Soviet Union was signed in May 1962 and it also included, beside a huge number of troops from all military branches, the installation of medium- and long-distance strategic nuclear missiles in Cuba. The transfer of the missiles as well as other military equipment and staff began in secret from July 1962 onwards, under the name Operation Anadyr (Diez Acosta 1992, 1997a, 1997b, 2002a, 2002c; Jiménez Gómez 2015). On 14 October, the illegal US reconnaissance flights over Cuba that had been taking place since 1960 revealed that nuclear-capable missiles had been installed at a number of sites, and this was the spark that ignited the Missile Crisis.

The missiles were medium-range missiles named R-12 by the Soviets and SS-4 by NATO. Thirty-six were deployed at six different sites, and each missile contained a nuclear warhead 75 times more powerful than the Hiroshima bomb. They had a range of 1400 miles (approx. 2250 km), which meant that they could reach Washington, DC and central parts of the US. Installations were also built for long-distance missiles (R-14/SS-5), but they were never operational, as the US naval blockade/quarantine that began on 24 October prevented the warheads from reaching Cuba (Diez Acosta 2002a, 2002c, 118–119). In parallel to the blockade, intensive negotiations were taking place between Washington and Moscow. In this extremely tense situation an accident or ill-considered action on either side could have started a nuclear war (Kennedy 1969, 127; Blight *et al.* 1991; Blight *et al.* 1993). During the 13 days that followed 14 October, the world stood on the brink of a thermonuclear holocaust.

Despite the US plans for a direct military attack on Cuba with the aim of removing both the missiles and the Cuban revolutionary government, the crisis was solved through diplomatic negotiations both in the UN and directly between the two superpowers. At the end of October, the US and the Soviet Union reached an agreement without the participation of the Cuban government, in accordance with which the Soviet missiles and all offensive weapons installed on Cuba were dismantled and shipped back to the Soviet Union during November. The agreement also had a secret part, in which the US promised to withdraw nuclear Jupiter missiles in Turkey and not to intervene militarily in Cuba in the future (Diez Acosta 1992, 1997b, 2002a, 2002c; Jiménez Gómez 2015).

The highest levels of the Missile Crisis have been extensively documented and investigated by historians, with a focus on its significance for world politics during the Cold War and encompassing the military-strategic dimensions, top-level diplomacy and the leadership of the two superpowers etc. (cf. Garthoff 1987; Blight *et al.* 1993; Allyn *et al.* 1992; Fursenko and Naftali 1997; May and Zelikow 1997). However, most of these investigations adopt a narrow perspective that is aligned with the standpoint of the US and its allies, and there are only a few investigations that present the crisis from a Cuban perspective (cf. Diez Acosta 1992, 1997b, 2002a, 2002c; Jiménez Gómez 2015).

This continuous presentation of the narrative of the crisis in the form of its development and internal dynamics has meant that other aspects of the crisis have been neglected and suppressed. This applies not least to the material remains found at a number of the eight former missile sites, and to the memories and stories of the people from the nearby villages and surrounding communities—memories and stories that constitute unique testimonies of how this world-crisis was perceived by people who suddenly and unexpectedly found themselves situated in the political epicentre of the crisis. During the decades that followed the crisis, it was also under-communicated in Cuba, despite the fact that nuclear missiles had been deployed on Cuban soil and Cuba's central significance to the event (cf. Diez Acosta, 1997b, 2002a, 2002c; Burström and Karlsson 2008; Burström *et al.* 2009; Burström *et al.* 2011).

Points of Departure

Since 2005, a contemporary archaeology project has been exploring the material and immaterial remains of the Missile Crisis in Cuba, using the neglected dimensions identi-

fied above in order to gain new insights about the Missile Crisis and its human dimensions, and to complement the dominant narration of the crisis (Burström, Gustafsson and Karlsson 2006; Burström and Karlsson 2008; Burström *et al.* 2009; Burström *et al.* 2011; González Hernández *et al.* 2014). The first phase of the project was realised during the period 2005–2009, in cooperation between Swedish archaeologists and Cuban archaeologists, anthropologists and historians. During this phase the project focused on material remains at three former missile sites and memories and stories held by people and communities around the former missile site of Santa Cruz de los Pinos, in the region of Artemisa, western Cuba. At theoretical and methodological levels, the project was and still is anchored in a contemporary archaeological approach and in an interest in material and immaterial remains from the Cold War (cf. Buchli and Lucas 2001; Schofield and Cocroft 2007). However, a contemporary archaeological focus is naturally multidisciplinary, since it combines information from material, written and oral sources, and it strives to let this information interact in a way which means that new forms of knowledge can be produced. Further, and on the methodological and practical level, this focus is often combined with a cooperation with local communities and actors as a form of public archaeology (cf. Buchli and Lucas 2001; Burström 2010; Persson 2014).

During this phase, the project succeeded in identifying material and immaterial multi-vocal voices “from below”, and more human dimensions to the Missile Crisis. It generated new insights concerning the exact locations of various structures at the former missile site of Santa Cruz de los Pinos, the reuse of material remains from the base in the local community and the local population’s recollections. It was also possible to show that archaeological fieldwork could function as an arena for a dialogue with the local population, and that this work—together with the material remains—could create processes of remembrance (Burström, Diez Acosta *et al.* 2006; Burström and Karlsson 2008; Burström *et al.* 2009; Burström 2010; González Hernández *et al.* 2014; Karlsson in press).

The second phase of the project (2010–2014) was based on a continued cooperation between the Swedish archaeologists and the Cuban archaeologists, anthropologists and historians, but with a new important actor also participating: the regional museum in San Cristóbal. The museum has an ambitious plan for the reuse of the former missile site in Santa Cruz de los Pinos as an open-air museum; a museum that could play a central local and regional role for education, tourism and local sustainable development (Sajion Sánchez and Lazcano Hernandez 2010). This new involvement, which was partly a direct consequence of the first part of the project, changed the focus of the second part towards issues concerning cultural heritage, its reuse, its relation to local actors and stakeholders and sustainable development at the local and regional levels (González Hernández *et al.* 2014). Thus, the project also became part of the developing field of the contemporary use of history and the relationship between cultural heritage and society more generally. These are subjects that have been explored extensively at national and international levels in the disciplines of history and archaeology, as well as in relation to questions concerning tourism and the participation of local societies and stakeholders in the development of society (cf. Lowenthal 1985, 1998; Robinson 1996; Grundberg 2004; Gustafsson and Karlsson 2004a, 2004b, 2015; Smith 2004, 2006; Pyburn 2009; Benton 2010; Harrison 2010, 2013; Moschenska and Dhanjal 2012; Skeates *et al.* eds. 2012; Biehl *et al.* 2014).

In 2015 the project can be said to have entered its third phase, a phase that blends the approaches and issues of the earlier two phases while investigating the material and immaterial remains at the two former Soviet nuclear missile sites at El Cacho and El Pitirre in the province of Pinar de Rio to complement the work at Santa Cruz de los Pinos (Figure 1).

At the theoretical and methodological levels, the project is still anchored in the approaches of contemporary archaeology, and the objectives of the project are the same as before: that is, it continues to strive to complement the overall and general history of the crisis with information gathered from material and immaterial remains in a manner where the dominant narration of the crisis can be complemented, enriched, explained and also questioned by insights “from below” (Iglesias Camargo *et al.* in press).

This article concentrates on two types of material remains in western Cuba and their life histories: a Soviet nuclear missile hangar located at El Cacho, one of the former Soviet nuclear missile sites located in Los Palacios, and the US Marston mats that can be found in a number of locations at farmsteads and villages in the Los Palacios and San Cristóbal areas. It seeks to answer: (1) To what extent can the dominating narration of the Missile Crisis be complemented and enriched by the life histories of these material remains, and their specific “from below” stories?; and (2) To the extent that this is the case, in what manner can the dominant narrative be complemented and challenged? As such, we take as our point of departure questions concerning the cultural life his-

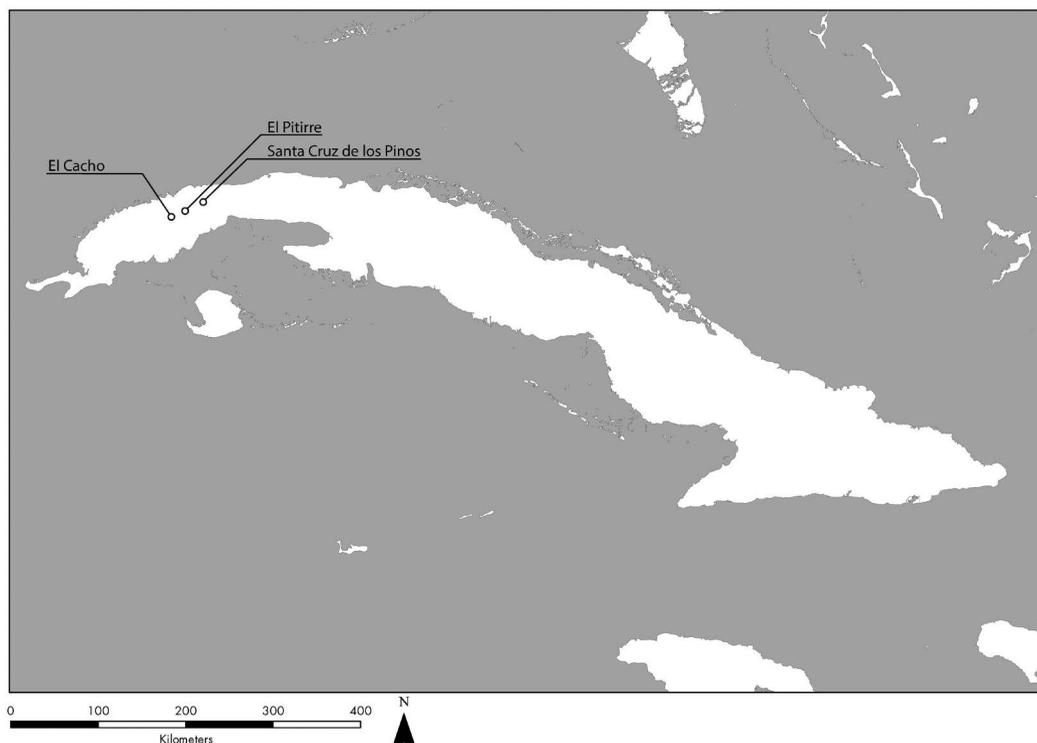


FIGURE 1. Map with the three sites marked (illustration by Rich Potter).

tories, biographies and reuse of material culture, as well as the relationship between material culture and human beings; themes that have been discussed and researched in archaeology from a variety of approaches, focuses and influences in the last decades.

Discussions of life histories and biographies (e.g. Shanks 1998, Bradley and Williams 1998; Marshall and Gosden 1999; Holtorf 2002; Karlsson 2008) have been influenced by the arguments presented by Igor Kopytoff (1986), amongst others, and they provide convincing evidence that the elements of material culture, like human beings, have biographies or life stories; that these elements go through different stages in their “lives”; and that the meaning or meanings ascribed to them change over time, and that no single one is more important than any other. These discussions, often rooted in a reflective and critical constructivist approach, thus also challenge the strong archaeological essentialist tradition in which the meaning and authenticity of a material culture is based on a quality of originality, genuineness, authenticity and truthfulness that the object or remain carries in itself as an essence and valuable asset (cf. Jones 2010; Holtorf 2013). Instead, it is stressed that all types of material expressions originating in the past are parts of contemporary cultural processes where they are interpreted, staged and communicated in the context of specific contextual anchored approaches, meanings and narrations (cf. Shanks 1998; Holtorf and Schadla-Hall 1999; Holtorf 2005; Jones 2010; Harrison 2010, 2013; Gustafsson and Karlsson 2015).

These are fruitful theoretical points of departure when discussing the material culture approached in this article, since the Soviet nuclear missile hangar and the US Marston mats cannot be isolated in the past when the meanings ascribed to them are created continuously and therefore also have changed during their lives. At the same time these material remains have influenced the people ascribing meaning to them in various ways. The concept of life histories is also particularly intriguing when approaching material culture that was part of an event that came close to ending the history of humanity.

The Soviet Missile Hangar at El Cacho

During 2014 and 2015 the project began preliminary archaeological and anthropological investigations at the two former Soviet nuclear missile sites of El Cacho and El Pitirre at Los Palacios in the province of Pinar del Rio, western Cuba. Just as was the case with the site at Santa Cruz de los Pinos, there has not been much previous interest in the material remains or the memories, stories and experiences of the local populations. The exception is a survey of the material remains organised by the Cuban historian Tomás Diez Acosta in 1997 (Diez Acosta 1997a).

Materiality

The hangar (Figure 2) is constructed from 44 three-part reinforced concrete arcs which were put together to form a 25-m long and 11-m wide building (Diez Acosta 1997a, 2002c, 118). Both during the crisis and when used in the Soviet Union before the crisis, the hangar functioned as a storage and assembly point where nuclear warheads were to be maintained ready for combat, in an environment with a controlled temperature and humidity. It was from the hangar that the warheads were to be transported to the



FIGURE 2. The outside of the hangar today (photograph by Håkan Karlsson).

launch ramps situated in the vicinity, and connected to the missile bodies to create combat-ready missiles (Jiménez Gónzales 2015, 121–123). Thus, the hangar was a central entity for the functionality of a Soviet nuclear missile base in the 1960s.

From the Soviet Union to Cuba: Pre-Crisis Life

Before the crisis, the hangar was used as a part of the infrastructure of the Strategic Missile Troops of the Soviet Union, more precisely within the 43rd Rocket Army's 43rd Division (Diez Acosta 2002c, 116). It was placed outside the town of Kremenchug, Ukraine, where it was handled by staff belonging to a particular regiment. At the beginning of August 1962—as a central element of the top-secret Operation Anadyr—the hangar was dismantled, along with the rest of the large equipment of the five nuclear missile regiments that constituted the 43rd Division. The regiments were shipped to Cuba in August (Gribkov and Smith 1993, 491–495; Diez Acosta 2002c, 117), and on 1 September the hangar, eight missiles, and other equipment bound for the four missile bases of western Cuba left from the port of Sebastopol, Crimea, on board the freighter *Poltava* (Jiménez Gónzales 2015, 183).

The hangar reached the Cuban harbour of Mariel on 16 September, and it was transported on covered lorries by night to the site of El Cacho (Jiménez Gónzales 2015,



FIGURE 3. Low-altitude photo of the hangar under construction, 23 October, 1962 (National Security Archive, Washington, DC, used with permission).

196). More equipment was shipped in the following weeks and, with the exception of the R-12 nuclear warheads, which reached Cuba on 4 October, all the equipment and components needed for constructing a functional missile base were in place at El Cacho at the end of September (Jiménez Gónzales 2015, 218). When the hangar and the rest of the equipment reached the site, engineering troops and personnel from the 539th missile regiment stepped up their work to get the unit ready for combat. The construction work at the hangar was documented by low-altitude US reconnaissance airplanes on 23 October (Figure 3).

The missile site of El Cacho was fully operational and armed with six medium-range R-12/SS-4 missiles when the warheads were transported to the site from the central depot in Bejucal, in the province of Havana, on 26 October (Diez Acosta 2002b, 181). During its time in the Soviet Union the hangar had already contributed to the build-up of the Cold War, and it therefore influenced not just world politics but also affected people's feelings and fears—not just those people living in the US, the Soviet Union, or in allied countries, but also those in neutral states.

Discovery and Use in Diplomatic Negotiations: Crisis Life

The missile site of El Cacho (San Cristóbal 1 in US documentation) was the first nuclear missile site that was discovered by the high-altitude U2 reconnaissance flights that had illegally been patrolling over Cuba since 1960. The discovery was made on 14 October, and the photos were interpreted the next day and presented to President John F. Kennedy on the morning of 16 October (cf. Diez Acosta 1997b, 2002c, 136). Thus, it can be said that this site and its material culture ignited the Missile Crisis. During the days following the discovery the US flew a number of low-altitude reconnaissance missions



FIGURE 4. Photo from the UN Security Council, 25 October, 1962 (National Security Archive, Washington, DC, used with permission).

over the whole of Cuba, and the hangar at El Cacho was photographed on 23 October. The famous image of the US ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, presenting photographs to the UN Security Council on 25 October (Figure 4) shows structures and lorry columns in the Los Palacios area and in the vicinity of El Cacho, as well as the work on structures at the site, such as the hangar.

At this meeting, Stevenson used the photo evidence to convince the Security Council of the Soviet nuclear-missile build-up in Cuba, and urged the Security Council to approve a resolution calling for the withdrawal of Soviet-supplied missile bases from the island (Diez Acosta 2002b, 167–170; 2002c, 173). One of the photos of the hangar shows the clearest evidence of the Soviet construction activities; in Stevenson's own words:

A second large photograph shows the same area about 6 weeks later. Here you will see a very heavy construction effort to push the launching area to rapid completion. The pictures show [...] a large reinforced concrete building under construction. A building with a heavy arch may well be intended as the storage area for the nuclear warheads. The installation is not yet complete, and no warheads are yet visible. (Stevenson 1962, 739)

However, following the introduction of a US marine blockade of Cuba from 23 October, the crisis was solved by direct and intense diplomatic negotiations between the US and the Soviet Union during the last days of October—and the world was able to let out a deep breath. Humanity had looked into the abyss, but the final step towards mutual destruction was never taken.

In line with the agreement between the US and the Soviet Union that ended the crisis in the last days of October, all material constructions at the bases were to be dismantled and shipped back to the Soviet Union. In accordance with Stevenson's argument

in the UN Security Council on 25 October, the US also demanded that the UN should oversee this dismantling, but this kind of inspection was firmly rejected by the Cuban government and therefore was never implemented (Diez Acosta 2002c, 190–195). Due to the rapid withdrawal of the Strategic Missile Troops regiments along with the nuclear missiles from Cuba starting on 31 October (Diez Acosta 2002c, 190–195), the 539th regiment had no time to dismantle the hangar at El Cacho. Previously, and especially during the UN negotiations, the hangar had been at the centre of the world's attention and directly influencing world politics, but now it was abandoned and left behind. During the crisis, the hangar and the nuclear missile machinery surrounding it had threatened the population of the whole world; it avoided destruction, but was left standing as a ruin from the Missile Crisis.

After the Missile Crisis: Post-Crisis Life

Directly after the crisis, and for the next new two years, the hangar functioned as a living area for a peasant named Esteban de la Torre Acosta, his wife Celia and their three children (Figure 5). The family was one of a number of peasant families that had quickly had to move out from the area of the missile site during its construction and use. These families were provided with new houses and new land away from the site, and in most cases they continued to live in their new places after the crisis (de la Torre Acosta, interview; Diez Acosta 2002c, 107). Esteban and his family, however, chose to



FIGURE 5. Esteban de la Torre Acosta and his wife Celia in front of the house where they live today (photograph by Håkan Karlsson).

move back and to give the hangar a completely new meaning and a new life. Where the nuclear warheads had been prepared just some weeks earlier, children now lived and played (de la Torre, interview). However, the Cuban military (MINFAR) installed a centre for education and training of their Special Troops at the former missile site in 1965, and Esteban and his family then moved to a new house adjacent to the former missile site.

The Cuban troops that participated in the war in Angola during the 1970s were among those who were educated and trained at this centre (Diez Acosta, interview). During the time that the hangar was a part of the military unit it was used for a number of purposes: for instance, as a storage building, an officers' mess, and as a regimental museum (Diez Acosta 1997a; Diaz, interview). It was also during this time that the first interest was shown in documentation and conservation of the material remains as important testimonies of the Missile Crisis and as a heritage of Cuban history. In 1997 the Cuban historian Tomás Diez Acosta carried out surveys with personnel from the Cuban military's engineer troops and documented all of the former Soviet nuclear missile sites (Diez Acosta 1997a). This investigation was during the period when the hangar at El Cacho was being used as an officers' mess, and so the entrance had been reduced to fit an ordinary door, a roof had been constructed over the entrance and the sides of the hangar had been opened up with a number of windows. The military use of the site and of the hangar ended in 2010 after 35 years, as commemorated by a small monument in front of the hangar.

In 2010 officials in the Los Palacios district decided that the buildings and the infrastructure at the site from its Cuban military period should be used to construct an ecology tourist centre focusing on the surrounding nature and wildlife. In this new context the hangar functions, for example, as a place for meetings and as a dining room for guests (Figure 6).

Today, in 2015, and at least partly as a consequence of the research project, the museum in Los Palacios is showing an interest in creating an exhibition inside the hangar focusing on the Missile Crisis; an exhibition that, amongst others purposes, could be used for education, as well as attracting tourists to the ecology centre. In this manner the museum would create a centre combining interest in both nature and culture. Only the future can tell if this will be realised or not, but in the meantime the hangar stands as a material memory of a crisis that could have ended the future of humanity.

The US Marston Mats

When the project carried out its first field activities in 2005 at the former Soviet nuclear missile site at Santa Cruz de los Pinos, in the province of Artemisa, western Cuba, we already found perforated metal mats that were being reused in a number of ways in the local community of San Cristóbal and in the countryside surrounding the site (Burström *et al.* 2009; Burström *et al.* 2013). At that time we understood that this equipment had been used for reinforcing the ground for heavy vehicles, but we did not know that they were Marston mats, and we did not know anything about their life history.

Materiality

These metal mats (Figure 7) are constructed of steel. They have holes punched through them in rows and U-shaped channels between the holes. Hooks are attached along one



FIGURE 6. The hangar as dining room (photograph by Håkan Karlsson).

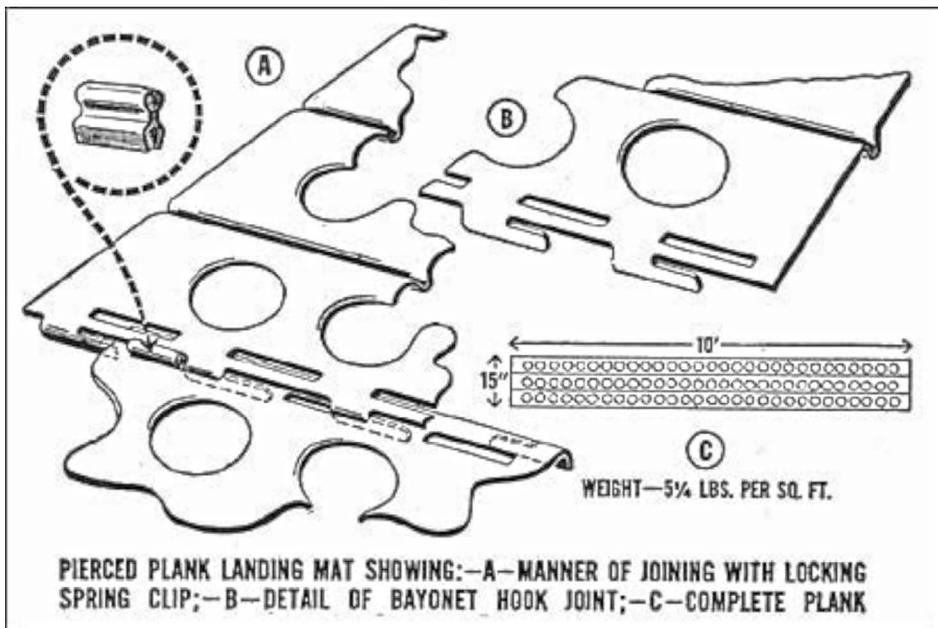


FIGURE 7. Technical drawing of a Marston mat (National Museum of the US Air Force, file 050429-F-1234P-028, used with permission).

long edge and slots along the other, so that a number of sections can be connected. The mats that we have observed in Cuba consist of single pieces with a weight of c. 65 lb (29.5 kg), a length of 3 m and a width of 0.4 m. Each mat is three holes wide and has 29 holes along its length—i.e. a total of 87 holes per mat. This is the standard type used by the US Army (Gabel 1992, 182–185).

From US to the Soviet Union to Cuba: Pre-crisis Life

Standardised perforated steel mats such as those described in the previous section were originally developed by the US Army in 1941, primarily for the rapid construction of temporary runways and taxiing and landing strips (Cannon 1979, 39–43; Gabel 1992, 182–183; Cohen 1993; Mola 2014). Their official name was “PSP”, for perforated (or pierced) steel planking; the nickname “Marston mats” is a result of their first production and use at the military airfield of Camp Mackall, adjacent to the town of Marston in North Carolina. They were extremely functional, and during World War Two these mats were used extensively to construct runways at all the US war theatres (Figure 8), particularly the Pacific, but also in connection with the invasion of Normandy and in Sicily (Gurney 1962; Cannon 1979, 39–43; Gabel 1992, 182–183; Mola 2014). The Marston mats were produced in various types, but the type called “M8 landing mat” was mass produced and standardised for army use (Cannon 1979, 39).



FIGURE 8. A Curtiss P-40 “Warhawk” taxiing along Marston mats at Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea in September 1942 (Australian War Memorial, file AWM 026647, used with permission).

Marston mats were provided to the US's wartime allies, including the Soviet Union, within the framework of the 1941 Lend-Lease Act (Mola 2014), by which the US supported its allies with food, oil and material until the end of the war in 1945, along with military equipment and weaponry (Allen 1955; Dawson 1959; Herring 1973; Weeks 2004). Land-lease material transported to the Soviet Union was delivered via the Arctic Convoys, the Persian Corridor and the Pacific Route (Kemp 1993). It is hard to know through which route the Marston mats were transported to the Soviet Union, but we can only conclude that they reached their destination. During WWII they were used in the Soviet Union for the construction of airstrips, but probably also for constructing roads and reinforcing the ground for heavy vehicles during the war on the Eastern Front, and during the march towards Berlin. During the period 1945–1962 they were used, amongst others purposes, for constructing and reinforcing roads at the strategic missile sites, and were a necessary component for the functionality of a Soviet nuclear missile base in the 1960s. Thus, even if not so prominent, they were an important part of making the strategic nuclear regiments of the Soviet Union functional during the Cold War. Therefore, they did their part in the arms race and the fear of a thermonuclear Armageddon that stalked the world.

It is likely that the Marston mats of the M8 type that were shipped to Cuba were transported in August 1962 as a part of Operation Anadyr. As with the rest of the equipment bound for the strategic nuclear sites and regiments of western Cuba, they were probably unloaded in the port of Mariel, from where they were transported by night in covered lorries to the sites of El Cacho, El Pitirre, Santa Cruz de los Pinos and La Rosa.

In Use at the Missile Sites of Western Cuba: Crisis Life

At these sites the Soviet engineer troops used the Marston mats for reinforcing roads inside the missile sites, as well for reinforcing the ground adjacent to the launch pads (Diez Acosta 1997a; Diaz, interview). Of course, the mats did not play such a central role as, for instance, the hangar at El Cacho or the missiles themselves during the crisis, but nevertheless they constituted necessary components for making the deadly machinery of the nuclear missile sites functional. As we have seen above, the agreement between the US and the Soviet Union that ended the crisis in the last days of October stated that all material constructions at the bases should be dismantled and shipped back to the Soviet Union. Due to the rapid withdrawal of the Strategic Missile Troops and the strategic nuclear missiles from Cuba that started on 31 October (Diez Acosta 2002c, 190–195), the troops had no time to recover and load the Marston mats for transport. Thus, as with the case of the hangars, the Marston mats were abandoned and left behind, as material memories of the road infrastructure of a nuclear missile site. They did not achieve the same fame as the hangar and they were not discussed in the UN Security Council, but nonetheless they constituted an important part of getting the nuclear missile sites functional during the crisis, and they were a part of the nuclear missile machinery that threatened the world during the crisis.

After the Missile Crisis: Post-Crisis Life

Directly after the crisis, or rather as soon as the last Soviet vehicle had left the sites of El Cacho, El Pitirre and Santa Cruz de los Pinos in the first days of November, the farmers



FIGURE 9. Marston mat used as a footbridge, San Cristóbal (photograph by Mats Burström).

and the people from the nearby villages visited the sites looking for usable things that had been left behind. They found, for instance, boots, cans, coats, field bottles, nylon covers, oil, spades, spoons, timber boards and empty ammunition boxes. In the countryside surrounding these sites the farmers have been using material remains from the sites in different ways over the decades that have passed since the crisis; this reuse can also be found in the nearby villages (Burström *et al.* 2008; Burström *et al.* 2011; Burström *et al.* 2013). The material that has been most commonly reused is undoubtedly the Marston mats, which have found new meanings, functions and lives in a number of ways in new contexts (Figures 9 and 10).

Today one can still find the Marston mats in the countryside surrounding the former missile sites, but also in the nearby villages, where they are mixed and blended with other forms of material culture. Thus, they take part in the construction of a palimpsest landscape where past and present are intimately interlaced and brought together in a manner by which these periods cannot be isolated from each other.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the hangar at the former missile site of El Cacho, and the Marston mats from the sites of El Cacho, El Pitirre, Santa Cruz de los Pinos and La Rosa, have had a number of different meanings and functions during their lifetime, and that they have gone through a number of transformations. The hangar has been situated at the centre of the world's attention and been more or less forgotten; it has been moved from



FIGURE 10. Marston mats used as fencing, Los Palacios (photograph by Javier Iglesias Camargo).

the countryside of Kremenchug to the countryside of Los Palacios; it has functioned as a storage area for nuclear warheads and as a playground for children. The Marston mats have been part of the nuclear missile site machinery in different parts of the world; they have been moved from the US to the Soviet Union, and then to Cuba; they have functioned as reinforcements of roads and footbridges, barn walls and bottle holders. Thus, various meanings have been ascribed to this material culture during its lifetime, but at the same time it has influenced the people ascribing meaning to them in various ways during their existence. Today, the hangar and the Marston mats are once again changing their meaning, and are interacting and influencing people in new ways since they (primarily the hangar) have become the focus for a regional interest concerning tourism, and since they have begun to be studied scientifically within the framework of the presented project.

At the beginning of this text we presented two questions. In answer to the first—*To what extent can the dominating narration of the Missile Crisis be complemented and enriched by the life histories of these material remains, and their specific “from below” stories?*—we would like to say that the life histories of the material culture and the objects presented in this text present small-scale material stories of the crisis that complement and enrich the dominant narration of the crisis through a military-strategic and Cold War perspective. As regards the second question—*In what manner can the dominating narration be complemented and challenged?*—it can be said that the dominant narrative indeed been challenged by the life histories of the hangar and the

Marston mats, demonstrating that the histories of the lives of material objects show that profound historical events are never as simple as stereotypical narrations often force us to believe. In this case we have approached material remains and their life histories as partly telling another story about the Missile Crisis; that even though the two superpowers were standing eyeball to eyeball during that crucial month of October, the material used during the crisis was at least partly (the Marston mats) a remainder of a time when these so-called archenemies were once allied in a war against a common enemy. This implies that there is always a more complex material pattern and an intertwined story to be found beyond the dominant narrative of a historical event, and in the case of the Missile Crisis these complexities can be revealed by the material objects. This means that archaeology can rewrite the history of the Missile Crisis!

The dominant narrative can also be complemented and challenged by the fact that more voices are starting to be heard through the efforts of the project and its interest in the immaterial remains from the crisis: the voices of people presenting various histories “from below” concerning their memories and experiences of the crisis. In the Cuban countryside it is sometimes hard for some people to understand the project’s interest in the material remains, but at the same time this interest in the material, and in people’s encounters with the material remains from the crisis, functions as a starting point for remembrance and for a more human dimension of the crisis. It also functions as a bridge leading to the insight that the ordinary and daily experiences of the crisis are valuable contributions to the overall knowledge and understanding of the crisis.

In the aftermath of the crisis the material objects are now mixed and blended together in the Cuban countryside in a way that constructs a timeless palimpsest landscape, and where they are loaded with new meanings and functions. In this context they influence, and are influenced by, people, not least within the framework of the project presented in this text. Perhaps the future of the material remains presented here (at least as regards the hangar) lies within the framework of cultural tourism and the educational dimensions that the regional decision-makers want to explore. Of course, there is economic potential in these remains, since people all around the world have memories of the Missile Crisis and this dangerous moment in the history of mankind. It is therefore likely that many people might wish to see the sites that were the focus of the world’s attention more than 50 years ago. Even if the future of the material remains develops in other directions, one can be convinced that the lives of the hangar and of the Marston mats will continue in new contexts that are partly constructed through their material existence and partly through their interaction and co-existence with human beings, who will not be the same after they encounter them.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following persons for various forms of support that have made this text possible: Mats Burström (Stockholm University), for his invaluable inspiration during the project’s first phase; Estrella González Noriega (Institute of Cuban Anthropology, Havana), Felina González Hernández (Museum of San Cristóbal), Ana Gloria Crespo Valdès (Museum of Las Palacios) and Lázaro Corps Peña (Los Palacios) for valuable ideas and contributions to the fieldwork; and Juan and Rosando Díaz and Esteban de la Torre Acosta

(farmers in the Los Palacios area), for sharing their local knowledge and their experiences of the crisis. Last, but not at least, we want to thank our colleagues and close friends Tomás Díez Acosta (Institute of Cuban History, Havana), and Stefan Kovacs (Havana) without whose help this article had never been produced. We are grateful to all of you!

Interviews

Esteban de la Torre Acosta, 22 October, 2015.*

Rosando Díaz, Interview, 21 October, 2015.*

Tomás Díez Acosta, Interview, October 2015.

* Retained in Håkan Karlsson's archive.

References

- Allen, H. C. 1955. *Britain and the United States*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Allyn, B. J., J. Bruce, J. G. Blight and D. A. Welch, eds. 1992. *Back to the Brink: Proceedings of the Moscow Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis, January 27-28, 1989*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Benton, T., ed. 2010. *Understanding Heritage and Memory*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Biehl, P., D. Comer, C. Prescott and H. A. Soderland, eds. 2014. *Identity and Heritage: Contemporary Challenges in a Globalized World*. London: Springer.
- Blight, J. G., D. Lewis and D. A. Welch, eds. 1991. *Cuba between the Superpowers: The Antigua Conference on the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Providence, RI: Brown University
- _____, B. C. Allyn and D. A. Welch, eds. 1993. *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, the Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Collapse*. New York: Pantheon.
- Bradley, R. and H. Williams, eds. 1998. "The Past in the Past: The Reuse of Ancient Monuments." Special issue, *World Archaeology* 39 (1).
- Buchli, V. and G. Lucas, eds. 2001. *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past*. London: Routledge.
- Burström, M. 2010. *Samtidsarkeologi. En introduktion*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- _____, T. Díez Acosta, E. González, A. Gustafsson, I. Hernández, H. Karlsson, J. M. Pajón, R. Robaina and B. Westergaard, 2009. "Memories of a World Crisis: The Contemporary Archaeology of a Former Soviet Missile Site in Cuba." *Social Archaeology* 9 (3): 295–318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1469605309337884>
- _____, T. Díez, E. González, A. Gustafsson, I. Hernández, G. Izquierdo, H. Karlsson, D. M. O'Halloran, J. M. Pajón and R. Robaina. 2006. *Reconocimiento Geodinámico y Arqueohistórico preliminar del área de emplazamiento de las unidades coheteriles Soviéticas grupo R-12 Santa Cruz de los Pinos, Pinar del Río, Cuba, durante la crisis de octubre de 1962*. Centro de Antropología de Cuba. Havana. Unpublished manuscript.
- _____, A. Gustafsson and H. Karlsson, 2006. "The Air Torpedo of Bäckebo: Local Incident and World History." *Current Swedish Archaeology* 14: 7–24.
- _____, A. Gustafsson and H. Karlsson. 2011. *World Crisis in Ruin: The Archaeology of the Former Soviet Nuclear Missile Sites in Cuba*. Lindome, Sweden: Bricoleur Press.
- _____. 2013. "From Nuclear Missile Hangar to Pigsty: An Archaeological Photo-Essay on The 1962 World Crisis." In *Counterpoint: Essays in Archaeology and Heritage Studies in Honour of Professor Kristian Kristiansen*, edited by S. Bergerbrandt and S. Sabatini, 733–738. BAR International Series 2508. Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.
- _____. and H. Karlsson, 2008. "Världskris i ruin. Samtidsarkeologiska undersökningar av sovjetiska kärnvapenbaser på Kuba". In *Samtidsarkeologi. Varför gräva i det förflutna*. Södertörn Archaeological Studies 6, edited by M. Burström, 41–48. Huddinge. Sweden: University of Södertörn.
- Cannon, J. L. 1979. *A History of the Waterways Experiment Station 1929-1979*. Vicksburg, MS: U. S. Corps of Engineers.
- Cohen, S. 1993. *The Forgotten War, Volume Four. A Pictorial History of World War II in Alaska and Northwestern Canada*. Missoula, MT: Pictorial Histories Publishing.
- Dawson, R. H. 1959. *The Decision to Aid Russia 1941: Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Díez Acosta, T. 1992. *Peligros y Principios*. Havana: Ediciones Verde Olivo.
- _____. 1997a "Informe sobre las regiones de emplazamiento de las unidades coheteriles estratégicas Soviéticas desplegadas en el territorio de la República de Cuba en el periodo de la crisis de octubre." Unpublished manuscript.

- _____. 1997b. *La Crisis de los Misiles, 1962*. Havana: Ediciones Verde Olivo.
- _____. 2002a. *In the Threshold of Nuclear War: The 1962 Missile Crisis*. Havana: Editorial José Martí.
- _____. 2002b. *October 1962: The "Missile" Crisis as Seen from Cuba*. New York: Pathfinder.
- _____. 2002c. *Octubre de 1962, a un paso de holocausto*. Havana: Editora Política.
- _____. 2014. *La Derrota de la Guerra Sucia*. Havana: Prensa Latina.
- Fursuenko, A. and T. J. Naftali. 1997. *One Hell of a Gamble: Krushchev, Castro and Kennedy, 1958-1964*. New York: Norton.
- Gabel, C. R. 1992. "The U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941." Washington, DC: Center of Military History / United States Army.
- Garthoff, R. L. 1987. *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Washington, DC: Brookings.
- González Hernández, F. A. Gustafsson and H. Karlsson. 2014. "De crisis mundial hacia un desarrollo local. Breve informe de un proyecto de arqueología contemporánea sobre el patrimonio cultural de la antigua base de misiles nucleares soviéticos en Santa Cruz de los Pinos, Cuba." *Cuba Arqueológica* 7 (2): 19–28.
- Gribov, A. I. and W. Y. Smith. 1993. *Operation Anadyr: U.S. and Soviet Generals Recount the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Chicago: Edition Q.
- Grundberg, J. 2004. *Historiebruk, globaliseringoch kulturarsförvaltning. Utveckling eller konflikt?* Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg / ETOUR.
- Gurney, G. 1962. *The War in the Air: A Pictorial History of World War II Air Forces in Combat*. New York: Crown.
- Gustafsson, A. and H. Karlsson. 2004a. *Kulturav som samhällsdialog*. Stockholm: Riksantikvarieämbetet.
- _____. 2004b. *Plats på scen. Kring presentation och förmedling av fasta fornlämningar i Bohuslän genom tiderna*. Uddevalla, Sweden. Bohusläns Museum / Riksantikvarieämbetet.
- _____. 2015. "La autenticidad en la práctica. Ejemplos desde ocho sitios con arte rupestre clasificados como patrimonio mundial." *PH Investigación* 5: 25–43.
- Harrison, R., ed. 2010. *Understanding the Politics of Heritage*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- _____. 2013. *Heritage: Critical Approaches*. London: Routledge.
- Herring, G.C. Jr. 1973. *Aid to Russia 1941-1946: Strategy, Diplomacy, the Origins of the Cold War*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Holtorf, C. 2002. "Notes on the Life History of a Pot Sherd." *Journal of Material Culture* 7 (1): 49–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183502007001305>
- _____. 2005. *From Stonehenge to Las Vegas: Archaeology as Popular Culture*. Lanham, MD: Altamira Press.
- _____. 2013. "On Pastness: A Reconsideration of Materiality in Archaeological Object Authenticity." *Anthropological Quarterly* 86 (2): 427–444. <https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2013.0026>
- _____. and T. Schadla-Hall, 1999. "Age as Artefact: On Archaeological Authenticity." *European Journal of Archaeology* 2 (2): 229–247. <https://doi.org/10.1179/eja.1999.2.2.229>
- Iglesias Camargo, J., G. M. Miranda González and H. Karlsson (in press), "Un hangar para misiles nucleares reutilizado como casa de vivienda, almacén y comedor. Nuevos descubrimientos arqueológicos y antropológicos en las antiguas bases de misiles nucleares soviéticos en Los Palacios, Cuba." *Cuba Arqueológica*.
- Jiménez Gómez, R. 2015. *En Octubre del 1962. Cohetes nucleares en el Caribe*. Havana: Verde Olivo.
- Jones, S. 2010. "Negotiating Authentic Objects and Authentic Selves Beyond the Deconstruction of Authenticity." *Journal of Material Culture* 15 (2): 181–203. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183510364074>
- Karlsson, H. 2008. *Ekornavallen. Mellan mångtydighet, demokrati och etnografi*. Lindome: Bricoleur Press.
- _____. (in press) "La arqueología contemporánea y la Crisis de los Misiles. I." In *Simposio Internacional "La Revolución Cubana. Génesis y Desarrollo Histórico"*, edited by T. Diez Acosta.
- Kemp, P. 1993. *Convoy! Drama in Arctic Waters*. London: Arms and Armour.
- Kennedy, R. F. 1969. *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: New American Library.
- Kopytoff, I. 1986. "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process." In *The Social Life of Things: Commoditise in Cultural Perspective*, edited by A. Appadurai, 64–91. Cambridge: Polity Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511819582.004>
- Lowenthal, D. 1985. *The Past is a Foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1998. *The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511523809>
- Marshall, Y. and C. Gosden, eds. 1999. "The Cultural Biography of Objects." Special issue, *World Archaeology* 39 (2).
- May, E. R. and P. D. Zelikow, eds. 1997. *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Norton: New York.

- Mola, R. 2014. "These Portable Runways helped Win the War in the Pacific." *Air & Space*. Available online: www.airspacemag.com/multimedia/these-portable-runways-helped-win-the-war-pacific-180951234
- Moschenska, G. and S. Dhanjal, eds. 2012. *Community Archaeology: Themes, Methods and Practices*. Oxford: Oxbow.
- Persson, M. 2014. *Minnen från vår samtid. Arkeologi, materialitet och samtidshistoria*. Gotarc Serie B 62. Gothenburg: Gothenburg University.
- Pyburn, K. A. 2009. "Practicing Archaeology: As If It Really Matters." *Public Archaeology* (8) 2–3: 161–175. <https://doi.org/10.1179/175355309X457204>
- Robinson, M. P. 1996. "Shampoo Archaeology: Towards a Participatory Action Research in Civil Society." *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 16 (1): 125–138.
- Sajión Sánchez, M. I. and P. F. Lazcano Hernández. 2010. *Autogestión comunitaria en la conservación del patrimonio, amenazado por la actividad del hombre, en la localidad de Aspiro*. San Cristóbal: Universidad de Pinar del Río and Centro Universitario Municipal San Cristóbal.
- Schofield, J. and W. D. Cocroft, eds. 2007. *A Fear-some Heritage: The Diverse Legacies of the Cold War*. Lanham, MD: Left Coast Press.
- Shanks, M. 1998. "The Life of an Artifact in Interpretive Archaeology." *Fennoscandia Archaeologica* 15: 15–42.
- Skeates, R., C. McDavid, and J. Carman, 2012. *The Oxford Handbook of Public Archaeology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199237821.001.0001>
- Smith, L. 2004. *Archaeological Theory and the Politics of Cultural Heritage*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203307991>
- _____. 2006. *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge.
- Stevenson, A. 1962 "Second Statement of October 25." US/UN Press Release 4074. In "U.N. Security Council Hears U.S. Charges of Soviet Military Buildup in Cuba," 737–740. *Bulletin of the Department of State* 47 (1220): 723–741.
- Weeks, A. L. 2004. *Russia's Life-Saver: Lend-Lease Aid to the U.S.S.R. in World War II*. Lanham, MD: Lexington.

Anders Gustafsson is Associate Professor at the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Gothenburg. Address for correspondence: Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg, Box 200, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden.

Javier Iglesias Camargo is a student at the University of Pinar del Río, "Hermanos Saiz Montes de Oca", Cuba. Address for correspondence: c/o Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg, Box 200, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden.

Håkan Karlsson is Full Professor at the Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg. Address for correspondence: Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg, Box 200, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden.

Gloria M. Miranda González is Curator at the Museo de Los Palacios, Cuba. Address for correspondence: c/o Department of Historical Studies, University of Gothenburg, Box 200, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden.