

## Introduction

In 2019, the Museum of History, Anthropology and Art of the University of Puerto Rico accepted the donation of an orphaned archaeological collection that suffered damages from Hurricane María in 2017. Windows were blown open by the 113-mph hurricane winds. Water damage from flooding, and pest damage occurred in the following months.

This case study contemplates the challenges in salvaging a collection impacted by a natural disaster and acknowledges its significance. The Castillo Indigenous Collection was owned by the Centro de Investigaciones Indígenas, Inc.: a private archaeological organization active from 1984 to 1992. Close to 40 boxes were recovered, that contained nearly 4,000 ceramic, stone, and bone artifactual remains in plastic bags with plastic wire twist ties. These contents were transferred to new corrugated plastic boxes and moved to the museum's facilities, along with four record books that reflect complex dynamics, such as a competitive collector's market and the constant movement of archaeological objects through exchange, family inheritance, or disappearing museums.



The above images show the Castillo Indigenous Collection in 2019, stored in cardboard boxes on the first floor of a two-story apartment building, two years after the hurricane. At the upper center, in blue, Dr. Yvonne Narganes.

## José Castillo Fernández (1925-2017)

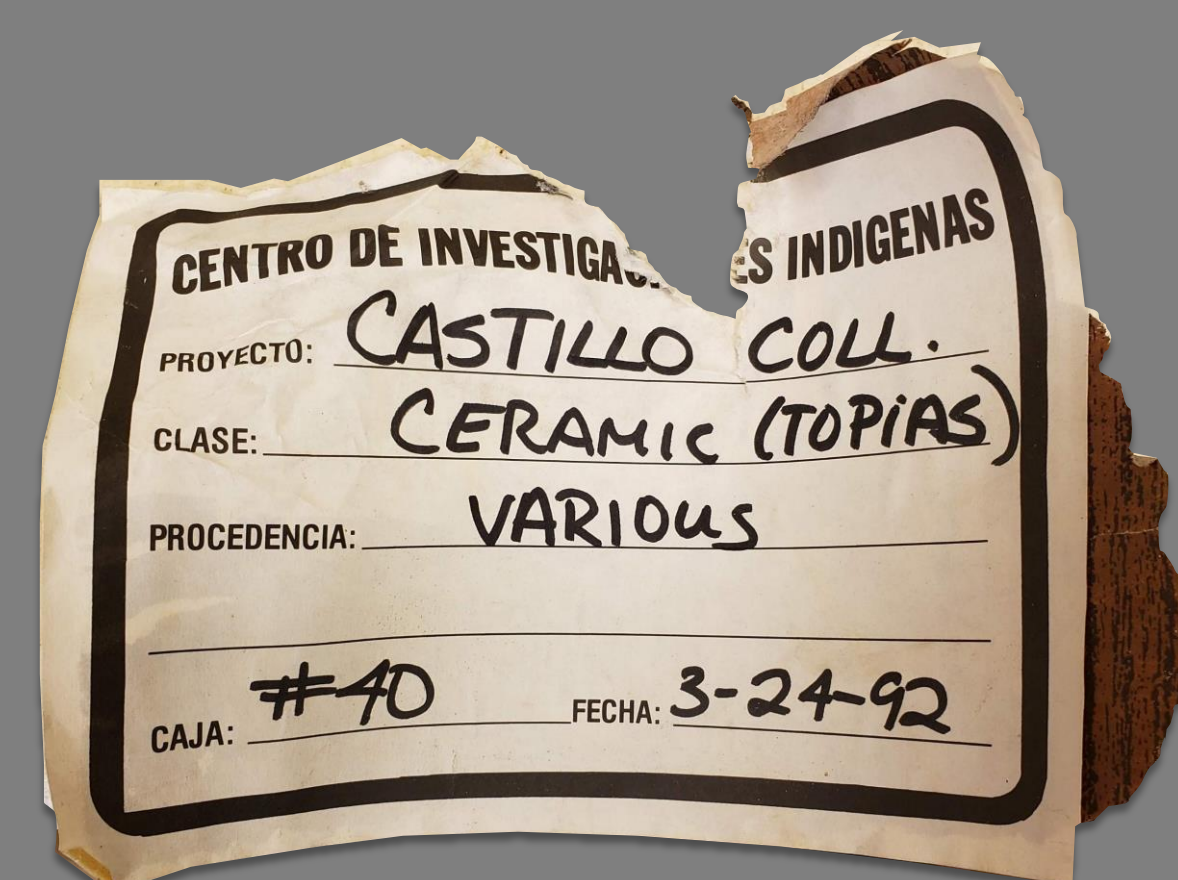
José Castillo Fernández was a Puerto Rican collector of pre-Colombian antiquities, active from 1960 to 1975. He owned the second-largest collection of aboriginal artifacts from the Hacienda Grande (110 AD and 630 AD) archaeological site in Loíza, on the island's northeastern coast. While researching the Castillo Indigenous Collection, a story unfolded: an extensive network of archaeological groups, active from the 1960's to the mid-eighties, that collaborated with the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture towards the preservation of archaeological resources.

José Castillo Fernández became an expert and dedicated lecturer of Puerto Rican prehistory, at a time when there were only three local archaeologists and no academic programs aimed at these studies in Puerto Rico. He founded the Archaeology Committee of the Puerto Rico Natural History Society, and the Castillo Indigenous Museum. A travelling museum, exhibited in schools and cultural centers throughout the island, that showed objects from the various aboriginal groups that inhabited Puerto Rico before the arrival of the Spanish colonists.

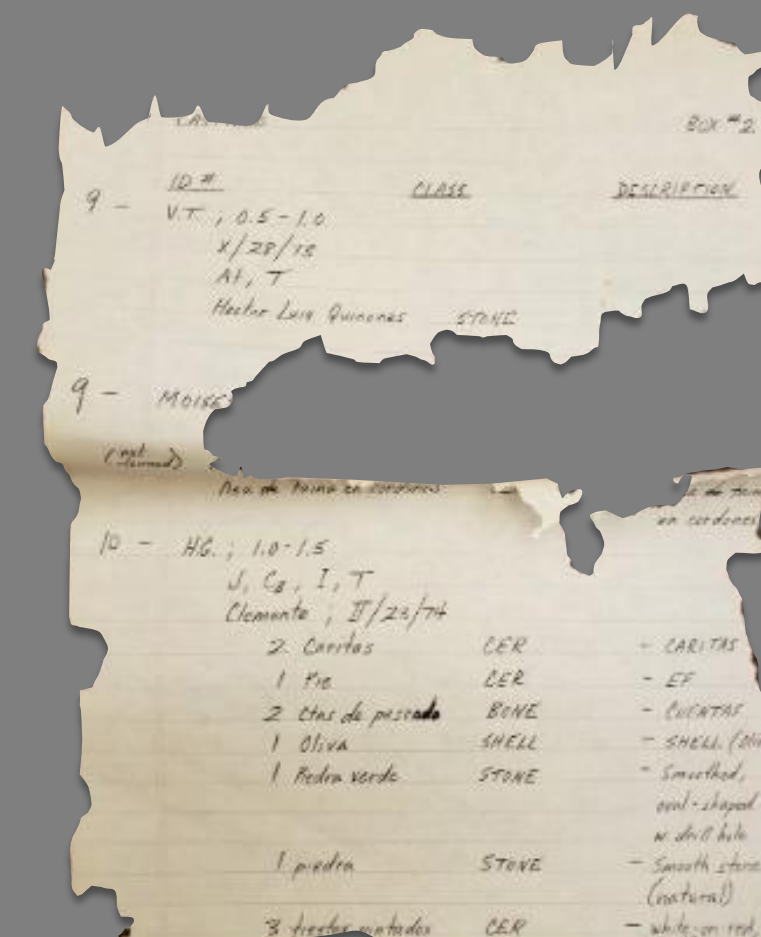
## Methodology

Nothing was known about the collection's provenance or history. Therefore, this narrative was achieved through various resources:

- ✓ Examination of the materials and archives recovered.
- ✓ A Microsoft Excel sheet with a description and condition of the object to produce quantitative data for conservation planning.
- ✓ Research conducted at the Council of Terrestrial Archaeology, the Office of Inactive Documents of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, and the General Archives Library of Puerto Rico.
- ✓ Interviews were done with four archaeologists, who were members of archaeological groups during their youth, and two collectors who donated to the Castillo Indigenous Museum.



Paper label adhered to exterior of box # 40 shows water damage.



Inventory list of box # 2 showing pest damage.

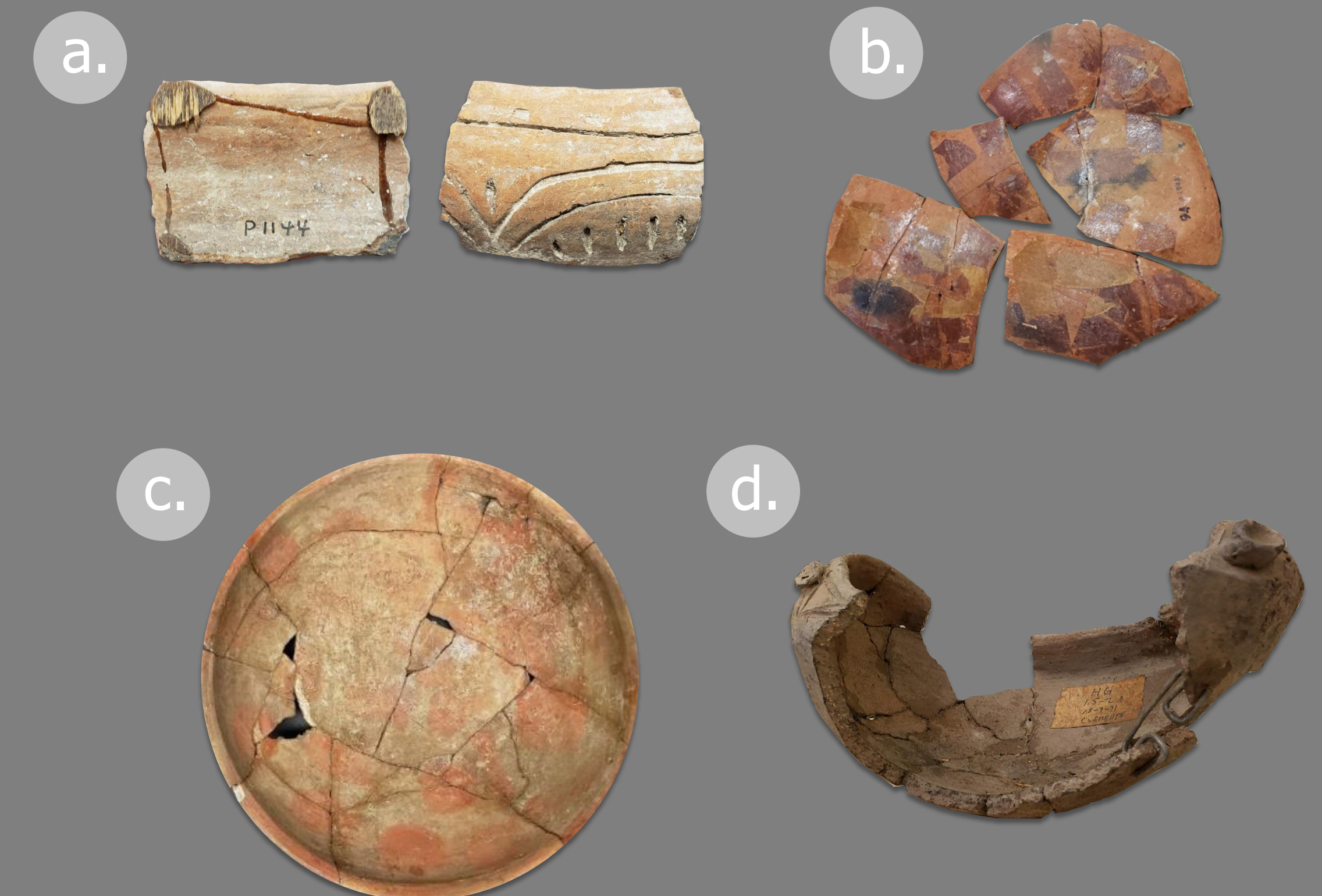


The bagged artifacts from the Castillo Indigenous Collection were transferred to new corrugated plastic boxes. If an inventory list was found, the contents recovered were compared with the box list.

This study identified over 20 archaeological groups of aficionados that created collections currently with uncertain conditions and whereabouts. Said collections are neglected by academia for their poor archaeological data. However, the majority are the only remaining evidence of aboriginal sites destroyed by recreational archaeology and/or urban development.

Collectors and enthusiasts still share the same methods of acquiring and restoring indigenous artifacts. Examination of the Castillo Indigenous Collection shows that certain standard practices have caused current conservation issues. The four main issues observed on archaeological objects:

- Mounting fragments for display on wooden boards.
- Masking tape for labeling and assembling artefacts.
- Restoration of ceramic vessels using epoxy adhesives.
- Adding incompatible materials as fills and support.



a. Santa Elena style (600 AD-1200 AD) ceramic vessel rim fragment shows adhesive and residue from the wooden backing board. b. Saladoid style (640 BC- 870 AD) vessel fragments show residue from tape carrier used for vessel assembly. c. Restored Monserrate style (600 AD-1200 AD) ceramic bowl shows adhesive staining. d. Reconstructed Taino (1200 AD-1500 AD) ceramic vessel with stains from adhesive. Pressure-sensitive tape used for provenance. Metal piece added as a fill and for support.

## Results, Observations and Achievements

In Puerto Rico, archaeological collecting is an active tradition that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. However, it was only in the 1950's that indigenous heritage became a part of the Puerto Rican cultural identity. Today, there are hundreds of private archaeological collections, resulting from the need for an archaeological repository on the island.

Most archaeological research in Puerto Rico has been done by amateur or vocational archaeologists, due to the need for locally trained professionals and academic programs. Hence, most collections lack provenance or archaeological context. In the 1970's, archaeological collecting became a trend. Different types of people discovered in amateur archaeology a way to study and connect with their aboriginal heritage; attempting to fill a historical void.

## Let's talk about it!

Sharing the untold story of the Castillo Indigenous Collection generates awareness about the significance and conservation needs of collections in Puerto Rico. Archaeologists need to work with communities to preserve collections instead of creating new collections. Hence, archaeologists and communities must engage in dialogues concerning past archaeological practices to inform these resources' present and future management. Ultimately, archaeological conservation strategies must aim to inform and involve communities in caring for their patrimonial heritage.

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dr. Yvonne Narganes Storde and Flavia Marichal Lugo, Archaeologist and Director of the Museum of History, Anthropology and Art of the University of Puerto Rico for their guidance. Interviewed archaeologists: Ivor Hernández, Dr. Ovidio Dávila, Dr. José Oliver, Dr. Miguel Rodríguez; and collector Fenelón Couvertier, for participating in this investigation. Marly Ferrer of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture and Marcos Nieves of the Archives Library of Puerto Rico for their assistance during research. Special thanks to the Foundation for Advancement in Conservation, the Getty Conservation Institute, and APOYOnline for providing funding for this poster presentation.