

A photograph of a dense forest with tall, slender trees and a thick layer of mist or fog. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking up at the trees. The bottom of the image is obscured by a curved, semi-transparent green band.

Amanda Jackson

Marronage in Colombia

Cartagena: Largest Slave Port in Spanish America

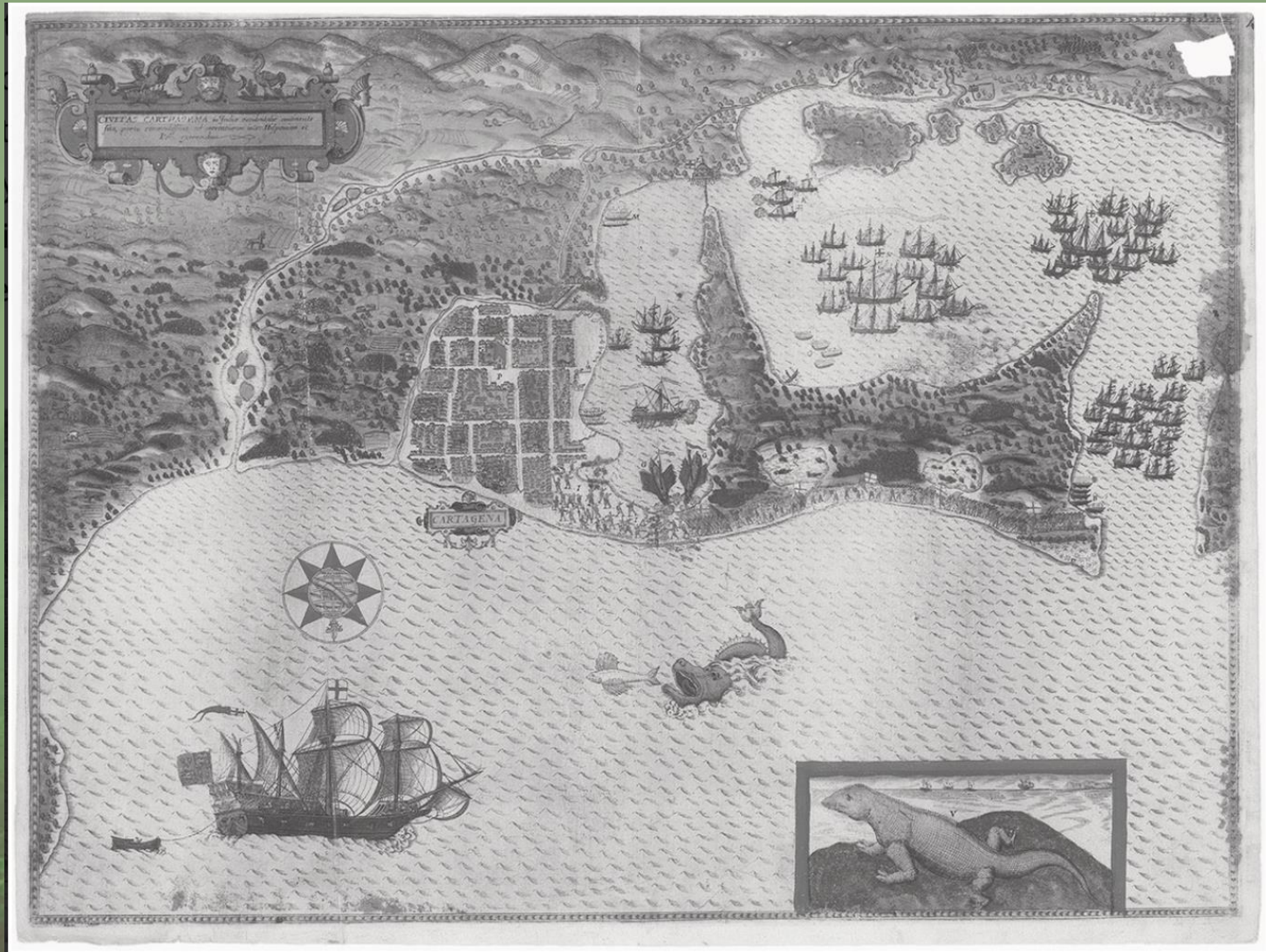
“African slaves and their racially-mixed, free or enslaved descendants numerically dominated the region from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.”

von Germeten, Nicole, “Paula de Eguiluz, Seventeenth-Century Puerto Rico, Cuba, and New Granada (Colombia),” in *As If She Were Free: A Collective Biography of Women and Emancipation in the Americas*, ed. Erica L. Ball, Tatiana Seijas, and Terri L. Snyder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

“In 1570 this city comprised approximately 800 Black slaves, with 400 more who, over the course of that year, were taken from nearby *palenques*. This number grew to 1,776 slaves between 1584 and 1595; from this last date until 1600, 15,445 more slaves disembarked in the port, a number that grew to 35,311 between 1604 and 1640.” (translation mine)

Castaño, Alen. “Palenques y Cimarronaje: Procesos de resistencia al sistema colonial esclavista en el Caribe Sabanero (Siglos XVI, XVII Y XVIII).” *Revista CS* 16 (2015): 61–86. <https://doi.org/10.18046/recs.i16.2024>.

Map of Cartagena, 1588



von Germeten, "Paula de Eguiluz," 2020.

Number of Slaves by Subregion in Cartagena

Population of
Enslaved Black People
in the Cartagena
Region (1687)

Subregion (left)
Number of Slaves (right)

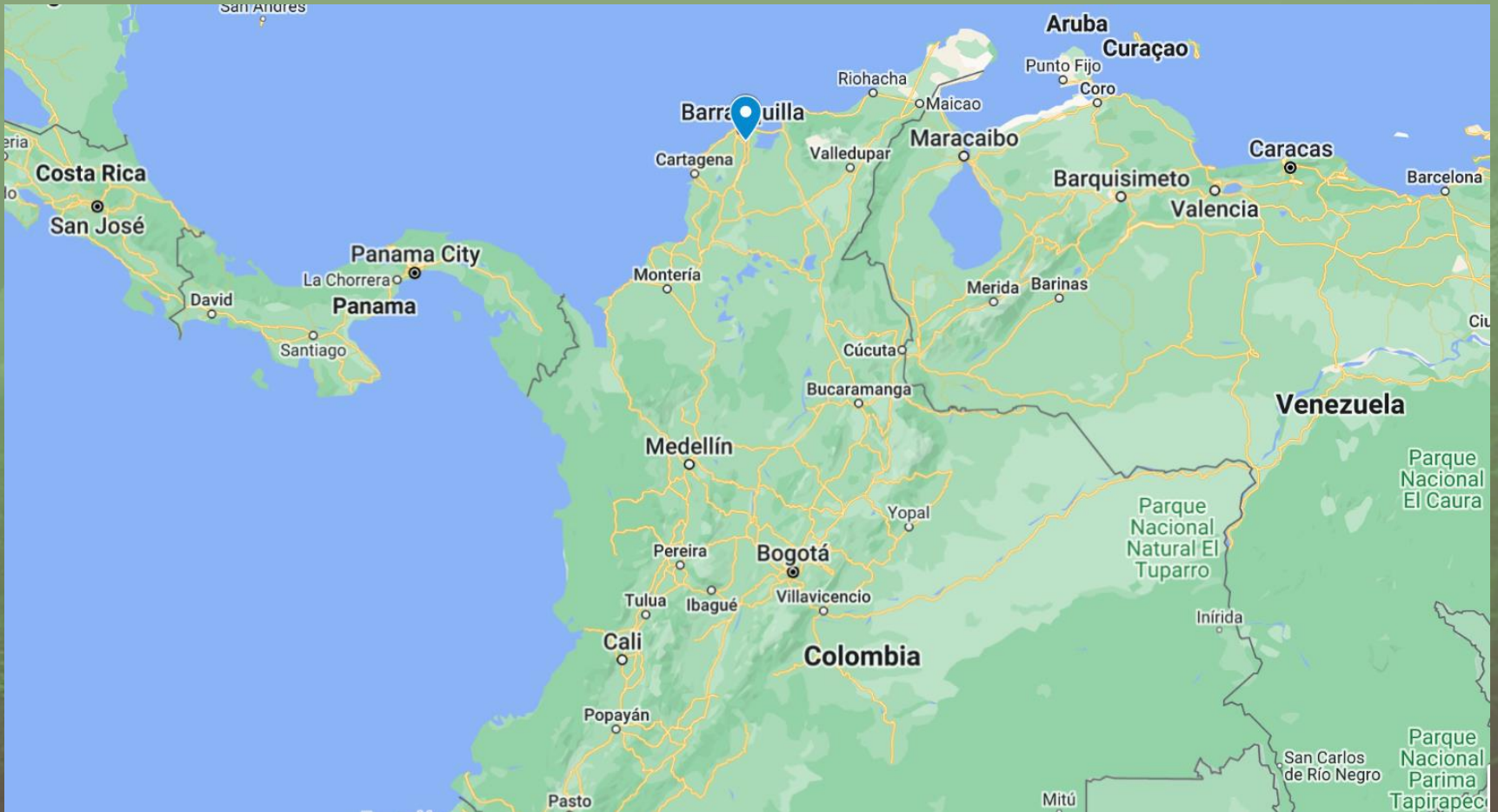
TABLA 1 Población de negros esclavizados en Cartagena (1687)	
Partido	No. de esclavos
Cartagena	1.952
Tierra Adentro	473
Barracas	359
Majates	197
Partido desde Turbaco, Arjona y Bahía	558
Partido desde Metumilla y María, desde Matura hasta la jurisdicción de Tolú	618
Villa de Tolú	230
Río de Sinú	230
Villa de San Benito	311
Mompox	628
Simití	160
Total	5.716

Fuente: Borrego Plá (1973)

Castaño, “Palenques y Cimarronaje, 2015.

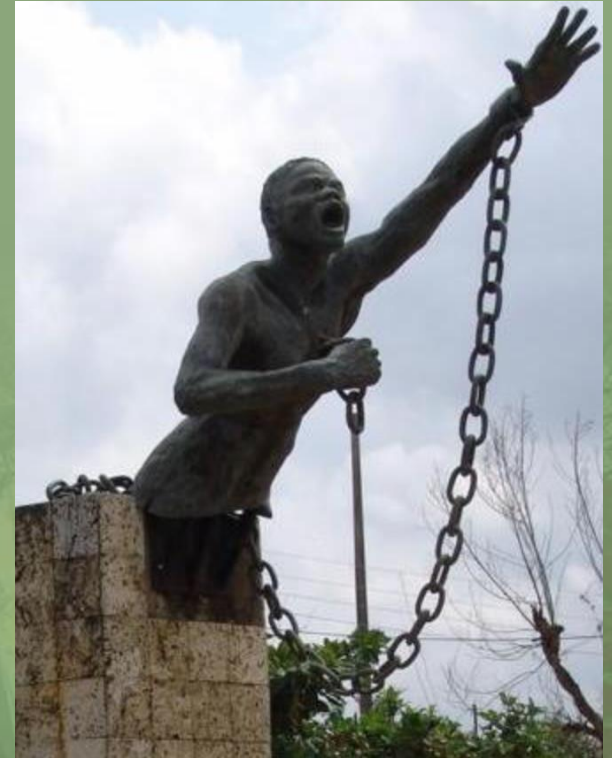
Malambo Ravine

Near modern-day Barranquilla, in a swamp surrounded by mountains



Malambo Maroon

- ❑ Leader: Domingo “Benkos” Biohó
- ❑ Formed by fugitive slaves from Cartagena and Santa Marta
- ❑ 1570: First mentioned in an official government report
- ❑ 1580 & 1603: Attacked by governor’s troops
- ❑ Community of more than 60 people
- ❑ Raided and set fire to nearby plantations and “Indian villages”



Statue of Benkos Biohó, San Basilio de Palenque

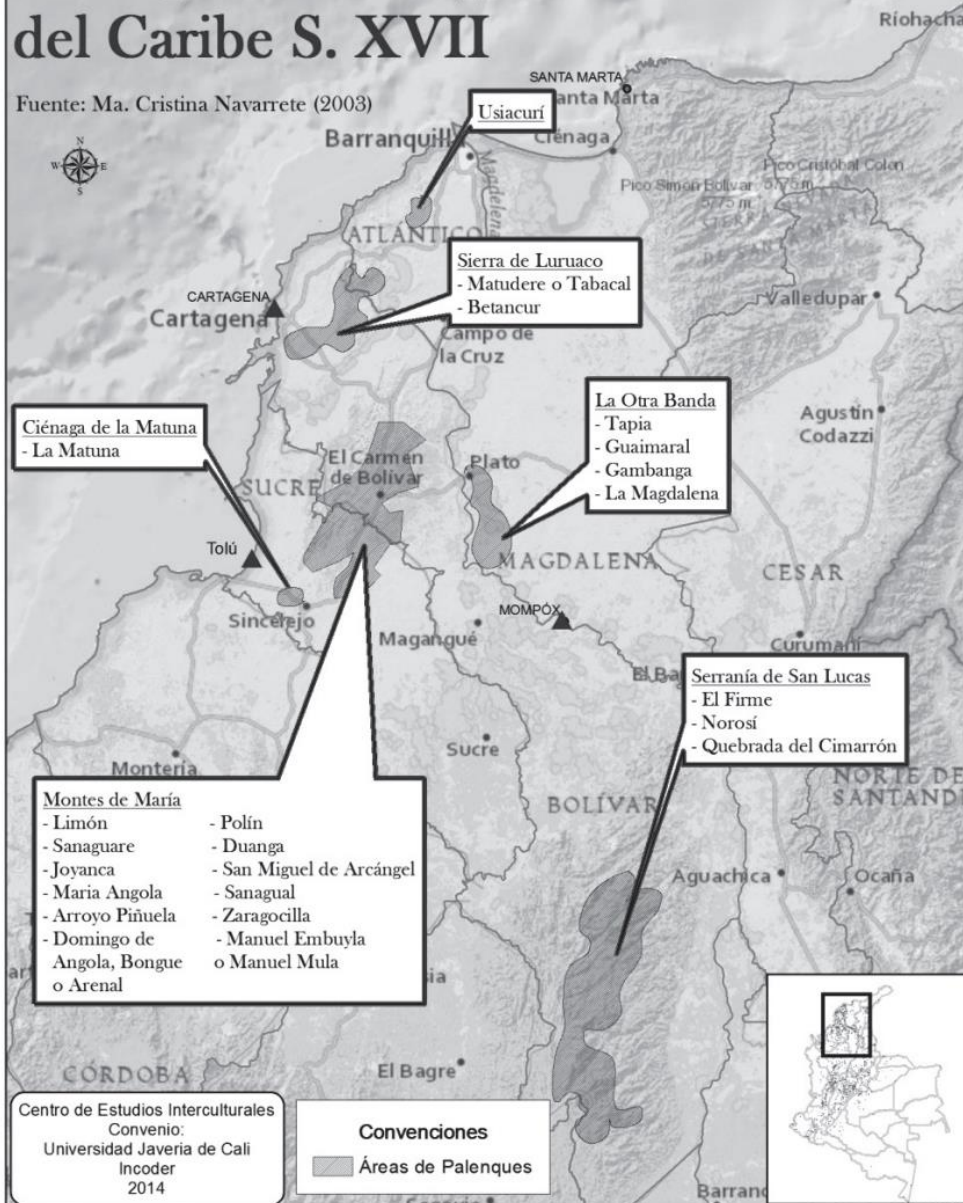
“Benkos Biohó, slave leader of an emancipation movement and emblematic Afro-Colombian figure.” Afrikhepri Foundation. September 24, 2022. <https://afrikhepri.org/en/benkos-bioho-slave-leader-of-a-demancipation-movement-and-emblematic-figure-afro-colombian/>.

Burset Flores, Luis Rafael. “Entre La Esclavitud y La Resistencia: El Negro Esclavo En El Caribe, 1590-1620.” *Caribbean Studies* 46, no. 2 (2018): 141–60. <https://doi.org/10.1353/crb.2018.0026>.

Castaño, “Palenques y cimarronaje,” 2015.

Principales Palenques del Caribe S. XVII

Fuente: Ma. Cristina Navarrete (2003)



Principal *palenques* of the Sabanero Caribbean in the 17th century

Castaño, “Palenques y cimarronaje,” 2015.

The María Mountains



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Maroons in the María Mountains

- ❑ 1622: The residents of Tolú are notified about a slave rebellion, whose members fled to the “highest part of the María Mountains”
- ❑ 1631: The governor of Cartagena learns of a *palenque* 20 leagues from the city in the “mountains and thick forests of the Indian village Usiacurí” (translation mine)
- ❑ 1634: The government of Cartagena acknowledges that maroons have existed 12 leagues from the city for the past 70 years
- ❑ Named *palenques*: San Miguel, Domingo Angola, Piolín, Sanguare, Limón.



Modern-day Sanguare (now a nature reserve)

“Rincon del Mar.” Tom Plan My Trip. 2022. <https://www.tomplanmytrip.com/travel-to-colombia/destinations-in-colombia/caribbean-west/rincon-del-mar/>.

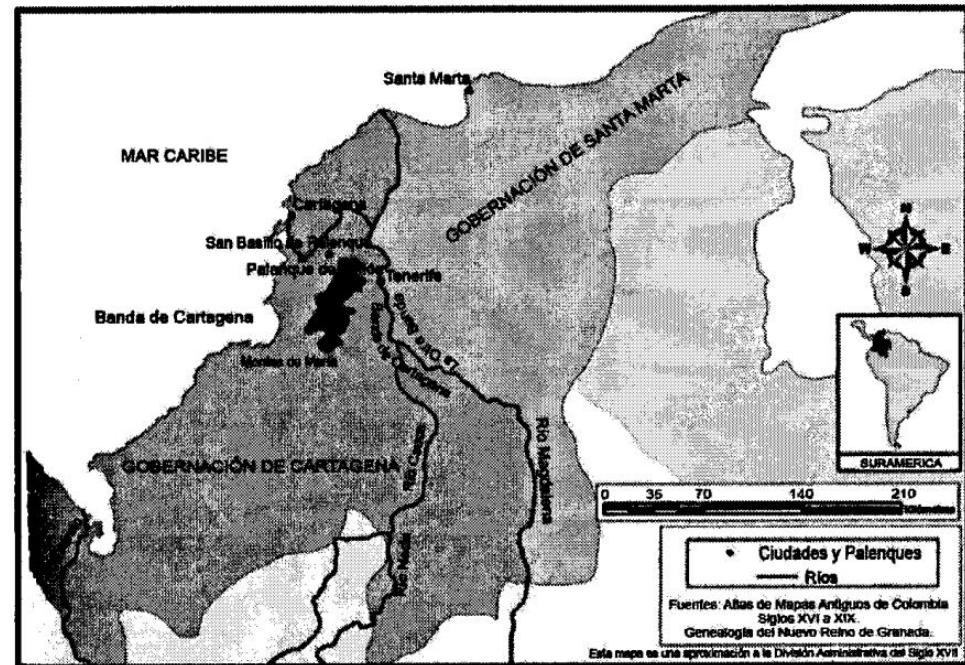
Castaño, “Palenques y cimarronaje,” 2015.

Limón

- ❑ Led by a woman known as “Queen Leonor”
- ❑ Between 200 and 500 residents
- ❑ Close relationship with slaves on nearby farms-exchange
- ❑ Farmed corn, wheat, beans, and sesame
- ❑ Destroyed by governor’s troops in December 1633

Navarrete, María Cristina, “El palenque de Limón (Cartagena de Indias, Siglo XVII): el imaginario del poder y sus jerarquías,” in *Vicisitudes negro africanas en iberoamérica: experiencias de investigación* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2011).

POSIBLE LOCALIZACIÓN DEL PALENQUE DE LIMÓN HASTA 1634



Possible location of Limón until 1634

En cuyo semejante, se tubo por imposible el conseguir
 Futo alguna ymas. Sundo los negros, mas de quientos
 que tomaban Armas, y los que se les podian agregar.
 mas de dos mill quitaban Armas, y lo en aquel
 partido sin mas de otros. de y mill que ay en este terro-
 torio que conodamente, hanan de quientos, de este
 que ha querido Dto. Saboyes. esta Brumada por
 que ha mandado hecho capay de la disposicion de las
 Tierra y aguelas, los puros y Redivada. Con
 gubnientos. hombres, bagulanos encomendando la obra
 a personas. de entera satisfacion suyas acometidos
 los palenques, y otros, y muertos, mucha cantidad
 y se han hecho, en ellos, exemplares, Castigos En
 que se este, que ha go. en este proposito, para lo que
 no lo de adelante, Como R. M. de. ma. en particular.
 sera y formaldo, de los auto. Cauados, que remito
 a do logual. Se ha ondo, sin que se ayatocado, ni
 gastado. Cosa alguna, del real haer. porque pro
 puesto el caso, Con los del gobierno haze duntar. por
 bia de Donatillo cynteros, que cada uno, en el nombre
 de Cantidad que se ha en uaria nombrada, y otros
 de los mismos Capitulares, que Con la biduria, Genda
 y comunicacion de todos, se fue executando, lo que
 Combimies, que es el estado, en que se queda. De
 que de lo Resfido, haze Recoger toda la gente del
 guerra y de la guerra, y de la guerra, y de la guerra
 que los negros, que se ocupan tan queddo, por la

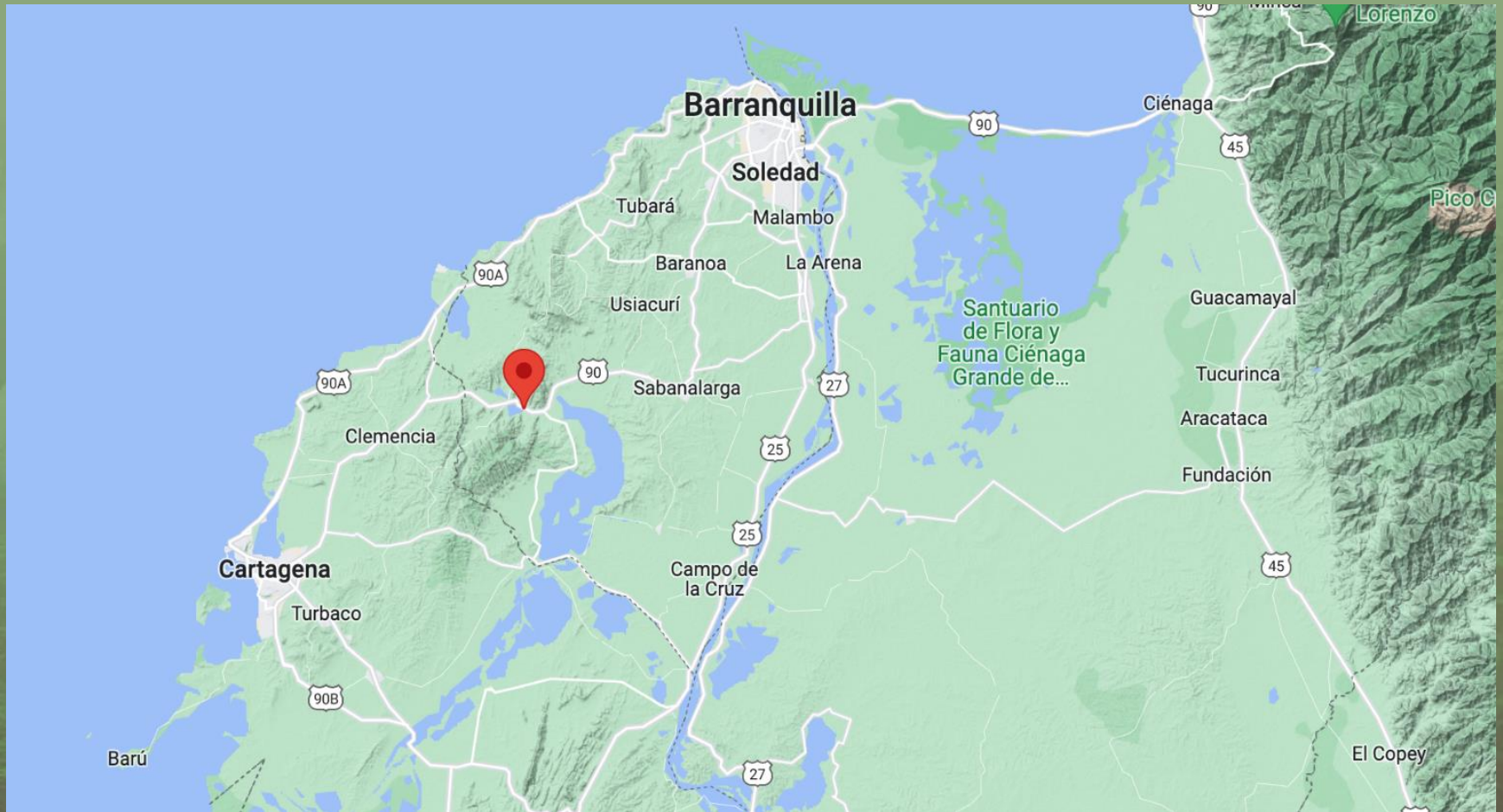
Excerpt from a letter written by
 the governor of Cartagena
 about the destruction of Limón
 (found in PARES database):

“To my complete satisfaction,
 the *palenques* were attacked
 and many were imprisoned and
 died and they have been made
 examples...” (translation mine)

“Francisco de Murga: cimarrones de Limón
 Polín y Zanaguare.”

Archivo General de Indias, Patronato, 234, R.7.
[http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/126365?nm.](http://pares.mcu.es/ParesBusquedas20/catalogo/show/126365?nm)

The Luruaco Mountains



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Maroons in the Luruaco Mountains

- ❑ Matudere and Betancur: comprised solely of “creoles” (slaves born on the continent)
- ❑ Matudere
 - ❑ Visited by Franciscan Friar in 1693, had an “adequate” church
 - ❑ 1693: “warriors from Matudere ambushed and defeated a Spanish force of some sixty men sent out against them, appropriated their weapons, and sent the commander’s testicles wrapped in a cloth (as a sort of amulet), back to the governor in Cartagena”
 - ❑ Demographics of survivors of counter-raid: “twenty-eight Minas, nineteen Ararás, ten Congos, nine Luangos, five Angolas, three Popos, three Yolofes, two Caravalíes, one Bran, one Goyo, and at least one Biáfara”

Juana

- ❑ Founder and “vice-queen” of Matudere
- ❑ Led community for two decades
- ❑ Imprisoned, sentenced to 200 lashes, and returned to slavery in 1693 (age ~60)
- ❑ Governor commissioned a portrait of her after her imprisonment



Wills, Matthew. “Two Women of the African Slave Resistance.” JSTOR Daily. August 25, 2017. <https://daily.jstor.org/the-women-of-the-african-slave-resistance/>.

Landers, “Founding Mothers,” 2013.

Drawing of enslaved women: Brazil, 1830s

The San Lucas Mountains



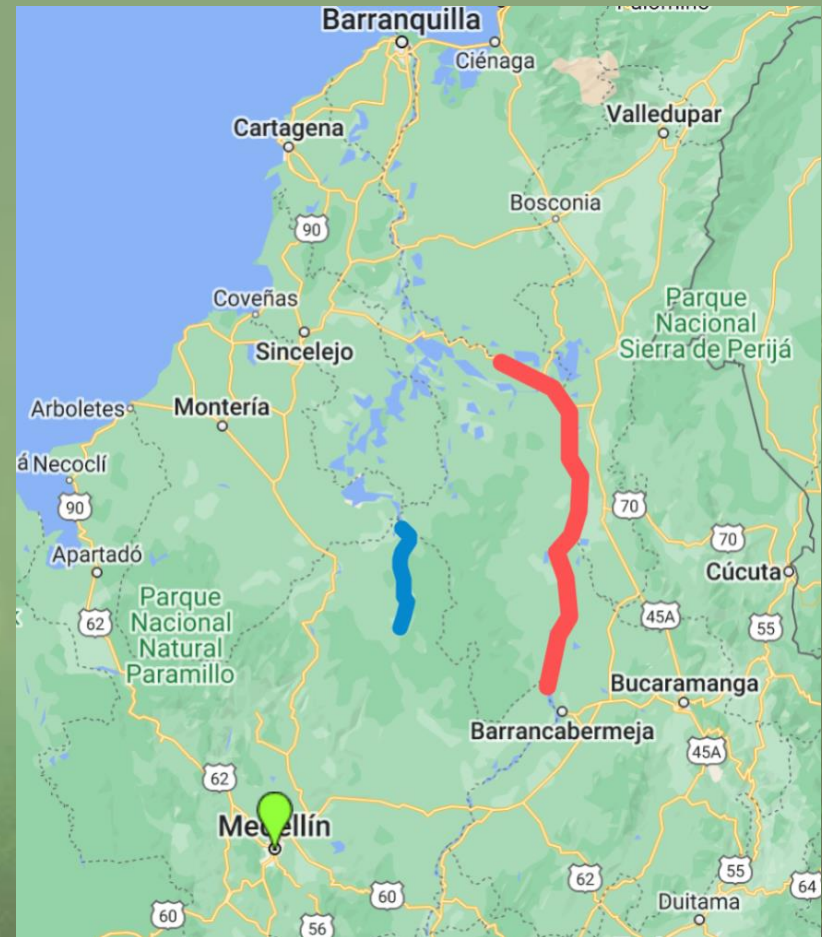
Made with Google Maps

Maroons in the San Lucas Mountains

- ❑ Named *palenques*: Norosí, Arenal, San Bartolomé de Buenavista
- ❑ Located between the Magdalena and Nechí rivers
- ❑ “The principle population characteristic of these settlements was the presence of Black maroons, slaves, and a few whites. In this rainforested and mountainous area, a zone of mobility, refuge, and resistance for Black slaves was consolidated through the construction of *palenques* opposite the farms and mines located to the north of the Antioquia province.” (translation mine)

Locating the San Lucas Maroons

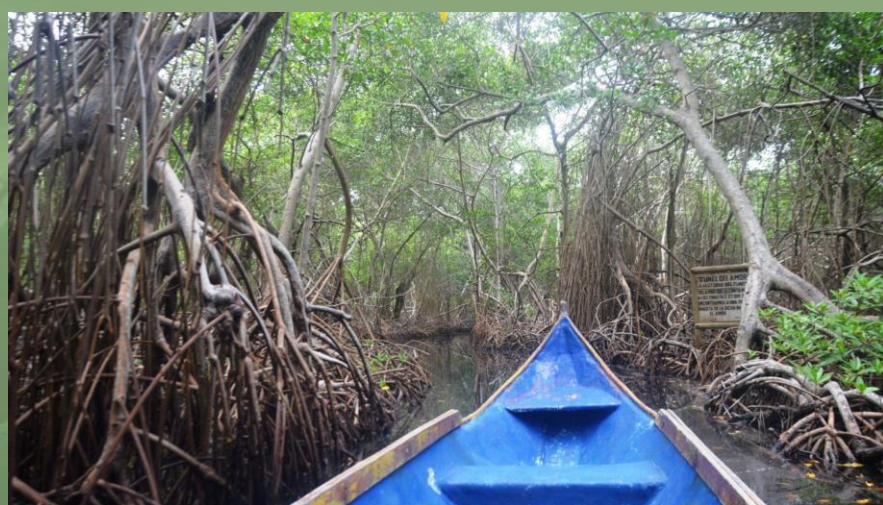
These maroons were located between the Nechí (blue) and Magdalena (red) rivers. They included slaves who escaped from the Antioquia province (green).



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Matuna Swamp

Maroon community established in “the thick forest of the Matuna Swamp, near the village of Tolú, twenty leagues from the city of Cartagena” (translation mine)

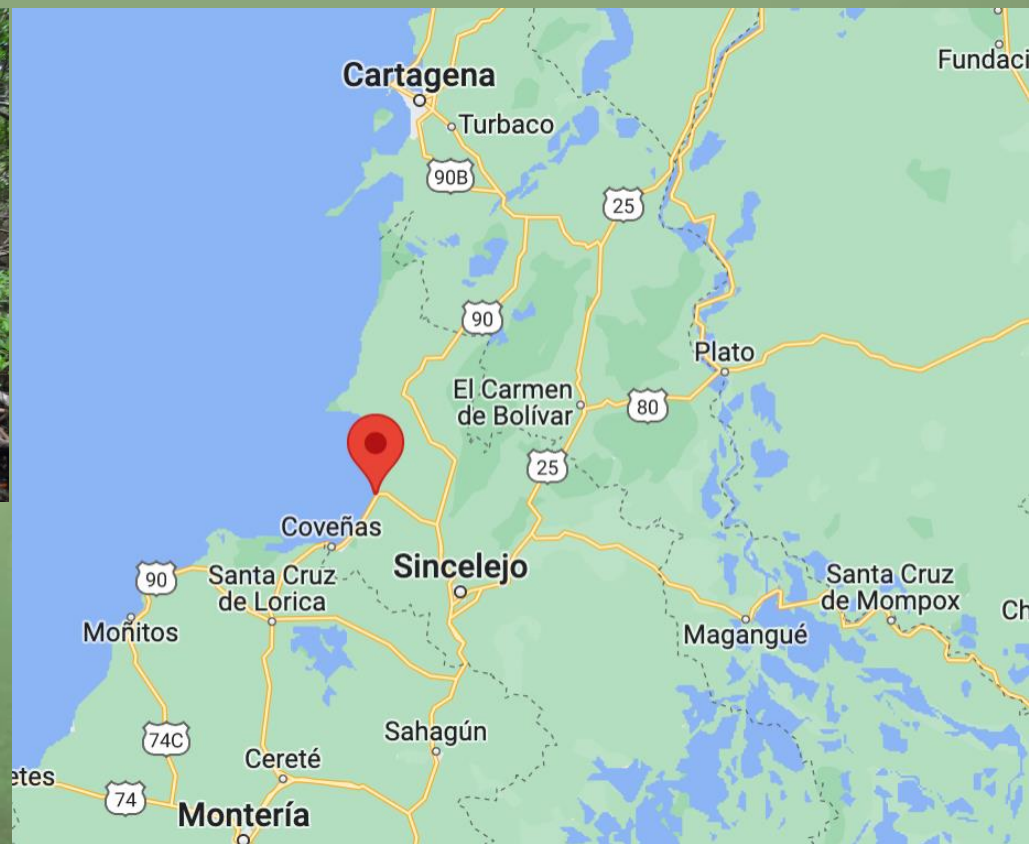


Modern-day Caimanera Swamp,
near Tolú

“Caimanera, la ciénaga donde ‘reman’ para que la especie no desaparezca.” El Heraldó Sucre. September 15, 2019.

<https://www.elheraldo.co/sucre/caimanera-la-cienaga-donde-reman-para-que-la-especie-no-desaparezca-665438>

Castaño, “Palenques y cimarronaje,” 2015.

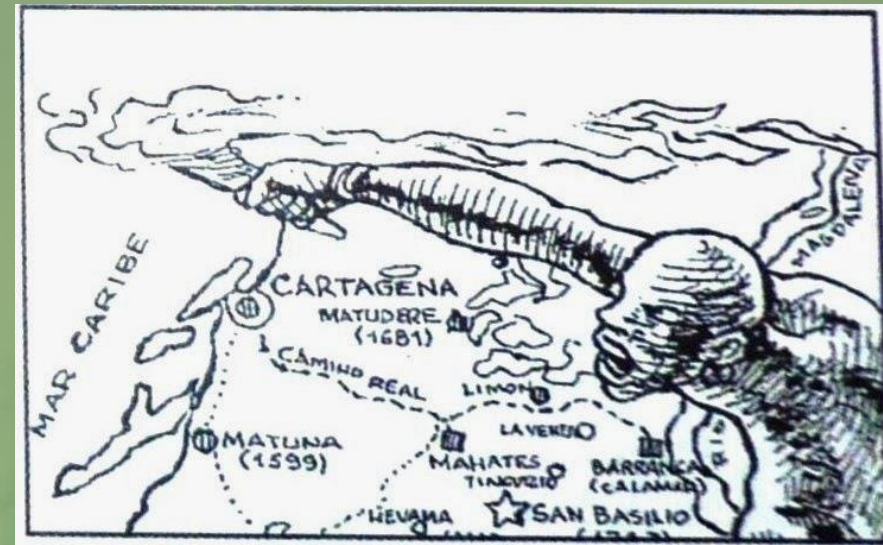


Tolú

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Matuna *Palenque* Timeline

- ❑ Early *palenque* in the Cartagena region, used as a model later
- ❑ 1599 or 1600- Benkos Biohó and his wife lead an uprising in Cartagena and found a settlement in the swamp (initial population 30)
- ❑ 1605- an attempted attack on the *palenque* by the governments of Cartagena and Tolú fails
- ❑ 1605- Benkos Biohó is officially recognized as the leader of the region



Arias Escobar, Felipe. Twitter Post.
March 14, 2021. 2:02 PM.
<https://twitter.com/Feloarias/status/1371174878590742541>.

Castaño, “Palenques y cimarronaje,” 2015.

The Magdalena River

“During the colonial period, the Magdalena River was the axis of territorial, commercial, and social configuration in the interior of the old governance of Cartagena; it was through the river that the principal city of the province developed numerous commercial activities” (translation mine)



Castaño, “Palenques y cimarronaje,” 2015.

Alexrk2, *Map of Magdalena River and its drainage basin*. Map. Wikipedia. January, 2010.
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rio_Magdalena_map.png

Banks of the Magdalena

- ❑ Disputed claims on this territory by the Cartagena and Santa Marta districts
- ❑ Left bank:
 - ❑ Named *palenques*: Duanga, Manuel Embuyla
- ❑ Right bank (also known as “the other bank”)
 - ❑ Named *palenques*: Tapia, Guaimaral, Gambanga, La Magdalena
 - ❑ Often formed by those fleeing the destruction of other *palenques*

“Magdalena River.” International Rivers.
<https://archive.internationalrivers.org/campaigns/magdalena-river>.

Castaño, “Palenques y cimarronaje,” 2015.



Marronage Near the Ecuadorian Border



The Patía Valley
Made with Google Maps

El Castigo

- ❑ “Perhaps the largest *palenque* formed in the Pacific Lowlands was El Castigo, in the foothills of the Western Cordillera between Barbacoas and the upper Patía valley”
- ❑ Established between 1635 and 1726
- ❑ By 1732 was made up of two settlements: Nachao (pop. 200) and Nalgua (pop. 100)
- ❑ Formally recognized by Spanish government and church
- ❑ Had trade relations with slaves and other free Black communities in the Patía Valley

Lane, Kris and Mario Diego Romero. “Miners & Maroons: Freedom on the Pacific Coast of Colombia and Ecuador.” Cultural Survival. April 28, 2010. <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/miners-maroons-freedom-pacific-coast-colombia-and-ecuador>.

The Cauca Valley



TUBS, *Valle del Cauca in Colombia (mainland)*. Map. Wikipedia. November 16, 2011. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Valle_del_Cauca_in_Colombia_\(mainland\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Valle_del_Cauca_in_Colombia_(mainland).svg).

Sombrerillo

- ❑ “Free town” founded in the 18th century (pop. ~200)
- ❑ Many residents were free canoe polers on the Dagua River
- ❑ “Sombrerillo came to be recognized as a refuge for escaped slaves, especially those coming from Cauca Valley haciendas. Fugitives were said to be well-received and some moved westward toward Buenaventura to form similar communities at La Vibora, Triana, and Magdalena.”
- ❑ “filled with families of free blacks, Afro-Indians (zambas), mulattos, and a few white outsiders [i.e., merchants]”

Maroons on the Map



N: "Royal and new road
of the *simarronas*
(maroons)"



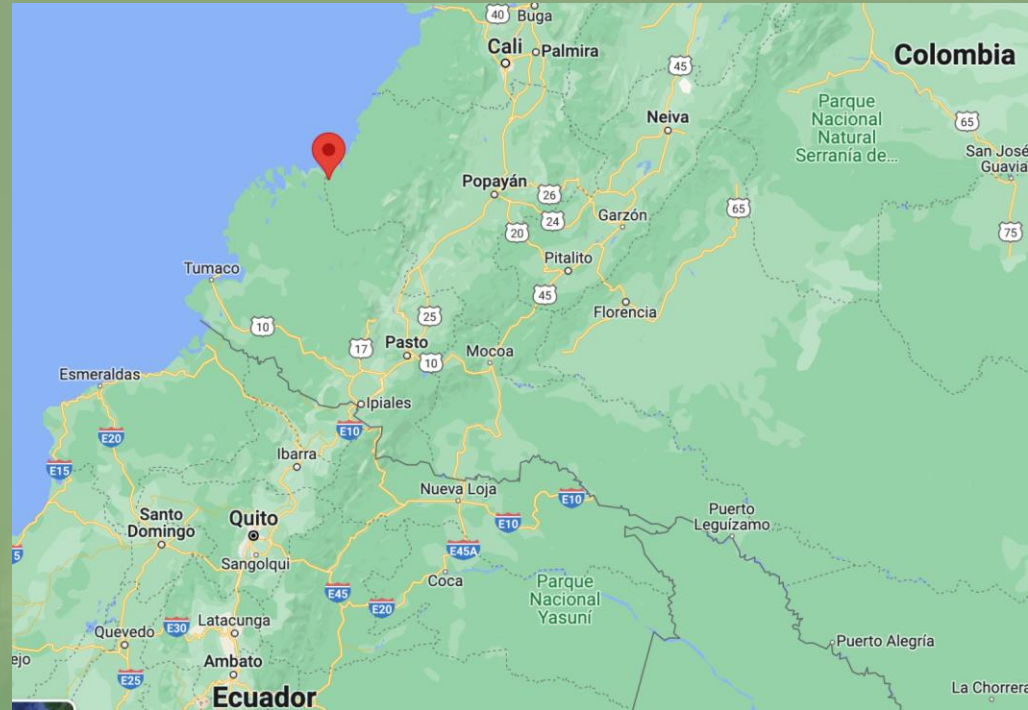
11: Site of Sombrerillo

12: Sombrerillo Ravine

Manuscript Map of Dagua River Region, Library of Congress, 1764.

Belén

- ❑ Free community accused of “corrupting” slaves working in nearby mines by 1766
- ❑ Near modern-day Guapí
- ❑ “the numerous [free people] in the area are the result of the pernicious intermixture of free and slave” (Spanish authority, 1766)



Made with Google Maps

Marronage Today

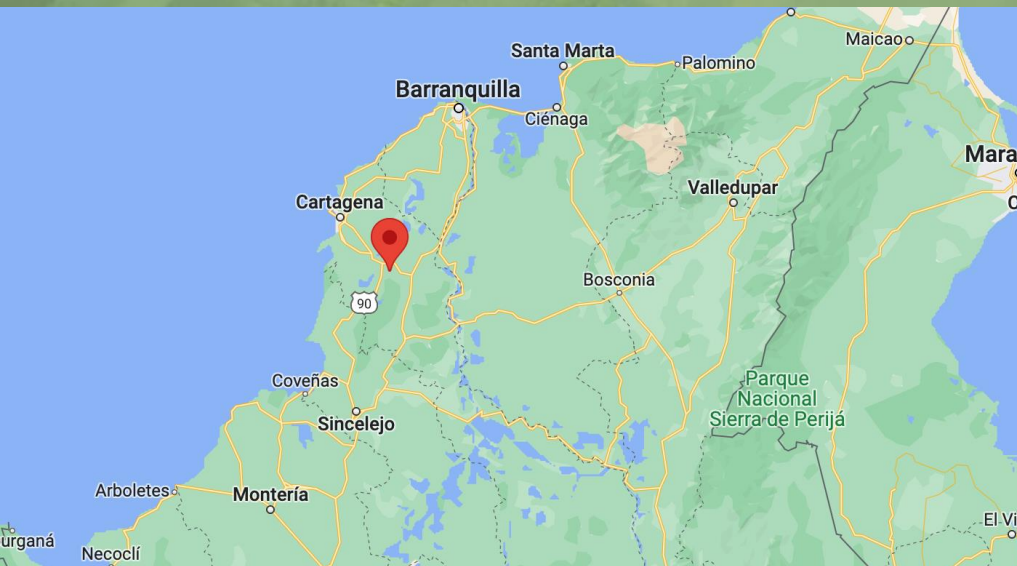


Bahía Málaga community: 2:55-16:20

Stand For Trees, “SONIC FOREST (English),” YouTube Video, 35:27, November 18, 2020.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMgbWswcj3U&ab_channel=StandForTrees.

San Basilio de Palenque

- ❑ Most well-known *palenque* in Colombia today
- ❑ Founded by Benkos Biohó in either 1603 or 1655-1674
- ❑ 1713: Recognized by Spanish government as free and autonomous area- known as “the first free territory of the Americas”
- ❑ Retains the cultural and linguistic traits of its origins: *lengua palenquera* (only Spanish-based creole with African grammatical structures), traditional medicine and funeral practices



Made with Google Maps

Camargo, Blanca and Alain Lawo-Sukam. “San Basilio de Palenque (Re)visited: African Heritage, Tourism, and Development in Colombia.” *Afro-Hispanic Review* 34, no. 1 (2015): 7-23.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26334887>.

Historical Population Data

Population Census in San Basilio de Palenque: Sex and Age (1777)

Age Range (left)
Men (middle)
Women (right)

TABLA 2 | Censo poblacional en San Basilio de Palenque: Sexo y Edad (1777)

Rango Edad	Hombres	Mujeres
5	41	64
10	62	51
15	38	41
20	40	42
25	25	21
30	15	27
35	28	16
40	10	14
45	17	15
50	7	2
60	4	8
70	13	9
80	2	0
90	4	0
Total	306	310

Fuente: Archivo Histórico Nacional Censos Varios. T.8 f.833r - 839v (Blanco, 1995)

Castaño, "Palenques y cimarronaje," 2015.

San Basilio de Palenque Today



Devia, Renzo. "San Basilio de Palenque." Hero Traveler.
[https://www.herotraveler.com/RenzoDevia/story/san_basilio_de_palenque.](https://www.herotraveler.com/RenzoDevia/story/san_basilio_de_palenque)



Conclusions

- ❑ Maroon communities in Colombia mainly arose in ravines, mountains, and swampy regions.
- ❑ Benkos Biohó had an enormous influence as a founder of several early maroons and an inspiration to later communities.
- ❑ *Palenques*, “free towns,” and enslaved workers on farms and in mines kept up a considerable amount of contact and trade throughout the 17th and 18th centuries.
- ❑ The legacy of marronage lives on in communities like Bahía Málaga and San Basilio de Palenque.