

**Paleoenvironmental Reconstruction of a Coastal Lagoon in Southwestern Dominican Republic**

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## Abstract

The study of lake sediments can provide valuable insights into lake history and climate variation throughout time. In-depth studies have been carried out at Lake Miragoane, Haiti and in high- and mid-elevation sites in the Dominican Republic, and a few other inland and coastal locations throughout the Caribbean; however, to date little has been published on prehistoric conditions in other coastal areas of Hispaniola. Laguna Alejandro (informally named by researchers) (~18.31°N, 71.03°W), on the southwest coast of the Dominican Republic, was examined to expand our knowledge of long-term environmental history in this region. This ~25 hectare lake is separated from the Caribbean Sea by a 100 m wide limestone ridge about 3–5 m tall. We recovered two consecutive cores (0–100 cm, 100–185.5 cm) close to the limestone barrier to investigate the potential for paleotempestology and other paleoenvironmental reconstructions. Three AMS <sup>14</sup>C dates indicate that the lake is ~1100 years in age. Sediment analyses revealed three major events that correlate with bands of uncharacteristic sediment composition and particle size at 74–77.5 cm, 150.5–153 cm, and 183.5–185.5 cm. Four distinct strata containing serpulids and several pockets of *Ammonia beccarii* provided insights on changes in salinity and the connections between the lagoon and the ocean. The upper deposit (74–77.5 cm, 620 ±60 YBP) contains gypsum and represents a period of increased salinity within the lake brought on by drought. The two lower bands are composed of sand consistent with nearby beach sands. The 150.5–153 cm band provides evidence of a hurricane landfall at 1022 ± 60 YBP. The combination of biological data from 165–183.5 cm and sediments within the 183.5–185.5 cm band provide evidence for salinity

fluctuations that indicate the closure of the lake. Sediments contained a variety of invertebrates that helped to document changes in lake chemistry through time. This study of Laguna Alejandro sediments documented lake history and provided information on recent climatic shifts in the region.

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# Table of Contents

	Page
Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures.....	vi
List of Tables.....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction and Statement of Purpose.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Paleoenvironmental Reconstruction of an Unnamed Coastal Lagoon in Southwestern Dominican Republic.....	7
Introduction.....	7
Methods.....	8
Site Description.....	8
Field Methods.....	9
Laboratory Methods.....	10
Results.....	12
Loss on Ignition and GeoTek core logger.....	12
Sediment Analysis.....	13
Biota.....	13
Discussion.....	14
Conclusions.....	21
Acknowledgements.....	22

## List of Figures

	Page
Figure 1.1. Location of L. Alejandro in the Dominican Republic.....	5
Figure 1.2 Map of L. Alejandro and surrounding features.....	6
Figure 2.1. Location of L. Alejandro in the Dominican Republic.....	27
Figure 2.2. Map of L. Alejandro and surrounding features.....	28
Figure 2.3. Line spectral images of the two sequential cores alongside the x-ray image for each core.....	29
Figure 2.4. Example of serpulid sampling for stable isotopes.....	30
Figure 2.5. Radiocarbon dating graph.....	31
Figure 2.6. Graph of loss on ignition, density and, fractional porosity data.....	32
Figure 2.7. Organic deposit at 175–176 cm.....	33
Figure 2.8. Sand deposits at 150.57 and 182cm.....	34
Figure 2.9. Gypsum and powder cement found from 74.5–77 cm.....	35
Figure 2.10 Samples of a selenite gypsum crystal.....	36
Figure 2.11. Serpulid growth within the core.....	37
Figure 2.12. Vertical growth of serpulids.....	38
Figure 2.13. Serpulids growing off other serpulid tubes.....	39
Figure 2.14: Graph of serpulid stable isotope analysis.....	40
Figure 2.15. <i>Ammonia Beccarii</i> .....	41
Figure 2.16. Graph of <i>A. Beccarii</i> abundance.....	42
Figure 2.17. Distinct layer of shell at 168 cm.....	43
Figure 2.18. Diagram of water balance inputs into the lagoon.....	44
Figure 2.19. Line spectral image with notation of key environmental events.....	45

**List of Tables**

Table 2.1: Radio Carbon Dating Results.....46

Table 2.2: XRD Results.....47