

Crossroads in the Caribbean: a site of encounter and exchange on Dominica

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Abstract

Dominica is the most mountainous of all the islands of the Lesser Antilles which forms the eastern arc of the Caribbean archipelago. It was the last island in the Caribbean to be colonized by Europeans. Its thick oceanic rain forests provided a refuge and ecological resources for the indigenous Carib people facing the Spanish, French, English and Dutch advance into the Caribbean during the sixteenth century. Dominica also provided a strategic location on which to cultivate and process raw materials for trading with the European ships en route to other parts of the Caribbean and American mainland. It is argued that the primary Carib product in this exchange was tobacco and that the traditionally established view of total resistance by 'warlike Caribs' to the European advance should be modified in the light of this trade. The recent discovery of a late Amerindian archaeological site at such an important maritime crossroad provides a unique opportunity to re-evaluate the relationship between Caribs and Europeans in the years immediately following contact and the effects which this had on Carib society.

Keywords

Caribbean; Dominica; Caribs.

Introduction

In March 1996 The House of Assembly of the small Caribbean nation of Dominica debated what it hoped was the final act of settlement of a grant of land to the descendants of the indigenous Carib people of the island (Act 28 1996). These were the people whom Christopher Columbus had met during his second voyage in 1493, and who, at the period of contact, occupied the islands of the Lesser Antilles which forms the eastern arc of the Caribbean archipelago. The mixed descendants of these original Carib islanders still occupy a 3,700 acre territory in the precipitous northeastern corner of Dominica which was granted to them by the British colonial authorities in 1903 (Bell 1902). The legislation before the House of Assembly sought to extend the boundaries of land belonging to the Caribs whose entire island had been seized, divided and sold by Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for the establishment of plantation agriculture. The

historical references contained in the debate confirmed that the extreme violence of the encounter, the genocide and dispossession associated with the early years of European contact with indigenous groups in the Caribbean, remains the lasting image of the encounter, the main themes of which are all too familiar to other indigenous groups across the Americas. Even in academic circles, little or no consideration has been given to the trading relationship which developed at a later period between the two groups on the islands, or of the ecological and agricultural information provided by the Caribs of the Lesser Antilles to seventeenth-century European settlers unfamiliar with the new natural environment into which they had adventured (Beckles 1992; Gordon 1983; Dookham 1981).

It is still possible to trace the effects of such exchange, both of goods and information on the islands of Dominica and St Vincent where the Caribs survived long enough to maintain some influence within the emergent Creole culture. Their relationship with Europeans, and the later West African arrivals, went through several distinct phases: the violent reaction at the initial encounter; resistance to actual colonization by the 'warlike Caribs'; the eventual absorption into the multi-ethnic Creole community. Exchange of material culture was, however, a continuous, even if fluctuating agent which operated concurrently throughout these periods of unsettled interaction. In spite of the dislocation and subsequent reordering of their inter-island trading systems, the Caribs maintained links with the dwindling number of other Carib settlements among the islands of the southern Lesser Antilles, first referred to by the Europeans as 'The Caribbees' and today as the Windward Islands.

The focus of this study is contact and exchange on Dominica during a period at the end of the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. It was a phase when Carib and European cordiality encouraged significant trading at a particular site on the island. Dominica's rugged volcanic terrain of 750 sq. km and the resistance of the people who occupied it defied rapid European settlement. The period of interaction on Dominica, between the Caribs and the vanguard of Europeans entering the region, lasted longer than anywhere else on the islands and provides an extended timeframe within which to study the characteristics of the indigenous encounter and exchange mechanisms in the Caribbean. Initial indications are that the archaeology associated with this area may complement the ethnography dealing with contact and exchange. It provides a starting point from which to analyse the methods and materials of exchange and the effects they had on Carib society.

Carib prehistory and identity

Exactly who these Caribs were needs first to be satisfactorily explained. Allaire (1977) among others, has pointed out the use of 'Carib' as a generic term; not all aborigines historically identified as 'Carib' are ethnically Island Carib. It was not what the 'Caribs' called themselves. Columbus had picked up the word, or something like it, from the Tainos on Hispaniola while on his first voyage in 1492. He applied it to the people whom he saw in the Lesser Antilles during his second voyage in 1493 (Colon 1992). They have variously been called *canima*, *canybal*, *caraibe*, *carebie*, *caribbee*, *charaibe* and *cribe* in other European languages (Hume and Whitehead 1992). The French missionary Raymond Breton,

visiting Dominica in 1642, recorded that the 'Caribs' name for themselves was Callinago in the 'men's language' and Calliponam in the 'women's language' (Breton 1665).

Archaeologists of this region, led by members of The International Association of Caribbean Archaeology, are still in the process of tracing the patterns of migration, trade and raiding routes which existed along the island arc prior to European intervention. In his sixty years of working in the region, Irving Rouse, the *éminence grise* of Caribbean archaeology, has had to make numerous revisions to his pre-columbian map of the region as new material has emerged (Rouse in Olsen 1974; Rouse 1948a, 1948b, 1986, 1992). Distinct styles of pottery, divided into successive ceramic series extending along the island chain from the mouth of the Orinoco river, have formed the basis of theories on regional systems and chronological frontiers of culture. Following the course of the South Equatorial Current as it curved up into the Caribbean, and aided by the close proximity of the islands to one another along the chain, various groups of mainland people moved from the Orinoco delta northwards. The first were the archaic Ortoiroid, setting out c. 6000 BP. The introduction of horticulture and ceramics into the islands is associated with the Saladoid c. AD 250 and the end of the pre-columbian era in the Lesser Antilles is associated with the Sauzoid series c. AD 1200 (Rouse 1992).

At present two broad models have been proposed to account for the archaeological, linguistic, historical and ethnographic information concerning the Island Caribs, known to be the last Amerindian group in the Lesser Antilles. The more traditionally established model, engrained into the consciousness of the entire population of the modern Caribbean through the education system over the last fifty years, can be called the 'Carib Invasion' model. It proposes that the 'warlike' Island Caribs were descended from mainland Caribs who, in the centuries shortly before European contact, had conquered some or all of the Lesser Antilles, attacking the earlier settlers, the 'peaceful Arawaks' or Taino, killing (and in some versions eating) the men and taking the women as their wives.

In the other, more recent 'Arawakan Continuity' model, the people now called the Island Caribs, who inhabited the Lesser Antilles in 1492, were descended from the same people as the Greater Antillian Taino (Wilson 1994). However, divergent trajectories of cultural change had made them relatively distinct between AD 500 and 1000. What was traditionally assumed to be the victorious Carib 'men's language', separate from the conquered Arawak 'women's language', is now considered to have been a pidgin trading language used when communicating with the Karina, mainland Caribs. The structure of the Island Carib language, which the early French missionaries had called 'Carib', has now been identified as Arawakan (Taylor 1977: 24–28). Such linguistic arguments have been used in support of the 'Arawak Continuity' model.

At present, both of these models suffer from inadequate evidence and insufficient chronological control to come to a firm conclusion. Island Carib origins, ethnic identity and affiliations, and identification of their ceramics are still unconfirmed. It is undoubtedly the most hotly contested issue in current Lesser Antillian archaeology. Taylor and Hoff (1980) mention various Carib legends that report a migration from the South American mainland into the islands under a variety of circumstances at unspecified times. Bullen and Bullen (1972), working on St Vincent and the Grenadines, associate the final Suazoid complex ceramics with Carib invaders. They report the first appearance of this complex c. AD 1200 and conclude that this represents a Carib invasion from the Guianas. Allaire

(1977) has examined the archaeological, ethnohistoric and linguistic evidence. He rejects the identification of the Suazoid complex with the Island Caribs and suggests two possible sub-models for their origins:

- 1 They may be Arawaks acculturated through extensive contact with mainland Caribs, or their presence may be the result of a late migration of Caribs from the Guianas, so late that it is not discernible in the archaeological record.
- 2 Davis and Goodwin (1988) believe that the identification of the Suazoid complex with the Island Caribs has neither been confirmed nor denied. Because the linguistic evidence is more consistent with culture-contact than with an invasion, Davis and Goodwin hold that the Island Caribs are probably Arawaks influenced by mainland Caribs.

In summarizing his assessment of both models, Wilson concludes that, whatever the eventual outcome, historical and archaeological evidence from the Lesser Antilles suggests that there was more cultural heterogeneity than had previously been recognized:

Although speculative, I feel it is more likely that the prehistoric and early historic Lesser Antilles contained a complex mosaic of ethnic groups which had considerable interaction with each other, the mainland and the Greater Antilles. As now, the individual islands and island groups would have become populous trading centres or isolated backwaters according to the abundance of their resources, the strength of their social and political ties with other centres, and their unique histories of colonisation and cultural change.

(Wilson 1994: 56)

The people whom the Europeans met in the Lesser Antilles and whom they called Caribs were in a geographic position which would have encouraged a heterogeneous outlook. Located halfway between the Classic Taino culture of the Greater Antilles (Rouse 1992) and the mainland tribes trading from the Orinoco delta in the south (Whitehead 1988) they were in a position to provide important trading and cultural links between the two zones. Even after contact this line of maritime trade extended to Amerindian partners on the coast of the mainland where, by 1510, Spanish slave raiding was already taking its toll (Beckles 1992). The Caribs possessed what appears to be an additional trading language (Breton 1665; Taylor 1977). They captured wives from neighbouring groups whom they incorporated into their kinship system (Whitehead 1988: 2; Cohen 1969). They also integrated males as *poitos* (sons-in-law) to maintain the group's communal strength for canoe and house building, agricultural land clearing, raids, fishing and trading voyages (Honychurch 1995b). Such continuous interaction stimulated a heterogeneous Carib identity which resulted in a diversity of responses to contact and meant that interaction was a key part of Carib cultural logics which was given a new thrust with the meeting of Europeans.

Columbian encounters

If, as it now appears, the pre-columbian Caribbean contained a complex mosaic of ethnic groups, the European arrival into the Lesser Antilles from the east added a new, albeit more dynamic, perspective to this mosaic which had already been coloured by influences

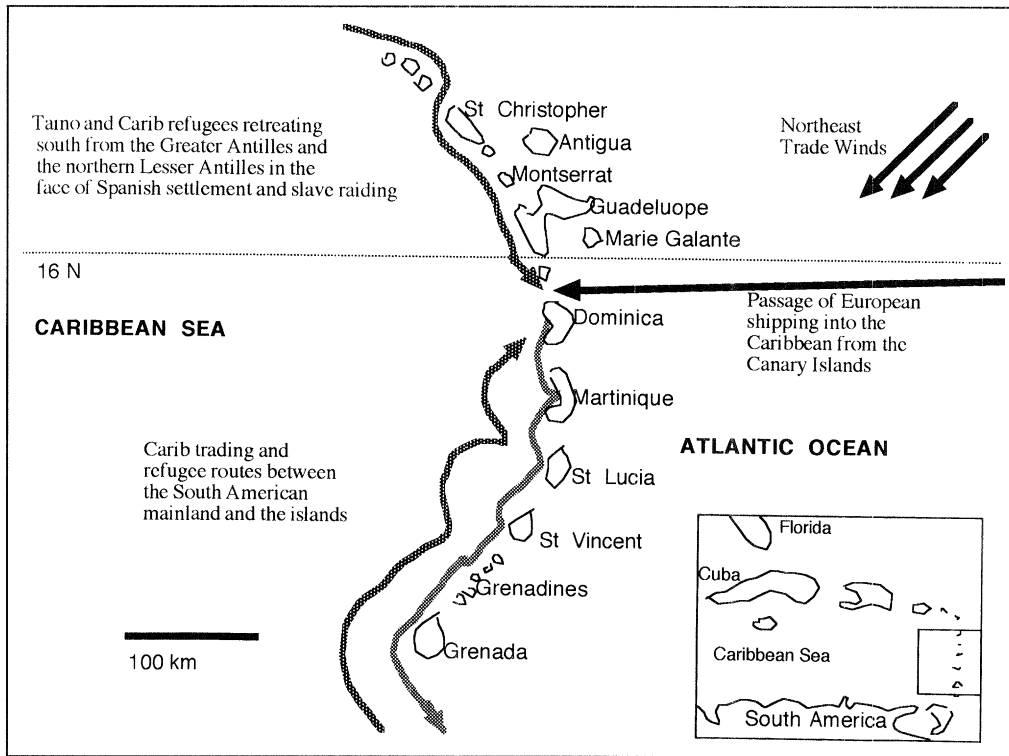


Figure 1 The major lines of cross-cultural contact and interaction among the islands of the Lesser Antilles during the sixteenth century were focused on the point of European entry into the Caribbean Sea by way of the Dominica–Guadeloupe passage and the Carib stronghold on Dominica.

from the Taino of the Greater Antilles in the north and from the mainland tribes trading or raiding from the south. Christopher Columbus arrived off the east coast of Dominica on 3 November 1493 after an easy and uneventful voyage from Cadiz via the Canary Islands. This efficient route into the Caribbean was followed continuously until steam replaced sail. Forced to navigate by latitude alone in the days before longitude was established, European merchant ships, warships and pirate ships all clustered along well-trafficked routes where they fell prey to one another (Sobel 1995). By catching the constant north-easterly Trade Winds off the Canaries and keeping roughly to the line of 16 degrees north latitude, vessels entered the Lesser Antilles through the channel between Dominica and Guadeloupe. From there they crossed the Caribbean Sea to Central American destinations or veered northwards, sailing in the lee of the arc of islands, towards the Spanish possessions in the Greater Antilles and Mexico (Fig. 1).

The cliff-bound windward coast of Dominica had afforded no anchorage for Columbus but the master of one caravel from his fleet of seventeen ships located a commodious bay on the island's leeward shore and reported seeing dwellings and people (Cohen 1969). Spanish captains who followed in the wake of Columbus began to make regular use of the



Figure 2 The natives meeting the ships. Th. de Bry.

bay as their first refreshment stop after the crossing. They found within its well protected harbour three rivers of excellent fresh water, hot mineral springs for the relief of ailing crew members and abundant forests skirting the shore. In 1535 the bay was declared a dividing point for the convoys of flotas and galleons on their outward bound voyage to Spanish colonies (Borome 1972). No settlement was effected, but as European rivalry in the region intensified, the bay, and the Caribs who inhabited it, were subject to increased visits by ships of all the contending maritime kingdoms.

This point of contact has been identified through the analysis of ethnographical accounts contained in the reports of ships' captains, missionaries and itinerant adventurers who used the the natural provisions afforded by the area to refresh themselves after lengthy transatlantic voyages. It is now called Prince Rupert Bay after one of its more famous English visitors. The French called it Grande Anse and a prominent mountain overlooking the bay is still called Morne Espagnol in the local Creole language – all linguistic indicators of the main protagonists who utilized the resources of the area. The majority of these encounters took place on the water, with Carib canoes coming alongside ships at anchor in the bay to barter their fruit, tobacco and processed cassava bread in exchange for European goods (Fig. 2).

The accumulated documentary accounts of the period of Carib–European engagement, although patchy, indicate several distinct phases and levels of negotiation in the relationship between the various cultural groups involved and therefore present a unique opportunity for reassessment of the encounter throughout the region. Spanish slave raiding from 1511, seeking forced labour for plantations in the Greater Antilles, soured Spanish–Carib relations for the rest of the century (Beckles 1992). The decline of Spanish control over the islands led to increased visits by French, English and Dutch ships from 1560 onwards. This was the period when most trading is recorded at Prince Rupert Bay. Relations remained cordial for the most part until French and English settlers began to take physical control of the neighbouring islands from 1625. This prompted violent reaction from the Caribs of Dominica who were at the same time being joined by Carib refugees fleeing colonization on the more accessible islands to the north. French missionary reports indicate that Prince Rupert Bay was inhabited by Caribs at least up until the 1640s, giving a post-contact occupation period of some 150 years (Breton 1665). By the time the first French settlers arrived on Dominica itself c. 1700, the Caribs had mostly retreated to the isolated east coast and their dependence on European trade goods was virtually total.

Encounters and exchanges

The process by which Carib dependency on European materials began to be established may best be studied during the late sixteenth century when trading relations between the two groups were at their most balanced. The Caribs were still in full possession of the island and controlled the means of raising and processing the produce for exchange. Studies of the accounts of trading, which will be referred to later, detail several of the objects imported, among them glass beads, knives, hatchets, saws, ‘copper jewels’ and brass pendants. This was matched among their clients by the rising demand for tobacco in Europe. The goods which the Caribs desired and depended on most in exchange for their tobacco were iron cutting tools.

‘None of the people we have met so far have iron’ writes Dr Chanca who sailed with Columbus through the Lesser and Greater Antilles on his second voyage. ‘They have quantities of tools such as hatchets and axes, made of stone, which is so beautifully worked that it is a wonder they have been able to make them without iron’ (Chanca 1969: 156). Within twenty years of Chanca’s visit in 1493, iron tools had become available in limited quantities to the Caribs and by the early seventeenth century had been appropriated into the canoe technology of the Windward Islands.

The dugout canoe, manufactured from trees in the island rain forests was, for the seafaring Caribs, their most valuable item of material culture. Its fabrication was dependent on the stone axe and shell gouge. Over 300 years later, the European axe, adze and hatchet which replaced the stone implements remain the prime tools for the manufacture of canoes. As objects of material culture, these tools are tangible evidence of the historical conditions which influenced the development of adaptive strategies among the Caribs. It was also significantly influenced by the receptiveness of the community to accept or adopt the products which historical circumstances provided.

It is apparent from the European maritime literature that iron axes were in common use among the Caribs by the seventeenth century. Indications of the period of iron axe introduction to Dominica, and of the other goods exchanged, are contained in narratives which provide the dates of trading and the details of goods traded. Carib possession of European tools, however, predates these accounts. The most detailed reports come from the late sixteenth century but it is clear from linguistic sources that such tools had been obtained from the Spanish or had filtered down through capture or exchange from the Spanish territories in the Greater Antilles at an even earlier date. Raids on Spanish settlements in Puerto Rico by the Caribs from Guadeloupe and Dominica are recorded to have occurred as early as 1515 and continued for much of that century (Southey 1827). Most accounts concentrate on the numbers of settlers and slaves killed or captured but some do mention the ‘plundering of houses’ (Southey 1827: 161). The stripping of ships wrecked on Dominica’s shores is also referred to in Spanish papers. From a homeward bound convoy, driven against the north coast in 1565, the Caribs ‘took for their use the iron, nails and slaves, and for their delight the immense treasure’ (Borome 1972: 69).

Further evidence of the Spanish origin of trade goods associated with the processing of timber is provided by the application of linguistic concepts of borrowing and loan translation. The clues to this begin with a brief but tantalizing observation on the Caribs’ use of language by the chaplain to George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland in 1598: ‘They speak some Spanish words’ (Purchase 1625: 52). Half a century later Father Raymond Breton compiled his *Dictionnaire caraibe-français* during his evangelical mission in Dominica from 1642 to 1648 (Breton 1665). The book has been analysed by Taylor, and several European loan words were gleaned from the lists. These were almost entirely of either French or Spanish origin and consisted for the most part of names for newly introduced animals, implements and weapons and contained few verbal derivatives (Taylor 1977). A search through these lists for the names of iron tools reveals that the sources of the Island Carib loan words for saw, scissors, cutlass, gun, bill hook, nails, iron, needle, knife are all Spanish.

Robert Davies’s account of Capt. Amias Preston’s voyage mentions a stop at Dominica in May 1595 where Caribs came to the ships in canoes ‘and brought in them plantans, pinos and potatoes, and trucked with us for hatchets, knives and small headstones’ (Andrews 1959: 383). An account of Drake and Hawkins’ visit later that same year says that Dominica ‘groweth great store of Tobacco : where most of our English and French men barter knives, hatchets, sawes and such like yron tooles in truck of Tobacco’ (Andrews 1972: 228). During the winter months of 1607, George Percy sailed in and recounts that

many Savage Indians . . . came to our ships with their Canoas, bringing us many kinds of sundry fruites as Pines, Potatoes, Plantons, Tabacco, and other fruits, and Roane Cloth abundance, which they had gotten out of certaine Spanish ships that were cast away upon that Island. We gave them Knives, Hatchets for exchange which they esteeme much, wee also gave them Beades, Copper Jewels which they hang through their nostrils, eares, and lips

(Barbour 1969: 129)

The effects of these new objects of material culture on language, the patterns of exchange and the technology associated with the all-important canoe identify this period

of the late sixteenth century as one of significant cultural reordering among the Island Caribs. It was not so much the use of the axe itself which changed, as much as the cultural network associated with it that became disengaged. It was a network which had involved and sustained relationships within the island groups and those beyond them. While the islanders' internal systems of reciprocity had been developed to ensure continuity in social terms as well as trade, the European market-dominated exchange in this case became blatantly exploitative.

Yet, as was found in North America, 'contrary to the popular impression that Indians traded mostly for gimracks and baubles, traders soon discovered that the goods most in demand were those adapted to practical use in the Indian way of living' (Jennings 1976: 86). Energies were bent towards the means required for obtaining those goods. In the North American fur trade, the Indians' new circumstances required them to procure great surpluses of pelts for exchange. In short they added commercial hunting to subsistence hunting (Jennings 1976; Wolf 1990). In the Windward Islands, the increasing references in the late sixteenth-century texts to moderate but regular quantities of tobacco being traded with French and British ships, would indicate a similar shift, in that Caribs appeared to be adding 'commercial' tobacco farming to subsistence farming. Alternatively they could also have been redirecting their surplus from internal exchange networks to external ones. It is however questionable whether internal systems ever required such quantities. Whatever the source of supply, it appears that the Caribs had some significant influence on external tobacco trading from the 1590s to at least until the first European settlements were established in the islands in 1625. By this time the demand for tobacco in Europe exceeded that which could be supplied by casual trading arrangements with the natives of the islands. Decline in Amerindian populations implied correlated decline in cultivation and consumption of trade goods, but Caribs, at certain key locations around refreshment stops such as the Indian River, manned tobacco markets so to speak until the settlement of English and French colonial populations eventually seized the land on which to conduct the business of tobacco farming and export themselves.

The Indian River site

Archaeological analysis of one such key location would shed further light on this period of encounter and exchange. By matching the descriptions of these encounters at Prince Rupert Bay to existing landmarks, it has been possible to close in on the probable site of the main Carib settlement occupied during the most active period of Carib-European interaction at the end of the sixteenth century. Negotiation over the procurement of fresh water, such as an incident recorded by Francis Drake in 1596, took place at the mouth of the fast-flowing Picard River (Hakluyt 1927). Half a kilometre north is another, larger, meandering river which was labelled on the earliest English map as the Indian River (Simpson 1765). Hot mineral springs which still exist on the land between these two rivers are also repeatedly mentioned in the texts. Sir Anthony Shirley calling in 1596 and George Clifford, Earl of Cumberland, in 1598 both arrived with sick crews who, with the advice and the assistance of the Caribs, benefited from soaking in these springs (Purchase 1905). Cumberland reports that two of his captains rowed up what is evidently the Indian River

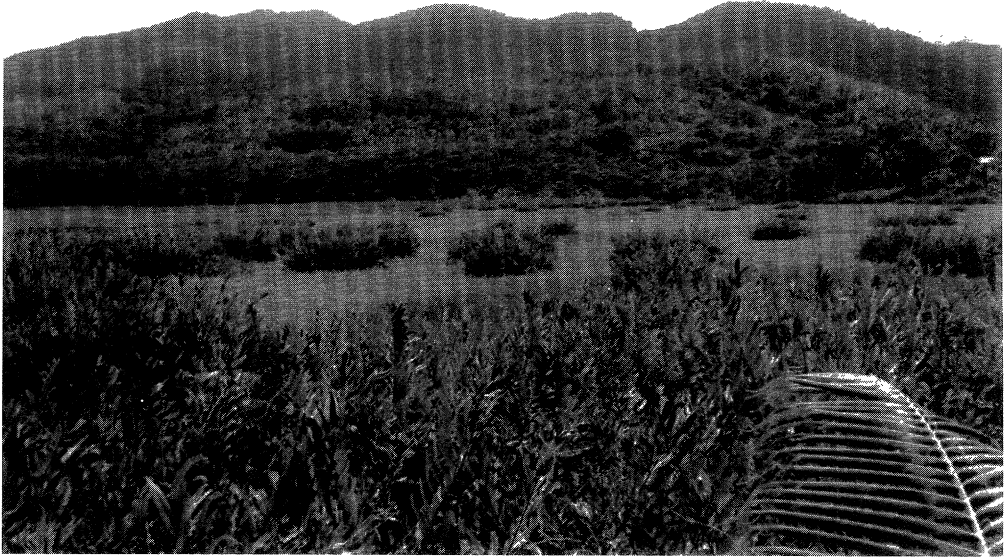


Plate 1 The swamp in the estuary of the Indian River on the northwestern coast of Dominica. This was once a large body of water but was silted up because of deforestation during the colonial era. The late Amerindian site is located on the distant shore at the right of the picture.

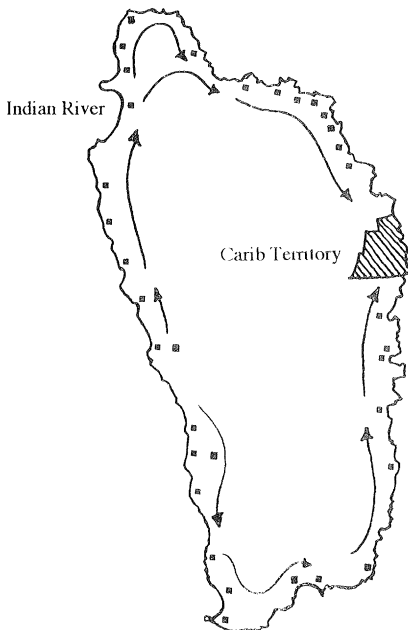


Figure 3 Pre-columbian settlement sites on Dominica. Arrows indicate the movement of Caribs during colonial times towards the most isolated corner of the island where the British established the Carib Reserve in 1903, now called the Carib Territory.

to the main Carib village of some twenty houses where they were entertained by the chief and danced with his two daughters after their meal (Purchase 1905).

The corroboration of this documented period of contact with similar archaeological evidence covering the same timeframe has been the subject of my preliminary fieldwork at

Prince Rupert Bay on the northwest coast of Dominica. As has been found at the other thirty-four pre-columbian sites elsewhere on the island, settlements were located close to sources of fresh water, within easy reach of the sea and out of reach of flooding (Fig. 3). Preliminary fieldwork extending from the shoreline up along the banks of streams flowing into the bay has led to the identification of a site on the shore of part of the Indian River estuary which once provided a sheltered lagoon for beaching canoes and access from a Carib village to the sea (Plate 1).

Potsherds of the final Suazoid series and stone axes which have been found provide the initial indicators of this settlement. On a headland across the bay, at a place disturbed by the construction of British fortifications in the eighteenth century, other stone implements have been located. Since stone axes have been among the first artefacts identified at the Indian River, an ethnological analysis of their replacement by iron tools, as documented during the first years of trading with Europeans, complements the current archaeological investigation of this important contact site. It is hoped that further excavation will reveal items similar to the trade goods mentioned in the ethnographies. The commencement of excavation at Indian River and more detailed analysis of the ethnography of contact has stimulated consideration of the cultural logics which were involved in the exchange of goods at Prince Rupert Bay and the Indian River at the end of the sixteenth century.

Conclusion

Modern historians of the Caribbean have paid little or no attention to the trading relationship and methods of social integration for survival exercised by the Island Caribs in the face of the European advance. Rather, their work has been focused on a concept of a total nationalist type Carib resistance against the 'economically aggressive and militarily determined English and French' (Beckles 1992: 3). Although in a very general analysis this may be an accurate reading of events, such 'resistance literature', in concentrating only on the dominance of confrontation, fails to accord the Caribs some element of rational decisiveness in their exchange mechanisms with Europeans. Neither does it consider the concept of alien ethnic incorporation for cultural survival. This the Caribs appear to have done by incorporating Africans and Europeans into their kinship systems just as they had done with neighbouring Amerindian groups in pre-columbian times (Honychurch 1995a). Recent work in the Orinoco has shown that, as a part of the 'System of Orinoco Regional Interdependence', each ethnic group handled the nucleus of *cultura propria* and in turn a sphere of alien resources that would gradually be incorporated into its own culture proper as well. At the same time many of these societies incorporated alien cultural resources and in the process redefined both their own and others' into a new synthesis (Arvelo-Jiménez and Biord 1994).

Thus it is understood why the integration of the Orinoco societies into the colonial market system was not totally forced. The Europeans, in penetrating the System of Orinoco Regional Interdependence, introduced not only new products (e.g. steel tools and firearms) but also new economic premises, such as terms of differential exchange . . . and the nucleation of populations as requirements for gaining access to those products.

(Arvelo-Jiménez and Biord 1994: 70)

By trading for tools, the Caribs were accepting new economic premises. However brief their tobacco trading period may have been, it did engage them in decisive control of differential exchange of tobacco for tools. As demand for tobacco in Europe increased from the early seventeenth century, French and English seamen moving through the islands to and from the Guianas appropriated control of the commodity by taking over the land on which it was produced, quickly cutting the Caribs out of all stages of participation in the sequence of exchange. At the same time the Caribs' increasing dependency on iron trade goods (followed rapidly by rum and cloth) became a weak point on their side in the balance of the relationship. By the end of the seventeenth century, the only commodity in their power to trade in return for European goods were 'canoe shells' for adaptation into European styled pirogues, baskets for plantation use and the 'sale' of Carib lands on their last held islands such as Dominica. Once these lands were gone, by the mid-eighteenth century, they retreated to the most isolated corners of the islands. From these rugged retreats they occasionally emerged to trade their canoes, baskets and game with resident colonists for tools or money to buy tools (Atwood 1791). Their subsistence economy based on clearing land in the slash and burn method for crop cultivation, and the cutting and carving of trees for canoe production, became totally dependent on one type of trade good: the iron cutting tool.

Sucked into the periphery of the growing mercantilist world economy, on islands which were becoming increasingly multi-ethnic, the Caribs, like the other ethnic groups which arrived on the islands, survived by adapting and contributing to the new emergent Creole culture. For the Island Caribs and the increasingly mixed members of their kin, already subject to the dislocations caused by disease, military incursions, loss of land and access to key natural resources, the dependence on iron trade goods for the continued production of their last major items of cultural property marked a crucial alteration of their condition and their relationship to the European and later African arrivals. Once set in motion, as it was in the 1500s, the effect of that innovation was similar to cases elsewhere in the Americas at other periods of history. The relationships which it stimulates take on a life of their own and it is impossible to restrict the impact on the societies it touches. Writing of Hawaii in the decades following Cook's fatal visit, Sahlins traces a similar course of change.

... chiefs and commoners, men and women, ritual tabus and material goods, were all engaged in practical exchange with Europeans in ways that altered their customary meanings and relationships. And always the functional revaluations appear as logical extensions of traditional conceptions.

(Sahlins 1985: 140)

So it was in the Pacific in the late eighteenth century as it had been on Dominica 200 years before. To see the European arrival on Dominica and in the Lesser Antilles as a complete break with the past is to deny the ability of human groups to recondition traditional conceptions based on customary relationships, even in the most extreme circumstances, so as to enable them to meet new challenges to their cultural continuity. Those, like the Caribs, who had a longstanding tradition of cultural heterogeneity prior to European contact, were usually the most capable of devising reconditioned strategies in the face of adversity. The ability to absorb and recreate, both in terms of their culture and their mixed

ethnicity has enabled them to leave their mark on the last islands which they controlled. To trace these logical extensions back to their origins on the banks of the Indian River at Prince Rupert Bay on Dominica is an exercise which crosses many disciplines. Here, at this crossroad of sea borne cultures, archaeology meets anthropology, history, ecology and economics to inform the encounter of the people of Europe, Africa and the Americas as they entered the first stage in the evolution of a Caribbean culture new to the world.

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