Barbados's Amerindian past

GEORGE GMELCH & SHARON BOHN GMELCH

George Gmelch is chair and Professor of Anthropology at Union College in upstate New

Unlike Bernal Diaz and other observers who accompanied the conquistadors to Mexico and Peru and wrote detailed descriptions of the Amerindians they encountered, the chroniclers of the conquest of the Caribbean left only sketchy accounts. The Spanish – the first Europeans to visit Barbados early in the 16th century – noted nothing more than the presence of many Amerindian settlements. By the time a Portuguese expedition led by Pedro a Campus arrived in 1536, the island's Amerindians were apparently gone. When English mariners visited Barbados in 1625 followed by a settlement party in 1627, material remains suggesting somewhat recent habitation were found, but no people. Who were the aboriginal inhabitants of Barbados and other islands of the Eastern Caribbean? What was their culture like? Our best answers to both questions come from the work of archaeologists.

In this article we describe Barbados's Amerindian population and culture using information acquired from a single excavation in order to illustrate how archaeological research is conducted and how artefacts and features are interpreted in the Caribbean. The site, known as Chancery Lane, is located on the south coast of Barbados. Several thousand years ago the area was a bay,

York. His most recent book is Double passage: the lives of Caribbean migrants abroad and back home. *He is currently doing a study of the subculture of professional baseball. Sharon Gmelch is Professor of Anthropology and Director of Women's Studies at Union College. Her most recent book is* Nan: the life of an Irish travelling woman. *She is currently working on an ethnohistorical study of Tlingit-white relations in an Alaskan town.*

but by the time the first Amerindians settled there, about 2,000 years ago, it had filled in after a sand spit formed across its mouth and mangrove trees had taken root. In historic times, Chancery Lane was a favourite 'shooting swamp' for Barbados's white elites, the descendants of its English settlers, who came to hunt ducks and other birds. The world's last Eskimo curlew was felled nearby, by a shotgun blast in the 1960s.

Chancery Lane is one of 63 known Amerindian settlement sites on Barbados.[2] Most have been identified from surface deposits. Only a handful have been dug. Amateur archaeological interest and collecting dates back to the 18th century, when there was a brisk trade in shell tools which were sold to visitors as they arrived by ship.[3] During the 1960s, Chancery Lane was partially excavated by Barbadian Ronald Taylor and by Ripley Bullen and Adelaide Bullen from Florida State University. But it was not until the late 1980s, at the invitation of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society, that archaeologist Steven Hackenberger, then of the University of Wisconsin, and a team of archaeologists from the University of London headed by Peter Drewett, began the professional and systematic work of uncovering and reconstructing the island's prehistory.[4]

At the time of the 1993 excavation, we had a dozen students living in various communities in Barbados as part of a field training programme in cultural anthropology. In previous years we had involved our students on Steve Hackenberger's digs, to provide them with a first-hand introduction to the island's prehistory and as a way of giving something back to the country that hosts us. This time, as cultural anthropologists, we decided to observe the excavation ourselves to learn the lessons a single dig can provide and see how an archaeologist in the Caribbean reconstructs prehistoric culture.

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Overlooking Chancery Lane from the top of the coral cliffs, the crew was little more than a cluster of dots amid the tall grass and sea grape. As we approached the site, however, we could see that some were bent over, twisting white plastic tags onto the long grass. About a dozen others were working in pairs: one person pounding a metal rod into the ground, while the other made notations on a clipboard. We soon learned that they were probing the beach rock under the sandy soil for places that might have been disturbed by aboriginal inhabitants. Most probes were sinking about 40 cm. before hitting rock, but a few had sunk much further.[5]

Here, Hackenberger reasoned, might be the location of postholes where Amerindians had placed the supports for their homes. A house was what he hoped to find and excavate. It is the most important feature an archaeologist working in the Caribbean can discover to reconstruct the living patterns of prehistoric people. 'It not only gives data about the type of society and the number of families that comprised a household', he explained, 'but houses also contain cooking features and burials that offer clues about many other aspects of Amerindian culture, from subsistence to cosmology'.

After considering the information from the probes, Hackenberger marked out three areas for his crew to begin excavating. Two were small (50 x 50 cm.) pits directly over the suspected postholes; one was a two by two metre block where the probes had suggested there might once have been more than one post. 'If we're lucky', Hackenberger informs the crew, 'this will be a double posthole. We know from other sites here and from ethnographic accounts on the continent that Amerindians sometimes used double postholes in the centre of their houses'. The typical dwelling was a large communal structure, sheltering an extended family.

Two crew members, both Earthwatch volunteers, begin digging in the larger pit, dumping shovels full of soil into a screen held by one of our students and another volunteer. Together they rock and bounce the screen back and forth. As the soil falls through the mesh, artefact fragments, bones, shells and bits of coral and rock emerge. At the depth of 5 to 10 cm., shell ridden debris and broken pottery turns up in three of the pits. This was expected. In tropical environments, pottery forms a large percentage of the artefact assemblage. The preservation of objects made from other materials – wood, cloth, and plant fibres – is usually poor. Unfortunately, most everyday objects the Amerindians would have used, from baskets and utensils to clothing and fish traps, were made from perishable plant fibres and wood. Their loss makes an archaeologist's work of reconstructing their material culture and life that much more difficult. It is no surprise that Caribbean archaeologists know less about the islands' aboriginal populations than archaeologists working in the dry environment of the American Southwest know about Anazasi, Pueblo and other early desert cultures.

At least Caribbean Amerindians made ceramics from which much can be learned. A chronology of pottery types has been developed for the Caribbean which allows them to infer the time span of settlements as well as approximate dates for different levels in a site. Certain broad changes in ceramics have taken place in the region between the first millennium B.C. and European conquest.[6] Thin, white-on-red and finely incised pottery (labelled the Saladoid tradition) gave way to thicker pots.[7] The new tradition (called Barranacoid) had pots, which were usually painted red, with heavy triangular flanged rims and broader incised decorations.

Changes in pottery styles and similarities in the style and decoration of pots from two or more regions provide important evidence of contact and possible migration routes. Archaeologists, however, have expended a lot of mental energy debating whether similarities and differences in pottery types reflect the diffusion of ideas, the mixing of populations, and/or the replacement of one group by another.[8] Contact may have taken the form of trade and direct learning; it may have involved intermarriage or raiding in which pottery makers from one group were taken home as captives or mates. Specific ideas – the shape and decoration used on bowls – might also have been transferred as a result of migration and the arrival of new settlers, as early Caribbean archaeologists assumed to have taken place.

They tended to equate pottery with people. Similarities between pottery found on Barbados and early well-developed ceramic traditions in Venezuela led investigators to conclude that people had migrated from there to the islands. Saladoid ceramics first appear in sites on the Orinoco River in Venezuela around 2,000 BC, showing up at later dates in sites throughout the Eastern Caribbean and eventually (at about the time of Christ) in Puerto Rico, a thousand sea miles north. Cultural chronologies were developed, based in large part on ceramic types that included distinct varieties of island wares; each type of pottery represented a different group of people.[9] At present, Caribbean archaeologists are trying to overcome a predilection to see 'pottery as people' and are re-evaluating their ideas about what pottery types actually tell us.

As Hackenberger's crew continued to excavate, they uncover pottery from several different ceramic traditions. A few fragments are similar to some Saladoid

Excavators uncover a double burial at Chancery Lane (photo by S. Hackenberger).

1. The date of the first European landing on Barbados is uncertain. Barbados appears on a Spanish chart in 1542. But there is an earlier written reference to Barbados in 1518, when Charles V of Spain sent Rodrigo de Figueroa to Espanola 'to ameliorate the condition of indians sent there as slaves' (Drewett (1991), p.1). In this document, Barbados is referred to as the 'Isla de Barbudos'.
2. The literature on Barbados's Amerindian population describes two major groups, both named by the Spanish. The earliest population, until about 1200 AD, is referred to as Arawaks; the later group, Caribs. They have been distinguished archaeologically by different pottery traditions, with the so-called Arawak producing fine, decorated, polychromatic pottery fired at a high temperature, while the Caribs apparently had lost the art of pottery making. In this account, we have chosen to follow the example of archaeologists Peter Drewett and Steven Hackenberger and simply use the term 'Amerindian'. See Drewett, *op. cit.*
3. In *The natural history of Barbados* (1750), Griffith Hughes describes and sketches many Amerindian remains.
4. Steven Hackenberger – who has so generously assisted us with this paper – is now chair of the

and Barranacoid ceramics; more examples resemble Troumasoid and Suazoid ceramics. 'This may be due to population pressures from outside the region', speculates historian Karl Watson during a visit to the site. 'As a group expands, it takes territory away from a neighbouring group, displacing them. Much of the migration up the islands may have been due to this kind of population displacement.' Watson is a Barbadian, schooled and trained in the Caribbean (and in Florida), where scholars have focused on reconstructing the causes and rates of island migrations. Hackenberger, schooled in the new archaeology of the Western United States, believes 'It is also possible that related groups occupied the site for a long period'. He favours his idea that most of the change in pottery styles within the Eastern Caribbean, and at Chancery Lane in particular, is attributable to changes in the uses of pottery. Stylistic shifts were probably due to a decrease in the importance of rituals – and ceramics used in them – involving narcotics and other stimulants, while increases in the use of large utilitarian vessels probably reflect a greater emphasis on the communal preparation of food like cassava beer. This, in turn, Hackenberger explains, 'might correspond with an increase in the size of households and stronger social bonds between families, or within clans. Such bonds would be very necessary in rapidly growing island communities'.

Most of the pottery the crew finds are fragments or 'shards' (in the United States, 'sherds'), ranging in size from a large coin to not much bigger than a man's wallet. But closer examination of the shards reveals that their construction and decoration are often quite different. Most are from the Sauzoid tradition, which is characterized by large utilitarian pots used for stews and cassava beer, and griddles for cooking cassava cakes. Many of the shards are too small to suggest the original shape or size of the vessel they come from. But in a pit from level two, one digger exposes a substantial rim piece. It provides a good example of what Hackenberger means by large utilitarian vessels. It is reinforced with a thick flange and shows the open curve of a shallow bowl that may have been up to 50 centimetres in diameter.

At the end of the second week, an exciting discovery is made. The crew uncovers two holes side by side. There seems little doubt that this is the double posthole Hackenberger has been hoping for. An 1840s watercolour of an Amerindian house in Guiana by Edward Goodall shows a man leaning against a double post. The sketch also shows a brace going off at a perpendicular angle to a second double post. 'We'll use this information to orient ourselves as to where the second set of double postholes might be', says Hackenberger, showing a photocopy of the watercolour to several excited crew members. The following day they find the second set, exactly where predicted, and a day later, another set of double postholes.

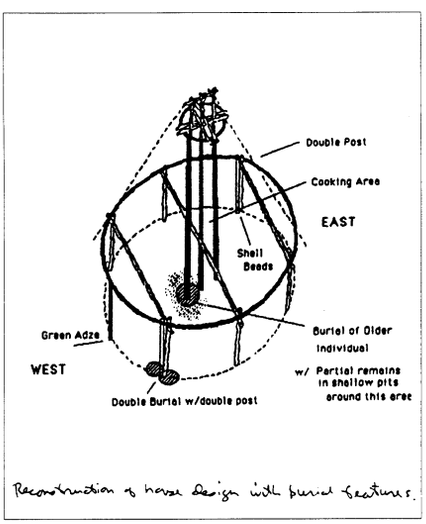
As the days go by and more earth is removed, the shape of the house becomes evident from the pattern of postholes, which are evenly spaced about every three metres. It is oval and more then 20 metres in diameter. Its interior was once divided into partitions. From ethnohistorical and ethnographic sources, it is known that Amerindian houses contained living compartments for individual families as well as one for the headman and another for visitors. There were also partitioned areas for ceremonies, cooking, and the beer canoe – a trough used in the manufacture and ceremonial drinking of cassava beer. Around the centre of the house was a dance path.

At the eastern end of the house, the crew finds a cooking pit. Ethnohistorical accounts of Amerindians from northern South American and other islands describe their houses as being divided into distinct men's and women's sides, each with its own entrance. The men's area was always located at the west end of the house, and the women's on the east. Cooking was done on the east or women's side, while ceremonies and often burials were performed on the west or men's side. The association of burials on the west and women's activities on the east is perhaps explained by mainland Amerindians' belief that the sun, after setting below the horizon in the west, travelled during the night in a large canoe on an underground river before being reborn in the eastern sky.[10]

During the third week of the excavation, the cooking area is thoroughly excavated but almost no charcoal is found. This is puzzling. Hackenberger speculates that the fuel the Amerindians used might have burned very hot, right down to the ash. He makes a note to call several tropical botanists who might know the burning properties of mangrove and palm, the trees most likely used as fuel by Amerindians. The lack of charcoal is also unfortunate as even a piece as small as a pencil eraser would be enough to obtain a Carbon 14 date for the occupation. The few small bits found, however, will require the use of an accelerator to date them – an expensive process not included in the excavation's original budget.

When screening the debris from the area of the cooking pit, the crew discovers some tiny, sharp chips of chert. The chert must have come from somewhere else, since there are no deposits of this sedimentary rock in the geological formations of Barbados. But chert does occur on the neighbouring volcanic islands of St. Vincent and St. Lucia. Amerindians in other places in the Caribbean were known to embed small flakes of chert into flat boards to create cassava graters. Cassava, a shrub with bulbous tubers, was a dietary staple, second only to yams in its carbohydrate content. After the cassava was grated, it was strained repeatedly to remove poisonous cyanide. The washed cassava was then dried in the sun before being baked on thick, circular clay griddles over the fire. (Cassava starch is of such high quality that it is burn resistant, and thus does not adhere to a griddle.) Among the pottery shards sorted by the crew are the fragments of many cassava griddles, recognizable by their thickness and flat shape and by the smoke and carbon deposits on one side.

Amerindians were heavily dependent on cassava which they cultivated in forest clearings. The coastline location of most sites, however, also indicates the importance of marine resources – fish, shellfish, mollusca



Reconstruction of house design with burial features.

anthropology department at Central Washington University.

5. The steel rods were used after electronic resistivity equipment malfunctioned. But Hackenberger also thought the rods would be useful based on Peter Drewett's prior testing which had detected pits beneath the surface. Drewett thought they might be wells, but Hackenberger became convinced they were postholes after hearing a paper describing a site in St. Eustatius.
6. Drewett, *op. cit.*, 37.
7. The Saladoid ceramic tradition was first discovered on the Orinoco River in Venezuela, and dates from 2,000 BC until 500 BD, when it involved into or was supplanted by the Barrancoid tradition. Saladoid pottery is characteristically thin and frequently incised, with shallow, platter-like bowls a common artefact. Saladoid is the earliest ceramic tradition to spread from South America, especially from the Orinoco, into the Eastern Caribbean and eventually all the way northwest into Puerto Rico. The first archaeologist to work on the Orinoco named the pottery after the village of Saladero, the site just above the Orinoco River Delta where the oldest example of the ceramic was first discovered. They added the '-oid' suffix to indicate an archaeologically defined tradition. See Rouse (1986).
8. See Rouse, *ib.*
9. The development of these early chronologies was also based on an effort to corroborate ethnohistoric accounts of pre-contact invasions of Island Caribs.
10. Karl Watson, pers. comm.
11. Drewett, *ib.*, 1.
12. *ib.*, 184.
13. Richard Ligon, who lived in Barbados for three years from 1647 to 1650 and provided the most thorough descriptions of Barbadian life in his period, notes that the Indians comprised only a 'slight fraction of the total Barbadian population'.
14. Fraser et al., *A–Z of Barbadian heritage*, Kingston, Jamaica:

and crustacea – in their diet. A clustering of sites in northern Barbados on cliff tops above the sea suggests that defence may have been a consideration. The jagged cliffs, constantly battered by Atlantic swells, would have provided protection from enemies approaching from the sea. Archaeologist Peter Drewett, however, does not believe there is sufficient evidence to claim that defence was an important factor in the selection of village sites. The location of fresh water along the coastal fringe is, he believes, the main reason Barbados's Amerindians settled where they did.

As the crew screens the pit debris, other evidence of the Amerindian diet is discovered. Quarter-inch screens catch faunal remains – conch, whelk, limpets, chitons and periwinkles. The crew also finds the jaws and teeth of parrot fish, which Amerindians probably caught in basket traps set on the reef. Using very fine mesh screens, some crew members carry the debris down to the sea to be washed. What stays in the screens are tiny fish bones, sea urchin spines, and other small faunal and plant remains. A volunteer worker, a retired paediatrician who at eighty is taking anthropology courses at Yale University, finds a large, well preserved seed. At first glance, Hackenberger believes it is a sugar apple seed, a species of tree that was brought to the island in historic times. If he is right, it could have been introduced into the lower levels of the site by land crabs which tunnel like moles, moving earth and artefacts from higher to lower strata, sometimes confounding archaeologists who rely on stratigraphy to indicate when tools and remains were laid down. Another crew member finds a piece of delicate, incised, polychromatic pottery from the Saladoid tradition in a layer 20 cm. above where it should have been found. Land crabs again? Or, perhaps some latter-day Amerindian found the fragment and saved it. After all the debris has been screened through fine-mesh, Hackenberger will take soil samples back to the United States for microscopic analysis which will reveal pollen and phytoliths – small silica structures, formed around the pores of plants, that will help identify plant remains.

On the 22nd day of the excavation, a crew member scrapes his trowel over the top of a cranium. A few inches away, finger and toe bones emerge as he carefully removes the dirt, now working with a dental pick and fine brush. Next to the burial, parts of a second skull emerge, followed by long bones and a rib cage. The bones are poorly preserved and friable, which slows the work considerably since crew members must take extra care to minimize damaging them. It takes two full days to clear enough soil away to prepare the area for a good photograph. As the season's excavation time runs out, Hackenberger has mixed feelings. 'Finding the burials means we'll have to sacrifice some of the time that we could have spent uncovering the rest of the house', he tells us. 'We may wind up knowing less about the house, but the burials will tell us something about the nutrition and cause of death of the people'. The remains are located at the west end of the house, offering further support for the hypothesis that the men's side of the house was the area in which the Amerindians buried their dead.

The following day Hackenberger brings with him several artefacts that have been found with burials at another site to show the crew. Several are small clay discs which may represent cassava cakes – symbolic food for the afterlife. Running his finger down the snout of a clay animal head with an inlaid shell eye, he speculates that it is meant to represent a dog. 'Dogs were important to the Amerindians both as companions and for food, and they were often buried with people. Just like in Greek mythology, dogs were believed to be the keepers of the afterworld. It may be that there is a connection between this figure and the afterlife of the deceased girl who it was found with'.

As word of the excavation spreads, in part because of several articles in Barbadian newspapers, more visitors come to the site. Hackenberger is patient, taking the time to explain what is going on and to answer questions, even though his season is fast coming to an end. The discovery of burials only increases public interest. Many people ask him how an archaeologist can be certain that the bodies are not murder victims, and how he can be sure that they are Amerindians and not African slaves. Hackenberger mentions some of the telltale signs, including the flexed, upright position of the bodies, the shovel-shaped incisors on the jaws that are characteristic of Amerindians and peoples of Asian origin, the general flatness of the faces, the depth of the burials in beach rock (no murderer or slave owner would have gone to the trouble to dig so deep into the coral), and the remains of grave offerings.

Burials are obviously an important source of new information for an archaeologist, but they can also create problems. We detect a certain nervousness among some crew members and students when unearthing the remains. They have lain undisturbed for 500 to 1,000 years or more. Hackenberger expects everyone to treat the burials with respect, handling the bones carefully and as little as possible. 'Treat them the same way you would want a doctor or mortician to handle a family member's body', he tells people. The issue of where the remains will be taken after they have been removed from the site is in question. 'Everywhere I have worked in the States', he informs us, 'I've been able to meet with representatives of the tribes [Native Americans] to talk about the disposition of the remains after we finish the dig. In Barbados there is no one to talk to. The Amerindians have no descendants on the island. Perhaps, I could go to the Caribs in Dominica, or related peoples in Guyana or Suriname or Venezuela, but that's not very practical'.

It takes four days before the bodies are completely unearthed. The bones are thin and poorly preserved, but the jaws of both individuals are in good condition with teeth that show little wear and no caries. The life expectancy of Amerindians was about 35 to 40 years, with most individuals having heavy tooth wear by their thirties. The absence of this kind of wear suggests that the people buried here were in their mid to late-twenties when they died. About 200 grams of bone will be sacrificed for carbon dating and to examine carbon isotopes for clues about diet. Because there is a difference in the carbon balance between land and sea, populations heavily dependent upon marine resources have a higher proportion of some isotopes than do populations who are more dependent upon land resources. Hackenberger will send the bones to physical anthropologists in the States, people he knows well.

Five years ago, however, he and the Barbados Museum had sent the only other Amerindian burials (the partial remains of a dozen individuals) found in Barbados to Austria, to a team of physical anthropologists who were interested in doing a complete reconstruction of the remains along with an analysis of their pathology and nutrition. The museum has since heard nothing and their correspondence to Austria has not been returned. At the moment the location of the skeletons is unknown. 'For all we know', says Hackenberger, 'the burials may never have arrived at their destination. Or

Heinemann (Caribbean), 1990, p.6.

15. *ib.*

16. Handler, p.190.

17. In 1720, a British man-of-war encountered a large canoe at sea which had overturned. About half the Amerindians had drowned, but the others were rescued and brought to Barbados where they were given food and a new set of clothes. They eventually returned to St Vincent (Karl Watson, pers. comm.)

18. Handler, p.195-7.

19. *ib.*, p.204.

20. *ib.*, p.198.

they could be sitting in a warehouse somewhere in Vienna. We don't even know if the principal investigator is still alive'.

Artefacts found on the house floor of the Chancery Lane site reveal more information. On the eastern side of the house, two clay spindle whorls are found. These weights were attached to the end of a stick to spin cotton twine. They offer direct evidence for the growing of cotton by Amerindians in Barbados. From ethnohistorical evidence, it is known that cotton was used by them in other places to make hammocks, belts, girdles, aprons and loincloths, as well as to thread beads and shells for necklaces and arm and ankle decorations. Other decorative objects are uncovered at the site, including a carved, circular piece of shell with lips along both edges, much like a car wheel rim. It appears to be an ear spool. (Later, students back in Wisconsin discover minute shell beads in the soil samples from post poles on the east or women's side of the house.) Ethnohistorical accounts indicate that Amerindians liked to decorate their bodies, particularly with paint. Clay stamps with geometric designs have been found in other Barbadian sites and were probably used to apply paint made from vegetable dyes and turtle egg oil, to the body. Sharp splinters of conch shell and the flint chips found at some sites, archaeologist Peter Drewett has suggested, may have been used for tattooing.[11]

In the area of the house where the ceremonial centre would most likely have been, a crew member finds a pot with a clay nipple and elaborate incised decoration. To Hackenberger's trained eye it looks like part of an incense burner; these resemble inverted flower pots with a hole or nipple on the top through which the smoke escaped. Narcotics and stimulants were widely used by Amerindians, although there is no direct evidence for their use in prehistoric Barbados.[12] Tobacco, cultivated in many Amerindian settlements, may also have been burned in this artefact, its fumes being inhaled through tubes.

One of our students finds a small, polished green adze made of basalt, a type of stone not found on the island but quite common on St. Vincent, 92 miles away. Other stone axes and adzes have been found in Barbados, but most have turned up in fields or cut banks where nothing was known about their context or the other artefacts associated with them. This time the adze is in context, on the west or male side of the house. But Hackenberger is puzzled by its location in the bottom of a posthole. Did it slip into the hole accidentally? Or was it intentionally placed there as a ritual offering, perhaps when the house was being built? The small size of the tool, smaller than working adzes, makes Hackenberger lean toward the latter hypothesis.

The picture of Barbados's prehistoric population that emerges from the Chancery Lane site – supported by excavations elsewhere on the island and by ethnohistorical evidence from South America – is of a horticultural people planting cassava in forest clearings, but living on the coastal fringe and making extensive use of fish and shellfish from the sea and reefs near their settlements. Barbados's Amerindians lived in communal houses that appear to have been divided into men's and women's areas. Ceremony and ritual were important parts of daily life. They adorned their bodies, used alcohol, tobacco, and probably hallucinogenic drugs, perhaps only in conjunction with religious practices. They also appear to have believed in an afterlife. The archaeological record cannot tell us much about their character, but Europeans who were acquainted with Amerindians on other islands were impressed by their humour and gentleness, as well as by their fierceness when called for. The question that continues to perplex archaeologists is what happened to Barbados's aboriginal population? 'Whenever I lecture on the prehistory of Barbados', says Hackenberger, 'it's the first question people ask. Our best guess is that they were decimated by disease or were removed by slave raiders, or a combination of the two'. It is well known that elsewhere in the Caribbean and Central America, Amerindians died rapidly from European diseases such as the 'flu and measles.

Although there were no aboriginal inhabitants on Barbados when English settlers arrived in 1627, it would be wrong to assume, as most contemporary Barbadians do, that they had no influence on the island's culture. During the first decade of English settlement small numbers of Amerindians were brought from South America to Barbados.[13] Henry Powell, an English ship captain, sailed to the Essequibo River in Guyana just two weeks after he had delivered the first group of English settlers to Barbados. He went to trade manufactured goods for food crops to bring back to the colonists for planting in Barbados.[14] As he left the Essequibo, he was followed by three canoes with Indians who wanted to sail with him. Conversations with them led Powell to believe that they knew of Barbados and that the island might have been occupied by their ancestors.[15] He brought 30 Amerindians back to Barbados. They arrived as freemen but were later enslaved, reportedly serving as household domestics rather than as field labourers.[16] There are also reliable accounts of Amerindians from the island of St. Vincent sailing to Barbados in long, dug-out canoes.[17]

Although their numbers were few – there were probably never more than 500 Amerindians on the island during the 17th century – they left an imprint on the Barbados's early culture. Anthropologists such as Jerome Handler suggest that both Europeans and Africans learned fishing and intertidal gathering techniques from them, including crab collecting, the use of fish poisons, and harvesting sea turtles by turning over the females as they came ashore to lay eggs.[18] It is also likely that hammocks, used widely by the English from the earliest days of the colony and later by African slaves, were acquired from Amerindians. The hammock was an Amerindian invention and still used widely by the Indians of northern South America. Writing around 1650, Richard Ligon noted that by tarring 'the strings of our hammocks ... we avoid [ants] better than in beds'.[19] (Early Barbadians also warded off ants and biting insects by lighting small fires under their hammocks, which they could not so easily have been done using beds.)

The greatest contribution of Amerindians to the development of Barbados, however, was the domestication of plants unknown elsewhere. Plants that had an impact on the island's agriculture include potatoes, tobacco, maize, cassava, pineapple, and cotton. Cotton and tobacco were initially the colony's major cash crops, until supplanted by sugar cane in the 1640s. Whatever borrowing of ideas occurred, however, it did not last for many years as the Indians once again disappeared from Barbados. □

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