

Caribbean history is relatively new. Until the 1960s, most of the histories of the Caribbean were about the military and economic activities of European states in the region—not about the lives and experiences of Caribbean people themselves. This changed in conjunction with the shifting political currents of the 1950s and 1960s and the rise of nationalist and revolutionary ideals which refocused the writing of regional history as an act of cultural decolonization. In recent decades, the field has surged forward. Scholarship on the Caribbean past has proliferated, and one of the most noteworthy features of this new Caribbean historiography has been the centrality of social history. Nevertheless, Caribbean history has still not been widely taught outside the region, and there remain only a very limited number of books designed for classroom usage.

In part, this reflects the complexity of the Caribbean past, and the challenge of condensing it into a single story. There are lots of debates about what the Caribbean even “is”—where do the region’s physical and cultural borders lie? Is “the Caribbean” simply the islands of the Caribbean Sea? Or does it encompass the Caribbean basin—the physical territories that border the Caribbean Sea? Or can we conceptualize a “Greater Caribbean” stretching all the way from Virginia in the north to Brazil in the south? In this book, the Caribbean is defined in terms of the Caribbean basin, to include the coastal regions of South and Central America as well as the Caribbean islands themselves. This is an incredibly diverse area. It comprises different islands that range from the relative colossus of Cuba (covering 44,000 square miles with a population of over 11 million people) to tiny micro-societies such as Salt Cay in the Turks and Caicos Islands (just 2.6 square miles and with a population of less than 200 people). It also includes the Guianas of northeastern South America and the tropical coast of Central America. Linguistic diversity abounds and languages spoken include English, French, Spanish, and Dutch, along with indigenous languages (most notably Carib), and a range of Creoles, including Saramaccan (the language of the Surinamese maroons) and Haitian Creole. The region is also noteworthy for its ethnic diversity, and its inhabitants include people who descended from all parts of Africa and Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, in addition to multiple indigenous groups. Race mixture has been common, and a range of terms is used to classify people of various interracial groups. The region varies widely in its level of economic development, and ranges from the appalling poverty of Haiti, the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, to industrial centers such as Aruba and Trinidad and Tobago, which rank in the top one-quarter of global per capita GDP. This incredible variegation has created significant challenges for the creation of a regional history.

This book does not seek to reduce the Caribbean to a single history in the sense of one story that can incorporate all the specific events and nuances of every different territory. Instead, it focuses on the basic forces and processes that all parts of Caribbean shared: European conquest and colonization; the establishment of a plantation system; chattel slavery; resistance and the struggle of individuals at the bottom of society to claim their rights; the political and economic influence of the United States; and migration as a strategy of social and economic adaptation. Each chapter presents a range of classic and recent scholarship on a particular theme, integrating approaches from social, cultural, political, and economic histories, along with a range of primary sources. It allows students both to review the multiple dimensions of the most important historical debates and to use primary documents to untangle these questions for themselves.

## 1

## Pre-Columbian Societies

THE YEAR 1492 IS OFTEN IMAGINED as the “beginning” of Caribbean history. However, human civilizations have a very long and rich history in the region, extending back over tens of thousands of years. From archeological data, we know that people have lived in the Caribbean islands since at least 5,000 B.C.E., and possibly as far back as 8,000 B.C.E. Certainly, by about 2,000 B.C.E., there were human settlements throughout the region, including Trinidad, Cuba, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and the Lesser Antilles.

There has been a great deal of scholarly debate about the specific process and chronology of human settlement in the Caribbean. Archeologists conventionally suggested that migration to the Antilles originated in South America (which at the time of first settlement was probably connected to the island of Trinidad by land, sea levels being considerably lower than they are today) and proceeded north along the chain of islands; with patterns of religion, diet, and social and political organization being built over an Amazonian template.<sup>1</sup> However, some recent scholars have noted that the ancient peoples of the Greater Antilles shared cultural properties with those of the circum-Caribbean basin, and have suggested that some cultural patterns were diffused across the Caribbean Sea from Central America. The idea that pre-Columbian Caribbean peoples came from diverse geographic origins has gained ground in recent years, as a result of archeological discoveries which suggest the consumption and trading of jade sourced from Guatemala, and the creation of pendants and other personal adornments with marked similarities to those found in Costa Rica and Mexico during the same period.<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of point of origin, we know that over time there were a series of cultural shifts as Caribbean societies, especially in the Greater Antilles, moved from small mobile bands of hunter-gatherers and fishermen toward more socially complex societies, marked by the use of intensive agricultural techniques and the construction of ceremonial centers.

By 1492, there were two main groups living in the region—the Taíno and the Caribs or Kalinago. Taíno settlement in Puerto Rico and Hispaniola dates back to around 500 C.E. and, by 1,000 C.E., they had established themselves in Cuba, Jamaica, and the Bahamas. The Caribs were more recent arrivals in the archipelago, and are thought to have come to the Lesser Antilles from South America by seagoing canoe by around the year 1,400 C.E. Their main strongholds were the Windward Islands of Dominica, Martinique, St. Vincent, and Guadeloupe. At the time of European contact, a loosely defined state of war appears to have existed between the two groups, as the Caribs sought to extend their control over territory and resources.

<sup>1</sup> Irving Rouse is the most important scholar associated with this theory.

<sup>2</sup> This idea of a Mesoamerican connection was first posited by J. H. Steward in 1948, and has been revived by a new generation of scholars, including William Keegan and Reniel Rodríguez Ramos in recent years. A good recent synthesis of the debate can be found in Scott M. Fitzpatrick and Ann H. Ross (eds.), *Island Shores, Distant Pasts: Archeological and Biological Approaches to the Pre-Columbian Settlement of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 4–5.

The image we have of Caribbean indigenous societies from Europeans is that they were backward, uncivilized, simplistic, and of course, cannibalistic. These images are false. While Taíno and Kalinago societies varied in the nature of their political and economic organization, they both possessed advanced agricultural techniques, complex religious beliefs, and a sophisticated material culture. Moreover, there is almost no firm evidence that cannibalism ever existed in the region.

A big challenge for studying pre-Columbian history is the absence of conventional sources. Both Taíno and Kalinago societies were non-literate. Ethnohistorical studies have had to rely on the testimony of European chroniclers, such as Christopher Columbus and his associates. The accounts of missionaries who learned indigenous languages in order to advance their goal of evangelization and conversion present the most useful insights, but their writings are still filtered through European value-systems. Archeological evidence is extremely valuable, but such data has been limited by the ravages of the tropical climate. In order to truly understand early Caribbean peoples, it is necessary to combine ethnohistorical data with perspectives from archeology, cultural anthropology, and linguistics. Biological data, such as DNA analysis and craniometrics, have also been analyzed in recent years, although the full measure of the insight that such techniques can provide is yet to be established.

We have most knowledge about the Taíno, as they were the first group the Spanish encountered and colonized, and thus they were able to document their cultural patterns in greater detail. The Taíno were a sedentary agricultural people who possessed a complex system of settlement and a highly stratified system of political organization. They lived in villages of between 1,000 and 2,000 people, in which wooden houses were organized around a central plaza that served as a location for ceremonial functions and sporting events. Each village was governed by a chief or *cacique*, which was largely an inherited position, although heirs of chiefs who showed no promise could be rejected in favor of an ordinary person selected through popular election. The Taíno possessed a highly organized religion, in which religious deities called *cemís* were represented by icons made of wood, stone, or human remains. Each individual had his own personal collection of *cemís*, with the range and number reflecting their owner's place in the social hierarchy. Agriculture was the most important economic activity, and the Taíno farmed potatoes, cassava, peanuts, and beans. Fishing was also practiced, using nets, hooks, spears, and storage pens. The Taíno were one of the least aggressive peoples of the early Americas, and militarism was not an important part of their culture.

The Caribs were also an agricultural society. They grew many of the same crops as the Taíno, and used similar fishing techniques. Their political organization was much more egalitarian, and there were no chiefs, although war leaders did wield temporary authority during the course of raids. Carib religion shared with the Taíno the assignment of a spirituality associated with both ancestors and the powers of nature to plants, animals, and landscapes. However, their mechanisms of religious worship were less developed, and they had few recognizable gods, and nothing analogous to the Taíno *cemís*. Their arts and crafts were also simpler than those of the Taíno. However, in the realm of warfare, the Caribs were much more advanced, and they developed a wide-ranging arsenal of weapons, including bows, poisoned arrows, blowguns, and clubs that they used to gain control of territory and resources.

While much writing about pre-Columbian societies has emphasized the divisions between these two ethnic groups, in reality Taíno and Carib people interacted frequently. In particular, Taíno women were routinely raided by Carib war parties, and it is likely that such captured women had a significant impact on the nature of Carib society, and passed on aspects of Taíno language and culture to their mixed-heritage offspring. Europeans sought to emphasize the distinctions between the two societies to explain the difference in the reception that their presence received. Many scholars argue that our view of Carib society in particular has been skewed as a result of our reliance on this divisive European lens.

The documents in this section provide an overview of the political, economic, social, and religious life of indigenous societies at the time of European contact, and interweave the writings of archeologists and historians with primary sources depicting native material culture and iconography, as well as some of the best-known ethnohistorical accounts.

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1.1 IRVING ROUSE, *THE TAÍNOS: RISE AND DECLINE OF THE PEOPLE WHO GREETED COLUMBUS* (NEW HAVEN: YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1992) PP. 9–17.

The late Irving Rouse is the most important pioneer of the study of Caribbean ancient history. While recent scholars have challenged some of his interpretations, especially in terms of his models for determining the chronology and sequencing of cultural settlement in the region, his ethnographic work remains an unparalleled achievement in Caribbean cultural history. His work on Taíno society at the time of contact is still the classic in the field. In this excerpt he provides an overview of Taíno political organization, dress and adornment, agricultural techniques, settlement patterns, and ceremonial and military rituals.

Columbus encountered large, permanent villages in Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, each governed by a chief, or cacique. They contained an average of one thousand to two thousand people and ranged in size from a single building to twenty to fifty houses, all made of wood and thatch. Several related families lived together in the same house (Sauer 1966: 62–64).

The houses were irregularly arranged around a central plaza. The chief's home, larger and better made than the rest, was situated on the plaza. Round, conically roofed dwellings called *caney* predominated. [...] The houses had dirt floors, and there were no partitions between families. Although some chiefs slept on wooden platforms, most people used hammocks (*hamaca*) made of cordage. Goods were stored in baskets hung from the roof and walls. The chiefs and other persons of high rank received guests while sitting on carved wooden stools, or *duho*, which reminded the Spaniards of the thrones they knew in Europe.

The villages were loosely organized into district chiefdoms, each ruled by one of the village chiefs in the district, and the district chiefdoms were in turn grouped into regional chiefdoms, each headed by the most prominent district chief. The villagers were divided into two classes (*nitáino* and *naboría*), which the chroniclers equated with their own nobility and commoners. They searched in vain for a still lower class, comparable to their own slaves (Stevens-Arroyo 1988: 47–48).

Columbus took special notice of the Taínos' goldwork because it offered him an opportunity to repay his debt to his patrons, the king and queen of Spain. The Taínos mined nuggets of gold locally and beat them into small plates. Archeological research has shown that they were used interchangeably with cut shell to inlay wooden objects and to overlay clothing and ornaments. The Taínos could not cast the metal, but their caciques did wear *guanín*, ornaments made of a copper and gold alloy, that they obtained through trade with South America (see Sauer 1966: 25–26; Vega 1979).

The local artisans were also experienced woodworkers, potters, weavers of cotton, and carvers of wood, stone, bone, and shell. Some may have specialized in different crafts, but the Taínos do not seem to have developed any craft into a full-time occupation (Sauer 1966: 59–66). They made fire with a wooden drill.

The men went naked or covered their genitalia with cotton loincloths. Unmarried women wore headbands; wives wore short skirts (*nagua*), the length of which indicated the wearer's rank. Both sexes painted themselves before participating in ceremonies, the men also before going to war. Red was a favorite color; this may have given rise to the misconception that Native Americans have red skins.

It was fashionable to flatten the forehead by binding a hard object against it in childhood, before the skull was fully formed. Ears and nasal septa were pierced for the insertion of feathers, plugs, and other ornaments; and waists and necks were decorated with belts and necklaces. The Spaniards reported that the chiefs were distinguished by headdresses adorned with gold and feathers. Pendants in the form of carved human masks, called *guatza*, were also worn as a sign of rank (see Rouse 1948: 525–27; García Arévalo 1982: 26).

The Classic Taínos had a sophisticated form of agriculture. Instead of simply slashing and burning the forest to make a temporary clearing, as is common in the tropics, they heaped up mounds of earth in more permanent fields to cultivate root crops in the soft alluvial soil. The mounded fields were called *conuco*. The mounds, three feet high and some nine feet in circumference, were arranged in regular rows. They retarded erosion, improved the drainage, and thus permitted more lengthy storage of the mature tubers in the ground. They also made it easier to weed and to harvest the crops. The inhabitants of the dry southwestern part of Hispaniola are said to have constructed extensive irrigation systems (see Oviedo y Valdés 1959: 13–18; Sturtevant 1961, 1969; Sauer 1966: 51–54).

Cassava (*casabe*) was the principal root crop, followed by the sweet potato (*batata*). Cassava thrived in a broad range of local conditions, from wet to dry. It could be grown over a period of ten to twelve months and kept in the ground for up to three years. The men used digging sticks (*coa*) to plant cassava cuttings. Women grated its starchy roots and squeezed out its often-poisonous juice in a basketry tube to obtain flour, from which they baked bread on a clay griddle (*buren*). The bread, too, could be preserved for long periods of time. Sweet potato was eaten as a vegetable.

Indian corn (*maiz*) was less important, as is evidenced by the fact that it played no role in the Taínos' religion. It was grown on the forest floor by the slash-and-burn technique, and its kernels were eaten off the cob instead of being ground into flour and made into bread, as on the mainland. According to Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés (1959: 13–15), corn bread was inferior to cassava bread because it could not be stored in the high tropical humidity of the islands; it soon became moldy.

Other crops grown from seed included squash, beans, peppers, and peanuts. They were boiled with meat, fish, and cassava juice, a procedure that detoxified the juice. "Pepper pots" containing these ingredients were kept on the fire to provide food as needed. Alternatively, meat and fish were roasted on spits (Rouse 1948: 522–24; Sauer 1966: 54–59).

Fruits, calabashes, cotton, and tobacco were grown around the houses. The pineapple was cultivated, but not the peach palm and cacao, which were limited to the mainland and to Trinidad (Schultes 1984). Calabashes served as water containers. Tobacco was smoked in the form of cigars (*tabaco*), apparently for pleasure. Unlike the mainland ethnic groups, the Classic Taínos did not indulge in beer fermented from cassava or corn, nor did they chew coca (Sauer 1966: 51; Plowman 1984). They collected a variety of wild fruits and vegetables, such as palms nuts, guava berries, and guáiyiga roots, whose remains have been found archeologically (Veloz Maggiolo, Ortega, and Caba Fuentes 1981: 169–70).

The chroniclers tell us that the Taínos caught fish in nets, speared them, and used hooks and lines. They also stupefied them with poison, trapped them in weirs, and stored both fish and turtles in weirs until they were ready to eat them. They drove hutias into corrals by burning the prairies or chasing them with dogs and torches and kept them penned there until needed. They plucked iguanas off trees and decoyed wild parrots with tame birds. In the absence of large land mammals, they augmented their supply of protein by spearing manatees in the mouths of the rivers and by eating dogs. They may also have had guinea pigs, but the evidence for this is inconclusive (Sauer 1966: 58–59).

[...]

The cacique's house—and presumably also his or her temple—faced on the central plaza, where dances and ceremonies were held. [...]

The annual homages to the chief's *zemis* took place on the central dance ground or court. Other rituals were performed there before and after battles and upon the marriage or death of a chief, and so were ceremonies (*areito*) celebrating the deeds of ancestors. The dancers were accompanied by singing, drumming, and rattling (Lovén 1935: 492–97).

The Classic Taínos also played ball on the central plaza and elsewhere. Their ancestors appear to have used nonstructured areas, which may be termed ball grounds. They themselves often

constructed specially designed ball courts, applying the term *batey* to both the game and the court where it was played. The court is said to have been rectangular. Ordinary spectators sat on its stones or embankments, the caciques and nobles on their stools. The courts within the villages were for intramural games; other courts, in the countryside, were for games between villages. Gary S. Vescelius (personal communication) has noticed that the most elaborate courts in Puerto Rico were on the putative boundaries of chiefdoms and has suggested that they were used for games between polities.

Both men and women participated, always separately. The teams, each with ten to thirty players, occupied opposite ends of the court, as in tennis, and alternated in serving the ball. Players attempted to keep it in motion by bouncing it back and forth from their bodies to the ground inside the limits of the court. They were not allowed to touch it with their hands or feet. Its elasticity amazed the Spaniards, who had never seen rubber, the substance of which it was made (Stern 1949: 29–32).

Courts are said to have been in constant use. Wagers were made by the players and, in the case of intervillage games, by their caciques, who also offered small prizes—food, for example. The game was occasionally played before public decisions were made (Lovén 1935: 524–26; Alegría 1983: 4).

[...]

Unlike the present inhabitants of the West Indies, the natives traveled by sea whenever possible. They used canoes (*canoas*), which they hollowed out of logs by alternately charring and chopping them with petaloid stone axes, known as celts. Spade-shaped paddles were the only means of propulsion until the Spaniards introduced sails. The largest canoes belonged to the chiefs. They were carved, painted, and kept in special boathouses reminiscent of those in Polynesia. Columbus reported that they could hold up to 150 people. On land, the chiefs traveled in litters, and the ordinary people by foot. The latter carried burdens suspended from balance poles (Lovén 1935: 414–20; McKusick 1970; Glazier 1991).

Both men and women were eligible to serve as chiefs and, as such, to live in specially built houses, sit on throne-like stools, have special forms of transportation, and wear insignia of their rank. Each cacique presided over the village in which he or she lived. They organized the daily activities and were responsible for the storage of surplus commodities, which they kept in buildings constructed for the purpose and redistributed among the villagers as needed. They acted as hosts when the villages received visitors, and had charge of the political relations with other villages. The caciques owned the most powerful zemis and supervised their worship. They organized the public feasts and dances and, having learned the songs by heart, directed the singing. Because their canoes were the largest in the village, they were responsible for public forms of transportation (Lovén 1935: 498–540; Rouse 1948: 528–30; Wilson 1990a: 119–25).

Village chiefs reportedly had the power of life or death over their subjects. The district and regional chiefs did not exercise this kind of control but could requisition food and military service. Their ability to do so depended upon their personalities and political relations (Wilson 1990b).

The Classic Taínos believed that they had originally come from caves in a sacred mountain on the island of Hispaniola (Alegría 1978: 57–94; Rouse and Arrom 1991). Individuals traced their descent through their mothers rather than their fathers. Goods, class status, and the office of chief were also inherited matrilineally. A man resided in the village of his mother's lineage. If he chose a wife from another village, he brought her to his own (Keegan and Maclachlan 1989: 617–18).

Polygyny was prevalent. Most men probably obtained wives in or near their own villages, but chiefs sometimes arranged long-distance marriages for political purposes (Wilson 1990a: 111–19). A commoner had to temporarily serve his prospective bride's family to compensate it for her loss: a chief could instead make a payment of goods. Only a chief could afford to have many wives.

Trade was widespread. Parties or single persons undertook long sea voyages for the purpose. Some districts excelled in making particular products; for example, Gonáve Island off the western

coast of Haiti was known for its wooden bowls (Lovén 1935: 60–61). Residents of eastern Hispaniola and western Puerto Rico are said to have exchanged daily visits across the Mona Passage (Rouse 1982: 48). Such interaction was facilitated by a common language.

The Classic Taínos fought among themselves to avenge murders, to resolve disputes over hunting and fishing rights, or to force a chief who had received a bride price to deliver the woman purchased. They did not themselves obtain additional wives by raiding other communities and had difficulty fending off the Island-Caribs, who did (Rouse 1948: 532–33).

Only the chiefs and nobles attended meetings at which war was declared. A chief was elected to lead the attack; the nobles served as his or her bodyguard. Before going into battle they painted their bodies red, hung small images of zemis on their foreheads, and danced. They fought with clubs (*macana*), with spears propelled by throwing sticks, and, in the eastern part of their territory, with bows and arrows. The Ciguayan and Borinquen Taínos, of northeastern Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, respectively, are said to have been the most warlike, probably because they were forced to defend themselves against Island-Carib raids.

[...]

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1.2 FRAY RAMÓN PANÉ, AN ACCOUNT OF THE ANTIQUITIES OF THE INDIANS.  
A NEW EDITION WITH AN INTRODUCTORY STUDY, NOTES AND  
APPENDIXES BY JOSÉ JUAN ARROM AND TRANSLATED BY SUSAN  
C. GRISWOLD. (DURHAM: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1999) PP. 21–23.

One of the best sources for understanding Taíno society and religion is this account by Ramón Pané, completed around 1498. A self-described “humble friar” who had been sent to Hispaniola by Columbus to report on the beliefs of the native people, Pané learned the Taíno language and immersed himself in their beliefs and culture. His work represents one of the founding ethnographies of the new world. Although Pané went to Hispaniola with the aim of converting the Taíno to Christianity, he seemed to respect the integrity of their beliefs, and presents us in his account with the details of a complex and sophisticated religious system. The section replicated here deals with the role of the *behique*, or healer, and details the treatments used to cure people of illness. The extract sheds light on the connection between medicine and religion, and reveals the cohesiveness of the Taíno world view.

#### Chapter xv

*Concerning the observances of these Indian behiques, and how they practice medicine and teach the people, and in their medicinal cures they are often deceived.*

All or the majority of the people of the Island of Hispaniola have many zemis of various sorts. Some contain the bones of their father and mother and relatives and ancestors; they are made of stone or of wood. And they have many of both kinds, some that speak, and others that cause the things they eat to grow, and others that make it rain, and others that make the winds blow. Those simple, ignorant people believe that those idols—or, more properly speaking, demons—make such things happen because they have no knowledge of our holy faith. When one of them is sick, they take him to the *behique*, who is the physician. The physician is obliged to keep the same diet as the patient and to put on a sick face. He must also purge himself as the sick one does; and in order to purge themselves, they take a certain powder called *cohoba*, inhaling it through the nose, which inebriates them in such fashion that they do not know what they are doing; and thus they say many senseless things, affirming therein that they are speaking with the zemis, and that the latter tell them that the sickness has come from them.

#### Chapter xvi

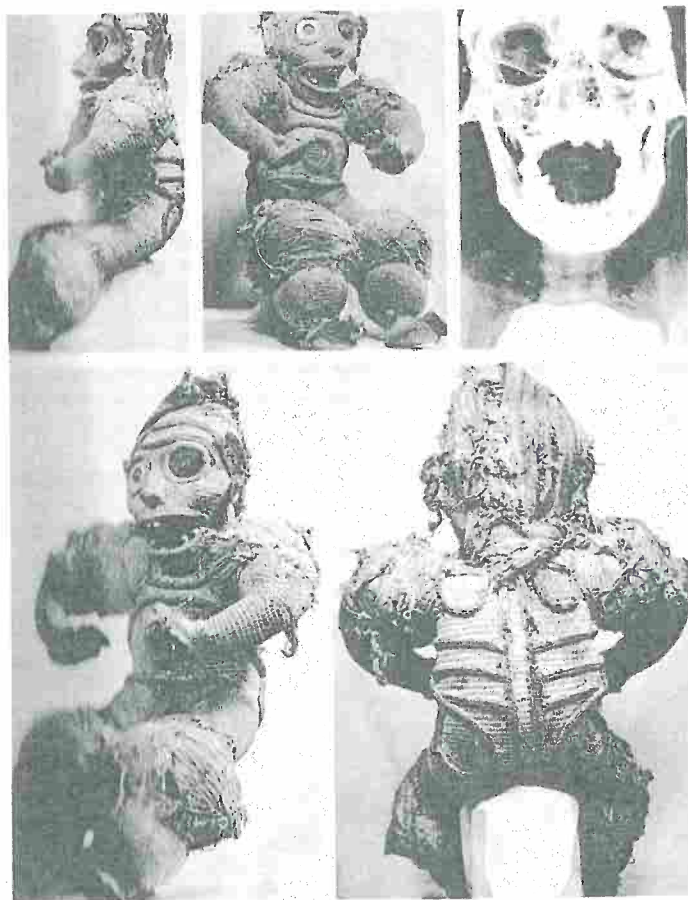
*Concerning what the said behiques do.*

When they go to visit some sick man, before leaving the house, they take soot from the cooking pots or ground charcoal, and they blacken their faces entirely so as to make the sick man believe whatever they may wish about his illness; and then they pick up some little bones and a bit of meat. And wrapping all this up in something so it will not scatter, the physician puts it into his mouth; at this time the sick man has already been purged with the powder as we have said. [...] they take some *güeyo* herbs... wide, and another herb, wrapped in an onion leaf, a half palm in length; and one of the said *güeyos* is what they all share, and after tearing them into pieces with their hands, they knead them;

and then they put them in their mouths so as to vomit what they have eaten so it will do them no harm. Then they begin to intone the aforesaid song; and lighting a torch, they drink that juice. When this first part is done, after remaining still for a time, the *behique* stands up and goes toward the sick man, who is seated alone in the middle of the house, and he walks around him twice, and then he stands in front of him and takes him by the legs, touching him on the thighs and continuing down to the feet; then he pulls hard on him, as if he wished to pull something out. From there he goes to the exit of the house and closes the door, and he speaks, saying: “Go away to the forest, or to the sea, or wherever you wish.” And with a puff, like one who blows into a straw, he turns one more time, puts his hands together and closes his mouth; and his hands tremble, like when one is very cold, and he blows on his hands and sucks in his breath, like when one sucks the marrow of a bone, and he sucks on the sick man’s neck or on his stomach or on his back or on his cheeks, or on his chest, or on his belly or on many parts of his body. When this is done, he begins to cough and to make ugly faces, as if he had eaten some bitter thing, and he spits into his hand and takes out those things we have already told he put into his mouth while in his own house or on his way to the sick man, whether stone or bone or meat, as has already been said. And if it is something to eat, he says to the sick man: “You must know that you have eaten something that has provoked in you the illness you are suffering; look how I have taken it out of your body, for your zemi had put it into your body because you did not pray to him or you did not build him some temple, or you did not give him some land.” And if it is made of stone, he says to the sick man: “Keep it with care.” And sometimes they believe it is true that those stones are good, and they help women give birth, and they keep them very carefully, wrapped in cotton, putting them into small baskets, and they feed them some of what they eat, and they do the same thing with the zemis they have at home. On a solemn occasion, when they have an abundance of food, fish, meat, or bread, or whatever else, they put some of everything in the house of the zemi so that the said idol may eat from those things. The next day they take all these foodstuffs to their homes, after the zemi has eaten. And so may God help them if the zemi eats any of those things because the zemi is a dead thing, shaped from stone or made of wood.

1.3 "CEMÍ MADE OF COTTON", IMAGE FROM ONORIO MONTAS, PEDRO JOSÉ BORRELL AND FRANK MOYA PONS, *ARTE TAÍNO* (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: BANCO CENTRAL DE LA REPUBLICA DOMINICANA, 1999)

The most common cemís were anthropomorphic representations, and could be made of various materials, including wood, cotton, shell, and stone. This cotton cemí was uncovered during an archeological dig in the Dominican Republic.



1.4 BASIL REID, "MYTH 7: THE ISLAND CARIBS WERE CANNIBALS", *MYTHS AND REALITIES OF CARIBBEAN HISTORY* (TUSCALOOSA: UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA PRESS, 2009), PP. 88-100.

Dominant ideas about Caribs center on the issue of cannibalism. The Taíno described their Carib enemies to Europeans as fierce cannibals, who ate the flesh of those they captured in war. Scholars later interpreted this practice as a ritualized effort to absorb the prowess of rival warriors through their consumption. Yet as Basil Reid points out here, there is no archeological evidence to support the common perception that the Carib were ever "man-eaters," and the only eyewitness accounts of cannibal feasts are highly questionable.

One of the greatest falsehoods still inscribed in our history books is the notion that the Island-Caribs were cannibals. The noble, peaceful Greater Antillean Arawak versus the barbaric, savage Lesser Antillean Carib was formalized as early as 1948 in the *Handbook of South American Indians*. In the first chapter of James Michener's blockbuster historical novel *Caribbean*, the Island-Caribs are depicted as fierce, terrible cannibals who fought unrelentingly against the Arawaks, not only to subdue them but also to eat them. Equally negative portrayals of Island-Caribs are evident in more scholarly writings. One prominent scholar, for example, contended that the Island-Carib men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries practiced ritualistic cannibalism. They "ate bits of the flesh of opposing warriors in order to acquire the latter's prowess" (Rouse 1992). Depictions of Island-Carib cannibalism in the 2006 movie *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*, which were vehemently denounced in 2005 by the chief of Dominica's Carib (Kalinago) Indians, underscore the extent to which these ideas permeate the popular culture of the day. No evidence, either archaeological or from firsthand observations by Europeans, conclusively proves that Island-Caribs ever consumed human flesh.

#### Archaeological Perspectives on Cannibalism

The four lines of evidence important in verifying cannibalism in the archaeological record are:

1. Similar butchering techniques in human and animal remains. Thus frequency, location, and type of verified cut marks and chop marks on human and animal bones must be similar, but we should allow for anatomical differences between humans and animals;
2. Similar patterns of long bone breakage that might facilitate marrow extraction
3. Identical patterns of postprocessing discard of human and animal remains
4. Evidence of cooking; if present, such evidence should indicate comparable treatment of human and animal remains. (Villa et al. 1986: 431)

Even though identifying cannibalism in the archaeological record is sometimes problematic (as a host of postdepositional factors, unrelated to anthropophagy, can alter human bones in some archaeological contexts), a handful of sites with evidence of human cannibalism have been found outside the Caribbean. Examples include the 780,000-year-old hominid site of Gran Dolina in Sierra de Atapuerca, Spain (Fernandez-Jalvo et al. 1999) and the Navatu midden in Fiji, whose chronology spanned from 50 B.C. to A.D. 1900 (Degusta 1999). In addition, ritual cannibalism may have motivated the mortuary practices of the Middle pre-Ceramic period (ca. 6500-2000 B.C.) for the Nanchoc region of the upper Zaña Valley, northern Peru where careful breaking, cutting, and placement of human bones from adult males during the Las Pircas phase (6500-4000 B.C.) gave way to more

haphazard breakage and discard during the subsequent Tierra Blanca phase (6000–3000 B.C.) (Rossen and Dillehay 2001).

The study of Mancos in southwestern Colorado in the United States is perhaps the most important research that conclusively points to cannibalism in pre-Columbian America (White 1992). Based on a reexamination of more than two thousand fragmented, burnt, cut, and completely disarticulated human bones from an Anasazi pueblo, it was concluded that nearly thirty men, women, and children had been butchered and cooked there around A.D. 1100. Their bones were fractured for marrow and the remains discarded in several rooms of the pueblo. By comparing the human skeletal remains with those of animals used for food at other sites, the study revealed evidence of skinning, dismembering, cooking, and fracturing, leading to the inference that cannibalism took place at Mancos (White 1992). Also identified was a new perimortem damage feature termed “pot polish”. It was shown, quite convincingly by experiment, and by Mancos Canyon statistics, that the projecting tips and spurs of some bone fragments are polished because they had likely been stirred around in rough pottery vessels.

To date, no such physical anthropological research has been conducted at Island-Carib sites in the Caribbean. The very fact that the Island-Caribs have largely been archaeologically invisible has no doubt complicated the issue (Keegan 1996a). Proper site identification is absolutely necessary before any useful physical anthropological research can be conducted in the field. To date, there are no confirmed Island-Carib sites, although contact-period sites in Grenada and St. Kitts that may relate to the Island-Caribs have been investigated (Cody 1995).

Previously, the Island-Caribs in the Caribbean were associated with a relatively crude style of pottery called Suazey after the Savanne Suazey site in Grenada where it was first identified (Bullen 1964). It has since been demonstrated that the people who manufactured Suazoid series pottery probably were not the historic Island-Caribs (Allaire 1984, 1991). Although contact sites on Grenada and St. Kitts have been investigated (Cody 1995; Farr 1995), it is unclear whether these are in fact Island-Carib. Moreover, the sites are few in number and are difficult to positively identify on the ground. Given this level of uncertainty, it would be difficult for any physical anthropologist to successfully find butchered, charred, or pot polished human bones that incontrovertibly relate to these people.

### Problems with Ethnohistory

Clearly, claims of Island-Carib cannibalism are not based on archaeological evidence but rather on ethnohistory, that is, European accounts of native populations in the Caribbean. Ethnohistorical sources cannot be entirely trusted as they are often laden with racial and cultural biases (Hulme 1993). A critical reading of Columbus's *diario*—the so-called daily log of Columbus's first voyage—reveals a litany of half-truths, anecdotal descriptions, hearsay, and preconceived Eurocentric ideas about the native peoples of the Caribbean. The November 4 entry in Columbus's diary has been interpreted as proof of the Admiral's knowledge of supposedly cannibalistic Carib Indians: “He [Columbus] understood also that, far from there, there were one-eyed men, and others, with snouts of dogs, who ate men, and that as soon as one was taken they cut his throat and drank his blood.” Although Columbus's *diario* has influenced in some way all discussions of the peoples of the Lesser Antilles, the Admiral's first voyage never actually reached the Lesser Antilles (Keegan 1996b). A critical analysis of this document reveals a confusion of the following categories (Keegan 1996b):

1. *Cannibals*: Natives who refused to submit to the Spanish were called cannibals. They were characterized as idolaters and consumers of human flesh who could not be converted into Christianity and were therefore suitable for enslaving.

2. *Caribes*: The Spanish understood Caribes to be real people when in fact they were creatures who existed only in Taíno mythology.
3. *Caniba*: Columbus sought an audience with the Grand Khan of Cathay (China). Caniba is the name Columbus gave to denote the Grand Khan's subjects.

In relation to item 1, there was simply no merit to those allegations as the so-called cannibals are essentially a legacy of the Spanish (Keegan 1992; Sued-Badillo 1978; Myers 1984). For several decades, history writers have created a false dichotomy of the “peaceful Arawaks” and the “man-eating cannibals.” In light of the regular skirmishes between the Taínos and the Spaniards (which culminated with the battle of the Vega Real in 1495) (Wilson 1990), the notion of “peaceful Arawaks” was considerably overplayed. Despite native resistance, the Spanish were able to easily subjugate the Taínos in the northern Caribbean because the Taínos often attempted compromise and accommodation rather than warfare (Keegan 1992). The more militant Island-Caribs of the Lesser Antilles, who adopted more aggressive postures toward the Spanish, French, English, Dutch, and anyone else who threatened their sovereignty, were categorized as cannibals (Keegan 1992). In fact, the word *Carib* soon became a general Spanish term for hostile natives. For example, between 1815 and 1820, an area on the coast of northeastern Luzon, Philippines, was labeled Negroes Caribes Bravos (González 1988). The Island-Carib's aggressive responses to the European proved to be the more successful since they survived unconquered into the eighteenth century and beyond. Charles Williams, the chief of Dominica's Caribs, was accurate when he said that “our ancestors stood up against early European conquerors and because they stood up ... we were labelled savages and cannibals up to today” (Reid 2005b).

The Spanish distinction between “peaceful” Taínos and “warlike” Caribs was not without self-interest. At the outset, Columbus seemed to have in mind the development of a slave trade similar to the Portuguese operation in Africa (Keegan 1992). Those people whom Columbus believed could be transformed into holiness through conversion to Christianity came to be known by history writers as the “peaceful Arawaks” (Black 1983; Dookhan 2006), while those who resisted were pagans who deserved to be enslaved. In fact, agitation against slave taking by priests who managed Spain's missionary efforts in the Greater Antilles caused the Crown to forbid slave taking among Indians who were friendly to the Spanish (Keegan 1992). But in response to economic interests, Queen Isabel in 1503 excluded from this ban “all cannibals.” These “cannibals” were legally defined as barbaric people, enemies of the Christian, those who refuse conversion, and those who eat human flesh (Sauer 1966).

The dichotomies of heavenly tropical paradise versus an unfriendly hellish jungle, of good, noble savages versus vicious, evil cannibals have for centuries been an intrinsic part of the Europeans' attitude toward the New World. This mind-set, was often imputed by Europeans to people beyond their cultural horizon. It was a brazen attempt to de-humanize non-Westerners, therefore justifying their brutal subjugation. “This form of othering” (de Albuquerque 1974) (seeing Europeans as distinct from subordinate groups lumped together as “the other”) is part of Western ideology of colonialism, missionization, and cultural imperialism.

### Conclusion

The issue of Island-Carib cannibalism owes its persistence to inaccurate interpretations of linguistic and ethnohistorical data and the lack of archaeological evidence supporting such claims. Although these allegations have no basis in fact, our history books continue to churn out literary fantasies about Island-Carib cannibalism. Movies like *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* are also active agents of this type of propaganda peddling. Here in the Caribbean, the need for historical

accuracy is both relevant and immediate, given the presence of the Santa Rosa Carib community in Arima, Trinidad, and Island-Carib descendants in both Dominica and St. Vincent. Inasmuch as the myth of Island-Carib cannibalism has become a part of popular thinking, by disseminating historically accurate information (particularly to our young people), we can eventually disabuse people's minds of this myth.

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- 1.5 RAYMOND BRETON, "ON THE ORIGINS, MORES, RELIGION AND OTHER CUSTOMS OF THE CARIBES COMMONLY CALLED SAVAGES, ANCIENT INHABITANTS OF GUADELOUPE" [1647], IN PETER HULME AND NEIL WHITEHEAD (ED.) *WILD MAJESTY: ENCOUNTERS WITH CARIBS FROM COLUMBUS TO THE PRESENT DAY* (OXFORD: CLARENDON PRESS, 1992) PP. 112-114.

Dominican missionary Raymond Breton lived among the Caribs of Guadeloupe from 1635 to 1634, and produced a series of linguistic and ethnographic studies of their language and culture; most notably a two part dictionary with extensive annotation and commentary on their main social, political and economic structures. His work represents the first in-depth study of Carib culture. While it provides a valuable window into indigenous life, it was written 150 years after the first arrival of Europeans, and although missionaries presented Carib culture as unchanging, it is impossible to determine how fully the source reflected pre-Columbian realities. This excerpt examines Carib family patterns and child-rearing practices, allowing us to gain a rare window into women's lives, as well as the role of gender in shaping European perceptions of indigenous societies.

### Of their Marriages and Education of their Children

As there is no polity or law among our savages, they also have no fixed rule for their marriages. There is no prohibited degree [of relatedness], or at least if they restrict themselves from some, such as between parents and their children and between brothers and sisters, it is rather by the powerful action of Nature that they are restrained than by reason of piety or continence. [...]

They have as many wives as they wish, and especially the chiefs and their children. And similarly they have them on different islands. They live in various little huts and sleep successively with their husbands, one one month, another the next. The one who sleeps with him serves him during this time and follows him all over, even to sea. If they surprise their wives in adultery or if they are pregnant by another man, they usually kill them, though sometimes they leave them one or two years without going to see them. The men are at liberty to leave their wives and they [the wives] are at liberty to remarry; but the women do not have any such prerogative. Although they have many wives, they [the wives] are seldom if ever jealous.

[...] They use no ceremony in marriage; if the girl is not absolutely promised to them as are the cousins of their sisters, they ask the father or the mother. They do not know what love is. They rarely marry without the consent of their father and mother. The men do not sleep at all with their wives, unless they are truly nubile and capable of having children. While the women are giving birth, the husbands withdraw from them, and they do not sleep together at all for five or six months from this point. And both undertake a fast, which is one of the most celebrated, especially when they have a boy for the first child. The man fasts more rigorously than the woman for fear that the infant should suffer by him. Father Raymond was at the house of Le Baron [Caribbean chieftain] on Dominica, going to see one of these fasters, and as the Father was speaking to him of this fast, the savage told him that some abstained entirely from drinking and eating for the first five days after the confinement of their wives, and on the other days until the tenth, they take nothing but *ouicou*. After this they eat nothing but cassava and drink *ouicou* for the space of a month or two. And note that they only eat the heart of the cassava and hang up the rest with a cord for the festival. It is true that after they begin to eat, they eat and drink when they wish, but nothing except cassava and *ouicou*. When the day of the festival has arrived and their friends are assembled, all the skin of their bodies is cut with agouti teeth, as with a knife, until it bleeds; then they are rubbed all over with pepper-juice which causes



them great pain, and they are sometimes so despondent with this fast and this blood-letting that it is necessary to lead them home by the hand, and, while the others get drunk at their expense, they continue to fast for some days yet. Once the fast is over, they still eat no fish or birds, as long as their infants are still feeble and weak, excepting crabs and also female chickens if they must.

The person fasting gave Father Raymond some very good reasons for it. It is, he said, because the children would have stomach illness or defective limbs like those of the animals that their fathers ate. For example, they would have a long and round snout if they were to eat eel, small and round eyes if parrots. (And for the same reason, they never eat sea-cow for fear that their children would have small, round eyes like this great fish.) They would have crooked feet if they were to eat pig and so on with other things.

We will also interpolate here this pleasing trait in passing. There is a species of caranx<sup>1</sup> which is a fine fish with the bones of the spine somewhat bent; when they eat this fish they take good care to dispose of its bones a long way off; they put them in the ground very gently for fear that they should become hump-backed and are astonished that the French mock them for this.

After the women have given birth, they press the forehead of their infants with their hand and thus make it match up with the crown of the head and force it to flatten. So it comes about that they have a large forehead. In order to keep them in this posture, they make them sleep by day on their knees, the head on one knee pressed by their hand, and their feet on the other knee. By night, they hold them to their side, from whence it comes that being accustomed to sleep so warmly, they will cry dreadfully when they [the mothers] go away even a little from their sides.

After two or three weeks they invite [someone] like a godfather or godmother who pierces the ears, the nose, and the underneath of the lip of these little infants and cuts their hair in front and gives them a name. They in exchange rub him with oil on the head and neck. The mothers never cover their infants when they go somewhere. They carry them under the arm with a little bed of cotton [hammock] that they pass over the shoulder in a sling.

When the children are one or two, the father holds a festival called *Elétoaz* at which their hair is cut entirely and their nose, ears, and under-lip are pierced if their weakness had hindered them being pierced when little.

The boys, when they are bigger, eat with their fathers and the girls with their mothers. They do not teach them any kind of manners nor do they say good day or good night nor thank you very much. They raise them with such dissoluteness that they will only do as they please, and will obey their parents only at whim, and the parents do not chastise them at all. The mothers sometimes mistreat them, but this is only out of anger or spite, not by way of discipline.

When the girls begin to menstruate, they make them fast for a month or two, as they do the boys when they reach their adolescence, and they have them cut with agouti teeth, as we will relate when we speak of their drinking-parties.

When the father dies or leaves his wife, all the children stay with her; she takes charge of them and the husband no longer concerns himself with them.

There are amongst the savages women who prostitute themselves. There are no indecent expressions among them. They all, big and small, girls and boys, call things by their names without any shame.

[...]

<sup>1</sup> Genus of *Scomberidae*, a family also uniquely distinguished by the *Caraiques* with the term "couilouarou".

## 2

### *First Encounters*

THE CARIBBEAN HAD EXPERIENCED THE RISE AND DECLINE of multiple cultural groups and civilizations prior to the onset of European colonialism. Yet, the arrival of Columbus's expedition in the Bahamas in October of 1492 still represents an important turning point in Caribbean—and world—history. The interactions between Europeans and Taínos represented the reintegration of "Old" and "New" Worlds after several millennia of separation. The chain of events they fostered would ultimately place the societies and economies of Europe, Africa, and the Americas on a new and different path. In the Caribbean, this first encounter established a framework for future interactions between Spanish and indigenous people that centered around forced labor, extraction of precious metals and Christian evangelization. It also set in motion a devastating process of demographic and cultural collapse. The consequences were most catastrophic for the Taíno: within 10 years of Columbus's arrival, their autonomous political and economic institutions were completely destroyed, and within 25 years, 90 percent of their population had died. However, the story of the encounter is not quite that of unquestioned European dominance and passive indigenous acquiescence that is often presented. Both Carib and Taíno peoples resisted and negotiated the European arrival in ways that placed their stamp upon these new histories.

Columbus's arrival in the Caribbean basin needs to be contextualized in the expansion of European trading networks during the fifteenth century. The Ottoman Empire was increasingly asserting control over Mediterranean and North African trade routes, and European merchants responded by seeking new trading alternatives. The Portuguese were in the vanguard of this process of exploration, and had sailed the coast of West Africa, opening up important new trading links. Columbus sought to create a new path to an old trading partner by reaching Asia by sailing west, rather than by heading east as was customary. His voyage reflected wider economic and political currents in several ways. Columbus himself was a Genoese merchant, part of a group that had been especially hard-hit by Ottoman expansion, and which had responded by moving to the trading ports of Andalusia, notably Lisbon and Seville. He was funded by the newly unified Spanish Crown, which had recently been forged from the kingdoms of Castile and Aragon. Spain was fresh from a military campaign that had expelled the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula and sought to expand its power still further by finding a new trade route outside of Ottoman and Portuguese control. By the time he approached the Spanish Court for funding to undertake a voyage, Columbus already had extensive seagoing experience, and understood that finding new land could reap him enormous personal wealth as well as entry into the nobility. This desire for social mobility doubtless motivated the Spanish men who accompanied Columbus on this and later voyages, and who became the first European settlers of the Caribbean. Columbus was not the first European to think about reaching Asia by sailing west, and his voyage was preceded by (unsuccessful) westward expeditions sponsored by the kings of Portugal and England. Had he not happened upon the Caribbean islands, it is likely that some other seafarer would have done so in the not too distant future.