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ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE ISLAND CARIB OF DOMINICA, B.W.I.

By DOUGLAS TAYLOR

AN earlier article published in the AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGIST[1] was written rather hurriedly after several cursory visits to the Carib Reserve of Dominica, British West Indies. Having since then been able to spend some consecutive weeks among this interesting group, I now take the liberty of offering further comments and corrections together with an additional vocabulary.

Physically, the Dominican Caribs are a small though sturdy race—the men averaging around five feet four inches and the women about five feet one inch in height. They have sleek black hair, high foreheads, broad cheek-bones, straight nostrils, and rounded chins. Their eyes are long and narrow—though usually *not* oblique— with long silky lashes. Their ears are very long and often lobeless, their feet small and extraordinarily high-arched. The girls are broad-shouldered, tend to be plump, and have powerful but almost straight loins. Men and women alike have little or no body-hair. The full-blooded Indian's color is quite distinct from that of a mulatto, and is best described as resembling the dried bark of cinnamon. The shade varies with the occupation followed—fishermen are darker than woodsmen—and does not always indicate the purity of the strain. Like all others of their race, the Indians of Dominica are naturally shy and reticent, sensitive to an extreme, quick to take offense, and given to occasional moods of melancholy or unreasonableness.

Perhaps the most typical of their present-day products is the pagàra or double lined Carib pannier. These are made by a number of the men, some of whom show almost as much skill as their more primitive cousins of the Guiana mainland. The commonest variety is the rectangular "toilet-basket" measuring about twenty-four by thirty by twenty-four inches, with lid of almost the same depth as the body and very slightly larger in order to fit over the latter. Other forms are the "satchel," a flat handbag-shaped affair some ten inches long by two inches wide by eighteen inches deep. The sides taper slightly toward the top, which is some two inches shorter than the base. The "grip" is a modern adaptation introduced to suit the tastes of town-negro and tourists. All these baskets are made in the same manner, and each consists of four pieces: a body and a lid, plaited in a more or less complicated design with strands of two or three colors, duplicated by linings of the same material in close plain white weave. Between

[1] The Island Caribs of Dominica, B. W. I. (American Anthropologist, Vol. 37, pp. 265–72, 1935).

the outside basket (body and lid alike) and the lining is placed an overlapping layer of cachibou leaves to ensure watertightness.

Hébichets or cassava-sifters, matùtu or Carib tables (a sort of low tabouret), and màtapi or cassava-squeezers (the typical stocking-like affair known here as "couleuvre") are also made yet by a few of the older men.

All of the above are made from the stem of the luàrouman. This reed-like plant (the itirite of the Guiana Indians ?) is found in the high woods, cut to a length of about eight feet, and brought back in big bundles to the Reserve. Here it is dried in the sun until it acquires a reddish-brown tinge, or steeped in "mud-holes" to dye it black. The stems are then prepared for use by splitting them in four and removing the pith with the aid of a knife. The white inner side of the strands is usually placed uppermost in either the warp or the weft of most products.

The women weave simple round wicker baskets in a variety of shapes and sizes out of a liana called mibi. The strands are often dyed yellow and mauve with the fruit and leaves respectively of plants known locally as "saffron" and "tan."

Other products are the catàoli or shoulder-carryall, made here of lattanier; kali, a kind of fish-pot used for catching flying-fish, and the sleeping-mat, no longer common, made from the ribs of balizier leaves.

Roucou (anatto) and cotton still abound in the reserve, but the women of today can neither dye nor spin, and the latter is now mainly used for caulking defective canoes.

The men still make their fishing-lines (nets are not used) in the old way out of what they call la pitte (kùrawa or silk-grass). A length of bush-rope (tressed strips of mahoe-bark) is attached to the fork of a tree and a slip-knot passed round the leaf, which is then folded over a thick round stick held in the hand. By an even pull, the leaf is made to pass through the knot, exposing the long fibre and leaving the waste matter on the rope. As the process continues the stick is twisted and the disengaged fibre wound around it. The latter, when dried and bleached, is spun into twine by rolling it on the naked thigh in a particular manner.

The tree *Carapa guiensis* is still found in the Dominica forests. Its fruit was formerly used to make the oil Caribs put on their hair and, mixed with roucou, on their bodies. Curiously, its name (carapat oil) is now given to the oil of the palma christi which the women still extract in a primitive way for anointing their hair. The men sometimes make shark oil for use in primitive lamps as a substitute for kerosene. The flambeau, now seldom seen, is a torch made from strips of a wood known as bois chandelle bound up in dried leaves together with lumps of white gum of the gommier tree. Such a

torch burns steadily for six or seven hours, and gives off a very pleasant aroma.

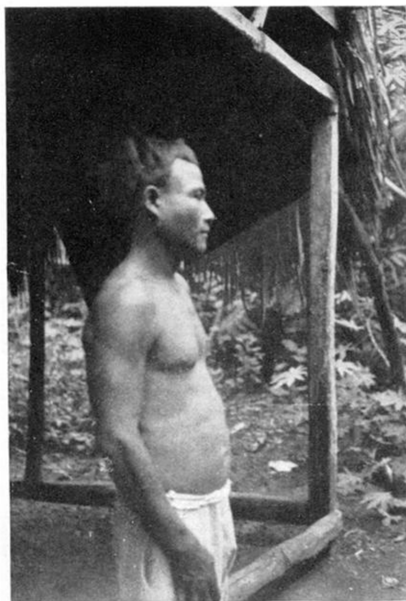
A few surviving customs are worth noting. Though not altogether confined to the Carib population today, they are, at any rate of purely Indian origin.

At least two fish-poisons are known and commonly used in river-pools whenever the sea is too rough for fishing. That known as nivrage (from the French "énivrer") is prepared by crushing the leaves of a shrub fairly common in the Reserve and probably identical with Carib kunàmi. The other and more powerful comes from the fruit of a tree called babarà. It may even, on occasion, be used in rock-pools of seawater.

Sorcery is not unknown, but has fallen into disrepute and become inextricably mixed with imported African and pseudo-Christian varieties. At the present time it is concerned chiefly with petty jealousies, love spells, the recovery of lost objects, and the like. The word piaïe is used throughout Dominica in the sense of "spell" or "charm," whereas obeah (supposed to be African) and quimbois (said to come from French "tiens bois") serve indifferently to denote the science and practice of sorcery. It is curious, though perhaps a coincidence, that these last two words so nearly resemble the Island Carib words (women's and men's languages respectively) for "spirit," "understanding:" ôpoya and akàmbué.

Some Carib are reluctant to tell their names to strangers—or at least they retain a private name they will divulge only to their family. Though Carib names have long been dropped for "Christian" names (usually incomprehensible corruptions of French names), family surnames are not used. Thus, a man whose father was John Jules may call himself Norbert John, and his son Siméon Norbert. This practice—in a country where most families already consist of "mine," "thine," and "ours"—makes it exceedingly difficult to trace genealogies. "Outside children" always remain with the mother, whether or not she has more legitimate responsibilities. A newly married girl brings her husband back to *her* parents' home until such time as he can build a house himself; she never goes to live with *his* parents.

Death and sickness are caused, not by disease, but by evil spirits in search of mischief. An old Carib friend once told me in confidence of the "death-spirits," against whom neither priest nor doctor could avail. His last words before he died—of a pleurisy contracted through wearing wet clothes—were: Yo ka pren' la vie au soè'-à, "Tonight they are taking life." Nine days after a death, a sort of second wake is held in the house of the deceased "pour faire la prière." It begins with the singing of French hymns by the women, becomes—refreshments helping—quite a merry party, and



Island Carib types, Dominica, British West Indies.

Island Carib types, Dominica, British West Indies.

ends around daybreak with games, conundrums (to tirer contes in patois), and ring-dances. All the priests I asked denied that this ceremony had any Christian origin. A Carib finally told me that the object of this prayer-evening, frowned on by the church, is to rid the house of any death-spirits that may still be lurking there—a sort of spiritual fumigation!

In writing the following supplementary vocabulary I have used a different orthography from that adopted in the previous article, as more suited to the genius of the language.[2]

People

ī'haru	woman
n-iani	my wife

Animals, Birds, Fish

wayàmaka	iguana lizard
wanàçaé	tête-chien snake
héhwé[3]	snake (generic)
kàturi	screech-owl
kùrapiào*	small song-bird (patois: merle)
çéçé*	small grass-bird
çicéru*	Dominica or Imperial parrot
bàlau*	small common fish
katàru	edible turtle (caret)
kùliru*	"Jack," small fish
haçùlali	fish (vive)

[2] In general, the vowels have been given their Latin values, while the consonants are as in English. Some modifications have, however, been necessary.

au, eu, aī are pronounced in two syllables.

ao is almost like English "how," ai almost like "I."

ĕ is the indefinite vowel in "mother."

ué, ui, ua replace wé, etc., where that sound results from an inflected u sound.

The tilde is used as in Portuguese to denote a nasalization of the vowel, in the same way as in French n final or before a consonant.

Accents denote stress, not quality.

ç is a sound intermediate between "ss" and "ch" (French).

hw is a strongly aspirated "wh" sound.

gh and kh are soft though distinct gutterals.

p, k, and t are softened so as to become confused with b, g, and d. There is similar confusion between long ô and u, ç and ch, l and r.

n and r seem to be sometimes aspirated.

Asterisks denote that the word is now used in Créole patois.

Where the English for a Carib word is unknown, its patois equivalent is given in parentheses.

[3] Used in patois in the expression hĕhwē-congre, the conger-eel.

hànnao	fish (bourse)
hépi	"parrot-fish"
makùba	river mud-fish (têtard)
mōbēi*	fish, cardinal
çìbuli*	fish (nègre) of dark color
tìtiri*	fry of certain fish caught in sheets at river-mouths
wàtĕribi	fish, variety of snapper (tanche)
ìçulu	fresh water crayfish

Elements

parànna	sea
konôbu	rain
karàbali	the breeze or trade-wind
iwàyuhurù	storm

Various

éçùbaraté	knife or cultlass
hébichet*	cassava-sifter
kàbuiya*	noose
kàli*	kind of fish-pot of cotton or bamboo
kanàri*	big earthenware cook-pot
katàoli[4]	shoulder container-basket
kuriàla[4]	dug-out canoe
matùtu*	Carib table (small basket-work tabouret)
muinã	palm-thatch dwelling

Native Trees whose Carib names have remained in general use in Dominica. bàlata, pàpai (papaya), kàrapa (crabwood tree), kàchibu, kwàchin, ikàku (corrupted to z'ikak), luàrumã, mibi, mōbeī, çima-ùba, wawa, yàttaghu.

Carib Place Names in Reserve, forgotten by all but oldest inhabitants. Ataori, Akàoyu (Raymond River), Kùçaràwa (Ravine Gros Rochers), Kuçàrakwa, Kuanarà (Ravine Viville), Wàiçima, Kuérek, Ĩçulukàti (Crayfish River), Bàraiçi (Bataca), Wàinika, Kuària (Big River, now a dried bed forming northern boundary), Wàraka (district between the foregoing and River Pegoua).

Phrases and Verb-Forms

bírihàli arhyàbu rícha	lightning streaks the night
kàïmã w-atàbura tùnã	let us go and draw water

[4] Heard once in patois, but very unusual.

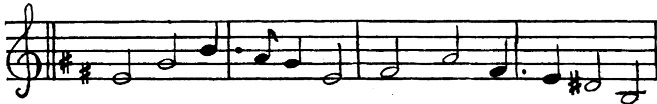
tabù-bùka tùnã	go and draw water!
ènni tàbu nāku	I'm going to sleep (lit., close my eyes)
ènn ay-àtakwa	here is for you to drink!
àla kuàbutu	I want (*or* let's have) a drink!
ènn kàï amulài	Here's how! (lit., here's let us appease)
aohwééli	he is dead
abínaka	to dance
chírakwa	to split, pierce

And some corrected forms of phrases given in the earlier article under Nos. 7, 8, 10, 12, and 14:

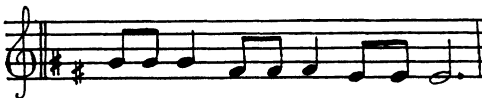
rùbài yété nùni—ni-lamāhàtina	Give here food—I am hungry
mékeru k'hiĩnçi	The negro smells!
makràbuhátina	I am thirsty
yùruk'-hào kàtu kàrrahí	Are you well?
rùbài pàipaté pùman iùtti kômulàkha	Go and get me a smoke!

nùni may be Breton's "no-i, pittance;" kàrrahi probably has to do with his "karrĕní, strength;" paipaté is, I think, undoubtedly his "baibatí, go thou;" pùman his "bóman, from thee" (a form used in asking); iùtti, "a portion;" kômulàkha, "to smoke."

The following song was taught me by Chief Jolly John, who learnt it from Tanaze, now dead.



Tù-kim màkuàrué! Tù-kim màkuàrué!
They make war, O lazy one! They make war, O lazy one!



Bínari tànura mannĕr' imu
Unwilling thou to flee, thou my son

Kà-ĩ-mã bíçikàni kaï w-aku! (repeat)
Come let us take the lead! Come let us awake!

As some of the words may be corrupt, I cannot vouch for the accuracy of the translation; for although words and air are known to several living Caribs, the meaning has been forgotten!

The remaining Indians of Dominica are today the only direct descendants of the two groups first encountered by Columbus—the Island Arawak and the Island Carib. They have, within the last seventy years, lost practically the whole of their language, tradition, and culture, and the greater part of their customs and individual way of living. This falling-off is not due to lack of stamina in them—the Dominicans having outlived by some two hundred years their cousins of the other islands—but is the outcome of a long, persistent, and stupid policy of interference and absorbtion that has remained unchanged since the days when the Indians were a real menace to white settlers of their islands. If something to preserve them is not undertaken soon—and it is doubtful whether that would still be possible—they in their turn will have disappeared in another generation. If that must be, it is high time to put on record in a more scientific way than has here been possible what yet may be ascertained of their physical characteristics, their customs, and their crafts; to etymologize the old place-names; and to make a representative collection of the ancient weapons and implements with which the soil of the island abounds.

EASTON, MARYLAND