

## Expansion of the Taino cacicazgos towards the Lesser Antilles

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### Resumen

La expansión de los cacicazgos tainos hacia las Pequeñas Antillas. Investigaciones arqueológicas recientes en la isla de Saba (Pequeñas Antillas) han revelado la incorporación de este lugar en el sistema socio-político de los cacicazgos de las Grandes Antillas. Se revisan varias hipótesis con el fin de comprender el proceso de la expansión Taino en las Pequeñas Antillas. Para interpretar los datos arqueológicos los autores del presente artículo acuden a la documentación etnohistórica disponible.

### Résumé

L'expansion des chefferies taino dans les Petites Antilles. Des recherches archéologiques sur l'île de Saba (Petites Antilles) ont montré l'inclusion des populations de ce lieu dans le système socio-politique des chefferies, caractéristique des Grandes Antilles. Plusieurs hypothèses sont évoquées pour expliquer le processus de l'expansion des Taïnos dans les Petites Antilles. Les sources ethnohistoriques sont mises à contribution pour interpréter les données archéologiques.

### Abstract

Archaeological research on the Lesser Antillean island of Saba has evidenced incorporation in the Taino cacical society of the Greater Antilles. Several hypotheses are presented to explain the process of Taino expansion towards the Lesser Antilles. Ethnohistorical information is used to contextualize the archaeological data.

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## EXPANSION OF THE TAINO CACICAZGOS TOWARDS THE LESSER ANTILLES

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Archaeological research on the Lesser Antillean island of Saba has evidenced incorporation in the *Taino cacical* society of the Greater Antilles. Several hypotheses are presented to explain the process of *Taino* expansion towards the Lesser Antilles. Ethnohistorical information is used to contextualize the archaeological data.

KEY WORDS : Archaeology, Greater Antilles, Lesser Antilles, Saba, Taino, cacicazgos, socio-political expansion.

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MOTS CLÉS : archéologie, Grandes Antilles, Petites Antilles, Saba, Taïno, chefferies, expansion socio-politique.

*La expansión de los cacicazgos tainos hacia las Pequeñas Antillas*

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PALABRAS CLAVES : arqueología, Grandes Antillas, Pequeñas Antillas, Saba, Taino, cacicazgos, expansión socio-política.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Caribbean archaeology, the understanding of the late pre-Columbian societies of the Greater Antilles has largely been based on the accounts in ethnohistorical sources. The earliest of these are the journals by Christopher Columbus, the letter by Chanca and the report on the native religion by Fray Ramon Pané (1974). Due to the rapid collapse of the indigeneous socio-political systems and the catastrophic reduction of the native population, the later sources contain little detailed information on the *cacicazgos* of the *Tainos* encountered by the Spaniards in 1492.

Ten days after his first landfall, Columbus met a *cacique* who was treated by his people with the ultimate respect, was carried on a litter and had two elders as his spokesmen and recipients of his food (Jane 1988). The sources further provided the information that the person of the *cacique* invoked his divinatory powers through chiefly rituals that involved fasting, administrating of hallucinogenic snuff (*cohoba*) and reciting of *areítos* thus commemorating the supernatural and human aspects of his authority in front of his personal effigy figures (*zemís*).

The *Taino* communities were regionally integrated into large political entities under a paramount chief. The degree of integration probably depended on the abilities of the *cacique* to enhance his political power by extending his political network over other lineages and to legitimate his position by demonstrating his supernatural status and religious functions.

The formation of alliances with other elite lineages formed mechanisms to secure the chief's position among his peers. The alliances in his regional network were similarly strengthened by marriages, exchange relationships, competitive feasts, and joint military warfare, while interelite ceremonial exchange and competitive feasts served to confirm the regional divinatory power of the *cacique* by his political peers (Wilson 1990).

The anthropological concept of chiefdom has been derived from the Spanish description of the local rulers, the *caciques* of the Greater Antilles. Oberg took the *cacicazgos* of the Greater Antilles as a model to describe the Circum-Caribbean centralized political organization as : « multi-village territorial chiefdoms governed by a paramount chief under whose control are districts and villages governed by a hierarchy of subordinate chiefs » (Oberg 1955, p. 484). More generally, chiefdoms are polities characterized by a hierarchical ranking of lineages and social status differences between lineage members. Most chiefdoms are ruled by a chief whose position is hereditary. The wide range of variability of chiefdoms has been subject of extensive debates in the literature (Service 1971 ; Carneiro 1981 ; Drennan and Uribe 1987 ; Spencer 1987 ; Marcus and Zeitlin 1994 ; Jansen and Reyes García 1997).

## TAINOS VERSUS ISLAND CARIBS AND IGNERIS

*Historic and linguistic research*

The term *taino* or *tayno* was heard for the first time by the Spaniards during Columbus' first voyage on the coasts of Hispaniola (Jane 1988).

« Tambien dicen otro nombre por grande que llaman nitayno, no sabian si lo decian por hidalgo o gobernador o juez »<sup>1</sup>

Las Casas writes in his *Historia* (1927 part I :275)

« ... nitayno es nombre de caballero y señor principal ... »<sup>2</sup>

and Pedro Martyr d'Anghera (1944 :123) writes that in Hispaniola :

« ... noble se dice taino ... »<sup>3</sup>.

These quotations suggest that the term was not used as a self-denomination but rather to indicate a class of the political stratification, the *nitainos* or *mitaines* who were nobles honoured for their high descent. They had executive functions and knew exactly where the borders of the different chiefdoms were located because they were in charge of the measurements of the properties and grounds (Oviedo 1959 Part I, p. 62 ; Part II, p. 93 ; Las Casas 1927 Part III, p. 62 ; Part IV, pp. 212, 213, 218). Arrom (1975) suggested that the prefix « ni » is a personal prefix and would indicate the third person plural. An other possibility is a possessive pronoun for the third person and would then indicate « his or them » resulting in « his or their noble ».

The word *Taino* is introduced in historic and linguistic research in the course of the nineteenth century. In 1836 Rafinesque used the term *Taino* for the first time to indicate the dialect of the native population of the Greater Antilles by contrast to the *Igneri* of the Lesser Antilles, and at the end of the nineteenth century, Von Martius (1876) used the term to indicate the inhabitants of the Greater Antilles.

Since the eighties, scholars suggest that the language spoken by the native population of the Greater Antilles derived from the Maipuran family as spoken on the coast of the Guyanas, as does the Island Carib language, the language spoken by the Island Caribs. The proto-Maipuran developed out of the proto-Arawakan which originated in the Amazon basin. Speakers of this proto-Maipuran language have spread onto the Guyanas and to the West-Indian islands. In the Guyanas it developed into *Lokono*, on the Lesser Antilles into the *Igneri* and on the Greater Antilles into *Taino*, which was also the language spoken by the *Lucayos* on the Bahamas (Rouse 1986). The Island Carib language which was spoken on the Lesser Antilles in the mid-seventeenth century is considered to be an Arawakan trade language (Hoff, 1994, 1995 ; Taylor and Hoff 1980).

In contrast to the Greater Antilles, the Lesser Antilles were reported to be inhabited by different groups during the early colonial period, i.e., the *Caribes* and the *Igneri*. Chroniclers of Columbus' second voyage have reported that *Caribes* were encountered on the island of St. Croix or St. Martin. Chanca mentions in a letter that the *Caribes* encountered on St. Martin, which was then called Nevis, had another appearance than the *Caribes* he had known from Guadeloupe. It is generally believed that the natives were not similar to those of Guadeloupe and Dominica (Hatt 1924). Chanca mentioned also that the *Caribes* from Guadeloupe had just recently depopulated the island of Montserrat from its original inhabitants (Jane 1988). According to Allaire (1987), this statement strongly suggests the presence of different ethnic entities in the Leeward islands since the Caribes are not reported to have raided each other, but on the contrary to have displayed a strong awareness of their common ethnic identity.

From the early colonial period on, the northern Lesser Antillean islands were regarded as *islas inútiles* because of the lack of precious goods and the « pugnacious and cannibalistic » native population, the *Caribes*. It is known from the sources that the *Caribes* resisted against the Spanish rule, what soon made them a persecuted people. In 1511 the Spanish Crown decided that only *Caribes* could be kept in slavery. Eventually, they were the only Indians who could be captured legally for slavery and the Lesser Antilles became the favourite hunting ground for the *indieros*, hunters of Indians. Since then, the Spanish sources mention that all islands southeast of Puerto Rico were inhabited by *Caribes* (Herrera 1934-57), a label which apparently not has been used to refer to a specific ethnic group but to any hostile Indians. For this reason Sued Badillo (1978) assumes that the *Caribes* were more of a mythical group invented by the early Spanish chroniclers. In Sued Badillo's (1995) opinion the differences between the inhabitants of the Lesser and Greater Antilles are more likely the result of different types of socio-economical and political development.

From the onset of the early colonial period, large numbers of Indians from the Lesser Antilles were brought into slavery for the mining and agriculture. Many of the Lesser Antilles were then left by native inhabitants for good.

The early colonial period ends on the Lesser Antilles around 1620 when French, English and Dutch settlers occupied the West Indian islands and marked the beginning of the « *implantation territoriale* » (Chaunu 1957). Since that time, some hundred and thirty years after the Spanish colonization, French chroniclers, among whom many missionaries, report extensively on the remaining native population of the southern Lesser Antilles and St. Kitts : the *Caraiibes* or now generally called *Island Caribs* (Breton 1665, 1978). It is also from this period that the Frenchman Guillaume Coppier (1645) mentions a group of « savages » or *Igneris* living on Saba. It seems that this term is used by the *Island Caribs* of St. Kitts, Guadeloupe and Dominica to designate another ethnic group.

For the Lesser Antilles, the period of colonial conquest ends at different times on the various islands. As far as the southern Lesser Antilles are concerned this is around 1795, when the English succeeded in conquering the last *Caribs* on St. Vincent. This marks the end of a long period of Amerindian habitation on the islands as only some remnants of the population were left. Up to present times *Caribs* still inhabit a territory on Dominica and they are only too aware of a Carib ethnic identity.

It is important to realize that most Spanish accounts refer to the first decades of the Spanish colonialization of the Greater Antilles and that the French sources are written more than a century later. A century in which the socio-political and demographic situation in the area changed drastically. It is from these reports, however, that scholars from various disciplines imposed the widespread cultural scheme, separating the peaceful *Tainos* of the Greater Antilles from their fierce southeastern neighbours, the *Caribes*, and suggested that the Caribbean islands were inhabited by various ethnic groups at the time of the Spanish colonization. The ethnic names derived from these sources are nowadays assigned by archaeologists as labels to major cultural groups as *Tainos*, *Island Caribs* and *Igneris*. The *Tainos* are considered to have inhabited the Greater Antilles, the so-called *Island Caribs* the southern Lesser Antilles and the *Igneries* are interpreted to have preceded the *Island Caribs* on these islands.

*Archaeological research*

On the Greater Antilles, social complexity seems to have arisen after AD 600-700. At this time populations were migrating from the coast to the intermediate mountains of Puerto Rico, and groups were expanding into Hispaniola. The most important centres of socio-political development were situated on these larger islands. Here the basis was made for the complex stratified chiefdoms of the *Tainos* with a consolidation of power through time and the deification of ancestors. The emergence of the *cacicazgos* on the Greater Antilles is archaeologically associated with the construction of communal works like ballcourts or *bateys*, a two- or three-level settlement hierarchy and the production and exchange of exotic prestige goods. Archaeological evidence suggests that this level of socio-political development was attained by AD 1200.

During the latest period, this is after AD 1200, the Chican Ostionoid ceramic subseries, in which a number of styles (Boca Chica, Capá and Esperanza) are distinguishable, developed in the Dominican Republic and then spread to Puerto Rico.

In archaeology, the term *Taino* was used for the first time at the beginning of this century by Fewkes (1907, p. 260) to indicate the original sedentary inhabitants of the Greater Antilles in contrast to the Island Caribs. Later he used the term to distinguish them from the older Arawak inhabitants (Fewkes 1922, p. 56). Harrington (1921, II, p. 395) used the term in the archaeology of Cuba and made a division between Classic *Taino* and sub-*Taino*, to indicate the less developed groups who lived there. Lovén (1935 :VI) used the term as a synonym of « Island Arawak ». Presently, the *Taino* culture is considered to be the common culture of one ethnic group. For the Lesser Antilles these are referred to as Eastern *Taino* in contrast with the Classic *Taino* inhabiting the central part of the area of this culture and the Western *Taino* inhabiting the western periphery. The Eastern and Western *Tainos* might possibly be regarded as local variants of the Classic *Tainos* (Rouse 1992). By archaeologists the Classic *Tainos* are correlated with the Ostionoid ceramic series of Hispaniola, Puerto Rico and the part of the Virgin Islands. The sub-*Tainos* with the Meillacan subseries on western Hispaniola and Cuba to the west and with the Ostionoid on the northern Virgin Islands and the northern Lesser Antilles (Rouse 1992). According to Rouse, this classification implies similarity in language, culture and ethnic affiliation with the *Tainos* of the Greater Antilles

Archaeologists have well identified the remains of the *Tainos* on the Greater Antilles, but the remains of the *Island Caribs* on the Windward Islands are not identified with certainty, although that they have been correlated with the Suazoid series (AD 1000-1450) and later with the Cayo complex ( $\pm$  AD 1250) (Bullen and Bullen 1970 ; Allaire 1977, 1980, 1984 ; Boomert 1986).

Allaire (1987) argues that, on the basis of historical and archaeological data, it is unlikely that the *Island Caribs*, who are assumed to have moved to the Windward Islands just before contact, might have been ethnically closely related to the *Tainos* whose presence in their islands is attested for several centuries as flourishing chiefdoms. Allaire also states that the role of the Greater Antilles in prehistoric times might have been somewhat underrated in the Lesser Antilles. Influences from the

extant *Taino* culture are found throughout the Lesser Antilles up onto the Martinique where archaeological evidence is found in the Suazoid material.

Recent research on the identity of the inhabitants of what is called the « *Taino-Carib* frontier » has been concentrated on the Virgin Islands. Archaeological remains on the island of St. Croix suggest a local development parallel with those on the Greater Antilles. According to Allaire they can therefore be classified, supposedly as well as the other Leeward Islands, as sub-*Tainos*.

#### THE LESSER ANTILLES : SOCIO-POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE TAINO PERIPHERY

The Lesser Antilles form a connection between the large landmasses of the South American mainland and the Greater Antilles such as Puerto Rico, Hispaniola and Cuba (fig. 1). It is not surprising that the first ceramic or Saladoid groups (400 BC-AD 600/850) had spread from the Orinoco through the islands of the Lesser Antilles to the Greater Antilles. The successful colonization of the islands, and the maintenance of a cultural unity over a large geographical area, during more than a millennium, would have required a rather complex socio-political and ideological organization. The latter is comparable to what may be classified as a complex tribe (see also Hoopes 1988) or, as more recently proposed by Boomert (1999), an organization structured as « big man collectivities ».

From the beginning of the Saladoid colonization ( $\pm$  400 BC) settlements were located on islands such as Martinique, Marie-Galante, Guadeloupe, Montserrat and St. Martin. In a later period (AD 150-450) all other islands of the Lesser Antilles have evidence of occupation. Archaeological research revealed a pattern of dispersed settlements, a longlasting ceramic tradition, a high degree of craft specialization, and uniform pattern of burial practices. Ceremonial life was established and exemplified in the material culture. There is evidence that communal ceremonial activities were performed on different levels in Saladoid society

The occurrence of a Huecan component in certain Cedrosan Saladoid sites on the northern Lesser Antilles and eastern Puerto Rico (Chanlatte 1983 ; Hofman and Hoogland 1999 ; Hofman *et al.* 1999 ; Oliver 1999 ; Rodríguez 1991 ; Watters and Petersen 1999) could well testify the presence of lineages of religious specialists and the performance of specific ritual activities at certain places. Ceramic and lithic artefacts of the Huecan component at these sites evidence craft specialization and standardization. The limited variation in vessel shape and decorative modes and symbolic laden designs points to a specific use of these artefacts. Sites as Punta Candelero, La Hueca, Hope Estate and Morel could then be interpreted as places where such activities took place at an inter-settlement level during Saladoid times.

Further it is hypothesized that the petroglyph sites such as at Trois Rivières, Guadeloupe functioned as centralized places for larger inter-regional ritual gatherings.

A disruption of the cultural unity is evidenced at the end of the Saladoid period, between AD 600 and 850. Regarding the material culture, a series of local developments evolved. In terms of ceramic cultures, these are referred to as Mamoran, Troumassan and Suazan Troumassoid (Hofman 1993). Ceramic techniques and decorative designs have developed out of the Saladoid, but are less elaborated.

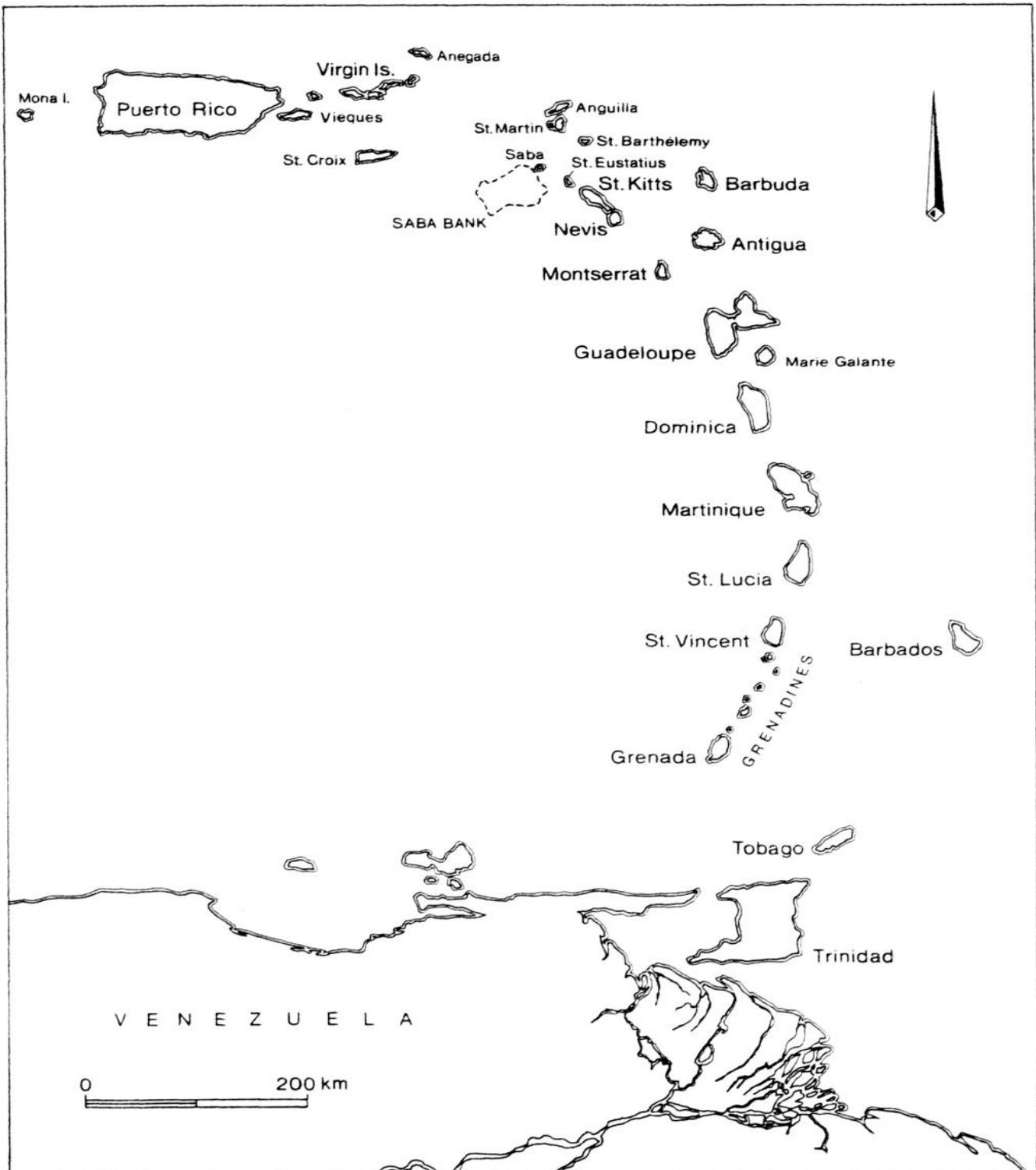


FIG. 1. Map of the Caribbean.



Symbolic representations of the material culture and the presence of *Taino* prestige goods demonstrate that also during the post-Saladoid period contacts were maintained with groups on the Greater Antilles and the South American mainland (Allaire 1990 ; Hofman 1993). In this process the islands of the Lesser Antilles kept on operating as stepping-stones for interacting groups. For the inhabitants of these islands it means that they have always been confronted with new ideas and they could select new cultural elements and add them to their own culture.

There is a shift in settlement pattern. The size and number of sites increase during this period and they are widely distributed over the island chain. In contrast to the decline in elaboration of the material culture, the burial rituals become very complex and variate (Hoogland 1997, 1998). Both primary and secondary burials occur within the same context. Apart from the practice of decomposition of the corpse within an unfilled grave-pit, there is evidence that bones were taken away from the grave after disiccation of the body. From the burial practices status differences between the individuals are evidenced.

During the post-Saladoid period the island societies consolidated their power in terms of socio-political and ideological organization. On the Greater Antilles these societies developed into complex hierarchical systems known as the *Taino cacicazgos*, which reached their climax at the end of the fifteenth century. The contemporaneous developments of societies on the Lesser Antilles are poorly documented to date. The discovery of the Kelbey's Ridge 2 site on Saba and type-related sites on other islands have recently sharpened our views.

#### *Saba : the Kelbey's Ridge 2 site*

Saba is the smallest island of the Lesser Antilles with a surface area of at the most 13 km (fig. 2). It is situated approximately 150 km to the southeast of the U.S. Virgin Island of St. Croix, which has been considered to date to be the eastern outpost of the « Classic *Taino* interaction sphere » during late prehistoric times (Allaire 1987 ; Hatt 1924 ; Faber Morse 1991, 1992 ; Rouse 1992).

The site of Kelbey's Ridge is located on a small flat, situated in the north-eastern part of the island on an elevation of 140 m asl. Due its elevated position Kelbey's Ridge provides a good view of the area and permanent control can be exercised over the surrounding areas and sea. The site location will have provided pre-Columbian people with easy access to a wide range of ecological zones and resources. Kelbey's Ridge is located 300 m from marine resources on the coast. In addition, the occupants of the site would have had access to the rainforest on the higher slopes, a resource of edible plants, fruit trees, birds, and small mammals.

The radiocarbon dates of the Kelbey's Ridge 2 component point to a pre-contact date of the site between 1350 and 1450 cal AD. With these dates the site precedes the early colonial period with a few decades.

The ceramic assemblage can be attributed to the Chican Ostionoid subseries of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico, which is associated with the *Taino* culture. Decoration is characterized by incision, modelling and punctation. Incision consists of deep narrow lines, a few of which end in punctations or arches. The incised decoration is applied on the upper part of the vessel directly under the rim, in a few

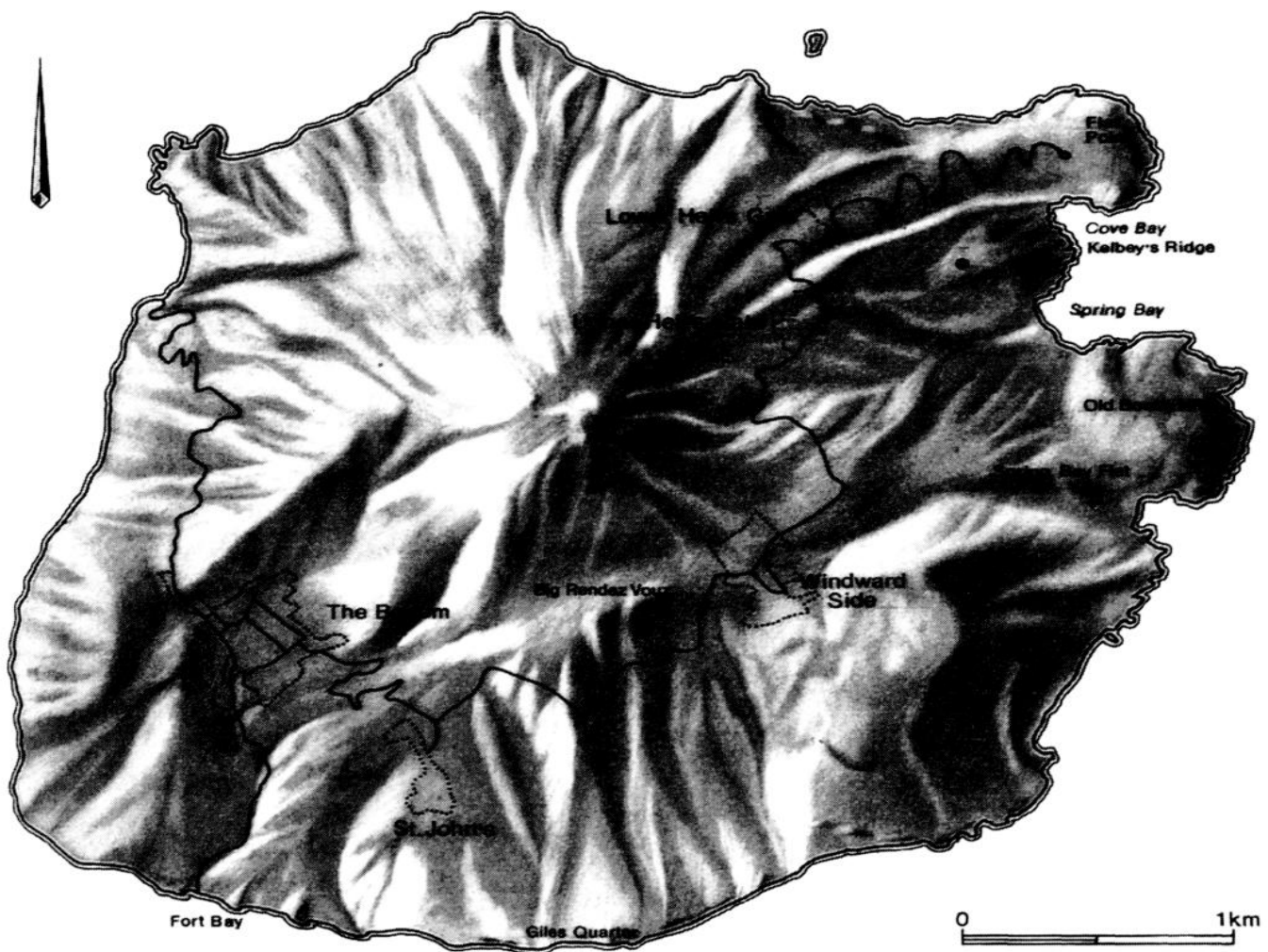


FIG. 2. — Map of Saba with location of the Kelbey's Ridge 2 site

cases on a red slipped surface. Decorative motifs include linear lines, v-shaped lines and scrolls. Modelling consist of appliqués with geometric (notched fillets), zoomorphic and anthropomorphic designs representing typical elements of the *Taino* mythology (fig. 3 a-h).

Local clays were used for the manufacture of most of the pottery. A few specimens, however, are made of exotic clays and have likely been imported from the Greater Antilles (Hofman 1993, p. 192).

In the excavated area at Kelbey's Ridge 2 five floor plans were reconstructed which are oval or round in shape with diameters between 6 and 8 m (fig. 4). The floor plans of Kelbey's Ridge 2 are interpreted as residential structures. They had a surface area of 57 to 80 m<sup>2</sup> and may have been inhabited by 11 to 15 persons (see also Curet 1992, pp. 168-170). This implies that the small dwellings were inhabited by nuclear families and some kin, probably from an elder generation, and the large dwelling by a moderately sized extended family. The houses resemble those of various other late archaeological sites in the Caribbean. For example, the Kelbey's Ridge floor plans are

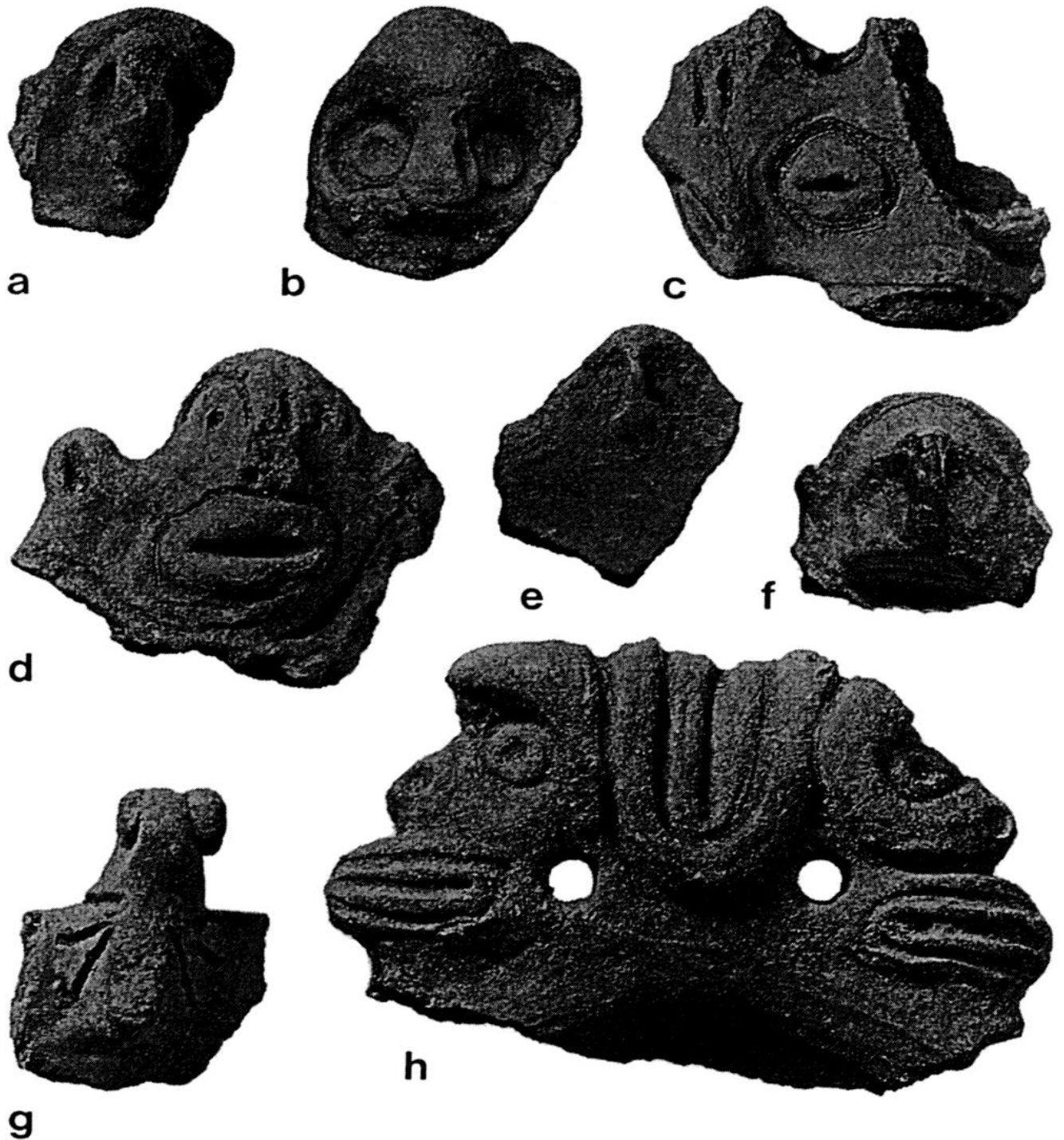


FIG. 3. Characteristic ceramics of the Kelbey's ridge 2 assemblage. a-h. anthropomorphic head lugs (scale 1:1).

quite similar to these at the Tutu site, Virgin Islands, of which the radiocarbon dates point to an occupation in the same period.

Regarding size and layout of the house plans they do not correspond to the descriptions of the communal round house in the ethnohistorical sources. To the contrary, the archaeological data suggest that much smaller houses of simpler construction formed the common type (Playa Blanca, Puerto Rico and Tutu, Virgin

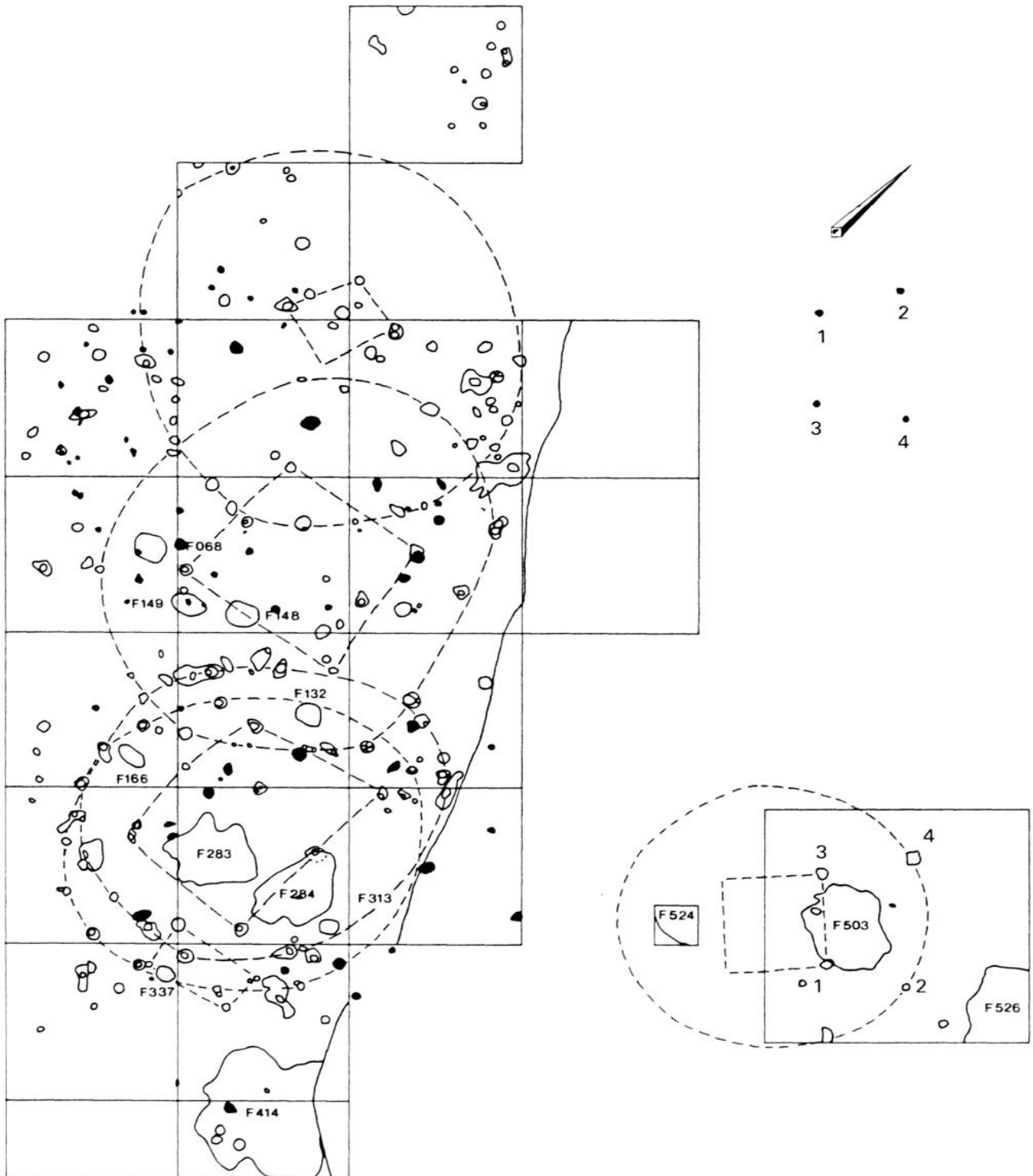


FIG. 4. Reconstruction of the household compound at Kelbey's Ridge 2.

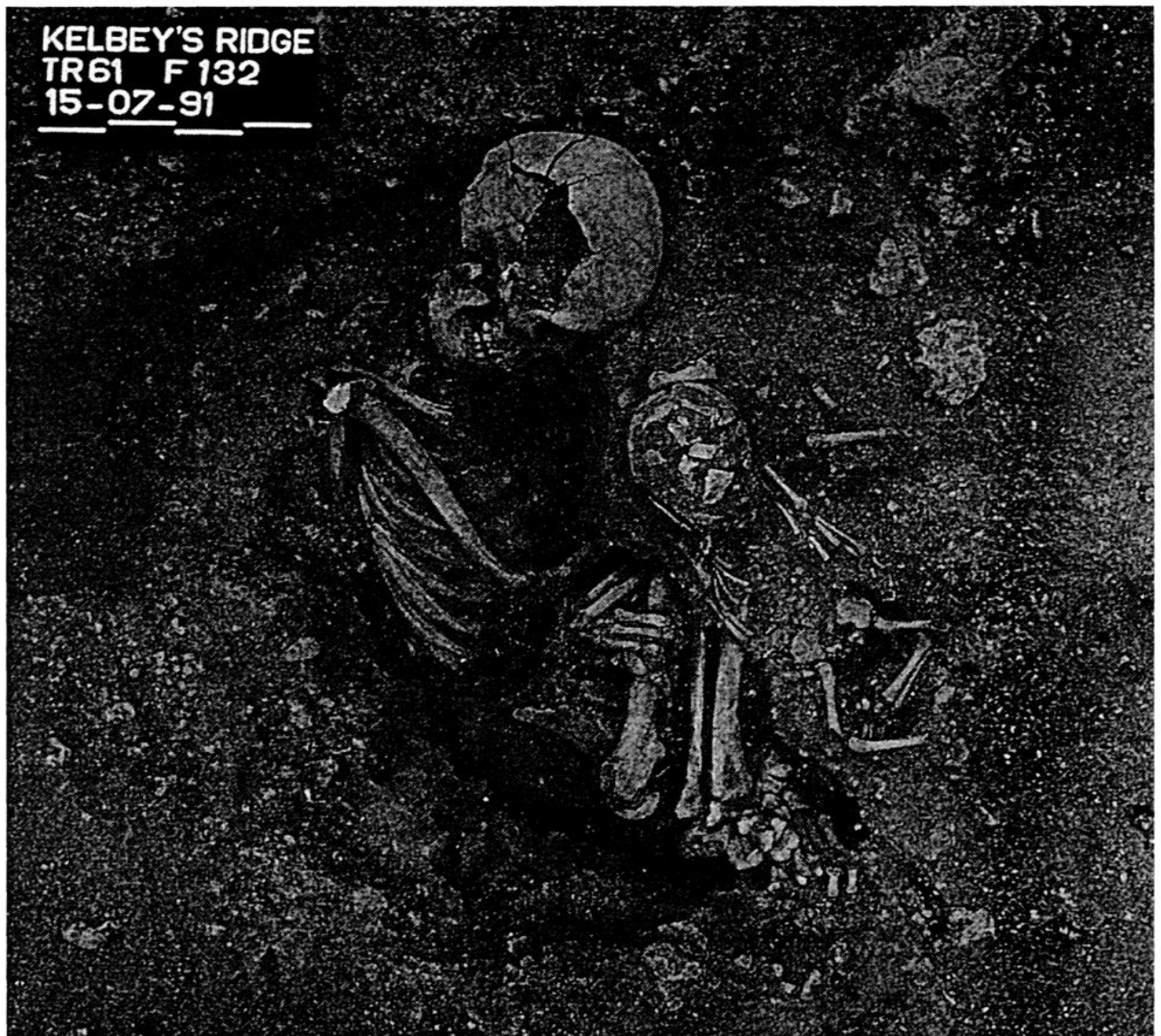


FIG. 5. Double burial of an adult individual and a newborn child.

Islands) (Rodríguez and Rivera 1991 ; Righter and Lundberg 1991). It should be noted that the observations by Las Casas and Oviedo refer to the large settlements as found in the centre of the Taino cultural area and that the archaeological observations refer to a settlement in the periphery (Tutu) or to a very small isolated settlement (Playa Blanca).

In total seven burials were uncovered in the excavated area. The deceased were all buried in a strongly flexed position, the knees bent towards the chest. The burial ritual is complex as is evidenced by two double burials, a cremation and the fact that in some burials parts of the skeletons are missing (fig. 5).

The two double burials of Kelbey's Ridge 2 attest a special relationship between a child and an adult. In one case the burial concerns a female, judging by the suture obliteration aged about 55 to 60 years and an infant aged less than a year. In the

second burial a male of about 50 years old and a child aged about 5 years were encountered. It is striking that in both cases there is evidence of a relationship between a first and a third or fourth generation individuals. It is assumed that these burials reflect a hereditary principle and can be explained by the custom of naming a child after one of its deceased grandparents<sup>4</sup>.

From the taphonomy of two skeletons it appears that the burial pit was left open for quite a while. These skeletons displayed no traces of disturbances by agents such as dogs and, moreover, the burial pits showed no signs of refill by natural processes. Apparently, the burial pits were protected from outside influences by a cover and the location of the burials in the settlement suggest that the interment took place in the house of the deceased. Ash spots in and near the grave pit suggest that after the interment of the deceased a fire has been burnt on or in the close vicinity of the grave to provoke desiccation and decomposition of the corpse.

The observation that three of the skeletons lack either the skull or one of the long bones can be explained by the practice of taking a bone out of the grave and keeping it in the house as an *zemí*. The custom of keeping skulls and other parts of the skeleton in the houses as symbolic representation of the deceased points to an elaborated ancestor cult and fits well in the picture of a hierarchically organized society.

Ceremonial paraphernalia found around the burials include a snuff-inhaler from manatee bone and three-pointers or *zemis* (fig. 6 a-h). *Zemis* are common items in the artefactual inventories of many sites since the Saladoid period and zemiism was extremely developed in the *Taino* culture (Las Casas 1927, Part I, p. 416 ; Pané 1974).

### *Site interpretations*

Based on the analysis of the material culture and the features the following picture emerges as to the structure of the Kelbey's Ridge 2 site and its cultural identification.

The residential structures seem to be typical of settlements in the periphery of the *Taino* culture area. The configuration of one or two contemporaneous houses and a hut with cooking fires has been interpreted as a household compound of an extended family. Although unequivocal evidence of the existence of extended families is not produced by the residential structures, confirmation of this principle is provided by the analysis of the burials. Both the double burials comprise a member of a first generation and one of the third or fourth generation. It is assumed that the deceased belong to the same kinship group and represent the members of one household. Since the burials comprise members of the first and the third or fourth generations, the household group was at least three to four generations deep. In this sense it meets the characteristics of an extended family. The members could have lived in two or more separate houses within one household compound, in which case the extended family formed a joint household.

If this line of reasoning is continued and, besides, it is assumed that a group of settlers comprise rather young families, it is plausible then to suppose that the settling community at Kelbey's Ridge 2 consisted of a set of interrelated household groups, each of which represented an incipient extended family consisting of two generations. One residential structure was sufficient for the household, but at the time that the second generation married, there was a need for a larger dwelling. Since the life span

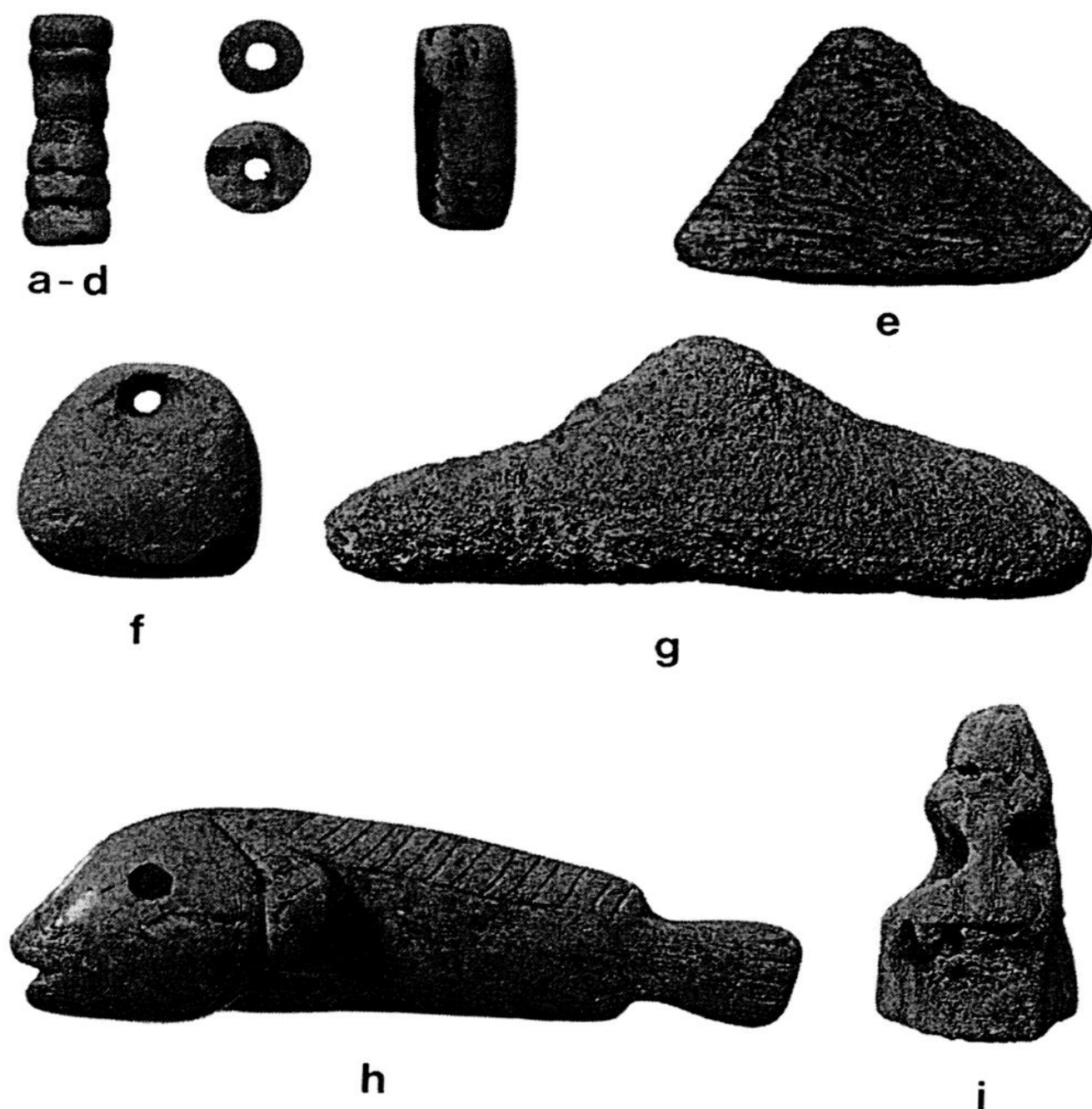


FIG. 6. — Ceremonial paraphernalia. a-d : diorite and bone beads, e : *zemi* made of coral, f : stone pendant, g : *zemi* made of coral, h : snuff-inhaler made of manatee bone in the shape of a fish. The opening in the mouth is connected by an Y-shaped perforation with two apertures behind the gills, i : *zemi* made of coral (scale 1 :1).

of the huts was probably limited to 10 to 15 years, shortage of space could have been an additional reason to build a new house. If it is assumed that the older persons in the composite burials represent the founding generation of the household and that they had an age of about 25 years at that time, it can be concluded that the household had reached an age of at least 25-35 years.

Since minimally three and perhaps four generations are represented in the double burials, the extended family had reached its mature stage of development. In this stage the extended family as residence group is less stable, especially after the death of a leading person of the elder generation.

This could mean that Kelbey's Ridge 2 was originally occupied by some inter-related household groups, which developed in a time of 30 to 40 years into mature extended families. Reaching this stage, fission would have been inevitable and the community may have fallen apart to start another developmental cycle. This does not imply that the settlement was abandoned. The fissioning household members could have formed another household within the settlement or beyond it.

The presence of an almost complete set of Tainan elements suggests an extension of the *Taino* culture towards the southeast. This extension could have involved the migration of a small group of *Taino* colonists to Saba or the incorporation of a subordinate, local group in the *Taino* socio-political system. A group, originating from the Virgin Islands or the Greater Antilles and fleeing social and/or political instability in that area, could have settled on Saba (Hofman and Hoogland 1991). This hypothesis was strengthened by the fact that Curet (1992, p. 289) suggested that the migration of Chican groups to, amongst others, the islands of the Lesser Antilles could be related to the decrease in population estimates on Puerto Rico for the Chican period. Since Curet conclusively excludes population pressure as the mechanism behind the migration, there must have been other incentives.

It seems, however, more accurate to explain the Taino presence on Saba by the expansion of one of the *Taino cacicazgos* towards the southeast provoked by socio-political and ideological incentives (Hoogland 1996).

Saba occupies a strategic position in the chain of islands connecting the Greater Antilles and the South American mainland. The route of trade and communication through which exchange of prestige goods took place ran along the Lesser Antilles. The production centres of some of the prestige goods for the elite, such as *guanin* and semi-precious stones, were situated on the South American mainland. Pendants in the shape of a semicircular moon made from a gold, silver and copper alloy (*guanin*) were made by groups on the mainland and one of the production centres of amulets from green stone was situated on the Lower Amazon. Through exchange with intermediate groups these goods were transported along the rivers to the coast. These exchanges took place through Arawakan and Cariban speaking groups. On the coast the prestige goods were probably exchanged with the *Tainos* eventually through the intermediary of groups living on the southern Lesser Antilles. The exchange of prestige goods was obviously an activity of the political/religious elite and was meant to reinforce both the position of the elite within their socio-political unit and its prestige within the regional network of peer policies (see also Renfrew and Cherry 1986). Interaction was possibly not only expressed by reciprocal relations, but also reflected by the competition between various groups within the network. Competitive groups could try to strengthen their position through alliances and through executing raids against their rivals.

This point of view emphasizes the idea of interaction between groups on the Greater Antilles and the mainland, and is based on the evidence drawn by recent



archaeological research and by a critical re-examination of the ethnohistoric literature by various authors (Allaire 1987 ; Boomert 1986, 1995 ; Whitehead 1990).

Saba could be considered to have had the role of a supportive base in this contact network. Its favorite location along the route of exchange and its proximity to the fishing grounds of the Saba Bank could have been the reason to incorporate Saba in one of the Greater Antillean *cacicazgos*. In this same line, Lundberg *et al.* (1992) suggest that contemporaneous settlements on the northern Virgin Islands functioned as *Taino* resource-extraction sites to exploit the resource potential of these small islands and their shallow waters.

#### CONCLUSIONS : THE TAINO EXPANSION IN A REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

From the first colonization of the Antilles by Saladoid people, intensive contacts existed between the mainland and the islands. On the Greater Antilles the societies were able to develop a stratified and complex socio-political organization, a development which was cut off by the Spanish colonization. Empiric data on the occupation of the Lesser Antilles during the pre-Colonial period remains scarce. The number of sites known for this period is limited. However, the data from Saba and the Virgin Islands (Hofman and Hoogland 1991 ; Hofman 1993 ; Hoogland 1996 ; Lundberg *et al.* 1992 ; Faber Morse 1991, 1992) confirm a development on these islands related to the expansion of the *Taino cacicuzgos* towards the southeast.

When considering the settlement pattern, site location and distribution of *Taino* related cultural elements on other islands of the Lesser Antilles, evidence increases as to the impact of *Taino cacical* organization on the societal and ideological development of societies on these smaller islands.

The settlement pattern reveals the development of a hierarchical organized society in which specific site locations were chosen for socio-political, ideological and economic reasons.

The strategic position of some sites and their location in particular geographical settings such as for example the site of Morne Cybèle on the plateau of La Désirade incites to hypothesize a ritual function of this place in the late 14th and 15th century AD (Hofman 1995).

Besides, the presence of very specific ceramic assemblages and an amount of symbolically loaded artefacts such as large stone *zemis*, shell masks or *guaizas*, snuff-inhalers and ceramic imitations or reduced models of *Taino* ceremonial objects in a number of sites (Allaire 1990 ; Basselet pers. comm. 1999 ; Douglas 1991, pp. 578, 585, fig. 5 and p. 588, fig. 8 ; Hofman 1995 ; Rouse 1992, p. 117, fig. 29c, p. 119 and jacket illustration, de Waal pers. comm. 1999) confirms the relation with the *Taino* religious world.

In a similar line of thinking, Allaire previously had argued that the copied specimens of *Taino* ceremonial objects on Martinique and St. Lucia were evidence of esoteric interaction between local shamans and *Taino* shamans or *behiques*. He had further assumed a progressive absorption or slow process of acculturation of the societies on the Lesser Antilles into the socio-political and ideological interaction sphere of the *Taino* centres.

These data suggest a regional development of *Taino* chiefdom society and ideology incorporating the Lesser Antilles until well into the 15th century. After AD 1200 a gradual decrease of population numbers for the Lesser Antilles is assumed, inferred from the low amount of sites reported for that period. This could be explained by a movement of groups towards the Greater Antilles incorporated by the socio-political, ideological and economical power of *Taino cacicazgos*.

On the other hand there is an expansion of the *Taino* territory towards the Lesser Antilles evidenced by the occurrence of settlements with specific function or ritual connotation and by the recurrent presence of *Taino* affiliated ceramic assemblages, imitations and reduced models of *Taino* ceremonial objects and prestige goods.

Until now, there has been a general tendency to formulate a rigid picture of Amerindian societies which leaves little space for dynamic transformation processes. This hampers the explanation of the great variability in the region over a relative short span of time. A more fluid perception of Amerindian societies is proposed which matches the social dynamics and ideological realms of expanding *Taino* chiefdom society.

After the decline of the political power of the *Taino caciques* during the early colonial period the balance between the competitive groups in the exchange network was totally disturbed. One may suppose that the Amerindian groups on the Lesser Antilles saw their position strengthened and took a superior position on behalf of the *Taino* remnant groups, who possibly fled for the Spanish colonization and settled on the Lesser Antilles. The description by Breton of the Carib invasion and the account of the *Igneries* on Saba by Coppier could be an indication for this process \*.

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#### NOTES

1. « They also say another name for great [which] they call nitayno, [they] did not know whether they said it for noble or governor or judge ».
2. « nitayno is [the] name for gentleman (or nobleman) and principal man »
3. « ... noble is called taino ... »
3. « Among the Guahibo a child is nameless for several years. Naming children is a prerogative of one of the wife's or husband's parents, or siblings of the parents, depending upon their respective availability (Morey and Metzger 1974).

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