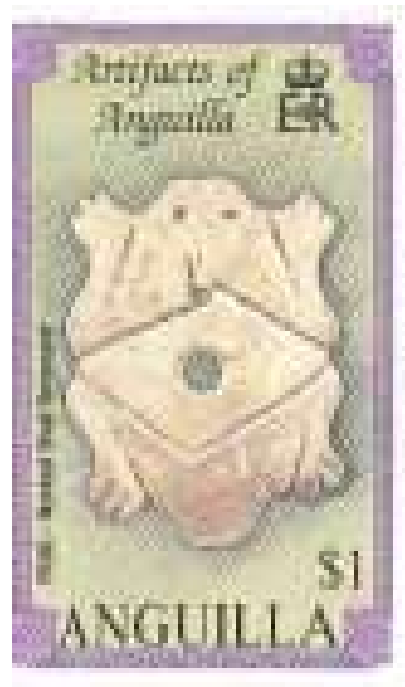


CHAPTER 2

THE AMERINDIANS

The first European settlers and their African captives arrived in Anguilla in 1650. There is no mention in the early accounts of any Amerindians living in the island. There is plenty of evidence of their occupying the island at earlier times. Fragments of their pottery are found at sites around the island. Middens, ancient rubbish heaps of broken conch shells and pottery; carvings; and other discarded objects, are occasionally revealed on or near the beaches (see illus 1).



1. Sandy Ground shell frog (Anguilla stamp)

Professionally conducted archaeological digs now take place (see illus 2).



2. Amerindian pottery bowl found at Sandy Ground

Archaeologists recognise three separate phases of Amerindian occupation of Anguilla and the other islands of the West Indies. The pre-ceramic or archaic period lasted roughly from 1,500 BC to AD 300, when the ceramic age begins. Pre-ceramic simply means before pottery. The pre-ceramic age occupants of the islands were hunter-gatherers. Those of the ceramic period, when the use of clay pots is evident, were sedentary farmers. The ceramic age occupants are divided into two cultures. Those of the earlier period, 300-900 AD, belong to the 'Saladoid Culture'. Their pottery is highly decorated compared to the simpler more utilitarian pottery of the 'Post-Saladoid' period, 900-1,500 AD. At least 13 Post-

Saladoid village sites belong to this period. There were also at least 20 smaller hamlets. Most of these sites are contemporaneous, suggesting that the late period in Anguilla was one of relatively high-density occupation.¹ The sites of Amerindian occupation most often mentioned include Sandy Ground, Meads Bay, Rendezvous Bay, and Island Harbour.

The three oldest wells at The Valley, The Quarter and Statia Valley, date from the time of the Amerindians.² There are also springs scattered throughout the island that supported human occupation. Fountain Cavern is perhaps the most famous of these springs (see illus 3). It was until recently used by Anguillians as an emergency source of water. In the 1950s, the crew of a visiting British frigate helpfully installed a sheer steel ladder from the entrance at the top of the cavern to the cave floor some 25 feet below. This allowed the people of Shoal Bay easier access to the spring. It is now sealed off to protect the rare and valuable petroglyphs left behind by the original inhabitants.

¹ Dr John Crock, The Forest North Site and Post-Saladoid Settlement in Anguilla, 16th Int. Cong. Car. Arch, 1996.

² Sir William Halcrow & Partners, Water Resources of St Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla (1964).



3. Fountain Cavern petroglyphs (By Penny Slinger®)

During much of the twentieth century electrically operated pumps brought water to the surface from The Valley and East End wells and distributed it through the government's main supply system. The Valley well is still used to provide brackish water to the modern desalinisation plant that now supplies a portion of the island's public potable water.

The Big Spring at Island Harbour shows signs of its importance to the Amerindians. There are many petroglyphs carved around its rim (see illus 4). It also never runs dry.



4. Big Spring (By Penny Slinger®)

At Sandy Ground, the Amerindians used the spring on the hillside under North Hill. Their artefacts are found in that area. The Road Well is located near to it alongside the main road.

Pere Raymond Breton was a French missionary who was sent to Guadeloupe in 1635. He spent the next twenty years travelling between that island and Dominica ministering to the Amerindians. Much of what we know about the aboriginal inhabitants of the islands comes from his writings. He tells us that they called the island 'Malliouhana'.³ The meaning of the word is lost. Some have written that it might mean 'arrow'. This must be a reference to the long, narrow shape of the island.⁴ Others suggest that it means 'Snake Island', after the island's long and winding shape, but those explanations are both

³ Pere Raymond Breton, Dictionnaire Caraibe-Francois, p.202.

⁴ Katherine J Burdon, A Handbook of St Kitts-Nevis (1920), quoting Pere Breton.

unlikely.⁵ Few islands in the world are named after their shape. It is difficult to imagine that the shape of Anguilla was immediately apparent to a person paddling by it in a canoe.

The word Anguilla means eel in Latin and Italian. The island provides an excellent habitat for the racer snake, a harmless grass snake that lives off insects, and that is found everywhere on the island. The first Italian to step ashore would quickly have become aware of their presence and named the island accordingly.

My preferred theory about the meaning of the word Malliouhana is based on Jill Tattersall's analysis of the wordlists and dictionaries of Amerindian languages.⁶ These were put together by the early missionaries to the Amerindians. Each vowel and consonant has a number of possible meanings or connotations. When you apply her analysis to the consonants and vowels you find that one possible meaning of the word Malliouhana is, 'The Ritual Strengthening Place of the Young Men of my Tribe'. If this is correct, it might be a reference to the important ceremonial function of the Fountain Cavern at Shoal Bay. The elaborate carvings and petroglyphs on its walls suggest this was a ritual cavern, far too elaborate to

⁵ Bryan Dyde, Out of the Crowded Vagueness: A History of the Islands of St Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla (2005).

⁶ Jill Tattersall, Standardised Simplified Spelling System Applied to Interpreting the Taino and Carib Languages (International Association for Caribbean Archaeology, 9th Congress, Santo Domingo, 1981, pp 506-509).

have served only the inhabitants of the island. You may conclude that the Fountain Cavern was more probably a ceremonial site for the puberty rituals of the young men from several of the islands around. At the most propitious time each year, the drugged young men would be landed on the beach at Shoal Bay. The well-worn track from the beach to the cavern shows generations of bare feet wearing down the rocky surface (see illus 5 for Penny Slinger's depiction of Shoal Bay and the cavern below).



5. Golden Age of the Arawaks (By Penny Slinger®)

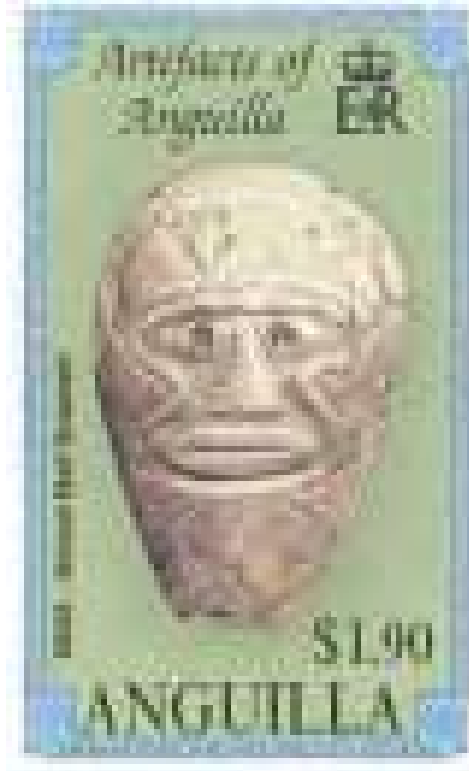
The grotesque wall carvings of the cavern, and the equally ominous totems carried by the shamans, visible in the flickering torch light, would doubtless have thoroughly terrified the young men. Such ceremonies were intended to prepare them for the rigours of manhood that they were about to meet (see ill 6, 7, and 8 for depictions of the petroglyphs).



6. Lizard Fertility God petroglyph from Fountain Cavern
(Anguilla stamp)



7. Solar Chieftain petroglyph at Fountain Cavern
(Anguilla stamp)



8. Rendezvous Bay shell mask (Anguilla stamp)

According to Spanish legend, that is unquestioningly repeated to this day in all the history books and tourist literature, the Amerindians that were living in the islands of the Caribbean when the Spaniards arrived belonged to two supposedly quite different and opposed Amerindian cultures. They called them the Caribs and the Arawaks.⁷

Archaeologists now believe that, during the period 900–1,500 AD, the Amerindians of Anguilla and the Leeward Islands were all members of one culture. They were mainly sedentary and agricultural, with extensive

⁷ RP Devas, *The Island of Grenada, 1650-1950* (1965) p. 23: "It was the Europeans who called these people Caribs, for that is not what they called themselves, which, says Raymond Breton, was Callinago . . ."

trade links between the islands. There is not one piece of archaeological evidence for the entry of the legendary warlike tribe of Caribs, killing and eating their way northwards through the islands at the time of the arrival of the Spanish.

When Christopher Columbus 'discovered' the northern islands of the Bahamas in 1492, he found the natives wearing ornaments of gold which they readily exchanged with the Spaniards for trifles (see illus 9). The search for the source of this gold became one of the major causes of the destruction of the Amerindians of the West Indies.

Columbus described the Amerindians of the Bahamas as having a loving manner and gentle speech. These Amerindians became known to history as the Arawaks. As we know, this was not the name they called themselves.

About the year 1975, Professor Christopher Goodwin, then of Baton Rouge University, gave a lecture in Basseterre in St Kitts. He was conducting rescue archaeology on the site of the Ponds Pasture industrial estate in St Kitts. This area of Basseterre was long known as an Amerindian burial site. As I recall his lecture, he gave an imaginary and amusing explanation of how Columbus came to mis-name the inhabitants of the Caribbean as 'Arawaks' and 'Caribs'.



9. Track through the Caribbean of the First Voyage of Columbus in 1492.

The purpose of his anecdote was to demonstrate how incredible it is that the Amerindians that Columbus met on his first voyage could have told him what the names were of the tribes that inhabited the West Indies at the time of Columbus' arrival. Tongue in cheek as the tale was, it is still the only sensible explanation that I have ever come across.

Convinced the earth was a sphere, Columbus sailed west in search of India and the spices of the east. He took the precaution of taking an interpreter, Luis de Torres, with him. According to Professor Godwin's amusing theory of what happened next, de Torres was fluent in Urdu and Hindi, the main languages of the Indian sub-continent. As this was the first voyage to the West

Indies, there were in Spain no Amerindian language speakers who could act as interpreters. When his crew came upon that first pirogue being furiously paddled by a terrified old man of the coast of the Bahamas, Professor Goodwin imagines that Columbus must have said to his interpreter, “*Ask the fellow in the canoe what part of India he belongs to.*” The interpreter complied. He ran to the bow of Columbus’ carrack, the Santa Maria (see illus 10), and leaned over, calling out to the paddler in the canoe below, “*Ah pucha nah, yani mani cou?*”, or something to that effect, in Urdu. The old man in the canoe below may have looked up to him, and with the Amerindian version of the famous two-finger gesture, responded, “*Arawak, Arawak*”, or something like that.

Not comprehending that he was being told to go back where he came from, but not wishing to seem incompetent, the interpreter hurried back to Columbus. He explained, “*Lord Admiral, I did as you instructed. The old man says he belongs to the Arawak nation.*”



10. Replica of Columbus' Santa Maria

Columbus solemnly wrote it down in his journal which was later carried to all the corners of Europe. "*The first Indian I found belongs to the Arawak nation!*" This word 'Arawak' has remained in all the history books ever since,

even though we have long known that it is utter nonsense.⁸

In recognition of the wrongful naming of the Amerindians as Caribs and Arawaks, modern archaeologists, following Irving Rouse, have taken to calling all the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Bahamas, the Greater Antilles, and the Northern Leeward Islands 'Tainos'.⁹ The word is thought to mean 'good' or 'noble'. There is no evidence that the people inhabiting Anguilla at the time of the arrival of Columbus called themselves by this name. It is more likely that the people of each island called themselves by their name for the island they occupied.

The so-called 'Arawak' crops of the Bahamas, as of Anguilla, consisted of maize and bulbous plants such as sweet potatoes and cassava (see illus 11). They cultivated tobacco and smoked it in pipes. They became quite intoxicated from smoking the dried leaves by inserting a forked pipe through their nostrils.

⁸ See for example: E Daniel, West Indian Histories (1937) Vol. 1, p. 35; John Parry and Phillip Sherlock, Short History of the West Indies (1956) p. 3; OA Garcia, History of the West Indies (1965) p. 18; Helmut Blume, The Caribbean Islands (1974) p. 55.

⁹ Irving Rouse, The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People who greeted Columbus (1992).



11. Cassava

They also grew cotton, weaving it into 'hamacas' to sleep in, nets, and small aprons or loin cloths. Some Arawaks went naked or clothed themselves with leaves. They protected their bodies from the sun by staining their skins with the dye they called 'roucou'. Arawak shelters were mere huts, thatched with palm leaves. Their chiefs or Caciques wore head-dresses of feathers, occasionally decorated with small pieces of gold and bands of coloured beads and bones. Their religion was a form of nature-worship. Their gods, called 'zemis', were represented in the form of heads of lizards, snakes or bats made from chalk or baked earth or carved on rocks (see illus 12 for one with character).

In addition to farming and fishing, the Amerindians of the Leeward Islands at the time of Columbus' arrival were a sea-faring people.



12. A zemi (By Penny Slinger®)

They built pirogues, large canoes, from the gommier and cedar trees, capable of holding up to one hundred men. These were used for travelling among the islands. There was an active trade in stone tools and pottery, and many of the artefacts found in Anguilla are made of stone from neighbouring islands.

According to the legends taught to our children to this day, the Caribs were supposedly far less civilized

than the Arawaks. They lived on the southern islands of the Lesser Antilles. The Arawaks were supposedly docile farmers and fishermen who occupied the northern islands. The Caribs were described as warlike and cannibalistic. As for the story of cannibalism, a form of ritual cannibalism undoubtedly existed among the Amerindians of the West Indies. This involved chopping up a dead or dying enemy and cooking and eating parts of him. This ritual was meant to insult the dead or dying enemy. The injuries to his muscles prevented his spirit from taking any kind of revenge once he was dead. If the eyes, tongue or muscles from the arms and legs were cooked and chewed, the spirit of the dead man would be handicapped from ever seeing, talking and shooting again. That was their faith.

For the religious 'Caribs', it was a waste to simply kill a captured enemy outright. Ritual required that his captors torture him death. His dying screams of pain, his last breath, would be inhaled by the victors leaning over his tortured body. In that way, the strength of his spirit was absorbed by his capturers and fortified their spirits. The greater the torture, and the more painful the death, the greater would be the strength of the spirit that was inhaled and absorbed. Hence, their reputation for sitting around their tortured male victims, watching them as they died. There was no similar advantage in torturing women

or children. There was no masculine strength to absorb from their dying spirits. There are no accounts of women or children being tortured or eaten. Torturing, killing and eating men was a religious practice, not a nutritional supplement.

Anthropologists call the practice of eating part of an enemy 'exo-cannibalism'. It is distinguished from 'endo-cannibalism'. The latter occurs when the fat, or some other part of the body of the deceased, is consumed by the grieving relatives. This is believed to preserve the spiritual essence of the loved one within the tribe and family. That is particularly important in the case of a great chief or other dignitary. The belief is not limited to the South American Amerindians. It is a recurring concept through human civilization. We see traces of its survival in the Christian ritual of the Eucharist. Thus, we celebrate Christ offering his disciples bread and water saying, "*This is my body, take it and eat it in memory of me. This is my blood, take it and drink it in memory of me*". The sacrament of the Eucharist is a ritualized form of endo-cannibalism. Both forms of cannibalism served religious rather than nutritional aims.

Professor Goodwin, as I recall, also amusingly explained how the 'Caribs' got their name. He surmises that, shortly after Columbus and his men landed on the first Bahamas island they came to, the ladies of the

village wasted no time in cavorting in the surf with his sailors and crew. The same enterprising, Urdu-speaking interpreter was sent to have a word with the Cacique, or chief, perhaps standing with his warriors in front of his home, or 'ajoupa'.

Columbus' instruction to the interpreter at this first landing was to enquire of the Cacique whether all the natives of the islands around were as friendly as his people were. Or, were there, perhaps, some who were dangerous and to be avoided? So, the interpreter approached the stern-looking Cacique. He enquired in Urdu, "*Ah pucha nah, mani ani cou yah nah hah?*" or something to that effect. The uncomprehending chieftain glared back at him. Perhaps, with an imperious gesture of his out-flung right hand, which was then pointing to the south, he replied, "*Carib, Carib,*" or something to that effect. He probably meant, "*Leave our women alone and sail back out to sea immediately!*"

Still not wishing to seem a dunderhead, the enterprising but uncomprehending interpreter hurried back to Columbus. He delivered the solemn news, "*My Lord High Admiral, I did as you instructed. The chieftain told me that, to the south, where he pointed, there lie a people who are war-like and much to be avoided. They call themselves Caribs.*" Columbus solemnly wrote down the information in his journal. And so, there entered the

lexicography, topography, and mythology of the world the long-lasting story of the peaceful Arawaks of the northern islands and the war-like Caribs of the southern islands of the West Indies. All this was told to Columbus on his first voyage, when there was no Spaniard who could speak or understand the language of the natives. This myth would haunt the Amerindians in the years to come. As for the image of the ladies cavorting in the surf with the Spanish adventurers, little did they know that the only historically significant gift of the 'Indians' that they would carry back to Europe when this voyage was over was the dread spirochete later known as Syphilis.

Bishop Bartholome Las Casas was a Spanish Roman Catholic priest (1474-1566) who arrived in Hispaniola in 1502. He was the first Catholic priest ordained in the Americas, and the first bishop of the West Indies, where he lived from 1502 to 1550. At his urging, the Spanish King would issue his famous but short-lived edict. This was to the effect that the 'peaceful Arawaks' were spared from slavery. No such indulgence need be shown to the 'war-like Caribs'. Having no immunity to common European diseases, the initially enslaved Amerindians of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico soon died off. More slaves were needed to work the Spanish mines.

Under the rules of engagement laid down by the Spanish King, the Caribs could legally be seized and

condemned to slavery. Given the exemption for enslaving Caribs, it is not surprising that the Spanish slave-hunters 'discovered' more and more Caribs paddling their canoes in the northern waters of the Caribbean. The explanation was that they were fighting their way from south to north, decimating and eating the peaceful Arawaks, and threatening the Spaniards. This false narrative served the Spaniards' purpose of legally enslaving only Caribs and not Arawaks. The truth is there never were either 'Arawaks' or 'Caribs' in any of the waters of the West Indies. The myth of their existence is repeated as gospel truth in the history books taught to the school children of the West Indies to this day.

It was on the second voyage to the West Indies that Columbus first met the Amerindians he called the Caribs. At Guadeloupe, he saw huts near the shore and landed, but he found the people run away. In the huts, his men discovered pottery of various kinds, calabashes, hammocks, parrots and cotton, both spun and unspun. What was more significant was the large number of human bones found lying around on the ground or in the eaves of the huts. It even appeared that drinking vessels were made from human skulls. This led the Spaniards to believe that they were in the islands of the warlike cannibals, the Caribs, described previously by the gentle natives of the Bahamas.

After a time, some Amerindian women and children were brought back to Columbus, and he learned that all the men were gone on a raid. Columbus' new interpreter, Diego Colon, an Amerindian taken back to Spain from the first voyage, explained that the women claimed they were captives from the northern islands, and that the male prisoners of those islands were slain and eaten (see illus 13).

The very word 'cannibal' derives from a spelling error in the name that Columbus gave the Caribs, whom he called 'Los Carribales'. Columbus was not very good at forming the letter 'r'. When he wrote it, it looked like an 'n'. The monks who transcribed his letter to Queen Isabella mis-read his 'carribales' as 'cannibales'. So, we get the word cannibal in English. The Caribbean Sea may as easily be called the Cannibal Sea.



13. An early and imaginary European depiction of Carib cannibalism

What was even more astonishing to the Spaniards was Diego Colon's claim that the Carib women spoke a completely different language from the men. This was a result, he claimed, of the Carib custom of carrying off Arawak women for wives. Diego Colon's account of the Carib women's explanation for their separate speech is nonsense. What we see here is the Amerindian religious concept of 'taboo' at work. When Amerindian men were on the warpath, they would use certain expressions which only men could employ. If the same expressions were used by women, bad luck would result. Just as it was

taboo for her to use his term for common objects or persons, so it was taboo for a man to use a woman's word for the same objects or persons. That does not mean that they did not understand each other perfectly well. We find a version of this common phenomenon even among modern teenagers. An urban male gang-member in a modern city to this day uses words special to him and his friends that no proper lady among his friends and family would dream of using.

There is another cause of sex differentiation in words and phrases amongst the Amerindians of South America even today. This is the Amerindian kinship and gender system. In European languages derived from Latin, objects and persons may be of the male or female gender. So, we say, 'le table' and 'la plume' in French, the first male, and the second female. Not so among the Amerindians. The word in question changes according to the gender of the speaker. Thus, the word for 'my father' varies according to the gender of the speaker. A son and a daughter use different expressions in addressing the same father. This system of gender differentiation in language is well understood.¹⁰ It suggests that the relationship of a boy with his father is different to the relationship of a daughter with the same father. The son and daughter understand each other perfectly when they

¹⁰ Peter Trudgil, Sociolinguistics (1974) p.85.

speak to each other about their father using the words proper to their gender. This does not mean they speak different languages, or that the men captured the women from foreign tribes.

The misnaming by Columbus of the aboriginal natives of the West Indies received a further boost in the mid-nineteenth century. The Prussian explorer and ethnologist Alexander von Humboldt explored the Amazon and Essequibo regions in the period 1799 to 1804. He met many Amerindian tribes in South America. He attempted to classify their languages. He explored the West Indies, and even wrote a history of Cuba.¹¹ He gave names to the groups of South American languages that he identified. Some of them he arbitrarily called 'Carib' and others 'Arawak.' These names were of course not known to the original inhabitants of the islands or of the South American continent. Nor were they an authentic, indigenous tribal classification. Von Humboldt made the classifications up out of thin air. In his writing, he repeated the lurid stories of cannibalism and of the report of the different languages of the men and the women.¹² His works were popular and widely read. After blessing with this repetition the fictitious story of the two

¹¹ Alexander Von Humboldt, The Island of Cuba (1856).

¹² Alexander Von Humboldt, Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of America during the years 1799-1804 (7 vols, 1814-1829).

competing tribes of the Caribs and the Arawaks, no one would doubt its accuracy until recent times.

On subsequent voyages, Columbus placed settlements in Hispaniola and later in Cuba and Puerto Rico, where mines were dug in the frantic Spanish search for gold and silver. They enslaved the Amerindians for this purpose. By the time that Anguilla was settled a hundred and fifty years later in 1650, the Amerindians were gone. One reads only of diminishing numbers of so-called Caribs living in some of the mountainous volcanic islands to the south, such as Dominica and Saint Vincent.

The rapid disappearance of the Amerindians from the islands, including Anguilla, is well documented. There are many explanations for their rapid dying off in the islands of the West Indies suggested in the textbooks. Spanish cruelty was Protestant propaganda, and not the entire reason. Even their great god, Jocahu, the cassava god, could not save them from extinction (see illus 14). The Amerindians were fatally susceptible to such minor common European diseases as smallpox, measles, and even the common cold. They possessed no immunity to these new diseases. More of them died from these infections than from the guns and swords of the Spaniards. The Amerindian wars with the English, French and Spanish intruders, and their enslavement in the Spanish mines, are all well documented. New light is

being thrown every day on the whole question of the identity and culture of these first aboriginal inhabitants of the islands. New theories are developing that explain many things not previously understood about their way of life and their eventual fate.¹³



14. The Great God Jochu, carved on a stalagmite at Fountain Cavern (Painting by Penny Slinger®)

The legend of the Arawak women captured by the fierce Caribs and speaking a different language from the Carib men is now laughed at. It is the same with the legend of the cannibalism of the indigenous people.

¹³ Penny Slinger's brilliant and surrealistic paintings of the Amerindians of Anguilla can be viewed at her website: <http://www.arawakart.com/>

Modern knowledge has not caused these legends or myths to disappear from the history books still written and published throughout the region. The attraction of the concepts remains. They probably start in the usual unconscious design of a conquering nation to objectify the people they are about to destroy. They were useful in promoting Christianisation and colonialism in the early period. They served as justification for the European enslavement and destruction of the 'savage Caribs'. Now that these fictions have outlived their usefulness, it might be time to let them go.