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## **SPATIAL BEHAVIOR, SOCIAL ORGANIZATION, AND ETHNICITY IN THE PREHISTORY OF TRINIDAD**

by Alfredo E. FIGUEREDO and Stephen D. GLAZIER

The purpose of this paper is to organize and publish some of our research on the prehistory of Trinidad, connected with the work we have done on the background to the aboriginal ethnohistory of that island. It also affords us an opportunity to point out possible avenues for research, and may serve to project future field work.

There are no palaeo-Indian remains reported from Trinidad. Given the fact that Trinidad was united to mainland South America perhaps as recently as 6000 B.C., this is anomalous. A «Flake Culture» has been discovered by Cruxent and Harris on some hill-top locations (Harris, 1976); it is basically a lithic industry of jasperized chert flakes with no other associations. The chert seems to be derived from Guianese sources (*ibid.*). While definitely artifactual, this industry presents us with nothing but debitage so far. Harris (*op. cit.*) places it chronologically before his Meso-Indian (= Archaic) Period, and effectively within Cruxent's palaeo-Indian (*ibid.*). This placement is open to question pending the discovery of suitable contexts. The «Flake» sites could have belonged to virtually any group in the prehistory of Trinidad.

The Archaic stage is represented on Trinidad by nine multicomponent sites dating from *ca.* 6000 to 200 B.C. (Harris, 1976). These sites are fairly deep shell middens (commonly over a meter of cultural remains) located on high, well-drained ground near navigable waterways. An exception is the Poonah Road site, which lacks shell remains. Mammal bones are frequently met with, basically representing the modern fauna (Wing, 1962). Fish remains are also common. Aside from some charred nuts, no plant remains have been found (*cf.* Krasniewicz, 1978). The artifacts recovered are mostly lithic debitage and used flakes, some ground stone (including small mullers) and bone awls, barbs, and bone projectile points (Harris, 1976). These assemblages have not been defined as distinct cultural units, because the difficulties encountered when analyzing these utilitarian artifacts lacking complex traits have precluded it (Rouse, personal communication). This difficulty is compounded by the very limited nature of the excavations to date, which have been typically 2 by 2 meter test pits (*cf.* Glazier, 1978a).



It seems to follow from the above that the Archaic people(s) of Trinidad were organized into small bands with annual rounds. This is because the Archaic sites are small habitation areas with no evidence of large, permanent structures, and the remains (exhumed or inferred) are those of an economy based upon hunting and gathering. The difficulty in establishing local cultures based upon the small excavated samples is to be expected, since band-level societies find it unnecessary to display much stylistic behavior (Wobst, 1976). It is conceivable that all or most bands on Trinidad at any one time formed part of the same mating network.

The overwhelming evidence for a pattern of littoral adaptation (Harris, 1976) presents a problem: band societies find it costly to arrange themselves linearly, as along a coastline (Wobst, *op. cit.*). This hampers the adoption of modes of subsistence which emphasize littoral resources. It is considered likely, therefore, that cultures with well-developed littoral adaptations have gone beyond the level of social relations typical of band societies (*ibid.*).

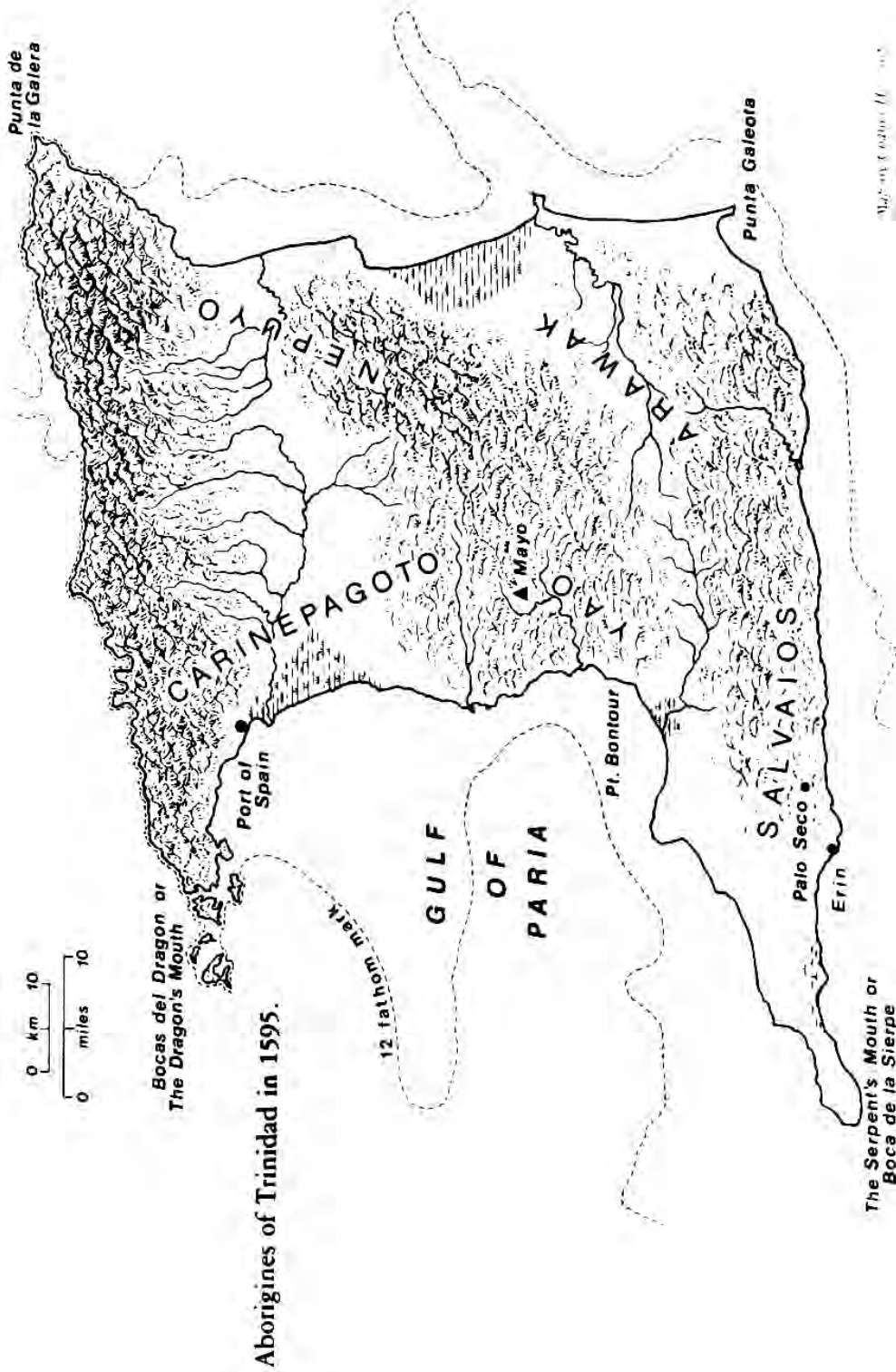
A solution to this problem is to be found in the geographical characteristics of Trinidad. It closes off the Gulf of Paria, presenting to it a very indented coastline, with many navigable streams, marshes, and lakes. The Gulf itself is a placid body of water, with the opposite shores visible from several points. Formerly, the Gulf was much smaller. During early Archaic times, it may have been only half its present size (van Andel and Sachs, 1964).

If we align and space dots around the Gulf, each dot representing a seasonal coastal station, and we make use of the many indentations in the coastline (including rivers and estuaries) for possible locations, we come up with a pattern of dots situated within easy access both of marine resources and of each other. Each of these coastal stations can retain hinterlands of sufficient magnitude to allow for full annual rounds, yet still be in a position to use the Gulf as a means of communication, uniting, rather than separating, the various bands. This reduces the cost of a littoral adaptation for a band-level society.

It is possible that the Gulf of Paria was pivotal to cultural development on Trinidad and the adjacent mainland, and that the Archaic remains found on Trinidad will be duplicated on mainland sites that await discovery. Rouse (1951) found that bodies of water unite and structure cultural areas in the West Indies, rather than separate them. This may be typical of the role played by bodies of water such as the Gulf of Paria under certain conditions. We will touch upon this point once more in the present paper. It will be necessary to conduct archaeological investigations on the Venezuelan side of the Gulf to test this with regard to Archaic groups.

Ceramics were introduced to Trinidad *ca.* 200 B.C. by a migration of Saladoid people (Olsen, 1973). A chronological framework for the ceramics of Trinidad has been published by Rouse (1947, 1953). Recent efforts by Peter O'B. Harris are awaiting publication. The broad outline of the existing chronology, formulated by Rouse (*op. cit.*) and confirmed recently by Bullen and Bullen (1976), would have a Saladoid tradition evolve *in situ* through two major styles until its displacement by a Barrancoid tradition; the latter evolved until its disappearance during colonial times.

All the ceramic cultures of Trinidad have been assigned to the Tropical Forest type, Guianas variant (Rouse, 1953a; *cf.* Figueredo and Glazier, 1978). This assumes the long tenure of root crop horticulture, supplemented with the trilogy maize-beans-squash, plus hunting and gathering. While the great antiquity of the root crop system of food production has been inferred creditably (*e. g.*, Lathrap, 1973), it remains to be demonstrated archaeologically (Krasniewicz, 1978). Better data is available for the ancillary activities connected



Map by Carlos H. ...

with hunting (Wing, 1962) and shell-fishing (Bullbrook, 1960). In these instances, one can argue that a single strategy for procurement spans basically the whole ceramic sequence. This would tend to strengthen indirectly the case for the long-term continuity of a Tropical Forest system of horticulture.

A settlement pattern based on dispersed communal houses is suggested by the small midden sites. This is also the pattern observed at the time of Contact (*vid.* Figueredo and Glazier, 1978). However, no structural remains have been detected in the archaeological record. The reason is due rather clearly to the sampling strategies usual in Trinidad archaeology, which emphasize chronology through test-pitting (Glazier, 1978a). A task before the practitioners in the area is the study of intra-site dynamics. This would involve the novelty of digging a bit to the sides as well.

It is likely that the excavation of structures on Trinidad will confirm the postulated antiquity of the communal house. Community patterning may involve the loose polities observed among the modern Panaré and Piaroa, and known from historic times on Trinidad (Figueredo and Glazier, 1978). Broader regional patterning may enable us to identify ethnic groups archaeologically. This is something which we cannot do very well at present.

A weakness in the archaeological literature dealing with Trinidad is the tendency to regard the whole island as one social and cultural unit through time (Glazier, 1978a). While it is true that no greatly contrasting ecological regions are to be found on the island, it is also true that during Contact, five very different ethnic groups occupied Trinidad (Figueredo and Glazier, 1978; Glazier, 1978c). The stylistic behavior connected with ethnicity should be retrievable in the archaeological record. It has not been found chiefly because it has not been looked for.

The stylistic analyses done by Bullbrook (1953) and Rouse (1953) tend to average out stylistic behavior along temporal planes and produce basically a chronology. This is because the artifacts and modes are not selected for analysis on the basis of their potential stylistic message (*vid.* Wobst, 1977), but rather for their chronological import. However valuable a chronology may be, it is but one of the first stages basic for more ambitious and interesting work (Rouse, 1977). It is to be hoped that this more ambitious work will materialize.

Tropical Forest groups have more-or-less the same economic base (swidden horticulture which relies heavily on root crops). The need for spacing behavior (*cf.* Vayda, 1976) leads to marked stylistic behavior as reinforcement (*cf.* Wobst, 1977). This is seen ethnographically in the proliferation of ethnic groups in the whole Guianas area. We would like to suggest that the dynamics of ethnicity are the cultural mechanisms that define and govern competition between groups in our area, and are therefore among the principle factors in the selection and diffusion of new cultural traits. This is why we believe that the identification and investigation of ethnic groups on the basis of stylistic behavior is of crucial importance for the study and assessment of prehistoric processes in Trinidad.

Long-distance trade is a necessity in the moist tropics of the New World (Lathrap, 1973). It is gratifying that we have ample evidence to document it in Trinidad (*vid.* Bullbrook, 1960). We mentioned earlier the likelihood that the Gulf of Paria may have been pivotal to the mating networks of the Archaic hunters and gatherers. We would like to postulate that the inland waterways that extend from Margarita island through the Gulf Paria to the Mouths of the Orinoco, were the heart and sinews of the trading networks around

which the Guianas cultural area was structured. This is precisely the situation found ethnohistorically (Glazier, 1978b).

The movement of goods, ideas, and people were over water. This rendered next to meaningless the insularity of Trinidad or the relative vastness of the mainland. Borde (1876) came close to recognizing this a century ago. The historic migrations into and out of Trinidad are understood more easily in this context (vid. Glazier, *op. cit.*). The pattern can be inferred archaeologically, since the goods converging on Trinidad come from the other portions of this network : the islands to the north and the Guianas proper (Bullbrook, 1960). There is a similar convergence of ceramic styles, indicative of intense and frequent contact (Rouse, personal communication).

It can be seen that the old approach of considering Trinidad and the other islands up to Margarita as marginal to the Guianas is basically fallacious. So is considering the Guianas marginal to the islands. In fact, both islands and mainland were integral parts of network cemented by the protected marine waterways, the rivers, and estuaries. Water was not a barrier, but a structuring agent, conducive to intensive exchange and helping to define a single area of interaction.

We have presented some ideas regarding the spatial behavior, social organization, and ethnicity of the prehistoric aborigines of Trinidad. The following are a list of topics which we feel will repay further research amply :

- 1) An intensive search for palaeo-Indian sites coupled with the continuing of the «Flake» sites.
- 2) The excavation of activity and habitation areas in Archaic sites.
- 3) A search for pre-ceramic sites on the Venezuelan side of the Gulf of Paria may test our suspicion that the Gulf was a vehicle for interaction and not a barrier.
- 4) Careful ethnobotanical work in ceramic sites may confirm the antiquity of root crop horticulture.
- 5) The excavation of ceramic-age structures may confirm the antiquity of the Guianese communal house.
- 6) The analysis of stylistic behavior (as outlined above) may give us the clues to the symbolic maintenance of ethnic boundaries.

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Alfredo E. FIGUEREDO et Stephen D. GLAZIER. *Comportement spatial, organisation sociale et ethnicité dans la préhistoire de Trinidad.*

Les travaux précédents sur l'archéologie de Trinidad ont concentré sur les aspects de la chronologie et des styles, avec une insistance occasionnelle quant aux restes faunistiques. On offre ici un modèle qui peut servir à expliquer le cadre chronologique connu comme une succession de stratagèmes d'adaptation, avec quelques interprétations sur la dynamique de l'ethnicité et de l'organisation sociale. Les corrélations possibles du témoin archéologique avec les peuples de l'ethnohistoire sont examinées et des directions nouvelles pour la recherche sont proposées.

*Comportamiento espacial, organización social y etnicidad en la prehistoria de Trinidad.*

Estudios anteriores sobre la arqueología de Trinidad se han concentrado en aspectos de la cronología y de los estilos, con un énfasis ocasional acerca de los residuos faunísticos. Se ofrece un modelo que puede ser utilizado para explicar el marco cronológico conocido como una sucesión de estrategias de adaptación con algunas interpretaciones sobre la dinámica de la etnicidad y de la organización social. Las correlaciones posibles del testigo arqueológico con las poblaciones de la etnohistoria son examinadas y nuevas direcciones para la investigación son propuestas.

*Spatial behaviour, social organization and ethnicity in the prehistory of Trinidad.*

Previous work on the archaeology of Trinidad has concentrated almost exclusively on chronological and stylistic factors, with occasional emphasis on faunal remains. Here is offered a model which may serve to explain the existing chronological framework as a succession of adaptive strategies, with concomitant inferences regarding the dynamics of ethnicity and social organization. Correlations of the archaeological record with ethno-historical groups are assessed, and possible avenues for future research are suggested.