

## A REVISED ABORIGINAL ETHNOHISTORY OF TRINIDAD

Alfredo E. Figueredo and Stephen D. Glazier

Earlier in the year, we decided to put together a brief account of Trinidad's aboriginal ethnohistory. When we learned of the recent book by Newson (1976), we considered abandoning the project. However, it became increasingly apparent that a more critical revision of this important topic was called for. Among other things, Newson's book turned out to concentrate mostly on the assimilation of Indians to Spanish Colonial Society. This paper will try to examine the ethnography of Trinidad taken from the scant primary sources of the XVI Century. For the XVII and XVIII Centuries and the problems of acculturation, we commend the reader to Aboriginal and Spanish Colonial Trinidad.

The current view of aboriginal Trinidad around 1595 would admit no Caribs (Bullbrook 1960:4), and postulate five territorial divisions "probably equivalent to the chieftainships of the Greater Antilles" (Rouse 1948: 546). Warlike Arawakans related to the Igneri of the Lesser Antilles are thought to have inhabited the Island (Taylor and Rouse 1955: 114), somehow spared by the earlier Callinage migrations northward.

There is something disturbing about this. In the first place, and as Borde (1976: I, 38) acknowledged a century ago, Dudley (1899), Raleigh (1848) and Sparrey (1906) reported Caribs in Trinidad. Also, there is no evidence for chieftainships involving coercive power or the alienation of wealth (such as is the case with those of the Greater Antilles), and the Arawaks of Trinidad were actually Lokono from the Mainland (cf. Barbudo 1874: 229).

A tendency to regard Trinidad as part of a West Indian or Circum-Caribbean cultural area is behind these misinterpretations. In fact, it remains to be seen whether any connections existed with the Greater Antilles. Actually, Borde (1876: I, 58) approached the question correctly when he observed that every ethnic group on Trinidad was represented also on the Mainland. One can go further and trace the connections specifically to the Guianas (cf. Harcourt 1928: 86).

The Indians of Trinidad lived in large, bell-shaped communal houses (cf. Las Casas 1951: III, 140; 1967: I, 287; Herrera 1934-1957: IV, 138; Rouse 1948: 546) that probably accommodated between a dozen and three-score persons each. The internal organization of these households could have ranged from the bilateral extended families of the contemporary Panare to the ad hoc political groupings of the contemporary Piara. It is conceivable that in some places several of these may have formed a single settlement under a "chief", but a fairly even scattering of single communal houses over the countryside (each largely independent politically) may have been the most frequent pattern.

Although the poet Castellanos (1850: 87-88) versified about two chieftains ruling as many "provinces" in 1530, Fernández de Oviedo (1959: II, 387) presents a much more plausible picture, with additional "chiefs". Caulin (1966: I, 209) describes even more significant a fragmentation. The reports leave a vivid impression of loose confederacies of very short duration. It seems also that the "chiefs" had little (if any) coercive power, and that the social structure probably was that of egalitarian farming groups (cf. Herrera 1934-1957: X, 88). A name given "chiefs" in Raleigh's (1848: 7; cf. Sparrey 1906: 302) time was Acrewana,

rendered often as Capitaynes by the Europeans. This became (here and elsewhere) typical Tropical Forest usage for such "chieftainships".

Barbudo (1874: 229) reports Caribs and Arawaks on Trinidad around 1574 (Pablo Ojer in Caulín 1966: I, 215, note 3; cf. Lovén 1935: 32, note 2). Dudley (1899), Raleigh (1848), and Sparrey (1906) present a more complicated picture by 1595. The groups named by Raleigh are the Iaio (= Yao, a Carib-speaking group), Arwaca (= Lokono, or True Arawak), Saluaios (?), Nepoios (= Sepoios, another Carib-speaking group), and Carinepagotos (a Carib-speaking group?). Raleigh (id.:4-5) seems to imply that there may be more such "nations" on Trinidad, but Sparrey (1906:301) lists these five alone. Borde (1876: I, 38) equates Raleigh's Saluaios with the Saliva, whereas Taylor (1977: 16) suggests an Arawakan affiliation.

In 1593, Antonio de Berrío reported a census of the Island, estimating more than 35,000 inhabitants, of which over 7,000 were probably adult males (Newson 1976: 31). This would be a high figure for a landlocked area, but the marine resources made available by an extensive coastline render this population density acceptable. It seems certain that Trinidad was peopled well below carrying capacity at less than 15 persons per square mile. The extant literature does not consider any "nation" as numerically preponderant on the Island. It is probable that no single ethnic group surpassed 10,000 persons.

Scott (1925: 121) mentions the Spaniards' attempts at settlement between 1522 (sic) and 1590. He also gives as the reason for their eventual success the "great differences" that the Sepoyes and Arawaks, on the one side, had with the Caribs ca. 1587 (cf. Harcourt 1928: 86 for similar alliances in the Guianas). He considers these differences to have ruined the Indians, to the benefit of Spain. Before that, "though of Different Nations", they had kept outsiders off their Island. The Sepoyes (themselves a Carib-speaking group) instigated the war against their distant kinsmen. It is interesting to note how in 1732 "Nepuyo" is listed as the common language of the mission Indians (Rionegro 1918: II, 237), and one wonders if the Sepoyes did not benefit somewhat in the long run from their fights with the Caribs almost a century and a half beforehand.

With the coming of Antonio de Berrío and the English pirates Dudley and Raleigh, one can say that aboriginal society begins to break down on Trinidad. After protracted missionary activity and extensive acculturation, there is barely a genetic survival left today.

From the preceding, one can reach some conclusions regarding the ethnohistory of aboriginal Trinidad in the XVI Century. Firstly, there were various Carib-speaking groups on Trinidad, sharing the Island with the Lokono or True Arawak (and possibly also with some Saliva-speakers). Secondly, Circum-Caribbean culture traits are rare on Trinidad, most connections being recognized readily to be with the Guianas Tropical Forest Culture groups of the Mainland. Thirdly, there is no real insularity in aboriginal Trinidad, and one can not understand its processes without reference to the Mainland.

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