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## **Martinique**

Benoît Bérard, Ryan Espersen, and Cheryl White

Martinique, which is administered directly by France, is located in the volcanic arc of the Lesser Antilles. The island has an area of 1,128 square kilometers. The French government's archaeological maps of Martinique identify more than 100 Amerindian sites. The evidence for the earliest human occupation on Martinique found thus far to dates to the first century BC at the Vivé site. In 1937, J. B. Delawarde (Delawarde, 1937) was the first archaeologist to published research based on research in Martinique. Delawarde's work focused on the excavations at the Anse Belleville prehistoric site. Since that time, Martinique has been a major center of precolonial archaeology in the Lesser Antilles. This work relies heavily on the work of local volunteers. Local support enabled Martinique to host that the first Congress of the Association for the Studies of the Lesser Antilles Pre-Columbian Civilizations (the predecessor of the International Association for Caribbean Archeology), which the *Société d'histoire de la Martinique* held at Fort-de-France in 1961.

### **Precolonial Archaeology**

Knowledge of Martinique's precolonial archaeology revolves around work conducted on a few major sites. In the 1970s, M. Mattioni conducted large excavations at early Cedrosan Saladoid sites, including Fond-Brûlé and Vivé. The latter site was also excavated by J. P. Giraud and B. Bérard (Bérard 2004) for several years in the 1990s. The Vivé site was abandoned quickly at the beginning of the Mount Pelée volcanic eruption around AD 350/400, making it a Caribbean

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precolonial version of Pompeii. The exceptional preservation conditions have made Vivé a major attraction for archaeologists for decades. The many publications based on their research have made the Vivé site a primary reference for West Indian early ceramic occupation. The main middle-late Saladoid phase reference site is Dizac au Diamant. The site has been excavated by several researchers since the 1960s. N. Vidal conducted the most recent operation in the 1990s. The primary reference publication on post-Saladoid occupation in Martinique remains L. Allaire's dissertation (1977), which is based on his work at the two major sites of Paquemar (Troumassan Troumassoid) and Macabou (Troumassan Suazoid). New sections of the Macabou site were excavated under S. Grouard's direction in the period 2005/2009. The precolonial cultural chronology of Martinique is thus based on numerous recent and large excavations and is one of the major references for the Windward Islands.

### **The Colonial Period**

Several colonial archaeology programs that combine archaeological, ethnoarchaeological, and archival research have been initiated in Martinique over the last two decades.

Martinique was settled in 1635 by the French. Pierre Belain d'Esnambuc took possession of the island in the name of the *Compagnie des Isles d'Amérique*, although the island was still inhabited by the Island-Carib. This first French settlement in the town of Saint-Pierre began with the construction of the Saint-Pierre fort. Soon the first tobacco plantations were set up; they relied primarily on the labor of white indentured servants. A major change in the island occurred in 1654 with the arrival of between 300 and 400 Dutch Jews from Brazil. These immigrants introduced new techniques that significantly improved sugar production on Martinique. Because the Dutch Jews used slave labor, there was also an increase in the number of enslaved Africans on Martinique during this period. The first African enslaved arrived in the mid-1600s, and by

1700 the enslaved population numbered some 16,000, eclipsing the slave population of Saint-Domingue, which at the time was 9,000. Sugar was the island's primary commercial resource from the 1690s to 1800, and the profitability of this crop made Martinique the most valuable French colony in the Lesser Antilles. After France lost Saint Domingue at the beginning of the nineteenth century because of the Haitian Revolution, Martinique became even more important. Over the next two centuries, Martinique was the most strategically valuable colonies during France's conflicts with England in the West Indies.

Saint-Pierre was the island's economic center until its complete destruction by the eruption of Mount Pelée on May 8, 1902. Several academic and contract archaeological research programs have been conducted at Saint-Pierre, primarily by S. Veuve, over the two last decades. These projects have focused on the first church (*l'église du Fort*), the first cemetery (*le cimetière du fort*), the cathedral, the psychiatric hospital (*la maison coloniale de santé*), the theater, the combat engineer house (*la maison du genie*), and several small private house blocks. The results of this research have been synthesized in a monograph publication that analyzes Saint-Pierre's architectural and urban history, including the results of underwater excavations in Saint-Pierre Bay (Veuve 1999). A diachronic study of the Martinique strategic military defense has been conducted by Laurence Verrand, combining archaeological surveys and archival research (Verrand 2004). Verrand divided the island's military history into four periods, each associated with a distinctive strategic military defense site pattern.

In 1672, during the first period (1635/1700), King Louis XIV ordered the construction of Fort Saint Louis in *Baie de Fort-Royal*. Two defensive batteries were maintained at Fort-Royale to protect the island from raids launched by buccaneers and Martinique's indigenous population. During the second period (1700/1750), Martinique's population doubled. The growth in the

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number of colonists and enslaved Africans and a shift from a tobacco-based economy to self-sustaining sugar plantations brought an increase in revenue and wealth. Batteries could now be found along the island's coastal rim where natural barriers of toxic foliage (such as *Hippomane mancinella*), cliffs, reefs, and swamps were used as defense mechanisms. Lime kilns made during the first three periods have been examined using ethnoarchaeological, historical, and archaeological techniques. Researchers have determined that lime, a local natural resource, was used as to construct garrisons and a purifier during the sugar distillation process (the so-called claying process for making white sugar).

During the third period (1750/1802), which included the Seven Years' War, Martinique resisted capture by the English in 1759 but fell to them in 1762/1763. Britain returned Martinique to France in the Peace of Paris treaty that ended the Seven Years' War. In 1784, the French constructed a naval base in Martinique in order to make the island the center of their Caribbean operations. Following the institution of laws recognizing equal rights for free blacks across the French colonies in 1791 and 1792, unrest ensued in Martinique, pitting republicans in favor of those laws against the monarchists. The British, who sided with the monarchists, captured Martinique, Guadeloupe, Tobago, and St. Lucia in 1794 in response to this unrest. However, Martinique was returned to France in the Peace of Amiens in 1802. As a result, slavery was maintained as an institution in Martinique. In response to these invasions and occupations and to an increase in slave revolts, the first landlocked fort was built to defend against land attacks. Slavery was finally abolished in Martinique in 1848. The fourth and final period (1803/1848) marked a shift in French military strategy. In the years leading up to the abolishment of slavery, there was increased concern about inland slave revolts. To remedy the issue, military installations were built on high ground to moderate the onset of tropical illnesses

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among vulnerable European soldiers. These fortifications provided a quick visual survey of surrounding areas as protection against potential threats.

After Saint-Pierre town and fortifications system, the third well-developed research focus within colonial archaeology in Martinique is plantation and slavery archaeology. It began in the 1980s with industrial archaeology research led by the *Université des Antilles et de la Guyane*. To date, around fifteen master's theses have been written about plantations in Martinique, using classic historical approaches and analyses of the standing buildings and ruins. The first real archaeological excavations were conducted in the 1990s on the Creve-Coeur, Fond Saint Jacques, and Dizac sugar plantations. These excavations were associated with a temporal analysis of the variability and evolution of sugar production. During the later 1990s, S. Veuve conducted an important excavation program at the Saint-Pierre plantation of the Jesuits (Veuve et al. 1999). As a result of Veuve's work, the great house was completely excavated; as was the nineteenth-century village that housed slaves and, after emancipation, free workers.

Kenneth Kelly's (2008) investigations complement plantation archaeology research in Martinique. To better understand French colonial slavery during the French Revolution, Kelly conducted research at plantation Crève Coeur, located in the southern region of Martinique. His excavations focused on the slave village site. His finds included low-fired earthenware ceramics that are commonly referred to as Afro-Caribbeanware. In addition, he identified and excavated house floors, wrought-iron nails, and midden deposits with faunal remains.

Although a large quantity of articles, books, and field reports have published in French, there are few English publications about Martinique's archaeological record. Since 1994, the French Ministry of Culture and Communication has published an annual review of archaeological work undertaken on Martinique entitled *Bilan Scientifique de la Région*

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*Martinique*. This governmental body identifies, records, and oversees archaeological sites on the island.

### **Further Reading**

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**See also** Afro-Caribbean Earthenwares; Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park (St. Kitts); Guadeloupe (Eastern); Historical Archaeological Sites (Types); Island-Carib.