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About Boxes and Labels: A Periodization of the Amerindian Occupation of the West Indies

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Depuis de nombreuses décennies, les données issues de la fouille de sites liés à l'occupation précolombienne de l'archipel antillais sont analysées en fonction du système classificatoire développé par Irving Rouse. Ce système fondé sur la triade complexe/sous-série/série a permis d'établir avec une grande efficacité un premier cadre chrono-culturel pour l'occupation amérindienne de l'aire caraïbe. C'est avant tout dans ce but qu'il avait été forgé. Il a cependant au cours des dernières années aussi démontré ses limites face à la complexité croissante des questionnements des chercheurs ; quand certains ont tenté de lui faire faire autre chose que ce pour quoi il avait été construit. L'objectif du présent article n'est pas de remplacer par un autre le modèle établi par Irving Rouse. Notre ambition est de tenter d'évaluer au niveau théorique et opérationnel en quoi l'adjonction d'une véritable périodisation pourrait d'avérer utile au développement d'une pensée complexe qu'implique le processus actuel de renouvellement des problématiques ainsi que de diversification et d'enrichissement rapide des données. Il s'agira, enfin, pour nous d'esquisser les contours de ce que pourrait être une telle périodisation en espérant que de cette première avancée puisse émerger de nombreuses discussions aptes à participer au processus de construction nécessairement collectif d'un tel outil.

For many decades, data from excavations of sites related to the pre-Columbian occupation of the Caribbean Archipelago have been analyzed according to the classification system developed by Irving Rouse. This system based on the triad complex/sub-series/series made it possible to establish with great effectiveness a first chrono-cultural framework for the Amerindian occupation of the Caribbean area. It was forged primarily for this purpose. However, in recent years it has also demonstrated its limitations in the face of the increasing complexity of researchers' questions when some have tried to make it do something other than what it was built for. The purpose of this article is not to replace the model established by Irving Rouse with another. Our ambition is to try to evaluate at the theoretical and operational level how the addition of a real periodization could be useful for the development of a complex thought that implies the current process of diversifying issues addressed by the researchers as well as the diversification and rapid enrichment of data. Finally, there is the question of sketching out the contours of what such a periodization could be, in the hope that this first step will lead to many discussions enable to participate in the necessarily collective building process of such a tool.

Durante muchas décadas, los datos de las excavaciones de yacimientos relacionados con la ocupación precolombina del archipiélago caribeño han sido analizados de acuerdo con el sistema de clasificación desarrollado por Irving Rouse. Este sistema basado en la triada complejo/sub-seria/seria permitió establecer con gran eficacia un primer marco crono-cultural para la ocupación amerindia del área del Caribe. Es para este propósito que fue forjado principalmente. Sin embargo, en los últimos años también ha demostrado sus limitaciones frente a la creciente complejidad de las preguntas de los investigadores cuando algunos han intentado hacer que haga algo distinto de para lo que fue construido. El propósito de este artículo no es reemplazar el modelo establecido por Irving Rouse por otro. Nuestra ambición es tratar de evaluar a nivel teórico y operativo cómo la adición de una periodización real podría ser útil para el desarrollo de un pensamiento complejo que implica el actual proceso de complejización de las problemáticas así como la diversificación y el rápido enriquecimiento de datos. Por último, se trata de esbozar los contornos de lo que podría ser una periodización de este tipo, con la esperanza de que este primer paso dé lugar a muchas discusiones que participaran en el proceso de construcción, necesariamente colectiva, de esta herramienta.

Introduction

Almost all archaeologists in the West Indies refer to the classification system developed by Irving Rouse (Keegan et al. 2014; Petersen et al. 2004). Strongly inspired by the Linnaean classification, it is composed of complexes (or styles), defined by a set of modes (essentially types of ceramic decorations), associated within sub-series, themselves components of series corresponding to historical traditions supposed to regroup the descendants (peoples and cultures) of a common ancestor (Rouse 1992). A continuum of modes is supposed to be the indicator of this "genetic" relationship (Rouse 1960). It is undoubtedly this last point that best shows the proximity between Rouse's framework and the thought pattern stemming from the natural sciences.

This framework has been the subject of much criticism in recent decades. The main ones concern the rigidity of the phylogenetic tree model, which appears to have little ability to account for the fact that "cultural evolution in the Caribbean is the product of complex interactions between local groups" (Keegan 2011:237; see also Hofman & Hoogland 2011). It also has been criticized for the very strong preponderance of ceramic decorations in the definition of complexes, subseries and series as well as the equivalence maintained between peoples, cultures and chronological periods (Rodríguez Ramos 2010). A periodization of the Native occupation of the Greater Antilles was, however, well established by Rouse mainly on the basis of early research conducted in Haiti and Puerto Rico (Rainey 1940; Rouse 1939, 1941). It initially consisted of seven arbitrary periods (I, IIa, IIb, IIIa, IIIb, IVa and IVb) whose identification resulted from cross-referencing the results of modal analysis

and the stratigraphic analysis of middens (Rouse 1951). However, if reference to this construction remained fundamental in all of his work and is repeated in some recent syntheses (Petersen et al. 2004), it was very widely dominated by the triad complex/subseries/series. To be convinced, it is sufficient to witness how little space the presentation of this periodization occupied in Rouse's (1992) last major synthesis (the term "period" is even missing in the glossary at the end of the book).

It is interesting to look briefly at his definitions of these different periods (Rouse 1992:106): "Periods Ia and Ib are preceramic. Period IIa is the time when painted pottery was dominant; and period IIb, the time when it was going out of fashion. Period IIIa is that of the newly found plain pottery. The later modeled-incised ware begins during period IIIb and reaches its climax during period IVa. Period IVb is historical." Thus, there does not seem to be any explicit coherence between the subparts of the same period (it is in fact based on the identification of series). Moreover, outside the period IVb the foundations of the definition for each of its periods are a mode of ceramic decoration playing the role of diagnostic fossil. Their identification is therefore based on the same type of data that forms the core of the complex/sub-series/series system. This is undoubtedly one of the main causes of the very weak role played by this periodization in the construction of archaeological knowledge concerning the Amerindian settlement of the West Indies.

In the Lesser Antilles (Table 1), period II corresponds to the Saladoid series, period III to the Troumassoid series, and period IV (partly contemporary with period IIIb) to the Chican Ostionoid subseries (Rouse and Faber-Morse 1999).

Jiménez and Rodríguez Ramos 2008). Luis Chanlatte Baik is the main contributor to

the development of a chrono-cultural framework following this perspective.

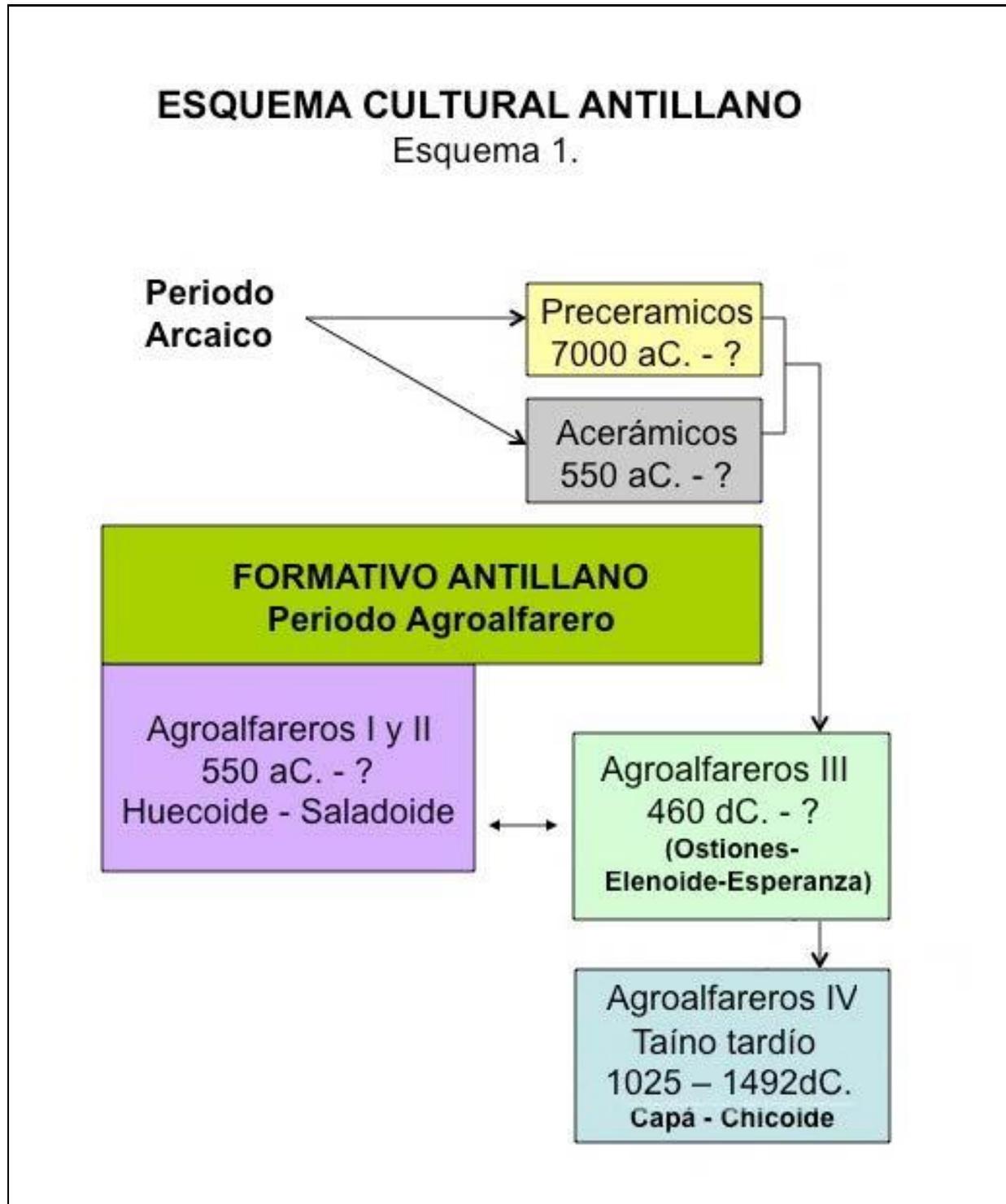


Table 2: Esquema cultural antillano (after Chanlatte-Baik, 2014).

The latest version of that Antillean cultural scheme (Chanlatte Baik 2014), in continuity with its previous productions, proposes a division between an archaic

period and an agro-ceramic period called the "Antillean formative". The Archaic Period is divided into two stages (pre-ceramic and ceramic), and the Caribbean

Formative Period is divided into four stages (agroalfareros I to IV) (Table 2). The establishment of a periodization that prevails over the identification of cultural ensembles, without ignoring them, is a fundamental element of this scheme that offers several solutions to the problems posed by the complex/sub-series/series system. We will come back to this later. No doubt, the passionate debates that have animated the Antilleanist archaeological community around the so-called "La Hueca problem" (Oliver 1999), of which Chanlatte Baik was one of the main actors, have not encouraged recognition of the value of this cultural scheme. Even more, the "vagueness" concerning its chronological transcription of this periodization (see in Table 2), and its difficult compatibility with the system developed by Rouse, which constitutes in fact a sort of *lingua franca* of the Antilleanist archaeological community, also undoubtedly have been disadvantages.

One may wonder about the usefulness of superimposing a real periodization of the Amerindian occupation of the West Indies on the complex/sub-series/series system; a situation that largely has been going on for nearly a century. Indeed, the problems linked to the historical periodization and the discussions relating to the very interest in the establishment of such a periodization are far from specific to the Caribbean area. In fact, these problems have been at the heart of many debates since the emergence of the "Ecole des Annales" in the whole field of historical sciences. Traditionally, history had been divided into successive periods that were supposed to give coherence to all the events and dynamics that took place there. In this, the period was supposed to embody the "spirit of a time." Whether in the Christian vision (from creation to the last judgment), in the positivist thought of Auguste Comte (from the theological phase to the scientific phase), or in the Marxist historical analysis, the succession of periods

followed a global logic highlighting an aim, a meaning to history. If Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre reject this teleological perspective of history, they insist above all on the fact that time is both continuum and perpetual change. Thus, any division is "... nothing more, nor nothing less than a perspective, whose legitimacy is proven by its fruitfulness" (Bloch 1952:78). Any periodization that is too rigid, conceived as a historical reality, ultimately becomes no longer an aid but an obstacle to understanding. Thus, the historian must consider that "... sometimes the great waves of related phenomena which cross from one side to the other, the duration, sometimes the human moment when these currents tighten in the powerful node of consciences" (Bloch 1952:79).

We can already distinguish here the premises of the tripartition of duration developed later by Fernand Braudel: short duration of the event, medium duration of the economic situation, and long duration of the structures (Braudel 1958). Michel Foucault, by underlining the conjunction of the power/knowledge binomial in the construction of discourses, only reinforces the criticisms of the historical periodization previously expressed by the "Ecole des Annales". However, its *Archeology of Knowledge* (Foucault 1969) is nonetheless an attempt of a global history aimed to reveal the face of an era. He thus conceives a periodized history of alternating "epistemes" (Foucault 1966) and "ruptures". Similarly, Paul Veyne rejects the myth of the period which he associates with a narrative practice of history (Veyne 1977), but stresses that "...facts do not exist in isolation but have objective connections [...] and no one can change anything about them" (Veyne 1971). Thus, these researchers laid the foundations for a return to the historical periodization freed from its original sins (Besserman 1996). In this post-modern perspective: "Each period is in itself equivocal. The periods differ from one another because there are different forms of heterogeneity, not

because each period held a single and coherent view of the world" (Hillis Miller 1975:31).

Periodization in the historical sciences is therefore both an extremely ancient and a very modern exercise. How, and under what conditions, can it prove useful in advancing our knowledge of the Amerindian settlement of the West Indies? The system set up by Rouse based on the triad complex/sub-series/series, based on a people-culture-period equivalence and inspired by the phylogenetic model, is today like an old habit worn for a long time and often for uses for which it was not designed. Too many times enlarged to adapt, as best it can, to the exponential enrichment of data. A hundred times reprised by its author and his successors, it has already shown its limits for some time. Thus, the growing complexity of the construction produced gradually removes any explanatory value. Today, it seems almost impossible to build a "true" account of the Amerindian occupation of the Antilles based on this system.

Our proposal is therefore not to break down Rouse's model but to reconstruct a real periodization based on factors other than the Rousean triad. This is accomplished by breaking the monopoly of cultural characterization to identify historical events or dynamics, moments of rupture or continuity, that have had an impact on a large scale. First, it should allow the construction of a narrative over a long period of time able to identify the historical dynamics produced and endured by the Amerindian populations of the West Indies. Second, this framework should encourage recognition and interpretation of the complexity of the interactions that have existed between the different cultural groups within the archipelagoes and between the archipelagoes and various continental areas. On the other hand, the periodization exercise allows comparison and: "However perilous it may be, comparatism authorizes systemic hypotheses rich in ideas which in turn

suggest or even require case studies designed to invalidate or confirm the intuitions thus canalized" (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2004:32). Finally, it could perhaps encourage the emergence of a metalanguage to develop interactions with the archaeological communities of continental America, which generally think of pre-Columbian settlement according to other frameworks (phases, sequences, horizons, traditions, periods, etc.). This last point would not only encourage exchanges between researchers but would above all provide a more stable scientific basis for the construction of hypotheses involving strong interactions between the Amerindian populations of the West Indies and those of the continent.

This does not mean throwing the baby out with the bath water. The periodization that we advocate here should not replace the Rousean triad and lead to its disappearance. On the contrary, it must juxtapose them because, built on distinct bases, it fulfils different functions. The system complex/sub-series/series cleaned of a few slags would then simply be returned to the function for which it was designed: the identification of cultural ensembles and their organization in time and space according to their supposed degree of proximity. The cohabitation of these two explanatory frameworks, completed by others, would allow us to make some steps towards the production of a complex thought (Morin 1995) of the Amerindian occupation of the Antilles.

New Periodization

After this long theoretical preamble the time to get our hands dirty has arrived and it is time for us to propose and defend a periodization. We are far from considering this proposal as indisputable, on the contrary, our idea is above all to lay the foundations, even if they are polemical, of a process of necessarily collective construction of a periodization whose implementation seems to us eminently desirable for the reasons we have just

outlined. Any periodization as construction is a risky attempt "... because it will always be easy (...) to criticize this or that choice, depending on the reader's field of predilection, which does not necessarily correspond to that of the author" (Coquery-Vidrovitch 2004:32).

Because each periodization has validity only in a given geographical space, we have chosen to focus on the space extending from Grenada to Puerto Rico. Why this choice? We are firmly convinced that it is possible to identify a certain number of global phenomena at the scale of the entire Antillean archipelago that could provide a serious basis for periodization work. This space has experienced historical dynamics, certainly connected to those of other spaces, but whose specificity justifies this scale of analysis. Furthermore, our insufficient knowledge of the wide spaces that are the islands of Hispaniola, Cuba and Jamaica has prompted us to limit our ambition. We could have limited ourselves to the Lesser Antilles. However, we feel that Puerto Rico, the last of the Lesser Antilles and the first of the Greater Antilles, should be included for two main reasons. First, Puerto Rico was the only one of the Greater Antilles to have been impacted by the first phase of formative occupation of the archipelago, which is at the heart of our concerns that otherwise were limited to the Lesser Antilles. Second, this integration of Puerto Rico is a first step toward integrating the rest of the archipelago as part of a collective effort that we hope to accomplish. As regards the exclusion of the islands of Trinidad and Tobago from our study space, Trinidad is first of all geologically and biogeographically a continental island, a continent to which it was still connected until around 9000 BP (Ribera-Collazo 2019). Tobago, because of its proximity to the mainland and Trinidad, can also be considered at another level as a continental island. Conversely, from Grenada the West Indies constitute an oceanic archipelago. Moreover, in terms of

pre-Columbian navigation, regular round trips between Trinidad or Tobago and Grenada are difficult to envisage due to the nature of the currents. Indeed, if the navigation in a southeast to northwest direction (Tobago to Granada) does not pose any particular problem (Slayton, 2018), the way back is problematic because of the force of the equatorial south current which flows north along the coast of South America and enters the Caribbean Sea precisely between Trinidad and Tobago and Grenada. Thus, the most natural gateway to the mainland from Grenada seems to be further west near Margarita Island, rather than Trinidad. These different elements make the Amerindian occupation of Trinidad more associated with the cultural dynamics taking place in the Orinoco basin and the northeastern coast of South America (from Guyana to Margarita), than with those specific to the Caribbean archipelago (Boomert 2000:218, Fig. 55; Boomert 2006). The island of Tobago would constitute a border zone, an interface between these two areas, which of course maintained links but which also have their own specificity.

Once the geographical framework has been established, constructing a periodization can be summarized as defining breaks and continuity. We begin by maintaining continuity with previous productions, so our periodisation is largely inspired as much by Chanlatte-Baik's scheme as by the age system set up by Rouse. Similarly, because cultural changes are a consequence of the historical phenomena on which we wish to base our chronology, dialogue with the Rousean system of cultural characterization should not pose a major problem. Thus, the names we chose to designate each period are not original; the important thing was to concentrate our efforts on the contents of the boxes rather than on the labels. Four "events" seem to characterize the Amerindian occupation of the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico: the arrival of

humans, the migration of formative type groups, the development of complex hierarchical societies, and the European invasion. Three of them are exogenous, linked to the arrival of new populations, and of relatively short duration. The fourth, the endogenous development of hierarchical societies, is a historical process that takes place over a longer period of time. It is probably desirable to divide it into two phases: the first would correspond to the sequence of the different stages of its development, the second to its

evolution as a global, established, and coherent social, political and economic system. Another phenomenon of more discreet endogenous evolution also seems to characterize the Amerindian occupation of the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico: the passage from formative societies belonging to a pioneering logic and based on structures of essentially continental origin to the first original insular cultures.

Therefore, we propose the following periodization (Table 3).

DATES	AGES	PERIODS	CULTURAL COMPONENTS
16th-18th centuries	HISTORIC	Contact	Cayo
1100 C.E./contact	CERAMIC	Final Ceramic	Suazan Troumassoid / Marmoran Troumassoid (Marmora bay),/ Chican Ostionoid -Chicoid.
750/1100 C.E.		Late Ceramic	Troumassan Troumassoid /Troumassoid marmoran (Mill Reef)/ Ostionan Ostionoid / Elenan Ostionoid /Late Cedrosan Saladoid /Caliviny
400/750 C.E.		Middle Ceramic	Middle-Late Cedrosan Saladoid
(400 ?) 200 B.C.E./400 C.E.		Early Ceramic	Early Cedrosan Saladoid / Huecan Saladoid - Huecoid
Around 3000 B.C.E./ 0	ARCHAIC		Casimiroid /Ortoiroid corosan ?

Table 3: Proposed periodization of Amerindian occupation of the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico.

- **Archaic Age:** The Amerindian occupation of the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico began with the arrival of nomadic human groups whose economic system was mainly based on foraging. Their arrival within our study area is dated around 3000 BC according to data from Puerto Rico (Rodríguez-Ramos 2010) and St. Martin (Bonnissent 2010) where these occupations have been most widely documented (see Hofman and Antczak 2019 for a global synthesis). Occupations associated with the archaic age are largely documented in the northern part of our study area between Guadeloupe and Puerto Rico. Their presence seems more discreet or even non-existent in the southern part of our study area (Bérard 2002; Callaghan 2010; Fitzpatrick 2011), where our knowledge is based essentially on indirect evidences (Siegel et al. 2015). In the northern Lesser Antilles and the Virgin Islands our knowledge of the way of life of these groups has improved greatly in recent years (Bonnissent 2010, 2013; Hofman, et al. 2006, Hofman and Antczak 2019). This area was occupied for nearly three millennia by populations whose economy was based on a nomadic multi-island circuit. In Puerto Rico, introductions of plants from the mainland (Pagán Jiménez 2013) and possible limited ceramic practice (Rodríguez Ramos et al. 2008) have been documented in some archaic sites. For the time being, it remains difficult to establish an internal periodization of these three millennia at the scale of our study area, although a few limited attempts and the multiplication of works give hope that this objective can be achieved in the near future. This will only be

possible within the framework of a global approach integrating the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola where archaic occupations are numerous and ancient. Culturally, the archaic sites of Puerto Rico and the Lesser Antilles have been linked to the Casimiroid or Ortoiroid series almost solely on the basis of the presence or absence of flint macroblades in the assemblages. If the presence of macroblades seems to indicate a technical and cultural filiation with the Casimiroid ensemble, the cultural attribution of occupations where they are absent to the Ortoiroid would undoubtedly deserve a closer discussion. Especially since the reality of migration within the Lesser Antilles of Ortoiroid groups, whose presence is well documented in Trinidad, has been questioned in recent years (Callaghan 2010). Archaic occupations gradually disappeared after the second half of the first millennium BC. This disappearance, whatever the modalities, appears to be the consequence of the development of formative occupations.

- **Ceramic Age (400/200 BC - Contact):** The Ceramic Age began with the appearance of formative sites in the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico during the second half of the first millennium BC. This appearance is linked to the migration of groups from the north of the South American continent. It ends with the appearance in archaeological assemblages of evidence of direct or indirect contact with Europeans. It can be divided into four periods based on the criteria described above
 - *Early Ceramics* (400/200 B.C.-400 A.D.): This first period

corresponds to the expansion of these agro-ceramicist groups between Grenada and Puerto Rico as well as the period during which their economy, their symbolic system and their technical system remain generally in conformity with the structures that allowed the development and success of their pioneering project (Bérard 2013). The early Ceramics is thus characterized by a highly standardized and predetermined economic system based, among other things, on the introduction into the archipelago of a consistent corpus of plants and animals from the mainland. These groups also are marked by a strong cultural identity visible, among other things, through their expression of a complex symbolic system within the framework of their ceramic and lapidary production. Finally, this period was marked by the establishment of an important network of long-distance exchanges. So far two cultural ensembles have been identified during the early ceramics: the Early Cedrosan Saladoïde and the Huecan Saladoïde/Huecoïde. While the first of these clearly originated in the Orinoco basin, the second, in the absence of a clearly identified continental ancestor to date, could be the result of a process of ethnogenesis that took place in the West Indies.

o *Middle Ceramics* (400-700 AD): In a process that seems, despite the action of external factors, essentially endogenous, an evolution of Amerindian societies in the Lesser Antilles and Puerto Rico can be observed during the 4th century AD. This evolution seems to be the product of the conjunction of different phenomena. The Middle Ceramics

is thus marked by a visible demographic expansion through an increase in the number of sites and the colonization of new spaces (Curet 2005). The economic system is also undergoing significant changes. Settlement sites are established in very varied environments (Bérard and Vidal 2003). Associated with this is an increase in the diversity of economic choices and the appearance of specialized sites that testify to the implementation of new modes of land management. Various changes have also been identified in the symbolic system. They are partly due to the influence of the Barranoid series whose presence is attested in Trinidad from the second half of the 3rd century AD (Boomert 2000).

These changes are visible not only in the decoration of the ceramics but also in the appearance of "three-pointed stones." Finally, the first petroglyphs of the Lesser Antilles were probably made during the Middle Ceramics (Jönsson-Marquet 2002). It is interesting to note that the diversification of economic solutions seems to find an echo in ceramic production. It is marked, compared to the previous phase, by an enrichment of the morphological and decorative vocabulary used by craftsmen. However, this richness is little used and at the same time there is a reduction in the diversity of the production (Berthé and Bérard 2013). Both economically, and in terms of pottery production, these changes seem to indicate a reduction in the constraining social norm that so strongly marked the early ceramic groups representing a pioneering logic in these two fields. Only one cultural ensemble has so far been documented during the

Middle Ceramics. This is the middle Cedrosan Saladoid.

o *Late Ceramics* (700-1100 AD): The transition between the Middle Ceramics and the Late Ceramics seems to be an endogenous phenomenon again. No significant influence of cultural groups outside the archipelago can be observed during the process and the cultures that are being established have no continental equivalents. The most striking feature of this transition is the break with the relative cultural homogeneity that characterized the previous period. While in the Lesser Antilles a system seems to be maintained within which the village constitutes the social, political and economic unit of reference, one sees appearing in Puerto Rico the signs of regional integration (development of ceremonial centers, modification of funeral practices) (Curet and Oliver 1998) of the development of more complex societies (Wilson 2007).

The populations of the Greater Antilles, and Puerto Rico in particular, were beginning a process of economic and political integration that is gradually differentiating them from their neighbors in the Lesser Antilles. This phenomenon appears concomitant with if not of a disappearance, then of a reduction of, long-distance trade networks. In the Lesser Antilles, if the economic system seems, with the exception of this reduction in trade networks, relatively identical to that of the previous period, we observe a progressive evolution of the symbolic system. It is visible in the modification of the patterns present on ceramics as well as in the change in funeral practices (Hofman & Hoogland 2004). The

technical and symbolic investment made in ceramic production in previous periods has gradually been reduced, probably to the benefit of other types of support or practices.

o *Final Ceramics* (1100 A.D. - Contact): In Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, as in most of the Greater Antilles, the process of developing complex societies seems to lead, with the Final Ceramics, to the establishment of a global and coherent system marked by a strong social hierarchy and a significant production of prestige goods of high symbolic value. In the northern Lesser Antilles (e.g., Anguilla [Crock & Petersen 2004], Saint-Martin [Bonnissent 2010], Saba [Hofman & Hoogland 1991]) there seems to be integration into this cultural sphere and its socio-political model has spread there. This diffusion of social hierarchy may even have extended further south (Hofman & Hoogland 2004). In any case, the cultural influence of the complex societies of the Greater Antilles is felt there in an attenuated form (Allaire 1990). At the economic level, there is preferential exploitation of mangrove areas in the Lesser Antilles (Crock and Petersen 2004; Bérard and Vidal 2003). Finally, some researchers (Boomert 1986) have located in the Final Ceramics the integration of the Southern Lesser Antilles within a vast cultural complex whose heart would lie in the Guyana Plateau. However, no date in the West Indies makes it possible to affirm for the moment the pre-Columbian character of the phenomenon. Various cultural ensembles have been dated from the Final Ceramics: the Suazan Troumassoid, the Marmoran Troumassoid and the Chican Ostionoid (or Chicoid).

- **Historical Age** (Contact-?): The Historical Age begins with the European invasion of the West Indies. The archaeological study of Amerindian sites of historical age remains limited until now. The generally shallow archaeological layers are often disturbed and even when this was not clearly demonstrated, the presence within the same level of Amerindian and European objects was more frequently seen as the result of taphonomic problems than of contact between the Old and the New Worlds. Thus, most of our knowledge of the way of life of Antillean Amerindian groups from the 16th century onwards is based on the study of European historical texts. However, the gradual empowerment of the historical narrative produced by the archaeological work vis-à-vis that resulting from the study of these texts (Allaire 1977; Allaire 1980; Boomert 2011; Bright 2011; Davis and Goodwin 1990) has only made the excavation of historic Amerindian sites all the more necessary.

The aim in formally recognizing a Historical Age is to highlight issues of transculturation in contrast to the long-standing emphasis on genocide. It offers a counterpoint to the European vision and emphasizes the progressive impact of contact on the Amerindian population. Various sites excavated in recent years (Boomert 2011), and in particular those of Argyles in Saint-Vincent (Hofman & Hoogland 2012), and of La Poterie on Grenada (Keegan and Hofman 2017) have shown the existence of a strong connection between the Amerindian societies of Guyana and the West Indies

during the contact period. The modalities of this connection, described as a violent invasion by European sources, remain largely to be characterized from an archaeological point of view.

Conclusions

Any periodization is only a working tool. The one presented here is the tool we will use for the rest of our research. Based on the recognition of significant dynamics in the Amerindian history of the West Indies, it constitutes a first stage, but in no case a final outcome. It deserves to be completed and enriched by other thematic periodization (paleo-environmental, technical, etc.). From the dialogue between these different frameworks, a real complex thought of the Amerindian occupation of the West Indies could emerge. It will then have to be extended geographically, in particular to all the Greater Antilles. We are well aware that the geographical framework we have (too?) carefully chosen strongly limits our understanding of a certain number of phenomena (first settlement of the archipelago, complexity of archaic occupations, development processes of complex societies). It will undoubtedly be necessary to put it in resonance with those of the various continental zones associated with the history of the populations of the archipelago. Finally, the periodization that we propose deserves to be specified and refined. This work concerns in particular the question of absolute dates which we have chosen to largely evade. It could also concern a more detailed approach to the transition processes between the different periods which, as most often endogenous phenomena, are of a duration which must be apprehended in terms of relative chronology. Our proposal will therefore only reach real maturity if other researchers take it up to criticize, amend, complete and thus co-construct it. What was essential for us was to offer the possibility of inscribing cultural entities in

periods and to no longer to attach them without real reflection and in a relative

equivalence of periods to cultural sets (series, subseries, complex).

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