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ISLAND CARIB CANNIBALISM

One of the legends that spread quickest and farthest, and one of the most difficult to verify, was that of the man-eating men of the New World (Arciniegas 1955: 182).

INTRODUCTION

In *The Man-Eating Myth*, William Arens questions the existence of customary cannibalism “as an accepted practice for any time or place” (1979: 9). He finds no satisfactory documentation or sustained ethnography of cannibalism and cannot “isolate a single reliable complete first-hand account by an anthropologist of cannibalism” (1979: 181). Institutional cannibalism is a myth, he concludes; one which anthropologists, missionaries, explorers, and travellers alike have perpetuated. His skepticism has been received reluctantly but there have been few rigorous examinations of the evidence (Brady 1982).

One “classic man-eater” group he discusses is the Island Carib of the Lesser Antilles, the second New World culture encountered by the Spanish and source of the word “cannibal.” This paper provides a detailed review of the basis for Island Carib cannibalism and therefore a test of Arens’s thesis in this region. To sort out the problem of Island Carib cannibalism, I examine the difficulties surrounding the issue, the skeptical literature preceding Arens, and the actual ethnohistorical data and its modern presentation, and I suggest reasons for the prevailing uncritical acceptance of the idea of cannibalism¹.

Were the Island Caribs cannibals or were they not? Many authors accepted the simplicity of this reductionistic question and relied upon select, but prevalent European judgments for an affirmative answer (Boromé 1966, Bradford 1973, Jesse 1963, Joyce 1916, Loeb 1923, Morison, 1942, 1971, 1974, Ross 1970,

Rouse 1948, Volhard 1939). Yet major problems cloud the issue.

Chief among these is the availability and use of primary sources. The late ethnologist-linguist Douglas Taylor, who knew the Caribs and the original material better than anyone else, put the situation in perspective:

Unfortunately now when it is possible to investigate primitive Antillean societies we find that we are too late, for the aborigines have nearly all disappeared. Nor can we rely on the early chroniclers of this region [Du Tertre, Las Casas, Rochefort] for their bulky writings are filled not with valuable notes of native "curiosities" but rather with lengthy accounts of their own personal problems (1945: 513).

... the picture of Island Carib society in early colonial days, left to us by the French missionary fathers of the seventeenth century, contains many gaps and ambiguities which it is now too late to fill in and elucidate (1946: 210).

In the absence or paucity of primary data, most writers have relied on sources far removed from the few originals. The problem of source material is compounded because the original manuscripts are widely scattered in European and American archives and libraries (Myers 1981). Ideally one must be fluent in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Spanish, French, English, Italian, and Latin to gain proper access to the accounts. The definitive manuscripts may be undiscovered.

A few years ago one might have been comfortable that we understood Antillean societies fairly well, but that is not the case today. We have little idea how many Indians inhabited the Greater or Lesser Antilles or for how long (Myers 1978). The dates of Carib migration northward from South America have been revised recently by Allaire (1976). It is difficult to tell Carib archaeological sites from Arawak ones. Taylor and Hoff suggest that the Island Carib men's language is probably an Arawak-based pidgin (1980), showing that we are far from certain about Antillean languages despite decades of analysis. Cannibalism is another uncertainty in Island Carib studies.

Even the words "Carib" and "cannibal" have a problematic history. (See Henríquez Ureña 1938: 95–102, for an account of the rapid spread of these words in European languages). Current usage and meaning of these is a result of Spanish errors of translation and interpretation. *Caniba*, *caritaba*, *caribana*, *caris*, and *carib*

all occur in the earliest documents without clear distinction (Salas 1921: 89). The Island Carib referred to themselves as *Kalipuna* in the Arawakan speech of the women and as *Callinago* in the men's Cariban vocabulary (Taylor 1958: 156). According to Taylor,

... our 'cannibal' and 'Carib' go back to Arawakan designations describing some tribe or clan as manioc people. Had the original name been pejorative, as those applied to foreigners often are, it would not have been widely adopted, as it has been, by the people so designated (1958: 157).

Escardo points out that the original distinction by the Spanish between *indios* meaning peaceful, gentle people, and *caribes* or fierce, brave, daring, courageous people, some of whom may have been anthropophagous, has been lost (1978: 245–57). From the initial contact with New World cultures, there has been confusion over exactly who the Caribs, Callinago, Canibs, or Kalipuna were.

There is an absence of a clear definition of cannibalism, a practice encompassing an extremely broad and sometimes ambiguous range of behaviors. Cannibalism can include drinking waterdiluted ashes of a cremated relative, licking blood off a sword in warfare (Sagan 1974: 56), masticating and subsequently vomiting a snippet of flesh (Brown and Tuzin 1983), celebrating Christian communion, or gnawing on entire barbecued limbs as De Bry depicts Caribs doing (1590–95). Accompanying these behaviors is a display of affect ranging from revulsion to reverence and enthusiasm. The practice is categorized as endo- or exocannibalism, or as gustatory, ritual, survival, or symbolic. However, reports of Island Carib cannibalism unambiguously refer to the consumption of large, cooked body parts. In formal terms, the Caribs allegedly engaged in customary, ritual exocannibalism of their captured male enemies.

THE LITERATURE

Dissenting views on Island Carib cannibalism, often disregarded, lead from Taylor, the late contemporary expert, to Columbus. The most impressive commentary on Carib cannibalism, because it is among the briefest, is by Taylor, who emphasizes the Caribs'

virtues (1935, 1936, 1938, 1945, 1946, 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1958; Hodge and Taylor 1957). Reviewing accounts of European-Carib contact, he includes Chanca's comment that the Taino of Puerto Rico,

'though most seamen, use bows and arrows, and eat the Caribs as the Caribs eat them.' But it must be remembered also that the opinions of Carib cruelty held by the Spaniards were obtained almost exclusively from Tainos who had been captives among them or who had suffered from their attacks, and who hoped to transfer the white men's depredations from their own persons and property to those of their enemies. Later, independent reports certainly do not vindicate such assertions of Carib cruelty and ferocity (1951: 16).

Seventeenth-century French missionaries got on well with the Caribs. Breton "speaks with unveiled sarcasm of the Spaniards' accusations against the Caribs, 'on the contrary, I would complain much more readily of their gentleness toward me'" (Taylor 1951: 17, my translation). Armand de la Paix, who lived among them about the same time, declares, "'in their basic way of living they are only cruel against their enemies. They are dangerous when they are drunk and they fight against each other, but apart from that, they are a pleasant bunch'" (Taylor 1951: 17, my translation). Du Tertre agrees, and Labat, writes Taylor,

goes so far as to deny that they ever were anthropophagous. All our French sources agree in characterizing them by such terms as: reticent, taciturn, melancholic, fanciful, and fearful, indolent, individualistic, indifferent, ... given to mockery, unacquisitiveness and unambitious; but none who knew them well accuses them of cruelty (1951: 17).

Elsewhere, Taylor includes an allegorical story told by an elderly woman on Dominica's Carib Reserve about a former Carib chief:

Petit François used to receive strange visits. He told people it was his friends from the rivers Orinoco and Amazon. Once they sent him the smoked haunch of a woman, and another time a little lame boy — I forget his name — to make soup of. However, a priest got hold of the boy and made him baptized; but when the holy water touched him, the boy fell dead (1945: 518).

Richard Moore vigorously defends the Caribs against historical "smears and stereotypes." The usual view, he writes, "*is demonstrably erroneous, and has been used to attempt to justify their enslave-*

ment" (1973: 119–20, italics in original). Johns Hopkins historian Franklin B. Knight seconds Moore's assertion, "... the Caribs received their cannibalistic description from the malicious Spanish propaganda used as a smokescreen for attempts to enslave them" (Moore 1972:vi).

Nineteenth-century scholars reached similar conclusions. American naturalist Frederick Ober wrote

... the Spaniards left them alone for many years, only making descents upon them when they could take them at a disadvantage and enslaving them under an act which allowed the capture and transportation of such as should be proven cannibals. After the enslavement of the rapidly decreasing natives of the larger islands was prohibited, it was most surprising to find how many "cannibals" the Spaniards discovered. I do not think it has been successfully maintained that the natives of the Lesser Antilles were anthropophagous, but, as it suited the purposes of the Spaniards to have them declared so, thus they have remained, with the stigma attached to their name, to this day (Ober 1895: 296).

Justin Winsor, historian and biographer of Columbus, takes a conservative view. "It seems impossible for us now, from so many dubious and conflicting authorities, to reach any trustworthy knowledge on this subject" (1889: 328).

Among the accounts of these early experiences of the Spaniards with the native people, the story of cannibalism is a constant theme. To circulate such stories enhanced the wonder with which Europe was to be impressed (Winsor 1891, in Moore 1972: 14).

In his judgment the Spanish used the cannibalism epithet "to overcome the earliest humane protests against the slaughter of the natives and their deportation for slaves" (1889: 329). And in evaluating Las Casas' view, he reports that "Las Casas nowhere denies positively the existence of this shocking barbarism. One might well infer, however, from his pages that he was at least incredulous as to its prevalence" (1889: 329).

As part of an effort to demonstrate that Verrazzano never died at Carib hands, Henry C. Murphy stressed

... however savage and cruel they were toward their enemies, or, under provocation, towards strangers, no authenticated instance of cannibalism has ever been produced; but on the contrary, the testimony of the best authorities is that they were guiltless of any such horrid practice (1875: 149).

Washington Irving, a Columbus scholar, and William Sheldon earlier in the century also dissented (Irving 1831; Sheldon 1820).

Little was written in the eighteenth century on the Carib practice except by Labat, whose views are fully described below with those of other priests. According to Salas, Juan de Castellanos, a Spanish conquistador, explained the problem in his *Elegia*: "they were called Caribs/ not because they would eat human flesh/ but because they defended their homes well" (1921: 101; Moore 1972: 15).

Even Columbus was unconcerned about cannibals in the journal of the third voyage.

He commanded that whenever they arrived and landed to refresh themselves, they should procure that which they needed by barter, and that for a trifle which they might give to the Indians, even if those Indians might be the Cannibales, who are said to eat human flesh, they would have whatever they might wish, and that the Indians would give them all that they had (Jane 1930: 268).

DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

There are so few reports of Carib cannibalism that each deserves scrutiny. With all available data, chronologically presented, I include descriptions of the context of European-Carib relations, a vital and often-neglected aspect of the issue. The lengthy quotations are necessary to preserve the flavor of the original perceptions. The first 200 years after discovery form the critical period of evidence, for thereafter the Caribs were few and their cannibalism was attributed to a legendary past by both friend and foe.

Columbus's original views were all-important in setting the stage for conflict with the Amerindians. On October 12, 1492, the die was unalterably cast. His initial positive reactions to the Lucayans, an Arawakan people, reveal motives which characterized Spanish-Indian relations for the next 30 years.

They are all generally fairly tall, good looking and well proportioned. I saw some who bore marks of wounds on their bodies, and I made signs to them to ask how this came about, and they indicated to me that people had come from

other islands, which are near, and wished to capture them, and they had defended themselves. And I believed and still believe that they came here from the mainland to take them for slaves. They should be good servants and of quick intelligence, since I see that they would easily be made Christians, for it appeared to me that they had no creed. I, Our Lord willing, will carry away from here at the time of my departure, six to your highness, that they may learn to talk (Jane 1930: 149; cf. MacNutt 1909: 18).

And I soon saw two or three, and the people all came to the shore, calling us and giving thanks to God . . . One old man got into the boat, and all the rest, men and women, cried in loud voices: 'Come and see the men who have come from heaven; bring the food and drink.' Many came and several women, each with something, giving thanks to God, throwing themselves on the ground and raising their hands to the sky, and then shouting to us that we should land . . . These people are very unskilled in arms, as your highness will see from the seven whom I caused to be taken in order to carry them off that they may learn our language and return. However, when your highnesses so command, they can all be carried off to Castile or held captive in the island itself, since with fifty men they would all be kept in subjection and forced to do whatever may be wished (Jane 1930: 151).

I in order that they might feel great amity toward us because I knew that they were a people to be delivered and to be converted to our holy faith rather by love than by force, gave to some among them some red caps and some glass beads, which they hung round their necks, and many other things of little value (Jane 1930: 148).

At first meeting, Columbus exploited the Indians with cheap gifts, thought immediately of enslaving them, kidnapped seven, somehow managed detailed communication, and passed himself off as a god. Whether Lucayans said "come and see the men from heaven" is questionable, but in Columbus's mind, the enormous gulf between cultures had been bridged.

By late November, communication improved and he learned more of the area's inhabitants. "In a short time, either by gestures and signs, or by words, we were enabled to understand each other" (Major 1847: 9; Jane 1930: 262).

Indians with Columbus pointed out "Bohio." They said that this land was very extensive and that in it were people who had one eye in the forehead and others whom they called "cannibals." Of these last, they showed great fear, and when they saw that this course was being taken, they were speechless, he says, because those people ate them and because they are very warlike. The admiral says that he well believes that there is something in this, but that since they were armed, they must be an intelligent people, and he believed that they may have captured some men and that, because they did not return to their

own land, they may say that they were eaten. They believed the same of the Christians and of the admiral, at the beginning when they saw some of them (Jane 1930: 180).

All the people who have been found up to this time have, he says, the very greatest fear of those of Caniba or Camina, ... they, when they saw he was going in the direction of that land, were speechless, fearing that they would be eaten, and he could not calm their terror; and they said that there people had only one eye and the face of a dog. The admiral believed that they were lying... (Jane 1930: 183).

On Hispaniola, Columbus found no cannibals, cyclops or dog-faced people, but man-eaters and bald Indians were said to be on neighboring islands, along with hoards of gold.

I did not find, as some of us had expected, any cannibals amongst them, but on the contrary men of great deference and kindness ... Thus, as I have already said, I saw no cannibals, nor did I hear of any, except in a certain island called Charis [Porto Rico], which is second from Española on the side towards India, where dwell a people who are considered by the neighboring islanders as most ferocious; and these feed on human flesh ... These are the men who form unions with certain women, who dwell in the island Matenin ... They assure me that there is another island larger than Española, whose inhabitants have no hair, and in which is gold more than any of the rest (Major 1847: 13, 14, 15).

The quest for gold preoccupied Columbus who repeated his obsession with locating it on the island of women throughout January, 1493.

He called gold 'tuob,' and did not understand it by 'casna,' as they call it in the first part of the island, or by 'nozay,' as they name it in San Salvador and in the other islands. In Española they call copper or gold of poor quality 'tuob.' Of the island of Martinio that Indian said it was entirely peopled by women without men, and that in it there is very much 'tuob,' which is gold or copper, and that it is farther to the east of Carib ... In some islands they call it 'caniba,' but in Española 'Carib'; and that it must belong to a daring people, since they go through all the islands and eat the people whom they can take ... he understood some words, and from them he says that he gathered other things, and that the Indians whom he carried with him understood more, although they found differences of languages, owing to the great distance between the lands (Jane 1930: 234; Morison 1942, I: 404-405).

... in the island of Carib and in Martinio there is much copper, although there would be difficulties in Carib, because that people is said to eat human flesh, and that their island was in sight from there ... the island of Martinio, which is said to be entirely peopled by women without men (Jane 1930: 236).

The Indians told him that by that route he would find the island of Martinio, which is said to be peopled by women without men, and which the admiral greatly desired to visit, ... to take to the sovereigns five or six of them. But he doubted whether the Indians knew the course well ... But he says that it was certain that there were these women, and that at a certain time of the year men came to them from the said island of Carib, ... and if they gave birth to a boy, they sent him to the island of the men, and if to a girl, they kept her with them ... (Jane 1930: 237, 238).

Morison explains that Christopher Columbus had read about Marco Polo's travels, on which he reported the islands Masculina and Feminea in the Indian Ocean (1942, I: 404). Columbus summarized his first trip in a letter to the sovereigns, never failing to mention the region's menagerie.

In the Western part of the island of Juana, there remained two provinces to which Columbus did not go, to one of which the Indians gave the name Naan, where they say that men are born with a tail, but I doubt believe that is there, it will not be long before it is visited, with God's help (Jane 1930: 262, 313).

In all these islands I have so far found no human monstrosities, as many expected, but on the contrary the whole population is very well formed ... As I have found no monsters, so I have had no report of any except in an island 'Quaris,' which is the second at the coming into the Indies, and which is inhabited by a people who are regarded in all the islands as very fierce and who eat human flesh ... They are no more malformed than are the others ... These are they who have intercourse with the women of 'Martinio,' which is the first island met on the way from Spain to the Indies, in which there is not a man. These women engage in no feminine occupation, but use bows and arrows of cane, and they arm and protect themselves with plates of copper, of which they have much. In another island ... the people have no hair. In it there is gold incalculable, and from it and from the other islands I bring with me Indians as evidence (Jane 1930: 263-265).

After months of exploration Columbus was able to confirm neither the rumors of semi-human oddities nor precious metals, which he needed to justify his expedition. His only evidence was a small collection of gold ornaments and ten captured Amerindians, six of whom he presented to the King and Queen (Jane 1930: 314). He returned to Spain disappointed at failing to contact the Khan and oriental civilization, but hopeful a return trip would be more profitable. Above all, he carried to Europe tales of mythological creatures of which only the Carib cannibals survived his next voyage.

None of the Admiral's records of the second trip remain, but the expedition's physician, Diego Alvarez Chanca, left a meager account. Chanca's letter provides the first ethnographic report on people of the New World and contains data crucial for the history of cannibalism (Ybarra 1907; Morison 1939).

Deliberately seeking the gold-laden islands of women and cannibals he discovered Dominica on November 3, 1493. Finding no anchorage, the seventeen-ship fleet proceeded to Guadeloupe and remained eight days. There the long-anticipated cannibalism was confirmed. Most male Caribs had left to attack Arawaks on other islands, but the first explorers returned with spun cotton and provisions.

Besides those articles of food he likewise brought away with him four or five bones of human arms and legs. When we saw those bones we immediately suspected that we were then among the Caribbee islands, whose inhabitants eat human flesh, because the admiral, guided by the information respecting their situation he had received from the Indians of the islands he had discovered during his former voyage, had directed the course of our ship with a view to find them.

The few remaining inhabitants were wisely cautious.

The result was that none of these men could be persuaded to join us, and only two of them were taken by force and led away. More than twenty of the female captives were taken with their own consent, and a few of the native women by surprise, and forcibly carried off. Several of the boys, who were captives, came to us, fleeing from the natives of the islands who had taken them prisoners in their own country. . . . We found there a vast number of human bones and skulls hung up about the houses, like vessels intended for holding various things. . . . We inquired of the women who were prisoners of the inhabitants of the island, what sort of people the islanders were, and they replied, Caribbees. As soon as these women learned that we abhor such kind of people because of their evil practice of eating human flesh, they felt delighted. And after that, if any man or woman belonging to the Caribbees was forcibly brought forward by our men, they informed us (but in a secret way) whether he or she belonged to that kind of people, evincing at the same time by their dread of their conquerors that those poor women pertained to a vanquished nation, though they well knew that they were safe in our company (Chanca 1494: 437, 438, 439).

These captive women told us that the Caribbee men use them with such cruelty as would scarcely be believed; and that they eat the children which they bear to them, only bringing up those which they have by their native wives. Such of their male enemies as they can take away alive, they bring here to their homes to make a feast of them, and those who are killed in battle they

eat up after the fighting is over. They claim that the flesh of man is so good to eat that nothing like it can be compared to it in the world; and this is pretty evident, for of the human bones we found in their houses every thing that could be gnawed had already been gnawed, so that nothing else remained of them but what was too hard to be eaten. In one of the houses we found the neck of a man undergoing the process of cooking in a pot, preparatory for eating it.

The habits of these Caribees are beastly (Chanca 1494: 440).

Jane's translation is just different enough to note.

In one house they found the head of a man cooking. The boys whom they capture young, they are said to castrate and keep them as servants until they are full grown, or until they wish, and then they make a feast and kill them and eat them, and they say that the flesh of boys and women is not good, nor like that of men. Three of these boys fled to the fleet, all of whom had been castrated (Jane 1930: 318).

These lengthy accounts constituting the bulk of the earliest evidence for Island Carib cannibalism confirmed what the Spanish had been led to expect by the Arawaks. Actual cannibalism was not observed; the accusers were prisoners wanting to please the Spaniards. The means of communication is not clearly described. The head in the pot may have been there to clean the skull as well as for the presumed cannibal feast. The Spaniards took five captives to replace the interpreters who died on the voyage from Spain (Morison 1942, II; 99, n. 17).

By 1494, Columbus had captured more Indians and sent them to Spain to learn the language. The Indians, he argued, would gain immensely from exposure to civilization.

... by taking these people from their surroundings they would be cured of their cannibalism, converted to Christianity, and their souls saved; besides which, if the cannibals were thus converted, the Indians of the neighboring islands, who were peaceable and lived in fear of them would conceive a still higher regard for the Spanish ... The admiral, always dwelling upon the spiritual welfare of the cannibal natives, proposed that the more of them that could be captured, the better it would be, and then, ... he explained that the quantities of live stock and other necessities required by the colonists, might be paid for by the sale of slaves ... (MacNutt 1909: 23-24)

Columbus continued to Puerto Rico "for the purpose of capturing more cannibals" (MacNutt 1909: 24). These predations grew as

in 1496, Bartholomew Columbus sent 300 Indians to Spain as slaves, followed two years later by another 600 (MacNutt 1909: 25, 27).

In April, 1496, Columbus, thinking Guadeloupe was Martinino, the Amazon isle, reported finding red parrots, honey, and wax in a Carib village. "They also found a human arm roasting on a spit" (Morison 1942, II: 183). Las Casas, however, did not believe they found honey or wax, but has no comment on the arm (Morison 1942, II: 184).

The triple theme of gold, cannibals, and slaves was repeated on the third voyage. In Trinidad, Morison writes, "there was usually something comic as well as pathetic in Columbus's first contacts with natives as they attempted to lure the curious Indians to the ships by waving brass chamber pots and 'other shining things'" (1942, II: 256). Columbus, once again, was told what he wanted to hear.

They said as far as they could understand by signs, that there were in that district certain islands, where there was much of that gold, but that the inhabitants were cannibals, and the admiral says here that this word "Cannibal" all there regarded as a reason for enmity, or, perhaps, they used it because they did not wish the Christians to go there but to remain here all their lives (Jane 1930: 280).

The Indians, whom he had taken, told him, as he understood, that the people there were Cannibals, and that there gold was to be had or produced . . . (Jane 1930: 282; Morison 1942, II: 264ff.)

As occurred before and after, gold and cannibals were said to exist in the same place. But whenever Columbus looked, he found only traces at best of gold and spurious signs of cannibals. One gets the impression that the first two questions he put to the Indians were, "Do you have any gold?" and "Are you cannibals?" to which the replies were always the same, "No, we don't and aren't, but you'll find both if you go over there."

The Island Caribs, already expanding aggressively throughout the Antilles, responded in kind to the brutality of the European invaders. Before long, the once peaceful Arawak may have joined with the Caribs against the common enemy (Figueredo 1978). Survival of the group required active physical resistance, a rugged

home base for safe retreat, and a territory which held no value for the Europeans. These characteristics fit the Carib but not the Arawak. "It is sad but significant that the only Indians of the Caribbean who have survived are those who proved both willing and able to defend themselves. The Tainos, whom Columbus found so gentle and handsome and hospitable, are long since extinct" (Morison 1942, I: 305).

One of the major disruptions of the contact period must have been the diseases to which the Amerindians had no resistance: measles, smallpox, and tuberculosis. Because colonies were not established in the Lesser Antilles for 130 years after discovery, no resident observers documented the mortality or morbidity among the Caribs. Along with slaughter and slavery, disease accelerated the demise of once vigorous Caribbean cultures. Despite whatever destruction of Carib society occurred, their reputation as fierce cannibals persisted.

Once cannibalism was confirmed by circumstantial evidence, belief in it became thoroughly entrenched, while tailed and dog-faced men and Amazon women faded quickly from mention or to the interior of unexplored continents. Emphasis on cannibalism served the ends of Columbus to derive economic benefit from his voyages. Slavery became an expedient way to use the new-found Indies, and the claims of cannibalism a vehicle for promoting it. Columbus's approach to the Carib "problem" was one which fixed relations between European and Indian in intractable opposition. No other solution was possible until the Island Carib were subdued by disease and cultural collapse. By then, cannibalism was part of dim legend, or perhaps myth.

Alonso de Ojeda assisted coastal South American Indians by avenging Island Carib raids in 1499. The friendly Indians, who considered the Spanish "superhuman beings," explained that "their coast was subject to invasion from a distant island, the inhabitants of which were cannibals, and carried their people into captivity, to be devoured at their unnatural banquets" (Irving 1831: 18). Ojeda sailed to the unnamed Carib isle, ravaged the residents, and left with 'a number of Carib captives' (1831: 20).

Amerigo Vespucci described the Indians of Trinidad as "cannibals, of friendly disposition and goodly stature." He

created a lasting impression in European minds of savage treachery and located the cannibals in northeastern South America with a vivid account of a Portuguese sailor sent ashore to meet the Indians.

As soon as he stepped ashore the women gathered around him in a circle. They observed him, they touched him. He seemed to please them. Suddenly a woman emerged from the woods carrying a great club, which she brought down on the sailor's head with such force that he dropped dead where he stood. The women swiftly dragged his body into the woods. The men came out with bows and arrows. The ships' crews did not venture to leave their vessels, but discharged four cannon balls, which did no harm, but cleared the beach as by magic. Back on the hill, the women piled more wood on the fire and roasted the Portuguese over the flames with shouts of glee. When they judged that he was done, they carved him up, and everyone grabbed a piece of the delicious meat, waving the gnawed bones triumphantly (Arciniegas 1955: 213).

"It was the custom," according to Amerigo,

to eat enemies taken prisoners of war. After making use of the women captives for a time, they shot them and their children with arrows and ate them at great banquets celebrating past victories. Smoked human legs hung from the rafters of their houses like hams, and they fattened children for their larder. The Christians took pity on ten such tender victims — 'destined to the sacrifice, not to say malefice' — and bought them (1955: 214).

Amerigo Vespucci was a publicist and unconcerned with critical accuracy. He described meeting an old Indian who "indicated to me by stones that he had lived 1,700 moons, which make 132 years" (Arciniegas 1955: 214). The location of Vespucci's cannibal orgy may lie just beyond the Island Carib province, but the event closely resembles other Indian attacks attributed to the Island Caribs and is flawed by similar vagueness of location, ambiguity, and onesidedness.

One of the anthropophagous feasts known best to Europeans concerns the death of Giovanni da Verrazzano, but the details and even the veracity of the story, remain in dispute. It is usually asserted that Verrazzano was eaten by Caribs on his third voyage to the New World in 1528, but the facts are scarce and illustrate the entire problem of Island Carib cannibalism. The earliest papers referring to the voyage date from 1531, 1533, and 1535, but "they add nothing but further questions to the scanty docum-

entation concerning the death of 'Verrazzano' (Wroth 1970: 237). There is no cartographic evidence pertaining to the Verrazzano voyage. "Gerolamo da Verrazzano drew his map in 1529 with no trace upon it of the specific route and landing places of his brother's last expedition" (1970: 236). The earliest printed statement about the voyage of 1528 is the *Elogia vivorum* of Paolo Giovio, Bishop of Nocera, printed in 1551 and contains the first reference to his death by cannibals:

dum curiosius navigando naturae abstrusa planeque deserta scrutaretur, a canibalibus, spectantibus e classe sociis, comestus est (Wroth 1970: 237).

All other descriptions derive from this account of Verrazzano's death, written twenty-three years after it supposedly occurred. In 1556, Giovanni Battista Ramusio rendered it loosely into Italian but offered no additional factual data.

nell ultimo viaggio, che esto fece, havendo voluto smontare in terre con alcuni compagni, furono tutti morti da quei popoli, & in presentia de coloro, che erano rimasi nelle navi, furono arrostiti & mangiati (Wroth 1970: 237).

[“During the last trip that we made, because we wanted to land with some fellows, all of them were killed by that people, and observed by those who were left on the ships, they were roasted and eaten.” (my translation)]

About 1560 — the date is uncertain — Giulio Giovio, nephew of Paolo Giovio, composed an expanded, poetical, general history of the events. It is the “most comprehensive and detailed of the accounts” writes Wroth, who translated stanzas 7–10:

7. Near that place there are many small islands, among which Cabaco and Bahama. Poor Verrazzano was not granted a long life, since in that sea he ran into troubles: he was attacked by people who, always, want to eat foreigners and who are called cruel and wicked cannibals.

8. He turned his ship about and, sailing to the south, he decided to go to Darien, a very beautiful place on land. Sailing and always seeking with his intelligence to discover more places, with six of his men he disembarked on a deserted island which seemed covered with tall trees.

9. They were taken by cruel people who suddenly attacked them. They were killed, laid on the ground, cut into pieces and eaten down to the smallest bone by those people. And there also was Verrazzano's brother who saw the ground red with his brother's blood, but could give no help, being aboard ship.

10. He saw everything and, having later come to Rome, one day he told us, in tears, about this bitter event. Such a sad death had the seeker of new lands (1970: 250).

The barest events have been given body and emotion. The site of the murder is not specified, nor is the context of the encounter elaborated. There are similarities to the description of the murder of the Portuguese sailor on Amerigo's voyage: a defenseless party of Europeans trusting the natives, or the absence of natives, lands and is viciously dispatched and devoured while comrades watch helplessly off shore.

This version of Verrazzano's death was accepted for two centuries until a Spanish annalist proposed that he was hung for piracy elsewhere. Elaborating on this theory, Murphy declared "the statement that Verrazzano and a member of his crew were killed and then feasted upon by the inhabitants of the coast which he had visited a second time, has no support or confirmation in the history of that rude and uncivilized people, ..." (1875: 149). Wroth examined all arguments and evidence; his conclusions are cautious, scholarly, and convincing:

With full awareness of the conjectural quality of this argument we may accept the poem as a probably factual, if not explicit, account of the last expedition and the death of Giovanni da Verrazzano (1970: 260) ... The historian of today may question the contemporary story of his death at the hands of cannibals in 1528 or 1529, but in view of available documentation he must certainly reject the accounts which would have him hanged for piracy in Spain by the Spaniards in 1527 (1970: 255).

Additionally interesting is the way sparse events and conjectures are given substance by a master storyteller, Samuel Eliot Morison. Morison deduces that Verrazzano must have landed on Guadeloupe, "chief stronghold of the Carib and the most heavily populated, where Spaniards had ceased landing after experiences like Verrazzano's" since there "are few places where one can anchor a mile or more off shore, as Verrazzano liked to do" (1971: 325). As he recounts the by-now all too familiar tragedy,

En route he changed his mind and followed the chain of the Lesser Antilles. There he made the mistake of anchoring well off shore, as he customarily did. Unfortunately, the island where he chose to call — probably Guadeloupe —

was inhabited by no gentle tribe of Indians, but by ferocious, man-eating Caribs. The Verrazzano brothers rowed shoreward in the ship's boat. A crowd of natives waited at the water's edge, licking their chops at the prospect of a human lunch; but the French as yet knew nought of this nation of cannibals. Giovanni innocently waded ashore alone while Girolamo and the boat's crew plied their oars far enough off the beach to avoid the breakers. The Caribs, expert at murder, overpowered and killed the great navigator, then cut up and ate his still quivering body whilst his brother looked on helplessly, seeing the 'sand ruddy with fraternal blood.' The ships were anchored too far off shore to render gunfire support" (1971: 315).

There are obvious problems with Morison's fantasy. The Spaniards did not cease landing on Guadeloupe or anywhere else during the sixteenth century because of the presence of Caribs. If the boat was anchored far off shore and it was at Guadeloupe, breakers on the Carribean shore would be highly unlikely. Morison speculates that both brothers went ashore and that they went unarmed. "Licking their chops" and "quivering body" are blatant embellishments. Thus an event which went unmentioned for a generation, which may or may not have occurred, in an unknown location, on an undocumented voyage, has been given factual, detailed existence, definite location, and a scholarly imprimatur. Morison's exciting version will undoubtedly spread wider and be quoted more frequently than Wroth's careful analysis.

Accounts of the Island Caribs for the next 130 years resulted from their raids on other islands, from tales repeated by escaped captives, or from the expanding legends of their exploits. Despite periodically violent encounters and the reputation of the Caribs as cannibals, Spanish, and eventually French and English, ships called at Dominica, the Carib stronghold, to take on wood and fresh water and to trade with the Indians. Mention of peaceful encounters between Europeans and Caribs gradually enters the literature toward the end of the sixteenth century.

Although the cedula of December, 1511, empowered all Spanish to make war against and to enslave the Caribs for resisting Catholicism, killing Christians, and "dismembering and eating" their Indian neighbors (Jesse 1963: 29), cannibalism is not described for nearly seventy years. Fleets called repeatedly at Dominica and Guadeloupe, sometimes with loss of life (Irving

1831: 320; Boromé 1966: 32, 33, 35, 43, n.28; Southey 1827, I: 189). The Caribs raided Puerto Rico so frequently that in 1562, its residents declared war on them. The Archives of the Indies in Sevilla contain 130 folios documenting raids by Dominican Caribs during 1558–80 (Boromé 1966: 41, n.11). Yet in 1568, several English ships landed at Dominica and “trafficked with the natives” uneventfully (Southey 1827, I: 192).

In 1580, Luisa Navarrete, a 23-year old free Negress, escaped from her Carib captors. Although all slaves were badly treated, only non-Carib Indians were eaten, she claimed.

Denied any meat save raw mice, snakes or cooked Indian captives, they were permitted uncooked fish, crabs, and mussels. . . . Male slaves dreaded the religious or war victory feasts with dancing to songs (*arietos*), in the course of which one of them would be killed and flung into the sea if European or African, or eaten if Indian . . . Under the stress of slavery some captives went mad. Others turned cannibal and performed the same rites as the Caribs (Boromé 1966: 35).

By this time legends had arisen to explain Carib culinary discriminations. Bishop Salamanca of Puerto Rico wrote

that people eats human flesh and they do not eat Christians as they did before because once they ate a priest and all who ate him died. What they do now is that they use the Cristians as slaves. They make Christians go about naked and with long hair as they have. And since they really enjoy eating human flesh, they go to the island of Trinidad and other places and capture Indians to eat (1587).

As Boromé described the tale,

This indigestion story went the rounds. When becalmed off Dominica and in desperate need of wood and water, the Spaniards took to sending ashore a friar, or a sailor disguised in gunny sack as one, to negotiate with the natives. Whether this ruse actually fooled the Caribs is much to be doubted. They were not a stupid people and seemed able to smell a Spaniard a mile away. Although they dropped Christian Europeans from their diet, rumours persisted for yet another hundred years that they found the Spaniards stringy and full of gristle, the French delicious, and the Dutch fairly tasteless (Boromé 1966: 31–32; see also Morison 1942, II: 68).

Herrera repeats the friar story in 1601, but says they quit eating human flesh in general, without limiting it to Christians, Europeans, or clergymen:

... The men of Sancta Cruz, and others, had a custome to goe and hunt for men to the Iland of Saint John, for to eate, and at this day they of Dominica doe it... Now they say, that within this little while, they of Dominica did eate a Fryer, and that alle they which did eate his flesh, had such a fluxe, that some dyed, and that therefore they have left eating humane flesh (Purchas 1905, 14: 451-452).

Space does not permit listing all peaceful contacts between the English, French, and Caribs, but John White's 1590 stop at Dominica was the usual experience.

The first of May in the morning many of the Salvages came aboard our ships in their canowes, and did traffique with us; we also the same day landed and entered their towne whence we returned the same day aboard without any resistance of the Salvages; or any offence done to them (Burrage 1906: 308).

English-Carib encounters later deteriorated but the record of this period is generally one of good relations, and absense of reports of cannibalism.

From the 1630's until the 1660's, French influence waxes as that nation "planted her flag on Dominica (1635), made a treaty with the Indians (1640), sent in a missionary (1642), and assumed proprietorship to the point of ordering (1643) that no strangers be permitted to settle there" (Boromé 1966: 40). That missionary was Father Raymond Breton, who resided on Dominica from 1642 to 1653, and provided the bulk of the ethnographic and linguistic description of the Island Caribs which exists, as he attempted in vain to convert them to Christianity. Breton had the advantage of reading descriptions by others to whom he had spoken or written about the Caribs or who had been in the islands themselves: Bouton (1958), Armand de la Paix (MS), DuTertre (1667), and Rochefort (1658). When he finally did publish his accounts and the Carib-French dictionary, he corrected wrong impressions left by the others (Petitjean-Roget 1963; Rennard 1929, 1935).

In 1640, Jacques Bouton wrote the earliest account of the French in Martinique, another island home of Caribs south of Dominica. He lacked firsthand experience with the Caribs and his relation is a classic example of ethnocentric reportage. He describes the Caribs as "filthy," "unfaithful," and "extremely sloth-

ful." They "go entirely naked without shame" and have a "ridiculous ceremony at the birth of their children" (1958: 3).

They kill and eat their captives with a thousand ceremonies and cruelties, however not so extreme as those of the Canadians. They sometimes preserve a hand of the dead enemy which they carry in triumph and dance all about with it (1958: 7).

Armand de la Paix worked with Breton on Dominica. He knew the "cannibals" personally, but his accounts leave the blurred impression of one describing hearsay as fact.

The result is that now they only rarely show mercy to male slaves, but rather they kill and eat them . . . One of the natives of Dominica told Father Raymond of a raid in which they captured a large number of Negroes and butchered one of our Fathers and smoked him to eat, but he had aroused in them such a reluctance that they never dared eat him. The narrator affirmed that he was one of those present at that occasion. For sometime now they have abstained from eating the flesh of Christians . . . After the combat, they pillage thoroughly. If there are any dead enemies, they eat the arms and feet, and smoke the rest for their return home . . . After beating a captive to death, they cut him into pieces and eat part of him at that time. Each one carries a piece home which he eats with his family in great solemnity (Breton & La Paix HRAF ST 13, 1: 3, 23; cf. Rennard 1929).

This has the persuasiveness of observation, but nowhere does La Paix say he saw it himself.

Raymond Breton was fond of the people among whom he spent so many years. He reports seemingly incontrovertible evidence of Carib cannibalism.

They kill their prisoners with blows of clubs. If some of the prisoners are women they take them home and give them to the old men as wives and slaves. If they capture male children they regard them as slaves, but if the males are older they force them to fast, because the Caribs do not like to eat fat, and then they kill them . . . All their harangues, which they make so frequently, are only war speeches to excite themselves against their enemies. Even the human flesh they eat *at this time* is for the same purpose, because they eat it in such small quantities. However, *I think* that when they have it in large quantities they eat all they can, because *I heard it said* here that when they killed three of our missionaries at Puerto Rico they smoked them. But during the meal they became so greatly disgusted that they dared not look at them . . . When they are going to eat an Arawak there is singing, dancing and rejoicing. At the beginning of my stay in Dominica, my host, Captain Baron, had killed and brought back an Arawak from South America. He had a great drinking party and invited anyone who wished to come. He gave each woman a part of the

Arawak to cook in her own pot so that she should eat it with her husband and family who were in the assembly. This they did with great enjoyment during the day. After having drunk and been entertained in their harangues concerning their valor, as night fell they were reeling and their eyes rolled in their heads. They began to sing and dance and howled with such fury and hatred that I was completely terrified.

If there is anything capable of saddening the Caribs it would be not being able to kill an Arawak, because they can neither become captains nor be respected except by this feat towards which all their thoughts are directed and channeled. The Arawaks are their chief enemies towards whom they are relentless and for whom they want to be living tombs [i.e. whom they want to eat alive.]

I think that when they catch them they do not change their attitude; they enslave only the women and children (Breton 1665, HRAF ST 13; 2: 13-14, *italics added*).

This selection is the only reliable, first-hand description of Carib cannibalism in the entire literature and cannot be dismissed. Several problems remain, however. Breton clearly implies, but does not claim explicitly, that he saw what he describes. He writes, "I think" and "I heard it said" about the situations in which the Caribs supposedly ate "large quantities" of flesh. The "small quantities" of flesh eaten "at this time" may refer not to the present, but to the general situation described above. The only occasion at which he claims to have been present was soon after he arrived in Dominica and he was "terrified". The scene Breton describes contrasts with the "great solemnity" of Armand de la Paix, as well as with the mention of castrating and fattening youths by Chanca and Amerigo Vespucci. There is enough blurring between oral tradition and eye-witnessed events to make Breton's description less than totally convincing. There is no distinction between hearsay and the ethnographic present.

The historian Jean Baptiste DuTertre gives an even fuller account, but his source of information was Breton.

When there are enemy dead on the ground they are barbecued, that is to say roasted until they are dry, and then eaten immediately. The male captives are brought home in triumph. They are starved and a general assembly is held, the captives being displayed tied up rightly . . . The prisoners even defy their captors by boasting loudly that they have eaten the fathers of the conquerors, and tell them that they [the conquerors] will be eating their own fathers when they eat the prisoners. They add that their own relatives and friends will know how to revenge their death . . .

After the prisoners are killed the captors dismember them, cutting up the

meat with knives and the bones with billhooks. They throw the limbs on a large barbecue over a blazing fire. . . . After this good meat is cooked the bravest roast the heart and eat it. The women's share is the legs and thighs. The others eat the other parts indifferently. The meat is eaten with fury rather than with pleasure, through revenge rather than to feed themselves. They do not enjoy its taste, for most of them become sick after this terrible meal. It is a fantastic and amazing sight to see the madness or more exactly fury of the women while eating the flesh of their enemies. They chew it, chew it again, tighten it between their teeth and are so afraid to lose a morsel that they lick the grill sticks on which some spots of grease have fallen.

When everyone in the assembly has eaten the meat, each one carries some home with him to eat at another time. While I was in Martinique I saw a Carib carry a roasted leg into a house, the leg being as dry and hard as wood. He invited each one to join him. He said that those who had eaten some Allouague — for this is what he called his cooked meat — would become very courageous. Among the Caribs those who have eaten the most are the most respected.

The Caribs have tasted men from every nation that has visited them. I have heard them say several times that among all the Christians, the French were the best and the most delicate, in contrast to the Spaniards who were so tough that the Caribs had difficulty eating them. A little time prior to the occupation of St. Kitts by the French, the Caribs raided Puerto Rico. Among their other crimes they killed and roasted one of our missionaries. After eating him most of them died, the survivors stated they had not eaten a morsel of him. I think they only say this, for the simplest among them naively confess that they devoured him. Since that time they have not eaten any more Christians, contenting themselves with killing them and abandoning them were they fall (DuTertre 1667, HRAF ST 13, 4: 37-38).

Several items of interest emerge from this remarkable account. The Caribs eat dried flesh, but they do not enjoy it, as it makes them sick. They eat to bolster their courage and for revenge and they do it with anger. Aside from the roasted leg he saw in Martinique, which might have been a horse or cow limb, everything DuTertre reports is hearsay or oral tradition. He did not say he saw the leg being eaten, which is consistent with the denial of cannibalism by Labat below. DuTertre repeats his own version of two traditions mentioned above, and now the Spanish friar has become one of "our missionaries." He says this occurred shortly before 1627, when the French settled St. Kitts, but by then the story had been around for at least fifty years. As strong as DuTertre's report of cannibalism seems at first, it adds nothing to the rumors already circulating.

During the remainder of the seventeenth century, the French relaxed their missionary efforts and the Caribs and English

became mortal enemies. Caribs from Dominica and St. Vincent attacked Montserrat and Antigua, burned houses, killed men, and "carried off the women and children, ravishing and making slaves of them" (Great Britain 1896, 10: 642). English outrage prompted aggressive, treacherous reprisals beyond the scope of this paper, but there is no mention of cannibalism.

The last primary source relevant to the issue is from historian-priest Père Jean-Baptiste Labat who lived in the Lesser Antilles from 1693 to 1705. In January, 1700, he spent seventeen days with Dominica's Caribs, the most traditional group remaining in the region, numbering 2000 by Labat's estimation (Labat 1724).

It is a mistake to believe that the savages of our islands are cannibals, or that they go to war for the express purpose of capturing prisoners in order to devour them. I have proofs to the contrary clearer than the day.

It is true I have heard many of our filibusters say there are wandering tribes of Indians on the Isthmus of Darien, Bocca del Toto, and l'isle d'Or, who kill without mercy and eat all who fall into their hands. This may be true and it may not be true, for the Indians in those places are a long way off, and have different customs and speak a different language.

I also know, and it is quite true, that when the English and French first settled in the Islands many men of both nations were killed, *boucanned*, and eaten by the Caribs. But this was due to the inability of the Indians to take revenge on the Europeans for their injustice and cruelty, and it was impotent rage, and not custom, that urged them to commit this excess after being hunted from their islands, and done to death with unheard-of tortures. Again, if they were cannibals in those days, why are they not cannibals now? I have certainly never heard of them eating people, whether English-men with whom the Carib are nearly always fighting, or Allouages Indians of the mainland near the Orinoco with whom they are continually at war.

It is true too that when they kill a man, they often *boucan* his limbs and fill calabashes with his fat to take home with them. They do this, however, to keep as trophies and proofs of their victory and courage. The Indians of Canada have a similar custom and keep the scalps of enemies whom they have killed in battle, or tortured to death in a horrible manner. Our savages are less cruel. When they capture women, no matter what race they may be, they always treat them kindly, and if they marry them regard them as belonging to their nation. When they capture children they bring them up as if they were their own, and the worst thing that can happen to them is to be sold as slaves to Europeans. With regard to men, it is certain that they kill them in the heat of battle, and do not take the trouble of making them prisoners . . .

I repeat that though the Caribs do *boucan* the limbs of enemies they have slain, it is only done to preserve the memory of the fight and rouse them to future vengeance, and not with any idea of eating them . . .

At these feasts when all the guests have eaten to repletion and drunk ouicou

and taffia to excess, the master of the carbet explains his proposals. Whatever these may be the Indians invariably show their approval in the customary manner. If it be to arrange a war party, an old woman enters the carbet and harangues the guests to excite them to vengeance. She recounts the wrongs that they have suffered at the hands of their enemies, and recites a long list of their friends and relations who have been killed. When she sees that they are properly heated by drink and showing signs of fury, she throws the *boucanned* limbs of some enemy into their midst. The Indians thereupon fall on the limbs, cutting, tearing, biting and gnawing them, with all the rage cowardly and vindictive drunkards are capable of showing ... (Labat in Eaden 1970: 99-103).

Labat is convinced that the Caribs never practiced customary cannibalism, that they did eat English and French when they first settled the islands. but only out of the deepest frustrations at being hunted nearly to extinction, and that they kill and boucan, but do not eat, their male Indian captives. The worst thing they do is sell captured Arawak children to Europeans as slaves. The story of Island Carib cannibalism has come nearly full circle from the accounts of Carib predations served up by the first Spanish explorers.

As with earlier reports, it is never clear whether Labat is reporting observed facts or stories the Caribs told him. He does not report seeing a boucanned limb himself. He knows "and it is quite true" that English and French (but not the Spanish?) were eaten when they "first settled in the islands" but this yields a date only back to the 1620s, a time which has been described by most others as long after they ceased eating Europeans. Therefore, his time frame for when alleged cannibalism stopped should be pushed back. Labat does not say whether he used an interpreter, or which was the language of communication. It is clear that Labat knows the other published works on the Antilles, and with his historian's ear and extended time in the region, he knows the local lore and oral traditions.

Neveu-Lemaire, unpersuaded by Labat's denial, writes that "meat is an unimportant part of their diet ..." but that

even formerly when they did not object to human flesh it seems that they used it only rarely; when following a war they had massacred a large number of enemies, they thought it only fitting to eat them. Furthermore, Father Labat is full of indulgence towards them on this point, and although they had once

offered him the smoked arm of an Englishman, probably the remains of a feast, he finds it hard to apply to them the epithet of cannibals (Neveu-Lemaire 1921; trans. in HRAF St 13, 10: 9).

He is drawing on traditions that predated Labat for more than a century.

Labat's judgments of the Island Caribs run to extremes. He calls them the laziest people under the sun. "They will spend days together only getting in and out of their hammocks, and are surely the most careless and lazy creatures that have ever come from the hands of God" (Eaden 1970: 73). They are also the fiercest and most independent, "jealous of their liberty," and consider the Europeans cowards (Eaden 1970: 104). The context of Labat's visit was that of a foreigner bringing a valued gift, for everywhere he made friends and loosened tongues with the demon libation. "... [we] were well received in all the carbets that we visited. How could it be otherwise? We had rum" (Eaden 1970: 96). When these data of Labat, as well as the other Europeans, are interpreted in light of the cautions of Dean and Whyte (1958) and Vansina (1965), their literal value is diminished substantially.

OTHER SOURCES

Linguistics. Columbus's problems communicating with the Amerindians have been mentioned. His Arabic-speaking interpreter was useless; sign language and a rudimentary lingua franca may have led to significant errors. Some Indians learned Spanish and later French or French Creole, but only Breton, 150 years after original contact and after decimation by diseases, warring, and slaving Spaniards, concerned himself with Carib of Arawak. Unfortunately, he offers no unique vocabulary for cannibal cuisine and no commentary on the preparation or taste of human flesh. One would expect a ritual evoking such deep emotions among the Caribs and their captives to have acquired a specialized vocabulary or more elaborate linguistic context.

Historical Cartography. Descriptive place names and illustrations on maps can be revealing. The Spanish and Portuguese, and later the

French, designated New World islands and regions as cannibal domains. Juan de la Cosa labels Dominica or the islands in that area as *illa de cannibales* on the first map of the world showing the New World explorations (1500). Johannes Ruysch in Ptolomy's *Geographia* (1508), shifts the label *canibalos* southward to Trinidad (Kohl 1860).

Anonymous maps drawn between 1502 and 1503, but not published until 1859 by Kunstmann, show the early influence of Amerigo Vespucci.

Unquestionably the cartographer took his information from Amerigo's voyage . . . The illustrations of the map are as interesting as the coastline. The interior of Brazil shows a meticulously drawn scene of a spit being slowly turned by a kneeling Indian, and on the spit a naked white man being roasted over the flames. This drawing was to be repeated on subsequent maps (Arciniegas 1955: 213–214).

The 1516 world map of Martin Waldseemüller, a new edition of the 1507 map which first used America (Amerige) for the New World, designates an island close to South America as *Cambales*, clearly labels the Guianas as “terra canibalorx quihant habität antropophagi,” and includes a vivid etching of a cannibal victim (1907).

Waldseemüller, whose maps are a riot of color and of fact and fancy, limits to three lines his description of Brasil on his phanisphere of 1516. He says first that its lands are inhabited by anthropophagi and adds “*Brasilia sive terra Papagalli*” (Arciniegas 1955: 182).

That is, Brazil has cannibals and parrots.

The 1527 world map of Vesconte de Maggiolo labels the Lesser Antilles clearly but omits cannibals entirely. Simon Grynaeus's 1532 world map locates *canibali* in northeastern South America, not in the islands (1532).

Spanish and Portuguese mapmakers pushed the designation “cannibal” to remote regions of the southern continent. Similarly, the Amazons, once thought to reside on “Martinino,” were re-located in central South America with a major river as namesake. The French and English, about a century behind the Spanish in exploration, persisted longer in using the terms “cannibal isles” or “home of the anthropophagi.” Yet cartographic depictions neither confirm nor disprove the existence of cannibalism, but

rather suggest the extent to which the idea was embedded in the minds of the mapmaker and his public².

Archaeology. The issue of cannibalism could be more easily resolved if there were physical evidence, such as appropriately broken skulls or long bones, or tooth- or knife-marked bones, but none exist. To make matters worse, Carib sites are not easily distinguished from Arawak sites. According to Irving Rouse, perhaps the most knowledgeable archaeologist of the Caribbean,

So far as I am aware, there is no clear evidence of cannibalism in the West Indies. Scattered human bones have been found in a number of sites, but we do not know whether they are the result of cannibalism or of the practice of keeping the bones of ancestors as religious objects. One problem is that we have not yet been able satisfactorily to identify a Carib site. As Louis Allaire demonstrates in his doctoral dissertation at Yale, all the sites found to date are probably pre-Carib (personal communication, July 13, 1979).

Wooden structures for boucanning victims as depicted by De Bry, would not survive; and large cooking pots are few. The tropical climate, acidic soils, and locations of modern towns over Amerindian sites may have destroyed important artifacts. But archaeological exploration of the Lesser Antilles is incomplete and evidence may exist which has not been discovered.

DISCUSSION

As time distanced reputed events from the people who described them, three broad uses of these primary data emerged. Several writers and anthropologists either ignored the cannibalism issue or, examining it critically, asserted its weak factual basis and exploitative nature. This group, including Ober, Windsor, Moore, Knight, Arens, and above all, Taylor, pointed out the limitations of the existing accounts and the cultural biases of the explorers and priests.

A second approach has been to take the alleged facts at face value and pass them on to unsuspecting readers. Professional writers, historians, and anthropologists have assumed all too often that any events recounted by an informant or historical document

were accurate reports of behavior (Davies 1981; Farb and Armelagos 1980; Morison 1942, 1971, 1974; Rouse 1948).

Another misuse of the alleged facts appears in three crosscultural surveys of the practice. E. M. Loeb links circumcision, finger sacrifice, and cannibalism in a "blood sacrifice complex" (1923). He barely mentions the Caribs, citing as his source "Cronau, Rud. Amerika. (Leipzig, 1892) Bd. 1, pp. 252, 272" (1923: 35), a curious reference given available primary sources. Ewald Volhard's *Kannibalismus* (1939) is the most thorough study of cannibalism attempted, yet he devotes one page out of nearly 500 to the West Indies. He describes general features of cannibalism and refers to the study of T. A. Joyce (1916), who, unfortunately, has little to say about Island Carib cannibalism. Other names he mentions — de Poincy, Peter Martyr, Ferdinand Kolumbus — are not listed in the extensive bibliography. Reay Tannahill's popular study *Flesh and Blood, a History of the Cannibal Complex* (1975), refers to the Caribs twice:

... and it was, in fact, the resultant craving for meat that turned such peoples as the Caribs and the Papuans into the great cannibals of the postmediaeval world (1975: 17).

It is virtually impossible to discover the unvarnished truth about the early Caribs because layers of legend were so quickly built up around them ... (1975: 75).

There is no evidence for the first statement, and the second is the point of this essay.

A third group exaggerates the earliest, extreme Spanish material. Samuel Eliot Morison was particularly guilty:

In huts deserted by the natives they found human limbs and cuts of human flesh partly consumed, as well as emasculated boys who were being fattened to provide the main dish for a feast, and girl captives used to produce babies for the hors d'oeuvre. Two boys and 'twelve very beautiful plump girls from fifteen to sixteen years old' were picked up by the Spaniards. These girls, who had been captured by the Caribs in a raid on Hispaniola, were useful as interpreters, and doubtless in other ways too (Morison 1974: 106).

Morison spins a good yarn, but he has subtle ways of demeaning the "natives dressed in warpaint" and the practices which make humans into objects or courses on a menu. He gets a lot of mileage

from the historical material. Consider the same event described by him thirty-two years earlier:

In huts deserted by the warriors, who ungallantly fled, they found large cuts and joints of human flesh, skin bones set aside to make arrows of, caponized Arawak boy captives who were being fattened for the friddle, and girl captives who were mainly used to produce babies, which the Caribs regarded as a particularly toothsome morsel (1942, II: 70).

Charlesworth Ross embellishes the material with poetic flair:

Their anthropophagy was of a ceremonial rather than of a gastronomical nature. They ate a brave enemy to possess themselves of his warlike qualities and to seal a military victory beyond all doubt . . .

Carib victims were got ready for eating while still alive. The Caribs cut slits down the back and sides of their enemies and stuffed the body with spices. They then killed the victim with a mace, and the corpses were trussed to poles and roasted over a fire, while the women turned and basted the bodies, catching the lard which dripped into gourds and calabashes for future use. Some of the meat was eaten on the spot; some was stored away for lean periods in the future (1970: 52-53).

Ernle Bradford follows in similar unattributed fashion:

. . . the Caribs would raid the other islands and carry off the young women and boys. The latter were castrated and fattened for the pot like capons. The girls were used like battery hens to produce the piece de resistance on the Carib menu — roast baby. (Their children by their own women were, of course, treated quite differently). The Caribs seem to have regarded the other peoples inhabiting the islands as no more than human fodder. The fact was that they had no domestic animals for consumption, and cannibalism had possibly been forced upon them by this lack in their diet (Bradford 1973: 184).

What explains the perpetuation of gruesome details of Carib cannibalism, and the continued matter-of-fact linkage of the Island Carib with anthropophagy even after it was downplayed by the only Europeans who knew them well? Exploitative Spanish interests were well served by portrayal of the Indians as sub-human savages. Las Casas spoke up for the Indian (MacNutt 1909; Poole 1974, Sanderlin 1971), but his was virtually a lone voice until the mid-seventeenth century. Long before then the theme of cannibalism found fertile soil in European consciousness.

Deliberate public relations manipulations by the Spanish are not sufficient to explain the firm foothold the idea of cannibalism

rapidly acquired. Xenophobia played a role. Europeans had never encountered on a large scale anything like the Amerindians, whether pacific Arawaks or their stereotypical counterpoint, the Caribs. The collision of cultures was sharp and required intellectual adjustments by both groups. It took Europeans years to decide whether the Amerindians were human enough to have souls. It was a simple feat to relegate the shockingly new Amerindians to a category of creatures who ate their own kind. Once cannibalism was rumoured or attributed, it was difficult to disprove.

Explorers' experiences never confirmed bald, tailed or dog-faced men, cyclopes, or islands of women; for want of even circumstantial evidence, they vanished from the record. Cannibalism was another matter. Customary cannibalism remained just plausible enough to seem real. It was easily "confirmed" by circumstantial evidence. Once conferred, popular labels are rarely forgotten.

The idea of cannibalism fascinates: it reliably excites a strong emotional response. It offers power through complete domination of enemies or reverence for loved ones. It is the ultimate negation or incorporation of another person by the most elemental act: ingestion. Cannibalism evokes polar, not ambiguous, categories. It does not so much separate humans from animals, as good humans from evil ones. Those labeled cannibals are still recognized as human. They are, however, seen as abnormal, bad, immoral, insane, or damned, depending on circumstances or accuser, and treated accordingly. The Island Caribs were labeled uncivilized, and therefore were exploitable; deviant and therefore feared; evil therefore fair game. Cannibals are part of that diverse company of abnormals which has included witches, communists, and homosexuals: scapegoats whose existence serves prevailing conventions, sometimes for generations.

CONCLUSIONS

Several conclusions about Island Carib cannibalism are justified.

1. Columbus believed in Carib cannibalism long before he saw

circumstantial evidence. Neither he nor any of his sailors witnessed the act. His accounts, like most, if not all, of those who followed him are flawed by serious cultural biases.

2. Belief in the existence of cannibalism was an integral part of the hostilities between Arawaks and Caribs, and between Caribs and Europeans. The idea of the practice, whether justified or not, served positive functions for each group. For Arawaks and Europeans, it was important in characterizing the violent enemy and it was used to justify slavery, reprisal, and extinction. For the Caribs it supported their self-view as fierce warriors, and was used to mobilize their aggressions; after European contact, it aided their survival by keeping European settlers at bay.

3. If cannibalism was practiced at the end of the fifteenth century, it rapidly disappeared.

4. The ethnographic record is remarkably sparse given cannibalism's prominence in the region's lore. Descriptions of cannibalism lack the detail found for other aspects of Carib life. If the act had larger ritual, mythological, or symbolic components, they have been lost.

5. French priests living among the Caribs downplayed or rejected the cannibalism label, stressing other features of Island Carib character.

6. There is as much detail or more about individuals well treated or adopted by Caribs as about the supposed cruelties and cannibalistic feasts.

7. Early chroniclers did not explore alternative interpretations of the circumstantial evidence for cannibalism. Bones might have been kept for religious reasons, or boiled and cleaned for use as tools, household items, or musical instruments.

8. Few observers distinguished between oral traditions and witnessed events. Most informants had something to gain by claiming the Caribs were cannibals.

9. Neither archaeological nor linguistic data support the existence of cannibalism.

10. Some recent writers and historians exaggerated or distorted reports of Island Carib cannibalism without regard for primary sources.

In view of these conclusions, there is a reasonable doubt that the

customary cannibalism attributed to the Island Caribs existed. Available data do not allow an absolute conclusion, but all the evidence is weak, circumstantial, and largely secondhand. If the Caribs were on trial for cannibalism, they would be acquitted.

Unfortunately, justice is not blind; nor are explorers, historians, anthropologists, or journalists unbiased. The view of Island Caribs as cannibals will remain, at least in the popular press, as illustrated by a recent *Wall Street Journal* article on Dominica:

After Columbus's sighting, only sailors ventured ashore but were promptly murdered, and often eaten, by the Caribs, an inhospitable band of Indians (Goolrick 1982: 22).

NOTES

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2. The tendency of cartographers to fill voids with imaginative illustrations has been noted by others, especially in the case of Africa. "If there was any part of the world where the map was a blank inviting embellishment, it was Africa south of the Sahara, the part of the world of which Swift wrote:

So geographers, in Afric maps,
With savage pictures fill their gaps,
And o'er inhabitable downs
Place elephants for want of towns."
(Lloyd 1972: 21)

Graham Greene encountered the problem in 1935, for his trip across Liberia when he acquired two large-scale maps, one British, one American.

Where the English map is content to leave a blank space, the American in large letters fills it with the word 'Cannibals' . . . there is something Elizabethan in its imagination. 'Dense Forest'; 'Cannibals'; rivers which don't exist, at any rate anywhere near where they are put; one expects to find Eldorado, two-headed men and fabulous beasts represented in little pictures in the Gola Forrest.
(Greene 1978: 45-46)

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