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## ARCHEOLOGY OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

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On a recent visit to Washington, Robert Nichols, Superintendent of Agriculture of St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, informed Dr. Wetmore, Assistant Secretary, Smithsonian Institution, of a large shell mound on the Island of Anegada, the most northerly of the British Virgin Islands. As a result of this information, an expedition was organized to explore the mound, the scientific objective being a comparison of the Indian relics to be recovered there with the large collections obtained by previous Smithsonian expeditions from the Bahama Islands, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico. The writer sailed October 14 from New York, and returned at the close of the year.

Since the immediate objective was an exploration of the Anegada mound, the cooperation of the United States Coast Guard Service was obtained within a few days after arrival at the beautiful port of Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas. Captain Walsh of the Coast Guard boat, the *Marion*, and his entire crew were quite willing to embark on the expedition since they had not heretofore sailed in the British waters immediately adjacent to Anegada.

Many fertile suggestions were forthcoming from officialdom in Charlotte Amalie regarding the proposed sojourn on Anegada, for many dark tales had been told regarding its native population, whose naïve occupation of steamer wrecking is still listed in current encyclopedias. No one at Charlotte Amalie had ever seen Anegada, and stories of shifting and disappearing lighthouses, of shoals, hulks of wrecked freighters, and of the mysterious splendor of house furnishings of a marine flavor in the huts of the leading citizens of Anegada were freely circulated among the credulous members of our expedition from Captain Walsh down to the courtly cook. Nevertheless, all were anxious to go, including most of the small American colony of Charlotte Amalie.

En route to Anegada, an official call was made on the Commissioner of the British Virgin Islands, at Road Town, on the Island of Tortola. The Commissioner was highly pleased with the prospect of placing Anegada on the map archeologically. Mr. Roy, Agricultural Superintendent of the British Virgin Islands, who was thoroughly familiar



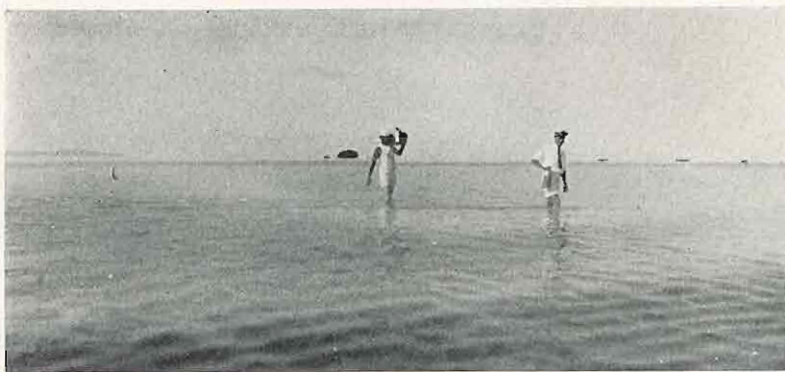


FIG. 98.—Captain Walsh, of the U. S. Coast Guard cutter *Marion* approaches Anegada's shore by walking on the ocean floor which is here as smooth and firm as a pavement. The water is too shallow even for the ship's boat.



FIG. 99.—The reception committee at Anegada, comprising a good share of the entire population, waited while we adjusted trousers and foot gear after our journey ashore through the ocean shallows.

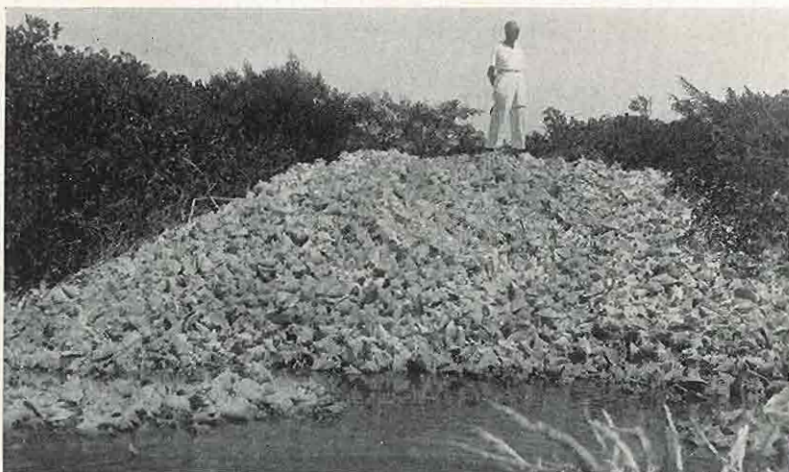


FIG. 100.—Mr. Roy, Agricultural Superintendent of the British Virgin Islands, standing atop the mound of conch shells near the eastern end of Anegada.

with the native population and the geography of Anegada, joined the expedition at Road Town.

On his second voyage to the West Indies in 1493, Christopher Columbus, after pausing at the islands of Dominica, Guadeloupe, St. Martin, and St. Croix, long enough to give them their names, which they have retained to the present day, observed north of low-lying St. Croix a formation of rocks, islets, and mountainous islands "too numerous to mention" even to this facile explorer. His imaginative brain immediately visualized this massed archipelago as symbolizing St. Ursula and her 11,000 virgins—hence the name Virgin Islands. He singled out the Island of Tortola as worthy of a special name, since it appeared to be more mountainous—suggesting great mineral deposits, which after all, was a major objective of this First Explorer.

The island of Anegada was approached cautiously at half speed because of the extensive shallows. At a distance of 5 miles from the shore the *Marion* dropped anchor in 4 fathoms. Anegada, a low-lying coralline formation, was but dimly visible. The *Marion's* boat was launched and loaded with supplies. Practically the entire population of Anegada, embarked in a nondescript fleet of sailboats and rowboats, came out to meet us, to "see that it was done properly", as we learned later from the colored British Government Agent. He did not explain what he meant by "it." A lookout in the only tall tree on the island had reported the *Marion* aground. Native joy was soon dampened when the lookout's error was discovered.

No time was lost in reaching the shell mound, which proved to be a very large one built up almost entirely of conch shells, *Strombus gigas*. The thorn forest which covers most of Anegada hid from our view any other evidence of aboriginal occupancy. Since the excavating of a mound practically devoid of any cultural material other than discarded conch shells was impractical, work here was restricted to making measurements and photographs of the mound. A brief survey of the island was made in an attempt to locate other middens that might be richer in cultural material, and selection was made of pottery, shell, and polished stone implements gathered at random from the surface. All of this consumed a few days' time, after which the expedition returned to Road Town.

Mr. Roy, who was very helpful throughout, suggested a trial excavation of the Indian midden just east of Road Town. With his help, laborers were obtained and the highest part of the midden was trenched. The results were striking in that the cultural objects obtained were practically identical with material collected by previous Smithsonian expeditions from Arawak village sites in Santo Domingo,



FIG. 101.—Magens Bay and valley on the north central coast of St. Thomas as seen from Mafolie, a village near the mountain summit. In the valley shown at the right is located one of the most extensive village sites of former Indian inhabitants in the West Indies.



FIG. 102. Completing the trench of excavation No. 1 at Magens Bay, St. Thomas. This site is at the extreme northeast end of the valley as seen in figure 101.



FIG. 103.—Examining debris from cut No. 2, the middle portions of excavation No. 1, at Magens Bay, St. Thomas. Hand sieves were used by laborers selected from the French settlements on the island.

thus contrasting markedly with material to be later excavated at St. Croix and St. Thomas. Although the time consumed in the study of the Aneгада shell midden and the Road Town kitchenmidden was brief, the scientific results obtained were definite. The position of the Road Town midden as one of the older in the aboriginal cultural sequence of the Virgin Islands became evident. Thus the archeological chronology of aboriginal cultural remains in the West Indies finally assumed form.

The next phase of the work of the expedition was the excavating of prehistoric aboriginal Indian village sites on the island of St. Thomas. This island is mountainous and presents a radically different aspect from that of flat, coralline Aneгада. St. Thomas and the other Virgin Islands proper belong geologically to the ancient submerged continent of which mountainous Puerto Rico and the still higher Santo Domingo constitute the main axis. Shore lines present evidence of continued subsidence. The writer found quarters at the Government Hotel which clusters around the tower of the infamous pirate Bluebeard, the subject of many fabricated legends despite the ponderous facts of the many rusted cannon and battlement stanchions.

It was a pleasant daily morning journey indeed to labor upward in a 1928 Marquette automobile over the hogback of the mountain range just back of and above sleepy Charlotte Amalie and then downward along the steep northern slope into the broad, flat valley which terminates in the waters of Magens Bay. Much of this area is the property of A. S. Fairchild, whose residence, *Louisenhöj*, rests astride a peak of the central mountain massif. Mr. Fairchild kindly gave permission to excavate on his land and cooperated in every way possible to make the undertaking a success.

The writer, whose previous experience in active investigation of West Indian archeology was limited to the islands west of St. Thomas, found at Magens Bay archeological specimens strikingly dissimilar to the pattern of the Arawak culture of Santo Domingo. It became at once apparent that cultural infection must have spread northward from the islands of the Lesser Antilles which stretch southeastward 500 miles or more to the South American mainland. This made possible a comparison of the older Arawak (*Taino-Igneri*) culture trait complex as typified in a midden at the extreme northeastern end of Magens Bay valley with a later, more characteristically South American culture embodied in a series of nearby middens south and west of the older Arawak site. Objects typical of each culture provided ample data for a definite determination of aboriginal culture sequence in the West Indies. The presence of red paint on the pottery vessels recov-



FIG. 104.—The west end of the island of St. Croix from the open roadstead of Fredericksted. Montpelier Mountain in the background. Mountains such as this are visible to one standing at sea level in St. Thomas, 40 miles north. The South American Arawak Indian could always see one or more islands of the Antillean chain as he migrated northward.



FIG. 105.—The sugar central at Bethlehem, centrally located on the southern plains of St. Croix.



FIG. 106.—The denuded mountain slopes of St. Thomas near Charlotte Amalie. Slave labor once cultivated sugar cane on land now considered too rough and arid.



ered in the middens of the southwestern section of the valley is striking evidence of cultural infection. Painted pottery in the West Indies is unknown west of the Virgin Islands, with the exception of red painted ceramic wares in the vicinity of Ponce, Puerto Rico, and white kaolin slipware from northern Santo Domingo in the vicinity of Monte Cristi.

After an intensive archeological investigation of the Magens Bay site, the writer undertook a survey of the island of St. Croix. In this project he received the active direction and cooperation of Harry Taylor, Administrator of the island, an enthusiastic student of archeology, who hopes to develop for the Insular Government a museum featuring the prehistory and natural history of the Virgin Islands.

The largest Indian village ruins on St. Croix are located on the west side of an inlet and lagoon which indents the north shore of the island at its approximate center. Here at the mouth of Salt River, really a streamlet, but always providing an abundance of fresh water, was the tribal seat. Excavations were undertaken at this major site, also at other middens notably at Fair Plain, midway on the south coast, at Prosperity, diagonally opposite the Salt River site on the west end of the island, and finally at Ackles on the southwest coast near the west-end Saltpond on the Camporico estate. Excavations made at each of these sites afforded new data on the daily life of the prehistoric Indian inhabitants of St. Croix and served to verify tentative conclusions based on the finds at Magens Bay, St. Thomas. Outstanding at each site was the overwhelming evidence of cannibalism. Complete human skulls and skeletal remains in quantity were mingled with turtle, bird, and fish bones in the deep ash beds surrounding the primitive hearths.

The German historian Oldendorp is authority for the statement that the Virgin Island Indians were exterminated about 1550 at the order of Carlos V of Spain. Perhaps Carlos V was in the right in ordering Indians addicted to such practices to be treated as enemies and to be exterminated, but we can only wish he had delayed the execution of this order until an anthropologist could have studied them as a living group. Cannibals sometimes are lovable people, and it is conjectured that such a study might have shown the anthropologist that these primitive St. Crucian cannibals were, as a part of their defense mechanism, exercising a culture trait borrowed from their enemies—the Caribs.