

A PROBLEMATIC ARTIFACT FROM TRANT'S, MONTSERRAT

By David R. Watters

In June, 1979, Walter Connell, Curator of the Montserrat National Trust Museum, brought to the author's attention a curious artifact which had been uncovered shortly before at Trant's site (MS-G1). Exact provenience information for the artifact, unfortunately, is lacking; it was removed from its original context without benefit of even rudimentary controls. Apparently it was found at an unspecified depth, approximately 6 meters north of test pit 1 which had been dug the previous February by the author. Connell was unable to provide any specific information concerning artifacts definitely associated. Trant's, the most extensive prehistoric site yet recorded for Montserrat, is located upon a spacious expanse of relatively level land about midway on the windward coast near Blackburne Airport.

A cursory review of the literature has not disclosed any other Antillean artifact similar, in description or illustration, to the Montserrat find. The artifact was made from an extremely fine-grained sedimentary shale or metamorphic slate having a hardness of about 4 on the Mohs Scale. Such rock may or may not be native to Montserrat. Despite some color variation the rock is predominantly dark brown (7.5YR3.5/4, Munsell Soil Color Chart). The maximum length is 64.8 mm., the maximum height is 24.3 mm., and the maximum width (*i.e.*, thickness) is 7.3 mm. Both slate and shale generally exhibit slaty cleavage and thus tend to split along parallel planes. Judging from the lateral sides (*vid.* Fig.), the person making the artifact took advantage of that inherent property of rock cleavage in shaping it.

The object appears entirely asymmetrical when viewed laterally. The anterior, posterior, superior, and inferior edges are neither parallel nor equal in length. All the constituent angles likewise are dissimilar. Quite distinct and carefully rendered bevels occur on both sides, along the anterior, posterior, and inferior edges. They seem to have been purposefully ground rather than having been worn through use. The superior edge is somewhat anomalous however, since it is not bevelled but instead is ground almost flat. A sheen or luster, present on all surfaces, is perhaps due in part to the fine-grained particles in the rock and in part to intentional polishing of the formation of a patina.

A number of inclusions, inherent to the rock, occur on the superior surface and right lateral side. The inclusion on the right side nicely 'fits' the forefinger when held in the right hand or, conversely, the thumb when held in the left. The object rests comfortably between the thumb and forefinger. Two grooves,

one on the anterior aspect and another on the inferior, are present slightly behind the tip. Unlike the inclusions, these grooves are not inherent to the rock; instead, they are the consequence of human modification or alteration of that rock. Each extends from the right side, across the edge, to the left side.

Several colleagues observed and commented on the artifact during the late archaeological Congress in St. Kitts. None indicated they had seen a similar object in Antillean collections. Several suggestions were made regarding possible functions of the object. One suggestion was that it had been an amulet or pendant with a string or other supporting device attached through the grooves. A second idea was that it had been a burnishing stone used to smooth the surface of ceramics or perhaps other materials. The presence of the bevels was the major consideration in this idea. The third suggestion was that the object had been a device used for reaming, boring, or perforating. The primary consideration here is the opposition of the grooves slightly behind the tip.

Such suggestions cannot be summarily dismissed. However, in at least some cases, the suggested functions do not account for all the attributes of the artifact. For example, if it were a burnishing stone, then why are there seemingly incongruous grooves on two edges? If it were a borer, reamer, or perforator, then why are there carefully rendered bevels on three edges? If it were a borer or reamer, then should there not be wear evident between the tip and the grooves? The artifact lacks such wear. That argument might be countered by contending that the tip had been inserted through a hole already punched in the material (*e.g.*, shell or wood). Only the grooves would have been in contact with the material; the tip would have turned in 'free space' (*e.g.*, the chamber of a shell) with no resultant wear being evident.

The preceding discussion has several implicit assumptions. The first is that the artifact indeed had a determinable function or purpose. The second assumption is that the artifact had a *single* function. Yet, if the object was in fact a multi-purpose tool perhaps used for disparate functions at different times, then the preceding discussion may be moot or at least inconsistent. If the object indeed was a multi-purpose tool, then the seemingly irrelevant attribute (*e.g.*, beveling on a borer) would no longer be in fact illogical, because it would be compatible with the presumed later function (*viz.*, burnishing).

The uncertainty that this is a complete artifact further confounds the discussion. At present it manifests one tang formed at the angle of the posterior and inferior edges. Perhaps at one time it possessed a second, similar tang (later broken) at the posterior and superior edge. If so, a slight notch evident on the posterior edge may be significant. This notch, as with the aforementioned grooves, extends from one side, across the edge, to the opposite side. A line drawn on a side between the tip and the notch would essentially bisect the artifact *if* there were two tangs present. The notch and grooves might provide three

points of attachment for a string or other supporting device used in bearing an amulet or pendant. Later, the tang in question presumably was broken. Perhaps the irregular surface that resulted was then ground anew. This might account for the flat, ground surface which is shown by the superior edge at this time.

There are, undoubtedly, other possible functions beyond those discussed above. The author would be pleased to learn if anyone has observed a similar artifact or has suggestions regarding the Monserrat find. Several cautionary notes are warranted. The artifact was removed from its original context without controls. Trant's has been extensively and intensively cultivated for the past few centuries (even to this day), and there is a possibility the object may be from a historic period. Connell, who originally found the object, believes it to be prehistoric, because his 'test pit' yielded principally aboriginal materials. Regardless of whether it is of the prehistoric or historic period, the curious artifact is presently enigmatic. We hope the description and conjectures presented above will stimulate additional discussion about this puzzling artifact.

Acknowledgements

The object was brought to my attention while on-Island for other archaeological research supported by a Fulbright-Hays (DHEW:OE) grant and an Andrew Mellon fellowship. I appreciate the permission granted by Walter Connell and the Montserrat National Trust to remove the artifact to the United States for additional study. Jack Donahue and Frank Vento (Department of Geology and Planetary Sciences, University of Pittsburgh) assisted with the lithologic studies. I am also indebted to the many colleagues who commented on the specimen. All errors in the article remain the responsibility of the author.

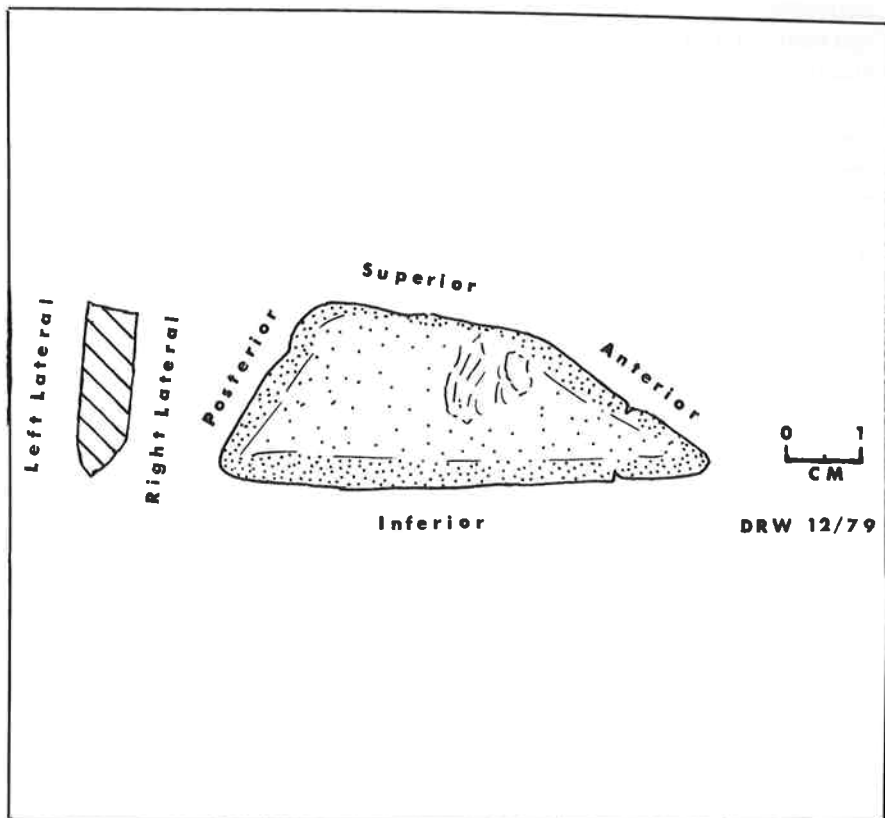


FIGURE
Cross section and view of right lateral aspect of problematic artifact from Montserrat.

COTTON GARDEN RED-ON-BROWN WARE: SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

By Bruce E. Tilden

Introduction

'Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware' was encountered first during the course of excavations in the summer of 1975. These excavations took place under my direction at Cramer Park, St. Croix, and were sponsored jointly by the Virgin Islands Office of Archaeological Services and the Youth Conservation Corps. The Cramer Park Site is in the old Cotton Garden Estate, and is both a late prehistoric and XVIII Century historic site; Cotton Garden Estate is in Eastend B Quarter, Christiansted Jurisdiction, on the northeastern shore of St. Croix, Virgin Islands of the United States.

'Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware' is a distinctive type of pottery which, since 1975, has been found elsewhere on St. Croix. It is known from Fair Plain (a late prehistoric site) and the Salt River Point Site (a multicomponent, prehistoric and historic site).

Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware sherds appear to represent a variety of vessel shapes. Some vessels may have circular orifices while others may form oval or rectangular orifices. The distinctive diagnostic trait of Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware is that the interior of its vessels have a red-painted zoned design motif over a plain brown paste. The exteriors of these vessels are always plain.

Description

Based solely on the material recovered from the Cramer Park Site, Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware sherds are well-fired and grit tempered. The paste of individual Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware sherds is, generally, of a uniform color; profiles of rim sherds indicate variation in shape and thickness (*vid.* Fig. 1). Rims are either tapering or rounded and vary from 5 to 9 mm. in thickness.

The red-painted design motif is limited always to the rim and interior surface of the sherds. The red paint always is applied to the orificial portions of the rim sherds. From the red-painted orifice, red lines extend inward toward the inside bottom of the vessels. These broad red lines or bands occasionally form obtuse angles (Fig. 2).

The insufficient number of sherds found renders the accurate reconstruction of the interior zoned red-painted motif difficult. Based on the fragmentary sections, it appears that the broad red lines or bands have a concave or slightly U-shaped line joining the red orifice at each end of the motif.

It is possible that the design motif of each Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware vessel was composed of a set of mildly concave broad red lines, from two to three per set, which was opposed by another set of concave lines. Were one to look directly overhead into a Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware interior, one would see the motif as a set of two to three concave lines covering one half of the vessel interior, opposed by a similar set (as in a reverse mirror-image) covering the other half of the vessel's interior, forming a simple symmetrical design (Fig. 3).

Were one to assume that the Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware rim sherds belong to vessels with circular orifices, then, based on such an apparent official diameter, Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware vessels appear to be large shallow bowls with rounded bottoms (Fig. 4).

Variations

Recovered also at the Cramer Park Site were sherds which seem to have a similar zoned red-painted motif on their interior surfaces; however, the sherds have a black interior surface paste, as opposed to the brown, plain surfaces found on Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware sherds. It appears that a 'Cotton Garden Red-on-Black Ware' also exists. Cotton Garden Red-on-Black Ware rims are rounded or tapering as is the case with Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware rims; however, there is a single, exceptional sherd with a rim point.

Cotton Garden Red-on-Black Ware has been found to date only at the Cramer Park Site. Due to its very limited known distribution and its shared traits, it is likely that Cotton Garden Red-on-Black Ware is a variation of Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware.

Provenience

To date, Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware sherds have been found at three prehistoric sites on St. Croix: the type site, Cramer Park, where it was discovered in 1975; Fair Plain, where Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware sherds were found in the course of excavations in 1976, and the multicomponent Salt River Point Site.

What appears to be a whole Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware bowl is in

the collections of the National Park Service, Christiansted, St. Croix; however, there is no provenience for this vessel.

Associations

In the case of both the Cramer Park and the Fair Plain sites, Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware sherds were found in association with Chicoid sherds. At the Salt River Point Site, Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware sherds have been found in surface collections and in excavations; however, these sherds can not be associated clearly with Chicoid material.

Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware bears little or no resemblance to Chicoid ceramics. I have been unable to find zoned red-painted motifs similar to these in the interior of vessels from the Lesser Antilles. This leads me to believe that Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware is unique to the Virgin Islands (and possibly eastern Puerto Rico as well).

Zoned, red-painted interior motifs have been found in the interiors of Ostionoid vessels within the Virgin Islands/Puerto Rico area. While these zoned, red-painted interior motifs are quite different from those found in the interiors of Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware, possibly there is a connection.

What appears to be Ostionoid vessels with painted red scrolls in their interiors were found on St. Croix by Gudmund Hatt. While, admittedly, the red scroll designs found in the interiors of these vessels are quite different from the zoned, red-painted motifs found in the interiors of Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware, several traits, it can be seen, are common to both.

The use of zoned, red-painted designs may indicate that during Chicoid times, vessels were being produced on St. Croix whose traits were of local origin, predating the introduction of Chicoid ceramics to the Virgin Islands.

Cultural Ramifications

Cotton Garden Red-on-Brown Ware may indicate the continuation of local, earlier traditions within a new, Chicoid context in the Virgin Islands. The purpose which these vessels served in an otherwise different assemblage is open to question.

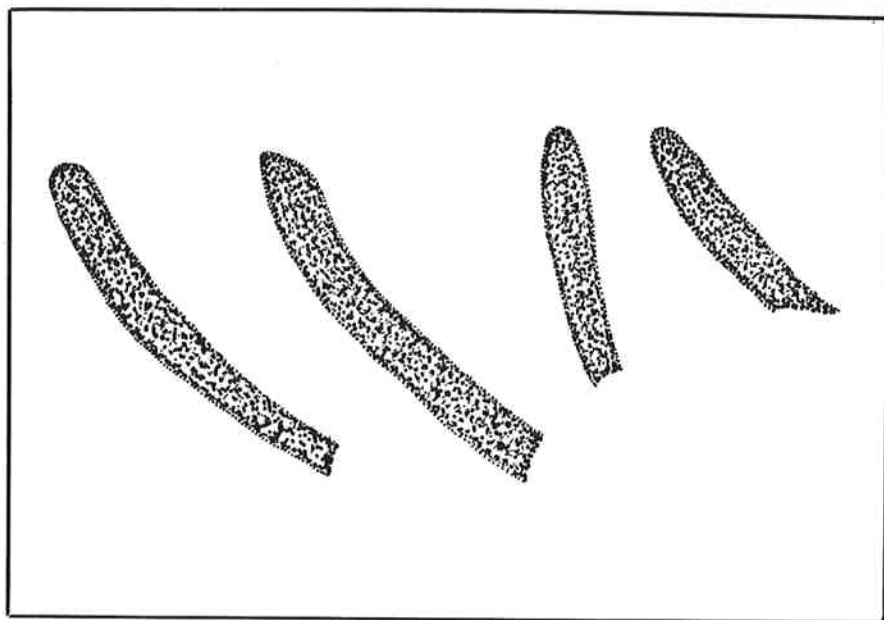


FIGURE 1

Scale 1:2

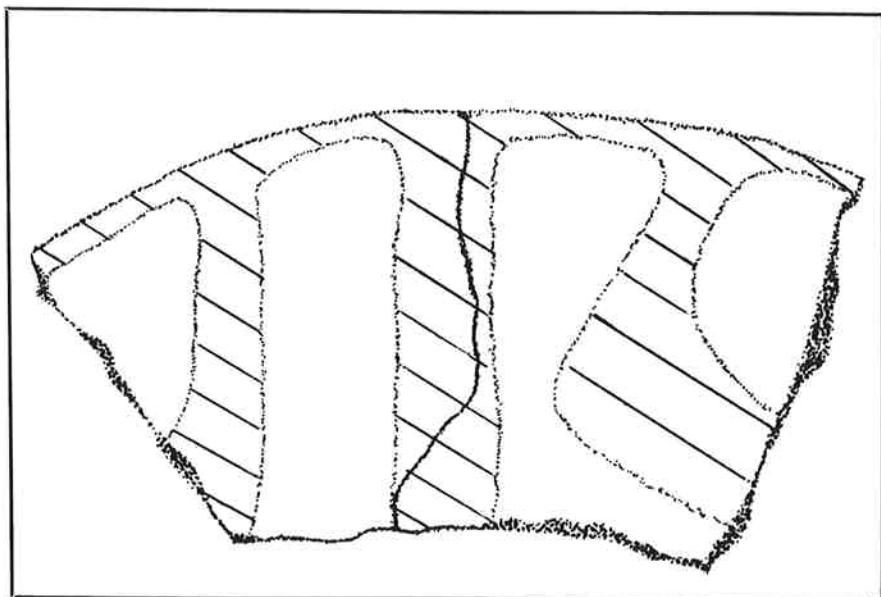


FIGURE 2

Scale 1:2

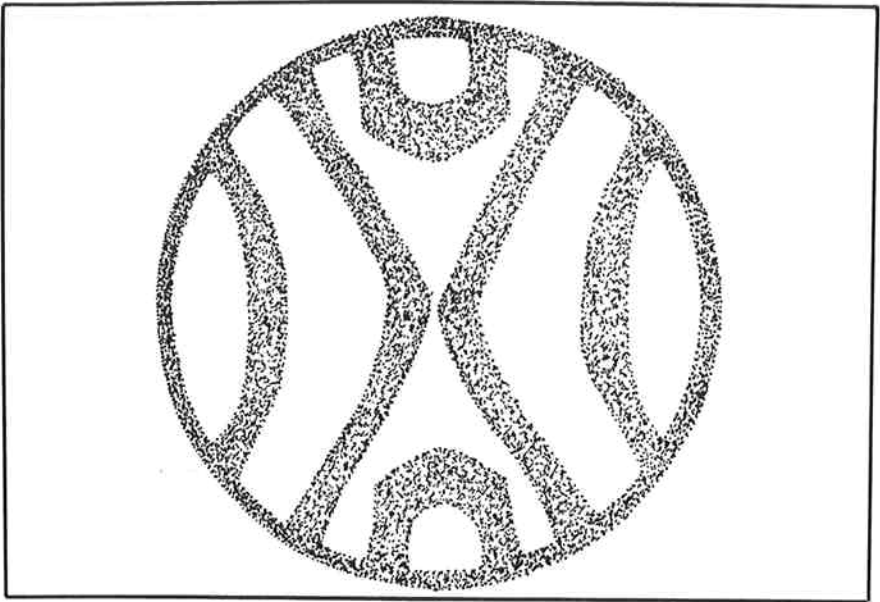


FIGURE 3
Scale 1:4

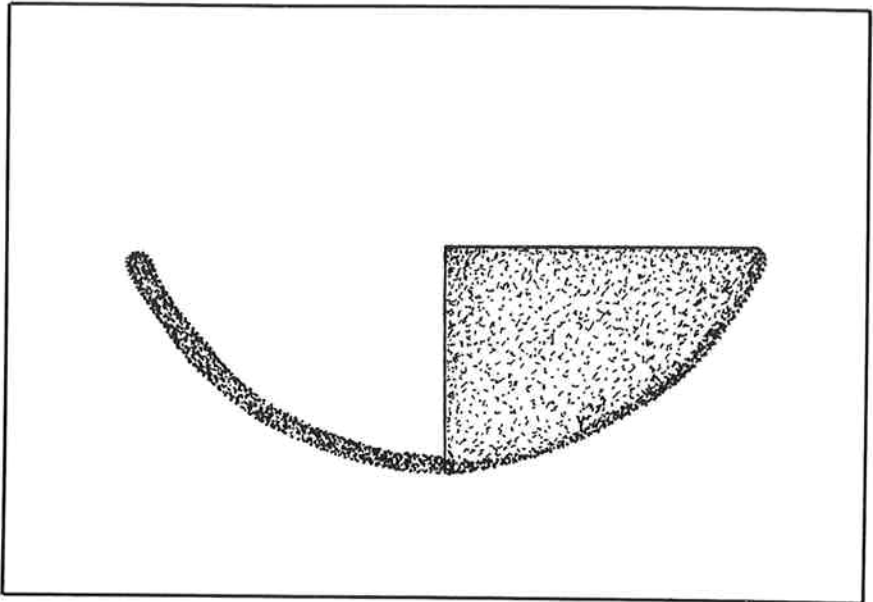


FIGURE 4
Scale 1:3