The Use of Molluscs in the Precolombian Amerindian Lesser Antilles: Human, Animal, and Environmental Parameters (with an emphasis on metrics)

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ABSTRACT: The diverse use of molluscs in the pre-Columbian Amerindian Lesser Antilles is outlined based on data from twenty-seven sites and case studies from the Preceramic through to the Ceramic Ages (ca. 1000 BC - AD 1200). Clear variations in the role of molluscs through time reflect as yet little understood economic and cultural evolutions of Amerindian island societies, but they likely relate to interacting factors such as local and large-scale animal population dynamics, ecology, and paleoenvironmental processes. Articulating all dimensions based on rather imperfect archaeological records, unsuitable ecological data, and the vast field of human cultural facts, is a challenge for archaeomalacology. The use of metrics recorded on archaeologically-recovered species is particularly discussed here as a case study. It illuminates the parameters and pitfalls that need to be taken into account before building anthropogenic or paleoenvironmental interpretations.

KEYWORDS: MOLLUSCS, PRE-COLUMBIAN AMERINDIAN LESSER ANTILLES, CONSUMPTION, INDUSTRY, METRICS, ECOLOGY

RESUMEN: La diversificada explotación de moluscos en las Antillas menores precolombinas queda sintetizada a través de datos procedentes de 27 yacimientos y muestras que discurren desde el Precerámico hasta el Cerámico (ca. 1000 a.C. - 1200 d.C.). Las patentes variaciones que desempeñaron los moluscos en distintos momentos reflejarían una evolución económica y cultural de las sociedades amerindias isleñas que, hoy por hoy, es mal comprendida, aunque seguramente implicarían la interactuación de una amplia serie de factores entre los que incluimos la propia dinámica de las poblaciones, tanto a escala local como regional, y procesos que afectarían a la ecología y al paleoambiente. Integrar todos estos fenómenos sobre la base de registros arqueológicos incompletos, datos ecológicos inadecuados y una enorme variedad de factores de origen antropológico, es un reto para la arqueomalacología. Se valora aquí, en concreto, el uso de la biometría realizada sobre especies arqueológicas a modo de botón de muestra. Ello ilustra los parámetros y limitaciones que uno tiene que tener en cuenta antes de intentar realizar interpretaciones antropogénicas y paleoambientales.

PALABRAS CLAVE: MOLUSCOS, AMERINDIOS PRECOLOMBINOS, ANTILLAS MENORES, CONSUMO, INDUSTRIA, BIOMETRÍA, ECOLOGÍA
INTRODUCTION

The pre-Columbian Amerindian societies of the West Indies used molluscs in various ways which are of interest to the field of archaeomalacology. A good number of assemblages witness to the diverse roles these organisms played from the Pre-ceramic up to the Late Ceramic Ages (ca. 1000 BC-AD 1200). Molluscs were simultaneously an important food resource, a raw material for tools and ornaments, and trade items integrated within the mobility and spatial occupation strategies.

In a complementary role to marine fish, molluscs occupied an important place in the subsistence economies of the pre-Columbian societies, especially in the small islands of the Lesser Antilles characterised by a limited set of terrestrial animal resources. Yet, this role fluctuated through time and these variations remain to be fully understood. While some relate to economic, cultural, and social processes, they also likely imply other dynamic factors. It is clear that local, seasonal and large-scale animal population dynamics and ecology, and paleoenvironmental processes (e.g. local modifications of littoral environments, sea-level fluctuations), interacted with the human activities (e.g. susceptibility to stock depletion).

It is thus challenging for archaeomalacology to investigate from the basis of the rather imperfect archaeological records, incomplete and sometimes unsuitable ecological data, and the vast field of human cultural facts and social processes. This challenge is compounded in the West Indies, where the set of raw archaeological and ecological information, although extensive, is still often incomplete. The use of metrics on archaeological specimens is discussed here as an example of the difficulty of building anthropogenic or paleoecological interpretations.

THE EXPLOITATION OF MOLLUSCS IN THE PRE-COLUMBIAN AMERINDIAN LESSER ANTILLES: GENERAL TRENDS

The Caribbean islands (Figure 1) were first settled by mobile navigators, hunters and gatherers known as Preceramic peoples. Coming either from South or Central America, they were present in some of the Greater and Lesser Antilles islands, and in Trinidad starting around the 6th millennium BC. Around 500 BC, more sedentary groups of potters and horticulturists (Saladoid series) came from the Venezuelan and Guyanese coasts. Initiating the Ceramic Age, they initially occupied the Lesser Antilles only as far north as the eastern tip of Hispaniola (Figure 1). Between the 7th and 9th centuries AD, multiple lines of evidence point to a regional diversification in ceramic styles, population movements, colonization of the entire West Indies (Figure 1), and an increase in cultural and social complexity. This post-Saladoid period of the Ceramic Age (Ostionoid, Troumassoid, and Suazoid series) lasted until the European arrival (Contact period after 1492) (Rouse & Cruxent, 1963; Rouse, 1992; Keegan, 1994, 2000).

The evidence for Caribbean pre-Columbian Amerindian subsistence economies implies various combinations of hunting, fishing and collecting of terrestrial and marine plants and animals (Wing & Wing, 1995; deFrance et al., 1996). Those came in addition to horticulture which was more or less developed in the Pre-ceramic Age economies (Pagan & Rodríguez, 2007) and likely became a staple during the Ceramic Age. In the Lesser Antilles, the set of terrestrial animal resources being rather limited (reptiles, birds, small mammals, crabs), molluscs had their role in the subsistence in complement to marine fish. Moreover, they were an important raw material for a variety of tool and ornamental productions, as well as valued trade items (Serrand, 2002).

During the Pre-ceramic period, marine molluscs make up the majority of faunal remains in the coastal sites of the Lesser Antilles (see Armstrong, 1978; Lundberg, 1989; Brokke, 1999). They were most often collected intensively with a few productive, large-sized species targeted; quite often bivalves available in shallow biotopes. Two recently excavated Pre-ceramic coastal sites in St Martin, Orient Bay (800-400 BC; Bonnissent et al., 2002, 2003) and Etang Rouge (Bonnissent et al., 2005), confirm patterns of occupation and resource exploitation largely centred on molluscs (Serrand, 2005a; Serrand & Bonnissent, 2005; Figure 2a, b). Shellfish predominate at both sites (Figure 2a): in Etang Rouge, a large bivalve, Arca zebra, was intensively targeted (MNI = 4889, 93%). In Orient Bay, five species (MNI = 3819, 84%) – including the large Queen Conch Strombus gigas and West Indian topshell Cittarium pica – were collected in a pragmatic way with the most accessible specimens targeted in the shallow sea grass beds and intertidal rocky shores. Both sites
FIGURE 1
Simplified major pre-Columbian phases in the West Indies (after Hofman 1993, fig. 94); close-up of the Lesser Antilles – in bold: islands mentioned in the text.

FIGURE 2
(a) Proportions of individuals (% MNI) of the major species in the Preceramic sites of Orient Bay and Etang Rouge in Saint-Martin (Northern Lesser Antilles); (b) Production stages of tools made of the lip of *Strombus gigas* in Orient Bay.

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contain evidence testifying to the cooking of large amounts of these molluscs on the spot, in structures composed of heated rocks (Bonnissent et al., 2002, 2003). In Orient Bay, moreover, lips of mature conchs were used for the intensive production of standardized adze tools (Figure 2b). This industry, maybe related to the manufacture of wooden canoes, continued throughout the punctuated occupation of the site. Access to Strombus gigas populations, providing raw materials for tools, thus likely played a major role in the location of the Orient Bay specialized site, while subsistence motives were probably more important in terms of Etang Rouge. In both cases, nearby dense populations of a few large species of molluscs, which were intensively exploited, appear to have motivated series of short-term, repeated occupations.

As Orient Bay and Etang Rouge, other Pre-ceramic sites of the Lesser Antilles reveal specialized economic strategies centred on different zones of the landscape, with coastal economies being centred on molluscs while terrestrial resources are targeted in inland sites (Hofman & Hoogland, 2003). These lines of evidence suggest that the distribution of resources played an important role in the groups’ mobility and, hence, spatial occupation patterns of that period. These were probably based on the cyclic exploitation of complementary resources for social facets such as industry and subsistence, within a network of specialized sites. Molluscs played an important role within these systems as witnessed by the coastal sites.

During the following Ceramic Age, the Amerindian groups of the Saladoid and subsequent post-Saladoïd series were largely sedentary and relied on horticulture. While still a component of the subsistence economy, molluscs probably played a less significant role. This fact is reflected in the less diffuse mobility and spatial occupation strategies.

For the very early (Huecan/Cedrosan) Saladoid period (ca. 500 BC-AD 400), several sites of the Lesser Antilles studied by the author – Radio Antilles and Trants (Petersen, 1996) in Montserrat, Hope Estate in St Martin (Bonnissent & Henocq, 1999), and Cathédrale and Gare Maritime de Basse-Terre (Bonnissent et al., 2004, Romon et al., 2006) – show similar exploitation patterns of molluscs and more generally invertebrates (Serrand, 2002, 2004). Land invertebrates play an important role: either crabs as in Hope Estate, Trants and Radio Antilles, or freshwater snails such as Neritina virginea in Cathédrale and Gare Maritime de Basse-Terre. As for marine molluscs (Figure 3a), bivalves were rarely exploited and the gathering focused mostly on gastropods, apparently collected at random in the productive ecological zones of the rocky shore and sea grass areas. While the most productive species of these ecotones (i.e. Cittarium pica, Strombus gigas) were collected in good numbers, there is little to suggest they were necessarily targeted. As these sites witness, the importance of land invertebrates (crabs / snails) decreases through time in favour of the marine gastropods from rocky shores (notably nerites and Cittarium pica) and sea grass beds (conchs, star and turban shells). In parallel, during that period, the shell industry is well developed and diversified with artefacts mostly related to the ornamental field but rather standardized from one site to the other: there is a clear homogeneous common background.

The later phases of the Ceramic period witness changes in the exploitation of invertebrates. Several sites in Martinique, spanning from the late Saladoid to Suazoid series, give particular insights into this evolution (Serrand, 2007) (Figure 3b). Gathering at the coastal site of Dizac (ca. AD 450-700), while including various mollusc species from several environments (sandy bottoms, sea grass beds, rocky zones), initially focused on a small bivalve, Donax denticulatus (West-Indian donax). Targeted on the nearby sandy splash zone, it remains important throughout the occupation (30 to 50% MNI) but with a clear decrease in numbers through time. In parallel, other more distant and varied environments (sea grass beds, sandy bottoms, rocky shores, and mangrove) and species, including mostly bivalves, are progressively included. These variations go along with changes in the metrics of Donax (see second part of the paper). The importance of the small bivalve in this site initiates a trend which becomes more noticeable through time as in the three later coastal sites of Martinique: in Les Salines (5-8th and 12-13th centuries AD, Saladoid/Troumassoid series), Trabaud (11-13th c. AD, late Troumassoid/early Suazoid series), and Macabou (12-15th c. AD, Suazoid series), the exploitation is almost entirely focused on dense bivalve beds (over 70% MNI), easy to collect in large quantities, on sandy and muddy bottoms present near the sites (Figure 3b).

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Although not systematic, the pattern through time is rather clear: most late Saladoid to post-Saladoid period sites studied by the author in the Lesser Antilles are also characterized by the importance of bivalves (e.g. Sulphur Ghaut in Nevis and Bas-de-la-Source in Guadeloupe where *D. denticulatus* accounts for respectively 88 and 53% MNI; Serrand, 2002, 2005b). While situations may be more varied in the Greater Antilles and the Bahamas given the higher diversity of land
resources, a few sites currently under study also include a sizeable bivalve component (e.g. Paso del Indio in Puerto Rico, where *Anomalocardia brasiliana* accounts for 22% MNI; three late post-Saladoid sites in Middle Caicos, Bahamas, where bivalves account for between 40 and 80% MNI; Serrand, unpubl.).

The higher contribution of bivalves is thus clearly marked in a large number of late Saladoid and post-Saladoid sites. Although bivalves contribute little in terms of meat (compared with fish, mammals or large gastropods), these gregarious species have the advantage of being concentrated in dense beds and easy to collect in large quantities. They were favoured for some reason by most sites’ inhabitants of this period and this overall pattern in the Lesser Antilles contrasts with that of the former early Saladoid period. Indeed, it has been shown that land invertebrates and gastropods of the rocky shores and sea grass beds dominated while bivalves were rare (Serrand, 2002). In opposition, in most late Saladoid and post-Saladoid sites, the exploitation of land invertebrates is universally small, with a few local exceptions [e.g. Pointe du Helleux in Guadeloupe, Grouard (2001)], while that of bivalves increases or is dominant (Figure 4). This trend appears at a time when former unsettled islands are colonized and settlement processes intensify in the formerly occupied islands. In Martinique, for example, there is an increase in the number and diversity of post-Saladoid sites; they are located in a greater variety of locations and often functionally specialized (Bérard, 2004; Bérard et al., 2005). The increasing integration of bivalves –species available in larger quantities and densities – during the post-Saladoid period may thus parallel and reflect an intensification of resource exploitation. The precise relationships between this trend and the new settlement patterns are unclear but the predilection for dense available resources is overall consistent with the apparent process of settlement intensification. Nevertheless, again, data from the Greater Antilles should be included to widen this picture.

ANIMAL POPULATION DYNAMICS, PALE-OENVIRONMENTAL PROCESSES, AND HUMAN ACTIVITIES: A CHALLENGING MIX FOR CARIBBEAN ARCHAEOMALACOLOGY

Trends appear through time in the use of molluscs by the Pre-Columbian Amerindian societies of the Lesser Antilles. They likely reflect a combination of local and large-scale social and economic strategies, patterns and evolutions, animal population dynamics and ecology (seasonal variations, susceptibility to stock depletion), and paleoenvi-

![Figure 4](image_url)

**FIGURE 4**

Variation of the % MNI and % NISP of land crabs and bivalves in several sites of the West Indies across the Preceramic and ceramic periods.
The use of molluscs in the Pre-Columbian Amerindian Lesser Antilles

Environmental processes (sea-level fluctuations, local modifications of littoral environments).

It is not the aim of this paper to explore all of these possible aspects and their interactions – as yet mostly uncontrolled in the Caribbean – but to present a few cases which demonstrate the need for caution when interpreting data. One restricted aspect – metrics – is used as a means of approaching and discussing possible multi-scale parameters that should be taken into account before building anthropogenic or paleoecological interpretations.

In the Caribbean, assessing the value of metric data recorded on archaeological specimens and comparing them are difficult tasks. Indeed, data on the ecology and growth patterns are available for only a few economically important species (e.g. the conch *Strombus gigas*) and incomplete or absent for many others. This adds to the difficulty of using incomplete archaeological records where assessing the time range of the various deposits (site and inter-site levels) is not always easy. Such difficulties are exposed in the following two examples.

As has been seen before (see above), the shell assemblage of the late Saladoid site of Dizac in Martinique is dominated by the small bivalve *Donax denticulatus*, which is the main species at least in terms of gathering time investment. Initially targeted, it remains important throughout the occupation (30 to 50% MNI). Nevertheless, this species importance slightly decreases in time in favour of other species which are progressively incorporated. Changes occur along in the mean length of *Donax* individuals and in the structure of the collected archaeological population(s). Initially, *Donax* is heavily exploited, the individual mean length is high and steady and the population balanced. In the following part of the sequence, the quantity of *Donax* fluctuates and decreases and both the mean individual length and the population structure reveal episodes of decline and signs of imbalance (Figure 5). One would be tempted to

**FIGURE 5**
Relative frequencies of individuals (% MNI), mean length (mm) and distribution in length classes (mm) of *Donax denticulatus* individuals on the stratigraphic sequence of Dizac.

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conclude that these trends reflect the impact of the initial intensive exploitation leading to an imbalance of the bivalve beds hence their lesser exploitation at the end of the occupation. But several factors and unknowns make it more complex and should be taken into account.

From an archaeological point of view, the excavated portion of the site is a dump area formed by the accumulation of several episodes of discard and does not correspond easily with stratified occupation levels. Thus the temporal aspects of the dump are ambiguous. Moreover, the archaeological material does not allow specification of the occupation pattern of the site, such as classification as permanent occupation, specialized activity site, or other function. Thus, estimating the exact value of the analyzed samples is hard in that there are few stratigraphic indicators to isolate episodes of mixing and separate discard events clear through time. It is consequently hard to assess what is the temporal range of the metric trends. What remains is that they nevertheless go along with clear modifications in the species proportions and these proportions appear to define coherent phases (Figure 5).

From the anthropogenic point of view, the collecting modes are unknown. They may have fluctuated during the occupation, depending upon the season, the groups of gatherers, or another variable/mix of variables: the gathering could be, always or sometimes, targeted or random with even the smallest specimens kept, or with a sorting of only the specimens of decent size. It could be conducted across the whole beach or only in some parts, and hence focused on specific local beds. In short, the variations could simply reflect varying events and modes of collecting through time depending on fluctuating mix of variables rather than the tangible impact of a constant and continuing mode of collecting.

From the ecological point of view (Figure 6), there are several contributions about the ecology, growth, and reproduction of *Donax denticulatus* (Etechevers, 1975; Marcano et al., 2004). They show great variation of data between different populations and localities. For example, Vélez (1985) and Vélez et al. (1985) state for *Donax* in Venezuela a life expectancy of 13 to 16 months, length variation (beyond the spat stage) of 4 and 24 mm, and a major reproductive season between July and December. On another hand, Wade (1967, 1968) indicates great variations in the densities and length frequencies between populations from different localities of Jamaica.

It is thus hard to find a good present-day sample as a comparison basis for our incomplete archaeological data, and to go (for now at least) beyond the assessment of fluctuations «probably» related to some impact of the collection but possibly combined with the marked seasonal fluctuations of the *Donax* populations and of the gathering activity itself. Further mixture analysis (based on the method of maximum likelihood) will be tested, using bootstrap and kernel methods (Monchot & Léchelle, 2002) to help identify the various components of the samples and study the distributions better than is possible with histograms.

The second case deals with data on the West Indian topshell *Cittarium pica* through time on the island of Saint-Martin at the Orient Bay Preceramic site, the Hope Estate early Saladoid site, and the Orient Bay post-Saladoid site (see above). The first and last sites, almost 1000 years apart, are in the same coastal location, thus making the comparison especially interesting. *C. pica* accounts for between 25 and 50% of the MNI in the three sites (Figure 7). Metrics are presented according to the width [measured across the widest dimension of the shell base; Debrot (1990b)]. In the Orient Bay Preceramic site [800-400 BC; Bonnissent et al. (2002)] (Figure 7), a likely punctuated occupation with no apparent stratigraphy, the sample of measured specimens is considered as a whole (n = 1151). It comprises mostly medium-sized individuals supplemented by a smaller proportion of large specimens. At Hope Estate, a long-term occupation with stratified deposits [500 BC-AD 700; Bonnissent & Henocq (1999)], small individuals dominate in the total sample (n = 3981) and in most stratigraphic levels. All other classes are nevertheless also represented but in low proportions. Finally, in the Orient Bay post-Saladoid site [8-10th c. AD; Bonnissent et al. (2002)], a likely one-time occupation with no apparent stratigraphy, the population sample (n = 1135) is balanced with a few juveniles, a sizeable portion of young to medi-

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1 The small number is due to high fragmentation. Nevertheless, the fragments (n = 1255), sorted into growth classes, mostly belong as well to small-to-medium and medium (78%) sized individuals.

2 Again, the small number is due to high fragmentation. Unfortunately, no assessment of the fragments’ growth stages was conducted and fragmentation could bias the width-frequencies.

3 No significant difference between the levels could be detected.
A few studies (Randall, 1964; Debrot, 1990a, b; Bell, 1992), and present-day data (Schmidt et al., 2002) (Figure 8) show interesting differences in width-frequency distributions of Cittarium pica individuals at both human exploited and non-exploited sites in Costa Rica. The absence of the large size classes at the exploited sites and the balanced distribution at the unexploited one nicely echo those at respectively the Hope Estate and post-Saladoid Orient Bay sites (Figure 7). Nevertheless, again, one needs to look at various factors before pretending to understand these data, in particular, the archaeological and anthropogenic variables suggested by the samples, basic site data and potential exploitation patterns.

As seen above, in the episodically-frequented Preceramic Orient Bay site, the shell industry and the access to raw materials seem to have been the determining factor in the choice of location and settlement strategies. The gathering of molluscs for food was very likely a secondary focus and was organized accordingly. Utilising a ‘pragmatic’

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Schmidt et al. 2002 in Costa Rica in both exploited and non-exploited sites are smaller than those recorded in our archaeological samples.

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FIGURE 6
(a) Excerpt from Velez et al. (1985: fig. 1) – Length-frequency histograms for D. denticulatus 1974-1976; (b) Excerpt from Wade (1967: fig. 7) – Length-frequency graphs for samples of four populations of D. denticulatus in Jamaica.
strategy, inhabitants took advantage of species and individuals easily available in the nearby shallow, productive enough, environments. This is the case for the medium-sized individuals of *C. pica*, which are easily found in the upper levels of the rocky intertidal, and thus were probably favoured by the occupants for the ease of their collecting, although more mature specimens were available as well (a few are represented in the archaeological sample\(^5\)).

The Saladoid Hope Estate site is a long-term occupation village located about 2 km distant heading inland, up in the mountains. This site yielded evidence of differential transportation of shells with regard to the larger species, *Strombus gigas* (Serrand, 2002), and it is possible that it was also the case for *C. pica*. Most of the largest shells may have been discarded after meat extraction at the collecting site(s) and only their flesh and smaller individuals – for which the extraction on the spot may be less cost-effective then the transportation (Bettinger & Malhi, 1997) – were brought to the site. The high proportion of small individuals in the sample may therefore not reflect the state of the collected natural population or the targeting of the collecting but mostly transportation or consumption strategies related to the management of distances and costs.

Finally, in the post-Saladoid Orient Bay site, a likely one-time occupation, *Cittarium pica* appears to have been the major mollusc exploited for food (>54% MNI). Local populations were intensively exploited including specimens of all size classes. The archaeological population structure is balanced, and close to that of a natural one.

\(^5\) To note, as underlined by K. Szabo, the lack of focus on larger, less accessible specimens probably heightened the population’s ability to recruit and replenish their stocks.
Nevertheless, the occupation/exploitation duration is unknown. What appears as a one mid-term event of exploitation may be the result of several accumulated events. Despite this, it is clear that the West Indian top shell was the sole exploited mollusc resource and all specimens were integrated (and likely brought back to the site).

Again, thus, before metrics can be used to discuss potential changes in the local populations of one species through time, and related to possible human impacts, all combined potential parameters must be examined, here especially the clues about the exploitation patterns.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Of all the various approaches that can be used to investigate the nature of archaeomalacological samples, one must take particular care with metric information. As the sketchy presentation of the varied uses of molluscs showed, their exploitation by the Amerindian pre-Columbian populations was obviously part of larger and complex strategies of territorial occupation, mobility, economic cycles and networks, most of which are still mostly unknown. Therefore, as demonstrated through the three sites in Saint-Martin, no matter how good the metric records, it is crucial to put them back into anthropic frames (settlement patterns, resources exploitation strategies, mobility, networks of specialized sites, etc.) to avoid certain pitfalls. On another hand, such metrics cannot be properly addressed if precise ecological and biological data are not available, or, even better, present-day analogues. Unfortunately, such analogues are generally lacking in the Lesser Antilles. Finally, it is also necessary to put into practice adapted tools for analyzing data under discussion (e.g. mixture analysis; Monchot & Léchelle, 2002). In short, several levels of parameters need to be included in any interpretative approach given the complexity of human social behaviours and the various unknowns and imperfections of the archaeological record, ecological data and paleoenvironmental field.

In this last regard, it is becoming clear in the West Indies that local and large scale, short- and long-term environmental changes probably played a role in some of the socio-economic options that the Amerindian populations adopted through time. A few paleoenvironmental studies conducted in Puerto Rico, Haiti and St Thomas suggest wet /
dry alternations (Higuera-Gundy, 1991; Hoddell et al., 1991; Curtis & Hoddell, 1993; Burney et al., 1994). Such climatic alternations are evidenced for the Lesser Antilles as well, although with local variation. In the Guadeloupean site of Anse à la Gourde (Beets et al., 2006), data are available for the 6th and 13th centuries AD and, on the island of Saint-Martin, during the last four millennia (Bertran et al., 2004; Bonnissent et al., 2007). Relative synchronicities appear at Anse à la Gourde and in Saint-Martin between the major occupation events and cultural phases (in Saint-Martin, especially the Saladoid and post-Saladoid periods) and the various climatic alternations. These data illuminate paleoenvironmental variability and its potential role, along with other parameters (cultural, demographic, socio-political), within the economic, occupation and mobility patterns on local and larger scales (site, coastal area, part of an island, cultural phases, etc.). And, clearly these climatic alternations, sea-level fluctuations (Lighty et al., 1982; Digerfeldt & Hendry, 1987) and cyclical tropical disturbances had a local impact (modification, transgression and regression of ecosystems) on the resources, their richness and availability and probably impacted some of the Amerindian exploitation strategies. This largely unexplored aspect cannot be ignored and should be explored further. It is especially interesting to raise the matter when addressing the increasing role of bivalves (see Keegan et al., 2003) which becomes noticeable with the late Saladoid period and later, in a time of intensification of social and demographic processes and likely climatic transition to a dryer phase (Bonnissent et al., 2007).

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