Facing society : A study of identity through head shaping practices among the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean in the ceramic age and colonial period

Duijvenbode, A. van

4 CARIBBEAN IDENTITIES

To hear the rollers thunder on a shore that isn't mine
Privateering – Mark Knopfler (2012)

The history of the Caribbean is often defined by the pivotal moment of contact in 1492 and the historic aftermath of interaction, conquest, and slavery that shaped our modern world. Even before the arrival of Columbus, however, the region was an intricate cultural kaleidoscope of different peoples and languages in a complex land- and seascape. Insights into the diverse geography and environments that compose the Caribbean, as well as a grasp of the region's long history of human occupation and development are crucial for the investigation of identity practices of past and present Caribbean peoples.

This chapter will sketch the social history of indigenous Caribbean communities from the first explorers to settle in the archipelago to the tumultuous period of intercultural interaction in colonial times. This overview is based on information gained from archaeology, history, and ethnography and will embed head shaping practices in their larger social context, including childcare practices, kinship relations, and socio-political organisation as well as ties between different communities and exchange networks connecting the Caribbean. The discussion will also incorporate information on the physical appearance of the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean, as it is important to reconstruct the full suite of temporary and permanent cultural components that construct a social agent and not view cranial modification in isolation.

4.1 SEAS AND SHORES

Defining the boundaries of the Caribbean can be done in a multitude of ways, but here the area of study is considered as the islands of the West Indies, the coastal areas surrounding the Caribbean Sea, and the Orinoco River Basin in Venezuela following Rouse (1961). This is not in any way a reflection of the extent of past human movement and interaction in the region, as evidence has shown far wider reaching networks of trade and exchange connected ancient Americans (e.g. Hofman and Bright 2010; Mol 2014; Rodríguez Ramos 2010). However, scholarly studies must always draw arbitrary boundaries to demarcate areas of study and the regional boundaries chosen here

correspond best with the aim to study cranial modification through a multi-scalar approach ranging from individual experiences to regional patterns.

Figure 6 Map of the Caribbean (map created by M.L.P. Hoogland).

The arc of islands forming the Caribbean archipelago extends from the mouth of the Orinoco River on the South American coast to the peninsulas of Florida and Yucatan and consists of three major clusters: the Bahamas, the Greater Antilles, and the Lesser Antilles. The Bahamian archipelago includes the Turks and Caicos Islands and lies between the Greater Antilles and Florida. The Greater Antilles consist of the largest Caribbean islands of Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico. In fact, their combined land mass represents almost 90% of the entire region. The Lesser Antilles stretch from Puerto Rico to the coastal islands of Trinidad and Tobago and can be subdivided into three distinct archipelagos: the Virgin Islands, the Windward Islands, and the Leeward Islands. The Virgin Islands lie to the east of Puerto Rico and are separated from the remainder of the Lesser Antilles by the Anegada Passage. The Leeward islands stretch from Anguilla to Guadeloupe and are divided by the Dominica Channel from the Windward islands that range from Dominica to Grenada. Trinidad and Tobago form the final stepping stones towards South America. These islands lie on the continental shelf of South America, resulting in a more continental fauna and flora (Boomert 2014; Rouse 1961, 1964; Keegan et al. 2013; Wilson 2007).

Also part of the Caribbean is a group of islands stretching along the northern coast of Venezuela. These are referred to as the Southern Caribbean Region or occasionally the

Leeward Antilles, the latter not to be confused with the Leeward Islands mentioned previously. They consist of Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (known together as the ABC islands) and several Venezuelan islands and islets. The regions of the South American mainland of importance here include the Western coastal region and Orinoco River Basin of Venezuela as well as French Guiana, Guyana, and Suriname (Boomert 2014; Keegan et al. 2013; Rouse 1961, 1964, 1992; Wilson 2007).

Variety seems to be the key term to successfully describing and understanding the Caribbean. Complex geological formation processes have created a range of different settings, ranging from the flat coral islands of the Bahamas barely rising out of the sea to the sharp peaks of volcanic Saba or the mountain ranges interspersed with fertile valleys of the Greater Antilles. Each environment has created unique ecosystems and micro-climates that host a range of flora and fauna. The terrestrial fauna on the islands is impoverished in comparison to the abundance of the South American mainland, but this is offset by the affluence of the marine ecosystems surrounding the islands. The distribution of certain species of flora and fauna as well as other raw materials, such as flint, is connected to the diverse environments and geological formation processes throughout the region (Boomert 2014; Keegan et al. 2013; Knippenberg 2006; Hofman et al. 2011, 2014; Mol 2014; Rouse 1964, 1992; Wilson 2007).

This diverse and varied Caribbean has profoundly influenced the way its inhabitants acted and interacted. The stepping stone pattern of islands – almost all intervisible – combined with the dominant eastern trade winds and east-to-west sea currents were instrumental in the human migration into the region and the continued mobility of people across the Caribbean seascape. The discontinuous distribution of natural resources required continuous travel, interaction, and exchange between the different Caribbean communities. One could argue that the diversity of the natural Caribbean shaped the complex social dynamics recovered in its archaeological record (Boomert 2014; Keegan et al. 2013; Hofman and Bright 2010; Hofman and Hoogland 2011; Mol 2014; Rouse 1992; Wilson 2007).

4.2 ANCIENT MARINERS

The history of humans in the Caribbean is as complex and dynamic as the natural environment of the region and is characterised by the continuous movement of people, goods, and ideas throughout the archipelago (Keegan et al. 2013; Hofman et al. 2007, 2011; Hofman and Bright 2010). Innovations and transformations in material culture and cultural practices are found at the social boundaries created by the encounters between different groups and communities. Though the intercultural contact of the early colonial

period is perhaps the best known and documented example in the region, encounters between different peoples and their transformative potential can be traced back to the origins of Caribbean communities (Hofman et al. 2014; Rodríguez Ramos 2010).

The first evidence of human occupation in the Caribbean can be found in the coastal regions of Venezuela and north-eastern South America around 15,000 BC. The first intrepid explorers moved into the insular Caribbean from 6000 BC onwards, likely using dugout canoes. Two distinct migratory waves into the islands can be reconstructed based on the lithic tool assemblages: one from the Yucatán peninsula to Cuba and Hispaniola and one from the South American coast to Puerto Rico and the Leeward Lesser Antilles (Boomert 2014; Pagán-Jiménez et al. 2014; Rodríguez Ramos et al. 2013; Wilson 2007). The frontier of interaction and exchange, created when the two communities met on Puerto Rico around 3000 BC (Boomert 2014), shaped the Archaic age population of the island and is the first documented example of the dynamic processes that occur at social boundaries in the Caribbean.

Recent investigations have overthrown the old notions of these people as simple mobile bands of hunter-gatherers. There is evidence of substantial variation in settlement strategy during this period, with permanent and semi-permanent settlements, special activity sites, and yearly mobility cycles (Boomert 2014; Hofman et al. 2006; Rivera-Collazo 2011; Rodríguez Ramos et al. 2013). The independent development of pottery took place around 2000 BC on the Greater Antilles, dispelling the idea that pottery was first introduced by a later wave of migration from the mainland (Rodríguez Ramos et al. 2008; Ulloa and Valcárcel Rojas 2002). These communities had a broad spectrum diet composed of hunting, fishing, and horticulture which varied depending on the resources available in each biosphere. Palaeobotanical studies have shown that key crops such as maize and manioc were brought to the islands by the first settlers (Pagán-Jiménez 2013; Pagán-Jiménez et al. 2005). These plants became part of the regional exchange systems used to trade raw materials, including flint and chert, as well as intangible ideas (Hofman et al. 2014; Hofman et al. in press). These ties connecting distant insular communities foreshadow the continual importance of dynamic social interaction that characterises Caribbean history (Crock 2000; Hofman et al. 2011; Hofman et al. 2014; Rodríguez Ramos et al. 2013).

Despite these major developments and advancing insights regarding the earliest Caribbean settlers, little is known about the social organisation of these communities. The sparse skeletal material dating to this period has yielded no evidence of intentional cranial modification, with two potential exceptions on the islands of Aruba and Hispaniola. The site of Canashito on Aruba in the Southern Caribbean Region has been attributed to the Archaic Age by the excavators based on a radiocarbon date of 2210±95

BP obtained from the bone collagen of individual C1. The head shape of another burial found at Canashito, individual C2, was described as a possible case of cranial modification (Tacoma 1959).

The second case was recovered from the Cueva de Berna cave in the east of the Dominican Republic. The cave was in use by Archaic people between 1890 and 1255 BC and several human burials belonging to this period were recovered (Veloz Maggiolo et al. 1977). The remains of a young child lying in an extended position were recovered buried underneath a layer of ash. Luna Calderon (1977) describes the head shape of the child as intentionally altered and classifies it as circumferential (*seudocircular*).

4.3 THE CONNECTED CARIBBEAN

A new wave of immigrants moved into the islands from the Venezuelan coast around 500 BC marking the beginning of the Ceramic Age. The traditional idea that these new islanders brought the first pottery into the archipelago has been refuted by recent evidence of independent pottery production long before their arrival (Rodríguez Ramos et al. 2008; Ulloa and Valcárcel Rojas 2002). In fact, the social developments throughout the Ceramic Age are not based on a clear break from the past created by a complete replacement of people and ideas as was previously assumed, but arise from the foundations laid by the first Caribbean peoples and the interaction along the social boundaries between these groups and the new arrivals (Hofman et al. 2014; Rodríguez Ramos 2010; Rodríguez Ramos et al. 2013).

This period is divided into the Early Ceramic Age from 400 BC to AD 600 and the Late Ceramic Age from AD 600 to 1492, corresponding to the major socio-political developments seen in the indigenous societies. These dates are general indications based on the overall trends seen on a regional scale, but there are temporal discrepancies between the different islands created by the ebb and flow of the dynamic interactions in the region reaching shores at different times (Keegan 2004; Hofman 2013; Petersen et al. 2004).

A problem which must briefly be addressed before studying the communities of the Ceramic Age is the issue regarding the dating of human skeletal material in the region. Sketching a social history of head shaping in the Caribbean requires knowledge on the correct temporal association of crania and this has proven a complicated matter for much of the material collected in the early years of Caribbean archaeology. Skeletal material is often attributed to a broad period of Caribbean history (e.g. Ceramic Age) or may lack a temporal ascription all together. Such cases have not been cited in this overview as the gaps in the archaeological context prevent accurate placement, but

their presence indicates that head shaping practices were more widespread among prehistoric Caribbean communities than apparent from this overview and underscores the necessity of the current study.

Early Ceramic Age

Communities from the Lower Orinoco carrying Saladoid pottery had reached the Venezuelan coast sometime before 1000 BC (Keegan and Hofman 2017; Rouse and Cruxent 1963). During this crucial period of transformation in Venezuela, agriculture becomes the main subsistence strategy and settlement becomes more permanent. Slightly divergent regional developments take place recognised through distinct ceramic styles, burial practices, and settlement patterns. The Dabajuroid style develops in the west, the Barrancoid series can be found in the central Lake Valencia Basin and on the Lower Orinoco river, and the Saladoid style is present in the coastal regions of Eastern Venezuela used as the gateway into the island chain (Petersen et al. 2004; Rouse and Cruxent 1963). In the coastal regions of Venezuela, evidence of head shaping practices can be found among the Barrancoid communities living on the shores of Lake Valencia (Kidder 1944).

The rapid Saladoid expansion into the archipelago between 500 and 200 BC likely skipped the stepping stone pattern of migration that the Caribbean geography seems so ideally suited to, but instead appears to shows direct settlement of the north-eastern Caribbean (namely Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the Leeward Islands) followed by a later expansion back down towards the mainland into the Windwards. This direct expansion and the successful transition from riverine to marine seafaring technology are probably due to the interaction and exchange between the Archaic inhabitants of the Venezuelan coast and the newly arrived Saladoid communities (Boomert 2014; Fitzpatrick 2006, 2013; Hofman et al. 2011, 2014; Rodríguez Ramos 2010; Rouse and Cruxent 1963).

A second key encounter that shaped the history of the Caribbean took place between the first Saladoid settlers on the islands and the Archaic peoples already living in the north-eastern Caribbean. The interaction at this new frontier created a new cultural tradition known as Huecoid. Their pottery traditions combined Saladoid decorations with elements reminiscent of Archaic designs and their lithic technology is based on the older traditions found in the insular Caribbean. Huecoid material culture has been found in close association with Saladoid assemblages, although the small number of Huecoid sites and chronometric difficulties with radiocarbon dates hinder our attempts at understanding the exact nature of the relation between the Huecoid and Saladoid (Oliver 1999; Rodríguez Ramos 2010). These two groups share some practices,

like a broad spectrum subsistence strategy including cultivation using slash-and-burn techniques, hunting, fishing, and collecting of marine and land resources, yet are clearly different in other instances. There is evidence of interaction and the exchange of raw materials, goods, and ideas in a network that included the Archaic communities of the region as well as ties with the mainland communities (Boomert 2014; Hofman et al. 2011, 2014, in press; Mol 2014; Rodríguez Ramos 2010).

Thus far, archaeological evidence from the Early Ceramic Age sites shows concentric or linear middens surrounding an open area and generally located close to fresh water streams and near the shore. The houses tend to be circular or oval and are large enough to accommodate multiple families. A broad spectrum subsistence pattern combines the cultivation of plants with hunting, fishing, and collecting tailored to the diverse Caribbean environments. Burials of individuals in flexed position with little grave goods are found in the communal plaza in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands (Boomert 2000, 2014; Curet and Oliver 1998; Keegan 2000; Hofman et al. 2007; Siegel 1996; Wilson 2007).

These communities are seen as egalitarian societies organised along kinship principles. Egalitarian is often incorrectly equated to a complete lack of inequality, however internal social stratification can occur in such communities with the differentiation either horizontal in nature or based on achieved status and only temporary (Boomert 2000; Curet and Oliver 1998; Hofman and Hoogland 2004; Siegel 2010; Torres 2012). Boomert (2001) has cited the 'Big Man Collectivities' from Melanesia and New Guinea as an excellent ethnographic model of fluctuating leadership in egalitarian societies that enhances our understanding of the Early Ceramic Age communities of the Caribbean.

Throughout the Early Ceramic Age, a tension can be seen between the local and the regional. The orientation towards the local community based on notions of shared kinship is an important feature of these egalitarian societies settling into new territories and strengthening the internal social cohesion. On the other hand, the striking uniformity of Saladoid ceramics across the region, sometimes referred to as the 'Saladoid Veneer' (Keegan 2004), indicate a shared outlook that facilitated interaction. The exchange networks stretching across the Caribbean represent key ties for these communities that help mitigate the risky and adverse aspects of colonisation. As these people became established towards the end of the Early Ceramic Age, the exchange networks became less vital and growing regionalisation is seen (Bérard 2013; Boomert 2014; Hofman et al. 2007, Hofman and Hoogland 2004). At this time, Barrancoid ceramics from the mainland appear on Trinidad and its stylistic influences can be seen in the pottery of the Windward islands (Boomert 2014; Petersen et al. 2004; Rouse 1992). The Barrancoid expansion on the mainland is evidenced by the construction of mounds as far east as Suriname (Versteeg 2008).

The first indisputable evidence of head shaping practices among the indigenous societies of the Caribbean is found in the Early Ceramic Age. The earliest case is reported in a skeleton recovered from Morel on the island of Guadeloupe. The individual was wearing an elaborate necklace executed in the Huecoid style and showed evidence of frontal flattening (Durand and Petitjean Roget 1991). A radiocarbon date of 2410±120 BP places the life and death of this person at the beginning of the Early Ceramic Age (Delpuech et al. 1995), though the taphonomic conditions in which the remains were found indicate that caution should be taken with this radiocarbon date.[1] This supports the hypothesis of Crespo Torres (2000, 2005) that the origin of cranial modification in the Caribbean can be traced back to the Huecoid series. He proposes two potential routes taken by these travellers: the first along the Orinoco River and the second along the north coast of South America.

Cranial modification has also been depicted in Huecoid material culture, in particular in iconic greenstone pendants of a bird of prey carrying a human head. In several cases, the frontal bone of the skull has a flattened appearance (Crespo Torres 2005). It is interesting that the shapes seen in the human remains and material culture match, as both depict frontal flattening, especially given the current lack of other skeletal material securely attributed to the Huecoid.

Intentional cranial modification is also present in the Saladoid communities of the Early Ceramic Age, in particular in the north-eastern Caribbean. Fronto-occipital modification and frontal flattening have been found in Maisabel (Weston and Schats 2010), PO-29 (Espenshade et al. 2014), Punta Candelero (Crespo Torres 2000), and Tibes (Crespo Torres 2010) on Puerto Rico as well as in Hemer's Peninsula (Winter et al. 1991) on the Virgin Islands, Palo Seco on Trinidad (Bullbrook 1953), and in the Saladoid component of Morel on Guadeloupe (Clerc 1968). A single hypothesis on the social motivations behind head shaping in this period has so far been proposed. Crespo Torres (2000) suggests that the altered head shapes among the Saladoid communities on Puerto Rico are used as some type of in-group differentiation.

Late Ceramic Age

The ever changing social landscape of the Caribbean was set for another series of major developments between AD 600 and 1492. Different trends in the numerous social and cultural transformations taking place during the Late Ceramic Age can be seen for the

1 The skeleton was found encased in beach rock, created through a lithification of sand into a cement-like substance under particular conditions (Delpuech et al. ND). The effects of this process on the bone and collagen and its potential implications for the radiocarbon dating method have not been properly investigated.

first few centuries from AD 600 to 1200 and the last period of independent development from AD 1200 to 1492 before the impact of intercultural contact initiated by the arrival of Columbus. These periods will be sketched separately below for more clarity, though such a division does not reflect the reality of continuous cultural developments and transformations.

Local Ties

In the first centuries of the Late Ceramic Age, communities using Dabajuroid pottery spread from the western coast of Venezuela to the islands of the Southern Caribbean region. A simultaneous shift in lithic technology is observed. Urn burials also appear in the archaeological record, another trait associated with the Venezuelan communities. Subsistence strategies are mixed, with a heavy reliance on marine resources supplemented with agriculture and hunting (Du Rhy 1960; Haviser 1987; Rouse and Cruxent 1963; van Heekeren 1960). A potential case of cranial modification was found in the De Savaan site on Curacao (Haviser 1987, Tacoma 1987), but the presence of the practice has not been confirmed by additional evidence from other sources.

Different variations of the Arauquinoid can be found in the Eastern coastal region, spreading from Venezuela towards the Guianas. In Suriname and western Guiana, evidence of this tradition starts with mounds and associated raised fields constructed from AD 700 onwards. Agriculture seems to have been the predominant subsistence strategy. Burials took place within the habitation area and show a wide variety of practices (Rostain 2008; Versteeg 2008). The earliest case of cranial modification associated with Arauquinoid ceramics was found at the Wageningen-1 mound in Suriname (Maat 1985; Versteeg 1985).

Similar transformations in social and cultural practices also occur on the islands by AD 600, in particular on Puerto Rico and the surrounding islands at the crucial social boundaries between different collectives. A clear shift in settlement pattern can be seen, with new smaller settlements founded in previously uninhabited areas of the landscape. At the same time, domestic structures become smaller and burials are found associated with houses and no longer occur underneath the central plaza. These shifts imply fundamental changes in social organisation and indicate an increased importance of nuclear households and kinship identity based on these corporate residential groups (Curet and Oliver 1998; Keegan 2009; Torres 2012). A new ceramic style, Ostionoid, emerges showing clear stylistic influences from Saladoid ceramics and Archaic Casimiroid designs. These Casimiroid influences can also be seen in the Ostionoid lithic technology. Once again, it is the interaction between different peoples that seems to spark these social and cultural changes (Boomert 2014; Curet et al. 2004; Curet and Olivier 1998; Keegan 2000; Keegan and Hofman 2017; Rouse 1992; Wilson 2007).

Despite the regionalisation of identities in this period, these smaller residential kin groups must not be considered isolated. They functioned within a multiscalar network of social ties on local and regional levels. Exogamous marriage practices provided an important impetus for social interaction and competition between groups (Ensor 2013). The appearance of stone-lined plazas, or *bateys*, in this period likely reflects the need for new mechanisms to maintain social cohesion and structure relations between the developing unilineal descent groups. These ritual spaces consolidated and reinforced the local kinship identities and created possibilities for the social negotiation of power and prestige between different communities laying the foundations for further changes in the socio-political organisation after AD 1200 (Torres 2012, 2013).

The practice of cranial modification, which first appeared in the Early Ceramic Age, continues during this period. Fronto-occipital modification and frontal flattening are found in skeletal assemblages associated with Ostionoid. The correlation has been reported extensively, with much evidence coming from Puerto Rico including the assemblages from Luquillo Beach (Roe et al. 1990), Maisabel (Weston and Schats 2010), Paso del Indio (Crespo Torres 2000), PO-29 (Espenshade et al. 2014), Tibes (Crespo Torres 2010), and Yauco (Drew 2003). Crespo Torres (2000) views the cranial modification among these communities as an extension of the Early Ceramic Age practices. This is evident outside Puerto Rico as well, as can be seen in the skeletal material from the Calabash Boom site in the US Virgin Islands. Fronto-occipital cranial modification was found in several individuals dating to the transition from Saladoid to Ostionoid ceramics (Caesar et al. 1991). Crespo Torres (2000) also argues the altered head shape is likely used to emphasise social status differentiation within these communities.

Head shaping practices in communities with Ostionoid ceramics have also been reported for the Dominican Republic. Frontal flattening was reported in crania recovered from Cueva Andres (Morbán Laucer 1979), and a single case of fronto-occipital modification was recovered in a child's skull from the Maria Sosa cave (Luna Calderón 1982). The most interesting case was presented by Luna Calderón (1985), who notes differences between head shapes in the earlier part of the skeletal assemblage from El Soco associated with Ostionoid ceramics and the later phase with Chicoid ceramics. His report details that earlier Ostionoid head shapes were created through wrapping with bandages, whereas the later Chicoid shapes correspond to the fronto-occipital modification using boards reported throughout the region.

Humans carrying Ostionoid pottery spread towards the west into Eastern Cuba and towards the east into the Virgin Islands. Migration into previously uninhabited regions also takes place during this time evidenced by Ostionoid pottery on Jamaica and in the Bahamian archipelago. Cranial modification was found in skeletal material

from Preacher's Cave in the Bahamas (Carr et al. 2007; Schaffer et al. 2012), suggesting head shaping was among a suite of cultural practices brought along by the settlers of the archipelago.

Around AD 700, Meillacoid pottery, a separate ceramic tradition resulting from interaction between the Saladoid and Casimiroid in northern Hispaniola, replaced the Ostionoid style on eastern Cuba and Jamaica and spread to the Southern Bahamas and Turks and Caicos (Boomert 2014; Rouse 1992). Cranial modification has also been reported in communities using Meillacoid ceramics. Fronto-occipital modification was found in burials from the Diale 1 site on the northern coast of Haiti (Rainey and Rouse 1941). The practice has also been reported in numerous Jamaican skeletal assemblages (f.e. Duerden 1897; MacCormack 1898; Santos et al. 2002). However, most have been recovered from cave settings complicating the exact dating and cultural affiliation of remains. In other words, though all cranial modification on Jamaica dates to the Ceramic Age as the island was uninhabited before that period, it is difficult to attribute these skeletal remains with certainty to the Ostionoid or Meillacoid communities. The only case which can be linked with some degree of certainty to the later Meillacoid phase is the skeletal material from the Belle Air Cave, with evidence of fronto-occipital parallel modification (Allsworth-Jones et al. 2011).

The Lesser Antilles show similar trends at the beginning of the Late Ceramic Age, including growing regionalisation in material culture and changes in social organisation. By AD 600 to 800, pottery of the Troumassoid style appears and a division develops between the Northern and Southern islands with ceramics from the Leewards showing more evidence of Saladoid traits than those styles favoured in the Windwards (Hofman 2013; Petersen et al. 2004). Population growth and changes in social structure are evidenced by the appearance of more but smaller settlements on the islands and a decrease in household size akin to the trends seen on the Greater Antilles. Human burials are associated with domestic structures and the variety in mortuary practices shows internal differentiation within the group. These trends point towards the growing importance of local communities and kinship groups based on lineage and descent. These communities were organised in an egalitarian manner – i.e. showing internal differentiation and variation in social status that is not institutionalised – with fluctuating leadership (Boomert 2001, 2014; Drewett 2004; Hofman and Hoogland 2004; Siegel 1996).

Intentional cranial modification has been found on several of the Lesser Antillean islands in these opening centuries of the Late Ceramic Age. Head shaping has been reported in the skeletal material recovered from Morel (Clerc 1968) and Anse à la Gourde (Delpuech et al. 1997; Hofman et al. 2001) on Guadeloupe, Bloody Point (Farr 1993, 1996) on St. Kitts, and Pointe de Caille (Fabrizii-Reuer and Reuer 2005) on St. Lucia.

Kinship, Community, and Caciques

In the latter stages of the Late Ceramic Age new socio-political developments swept the Caribbean coasts and islands. Interaction between the Barrancoid and Arauquinoid communities in the Lake Valencia basin results in the development of the Valencoid ceramic series extending from central Venezuela into the coastal region and islands off the coast. These permanent settlements associated with Valencoid pottery are characterised by mounds, used for habitation and as cemeteries. Human mortuary practices show much variation, including primary interments and secondary urn burials. The socio-political organisation of these communities is debated. Some have argued for chiefdoms with institutionalised social stratification and hereditary leadership (Sanoja Obediente and Vargas Arenas 1987), while others suggest the leadership may have been more fluctuating in nature (Antzcak 1998). These communities were tied into regional exchange networks trading raw materials, goods, and ideas with the coast and interior of north-eastern South America (Kidder 1944; Rouse and Cruxent 1963; Antzcak 1998).

Elaborate figurines and personal adornment in the shape of beads and pendants are iconic elements of these communities (Kidder 1944; Antczak 2000). The tradition of head shaping, already found in the preceding Barrancoid communities, is continued. The altered head shapes are found in the human skeletal material associated with Valencioid material culture (Bennett 1937; Kidder 1944) as well as in the ceramics themselves (Antczak 2000; Antczak and Antczak 2006; Requena 1946). Some of the human figurines produced by these communities have broad heads and show either flattened planes on the front and back of the head or head gear consisting of broad flat boards with decorations. The latter have been considered to represent the modification apparatus used to create intentional cranial modification (Antczak 2000; Antczak and Antczak 2006; Requena 1946).

Arauquinoid communities had arrived on the coast of the Guianas at the beginning of the Late Ceramic Age, but settlements become more abundant after AD 1000 suggesting a growth of the population. Settlements occur on man-made mounds or natural sandy ridges and agriculture takes place on artificially raised fields. Local differences in ceramic styles develop during this period, but these communities remain linked together in a network of interaction and exchange. These ties also include trade of raw materials and finished artefacts with populations living in the interior, taking advantage of the rivers flowing from the mountains to the coast (Boomert and Kroonenberg 1977; Rostain 2008; Rostain and Versteeg 2004). Head shaping practices appear part of the socio-cultural repertoire of these communities, as evidence has been found at the site of Hertenrits (Tacoma 1963) and Kwatta Tingiholo (Tacoma et al. 1991; Khudabux 1991; Khudabux et al. 1991).

The increased focus on local communities and restructuration of kinship emphasizing lineage and descent in the Late Ceramic Age created a dynamic social arena where power and prestige could be acquired, negotiated, and maintained. From AD 1000 to 1200 onwards, these processes led to the establishment of chiefdoms in the Greater Antilles. Known in the Caribbean as *cacicazgos*, these polities consist of multiple communities under hereditary leadership of a chief with institutionalised social stratification. Ancestor veneration, reinforcing the importance of kinship, and shamanism were central in the world view of these peoples. Ceremonial centres with monumental architecture are present in the archaeological record as well as smaller settlements with houses suited for nuclear families (Boomert 2014; Curet and Oliver 1998; Siegel 2004; Torres 2012; Wilson 2007).

The population of the Greater Antilles increased in this period, supported by the intensification of agricultural practices. Local developments in ceramic technology in Puerto Rico and Eastern Hispaniola around AD 1200 resulted in the Chicoid pottery. These ceramics spread west to eastern Cuba and as far east as the Leewards Islands where they are found together with local Troumassoid pottery (Hofman 1993, 2013). Other elements of material culture found associated with this ceramic style include stone and wooden artefacts, such as stools (*duhos*), idols of various shapes and sizes (*zemis*), stone collars, three-dimensional stone heads (*macorís* heads), and faces (*guaízas*) (Boomert 2014; Curet et al. 2004; Hofman et al. 2008; Rouse 1992; Oliver 2009; Wilson 2007). It is worth reiterating here that this brief sketch of general trends and developments across the Greater Antilles overemphasises shared traits and obscures the heterogeneity seen in the archaeological record. Individuals and local communities possess social agency that is exerted against the backdrop of shared regional social and ideological notions.

Head shaping practices remain in use throughout the latter stages of the Late Ceramic Age among Greater Antillean communities. Altered head shape were found at El Soco (Luna Calderón 1985), El Atajadizo (Luna Calderón 1976), Juan Dolio (Drusini et al. 1987), La Caleta (Herrera Fritot and Youmans 1946), and La Cucama (Luna Calderón 1986) in the Dominican Republic, which has yielded a particular rich osteological record for this period. Several sites on Cuba (Harrington 1921; Rivero de la Calle 1960) show head shaping was practiced on the island in the Late Ceramic Age. The practice has also been reported for a multitude of Jamaican sites (Allsworth-Jones 2008; Duerden 1897; Santos et al. 2002), but many of these individuals cannot be given a more accurate date than Late Ceramic Age due to issues in dating caused by the palimpsests inherent to their deposition in caves.

Some scholars move beyond mere descriptions of altered crania and progress towards social interpretations of the practice. An early example was the hypothesis by Herrera Fritot that the altered head shapes he observed at La Caleta mimic the cranial shape of a turtle, chosen due to its role as a totemic ancestor (Herrera Fritot and Youmans 1946). Herrera Fritot fails to explain the origin of this theory nor is any supporting evidence provided, making this difficult to credit. Other early insights include the relation between head shaping and aesthetic considerations voiced by Rivero de la Calle (1960) and Pina Peña (1972). Relating head shaping practices to the intricate social developments of the Late Ceramic Age, Crespo Torres (2000) has proposed the practice transformed from indicating internal status differentiation in the Early Ceramic Age into a communal marker of group identity in the Late Ceramic Age on Puerto Rico.

The Huecoid pendants have already demonstrated that altered head shapes in the circum-Caribbean archaeological record are not restricted to the human crania of its inhabitants, but can also be recognised in various elements of the material culture repertoire. Early versions of stone heads, sometimes referred to by the term *macorís*, were found in the Saladoid and Huecoid assemblages (Oliver 2009). These early prototypes are rare, but the three-dimensional sculptures of predominantly anthropomorphic heads with skeletal features are found more often in the Late Ceramic Age assemblages of the Caribbean. They are considered material proxies for the human head, potentially related to notions of kinship, lineage and ancestors. Some of these *macorís* heads show evidence of cranial modification in the form of frontal flattening clearly visible in the lateral aspect (Crespo Torres 2000; Fewkes 1907; Oliver 2009). The flattening of the forehead has also been recognised in *adornos*, decorative heads on the rims of ceramics, in the Bahamian archipelago (De Booy 1912). Depictions of human faces are common in Caribbean iconography and are found throughout the material cultural repertoire of the Ceramic Age (Mol 2007, 2014).

The northern and southern Lesser Antilles show divergent developments in the latter part of the Late Ceramic Age. The Virgin and Leeward Islands become part of the Greater Antillean interaction sphere. Chicoid ceramics and other elements associated with the material culture assemblage from the Greater Antilles, such as *duhos*, *zemís*, and shamanistic paraphernalia, suggest the exchange of goods and ideas (Crock 2000; Hofman 1993; Hofman and Hoogland 2011; Hoogland and Hofman 1999). Human burials in domestic contexts and evidence of the manipulation of bodies after death point towards the continued importance of lineage in social organisation. There is no evidence for institutionalised social stratification of hereditary leadership in these communities, suggesting leadership and social status remain fluctuating and flexible (Boomert 2014; Hofman 2013; Hofman and Hoogland 2004, 2011; Hoogland and Hofman 2013; Petersen et al. 2004).

After AD 1200, a clear demographic shift is present here as population levels decrease. Few settlements are known from this period in the Leeward Islands and an increased inter-settlement distance and preference for defendable locations is clear in those that have been found (Boomert 2014, Hofman and Hoogland 2004, Petersen et al. 2004, Waal 2006). Human skeletal material from this period of Lesser Antillean history is sparse so far, though cranial modification has been reported in the population of the Taíno outpost Kelbey's Ridge 2 on Saba (Hoogland and Hofman 1999; Weston 2010).

Different developments are taking place simultaneously in settlements with Suazoid ceramics in the Windward islands. Altered head shapes were encountered in the skeletal material from the site of Hillcrest on Barbados dating to this period (Drewett 1991). From AD 1250 onwards, settlements with Cayo ceramics appear in these southern islands. This tradition appears to be related to the Koriabo pottery spreading along the Guiana coast at the same time but also shows traits of the Chicoid style from the Greater Antilles suggesting ties with both interaction spheres. This Cayo pottery persisted into colonial times and is associated with the Island Carib societies described in historical sources (Boomert 2011, 2014; Bright 2011; Hofman 2013; Hofman and Hoogland 2004, 2012; Hofman et al. 2014; Petersen et al. 2004).

4.4 CARIBBEAN ENCOUNTERS

The social history of the Caribbean sketched above has principally relied on interpretations of archaeological remains, such as ceramics and skulls, to tell the story of head shaping practices in their social setting. The lack of a written record from the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean means a first person perspective on their own cultural practices is missing. The only descriptions of living individuals with altered head shapes can be found in the historic sources written by outsiders after AD 1492. However, these sources can provide a wealth of information on head shaping and other aspects of indigenous appearance, early socialisation processes, and general aspects of indigenous life after critical assessment for biases and misunderstandings.

The presentation of the information in this section follows a dichotomy found in the original sources between the 'Arawak' and the 'Carib' which demonstrates the issues surrounding historic documents. This division between the peaceful Arawakan speaking Taíno of the Greater Antilles and the ferocious (even cannibalistic) Island Carib of the Lesser Antilles originates from interpretations made by Colombus during his early voyages and continued to be uncritically applied in later sources (Hofman et al. 2008; Hofman and Hoogland 2012; Hulme and Whitehead 1992; Whitehead 1995). Modern studies have questioned these old stereotypes, not in the least because linguistic

analysis shows Island Carib is affiliated with the Arawakan language (Hulme and Whitehead 1992; Paquette and Engerman 1996). The structure has only been used here as a convenient way of grouping information as detangling them now is very challenging and beyond the scope of this work. This is not in any way an implicit suggestion that these are legitimate cultural or ethnic identities.

The vastly different historic trajectories of the two regions after 1492 support the use of this division to structure the following section. The Greater Antilles became part of the Spanish empire from the very start resulting in vast social changes from the beginning of the 16th century, whereas the Lesser Antilles were mostly ignored in favour of the promise of the South American mainland. Only after the other European nations started expending their colonisation efforts of the islands from the early 17th century onwards, did culture contact truly begin impacting the indigenous inhabitants in the Lesser Antilles (Hulme and Whitehead 1992; Kiple and Ornelas 1996; Paquette and Engerman 1996).

Remarks on cranial modification disappear from written documents on the insular Caribbean after the 18th century, but the practice continues to be recognised and described on the South American mainland until the 20th century. Information on head shaping among indigenous populations of the tropical lowlands of South America has been reproduced here using accounts of travellers and modern ethnographic studies.

Altered head shapes are formed and function during life and therefore constitute much more than the bare skull seen by archaeologists today. All aspects of appearance, in particular hair styles or head gear, can frame and influence the way the head shape of social actors looks. This facet is very difficult to reconstruct through archaeology alone, in particular in the tropical Caribbean where organic materials suffer from poor preservation, and an excellent example of ways in which historic documents can supplement archaeological investigations. A similar argument can be made for the manner in which cranial modification is embedded in an array of child care practices. Like elements of personal appearance, these leave little or none direct archaeological evidence, but can be carefully reconstructed from the information provided in historic sources and ethnographic accounts. In both cases, the metaphoric ice is perhaps even thinner than in reproducing information on head shaping, as what is recorded by an eighteenth-century French traveller in the Lesser Antilles is unlikely to directly apply to the people migrating into the Caribbean archipelago from the mainland two thousand years earlier. Still, any information gained from these sources may help build a highly hypothetical understanding of the social integration of head shaping and this is considered well worth the risk.

Taíno of the Greater Antilles

The arrival of Columbus in 1492 marks the start of a transformative period for the indigenous communities of the Caribbean. The Greater Antilles became the focal point of the early Spanish colonial strategy and bore the brunt of the destructive consequences of intercultural interaction in the early colonial period. Though the complete demise of the people referred to as Arawak or Taíno a mere five decades after initial contact is erroneous, the demographic collapse brought about by slavery and disease was catastrophic. Yet despite this and the rapid social changes, early colonial sources have documented the languages and lifestyles of these communities.

The late fifteenth and early sixteenth-century chronicles of the Greater Antilles describe large villages of predominantly circular high-pitched houses. On Hispaniola, these communities were organised in five *cacicazgos*, polities ruled by a paramount chief known as *cacique*. Social stratification is described as a three-tiered system led by the *cacique*, followed by the *nitainos* interpreted by the Spanish as nobles who included the *behique* or shaman, and the *naborias* considered labourers or non-elites (Curet 2003; Deagan 2004; Keegan 2013; Oliver 2009; Wilson 2007). This social organisation was based upon exogamous matrilineal kinship principles, allowing for competition and negotiation of power between lineages (Ensor 2013, Keegan and Maclachlan 1989). Large ball courts and ceremonial plazas formed the stage for the brokering of social power (Ensor 2013; Torres 2013).

These historic sources also provide the first evidence of the languages spoken by the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. Three different languages and several dialects were spoken in the Greater Antilles. Taíno belongs to the Arawakan language family and can be divided into two dialects: Classic and Ciboney Taíno. The first was spoken in Eastern Cuba, most of the Dominican Republic, the Turks and Caicos, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Ciboney can be found in western Cuba, Haiti, the Bahamas, and likely Jamaica. Classic Taíno served as the trade language or lingua franca of the Greater Antilles. Two dialects of Macorís, probably with some affiliations to the Waroid language family, were spoken in the north of the Dominican Republic. Finally, Ciguayo is found on the Samaná peninsula in north-eastern Hispaniola and tentatively linked to the Tolan language family (Granberry 2013; Granberry and Vescelius 2004; Hofman and Carlin 2010).

There are several issues that must be addressed when constructing such a general view of Taíno society based on historic sources. Even if purposeful distortion of native customs for political gain are disregarded as a source for bias in the historic descriptions, medieval Spanish authors will still have viewed indigenous societies through their

own cultural frame of reference. Their understanding of a three-tiered system of social organisation of Hispaniola, for example, may have been informed by and understood through the lens of Spanish medieval society (Curet 2003; Keegan 2013).

The early colonial sources are a patchwork of information created by various writers in different locations, often without proper reference to the exact source of the information. This data was used to create a model of 'the Taíno' under the assumption that the different communities of the Greater Antilles were culturally and socially uniform. This notion was reinforced by several of the early chroniclers referring to a single people sharing a language and culture, even though this is contradicted by their own information. These interpretations led to descriptions of the socio-political organisation on Hispaniola and in particular the paramount polities of the island being uncritically extended to the entire Greater Antilles and even extrapolated to the Late Ceramic Age communities of the region, despite evidence of local variation in socio-political structures. Archaeological and linguistic data show a great deal of social and cultural diversity obscured by the overemphasis on similarities and counter the notion of a singular Taíno ethnic identity (Curet 2003; Granberry and Vescelius 2004; Keegan 2013; Keegan and Hofman 2017; Wilson 2007).

An integrated approach combining a critical view of the data found in the historic documents and archaeological record shows the Late Ceramic Age and early colonial societies of the Greater Antilles were in a constant interplay between uniformity and diversity. General cultural and social similarities are seen throughout the region, suggesting these communities are tied in a social web of continued interaction and exchange. The linguistic evidence of a trade language supports this notion and would have facilitated the social interactions. Simultaneously, local differences in socio-political organisation, language, and material culture assemblages reflect social choices on a smaller scale. Instead of a single Taíno identity, the communities of the Greater Antilles are best understood as a cultural mosaic of differences and similarities on various scales tied into a social network (Curet 2003, Granberry and Vescelius 2004; Hofman et al. 2008; Keegan 2013; Keegan and Hofman 2017; Oliver 2009; Wilson 2007). As some type of shorthand is required to refer to this complicated 'spectrum of Taínoness' (Rodriguez Ramos 2010) whilst demonstrating awareness of the issues, this dissertation will use Taíno all the while acknowledging the underlying heterogeneity.

Despite these cautionary words on historic documents, the limited information on cranial modification and physical appearance will be reproduced here. A concerted effort has been made to provide the temporal and spatial context of these descriptions wherever possible in an attempt to prevent overgeneralisation. The very first historic notes on cranial modification among the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean can be

found in the diary of Christopher Columbus himself. Although the original pages on which he recorded his thoughts have since vanished, his words reach us through the copied phrases and added interpretations of Las Casas. On October the 13th, a mere day after first setting foot ashore in the Bahamas, he wrote of the people he met:

> 'and all of them very wide in the forehead and head, more so than any other race that I have seen so far' (Dunn and Kelley 1991:69).

This could be considered an oblique reference to the broadening of the skull that takes place as a result of fronto-occipital pressure from the modification device. Francisco Thamara (1556:253) also remarks on the wide foreheads of the indigenous inhabitants of Hispaniola, created artificially by pressure on the front and back of the head. Information seems sparse at this point with no mention of any specific information on the execution and duration of head shaping, nor any details on the construction of the modification device.

The initial voyages of Columbus also provide our first clues to the hairstyles of the inhabitants of the Greater Antilles. In his diary of the first voyage he writes of a man from Hispaniola he met on January 13th:

> 'He wore all his hair very long, gathered and tied behind then put in a small net of parrot feathers' (Dunn and Kelley 1991:329).

The broad forehead created by the cranial modification styles of the region and noted by Colombus earlier would be clearly visible in this manner, though any alterations to the occipital would be more difficult to see. Oviedo y Váldes (1851[1535]) depicts several men panning for gold in the early colonial period with a hairstyle similar to that described by Columbus. The image is reproduced in Figure 7 and clearly shows how this hair style would stress the frontal flattening and broadening produced by Caribbean head shaping practices. Another description is found in Dr Chanca's account of an encounter with Amerindians on Hispaniola during the second voyage:

> 'They also shave some parts of their heads, and in other parts of it wear long tufts of matted hair' (Chanca, translated by Fernandez de Ybarra 1907:452).

Rouse repeats this description and adds that during the colonial period this transformed into shoulder length hear tied with a band. On special occasions, the hair was adorned with feathers (Rouse 1948:526). A cap ornamented with coloured stones, gifted to Columbus during his voyages through the region, was supposedly worn into battle by the *cacique* (Fernandez de Ybarra 1907:450).

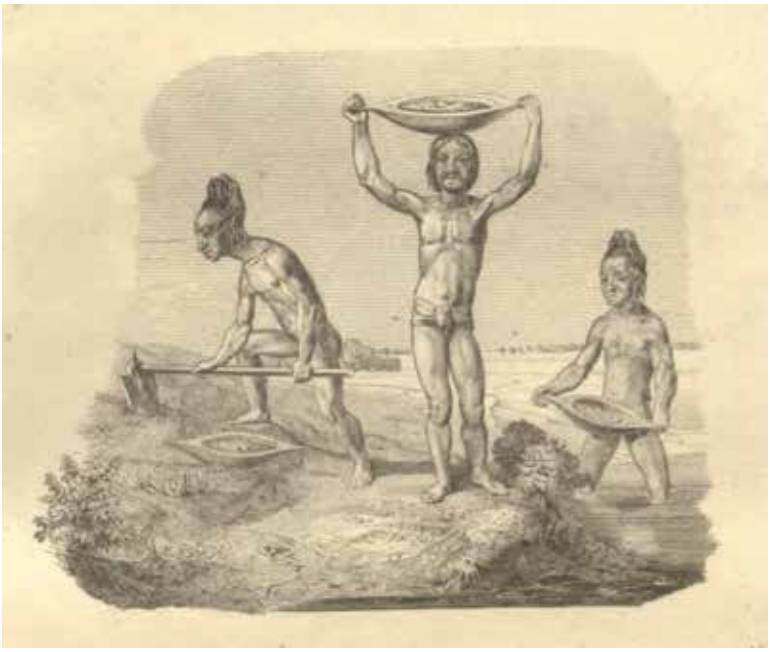

Figure 7 **Depiction of gold panning in the Greater Antilles during the early colonial period showing the gathered hair style (Oviedo y Valdés 1851[1535]:plate 2).**

An iconographic survey of images depicting the indigenous inhabitants of the Greater Antilles in early colonial documents was undertaken to see if this would yield additional information on cranial modification. Unfortunately, most images either contain insufficient detail or are of poor quality hindering the recognition of head shaping practices. An additional problem is the redrawing of images in later publication as is the case for Figure 7. This is a later interpretation of the image originally published in Oviedo y Valdés' manuscript (compare Myers 2007:202 for the original).

Columbus' diaries also mention other intentional changes to the appearance of the human body. He describes the extensive use of body paint, such as this encounter with a male from Hispaniola on January 13th:

> 'He had his face all stained with charcoal, although everywhere they are accustomed to staining themselves with different colors' (Dunn and Kelley 1991:329).

Throughout his writing, Columbus mentions various colours and designs covering the whole or parts of the face and body (Dunn and Kelley 1991:67). Unfortunately, he provides little detail on specific patterns or the meaning behind the different colours and designs. Taken together, these clues paint a picture of the faces of the people who greeted Columbus.

A later account by Charlevoix adds to our knowledge of the practice of intentional cranial modification on Hispaniola. He specifies that the altered head shapes are created by the mothers using their hands or two boards, providing a little more detail on the agent executing the practice and the modification device (Charlevoix 1730:37). He then remarks that the modification must harden the skull, as Spanish swords break while striking these modified crania and that the cranial modification adds to the ferocious appearance of these indigenous groups (Charlevoix 1730:37). None of the changes created by cranial modification would result in a stronger skull capable of shattering a sword, so if anything this is an embellishment by the author or perhaps a reflection of the poor condition of Spanish weaponry. There is no doubt the altered cranial shapes may have appeared more fierce and savage through European eyes, but this should be considered as an interpretation of a cultural practice by outsiders and not, as some have claimed, an indigenous motivation for head shaping.

Edwards (1801) claims there are differences in the cranial shapes created by the inhabitants of the Greater and the Lesser Antilles. He seems to have based most of his work on already published accounts from others, including Oviedo y Valdés and Rochefort. He describes the cranial shape of the Greater Antilles as:

> 'the *sinciput*, or fore-part of the head from the eye-brows to the coronal suture, was depressed, which gave an unnatural thickness and elevation to the *occiput*, or hinder part of the skull' (Edwards 1801:74, italics in original)

Edwards has not cited his specific source for this information nor is the shape he describes markedly different from his later description of Carib modification practices which will be discussed in more detail below.

Guanahatabey

Early historic documents present contentious evidence of another group inhabiting the Greater Antilles, referred to as the Guanahatabey or Ciboney. The latter seems to be an erroneous label resulting from the confusion between these groups and the Taíno dialect spoken in central Cuba and other regions of the Greater Antilles (Granberry and Vescelius 2004; Rouse 1992). Several sources report the presence of these Guanahatabey, described as cave-dwelling hunter gatherers, in the extreme west of Cuba (Keegan 1989; Rodríguez Ramos 2008).

Uncritical acceptation of such reports in turn saw the Guanahatabey represented as a 'relic' population from preceramic times pushed to the fringes by the later Taíno migrations (see for example Rouse 1948). Cuban scholars see a clear division in head shaping practices, with altered cranial shapes reported solely among skeletal material

attributed to Taíno communities on the island (Dacal Moure and Rivero de la Calle 1997; Tabío and Rey 1966; Rivero de la Calle 1960). However, both Lovén (1935) and Keegan (1989, 2007) argue that the etnohistorical reports on the Guanahatabey are predominantly based on hearsay and the entire concept should be approached with caution. Archaeological evidence is inconclusive at this point, with evidence of sites corresponding to these descriptions present in the region yet the temporal dimension of such communities are currently ill understood (Wilson 2007).

Caribs of the Lesser Antilles

Colonial developments in the Lesser Antilles follow a different path. The Spanish focused their efforts on the larger islands of the Caribbean and the South American mainland, leaving the Lesser Antillean communities relatively undisturbed in the early colonial period. It is only during the 17th century that other European powers embark on the colonisation of the region. This does not mean that the Lesser Antillean populations escaped the demographic collapse and social decline brought by European colonisers, merely that the delay allowed for the production of more abundant sources on their languages and lifestyles (Kiple and Ornelas 1996; Paquette and Engerman 1996).

The linguistic situation in the Lesser Antilles is equally complex. The Classic Taíno dialect is spoken in the Virgin Islands. This corresponds roughly to the extent of the pre-Columbian exchange network in the region, which would have been greatly facilitated by a communal language. Another Arawaken language, Eyeri or Kaliphuna is found in the Windward Islands and Guadeloupe and has been associated with the Island Carib (Granberry 2013; Granberry and Vescelius 2004; Taylor and Hoff 1980).

Villages consisted of several smaller huts inhabited by nuclear families all related through kinship bonds surrounding a central larger house known as a *taboui* (Hofman et al. 2014). The Island Carib societies were essentially egalitarian, with fluctuating leadership by chiefs of captains depending on the circumstances. There was a division in tasks, with women producing and cooking food and men tasked with trade (Cooper 1997). Communities gather during feasts, which act as essential stages for social interaction and negotiation (Allaire 2013; Verrand 2001). However, the arguments against a single Taíno identity also hold true for the Island Carib, where historic sources have similarly created a veil of homogeneity that masks underlying cultural and social plurality (Davis and Goodwin 1990; Hulme and Whitehead 1992; Lenik 2012).

Cranial modification is also mentioned in the descriptions of the Carib populations of the Lesser Antilles. Du Tertre (1654) and the Anonymous of Carpentras (Moreau

1990) speak of females flattening the forehead and nose of the newborn children, without providing much additional detail on the practice. Similarly, Oviedo y Valdés (1851:68) mentions wide foreheads created by pressure on the front and back of the skull after birth while Labat (1742:72) adds to our knowledge on the modification device by describing a small board pressed to the frontal of the newborn's head. De La Borde also speaks of flattening of the forehead and nose undertaken with an aesthetic motivation. Mothers pressure these areas from birth until the age of weaning (De La Borde 1674:29).

Breton adds some interesting details in his description of frontal flattening among the Carib of Dominica. He does not describe a modification device, but clearly states the modification is executed by a female and the resulting cranial shape is considered beautiful. Breton implies that the practice was not undertaken if the infant was ill when the skull was still malleable (Breton 1999 [1665]:49). He adds that mothers will continue the process by holding the child on their lap every day for the next two years of life and compression the skull with their hands in order to ensure the cranial shape remains altered. Breton also mentions a bulging of the eyes, likely a side effect of the frontal pressure (Breton 1999 [1665]:75).

Head shaping is also mentioned in the description of the St. Vincent Caribs in the works of Charles de Rochefort and John Davies. These works have an interesting history as Davies' The History of the Caribby-Islands (1666) is in fact an English translation of the *Histoire Naturelle et Morale des Iles Antilles de l'Amérique* published by Rochefort in 1658. Interest in the recently discovered New World and the appearance and customs of its indigenous inhabitants was high all over Europe, yet original information was limited. Davies therefore produced a translation of Rocheforts work for the Anglophone community and stayed relatively true to the original, at least where cranial modification is concerned.

Returning to the Carib of St. Vincent, Rochefort remarks on the flatness of the forehead and nose, caused by continual pressure exerted by the mothers starting after birth and continuing until the child is weaned (Rochefort 1667:353; Davies 1666:251). Although Rochefort does not describe the modification device itself, he does mention that the altered skull shape is considered beautiful. In a later section he adds more details on the social motivation, here in the faithful translation by Davies:

> 'As soon as the Children are born, the Mothers make their foreheads flat, and press them so that there is a descent backwards, for besides that that form of the forehead is accounted one of the principal pieces of beauty among them, they affirm, that is facilitates their shooting up to the top of a tree standing at the foot of it, wherein they are extreamely expert as being brought up to it from their child-hood' (Davies 1666:338).[2]

The tie between beauty and cranial modification is common in historic sources on the practice from around the world, but the explanation that the flattened forehead would facilitate shooting arrows is rather original. This assertion is not repeated in any of the other chronicles on the Caribbean that discuss the matter and is difficult to judge. In the words of Dingwall discussing this assertion using Davies as a source: 'As regards the latter explanation we have nothing to say except that it is very improbable and that little value can be attached to it' (Dingwall 1931:159).

Another example of the issues which may arise when authors copy and interpret data by others is the report of Edwards (1801) on cranial modification practices among the Carib of St. Vincent. Basing himself on the previously cited sources of Oviedo y Valdés and Rochefort, he describes how two boards were tied to the front and back of the infant skull to create an altered head shape (Edwards 1801:54). I have not been able to find any mention of boards in Rochefort (1667) or Oviedo y Valdés (1851). Both discuss pressure is placed on the skull but neither specifies the exact manner or materials used. This is not to say Edwards is necessarily incorrect, but shows the complications than can arise when authors copy and interpret other sources.

The most detailed description of the execution of cranial modification in the region comes from Leblond (1813), who travelled in the Lesser Antilles in the last decades of the 18th century. At this time, European expansion into the Lesser Antillean islands was in full swing and major social changes had occurred, in particular on the island of St. Vincent where two distinct groups had formed referred to in the historic documents as the Red or Yellow and Black Carib. Despite the extraordinary level of detail in Leblond's account of modification, it is unclear whether these events took place in a Red or Black Carib village. Leblond's evidence is presented here and a more detailed look at the Black Carib will follow in the next section.

2 Rochefort's original description states: 'Dés que les enfants font nez, les Meres leur applatissent le front, & le present en telle frote, qu'il panche un peu en arriere, car outré que cette forme est l'un des principaus traits de la beauté qui est estimée parmy eus, ils dissent qu'elle sert pur pouvoir mieus décocher leurs fléches au dessus d'un arbre, en se tenant au pied, à quoy ils sont extremement adroits, y êtans façonnez dés leur jeunesse.' (Rochefort 1667:610).

Upon arrival, Leblond was shown a newly born infant with a modification device in place. The device consisted of two light but firm boards tied together with cords made from *Mahot*.[3] Pads of cotton were used to ensure the device did not injure the infant. An opening in the back board ensured the occipital bone was not compressed (Leblond 1813:198). Leblond does not specify the size of the hole, but it is likely he means the occipital protuberance and not the entire occipital.

The device is worn for nine days on end, after which it is temporarily removed and replaced until the head has acquired the desired shape. Many children aged three to four months were still wearing the modification device, suggesting the process will have lasted some time. Leblond also noticed a side effect of the process: a bulging appearance of the eyes created by the pressure exerted on the frontal bone (Leblond 1813:198).

Leblond offers little in terms of social motivation for the practice. The wording of his account shows a distinctly negative attitude towards head shaping, in particular his reference to the infant as 'the little unfortunate one' (Leblond 1813:198).[4] Still, his account of the practice itself is factual and does not seem to be unduly influenced by his views on the matter.

In addition to these descriptions of head shaping practices, illustrations accompanying these colonial documents as well as paintings of the indigenous peoples of the Lesser Antilles were investigated for additional clues to intentional cranial modification. Unfortunately, these lacked the detail necessary to reveal alterations in head shape.

Besides the insights into the process of modification provided by the descriptions in colonial sources, these writers also discussed the overall appearance of the inhabitants of the Lesser Antilles. De La Borde describes the hair style of the early colonial Carib communities as cut in a fringe across the forehead with the rest of the hair worn long. Two small locks are left on each side of the head and the rest of the hair is pulled back using cotton cords adorned with small ornaments such as shells or thimbles. The hair is then wrapped and adorned with feathers (De La Borde 1674:29-30). A somewhat similar account is provided by Rochefort, who describes long straight hair tied at the back of the head. Rochefort notes a difference between males and females, stating females wear a centre part, whereas men cut the front locks in a fringe (Rochefort 1667; Davies 1666). Breton describes head bands and caps decorated with coloured feathers worn atop the head (Breton 1978:60).

3 *Mahot* is an Arawak word used for the Sterculia caribaea. The inner bark of these trees was used to create straps.

4 'le petit malheureux' (Leblond 1813:198).

The historic documents and ethnographic accounts also discuss the use of temporary body painting and more permanent tattoos. The Carib of the Lesser Antilles use *roucou* – a type of red dye – all over the body. De la Borde (1674:30,32) describes a painted design on the forehead resembling a head band coming down into a point above the nose. Such markings would draw attention to the forehead and may serve to emphasise the alterations created by head shaping. Dr. Chanca describes Amerindians encountered in the Lesser Antilles during the second voyage:

> 'The difference between these Caribbees and the other Indians, with respect to dress, consists in wearing their hair very long, while the others have it clipt irregularly; also because they engrave on their heads innumerable cross-like marks and different devices, each according to his fancy; and they make these lasting marks with sharpened bamboo sticks' (Chanca, translated by Fernandez de Ybarra 1907:443).

The implied permanence of the symbols seems to indicate that this is a description of tattoos and not marks created through body paint.

In addition to these various aspects of physical appearance, social practices related to the birth and early socialisation of an infant are recounted. Du Tertre describes a key event in the Carib process of becoming human. Six weeks to two months after birth, a family friend is invited by the father to name the child. The ears, lower lip, and septum of the infant are pierced, unless the infant is perceived as too weak to endure this pain. In that case, the procedure is postponed until about a year in age (DuTerte 1654).

Rochefort (1667:611) gives a rather similar account with minor variations. He remarks that the naming of the children takes place twelve to fifteen days after birth, so somewhat sooner than indicated by DuTertre. De La Borde confirms the relation between the piercing and naming of the child and indicates this is done in the first month of life (De La Borde 1674:30). Regardless of the exact timing of these events, it is clear that naming and piercing represent important steps towards becoming a social person for the Carib newborn. The process of cranial modification would still be ongoing at this time and can be considered a part of the early socialisation processes of the Carib.

Black Carib

By the end of the seventeenth century, the island of St. Vincent was inhabited by two distinct communities: the Red and Black Carib. The addition of Red – or occasionally

Yellow – to the Carib name was introduced in the written documents to distinguish the Amerindian groups discussed in the previous section from the Black Carib. The origin of this community of African descendants is both intriguing and enigmatic. Several sources claim a European vessel carrying slaves from Africa to the West Indies shipwrecked near the island of St. Vincent during a storm. Survivors who made it to the shores of St. Vincent or neighbouring Bequia were the alleged start of the Black Carib community. Although the details of this story – the year of the event, the amount and nationality of ships, and the location of the wreck – vary considerably between different writers, the consistent reference to a shipwreck in most early sources lend this theory credence (Kerns 1977, 1983; C. Taylor 2012; D. Taylor 1951).

However, it is likely that Africans were already present on St. Vincent before this shipwreck and the origin of this community is more diverse. Historic documents tell of raids carried out by the Carib of the Lesser Antilles on European colonial settlements which resulted in the capture of European settlers and African slaves. The prevailing sea currents ensured that slaves escaping by boat or raft from the English colony of Barbados washed ashore on the island of St. Vincent. The expanding free African population on the island attracted other runaway slaves (Gullick 1976; Kerns 1977, 1983; D. Taylor 1951; C. Taylor 2012).

There is no reliable information on the reception of the shipwreck survivors and growing number of free Africans by the local Amerindian community. Young ([1795] 1971) describes an almost biblical story where after enslaving the Africans and finding it difficult to control them, the Carib prepared to kill all male infants. This resulted in a rebellion that led to the separation of the Red and Black Carib, the former also known as Kalinago. Young's account was not only written a century after the events he describes, but is also an extremely politically motivated work written at a time when the Black Carib were at war with the British Crown. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that the two groups were engaged in intense interaction, certainly in the beginning. The Black Carib adopted the Kalinago language and many of their customs and practices. However, by the end of the seventeenth century the community had split in two clearly distinct groups living in different areas of the island (Kerns 1977, 1983; C. Taylor 2012; D. Taylor 1951).

Among the customs adopted from the indigenous Carib was the practice of cranial modification. Numerous sources report the altered head shapes of the Black Carib, but fewer provide any details. Chanvalon's description of his voyages in the Lesser Antilles around the middle of the eighteenth century includes the assertion that the Black Carib compressed the heads of their children between two boards (Chanvalon 1761:39-40).

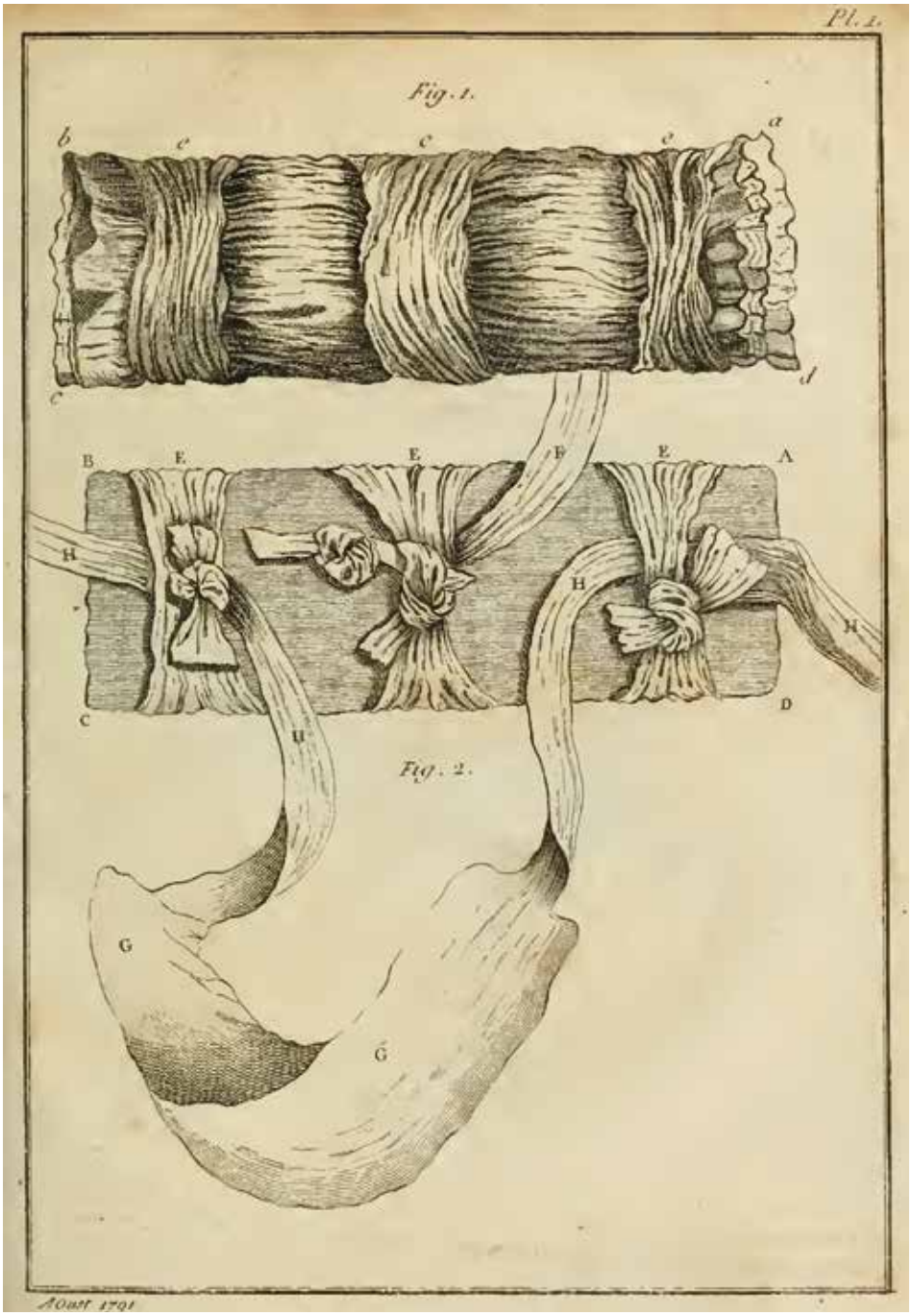

Figure 8 **Black Carib modification device produced for Amic consisting of a single padded board and textile band (Amic 1791:plate 1).**

A slightly more detailed account can be found in Davidson (1787). His description of the modification device is a little different from Chanvalon: he describes a single board wrapped in cotton pressed to the forehead by ties fastened at the back of the head (Davidson 1787:10). He also adds information regarding the execution of the practice, stating that it starts directly after birth and is continued for two to three months. Male infants are subjected to pressure longer than females. Sickly children or twins are exempt from the custom (Davidson 1787:10).

This description of the modification device is confirmed by the account of M. Amic. In a letter from 1791, he speaks of an encounter with a canoe containing nine Black Carib, one Red Carib female, and two Red Carib children. Intrigued by their 'flattened frontals and lopsided occipitals', Amic proceeded to question the Black Carib about their head shape. He was informed a board wrapped in cotton was worn until the altered cranial shape was permanent. Upon further inquiries, the Black Carib recreated a simple version of the modification device for Amic, depicted in Figure 8 (Amic 1791). They informed Amic that the two bands wrapping around the head were important and that the third band tied to the middle of the board was rarely used. Sometime later, Amic encountered a second canoe of Black Carib who confirmed the shape of the modification device, though they found it crudely made (Amic 1791).

The documentary sources also contain information on the social motivations behind the practice. Most cite a single reason for the adoption of the practice from the Red Carib: to avoid being confused for escaped African slaves. Chanvalon (1793:40) poetically refers to the altered head shape, which he has just described as deformed and monstrous, as a sign of their freedom.[5] Davidson (1787:10), Leblond (1813:154), and an anonymous writer in 1773 (cited in Kerns 1983:29), all confirm this notion. Shephard (1831:24) concurs, but simultaneously refers to it as 'a token of their independence'. This may seem a minor difference, but in fact it takes the rather prosaic and functional explanation to a new level by tying it to the developing group identity of the Black Carib. In this light, information provided by Amic is also interesting. When talking about the practice, the Black Carib tell Amic (1791:133) that the modification is 'the character of their nation'.[6] This is an interesting phrase which may point to the practice being considered an important part of their group identity at that stage, having surpassed the mere functional.

Amic's letter also records details that may be considered evidence of the waning of the practice. He noted the normal bulging frontal of one of the Black Carib he encountered and was informed that the young man's mother had refused to submit him to the

5 '(…)la rend difforme & monstrueuse. (…) cette marque distinctive, qui est le signe de leur liberte' (Chanvalon 1793:40).

6 'la caractère de leur nation' (Amic 1791:133).

tradition (Amic 1791:133). Similarly, the second group of Black Caribs tells Amic that head shaping might soon disappear as several families have already stopped practicing the custom (Amic 1791:133). The only other source that points to a decline of the practice towards the end of the eighteenth century is Anderson (in Taylor 2012:104).

Increasing hostility between the Black Carib and the British Crown led to several violent clashes between the parties. The conflict was decided in favour of the British in 1796, who proceeded to deport the entire Black Carib population to the island of Roatan near the Honduran coast. From there, Black Carib communities spread along the nearby Central American coast where descendant communities can still be found today (Gullick 1976; Kerns 1977; Taylor 2012). There may be some doubt as to whether a decline of head shaping was already occurring on St. Vincent, but the practice was in any case abandoned relatively quickly after their deportation. Reports as early as the 1820's already mention its absence (Roberts 1827:275) and modern ethnographic accounts of the Garifuna – as the community prefers to be known - confirm this (Conzemius 1928; D. Taylor 1951).

These Garifuna communities along the Central American coast can also provide insight into practices surrounding birth and infant care. From the moment a women realises her pregnancy, she must refrain from certain foods whereas her partner is expected to restrict his activities to prevent harming the infant. The newborn is in a dangerous position because its *áfurugu* or spirit double can only be passed from the father to child after the umbilical cord falls off. A fire must be present in the house for the first eight days after the birth of an infant. Removal or extinction of the fire would result in the death of the newborn. This critical nine day period is followed by a ritual bath for mother and child (Coelho 1949; Taylor 1951).

Baptism among the Garifuna may take place directly after the critical nine day period, but may also be postponed to several weeks or months after birth. The christening involves two godparents and a small private feast (Kerns 1977; Taylor 1951). Although it is almost impossible to separate the Carib, African, and Christian elements that have all contributed to Garifuna practices, this does seem to echo some of the sixteenth-century Lesser Antillean Carib customs described by Rochefort (1667) and Du Tertre (1654).

The nine day period and presence of fire also create an interesting parallel with the rituals surrounding the death of an adult among the Garifuna (Kerns 1977; Taylor 2012). The death of an infant is mourned by its parents and close kin and the body is buried, but the passing of an infant is not accompanied by the extensive rituals that mark the death and burial of adult individuals (Kerns 1977). This may indicate that young infants are not yet considered fully formed social persons at this stage.

Contemporary Caribbean Communities

The remarks by eighteenth-century travellers on the altered head shapes of both the Island and Black Carib of the Lesser Antilles constitute the last evidence of cranial modification in living individuals from the Caribbean. After the deportation of the Black Carib and the continued European expansion and interest in the region, the practice seems to have ceased at some point as the current descendant communities in the region no longer practice head shaping in the same manner.

This is not to say that the practice has disappeared completely, as remnants of it surfaced in an anthropological study on child care practices by FitzSimmons and colleagues (1998). Interviews with adults of different cultural backgrounds residing in the United States revealed the presence of infant skull moulding in several groups, including women originally from Jamaica. The practice is believed to contribute to the general health and beauty of the infant, with women aiming to create a round skull because 'a broad, flat head is considered stupid' (FitzSimmons et al. 1998:89). This cranial shape was created through massaging of the skull and aided with tight caps, carrying on until the infant was about a year old. Knowledge regarding the practice was passed on between women after the birth of the first infant, with men having little to no knowledge of the custom (FitzSimmons et al. 1998).

Cranial moulding has also been reported among child care practices in an ethnographic study of Haitian community life in the valley of Mirebalais by Herskovits (1964). Moulding is begun soon after birth, but details surrounding the practice vary. Some claim pressure is exerted once a day for the first three days whereas others report every eight days for two months (Herskovits 1964).

An ethnographic study of the Toco community in Trinidad did not report any lingering cranial modification practices, but does give an insight into other child care customs analogous to those described in historic sources. A fire is kept burning in the house for the first nine days after birth. On the ninth day, mother and infant step out of the house and the infant is introduced to the living and dead members of the family. Baptism and naming take place after this event but before the child reaches three months of age (Herskovits and Herskovits 1947).

Apart from this fascinating insight into the transformative potential and longevity of certain social practices, no other evidence of cranial modification or remnants of head shaping practices currently exist in the Caribbean, although such information may simply not be recognised or reported.

Caribbean Mainland

Given that the Americas are often referred to as the heartland of cranial modification (Virchow 1892), it is not surprising that evidence of the practice can also be found in accounts from both continents. This section has restricted itself predominantly to the coastal region of the South American mainland traditionally seen as part of the circum-Caribbean region, as a complete overview of American modification practices is far beyond the scope of this work.

Stedman's narrative of his travels in Suriname between 1772 and 1777 contains encounters with several indigenous peoples, including the following remark on cranial modification:

> 'Most of these people esteeming a flat forehead a mark of beauty, they compress the heads of their children, it is said, immediately after their birth' (Stedman 1813:414).

This rather general reference does not contain information on the method of compression, the resulting cranial shapes, or even the name or location of the Amerindian community practicing head shaping. By the time Everard im Thurn travelled through the Guyana (then British Guiana) in the last decades of the 19th century, the practice of cranial modification was a mere memory among the Carib of the coastal region. Im Thurn does mention a remote group living in the interior near the source of the Essequibo River that still uses boards to create cranial flattening, but is unable to provide any details or even the name of the community (Im Thurn 1967).

Gillin (1948) found occasional references to cranial modification among the coastal Carib, Taruma, and Maopityan communities of Suriname and French Guiana. Gillin is unsure whether these modifications are intentional and mentions a difference in shape: frontal flattening on the coast and fronto-occipital and side-to-side modification in the interior. This side-to-side modification is explained in more detail by Brown (in Roth 1924:412-3) based on his experiences with the Maopityan living along the Upper Essequibo in the interior of Guyana. Brown describes a long, narrow, and high head shape created by the compression of the sides of the skull by two small wooden boards (Roth 1924:412-3). This lateral compression forces cranial growth in a superior direction, creating a high skull. This is likely the unnamed tribe mentioned by Im Thurn (1967). Barrère (1743:239) also reports fronto-occipital modification created by small boards among the Fapouyranas of French Guiana.

Cranial modification can also be found among the communities of eastern Venezuela living between the Gulf of Paria and the Orinoco River. Fronto-occipital modification

was practiced using of two 'cushions made of cotton' to create a flattening of the front and back of the head (Kirchhoff 1948:485). It is possible that these cushions were in fact small boards wrapped completely in cotton, as has been reported in other regions.

The ethnographic accounts of the Carib population in Suriname give some interesting insight into social practices surrounding birth and early child care. Immediately after the birth of the newborn, the father retreats to his hammock and avoids strenuous activities, hunting, and certain foods. The spirit of the little infant comes from the father and enters the body through the open anterior fontanel of the skull. While this remains open, the father and infant are directly connected and any misstep by the father may result in the serious harm or death of the infant through this spiritual link (Roth 1924:695-6).

These notions may be directly tied to the concept of what it means to be human. Among the Carib of the Maroni River in Suriname, an infant is only considered a person after it is 'a few months or even weeks old' (Kloos 1971:147). The difference is clearly marked in the funerary rites, with a baby dying in childbirth or soon after buried without the customary funeral feasts which are apparently solely reserved for social actors. This notion is supported by the fact that the naming of a child takes place an undisclosed time after birth (Kloos 1971).

As is the case with the evidence on cranial modification, care must be taken in the data on physical appearance that can be extrapolated from ethnographic accounts. Information on hairstyles in the tropical lowlands, for example, show much variation and cannot be relied upon to provide an accurate picture of prehistoric practices. However, an interesting similarity with the Greater Antilles is observed by Humboldt among the Carib of the Lower Orinoco where the head is shaved save a circular tuft on the crown of the head making the forehead appear elongated (Humboldt in Roth 1924:426).

Ethnographic data from the mainland communities in the Guianas indicates the presence of tall caps, wicker hats, and feather head dresses among several tribes. The elaborate feather crowns seem to be restricted to ceremonial occasions. Little detail is provided on the remainder of the hats besides the notion that the chief's hat was different from the others. Roth also reports on the use of forehead bands or fillets among several mainland groups. Males of the Arawak communities wore a band with cotton tassels across the forehead and the Carib males had a similar cotton fillet. Woven or cotton head bands are also worn by the Makusi, Waiwai and Taruma females (Roth 1924:431-2).

Body paint is also a very common occurrence among the indigenous peoples of the Guianas. A mixture of oil and *annatto* – a red pigment obtained from Bixa orellana – is used on the whole body on a daily basis. Different colours and designs may be added if dictated by the circumstances. The pigments can be applied with the fingers, brushes, or even engraved stamps or rollers (Roth 1924:422-3).

The presence of facial tattoos in Dr. Chanca's account of Columbus's voyages to the Greater Antilles is echoed in ethnographic accounts on the mainland Awarak, Warao and some Carib groups from the beginning of the 20th century. Roth (1924) and Gillin (1948) provide a number of examples among these groups and indicate the tattooing 'took place soon after birth or in early childhood, the parts usually chosen being in proximity to the mouth and over the eyebrows' (Roth 1924:419). The potential link between facial tattoos and early socialisation practices is intriguing, but unfortunately too little is known regarding Caribbean practices to make any clear connections.

Piercing of the skin and decoration of these perforations with various artefacts or natural materials can also be found among the Carib speakers of the Guianas. Lower lip perforation was common among males and females and pins, bones, or thorns were worn in the opening (Roth 1924:414). The Arawakan speaking Wapishana also practiced piercing and bone or shell bells were worn (Roth 1924:414). Feathers worn through perforations of the cheeks also occur, if much more infrequently, in Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana (Roth 1924; Stedman 1813). Piercing of the nasal septum is relatively common and can be decorated with hanging ornaments or wooden sticks (Roth 1924).

The Case of the Shipibo

Outside of the tropical lowlands of direct interest to this investigation, cranial modification is mentioned often for communities living along the rivers draining the eastern side of the Andean mountain chain. This particular case study has been selected based on the level of detail available on early child care practices, including head shaping, and the interesting and well described effects of cultural contact on the practice.

The Shipibo live along the banks of the Ucayali River in central Peru and have long been the focus of ethnographic research. Karsten provides several interesting details on the practices surrounding the birth of an infant he observed during his stay in 1952. The baby is bathed after the delivery and its face, body, and hair painted with genipa. This dark body paint is one of several protective measures, including a restricted diet by the mother and a couvade observed by the father (Karsten 1964).

Cranial modification is commenced directly after birth using a so-called *vuitánete*. Karsten describes two boards – one at the front and one at the back of the head –

being tightened by ligatures (Karsten 1964). Others describe a device consisting of a single frontal board secured by a band passing around the head (Farabee 1922). It can be seen in this drawing from Farabee (1922:98) reproduced in Figure 9. This device is very similar to the descriptions and drawings of the Lesser Antillean Carib apparatus by Leblond (1813) and Amic (1791).

Figure 9 **Shipibo mother holding her infant undergoing cranial modification through application of a *vuitánete* (Farabee 1922:98).**

The modification device is kept in place for about three (Karsten 1964) or six months (Farabee 1922). Head shaping is referred to as an ancient custom that results in an aesthetically pleasing shape of the skull. Karsten theorises that this is among a suite of practices meant to ensure the safety of the infant. He considers the fact that the head is considered especially susceptible to evil spirits, perhaps due to the presence of the open fontanelles in the first months after birth. Karsten cites several other adornments which may also assist in this protection, such as hair styles and the piercing of the ear, nasal septum, and lips.

A mere three decades later, fieldwork among the Shipibo of Yarinacocha and Huarayos of Tambopata by Tommaseo and Drusini (1984) documented the decline of cranial modification among these groups. No trace of the custom could be found among the Huarayos, even though earlier studies had mentioned cranial modification was practiced. Despite Karsten's detailed description of Shipibo head shaping in the fifties, by the eighties only several adult Shipibo had altered head shapes that reminded the population of the practice.

Karsten's work already showed the impending signs of the demise of the practice. He wrote that 'many Indian fathers, who were more influenced by modern ideas, were disposed to abandon this old custom, the Indian mothers, on the other hand, were more conservative and most anxious to keep it up' (Karsten 1964:195). Tommaseo and Drusini only observed altered head shapes in five adults males all over the age of 40, suggesting the practice had gone out of use not long after Karsten's observations. Informants would not even discuss the practice with the investigators, as cranial modification was forbidden by the government and 'considered a sign of backwardness' (Tommaseo and Drusini 1984:326). These negative connotations must be linked to the rapid decline of the practice among the indigenous communities.

4.5 BRIDGING BOUNDARIES

This brief social history of Caribbean communities from the first intrepid explorers of its coasts to its present day inhabitants has shown that the region has a rich past characterised by transformations and developments occurring at the social boundaries between groups. Far from isolated island communities, Caribbean peoples thrive on interaction and have been tied into multiscalar networks of exchange from the very start. As a part of early socialisation processes and inherently tied to identity formation and expression, head shaping practices were tied into this dynamic social setting.

Despite the fact that intentional cranial modification was first reported by Columbus and has received scholarly attention ever since, little has been done to explore the social connections and motivations behind head shaping. The work by Crespo Torres (2000, 2005) demonstrates the potential and value of such an approach and it is this void the current study hopes to fill by taking a multiscalar approach to contextualise intentional cranial modification from its meaning for an individual to its entanglement in regional social developments.