From Golden Rock to Historic Gem: a historical archaeological analysis of the maritime cultural landscape of St. Eustatius, Dutch Caribbean

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6

Political Components

Political components include the defense component and the power component. These are concerned with the use of intrigue or strategy in obtaining or retaining any position of power or control. People of all social classes participated in the political component to improve or retain their social and economic positions, including government officials, merchants, planters, and even enslaved people. Political components was heavily influenced by external factors, largely out of control to Statian society. They were adaptable to both internal and external threats, and even though it was constructed to impose a sense of awe, fear, or control, political components were often nothing more than pretense. Several elements contained in political components, such as the expression of wealth, are still present in modern-day Statian society.

6.1 The defense component

Far away from the mother country and surrounded by colonies from different colonial powers, safety was a primary concern for people living in the West Indies. Many wars that originated in Europe were fought in the colonies and the islands often became bargaining chips when peace needed to be established again. To complicate matters further, pirates and privateers were a constant threat to an island's safety and slave revolts posed a significant threat from within as the enslaved constituted the majority of the population on most islands. To combat these problems, works of defense were built to protect the islands and their people. These ranged from small coastal batteries to fortified mountains such as Brimstone Hill Fortress on St. Kitts or even completely enclosed cities such as San Juan, Puerto Rico. Batteries were installations used in the defense of an island against pirates and privateers, while forts and fortified cities could house entire regiments or even populations in the event of an enemy takeover. As land-based structures looking out towards the sea, military installations occupy a central role in the maritime cultural landscape. Their location, size, and type of construction are heavily influenced by the landscape – on land as well as under water – and provide important clues as to the decisions made by people defending their settlement. In turn, these structures determined to a large extent the behaviour of people on the water, particularly the roadstead.

Statia's fortifications are found all over the island (Hartog 1997). By studying the distribution of Statian forts and batteries, one gets the impression that the island was a well-defended stronghold. This was the way colonial administrators wanted the island

to appear to the outside world, as the danger of invading forces and raiding pirates and privateers was ever present. Interestingly though, the island changed hands 22 times among the Dutch, English, and French between 1636 and 1816 (Hartog 1976:23). The island was repeatedly surrendered without any fight. This raises the question of how effective the military installations on Statia actually were in defending the island. Moreover, the fact that late eighteenth-century Statia was one of the busiest ports in the world and its warehouses stored an enormous amount of wealth warrants a thorough look at the island's state of defense. This issue will be explored through an analysis of the various forts and batteries, artillery employed in them, the safety situation in the waters surrounding the island, and by examining the events of 1781, the most turbulent year in Statian history when the island was sacked by the English and captured by the French several months later.

6.1.1 The first fort

The English were the first Europeans to settle on St. Eustatius in 1625, but they moved soon after, probably due to unsuccessful attempts to set up agricultural ventures (Alofs 1997:76). When Pieter Van Corselles and his men took possession of the island for the Dutch in 1636 they found the ruins of a deserted bastion that had been built by the French in 1629. It was on this bastion that they built Fort Oranje. The French temporarily settled on Statia in 1629 because they were afraid the Spanish were going to use the island as a base from which to attack the French settlement on St. Kitts (Hartog

Figure 6.1 Oblique aerial view of Fort Oranje in 2014. The fort was restored in 1979. To the right is the Dutch Reformed church. The Quill is in the background. Photo by Fred van Keulen.

1997:24). Insufficient quantities of drinking water made their stay a short one. Van Corselles wrote to his superiors in Flushing that he built a fort "on a mountain 150 steps high" that he called Fort Oranje. The fort was armed with ship cannon, and its location offered a wide view over the entire bay. A report made by Spanish spies in 1640 mentions that sixteen guns were present in Fort Oranje (Hartog 1997:25).

Originally Fort Oranje was built with four bastions, but in the early eighteenth century the bastion *Kleene Bockepunt*, which was closest to the edge of the cliff, collapsed and fell down due to erosion that had taken place below it (Hartog 1997:29). The bastion was never rebuilt; up to this day the entire cliff side of the fort is enclosed by a low wall. A moat was excavated on the other side of the fort. This moat was a project started by the French in 1689 and completed in the 1730s when the island was again under Dutch rule (Hartog 1997:29). Due to the island's dry climate and the moat's connection to a gut where water flows down the cliff instantly, it is unlikely that it ever contained water. It was, however, completely overgrown with thorny vegetation, making it almost impossible to cross (Hartog 1997:29). The fort contained various buildings, including the commander's residence, barracks for soldiers, a powder house, three cisterns, and a prison. Throughout its lifespan, Fort Oranje and its artillery were plagued by a lack of maintenance and insufficient numbers of soldiers, causing the island to be taken with relative ease time and again. In 1785, a man by the name of Philip O'Reilly compiled a report in which he described the state of fortifications on St. Eustatius. He described Fort Oranje as utterly useless:

> "Fort Oranje is situated in Upper Town at the corner of a hill dividing it from Lower Town. It is of no strength, heavy artillery cannot be used due to the danger of the collapse of the cliff, and the small pieces employed in there [the fort], are not sufficient to be used on ships or to defend the town or ships on the road, because the firing of these guns can cause fires in Lower Town, as has happened before. The embrasures are too narrow, the guns can only shoot straight ahead, the parapets are so high, that during an attack they would do more harm than the enemy's cannon." (NA 1.05.01.02 – 635, folio 432-435)

After St. Eustatius changed hands for the last time in 1816 and warfare in the Caribbean came to an end, Fort Oranje remained in use as a saluting battery until 1925. By 1829 it was very much decayed, and sixteen years later, it was abandoned by the remaining garrison. Fort Oranje remained the seat of government until the 1970s (Hartog 1997:59).

6.1.2 A ring of fortifications

The first record of a fort other than Fort Oranje is found at the end of the seventeenth century. In 1687, Fort Amsterdam or the Waterfort was built. It contained sixteen cannon but was hardly ever used. As a result, it quickly fell into disrepair and was converted into a slave depot in the 1720s (Hartog 1997:130). When Isaac Lamont accepted the post of commander in 1701, he found the island's works of defense in a deplorable state. He asked the *Heren X* of the WIC for building materials and craftsmen to strengthen them, but his needs were never met. French filibusters captured the island in 1709. Out of joy at their easy conquest, they wanted to fire off a cannon,

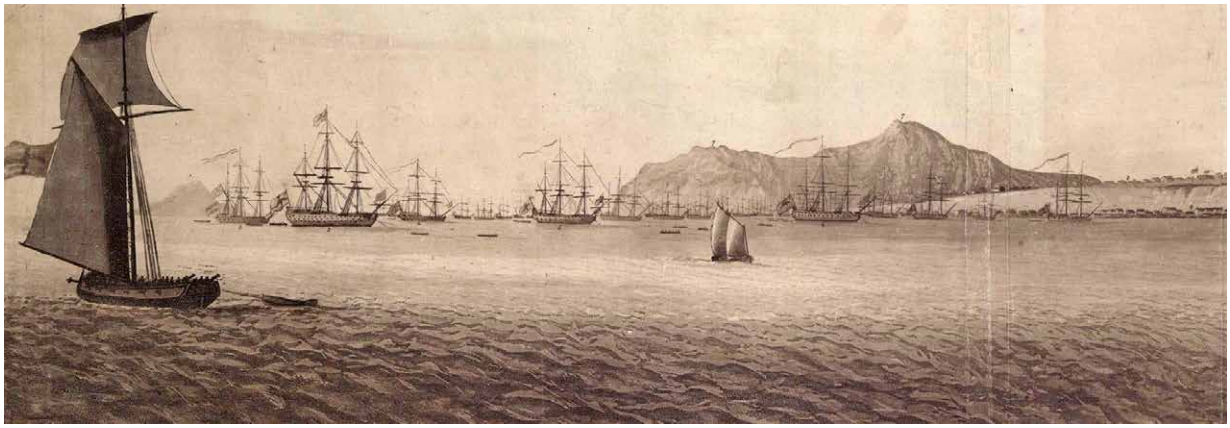


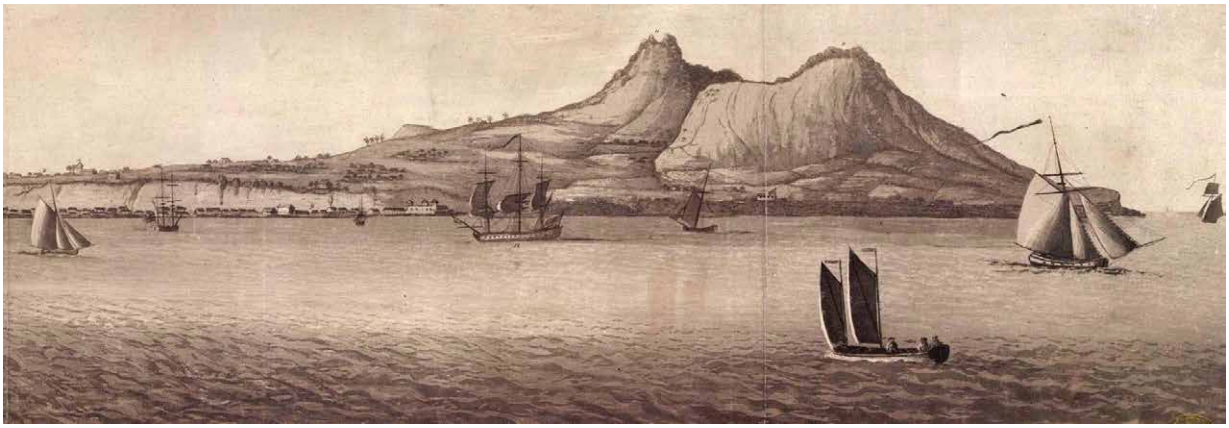
Figure 6.2 "View of St. Eustatia" by Charles Forrest. This drawing was made in April 1781, two months after the British conquered the island. British men-of-war are depicted on the left while smaller vessels used in the inter-island trade are shown in the foreground. Source: British Library, Ktop CXXIII, 76.

but not a single one was fit for use. The French soon took off with a large booty, after which Lamont resumed possession of the island (Attema 1976:23). By this time there were three other batteries in use apart from Fort Oranje: Dolijn, Tommelendijk and a newly constructed fort between Tommelendijk and Oranje (Attema 1976:23). During the command of Isaac Faesch nearly 30 years later, not much seems to have changed, for the forts were still in a poor state. In 1737, taxes were raised to finance their repair and the WIC sent 30,000 bricks for the forts' renovation. Walls were strengthened and the platforms for the cannon were rebuilt, but despite these developments everything remained much as before (Attema 1976:24).

In 1748, during the command of Johannes Heyliger, the citizens voluntarily raised a sum of money for the construction of some new coastal fortifications. Two new forts were built: Hollandia and Zeelandia. The *Heren X* supplied the forts with cannon, but they forgot to send the cannonballs. Fort Oranje was renovated as well, but by 1755 its condition had again deteriorated (Attema 1976:24). It was around this time that the situation seemed to change. Governor Jan De Windt built various batteries along the northern coast of the island: Turtle Bay, Concordia, Corriecorrie, and Lucie. In the south he built a battery named after himself – Battery De Windt. Slightly to the northwest, he built battery Nassau overlooking Kay Bay (Hartog 1976:27). By 1781, fourteen military sites were present on the island but they had all fallen into severe disrepair. The attitude of the WIC was one of the reasons why the fortifications time and time again fell into negligence: everything had to be done as cheaply as possible. This was not exceptional in the Caribbean, since fortifications on the British and French islands fared no better (Hartog 1976:28).

6.1.3 The year 1781

On February 3, 1781 a British fleet appeared on Statia's horizon. The fleet, consisting of 22 ships of the line, five frigates, and a number of smaller vessels was commanded by Admiral George Brydges Rodney and his rear-admiral Sir Samuel Hood. On board



were three regiments of soldiers. Great Britain had just declared war on the Dutch Republic two months earlier (the Fourth Anglo-Dutch War), and Rodney and Hood were ordered to capture the island to put an end to the arms trade between St. Eustatius and the North American rebels (Hartog 1976:84). The capture of St. Eustatius was of paramount importance for the British, as is aptly illustrated by a quote from Lord Stormont in British Parliament in 1778: "If St. Eustatius had sunk into the sea three years before, the United Kingdom would already have dealt with George Washington" (Nielson 2010:IV).

Nothing could have been done to prevent the capture; the Statian garrison numbered 60 men stationed in dilapidated fortifications containing rusty, unserviceable artillery. According to a report compiled three days before the capture, there were 41 cannon present in Fort Oranje, of which only eight were barely serviceable. Nine new cannon and carriages had apparently arrived just before the capture, but these were still waiting to be installed. Even the Dutch man-of-war *Mars*, carrying 36 pieces of artillery and 230 men, was useless against the British fleet (Hartog 1976:85). With hundreds of cannon aimed at the island and thousands of troops ready to disembark, St. Eustatius quickly surrendered without a fight. Rodney took command of the island and treated the Statian population as prisoners of war. He confiscated ships, property, warehouses, and the merchandise stored in them. The Dutch flag was left flying from Fort Oranje for a month in order to seize the cargoes of unsuspecting ships arriving on the island. The Jewish population endured even more hardships than the rest. Ten days after the capture, all Jewish men had to appear at the weighing house where they were searched for money they had on them. Thirty of them were deported to St. Kitts, while the remaining 71 were imprisoned in the weighing house for three days (Hartog 1976:92).

Fort Oranje was renamed Fort George after the British King George III, but nothing was done to improve its dilapidated state. During an exercise with several guns on one morning, part of one of the parapets broke off and fell down the cliff (Hartog 1997:49). To improve the defense of the town and the road a new battery was built on the cliff edge called Battery Vaughan, after General John Vaughan who commanded the invading regiments. Existing works of defense around the island were strengthened by the British, who stationed 650 men on Statia (Hartog 1997:50).

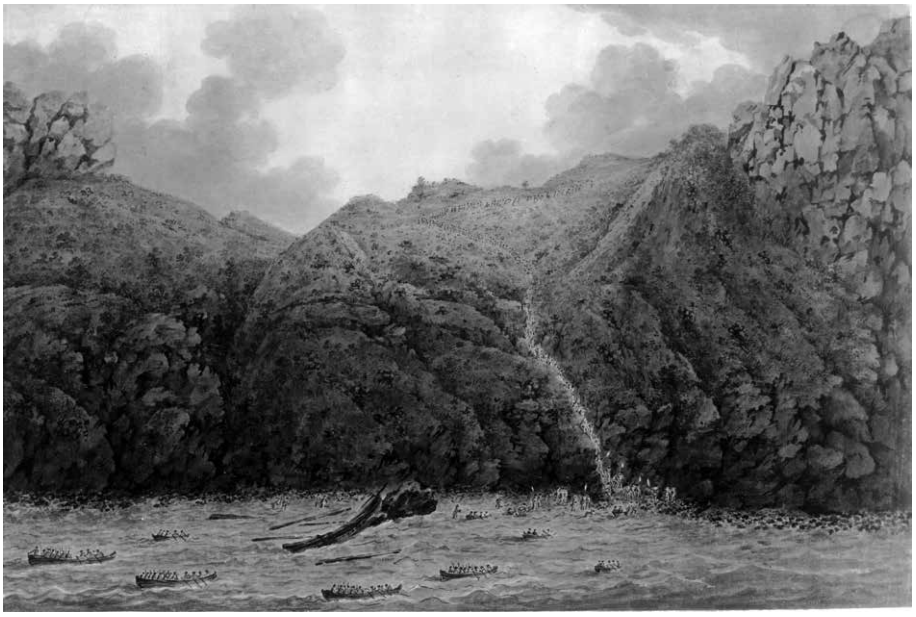


Figure 6.3 The French landing at Jenkins Bay on the night of November 26, 1781. Displayed at Windsor Castle.

The island remained British for a mere nine months, after which the French took control in one of Statia's most comical episodes. On the night of November 26, General de Bouillé together with 400 men landed unnoticed in Jenkins Bay. In the dark of night, they marched through the Northern Hills down to Fort Oranje, where they waited in hiding until British troops exited the fort for a marching exercise. When they did, the French – far outnumbered – fired their guns, thereby dispersing the British troops. The French troops entered the fort, closed the draw bridge, and took command. To complete the British humiliation, the commander of their troops was taken prisoner (Hartog 1997:51). With hardly any resistance encountered, the island became French. The state of the island's military installations was one of the reasons why this happened with relative ease. The nine-gun battery at Tumble Down Dick Bay was manned by only four people, while the battery at the site of the landing was not manned at all. To make matters worse, the signal post on Panga Hill – offering views over the Northern Hills – was only manned during the day. Had people been stationed there at night as well, they would have easily spotted the French troops marching towards town, and with the firing of one shot, could have alerted the garrison in Fort Oranje (Moret 1994:16).

St. Eustatius remained French for nearly two and a half years, during which much was done to improve its state of defense. The neglected fortifications were restored and four new ones were built: Panga, Jussac, Royal, and Bouillé. The French also constructed a network of roads linking the forts and batteries. At the end of 1782, Johannes de Graaff mentioned that the island had been brought "in a formidable state of defense" (Hartog 1976:97). The French recognized the flaws in the Dutch and British defense system on the island, as they had made use of these themselves. Fort Panga and bat-

tery Jussac were constructed on Signal Hill. Connected by a deep trench, these two fortifications were aimed at defending the island once an invading force had already managed to land.

6.1.4 Safety on the roadstead

Given the size of St. Eustatius' road and the enormous value of the anchored ships' cargoes, safety on this vital stretch of water was of utmost importance and played a major role in defining the defense component of the maritime cultural landscape. At the time of Rodney's conquest in 1781, there were five batteries and one fort protecting the road. When the French returned the island to the Dutch three years later, the number had risen to two forts and eight batteries. An important question that needs to be answered is whether these fortifications were able to provide safety to vessels on the road. Failure to do so could have influenced Statia's position in the regional and Atlantic World trade networks. The answer to this question can be found in various eighteenth- and nineteeth-century letters and ship logs.

In 1760, Captain Bylandt, anchored on Statia's road in the Dutch warship *Maarssen*, described a scene whereby the French pirate ship *Catherine* sailed into port with an English prize, taken on the western side of the island within reach of the fort. One of the batteries, the fort, and the *Maarssen* had fired their cannon at the pirate ship, but to no avail. The prize was left on the road after the pirates had taken over 80 enslaved Africans from it (NA 1.01.47.17 – 48, folio 63). Even bolder was a situation described by the captain of the *Jonge Wilhem* in 1746, whereby an English privateer came on the road in the middle of the day and took a French ship (NL-MdbZA_20_649, folio 18). The French immediately abandoned ship by jumping in the water. Everyone on the road and on land saw it happening. One Dutch warship and the island's batteries fired several shots at the privateer, but he managed to get away with the French prize. In another instance, on a night in 1778, English pirates took a North American schooner on the road which went unnoticed by other ships and the fortifications. The Americans on board were dropped off at Saba but returned to Statia a few days later. When the pirate ship returned to Statia a few days after, its captain and crew were detained in Fort Oranje (NA 1.01.46 – 2417, folio 165). Threats did not only come from the sea; a few days after the event in 1746, in the middle of the night, several French and Spaniards swam from the island to a barque on the road and sailed away with it. Several shots were fired from a Dutch warship at anchor, but to no avail (NL-MdbZA_20_649, folio 19).

Interestingly, ships were not only attempted to be taken by force; sometimes a formal request was submitted. A letter sent to Philadelphia from St. Eustatius, dated July 11, 1776 describes such a curious situation. At this time, the frigate *Pomona* sailed from Antigua to Statia, where she lay on the road for several days. Its captain was aware of the fact that the North American brig *Booker*, also on the road, was buying arms and ammunition. As soon as the *Booker* left, the *Pomona* followed, took her, and brought her to St. Kitts. This in itself was not an exceptional situation as shown above. Interestingly, however, while the *Pomona* was waiting in Statia's road, its captain sent a letter to the Statian Governor, requesting permission to take possession of several American vessels that were on the road as well, among which was the *Booker*. The permission was not granted by the Governor and council, but this did not stop the

English captain from carrying out his plan. On this occasion, Governor and council determined that if any English frigates or cruisers came within reach of the guns of any fortification on the island with the intention to obstruct trade, the forts' commanders had orders to fire at them (S5-V1-P01-sp04-D0195).

From the log of the *Princes Royal Frederique Sophie Wilhelmine*, a 50-gun warship anchored on Statia in 1778, it becomes clear that privateering was a common practice in Statia's surrounding waters. Over a four-and-a-half month period, sixteen instances of privateering were described, fourteen of which were stopped by the batteries on the island. Battery Nassau played an important role in this regard by providing much needed protection to ships against pirates and privateers (NA 1.01.46 – 2417, folio 135-169). Built in 1753 by Commander Jan de Windt, battery Nassau is located on top of a steep cliff overlooking Kay Bay and the southwestern coast of the island (Hartog 1997:81). According to De Jong, there were three cannon employed at the battery in 1780. He mentions in his account that when the constable recently fired one of them at an English pirate, the gun exploded and the constable was "split into several pieces" (De Jong 1807:112). Five years later, the battery housed five guns: three 18-pounders and two 12-pounders (Hartog 1997:81). In 1789, there were five 18-pounders present, hinting at the increased importance of this battery as the eighteenth century progressed (NA 1.05.01.02 – 256). Three cannon were left in 1801 (Stelten 2010:61). For such a small battery – the width of its embrasures is approximately 13 meters – it was very well armed. The reason for this can be found in the log of the *Princes Royal Frederique Sophie Wilhelmine*, which shows that battery Nassau was the most important, or at least the most active, fortification in the battle against privateering. In November 1778, a North American vessel was being chased by an English pirate. As they approached, some 50 or 60 shots were fired from battery Nassau at the pirate ship. Of the fifteen other instances of privateering that were described, eleven were stopped by battery Nassau. Privateering happened mostly south of St. Eustatius with the pirates and privateers being almost exclusively English. The *Princes Royal Frederique Sophie Wilhelmine* also fired shots at various pirate ships, indicating that warships at anchor were sometimes an extension of the defense component into the sea (NA 1.01.46 – 2417, folio 135-169). Privateering continued until well into the nineteenth century. In 1828, Thomas Harper wrote that "privateers have certainly been seen hovering off this port [St. Eustatius] every day since my arrival" (Wood 1830:23).

Several ship logs mention prizes being brought to Statia, which were frequently taken close to the island (NA 1.01.47.17 – 48, folio 63-81; NA 1.01.46 – 2417, folio 135-169). One night in 1778, the *Sancta Barbera*, flying a Spanish flag, came on the road. The ship, which had previously been under Dutch command, was captured by a British privateer off Nevis and subsequently sold in St. Kitts to a Spanish captain. The ship still bore its original name *Maria Christina* on the back. Because the captain could only show the papers from a previous ship he had lost he was ordered not to leave the road, presumably awaiting further investigation of the matter. In another instance a few days later, a three-master flying the Dutch flag arrived on the road. This particular ship had previously been a French slaver but was captured by the English. It was then sold on St. Kitts to a Statian merchant by the name of Mr. Jennings (NA 1.01.46 – 2417, folio 150). Statians did not only buy prizes on other islands, they were sometimes sold on St. Eustatius as well. These examples illustrate the complicated situation regarding

ships that frequently changed owner, crew, and flag, and show that Statian merchants were encouraging privateering practices themselves by buying captured ships.

A common practice for ships leaving the road was to sail in convoy in order to protect themselves from attacks by pirates and privateers. In 1760, the *Maarssen* accompanied seven merchantmen back to the Dutch Republic, as their captains were very concerned about the privateering carried out by the English in the region (NA 1.01.47.17 – 48, folio 79). In 1778, an even larger convoy of fifteen North American ships left the road carrying large quantities of rum, sugar, and salt (NA 1.01.46 – 2417, folio 170). Statia's road was not entirely safe despite repeated efforts aimed at improving the island's works of defense. As these examples show, there was always a chance of being attacked no matter where a ship was anchored. It was, however, much safer to be on the road within reach of the island's and anchored warships' guns than it was further offshore where there was a constant threat of being attacked by pirates and privateers.

6.2 The power component

The power component involves the expression of power and wealth. On St. Eustatius, this component comprised plantation residences, mansions, merchant houses, cemeteries, and military installations. It was also found in the possessions of the island's elite. Many people that moved to the island became successful and wealthy merchants. "The riches of St. Eustatius are beyond all comprehension," Admiral George Brydges Rodney wrote to his wife after capturing the island in 1781 (Jameson 1903:700). When he landed, the rent on Lower Town's warehouses totaled £1,200,000, which is the equivalent of £135,400,000 or 167,000,000 US dollars in today's terms.[35] Goods he had auctioned amounted to £3,000,000 and an additional £4,000,000 in bullion was confiscated from the island's residents (Gilmore 2013:49. To put these numbers into perspective, Gilmore calculated that this amount of wealth equaled Great Britain's entire public spending for four months in 1780 (Gilmore 2013:49). This £7,000,000 loot in 1781 is the equivalent of a staggering £789,700,000 or nearly one billion US dollars today.[36] This wealth and the power it generated were found throughout the Statian landscape in various ways, from the smallest artifacts to the largest buildings.

6.2.1 Moveable objects

Perhaps the best example of a merchant's success story is that of Mr. Jenkins. When he arrived on a deserted bay in the north of the island, he had nothing but the canoe that brought him there. He spent his first night on the island sleeping on the beach underneath his canoe. Over the years he became one of Statia's wealthiest merchants, so wealthy that he even had his own coins minted (Hartog 1976:31). One side of the coins contained an image of a canoe on a pebbled beach, emphasizing his rags to riches story. The archaeological record informs us that coins minted by Herman Gossling, another successful Statian merchant, were an even more explicit display of power and wealth. His coins, called "Gosslings," were a glorification of himself and his success. The obverse side of the coins, minted in the denominations of one bit and a half bit,

35 Calculated using the website www.measuringworth.com, based on the real price commodity value in 1781.
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Figure 6.4 Coins minted on St. Eustatius. The top coin was minted by Mr. Jenkins. The obverse side shows a canoe on a pebbled beach which represents his past. The reverse side shown the name of his firm, R.D. Jenkins Co. The bottom coin was minted by Herman Gossling in 1771 as shown on the reverse side. The denomination "1 Bit" is indicated in the center. The obverse side shown an image of a grazing gosling surrounded by the text "GOD BLESS ST. EUSTATIUS & GOVERNOR."

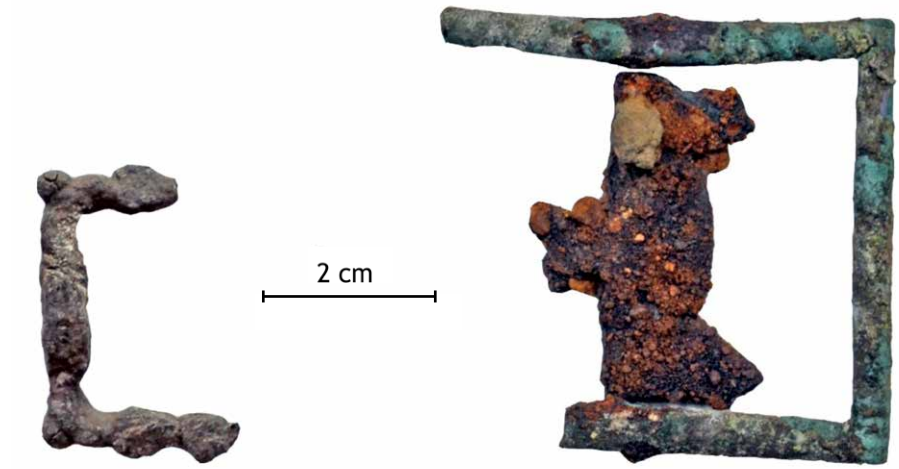

Figure 6.5 Shoe buckles found in the Schotsenhoek slave quarters. The left buckle is composed of a lead alloy, while the right buckle is made of a copper alloy and contains an iron alloy backpiece. Both types date to the period 1720-1800. Photos by the author.

depicted a grazing young goose, or gosling, while the reverse side contained his own name – something that was normally reserved only for kings. At the time of his death in 1827, long after the economic collapse of the Golden Rock, he still owned beautifully furnished houses and properties in Upper and Lower Town, thirteen enslaved people, and a number of farm animals (NA 1.05.13.01 – 209, folio 340-345).

This is but one example of wealth that is represented throughout the historical and archaeological records. Many other artifact categories reflect the prosperity of the island's elite. In 2009, the author studied a collection of 54 shoe buckles recovered from Oranje Bay (Stelten 2009). From the late seventeenth until the end of the eighteenth

century, shoe buckles were regarded as articles of high fashion and were worn by men, women, and children from nearly all social classes. The Statian collection contains many relatively expensive buckles. Almost two-thirds of the shoe buckles were elaborately decorated and/or were made of valuable materials such as silver. Some buckles were even gold-plated. These objects clearly reflect the economic prosperity the island enjoyed but perhaps more importantly, they are a very explicit expression of wealth by the people who wore them on a daily basis. While the documentary record could inform us about the trade in buckles, it is through archaeology that the social context of the buckles is revealed.

The discovery of two shoe buckles at the Schotsenhoek plantation slave quarters indicates that the use of these items was not restricted to the island's free population (Stelten 2015b:298). These findings point to a few things. First, it implies that enslaved laborers were allowed to wear shoes, a privilege not necessarily experienced by enslaved people in other colonies. Second, it shows that enslaved laborers had the economic means to buy shoe buckles and were willing to spend their hard-earned money on them. Given the fact that these items were true symbols of wealth, they must have given enslaved people a feeling of having an elevated economic and even social status. An enslaved person wearing similar buckles as his master and, as was shown in Chapter 4, eating from more or less the same plates, would have felt a bit closer to becoming a free person as his or her material culture mimicked that of a free person. This is a very explicit yet subtle way of exercising power, and interestingly, might have had a greater effect on the one experiencing it than on the one exercising. Through the display of material wealth, the white elites saw their subjects – considered their property – moving higher up the economic ladder and in a way gaining more independence, thereby threatening the elite's relative status in the process. As might be expected, the free black community also used material culture in similar ways. At the free black village excavated by Gilmore, material possessions developed to the point that even hand-painted porcelain was relatively common (Gilmore 2013:52). These examples show the enormous potential of archaeology in studying the lives of enslaved people, by providing information on material culture which cannot be gleaned from the documentary record.

6.2.2 Plantations

The power component is most noticeable in the countryside, where plantation residences once dominated the scene. These so-called "Great Houses" were usually located in prominent locations on the estates. Some Great Houses, such as those at Pleasures and Glass Bottle plantations, were located high up the Quill and dominated the Statian landscape. These could be seen from most places on the island and even by sailors at anchor on the road. Their prominence is reflected in their depiction in many eighteenth-century drawings of the island. Great Houses on plantations in lower parts of the island were often situated on the most elevated areas of the estate. The most notable example of this is Godet plantation, located just north of the town close to the Caribbean coast. Other examples include the great houses at neighboring Benners plantation, Princess Estate, and Fair Play plantation. These large and beautiful residences were very explicit expressions of wealth built in highly visible locations. Their importance was often enhanced by the fact that large parties were held here (see Chapter 5). The

Figure 6.6 Wind mill at Fair Play plantation with the Quill in the background. Part of the mill, including the inscribed keystone, collapsed during hurricane Lenny in 1999. Photo by the author.

Great House at English Quarter plantation was particularly famous for this. Parties at English Quarter even drew people from neighboring St. Kitts, who could all behold the great fortunes that were bestowed upon St. Eustatius' upper class.

What is perhaps even more important in the configuration of plantations on St. Eustatius is the relationship between the Great House and the slave quarters. On many Statian plantations the slave quarters were located in the lowest parts of the landscape, behind the industrial complex and out of sight from the Great House. The elevation difference between the Great House and the slave quarters can be regarded as a quintessential expression of power over the enslaved population.[37] This is most noticeable at Godet, where the elevation difference is at least 15 meters. The fact that the slave owner lived in a physical location higher than that of his enslaved workers enforced the notion of his social and racial superiority. In many cases, however, the plantation owner could not view the slave quarters from his house. While this indicates that enslaved people on St. Eustatius may have enjoyed a little more freedom than those on other islands, it is also a clear sign of the power the slave owner held over his subordinates. Given the small size of the island and the scarcity of hiding places, a successful escape must have been extremely difficult to achieve (NA 1.05.08.01 – 730). Slave owners therefore might have not felt the need to watch their workers constantly.[38]

Theodore Godet Heyliger's windmill, completed in 1831, is another poignant example in which an individual instilled power in the landscape. Many plantations had to shut down as sugar prices dropped throughout the region during the nineteenth century (Richardson 1992:60). While there were still dozens of plantations in 1775,

37 This was also observed by Symanski in Brazil (Symanski 2012) and Singleton in Cuba (Singleton 2001).

38 Nevertheless, slaves frequently tried to escape. An issue of the *St. Eustatius Gazette* from 1792 contains two runaway advertisements, whereby one mentions that the slave in question escaped several times before.

this number had diminished to a mere ten plantations by the 1840s (NA 4.MIKO 3.A.2.5.1. – 645). Nevertheless, in 1831, a new windmill was built at Fair Play plantation as evidenced by an inscription in a keystone of one of its arches. The keystone is inscribed "TGH, FP, 1831." The letters represent the plantation owner's name, Theodore Godet Heyliger, the name of the plantation, Fair Play, and the year of construction. In his analysis of sugar plantations on the island, James Delle attributes the construction of the windmill to the owner's determination to make a profit from sugar production at a time when it was becoming increasingly difficult to do so (Delle 1989:180). In this way, the construction of the windmill is just as much an attempt to symbolize the power of the planter elite at a time when this power had been dwindling for decades. The fact that the owner had his own initials carved in the keystone, a marking which is not seen at any other plantation on the island, is a case in point. Furthermore, the windmill was and still is a structure that dominates the surrounding landscape. It was also one of the few windmills on the island, as most were much cheaper and less visible animal mills. The structure therefore clearly indicated the planter's status; even though the island's economy had collapsed, he was still able to erect an imposing building that many plantations did not even have in the prosperous times of the eighteenth century. He could just as easily have constructed a new animal mill, but instead Theodore Godet Heyliger chose to construct an expensive, highly visible, and relatively unique windmill which, to top it all off, contained his own initials.

Several years later, in 1857, the owner of nearby English Quarter plantation erected an impressive arch at the entrance of his estate. The arch contained a beautiful marble keystone with the inscription "EQ 1857." While not as explicit as the Fair Play windmill, this is another example of the display of power and wealth after the collapse of the island's economy, particularly because the arch did not serve any real purpose besides impressing people visiting the plantation or anyone who passed it on the road.

6.2.3 Johannes de Graaff

While St. Eustatius was home to a large number of wealthy merchants in the eighteenth century, perhaps no one was richer and more famous than Johannes de Graaff. He can be regarded as the embodiment of the power component. His wealth and influence was virtually unchecked. Born in 1729 of wealthy parents on St. Eustatius, he was appointed Governor in 1776 following the death of preceding Governor Jan de Windt. De Graaff was educated in the Netherlands and later returned to the island of his birth. Being both a planter and a merchant, De Graaff was extremely rich. He owned a quarter of all privately-owned land on the island and is said to have possessed 300 enslaved people. As Governor of the island he made a modest 500 US dollars per year. As a merchant, however, he earned 30,000 US dollars annually, an enormous amount of money in the eighteenth century (Barka 1996:6). De Graaff's annual income in 1781 was the equivalent of 13,200,000 US dollars in today's terms.[39] The rich planters on the island formed an oligarchy in which the richest one rose to the highest rank. The richest planters and merchants extended protection to one another; together with De Graaff, they formed the island council and the church consistory. Both the

39 Calculated using the website www.measuringworth.com, based on the relative labor earnings income or wealth value in 1781.

Figure 6.7 Portrait of Johannes de Graaff (1729-1813), currently held in the State House at Concord, New Hampshire.

government and the administration of justice were in their hands and, as members of the church consistory, they were charged with supervising the daily life of the rest of the population (Hartog 1976:67). It was during De Graaff's administration that the American flag was first saluted on November 16, 1776. His official power on the island came to an end when Admiral Rodney occupied the island in 1781. De Graaff was sent to England and returned to Statia as a private citizen a year later (Hartog 1976:88).

Historical testimonies regarding De Graaff's personality portray him as a tyrant. In one instance, he fined a butcher who refused to sell meat at the price De Graaff demanded. On another occasion, in 1777, De Graaff attempted to extract a confession from a young cabin boy accused of a minor offense by allowing him to be hoisted up by tackle with his hands tied behind his back and a heavy shot around his neck. His cruel personality was present in government as well: De Graaff once sent councilman Dirk Groeneveld to prison for contradicting him during a meeting (Hartog 1976:69).

De Graaff's probate inventory, held at the National Archives in The Hague, provides a detailed list of his possessions at the time of his death in 1813 (NA 1.05.08.01 – 729).[40] It shows that he was still a very rich man at this time, even 32 years after leaving

40 It should be noted that this probate inventory, despite the shortcomings outlined in paragraph 3.2.3., appears to be very reliable. While some items, such as food, might indeed have been omitted (at least they are not listed), other items such as books and ceramics are described in great detail. Moreover, as shown below, archaeological evidence matches one of the most remarkable items listed in the inventory.

office as Governor. The possessions listed – including real estate, enslaved people, and material goods – are extensive. In the countryside he owned seven plantations and 25 other parcels of land; his possessions in Upper Town included 25 parcels of land and sixteen houses; on the bay he owned fifteen parcels of property and at least fourteen buildings, some of which were at prime locations close to the weighing house. The inventory includes many moveable objects such as countless sets of porcelain tableware and silver cutlery, mahogany furniture, silver and golden buckles, a cane with a golden head, books, golden watches, and much more. While his slave ownership was greater while he was in charge of the island, the inventory indicates that De Graaff still owned 133 enslaved people in 1813, a staggering number for a Statian planter in his 80s.

What is most interesting with respect to the power component are those possessions De Graaff used to display his political power and wealth. Needless to say, the many expensive goods he owned were a clear indicator of his wealth to anyone invited to his residence. Many rich planters and merchants, however, had these kinds of possessions. De Graaff needed something that would set him apart from the rest. In 1994, archaeologists from the College of William & Mary conducted extensive research at Concordia plantation, the estate where he lived (Barka 1996). Numerous structures, including a residence, sugar train, and outhouses were excavated and recorded. One unusual feature drew the researchers' immediate attention. Located next to the residential building is a peculiar structure resembling a cistern. It is 10.4 meters long, 3 meters wide, 2.3 meters deep, and plastered on the inside. Based on the plastering it is clear that this structure once held a body of water approximately 1.5 meters deep. The structure was very well built, consisting of red and yellow bricks and nicely curved basalt cornerstones uncharacteristic of a cistern. Unlike other cisterns on the island, one side of the structure contains an arch, the base of which would have been at the same level as the water it contained. Further, the walls of the structure were topped with decorative coping rather than the vaulted roof normally constructed over a cistern. These features suggested that the structure was not a cistern after all (Barka 1996:46). De Graaff's probate inventory lists all structures at Concordia plantation, which includes a duck pond. Based on the archaeological research at the property, William & Mary archaeologists concluded this unusual structure was in fact the duck pond that was listed. Its location next to the residence meant it would be visible to anyone visiting Johannes de Graaff on his estate. As no ducks ponds are known to have existed on St. Eustatius or neighboring islands at that time, and ducks were not native to the island but had to be imported, this feature was truly one of a kind. De Graaff used it to set him apart from other wealthy merchants and planters on St. Eustatius and beyond.[41]

41 It is interesting to note that extravagant displays of wealth could be very different on other islands. The interiors of Bermudian mansions, for example, were very similar to those of their Statian counterparts where the owner's wealth was displayed by mahogany furniture, sets of Chinese porcelain and silverware, musical instruments, and other exotic and expensive goods. While these types of goods were status symbols in most island colonies, on Bermuda these imported possessions were so ubiquitous that they did not convey a particularly high status. One's standing in society was instead reflected in the size of the mansions themselves, cedar trees, and the ownership of horses (Jarvis 2010:312).

6.2.4 Cemeteries

To the inhabitants of St. Eustatius, graves were clear status symbols that reflected the deceased's position in the community. St. Eustatius is home to no less than fourteen marked graveyards which are spread across the island. Many are located in Upper Town, but they are also present on the plantations. Together they contain hundreds of graves that can be quite different in appearance. In her study of gravestones on St. Eustatius, Paonessa found that there were many ways in which graves indicated an individual's status: the height of the gravestone, the use of imported materials, decorative motifs, location, and the display of status information such as title, occupation, and/or familiar relationships (Paonessa 1990).

Not surprisingly, the graves of former Governors are among the most conspicuous ones found on the island. Governor Jan de Windt's tomb, for example, contains a marble slab that is beautifully inscribed and decorated. His tomb is located next to the entrance of the Dutch Reformed Church where it can easily be observed from the outside, but also through the first window on the left as one enters the church. The Dutch Reformed Churchyard contains the graves of many other high-status individuals, such as former Governor Johannes de Veer and British Brigadier General David Ogilvy who replaced Admiral Rodney as commander during the British occupation. Governors were also buried in more secluded places. The gravestone of Johannes Salomons Gibbes, former Governor of the Dutch part of St. Maarten, is found on a cemetery at Benners plantation. Despite the fact that his grave is much less visible than those of many high-status people buried in town, the grave is marked by a two-meter-long marble slab that is inscribed from top to bottom. It is by far the most elaborate gravestone in the cemetery, and a clear indication of his higher status in life compared to the people buried around him.

Elaborate mortuary display was not only reserved for the island's political elite. A Jewish cemetery is located on the edge of Upper Town. Among the eighteenth-century Jewish community on the island were many successful merchants (Miller 2013:112,137). Their economic success would have given them an elevated status in Statian society which is reflected in their tombstones. While not as tall as many graves in the Dutch Reformed Churchyard, the Jewish cemetery boasts an impressive array of beautifully decorated marble and granite slabs not found anywhere else on the island. The slabs contain carved religious scenes, decorative motifs, and texts in Hebrew, English, Spanish, and Portuguese. These types of gravestones were very costly and were therefore reserved only for the richest members of society, who used them to continue their display of wealth in death.

6.2.5 Military installations

In addition to merchants, politicians, and plantation owners who sought various ways to assert their dominance, there existed another element in the power component. Forts, batteries, and other types of military installations were a very explicit representation of military and political power. As outlined earlier in this chapter, the island's fortifications could never have prevented a large invading naval force from capturing the island. Nevertheless, they could be very effective in repelling pirates and privateers and providing safety for ships on the road and those sailing near the island.

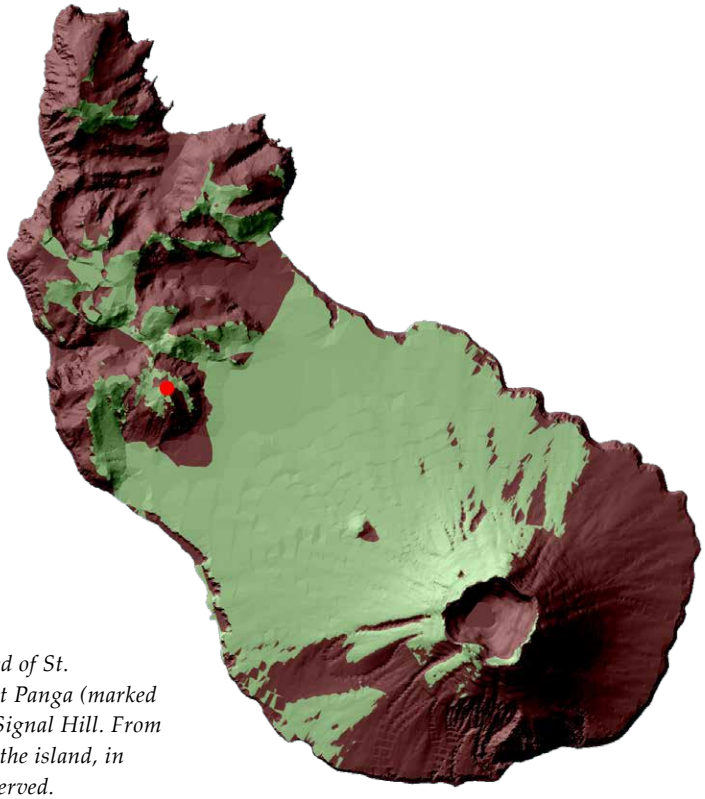

Figure 6.8 Viewshed of St. Eustatius from Fort Panga (marked by the red dot) on Signal Hill. From here, 47 percent of the island, in green, could be observed.

All Statian fortifications, without exceptions, were located at highly visible points in the landscape. This served two functions: soldiers in the forts and batteries always had an unobstructed view of their surroundings while, on the other hand, ships sailing past the island were able to see the many works of defense and their artillery pointed at them. Even though a lot of these guns were not fit for service and proved to be more dangerous to the people firing them than to the people they were firing at, and there were never enough skilled soldiers and gunners on the island to operate all pieces of artillery simultaneously, pirates and privateers sailing near the island would not have necessarily known this. From the outside, St. Eustatius and its surrounding waters would have appeared to be an impenetrable stronghold. The fact that all fortifications were located on top of steep cliffs at elevations tens or even hundreds of meters higher than passing vessels meant that these could easily fire at ships, but ships could not fire back at them. Perched on steep cliffs often inaccessible from shore, the natural landscape ensured that the forts and batteries exerted a form of control, power, and dominance over anyone who came within the reach of their guns. This way, their impact stretched much further than the island itself; up to three kilometers of sea around the island – the reach of some of the heaviest pieces of artillery – was added to their sphere of influence. On islands with less dramatic differences in elevation, such as Bonaire and Curaçao, fortifications would not have been as imposing and would not have played such a prominent role in the power component. Using SECAR's digital elevation model, a viewshed analysis of the island's forts and batteries was conducted

in order to explore the visibility of these structures from their surrounding areas. Only ships approaching the island from the north and sailing towards Boven Hill would not have been able to see any works of defense, while ships coming from any other direction would have seen several fortifications at once.

Military installations were not only built to impress outsiders; some also served to reinforce the notion of the power component to people living on the island itself. The best example in this regard is Fort Panga, built by the French in the 1780s after they captured the island from the British (Hartog 1997:110). Contrary to almost all other fortifications, this one was not coastal but located on Signal Hill, an inland location. From here one has a magnificent view of large parts of the island. A viewshed analysis conducted from this location shows that soldiers stationed at Fort Panga could observe 47 percent of the island, including the entire *Cultuurvlakte*. This also meant that the majority of the island's population could see Fort Panga, contrary to the coastal batteries that were much less visible for people on the island. Fort Panga emphasized the military power to the Statian population, particularly the enslaved. Slave revolts were not an uncommon occurrence in the West Indies; a small revolt even occurred on St. Eustatius in 1848 (Juang & Morrissette 2008:817). This uprising was quickly suppressed but not without bloodshed. The presence of a fort from which soldiers kept a constant eye on the island's enslaved population, while perhaps not actually being able to prevent a rebellion, must have had an effect in the minds of people as they were constantly reminded of the fact that someone could be watching them at any given time. In the same way, however, the power component created an element of resistance, whereby the enslaved population resisted that authority. This resistance was reinforced when authority on other islands decreased, for example at the time of abolition on the French islands in 1848.

The role of the military installations in the power component was reinforced by a very noticeable object: the flag. Flags were found on many, if not all, Statian fortifications as evidenced by historical drawings. In historical artwork flags are usually depicted disproportionately large which underscores their significance. The flag flown from a fort or battery served to link the authority of the colonial power in charge to the physical influence that the fortifications exerted over people within their reach.

6.3 Conclusions

The fortifications of St. Eustatius never provided much safety to the island's inhabitants. The frequent changes of power were a direct result of the dilapidated state of its military installations. Besides the neglect and mismanagement, however, many attempts were made at improving the island's defense. British, Dutch, and French commanders all tried to defend the prized colony in various ways. Large invading forces such as that of Rodney may never have been possible to stop, but a more robust system of military installations and a well-trained garrison may have prevented smaller takeovers. The defense component played a determining role in the maritime cultural landscape. It shaped the island's history in profound ways and influenced decisions made by government, captains, merchants, and even people from the lowest social classes. The fortifications provided a relatively safe haven to merchant vessels but were no guarantee for safety. Some batteries proved extremely useful in providing protection to merchant

vessels against privateers, but given the size of Statia's roadstead and the large numbers of ships at anchor, they could not protect every vessel that came within reach of their guns. Nevertheless, the military installations are testimonies to the ingenuity and ambition of the colonists in an attempt to protect themselves and their trading partners against a multitude of threats in the ever-changing mosaic of people and alliances, and political and economic forces that shaped the history of the Caribbean.

The expression of power and wealth formed an integral part of Statian society. It is evidenced throughout the archaeological record, from small coins to imposing great houses. As Hicks argues, in order to retain this wealth within the family, the planter aristocracy of the eastern Caribbean carefully developed pedigrees through marriage relations that would ensure political and economic influence, especially in the face of a newly emerging Atlantic merchant class (Hicks 2007:47). On St. Eustatius, however, many members of the elite class were both planters and merchants.

Throughout the island's history, merchants and planters sought to display their economic and political influence in various ways, even in death. The natural environment played an important role in shaping the configuration of plantations and determining the layout of the military landscape, resulting in the expression of power and wealth. Not just the white Christian elite expressed their power and wealth, the Jewish community did so as well by erecting elaborate and expensive tombstones. Enslaved people challenged their masters' status by using similar material culture that was originally meant to set the elite apart from their enslaved subjects.

One group of people that experienced power struggles perhaps more than any other class in society were free blacks and coloreds. On the one hand, despite being free they were regarded as racially inferior by the white elite and were living on the periphery of Upper Town. Free blacks and coloreds were required to have the proper manumission papers in order to remain free, and had to wear red ribbons as a sign of their freedom (Schiltkamp & Smidt 1979:327,426).

On the other hand, some did have substantial economic means. The free negro Cloé, formerly the property of a "Mr. Rieboo", owned an enslaved person called Marian. Her economic prowess is illustrated by the fact that she purchased her own freedom and she owned a number of houses that she rented to other free blacks on the island. Joseph How, another free black, owned four enslaved people. The free negro May Harvis owned three enslaved people in her house in the New Town. The potential economic power of free blacks is illustrated by the purchase of Glassbottle plantation, including fourteen enslaved people, by the free black woman Fraces Cuffey in 1818 (Gilmore 2004:59). As former enslaved people, free blacks and coloreds certainly tried to remove themselves further from their former status by owning enslaved people themselves. Another remarkable clue as to the wealth and social status of free blacks was found by Gilmore in the free black village excavation. At the property boundary on the site, an earthen ritual mound containing an offering in the form of a gold nugget was excavated. This indicates that the free black community had the economic means to dispose of gold in this way, and that West African religious practices survived and openly flourished (Gilmore 2013:52).

There are other indications that free blacks and coloreds formed an important middle class on the island. On St. Eustatius, young free black boys were apprenticed for a set period of five to seven years in order to learn specialised skills such as carpentry,

joinery, or blacksmithing. During this time they were expected to work for their master in any capacity that he asked in exchange for his knowledge. At the end of the apprentice period the person was no longer bound to their master and could open up a business of their own or possibly join the master's business. An example of this is found in a 1792 document, in which a free negro woman called Fanny de Windt binds her son Adam for seven years to the free negro Henry Bastiaans to learn the skills of a carpenter/joiner. It is interesting to note that Henry Bastiaans was viewed as a good fit for Fanny's son. She took him to a free negro carpenter/joiner as opposed to one of European descent. In addition, it was a great economic risk for Henry to enter into this contract with Fanny, as he would be responsible for clothing and feeding Adam for seven years. He must have been a reasonably successful skilled workman to take on such a responsibility. It is evident then, that people of African heritage were able to not only obtain their freedom but also to establish successful business ventures within the context of Statian society (Gilmore 2004:62).

This chapter has discussed the complex power relations that existed in Statian society. While historians have often tried to answer *why* these relations existed (for example, from an economic perspective), the archaeological record examined in this chapter has provided new information on *how* these relations existed and *how* power and wealth were expressed by certain individuals. Material expressions of power by all classes in society, on public and private lands, in urban and rural settings, in professional and private capacities, and from one end of the island to the other reinforced the power component as experienced by the island's inhabitants and its visitors.