Spatial Organization at a Troumassoid Settlement, The Case of Anse à la Gourde, Guadeloupe
Corinne L. Hofman, Menno L. P. Hoogland and André Delpuech

Abstract
The spatial organisation of the post-Saladoid or Troumassoid settlement at Anse à la Gourde, Guadeloupe will be presented. This settlement extends over an area of approx. 4 hectares, with a doughnut-shaped midden encircling a habitation area. The presence of a considerable number of features including postholes, refuse pits and burials indicates that the north-east part of this area has been intensively used as a residential space. A symbolic value to this part of the settlement is postulated from the limited surface area which has been in continuous use for the construction of the houses. Numerous burials are associated with the houses and possibly also have conferred a certain ritual significance. This phenomenon might have contributed to the structuring of the village plan.

Resume
L'organisation spatiale du village post-Saladoide ou Troumassoide de l'Anse à la Gourde, Guadeloupe est présentée. Celui-ci s'étend sur une surface d'environ 4 hectares, avec une zone de rejets ovale qui ceinture une aire d'habitation. La présence d'un nombre considérable de structures comme des trous de poteaux, des grandes fosses de déchets et des sépultures indique que la partie nord-est de cette zone a été intensivement utilisée comme espace résidentiel. L'aire limitée pour la construction des habitations peut être associée à la valeur symbolique de cette partie du village où de nombreuses sépultures ont été inhumées. Ce phénomène rituel a contribué à ordonner le plan du village.

Resumen
La organización espacial de asentamiento post-Saladoid o Troumassoid en Anse à la Gourde en la isla de Guadaloupe será presentado. Este asentamiento se extiende sobre una superficie de más de 4 ha. que muestra un acumulamiento de material en forma anular que encierra una área habitacional. La presencia de un número considerable de características que incluyen postes, pozos de desechos y entierros indican que la parte noreste de esta área fue utilizada intensamente como espacio residencial. Un valor simbólico a este asentamiento se postuló a causa de la limitada superficie la cual ha sido continuamente utilizada para la construcción de casas. Numerosos entierros son asociados con las casas y posiblemente también conferían un cierto valor ritual. Este fenómeno pudo haber contribuido a la estructuración en la planificación-del-asentamiento.
Introduction
The site of Anse à la Gourde is situated at the north-east end of Grande Terre, Guadeloupe and thus exposed to the Atlantic coast. The site has been subjected to extensive investigations between 1995 and 2000 (Delpuech et al. 1999, Hofman et al. 1999, Hoogland 1999). In total 1424 m² have been excavated. The site has a surface area of approx. 4 ha and has known four successive occupation phases radiocarbon dated between AD 450 and AD 1350. The major occupation, though, took place between AD 1000 and AD 1350. Material remains associated with this occupation phases belong to the post-Saladoid or Troumassoid series. Ceramics are characterized by vessels with simple shapes, rarely decorated but often covered by a red slip. Incisions are large and shallow, modeled zoomorphic and anthropomorphic representations occur on the vessel rims. Legged griddles are present. Influences from both the northern (Mamoran Troumassoid) and the southern (Suazan Troumassoid) Lesser Antilles are evidenced in this ceramic assemblage.

Settlement data
While during the first occupation phases at Anse à la Gourde the habitation seems to have taken place more towards the sea on a large sand beach, during the post-Saladoid occupation the people were obliged to move towards the calcareous plateau situated more inland behind the dunes. It is probable that the beach which was continually exposed to severe erosion and the dune area were abandoned as a habitation area during this later period because it was considered not appropriate anymore for the construction of houses as the sea level continued to rise and the coast was threatened by water and winds. A retreat of the coastline of approximately 50 meters since the Saladoid period is suggested. Palimpsest of habitation traces has been evidenced in a relatively small perimeter, which is suggestive of successive construction phases at the same spot over many decades. A (re-)construction of the post-Saladoid or Troumassoid habitation history and the type of occupations may be determined by the following characteristics of the site.

The large doughnut shaped midden area is characterized by the formation of an anthropic soil which has been grey coloured by the continuous deposition of organic refuse, charcoal and ashes. The midden has a surface area of about 1.1 hectare and has an oval shape measuring 200 m from east to west and 130 m from north to south. The diameter of the belt is approx. 20 to 25 meters. The midden area encompasses the dunes to the north and the calcareous plateau to the south. The midden is composed of tons of refuse like faunal remains, shells and broken ceramics, which evidences its function as a dump area.

The midden area encircles a habitation area. Only the northern part of this area has been excavated. Excavation of the southern part was impossible due to the recent constructions in this area. The northern part, though, may be divided in two loci: the first in the northeast covers 1650 m² and constitutes the area where most of the features were recorded including postholes, burials, hearths and refuse pits. Like the midden area, it is composed of a grey anthropic soil with artefacts scattered around. The intensity of postholes and burials in this relatively restricted area clearly indicates that it was the most...
intensively used residential space. This restricted space for the construction of the houses may be associated with a symbolic value of this part of the settlement. The large number of burials might refer to a certain ritual connotation. It is suggested that this phenomenon may have contributed to the structuring of the village plan.

Within this residential space, the floor plans of the houses vary from round to oval with diameters between 8 and 12 m with a single or double row of posts. The attention the Amerindian peoples had put into the construction of their houses is manifested by the size of their posts, which in many cases have been dug into the bedrock or reinforced with slab stones. Their solidity seems to have been adapted to bad weather conditions as tropical storms and hurricanes to which the Atlantic coast is often submitted. Strombus gigas shells and lithic artefacts have been deposited in some of the post-holes as a cache.

Most of the 79 excavated burials are situated within the houses, which seems to be a common practice during the post-Saladoid occupation phases at Anse à la Gourde. The total of 79 burials contain the human remains of 83 individuals of which most are adults. Five individuals are either entirely or partially covered by a ceramic vessel. Burial gifts are scarce, and are limited to some quartz and diorite beads and several stone and shell axes.

Around the houses, light constructions, interpreted as sheds and racks complete the organisation of the village. To the south of the main structures, a special activity zone with large refuse pits (F1913), hearths (F1024) or food preparation areas (F2210) is located. To the west of the residential area, a cleared or empty space is located which measures 70 by 35 meters. In this area hardly any artefacts were recorded, nor were any features registered. One may hypothesize that this area was kept clean on purpose and may have functioned as a plaza during the post-Saladoid occupation. However, no caches or burials have been found in this area, in contrast to Saladoid plazas and in some cases also post-Saladoid plazas elsewhere in the Caribbean (Curet and Oliver 1998, Siegel 1999).

**Spatial organization of the Troumassoid village: interpretations and analogies**

A settlement configuration as noted for the Troumassoid occupation of Anse à la Gourde residential space surrounded by a domestic area with auxiliary structures, and a cleared space or plaza used for intra- and inter community feasts and rituals is documented for many Amerindian sites in the pre-Columbian Caribbean but also in the Tropical Lowlands of South America today as in the interfluvial zones of Central and east Brazil and in the Xingú region (Heckenberger et al. 1995, Meggers 1971:44-46, Oliver 1998:50-51). Archaeological and ethnographic data show that village structures are often circular or semi-circularly arranged around a plaza. The village then, in which the cosmos is symbolically represented, is considered the centre of the universe; it is the most socialized place as opposed to the natural or a-social surrounding 'forest' environment where men could transform into animals or spirits.
The spatial organisation of a village is strongly associated with the social structure or social organisation of the society. On the Lesser Antilles various concentric circular village patterns have been (re-)constructed for Saladoid sites (500 BC.-AD 600) where it seems to be the primary settlement type. According to some scholars this village pattern was abandoned during the post-Saladoid period, i.e. after ca AD 600 – 800 (Petersen and Watters 1991; Siegel 1992; Versteeg and Schinkel 1992; Watters 1994). However, the data from Anse à la Gourde suggest that the semi-circular or circular village model may have continued to exist during post-Saladoid times. On the other hand, the internal organisation of the village and mortuary practices seemed to have drastically changed from the previous Saladoid period. House sizes seem to have decreased from the large Saladoid malocas as reported for Golden Rock, St. Eustatius (Versteeg and Schinkel 1992) to smaller dwellings. Whereas the dead people who were buried outside the houses, in the central portion of the settlement or midden areas during Saladoid times are now buried within the residential space and under the house floors. Moreover, the way the dead are treated is far more complex than known from older sites in the region (Siegel 1999).

Burials at Anse à la Gourde give evidence of complex burial practices as well as a variety in treatment of the dead (see Hoogland 1999). However, a certain pattern of disposal of the dead is discernable which may reflect the society’s social and cosmological ideology. Differentiation in mortuary practices is evidenced by a variety of primary, secondary and partially secondary burials (figs. 1-3). In some cases, the dead were prepared, wrapped in a container (basket, hammock), then probably dried above or near a fire. They were then buried in a small pit in the house, which in certain cases was left open. After some time (probably after complete decomposition of the body) the cranium or one of the long bones was removed from the grave. It is suggested that this differentiated treatment of the dead represents social inequality.

Similar burial practices have been described for other regions (Hertz 1960, in Metcalf and Huntington 1991). It is evidenced that such burial practices can last for a few months and are accompanied by rituals to guide the soul of the deceased to the world of the ancestors, the so-called liminal phase. At Anse à la Gourde it is hypothesized that such a liminal phase can be discerned in the way the dead were treated. During the liminal phase the deceased person still plays an important role in the household community and gradually transforms into an ancestor spirit. The exhumation of bones in several burials at Anse à la Gourde points to the fact that these bones may have acted within the community of the living. It is suggested that such a practice points to the veneration of ancestors. Although mortuary treatment is often regarded as a representation of the social personae of an individual at death, rules are fluid and mortuary treatment is open to manipulation. Manipulation of the identity of a deceased person symbolized by mortuary treatment is an important mechanism to claim lineage primogeniture.

Concluding remarks
Curet, Oliver (1998) and Siegel (1999) noted a change from the Saladoid to post-Saladoid periods on
Puerto Rico regarding house size, burial location and mortuary practices. Most salient is the shift from centralized burial grounds to the placement of graves in domestic contexts. The development in spatial organization is suggested to prelude a period of transition from communal to household group legitimation associated with the shift from egalitarian societies to chiefdoms. It has been argued that in this period there was an intensification of power relations and ideology (Siegel 1992) crucial for the understanding of the process of consolidation of power by the Taino caciques on Puerto Rico and Hispaniola. Obviously, focus was laid upon the emergence of chiefdom societies on the Greater Antilles. However, little attention has been paid to the social organization of post-Saladoid societies on the Lesser Antilles.

The post-Saladoid or Troumassoid occupation at Anse à la Gourde dates from the 11-13th century, thus coincides with this crucial period. Spatial organization shows a similar discontinuity and change in house size, burial location and mortuary practices. The Anse à la Gourde data suggest that the changes in spatial organization and mortuary practices from the Saladoid to the Troumassoid periods on the Lesser Antilles parallel those of the Greater Antilles. It is suggested that the post-Saladoid or Troumassoid house at Anse à la Gourde evidences lineage ideology and continuity in the internment of ancestors. This leads us to conclude that the post-Saladoid peoples occupying the Lesser Antilles followed a similar schema of socio-political and religious development at the onset of the period of power consolidation. Archaeological data from 14th and 15th (Allaire 1990, Faber Morse 1992, Henocq and Petit 1995, Hoogland and Hofman 1999, Lundberg et al. 1992) century sites on the Lesser Antilles suggest that after this transitional period, the Lesser Antillean societies (or at least those who inhabited the northern part of it) were incorporated in the influence sphere of the Greater Antillean chiefdoms.

References


Figure 1. Anse à la Gourde. Primary burial
Figure 2: Anse à la Gourde. Secondary burial.

Figure 3. Anse à la Gourde. Secondary burial.