SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH SETTLEMENTS AND DEFENSES OF SAINT KITTS

ASENTAMIENTOS Y DEFENSAS DEL SIGLO XVII DE ST. KITTS FRANCÉS

LES ÉTABLISSEMENTS ET DÉFENSES FRANÇAISES DE SAINT-KITTS AU XVIIIE SIÈCLE

Steven Pendery

Saint Kitts, also known as Saint Christopher Island, contains sites representing the earliest periods of French colonization in the Caribbean. The island was settled by both the French and English in the early 1620s and divided between them in 1627. The British received the entire island as an outcome of the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht and many French settlements and defenses were plundered and destroyed. However, some sites survive as architectural, landscape, and archaeological resources with enough baseline documentation to help interpret their use. This paper explores the significance of surviving physical evidence for seventeenth-century French settlement and defenses on Saint Kitts. The town of Basseterre began its urban trajectory during this period as documented by land records and elements of its surviving street system. Fortifications at Basseterre and Fig Tree Fort are considered in light of the military background of early Saint Kitts governors. The Fountain Estate is presented as a case study for how French elites tried to manage the French sector island plantation economy. French colonial cultural resources of Saint Kitts lack the visibility of English period remains and most sites are located in coastal zones susceptible to erosion and development. This paper argues for the need to rapidly and accurately document these globally significant resources.

Key words: Saint Kitts, Archaeology, Cultural Resources, Fortifications, Documentation

St. Kitts, también conocida como St. Christopher Island, contiene sitios que representan los primeros períodos de la colonización francesa en el Caribe. La isla fue colonizada por franceses e ingleses a principios de la década de 1620 y dividida entre ellos en 1627. Los británicos recibieron toda la isla como resultado del Tratado de Utrecht de 1713 y muchos asentamientos y defensas francesas fueron saqueados y destruidos. Sin embargo, algunos sitios sobreviven como recursos arquitectónicos, paisajísticos y arqueológicos con suficiente documentación de referencia para ayudar a interpretar su uso. Este artículo explora la importancia de la supervivencia de la evidencia física para el siglo XVII. Asentamiento francés y defensas en St. Kitts. La ciudad de Basseterre comenzó su trayectoria urbana durante este periodo según lo documentado por los registros de la tierra y los elementos de su sistema de calles sobrevivientes. Las fortificaciones en Basseterre y Fig Tree Fort se consideran a la luz de los antecedentes militares de los primeros gobernadores de San Cristóbal. La plantación de la fuente se presenta como un estudio de caso sobre cómo las elites francesas intentaron manejar la economía de plantación de islas del sector francés. Los recursos culturales coloniales
franceses de Saint Kitts carecen de la visibilidad de los restos del periodo inglés y la mayoría de los sitios se encuentran en zonas costeras susceptibles a la erosión y al desarrollo. Este documento aboga por la necesidad de documentar de forma rápida y precisa estos recursos significativos a nivel mundial.

Palabras clave: San Cristóbal, St. Kitts, Arqueología, Recursos Culturales, Fortificaciones, Documentación

This paper focuses on French-period cultural resources of the island of Saint Kitts (also known as Saint Christopher and Saint-Christophe) in order to make three points.1 The first is that archaeological resources of the former French Antilles may have as much research and public significance as those on islands still under French control (Figures 1 and 2). The second is that Saint Kitts, in particular, had a primary role in both French and English colonization in the Caribbean. Its political, economic and military cultures and their material expressions evolved rapidly and then diffused to other islands. The third point is that many of its significant sites are threatened by coastal erosion and development and a geoinformatic approach to site documentation needs to be taken before essential information is lost.

Most historical archaeological data on the French Antilles is derived from fieldwork conducted at two départements d'outre-mer, the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique and their dependencies. These islands benefit from access to French governmental cultural resource management (CRM) funding and services including those provided by the Services Regionales d’Archeologie (SRA) and the Institut Nationale de Recherches Archéologiques Preventatives (INRAP). There is also European Union (EU) support and important international, university-based research such as that conducted by Kenneth Kelly and described in his recent review of French sugar plantation archaeology (Kelly 2017:218-19; see also Bérard and Losier 2014). Archaeology at the two French Caribbean collectivités d'outre-mer of Saint-Barthélemy and Saint-Martin also benefits from French and European Union funds. At the 2015 IACA meetings we saw first-hand the accomplishments in Saint-Martin archaeology including the good work of Jay Haviser and the Saint Maarten Archaeology Center (SIMARC).

1 The author thanks the following individuals and institutions: Victoria O‘Flaherty, Saint Kitts National Archives; The Saint-Christopher National Trust; The Saint Kitts National Museum; Reginald Auger, Université Laval, Elisa Pendery, Angie Pereira, and Cameron Gill.
However, conducting historical archaeology of former French Antilles islands (those that severed ties with France long ago) proves to be more of a challenge. These include Saint-Domingue (Haiti) and Tortuga, the Grenadines, Saint-Christopher, Saint-Lucia, Saint-Vincent, Saint-Eustache (Saint Eustasius), Trinidad, Tobago, and Saint-Croix. Local factors that may inhibit research on the French heritage on these islands include the loss of French identity and the brutality of the French colonial period, marked by the Code Noir (Scott 2017:9-10). In addition, French material culture deteriorated as successive colonizers tried to erase all trace of former French presence. Sites and archives suffered from the vicissitudes of warfare, climate, and preservation funding. Yet, identifying and synthesizing data from sites including forts, ports and plantations is essential in developing a comprehensive model of French colonialism in the Antilles, one that addresses French interactions with Europeans and non-Europeans alike.

Saint Kitts

This paper describes the initial efforts made by the Université Laval, Quebec, Canada, to document key French sites on Saint Kitts, the main island within the country of Saint Kitts and Nevis (Figure 2). It was settled in the 1620s by both the French and English and divided between them in 1627 with France receiving the two ends, referred to as Saint-Christophe in this paper. Both groups shared the salt ponds of the eastern peninsula. I adopt Doug Armstrong's 'landscapes of power' archaeological site typology consisting of ports, forts, and plantations and present three case studies to illuminate the significance of French period sites including the town of Basseterre itself, various island coastal fortifications, and the governors' mansions at the Fountain Estate (Armstrong 2013). The urgency of documenting heritage sites in face of climate change and development is discussed (Reid 2008).

Saint Kitts is one of the Lesser French Antilles and is 19 miles (30.5 kilometers) long and averages 6 miles (9.6 kilometers) in width. It has a mountainous interior, coastal plains that historically have supported agriculture, and a southern peninsula containing extensive salt ponds. The island was probably occupied by the agriculturalist Saladoid people and in more recent times by the Arawak and after AD 1300 by the Caribs. The Caribs were impacted by European diseases and their presence on the island was perceived as a threat by English and French settlers, leading to a massacre of native peoples in 1626 at Bloody Brook.

The island emerged as the birthplace of both French and English colonization efforts in the Caribbean (Table 1). Christopher Columbus sighted the island in 1493 but there was no subsequent colonization until a short-lived French Huguenot settlement was established in 1538 on the island’s northern shore. Sir Thomas Warner (1580-1649) arrived at the island in 1623, received support in England for his venture and returned the following year to settle at Old Road, the first English colonial settlement in the Caribbean. In 1625 the French adventurer Pierre Belain, Sieur d'Esnambuc (1585-1636) sought refuge on the island after a clash with a Spanish fleet. The following year he gained the support of French Cardinal Richelieu to establish a colony on the same island under the auspices of the Compagnie de Saint-Christophe. The French were relegated the island's north end (Capesterre) and south end (Basseterre), with the English in the middle, an arrangement shown in one of the island’s earliest maps by Nicolas Sanson (Figure 3). D'Esnambuc spent his last years as governor tending to the colonization of Martinique with his nephew Jacques Dyel du Parquet (Boucher 2008:69-70).

The mid-seventeenth-century history of French Saint-Christophe is dominated by the figure of Lieutenant-Governor Philippe Longvilliers de Poincy (1584-1660) and his nephew, Robert (Cultru 1915; Allen 1991). The Compagnie de Saint-Christophe was reformulated by Cardinal Richelieu in 1635 into the
Compagnie des Isles de l'Amérique, which included 57 associates. Cardinal Richelieu was an investor. As a member of the order of Saint-John Hospitaller, also known as the Knights of Malta, he trusted and supported fellow Knights as their influence extended into the Caribbean. Following the death of d'Esnambuc in 1636, the elder de Poincy, a Bailiff Grand Cross of the Knights of Malta, was appointed as Lieutenant Governor of the Isles and as Captain General of French Saint-Christophe. His turbulent tenure was also marked by a bold shift in the island economy from tobacco to sugar production, a policy later followed by most other Caribbean islands (Labat 1993 [1724]:362-3; Camus 1997: 121,122). In the 1640s he staked out French claims to Tortuga, Saint-Barthélemy, Saint-Croix and Saint-Martin. Key documents bearing on the status of French settlement include Knights of Malta plans and correspondence, 1660s probate inventories, a 1671 island census, the 1714 Buor map and 1726 record of French lands distributed to the English (Freller and Zammit 2015).

Case Study 1: Town Of Basseterre

Basse-Terre was the name of the southernmost French sector. Its port, also named Basseterre, was established between the Westbourne Gut and College Gut in the 1620s under Governor d'Esnambuc. The town featured a precocious orthogonal street system including a waterfront row of warehouses and wharves, many of which were owned and managed by Dutch traders. Elements of the original French plan for Basseterre are visible in the 1714 Buor map (Figure 4b). De Poincy built a hall of justice and a hospital for the indigent on a lot once occupied by the Capucins, whom he expelled from the colony in 1646 and replaced with the Jesuits (De Rochefort 1665:50). A church where de Poincy was laid to rest in 1660 existed in the approximate location of today's Saint-George's church. Fortifications defined the port's coastal boundaries. A rudimentary fort was located just east of the town, probably rebuilt in masonry after d'Esnambuc's death in 1635. To the west was located the Bluff Point fort. After wars, earthquakes, and fires, there are no documented seventeenth-century buildings left standing, but archaeological remains should be present beneath Basseterre's parks, streets and side yards.

Case Study 2: Island Defenses

The defenses of the island’s French sectors were strengthened under the direction of Governor de Poincy’s Huguenot military engineer, François Levasseur. These included forts at Basseterre and along the English borders with Capesterre, at Fig Tree and near Dieppe. Due to early labor shortages, these fortifications were strategically located to incorporate natural defensive features. Initially they may have been built of earth and wood and later improved with masonry construction.

The pre-Vauban bastioned rectangular fort at Basseterre and its flanking fort at Bluff Point survived into the eighteenth century and are depicted in maps from 1660 and 1714 (Figures 4a, 4b). They are also referenced in land deeds and visitor accounts (De Rochefort 1665:47-8). Saint-Christophe's Governor Blenac clearly intended to update these forts but failed to do so during the turbulent later years of the seventeenth century (Figure 5). In 1727 the eastern limit to the new English island capital of Basseterre was described as the "ditch of the Old French fort." The fort was replaced by the British in 1728 with the five-bastioned Fort Londonderry; remains of both French and British forts still may be located in proximity to Basseterre's shoreline (Innis 1985:17,31).

2 M. de Poincy fit tant d'estime de sa personne, qu'il semblloit ne prendre conseil [que] de luy; il s'en servit dans la visite qu'il fit de tous les quartiers de son Isle, de apprendre de luy non seulement les lieux ou il devoit bastir des forteresses, mais encore la maniere de les construir. (Du Tertre 1671:263, in Wilkie 1991:35).
A massive masonry fort was constructed on a hill in the town of Fig Tree near where the English sector boundary was established in 1627 (Dyde 2005:27). The 1658 Sanson map shows a corner-bastioned rectangular fort just inside the French sector (Figure 6a). This fort became redundant with the unification of the island under the British but is still depicted on later maps from 1714 and 1775 and 1828 (Figures 6b, 6c, 6d). In the 1775 Ravel map, only three bastions are present, suggesting loss of the fourth through erosion. The fort is identified in the 1828 McMahon map and may have been incorporated into an adjacent sugar plantation (Figure 6d). Fig Tree Fort's remaining masonry walls and a possible powder house are actively being degraded by erosion and residential development.

Pre-Vauban bastioned rectangular fort plans appear on two other islands under de Poincy's control. The Huguenot military engineer François Levasseur was sent by de Poincy in 1640 to take over the small island of Tortuga and shortly afterwards he rebuilt an old Spanish fort in corner bastioned French style (Pendery 2010:61). The second fort was the wooden Fort de la Magdalene overlooking the town of Baillif in Guadeloupe, built about 1650 by the Boisseret family (Figure 7). A period engraving shows that it followed the plans of Lavasseur's earlier masonry forts. The influence of Lieutenant Governor de Poincy himself in the design of fortifications should not be understated as he was a military man and Knight of Malta whose library contained treatises on military fortification by Antoine de la Vallée, the Chevalier de Ville, Nicolas Coldeman and others (Wilkie 1990, 1991).

Case Study 3: The Fountain Estate

De Poincy personally spearheaded Saint-Christophe's transition to a sugar economy when he arrived in 1639. He followed the lead of Governor D'Esnambuc and established his own plantation about 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) north of the settlement of Basseterre along the upper reaches of the Fountain River, with a second plantation located at Cayonne. His first residence was the same house was built by D'Esnambuc and possibly used by two successive governors of Saint-Christophe, Pierre du Halde and Réné de Becauldt. It is depicted in a recently-discovered map from the Secret Vatican Archives (Zammit 2013). In 1640 de Poincy began building his own terraced palace. This three-storied brick and limestone structure was considered by some to be the finest governor's palace in the Caribbean until it was destroyed in a 1690 earthquake. It drew design inspiration from Italianate palaces and French châteaux at Paris, Saint-Germain-en-Laye and Fontainbleau.

There are published descriptions of the house along with certain of its contents in 1660 (Wilkie 1990, 1991). De Rochefort's Histoire Naturelle et Morale discusses the property at length and features an engraving based on paintings de Poincy sent to him, probably in the mid-1650s (Figure 8). This may be compared with the circa 1660 plan of the mansion prepared for the Order of Saint John and recently found in the Vatican Secret Archives. As William Zammit notes, the defenses of the property were possibly augmented by the late 1650s. Earlier, the residence was guarded mainly by cannon but by 1660 a defensible perimeter wall with moat had been established along with a gated entrance with barbican to the north. The village of enslaved plantation workers called 'Angola' depicted in the earlier engravings is gone by 1660. Instead, there is a smaller residential enclave of enslaved domestic servants beyond the garden west of the mansion. Villages of other enslaved workers appear to have been dispersed elsewhere on the plantation.

Historian Brian Dyde argues with respect to today's Fountain Plantation and De Rochefort's engraving of de Poincy's palace, that "the site... bears no resemblance whatsoever to that of the illustration" (Dyde 2005:47). This statement is accurate when considering the loss of the palace and possibly the outer defensive perimeter wall in the 1690 earthquake (or at the hands of the British military after the 1713 Treaty
of Utrecht to prevent reuse by hostile forces). The Fountain Estate was sub-divided and passed through the hands of a succession of high-status English families including the Stapletons, Boyds and Berkeleys down to the twentieth century. A plantation house replaced de Poincy's palace on the exact same cellar containing a sealed tunnel leading to subterranean stables. The preservation of early French landscape features is outstanding, including the fountain (the plantation's namesake), a grotto, staircases (Figure 9), interior courtyard wall, and subterranean chambers. As de Poincy became one of the wealthiest planters of the French Antilles, his plantation house was hardly typical. However, its incorporation of Palladian features and integration into a terraced landscape setting inspired the design of governors' mansions elsewhere in the French Antilles, including that of Governor du Bois at Saint Croix Island. At present there is no threat to the property, and the privacy of the residents must be respected.

Conclusions

The French period port, forts, and plantations of Saint Kitts are significant in local, regional, and global contexts. They document an initial frontier period of French colonization and exploitation of the Caribbean's natural and human resources that included the incipient trade in enslaved peoples from Africa. The port of Basseterre reflects a progressive, early seventeenth-century approach to town planning incorporating an orthogonal street system. The island fortifications reflect contemporary French and Italian ideas about defense that anticipated design principles later advocated by Vauban. Construction of these imposing structures certainly involved the labor and skill of enslaved Africans, as was the case in for the island's British fortifications (Schoedl and Ahlman 2002). The remains of French plantations such as those of the Fountain Estate document the emergence of the sugar plantation system in the Caribbean and the brutality of enslaved labor that was central to its operation.

These cultural resources need to be protected and interpreted. We advocate the approaches followed by the authors of the volume Archaeology and Geoinformatics, Case Studies from the Caribbean edited by Basil Reid (2008). This involves deploying non-destructive methods of imaging resources for both research and management: remote sensing by satellite, topographic recording by drone-based photogrammetry, laser-scanning of buildings and landscapes, and geophysics for subsurface imaging. Where field archaeology does occur, standardized but flexible artifact typologies and field recording systems in French and English should be used to facilitate comparative data analysis across the French Antilles. A digital archives for existing historical documentation and archaeology should be prepared before any large-scale problem-oriented archaeology is attempted. This will contribute in the long term to developing a comparative and comprehensive archaeology of both the former and present-day French Antilles.

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Blenac  

Buor, Pierre  

McMahon, William  

Sanson, Nicolas  
Table 1. Summary Chronology of Saint Kitts (Saint Christopher Island), 1493-1783

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1493</td>
<td>European discovery of island by Christopher Columbus</td>
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<tr>
<td>1624</td>
<td>Thomas Warner establishes colony and cultivates tobacco</td>
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<td>1626</td>
<td>Battles with Caribs at Bloody Brook</td>
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<tr>
<td>1639-1641</td>
<td>Tobacco cultivation banned</td>
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<tr>
<td>1665-1667</td>
<td>French take control of island</td>
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<tr>
<td>1667</td>
<td>Island returned to joint French and English control by Treaty of Breda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1689-1690</td>
<td>French occupy entire island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1690</td>
<td>Christopher Codrington takes island and deports French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1697</td>
<td>Island returned to joint French and English control Treaty of Rijswijk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1705-1713</td>
<td>French seize control of island during War of the Spanish Succession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1713</td>
<td>Treaty of Utrecht grants Britain full control of island.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1727</td>
<td>British move capital from Old Road to Basseterre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1782-1783</td>
<td>French seize island during later years of American Revolutionary War</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1783</td>
<td>Treaty of Versailles returns entire island to British control</td>
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Figure 1. Locations of present and former French West Indies and other sites. Map by author.

Figure 2. Map of Saint Kitts showing locations of fortified French sites. Map by author, after Dyde 2005.
Figure 3. Sanson 1658 Map of Saint Christopher showing French and English sectors. Courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.

Figure 4. Maps from 1660, 1714, 1735 and ca. 1920 showing Basseterre forts.

a. Anonymous 1660
b. Buor 1714
c. Baker 1753
d. Ca. 1920
Figure 5. Blenac map of 1678 showing proposed modifications to Basseterre fort. Courtesy of Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.
Figure 6. Maps of Fig Tree Fort in 1658 (a); 1714 (b); 1753 (c); and 1828 (d).
Figure 7. Fort de la Magdalene, Guadeloupe (top) and view of de Poincy's Chateau de la Montagne from the south (bottom). Engraving by Du Clerc in *l'Histoire Générale des Antilles* by Père Jean-Baptiste du Tertre.

Figure 8. De Poincy's Chateau de la Montagne from De Rochefort's *Histoire Naturelle et Morale*. Courtesy Houghton Library, Harvard University.
Figure 9. View of Fountain Estate staircase and terrace, 2016. Photograph by author.