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An African Pipe from a Slave Cemetery in Barbados,
West Indies

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By the end of the seventeenth century, the south-eastern Caribbean island of Barbados had become England's richest colony in the New World. The wealth that Barbados generated derived from sugar production under a plantation system which employed tens of thousands of slaves of African birth or descent. Although Jamaica pre-empted Barbados's position among England's Caribbean colonies by the third decade of the eighteenth century, slaves continued to be of fundamental importance to Barbadian society and economy until 1834, the year slavery legally ended in the British Empire.

As with slaves throughout the New World, Barbados's slaves created a cultural system which was influenced by the traditions of their African homelands as well as by European traditions and plantation-colonial conditions specific to the New World environment. This cultural system included a variety of material components, among which tobacco pipes were particularly significant.

Slaves valued and smoked tobacco. Although they sometimes produced their own on small land units they were allocated by plantation owners, most of the tobacco they consumed was imported and distributed by plantation owners or managers as a treat and as a reward or incentive for good behavior. Tobacco was smoked as cigars or in clay pipes. Slaves acquired pipes in several ways: by picking up those whose stems had broken and which had been discarded by their former European owners; through theft; and by purchase or barter on the island's internal marketing system in which the slaves were active participants. In addition, European-manufactured clay pipes were important elements in the plantation governance system. Slaveowners or plantation managers periodically distributed these pipes to their slaves as incentives or rewards for conformity to disciplinary and labor norms (Handler and Lange 1978: 133-135). Clay pipes also played a role in the heavily African influenced plantation slave mortuary complex and were used, along with other items, as grave goods interred with burials (Handler and Lange 1978: 199-201).

Excavations in a slave cemetery at a sugar plantation in Barbados during 1972 and 1973 yielded twenty-two whole clay pipes in association with eighteen of the ninety-two burials; these pipes constitute the largest sample of whole pipes yet excavated from archaeological contexts in any New World colonial site. Pipe-stem fragments and bowl fragments were also found in the fill surrounding thirty-one other burials (the excavations and their results are discussed at length in Handler and Lange 1978). Aside from nails, tacks and handles associated with coffins, clay pipes were the most frequent artifacts associated with burials. All but one of these pipes and pipe fragments were made of white kaolin and had been manufactured in England from the late seventeenth to the early nineteenth centuries; similar pipes regularly have been found in North American sites dating from the colonial period

and occur as well in West Africa (see, for example, Calvocoressi 1975). One of the Barbados pipes, however, was remarkably different from the others. It is the only one not made of white clay, and its mode of manufacture, form, and decorative features suggest that it is West African. As far as I am aware, this pipe is the only known example of its kind recovered from any archaeological site in the New World. (Figs. 1 and 2)

The pipe was associated with an undisturbed burial that was distinctive in terms of the number and variety of grave goods associated with it. The burial was that of an old man, probably of African birth, who was interred in the late 1600s or early 1700s and who may have been an Obeah man, that is, a medicine man or folk doctor. Obeah men (and women) were very common on West Indian sugar plantations. They held important positions in the slave communities because, among other reasons, of their adeptness in using plants and magical procedures for curative and other socially valued purposes. The prestige of the deceased was reflected in the burial's relatively large number of associated grave goods which dramatically contrasts with the total absence or very limited quantity of goods found with other burials; moreover, most of the grave goods were unique examples of their kind in the cemetery. The burial was interred with an iron knife, three different types of copper and brass bracelets or armlets (which are of African style or manufacture), a brass or bronze finger ring, two silver alloy rings, an elaborate necklace (composed of dog canines, European-manufactured glass beads, fish vertebrae, money cowry shells, and a large carnelian bead manufactured in Cambay, India) with obvious, but generalized, African characteristics (Handler, Lange, and Orser, 1979); the unique clay pipe had been placed on his pelvic area.

Although broken prior to excavation, the pipe is complete except for a small portion missing from the back of the bowl. The bowl mouth is not perfectly circular, but is approximately 3.2 centimeters across the diameter of the mouth to the outer edges, and approximately 3.4 centimeters from the top of the mouth to the point of the base where the bowl joins the stem (see figure). Internally, the bowl is funnel-shaped and tapers from an approximately 2.1-centimeter diameter at the mouth to approximately 0.8 centimeters at the base where it joins the bore hole of the stem. The bore hole is also tapered, from 0.9 centimeters at the opening to an approximately 0.5 centimeter diameter where it enters the base of the bowl. Measured externally, the short stem is approximately 3.8 centimeters long and 1.9 centimeters wide.

The pipe is fired to a buff-color with a brown polished slip. The paste is soft and iron staining is present in the clay, which includes quartz sand inclusions and sherd temper. It is difficult to establish if the pipe was made in a mold. There is no evidence of a seam on either the stem or the bowl, as appears in the mold-made European pipes found in the cemetery. The absence of this seam, however, does not preclude the possibility that the pipe was made in a one-piece mold although it, or various of its

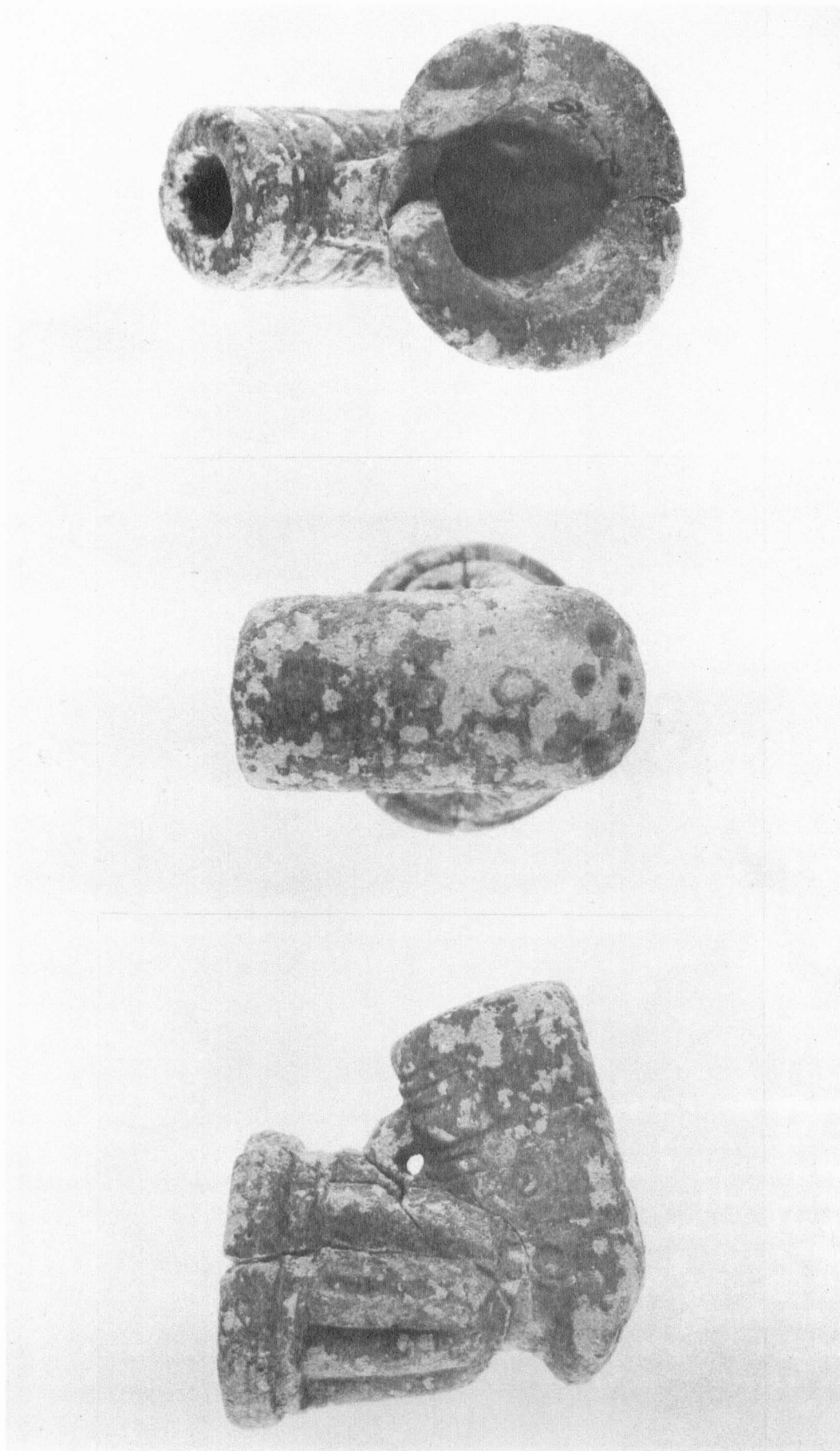


Fig. 1 An African Pipe from Barbados

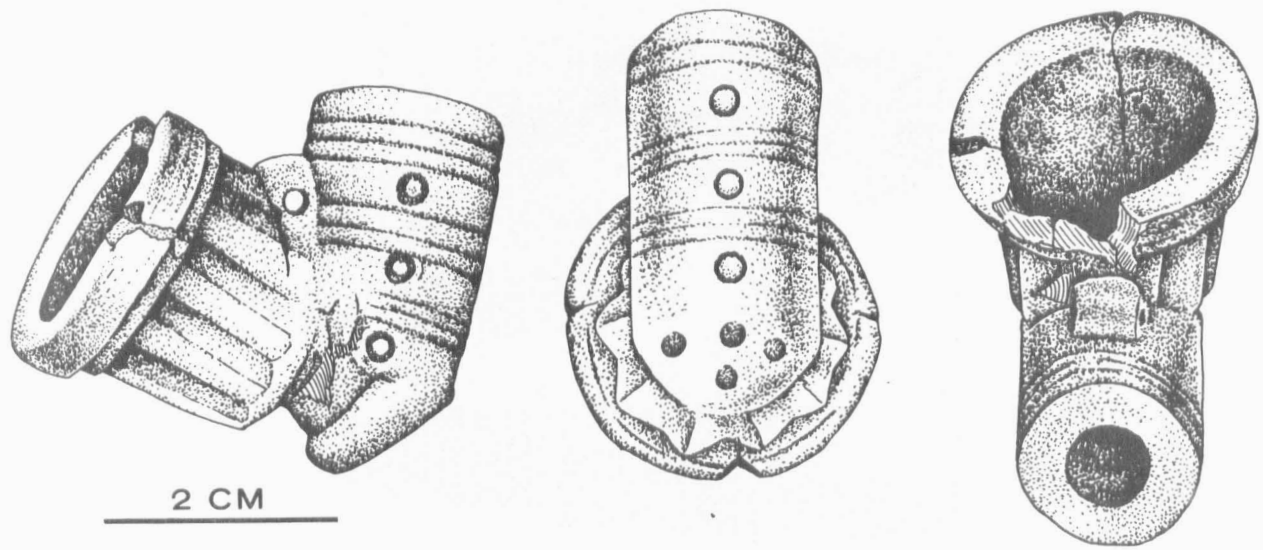


Fig. 2 An African Pipe from Barbados

decorative features, could have been carved from a solid piece of leather-hard clay.

Around its outer circumference, the bowl is decorated with nine equally spaced flutes. Because these flutes are eroded it is difficult to determine if they were carved onto the leather-hard clay prior to firing or if they were manufactured in a mold from wet clay. In either case, the outer circumference of the stem has three groups of incised lines; each group, in turn, is comprised of three lines. A relief dot is set inside an annular punctation or impression between each group of lines; three of these dots are on each side on the bottom of the stem. Four shallow and roughly circular punctations are on the blunt heel of the stem, but these punctations are not equidistant.

Documentary evidence suggests that Barbadian slaves sometimes smoked short-stemmed pipes. George Pinckard, a British medical doctor who visited the island in 1796 and observed life among plantation slaves, reported: "Very often the pipe is so short... as to be in danger of burning the nose, or even the lips. I have frequently seen... [the slaves] smoking with the pipe so short as to hold it in the mouth by pressing the lips upon the lower part of the bowl" (1806; 2: 215). (The "short" pipes reported by Pinckard may have been merely European pipes whose stems had broken off, or they may have been distinctive types; a late eighteenth century source for Jamaica, for example, mentions that some planters on that island supplied their slaves with, among other goods, "short tobacco pipes" [quoted in Brathwaite 1971: 232].)

Although the pipe discussed in this paper may have been smoked in the manner described by Pinckard, it is more likely that a detachable stem of some perishable material, such as a hollow reed or tube of wood (see, for example, Shaw 1960), was inserted into the bore hole to enlarge the total stem. The small bridge between the back of the bowl and the top of the stem on the Barbadian pipe (see figure) has an approximately 0.3-centimeter hole which was probably used to tie or otherwise secure the detachable stem to the rest of the pipe. This usage has been suggested by Ozanne's observations on a large collection of Ghanaian pipes he studied (1964):

In most Ghanaian tobacco-pipes, provision is made for the secure attachment of a very tightly drawn string fixing the two parts together. A simple collar termination to the stem was an early and very widespread device for securing the cord. In Accra and Shai this was quickly given up in favour of a hook between the bowl and the stem... if the string were drawn from the hook towards the underside of the vegetable stem, most of the strain would fall on the clay stem, the hook serving only to keep the string in place.

The bridge or hook "is a common feature" of archaeologically recovered pipes from historic period sites in southern Ghana, particularly the coastal areas (Ozanne 1962: 52). This hook does not appear to have been reported from central or northern Ghana or other areas of West Africa where "two-piece" pipes have been recovered archaeologically (Ozanne 1964: 37; Shaw 1960; Shinnie

and Ozanne 1962; York 1973; and Posnansky, personal communication. Cf. Hill 1976); moreover, the hook feature does not seem to have been found in European pipes or pipes of aboriginal American manufacture (see, for example, Shaw 1960). The bridge or hook on the Barbados pipe is one of its distinctive features and provides a strong clue, as will be discussed below, to the pipe's ultimate provenance in southern Ghana (Gold Coast).

In trying to establish the stylistic provenance or actual origin of the Barbados pipe, the pipe or illustrations and photographs of it were shown to a number of New World scholars. Several could not suggest a provenance or were emphatic that it is not of European origin. One authority ventured a Brazilian Amerindian origin on the basis of decorative features, such as the fluting, but this could not be confirmed by any published source or verbal authority; another reputable New World archaeologist, attesting to the rarity of the pipe, suggested a late sixteenth- or seventeenth-century Spanish colonial manufacture, but this identification likewise could not be corroborated. Furthermore, a search of the North American historical archaeological literature failed to yield similar items. Other authorities and published evidence, however, strongly suggest that the pipe is of West African, particularly Ghanaian, origin.

Judging from a search of the West African ethnographic literature and various museum collections I have examined, the Barbados pipe does not appear to resemble modern or relatively modern West African pipes; and it does not resemble archaeologically recovered pipes which have been reported from various areas of West Africa such as Sierra Leone, Mali, and Chad (Hill 1976). However, a probable African provenance was suggested by Frank Willett and Merrick Posnansky, scholars with extensive experience in West African archaeology, who examined drawings and photographs of the pipe. Willett believes the pipe is "essentially African in form" (personal communication) and Posnansky independently concluded that the pipe "could quite easily be dropped into a late seventeenth century collection from Ghana and would be quite at home" (personal communication). Corroborative and more detailed evidence primarily derives from Paul Ozanne's research on Ghanaian pipes.

In an article dealing with the early historic period archaeology around Accra, Ozanne discusses various types of clay pipes which represented many different forms. Most of these pipes were "collected from the surface of old settlements, or from road-cuttings and industrial workings" (1962: 51). Although the illustrations accompanying Ozanne's article often lack clarity and individual pipes are not described in detail, in stylistic and other features some of the pipes appear to be very similar to the pipe discussed in this paper. According to Ozanne, the Ghanaian pipes were manufactured in Africa (that is, they were not European), and dated from the latter half of the seventeenth century. In a more detailed study of a Ghanaian collection of between 1,500 and 2,000 pipes, all of which are short-stemmed or "two-piece", Ozanne (1964) also provides suggestive evidence for a Ghanaian origin for the Barbados pipe. The collection that he studied displayed "a

bewildering variety in design". Ozanne classified the collection into five types, two of which have the hook between bowl and stem, and one of which (Ozanne's type 2b) seems most closely to fit the Barbados pipe.

Ghanaian two-piece pipes include such a wide array of stylistic and decorative features that although many may have been mold-made, one gets the impression that decorative features were individually crafted and not mass produced. In any case, the Barbados pipe even appears distinctive in various of its specific decorative details when these are compared to other pipes from southern Ghana which have been illustrated in the archaeological literature from that area (Ozanne 1962, 1964; Shaw 1960). Nonetheless in its form and shape, short-stem, general decorative features, and especially the presence of the hook, the Barbados pipe closely resembles a number of pipes from southern and coastal Ghana. In his monographic study, Ozanne (1964) has dated these pipes from the latter half of the seventeenth century, although his discussion and the often crude accompanying illustrations (and lack of some crucial illustrations in the monograph copy I was able to consult) make it difficult to assign a more specific provenance and precise date to the Barbados pipe.

Although the pipe could have been made in Barbados following West African techniques and stylistic features, available evidence makes it highly unlikely that it was manufactured on the island. Barbados contains clay deposits from which pottery has been manufactured for almost three centuries (Handler 1963). However, the color and qualities of the pipe's clay, the absence of other archaeological evidence for similar pipes in the cemetery and from excavations and surface collections in other areas of the island, and the fact that an abundant array of primary historical sources do not mention or suggest any kind of pipe manufacturing in Barbados indicate that the pipe was brought from elsewhere.

A Ghanaian provenance would be consistent with what is known about the English slave trade from the Gold Coast to Barbados during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Handler and Lange 1978: 20-28), as well as with the apparent West African stylistic origin of other artifacts associated with the burial, particularly the necklace and the metal bracelets and armllets - even though none of these artifacts is sufficiently distinctive to permit identification with a particular West African cultural group or a specific coastal area.

Some of the metal artifacts could have been manufactured in Barbados by slaves who applied African stylistic features and employed African manufacturing techniques in their houses or at plantation forges (Handler and Lange 1978: 153-158), although it is more likely that these artifacts and the pipe were transported to the island via the middle passage from West Africa to the New World. Whether the pipe, in particular, was actually transported by the person with whom it was ultimately interred is, of course, a question that never can be answered. The use of the pipe, however, as a grave good reflects a characteristically West African mortuary pattern which was also well evident in other burials excavated in the slave cemetery. Although these burials were

associated with European-manufactured white clay pipes, the pipes were incorporated in the mortuary complex following an African pattern. Their use as grave goods was one manifestation of a number of African influences on the mortuary complex that plantation slaves developed (Handler and Lange 1978: 208-215), and the mortuary complex, in turn, provides but another example of the way in which African traditions influenced Barbadian slave culture in general (see, for example, Handler and Frisbie 1972).

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