

THE SHELL-IMPLEMENTS AND OTHER ANTIQUITIES OF BARBADOS.

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THE small Island of Barbados is mainly composed of a recent coralline limestone, which seems to have been upheaved from the bosom of the ocean in successive and well-marked terraces of elevation. There is not even a fragment of the primary or secondary rocks in the whole island; or, in other words, there is no hard stone. It was therefore a problem to the aboriginal inhabitants, of what substance they should form their weapons and implements for daily use, and it was solved by their employment of the hardest material to which they had access, the shells, viz., of the surrounding sea, such as the *cassis* and *conus*, and especially the great *strombus*, and, when additional hardness was required, the fossil shells which abound in the coralline limestone. It is this circumstance which gives individuality to the implements of the aborigines of Barbados, and renders them peculiarly interesting to the ethnologist and antiquary. Weapons of *hard* stone are, it is true, occasionally found in Barbados, but they are comparatively of very rare occurrence, and were, of course, brought either from the other islands where primitive or volcanic rocks abound, or from the mainland of South America. One example of these was found in a grave, associated with a skeleton which had been interred in a sitting posture. It may perhaps be questioned whether these *hard* stone objects were not used by another or an earlier race, but it is much more probable that the two materials were used contemporaneously. The wealthier people would have been able to afford the luxury of an imported article, while the lower class would put up with those of home manufacture. That the shell implements were the product of Barbados, and Barbados alone, is proved by the fact, that, whereas the superior stone implements are

found in large numbers in islands like Grenada or St. Vincent, which abound in volcanic rocks, the shell implements are only discovered in Barbados ; their inferior quality in point of hardness doubtless preventing their exportation to other places.

The present race of white Barbadians, or "Bims," to whom the desire or habit of scientific investigation is altogether abhorrent, have a notion that, previous to the settlement of the island by the English, in the seventeenth century, it had never been inhabited by any fixed race, and was only occasionally visited by wandering Caribs, as in the case of the fabled island of Robinson Crusoe. This opinion, however, is completely disproved by the extraordinary quantity of implements and pottery which are discovered throughout the whole island, no less in its centre than along the coast.¹ In the parish of St. James, for instance, several cart-loads were found lying together, and with characteristic incuriosity were carried away to "macadamize" a road. Near the Chapel of St. Luke, in a small gully at the very centre of the island, I myself on one occasion picked up no less than seven implements in the space of ten minutes, as well as a quantity of pottery. The favourite spots for the habitation of the shell-workers seem to have been under rock-shelters at the entrance of caves in the limestone rocks, and upon the sloping sides of the numerous "gullies," which form the most characteristic feature of Barbadian scenery, and in whose bottoms water might be readily retained. "Indian River," in St. Michael's parish, and the neighbourhood of the fresh water springs on the borders of St. Michael's and St. James's, and the springs on the Codrington College estate in St. John's, seem all to have been centres of peculiarly dense population. The fact that almost every available inch of land has for years been under cultivation, joined to the great ignorance and want of observation on the part of the inhabitants, has unfortunately combined to prevent the discovery and recording of the burial places of the ancient aborigines. The instance already mentioned, for which I am indebted to Mr. W. A. Culpeper, a young gentleman, a student of Codrington College, who, almost alone amongst Barbadians, takes an

¹ The Rev. Griffith Hughes, in his History of Barbados, mentions the discovery of numerous pottery kilns.

intelligent interest in the Archæology and Natural History of the island, is the only one of which I could hear during a year's residence.

The shell implements, of which I exhibited a large collection in the temporary museum at the meeting of the Institute at Bury St. Edmunds, preparatory to presenting them to the British Museum, are of several well-marked distinct shapes.

The commonest type of all is a grooved chisel, in which the natural bend of the shell from which it is cut is taken advantage of to form a handle convenient for the grasp. Ungrooved chisels are likewise of frequent occurrence, and resemble in form the various types of the so-called "celts" of Europe. One of these last, found in digging the foundations of the hospital at Bridgetown, is formed apparently from a *fossil* shell. These implements vary in length from $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. to $6\frac{1}{2}$ in., and some of the smaller ones are very beautifully made. The cutting edge is generally straight, but in some few instances it is formed obliquely. Associated with objects of these two types, there is commonly found a class of implements whose use is hitherto unexplained. They are generally of a long oval form, somewhat curved at one end, and have their under side rough or serrated from the natural grooves of the lip of the shell out of which they are carved. The first which came under my notice, found near Codrington College, and given by me to the Christy Collection, had the irregularities rubbed down, which led me to suppose that it might be a kind of hone; but as this was the case in no other specimen, I have abandoned that idea as untenable. Some of the more rounded specimens somewhat resemble in shape the clay flesh-rubbers made at Siout in Egypt for use in the baths. The largest in my collection measures 6 inches in length by 3 inches in breadth; but two, which are the narrowest I have met with, are respectively 6 inches by 1 inch, and 6 inches by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch. One is only $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by $\frac{1}{2}$ an inch wide.

Another form of shell implement resembles that of a spoon. As in all the specimens of this type which I have seen the handles invariably end abruptly, or appear to be broken off at about the same distance from the edge, I conclude that they were originally fixed in a handle. Besides these types there are small instruments, which may possibly

be javelin heads, formed of the serrated lips of small shells, the serrations being retained apparently in order the more firmly to fix them to a handle with a thong. A perforated *conus* in my possession, which is rubbed down to form a smooth surface upon one side, almost looks as if it may have been intended for a whistle; and this idea may seem the more probable from the fact that large shells are used by the negroes of the present day, as they were in classical times, as trumpets; and indeed ancient shells are commonly found along with other shell implements which had apparently been prepared to serve the same purpose.²

Two facts may be mentioned in connection with this subject.

1. Shell trumpets (if such they be) made from shells of the Gulf of Mexico, have been found in ancient graves in *Canada*. My attention was drawn to one of them in the Museum of the University of Toronto, by Professor Wilson, the learned author of "*Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*."

2. *The* characteristic type of *North* as distinguished from *South* American stone implements, is the *grooved* type, that, viz., which resembles the most common form of the chisels of Barbados.

Amongst other objects formed of shell, I have a disk, $1\frac{7}{8}$ inch in diameter, slightly grooved with longitudinal marks (apparently the natural surface of the shell) upon one side, which I found with other remains in a small water-course near Codrington College,³ and a small turtle's head presented to me by Mr. W. A. Culpeper, found in the Parish of St. James.

In every place where the shell implements are found there is also discovered a large quantity of fragments of pottery. Some of this displays a considerable amount of design, as is the case with the lip of a vase in my possession, which also is shaped like the head of a turtle. Some vases display variety of colour. Imitations of animals were also made in this material; I have seen heads which may have been meant for those of seals, and I have heard of others being found, intended for toads. Schomburgk, in his

² The slaves in Barbados used formerly to be summoned to work by the blowing of shell trumpets.

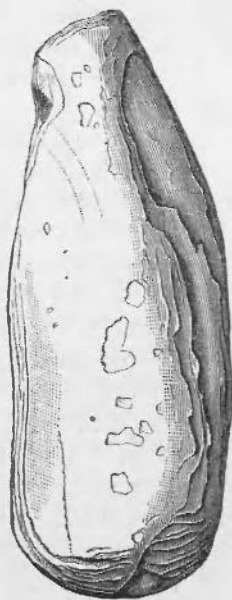
³ In the Blackmore Museum at Salisbury there is a similar flat disk formed

of shell, differing only in being slightly larger than the specimen here noticed. It was obtained from a "shell-mound" in Florida. There is another specimen in the Christy Collection.

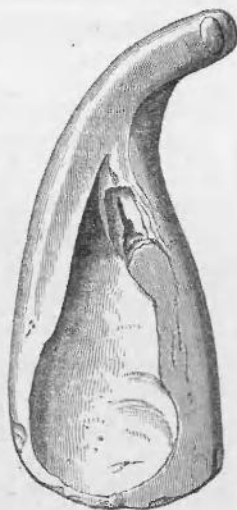
ANTIQUITIES OF BARBADOS.



Head, of reddish pottery, found in Barbados.



(Length $6\frac{1}{4}$ in.) Conset Point.

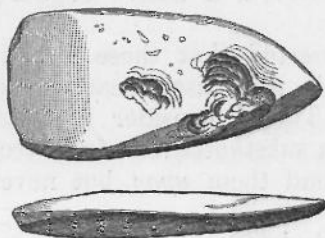


(Length $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.)



Implements formed of shell, found in Barbados.

work on Barbados, quoting from the earlier historian, Hughes, mentions the discovery of a huge pottery idol with its stand, and I myself possess two human heads, in reddish pottery, of which one in particular deserves notice from the great individuality of expression which it displays. I have likewise a singular pottery stamp impressed with a whorl ornament, and the half of a large pottery bead. Entire vases are of rare occurrence, but their excellency of workmanship is extolled by Hughes. The fragments of a huge vase found near Mount Ararat, in St. Michael's, were pointed out to me by the negro who discovered and afterwards broke it. It may perhaps have been of a sepulchral character, as certain South American tribes are reported to bury their dead in pots.



Length 5½ in.

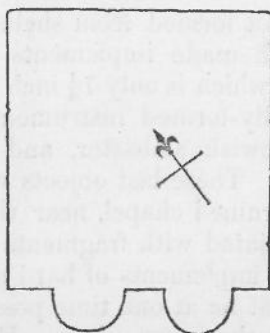
Of antiquities not formed from shells found in Barbados, I have several well made implements of hard green and black stone, one of which is only $1\frac{1}{4}$ inch long. I have also a small and beautifully-formed instrument in the shape of a knife, made of yellowish alabaster, and a kind of stamp of the same material. These last objects were found near the old parsonage and ruined chapel, near the sea, in the parish of St. Joseph, associated with fragments of pottery, pottery figures, and broken implements of hard stone. A civil engineer assured me that he at one time possessed an extraordinary relic found at the same place. He described it as a kind of cuirass or covering for a woman's breasts, formed of shell, beautifully carved with interlacing patterns, and perforated at the nipples. He had also a small crescent-shaped shell ornament, probably for suspension from the neck. Similar objects to this last are not unfrequently found in North America. Under a rock-shelter at Conset Point, I one day picked up a large disk of a fine light-coloured clay,

nearly as large as an ordinary plate. It may be conjectured that this was intended for food. Humboldt, in his "Views of Nature,"⁴ mentions that the Otomacs of the Orinoco eat yellowish-grey balls of this substance, and the same is the case with the inhabitants of a portion of Guiana, Bolivia, and Peru. The immense number of shells which lie scattered about wherever ancient remains are found in Barbados, testify moreover that the ancient shell-workers were great devourers of mollusks.

Representations of the commonest form of shell chisels may be found in Hughes's quaint History of Barbados; and Professor Wilson has given two in his "Prehistoric Man," of which the original of one is remarkable as having a pattern incised upon the back. It was presented to the Professor by Dr. Bovell, a native of Barbados, now practising at Toronto.

It has been asserted that these implements have been found imbedded in the raised beach near a place called the Bat Rock. This I consider as probable, but I was unable to obtain a substantiation of the truth of the report. I have myself found them *upon*, but never *in*, the deposit in question.

Before I left Barbados, I became aware, through the

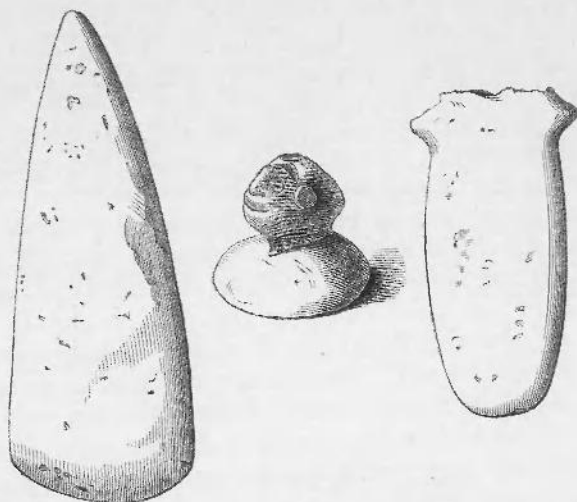


No. I.—Indian cave, or chamber, in limestone rock on the Goodland Estate, Barbados.

Dimensions 30 ft. by 28 ft.

kindness of Mr. W. A. Culpeper of Frolic, Fontabelle, and Codrington College, of the existence of some curious rock-hewn chambers excavated in the limestone in the neighbourhood of Bridgetown, and designated by the inhabitants

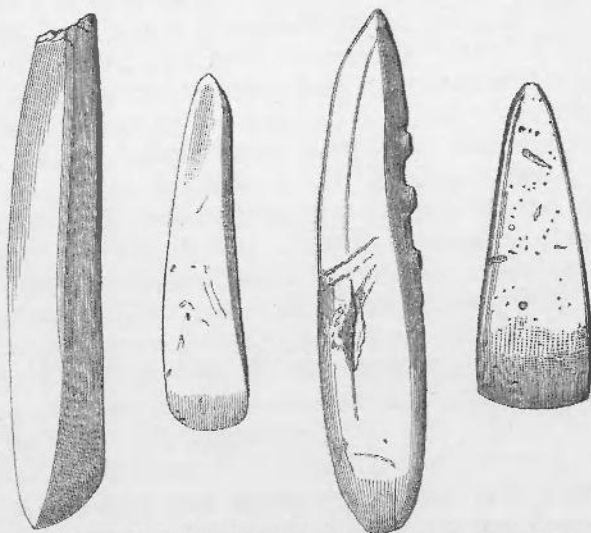
⁴ Page 143, English edition.



Length nearly 4 in., of shell.

Original size, of alabaster (?)

The central object is probably a lip-ornament, of shell : orig. size.



Original size.

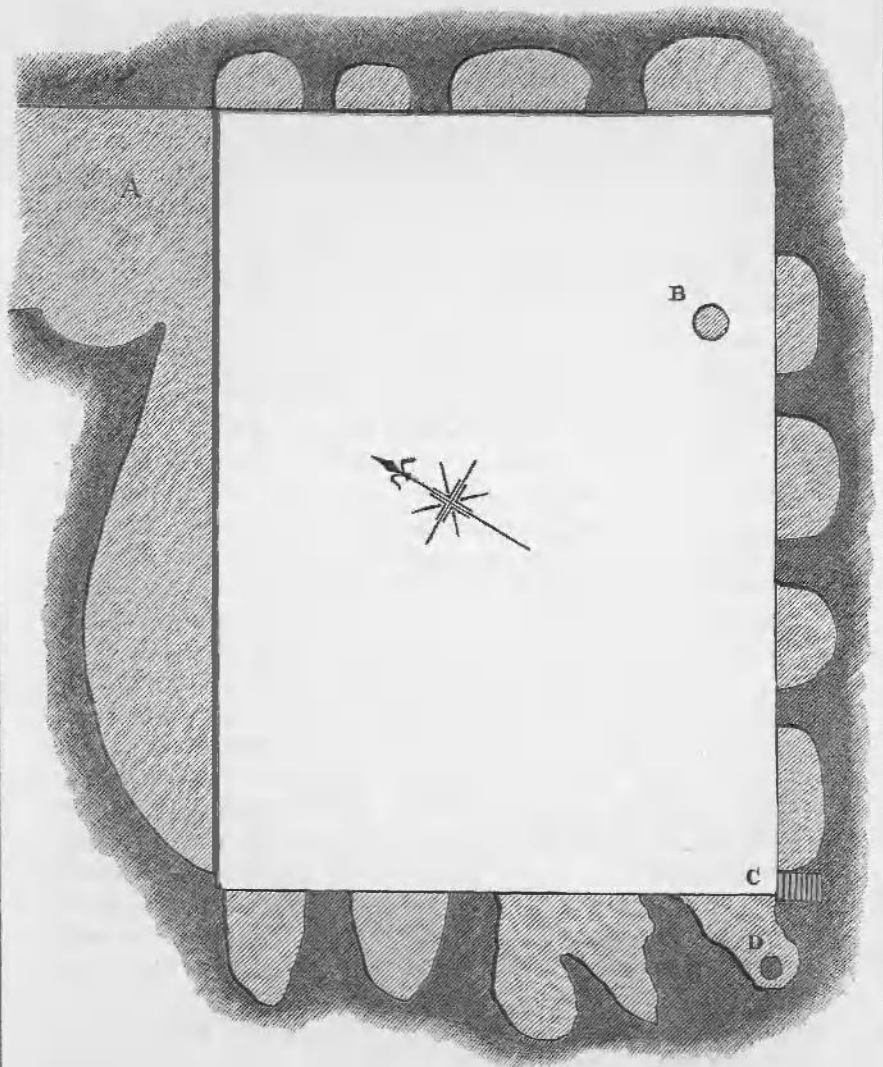
Implements of shell found in Barbados.

as "Indian caves." The peculiarities of these structures are so great, that, whatever be their age, it is desirable that a few particulars about them should be placed on record. The "caves" in question are three in number, and are situated respectively at Lemon Grove, Mount Ararat, and on the Goodland estate, all in the parish of St. Michael, and in a district teeming with the shell implements and pottery of the ancient aborigines.⁵ The "caves" or chambers possess the same common characteristics, all being roofless rooms cut in the coralline limestone rock, and all containing a greater or less number of niches. The simplest of the three (I.), that on the Goodland estate, I was unable to visit, but Mr. W. A. Culpeper has obligingly furnished me with a plan. This excavation is 30 ft. in length by 28 ft. in breadth, and has two niches at its south-western end. The second "cave" (II.) is on the property called Lemon Grove, at Fontabelle, St. Michael's, close to Indian River, and with characteristic barbarism has been turned into a pig-stye by a sporting mulatto who lives in the adjoining house. This excavation contains a modern well, and is approached by modern steps. It must be nearly 40 ft. long by some 30 ft. broad, but the north-west side is dilapidated by time. Twelve niches, varying in width from 5 to 9 ft., remain in the sides of the excavation. The third and most interesting "cave" (III.) is that on the Mount Ararat estate, and is situate on an upheaved rock-terrace close to the sea, and near the remarkable fresh-water springs which burst forth under the waters of the ocean. By the kindness of H. E. Major Mundy, acting Governor of Barbados, who granted me the use of a gang of negro convicts, I was enabled to explore this curious cave, and to discover hard by another chamber of equal dimensions. The "cave" itself was partially filled up with an accumulation of earth, and some tamarind trees had established themselves at the bottom, while an ancient frangipani tree, with its twisted and gnarled stem, leaned over the top. (See woodcuts.)

Having cut down the tamarinds, and cleared the entire cave of the earth and stones with which in course of years it had become incumbered, finding in the course of the excavation a few of the shell implements of the aborigines,

⁵ Others, it is said, exist in the Parishes of St. James and Christ Church, but I have

not been able to verify the truth of the report.



No. II.—Indian Cave, at Lemon Grove, St. Michael's, Barbados. Dimensions, about 40 ft. by 30 ft.

- A. Rectangular chamber, 20 ft. by 10 ft., probably modern, or much changed, the whole north west side of the cave having been much modified and injured.
 - B. A modern well.
 - C. Modern descent by steps, and door.
 - D. A hole now closed up, possibly for exit of smoke, originally, or approach to the cave.
- The niches at the sides vary in width from 5 to 9 ft. ; the intervening portions of rock 18 in. to 30 in.

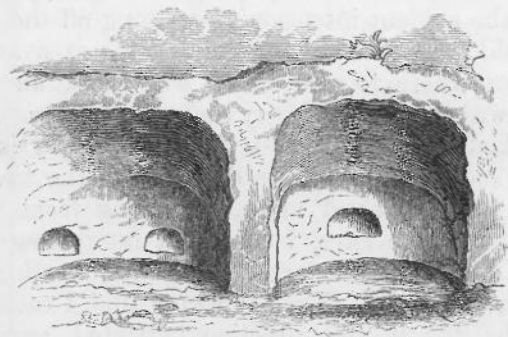
and a few fragments of pottery, the cave presented the features of a room 30 ft. in length by 12 ft. in breadth, with walls formed by the coralline limestone rock. In depth the cave is about 6 ft. All round the walls are a series of rounded arches forming niches. Of these there is one at the north-western extremity, from which an internal arch had originally communicated with the surface, and formed an approach to or exit from the cave. At the opposite end there are two large niches, in one of which I discovered two small internal niches, and in the other one a similar cavity (see woodcut on the next page). On either side of the room are five large niches, two smaller and lower ones being in each case placed alternately between higher ones—an arrangement which gives something of architectural effect to the place. Near the middle of the cave, a kind of circular well-hole has been sunk to the depth of a few feet, with the evident intention of draining off the rain-water which would otherwise have inundated the excavation. The floor is everywhere formed of the solid rock, and the walls are hewn with great regularity and smoothness. It should be remarked that the limestone of Barbados is soft and easily worked, but hardens on exposure to the air.

In the first left-hand niche, reckoning from the south-western end of the cave, I made an interesting discovery. This was a small inner arch, apparently leading to some other place, or to the surface. Seeing this, I caused several holes to be dug in the direction indicated, and was soon rewarded by finding a room or cave of equal dimensions with the first, and lying parallel to it, at the distance of about four feet, and entirely filled with earth and stones. Further excavation proved this cave to have a single niche at either end, and four niches upon each of the sides. These last are, however, differently arranged from those in the sides of the first chamber, two lower and somewhat smaller niches being placed between two higher ones, instead of alternating with them, as in the first instance.⁶ The entrance to this second cave was at the opposite end as compared with that in the other, being at the south-western extremity. Following this entrance arch to the surface, I discovered four curious niche-chambers (not shown in the plan,) placed

⁶ The space occupied by these two caves is about 30 ft. north-west and south-east by 12 ft. north-east and south-west.

irregularly beside the ascent or exit, one on the left and three on the right-hand side.

The age and purpose of these curious caves I must leave for the decision of those more competent to form a judgment than I am myself. If I might form a conjecture, I should imagine that they may have been constructed as rude temples, and that the niches were intended for the reception of the large idols of pottery, of which, as already mentioned, numerous fragments, and in one instance an entire specimen, have been found in the island. The niches are of such a size as readily to admit a tall man in a sitting posture. There is assuredly nothing of a sepulchral character about the caves, and the fact that all these chambers are open to the sky at the top precludes the idea of their being intended for habitation.

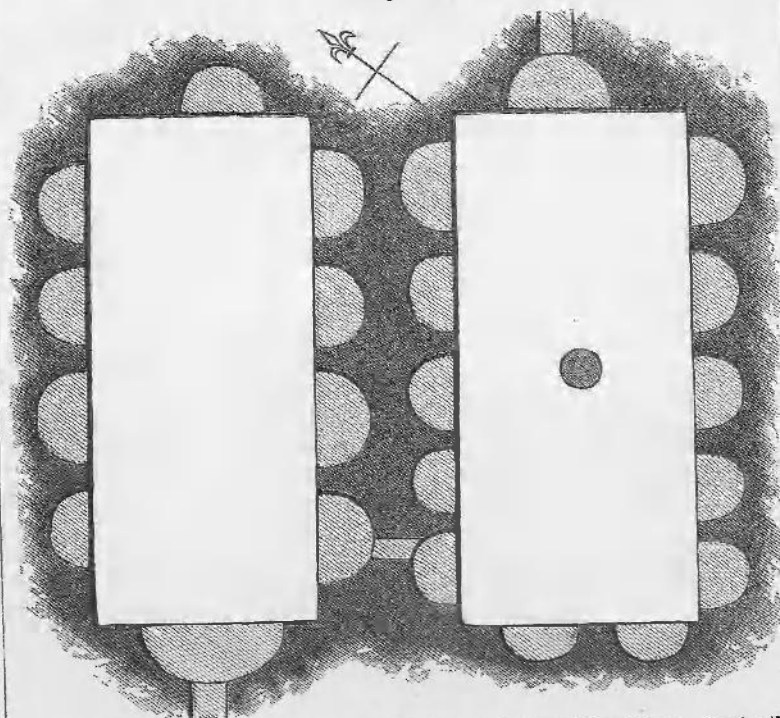


Cave (No. III.) on the Mount Ararat Estate, Barbados. South-western end of the chamber first examined.

ANTIQUITIES OF BARBADOS



No. III.—Indian Cave near Bridgetown, Barbados. On the Mount Ararat Estate.
View looking north-east.



No. III.—Plan of the Caves near Bridgetown, Barbados. On the Mount Ararat Estate, shewing the entrance passages, &c. (Area occupied by the two caves about 50 ft. by 12 ft.)