FORAGING VARIABILITY IN THE PREHISTORIC CARIBBEAN: A PAIRED SITE COMPARISON FROM CARRIACOU, GRENADA [1]


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This research assesses the zooarchaeological evidence for variable foraging strategies at two matched Caribbean sites, Sabazan and Grand Bay, on the Grenadine Island of Carriacou during the Late Ceramic Age, ca. AD 400 – 1400. Using human behavioral ecology and foraging theory, I investigate whether foraging adaptations differ between sites in a context where the culture, environmental structure, and settlement history of the study locals correspond strongly to each other. This parity of comparison permits me to evaluate whether multiple, optimally adaptive foraging solutions (multiple foraging optima) may exist under the same set of cultural, ecological, and chronological constraints. In addition, I consider the potential for disparate foraging optima to differentially influence the course of future adaptations at each site and resulting human impacts on the environment by examining long-term patterns of resource use and evidence for anthropogenic exploitation depression. Results indicate strong correspondences between the sites in taxonomic composition, major prey species and habitats targeted, the introduction of continental mammals, and intensified exploitation of molluscan resources over time. At both sites, resource use appears to have been sustainable over a millennium of occupation. Significant zooarchaeological differences between sites were also identified, namely the presence of a well-developed pelagic tuna fishery at Sabazan and a comparatively greater emphasis on inshore/shallow water fishing at Grand Bay. Rather than support the existence of multiple foraging optima, however, these disparities in resource use are better attributed to modest differences in local environmental structure. These findings underscore the way in which seemingly minor foraging constraints may shape behavioral adaptations and the importance of incorporating such considerations into analytic models. Moreover, they illustrate that the ecological effects of human foraging in the past are variable and cannot be universally assumed to have been detrimental, even for small island ecosystems. It is hoped that by integrating into an explicit foraging theory framework the methods currently employed in Caribbean archaeology to understand resource exploitation and insular adaptation, this research will increase the predictive and explanatory power of such studies and open up additional avenues of research.
[3] https://anthropology.washington.edu/research/graduate