

# Chapter 3

## The Movement of People and Things in the Capitania de Pernambuco: Challenges for Archaeological Interpretation

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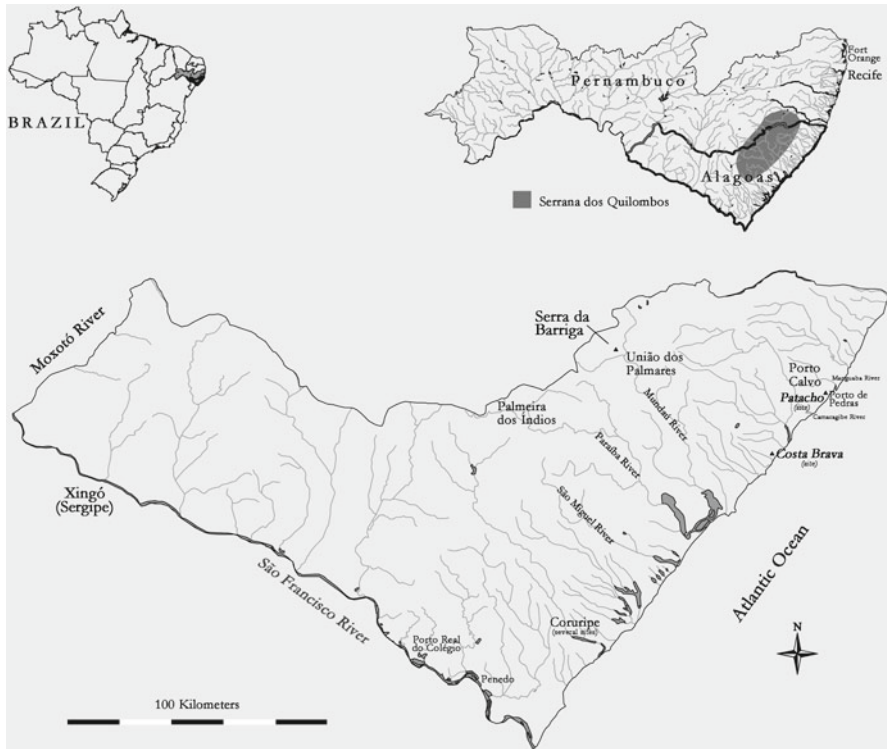
The archaeological interpretation of contact situations is an area of great potential to understand the complexity of cultural entanglements among diverse groups brought together in varied circumstances. Archaeological narratives concerning these tumultuous episodes are relevant on a number of levels, ranging from methodological issues and advances in a variety of historical and environmental contexts to the engagement and inclusion of descendent communities upon whom the production of knowledge has the most direct impact. While this field of research has been promising and has produced an extensive literature, many conceptual and methodological challenges remain unresolved. Of interest for the present discussion are the reductionist categories often employed to “sort out” and simplify extremely complex and rapidly changing social environments, topics broached by a number of historical archaeologists [cf. contributions to Cusick (1998)].

As in most regions during European expansion and colonization, the Brazilian northeast experienced upheavals that touched upon every aspect of life. Nonetheless, historical archaeological research in this region has focused principally on colonial endeavors and associated sites, such as forts (Albuquerque, Lucena, & Walmsley, 1999; Allen, Moraes, Leite Neto, & Miranda Pinto, 2009), urban sites (Albuquerque & Cazetta, 2009), sugar plantations (Barbosa, 2012; Forest, 2006), religious centers (Albuquerque & Lucena, 2003), and the like. While the location and identification of diverse colonial archaeological sites such as these is a rather easy endeavor, owing to their visibility in the archaeological record and heritage politics favorable to the study of these places, historic-period Native American villages and maroon communities permit no such facility. As such, these types of sites have received very little attention by historical archaeologists working in the northeast.

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**Fig. 3.1** Map showing places and archaeological sites mentioned in the text (figure by S.J. Allen)

Interpretive difficulties in the archaeology of contact in the region came to light after several field seasons conducted on the Serra da Barriga, in the town of União dos Palmares in the state of Alagoas (Fig. 3.1). The colonial Captaincy of Pernambuco included the entirety of the present-day state of Alagoas, which is delimited in the south by the São Francisco River, in the west by the Moxotó River, and on the east by the Atlantic Ocean. The state's northern border is shared by the present-day state of Pernambuco.

Archaeological studies in this region have provided ample data on prehistoric occupation and material culture, a situation that is at once exciting and frustrating. Exciting because archaeological research in Alagoas up to approximately 15 years ago was limited to scattered salvage work that provided little benefit for advancing knowledge beyond description, with the notable exception of a large Cultural Resource Management (CRM) project owing to a hydroelectric dam at the far western edge of the state (Xingó). The accelerated pace of studies over the past decade, particularly those headed by the Núcleo de Ensino e Pesquisa Arqueológico (NEPA) of the Universidade Federal de Alagoas (UFAL), has enabled the development of a general picture of settlement patterns and artifact diversity as well as honing

excavation techniques on open-air sites in a variety of postdepositional contexts. Aside from these advances, the situation is also frustrating as the Serra da Barriga was chosen, obviously, for its role as an important place for the *Palmarinos*, Africans and African-Brazilians who escaped the sugar plantations, eventually building a complex of communities, called *quilombos*, *mocambos*, *palenques*, *cimarrones*, or maroon societies that endured from the end of the sixteenth century to 1694. Indeed, the continued existence of these maroon societies into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is still an unexplored area of research. Irrespective of persistent speculative interpretations (e.g., Funari & Carvalho, 2011), the material evidence at the Serra da Barriga points to pre-Palmares occupation by Native South American groups, and the quilombo seems as elusive today as it was in the seventeenth century [Allen, 2001; see Allen (2010) for a review of research in the region].

The archaeology of contact sites in northeastern Brazil has suffered from under-theorizing and particularly faulty methodologies. In light of this situation, the present text does not aim to offer an innovative conceptual framework or analytical technique for the archaeology of contact, but rather to contextualize these challenges regionally and to suggest a direction for future and, one hopes, more productive research. Here, I present the issues and problems facing the archaeological interpretation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Native South American and maroon sites in Alagoas. I first present a brief portrayal of the region from initial occupation by Native South American groups to European settlement. Next, I suggest that the first two centuries of European colonization created a social and cultural milieu that (should) inhibit the employment of reductionist categories and associated methodologies for studying the period. The third section examines smoking pipes to illustrate the current difficulties in advancing convincing interpretations on the archaeology of contact in the region. Finally, I identify, based on Rogers (2005), some points that should be considered in the approach to the archaeological study of contact in the Brazilian northeast.

## **Native South Americans in the Serrana dos Quilombos**

A convincing account of culture contact and change requires an understanding of precontact social and cultural processes, themselves dynamic and changing. As mentioned above, archaeological research in Alagoas is scant, but sufficient to draw a general picture of prehistoric occupation. Sites excavated in Xingó, on the margins of the São Francisco River, have yielded C<sup>14</sup> dates of 9,000 BP, continuing through approximately 1,000 BP (Martin, 1997), to date the oldest sites in the immediate region of Alagoas perhaps also representing initial occupation. The period between this initial occupation and the emergence of semisedentary villages has not been studied in Alagoas. Nonetheless, the presence of many rock art sites and the occasional discovery of lithic processing sites with no apparent association to larger sedentary communities suggest a generalized hunting-gathering subsistence economy by mobile populations.

Archaeological excavations in the towns of Palmeira dos Índios (Hoffnagel, de Lima, & Martins, 1990) and União dos Palmares (Allen, 2010) demonstrate that peoples of the Macro-Jê or isolated linguistic groups, or more specifically non-Tupinambá, occupied large open-air spaces on elevated terrain from approximately 1500 years BP to shortly before and up to contact with Europeans. The archaeological record indicates that these groups, often referred to archaeologically as the Aratu archaeological tradition (Prous, 1993), lived in large villages constructed around central plazas where they practiced swidden horticulture and primary and secondary burial practices in large and small pottery urns. Currently, these sites are easily detected by highly visible and dense concentrations of pottery and black earth.

While no convincing systematic research has been conducted on coastal precolonial sites in Alagoas, studies in the state of Pernambuco to the north, and Sergipe to the south, together with ethnohistorical sources suggest that the coastal region was occupied by diverse groups related to the Tupi-Guarani linguistic group, including Caeté and Potiguar, among others (Marchant, 1942; Martin, 1997; Prous, 1993). These sites are rather easily identified by the distinctive pottery painted in elaborate geometric motifs (Prous & Lima, 2008), while subsistence economy and intra-village patterning appear quite similar to other groups throughout northeastern Brazil.

Previous to European contact in 1500, and certainly after, the hills and valleys of the Mundaú, Paraíba, and São Miguel Rivers appear to have been contested territory. Evidence in the northeast generally points to prehistoric contact among diverse Tupi-Guarani and other Native South American groups (historically referred to collectively as *Tapuia*), suggesting a complex social and political landscape prior to the arrival of Europeans, and it is commonly held that they battled constantly. The archaeological sites Rosa and Tetos, located on the far eastern portion of the Serra da Barriga, are Tupinambá. Although still in analysis, the data suggest that the sites were occupied concomitantly and perhaps served different purposes, the latter being for ritual practices. The relation between these two sites and the Serra da Barriga site (SB1, exhibiting non-Tupi material culture) remains unclear. Less obscure, however, is that while contact with Europeans might have differed in character and scope to previous encounters, the native peoples of the northeast were well accustomed to cultural contact, change, and certainly adaptation.

## First Portuguese Settlements and the First Quilombos

Very little is known about the contact between Europeans and Native South Americans during the sixteenth century in Alagoas. Some sources suggest the existence of settlement in the region during the early sixteenth century (Calado, 2004[1648]; Salvador, 1982[1627]; Souza, 2001[1587]). But it was not until around 1580 that the region became a target of a concerted effort to establish sugar plantations. Cristóvão Lins received a sizeable land grant and was tasked by the Crown with clearing the region of foreign traders, particularly the French, and “pacifying” Native Americans, which led most frequently to extermination, enslavement, and

forced relocation (Calado, 2004[1648]; Marchant, 1942). The region chosen for installation of the first sugar plantations and mills (*engenhos*) was Porto Calvo, accessible by the navigable Manguaba River. Five to seven *engenhos* were built (the number depends on the source consulted), at least four in the present-day municipality of Porto Calvo and one between the Camaragibe River and the town (Allen, Miranda, Silva, & Tenório, 2007; Mello Neto, 1977). Given this concerted effort to pacify or remove native peoples, it is easy to imagine a sizable influx of coastal Native Americans to the hinterland.

It was during this period that the first mention of quilombos was noted as a problem for economic development, and it is reasonable to suggest that the establishment of these communities predated by some years the efforts of the Portuguese to abolish them (Allen, 2010). Although some historians prefer to fix a date for the origin of Palmares—1605 is often cited (Freitas, 1984)—it is reasonable to date their emergence to the second half of the sixteenth century if we accept that prior to becoming a concern for authorities, the runaways already had the time to organize into viable and sustainable communities.

Similar to the case of Native South Americans, who had been either enslaved or displaced by colonists, many African and Afro-Brazilian enslaved workers took to the hinterland as soon as opportunity allowed. If these new arrivals to the hinterland were indeed on a bad footing with all native peoples in the region, as is commonly held, it is doubtful they would have been able to survive given the presence of cultural groups more familiar with the physical and social environment. Added to this is also the fact that the historical records are quite silent on hostilities between the two groups (in the broad sense); in fact, many documents seem to paint a rather vague and fluid notion of ethnic or racial distinctions [see documents appended to Gomes (2010)]. Only when accompanied by Europeans are South American Indians mentioned in the context of hostilities with Palmarinos. Caution should be exercised in assuming that Native South Americans fighting alongside the Portuguese necessarily meant that they were against the runaways, as individuals of African descent were also employed in the hunting of fugitives. Indeed, the social and political disruption wrought by European settlement opened the door for numerous factions and alliances on all sides, a situation documented throughout the world in contact situations (see Cusick, 1998; Trigger, 1985; Axtell, 1985; Marchant, 1942).

The brief historical context offered above has real implications for the archaeological study of quilombos and historic-period Native South American villages. Excluding precolonial population dynamics for the moment, the early colonial period was marked by the reoccupation of prehistoric sites by colonists and displaced Native South American individuals and groups as well as by maroons, and new communities were certainly established by these same peoples. Additionally, some sites, such as those on the Serra da Barriga, were possibly occupied during colonization of the coast and were marked by contact between displaced groups, whether bellicose or cooperative. In addition to the movements of individuals, the transfer, modification, and creation of traditions, both material and nonmaterial, served to mediate relations. The configurations are many and lead to a rather bewildering problem: just what will a seventeenth-century runaway slave or Native

South American village look like archaeologically? Furthermore, is the question itself valid given that Palmarino villages might have been neither but rather something altogether new (Allen, 2000a, 2000b, 2001)?

Tentatively, I argue that the region was a refuge zone in the sense employed by many researchers who study contact and colonization [cf. contributions to Cusick (1998), Stein (2005) and Murray (2004)]. This characterization arises from historical factors and the archaeological record. Religious missions were established to the west in Palmeira dos Índios (late seventeenth century), south in Porto Real do Colégio (early seventeenth century), and east in Porto de Pedras (late sixteenth century) (Souza, 2001[1587]), leaving the Serrana region unsettled by Europeans for more than 200 years after the first reconnoiters on the coast by explorers and traders. Not until the eighteenth century is there some evidence of Portuguese settlement, though documents from the early nineteenth century indicate clearly the existence of colonial towns and *aldeias* (loosely, missions and reservations) (Antunes, 1984). Archaeological research will be the only way to discover the social and cultural dynamics that took place in this region, and, for compelling interpretations to be constructed, the materiality of contact must be addressed critically.

## Smoking Pipes

The study of quilombos conceived as the study of contact brings with it the related issue of ethnic identification and affiliation of site—a relation that I feel has hindered development in this area and perhaps produced distortions of the social and cultural dynamics during this period. What we know, or thought we knew, from the early work on the Serra da Barriga site brings me to consider smoking pipes and the challenges to the archaeology of contact in northeastern Brazil. Though the discussion is centered on this site and others in the region, the issues raised apply to a much broader geographical area, as well as, I suspect, to similar historical and cultural circumstances in the Americas and beyond generally (for instance, debates on Colonoware in North American archaeology).

Six archaeological sites have been located on the Serra da Barriga, a small mountain in the geographic micro-region called Serrana dos Quilombos comprising principally the Atlantic Forest in the northeastern highlands (Allen, 2010). The sites range in date from approximately 900 BP to the nineteenth century. Although the Serra is currently populated, with about a dozen households, locales with no evidence of pre-twentieth century occupation were not considered archaeological sites. Initiated in 1992, archaeological research on the Serra da Barriga sought to uncover the Palmarino past, though interpretation of the record was subsequently set aside in lieu of discourse on the social and political importance and ramifications of the process of doing archaeology of Palmares (see Allen, 2001, 2006, 2010). Because of the exploratory nature of the Palmares Archaeological Project (see Allen, 2008; Orser, 1992, 1993), some artifacts were erroneously identified and attributed to the



**Fig. 3.2** Pipes from the Museu Maria Mariá, União dos Palmares, discussed in Orser, 1996, and currently housed in the Centro Arqueológico Palmarino (Photo by S.J. Allen)

quilombo, and subsequent data have forced us to reevaluate previous assumptions and interpretations.

Smoking pipes provide an excellent example of the difficulties in recognizing the archaeological record of seventeenth-century sites in the Brazilian northeast. Archaeological excavations on most sites in the northeast reveal at least fragments of smoking pipes if not complete examples, which provide, in general terms, a view of these artifacts from late prehistoric to modern times. Orser (1996: 123–129) employed a small sample of pipes as part of his argument in weaving the web of global connections of quilombos to the wider colonial world, attributing them to Palmarino manufacture (Fig. 3.2). The pipes were discovered by locals and kept in a museum called Museu Maria Mariá, named after an illustrious figure of the Sarmiento family of União dos Palmares. The pipes were reportedly found *on* the Serra da Barriga (Paulo Sarmiento, personal communication), although experience in working in this area has shown that the Serra da Barriga refers not only to the hill itself but to the surrounding area.

The pipes are manufactured of clay with a very fine-grained temper, and most are formed in molds. They are short stemmed and require reeds or other such tubes for smoking. Many pipes of this type, like the two on the left in Fig. 3.2, have perforations (fractured on the bottom example) probably allowing for hanging the pipe by a cord around the neck.



The lack of an archaeological context for the pipes obviously makes difficult their affiliation to Palmarino manufacture and/or use, though comparison to similar pipes discovered in Burial 72 on the Newton Plantation is certainly compelling (Orser, 1996: 126). Additionally, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century iconography depicting enslaved and free Africans and African-Brazilians smoking, together with the reification by the National Heritage Institute (IPHAN) of these types of pipes as “African,” leads to this largely uncritical affiliation. When excavated or studied in museum collections, the attribution is more often than not asserted but not demonstrated.

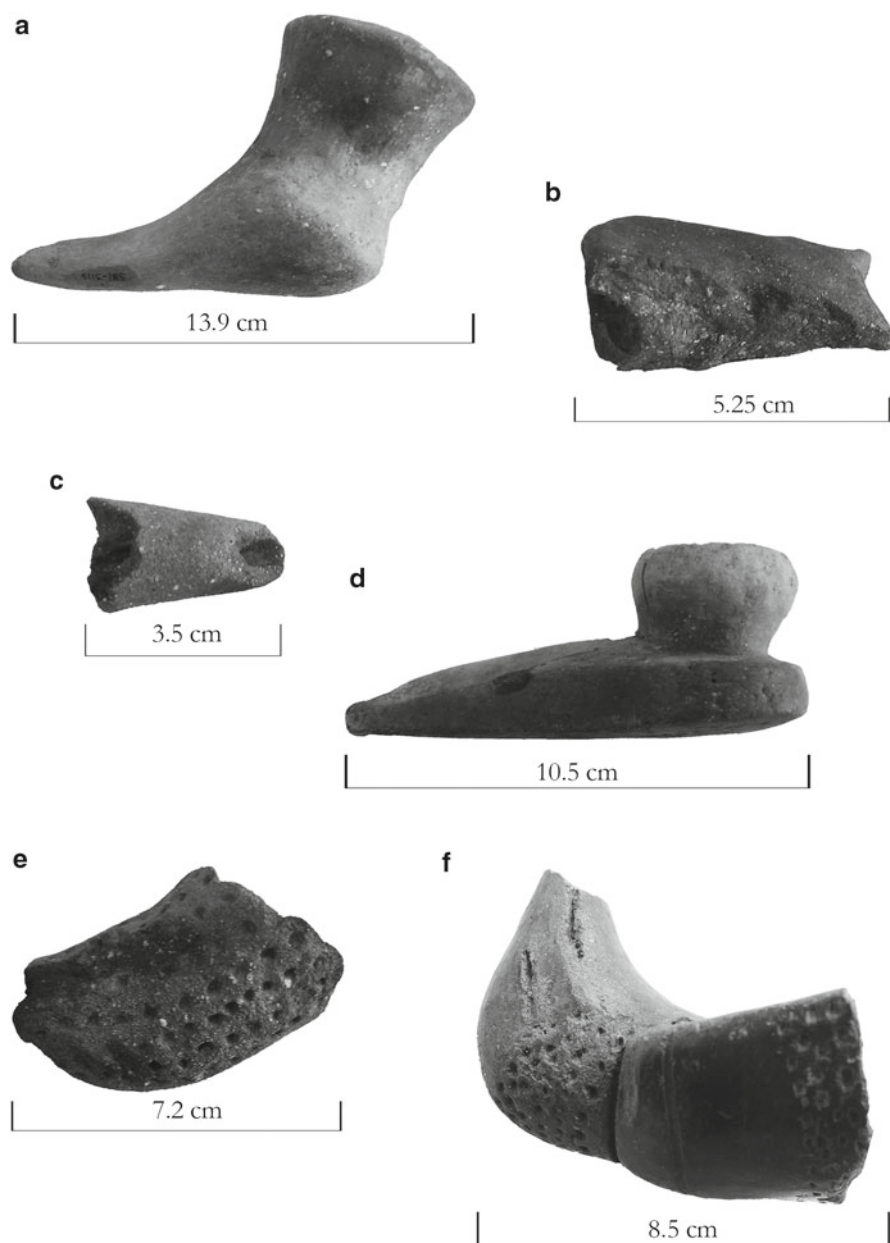
Though I had earlier dismissed Orser’s designation of these pipes as the “mystical pipes of Palmares” because they were not excavated (Allen, 2001), I have since returned to them to determine whether they could provide temporal and perhaps stylistic elements that might prove useful in the study of the region. The eventual utility of affirming the association to Palmarino manufacture is apparent. As described in the historical record, Palmarino villages should appear quite similar spatially to Native South American settlements, with dwellings arranged around a central plaza. Subsistence economy was equally similar, relying on beans, corn, and manioc; one might expect similar preparation methods and associated pottery vessels. While other groups of artifacts, such as ferrous items, could easily separate precolonial villages from historic-period quilombos, such an affiliation becomes extremely difficult after 1500. *If* the pipes could be attributed convincingly to Palmarino manufacture, they would provide at minimum evidence for identifying a site as a quilombo or a site involved in trade with the quilombos.

Dozens of smoking pipes, most fragmented but with several complete or near complete examples, have been recovered archaeologically from the site Serra da Barriga (Fig. 3.3). With the exception of one (pipe “d”), all exhibit forms known in the archaeology of prehistoric villages in the northeast. Although the zoomorphic pipe appears unusual if not unique at present, it is securely dated as pre (European) contact. No smoking pipes similar to those in Fig. 3.2 were recovered archaeologically on the Serra da Barriga, complicating the case made by Orser for a Palmarino origin; the situation is even more complex, however.

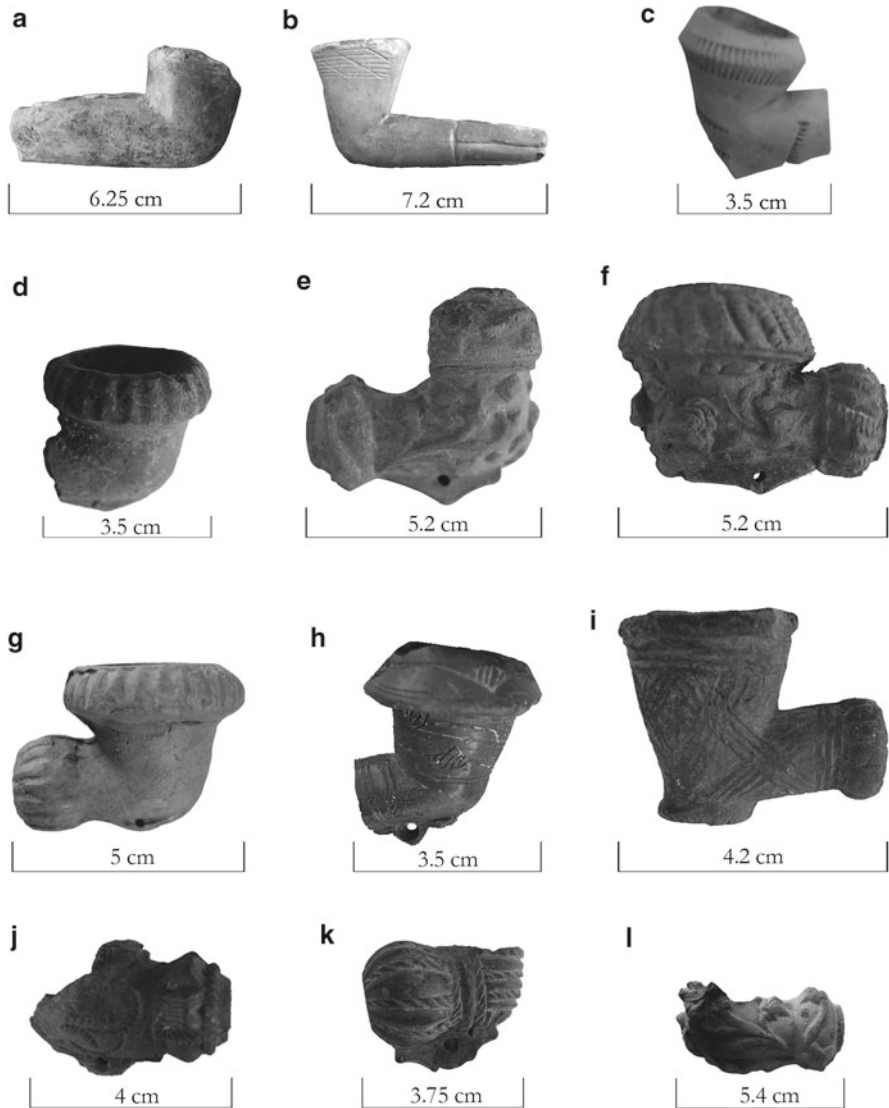
Relative and absolute dating of diverse contexts on the Serra da Barriga site (SB1) confirms that the most visible and dense component is prehistoric, occupied at least 900 years ago. In no closed context have we found diagnostic and chronologically informative historical objects. The situation leads us to question of whether the Serra da Barriga was indeed the location of the principal village of Palmares, at least as regards daily life as might be revealed through excavation of dwellings and other activity areas. Nonetheless, as the pipes were found in unknown areas, perhaps around the Serra da Barriga, it remained a possibility that the principal sites pertaining to the Palmares quilombos were not *on* the Serra but rather scattered around the valley. Given this possibility, it seemed necessary to determine, if possible, relative dates for the smoking pipes found in União dos Palmares by comparison with specimens uncovered regionally and from known historical contexts (Fig. 3.4).

Pipes from sites in Alagoas used for comparison include a seventeenth-century Dutch fortification (Costa Brava); a nineteenth-century coastal community called Patacho, located in Porto de Pedras; and the municipality of Coruripe, specifically





**Fig. 3.3** Clay smoking pipes recovered from the site *Serra da Barriga* (AL-UDP-SB1). Complete (a) and fragmented (f) pipes excavated from living surface of a Native American dwelling (VG1), dated to  $900 \pm 67$  BP. Note that (f) is in form of an armadillo. Complete (b), though worn, tubular pipe with fishtail lip, excavated from Area D. Mouthpiece (c) and bowl (e) recovered from surface collection. An unusual form (d) unfortunately recovered in bioturbation (probable tree root) (Photo by S.J. Allen)



**Fig. 3.4** Clay smoking pipes recovered from the sites in Alagoas and Pernambuco. Pipes (a) and (b) from Dutch fortification, (c) from *engenhoca* in Coruripe, (d) from Patacho site, (e) through (l) from sites in Recife and Fort Orange, Pernambuco (Photo by S.J. Allen)

an area marked by numerous small sugar mills (*engenhocas*) established during the nineteenth century. The Dutch fortification was constructed in 1635 and destroyed in 1636 (Coelho, 2003[1654]; Wätjen, 2004[1921]), providing tight chronological control as the site appears to be single component. Excavated in its entirety by archaeologists in 1992, all of the materials collected are housed currently at the local university (UFAL). As expected, the assemblage includes a large number of

white ball clay pipe stems and bowls but only two red clay examples (“a” and “b”). The latter are angular, with square bowls and short stems, though it appears that reeds or tubes were not necessary for smoking. The pipes are decorated with incised geometric motifs.

The vast sugarcane fields of the southern coastal region of Alagoas, in the municipality of Coruripe, have been the target of archaeological reconnaissance and sub-surface testing over the past several years (Allen, 2008; Allen & Moraes, 2008, 2010a, 2010b; Allen, Surya, Miranda, Tenório & Carrera, 2007). Most of the sites are nineteenth- to early twentieth-century *engenhocas*, small sugar mills engaged in the fabrication of sweets and *cachaça* (cane alcohol). While the depositional context of pipe “c” was superficial, it was found among a surface scatter that places it in the nineteenth century, although the presence of some painted Tupinambá earthenware is curious, perhaps owing to the plowzone. Surface treatment and paste characteristics of the pipe, however, support a later date.

Finally, a single red clay pipe (“d”) was excavated from the site Patacho, an important commercial center during the nineteenth and early twentieth century located in the town of Porto de Pedras (Allen, Fidelis, Lima, & Tenório, 2007; Barbosa, 2012). This small port was used principally for the importation of manufactured goods for distribution in the region and for export of coconut-derived products and sugar (cane or processed), among other produce. While tradition maintains and some documentary evidence suggests that the site may have been occupied in the seventeenth century, associated archaeological material was clearly no older than the nineteenth century.

Although some of the smoking pipes uncovered in Alagoas are similar in manufacture (molded) and morphology (requiring reeds or tubes to smoke) to those housed in the Museu Maria Mariá discussed by Orser, the design motifs are different. As relatively little archaeological work has been done in Alagoas, I turned to collections at the Universidade Federal de Pernambuco. The assemblages studied come from urban archaeological sites in Recife, the target of ongoing salvage archaeology over the past several years, as well as Fort Orange, a military installation built by the Dutch in 1631 and used until the nineteenth century (see Albuquerque et al., 1999).

A great number of pipes have been uncovered from the historical district known as *Recife Antigo* (Old Recife). It is interesting to note that preliminary analysis of the area indicates that a structure thought to be a Dutch merchant’s house produced only white ball clay pipes, while an area considered to have been a stretch of later workers’ houses includes a much larger proportion of red clay pipes, including many examples similar to those found in União dos Palmares (pipes “g,” “h,” and “i”). It remains to be studied what meaning(s) these pipes might have had for the people who lived in these houses, whether reflections of economic status or preference based on some underlying symbolic importance.

Excavations at Fort Orange do not provide tight chronological control for the pipe assemblage, as most were recovered from mixed contexts and thus could fall within a range of over 200 years. Nonetheless, the examples shown (“e,” “f,” “i,” “j,” and “k”), representing just a very small handful of the total, are too similar to ignore. If the pipes from União dos Palmares are indeed of Palmarino manufacture, they were a commodity distributed widely, as their abundance on sites in Recife reveals. The morphology of these smoking pipes on sites post-Palmares, however,

appears to indicate that they were not related intrinsically to quilombos, perhaps being fabricated by artisans and sold at local markets, a position advanced by Mello Neto (1977).

Although it is too early to make affirmations, it would appear that the clay pipes in question were a later addition to the colonial material world. Interestingly, none of the sites excavated in Alagoas can be placed firmly within the eighteenth century; indeed, even traditional historical sources are unsettlingly quiet for this century. Could it be that the pipes were in circulation during this period? If we consider that the region of Palmares was subsequently occupied by government-administered Native American communities (*aldeias*) and settlers' homesteads, as well as mercenaries and soldiers in exchange for services rendered in the destruction of Palmares [cf. documents appended to Gomes (2010)], it could be that the redware pipes might have been simply of local manufacture, sold at local markets, and distributed widely within the colonial economy. In fact, similar clay pipes, though not normally decorated, are still sold at local markets in the northeast.

As to the archaeological visibility of quilombos and historic-period Native American villages, it appears that these smoking pipes do not provide information that can aid in the identification of these communities. The jury is still out regarding their proper placement into chronological and cultural contexts, steps necessary prior to any in-depth interpretation of their role in social organization.

The point of employing these artifacts is to underscore the difficulties in identifying not only quilombos but also in differentiating sites occupied by South American Indian groups and nonurban colonial settlements dating from the sixteenth to the early eighteenth century. The lack of refined understanding of locally made material goods in circulation during the contact period seriously inhibits our interpretive power. While research continues on this group of artifacts, other categories, such as locally made redware pottery, also suffer from similar problems, and, at present, research is underway to aid in building a solid comparative material baseline for utilitarian pottery. Sikes' statement about star-motif pipes in the Chesapeake region as "made and used by all the actors involved in the complex social encounters that took place in Tsenacommacah" (2008: 76) is certainly relevant to the study of pipes and local production in northeastern Brazil.

## **Conclusion: Towards an Archaeology of Contact in Northeastern Brazil**

As the discussion on smoking pipes illustrates, the archaeological record is often oversimplified, and too much weight is given to "cultural traits" supposedly imbued in material goods. These two factors deny the complexity of social-cultural processes ensuing as diverse social groups came into proximity, opening the path for cooperation and conflict, adaptation, accommodation, and disruption. Accordingly, these processes have material components just as complex to "read" as the symbolic systems in which they operated.

Rogers (2005: 349–350) advances five propositions to consider in developing an archaeological methodology for a historical archaeology of contact and colonial situations in the area currently under study. These propositions are being used to inform and direct the development of a research program aimed at building a better understanding of the period. First, responses to the meeting and interaction between cultures are “meaningfully constructed”—a situation that also involves the materials (and structures) bound up in this process. This is a particularly important, if deceptively simple, affirmation as contact archaeology is often couched in terms of identity and ethnicity, and artifacts are often assumed to be bearers of culture, simplifying and distorting the context(s) of dynamic historical and cultural processes. In the context of northeastern Brazil, adhering to this constructivist view should remind researchers that there are no “black,” “Indian,” and “white” artifacts, but material goods to be understood in the complexity in which they were manufactured, traded, and used.

Second, social groups caught up in contact situations will understand, process, and respond in forms familiar to each. As discussed earlier, the Serrana dos Quilombos became the refuge of individuals and groups possessing a vast range of cultural traditions and speaking many languages. Similarly, the plantations and emerging urban centers also exhibited considerable diversity. The interaction between these many groups, material and nonmaterial, provided the milieu for adaptations and cultural inventions.

Third, historical sources reflect the understanding and rationalization of the “disjuncture in cultural logic.” Closely related to the above, this observation is generally applicable to written documents, sources most often used in ethnohistorical studies and historical archaeological research on contact situations, particularly the cultural “distance” of observer and observed. Additionally, the temporal-cultural separation of the researcher to subject warrants the same observation (cf. Cleland, 2001). Challenges in reading the extant contemporary texts on Palmares, for example, include mentions of “pagan” religious practices, terminology in identifying the cultural and racial affiliation of individuals, as well as discerning social and political organization.

Fourth, historical and physical contexts are undeniable factors in giving meaning to the archaeological record and thus to understanding contact situations. The implication here is that artifacts cannot be used to gauge the degree of change, such as occurs commonly in acculturation models. For example, a glass bead on a Native American archaeological site, or a funnel-shaped smoking pipe on a plantation, tell us nothing of the role these materials had (if any) in creating, fostering, or challenging social structures. Time is also important as the meanings in given historical contexts change and thus need to be understood alongside both broad and small-scale social and cultural processes (Silliman, 2009).

Finally, a guarded objectivity and perhaps pragmatic perspective seems coherent in approaching and interpreting material culture as, irrespective of meaning, the physical properties of artifacts are “not arbitrary.” This may lead to the acceptance, for example, that an iron knife is “manifestly stronger and more durable than a stone knife” (Rogers, 2005: 350). The implication of this position is that one can infer,

based at least in part of the assumed function of some objects, that some type of change must have taken place in some sphere of the society under study. Nonetheless, the rationalization and interpretation of these deceptively “obvious” choices need to be understood in context.

While these five points are not too controversial, the problem lies in how to operationalize them in archaeological contexts. Current research in the region of the Serrana dos Quilombos is geared to constructing a viable research plan for understanding the lives of the many diverse peoples who inhabited the hinterlands of the Capitania de Pernambuco. The location and study of diverse types of archaeological sites together with a better understanding of colonial-period material culture will provide a sounder base from which to pose questions and build interpretations.

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