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DE INSULIS KARAYBICIS RELATIONES MANUSCRIPTÆ

Adrien Le Breton, the last Jesuit missionary in the Carib island of St. Vincent¹

Benoît Roux

From his experience on St. Vincent, Adrien Le Breton has left a set of five manuscripts, now being preserved at the *Muséum national d'histoire naturelle* in Paris. It reveals in particular an *Herbier karaïbe* in which he describes nearly 500 plant species observed at St. Vincent and Dominica. This paper, however, focuses on manuscript 939 (Ms. 939): the *De insulis Karaybicis relationes manuscriptæ*. This composite manuscript, written in both Latin and French, consists of 121 pages and describes the islands of St. Vincent and Martinique, with specific references to the Amerindian populations of these islands. Obviously, the Ms. 939 was meant to be published, but this has never been done. However, it appears to have formed the basis of an anonymous manuscript entitled *Description de l'isle de Saint-Vincent*, preserved today in the *Archives départementales de la Martinique*. This paper will look at Ms. 939 in detail and analyse the document, and specifically its description of indigenous populations, in its historical context.

Sobre su experiencia en San Vicente, Adrien Le Breton nos ha dejado un conjunto de cinco manuscritos conservados en el *Muséum national d'histoire naturelle* de París. Nos permite descubrir especialmente un *Herbier karaïbe* en el que describe cerca de 500 especies vegetales observadas en San Vicente y en la Dominica. Pero en este artículo nosotros enfocamos en el manuscrito 939 (Ms. 939): el titulado *De insulis Karaybicis relationes manuscriptæ*. Este manuscrito compuesto, redactado en latín y en francés, que comprende 121 páginas, describe de modo un tanto deshilvanado la isla de San Vicente, la de la Martinica y sobre todo las poblaciones amerindias de dichas islas. A pesar de haber sido destinado a todas luces a la publicación, el Ms. 939 nunca llegó a ser publicado. No obstante, parece que sirvió de base a un manuscrito anónimo titulado *Description de l'isle de Saint-Vincent*, conservado hoy en día en los *Archives départementales de la Martinique*. A partir del Ms. 939 y tomando como referencia numerosos documentos archivísticos, nos esforzaremos en saber cuál fue la misión de Adrien Le Breton y cuáles son las informaciones extraíbles de este manuscrito para nuestro conocimiento de los indígenas caribes de San Vicente.

De son expérience à Saint-Vincent, Adrien Le Breton nous a laissé un ensemble de cinq manuscrits conservés au *Muséum national d'histoire naturelle* à Paris. On y découvre notamment un *Herbier karaïbe* dans lequel il décrit près de 500 espèces végétales observées

1 Article drafted within the framework of a PhD study about the Amerindian societies of the Lesser Antilles (from the end of the fifteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century), supervised by Professor Bernard Grunberg at the Université de Reims Champagne-Ardenne.

à Saint-Vincent et à la Dominique. Mais nous nous intéresserons davantage au manuscrit 939 (Ms. 939) : Le *De insulis Karaybicus relationes manuscriptæ*. Ce manuscrit composite, rédigé en latin et en français, formé de 121 pages, décrit de façon plus ou moins épars l'île de Saint-Vincent, de la Martinique et surtout les populations amérindiennes de ces îles. Visiblement destiné à être publié, le Ms. 939 ne le fut pourtant jamais. Néanmoins, il semble avoir servi de base à un manuscrit anonyme intitulé *Description de l'isle de Saint-Vincent*, conservé aujourd'hui aux Archives départementales de la Martinique. À partir du Ms. 939 et à l'aune de nombreux documents d'archives, nous chercherons à savoir quelle a été la mission d'Adrien Le Breton et quelles sont les informations que nous pouvons tirer de ce manuscrit pour notre connaissance des Indiens caraïbes de Saint-Vincent.

Introduction

"He was a wise man, skilled at Mathematics, extremely pious and zealous for the glory of God and the salvation of these poor Barbarians" (Labat 1722:IV 449).

The famous Dominican Jean-Baptiste Labat uses these terms to draw the only known portrait of the Jesuit missionary Adrien Le Breton, whom he met in St. Vincent on September 24th, 1700. Even if many only see a literary fiction in this phrase, we can however retain the praise of a "missionary and botanist on whom we would have liked to know more about" (David 1984:153; Chatillon 1979:37-39).

Adrien Le Breton was baptized on February 5th, 1662 in Blois.² Related to a rich *bourgeois* family of Blois, the Pelluys, he was the son of the squire Pierre Le Breton, sieur de Bardy, and Marie Petit, herself daughter of one of the King's lawyers, also advisor at the *présidial* (judicial tribunal) of Blois.³ Having studied philosophy for two years, he entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus in Paris (*Domus Probationis Parisiensis*) in October 1679.⁴ From 1682, he studied grammar, philosophy and humanities at the Jesuit college of Blois.⁵ Then he taught there (*professor non sacerdos*) humanities (1683-1685) and rhetoric (1685-1686).⁶ In 1686, he went to the Jesuit college of Nevers to teach humanities.⁷ In 1687, he became *repetitor* at the famous Jesuit college of La Flèche and pursued there his studies in theology (1688-1691).⁸ At the end of 1692, the Roman archives mention him as being *In itinere ad Insulas*.⁹ Indeed, he landed on Martinique probably at the beginning of 1693.¹⁰ Immediately, he was sent on a mission among the Carib Indians of St. Vincent. He lived there until April 1701 (Labat 1722:I 68).

2 Archives départementales du Loir-et-Cher [AD 41, Blois], 5 Mi 18, R5, *Registres des baptêmes de la paroisse Saint-Honoré, Blois*, 05/02/1662.

3 AD 41, F 278, *Contrat de mariage de Pierre Le Brethon et Marie Petit*, 13/01/1650, 11 f°; Bibliothèque centrale du Muséum national d'histoire naturelle [BCMNHN, Paris], Ms. 939, *De insulis Karaybicus relationes manuscriptæ*, p.[1] (25).

4 Archivum romanum societatis Iesu [ARSI, Roma], Francia, vol. 23, *Catalogi breves (1640-1681)*, 1679, f°443v; ARSI, Francia, vol. 15, *Catalogi triennales (1675-1685)*, 1681, f°297r and 347r, n°20.

5 ARSI, Francia, vol. 15, *Catalogi triennales (1675-1685)*, 1685, f°416r and 474r, n°7.

6 ARSI, Francia, vol. 24, *Catalogi breves (1682-1699)*, 1683, f°56r, 1684, f°93r, 1685, f°124v.

7 ARSI, Francia, vol. 24, *Catalogi breves (1682-1699)*, 1686-1687, f°155r.

8 ARSI, Francia, vol. 24, *Catalogi breves (1682-1699)*, 1687-1688, f°183v, 1688, f°214v, 1689, f°234v, 1690, f°257v, 1691-1692, f°292v; ARSI, Francia, vol. 16, *Catalogi triennales (1690-1696)*, 1690, f°49r and 118r, n°42.

9 ARSI, Francia, vol. 24, *Catalogi breves (1682-1699)*, 1692, f°344r.

10 ARSI, Francia, vol. 24, *Catalogi breves (1682-1699)*, 1693, f°352v; ARSI, Francia, vol. 16, *Catalogi triennales (1690-1696)*, 1693, f°240r and 296v, n°17.

From his experience on St. Vincent, which put an end to fifty years of Jesuit evangelism in this island, Adrien Le Breton left us several testimonies, among which numerous papers on Antillean botany, published between 1726 and 1733 in the *Mémoires de Trévoux* – a literary and scientific periodical created by the Jesuits in 1701.¹¹ Some manuscripts also reappeared in the nineteenth century thanks to the scattering of several private libraries. For example, in February 1858, the auction sale of the library of the Jussieu family allowed the *Muséum national d'histoire naturelle* of Paris to acquire two manuscripts of Adrien Le Breton: the *Relatio historica de Sancti Vincentii insulâ Karaybicâ* (classification mark Ms. 939) and the *Herbier karaïbe* (classification mark Ms. 937-938).¹² A few years before, the *Muséum* had bought three other manuscripts attributed to Le Breton.¹³

But here we will focus on Ms. 939, renamed by the librarians of the *Muséum*: *De insulis Karaybicus relationes manuscriptæ*. It is a composite manuscript of 121 pages, written and paged on both sides, composed of three different parts. The first one (pp.1-30) is the *Relatio historica de Sancti Vincentii* strictly speaking. The second one (pp.31-32) is a short description of Martinique entitled *De Martinicâ insulâ americanâ*. The third part (pp.33-121) consists of a set of scattered elements, notes in French and Latin on the Carib Indians of St. Vincent and on the Antillean flora. The manuscript is preceded by a letter in French from Adrien Le Breton, which was attached to the consignment of the *Relatio* to France. It was sent from Martinique to his brother “Mr. Breton de Bardy” and is dated May 7th, 1722 (pp.[1]-[3]). So, Ms. 939 was drafted at the latest in 1722, but it is not possible to date it more accurately. The letter is followed by a *Mémoire*, in French, describing the contents of a package of plants intended for “Mrs de Jussieu, Doctors of Medicine, etc. in Paris” (p.[4]). This last document could explain the presence of Ms. 939 in the Jussieu library. The manuscript has been written in a single hand, certainly Le Breton's.

In 1982, Ms. 939 was published and translated into French by R. Lapiere and R. Divone in the *Annales des Antilles*. This edition has been partially translated into English in 1998 (Le Breton 1982:35-118, 1998). However, the page order of the manuscript having been modified in these two editions, our study rests above all on the original manuscript.¹⁴ Although Ms. 939 is a late testimony, it has two main interests: first of all, Le Breton is the last missionary to have stayed durably among the Amerindians of St. Vincent, which

11 *Journal de Trévoux ou Mémoires pour l'histoire des sciences & des beaux-arts*. Trévoux: Imprimerie de S.A.S., 1726-1733.

12 *Catalogue de la bibliothèque scientifique de MM. de Jussieu*. Paris: Henri Labitte Libraire, 1857, p.451, n°3978-3979; BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis Karaybicus relationes manuscriptæ*. Paper. 121 p. 230×165 and 175×115 mm. Calfskin binding; BCMNHN, Ms. 937-938, *Herbier karaïbe, ou Traité des plantes qui croissent dans les isles karaybes de la Dominique et de Saint-Vincent*. Paper. 284 p. and 143 f. 175×115 mm. Hardback.

13 BCMNHN, Ms. 63, *Observations du R.P. Le Breton, de la Compagnie de Jésus, sur quelques plantes des isles de l'Amérique, décrites par Guillaume Pison*. Paper. 65 p. 310×190 mm. Paper-backed; BCMNHN, Ms. 667, *Description des plantes de l'Amérique, par le Père Le Breton, avec une lettre de ce religieux*. Paper. 35 f. 170×110 mm. Paper-backed; BCMNHN, Ms. 668, *Observations sur quelques plantes de l'Amérique, avec des descriptions et quelques figures envoyées à Messieurs Fagon, premier médecin de Louis XIV, roy de France, et Raudot, par le R.P. Le Breton, missionnaire apostolique de la Compagnie de Jésus, du Cap françois de Saint-Domingue, le 27 juillet 1715*. Paper. 63 and 133 f. 185×120 mm. Brown calfskin binding.

14 We shall give, besides the references of the manuscript, the corresponding pagination for the edition of 1982 in brackets ().

island became a Carib territory after the peace treaty of Basse-Terre in 1660.¹⁵ Moreover, he is the only one, along with the Sieur De la Borde and Monsieur Du Montel, to have left a testimony about the Indians of this island (De la Borde 1674:40).¹⁶

From Ms. 939 and numerous other archival documents, we will focus on explaining Adrien Le Breton's mission in St. Vincent. Then we shall reflect on the reasons and conditions of the writing, and *in fine* on the ethnohistorical reach of *De insulis Karaybicus*. We will finally try to show what this manuscript, still relatively unknown, can add to our knowledge of the Carib of St. Vincent.

The mission of Adrien Le Breton to St. Vincent

In 1693, when Adrien Le Breton landed in St. Vincent, the Jesuits had already established a mission there for forty years. However, the friars never felt totally safe, as is shown by the martyrdom of the Jesuits Aubergeon and Gueymeu, who were killed by some Indians while officiating in St. Vincent in 1654 (Du Tertre 1667:I 466; Pelleprat 1655:I 78-93).

Adrien Le Breton: an instrument of a new French-Amerindian diplomacy

Looking at the official correspondence, Le Breton's mission to St. Vincent was part of a wider project of aiming at regaining control on the Carib territories by the administrators of the French islands. Indeed, in 1686-1687, the administrators of the French islands, General Governor Blénac and Intendant Du Maitz de Goimpy defined together a coherent policy for the Carib Indians. Because of the impossibility to lead military operations against the latter, both administrators chose to privilege the diplomatic way.¹⁷ Religion appeared to be an essential part of their handling of the general situation and hence missionaries became the instruments of this new policy. In March 1694, Du Maitz de Goimpy describes the mission of Le Breton to St. Vincent as a strategic operation following "the attempt that the English made to entice the savages [i.e. Indians]". Indeed, in 1664 the English made a serious attempt, by handing over a commission of Deputy-Governor of Dominica to the English-Indian half-blood Thomas Warner ("Indian Warner") (Du Tertre 1667:III 85-86). Trying to learn from this issue, the French administrators decided to reactivate the Jesuit mission to St. Vincent, having "noticed the consequence of this intention which consists in making between them [i.e. the Indians] the difference of the presents and the commissions to incite in them a spirit of superiority which would maintain the others in an appearance of subordination where they could become used by the intervention of the missionaries who go to mission in their isles".¹⁸ By trying to establish a hierarchy among the Indians and by leading them to accept a social organization close to that of the Europeans, Blénac and Du Maitz thus hoped to subject them to the colonial order, or at least to maintain in them some loyalty to the King of France.

15 Du Tertre (1667:I 572-578); Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer [ANOM, Aix-en-Provence], COL, C^{8B}1, n°4-5, *Traité conclu entre Charles Houel, gouverneur de la Guadeloupe et les Caraïbes and Copie enregistrée au conseil supérieur de la Martinique du traité d'alliance défensive et offensive conclu entre les Français et les Anglais contre les Caraïbes de Saint-Vincent et de la Dominique*, Guadeloupe and Martinique, 31/03/1660-06/04/1660.

16 Today lost, the papers of Monsieur du Montel are indirectly known thanks to Charles de Rochefort (1658:140-141) who quotes them.

17 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}2, *Blénac à Colbert*, Martinique, 18/11/1679, P²⁰⁶r-207r; ANOM, COL, C^{8A}2, *Blénac à Colbert*, Martinique 30/01/1680, P²⁹⁰.

18 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}8, *Du Maitz*, Martinique, 01/03/1694, P²⁷v; ANOM, COL, C^{8A}8, *Du Maitz*, Martinique, 01/03/1694, P¹⁵³r-153v.

Blénac and Du Maitz gave themselves the political and financial means to achieve their ambitions. On a political level, especially directed towards the English, the administrators (on the orders of the King) based their legitimacy of action on the treaty signed in Basse-Terre in 1660, which stipulated that the Indians can be educated by French missionaries, whom they are free to welcome at home.¹⁹ But the real tour-de-force took place in 1687, when the missionary Pierre Combaud got authorization from Blénac and his superiors to base his mission in St. Vincent, under the protection of the English in order to be provided for all contingencies.²⁰ At the same time, Blénac and Du Maitz also took care of providing enough resources to the Dominican and Jesuit missions in the Lesser Antilles.²¹ In 1687, Du Maitz wrote: “It’s necessary to pay the Jesuits for the mission that they undertook in St. Vincent, 1406^l [i.e. pounds] 15, according to the report which they send. This may seem too high an expense, but will be seen as necessary to easily infiltrate within the savages by being generous with them”.²² In the following days, the Jesuits asked permission to definitively settle this matter by fixing the amount that should be paid by the King for their services.²³ This financial aspect clearly marks a break in the perception of the role of the missions by the French authorities. They used to be initiatives by religious orders, generally approved by Companies or wealthy patrons (Du Puis 1652:228-229). By 1687, the apostolic action in Carib territory became an official mission which was paid by the King around 1500 pounds a year.²⁴

The material conditions of the mission in St. Vincent

While the project was clear and known, the ways to achieve it were obscure. Furthermore, the absence of a real framework staging the author in *De insulis Karaybicus* indubitably complicates our study of the mission of Le Breton. Speaking of his settling, Le Breton only suggests that he did not live in an Indian village but rather nearby as he writes: “One day, I saw, myself, that five hundred men [...], had hurried to the village to gather quite close to my house”.²⁵ Labat adds: “there are ten leagues from the place where we had cast anchor in the Basseterre of St. Vincent to the river of Roseaux, located approximately in the middle of Basseterre of the island of Sainte-Alousie [i.e. St. Lucia]” (Labat 1722:IV 448). The mission was thus probably located in the northwestern part of the island, as is confirmed by all the texts mentioning the Jesuit presence in St. Vincent (Pelleprat 1655:II 128; La Pierre 1980:36). But in 1753, a French inhabitant of St. Vincent, sued at the court of Martinique for having taken possession of a land apparently given by the Indians to Adrien Le Breton,

19 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}4, *Blénac et Du Maitz*, Martinique, 15/08/1686-06/05/1687, f°249v. and 250v-251r; Du Tertre (1667:I 577-578); ANOM, COL, C^{8B}1, n°5, *Copie enregistrée au conseil supérieur de la Martinique du traité d’alliance défensive et offensive conclu entre les Français et les Anglais contre les Caraïbes de Saint-Vincent et de la Dominique*, Martinique, 31/03/1660-06/04/1660.

20 The National Archives (UK) [AN, London], CO 1/60, n°53, *Combaud to the English commander of the H.M.S. Mary Rose*, St. Vincent, 15/08/1686, f°178r-178v; ANOM, COL, C^{8A}4, *Blénac et Du Maitz au Roi*, Martinique, 06/03/1687, f°234r-234v.

21 About the financing of the Dominican mission cf. ANOM, COL, C^{8A}4, *Blénac et Du Maitz au Roi*, Martinique, 06/03/1687, f°236r-236v.

22 ANOM, COL, C^{10D}2, *Correspondance*, Saint-Vincent, 22/04/1687, f°1.

23 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}4, *Du Maitz*, Saint-Christophe, 24/04/1687, f°321r.

24 ANOM, COL, F⁵58, *Fonds Moreau de Saint-Méry, Mémoires des habitants de la Martinique*, Saint-Vincent, 1720.

25 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.28 (68).

declares that the latter “lived with the person who granted him asylum, [and that he has] never acquired from the Carib Indians the land in question” (Le Breton 1982:8). It must therefore have been a roving mission.

It is also very difficult to estimate how much time Le Breton really spent in St. Vincent. Indeed, although appointed to this mission from 1693 until 1701, he regularly returned to Martinique to serve several parishes there. For example, Jean-Baptiste Labat mentions his presence in the fort of Saint-Pierre in January 1694 and that he remained there until March of the same year (Labat 1722:I 68,226). Parish registers of Martinique also show his frequent presence on this island. He served Case-Pilote from September 1694 till May 1695 and from February till May 1696.²⁶ Meanwhile, he pronounced his vows on August 1695.²⁷ In 1698, he is again in Martinique. Finally, it is difficult to draw up a precise chronology of his movements. We may simply note that, according to a letter sent to General Governor Machault in 1705, it is said that Le Breton ‘was on a mission of almost three years in St. Vincent’, which makes him the friar who stayed the longest among the Indians of St. Vincent.²⁸

The Jesuit priest’s frequent journeys between St. Vincent and Martinique show the numerical weakness of missionaries in the Lesser Antilles. This deficiency is more obvious when the scale of the apostolic missions is taken into account. When Le Breton arrived in St. Vincent, he met the friar coadjutor Nicolas Odot there, who had been staying alone on the island since the previous year.²⁹ In 1694, they returned to Martinique together where Odot died in September 1695.³⁰ Le Breton thus found himself alone until the arrival of his colleague Antoine du Chailloux in 1697. But the following year, du Chailloux’s health forced them to return to Martinique. Le Breton got back to St. Vincent a little later, very likely alone.³¹ However, in 1700, Labat underlined the presence of three incumbents by Le Breton’s side, “one Frenchman and two Blacks”. But this statement is contradicted by the testimony of a Frenchman in St. Vincent in 1753 (Labat 1722:IV 448; Le Breton 1982:8). However that may be, these elements prove that actual investment in the mission at St. Vincent was low and show the gap between the plan of the colonial authorities, the apostolic project of the Jesuits, and the real number of missionaries.

This is even more obvious when we study the population that was to be evangelized. Le Breton does not make quantitative assessments, but he notices the heterogeneousness of the population of St. Vincent. Alongside the “Carib Republic” (Labat 1722:IV 442-443), “for fifty years at most, many slaves who came from the African coast infiltrated there [after] the ship that transported them [...] was wrecked”. All the “Ethiopians” perished except for the few who got together with some Indians and “had children who increased in numbers so fast during the following years that they equal, if not exceed, the Carib population today”.³² This narrative telling the origin of those that are not yet named the “Black Caribs” is entirely stereotyped and can be found in all the texts about St. Vincent (De la Borde 1674:27; La Pierre 1980:38). But unlike other authors, Le Breton does not mention the

26 ANOM, DPPC, 5 Mi 491, *Registres paroissiaux de Case-Pilote*, Martinique, 1675-1778.

27 ARSI, Gallia, vol. 40, *Epistole de promovendis ad gradum (1610-1755)*, 1695, f°121r; ARSI, Francia, vol. 16, *Catalogi triennales (1690-1696)*, 1696, f°392v, n°13.

28 ANOM, COL, C^{10A}1, *Sieur de Beaumont*, Martinique, 14/10/1705, 6^p.

29 ARSI, Francia, vol. 24, *Catalogi breves (1682-1699)*, 1692, f°344r, 1693, f°352v.

30 ARSI, Francia, vol. 24, *Catalogi breves (1682-1699)*, 1695-1696 f°380v.

31 ARSI, Francia, vol. 24, *Catalogi breves (1682-1699)*, 1697-1698, f°389v, 1699, f°417r.

32 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.3-4 (37-38).

Maroons and the slaves kidnapped by the Indians, although they were present prior to the 1675 shipwreck that he mentions (Young 1795:6). Indeed, from the end of the sixteenth century, the Spanish authorities noted the massive presence of Blacks in Indian villages (cf. Moreau 1992:176-177). It would otherwise be difficult to explain that a small group of Black survivors were able to exceed the Amerindian population in only two generations. In February 1683, Governor Blénac and Intendant Bégon considered that there were approximately 2000 Carib Indians and 4000 Blacks on St. Vincent.³³ Despite an epidemic of smallpox that occurred in 1690, the proportions of Indians and Blacks must have been rather similar to what they were at the beginning of Le Breton's mission.³⁴ It is thus with a numerous and mixed population that the Jesuit was confronted.

From the mission to the parishes: the end of the Jesuit presence on St. Vincent

We have understood that the political project established by Blénac and Du Maitz required people, financial means and a continuity of action, all of which needed support from the colonial authorities. The appointment in 1696 of General Governor d'Amblimont and Intendant Robert created a new order. Tinged with a restrictive vision of French policy on the Indians, both administrators were not convinced of the necessity to pursue their evangelization, the result of which seemed insignificant to them. In March 1699, the colonial authorities thus decreed that the very few friars available had to be allotted to supervising the French and the slaves, rather than to the Indian missions.³⁵ Deprived of the support of the administrators, the Jesuits were forced to give up their mission on St. Vincent. In 1700, Le Breton briefly left St. Vincent and exercised his ministry at St. Kitts as *missionarius Gallorum et Nigritarum*. During this short period, Antoine du Chailloux and Charles Thomas Yon succeeded him in St. Vincent.³⁶ In April 1701, Superior General Pierre Combaud definitively called back Le Breton to Martinique, in order to exercise his ministry in the Fort "as priest of the Negroes", and then in the parishes of Prêcheur and Case-Pilote.³⁷ In 1705, he was sent with five other Jesuits and two seculars to Santo Domingo, to serve eight parishes in the north of the island.³⁸ He remained there for about ten years, before finally returning to Martinique, where he carried on with his pastoral work in Carbet, in Case-Pilote and in the Fort, until his death on July 14th, 1736 in Saint-Pierre.³⁹

The end of the Jesuit missions on Carib territory clearly shows a shift of the French policy towards the Amerindians rather than a change in the strategy of the missionaries. For a long time, the Jesuit missionary project would be no longer based on the evangelization of the Island Carib but on the indoctrination of the slaves and the Indians of the mainland.

33 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}3, *Blénac et Bégon au Roi*, Saint-Christophe, 13/02/1683, f°251 ff.

34 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}6, *Blénac*, Martinique, 05/04/1690, f°6r-6v; ANOM, COL, C^{8A}6, *Blénac*, Martinique, 30/05/1690, f°48v.

35 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}11, *d'Amblimont*, Martinique, 31/03/1699, f°21r-23r.

36 ARSI, Francia, vol. 24, *Catalogi breves (1682-1700)*, 1700, f°426v; ARSI, Francia, vol. 25¹, *Catalogi breves (1700-1713)*, 1700, f°8v.

37 ANOM, DPPC, 5 Mi 621, *Registres paroissiaux de Prêcheur*, Martinique, 1665-1777; ANOM, DPPC, 5 Mi 491, *Registres paroissiaux de Case-Pilote*, Martinique, 1675-1778; ARSI, Francia, vol. 25¹, *Catalogi breves (1700-1713)*, 1701, f°19v-20r.

38 ARSI, Francia, vol. 25¹, *Catalogi breves (1700-1713)*, 1705, f°63v.

39 ARSI, Francia, vol. 25¹¹, *Catalogi breves (1714-1720)*, 1719, f°527v; ANOM, DPPC, 5 Mi 482, *Registres paroissiaux du Carbet*, Martinique, 1677-1770; ANOM, DPPC, 5 Mi 491, *Registres paroissiaux de Case-Pilote*, Martinique, 1675-1778; ARSI, Francia, vol. 27, *Catalogi breves (1731-1744)*, 1736, f°104v.

Besides, when negotiating about the royal funding of the mission of St. Vincent, the Jesuits also asked to be in charge of “the conversion of the Savages of the mainland and not to be limited to St. Vincent only”.⁴⁰

We must, however, add that in 1701 the hope of restoring the Jesuit mission in St. Vincent was still real.⁴¹ Moreover, Le Breton continued to play a leading role in the French-Amerindian relationships. In September 1705, he was sent with the Sieur de Beaumont to Grenada in order to clarify the events which led to the murder of several inhabitants by the Indians of the island, and avoid a war. Le Breton and an Indian of St. Vincent (probably a translator) disembark in the “quartier of the Carib Indians”, on the windward coast of Grenada, in order to meet Olivier, the Indian accused of the murders. However, nobody appears for two days.⁴² On the 3rd of October, the ship that took Le Breton back to Martinique made a stopover at St. Vincent. The Jesuit was then put in charge of exchanging “eight Savages (except the Indian passenger) [for] three English prisoners of the Caribs”.⁴³ This last mission was a success but the mediation undertaken by Le Breton is an overall failure, since a new French-Amerindian war was declared in the following days, much to the annoyance of the inhabitants of Grenada.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, after his return from Santo Domingo, Le Breton pursued his action among some Indians in Martinique and regularly goes to Dominica (abandoned by the Dominicans) “to tell God’s word”.⁴⁵ Curiously, Le Breton does not say a single word about the Indian presence in Martinique in the part of Ms. 939 dedicated to this island.

De insulis Karaybicus: between an official report and a curious report

The writing conditions

Le Breton very likely wrote the manuscript in 1722, about twenty years after the end of his mission in St. Vincent. The *Relatio* is a compilation of scattered notes taken during that mission.⁴⁶ The style is epistolary and the composition ends with the promise of sending “the rest that is missing”.⁴⁷ The second and third parts of Ms. 939 partly complete it, but the chapters about language and “Indian superstitions” were never written.⁴⁸ The whole document was sent to “Mr Raudot, General Intendant of the French Navy” with whom Le Breton regularly corresponded through his brother “Mr Le Breton de Bardy”.⁴⁹ Commissioner as well as General Inspector of the Navy and former Intendant of New France, Antoine-Denis Raudot also held the offices of coastguard of the Invalides and

40 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}4, *Du Maitz*, Saint-Christophe, 24/04/1687, f°321r.

41 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}11, *d’Amblimont*, Martinique, 31/03/1699, f°21r-23r; Archives S.J. Province de France [ASJF, Vanves], IB2, n°32, *Combaud à Bégon*, Martinique, 06/06/1701, f°1r; ARSI, Francia, vol. 25¹, *Catalogi breves (1700-1713)*, 1702, f°36r.

42 ANOM, COL, C^{10A}1, *Sieur de Beaumont*, Martinique, 14/10/1705, 6 f°.

43 ANOM, COL, C^{10A}1, *Sieur de Beaumont*, Martinique, 14/10/1705, 6 f°.

44 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}15, *Sieur Sauvan à Machault*, La Grenade, 13/10/1705, f°390r; ANOM, COL, C^{8A}15, *Machault*, Martinique, 12/12/1705, f°394r-395v.

45 ANOM, COL, C^{8B}1, n°20, *Carte de la Martinique par l’ingénieur Blondel*, c.1680; ANOM, COL, F³44, *Fonds Moreau de Saint-Méry*, 08/01/1728, f°484r-485v; DAVID, *Dictionnaire*, Tome 1, p.154.

46 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.[1] (25).

47 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.30 (69).

48 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.3 (37), p.44 (83).

49 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.[1] (25).

Colonies, and councillor in colonial affairs since 1711 (Brown *et al.* 1966). It was not the first time that Le Breton sent him documents about the West Indies. In 1715, while in Santo Domingo, the Jesuit sent him his *Observations sur quelques plantes de l'Amérique*⁵⁰. At the beginning of the 1720s, he regularly sent him “either curiosities or seeds of this country [i.e. the Antilles]”.⁵¹ Le Breton actually confessed that the writing of Ms. 939 answered a direct request from Raudot.⁵²

During the eighteenth century, it is common that missionaries corresponded directly with the Ministry of the Navy. Besides, Le Breton, also interested in botany, maintained epistolary relationships with the *Académie royale des Sciences* and with the *Jardin du Roi*, to which he addressed numerous reports, botanical and zoological packages which often crossed the Atlantic Ocean inside coconuts or gourds, for lack of boxes.⁵³ He also supplied the American collections of the cabinet of curiosities of Michel Bégon, then Intendant of the Navy in Rochefort. In 1701, he sent him “some small curiosities [of St. Vincent], each with their particular label in addition to the general report provided in the box”.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, none of these packages reached our time.

Right from the introduction of the *Relatio*, Le Breton introduced himself as a “historian” in charge of recording in writing what “deserves to be known and kept in memory” about the Amerindians: “their name, their race, their institutions, customs, intelligence, technical activities, character, tastes, religious practices, language, way of living and of acting”.⁵⁵ This document comes within a batch of sendings intended to supply cabinets of curiosities as much as the colonial scientific machinery implemented by Colbert. Besides, Raudot is the author of a *Relation par lettres de l'Amérique septentrionale*, written from several reports sent to him about the Illinois and Miami Indians (cf. Kinietz 1940). Did he have similar intentions with Le Breton's narrative? Unless Raudot wanted to take advantage of the Le Breton's information to support the different French attempts to get a foothold on St. Vincent in the years 1720s.⁵⁶ We know nothing about it.

Le Breton's narrative: an ethnohistoric source or the reproduction of a well-known model?

It is obvious that Adrien Le Breton draws the main part of his narrative from the years he spent in St. Vincent. However, given the number of such documents written in the eighteenth century, it is legitimate to question the way he collected the information and wonder about his readings relating to the Antilles. As many chroniclers, Le Breton says nothing of his informants. Official correspondence informs us that he spoke the Arawakan language of the Island Carib, which is confirmed by his superiors when they note his inclination to learn languages.⁵⁷ Besides, the repeated use of action verbs such as hear, learn and see sug-

50 BCMNH, Ms. 668, *Observations*, f°[1].

51 BCMNH, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.[1] (25).

52 BCMNH, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.[1] (25).

53 BCMNH, Ms. 667, *Description*, f°4v and 5r-6r.

54 ASJF, IB2, n°32, *Combaud à Bégon*, Martinique, 06/06/1701, f°1r-1v.

55 BCMNH, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.1 (35), p.3 (37), p.25 (62).

56 ANOM, COL, F³58, *Fonds Moreau de Saint-Méry*, Saint-Vincent, 03/12/1719; ANOM, COL, F³58, *Fonds Moreau de Saint-Méry*, *Mémoires des habitants de la Martinique*, Saint-Vincent, 1720; ANOM, COL, F³58, *Fonds Moreau de Saint-Méry*, Saint-Vincent, 07/11/1727.

57 ANOM, COL, C⁸b2, n°81, *Mithon*, Martinique, 19/09/1705, f°8v-9r; ARSI, Francia, vol. 16, *Catalogi triennales (1690-1696)*, 1693, f°296v, n°17, 1696, f°444v, n°13.

gest that – contrary to Raymond Breton, a few years before in Dominica, who was assisted by a French-speaking Indian – Le Breton (1978:58) directly noted down Indian words. However, the long comments attributed to the Indians are probably not *verbatim* transcriptions. There are three main distortions to the original Amerindian language: at first a double translation (from Carib language to French and from French to Latin), then an obvious by stylistic adjustment which altered the Indian rhetoric.

Le Breton might have read some of the many works already published about the New World and the Antilles at the beginning of the eighteenth century. But he does not give any information about that. The sketchy aspect of the plan of his manuscript makes a comparative study between the shaping of his text and that of previous authors almost impossible. Except for some elements already present in many of the Antillean chronicles, there is no flagrant borrowing from another author. On the contrary, he diverges for example from Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre's narrative when staging an Indian coated with *rocou* (annatto) who left a mark on the white bed of the governor's wife, as he sat down on it. According to Le Breton, the scene took place in Martinique at Governor Jacques Dyel Du Parquet's house, while Du Tertre locates it in Guadeloupe in the house of Governor Jean Aubert.⁵⁸

The use of certain specific terms can also be a discriminating factor in the study of the Antillean textual tradition. Le Breton uses for example the Carib word *piajje* as a synonym of *bohyé* (a shaman), a word rarely used in the Antillean literature (more common in the Amazonian literature).⁵⁹ The Sieur De la Borde (1674:9) is the only one to use it in the whole printed corpus. Le Breton might have been inspired by De la Borde's narrative. However, this term may be specific to the Indians of St. Vincent, given that the Jesuit Étienne de La Pierre (1980:39), who also stayed on this island, used it in his correspondence. However that may be, Ms. 939 is maybe more the result of personal experience than the simple repeat of elements already known. In this regard, Le Breton's narrative is a first-hand source for the study of the Amerindian populations of the Lesser Antilles.

La Description de l'isle Saint-Vincent: an accomplished version of De insulis Karaybicis?

If no relationship can be established between Ms. 939 and previous sources, it is possible to draw a parallel between this text and another, *a priori* later, document. In 1957, the departmental archives of Martinique acquired an anonymous manuscript of 107 pages entitled *Description de l'isle de Saint-Vincent*.⁶⁰ Published in 1961 by R. Pinchon in the *Annales des Antilles*, this manuscript is not entirely unknown since Charles Leclerc, a bibliophile, mentions it in his *Bibliotheca Americana* of 1887.⁶¹ The analysis of the written form asserts that Le Breton did not draft it and that it is an eighteenth century document. The structure of the *Description* is much more accomplished than that of Ms. 939 but takes up again many points already tackled in the latter, as is shown by numerous significant resemblances. There is no doubt that the author of the *Description* had knowledge of the text of Le Breton. Both documents insist on the heterogeneous nature of the population of

58 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.48-49 (86-87); Du Tertre 1667:II 391-392).

59 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.35 (75) ff.

60 Archives départementales de la Martinique [AD 972, Fort-de-France], 1 J 212, *Description de l'île de Saint-Vincent*, 107 p.

61 Description de l'île de Saint-Vincent. *Annales des Antilles: Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire de la Martinique*, 1961, n°9, p.31-81; Leclerc (1887:30).

St. Vincent, using the term “Ethiopians” to refer to Blacks. They also pay equal attention to funeral rites. They make identical references to the Greeks and the Romans to condemn the presumption of inhumanity of the Europeans towards the Amerindians. Moreover, they both give praise to the Spaniards’ foresight introducing several European animal species into the islands to provide for hunting. They even tell the same anecdote of a Carib leader coated with *rocou* and stage it in Martinique at Du Parquet’s. Some aspects are however different: the author of the *Description* dates the wreckage of the slave ship in 1657 and states that the Blacks had totally supplanted the Indians in numbers.⁶² Finally, the idyllic vision of Le Breton is finely shaded, in particular by the use of repeated pejorative terms such as “vindictive”, “lazy” and “superstitious”.⁶³ The issue of the philological tie between the two manuscripts remains however undetermined.

Le Breton and the Carib Indians of St. Vincent

The Carib Indians: an itinerant population of navigators

Like all the Antillean chroniclers, Le Breton wonders about the origins of the Carib Indians. But he is probably the first one not to link them with a mythical Amerindian narrative (*Kalinago-Akayoman*). On the contrary, he bases his interrogation on a determinist pre-scientific reflection. He dates the arrival of the Carib Indians in the islands around the thirteenth century.⁶⁴ This early dating is chronologically in line with archaeological theories developed between 1960 and 1975, which linked the arrival of the Carib Indians to the emergence of the Suazan Troumassoid ceramic subseries, at the beginning of the thirteenth century (cf. Bullen and Mattioni 1970:1-3). The analogy stops here, however, since Le Breton bases his dating on the primitive aspect of the vegetation of the islands and on the fact “that there is not the slightest vestige of a distant antiquity”.⁶⁵

From the beginning of the *Relatio*, Le Breton insists on the fact that the Carib Indians are not sedentary but “itinerant” (we would rather use the term semi-nomadic). Indeed, he seems to have been struck by their high mobility and by their frequent changes of settlement, which he ranks among the Amerindian “customs”. He emphasizes the effective importance of the inter-island relationships in the preservation of political alliances.⁶⁶ For example, one day he evokes the presence in St. Vincent of 500 men dressed in their ceremonial fineries that came to attend a *caouynage* (a ritual drinking feast).⁶⁷ This element is all the more important, since from the years 1670-1680, the French colonial authorities made several attempts to regulate the movements and economic activities of the Indians.⁶⁸ Apparently, these did not work very well.

Le Breton’s interest in Amerindian navigation is also perceptible. Indeed, he dedicates a rather long passage to “dugouts and boats” in the chapter on “the journeys” in the *Relatio*, and another chapter to “Indian shipbuilding” in the third part of the manuscript.⁶⁹ In the

62 AD 972, 1 J 212, *Description*, p.8-9 (38).

63 AD 972, 1 J 212, *Description*, p.16 (41), p.23 (44), p.25 (45), p.58 (59).

64 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.6 (40-41).

65 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.6 (40-41).

66 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.7-9 (42-43).

67 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.28 (68).

68 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}2, *Traité conclu entre Blénac et Pierre Moigna et Jonana, chefs Caraïbes de Saint-Vincent*, Saint-Vincent, 13/02/1679, f°104r-105r.

69 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.21-27 (58-64), p.77-82 (101-104).

latter, he presents three types of boats, used by the natives: the *pipery* to sail on rivers, the *kouliala* or boat and the *kanaoa* or dugout to sail in open sea, especially during wars. A chapter devoted to “fishing” is the opportunity to describe in detail the various Amerindian fishing techniques (in the river or in the sea).⁷⁰

*The Carib “golden age” or the idealized vision of the “ancient natives”*⁷¹

Following the pattern of numerous Antillean chroniclers, Le Breton lingers on describing the heavenly environment of St. Vincent. The climate is wonderful and appropriate for the preservation of good health. Springs of water are numerous. The Jesuit also notes the fertility of the ground and the “continuous abundance” of Indian products, such as “pineapple, banana, Indian fig, various varieties of palm-kernels, sweet potatoes, yams, five sorts of custard apple, yellow and white guava, yellow mombin, mahogany, manioc”.⁷² The usual disadvantages of the area are absent from St. Vincent which is, for example, exempt “from mosquitoes and from all other small venomous creatures”. Nevertheless sixty years before, his colleague Jean Hallay talked about the important presence of “vipers” on the island!⁷³

Le Breton has the same heavenly vision when talking of the Amerindians. He paints a “sincere moral portrait” of the Indians that ends with this sentence which summarizes his vision: “And there is finally, everywhere, pure love from a sincere heart, so that the Indians truly enjoy the golden age so celebrated by the poets”.⁷⁴ This impression of a timeless golden age is strengthened by the absence of a factual framework and by the use of numerous implicit references to classical authors (Ovid, Lucan, Homer or Cicero). Le Breton even ventures into giving a Greek etymology to the term “dugout” (*piroque* in French), which starts with the Greek prefix *pyro-*, which means fire, “because of the speed of its race which in a way reminds that of the fire”.⁷⁵ This vision is not surprising since heavenly imaginary and antique idyllism were very widespread at the time when the first chroniclers (Bouton, Pelleprat, Du Tertre) published their reports. Besides, to avoid disturbing this idyllic image, Le Breton very quickly juggles away the presence of the Blacks which were about to outnumber the Indians and totally omits to mention the presence of French settlers on the island, which dates back at least to the 1670s.⁷⁶

Like Montaigne or Léry, Le Breton puts also the “inhumanity” of the Indians in perspective using examples from Antiquity. He of course condemns their excesses: their drinking sessions, their violence and superstitions, but he systematically emphasizes the good in them, that carries a higher hope than the evil.⁷⁷ It is therefore an unusual narrative despite Labat’s report stating that Le Breton’s situation in St. Vincent was hardly more idyllic than that of his predecessors. Like the Antillean Jesuit martyrs, the friar was always afraid of being slaughtered by the Indians, especially when they were drunk (Labat 1722:IV 448).

70 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.13-15 (50-53).

71 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.4 (39).

72 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.5-6 (41).

73 Bibliothèque nationale de France [BnF, Paris], Ms. Moreau 841, *Relation des Isles de la Martinique et de S. Christophe par le P. Jean Hallay de la Compagnie de Jésus écrite à Nismes en 1657*, f°161r.

74 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.66 (97).

75 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.21 (58).

76 ANOM, COL, C^{8A}2, *Traité conclu entre Blénac et Pierre Moigna et Jonana, chefs Caraïbes de Saint-Vincent*, Saint-Vincent, 13/02/1679, f°104r-105r.

77 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.64 (96).

However, Le Breton's narrative does not let anything transpire of the conditions described by Labat.

The Indians under the eyes of the botanist: a precise description of everyday life

Le Breton is particularly interested in the daily life of the Indians, their customs and knowledge. Every chapter is an opportunity to describe items of their everyday life. He evokes the welcoming ceremony of visitors in a village and carefully describes the furniture they used: seats, *hactey* (hammocks), *matoutou* (table trays).⁷⁸ He is always worried about the slightest detail, for example when describing the Carib seats: "Picture a small piece of wood one or two feet long, thick and approximately six fingers wide, with the top bent in on each side towards the middle and the bottom part cut and dug in four places, so that at times it can be stable, and at other times removed from the rest". Calabashes have a central place as they are used in the making of bowls and utensils. Hence ceramic seems secondary.⁷⁹

In spite of a certain timeless dimension, Le Breton's narrative does not paint the picture of Indian society at a standstill. On the contrary, the frequent oppositions between past and present clearly mark evolution. For example, he stresses their technological borrowings from the Europeans, such as metal tools (in particular those of the carpenter) or the technique of sailing. But it is especially in the field of Indian weaponry that Le Breton notes most changes: metal arrow points, and the even more frequent use of firearms, which the Indians handle as assuredly as their bows.⁸⁰ But Le Breton is above all the first one to note that some Indians carry swords instead of the traditional *boutous* (war clubs).⁸¹ He also notices the presence of cocks, goats, and pigs imported from Europe and hunted by the Amerindians with dogs (also of European origin).⁸² The very precise descriptions of the Amerindian ornaments allow Le Breton to underline even more the importance of *rassades* (small European glass beads).⁸³ Even when he talks about items that the natives reject, such as the compass, it is to show the efficiency of the empirical Indian knowledge in mathematics, astronomy or navigation.⁸⁴ Le Breton thus describes a largely altered Amerindian society. However, it remains very difficult to reveal the influence of Blacks on this society.

A marked interest for the Carib Indians' "non-religion"

As many other friars, Adrien Le Breton considers the Carib Indians as people without religion. Despite that, he devotes numerous pages to the description of their beliefs and ceremonies. This contradiction can be explained by the fact that the Jesuit based the Carib "non-religion" on the absence of prayers, rites, temples and sacrifices and not on the Indian beliefs.⁸⁵ Just like his contemporary chroniclers, he distinguishes two spirits: *Chemijn* about whom he says almost nothing except that it is not necessary to honour him because he "is self-sufficient to himself to enjoy all sorts of bliss"; and *Mabouja* or *Maboja* responsible for

78 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.9-10 (44-47).

79 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.97-101 (113-115).

80 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.18-19 (55-57).

81 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.28 (67).

82 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.16 (54).

83 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.85 (107).

84 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.23 (60).

85 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.33-34 (73-74).

all sorts of troubles such as hurricanes, wrecks, and *Mal de Siam* (yellow fever) etc.⁸⁶ Like his colleague Jacques Bouton, Le Breton notices that this “demon [i.e. *Maboya*]” very often beats the Indians.⁸⁷ He is apparently disturbed by what he sees and hears about this spirit, as he later confesses: “I am undoubtedly not a man to listen to this twaddle, but so many things, and of importance, are told in good faith by reliable men, witnesses who not only heard but also saw, that I have scruples to deny all this”.⁸⁸

Le Breton then evokes the *bojéz* or *pjažjes* who suffer the harshest treatment from the *Maboya*. He describes them as being at the same time “priest, magistrate, [and] medicine man”.⁸⁹ Following the example of Du Tertre, Le Breton does not consider *boyés* as priests but as ministers since they do not devote themselves entirely to their gods, thus establishing a parallel with the Protestants, heretical ministers in the eyes of the Jesuit.⁹⁰ But before “being registered among the apprentices *Boyhez*”, novices must follow an apprenticeship, the initiation tests which appear to him as “cruel torture” (purges by means of emetics, scarifications, fasts).⁹¹ Essentially, the description of the meeting between *Maboya*, the *boyé* and his apprentice (the last step of the apprenticeship) is similar to the ceremony of invocation of the *Chemin* described a century earlier by the Anonymous of Carpentras.⁹² The action always takes place at night, in a dark hut as “*Maboya* hates light”. He arrives in a big crash and stirs a lot during his conversation with the novice. Le Breton seems rather gullible when facing this ritual staging. Furthermore, he contradicts himself twice in his narrative. On one hand, *Maboya*, who until then had appeared as a unique entity – and thus comparable to the devil – divides himself in several “geniuses”, one for each of the *boyé*. On the other hand, this “Satan” is called “Lare”, a protective divinity of the Roman household, intrinsically beneficial.⁹³ Is it a clumsy translation or a real mistake? We can see here the limits of the missionaries’ understanding of the Carib spiritual world.

The *boyé* is also a medicine man. He is the one who “treats [...] by uncountable tricks, to either make illusion more easily, or by abundant and repeated absorption of essences that are extracted by hand, or after cooking, from trees as well as from medicinal herbs”.⁹⁴ But Le Breton also introduced the idea that the *boyé* holds a magistracy – in the antique meaning of the word – “empowered only in reason, he is in charge not only of explaining and interpreting, but also of regulating the customs, decisions, usages and laws of the entire community”. Without talking of the prophetic role of the shamans in certain South American societies, this remark offers a reinterpretation of the role of the *boyés* in Carib society. Actually they seem to have influenced the decisions of the group more effectively than the leaders themselves (*Tiouboutouli haute/Ouboutou*). This role seems strengthened when the author of Ms. 939 evokes “the witches”, old widows or young virgins, responsible for evil spells, diseases and death.⁹⁵ Indeed, it is the *boyés* – then qualified as “criminal wiz-

86 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.34 (p.74).

87 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.34-35 (74-75); Bouton (1640:IX 106).

88 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.35 (75).

89 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.36 (76).

90 Du Tertre (1667: II 365).

91 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.36-39 (76-78).

92 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.39-44 (78-83); Bibliothèque Inguimbertaine [Carpentras], Ms. 590, *Relation d'un voyage infortuné fait aux Indes occidentales par le capitaine Fleury avec la description de quelques îles qu'on y rencontre, recueillie par l'un de sa compagnie qui fit le voyage*, c.1620, f°52r-53v.

93 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.39 (78), 41 (80).

94 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.55-57 (97-98).

95 BCMNHN, Ms. 939, *De insulis*, p.77-78 (83-84).

ards” – who are in charge of exposing those responsible for the group’s misfortune to public condemnation, thus exposing them to execution. They thus exercise a very important control on their society (Descola 1988:818-827). Even if Ms. 939 allows us to shed some light on those aspects, Le Breton is totally unaware of it when he writes: “All being entirely equal, they [i.e. the Indians] admit no highly ranked man, no leader, no magistrate”.⁹⁶

Despite an extremely marked interest in “the non-religion” of the Carib Indians, Le Breton almost never talks about his apostolic action. By contrast with many other Antillean chronicles, the knowledge and description of the Amerindian beliefs do not appear here as part of the evangelization process. As he personally confessed, Le Breton has “completely lost [his] goods [i.e. the presents for the Indians] and [his] effort” for a tiny result. But was not the interest of his mission, and *in fine* of his narrative, ultimately somewhere else? Certainly!

Conclusions

What new knowledge of the Carib Indians does Le Breton’s text bring us? Firstly, the existence of *De insulis Karaybicis* gives an opportunity of illustrating the last Jesuit mission in St. Vincent, little studied before. At the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the missionaries willingly became diplomats among the Indians, with the support of the colonial authorities. Le Breton’s narrative reflects this new policy. His ethnographical quest is thus aimed at improving his knowledge of the Indians, rather than evangelizing them. But, contrary to the other chronicles of the seventeenth century, Ms. 939 does not describe the Amerindian societies of the Lesser Antilles, it rather tries to faithfully describe their traditional characteristics. This is constant in the Antillean texts of the eighteenth century. However, Le Breton’s narrative paints a very detailed picture of the everyday life of the Carib Indians, in which the reader can detect many practical changes learnt from the relationships with the Europeans, and even with the Africans. Ms. 939 is thus an essential source for our knowledge of the Indians of St. Vincent at the end of the seventeenth century and at the beginning of the eighteenth^h century, before the emergence of the Black Carib and the Yellow Carib.

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