

# **New study finds first inhabitants of Caribbean brought drug heirlooms with them**

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A new study led by North Carolina State University's Dr. Scott Fitzpatrick is the first to show physical evidence that the people who colonized the Caribbean from South America brought with them heirloom drug paraphernalia that had been passed down from generation to generation as the colonists traveled through the islands.

The research team used a dating technique called luminescence to determine the age of several artifacts found on the Caribbean island of Carriacou, in the West Indies, and discovered that the items dated back to between roughly 400 and 100 B.C. These dates are well before Carriacou was colonized in approximately A.D. 400. Luminescence testing involves heating a substance and measuring the amount of light it gives off to determine how long ago it was last heated.

Heirlooms are portable objects that are inherited by family members and kept in circulation for generations, Fitzpatrick says, and are frequently part of important rituals. The objects tested for this study are ceramic inhaling bowls that were likely used for the ingestion of hallucinogenic substances. Fitzpatrick says the luminescence dates of the bowls, as well as analysis of the material from which the bowls were made, indicate that the artifacts "appear to have been transported to Carriacou when it was colonized – possibly hundreds of years after they were made."

Fitzpatrick, an assistant professor of anthropology at NC State, says scholars have long thought that the people who settled the Caribbean islands likely brought heirlooms with them – but says the bowls "are the

first physical evidence we've found to support that claim."

The study, "Evidence for inter-island transport of heirlooms: luminescence dating and petrographic analysis of ceramic inhaling bowls from Carriacou, West Indies," will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Journal of Archaeological Science*.

Source: North Carolina State University

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