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Islands in the Crossroads: Migration, Seafaring, and Interaction in the Caribbean

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L. Antonio Curet & Mark W. Hauser (eds.)

Islands in the Crossroads: Migration, Seafaring, and Interaction in the Caribbean.

Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011. xi + 313 pp. (Paper US\$ 35.00)

This important volume explores the complex history of human relationships in the Caribbean through the lens of interaction, examining the movement of peoples as well as the exchange of goods and ideas throughout the island chain. Interaction is viewed at multiple scales of analysis ranging from intra-island relationships to broad circum-Caribbean exchanges that connected peoples in the islands to various mainland enclaves. This framework allows the contributors to move beyond site-specific archaeological discoveries in order to understand both micro- and macrolevel processes that shaped the history and development of peoples in the region. The essays highlight various forms of material and ideological exchanges and, in many cases, attempt to show the routes along which these exchanges took place. Migration and seafaring are key components. One of the book's strengths for Caribbeanists is that it incorporates both prehistoric and historic archaeological studies of interaction, which will no doubt help break down barriers between scholars of the pre- and post-Columbian Caribbean.

The book opens with a section critiquing the history and practice of Caribbean archaeology. The essays outline the ways in which early Caribbean archaeological studies obscured, and in many cases completely overlooked, local and regional interactions among Caribbean peoples. L. Antonio Curet, for example, provides an overview of the work of the famed culture historian and Caribbean archaeologist Irving Rouse which revisits Rouse's scholarly contributions to our understanding of the prehistoric peoples of the Caribbean. Curet is particularly interested in deconstructing Rouse's ideas about Caribbean migration and its usefulness as a tool for understanding interaction and culture change in the region. While praising Rouse for his many contributions, Curet also takes issue with the way his migration studies have simplified our understanding of interactions and incorrectly homogenized prehistoric peoples of the Caribbean. He argues that the emphasis on empiricism and normativism inherent in Rouse's migration studies led to the misguided construction of culturally homogenous groups in the Caribbean that for many years prevented archaeologists from seeing diversity and socioeconomic exchange.

Isabel C. Rivera-Collazo also provides a rather provocative assessment of archaeological practice in the Caribbean, using Puerto Rico as an example. Embracing a postcolonial critique, she conjures up the ghost of Shakespeare's Caliban to call for an archaeology of Caribbean islands done by "insular archaeologists." Caliban has been used before by Caribbean historians and anthro-

pologists as a literary device and analytical tool, but not archaeologists until now. Rivera-Collazo pits islanders against mainlanders and colonized against colonizers in order to show how the isolationist thinking of foreign archaeologists has blurred our understanding of the diverse interactions that shaped Caribbean peoples. Rivera-Collazo privileges the lived experiences of insular archaeologists over the misguided theoretical frames of foreign researchers. She asserts that foreign archaeologists, who typically bring with them the scholarly baggage of colonializing metropolises, tend to stress insularity over interaction, thereby “erasing the islanders’ migratory histories and maritime capacities” (p. 36). And she argues that the practice of Caribbean archaeology therefore contributes to a continuing form of ideological colonization.

Methodologically rigorous studies found throughout the volume highlight the potential routes of interaction and the complex relationships of Caribbean peoples. Richard T. Callaghan’s study of maritime navigation uses sophisticated computer simulation models to highlight potential conduits of contact between islanders and mainland peoples in the circum-Caribbean. Mary J. Berman’s study of nonlocal materials, such as chert, greenstone, copper, and jadeite, found on Lucayan sites in the Bahamas also reveals the potential trade routes and interactions Lucayans had with peoples in other parts of the Caribbean. Ethnohistorical evidence helps support Berman’s main argument that Lucayan trade connected vast areas of the Caribbean and may have been driven by a desire for bright and luminous materials that catered to the Lucayans “aesthetic of brilliance.” Reniel Rodríguez Ramos’s excellent essay on lithics, personal adornment items, and other materials shows iconographic themes that link the Antilles and areas as far away as Colombia, Panama, and Costa Rica. An essay by Corrine Hoffman et al. draws on evidence from Europe and Polynesia to explain interactions and social relations between the Antilles and the South American mainland.

Several historical archaeological chapters speak to the need for a broad interactionist framework for the colonial Caribbean. Mark Hauser and Kenneth Kelly examine interisland trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They argue that the emphasis on site-specific research, especially plantation studies, has hindered efforts to examine broad political economic relations in the Caribbean. And they use the archaeological record to explore interisland trade, largely illicit, during the early colonial era. The presence of Spanish ceramics in sites in Jamaica and French ceramics in sites in the Danish island of St. John show the fluidity of colonial boundaries and the extent of interisland trade between competing colonial powers. In a similar spirit, Ingrid Newquist examines the contraband trade in the Spanish islands, and Douglas Armstrong and Christian Williamson explore the diversity of peoples and materials at a

domestic site in the urban port town of Charlotte Amalie in the Danish West Indies.

This volume brings together a wide range of interesting essays that speak to the concept of Caribbean interactions. A valuable contribution to Caribbean archaeology, it provides a provocative framework for understanding the nature of Caribbean relationships that undermines the insular nature of traditional archaeological work in the region.

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