
Out of Many, One People showcases the breadth and diversity of archaeological perspectives on Jamaica. Whereas previous Caribbean archaeological edited volumes have taken a thematic approach (e.g., Haviser 1999) or inter-island perspectives (e.g., Curet & Hauser 2011, Farnsworth 2001, Rainbird 2007), this volume provides an interdisciplinary focus on place. In doing so, the authors elucidate the changing nature of Jamaican life during the early modern period. The volume examines not only the complex social and cultural relationships of the island, but more importantly, the way material connections from different locales influenced, shaped, and were a product of life in the early modern Atlantic world (in chapters by Robyn P. Woodward on sugar production and Jillian E. Galle on comparative demography and consumer activities).

The opening chapters focus on Port Royal. This now partially submerged city provides an opportunity for terrestrial and underwater archaeologists to work in concert to create a better picture of urban life in the Caribbean. Maureen Brown’s study of the New Street tavern site links a public tavern archaeological assemblage with the emergence of a colonial merchant class in the late seventeenth century. Marianne Franklin’s study of wrought iron tools juxtaposes recovered material culture with the detailed archival records. Together these chapters illustrate the vibrant life in the “wickedest city on earth” (p. 41).

The volume’s greatest contribution to Caribbean archaeology is its diachronic consideration of the changing lifeways of Jamaica’s enslaved and subsequently emancipated African diasporic community. Douglas Armstrong’s chapter brings together more than ten years of archaeological work at Seville Plantation, and explores creativity and dynamic communal space among the site’s enslaved population. James Delle examines the intricate landscapes of power at the regional, plantation, and local spatial scales. He investigates how space was used on differing scales to create and reinforce power not through visual display but through practice. What is most striking about Delle’s work is that he demonstrates how enslaved communities pushed back against dominant colonial structures, creating a life
and landscape outside the gaze of their white overlords. In his words, the enslaved community “created a habitus of their own that was still simultaneously intertwined in the spatial logic of the plantation” (p. 143).

While Delle studies how enslaved communities carved out a life within the plantation system, Candice Goucher and Kofi Agorsah explore “the stories of Maroons—enslaved Africans and their descendants—who fled from bondage and fought a series of wars to maintain their freedom” (p. 145). This contribution brings to light the archaeology of Maroon communities and posits that one cannot understand the Maroon experience without the aid of material culture (p. 159). Mark Hauser explores the phenomenon of “black markets” that were controlled by individuals of African descent. Chief among the sales in these markets were low-fired earthenwares called yabbas. Hauser argues that these markets were contested colonial frontiers comprised of a complex system of ceramic distribution networks from sites across Jamaica. In his words, “this analysis opens up for discussion archaeology’s role in understanding the formations of slavery, markets and empires” (p. 181). In a connected economic vein, Matthew Reeves studies the differing economic strategies among enslaved households, stressing the interconnection of enslavement, commerce, and social life, while the chapter by Gregory D. Cook and A. Rubensteins brings a maritime perspective to the plantation economies of St. Anne’s Bay. The final chapter, by Kenneth G. Kelly, Mark W. Hauser, and Douglas V. Armstrong, reflects on Jamaica’s postemancipatory landscape. Through comparative analysis they investigate the differing postslavery strategies of former slaves. Their study demonstrates that “former enslaved laborers remained caught in the social and economic web of servitude, repressive wage labor, and an inability to gain access to land and resources” (p. 257, citing Armstrong 2010).

While the work presented here successfully brings together archaeology and archival lines of evidence, a future collaborative angle might incorporate some of the recent work by architectural historians examining Jamaica’s built landscape (e.g., Nelson 2011), thereby understanding the relationships among the island’s material life, built landscapes, and environment. This volume’s broad approach to the study of Jamaica’s past places is at the forefront of contemporary approaches to the archaeology of island life in the Caribbean. As Armstrong notes in his epilogue, the future
will bring new research techniques, questions, and perspectives that will continue to enrich our understanding of Jamaica’s social development.

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References