Kenneth G. Kelly & Meredith D. Hardy (eds.)

This book introduces readers to the potential of archaeology to gather original information on the post-Columbian period in the greater circum-Caribbean region. The contributors’ main goal is to explore through historical archaeology the dynamism, the diversity, and the singularities of the French colonies located outside the well-documented North American territories such as Canada or the Great Lakes region (p. 2). To do so, the articles focus on the ways the French diaspora was experiencing life during the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries in various colonial contexts in the present-day United States, French Antilles, and French Guiana. Rather than focusing solely on the French presence, it addresses questions about interactions between people from different cultural backgrounds—European colonists, Native Americans, and enslaved Africans.

This is a pioneering attempt to bring together archaeological information on the French colonial territories of the extended circum-Caribbean area. Although research is regularly realized in the context of CRM (Cultural Resources Management) archaeology or compliance archaeology in the Mississippi Valley, Louisiana, South Carolina, and the French départements d’outre-mer of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Guyane, the field reports are difficult to obtain and their results are rarely synthesized in easily accessible media. Thus, this collection dramatically increases our understanding of the colonial circum-Caribbean area by exploring the contribution of France and French colonists in the development of the region. Unfortunately French scientists working in the Lesser Antilles are underrepresented; I propose that they merit another volume in the future.

The book is based on a session of the 2004 meeting of the Society for Historical Archaeology chaired by Kelly and Hardy. Their introductory chapter discusses the contexts of French colonization in the Americas as well as the state of research in historical archaeology on this subject. In Chapter 2, Ellen Shlasko looks at the way the French Huguenots and enslaved Africans adapted and maintained their identities within the development of South Carolina society by, among other things, their architectural traditions. Chapter 3, by Sarah Rivers-Cofield, investigates the relationship the refugee planters from Saint-Domingue maintained with their slaves, as well as the difference between French and American plantations in Maryland. Chapters 4 and 5 explore France’s unsuccessful efforts (1720–22) to establish the capital of Louisiana in Biloxi and the precarious condition in which the colonists were living—
Barbara Hester through the analysis of archaeological data from several sites and Marie Danforth through bioarchaeological analysis.

In Chapter 6, Ann Early sets the table for future archaeological research on the second French-Chikasaw War which took place in the Mississippi Valley during the eighteenth century. Her essay shows the potential for studying multicultural collaboration between Europeans, enslaved Africans, and Native Americans during an armed conflict. Multicultural settings are also the focus of Chapters 7, 8 and 9, which explore intercultural contacts, adaptation, and creolization in colonial Louisiana through the analysis of faunal remains (Elizabeth Scott & Shannon Dawdy), the colonoware ceramic production (David Morgan & Kevin MacDonald), and foodway systems (Meredith D. Hardy). Moving further south, Chapters 10 (Kenneth G. Kelly) and 11 (Allison Bain, Réginald Auger & Yannick Le Roux) focus on plantation contexts and the daily life of enslaved peoples working in production estates in Guadeloupe and French Guiana. In the concluding chapter John de Bry complements each of the essays with additional information coming from the French archival record; this contribution is important in opening up avenues for future research.

In addition to giving information on the French colonization of the Americas and related archaeological contexts, this book explores the colonial experiences of individuals using different research axes and recent theoretical perspectives. It is an important addition to the body of literature of the colonial-period archaeology. The papers shed light on the materialization of various French colonial contexts under themes such as identity, diversity, cultural contact, adaptation, and creolization, topics that are at the forefront of research in historical archaeology today. It is also a great joy to see how almost all the authors insist, with nuance and acuity, on the way the colonial society was formed by interactions among diverse cultural groups, underlining the importance of the “vivre ensemble” in a multicultural society.

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