William F. Keegan & Corinne L. Hofman, *The Caribbean before Columbus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. xx + 332 pp. (Paper US\$35.00)

The Caribbean Archipelago presents a complex social and environmental scenario. Few monographs have been able to successfully paint the picture of this complexity in a coherent way. *The Caribbean before Columbus* is a laudable attempt to fill the void. William Keegan and Corinne Hofman invite Caribbean archaeologists to move away from a uniformizing vision of linear cultural evolution, proposing a new way of looking at the past through chaos theory. Their goal in this book is to acknowledge the diversity in the Caribbean that sits behind the blocky uniformity of Irving Rouse's time-space typological diagram.

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the geography and environment of the Caribbean, followed by a brief but insightful summary of the main theoretical debates and challenges. The next two chapters present a social picture of the archipelago as a whole (both Lesser and Greater Antilles). Chapter 2 focuses on the earliest inhabitants and Chapter 3 discusses the Early Ceramic Age, considering the migration and settlement of a broadly defined Saladoid (but avoiding serious consideration of the "Huecoid problem"). In the next four chapters the approach shifts away from addressing a time or cultural period in the Caribbean as a whole, instead grouping processes by geographic areas covering multiple dynamics and characteristics from initial colonizations to the contact period. Chapter 4 focuses on Puerto Rico; Chapter 5 on Hispaniola; Chapter 6 on Cuba, the Bahamas, and Jamaica; and Chapter 7 on all of the Lesser Antilles. Finally, Chapter 8 zooms back out and discusses the archipelago as seen through the eyes of the Europeans, and the way their biased descriptions have influenced understandings of the indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean from the fifteenth century onward.

Keegan and Hofman have successfully addressed the main issues in Caribbean archaeology in a single monograph, ambitiously covering a wide range of topics, from individual sites to social interpretations. However, even though they aimed to create a new vision, by focusing on two completely independent migrations (Lithic/Archaic and Saladoid) and using traditional pottery typologies to understand what happened after them, they end up reinforcing Rouse's perspective more than moving away from it. They do recognize a multiplicity of theories (such as the *Preagroalfarero*, *Protoagricola* and *Ceramista* format of Cuba, and the *Modo de Vida* of Hispaniola and Luis Chanlatte's culture model of Puerto Rico), but fall short of creating something new, failing to acknowledge the hindrances that come from uneven data collecting and reporting, and the ubiquitous practice of making and repeating assumptions without questioning the data behind them.

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Keegan and Hofman try to make a case for diversity and complexity, but their arguments end up being repetitive, confusing, and at times self-contradictory. Some of their proposals tend to be highly speculative. For example, they propose that the burials underneath plazas in the Saladoid period—traditionally assumed to be part of ancestor veneration—could represent the return, after death, of male members of the community who had married away from it. This alternative hypothesis could be interesting, but there is no discussion of the archaeological evidence that might or might not support it (for example, isotopes, presence of secondary burials, unequal gender distribution, et cetera). This absence of data transforms a new interpretation into a weak speculation. Another issue is that the authors provide few supporting references for innovative proposals, and mostly cite their own work or that of their students. This is a serious problem that often leads to the construction of circular arguments.

The book does make two significant contributions. It collates in a single volume the mainstream state of knowledge in Caribbean archaeology and it includes useful summaries of individual sites, which are otherwise difficult to access. *The Caribbean before Columbus* will be most useful to specialists who can use it critically. By attempting to redefine Caribbean archaeology, Keegan and Hofman have tackled a monster, but they have provided a commendable summary of where we are, and an excellent base to build roads to where we would like to be. It will be cited for many years to come.

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