Vernon James Knight, *Caribbean Figure Pendants: Style and Subject Matter: Anthropomorphic Figure Pendants of the late Ceramic Age in the Greater Antilles*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Sidestone Press, 2020. xviii + 251 pp. (Paper US\$ 50.00)

If you are one of the hundreds of archaeologists or handful of art historians working on the pre-Columbian Caribbean, you have encountered the finely carved figure pendants of the Taíno era. Imagine finding one of these evocative jewels of lapidary or shell work in an excavation or surface collection or opening a drawer full of them at a museum. Until now, if you wanted to understand how your excavated *idolillo* fits into the greater corpus of figure pendants or wondered whether your museum collection might organize them stylistically, iconographically, or chronologically, you would have some detective work to do—scraping together chapters, paragraphs, and honorary mentions in scores of publications and reports across several languages. Occasionally, you might come upon a whole book on figure pendants from a particular island, such as Cuban educator Esteban Maciques Sánchez's *Idolillos colgantes de piedra en la cultura taína* (2003). In *Caribbean Figure Pendants: Style and Subject Matter*. However, Vernon James Knight has done much of that hunting and gathering for us.

This generously illustrated book identifies nine major styles of figure pendants spanning the Greater Antilles, along with several substyles all from among 500 specimens. Knight also singles out several unattributed examples for discussion with the proviso that further study and continuing excavations might reveal them to belong to distinct styles of their own. He names each major style for a site or locality where exemplars were found or collected, and each figure pendant is assigned a catalogue number for cross-reference in his database of images.

Knight dedicates a chapter to most of his styles, each following the same format. The book's subject and systematic organization effectively make it well suited to quick consultations during field seasons or collection visits. Included in each chapter is a detailed description of the four distinguishing aspects of that pendant style—the head, torso and arms, legs and genitalia, and the back. Knight also indicates the average size of pendants in each style and the method of drilling for suspension or attachment—(whether transverse, longitudinal, or “elbow style perforation”), making each style readily apparent—and thus reflects somewhat the standardized way that figure pendants were sawed and carved in distinguishable crafting communities. Pendants are also subtyped into variations on a standard form. Chapters end with brief notes on what is known of the geology of stone pendants, their geographical distributions, what can be deduced about chronological development, and what can be suggested

about iconography, usually deferring longer discussion of symbolic content for the concluding chapters of the book.

Knight's uniform, detailed descriptions of each of these very different pendant figurines range somewhat in their clarity. It is easier to describe some objects than others using the Euclidean language upon which he relies. Fortunately, metric prose is aided by color illustrations of the objects throughout, and together, they enable us to envision the configuration and surface details of objects down to the shape of the blank matrices from which they were hewn.

With the publication of this book, some of our previous guesswork about these objects seems a bit naïve. Its chapters contain discoveries that could only result from surveying a large corpus of the same class of object. For example, when Knight discusses the pendant style that he calls "Puerto Plata," he reveals that figures with hands on their abdomens always have a navel whereas figures with their hands on their knees never do. Before his study, no one collection had a sufficient sample for the recognition of such a correlation or many other conventions it elucidates.

My criticisms of this important work are minor compared to the magnitude of its contribution. Semioticians will be disappointed by Knight's relative lack of engagement with the meaning of these objects. In fact, his first chapter witheringly critiques what he perceives as the overreliance among Caribbean pre-Columbianists on the "deficient mythic corpus" in Ramón Pané's *Conquest-era Account of the Antiquities of the Indians*. Leaving behind this balefully short and incomplete proto-ethnology, which survives only in imperfect translations, Knight opts for George Kubler's configurational analysis methodology to identify four or five main characters in figure pendants whom he hesitates to locate in any known Antillean or Amazonian narrative corpus. Nevertheless, iconographers will find Knight's book a welcome organizing tool in their explorations of the Antillean ethos. For now, pre-Columbianists of all stripes can refer at least provisionally to figure pendants by regionally- and chronologically-affiliated style names while comparing them to others of their type or subject, and while assessing their relative technical and artistic merits.

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