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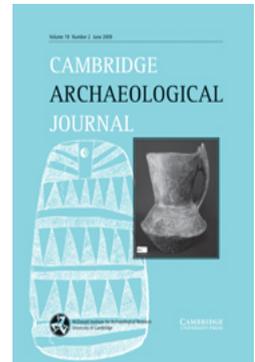
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***Taíno Indian Myth and Practice: the Arrival of the Stranger King*, by William F. Keegan, 2007. Gainesville (FL): University Press of Florida; ISBN 978-0-8130-3038-8 hardback £36 & US\$39.95; xxvi+230 pp., 25 figs., 11 tables**

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Cambridge Archaeological Journal / Volume 19 / Issue 02 / June 2009, pp 274 - 275
DOI: 10.1017/S0959774309000407, Published online: 13 May 2009

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0959774309000407

How to cite this article:

José R. Oliver (2009). Cambridge Archaeological Journal, 19, pp 274-275 doi:10.1017/S0959774309000407

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The book, authored by Bill Keegan, takes as its central theme the arrival in Hispaniola (Haiti-Dominican Republic) of one of the most colourful yet enigmatic historical figures: Caonabó. He was a powerful *cacique* (chief) who was not a native of Hispaniola but instead came from the Bahamian Archipelago. He was a *Lucayo* and, hence, a 'stranger king'. Ever since Christopher Columbus arrived in 1492, Caonabó led armed rebellions against the Spaniards. In 1495, the Spaniards finally captured Caonabó, who was then taken to La Isabela and imprisoned in a ship. A devastating hurricane sank the ship where he and other prisoners drowned. The heroic deeds attributed to Caonabó, even in life, became the stuff of legend. Being a Lucayan, the story of Caonabó provides Keegan with a powerful argument for Caribbean scholars to reconsider the Bahamas not as marginal but central to the ancient political history of the Greater Antilles.

In this book, Keegan frames the 'facts' of Caonabó — The Stranger King — within the general Taíno culture, religion (mythology) and archaeology. The principal aim is to explain how come a stranger came to be a paramount chief in Hispaniola. The author approaches these diverse sources of information through chaos theory (pp. 3–16), where 'initial conditions' are critical in the unravelling of the events that led to the rulership of Caonabó in a 'foreign' island and its aftermath as a heroic figure of mythological proportions.

What is very distinct in this book, if not unique for Caribbean archaeological/academic texts, is that Keegan explicitly chose to write in the post-modernist literary genre. The main cast of characters is Caonabó and Shaun D. Sullivan, the heroic and legendary protagonists (p. 16), and the author himself. Casting Sullivan is a fitting tribute to a colourful archaeologist who contributed so much to Bahamian archaeology. In evaluating this book I am struck by ambivalence: should I read it as a post-modernist 'historical novel', as a robust display of anthropological-archaeological scholarship (p. 8) or both? There are elements of both but at least from my perspective this formula is not entirely successful. This is neither to say that the book is not well written nor that scholarship is absent.

Hints of intertextuality, typical of the post-modernist literature, make this book a very entertaining read indeed. The plot has its elements of suspense to keep readers interested. From what island did Caonabó come from? How could a stranger become 'king' in Hispaniola? What were the roles of those, from the past and present day, who contributed to create both the historical person and legend that was Caonabó? Does the archaeological evidence support Caonabó's Lucayan origin? As a post-modern literary piece, Keegan has succeeded, but in terms of academic rigour there are numerous weaknesses that undermine his efforts.

Given his avocation for a theory of chaos, it is of paramount importance that his arguments for the 'initial conditions' leading to Caonabó's rulership are water-tight. They are not. His contention that the Taíno elite were *de facto* matrilineal and practised viri-avunculocality is the crucial initial condition, as it would explain how this Lucayan stranger would come to be raised in his maternal uncle's household (who would be a *cacique*) in Hispaniola and eventually succeed his purported 'rival' brothers to the position of *cacique*. In earlier writings Keegan had postulated matrilineality as a hypothesis, but in this book he presented it as an incontrovertible fact. There is no evidence that Caonabó had a maternal uncle in Hispaniola. The chronicler Las Casas explicitly noted that Caonabó accessed power through his personal achievements as a brave warrior and wise politician, not through birthright. Furthermore, various chroniclers presented several other customary routes to inherit the office of *cacique* that were *not* matrilineal. Keegan ignored previous critiques made by Antonio Curet in *Ethnohistory* (49(2), 259–80) and the ensuing arguments between both authors (*Ethnohistory* 53(2), 393–8). In this book Keegan did not provide new ethnohistoric evidence that would support his thesis. If the initial conditions of matrilineality and viri-avunculocality are purely hypothetical, then so is the subsequent unravelling of the 'story' of Caonabó.

Keegan used a rather weak excuse for dispensing with detailed reference citations of the sixteenth-century chroniclers to support his arguments; moreover, there is an overreliance on secondary sources, such as Sauer, Rouse, Loven or Fewkes. His justifications are that interpretations of ethnohistoric texts have a life divorced from the authors that lead to multiple interpretations and that inserting reference citations at every turn would interfere with the flow of the narrative. I remain unimpressed. Keegan still has recourse to chapter endnotes to keep the narrative flow unimpeded. Nothing can substitute the process of analysis and verification of the *primary* historic texts against secondary sources. Just because there can be multiple interpretations does not mean that all are equally justifiable or valid. As a result, there are quite a number of inaccurate 'facts' as well as unfounded assumptions, some reached by an uncritical acceptance of the secondary sources. A few examples will suffice.

Keegan states (p. 23) that Caonabó was the principal *cacique* for the region where the Spanish La Navidad fortress was located and that the local chief, Guacanagarí, was his subordinate. In fact, Caonabó's polity was in the Maguana region, much further south of Guacanagarí's Marién region. Keegan (p. 28) states that there was little gold in the chief-

dom of Canoabó, when there is abundant evidence to the contrary. There are also inaccuracies in describing the myth of Deminán Caracacol and his three brothers (the Taíno culture heroes) and the Yayael myth (pp. 45–8). Deminán did *not* go to Yaya's house to steal cassava bread and was not tardy in entering Yaya's house. The Cacaracol brothers did not capture eels, but instead wooden, slippery beings. It was not Deminán who freed the first Taíno beings from the mythical cave of origin, but Guahayona, the mythical *cacique*.

Keegan argues that these myths confirm the Taíno practice for a matrilineal conical clan where the 'brothers of the same mother are the progenitors of new colonies', but where Caonabó seems to 'break the rules' because he was a foreigner. However, various chroniclers, including Las Casas, noted that Caonabó's brothers, in fact, lived in the chiefdom of Maguana. Contrary to Keegan's statements (pp. 96–7), there are no ethnohistoric references indicating 'female inheritance' of *cemí* objects, nor stating that women controlled the production and distribution of high-status objects.

On the positive side, Keegan's discussion of the archaeological data of the Bahamian Archipelago in relation to Hispaniola (Chs. 5–6), provides an excellent, updated synthesis of important work that is not well known even among Caribbeanists, particularly Shaun Sullivan's PhD dissertation work.

Through a process of elimination, Keegan proposes that site MC-6 in Middle Caicos is the only one that would meet the requirements for Caonabó's home, if not birthplace. It is based on various lines of evidence (pp. 183–4) but most particularly the site's unique spatial layout. However, whether MC-6 is 'more typical of chiefly villages in the Greater Antilles' remains debatable, since a 'typical' layout has yet to be defined, much less what is or is not a 'chiefly' village in archaeological terms. This already assumes that Caonabó belonged to a chiefly lineage, which as noted above, is not proven. Finally, while Canoabó was a Lucayo, there are no reasons to assume, as Keegan does, that he had to come from a site that archaeologically belongs to the Chican subtradition, instead of one characterized by the Palmetto 'culture' or by Meillac tradition. If part of Keegan's argument is that Caonabó was a stranger king, then belonging to another cultural tradition would make him even more strange; if, instead, he belonged to the same cultural tradition and was a relative of the chief (his 'maternal uncle'), and possibly lived there since puberty, as claimed in this book, then Caonabó was not a stranger at all.

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