

Basil A. Reid (ed.), *The Archaeology of Caribbean and Circum-Caribbean Farmers (6000BC–AD1500)*. London: Routledge, 2018. xxv + 453 pp. (Paper US\$39.95)

This edited volume is a welcome contribution to the archaeology of the Circum-Caribbean, a region that in the last two decades has witnessed an upsurge of new data and fresh insights based on both fieldwork projects and the reevaluation of long-standing understandings of its precolonial history. The stress is on farming in its broadest sense, from early plant management and incipient cultivation (low-level food production) to fully developed agriculture; its 53 contributors provide a thorough temporal and spatial coverage of the region. In the postscript, Peter Bellwood offers a useful cross-cultural comparison from his perspective as a scholar of the Pacific, highlighting the entanglement of historical contingencies and evolutionary processes in developmental trajectories of “farmers” in the two regions. The book’s broad range of themes resonate with world-wide concerns in archaeology: dispersal of cultivars, incipient domestication, and dietary profiles, as well as the ever-changing signatures of the “cultivated” landscape, all of which reflects on processes of “neolithization,” social interaction, complexity, agency, trade/exchange, mobility, and migration. Data sources range from pottery, lithic tools, cooking pits, and architecture to dental calculus, stable isotopes, forensic pathologies, sediment cores, woody remains, and animal and microbotanical remains.

Part One covers Caribbean farmers from a broad regional perspective. Part Two focuses on terrestrial animal domestication. Part Three is devoted to rock art. Part Four compares Caribbean and Pacific farming trajectories. Parts Five and Six focus on insular Caribbean farming methods and techniques—woody resources, anthropogenic soils, and landform modification in Puerto Rico, stable isotopes and its challenges in Puerto Rico, dietary and subsistence transitions based on dental analyses and isotope studies on Aruba, and social complexity in the context of managed foraging in the Florida Keys. Part Six also includes two chapters on maize, manioc, and *mamey* cultivars in Central America. Part Seven turns to a *longue-durée* overview of the farming history of the Guianas (*terra preta*, plant domestication, raised fields and drainage canals, settlements and food processing evidence), plus a detailed discussion of the transition from Archaic to Early Ceramic farmers in French Guiana.

Bellwood notes, correctly, that many of the authors “clearly have quite strong views about such issues as foraging versus farming, low-level food production versus agricultural dependence, [...] that rather *thorny concept called ‘migration’*, [and on] how to recognize complexity in socio-political organization” and that “most Caribbean archaeologists [would] still agree that a Saladoid farmer immigration actually happened and is not a figment of the imagi-

nation" (p. 420, my italics). The reaction against normative culture history (that is, Irving Rouse) and its focus on migration, has resulted in a tendency, in some quarters, to downplay the substantial impacts that the migration of Arawak-speaking agricultural farmers bearing related ceramic styles (Saladoid series/tradition) had on pre-existing Archaic economies that ranged from hunting-gathering to low-level farming. The interpretations of the outcomes of the "encounters" between Archaic and "Saladoid" farming economies often rely too much on guesswork. The trend nowadays is to shift attention away from "migration" to "mobility" leading to networks (without computation) for making inferences about the direction and circulation of plants, animals, goods, and people. Although buttressed by injecting social actors, interpretations of the circulation of things retains the flavor of that age-old diffuse concept, diffusion. Mobility does not preclude migration and vice versa; their conceptual distinction should be more explicit. It is difficult in some cases to assess, on the evidence available, the degree of dependency on farming (low-level cultivation) that some of the Archaic groups may have had relative to food procurement.

The analyses of sediment cores bearing microplant remains and charcoal in four lacustrine/marsh localities of the Lesser Antilles (Chapter 2) show support for the presence of human impacts on the landscape vegetation dating from 5600 years before present onward despite the fact that archaeological habitation or activity sites older than the local Saladoid (around the first century AD) are absent. As the authors indicate, the degree of disturbances suggests persistent Archaic- to Early Ceramic-age human activities that would *not* be expected from purely exploratory expeditions. The notion that the Windward Islands were bypassed by first colonists from South America is now highly questionable. Finally, the question in Chapter 8 of why the Pacific Island trajectory toward a higher degree of sociopolitical complexity as well as monumental architecture and large agricultural landscape projects is not attained in the Caribbean is challenging. Perhaps there ought not to be an expectation that the presence of successful tropical agro-economies necessarily leads to a similar kind of (phenotypic) expression of complexity. It may well be that the issue is how we define and conceptualize "complexity."

In sum, this book is both highly informative and illuminating.

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