

An Archaeology of Black Markets: Local Ceramics and Economies in Eighteenth-Century Jamaica.

Mark W. Hauser. University Press of Florida, Gainesville, 2008

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This volume is an excellent study that will interest students of the African Diaspora, African-influenced pottery of the Americas and Caribbean, and the economic strategies of slaves. Hauser presents a detailed examination of how the pottery made by African-Jamaicans in the eighteenth century can be used to model the various interactions that occurred in the informal market economy. Under this system, enslaved Africans and African-Jamaicans were provided the opportunity to sell or barter their excess garden produce and crafts at Sunday markets throughout the island. Hauser recognizes the distributions of local pottery as a reflection of these exchange systems. He examines the phenomenon of informal African-Jamaican markets as having both positive and negative effects on the various actors in the plantation system. With a strong backing in his data, Hauser goes so far as to suggest that the informal market system provided the opportunity for African-Jamaicans to coordinate the rebellion of 1831. Hauser draws from diverse data sources to provide an excellent context for his discussions.

The volume contains an introduction, six chapters, an epilogue, and two technical appendices. In the Introduction, Hauser introduces the concept of black markets, and addresses how the study of such markets can provide valuable insight on the history of Diasporic adaptations.

In Chapter 1, Hauser addresses how historical archaeologists and historians have addressed the Caribbean plantation. He applauds the movement away from “top-down” treatments of the plantation system, and argues that there is a strong need to consider institutions (such as the Sunday markets) that involved enslaved and free persons from many contexts on the island.

Chapter 2 addresses the long history and diverse roles of informal economies in the development of Jamaica. Hauser (Page 40) emphasizes that “the market system, as one of these institutional forms, was at the nexus of the global and the local.” The author provides a literature review of key studies in informal, internal economies, as a basis for his contention that the markets were places of tension, where the many contradictions of the Colonial economy were highlighted.

Hauser addresses connections – communication and commerce – between the rural and urban in Chapter 3. He details the development through time in the road/trail infrastruc-

ture that allowed increased interaction between rural plantations and urban market locations. Hauser introduces his major study sites including four plantations (Drax Hall, Seville, Thetford, and Juan de Bollas) and two urban contexts of Spanish Town (Old King's House) and Port Royal (Old Naval Dockyard and St. Peter's Church).

For the fourth chapter, the author takes a step back to survey the broad field of African-American and African-Caribbean pottery traditions, and what those traditions may say about the disruptive and creative forces associated with the Diaspora. The review by Hauser is shown to support his argument that the pottery produced by African Jamaicans is an appropriate avenue toward "understanding of this economy's scope or scale" (Page 119).

Hauser brings us back to Jamaica in Chapter 5 with a detailed discussion of African-Jamaican pottery from the eighteenth century to today. The author blends historical accounts and images, ethnographic accounts, ethnoarchaeological observations, and archaeological examples from his study sites to capture the tremendous variability in African-Jamaican pottery. Considering the temporal trends in vessel forms, vessel diameters, and vessel decoration, Hauser (Pages 154-155) argues "It is my belief that in the eighteenth century we see the development of these yabbas as a trade item which is produced in somewhat larger scale than would be suggested by domestic manufacture."

In Chapter 6, Hauser seeks to address how those many pots spread through the island economy. Petrography and Neutron Activation Analysis are used to convincingly argue that despite localized production, yabbas moved extensively about the island. His case is strengthened by the inclusion of clay samples and African-Jamaican pottery produced in the

twentieth century. Hauser (Page 190) summarizes:

"the petrographic description and NAA confirm that pots recovered archaeologically from sites located on the north coast appear to be made using the same ceramic recipe as pottery recovered from the south coast and the central part of the island."

This is a convincing analytical study, and the findings serve as a strong basis for the consideration of the role of the Sunday markets in African-Jamaican life of the eighteenth century. Hauser ends the chapter by reminding us that pots do not move themselves over the landscape.

In the Epilogue, the author recaps his evidence for the scope of the ceramic trade network on Jamaica. He emphasizes that the scope of the market system, as evidenced in part by the movement of pots, was important for both economic and social reasons. The very existence of these markets required a blurring of social boundaries, and allowed African-Jamaicans to mitigate in a limited way the circumscription of the rural estate system.

I had only minor problems with this book. I think the most troublesome is that Hauser defines yabba two ways. Early in the book, he defines yabba as "both a type and a form." He says the form is a restricted bowl and the type is a coarse, low-fired, hand-made Jamaican ceramic. It would have been less confusing, perhaps, to note the generalized use of yabba to denote a form, and then have limited its use in this study to the broader meaning (i.e., a coarse, low-fired, hand-made Jamaican ceramic). It is this latter definition that is most pertinent to the study, as trade was not restricted to a single vessel form.

Another concern was Hauser's apparent confusion or collapsing of the attributes of geo-

graphic scale and product volume, with regard to the pottery distribution network. His data are convincing that certain pots were indeed traded over significant distances, thereby establishing the geographic scale of the system. However, Hauser never really addresses how many pots moved through this system. Did the eighteenth century see 100 or 10,000 pots per year distributed around the island? The market images may be misleading, due to their generally late dates and due to the fact that the number of pots on display does not necessarily equal the number sold. The conclusions on the scope of the ceramic trade would have been strengthened, even if the author could only offer a ballpark estimate based on the estimated number pots in use per household unit, the life span of those pots, and the number of households on the island in various periods. Even such a speculative exercise would serve to underline that the network was both widespread and heavily used.

This volume is a strong contribution to the literature. Any minor weaknesses are overwhelmed by the quality of Hauser's volume. *An Archaeology of Black Markets* is a highly readable, interesting, and important study. Whether on your Caribbean shelf, or amongst your sources on Diaspora archaeology, or in the corner with your folk pottery studies, you should have this book. As well, a creative professor could do much with this volume in a wide variety of graduate and undergraduate courses.