

**TOWARDS A PAN-CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVE OF
PRE-COLONIAL MOBILITY AND EXCHANGE:
PREFACE TO A SPECIAL VOLUME OF
THE JOURNAL OF CARIBBEAN
ARCHAEOLOGY**

Special editors:

Corinne L. Hofman and Alistair J. Bright
Faculty of Archaeology
Leiden University
P.O. Box 9515
2300 RA Leiden
The Netherlands

On a micro-scale, there has been evidence of intensive interaction between peoples throughout the Caribbean archipelago for many years. Recently though, increasing evidence has come to light to suggest that these relationships extended over far larger areas, bridged greater distances and variably intersected one another more than had been previously anticipated. Conceiving of the wider Caribbean as a circum-Caribbean region (Antilles, coastal South America, southern Caribbean islands, Isthmo-Colombian area and coastal Central America) inhabited by a multitude of pre-Colonial Amerindian communities, is to render (at least conceptually) the region a variegated yet cohesive entity, and lend it a degree of commonality and shared identity. In so doing, actors and contact lines should be identified, any of which could represent pivotal nodes within what may amount to a pan-Caribbean network system made up of larger as well as smaller interlocked or independent interaction spheres, in which people, goods and ideas moved. Such a broad, regional take on the prehistory of the wider Caribbean should not only provide a holistic view of the patterns of material interaction in the area, but, by expand-

ing the scale of analysis, we are opening the door to exploring hitherto un(der) considered long-distance inter-societal engagements between the inhabitants of the islands and those of the surrounding continental regions. This would in turn invite (if not demand) us to speculate on how to conceptualize the potential engagements between communities with different levels of socio-political complexity over great distances and over long periods of time. In this spirit of scalar expansion and horizon-gazing, an international conference session was conceived to explicitly explore the themes of mobility and exchange within the circum-Caribbean region.

We are grateful to Chris O. Clement and William F. Keegan for giving us the opportunity to publish in this special issue of the *Journal of Caribbean Archaeology* the fruits of the exciting and wide ranging session entitled 'Mobility and exchange from a Pan-Caribbean perspective', held at the 2008 Society of American Archaeology (SAA) meetings in Vancouver, Canada. The original session encompassed sixteen presentations by scholars specialised in the archaeology of the Caribbean and Central

America, i.e., John Hoopes, David Watters, Mary-Jane Berman, Sam Wilson, José Oliver, Alexander Geurds, Reniel Rodríguez Ramos, Jago Cooper, Roberto Valcárcel Rojas, Jorge Ulloa-Hung, Laura Wingfield, Angus Mol, Laura van Broekhoven, Corinne Hofman, Alistair Bright, John Crock, William Keegan and Peter Siegel. This compilation represents a selection of synthesizing papers of both local and regional studies addressing the topics of mobility and exchange from a pan-Caribbean perspective. Contributions from the various areas skirting the Caribbean Sea provide a panorama of the dynamics of human mobility and the distribution of goods and ideas across the circum-Caribbean region through time. It is our conviction that comparing developments throughout the macro-region is important regardless of whether there was actual contact between all of its inhabitants or not. Only in this manner can the full range of social dynamics and mechanisms at play in the Caribbeanscape be demonstrated.

Corinne L. Hofman, Alistair J. Bright and Reniel Rodríguez Ramos explore the participation of pre-Colonial Amerindian community members in interaction networks of human mobility and exchange of goods and ideas. They propose a multi-disciplinary and multi-scalar approach to evaluate the structure through time of these social networks, examining various lines of evidence in the process. The focus in their contribution is on the larger archipelagic and regional scale.

Reniel Rodríguez Ramos makes a case for considering the Greater Caribbean as a geohistorical area of study, and bolsters this proposal by referring to the long-term macro-regional interactions evident in the circulation of jadeitite and social jade.

Alexander Geurds and Laura van Broekhoven present data from a surface survey conducted in central Nicaragua, which they analyze for indications of political power as well as ritual economic activity. By merging analytical frameworks they look at how strategic choices are made and reflect a society's intent and subsequent level of success in fitting into local social structures as well as forming part of extra-local exchange networks.

Angus A.A. Mol reconsiders the expectations that exchange entails reciprocity, i.e., a gift and a counter-gift. Concentrating on the social value of things instead of their economical value, he proposes that certain Caribbean shell artifacts, known as *guaízas*, were given, but not necessarily reciprocated.

Heather McKillop evaluates ancient Maya economy and sea trade networks on the basis of data stretching from the Pre-classic to Postclassic, incorporating in her discussion the Butterfly Wing shell midden and the trading ports of Moho Cay and Wild Cane Cay. The seafaring skills, marine trading networks, coastal adaptation and exploitation of marine resources exhibited by the Maya further tie them to other ancient peoples inhabiting the circum-Caribbean region.

Arie Boomert raises a cautionary note to discussions of inter-island connectivity by detailing how the convergence between the neighbouring islands of Trinidad and Tobago during the Saladoid epoch of pan-Caribbean cultural unity rapidly disintegrated after about AD 700/800. His paper charts the patterns of Amerindian interaction and communication across the Galleons' Passage between Trinidad and Tobago during Late Ceramic times and attempts to appreciate the post-Saladoid cultural realignment of the two islands and its consequences.

Jago Cooper models movement and exchange between pre-Columbian sites in the island of Cuba through GIS based cluster analyses, viewshed analyses, surface cost maps and simulated journey models. His analyses suggest that in some cases, marine or riverine based transport and interaction would have been favoured over more time-consuming or inefficient land based movement. Furthermore, he provides hypotheses for the nature of interaction between coastal and offshore sites, and between coastal and interior sites.

William F. Keegan explores how the concepts of boundary work and reputational systems have been used to delimit and structure the investigation of population movement in the prehistoric insular Caribbean. His inquiry demonstrates that representations of prehistoric population movements are a product of historical contingencies within the discipline of Caribbean archaeology and not necessarily an accurate portrait of human migrations into and within the islands.

Peter Siegel rounds off the compilation with a thoughtful, critical appraisal of the papers and a number of themes that are raised in them, principally the history of ideas or reception of past Caribbean research, geographic scales of analysis, and modes of interaction.

In closing, we would like to acknowledge Scott Fitzpatrick and an anonymous reviewer for their useful comments on the papers submitted for publication in this special issue. We also wish to express our thanks to Alex Geurds for correcting all Spanish abstracts, to Benoît Roux for correcting all French abstracts, and to Anne van Duijvenbode and Hayley Mickleburgh for assisting with checking the copy proofs.