

WHAT IS THE CARIBBEAN? AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Caribbean as a culture area has traditionally been limited to the Antilles and north-eastern South America. This geo-cultural construct has thus served to alienate the Antillean chain from other surrounding continental regions that are also bathed by this body of water. Evidence recently recovered from the Antilles of jade circulation that indicates long-term macro-regional interactions across the Caribbeanscape will be presented. These data will be used to show the limitations imposed the current configuration of the Caribbean culture area and to propose the consideration of the Greater Caribbean as a geohistorical area of study.

Résumé

Les Caraïbes, comprises comme aire culturelle, ont traditionnellement été limitées aux Antilles et au nord-est de l'Amérique du Sud. Cette construction géoculturelle a ainsi conduit à dissocier l'archipel antillais des régions continentales voisines, également baignées par la mer des Caraïbes. Cet article éclaire la découverte récente, dans les Antilles, de preuves de la circulation de jade, impliquant des interactions macro-régionales sur une longue période dans le paysage caribéen (Caribbeanscape). Ces données mettent en évidence les limites de la conception traditionnelle de l'aire culturelle Caraïbe et permettent de proposer la prise en compte d'une grande Caraïbe comme aire d'étude géohistorique.

Resumen

El área cultural Caribe se ha remitido tradicionalmente a las Antillas y el noreste de América del Sur. Como resultado, este concepto geocultural ha servido para aislar el arco antillano de otras áreas continentales que también son bañadas por este cuerpo de agua. Evidencia recuperada recientemente de las Antillas sobre la circulación de jade, la cual indica interacciones macro-regionales de larga duración, es presentada. Esta evidencia es empleada para demostrar las limitaciones impuestas por la configuración actual del área cultural Caribe y para proponer la consideración del Gran Caribe como un área geohistórica de estudio.

Introduction

The Caribbean is not the Antilles and the Antilles is not the Caribbean. Although this

may seem like a banal statement, the reality is that in archaeological terms the Caribbean tends to be summarized into the An-

tilles, a perspective that disregards the fact that in geographic terms the Caribbean includes not only the archipelago but also the rest of the continental areas that are bathed by this body of water (cf. Bracho 2004; Gaztambide Géigel 2000, 2003; Rodríguez Ramos 2007, in press; Rodríguez Ramos and Pagán Jiménez 2006; Vidal 2003).

This archaeological misconception is to a great extent derived from the current configuration of the Caribbean culture area. As was established by the late Irving Rouse (1960:6), and as is currently conceived by most archaeologists, the Caribbean culture area is constituted by “the region lying east of Mesoamerica and the Intermediate area, north of Amazonia, and southeast of the United States, that is, to central and northeastern Venezuela, the adjacent part of British Guiana, and the West Indies”. The segregationist narrative embedded in the articulation of this geocultural construct has thus created a segmented Caribbean body, resulting in a disjointed perspective about the ways in which the histories of the peoples that inhabited the Antilles and other surrounding continental regions united by the Caribbean Sea where shared in precolonial times.

In this work, I will argue for the need to reattach this partitioned liquid body in order to understand the mutually constituting nature of the processes that took place in the different areas bound by it. With such an objective, I will propose that we broaden the analytical scope of what we archaeologically conceive as the “Caribbean” by incorporating other continental areas facing such sea. In order to demonstrate the utility of employing this fluid scape as a unit for archaeological analysis and as an avenue of macro-regional integration, as Fernand Braudel (1972[1944]) did with the Mediterranean, I will use as a case sample the multiscale

circulation of jade (in its various forms) across the Caribbean through time. Particular attention will be paid to evidence of interactions between the precolonial inhabitants of the Antilles with those of a surrounding continental Caribbean region seldom mentioned in what is currently conceived as “Caribbean archaeology”: the Isthmo-Colombian area (*sensu* Hoopes and Fonseca 2003). Through the reexamination of the possible connections between the inhabitants of these two areas in pre-Columbian times, I hope to demonstrate how this shift toward a “Pan-Caribbean” (see Hofman et al., this volume) geohistorical perspective has implications for the understanding of archaeological processes in both, the insular and the continental Caribbean.

A Brief History of the Caribbean Culture Area

Culture areas have been the main geocultural heuristic devices used in archaeology. Derived primarily from the German-Austrian *kulturkreise* template (Barnard 2000), these have served as the most inclusive geographic units of culture in archaeological research since the beginning of the 20th century. Culture areas have been conceived as spatially confined cultural cores, where peoples shared a set of trait complexes that were mainly defined on the basis of the geographic patterning of their ethnic, linguistic, and cultural makeup at the time of the European conquest and/or in the ethnographic present (Creamer 1987). In some cases, such trait complexes have been traced back in the archaeological record to earlier population movements through a direct-historical approach (e.g., Jones 2003; Rouse 1955; Willey 1971). Culture areas have served to delineate intra-areal culture-historical trajectories (often from a phylogenetic perspective)

and to determine the role of the natural environment on cultural developments within those areas (Linton 1936).

However, the use of this modernist concept has been widely criticized in archaeology recently (e.g., Hoopes and Fonseca 2004; Lyman et al. 1997). As indicated by Curet (n.d.), the problems and limitations of this concept “are many and include aspects such as the non-historicity of the term, the overuse of diffusionism to explain similarities, the lack of hierarchization of cultural traits, the lack of considering the function and reinterpretation of cultural features in each society within the area, underestimation of internal variability, and the lack of analytical potential of the concept”. Despite these limitations, culture areas are still at the geocultural core of archaeological research, having remained basically unaltered since their original construction in the earlier part of the 20th Century in later theoretical perspectives developed in the discipline. Even concepts that fall within what has been termed by Shortman and Urban (1992) the “interaction paradigm” such as peer polities (*sensu* Renfrew 1982), interactions spheres (*sensu* Friedel 1979), and world systems (e.g., Peregrine 1996; Schneider 1977) have been encapsulated within the confines of pre-defined culture areas (e.g., Mesoamerican World System [Carmack and Salgado González 2006; Paris 2008], Hopewellian interaction sphere [Seaman 1979]). This is particularly evident in the case of what is currently conceived as the Caribbean culture area, whose definition was established more than half a century ago and has remained fossilized ever since.

The term “Caribbean” itself has a long and dilapidated history. Although the original name provided by the Spaniards to the whole set of islands was *Las Indias* (i.e., Indies) and then *Antillas* (by way of the

French word *entilles*) (e.g., Rafinesque 1836), since the 17th century the term *Caribe* has become the main referent not only for the sea which bears such name but also for the group of islands that were the first context of colonization of Europeans and its respondent indigenous resistance in this hemisphere (Sued Badillo 1978). The name *Caribe* itself is derived from the word *caniba*, meaning cannibal (Keegan 2007; Wilson 2007), a term used by the Spaniards to demonize the indigenous peoples that resisted their infringement (Sued Badillo 1978). This concept became the most common referent to the islands toward the end of the 17th century by way of the English word Caribby or Caribbee, eventually gaining currency in conjunction to United States’ expansionist agenda toward the south (Gaztambide Geigel 2003; Girvan 2001). The colonialist implications of this word usage as resulting from the United States’ intrusion across its southern frontier have been critically analyzed elsewhere (Gaztambide Géigel 2000, 2003).

It is within this political context that the construction of the Caribbean culture area took place. The contours of this culture area were originally established by Fewkes (1922), who in 1902 came to Puerto Rico on behalf of the Bureau of American Ethnology, shortly after the invasion of the island by the United States in 1898 (Hough 1932). On the basis of his extensive research in Puerto Rico and other islands in the Greater and Lesser Antilles, he was the first to propose the arcuate archipelago that conforms the Antilles as a distinct culture area, an idea that was also advocated at the time by Holmes (1914) and Wissler (1916) from anthropological and museological perspectives respectively. Fewkes (1922:51) noted that “The Antillean culture is sufficiently self-centered and distinctive

to be called unique, although the germ originally came from South America”.

In the early 1930s, the concept of a Caribbean culture area was inserted into the discipline in conjunction with the macro-regional scope of the Caribbean Archaeology Program of the Peabody Museum of Yale University, directed at the time by Cornelius Osgood. The main research agenda of this program was to “attempt to improve the methodology of archaeology through intensive research in a particular area, as well as to resolve the Historic problems of the aboriginal populations of the West Indies” (Osgood 1942:6-7, cited in Rodríguez Ramos 2005a:1). The effort of these researchers was erected upon the platform of what was initially called the Puerto Rican Survey, directed since 1914 by Franz Boas, which brought to Puerto Rico distinguished archaeologists such as J. Alden Mason, Robert Aitken, and Herman Haebelin. Their efforts, as well as the later ones by Froelich Rainey, laid the foundations for establishing the Caribbean culture area, which was formally defined in the mid-20th Century by Irving Rouse, who, as Jesse W. Fewkes, also had the advantage of getting an Antillean-wide perspective of the culture-historical stratigraphy of the islands. By employing the term “Caribbean” not in its “ordinary, geographical meaning but in a special cultural sense” (Rouse 1992:6), the boundaries of the Caribbean culture area have since then been defined resting on several assumptions: that there was only one migration of pottery making culture to the Antilles, which represented a biologically and linguistically homogeneous group; that aspects of religion, diet, and social organization of Antillean indigenous societies were built over an Amazonian template; and that all those elements were derived from northeastern South America, the only continen-

tal region that is included within this culture area.

In the process of inventing the Caribbean culture area, other geocultural models, such as the Circum-Caribbean proposed by Steward (1948), were put to the test and debunked (Rouse 1953). Steward had defined the Circum-Caribbean area, primarily on the basis of ethnographic and ethnohistoric data, as being comprised geographically by the “Intermediate Area” and the Greater Antilles. He proposed that the circum-Caribbean peoples that inhabited those areas shared analogous properties that resulted primarily from their development in similar environmental matrices, and that they also shared an Andean “substratum” that diffused across the Caribbean Sea (Steward 1948:13; see discussion of this in Curet n.d.; Rodríguez Ramos in press, Rodríguez Ramos and Pagán Jiménez 2006). Rouse later criticized Steward’s model by arguing that, although there were some isolated Andean traits that might have appeared in the Antilles due to diffusion, the linguistic, biological, and cultural makeup of the area indicated a single Orinocan origin.

This fixation on the Orinocan corridor as the exclusive ancestral homeland of Antillean indigenous societies has resonated archaeologically in a generalized lack of consideration of the possibility of sustained trans-Caribbean engagements between the precolonial inhabitants of the islands with those from surrounding continental regions beyond northeastern South America. Although one of Rouse’s most important contributions was his early consideration of the sea as a bridge that united neighboring islands, this perspective was limited to the maritime passages between insular territories, while paradoxically the Caribbean Sea was envisioned as a barrier for contacts with surrounding continents, as he clearly

exemplified by saying:

The Caribbean is a large body of open water, 1,500 miles long and at least 350 miles wide. Traversing it was no problem for Columbus, but so far as is known, the natives lacked ships, sails *and the ability* [emphasis mine] to navigate such long distances. Hence, they are generally assumed to have traveled up and down the chain of islands, rather than across the Caribbean Sea (Rouse 1992:1). This quote not only makes evident the commonplace downplay of the navigational capacities of the native inhabitants of the Antilles and the rest of the Greater Caribbean, but also shows the consideration of this body of water as a negative space, which has led to the neglect of the study of archaeological processes that crosscut the cultural boundary lines of the peoples united by the Caribbeanscape.

In fact, as noted elsewhere (Rodríguez Ramos 2007, 2010) the Antilles has been made invisible, literally, by archaeologists working in surrounding continental regions, being even erased from the maps that delimit their study areas. In other cases, the Caribbean portion of continental areas facing these sea have been labeled as part of the “Atlantic” watershed (e.g., Fonseca 2002; Snarskis 1984), thus obfuscating their relationship to this Sea. This has been translated into a lack of dialogue between colleagues working in different parts of the Caribbean, whose research has gone almost completely unnoticed by those of us working in the Antilles and vice versa. This is clearly exemplified by the current configuration of the International Association for *Caribbean* Archaeology (IACA). Between 1963 and 1994 around 98 percent of the papers delivered at the IACA Congresses were geographically circumscribed to the areas collapsed under the Caribbean culture area, utterly disregarding

the rest of the regions unified by this maritime basin (Alegría [editor] 1994). This cultural configuration of the Caribbean is also observed in the construction of anthropological perspectives developed for the study of “Caribbean” peoples (e.g., Slocum and Thomas 2003; Yelvington 2001).

As was previously noted, the construction of culture areas as integrative devices also assumed a horizontal perspective because these were primarily defined on the basis of similarities in cultural trait complexes and language documented within major physiographic divisions in the ethnohistorical record and/or in the ethnographic present. Due to the lack of indigenous groups in existence in the Antilles at the time in which the Caribbean culture area was defined, the establishment of these shared traits relied primarily on the Spanish chronicles of the islands. Since those records supposedly indicated that the area was dominated by groups that spoke a single language and that were otherwise quite similar, the Caribbean culture area was considered to be biologically, linguistically, and ethnically homogeneous in pre-colonial times. The use of analogies for the interpretation of aspects such as Antillean cosmivision (Alegría 1978; Boomert 1987; Roe 1989), language (Taylor 1977), diet (Petersen 1997), and the organization of communities (Siegel 1992), among many others, have often been erected upon a single “Orinoquian” (sensu Gassón 2002) template.

However, as Wilson (1993) has been saying for almost two decades, if there is something that the Caribbean has ever lacked it is homogeneity. Rather, he has defined the Caribbean-with an emphasis on the Antilles-as a mosaic of cultures (see also Trincado 1984). A similar perspective was ingrained in Mintz’s (1971) definition of the Caribbean socio-cultural area as he

understood that, although there were social similarities in the Antilles resulting from colonialist processes such as slavery and sugar production systems, any attempt to arrive at a unified ethos in the Caribbean is a futile attempt because the area is actually characterized by cultural, linguistic, and biological plurality.

When envisioning, not only the Antilles, but the Greater Caribbean as a seascape of plurality within which peoples with distinct ancestral histories contested and negotiated ideologies and identities in varying ways through time, the inadequacy of the current essentialist definition of the Caribbean culture area becomes readily apparent. Therefore, I consider that we would be better served if we work beyond this and the other culture areas that have sliced up Caribbean body and rather consider the Greater Caribbean (i.e., pan-Caribbean) a geohistorical space. This will allow us to overturn the “politics of segregation” (Rodríguez Ramos and Curet in press) involved in the definition culture areas that has resulted in the segmentation of the shared precolonial histories that have bound the peoples united by such body of water through time and will allow us to address cultural and social processes that transcend cultural boundary lines.

Toward a Pan-Caribbean Geohistorical Perspective

Geohistorical areas have been used as units of macro-regional analysis in disciplines such as geography (Bentley 1999; Lewis 1999), history (Amodio 1991; Vidal 2003), and sociology (Mintz 1971), as well as in archaeology (McGregor 2002; Sanoja Obediente 2006). The application of this perspective has allowed scholars to develop the “ability to convey the realities of different territories of the region beyond the language barriers and nationalist limita-

tions” (N’Zergon Tayo 2001:150). This organizing framework has several important differences with the culture area approach. First, this analytical category is particularly useful when culturally plural contexts are encountered, as was Braudel’s case study in the Mediterranean, because it allows addressing historical processes which shaped and were shaped by the cultures and societies of all peoples linked beyond cultural frontiers from a reticulate perspective. This is because the frontiers of geocultural areas are porous and, as a result, there is no discrimination by culture, biology or language in their potential for the study of historical, social, and/or cultural processes. By focusing spatially on the “liquid planes of the sea”, as Braudel (1992:65) did in the Mediterranean, it is also assumed that the maritime nature of coastal scapes overrides their continental or insular character. This allows avoiding the limitations imposed by the so-called ‘island archaeology’ perspective, which has often restricted our perception of the social dynamics registered between the inhabitants of insular and continental territories (cf. Boomert and Bright 2007).

These geographic analytical units are also emancipated from the synchronic temporal boundaries and the essentialism involved in the definition of culture areas, thus being able to highlight the changing dynamics of long-term social and cultural interactions conducted across bodies of water and their effects at the micro and macro scales that recursively constitute each other. A geohistorical perspective also allows higher degrees of vertical plasticity for addressing fluctuating patterns of human activity and interaction through time beyond cultural boundary lines. For instance, it will be demonstrated that the inhabitants of what is termed Mesoamerica and the Isthmo-Colombian area were in-

volved in maritime-based interaction networks that extended up to the insular Caribbean in varying ways through time, although the Antillean chain lies outside both of those spatio-cultural constructs. At first, these interactions involved population movements between central Mesoamerica (i.e., Yucatán Península, Casimiroid series; Rouse 1992) and/or the Isthmo-Colombian area (Rodríguez Ramos 2007; Rodríguez Ramos and Pagán Jiménez 2006; Veloz Maggiolo 1972) and the Antilles, while later on the interactions focused on the long distance negotiation of prestige-enhancing commodities (raw materials and finished products) and their attached ideological narratives between the inhabitants of those territories (Rodríguez Ramos 2007, 2010; Rodríguez Ramos and Pagan Jimenez 2006). As previously mentioned, the possible implications of these broad horizontal phenomena in both the insular and the continental Caribbean have not been adequately addressed due to the straightjacketing that cultural areas have imposed on their analysis.

By using the pan-Caribbean as a panoramic subject, I will now turn my attention to the macro-regional distribution of jade in order to show how does adopting a geohistorical perspective might help us gain a better understanding of the processes that took place between the many peoples united by the Caribbean Sea.

Jade Distribution across the Caribbean-scape

One of the types of materials that have the longest record of circulation in the Pan-Caribbean has been jade. Jade is a generic term often used for making reference to different types of gemstones and greenish lustrous rocks that represented very important commodities during precolonial times in the Greater Caribbean. Lange (1993) and

Guerrero (1993) have established a distinction between true jade which refers to jadeitite and nephrite, and social jade, which includes rocks such as serpentinite, quartz, and agate, among others. This distinction is quite important because, as will be argued, these rocks were used interchangeably in the widespread negotiation of ideological traditions in the area. In addition to true jades, in the following discussion I will focus on three other forms of social jade: serpentinite, turquoise, and radiolarian limestone. These rocks were used concomitantly with jadeitite in the Antilles for the production of similar personal adornments and/or celts, so they seem to have played overlapping symbolical and functional roles.

The Sources

Sourcing studies have determined the main social and true jade occurrences in the Greater Caribbean (Figure 1). The principal source of jadeitite often mentioned in the archaeological literature has been located in the Motagua River Valley of Guatemala. The movement of this material into the Caribbean basin seems to have proceeded from the Motagua Fault Zone toward the Caribbean coast of Guatemala, around drainages of the Motagua, Dulce, and Sarstun Rivers. From there, jadeitite moved along the coast as far north as the Yucatan Peninsula, south down to Colombia, and across the Caribbean to the Antilles, as will be discussed below. On the other hand, in the Pacific coast the reach of the southern circulation of this raw material seems to have been more limited, stopping south in the Greater Nicoya (Fernandez 2006).

Until recently, the Motagua source was considered to be the only occurrence of jadeitite in the Americas (Harlow 1993; for arguments against the single-source hy-

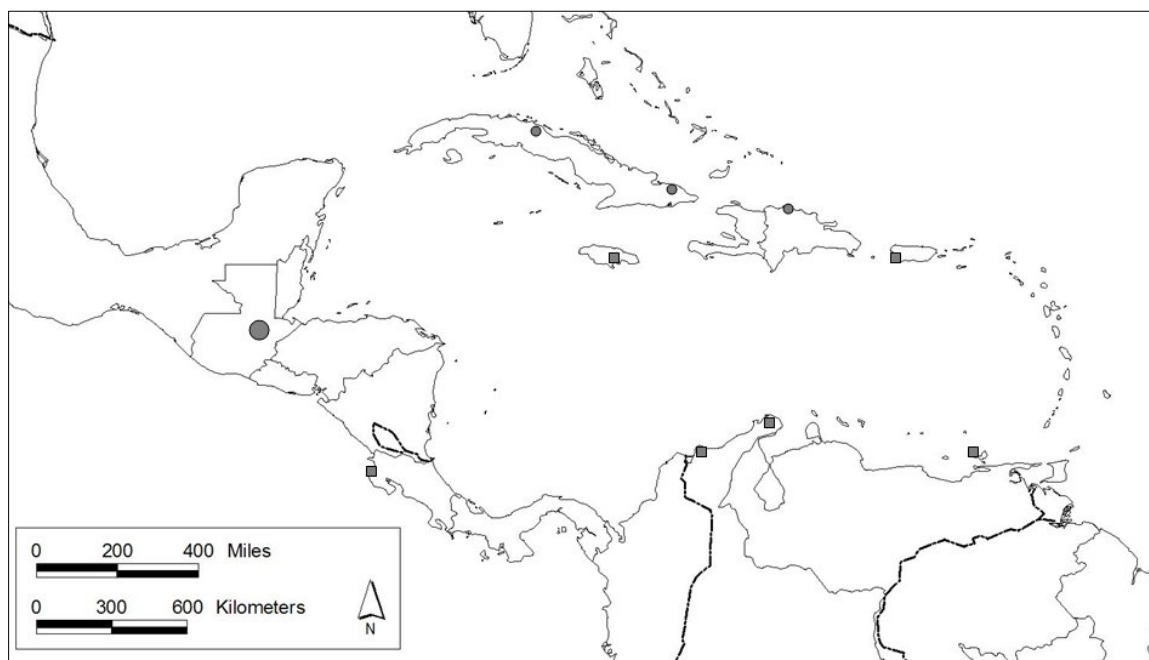


Figure 1. Location of jade sources in the Greater Caribbean. Round symbols reflect jadeitite and square ones indicate serpentinite.

pothesis see Bishop and Lange 1993). However, recent research has also documented jadeitite in the Greater Antilles, namely in south central (Escambray) and eastern (Sierra del Convento) Cuba (García-Casco et al. 2008), as well as in north-central Hispaniola (San Juan complex mélangé; Baese et al. 2007; Schertl et al. 2007). These sources form part of the tectonic boundary zone between the Caribbean and the North American plates, which extends eastward from Guatemala into Puerto Rico. The existence of jadeitite sources has also been mentioned for southwestern Puerto Rico in association to the Sierra Bermeja Complex (Moya 1989; Smith 1954), but there has been no geological confirmation of its occurrence. Although thus far there are no quarry sites associated to any of these Antillean jadeitite sources nor any artifacts clearly ascribed to them, their documentation opens a complete new avenue of investigations for the understanding the distribution of

this type of rock in the area, as will be discussed below.

The distribution of nephrite is the less well researched form of true jade. Occurrences of this type of rock have been proposed for Bahía in Brazil and the Santa Elena peninsula in northwestern Costa Rica (Fernández 2005:27), but thus far no geological confirmation of their local occurrences has been produced neither in South America or Mesoamerica (Middletown 2006).

There are other important sources of social jade that have been documented in the Greater Caribbean. Serpentinite is the type of social jade that seems to have the widest distribution in the area (Cody 1991). In the Antilles, several sources of serpentinite have been located. The most often cited in the archaeological literature of the islands is the serpentinite occurrence that is located in the southwestern part of Puerto Rico (Laó-Dávila 2008; Mattson 1964), which has been considered as the most likely

provenance for most of the pendants and celts made of this raw material in the archipelago (Cody 1991; Narganes Storde 1995; Rodríguez López 1993; Rodríguez Ramos 2002). However, further consideration needs to be provided to other serpentinite occurrences located in Jamaica, Cuba, and Hispaniola (Laó Dávila 2008) as potential sources for this raw material in the islands. Other sources of this raw material have been documented in both the Pacific and the Caribbean sides of Costa Rica (Fernandez 2006; Guerrero 1993), Guatemala, Bay Islands of Honduras (George Harlow, personal communication 2010), Margarita Island, northwestern Venezuela, and Colombia (Guajira peninsula) (Wagner and Schubert 1972).

Other widely distributed form of social jade is radiolarian limestone. Sourcing studies have clearly ascribed radiolarian limestone to the Point Blanche Formation of St. Martin (Knippenberg 2006). This Antillean version of social jade, because of its green and lustrous character, was widely circulated across Puerto Rico and the Lesser Antilles, primarily in association to the production of celts (Haviser 1999; Hofman et al. 2007; Knippenberg 2006). Archaeological contexts of the Antilles and other continental parts of the Greater Caribbean have also shown the use of turquoise. Thus far, there are no known occurrences of this type of raw material in the Greater Caribbean, as its nearest sources are in northern Bolivia, northern Mexico and the southwestern United States (Cody 1991; Rodríguez López 1993).

It should be noted that in most cases, the identification of the particular archaeological materials as either form of jade have been based on visual inspections that need further corroboration by a trained expert. This is particularly the case of the catch-all “greenstone” category, under which some

of these materials have been classified. Therefore, further lithic characterization research is definitely needed to corroborate the adscription of artifacts to the different types of jade rocks and their sources.

As will be discussed below, all of the aforementioned jade sources intersected in the interaction networks articulated in the Greater Caribbean through time. Now, I will turn my attention to the production and circulation of materials made of these rock types in the area and how these interaction networks shifted through time. I will divide this discussion along the lines of critical periods when the main temporal changes in the pan-regional distribution of these resources are registered, following the lead of Bentley (1996; see also Rodríguez Ramos 2007, 2010) for addressing long term changes in societies under interaction within maritime basins.

2500 - 500 BC: The Foundational Period

The available evidence indicates that jadeite use in the Americas starts around 1500 BC in Soconusco in association to Mocaya sites, eventually gaining currency in Olmec territory, most notably in Veracruz (Taube 2004). The geological provenance of the finely carved jadeite pieces that have been recovered in these Formative sites have been traced to the Motaguan source, from where these were exported north along the Caribbean coast into southeastern Mexico. Jade (including jadeite and locally available serpentinite) has been considered to be central to Olmec ideology but, as far as it is known, it did not become a major exchange commodity south of Mexico until around 900 BC, when it was imported south to Copán in Honduras (Fernández 2006). Thus far, no evidence of true or social jade has been unearthed in the Isthmo-Colombian area prior to 500 BC.

In the Greater Antilles, the earliest reference that we have of the movement of social jade comes from Puerto Rico. There, serpentinite beads have been found in pre-Arawak contexts with dates that go back to 2500 BC. Personal adornments of teardrop shape made of this form of social jade have been unearthed from the Ortiz site in Cabo Rojo (Koski-Karell 1993) and, in association to a burial, in Angostura (Ayes Suárez 1988) in north-central Puerto Rico. Although scarce, this evidence indicates that the pre-Arawak inhabitants of the island were moving this type of raw material across rather long distances within, at least, Puerto Rico thus highlighting its early importance for those societies (Rodríguez Ramos 2007). Thus far no evidence has been found in these sites of blanks, pre-forms or debitage associated to the production of the aforementioned personal adornments, these seem to have been moved as finished items between locations. A rim fragment of a serpentinite stone bowl as well as a polishing stone have also been documented in Banwari Trace, in Trinidad (Harris 1973), where this type of raw material has not been documented locally thus far. The finding of jade-like rocks has also been reported in an early context in Guayana in northeastern Venezuela (Sanoja Obediente 1980).

During this period, there has been no evidence of the translocation of any jade form across the Caribbean Sea. However, there are other indications of the interactions between the insular and the continental Caribbean, namely through the circulation of a botanic tradition that emphasized the movement of cultivar complex that included maize, manioc, and sweet potatoes (Fortuna 1980; Pagán Jiménez 2007; Pagán Jiménez et al. 2005), as has been documented thus far in Puerto Rico and Hispaniola. Prior to these findings, common

wisdom regarding early plant dispersals in the Neotropics indicated that domesticates such as maize had spread south from its homeland in western Mexico, while others such as manioc were supposed to have moved from South America into Central America. This supposedly took place via overland or coastal routes predominantly along a north-south axis (Dickau 2005). However, when considering the evidence recently generated in the Antilles a completely different panorama is observed since it indicates that these and other cultivars were translocated outside the continent into the islands since at least 2500 BC, which is much earlier than originally thought. This not only underlines the importance of navigation as a mechanism for early plant dispersals in the neotropics but also indicates the multiple vectors across which these botanical traditions were diffused (cf. Pagán Jiménez et al. 2005; Rodríguez Ramos 2005b, 2007; Rodríguez Ramos and Pagán Jiménez 2007). The evidence from the islands also demands that more research is placed on the continental Caribbean in order to look for the sources of such botanical traditions, which must have reached those coastal locations much earlier than is actually thought (cf. Griggs 2005).

These botanical traditions also included a plant-processing repertoire that was dominated by the edge-ground cobble/millingstone complex. Experimental work and starch grain evidence recovered from Colombia, Panama, and Puerto Rico has shown that these implements were associated to the confection of pastes that could be transformed into meals by different recipes such as the making of *bollos*, *tamales*, or *guanimes* (Ranere 1980; Rodríguez Ramos 2005b). This indicates that the macro-regional spread of these early botanical complexes entailed much more than

the mere translocation of domesticated crops and agricultural techniques, but also involved the spread of culinary repertoires and very likely a set of ideological principles associated with those botanical traditions. This is particularly notable when considering the central role that maize played in Formative societies in Central America during this time and until much later.

Furthermore, obsidian, which very likely has either a Central American or an Andean origin, has also been documented on Puerto Rico (Febles 2004; Rodríguez Ramos 2007). Furthermore, some Greater Antillean early pottery traditions seem to have spread between the Antilles and the Isthmo-Colombian area (Reichel Dolmatoff (1997) and/or northern Venezuela (Arvelo and Wagner 1984; Zucchi 1984) much prior to previously thought. This evidence for the maritime circulation of early botanical traditions, early pottery, and lithic materials between the Antilles and surrounding continental regions, brings back the idea of the articulation of a pan-Caribbean Formative, as was suggested more than two decades ago by Donald Lathrap and José Oliver (1986; see also Rodríguez Ramos and Pagán Jiménez 2006), which might have laid the foundations for the later interactions that took place within this body of water, such as those registered since 500 BC that emphasized the negotiation of an ideological repertoire objectified in celts and shiny wearable art, as will be discussed below.

500 BC – AD 500/700: The Iridescent Period

It is after 500 BC that a Fluorescent period of jadeite movement has been documented in the Isthmo-Colombian area, most notably in Costa Rica emphasizing the circulation of jadeite and social jade

celts and personal adornments (Guerrero 1993). The earliest evidence of jade consumption in this region comes from La Regla in the Gulf of Nicoya, in the form of an axe-god pendant found in a burial context dated to circa 500 BC. The widespread distribution of jade goods as well as of the ideological narratives attached to them has been associated to the early rise of social asymmetry in the area (Corrales 1999). Jade working in Costa Rica has also been considered to be an indicator of a southbound Olmec ideological vector from where the traditions of jade working and its attended symbolism originated, which influenced southern developments until much later in time (Snarskis 1984).

The main source of the jade used in this period in the continental Caribbean continues to be that of the Motagua river valley. This period shows a considerable distribution of raw materials from this source, going north up to Mayan territory in the Yucatan and down to northwestern Colombia around AD 300 (Saenz Samper and Lleras Pérez 1999). In addition to jadeite and nephrite, sites in the continental Caribbean also evidence the use of other forms of social jade, such as serpentinite. The extensive networks documented in the Isthmo-Colombian area at this time have traditionally been deemed to reflect a similar north-south axis of influence as was the aforementioned case of early cultivars (i.e., maize to the south and manioc to the north). This is because jade traditions have been argued to diffuse south from Mesoamerica while metallurgical traditions spread north from Colombia, again via overland or coastal routes (Cooke 2005; Fernandez 2005). However, the horizontal configuration of these networks again changes dramatically when considering the evidence generated in the Antilles, where an emphasis on the consumption of jade

celts and personal adornments (as well as *tumbaga*, as will be discussed below) during this period is also observed mirroring the changes noted at this time in the Isthmo-Colombian area, most conspicuously in Costa Rica (McGinnis 1997; Rodríguez Ramos 2007; Rodríguez Ramos and Pagán Jiménez 2006; Sued Badillo 1979).

The available evidence indicates that some of the most recurrent pan-regional themes observed in the Isthmo-Colombian area are manifested in quite a similar fashion in contemporaneous contexts in Puerto Rico and the northern Antilles, in association to both, Huecoid and Saladoid cultural manifestations. Amongst the pan-regional themes reflected in personal adornments associated to these Antillean cultural manifestations are the representation of beak birds, axe-god, curly-tailed, frog-shaped, reptilian, and winged pendants (Figure 2), which are markedly similar to contemporaneous pieces produced in Costa Rica and

Colombia at this time (Perera 1979; Plazas 2007; Rodríguez Ramos 2007, in press; Rodríguez Ramos and Pagán Jiménez 2006).

In addition to the iconographic parallels between the wearable art of the Isthmo-Colombian area and the Antilles, these items were also produced following similar technological styles, as is particularly noted by the use of string sawing for the production of the beak bird pendants as well as the use of transverse drilling for pendant suspension in both areas. It should be noted that the use of the string sawing technique outside Puerto Rico has only been observed thus far at this time in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, and southeastern United States.

The concomitances between these Antillean and Isthmo-Colombian adornments are not only limited to iconographic and technological elements, but are also reflected in the types of raw materials selected for their production, as these were

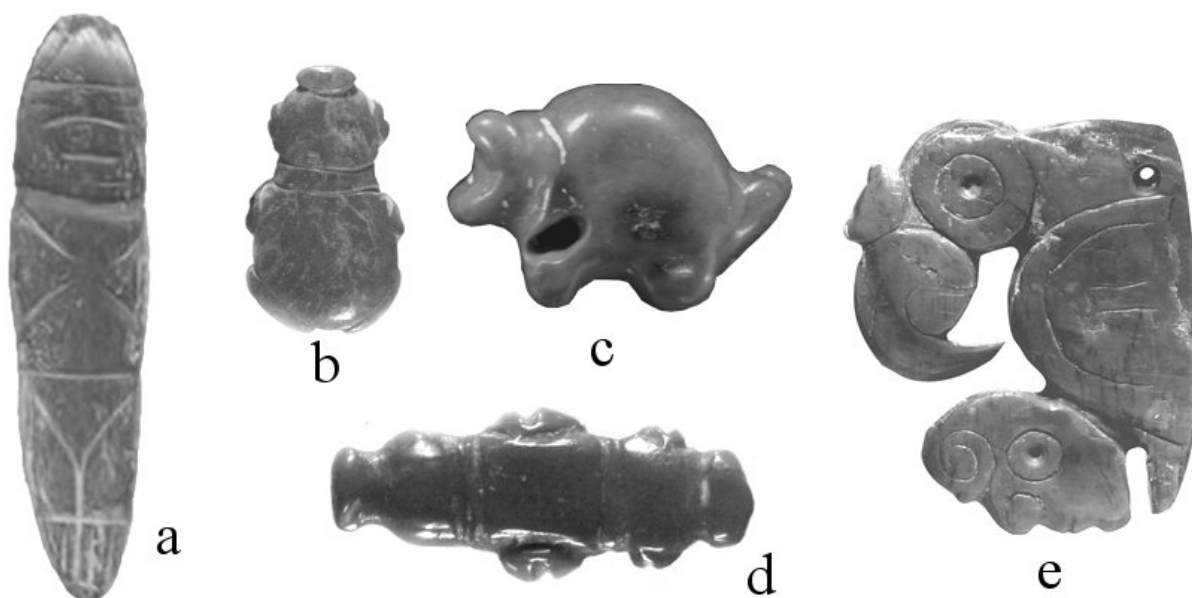


Figure 2. Pan-Caribbean themes objectified in personal adornments in the Antilles: (a) axe-god pendant, Antigua (modified from <http://www.archaeologyantigua.org.htm>); (b) frog-shaped pendant, La Hueca-Sorcé, Vieques (Centro de Investigaciones Arqueológicas [CIA]); (c) curly-tailed pendant, La Hueca-Sorcé (CIA); (d) reptilian amulet, La Hueca-Sorcé (CIA); (e) beak-bird pendant, La Hueca-Sorcé (CIA).



Figure 3. Jade pendants. Far left Tecla I, Guayanilla, Puerto Rico (CIA); all others La Hueca Sorcé, Vieques (CIA).

manufactured using the various forms of jade, which included jadeitite, serpentinite, and nephrite (Figure 3).

Unfortunately, thus far there have not been any detailed petrographic studies on these ornamental materials in the Antilles, so their identification (particularly of jadeitite and nephrite) remains tentative at present.

Blanks and preforms of serpentinite beads and pendants have been documented thus far in Puerto Rico contexts in La Hueca-Sorcé, Maisabel, and Punta Candel-

ero (Figure 4), from where they were moved south all the way down to Grenada (Cody 1991; Oliver 2008).

In contrast, in the case of the jadeitite and nephrite pendants, there has been no indication of their intra-Antillean manufacture. This indicates that either these jadeite pieces were brought as finished items or that their last stages of reduction were conducted at off-site or unsampled locations.

This is also the case of turquoise, which seem also to have arrived in finished form to the islands, as no evidence of discarded



Figure 4. Serpentinite preforms of beak-bird pendants, Punta Candelero, Puerto Rico (courtesy of Miguel Rodríguez López).

performs or detritus associated to their transformation into tools has been recovered thus far (Chanlatte Baik and Narganes Storde 2005). As previously noted, the origins of these rocks is not clear at the moment, but on the basis of reported geological occurrences these could be obtained from Chile by way of Colombia, or from Mexico, perhaps following a similar route of that of the Guatemalan jadeite into Puerto Rico.

It should be noted that although there are some marked similarities in the iconographic themes that were deployed in these forms of jade as well as in their technological styles of manufacture, the contexts in which these have been found vary between the Isthmo-Colombian area and the Antilles. For instance, in Costa Rica, these jadeite pieces are usually associated to burial contexts (Guerrero 1993), while in Puerto Rico and the Lesser Antilles these materials have usually been found in mounded middens. Despite the iconographic similarities, there are also some interesting differences in the ways that the themes are represented both areas, as for example while in Costa Rica most of these birds seem to be in the act of feeding or eating the prey (being depicted by the beak connected to the head), in the Huecoid the beak of the bird is separated from the clasped head, perhaps representing the act of catching it. This might be either suggesting local reinterpretations in both areas of the same motif or different but related events within a single mythical narrative (Rodríguez Ramos 2007, in press). This indicates that, although some of the ideological narratives that are attached to these materials are spread in these areas, still the negotiations that are made with such materials vary from region to region.

As is the case in the Isthmo-Colombian area, there was an emphasis during this

time in the manufacture of jade celts in the Antilles, most notably made of social jade varieties available within the islands such as serpentinite (Figure 5) and radiolarian limestone (see Knippenberg 2006; Rodríguez Ramos 2007).

Serpentinite and peridotite celts have been documented in Puerto Rico in sites such as La Hueca-Sorcé, Maisabel, and Punta Candelerero. In none of those sites has there been any indication of their local production, so these also seem to have been circulated as finished items.

The widest intra-Antillean distribution during this time of greenstone celts has



Figure 5. Serpentinite celt (6.75x3.75 cm), Maisabel, Puerto Rico.

been associated to radiolarian limestone. Knippenberg's (2006) studies have demonstrated that there were some focal points of radiolarian celt manufacture, namely in St. Martin initially and eventually between St. Kitts and Anguilla, from which these were exported west into consumption sites into Puerto Rico and south into Martinique. In fact, Haviser (1991) has argued for the presence of celt manufacturing centers in the northern Antilles (an example being Hope Estate), from which these implements were widely distributed by maritime based networks into consumption sites in islands to the south.

Petrographic studies conducted by George Harlow have shown the presence of jadeitite celts in Huecoid and Saladoid contexts in Puerto Rico (Harlow 2007, cited in Rodríguez Ramos 2007), St. Croix (Hardy 2008), and Antigua (Harlow et al. 2006). This researcher has proposed as the most plausible provenance of the jadeite used in the manufacture of these ground bifaces the Motagua Valley in Guatemala. If this is further confirmed, this would provide solid evidence for the participation of the inhabitants of the island in the pan-regional interaction spheres that led to the movement of this raw material during this period.

The aforementioned evidence of jadeite occurrences recently reported in Cuba (García-Casco et al. 2009) and Hispaniola (Baese et al. 2007; Schertl et al. 2007) provide additional geologic alternatives for the obtainment of this important raw material. However, it should be noted that thus far there is no evidence in Cuba or Hispaniola of finished jadeitite artifacts or their production predating or contemporaneous to Huecoid and Hacienda Grande contexts from Puerto Rico and the northern Lesser Antilles. Thus far, there are also no archaeological contexts associated to any of those cultural manifestations in those is-

lands. In fact, the dates from Puerto Rico, St. Croix, and Antigua where this raw material has been unearthed are at least half a millennium earlier than the earliest Arawakan contexts of Cuba and Hispaniola. Therefore, if the Cuban or Hispaniolan sources were indeed the areas from which jadeite was procured and then circulated to the islands to the east, this could imply the articulation an Pre-Arawak/Saladoid/Huecoid interaction network, as has been suggested for Puerto Rico (Rodríguez Ramos 2002, 2007). But, taking into consideration the iconographic and technological concomitances observed between the Isthmo-Colombian region, Puerto Rico, and the northern Antilles at this time, it is very likely that the jadeitites found in archaeological sites that date to this period have a Central American origin.

Almost all of the jadeitite celts documented thus far are of petaloid (i.e., tear drop) shape. However, a notable finding has been that of one jadeitite plano-convex adze that was recovered from Tecla 1 in southwestern Puerto Rico. Due to its association to mortuary practices and its lack of use traces at the macroscopic level, the plano-convex adze has commonly been considered to be manufactured for non-utilitarian activities (Rodríguez Ramos 2001, 2007; Siegel 1992). This finding of a jadeitite plano-convex adze is quite interesting, since this type of celt has not been documented thus far in northeastern South America in contexts predating those of Puerto Rico and the Lesser Antilles, while it has been widely documented in Costa Rica. This indicates the pan-regional importance placed in the manufacture of this type of implement at this time. Particularly in Costa Rica, plano-convex adzes are found without decorations or as pendants depicting the axe-god motif, thus signaling the possibility that this type of implement

might have played a significant ideological role in the Antillean negotiation of the mythical narratives associated to those celt idols in the Isthmo-Colombian area. Thus far, there has been no evidence for the intra-Antillean manufacture of jadeitite celts, so these were very likely imported to the sites in finished forms.

Another product that has an Isthmo-colombian origin and made its way to Puerto Rico is tumbaga or *guanín* (i.e., a gold copper alloy), which very likely arrived through the same networks that promoted jade circulation across the Caribbeanscape. The metallurgical evidence comes from a *guanín* hammered plate recovered from a Saladoid context in northern Puerto Rico dated to AD 100 (Siegel and Severin 1993), which is a time where the only circum-Caribbean areas where this gold-copper alloy was being produced were located between Colombia and Costa Rica (Fernández 2005). Other materials that were of marked importance in the Isthmo-Colombian area and the Antilles for the manufacture of wearable art is *mullu*, a concept that makes reference to artifacts made of *Pinctada* and *Spondylus* shells which have usually been considered as emblems of long distance relationships (Cooke and Sánchez 2001). Also, drilled jaguar and peccary teeth for their use as pendants have been documented in Puerto Rico, which is very notable since none of those animals formed part of the endemic fauna of the Antilles (Chanlatte Baik and Narganes Storde 2005). Other artifacts such as the womb-shaped vessel recovered from the Saladoid context of Indian Creek (Rouse and Morse 1999) also show marked similarities to contemporaneous materials from Costa Rica. All of this evidence underlines the pan-regional negotiation of technical and ideological traditions reflected in pottery, shell, metallurgical, and

lapidary work across these vast stretches of sea.

The botanical evidence recovered during this time also provides further confirmation of these Isthmo-Antillean engagements. Pagán Jiménez (2007) has noted that, although most of the cultivated plants consumed by the Huecoid had already been introduced during pre-Arawak times, one of the missing pieces of the Isthmo-Colombian plant assemblage, lerén (*Calathea allouia* and *calatea* or *Calathea* cf. *veitchiana*), was found amongst the Huecoid botanical assemblage. Furthermore, the possible use of hallucinogenic substances associated to a similar array of snuff inhaling paraphernalia in both areas (Oliver 2009; Wilson 2007) might attest shared ritual practices between these regions.

As suggested by Helms (1987), the maritime movement of agents through such long distances provided them with a privileged access to the sources of esoteric knowledge. This must have played a pivotal role in the social accommodation of those individuals who were able to reach those places located beyond the horizon. Although most researchers of the insular Caribbean (e.g., Curet and Oliver 1998; Siegel 1992) consider that the societies of the islands during this period were equalitarian, Cody (1991; see also Chanlatte and Narganes 1983) has argued that these long distance engagements served to legitimize a pyramidal societal structure in, at least, those communities that participated in these macro-regional networks at this time. This echoes the observations about the onset of social asymmetry noted for the Isthmo-Colombian area at this time (Corrales 1999; Fonseca 2002; Hoopes 2005). As argued by Drennan (1984), the long distances involved in these inter-societal translocations of jade pieces indi-

cates that it is very unlikely that these engagements involved high-necessity goods, but rather were mostly concentrated on social transactions emphasizing rank-enhancing commodities and information. Therefore, the enzymatic agent behind the movement of these fetishized objects rested on their imbued ideological capital, which was variably negotiated at both the local and extralocal levels by all the parties that participated in these inter-societal transactions across the Caribbean.

Perhaps, the population movements of Early Ceramic societies from the continental Caribbean into the Antilles during this period at least in part responded to the search of agents for suitable venues in which to position themselves within these pan-Caribbean interaction networks (Rodríguez Ramos 2007, in press). This could explain why some of the earliest sites are located in proximity to sources of materials with ritual and/or economic value in these transactional circuits, which may also point to community-levels of specialization in the manufacture of certain goods that were important in such networks. This is the case, for instance, of the social jade obtained from the serpentinite belt located nearby Tecla and the radiolarian limestone used in green-stone celt production observed in Hope Estate, both of which were within easy reach from those sites.

The trans-Caribbean engagements registered during this period not only indicate the movement of raw materials, technological styles, and iconographic themes but also seem to have entailed the macro-regional negotiation of a system of belief that was materially and symbolically objectified in the aforementioned materials. The pan-regionally negotiated structural principles of this cosmivision perhaps laid the foundation for the eventual materialization of some of the most conspicuous ideologi-

cal grammar observed in later contexts in the Antilles and the Isthmo-Colombian area. This could have been a very important element in social practices that eventually gave rise to pyramidal social structures in these areas, which intensifies after AD 500, as will be discussed below.

AD 500/700 – 1500: The Nucleation Period

After AD 500, there is a marked shift in the insular Caribbean with regards to the articulation of the interaction networks registered earlier in time. This is reflected by the marked decline in the widespread distribution of shiny raw materials used for making personal adornments concomitant with an increase in emphasis in the circulation of green celts. Taking into consideration the technological changes noted during this period in the organization of core-flake technologies toward ones that emphasized the manufacture of larger and thicker flakes, it is very likely that these interaction circuits emphasized the circulation of wood commodities (Rodríguez Ramos 2007). These changes coincide with marked alterations in the social structure of Antillean societies, most notably in Puerto Rico and the Greater Antilles. Among some of the most notable changes observed during this period that signal higher degrees of social stratification are the construction of stone lined precincts or *bateyes*, shifts from communal to nuclear households, the practice of tabular oblique fronto-occipital cranial deformation in certain individuals, and changes in mortuary behaviors from ones that emphasized a kin-based corporate system where there was a communal right over space and ideology to a formalized lineage based elite that now had control over those resources (Crespo Torres 2005; Curet 2003; Curet and Oliver 1998; Pagán Jiménez 2007).

It around this period that a shift in emphasis from jade to tumbaga circulation is noted in the Isthmo-Colombian area, most notably after AD 700 (Guerrero 1993; Hoopes 2005; Snarskis 2003). As is the case in the Antilles, this shift toward increasing levels of social asymmetry was a widespread phenomenon, which extended from eastern Honduras to Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta in Colombia (Hoopes 2005).

The available evidence indicates that it is after AD 500 that the widest distribution of jadeitite celts is registered in the Antilles, now involving other Greater Antilles besides Puerto Rico as well as other islands in the Lesser Antilles. Based on visual inspections of the materials, jadeitite celts have also been observed in the Dominican Republic (El Cabo), Puerto Rico (La Mina, Monserrate, Tibes, Jácanas, Aguacate), the Virgin Islands (Coakley Bay and Estate Adrian in St. Croix and Estate Anguilla in

St. Johns), St. Eustatius (Golden Rock), Anguilla (Forest North), Saba (Kelbey's Ridge), Guadeloupe (Anse à la Gourde), and several other islands, going all the way down to sites near Balembouche in St. Lucia (Figure 6).

Thus far, petrographic studies have been conducted on jadeitite celts from Tecla II and Río Tanamá sites in Puerto Rico (Harlow 2007, cited in Rodríguez Ramos 2007) and have again traced this raw material back to the Motagua formation in Guatemala. If, as has been usually argued, the control of the exploitation and distribution of jadeitite nurtured the nucleation of power as a core strategy in the Mesoamerican World System at this time (which now includes the northern part of the Isthmo-Colombian area; Carmack and Salgado 2006), then the particular role that the inhabitants of the Antilles played as



Figure 6. Jadeitite celts. (left) El Cabo, Dominican Republic (courtesy of Alice Samson); (right) Tecla II, Guayanilla, Puerto Rico.

active participants in the macro-regional distribution of this raw material needs to be further addressed, in order to elucidate what was coming back from the Antilles into the continent in exchange for jadeitite social goods.

The widespread movement of jadeitite is mirrored in the Antilles by the long-distance distribution of radiolarian limestone. During this period, there is an increase in sites to which radiolarian limestone objective pieces were moved for their local transformation into celts, including islands such as Anguilla, Saba, and St. Martin (Crock 2000; Knippenberg 2006). From these sites, finished celts were distributed as far south as Martinique (Knippenberg 2006). No radiolarian limestone celts have been uncovered west of St. Martin, so the connection with Puerto Rico, Vieques, and the Virgin Islands related to the counterclockwise movement of this raw material subsides after AD 500.

Although the emphasis during this period on jade circulation was related to celts,

there have been some mentions of personal adornments made of this type of raw material during this period. Frog shaped jadeitite pendants have been observed in sites such as Jácenas and Aguacate in Puerto Rico as well as in Anse à la Gourde in Guadeloupe (Figure 7).

No evidence of preforms or debitage associated to the production of these adornments has been uncovered thus far at those sites, thus underlining again the fact that these seem to have been moved either as finished items and/or as pre-shaped preforms to the different locations from yet unknown production sites.

It is quite possible that after AD 1000, the Cuban and Hispaniolan sources of jadeitite get inserted into the pan-regional distribution of this raw material along routes previously delineated in the interaction networks that also emphasized the movement of this raw material from other sources (i.e., Motagua). Jadeitite has been recovered at this time from the Bahamas



Figure 7. Jadeitite pendant, Anse à la Gourde, Guadeloupe (courtesy of Sebastiaan Knippenberg).

(Carlson 1995; Rose 1989) and Jamaica (Allsworth-Jones 2008). In Cuba, artifacts associated to the “Taíno” culture were recovered from a site quite near jadeitite occurrences in the eastern part of the island (García Casco et al. 2009; Mendoza Cuevas et al. 2009).

Another notable Greater Antillean development takes place after AD 1000 has to do with the production of adorned celts that sport emblems reminiscent of the axe-god motif documented in Costa Rica (as well as in the aforementioned Antiguan axe-god pendant) since much earlier. Celts decorated with these images have been uncovered from Puerto Rico, Hispaniola, and Cuba (Figure 8).

However, in contrast to the ones produced in Costa Rica, these are not to be worn but rather served as hand held implements. Also, while the head of the Costa Rican icons is located to the “poll” side of the celts, in the Antillean specimens these are located toward their bits, again showing a variation of the same theme in these areas.

Another type of implement that appears after AD 1000 in the Greater Antilles that shows the heavy ideological loads imbued in these ground implements is the monolithic axe. Greater Antillean axes show marked re-

semblances to specimens in the Isthmo-Colombian area, most notably those of Colombia. In fact, monolithic axes are still being used by the Kogi in rain ceremonies (Bray 2003), and were very likely used in the Antilles and Colombia in precolonial times for similar ritual activities.

The pan-regional negotiation of the ideological template that led to the maritime circulation of these celts was very likely associated also to the movement of *guanín* or tumbaga. These gold-copper alloy adornments were brought to the Antilles from the mainland, as there is no evidence of the practice of metallurgy anywhere in the Antilles. Due to the fact that there has been no finding of *guanín* in the Lesser



Figure 8. Decorated celts depicting variations of the axe-god motif. (left) Dominican Republic; (center) Puerto Rico; (right) Cuba (modified from plates VIe, VIIb, and XIXb from Herrera Fritot 1964).

Antilles or any evidence of metallurgical practices in northeastern South America, it is very likely that these prestige-enhancing items were brought to the Greater Antilles directly from the Isthmo-Colombian area across the Caribbean Sea, as was the case proposed of the Motaguan jade. Other prestige paraphernalia such as the stone belts, *dujos*, and other materials made of black-polished wood (Helms 1987) could have also been inserted in these pan-regional networks of highly valued commodities within which ideologies and knowledge were objectified. Some of these superstructural-based interactions extended between the Greater and the Lesser Antilles, leading to the inter-island movement of ceremonial paraphernalia and/or its emulation by the inhabitants of the islands engaged in these networks within which 'Tainoness' was negotiated (Allaire 1990; Hofman and Hoogland 2004; Hoogland and Hofman 1993; Mol 2007; Oliver 2009; Rodríguez Ramos 2007).

These macro-regional engagements might have also been related to the construction of integrative facilities, or *bateyes*, in the Greater Antilles and in the northern Lesser Antilles (most notably in Antigua). As has been noted by Wilson (2007b), these *bateyes* show quite marked architectural similarities to enclosures built between Colombia and Costa Rica at this time. The lithification of the landscape indicated by the construction of these architectural features is related to an emphasis in the enacting of communalizing activities that served to negotiate sameness and difference between groups at the local and macroregional levels (Rodríguez Ramos 2007). Perhaps, in addition to their localized functions, these structures served to engage networks of interacting elites of the Isthmo-Colombian area and the Antilles in the negotiation of widespread religious so-

dalities (Hoopes 2005:25). If such is the case, the production of these sacred centers might be related to a process of religious 'routinization' (Oyuela Caycedo 2002) by which a set of precepts was transmitted between priestly and/or chiefly authorities at both the micro and macro-regional levels (Hoopes 2005) across the Caribbean.

Discussion

The information that is available regarding the pan-regional distribution of different forms of jade in the Greater Caribbean that has been hereby presented seems to be very promising for understanding the types of inter-societal and ideological engagements that were established through time across this sea between the Antilles and the Isthmo-Colombian area, and potentially other continental Caribbean regions. However, there are still many voids in the data that we have available, particularly from the islands, which definitely make any observation at this time preliminary. Nevertheless, on the basis of the data at hand there are some trends that are emerging in the pan-regional distribution of jade that we want to advance:

(1) The pan-Caribbean distribution of jade starts around 500-300 BC, and seems to have been framed upon previous intersocietal networks that were established since earlier times across the Caribbean Sea. The macro-regional distribution of jade focuses initially on the production of personal adornments, some of which objectify iconographic themes that circulated along with ideological narratives and their technological styles of production, most notably in the Antilles and the Isthmo-Colombian area.

(2) On the basis of the iconographic and technological correspondences observed between these two areas at this time, in conjunction with the lack of evidence of

the exploitation of intra-Antillean jadeitite sources, the evidence seems to pinpoint to Guatemala as the main (or perhaps the only) source of this raw material before AD 1000, being interchangeably used for the production of similar items with locally available materials. Guatemalan jadeitite made its way between Puerto Rico and Antigua, from where it might have eventually been moved clockwise into the Lesser Antilles.

(3) Sometime around AD 500, this emphasis on the circulation of wearable art subsides, while a transition to the widespread movement of jadeitite celts is registered in the Antilles, perhaps in tandem with an increase emphasis in the circulation of wooden commodities. The movement of these materials is inserted within previously articulated interaction spheres that emphasized the movement of green shiny celts made out of radiolarian limestone and serpentinite, most notably between eastern Hispaniola and the Lesser Antilles. A transition is also observed during this time in the Isthmo-Colombian area, but in that area the shift is toward tumbaga (i.e., *guanín*) distribution. After AD 500, the movement of some forms of social jade such as serpentinite and turquoise (in conjunction with other semi-precious stones) also reflects a drastic decline.

(4) It is very probable that after AD 1000, the Antillean jadeitite sources became more sought after. At this time, a tradition of celt making develops in the Greater Antilles that emphasized the representation of axe gods and other images in their ventral and dorsal aspects. Also at this time, the widespread circulation of radiolarian limestone drastically declined. It is during this period that the inhabitants of islands in the Bahamas and Jamaica became inserted into these pan-regional spheres of jade distribution.

Concluding Remarks

This analysis of the pan-regional distribution of jadeite in the Greater Caribbean has aimed to show how does working beyond the cultural boundary lines in the Greater Caribbean allows addressing processes of maritime-based precolonial interactions. This type of study had previously been limited due to the physical fragmentation of the Caribbean into culture areas, which tended to obscure our perceptions of processes that take place beyond their constituent limits.

The available evidence indicates that, starting around 500 BC, there were multiple intersecting circuits of jade distribution in the Greater Caribbean, which were also related to the widespread movement of other types of gemstones, metals, wood, and shell artifacts. The mechanisms and the social and ideological reasons that regulated the circulation of these materials along such long distances is most definitely an issue that needs to be further addressed in dialogue between the researchers that work in the different areas bound by these networks of interactions.¹

The consumption of jades and their related technological styles and iconography in the Antilles and the Isthmo-Colombian area seems to have entailed the macro-regional negotiation of a pan-regional system of belief whose structural principles were articulated from within and without each of the areas integrated by this body of water. I consider that the “diffuse unity” (Hoopes 2005:5) reflected by these macro-regional ideological concomitances objectified in the artifacts that were moved through such vast stretches of sea were not the result of the sudden manifestation of a cultural substratum (Spinden 1917; Steward 1948) or of the psychic unity of these peoples (Ford 1969), but rather denote the

outcome of the millenary interactions that took place within the Caribbeanscape. In order to understand the deep seated relations that might have promoted these homologous developments and the ways in which these were embedded in the daily lives of the peoples that participated in their structuration we have come to terms with the statement made at the beginning of this work: that the Antilles is not the Caribbean and that the Caribbean is not the Antilles.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank Sebastiaan Knippenberg for our discussions about jadeitite distribution in the area, which have given us a platform for the study that we are conducting together with Antonio García-Casco and George Harlow about the circulation of this raw material in the Greater Caribbean. The X-ray diffraction studies conducted by George Harlow together with his comments on an earlier version of this work were also instrumental in developing some of the ideas hereby presented. Information provided by Antonio García-Casco, Jaime Pagán Jiménez, Mary Jane Berman, Daniel Laó Dávila, and Elvis Babilonia, and comments submitted by Scott Fitzpatrick and one anonymous reviewer are also immensely appreciated. This work was made possible thanks to a grant from the Netherlands Foundation for Scientific Research (#27762001) held by Corinne Hofman for the project "Communicating Communities: Unraveling Precolonial Networks of Human Mobility and Exchange of Goods and Ideas from a Pan-Caribbean Perspective".

1. Currently, we are moving in that direction, as characterization research is being conducted on jadeitite artifacts from the Greater and Lesser Antilles by Antonio García-Casco (Universidad de Gra-

nada) who, together with George Harlow (American Museum of Natural History), will generate a dataset that will allow us to get a better perspective on the vectors of distribution of this raw material in both the continental and the insular Caribbean.

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