



The materiality of human–water interaction in the Caribbean: an archaeological perspective

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This contribution offers a broad overview of the material evidence (archaeology) of multiscalar approaches to human–water interaction on the islands of the Caribbean from the precontact period up to the present day (i.e., ca 3000 BC–AD 2000). Precontact indigenous hunting/gathering/fishing and early farming peoples relied upon water management technology to mitigate problems of water shortage and drought (and indeed problems of excess of water, flooding). Further, archaeological work linked to other interdisciplinary approaches can demonstrate that their perception of water use was also linked to symbolic behavior as well. After AD 1492 as the newly Europeanized Caribbean islands industrialized in response to developing intensive sugar monoculture systems, more emphasis was placed upon extensive and complex water storage and irrigation works that at once reflected differing environmental demands of island ecologies, and also residual cultural traditions of the European colonial powers regarding water management and conservation. It will be demonstrated that within these socially and culturally diverse landscapes, novel symbolic approaches to water also emerged, reflecting these many and varied roots of Caribbean cultural traditions. © 2017 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

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INTRODUCTION

Water, salt and fresh, dominates the socio-economic and cultural fabric of Caribbean landscapes. The seas surrounding them offer a nexus of human movement and economic bounty. Fresh water even in this predominantly rainy, tropical environment is an important commodity; many Caribbean islanders have evolved elaborate storage systems to store rainfall for domestic use. Water use and management remains an important concern of governmental policy in the region.¹ On the industrial scale, irrigation works are an important factor in optimizing marginal island agricultural economies. This overview focuses upon the historical development of the

material traces of water storage and management systems in the insular Caribbean region. In doing so, it takes an explicitly archaeological and long-term perspective on human–water interaction. The first two sections of the overview place the main body of data within (1) geographical, ecological, and historical contexts and (2) theoretical and methodological contexts. Stress here is placed upon viewing the islands as ecologically and culturally dynamic and varied physical entities, and secondly developing the notion that the island populations are historically cosmopolitan (this idea of cultural mixing within the Caribbean historical context is termed ‘creolization’).^{2–4} In very basic terms this process describes the dynamics extensive cultural synthesis, and it is argued herein that creolization is also visible in the material culture traces of human–water interaction. Finally, this opening contextual discussion seeks to define a framework for archaeology of water, and how this analysis can move to understand the symbolic, numinous role of water in Caribbean insular societies.

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1 In the second section of the overview, the main
2 data are presented. An examination of the
3 pre-European contact (i.e., pre-Columbian <AD 1492)
4 material evidence for water storage and management
5 strategies across the Greater and Lesser Antilles is out-
6 lined, focusing upon technological developments, and
7 then the possible material evidence for more symbolic
8 uses of water is considered. We then move, after the
9 15th century, to an examination of water management
10 within the European colonial context (i.e., under the
11 framework of Spanish, British, Dutch, French, and Dan-
12 ish rule). The role of irrigation and water storage sys-
13 tems within the industrialized plantation landscapes are
14 studied, and then on another scale, we consider water
15 use within the domestic sphere of European planters
16 and enslaved Africans. Finally, ideas surrounding the
17 symbolic associations of water evidenced by material
18 remains are outlined. Underpinning this overview is the
19 contention that the archaeological analysis of human-
20 water interaction as a whole must move beyond the
21 consideration of the tangible function and embrace the
22 more ephemeral symbolic meaning. Further, within the
23 context of this study area, the application of the idea of
24 creolization allows us to define a multiplicity of cultural
25 traditions coming together, and being refocused within
26 these diverse island environments.

29 THE CARIBBEAN: GEOGRAPHICAL, 30 ECOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL 31 CONTEXTS 32

33 The Caribbean Sea extends over a surface area of
34 some 2,750,000 km² (Figure 1). Its eastern boundary
35 is delineated by a chain of islands (thus, the insular
36 Caribbean) comprising the Greater and Lesser Antil-
37 les running roughly from the north-west to south-
38 east. The Greater Antilles include the islands of
39 Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola (comprising the nation
40 states of Haiti in the west and the Dominican Repub-
41 lic in the east), and the US territory of Puerto Rico.
42 Further east, the smaller Lesser Antilles chain curves
43 southwards along the eastern boundary of the Carib-
44 bean Sea. This chain is divided into the Leeward
45 Islands in the north and the Windward Islands to the
46 south (the 'hinge' point of the two island groups
47 being between the islands of Guadeloupe and Domi-
48 nica). The former group, the Leewards, comprises
49 island states such as Antigua, St Kitts and Nevis, and
50 the Virgin Islands. The Windward group comprises
51 islands such as St Lucia, St Vincent, the Grenadines
52 chain, and Grenada, furthest south. Outlying islands
53 include Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, and further
54 west the three Dutch islands (Leeward Antilles) of

Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao. To the north, between 57
the Leeward Islands and Florida are the Bahamas, 58
not strictly speaking part of the Caribbean. 59

60 Island geographies vary dramatically across the
61 chain, and these settings have obvious implications for
62 the discussion presented here.⁵ The Bahamian islands,
63 for example, are flat and coralline and often highly
64 developed in terms of tourist resort infrastructure. The
65 larger islands of the Greater Antilles are more moun-
66 tainous and forested. Eastwards, the Leeward Islands
67 tend to be more rugged while the Windwards are of
68 mainly volcanic geology and heavily covered in rainfor-
69 est. Barbados offers yet another contrast; flatter, lime-
70 stone and more densely developed. The climate of each
71 island naturally reflects water management strategies.⁶
72 The predominant winds are the north-easterly trade
73 winds and these bear moisture upon the windward
74 (Atlantic-facing) sides of the islands, leaving in some
75 cases a rain shadow on the leeward coasts. The main
76 rainy season in the region is from August to November
77 when hurricanes develop in the Atlantic and track
78 north-eastwards across the region. In general, the fur-
79 ther west the island is the drier its climate. Aruba, for
80 example, will average around 2.5–7.5 cm of rain a
81 month whilst Dominica would average around
82 5–7.5 cm per month in the drier spring and early sum-
83 mer seasons, peaking at ca 32–38 cm per month in the
84 Hurricane season of late summer and autumn.⁷

85 Current archaeological, genetic, and linguistic
86 thinking posits that humans settled the insular Carib-
87 bean around 6000 years ago.⁸ The earliest archaeo-
88 logical sites in the region are found in the south, in
89 Trinidad, and are associated with the hunter-
90 gatherer Ortoiroid culture and date from the sixth
91 millennium BC.⁹ The earliest hunter-gatherer phase
92 in the Greater Antilles (Hispaniola and Cuba) is asso-
93 ciated with the Casimiroid culture.¹⁰ Later, between
94 ca 800 BC and 200 BC Saladoid peoples introduced
95 pottery and cultivation into the islands from a center
96 of origin in South America.¹¹ Successive waves of
97 immigrants then followed,¹² and by the end of the
98 first millennium AD the Arawak-speaking Arauqui-
99 noid peoples established the complex Taino polities
100 in the Greater Antilles.¹³ Further south and west
101 Kalinago 'Carib' peoples inhabited islands such as St
102 Vincent and Dominica, where many of their descen-
103 dants still live today.¹⁴

104 In 1492, Christopher Columbus encountered the
105 complex Taino polities of the Greater Antilles, and
106 this event ushered in an era of European settlement
107 and exploitation of the Caribbean islands. Initially,
108 the Spanish represented the dominant military, politi-
109 cal, and cultural presence, as evidenced by the devel-
110 opment of townscapes and fortifications on the islands



FIGURE 1 | Map of the Caribbean indicating sites discussed herein.

and in the wider region,¹⁵ but were soon joined by other European powers, some of whom still maintain close political control over their island possessions. From the 17th century, sugar replaced tobacco, cotton, and indigo as the dominant cash crop, creating huge possibilities of wealth for the European planters. In order to service these huge and lucrative industrial plantations a source of cheap labor was required. Slaves were sourced from across West Africa and shipped over to the Caribbean plantations. They brought with them a range of African cultural traditions, and soon the Caribbean islands became cosmopolitan social and cultural ‘creolized’ melting pots.¹⁶

TOWARDS AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF WATER

Archaeology is broadly defined as dealing with things. As a discipline, it is historical, but history deals with words. Archaeology analyzes material culture, and through this seeks to get into the minds of past peoples. Water is arguably one of the most important resources in human cultural and economic development, as a necessity for human life, and also for washing, for food preparation and for feeding plants. Its uses are diverse and are reflected globally in human material behavior.¹⁷ Many methods of investigation are deployed by archaeologists to

investigate material traces of the past and focusing upon a range of different scales.

The study of artifacts within the domestic context can inform our study of historic human–water interaction. Storage media, such as pots, have been historically fabricated to hold and transport water for thousands of years, and humans have also had to evolve means for rendering water potable, a technological process that leaves material traces accessible to the archaeologist. Large-scale water management strategies, such as cisterns or urban sanitation systems¹⁸ and irrigation systems in arid environments¹⁹ and nonarid environments²⁰ can also be recognized archaeologically through a wider regional, holistic landscape archaeology survey approach. These are, to take just a small sample of possible case studies, adaptive approaches to the material culture record. By this, we mean an emphasis on cultural *adaptation* to ecological conditions, betokening a very fixed and *deterministic* view of human water use.²¹

Archaeologists do more than excavate sites, analyze artifacts, or map irrigation systems in the landscape using increasingly sophisticated survey techniques. Since the early 1980s in the United Kingdom, archaeologists of what we term the ‘post-processual’ school have sought to widen our horizons by absorbing a range of theoretical standpoints drawn from a number of cognate disciplines.²² From an epistemological perspective based upon empiricism, a

1 more rationalist approach prevails, emphasizing an
2 idealist rather than materialist ontology. In general,
3 terms this requires archaeologists to engage more
4 with human thought and emotion rather than just
5 perceiving the mere functionality of the artifact or
6 site. This has important implications for the present
7 overview in moving the archaeological analysis in a
8 different direction. One area of importance is the
9 realization that humans invest natural places with a
10 great deal of symbolic meaning, and in some case,
11 the material traces of these emotional responses
12 might not be immediately apparent.^{23,24}

13 For example, archaeology of Caribbean
14 human–water interaction could reasonably focus, as
15 we shall see, on wells or cisterns, or irrigation land-
16 scapes in plantations, but there is the possibility of
17 extending the debate into more imaginative direc-
18 tions.^{25,26} Using an interpretative or *hermeneutic*
19 approach, we can start to consider the symbolic role
20 of water in Caribbean societies, water not as a pas-
21 sive material, but one that reflects (figuratively and
22 literally) diverse human belief systems. Some exam-
23 ples of this sort of behavior could include water in
24 wider symbolic and ritual landscapes,^{27,28} the use of
25 water in ritual purification contexts,²⁹ or association
26 of water with votive offerings, shrines or burials, or
27 modified or unmodified landscape features.^{30–32} This
28 is what archaeologist's term *phenomenology*; an
29 attempt to access human response to the landscape.
30 This is a term widely critiqued within current archae-
31 ological practice,³³ but at least it moves the study of
32 human interaction with the natural world in general
33 (and here with water specifically) away from a nar-
34 row conception of water use.³⁴ A phenomenological
35 framework of understanding is proposed here, an
36 appreciation of the sensuous, numinous, and sym-
37 bolic qualities of water within the natural landscape
38 and how humans *experience* (the crux of phenome-
39 nology) these qualities. With these broader contexts
40 in mind (and admittedly there is much more that
41 could be said in relation to this notion of water and
42 symbolism), we will now consider the archaeological
43 picture in the insular Caribbean, starting with the
44 precontact period.

47 HUMAN–WATER INTERACTION IN 48 THE CARIBBEAN IN THE 49 PRECONTACT PERIODS 50

51 Archaeology is uniquely placed to inform us about
52 the importance of water management and usage stra-
53 tegies among the precontact Caribbean peoples,
54 although in comparison with neighboring mainland

57 areas, the picture of water management strategies on
58 the Caribbean islands remains frustratingly
59 sparse.^{35,36} A recent archaeological study of human
60 technological responses to excess of water availability
61 or scarcity in the precontact Caribbean has gone
62 some way to rectify the issue, although the accent
63 remains firmly upon the functionally adaptive rather
64 than the ritualistic aspect of human–water interaction
65 in the Caribbean.³⁷ The authors make several impor-
66 tant points in their analysis. Firstly, they demonstrate
67 that these islands are climatically diverse and offer
68 very dynamic environmental conditions, from flood-
69 ing to drought, and as such humans have had to
70 adapt ingenious ways of mitigating these problems.

71 An examination of Caribbean palaeoenviron-
72 mental data over the last 2000 or so years (mainly
73 yielded by analysis of isotopic composition in snail
74 shells from the site of Anse à la Gourde, Guadeloupe)
75 bears out this picture of dynamic climatic change;
76 these data suggest broadly a series of wet and dry
77 periods in rapid succession from ca 400 AD to the
78 present day. Against this background, the early
79 island settlers had to adapt their relations with water.
80 Shifts in sea level, which was part and parcel of cli-
81 matic change, forced abandonment of coastal settle-
82 ments, for example, changing the availability of
83 certain maritime and fresh water sources. This is cer-
84 tainly clear at the site of Anse à la Gourde.³⁸ *In*
85 *extremis*, it is also not unknown for tsunami (or even
86 hurricane) events to also be a factor in influencing
87 human settlement. This is borne out, for example,
88 with the use of stilts to support houses at the Los
89 Buchilliones site, Cuba (dating from AD 1250 to
90 1500) to mitigate flooding in what was a wet envi-
91 ronment (in passing it should be noted that this wet-
92 land site, unusual in the Caribbean context, offers
93 excellent scope for organic artifact survival).³⁹ So,
94 where there are issues of *too much* water, the precon-
95 tact inhabitants of these islands were forced to adapt
96 ways round the problem.

97 Second, as Hofman and Hoogland also point
98 out, there are also cases of too little water, and this
99 factor resulted in the development of complex water
100 conservation techniques. On Aruba, for example,
101 natural gullies (*rooiën*) at the site of Tanki Flip are
102 suggested to be linked to rudimentary man-made
103 water management systems, and date from around
104 AD 1000.³⁷ Wells are another means of mitigating
105 availability of potable water, particularly on the lime-
106 stone islands. Coastal pot-lined shallow wells have
107 been found on a number of islands in the south-east
108 of the Caribbean in particular. They take advantage
109 of fresh rainwater running off the land, and sitting
110 on top of the denser saline water just above the water

1 table. Excavated examples of at least 53 of these
2 wells from the coastal site of Port St Charles in
3 north-western Barbados bear witness to the skill of
4 precontact island dwellers in accessing and storing
5 water.⁴⁰ These wells were either lined with wood,
6 which was well preserved in the damp anaerobic
7 environment, or large pots with their bottoms
8 knocked out and arranged to form a longer pipe.
9 These wells date from around ca AD 700 to 1100.
10 The use of large shells of the Queen Conch (*Strom-*
11 *bis gigas*) is also reported as being a viable rainwater
12 trapping technique on the Los Roques Archipelago
13 off the Venezuelan coast, and it may be that archae-
14 ologists in the future recognize these shells as eviden-
15 cing actual water storage strategies rather than the
16 remains of beach-side shellfish consumption.⁴¹

17 Archaeological reconstruction of the belief sys-
18 tems of these peoples and their ritual association with
19 water remains speculative. There are, however, a few
20 categories of evidence that may betoken deep symbolic
21 attachment to water. The widespread ritual appropriation
22 of caves by the Maya in Mexico and water-filled
23 sink holes (*cenotes*), in particular, may offer a useful
24 analog to the study of sacred water sources in the Car-
25ibbean islands.^{42,43} These striking natural features are
26 formed by the dissolution of the rocks above, and
27 given the association of prehistoric burials with these
28 sites it seems that they acquired some unknown sym-
29bolic importance, perhaps associated with idea of a
30 gateway to the underworld. In the Greater Antilles, a
31 number of distinctive anthropomorphic jars (*potizas*)
32 have been recovered from springs and *cenotes* associ-
33ated with Taino settlement in the Dominican Republic
34 on the island of Hispaniola (here the sink hole site of
35 Manatí de la Aleta is noteworthy for its extensive
36 evidence for structured deposition in particular).⁴⁴ It
37 has been hypothesized that these vessels were water
38 carrying jars used and discarded in a nonritual con-
39text, but as VanderVeen demonstrates,⁴⁵ their mor-
40phology is not an optimum design for carrying liquid
41 over a long distance, but for holding water *in situ*. Fur-
42thermore, it is suggested that the decoration of these
43 vessels, with exaggerated anthropomorphic sexual
44 characteristics, suggests some fertility function
45 entwined with water use. Certainly, caves as a whole
46 feature strongly in Taino ritualistic landscapes; their
47 obvious uses as places of refuge or for accessing pota-
48ble (but poor quality mineral-rich) water sit aside
49 some indefinable function as a *genius loci*, as sug-
50gested by the presence of human burials. The inter-
51twining of the natural and cultural worlds thus
52appears to be vivid in Taino life.⁴⁶

53 Further north, in the Bahamas, we see a similar
54 association between ritualistic behavior and water-

57 filled caves, although here the caves ('Blue Holes')
58 are associated with seascapes rather than fresh water.
59 Indigenous Lucayan peoples attached a strong sym-
60bolic meaning to Blue Holes, seeing them as the
61 abode of the mythical sea creature the '*Lusca*,'⁴⁷ as
62 well as using them for human burial. Certainly, the
63 Lucayan peoples invested a great deal of meaning in
64 water imagery, referring, for example, to the primor-
65dial ocean (*Bagua*) and the centrality of fish and
66 aquatic life in general in their cosmology.⁴⁸ Caves
67 were an obvious place to inter higher status indivi-
68duals (such as the Stargate Blue Hole on Andros
69 Island, perhaps), and no doubt the connection with
70 water must have been important; certainly these dra-
71matic Bahamian Blue Holes evoked (as they continue
72 to do today) a strong emotional pull to humans who
73 came into contact with them.⁴⁹

74 The foregoing section has considered water use
75 and symbolism within small-scale island societies. The
76 arrival of Europeans after AD 1492, however, chan-
77ged cultural and economic character of the islands for-
78ever. In response to a growing demand for sugar,
79 European powers converted these islands into
80 industrial-scale farming societies, manned by imported
81 slave labor from Africa. Now a new set of functional
82 and symbolic associations of water emerged, in some
83 cases reflecting the coming together of African,
84 European, and indigenous cosmologies as well as
85 changing economic needs and agricultural regimes.

88 HUMAN–WATER INTERACTION IN 89 THE COLONIAL PERIODS 90

91 The Spanish pioneered the cultivation of sugar cane
92 (*Saccharum* sp.) in the Caribbean. At the site of
93 Sevilla La Nueva in Jamaica, excavations recovered
94 the remains of a 16th century water mill (*ingenio*)
95 set alongside the urban structure of the early Spanish
96 town there.⁵⁰ It was more common practice in the
97 Caribbean for the sugar cane to be pulped using a *tra-*
98 *piche*, or basic edge runner mill (powered by animals
99 or indeed slaves) and latterly windmills, so this use of
100 hydraulic technology within a plantation setting is, as
101 Woodward argues, redolent of a direct Spanish-style
102 organization of the agricultural landscape. Unfortu-
103nately, Woodward was unable to recover evidence of
104 the leats or channeling systems that fed the water-
105 wheel; these patterns of water use in the landscape
106 may mirror Iberian practice (although historic map-
107ping sources clearly show the extensive use of aque-
108ducts and water mills during this period).⁵¹ In recent
109 contexts, the industrial use of water within plantation
110 settings becomes more apparent.

1 A recent landscape archaeology study of the
2 Balenbouche Estate in St Lucia has suggested the
3 potential for identification of large-scale plantation
4 water control systems through the use of survey and
5 map analysis. This survey work identified a hydraulic
6 system of leats and channels feeding water mills and
7 an 18th century coffee plantation belonging to the
8 French colonial period.⁵² Particular attention
9 attaches to a large stone dam, 5-m thick and 7-m
10 high used to form a reservoir from which a 4-km
11 long stone-lined leat ran to the industrial center. This
12 is hydraulic engineering on a significant scale, and
13 leaves clear evidence in the archaeological landscape
14 (a similar dam feature is also found at the plantation
15 site of Belvedere on St Maarten in the Leewards). It
16 should also be noted that there are still extensive
17 remains of water mills to be found on the island of
18 Dominica, to the north of St Lucia. There are exten-
19 sive canalization features such as aqueducts on the
20 Rosalie estate, and a working water mill at the
21 Macoucherie rum distillery. As is noted above, Domi-
22 nica can be an exceptionally wet island, and the use
23 of water technology as opposed to wind or animal
24 powered milling makes eminent sense here.

25 Wells represent another category of water stor-
26 age and usage within the wider Caribbean plantation
27 context, although are less visible archaeologically.
28 Recent landscape survey by the author in Barbados,
29 for example, has located a series of very deep stone-
30 lined wells in the vicinity of the fort at Six Mens
31 (St Peter's), and many other wells of this type are
32 reported from sugar plantations across the island.
33 These would have been used to water livestock and
34 slaves. Further landscape survey in the area has also
35 shown other examples of colonial-period human-
36 water interaction, such as clay-lined ponds that
37 appear to have been used to support wildfowl popu-
38 lations for shooting from the 18th century onwards.
39 It is therefore possible to see the manipulation of the
40 natural landscape of an island-like Barbados follow-
41 ing trends apparent in the management and enclosure
42 of 18th century English estates. Water was therefore
43 an essential part of 'taming' and acculturating the
44 island landscape, making the unfamiliar familiar.
45 This was not just an English fashion; on the Dutch
46 island of St Eustatius, for example, the country house
47 of the late 18th century Dutch commander, Johannes
48 de Graaf, boasted a large brick-lined duck pond,
49 about 10 m × 3 m in size. Water was being used in
50 the Caribbean colonial context as a formalized land-
51 scape feature, a means to assert control and order
52 over the landscape.⁵³

53 Another important plantation cash crop, particu-
54 larly in the Greater Antilles, was coffee (*Coffea*

arabica). In a study of the archaeology of Jamaican
57 coffee plantations, the American archaeologist James
58 Delle points to the intensive use of water in the
59 processing of the coffee berries. Pulping mills were
60 hydraulically powered and required a dependable
61 source of water; large tanks were also needed to
62 steep the coffee pod pulp. In some cases, mapping
63 has revealed channeling and aqueduct systems used
64 to maintain a constant supply of water into the pro-
65 cessing areas.⁵⁴ Much large-scale irrigation works,
66 comprising canals, aqueducts, and cisterns, can be
67 found at 19th century coffee plantations (*cafetales*) in
68 south-eastern Cuba using techniques developed by
69 French specialists. Such is their historical importance
70 that they have been inscribed as UNESCO World
71 Heritage Sites.⁵⁵

72 Another—albeit more minor—historical Carib-
73 bean cash crop indigo (*Indigofera* sp.) was used for
74 dyeing fabric from the late 17th century and was a fea-
75 ture of earlier French island economies in the Wind-
76 wards.⁵⁶ Processing of this resource is water-intensive;
77 freshly cut plants were steeped in one large tank and
78 were pounded until the mixture fermented. The liquid
79 was then drawn off into a second large vat where it
80 was stirred, and finally the residue was tapped into a
81 third vat. These structures, therefore, have distinctive
82 archaeological signatures, and clearly rely on relatively
83 complex water management. Examples have been sur-
84 veyed in Bequia, in the St Vincent Grenadines; the
85 complication of this location is that it is an arid island,
86 so water management was problematic. Here the
87 indigo works are sited on the wetter north-eastern
88 coast of the island, and are situated within a system of
89 small run off channels and canals.⁵⁷ These complexes
90 bear general similarities to contemporary works found
91 on the French island of Guadeloupe.⁵⁸

92 It is also important to draw attention to the
93 impact of the Caribbean salt extraction industries
94 (particularly associated with the northern Caribbean
95 islands of St Maarten/St Martin, Anguilla, and Turks
96 and Caicos) on the landscape. These industries require
97 large, shallow ponds of brackish water, and are often
98 associated with canal systems to conduct water
99 through the evaporation system. The salt works of Salt
100 cay on the Turks and Caicos, for example, although
101 now defunct, still retain evidence for canal and sluice
102 systems.⁵⁹ This is another example of the historical
103 centrality of water technology to Caribbean industry,
104 and one which has clear implications for the impact
105 upon smaller, marginal island economies where sugar
106 cultivation was never significant.

107 Cisterns used for storing water are a common
108 feature on many of the plantations of the insular
109 Caribbean. To take one example from a well-
110

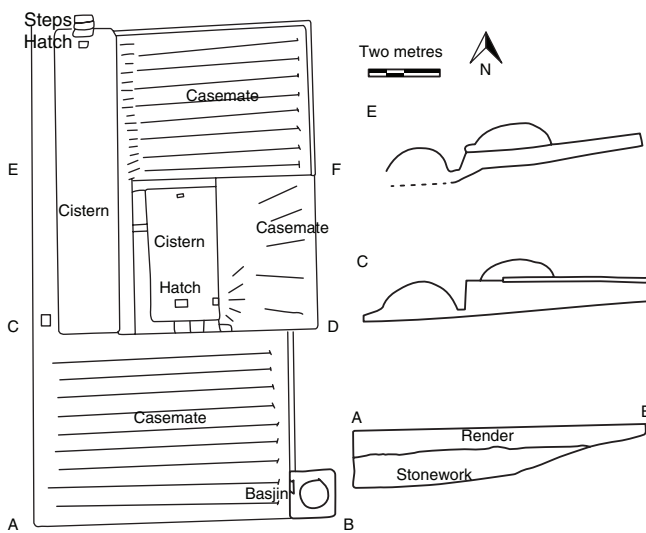
1 researched site, there are at least six cisterns associ- 57
 2 ated with the industrial complex at Betty’s Hope in 58
 3 Antigua, hardly a surprise given that the island is 59
 4 quite arid (cisterns are also a key feature of many of 60
 5 the island’s fortifications too). One of the cisterns at 61
 6 Betty’s Hope is associated with an animal pen, the 62
 7 other with the mid-18th century slave village and at 63
 8 least four associated with the Great House, where 64
 9 the Planter himself would have lived. This hierarchy 65
 10 of provision of water clearly reflects the social hierar- 66
 11 chy of the Plantation itself.⁶⁰ Away from the large 67
 12 sugar plantations, and in more small-scale island 68
 13 societies, water management techniques were not so 69
 14 much an industrial consideration, more a real factor 70
 15 of life and death.

16 One of the most detailed archaeological studies 71
 17 of the use of domestic water storage systems in the 72
 18 Caribbean was undertaken by the archaeologist Ryan 73
 19 Espersen at the sites of Palmetto Point and Middle 74
 20 Island on the arid and rocky island of Saba in the 75
 21 northern Leeward Islands.⁶¹ For a time in the 18th 76
 22 century, Saba exported significant quantities of agri- 77
 23 cultural resources (not so much sugar) to neighboring 78
 24 islands such as St Eustatius. The rugged terrain of the 79
 25 island demanded the use of terracing to increase avail- 80
 26 able land for cultivation. Water management strate- 81
 27 gies also evolved in the shape of shared cisterns 82
 28 (by 1934 Espersen records there being over 250 such 83
 29 structures on the island). As such, there was a great 84
 30 deal of communal investment in their construction 85
 31 and their maintenance. These distinctive domed struc- 86
 32 tures were attached to flat rectangular catchments for 87
 33 88

collecting water. In general, each catchment structure 57
 measures between 8 and 9 m in length, with an aver- 58
 age width of ca 5 m; the domed cistern structures 59
 themselves are about half the size and hold a volume 60
 of water from about 10,000 to 36,000 L. 61

62 Espersen makes the point that these amounts 62
 would not be sufficient to store enough water for the 63
 inhabitants of these settlements, and water shortages 64
 could have provoked male emigration from the 65
 island particularly in the 19th century, as is borne 66
 out by census record. Espersen’s daily estimates of 67
 water consumption do not only take into account 68
 access to potable water but also the ability to water 69
 crops and rehydrate dried food such as ‘corned’ 70
 (salted) fish. In every sense, this was a marginal envi- 71
 ronment, and even with highly developed water gath- 72
 ering and storage technologies unsustainable for 73
 human habitation. It is no wonder that the villages 74
 were abandoned. Technology could not keep up with 75
 water demand. 76

77 It is difficult to physically date these structures. 77
 Similar cisterns have, unsurprisingly, been found 78
 associated with 18th century dwellings and planta- 79
 tions on the nearby small Dutch island of St Eusta- 80
 tius.⁶² Recent work on the island of Bequia in the St 81
 Vincent Grenadines offers some potential for draw- 82
 ing conclusions about the transfer of water storage 83
 technology between Caribbean islands over a longer 84
 distance and across spheres of European cultural 85
 interaction. In 2015, a series of barrel-vaulted brick- 86
 built cisterns and casemates were recorded at the site 87
 of Old Fort, Bequia⁶³ (Figure 2). As with Saba and St 88
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Old Fort Bequia SVG. Plan and profiles of cisterns

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FIGURE 2 | Brick vaulted cistern and casemate structure, Old Fort, Bequia, St Vincent Grenadines (plan and elevations; scale at right in photograph 1 m).

1 Eustatius, Bequia is an arid island; in fact a drought
 2 here in the 1950s effectively ended marginal sugar
 3 cultivation on the island. The water storage units at
 4 Old Fort were not unique in the context of Bequia;
 5 similar storage tanks existed at the abandoned estates
 6 at Belmont and Friendship Bay (although interest-
 7 ingly the cistern at the site of Padget's Farm on the
 8 west of the island is subterranean, stone-lined and
 9 rectangular in shape, and may date from the earlier
 10 French colonization of the island; the masonry is sim-
 11 ilar to the indigo tanks, noted above). Why were cis-
 12 terns built upon this *Dutch* pattern present here? A
 13 crucial historical source helped to clarify this archae-
 14 ological problem.⁶⁴ This contemporary note
 15 explained that after the British had seized Bequia
 16 from the French in the 1780s, a request was placed
 17 for settlers *from* Saba to be allowed to settle the
 18 island. Given the similarities in construction tech-
 19 nique, architectural style and volume of the Bequia
 20 cisterns it is suggested that here we have direct evi-
 21 dence of a transfer of water storage technology from
 22 the northern Leewards into the southern Windwards
 23 from as early as the late 18th century.

24 Water management at an even more archaeolog-
 25 ically ephemeral and domestic scale is an important
 26 feature of Caribbean material culture. The work of
 27 Pulsipher on the British island of Montserrat (which
 28 in 1995 was largely destroyed in a volcanic eruption)
 29 drew attention to informal small-scale slave garden
 30 economies on the fringes of the Galways plantation.
 31 Although formalized small-scale water storage, and
 32 diversion channels and tunnels were attached to the
 33 actual industrial core of the plantation, survey outside
 34 these areas suggested that slaves had also constructed
 35 smaller scale and more ephemeral structures to help
 36 retain rainwater.⁶⁵ Her ethnographic work around
 37 the archaeological site suggested that small-scale
 38 domestic and informal arrangements for managing
 39 water supply were still present. For example, large
 40 natural boulders in Galways village have been modi-
 41 fied to form shallow basins to catch enough rainwater
 42 to enable washing or cooking to take place without
 43 having to trek to the springs.⁶⁶

44 Water storage technology is just one part of the
 45 archaeological analysis. Other forms of technology
 46 emerged in these islands to ensure that water was safe
 47 to drink, an important consideration for the upper
 48 class of planter society. At the Barbados Museum in
 49 Bridgetown, Barbados, one is still able to see a loca-
 50 lized island solution to purification of water. Drip-
 51 stones, made from the local coral limestone were once
 52 extensively exported from Barbados to other Carib-
 53 bean islands (Figure 3). Consisting of two superim-
 54 posed coral-limestone basins, the water gradually



FIGURE 3 | Limestone dripstones for water purification, Barbados Museum.

seeped through the basins from the top through the
 porous rock into an earthenware jar below. This type
 of purification technology derives from Spanish colo-
 nial practice (variants can be seen in colonial contexts
 in houses in the Dominican Republic; in some cases,
 the hollows in the stones contained charcoal to allow
 more effective filtration). Recent research has indi-
 cated that the filtration process does not reduce all
 bacterial contamination but can significantly reduce
 levels of harmful coliform bacteria.⁶⁷ Also belong-
 ing within this continuum of small-scale water stor-
 age and use are pots; in Barbados these are commonly
 referred to as 'Monkeys' and their unglazed and
 porous exterior allows evaporation of the liquid
 inside and keeps the contents of the jar cool. It is
 probable that this form of technology does not belong
 to a European, colonial context but may reference
 imported African ceramic technologies.⁶⁸

The foregoing paragraphs have outlined the
 importance of water management and storage strate-
 gies at a number of different scales in the colonial
 Caribbean. What can we say about symbolic

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Color Figure 3 Print and Online

1 associations of water use in this industrialized and
 2 cosmopolitan world? Two examples may be taken to
 3 indicate the potential directions such studies could
 4 take in the future. Belief in the West African water
 5 spirit, generically termed ‘Mami Wata’ and depicted
 6 as a mermaid (indeed female water spirits are also an
 7 important feature of Haitian Vodou iconography as
 8 well)⁶⁹ is widespread in Diaspora communities in the
 9 New World. In the Santeria cosmology of Cuba she
 10 is referred to as Yemaya, and in other French Carib-
 11 bean islands as Maman Dlo (a clear corruption of
 12 *Maman de L’Eau*; another water-related figure in the
 13 Haitian system of Vodou, Admiral Agwe, is the mas-
 14 ter of water and his consort Lasiren is depicted as a
 15 mermaid). Mami Wata personifies this idea outlined
 16 earlier in the paper of syncretism, or creolization, a
 17 meeting of cosmologies.⁷⁰ Clearly focused anthropo-
 18 logical and archaeological work should aim to study
 19 the material representation of this deity, perhaps
 20 through recognition of shrines, offerings, and places
 21 in the landscape, as is found in West Africa.⁷¹



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FIGURE 4 | Jewish ritual purification in a historic Caribbean townscape: the spring-fed Mikveh, Nidhe Israel Synagogue, Bridgetown, Barbados.



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FIGURE 5 | Jewish ritual purification in a historic Caribbean townscape: marble laver or hand washing stoup, Barbados Museum, Bridgetown.

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 From the European perspective, we are familiar with the use of water as an agent of purification in the Christian Church (e.g., in a stoup or baptisterial font; this is also a feature of some creolized Afro-Caribbean religions too, e.g., in the Cuban rite of Santeria, sacred Bata drums are cleansed with water before ritual use). Christianity is indeed the dominant religion across the Caribbean, but this ignores the significance of the historic settlement of the Sephardic Jewish communities originating from Iberia and arriving in the region via Amsterdam as part of the development of the sugar trade in the 17th century onwards.⁷² Extant and ruined synagogues can be found on Nevis, St Eustatius, Barbados, Jamaica, Aruba, Curacao, and Cuba. The oldest synagogue in the western hemisphere is the Nidhe Israel Synagogue in Bridgetown Barbados and in 2007 the ritual bath, or Mikveh, was excavated and restored as part of the development of a Jewish museum on site⁷³ (Figure 4). This important element in the symbolic architecture of the Jewish ritual was known by Sephardic Jews as a *Bano* and was fed by a spring and used exclusively by female worshippers. Another element of material culture relating to ritual purification, a marble laver, is on display at the Barbados Museum (Figure 5).

This is just a single archaeological example of the symbolic use of water within ritual purification contexts across the Caribbean; archaeology, informed by local oral history and anthropological research has a role in defining many more.

CONCLUSION

The foregoing survey of the material evidence for human–water interaction in the Caribbean has highlighted both the industrial/domestic and symbolic importance of water on these tropical islands over many millennia. This material evidence reflects in turn the rich creolized and syncretic identity of Caribbean peoples, their cultures, economies, and belief systems. Many examples could have been chosen to develop these ideas further, and clearly there is much work to do in this area. It is therefore hoped that several promising directions for future multidisciplinary

research have been clearly signposted and that archaeological approaches to human–water interaction can move on in new and innovative directions, and not just in the Caribbean region. In a recent paper, the American archaeologist Mark Hauser has focused upon the politics of the control of water within the context of 18th and 19th century Dominica.⁷⁴ Using a variety of categories of archaeological evidence, he has drawn attention to the centrality of the control of access and storage of water. His use of the notion ‘water ways’ urges us to consider the different human responses to water as a resource. As he has demonstrated, and as has hopefully been shown in more general terms in this article, human capacity to manage water is historically varied and intriguing. Some of these long-lived strategies may point the way to sustainable water management strategies in the Caribbean at a time of ongoing climatic change in the present and future.

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1 **Graphical abstract**

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3 **The materiality of human–water interaction in the Caribbean: an archaeological**
4 **perspective**

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7 Niall P. Finneran¹



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26 Dean's Blue Hole, Long Island, Bahamas. A striking 200-m deep natural water feature. Blue Holes are common
27 to these islands and are laden with rich symbolic meaning, as evidenced by their association with precontact
28 Lucayan human burials.

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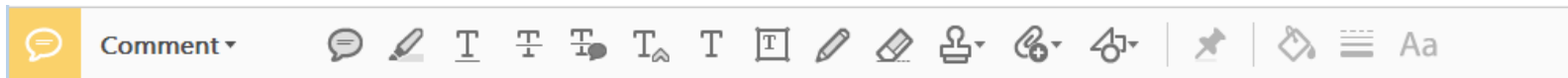
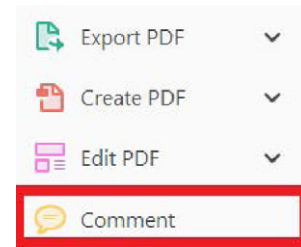
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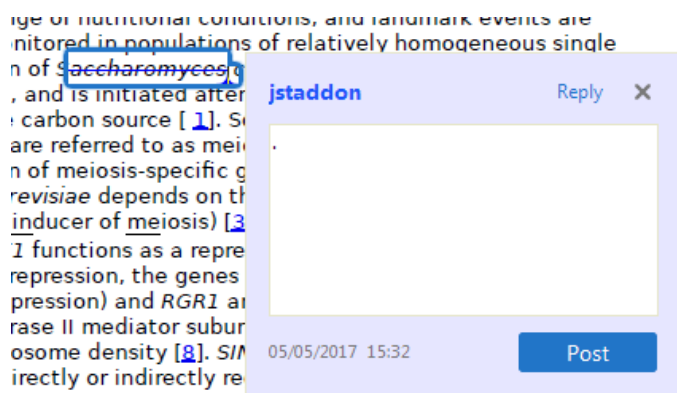


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
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
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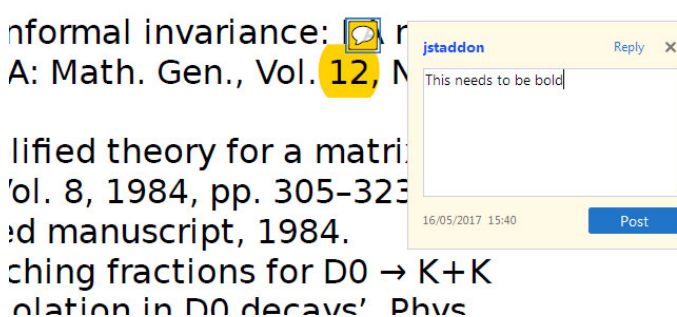
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2. Absence of similarity to known proteins.
3. Absence of functional data which could not be the real overlapping gene.
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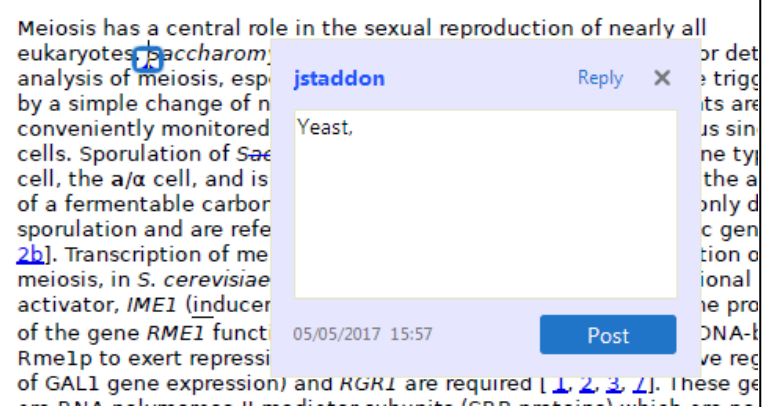


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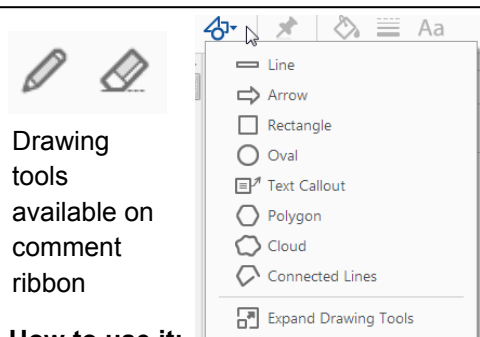
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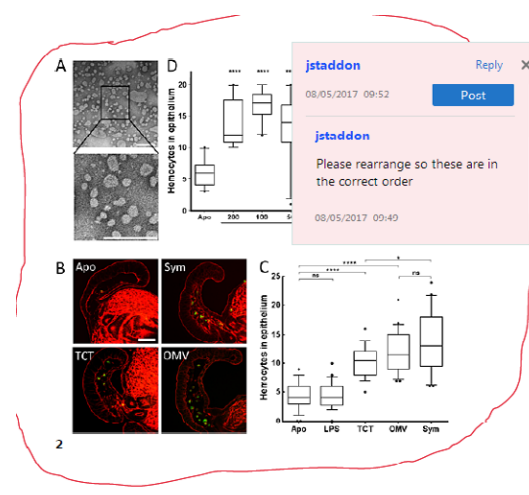


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