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An Archaeology of Black Markets: Local Ceramics and Economics in Eighteenth Century Jamaica

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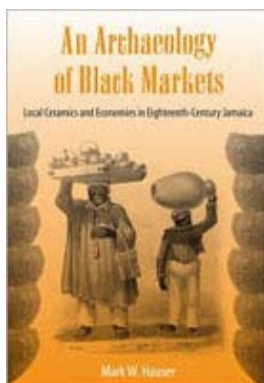
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June 2011 Newsletter



Mark W. Hauser. *An Archaeology of Black Markets: Local Ceramics and Economics in Eighteenth Century Jamaica*. Florida Museum of Natural History: Ripley P. Bullen Series. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008. xxiii and 269 pp., 48 illustrations, bibliography, index. \$65.00, Hardcover. ISBN 978-0813032610.

Reviewed for the African Diaspora Archeology Newsletter by Kevin Farmer, Barbados Museum & Historical Society and University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus.

An Archaeology of Black Markets explores the complexity of trade networks and consumption patterns in eighteenth century Jamaica through the multiple lenses of ethnography, documentary sources, and ceramic analysis. These varied sources are used to reconstruct and examine Jamaica's pottery tradition, not as an ethnographic exploration of creolization, but as a lens through which one can understand the internal market system of a society within the wider trans-Atlantic economy.

Although not stated explicitly, the author seeks to unravel production and consumption patterns of the enslaved and their role in pottery production. This discussion is then used to comment on the wider internal market system of Jamaican slave society. Hauser approaches this task by utilizing that most ubiquitous item of material culture, the pottery sherd, to discuss a variety of topics, including vessel form morphology, while engaging in a nuanced definition of provenance (p. 162) in discussing the Jamaican internal market system. He also provides a comprehensive review of the current literature on ceramic analysis in the Caribbean and concludes by discussing a methodology that has not been previously used for analyzing regional ceramics.

Compositional analysis is used not simply to discuss sites of manufacture and distribution, but as a conduit through which the wider discussion of locally made earthenwares and their role in the internal market can and should be addressed by researchers seeking to make sense of local pottery industries. Not since Grant Gillmore's (2005) Ph.D. dissertation has

chemical analysis been used to discuss Caribbean ceramics during the historic period. Whereas Gilmore was concerned with identifying the trade networks that provided ceramics to ‘Statia,’ within the wider discussion of the slave society of St. Eustatius, Hauser is concerned with untangling the internal consumption and distribution of Jamaican earthenwares.

Hauser’s chapter 1 reviews the current literature on Caribbean plantation archaeology and notes its preoccupation with identifying ethnicity. Creolization is viewed as paramount to understanding the enslaved and their creation of culture in the face of a brutal system. By dissecting creolization’s contribution to our understanding of ceramic production in the region, Hauser insists on the need to locate local circumstance as individualistic and therefore worthy of research and “not to be mistakenly glossed (over) as European modernity” (p. 10). Instead, Hauser implores us to utilise multi-scalar analytical approaches to tease out the importance of the internal market system in understanding the island’s economy, not as peripheral, but as central to the trade network. At the same time, he stresses its role in determining and shaping what ceramic forms are produced, distributed, and consumed in Jamaica.

In chapter 2 Hauser provides an in-depth examination of the local system by exploring its historical and governance framework. He acknowledges that the market space occupied by the enslaved, which was perceived as liminal by the Jamaican elite, was in reality a place of activity where, although “there were regimes of economic control” the “practice of market participants was somewhat contrary to colonial expectations” (p. 40). In emphasizing the market system as an avenue for economic freedom, Hauser directs us to a methodology that gives voice and evidence to the importance of the internal market system at the micro and macro levels of the economy. Material culture is the foundation on which he bases his discussion of the internal market system. This is coupled with a re-interrogation of the documentary sources that in turn elevates his artifact analysis to view ceramics as operating in the contested space of the internal market system of the island. Hauser concludes that the Sunday market in Jamaica provided a dual role for the enslaved, as a place for ‘economic agency’ as well as a space that provided social networks through which commerce and resistance could be woven.

The focus on pottery consumption sites and their potential for developing social networks is explored in chapter 3. Hauser examines excavated ceramics from seven eighteenth-century sites spread across Jamaica, and provides an understanding of the distribution network employed by the enslaved across the island’s landscape. Site selection was based on four criteria: 1) tight

temporal control; 2) location across four discrete regions; 3) linkages between sites provided by an extensive road network; and 4) variation of site types across rural and urban Jamaica, and the concomitant experience of persons living in such locales. Such criteria resulted in the selection of four rural sites -- three plantations (Drax Hall, Seville and Thetford) and one provisioning estate (Juan de Bollas) -- and three urban sites -- the Old King's House (the Governor's residence), the Old Naval Dockyard, and St. Peter's Church.

An understanding of such markets and their meanings are discussed in chapter 4. Hauser discusses earlier archaeological ceramic research in the Caribbean while outlining his alternative methodology to view pottery as a "residue of a market system" (p. 11). Essentially, he argues that researchers in the region should acknowledge the site-specific nature of pottery production, thus recognizing regional heterogeneity in pottery manufacture, instead of examining pottery as markers of "ethnic or cultural identity" (p. 11). He urges researchers to move away from the homogenous label of "colonoware" when describing Caribbean earthenwares, replacing that term with site specific nomenclature that acknowledges the heterogeneity of Caribbean pottery traditions.

A study of pottery's importance to understanding society is discussed in chapter 5, where the Jamaican pottery industry is reviewed from colonial to post-colonial times. Hauser employs archaeological, ethnohistorical, and documentary evidence to discuss changes in vessel forms and decorative techniques. By employing this methodology, he shows how the pottery tradition evolved within the wider context of the market forces that impacted its development.

His final chapter 6 uses both petrological and neutron activated analysis as tools to discuss provenance and distribution of locally produced earthenwares. It is hoped, he maintains, that such analysis would provide information on origins of production, routes of trade, and centers of distribution and ultimately the places of discard of local pottery. These techniques provide new insights into understanding trade networks in Jamaica which underscore that distribution was not limited to a confined area close to production centers, but instead ranged farther than the neighborhood of its manufacture. Pottery distribution in the market was a result of the efforts of enslaved women as they provided produce for market. Hauser concludes that compositional analysis allows a detailed discussion of commodity flows both internal and external to Jamaica and, in so doing, he enables us to re-imagine the geography of the enslaved experience (p. 191).

Studies such as Hauser's significantly advance this field of research. When such studies focus on pottery traditions in other locations in the Caribbean, such as Barbados, researchers will hopefully work to evaluate similar dynamics of agency in the local pottery traditions (p. 126-127). In describing Afro-Jamaican wares, for example, Hauser interprets particular forms of agency in its formation, and such an analytic approach would be effectively focused on the development of the Barbadian pottery as well (p. 108-119). Many researchers working on Caribbean sites often associate hand-built pottery with African heritage traditions and assume that wheel-thrown pottery cannot be associated in the same way (e.g., Peterson, Watters and Nicholson 1999; Heath 1999; Loftfield 2001). In so doing, regional archeology has failed to acknowledge the possible modification made to the wheel and kiln technology by Barbadian potters in the evolution of their craft tradition. This perspective is narrow, especially if one seeks to acknowledge the heterogeneity of pottery traditions in the Caribbean.

Hauser's book title makes a play on words with the phrase "Black Markets." One might argue that its loaded phrasing is warranted in indicating a system in which colonial administrations sought to marginalize those whose effect on the economy, whether as consumers or producers of ceramics, was anything but peripheral. However, his use of the phrase could have been better defined and decoded early in the volume; an explanation of its selection in his epilogue is buried too deep to be found by any but the most discerning of readers. Academic readers will understand his use of the phrase, but some in his wider African diaspora audience may not.

Hauser provides a well-researched, informed argument and an alternative methodological approach to the examination of local ceramic production in the Caribbean in this work. It is a seminal publication not only for Jamaica, but also for scholars of the wider region who are interested in the multi-scalar changes wrought by the trans-Atlantic economy. Hauser's study allows for an alternative perception of ceramic studies, signaling a new frontier for historical archaeologists who wish to explore the region's internal economy, not as localized or restricted to one area, but as regionalized with ceramics as a medium of exchange.

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