



## Book Reviews

### PRE-COLUMBIAN JAMAICA BY P. ALLSWORTH-JONES

*The University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, 2008. 320pp+ CD, 31 figs, 25 tabs, pb ISBN 13 978 0 8173 5466 4 (£39.95)*

Investigations into the Pre-Columbian archaeology of Jamaica have been underway for well over 100 years but for a variety of reasons little information have been available outside the country until the arrival of this splendid book. The last detailed overview of the subject was published by J.E. Duerden in the *Journal of the Institute of Jamaica* for 1897. This article included some of the best 19<sup>th</sup> century illustrations of Pre-Columbian objects including unique stone and wooden objects. The importance of Duerden's article is such that it has been reprinted in full, all 87 pages, in this volume. Taking Duerden's article as a starting point Dr Allsworth-Jones outlines and puts in contexts archaeological work over the last 100 years. Much of this work was undertaken by James Lee, a professional geologist working on Jamaica from 1951 until his retirement in 1986. James Lee founded the Archaeological Club of Jamaica in 1965 which became the Archaeological Society of Jamaica in 1970. This Society, James Lee and others investigated Pre-Columbian sites all over Jamaica recording their work in their 'Archaeology Jamaica' newsletter. In 2000 James Lee presented his substantial personal collection and records to the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies on Jamaica. At that time Mona was the only campus of the University of the West Indies with a lecturer in Archaeology (since then the Trinidad campus has appointed Dr Basil Reid and the Barbados campus Dr Maaïke S. deWaal). The arrival of the Lee archive was seen by Dr Allsworth-Jones (then recently appointed as Senior Lecturer at Mona) as the impetus for this book, in his words to plug the 'black hole' in the prehistory of the Caribbean Jamaica is sometimes erroneously said to be.

This book is in four main sections. Firstly Allsworth-Jones narrative on Pre-Columbian Jamaica (134pp). This is followed by a substantial appendix (43pp) listing and describing principal excavated sites in Jamaica. There then follows the 87 page reprint of Duerden's 1897 article on 'Aboriginal Indian Remains in Jamaica'. Finally the Lee Collection is catalogued and illustrated on CD-ROM. Taken together this volume is a mine a data convincingly brought together with a continuous narrative.

The narrative on Pre-Columbian Jamaica is divided into eleven chapters. The Introduction explains how the book came into being and its arrangement together with an explanation of Lee's system of recording. Chapter 2 outlines a History of Investigation from Sir Hans Sloane's 1707 record of a cave with human bones and potsherds 'attributed to the Indians', through the work of Duerden and Cundall to James Lee's major project of 'mapping all known Arawak sites on Jamaica'. It ends with a brief account of the most recent excavations including Dr Kofi Agorsah's pioneering work at Nanny Town (a major Maroon site but sitting on a significant inland Pre-Columbian site) and Dr Allsworth-Jones' own work at Annotto Bay. The author's conclusion to this history of investigation could be applied to so many islands in the Caribbean, 'what has been lacking above all has been the practice of carefully recording what has been found in the field, making plans and stratigraphic sections, and fully publishing the results'.

Chapter 3 briefly outlines General Frameworks for Caribbean Prehistory and moves swiftly on to Environment, Fauna and Flora of the island (Chapter 4). Chapter 5 outlines the material culture of Pre-Columbian Jamaica based on a study of 28,149 artefacts recovered from 191 sites and described in more detail on the CD-ROM. The material studied is divided into 18 main categories dominated by ten categories of pottery, then lithics, shell tools and ornaments and organic remains. Five clear pages of artefact drawings accompany this chapter giving a foretaste of what is available on the CD-ROM.

Chapter 6 Mapping the Sites briefly outlines how Lee undertook his project of 'mapping all known Arawak sites in Jamaica'. Figure 17 locates the 271 known Pre-Columbian sites on Jamaica (including only 5 additions to Lee's survey). Appendix B later in the book provides a complete list of these sites while Appendix A has brief descriptions of all the main sites excavated in Jamaica. Chapter 7 gets to grips with the four distinct cultural variants in the Pre-Columbian material culture of Jamaica, largely based on different pottery types, Redware, Montego Bay, Port Morant and White Marl. It remains uncertain why Jamaica was settled so late in Caribbean prehistory (especially given dates back to some 4000 B.C. on the relatively close islands of Cuba and Hispaniola). Currently dates from Jamaica suggest settlement not much earlier than A.D. 645 while the bulk of settlement (178 sites) are White Marl and Montego Bay (c. A.D. 950 - 1545). Three short chapters 8, 9 and 10 then outline petroglyphs and pictographs, excavated faunal assemblages and burials and human remains. More detailed data on aspects of these topics appear on the CD-ROM.

Chapter 11 Conclusion is not really a conclusion about Pre-Columbian Jamaica (which would anyway perhaps be somewhat premature) but is a conclusion on the present state of Pre-Columbian archaeology on Jamaica. Many of the valuable comments could be equally applied to most other islands in the Caribbean. Older collections (like the Lee collection) are invaluable resources needing re-evaluation, development is threatening to destroy many sites, publication of data is needed, faunal and human remains need study, key sites need protection. As the author concludes 'the foundations have been well laid, but so much more needs to be done'. Clearly this is true. If the author

of this book had based his project on his own fieldwork rather than on a pre-existing archive he would no doubt have done things differently. Instead he has provided a major basis on which future archaeologists in the region can plan new research. Archaeologists in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean owe Dr Allsworth-Jones a debt of gratitude for making available and ordering Lee's important, but until now largely unknown and unpublished, archive.

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*The views expressed in this review are not necessarily those of the Society or the Reviews Editor*