Notes From The Caribbean

Roderick Ebanks

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Matthew Reeves, a graduate student from Syracuse University, has since 1992 been looking for, without success, the Maroon settlement of Juan deBolas. This year he is back in Jamaica working on a Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Produce and Market -- A Comparative Analysis of African-Jamaican Slave Accessibility to Market Goods."

This thesis is based on Hall and Mintz's work on the creation and development of the Jamaican internal marketing system. The study sets out to test the hypothesis that with a decrease in intensity of the enslaved peoples involvement in agricultural production, there would have been an increase in their ability to produce ground provisions, and therefore their access to material goods through the markets increased.

To test this, Reeves intends looking at material assemblages excavated from slave settlements located on plantations of known production regimes and scale within a common geographic region.

Dr. Kofi Agorsah, who was the first archeologist with the University of the West Indies, Mona campus, has now moved on to Portland State. He recently completed a three year period of excavations at the Maroon settlement of Nanny Town, some 14 miles into the tropical forest area of the John Crow Mountains in northeast Jamaica.

The preliminary results are extremely interesting. The site can be divided into three phases, namely: Taino, Taino/Maroon and Maroon/English. The results suggest that the Maroon oral traditions as given by Ebanks in 1976 are in large measure correct. A preliminary report has been published in the Archaeological Society of Jamaica's newsletter 1993. The final report is eagerly awaited.

Roderick Ebanks, Technical Director of Archaeology at the Jamaica National Heritage Trust, has finally completed his M.Phil. thesis on the "History of Jamaican Ceramics 1655-1840." The thesis is constructed in such a way as to relate the ceramics of this period with those of the preceding period, i.e. Taino and Iberian, and the following period, i.e. post-1840. The research objectives were three-fold and included:

- A definition of the red earthenware assemblage from two sites; the Old King's House of Spanish Town and the New Street site of Port Royal to include technic and stylistic data.
- To trace origins of the assemblage over time from possible sources to and in Jamaica.
- To investigate the assemblage for socio-cultural meaning.

A multi-disciplinary approach was used including petrographic studies, oral history and archival research, and artifactual analysis based in atypological exercise that included comparing the material with that from other sites in Jamaica, in Europe and in West Africa. The results are as follows:
The red earthenware assemblage can be divided into four complexes including:

a. Circum Caribbean; imported from southern North America, i.e. Florida; Central American, possibly northern South America; and included native Indian and syncretic types, i.e. Indian and European.

b. West African-indigenised. No imported wares have yet been identified.

c. European-imported and indigenised mainly Iberian and English.

d. A syncretic tradition, created in Jamaica, that combined African and European technological and stylistic elements in such a way as to create an independent and new ceramic tradition.

That the indigenised European and one of the West African sub-complexes were traceable to their points of origin.

Through petrographic analysis it was found that the indigenised African complex was divided between two locations in Jamaica, Spanish Town and the Liguanea Plain. The indigenised English potters were located on the Liguanea Plain and the syncretic potters worked on the Liguanea Plain.

Each of the three major indigenised complexes began operating in Jamaica between 1655 and 1700, peaking between 1750 and 1800, and continuing into the modern era.

Each of these complexes participated in the internal marketing system with wares being traded as far away as Drax Hall (50 miles away) on the northwest coast, Savanna la Mar (105 miles away) on the southwest coast, and Morant Bay (40 miles) on the southeast coast.

The earthenware industry exhibits inter and intra-complex differentiation. The African-Jamaican complex has to be viewed from the African perspective or differentiation in this complex is not easily recognized. One specific point of differentiation is the role of women in the African-Jamaican economy and society.