

Corinne L. Hofman and Floris W. M. Keehnen, eds, *Material Encounters and Indigenous Transformations in The Early Colonial Americas* (Boston: Brill, 2019). Print, xxii + 399 pp., USD \$210.00, ISBN: 9789004392458.



Review

Material Encounters and Indigenous Transformations In The Early Colonial Americas is a robust contribution to archaeological scholarship on the earliest stages of European colonization of the Americas. Throughout the fifteen chapters provided from both early career and established scholars, which span the end of the fifteenth century to the early seventeenth century, a narrative emerges depicting the early colonial period as a complex web of cultural entanglements and bidirectional exchange, which clearly contrast from older paradigms of colonialization as a unidirectional cultural flow and power projection. The authors each present well-constructed arguments in their studies, with a diverse range of geographic locales, from the earliest points of contact in the Caribbean, to the jungles of Mesoamerica, and finally the deserts of Mexico and the Southwest United States. As a volume, the book seeks to add to the continued decolonizing of archaeological research in the early Americas seen in more recent decades.

The opening chapter by the editors sets the stage for the remaining authors of the volume, providing brief summaries of the case studies, and identifying the way in which the authors will collectively amend some longstanding narratives in both academic and popular culture through the use of new archaeological data.

Proceeding through time and geographic spaces in each consecutive chapter, a variety of cultural exchange, interaction, and material entanglement processes are progressively described, demonstrating that colonialization was not a uniform process which was imposed by Europeans and inevitably crushed indigenous identities. While some cultures like the Lucayans, located in the Bahamas in chapter two, readily accepted European objects, sites such as El Cabo and Playa Grande in Chapter six show a resilience in indigenous ceramic manufacturing techniques, most notably with a refusal to abandon traditional coiling techniques with vessel formation in lieu of adopting the pottery wheel after its introduction by the Spanish.

Further case studies in following chapters shift to the mainland, with focus on Mesoamerican trade dynamics between the Maya and early Spanish expeditions, conversion processes in southern Mexico, conflicts and indigenous fortification in Honduras, technological exchange and hybridization processes in central Mexico, war and peace in the present US Southwest, as well as confrontation and political maneuvering between rival colonial powers and indigenous groups in the Guianas. A final case study shifts back to the Caribbean where earliest contact took place, demonstrating that despite the depopulation of the indigenous groups over time, heavy resistance was encountered by the Spanish early on, and over time escaped slaves contributed to a mixed ethnic identity in the region.

If there is one weakness, it would be that a reader searching for a set of case studies which shed light on early colonial encounters with European powers other

than the Spanish, is to look elsewhere. Aside from minor mentions of the Dutch and British, the book lacks case studies focused on the early material and cultural transformations experienced by indigenous peoples as well as colonizers outside of Spanish control. However, this is a minor criticism of an otherwise exceptional collection of archaeological case studies, and for the purposes of establishing a coherent research narrative, a narrow focus is beneficial.

To summarize, *Material Encounters and Indigenous Transformations In The Early Colonial Americas* offers a critical analysis of historic records and ethnohistorical sources from the early points of contact between indigenous Americans and European colonists with the results of archaeological fieldwork and museum collections. The origins of the complex modern ethnic identities in former Spanish colonies are illustrated through the case studies, particularly in the Caribbean. The long held historic narratives of the unidirectional colonialization process give way to a much more nuanced collection of micro processes, where indigenous armed resistance, politics, selective adoption or rejection of technologies and trade materials, as well as the role European objects play within differing indigenous cultures in the case studies. The way in which Europeans evolve in their interactions is also of note, with early trade interactions taking advantage of pre-made “gift kits”, which progressively gave way to the Spanish system of *Ecomienda*. However, the bidirectional nature of the cultural transformations are keenly reflected in chapters such as ‘Resignification As A Fourth Narrative’, where despite a violent evangelical campaign in Hidalgo, material objects such as ceramics in religious settlements

remained surprisingly traditional. With this and the plethora of examples in other case studies, as well as the introduction and conclusion, the book as a whole is a valuable contribution to the process of decolonizing archaeological studies in the Americas. Hofman and Keehnen set out with their coauthors to illustrate the complexity, indigenous agency, and diversity in colonial encounters, and do so successfully while highlighting the importance of ongoing archaeological research in the Caribbean and other understudied regions. It is recommendable to any student or scholar on both sides of the Atlantic who require an introduction to the early colonial period, or wish to introduce themselves to the archaeological fieldwork and theory within interdisciplinary studies of the Early Modern Period.

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