the sixteenth century. At the outset, several approaches to managing the conquered native population were institutionalized: encomienda, repartimiento, and congregación. An encomienda was a grant of land to a Spaniard, which included the resident native people. Ideally, the encomendero was obligated to provide for the welfare of the indigenous population on his grant, assuring a civilizing process in exchange for their labor. The repartimiento was a labor levy, usually managed through the native chiefs, which required a set period of service. The demora, or period of required labor, might be fulfilled locally or at a distance from the individual’s home settlement. Congregación involved movement of indigenous people to areas nearer Spanish interests, both residential and commercial. Congregación often resulted in the destruction of native settlements and the creation of “vacant lands” thereafter granted to Spaniards.

And what of the civilizing process? Native peoples tended to fulfill their demoras, return to their villages, and resume indigenous lifeways and ceremonial patterns. The resumption of practices, which to Spaniards were idolatrous, indicated that Christianizing efforts made no lasting impression on the natives of Hispaniola. This observation convinced Spaniards that natives were not capable of achieving civilized life and justified their exploitation in commercial enterprises as conquered peoples. Population decline from maltreatment began soon after contact in the late fifteenth century. Spaniards were aware of the declining population on Hispaniola, and a vigorous slave trade for replacements was underway. In 1511, the Dominican Antonio de Montesinos preached a sermon that castigated Spaniards as sinners for the deaths of native peoples. The Laws of Burgos were promulgated a year later as a result of Crown concerns with these accusations. These laws were intended to alleviate maltreatment of native peoples, but they legalized many of the practices responsible for native deaths. Other such laws would follow, but they were generally ignored by colonial government functionaries. For native peoples, there was no effective relief from maltreatment.

Two primary sources, the Repartimiento of 1514 and the Hieronymite Interrogatory of 1517, are used to gain insights relevant to the treatment of indigenous peoples. By the time these documents were written, however, commercial exploitation of Hispaniola was well underway, and local populations were already severely diminished. It is clear that these documents were written to justify the status quo: encomienda grants, forced labor of native peoples, movement to work sites from their settlements, and intra-island and extra-island relocation of native peoples.

Anderson-Córdova stresses the implications of her findings for archaeologists. The movement of people within the islands of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico and inter-island slave raiding in the islands of the Lesser Antilles are significant matters for archaeologists. Postcontact-period archaeology in the Caribbean is not yet well developed, but there are insights of significance. It is clear that native lifeways persisted in some areas, but examples are few. More important is the probability of cultural mixing; that material remains in archaeological sites represent blended or new cultures arising from postconquest conditions.

The term holocaust was appropriated in the mid-twentieth century to encompass the depredations against the Jews of Europe and other people who did not conform to measures of racial purity required by the German National Socialist state. Anderson-Córdova shows us that holocaust is a term that also should be applied to the depredations that ended the lives and cultures of native peoples of the New World. For Native Americans, this holocaust began in the Caribbean on the island of Hispaniola. The social, commercial, religious, and governmental policies developed so early in the contact period on Hispaniola and Puerto Rico would be imported and applied widely in many other colonial areas of the Americas. For native peoples, the result would be the same.


Reviewed by Patricia A. McAnany, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Challenging the orthodoxy of a unified ethnic identity called “The Maya,” this book reckons with the meaning of material remains, language and hieroglyphs, oral history, ethnography, and contemporary cultural critique. Ambitious in temporal scope, some chapters delve deeply into the past while others contemplate the impact of constructs about the past on the present. In a manner that is characteristic of Maya studies, the book is remarkably inter-disciplinary and includes eleven chapters written by ethnographers, historians, archaeologists, linguists, epigraphers, and a bioarchaeologist. The diversity of critical perspectives on identity and ethnicity creates a critical mass of scholarship that hopefully will topple the apocryphal notion...
that an identity called Maya—past or present—ever existed in the monolithic fashion that is entrenched in archaeological prose.

A welcome contribution to this book on “the only true people” is the voice of Juan Castillo Cocom, in Chapter 3, who, with fellow co-authors, calls for an ethnoexodus or escape from the straitjacket of “Mayaland,” that imposes a National Geographic-style timeless Maya ethnicity on contemporary people who have deep taproots in this part of the world. Although he is not the first to talk about ethnoracialized stereotyping as repressive ascription that results in a loss of self-representation, the inclusion of a critique-from-the-inside in an edited book on Maya culture and archaeology indicates that Maya archaeological praxis is becoming more reflexive and inclusive. In an artful inversion of the anthropological schema of Maya cosmology that emphasizes four quadrants of a plane with a ceiba tree at the center, authors model the four quadrants as the Western-knowledge juggernaut of linguistics, history, anthropology, and archaeology that together produce a ceiba called Maya culture and identity (p. 54). Instead of this monolithic edifice, the authors suggest the concept of iknal—indicative of a social agency that includes “perspective, presence, action, and attitudes” (p. 50)—as a way to exit the trap of ethnoracialization that harms both descendant peoples and scholarship.

“The Only True People” begins with an introduction by Bethany Beyyette, in which ethnogenesis is linked with political factors such as colonization and oppressive regimes. From this perspective, bounded ethnic identities—specifically in the Maya region—could exist as a response to sixteenth-century colonialism (and its aftermath) or a phenomenon that occurs whenever salient political factors are in play. Given the tremendous linguistic diversity that exists in the southern highland portions of the Maya region, it is easy to see why the concept of ethno linguistic groupings is often invoked by ethnographers. In Chapter 2, ethnographer C. Mathews Samson begins with a broad look at identity across the Maya region and observes that pronounced diversity in the extent to which ethnicity is invoked and mobilized—particularly for political resistance—is dependent, to a large extent, upon local engagement with the nation-states with which ethnolinguistically Mayan groups find themselves in negotiation. In Maya Cultural Heritage: How Archaeology and Indigenous Communities Engage the Past (Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), I echo this point in reference to claims on ancestral places. Samson emphasizes that the multiple faces of identity—including an evangelical Christian identity—are probably more salient to people’s lives today than the unified identity that is projected in the political arena.

In Chapter 4, linguist Charles Hofling presents an analysis of the distribution of lowland Mayan language groups. Employing lexical similarities and differences, Hofling concludes that the Itzaj and Mopan ethnolinguistic groups—now restricted to southern Petén and southern Belize—are derived from a proto-Yukatekan language. A lack of any necessary linkage between language and ethnicity is asserted in Chapter 5 by Matthew Restall and Wolfgang Gabbert. In an argument that has been rehearsed in other publications, Restall and Gabbert note that the term Maya is conspicuously absent from historical records. Sources for Yucatán do indicate, however, that Maya senses of identity generally revolve(d) around the local community (cah) and a wider, spidery network of lineage connections (chibal). Early colonial evidence suggests that the term Maya was used in reference to residents of Postclassic Mayapan, located in northern Yucatán. Over time, the term was borrowed by linguists, ethnographers, and archaeologists for shorthand notation of an alarmingly large area. Thus, although critiques of the term Maya in Chapters 3 and 5 begin at very different places, they converge on the same conclusion.

Combining linguistics with epigraphy, Martha Macri, in Chapter 6, suggests that Classic Maya royal courts participated in a social network that was larger and more diverse than previously thought. Although the term hybridity is seldom invoked in reference to royal courts, the intermingling of Ch’ol and Yukatekan words in hieroglyphic texts, the inclusion of a Nahua term for high nobility, and the use of terms for stranger in reference to nobility all suggest a porous community, which correspondingly implies that variable identities coexisted within Classic period royal courts (another nail in the coffin).

Chapters 7 to 10 turn to strictly archaeological approaches to identity. Lisa LeCount, in Chapter 7, focuses on the upper Belize valley—the interstices between the Petén heartland of kings and the eastern Caribbean seaboard, where rulership, if present, was expressed in a less orthodox fashion. She suggests that hegemonic processes, which so often lead to ethnic boundaries, were present at this interface but shies away from asserting that ethnogenesis was the resulting condition. Turning to the Classic royal court of Palenque in Chapter 8, Damien Marken, Stanley Guenter, and David Freidel comment on the singularity of Palenque (in reference to architecture, ceramics, and patron deities). Many now recognize that patron deities and their shrines—specific to place—provided critical social integration that cut across widespread
horizontal networks that produced and reproduced royal courts.

In Chapter 9, Marcello Canuto and Ellen Bell consider the farthest southeastern extent of the network of royal courts—located in the Copan Valley and contiguous areas during Classic times. Authors focus on the construction of proximate centers that were built in very different architectural styles, e.g., El Paraíso, constructed in emulation of the restricted access characteristic of Copan, and El Cafetal, which was built with large, open-access plazas. Pushing back the ethnolinguistic boundary known to have existed in this region since the sixteenth century, the authors suggest that ethnogenesis indeed may have been an operative concept for understanding architectural and artefactual differences. Focusing on humans buried at the Classic site of Copan and also Preclassic K’aaxob (located in northern Belize), Rebecca Storey, in Chapter 10, presents a study of dental characteristics that suggest no significant differences between the two burial populations despite pronounced contrasts in mortuary treatment and burial accoutrements. By way of concluding comments, Edward Schortman, in Chapter 11, considers the fragility inherent in a royal court structure in which vertical group integration via sacred propositions must be balanced with horizontal political networks of paramount importance. Finally, he observes that books such as “The Only True People” call for “deep probing of disciplinary habitus” (p. 273), which is only one of the reasons this book should be read by all students of Maya archaeology, of ethnicity, and of postcolonial racialization.


Reviewed by Anna C. Roosevelt, Anthropology, University of Illinois at Chicago

This intriguing but also frustrating book is a catalogue that illustrates, describes, and discusses the representations of animals in the styles of the prehistoric Saladoid ceramic horizon. Most of these animal images are adornos: small sculptured figures, sometimes painted, attached to the rims and handles of pottery vessels for cooking and serving. Rarer are effigy vessels in the form of animals. Rarer still are animal images merged with those of other animals or with humans. Although the title mentions only the lesser Antilles, the text makes extensive comparisons with the animal imagery of earlier Saladoid pottery in the South American mainland: the Orinoco and Caribbean coast. After an introduction and explanation of the author’s approach, the book proceeds with chapters on different animal groups: mammals of the land and water, bats, birds, and reptiles and amphibians. The author characterizes the different taxa and the roles they play, both in their environments and in the mythology of indigenous cultures of the tropical lowlands and Antilles. The book is based on the author’s dissertation research: a first-hand study of hundreds of examples of pottery fragments and whole vessels from numerous collections of Saladoid pottery in the lesser Antilles. In tables at the back of the book the author lists the numbers of animals he has identified in different regions, and in the text he seeks to explain the possible ecological causes of the variations in their distribution in the region. His explanations use information about indigenous societies from several ethnographic monographs on indigenous cultures that survived into the 20th and 21st centuries in South America.

The book is a worthy and useful contribution, firstly because it introduces readers to Saladoid, an exquisite and complex prehistoric art style of the Caribbean mainland and islands, about which little has been published in venues easily accessible to the public. The book is also interesting for readers because it draws attention not only to the intricate and sensitive images of animals in the ancient art style but also to the living animals themselves, their ecological niches, and the indigenous artists and their cultures. Readers can learn about ancient art, indigenous societies, tropical lowland habitats, and some of their animals. The book also is enjoyable to read because the author has considerable ability to express his ideas skillfully and evocatively. His occasional extended riffs about habitats and the way animals interact with them are delightful in themselves.

One of the author’s goals is to delineate and explain the history of Saladoid iconography from its origin in the Orinoco to its culmination in the Greater Antilles. But the book is quite flawed by inaccuracies in areas that are important to this goal: the identification of animal images, the character of habitats, the occurrence of different animals in the art of different places and times, and the roles of men and women in indigenous cultures. Sharp-eyed readers will find fault with some of his identifications. For example, several of his “birds” do not have beaks, but mammal muzzles with mouths and nostrils at their tips. His enumeration of the animal images in early Venezuelan Saladoid styles in the tables are not at all accurate. He leaves out most