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REVIEWS

R. K. Skowronek and C. R. Ewan (eds) 2006. *X Marks the Spot: the Archaeology of Piracy*. University Press of Florida, Florida. Hardback. 339 pp., figs, plates, bib., index. US\$55.

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Everyone, be they child or child at heart, knows what a pirate looks like: peg-leg, eye-patch, an abundance of cannon (loaded, of course), and a Jolly Roger dangling jauntily from the mast of his ship. Pirates and pirate imagery have long been staples in our society. Pirate characters are as popular today as they were when James Barrie first penned Peter Pan and R. L. Stevenson first thought of the name Long John Silver. The popular cartoon *Spongebob Squarepants* has a loudmouthed pirate named Captain Bart. The 2003 blockbuster movie *Pirates of the Caribbean* (along with its 2006 sequel) features Johnny Depp as that loveable rogue Captain Jack Sparrow. Popular heavy metal bands such as Running Wild, Battleheart and Manowar have long used pirate imagery in their lyrics, album covers and stage shows.

Piracy is the act of unlawfully seizing ships, cargo, sailors and passengers for profit, and has been the scourge of sailors since the first voyages of maritime trade. The evidence of piracy can be most readily seen in documentation from ships logs, court records and trading papers. Hence, pirates are most often studied and commented upon by historians. In this unique volume, however, it is archaeologists' turn to identify and investigate piracy

This volume combines essays from archaeologists working on sites that are in some way related to pirates during the 17–18th centuries. The book is divided into three sections: the first, “Pirate Lairs”, deals with land sites associated with piracy; the second, “Pirate Ships and their Prey”, is devoted to pirate-associated maritime archaeology; and the section, “Pirates in Fact or Fiction”, is an appraisal of past and modern conceptions of piracy and how these influence the study of pirates. This is a sensible division of the essays and gives the volume a well-defined structure that it might otherwise lack as a work combining writings by diverse authors on many different sites and locations.

‘Pirate Lairs’ begins with a chapter detailing the archaeological investigations at Port Royal, Jamaica (D. L. Hamilton). Port Royal was an infamous merchant and pirate port in the seventeenth century before it was destroyed by an earthquake in 1692. Working from the historical evidence Hamilton conducted a long-running underwater investigation of the port. He details his results and the results of other underwater excavations, mostly in the form of shipwrecks. Hamilton concludes that little archaeological evidence can be found relating specifically to pirates, and nothing was found that could be attributed to any of the famous Port Royal pirate clientele: Henry Morgan, Mary Read, Anne Bonney and Calico Jack Rackham. He explains that the wealth of the pirates was transitory, soon ending up in the hands of the merchants and brothel-owners of Port Royal. He concludes that the best evidence of piracy comes from the shipwreck surveys, and these rely upon accurate historical documentation in order to be identified as pirate vessels.

Other ‘Pirate Lairs’ that are discussed include the surveys of Jean Lafitte’s lair on Grand Terre Island, and studies of the archaeology of the Bay of Honduras, where many pirates joined the communities of logwood cutters after the British began to successfully eliminate piracy in the Caribbean and Atlantic in the 1720s. Both chapters conclude that it is difficult to discern artefacts, features and landscapes distinctly related to pirates, and stress the necessity of historical documentation.

The second section, ‘Pirate Ships and their Prey’, comprises the literary equivalent of a treasure chest, brimming with gold and jewels and booty aplenty. The brightest jewel is without a doubt the wreck of the *Queen Anne’s Revenge*, the flagship of Edward Teach (commonly known as Blackbeard) discovered by Intersal Inc. in 1996. M. U. Wilde-Ramsing outlines the archaeological techniques used to locate, map, survey and excavate the wreck, and discusses the historical evidence that has led him to confidently pronounce the ship to be Blackbeard’s galley. Following this, W. R. Lusardi describes the artefact assemblage – with particular attention to the dating of artefacts – and offers his arguments to why the ship might not be the *Queen Anne’s Revenge*.

An interesting edition to this volume is C. E. Hamilton’s chapter on the *Whydah Galley*, flagship of the pirate ‘Black’ Sam Bellemy. The *Whydah* is unique because it is the only vessel so far discovered that can positively be identified as a pirate ship, owing to the recovery of the ship’s bell bearing the inscription “THE WHYDAH GALLEY 1716.” However, the excavation, recording and interpretation of the *Whydah* is under the auspices of Barry Clifford, who is not an archaeologist but a treasure-hunter. As such, this remarkable vessel has not been adequately published – except in Clifford’s auto-

biography. The artefacts and features of the *Whydah* are not as well recorded, interpreted or published as the other works in the volume, and this chapter stands in stark contrast to the thorough and meticulous work of the *Queen Anne's Revenge* archaeologists.

The final chapter in this section (R. K. Skowronek and C. R. Ewan) takes a unique approach to pirate archaeology, discussing Caribbean piracy through evidence of its victims, the Spanish Colonies. They conclude that an increased fear of piracy was evident in the erection, enlargement and modification of fortifications, particularly those guarding harbours. Quantification of ceramic ware (one of the few items that have an identifiable point of origin via maker's marks) also shows fluctuations in the frequency of 'Spanish' and 'non-Spanish' (probably illicit) trade items.

'Pirates in Fact and Fiction' serves as the conclusion of the volume. L. E. Babits, J. B. Howard and M. Brenkle first discuss, using examples from the previous chapters, what differentiates a pirate ship from a merchant vessel (alterations, excessive and varied munitions), and how the modern pirate imagery differs from the reality of pirate life. Skowronek concludes the book with a chapter outlining modern conception of piracy, including the recent phenomena of music and movie 'piracy' on the internet. He discusses the ramifications of this on the archaeology of piracy.

The main concern of all the projects outlined in this volume is the identification of pirate artefacts or sites. All of the archaeologists conclude that it is difficult to identify artefacts or sites as specifically belonging to pirates and that there does not appear to be a specific pirate 'assemblage' or a method of definitively identifying piracy in the archaeological record. All of the authors stress the importance of historical documentation on their research, and all stress that further study is necessary in this interesting field.

This book has proven to be one of recent archaeology's more engaging and intriguing reads. The recent resurgence in popularity of pirates (through the blockbuster *Pirates of the Caribbean* movies) has given these archaeologists the perfect opportunity to showcase their work on a subject that will appeal to the general public as well as fellow archaeologists and academics. The language in the book is straightforward without being too simplistic, and the editors have ensured a strong connective flow throughout.

I feel that the concluding chapters were a little light and might have included some discussion of the impact of treasure-hunters on pirate archaeology, especially considering the inclusion of C. E. Hamilton's chapter in the volume. I also feel that more weight might have been added to the concluding chapters by combining evidence from more of the myriad of examples from the previous chapters, as only a few were discussed, and none in adequate

detail. However, as I have stated, all of the authors offered similar conclusions: the difficulty of identifying piracy sites, the importance of historical documentation in studying piracy and the need for further research. Perhaps further reiteration of these points in the concluding chapter is not necessary and would clutter the clarity of the text.

X Marks the Spot: the Archaeology of Piracy is a volume of impressive scholastic and archaeological treasure-hunting. Its subject matter has been sadly neglected by archaeologists and it proves a rewarding and welcome contribution to studies of pirates. This book will capture the imagination of archaeologists, sailors and landlubbers alike.

Chris Ballard, Paula Brown, R Michael Bourke and Tracy Harwood (eds), 2005. *The Sweet Potato in Oceania: A Reappraisal*. Ethnology Monographs 19, University of Pittsburgh, Oceania Monograph 56, University of Sydney. Paper, viii + 227 pp., bib., index. \$USD56.00.

Louise Furey, CFG Heritage Ltd

This volume of papers is the outcome of a session of the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania held in Auckland in 2002. Thirteen participants contributed, and five other papers were subsequently solicited. The title of the conference session was ‘Sweet Potato in the Pacific – a reassessment’, focussing on advances on the model for sweet potato introduction and diffusion in the Pacific put forward by Doug Yen in 1974 when he published *The Sweet Potato and Oceania: An Essay in Ethnobotany*. The editors acknowledge that this volume does not cover all aspects of advances in knowledge over the last 30 years, with genetic work in particular being singled out as an omission.

There are nine chapters on Melanesia and in particular New Guinea, two on Polynesia, and others on the contributions of microfossil work, South American origins and connections, Maori mythology of the kumara, a review of evidence for chronology and introduction to island groups, one on how kumara may have been perceived, an introductory chapter, and a reflective concluding chapter by Doug Yen. There is a mix of archaeology- and anthropology-oriented papers and the diverse range of topics will enhance future discussion and research directions.

The book provides an up-to-date summary of the contribution of sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*), cultivation practices and the social changes brought about by the adoption of sweet potato into the role in the economy of island societies and New Guinea.

Sweet potato has had a significant impact in parts of the Pacific, particularly in New Guinea where it provides 60% of food energy and is the dominant staple for more than half of the population. It is one of the few crops capable of growing in a range of temperatures and altitudes, is more productive than taro in New Guinea, has a shorter growing season and produces well even on soils of moderate to low fertility.

Richard Scaglione reviews the South American evidence, and use of the term *cumar* (*comal*, *cumal*) for sweet potato in Ecuador, suggesting that further research is warranted in this geographic area which might, in time, prove to be the place of Polynesian contact.

Two chapters on Polynesian archaeology emphasise the importance of sweet potato as a crop tolerant of drought conditions, allowing agricultural expansion into more marginal areas. James Coil and Pat Kirch describe the field systems based on stone walls and mounds on the dry, stony volcanic landscape of Kahikinui on Maui, while in the chapter on Rapa Nui Paul Wallin, Christopher Stevenson and Thegn Ladefoged link the introduction and increased dominance of drought tolerant sweet potato, with higher yields and surplus, to the construction of monumental architecture by the elite.

Several chapters on New Guinea focus on the role sweet potato has played in social changes following introduction of the tuber in historic times—the so-called Ipomoean Revolution. The social, ritual and symbolic roles of sweet potato in the highlands of New Guinea are outlined by Polly Wiessner, while Paula Brown and Harold Brookfield describe how the introduction of the more tolerant sweet potato allowed the intensification of pig husbandry, extending to the development of elaborate festivals requiring a large labour input and planning over several years. The connection between sweet potato and pig husbandry is also addressed in the archaeological chapter by Tim Bayliss-Smith, Jack Golson, Philip Hughes, Russell Blong and Wal Ambrose on the swamp channels in the Kuk Swamp in the upper Waghi Valley. Although the construction of ditch drainage systems for taro date back 9000 years, the reduction in number of channels and drains in the post-Ipomoean period is believed to be associated with the increased use of dry-land areas for growing sweet potato, and a redistribution of labour away from drainage maintenance and towards social activities associated with pigs. In a chapter on the relatively unknown area of Papua, Anton Ploeg surveyed ethnographic literature which indicates there is variation in the extent to which sweet potato has been adopted and its influence on societies. Papua is also the subject of the chapter by Alexander Yaku and Caecilia Widyastuti on research into modern use of sweet potato.

The most interesting papers, from my perspective, were two written by New Zealand archaeologists although not directly in relation to New Zealand. Roger Green's comprehensive review of who was responsible for introducing sweet potato into Polynesia favours Polynesians as eastward voyagers, returning with **kuumala* and other plants including the bottle gourd. Green then reviews the linguistic, historical and archaeological evidence and concludes that sweet potato entered Polynesia about AD 1000–1100 via the island groups of central eastern Polynesia. He concludes that Mangaia was the most probable source for the kumara introduced into New Zealand. Western Polynesia has not been ignored in his review of the evidence, and the chapter concludes with discussion of possible modes and chronology of transfer westwards. While Green's contribution emphasised how the tuber got from A to B, Helen Leach's paper addressed why sweet potato may have been selected by the Polynesian voyagers for introduction into Polynesia. The chapter is thought-provoking and comprehensively argued: she speculates that of all the potential cultigens available in South America, sweet potato was possibly considered a form of yam as both cultigens have a similar leaf shape, are unlike taro in being seasonal and require storage of the harvested tubers, and both are planted on mounds. Kumara in New Zealand, being a more adaptive plant and therefore more widely grown, may have taken over some of the rituals ascribed to yam. The rapid disappearance of yam soon after European arrival means there is little information on how it was cultivated. There are other questions to be asked about the yam in New Zealand—for instance why it persisted in the gardening system over hundreds of years if it was difficult to grow, and why it disappeared in a few decades after European arrival.

Expressing a personal bias, I think a chapter on New Zealand where kumara was a highly significant crop would have rounded the book out and emphasised both the adaptiveness of sweet potato and the challenges in a social sense to grow, and then maintain the crop in storage. The field is wide open for further research in use of kumara (and relationship to other crops) in New Zealand.

I found this collection of papers very readable and the text and figures are well set out. I recommend the book to archaeologists and also to students. It will retain its relevance and not be outdated for some time to come. Doug Yen, as is fitting, had the final say in the book. He concurred that the basic story (bar genetic work) has been written, but there will continue to be fine tuning with regard to origins and the continuing importance of sweet potato as both a food, and the possibility of use as a fuel in the future.