

**Olivier, José R. (Ed.) *El caribe precolombino. Fray Ramón Pané y el universo taíno.* Catalogue of the Exhibit organized by the Museu Barbier-Mueller d'Art Precolombí, with the collaboration of The British Museum, Ministerio de Cultura, Museo de América and Fundación Caixa Galicia, 2008, 285 pp. ISBN 978-84-9850-105-6.**

The catalogue edited by José R. Olivier, Colin McEwan, and Anna Casas Gilberga presents Taino artefacts in the context of the culture that produced them. While its title promises the reader research on Pre-Columbian Taino culture, only one of its seven essays deals with pre-contact Taino practices from an archaeological perspective that does not move along the analytical axes of Spanish colonization or European collectionism.

There seem to be very different criteria and interests at play in the making of this exhibit and catalogue. Jean Paul Barbier-Mueller's essay deals with Columbus's travels in a celebratory manner. The well-known collector's thoughts appear Eurocentric in the context of the catalogue, insofar as he is mostly concerned with celebrating the figures of Columbus and of the Catalan friar Ramón Pané. Nonetheless, this appears to be an isolated case with regard to the other authors. In his essay on Pané, Jaume Aymar i Ragolta brings detailed information and images of the Monastery where Pané resided, Sant Jeroni de la Murtra, and general information on the Hieronymite monastic order. One of the catalogue's goals is to highlight Pané's contact with the Tainos. In fact, we owe Pané the partial access we have to anonymous Taino voices from the contact period. Following Columbus's orders, this friar managed to gather information on Taino mythology and *cemis* (religious artefacts) from native informants, while dealing with language barriers and material difficulties. Consuelo Varela and Juan Gil, two well-renowned specialists on Columbus, make a brief but worthy contribution to the volume, providing bibliographical and documental information that may be useful for those studying Pané's *Relación* and the specific circumstances of his arrival in the New

World. Olivier's essay on Columbus's second travel and his strategies for enslaving the Tainos presents a contrasting portrait of the Admiral when compared to Barbier-Mueller's contribution.

The section of nineteen illustrations in the center of the volume is undoubtedly one of the jewels of this catalogue. The Taino religious and cultural objects, many of them shown to the public for the first time, have been masterfully photographed, allowing readers to observe up close and in detail Taino objects that are the material traces of a people and a culture destroyed by colonialism. They mark the existence of a nation that, otherwise, we can only approach through the writings of those who conquered and colonized them, like Columbus and Pané, and through the archaeological research that began being conducted in the eighteenth century. Paz Cabello Carro's essay underscores this aspect by opportunely revising the relation between the origins of archaeological research and colonialism.

In the one but insightful essay that deals with Taino culture from the pre-contact period, Olivier transports the readers to the *cohoba* ritual in a welcome attempt to understand Taino culture through its material traces and on its own terms. But the editors are not ingenuous and, as Cabello Carro's essay reminds us, our research methodologies stem from their inception from colonial relations and practices. McEwan's essay further stresses the point that researching this period involves handling knowledge and objects gained in situations of violent colonial domination.

The editors also include Pane's complete *Relación de las antigüedades de los yndios*, a central piece for understanding the contact period that should receive more critical attention. Unfortunately, the edition presented here is modernized and does not appear to have been cared for by a specialist, and in the well-intended dedication to José Juan Arrom, who pioneered studies on Pané, his name has been miswritten.

In sum, this catalogue confronts readers with the dense network of colonial relations of domination that have determined the circulation of Taino objects since 1492, ultimately calling to reflect on epistemic colonialism. In this sense, *El Caribe precolombino* holds great value for Colonial Studies, as it reminds us of the complexity and challenges harboured not just by our objects but also of our fields of study.

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