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Mark Hauser, Northwestern University, USA:

Perennial Problem Solving

Abstract:

Extreme weather events, changing precipitation, and sea-level rise have made those living in the global north more mindful of the vulnerability of lives and livelihoods due to climate change. For centuries, people living on Caribbean islands, particularly those who are most economically and politically vulnerable, have been at the forefront of solving climate problems, including agricultural precarity, water resource management, and forced migration. Eighteenth-century sugar cultivation made everyday life more precarious for enslaved laborers, Kalinago, and smallholders, especially with regard to issues of subsistence, land, and its resources. Sugar cane had a detrimental effect on soil and water availability. Plantation economies led to forced migration and conscription of people to and from Dominica as planters attempted to meet labor needs and cut costs when markets faltered. Despite the harsh conditions of slavery, enslaved laborers in regimented plantation villages carved out new spaces where they could lead rich social lives with social networks extending to other communities on Dominica and beyond, including Kalinago and Maroon. Through these ties, they cultivated a set of ecological priorities that promoted woodland management and helped solve the problems created by cash-crop economies. Household assemblages provide insights into everyday solutions created by the enslaved to resolve the issue of scarcity and secure their lives and livelihoods.

Bio:

Mark Hauser is a historical anthropologist who focusses on the economic and ecological legacies of slavery in the Caribbean and South India. His works use the archaeological record of households to compare and connect how marginalized people negotiated landscapes of inequality in everyday life. His first book, *An Archaeology of Black Markets* (University of Florida Press 2008), maps the informal economies of enslaved people in Jamaica through the utilitarian pottery they made and with which they furnished their houses, to trace the cultural and political registers of their everyday lives. His most recent book, *Mapping water in Dominica* (Washington 2021), examines the archaeological record of water, its management, and everyday uses during the island's short-lived 'sugar revolution,' to map the ecological legacies of colonialism and slavery in the Caribbean. His current research, on the labor histories and social lives of two communities in the Caribbean and South India, explores a 'prehistory' of the global south by mapping the movement of people, objects, and ideas between two oceans.