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Indigenous Animal Management Practices on the Eve of Columbus' Landfall

Isotopic and Zooarchaeological Investigations in the
Dominican Republic and Jamaica



Gene T. Shev



The five case studies that comprise this volume detail zooarchaeological and isotopic investigations of animal mortality ages, morphologies, and dietary linkages between humans and several species commonly found in archaeological sites throughout the Greater Antilles. Examined species include domesticated dogs (*Canis familiaris*) and two species of capromyid rodents endemic to the region, namely extant Jamaican hutia (*Geocapromys brownii*) and extinct Puerto Rican hutia (*Isolobodon portoricensis*). It has long been theorized that some hutias species were managed or possibly undergoing nascent domestication by Indigenous groups prior to the arrival of Columbus.

This dissertation examines the zooarchaeological evidence of hutia management and assesses whether there is evidence of human-influenced feeding behaviour in their dietary isotope values. The studies within this volume provide evidence suggesting either the purposeful feeding of some hutias or more probably that hutias were successfully scavenging from human garden plots. These species may have been beneficiaries of human ecosystem engineering practices such as slash-and-burn farming which may have bolstered hutia populations. The abundance of hutias in many archaeological sites and the isotopic evidence of human-influenced diets may indicate 'garden hunting' strategies. This constituted a form of animal management that is tied to plant cultivation and therefore was an arguably sustainable mode of low-level food production.