THE PRICE OF SPICE: ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF COLONIAL ERA NUTMEG PLANTATIONS ON THE BANDA ISLANDS, MALUKU PROVINCE, INDONESIA


Adviser: Peter V. Lape

The Banda Islands were the world's sole source of nutmeg in the 16th century. Control over the spice trade was a major goal for European powers during the Age of Expansion. Consequently, the Banda Islands were a location of early disputes and colonial experimentation. After eradicating most of the indigenous population, the Dutch East India Company established a plantation system in 1621 on the islands. The Banda Island plantation system was an early experiment in mercantile colonialism with imported enslaved workers, company-provided subsistence rations, and a VOC monopoly on the spice trade inhibiting the accumulation of capital. Peoples from a variety of European, Asian, and African backgrounds were forced to co-exist on these remote islands and create a functional society. The plantation system fundamentally altered the lifeways of all inhabitants of the Banda Islands, many of whom were non-indigenous, but there is little evidence regarding how the alterations and adaptations occurred or why. In the research outlined here, I argue that these alterations and adaptations can be investigated through the analysis of food remains, which can be accessed through both historical records and archaeological materials. Previous research on the role of food in plantation societies have focused on three main models: Energetic efficiency from optimal foraging theory, power/ resistance, and creolization. I test hypotheses created using these models based on the material culture associated with foodways that is expected to be found in colonial Banda contexts. Given a set of faunal resources, imported starches, and imported and domestic ceramics, different patterns of distribution are predicted by each model.