Christer Petley & Stephan Lenik (eds.)

Material Cultures of Slavery and Abolition in the British Caribbean. London: Routledge, 2016. 9 + 154 pp. (Cloth US\$155.00)

This book's seven essays, largely by a younger generation of North American scholars, together with an introduction by the editors and a magisterial afterword by Barry Higman, are reprinted from a special issue of *Slavery & Abolition* (September 2014), in a welcome effort to achieve an audience beyond the journal's readership, not only for the contributors' research but also for the editors' programmatic attempt to reinforce the interactions of archaeology and history in the study of Caribbean slave societies. As the editors acknowledge, and Barry Higman underscores, the "British Caribbean" is taken here to embrace Jamaica (the subject of three chapters) and Barbados (the subject of two), with a further comparative chapter on Barbados and Jamaica, while Dominica, the subject of the remaining chapter, stands for the rest of the British colonies; this means that the volume does not challenge the perennial dominance of Jamaica as the major, and Barbados as the minor, pillar of the historiography of British slave colonies, even though almost half of the enslaved people lived elsewhere. The book also reproduces the conventional emphasis on the plantation, with five of the chapters focused on the estate, one on urban or suburban houses of the slave owners, and one on missionary houses and chapels. The material culture of urban slavery is thus largely missing. The book's treatment of "material culture" also excludes financial assets even though Christer Petley's essay on the Jamaican slave owners Simon Taylor and John Cunningham shows that no successful slave owner could consume wealth at the rate slavery produced it. Surpluses were either repatriated to Britain through the export of sugar or bills of exchange, invested in British financial instruments or British land, or left to heirs in Britain, who spent the money. The material culture of such slave-owning elites was thus expressed in metropolitan Britain at least as much as in Jamaica, even by slave owners resident in the Caribbean, and needs to be brought into the same frame.

These limitations, however, should not detract from an appreciation of what the collection brings, especially concerning the usefulness of studying material culture as part of an attempt to recover the histories of enslaved people. As Higman shows, the survival of the material culture of enslaved people reflects inequalities not only in the era of slavery but also in the subsequent two centuries, and our access to that material culture often depends on its representation by European commentators. But this volume vividly demonstrates the power of the study of material culture for exploring dynamics at the level of the group. Two exemplary pieces based on archaeological fieldwork, one by

Douglas Armstrong and Matthew Reilly and another by Stephanie Bergman and Frederick Smith, chart transitions in the Barbadian slave economy. In the important second section of the book, Justin Roberts addresses the difficult but necessary topic of internal stratifications within enslaved populations on the plantation, a subject continued in an exploration, by James Delle and Kristen Fellows, of the evidence of relative wealth or status among enslaved people that can be gleaned from burial grounds on Marshall's Pen Estate in Jamaica. Natalie Zacek and Laurence Brown show the importance of material culture to the abolitionist project, the strong drive by metropolitan reformers and local missionaries to reconstitute enslaved people as consumers, as sources of demand but only for approved goods. Stephan Lenik's chapter on the material culture of slave resistance, embodied in an uprising and a labor dispute 50 years apart on the Geneva Estate on Dominica, is perhaps the most methodologically ambitious of the essays, and if it falls short of its full objectives, it does so, as Higman highlights, in ways that are suggestive of the need for bringing to bear the full range of historical techniques alongside the analysis of material culture.

For in the end, the most extensively held, most valuable pieces of material culture in slavery were the enslaved people themselves: that was the essence of chattel slavery. To help overcome the consequences of centuries of deracination and commodification of captive Africans, one path forward in the recovery of the history of enslaved people could be to combine the work of material culture, which operates at the level of the group or community, with the construction of a prosopography of enslaved people—of records for each known individual, however fragmentary the evidence. Higman again points to the untapped potential of slave registers as a starting point for such an endeavor, which would require international collaboration and substantial resources, but would offer the potential to bring to enslaved people the historical presence already granted to the slave owners.

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