John M. Chenoweth, *Simplicity, Equality, and Slavery: An Archaeology of Quakerism in the British Virgin Islands, 1740–1780*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2017. xviii + 244 pp. (Cloth US\$ 74.95)

The Society of Friends, or Quakers, often heralded for their abolitionist activism in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain and the United States, have been receiving attention recently for their eager entry into Atlantic slaveholding during the late seventeenth century. As Larry Gragg's *The Quaker Community on Barbados* (2009), Kristen Block's *Ordinary Lives in the Early Caribbean* (2012), and Marcus Rediker's *The Fearless Benjamin Lay* (2017) show, the seeming contradiction of "inner light"-inspired Friends abandoning their beliefs to buy and sell human beings in Barbados, Pennsylvania, and elsewhere reflects the apotheosis of Protestant Christianity's complicity with the barbarism of the slave trade.

Simplicity, Equality, and Slavery explores how one Quaker community in the British Virgin Islands understood and lived their participation in slaveholding. Combining a scanty documentary record with archaeological excavation, it investigates power relations between the slaveholders, who considered themselves God's special people, and their enslaved workers. John Chenoweth focuses on one estate, owned by the Lettsom family, who probably originated as English indentured servants, settled there in the early eighteenth century, and were affiliated with the Quaker Meeting on nearby Tortola. As with many poor to middling European migrants to the Americas, even the very pious, no moral concerns troubled the Lettsoms' participation in the slave trade. Rather, slavery afforded the path to advancement, with the African laborers serving "more as an Other against which Quaker identity could be constructed as inherently white, affording ties between Quakers and non-Quaker white planters" (p. 152). In theory, Quakers endorsed the ideas of African spiritual equality and their own paternalistic responsibility for slaves, but the Tortola group, like most of their counterparts elsewhere, made no apparent effort to include them in the meeting.

Chenoweth argues that the archaeological record suggests the Lettsoms' strong preference for separation from Africans rather than fellowship with them. Unlike most West Indian estates, where slave quarters were strategically placed in sight of planters' and overseers' houses for surveillance, the Lettsoms' view was blocked by a curve in the landscape that made surveillance impossible, reflecting the family's desire to differentiate themselves racially, economically, and religiously from their workers.

Other clues in the material culture underscore tensions between Quaker beliefs and slaveholding. Like Friends elsewhere, the Lettsoms cited their religious pacifism as reason not to bear arms in colonial defense, occasioning threats from the authorities. And yet, lead, flint, and copper remains from guns suggest the Quakers did arm themselves, most likely against the threat of a slave uprising; some Quaker houses had “gun loops,” narrow apertures in masonry walls, through which defenders inside could fire out. The Quakers’ pacifism thus differentiated between bearing arms for the State and for self-defense.

Chenoweth argues that religious doctrine should be considered, not as a rigid prescription that practitioners always uphold, but as a flexible set of values contingent on time, place, and circumstance. But his case is undermined by a tendency for simplistic generalization: “We are apt to think of religions as lists of rules or actions carried out by rote—Quakers wear broad-brimmed hats, Catholics burn incense during mass, Muslims and Jews avoid eating pork, and so on” rather than as “functions of what people do” (p. 2). It is difficult to imagine to whom this comment might refer, but a cursory familiarity with religious studies would disclose that scholars have not viewed religions as “rules carried out by rote” in a very long time.

Chenoweth’s brief for the value of archaeological data to fill gaps in the written record, moreover, rests on more needless reductionism: “Although religion is the motivator of many written works, only archaeology can tell us about what people do with the ideas captured in these writings” (p. 19). Few would disagree that historical archaeology helps us to retrieve aspects of peoples’ lives that are only scantily covered in the written archive. But documents can also tell us plenty about what people do. Here again, Chenoweth seems unfamiliar with the methodological revolution in social history over the past half century that has energized the study of ordinary or marginalized people. One certainly need not be an archaeologist to do this kind of work.

Simplicity, Equality and Slavery focuses largely on Quaker planters rather than Africans laborers. Chenoweth insists that the enslaved were very much a part of the study, but they appear as little more than shadows, leaving unfulfilled the promise of archaeology to take us where documents cannot. Overall, the book offers a useful reminder of the power of slavery to disrupt people’s lives and beliefs in unexpected ways.

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