Kathleen E.A. Monteith, *Plantation Coffee in Jamaica, 1790–1848*. Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2019. xv + 250 pp. (Paper US\$ 60.00)

Plantation Coffee in Jamaica, 1790–1848 details the rise and fall of coffee as a major export crop in nineteenth-century Jamaica. Coffee was first introduced to the island in the 1720s but remained a minor staple until the end of the eighteenth century. Then, for a brief period following the revolution by enslaved people in Saint-Domingue, coffee plantations and production expanded dramatically so that by 1800, Jamaica had emerged as the world's leading coffee producer. Its primacy, however, proved short lived. Within a decade or so, Jamaican coffee production began a steady decline as war in Europe, increased foreign competition, the end of slavery, environmental degradation, and shifting British trade policies left Jamaican planters facing higher production costs (including new costs for labor), lower yields, and an increasingly competitive international marketplace by the 1840s and 1850s. Many already-indebted planters gave up, abandoning coffee production and sometimes dividing plantation lands into smaller parcels to sell to recently freed people. Whereas almost 700 plantations operated in 1799, only 353 were producing coffee in 1836, and that number fell further over the next two decades. Coffee production, of course, never ceased in Jamaica, but it faded in importance. Blue Mountain coffee remains a premier brand today and output has expanded in recent years, driven by markets in Asia, particularly Japan. Indeed, production figures for the first two decades of the twenty-first century approach export figures from the 1820s and 1830s.

Kathleen Monteith begins her deeply-researched and well-written study with nuggets of information on the current market for Jamaican coffee and a brief discussion of the development of the industry in the eighteenth century, but her focus is on those decades in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century when coffee occupied a more prominent place in Jamaica's physical and economic landscape. That focus makes sense, although a somewhat fuller discussion of both coffee's origins in Jamaica and the situation after the 1850s would have provided richer context for her analysis.

The book consists of an introduction, six substantive chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter explores the number and geographical locations of plantations on the island, highlighting the environmental requirements necessary for coffee production. The second offers a demographic analysis of the coffee planter class, which included some women, free people of color, and migrants from Saint-Domingue. Monteith emphasizes that the smaller scale of coffee production and lower capital requirements "facilitated a diversity among the planter class that was perhaps not possible within the sugar industry" (p. 62).

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The next two chapters outline the production process for coffee and the system under which enslaved people labored to produce the beans. Monteith concludes that coffee planters exploited coffee fields with little consideration for long-term environmental consequences, but that they also embraced technological developments and paid careful attention to the layout of plantations in an effort to maximize efficiency in the processing of the beans. These chapters build on excellent work with select plantation accounts, and throughout, Monteith fruitfully compares and contrasts work on sugar and coffee estates, concluding that the latter involved a “less harsh work regimen” (p. 123). She also notes that because the period of greatest coffee output roughly coincided with the abolition of the slave trade, nineteenth-century plantations often contained relatively few enslaved men of prime working age and many more both younger and older individuals than planters found ideal. As a result, both young and old enslaved persons routinely spent significant time working in the fields.

The final two chapters assess the profitability of plantations during the first half of the nineteenth century, outline the factors that led to the decline of coffee as a plantation crop, and trace the impact of emancipation for both planters and the enslaved. Monteith does not engage directly larger debates about the West Indian economy in the era of abolition, focusing instead on the specific market conditions (noted above) that promoted, and then undermined, coffee production in Jamaica. There are suggestive asides that hurricanes, flooding, and other environmental forces had a significant impact on production at times, although this theme is not explored fully. Overall, this fine book will be an essential starting point for anyone seeking to understand the history of coffee in Jamaica. Finally, in an era of tight budgets, the UWI Press deserves praise for producing such a richly illustrated text. The book has lots of images—graphs, tables, photographs, and a map—which contribute greatly throughout to Monteith’s analysis.

Matthew Mulcahy

Department of History, Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore MD, U.S.A.
mmulcahy@loyola.edu