

Mapping Water in Dominica: Enslavement and Environment under Colonialism. Mark W. Hauser. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021. 284 pp. \$30. Paperback ISBN: 9780295748726.

In this fine study of colonial Dominica, Mark W. Hauser brings together the history of slavery, the environment, and the growing field of histories of water. His interdisciplinary approach unveils new perspectives on known events and provides fresh insights into largely forgotten histories.

Dominica, it is worth recalling, is one of the Caribbean islands, and it has been an independent nation since 1978. Before then, Dominica was part of the British West Indies from 1761, when the British conquered the island from the French who had been in control of Dominica since 1632. Before then, indigenous Caribbeans lived there, and, starting in 1493, in an unhappy relationship with Spanish settlers who never managed to fully control the island. It is thus an island marked by colonial history and exploitation, including sugar plantations and slavery. Hauser has chosen to focus on the period starting with British colonization. He provides a detailed study of key plantations of the Change and the Picard estates in the northwest of the island and the estates in the Soufriere region in the south.

Most impressive and interesting about this study is its interdisciplinary research. Scholars often talk about it; Hauser has done it. He – along with fellow archaeologists – has dug up glass bottles, potsherds, and lost objects from the soil of the plantations to understand the deeper history of these estates, especially as they relate to slavery. And these archeological excavations are key to understanding the lives of slaves, who would rarely (if ever) leave written accounts of their experiences on the plantations. Hauser has also studied in depth the written accounts left by the British colonizers, but their story is not at the heart of the book. Instead, he used the written accounts to better understand the objects found in the ground. Even more fascinating, Hauser has used anthropological and botanical knowledge to read the current state of the land and thus see better what it looked like in the past. That is, he looks at how the current vegetations serve as indicators of past use of landscapes. This mixture of historical, archeological, and botanical perspectives in his research is refreshing.

The story that emerges is that of water and how it has been used by different groups on the island. This, too, is novel. More often than not, histories of colonial slavery are those of the oppressor and the oppressed. In Hauser's book, there is, of course, a fair amount of that, as slavery was undoubtedly oppressive. Yet Hauser provides a nuanced and an enriched environmentally informed history of how that oppression took place and by what means. Water becomes a useful tool to understand the subjugation: "Because water inscribes itself in the archaeological record in economic, metabolic, and symbolic ways, waterways allow an examination of slavery's predicaments and the assemblages of politics, economy, body, and culture they generated," (115). The result of his findings gives new insights into the sugarcane production and the negotiations of the predicament of water insecurity that followed the production of the crop. Sugarcane is not a native species of the Caribbean nor was it a plant that thrived in its new environment. It took a lot of labor

and water to make it grow successfully, and it is exactly that junction Hauser has investigated. Enslaved labor engaged in everyday forms of resilience and resistance as they endured the slow and fast violence wrought by the plantations. Their use and management of water were an important means to that end.

Overall, most of the book deals with the immediate aftermath of the British conquest of 1761 and the French ceding of Dominica to the British in 1763. Most primary sources refer to British managerial schemes following these dramatic events, and the subsequent fifty years or so of archival material containing colonial planning documents and correspondence. These are not easy papers to decipher. Hauser has done an excellent job bringing them to light and scholarly attention. Matching such archival material with archeological findings and botanical information is no small achievement. The hard work behind the book is clear, making the book rewarding for the reader. Yet, it would have been helpful if Hauser had placed the plantations in the larger history of the West Indies. *Mapping Water in Dominica* is thus perhaps most helpful for those who already have some basic knowledge about the history of the island.

Today Dominica is known for its natural beauty and biodiversity, and it has become a tourist destination geared towards the luxury of ecotourism. In fact, some of the resorts on the island are located in the very proximity of the plantations discussed in this book. Judging from what I see on promotional websites, the tourists are spared from hearing about colonial slavery. But there is no lack of images of the ocean, waterways, and waterfalls to entice tourists to come. Hopefully, Hauser's book can help to facilitate reflections among Dominicans as well as visitors on the connection between water, the environment, and colonial legacies of slavery.

Peder Anker, New York University