

**Slavery Behind the Wall: An Archaeology of a Cuban Coffee Plantation.** *Theresa A. Singleton.* Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015. 261 pp.

Theresa Singleton's *Slavery Behind the Wall* offers a welcome English-language historical archaeological study of a 19th-century Cuban *cafetal* [coffee plantation]. While Cuban historical archaeology has been one of the most robust such programs in Latin America in the last decades, its investigations have only recently been made available to English-speaking archaeologists. Singleton presents a thorough micro-history of the Cuban *cafetal* of Santa Ana de Biajacas and frames the study around the interpretation of its anomalous walled slave settlement, offering glimpses into the lives of the enslaved Africans living within its confines.

This book crystallized out of Singleton's long-term scholarly engagement with *Cafetal Biajacas*, dating back to 1998. Its explicit goal is to understand the "object world of slavery" on 19th-century Cuban coffee plantations (p. 2), and for this reason Singleton deploys a theoretical approach inspired by recent archaeological iterations of the concept of materiality. The author also seeks to understand the ways in which planters and enslaved negotiated the built plantation landscape for their particular purposes (p. 4)—the first to organize and control and the latter to often subvert the planter's power and curtail the dehumanizing effects of the repressive institution of slavery.

Following an introductory Chapter 1, Chapter 2 sets the stage for the study by presenting the geographical and environmental setting of *Cafetal Biajacas*, nestled in Western-Cuba's Mayabeque Province, and briefly delineating the history of Spanish colonialism on the island (1511–1858). The chapter also tells the family story of the owner of the *cafetal*, Catholic priest Ignacio O'Farrill y Herrera, and the rise and fall of his plantation.

The third chapter explores the coffee economy of Western Cuba during the 19th-century period of "second slavery" (p. 26), when the island saw a thirteen-year-long stint as the world's largest coffee producer (1817–1830). The author explains the reasons for this brief boom in coffee production and presents the local and foreign planters who were engaged in its development. Singleton discusses the ideal environmental factors and location for setting up *cafetales*, their spatial layout, their annual growth and harvest cycles, and also explains the coffee production process and labor organization.

Chapter 4 examines the spatial politics of the built landscapes of Cuban *cafetales* and offers an archaeologically-grounded reconstruction of the *batey* at *Cafetal Biajacas* (the site of all the domestic and agricultural buildings at the plantation). Singleton then explains the functions of the particular buildings and structures at *Cafetal Biajacas*, underlining the uniqueness of the enslaved settlement surrounded by a 3.35-meter tall and 0.70-meter thick masonry wall (p. 116).

Providing the backdrop for the investigation of the wall, the fifth chapter presents the two types of slave housing used on Cuban plantations: the *bohío* (a detached wattle-and-daub construction with several variants) and the *barracón* (a single building that often housed the entire enslaved population of a plantation) (p. 93). Further, a review of the Cuban legislation and planter discourse for using either type of these housing solutions is offered. Finally, Singleton outlines her archaeological surveys and excavations in search of slave *bohíos* within *Cafetal Biajacas*' enclosure.

The gender composition and provisioning of the enslaved population at the *cafetal* are discussed in Chapter 6. Independent production within the walled settlement is inferred from a number of artefacts that Singleton cautiously interprets as evidence for the production of handicrafts, such as: reworked bottle-glass to make sharp-edged tools, pipe stems possibly used for polishing, and refashioned ceramic discs plausibly used as gaming pieces.

Chapter 7 further explores the quotidian life of the enslaved Africans at the cafetal through the artefacts recovered within the walled settlement. Singleton discusses the recovered faunal remains and scrutinizes the ceramic assemblage, suggesting what foods and drinks were consumed at the cafetal, among which there might have been dishes and beverages of African origin. Recovered personal objects such as bodily adornments, machetes and pipes are also discussed and linked to African religious and cultural practices and weekend diversions of the enslaved.

In Chapter 8 Singleton proposes that the wall was built around the slave settlement by the planter to contain and control the enslaved. The enslaved, in turn, resisted and subverted the authority of the wall—an example of this being the enslaved population clandestinely housing *cimarrones* [runaway slaves] for a few days (p. 188). Singleton also discusses the 61 machete fragments recovered within the enclosure and presents them as a potentially dormant source of violent reprisal, although no records indicate that they were ever used in acts of violence at the cafetal (pp. 195–197).

Singleton often compares Cafetal Biajacas to other Cuban coffee and sugar plantations, drawing from her comprehensive knowledge of Cuban historiography. Besides archaeological data, she also draws upon a rich variety of evidentiary sources including maps, correspondences, estate records, traveler diaries, and ethnographic studies. Relevant oral histories could not be recorded given the discontinuity between plantation-era residents and the current settlers on the land of Cafetal Biajacas who moved there after the plantation was abandoned (p. 208).

I highly commend Singleton's embracing of Spanish and Cuban terminology and her use of full-length in-text Spanish quotations, providing the English-language study with much of the Spanish and autochthonous-Cuban nuance that would be otherwise lost in translation. My only notice is that a few of these quotations have grammatical errors that are noticeable to a native Spanish-speaker.

Singleton's long-term and persistent scholarly engagement with the site of Cafetal Biajacas and her judicious interpretation of a fragmentary archaeological record with a paucity of artefacts results in a rigorous archaeological investigation that makes the best of what some might see as a limited set of data. *Slavery Behind the Wall* is an important contribution to the small number of in-depth studies of plantations in the Spanish Caribbean, offering not only archaeologists but also those interested in colonialism and the African diaspora an important comparative case-study.

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