SUGAR AND SLAVERY IN THE FRENCH WEST INDIES: TRANSFORMATIONS FROM THE ANCIEN RÉGIME THROUGH THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD

Following the Seven Years’ War, France negotiated to surrender virtually all of her North American possessions in order to retain hold on the comparatively small islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe, which generated wealth for the French through the labor of over 150,000 enslaved Africans and their descendants on sugar plantations. This paper draws upon nearly 10 years of archaeological work conducted on three sugar plantation slave villages in Guadeloupe and Martinique to explore this period through the lived experiences of captive Africans. Observations developed in this paper will showcase the ways in which archaeological data, which has heretofore largely been overlooked in the case of French plantation studies, can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of history, and can offer a different voice that foregrounds the lived experiences of enslaved plantation workers in the French West Indies. These experiences will be contrasted between Guadeloupe and Martinique, each of which experienced very different manifestations of the Revolutionary period followed by the continuation of slavery until 1848 in both locations.

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