

Chocolate, Subsistence, and Survival in Early English Jamaica

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Jamaica tends to be associated more with the rise of sugar than with chocolate, but cacao was an important crop in the island's early colonial history.¹ Cacao trees had first been planted by the island's Spanish colonists, who grew it for domestic consumption and export.² When England conquered Jamaica in 1655, the first English arrivals discovered already existing cacao plantations and decided to expand them to participate in the growing Atlantic market for chocolate. Indeed, Jamaica quickly became a significant supplier of chocolate and helped to catalyze the introduction of the commodity to England.³ In 1708, the historian John Oldmixon thus wrote of the island that "There is more Cacao comes from thence than from all our Colonies....it was the principal Invitation to the peopling [of] *Jamaica*."⁴

As Oldmixon was also forced to admit, however, cacao was "now no longer a Commodity to be regarded in our Plantations."⁵ This shift had been precipitated by the widespread and mysterious death of cacao trees in the island. Keen to preserve the plantations, Thomas Lynch, the governor of Jamaica, sent an envoy to Cuba in 1672 to see if its inhabitants

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¹ "Chocolate," "cacao," and even "cocoa" are often treated as interchangeable terms today. There was considerable variation in their spelling and usage in early modern texts as well. In general, I will use "chocolate" to refer to the processed consumable and "cacao" to refer to the plant *Theobroma cacao* L. or its unprocessed seeds, which are the source of chocolate. For more on the meanings of these terms, see Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe, *The True History of Chocolate* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996), 18-19.

² B. W. Higman, *Jamaican Food: History, Biology, Culture* (Kingston, Jamaica: Univ. of the West Indies Press, 2008), 273.

³ Coe and Coe, *True History of Chocolate*, 169.

⁴ John Oldmixon, *The British Empire in America* (London, 1708), 2:325.

⁵ *Ibid.*

had any idea as to what was causing the cacao crops to fail. Yet while Lynch was interested in what the Spaniards in Cuba might be able to tell him, he was just as interested in using them to access another kind of knowledge. As he explained his reasoning, “[N]or have wee had Natives to Assist or informe Us, for many years since, all the Indians in those great Islands, have been destroyed and y^e Spaniards are more learned than wee.”⁶ Cacao trees were actually indigenous to South America and first domesticated either there or in Central America, not the Caribbean.⁷ Lynch thus mistakenly assumed that the pre-colonial inhabitants of Jamaica would have known how to tend them. Nevertheless, he wanted indigenous knowledge and hoped that he could access it through the Spaniards, who had made direct contact with Amerindians upon their initial colonization of the Americas. Lynch’s allusion to the fact that these Amerindians had “been destroyed,” however, also suggested the inaccessibility of what they had known. Cacao therefore possessed two contradictory meanings in late seventeenth-century Jamaica: on the one hand, it signified the hopes of colonists for a successful plantation commodity. On the other, it pointed to the existence of alternate agricultural traditions that could not easily be turned to imperial use.

Cacao never became a major export for Jamaica. Not surprisingly, histories of the island have focused instead on those crops that became the basis for large-scale, monocultural enterprises: these crops, which included sugar, had transformative effects on local ecologies and global patterns of consumption.⁸ Verene A. Shepherd has argued, though, that the privileging of

⁶ Thomas Lynch to Lord Arlington, Dec. 25, 1672, “Letters from S^t. Thomas Lynch To My Lord Arlington Principall Secy of State &c^a,” Add. MS 11410, British Library, London, fol. 607.

⁷ There is considerable disagreement about the ecological history of *T. cacao*. As Cameron L. McNeil points out, it is “generally accepted that the genus *Theobroma* evolved in South America” and that *T. cacao* first appeared there, too. See McNeil, “Introduction,” in *Chocolate in Mesoamerica: A Cultural History of Cacao*, ed. Cameron L. McNeil (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2006), 4. How *T. cacao* moved from South America to Central America is unclear, however. Also unclear is whether *T. cacao* was independently domesticated in both South and Central America or whether it was first domesticated in one region and then the other. McNeil, “Introduction,” 5-6.

⁸ For an exemplary history of sugar, see Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking, 1985).

sugar “often masks the fact that diversification was a significant feature of Caribbean society and economy.”⁹ Colonists engaged in considerable experimentation with a wide variety of potential commodities in their search for the most effective means of making a profit, especially in the early stages of settlement, when it was not yet determined that sugar monoculture would take over large swathes of the Caribbean.¹⁰ Ignoring the cultivation of other crops thus simplifies the history of agriculture in the region.

It also misses the fact that colonial cultivation was often motivated by the need to survive and that colonists looked to appropriate indigenous and non-European knowledge of crops in order to do so. As John H. Parry has noted of the arrival of new groups in the Caribbean, “All these people had to be fed.”¹¹ There are also more recent histories of colonial subsistence that have sought to complicate the picture that has been painted of the Americas as a place where planters’ desires for commodities formed the primary shaping influence on the environment. Before substances like tobacco were turned into profitable exports, Africans and Amerindians grew them for their own use.¹² Furthermore, planters did not necessarily recognize the commercial potential of these subsistence items right away. Examining the development of rice in South Carolina, S. Max Edelson has argued that colonists first became interested in rice because they wanted to eat it. In other words, the desire “to reconstitute material life in the

⁹ Verene A. Shepherd, “Introduction,” in *Slavery Without Sugar: Diversity in Caribbean Economy and Society Since the 17th Century*, ed. Verene A. Shepherd (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2002), 1.

¹⁰ Richard B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973), 119.

¹¹ John H. Parry, “Plantation and Provision Ground: An Historical Sketch of the Introduction of Food Crops Into Jamaica,” *Revista de historia de América* 39 (1955): 2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20136915>.

¹² Marcy Norton and Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, “The Multinational Commodification of Tobacco, 1492-1650: An Iberian Perspective,” in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550-1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2007), 254-59.

harsh setting of an accelerating plantation economy,” where there were limited and often inadequate supplies of food, played an important role in its adoption.¹³

Seventeenth-century Jamaica would have presented the first English inhabitants with similarly difficult conditions. Although the island was captured with relative ease, it was something of a consolation prize for the overall failure of Oliver Cromwell’s ambitious Western Design, which had imagined the conquest of multiple Spanish American territories and the supplanting of Spain as the premier imperial power in the Americas. The first phase of the Western Design revealed the hubris of the plan, however, as English forces attacked but failed to capture Hispaniola.¹⁴ Then, in Jamaica, although the Spanish governor agreed almost immediately to terms for surrender, displaced Spanish colonists hid in Jamaica’s mountainous interior for five more years, carrying out guerrilla attacks and seeking the reconquest of the island.¹⁵ Even more disturbing was the fact that living in Jamaica appeared to be incompatible with English health. Approximately seven thousand men had arrived from Hispaniola, but in the first ten months of Jamaican occupation, more than five thousand of them died from various

¹³ S. Max Edelson, “Beyond ‘Black Rice’: Reconstructing Material and Cultural Contexts for Early Plantation Agriculture,” *American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (2010): 126, doi:10.1086/ahr.115.1.125. Also see S. Max Edelson, *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006), 53-91. Edelson’s work is responding in part to the debate started by the “black rice” thesis, which proposed that planters learned about rice cultivation from Africans and that the latter hence could be credited with a major role in the development of plantation risiculture in the Americas. See Judith A. Carney, *Black Rice: The African Origins of Rice Cultivation in the Americas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001). For a challenge to the black rice thesis, see David Eltis, Philip Morgan, and David Richardson, “Agency and Diaspora in Atlantic History: Reassessing the African Contribution to Rice Cultivation in the Americas,” *American Historical Review* 112, no. 5 (2007): 1329-58, doi:10.1086/ahr.112.5.1329. For responses to Eltis et al., see “AHR Exchange: The Question of ‘Black Rice,’” *American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (2010): 123-71. Edelson’s “Beyond ‘Black Rice,’” cited above, appeared in this exchange.

¹⁴ Carla Gardina Pestana, “English Character and the Fiasco of the Western Design,” *Early American Studies* 3, no. 1 (2005): 1-6, doi:10.1353/eam.2007.0021.

¹⁵ S. A. G. Taylor, *The Western Design: An Account of Cromwell’s Expedition to the Caribbean* (Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Jamaica and Jamaica Historical Society, 1965), 49-64, 98-110.

diseases.¹⁶ The experience of colonization challenged the idea that England could be a rival to Spain and that English subjects could survive the climate of the Caribbean.

In what follows, I will trace the history of cacao in seventeenth-century Jamaica to show that it initially promised to fulfill English desires for both a commodity crop and a subsistence good. On the one hand, promoters of colonization saw cacao, which was already growing in Jamaica due to Spanish intervention, as an obvious choice for commoditization. Their hopes were further raised by the circulation of stories about chocolate's value in Spanish America, where it functioned as money and held out the promise of agricultural riches. On the other, early accounts of chocolate reveal a persistent tendency to cast it as a survival food. Particularly popular was the idea that chocolate was a kind of Amerindian miracle substance that would help new arrivals adapt to the hostile Jamaican climate and avoid illness and death. If English settlers hoped to emulate Spanish cacao production, they also wanted to discover and imitate indigenous traditions.

There was at least one problem with this strategy, however: Anglo-Jamaicans lacked crucial knowledge of indigenous peoples and cacao, as the death of the cacao plantations and Lynch's desperate attempt to send to Cuba for information suggest. Even more suggestive are the stories of African and maroon uses of chocolate that began to circulate in the late seventeenth century. Such stories disturbed English fantasies of success, as colonists recognized that the ability to provide for oneself created possibilities for freedom and for the construction of what Jill Casid has called a "black-controlled and functioning subsistence landscape of cultivated fields beyond the limits of the plantation machine."¹⁷ Casid has also called this assemblage a

¹⁶ Taylor, *Western Design*, 92; Pestana, "English Character," 7.

¹⁷ Jill H. Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2005), 215.

“maroon counterlandscape.”¹⁸ As I will conclude, looking at cacao ends up revealing the development of counter-plantations, as well as plantations, in Jamaica.

1. Cacao as Commodity

The expectation that chocolate would bring wealth to English colonists is not surprising, given the tendency of European descriptions to emphasize its association with Amerindian elites. One of the earliest and most substantial accounts came from the soldier Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who accompanied Hernán Cortés on his conquest of Mexico. As Díaz described the appearance of chocolate at a meal hosted by the Aztec leader Moctezuma,

While he [Moctezuma] was eating, the men of his guard...were not even to think of making any disturbance or speaking out loud. They brought him fruit of all the different kinds they have in that land...They brought him, in some fine golden cups, a certain drink made from pure cacao; they said it was for going to have relations with his women, and we paid no attention to it at that time; but what I did see was that they brought more than fifty large pitchers of good cacao with its froth and he drank of that.¹⁹

Díaz added that after Moctezuma was done eating and drinking, he distributed “more than two thousands jugs of cacao” among the other attendees.²⁰ Sophie D. Coe and Michael D. Coe have pointed out that Díaz’s account is worth treating with some skepticism, both because of its claims about chocolate’s aphrodisiacal properties and because of Díaz’s mentioning of golden

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁹ Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, trans. Janet Burke and Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2012), 202.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

cups, which were most likely not used by the Aztecs.²¹ Nevertheless, there is no question that, at the time of the Spanish conquest, chocolate had become an integral part of displays of conspicuous consumption meant to emphasize the wealth and power of those who drank it. In fact, as Marcy Norton notes, the Spaniards who witnessed performances like the one orchestrated by Moctezuma were “themselves products of an intensely stratified and status-conscious culture” and therefore would have “grasped very quickly” the meaning of chocolate.²²

They were also quick to grasp that chocolate had monetary, in addition to symbolic, value. Moctezuma’s consumption of chocolate was extravagant not only because of its scale but also because cacao seeds or nuts served as currency across Central America. Cacao was, moreover, essential to everyday indigenous economies because it was “low enough in value to be used in small transactions.”²³ As such, Moctezuma and other Aztec elites collected cacao through long-distance tribute networks that connected Mexico in the north to cacao-growing regions in the south.²⁴ These networks were subsequently taken over and expanded by Spanish colonists after their arrival.²⁵

The idea of cacao as an equivalent to money quickly began to circulate in European literature and helped to establish popular myths of the Americas as a paradise for those seeking enrichment. As Peter Martyr d’Anghera claimed of cacao in his history of the colonization of the Aztecs,

²¹ Coe and Coe, *True History of Chocolate*, 94-96.

²² Marcy Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures: A History of Tobacco and Chocolate in the Atlantic World* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008), 15.

²³ John F. Bergmann, “The Distribution of Cacao Cultivation in Pre-Columbian America,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59, no. 1 (1969): 86, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2569524>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 85-96.

²⁵ Dauril Alden, “The Significance of Cacao Production in the Amazon Region During the Late Colonial Period: An Essay in Comparative Economic History,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 120, no. 2 (1976): 104-5, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/986517>.

I Have heeretofore said that their currant money is of the fruits of certaine trees, like our almonds, which they call *Cachoas*. The utility and benefit thereof is two fould: for this almonde supplieth the use of monie, and is fit, to make drink...O blessed money, which yeeldeth sweete, and profitable drinke for mankinde, and preserveth the possessors thereof free from the hellish pestilence of avarice, because it cannot be long kept, or hid under grounde.²⁶

In his description of cacao, Martyr depicted the New World as a kind of prelapsarian utopia where human desires to accumulate could not operate: assuming that cacao was perishable, Martyr thought that it could not be hoarded. Martyr did not understand that the Aztecs maintained both tribute networks and storehouses where cacao could be kept for years: cacao actually was surprisingly durable, in spite of being an organic substance.²⁷ Edmund Valentine Campos has also pointed out that Martyr's portrayal of the Americas as a place where money literally grew on trees "contributed to the golden allure" of the region.²⁸ Martyr may have been critiquing European greed through his praise of Amerindian freedom from it, but, at the same time, he constructed a tempting vision of naturally abundant wealth that could be exploited by Europeans.

Martyr's story may have been particularly appealing to English readers because of their desire to compete with Spain and find agricultural analogues to precious metals. As Anthony Pagden has observed, "the first objectives of all the European powers in the Atlantic had been

²⁶ Peter Martyr d'Anghera, *De Novo Orbe, Or the Historie of the West Indies*, trans. Richard Eden and Lok Gent (London, 1612), fol. 196v, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99836033.

²⁷ Bergmann, "The Distribution of Cacao Cultivation," 86.

²⁸ Edmund Valentine Campos, "Thomas Gage and the English Colonial Encounter with Chocolate," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 39, no. 1 (2009): 185, doi:10.1215/10829636-2008-019.

simply to imitate the Spaniards.”²⁹ This imitation primarily took the form of quests to find deposits of gold and silver in territories that had not yet been fully occupied by Spanish colonists. As it became increasingly clear that such deposits would not be found, however, English hopes turned, somewhat reluctantly, to commercial and agricultural enterprises.³⁰ In order to justify this turn, a discourse denigrating gold as corrupting and agricultural commodities as virtuous substitutes also developed.³¹

This discourse appeared in early English accounts of Jamaica. In particular, in his *Jamaica Viewed* (1661), Edmund Hickerlingill condemned readers who were expecting him to “discover some *Mines of Silver or Gold*; as the most undoubted transcendency of a rich Land.”³² Accusing these readers of “prophane *Boulimy* and insatiable *Poludipsie*” (the over-consumption of food and water, respectively), Hickerlingill equated their desire for silver and gold with a physically excessive and harmful appetite.³³ Hickerlingill’s goal in *Jamaica Viewed* was to promote the island’s colonization, but Hickerlingill wanted the new English colonists to shun mining, which he characterized not only as productive of greed but also as a violation of the land itself. Developing the metaphor of appetite, Hickerlingill portrayed the consuming desires of miners as extending to the “*entrails and womb* of the earth” itself, which they tore open via a “*Caesarean Section*, and debauch’d *midwifery*.”³⁴ Mining, then, was a depraved form of

²⁹ Anthony Pagden, *Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c. 1800* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1995), 67.

³⁰ See Carole Shammas on what she calls the “commercializing of colonization.” Shammas, “English Commercial Development and American Colonization, 1560-1620,” in *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America 1480-1650*, ed. K. R. Andrews, N. P. Canny, and P. E. H. Hair (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1979), 173.

³¹ See Pagden, *Lords of All the World*, 68, for this discourse as a “form of triumphalism.” Also see Jeffrey Knapp, “Elizabethan Tobacco,” *Representations* 21 (1988): 26-66.

³² Edmund Hickerlingill, *Jamaica Viewed* (London, 1661), 28, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99863318.

³³ *Ibid.*, 31. For a definition of “poludipsie,” see “polydipsia, n.1,” in *OED Online*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/147124?redirectedFrom=polydipsia>.

³⁴ Hickerlingill, *Jamaica Viewed*, 31.

production, one that would lead to the destruction of the colony, versus a successful birth. In contrast, the planting and harvesting of agricultural commodities was a harmless “reap[ing of] the Fruits of the Common Earth.”³⁵

Hickeringill was especially eager for the English colonists to try cacao. Placing it at the head of his list of “*improv’d*” or cultivated crops in Jamaica, he described its potential to generate wealth in terms that both echoed and extended Martyr’s equation of cacao with money.³⁶ As he wrote of the plantations that the Spaniards had left behind, “Nor indeed can any ground be better employ’d” than through their cultivation, “the *Spaniard*, (who best understands the value of them) reckoning every one of his *Cocoa* trees to be worth him a piece of Eight *per an.* after it begins to bear.”³⁷ While Martyr placed cacao in opposition to coin, Hickeringill instead imagined their equivalence and dreamed of trees that would be able to produce treasure.³⁸

Hickeringill was not the only English author to blur the distinction between chocolate and Spanish money. In a 1648 work entitled *The English-American His Travail by Sea and Land: Or, A New Survey of the West-Indias*, Thomas Gage portrayed cacao as an analogue to the silver and other valuable commodities regularly carried by the Spanish fleet across the Atlantic.³⁹ Gage’s comparison was prompted by stories about English privateers finding cacao in the cargoes of ships and throwing it overboard. As he elaborated, “I have heard the *Spaniards* say that when we have taken a good prize, a ship laden with Cacao, in anger and wrath we have hurled over board

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁸ It is worth noting that Hickeringill, in spite of his championing of agriculture and cacao, exhibited ambivalence about giving up on the hope of finding mines in Jamaica. Hickeringill claimed, for instance, that some former slaves of the Spaniards had told him that “their Masters did certainly know of two Silver Mines” in the island. Hickeringill, *Jamaica Viewed*, 32. Other colonists, too, continued to circulate stories of hidden treasure that had been left behind by the Spaniards. See James Robertson, “Re-Writing the English Conquest of Jamaica in the Late Seventeenth Century,” *English Historical Review* 117, no. 473 (2002): 813-39.

³⁹ Thomas Gage, *The English-American His Travail by Sea and Land: Or, A New Survey of the West-Indias* (London, 1648), http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:12061779.

this good commoditie, not regarding the worth and goodnesse of it, but calling it in bad *Spanish*, *Cagaruta de Carnero*, or sheeps dung in good *English*.”⁴⁰ The privateers may have been put off by the appearance of cacao, but Gage was even more disgusted by their ignorance of the value of cacao, which, as he explained, was “one of the necessariest commodities in the *India*’s, and nothing enricheth *Chiapa* in particular more then it, whither are brought from *Mexico* and other parts, the rich bags of Patacons onely for this *Cagaruta de Carnero*, which we call sheeps dung.”⁴¹ Invoking the spectacle of “Patacons” or silver coins used by the Portuguese and Spanish in the Americas, Gage again suggested that cacao was a viable path to imperial success, as long as its true worth was properly recognized.⁴²

In fact, Gage thought that cacao was so valuable that it might even justify the invasion of the Americas and Chiapas in particular, which was one of the colonial centers of cacao production in Central America.⁴³ As he described the susceptibility of the region’s location to an English attack,

[T]hese two, the River of *Tabasco*, *alias Grijalva*, and *Puerto Real*, though they bee commodious...yet they are causes of daily feares unto the *Spaniards*, who well know the weaknesse of them, and that if a forraine Nation should manfully thrust into that Country by any of these two wayes, they might so conquer all *Chiapa*, and from thence passe easily unto *Guatemala*. But the River of *Tabasco* lying low, and being somewhat hot, and the Towns about it infested with many gnats, and the chieftest commodity there being but *Cacao*, have often discouraged both our *English* and *Hollanders*, who have come up some part of the River, and

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² “patacon, n.1,” in *OED Online*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138671?redirectedFrom=patacon>.

⁴³ Bergmann, “The Distribution of Cacao Cultivation,” 89.

minding more the foresaid reasons, then what was forward to bee had, have turned back, losing a rich Country and slighting an eternall name, for few and frivolous present difficulties.⁴⁴

Gage's proposal for the invasion of Chiapas by river recalls Walter Raleigh's gendered language of conquest in his sixteenth-century account of Guiana, which Raleigh infamously described as possessing a "maydenhead" ready to be despoiled by English adventurers.⁴⁵ Gage, too, presented Chiapas as a feminized land ready to be taken over by a masculinized invading force. Yet if Raleigh was in Guiana searching for a land of gold, Gage had his eyes only on cacao, which he insisted was worth the troubles caused by a hot and insect-infested climate. To mind these troubles, as had previous English and Dutch parties, would be to give too much weight to "frivolous present difficulties" and not enough to the chance to possess a "rich Country" and gain an "eternall name" as a New World conqueror.

Although England did not try to invade Chiapas or Guatemala in the seventeenth century, Gage's recommendation nevertheless may have played a key role in the events that eventually led to the conquest of Jamaica. When it was published, Gage's *The English-American* proved a popular and influential text because it was the first English-authored work to provide detailed, first-hand information about Spanish America. Gage had been able to gather this information because he had served for twelve years in Mexico and Guatemala as a Dominican missionary. Moreover, although he had been born to a recusant Catholic family, when Gage returned to England in 1637, he converted to Anglicanism and published his travel narrative, which functioned both as a conversion narrative and as an exculpatory offering of "strategic

⁴⁴ Gage, *English-American*, 105.

⁴⁵ Louis Montrose, "The Work of Gender in the Discourse of Discovery," *Representations* 33 (1991): 12, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928756>.

intelligence” about New Spain meant to prove his loyalty to the Protestant regime.⁴⁶ Gage’s strategy succeeded, in that he became a close advisor to Oliver Cromwell about the Western Design. Gage even accompanied the English forces to Jamaica as their chaplain.⁴⁷ It is unlikely that Cromwell and other leaders of the Western Design were as concerned with cacao as Gage. For Gage, though, cacao was what justified the invasion of the Americas and underlay his own advocacy of imperial aggression.

2. Chocolate as Antidote

Ironically, Gage died upon his arrival in Jamaica and became a victim of the very scheme that he had propounded.⁴⁸ Gage’s death was made even more ironic by the fact that he had claimed in *The English-American* to have found the key to survival in dangerous New World climates. This key, perhaps unsurprisingly, was chocolate. As Gage described his discovery of its special properties,

For my self I must say, I used it twelve yeers constantly, drinking one cup in the morning, another yet before dinner between nine or ten of the clock; another within an houre or two after dinner, and another between four and five in the afternoon; and when I purposed to sit up late to study, I would take another cup about seven or eight at night, which would keep me waking till about midnight. And if by chance I did neglect any of these accustomed houres, I presently found

⁴⁶ For biographical information about Gage, see Allen D. Boyer, “Gage, Thomas (1603?-1656),” in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/10274>. For “strategic intelligence,” see Campos, “Thomas Gage,” 187.

⁴⁷ Campos, “Thomas Gage,” 194.

⁴⁸ Taylor, *Western Design*, 92.

my stomacke fainty. And with this custome I lived twelve yeers in those parts healthy.⁴⁹

Campos notes the “chocaholism” that Gage displayed in this passage, which indicates that he drank four to five cups of chocolate per day.⁵⁰ Campos also claims that chocolate served as a kind of “dietary supplement” for Gage, who found the foods of the Americas insufficiently satisfying.⁵¹ Specifically, Gage condemned the meat and fruits that he encountered for containing “little inward virtue or nourishment,” even if they were “most faire and beautifull to behold.”⁵² He moreover added support for his opinions by claiming that Elizabeth I, upon being presented with some of these same items, declared that “surely where those fruits grew, the women were light, and all the people hollow and false hearted.”⁵³ Reading the reference to Elizabeth as an attempt to “evoke nostalgic anti-Spanish feeling,” Campos concludes that Gage’s discussion of food was meant to stand in for a “moral critique” of America’s Catholic inhabitants, who, like their diets, were not to be trusted.⁵⁴

While Gage’s references to the deceptive foods of the Americas held religious and national significance, they also signaled a real concern about the harmful effects of the American climate. As Rebecca Earle has shown, many early Spanish colonists believed that changes in diet could cause illness and even racial degeneration. These beliefs arose out of adherence to humoral theories of the relationship between the environment and individuals: according to the principles of humoralism, external influences, including food and drink, had the capacity to change the proportion of fluids in a body and introduce unhealthy imbalances. Novel comestibles were thus

⁴⁹ Gage, *English-American*, 109.

⁵⁰ Campos, “Thomas Gage,” 183.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

⁵² Gage, *English-American*, 43.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Campos, “Thomas Gage,” 190.

treated with caution, since they could have unanticipated effects. Items associated with Amerindians were viewed with particular suspicion because Europeans believed that Amerindian bodies were fundamentally weaker than theirs and that this weakness stemmed from the nature of what they consumed. They thereby shunned foods from the Americas in order to avoid becoming like the region's indigenous inhabitants.⁵⁵

Gage directly discussed the problem of climate in the same passages that mentioned Elizabeth and the deceitful Spaniards. As he elaborated on the physical problems posed by switching to an American diet,

[I]n our stomackes we found a great difference betweene *Spain* and that Countrey. For in *Spain* and other parts of *Europe* a mans stomack will hold out from meale to meale...But in *Mexico* and other parts of *America* wee found that two or three houres after a good meale...our stomackes would bee ready to faint, and so wee were faine to support them with either a cup of *Chocolatte*, or a bit of Conserve or Bisket. This seemed to mee so strange...that I for some satisfaction presently had recourse to a Doctor of Physick...hee told mee that the Climate of those parts had this effect, to produce a faire shew, but little matter or substance.⁵⁶

For Gage, there was a discernible difference between Old and New World foods, as well as the environments that produced them. Yet in telling his readers that the negative effects of an American diet could be rectified by the consumption of chocolate and other supplements, he cast them as antidotes to change.

The idea that chocolate could guarantee health proved to be a popular one that was quickly taken up by English writers interested in counteracting diseases in Jamaica. For instance,

⁵⁵ Rebecca Earle, *The Body of the Conquistador: Food, Race and the Colonial Experience in Spanish America, 1492-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2012), 19-53.

⁵⁶ Gage, *English-American*, 42-43.

the physician Henry Stubbe touted chocolate in the title of his 1662 tract as an “*Indian Nectar*” or panacea with the ability to cure almost any ailment.⁵⁷ Stubbe is probably best known for reviving Díaz’s claim that chocolate was an aphrodisiac.⁵⁸ Like Gage, however, Stubbe also believed in chocolate’s nourishing properties. As he wrote,

[T]he Indians by the help of *Cacao* nuts alone do subsist all day, notwithstanding their great labour, and heat. Which is a truth well known to our Seamen, and Land soldiers, in, and about *Jamaica*, that by the help of the *Cacao* nut made into paste with Sugar, and dissolved in water, neither having, nor wanting other food, they usually sustain themselves, sometimes for a long season; and I have been assured, that the *Indian* women do so feed on it, (eating it often) that they scarce eat any solid meat twice in a week; yet feel no decay of heat, or strength.⁵⁹

For Stubbe, chocolate was both strengthening and absolutely essential to the colonial enterprise: on nothing more than cacao nuts, water, and sugar, laborers could keep working under the harshest of conditions. Interestingly, Stubbe also framed chocolate as a specifically indigenous substance that the English had to learn about from the Amerindians who had first used it.

In associating chocolate with Amerindians, Stubbe may have simply been marketing it: Ross W. Jamieson has argued that chocolate and related beverages like coffee and tea became popular in part because their non-European associations set them apart from everyday comestibles and bestowed distinction on their consumers (fig. 1).⁶⁰ Stubbe went beyond a superficial exoticism, however, by citing Spanish authors of travel narratives and natural

⁵⁷ Henry Stubbe, *The Indian Nectar, Or a Discourse Concerning Chocolata* (London, 1662), http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:12752549.

⁵⁸ Coe and Coe, *True History of Chocolate*, 174-76.

⁵⁹ Stubbe, *Indian Nectar*, 31.

⁶⁰ Ross W. Jamieson, “The Essence of Commodification: Caffeine Dependencies in the Early Modern World,” *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 2 (2001): 279-80, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3790189>.

histories. At the time that he wrote *The Indian Nectar*, Stubbe had not yet traveled to the Americas, although he had been appointed the king's physician to Jamaica.⁶¹ He thus referred to those who had directly observed Amerindian uses of chocolate in an attempt to bolster his authority. He also conflated these authors with Amerindians themselves so that he could make their evidence even more convincing. As he wrote in one instance, "It is the *general vogue* of the *Indians*, and *Indian writers*, which is no lesse, then the testimony of uncontroverted *Experience*, that this *Cacao nut* is *very nourishing*: that it is *multi nutrimenti*, is the assertion of *Hernandez*."⁶² Referring to the physician Francisco Hernández, who was commissioned by Philip II to study Amerindian medicine in the Americas, Stubbe repeated his assertion that chocolate was a kind of superfood and tried to provide an unassailable indigenous pedigree for it.⁶³

⁶¹ Mordechai Feingold, "Stubbe, Henry (1632-1676)," in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26734>.

⁶² Stubbe, *Indian Nectar*, 30.

⁶³ On Hernández, see Norton, *Sacred Gifts, Profane Pleasures*, 121-22.



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Fig. 1. Philippe Sylvestre Dufour, *Traitez nouveaux et curieux du café, du thé et du chocolate* (Lyon, 1685). An Amerindian is depicted here with the cacao plant and chocolate paraphernalia.

The truth of Stubbe's claim is questionable: although there were older Mesoamerican associations of chocolate with blood and sacred life forces, it is not clear that Amerindians ever lived on chocolate alone, as Stubbe wanted to assert.⁶⁴ Still, the idea's uncertain provenance did not stop other English writers from picking up on it and recommending the further imitation of Amerindian traditions of consumption. For example, William Hughes, who had served as a naval physician in Jamaica during the 1660s, claimed in *The American Physitian* (1672) that chocolate could "supplieth the want of all other Aliment" and serve "all such as require a speedy refreshment after travel, hard labour, or violent exercise."⁶⁵ Hughes went further than Stubbe, in fact, in recommending chocolate as a tonic to aid English survival not only in Jamaica but also in all of the West Indies. As he declared, "good *Chocolate* is the only drink in the *Indies*, and I am fully perswaded is instrumental to the preservation and prolonging of many an Europeans life that travels there."⁶⁶ Hughes also instructed his readers to prepare it in the manner of the "Native Indians," who "seldom or never use any Compounds; desiring rather to preserve their healths, then to gratifie and please their Palats, until the Spaniards coming amongst them, made several mixtures and Compounds; which instead of making the former better (as they supposed) have made it much worse."⁶⁷ Imagining the Spanish destruction of an original method of preparing chocolate, Hughes urged a return to the purer ways of Amerindians in order to ensure survival.

This insistence may seem puzzling, given that the initial problem involved the unsuitability of Amerindian foods for European bodies. Enthusiasm for chocolate may have stemmed, however, from another set of beliefs about naturalization or what was sometimes

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 33-35.

⁶⁵ William Hughes, *The American Physitian; Or, A Treatise of the Roots, Plants, Tress, Shrubs, Fruit, Herbs, &c. Growing in the English Plantations in America* (London, 1672), 138, 145, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:12159581.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

called seasoning. According to these beliefs, as Joyce E. Chaplin has explained, Europeans needed to learn to eat New World foods and otherwise adjust to the unfamiliar environment; if they did not, they would not survive. Older residents thus had an advantage over new arrivals, who were thought to be more likely to suffer from premature death.⁶⁸ Yet even those who had become seasoned needed to “keep eating native foods to maintain bodily adjustment,” or they risked losing whatever advantage they had gained.⁶⁹ In other words, colonists may have believed that they needed to acquire and maintain a kind of tolerance for Amerindian foods.

The physician Thomas Trapham discussed the importance of establishing new habits in his 1679 *A Discourse of the State of Health in the Island of Jamaica*.⁷⁰ As he justified his focus, “The consideration of the Customs and Manners of living, is no way an alien speculation from our scope of desired health, but the neglect thereof often much contributes to diverse Intemperatures, unadvisedly drawn on our selves, for the want of substituting new Indian ones in the place of our proper native manners and usages in living.”⁷¹ Here, “native manners and usages” refer to the customs that English subjects grew up with in England. Although Trapham understood the difficulty of giving up familiar practices, he nevertheless insisted that colonists adopt “Indian ones” that would be better suited to their new place of habitation. The goal was to become native to a new locale by imitating the customs and manners of its original inhabitants. These customs included the drinking of chocolate, which Trapham advocated so heartily that he wanted “the regular living *Jamaica* man” to make it “one half of his sustenance.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), 151-52.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁷⁰ Thomas Trapham, *A Discourse of the State of Health in the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1679), http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:17150875.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 57.

So much did Trapham believe in the necessity for those living in Jamaica to consume chocolate that he even made it the central component of a kind of test of acclimatization. As he explained of individuals' reactions to it,

If to any Thirst ensue the drinking thereof, or whereso it may disagree with the Stomach, as sometimes it may, it signifies such of no good west Indian temper, at least at present; or that the place doth not naturally agree with such an one: For as much as all Natives I ere observed most greedily desire to from their infancy, and if ever they refuse Chocolata, it signifies they need rectifying their State.

Wherefore it is not only a Food, but a natural test of Health.⁷³

Chocolate, in this formulation, has gone from being Gage's cure to being a measure of West Indian suitability. If a person could not consume chocolate, then he or she was not properly tempered to the environment and perhaps even fundamentally incompatible with it. Conversely, colonists who could drink chocolate had a chance of enduring the local climate.⁷⁴

Indeed, chocolate seems to have been consumed with some regularity by not only adults but also children in early English Jamaica. Hans Sloane noted that "Children and Infants drink it here, as commonly as in *England* they feed on Milk."⁷⁵ Sloane was not necessarily as enthusiastic about this custom as Trapham. He "found it [chocolate] in great quantities, nauseous, and hard of digestion"; he also asserted that it "colours the Excrements of those

⁷³ Ibid., 56.

⁷⁴ For further discussion of Trapham's prescriptions regarding chocolate, as well as other dietary recommendations that he made, see Karen Ordahl Kupperman, "Fear of Hot Climates in the Anglo-American Colonial Experience," *William and Mary Quarterly* 41, no. 2 (1984): 232-33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1919050>.

⁷⁵ Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands Madera, Barbados, Nieves, S. Christophers and Jamaica* (London, 1707), 1:xx. It is worth noting that Sloane is commonly credited with the invention of milk chocolate. Yet as James Delbourgo has shown, Stubbe's *Indian Nectar* included recipes for mixtures of chocolate and milk that predated Sloane's voyage to Jamaica. Delbourgo also argues that Sloane's "engagement with cacao was in fact a late intervention in a long history of cultivation and circulation shaped by Amerindians, Spanish colonizers, and enslaved Africans," versus an innovative departure from previous traditions of chocolate consumption. Delbourgo, "Sir Hans Sloane's Milk Chocolate and the Whole History of Cacao," *Social Text* 29, no. 1 (2011): 78, doi:10.1215/01642472-1210274.

feeding on it of a dirty colour.”⁷⁶ Chocolate, with its complex history of racial associations, may still have seemed tainted and potentially contaminating. Yet most colonists came to believe that drinking it would not only save their bodies but also enable them to break the pattern of death on the island. If the first to arrive in Jamaica had suffered from epidemic disease, now, children seemed to be thriving on this novel Amerindian substance and thereby allowing the colony to persist.

3. Plantation and Counter-Plantation

Unfortunately, these plans rested on the fantasy that actions like changing one’s diet could reverse the trend of early death in Jamaica. As Trevor Burnard has pointed out, “Jamaicans denied the obvious” and “developed several myths about how mortality patterns operated” to assuage their fears.⁷⁷ That chocolate could not prevent death became clearer, perhaps, when Jamaican cacao trees themselves began succumbing to an unknown ailment in the 1660s. Oldmixon speculated that the deaths had been caused by some kind of “black Worm or Grub, which they find clinging to [cacao’s] Root,” yet he was forced to admit that, ultimately, the reasons were “unaccountable.”⁷⁸ To return to Lynch, he, too, in spite of his consultation with the Spaniards in Cuba, found himself lost in competing explanations. As he summarized for the Royal Society the various theories that had been floated, “Neither we, nor our neighbours of *Hispaniola* or *Cuba* know, what to attribute this late blast of the Cacao to. Some fancy, ’tis age; others think, ’tis worms; some believe it to be want of shade, or an ill quality of the winds; but

⁷⁶ Sloane, *Voyage to the Islands*, 1:xx.

⁷⁷ Trevor Burnard, “‘The Countrie Continues Sicklie’: White Mortality in Jamaica, 1655-1780,” *Social History of Medicine* 12, no. 1 (1999): 67, doi:10.1093/shm/12.1.45.

⁷⁸ Oldmixon, *British Empire in America*, 2:325.

most judge it's some Constellation or ill Disposition of the Climate.”⁷⁹ Lynch’s use of the term “blast” in his account is telling: it could refer to anything from a strong gust of wind or a lightning stroke to a sudden infection or an insect-caused blight. It could also refer, more simply, to a curse, which is the explanation that the Cubans seem to have resorted to.⁸⁰ Explaining their procedure for treating trees that seemed to be recovering, Lynch noted that they would “bring a Priest and exorcise it and make to apply such a part of its fruit to some particular Saints devotion.”⁸¹ Lynch concluded in disappointment, “I understand their Piety has succeeded as little as our Husbandry.”⁸²

Colonists wanted to pinpoint a specific cause for their troubles. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the possibility that it was not simply one thing that precipitated the destruction of cacao but rather the interaction of multiple biological agents, including human beings, with the environment. Cacao is certainly vulnerable to attack by fungal diseases, worms, and insects. Yet they probably would not have produced such catastrophic effects had cacao trees not been grown on plantations, where infection could easily spread from one closely packed plant to another.⁸³ It is also possible that planter preconceptions about proper agricultural practice contributed to the demise of cacao. Describing the physical appearance of the plantations, Hicqueringill stated that “The Trees are about the bignesse of our largest Plum-trees in *England*, orderly set, like our *Orchards*, at the distance of 6, or 7. foot from each other; which *Interstitiums* are carefully *weeded*, and cleared from the Grasse, that the *Cocoa* Trees may

⁷⁹ [Thomas Lynch], “An Accurate Description of the Cacao-Tree,” *Philosophical Transactions* 8 (1673): 6009, doi:10.1098/rstl.1673.0009.

⁸⁰ “blast, n.1,” in *OED Online*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/19936?rskey=0sfdCL&result=1&isAdvanced=false>.

⁸¹ Lynch to Lord Arlington, Dec. 25, 1672, “Letters from S^r. Thomas Lynch to My Lord Arlington,” fol. 608.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Chris Bright, “Chocolate Could Bring the Forest Back,” *World Watch* 14, no. 6 (2001): 17-18, <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/510>.

without a *Rival* engross the Sap and substance of the *Soil*.”⁸⁴ In growing cacao, English planters did follow indigenous traditions of interplanting, which placed cacao trees under the shade of taller plants (fig. 2).⁸⁵ Yet Hickersingill’s praise of English orchards and horticultural methods testifies to a serious misunderstanding of the ecology of the cacao tree. Cacao trees are native to the heterogeneous environments of American tropical forests, and the leaf litter created by other trees both fostered pollinating insects and protected cacao tree roots from disease-causing worms.⁸⁶ To weed and clear the ground between the trees was the last thing that cultivators should have been doing.

⁸⁴ Hickersingill, *Jamaica Viewed*, 19.

⁸⁵ For more on interplanting, see Carl Ortwin Sauer, *The Early Spanish Main* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1966), 51-55; David Watts, *The West Indies: Patterns of Development, Culture and Environmental Change Since 1492* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 53-60.

⁸⁶ For leaf litter and cacao pollination, see Coe and Coe, *True History of Chocolate*, 21. For the prevention of worms, see Robert A. Rice and Russell Greenberg, “Cacao Cultivation and the Conservation of Biological Diversity,” *Ambio* 29, no. 3 (2000): 172, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4315022>.

MONDO NUOVO. 102

toccato dal Sole morirebbe : & per tanto si pianta
fra i boschi nell'humido, & non li bastando questo,
si piantano appresso vn'albero, ilquale gli è superio
re, & come comincia a crescere gli raddoppiano la
cima di forte, che quando è grande, lo cuopre, &
cosi l'vno con l'altro si fanno ombra, di modo che'l
Sole non gli dà noia alcuna.

Albero che produce il cacauate, & come
gl'Indiani di due legni cauano' fuoco.



Il suo frutto è a modo di mandorle, & nasce in cer

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Fig. 2. Girolamo Benzoni, *La historia del mondo nuovo* (Venice, 1565), fol. 102r. Benzoni depicts a shade tree bending over a cacao tree (with cacao pods) to protect it. He also shows cacao drying in the background and an Amerindian in the foreground starting a fire.

Indeed, planters may have turned away from cacao not only because of the blast but also because it did not meet their expectations for plantation agriculture. As B. W. Higman has claimed, “By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Jamaican cocoa was being displaced by sugar and was sidelined as a plantation crop. The collapse of cocoa production was accelerated by a wilting disease and by the unwillingness of planters to wait on the trees’ coming to bearing.”⁸⁷ Even though he mentions the effects of a “wilting disease,” Higman suggests that planter actions played an equally important role: English colonists may have actively rejected cacao because of its disadvantages in relation to sugar. Cacao has a long growing period, with trees usually taking three to four years to bear fruit.⁸⁸ As such, it could not provide immediate profit.

The need to wait several years before reaping a harvest also created labor problems for planters, even in the eyes of the most enthusiastic promoters of cacao. One of these promoters was Richard Blome, who, as late as 1672, several years after the onset of the blast, was still touting cacao as the “most beneficial *Commodity* of the *Isle*.”⁸⁹ Blome also made sure to provide detailed instructions for the establishment of a cacao plantation. In these instructions, he downplayed the time that one had to wait for the cacao trees to come to fruition, initially dismissing the period as “less then 4. years.”⁹⁰ Yet he later modified this estimate to confess that after an initial, brief phase of work to plant the cacao, there would be almost nothing to do until the crop was ready to be harvested. As he described the situation,

⁸⁷ Higman, *Jamaican Food*, 274.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 272.

⁸⁹ Richard Blome, *A Description of the Island of Jamaica* (London, 1672), 9, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:11899209.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

Note, that all this that is *Planted*, is done in 15. *months*, and the *Cacao* bears not compleatly until the sixth year from the first begining, or comming; so that you will have four years and nine months at liberty with your *Servants*, either to encrease the *Cacao-Walk*, building of convenient houses, and makeing of *Gardens* for pleasure; or else you may fall on *Ginger*, *Indico*, or some other *Commodity* for present profit.⁹¹

Although ginger and indigo were crops that English colonists experimented with in seventeenth-century Jamaica, Blome's suggestions for ways to fill the time were quite fanciful: it is hard to imagine that planters trying to weather the first years of colonization would have wanted to cultivate pleasure gardens.

To let laborers, including enslaved Africans, have gardens and "liberty" on cacao plantations would have seemed even less appealing in the context of maroon resistance. In the late seventeenth century, significant numbers of maroons inhabited Jamaica's mountains. These maroons were Spanish ex-slaves, who gained their freedom when their masters were forced to flee the island in the wake of the English conquest.⁹² Moreover, they were able to evade plantation discipline and establish free communities in large part because of their knowledge of local plants and foodstuffs.⁹³ There is even some suggestive evidence that cacao was one of the plants that they utilized to survive in the mountains: Hughes claimed that "*Maroonoes, Hunters, and such as have occasion to travel the Country*" carried "Balls or Lozanges finely made up with

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

⁹² Orlando Patterson, "Slavery and Slave Revolts: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the First Maroon War Jamaica, 1655-1740," *Social and Economic Studies* 19, no. 3 (1970): 294-97, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27856434>. For more on the history of the first Jamaican maroons, see Barbara Klamon Kopytoff, "The Early Political Development of Jamaican Maroon Societies," *William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (1978): 287-307, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1921836>; Mavis C. Campbell, *The Maroons of Jamaica, 1655-1796: A History of Resistance, Collaboration and Betrayal* (Granby, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey, 1988), 14-43.

⁹³ Kenneth M. Bilby, *True-Born Maroons* (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 2005), 129-36.

Cacao” on their travels so that they could use them in the woods.⁹⁴ Additionally, by featuring chocolate tea as a traditional dish, modern maroon celebrations in Jamaica indicate that “Afro-Jamaicans and their descendants have always had their own uses for plants like cacao.”⁹⁵ If English colonists wanted to imagine that chocolate would help them survive, there was also the possibility that it could sustain those who were opposed to their rule.

In its capacity as a maroon subsistence item, cacao could even be viewed as belonging to a counter-plantation, versus plantation, system. The counter-plantation included provision grounds, kitchen gardens, and other sites that Africans used to gain some “measure of autonomy” by providing food for themselves or selling the surplus.⁹⁶ Ironically, this counter-plantation system was initially established with the acquiescence of planters, who did not want to support their enslaved laborers with expensive, imported provisions.⁹⁷ Planter neglect opened up a “narrow window” of opportunity for cultivators, however, who used their plots to grow what they wanted.⁹⁸ These crops included such African mainstays as yams, okra, and black-eyed peas and represented the expression of “traditional food preferences” by those who still remembered the cuisines of their homelands.⁹⁹ They included plants of American origin as well: the knowledge of indigenous staples like cassava, sweet potatoes, and maize had been passed on when large numbers of Amerindians still lived in the Caribbean and worked alongside Africans

⁹⁴ Hughes, *American Physitian*, 131.

⁹⁵ James Delbourgo, “Sir Hans Sloane’s Milk Chocolate,” 93.

⁹⁶ Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan, 2012), 33. For the first formulation of the counter-plantation concept, see Yvonne Acosta and Jean Casimir, “Social Origins of the Counter-Plantation System in St. Lucia,” in *Rural Development in the Caribbean*, ed. P. I. Gomes (London: C. Hurst, 1985), 34-59.

⁹⁷ Sidney W. Mintz and Douglas Hall, “The Origins of the Jamaican Internal Marketing System,” *Yale University Publications in Anthropology* 57 (1960): 3.

⁹⁸ Judith A. Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff, *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa’s Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 2009), 127.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

on plantations.¹⁰⁰ In addition to serving as “vital repositories of indigenous and African beliefs,” the counter-plantation thus also raised the possibility of ecological exchanges taking place between non-European peoples, without the direct involvement of Europeans.¹⁰¹

The independent and potentially threatening circulation of cacao knowledge appeared in some English accounts of the blast. As Dalby Thomas explained in his 1690 description of its cause,

But the old Trees planted by the *Spaniards* being gone by age, and few new thriving, as the *Spanish Negro's* foretold, little or none now is produc'd worthy the care and pains in planting and expecting it. Those Slaves give a Superstitious Reason for its not Thriving, many Religious rites being perform'd at its Planting by the *Spaniards*, which their Slaves were not permitted to see: But it is probable, that wary Nation...in their transplanting of *Cocoa* from the *Caracus* and *Guatemala* conceal willfully some secret in its planting from their Slaves, lest it might teach them to set up for themselves, by being able to produce a Commodity of such excellent use for the support of mans life, with which alone and water, some persons have been necessitated to live 10 weeks together without finding the least diminution of either Health or Strength.¹⁰²

In this narrative, the life-sustaining properties of cacao once again come to the fore, as they did in previous writings about Jamaica's most promising crop. Here, however, cacao's ability to enable survival aids not planters but their antagonists. As Thomas imagined, the former Spanish

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 108.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth DeLoughrey, “Yam, Roots, and Rot: Allegories of the Provision Grounds,” *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 15, no. 1 (2011): 62, doi:10.1215/07990537-1189530.

¹⁰² Dalby Thomas, *An Historical Account of the Rise and Growth of the West-India Collonies* (London, 1690), 24, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:17311826.

masters of Jamaica's cacao walks withheld information about their cultivation because they were afraid that their slaves would flee once they knew how to grow a substance that could provide them with months of sustenance. Moreover, Thomas' account suggests that perhaps the formerly Spanish slaves did actually possess knowledge that they were simply withholding. They did not reveal any of this knowledge to English planters, who concluded that their old masters had kept secrets from them. Yet these same, supposedly ignorant informants did manage to predict that cacao would fail: they "foretold" its decline as a profitable crop.

Thomas' history thus raised the possibility that the English might never establish control over cacao or its meanings. Cacao had been construed by its first English promoters as a source of wealth, but it consistently called up memories of other uses. Some of these memories were benign and even reassuring, as colonists believed that they could imitate and coopt Amerindian rituals of chocolate preparation and consumption to ensure their own survival. The onset of the blast proved, however, that they suffered from gaps in their knowledge of indigenous agricultural traditions. The blast also highlighted their precarious position in the colony, which still lacked a major commodity crop. By the late seventeenth century, sugar was already being cultivated, yet the island's inhabitants could not foresee the success that it would bring. They instead worried about the death of Jamaica's cacao trees and their vulnerability to maroon subversion. Early Jamaican cacao cultivation certainly belongs in a history of plantation development, yet it also points to the influence of non-European actors and their fashioning of alternative ecologies.