Anne Pérotin-Dumon, *La ville aux îles, la ville dans l'île. Basse-Terre et Pointe-à- Pitre, Guadeloupe, 1650-1820.* Paris: Éditions Karthala, 2000. 1044 pp. Appendices, bibliography, index, and illustrations. 56.53 Euros (pb). ISBN 2-86537-936-1.

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Anne Pérotin-Dumon, already well known for her work on Guadeloupe under the Directory,[1] has written a book whose title suggests that it is a monograph on Guadeloupe's two principal cities. As such, it would already be extremely interesting. But it is much more than that.

Methodologically, the author inscribes the history of the colonial city into the larger pattern of urban development occurring on both sides of the Atlantic between the sixteenth and the middle of the nineteenth centuries. She thus defines and situates her subject in a comparative perspective, measuring the originality of the Guadeloupean city against similar constructs, not only in the Antilles, including the English- and Spanish-speaking Caribbean, but also in the larger context of the New World--that is, of all the regions affected by European expansion, since she compares Basse-Terre to the trading factories of West Africa and French India, such as Port-Louis or Pondichéry.

The book also re-situates urban development in the historiography of the French Antilles. Pérotin-Dumon shows how recent Caribbean history, in claiming its own identity and desire to break with the institutional narratives of the metropole, has focused on the plantation as the womb and metaphor for all of Caribbean society, marginalizing or deliberately ignoring the complex and shifting world of the city. She attempts, therefore, to move beyond the one-dimensional (dare we say, with the author, "totalizing"?) interpretation of the Caribbean past produced when it is studied solely as a "plantation society." As is apparent, this is a methodologically ambitious undertaking, as its historiographical claims warrant.

Pérotin-Dumon begins with a chronological presentation of the development of Basse-Terre and Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe's two main cities. Basse-Terre, the oldest, had little in common with the utopian constructions of the European Renaissance, of which Spain's New World *ciudades* were the ultimate example, with their checkerboard plans, geometrically aligned streets, and spatial representation of social and political hierarchies. Instead, pragmatism ruled, beginning with the original small fort (such as one finds on all frontiers from Canada to Tierra del Fuego, but especially on the coasts of the Gulf of Guinea), and the sheltered harbor where ships could anchor and replenish their water supply. Beyond the fort was the brief Grand Street, parallel to the sea, connecting the buildings grouped around the warehouses (used both for storage and for trading). In the higher elevations, convents and churches dominated the landscape, gradually giving way to plantations. Defense, commerce, and religion were separate functions, and these little clusters of buildings did not yet form a city. What gave coherence and status to the agglomeration was its aristocratic, privileged nature. This

New World society, commonly described as beyond feudal constraints, only developed its own momentum under a feudal impetus. Charles Houel, given seigneurial rights by the Crown, distributed land grants as so many privileges, starting in 1643. After that, between 1640 and 1670, sugar provided a footing for the urban economy and fed its growth.

Pointe-à-Pitre was born almost a century later, in quite a different context. Its development was a feature of the colony's growth, which included a population shift from the area around Basse-Terre towards that part of the Guadeloupean archipelago known as Grand Terre, an evolution linked to the growth of major transatlantic commerce, stimulated by mercantilism. French trade policy made Saint-Pierre in Martinique the leading port in the Lesser Antilles, relegating Basse-Terre to the rank of second-order trading center. But the conflicts of the eighteenth century, especially the Seven Years' War, overturned this pre-established framework, which had insured the "take-off" of the sugar economy in the larger context of the first globalization. Under mercantilism, the circuits of inter-Caribbean commerce were merely extensions of the islands' legally regulated and exclusive trade with France, which was controlled by networks of metropolitan shippers and island merchant-factors. But in wartime, inter-Caribbean trade supported the practice of privateering in the context of a survival economy that established new conditions for commercial exchange and for the social transformation of the "sugar islands." The wars of the French Revolution were part of that evolution, with privateering reaching its climax in the years 1797-1801, during France's "quasi-war" with the United States. The Revolutionary events of the 1790s accelerated the social changes produced by the inter-Caribbean trade, but those changes were rooted in pre-Revolutionary developments, such as the growth of the category of "free people of color," which was particularly well represented in privateer crews and in urban society. Although this free population of color comprised only 5% to 10% of Guadeloupe's total population at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it represented between a quarter and a third of the urban population.

In this conjunction of inter-European conflict and social crisis, representations of the colonial city changed in a way that produced the title of this study. From the "*ville aux îles,*" an accidental outgrowth born at a site favorable to the needs of international navigation and transatlantic commerce, we pass to the "*ville dans l'île,*" a multifunctional organism occupying an autonomous space, responding to the pressures of an increasingly self-generated growth. Pérotin-Dumon hopes to capture the uniqueness of the French Antillean city, contrasting it with the classic period of urban development in Europe (from the 1640s to the Revolutionary period) to draw attention to its specific features, that is, to what the Caribbean had in common with the increasingly self-conscious Anglo-Saxon and Iberian "New Worlds."

Like their European counterparts, colonial cities grew only through a constant migratory influx, since their natural population balance was always negative. But the colonial situation was shaped by a unique pathology: the existence of endemic "fevers" that were deadly to newly arriving Europeans. For this reason, the urban population was caught in a formidable vise: it could only renew itself by the massive addition of white immigrants, but these were the most vulnerable to the disease environment, and their arrival exacerbated urban death rates. Wars, with the intermittent arrival of metropolitan troops, produced the most drastic cases of this phenomenon. The addition of black workers fleeing the plantation world through escape and manumission helped lower the high mortality rate and consolidate urban growth. They also significantly increased the proportion of the overall city population that was free colored--black, mixed race, or mulatto. These were two trends occurring simultaneously during the decade before the Revolution.

Another distinctive characteristic was the unbalanced sex ratio, with a surplus male population. Yet, as the author shows, this situation reversed itself at the beginning of the nineteenth century. From this moment, demographic growth favored women, particularly the category of free women of color. A painstaking analysis of civil records, complemented by notarial archives, confirms the importance of women as workers in the colonial cities. This section of the book bears witness to the wealth of data

contained in the censuses of the Directory, notably in that of the Year V, already exploited by urban historians of metropolitan France. In the commercial center of Pointe-à-Pitre, 62.4% of women were categorized as "active" in 1797, compared to 61.2 % of men. It was these women who insured that strictly urban work, like crafts or petty marketing, far outnumbered jobs linked to the sea or to governmental service. For the most part they were domestic servants, laundresses, and seamstresses. The author's judicious use of iconographic representations of Caribbean cities (especially Basse-Terre and Saint-Pierre in Martinique), in conjunction with these state sources, confirms the ubiquity of these working women, especially laundresses.

Colonialism's caste system both emphasized and solidified the dissymmetry of the socio-economic pyramid, whose very narrow summit, composed of white men, rested on a base that was both black and female. However, the intermediary class was the key to the dynamism of the colonial urban world: petty merchants and craftsmen linked through commercial partnerships, neighborhood networks, kinship and reciprocal obligations. In the city, artisans and white construction contractors were in daily contact with propertied and un-propertied free people of color who provided a variety of services, in contrast to the traditional stereotype of tropical indolence. Some of these free colored landowners had risen to the very outer-edges of notability. The emigration of many royalists during the Revolution greatly accelerated this trend. Boyer-Peyreleau's remark at the beginnings of the Restoration holds true for all the preceding decades, especially after the 1760s: "The free men of color are valuable, for they form the majority of the industrious class. They operate a variety of small businesses, including the retail trade, and practice all the trades useful to society" (p. 571).

In our opinion, this is the most important aspect of this work and is what makes its analysis so profoundly original. By using notarial contracts, genealogical reconstruction, and civil documents to illuminate the free colored social world of Guadeloupe's cities, the book draws attention to the gap between social reality and ideological representations of colonialism, based on a literal interpretation of French slave law. The enormous imbalance that existed on the plantations between the slave masses and the tiny minority of estate managers, and the resulting distance between masters and slaves, had no parallel in Guadeloupe's cities, where the number of slaves was roughly equal to the number of free people, and where the average number of slaves per master was only two or three (the Caribbean equivalent of the "small holding culture" of the southern towns of the United States).

Moreover, after the 1760s especially, there arose a twin dynamic of manumission that shattered the rigid framework of the caste system, which had never been wholeheartedly endorsed by the Old Regime monarchy: economic manumission, a mostly feminine route, and military manumission, which was exclusively masculine. The first of these produced a group of "*de facto* free coloreds" moving towards complete freedom, a process in which a former master became an employer in a relationship based on money. These "founding mothers" played a fundamental role in the emergence of Guadeloupe's free population of color. They, not the fathers, were the ones who created the family. They were the ones who would transmit French cultural norms to their descendants. Escaped slaves living in the cities were another essential element of the free population of color, but one with little of the symbolic weight that today is often conferred upon the "maroon slave." These fugitives were not rebels, but individuals searching for ways to assimilate, especially through membership in this population of "*de facto*" free coloreds.

The military provided the other main route to freedom. In the course of its eighteenth-century wars, the French state increasingly relied on the armed service of slaves, promising them freedom at the end of the conflict. The Revolutionary wars and the formation of the Revolutionary Army of the Antilles in 1794, in which blacks and men of color formed the majority, were simply extensions of this phenomenon. In this context, even the decree of general emancipation on 16 pluviôse Year II [February 4, 1794] was merely an additional step, though one of enormous symbolic importance, down the path of military manumission, practiced for at least four decades. For this reason the disarming of black and

colored troops was a necessary precondition for the re-establishment of slavery in May 1802. Despite the very severe repression that accompanied this colonial restoration (massive executions, massacres, and the forced emigration of free colored "patriots"), the long journey towards *de facto* liberty through economic promotion of free people of color continued until the second emancipation in 1848.

This promotion asserted itself over time, but it could be seen in the emerging social geography of urban districts that gradually acquired a dominant character (residential and artisanal districts, white districts and districts where free coloreds were in the majority) without ever producing a ghetto. This social evolution asserted itself in concrete terms, inscribed on paper, in stone, and in clay. The author uses her great familiarity with the notarial archives, emphasized above, to craft a narrative that privileges the detailed description of living spaces, streets, and houses, but which also emphasizes the urban cultural environment. The colonial city became part of European civilization through the multiplication of social spaces such as academies, Masonic lodges, theatres, and reading rooms. Some 160 pages of well-chosen appendices and numerous illustrations make this book a valuable resource for educators and for urban, colonial, economic, and military historians. By its conclusion, one understands better how the history of Guadeloupe's two main cities illuminates the larger world around them, in the tradition of Fernand Braudel.

This is a magisterial synthesis, destined to be a landmark in the field.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

Pérotin-Dumon's publications in English include "Ambiguous Revolution In The Caribbean: The White Jacobins, 1789-1800," *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* (Canada) 13:2&3 (1986): 495-515; "Free Coloreds and Slaves in Revolutionary Guadeloupe: Politics and Political Consciousness," in *The Lesser Antilles in the Age of European Expansion*, ed. Robert L. Paquette and Stanley L. Engerman (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996); "The Emergence of Politics among Free Coloureds and Slaves in Revolutionary Guadeloupe," *Journal of Caribbean History* 25 (1991):100-135; "The 'Informal Sector' of Atlantic Trade: Cabotage and Contraband in the Port of Guadeloupe, 1650-1800," in *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850*, ed. Franklin W. Knight and Peggy K. Liss (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); "Historiography of the French Antilles and French Guyana, Part A: Martinique and Guadeloupe," in *Methodology and Historiography of the Caribbean*, ed. B.W. Higman (London: UNESCO Publishers, 1999); "French, English and Dutch in the Lesser Antilles: From Privateering to Planting, c. 1550-c.1650," in *New Societies: The Caribbean in the Long Sixteenth Century*, ed. P.C. Emmer (London: UNESCO Publishers, 1999).

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