On a small island called Little Jost van Dyke, five kilometers from the regional population center of Tortola, sits the long-abandoned ruins of a house. Tamarind trees shade these ruins, their roots finding tiny spaces in between the stones and pulling them slowly apart (Figure 1.1). This island is known to the historical record primarily because of one of the people born there: John Coakley Lettsom, a white man of English descent who in the eighteenth century moved away from this poor island, gained an education, and established a successful medical practice in Britain, including treating members of the royal family. Such connections to power, money, and European elites are frequently found in the written record of the Caribbean. Moreover, these islands, large and small, supported European empires and formed the foundation for the economic engine that ran them, fueled by sugar, rum, and profits squeezed from the blood and sweat of enslaved people.

While much has been written of late about the archaeology of the colonial Caribbean (e.g., Delle 2014; Hauser 2011; Kelly et al. 2011) this volume explores sites, themes, and times often overlooked by historical archaeologists. The small, marginal site of Little Jost van Dyke exemplifies the central role often played by these neglected “spaces in between,” revealing how the mainstream narratives of European empires and elites like John Coakley Lettsom are framed by often-untold backstories and simplifications. During his life, Lettsom had little to say about his modest “creole” origins or those whose labor paid for his education; they did not fit with the high society in which he circulated. Nevertheless, his racial identity allowed him to gain access to the elite circles of the imperial core, a privilege that led to a well-recorded life history present in the documentary record of empire.
Although the social and racial structures of his day allowed Lettsom to remove himself from Little Jost van Dyke, there were, of course, those whose racial identity prohibited such free movement. It was primarily the hands of the enslaved Africans of Little Jost van Dyke that built the walls that are now slowly being ruined by the encroaching forest, but little
remains in the written record to document their lives. In recent decades, archaeology of the historic era has turned toward the stories of those “of little note” (Scott 1994): those literally rarely noted by documentary records but also seen as unimportant by the elites of their day, a view that archaeology aims to counter. Understanding the lives of the “invisible” men and women of the empire has long been a focus of Caribbean historians and archaeologists (e.g., Craton 1978; Handler and Lange 1978), but here archaeological work has the added responsibility of understanding the long, sinuous roots of empire: trading networks, military structures, and religious groups in addition to the plantation system itself. These were organizations that stretched worldwide but whose presence was often felt (and fought) in the microscale of daily life. Both of these avenues of research—understanding the sinuous connections between Caribbean plantations and empires and returning those edited out of history to their deserved place—are vibrant avenues of research that are far from exhausted. Yet the chapters in this volume seek to focus our attention on a different set of stories that have so far mainly fallen through the gaps in Caribbean historical archaeology.

The Spaces in Between

Michel de Certeau famously defined a difference between “place” as “the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence” and “space” as living or “practicing” in this place, taking into consideration the “vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables. . . . In relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken” (1984:117). We find this distinction a useful one in imagining the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Caribbean. At first glance, few institutions were more emplaced—more stable, ordered, and structural—than the Caribbean plantation. The physical order of fields, village, and “great” house implies and creates social order of free and enslaved, wealthy and poor. But any student of the Caribbean knows that this stability is to some degree illusory. As “the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers” (de Certeau 1984:117), so was the plantation landscape transformed by the active living of those who inhabited it.

In de Certeau’s terms, space and place coexist since “space is practiced place” (1984:117). In life, even the most ordered of “places” were lived and negotiated as active “spaces,” and the two are not separable—some areas being declared “places” and others “spaces.” In this way, the “space” of our title is not literally de Certeau’s, and his distinction of “space” and “place” is
not necessarily played out in every chapter. Nonetheless, we find this perspective useful in directing us away from a view of ordered stability and the plantation core: a story of oppression and control that, although not wrong, is incomplete.

The site on Little Jost van Dyke described above was the subject of archaeological research that focused on the traditional plantation core of the site: the owners’ house and the homes of the enslaved people held there (Chenoweth 2011, 2012, 2014). Even in this isolated setting we find evidence of the long economic and social arms of empire: manufactured goods, signs of broader religious movements (Quakerism), production geared toward the export of cash crops for the empire, and so on. A traditional focus on an “emplaced” plantation was not the goal here, and the site was considered as lived (as a space), but the focus remained on this core.

While valuable, an alternate view of this site and the empire to which it was tied is also possible. The slow growth of European empires within the island communities of the Caribbean was “enacted in regimes of everyday practices that [were] more mobile and flexible” than one might imagine but that nevertheless resulted in the development of cemented social and economic hierarchies (Hardt and Negri 2000:194). Even on the well-studied plantation, there are creative negotiations, “spaces” being made. While necessarily subordinate to many aspects of imperial goals, local people created their own spaces both within and outside of the imposed divisions established in the colonial world.

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The oppressions of the European empires have been well studied by historians and archaeologists alike. While the stories in this volume frequently entail oppressions, our collective goal is to understand the strategies of people who sought to maintain their own spaces inside or outside the fixed borders of the plantation. All parts of the Caribbean were shaped by similar forces, including race-based chattel slavery, sugar production, capitalism, and the tropical and sometimes deadly natural environment. Embedded in these commonalities, however, is a great deal of diversity. Large sugar plantations populated by hundreds of enslaved Africans have rightfully received a great deal of attention from archaeologists, historians, and the public. They were, however, not as totalizing as a passing glance might reveal, and they cannot be understood simplistically as expressions of the wills of their white owners (Battle-Baptiste 2011; Fellows and Delle 2015; Hauser 2008; Singleton 2001; Wilkie and Farnsworth 2005).
At the same time, these sites do not account for the experiences of everyone in the Caribbean. Other large groups of people lived very different lives, including the great majority of free people who owned only a handful of enslaved people or none at all (Higman 2014:531), the free black population, and a sizable minority of the enslaved who were held on smaller operations. The authors in this volume use innovative techniques and perspectives to reveal stories of spaces and times where the rules of the sugar lords did not always apply. Some of these “spaces in between” hide within plantation landscapes and some are revealed by alternate views of landscapes dominated by the plantation economy. These time periods and sites have received less attention than the experience of being an enslaved person on a large sugar estate in part because the latter was a very common life of an inhabitant of the Caribbean and because of the rich documentary resources associated with large plantations (Higman 2014:531).

Other “spaces in between” are opened up by looking at a time when the plantation system as it had existed was being restructured during the transitions surrounding and following emancipation in 1838. As Kenneth G. Kelly, Mark W. Hauser, and Douglas V. Armstrong note, while slavery-era archaeology has spoken for those denied a voice in written history, “archaeology has not been similarly applied to the post-slavery period, and yet emancipation did not suddenly render workers with history” (Kelly et al. 2011:244). And yet archaeologists have not been quick to investigate this period (although there are important exceptions, such as contributions to Barnes 2011). Particularly in the Caribbean, archaeologists have yet to fully realize the potential to consider this important time (Hicks 2007; Wilkie and Farnsworth 2011).

The authors in this volume aim to take up the challenges posed by these observations through the analysis of lesser known contexts, such as Dominica, St. Lucia, the British Virgin Islands, and the Dominican Republic, as well as the reexamination of unfamiliar settings in more well-studied islands, including Jamaica and Barbados. Despite grueling work regimes and the social and economic restrictions of slavery, people held in bondage carved out spaces in plantation societies ordered and “placed” by others. In similar fashion, studies of the lives, of non-elite Europeans, continental soldiers, and free people of color demonstrate that binary models of black slaves and white planters do not fully encompass the diverse landscape of Caribbean identities as they were negotiated both before and after emancipation. The studies in this volume employ innovative research tools and integrate data from a variety of historical and archaeological sources to
better understand these alternate stories within and beyond the sprawling sugar estates and their modes of order.

**Historical Archaeology in the Caribbean**

While a full review of historical archaeological work in the Caribbean is beyond the scope of this introduction, our suggestion that the works in this volume expand in a new way on this body of work necessitates some discussion of its shape. There are a number of bibliographies and guides to the literature that expand on the discussions considered here. These are usually grouped by the colonial power whose colonies they concern, as in predominantly Spanish (e.g., Curet 2011; Deagan 1988; Ewen 1990a, 2001), English (e.g., Delle 2014; Delle et al. 2011; Hamilton 1996; Watters 2001), French (e.g., Delpuech 2001; Kelly 2008, 2009, 2014), and Dutch (e.g., Haviser 2001) settlements, but other subject-oriented bibliographies, such as Bell’s (1994) on cemeteries or Orser’s (1992) on plantation slavery also include much Caribbean material.

Historical archaeological work in the Caribbean can be loosely classed into five groups. The earliest Caribbean archaeology was concerned with the earliest European occupations. In the 1960s, archaeologists turned to documenting how the enslaved people who made up the bulk of the Caribbean population lived and saw the world. While the role the environment played in shaping human society was a key focus of processual work in 1970s and 1980s, in the late 1990s researchers began to study archaeological “landscapes,” focusing on the way the physical environment was seen and shaped socially. Beginning in the late 1970s Caribbean historical archaeologists began to search for “Africanisms”—cultural survivals carried by African-descended peoples across the middle passage and into the New World. Finally, critiques of the search for such Africanism led to a new focus away from “acculturation” toward “creolization,” the creation of a new uniquely Caribbean culture, and its expression and negotiation. These categories are, like any such grouping, heuristic rather than absolute, and many works cross or blur the lines. For instance, the important theme of how African-descended peoples resisted their own enslavement and thwarted the ends of their enslavers rather than being passive victims cuts across several of these categories. Also, despite the roughly chronological sequence in which these trends appeared, it is not suggested that any one has or should replace any other, and high-quality work toward all of these goals continues.