



Jamaica in 1687: The Taylor Manuscript at the National Library of Jamaica

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This remarkable description of Jamaica in the late 1680s was written by a contemporary English observer, John Taylor, who spent some months on the island. The original manuscript is held by the National Library of Jamaica, and has rarely been used by scholars. It contains information about Jamaica under the Spaniards, about the English invasion of 1655 and about the formation of the subsequent society, including the treatment of slaves. There are sections on the island's settlement and architecture, including a particularly full description of Port Royal. John Taylor sets out fifty current laws, many of them unknown to other such collections. He also carefully explains the nature of Jamaica's birds, beasts and plants. Taylor offers an image of the island before the general spread of sugar cultivation, citing some creatures now extinct in Jamaica; he also makes many suggestions about the medical use of natural products. His world is still one in which certain places are enchanted, though he also describes an island whose main features will be entirely familiar to modern Jamaicans. Buisseret's meticulous work on this manuscript has taken over twenty years and he provides an annotated version of the manuscript, which was originally more than 850 pages and was in three volumes. This edition covers the second half of volume 1 and the whole of volume 2, providing a rich tapestry of Taylor's observations and notes on Jamaica. Most of the remaining manuscript contains autobiographical material and nautical logs. Buisseret's edition provides an annotation and a glossary. The text will be useful to generations of scholars and students alike or to anyone with an interest in Jamaica and its colorful history. Co-published with the the National Library of Jamaica and the Mill Press.

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