

Maureen Warner-Lewis. *Archibald Monteath: Igbo, Jamaican, Moravian*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2007. pp. xv + 367.

The personal narrative of the Biafran Igbo Aniaso, who first became the Jamaican slave Toby, was later christened Archibald John Monteath, and in due course became a trusty and respected Moravian “helper” in the transition from slavery to limited freedom, is one of the precious few surviving ex-slave testimonies from the British West Indies. On the surface, Monteath’s actual testimony (consisting of two overlapping versions), would seem devalued by its very uniqueness and the many tantalizing omissions. But by painstaking research and thoughtful speculations spread over fifteen years, spanning Africa, Scotland, England, Pennsylvania, and Jamaica, Maureen Warner-Lewis, Professor Emerita of the University of the West Indies, has filled in many of the gaps and placed the narrative in its African, Jamaican, religious, social, and economic contexts, shedding invaluable new light on the creolising of Jamaica and Jamaicans in the late slavery and early post-slavery period (1800-1865).

The two basic Monteath narratives, which date from the 1850s and which were printed as early as 1864 and as late as 1966, appear in the present book as two appendices. These narratives are testimonies of the spiritual evolution of one of the most outstanding and ardent of early non-white converts to the peculiarly Moravian version of “non-conformist” Christianity. Professor Warner-Lewis has fruitfully challenged the neglect of Monteath by historians who have favoured such anti-slavery witnesses as his fellow Igbo Olaudah Equiano and the emancipationist martyr (and Jamaican hero) Samuel Sharpe. She must also contend with the common characterization of the Moravian missionaries as allies of the slavery system, and with a series of logistical difficulties, notably a paucity of information concerning the details of Monteath’s kidnapping as a boy around 1800,

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his life as a slave before his religious conversion, his enrolment as a Moravian evangelist from 1827, and his non-religious livelihood from this time until his death in 1864. Following a thorough description of the genesis of the Moravian-inspired narrative reprinted in the appendices, Professor Warner-Lewis devotes the bulk of the book to the nine chapters in which she sequentially fleshes out, corroborates, and evaluates the record from all possible angles—sometimes in excessive detail—before venturing a plausible conclusion.

Warner-Lewis was fortunately able to visit Nigerian Biafra and consult with local scholars to get an informed picture of the geography and culture of the area from which Aniaso was kidnapped—gathering details which had either faded or been reshaped in the captive's mind over the half century between his capture and its recounting. Thus, Warner-Lewis is able to show that, while Aniaso experienced a forcible disjunction, there were features of the Middle Passage that actually facilitated his transition. Significantly, Igboland was a stateless area of small self-contained social units, effectively subsisting on a peasant-style economy, with well-defined structures of caste and inheritance, including slavery. Though apparently too young at the time of his abduction to have undergone the scarifying adult caste rituals, Aniaso claimed to have been the scion of aristocrats, son of a father who was unusual in being, like Christians, monogamous. As to his memory of Igbo religious beliefs, Aniaso drew a parallel, which has been corroborated by contemporary scholars, between the Igbo and Christian concepts of a single supreme being (called Chukwu by the Igbo), although significantly Aniaso maintained that the Igbo had no concept of redemption or of the life hereafter, ideas that are of course essential to Christianity.

After exploring Aniaso's Igbo inheritance, Warner-Lewis turns her attention in the next three chapters to the early years of the relationships between the slave Toby and his owners. He adopted his owners' surname—a common experience for a slave—naming himself Archibald John Monteath in 1821, yet showed distinctive characteristics in other ways. At first reading, the author seems almost to relish for its own sake the amount of detail she has uncovered about

the Scottish Monteath family and its investment connections. The family, which came from Glasgow, had investments in India and in the burgeoning Scottish cotton industry as well as in Jamaica. But on reflection, it becomes apparent that this detail is necessary to demonstrate the degree to which the Monteath estates deviated from other Jamaican plantations, and how this difference affected Toby and made him more fortunate than most slaves. Rather than an area of large lowland sugar plantations, each inhabited by hundreds of brutally overworked and virtually imprisoned slaves, the Monteath holdings in the late slavery period consisted of congeries of smallish stock pens, and coffee and provision farms in a hilly and relatively undeveloped area of south-western Jamaica. Not only were the slave workers found in smaller and more mobile units, they were also more variously employed, and were culturally and even genetically more akin to their owners than were the slaves of most absentee sugar barons. The Igbo Aniaso was bought by John Monteath, a relatively poor relation of the extended Monteath clan, to be passed on successively to his mulatto common-law wife Nancy and their quadroon eldest son, James—both of whom had been formerly enslaved. Aniaso-Toby fitted into this complex ménage with relative comfort, first as a domestic rather than a labourer, then earning the position of “headman,” “driver” or even “overseer” on several Monteath estates, as a token of his intelligence, hard work and fidelity. He even gained the rudiments of literacy in the process. During this two-decade period, however, he apparently retained many of his “African” characteristics, being an avid dancer and participant in Christmas Junkanoos, engaging in informal sexual relationships, and fathering at least one child out of wedlock.

An important stage in his acculturation was reached when the slave Toby was baptized on 24 June 1821—a ceremony that, of necessity, took place in the local Anglican church—and chose to adopt the Monteath name. But the core of the book, as of the ex-slave’s 1850s testimony, covers his gradual adoption and eventual complete absorption into the Moravian missionary community between 1824 and 1837. The Moravians in the West Indies were a pioneer group of

mostly German evangelists who chose to work with, rather than to oppose, the institution of slavery. Indeed some of them actually owned slaves themselves, a position that to a certain extent explains their acceptance in various West Indian colonies. Sporadically attending the recently-built Moravian mission church of New Carmel, and constantly improving his English reading, writing, and speech, “Archy” Monteath underwent his first recorded epiphanic moment while comforting a dying church member called Christina: he was able to take her confession and convince her to die peacefully and happily in the belief that she was on her way to heaven. At least equally important was Monteath’s marriage in January 1826 to a Moravian convert called Rebecca, which occurred after he broke off a long-standing informal relationship with another woman, the mother of a child “born in sin,” who adamantly refused to join the Moravians. Monteath’s adherence to the community of New Carmel was cemented by his formal acceptance into the congregation by its German-American minister in November 1827, his taking of first communion, and his recognition as a helper in September 1829.

The decade of the 1830s was a key period for the new Moravian helper, as well as a testing time for all slaves in Jamaica. Monteath, as a man still enslaved, was also tied to his function as a slave overseer. But he seems to have enjoyed almost as much practical freedom and mobility as the Baptist slave deacon Samuel Sharpe and other privileged slaves in the same western third of Jamaica. In contrast to the activities of Sharpe and the other black Baptist deacons, however, Monteath’s evangelism did not inflame the unrest which led to the bloody slave rebellion throughout much of western Jamaica over Christmas 1831. Rather, the reverse is true: Monteath was instrumental in keeping most of the slaves within his orbit from rebelling, and he subsequently helped to smooth over difficulties during the tumultuous period of political and economic upheaval that led up to the multi-stage emancipation of the slaves between August 1834 and August 1838. This certainly earned Monteath the respect and gratitude of the Moravian missionaries—not least the Reverend Heinrich Pfeiffer, who shared the persecution of the non-Moravian

ministers, but was soon acquitted, largely on the testimony of the slave converts, including Monteath.

What was probably the most important year in Archibald Monteath's personal odyssey, however, was 1837, the very cusp between Jamaican slavery and the limited freedom that followed. Though Monteath did not specifically explain his motives, the person who was now the Moravians' most influential layman manoeuvred energetically to obtain his personal freedom, and that of his wife and child, less than a year before the period of compulsory apprenticeship ended. We can only speculate that he wanted to bring about this change, despite the considerable expense, as a recognition and index of the unusual level of financial, material, and moral status he had already achieved. Significantly, in the same year, the pastor of New Carmel, Reverend Jacob Zorn, successfully secured from supporters in England an annual stipend of thirteen pounds sterling to enable Monteath to become almost a full-time Moravian evangelist.

Professor Warner-Lewis has had to go beyond Archibald Monteath's bare autobiography to fill in as far as possible the details of the concluding twenty-seven years of his life and work, investigating the years both before and after the 1854 compilation of his personal testimony. Most of this new information has been derived from Moravian records and reports (mainly in the Moravian headquarters in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania), and from Jamaican archives, which provide details of Monteath's expanding family connections and business transactions. A much clearer picture emerges of a personage who, while never achieving the formal status of an ordained Moravian minister—the Jamaican Moravian mission was not completely Jamaicanised for another century—remained a dedicated adherent. Monteath was not only admired and valued for his role in developing free Moravian villages and schools, but was also revered for what Warner-Lewis refers to as his "apparent equanimity and charm of disposition." (266)

Perhaps the most telling item in this impressive study is a small visual one: the photograph of Archibald John Monteath's headstone in the New Carmel graveyard. His grave is almost uniquely po-

sitioned alongside those of his ordained white Moravian brethren. This photograph symbolizes Warner-Lewis's rescue of Archibald John Monteath from an obscurity that stems from the preference of most historians for resisters rather than adapters. Far from being a Jamaican Uncle Tom, Aniaso-Toby-Archibald John Monteath was a salient example of the type of proto-Jamaican who made the best of his fate and adapted peacefully yet positively to change. Through his moral leadership—albeit within the constraints of colour and caste—Monteath provided an alternative template for the sons and daughters of the slavery nexus.

Michael Craton
University of Waterloo