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Jaque Hidalgo, Javiera, and Miguel Valerio, eds. Indigenous and Black Confraternities in Colonial Latin America: Negotiating Status through Religious Practices

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Jaque Hidalgo, Javiera, and Miguel Valerio, eds.
Indigenous and Black Confraternities in Colonial Latin America: Negotiating Status through Religious Practices.
Connected Histories in the Early Modern World. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022. Pp. 408. ISBN 978-94-6372-154-7 (hardcover) €119.

While a good number of essay collections have now cast a long and wide-ranging eye over lay religious confraternities in early modern Europe, surveying the phenomenon across cultural/political borders as well as scholarly disciplines (see, for example, Konrad Eisenbichler, ed., *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Confraternities* [Leiden: Brill, 2019]), the same has not been done as extensively for confraternities in early modern Latin America. One of the first to do so for Latin America was Albert Meyers and Diane Elizabeth Hopkins's *Manipulating the Saints: Religious Brotherhoods and Social Integration in Postconquest Latin America* (Hamburg: Wayasbah, 1988), which looked at confraternities in Mexico, Guatemala, the New Kingdom of Granada (northern South America), along the Andes, and in Peru. Back in 1988 that groundbreaking collection was well ahead of its time when it devoted a few of its articles to indigenous and black confraternities on the continent. Now, more than three decades later, the editors of the current volume have elected to "present a long-overdue regional map of the religious and cultural practices associated with indigenous confraternities, as well as those of African or Afrodescendants, from early to late colonial times featuring the work of scholars from varied fields and regions" (11).

The thirteen articles in this most recent collection are grouped according to four geographic areas—New Spain (basically Mexico), Peru, the "Southern Cone" (Chile, Bolivia, Argentina), and Brazil. Its articles are tesserae in a still-developing mosaic of the confraternal movement in Latin America. As a whole, they illustrate both the extensive similarities these confraternities had with their European counterparts and the innovative ways in which Latin America's indigenous and Afro/Afrodescendant populations adapted European institutions and religion to better serve their needs.

Laura Dierksmeier opens the collection with an article that uses confraternity records from central Mexico, "often written in Nahuatl with finances recorded in Aztec currencies," to point out how "indigenous people formed a Christianity of their own that was neither fully 'orthodox' nor wholly

'unorthodox'" (38). The hybrid indigenous/Catholic religiosity evident in the Nahuatl sources highlights various areas of autonomy that "were likely factors for [the] continued voluntary participation of indigenous people in colonial Mexican confraternities" (52) and, consequently, in the larger colonial enterprise. One wonders, in fact, why colonized populations would voluntarily participate in, and adopt, the colonizers' systems of control. One of the answers may well lie in what the system (in this case Catholic confraternities) had to offer.

As with confraternities in Europe, those in Latin America offered their members a communal space in which to worship, establish social bonds, and, as we see in the case of "national confraternities" in places such as Rome or Venice, to preserve and foster certain fundamental aspects of their members' identity, such as their language, culture, devotions, and rituals. Indigenous and Afro/Afrodescendant confraternities in Latin America did the same. But it came with a catch. Though advantageous to members, the social cohesiveness fostered by confraternities was at times viewed with suspicion by the colonizing power, especially when it could be seen as a form of resistance. That same suspicion is present in modern scholarship; in her contribution to the volume, Cristina Verónica Masferrer León points out that by "studying confraternities of people of African origins, it is possible to observe the way in which they made use of the spaces the Spaniards allotted them to form organized groups. These are, in this sense, manifestations of resistance, that is to say, […] a form of rebellion compatible with apparent submission" (84). This same view is expressed in a number of contributions to the volume and in the afterword. Candela De Luca, for example, sees the proliferation of Marian images in indigenous confraternities in eighteenth-century Potosí (Bolivia) as a resistance strategy within the political and religious imaginary of the time (241–71). A less politicized view might suggest, as Masferrer León does, that "[t]he formation of a group that shared a social identity is an extremely complex phenomenon" (85).

That complexity, evident in all contributions to the volume, reflects the protean vitality of confraternities in early modern Europe and the Americas. Krystal Farman Sweda, for example, argues that "the complex social relationships forged by persons of African descent within the multiethnic colonial parish formed the foundation of their religious communities" (91). Her article illustrates how black confraternities brought together people "of all types of *calidad* or color" and were part of the shifting dynamics that firmly linked these sodalities, and their members, with the parish and the community around them.

One of these links was artistic. In her contribution on the artworks in, and visual displays of black confraternities in Lima, Peru, Ximena Gómez points out how the visual imagery owned and used by confraternities were not static pieces to be admired at a distance but living elements of the devotional and communal life of the membership. After recalling Richard Trexler's assertion about how "mistaken we are when we describe these images as if they were in a museum, stripped to the bone and divested of all the ornaments of clothing and honors with which they were earlier dressed" (130), she concludes that the real barrier to our understanding of the role of images in the devotional life of Latin American populations "may not reside in the loss of their sacred images, but in the total lack of extant examples of the clothing, jewelry, wigs, and capes through which they were defined" (130). Even given such a loss, Gómez is able to conclude, more optimistically, that "black and indigenous people defined Lima's religious landscape through their participation in devotion and festivals, and through the display of their confraternal art and *bienes* in their decorated chapels and in public procession" (131).

Enrique Normando Cruz and Grit Kirstin Koeltzsch take a different perspective in their joint article on the religious festivals of the indigenous population of Jujuy (Argentina) to argue that such festivals helped to consolidate Spanish rule and legitimize the authority of the local indigenous governor, not to mention foster a penchant for excessive consumption of food and wine (273–95). The latter observation brings to mind Luther's famous condemnation of German confraternities as debauched drinking clubs (Martin Luther, "The Blessed Sacrament of the Holy and True Body of Christ, and the Brotherhoods," in Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther*, trans. Jeremiah Schindel [Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1916], 2:26–27).

Karen B. Graubart looks at the language of black confraternities in Peru to show how "Lima's Afro-Peruvian *cofrades* drew upon their contemporary experiences and needs to formulate community and differentiate themselves from their 'others'" and, in so doing, "how enslaved and freed people of color saw themselves within the colonial city" (158).

Tamara J. Walker looks at how the Afrodescent women in Lima's sodalities "used the acquisition of devotional items to lay claim to a particular kind of status, one that not only signaled their profound personal fealty to Christianity but that also allowed them to convey it to others," something that, unfortunately, could have dire consequences when these women became "targets of suspicion

that ultimately led to their being accused of kidnapping and theft" (176), or worse.

Angelica Serna Jeri's fascinating article looks at how geographical features such as glaciers served as sites of devotion for Andean and Amazonian confraternities (181–207). Jaime Valenzuela Márquez surveys the Andean Amerindian confraternities in Santiago de Chile in the seventeenth century to conclude that these institutions allowed the immigrant indigenous population "to build new social and cultural identities and, eventually, new ethnic references, as revealed by the use of the term 'cuzco'" (235). Again, an echo of the "national confraternities" we see in Rome and/or Venice.

The final three articles focus on Brazil. Célia Maja Borges surveys its black brotherhoods, concluding once again that they served as sites for community and solidarity building (299–318). Marina de Mello e Souza looks at Afro-Brazilian confraternities to conclude that Afro-Brazilians were able to create their own space(s) by negotiating between cultures and by adopting European institutions (319–34). Lucilene Reginaldo returns to festivals and pageantry, this time to point out the economic and political impact of black confraternities in Bahia (335–57).

Nicole von Germeten brings the volume to a close with an afterword (359–65) that points out how indigenous and Afro/Afrodescendant confraternities in Latin America helped to shape identity, politics, art, and economy on the continent and encourages readers and colleagues to continue the conversation on "the long tradition of activism" (363) within black and indigenous confraternities in Latin America.

In its regional distribution and disciplinary diversity, this collection significantly expands our knowledge and understanding of indigenous and black confraternities in Latin America. One is truly enriched by the archival information presented and the scholarly interpretations offered by the articles. In reading the various contributions this reader kept hearing echoes of similar situations in European confraternities, something that clearly illustrates the appeal and usefulness of confraternities to early modern people, whether indigenous, black, or European.

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