

presenting precontact religion and local knowledge, which the church so zealously struggled to eradicate. Since detailed information about ritual practices violated the injunctions of both church and crown, such works were simply illicit. But the power of the plays could be even more far-reaching: Leeming argues that by creating a public space where Indigenous actors were to become living embodiments of banned deities, they achieved a much deeper level of discursive and ideological (re)appropriation. Likewise, he shows convincingly that the contestation of dominant ideologies flowing beneath the textual surface manifests itself in establishing parallels between the fearless Nahua Christian martyrs and Christ, thus opposing the prejudiced views of Indigenous Christians as weak and eternally immature “children in faith”.

Finally, Leeming contextualizes this challenging textual production in Nahuatl by anchoring the apocalyptic thought conveyed by the Native religious texts in the concept of cultural trauma caused by Christianization and colonization. This interpretative framework guides the readers through a highly complex but utterly fascinating historical source, making them aware that Native people dealt with painful events using alphabetic writing in their own language as “the perfect instrument for pushing back against empire’s hegemonic claims”.

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AFRO-MEXICO AND THE EARLY CARIBBEAN

Joseph M. H. Clark. *Veracruz and the Caribbean in the Seventeenth Century*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. xviii +, 313. \$110.00 cloth; \$110.00 e-book. doi:10.1017/tam.2023.68

The last decade has seen a fluorescence of studies on Afro-Mexico and a renewed interest in the early Caribbean. Joseph M. H. Clark expertly weaves both strands of scholarship into a study that centers Veracruz as a predominately Black community that linked the Mexican interior to the Caribbean and Atlantic worlds. My one critique is that the title of the book does not convey the monograph’s profound engagement with the history of Africans and their descendants in Veracruz: he puts Veracruz and its Black residents at the center of a history that highlights how the maritime connection to Caribbean circuits shaped the development of the city as a vital node of empire and the culture and society of its residents.

Clark divides the work into two sections. Building the Mexican-Caribbean World examines the material links between Veracruz and the Caribbean in four chapters. The first one examines the history of settlement, from the pre-Colombian period through the Spanish city’s foundation and multiple relocations, ending with the foundation of

Nueva Veracruz in 1599. The second chapter tackles the linkages between environment, illness, and Afro-descended residents of the city. Clark notes that the association often made between the port's tropical environment and frequent outbreaks of pestilential illness, and its increasingly racialized residents, served to set the city apart as a place and space unlike other cities in New Spain.

Chapter 3 maps the trade networks that linked Veracruz to coastal, Caribbean, and transatlantic circuits of trade. This nuanced analysis draws from a variety of previously underutilized sources to argue that although trade along the coast and to and from the Caribbean generated less revenue than the formal fleet system, these circuits provided a more consistent link to other maritime communities in the region. The fourth chapter similarly delves into less frequently consulted sources to map the routes by which enslaved Africans entered Veracruz. Clark highlights several shortcomings in prior studies and, in an important way, reminds readers that Africans transported during the first centuries of the transatlantic trade did not always travel in ships dedicated solely to the transport of enslaved persons.

The second part of the book, *The Caribbean in Veracruz*, analyzes Afro-Veracruz culture and society, highlighting how Veracruz's linkages to the Caribbean influenced the practices, beliefs, and identities of its residents. Chapter 5 examines the use of African ethnic labels and argues that specific African ethnonyms, such as Matamba or Lobolo, retained salience even decades after the volume of African arrivals in the city had drastically diminished. Clark argues that this granularity of identity facilitated both Africans' continuing connections to diasporic communities across the Caribbean and officials' efforts to find ways to divide and differentiate the city's majority Afro-descended residents.

The sixth chapter examines a variety of Inquisition cases that highlight how heterodox religious beliefs and practices circulated through Veracruz as they moved from Atlantic and Caribbean spaces into the Mexican interior. The final chapter examines the free-Black militias of Veracruz, pointing out that their petition for collective rights and privileges pre-dated those of other militia units on the mainland by almost a century and grew out of their important role and deployment in defense of the Caribbean.

Overall, this book provides a nuanced and multifaceted look at the profound ways in which Veracruz represented a key port of the Caribbean and an important site of African ethnogenesis in the Americas. The prose flows easily and the arguments are accessible to scholars and lay readers alike. Deeply researched and skillfully argued, this study offers insights and methodological frameworks that will continue to influence the field for years to come.

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