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Review Essay

Larissa Brewer-García, *Beyond Babel; Translations of Blackness in Colonial Peru and New Granada*.
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Carmen Fracchia, *'Black but Human': Slavery and Visual Arts in Hapsburg Spain, 1480-1700*.
Oxford University Press, 2019 Print ISBN-13: 9780198767978

Cécile Fromont, ed. *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas;
Performance, Representation, and the Making of Black Atlantic Tradition*.
Penn State University Press. 2019 ISBN: 978-0-271-08329-2

Erin Kathleen Rowe, *Black Saints in Early Modern Global Catholicism*.
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Scholarship that has embraced pervasive ‘truths’ about the meaning of black skin color in the sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Iberian world – primarily, that Iberians’ visions of purity of blood led Iberian thinkers to exclude Black Africans from the possibility of claiming an Old Christian status – has rendered invisible varied discourses pertaining to Africa, Catholicism, blackness, and slavery in this period, and the important intellectual work that free and enslaved Black men and women engaged in to craft meanings of blackness and Catholicism in localised sites of the Atlantic world. The works under review explore how varied ideas about blackness circulated and obtained currency in particular sites in Iberia and the Americas, while centring the intellectual work of Black Africans and their descendants. Collectively, these studies explore how enslaved and free Black men and women in Iberia and the Americas shaped early modern Catholicism through devotional practice, performance of religious festivities, litigation, royal and papal petitioning, artistic endeavours, and spiritual and linguistic mediation.

In *'Black but Human': Slavery and Visual Arts in Hapsburg Spain, 1480-1700*, Carmen Fracchia maps how ideas about black skin color emerged (and were contested) in Hapsburg Spain through a rich history of visual representations of slavery and Black Africans following the themes of ‘slavery,’ ‘props and costume,’ ‘commodification,’ and the ‘image of freedom.’ The strength of this book lies in the tour-de-force discussion of varied visual representations of Black Africans and their descendants in Hapsburg Spain that are not always considered together, culminating in a rich catalogue of 58 images. Fracchia explores the often-contradictory visual landscape that depicted blackness in the period. For example, Fracchia offers a poignant discussion of how artists in Spain imbued the myth of the Miracle of the Black Leg with a particularly violent form, tending to depict the torturous pain of the amputation of an enslaved Black man’s leg while he was still alive. In contrast, painters such as Diego Velázquez (1599-1660) depicted the quotidian presence of enslaved and free Black men and women in the social fabric of urban life and

domestic labor. A nuanced discussion of black portraiture through the work of the Black artist Juan de Pareja (1610 -1670), who was formerly enslaved to Velázquez, offers a powerful analysis of how Juan de Pareja altered his own self-portrait from Velázquez's portrait of him to represent himself as a noble Black old Christian, thus offering a powerful analysis of Juan de Pareja's self-fashioning through self-portraiture. Less powerful, while still tantalizing, were discussions of literary traditions (particularly the Black Christmas Carols known as *Villancicos de Negros*) and legal archives (particularly the 1604 conflict between a black confraternity of Seville and the Archbishop) as Fracchia synthesises well-known and widely available publications in Spanish, while the proposal that a topos existed among Afro-Iberians of 'black but human' rests on a thin evidentiary basis. Fracchia's ambitious study of the diverse visual cultures of blackness and slavery in Hapsburg Spain will be invaluable to readers seeking to understand how diverse artists, including formerly enslaved Juan de Pareja, defined and debated the meanings of blackness in Hapsburg Spain.

The most widespread circulation of black images in this period were those of Black saints. In *Black Saints in Early Modern Global Catholicism*, Erin Rowe explores how the veneration of Black saints and cults in black brotherhoods across the Iberian world transformed spiritual practice in Catholic Europe. Rowe explores global Catholicism "beyond a Eurocentric framework" and argues that early modern devotional practices spearheaded by individuals in the margins of the Iberian world, including Afro-Iberians, could and did de-center Rome in early modern devotional practise and transformed the early modern Catholic Church in Europe as well as in the Americas. Rowe offers a synthetic analysis of the cults of Black saints in the Iberian world with case studies drawn primarily from Iberia (Spain and Portugal) and Lima (Peru) to explore how the clergy and Afro-Iberians constructed images and ideas about sacred blackness, with a focus on hagiographies of Black cults and saints penned by theologians in the early Iberian world, confessional texts penned partially or entirely by spiritual mystics of African descent (most prominently Úrsula de Jesús in Lima), selected records of conflicts between black confraternities and ecclesiastical authorities, a petition delivered by a Black African to the Vatican, and a detailed exploration of the materiality and visual imagery of sculptures and images of black sanctity in the Iberian world. For the latter, Rowe has catalogued 89 images that will be invaluable to scholars and students.

Throughout the study, Rowe traces how representations of Black saints became sites of important discursive landscapes for discussions about the meanings of blackness and black sanctity in the Catholic church. The first chapter explores the emergence of Black saints in early modern Europe, offering the reader a glimpse of the variety of holy of people of color in Catholic Europe. These included Ethiopian saints such as Efigenia and Elesbao, Black Madonnas, and contemporaneous holy people, such as San Benito de Palermo. The second chapter maps the formation of black religious confraternities in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Iberia, and traces their widespread adoption of black devotional images, with a particular focus on Benito de Palermo. The third chapter explores how Afro-Iberians shaped meanings of Catholicism by arguing for a Church that was more inclusive of Black people, often through litigation or petitions. For example, an Afro-Iberian named Lorenzo Silva de Mendoxa travelled from Portugal to Rome in 1698 to deliver a petition to the Vatican that criticized how Black Christians in the Iberian world were often condemned to "perpetual slavery." Another section explores a well-known legal conflict in the early seventeenth century between a black brotherhood in Seville and the Archbishop, in which members of the black confraternity defended their right to partake in Seville's highly competitive Holy Week processions by arguing that Catholicism was inclusive of Black people. Collectively, these first three chapters catalogue the myriad ways that Afro-Iberians shaped early devotional practices and meanings of blackness in the Catholic church in localised sites.

The next chapters explore a diverse discursive landscape about black Catholicism in the Iberian world through an analysis of varied images of black sanctity in the early modern period across three source bases that include sculpture and images, hagiographies, and confessional texts. Chapter Four explores the materiality of sculptures and images of Black saints, positing that artists and sculptors often sought to represent black beauty and the spiritual potential of Africans through the images of Black saints. The fifth chapter focuses on the hagiographic tradition of the lives of Black holy people, with a particular, but not exclusive focus on the hagiographies built around the cult of Benito de Palermo. This chapter illuminates the complex ways that hagiographers dealt with competing ideas about race and blackness and Catholicism. As Rowe notes, hagiographies of Black saints drew from tropes developed in older medieval and early modern works while developing new discourses of sanctity as “the lives of contemporary holy people of color necessitated a different approach, one that naturalised color difference.” Hagiographies of Black saints reveal how clerical authors discussed, understood, and provided spiritual meaning to Black saints’ colour difference within the framework of Catholic theology. This chapter is a major contribution to our understanding of how the devotional practices of Afro-Iberians, who chose to venerate Benito de Palermo, transformed early modern global Catholicism; religious thinkers engaged with Black devotional practices and attempted to rethink Blackness, sanctity, and beauty by penning hagiographies and other religious texts. The sixth and final chapter explores the confessional texts of religious women and *donadas* of African origins, most prominently Úrsula de Jesús (1604-1666), an Afro-Peruvian who lived in a cloistered convent in late-seventeenth-century Lima and was renowned for her ability to intercede on behalf of souls in purgatory. Rowe explores how Úrsula de Jesús navigated meanings of Blackness, difference, and racial segregation in society through discussions with souls in purgatory about earthly segregation of enslaved and free Black men and women. Exploring the confessional texts of contemporaneous holy women of color across different sites in the Iberian world, Rowe explores how each of these holy women of African descent practiced and espoused humility, mirroring the humility described by hagiographers writing about Black saints’ lives explored in earlier chapters.

This study thus not only explores layered and diverse discursive landscapes pertaining to Black devotion, meanings of blackness, and black Christianity in this period, but also situates the fundamental role that both individual Afro-Iberians and the clergy played in shaping such meanings. Plotting these sources and historical episodes in conversation across the chapters highlights important connections between these diverse historical contexts, and raises provocative questions about the extent to which historical processes in each sphere (such as hagiographies and confraternal conflicts, Úrsula de Jesús’ spiritual diary, or an anonymous author of a letter to nuns in Madrid) affected and shaped one another. Rowe’s thematic approach, with a focus on the emergence of ideas about beautiful blackness, humility, and sanctity, raises questions about the extent to which Afro-Iberian historical actors regarded themselves as part of the same devotional culture as holy or religious people of color, or whether their actions responded to very localised contexts.

This tantalizing question about whether enslaved and free Black Africans regarded themselves as part of a broader black Catholic Iberian tradition, and whether Black men and women developed ideas about black Catholicism in tandem with, or in opposition to, clergy is perhaps best answered through a focus on particular locales. Larissa Brewer-García’s landmark study *Beyond Babel; Translations of Blackness in Colonial Peru and New Granada* explores the intellectual production of black linguistic and spiritual intermediaries in seventeenth-century Cartagena (in present-day Colombia) and Lima (in present-day Peru), who mediated the Christian evangelization of enslaved and free Black Africans in the Spanish Americas. In this important

study, Brewer-García explores how black linguistic and spiritual mediators created images of black virtue and black beauty that contradicted Iberian ideas about racial hierarchies and stigmatization of blackness.

Brewer-García adeptly explores Cartagena de Indias as a core site for black intellectual production by focusing on the actions of a coterie of enslaved Africans who served as linguistic translators (*lenguas*) for the Jesuit mission in Cartagena. The town became one of the highest-volume slave-trading ports of the early seventeenth-century Atlantic; historians have uncovered records of the arrival of at least 487 slave ships between 1573 and 1640, which disembarked “at least 78,453 enslaved Africans in the city and neighboring ports,” most of whom hailed from Upper Guinea and Angola.¹ Based in Cartagena, Jesuit priest Alonso de Sandoval (1576-1652) became obsessed with the ubiquity of illegitimate baptisms that priests and slave traders administered to enslaved Africans in slave-trading ports in Angola, Cape Verde Islands, and Guinea, and on slave ships destined for the Spanish Indies, and dedicated his missionary and intellectual life to correcting null baptisms that occurred in the slave trade. In his daily life, Sandoval and his disciples tended to the souls of enslaved Guineans and Angolans who survived the horrific brutality of forced displacements on slave ships that crossed the Atlantic and arrived in Cartagena de Indias. Brewer-García explores how the Jesuit approach to conversion in Cartagena relied on the labor of enslaved Black African interpreters from diverse linguistic backgrounds, known as *lenguas*, to translate the catechism to enslaved Black Africans in Cartagena. This Jesuit strategy for black evangelisation granted Black interpreters in Cartagena unparalleled influence over the translation of Christian doctrine into African languages, and positioned certain Black linguistic and spiritual intermediaries in powerful positions to mediate Christianity. In other words, Brewer-García explores how the Jesuits’ reliance on Black interpreters for the evangelisation of enslaved Africans in Cartagena afforded Black interpreters a position of interpretive authority to shape and circulate evangelical discourse in colonial Spanish Americas.

Brewer-García explores how Black translators leveraged an ideology of Christian equality in seventeenth-century Spanish America to identify with and articulate notions of black virtue and black beauty in colonial texts. For example, Brewer-García reads the late seventeenth-century beatification process of Jesuit priest Pedro de Claver (1580-1654) to analyse how enslaved interpreters chose to present images of beautiful black spirituality in their conversations with enslaved Africans. This argumentative thread highlights Brewer’s impressive work in translation studies by deploying a sensitive analysis of varied textual sources to read Black interpreters’ agency across fragmentary testimonial collections in seventeenth century Cartagena; the author compares Black interpreters’ statements about certain evangelisation rituals with those of other Jesuit brothers in the same beatification report, as well as discussions of evangelisation scenes in the annual letters penned by Cartagena Jesuits to Rome, and later hagiographic celebrations of Pedro de Claver’s life. In another example, Brewer-García explores the life of Úrsula de Jesús in Lima. Brewer-García defines Úrsula de Jesús as a spiritual mediator whose power to intercede on behalf of souls between purgatory and heaven positioned her in a unique space of spiritual authority and translation, akin to the enslaved Black linguistic interpreters in Cartagena. Brewer-García’s work thus explores how Black spiritual and linguistic mediators played a fundamental role in shaping alternative visions of blackness that coalesced around ideas of black beauty within Christianity. Importantly, such a history centres the labour and intellectual work of enslaved and free Black Africans.

1 Alex Borucki, David Eltis, David Wheat, “Atlantic History and the Slave Trade to Spanish America,” *The American Historical Review*, Volume 120, Issue 2, April 2015, Pages 433–461. David Wheat, “The First Great Waves: African Provenance Zones for the Transatlantic Slave Trade to Cartagena De Indias, 1570—1640,” *The Journal of African History*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2011, pp. 1–22.

Cécile Fromont's edited volume *Afro-Catholic Festivals in the Americas; Performance, Representation, and the Making of Black Atlantic Tradition* considers how enslaved and free Africans and their descendants forged black Atlantic traditions by drawing on festive rituals that hailed from practices in Central African Catholicism. The authors of the volume focus on the performance of religious festivals in different Atlantic sites to trace how such staged activities often emerged from specific central African Christian rituals. One particular focus across many of the chapters is on the *sangamento*, a dance mock fight ritual that emerged among the elite in the Kingdom of Kongo to celebrate feast days as part of ceremonies and prior to important battles. An illuminating chapter by Miguel A. Valerio analyses the first recorded festival staged by Black performers in the Americas, which took place in Mexico-Tenochtitlan as part of the 1539 celebration of the truce of Aiges-Mortes. Valerio posits that the 1539 performance represented a *ladino* invention that fused central African rituals and previous Iberian experiences of Black *ladinos* of Central African origins who had lived in both Iberia and New Spain. In another chapter, Kevin Dawson explores how enslaved men and women staged a mock naval battle of the Iberian ritual drama of the *Moors and Christians* on the island Itamarca in Pernambuco in 1815. Dawson explores how enslaved actors brought freshwater and saltwater west-central African spiritual traditions to Brazil's ecological and maritime environment. The chapters in this collection explore how Catholicism in central Africa, and especially in the Kingdom of Kongo altered Atlantic History; African diasporas in the Americas who took part in performing Christian rituals engaged with and responded to European Christian traditions while also drawing on varied memories, histories, and traditions of Catholicism in Central Africa.

These four publications span varied disciplinary and methodological approaches to black devotional practices within early modern Catholicism in Iberia and the Americas, and open important new avenues in the histories of ideas about race, blackness, Catholicism, and Africa in the Iberian Atlantic. Each publication points to important ways that Black Africans and their descendants interacted with, and often shaped, early modern Catholicism, and collectively these studies will undoubtedly animate important research questions and methodological approaches for future scholarship exploring the intellectual production of enslaved and free black Africans and their descendants in the Atlantic world.