

CHRISTIANITY AND ENSLAVEMENT IN BRAZIL

Paternalism, Transgression and Slave Resistance in Brazil. By Robson Pedrosa Costa. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2022. Pp. 208. \$99.99 cloth; \$99.99 e-book; \$99.99 PDE
doi:10.1017/tam.2023.69

This specialized monograph provides a rich archivally based study of enslavement and Benedictine paternalism in colonial Brazil, especially during the nineteenth century. Costa carefully considers internal records and related historical documentation to detail the enslavement practiced by the Benedictine monastery in Olinda, Pernambuco, founded in the late sixteenth century and still an active monastery today. Drawing theoretical inspiration from E. P. Thompson, Eugene Genovese, and a pioneering 1982 article published in *The Americas* by Stuart B. Schwartz, Costa provides a historical reconstruction of what he terms “Benedictine slaveholding paternalism” (43, 53–54).

This matters, because after the 1759 expulsion of the Jesuits and alongside individual monks’ vows of poverty, the Benedictine order collectively became the wealthiest and most extensively slaveholding religious order in all of nineteenth century Brazil. Though a powerful force in Portugal and throughout the Portuguese empire, Benedictines were not active in Spanish America until the twentieth century. Uniquely in the Brazilian context, the enslaved workforce controlled by the Benedictines managed to reproduce itself, a social historical reality first noted by Schwartz. Costa provides a persuasive explanation of this fact, one that honestly confronts the limitations as well as the distinctiveness of Benedictine managerial strategies in a context of extreme inequality.

The book seeks to balance two considerations. As Costa asserts “Not even better treatment could reduce the intrinsic violence of enslaving someone. Slavery was above all pain, deprivation, restriction” (42). In this context, he sets forth his aims: “The main purpose of this book is to demonstrate how a Christian religious institution devised and re-engineered somewhat original strategies for controlling the bodies, minds, and even reproduction of enslaved people” (2). The historical evidence skews heavily toward the nineteenth century.

Alongside thorough documentation of abuses of power and conflicts over resources including land and equipment, and frequently stymied attempts to control people providing essential labor and reproductive capacities (99–100), two especially interesting areas of negotiation and compromise emerge. The first involves Benedictine (and until their expulsion, Jesuit) insistence on Christian marriage and the refusal to break up family units formed by the enslaved. While this was imposed “from above” and provided obvious benefits in terms of stabilizing and increasing the workforce, other human traffickers in this time and place showed no restraint in destroying enslaved families and bitterly opposed Benedictine efforts to promote Christian

marriage. The second concerns abolition. The Benedictines in Brazil appear to have been an important elite faction pushing Brazilian abolition forward by supporting passage of a “free womb” law in 1866 and freeing all their enslaved in 1871, some 17 years prior to Brazilian emancipation in 1888.

Benedictines were important advisers to Emperor Pedro II, and the discussion of elite abolitionist politics among conservatives and monarchists is fascinating in unexpected ways. As Costa demonstrates, positive assessments of Benedictine promotion of abolition in Brazil must be tempered by the acknowledgment of several realities. Benedictine concessions on abolition came in the context of liberal attacks on the vast holdings of the religious orders in Portugal and Brazil (85–86, 153). This included a prohibition on the admission of “novices,” or new members, from 1855 on (86), with the result that only four Benedictines were left in the Olinda monastery in 1871 (34, 136), before the twentieth-century re-emergence of reformed monastic communities.

The Benedictines’ “freeing of the slaves” at times improved their relationships with the national government by providing soldiers for the 1864–70 War of the Triple Alliance, with freedom being granted in exchange for military service (181). Benedictines also granted manumission in the hope of nourishing a loyal “free” workforce while reducing holdings in land and people to prevent liberal property expropriations (170, 174–75). Much as in Genovese’s South, Benedictine paternalistic expectations in Brazil were crushed following emancipation when most of the formerly enslaved chose to leave their previous places of captivity (186). Most important, prior to the final crisis of the slave system and intensification of Benedictine manumissions from 1866 onward (156), over 90 percent of those manumitted by the Benedictines in Olinda had paid for their own freedom (71, 78). A tragic but notable aspect of Brazilian enslavement was that many of the enslaved, including those on Benedictine estates, gained their own freedom by purchasing other enslaved people to provide income streams or to take their place (103).

Costa is aware of the central problem of silences in the historical record. He asks “What did slave people think and feel?” (147), before naming a long list of important issues. The question is possibly unanswerable, and certainly unanswerable using the types of historical sources on which the analysis is based. In terms of the historiography of Benedictines in Brazil, we know that from the late eighteenth century onward a small number of mixed-race and other Afro-descendent Brazilians joined the Benedictine order, though what this means in terms of daily life, existing racial hierarchies, legal statuses, and cultural redefinitions remains unexplored.

While the Benedictine role in elite abolitionist politics from 1866–71 had important consequences, the space in the historiography devoted to these final years should be balanced with a more detailed assessment of the centuries of Benedictine involvement with slavery in colonial Brazil. Indeed, Benedictine support for abolition in Brazil came approximately 1331 years after Benedict of Nursia first composed what initially was a

startlingly radical statement on the proper treatment of slaves in the monastery, a rule that among other things pre-dated the emergence of the Atlantic slave trade by nearly a millennium. Those interested in the complex relationships between texts and contexts, especially as these relate to terms of Christianity and enslavement in Brazil, will benefit from Costa's meticulous research.

Haverford College
Haverford, Pennsylvania
jkrippne@haverford.edu

JAMES KRIPPNER

GLOBALIZING POLITICAL ECONOMY IN HAITI

Entrepôt of Revolutions: Saint-Domingue, Commercial Sovereignty, and the French-American Alliance. By Manuel Covo. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. 304. \$27.95 paper.
 doi:10.1017/tam.2023.70

There is no shortage of works on Atlantic empires, economies, or revolutions, and yet Manuel Covo's *Entrepôt of Revolutions* reframes how we think about all of these things. Covo's analysis of colonial capitalism centers not on the British and Spanish slave labor camps and mines, or genocide campaigns on the American continents that often star in stories of imperial development, but on Saint-Domingue. Covo showcases the "pearl of the Antilles" as the "hub of global capitalism" (2). The free-trade debates of the American, French, and Haitian revolutions centered on this incredibly rich island—the most profitable colony in the Atlantic in the late eighteenth century.

This is not, however, a book about only economic debates in the abstract, but one on the complicated realities and shifting networks that defined the era of imperial overthrow in the Americas. Covo mines a wealth of trade records, legislative documents, merchant papers, diplomatic correspondence, and pamphlets in multiple languages to spotlight the diverse cast of individuals, from enslaved laborers to well-known philosophers, who made Saint Domingue the "counterintuitive pinnacle of a republican project based on international law and commercial diplomacy" (97). Because France, like Spain, was a "polycentric polity," there were multiple centers of power; the book highlights in new ways the importance of Saint Domingue as one of these centers (8).

After an introduction that explains the stakes in "placing political economy at the center of the revolutionary narrative" and shifting the conversation away from a Eurocentric understanding of the Age of Revolutions and free trade debates, Covo moves from 1776 to 1801 to highlight the American, French, and Haitian revolutions. In nine chapters, he painstakingly reconstructs the mercantile relationships, diplomatic networks, and political ideas that flowed through Saint-Domingue (8). Each chapter highlights the shifting attitudes and actions of individuals who were not bound by the