

African Kings and Black Slaves is deeply historiographical and written with passion; it is a work that is likely to spark discussion. It is a worthwhile beginning for anyone interested in understanding the origins of the slave trade, racism, or the status and nature of slavery in Europe and the Americas.

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A WEST AFRICAN BRIDE OF CHRIST IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SPAIN

Black Bride of Christ: Chicaba, an African Nun in Eighteenth-Century Spain.

Edited by Sue E. Houchins and Baltasar Fra-Molinero.

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Baltasar Fra-Molinero and Sue E. Houchins have produced, with *Black Bride of Christ: Chicaba, an African Nun in Eighteenth-Century Spain*, the first English translation of the 1764 edition of the *Compendio de la vida ejemplar de la Venerable Madre Sor Teresa Juliana de Santo Domingo*. This is a spiritual biography, or *vida*, of Sor Teresa Chicaba. Chicaba was an African (probably Ewe) woman who professed as a nun of the white veil, a lower-status member of the Dominican convent *La Penitencia*, in Salamanca in 1704. Chicaba (called Teresa in Spain) was born in La Mina Baja de Oro in the Bight of Benin. She was captured, enslaved, brought to Spain, and eventually sold to the Marquesa de Mancera, who was the second wife of the former viceroy of New Spain. Just before the marquesa died, she freed the exceptionally pious Chicaba and left money for her to enter a convent, although finding one willing to admit a black woman was difficult. At *La Penitencia*, Chicaba performed manual labor and lived in the infirmary, separate from other nuns. Despite being marginalized, she was renowned for her piety, healing abilities, and relationship with God. When Chicaba died in 1748 a Theatine priest, Juan Carlos Miguel de Paniagua, wrote a funeral oration and a hagiographic *vida* to promote her for canonization, an effort that continues today. Paniagua claimed to have drawn on Chicaba's writings and conversations he had with her in the months before her death, meaning that she had a role in constructing the *vida*. *Black Bride of Christ* includes the translated *vida* and other materials that provide context.

The volume has three major sections: the first consists of a two-part Introduction by Fra-Molinero and Houchins explaining the genre of spiritual biography and literary influences on Chicaba's *vida*. They explore methods of gleaning information about religious women's thoughts and experiences from biographical texts authored by male clerics. Fra-Molinero and Houchins argue convincingly that the *vida* reveals Chicaba's voice. First, they show that Chicaba was literate; her writings could have thus provided material for the *vida*. Second, they examine places where Chicaba's critiques of slavery and racial discrimination appear in the narrative. For example, a statement about how slavery brought Chicaba

salvation by introducing her to Christianity appears next to a discussion of how she wanted to drown herself to escape the slave ship; Fra-Molinero and Houchins argue that this and other negative characterizations of slavery and racial discrimination come from Chicaba herself. Another technique that Fra-Molinero and Houchins use to understand Chicaba's voice is to compare the funeral oration authored by Paniagua with the *vida* to see where the narratives diverge; areas of divergence may represent Chicaba's input in the text. Finally, they compare Chicaba's story with narratives of former slaves from British America, revealing her use of narrative strategies that resemble those employed by other formerly enslaved people. This initially surprising but ultimately illuminating tactic exposes diasporic connections.

The second part of the Introduction analyzes specific chapters of Chicaba's *vida*, explaining politics in the Bight of Benin to provide context for Chicaba's childhood memories and discussing the way that Paniagua emphasized Chicaba's royal origins, her family's Christian conversion, and the miracles and saintly interventions she experienced, in order to argue that she had the appropriate background for sainthood.

The middle third of the volume opens with images, including a portrait of Chicaba, and contains the entire *vida*, a fascinating account of African childhood, enslavement, Chicaba's close relationship with the Manceras, convent life, the racial discrimination Chicaba suffered throughout her life, and her virtues and experiences of heavenly aid. The last section contains the payment letter for Chicaba's convent admission, her act of profession, her obituary, and sections of the marquesa's will relating to Chicaba.

The translation of Chicaba's *vida* alone makes this book an important scholarly contribution. Yet the value of the text exceeds the primary sources; the introductory essays do wonderful work explaining Chicaba's historical and geographical contexts and the *vida*'s diasporic relevance. For those interested in Spanish America, Chicaba's text can be read alongside those written by and about the black holy women Úrsula de Jesús in Peru and Juana Esperanza de San Alberto in Mexico.¹ The latter provides an especially interesting point of comparison because, like Chicaba, Juana Esperanza was a West African renowned for her spirituality (and, coincidentally, she once met the first Marquesa de Mancera). Yet, unlike Chicaba, Juana Esperanza did not produce materials for her *vida*, making it difficult for scholars including myself to locate her voice. Fra-Molinero and Houchins's discussion of how to read early modern black women's biographies to find their individual perspectives is therefore invaluable. Thus, in addition to translating, annotating, and making accessible an important primary source, Fra-Molinero and Houchins have provided essential insight into how we read *vidas* and other kinds of early modern life stories and how we think about diasporic literary production across time and space.

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¹ J. Gómez de la Parra, *Fundación y primero siglo: Crónica del primer convento de carmelitas descalzas en Puebla, 1604–1704* (México, 1992); and U. de Jesús, *The Souls of Purgatory: The Spiritual Diary of a Seventeenth-Century Afro-Peruvian Mystic, Ursula de Jesús*, Nancy van Deusen (ed.), (Albuquerque, 2004).