

who escaped to New Orleans where she was able to ascertain free status and enter into a legal marital union.

The historical examinations brought out in these Black Atlantic biographies offer both students and scholars a broader and more critical understanding of the history of transatlantic slaving and the countless numbers of people enslaved. And, as James Campbell notes in the afterword, the biographies point out the pervasive presence of slaving and its economic, social, and political influence throughout the Age of Discovery and the formative centuries of European colonization. It is a work that has interdisciplinary import and will find application in classrooms and research focusing on black transnationalism, transatlantic slaving, and related topics.

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*Divining Slavery and Freedom: The Story of Domingos Sodré, an African Priest in Nineteenth-Century Brazil*, by João José Reis. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. 370. Illustrations. \$32.99 paper.  
doi:[10.1017/tam.2016.42](https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2016.42)

Readers will celebrate the publication of this translation of João José Reis's groundbreaking study of religion, culture, and society in nineteenth-century Bahia. The present volume is dedicated to Stuart Schwartz and Katia Mattoso—two of Reis's teachers. With this study, he proves himself their worthy heir and sets the benchmark for a creative blend of microhistory and rich sociocultural contextualization. The story begins with an arrest for “vile” practices associated with witchcraft—which was the way Domingos Sodré's religious activities as a leading figure in the local Candomblé scene were parsed by the local chief of police. This arrest, which ultimately did little to alter Domingos's life path, opens up a rich terrain for cultural and social analysis backed by a truly remarkable range of interlocking documents. Owing to the constraints associated with short book reviews, what follows will merely sketch some of the major themes in Reis's study. It would be impossible, in just a few words, to do justice to the complexity of the story of Domingos as it unfolds in H. Sabrina Gledhill's fine translation.

The first major theme centers on religion and religious practice with reference to both African antecedents and Bahian realities. Reis shows how Candomblé might have been practiced and by whom (mostly African men, the leadership coming mostly from the ranks of freedmen). He also demonstrates the range of responses to African religious activity on the part of the authorities—from bitter repression to episodes of negotiated tolerance. What comes through in these pages is the power of African belief systems transposed to Brazilian contexts. Men like Domingos Sodré manipulated material and

spiritual realms in order to cure, to curse, and, most interestingly, to ameliorate the condition of slavery. This last aspect of his activities included the use of spiritual knowledge and divination to assist in the quest for manumission among the slaves who numbered among his followers. It also included techniques for taming masters (*amansa-senhor*) through the use of spells and concoctions. Living with slavery was a constant struggle, and one in which the spiritual realm might be just as important as the material.

A second theme surrounds the origins and social background of Domingos Sodré. Through a combination of documentary evidence and careful intuition, Reis reconstructs the birth and life journey of this remarkable African priest from his birthplace near Lagos, Nigeria, to the cane fields near Salvador, and finally to his becoming an independent black man of means in the city itself. Domingos nearly saw it all, living to within a few years of abolition. He participated (or claimed to have done so) in the struggle for Brazilian independence; he gained his freedom; and he eventually married twice in the Catholic faith, though he had no children with either partner. Along the way, he accumulated a modicum of wealth, including the ownership of a variety of slaves and various urban properties. Yet, at his death, he left his second wife, Maria da Conceição, with only a modest sum invested in the Caixa Econômica to carry her through her last years. As successful as he was, it was a tenuous kind of stability he was able to carve out in Bahian society, and not one that went uncontested, as his arrest and other legal battles suggest.

The third and last theme to be highlighted in this review is the theme of community. Only a scholar with the experience and insight of Reis could pull together all of the strands of this story and weave an image of a complex human community. The triumph of the book, from this reviewer's perspective, is the way Reis shows the many, and at times contentious, ways that Africans like Domingos forged networks of solidarity and social integration in a society dominated by the power of white slaveholders. The list would begin, of course, with the spiritual community, in which Domingos played a significant role as diviner. But the dimensions of this community sprawl outward, through Reis's painstaking reconstruction, to embrace kinship and family (Domingos stood as a godfather no less than 14 times), formal organizations such as lay religious brotherhoods, and slightly less formal but no less substantial organizations such as manumission societies. Domingos himself led such a society for a decade or more.

Then there are the ties, formal and informal, that bound the community around economic activities, including loans granted and sometimes repaid. Finally, beyond all this, there is the interlacing of Domingos's world with the formal institutions and practices of the dominant society. Domingos was litigious and once sued a fellow African freedman named Elias over a purported debt related to the manumission society he led. He used the local public notary with regularity, although as an illiterate man he always brought a trusted associate to sign on his behalf. All of which is to say that the story of Domingos is the story of a whole community and its multifarious interconnections,

alliances, feuds, and protocols. In this regard, the book rises to new heights in the historiography of Brazil.

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*Slave Families and the Hato Economy in Puerto Rico.* By David M. Stark. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015. Pp. xv, 251. Figures. Tables. Index. \$74.95 cloth. doi:[10.1017/tam.2016.43](https://doi.org/10.1017/tam.2016.43)

Documenting the history of those early colonial Spanish American regions farthest removed from the viceregal seats of imperial power or other major governmental centers is no easy task. Among those regions are parts of the Hispanic Caribbean during the approximately 200-year period extending roughly from 1550 to 1750. Historians generally refer to this interval as the pre-plantation era to accentuate the glaring contrast between that time and the subsequent rise of commercial, slave-based sugar and coffee that began to take form around the last decades of the eighteenth century. The earlier phase was marked by widespread smuggling, subsistence farming, low population density, sparse urban settlement, a rudimentary communications infrastructure, limited “legal” immigration, and lax administrative control. Given the relative dearth of such standard materials as censuses, municipal tax records, and official commercial statistics that might be useful to reconstruct the past, just how can one safely establish the social, cultural, political, and economic evolution of those areas?

David Stark’s book delves into this shadowy landscape and the elusive enslaved Africans in its midst. The author notes that most of the research carried out about the plight of the involuntary migrants is overwhelmingly based on their dehumanization in the plantation belt. There, especially in the export-oriented, sugar-producing estates, African captives and their enslaved kin were treated harshly, worked brutally, their geographical mobility and leisure activities closely monitored or curtailed and their ability to form lasting, legally recognized unions almost universally denied. According to Stark, those conditions did not dominate the lives of those toiling in the *hatos*, the vast, unenclosed landholdings that became entrenched in Puerto Rico prior to the nineteenth century. Slaves in the *hatos* generally raised various kinds of draft animals, timbered, grew provisions (including tobacco), and hunted game, occupations that were not as physically demanding, in relative terms, as those performed by the counterparts on the sugar plantations.

The author focuses on the extent to which enslaved men and women married and established families in accordance with the doctrines of the Catholic Church prior to the reemergence of labor-intensive, commercial agriculture. He does so by painstakingly gathering the birth, marriage, and death records of the northern town of Arecibo for