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Cultural/Literary Studies. *The Murals of Cacaxtla: The Power of Painting in Ancient Central Mexico.* By Claudia Lozoff Brittenham. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. Pp. 320. Foreword by María Teresa Uriarte Illustrations. Maps. Notes. Index. \ \$70.00 cloth.

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seventeenth and eighteenth century. Nevertheless, Bryant's analysis of baptism and marriage records provides useful counterpoints to similar works by Herman Bennett on Mexico and Rachel O'Toole on Peru.

The final chapter examines Africans and their efforts to use the legal system to mediate their position in society. Like authors of other similar works, Bryant illustrates how enslaved peoples understood the mechanisms by which they could legally contest the impositions placed upon them. As legal rulings established precedents and new laws, slaves actively shaped the juridical basis of slavery through such legal contests.

Overall, *Rivers of Gold, Lives of Bondage* succeeds in demonstrating how omnipresent slavery could be in even a region that had relatively few slaves. Additionally, Bryant's balancing of political economy with lived experience takes us beyond simple materialist or juridical explorations of this institution. By providing a holistic analysis, Bryant demonstrates that slavery was about more than just masters and slaves—all members of colonial society were shaped by the presence and importance of slavery. This balanced approach to slavery makes this book an important addition to our understanding of slavery in the Americas and its effects on Spanish American society. Finally, its exploration of a relatively understudied region makes it an excellent counterpoint to works that have examined slavery in Brazil, Mexico, or the Caribbean.

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CULTURAL/LITERARY STUDIES

The Murals of Cacaxtla: The Power of Painting in Ancient Central Mexico. By Claudia Lozoff Brittenham. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015. Pp. 320. Foreword by María Teresa Uriarte Illustrations. Maps. Notes. Index. \$70.00 cloth.
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The 1975 discovery of vibrant murals at Cacaxtla, a little known pre-Hispanic site east of Mexico City, generated fascination, adulation, and astonishment. Further archaeological excavations revealed more exquisitely painted walls, many depicting humans and deities in recognizable Maya style, juxtaposed with central Mexican motifs. The most impressive is a 20-meter long battle scene depicting horrific hand-to-hand combat among 49 near life-size warriors. The murals flummoxed scholars. How could one explain this blend of two separate artistic traditions? Did Maya artists travel 700 kilometers to central Mexico? Did Maya peoples conquer Cacaxtla?

While several studies of Cacaxtla's murals have appeared since the 1980s, Brittenham's book stands out. It is illustrated with superb full-color photographs from the UNAM project *La Pintura Mural Prehispánica en México*. The author provides a comprehensive treatment of the painting program at Cacaxtla that is grounded in exhaustive research into its archaeology, iconography, and culture history. The murals are discussed

in architectural and functional contexts as these were modified over time. Finally, Brittenham's sophisticated art-historical approach to their analysis is a most important contribution.

Cacaxtla's small acropolis is located near more prominent central Mexican centers, including Xochitecatl, Cholula, and the greatest city of all, Teotihuacan, 70 kilometers to the northwest. Teotihuacan figures prominently in Cacaxtla's apogee during the Epiclassic period when the paintings were made. The Epiclassic was marked by widespread political turmoil beginning with Teotihuacan's decline in AD 600–650 and ending with the “collapse” of the Classic Maya civilization ca. 950. Cacaxtla's murals share obvious similarities with the earlier wall paintings of Teotihuacan, but the former's artists were also influenced by contemporary Maya painting, such as the famous battle mural at Bonampak.

Brittenham's novel approach to the paintings advances our understanding of Cacaxtla and the Epiclassic period and provides insights into the role of public art. Using archaeological information and radiocarbon dates, she presents the murals in the likely order of their creation, rather than in the order of their discovery. She demonstrates how the paintings form a single dynamic and innovative tradition, as later artworks cited earlier ones or literally incorporated an earlier painting in a new composition. She also considers how later building phases buried or changed the meanings of earlier paintings.

Following two introductory chapters on Cacaxtla's historical and geographical context and the technical aspects of the paintings, Brittenham describes and interprets the different mural groups, from earliest to latest: the Serpent Corridor and Captive Stair, the Temple of Venus, the Battle Mural, the Red Temple with a “Maya” Merchant God, and the Maya-like figures painted on the door jambs of Structure A. Her analysis emphasizes the “power of painting” in elite visual programs, based on its potentially polyvalent interpretations, low cost in comparison to stone carving, and openness to modification.

Significantly, Brittenham dismisses the twinned issues of style and ethnicity that have dominated interpretations of Cacaxtla's artworks. She cogently observes that “style” is often read as a sign of “ethnicity,” in circular fashion, and argues instead that Cacaxtla artists and their patrons developed a local painting program that blended select elements from different artistic traditions, rather than aligning themselves to a specific outside group. The unique style they derived formed a resolutely local “visual identity” during a tumultuous time of political jockeying. Cacaxtla artists ably assimilated widespread Mesoamerican religious themes and icons, such as the feathered serpent or Venus imagery, and then interpreted them in new ways.

Brittenham's conclusion is revelatory for all of Mesoamerican archaeology and art history. She observes that all artists borrowed, adapted, and transformed styles and images, concluding that it would be futile to search for the “origin” of some motif in

a particular site or ethnic group. This means the Mesoamerican world was much more interconnected than conventional scholarship would allow.

The book is beautifully produced, lavishly illustrated, and economically priced. It is written for readers familiar with pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, but the gist of the arguments is comprehensible to non-specialists.

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Tropical Whites: The Rise of the Tourist South in the Americas. By Catherine Cocks. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. Pp. 255, Illustrations, Notes, Index. \$59.95 cloth.
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A refreshingly original study, *Tropical Whites* traces the rise of mass travel to Florida, California, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Throughout, the author's richly informed discussion traces a complex process by which privileged North Americans learned to "love the tropics without losing their souls" (p. 2). Cocks's first chapter tells how northerners set out to "tame" the south for their own profit and pleasure. Previously, the idea (and practice) of people traveling to warm climates engendered considerable fear. Hot zones, it was said, constituted a veritable "white man's grave" for anyone foolish enough to venture forth. To combat this, "modern" transport, engineering, and medical practices were called into action.

Her second chapter follows the rise of railroad and steamship travel in the making of the American tourist industry. Cruise lines such as the Great White Fleet (!) ferried passengers from island to island across the Caribbean offering shore excursion encounters "in small doses, short visits, and symbolic souvenirs" (p. 72). She then takes up the idea of how pleasure travel to the tropic zones came to be understood as not only safe but even restorative for whites. Here, Cocks's impressive access to tourist-industry promotional literature illustrates how "Southland promoters rearticulated the relationship between humans and nature," finding that whites could in fact securely sojourn south. Tourists enjoyed time in the tropics but were careful to limit their exposure to (it was assumed) unhygienic nonwhites. Following guidelines cast in the heyday of Jim Crow, such "racial" and class segregation proved unproblematic for most.

Cocks describes ways in which southern cultures were carefully marketed for consumption. In scheduling exposure to local destinations, great care was (and still is) taken in selecting just the "right" and most "authentic" aspects. "Advertising rapid journeys through a tropical bazaar," she writes, "tourist brochures offered healing drafts for over-civilized, hardworking whites, not encounters with people or politics or places with histories" (p. 87).