

JOUVE MARTIN, José R., 2014, *The Black Doctors of Colonial Lima: Science, Race, and Writing in Colonial and Early Republican Peru*, Montreal, Kingston, London and Ithaca, McGill-Queen's University Press. 210 pp.

Throughout most of its history, about half of the inhabitants of Lima were of African origin. Innumerable roles in the life of the city were performed by those who, following the colonial system of racial classification, were referred to as "blacks," "pardos" or "mulattos." The trades associated with medicine were no exception. Until the mid-19th century, it was probably people of African descent who undertook most of this work in a society in which medicine did not enjoy the scientific and social status it later acquired, although it did play a vital social role. Lima was a city of black doctors.

The Black Doctors of Colonial Lima by José Jouve Martín is a pioneering approach to the study of this subject. Historical inequalities in access to writing (explored in all its complexity by Jouve Martín in an important earlier book) have meant that the documentary record does not include many of the individual stories of physicians of African descent. Given these limitations, the author analyzes the trajectories of three men whose remarkable medical careers – during the turbulent years of transition between the viceroyalty and the republic – and the importance of notarized public documents at the time, ensured a written record. This book tells the sometimes interlinked stories of José Manuel Valdés (1787-1843), José Manuel Dávalos (1758-1821), and José Pastor Larrinaga (1758-1821).

Jouve Martín uses the biographies of Valdés, Dávalos, and Larrinaga to present an innovative glimpse of scientific and intellectual life in late colonial and republican Lima. The author demonstrates that racial divisions were significant, but not insurmountable. Men of African descent played central roles in the history of enlightened scientific reformation and in the scientific revolution in medicine. They became public intellectuals and multifaceted writers who took great pains to construct their identity and authority through interventions in scientific, political, religious, and humanistic debates. In the creation of their public image, which was marked by what the author calls an "anxiety to have influence" (p. 62), these remarkable black doctors usually emphasized their professional over their racial identity. At the same time, they never denied being of African descent.

The first chapter of the book demonstrates that Valdés, Dávalos, and Larrinaga were part of a long tradition of surgeons and doctors of African origin that included the Dominican friar, later beatified, Martín de Porres. In a hierarchical society, social and professional advancement depended on both individual talent and commitment and on the ability to establish beneficial personal bonds. Valdés, for example, was born into a poor family.

He was able to study and become a "Latin" surgeon (the highest grade among surgeons) due to the support of his Spanish patrons, and worked his way up under the patronage of the undisputed leader of enlightened criollo medicine during the Viceroyalty, Hipólito Unanue. Larrinaga initially was able to join the medical elite through his family's contact with the Archbishop of Cuzco, Manuel Moscoso y Peralta. Dávalos, meanwhile, came from a wealthier family, but as a result of the prohibition on studying medicine in Lima, was forced to study for a doctorate at the prestigious Faculty of Medicine of the University of Montpellier in France.

The second chapter examines the experiences of Valdés and Larrinaga in the learned circle of Unanue. Jouve Martín reconstructs the participation of the two surgeons in the *Mercurio Peruano*. They were the only people of African descent who participated in this publishing project of the Sociedad de Amantes del País (of which, tellingly, they were not members). Starting with this chapter, the author closely follows the scientific discussions in which the main protagonists of his book participated. As suggested in classical studies of the history and sociology of science, these controversies are particularly useful for understanding the criteria, methods, and rhetoric with which scientific authority is constructed. In this case, the discussions on how to increase the population and ensure the progress of the "homeland" were presented in the context of the wider debate on the scientific status and the usefulness of surgery – the medical discipline most associated with the black population. In this sense, the participation of Valdés and Larrinaga in the prestigious *Mercurio Peruano* constituted almost an end in itself.

The rest of the book deals primarily with these types of discussions, published in a variety of formats, amid the political turmoil and the publishing explosion that characterized the last years of colonial rule and the first years of the republican era. The issues that the participants debated were sometimes extremely specific and often esoteric, but Jouve Martín skillfully reconstructs the political significance and meanings in the context of the professional, intellectual and ideological competencies of which they were part. The arguments of the learned doctors – set forth in first-person narratives of their experiences in the practice of medicine – emphasized their erudition and their own experiences in the field and in the anatomical amphitheater. The credibility of their stories was one of the keys to building prestige, since the success of their methods and the truth of their accounts were doubted, and accusations of "having sent people to the grave" were common (p. 185).

The author describes various fascinating examples of such debates. For example, Dávalos launched into a complex discussion about whether the climate of Lima caused digestive problems and childhood diseases; Larrinaga stated that he had discovered the case of a

woman who had given birth to a bird; and Valdés took pains to reconcile the medical miracles of Martín de Porres with a certain amount of scientific skepticism. Much of what makes these discussions interesting is what is not explicitly stated: Dávalos asked that his extraordinary academic career be recognized; Larrinaga fought to redeem the image of surgeons and black men amidst the uncertainty about the citizenship of the "castas" at the time of the Constitution of Cadiz; and Valdés, the Protoméxico of the Republic (supreme authority on medicine), took pains to legitimize medicine at a time when serious questions were being raised about its status as a science by liberal sectors in Lima. Through their interventions in the public sphere and with varying degrees of success, the three physicians built their professional and intellectual trajectories, which were nearly always inseparable from their political positions. Some of the topics covered in the book deserve further empirical research and theoretical discussion. It is possible that the author's decision to discuss the lives of Valdés, Dávalos and Larrinaga in chronological order, albeit in an unavoidably fragmented way, conspired against the possibility of dealing in more depth with issues that deserve more attention, such as the relationship between science and religion, the exclusion of traditional forms of knowledge, and the almost total exclusion of women from the public sphere. However, this is a misleading criticism: *The Black Doctors of Colonial Lima* discusses, in a highly accessible manner, important issues in the history of science and public life in Peru that are rarely studied, and it suggests many more. Its publication and, hopefully, its rapid translation into Spanish will be welcomed by specialists and by the general public.

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