In 1700, the commissary of the Inquisition in the town of Orizaba received orders to question Pascuala de los Reyes about her husband, a chino named Joseph Feliciano who was suspected of bigamy. She had to testify about their separation and provide details about his “nature, age, occupation, and identifying features.”¹ The commissary found her living with a widow. First, Pascuala clarified that she had indeed married him some ten years earlier, but his full name was Juan Feliciano de la Cruz. As she said, “his proper name is Juan, and not Joseph, perhaps he changed his name.” Juan had abandoned her when they were living together in Veracruz, when the port city was sieged by pirates, leaving her to find safety on her own. The name change was likely meant to hide his whereabouts, but Pascuala had heard in the intervening years that he was living on the coast of Tabasco. As to his appearance, she said “he had two moles on his right cheek, with hairs coming out,” and “he was tall and had a good body, neither fat or too thin.” Most critically, Pascuala swore that “his casta or nature was chino, born in Pampanga.” Juan was a native Filipino. That fact alone terminated the Inquisition’s interest; Indians (indios) could not be tried by the Holy Office.² The case exemplifies the end result of a long process. During the course of the seventeenth century, the church went from treating chinos as slaves to identifying them as Indians. The ecclesiastical courts were at the center of this change.

At first, the church demanded normative behavior and deference to the slave-owning class. The episcopal court, for example, threatened to

¹ AGN Inquisición 718 f.339–342v (1701).
² All native peoples of Spanish colonies were Indians, which meant that they were free vassals of the crown. See Chapter 2 for reasons why the colonial state did not protect Indians from the Spanish Philippines and allowed their enslavement through the seventeenth century.
excommunicate anyone who helped chino slaves run away, and the
Inquisition actively prosecuted chino slaves for blasphemous speech and
other transgressions. In time, however, the church increasingly associated
chinos with Indians and embraced them as individuals who were under
their legal purview and needed special protection. As Indians, chinos
became *miserables*, which was a designation under canon law that placed
them under the direct supervision of ecclesiastical authorities in the same
manner as Indians. The church’s concern with Indians, derived from its
missionary role in Spanish colonization, did not extend to foreign slaves.

This chapter examines chinos’ changing legal status and ethnic identity in
the context of the church bureaucracy. It begins with an overview of the
significance of baptism for Indians versus slaves to understand chinos’
distinct status within the church. The next section on the episcopal court is
about the contradictions associated with ministering to people with different
legal rights. This court safeguarded slaves’ right to have a family, as well as
slave owners’ right to control their property. The section on the court of the
Inquisition illustrates a similar protection of slavery; chino slaves, like
African slaves, were prosecuted for challenging the social order. At the
same time, this section shows that the Tribunal became a place where chinos’
Indian identity was put to the test. All Indians, including Filipinos, were
given immunity from prosecution by the Holy Office from the time of its
founding in New Spain. Over time, inquisitors implemented the exemption
more broadly, releasing all chino slaves because they identified them as
Indians. Finally, the chapter discusses the organizational changes that
resulted from the abolition of chino slavery, when the church embraced all
chinos as Indians and thus confirmed their new status as indigenous vassals.

**BAPTISM AND SLAVERY: VASSALAGE VERSUS SALVATION**

The Catholic Church derived considerable power from its special relation-
ship with Spanish monarchs, who in turn depended on religion to legiti-
mize their conquests and political dominion. The *Patronato Real* cemented
this alliance, giving the crown papal consent to fund a missionary enter-
prise in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that spread Christianity to
Mexico and then the Philippines. The goal of this singular conversion
effort was to extend the spiritual and spatial boundaries of Christendom to

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3 Pope Julius II granted the Spanish monarchs ecclesiastical control over their colonies in the
papal bull *Universalis ecclesiae* (1508); this was called *Real Patronato de Indias* (royal
patronage).
include all of humanity as believers under the control of a Christian ruler. Spain’s imperial expansion thus acquired religious meaning, as it enabled the church to lay the groundwork for universal salvation. Baptism was a critical component of this endeavor because it erased original sin – a critical requirement for heavenly deliverance. In addition, baptism had significance as a rite that symbolized entry into the Spanish political order. When newly conquered peoples accepted baptism, they simultaneously bowed to Spanish sovereignty. As such, one of the church’s main goals in the Spanish colonies was to ensure that everyone be baptized.

Baptism had a different significance for Indians than for slaves, which reflected the complex relationship between the church and the Spanish crown, and canon versus civil law. The Spanish crown required people living in the colonies to be baptized. Baptism indicated acceptance of the religion of the state and monarch, who derived power from his or her role as defender of Christendom. As a sacramental rite, the ceremony marked a person as a member of the Christian community. It incorporated individuals into the Christian body and made them subject to the laws of the church.

During the course of the sixteenth century, baptism came to have different political meanings for Indians than for slaves based on civil law. Indians were a colonized people, so baptism was a political tool that incorporated them into the government as vassals. Slaves, on the other hand, were from foreign lands. They were non-Christian outsiders who were baptized to save their souls, but the sacrament did not change their legal status and certainly did not impart freedom.

4 There were rare exceptions to this policy, such as the Chinese merchant community in Manila, whose members were allowed to maintain their religious traditions, though encouraged to convert, but were required to live in a segregated neighborhood called the parían outside the city walls. AGI Filipinas 27–23 (1591). AGI Filipinas 29–57–382r (1595).

5 By papal concession, the Spanish king held imperial dominion (dominio imperial) over the natives of Spain’s colonies who had been baptized. These natives owed him tribute. The king had temporal dominion over individuals who were not baptized; unbaptized natives who submitted freely owed tribute, but not those who did not submit to Spanish sovereignty. For a political and economic analysis of the missionary project in Mexico and the meaning of baptism, see Ryan D. Crewe, “Building a Visible Church: The Mexican Mission Enterprise in the Early Spanish Atlantic, 1521–1600” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

6 For an analysis of how Spaniards differentiated between Indians and Africans in terms of their alleged bloodlines, reception of Christianity, and loyalty to the crown, see María Elena Martínez, Genealogical Fictions: Limpieza De Sangre, Religion, and Gender in Colonial Mexico (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

7 A number of Africans were freed after baptism in fifteenth-century Spain, but this provision could not stand after the inception of the Atlantic slave trade for obvious economic reasons. The influential jurist Solórzano confirmed this ruling in his 1629 treatise on the laws of the
moreover, had theological implications for slaves who were freed. A number of churchmen in the Philippines, for example, feared that manumitted slaves from “enemy kingdoms” would be “impelled by a natural love of their homeland” to return there, and that they would then “abnegate the faith they promised to His Majesty and renounce what they had professed in Holy Baptism.”

For the most part, however, clergy were not overly concerned with apostasy, especially in the American colonies, where most slaves were oceans apart from their homelands. Both the church and crown agreed that baptism did not alter the legal standing of African slaves (negros). In fact, slaves did not have to be baptized prior to entering the New World. The repeated prohibitions against heretics and new converts from Islam and Judaism traveling to the Americas, which ostensibly sought to protect the Indians from their influence, exempted slaves. The expectation, however, was that slaves would be brought into the Christian fold soon after arrival. In 1545, the crown entrusted masters, on their conscience, to baptize their slaves within six months of purchase. The reasoning was that “all blacks by inclination are amiable to Christianity and easy to convert.”

The dictate regarding baptism was part of the “Ordinances regarding the good treatment of negros for their conservation” issued in 1545, which also laid out numerous prohibitions, including bans on slaves congregating, riding horses, bearing arms, and traveling without permission from their masters. AGI Patronato 171 N.2 R.10 (1545).

In 1603, for example, the king recommended that officials in Lima urge masters to pay for the sustenance of a priest dedicated to indoctrinating their slaves. AGI Lima 582 L.14 f.170r (1603).

In 1595, the Council of Indies recommended that slave traders be made to present certifications of baptism because so many slaves were not receiving the sacrament prior to arrival in the colonies. AGI Lima 1, N.130 (1595).
bore the cost of the missionary project directed at Indians—it paid for their baptisms. This variance is at the heart of the difference between how the church treated Indians versus slaves. The Spanish monarch employed the church to baptize and guide colonized subjects; the church did not have the same institutional role with regard to slaves.

The church’s concern with Indians also stemmed from its sixteenth-century commitment to create a utopian Christian society in the New World. In the context of the first missions, clergymen argued that the church had a special role as defender of the Indians and that they needed to employ peaceful means to convert native peoples. The most important and long-standing argument against enslaving Indians was that the Gospel had to be accepted willingly by free men. As such, the church remained singularly committed to converting and protecting the indigenous population from overt exploitation and enslavement throughout the colonial period. For instance, in 1674, Jesuit Diego de Rosales, who had lived among the Mapuches in Chile, argued that Indians should never be enslaved, under any pretext, “because it frustrated the goal of teaching them the Catholic faith.” The church in the Philippines maintained a similar stance; it repeatedly called for the emancipation of Indian slaves owned by native chiefs until this was finally done at the end of the seventeenth century. As a result of these efforts, the crown finally decreed an end to indigenous slavery throughout the Spanish empire; no native person of Spain’s colonies could be enslaved or kept in slavery under the guise of making them Christians.

14 AGI Chile 57 (1674). The crown had exempted the Mapuche from the legislation against indigenous slavery as a result of the 1598 rebellion, which was regarded as treason punishable with enslavement. AGI Chile 166 L.1 f.121 (1608). This opinion was subsequently reversed in a series of letters and decrees (AGI Lima 374 L.28 f.215) that were codified as book 6, title 2, law 1.4 of the Laws of the Indies. For a detailed outline of the legislation on indigenous slavery from 1492 through 1696, see Richard Konetzke, “La esclavitud de los Indians comme elemento en la estructuración social de Hispanoamérica,” Estudios de historia social de España 1 (1949).
15 Various scholars argue that certain segments of the church became disenchanted with the missionary enterprise in the Americas in the seventeenth century, when they discovered that some Indians had maintained their indigenous beliefs, which resulted in anti-idolatry campaigns. Kenneth Mills, Idolatry and Its Enemies: Colonial Andean Religion and Extirpation, 1640–1750 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Bristol takes this skepticism about Indians’ adherence to Christianity to mean that churchmen perceived both Indians and Africans to be “morally ambiguous.” Joan Cameron Bristol, Christians, Blasphemers, and Witches: Afro-Mexican Ritual Practice in the Seventeenth Century (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 43.
The conversation about slaves from Africa and their descendants was altogether separate. The church had a complicated attitude toward slavery in that it accepted the institution as an economic necessity but nonetheless sought to include slaves in its ministry. The church’s principal justification of slavery was that it delivered pagans to Christendom. Slavery served as a tool for converting people from places outside of Spanish control. The influential Jesuit Alonso de Sandoval, for example, argued that slavery benefited Africans by making them Christians. A related justification was that the institution benefited formerly pagan slaves by forcing them to live among Christians and be guided by them. The church scarcely addressed the hypocrisy of demanding peace and freedom for the conversion of Indians but not for Africans. For the latter, it was considered enough to ensure their salvation—through forced baptism if need be.

The church’s sanctioning of slavery, however, should not be overstated. A number of churchmen publicly opposed the justification of the Atlantic slave trade as a means to convert unbelievers, and they worried that it hindered missionary efforts in Africa. The archbishop of Mexico, Fray Alonso de Montúfar, articulated this opposition. In 1560, he wrote a biting letter to Philip II, arguing that blacks had to be protected from enslavement just as the Indians. A decade later, the jurist Bartolomé de Albornoz similarly contradicted the accepted wisdom regarding the merits of enslavement for saving souls. He wrote: “The law of Jesus Christ” does not dictate that “the liberty of the soul should be paid with the servitude of the body.” Apart from these few men, however, there was no organized opposition.

16 See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the debates in the Philippines, where colonists sought to justify their enslavement of the indigenous population by claiming that slavery brought the native peoples to Christianity.


18 José Andrés-Gallego and Jesús María García Añoveros, La iglesia y la esclavitud de los negros (Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 2002).

19 Montúfar’s major concern was that the Portuguese traders who brought slaves from Africa could not verify the legality of their slave titles. He wrote, “such grave, generalized, and reckless commerce” should not be allowed in the lands of Christian princes. The Gospel had to be brought to lands where people were free, body and soul, and could thus come to a true understanding of Christ. Alonso de Montúfar, “Carta al rey del arzobispo,” in Epistolario de Nueva España, 1505–1818, ed. Franisco del Paso y Troncoso (México: Antigua Libraría Robredo de José Porrúa e Hijos, 1940).

20 Albornoz was a professor of law at the university in Mexico City. In an echo of Orlando Patterson’s definition of slavery as social death, Albornoz wrote in 1573: “servitude is the same as death.” The slave trade was “manifest robbery.” Acknowledging that the Portuguese were legally allowed by their king to trade in slaves, he nonetheless maintained,
effort by the church to oppose slavery by demanding that Africans, like Indians, had to be free body and soul to join the Christian community. Churchmen in Mexico, as such, did not oppose chino slavery; they simply associated chinos with Indians and thus started treating them like free men.

The ongoing discussion about the use of slavery to spread Christianity had special pertinence to the missionary campaign in the Spanish Philippines, where the church had difficulty protecting native peoples from being enslaved. The crown allowed native chiefs in the Philippines to keep their slaves until the end of the seventeenth century, which problematized the political and theological meanings of baptism. The baptism of natives of the Spanish Philippines should have made them free Christian vassals, but this was not the case. Natives of those islands remained in bondage after they were baptized, and they entered the supply chain for the transpacific slave trade.

The religious orders working in the Spanish Philippines may not have been able to protect indigenous people from enslavement, but missionaries did make considerable effort to indoctrinate Indian slaves in the faith. Friars in the Philippines, for instance, taught the catechism to Indians in multiple native languages before baptizing them.21 By the time enslaved natives of the Philippines arrived in Mexico, they already understood the significance of Christianity in Spanish culture and

“No contract . . . suffices to free from culpability those who keep in servitude [people] who have had their liberty usurped.” Bartolomé de Albornoz, “Arte de los contractos,” in Obras escogidas de filósofos, ed. Adolfo de Castro, Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, vol. 65 (Madrid: M. Rivadeneyra, 1873), 231–3. By 1596, the Spanish Inquisition had censured all of Albornoz’s works, which included a treatise on the conversion of the Indians that criticized Bartolomé de las Casas. Eduardo Soto Kloss, “El ‘Arte de los contractos’ de Bartolomé de Albornoz, un jurista del siglo xvi,” Revista Chilena de Historia del Derecho 11 (1985). Davis and other scholars have taken the Inquisition’s rebuke of Albornoz’s works to mean that the church silenced the few men who condemned the African slave trade, but it is not at all evident that his short passage on slavery, which was part of very long treatise on contracts, was the cause of the censure. David Brion Davis, The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), 189–90.

appreciated the power of the church. This knowledge proved to be a great asset for chino slaves.

The religious orders in the Philippines also indoctrinated slaves from other parts of Asia. For instance, Diego de la Cruz, who was originally from Malacca, said that he learned the “pater noster, ave maria, credo, salve regina, and the ten commandments of the law of God” during his stay in Manila, before traveling to Mexico.\(^\text{22}\) Slaves from Portuguese India, moreover, would have had some religious instruction on which to build, because there was extensive missionary activity in that colony as well.\(^\text{23}\) A slave named Anton, for example, explained to church officials in Mexico City that he had learned his prayers at the Franciscan monastery in Goa, where he was also taught to read.\(^\text{24}\) Overall, given the vigilance of the church in Manila and the small size of the Pacific slave trade, few if any slaves boarded the Galleon without some knowledge of Christianity.\(^\text{25}\)

Chino slaves benefited from this prior exposure to the dominant religion, helping them understand social proscriptions. Lucas de Arauso, for example, learned doctrine and writing from the Jesuits in Manila; this exposure to the church and Spanish language gave him the know-how to turn to the Inquisition in Mexico as a platform to denounce his master’s cruelty.\(^\text{26}\) Chino slaves like Lucas knew they were accountable to the authority of the church, but also that the institution protected slaves in certain matters. The experience of chino slaves in Mexico was thus distinct from that of African slaves, who for the most part did not have the same religious literacy on arrival. In fact, many of the African slaves taken to Spanish America were baptized en masse, with no concern for their indoctrination, or not baptized at all.\(^\text{27}\)

\(^{22}\) AGN Inquisición 372 exp.20 (1632).

\(^{23}\) The documentation attached to slave titles sometimes reference baptism, with Christian names replacing individuals’ birth names. For example, in 1622, a man named Anaya (“casta parea”) was enslaved in Cochin; he was sold by the name Andres Anaya in Manila and then sold again as a chino slave named Andres in Mexico in 1634. AGN Jesuitas 4–50 (1634).

\(^{24}\) AGN Inquisición 454 exp.27 f.443 (1651).

\(^{25}\) Sample ship registries from Acapulco record the entry of chino slaves with Christian names only. AGI Contaduría 897–903 (Cuentas de Hacienda, Caja de Acapulco).

\(^{26}\) AGN Inquisición exp.5 f.520 (1661).

\(^{27}\) In my data sample of 2,677 African slave titles from seventeenth-century Mexico, ten titles have the phrase “not yet baptized” and another fifty list no Christian names for bozales (the word used for slaves who were recent arrivals), which means these individuals were also not baptized.
THE EPISCOPAL COURT: CHRISTIAN FAMILY AND HUMAN CHATTEL

The episcopal court had jurisdiction over chino slaves as Christians and defended their sacramental rights, but it also handled cases in which they were merely chattel. On the one side, the court affirmed the humanity of chino slaves by helping them maintain their family relations. Marriage was a Christian right and necessary for social stability. On the other side, the episcopal court defended property rights and punished individuals who helped chino slaves escape their masters. This treatment derived from the fact that the church upheld a legal system that allowed humans to be property. The actions of the episcopal court illustrate the position of the church as a whole regarding slavery: slaves had a right to family and kinship under canon law, which had nothing to do with civil law, under which slaves had no rights at all.

Chino slaves sought to be married in the church to legitimate their personal bonds and to have their unions sanctified with religious significance. The church insisted on free choice in marriage. When china María de la Cruz and Spaniard Lázaro Hernández petitioned the ecclesiastical court in Mexico City to be allowed to marry without the reading of the banns, they specifically explained that their consciences had been overburdened from living in a “bad state” for more than six years.

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28 The episcopal court for the archdiocese of Mexico mainly handled cases that involved clergymen (civil and criminal), Indians (religious wrongdoings), and married couples (marital issues except bigamy). The court also received petitions for intervention in other matters. For an analysis of this tribunal, see Jorge E. Traslosheros Hernández, Iglesia, justicia y sociedad en la Nueva España: la audiencia del arzobispado de México 1528–1668 (México: Porrúa, 2004).

29 The crown specifically encouraged marriage among slaves. AGI México 1090 L.6 f.21 (1570); transcribed in Konetzke, 1953, 1:450. The decree was codified as book 7, title 5, law 5 of the Laws of the Indies.


31 AGN Matrimonios 5 exp.16 f.317 (1633). The banns consisted of a statement made by the priest during mass of the couple’s intention to marry to elicit information from the community about possible impediments. On rare occasions, an exemption would be
father was adamantly opposed to the match because she was a slave, so they needed to proceed in haste and secrecy. The couple’s urgency speaks to the importance people gave to having their union formalized by the church. Once married, the groom’s father would no longer be able to scorn their relationship, and the bride’s master would also have to accept that his slave was legally bound to a free man. The marriage ceremony was a sacramental rite, so it had to be carried out with the dignity of freedom.  

The vicar general, for example, ordered a master to release the chains on his slaves for the rite: “The individuals have to be allowed to leave the textile mill, free of chains, to celebrate their union in full liberty.”

Marriage, moreover, accorded chino slaves protection to lead a conjugal life. Slaves could not be separated from their spouses. In 1585, the Third Provincial Council of Mexico ordered masters not to sell their married slaves across long distances, because it would prevent conjugal visitations. Subsequently, chino slaves took legal recourse from this mandate and appealed to the episcopal court for protection. In their petitions, chino slaves explained that they had been unable to see their wives or husbands and asked the court to intercede on their behalf. For instance, in 1612, Pedro de Silva, a black slave from Portuguese India, petitioned to be allowed to have a “marital life” with his wife Damiana (a china slave). He also wanted the court to prevent her mistress from

made when the petitioner was a slave new to the community. AGN Matrimonios 213 exp. 32 (1660).

The Council of Trent dictated that the sacrament of marriage required matrimony, as in a public ceremony involving the consecration of a priest and witnesses. The council met from 1545 to 1563 to formulate a response to Lutheranism; it settled varied doctrinal issues and produced directives for the governing of the church. Prior to Trent, there was no mandated church ceremony, rather, marriage occurred when two people made verbal promises to each other (palabras de casamiento) and had sexual relations. Monogamous marriage was the natural way for people to have sexual relations without sin, harnessing lust for the purpose of procreation. Fidelity in marriage was exhorted in Mexico’s First Provincial Council. Antonio Lorenzano, ed., Conclíos provinciales primero y segundo celebrados en la muy noble y muy leal ciudad de México, 1555 y 1565, 2 vols. (México: J. Porrúa, 1981). For a discussion of the church’s concern with sexuality, see Asunción Lavrin, “Sexuality in Colonial Mexico: A Church Dilemma,” in Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America, ed. Asunción Lavrin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

For an analysis of the church’s aims regarding freedom of choice in marriage, see Luis Martínez Ferrer, “La defensa de la libertad de indios y negros para contraer matrimonio en el Tercer Concilio Mexicano, 1585,” in Los indios, el derecho canónico y la justicia eclesiástica en la América virreinal, ed. Ana de Zaballa Beascochea (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2011).

AGN Indiferente 151 exp. 25 (1612).
mistreating them.” The vicar general agreed and ordered the said mistress “to permit him to enter her house so that he could join and cohabit with [his wife] . . . and not to sell or transport her outside the city.”36 The petitioners specifically asked the court to pressure the person who was preventing them from having some contact with their loved ones. Juan de la Cruz, a chino slave who was married to a free woman named Inés de Valderama, claimed that her “odious” mother “distorted their married life.” In response, the court issued an order (auto) requiring the mother “to allow them to cohabit,” and to do so “as an obligation to the virtue of obedience and under penalty of being excommunicated.”37 These and various other cases testify to the frequency with which chino slaves turned to the episcopal court for help in keeping their families together.

The mistress of a china slave named Dominga kept her working in chains in an obraje (textile workshop), in part to prevent her from petitioning the government for her freedom. The year was 1675, and Dominga’s husband Miguel de la Cruz knew that the crown had freed chino slaves three years earlier. He needed Dominga to have access to a lawyer. So, Miguel petitioned the episcopal court “to stop these cruelties”; the mistress kept the couple apart and refused to give them the “two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon” that were supposed to be “conceded to married slaves.”38 Desperate to have his wife “achieve her liberty,” Miguel turned to the church to intervene in the personal matter of being able to have a “marital life,” with the idea that this allowance would enable Dominga to have a few hours a day to present her case and access secular justice. The vicar at court took action within a day, issuing an order to Dominga’s mistress that “she not impede Dominga and her husband Miguel from cohabiting as God commands and not maltreat them by word or deed.” The order did not mention the issue of her liberty, but this intercession at least gave Dominga the chance to pursue it.

36 Yet another case is from 1665, in which a chino slave named Alonso Hilario received notice that his wife’s owner was planning on selling his wife María de la Rosa, also a china, to a new master far from Mexico City. He was rarely allowed to visit so he had little information. He nonetheless brought his case to the court and succeeded in having a cathedral canon intervene in his defense. María’s master was warned that he risked excommunication if he did not obey the church and was ordered to cease impeding these slaves from having a marital life together. AGN Indiferente 2447 exp.46 (1665).

37 This is the same Juan de la Cruz cited in Chapter 4 as a literate personal servant. Inés de Valderama was categorized as a “mulata native of Mexico City.” AGN Indiferente 2430 exp.21 (1634).

38 AGN Indiferente 1605 exp.7 (1675).
Agustín de la Cruz, a chino slave from Makassar, tried to employ the church’s procedures to recover his wife María Josefa. She had recently been sold to a person living in Oaxaca – “a place remote” from Mexico City – so he petitioned the ecclesiastical court to intervene. Agustín claimed that he could not travel to join her and have a “marital life” because his own masters (Dominican friars) needed him. The judge agreed to order María’s previous owner to annul the last sale and have her return to Mexico City, so that the two of them could spend Saturday nights together “as customary.” Remarkably, the owner replied that she could not in good conscience return the slave because Agustín was physically abusive, to the point that María feared for her life. To the owner’s credit, she presented documentation of having submitted a complaint three months earlier to the same court asking that the marriage between her slave María and Agustín be annulled. At that time, the vicar had requested that Agustín be questioned on the matter, and he had absolutely denied ever “maltreating her,” except for scolding her because she often ran away and thus did “not fulfill her obligation to serve her masters.” Now, María’s owner admitted she was notorious for running away, so she had been unable to find a buyer in Mexico City, which led to María being sold in a different town. In all of this, we are missing María’s declaration of her own experience and perspective, so it is impossible to know who was telling the truth. It could be that the owner had fabricated the story of abuse to obtain an annulment, which would have freed her to sell María to whomever or wherever she wanted. As such, the case is a good example of the care that must be taken in reading these petitions for intervention, for masters as well as slaves could use them for different purposes. The episcopal court received myriad petitions that were only tangentially related to religious matters.

The church perpetuated a hierarchy in the colonies that placed clergy over laymen and masters over slaves, in the belief that a morally righteous and civilized society required this kind of order. Nothing makes this attitude clearer than the actions of ecclesiastical judges, who helped masters recover their escaped slaves by issuing censures (censuras) against individuals who aided runaway slaves. Masters petitioned the episcopal court in Mexico City for these censures against fugitive chinos just as they

39 AGN Matrimonios 139 exp.36 (1663).
40 Apart from the cases discussed in this section, see AGN Indiferente 4049 exp.8 (1617); AGN Indiferente 3470 exp.11 (1626); AGN Indiferente 1007 exp.14 (1634); AGN Indiferente 2242 exp.29 (1636); AGN Indiferente 2289 exp.1 (1658).
did for blacks. In canon law, a censure was a spiritual punishment directed at people who went against the Catholic Church; excommunication meant exclusion from the Christian community, whereas an interdiction only barred people from participating in certain rites, particularly communion.

Preserving the rights of property owners was not a doctrinal issue, and yet judges were strikingly willing to use an extreme threat – the denial of salvation through excommunication – to assist slave owners. In this regard, the censures were an instrument for social control. The censures were targeted toward those individuals who helped slaves steal themselves, which was the legal understanding of the crime. In all these cases, the onus was on the community – someone had to have seen the runaway slave or been somehow involved. As such, the threats were meant to encourage individuals to tell on each other. Censures, moreover, were supposed to deter slaves from becoming fugitives. Slaves would know that they would be found out, because no one would endanger their souls to help them escape or stay on the run.

In 1660, Alonso Gómez came before the court to report that his china slave María de la Rosa, called “the white one,” had run away a few days prior when the household was attending mass.\(^{41}\) She was branded on the face and was wearing a blue skirt, white blouse, and white shawl on the day of her disappearance.\(^{42}\) Gómez had already made inquiries and looked for María in the homes of her friends to no avail. According to him, María had run away on previous occasions and taken various silver service pieces; this time she had taken off with some keys. After making “extraordinary solicitations to find out who had stolen” his property, Gómez said that his sole recourse was to ask the court to issue censures, “including anathema,” to force “whoever knew about the matter” to come forward.\(^{43}\) The vicar general conceded to his request and issued a formal censure letter, exhorting individuals who were “hiding the said María de la Rosa” to acknowledge their wickedness. Gómez had every right to know her whereabouts and “be able to press charges” against the perpetrators.

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\(^{41}\) This is the same slave mentioned in Chapter 5. AGN Indiferente 2306 exp.8 (1661).

\(^{42}\) Scholars have written extensively about the ways descriptions of clothing were used in runaway advertisements in the U.S. South, and what these tell us about cultural perceptions. There are no comparable studies for slaves in Spanish America. For some representative studies, see David Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1995); Jonathan Prude, “To Look upon the ‘Lower Sort’: Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750–1800,” *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (1991).

\(^{43}\) Anathema was a formal curse of excommunication.
Individuals who did not comply with the church’s order were “disobedient rebels” who would be given the sentence of major excommunication. The outcome is unknown, but the severity of the language was surely enough to make the situation difficult for María.

The wording of another censure is even more dramatic. Miguel de Irisari turned to the court after his china slave Angelina de la Cruz had been missing for more than two months, having never returned from her daily circuit of the streets selling confections. The judge wrote the censure to be read in every church of Mexico City. If no one came forward after six days, the priests were to carry out an elaborate spectacle for their parishioners. They were to “stand before the doors of their church with a cross covered in a mourning shroud and lit candles in their hands, and sing the psalms.” They were then to warn the spectators that they had to obey the Holy Mother Church or risk being “like candles submerged in water, dead, with their souls in hell.” The church expected full obedience, warning that people who harbored slaves would have their “bread, wine, meat, salt, and water” cursed and be damned for eternity. As in other church spectacles, these kinds of threats were meant to increase social surveillance. This performance of exemplary punishment thus functioned to encourage compliance with secular law and to uphold the economic institution of slavery.

Apart from the ecclesiastical court, masters also turned to the Inquisition for help in recovering their slaves. The Holy Office was only supposed to judge matters of faith, but in this slave-owning society, the court also served to settle property disputes. In 1619, for example, Álvaro Martínez, a plantation owner, had a commissary of the Inquisition threaten another Spaniard named Diego de Riano with excommunication if he did not return his unnamed chino slave. Riano refused; he had captured the fugitive slave on the road to Veracruz and now demanded that the master pay his expenses. In addition, Riano wrote directly to the tribunal in Mexico City to explain that he had “not committed a crime against the Catholic faith.” Martínez was the one at fault—he was shirking his responsibility to pay for the costs of capturing and feeding his runaway slave. Riano wanted the inquisitors to chastise the commissary, who had acted beyond his purview. Both Spaniards, in other words, looked to the Inquisition to settle a case involving a slave in so far as he was property. The outcome of this dispute is unknown, but these men’s willingness to

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44 AGN Indiferente 2306 exp.9 (1660).
45 AGN Indiferente 2306 exp.22 (1663).
46 AGN Inquisición 328–2 exp.55 f.378 (1619).
turn to the Inquisition for a resolution regarding a financial obligation speaks to the breadth of the tribunal’s influence.

Still, the church’s stance on slaves was more complicated than these censures might imply. Slaves were not merely chattel; they were human beings who required some protection, at least regarding the sacraments. That said, the Tribunal of the Inquisition handled cases involving slaves that illustrate how the church preserved masters’ dominance. Inquisitors had chinos disciplined in the same way as black slaves, with harsh rebukes and beatings, until they started identifying chinos as Indians and thus protected them from prosecution.

THE INQUISITION ON INDIANS VERSUS SLAVES

Spaniard Juan de Huerta was disgusted and shocked: his neighbor Mateo, a chino, had taken to throwing out papers on the street with excrement – and the horror was that some had religious imprints.\(^\text{47}\) It was blasphemy. Huerta had to denounce Mateo to the Holy Office. How dare he dirty the image of the Holy Trinity or the Ecce Homo? On the morning of September 27, 1616, Huerta had an audience at the Inquisition Tribunal, where he described the sordid business to the inquisitor and presented him with the physical evidence. The judge, however, did nothing about the matter.\(^\text{48}\) It was unneighborly nastiness. More significantly, Mateo was an “indio chino” (i.e., a native Filipino) and the Tribunal had no jurisdiction over Indians. Had Mateo been a chino slave, it would have been a different matter; the Inquisition routinely prosecuted slaves for offenses against the faith, such as defacing religious imagery. This case points to the complicated jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical courts in Mexico, and to churchmen’s conflicting attitudes toward chinos who were free Indians versus chino slaves.

\(^{47}\) AGN Inquisición 312 exp.45 f.228-v (1616).

\(^{48}\) Procedurally, the Holy Office worked as follows: Inquisitors reviewed letters sent by deputies and familiars detailing allegations and then directed their representatives on how to proceed. They also held audiences at court in the palace of the Inquisition in Mexico City. If a case was considered serious, jurists ordered further investigation and the collaboration of witnesses to make a formal accusation (sumario). After receiving the additional information, inquisitors then decided whether to proceed with a trial (prueba), which would include submitting the purported offender to further questioning. Finally, after reading all the materials, the inquisitors would issue their definitive sentence (sentencia). For an analysis of the functioning of the Holy Office in Mexico, see John F. Chuchiak, *The Inquisition in New Spain, 1536–1820: A Documentary History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012).
Indians were subject to the church in matters of religious orthodoxy and morality, but the Inquisition did not handle their offenses. When the Mexican Inquisition was founded in 1571, the Spanish crown made a critical exception: the Tribunal would not have jurisdiction over indigenous people.\(^{49}\) The court was only charged with enforcing religious orthodoxy among Spaniards, people of mixed race, and slaves. Indians were religious novices and hence not accountable to the same standards as Old Christians.\(^{50}\) Notably, slaves from Africa or Asia, many who were also newly baptized, and thus new to the faith, were not given the same leeway as Indians. The Inquisition, at least in theory, prosecuted slaves for heretical practices under the assumption that they willingly disrespected the church’s teachings. In reality, the Tribunal’s oversight of slaves had more to do with social control. The Inquisition went after slaves when they committed religious crimes because their actions were an attack on the social order.

The church dealt with the religious infractions of Indians in a way that was altogether different from the way it dealt with slaves. Cases of idolatry related to preconquest religious practices, for example, were charged to the judge ordinary (provisor oficial) or vicar general of each bishopric. The bishops maintained their early-conquest role as judges of morality and religious practice over the Indian population. This determination was based on canon law, which categorized Indians as wretched people (persona miserabilis in Latin) in need of special protection.\(^{51}\) They were “new plants in the faith” (plantas nuevas en la fe), who had to be treated with

\(^{49}\) Alberro suggests that the crown issued the decree to prevent the abuses of the early post-conquest period, when a number of churchmen with inquisitorial powers (sometimes referred to as an Episcopal Inquisition) ordered that several high-ranking indigenous men be burned for allegedly relapsing to their traditional beliefs; see Solange Alberro, *Inquisición y sociedad en México, 1571–1700* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004). In contrast, Greenleaf suggests that the exclusion was related to the acrimonious conflict over doctrinal jurisdiction between archbishop and episcopal inquisitor Alonso de Montúfar, O.P., who tried to implement the decrees of the Council of Trent, and the secular clergy. Philip II favored the regulars when he excluded the Indians from the formal Inquisition. See Richard E. Greenleaf, *La Inquisición en Nueva España* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1969), 126–67. For an acute analysis of the consequences of excluding indigenous people from the Inquisition’s purview, see David Tavárez, *The Invisible War: Indigenous Devotions, Discipline, and Dissent in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

\(^{50}\) Coming out of the context of the Reconquista, Old Christians were people who could prove they had no ancestors who were Jews or Muslims.

\(^{51}\) Medieval canon law conceived of persona miserabilis as those people who needed the special protection of the church, even beyond matters of morality, because they were the weakest members of society in terms of power and wealth. For the articulation of this
The idea was that churchmen who were actively involved in the missionary campaign would have a more nuanced understanding of indigenous culture and be better able to judge their transgressions. Inquisitors were therefore careful not to overstep their authority in regard to Indians. This distinction eventually shaped how they perceived chino slaves.

After Spain’s Pacific conquest, the Tribunal in Mexico City was charged with oversight of the Philippines. As in Mexico, the Inquisition had no jurisdiction over native people, who had to respond to the episcopal court under the archbishop of Manila. The Inquisition periodically sent an inspector (visitador), but most of the time the judges in Mexico City relied on resident commissaries (comisarios), who made inquiries, took testimonies, and wrote reports detailing potential cases of religious wrongdoing in Manila, and farther afield. They sent their findings to Mexico City for review and waited for further directions on how to proceed. Tellingly, when the Inquisition’s deputies mistakenly forwarded a case concerning an Indian from the Philippines, the judges returned the documentation to the diocesan authorities. The judges in Mexico City consistently maintained the jurisdictional boundaries; their concern was with Spanish colonists and other foreigners in the Philippines, not with native peoples.

The policy of returning cases to Manila made for some interesting discussions among inquisitors, who were typically ignorant of Asian geography as it concerned the true origins of certain individuals. In general, judges grouped people from elsewhere in Asia with those from the Philippines. In 1662, for instance, the Inquisition in Mexico City received a letter regarding a slave named Francisco Macasar, who was accused of being a diviner (adivinador). Overlooking the fact that Francisco’s name

documentation forwarded to Mexico by the commissary in the Philippines, a Dominican friar, for the years 1622 through 1625 is found in AGN Inquisición 220 exp.8 (1623).
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52 The Third Provincial Council in Mexico City (1585) employed this metaphor to articulate the need for the church’s continued guardianship of the indigenous population. Traslosheros, 2001, 502.
53 The crown gave jurisdiction over the Philippines to the Mexican Inquisition in 1585. José Toribio Medina, El tribunal del Santo Oficio de la Inquisición en las Islas Filipinas (Santiago de Chile: Imprenta Elzeviriana, 1899).
54 On arrival at Acapulco, the admiral of the Manila Galleon had to hand over the letters and dispatches addressed to the Holy Office to the commissary of the Inquisition. AGN Inquisición 140 exp.8 f.339-345v (1586). The documentation forwarded to Mexico by the commissary in the Philippines, a Dominican friar, for the years 1622 through 1625 is found in AGN Inquisición 220 exp.8 (1623).
indicated that he was from Makassar, in Sulawesi Island rather than from the Philippine Islands, the inquisitor reviewing the case identified him as an Indian from the Spanish Philippines and judged the case to be outside the court’s purview. As a foreigner and a slave, Francisco should have been investigated, especially as the inquisitor suspected grave wrongdoing and ordered a sharp reprimand for the Spaniards who had visited him. Francisco’s identification as an Indian, however, superseded doctrinal concerns; in terms of religious jurisdiction, the Inquisition could not proceed against the native peoples of Spain’s colonies.

In contrast to the cases sent from the Philippines, the Inquisition’s policy toward the natives of the Philippines who ended up in Mexico was inconsistent and much more complicated. While they remained in Spain’s Asian colony, indigenous people were categorized as Indians and therefore excused from inquisitorial scrutiny. Once these individuals were in Mexico, the distinction was no longer made. Inquisitors, like everyone else, categorized all slaves who arrived from Asia (other than blacks) as chino slaves, whether they were originally from Manila or Goa. In other words, once natives of the Philippines disembarked at Acapulco, they ceased being Indians and became chino slaves – and as slaves they were under the Tribunal’s jurisdiction.

That said, Inquisitors did express some confusion over where chino slaves came from and about their relation to Indians. It took decades, however, for the Inquisition to make clear distinctions and to group chinos with Indians under the same jurisdiction. Finally, at the end of the seventeenth century, inquisitors started to classify chinos as Indians, which went along with a broader recognition in society that many chino slaves were in fact natives of the Philippine Islands. To make the distinction, inquisitorial judges became increasingly interested in the part of the testimony when accused individuals gave their life discourse (discurso de la vida) and provided details regarding their ancestry. The inquisitors also started to rely on details about people’s skin color and customs to distinguish Indians from legal (i.e., non-native) slaves. The judges used chinos’ self-rendering, along with their own observations, to draw conclusions about their identity and thus determine the appropriate jurisdiction.

55 Makassar is in present-day Indonesia. AGN Inquisición 502, exp.6 f.452–474 (1662).
In 1621, a commissary of the Inquisition in the city of Puebla wrote to the Tribunal in the capital about a chino slave named Andrés, who was known for selling magical powders, allegedly acquired from the “great Turk.” Men were said to flock to Andrés because he made them feel like they could get any woman of their choosing. The commissary asked for the judges’ opinion on whether to proceed with the inquiry and collect testimonies. At question was the possibility that Andrés might be an Indian. If the slave were indeed a native, then it would be the bishop who would have to intervene. The commissary thus wondered whether chinos were in fact Indians, knowing that the Inquisition could not prosecute an indigenous person.

The growing association between chino slaves and Indians derived in part from their very real connections in everyday life. The case of Diego Juan de la Cruz from 1632 illustrates how chino slaves emphasized their interactions with Indians. In 1632, Diego confessed a string of transgressions to a local priest, from behind a cell wall. He had been on the run from his master for months, trekking through the mountains, until finally being caught and jailed in the town of Toluca. Diego told the priest of his days as a fugitive and showed him “a small black figurine in the shape of a bird” that an Indian had given him. Whenever Diego was in trouble, he would take a bite from the bird and mix it with saliva to spread on his hands, and this would fill him with vigor, which allowed him to go on.

Diego also spoke of demons and slavery. One day, he had called on the devil for help and a demon had instantly appeared to offer his assistance. In exchange, Diego was told that he would have “to draw blood from his veins,” and with this red liquid he was to sign a document that made him the devil’s slave. He confessed to the priest that he had been tempted to sign the demon’s contract but had not done so because he was a true Christian. Diego did not say as much, but his story suggests that creatures that ask for slave contracts are demons, which can be interpreted as a veiled critique of the church for justifying slavery. In this sense, Diego, like other chino slaves, used religious rhetoric to articulate his desire for actual freedom.

57 AGN Inquisición 486 exp.39 f.201 (1621).
58 AGN Inquisición 372 exp.20 (1632).
59 Diego expressed similar religious disdain when he confessed to defecating on an image of Our Lady of the Rosary and then “smashing his rosary to pieces.”
60 The appropriation of Christian rhetoric by subalterns to contest hegemonic powers is a commonly studied historical topic. For an analysis of how indigenous people in the Philippines employed Catholicism to limit Spanish control, see Rafael, 1988.
Visibly shaken by the stories, the priest admonished Diego and warned him not to say such things “to get out of jail or for fear of his master.” Diego, however, was adamant: he wanted to be absolved by the Inquisition for his sins, which was why he had spoken out in the first place. The priest therefore carried on and gathered testimonies from Diego’s cellmates to write a report for the Tribunal. Among the tales the priest heard from these men was that Diego had repeatedly boasted that he had once grabbed a turkey, which had lain at his feet, and “had a human act with it.” The priest’s detailed report of the confession and testimonies prompted the Inquisition to hear the case, so Diego got the audience he had wanted.

At court, Diego lamented the sorrows and extreme hopelessness that had led him to offend God on many occasions, including thoughts of suicide. He begged “the Holy Office to guide him toward the path to salvation.” Interestingly, Diego changed some of the characters in the stories he told the presiding inquisitor. To the priest and his cellmates, he had allegedly spoken of demons and supernatural powers, but to the inquisitor he related a more personal story about his friendship with an Indian. This unnamed Indian was a kind of healer who had “consoled” and helped him find strength (by giving him the bird figurine). They had parted ways, but that same Indian (rather than the devil) had appeared to him in dreams and one time sent an envoy of sorts, another Indian “dressed in a white cape,” to help him escape from a sugar plantation where he had been working. This caped Indian had shattered the chains that bound Diego and had given him a mare so that he could go back to his family in Mexico City. The Indian had also promised to come to his aid in the future and requested that Diego “offer a fast for him.” When the inquisitor asked what this fasting was about, as “all penitence and mortifications are due only to God,” Diego explained that it was simply a customary phrase used by friends. The Indian had meant that he wanted Diego “to pray for him and commend him to God.” With this elaboration of his visions, Diego humanized his rendering as the tale of a man driven to desperate measures to escape bondage who had received help from a fellow Christian Indian.61

The inquisitor was swayed by Diego’s tearful acknowledgment of his errors and effusive contrition. He had come to the Tribunal’s attention as a

61 Diego referred to him as a chichimeca, but there is no sense that he implied a negative connotation, even though the word was often used as a derogatory term for “barbarian” (i.e., bellicose) Indians from the northern frontier.
man who had fiendish temptations. Diego’s stories, however, had the effect of transforming him into a wretched and ignorant Indian. The judge was willing to forgive his lapses with a reprimand. The sentence was as follows:

Due to his condition, color, and the experience we have in these parts with the slaves who come from the Philippines . . . he ought to be recognized as a native indio chino . . . and having shown signs of repentance, he should be warned not to commit such unlawful acts . . . and be instructed to be a good Catholic Christian, and then be handed over to his master.

The use of the term “indio chino” indicates that in the 1630s, there was already a predisposition to think of chinos as Indians, even in the case of a man who was branded on the face to mark him as a slave. The inquisitor, moreover, specifically identified him as an Indian from the Spanish Philippines, even though Diego said he had been born and baptized in Malacca.62 On this occasion, the categorization as an Indian did not raise jurisdictional concerns. The inquisitor identified Diego as a slave, which made him subject to the court; Diego’s Indian-ness, however, seemed to have made him less culpable, as evident from the judge’s lenient ruling.

Over the course of the seventeenth century, chinos showed an increased understanding of what was expected from them during their proceso (trial), which was to repent and plead with the presiding inquisitor for forgiveness. There was always a possibility of mercy, even when the evidence was quite damning. Chinos were helped in this performance from their knowledge of Catholic doctrine, which they gained prior to arriving in Mexico.

We know something about their strategies because the surviving documentation includes transcriptions of chino testimonies.63 These narratives provide insight into how the accused responded to allegations against them and how chino slaves negotiated with this institution. The court notaries who wrote down people’s words did act as mediators, often summarizing their responses to (often leading) questions and intermixing juridical jargon. It would have been unthinkable, however, for them to make up personal information or add emotional details, especially as the transcriptions were read back to the witnesses and the accused for confirmation. These transcripts represent what was said at court, minus some unstated understandings.

62 The Portuguese conquered the Malay city of Malacca in 1511, which was then taken by the Dutch in 1641.
63 The surviving inquisitorial documentation on chino slaves consists of accusations, indictments, testimonies, and the inquisitors’ directives and pronouncements.
The Inquisition prosecuted chino slaves for three main crimes: blasphemy, divination and bigamy. The first and most common accusation was blasphemy, for slaves who cursed or denied the Christian god, often to protest bondage. The second category, divination, involved chinos who allegedly claimed to have supernatural powers and thus swindled ignorant people. The third, bigamy, concerned men who sought to have new families, frequently because their first wives remained in the Philippines. For the accusers, chinos were foreigners with suspicious beliefs and questionable motives. At court, chinos slaves sought to challenge these assumptions by stressing their Christian devotion and submission to the power of the church.

Like African slaves, chinos cursed the Christian God to express their desperation and as a way of calling out for help.\(^\text{64}\) Women in particular were wont to lash out against religious objects as a way of expressing their anger. In 1626, for instance, a commissary reported that a china slave named Lucia had been accused of striking a crucifix, and he had called on a black slave from the same household to testify on the matter.\(^\text{65}\) This witness – a cook – remembered a telling incident. One day she had found Lucia gathering food remains from the floor and asked: “Are you so hungry that you would eat that filth?” In response, Lucia had said she was so hungry that she “wanted to eat a Christian, like the Moors do, who are as fat as sausages.”\(^\text{66}\) Lucia had undoubtedly heard about the long-lasting animosity between Catholics and Muslims (moros) and used the reference to reflect her own bitterness toward the masters who starved

\(^{64}\) Several scholars have convincingly argued that blasphemy among African slaves was an act of social resistance, defined as an attempt to act independently and confront a perceived injustice, especially cruel punishments. See especially Frank T. Proctor III, “Damned Notions of Liberty”: Slavery, Culture, and Power in Colonial Mexico (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010); Javier Villa-Flores, Dangerous Speech: A Social History of Blasphemy in Colonial Mexico (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2006); Alberro, 472–4. Kathryn Joy McKnight, “Blasphemy as Resistance: An African Slave Woman before the Mexican Inquisition,” in Women in the Inquisition: Spain and the New World, ed. Mary E. Giles (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999). In contrast, earlier scholarship emphasized the inquisition’s punitive role in social control and thus focused on those cases where slaves were severely punished even when they had blasphemed under duress; see, for example, David M. Davidson, “Negro Slave Control and Resistance in Colonial Mexico, 1519–1650,” Hispanic American Historical Review 46, no. 3 (1966): 241.

\(^{65}\) Another china slave named Ana was similarly accused of assaulting (abofetear) a crucifix. AGN Inquisición 1552 f.192 (1626).

\(^{66}\) AGN Inquisición 365 exp.3 (1628).
The inquisitor who read the report discounted her pleas, judging these outbursts to be “of little substance,” rather than insults to God. The judge may have recognized that a slave provoked by fear and misery could slide easily into despair and express it as religious irreverence.

In some cases, chino slaves blasphemed to obtain a reprieve from physical torment – a mechanism similarly employed by slaves of African descent. Their actions can be understood as willful attempts to precipitate the intervention of the Inquisition. Chino slaves cried out to gain an audience at court where they could denounce abusive masters lacking in Christian charity. Chino slaves understood that whoever witnessed blasphemy had to denounce the event to the Inquisition, so they did so to invite the intercession of the Inquisition. The master would not be held responsible, as the sacrilege endangered only the blasphemer’s soul, but the slave could expect the Tribunal to acknowledge the master’s cruelty and insist that he treat slaves more humanely. Chino slaves thus employed the rhetoric of paternalism to ameliorate their condition.

Masters voluntarily turned in their slaves and testified against them, which points to the severe social pressure that led individuals to report heterodox behavior. Slave owners had to pay all costs associated with a trial, including room and board at the inquisitorial jail, so there was actually a financial disincentive to denounce their slaves. Yet, they did. Masters well understood that they were supposed to ensure that their slaves acted like good Christians, and they avoided the perception that they were skirting that responsibility.

Andres Álvarez, for example, asked the court to punish his chino slave Antón because he had stood up during Sunday mass and renounced God and the Virgin Mary, scandalizing the parishioners. As the inquiry revealed, the outburst had been brewing for some time. Antón had previously run away, so Álvarez kept him in chains at all times. From Álvarez’s perspective, Antón was a “malicious” slave who never completed his work, “grumbled” constantly, and even refused to wash his

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67 See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the historical animosity between Catholics and Muslims in Iberia, and how that shaped Spaniards’ attitude toward slavery.

68 Proctor suggests that African slaves used blasphemy as a way to “negotiate” what was “acceptable treatment” versus “illegitimate or cruel punishment.” Proctor, 2010, 114–20. Villa-Flores, on the other hand, suggests that slaves often blasphemed to stop the abuse and to prompt the intervention of the Inquisition. Villa-Flores, 2006, 131–40. I emphasize that slaves’ motivations for blaspheming were as varied as their own individual circumstances.
face to attend mass. Álvarez did not add, however, that he had broken Antón’s left arm in a beating some days earlier, making it impossible for Antón to carry out his orders. When it came time for Antón to defend himself at court, he told of having previously worked at a textile mill, where slaves often “reneged God” because of the “beatings and punishments” that were meted out. He said that an “old inquisitor with a good face” had ordered their master “to treat them well.” Antón had obviously wanted the same thing to happen again: to have the Inquisition admonish Álvarez and make him act in a more Christian manner.

As in other cases involving chino slaves, the presiding inquisitor focused his attention on Antón’s lineage, rather than the blasphemy. Antón had said he was a mulatto from the city of Goa; his paternal grandmother had been a slave from Mozambique, his grandfather a Portuguese captain, and his maternal grandparents were Muslims from Terrenate in the Maluku Islands. No further information was taken about his genealogy because the inquisitor though it “unnecessary to determine the quality of his person.” The inquisitor had heard enough to know that Antón was a slave, not an Indian, which meant he fell under the court’s jurisdiction. The punishment was 200 lashes. The inquisitor, however, also had severe words for Álvarez, demanding that he stop his cruelties and treat his slaves with “Christian charity.” Álvarez was also told to sell Antón to another master, as he was obviously “a hurt (irritado) and desperate slave.” This case suggests that slaves did indeed count on the Inquisition to mitigate their masters’ cruelty, and that judges had to decide on what constituted excessive punishment, which was obviously recognized to be one of the factors that provoked slaves to rebel against their masters, even if the rebellion was suicidal.

The Inquisition’s main function was ideological – the inquisitors were charged with enforcing religious orthodoxy and uncovering heresy. That said, inquisitors were generally wary of condemning chino slaves who blasphemed too harshly if they were new converts, understanding that they often spoke out because of ill treatment. As such, the judges were often lenient with chino slaves, acknowledging the difficult circumstances in which they found themselves. In 1626, a chino slave named Gaspar was

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69 AGN Inquisición 454 exp.27 f.443–458v (1651).
70 Ibid.
71 Inquisitors spent much of their time censoring books and ideas that challenged Catholic dogma. For a study on their intellectual foundations, see Martin Austin Nesvig, *Ideology and Inquisition: The World of the Censors in Early Mexico* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
caught fleeing from a sugar plantation. Struggling, Gaspar called out injuries to God and His Saints as he was put in iron chains. He immediately expressed deep remorse for his words and “begged for mercy with much sentiment.”

In response, the inquisitor wrote that “in attention to the slave’s capacity and regret,” the punishment would be only twenty lashes.

In a similar case, a chino slave named Tomás, who had recently arrived at his master’s plantation, blasphemed while fumbling with the sugar press. On review, the inquisitor simply filed the case, noting that the blasphemy had been committed under duress and that the slave had spoken in the context of “oppression.” As with newly converted Indians, churchmen knew that chino slaves might not understand the theological significance of their words because they were ignorant of doctrinal matters. They also understood that people misspoke when they were being abused. The slave in question had to be punished for his or her blasphemy to set an example for others, but the judges allowed some latitude for context.

The Holy Office was charged with enforcing normative behavior, so inquisitors showed less sympathy toward chino slaves who blasphemed in the process of challenging authority. They prescribed strict punishments for slaves who did not abide by established rules of behavior, especially if they tried to avoid work or disavowed their masters’ orders. In 1661, a chino slave named Lucas de Araujo was denounced as a blasphemer. The incident occurred at a bakery late one night when Lucas complained of the workload. To quiet him down, the supervisor sent an Indian worker to bind him. Lucas responded by renouncing God and all His Saints “six or eight times very angry and choleric.” His hands tied, Lucas called on the Virgin and the Saints “to set him free from the ropes of the devil.” Alarmed by this behavior, the supervisor loosened the bonds but did not free him for fear that Lucas would hang himself out of desperation.

The morning after the incident, Lucas was delivered to the Inquisition’s jail, wearing old clothes and carrying a small rosary. During questioning, Lucas first told the court he was a Christian “baptized and confirmed by divine grace.” He claimed not to remember what had happened that night because he had come to work drunk; the following morning, he had found himself bound and naked, hanging from a ceiling beam. Lucas made the same declaration on five different occasions, only to relent and finally admit that he had indeed spoken against God in agony over the pain of

72 AGN Inquisición 355 exp.18 f.582 (1626).
73 AGN Inquisición 598 exp.15 f.169 (1663).
74 AGN Inquisición 583 exp.5 f.520–567v (1661).
severe beatings. As evidence he showed the welts made by the leather whip that were still visible on his backside. He had been ashamed and frightened of further punishment, but he was now ready to ask for mercy from the court.

Lucas also explained that a few days after the incident, while delivering bread, he had stopped at a chapel and confessed to a friar, who absolved him. Lucas’s testimony makes clear his religiosity in the sense that he knew his outburst had been sinful and sought to amend his actions through confession. Far from rejecting his faith, Lucas took recourse in petitioning for forgiveness, following the Catholic doctrine of redemption.

The presiding inquisitor inquired in detail about Lucas’s genealogy, particularly the legal status of his parents. Lucas was “originally from Manila,” so the judge had to be certain that he was not an Indian. After repeated questioning, Lucas explained that both his parents had indeed been slaves, “chinos like him,” who had worked at the ship docks, but he knew nothing about his grandparents. His only other known relations were a maternal aunt and a brother living in Manila, who were married to free “Indians from Pampanga.”

This was a clear distinction: his direct kin were married to natives of the Philippines, but this fact did not make them Indians. Having judged him a legal slave, the inquisitor ordered 200 lashes as punishment and returned Lucas to his master. Lucas had to serve as an “example to other slaves” who might otherwise be encouraged to use God’s name in vain.

During the 1650s and 1660s, inquisitors increasingly focused on slaves’ origins: they wanted to know where the slaves were born and how they got to Mexico. The answers to these questions determined the legal process. This was the case with a chino slave named Antón, who was commonly referred to as “the wise one” or diviner (zahorí).

It was said that Antón “said future things by looking at hand lines ... and was consulted regarding lost items,” but that he always made religious references in his prognostications. Antón had credence among his customers because he had the image of the cross “inscribed” (tattooed?) on his palate. Antón’s wanton claim to have a special connection to Jesus Christ landed him in the Inquisition’s secret prison.

75 Pampanga is a region in central Luzon Island in the Philippines.
76 There is extensive documentation from the initial investigation, subsequent proceedings, and an ensuing summary of the case. AGN Inquisición 456 exp.2 f.55–98v (1650). AGN Inquisición 435 exp.243 (1690).
Once in court, Antón tried to maintain his innocence by claiming that he no longer made prognostications or acted like a “false sorcerer” because he was a good Christian. As part of his life discourse, Antón said he was “a native of Cochin in Malabar, land of gentiles, not Muslims or Jews.” He likely made this distinction because he knew about Spaniards’ hatred of Islam and Judaism. Antón explained that a Portuguese friar had baptized him and that he regularly attended mass. He also recited some of the required prayers and stated that he knew how to read and write, but only in his native language. In explaining his sins, Antón admitted that he used to answer questions regarding lost items or about the future, but it had all been a hoax: he would accept “two or four reales . . . to buy chocolate and tobacco” and would respond to people’s questions with whatever came to his mind, which seemed to satisfy them. He figured his prognostications might have seemed cryptic because he could not speak Spanish or “Indian” (meaning Nahua) very well.

Antón was brought before the judges several more times but had nothing to add to his first statement. Then, the prosecutor showed him the accusations that had been collected, as dictated by inquisitorial procedure. Antón had to respond, so he changed tactics. Antón pleaded for mercy, emphasizing his ignorance and lack of malice, reiterating that he had only read palms to get money for chocolate and pulque (an indigenous alcoholic beverage made from maguey cacti). He had “read so many people’s palms that he could hardly remember them.” People would ask him questions and he would answer according to logical deduction. Once, for example, he had deduced that an allegedly stolen silver plate was to be found in the place where he had seen some servants washing it.

From the testimony, it was clear to the presiding inquisitor that Antón fell under the Inquisition’s jurisdiction. He was a slave from Portuguese India, with no connection to Indians. The palm reading hardly counted as heresy or wizardry. Antón was simply a man who took advantage of poor people’s ignorance and credulity to make a little money. After a long trial, the presiding inquisitor merely gave Antón a sharp reprimand and warned him not to say such “lies and artifice.”

As the seventeenth century wore on, inquisitors increasingly looked to skin color to make the distinction between who was a slave versus who was an Indian. The logic was as follows: an Indian was someone who looked like an Indian; chinos looked like Indians so they were Indians, not slaves; slaves were people with African features. For instance, in 1665, an Indian elder (cacique) turned in a runaway chino slave who had blasphemed. This unnamed chino slave, who was “tall and fat,” had yelled and tried to
intimidate the men who attempted to prevent him from running away.\textsuperscript{77} The chino had threatened to renege on God if he were not set loose from the straps that bound him, but the cacique refused to loosen the ties for fear that the slave would turn against him or jump into the nearby channel and drown. The day after the incident, several witnesses went to the Tribunal to denounce the slave, confirming the cacique’s story, except for the slave’s ethnic category. On that regard, there was sharp disagreement: some testified he was a mulatto slave, and others called him a negro. The wording of these testimonies suggests that in 1665, the word “black” was being used as shorthand for slave. The accused did not have to testify or even identify who he was. The judge simply accepted the categorization of the Spanish witnesses and treated him as a slave. The unnamed chino looked like a slave, so he was under the court’s jurisdiction. In any case, the presiding inquisitor was not concerned with the blasphemy. In the ruling, the judge wrote, “trouble and vexation afflicted [the accused] . . . because he was being taken back to his master.” The outburst, in other words, had clearly derived from desperation, rather than malice, so the inquisitor merited out lenient punishment.

The Inquisition had to determine individuals’ identity and investigate their ancestry with much more care after 1672, when the crown decreed that chinos had to be freed and recognized as Indians. The judges of the Tribunal thus had to categorize chinos carefully to establish jurisdiction. One way for them to make distinctions was through physical features: chinos who looked like Indians were identified as Indians, and their cases were forwarded to another ecclesiastical court. Individuals who had African features or whom witnesses described as castas (people of mixed descent) were not identified as chinos/Indians. Individuals who did not resemble Indians, in other words, remained under the court’s purview. In 1686, several nuns accused a servant named María Juana de San Ignacio, whom they identified as a china but also described as a mulata with Asian features (achinada). The charge was that María had made a pact with the devil to leave the confines of the convent where she was employed.\textsuperscript{78} Nothing else is known about María, but it is possible that she was a former china slave who was being forcibly kept in servitude. She may have been acting out to get attention and help in acquiring her freedom. Regardless, the inquisitor did not investigate further; he categorized María as a casta and

\textsuperscript{77} AGN Inquisición 600 exp.23 f.521–528v (1665).
\textsuperscript{78} AGN Inquisición 1551 exp.37 f.546 (1686).
simply ordered that she be severely reprimanded. From the judge’s perspective, María was not a china or an Indian – she was merely a lowly casta servant whose trials and tribulations were not the Tribunal’s concern.

THE TRIBUNAL FOR INDIAN AFFAIRS AND INDIGENOUS PARISHES

During the eighteenth century, the natives of all Spanish colonies were subject to an episcopal body that enforced religious orthodoxy and imposed prescribed social norms among all colonized indigenous peoples. After abolition, chinos formally came under the jurisdiction of the episcopal court in charge of Indian affairs. The court’s name in the late eighteenth century – Tribunal of the Ordinary Inquisition for Indians and Chinos (Provisorato de la inquisición ordinaria de indios y chinos) – testifies to this inclusion.79 Chinos were now generally assumed to be Indians from the Philippines and categorized as native vassals. In 1769, for example, the tribunal issued a widely distributed edict against idolatry that articulated this categorization. One of the clauses reads as follows: “If anyone knows an Indian born in this archbishopric, or from the Philippine Islands, who are vulgarly called chinos, who has committed an offense against our Holy Faith, he must be denounced to the court or the parish priest.”80 The decree also made a telling association about Indians’ alleged predisposition to bigamy: “Due to their frailty, Indians and chinos may find themselves wanting to remarry while their wife is still alive.” The document thus ascribed moral weakness to indigenous peoples from different parts of the empire interchangeably, as if they were all the same. As natives who were new to the faith, they required special guidance to stay on the path of righteousness.

79 This Provisorato was also called the Provisorato de Naturales, Tribunal de la Fe de los Naturales, Inquisición Ordinaria, Vicariato de Indios, and Juzgado de Naturales. There is no comprehensive study of the workings of the eighteenth-century court. Richard E. Greenleaf, “The Inquisition and the Indians of New Spain: A Study in Jurisdictional Confusion,” The Americas 22, no. 2 (1965). See the following works for the institutionalization of the episcopal court (audiencia) for Indian “natives” (naturales): Jorge E. Traslosheros Hernández and Ana de Zaballa Beascoechea, eds., Los indios ante los foros de justicia religiosa en la hispanoamérica virreinal (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2010); Jorge E. Traslosheros Hernández, “El tribunal eclesiástico y los indios en el Arzobispado de México hasta 1630,” Historia Mexicana 51, no. 3 (2001).
80 AGN Inquisición 1037 exp.6 f.248 (1769).
The ordinary court also became a place where chinos could seek redress for a wrong done to them. In 1677, for example, Felipe de Jesus came before the ecclesiastical judge to raise a complaint against a cleric named Cristobal de Garnica, who had attacked him earlier that day. As Felipe recounted, he had been sweeping the sidewalk in front of his house when Cristobal came toward him very angrily and started yelling profanities and punching him “for no cause or reason.” Felipe’s neighbors had to intervene when Cristobal took out a knife and threatened to kill him. The judge was sympathetic, promising to follow up on the matter. The court therefore acted to defend chinos/Indians from abuses, as part of keeping track of how they behaved in society.

As a result of this jurisdictional change, the Inquisition had to confirm the natural identity (naturaleza) of individuals who were called chinos before a case could ensue against them. During the course of the eighteenth century, inquisitors generally asked commissaries to carry out an investigation to verify where accused chinos came from originally, and what the chinos looked like if they lived elsewhere in Mexico. The understanding was that if individuals were really Indians, the Holy Office could not proceed against them.

The wording in these records expresses the Inquisition’s concern. In the case of a chino named Agustín Miguel de Estrada, the judge wrote the following:

The testimonies do not make clear whether he is a lobo or a mestizo, and some suggest he is an Indian ... Since the Holy Office does not prosecute the religious offenses committed by Indians, it is necessary to determine if he is a pure Indian by questioning three witnesses who can identify his casta.

Who was this man? As it turned out, Agustín was something of a fugitive – on the run from two wives. The people who testified against the bigamist described him as having brown skin and slanted eyes, calling him an Indian, a chino, and different casta categories almost interchangeably. Finally, Agustín’s second wife appeared at court and explained that he was a native of the Philippines. She was the key witness. The Tribunal could not bring Agustín to trial because he really was an Indian who had to answer to a different court.

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81 AGN Indiferente 4395 exp.1 (1677).
82 During the eighteenth century, the Holy Office recorded numerous accusations against chinos but did not proceed further. AGN Inquisición 999 exp.6 f.334 (1750).
83 AGN Inquisición 872 exp.2 f.36 (1735).
The Inquisition made similar inquiries in the case of a chino named Nicolás Ubaldo de Sosa, who was accused of “marrying in China and Cuernavaca.”\textsuperscript{84} The witnesses described him as having small slanted eyes, a flat nose, “chino-colored skin,” and black hair. Based on their testimonies, the presiding inquisitor forwarded the case to the Ordinary court for prosecution. He had the appearance of a chino from Manila, which was where he was from, and that made him a “pure” native. Nicolás was an Indian, and, in the words of the judge, “this tribunal does not proceed against people in this class.”\textsuperscript{85}

By the end of the colonial era, the association was complete: Indians from the Philippines, now generally called “Indian Filipinos” rather than chinos, fell under the jurisdiction of the Ordinary court. In 1803, a man from the Philippines, accused of being a great liar (\textit{embustero}), was identified as an Indian because of his “flat nose, general physiognomy, color, and scarce and clumsy Spanish.”\textsuperscript{86} The distinction was plainly made on this person’s appearance: he was an Indian because he looked like an Indian.

Freed chino slaves were formally incorporated into the ecclesiastical system as Indians at the end of the seventeenth century. The transformation of chinos into Indians brought them under the indigenous parish system.\textsuperscript{87} The parishes of Mexico City were originally organized under a principle of separation: secular clergy headed parishes for Spaniards and

\textsuperscript{84} AGN Inquisición 1103 exp.11 f.132 (1772).

\textsuperscript{85} In yet another example, witnesses against José Miguel del Sacramento, accused of painting pictures of the devil on his body and loose papers, described him as a mulatto and others as a chino. The inquisitor had to be certain of his ancestry, so he asked for further investigation, writing, “if he turns out to be an indio chino, then the investigation should be suspended” and the case dropped. AGN Inquisición 1281 exp.13 f.59 (1790).

\textsuperscript{86} AGN Inquisición 1418 exp.15 f.180 (1803).

\textsuperscript{87} After the conquest, Mexico City was divided into two zones (political and religious): Spaniards were supposed to live in the center (called \textit{traza}) and attend parish churches; Indians were supposed to live in the periphery, which was subdivided into smaller neighborhoods (\textit{barrios}), and attend the \textit{visita} chapel in their barrio (the chapels were administered by two \textit{doctrinas}). By the seventeenth century, the city was divided into the following parishes: Sagrario Metropolitano; San Miguel, Santa Catarina Mártir, Santa Veracruz; San José de los Naturales; Santa Cruz y Soledad Cotzinco; San Sebastián Arzacualco; Santa María la Redonda; San Pablo Teopan; Santiago Tlatelolco; and Indios Extravagantes. By 1777, the archbishopric of Mexico City also included Santa Ana, Santa Cruz Acatlán, Concepción Salto de Agua, Santo Tomás de la Palma, and San Antonio de las Huertas. Peter Gerhard, \textit{A Guide to the Historical Geography of New Spain} (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), 181. Ernest Sánchez Santiró, \textit{Padrón del Arzobispado de México, 1777} (México: Archivo General de la Nación, 2003).
the religious orders had parishes for Indians called doctrinas. By the end of the sixteenth century, the orders found it difficult to maintain their jurisdiction, with many Indians attending the Spanish parishes, which also catered to the city’s growing mixed population.88 The one significant exception was a new parish that developed from a doctrina founded in 1610 by the Dominican Order to minister to Mixtecs who had migrated to the city.89 In subsequent decades, this doctrina became the parish of Nuestra Señora del Rosario for Indios extravagantes (migrant Indians), also called the Language parish (parroquia de lengua).90 This parish was unique because it did not have a specific territory, reaching out to all non-Nahua Indians living across the city. Starting in the late 1660s, the Language parish served Indians from the Philippines (see Figure 6.1).91 By association, they also served chinos who were from other parts of Asia. Notably, a census-like report from 1692 did not specifically mention Filipinos or chinos, because by this time, churchmen routinely grouped all chinos as migrant Indians.92 They were no longer slaves or foreigners, but rather members of the Republic of Indians.

During the course of the seventeenth century, the Language parish became a place that brought together Indians of varied regions, far beyond the original constituency of Mixtec-speaking Indians. The parishioners, who would have spoken varied languages, from Zapotec

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89 Juan Javier Pescador, De bautizados a fieles difuntos: familia y mentalidades en una parroquia urbana, Santa Catarina de México, 1568–1820 (México: El Colegio de México, 1992), 28. The doctrina was housed at the Dominican friary. AGN Indios 11 exp.122 f.98 (1639).

90 O’Hara suggests that the Franciscans resented that the Dominicans included Indians other than Mixtecos, perceiving it as an attempt to steal their own Indian parishioners. O’Hara, 40–4. For a brief outline of the parish’s history, see Francisco Sedano, Noticias de México, vol. 2 (México: Colección Metropolitana, 1880), 20–2.


92 By 1692, the doctrina of Nuestra Señora del Rosario for “indios extravagantes” was composed of “indios naturales mixtecos, zapotecos, mestitlan, criollos, y otras naciones, residentes en esta ciudad.” This lack of territoriality was a cause of concern for the parish friar, who complained that many of his parishioners did not attend mass regularly because they lived far from the Dominican friary. AGN Historia 413 exp.1 (1692); transcribed in “Sobre los inconvenientes de vivir los indios en el centro de la ciudad,” Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación 9, no. 1 (1938), 1–34.
to Tagalog, likely communicated in their one common language – Spanish – or in Nahua, which became a lingua franca among indigenous people in Central Mexico and beyond. The varied individuals from all over Asia, including the Spanish Philippines, previously grouped as chino slaves, were considered free Indians at the end of the seventeenth century.

The final confirmation of chinos being Indians was that they began to form their own religious brotherhoods or confraternities (cofradías) as Indians. Confraternities in Mexico were lay organizations with ecclesiastical ties that promoted religious worship and mutual support. Through these brotherhoods, chinos carved out a place of their own within the church. By 1694, the “natives of San Sebastián from Mexico and the

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94 Confraternities were also called brotherhoods (hermandad); the Jesuit version was called an ecclesiastical congregation (congregación eclesiastica).
Philippine Islands” had formed a brotherhood to care for and worship in the presence of the image of Our Lady of Sorrows housed at the convent of San Sebastián. Following the stated purpose of such brotherhoods – Christian devotion – the founders came together every evening in community as Indians to say the rosary. In the words of the constitution, it was a brotherhood for migrant Indians: “If Spaniards sought admission, they would not be allowed to intervene in its affairs.” The confraternity thus provided a space for individual chinos to take leadership roles in the community and foster ties with other Indians, separate from the Republic of Spaniards.

Notably, the chinos who joined these spiritual communities provided one another with a special kind of economic support. Prior to the abolition decree, they appear to have helped one another achieve their liberty. In 1659, for example, the chino brotherhood of Santo Cristo (housed at the convent of Saint Claire) made the following statement: “The members wish to free chino Juan de la Cruz because he belongs to their nation and is the eldest among them; they entreat his mistress to grant him liberty in exchange for the 250 pesos that were collected for his liberty.” The wording conveys the great value they placed on liberty; these chino brothers honored one of their members by making it possible for him to live as a free man.

**CONCLUSION**

The interior life of most chino slaves remains elusive. There is ample evidence that chinos participated in the public life of the church and gave outward expressions of devotion, but little that sheds light on their personal

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95 AGN Bienes Nacionales 1028 exp.28 (1682).
96 Apart from common prayer, most confraternities promoted attendance at mass, charity work, and participation in processions on feast days.
97 The archbishop confirmed the confraternity’s constitution in 1694. AGN Bienes Nacionales 1028 exp.28 (1682).
98 I have found very few documents about chino confraternities from the seventeenth century, so it is impossible for me to make further observations about the ways these communities of chinos helped one another. Historian von Germeten, who wrote a monograph-length study of African brotherhoods in Mexico, suggests that the cofradías for Africans and their descendants did not focus on facilitating the manumission of their members; she found only one brotherhood – the Zape cofradía in Mexico City – that made such a bequest. Joan Nicole Von Germeten, *Black Blood Brothers: Confraternities and Social Mobility for Afro-Mexicans* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 88.
99 ANM Juan de Salas 4380 f.59v (1659).
worship or innermost beliefs. Chino slaves might well have carried their native belief systems to the New World, but the surviving historical record does not reveal non-Christian practices. What we do know is that membership in the Catholic Church had real significance and complex consequences for chino slaves, which included their becoming Indians.

The church simultaneously defended the natural liberty of the Indians and justified the institution of slavery. The indigenous peoples of colonized territories were vassals of the Spanish crown who needed to be brought into the Christian fold and protected in their natural liberty; slaves were foreigners. Chino slaves blurred that distinction because they endeavored to become Indians and gain full membership in the church as free men and women. It was critical, in other words, for chino slaves to be seen as natives instead of foreigners to be able to claim that they could not legally be enslaved. By the end of the seventeenth century, the church assented to chinos’ self-identification and incorporated chinos into its institutional framework as Indians. Individual churchmen and chinos engaged in a century-long transformation that made chino slaves into free Indians. Theologians may have justified slavery, but they also insisted on the principle of natural liberty and the community of Christians.

The story of a china named Francisca Hernández points to the importance of this Christian communion. Francisca dictated her last will and testament in 1647 from her deathbed at the hospital of San Juan de Dios in Mexico City. She had no heirs and little to pass on, except a keyed trunk, some articles of clothing, a wooden bed, and some textiles. Francisca left these items to the friars who cared for her, empowering them to collect a few debts and sell her belongings to pay for a requiem mass and to be buried “at the new church” (see Figure 6.2). The religious

100 Chinos, for example, took on official positions in the church. Chino Joseph Manuel was the sacristan at the Church of Our Lady of Valvanera, which was part of the convent of the Conceptionist nuns in Mexico City. The sacristan was charged with caring for the ornaments and helping the priest prepare for mass. AGN Matrimonios 166 exp.47 (1693).
101 This study does not directly engage the immense scholarship on the religiosity of African slaves in the Americas, which has tended to emphasize African continuities and the survival of non-Christian spirituality.
102 The hospital was run by the Brothers Hospitallers of St. John of God – an order that arrived in New Spain in the early seventeenth century and was known for caring for the sick regardless of social class. Josefa Muriel, Hospitales de la Nueva España, fundaciones de los siglos XVII y XVIII, vol. 2 (México: Editorial Jus), 10.
103 ANM Francisco de Olalde 470 f.444 (1647). The Church of San Juan de Dios, where Francisca wished to be buried, was finished in 1647 – the same year as the testament. Muriel 29–38.
Figure 6.2. Church of San Juan de Dios, formerly part of the Hospital of San Juan de Dios, Mexico City. Photograph by Alexandra Hart Brown and Daniel Fermín Pfeffer.
wording of her will was partly formulaic in that testators habitually declared their belief in the Trinity and called on the Virgin Mary to be their advocate in heaven, but Francisca’s avowed “belief in the Holy Mother Church” rings true. Francisca was far from her “native Philippines,” but the church at least gave her some comfort at the time of her death.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴ There is no mention in the will of her having been enslaved, but the fact that she could not remember her parents’ names suggests that she was taken from them at a young age, as would a slave. Moreover, her trade as a seamstress associated her with the textile industry, which was known for employing chino slaves.