On January 20, 1683, the Danish ship Havmanden (the Merman) was taken over by convicts and Danish, English, German, and Norwegian sailors on its way to the Caribbean island of St. Thomas. The mutineers killed the ship’s Dutch captain and the former Danish governor of St Thomas, Governor Iversen, and planned to sail to Ireland to share the spoils. Instead, the piratical seizure of the ship ended in terror and gruesome punishment. The mutineers were challenged by other individuals from the lower deck and, after over two months at sea, the ringleaders were arrested by Danish authorities. Upon their trial and torture, their mutilated bodies were exhibited at the northeastern gate of the Danish capital of Copenhagen. Despite this failure, Johan Heinsen argues in his compelling Mutiny in the Danish Atlantic World, the mutiny forever changed the course of the Danish colonial empire. It pushed the Danish West India Company to reject the use of convict labor in the Danish Caribbean colonies and contributed to the growing reliance on enslaved African laborers instead.

In a historiography that has long debated the transition from convict labor and indenture to the use of enslaved Africans in Europe’s American colonies, Heinsen’s argument might seem a little pedestrian. It is, however, only meant to serve as a corrective to a Danish historiography that has neglected to examine the agency of the lower classes when seeking to explain the fragility of seventeenth-century Danish colonization. This historiographical intervention, moreover, is far from the most interesting aspect of Heinsen’s monograph. What makes this book a gripping read is how Heinsen tells the history of the mutiny and its consequences as a social history from below. Using testimonies of the trial and earlier complaints against Governor Iversen as his main sources, Heinsen skillfully captures the fragmented voices and discursive universe of the lower deck, highlighting the power of storytelling and rumor as a driver of resistance to oppression. As he does so, he reveals a shared world of antagonistic perspectives, a world of empire as a world of dissonance.

Mutiny in the Danish Atlantic World is divided into six chapters, the first three of which pay attention to the lead actors of the mutiny as well as their main antagonists on board the Merman. In the first three chapters, Heinsen’s own storytelling is peppered with engaging reflections on options available to scholars seeking to capture the voices of the lower deck from archival sources composed by, and for, elite agents of the state. Drawing on the methodologies, concepts, and interpretative framework pioneered by maritime historian Marcus Rediker, Heinsen is wholly aware of the ease with which critics can undermine his argument about lower-deck agency due to the paucity of sources written by the actors themselves. Nevertheless, Heinsen meets such possible evidentiary skepticism with an open mind, scrupulously alerting the reader to the leaps of imagination that his exploration of mobilization below deck necessarily requires. The result is that even the most critical reader will recognize that Heinsen is making the most of the scraps of information at his disposal.

The latter three chapters of the book place the actions of the mutineers within a larger Atlantic history of sailors, captives, deserters, and piracy. As Heinsen
moves into the Atlantic world, his study begins to echo the existing scholarship rather than add to it. In these chapters as well as the earlier ones, Heinsen is missing an opportunity to reflect on the role of black sailors and women below deck, groups that were indeed a part of the story Heinsen narrates but whom he does not dwell on. His attention to slaves and maroons in chapter 5 also tends to move the book too far away from its initial focus on mutiny. In the concluding chapter, however, Heinsen returns to the main topic of the book and provides the reader with an excellent discussion of his main arguments.

In general, Heinsen’s innovative focus on spaces of listening, interpretation, and narration below deck, and his analysis of the dissonances produced by myriad voices of maritime and colonial life, elevate *Mutiny in the Danish Atlantic World* from a solid addition to a familiar story of captivity, mutiny, and piracy to a tour de force of social history from below. Theoretically sophisticated and beautifully written, the book will stimulate debate in graduate seminars and among scholars engaged in writing a global history from below. It deserves a broad, attentive audience.

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