

THE FIRST AND LAST KING OF HAITI

The Rise and Fall of Henry Christophe

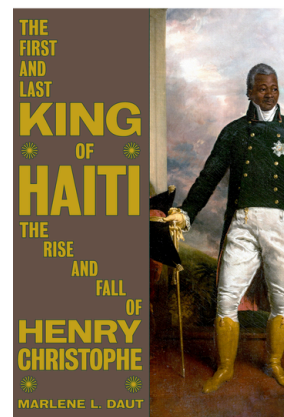
The essential biography of the controversial revolutionary and only king of Haiti. Henry Christophe (1767 - 1820) is one of the most richly complex figures in the history of the Americas, and was, in his time, popular and famous the world over: in *The First and Last King of Haiti*, a brilliant, award-winning Yale scholar unravels the still controversial enigma that he was.

Slave, revolutionary, king, Henry Christophe was, in his time, popular and famous the world over. Born to an enslaved mother on the Caribbean island of Grenada, Christophe first fought to overthrow the British in North America, before helping his fellow enslaved Africans in Saint-Domingue, as Haiti was then called, to gain their freedom from France. Yet in an incredible twist of fate, Christophe ended up fighting with Napoleon's forces against the very enslaved men and women he had once fought alongside. Later, reuniting with those he had abandoned, he offered to lead them and made himself their king. But it all came to a sudden and tragic end when Christophe—after nine years of his rule as King Henry I—shot himself in the heart, some say with a silver bullet.

But why did Christophe turn his back on Toussaint Louverture and the very revolution with which his name is so indelibly associated? How did it come to pass that Christophe found himself accused of participating in the plot to assassinate Haiti's first ruler, Dessalines? And what caused Haiti to eventually split into two countries, one ruled by Christophe in the north, who made himself king, the other led by President Pétion in the south?

Drawing from a trove of previously overlooked sources to paint a captivating history of his life and the awe-inspiring kingdom he built, Marlene L. Daut offers a fresh perspective on a figure long overshadowed by caricature and cliché. Peeling back the layers of myth and misconception reveals a man driven by both noble ideals and profound flaws, as unforgettable as he is enigmatic. More than just a biography, *The First and Last King of Haiti* is a masterful exploration of power, ambition, and the human spirit. From his pivotal role in the Haitian Revolution to his coronation as king and eventual demise, this book is testament to the enduring allure of those who dare to defy the odds and shape the course of nations.

The First and Last King of Haiti is a riveting story of not only geopolitical clashes on a grand scale but also of friendship and loyalty, treachery and betrayal, heroism and strife in an era of revolutionary upheaval.



PRAISE FOR THE FIRST AND LAST KING OF HAITI

"A tour de force. Daut brings King Henry Christophe vividly back to life in this deeply researched and rivetingly told biography. In a work overflowing with new archival discoveries and insights, she carries us expertly through a moment of revolutionary political thought and cultural transformation that reshaped our world and its possibilities. Everyone should know this history."

—Laurent Dubois, author of *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*

"Daut is meticulous, indeed, forensic, in her examination of the extant archival and textual documentation of Christophe's life and times. Daut's monumental work conclusively demystifies one of the most misunderstood, romanticized and demonized figures of the Haitian Revolution in order to set him free once more. This is an important, signal work from one of Haiti's leading historians."

—Myriam J. A. Chancy, author of *Harvesting Haiti: Reflections on Unnatural Disasters*

"This indispensable book offers us an excellent, granular biography not only of King Henry Christophe of Haiti but of the revolution of the enslaved in which he fiercely participated and of which he was the political offspring. The photorealistic portrait of colonial and then revolutionary Haiti that Marlene Daut paints is a gift to those who know the broad outlines of the story well but who have been thirsty for the life-breathing details. Meticulous in her research, Daut shows us, often for the first time, the various personal, cultural, political, and financial forces that created the controversial future king in all his complexity, as well as the specific contours of his leadership—and his failures. From a place of heartfelt agony, she deploys magnificent archival detective work to catalogue the horrors of enslavement and the slave-based economy from which sprang the world-historic Haitian revolution, progenitor of the modern era. And in the end, with sympathetic humanity, she presents us with the singular figure who navigated intense and complicated international pressures and presided over the new nation's difficult first years." —Amy Wilentz, author of *The Rainy Season: Haiti Since Duvalier*



Marlene L. Daut is Professor of French, African American Studies, and History at Yale University. She is the author of the award-winning *Awakening the Ashes: An Intellectual History of the Haitian Revolution* (UNC Press, 2023); *Baron de Vastey and the Origins of Black Atlantic Humanism* (Palgrave, 2017); and *Tropics of Haiti: Race and the Literary History of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Liverpool, 2015).

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CONTACT:
Nanda Dyssou, Publicist
nanda@corioliscompany.com
(424)-226-6148