



# Alone Before God: The Religious Origins of Modernity in Mexico

*Pamela Voekel*

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## **Alone Before God: The Religious Origins of Modernity in Mexico** Pamela Voekel

Focusing on cemetery burials in late-eighteenth-century Mexico, *Alone Before God* provides a window onto the contested origins of modernity in Mexico. By investigating the religious and political debates surrounding the initiative to transfer the burials of prominent citizens from urban to suburban cemeteries, Pamela Voekel challenges the characterization of Catholicism in Mexico as an intractable and monolithic institution that had to be forcibly dragged into the modern world.

Drawing on the archival research of wills, public documents, and other texts from late-colonial and early-republican Mexico, Voekel describes the marked scaling-down of the pomp and display that had characterized baroque Catholic burials and the various devices through which citizens sought to safeguard their souls in the afterlife. In lieu of these baroque practices, the new enlightened Catholics, claims Voekel, expressed a spiritually and hygienically motivated preference for extremely simple burial ceremonies, for burial outside the confines of the church building, and for leaving their earthly goods to charity. Claiming that these changes mirrored a larger shift from an external, corporate Catholicism to a more interior piety, she demonstrates how this new form of Catholicism helped to initiate a cultural and epistemic shift that placed the individual at the center of knowledge.

Breaking with the traditional historiography to argue that Mexican liberalism had deeply religious roots, *Alone Before God* will be of interest to specialists in Latin American history, modernity, and religion.

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