

unimaginable to them. After the war some of them returned like ghosts to families and villages who had not heard of them for years, thought they were dead and could sense they were changed. It is unfortunate, as Killingray remarks, that the one subject about which we know almost nothing is the religious experience of African soldiers. All we can do is to speculate what eschatologies could match the experience of the Burmese forest; what Protestantisms could engender military self-discipline; what rituals of healing and ancestorhood could reintegrate returning ghosts.

And all the while both Killingray's sensible sociology and his inflamed oral history challenge his title. In what sense *were* these soldiers '*Fighting for Britain*'? On page 214 Killingray quotes Waruhui Itote, later the Mau Mau 'General China'. Itote remembered 1943 'in the Kalewa trenches on the Burma front' where a British soldier told him: 'I don't understand you Africans who are out here fighting. What do you think you are fighting for? . . . At least if I die in this war . . . I know it will be for my country. But if you're killed here what will your country have gained?' As Itote wrote, 'What he'd told me never left my mind.' Of course, Killingray's point here – and Itote's – is that before the war no-one could have thought they were fighting for Kenya. But why should anyone have thought they were fighting for Britain? Even today someone like Father John Mandambwe, who spent seven years in the King's African Rifles, and became a Staff-Sergeant, can ask a young white interviewer, 'very sincerely', *Can you tell me why I went to war?* (Kachere, Zomba, 2007).

My recent research on Southern Rhodesia has suggested one answer to me. Black intellectuals there in the late 1930s and early 1940s *were* loyal to Britain, in the form of the imperial monarchy. They could see what might be gained by Rhodesian Africans fighting for Britain. They were very disconcerted and humiliated when the Governor told a meeting in Bulawayo that blacks were needed for their labour and would not be recruited as soldiers. Charlton Ngcebetsha, teacher, clerk and newspaper man, remembered that one of the main African advocates of military service turned almost white with mortification as he listened! When the Southern Rhodesian government relented and began to recruit, such black intellectuals threw themselves behind the campaign. They did not fight themselves but raised significant money for the Spitfire Fund. When the war was over these men claimed concessions as a reward for the sacrifice of African blood. None were given. Embittered intellectuals like Ngcebetsha were angrier about the shabby treatment meted out to returning black soldiers than the men themselves. Ngcebetsha and his friends knew why they were 'fighting' for Britain though they never bore arms. The black soldiers themselves had little idea.

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Review of the British Museum exhibition *Kingdom of Ife: sculptures from West Africa* (4 March–6 June 2010).

This major British Museum exhibition displayed a fascinating range of brass, copper, terracotta and stone artefacts from the West African city-state of Ife (in present-day Nigeria) deriving mainly from the eleventh–fourteenth centuries. Perhaps the most striking and well-known artefacts on display were the figures and heads cast in brass and copper. While such sculptures were known and used

as part of religious shrines in Nigeria into the last century, when they first came to the attention of European observers they caused a stir. Their naturalistic aesthetic and technical complexity caused them to be attributed variously to ancient Greek, Egyptian and even Italian Renaissance artists. What so surprised Western observers in the early 1900s was the naturalism of the brass, copper and terracotta sculptures. Many of the figures and heads on display in the exhibition are thought to be portraits of rulers and ancestral figures made in the image of living models. Rather than being stylized types, they have individual traits and features.

Moreover, as brass and copper were not locally extracted but obtained through trade, it was speculated that outsiders, if not a foreign culture altogether, might have been responsible for the production of the sculptures. Subsequent archaeological finds confirmed to the West that these were indeed African masterpieces, and it is now believed that the artists who created the Benin bronzes learned their craft from Ife. Today this material heritage is recognized as a centrepiece in the cultural legacy of the Yoruba people.

The exhibition emphasizes the significance of Ife to the Yoruba people as the site of mythic creation and cultural origin. As the catalogue stresses, 'Today, the rulers, divinities, deified ancestors, and even some of the animals depicted in Ife art are still actively celebrated among Yoruba-speaking people in modern Nigeria and in the Yoruba diaspora' (Drewal and Schildkrout 2010: 3). The authors posit a cultural and artistic continuity from the Ile-Ife of the turn of the first millennium to the present. As examples of this continuity, it is noted that the current ruler, the Ooni of Ife, when he sits in state like his forebears, wears a beaded crown and holds a royal sceptre and whisk 'similar to that worn by the two copper-alloy figures of an Ooni in the exhibition' (*ibid.*: 3). Similarly, '[i]n Ife today, people worship at shrines dedicated to the same deities that are referred to in the ancient city-state's art' (*ibid.*: 3).

The Ife of the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries is thought to have been a cosmopolitan and thriving city-state. Many of the terracotta heads found show different styles of facial scarification, the variety of which is understood as an indicator of the different peoples who inhabited or had contact with the city-state. Situated close to the River Niger, Ife was an important trade and cultural centre in the region and its concomitant wealth is partly inferred from the artefacts. The use of glass and carnelian beads, and the depiction of the adornment of figures with cowry shells indicates trade connections and wealth. Moreover, the presence of an artistic tradition of producing cast brass and copper sculptures in itself suggests trade, exchanges and dialogue with wider North and West African artistic and crafts traditions.

Information on techniques in pottery and 'lost wax casting' represent a compelling inclusion in the exhibition. For instance, video footage shows craftspeople forming the inner clay core of a head, defining a face in wax, covering this with further clay and finally pouring in the molten bronze, thereby melting the wax and casting the metal in the shape of the outer clay layer. The footage is recent and, we are told, lost wax casting is still practised today.

The archaeologist John Picton provides another interesting inclusion in the form of an audio guide telling the story of how a group of Ife artefacts were collected in the 1960s. At the time of the civil war, these were being used at a shrine in Tada, and Picton was despatched there to bring them to the museum in Lagos. Here, and throughout the exhibition, reference is only briefly made to the more recent context in which the artefacts were collected: for instance the 'guardian priests' of the functioning shrines from which many of the artefacts were collected, and the people who attended those shrines in their daily lives. Similarly, the craftspeople demonstrating techniques appear with little contextual

information, as executioners of techniques that (we have to presume) have changed little over the past 1,000 years.

The narrative of the exhibition in this way seems to include several strands: that told by the archaeological material on display; that concerning the technical aspects of their production; that concerning the historical context for the collection of the artefacts; and that of the relevance of the artefacts today. Yet how these strands speak to one another is left unclear. A concluding commentary invites the visitor to recognize affinities between the artefacts displayed and today's world. The exhibition might have encouraged that kind of recognition by fleshing out and weaving those strands together in a single, and perhaps more complex, story.

Drewal, H. J. and E. Schildkrout (2010) *Kingdom of Ife: sculptures from West Africa*. London: The British Museum Press.

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Review of the exhibition *Djenné: African City of Mud*, Royal Institute of British Architects (London), 3 March–29 April 2010 (extended until 29 May).

At the heart of Mali's Inland Niger delta, the ancient town of Djenné was once a vital crossroads for trans-Saharan commercial trade. With its 'sister city' Timbuktu, Djenné's reputation grew as an important Islamic Studies centre and attracted scholars to the region. In recent years, the mud-brick architecture of Djenné and its famous mud-brick mosque have emerged as the focal aspects of the town, capturing the imagination of overseas tourists who visit in large numbers. In 1988, the town was added to the world heritage list by UNESCO, with strict moves to preserve the unique architecture. In the exhibition *Djenné: African City of Mud*, curated by Trevor H. J. Marchand, the integral roles of the masons of Djenné are presented as well as the wider positionings of Djenné inhabitants (Djennenkés) within diverse social contexts. Marchand portrays the city, locating it geographically and economically within a loose historical framework whilst maintaining a narrative that reveals insights into the daily lives of its inhabitants. The exhibition contains few references to contemporary localized-versus-Western heritage politics (with the tensions that ensue, such as cultural ownership, alienation and issues of authenticity). Rather, it challenges the freeze-framing constraints on architecture as heritage by exposing the more internally dynamic and intimate worlds of Djenné and Djennenkés.

On the top floor mezzanine of the Royal Institute of British Architects (London), the free-entry exhibition ran from 3 March–29 April 2010 (extended until 29 May). Marchand, a trained architect, is Professor of Anthropology at the University of London (SOAS). The exhibition was the outcome of his research on the masons of Djenné (2001–5), with fieldwork (2001 and 2002) and a book publication (2009). Marchand signed on as a labourer and an apprentice mason on Djenné construction sites to gain insight into the architectural heritage as well as an understanding of trade skill communication, and this is reflected throughout the exhibition. Accompanying *Djenné: African City of Mud* were a series of talks, lectures, guided tours, and a screening of the documentary film co-produced with Susan Vogel and Samuel Sidibe (2007).

The exhibition is divided into seven sections that cover Djenné's inhabitants, mud architecture, mud-brick mosques, drought, conservation, and, of course, the