

form to the sculptures. Nevertheless, the text eventually returns to the art and to its possible indigenous meanings. The analysis of these ivory sculptures furthermore serves as a foundational reference for the art forms explored in the remaining chapters.

Of note is Chapter Six, in which Strother focuses on arts made for Congolese patronage. In that chapter, the examination of a sculpture portraying a colonial officer makes for some of the most riveting passages of the book. Here, Strother's field-based expertise on Pende art (see Strother, *Inventing Masks*, 1998) and her understanding of the Belgian colonial archive and the region's history provide revelatory information about this object, which could easily be mistaken as a *colon* figure made for the souvenir market. Strother, in collaboration with the curatorial and conservation teams of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, which owns the sculpture, deconstructs this unusual work. Not only does the figure appear to be a portrait of a specific Belgian officer killed in the 1931 Pende Revolt, but it also likely served as a power object, or 'war medicine', that was designed to protect an individual Pende from the destructiveness of the colonial regime.

Throughout the book, Strother deftly weaves incisive visual analysis together with historical records. The rich object studies that she carries out are couched by an astute and steadfast reckoning with the uses of humor and critique within a context of violence and turmoil. Towards this end, Strother draws upon Western and African theorists as well as voices from the archive, all the while acknowledging that Congolese expressions of spiritual survival and assertions of humanity depended upon intangibility and indirectness.

Strother makes clear that Congolese artists lived through, and made a record of, the violence of the transatlantic slave trade, forced labor, rubber quotas, and colonial abuses, as well as the political upheavals and transformations that accompanied the creation of the Congo Free State, the resistance of the Pende Revolt, the rise and demise of Patrice Lumumba, the rule of Mobutu Sese Seko, and the *pillages* of Kinshasa. *Humor and Violence* illuminates these wide-ranging historical moments of contact and conflict in the Congo in a readable, accessible text. Congolese artists bore witness to strikes of the *chicotte*, as well as to leering glances, insults, and assaults – and they found the strength to laugh.

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THE SLAVE TRADE ON THE WESTERN SLAVE COAST

Afro-European Trade in the Atlantic World: The Western Slave Coast, c. 1550–c. 1885.

By Silke Strickrodt.

Rochester, NY: James Currey, 2015. Pp. xiv + 266. \$80.00, hardback (ISBN 9781847011107);

\$29.95, paperback (ISBN 9781847011787).

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Key Words: West Africa, precolonial, slave trade, slavery, commerce.

As has been well established, Atlantic commercial entanglements generated wide-reaching impacts on communities across West Africa's coast and hinterlands. The royal capitals of

kingdoms engaged in the Atlantic slave trade expanded rapidly. New towns emerged in the interior to control important nodes of regional exchange. People flocked to European-controlled coastal communities, and towns grew to include populations of tens of thousands of people. Other people fled conflict to mountainous areas, building complex defensive systems to avoid capture. Overall, the period was one of major demographic upheaval and political consolidation and competition, and these processes created profound impacts on social and political systems across the region. Decades of historical and, increasingly, archaeological research have examined the close connections between the rise of large-scale expansionist states, such as Asante and Dahomey, and their capacity to centralize state power and exercise control over the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Additionally, scholars have directed significant attention to the European trading forts and castles that dotted the coastlines of these regions, highlighting their role as key ports of trade for the expanding Atlantic commercial system.

But these were not the only communities to participate in the export of human captives in the Atlantic era. What about the minor players who acted, sometimes profitably, other times less so, on the peripheries of such expansionist states? How can we begin to grasp the wide-reaching impact of the slave trade on West Africa if such societies, which were probably in the majority, are not studied with the same level of intensity as their larger expansionist neighbors?

Drawing from a large variety of documentary and oral sources, Silke Strickrodt's *Afro-European Trade in the Atlantic World* seeks to correct this historical lacuna. This book widens our understanding of the relationship between Afro-European trade and local political dynamics to include relatively minor players in the region. To that effect, the volume focuses on the western Slave Coast, an area that Strickrodt defines as an 'intermediate' area between zones of greater mercantile interest, notably the Gold Coast to the west, and the eastern Slave Coast (principally Dahomey) to the east. The western Slave Coast was a region in which no large-scale expansionist states developed, no permanent European forts or castles were established, and the supply of slaves proved comparably unreliable and unpredictable. Such zones, which contributed much less to the overall volume of Atlantic trade than their neighbors, have not been deemed important enough to warrant significant historical attention. Yet, as Strickrodt shows, despite the relatively minor contribution that this region made to the overall volume of the trade, Afro-European commerce clearly produced significant implications for long-term historical developments. Indeed, the histories of towns associated with the Kingdom of Hula (Grand Popo), the Kingdom of Ge (Little Popo), as well as a wide range of smaller settlements along the coast, reveal how smaller polities struggled for economic and political survival in this period.

Chapters One and Two introduce the geographic setting and explore the rise of Afro-European trade along the western Slave Coast. Chapter One focuses on the physical environment, evidence of the earliest settlers, and the nature of the local economy and regional trade networks at the dawn of Afro-European trade. Here Strickrodt describes a series of coastal communities, united by a lagoon system that fostered east-west trade behind the coastal sandbars, yet largely blocked by the Atacora mountain chain from sustained economic interaction with the interior. Chapter Two situates the region within the context of the wider Atlantic World. It introduces the western Slave Coast's role as a secondary center for the emerging Afro-European trade that attracted minor players unable to

compete at major ports like Offra and Ouidah. Despite its secondary status, commercial relations in this period generated important consequences for social and political life at the local level. More specifically, the commercial opportunities and demands of the seventeenth century stimulated competition and conflicts among leaders and drove immigration from neighboring regions (Akan, Ga, Adangme, etc.), which contributed to a series of multi-ethnic and spatially decentralized coastal communities. In this way, the onset of Afro-European commerce reoriented economic life across the region, a process that bore significant consequences for its social and cultural fabric.

These processes set the stage for the remainder of the book, which examines the dynamic relationship between international trade and local politics in the western Slave Coast until the close of the nineteenth century. Chapter Three examines how coastal kingdoms in the eighteenth century struggled for dominance over the intensifying slave trade in a period marked by increased warfare and violence. Here Strickrodt highlights how military incursions by rising powers to the west (Akwamu) and east (Dahomey) generated dislocation, banditry, and social upheaval across the region. Within this context, Strickrodt explores how Little Popo managed to assert its territorial dominance despite its troubled associations with European traders, a dynamic that highlights the complex relationship between war and the Atlantic slave trade in eighteenth-century West Africa. Chapter Four describes political developments from the end of the eighteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century, when the slave trade declined. Strickrodt demonstrates that coastal African trading families often succeeded in setting the terms of the trade, often to the dismay of their political leaders, and succeeded in shifting the balance of power in their favor. By way of contrast, Chapters Five and Six focus on how coastal communities adapted to the abolition of the slave trade and the shift towards 'legitimate' commerce in agricultural products. This transition accentuated local trading rivalries and factional conflicts, which sometimes resulted in war, but which also led to the establishment of new towns such as Porto Seguro and Agoué, which sometimes served as outlets for the clandestine slave trade. Lastly, the epilogue examines the onset of colonial rule. It describes how local political instabilities led rulers to cede territory to European powers, and how the arbitrariness of the colonial partition wreaked havoc on the economic support that towns had heretofore reaped from their respective hinterlands.

Strickrodt raises many themes that are familiar to those working on the relationship between Afro-European trade and local political and economic transformations elsewhere on the Slave Coast. Indeed, the emergence of multi-ethnic communities, the relationship between war and slavery, the expansion of the economic and political power of coastal trading families, and the destabilizing effects of the transition to 'legitimate' commerce are major historiographical themes in Dahomey to the east. However, unlike Dahomey, there were no large-scale centralized kingdoms in the western Slave Coast to absorb and mitigate the destabilizing forces unleashed by the slave trade. Rather, in the case described in this volume, we learn how small-scale towns and kingdoms navigated this shifting landscape in the absence of the overarching bureaucratic and military structures that served to maintain political order in Dahomey.

This book thus provides a valuable new corrective to our understanding of the role of trans-Atlantic commerce in shaping the long-term histories of communities across the region. *Afro-European Trade in the Atlantic World* is accessible and rich in historical

detail, and it will find a welcome home on the bookshelves of scholars interested in the trans-Atlantic slave trade's impact on West African societies.

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KNOWLEDGE AND HEALING IN THE EARLY MODERN ATLANTIC

The Experiential Caribbean: Creating Knowledge and Healing in the Early Modern Atlantic.

By Pablo Gómez.

Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2016. Pp. xxii + 314. \$85.00, hardback (ISBN 9781496990861); \$29.95, paperback (9781469630878).

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Key Words: Atlantic World, African diaspora, medicine, precolonial.

In recent years, there has been a boom in the history of 'natural knowledge' and *materia medica* in the early modern Atlantic. This project has been richly interdisciplinary, and it has integrated the work of art historians such as Daniela Bleichmar and Cécile Fremont; the geographer Judith Carney; historians of the Spanish and Portuguese empires including Matthew Crawford and Timothy Walker; and historians of science and medicine such as Londa Schiebinger and Paula de Vos. Scholars of Africa and the Black Atlantic have also played a prominent role in this flourishing scholarly realm: Jose Curto's *Enslaving Spirits* (2003) ably documented the effects of European-traded alcoholic spirits on seventeenth-century Luanda, while James Sweet's study (2011) of the African-born healer Domingos Álvares revolutionized our understanding of the intellectual history of the Iberian Atlantic world.

Pablo Gómez's new book, *The Experiential Caribbean*, builds on this existing body of work, but also makes a strong case for seeing the world of black healers in the Caribbean as more than a source for Atlantic 'circulations' of natural knowledge. Gómez's close attention to a specific set of archival documents and the locally bounded questions they provoke is a refreshing change of pace in this regard. He is not particularly concerned with the question of how the cures discussed in his book were received in Europe; nor does he wade into longstanding debates about the continuity of African cultural practices and epistemologies in the Atlantic diaspora. Instead, he returns repeatedly to sensitive and illuminating readings of specific Inquisition cases concerning the 'rites and healing procedures of black Caribbean ritual practitioners' (121).

One outstanding feature of Gómez's book is its deep commitment to unearthing the full potential of the Inquisition records of colonial Cartagena. Gómez has identified a veritable treasure trove of little-known Inquisition cases. Taken in aggregate, these sources make a very convincing case for 'the power of black Caribbean communities in creating sophisticated and highly adaptable knowledge-producing practices' (8). Gómez's mastery of his archival source base allows him to make highly original interventions in the historiography of the Black Atlantic and medical practice in the colonial Americas. People who, due either to archival gaps or historiographic neglect, all too often appear as decontextualized fragments, here emerge as vivid and fully formed. For instance, we follow Francisco