

In Gadzekpo's piece on Mercy Ffoulkes-Crabbe of Cape Coast, Ghana, an autobiographical author who did edit her unpublished manuscript and was also a public writer, the genre in question might more properly belong to obituaries than to memoirs. T. C. McCaskie focused his chapter upon the evolution of this mode of writing in colonial Asante. His is the one contribution which most fully lives up to the book's promise of examining not only the textual content of the obituaries in question but also the full range of their presentation, circulation (or repression) and even practices of reception (combining private with public reading and elaborate oral commentaries extending well beyond the often very restrained information that gets printed).

A number of the essays focus upon letters, sometimes preserved in 'tin trunks' but often culled from various state and private archives. Here writing is very directly connected to practical objects: for Catherine Burns's herbalist, Louisa Mvemve, the legitimation of professional and civil status before South African state authorities; for Vukile Khumalo's Zulu-language 'epistolary network' around the Natal mission station of Ekukahanyeni, a variety of social but particularly political needs; for Keith Breckenridge's workers, the management of their often very precarious lives in a South Africa of extensive labor migration; for Lynn Thomas's Kenya schoolgirls, the pursuit of claims upon men who had made them pregnant outside of marriage. Politics and cultural uplift are the more obvious issue in Bodil Folke Frederiksen's study of a 1945–52 Kikuyu newspaper, much of whose content also consisted of letters.

The central question for the research which holds together this entire volume is whether its focus on literature and literacy moves us beyond the usual use of 'tin trunk' materials for reconstructing social history, i.e. how much does the contextual tail end up wagging the textual dog? Perhaps such a question is inappropriate, since the whole notion of an even semi-autonomous text is linked to a European cultural paradigm which projects like this (along with postmodernist literary theory, happily not much present here) seek to transcend. But, except for McCaskie and Furniss (as well as, in a negative sense, Barber), there is little attempt by the authors to connect modern literacy with precolonial oral or written-Islamic forms of literary expression. Writing and literacy thus appear as Western skills, appropriated by Africans for instrumental rather than expressive purposes. Nonetheless, writings of this kind inevitably reveal something more of the 'selves' who produce them than other forms of evidence and so the book does live up to its promise.

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THE SLOW SUPPRESSION OF THE SLAVE TRADE IN SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

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The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885–1950. By A. E. AFIGBO. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006. Pp. xv + 208. \$75/£45 (ISBN 1-58046-242-1).

KEY WORDS: Nigeria, colonial policy, slavery abolition, slave trade abolition.

This book is a welcome addition to the growing corpus of studies of the suppression of slavery during the colonial period. It differs from others in its specific focus on the issue of slave-trading, rather than the institution of slavery. It is based

mainly on British colonial records (over a quarter of the text, in fact, comprising appendices of colonial documents), although some use is also made of local oral traditions. In southeastern Nigeria, as elsewhere, despite the centrality of anti-slavery rhetoric in the public justification of the establishment of British rule, subsequent policy was cautious and gradualist. This was partly due to the constraints of limited personnel, but also to fear of the disruptive social and economic consequences of precipitate emancipation, which encouraged the belief that slavery was best left to wither away in the general process of economic and social modernization which colonial rule supposedly promoted.

Afigbo also suggests that this policy reflected the declining priority attached to the issue, in comparison with consolidation of British imperial rule and commercial interests. Although the protectorate over southeastern Nigeria was originally established in 1885, slave-dealing (defined to include enslavement, as well as the sale and purchase of slaves) was not formally prohibited until 1901 (and slavery itself remained legal until 1916). Even after its legal banning, moreover, dealing in slaves, especially children, persisted. Although British military conquest broke the power of the Aro, who had been the major suppliers of slaves for the Atlantic trade in this region, in 1901–2, they survived to dominate the continuing internal trade. In the 1930s, indeed, some colonial officials believed that the slave trade might even be on the increase, provoking intensified police action against it in 1933–6, which however was not sustained. On when the slave trade came to an end (or at least declined into insignificance), the conclusions of the book are equivocal. It ceased to be a major object of official concern by the 1940s, and it is evidently this failure of documentation which explains Afigbo's chosen terminal date of 1950. He himself, however, interprets this to mean only that the administration had 'lost interest' in the issue (p. 114), rather than that suppression had been judged effective, and seems to imply that the slave trade continued much as before; but in his conclusion, he suggests that the slave trade had indeed 'fizzled out' in 'the late 1940s or early 1950s' (p. 129). He is unequivocal, however, in concluding that the decline of slave-trading had little to do with direct government action, but was due rather to the social and economic changes associated with colonial rule, which engendered 'general civilization and enlightenment' (p. 121).

Afigbo makes good use of records of prosecutions of alleged slave-dealers to illustrate the detailed workings of the trade, including the practice of concealing the acquisition and transfer of female slaves under the guise of marriage transactions, and the use of ritual sanctions to discourage escapes and ensure the silence of witnesses. He also discusses the reasons for the persistence of both the demand for and the supply of slaves in this region. On the former, he emphasizes the persistence of precolonial patterns ('old habits died hard' [p. 100]), such as the social prestige deriving from slave ownership, the advantages of slave over free wives in terms of control of their offspring, and the killing of slaves as funeral sacrifices. This, however, would not on the face of it explain the supposed *increase* in slave-trading in the 1930s; although some reference is made to the use of slaves in production for export, suggesting that colonial commercial developments might actually have increased the demand for slaves (as has been argued elsewhere), these economic aspects of the question are not addressed in a sustained fashion. On the demand side, he stresses that children were not only kidnapped, but also sometimes voluntarily sold by their families, not only for economic reasons but also as a means of getting rid of those deemed undesirable (e.g. for having violated religious taboos). One disappointment is that Afigbo's engagement with earlier historiography is restricted to literature relating specifically to southeastern Nigeria, and he cites no comparative material (not even from other areas of Nigeria). This leaves it unclear whether this case was typical, or, in so far as it had a distinctive character

(as perhaps, in the apparent persistence of a significant scale of slave-dealing into the 1930s), what the reasons for this might be.

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TRANSFORMATIONS IN SLAVERY IN THE GREAT LAKES REGION

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Slavery in the Great Lakes Region of East Africa. Edited by HENRI MÉDARD and SHANE DOYLE. Oxford: James Currey; Athens: Ohio University Press; Nairobi: EAEP; Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2007. Pp. xiv + 273. £55 (ISBN 978-184701-602-7); £17.95, paperback (ISBN 978-184701-603-4).

KEY WORDS: Eastern Africa, slavery, slave trade.

The Great Lakes region of East Africa is interesting as a region where the dynamics of political and social change were, until the nineteenth century, largely internal to the area. This makes it particularly interesting for the study of slavery. Penetration of the region by slave dealers led to a rapid expansion of slavery in the nineteenth century, but this book makes clear that slavery has a long history there. Until the recent research of Michael Twaddle, most authors believed that slavery was unimportant in earlier centuries. Few colonial administrators talked about slavery. The Christian elites often said little, and nor, except for the White Fathers, did many Christian missions. There is, nonetheless, a significant amount of data, which is ably presented here. The Great Lakes is interpreted rather broadly to include the Nyamwezi and the eastern Congo.

Most of the articles deal with the nineteenth century. In fact, half deal with the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The argument for early development is made most clearly by David Schoenbrun in an article based on linguistic evidence. Schoenbrun argues that some form of dependency existed by the twelfth century and that, by the sixteenth century, a separate term for female dependents exists. A market for slaves, however, developed later. Schoenbrun links the process to political centralization. It is probable that chiefs and kings were the most important slave-users and that slave retainers played a major role in that centralization. Schoenbrun's argument is important to the introduction by Médard, who ably pulls together the other papers, the discussions at the 2002 Paris conference from which this book emerged, and some unpublished research, including a much-cited 1983 undergraduate thesis from the National University of Rwanda. The only other author to look at the pre-1850 period is Richard Reid, who argues that slaves were important to the functioning of the Buganda political and economic system before they became a major export.

Médard lays out two theories to explain the development of slavery – first, Lovejoy's argument that external demand for slaves led to transformation of the societies that provided them and, second, Thornton's argument that the slave trade expanded rapidly because slavery was already well established – and then argues that both theories are valid for the Great Lakes. There are enough data here to trace out a regional history of slavery, though with substantial local variations. The first slaves were newcomers or outsiders, exploitable because of their marginality. Women were clearly incorporated in significantly different ways. When invaders penetrated the area, both as raiders and traders, there was a dual process. The sale of slaves became a way to buy the weapons needed to parry the invaders and to expand various states, most strikingly in Buganda. Slaves also staffed market towns