vocated in this book—as a practice that is not rooted in European colonial expansion and one that makes heavy use of oral traditions? How far back in time can archaeologists validly apply oral traditions? This book explores these questions.

However, *Historical Archaeology in Africa* is not necessarily easy reading. For example, what is the meaning of the following: "The consequences of constructing a 'lived past'—if we are to use the concept—must be examined reflexively. It is a powerful trope, a metonymy that animates and has the potential to transform and homogenize pasts by renaming them" (47)?

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Arnold Hughes and David Perfect. *A Political History of The Gambia, 1816–1994.* Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2006. xviii + 530 pp. Map. Tables. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $90.00. Cloth.

Kenneth Swindell and Alieu Jeng. *Migrants, Credit and Climate: The Gambian Groundnut Trade, 1834–1934.* Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006. xxxv + 261 pp. Maps. Figures. Notes. Index. $91.00. Paper.

Serious studies of Gambian history rarely appear. Yet here, in the same year, are two histories, each written by a long-time authority (Arnold Hughes and Kenneth Swindell, respectively), each in co-authorship with a person he trained at the University of Birmingham. Each book is based on thorough research and provides insight gained over years of study. Too bad so few non-Gambians are interested enough in the country's history to take advantage of these studies; too bad the books cost so much that few Gambians could afford one.

A massive compendium of information (35 pages of bibliography, 130 of citations), *A Political History of The Gambia, 1816–1994* is now the place to begin study of Gambian history or society over the last two centuries and the de facto encyclopedia for Gambian government and politics. In addition to analysis, the authors provide gritty detail. When it comes to modern Gambian politics, Hughes and Perfect know the players and understand their motives.

The story runs like this. From colonial Gambia's beginning in 1816 until the late 1950s, its political focus was the capital city (today's Banjul) and surroundings ("the Colony"), excluding rural areas ("the Protectorate"), which held 80 percent of the population. Through the 1860s British merchants exercised the greatest influence on government, but by the 1880s two other groups competed for seats on the Legislative Council: elite urban Aku (descendants of Liberated Africans), or Wolof, divided by fam-

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ily, religion, and class, and conservative in nature. A more radical element emerged in the 1920s, led by the journalist and early West-African nationalist E. F. Small, but the old patricians continued to dominate elections. When political parties emerged after World War II, they took on the personalities of their charismatic leaders. A new constitution in 1959, which allotted a majority of directly elected seats to the Protectorate, opened a path for a new Protectorate People's Party (soon the People's Progressive Party, PPP), which, under the leadership of D. K. Jawara, dominated Gambian politics as the country gained independence in 1965. By the early 1970s, though a working democracy, The Gambia was essentially a one-party state. PPP control was threatened only by an abortive coup in 1981, which Senegal's army quelled and which fostered a weak Senegambian Confederation from 1982 to 1989. What led to the government's eventual downfall was corruption and resistance to change. In 1994 a bloodless coup headed by junior officers in the Gambia National Army took over, ending "the longest continuously surviving multiparty democracy in Africa" (280) and paving the way for a government headed by Lieutenant (later Colonel, now President) A. J. J. Jammeh. It remains unclear if the new regime is outdoing Jawara's in corruption and general ineptness, but it is doubtlessly worse in its respect for human rights. The authors conclude with a balanced assessment of Jawara that, while pointing to his flaws, suggests that in recent Gambian history only Small is of comparable stature in terms of "his overall contribution to Gambian public life"; Hughes and Perfect recognize the likelihood that "future historians will judge [Jawara] much more kindly than his successor" (294).

Since the 1840s, revenues supporting the Gambian government came, directly or indirectly, from peasant production of groundnuts (or peanuts) for market. In *Migrants, Credit and Climate: The Gambian Groundnut Trade, 1834–1934,* Swindell and Jeng analyze their subject more thoroughly than anyone has before, drawing attention to the importance of human and natural forces in the way the economy evolved. Most clearly, the authors show how groundnut cultivation drew Gambians ever more thoroughly into a global economy. One reads here how Gambians' ability to obtain life's necessities was affected by a host of seemingly unrelated events occurring a world away: foreign tariffs, European revolutions, the opening of the Suez Canal (giving Europe easier access to Indian groundnuts), global depressions, and World Wars I and II. The authors also appropriately draw attention to migrant laborers—"strange farmers" in The Gambia. The ending of slavery in the Upper Niger-Senegal region let loose young male laborers who found opportunity in seasonal migration to the Gambia River, where they could make a crop and return home with the means to support a family. Through such men and their descendants, distant areas connected to the global economy and people living there became as dependent as Gambians on prices paid for their groundnuts and charged for imports.

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Swindell and Jeng are so fair in their treatment that one must read carefully to find the bad guys in Gambia's long decline into dependence and poverty. Merchant capital gained the most in British Gambia through the purchase of nuts from producers for substantially less than they were sold in Europe and through the even greater profits amassed from imports (including food) and credit. Price fixing was one of the tools; chains of credit extended all the way back to institutions in Europe. The colonial government "provided a context for the operation of merchant capital, even if it did not always approve of the actions of the merchants or directly support them" (251), and the government was so intent on having both a balanced budget and a hefty contingency fund that it spent next to nothing—truly—from groundnut revenues on the health, education, and welfare of the producers or the colony's infrastructure.

As one would expect with related books on political and economic history, these two works support each other nicely. Merchants were long involved in politics, producers only recently; politicians argued over budgets based on revenues from groundnuts. Had Swindell and Jeng continued their study through the rest of the twentieth century (and this reviewer puzzles over why they stopped in 1934), one could see how Gambia's government continued to be thoroughly integrated with its groundnut economy. Of special value for today is recognition of how the degradation of the environment, related partly to clearing land for groundnut production, makes it unlikely that Gambians will again be able to produce much from the land. This means that, sadly, no government that relies on revenues from such production will have resources for development, or will likely be able to govern effectively in this small, poor country.

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Dan Wylie. *Myth of Iron: Shaka in History.* Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006. Distributed by International Specialized Book Services, Portland, Ore. xviii + 615 pp. Maps. Boxes. Charts. Notes. Select Bibliography. Index. $69.95. Cloth.

Dan Wylie calls *Myth of Iron* an "anti-biography" of Shaka because "it's scarcely possible to write a biography of Shaka at all" (3). By this Wylie means that, despite all the historical works that discuss Shaka, there are very few undisputed facts about his personal life and actions. "Shaka" seems to exist as a collection of historical contradictions supporting the contending agendas of those who have written about him.

A reader can approach *Myth of Iron* at two different levels: one is as a detailed discussion of various historical accounts about both Shaka and the broader region in the early 1800s; the second is as the most recent sortie in

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