

would have benefited from an added essay in which Alpers discussed his own research and that of other scholars working on this part of the world, with a view to framing issues and questions that future research agendas should consider.

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Edda L. Fields-Black. *Deep Roots: Rice Farmers in West Africa and the African Diaspora*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. xv + 277 pp. Orthography. Photographs. Maps. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Appendixes. \$34.95. Cloth.

“Rice in mangrove, with salt water?” Incredulous visitors to the Africa Rice Center, an international agricultural research center with headquarters outside Cotonou, Benin, begin conversations with variations of this question on hearing of a mangrove ecosystem setting for rice cultivation.

Deep Roots is an exploration of how and why farmers grow rice in the unlikely environment of tidal estuaries along West Africa’s coast from Senegal to Liberia. It is also much more. Like the deep roots evoked in the title, the origins of the West African rice knowledge system are traced by the author deep into the undocumented past. She does this by applying the comparative method of historical linguistics to a study of the earliest written records and oral traditions, building on Jan Vansina’s approach to Central Africa’s history. She explores language divergence and its relationship to cultural ecology in Guinea’s coastal Rio Nunez north of Conakry in order to piece together the origins of tidal rice-growing technologies. In doing this, the book also seeks new ways of understanding the contributions of enslaved Africans from the West African rice zone to rice farming in South Carolina and Georgia.

Deep Roots begins with the 1793 description of rice farming in the Rio Nunez by the English slave trader Samuel Gamble. Caught on the coast during the rainy season with his sick crew, Gamble wrote of ridges, mounds, seedling rice nurseries, and transplanting. Fields-Black takes this unusual account as her point of departure, and it serves as a common thread to which her narrative returns, underscoring the value of the early written record in areas where little historical, archaeological, or botanical evidence exists. The introduction provides a clear explanation of the comparative method of historical linguistics and of glottochronology, a linguistic method adopted by Vansina that provides relative dating where there are no other markers in time.

The book’s chapters outline the evolution of the tidal rice-growing agro-ecosystem. Chapter 1 presents a brief history of African rice, emphasizing that tidal, or mangrove, rice is a very small part of African rice agriculture. Chapter 2 establishes the earliest inhabitants of Rio Nunez, their adaptation to the coastal environment and language differentiation among

communities isolated along estuaries and during long rainy seasons. Chapter 3 discusses the movement of another Atlantic-language-speaking people (Sitem) to the coast from the interior highlands (a forest-savanna zone), and the new knowledge of rice cultivation that they brought with them. Chapter 4 argues that during the period roughly from 1000 to 1500, collaboration among the first-comers, coastal-language communities, and later arriving highlands-language communities resulted in the tidal rice knowledge system as an in situ innovation, not an imported, diffused Mande technology package. Chapter 5 presents the entry of Mande (Susu) technology in the form of iron tools, which made possible the exploitation of the more marginal red mangrove zone by peoples who had already developed a coastal land-use system. Chapter 6 situates the tidal rice farming system in the context of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as a supplier of food and captives who carried agricultural knowledge of rice cropping systems to South Carolina and Georgia.

Deep Roots is a valuable addition to research on African rice systems and their origins. Moreover, it contributes to the understanding of the rich cultural diversity of the coastal region extending from Gambia south and east to Liberia. Fields-Black's multidisciplinary approach shows tidal rice-farming as a local cultural adaptation to a micro-environment. This study should inspire research on the relationship between diverse, dynamic environmental settings and distinct cultural identities manifested in such forms as language, cropping systems, and landscape modification. In *Deep Roots*, readers will indeed understand mangrove rice as an indigenous innovation set firmly in its historical and geographical setting.

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Mamadou Diawara, Paulo Fernando de Moraes Farias, and Gerd Spittler, eds. *Heinrich Barth et l'Afrique*. Cologne: Rudiger Koppe Verlag, 2006. Studien zur Kulturkunde, vol. 125. 286 pp. Photographs. Illustrations. Tables. Notes. Bibliography. Index. €39.80. Paper.

Heinrich Barth, a German geographer and historian who traveled to the Central and Western Sudan between 1849 and 1855 and published his accounts in English, German, and French, has been a critical source for the understanding of history and society in a broad swath of West Africa. In this book, the editors and a range of colleagues (historians, a few anthropologists, and one literary scholar), writing in French and occasionally in English, provide a multifaceted examination of this influential traveler and commentator. Many of the articles here were initially presented as papers at a conference in Timbuktu in 2004. The work is very carefully crafted, and it brings new insight to the reading and interpretation of Barth. The