

that by carefully reading “against the grain” of the sources, and by considering economic, social, and cultural dimensions together, the histories of groups like East Africa’s porters can, and should, be made visible.

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**A. E. Afigbo. *The Abolition of the Slave Trade in Southeastern Nigeria, 1885–1950*.** Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2006. Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora. xv + 210 pp. Maps. Appendixes. Bibliography. Index. \$75.00. Cloth.

The distinguished Nigerian historian Adiele Afigbo reports that this book, thirty years in the making, was finally completed after he gained some respite from years of academic duties. Many will find it worth the wait, both for the fascinating evidence it provides from Nigerian and other archives and for the questions it raises about Nigeria’s colonial history.

Afigbo argues that an internal slave trade in southeastern Nigeria continued throughout the colonial period and that Britain largely abandoned abolitionism in the period 1885 to 1930 in favor of “naked political power and naked economic interest” (11). When British officials finally moved against the slave trade in the 1930s, their campaign was neither intended nor able “to ferret out the slave traders... once and for all” (122).

That the argument about colonial policy and commitment is the primary focus of his work is not surprising, as the argument flows from a systematic and careful reading of surviving colonial records. However, there is a subtler argument, which surfaces fully only in chapter 5, that may have greater explanatory importance. Afigbo shows that the people of southeastern Nigeria supported slave trading to feed “an unprecedented increase in the incidence of human sacrifice” (38), to provide children to become slave wives and house servants, and to rid households of people who were guilty of ritual abominations. He further suggests that local people resisted British efforts to suppress the internal slave trade because they regarded the slave traders as pursuing “a time-honored profession” (109), providing important goods and services (including the sale of unwanted children), and that most people took kidnapping lightly unless their own children were involved. Further, an “apparent conspiracy of silence” (120) by local Africans impeded the apprehension and conviction of slave traders. Even those who had been enslaved were reluctant to seek liberation because they were well treated, became well acculturated to their new communities, and had little memory of their childhood homes.

The conjunction of British policy and the underlying African sociocultural realities raises some issues of interpretation. First, in light of the strength of African resistance, it may be excessive to put so much blame on

the British for failing to extinguish the internal slave trade. At one point the author clearly states that “the *pax Britannica* brought the peoples of southeastern Nigeria face to face with a moral, cosmological, and ritual dilemma, which took them time to resolve” (103), but this insight remains undeveloped. A second issue is that the changes colonial rule brought to southeastern Nigeria, outside of colonial administration, seem to have reduced slavery and slave trading more than Afigbo seems inclined to concede. Although domestic slavery in the region increased when slave prices fell after the ending of the Atlantic slave trade, it seems unlikely that internal demand could have remained anywhere near the early 1800s export level of fifteen thousand a year. Likewise, as Don Ohadike has argued (in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts, eds., *The End of Slavery in Africa* [University of Wisconsin Press, 1988]), the internal slave trade of the region fell sharply in the colonial decades as the result of the spread of wage labor and Christian conversions. Thus the slave trade that Afigbo documents in the 1930s might be seen less as a continuation of earlier slave trading than the survival of some difficult-to-extinguish remnants of it, strongly tied to African values. Nonetheless, despite such queries, these issues of interpretation and perspective do not seriously diminish the value of this case study.

Of the four poorly reproduced maps in the book three are attached to the wrong captions.

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**Robin Law and Paul Lovejoy, eds. *The Biography of Mahomah Gardo Baquaqua: His Passage from Slavery to Freedom in Africa and America*.**

Revised and expanded second edition. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2007. xix + 278 pp. Illustrations. Maps. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$69.95. Cloth. \$22.95. Paper.

Slave-route narratives—memoirs written or narrated by Africans who had been caught up in the vortex of the trans-Atlantic slave trade—have long been an indispensable source for understanding the operations of the slave trade within Africa, the horrors of the middle passage, and the experience of slaves in the new world. It is unfortunate and frustrating that there are so few of them. Philip Curtin’s *Africa Remembered*, published some forty years ago, provided scholars with an invaluable compendium of all the slave-route narratives known at the time. Despite enormous amounts of research on the slave trade in the ensuing years, surprisingly little of the canon has changed. One development is that the accuracy of the best-known work of this genre, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*, has been questioned in Vincent Carretta’s recent biography of Equiano, raising serious doubts as to whether