

cliometric, economic, and political treatments of the subject and infuses them with a degree of humanity that is welcome, indeed.

In so doing, Konadu provides instructors and students with a number of important perspectives on Atlantic slavery. Among these are such points as that Atlantic slavery was not so much an event as a process and that the trade was not so much a triangle as a hexagon, for which I am deeply appreciative. I believe there are few terms as misleading as the ubiquitous notion of the ‘triangular trade’ taught to generation after generation of secondary and college students. Perhaps most importantly Konadu drives home to his audience that while the Atlantic slave trade and slavery did come to an end, their economic, political, and cultural legacies are very much alive in the world today.

Konadu presents these broader points and other critical issues in four carefully constructed, and creatively titled, chapters. In Chapter One, ‘The Anchors: African Understandings of their Societies and “Slavery”’, he provides a nuanced discussion of African notions of sovereignty, freedom, and slavery. Chapter Two, ‘Vessels and Villians: African Understandings of Atlantic Commerce and Commodification’ builds from a discussion of African systems of commerce and exchange to examine how growing Atlantic economic connections generated new economies and identities in parts of Africa. The theme of identity continues and is further complicated in Chapter Three, ‘Black Bodies at Bay and Reversing Sail: African Understandings of Self, Religion, and Returning Home’. In particular, this chapter examines the creation of uniquely Atlantic identities and the role of religion, particularly Christianity, in defining Africans and in African’s creation of new identities in the Americas and Africa. The fourth and final full chapter, ‘The Endless Voyage of Cannibalism and Capitalism: African Understandings of the Impacts of Trans-Atlantic Slaving and Abolitionism’ seeks to offer a counterpoint to scholarly interpretations of the Atlantic slave trade by utilizing African metaphors and idioms, as well as first-person narratives, to privilege African understandings of the era so as to ‘calculate the unquantifiable’. The text then concludes with an epilogue by series editor Trevor Getz, which reinforces the case for the continued influence of the Atlantic slave trade in the lives of those living today – in Africa and beyond.

In conclusion, *Transatlantic Africa* is a welcome, and in many ways, novel addition to the significant literature on slavery in the Atlantic World. Despite its brevity, it brings a host of important questions and perspectives to our understanding of Africa and the World. It deserves a place on both graduate and undergraduate syllabi dealing with African, Atlantic, and World History.

JONATHAN REYNOLDS  
Northern Kentucky University

## THE HUMAN SIDE OF AN ANTISLAVERY ICON

*The Letters and Other Writings of Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano, the African): Documenting Abolition of the Slave Trade.*

Edited by Karlee Anne Sapoznik.

Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2013. Pp. xxvii + 274. \$69.95, hardback (ISBN 978-1-55876-557-3); \$26.95, paperback (ISBN 978-1-55876-558-0).  
doi:10.1017/S0021853715000389

**Key Words:** Global, slavery abolition, text editions.

Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano) was the face and the voice of the antislavery movement in England at the end of the eighteenth century. This collection by Karlee Anne Sapoznik assembles his published and unpublished works from the mid-1760s to the late-1790s. Since most of the documents date from the 1780s and the 1790s, this collection shows us how the author of a bestseller dealt with the increased scrutiny that befell him. *The Interesting Narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* was a hit. It went through nine editions between its publications in 1789 and the author's death in 1797; it was translated into Dutch, German, and Russian. Vassa controlled the publication of each English edition and sold copies throughout the British Isles, going on multiple book tours.

As an antislavery activist, Olaudah Equiano might be as popular today as he was in the 1790s, and yet many misconceptions still exist around him, starting with his name. As Paul Lovejoy's concise introduction reminds us, Equiano insisted on being called Gustavus Vassa. It was the name he received from his master, Captain Pascal, when he was taken to England, the country that was to become his home. Vassa received many other names: Olaudah Equiano as a child in Igboland; Michael as cargo on the Middle Passage; and, Jacob as a slave in Virginia. Vassa preferred to use his pen name in professional and personal settings. In the first edition of *The Interesting Narrative*, he wrote that, as a slave, he 'was obliged to bear the present name [Vassa] by which I have been known ever since'. When the ninth edition of the book came out in 1794, the name of a slave had become the name of a celebrity.

We know that Vassa's legitimacy as an author and as an African frequently came under attack and Sapoznik's volume shows how Vassa defended himself. While some documents have been published before, for example in Folarin Shyllon's *Black People in Britain 1555-1833* and in Vincent Carreta's edition of *The Interesting Narrative*, Sapoznik has painstakingly reconstructed Vassa's paper trail drawing from various archives. The 125 documents are classified by genre from legal records to newspaper articles, including a section Sapoznik entitles 'Possible Attributions'. Each of the five sections opens with a very short introduction. The documents are short, generally one-half page in length. Sapoznik's presence as an editor is discreet. She decides not to include much information about the historical and social context, leaving the readers to form their own interpretation. Since Vassa travelled so much and engaged in different ventures, it is sometimes hard to keep track of the timeline. The detailed chronology at the end of the volume is a precious aid. Sapoznik has also traced Vassa's connections and has identified the people, places, and events referred to in the primary sources. The inclusion of maps is a helpful addition to the book.

This volume will be a valuable contribution to any course on the abolitionist movement or social reform and is a valuable companion to Vassa's autobiography. *The Letters and*

*Other Writings* paints the picture of a complex and well-connected individual and offers a wonderful opportunity to explore Vassa's work from new perspectives. As Sapoznik notes, more remains to be uncovered. Documentation is fragmented and uneven. Some crucial aspects of Vassa's life are missing, for example his involvement with a Mosquito Shore plantation and his marriage to a Euro-British woman. This volume might be particularly interesting for those studying Anglo-American print culture. Not only was Vassa a self-made man, he was also a shrewd self-promoter. Acutely aware of what we would today call his 'brand', he relentlessly advertised his persona as an author, a former slave, and an Afro-British. The character references Vassa took with him on his tours of the British Isles emphasize this aspect. As William Langworthy wrote during Vassa's visit to Bath in 1793, 'His *business* [sic] in your part of the world is to promote the sale of his book' (p. 64). Saponik's collection is also unexpectedly moving. Vassa negotiated his way in a precarious world; several documents mention that his physical integrity was often in jeopardy. Some pages are genuinely poignant: Vassa's will, in which he made sure to provide for his two daughters, is juxtaposed with a photo of the memorial plaque for his eldest who died at the age of four, a mere three months after her father. The epitaph 'A child of colour haply not thine own/Her father born of Afric's sun-burnt race' reminds us that Vassa's life was indeed a human story.

VANESSA MONGEY  
*University of Pittsburgh*

## A CIRCUM-ATLANTIC LANGUAGE

*Èṣù: Yoruba God, Power, and the Frontiers.*

Edited By Toyin Falola.

Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2013. Pp. xxiii + 392. \$60, paperback (ISBN 978-1-61163-222-4).

doi:10.1017/S0021853715000390

**Key Words:** West Africa, African diaspora, comparative, religion.

Toyin Falola's edited volume, *Èṣù: Yoruba God, Power, and the Imaginative Frontiers*, serves as an extensive study of this Yorùbá deity, who embodies and embraces change, uncertainty, paradox, and hybridity. The 19 chapters within this volume, many of which were written by scholars of Yorùbá descent, provide important insight for those seeking to deepen their understanding of Yorùbá religion, history, and philosophy. By including scholars from various disciplines across the humanities and social sciences, this book organizes the debates surrounding Èṣù and contributes to an understanding of his role in Yorùbá spirituality, art, and identity formation.

For this reason, Falola organizes the volume using a two-part thematic structure that explores how Èṣù influences, and is influenced by, Yorùbá people's historical and contemporary processes of migration, socio-religious change, and cultural reinterpretation. The chapters address these processes' effects on his invocations in secular, scholarly, and