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REVIEWS

THE BLACK ATLANTIC FROM AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora. Edited by AKINWUMI OGUNDIRAN and TOYIN FALOLA. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. Pp. xvii + 509. $59.95; £33 (ISBN 978-0-253-34919-4).

KEY WORDS: Diaspora, African diaspora, archaeology.

Archaeologists have long sought to contribute to the study of the African diaspora in the Americas. Less numerous, but developing apace, are projects specifically focusing on the African end of the trade, the ways it was structured there and the consequences that it entailed, of which Chris De Corse's *An Archaeology of Elmina* (Washington, 2001) and the contributions collated in his *West Africa During the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Leicester, 2001) provide examples. Nevertheless, overviews that span the Atlantic and draw together archaeological studies from both its American and African sides remain uncommon, with none providing the breadth of coverage that Ogundiran and Falola offer here.

A short review cannot do justice to a volume as large and diverse as this, but it is appropriate to emphasize first the contribution made by the editors themselves in their introduction. In a substantial essay of over forty pages, they skilfully articulate the importance of integrating the African Atlantic and the African diaspora in the Americas within a single analytical framework, underlining the necessity for those working in the New World of understanding the depth and variety of the African historical and material records and for Africanist archaeologists of grasping how the trade in slaves and other commodities altered societies and institutions in Africa itself. Topics noted as fertile terrain for future research include the agro-ecological impact of the introduction of New World cultigens; comparisons between plantation archaeology in Atlantic Africa (e.g. Frederiksgave, Ghana) and the New World (to which one could add Africa's own, sadly yet unstudied, Atlantic islands); the potential of ancient DNA for tying archaeologically recovered diaspora skeletons to living populations in Africa; and the need for more nuanced studies of material culture that allow for the cultural diversity of African populations and the long-term history of their contacts with Europe as much as the historical specificity of how African values and beliefs were reproduced, altered and given material form in the diaspora.

Turning to the remainder of the volume, it is the seven African case studies that may be of greatest interest to readers of this journal. Papers by Stahl (on Banda, Ghana) and Ogundiran (on Yorubaland) show how the growth of transcontinental economies affected daily life in two areas of West Africa, including new patterns of consumption (especially of tobacco). They also underline how the emergence of an Atlantic system often came at the expense of previous trans-Saharan trading networks. Implicit in both papers is the way in which the growing Atlantic economy helped bring about major political realignments, something Monroe addresses in depth in his chapter on the emergence of the kingdom of Dahomey. The theme of political transformation is also explored by Déme and Guèye writing of the Middle Senegal Valley (again with an eye on contrasts with trans-Saharan networks), Usman on northern Yorubaland and (rather stretching the term 'Atlantic'?)

Kusimba for the Swahili coast. Finally, Osei-tutu discusses the competing interests of indigenous Ghanaians and foreign tourists (including African Americans) in the restoration and presentation of Cape Coast and Elmina castles.

Common to most of these papers is a breadth of vision that encompasses the archaeological record and relevant historical, ethnographic and palaeoclimatic data in ways that highlight the complexity of the processes taking place in Atlantic Africa from (indeed, before) the fifteenth century. That breadth is not so clearly evident in all twelve New World chapters, some of which largely reiterate results long in print (Goucher, Funari, Agorsah) or focus on single sites enlivened by a heavy, but not wholly convincing, dose of theory (e.g. Battle-Baptiste). Papers on BaKongo identity and expression (Fennell), contrasting owner and slave experiences of landscape (Chan), the ethnogenesis of groups of mixed African/Native American descent (Weik) and landscape aesthetics among a free African community in New England (Beaudry and Berkland) stand out, but, judging from what is presented here, one is left feeling that archaeological studies of the African Atlantic are currently more vibrant and productive on its eastern than its western, shores. Greater communication of the kind Ogundiran and Falola advocate and display can, however, only benefit archaeological practitioners in both regions, not least by encouraging their cooperation on and below the ground.

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AFRICAN IDENTITY AS A DIASPORIC CREATION?

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Becoming African in America: Race and Nation in the Early Black Atlantic. By JAMES SIDBURY. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. ix + 291. $29.95 (ISBN 978-0-195-32010-7).

KEY WORDS: African diaspora, identity, slave trade.

James Sidbury took ten years to write this book, and it was well worth the time and effort. *Becoming African in America* is a fine and welcome addition to the literature on the history of the African diaspora and the black Atlantic world (which are not necessarily the same, conceptually or analytically). The work revolves around the question of the emergence of protonationalist identity as it pertains to the African-descended, with temporal borders stretching from the last quarter of the eighteenth century through the first thirty years of the nineteenth. As such, Sidbury is interested in those discursive practices that made significant and lasting contributions to a project by which African 'affiliative' identity came to be applied, and more importantly embraced more broadly than narrowly, and the means by which the transnational potential of that identity was hijacked and underwent diminution of status (as a consequence of US internal politics regarding domestic slavery). Stated differently, the author is after those processes by which an African identity came to be asserted by many, whether African- or American/European-born, during a period coterminous with the early American republic. Though the book is largely preoccupied with developments in North America, there is considerable discussion of Sierra Leone and Liberia, and to a lesser extent England.

The author's point is that the concept of being an 'African' was largely formulated in diaspora, that it was much more informed by a set of similar circumstances