



African Diaspora Archaeology

Compiled with an Introduction
by Christopher C. Fennell



The Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) has launched a new publication series, entitled “Perspectives from Historical Archaeology,” which will provide subject and regional readers on a variety of topics of interest to archaeologists and scholars in related fields. Each volume includes an introduction by the compiler that reviews historical archaeology’s work on the topic. “Perspectives” volumes will be available in both perfect bound and pdf formats, and sales proceeds benefit the Society’s educational and research missions.

The first of the new “Perspectives” is entitled *African Diaspora Archaeology*, compiled by Chris Fennell. This publication includes an introduction that reviews the field and 23 articles selected from the *Historical Archaeology Journal*. Including studies from Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and both the northern and southern U.S., this volume provides a fascinating look at African culture, sites, and artifacts and traces the transition of African peoples from the Old World to the New. A table of contents and abstracts is set out below. You can obtain volumes from the “Perspectives” Series online at: <https://www.lulu.com/spotlight/shabookstore>.

Part I. Introduction

1. *African Diaspora Archaeology in Multiscalar and Multivariate Perspectives*
Christopher C. Fennell

Abstract: This introduction chapter addresses historical trends in African diaspora archaeology over the past several decades, assesses ongoing debates in theories, research questions, and interpretative frameworks, and provides an overview of the selected readings included in this volume. [pp. 1-25]

Part II. Perspectives from Historical Archaeology in Africa

2. *Historical Archaeology in Sub-Saharan Africa -- A Review*
Merrick Posnansky and Christopher R. Decorse

Abstract: Relatively few historical archaeology projects have been carried out in Sub-Saharan Africa, yet the area presents a wide variety of research potentialities from both historical and theoretical viewpoints. Various definitions of historical archaeology and their application to Africa are examined, and the research undertaken thus far is reviewed. Previous work has largely focused on the larger fortified sites of 15th to 19th century European construction. On the East African Coast archaeological fieldwork has also been carried out on Islamic sites where limited documentation is provided by Arabic writings. Directions for future research are discussed, including the possibility of examining the sociocultural background of the African diaspora. Particular stress is

placed on the necessity for intensified regional studies, cognizant of the contacts between well documented historical sites and the villages and resource areas with which they interacted. [pp. 26-39]

3. *The Historical Archaeology of Vergelegen, an Early Farmstead at the Cape of Good Hope*
Ann Markell, Martin Hall, and Carmel Schrire

Abstract: Excavations at Vergelegen, a large estate in the Western Cape of South Africa that dates to the earliest years of the 18th century, have allowed archaeologists to address a number of questions about the nature of colonial settlement in this former Dutch colony. Primary among these were questions about slavery and about the interrelationships between slaves, colonists, and the indigenous inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope. This article offers some of the results of this investigation, and an interpretation of those results in light of the original questions about slave community, slave indigenous interaction, and early colonial architecture in the Cape. [pp. 40-64]

4. *Material Culture and Social Death: African-American Burial Practices*
Ross W. Jamieson

Abstract: Orlando Patterson has proposed that the institution of slavery caused the “social death” of slaves, in that the inherited meanings of their ancestors were denied to them through control of their cultural practices by slave owners and overseers. A survey of archaeological evidence for mortuary practices in both African and African-American societies, however, shows that this was not the case, as such inherited meanings were present throughout the early historical period, and in some communities are still present. The careful identification of such occurrences can only be made through comparison to African archaeological and ethnographic evidence. Such occurrences do not negate the horrors of the dominance of slaveholders over slaves in the New World, but do give an opportunity to celebrate the unique nature of African-Atlantic culture. [pp. 65-84]

Part III. African Heritage in the Caribbean, Central and South America

5. *Africans in the Spanish Colonies*
Jane Landers

Abstract: If the 15th-century history of the Americas was characterized by the drama of first contact and the 16th century by continued exploration, conquest, and expansion of Spanish hegemony, the 17th century has often been described as a time of protracted depression and decline. Africans, heavily concentrated in the coastal circum-Caribbean, were embroiled in the imperial contests played out there and, like Europeans and natives, they carefully evaluated their positions and acted in what they perceived to be their own best interests. In short, they made choices and concessions and were agents of change who have gone little noticed, although their tenure in the Americas matches that of the Spaniards. [pp. 85-92]

6. *Archaeology of the African Diaspora in Latin America*
Terrance Weik

Abstract: Archaeology conducted at Latin American sites in Brazil, Cuba, Florida, Hispaniola, Jamaica, and Peru has made significant contributions to our understanding of African Diaspora history. Historical archaeology of the African Diaspora in Latin America has explored technological innovations in pottery making, resistance to slavery, and everyday life. The unifying theme in these studies, like that of the Anglo colonies, has been ethnic or cultural markers of identity. Maroon studies have predominated, while plantation archaeology in Latin America is developing slowly. By placing Latin American sites within the context of theories such as ethnogenesis, focusing on intercultural interactions in Maroon and slave societies, and rediscovering the forgotten connections between Amerindians and Africans, it is possible to advance our understanding of African Diaspora social formation and culture creation. [pp. 93-109]

7. *The Influence of Trade on Bahamian Slave Culture*
Paul Farnsworth

Abstract: The Bahamian plantations of Wade's Green and Promised Land are compared using analyses of ceramics, tobacco pipes, and beads. The differences in the distributions revealed are explained by each plantation's market access. The research is significant because it illustrates conditions where economic models commonly used to interpret archaeological data are mediated by local conditions. Distance and isolation from the point of distribution restricted access to goods and accentuated the planter's control over the goods available to the slaves in the Bahamas. [pp. 110-133]

8. *The Material and Cognitive Dimensions of Creolization in Nineteenth-Century Jamaica*
James A. Delle

Abstract: Creolization is defined as a special form of ethnogenesis that in plantation contexts was a process through which social and material worlds were defined. Using colonial Jamaica as an example, ethnohistorical sources to suggest how creole identities were emically defined by and negotiated between populations of both European and African descent, and suggests how the process of creolization was manifested in the use of space, foodways, and general health of creole populations of both European and African descent. [pp. 134-149]

9. *Mortuary Patterns at the Harney Site Slave Cemetery, Montserrat, in Caribbean Perspective*
David R. Watters

Abstract: Mortuary patterns discernible at the Harney site, despite its disturbed condition, include demographic, burial, and artifact information derived from 17 skeletons, 19 unmatched bones, 10 graves, and 134 artifacts. The cemetery dates to the late 18th century and provides data on the mortuary practices of enslaved persons in Montserrat at a time when sugar production dominated the economy of the British West Indies. A broader perspective on the mortuary patterns of enslaved populations within the Caribbean region is provided by comparable data from burial sites in two other British islands, Barbados and Jamaica, and a mainland South American colony, Dutch Guiana -- now Suriname. Collaboration by avocational and professional archaeologists during the Harney site salvage project exemplifies the joint research efforts typical of many small islands in the eastern Caribbean. [pp. 150-168]

10. *A Prone Burial from a Plantation Slave Cemetery in Barbados, West Indies: Possible Evidence for an African-type Witch or Other Negatively Viewed Person*
Jerome S. Handler

Abstract: Dating to the late 1600s or early 1700s, a burial excavated from a slave cemetery at Newton Plantation in Barbados had several unique characteristics. Buried in the largest artificial earthen mound in the cemetery without grave goods or a coffin, this young adult woman was the solitary interment in the mound and the cemetery's only prone burial. Her skeleton showed no signs of unusual death although analysis of lead in her bones suggests she suffered from severe lead poisoning. Documentary evidence on Barbados slave culture in general and ethnographic/ethnohistorical evidence on West African mortuary practices suggest interpretations for this burial: She may have been a witch or some other negatively viewed person with supernatural powers who, following African custom, was feared or socially ostracized. [pp. 169-179]

11. *Toward a Global Historical Archaeology: An Example from Brazil*
Charles E. Orser, Jr.

Abstract: Schuyler has recently argued that historical archaeologists can make their greatest contribution to knowledge by preparing "historic ethnographies," detailed studies of specific communities. Even though Schuyler's view has merit, no study of the modern world -- including historical archaeology -- can be truly complete without considering the many connections that were normally maintained by inhabitants of historical sites. Historical archaeology must be a global, broadly conceived field that looks beyond the site to the wider world. The runaway slave community of Palmares in Brazil illustrates this position. [pp. 180-197]

Part IV. African Descendant Communities in North America

12. *"Power to the People": Sociopolitics and the Archaeology of Black Americans*
Maria Franklin

Abstract: This article is concerned with the sociopolitics of African-American archaeology. The intent here is to prompt archaeologists to think more about how our research affects black Americans today, and therefore why it is necessary that they be encouraged to take an interest in archaeological endeavors. The success or failure of our attempts to establish ties with black communities depends on us. The main emphases of this article are, therefore, focused on raising our level of awareness to the challenges we face, and increasing understanding as to the variable histories and perspectives that the diverse and knowledgeable black American public possesses and will hopefully share with archaeologists. [pp. 198-212]

13. *Resistance and Compliance: CRM and the Archaeology of the African Diaspora*
J. W. Joseph

Abstract: Archaeological investigations carried out in compliance with the dictates of the National Historic Preservation Act have played an integral role in developing our understanding of and approach to the archaeology of the African diaspora. These cultural resource management (CRM) studies include several landmark projects that helped shape the national approach to African American archaeology. However, as with other sectors of the discipline, CRM archaeology of the African diaspora is presently suffering from a period of stagnation and lack of focus. This paper considers CRM's contribution to the archaeology of African America, past and present, and attempts to project the future place of CRM in the study of the African American past. [pp. 213-226]

14. *Seizing Intellectual Power: The Dialogue at the New York African Burial Ground*
Cheryl J. LaRoche and Michael L. Blakey

Abstract: The New York African Burial Ground Project embodies the problems, concerns, and goals of contemporary African-American and urban archaeology. The project at once has informed and has been informed by the ever-watchful African Americans and New York public. It is a public that understands that the hypothetical and theoretical constructs that guide research are not value-free and are often, in fact, politically charged. An ongoing dialogue between the concerned community, the federal steering committee, the federal government, and the archaeological community has proved difficult but ultimately productive. The project has an Office of Public Education and Interpretation which informs the public through a newsletter, educators' conferences, and laboratory tours. The public, largely students, attends laboratory tours which often provide initial exposure to archaeology and physical anthropology. Much of this public involvement, however, was driven by angry public reaction to the excavation of a site of both historical prominence and spiritual significance. [pp. 227-249]

15. *The New York African Burial Ground Project: Past Biases, Current Dilemmas, and Future Research Opportunities*

Mark E. Mack and Michael L. Blakey

Abstract: The recent excavation of skeletal remains from the African Burial Ground in New York City and their current bioanthropological study and analysis at Howard University is contributing to our understanding of the conditions faced by Africans and their descendants in colonial North America. The complex nature of African enslavement points to the need for interdisciplinary and comparative research on African origins, as well as the biocultural interaction of members of the African Diaspora in the context of European enslavement practices. Research on variation in the biological health status of African-descent communities in the Americas is shown to contribute to knowledge of their social and cultural histories. Through public approval and support, our research team has been able to pursue a more sophisticated and extensive research plan than is usually allowed. The identities thus constructed are complex and compel novel questions. Additionally, our methodological approach empowers the descendant community to engage in its own cultural and historical construction. [pp. 250-257]

16. *The Landscapes of Northern Bondage*

Robert F. Fitts

Abstract: In his 1988 book, *Black Yankees*, William Pierson argued that quartering slaves within their owners' homes led to a mild and paternalistic form of slavery in New England. This article challenges this position by arguing that in Narragansett, Rhode Island, shared domestic space was an important aspect of slave control. Quartering slaves within the main house allowed planters to monitor their actions and led to a form of racial segregation at meals, church, and in burials designed to mark slaves as aliens and teach them "their place." Slaves responded by circumventing monitored space and turning segregated space to their advantage by using this unsupervised time to socialize among themselves. This conflict between the masters' desire to monitor their bondsmen -- the term used in historical accounts and documents and the slaves' attempts to escape *this* surveillance typified Narragansett master/slave relations. In this manner, slavery in Narragansett, Rhode Island, was strikingly similar to southern slavery. [pp. 258-277]

17. *A Future after Freedom*

Lu Ann De Cunzo

Abstract: Just after the Civil War, two African-American families left Maryland to build new lives in northern Delaware. Sidney and Rachel Stump and David and Sarah Walmsley probably did not know each other in Maryland, but they settled in nearby communities in Delaware. There work, family, church, and community connections may have introduced them. Both men labored on area farms, when they could get work, until they were at least 70 years old. Both women did laundry and sewing for neighbors in town. Both families raised their children to work hard and to value education, their faith, and "joyous play." The Stumps and Walmsleys drew on their pasts and looked to the future as they created a distinctive cultural style framed by racism and constrained

opportunities. Archaeology prompted by the Delaware Department of Transportation's road-building activities has brought us closer to these families' stories. In this paper, readers visit them in their homes on the edge of town, as they prepare for a most important event in their annual festive calendar, the Big Quarterly. [pp. 278-290]

18. *Race and the Genteel Consumer: Class and African-American Consumption, 1850-1930*
Paul R. Mullins

Abstract: Between the Civil War and the 1920s, a consumer culture emerged which attempted to evade class tension by focusing on contrived racial differences. The vast majority of American born whites and European immigrants alike embraced the illusion of a classless consumer culture in which opportunity was available to white citizens alone. African Americans were caricatured as being racially unsuited to those citizen privileges in consumption and labor space. Archaeological assemblages from Annapolis, Maryland demonstrate, however, that African-American consumers actively sought the opportunities consumer culture promised and articulated an anti-racist class struggle in consumer space. [pp. 291-307]

19. *The Archaeology of the Plantation South: A Review of Approaches and Goals*
Theresa A. Singleton

Abstract: This essay provides a review of how archaeologists have studied plantations in the American South and for what purpose. This is an evaluation of research in plantation archaeology through time, addressing the promises and problems of past and current studies. [pp. 308-315]

20. *Social Relations and Material Culture: A Critique of the Archaeology of Plantation Slavery*
Jean E. Howson

Abstract: This article examines the archaeology of plantation slavery and related methodological challenges and offers suggestions for enhancing the theoretical underpinnings of archaeological work in this field. First, the concept of cultural markers raises a need for a more sophisticated approach to the dynamics of culture change. Interpretations of material culture of African-American sites can also be enriched through a better understanding of context. Finally, this article assesses the usefulness of status definitions for modeling possible social relations in past plantation communities. [pp. 316-329]

21. *"The Little Spots Allow'd Them": The Archaeological Study of African-American Yards*
Barbara J. Heath and Amber Bennett

Abstract: Yards, like buildings and more portable artifacts, are significant expressions of culture. Yet within African-American archaeology, yards have not been the focus of serious discussions addressing questions of work and leisure activities, community interactions, aesthetics, and culture change. The authors review archaeological, ethnographic, and historical evidence of yards associated with New World slave quarters

and present a framework for analysis. Results of recent excavations at a slave quarter at Poplar Forest in central Virginia, occupied from ca. 1790 to 1812, are presented within the context of this framework. The archaeological study of yard spaces provides significant information about cultural meanings and uses of space. [pp. 330-347]

22. *Structural Continuity in an African-American Slave and Tenant Community*
Kenneth L. Brown and Doreen C. Cooper

Abstract: In studying African-American occupation sites, archaeologists must look at the function, use, and meaning of artifacts within a context that is not totally dependent upon the dominant European-American behavioral system. Africans became African-Americans; during the acculturation process, they adapted European-American material culture they observed. This paper illustrates the acculturation of an antebellum and postbellum slave and tenant community -- the Levi Jordan Plantation -- from the Gulf Coastal Plains of Texas. Through the use of a methodology which employs ethnographic analogies derived from African and African-American contexts, this essay demonstrates how the study of artifacts can contribute to the main themes of American history. [pp. 348-360]

23. *Blue Beads as African-American Cultural Symbols*
Linda F. Stine, Melanie A. Cabak, and Mark D. Groover

Abstract: Blue beads are consistent finds at African-American sites. Archaeologists acknowledge these artifacts were used for adornment, yet some researchers also propose beads possessed additional cultural meaning among African Americans. For this study bead data from African-American sites in the South are analyzed. The results indicate blue is the predominant bead color. The prevalence of these items suggests they may indeed have been an important yet unrecognized aspect of African-American culture. The multiple underlying meanings assigned to blue beads are considered through reference to ethnographic information, folklore, and oral history associated with West and Central Africa and the Southeast. [pp. 361-387]

24. *Secret and Sacred: Contextualizing the Artifacts of African-American Magic and Religion*
Laurie A. Wilkie

Abstract: Although historical archaeologists have accumulated a large amount of data regarding African-American magical and religious systems, researchers still underestimate the importance of magical and religious systems within African-American communities. In addition, archaeologists seem reluctant to interpret these data in a diachronic manner. Spiritual beliefs affected all arenas of the African-American experience including medicine, childcare, gender, family, and community relations. To properly understand African-American daily life, attention must be paid to spiritual traditions. This paper addresses the role of magical practices within African-American society and the importance of recognizing the role of gender ideologies within magical and religious practice, and proposes a diachronic model for understanding the changing relationship between magic and religion. The model, consisting of three stages of cultural change, Formative, Persisting, and Transformative, provides a means of linking the

archaeological and documentary databases. Application of the model to three archaeologically well-studied regions demonstrates that, despite growing interest in the archaeological study of African-American spiritual traditions, archaeological evidence for these traditions is sparse when analyzed diachronically. [pp. 388-413]