

Out of Africa

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A review of *Africa and Africans in the Antiquity*, ed. by Edwin M. Yamauchi (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2001). 324 pp.

In G.K. Chesterton's poem "The Donkey", the eponymous animal, a reliable and intelligent servant to humanity since its domestication, yet almost universally under appreciated and ignored, describes its moment of glory. Such is the case of ancient African archeology, a discipline which has long been overshadowed by its more well known sister disciplines of Egyptology and Classical studies.

Edwin Yamauchi's delightful collection of essays is a wonderful introduction to a discipline of which even noted classicists may confess their ignorance. His selection is aimed at a general audience of people without a strong background in African history.

The work could almost be used as a textbook of the different approaches to interpreting the past. The editor carefully chose essays that highlighted the interdisciplinary nature of the study of the past. Thus, while some essays base themselves on the traditional staples of literary references and physical archeology, others employ techniques from sociology, political theory, linguistics and climatology.

The organization of the book also reflects the editor's concern that it be accessible to the greatest number of people. Indeed, the essays are grouped together both chronologically and geographically to the point that each essay seems to be the logical continuation of the previous one.

The editor of a book on Ancient African history must stay the course between the Scylla of overarching generality and the Charybdis of particularism. Thus, one may fear that the editor would lump together all the African kingdoms, ignoring the incredible diversity of the Libyans, the Nubians, and the

Ethiopians.

The opposite concern is that the editor will engage in such minutiae as to leave the book largely inaccessible to the untutored reader. It is this reviewer's happy duty to report that Prof. Yamauchi succeeds in compiling such a series of essays to be engaging to novice even without being condescending.

The first essay, "Afroasiatic" by Carleton Hodge, deals generally with the linguistic unity of certain African and Middle Eastern languages. In particular, the Semitic, Berber, Chadic, Egyptian, Cushitic and Omotic languages form a family separate from the European languages.

The second through fifth essays by Frank Yurco, Edna Russman, Stanley Burstein, and William Adams are a chronology of the Nubian Kingdoms. The chronology of these kingdoms, clustered around the Nile to the south of Egypt, begins with the first Egyptian dynasty in 3000 B.C. and ends with their conversion to Christianity, in 580 A.D.

The sixth essay by Reuben Bullard describes the interaction between the Berbers near Carthage, and the Greek and Roman Empires, and in particular, the Greek settlers of Carthage.

The seventh essay, "An archeological survey of the Cyrenaican and Marmarican Regions of Northeast Africa", by Donald White also deals with part of the Mediterranean littoral, and makes good use of geographical to reflect the lives of the African pastoralists who lived there. Both the sixth and the seventh essays echo the chronologies of the essays on Nubia, applied to a different part of the Ancient world.

The eighth piece, by Frank Snowdon Jr., is of particular interest. Rather than dealing with the history of a particular kingdom, it examines the Greek and Roman perspectives on Aethiopians, or "burnt-face people". The story is an intriguing yet tragic one, as the archeologists of the 19th and the early 20th century imposed their own racism on the interpretation of the literary and archeological record. One can find solace in the fact that the Greek and Roman Empires, though not completely free of prejudice, as no society truly is, did not systematically distinguish people based solely on the colour of their skin.

The ninth contribution, by Kathryn Bard and Rodolfo Fattovich compares the formation of the Egyptian and Ethiopian States. At first glance, this may seem curious, given the different prevailing conditions in each case. However, their interest in political theory leads them to try to discover the universal bases of state formation by looking at these two maximally disparate cases.

The final essay in the collection, by Maynard Swanson, stands out from all the others. Firstly, it deals with the Shona culture of Zimbabwe, a civilization outside what F. Braudel would call the world-system of the Mediterranean of the ancient world. Secondly, the key period of consideration is from roughly the tenth century to the sixteenth, or well outside the range covered by the rest of the book. Finally, the piece is a chronicle of the competing, petty, acrimonious scholarship of the 19th and 20th century, between those who thought it inconceivable (for generally racist reasons) that the Shona could create such impressive monuments (the so-called diffusionists) and those who retorted that there was no evidence to support a theory of external intervention (the indigenists). In this, the essay echoes Prof. Snowdon's similar essay on Greek and Roman attitudes towards black Africans, and how such scholarship was tainted by prejudice.

Two themes unite this book, or rather, two opposing perspectives of a single theme. The first is the checkered history of archeology, which has bequeathed present day historians a maddening legacy of plunder, destruction, neglect, and outright fabrication in the service of an outdated ideology. The second is the manner in which archeologists faced with a spotty and distorted historical record, have risen to the task by developing techniques and approaches from a variety of disciplines to draw as much as possible from every last bit of evidence.

This book is about the history of archeology, from its origins as little more than state-sanctioned plunder, to academic and conservative ivory tower, to vibrant interdisciplinary area of study in our time.

African archeology, neglected for so long, offers a cornucopia of future research, hence the hope, mentioned in the opening lines of the article that it "too shall have my hour, one far fierce hour and sweet! While shouts about my ears, and palms before my feet".