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Connecting African Diaspora and West African Historical Archaeologies

ABSTRACT

Historical archaeology is a growing and vibrant field of inquiry in West Africa. Since the 1980s, there has been a steady increase in the number of studies related to the Atlantic trade and indigenous/European interaction. As the departure point for Africans entering the diaspora, West Africa should be at the forefront of the African Atlantic archaeology, a concept most recently championed by Ogundiran and Falola. Despite the logistical challenges that often inhibit fieldwork, as well as difficulties in communication between Western and African scholars, significant amounts of work have been carried out in West Africa that can inform diaspora and African Atlantic archaeology. By presenting the current state of West African historical archaeology as it relates to common questions and themes within African diaspora studies, the following review serves as a means of initiating and encouraging in-depth engagement and discussion between researchers in archaeology and in related fields working in regions across the Atlantic basin.

Introduction

African diaspora archaeology began on plantations with the work of Fairbanks (1974) and others (Handler and Lange 1978; Otto 1980) who sought to prove that African slaves in the American Southeast could be identified in the archaeological record (Orser 1998:66–69). Since its inception as a field of inquiry within historical archaeology in the Americas, diaspora studies have moved beyond the basic identification of slave quarters to address relationships of power and resistance (Orser and Funari 2001); maroon settlements (Agorsah 1994; Allen 1994; Funari 1995; Weik 1997, 2004); ritual and religion (Handler 1997; Wilkie 1997; Franklin 1998; Orser 1998:68; Wilkie 1999; Fennell 2000; Ogundiran 2007); daily life of enslaved populations in the United States and the Caribbean, including changes surrounding local events (Kelly 2008; Gibson 2009); and understanding the experiences of free persons

of African ancestry prior to and during the post-emancipation eras in various regions of the Americas (Brown 1994; Paynter et al. 1994; Bastian 1999; Deagan and Landers 1999; Heath 1999; Mullins 1999, 2008; Wilkie 2000; Milne 2002; Armstrong 2003; Martin and Shackel 2004; Leone et al. 2005; Kelly 2008; Gibson 2009; Fennell et al. 2010).

The most visible aspect of diaspora studies throughout its historical trajectory has been the desire to link African communities in the New World to those in West Africa through the material culture created by different communities in the Americas and their imagined contemporaries in Africa. Many of these studies still incorporate attempts to trace direct connections between specific populations on both sides of the Atlantic through “Africanisms” (Franklin and McKee 2004; Leone et al. 2005), although other approaches, such as the work of Schroeder et al. (2009) with isotopic studies concerning the origins of enslaved Africans in the Caribbean, have proved somewhat more concrete. As a whole, efforts at making direct connections between populations tend to be deterministic, with the identification of possible connections as the goal, rather than the initiation of further examination. In doing so, archaeologists silence the dynamic nature of African societies in the past as well as the present (Connah 1998; Falola and Usman 2009; Stahl 2009). These attempts are additionally hampered by the limited amount of archaeological data from West Africa on sites from Africa’s more recent past. As a result, these studies are informed more by historical or current ethnographic data and not archaeological findings from contemporary communities in Africa (Scott 1999; Fennell 2000; Leone 2008).

A truly African Atlantic focus within historical archaeology, specifically one connecting research in West Africa and in the Americas, is not possible if there is not a move away from the search for direct links between past communities as the goal of research. A more fruitful avenue of inquiry is an examination of how communities of African descent on all sides of the Atlantic negotiated the socioeconomic

realities of the Atlantic World (DeCorse 2001a; Kelly 2001; Stahl 2001; Agorsah 2006; Haviser and MacDonald 2006; Ogundiran 2007, 2009a; Gijanto 2010; Steen and Barnes 2010). This will serve to extend research perspectives across the Atlantic and will also provide a more substantial foundation for gaining a better understanding of the lives of all peoples entwined in the Atlantic trade. To accomplish this, it is necessary to merge current approaches and broaden theoretical perspectives toward historical archaeology by researchers in West Africa and the Americas. In particular, the capitalist focus in American historical archaeology (McGuire 1992; Johnson 1996; Orser 1996), situating enslaved and free communities of African descent within a defined economic structure as opposed to a more holistic view of past interactions between Africans, Europeans, Americans, and creoles in West Africa, incorporates a deep time perspective (Schmidt 2007) but is incomplete. The varied contexts in which these communities lived and live today speak to the assertion that identity is anything but static (Gosselain 2000). By recognizing the fluidity of past identities and the impact of interaction on them, it is possible to address how contemporary African communities throughout the Atlantic basin enacted creative ways of engagement, resistance, and wealth accumulation tied to their position in the Atlantic World. Such an approach not only adds depth to African Atlantic studies but engages with discourses of memory and the meaning embedded in heritage sites. This is a renewed and more directed call towards a meaningful archaeology of the African Atlantic.

In order to develop a more nuanced archaeological approach to the African Atlantic, it is imperative to maintain a dialogue between archaeologists working in the Americas and those in West Africa. Through this dialogue it will be possible to address shared perspectives and avenues of inquiry that are of interest, while simultaneously informing historical archaeological research on all sides of the Atlantic. Before this can occur, however, all researchers, regardless of affiliation, must understand their respective positions, the accessibility of their work to researchers in other fields and countries, and how their counterparts understand and interpret the archaeology of the African diaspora. As a means to initiate this

interaction, a brief overview of the past and present avenues of inquiry in African diaspora archaeology in the Americas is considered. This is followed by a discussion of what has come to be known as African Atlantic (or “Black Atlantic” [Walvin 2000; Mann and Bay 2001; Matory 2005]) studies and the archaeological facets of this in West Africa. This discussion is loosely based on Gilroy’s (1993) analysis of the development of the concept of the Black Atlantic, and how cultures on all sides of the Atlantic highlight the hybrid nature of these past and present cultures, as well as the former, current, and past interactions with the Americas and Europe in forming these cultures. Drawing upon current themes and research agendas in both regions, including multiscalar approaches to style and value (MacEachern 1998; Stahl 2001; Galke 2009; Richard 2010; Gijanto 2011b), practice and everyday life (Stahl 2007; Gibson 2009; Ogundiran 2009b), as well as social identities (Kelly 1997; MacDonald et al. 2006; Monroe 2010; Steen and Barnes 2010) a plan of action for a comprehensive African Atlantic archaeology recently called for by Ogundiran and Falola (2007a) is developed that examines the constant process of identity negotiation and reformation within the multiple contexts of the African Atlantic. By bringing Africanist researchers into the discussion, the resulting epistemology will incorporate aspects of African diaspora archaeological studies that can best be informed by archaeological investigations in West Africa on Atlantic World sites, drawing on current research that addresses sociopolitical aspects of African identity. While this is not a call for Africanist archaeologists to mimic the work already done in other parts of the Atlantic, African diaspora archaeological investigations in the United States and the Caribbean are useful guides in this endeavor, summaries of which may be found in Orser (1996), Franklin and McKee (2004), and, most recently, Fennell (2011).

Themes and Trends in African Diaspora Studies

The initial goal of early archaeological investigations of enslaved communities in the American Southeast was to determine how to identify these persons materially. Though the presence of documents noting the location of

former slave villages and burial locales enabled researchers to choose which sites or areas of the plantation to excavate, it was often not possible to define a distinct material signature that was “African American” (Fairbanks 1974:90). As a new area of inquiry, it was thus necessary to define what this might be or what it might look like. Archaeologists took up the search for tangible markers of African origin, such as Africanisms. The search for Africanisms or African survivals was not unique to historical archaeology in the 1970s (Herskovits 1943; Holloway 1990; Okpewho et al. 2001); it continues to the present. Rather than rehashing former debates including the acceptance, rejection, and frustration embedded in this search as seen in ethnomusicology (Waterman 1963), linguistics (Turner 1949; Mufwene 1995), and African studies (Owomoyela 1994), archaeologists are ready to move forward in other directions (Ogundiran and Falola 2007a; Ogundiran 2008). The way forward is a dialogue among archaeologists studying African communities on all sides of the Atlantic that highlights the unique nature of those communities in their particular historical contexts, instead of searching for specific “African” elements. This requires the development of a comprehensive African Atlantic archaeology (Ogundiran and Falola 2007b) that builds upon the early studies and that addresses current questions of the impact of cultural interaction on social life being asked by Africanist and African diaspora archaeologists alike. Unfortunately, even to date, Fairbanks’s recognition that a distinct “African American” material signature does not exist has not been fully embraced. Some cultural elements of the numerous African peoples that arrived in the Americas via the Atlantic slave trade are clearly present; however, the more pressing question is how they negotiated and adapted to their new socioeconomic setting through material means.

In 1988, Singleton addressed the newness of what was then referred to as “slave archaeology” in the United States. She lamented that most of the information gathered archaeologically was “buried in unpublished sources,” thus resulting in the inability of historians to incorporate archaeological findings in their historiography (Singleton 1988:363). Additionally, she suggested that the published sources were equally inaccessible to researchers from other

disciplines due to the technical nature of many reports and disciplinary jargon. Her proposed solution was for archaeologists to direct their findings toward questions asked by historians in order to create a dialogue (Singleton 1988:364). Interestingly, there have been some echoing calls by historians to incorporate archaeological data into their own analyses (Fountain 1995; Vansina 1995), demonstrating that this is not necessarily a discipline-specific concern but, rather, a thematic one (Stahl and Lavolette 2009). A perusal of the historical literature by Africanists and Western scholars suggests that some archaeologists did heed the call to an extent, focusing on Africanisms and attempts to define African peoples such as the Yoruba, Mande, Bambara, and others in the Americas (Fennell 2000; Falola and Usman 2009). Unfortunately, the pitfalls and lessons learned from similar quests in related fields remain unheeded (Okpewho 2001). A more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of persons of African descent throughout the Atlantic World would be gained through dialogue between Africanist archaeologists and those studying the diaspora.

Throughout the course of African diaspora archaeology’s history, many scholars have presented their data, perspectives, and goals for future work in review articles and edited volumes of journals or individual texts (Singleton and Bogard 1995; McDavid and Babson 1997; Orser 1998; Havisser 1999; Singleton 1999; Franklin and McKee 2004; Havisser and MacDonald 2006; Ogundiran and Falola 2007b; Fennell 2011). A careful reading of these presents a clear trajectory of work, from the early desire to prove a distinct African American presence in the archaeological record of plantations in the United States to studies focused on spirituality and ritual (Russell 1997; Franklin and McKee 2004:3–5). Most recently, researchers have recognized the role archaeological findings play in current nationalistic and social movements both within and outside the United States (Fowler 1987; Wilmsen and Denbow 1990; Handley 2006; Schmidt 2009). However, as Franklin and McKee (2004:1) noted in one such exercise, “reviewing earlier visions of the future of African diaspora archaeological research leaves one with a considerable gap between the field’s expectations for itself and its actual accomplishments.”

Currently, studies of the diaspora in the Americas are dominated by community-based approaches that bring to the fore the need to understand the constant recreation of the past, as well as the influences of interest groups in archaeological interpretation (Haviser and MacDonald 2006). When communal memory or specific images of the past tied to the transatlantic slave trade are transferred to modern West Africa, the lines of history are further blurred, and the complexity of past interactions, particularly on the coast, are denied. Moreover, the changes in African culture, politics, and economic access that occurred throughout the Atlantic trade tend to go unacknowledged in favor of two opposing views of the impact of the slave trade: it was either catastrophic or had no influence on local cultures (Yerxa 2008; Ogundiran 2009b:352). Archaeologists working in West Africa focusing on the Atlantic era hope to see yet another development in the field that merges African diaspora research with West African studies of the Atlantic trade, thus forming an “Archaeology of the African Atlantic” (Ogundiran and Falola 2007b; Ogundiran 2008). As an all-encompassing approach, common questions focusing on past interactions, socioeconomic identity, creolization, or hybridity can be brought to the fore in lieu of a search for eternal ties. The deep connections, some of which are quite clearly direct, between diasporic and West African communities is not denied (Goucher 1993; Carney 1998; Meyers 1999; Hauser and DeCorse 2003; Handler 2009), but in favoring this line of inquiry archaeologists inadvertently deny the uniqueness and creativity of African American and African Caribbean societies that flourish today within the African Atlantic.

Closing the Gap: Developing an African Historical Archaeology

In their 1986 article in this journal, Posnansky and DeCorse reviewed the progress of historical archaeology in West Africa (Posnansky and DeCorse 1986). Since then, the number of researchers, both foreigners and African nationals, embarking on historical archaeological research, as defined from an Americanist perspective, on the period of the Atlantic trade in West Africa has increased (McIntosh 1994),

though not in nearly the same numbers as those investigating African diaspora sites in the United States, Caribbean, and South America. Over a decade later, when reflecting on African American archaeology, Posnansky (1999:21) observed that “no concerted effort had been made to examine the archaeology from West and Central Africa where the twelve to fifteen million Africans brought to the Americas as slaves originated.” This oversight is in many ways the result of disinterestedness, demonstrated by many Africanists, in what has come to be known as the “later African past” (Connah 1998) and will only be rectified, as Posnansky (1999:21) asserts, if African diaspora archaeology is “rooted in the study of African archaeology and ethnology.” The task at hand, then, becomes finding a way to close the gap between what is known (or unknown) in the Americas about African archaeology and what has been accomplished in West Africa since the 1990s (DeCorse 1998; Posnansky 1999; Singleton 2001; Kelly 2004).

The most recent comprehensive effort to highlight the concepts, approaches, methodologies, and research of Africanist scholars addressing the recent past (i.e., the 16th to 19th centuries) in West and Central Africa is Ogundiran and Falola’s edited text, *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora* (2007b). In their introductory chapter, perhaps the most succinct published discussion available of the ties, disparities, possibilities, and defined agenda for creating an African Atlantic archaeology, Ogundiran and Falola reiterate the need for comparative datasets from West Africa in order to undertake in-depth interpretations and make connections between past populations as other Africanists have called for (Hill 1987; DeCorse 1998; Posnansky 1999; Singleton 2001; Kelly 2004).

Perhaps the greatest disconnect between African diaspora archaeology and African Atlantic archaeology in the Americas and West Africa can be found in the overarching discipline to which they both lay claim. Since its inception, researchers self-identifying as historical archaeologists in the United States have been at odds with regard to a single all-encompassing definition of the field (Deetz 1991; Orser 1996). Alternatively, Africanist interpretations of historical archaeology are tied to a wide array of

sources available to them, including oral, documentary, and archaeological data (DeCorse 1996, 1997; Hall 1997; Robertshaw 2004:379–380; Schmidt and Walz 2007). Whereas researchers in the Americas and Europe (particularly England) have sought to define an archaeology of the modern or capitalist world (Johnson 1996; Orser 1996), Africanists who examine the period between the 16th and 19th centuries have identified yet another niche, or facet, of potential historical archaeological inquiry in West, Central, and even South Africa that is ideally suited to work in tandem with African diaspora archaeology: the archaeology of the African Atlantic (Ogundiran and Falola 2007a).

Furthermore, because of African archaeology's early relationship with African historical inquiry, primarily as a means to dispel the myth of a stagnant, underdeveloped continent (Robertshaw 2004:281), historical archaeological studies are necessarily situated in the *longue duree* and are multidisciplinary in nature (Kelly 1997; Kelly and Norman 2006). The indigenous communities that came into contact and interacted with European traders had longstanding traditions that already had undergone change due to socioeconomic contacts with trade in the interior. These were anything but stagnant societies, and the processes of change, continuity, and reinvention of past practices continued throughout and after the Atlantic trade. Considering this, it is necessary to understand the long-term history of these communities before analogies can be made with diasporic communities and their interactions with the Atlantic trade in the Americas. The nature and epistemologies of Africa and the Atlantic World are the focus of an ongoing dialogue with historians and others (Mufwene 1993; Vansina 1995; Robertshaw 2000; DeCorse and Chouin 2003; McIntosh 2005; Schmidt 2007; Yerxa 2008; Stahl and LaViolette 2009) that has proved fruitful in the past, but which needs to be further developed before the full potential of this interdisciplinary endeavor is realized (Stahl 2009:242).

Robertshaw (2004:381) observed that “in West Africa historical archaeology's initial *raison d'être* was the African diaspora; in South Africa it was the study of the impact of colonialism.” For some researchers this may be the case, but this singular claim disregards the scope of historical archaeological work that has occurred on the continent. However, if one accepts this claim,

it is surprising that researchers of the African diaspora have not worked more closely with their counterparts in parts of western Africa.

As a means of moving forward with an undertaking of Atlantic-wide research questions and comparative datasets, the following discussion details the current state of historical archaeological research in a number of areas of West Africa. Here, we are adopting the Americanist definition focusing on the time period rather than sources in order to refine our focus on the Atlantic era. Recognizably, this limits the range of studies currently being carried out in parts of West Africa that would fall under historical archaeology as defined by Schmidt and Walz (2007). Following this, a discussion of current historical archaeological studies concerning the diaspora in Africa is limited to West Africa as the primary source of slaves and point of exchange for Africa in the Atlantic Era. A conscious choice was made to limit our discussion geographically within West Africa due to the space afforded in a journal article. Additionally, a focus on those projects that engage methods, questions, and theoretical perspectives that are complementary and can inform diaspora studies in the Americas is engaged.

Current Research in West Africa

Just as the current trend within African diaspora archaeology is to examine a diverse range of socioeconomic settings in which people of African origin and descent lived and interacted outside the plantation, it is equally important to incorporate sites of a similar nature outside the Americas. The counterpart to African diaspora archaeology in West Africa is the archaeology of the slave trade, which has been a major focus of historical archaeological inquiry in the region (Posnansky 1999:23–25). While not emphasizing the trade itself, other studies were presented as examining the period “during the Atlantic slave trade” (DeCorse 2001b). While the slave trade and the African diaspora are often used synonymously in Americanist circles, the research in West Africa discussed here demonstrates that Africanists view the trade as a force of changing, driving socioeconomic and political change along the Atlantic coast (DeCorse 2001a; Monroe and Ogundiran 2012). In West Africa, archaeological excavations

carried out by national universities and local archaeologists are often salvage or rescue projects (MacEachern and Lavachery 2010), although there are robust research programs growing in a number of areas. Moreover, the site reports and relevant literature that result from these projects often do not make it into American or European academic journals. Rather, they exist in the gray literature similar to cultural resource management reports in the United States. In addition to a lack of resources, an important aspect of this disconnect between American and West African researchers is language. It is not a coincidence that work conducted in Ghana and Nigeria, for example, is better known in American circles than much of the research carried out in francophone West Africa (with exceptions being the work done by European and American scholars). Africanist journals such as *Azania* and the *African Archaeological Review* do print articles in French and English, however, translations beyond abstracts are not often provided. These journals, as well as *Nyame Akuma*, *Journal of African Archaeology*, and the *West African Journal of Archaeology* have been important venues for the dissemination of research by West African archaeologists. Conversely, West African scholars are often unable to procure edited volumes, site reports, or journals printed outside Africa or not focused on Africa, and often struggle to marshal the necessary funds to attend international conferences where the dialogue advocated here can best be fostered. While none of these reasons is individually insurmountable, the cumulative effect is a lack of dialogue and crossover of ideas and information among those who work on African diaspora studies on any side of the Atlantic.

The following discussion is by no means exhaustive and is not meant to provide an Africanist perspective on historical archaeology. Even though the focus is on current research that can directly inform archaeological inquiry in the Americas emphasizing the historical African Atlantic and on areas where large-scale or unique research has been carried out, certain areas of West Africa are not addressed in detail due to space limitations (de Barros 2001; Holl 2001; MacEachern 2001; Kelly 2006; DeCorse 2007; MacDonald and Camara 2012). It is also necessarily restricted by the

problems of accessibility addressed above, thus, sources believed to be more readily accessible to Americanist researchers (in terms of physical and linguistic access) are highlighted. Finally, this discussion is confined to West Africa, because, while it can be argued that East and South Africa should be included (Reid and Lane 2004; Swanepoel 2009b), unfortunately such an addition is beyond the scope of this piece, though their importance is not underestimated, particularly in works published in languages other than English.

Ghana

Ghana, historically known as the Gold Coast, has received the greatest attention by Africanist archaeologists interested in the Atlantic trade, centering initially on investigations of the European trade forts and castles of the coast (van Dantzig 1980; DeCorse 2010). More recently, investigations encompassing other areas, time periods, and research questions, particularly addressing the impacts and effects of the slave trade on indigenous societies, have been conducted (Kankpeyeng and DeCorse 2004; Swanepoel 2005; Connah 2007). A significant portion of this work has been undertaken by DeCorse and his students involved in the Central Region Project (DeCorse et al. 2000; DeCorse 2001b; Kankpeyeng 2003; Swanepoel 2004, 2005, 2009a; Spiers 2007; Kankpeyeng 2009; DeCorse 2010; Chouin 2012), as well as work carried out by Ghanaian, European, and American archaeologists (Stahl 2001; DeCorse 2001a; Cruz 2003; Anquandah 2008; Stahl et al. 2008; Insoll 2009). Because of its long and rich history and involvement in the Atlantic trade and international spheres, Ghana has also long been the central focus of Africanist historians (van Dantzig 1978; Wilks 1982; van Dantzig and Jones 1987; Feinberg 1989; Lovejoy 1989; Alpern 1995; Diouf 2003). Many of these works, such as DeCorse's (2001a) extensive investigation into culture contact and change in Elmina during the period of the Atlantic trade, have provided invaluable contributions to archaeological interpretations in Ghana and continue to provide useful insights, dialogue, and debates for researchers asking questions of the Atlantic trade and African diaspora throughout Western Africa. Local and international

researchers are investigating these problems in a range of projects in Ghana, connecting documentary, oral, and archaeological resources.

Stahl (1994, 1999, 2001, 2007) and her students (Cruz 2003; Smith 2008) in Banda have addressed the colonial period, situating their findings in the long-term history and tying this to global encounters in the interior regions of Ghana. Stahl's work draws on current ethnographic research and historical documentation to ascertain potential parallels with events and processes in the past. However, she cautions against drawing direct comparisons because of the dynamic nature of peoples and cultures, including rapid change over time. In a similar vein, several Ghanaian archaeologists have also begun to draw attention to the effects of the Atlantic trade on peoples in Ghana. Kankpeyeng (2009) investigates historical sites in the hinterland of northern Ghana and draws attention to the fact that the Atlantic diaspora was but one route in the dissemination of enslaved Africans and is just one of the factors that impacted trade and the daily lives of peoples in the hinterland before, during, and after the abolition of the slave trade by Western nations. Kankpeyeng suggests that by expanding diasporic archaeology to the more remote hinterland areas, it is possible to broaden the purview of those looking for ancestral roots, including an emphasis on aspects of domestic slavery in Ghana (both in the past and present). This involves highlighting the connections to various other slave trades both within and outside Africa (Kusimba 2004; Croucher and Wynne-Jones 2006; Swanepoel 2009a). Along similar lines, and in association with UNESCO's International Slave Route Project, Nkumbaan (2009) discusses the peoples, sources, routes, and effects of the slave trade in the upper-west region of Ghana. His historical research, collection of oral histories, and archaeological investigations focus on one particular raiding tribe, the Zambarina, and the devastation their activities wreaked on the Kasana people, culture, and industries, in addition to conducting an analysis of appropriate sources of data for this research.

A number of studies by Ghanaian archaeologists explore the country's coastal regions. Gavua has published preliminary results of his ethnographic and archaeological research into the internal diasporas (and slave trades) of indigenous

people of the Gold Coast, specifically the Ewe of the Volta Region in Ghana (Gavua 2009). He discusses the complex changes and continuities of cultural traits and identities among relocated indigenous peoples, as well as influences of peoples and cultures involved in the transatlantic trade, including freed or escaped slaves. Boachie-Ansah's work (2009) at Fort Amsterdam, a European slave-trading stronghold in the central coastal region of Ghana, draws attention to the interactions of the European occupants of the fort with local peoples, as well as the extensive networks of trade across the coastal region. His comparative analysis of ceramics at different sites points to adaptations of Europeans to local resources and the influences of Europeans on the daily lives of local peoples, as well as factors affecting sites of the Atlantic trade. Among other areas of investigation, Bredwa-Mensah's (2004, 2008) work explores the more subtle examples of resistance and manipulation within the very deliberately created and controlled landscape of Danish plantations in Ghana. Taking a slightly different tack, Agorsah (1993, 2006) has weighed-in in the cross-Atlantic arena and has used ethnographical and archaeological research in Ghana to illustrate likely cultural ties and discontinuities with certain resistant groups and maroons in the Caribbean. He, too, laments the lack of African archaeological engagement with and in the investigation of the African diaspora, at the same time cautioning African and other scholars against making direct linkages between historical communities across the Atlantic or cultures in the present with those of the past (Agorsah 1996:221,223).

DeCorse's work on historical sites in coastal Ghana has been prolific and varied, but predominantly woven through it are themes of change and adaptation in African societies over time due to the multifarious facets of international cultural contact (DeCorse 1992, 1993, 2001a, 2010). The result of several decades of work in Ghana, the Central Region Project incorporates both terrestrial and maritime investigations into the era of the Atlantic trade. Terrestrial work includes complexity in cultures and cultural change in central coastal Ghana over the past millennium (Spiers 2007), landscape use and transformations over time (DeCorse 2001a:31–37), sociopolitical evolution

(DeCorse and Spiers 2009), and the inland and internal slave-raiding frontier in Ghana (Swanepoel 2004, 2005; Kankpeyeng 2009). Underwater archaeological investigations have focused on maritime surveys for submerged cultural resources relating to the Atlantic trade (Cook and Spiers 2004; Horlings et al. 2010) and limited excavations of a 17th-century shipwreck of a trading vessel off the coast of Elmina (Cook and Spiers 2004; DeCorse et al. 2009; Horlings 2011; Pietruszka 2011; Cook 2012). Maritime archaeological investigations are more widely inclusive than the African diaspora, but play a crucial role in the investigation of the mechanism of trade—that is, the shipping and transportation that made the trade possible (Moore and Malcom 2008) and the maritime cultural landscapes of the Atlantic trade in West Africa. This new area of research is just scratching the surface of the potential for learning about maritime interactions and cultures, the people included and affected, and how these changed over time as the nature of the trade morphed. Recognizing the importance of this arena of interaction, Ogundiran and Falola (2007a:35) connect the maritime histories of Africans with the skills developed and utilized by enslaved and freed Africans and their descendants in the New World, highlighting the need to explore these connections across the Atlantic.

Nigeria

Much of the archaeological research in Nigeria has focused on sites from before and after the time of the Atlantic trade (Wesler 1992, 1998b; Ogundiran 2008; Kahlheber et al. 2009) or on loosely related research questions (Wesler 1999) such as iron smelting traditions (Okafor 1993; Aremu 1999, 2005). While some research has taken place in the timeframe and regions affected by the Atlantic trade, in general, little archaeological emphasis has been placed directly on the trade itself, although some research has investigated its impacts on local peoples (Ogundiran 2001, 2007; Usman 2007). Ogundiran has published most extensively on both the historical archaeology associated with the transatlantic trade in Nigeria (Ogundiran 2002, 2005), as well as on the connections and dialogues among Africanist archaeologists on all sides of the Atlantic (Ogundiran 2008). In a

related vein, Wesler (1998a) discusses archaeological perspectives from Nigeria and how they engage with those of Western researchers, providing avenues of further discussion.

Much of the research conducted on the Atlantic trade in West Africa has been focused on coastal communities, with less emphasis on the interior regions where the majority of the enslaved people brought to the New World most likely originated (although this is an area more explored by historians, e.g., Nwokeji [2000]). Importantly, Ogundiran's (2001, 2007, 2009a) work does include some interior regions, as he examines the ripple effect of the incorporation of the Yoruba hinterlands into the Atlantic World, focusing on change and stabilities, reactions, migrations, cultural transformations, and innovations within a dynamic cultural perspective. In the process he has provided a direct link between the coastal and more interior regions of Nigeria, including, for example, the examination of Ede-Ile as the connective corridor between the Yoruba in Oyo and the polities in the Bight of Benin (Ogundiran 2009b:360). Related to this is Usman's work in northern Yorubaland (Usman 2007). He seeks to understand the effects of various historical events on the people of the Yoruba hinterland, such as the rise of the Oyo Empire, the multiple slave trades in the region, and the Atlantic trade.

As with other regions in Africa in general and West Africa in particular, historians have contributed a great deal to investigations of the Atlantic trade in Nigeria (Nwokeji 2000). For example, historical work on the internal (Hair 1990; Ubah 1991) and international (Behrendt and Graham 2003) slave trades of Nigeria has provided extensive resources for archaeologists addressing this. An example may be found in Ogundiran's (2002) "historicization" of African material culture by following adaptations to imputed values and meanings of small, seemingly minor artifacts introduced into Nigeria as part of the Atlantic trade. In the end, he demonstrates how this process of historicization can aid archaeologists in understanding processes of global and local change in West Africa, and how they affected and shaped "the contours of human experience in the Atlantic basin" (Ogundiran 2002:457). Although the beginnings of African Atlantic archaeology are appearing in Nigeria, the work that has been done has been

primarily focused on the Yoruba, even though this is just one of a plethora of peoples entangled within it. While it is certainly the case that there was a strong connection between the New World and Nigeria, and the Yoruba in particular, it is vitally important that this work expands to other peoples and research questions that can provide alternative and balanced views of groups from the Slave Coast (now primarily Nigeria) and their experiences in the Atlantic World.

As in Ghana, the importance of the maritime environment to the historic Atlantic trade in Nigeria is acknowledged, primarily in historical research (Law 1983, 1994; Law and Mann 1999; Lovejoy and Richardson 1999), but the questions that they ask are fully applicable to archaeological inquiry as well. It is hoped that in the future maritime archaeological investigations will be initiated in this country with such a rich internal and international history. While this is not the focus of his work, Ogundiran's (2002, 2009b) discussion of the relationship of money cowries with Yoruba associations with the ocean, the accumulation of wealth, and perceptions of slavery provides one possible direction in which maritime associations may become an integral part of Atlantic trade archaeology in Nigeria.

Benin

Similar to Ghana, historical archaeological investigations in the modern nation of Benin have focused on coastal kingdoms that flourished during the Atlantic trade. Yet unlike Ghana, however, historical archaeology in particular is still in its infancy here. Though there are locally trained archaeologists, much of this work is being carried out by American and European researchers with some local involvement (Iroko 1999; Monroe 2003:10, 2007b:101). The kingdoms receiving the greatest attention by historians and archaeologists are Hueda (Law 1990; Kelly 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001; Kelly et al. 1999; Brunache 2001; Law 2004; Kelly and Norman 2006; Norman 2008, 2009) and Dahomey (Herskovits 1938; Manning 1982; Bay 1998, 2001; Monroe 2003, 2004). The Hueda Kingdom was a major slave-exporting power in West Africa during the transatlantic slave trade, and the earliest historical archaeological investigations there were conducted by Kelly at

the former capital of Savi, in the Hueda state, which had its greatest influence between 1670 and 1727 (Kelly 1996:688). Kelly's work at Savi is situated within an interactive view of the Atlantic World (Kelly 1996) and is characteristic of the initial historical archaeological studies of this period in West Africa. This study seeks to understand the local response to European trade, and the change or lack thereof that occurred as a result of these interactions (Kelly 1995, 2001). Building upon his pioneering work, Norman has developed independent research programs addressing two distinct aspects of the Atlantic period in present-day Benin. While Kelly's work focused on the nexus of power in Hueda, Norman (2008) expanded this investigation to the surrounding countryside. Norman's research also addresses vodun religious practices and has the potential to inform African diaspora interpretations of ritual and religion (Kelly and Norman 2006; Norman 2009a, 2009b). While Norman, like Ogundiran in Nigeria, focuses on everyday practices of the non-elite, Monroe examines the process of elite authority-making through architecture (Monroe 2010). Additionally, Monroe's work on 18th- and 19th-century Dahomey focusing on the royal architecture in the Abohomey Plateau is one of the few studies in West Africa that examines the transitional period from the height of the Atlantic trade to its decline and the impact of this shift in socio-economic interactions on local elite (Monroe 2003, 2007a, 2007b, 2010).

Like Ogundiran's work in Nigeria (Ogundiran 2001) and Spiers's work in Ghana (Spiers 2007), the historical archaeological work carried out thus far in Benin examines the ripple effect of the incorporation of these regions into the Atlantic World, focusing on change, reactions, and innovations within a dynamic regional cultural perspective. The historical connections between this region and the Yoruba to the north are reflected in the material culture of everyday life in both locales (Monroe 2007a; Ogundiran 2009b). Monroe's work takes this a step farther, examining 19th-century transformations at the interface of the Atlantic trade and African colonial era. Finally, historians of Benin have also addressed these connections and examined how the broader Atlantic impacted the region's culture and daily life (Bay 2001; Soumonni 2001; Law 2004).

The Senegambia

Until recently, archaeological investigations in the Senegambia were concentrated on megalithic and Iron Age settlements (McIntosh and McIntosh 1993; Lawson 2003). Following the same historical trajectory as the rest of West Africa, historical archaeological investigations began with standing trading sites such as the island of Gorée. Work has been undertaken on Gorée by several archaeologists from Senegal (Thiaw 2003) and the United States (Croff 2009), including the recent field schools run through Rice University under the direction of S. K. McIntosh. Both Thiaw and Richard have completed long-term archaeological projects incorporating Atlantic period sites in Senegal, though this period has not been the exclusive focus of any study to date in northern Senegal (Thiaw 1999; McIntosh 2001; Richard 2007; Gokee 2011). The development of archaeology in northern Senegal, as opposed to the Casamance region and the Gambia, is tied primarily to the presence of the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) in Dakar (Richard 2009). A substantial body of archaeological literature produced by researchers and students at the IFAN is beyond the scope of the present discussion but can be found in the *Bulletin de l'IFAN*.

The development of archaeological inquiry in Senegal and the training of Senegalese researchers is the opposite of that in the Gambia. As many Africanists have addressed, the impact of colonial legacy varied dramatically throughout Africa, and a big part of this involved the infrastructure left behind (de Barros 1990). Whereas the IFAN and Cheikh Anta Diop University in Senegal were amongst the earliest universities in West Africa and in operation before independence, the University of the Gambia (UTG) is still less than a decade old. At present there is no Department of Anthropology at the UTG and no national position for an archaeologist in either the university or the National Centre for Arts and Culture, which maintains all the country's cultural resources. It is this situation that has led to a lag between Wood's (1967) assessment of the potential for archaeological examinations of the Atlantic era in the region and the first serious endeavors. Gijanto's research is the first to focus directly on the Atlantic trade and is centered on the Gambia River (2007, 2010),

while McIntosh and Thiaw completed similar work in northern Senegal on Fort Sneudébu (Thiaw 1999; McIntosh 2001:29). In 2004, Gijanto initiated work at the former Niimi commercial center on the north bank of the Gambia River. This former Niimi Kingdom emerged as a local center of trade in the 17th century, and the villages comprising the commercial center represent various populations and levels of involvement in commerce, thus providing an ideal setting for examining the impact of increased socioeconomic interactions during the Atlantic trade (Gijanto 2010). Gijanto's study focuses primarily on the village and Royal African Company trading factory at Juffure with comparisons drawn from the nearby Luso-African village and a late Royal African Company filling station at San Domingo, as well as the Mandé settlement of Lamin Conco. Her research demonstrates that, more than expressions of ethnic or cultural identity, change in local material culture is highly situational and subject to socioeconomic circumstances (Gijanto 2011a, 2011b). Related to this, her work at Juffure reveals heightened acts of social display utilizing pre-existing practices to assert status and wealth that incorporated new materials, and an increased diversity in local resources such as food. In addition to work at Juffure, efforts have been taken to stabilize the British fort on James Island, addressing problems of conservation and threats to site preservation on the river (Gijanto 2009a). Bugarin has recently begun archaeological investigations on the island, investigating the lives of castle slaves residing there alongside British military and Royal African Company employees. In an effort to aid in site interpretation, she has presented a model of the fort using GIS modeling (Bugarin and Tolley 2006; Bugarin 2007). Work in the Gambia is now beginning to move beyond the coastal region and has begun to identify Royal African Company factories in the upriver kingdoms (DeCorse et al. 2010), but this is only scratching the surface of Atlantic era sites.

Work has also been conducted on colonial era sites in the Gambia. In June and July of 2008 the Banjul Heritage Project was initiated by Bob Agee of Annapolis and Orlando Rideout of the Maryland Historic Trust. The overall aim of the project is to assess the potential for establishing an historic district in Banjul, the capital of

the Gambia, centered on the extant colonial era structures (Agee and Rideout 2008). Currently, the Gambia Ports Authority is expanding its container facility, which will take over a significant portion of Half Die, one of Banjul's oldest neighborhoods. Coupled with this construction project is the rapid destruction of many of the former 19th-century warehouses and other structures throughout the city in the name of development. As part of this initiative, Gijanto developed a small urban archaeology project in Banjul focused on the neighborhood of Half Die (Gijanto 2009b). It included extensive documentation of the area that would be demolished for the port expansion, involving interviews, mapping, and photography. Additionally, excavation was carried out at one site already taken over by the Gambian Ports Authority. As this project demonstrates, more than in the United States, archaeological and heritage sites related to the Atlantic trade are under constant threat of development throughout West Africa (Kankpeyeng and DeCorse 2004; Osei-Tutu 2007; Handley 2006; Sørensen and Evans 2011).

A View of the African Atlantic: Toward Addressing Common Questions

A common theme throughout many of the projects described above is a desire to understand the impact of the Atlantic trade on coastal West African polities and hinterland communities directly involved in commerce, including, but not limited to, the slave trade. Drawing on work conducted in Benin, Nigeria, Ghana, and the Senegambia, the Atlantic period is defined by constant transformation and political reorganization leading to shifts in economic access and wealth, as well as cultural adaptations and transformations. The second trend is the examination of the surrounding hinterland associated with the commercial towns that were directly involved with the Atlantic trade. Just a few examples address ritual, religion, and the often-impossible act of identifying ethnic identity (DeCorse 1989; Ogundiran 2007; Norman 2009b). Studies in most areas of West Africa have not been addressed in detail, including those in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Angola, Mali, and Ivory Coast, as they are beyond the limited focus of this article. The importance of the reformulation of our understanding of Cameroon, for example,

demonstrating either the entanglements of the coastal and interior trades in Central and West Africa and the material manifestations of this in local contexts (de Barros 2001; MacEachern 2012) is highlighted but not restricted to the research noted in this brief overview. The aim here, then, is to begin and encourage a sustained dialogue between American scholars working on Atlantic World sites in West Africa and those in the Americas that will develop into a more fluid debate incorporating a broad range of approaches and American, European, African, and Caribbean scholars. Therefore, this cursory overview of West African archaeological studies is presented from an Americanist perspective for a largely American audience.

While this discussion of historical archaeological investigations in West Africa is necessarily limited to regions where research is ongoing and published material is accessible and largely printed in English, it also recognizes the contributions of work published in other languages, particularly in French. Acknowledging this, the work presented here clearly reflects the need for greater efforts at archaeological inquiry throughout the region. The comparatively few studies carried out in various parts of West Africa compared to those in the Americas underscores the necessity for those investigating the diaspora to exercise caution when making direct connections to groups from across the Atlantic, as well as highlighting the need for additional archaeological investigations in West and Central Africa. Moreover, most of the work done early on in West Africa has been focused on communities engaged in coastal trade rather than the interior regions where the majority of the enslaved people brought to the New World most likely originated, making connections to peoples across time and the Atlantic even more tenuous. This trend has shifted, and Africanists continue to situate their discussions of the Atlantic era within a long-term perspective (DeCorse 2001b; Stahl 2007; Thiaw 2012), examining broader regional areas (Ogundiran 2009a). A final factor leading to this disconnect is the publication of work in languages other than English, such as Portuguese and French, less utilized by American scholars, and vice versa. The combination of these factors greatly stymies in-depth comparisons between diaspora populations and their communities of origin in West Africa.

In order to provide more complete understanding of the African Atlantic from the vantage of the West and Central African coast (Dème and Guèye 2007), further research on coastal trading settlements (associated with both the slave and commodities trades), areas where slave raiding occurred, and points in the interior along these multiple trade routes must be carried out and the results disseminated to the academic and public communities at large. In the same way that Ogundiran and Falola intentionally embraced Lovejoy's (1997) revisionist or "continuous historical experience thesis," the approach to West Africa and the African diaspora engaged here is drawn from the belief that "not only do we have historical continuity between Atlantic Africa and African Diaspora, but we have also come to the point where both should be integrated into one unit of analysis" (Ogundiran and Falola 2007a:5). In addition to historical analysis using an array of oral and documentary sources, the examples cited here demonstrate the vibrant, dynamic nature of West Africa at the time of the Atlantic trade (Posnansky 1999:23) and highlight exciting possibilities for cross-Atlantic studies.

Despite the fact that serious archaeological inquiry focused on Atlantic World sites in West Africa began at nearly the same time as African diaspora archaeology in the United States, the former has not received nearly the equivalent interest, activity, or support. While there are numerous reasons, including political instability, lack of resources, funds, and trained professionals in West Africa to mirror the growth of their New World counterparts, the interpretation of material connections between West Africa and the Americas has often not been undertaken with the necessary modicum of caution. Arguing support for an Africanist perspective of diaspora culture composed significantly of identifiable aspects of African survivals as opposed to creolized identities (Mintz and Price 1976) continues to disregard interaction, contact, and change in contemporary West Africa. For example, Fennell's (2011:7) recent argument drawing on new documentary evidence for the importation of slaves from Africa into the United States as late as the 1820s seems to support this Africanist perspective. This suggests the continued problematic assumption of a static, unchanging African cultural landscape, and reiterates the need for

an engaged dialogue between archaeologists (as well as historians) working on all sides of the Atlantic, an engagement that includes cognizance of other researchers' work and a willingness to embrace approaches that may provide more fruitful results, even if they are not what is anticipated or hoped for. While an in-depth engagement with work by African historians has not been included here, the dialogues between them and Africanist archaeologists are extremely relevant (particularly those published in the journal *History in Africa*, vol. 22).

Shared avenues of inquiry on both sides of the Atlantic should incorporate discussions of the fluidity of past and present identities (Sweet 2009). For example, examining the globalization of Yoruba identity, Palmié aptly asked whether Reverend Samuel Johnson were a Yoruba (Palmié 2005:43). After a detailed examination of his life beginning with his birth in Sierra Leone as an Aku, through his Christian training and death in 1901, Palmié is unable to provide a definitive answer. This is in spite of Johnson's own scholarship on "Yoruba-ness" and self-profession of this identity as an adult, tied to his vision of a Christian Yoruba Nation. It was Johnson and others who defined their Yoruba identity as adults, yet Palmié highlights the constantly changing, situational nature of identities that are often confused with ethnicity by archaeologists and other researchers (Ojo 2009; Oshineye 2009). This example demonstrates how it is often problematic to trace African origins even within West Africa over the course of several centuries, let alone between communities in isolation from one another living on opposite sides of the Atlantic. Rather than pursuing such connections between groups, presupposing static identities that bridge time and space, it is best to view the development of Atlantic and colonial identities in West Africa and the Americas through shared processes within the overarching framework of the Atlantic World. How were communities of African origin affected by their incorporation into the Atlantic World? The Atlantic trade was a period of rapid change and reorientation of political power, as is clearly demonstrated by researchers currently working throughout the region. The recurring themes in all these studies are the impacts, changes, and reactions to heightened interactions at times when groups formerly unknown to each other

(Europeans and local Africans) were brought into continuous socioeconomic contact.

Concluding Remarks

In the United States, African diaspora studies have taken several forms, though two overarching branches are of interest here. The first is the focus on identity and its expression, incorporating numerous paradigms found throughout archaeological inquiry such as gender, power, ritual, symbolism, Marxist interpretation, and social stratification, amongst others. The second is tied to community action, public archaeology, and heritage tourism. It is the latter that can be most directly related to the past and current state of West Africa and its place in the diaspora beyond archaeological inquiry (Gilroy 1993), although research in West Africa has tended to take different directions, favoring adaptations and change in local and regional communities. It is these multiple avenues of scholarship that necessitate yet another shift in African diaspora archaeology to an archaeology of the African Atlantic, one which necessarily takes on a truly multiregional approach to the experiences of African communities in the Atlantic basin from the 16th through the 19th centuries (Franklin and Mckee 2004:2).

As scholars of the African Atlantic, the aim is to move beyond the role of Africa at this time as a point of departure, and, rather, to situate this period as one of interaction. For scholars interested in the colonial era in West Africa, it is important to understand the African diaspora in the Americas, specifically the regions where liberated Africans originated, just as it is essential for more in-depth, comprehensive work to be done in West Africa on Atlantic period sites to truly understand the people who were brought to the Americas and formed diasporic communities there. It is vitally important to see what and who came to West Africa, as well as who and what left. Finally, because of the shared interactions and engagements over time and space in the historic Atlantic trade, associated archaeological and heritage sites, whether they be on an island in the Caribbean or inland in coastal Ghana, need to be investigated and preserved by the complex community of those whose present research worlds are connected in the past (Eze-Uzomaka 2000; Kankpeyeng and

DeCorse 2004; Handley 2006; Osei-Tutu 2007; Ogundiran 2008).

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