

# BOOK REVIEW

**Colleen E. Kriger. *Making Money: Life, Death, and Early Modern Trade on Africa's Guinea Coast*.** Ohio University Press, 2017. xiii + 233 pp. Illustrations. Maps. Tables. Index. \$28.95. Paper. ISBN: 9780896802964.

Colleen Kriger begins her new book, *Making Money: Life, Death, and Early Modern Trade on Africa's Guinea Coast*, on the interconnected lives and trade of individuals in West Africa with the microhistory of Hope Heath. Heath was a freed slave from the Gambia river region who had married a soldier of the Royal African Company named William, eventually coming to live near London. On William's death, his family filed suit, claiming that she was not in fact the legitimate widow and that she had been but William's servant. In point of fact, Hope had kept a number of William's letters which demonstrated his devotion to her and proved that she was legitimately living as a free woman of color with her child and inheritance in late seventeenth-century London.

Heath's life illuminates many facets of Kriger's valuable book. It reveals the importance of legal frameworks for African actors in the Atlantic trade, the complex and mixed lives of people involved in the Atlantic trade in West Africa, and also the global presence of Africans from the mixed Atlantic trading communities. It also illustrates well the archival diligence which Kriger has demonstrated in piecing together this book; it is this level of fine-grained detail which allows her to achieve her aim, that of bringing a human pattern to the complexities of the Atlantic trade in "Guinea" (the region she writes of also being known in the scholarly literature as "Greater Senegambia" and "Upper Guinea," but referred to hereafter in this review simply as "Guinea").

Kriger is a distinguished historian of Western Africa who has written important works on cloth and iron production in West and West-Central Africa. These focused especially on labor and the production of manufactured goods, and this theme is also a feature of this book, which has a more determinedly Atlantic dimension than her earlier work. Kriger devotes her concluding chapter largely to the lives of employees of the Royal African Company and the careers they forged in Africa (with a smaller section on some of their African employees). Her second chapter, meanwhile, analyzes the different producers of goods which were traded in West Africa, cloth-workers in Gujarat and peasant iron producers in England. The ways in

which their labor interconnected with the development of the Royal African Company and the trade destined for Europe also offers her the chance to provide a very readable summary of the complexities involved in the Atlantic trading system as it operated in West Africa.

Indeed, this is one of the impressive features of this book. In her introduction, Kriger sets out one of her core aims as writing accessibly so as to reach a wide audience. In this, she succeeds admirably, and her chapters offer both illuminating windows onto aspects of the trade along with valuable summaries for beginners to the topic. The book's first chapter, for instance, offers a very useful account of the overall framework of trade in West Africa, its many complexities, and the ways in which the Atlantic trade formed a part of a wider whole.

For scholars, however, undoubtedly the most significant elements of the book are the chapters in which Kriger's archival excavations uncover a wealth of previously untapped detail which present the lives and engagement of Atlantic African individuals from Guinea in an entirely new light. Poring minutely through the company account books, Kriger is able to discuss at length the lives and interactions of European traders in Guinea, their African hosts and trading partners, and of captives and soldiers who formed part of the complex jigsaw of African-European relations. The account books also reveal a more detailed account of the process of enslavement, the paths of rebellion, and the lives of captives in this region of Africa than has hitherto been available.

The third chapter of the book brings together completely new material, showing the interaction of English trading posts on the Gambia river with Luso-African trading firms in what is now Guinea-Bissau. It also offers an original perspective on the complexities of the political relations of the European trading companies through an analysis of a farewell celebration for the English agent on James Island (at the estuary of the Gambia river), Alexander Cleeve, and the range of Senegambian kings and dignitaries to whom gifts were made at this event.

In the fourth chapter Kriger offers a new perspective on slavery in the region, looking both at the lives of slaves working cotton plantations and performing associated tasks such as threshing and weaving, and at those slaves exchanged for produce by Atlantic traders. A particularly important element of her research here is her rescuing from the archives of microhistories of rebellion by the enslaved in Guinea, and of the subsequent strategies of repression and forestalling of these as developed by English slave traders. The strategies of the enslaved, and the structure of organized violence and oppression they faced, emerge in more detail than I have seen in earlier works, and this is testament to the importance of Kriger's book as well as to her meticulous research.

The research and approach which Kriger has taken here offer her the chance to develop a historical framework in which individual producers and consumers in Africa, Europe, and Asia had connected lives. By humanizing too the political actors, traders, and captives produced by the Atlantic

system in Africa, Kriger brings the current fashion in Atlantic studies for microhistories to bear on the Guinea region for an earlier period than usual. There's no doubt that this book should be a standard feature on course curricula for many years to come.

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**For more reading on this subject, see:**

- Alpern, Stanley B. 1995. "What Africans Got for Their Slaves: A Master List of European Trade Goods." *History in Africa* 22: 5–43. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3171906>
- Bernaut, Florence. 2015. "Suitcases and the Poetics of Oddities: Writing History from Disorderly Archives." *History in Africa* 42: 269–277. <https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2015.5>
- Kriger, Colleen E. 2015. "Introduction – Material Culture and Commerce in Precolonial Africa." *History in Africa* 42: 319–321. <https://doi.org/10.1017/hia.2015.14>