

*Caravans of Gold, Fragments in Time: Art, Culture, and Exchange across Medieval Saharan Africa.* Kathleen Bickford Berzock, ed.

Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019. 312 pp. \$65.

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This impressive and beautifully illustrated compendium incorporates both introductory texts and original scholarship. The contributions present a cross-disciplinary picture of the trans-Saharan trade, with a focus on the ninth to the fifteenth centuries. Approaches range from archaeology to art history to the epigraphy of Arabic documents. *Caravans of Gold* initially served as the catalogue to an exhibition of the same name, organized and presented at Northwestern University, and later traveling to the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto and to the Smithsonian Institution.

The dual aim of the editor was to present a catalogue focused on objects in the exhibition and on the archaeological sites from which many of these objects came, while at the same time presenting the works in the historical context of long-distance commerce across the Sahara. The book admirably meets these goals. In addition, perhaps the most important contribution of *Caravans of Gold* is that it establishes the place of the Sahel (or shore of the desert) and the adjacent, more heavily populated West African savanna, as integrally tied to the medieval Mediterranean world. This constitutes a significant reappraisal: West Africa was economically linked to Mediterranean Europe centuries before the arrival there of Portuguese mariners. The roots of fifteenth-century globalization and of European awakening to the African continent were laid down, as this catalogue demonstrates, by earlier centuries of trans-Saharan trade.

*Caravans of Gold* brings together excellent essays by long-established specialists in the trans-Saharan trade and associated cultures, including Ralph Austen, Robert Launay, and Ray Silverman, along with papers by a younger generation of scholars. Robert Launay mines medieval Arabic sources to present a picture of the trans-desert trade, in an essay that serves as foundation for what follows. Sam Nixon's report on recent archaeological excavations in the southern Saharan trading town of Tadmekka provides additional information, based on local Arabic rock inscriptions. Messier and Fili add an excellent chapter on Sijilmasa, a northern terminus of the trade. Mamadou Cissé reports on excavations he carried out in Gao, where carbon 14 dating has provided dates of 700–1100 CE and where glass beads imply the existence not only of long-distance trade, but also of local production. These are major revisions and additions to the history of trans-Saharan commerce.

Three impressively detailed and original chapters constitute important contributions to the growing corpus of West African archaeology. Here is abundant proof that West Africa was not simply exporting raw materials; local industry was processing and producing gold and beads. Art historian Sarah Guérin, a specialist in medieval Europe, analyzes archaeological remnants of trade in gold and ivory. She brilliantly compares jewelry styles from the Mediterranean world and the Sahara to demonstrate

“historical participation in a shared, interregional elite culture.” Further, she specifies the origin of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century ivory carved in Europe. Extrapolating the size of the tusks, she shows that these could only have belonged to savanna elephants. Mamadi Dembélé looks at urbanization and trade in a better-known region, the inland delta of the Niger River. There, ivory, slaves, and gold, along with kola from the forest zone of the Guinea Coast, were exchanged for salt, copper, and other goods. This chapter does, however, present an outmoded view of religious interaction, based on a model of “traditional practices vs. Islam.”

In a second essay on Tadmekka, Pastorelli, Walter, and Nixon report the discovery of coin molds and they demonstrate the stamping of (probably) blank gold coins in that trading center. Abidemi Babatunde Babalola, in a scintillating essay on southern Nigeria, demonstrates the mass production of glass beads in eleventh- to fifteenth-century Ile-Ife. This is a highly significant discovery. While some beads came from Central Europe as previously thought, Babalola has identified “the first primary glass production center in medieval West Africa.” This essay—like much of *Caravans of Gold*—is a pleasure to read and it serves as a model for historically situated archaeology and contextually interpreted material culture.

One critique of the overall editing: there is excessive repetition from one chapter to another. As a result, through no fault of the individual authors, later chapters appear to be redundant. But this is trivial, considering the major contributions to scholarship of the catalogue. *Caravans of Gold* clearly achieves the editor’s objective, to speak both to a lay audience and to specialists. In line with this aim, the plentiful, high-quality illustrations are accompanied by double captions; this permits the authors to add detailed historical and archaeological information that relates directly to the objects. This volume could serve—indeed, is already in use—as a text for university courses in archaeology as well as in art history. It would also do nicely as a supplemental reading for an introductory course in pre-colonial African history. Congratulations are in order to the team who wrote and compiled this work.

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*Confessional Diplomacy in Early Modern Europe*. Roberta Anderson and Charlotte Backerra, eds.

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Historians have developed the idea that after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the confessional dimension—i.e., the choice between Catholicism and Protestantism—became less important in international relations and diplomatic life. This collection takes up the