History 774  
7:00-9:00 Wed  
2611 Humanities  
office hours: 2:30-3:30 Tues & Thurs & by apmt  
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Methods of Historical Research for Pre-Literate Societies

The seminar is an introduction to sources and techniques used by historians for reconstructing the histories of pre-literate societies, including those of groups embedded within larger literate ones. While the main focus will be on African materials, the techniques are applicable to other areas and peoples and you are encouraged to range broadly in your reading.

Requirements

(1) a weekly journal, submitted in class, briefly summarizing the arguments of the readings and then commenting on them.

(2) Three longer essays on oral traditions (due 10/20), oral history (11/10), and ethnography and history (11/24). I have suggested books & topics in the relevant sections of the syllabus, but you may substitute others if you clear them with me in advance. You should not choose books/topics you have done for another course, but use the opportunity to explore new materials.

Readings

The readings range from broad surveys and theoretical statements to individual case studies. I have tried to combine explicit methodological statements with examples of work employing that methodology wherever possible, and encourage you to assess both the theory and the practice. The 'required' reading is extensive, insanely so. I will survey the upcoming reading weekly, and encourage you to use your own judgement in discriminating among it. The 'recommended' reading is for people who wish to pursue a particular methodology at greater length, now or in the future.

abbreviations

* available in Bookstore and on Reserve  
+ available on Reserve only (journals are available in stacks)

APS       Joseph Miller (ed.), The African Past Speaks
CSSH     Comparative Studies in Society and History
HA       History in Africa
IJAHS   Internat'l J. of African Historical Studies
IJOH    Internat'l J. of Oral History
JAH   Journal of African History
OH       Oral History
OT       Oral Tradition
general handbooks (all now dated)

C. Gabel & N. Bennett (eds.), Reconstructing African Culture History
I.M. Lewis (ed.), History and Social Anthropology
D. McCall, Africa in Time Perspective
T. Ranger (ed.), Emerging Themes in African History
B. Trigger, Beyond History
J. Vansina, et. al. (ed.), The Historian in Tropical Africa

Schedule of Classes

9/8 Introduction

Choose one of the following and read before the first class. Be alert to the methods employed and how they shape the account. We will be returning to these later.

* C. Joyner, Down by the Riverside
* R. Price, Alabi's World
* R. White, The Middle Ground

Archaeology, Paleoeconomy & Biology

9/15 Archaeology and Prehistory

How does one 'read' and interpret a site report or other archaeological 'evidence'? More specifically, how do archaeologists define 'cultures' and explain changes in them? What are some of the problems of correlating archaeological data with other evidence?

required
* T. Spear, Kenya's Past, Ch 1.
+ UNESCO, Ch 9 (17-28 recommended).
  a site report from Azania, African Archaeological Review or other archaeological journal [e.g., Robertshaw or Davison in Azania, 26(1991)].

recommended
P. Courbin, What is Archaeology?
P. Courbin, Analysis of Prehistoric Economic Patterns
C. Ehret & M. Posnansky, The Archaeological and Linguistic Reconstruction of African History
D. Phillipson, The Later Prehistory of Eastern & Southern Africa
P. Schmidt, Historical Archaeology
Azania and African Archaeological Review: site reports.
JAH: periodic reviews of arch. sites and dating

8/31/93
9/22  **Biology, Paleocology, and the Environment**

A potpourri on reconstructing changes in human populations, climate and the environment, agriculture, and the relations among them.

**required**

+ UNESCO, Ch 13-14.


S.E. Nicholson, 'The Methodology of Historical Climate Reconstruction and its Application to Africa,' *JAH*, 20(1979), 31-49.


**recommended**

J. Hiernaux, *The Peoples of Africa*

J. Harlan, *et al., Origins of African Plant Domestication*

J. Clark & S. Brandt, *From Hunters to Farmers*


J. Ford, *The Role of Trypanosomiasis in African Ecology*

M. Lyons, *The Colonial Disease*

J. Christie, *Cholera Epidemics in East Africa*

H. Kjekjhus, *Ecology Control and Economic Development in East African History*

J. Koponen, *People and Production in Late Precolonial Tanzania*


J. McCann, *From Poverty to Famine in Northeast Ethiopia*

M. Vaughn, *The Story of an African Famine*

M. Watts, *Silent Violence*

P. Richards, *Coping with Hunger*


S. Feierman & J. Janzen, *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa*

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9/29  **Comparative Linguistics**

The focus here is on interpreting genetic relationships among languages and the study of words, both inherited and borrowed, to chart historical developments and interactions with others. And then there is the thorny issue of glottochronology.
required
* T. Spear, Kenya's Past, Ch 2.
+ UNESCO, Ch 10-12.
D. Schoenbrun, 'We are What We Eat: Ancient Agriculture between the Great Lakes,' JAH, 34(1993), 1-31.
D. Nurse, 'Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics: the Case of Mwíimí,' paper, ASA, 1991 (handout)

recommended
E. Sapir, 'Time Perspective in Aboriginal American Culture' in Selected Writing of Edward Sapir, 389-462
R. Antilla, An Introduction to Historical and Comparative Linguistics
T. Byron, Historical Linguistics
H. Hock, Principles of Historical Linguistics
Mary Haas, Culture, Language, and History
C. Ehret & M. Posnansky, The Archaeological and Linguistic Reconstruction of African History
C. Ehret, Southern Nilotic History
C. Ehret, Eduopians and East Africans
C. Ehret, The Historical Reconstruction of Southern Cushitic
D. Nurse & T. Spear, The Swahili

10/6 Words and Things

Given that we can reconstruct historical forms of languages and trace their relations with others, can we also reconstruct historical meanings for these forms? historical ethnographies? How?

Presentation by Jan Vansina on Bantu migrations and Words and Things.

required
* J. Vansina, Paths in the Rainforest, Ch 1-6, 9.

recommended
see above

Oral Traditions & Oral History

10/13 Theory

While oral traditions are now generally accepted as a source, the debate continues on their meaning, interpretation, and significance.

required
* T. Spear, Kenya's Past, Ch 3.
* J. Vansina, Oral Tradition as History
+ L. Vail & L. White, Power and the Praise Poem, Ch 1-2.
recommended

+ D. Henige, *Oral Historiography*, Ch 3-5
+ UNESCO, Ch 2, 7, 8
B. Jewsiewicki & D. Newbury, *African Historiographies*
P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember*
K. Barber & P. de Moreas Farias (eds.), *Discourse and its Disguises*

H. Scheub, *The Xhosa Ntsomi*
J. Miller, 'The Dynamics of Oral Tradition in Africa' in B. Bernardi, et al. (eds.), *Fonti Orali*
+ J. Miller (ed.), *The African Past Speaks* (Intro & case studies)
D. Cohen, *Towards a Reconstructed Past: Historical Texts from Busoga, Uganda*
D. Beach, 'The Rozwi in Search of their Past,' *HA*, 10(1983), 13-34.
D. Golan, 'The Life Story of King Shaka and Gender Tensions in the Zulu State,' *HA*, 17(1990), 131-156.
P. de Moreas Farias, 'History and Consolation: Royal Yoruba Bards Comment on their Craft,' *HA*, 19(1992), 263-297.

10/20 Practice


Individual papers: Choose one of the following and compare and assess the author's methods and practice. You may choose another work if you clear it with me in advance, but you should not use a book you have done in another class. Paper and oral presentation due in class.

D. Cohen, *The Historical Tradition of Busoga*
J. Ewald, 'Speaking, Writing and Authority,' *CSSH*, 30(1988), 199-224 & *Soldiers, Traders and Slaves* (Part I)
S. Feierman, *The Shamba Kingdom*
R. Harms, *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow* & *APS*, Ch 7
J. Lamphear, *The Traditional History of the Jie of Uganda*
P. Irwin, *Liptako Speaks*
R. Law, *The Oyo Empire* & *R. Law in S.O. Biobaku* (ed.), *Sources of Yoruba History*, Ch 2 & 3.
J. Miller, *Kings and Kinsmen*
R. Packard, *Chiefship & Cosmology* & *APS*, Ch 6
R. Price, *First-Time*
T. Spear, *Traditions of Origin and their Interpretation* & *The Kaya Complex*
J. Vansina, *The Children of Woot*

8/31/93
also recommended
J. Boston, *The Igala Kingdom*
G. Hartwig, *The Art of Survival*

10/27 Ritual and Art as Tradition

Are ritual and art just another form of 'tradition'? How are they different?

required
+ A. Apter, *Black Critics and Kings*, pp 1-94
+ P. Mark, *The Wild Bull and the Secret Forest*

recommended
J. Vansina, *Art History in Africa*

11/3 Genealogies, Kinglists, and Chronology

How do oral chronologies differ from written ones? Why? Can these differences be resolved? How do people we have read so far treat chronology?

required

recommended

11/10 Oral History, Life Histories & Memoirs

required

Individual papers: Choose one of the following and assess the author's use of oral/life histories. Again, substitutions are allowed if cleared with me in advance. Paper and oral presentation due in class.

S. Berry, *Fathers Work for their Sons*
S. Mirza & M. Strobel, *Three Swahili Women*
H. Munson, *The House of Si Abd Allah*
L. Plotnicov, *Strangers to the City*
P. Romero, *Life Histories of African Women*
M. Shostak, Nisa & 'What the Wind Won't Take Away,' IJOH, 8(1987), 171-81.
M. Smith, Baba of Karo: A Woman of the Muslim Hausa

**Ethnography**

11/17 Ethnography

Evans-Pritchard's The Nuer stands as a monument to functionalist ethnography, so much so that it is now a subject of endless reinterpretation itself. What follows stresses the analysis of relationships between structural forms and processes.

**required**


**recommended**

see Kelly bibliography

11/24 Ethnography and History

(NB: We probably want to move this class to another day.)

The debate over structure and process is criticized as being ahistorical and attempts are made to historicize structural processes.

**required**

* T. Spear, Kenya's Past, Ch 4-5.
+ J. & J.L. Comaroff, Ethnography & the Historical Imagination, Intro.
Individual papers: Choose one of the following and assess how the authors use structural and/or historical models. Substitution of another text is possible if you consult me in advance. Paper and oral presentation due in class.

L. Cassanelli, *The Shaping of Somali Society*
D. Cohen, *Womunafu's Bunafu & APS*, Ch 8
J. Miller, *Kings and Kinsmen*
D. Newbury, *Kings and Clans*
R. Packard, *Chiefship and Cosmology*
D. Lan, *Guns and Rain*
M. Sahlins, *Historical Metaphors and Mythical Realities* & G. Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook*
R. Willis, *The Making of a State*

recommended
M. Sahlins, *Islands of History*
R. Rosaldo, 'From the Door of his Tent' in Clifford & Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture*, 77-97.

12/1 Ethnohistory & Cultural Change

Is Ethnohistory ethnic history, ethnographic history, or historical anthropology? How does African history and ethnohistory compare? Is there ethnohistory before or without cultural contact? How does Dening's 'cultural death' compare with White's 'middle ground'?

required
* T. Spear, *Kenya's Past*, Ch 5
* R. White, *The Middle Ground*, Ch 1-3+

+ G. Dening, *Islands and Beaches*

recommended
J. Axtell, *The Invasion Within*
J. Axtell, *After Columbus*
I. Clendinnen, *Ambivalent Conquest*
J. Merrell, *The Indians New World*
W. Simmons, *The Spirit of New England Tribes*
R. White, *The Roots of Dependency*

12/8 Africa in the Americas

The debate over the development of African-American culture has been between the continuity of African 'survivals' (Herskovits) vs. the impact of slavery (Frazier), now somewhat resolved in a dialectical model of 'cultural creolization' (Mintz & Price, Joyner).

required
* C. Joyner, *Down by the Riverside*
recommended (a sampling)
A. Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 43-92. (Frazier vs. Herskovits debate on survivals)
S. Mintz & R. Price, *The Birth of Afro-American Culture*
M. Crahan & F. Knight, *Africa and the Caribbean*
E. Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica*
L. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*
R. Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*
W. Bascom, *Shango in the New World*
J. Wafer, *The Taste of Blood*
L. Levine, *Black Culture, Black Consciousness*
J. Roberts, *Black Music of Two Worlds*
Vlatch, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*
R. Thompson, *Four Moments of the Sun*

Documents

12/15 Travelers Accounts, Maps, Photos & Other 'Hard' Evidence

A wide range of issues arise here, from the sources for putative 'original' accounts, to their historical contexts, genres, and forms of reproducing information, not to mention the difficulties of interpretation and meaning.

Presentation by Robin Law.

required

* R. Price, *Alabi's World*
A. Jones, 'Decompiling Dapper: A Preliminary Search for Evidence,' *HA*, 17(1990), 171-209. (plagiarism)
+ R. Bridges, '19th c East African Travel Records' in Jones & Heintze, 179-196.
+ J. Vansina, 'The Ethnographic Account as a Genre' in Jones & Heintze, 433-444.
A. Jones, 'Four Years in Asante: One Source or Several,' *HA*, 18(1991), 173-203.
+ A. Hilton, 'European Sources for the Study of Religious Change in 16th and 17th c Kongo' in Jones & Heintze, 289-312. (interpretation)

recommended
P. Curtin, *The Image of Africa*
J. Hanson, 'African Testimony Reported in European Travel Literature,' *HA*, 18(1991), 143-158.
B. Heintze, 'In Pursuit of a Chameleon,' *HA*, 17(1990), 137-156.
A. Roberts (ed.), *Photographs as Sources for African History* (SOAS, 1988)
N. Monti (ed.), *Africa Then: Photographs 1840-1918*