NEW STUDIES IN ARCHAEOLOGY

Making History in Banda

Anthropological Visions of Africa's Past

Drawing on evidence from several disciplines, Professor Ann B. Stahl reconstructs the daily lives of Banda villagers of west central Ghana, from the time that they were drawn into the Niger trade (around AD 1300) until British rule was established early in the twentieth century. The study is designed to make the case for a closer integration of perspectives drawn from archaeology, history, and anthropology.

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ANN BROWER STAHL

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For Christina and Emma

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PREFACE

In November 1996 a group of young men acting on behalf of Banda elders entered the palace of their paramount chief, forcibly removed his sandals, and placed his bare feet on the ground. This act of destoolment brought to a close his nineteen-year reign, which had been the focus of a chieftaincy dispute that began before the death of the previous paramount chief in 1977. This was the longest-lived, most contested chieftaincy dispute in the Brong-Ahafo Region, Ghana, a country where chieftaincy disputes are common. The dispute centered on whether a rotational principle should have prevailed in selecting the dead chief's successor. Rival families marshaled competing visions of history to support their claims to power. The family of the former chief, Kofi Dwuru II, rejected the historical primacy of a rotational principle, and – supported by the majority of elders – selected a successor from their own family who initially served as regent. In 1985 Kofi Dwuru III was placed on the royal stool that embodies the Banda state. The new incumbent survived numerous challenges to his chieftaincy from the rival family, but was ultimately brought down by his own family and their supporters because he refused to offer certain sacrifices which, as a Christian, he felt unable to do. Ironically, his selection as chief had been motivated by his worldliness – he was relatively junior among potential candidates, but was selected because he had worked for a government agency in the capital, and had broader experience of the world than his rivals. For two decades the elders tolerated his Christianity, and their destoolment of him in 1996 further complicated the chieftaincy dispute.

The destoolment of the Banda chief was an act of disembodiment, an act at once profoundly historical, material, and symbolic, and best understood in broader social, political-economic, and temporal context. The event might be read as the culmination of a struggle between tradition and modernity, continuity and change, structure and transformation, one profoundly influenced by the past and its construction. It is a struggle rooted in the ethnic, political-economic, and social history of Banda that draws on colonial and anthropological categories (i.e., tradition) to advance claims to power in the postcolonial state. It is a local struggle, but one that involves the state through periodic police or military intervention and court hearings. It is a struggle that raises questions over whether the competing historical claims of rival factions have any grounding in a lived past, or whether they represent alternative discourses whose construction in the present is shaped solely by contemporary concerns. It is a struggle involving silences, some maintained through active suppression of historical accounts, one open to either historical or anthropological analysis, but

incomplete without both. The event of destoolment provides a window into social processes that can only be understood in their temporal, historical dimensions. As Eric Wolf (1982, 1999) taught us, they are processes that must be understood in a broader geopolitical perspective that takes power into account. As recent social theorists have demonstrated, they are processes with a material dimension, a materiality that actively creates rather than passively reflects "the social," processes that involve bodies, material symbols, space, wealth, and quotidian practices (Cohn 1996; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997).

The materiality of social processes suggests that they are open to archaeological exegesis in pasts both shallow and deep, and that a fuller understanding of the social, political-economic processes that shaped contemporary societies would emerge from considering a broad array of historical traces – material, textual, and oral. Yet anthropologists and historians have typically relied on documentary and oral-historical sources in reconstructing the historical processes that have shaped postcolonial societies like Banda. These sources provide rich, if uneven, insights into the last 100 years and sometimes more. But insights into a deeper past – where the colonial gives way to the "precolonial," history to "prehistory" – are more limited. Insights into this deeper past are often shaped by notions of tradition, allowing analysts to sort among ethnographic and historic descriptions for traces of durable practices that can be excised from their temporal moorings to animate a distant past. It is in constructing this deeper past, one beyond the range of documents and oral histories, that archaeology typically plays a role. The impoverished material remains of abandoned settlements provide inanimate testimony to the daily lives of ancestors, but reveal little about the dramatic encounters like those between the Banda chief and his detractors.

The historic turn in anthropology and the anthropological turn in history promised to produce more integrated understandings of societies past and present. Yet recent literature suggests that the promise of integrated understanding is fracturing under the weight of differing visions of history, society, and culture (Dirks 1996; Spear 1994). Historians find anthropologists insufficiently historical, while anthropologists rue inattention to culture and meaning in history. Some scholars are more interested in the contemporary social, political-economic contexts in which knowledge about the past is produced than in a lived past. In many circles, Foucauldian archaeology has more cachet than does archaeology done with a spade. Archaeology is thus a source of last resort, a source to turn to when the archival and oral-historical trail runs cold. Yet if social life has a profoundly material dimension, what better source to examine than the material record of human social life?

This volume represents an exploration into the theoretical and methodological issues that confront those interested in constructing visions of an African past, especially under the rubric of historical anthropology. The founding of African historical studies was marked by a commitment to multidisciplinary approaches and the use of diverse sources. Yet, as I argue in Chapter 1, unexamined epistemological legacies hampered early interdisciplinary cooperation and continue to lend distinctive shape to the historical projects of anthropologists, historians, and archaeologists in

a period of renewed multidisciplinary activity. This study is based on the premise that anthropologists, historians, and archaeologists have mutually valuable perspectives on African societies, past and present, but that efforts to draw on diverse sources often have a "pasted-together" feel about them. I write from the perspective of an archaeologist trained in an American tradition of anthropology, seeking to understand the distinctive imprint that anthropological, archaeological, and historical "ways of knowing" have on our reconstructions of Africa's past. As an archaeologist who has worked with material, oral-historical, and documentary sources, I explore the challenges and limitations of those sources through a case study of the Banda area of west central Ghana. I endeavor to create images of a lived past, of the material, social, political-economic conditions that shaped the everyday lives of Banda villagers from the period when their social fields were framed by Banda's involvement in the Niger trade (from c. AD 1300), through Banda's pacification and incorporation into the British colonial state early in this century. At the same time, however, I work to examine how the past is constructed in the present – by competing groups within Banda, and by foreign researchers – and explore its consequences in the present. Though the volume focuses explicitly on Africa, the issues confronted and the methods proposed are not peculiar to African studies. In this sense, I hope the book will resonate for those working on similar problems in different parts of the globe.

Organization of this volume

Chapter 1 briefly examines the historical roots of anthropological, historical, and archaeological approaches to Africa's past, highlighting the epistemological legacy of progressive evolutionism and structural functionalism in contemporary historical, anthropological, and archaeological studies. I argue that an unexamined legacy of now-rejected approaches continues to shape historical anthropological practice. This leads me to consider in Chapter 2 the methodological legacies of these approaches. Chapter 3 introduces the Banda case study, which I conceptualize as an interrogation of silences informed by Trouillot's (1995) discussion of power and the production of history. The chapter examines the past in the present, and the potency of history in Banda today. This view of contemporary practice provides a comparative baseline against which to construct an image of a lived past in earlier centuries based on oral-historical, documentary, and archaeological sources. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the regional and subcontinental political economy that conditioned life in Banda. Chapters 5 through 7 examine local life in historical perspective, probing the consequences of broad shifts in the subcontinental political economy for social reproduction. Chapter 5 examines local life in the context of the Niger trade, c. 1300 to 1700, and considers the contemporary saliency of archaeological sites for the minority Kuulo people. Chapter 6 examines the changing social fields of Banda villagers during the period c. 1725–1825 in the wake of growing Atlantic trade and an expanding Asante polity. Here I am concerned with ethnogenesis and daily life on the forest–savanna margins. Chapter 7 examines daily life in the period c. 1825 to 1925 when the western Volta basin was subject to considerable political-economic

upheaval as a result of wars between Asante's provinces, the reverberations of Imam Samori's jihad, and British territorial ambitions. Throughout the volume I assess the resolution of disparate source materials and explore their sometimes contradictory implications, as well as consider the processes – past and present – through which Banda history is made. The final chapter (8) reflects on the implications of this case study for a re-visioned historical anthropology that takes fuller account of the material remains of daily life.

This study draws on unpublished documents from four sources: the Ghana National Archives (GNA), Accra; the GNA, Kumasi; the Northwestern University Library; and the Public Records Office, London. Full citations appear in the list of unpublished documents found at the end of the text.

I am sending this to press almost eighteen years to the day from when I departed for the dissertation fieldwork that first took me to Banda. The research that culminated in this volume had its genesis in that fieldwork, though it took directions that I did not then anticipate. In the intervening years I have accumulated many debts, personal and intellectual, that I can only imperfectly acknowledge here.

First and foremost are my debts to the people of Banda who have tolerated my comings and goings for eighteen years. They have given generously of their time to help me and the students who have accompanied me develop an understanding of Banda life. From the men and women who took time from their farming to show us archaeological sites in 1982, to those who shared their family histories in 1986, and those who worked with us at Makala Kataa, Kuulo Kataa, and in processing archaeological materials in Banda-Ahenkro, we owe a great deal. The study that follows builds on their willingness to share their insights and labor to contribute to a project that few of them could fully envision. I am grateful to the former Omanhene of Banda, Tolɛɛ Kofi Dwuru III, and his elders for their unflagging support of the project, even at times when we disagreed over the "facts" of history. Moreover, the people of Banda-Ahenkro contributed significantly to the construction of the Banda Cultural Centre, our base of operations in Banda-Ahenkro. They supplied communal labor, helping us to complete the building that has kept a roof over our heads and we are deeply appreciative.

The Banda Research Project has been funded by a variety of agencies over the years: the British Academy (1986); the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research (1989, G5133); the National Geographic Society (1990; Grant no. 4313-90); and the National Science Foundation (1994–1997; Grant SBR-9410726). Neutron activation analysis was supported by National Science Foundation funds through the Archaeometry Laboratory at the University of Missouri Research Reactor and Sigma Xi funds awarded to Maria Cruz. Our research has been licensed through the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board. I am grateful to Ghana Museums officials for their support of our work. Two Museum staff members accompanied us to Banda in 1994: Victor Matey and Rowland (Caesar) Apentiik, then a National Serviceman with the Museum. Both contributed

substantially to our 1994 excavations. Staff at the University of Ghana have also been supportive of the Banda Research Project. Special thanks to Professor James Anquandah, whose engagement in Ghana archaeology through the very difficult years of the 1980s set an example for us all.

I am grateful to the staff of the libraries and archives who facilitated our access to the sources on which this study builds. They include librarians at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana; staff of the Ghana National Archives in Accra, Kumase, and Sunyani; of the Public Records Office, London, and librarians at the British Library, the Library of the Royal Anthropological Society (Museum of Mankind, London), and the Herskovits Library at Northwestern University.

This project builds on the work of many students. Binghamton graduate students Andrew Black (1990, 1994), Alex Caton (1995), Maria das Dores Cruz (1994), Brian Thomas (1994), Larissa Thomas (1995), and Syracuse University student Leith Smith (since 1994) each contributed immeasurably to our archaeological fieldwork and interpretation. Tim Knapp and Laurie Miroff worked as graduate assistants in our Binghamton laboratory. A number of undergraduate volunteers have assisted us in inventorying and documenting the vast quantities of archaeological materials from our excavations: Maura Cahill, Brian Crandall, Diane DeMartino, Susan DeLeonardo, Krista Feichtinger, Michael Flynn, Samantha Guilday, Rebecca Stollman, Mia VanDeMark, and Chuck Wilke. Thanks to all for their enthusiastic participation.

I am grateful to colleagues who contributed to this project, knowingly or unknowingly. Peter Stahl analyzed the animal bones from our 1989, 1994, and 1995 excavations. Christopher DeCorse examined the imported artifacts from Makala Kataa. Merrick Posnansky shared information about Begho that has helped me understand its relationship with Banda. Leonard Crossland shared knowledge of Begho ceramics. Susan Pollock commented on iterations of writing that found their way into this volume. Through the course of many seminars and conferences, students and colleagues at Binghamton and other institutions challenged me to think more clearly. Finally, Rob Mann and Paul Reckner undertook close readings of the manuscript, as did several anonymous reviewers. I am grateful to them all.

I reserve the largest debt to last. Banda and its history has loomed large in the life of my family for close to two decades. My husband, Peter Stahl, has been unflagging in his support of this work, and his influence as a sounding board for ideas is reflected throughout. His thoughtful advice has sustained my confidence and pointed the way out of more than one dead end. He has taken on the role of mom and dad during my repeated absences from the home front, offering support that many women never experience. It seems insufficient to say that, without him, the research that sustains this study would not have been possible. The lives of my daughters, Christina and Emma, have also been shaped by Banda history. For the periods of absence and the moments of distraction when I was here, I apologize. But know that you've sustained me throughout and there is no greater joy in my life than you.