7-1970

Review of Phillip D. Curtin, *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of Slave Trade*

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**Abstract**
It has long been evident that folklore research in literate societies cannot rely exclusively on oral tradition but must incorporate data found in written sources as well. Now, indirectly, Phillip Curtin illustrates the applicability of the same methodological principle to folkloristic investigation in traditionally nonliterate societies.

**Disciplines**
African History | African Languages and Societies | Cultural History | Folklore | Near and Middle Eastern Studies | Oral History

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The results make good reading but perpetuate the misleading idea of the "savage innocent." There are many current Anglo-American oral traditions about Eskimos, for example, wife-trading jokes. *Shadows from the Singing House* is an interesting example of how such appealing items come to seem believable.

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It has long been evident that folklore research in literate societies cannot rely exclusively on oral tradition but must incorporate data found in written sources as well. Now, indirectly, Philip Curtin illustrates the applicability of the same methodological principle to folkloristic investigation in traditionally nonliterate societies. *Africa Remembered* is a collection of ten personal narratives which present the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Atlantic slave trade from an African perspective. These texts were either written down by freed and educated West African slaves and travelers or told by them to some interested scholars, missionaries, or writers. The narratives were culled from primary sources and prefaced, edited, and annotated by specialists in the histories of the respective West African countries.

In spite of the fact that the main purpose of this anthology is to serve research in African history, indirectly these narratives provide fragmentary but valuable eighteenth and nineteenth-century accounts of West African songs, music, and dances. One narrator, Olaudah Equiano, who later became a sailor, even strikes a note of a comparative nature when he points out the similarity between Ibo and Balkan dances (p. 72). Although the amount of actual folklore material in this important book is rather limited, the documents point to potential sources for the study of folklore in nonliterate societies in general and West African cultures in particular.

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