



African Archaeology at the Crossroads

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I am both excited and honored to take over as editor in chief of *African Archaeological Review* from my predecessor, Professor Akin Ogundiran, who has steered the journal brilliantly for the past 5 years. Under his masterful leadership, assisted by the talented outgoing Associate Editor Cameron Gokee, *AAR* has maintained its position as the primary venue for disseminating the latest archaeological research from across the continent and has expanded its influence into a wide range of public facing venues. Together, incoming Associate Editor Anneke Janzen and I will work hard to continue this important legacy. Reflecting on where we stand as a field and *AAR*'s role in it, the metaphor of the *crossroads* comes to mind. In many parts of Africa and the African Diaspora, crossroads represent liminal spaces with important symbolic and spiritual meanings. Indeed, crossroads represent thresholds, where people and ancestors, the living and the dead, co-exist. Crossroads are thus simultaneously sites of communication and opportunity and places of unpredictability and danger, requiring particular attention and care. I believe that African archaeological heritage, in both senses, also stands at a crossroads, and that *AAR* can continue to serve as our primary guide for navigating the dynamic landscape of African archaeological research well into the future.

African archaeological sites are endangered by a variety of imminent threats, and archaeological research is absolutely critical for mitigating their impacts. Across the continent, rising investment in urban development and mineralogical exploration has expanded exponentially in recent decades, resulting in the rapid destruction of yet to be discovered archaeological sites. Outbreaks of political conflict and civil strife in countries such as Ethiopia, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Sudan, among others, have also resulted in the accidental and intentional destruction of archaeological sites of unparalleled value to both local stakeholders and the international community at large. Overworked and underfunded heritage professionals on the ground struggle to mitigate such acts of destruction, and it will probably be decades before the full extent of the damage from conflicts can be assessed.

Additionally, human-induced climate change is rapidly impacting heritage sites and the communities in which they are located across the continent. As the Earth warms, forests retreat, deserts expand, and sea levels rise. Along coasts and in climate stressed regions, archaeological sites are increasingly threatened with destruction, either from aggressively shifting ecosystems, or from resulting military conflict and/or looting by community members seeking economic security in insecure times. Climate change in stressed regions is also resulting in the dislocation of contemporary communities from their ancestral

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lands, creating serious ruptures between communities and sites of cultural heritage and memory.

Despite these challenges, African archaeology has never had so much potential to illuminate humanity's vibrant historical experience across Africa, and the work published in *AAR* in recent years represents the highest quality, most impactful research our field has to offer. As archaeologists, we have all been asked the question by an incredulous student or family member, "is there anything left to discover?" Research across the continent proves the answer is a resounding "Yes!".

For example, recent research in Ethiopia and Eritrea has radically expanded what we know about settlement patterns and subsistence practices in Pre-Aksumitic civilization, and recent surveys and excavations in the Democratic Republic of Congo have begun to answer burning questions about the expansion of farming communities into Iron Age Central Africa. New research deploying the latest scientific methods in stable isotope analysis, aDNA and ZooMS, is transforming our understanding of pastoralism and its spread across the continent, and new work at iconic archaeological sites such as Kilwa and Ile-Ife is challenging old assumptions about the origins and composition of cities across sub-Saharan Africa. These are just a few examples of the exciting archaeological work happening across the continent. There are many, many more.

Such work is integrating archaeological questions and methods in new and exciting ways, bringing the best of modern scientific laboratory and field methods into productive conversation with sophisticated archaeological theory, oral historical research methods, and a commitment to community engagement. Simultaneously, archaeological programs have expanded rapidly in universities across the continent in recent years. As mutually beneficial partnerships between European, American, and African academic

institutions become the rule rather than the exception, African students are increasingly engaged in field research and actively participate at the meetings of the Pan African Archaeological Association and the Society of African Archaeologists. Collectively, such shifts in perspective and approach represent a watershed moment in Africanist archaeology. It is my goal that the pages of *AAR* will continue to serve as fertile ground for the dissemination of this new and exciting research in the coming years.

As I step into the role of Editor-in-Chief of *African Archaeological Review*, I am invigorated by the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead for our field. Turning back to the metaphor of the crossroads, African archaeology indeed stands at a pivotal juncture. African cultural heritage faces imminent threats, from rapid urban development and political conflict to the looming specter of climate change. Yet, amidst these challenges, there is good reason for hope and determination. From the rapid expansion in our knowledge of African archaeological landscapes, to the adoption of new methods and the expansion of university programs across the continent, African archaeology is truly booming. Working together, the pages of *AAR* will continue to guide us through the rapidly changing landscape of Africanist archaeological research. With unwavering dedication, I promise that *AAR* will continue to showcase the most impactful research on Africa's archaeological heritage, research that pushes the boundaries of discovery across the continent and promotes engaged scholarship that transcends borders. See you at the crossroads.

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