Manuel Barcia


Manuel Barcia examines the interconnections between Cuba, Bahia, and the interior of the Bight of Benin during the first several decades of the nineteenth century. He demonstrates that the background of enslaved Africans in war influenced their perceptions of slavery and their responses in the Americas. This refreshing study provides a view of Atlantic history that privileges Africa. Too often the study of the Americas during the era of slavery has not situated historical developments within the changing landscape of both sides of the Atlantic, often despite claims to the contrary. Barcia shows how events in Oyo and the further interior (specifically the impact of jihād) had a rippling impact that not only changed Yorubaland and indeed the Central Sudan but also set the course of events in Cuba and Brazil in the period before the mid-nineteenth century. This admirable study contributes to a revisionist approach to the study of the Atlantic world by merging the details of slave resistance in Cuba and Brazil with revolutionary transformations in West Africa.

Barcia uses historical sources with considerable ingenuity in showing how events in West Africa were linked to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. He clearly demonstrates how the major historical events of the Sokoto jihād and the corresponding impact on Oyo after 1817 were related to the many uprisings and conspiracies in both Cuba and Bahia. His chronology of events reveals how the various “Hausa” uprisings in Bahia, the jihād centered at Ilorin, uprisings in Cuba, and the Male revolt of 1835 were entangled. While it is possible to dispute Barcia’s interpretation of specific events and developments, such as the progression of political instability in Oyo, the overall comparative framework is convincing. In the case of Oyo, Barcia accepts the interpretation that constitutional troubles from the late eighteenth century through the first two decades of the nineteenth foreshadowed the dramatic transformations of the jihād and collapse of Oyo after 1817. This reconstruction is consistent with much of the scholarship, but it can still be questioned whether or not Oyo was experiencing steady decline before 1817. It can be argued that the Muslim uprising at Ilorin in 1817 marked a dramatic change that was tied to external factors, namely the jihad that consolidated the Sokoto Caliphate after 1804. Nonetheless, Barcia demonstrates an excellent command of the scholarly literature and many of the primary sources on which that literature is based for both sides of the Atlantic. This is no small achievement because critics of Atlantic history, including myself, have charged that scholars whose primary research is focused in the Americas have not applied...
the same rigorous academic standards in absorbing the research on African history into their analyses.

Inevitably in a work of synthesis, there are mistakes and sometimes curious interpretations. For example, the division of the Sokoto Caliphate into eastern and western sections occurred on the death of Uthman dan Fodio in 1817, not in 1811 (p. 28). Barcia’s identification of Atagara is confused, at one point suggesting that the town referred to Borno (p. 48) and then by implication with the Egbado corridor to the sea at Porto Novo and Badagry. He relies on a corrupt translation of Muhammad Bello’s *Infāq al-maysūr fī tā’rikh bilād al-Takrūr*, which accounts for the quotation that there was “a line of trade with Christians between Yarba and Atagara” (p. 44), which did not refer only to the Egbado corridor through Oyo but also to trade via Idah on the Niger River. Barcia refers to a manuscript map in the University of South Carolina Libraries, but in fact the map was published in 1826, included in Bovill’s edition of the Borno Mission, and discussed at length in Lockhart and Lovejoy’s edition of Clapperton’s second expedition, where the identification of Atagara with Idah is established.¹ The confusion over Atagara will continue until the history of Idah becomes better known. Furthermore, the Hausa states were not converted to Islam through the *jihād*, as Barcia claims (p. 68), since they had already been Muslim for centuries before the eruption of *jihād* in 1804. Other minor mistakes could be cited. James Frederick Schön’s *Magana Hausa*, which is based on the autobiography of Dorogu Kwage Adamu, initially written in Hausa, was published in 1885, not 1906.

Barcia’s discussion of the details of the slave trade, the trajectories of individual ships, the conditions of marketing, and the subsequent fate of individual Africans from the Bight of Benin draws on rich documentation, including the Registers of Liberated Africans in the Havana Courts of Mixed Commission. His documentation confirms the preponderance of males in the arriving slave population and the fact that most of these men were either involved in war or enslaved during war. His brilliant insight, which he documents convincingly, is that the uprisings and revolts in Cuba and Bahia were perceived as “war” and not as the acts of resistance that dominate historical interpretation. The Africans were engaged in warfare that continued the confrontations of *jihād* and the collapse of Oyo in West Africa and drew on the experiences of combatants and victims of those campaigns. Slave masters, governments at the time,