As a collection of conference papers (presented at the University of West Indies, Mona, October 18-19, 1991), Maroon Heritage is intended to reinforce a dialogue that is at once intercultural and interdisciplinary. Two Jamaican Maroon Chiefs, Colonel Harris from Moore Town and former Colonel Wright from Accompong, participated with contributions on various aspects of the history and culture of their respective communities. This dialogue between scholars and their subjects of study fulfilled a declared aim of the symposium, underlined by its organizer and the editor of the volume, E. Kofi Agorsah: "I pay special tribute to our Maroon Chiefs whose contributions make this volume the only one of its kind in Maroon heritage studies, for here we are with the researched and the researcher engaged in a dialogue with a common goal" (p. xviii).

For those who could not attend the conference, however, much of the dialogue seems to have been lost on the way from the spoken to the written (published) word. With such an intention as that paraphrased above, one could expect at least a summary of key and/or critical issues in the discussions during the conference; that is missing in this volume. Furthermore, most of the individual contributions to the volume fall short of including such scientific exchange in their conclusions. It therefore rests largely on readers to use their imagination to reconstruct possible discourses or dialogues. Not an easy task, since the participants of the conference come from such different walks of life and academic disciplines - from archaeology, ethnomusicology, ethnography, literature, literary criticism, language studies, journalism, and history to the roles of the Maroon chief and Jamaican police officer involved in archaeological enterprises. As a result, the modes of expression, styles of writing, and theoretical and methodological approaches applied in the volume are extremely varied. So are the topics,
which deal with most of the Maroon societies in the Americas even though the Jamaican Maroons provide the main focus.

However, the somewhat fragmentary approach does have an advantage insofar as it allows an idea of the numerous different perspectives taken in Maroon studies. Considering the abundance of historiographical work based on written documents and consequently, as Barry Higman points out (p. vii), relying on the views taken by the oppressor rather than the oppressed, a further swing to additional and alternative methods is quite welcome.

The editor provides an introduction to the historical background of the Maroon heritage. His general treatise on the "New World" and African foundations of Maroon societies establishes a starting point for the search for cultural continuities. Agorsah describes the prehistoric period in the Caribbean as well as in Africa to set the frame for his archaeological findings in two early Maroon settlements in Jamaica (Nanny Town and Old Accompong Town). His main goal is to trace social contact and cultural continuities between the first Maroons and the indigenous "Amerindian" population on the one hand and the West African systems on the other.

In an essay entitled "The True Traditions of my Ancestors," Colonel C.L.G. Harris of Moore Town presents parts of his historical and cultural knowledge. In the best tradition of a Maroon historian, Colonel Harris allows glimpses into his repertoire without selling out his total symbolic capital. Comparable to processes of oral tradition analyzed by Richard Price in his book on First-Time knowledge among the Saramaka Maroons (1983), the author transmits valuable bits and pieces on such issues as Maroon lands, social organization, law, family names and naming, military affairs, religion, language, economics, medicine, and technology. He makes sure to hint at further aspects of the expositions still kept in his mental possession. His colleague Martin Luther Wright, former Colonel of the Accompong Maroons, gives an overview of central aspects of the history and cultural practice of his community.

Kenneth Bilby grounds the oral historical traditions of the eastern Maroons within the context of Jamaican culture. He discusses the historical consciousness of Maroons, and their language, music, and dance as a distinct variant of Jamaican culture. With the extraordinary insight he has repeatedly proven in his numerous publications on Maroon cultures in Jamaica and Suriname, Bilby arrived at a conclusion that highlights the cultural links between Maroons and (other)
Jamaicans: "Maroons today do remain culturally distinct, though in a way that is thoroughly Jamaican" (p. 83). Another contribution deals with the general issue of Jamaican Maroon history. Carey Robinson's "Maroons and Rebels (A Dilemma)" offers little new information and the author abstains from giving any evidence for his remarks. Similarly Albert Edwards looks into the strategies of Maroon warfare; his presentation is likewise not based on sufficient source material. In contrast Joe Pereira sketches the Maroon heritage in Mexico in a well-documented paper. Equally well documented is the short characterization and comparison of different Maroon musical features in Jamaica and Suriname written by Marjorie Whylie and Maureen Warner-Lewis.

Two articles focus on Nanny, the Maroon leader who was declared a Jamaican National Hero in 1977, but from different angles. Carolyn Cooper deals with the symbolic meaning of Nanny for what she terms "resistance science" in Caribbean literature, particularly in Vic Reid's novel, Nanny Town. A provocative hypothesis in connection with Nanny is presented by Kamau Brathwaite, one of the founders of the Caribbean Artists Movement. Brathwaite strongly argues that Nanny of the Maroons in fact held the socio-political position of a Queen Mother comparable to an Ohemmaa in Asante. Referring to the problem of archival certification, Brathwaite bases his claim on an Afrocentric notion of cultural continuity. However his inference makes by far the most sense of all the available sources on Nanny. A structural comparison with historical (and recent) political systems in what is today Ghana strongly supports his arguments or at least promises to reveal further support.

Overall, the book attains its goal of promoting the interdisciplinary out-look on Maroon cultures. It certainly enriches the knowledge of scholars and researchers interested in this particular subject. And, most important, it poses valuable questions encouraging further research at the interface of archaeology, history, and cultural and political anthropology.

REFERENCE


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