



EDITORIAL

I am writing this editorial about a month before the Society of Africanist Archaeologists conference at Cambridge University. For the second time, SAFA meets in Europe, giving our far flung members a chance to interact half way in between Africa and North America. On behalf of SAFA, I would like to thank David Phillipson in advance for hosting this meeting.

This issue has a series of articles on archaeology and ethnoarchaeology. Pradines reports on French research at the Swahili town of Gedi, and LaViolette about similar work on Pemba. While these areas have long been known to archaeologists, new discoveries are continuing to be made. Initial survey or test excavations are reported by Ohinata for Swaziland, Alabi for coastal Nigeria and Petit for Benin. Chris DeCorse, our host at the last SAFA conference in Syracuse, and his colleagues report on continuing historical research into the nature of the interaction of Europeans and Africans along the coast of Ghana.

The 11th Congress of the PanAfrican Association of Prehistory and Related Studies will be held at the Palais de Congrès, Bamako, Mali, from February 7 to 12, 2001. As I mentioned in the last issue, registration fees will be \$100 US for ordinary members, \$50 for students, and \$50 for accompanying persons. The registration fee is payable after the circulation of the second announcement. Registration entitles one to full participation in the conference, and a discount on the cost of the published proceedings. A number of post congress tours are being organized. An initial registration form is available from Dr. Tereba Togola, Direction Nationale des Arts et de la Culture, B.P. 91, Bamako, Mali (phone 223-22-33-82; Fax 223-21-67-86). Basic information is available on SAFA's website (<http://www.rz.uni-frankfurt.de/~bornu/safa/safa.htm>).

The African past gets mentioned in the news quite often. Usually, its in relation to spectacular new discoveries. But the palaeoanthropologists still have a lead over all the rest of us, as any find of fossil human remains still has mass appeal. Most of this information is still presented as human

origins, rather than being specifically African. Current models about the African origin of modern *Homo sapiens*, however, continue to remind us of how inter-related our history really was.

In another sense, the African past was well represented on television in the USA earlier this year. The Public Broadcasting System (PBS) broadcast Henry Louis Gates' six part series titled "Wonders of the African World", a co-production with the BBC. While it is more of a travelogue and personal account than an archaeological or historical tour, it did show the monumental art and architecture of a variety of places on the continent. These were advertised as "lost civilizations", remnants of an African past which had been deliberately suppressed by generations of colonial governments and scholars. Surprisingly little mention was made of the amount of archaeological research that has been done, and continues to be done, at such places, mostly by our members and their colleagues. Even fewer archaeologists made it on to the screen. Among those that did, I noted Martin Hall from University of Cape Town and Kevin MacDonald from the Institute of Archaeology, University of London.

Many Africanist historians and other researchers had objections to much of Gates' narration. As a African American, he is (overly?) concerned with race and the legacy of slavery; as a result, his construction of African people, society and history is intensely personal. As a East African specialist, I found his conclusion about the Swahili unbelievable. Noting the tendency of his local informants to stress their Arab and Persian ancestry, he wonders when they will begin to think of themselves as black and African! But the program had one positive effect; it served to whet the appetite of those of us who are planning to go to Mali for the first time to attend the Pan African Congress. A wealth of history and archaeology awaits.