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Article:

Iles, L. orcid.org/0000-0003-4113-5844 (2016) Review of Chirikure, S.2015. Metals in past societies: a global perspective on indigenous African metallurgy. *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa*, 51 (2). pp. 284-286. ISSN 0067-270X

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0067270X.2015.1133871>

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Review of Chirikure, S. 2015. *Metals in Past Societies: a global perspective on indigenous African metallurgy*. New York: Springer

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December 2015

The study of past metallurgy in an African context has much to offer global archaeology, particularly in terms of highlighting the potential diversity in socio-cultural and technological approaches to metal production and use. Although this is well known to those already working in the continent, the value of African archaeometallurgy is not necessarily acknowledged by those whose research is based elsewhere in the world. In light of this, this compact but comprehensive book on African metallurgy is the first of a Springer series that aims to boost the visibility of African archaeology and emphasise its relevance to broader archaeological debates. Whether this volume will reach new audiences remains to be seen, but it nonetheless provides a thorough introduction to African metallurgy and a useful review of the theoretical approaches that underpin past and current research. Its publication follows hot on the heels of another Springer sourcebook on archaeometallurgy – *Archaeometallurgy in Global Perspective* (Roberts and Thornton 2014) – which, although broader in its coverage, also contains chapters that address African archaeometallurgy in a global context. However, the more focused format of the Chirikure volume under review here enables a more in-depth consideration of the African data, making it a valuable companion to the Roberts and Thornton publication. It will surely prove to be a welcome accompaniment to the teaching of African metallurgy, as well as archaeometallurgy in general.

The scope of this book is extensive: it presents and discusses data on a wide spectrum of metals – gold, iron, and copper and its alloys – and covers a vast chronological and geographical range. Given the book's limitations in length it does not provide an exhaustive summary or bibliography of research carried out in the continent – such a short text couldn't hope to – yet it presents an excellent overview of major research projects and findings throughout sub-Saharan Africa and north Africa. Relevant research undertaken elsewhere in the world is introduced where appropriate, emphasising the significance of seeking a global perspective to the interpretation of metallurgical remains.

Chirikure begins by providing a general introduction to the growth of archaeometallurgical research in Africa and elsewhere, and the theoretical debates that have influenced the development of the discipline. This is supplemented with a discussion of the data sources generally available to archaeometallurgists and other researchers, including a brief summary of the various analytical techniques that are currently used in metallurgical research.

Concluding the introductory section of the book is an overview of the trajectory of metal production and use in Africa. The core of the book is then given up to three chapters that provide an outline of the different technologies involved in ore procurement, metal production and metal-working respectively, each discussed with an emphasis on the conceptual transformation of natural substances into cultural artefacts. These chapters seamlessly combine the scientific and social aspects of metal production and metalworking in a way that is perfectly matched to the subject matter. The final two chapters present the main theses of the text and the central arguments of the author, picking up threads that had been introduced in earlier chapters. In particular, Chirikure encourages us to consider in more detail the socio-cultural role of metals in past African societies, and the socio-political drivers of the adoption and spread of metal production technologies and its consequences. The diversity of African metallurgical technologies is stressed, as is the vital role that they played in local and regional histories, embedded as they were within trade networks stretching into Eurasia and across the Indian Ocean.

As the title suggests, the social aspects of metallurgy feature as the primary concern of the book, and the particular contexts and demands of African metal-producing and metal-using populations are emphasised throughout. Topics such as gender and caste distinctions in relation to metalworking are – as would be expected – covered in detail. However, this strong socio-cultural focus means that other elements of African metallurgy have consequently been given less attention. Notable omissions include the metallurgy of non-agricultural societies, the environmental aspects of African metallurgy, and a discussion of the processes of site formation and artefact preservation that have influenced the available datasets. Some of the regional summaries also fall a little short, with some areas only very briefly covered. The concise nature of the volume means that it has not been possible to fully engage with all the intricacies of the debates and arguments that are introduced.

Nonetheless, these comments are far outweighed by the main strength of the book, which lies in prompting the reader to consider new ways of thinking about African metallurgy in a global framework. Running through the text are repeated cautions of the tendency to transpose modern (and often Western) understandings of technology and metallurgy onto past societies, and warnings that often there is a lack of evidence to address the big questions of African metallurgy. Yet Chirikure goes beyond these commonly stated caveats to pose original and stimulating questions with which to focus new research and expand the relevance of the study of past African metallurgy. One such problem presented to the reader is to consider why the trajectory of metallurgical development in much of Africa differs from other regions such as the Middle East or southeast Asia. We are challenged to explore what makes Africa different from

other regions of the world – what aspects of its technological past are shared and which are unique. The final chapter asks how we can make those working in other regions aware of the contribution that African metallurgy can make to global archaeology. This book seems to be a very positive step towards ensuring that this occurs, by eloquently presenting the numerous ways in which African archaeometallurgy has influenced archaeological theory to date, and highlighting those arenas upon which it can make an impact in the future.

Roberts, B. and Thornton, C. (eds.) *Archaeometallurgy in Global Perspective: methods and syntheses*. New York: Springer