Tom Earle, **Kate J. P. Lowe**. *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 417 S. $110.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-81582-6.

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Published on H-Atlantic (March, 2006)
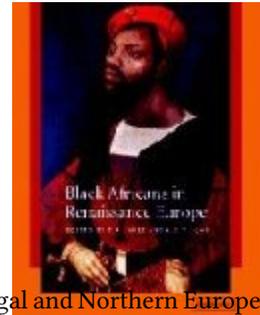
T. F. Earle and K. J. P. Lowe's edited volume, *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe,* the product of a 2001 conference at St. Peter's College, Oxford, joins several recent studies of race and race relations in Renaissance Europe.[1] Sixteen essays, divided into four sections, depict black Africans in Europe as pirates, land-owners, literati, members of urban confraternities, galley slaves, craftsmen and in many other socio-economic roles that illuminate the "variety and complexity of black African life in Europe between 1440 and 1600" (p. 3). This collection of essays reconstructs the way in which black Africans navigated white Europeans' often conflicting notions (inherited from classical and medieval texts) about the meanings of racial difference and the significance of Africa. Those who approach this book from a base in the study of England's engagement with the Atlantic world will be surprised to learn of the invisibility of black Africans in Continental scholarship and will be grateful for this effort to address that absence. This book's complex picture of black life across Europe makes it an important read not only for Renaissance scholars, but for all scholars of the early Atlantic world.

Black Africans includes four sections, entitled "Conceptualizing Black Africans," "Real and Symbolic Black Africans at Court," "The Practicalities of Enslavement and Emancipation," and "Black Africans with European Identities and Profiles." Echoing the older literature on English and French perspectives on Africa, this volume starts off by assessing Renaissance European stereotypes about black Africans.[2] Beginning with K. J. P. Lowe's essay, which is a standard account of racial ideas across Europe that draws predominantly on travelogues, the subsequent essays in part 1 consider particular aspects of racial imagery or race relations in France (Jean Michel Massing), Spain (Jeremy Lawrance), England (Anu Korhonen), and Portugal and Northern Europe (Jorge Fonseca). For early modern scholars of race, the cultural "stereotypes" delineated will not be particularly surprising–blackness was associated with the devil, with things foul and base, with lasciviousness and idleness, etc. These broad generalizations provide the interpretive fram? work for subsequent essays, though one of the strengths of this collection is that the individual essays that follow take into account the heterogeneity of European responses to racial difference and their evolution over time. As Didier Lahon's essay, reveals, for instance, Portuguese responses to black Africans shifted between 1450 and 1600, from an initial ideology of assimilation to a policy of separation, as the church and state faced pressure from slave owners who increasingly articulated notions of the purity of blood.

The three essays that make up part 2 (Paul H. D. Kaplan, Annemarie Jordan, Lorenz Seelig) examine the black presence in Italian and Portuguese courts. A recurring theme in this section is the elite's pursuit of slaves (or representations of them) as part of a larger desire to fabricate an image of imperial power. With the exception of Lorenz Seelig's essay, which investigates the origin and significance of a spectacular Nuremberg drinking vessel made in the idealized shape of a Moor's head, the essays in this section focus particularly on slave mistresses (Isabella d'Este in Kaplan's essay and Catherine of Austria in Jordan's) and the way in which their association with slaves contributed to their self-presentation as strong female figures with ambitions that extended beyond their countries' borders.

Part 3 (Sergio Tognetti, Debra Blumenthal, Aurelia Martin Casares, Didier Lahon, Nelson H. Minnich) draws on account books, legal documents, chronicles, and other

sources to reconstruct the emergence of a black African slave trade to Europe during the second half of the fifteenth century; the integration of free, freed, and enslaved black Africans into a range of economic and social spheres; the formation of black confraternities in Valencia, Lisbon, Granada, and Florence (many of which actively sought manumission of fellow slaves); and black Africans' mixed receptions in European societies, ranging from alienation to initial ideologies of assimilation. As Sergio Tognetti reminds us, a diverse slave population drawn from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean existed before the introduction of sub-Saharan Africans in the mid-fifteenth century. From the perspective of early modern England, these essays suggest a distinctive history for southern Europe, where slaves were not defined as non-European as early or as clearly as David Eltis has suggested they were in Northern Europe. Together, these five provocative essays illuminate the domestic effects of the Iberian shift towards Atlantic exploration and trade, provide a history to the confraternities that developed in Latin America, test ideologies of conversion against the opportunities for black Africans to participate in religious orders, and offer a new and important context to Bartolomé de Las Casas's acceptance of black slavery. One would very much like to know how perceptions of these internal communities changed with the rise of slavery in the Americas, and what happened to the seemingly significant number of slaves who managed to find their ways back to sub-Saharan Africa.

As part 4 turns to the emergence of "European identities" among black Africans, some of the problems of researching this subject become clear–two out of three of the essays examine figures who may or may not be black African. John K. Brackett's essay on the Florentine Alessandro de' Medici uses literary and visual material to argue, rather convincingly, that he had some black African ancestry, perhaps from his mother, only to argue that it was his peasant background, rather than his race, that mattered for his political career. Given the association of blackness with poverty, one wonders whether or not his color might have still played a role as a marker of social status that conflicted with his nobility. T. F. Earle's essay on the Portuguese Alfonso Álvarez bases its analysis on the assumption that the playwright Álvarez was one and the same as the mulatto poet of the same name. Álvarez's uncertain identity has consequences for how we understand his critique of the Jewish presence in Portugal. If he was mulatto, it may reflect one subordinated group targeting another; if not, it could simply be run-of-the-mill Portuguese anti-Semitism. The Spaniard

Juan Latino, author of an epic poem celebrating Spain's battle against the Ottoman Empire, is the only certain black African amongst this illustrious group. Baltasar Fra-Molinero wonderfully shows how Latino constructed a European identity by playing on his sense of difference: speaking from the position of the Ethiopian apostle Philip, Latino asserted an ancestral Christianity that offers an early example of black African pride. As all of the essays in this volume demonstrate, the evidence of black African life abounds, but the authors' honest engagement with the problems of securely identifying black Africans in Europe underscores the difficulties of this particular research subject.

One of the most interesting aspects of Renaissance attitudes toward black Africans is the way in which individual attributes, such as nobility or piety, as well as relationships (sexual or familial) with white Europeans could mediate ethnic differences. This point reminds us that collective stereotypes often break down at the individual level while re-emphasizing one of the striking points made in numerous essays–that blackness was often associated with slavery, but that the qualities attributed to black skin were shaped by the overwhelming impoverishment of black Africans within European societies. Future research might yield a picture of the developing identities among the enslaved and impoverished majority, by following the clues embedded in the emphasis of these essays upon the ability of slaves and freed blacks to use the courts, to lay claim to their right to freedom, to intermarry with Europeans, and to resist or embrace conversion.

One of the book's notable strengths is its interdisciplinary and comparative approach to the subject, which enriches the contexts and diversifies the sources from which this composite picture of black Africans in Europe emerges. This volume clearly builds upon the scholarship on representations of black Africans in Renaissance literature and art, such as *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (1979), Erickson and Hulse's *Early Modern Visual Culture* (2000), and (for England) Kim F. Hall's *Things of Darkness* (1995). Collectively, the essays situate their source material in a broad array of contexts, including geopolitical movements, the histories of art and literature, the history of slavery, and social history. Individually, however, the essays tend to focus on one or two of these contexts. The effect is that one tends to wish that these essays built on one another–for the contexts provided in one essay to fill in for the absence of that context in another. While this effect is obviously a strength for an edited volume, the one downside is that distinc-

tions between European societies–between, say, Spain and Italy–have a tendency to disappear, despite several authors' efforts to root their discussions of black experiences and white perceptions of black Africans in specific historical and geographical contexts. Including a series of maps might have helped to clarify the geographical relationship among the places discussed in the different essays. Further delineation of the distinct histories of European countries, or especially of regions, both in terms of their imperial aspirations and in terms of the relationships among these different societies, will deepen our understanding of cultural context. The lack of color in a book about race is also unfortunate, though the heavy price of the hardback volume ($110.00) would have been even more prohibitive if color images had been included.

Black Africans is a valuable book for those who work on early Atlantic history. As scholars of Africa have long thought of the Atlantic slave trade as an extension of the Eastern, trans-Saharan trade in slaves, these early encounters with black Africans in Europe ought to be understood as an early stage of the development of New World societies. One hopes not only for more research on Renaissance Europe, but also studies of the relationship between these internal communities of black Africans in Europe and those that developed abroad.

Notes

[1]. See, for instance, Peter Erickson and Clark Hulse, eds., *Early Modern Visual Culture: Representation, Race, and Empire in Renaissance Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); Stuart B. Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Catherine M. S. Alexander and Stanley Wells, eds., *Shakespeare and Race* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995); and Joyce Green MacDonald, ed., *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in the Renaissance* (Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997).

[2]. Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964); Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); and William B. Cohen, _The French Encounter with Africans: White Response to Blacks, 1530-1880 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980).

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Citation: Catherine Molineux. Review of Earle, Tom; Lowe, Kate J. P., *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe.* H-Atlantic, H-Net Reviews. March, 2006.

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