

## Cultural Landscape Heritage in Sub-Saharan Africa

Dumbarton Oaks Garden and Landscape Studies symposium, May 10-11, 2013

In 40 years of symposia, the Garden and Landscape Studies program at Dumbarton Oaks has addressed a nearly global range of cultures, epochs, and subjects. But one region is conspicuously absent: sub-Saharan Africa. This omission is particularly glaring, given that the subcontinent is one of the oldest inhabited landscapes on earth, with a staggering range of geographies, cultures, histories, and patterns of settlement.

Dumbarton Oaks is planning a symposium for May 10-11, 2013, that will begin to address this gap in scholarship. The symposium will focus particularly on cultural landscape heritage: what we know—or think we know—of pre-colonial landscapes; how they were read and misread in the colonial era; and how they are being reinterpreted in the present for various purposes, including conservation, economic development, education, and the creation of national identity. The subcontinent offers a rich array of places for study by landscape scholars and designers: World Heritage sites such as Great Zimbabwe, or Djenne and Timbuktu in Mali; massive earthworks and palace grounds in Benin; anthropogenic forests and forest shrines; contested wildlife parks and ecological reserves; village compounds and seemingly chaotic contemporary urban settlements; and official and unofficial memorials to the struggles against colonialism. The characteristics and complexities of such sites are only now beginning to be understood in the context of landscape studies. The symposium will aim to approach topics and sites diachronically and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, bridging the ethnographic, archaeological, sociological, and art historical; the pre-colonial and the post-colonial. The particular goal of the symposium will be to provide foundations for understanding the histories of designed landscapes in the region, and to explore the ways that localized practices—traditional settlement patterns, ritual, or specialized environmental knowledge, for instance—are framed and reframed in historical and contemporary cultural discourses. The intention is to focus more on the landscape as shaped and inhabited by Africans than on the spaces of the colonial era; to the extent that landscapes in the region have been studied, they are generally the parks, botanical gardens, urban modernization and rural development schemes of colonial governments. That said, contemporary sites can only be understood as the expression of complex histories that include colonialism. The hope is both that the symposium might advance sub-Saharan Africa as a subject of landscape studies and challenge some of the cultural assumptions that have excluded the region thus far, and that it might present work in progress and serve as an impetus to new research in the field.

Confirmed speakers include: Suzanne Blier, Harvard University; Lazare Eloundou, UNESCO World Heritage Center; Joost Fontein, University of Edinburgh; Jeremy Foster, Cornell University; Grey Gundaker, William and Mary; Charlotte Joy, University of London; Paul Lane, University of York; Neil Norman, William and Mary; Akin Ogundiran, UNC Charlotte; Ikem Okoye, University of Delaware; Innocent Pikirayi, University of Pretoria; Maano Ramutsindela, University of Cape Town; Gemma Rodriguez, UCLA; and Michael Sheridan, Middlebury College.