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Mark Hinchman, *Portrait of an Island: The Architecture and Material Culture of Gorée, Sénégal, 1758-1837*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015. xvii+ 396 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$70.00 (hb). ISBN 978-0-8032-5413-8.

Review by Kalala Ngalamulume, Bryn Mawr College.

In *Portrait of an Island*, Mark Hinchman explores the history of the built environment of Gorée, one of the two main trading posts in the Senegambian region, over the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. His “portrait” of Gorée focuses on the architectural history of the trading post, the identity formation of the people who lived there—Europeans and Africans (free blacks, mixed race, and domestic and export slaves); men and women; scientists and artists—, and the physical objects. He argues that the emergence of a hybrid architecture, the people (the inhabitants), and the physical objects form “three groups of artifacts that articulate the rise of capitalism, globalism, and an African modernity” (p. 4).

Using European maritime and cadastral maps of Gorée, the first chapter analyzes the architectural transformation of the island’s landscape in the eighteenth century from a European fort and three African villages to a “monolithic urban entity of masonry buildings” (p. 17), showing the regional African origins of Goréen architecture (p. 39). Chapter two investigates the architecture of Gorée (buildings and representations of buildings) and distinguishes three waves, or types, of construction. Hinchman demonstrates that the architecture in the eighteenth century developed “without architects” because those who were responsible for the buildings’ forms were the “end users, critics, politicians, builders, and craftsmen” (p. 86). In contrast, the evidence from the early nineteenth century suggests that “there were draftsmen or architects in Senegal who produced carefully drawn house plans” (p. 112). The evidence used in these two chapters comes mainly from the secondary literature.

The central issue discussed in the book—“how art and architecture were experienced” (p. 115)—, is discussed in chapters three, four, and five. Based on individual case studies drawn from the archives and secondary sources, Hinchman underlines the key role that houses and civic buildings played in shaping the multivalent identities of urban dwellers (the elite, occupational groups, and servants and slaves). He explains that different people experienced art and architecture differently. For example, possessing a piece of property was a symbol of social status and security for members of the elite group (the European traders, soldiers, and scientists and their artists; the African-born women and mixed-race African women known as *signares*). The decisions made by the African women concerning spatial segregation by gender and class within a house were informed by West African practices. Similarly, French domestic architecture also separated men from women (pp. 132-33). Hinchman shows that a Goréen house also served as a workplace for various occupational groups (p. 155).

In the final chapter, Hinchman examines household objects and their usage. He suggests that the objects constitute forms of representation of their owners’ social status, socio-economic conditions, lifestyles, and patterns of consumption, as well as the kind of global economy in which they participated.

The book is a well-researched, well-documented, and well-argued piece of scholarship. One of its strengths is the constant dialogue between primary and secondary sources and between the past and the present, and the use of microhistory. Hinchman makes an important contribution to the literature on the history of art and architecture, the history of the built environment, and slavery and the slave trade in West Africa, in general, and in Senegal, in particular.

Portrait of an Island is intended for Africanists, undergraduate and graduate students, and the general public.

Kalala Ngalamulume
Bryn Mawr College
kngalamu@brynmawr.edu

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