



# NEAA News

Vol. 35 No. 2  
WINTER 2013

---

The NEAA News is a quarterly publication of the  
Northeastern Anthropology Association

---

## NEAA 53rd Annual Meeting

March 1-2, 2013

University of Maryland, College Park, MD

*Abstract and Session submission deadline is February 1, 2013*

### In this issue...

First Sabbatical and Old Fieldwork	Allan Dawson	Page 1
Message from the Editor	Jessica Skolnikoff	Page 2
A Message from the Conference Organizers	Paul Shackel	Page 2
NEAA Bulletin	Anne Gavin	Page 3
Conference Highlights		Page 4

### First Sabbatical and Old Fieldwork: Revisiting Ancestor Veneration in West Africa

Allan C. Dawson, Department of Anthropology, Drew University, Madison, NJ, 07940

adawson@drew.edu

The gaze of many junior scholars as they arrive at their first sabbatical is often cast in one of two directions. For many, it is towards the future and the excitement of a new project, perhaps a new field site and a new language, that promises a reinvigoration of one's research agenda after years of toiling on a monograph or articles borne of one's dissertation and of learning the pitfalls and opportunities of the first tenure-track position. However, I find myself—as perhaps others do—looking to the past and to projects engaged before the work undertaken in the doctorate. This work, frequently contained within conference papers, masters theses or perhaps even undergraduate honors theses was often the first piece of serious ethnographic scholarship that many of us undertook but necessarily had to take a back seat to the dissertation and to the years afterwards as we found our footing in academia. Now however, with the bounty of the junior, pre-tenure sabbatical—a wonderful benefit of my position at Drew University and a rarity at colleges of similar size—stretching out in front of me and most of the revisions on my Brazil-focused monograph complete and ready to head off to the publisher, I intend to return to the ethnographic terroir that first excited me about anthropological fieldwork, the West African Sahel.

*Continued on page 3*

## Message from the Editor

Welcome to 2013!

I hope everyone had a nice holiday season. I was fortunate to be in New Hampshire over the holidays and experienced a winter wonderland.

I am excited about the upcoming meetings at the University of Maryland. I have loved the DC/Maryland area for many years, especially since my graduate school days. And I know the Executive Board has long wanted to have a meeting on the more southern end of our NEAA borders. They have planned a terrific program and I am sure it will be a great conference.

Faculty and practitioners: please encourage all anthropology students to attend the NEAA conference. It is a perfect venue for first time conference attendees along with seasoned veterans.

If you are a student who has attended the NEAAs before, please bring a friend or two along with you this time so they can see what a friendly conference it is.

Although the trip to Maryland may seem far to some, please remember that sometime soon the conference will be in your backyard.

I hope to see everyone March 1-2, 2013 at the University of Maryland.

Jess Skolnikoff  
Editor-in-Chief

## Message from the Conference Organizers

Hello All,

Registration for the 2013 Northeastern Anthropological Association meetings is now open. The meetings will be held on March 1 and 2 at the Stamp Student Union at the University of Maryland in College Park. We already have a great preliminary schedule, with a pre-conference tour at the Smithsonian collection center on February 28, Dorothy Lippert with an address on March 1, and Erve Chambers with a keynote address at the conference banquet on March 2. We have had several requests to show films, and we will designate a room for this purpose – so please let us know if you have authored a video and would like to show it at the conference. The meeting is a great opportunity to meet other professionals in the region, and it is also a great venue for students to present their research. Here is the link to the conference and registration information <http://www.neaa.org/conference/>.

Please let me or Mike Roller ([mroller@umd.edu](mailto:mroller@umd.edu)) know if you have any questions.

Best, Paul A. Shackel [pshackel@umd.edu](mailto:pshackel@umd.edu)

The NEAA is seeking proposals for future volumes of the NEAA Bulletin. If you are interested in serving as Guest Editor, please submit your proposal to Series Editor, Anne M. Galvin. Proposals and other correspondence should be sent to [bulletin@neaa.org](mailto:bulletin@neaa.org) no later than March 10, 2013.

This is a wonderful CV building opportunity for a graduate student or early career professional anthropologist, but might also serve as an exceptional creative opportunity for a senior scholar seeking a flexible forum for experimental research interests.

The Bulletin is a peer-reviewed series published regularly by the Northeastern Anthropological Association. The Bulletin is designed to promote and disseminate original, high quality scholarship by anthropologists situated in the Northeastern United States. The series is intended for professional anthropologists and students and publishes research covering the four fields of anthropology and applied work. The Bulletin will be available through the NEAA website and as a printed edition.

The proposed volume may coincide with a panel theme that has been proposed for the forthcoming annual meeting, or may simply cover a topic of interest within the 4 fields or applied anthropological research.

The current volume, *Borders, Margins, and Passages*, is now available for purchase through Amazon.com. The issue can also be viewed online at [http://neaa.org/publications/bulletin/NEAA\\_12\\_13\\_2.pdf](http://neaa.org/publications/bulletin/NEAA_12_13_2.pdf)

*Dawson continued from page 1*

How then to re-engage something that has lingered in one's teaching repertoire, that has been part of the odd tangential conference paper or lecture but hasn't been the focus of one's research and intellectual attention for some time? The key, I hope, will be through a theoretical revitalization of both old and new ethnographic data in light of new and previously unexplored literature.

Ethnographic considerations of the complex of earth shrines and ancestor veneration on the West African Sahel have largely dwelt upon the importance that these nexus points of veneration hold for ethnic identity, chieftaincy, traditional authority, and narratives of settlement and village formation. Earth shrines in West Africa—indeed throughout much of sub-Saharan Africa where ancestor veneration takes many forms—are cultural signposts that help us understand and read the ethnic, territorial, and social lay of the land. Shrines serve as physical manifestations of a societal claim to a village, a region, or a traditional territory. In this way, ethnicity can be seen as symbolically emanating from these points on the land, for they come to represent, both figuratively and literally, a community's 'roots' in the land they work and live upon.

The way in which anthropologists examine shrines in West Africa has remained surprisingly consistent over the past few decades and we can trace this pattern to Robin Horton's seminal 1971 work, *Stateless Societies in the History of West Africa*, which lays out the approach for understanding migration histories and settlement patterns in the Voltaic region of West Africa. Here, disjunctive forms of migration hold

sway as different ethnic groups lay claim to land and force other groups into the margins of the unpopulated savannah along a shifting African frontier. The way in which ownership and rights to cultivate are asserted is through the founding of a village's earth shrine—often a prominent feature of the landscape: a baobab tree, a crocodile pond, or rock escarpment. As such, the narrative history and traditions of orality attached to this point on the landscape have come to be one of the principal ways in which ethnographers have interrogated village histories and patterns of land usage.

On the whole, any examination of how the earth shrine actually articulates with constructions of landscape, environment, and indeed, the earth, have remained secondary to how the shrine serves as a point of narrative and symbolic focus for a complex of social processes from ethnic identity articulation to kinship, lineage, and chieftaincy disputes. In my sabbatical fieldwork I hope to start connecting these still very important symbolic domains within a broader framework that includes the place of the earth shrine in negotiating changing ideas about landscape and environment during a crucial time in Sahel. In the past, as populations migrate and found new settlements, earth shrines and consequently, villages, across the West African Sahel have been abandoned or fallen into disuse repeatedly. Often this has been due to pressure from outside populations, slave-raiding, or religious pressure from conquest chiefdoms. However, new changes are taking place that necessitate an inclusion of the insights of symbolic and political ecology to our understanding of how humans relate to the earth that they use, dwell upon and mark out with sacred sites such as shrines.

The effects of climate change on the African continent are well documented. While the countries of the northern hemisphere debate policies to combat changes in the planet's climate, the countries of sub-Saharan Africa are already experiencing significant climatic shifts. These changes are most profound in the semi-arid Sahelian and Sudanic belts that skirt the southern edge of the Sahara. Here, the boundaries of where rainfall agriculture and cattle pastoralism are possible continue to edge southwards and so, consequently, do populations. This region is also a crucial area of interface and cleavage between some of Sub-Saharan Africa's most troubled countries and regions. One need only glance along this belt—Mali, Nigeria, Chad, Eritrea, and Somalia—to quickly understand the consequences of significant changes to environment, climate, and landscape for cultivation, politics, economy, and even domains of social life such as ethnicity and religion. It is here, along this historical zone of interaction and social change, where climate change is having profound effects upon the ability of small agricultural communities—such as those found in the eastern portion of Ghana's Northern Region—to cultivate staple crops such as yams and millet. The purpose of this new research then, is to re-contextualize my past work on earth and ancestor veneration in northern Ghana in light of significant changes on the land; for as populations leave territory that is no longer suitable for tuber cultivation, they are also abandoning key loci of religious veneration and the concomitant histories of identity, authority, and settlement that are embedded within this symbolic complex.

### Some 2013 Conference Highlights

- **Modest Registration fees, discounted for students** (includes Conference Fee and NEAA membership dues; Presenters must register in advance and be NEAA members)
- **Book exhibit room**

- **Preconference Tour, Thursday, February 28, 2013, 2:00-4:00 PM Smithsonian Museum Support Center Tour**
- Pre-conference behind-the-scenes tour of the facilities at the Smithsonian Museum Support Center in Suitland. The tour will be limited to the first *20 people* to reserve a place. Contact Mike Roller to register before February 10. ([mroller@umd.edu](mailto:mroller@umd.edu))
- **Conference location provides convenient access to historical sites in Prince Georges County, Maryland and Washington, DC.** See the following sites for great ideas of places to visit: <http://www.anacostiatrains.org/>, <http://www.nps.gov/anac/index.htm> and <http://washington.org/>.

#### **Friday, March 1 - Saturday, March 2: Papers, Symposia and Poster Sessions**

- **March 1, 2013, 4:00 Cash bar and reception**
- **March 1, 2013, 5:00 First Keynote address from Dorothy Lippert**  
Dr. Dorothy Lippert is currently a Case Officer in the Repatriation Office of the National Museum of Natural History at the Smithsonian Institution. In her current position, she responds to repatriation requests from Indian tribes for human remains and sacred material. She is Choctaw, currently serves on the Executive of the World Archaeological Congress and is a past member of the Board of Directors for the Society for American Archaeology. She was recently appointed to the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.
- **March 2, 2013, 5:00 Banquet at Busboys and Poets.**
- **Keynote address from Erve Chambers, "If It Isn't Real Can It Still Be The Past?"**  
Erve recently took his family on a five month road trip around the USA, visiting as many tourism towns and tourist traps as they could fit in. His object was to have fun and experience some of the ways in which ideas of heritage and the past have come to shape contemporary tourism initiatives.

*Dr. Erve Chambers is a Professor of the Anthropology Department at the University of Maryland, College Park, where he has taught since 1981. He has conducted field research in Thailand, Mexico, and in several parts of the Unites States. Over the years, Erve's research has evolved from a general interest in regional and urban development to more specific work in tourism and environmental and heritage resource management. He currently has a strong interest in community-based tourism initiatives and in the public delineation, appropriation, and use of heritage resources. Dr. Chambers' current research and theoretical activities focus on issues related to sustainable tourism development.*

#### **Session and Paper Abstracts:**

Session, paper, and poster abstracts will be accepted via this website through February 1, 2013. Papers should be 20 min long (max). College Park will provide Windows laptops and digital projectors for all sessions. Please make sure your presentation is Windows and Microsoft Powerpoint compatible.

If you wish to submit a paper or poster abstract, please [login \(or create a new user account\)](#) and [submit your abstract here](#).

If you have organized a session, please [login \(or create a new user account\)](#), [submit your session abstract here](#) first, and then [submit all related papers and discussants here](#). *Note, if you are invited to be part of an organized session, your session organizer is responsible for submitting your abstract.*

When you are logged in, you can view your submissions by clicking on the "[My Submissions](#)" link in the red menu on the left.

## Conference Registration

Online conference registration [is now open](#) and accepting online payments. If you wish to pay by check or pay at the door, you may still register online and select "pay later." All presenters are required to register in advance (by the Feb. 1 abstract deadline) to secure their position in the program. Other attendees may register at the door. [Register now by clicking here](#).

NEAA conference website <http://www.neaa.org/conference/>



**NEAA NEWS VOLUME 35 NUMBER 1**

**Editor-in-Chief:** Jessica Skolnikoff (Roger Williams University) [jskolnikoff@rwu.edu](mailto:jskolnikoff@rwu.edu)

**Copy Editor:** Alan Hersker (SUNY Potsdam) [herskeal@potsteam.edu](mailto:herskeal@potsteam.edu)

**Contributing Editors**

Physical Anthropology: Barrett Brenton, (St. John's University) [brentonb@stjohns.edu](mailto:brentonb@stjohns.edu)

Cultural Anthropology: Marc Boglioli (Drew University) [mbogliol@drew.edu](mailto:mbogliol@drew.edu)

Archaeology: Alan Leveillee (The Public Archaeology Laboratory, Inc) [aleveillee@palinc.com](mailto:aleveillee@palinc.com)

Linguistics: Denice Szanfran (SUNY Buffalo) [dszafran@buffalo.edu](mailto:dszafran@buffalo.edu)

Applied Anthropology: Marybeth MacPhee (Roger Williams University) [mmacphee@rwu.edu](mailto:mmacphee@rwu.edu)

**President:** Don Pollock (SUNY Buffalo) [dpollock@buffalo.edu](mailto:dpollock@buffalo.edu)

**President-Elect:** Alan Hersker (SUNY Potsdam) [herskeal@potsteam.edu](mailto:herskeal@potsteam.edu)

**Past President:** Pierre Morenon, (Rhode Island College) [pmorenon@ric.edu](mailto:pmorenon@ric.edu)

**Secretary:** Anne Galvin (St. John's University) [galvina@stjohns.edu](mailto:galvina@stjohns.edu)

**Treasurer:** Barrett Brenton, (St. John's University) [brentonb@stjohns.edu](mailto:brentonb@stjohns.edu)

**Membership Coordinator:** Matthew Trevett-Smith (University of Richmond) [trevettsmith@gmail.com](mailto:trevettsmith@gmail.com)

**Archivist:** H. Martin Wobst (UMass-Amherst) [wobst@anthro.umass.edu](mailto:wobst@anthro.umass.edu)

**Film and Video Consultant:** Robert Gordon (University of Vermont) [rgordon@zoo.uvm.edu](mailto:rgordon@zoo.uvm.edu)

**Grad Student Rep (2011-2013):** OPEN

**Grad Student Rep (2010-2012):** Jen Faux (SUNY Buffalo) [jlfaux@buffalo.edu](mailto:jlfaux@buffalo.edu)

**Undergraduate Rep (2011-2013):** Chelsea Talcott (Bridgewater State University) [ctalcott@student.bridgew.edu](mailto:ctalcott@student.bridgew.edu)

**Undergraduate Rep (2010-2012):** Matthew Phillips (SUNY Potsdam) [phillims190@potsteam.edu](mailto:phillims190@potsteam.edu)

**Website Coordinator:** Angela Labrador (UMass Amherst) [alabra@anthro.umass.edu](mailto:alabra@anthro.umass.edu)

## YOUR INVITATION TO JOIN THE NEAA!!

TO JOIN THE NEAA, visit <http://www.neaa.org> and click on "membership" or you can SEND this form and your membership dues to:

Barrett Brenton, Treasurer, NEAA  
St. John Hall, Room 444G  
Department of Sociology & Anthropology  
Queens Campus (Main Campus)  
St. John's University  
8000 Utopia Parkway  
Queens, New York 11439

**Dues:** \$25.00 for full-time professionals; \$15.00 for students, adjuncts or sessionals.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Affiliation \_\_\_\_\_

Permanent Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

email \_\_\_\_\_

Please check if this is a renewal \_\_\_\_\_ and/or change of address \_\_\_\_\_

*MEMBERS RECEIVE 4 ISSUES OF THE NEAA NEWSLETTER PER YEAR*

