

Still, these are small drawbacks that do not detract from the author's significant achievement—one which makes an important contribution to African and colonial history, art history, and technology studies.

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Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong, ed. *Themes in West Africa's History*. Athens: Ohio University Press / Oxford: James Currey / Accra: Woeli Publishing Services, 2006. xii + 323 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$49.95. Cloth. \$24.95. Paper.

This edited volume is an exciting new West African history textbook that could be used effectively at both undergraduate and graduate levels. As its editor makes clear in the introduction, however, *Themes in West Africa's History* is not intended to be a substitute for a conventional historical textbook: it does not provide a narrative history of events. Nor is it organized, like Boahen's classic (though now out of date) *Topics in West African History* (Longman 1986 [1966]), around major episodes in West African history such as the trans-Saharan trade, Islamization, the slave trade, and colonialism. Rather, the chapters in this volume focus on themes—poverty, social inequality, environment and disease, religious transformation—that are particularly relevant to current conditions in the region; indeed, the authors of this volume share an interest in contributing to a “history of development” that speaks to Africa's contemporary problems and challenges. Thus while *Themes* does not solve the problem of out-of-print or out-of-date textbooks, it does potentially serve as a useful substitute, eliminating the need for a supplementary readings that, given copyright laws, can be costly.

The volume comprises an introduction and thirteen essays—including contributions from linguists, political scientists, economists, and anthropologists, as well as historians—organized into three parts. The essays are well-written, reflect up-to-date scholarship, and conclude with useful recommended reading lists. Part 1 provides an excellent introduction to the most significant methodological approaches in the reconstruction of African history. Susan McIntosh summarizes the archaeological and climatological evidence for the prehistory of West Africa from roughly 10,000 BP; underlining the indigenous sources of food production, urbanism, and occupational specialization, she puts to rest earlier theories attributing West African social innovation and complexity to external stimulus. James Webb's chapter on ecology and culture complements McIntosh's discussion, focusing on human adaptations to the environment through the period of increased external contact brought on by the trans-Saharan and Atlantic trades, colonialism, and postcolonial globalization. M. E. Kropp Dakubu provides a particularly lucid and accessible overview of historical and comparative linguistics, contact studies, and the importance of language studies

for historians. And David Conrad suggests how the content and form of Manding oral traditions reveal important cultural values, as well as a sense of history at odds with the European historiographical tradition; his chapter might be productively assigned alongside *The Epic of Sunjata*, a staple of West African history courses.

Part 2 brings together six very different essays that nonetheless emphasize common themes such as the historical importance of indigenous cultural categories and thought. In this section Patrick Manning's overview of slavery and the slave trade from 1450 to 1930 is complemented by Ismail Rashid's reflections on how, more broadly, kinship, class, and caste have produced social inequality throughout West African history. In a chapter on precolonial religion, Pashington Obeng argues convincingly against assumptions that African religions have always been nonmissionary in nature or restricted to narrow ethnic and geographic boundaries; to make his case he focuses on the transethnic mobility of medicine shrines and the "evangelist" zeal of their devotees. By means of an Igbo case study, Ogbu U. Kalu explores indigenous understandings of poverty, arguing that culturally specific knowledge is necessary to combat poverty's effects. Chapters on disease (Akyeampong) and urbanization (Eckert) round out this section.

Part 3 comprises three chapters focused on postcolonial West Africa. In the first of these, Celestin Monga, a World Bank economist, provides a fascinating assessment of both the origins and impact of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) on West African economies, and the multiple "narratives" (of justification and dissent) that have emerged in their wake. Monga does a masterful job of leading the reader through the relevant economic theory and precolonial and colonial economic history of the region before analyzing the merits of the arguments for and against the theory and practice of SAPs. In an essay on ethnicity, conflict, and the state, Cyril K. Daddieh explores some of the disastrous political consequences of these neoliberal economic reforms. In the final chapter Brian Larkin and Birgit Meyer break new ground in highlighting the unlikely similarities between the two major religious revitalization movements of the last four decades in West Africa: evangelical Pentecostalism and Islamic reform. Their insightful analysis of the new "social imaginaries" created by Pentecostalism in Ghana and Islamic reform movements in northern Nigeria emphasizes the ways in which these religions borrow from and mimic each other, "while at the same time stereotyping and objectifying the other in order to generate the energy for 'crusades' or 'jihads'" (287).

In sum, *Themes in West African History* constitutes a valuable addition to the teaching repertoires of those of us teaching West African history at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Students will find the scholarship sophisticated but accessible, and admirably topical in the historical issues engaged.

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