

editorial points. Overall, *From Slavery to Aid* stands as a shining example of research on this region, for historians and social scientists alike. Laced with subtle humour throughout, this book is, moreover, a joy to read.

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KNOWLEDGE, POWER, AND PERFORMANCE IN IFÁ DIVINATION

Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance.

Edited by Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland O. Abiodun.

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. Pp. xvi + 371. \$95.00, hardback (ISBN: 978-0-253-01882-3); \$40.00, paperback (ISBN: 978-0-253-01890-8).

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Key Words: ritual, religion, diaspora, West Africa.

Ifá is a system of knowledge accessed by diviners in Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and parts of the African diaspora in order to diagnose, explain, or predict elements of the present and the future. The *babalawo* (diviner) casts a chain, palm nuts, or cowry shells onto an ornate divination tray and interprets the binary code produced by their markings. Sixteen nuts or shells potentially can produce 256 different outcomes, each associated with a particular set of stories, poems, herbal remedies, and recommended sacrifices linked with an action and outcome in the deep past. The *babalawo* not only recites these, but also interprets the narratives for the present moment on behalf of the client, who may or may not take the proffered advice.

Ifá Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance offers an excellent introduction for readers new to this topic, as well as intriguing contributions for specialists. Twenty-four chapters plus an introduction by the editors, Jacob Olupona and Rowland Abiodun, together with Niyi Afolabi, explore the interpretation of *Ifá* orature, theoretical questions dealing with *Ifá* as knowledge, *Ifá*'s variations over time and space, and the system's sacred art. Significantly, the contributions consider *Ifá* in various parts of Yorubaland as well as its development in the Americas, where it spread through the slave trade.

Though the volume is intended for scholars in a range of disciplines as well as *Ifá* practitioners, historians will likely be most interested in contributions that refer to the past political and social contexts in which the *Ifá* corpus was produced and changed. Wándé Abimbólá's chapter, for instance, addresses historical transformations in *Ifá* oral texts and ritual practices in their African heartland as well as in the African diaspora, where fully qualified practitioners and some traditional materials were not available. Adélékè Adéèkò's valuable chapter treats the *Ifá odù* as a system of writing — which generates not phonemes but stories — and along the way offers a comprehensible explication of the divination process and the intellectual work of the *babalawo* as well as the agency of the client. In a fascinating methodological intervention, Andrew Apter describes how the *Ifá* verses invoked by the patterns in the divination tray themselves represent accounts of *Ifá* consultations from the past. A current consultation, then, tells the client how a

certain individual in the past was advised through a particular text, what action she or he took after the consultation, and how the outcome may serve as a lesson for the present. Thus *Ifá* represents a living archive of Yoruba historiography.

Several chapters situate *Ifá* within the context of well-known Yoruba historical and cultural elements. In a comparative chapter treating Dagbon, Oyo, and Kongo, Wyatt MacGaffey draws on existing scholarship to argue that dealings with spirits mirror transactions with Big Men in Yoruba societies. In considering the references to Islamic beliefs in *Ifá* orature, Olupona shows how *Ifá* was part of an active tradition of Yoruba selective incorporation of potentially challenging foreign elements. Similarly, Abiodun describes diviners as explorers, who gain insight from travel and exploration.

In a section of the volume on '*Ifá* in the Afro-Atlantic', seven case studies explore the divination system's past and present in Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, and the United States. In a historically rich contribution, Ysamur M. Flores-Peña explains that the Atlantic slave trade separated *babalawo* in Africa from practitioners in the new world, causing devotees in Cuba to create a more accessible form of divination known as *dilogún* through a process of creolization. M. Ajisebo McElwaine Abimbola argues that one of the key differences between *Ifá* in new and old worlds was the acceptance of female priests in the latter but not the former — a change she attributes to the influence of white supremacy, slavery, and colonialism. In a brilliant analysis focused on the Olotunji Village in South Carolina, Kamari Maxine Clarke considers the topics treated through contemporary divination: not only personal concerns, but also sociopolitical developments at national and international levels, wherein the relevant history is not so much slavery as it is globalization and capitalist inequality.

As to be expected with an interdisciplinary, edited volume with a range of contributions, some appeal more than others. Sections on the philosophy or artistic components of *Ifá* may well stimulate specialists in their relevant fields of inquiry, just as historians will likely most appreciate the historical chapters. Taken together, the essays offer a forceful argument that *Ifá* constitutes a major epistemology and worldview, commensurate with foundational religious texts such as the Bible, the Qur'an, and others, with key elements that are textual, artistic, and performative.

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THE CONTINGENCIES OF YORUBA MASQUERADING

Masquerading Politics: Kinship, Gender, and Ethnicity in a Yoruba Town.

By John Thabiti Willis.

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Key Words: Nigeria, gender, ritual, women, social, political.

John Thabiti Willis's monograph demonstrates that Yoruba masquerades can be apprehended as important historical actors in their own right. Animated by the spirit of powerful