

de Almada, Lemos Coelho, and Jesuit documents for which P. E. H. Hair undertook so much preparatory work.

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## A HIGHLY FOCUSED COLLECTION ON A WEST AFRICAN DEITY

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*Sàngó in Africa and the African Diaspora*. Edited by JOEL E. TISHKEN, TÓYÌN FÁLQOLÁ, and AKÍNTÚNDÉÍ AKÍNYEMÍ. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009. Pp. ix + 365. £59/\$75 hardback (ISBN 978-0-253-35336-8); £18.99/\$27.95 paperback (ISBN 978-0-253-22094-3).

KEY WORDS: West Africa, diaspora, popular culture, religion.

Sàngó is a West African deity whose qualities are vividly captured in praise poetry as the god ‘who dangles a touch of fire while dancing’ (p. 35). Like other deities of the complex pantheons from this part of the world, he represents many elements, but it is his symbolic relationship to lightning and thunder that gives him his most identifiable persona. He is an intriguing supernatural figure – hot tempered, lustful, yet socially compassionate – and in this volume he receives the careful attention of sixteen scholars and devotee-practitioners. Sàngó is the fourth West African deity in recent years to be the subject of a separate collection of essays; three treat Yorùbá deities and one a deity from the Tallensi area of northern Ghana. A fifth is underway. For those who want to expand their knowledge of African religion, this is an important addition to a growing series of probing studies.

There is much to be appreciated in this volume. It is a deep examination that, because it concentrates exclusively on a single deity, can provide exhaustive and penetrating insights into the nature of African religious experience that far exceed the usual overview of an historic religious system. The editors remind us in an informative introduction that a highly focused collection of this nature need not be bound to one time or place, but can treat both the past and present manifestations of a supernatural figure, as well as his local and transnational qualities. To these ends, they have divided the book into four sections that concentrate on definitions, popular culture, diaspora, and belief. In each section the authors explore multiple forms of expression, including *oríkì* (praise poetry), film, theater, sculpture, proverbs, myth, ritual paraphernalia, drumming, contemporary literature, and theological discourse.

Akíntúndé Akínyemí appropriately opens the volume with an overview of the meanings of the deity and suggests that Sàngó’s prominent position in the Yorùbá pantheon of gods and goddesses arose out of his well-known relationship to one of the early rulers of the vast precolonial empire of the Kingdom of Ọ̀yọ̀. This aspect of his identity was not eroded with the decline of Ọ̀yọ̀ or by the ideologies of Islam and Christianity that eclipsed preceding forms of authority. Nor did his eminence fade in the great diaspora, when devotees were separated from the wellsprings of their ritual lives.

His success in crossing the Atlantic is described by Luis Nicolau Parés in an insightful essay that examines the role of Xangô in the Afro-Brazilian contexts of Bahia and Maranhão. Here his royal attributes are emphasized by priestesses who use them to lay claim to elevated positions in their social interactions with other ritual authorities of Candomblé communities. Parés displays a keen understanding

of Yorùbá history and tradition. He relies on this background knowledge to demonstrate how, through Sàngó, political and religious realms were inextricably linked to kingship in pre-colonial Òyó and how, today, they remain entwined in Brazil, where Xangô's power, rather than being an integral part of the state, is a central element in binding together a ritually based communal hierarchy.

The volume is additionally valuable in that the contributors show that Sàngó is an active element in present-day life by concentrating on the ways in which his image is widely disseminated among the general public. Dúrótoyè Adélékè's study of Sàngó in contemporary video is outstanding in this respect. The filmic enactment of Sàngó (and formerly in traveling theatrical performances) accounts for his recognition as a significant figure primarily because visual media have the capacity to capture more fully than other forms of representation the nuanced aspects of a supernatural figure's unique characteristics and historical meanings. Videographers more than other producers of popular culture are able to touch on the multiple aspects of the deity's existence that, as Adélékè puts it, keep Sàngó's spirit visible in the minds of the public.

Contemporary depictions of Sàngó mark his transformation, for some people, from sacred to mythological figure in much the same way that classical Mediterranean deities have become embedded in the secular cultural fabric of the Western world. Yet devotee Ernesto Pichardo informs us, in a conversation with Michael Atwood Mason in the last section of the book, that for many other people Sàngó continues to play a spiritually significant role – and does so on both sides of the Atlantic. Pichardo is the ritual leader whose suit against the City of Hialeah, Florida, was successfully argued before the US Supreme Court in 1993 and led to constitutional protections for *òrìṣà* worshippers. His success in winning the case no doubt rested on his ability, as shown in this essay, to translate the existential preoccupations of the Sàngó community into the universal language of human experience.

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## THE STORY OF A MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN WEST AFRICA

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*Islam and Social Change in French West Africa: History of an Emancipatory Community.* By SEAN HANRETTA. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009. Pp xiii + 311. £48/\$80 hardback (ISBN 978-0-521-89971-0).

KEY WORDS: Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, gender, historiography, intellectual, Islam.

The first half of the twentieth century was a period of dramatic socioeconomic change in West Africa. European colonial rule, which sounded the death knell for slavery, witnessed profound transformations that affected the social stratification of West African societies and provided a number of subaltern groups with opportunities for emancipation. Some of those groups, as shown by Jean Loup Amselle's work on Wahhabism in Mali, and the reviewer's study on *Izala* in Northern Nigeria, reinterpreted various Islamic doctrines to articulate an ideology of emancipation from oppressive social orders. As suggested by the title of Hanretta's book, a similar argument is made in his study.