

like *Shari'a in Songhay*, this recent publication is much more forthcoming in describing the role of Islamic law as it applied to governance in Africa. What is missing is the viewpoint of the Jews themselves. Despite the availability of Jewish sources, it is not until the book's conclusion that Hunwick cites "a Jewish writer" (66) who writes of the brutal acts committed against the Tlemcen Jews. This exclusion seems to counter the author's goal of expanding his earlier research "so as to be able to produce and publish a whole book on the Jewish community of the Saharan oasis of Touat" (vii). Instead, the emphasis is on as-Maghili, and the very people he is researching are hardly ever referenced.

Nevertheless, this is not to deny Hunwick's continued agility and acumen in translating and interpreting Arabic sources, thereby securing his preeminent position as a scholar of African history; his latest book represents another important contribution. Studies of Africa's history should seek to widen the scope in order to reveal the diversity of its inhabitants and the complexity of their histories and religious identities. Hunwick's own fastidious efforts in interpreting the multitude of Muslim scholars debating Islamic law and the rationalization behind the downfall of the Tamantit community is a shining example of how this axiom could be applied to the history of African Jews.

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Colleen E. Kriger. *Cloth in West African History*. Lanham, Md.: AltaMira Press, 2006. xxii + 214 pp. Photographs. Maps. Charts. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$80.00. Cloth. \$32.95. Paper.

Cloth is a paradoxical raw material for the reconstruction of history. When used as clothing, its most common manifestation, cloth is highly visible, often revealing cultural values and social strata as well as aesthetic preferences. It is also highly mobile, leaving a record of travel, trade, and gift contacts. These factors make it a rich source of historical information.

Yet cloth also presents particular challenges as a primary document for historical research. Cloth itself is ephemeral; often used until it wears out, it rarely survives in archaeological contexts. Descriptions of cloth and clothing in travelers' accounts or trade records are often colored by the observers' own expectations and by the close link between dress and perceptions of morality (or immorality). Colleen E. Kriger undertakes an ambitious task in employing cloth and clothing as the raw material for her investigation of complex histories in West Africa, centered on the lower Niger River region. She succeeds in demonstrating that textiles and clothing can serve as windows onto richly layered African histories.

Taking three specific textiles as her starting points, Kriger follows their

threads (to use an irresistible metaphor) to linguistic, archaeological, literary, economic, political, technological, and iconographic forms of historical evidence. She draws together these disparate sources to elucidate long histories of innovation and international exchange. The three textiles, all from Nigeria, are an elaborately woven woman's wrapper, a pair of embroidered man's trousers, and a wrapper adorned with resist-dyed patterns in indigo dye. The wrappers were collected by the author in the 1970s, and the trousers were collected in 1930. Each textile provides Kriger with a way into broad subjects, including the development of weaving technologies in the region, the interaction between local weavers and regional or transnational influences, the development of indigo resist dyeing techniques, and the impact of colonial policies on African textile production and markets. Each discussion spans chronological and geographical distances, moving from the scant yet tantalizing evidence of centuries-old textiles (beginning with the eleventh-century fabrics found in the Bandiagara region of Mali) to the adaptation of a variety of synthetic fibers and dyes in late twentieth-century Nigeria.

Kriger assembles prodigious amounts of information drawn from a range of primary and secondary sources to find connections and offer hypotheses about the development of techniques and styles. She provides tables that summarize the records of British and Dutch textile trading firms, comparisons of textile-related terminology along the West African coast, and surveys of the iconography of *adire eleko* (the indigo resist developed in and around Lagos in the early twentieth century). Through all of this detailed information, the theme that emerges most strongly—and that represents Kriger's most important contribution—is the continuity of change in these ostensibly traditional textile forms: "Textile technology was labor-intensive, but that did not mean that it was static, outmoded, or unprofitable" (178). Thus a long history of change and exchange demonstrates that indigenous textile production has not survived as a holdover, a nostalgic remnant of the past, but rather because it continues to adapt to changing markets.

The book's strength is its well-organized accumulation of data from a dizzying array of sources, drawn together to address a series of questions. Its weaknesses are few, but they merit brief mention. A book on textiles must surely call for color illustrations—here, the author is limited to verbal descriptions of the vivid colors and dramatic patterns of textiles illustrated only in muddy black-and-white images. I also yearned for a bit more detail of textile production as Kriger herself has experienced it. She herself collected two of the textiles that are the focus of the book's explorations, and she has previously published important work based on field research in Nigeria, yet the reader gets very little sense of the individuals involved in textile production. Of course, we can know little of past producers whose identities were rarely preserved along with their work, but the words and lives of more recent artists using the techniques that are the focus of Kriger's historical research might have enlivened and enriched the book.

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