RELIGION

David H. Brown. *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003. xx + 413 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $38.00. Paper.

Santería Enthroned opens in the mid-1980s as the author begins fieldwork for his dissertation by visiting a *botánica* in Union City, New Jersey. He can make no sense of the heterogeneous items displayed: It would be ethnocentric to dismiss them as "urban kitsch," he figures, but they certainly don't look African to him. It is a false start; when he visits house-temples in the region, he is at last on the right track, one that leads him to comparable venues in New York, Miami, and eventually, Havana. For years, most Sundays find him present at Middle Day celebrations in which new initiates "gorgeously dressed in regal satin clothes and pasteboard crowns appeared under grand canopied 'thrones' before 'the people'" (2). What are the stylistic origins of these thrones? An admired *costurera* insists they are purely Cuban—her godmother's *tradición* creatively extemporized. On the other hand, "Louis XV—all the Luises" serve as an inspiration for a highly regarded throne-maker. Still another expresses disapproval of all this high-falutin' garb and urges a return to African sources. Thus is a colorful investigation introduced, although readers, alas, have to wait until the second half of the book to hear the rest of the story.

Meanwhile, the concatenation of objects viewed in the *botánica* is followed by an exasperating run-down of all the theories of tradition and innovation, to say nothing of a tangle of references, stubborn metonymies, and nit-picking. Academe at its worst, one might say. Herskovits gets his comeuppance from Andrew Apter; even the Thompson school of "Black Atlantic Cultural Currents" takes a hit, as Brown validates his own performance in advocating "hard-won struggles" over "passive survivals." Somewhat indelicately he makes much of the fact that Sidney Mintz and Richard Price quote his dissertation with approval in the 1992 reprinting of their 1976 essay, "The Birth of African-American Culture."

With part 2, Brown's genius for descriptive presentation of handwork is finally allowed to arise from the clutter in which it has been mired. Here his imagination takes off on wings provided by Lydia Cabrera, Cuba's outstanding ethnofolklorist of *La Regla de Ocha.* During early phases of fieldwork in her native Havana, Cabrera accompanied two elderly priestesses, Omí Tomí and Oddedeí, to a Middle Day celebration of a newly initiated daughter of Cabrera's own tutelary *santo,* Yemayá. Was this the occasion, Brown wonders (210), when Oddedeí famously observed that "to make a *santo* is to make a king, and *kariocha* is a ceremony of kings, like those of the palace of the Obá Lucumí"? (*El Monte* 1968: 24 n.1). And where is this palace? Perhaps always virtually over there in Africa, but most reliably in the here-and-now toward which the three ladies wend their way. Only a few

more strides will suffice for them to cross the threshold beyond which a patiently rigged stage set will disclose its soaring canopy, valances, panels, and gleaming swatches of rich cloth suspended and parted to reveal the initiate costumed as her *oricha.*

Brown's leap across the Atlantic from the pseudohistorical, prototypical palace of Obakòso (aka Chango) to the local throne room communally prepared to receive a new daughter of the goddess of the sea into the Lucumí religion is followed by another happy speculation. Omí Tomí is a seamstress who had sewn imported fabrics for Lydia Cabrera's grandmother and presumably also for other privileged colonial women, as well as for statues of Catholic saints on the occasion of their feasts. Surely her needle and thread had also put together festive costumes for dignitaries of *cabildos,* auxiliary Catholic associations which painstakingly evolved into *casas de ocha,* the basic units of creolized Yoruba/Lucumí religion. A half-century later their accoutrements continue to reflect Oddedeí's visionary palace and Omí Tomí's amalgamated patterns.

A resourceful editor could have helped Brown cut the tiresome repetitions and tailor marvelous new sections like that on the *soperas,* which entails a history of fine china, traded from outposts like Staffordshire via the Canary Islands to grace the glass-faced cabinets of colonial Cuban hostesses that served as elegant ancestors of the storied *canastilleros* upon whose shelves containers of *Oricha*-power sleep.

Throughout the book, one must note, craftsmanship is tenderly admired. Hidden in an endnote (352 n.40) is the admission from Brown himself that he put in time as a beader in a number of shops. But whenever he finds an engaging narrative voice like the one describing a visit to La Porcelana, his gaze soon falters as his inner-docent launches into habitual info-mode. In another edition, much of this material might well be relegated to endnotes or an appendix so that in the residual space Brown might recall for us how both host and guest felt and fared—including descriptions of the little cups of coffee graciously offered and sipped, and the long awkward silences.

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Daniel J. Schroeter. *The Sultan's Jew: Morocco and the Sephardi World.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002. xxii + 240 pp. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Bibliography. Index. $55.00. Cloth.

There is already a vast literature devoted to the Jewish experience in the Arab and Islamic worlds, including translated primary sources, scholarly studies of various communities, biographies and autobiographies, surveys of Jewish-Arab and Jewish-Muslim relations, literary and linguistic studies, gender studies, legal studies, studies of modernization and political devel-