"Oadeçalâ/Walda Sa'ālā" (II, 384) is dated to "late 15th century–1661", actually a bit too long a period.

Some doubts arise concerning the editors' linguistic competence in Ge'ez and Amharic, a preliminary requirement for any serious investigation of the history of Ethiopia, as it would be expected of a scholar in Italian history to master Italian, and Latin as well. In the introduction we read (I, 48): "he [Páez] translated *ambaçâ bêit*, *zefân bêit* and *farâz bêit* correctly, but his transcription of the latter two items is syntactically incorrect, since the determinative should be indicated by an affix represented by the first order character of the Ethiopic syllabary (*fidal*) or the letter 'a' in Latin transcription: *zefana bét* and *farāza bét*". Yet Páez's translation is correct ("house of the lion", "house of the bed", and "house of the horse" respectively), as is his transcription. The expressions are in Amharic, where no *–a*-status construct is needed, whereas the purportedly correct forms "*zefana bét*" and "*farāza bét*" would have a completely different meaning ("bed of the house", "horse of the house"). Also problematic are the remarks on theological vocabulary (II, 386–7): Ge'ez *bāḥrey*, "pearl", also "essence, nature", is curiously translated with "breath"; morevoer *śegā* "flesh, body" (and so *bāḥreya śegā*, not *bāḥreya ṣegā*, means "nature of the body, bodily nature" rather than "human nature"), *ṣaggā* "grace", *tawāḥedo* "union", are mis-spellt, thus engendering in the reader a sense of embarrassed distrust.

The editors have put at the disposal of scholars Páez's work in a universally accessible language, and some critical remarks are not intended to diminish the quality of their contribution. This translation is destined to remain for decades the standard reference edition of Páez's *História*.

Alessandro Bausi
University of Hamburg

MARLA C. BERNS, RICHARD FARDON and SIDNEY LITTLEFIELD KASFIR (eds): *Central Nigeria Unmasked: Arts of the Benue River Valley.* 607 pp. Los Angeles: Fowler Museum at UCLA, 2011. ISBN 978 0 9778344 6 4.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X12001917

This magnificent volume was produced to accompany a major exhibition of the arts of Nigeria's Benue River Valley which opened at the Fowler Museum of the University of California, Los Angeles in February 2011 and then travelled to the National Museum of African Art at the Smithsonian Institute and the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University, before arriving in November 2012 at the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. Both exhibition and book serve to extend the long sequence of scholarly projects mounted by the Fowler Museum on the rich artistic heritage of Nigeria, beginning with *Black Gods and Kings: Yoruba Art at UCLA* in 1971 and last seen in *Ways of the River: Arts and Environment of the Niger Delta* in 2002. The genesis of *Central Nigeria Unmasked* itself extends back thirty years or more: it is to be found in the work of Arnold Rubin (1937–1988), a pioneering art historian of the Jukun peoples who first conducted fieldwork in the region in 1964–66 and who in the early 1980s approached the Fowler Museum with a proposal for an exhibition of sculpture from the Benue Valley. Following Rubin's

untimely death, the project was taken up by his doctoral student Marla Berns, a specialist on the ceramic arts of the Upper Benue, who was joined by Richard Fardon and Sidney Kasfir, specialists on the cultures of the Middle and the Lower Benue, respectively. The published result is far more than the usual sumptuously produced exhibition catalogue: like the earlier *Ways of the River*, it represents an important collection of cutting-edge scholarship located at the intersection of African art history, history and anthropology.

The editorial team expertly marshal a sprawling eighteen chapters and nine "interleafed" case-studies written by a total of fifteen scholars – including Arnold Rubin and, sadly, two other recently deceased contributors, John Boston (whose own fieldwork began in the 1950s) and Barbara Frank. The magnitude of the work is one reflection of the historical and cultural complexity of the Benue region, which extends from the homelands of the Idoma, Igala and Ebira peoples around the Niger-Benue confluence east to those of the Tiv, Jukun, Chamba and Mumuye and on to the ethnically fragmented Gongola Valley and Ga'anda Mountains in the far north-east. From this 700 kilometre-long corridor traversing Nigeria's Middle Belt has emerged some of the most stunning plastic art in Africa. Styles and materials range widely, from the textile masquerades and objects cast in copper alloys of the Lower Benue to the ironwork of the Middle Benue and the ceramic spirit vessels typical of the Upper Benue – although the region's paradigmatic form of artistic production is figurative wooden sculpture, in two main categories: masks and shrine statues. At pains to avoid the reductive ethnic attributions that tended to characterize earlier phases of scholarship on African art, the editors have organized the volume in three parts corresponding to these broad geographic zones, and much emphasis is placed throughout on communication, innovation and exchange both within and between – and indeed, beyond – these sub-regions. As Fardon points out in his introduction to part two on the Middle Benue, however, accepting the redundancy of the notion of hermetic "tribal styles" is "not to deny that some style features clustered geographically in ways that corresponded (albeit not neatly or one-to-one) with ethnic distinctions. Moreover, the ethnonyms, or 'tribal names', people themselves adopted added an element of self-consciousness to identities that might come to be reflected in their own expectations of what 'their' artwork should look like" (p. 223).

This sensible lack of squeamishness about ethnicity certainly facilitates the task of locating often enigmatic artistic production in broader cultural contexts. In seeking to demonstrate that these processes were distinctly historical, the volume's most searching chapters make a valuable contribution to a more fully realized scholarship on material culture in Africa – one which is now taking the "history" part of art history seriously. The defining event in the modern history of the region was the nineteenth-century jihad waged against "pagan" peoples of the Middle Belt by the Hausa-Fulani rulers of the Sokoto Caliphate, which, combined with the concomitant movement of the Tiv and Chamba into the region from the south and west, dramatically reconfigured both the broad social landscape and particular streams of material culture. The impact of jihad was followed by that of colonial conquest on the part of the British in Nigeria and, in parts of the Upper Benue, the Germans in Kamerun. The period between colonial partition and the First World War represented the first concerted phase in the collection of artwork from the region, with officers in Kamerun and, in particular, the assiduous Leo Frobenius acquiring large amounts of sculpture destined for German museums. A second phase occurred in the 1970s following the Nigerian Civil War, which witnessed a further exodus of objects into the international art market via Cameroon-based dealers. The process of collection is shown to be an important part of the "life history" of objects: not only did it determine the formation of the scholarly canon, it extended the biographies of

artefacts from the context of local ritual economies to that of international connoisseurship, market value and gallery display. Indeed, part of the challenge of thinking historically about these wonderful objects is to understand that the decline of indigenous religious belief and practice in the second half of the twentieth century has meant that many artefacts – figurative shrine sculptures more than masks – are now as out of context locally as they are in Western galleries and loft apartments. As Fardon notes with regard to Chamba wooden figures, contemplating such sculptures in the rarefied atmosphere of Western museums is a strikingly different experience to that of the dazed and awestruck encounter experienced by young men being initiated into the world of historic Chamba religion – a world now in rapid retreat.

This book is a landmark in the history of African visual and material culture.

John Parker
SOAS, University of London

GENERAL

JOHN S. HARDING (ed.):
Studying Buddhism in Practice.
181 pp. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2012. £18.99. ISBN 978 0 415 46486 4.
doi:10.1017/S0041977X12001899

This volume, edited by John Harding (with added words by Hillary Rodrigues, the series editor) is dedicated to the legacy of William R. LaFleur who passed away unexpectedly before finishing his chapter intended for the book: thus, a special article is added compiled from LaFleur's earlier notes describing his personal journey into the study of Buddhism. There are eleven further contributors to the volume of whom four focus on Japan as a field of research. Other contributors have conducted research in Sri Lanka, Vietnam, India, Thailand, and also in Buddhist communities in North America, making for wide coverage and an interesting contribution to the study of Buddhism in practice.

John Holt takes us back to his early experience in Sri Lanka and gives an account of how social change has affected the pilgrimage site of the Tooth-Relic Temple in Kandy. He asserts that a Buddhist ethos remains fundamental to shaping people's identities, rooting them in their particular religious discourses despite the development of local economies and increasing secularization. The Buddha is seen not only as an object of veneration, but as a kind of "polestar", defining character and guiding people through major transformations in their lives. John Harding, by contrast, looks at the seemingly "uninterrupted" tradition of Shikoku pilgrimage. He compares current cultural markers with older pilgrimage patterns to find out what has been modified along the pilgrimage route as a result of Buddhist persecution in modern Japanese history.

Most authors present their self-reflexive accounts by conducting empirical research, but Lina Verchery goes further and examines her role as documentary film maker in representing factual reality. Her film describes the annual lobster-releasing ceremony organized by a remote Buddhist monastery in Nova Scotia, and touches on the issue of how to represent "reality" and create an emotional