

ways in which archives are created and information is preserved. The well-documented life geographies of the Clevelands and Holmans is due to their class position, wealth, and power which made it possible 'for them to leave their mark in the historical record on both sides of the Atlantic' (161).

Singularly or taken together, these life geographies elucidate the malleability of identity, race, and class, while they also show how these actors negotiated varied sociopolitical terrains across the Atlantic World. These stories also capture the agency and resilience of individuals in ways that is often difficult to grasp in studies of slave communities. Although these biographies are atypical of the experience of the vast majority of Africans who came to the Americas, they nonetheless provide examples of the diverse experiences of Africans in the diaspora, as well as significant insights into the larger communities of which these actors were a part. This excellent publication should be on the must-read list for all students of the African diaspora.

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A FEMALE PROPHET IN WEST AFRICA

West Africa's Women of God: Alinesitoué and the Diola Prophetic Tradition.

By Robert M. Baum.

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This book is Robert Baum's second on Diola religious traditions. His first monograph, *Shrines of the Slave Trade*, published in 1999, demonstrates how the Diola people of the Senegambia have for centuries relied on shrines in their dealings with the fates and fortunes of their world. For instance, he shows the pivotal role that shrines played in the region for managing the effects of the slave trade. Studying the historicity of a set of practices previously categorized in evolutionary terms as 'animism', Baum helped elevate Diola faith and beliefs to the status of 'religion'. In the book presently under review, Baum devotes his attention to another aspect of Diola religion. Listening to the wise words of the elders seated at their shrines, Baum has gained further knowledge of Diola religious practice to demonstrate that there exists among them a prophetic tradition comparable to that of the Abrahamic tradition, but one that features a remarkable difference because it is open to female prophets. In this book, Baum documents a unique tradition of prophecy.

The book revolves around one important case study, that of Alinsitoué. While living in Dakar during the Second World War, this young female migrant had visions in which *Emitai*, or God, spoke to her. In these visions, she received instructions from God and was charged with their execution. After her return to the village of her birth in the

Casamance, Alinsitoué started preaching to her people and praying about the ongoing drought that plagued the region. Although not the first Diola female prophet, Alinsitoué was a woman who claimed to speak to and be heard by God – Baum claims that she should therefore be considered a prophet, as opposed to a spirit medium – and she offered a response to the drought by organising rain rituals. Her message spread like wildfire. Within weeks after her return to her native village, pilgrims from all over the region made the journey to Kabrousse to sacrifice cattle and implore God to bring rains at community-wide ceremonies that attracted the participation of men, women, and children.

The French colonial authorities watched this movement closely. The Diola, who frequently contested colonial rule, had resisted the recruitment of young men for the colonial army and obstructed the requisitions of rice and cattle that the French imposed to alleviate food shortages in the colony. When French officials saw the number of people mobilized by this prophet, they suspected the beginning of an uprising against their authority and consequently intervened. They arrested Alinsitoué and deported her to Kayes, Mali, where she died the following year as a result of malnutrition.

This book does not add much to the story of Alinsitoué, which has been known for some time. The achievement of this book is rather that it situates this case in a longer history of Diola prophets, which Baum painstakingly documents using a wide variety of sources, but relying predominantly on oral sources. Baum claims that oral traditions present evidence of such prophets, initially only male, since ‘the time of the first ancestors’. He proposes that three different kinds of male prophets have succeeded each other historically. Only in the colonial era did female prophets emerge and claim to have been sent by God and to be in communication with It (*Emitai* is without gender). Baum attributes the emergence of female prophets to the deteriorating position of women in early colonial society: the introduction of cash crops and conversion to the world religions of Islam and Christianity adversely affected the influence and power of Diola women. Baum gives several reasons for why female prophets emerged at this particular point in time to combat their marginalisation. However, although there is no doubt that Diola society was subjected to profound transformations, the programs proposed by Alinsitoué were rather modest in scope compared to the reforms launched by other messianic movements of this era. Baum does not establish how, apart from founding new community shrines, these female prophets changed Diola society in any other substantial way. As a result, the argument that these women emerged to struggle against the demotion of women in Diola society remains somewhat underdeveloped – it would be useful to know, for example, about any enduring effects of the prophets’ interventions. Alinsitoué’s successors, some of whom claim to continue her legacy, were significantly less visible and seem to stand in her shadow. But Alinsitoué’s impact on colonial power has nonetheless created a memory. In postcolonial Senegal, the national government has appropriated the legacy of the prophet, who is now remembered as the nation’s Joan of Arc.

This book importantly demonstrates that a religious system oriented around female prophets emerged among the rice cultivators of Senegambia. Baum’s claim that it is a uniquely West African tradition will hopefully inspire others to explore similar practices of messianic revelation along the Guinea Coast.

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