

such as swords, stools, statues, crowns, and staffs are essential to the ceremonial life of African courts and serve as reminders of the unique status of the monarch. Royal art may provide a visual link between the dynasty and important myths and religious beliefs, commemorate past glories, or show the king's wealth. Even in stateless societies art objects may indicate rank and prestige.

Although this pioneering book is not primarily directed toward historians, they will find much of interest in its fourteen essays on art associated with leadership in eleven West African and Congolese societies. As the editors make clear in their introduction, the essays focus on the plastic arts to the virtual exclusion of politically significant performing arts.

Daniel Biebuyck (Lega) and Herbert Cole (Ibo) discuss objects associated with secret societies in acephalous groups. Simon Ottenberg's "Humorous Masks and Serious Politics among the Afikpo Ibo" is an analysis of the social and political functions of satirical plays conducted by young masked dancers. Daniel Crowley's essay on Chokwe political art touches on several important issues, including royal patronage of carvers and trends toward secularization. The *ndop* statues of Kuba kings are described by Jan Vansina, who argues that even the oldest *ndop* are originals or faithful copies. Thus the statues illustrate royal dress over three centuries. The changing political uses of sacred masks are discussed in a fascinating article by Leon Siroto on the BaKwile of Congo-Brazzaville.

Many historians will take special interest in René Bravmann's contribution, "The Diffusion of Ashanti Political Art." Bravmann argues that the Ashanti government used presents of regalia as a device to control outer provinces, especially in non-Akan areas. His study of Nafana political art shows that many objects were gifts from Ashanti rulers and can be linked with specific personalities and events. Similar studies elsewhere in the Ashanti hinterland might clarify chronological problems and the extent of Akan cultural influence.

Douglas Fraser's article, "The Fish-Legged Figure in Benin and Yoruba Art," is less satisfactory. He traces representations of men with fish-legs through various periods of European and Asian art and concludes that southern Nigerian carvers were influenced by motifs used in the Eastern Roman Empire before 1000 A.D. Fraser is aware of some of the dangers of diffusionism; he does not postulate wandering Byzantines in Benin. But, despite resemblances between Yoruba figures and specimens from Afghanistan, I suspect trait-chasing.

Other articles deal with the Cameroons Grasslands (Suzanne Rudy), Baule gold-plated objects (Hans Himmelheber), Yoruba beaded crowns (Robert Thompson), Kwahu terracottas (Roy Sieber), Ashanti regalia (Douglas Fraser), and Ife sculpture (Frank Willet). The editors' overview examines common features of political art and stresses how little is known about African art history.

*African Art & Leadership* is a commendable attempt to breach disciplinary boundaries and, inevitably, raises more issues than it solves. Why not, for example, something on Dahomey, Ethiopia, or the depiction of Europeans and their artifacts? How can students of history and art collaborate? Numerous black and white pictures make this book as esthetically pleasing as it is intellectually stimulating.

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For centuries African rulers have used art to  
symbolize their power and legitimacy. Regalia