Colleyn, Jean-Paul & de Clippel, Catherine. - *Bamanaya. Un' art di vivere in Mali/Bamanaya. Un art de vivre au Mali*

Monsieur David C. Conrad
histories. It argues that contemporary diasporic practices cannot be reduced to epiphenomena of the nation-state or of global capitalism. » Cet essai de théorisation hétérodoxe — par exemple la diaspora y est justement distinguée de l’exil ou du voyage — passe par le biais du commentaire de travaux récents, notamment du dernier de Gilroy, The Black Atlantic : Modernity and Double consciousness. Les thèses de ce livre, saluées d’emblée d’une appréciation positive (« brillantly argued and provocative new book »), font l’objet d’une importante et intéressante discussion. Notons juste, au passage, cette réserve qui pourrait bien à l’aventure faire retour à l’envoyeur : « He writes from a North Atlantic/European location. »

Comment, en effet, faire autrement ? À moins de reprendre le trop confortable point de vue de Sirius. Ce que James Clifford, en tant qu’auteur postmoderne conséquent, n’a garde de faire. Il ne lui reste plus dès lors qu’à assumer pleinement la position subjective, un brin romantique et nostalgique, mais en même temps résolument tournée vers l’avenir, qu’il adopte finalement dans le dernier essai « Fort Ross Meditation ». Mais de celui-ci, comme de l’ouvrage entier, Routes, dont il est sans doute l’aboutissement, nous en avons déjà assez dit. Et puisqu’il semble augurer d’une exténuation de la frontière entre histories et stories, laissons donc à l’auteur le dernier mot : « The project’s primary task would be to tell history “our way” ».

Nicolas Martin-Granel


A very limited amount of information about the Bamana people and their culture first became available to Europeans with the travel writings of the intrepid Scottish physician Mungo Park, whose descriptions of his expeditions to the Upper Niger River (1795-97 and 1805) were published in 1799 and 1815 respectively. Nineteenth-century travel accounts by Eugène Mage (1868) and Paul Soleillet (1887) among others, added to outsiders’ knowledge of the Bamana, and in the seventy-odd years of French occupation of West Africa beginning in about 1890, the corpus of information was greatly expanded by the works of colonial writers. During the postindependence era, academic interest has produced an increasing number of penetrating studies, some of which have been devoted to deconstructing false notions of Bamana social structure engendered during the nineteenth century. Now Jean-Paul Colleyn and Catherine De Clippel’s Bamanaya joins Patrick McNaughton’s The Mande Blacksmiths (1988) and Sarah Brett-Smith’s The Making of Bamana Sculpture (1994) as one of the modern era’s explorations of a society famous for maintaining its traditional cultural values and characterized by a wide range of secret ritual methods of tapping into spiritual sources of protection and power. Colleyn’s approach to his research differs from the other two, in that rather than basically confining his inquiries to one town or village group, he surveyed numerous villages in a large area of southern Mali, from west of Kita to east of San, and beyond Bougouni in the south (map, p. 39). This ambitions overview of traditional religious institutions extending over an unu-
usually broad landscape provides a useful complement to locally focused, in-depth studies, because it confronts longstanding questions involving intervillage relationships of ritual institutions that could not otherwise be answered. The book comprises a detailed survey of most of the essential components of Bamana society, with special emphasis on traditional methods of communication with the spirit world.

Catherine De Clippel is appropriately credited as co-author on the title page because she is the photographer responsible for the extraordinary collection of photographs with which the book is lavishly illustrated. Her black and white images of village elders, priests and performers, and dramatic scenes of ceremonial occasions, esoteric rituals, mask dancers, sacrificial altars, possession cults, power society sanctuaries and sculptures from museum collections, provide a wealth of information that could never be conveyed via the written word. De Clippel exhibits a remarkable gift for achieving candid shots of villagers involved in ritual activities including “washing” the bolivi, i.e., bathing sacrificial objects in rejuvenating sacrificial blood (pp. 122, 125), and what must be an astonishing ability presumably along with Colleyn to achieve the level of rapport with local dignitaries that is required to gain permission to photograph sacred shrines. An added photographic bonus, is that besides the wealth of photographic images by De Clippel illustrating Colleyn’s text, the book contains an appendix, “Fiches des objets exposés”, featuring fifty-nine photographs of sculptures and other material art objects from museums and private collections.

The book begins with an essay, “Dibi-Kèle-Dibi: Les ténèbres combattent les ténèbres” by Giovanna Parodi da Passano. Her contribution offers no new insights into “savoir, pouvoir et secret chez les Bamana” (as her essay is subtitled), but it provides a competent overview and serves as a useful introduction to the in-depth study by Colleyn. Along with standard sources like Dieterlen, Monteil and Zahan among others, Parodi da Passano appropriately relies on the more recent work of Patrick McNaughton, but her knowledge of these esoteric topics would be further enhanced by acquaintance with relevant essays by such researchers as Sarah Brett-Smith and Barbara Hoffman who are conspicuously absent from her bibliography.

Jean-Paul Colleyn partly introduces his study with a historical account of the development of European ideas about greater Mande society, of which the Bamana are a major group, and the one which has most closely maintained traditional spiritual pursuits in the face of Islamic influence. Colleyn’s review of “colonial ethnology” and other Eurocentric perspectives provides a well-balanced picture of how Bamana society has been viewed (often inaccurately) by outsiders. This and a well informed analysis of Bamana social structure (Chapter 1) that accompanies his review of what has been previously known about that society’s traditional (i.e., non-Islamic) relationship to the spirit world, effectively sets the stage for the later chapters in which the author introduces the results of his own research.

While exhibiting a thorough acquaintance with ritual processes and material arts involving communication with the spirit world and shedding new light on some aspects of these, Colleyn’s representation of other elements of Bamana culture can be uneven at times. For example, he provides an accurate, informed description of Mande social structure (p. 42 ff.) and gives “griots”
(locally, and more appropriately, termed jeliw) their share of credit, and later he even warns that their role "ne saurait être sous-estimé" (p. 119). Nevertheless, at times he lapses into describing them merely as "chanteurs et bouffons" (e.g. p. 64), which does not convey an accurate impression of their actual status. Similarly, Colleyn reverts to the colonial-era construction of lumping artisan and bardic groups together as "groupes castés" (p. 104), perpetuating the inappropriate application of the term "caste" to them, and thereby failing to promote awareness of the true nature of nyamakala groups' relationships to each other and the rest of society. In neither case do these usages do justice to the complexities of these people's roles in Bamana society.

The author's essential point of departure is to clarify and illuminate the concept of bamanaya, and he effectively does so from both anthropological and historical perspectives. He is in accord with other specialists on the subject, in observing that bamanaya is operative on numerous levels within a broader social framework, depending on a variety of individual perspectives. Says Colleyn, "Dans le parler ordinaire des villages, la bamanaya évoque bien d'autres choses: elle n'est pas une culture partielle, mais une 'voie' à l'intérieur d'une profonde hétérogénéité historique et connaît de nombreuses spécificités locales" (p. 48).

As an anthropological observer, Colleyn touches on several topics generating intense scrutiny among scholars today, of which two examples will suffice. He excels at analysing the ritual uses of sacred objects, including the interaction and relationship between masked dancers and audiences (e.g., p. 85). He reinforces our knowledge of women's roles in a number of instances, discussing female relationships to what are basically men's power associations (p. 104), highlighting the association known as Gwan (pp. 113-14), and describing women's activities vis-à-vis ritual processes (p. 117).

A large portion of the book is devoted to describing the organization of individual Bamana jow, the initiation societies or power associations, Colleyn's "associations socio-religieuses". Covering the entire range of institutions from children's rites of passage through adult power associations to possession cults, it is here (Chapter IV), that the most significant results of the author's research emerge, although again the presentation is uneven in terms of the amount of attention given to individual topics. Colleyn's brief reference to Ntomo initiates being called blaw (p. 107) and the bla relationship to a particular totem (p. 111) demand further discussion vis-à-vis the much more extensive information available from oral tradition on the bla identity of certain blacksmith clans, to which Colleyn makes no reference. In contrast to this kind of shortcoming, Colleyn's particularly detailed description of the boliw (pp. 122-27) combined with De Clippel's photographs, provides the most comprehensive explanation yet published, of these sacrificial altars that are so vital to Bamana spiritual pursuits (oddly, there is no reference to Brett-Smith's very relevant study "The Poison Child".

Regarding the larger sociological framework, scholars have long speculated on questions concerning the genesis and diffusion of individual village associations and the relationships between jow chapters of various communities. In this arena Colleyn breaks new ground with his

5. RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics, 6, 1983.
explanation of how associations like Nama and Komo are acquired by one village from another in a process involving a “métaphore matrimoniale”, and how these transactions shape subsequent community relationships, e.g., “... pour de longues années, le receveur d’un jo demeure redevable envers le donateur” (p. 118).

From a historical point of view, one of the best features of this book is Colleyn’s attention to chronology, which is so difficult to provide in the absence of written records for the study of Mande cultural institutions. The author notes the dates of ceremonial events whenever possible (p. 69 ff), but more significantly (and this is where his survey approach to the research really pays off), he somehow manages to provide a narrative history, with dates, of a surprising number of Komo branches over a wide area of the Mande countryside. Colleyn includes such details as when the Komo arrived in various communities, names of the villages that they came from, and which sanctuaries were founded by the chiefs of particular Komo chapters (pp. 130-37). To offer such detailed information on topics that are normally defined by their secret nature, is a notable achievement. Later in his exhaustive exploration of matters pertaining to Komo, Colleyn offers an additionally innovative and useful bit of material by providing the transcript of a ceremony demonstrating how Komo functions in solving a typical family problem, in this case one caused by a son who stayed away from home too long, working in Côte-d’Ivoire (pp. 143-47).

Printed in side-by-side columns of Italian and French in a large, glossy format, this extremely attractive volume will be indispensable to specialists in the art, ethnography, and history of the Mande peoples of West Africa.

David C. Conrad


S’il est aujourd’hui encore courant de constater la ténacité du mythe des Grands Empires africains, il est plus rare d’assister à la construction laborieuse d’une vision panégyrique de l’Histoire et à sa destruction brutale dans les dix dernières pages d’un ouvrage, par un même auteur et dans un même livre. Car, comment le lecteur ne serait-il pas désorienté lorsque après avoir été abreuvé du récit des splendeurs des Royaumes de Dahomey, Akan, Yoruba ou de Kongo, regorgeant d’or, de plaisirs et de magnificence, il découvre avec stupeur dans le bref chapitre intitulé « Éléments d’archéologie et d’histoire », que ces mêmes royaumes pratiquaient l’esclavage, étaient de fervents acteurs de la Traite négrière et procédaient par ailleurs à des sacrifices humains en masse. Mais peut-être faut-il considérer qu’on trouve là la rançon de l’Histoire puisque les autres (Luba, Lunda) « ne nous ont pas laissé d’œuvres originales »6. La difficulté paraît d’autant plus grande que le tableau dressé par Michèle Coquet de la décadence aux xixe et xxie siècles de ces entités politiques de l’actuelle République démocratique du Cap et de l’Angola, reste dans ses accents apocalyptiques, d’une discrétion totale sur le fait colonial. L’auteur