



**Review: [Untitled]**

Reviewed Work(s):

*The Historical Study of African Religion* by T. O. Ranger; Isaria Kimambo  
Ivan Karp

*American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 76, No. 2. (Jun., 1974), pp. 429-431.

Stable URL:

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DOI: 10.1525/aa.1974.76.2.02a00750

*American Anthropologist* is currently published by American Anthropological Association.

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tion to the economy of Ghana, and must have been residents in Ghana for the previous ten years.

In this exemplary work, Professor Mabogunje combines mature scholarship with an insider's sober understanding of development problems, and a concern for relevant and workable solutions to them. The book should be required reading for all serious students of West African modernization.

However, one minor correction is in order. Discussing the traditional reception arrangements for migrants (pp. 75-76), the author notes that periodic gifts or tribute to the host chief from strangers, are expected to stress the *dependent status* of the migrant community; gifts to the head of the host community are also expected, when the land being used is held under a system of tenancy.

In Ghana, "such gifts are known as *abusa*, literally meaning one-third of the farm" (p. 76; italics in original). The *abusa* is the oldest system of paid farm labor in Ghana (others are, *abehyem*, *afe*, *paa*, *nkotokuano*). Under the *abusa* system, the contract farm laborer, sometimes called *nhwesonyi* (caretaker), be he migrant or indigent, does all the farm work, harvests and stores the crop, one-third of which is then given to him as his reward (see Kwamina B. Dickson 1971:309-310; Polly Hill 1970:69-70).

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*The Historical Study of African Religion*. T. O. RANGER and ISARIA KIMAMBO, eds. Berkeley: University of California Press (Published under the auspices of the African Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles), 1972. ix + 307 pp., maps, table, chapter notes, indices. \$12.95 (cloth).

Reviewed by IVAN KARP  
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Both specialists on East and Central Africa and social anthropologists with historical interests should read this book. It reports the results of a conference of historians attempting (with anthropological help) to examine the possibilities of engaging in historical studies of African religious institutions. At this point, I must say that the book far exceeds the rather sceptical expectations with which I approached it. The historians demonstrate a far greater degree of theoretical sophistication than most of them have shown before. They combine this sophistication with a critical familiarity with recent developments in the analysis of religious systems. Almost all of the essays in this volume are instructive. Some of them propose new methods for

historical descriptions of religion; others define familiar problems in different and productive ways; and a few, by their failure, can tell us something about how not to go about studying religious institutions and ideas from an historical perspective. I do not mean to imply that the book is either entirely successful or a simple how-to-do-it manual for historically oriented research. Rather it is (to paraphrase C. Wright Mills) both a promise and a warning, and social anthropologists will do well to heed both.

In addition to an introduction, in which the editors summarize the contributions and discuss their implications, the book has six parts. They are: (1) methods for the reconstruction of early religious history (three papers); (2) cults of kingship (two papers); (3) the interaction of religious and political innovations (two papers); (4) the historical study of rites of transition and of spirit possession cults (one paper); (5) the nineteenth-century crisis and religious systems in East and Central Africa (three papers); and (6) interaction between African religion and Christianity in the twentieth century (two papers).

The first part, which is both methodological and theoretical in intent, can be separated from the case studies that follow. It is interesting to note that none of the papers in this section is by an historian. In the first paper, "Archeology, Ritual and Religion," Merrick Posnansky combines his usual blend of theoretical sophistication and good common sense to warn against utilizing archaeological remains to infer patterns of religious belief and ritual. He also provides us with a very useful discussion of how recent advances in the analysis of ritual and cosmology can be used in archaeological investigations. In the second paper, Christopher Ehret briefly discusses the use of linguistic evidence in examining the borrowing of religious traits by one culture from another. He stresses the examination of whole taxonomies, rather than isolated linguistic items. The final paper in this section, "Myth and the History of African Religion" by Michael Gilsenan, is a brilliant dissection of Lévi-Strauss's version of structural analysis. It should be required reading for anyone interested in the structural analysis of religious belief. Gilsenan turns Lévi-Strauss's

idealism on its head (apologies to Marx) with his suggestion that historical information may be encoded in the transformations that myths undergo. By relating the transformations to their social contexts, he believes we can discover the patterns of opposition that characterize given societies at specific times. It is an open question whether those African societies which are homogeneous in composition have myths which are amenable to this type of analysis, but the results are certainly worth the effort.

Although it is included in the case study section, Aylward Shorter's discussion of Victor Turner's theory of ritual has important methodological implications. Shorter makes the point, as do the editors in their introduction, that Turner, in common with other processual theorists, is concerned with "microhistory," rather than history *per se*. Shorter feels that processual theory exhibits a bias towards recurrent, rather than directional, processes. His conclusion is that processual theories can be historicized by taking account of changes in activities over longer periods of time. It seems to me that Shorter forgets that the fundamental interests of current processual theory are ahistorical. Processual theorists seek to explain the manipulation of norms by individuals; that is, the interrelationships between biography and structure. They are not concerned with history in the sense of long-term social trends and transformations.

The remaining papers in the book are case studies of particular religious systems or institutions. Unfortunately, the authors do not make use of the methods and theories that are presented in the first part. There is, however, plenty of anthropological input. The recent works of Horton, Rigby, Lewis, Parkin, and Kopytoff are cited, to name only a few. It is obvious that our colleagues in history are paying attention to us and have benefitted from that attention. The question to ask is, Can social anthropologists benefit from a similar attention to historians? The case studies provide an affirmative answer, because they utilize perspectives that are often lacking in conventional anthropological monographs.

The length of this review does not allow a discussion of all the differences in perspec-

tive. Taken together, they clearly demonstrate that it is possible to study religious ideas and institutions from a diachronic frame of reference. The most striking difference in perspective is that a number of the case studies have a regional, rather than a tribal, focus. This focus compels the authors to examine two problems. The first is to discover varying patterns of religious belief associated with a given religious institution within a range of related societies. The second problem is to determine the different structural relationships between a religious institution and the social organizations of a set of societies over time.

The use of this regional perspective makes the case studies particularly informative, and I note that those essays which seem to add very little to what we know about specific religious systems deal with only one group. It can be argued that the examination of an institution through a series of related societies is nothing more than the use of the method of controlled comparison. If that is so, we are in debt to historians for reminding us how useful the method can be for primary, rather than secondary, research. Their use of the regional perspective has provided insights about the dynamic aspects of social processes related to religion. For example, in some papers we are given studies of the different uses of religious institutions by different interest groups that add to the conventional discussions of ritual and symbolism by showing that the same symbolic structures may serve different political ends. Again, a similar concern with the dynamic aspects of social processes can be seen in the section on Christianity and indigenous religion. In these essays, the religious aspect of what used to be called "culture contact" is treated not as part of the conflict or accommodation between two groups, but as a situation whose structure is an element that helps to determine patterns of adaptation or resistance to change.

A short review can only begin to indicate the merits of this collection. Many of the case studies deserve to be mentioned. Perhaps their most significant contribution is that they demonstrate a convergence of interests between social anthropologists and historians which indicates that future collaborations will produce valuable results.

*Old and New in Southern Shona Independent Churches. Volume I: Background and Rise of the Major Movements.* M. L. DANEEL. Foreword by Bengt Sundkler. Change and Continuity in Africa series. The Hague: Mouton, 1971. xviii + 557 pp., charts, maps, plates, tables, 7 appendices, glossary, bibliography, 2 indices. D.G. 60.00 (cloth).

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This is the first volume to be published in a comprehensive study of the independent churches of the Southern Shona; it deals with the social and historical background of the churches. Subsequent volumes are to examine the patterns of recruitment, the organization and leadership of the churches, and their rituals and beliefs. Although it concerns Rhodesia, the study stands as something of a sequel to Sundkler's classic work on the churches of South Africa (1961); there are important historical ties between the independent churches of Rhodesia and those of South Africa, and the author addresses many of the issues which were of concern to Sundkler.

There are two main sections to the book. The first deals with the history of the Shona, their social organization and traditional religion, and the founding of missions by Europeans. Daneel emphasizes the continuation of certain Shona institutions and beliefs within the independent churches, and in presenting his ethnographic outline, he selects those features which are reflected in the churches. For example, a description of Shona clans and lineages serves as a background for a subsequent analysis of how kinship is used as a basis for the organization of the churches. It appears that Shona church leaders make considerable use of kinship ties in recruiting members and in distributing positions of authority. As for Shona traditional religion, many of the beliefs and practices have been incorporated into the independent churches. The author argues that the church leaders are successful largely because of their familiarity with traditional Shona beliefs and their ability to reinterpret Christianity and present it in a style that is more appealing to the Shona