

U.S. influence on the Guatemalan government—no matter the bumbling behavior of the Castillo Armas forces and CIA field agents—put so much pressure on the Guatemalan government that it collapsed. At a minimum, nevertheless, this book seriously undermines extravagant claims once made for CIA covert operations because it shows that even this “model” covert operation was littered with stupidities, rigidities, lack of foresight, and counterproductive effects in decades yet to come.

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Shrines of the Slave Trade: Diola Religion and Society in Precolonial Senegambia. By Robert M. Baum (New York, Oxford University Press, 1999)
287 pp. \$55.00

Baum's superb study of the history of Diola religion is based on a thesis submitted more than twenty years ago. The reasons for the delay are obvious. There are few histories of traditional religious systems and of decentralized societies, which most observers regard as static. Baum challenges this idea, but, in the process, underlines the difficulties of compiling the history. Decentralized societies are not simple societies. They are more complex than state societies; traditions are highly localized; and communities differ. In addition, the Diola were secretive. Baum studied the small village group of Esulalu on the south bank of the Casamance river in southern Senegal, which numbered about 15,000 people, visiting it seven times. Though Baum uses written descriptions by explorers, merchants, missionaries, and administrators, most of his data comes from oral histories of families and religious shrines. In the end, he takes issue with many established ideas.

The first is the link between the slave trade and centralized states. When the Portuguese first arrived in upper Guinea in the fifteenth century, they found both states and stateless societies. Some were Malinke colonies; others were linked by trade to Mali. The lower Casamance was dominated by the Bainouk kingdom of Cassanga, the ruler of which was called the Casa Mansa. Though these kingdoms responded to the Portuguese demand for slaves, the long-range effect of the Atlantic trade is their decline and loss of control over the decentralized societies that proved to be effective slavers. The Diola moved northward from an area in what is now Guinea-Bissau and eventually absorbed most earlier inhabitants of the lower Casamance. Today they number about 500,00 people.

In Esulalu, the Diola defeated and absorbed earlier Bainouk inhabitants. The Bainouk were integrated rather than being sold, perhaps because the slave trade was limited in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but more likely because they were too numerous. They also resembled the Diola in many ways. Bainouk shrines were adopted, and a Bainouk became the priest-king of the most important shrine.

The priest-king was a ritual figure who had little actual power. Governance was in the hands of the shrines, which settled disputes and regulated such economic activities as palm-wine tapping, rice cultivation, and the hiring of labor. The Diola immigration intensified population pressure and led to increased conflict over rice paddies, oil palms, fishing zones, hunting areas. The early Diola generally ransomed prisoners, many of whom were young men caught in attempted cattle raids. Others were men and women taken in slave raids. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, more and more prisoners were sold to agents of the Portuguese. New shrines were established to regulate the trade. Captives could not be mistreated; nor could they be sold before kin had a chance to search and ransom them. The slave trade stimulated conflict not only between village groups but also between villages and quarters. People went to their fields in groups and often armed.

The shrines provide Baum a window into Diola society. They were created in different ways, some borrowed from neighboring communities and others created as the result of dreams or visions by people who had spiritual gifts. The data that Baum culls from them enable him to question several popular theses. He questions Horton's distinction between traditional and universal religions, the former based on microcosmic views of the world, presenting a sophisticated Diola cosmology.¹ He also questions whether traditional religions were static and whether they necessarily had a magical view of causality, as well as the notion that they had little idea of history. Though he has an excellent description of the penetration of Islam and Christianity in the nineteenth century, he does not ask whether the new religions influenced Diola views of their old religion.

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Writing West Indian Histories. By B. W. Higman (London, Macmillan Heinemann, 1999) 289 pp. \$14.95

Higman is best known for his *Slave Populations of the British Caribbean, 1807–1834* (Baltimore, 1984), a massive demographic, environmental, economic, and social profile of slavery in the English-speaking Caribbean. His current work, a compact history of historical writing in the English-speaking West Indies, marks a departure from Higman's earlier exhaustive analysis, with its complete arsenal of social science techniques and heavy reliance on quantification. Indeed, it appears that Higman's historiography questions the exclusive reliance on "scientific history," at least in the treatment of Caribbean history. In the first line of his preface, he writes that he is looking particularly at "the complex interaction between popular and professional understandings of the past" (x).

1 Robin Horton, "African Conversion," *Africa*, XLI (1971), 85–108.