

Huib Blom. *Dogon Images and Traditions*. Brussels: Momentum Publication, 2011. Illustrations, glossary, maps. 385 pp. EUR 90 (cloth), ISBN 978-2-8399-0725-5.

Reviewed by Pascal James Imperato (SUNY Downstate Medical Center)

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Dogon Architecture and Traditions in Topographic Context

Huib Blom is a Swiss photographer who spent some twenty-five years documenting the Dogon people of Mali and the cliff-centered world in which they live. Given all that has been published about the Dogon in recent decades, one might at first presume that there is little need for yet another large format volume about them. Such a surmise can be quickly set aside on even a quick perusal of this book, for the author has created a unique integrative photographic and discursive coverage of Dogon architecture, religion, social organization, and art set against the dramatic topography in which these people live.

The author's five chapters are all richly illustrated with field photographs as well as with photographs of Dogon statuary from the localities under discussion. This permits the reader to see the world out of which a specific sculpture emanated, albeit in the distant past. In incorporating this unique feature into his book, Blom has wisely relied on the excellent statuary taxonomy published by H el ene Leloup and her colleagues in their book, *Dogon Statuary* (1994). There are roughly seventeen distinct areas of the Dogon country differentiated by topography and language, and nuanced by architecture, religious beliefs, and cultural traditions. Two very useful schematic maps depict these areas, the villages that are discussed in the text, and the statuary styles unique to them.

Blom's third chapter, "Architecture and Religion," provides dramatic examples of religious edifices including the homes of village hogons (religious chiefs), altars,

shrines, mosques, Togu-Na meeting shelters, granaries, and menstruation houses. His chapter on the seventeen areas of the Dogon country contain both excellent photographs and discussions of the diverse topographies and the differing architectural styles influenced by them. The author devotes a chapter to the various forms of funeral rites. In so doing, he illustrates the funerals of men, women, and the hogon of Sanga who died in 1985. This is followed by a lengthy chapter on Dogon masks and their roles in funeral and Dama ceremonies that commemorate the end of mourning. The association of funerals and Dama ceremonies with masks is clearly explained more fully in a lengthy chapter richly illustrated with both field photographs of performances and masks in Western collections.

Blom has wisely avoided entanglement in latter-day discourses critical of the Dogon myths and cosmology described decades ago by the French anthropologist Marcel Griaule and his colleagues. Griaule's highly structuralist Dogon cosmology has proven to be excellent grist for postmodern deconstructionists. Yet, despite their reasoned arguments, Griaule's influence continues to be profound. In part it is because the reality recorded by him cannot be denied by current absence in a dramatically changed contemporary Islamized and secularized Dogon world.

Blom's text and photographs attest to his profound knowledge of the Dogon. He has meticulously and elegantly presented a people, their religious beliefs, tradi-

tions, and art against a background canvas of their secular and religious architecture and the dramatic environment in which they live. In so doing, he has provided a new and unique perspective on Mali's famous mountain people.

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