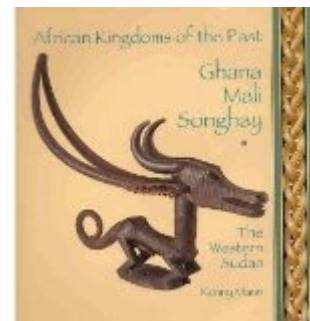


Kenny Mann. *Ghana, Mali, Songhay: The Western Sudan.* Parsippany, N.J.: Dillon Press, 1996. 108 pp. \$23.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-87518-656-6.



Reviewed by Dianne W. Oyler

Published on H-AfrTeach (April, 1999)

Ghana, Mali, Songhay is a skillfully organized history that includes a very visually stimulating approach to attract, and then capture, the imagination of the middle school student. This monograph would be an excellent supplement for the study of West Africa by seventh grade geography students.

The attractive visual encounter with the region relayed through photographs and colorful illustrations is one major strength of the monograph. In addition to illustrations, the visuals include maps, a timeline, and well-chosen and well-placed photographs that augment the telling of the region's history while keeping middle-grade students involved in reading the text. Colorful textboxes relate facts, word origins, and interesting historical asides that add texture to the study.

Another strength can be seen in an historical reconstruction that uses local and non-Western sources such as oral traditions and Arab travelers' accounts. Students are introduced to non-Western primary sources. The author also includes indigenous place names.

The monograph is user-friendly providing a pronunciation key, an index, and a strong bibliography.

Despite all this great visual stimulation and interest generation, the monograph is flawed. In the area of visuals, some of the wonderful photos are identified in too general a manner. Consequently, the author gives the impression that the visual is a universal statement for the entire region which is very misleading. Students are using this book as a window into the region and should know the specific name of the place they are seeing. For example, the photo of the market on p. 17 should be identified by name. One photo misidentifies a one-stringed instrument as a kora (p. 63). The instrument shown is 23 strings short of a kora.

While the text uses good sources, the author loses sight of the development of these civilizations. She discusses environment but does not distinguish between the environment of these empires and the environment today. She does not discuss the agricultural foundation of the empires, and without giving credit to a farming sur-

plus, goes on to say people in urban areas bought food from the farmers (pp. 35-40). Finally, when describing the famous king of Mali, Mansa (Kankan) Musa (pp. 66-71), Mann does not associate this name with him and then calls him the black Moses of Mali. While Musa may mean Moses in the Maninka language, this promotes the stereotype that African culture must be seen through the lens of western culture. There is no link between the biblical Moses or his actions and the actions of this famous ruler of Mali. Unfortunately, these errors serve to undermine the author's excellent work in trying to give a balanced portrait of the region.

Despite these flaws, I recommend the book to teachers and librarians at the elementary and middle/junior high school level. The book makes history come alive through its colorful presentation and use of non-Western sources.

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Citation: Dianne W. Oyler. Review of Mann, Kenny. *Ghana, Mali, Songhay: The Western Sudan*. H-AfrTeach, H-Net Reviews. April, 1999.

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