

as they were an integral part of the political landscape, in which they played an active role.

In her “Conclusions,” Foias claims that the “aim of this work is to present how archaeologists have reconstructed ancient Maya politics during the Classic period” (220), but this book is much more than that. It is an exemplary model of good scholarship and clearly presented arguments, who should find their use far beyond specialized Mesoamericanist courses.

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Fortis, Paolo: *Kuna Art and Shamanism. An Ethnographic Approach.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2012. 257 pp. ISBN 978-0-292-74353-3. Price: \$ 55.00

“Kuna Art and Shamanism,” an interesting and useful ethnographic experiment applying current models from Amazonian anthropology to a Central American culture, explores the connections between art and ontology among the Kuna of Panama in terms of the relationship between Kuna shamans and their auxiliary spirits, which are represented by carved wooden anthropomorphic figures (*nuchukana*). The author, Paolo Fortis, argues that categories he glosses as design and image are central to Kuna conceptualizations of the human person and to their perceptions of the world.

In the first two chapters of the book, dedicated to the author’s life among the Kuna, to the human spaces for economic and ritual activities, and to the forest beings that cause illness, Fortis characterizes Kuna perceptions of the forest as a dangerous space filled with spirit danger, but also as a source of curing.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the carving of the figures representing auxiliary spirits (*nuchukana*). Fortis shows that this activity is linked to the fertility of Kuna elders and to their ritual skill in dealing with ancestral tree entities. Through mastery of wood carving, a senior Kuna man can manipulate the powerful fertility of trees, transforming his own fertility and giving shape (life) to primordial entities. According to Fortis, a carver, conceptualized as a kind of male midwife, transforms part of a tree into a person, extracting a baby *nuchu* from its arboreal mother.

The next two chapters describe the life cycle of Kuna *neles* or seers, focusing on their relationships with both human kin and nonhuman beings. Fortis places much importance on *kurkin*, the somatic and spiritual attribute giving humans their destinies and spiritual powers, in the case of seers their ability to learn from cosmic entities and human beings. Thanks to his *kurkin* a *nele* has the ability to see into the invisible world, though this power must be maintained through medicines throughout his life.

Chapter 6 develops the idea that for the Kuna, shamanism is closely linked to what it means to be human. He presents the concept of *tarpakana*, entities associated in dreams with *nele*’s auxiliary spirits. Through *tarpakana* a seer can establish contact with the animals and acquire secret knowledge from them. Fortis develops this theme through the analysis of a myth about the killing of the mother of eight Kuna mythic heroes and the comparison with similar myths from Amazonia.

The final chapters consider the connection between carved figures and alterity, in part through comparison between Kuna and Xinguno myths and ritual praxis. Chapter 7 (“Images of Alterity”) focuses on the relationship between a *nele* and his *tarpakana*, on the initiation ceremony for a young *nele*, and on myths about alliances between humans and animals as a source of power against enemies. Fortis argues that in the Kuna case, these alliances ended with the transformation of animals into their current form and their separation from human beings. In chapter 8 it is argued that *nuchukana* are the instantiation of those primordial beings in present-day Kuna life. For him, wood carving is linked to the mythological attempt to bring the dead back to life. To understand what a *nuchu* for Kuna is, he considers the connection between “double of the dead” and “soul of the dead.” The meaning of carving a *nuchu* lies in its key role of mediating between human beings and primordial souls. The carvings represent the first people who lived on the earth, who were transformed into trees before today’s Kuna appeared. As such, they are the instantiation of primordial entities in the present-day Kuna lived world. They are generic images of a person and a body which is endowed with subjectivity. In this last chapter, Fortis further explores the definition of *kurkin* and the relevance of its design.

Throughout the book, Fortis foregrounds three visual categories (body, image, and design) that inform and organize the way the Kuna perceive their world. The differences between designs (in, for example, *mola* blouses) and images (such as *nuchukana*) consist of visibility vs. invisibility, and human learning vs. creation during mythic times. This opposition between image and design, according to Fortis, constitutes the elementary structure of the Kuna visual system, the basic opposition through which they organize visual experience. In this context, the body provides the synthesis through which image and design can coexist.

“Kuna Art and Shamanism” makes a worthy contribution to recent discussions in the Amazonian literature about the link between designs, personhood, and the body. How far Amazonian models can be pushed so far from home, however, is open to argument. In the Kuna case one difficulty concerns animal entities, which are conceptualized not as ordinary animals, but as the spirit masters or kings of animal species. Also problematic is the alleged separation between animals and humans. Fortis argues that ancient culture heroes transformed animals and sent them to a separate domain; it could be argued, however, that even today human social life also includes animals and that thus the separation is partial or illusory.

On some points of fact, Fortis differs with other sources on the Kuna. In chapter 5, for example, he asserts that, although women may become shamans in adulthood, only males are marked for shamanism from birth, a claim contradicted by Nordenskiöld (E. Nordenskiöld et al., *An Historical and Ethnological Survey of the Cuna Indians.* Göteborg 1938: 80–89), among others. Perhaps most important, the opposition between design (*narmakkalet*) and image (*sopalet*), fundamental to the book’s argument, can be understood differently in the Kuna language (*dulega-*

ya). *Narmakked* also means “to write” and *sobed*, “to build, to construct, to brew, to draw.” The opposition between writing and drawing confounds any invariant association of *sopalet* with internal forms and souls, and *narmakkalet* with externalities and bodies.

Mònica Martínez Mauri

Gagnon, Gregory O.: *Culture and Customs of the Sioux Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012. 182 pp. ISBN 978-0-8032-4454-2. Price: £ 12.99

This volume presents a succinct introduction to the history and culture of the Sioux, embracing the three major divisions – Santee, Yankton/Yanktonai, and Teton. Their territory stretched from Minnesota to Montana and despite cultural differences among them, historically they shared common cultural fundamentals and spoke a single language (though regionally differentiated into distinct dialects). The author is careful to note that although the Santee and Yankton/Yanktonai called themselves “Dakota,” and the Teton dialectal form is “Lakota,” there is no term in the native language to embrace both, so to designate all the groups he uses the word “Sioux.” Gagnon is attuned to the importance of understanding culture through language and he, therefore, chooses to use a number of native language terms throughout, such as *Itancan* rather than “leader” or “chief,” and *Tiyospaye* rather than “community” (viii).

The book does not result from original research but rather represents a wide range of scholarly literature combined with the author’s own experiences. Trained as a historian, Gagnon, himself a Chippewa tribal member, was an administrator at Oglala Lakota College on Pine Ridge Reservation for nearly seventeen years; subsequently, until his recent retirement, he taught Indian Studies at the University of North Dakota.

Gagnon begins the book with a detailed chronology dated from 10,000 B.P. to 2009. In this we see refracted the work of archeologists and linguists whose tentative reconstructions are transformed into facts when forced into a timeline. So, for example, the assertions (xi–xii) that the ancestors of the Sioux were living in northern Minnesota by 1300 and evolved into the people we know as the Sioux by 1500 result from merging speculations based on linguistic reconstruction with the study of archeological remains. In fact, there is no way of connecting archeological sites with specific language groups nor is there any way to know what the ethnic or political identity of ancestral speakers of Siouan languages might have been.

What we do know is that the Sioux are first mentioned in the “Jesuit Relations” in 1640 and from then on there is a growing record of their history and culture, and that is the focus of the book. Gagnon writes in his introductory chapter: “‘Traditional’ is the descriptive term selected to describe the Sioux of the eighteenth through much of the nineteenth century. This is the period when Sioux culture reached its florescence” (7). The first half of the book presents a history of the Sioux up to the 1980s. The account is focused on relations between the Sioux and Europeans, and later with the United States, emphasizing

diplomatic and political issues. The second half of the book deals with wide-ranging social and cultural topics, including religion, politics, economics, music and dance, and oral traditions. A concluding chapter surveys a variety of significant contemporary social and political issues. An appendix lists religious ceremonies, social and political divisions, and population numbers. A glossary defines some basic concepts and terms and a brief annotated bibliography concludes the book.

This work was first published in hardback by Greenwood Press in 2011; this edition makes it available in paperback. The book is appropriate as an introduction to the Sioux for readers who are not already familiar with more scholarly literature and will make a useful text as assigned reading for classes in American Indian Studies.

Raymond J. DeMallie

Gerrits, Godfried Johan Marie: *The House Tambaran of Bongiora*. Ed. by Elisabetta Gneccchi Ruscone and Christian Kaufmann. Lugano: Museo delle Culture, 2012. 485 pp. ISBN 978-88-7795-215-8. Price: sfr 60.00

This lavishly illustrated volume provides rich ethnographic data on the male initiation ritual complex of the Abelam tribe of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Known for their artwork, towering men’s houses that once dominated village skylines, and for growing huge ceremonial yams, the Abelam people inhabit the Sepik plains and foothills of the Prince Alexander Mountains. From 1972–77 Fred Gerrits was a medical doctor living in Maprik, a town in the northern part of Abelam territory. He became interested in Abelam culture, and, encouraged by two key informants, recorded the wealth of ethnographic data reported in this volume. In particular, he arranged for the purchase of two initiation “display rooms” of sacred objects, today exhibited at the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart and the Museum der Kulturen in Basel. Thus this volume also provides comprehensive contextual data for those collections.

That nearly 40 years have elapsed between data collection and publication is no accident. In the early 1970s, the secret information reported herein was guarded by initiated men, most of whom felt that it should not be made accessible to the uninitiated. Comparable data collected at the same time from nearby Neligum Village was revealed to me only under the provision of secrecy. But Gerrits feels that now, due to the decline of traditional Abelam culture, this information should be freely available to both his informants’ descendants and to scholars.

Traditional Abelam religion and spiritual beliefs involve (here I employ the ethnographic present) a collection of mystical objects, plants, animals, spirit beings and, especially, ancestral spirits. Many of these supernatural beings are thought to be capable of influencing human affairs. Two of the most important are the *ngwaaIndu* (ancestor spirits thought to be especially powerful) and the *kutakwa* (evil female spirit-beings similar to the witches of Western folklore). Abelam males are introduced to these supernatural beings through a series of successive, fairly well-defined initiation ceremonies which vary from village to village. In the author’s main fieldsite, Bongiora