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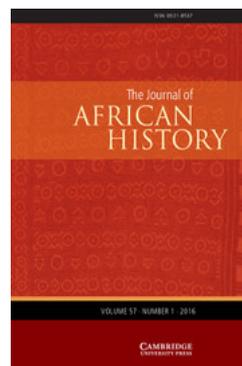
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SPACES OF CORRELATION. *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo.* By Cécile Fromont. Chapel Hill, NC: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Va. by the University of North Carolina Press, 2014. Pp. xviii + 283. \$45, hardback (ISBN 978-1-4696-1871-5).

INGE BRINKMAN and BERNARD CLIST

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SPACES OF CORRELATION

The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo.

By Cécile Fromont.

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Key Words: Christianity, material culture, missions, precolonial, religion.

In this beautiful book, Cécile Fromont argues that Christianity, which became important in the Kongo kingdom during the sixteenth century, was neither the result of superficial pragmatism nor an imposition, but stemmed from deep conversion and widespread structures that together formed a new worldview in which Kongo elites freely mixed foreign and local ideas, materials, and practices in a cosmopolitan manner. Diplomatic and religious sources clearly indicate that the Kongo was recognized by European powers as an independent Roman Catholic polity, a status that ended with nineteenth-century evolutionary notions of ‘race’.

Fromont contributes to this familiar argument by drawing upon visual and material sources. Through narrative, dance, dress, festivals, crucifixes, swords, staffs, medals, tombs, wall decoration, statues, churches, and chapels, she analyses Christian culture in the Kongo. Her art historical approach, richly documented in colour and black and white plates, certainly offers a fresh perspective on many issues of Kongo history. With impressive flair, Fromont shows how, in the new worldview of Kongo Christianity, local and foreign thought, materials, and images were brought together to generate new and dynamic forms. Fromont calls these new dynamics ‘spaces of correlation’: cultural creations that offer a domain where ideas and forms from radically different realms are brought together, including all kinds of processes of syncretism, appropriation, and innovation (pp. 15–19). This means that there was no rupture between a ‘native past’ and a ‘colonial present’ as in the Americas. In the Kongo region Christianity was ‘successfully naturalized’. Brutal changes did take place – notably in the realm of the slave trade – but in terms of culture, this was not an ‘assault’ (pp. 74–5). Newly forged international relations provided Kongo elites with ‘a source of new wares, technologies, and philosophies that they selectively welcomed according to their own aesthetics, needs, and curiosity’ (p. 26). The importance of the book’s central thesis is enhanced by the conclusion that the resulting Kongo Christianity not only enlarged the universe of Christendom, but also spread beyond west-central Africa to become part of the early modern Atlantic.

Fromont at times stretches her interpretations of material culture too far in order to accommodate her overall thesis. For example, she suggests that the building of churches was the initiative of the Kongo elite alone: ‘Built under the impetus of local rulers, European-style religious buildings participated in making the kingdom’s territories a Christian landscape’ (p. 196). In fact in a number of cases, the evidence points to the role of foreign clergy in initiating the building process. Similarly in her use of archaeological evidence she concludes that bodies were ‘often’ deposited in the tombs ‘positioned as if alive’ and ‘often’ outfitted with swords of status (p. 183). Yet we know from some fifty excavated graves in the Lower Congo province that only eleven graves contained swords or

sabres, and only twelve bodies allowed for an interpretation of the bodies' position: none of these was 'positioned as if alive'. These interpretative stretches are exacerbated by the limited annotation in the book: Fromont only refers to the archival manuscripts, not to the numerous published editions of the manuscripts. *The Art of Conversion* contains no general bibliography, rendering references particularly difficult to trace.

Nevertheless the new way she looks at the missionary watercolours, the architectural remains, and the material evidence offers excellent insight into Kongo elite cultures, rare in African history before the twentieth century. Her approach to interpreting and combining these sources is highly original. Overall, this innovative book contributes significantly to research on the Kongo kingdom, its relationship to the Americas and to Central Africa, and its place in World History more broadly.

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ACCUMULATING RESPONSIBILITY

Morality and Economic Growth in Rural West Africa: Indigenous Accumulation in Hausaland.

By Paul Clough.

New York: Berghahn Books, 2014. Pp. xxv + 442. \$120, hardback (ISBN 9781782382706).

doi:10.1017/S0021853715000717

Key Words: Nigeria, development, economy, family, local history.

This remarkable book presents an intensive study of economic life and change in a northern Nigerian village between 1976 and 1998. Located in the transition zone between savanna and sahel, Marmara village grew both demographically and economically during a period of wide swings in Nigeria's economic and political fortunes. Using a wealth of data gathered during intensive fieldwork in 1976 and 1977–9 followed by shorter visits in 1985 and 1996–8, Clough argues that Marmara grew through a three-stranded 'trajectory of accumulation'. Men used net income from farming, trade, and other non-agricultural occupations to expand the size of their households through polygynous marriages and child bearing, and to develop and sustain relationships with clients and creditors ('trading friends'). Inspired by a deep moral commitment to expanding 'social bonds of mutual trust and obligation' (p. 85), the accumulation of dependents and creditors both enhanced and absorbed material wealth – increasing men's access to labor, land, and credit, and their obligations to provide for those who supplied them. Men whose gains exceeded their growing obligations accumulated both material and social wealth; many only managed to maintain their households, but there was very little evidence of destitution.

Arguing that Marmara and villages like it experienced a distinctive trajectory of economic growth based on a dynamic of 'non-capitalist accumulation', Clough contrasts his model both to alternative theories of capitalist accumulation and to other culturally-centered analyses of historically-specific patterns of growth. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, farmers in Marmara participated in an expanding range of commercial exchanges, but the ensuing pattern of economic growth corresponds neither to Marxist