

structures sociales, économiques, ainsi que les principes religieux, des différents groupes de souche peul—(i) les Bandé et les Kamananke, (ii) les Tangué et les Bowé, (iii) les groupes assimilés, soumis à l'influence malinke.

Pour définir cette forme particulière de civilisation ouest-africaine, l'auteur écrit en conclusion: 'Nomade voué à l'ostracisme, dominateur ou métis assimilé comme dans la région qui nous intéresse, le Peul, dans ces situations différentes, conserve des structures socio-politiques qui l'inclinent vers une fermeture matrimoniale, un refus de réciprocité, d'abord vis-à-vis des autres populations en face desquelles s'affirme la spécificité de sa culture, ensuite vis-à-vis de ses semblables, étrangers à son propre noyau consanguin.'

Etant donné la valeur documentaire des contributions, bien que celles-ci négligent un peu le facteur psychologique vivant, les deux Cahiers du C.R.A., denses et remplis de faits, constituent certainement un apport appréciable à nos dossiers. B. HOLAS

The Rock Art of South Africa. By A. R. Willcox. London (Nelson), 1963. Pp. xiv, 96, 37 colour plates, 24 black and white plates, 42 maps and line drawings. Price £4 10s.

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In this, his second book on rock art, Alex Willcox has presented us with the first comprehensive account of the rock paintings and rock engravings of South Africa. But he has done more than this, for he has followed his usual critical scientific approach to the subject, thereby dispelling the vague romantic theories which have been advanced from time to time to explain the origin of this field of parietal art. The book is richly illustrated by excellent colour photographs, black and white photographs, and clear line drawings.

The most striking omission in a study of this nature is the complete lack of reference to the work of the late John Schofield, who was the first to use ethnographical evidence to refute the theories of foreign influence ('Four Debatable Points,' *S. Afr. Archaeol. Bull.*, Vol. IV, No. 15, 1949, pp. 98-106). Schofield, too, considered the rate of weathering of exposed rock surfaces to be sufficiently rapid to preclude the possibility of any existing paintings being of great age. These same arguments are advanced by Willcox without any mention of Schofield's earlier papers.

In fact Willcox might well have extended his ethnographical parallels to cover many more aspects of South African rock art. The Sotho still make karosses by sewing together a number of small skins, or from a single skin, which is dried by pegging it on the ground, thereby producing the points which are frequently seen in the paintings. 'Triple-curved' bows were used by the Tswana within historic time, and several African tribes at initiation still decorate their bodies with patterns in coloured earths.

In his chapter on 'Hunting and Fishing' Willcox discusses fully the various fishing scenes which have been recorded. He writes, 'What is more surprising since it is not supported historically is that in three of the fishing scenes the harpooners are shown standing up in small canoes or coracles. No case is known of Africans, Bushmen or Bantu, using any such craft south of the Limpopo.' A small dug-out canoe and a bark canoe from Vendaland are preserved in the Bloemfontein Museum, and have been described by Kirby ('The Swimming-Log of the Hottentots,' *Africana Notes and News*, Vol. IX, No. 4, 1952, pp. 107-24) and Hoffman ('Venda Dug-Out Canoe,' *Researches of the Nasionale Museum, Bloemfontein*, Vol. 1, Part 2, 1952, pp. 23-8). These two canoes are short vessels and are very similar to those shown on the paintings.

The 'White Lady' painting from the Brandberg, South-West Africa, naturally figures prominently, and Willcox supports earlier students who regarded the Abbé Breuil's 'White Lady' as being a youth. The patterning on the body is very similar to that which still decorates the bodies of many Bantu initiates. This resemblance would be still closer if the flower and the white band around the chin were removed. These features appear to have been added later and scientific study of the painting has confirmed that these apparent additions have been painted in white pigment which is of a different composition from the white pigment used for the remainder of the figure.

Many extravagant claims have been made for the age of South African rock paintings and engravings. After critically assessing the available evidence, Willcox concludes, 'An age of five centuries for the oldest surviving art is I should say certain, an age of twenty centuries quite possible, but longer than this unlikely for rock paintings or petroglyphs under the conditions in which they are found.' Elsewhere he states that the available evidence indicates that 'no surviving petroglyph can be older than six or seven centuries.'

In the chapter entitled 'Who Were The Engravers?', Willcox supports the view that the engravers were 'Bushmen and of the same tribes (or at least culture) as the neighbouring painters.' The reasoning advanced to support the thesis that paintings and petroglyphs were executed by the same people is far from convincing and in this section the scientific approach which characterizes the rest of the book is replaced by conjecture. In an attempt to answer the question, 'Why no engravings in the shelters?', the author suggests that the artists 'preferred to paint anyway and engraved only when conditions were not suitable for painting.' This of course is pure supposition. In the few cases where engravings do occur in the same caves as paintings the treatment and subject matter of the engravings is quite different from that of the paintings, and these differences cannot be simply explained as being the outcome of using different media.

In several other instances Willcox has not made the fullest use of all the available evidence but nevertheless his book will certainly prove a standard work of reference for a considerable time. Author and publisher alike are to be congratulated for assembling this material in one volume and also for presenting it in such a lucid and attractive manner. JAMES WALTON

African Sculpture: An Anthology. By William Fagg and Margaret Plass. London (Vista) and New York (Dutton), 1964. Pp. 160, 175 photographs. Price 8s. 6d.

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The book comprises a short introduction and succinct, but incisive, comments about form, meaning, interpretation, on nearly 200 sculptures in wood, ivory, stone, metal, mud. This is an original, authoritative, challenging contribution to the study of African sculpture, which will benefit not only the 'wide public' to which it is primarily addressed, but everyone interested in African art and culture.

The authors stress the 'personal character' of their selection, which is for this reason called an anthology. But it is clear that this is a selection based on a truly comprehensive knowledge of African sculpture, which few if any could equal, and on a deeply rooted feeling for it. Altogether there are 53 tribal areas or tribal styles from which examples have been drawn—among them many smaller or less well known groups. The sculptural modes of individual artists are also examined. What is, however, unique about the collection is that we are presented here with a set of sculptural documents which have never, or very rarely, been reproduced in books. This feature alone gives a special flavour of originality and research effort to the book, since so many of the previous publications on African art are saturated with the endlessly repetitious reproductions of the same pieces.

The sequences and perspective in which these sculptures are presented and discussed are challenging. The usual geographical and tribal, or tribal-stylistic categories, have been discarded. Instead the authors present 'a new way of looking at African art' in that they attempt to identify the different types of sculptural form in Africa and to show that 'many of the styles and movements widely supposed to have developed for the first time in Europe really represent recurrent modes in the human arts, modes which have always been available to the artist' (p. 5). This is done in a dispassionate and critical manner, thus the authors avoid pitfalls of idle speculation and fancy interpretation. The attempt is exploratory and heuristic, in order 'to furnish one means of clearing our minds of our own preconceptions.' The authors repeatedly, and very judiciously, emphasize the point that formal correspondences and convergences seldom extend to similarities of function or content.

In the first part of the book, the vast range of forms produced by the African artists is examined in terms of classic European

labels, such as cubism, abstraction, expressionism, naturalism, surrealism, baroque, rococo, art nouveau; elements of caricature and grotesque, and the technique of assemblage, are also discussed. The various comments comprise cursory, but pointed, remarks about diffusion and external influences, about humour, about architectonic and technological explanations of certain features of form.

In the second part of the book, African sculptures are examined 'on their own merits and in their own terms,' with some emphasis on the forms expressive of *gravitas* and growth. We all know how weakly documented the meaning and function of African sculpture are, and how some basic philosophies on which it rests largely escape us; when it comes to indicating these, the authors are critical and honest in their attempts.

For its originality, for the profound knowledge on which the selections and comments are based, for its many terse remarks, this book is enlightening, both for the layman and the student of African cultures.

DANIEL P. BIEBUYCK

African Sculpture from the Collection of Jay C. Leff. *New York (Mus. Prim. Art), 1964. Pp. 8; 44 plates. Price \$3.50*

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Having lightly undertaken to review this publication, I was somewhat disconcerted to find, on the arrival of the review copy, that it was no book in the accepted sense of containing both letterpress and illustrations, but a photographic catalogue of a number of works, with but single-line statements of their provenance, size and material. All those useful props for the reviewer were lacking; one could not carp at the author's predilections nor his style, his bias towards an ethnographical or an aesthetic interpretation, the excellence or otherwise of his index, for none of these things were there for comment. Confronted with the photographs, one was left to one's own devices.

Perhaps this is no bad thing from time to time, and it is salutary to notice one's reactions to such a situation. At the first casual glance the reaction was superficial. 'What a typical sixteenth-seventeenth century Benin that one is.' 'This? No, I can't quite place it—must turn back to the index and look it up.' 'Ah! That's surely a Dogon, although I've never seen another quite like it,' and so on. Identification on this level is of no more value than a glance at the headlines of the morning paper. From that came the realization of the impossibility of making an aesthetic judgment on a piece of sculpture from a single photograph, for so one sees it from one angle only; and free-standing sculpture, whether large or small, cannot be appreciated in this way. This, of course, is inevitable, but my second feeling of irritation was, perhaps, more justified. Some variation in the scale of different reproductions set on one page is also almost inevitable, but it is confusing to contemplate a Warega ivory measuring on the page eight and a half inches high, standing cheek by jowl with a Baule figure measuring four and a half inches high; and only when one has thumbed one's way back to the index can one check the conviction that in reality the Warega work is six and a half inches and the Baule 14 inches.

Coming down to serious business, on what criteria are the things to be judged? The collector asks us to 'charge boldly in the cultural world' and judge the material 'with less intellectual prejudice and greater artistic discernment.' We are back at the problem of form and content. Does not artistic discernment depend partially at least, on some understanding of what the artist is after, what he is trying to say—and to whom he is saying it? Is it not important to sense whether the individual artist is working with conviction and integrity, and not merely following a dead tradition or seeking to be with it in the latest local fashion? For this there must be some intellectual understanding of the social and religious background which has produced the work, or we easily become a prey to the hawker of faked antiques in ideas if not in material objects.

Happily although full appreciation of the arts in Africa cannot be attained without very considerable sympathetic intellectual effort, and despite the fact that all the latest gimmicks and -isms of Western art today have largely passed Africa by, it is easy when looking at any collection of African sculpture to pick out aesthetic qualities which are universal.

For perceptive observation and the resulting delicate modelling of facial planes the very differing heads of Benin (2), Ogowwe (9) and Dan (9 and 10) would be hard to beat by the most sensitive and highly skilled craftsmen of any art. Then when the sum total form of a sculpture is considered, the satisfying lumpy animal shape of the Bambara fetish (41) is splendidly conceived, as is also the equally satisfactory Dogon figure (8); and as close runners-up come the Baule figure (31) and the solid little Ogoni mask (32). For the appreciation of texture the graining of the block used for the Dogon mask (14) is outstanding, so is the roughly textured Bundu mask on the previous page.

These are all striking from the point of view of form rather than content; but to be honest I find myself shying away from public pronouncements on the subject of content in African sculpture; for after spending 30 years in East Africa in close daily contact with African University students, I have learnt not to make cheap and easy judgments of what I do not yet fully understand. Let it suffice to pick out those works in this collection which I myself find emotionally moving. There is something very touching about the little Ashanti goldweight figure of the hornblower (24); and also the Shango staff of the Yoruba (3), although I have seen other similar specimens to this last which appeal to me more; and for sheer vitality the Dan mask (33) takes a lot of beating.

Am I wrong in feeling that the sixteenth century ivory salt cellar, Afro-Portuguese, (34), is a bastard art? It has some beautiful qualities, especially in the simple low-relief figures on the base, but as a whole I find it unsatisfactory. These are personal preferences rather than public pronouncements; for it would seem to me impertinent to pontificate on aspects which I still do not profess to feel positive about, but they are an appraisal of qualities common to the arts of all peoples, and so within the comprehension of us all.

MARGARET TROWELL

Marsh Dwellers of the Euphrates Delta. By S. M. Salim. *U. of London Monog. Soc. Anthropol. No. 23, London (Athlone P.), 1962. Pp. 157. Price £1.10s.*

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This is an account of a people who inhabit an environment as inhospitable for a field worker as could be found anywhere, in all probability. Since its publication, Wilfred Thesiger has also written a book about the same people, entitled *The Marsh Arabs*; it is worth reading to gather something of the harshness of life which, with commendable modesty, is largely veiled in Dr. Salim's account.

The literature which exists on Shi'ite Muslims is scant. Dr. Salim's book deals with Muslims of this sect, and it is to be welcomed on this count alone. The ethnographical data in it are profuse, and mostly of good quality. But it is a pity that those parts which deal specifically with Shi'ite ritual and beliefs are so very brief. The short catalogue (pp. 12f.) gives a glimpse of the riches that exist, and it is hoped that

Dr. Salim will give detailed accounts of these in subsequent publications.

This insistence on brevity mars many parts of the book. His chapter on Family and Marriage is another example of the same kind of thing. The danger in this thumbnail sketch of as many aspects of social life as possible is that important facts requiring expansion and analysis come to be given the same weighting as incidental ones. Thus, a paragraph is devoted to *Mit'a* marriage—a practice whereby Shi'ite Muslims are permitted to engage in marriage unions for a specified period—but we are not told what sort of people practise it, what is its incidence or whether it is of little significance. The information offered is no more than that given in elementary textbooks on Shi'ite law and could have been omitted without damage. On the other hand the section dealing with the incidence of various types of marriage is much too brief, and the

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