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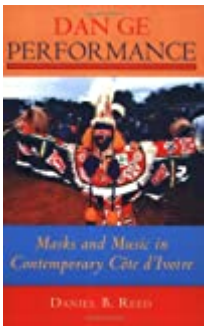

Daniel B. Reed. *Dan Ge Performance: Masks and Music in Contemporary Cote d'Ivoire.* Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003. xi + 213 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21612-0.

Reviewed by Monni Adams (Peabody Museum, Harvard University.)

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Calling the Spirits

An excellent account of recent research (1994, 1997) into two northern Dan masked performers, active in the predominantly Muslim city of Man.

The author retains the Dan word *ge* to refer to a single masked figure (pl. *genu*) following the preference of Dan specialists. He chooses *Ge* to stand for the philosophy and institution of Dan masking. One *ge* of the two he studies, Gedro, manifests mainly a spirit of joy as an entertainer. Its core support group consists primarily of young Dan men and women who seek the liberation of modernity through reviving Dan masking "tradition" which they see as flexible and open to change. Thus Gedro's vigorous dances include rhythms of Ivoirian popular music along with traditional beats, and when invited it performs publicly for tourists, visiting officials, and political party events in Man. These aspects of modernity helped in the 1990s to make Gedro's performances relevant as entertainment for the urban public of Man.

The second *ge*, Gegbade, a more somber spirit, uses traditional methods, such as song, dance, stories, and empowered objects (called "television" and "telephone") to communicate with other spirits in order to deal with sorcery cases. It fulfills this function in collaboration with the Ivoirian government. Highly respected as a spiritual healer locally, Gegbade is called upon also by other ethnic groups. Reed offers an exceptionally fine description of the artistically suspenseful emergence of Gegbade from the sacred enclosure to announce his departure to undertake an antisorcery task in a distant community.

Both *ge* and their close supporters experience their public appearances as part of their religious and ethnic identities. Through performance they seek to communicate these identities to the multiethnic and polyreligious public in the city of Man and elsewhere. As Reed points out, like ministers, rabbis, and priests elsewhere, the *genu* make a living from the practice of their religion.

The reader greatly benefits from the author's skills as a writer, musician and musicologist. Reed came well equipped with video and recording equipment, an array that encouraged a warm welcome at public events. His principal thesis, well supported by his Dan consultants, is that music is the spiritually activating force in performance. The sound of music calls the spirits *Yianannu* (pl.) from the astral realm. They in turn inspire the intensity of the singing and the extraordinarily creative execution of multilayered drumming. One of the precious values of this book is that Reed clearly explains and illustrates (chapters 5 and 6) the complexity of call-and-response singing variations and drumming subtleties.

Reed addresses the big question: "What is *Ge*?" (chapter 4). No translation exists for this word, which refers to the concept of a masked, costumed spirit who talks, sings, dances, and otherwise performs in private or public. According to his Dan consultants, the masked figure is the spirit; it does not re-present any other entity, it manifests the spirit itself. Starting with one man's poetic description that *Ge* are unknowable, nonmaterial, and omnipotent, Reed found more specific, shared answers among his other consultants that *genu* spirits come from the forest environment, revealed to humans through dreams from the ancestors. However, *genu* are always present in the mystical plane named *gebo*, and can be effective outside of masking. In sum the people"s concept of *Ge* is as metaphysical (and puzzling) as in other religions advocating worship of invisible entities.

An important part of Reed's message concerns his methods of research. Eminently readable, his book can be useful as a primer on the currently most favored methods in contemporary fieldwork. It is important that Reed considers the urban context, providing a fascinating account of the historical development of the city of Man and how it became a multiethnic but predominantly Muslim city (chapter 2). This helps the reader understand the underlying religious tensions and occasional opposition the Dan performers encounter. For readers' interest, he alternates chapters of explanatory text with narrative, describing in vivid, "you are there" style what happens in his successive fieldwork encounters. Reed employs an ethical approach to the study of masking making it clear he wants to know, not forbidden secrets, but what the people want him to know. He acknowledges and quotes his Dan consultants. Out of respect for a rule of masking, he does not mention the name of the human who wears the masked costume that manifests the spirit.

Reed intends that his reporting demonstrate a modified postmodern approach he calls "phenomenological ethnography." He does not believe it possible in research to discover an objective Truth, nor does he want to limit his report to his own isolated impressions. He seeks to construct shared meanings through social interaction, developing "intersubjectivity" by conversing, exchanging views, interviewing people with diverse perspectives, and listening to the multiple voices of practitioners, spectators, and critics. Not all these sources are included in this, his first book. Reed acknowledges that this information, organized by his observation and interpretation, attains only "a partial truth." Nevertheless, after several earlier studies of visual styles and functions of Dan masking, Reed's book offers a fresh account of Dan inspiration in religion, song, dance, and music, and altogether, an exciting advance into a nuanced understanding of Dan *Ge* performance.

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