

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON
Departments of Art History and History
Semester II, 1979-80

Instructor J. Vansina

Special Topics #500: African Art History to c.1900

GENERAL: Readings should be done in the week before classes, except for the first week. There is no major satisfactory text in the field. Two small texts (Bascom; Willett) are assigned. Texts for consultation should be consulted and read before the end of the course. The section "For illustration only" is a minimum to acquire some visual experience. Students are encouraged to browse through the journals and relevant African Art books in the Kohler Library.

EXAMS: Midterm---some identification: 30% of the final grade.
Final---essay questions: 30% of the final grade.
Paper, log or outline: 40% of the final grade.

Each student can choose to write a paper and then check with the instructor about a topic. Individual work in the form of a log of readings beyond the assignments, can be accepted in lieu of a paper. So can a justified (by written explanation!) outline of course in African Art History.

EXPLANATION OF OUTLINE:

Africa has known arts belonging to great traditions (e.g., Islam) that has interlocked with earlier Mediterranean and western Asian arts and influenced later arts from the oikoumena. But in two-thirds of the continent only regional traditions existed. They influenced neighboring traditions but sweeping influences over large areas are not evident.

Moreover, while the history of the visual arts of the great traditions is well known, art historians of the regional traditions have concentrated their efforts on classifying styles (alas, often called "tribal") and understanding contexts (ethnography) rather than on dating objects or on historical development.

Hence the course handles arts of the great traditions in a straightforward manner, then pauses to show what problems regional traditions pose, before taking the survey up again in the last part, where area rather than time is the main principle of organization and time becomes involved in every lecture.

REFERENCES AND TEXTS:

Bibliographies

- COULET WESTERN, D. A Bibliography of the Arts of Africa. Waltham, 1975.
GASKIN, L.J.P. A Bibliography of African Art. London, 1965.
(Use both jointly, never Coulet Western alone.)
BASQUIN, KIT. An Annotated Bibliography...on Ethiopian Art. Addis, 1968.
CBESWELL, K.A.C. A Bibliography of the Architecture, Arts and Crafts of Islam. Cairo, 1961.

REFERENCES AND TEXTS (Continued):

Journals

African Arts.
Arts d'Afrique.

Texts for Consultation

General Background:

BOHANNAN, P., and CURTIN, P. Africa and the Africans. New York, 1971. Read early.
CURTIN, P., FRIERMAN, S., THOMPSON, L., and VANSINA, J. African History. Boston, 1978. Read the first three parts as needed.

Islamic:

HOAG, JOHN D. Islamic Architecture. New York, 1977. Chapters 1, 4-9.
TALBOT RICE, D. Islamic Art (relevant parts will be assigned).

Ethiopia:

JAGER, O.A. Antiquities of N. Ethiopia: A Guide. Stuttgart, 1965.
(For reference; does not have to be read. Illustrations!)
PANEHURST, S. Ethiopia, A Cultural History. London, 1955 (background).

Regional Traditions:

RASCOM, W. African Art in Cultural Perspective. New York, 1973
(almost the whole book is assigned).
LAUDE, J. The Arts of Black Africa. Berkeley, 1971.
WILLETT, F. African Art: An Introduction. New York, 1971.

For illustration only, the following:

CORNET, J. Art of Africa, Treasures from the Congo. New York, 1971.
DELANGE, J. Arts and Peoples of Black Africa. New York, 1969
DENYER, S. African Traditional Architecture. New York, 1978.
LEIRIS, M., and DELANGE, J. Afrique noire: la création plastique.
Paris, 1967.
LEUZINGER, E. The Art of Black Africa. New York, 1967.
WINGERT, P. African Art (University Prints). Winchester, MA (see also their series O IV [Islamic] M [Egypt]).

OUTLINE

INTRODUCTION.

Week 1: Africa: Cultures and societies.
African History.
African art History: Sources and problems.

Reading: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia, Africa (all articles c.100 p.), editions 1974 and after. Reference Memorial Library.

OUTLINE (Continued)

PART I: NORTHERN AFRICAN ARTS.

- Week 2: Rock art of the Sahara (c.5000-500 B.C.); Egypt and Kush (3000-300 B.C.).
Coptic and Christian Nubia (to c.1200 A.D.).
Ethiopia: Axum and Lasta (600 B.C. - c.1270 A.D.).
Reading: BOHANNAN, P., and CURTIN, P. Africa and the Africans; consult First Part.
- Week 3: Early Islamic Art: Aghlabid (Qairuan, Sousse).
Early Islamic Art: Tulunid, early Fatimid in the West and Egypt.
Classical styles: almoravid and almohad.
Reading: HOAG, J. D. Islamic Architecture. Pp. 60-76; 94-115; 136-151.
- Week 4: Late Classical: Marinid and related.
Late Classical: Mamluk art in Egypt.
Late Classical: Sharifian, Hafsid and Ottoman.
Reading: HOAG, J. D. Islamic Architecture. Pp. 116-135; 152-183.
- Week 5: Libyan mosque style. The Sahara.
West African and East African mosques and palaces.
Ethiopia: Gondar.
Reading: PRUSSIN, L. "The architecture of Islam in West Africa." African Arts, 1968, 1, 2:32-35, 70-74.

PART II: AN AFRICAN "STYLE" TOPICS AND QUESTION.

Illustrations for this part are mostly drawn from the Kuba religious tradition in Zaïre.

- Week 6: Art and society.
Artworks as things 1.
Artworks as things 2.
Reading: BASCOM, W. African Art in Cultural Perspective. Pp. 3-25; 153-162.
- Week 7: Expressive culture: Icons as visual ideas; topics.
Icons as symbols and discourse.
Icons as "items."
Reading: WILLETT, F. African Art. Read all in this and next week.

OUTLINE (Continued)

Week 8: The shape of art: style.
aesthetics.
evolution of style.

Reading: WILLETT, F. African Art. (See Week 7.)
LAUDE, J. The Arts of Black Africa is also strongly
recommended.

PART III: SOUTH OF THE SAHARA: REGIONAL TRADITIONS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

Week 9: MID TERM EXAM.

West African Sahel: to c.1600.
West African Sahel since c.1600.

Reading: BASCOM, W. African Art in Cultural Perspective
(henceforth Bascom). Pp. 31-49.

Week 10: Early Nigerian art: Nok, Ife, Sao.
Benin since c.1300.
Yoruba since c.1600.

Reading: Bascom, pp. 83-109.

Week 11: The Guinea Coast since 1500: Early ivories and stone sculpture.
Western Guinea after 1600.
Eastern Guinea (Akan, Fon) after c.1700.

Reading: Bascom, pp. 51-80.

Week 12: Around the Bight of Benin (Delta to Dwala) since c.1500.
The Cameroon grasslands.
The Cameroon forest.

Reading: Bascom, pp. 115-121.

Week 13: The western rain forest (Gabon).
The eastern rain forest (Lega).
The northern forest fringe since 1815.

Reading: Bascom, pp. 123-131; 173-181.

Week 14: The Kongo coast: 1500-1900 (Kongo, Mbundu), Pounou, Yaka.
Inner Angola since c.1000 (Chokwe, Pende).
Luba and related styles since c.800.

Reading: Bascom, pp. 133-145; 165-171.

Week 15: East Africa from Ethiopia to Mozambique.
Zimbabwe and South Africa since c.1200.
South African Rock Art.

Reading: Bascom, pp. 183-187.

Week 16: Conclusions.

Optional reading for each week will follow.