Louise Müller


The author is a Dutch Africanist who is focusing on West African religious and cultural traditions, and the book is her doctoral thesis from the University of Edinburgh. The object of the investigation is the historical persistence of the chieftaincy institution of the Asante in Ghana, through precolonial, colonial and postcolonial history. Against this historical and contemporary material, the author has chosen the role of traditional religion as an interpretive perspective, as religion—she argues—is understudied in current research on the institution of chieftaincy. She is able to follow the chieftaincy institution through precolonial times (1701-1901), when the Asante authorities ruled over one of the largest kingdoms in West Africa, into colonial times (1901-1957), when the traditional ruling structure was integrated in the colonial structure of indirect rule, and further into contemporary, post-colonial times (1957-2009), when the chieftaincy institution has been integrated in modern Ghanaian democratic structures, with a special responsibility for Asante traditional customs. The book is organized in six main chapters (in addition to a brief introduction and conclusion, as well bibliography, appendices and an index of key words). Chapter 1 surveys the research context and points out the need for this investigation. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical study of the role of religious studies in relation to historical anthropology. Chapter 3 discusses the roles of the chieftaincy institution in precolonial times, especially in relation to Christians and Muslims entering the area. Chapter 4 follows up the focus of chapter 3, now in colonial times. And then, chapters 5 and 6 discuss the new role of the institution in postcolonial, democratic Ghana. In conclusion it is argued that whereas the religious function of the chieftaincy institution has changed throughout the different periods of Asante and Ghanaian history, its peacekeeping function has remained quite similar, and even increased. In a sum, the book offers an interesting analysis of the chieftaincy institution of the Asante, and it demonstrates how a sensitivity to religious perspectives can add important aspects to our understanding of such political and social institutions.

Reviewed 2014-10-10 by Knut Holter

MHS School of Mission and Theology, Misjonsmarka 12, N-4024 Stavanger, Norway

E-mail: knut.holter@mhs.no