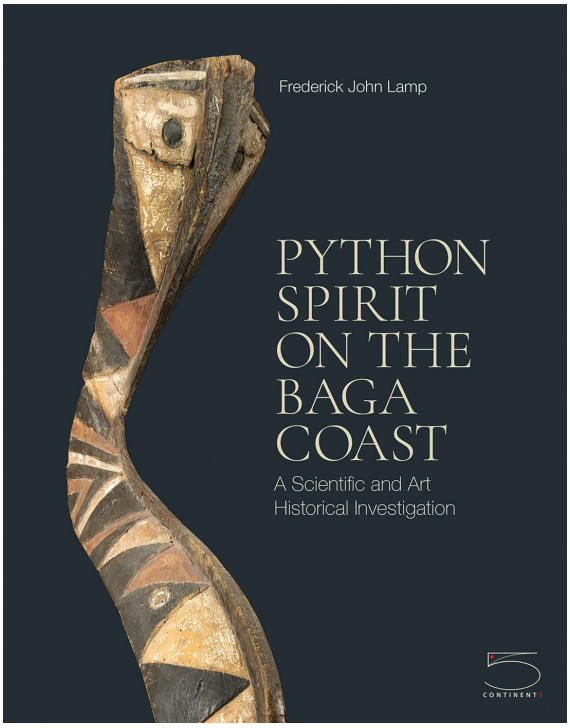
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Python Spirit on the Baga Coast

A Scientific and Art Historical Investigation

Frederick John Lamp

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- This book is a multi-vocal, inter-disciplinary, examination of Baga culture and specifically the performance of the Serpent masquerade within that culture

This study of the wooden Serpent figures/headdresses of the Baga people of Guinea is a collaboration by the author, as an art historian, with many contributions from diverse perspectives, including scientists preeminent in their fields, Robert J. Koestler, Roy Sieber, Dennis William Stevenson, Mark T. Wypyski, and Peter J. Zanzucchi.

The text begins with a thorough exploration of the ethnological and art historical evidence for the Serpent masquerade among the Baga of Guinea, bearing an immense wooden serpent figure on top of the head representing a python. Never witnessed or photographed by an outsider, it disappeared in the 1950s along with most ritual performance after an Islamic jihad instated strict prohibitions against indigenous religions. The ritual context is followed by an in-depth analysis of the Serpent masquerade figures now extant in collections in Europe, the Americas, and Africa, as well as other representations of the python in the ritual art of the region. The final sections present the arguments, as a debate, between interested persons in the arts, including art historians, dealers, appraisers, collectors, and curators, and the scientific examinations by specialists in botany, chemistry, physics, entomology, and conservation concerning one particular Serpent figure in question.

Frederick John Lamp is retired from Yale University as Curator of African Art at the Yale University Art Gallery and lecturer in the History of Art and in Theater Studies, 2004-2014. From 1981 to 2003, he was Head of the Department of the Art of Africa, the Americas, and Oceania at The Baltimore Museum of Art, and taught African art at The Johns Hopkins University, the Maryland Institute College of Art, and elsewhere. From 1973 to 1977, he was archivist of the Eliot Elisofon Archive and Head of Higher Education at the Museum of African Art, Washington, DC, and lecturer at Georgetown, George Washington, and Catholic Universities. He holds a Ph.D. in the History of Art from Yale University, 1982. He has conducted extensive field research over four decades in Sierra Leone and Guinea, with many fellowships from the Fulbright Scholar Award, the Smithsonian Institution, National Endowment for the Humanities, The National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, and others. His numerous publications include *Ancestors in Search of Descendants: Stone Effigies of the Ancient Sapi* (2018); *Continuing Life Histories of African Art: The Collection of Charles B. Benenson at the Yale University Art Gallery* (co-authored, 2012); *See the Music, Hear the Dance: Rethinking Africa at The Baltimore Museum of Art,* (ed., 2004); *Art of the Baga: A Drama of Cultural Reinvention (1996); La Guinée et ses Heritages Culturels* (1992); with invited contributions to many edited books; and articles in *African Arts, Afrique: Archéologie & Arts, The Drama Review, The Dictionary of Art, International Encyclopedia of Dance, History in Africa, Mande Studies,* and *The Art Bulletin*, among many others.

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