

Reviews

Zulu Shaman: Dreams, Prophecies & Mysteries, Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa

(Inner Traditions/Destiny Books, \$16.95)

Reviewed by Eric K. Lerner



In America, when we mention “Afrikan religions,” we usually mean West Afrikan religions. That is because the West Afrikan people constituted the greatest numbers of slaves. Yoruba, Fon and Akhan religions outlived the period of slavery in the Caribbean through the savvy of their followers. Permutations of those faiths have grown United States. Their base of followers now includes those of non-Afrikan descent. However, West Afrikan beliefs represent only a fraction of the whole of spiritual wisdom of a vast continent. Through works like Vusamazulu Credo Mutwa’s book Zulu Shaman, Published by Destiny

books, more Afrikan Wisdom now comes to light in the West.

Mutwa combines autobiography and story telling in Zulu Shaman. He strikes me as being one heck of a storyteller, and I mean this respectfully. In Zulu culture, a priest shares sacred knowledge with followers through telling myths. A priest who is a skilled raconteur can reach a large number of people because of his skill. The act of narrating sacred stories becomes a communal prayer. The better the story telling technique, the more effective the prayer. Mutwa seamlessly weaves his personal experience together with the myth. In doing so he creates emotional resonances in the reader that play off one another. Encountering both Mutwa’s legends and his life for the first time is very moving.

Obviously, Zulu Shaman is not a textbook. You are not going to read it and be able to cook up your very own Zulu love potions. You will not discover what leaves were used to empower the mighty Zulus who defeated the British nearly a century ago. What you will discover is a powerful faith, both personal and cosmic, that is threatened with extinction. Mutwa introduces outsiders to his unique worldview in an effort to preserve his beloved for posterity. He seeks to convey its beauty and relationship to other systems of spirituality. These are aspects of his faith, which can be grasped by us without direct exposure.



Mutwa encourages us to see that there is more to join us in our unique spiritual quests than separate us. It is a very simple message. However, it gets lost in many, if not most, books on religion. When one sees a book with a title such as Zulu Shaman, one may expect a recipe book or anthropological analysis. Mutwa stays clear of these approaches, although he does make intelligent comparisons between aspects of Zulu myth and other culture's. He is a literate man who extols the virtues of educating one's self about the outside world. This contradicts racist notions about illiterate "witch doctors," which are still far too prevalent.

Mutwa's life has been shaped by faith and the volatile politics of South Africa. He weaves a rich tableau of mother goddesses and tricksters (many of whom we have encountered by different names in our respective faiths) amidst a climate of discrimination, urbanization and violence. Mutwa is not an apologist for his fellow Zulus. He portrays them as real people with both noble and wicked propensities, whose behaviors often echo those depicted in ancient stories.

The worlds he paints with words are very immediate. It is in these depictions that one comes across something most unexpected in book on religion: the presence of extraterrestrials. This shocking inclusion may prove to be of most interest to prospective readers of Zulu Shaman. Mutwa matter-of-factly gives accounts of extra terrestrials and their role in Zulu faith. He carefully documents his own close encounters and those of his fellow holy men throughout South and East Afrika. He then cites specific types of extraterrestrials and their unique behaviors. He even gives common sense advice on how to handle communications with them when appropriate. The beings he portrays are similar to those described in popular books like *Communion* and *The Mothman Prophecies*.

Mutwa indicates that some E.T.'s are friendly and benefit mankind, while others may not be friendly or have readily comprehensible motives. He does not sensationalize this. They are part of his cosmology. He acknowledges that there is more to heaven and earth than even the most sage elders will ever realize.

Mutwa breaks with traditional secrecy regarding this subject, as well as many others. (I do not want to get into any debate about extraterrestrials, but I will attest that I am familiar with extraterrestrial mythos from my Yoruba elders.) Mutwa demonstrates that there is considerable discussion of extraterrestrial life among the holy men and people of Afrika and that they are perhaps wisely reluctant to share it with Westerners. He states that he wishes that Western authorities would entertain a more open dialogue on the subject. The issue here is honesty. Mutwa believes that keeping people in ignorance



over any topic is oppressive. When communication shuts down, fear and hatred have a beginning.

Mutwa reveals much about Zulu faith, because he is elderly and does not have a successor. His son who was to succeed him was brutally murdered by South African rebels who believed that his holding on to traditional faith was tantamount to collaboration with the White Oppressors. Mutwa has suffered greatly from the evil in this world. In his case, it has come at the hands of both a racist government and an oppressed people who adopt the mannerisms of their own oppressors.

He, himself, is an accomplished writer, sculptor and painter. His work celebrates Zulu beliefs. He regards creativity as a type of prayer in action. This is an integral part of other Afrikan religions. Artistry and creativity are powerful forces to recognize and enable the divinity in mankind. Mutwa realizes this through his own work and encouraging others.

The one thing missing in *Zulu Shaman* is color pictures of Mutwa's artwork. There are some black and white photographs of his sculptures and paintings which give tantalizing hints of his talent. I want to see better representations of his creative gifts.

I enjoyed *Zulu Shaman*. I was inspired by the accomplishment one man can achieve through his commitment to faith. Mutwa's account of his shamanistic initiation encouraged me to relive elements of my own. Again, there is much described in *Zulu Shaman* that we as humans share. Mutwa's observations do have wide indications. For instance he notes the strain an overabundance of television and radio waves have on Psychic faculty in urban settings. He illustrates an effect I see on myself and other people I know who embrace Shamanistic endeavors.

Mutwa sets an example for what a shaman can aspire to be. In spite of health challenges and threats on his life by the same forces who murdered his son, Mutwa has established a thriving colony for both artists and shamans in South Africa. Furthermore, he has made a crucial first step in documenting his faith for those who share this space-time with him and for generations to come.

In the King's Service, Katherine Kurtz
(Ace Books, 2003, 359pp. \$23.95)

After several years of waiting, finally there is a new book in Katherine Kurtz's long-running Deryni series. *King's Service* though billed as "a novel of the Deryni" is actually the first book in the Childe Morgan trilogy which chronicles the early life of King



Kelson's confidant Alaric Morgan. This novel takes place during the reign of King Donal Haldane grandfather to Kelson. In the Deryni chronology, the trilogy comes just before the Chronicles of the Deryni. Like all of Ms. Kurtz works this work demonstrates her ability to create an intricate plot and establish pace which keeps one reading. Her knowledge of the subtleties of the medieval court and church shows throughout and her unparalleled agility at weaving this knowledge through a compelling story line is unparalleled. It's been over thirty years since the appearance of the first Deryni novel and one still comes away wanting more.

Americano

Emanuel Xavier (Suspect Thoughts Press, 2002, 73pp. \$12.95)



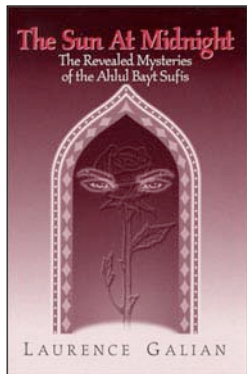
Americano is the latest book of poetry, released 2002, from the author of the collection *Pier Queer* and the novel *Christ-like*. Emanuel Xavier possesses a strong and original voice. Though only 72 pages, *Americano* is one of the freshest poetry collections I've read in years. Each poem, a force unto itself, grabs the reader with its pointed intensity and demands both undivided attention and unambiguous respect. The poet, though thoughtful and self-reflective at times, is absolutely unregretting and unapologetic throughout. Multiple thematic threads weave through the various poems—the poet's own past: the streets, as a prostitute, the drug and, often overlapping, club scene, his success with his earlier work. Uncompromising introspection intermixes with current romances. Dual threads of spirituality and religion thread through the work, the warp to the woof of the collection. Xavier's imagery moves seamlessly from the morphological harshness of Catholicism—the crucifixion, the stigmata, the thorns, the wounds of Chris—to “the Yoruba breezes” of the Afro-Caribbean spirituality of the Orishas. The collection ends with the author looking forward to a hard-fought, almost positivist, ‘evolution’ in “Undone”: “I am not done writing yet/the future is in our words.” ¡Coño Carajo! Fucking brilliant!



The Sun at Midnight: The Revealed Mysteries of the Ahlul Bayt Sufis,

Laurence Galian (Quiddity, Inc, 2003, 778pp, \$24.99)

Reviewed by Joseph Gelfer



Sufism is becoming increasingly popular, thanks in part to the Sufi poet Rumi whose work currently sells in larger volumes than any other poet in America. But Rumi aside, many people know little of Sufi traditions, except perhaps of Whirling Dervishes. The main reason for this is not that Sufism has done a better job of preserving its secrets than the mystical traditions of Christianity or Judaism, but more because Sufism's binding with Islam acts as a stumbling block for a Western audience. Laurence Galian is in a good position to overcome this issue, being both American and an initiate of two Sufi orders, the Nur

Ashki Jerrahi Sufi Order and the Rifa'i-Marufi Order.

The Sun at Midnight is essentially four books in one: a selection of spiritual practices; a fictional tale; a history of the Ahlul Bayt; and an exploration of spiritual development. Of these four interlocking strands the first two are the most accessible. The numerous spiritual practices offer useful ways of accessing Sufi contemplative activity. The fictional tale is about a homeless man who has the door to deeper spiritual awareness opened to him by an enigmatic stranger. The plot begins to thicken with the history of the Ahlul Bayt, the direct family of the Prophet Muhammad. Galian provides a detailed account of how the Ahlul Bayt's succession to Muhammad was interrupted in a nefarious manner by those who sought political advancement. This alternate succession provided the basis of Sunni Islam, which is followed by around ninety percent of all Muslims. The telling of the Ahlul Bayt story in this manner thus has the drastic consequence of questioning the version of Islam followed by the majority of Muslims in the modern world. Whether or not the reader accepts Galian's interpretation of the events following Muhammad's death (his research appears sound) this strand of the book provides a fascinating insight into Islamic history that we just don't see enough of in the West. Other unusual aspects of Islam are also discussed such as the Mahdi, the prophet who has been concealed within the world by Allah since Muhammad's death and who will be revealed in the End Days and Khezr, the Green Man of Islam.

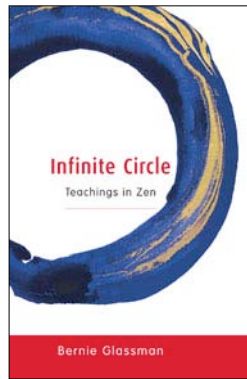
The final part of the book is the path of spiritual development and concerns the many facets the student of Sufism (Galian uses the word Murid) will need to address. Some readers will no doubt interpret Galian's portrayal of Sufism as somehow, 'Left



Hand Path.’ The reasons for this are special attention to esoteric knowledge, discussions of darkness and sex, and references toentheogens and Aleister Crowley. Such an interpretation probably misses the point of the Left Hand Path and almost certainly of Galian. The point is not to focus on these darker, ‘shadow’ elements as an end to themselves, but to acknowledge them alongside the traditional ‘light’ aspects, producing a more holistic spiritual development. This proves to be Galian’s greatest success, offering not some lofty, unachievable spirituality but one which reflects all of our humanity. Galian’s Murid is led away from overbearing gurus and masochistic regimes and encouraged instead to, “strive each day to have a good laugh, to do something silly, sing a song, and to feel the joy of life.”

Galian’s task is essentially one of rediscovering lost treasure. He rediscovers the Ahlul Bayt, he rediscovers the feminine at the heart of Islam, he rediscovers the Shadow and in doing so rediscovers what it is to be a real Sufi, Muslim, and Human.

Infinite Circle: Teachings In Zen, Bernie Glassman
(Shambhala, 2002, 142pp, \$13.95)



Glassman is a long time Zen practitioner and social activist. He is the first dharma heir to Taizan Maezumi Roshi the influential founder of the Los Angeles Zen Center. Glassman holds a firm conviction that practicing Zen also predicates a social conscience combined with social activism. Putting his belief into tireless practice, he is the founder of the Greystone Mandala a collection of various community development and service organizations based in New York City. The successful Greystone Bakery provides numerous jobs as well as helping to fund other Mandala initiatives, such as restoration of low cost housing, a housing facility for people with AIDS, a day project providing for health and medical needs of people living with HIV and AIDS, and a garden project bringing community members together.

Glassman is also co-founder, with his wife Jishu Holmes, of the international Peacemaker Community and a spiritually based order for clowns, the Order of DisOrder.

Infinite Circle, based on a series of talks, provides an articulation of Glassman's philosophy of engaged Buddhist practice. He tackles three classic Buddhist texts to bring a fleshed out vision of why he feels Bhuddhism requires action as well as contemplation.



He provides a detailed exegesis of the “Heart Sutra,” spending several pages discussing the meaning of the first sentence's first word *maha*. The second piece of material he discusses is the “Bodhisattva Precepts” using it to discuss the relative nature of the Dharma. To provide a balance between these two works, he gives an analysis of a lesser known work “The Identity of Relative and Absolute” a poem by Chinese Ch’an master Shih-t’ou Hsi-ch’ien. This latter work discusses enlightenment and action.

Though attempting to present some very difficult material in a rather slim volume, Glassman's book is still quite readable. Originally delivered as lectures, he manages to retain a conversational tone throughout most of the book. Ideally suited for readers who have some background knowledge of Zen Buddhism, much of the work is still accessible by those beginning their studies.

Tankhem: Meditations on Seth Magick, Mogg Morgan
(Mandrake of Oxford, 184pp £10.99)



Ancient Egypt and the “Typhonian” deity Seth, how to find out more? Followers of later cults obliterating Seth’s monuments, demonising and neglecting his cult. A possible starting point in the quest for the “hidden god” is an examination of the life of Egyptian King Sety I (“He of Seth”) also known as Sethos.

When looking for an astral temple that included all of the ancient Egyptian gods and goddesses, the Temple of Sety I proved itself worthy of examination. Many secrets began to reveal themselves. The essence of the real philosophy of the Sethian and indeed what Satanism is, stems from the author’s astral wanderings in this temple.

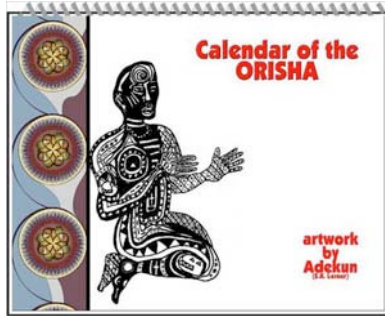
The temple is a real place and like any temple no part of its design is accidental. It is a record in stone and paint of the Egyptian mythos. It is also fits quite well with the Thelemic mythos and tells lots of interesting things about the ancient Seth cult - if you have the eye to see it.

Contents: Prolegomena to Egyptian magick; Setanism; Tankhem, Egyptian Magick and Tantra; Sexual Magick; Twenty Eight; North; The Crooked Wand

The author has published numerous articles, short stories and books, principally *Ayurveda: Medicine of the Gods*, *The English Mahatma* (a Tankhem novel) and as (“Katon Shual”) *Sexual Magick*.



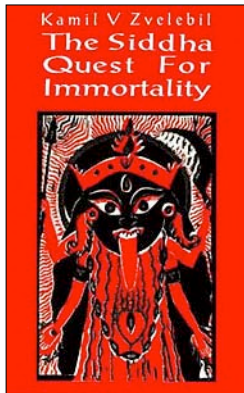
Calendar of the Orisha, Artwork by Adekun (E.K. Lerner)
(Lulu Press, 2004, \$17.95)



Adekun's artwork has appeared several times in the pages of Ashé and his submissions are always warmly welcomed. As an artist, he possesses a unique vision within the realm of spiritual art. His images of the Orishas, Santerian deities, are powerful, evocative, at times disturbing and thoroughly modern. Each image demonstrates his deep connection to the spirit he depicts. The calendar may be ordered online through Lulu

Press: <http://www.lulu.com/orisha>

Siddha Quest for Immortality: Sexual, alchemical and medical secrets of the Tamil Siddhas, the poets of the powers, K Zvelebil - reissued
(Mandrake of Oxford, 2003, 218pp, £13.99/\$25)



In South India there is a society where priests and lay people claim supernatural powers. Where a sophisticated medical system underlies a quest for physical longevity and psychic immortality. And where arcane and sexual rituals take place that are far removed from the Brahmanic tradition of the rest of India. That society is the Tamil Siddhas. In the Siddha Quest for Immortality world Tamil expert K Zvelebil offers a vivid picture of these people: their religious beliefs, their magical rites, their alchemical practices, their complex system of medicine, and their inspired tradition of poetry.

In the Poets of the Powers, Zvelebil introduced English speakers, for the first time, to the astonishing power of Siddha writing. The Siddha Quest for Immortality includes many newly translated examples of poetry that is deeply religious but not without humour. But physical longevity was also central to Siddha belief, and fascinating chapters on Siddha medicine describe routines by which one can maintain health, and tell how drugs are created from such varied ingredients as cowdung, human urine, honey, and milk.



K Zvelebil, (Professor Emeritus of the Universities of Chicago and Utrecht) is an ordained Buddhist and world-renowned expert on south Indian Languages and culture. He has written many books including the Lexicon of Tamil Literature. The Siddha Quest for Immortality makes available for the first time, secrets of tantrik magick and alchemy.

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