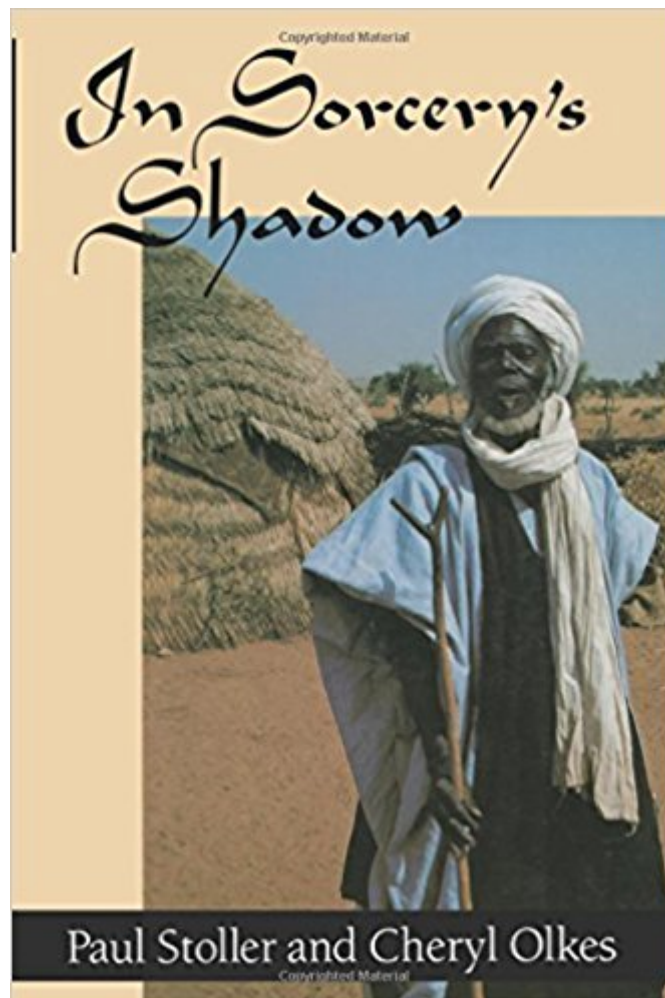




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In Sorcery's Shadow: A Memoir Of Apprenticeship Among The Songhay Of Niger



Synopsis

The tale of Paul Stoller's sojourn among sorcerers in the Republic of Niger is a story of growth and change, of mutual respect and understanding that will challenge all who read it to plunge deeply into an alien world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The tribal sorcerer is both hunter and hunted in a world of power seekers. The ominous sense of a narrowly oppressive quest for power is captured in this startling field report by an anthropologist who was himself initiated into African sorcery. Stoller made five field trips to study the Songhay, proud, fierce subsistence farmers of Niger. Becoming an apprentice, then a practitioner of the black arts, he took part in one ritual attack that, he claims, paralyzed the face of the intended victim's sister. After hostile sorcerers' spells temporarily paralyzed the author's legs, he began carrying around protective charms. On his last field trip, he was joined by his coauthor wife, a sociologist; she adds a measure of objectivity to this firsthand account. Although the narrative unfolds slowly and doesn't measure up as the metaphysical adventure it might have been, it is nevertheless a responsible attempt to pierce a hidden realm. Copyright 1987 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In the last decade, anthropologists have allowed personal concerns to become an acknowledged part of their ethnographic work. In this vein, Stoller "learned much about Songhay sorcery as an

initiated apprentice," and consequently his book is more "memoir" than standard ethnography. Still, the account contains incisive information about fieldwork in Niger and about Songhay sorcerythe incantations, power attributed to plants, antagonisms between sorcerers, and details of daily life that both he and, later, Olkes collected. A good presentation of many of the ethical dilemmas anthropologists face when doing fieldwork for informed laypersons and specialists. Schneebaum's book is again more autobiography than ethnography, but in contrast to Stoller's, it contains sketchy ethnographic information. Though Schneebaum incessantly interviewed the Asmat during his four years in New Guinea, little of that information is conveyed. The book is more a search for identity: Schneebaum knew the Asmat as no other ethnographer has (or would admit to); as "an exchange friend" he developed intimate bonds with male friends. The lack of detailed cultural information is therefore the more regrettable. The book does, however, give us clear descriptions of Schneebaum's anthropological encounter and subsequent personal questions. Winifred Lambrecht, Brown Univ., Providence, R.I. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Had to get this book for an Anthropology class. It was the only book we had to read that I actually enjoyed, and that's coming from a big book fan. I actually looked up Stoller's YouTube channel after reading this, I wanted to know more about him and his work and his life. It was a very well-written account of his time learning sorcery (technically, it wasn't all sorcery by definition, but a lot of it was) and according to others in my class it was very engaging. It's easy to keep me interested in a book, I just love reading, but many people don't, so I figured I'd include that my class's general consensus was about the same as mine. I dunno, if you're interested in learning about sorcery in Africa, it might not be the most educational resource since it's from a very ethnocentric perspective, but if you're simply interested in the subject in general I'd give it a read.

As a former Peace Corps volunteer in Niger, I had many unanswered questions about the Songhay's pre-Islamic beliefs by the time I got home. A lot of what I saw over there really makes more sense now that I've read this book (particularly what supposedly happens during possession dances and what their purpose is). Stoller does a great job turning the information into a narrative with dialogue and character development that really grabs the reader's attention and sustains it, making it read more like a thriller than an ethnography (which is not a bad thing as ethnographies can be very dry). Thus, you don't have to be an anthropologist to enjoy this book. My bias might be that I lived among Songhay for two years and appreciated many of his references in a way

someone else might overlook. My only gripe is that he seems to focus his effort so much in making the book enjoyable that he neglects a lot of the raw information I was looking for when I purchased this book. Fortunately, Stoller also wrote many other books on the Songhay which I thought did a much better job at explaining the whats and the whys, particularly in the history and origins of traditional "animism."

A fantastic ethnography, but reads more like a novel. Immensely entertaining.

We are preparing for a short term medical mission to Niger. This helped me gain an additional perspective.

Nice speed and quality

Great book! Amazing novel and story

Thanks

Good book, gives you a (somewhat) insider experiences of Songhay culture and Sorcery. I enjoyed it. I guess he also has another book that is like a prequel to this one and I guess reading this one is good after that one, I don't know what it's called though.

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