

L E T T E R S T O T H E E D I T O R S

Dear JASO,

In his notice of our book *Ethnic Sculpture* (JASO, Vol. XVI, no. 3, pp. 247-8), your reviewer raises what he takes to be errors of fact in our presentation of Nilotic attitudes to cattle. We would like to respond briefly to these remarks. Your reviewer also compliments us on a view which unfortunately we do not hold and did not express in the book. Since an important point has thereby been missed, this too might be corrected.

Firstly, then, cattle. This subject, we should explain - since your reviewer does not mention why it should be discussed in the first place in a book on sculpture - is raised only to bring into focus how shaky are some of the foundations of the notion of 'sculpture' when considered cross-culturally. 'As the subjects of pride and boasting, of lengthy and detailed discussion of form and colour conducted in a specialised vocabulary and as the models of aesthetic ideals (and, up to a point, of moral ones too) they (cattle) engage and even surpass most of the criteria conventionally applied in the West to sculpture' (p. 10). In little more than half a page, we sought to outline and amplify on a range of attitudes and behaviours which permit this conclusion especially amongst Nilotic populations. Our point was therefore a general one and an aside from the main discussion, and we felt at liberty to list instances and examples without being specific as to tribal sources.

We have not, however, invented the ethnography for all that. Your reviewer's observations, as indeed some of ours, clearly derive from the well-known literature dealing with the Sudanese Nuer and Dinka. We have also based ourselves, however, in field data and published material on Nilotic peoples elsewhere, in southeastern Sudan, for instance, especially on the Toposa, Jiye and those transhumant groups of Turkana and Nyangatom who cross the border from neighbouring Kenya and Ethiopia. There is also available published material on the Longarim (otherwise known as the Boya, or better the Larim) who though not Nilotic in a technical, linguistic sense have nonetheless been extensively influenced by Nilotic cultures and notably in relation to cattle (see, for instance, the information in A. Kronenberg, 'Longarim Favourite Beasts', *Kush*, 1961). This (p. 261) is indeed the source of our note, rejected as inaccurate, that the death of a favourite animal may be a cause for suicide. Here too is to be found a discussion of the extension of the range of favoured animals, found elsewhere as well, from oxen alone to bulls (which may be decorated in various ways) and indeed even to cattle. In generalising about Nilotic practice in this area, there is arguably good reason to follow Kronenberg and adopt a neutral term to refer to the favoured animal rather than exclusively the neutered term, oxen.

Turning to your reviewer's comments on matters more central to the book, he says: 'The lack of figurative sculpture in non-Western art is posed as a problem: and then rejected, quite properly, as an ethnocentric question' (p. 247). This is frankly puzzling. Leaving to one side field photographs and illustrations of tools or technical processes, all but two of our illustrations are in a direct and accessible way figurative - we have indeed made a point of the fact (p. 40) that, whilst what is actually represented in a sculpture may often be problematical, figuration rather than more purely abstract form is the normal vehicle for such representation. We can only suppose that what your reviewer was thinking of was our discussion of the lack of traditions of *portraiture* in a conventional Western sense. Yet, in that case, whilst we do indeed reject the notion that representing particular persons in art must inevitably involve attempts to produce their physical likenesses we do nonetheless note traditions in which visual reference to acts, mannerism, or the office a person holds, is sufficient to personalise sculptural representation. In the end it seems sad that a book intended to introduce and discuss ideas about non-Western sculpture, rather than yet another unchallenging catalogue, should be reviewed in so bland a manner.

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Dear JASO,

I must apologise to McLeod and Mack for my carelessness in using the term 'figurative' when referring to portrait sculpture. As for cattle, however, I still maintain that their account of Nilotic attitudes is misleading.

Indeed, the reason why their account is misleading is now clear: they have based it, in part, on material concerning a non-Nilotic people. Kronenberg's article no doubt gives an accurate picture of attitudes to cattle amongst the 10,000 or so Longarim, but McLeod and Mack are hardly justified in making generalisations, on the basis of Kronenberg's account, about attitudes to cattle amongst the Nilotics, who just in the Southern Sudan can be numbered in millions. As for adopting the neutral term 'beast', Kronenberg adopted 'the awkward term "favourite beast"' (*Kush* 1961, p. 258) because the Longarim, unlike the Nilotics, have both favourite oxen and favourite bulls - and even favourite cows. But I do not see why being aware of these Longarim customs means that we should use the neutral term when discussing the favourite ox among the Nilotics, for the Longarim are not Nilotic and, even if there are exceptions, it is still the case that the vast majority of Nilotics adopt oxen as favourite beasts. McLeod and Mack do not use the neutral term in their

discussion, referring instead to bulls; that it is generally speaking oxen is in itself surely an interesting fact, relevant to aesthetics and morals.

Having been accused of being bland, perhaps I might also add that although I do have criticisms of the book, I do think that *Ethnic Sculpture* is a very good introduction to contemporary ideas about non-Western sculpture and that it is worth any interested student's £4.95.

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