Title: West Africa: word, symbol, song

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Abstract: This book accompanies an exhibition on West Africa’s written and oral literature at the British Library, London (16 October 2015 - 16 February 2016). The exhibition was born out of an aspiration to celebrate the wealth and depth of West Africa’s written heritage, demonstrate the complexity and diversity of its orature and show the vast inventiveness of its printed literature, whether of creative, political or religious nature. The exhibition displayed manuscripts and maps, sound and video, historical and contemporary publications held in the collection of the British Library, augmented by a variety of other objects, such as textiles, artefacts bearing symbols, masks and contemporary art works, all contributing to the story of West African literature and orature from the distant past to the present day. The book deals with history, literature, music and politics in five chapters: 1. Building: narrative and knowledge in pre-colonial West Africa (Gus Casely-Hayford); 2. Spirit: histories of religion and the word (Insa Nolte); Crossings: word and music across the Atlantic (Lucy Durán, Janet Topp Fargion and Marion Wallace); Speaking out: dissent and creativity in the colonial era and beyond (Karin Barber and Stephanie Newell); Making: the West African imagination since Independence (Pius Adesanmi). [ASC Leiden abstract]