

“EWÉ”, Pierre Fatumbi Verger, Odebrecht / ed. Companhia das Letras, São Paulo, 1995, 758 pp.

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Abstract

In this article the author presents the last book written by Pierre Verger. This book, of which now there are only a few existing copies, offers precious information on Yoruba medicine and on the formulas used for the medical and magical *trabalhos*, this book is the result of the field research that Pierre Verger conducted for years in the African states of Nigeria, Benin and in the Brazilian state of Bahia.

Key-words: Yoruba medicine, magical, plants

“Ewé: the use of plants in the Yoruba culture”, ed. Companhia das Letras, the last book written by Pierre Verger, was published in Brazil in 1995 with the patronage of the Odebrecht Organization. This book, of which now there are only a few existing copies, offers precious information on Yoruba medicine and on the formulas used for the medical and magical *trabalhos*, this book is the result of the field research that Pierre Verger conducted for years in the African states of Nigeria, Benin and in the Brazilian state of Bahia.

In 1952 in Keto, today part of the Benin Republic, Pierre Verger was in fact initiated as babalão, receiving from his master Oluwo the name of Fatumbi, meaning “reborn from the grace of Ifà”. This facilitated his research because a babalão needs to know about plants for the preparation of potions, remedies and *trabalhos*”

Pierre Fatumbi Verger was able to record the mechanisms, the enchantments and the intonations used to cure the physical and spiritual illnesses by the ancient babalões, penetrating a vast area of the Negro culture that was not accessible to the Europeans and is still now closed to the non-initiated. In the span of 40 years he collected thousands of precious formulas from which he put together a book unique in its kind. The theory of the “actuating verb”, the medicinal and magical formulas, the lexicon of the names of plants and their scientific classification are an unlimited source of knowledge for future research.

The book in its original release includes 447 formulas, in Yoruba language and in Portuguese, divided in: *oògun*, that are recipes for medical use; *ibìmo*, that are recipes related to pregnancy and birth; *òrisà*, that are *trabalhos* related to the gods; *awure*, that are *trabalhos* for beneficial usage; *àbilù*, that is the work of evil; *ìdàábòbò*, that are *trabalhos* for protection against evil *trabalhos*.

The author offers other information like the pronunciation of the Yoruba language and the glossaries with the nomenclature of the Yoruba plants. He also comments on the relationship between the names assigned to the plants and their relative effects, a true

poetical relationship created to transmit the knowledge that for centuries has been transmitted orally from generation to generation. The book starts with a beautiful presentation by the Brazilian writer Jorge Amado and also contains two introductions by Pierre Fatumbi Verger. It's embellished by black and white drawings by the famous Brazilian painter Carybé that has also illustrated many books by Amado.

Antonella Rita Roscilli is a journalist and Brazilianist, she has collaborated with various journals, amongst which 'Latinoamerica e tutti i Sud del mondo' directed by Gianni Minà, and with Italian institutions such as 'la Fondazione Basso and l'ANPI that deals with cultural themes of Latin America (in particular Brazil) and portuguese speaking Africa. She has published various articles in Italian newspapers. Her degree from Rome University 'La Sapienza' in Brazilian literature, her thesis was on the writer Zélia Gattai Amado.

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