# **Suggested Reading**

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Glélé, Maurice Ahanhanzo. *Le Danxome: Du pouvoir aja à la nation fon*. Paris: Nubia, 1974.

Haskins, Jim, and Joann Biondi. *From Afar to Zulu: A Dictionary of African Cultures*. New York: Walker and Co., 1995.

Herskovits, Melville J. *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom*. Vol. 2. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1967.

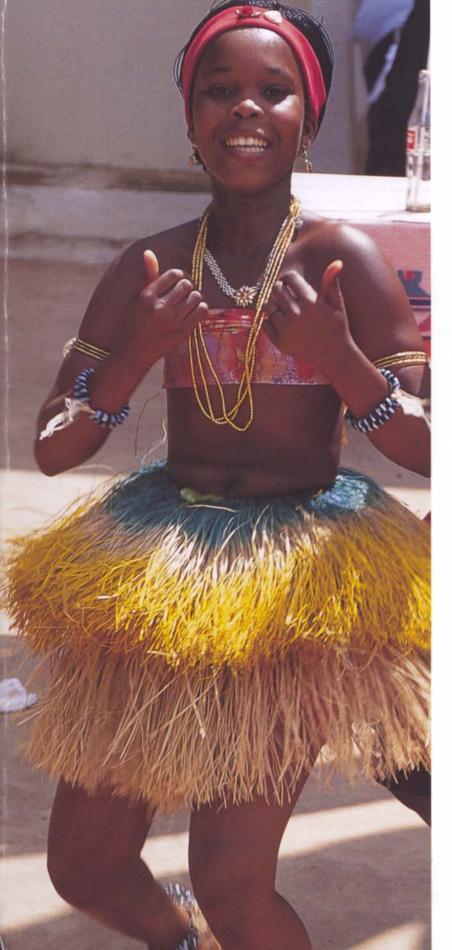
Koslow, Philip. *Dahomey: The Warrior Kings.* Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 1997. Moss, Joyce, and George Wilson. *Peoples* of the World: Africans South of the Sahara. Detroit and London: Gale Research, 1991.

Pliya, Jean. *Dahomey.* Issy-les-Moulineaux, France: Classiques Africains, 1975.

Ronen, Dov. *Dahomey: Between Tradition and Modernity.* Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1975.

Waterlot, E. G. Les bas-reliefs des Palais Royaux d'Abomey. Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1926.

In addition to the scholarly works listed above, interested readers may consult Archibald Dalzel's account of Dahomey in the late eighteenth century, The History of Dahomy: An Inland Kingdom of Africa (1793; reprint, London, Frank Cass and Co., 1967), and Sir Richard Burton's A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahome (1864; reprint, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966); both offer historical European perspectives on the Dahomey kingdom. More recently, the kingdom's dramatic history has also been treated in several works of fiction. The Guadeloupean novelist Maryse Condé uses the story of King Behanzin's exile as a backdrop to the modern black experience in the Americas in The Last of the African Kings (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). The English writer Bruce Chatwin's short historical novel The Viceroy of Ouidah (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), set in nineteenthcentury Dahomey, is based on the life of a Portuguese adventurer who became an ally of the Dahomean monarchy. It was the basis for the film Cobra Verde by the German director Werner Herzog. There is also a 43-minute video, History Told on Walls (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1997), that portrays the Abomey bas-reliefs and their conservation, as well as the living tradition of bas-relief art in Benin today.



# **Project Participants**

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Dancer performing at a reception at the Motel Abomey. Photograph by Susan Middleton, 1997.

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## Research

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# Acknowledgments

The four-year-long project to conserve the bas-reliefs of the Royal Palaces of Abomey, a collaboration between the Getty Conservation Institute (GCI) and the Ministry of Culture and Communication of the Republic of Benin, grew out of a shared belief in the critical importance of the bas-reliefs as a visual record of Fon culture. An extension of that project, this book seeks to bring to a wider audience the remarkable story of the Abomey bas-reliefs and the kingdom whose history they recount.

The conservation project and this book would not have been possible without the dedicated work of many individuals and the support of a number of institutions. We gratefully acknowledge the services rendered by officials of the Ministry of Culture and Communication. The GCI would also like to thank the staff of the Department of Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Benin; we owe particular debts of gratitude to the Department's conservation trainees — Léonard Ahonon, Justin Alaro, and Dorothé Ayadokoun Mizéhoun—who became indispensable colleagues. The staff of the Historic Museum of Abomey provided valuable support as well.

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Back cover: Reconstructed palace of Glélé.

Photographs by Susan Middleton, 1996.









he Republic of Benin in West Africa is home to more than forty ethnic groups, the largest of which is the Fon. In the early seventeenth century, the Fon established a society ruled by a dynasty of kings, who over the years forged the powerful kingdom of Dahomey. In their capital city of Abomey, the rulers built a remarkable complex of palaces that became the center of the kingdom's political, social, and religious life. The palace walls were decorated with colorful low-relief sculptures, or bas-reliefs, which recount legends and battles and glorify the dynasty's reign. In a society with no written language, these visual stories have perpetuated the history and myths of the Fon people.

Palace Sculptures of Abomey combines color photographs of the bas-reliefs with a lively history of Dahomey, complemented by rare historical images. As well as providing a vivid portrait of these narrative sculptures, the book details the collaborative efforts of the Benin Ministry of Culture and Communication and the Getty Conservation Institute to conserve the reliefs; describes the Historic Museum of Abomey, now housed in the palace compound; and discusses the continuing popularity of bas-reliefs in contemporary Beninois art.

