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Pride of Men (Social History of Africa (Paperback))

Coleen E Kriger

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Admired, respected, and remembered as legendary heroes, ironworkers occupied a special social position in precolonial west central Africa. *Pride of Men* investigates how and why this was so.

Colleen Kriger unveils the "mystique" of ritual and legend surrounding ironworking to shed light on the labor processes, workplaces, and metalwares that were deemed so indispensable to central African societies. She identifies complex patters of iron production and consumption that reveal master blacksmiths, as opposed to smelters, to be the key for understanding the special status of ironworkers during the nineteenth century. Successful smiths were wealthy and worldly. In addition to designing and making effective tools and weapons, metallic forms of currencies, and impressive symbols of prestige, blacksmiths created and reshaped social networks and cultural values that extended far beyond their own local communities.

This study raises issues about the definitions and structures of work in precolonial Africa, the roles of material objects in conveying public messages about power and prestige, and the ways in which cultural practices both constrain and encourage innovation and technological change.

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