



Epic Heroines of Burkina Faso

This series of photographs portrays two legendary warrior women of Burkina Faso, West Africa, telling a story of epic proportions. Princess Yennega and Princess Guimbi Ouattara, according to oral history shared to this day, played crucial roles in the origins and evolution of their country. These photographs of Princess Yennega, who is considered the mother of the West African nation of Burkina Faso, were selected by UNESCO Paris for its cultural project "Women in African History: an e-learning tool". The photos, taken by Brenda Gael McSweeney in 2009, capture the enduring legacy of the two heroines in present-day Burkina Faso, preserved and passed on by artists in the Burkinabe community. Both women figure in "Women of Vision Burkina", an intangible heritage narrative inspired by an initiative in Massachusetts called Brighton/Allston Women of Vision. The stories of these cultural icons are being transmitted both through local traditional artwork and e-curricula around the world.

According to UNESCO, "Yennega, an emblematic figure in Burkina Faso, was the mother of Ouédraogo, the founder of the dynasties of the Moose chieftains. She is thought to have lived between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. A legendary figure in West Africa, Yennega is the epitome of the female warrior, a free and independently minded woman." This citation is from the Women in African History website, spearheaded by UNESCO's Sasha Rubel and Edouard Joubaud. Learn more at en.unesco.org/womenin africa/.

Princess Guimbi Ouattara (1836-1919) was a key heroine in the history of the city of Bobo-Dioulasso in the western part of present-day Burkina Faso. She defended the city against invaders from the south, and also gave shelter to early explorers. A mausoleum has been erected in her honor. She too surmounted gender stereotypes and assumed a leadership role.

Interestingly, the stories of these two legendary heroines of Burkina Faso also constitute part of the intangible heritage of the country, the importance of which comes into focus in UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. See also Women of Vision – Burkina Faso at equalityburkina.blogspot.com

~ Brenda Gael McSweeney, Scholastique Kompaoré, Cassandra Fox

