

# HOLY PEOPLE OF THE WORLD

## *A Cross-Cultural Encyclopedia*

VOLUME 1: ENTRIES A TO G

*Phyllis G. Jestice, Editor*

*Foreword by Lionel Rothkrug*

A B C  C L I O

Santa Barbara, California

Denver, Colorado

Oxford, England

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Holy people of the world : a cross-cultural encyclopedia / Phyllis G. Jestice, editor.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-57607-355-6 (hardcover : alk. paper) — ISBN 1-85109-649-3 (e-book)

1. Religious biography—Encyclopedias. I. Jestice, Phyllis G.

BL72.H65 2004  
200'.92'2—dc22

2004022606

This book is available on the World Wide Web as an e-book. Visit [abc-clio.com](http://abc-clio.com) for details.

ABC-CLIO, Inc.  
130 Cremona Drive, P.O. Box 1911  
Santa Barbara, California 93116-1911

This book is printed on acid-free paper. ♻️  
Manufactured in the United States of America

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## Mopsus

*Greek seer*

Known as one of the great seers in Greek myth, Mopsus appears to be the name of a historical man, or perhaps a family. One genealogy said he was the son of Apollo and Manto (Prophetess), the daughter of Tiresias. After founding the oracle of Claros on the coast of Asia Minor, he migrated to Cilicia (in modern southern Turkey), where the town Mopsuetia was named after him. His historicity seems confirmed by the phrase "house of Mopsus" that appears in a Phoenician-Luwian inscription found near Cilicia. In myth he was celebrated as the seer on the ship *Argo* that transported Jason on his quest for the Golden Fleece. According to the Hellenistic poet of this expedition, Apollonius of Rhodes (third century B.C.E.), Mopsus died in Libya from a snake bite.

The principal story about Mopsus told how in Cilicia he defeated Calchas in a prophecy contest. Calchas asked, "How many figs on that tree?" "Ten thousand," Mopsus replied, "enough to fill a bushel with one left over." When Mopsus was proved right, Calchas asked, "How many piglets will that sow give birth to?" "Three, and one female." Mopsus was right again, and Calchas died of chagrin.

—Barry B. Powell

**See also:** Greek Prophets; Mediterranean Religions of Antiquity and Holy People; Prophets; Tiresias

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## Mora, Franciscó (Ifá Moroté)

(1903–1986 C.E.)

*Santería priest*

Francisco Mora was a Cuban American who popularized African religious traditions in the United States. He was initiated into the Lucumi religious tradition, known popularly as Santería (Way of the Saints), in Havana, Cuba, in 1944 and was made a priest of Ifá in a line of priests going back to the famous Adechina, who brought wide knowledge of the tradition from Africa. Ifá is a compendium of Yoruba medical and spiritual knowledge that is made available to devotees through a complex oracular system. A priest of Ifá must memorize thousands of verses in the Yoruba language and be able to apply them to life situations as the oracle dictates. Mora became an Ifá master and in 1946 became the first priest to establish a practice in the United States. He settled in New York. In 1964, he organized what is believed to be the first ceremony in the United States involving the sacred *batá* drums that call the African *orisha* spirits.

In the 1970s, Mora presided over a large community of Latino and African American initiates from his home in the Bronx. He was frequently called upon to travel to the Caribbean and South America, where his expertise was required and his generous counsel eagerly sought. By his own estimate, he had more than 6,000 "godchildren" in the Lucumi religious tradition.

—Joseph M. Murphy

**See also:** Adechina; Contemporary Holy People; Orishas; Priests; Santería

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## Moraa

(fl. early 20th cent. C.E.)

*Kenyan visionary, healer*

Moraa, like the more famous Tanzanian Kinjikitile, was one of the many seers and indigenous doctors who emerged in Kenya during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the aftermath of British colonialism. Partly because of the patriarchal nature of the Gusii community of western Kenya of which she was a member, not much is known about her life. However, it is possible to deduce that she was middle-aged by 1900. Sources identify her as Moraa, wife of Ngiti of Bogeke, subclan of Getutu.

Moraa's knowledge of medicine helped the Abagusii to win wars against the neighboring Luo and Kipsigis. Moreover, she predicted the coming of British colonialism in Gusii country and its effect on the native population. She foresaw and forewarned her people that the British would take away their land and cattle and conscript their children into forced labor.

Consequently, Moraa encouraged and instigated the Abagusii to resist colonial rule. William Ochieng' (1974) reports that when a white administrator robbed Otenyo (Omogusii) of two of his best cows, Moraa protested harshly. Not only did she condemn the robbery, she also demanded that the young people of her community take the white man down. Moraa's persistent exposure of the evils of British colonial domination culminated in the 1908 Gusii uprising. Moraa's activities did not enchant the British. They branded her a witch doctor who was ignorant of the British civilizing mission. This was clearly a misconception of Moraa's mission. Unfortunately, owing to patriarchy among the Gusii, Moraa was not accorded the recognition she deserved.

Moraa provided a discourse on the basis of which protest action was undertaken against the British. Like all great

Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Mugo's play *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (1977) has many passages that dramatize resistance to colonial rule in different Kenyan communities. The Gusii uprising of 1908 was one of many instances of protest against the British. Ngugi and Micere Mugo see the Mau Mau as the latest among a series of such protests.

—Richard M. Wafula

**See also:** Gender and Holy People; Kinjikitile Ngwale; Patriotism and Holy People; Prophets

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## Morality and Holy People

Most holy people in the world religious traditions have taught moral values, often modeling ethical behavior to others or fighting to raise the ethical awareness of the general populace. This is one of the difficulties of defining holy people at all in Judaism—since all Jews are held to a high ethical standard, it is hard to distinguish between a “good” Jew and a “holy” one. The vast majority of people defined as holy would have agreed with the Persian sufi al-Suhrawardi (1145–1234), who stressed proper moral conduct (*abab*), that the physical world is related to the spiritual world, so a person's behavior must match his or her inner state. He especially emphasized the necessity of obeying the law completely as a manifestation of divine order. Indeed, Buddhism regards the *arahant*, the fully awakened person, as actually incapable of certain kinds of moral transgression, essentially equating religious and moral perfection. On the whole, Christians have judged their saints by a higher standard of

of ethical conduct as “holy fools” or “madmen for God's sake.” Although some such people may indeed have been insane, it is clear in several cases that they were performing a profound social commentary, rousing people to awareness of the meaning behind societal rules and precepts. A whole class of Hindu holy persons, the *vamacharis* (followers of “left-handed” conduct), reverse the rules of what is pure and impure as a necessary part of their path to liberation.

In general, the problem has arisen more commonly of what to do when a person of perceived holiness advocates a practice regarded by his or her society as immoral. Islamic theologians debated whether satanic inspiration could be mistaken for the voice of God, and therefore whether divine inspiration should be passed on to others as a guide to ethical conduct. Many tales of Christian saints tell of demonic temptation posing as divine guidance, encouraging the saints to act in immoral ways—only to be foiled by the purity of the saint.

Particularly difficult is the problem of understanding the moral vision of holy people in a multicultural society, since the ethics of different cultures differ considerably. For example, it is hard for a Christian to recognize a polygamist as a saint, or to accept esoteric Daoist sexual practices as a point of connection to the divine. It serves as an important warning that, for all their similarities, we should not forget that holy people are the products of their own cultural systems.

—Phyllis G. Jestice

**See also:** Insanity; Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove; Suhrawardi, Shihabuddin

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age of five to the Bab's uncle, Haji Mirza Abu'l-Qasim, and educated within the uncle's household. In all probability, he had been castrated when taken captive in Africa and was a eunuch.

At the age of nineteen, the Bab—returning to Shiraz after a six-year absence—purchased Mubarak from his uncle for fourteen tumans (about \$28). Mubarak served the Bab and his family for the rest of his life. He was deeply involved in the events surrounding the founding of the Babi religion and was present (in an adjoining room) on May 22, 1844, when the Bab first declared his mission, beginning (for Baha'is) a new era in religious history.

Only two early believers were chosen to accompany the Bab on his subsequent pilgrimage to Mecca (1844–1845), Quddus (Mirza Muhammad-'Ali Barfarushi, the first in rank of the Bab's disciples) and Mubarak. The Bab is recorded to have sacrificed, in accordance with the customs of Islamic pilgrimage, nineteen lambs in Mecca—nine in his own name, seven in the name of Quddus, and three for Mubarak, securing for the latter the full benefits of the *hajj* to Mecca. When the Bab was arrested and exiled to Isfahan, Mubarak remained in Shiraz to serve and protect the Bab's wife (Khadijih Bagum) and mother. After the Bab's execution in 1850, his mother and grandmother were forced to transfer their residence to Karbala in Iraq. Mubarak accompanied them there and died in their service in around 1873 at about the age of forty.

After 1850, to salvage their respectability, members of the Bab's family maintained that the Bab had not been executed but was still alive on an extended business trip to India. Haji Mubarak helped to uphold this public fiction by vowing to sweep the courtyard around the tomb of Imam Husayn b. 'Ali in Karbala every day until his master should return. He performed this pious duty faithfully every morning until his death.

—Anthony A. Lee

See also: Bab, The; Baha'i Faith and Holy People; Disciples; Status

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set of Korongoro, which was initiated between 1815 and 1838, and lived where the present-day town of Sotik is located in western Kenya. He was of the Kipkendek clan, and his mother was the daughter of Arap Turugat, from Talai clan, the famous Nandi Orgoiyot.

Mugeni was married to five wives and had five sons and several daughters. He is said to have died approximately four years before the arrival of the first white man to Sotik. The first European to pass Sotik was Fredrick Jackson in 1889. It is therefore likely that Mugeni died in about 1885.

Tradition says that Asis revealed himself to Mugeni on several occasions. These revelations contained instruction on how the Kipsigis people were expected to live a holy life before Asis. Mugeni's visions also foretold future events that were to take place in the Kipsigis country. Among his prophecies was the coming of the white man, the arrival of trains, the development of towns, modern clothing, and the establishment of colonialism and the eventual independence of African nations. Prophecy came to him in visions as he went about his daily activities. These visions could appear while he was talking to friends, when he was at home with his family, or at traditional beer-drinking parties with elders.

One day when Mugeni was drinking beer at a friend's home with the elders, he suddenly stared at the pot of beer as if something were about to emerge from it. Then he said, "Isn't that Mr. Arap Matinyit? And isn't that his wife Tapsabei? What has come of them? Why does Mr. Matinyit look like his wife?" Then the elders asked him, "Mugeni, what are you saying and what does that mean?" He replied, "A time is coming when we are no longer alive, when there will be no difference between male and female."

The Kipsigis community is now seeing the breakdown of traditional gender roles with changes brought about by education and modernity, and many see this as the fulfillment of Mugeni's prophecy, citing the fact that women today have taken roles that were traditionally reserved for men alone, and vice versa.

—Adam K. arap Chepkwony

See also: African Religions and Holy People; Prophets

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## Mugeni, Barngetuny

(d. c. 1885 C.E.)

*Kipsigis prophet*

Barngetuny Mugeni was a Kipsigis prophet who is still respected by the Kipsigis community. It is popularly believed that he was the messenger of Asis (God). He was of the age

## Mugo wa Kibiro, Cege

(fl. c. 1890 C.E.)

*Kikuyu prophet*

Cege Mugo wa Kibiro was the most famous Kikuyu Kenyan prophet in the nineteenth century. The precise dates during

which he lived are not known. From an anecdote told about Chief Njiri wa Karanja, who lived between 1866 and 1974, however, it appears that Mugo wa Kibiro was an adult by 1888. In that year, Njiri was given special food by the prophet as a sign that he would be a chief in his community.

Mugo wa Kibiro foretold that visitors would come from out of the big water to the east. The big water to the east was the Indian Ocean. These visitors, Mugo predicted, would have strange complexions. Besides the fact that their skins resembled those of small white frogs (white, pale-looking people), they would wear clothes that looked like the wings of butterflies. The strangers, Mugo further said, would construct an iron snake (a train) that would spew fire as it crawled its way from the big water to the east (Indian Ocean) to the big water to the west (Lake Victoria). Moreover, Mugo spoke of the destructive weapons that the strangers would carry. Their weapons would be like sticks (guns); but unlike ordinary sticks, they would spit fire. Mugo warned Kikuyu warriors against attacking these strangers with spears and arrows, for the spears would not match the sticks that spat fire. Through this metaphorical language, Cege Mugo wa Kibiro foresaw the coming of European colonialism to Kenya.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o, in his early novels, especially *The River Between* (1975), uses the prophecy of Cege Mugo wa Kibiro to construct a narrative of loss and subsequent salvation from the yoke of colonialism not only of the Kikuyu but the entire Kenyan population. Mugo advised his people that the most effective way of dealing with the European power would be to learn the ways through which that power was created and sustained. Ngugi expands wa Kibiro's prophecy by pointing out that the basis of the white man's power is his education. Consequently, like the prophet of yore, Ngugi asserts that the best way of fighting against European colonialism is by acquiring Western education.

As a prophetic figure, Cege Mugo wa Kibiro led the Kikuyu to redefine their identity according to the exigencies of their time. Ngugi's early narratives give Mugo the credit for providing the germ of modern nationalism in Kikuyuland and beyond. During Cege Mugo wa Kibiro's lifetime, other seers from other Kenyan communities were voicing similar messages. Mutonyi wa Nabukelembe (Bukusu) and Sakawa (Gusii) also foretold the coming of the white man and its consequences.

—Richard M. Wafula

See also: African Religions and Holy People; Prophets

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## Muhammad

(570–632 C.E.)

*Muslim founder, prophet*

Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah Abu'l-Qasim al-Mustafa, the prophet of Islam, is revered as the messenger of God (*Rasul Allah*), prophet of God (*Nabi Allah*), and beloved of God (*Habib Allah*). Muslims believe that as the "Seal of the Prophets" (*Khatm al-anbiya'*), Muhammad culminates the prophetic legacy of Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. As a prophet (*nabi*), Muhammad stands as the last of 124,000 (by Muhammad's own count) called to relay God's guidance to a community. As messenger (*Rasul*), he is the 313th prophet also designated to perform at least one of these roles: (1) lead a community, (2) bring a revealed book, or (3) introduce a new religion.

The Qur'an describes Muhammad as the "unlettered prophet" (*an-nabi al-ummi*, 7:157), a "mercy to the worlds" (21:107), a shining lamp (33:46), "caring, . . . kind, and merciful" (9:128). Muhammad is, on the one hand, human, the "best of men," a "jewel among men," and the "perfect human being" (*insan al-kamil*). On the other, his essence has been described as the "Light of Muhammad" (*Nur Muhammad*), the primordial cosmic light, the *logos* within all the prophets.

Muhammad's significance centers around two poles: (1) He received the Qur'an as God's speech; and (2) his life is the exemplary precedent (*sunna*) for piety, virtue, and everyday living. Muslims send blessings (*salawat*) and greetings of peace upon the prophet following God and the angels (Qur'an 33:56). Mention of his name is followed with the formula, "God bless him and give him peace" (*Salla Allahu 'alayhi wa sallam*). The love of the prophet is a cornerstone of Islam, as the prophet said: "Not one of you has faith until I am dearer to him than his son and his father and all men together." Although portraits of the prophet are disallowed, calligraphic ornaments (*hilya*) describing his physical and spiritual beauty contribute to his veneration, as do relics retained throughout the world, such as his cloak, beard hairs, and sword.

The year of Muhammad's birth, 570, the "Year of the Elephant," marked the miraculous reversal of an elephant-driven Abyssinian attack in which the Ka'ba, the sanctuary attributed to Abraham, was spared. Hagiographies describe the light of Muhammad (*nur Muhammad*) radiating from the womb of his mother, Amina, to Syria, Iraq, and Egypt—places where later Islam would first spread. Orphaned of his father at birth, Muhammad was raised by his grandfather 'Abd al-Muttalib, who had rediscovered the Ka'ba precinct's Zamzam well, originally discovered by Hagar and Isma'il. A slightly raised oval birthmark between Muhammad's shoulder blades was later identified as his "Seal of Prophethood." The prophet's nursemaid reported that one day, when Muhammad was two years old, two men clothed in white appeared, opened his chest, removed his heart, opened it, and