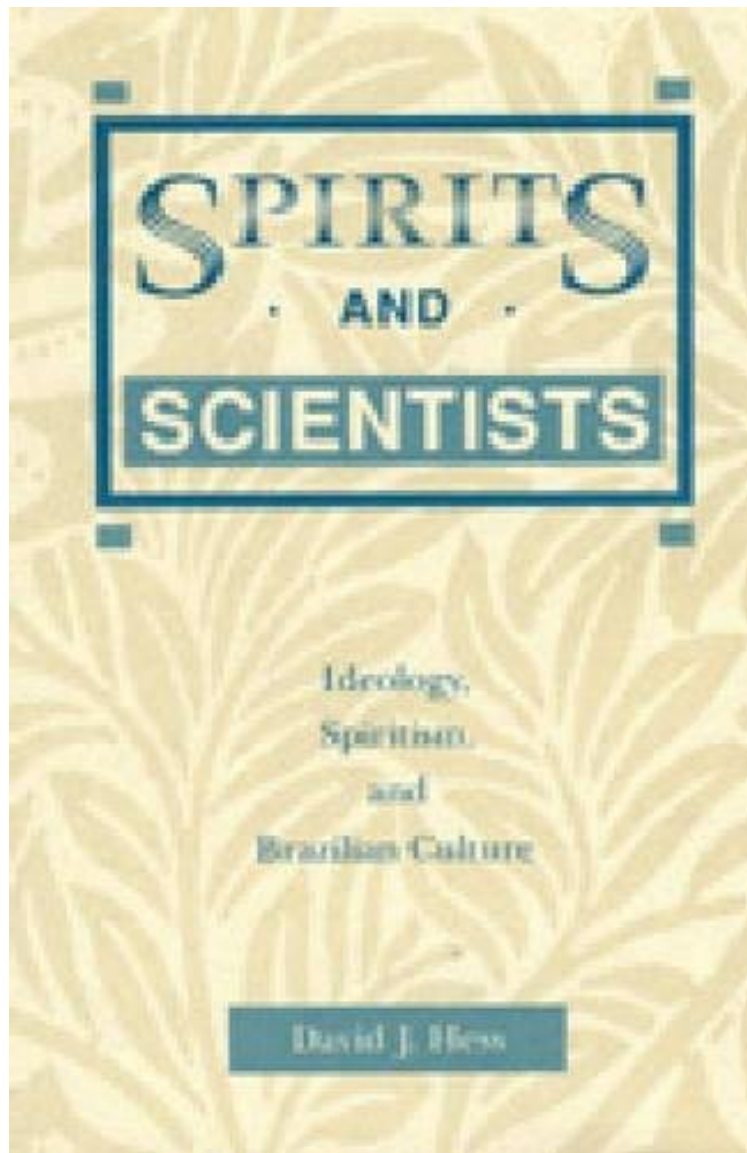


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David J. Hess

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on "New World" spiritism
By A Customer
This book provides a history and insight on the roots of Latin American spiritism. Its research on roots of Allan Kardec and the reason why French spiritism was brought to the "New World". It earns its place in the subjects of Latin American religion and ideology. Its cultural background of Brazil gives much insight to the ideological background of the Brazilian population. Even as a person of Caribbean background, I hold this book in regards to a part of my background ideologically. This book is an eye opener to the researcher interested in South American and Caribbean studies.

Brazilian Spiritism (espiritismo, kardecismo) is an important middle-class religious movement whose followers believe in communication with the dead via spirit mediums and in healing illnesses by means of spiritual therapies. Unlike Anglo-Saxon Spiritualists, Brazilian Spiritists count among their number a well-developed and institutionalized intellectual elite that has reinterpreted northern hemisphere parapsychology and developed its own alternative medicine and sociology of religion. As a result, the mediation between popular religion (especially Afro-Brazilian religious practices) and the orthodoxies of the universities, the state, and the medical profession. Situating Spiritist intellectual thought in what he calls a broader ideological arena, Hess examines Spiritism in the context of religion, science, political ideology, medicine, and even the social sciences. Hess challenges the legacy of French sociologist Roger Bastide, who saw in Spiritism an elitist, middle-class ideology. In the process, *Spirits and Scientists* provides a new approach to middle-class religious movements in Latin America.

A well-researched and well-written account of Spiritism among contemporary Brazilians. Theoretically, Hess is remaking the traditional concept of syncretism in the anthropological study of religions, particularly of folk religions where world religions are adapted over long periods of time to local systems of belief. Certainly in English there is nothing in the literature quite like this treatment of Spiritism among literate, and presumably modern, secular people in Brazil.
George Marcus, Rice University
About the Author
David J. Hess is Assistant Professor of Anthropology in the Science and Technology Studies Department at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.