

Eno Belinga, S. M. *L'épopée camerounaise—mvet. Moneblum ou l'homme bleu*. Yaoundé (Cameroun): Centre d'édition et de production pour l'enseignement et la recherche, 1978. 287 pages.

This work presents the complete original text (1,652 verses in the Bulu language) and the French translation of an oral epic from Bulu-Ngôé in southern Cameroun. The epic narrative was recited, sung, and danced out by the famous bard Daniel Osomo, who, according to Eno Belinga, knows about 70,000 epic verses (p. 16).

The epic is called Moneblum, or the Blue Man, after one of the heroic characters Efeñ-Ndôn of the Blum tribe. The central hero of the epic, however, is Mekui-Mengômô-Ondo, a member of the Ekañ of Engoñ-Zok (a subgroup of divine beings). At the request of his father (Ondo Mba), Mekui is banished by Akôma-Mba (king of the Ekañ), for nonobservance of a marriage custom, to the remote land of the redoubtable Efeñ-Ndôn. Bound by Efeñ to perform gigantic tasks of immense road building, Mekui is easily successful because of his supernatural powers (a blazing sword, an iron spear, a golden egg). On the verge of being rewarded with kingship for his achievements, Mekui seduces, then elopes with, Efeñ's wife. A long-lasting and undecided battle ensues between the two adversaries, who both display their supernatural powers. Mekui is unable to escape with Efeñ's wife and is forced to implore the help of his fathers, whose diviner is capable of following the struggle in his mirror. Showing superior magical power Mekui's people defeat those of Efeñ. Mekui and his wife are restored to his homeland, whereas Efeñ, punished with deformity, is placed under the authority of King Akôma-Mba. The text fits the general plot pattern of epics (*mvet*) found among the Fang, the Bulu, and the Beti (p. 16). These recite the deeds of the mortal Oku, who struggle against the divine Ekañ and try to rob them of their immortali-

ty (p. 14). The simple action plot is interlaced with long digressions, such as the divination scene intended to find the place to which Mekui should be exiled (verses 202-407); the council called to decide who will accompany him (verses 430-460); the description of the long journey to Efeñ (verses 461-834), including a most poetic evocation of the awakening morning sounds (verses 626-735).

The epic is divided into fifty-five chants (of uneven length) frequently marked by dance and song performances. The French translation of the epic is fluent and very readable and contains many features that are the hallmarks of classic epic literature: formulas and formulaic expressions (great importance is given particularly to epithets, patronymics, and extensive names of persons, groups, and places), repetitions, amplifications, digressions, enumerations (lists), assemblies, and descriptions of mental and physical states, battles, and heroic feats. The style is lofty and florid and the events are depicted with amplitude.

This book is important for the quality of the Bulu text and the French translation. It is a welcome addition to the primary documentation that is gradually becoming available on the extensive epic tradition (Eno Belinga estimates that over one million epic verses are known in southern Cameroun alone) of a group of peoples living in Cameroun, Gabon, and Guinea. Several photographs show the bard Daniel Osomo and others in performance. The introduction (pp. 11-40) provides some valuable information about the narrator and the text but little about the performance itself. In general, the introductory notes are sketchy, although there is the distinct impression that the author Eno Belinga has much in-depth information on various features related to the epic tradition. One scarcely known aspect is the rigorous initiation required of the poets-singers-dancers of *mvèt*, during which they systematically learn history, cosmology, geography, and principles of social structure (p. 15). This aspect is one of the least documented not only of epic literature but also of African initiation systems and socialization and learning patterns. It is therefore to be hoped that the author will pursue the comprehensive study of what he calls the "mystères de la théogonie, de la cosmogonie, de la psychologie et de la physique qui constituent la tradition initiatique" (p. 15).

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