

Hero and Chief: Epic Literature from the Banyanga, Zaïre Republic. By DANIEL BIEBUYCK. Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1978. Pp. xii, 320, glossary, bibl. \$20.00.

The book is divided into two parts: Interpretation and Texts. The first part contains the following main chapter headings: The Bards, The Dramatis Personae, Cultural Content, Formulas and Style Features, the Hero, the Chief and the Heroic Tales.

Part 2 gives the English translations of three versions of the already famous Mwindo Epic; the first version was published by Biebuyck in a separate volume (Biebuyck and Mateene, *the Mwindo Epic from the Banyanga*, University of California Press, 1971), in which also the text in the Nyanga language is given. Two appendices contain summaries of other epic tales in the Nyanga language, in translation. Very useful is the Glossary of Personages, which allows the reader to survey the many varied characters in the Nyanga epic, such as the Big Bird that develops into a dragon-like creature and is slain by the hero's sister who obtains iron weapons from Lightning. In the bibliography which concludes the book, many excellent names in the study of the epic in Africa have been entered, such as Boelaert and Viaene, side by side with the obligatory Ruth Finnegan. Other names are missing, such as Henry Morris, Isaac Schapera, Coupez-Kamanzi and Mme. Seydou.

In his preface, the author says many things that every student of oral traditions ought to remember, in the first place: 'In the appreciation of the epic genre, the text, with its massive cultural connotations and cross references, is the really important element.' Even more welcome is the following remark: 'The time when Bowra or Finnegan could question the existence of the epic genre in Africa, has long ended'. The present reviewer argued this point in 1967 (in Dorson, ed. *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, IV, 2-3, p. 173, Bloomington, Indiana). We may hope then, that the author will reproduce the texts of the versions here translated in another volume, together with more details on the prosody and mode of recitation.

The title of the book reveals a hitherto neglected aspect of the epic in Africa, which is, however, evident also in the Swahili epic: 'The chief is foreshadowed in the hero' (p.4). The hero is reckless and bold, where the chief has to be wise and respectable. In this way the epic is a moral tale for chiefs as well as an endearing history of the ideal he-man, the hero.

Professor Biebuyck's book gives a wealth of information on every aspect of Nyanga culture, as it is reflected in the epic; the numerous footnotes to the translations are worth studying as they show the close relationship between oral traditions and cultural structures.

JAN KNAPPERT

The Children of Woot: A History of the Kuba Peoples. By JAN VANSINA. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978. Pp. xi, 394, maps, appendixes, notes, reference list, glossary, index. £17.50.

This important book is a new and expanded synthesis of Kuba history based on Vansina's brilliant fieldwork, his judicious examination of sources (oral, written, and archival), and his analysis of ethnographic and linguistic evidence. Although relying on oral data elaborately analyzed in his *Geschiedenis van de Kuba* (Tervuren, 1963; a book that remains therefore an

indispensable source), Vansina offers a broadened outlook, new information, and richer conclusions. Following a brief introduction that recaps the major cultural divisions in the Kuba area with its general characteristics, the author clearly separates the Kuba view and remembrance of their history (pp. 15-74) from his own scholarly interpretation (pp. 77-224). The former is condensed in traditions of origin and migrations, genealogies, tales about the kings, and to some extent in sayings, praises, songs, and poems. In the latter part of the book, the author reconstructs the proto-Kuba period and sketches the Kuba's political and social history together with economic, religious, and artistic developments. The appendixes (pp. 245-318) contain a chronological list of Kuba rulers and detailed comparisons of Kuba-Bushoong terms for environment, farming, hunting, crafts, kinship, trade, social and political organization, religion, etc., with those of neighboring Bantu groups (Mongo, Kongo, Pende, Luba, Songye, Cokwe, and many others).

Although some information is especially relevant to the Bushoong chiefdom and its immediate neighbors (pp. 28 and 53), sweeping data on historical traditions and general culture were obtained throughout the Kuba kingdom including the incorporated Kete and Cwa. The corpus of oral traditions collected and analyzed is most impressive, but as the author concedes there are still many limitations (p. 28; e.g., a lack of substantial information on the Bieeng, an ethnic group located southwest of the kingdom; proverbs and tales with nonhistorical content). The scarceness of adequate ethnographic, linguistic, and historical documentation on many of the neighbors of the kingdom imposes severe restrictions on comparative study and makes the writing of a broader regional history impossible (p. 11). Vansina provides, however, a most fascinating and convincing interpretation of the 'Kuba miracle' (p. 4). He skillfully analyzes and interprets the unique interplay of outside influences (immigration of southern Mongo, encounter with the Kete, acceptance of foreign leaders, long-distance trade) and of 'dynamics inherent in the society and the culture itself' (p. 242; e.g., mixture of independence, individualism, and respect for conformity; prestige and status; creativity and stress on inventiveness in certain artistic spheres; acceptance of virtuosity; etc.). This creative synthesis produced the unique position of the Kuba amidst their Mongo- and Luba-speaking neighbors.

An acutely critical apparatus of data illuminates the emergence of the Kuba kingdom from a loosely connected congeries of small chiefdoms (preceded by a slow migration from the north of the Sankuru River that lasted for centuries and ended only in the sixteenth century), the culminating influences of kings Shyaam and Mbo Mboosh, and the unique contributions made by various other rulers. The history of economical development (increased agricultural potential, sophisticated division of labor, trade) is also well sketched. The process of selection and the criteria that guided the Kuba to remember 'some things past' (p. 227) and not others, and the resulting constraints for the historian, are remarkably placed in perspective. The least convincing part to me is the reconstruction of the ancestral southern Mongo and Kete society and culture from which the Kuba originated (pp. 90-103). Since archaeological evidence is still lacking and comparative ethnographical data for this area is so scanty (p. 234), such a characterization is tentative at best and too vague to have much meaning.

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