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Review of Mabel H. Ross and Barbara K. Walker, "*On Another Day...*" *Tales Told among the Nkundo of Zaire*

Abstract

From the end of 1972 until the middle of 1974, Mrs. Mabel H. Ross, a missionary, traveled in Central Zaire among the Nkundo people, recording their oral narratives. The present volume includes the English translation of these tales, supplemented by two texts translated from the Flemish and one from Lonkundo that appeared in A. de Rop, *De gesproken woordkunst van de Nkundo* (Tervuren: Musée Royale du Congo Belge, 1956) and in G. Hulstaert and A. de Rop (eds.), *Rechtspraakfabels van de Nkundo* (Tervuren: La Commission de Linguistique Africaine, 1954), and by eighteen texts translated from Lonkundo that were first published in a school reader, *Bekolo Bemo Bendemba Ba-Nkundo* (1957), compiled by three anonymous(?) mission-school teachers.

Disciplines

African Languages and Societies | Folklore | Near and Middle Eastern Studies | Oral History

drink that is served to bind groups of people together." On the other hand, the material on tools, technique, and, to a lesser degree, function, is well presented and ethnographically valuable.

Levinsohn's attempt in chapter three to use the lithographs and engravings as historical documents is overly cautious and weak. In addition, she unsuccessfully tries, in the same chapter, to relate the nature of design to social organization. Chapter four deals with the relationship between basketry design on the one hand and that of pottery and beadwork on the other. The discussion of beadwork is particularly informative and interesting. The strongest and most exciting section of the publication is chapter five, which deals with the meaning and symbolism of design among the Bayei. Yet, even here the author presents data but only suggests ideas. In addition, Ms. Levinsohn contradicts herself or confuses the reader, or both, by stating at the beginning of chapter five that only the Bayei "have evolved a series of symbolic patterns" and then ending the chapter with a discussion of animal images "depicted only by the Hambukushu."

Based on the title of the book, chapter six, "The Revival," should have been the longest, strongest, and most significant component of the text. However, this is not the case. In this section, the author refers to some recent developments without any analysis or consideration of the commercial and economic significance of these developments. Ms. Levinsohn declares, "The craftsman differentiates his works for three groups"—the villagers themselves, the tourist, and the collector—but she never informs the reader how or why they are differentiated. The scope and nature of the Vukani association, for example, is indicated, but its impact on Southern African basketry form and design is not.

In conclusion, the data could have been worked more and the text should have been more carefully organized and edited. The publication can be characterized as being disorganized in parts, inconsistent, disappointing, and lacking any discernible method or approach. Finally, the book is badly bound so that it easily falls apart.

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"ON ANOTHER DAY . . ."

Tales Told among the Nkundo of Zaire
Mabel H. Ross and Barbara K. Walker
The Shoe String Press, Hamden, Conn., 1979. 596 pp., map, appendixes, bibliography, index. \$35.

From the end of 1972 until the middle of 1974, Mrs. Mabel H. Ross, a missionary, traveled in Central Zaire among the Nkundo people, recording their oral narratives. The present volume includes the English translation of these tales, supplemented by two texts translated from the Flemish and one from Lonkundo that appeared in A. de Rop, *De gesproken woordkunst van de Nkundo* (Tervuren: Musée Royale du Congo Belge, 1956) and in G. Hulstaert and A. de Rop (eds.), *Rechtspraakfabels van de Nkundo* (Tervuren: La Com-

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mission de Linguistique Africaine, 1954), and by eighteen texts translated from Lonkundo that were first published in a school reader, *Bekolo Bemo Bendemba Ba-Nkundo* (1957), compiled by three anonymous(?) mission-school teachers.

All in all, the 95 tales in this volume span a variety of themes, which the editors have grouped into four parts: the first, "How the Nkundo World Began," includes mythical and etiological tales; the second, "The Nkundo in Fur and Feathers," has animal tales; the third, "People," contains stories with human characters, and in the fourth, "On-and-On," cumulative and dilemma tales appear regardless of the nature of the acting characters.

Let us state right from the outset: as far as comparative annotations are concerned, this volume is matched by none. Barbara Walker has identified the type of each tale and has analyzed in detail its motifs in terms of the standard folklore references and with the aid of unpublished dissertations that are indices of African folk literatures.

Both Ross and Walker have realized that comparative analysis is necessary but insufficient and have supplemented the narratives with rich information about Nkundo culture, about the narrators, and about the telling and recording of the tales. This abundance of information and discussion that overflows the pages of this volume is the source of its merits as well as its flaws. Often the details blur the focus, confuse the perspectives, and pull the reader into so many different directions that at the end he succumbs to an overbearing scholarship.

The honest and detailed description of the fieldwork points to the problems that mine this study. First, the very collecting of the tales lacked any guiding principles. As a missionary, Mabel Ross's primary contact was with the missions, schools, and hospitals. Consequently, the personnel connected with these institutions is unduly represented among the narrators of these stories, and the tales do not represent a cross-section of Nkundo society.

Secondly, in her analytical notes and introductions Barbara Walker searched for a focus that, unfortunately, has constantly eluded her. The Lonkundo tales that were published in the school reader 25 years ago could have provided an index of change in tradition, but, she has soon realized, neither time-depth nor breadth of collection permits meaningful comparison. She would have liked to relate the tales to Nkundo culture, society, and world-view, but without their thorough analysis and reconstruction, the references to social life and thought remain on a general level, and they are often incidental and unsystematic. Consequently, she occasionally indulges in curious observations, such as when she notes that "it is curious that 'Satan' was identified as 'left' or 'woman' " (p. 80). Obviously there is nothing strange about this association as we have learned from the studies that Rodney Needham edited in *Right & Left: Essays on Dual Symbolic Classification* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1973). In that

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respect the Nkundo hardly differ from any other people around the world.

Thirdly, the discussions in the book are confounded by a bemusing combination of perspectives that the two editors have apparently not reconciled. On the one hand there is an obvious attempt to maintain a high level of scholarship and descriptive rigor in reporting about the telling of the tales. On the other hand there is an undercurrent of an astonished delight in "the ways of the natives" that results in a condescending tone and stereotyped generalizations of the order "Nkundo are naturally responsive to tone and are decidedly musical" (p.28).

Perhaps, in addition to the comparative references, the most important aspect of the annotation is the detailed descriptions of the telling situations that document interruptions, moods, gestures, and the sounds the narrators made in performance. But even in this effort, there is a lack of consistency. For example, in tales 51 and 53 the editors relegate songs from the texts to the notes, as if not to burden the reader with undue disturbances. Yet the rich comments that accompany the tales represent a sincere attempt to provide the reader with as much information as he can handle, and more. They will be an unexhaustible mine for future scholars of Nkundo culture and oral literature and will provide a source for a systematic analysis of the narrative, the narrators, and their society.

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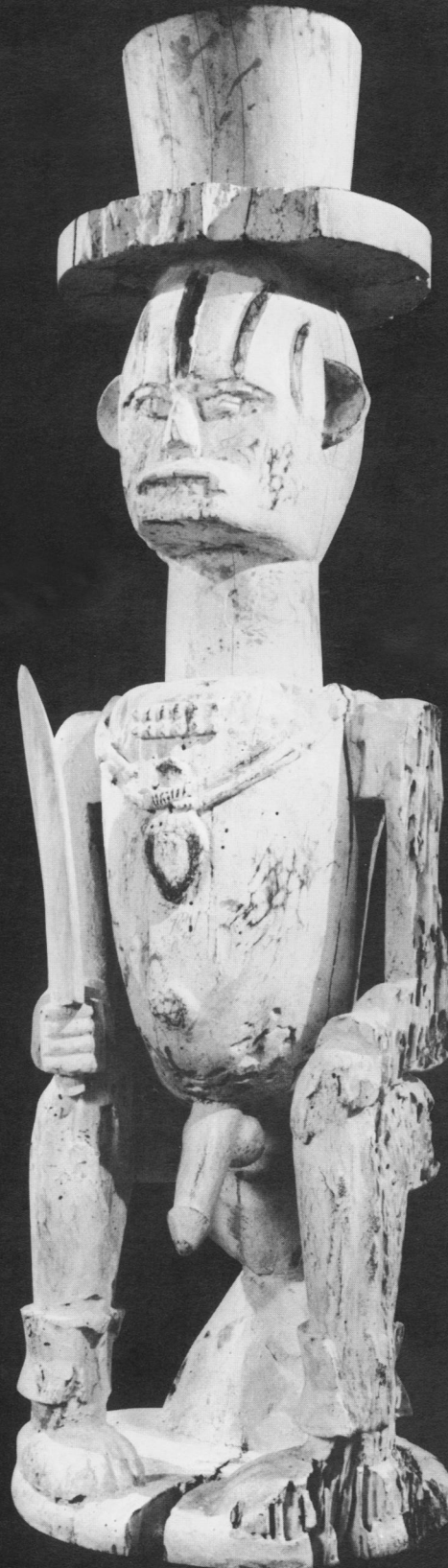
TIV SONG

Charles Keil

University of Chicago Press, 1979. 305 pp., 70 b/w illustrations, transcriptions, bibliography, index of Tiv terms. \$26.00.

The author of *Urban Blues* (Chicago, 1966) has written another arresting book, focusing this time on music and dance among the Tiv people of central Nigeria. Charles Keil paints on a very broad canvas while attempting to answer the deceptively simple question of "what Tiv song is and does." In a most innovative way, he endeavors to link song and other expressive outlets of Tiv culture to their social, psychological and ideological sources. Apropos of this, Keil states that "a culture's expression is probably as complicated as life" (p. 182). In short, contextual anthropological analysis far outweighs standard musicological analysis in this work. Studies of this sort are few and far between, and consequently this book is a most welcome addition to ethnomusicological literature. Moreover, students of ethnomusicology will also find it an excellent source on fieldwork problems and methods.

Keil deliberately avoids terminology like "art" and "aesthetics" (and the assumptions underlying these concepts), relying instead on the Tiv's own concepts, thereby removing "some of the blunders, biases and distortions inherent in our own vocabulary" and forcing us "to question some of the axioms of our own musicology" (pp. 26-27). His discussion of Tiv



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