
A transcription, with French translation and comment, of the saga of the Jahite Sabashi, the chiefly lineage of Ganâ. The text is considered both as a literary work and as an ideological production, the latter aspect being the more important. The narrative uses a classical form to express the way in which Malinke-Bambara States and chiefdoms conceive the acquisition and maintenance of power. Rather than attempting a restitution of Ganâ's history, griot Amadu Kuyate unrolls the chain of symbolic practices associated with power: geomancy, magics, secret, treason, women. His portraying of the two main characters, Saba and Farabalay, as well as of Samori, is a description of the bipolar basis of power in Mali, i.e., paganism and Islam. His narrative is also meaningful as regards the position of dispossessed aristocracies in today's Malian political system. [pp. 381-433]

M. Augé—A Young Man from a Good Family: The Logic of Accusation and Confession in the Ivory Coast.

Analysis of the confession, made to 'prophet' Atcho, at Bregbo, by Blaise, a young Aladian. The examination of the facts disclosed, as well as the rather precise identification of both his victims and his associates, underlines how closely his confession fits with the intellectual schemata underlying pre-Christian witchcraft beliefs and practices. Unhappy events—especially sickness—are not interpreted in a random fashion: an attempt is made here to reveal the logical dimensions of interpretation, which incorporate the unequal relationships stemming from the various actors' social position. [pp. 177-218]

J. Bazin—The Production of a Historical Narrative.

A number of historical African polities—such as the kingdom of Segu—are known to us almost exclusively through oral traditions. Hence the absolute necessity of a critical study of the production of this type of narratives, including both the processes of their generation and memorization and the circumstances of their enunciation. This is illustrated by the study in depth of a relation of king accessions, which is shown to be more than a mere 'historical', nonfictional report on things past. Far from being a factual, objective report of actual facts, the narrative has political and ethical implications which remain operative to this day. [pp. 435-483]

M. Bekombo-Priso—One Woman, Three Men.

A reconsideration of the theory of kinship terminology shifting the stress from the single husband/wife relationship to give equal weight to the mother/son and sister/brother ones, integrating them into a four-term 'atomic' kinship pattern. The examples are taken from the patrilineal coastal Bantu of Cameroon and show how, through her marriage, a woman becomes implicated in a three-sided alliance with three men: her opposite-sex sibling, her non-kin husband, and her son. It is only through a global analysis of these three relationships that one can account in an exhaustive way for the meaning of matrimony, its mechanisms and its consequences. [pp. 299-313]

Cahiers d'Études africaines, 73-76, XIX-1-4, pp. 597-602.
C. Bremond—*Morphology of an African Tale*.

The first chapter of Denise Paulme’s *La mère dévorante*, entitled ‘Morphology of the African tale’, aims at setting up a typology of narrative forms. Summing up and criticizing her study, C. Bremond shows that a mechanical application of its theses is likely to lead into a dead-end. In fact, some of the standard tales, whose thematic identity cannot be doubted, may be actually realized according to several typological contours. Denise Paulme’s method of analysis nevertheless remains safe, precise and fruitful, provided the necessary precautions are taken to avoid possible misunderstandings. This discussion is illustrated by a tale, quite widespread in Africa, of which D. Paulme herself has collected about fifty versions. [pp. 485-499]

G. Calame-Griaule—*Skinning the Donkey Mare*.

Pretty girl takes off her donkey skin for bathing. Chief’s son catches her unaware, marries her, and, by destroying the donkey skin, compels her to remain as a woman. This tale, widespread in the Niger Republic, has a frequent variant: the king falls in love with his daughter-in-law and, in order to marry her, has her husband thrown down a well; a palm-tree grows from the stone of a date she gave her husband, allowing him to escape from the well and avenge himself. These motifs are close to T 400 ‘The Swan Girl’, T 465 ‘Husband Persecuted because of his Wife’s Beauty’, and also reminiscent of T 510 ‘Donkey Skin’. Yet the tale raises the question of the animal species used as disguise, and the status of this species in the sub-Saharan Sahel. The dominant theme seems to be woman’s ambiguous character—oscillating between human and natural nature—and her socialization through marriage. [pp. 501-515]

J.-P. Dozon—*Kinship Laid Bare, or Pandora among the Bete (Ivory Coast)*.

This paper is based upon the analysis of a Bete etiological myth. It is a critical examination of an anthropological endeavour purporting to interpret social order. The myth takes apart the institutional forms of Bete society, especially those pertaining to kinship organisation, and reduces them to a representation of the origins of sexual difference. This process results in a kind of negative print of production and social division. Far from a dissolution within the integrative logic of a systemic analysis (symbol and kinship systems), this leads to an explicitation which maintains a distance between structure and dynamics, and between lineage organisation and segmentary or residential history. [pp. 101-110]

J.-P. Eschlimann—*Don’t Refuse a Given Husband*.

The ideology and lineage strategy of preferential marriage, far from being universally accepted in Anyi society, come under constant internal contention. The matrilineal dominancy prevailing in the socio-political system is imperilled by centrifugal forces resulting from the behaviour of some lineage heads and by the fact that there are youth more sensitive to the attraction of their partner, or of personal freedom, than by the *raison de lignage*. A corpus of tales gives a tentative explanation of this ever renewed tension between the ideological norm and the actual practice of marriage strategy. The storytellers harp on the disorder resulting from the incautiousness of girls, their defiance of elders, and so forth. They also denounce the erring ways of such men as condone such behaviour—and often forfeit their life in consequence. Finally they describe the lineage elders’ reaction to the disorder thus introduced by women. Lest the lineage stool its riches and its unity be put in jeopardy, elders need be attentive to unmask Death as it enters the lineage under the disguise of a beautiful Stranger. [pp. 517-547]

J.-M. Gibrail—*Ivorian Schoolboys within their Family*.

As soon as they re-enter their rural family life Ivorian schoolboys enjoy a privileged status which often breeds conflicts stirred up by their refusal to help their parents,
their behaviour towards girls, and more generally by their breaches of traditional
etiquette and religious duties. The resulting clashes beget economic and social
sanctions, as well as religious and magical counter-measures. The school attend-
ance or the decision to withdraw the child from school altogether are decisions
which sometimes have nothing to do with the actual performance of the student
himself. Success at school can also generate jealousy among the parents of un-
lucky schoolboys: failures at school are often put down to magical aggressions
coming from within the village itself. The influence of the environment is so
pervasive that the schoolboys themselves, while at first skeptical, gradually yield
to these views based on magic and often opt for an attitude of reserve and, whatever
their private convictions on the subject, usually accept their family views. This
encloses them in an ambiguous and contradictory status which they experience as
being 'between two worlds', as one of them put it. [pp. 87-100]

V. Görög & V. Karady—African Oral Literature.

A presentation and interpretation of statistical data relating to researches on oral
literature in Europe, Africa and the United States. The figures show a rapid
growth since 1960, correlative with the professionalization of African studies and
their integration into academic institutions. The study of oral literature tends to
become a subject by itself, as distinguished from anthropology and linguistics.
Comparative tables give data on dates, places and languages of publication, and
on the genres described. [pp. 579-588]

J. Jamin—The Monstrous Wraith: Senufo Hyena-Masks.

Rather than objets d'art Senufo masks are but a minor part of the routine production
of Senufo craftsmen, not different from plain tools up to the time when they are
integrated into a liturgy or a magical process. In other words the carving of a
mask is completely dissociated from its religious use. Which explains how the
industrial production of masks for the souvenir and 'antique' trade could develop
without hurting Senufo opinion. This attitude might well be a reaction to the
ideologic fetters of the poro cult, as evidenced by the wholesale destruction or dere-
liction of masks under the influence of recent messianistic cults. More generally
it can be related to a Senufo Weltanschauung based upon a quasi-manichean concept
of duality, expressed in the stylistic variants of masks. [pp. 125-142]

M. Leiris—The Forlorn Mountebank.

Remembrance of things past: a ham-fisted magician doing legerdemain in the
French West Indies. [pp. 19-24]

C. Meillassoux—The Pregnant Male, or On the Historicity of Myths.

C. Meillassoux first sets forth hypotheses on the relationships between the socio-
historical foundations of anthroponomic societies and the form and contents of the
modes of cultural expression. As an application he shows how concerns related to
social reproduction are to be found in the myths, legends and tales produced in this
type of societies, and how men use these media to seemingly invest themselves
with women's procreation capacity, thus laying bare men's century-old attempt to
appropriate that function at the social level. [pp. 353-380]

G. Niangoran-Bouah—'Nsoyahn' Marriage.

Among the matrilineal peoples of southern Ivory Coast (Ebbie, Abure, Akye, etc.),
nsoyahn is a special ceremony allowing nubile women freedom to choose a husband
of their own choice on their own initiative. Nsoyahn is organised only when the
proportion of unmarried women in a village is high enough to create social problems.
There is no bridewealth to pay, only the ‘thanking gift’ usually associated with any kind of current service, which makes nsoyahin far less expensive than a regular marriage. It has the same legal effects but a lesser social prestige. Its social role seems to be that of a kind of safety valve when the sex ratio becomes unbalanced. [pp. 315-322]

D. Paulme—*A Few Recollections*.

An outline sketch of D. Paulme’s career in her own words. [pp. 9-17]


According to the Ndenye matrilineal system, women, even if they were the sole transmitters of political power, did not normally share in its actual exercise. However traditional history shows that, in a number of emergencies, women took up the initiative from men and acted as efficient political agents in critical circumstances. This checks with their present situation in Anyi society where a number of women are often as active independent economic entrepreneurs as men, if not more. [pp. 219-223]

Y. Person—*The Age-Sets System of the Tangba and Yōwa (Djougou District)*.

The Tangba (Taneka) and Yōwa (Pila-Pila) of the Djougou district (People’s Republic of Benin) speak dialects of a single Voltaic language (Mosi subgroup) and have closely similar kinship systems. The former are characterized by a Stateless lineage organisation while the latter live in Bariba-type kingdom founded by a dynasty of Gurma origin. This contrast in political organisation is evidenced as well if one looks at the age-sets which play a major role among the Tangba while they are only marginal among the Yōwa. Tangba age-set rites are both rich and complex and serve as a meaningful framework for the whole social life. It seems clear that the development among the Yōwa of a hierarchy based upon social unequality has resulted in the impoverishment of a fundamental institution of lineage democracy. [pp. 25-53]

A. Popova—*‘Isolo’, the Royal Game of the Sukuma*.

A description of the simpler rules of the Sukuma variant of solo, with some considerations on its social meaning. [pp. 111-123]

A. Retel-Laurerentin—*Women’s Absconding in the Black Volta*.

In the Black Volta district of the Voltaic Republic, many Bwa women surreptitiously desert their husband’s home at night to seek refuge with another man. This man is not considered guilty of adultery but rather of a kind of theft or kidnapping. The deserted husband may recover his wife by legal action, with the help of his own kin. Far from chastising her if and when she comes back, he ‘flatters’ her by various gifts, sometimes extended to her family. This occurs in a society which considers marriage as irreversible. Relying on anthropological and statistical enquiries, the author shows that the apparent disparity between legal rule and actual practice implies a tacit agreement of the group. Women’s absconding does probably act as a regulating mechanism in a system in which endogamy and endo-local residence might otherwise lessen exchanges to a dangerous degree. [pp. 253-298]

M.-F. Rombi—*Three Paupers, Two Tyrants, Two Princesses*.

A tale from Maore (Mayotte, Comoro Islands) on the theme of ‘Wonder-Boy from Rags to Riches’, with a classical sinusoid structure (alternate want and fulfillment)
and two tales-within-the-tale. It is a good reflection of the nature of Swahili culture, with its mixture of Arabic and Bantu traits, and, at the same time, an implicit criticism of the unequal social relationships obtaining in the local context. [pp. 549-578]

A. Schwartz—Kru Woman-Images as Evidenced in a Funeral Ceremony (Ivory Coast).

Funerals provide Kru women with an opportunity for challenging the prevailing social order, that is a male order that allows women, in spite of their contribution to its reproduction, little control on their own destiny. An analysis of four dirges reveals that this challenge is ambiguous, insofar as by letting women vent out their wrath and frustration, it acts as a safety valve rather than as an outright rejection of institutions, and especially of marriage. [pp. 323-327]

P. Smith—Birth and Destiny: Iron Children and Butter Children.

In some African tales analyzed by D. Paulme, the characters of ‘Tom Thumb’ and ‘Clever Boy’ are marked at birth with special traits turning them into ‘over-begotten’ heroes. These traits (in association with several others) are developed in all the epic legend cycles found from Southern Cameroon to Rwanda to define a figure of the epic hero par excellence. They can be found as well in West African epics and also among the Finn, the Greek, the Khirgiz, etc. These traits can be opposed in every detail to those which define the character of the ‘under-begotten’ child, as exemplified by the man-made children to be found in Rwandese, Senegalese, Malian, and other myths. This pattern of opposition applies to the contrasting figures of John the Baptist and Jesus, whose special traits at birth foretell their destiny. This throws new light on some of the motifs in the Gospel and the liturgical tradition. The secret logic of the characters is thus shown to be an essential dimension of narrative art, all too often neglected in formal analysis. [pp. 329-352]


Contrary to a widely held opinion, revitalisation cults and religious and moral revivals are not restricted to the colonial period. A movement of this type occurred in the Brong kingdom of Gyaman during the last quarter of the 19th century, before European settlement in the country. The cult of genius Sakrobundi, spreading in the decade 1870-1880, appears as an attempt toward a global renovation of belief and mores. First introduced following a disruption of the traditional process of witchcraft control, it was openly supported by the king and chiefs. Its primary aim was to redress this process, but Sakrobundi very soon became a ‘guardian’ of public morals. This success is linked up with the social, economic and political upheaval which overtook Gyaman when Asante domination ended, from 1874 on. [pp. 143-176]

M.-J. Tubiana—Power and Confidence. The Mother’s Brother/Sister’s Son Relationship and the Zaghawa Political System (Chad-Sudan).

The Mother’s Brother/Sister’s Son relationship is usually analyzed within the framework of a given kinship system. Here it is examined with reference to the political system in a chiefdom where succession occurs through patrilineal filiation. This change of perspective shows the MB/ZS relationship under a new light. The chief’s uterine nephew, as his uncle’s most trusted helper, appears as the closest man to power. Yet he has not got any power of his own, except that delegated by the chief who can always withdraw it. Sister’s Sons belong to the land-masters’ clans, that is the autochthonous clans which have been dispossessed by the ancestors of the present chiefs. Which means that these uterine nephews can be considered, vis-à-vis the chief, as privileged hostages. [pp. 55-68]
F. Verdeaux—Tradition is no longer what it Used to Be. Two Cases of Inheritance among the Nzima Aduve (Ivory Coast).

Legal 'tradition' pertains more to practice than to theory, acted out rather than spoken out or explained in a coherent fashion. This allows for a wide margin of interpretation, and hence of variations, especially in a context of rapid social change. In the present economic situation of the Ivory Coast there is a contradiction between the traditional matrilineal inheritance system and the modern tendency to leave one's property to sons rather than to nephews (Sister's Sons). The analysis of two recent cases of family strife and conflicts of this type shows an interplay of social codes and actual practices in which the symbolic and ideological value of tradition remains predominant. [pp. 69-85]

J.-F. Vincent—Woman's Place and Power in the Mofu Hills.

A twofold approach to the study of women's position among the Mofu: through an analysis of myths and symbols, and through direct observation of actual behaviour. Myths relating to origins and myths relative to settlement give opposite images: according to the former, women, as destroyers of the Golden Age, are responsible for all the ills of human condition. The latter, conversely, show them as useful and much appreciated partners of men. As for the symbolic system it draws a clearcut separation between a male (left and odd) and a female (right and even) universe which leads to a subordination of female characters. Behavioural reality is equally ambiguous. While women behave as apparently inferior to men, wives enjoy a degree of independence. They own fields and their produce, are sole initiators of divorce, maintain altars for their ancestors, etc. Yet they wield little influence in their society (no initiation ceremony for girls, no participation in politics, no women's association) except in the field of divination, recently open to them and allowing them a role in communal life. [pp. 225-251]