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Review

JON ABBINK, MICHAEL BRYANT, and DANIEL BAMBU, *Suri Orature:
Introduction to the Society, Language and Oral Culture of the Suri People
(Southwest Ethiopia)*

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Bibliographical abbreviations used in this volume

- AE* *Annales d'Éthiopie*, Paris 1955ff.
- ÄthFor* Äthiopistische Forschungen, 1–35, ed. by E. HAMMERSCHMIDT, 36–40, ed. by S. UHLIG (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner (1–34), 1977–1992; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz (35–40), 1994–1995).
- AethFor* Aethiopistische Forschungen, 41–73, ed. by S. UHLIG (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998–2011); 74–75, ed. by A. BAUSI and S. UHLIG (*ibid.*, 2011f.); 76ff. ed. by A. BAUSI (*ibid.*, 2012ff.).
- AION* *Annali dell'Università degli studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale'*, Napoli: Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale' (former Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli), 1929ff.
- BSOAS* *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (London, 1917ff.).
- CSCO* Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1903ff.
- EAE* S. UHLIG, ed., *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, I: A–C; II: D–Ha; III: He–N; in cooperation with A. BAUSI, eds, IV: O–X (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010); A. BAUSI in cooperation with S. UHLIG, eds, V: Y–Z, *Supplementa, Addenda et Corrigenda, Maps, Index* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2014).
- EMML* Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm Library, Addis Ababa.
- JAH* *The Journal of African History*, Cambridge 1960ff.
- JES* *Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Addis Ababa 1963ff.
- OrChr* *Oriens Christianus*, Leipzig–Roma–Wiesbaden 1901ff.
- PdP* *La Parola del Passato. Rivista di studi classici*, Napoli 1946ff.
- PICES 8* TADDESE BEYENE, ed., *Proceedings of the Eighth International Conference of Ethiopian Studies, University of Addis Ababa (26–30 November) 1984*, I–II (Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies–Frankfurt am Main: Frobenius Institut, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität, 1988–1989).
- PICES 10* C. LEPAGE and É. DELAGE, eds, *Études éthiopiennes: Actes de la X^e Conférence internationale des études éthiopiennes, Paris, 24–28 août 1988* (Paris: Société française pour les études éthiopiennes, 1994).
- PO* *Patrologia Orientalis*, 1903ff.
- RIÉ* É. BERNAND, A.J. DREWES, and R. SCHNEIDER, *Recueil des inscriptions de l'Éthiopie des périodes pré-axoumite et axoumite*, I: *Les documents*, II: *Les planches* (Paris: (Académie des inscriptions et belle-lettres) Diffusion de Boccard, 1991).
- RRALm* *Rendiconti della Reale Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, Roma, 1892ff.
- RSE* *Rassegna di Studi Etiopici*, Roma, 1941–1981, Roma–Napoli, 1983ff.
- SAe* *Scriptores Aethiopici*.

Reviews

have lost in terms of cultural integrity, aesthetics and identity over the past half century.

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JON ABBINK, MICHAEL BRYANT, and DANIEL BAMBU, *Suri Orature: Introduction to the Society, Language and Oral Culture of the Suri People (Southwest Ethiopia)*, Verbal Art and Documentary Literature in African Languages, 33 (Köln: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 2013). x, 203 pp., 1 map, 6 colour photos. Price: € 29.80. ISBN: 978-3-89645-289-4.

The authors of this book use the term ‘orature’ in order to elevate Suri oral traditions to the rank of ‘literature’ to which they justly belong. Ironically, the presentation of Suri oral texts in written form transforms them into literature because of the inescapable loss of para-linguistic features such as tone, gesture and facial expression that normally distinguish orature. Irony also pervades the contributions made by each of the three authors, for their decision to document Suri orature arose as an urgent response to the ‘sudden and, in fact, rather stunning process of change’ (p. 5) which is affecting the Suri, and threatening their time honoured way of life and corresponding oral traditions.

The book is divided into four parts: *Suri Society*, *Suri Language*, *Orature – Samples from the ‘Literature’ of an Oral Culture*, and *A Suri View on Suri Life and Society – Daniel Bambu’s Accounts*.

In part 1, *Suri Society*, Jon Abbink provides an ‘Introduction to the Society and History of the Suri People’, setting his description of the ways of life and socio-cultural traditions of the Suri people as they were until c.2010, against the foreground of current ‘uni-dimensional and often imposed ‘development’ schemes and rather uncompromising, top-down prescribed change processes that entertain little or no dialogue with the people’ (p. 4). Abbink’s account acts as a testimony not only to Suri oral traditions, but also, most poignantly, to the radical changes to, and decline of, Suri culture. ‘They (the Suri) are in danger of becoming a proletarianized underclass in the new Ethiopia, certainly with little representation in the federal or other governments, but largely being a class of workers, plantation labourers, watchmen, etc.’ (p. 5). Abbink ends his account more optimistically with the hope that ‘it adds to an understanding of the Suri as a resilient and strong people that have survived for centuries in an area often called ‘marginal’, and have a humanity to be respected and a cultural heritage with many elements worth preserving’ (p. 22).

In part 2, *Suri Language*, Michael Bryant provides a condensed description of Suri language, which will be of greatest interest to scholars of linguistics. It is very important that Bryant's considerable understanding and analysis of Suri language has finally been made available in published form. I was struck by the absence of any reference to ideophones, and yet when I looked at the Suri texts I discovered a number of words that could not be classified otherwise. For example: *bu* translated as 'big splash', *hokor hokor* translated as 'shake shake', *kalduk* translated as 'bloop', *kumumul kumumul* translated as 'circle (together)', and *dhob* translated as 'plop! (dies)'. I have written about ideophones in Hamar where they play an important role in most types of oral texts, and especially in folk tales. I suspect that Suri ideophones, like their Hamar counterparts, are fired by a great deal of rhetorical energy, and are often accompanied by gesture, repetition and change of voice. Because of such features, and since ideophones defy one-to-one translation, they tend to disappear in translated written texts. This is one reason why I recommend the future collections of Suri orature be accompanied by a DVD with audio and video recordings, which allow people to appreciate the full rendering of oral texts. Bryant concludes his outline of Suri grammar with the hope that it will 'contribute to the further development of the Tirmaga-Chai language (usually called Suri) and educational materials in this language, thereby providing the people with a healthy means of integrating into the greater Ethiopian community and the global society' (p. 26).

Part 3, *Orature – Samples from the 'Literature' of an Oral Culture*, constitutes the heart of the book, to which all three authors have contributed in one way or another. Suri culture embodies, and is embodied by, a wide range of oral genres, such as: folk stories, fables, children's songs, public speeches, cattle praise songs, age-group songs, funeral speeches, divination texts, women's instructions, etc. Here we are presented with three folk tales, two public speeches (one recounted by a witness, the other being a live recording), and two traditional songs. In the introduction to the book Abbink regrets the absence of stories and texts by Suri girls and women, and promises that this would be redressed in subsequent publications. The texts are presented using Suri orthography and word-for-word English translation for those interested in linguistic research, and are followed by easy to read English summaries.

The folk tales are entertaining and reflect the Suri environment, fauna and flora, as well as cultural traditions and values. As mentioned above, I look forward to hearing and seeing the original telling of such folk tales in future publications. The two public speeches resonate strongly with Lomotor's Talk, which was recorded in Hamar by Ivo Strecker and included on a double album, *Music of the Hamar* (1979). Like Lomotor's Talk, *The Unscheduled Stick Fight* is an eye witness account of a public debate where the speaker

recounts, seemingly verbatim, the speeches of others. This remarkable talent is shared and cultivated by all good spokesmen and women in oral based societies. *The Lightning Ceremony* is the live speech of a Suri leader (*komoru*) appealing to his people to heed the rules of social life and preserve group cohesion. All these speeches are the product of rhetorical genius, the one being subdued and indirect, the other making use of tension, and all employing prosody, rhythm, modes and tones of feeling, to address prime concerns and persuade their audience to act morally correctly. I cannot help reiterating the benefit an audio recording of such speeches would bring, not only to gain the full effect of the orature, but also to enhance any attempts at analysis. It goes without saying that the same applies to the traditional Suri songs where the melody and phrasing can only really be reproduced in an audio recording. The poetic density found in songs makes it very difficult to translate, and any analysis will require references to cultural traditions, histories, environment etc.

Part 4, *A Suri View on Suri Life and Society – Daniel Bambu’s Narratives*, is a great treasure. As we learn in the last entry entitled *Daniel’s Story*, Daniel had a very difficult upbringing, suffering periods of extreme hunger, losing his siblings, his mother, and finally his blind grandmother. When his mother’s brother rejected him he fled to Jeba where he stayed until another uncle saw him and asked him to herd his cattle, but the man’s wife was always angry with him so he fled to the gold fields. Finally he returned to his village with nothing. Daniel’s narratives deal with assorted Suri histories and various Suri customs—all of which are fascinating. The footnotes are very helpful, and amongst other things we learn that Daniel is a Christian, which explains some of his comments that are not typically Suri.

Suri Orature succeeds well in its aim to provide an introduction to the society, language and oral culture of the Suri people, and I look forward to future editions of Suri oral texts.

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SUSANNE EPPLE, ed., *Creating and Crossing Boundaries in Ethiopia: Dynamics of Social Categorization and Differentiation*, Afrikanische Studien/African Studies, 53 (Berlin et al.: LIT Verlag, 2014). 257 pp. Price: € 29.90. ISBN: 978-3-643-90534-5.

Since the pioneering fieldwork of Ivo Strecker and Jean Lydall in the early 1970s the region of South Omo has been a major focus of cultural anthropological research in Ethiopia. The editor of this book, Susanne Epple, and some of her co-authors have been heavily influenced by this academic tradi-