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Jack Goody and S. W. D. K. Gandah. *Une récitation du Bagré*. *Classiques africains*, 20. Paris: Armand Colin, 1980. 405 pages.

Like the other nineteen volumes in the collection *Classiques africains*, this work by the well-known British anthropologist Jack Goody and his distinguished collaborator S. W. D. K. Gandah enhances our knowledge of African oral literature. The publication makes a new and original effort at a trilingual presentation of three Bagre myths in LoDagaba, English, and French. The original text, the translations, and the annotations are arranged in four juxtaposed columns distributed over two opposing pages, a me-

thod that facilitates reading and cross-checking. It should be noted that this conveniently arranged mode of presentation is made possible because the Bagre recitations consist of very short phrases (each line usually has two stressed syllables and an indefinite number of unstressed ones; often the phrase includes no more than three words in the transcription) that are intersected by pauses. The readable English translation seems to follow the original closely; the generally very accurate French transposition of the English rendition was made by R. and C. Launey. In addition to the original texts, their bilingual translations, the French annotations, and the bilingual summaries, there is a French introduction (pp. 11-63) by Goody. Although the introduction contains important data, I find it to be confusing at times, perhaps because of the literal translation of the English. This book, moreover, is a sequel to Goody's *The Myth of the Bagre* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), the reading of which remains essential to an understanding of much of the information presented in the volume under review.

Bagre (or Boore) is the name of a graded association, accessible to men and women (for the lower grade only), that is found among the LoDagaba (LoDagaa, Dagari) and the LoWiili (Wilé, Oulé) of northern Ghana. The complex ritual activities of Bagre, spread over several months and culminating in the dry season, are organized by local patrilineages about every four years. At the climactic moments of the initiations, the White and the Black Bagre myths are recited by elders. The terms *White* and *Black Bagre* refer to two main stages in the initiation process. There is also a third stage connected with the ownership of the Bagre medicines; this level must be reached by men before their sons or daughters may be initiated (Goody, 1972, p. 48; 1980, p. 15). A Funerary Bagre is recited when the seniors of the association are buried (p. 29). The Bagre myth "serves as a guide to the ritual processes, an explanation of these procedures and a placing of them in a cosmological scheme" (1972, p. 56).

In his earlier book, Goody published a version of the Black and of the White Bagre based on texts that Benima had dictated to him in 1951. The present work contains recitations, recorded with a magnetophone in 1969 and 1970 of the White Bagre (pp. 74-101) by Nyin; the Black Bagre (pp. 110-387) by Nimiden, Nikaa and others, incorporating a White Bagre by Kob; and the Funerary Bagre (pp. 390-405) by Nikaa and Nimiden. The text by Nyin was recorded during the Ceremony of the Bagre Bells; the others were specially recited in the house of a chief. For unexplained reasons, only 510 verses of the 3,916 recited by Nyin are presented in the

book, although the synopsis (pp. 67-73) covers the entire text. Portions of the Black Bagre (3,512 verses) by Nimiden and Nikaa and of the incorporated White Bagre by Kob (2,252 verses) are not translated but summarized (pp. 351-352, 380); some verses are missing, probably because of trouble with the recorder. The authors possess several other texts of both the White and the Black Bagre (pp. 37-38), and some of their structural components are briefly synthesized in synoptic tables (pp. 41-42, 46-47). Apart from these methodological problems, which sometimes render verification by the reader impossible, the actual presentation of the texts is excellent.

In his introductory essay Goody briefly describes some aspects of LoDagaa culture, the Bagre association with its ritual sequences, and the conceptual framework. The major arguments, however, are addressed to the problems posed by different versions and the significance of the resulting variations. In the synoptic tables and the comments on them, Goody convincingly demonstrates the diversities in phraseology, content, perspective, sequence, length of recitation, degree of elaboration (e.g., lengthening a passage, inclusion of formulas), and amount of redundancies. Although there are greater resemblances among the White Bagre versions than among the Black because the former "are linked with a series of actions" (p. 38) that pose "a certain external control" (p. 45), significant variations nevertheless occur in the White Bagre. These are not merely the result of the author's methods of recording the texts, and they are not the result of the various settings in which the texts were recorded (dictation, performance during the rite, special recitation in the house of a chief). Such other factors as positive creativity, intentional elaboration and elimination, and plain error shape the formulations. The author (p. 30) clearly notes that his conclusions about variations diverge greatly from those made in his earlier work (1972, p. 60) in which he indicated that "the memorizing of these myths is enjoined upon the new initiates" and that the apprentices "repeat whole sections, line by line . . . , then test them . . . to see what they have learned."

There is no doubt that the "relatively standardized recitations comprise an enormous amount of variations" (p. 33). It seems to this reviewer, however, that little progress can be made in the understanding of the extent, nature, and significance of these variations as long as scholars simply compare the versions that happen to be available. Much more systematic work is needed on the repetitive oral performances of single narrators in changing contexts and under diverse conditions of recording. Further study

is required on performances of the same narratives by "pupil(s)" and "masters" of varying experience and fame.

In the final parts of Goody's introduction, he mildly criticizes the model builders, those who place exaggerated emphasis on deep underlying structures, homology, concordance, and transformation of a common structure. In the case of Bagre, there is no finite number of versions (p. 56); each recitation is a creative transformation and not simply the result of forgetfulness or deviation from the original form (p. 58). The foremost task, then, remains the interpretation of the "superficial structure" that is "the much neglected level of the explicit semantic content of the act of communication" (p. 62). I could not agree more. The present work is an excellent example of judiciously transcribed and translated texts with incisive comments.

Daniel P. Biebuyck

Amadou Abel Sy. *Seul contre tous: Deux recits épiques des pêcheurs du Fouta Toro*. Dakar and Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1978. 167 pages.

What makes the study of African folklore more absorbing than other fields is the opportunity to retrieve the texts to be analyzed and commented on—to add to the usual procedures of literary criticism the discovery and translation of new materials, now available for the first time to new readers. Especially welcome therefore is the Traditions Orales collection, published by the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN) under subsidy from the government of the Republic of Senegal. In this series will appear, we are told, bilingual editions of African oral-literary works, cheap enough to be within the reach of the African reader of crime novels, the literate countryman, or the student. Translations, monographs, research studies, and chronicles are planned, in African languages of Mali, Guinea, Cameroun, Congo, Nigeria, Zaire and elsewhere. Lilyan Kesteloot, editor of the series, declares there is but one requirement, authenticity. No adaptation, summary, amplification, or rewriting of a traditional text will appear in the series, she says.

Seul contre tous offers two heroic narratives from performances broadcast and recorded by Radio Senegal by Guélaye Ali Fall (1898–1971), a master singer of tales of the riverain Tukulor (a subgroup of the Peul or Fulani). The editor, Amadou Abel Sy,