

Harold Womersley. Legends and History of the Luba.
Los Angeles: Crossroads Press, 1984. xvii, 102 pp.
Maps, index. price not given.

The author, a former missionary, has traveled widely among the Luba and Songye ethnic groups of southeastern Zaire during forty-seven years of residence there; since retirement he has maintained his contacts with the Luba. Many of his experiences and ethnographic data have already been published in his Congo Miracle (1974) and In the Glow of the Log Fire (1975).

The present booklet, part of a series entitled "African Primary Texts" (edited by D. Henige), contains thirty-one historical and ethnographic documents in English, in addition to an introduction by the editor and a preface by the author. These documents, regrettably, are not "primary" texts (as the series intends to present)-- they do not comprise the integral and direct rendition in English of particular oral statements made in specific Luba contexts by Luba historians, initiators, political authorities, and so on. Rather, as Henige (p. v) points out, they are "syntheses of oral testimonies," enriched with documentation from early explorers (e.g., Cameron,

Delcommune); included also are general observations and reflections by the author. The original oral texts would have been particularly welcome because all too frequently in the area of Luba studies authors writing about myths and epics have at their disposal only loosely worded abstracts and not the real texts.

Nevertheless, the ethnographic and ethnohistorical information provided in these syntheses is of great value, partly because much of it was gathered (in different stages and on various occasions) from Luba sages, such as the famed inabanza Kataba, "senior counsellor" of the Luba chief Kabongo Kumwimba Nshimbu, and from other prominent titleholders (see the listing pp. xii-xiv). The contents of the thirty-one documents range widely, from the Luba "genesis myth" and the conflicts between the hero-chiefs Kongolo and Kalala Ilunga to the more recent oppositions between chiefs Kasongwa Niembo and Kabongo and the advent of Tetela rebels and Europeans. The documents also present descriptions of particular Luba institutions and sets of customs. For example, chapters XXVII-XXXI deal with enthronement rites, selection of counselors, and burial ritual. These heterogeneous ethnographic topics, however, are treated in an incomplete and sketchy manner. Chapter XXX on the 1948 burial of King Kabongo Kumwimba is nothing more than an elementary eyewitness report on certain phases of

that ritual complex. To be fully useful, the synthetic documents would require more explanation and interpretation than are now provided in the "editorial notes."

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