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PEEK, PHILIP M. (ED.).
AFRICAN DIVINATION SYSTEMS: WAYS OF KNOWING.
Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991. Pp. 230.
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The major focus of this book is the divination systems of ten ethnic groups in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is written by twelve authors and includes also an afterword by James Fernandez who is a well-known specialist on African thought patterns and practices. The book is divided into five parts, with a general introduction by the editor P.M. Peek, who has also provided a lucid phenomenological analysis of divination in part five. Moreover, he has written helpful summaries of the works of contributing authors in relation to previous works on their respective areas and themes at the beginning of each of the other four parts. In Part one, Peek demonstrates the dynamic presence of divination in every human society, especially in Africa, both as a living legacy and as a special branch of knowledge. Despite its central role in the functioning and understanding of African cultures, Peek correctly laments that divination has been poorly studied. He takes stock of the contributions of scholars to the study of African divination systems before and after Evans-Pritchard. He observes that before Evans-Pritchard, scholars like E.B. Taylor, H. Junod, H. Callaway, L. Levy-Bruhl, and M. Griaule, among others, made important contributions to the study of divination. And after Evans-Pritchard came W.R. Bascom, P. Gebauer, J. Fernandez, G.K. Park, P. Bohannan and a host of others. Peek assesses the great impact of the classic work of Evans-Pritchard on the Zande in the study of divination. Furthermore, Peek provides an interesting analysis of various typologies of divination, particularly that of R. Devisch. Peek then suggests that "previous typologies are unsatisfactory because the cognitive modes they attempt to distinguish usually overlap". He continues: "In fact, a key to our understanding of divination is found in the continual reference to an intermediate category between the poles of mathematical calculation and spiritual mediumship" (p. 12); a suggestion I find not only logical but practicable.

In Part one, Henry Callaway provides detailed insights into the initiation of a Zulu diviner (inyanga), who like the Hausa Bori priest/priestess must experience affliction and locate hidden things as a part of his/her calling. Call to office through illness has also been demonstrated in mediumistic divination

among the Northern Yaka of Zaire and among Batammaliba of Togo by R. Devish and R. Blier respectively. In these cases, initiation into the cult marks the end of illness. In Part two, J.W. Burton accounts for possession among Nilotic peoples of Southern Sudan as a result of physical maladies associated with their cosmology and philosophy. He also shows how Dinka explain away failure in divination "when experience contradicts expectation, by reorganizing the limits of human agency" (p. 43). This is explained in terms of the refusal of God to act ("Divinity has refused") or failure on the part of the diviner to correctly identify affliction. Two other essays discuss different ways African diviners cope with failure in divination. Peek (p. 24) evaluates Evans-Pritchard's observations of how the Zande explain failure in divination. Peek also says that when divination fails, the Zulu will say that "the diviner is only human". With regard to the Batammaliba, R. Blier contends that diviners acknowledge publicly the difficulties and problems encountered in their profession. When a diviner dies, other diviners gather at his house and at a predetermined time walk around the house, ringing a bell and singing, "it is the consultant who is a liar, he consults to eat" (p. 80). Some of the essays unfortunately pay little attention to the problem of failure in divination. Hence the adage in most parts of Africa, that the people 'remember the successes and forget the failures' of the diviner is not properly evaluated.

In his study of Nilotic peoples, Burton states that the diviner (tiet) is possessed by jok, a power which resides within him/her and is called in when another is possessed by jok, "a power that seizes", thereby enabling diviners to see the consequences of human actions. Burton gives us a lengthy and informative account of an exorcist's session. While Virin and Rajaonarimanana, in the same section, provide a detailed description of the Sikidy configuration system of Atemoro of Madagascar, a system of divination which has strong links with Islamic astrology (Khatt), as well as with Nupe Hati and Eba, Yoruba Ifa and Agbigba, Igbo Afa, Temne An-bere and Pa divination of Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau (Nigeria), such as Mupun, Ngas and Mwaghavul. Their work has thrown more light on the relations between Arabic/Islamic, Asian, Mayote, Somali (Burji) divination and other divination systems in Africa. Their chapter gives us the most detailed body of documented epistemology among all the case studies presented in the book. Their illustrations are also very informative.

Part three is composed of four essays that illustrate the dependence of ethnic groups and individuals on divination in daily life, especially in coping with disease causation, health care delivery, and provision of food. R. Blier sees the Batammaliba diviner as an "alienist and enunciator" who must fulfil a paradox, that of simultaneously being outside and inside his society in order to serve it properly. Among Lobi of Burkina Faso, P. Meyer observes that the thila are voiceless spirits which are given voice, means of communication and

social authority through divination. The thila's call is mandatory and can only be refused with grave consequences. A. Almquist states that Pagibeti of Zaire, in two of their divination systems (ntiseye mboko and mbolongo), utilise suprahuman oracular knowledge for hunting in times of scarcity, where the man with "a good back" (ngonga enza) is chosen to perform the necessary rites. Hedged round by taboos, he is assisted by a child. R. Devisch reckons diviners to be exceptionally intelligent persons with high sensory perceptive abilities. He deals with the Yaka process of divination as a rite de passage. Here, the uterine kin authoritatively controls mediumistic divination, while the agnatic descent kin group presides over customary law and political power. Both are necessary for the balanced functioning of Yaka society.

In Part four, there are three essays in all. These essays deal with gender identification and authority in divination. R. Shaw and S.R. Whyte show that divination in Temne and Nyole, respectively, are primarily within the echelon of male authority and control, though women may manipulate the system. Like Peek, Shaw reviews some typologies of assessing divination, where she sees divination not only as a rational truth finding process through cryptic potency, but concludes that it is a "division of oracular labour". This is a process of splitting truth from darkness in Temne private (An-bere) and public (An-bare) divination, as well as in witch detection (ka-gbak). Whyte's analysis locates divination around the Nyole concept of misfortune, where mediumistic divination is dominated by women and the Arabic (book) form of divination dominated by men (the lamuli). She centred her research on Nyole divination around two systems of divination represented by case studies. It is interesting to note that the majority of Muslim (lamuli) diviners' clients are Christians. Another interesting observation is that clients often consult diviners far away because they are considered to be more powerful. She concludes that both client and diviner are jointly engaged in the discovery of knowledge, where both are authorities, one (the diviner) on the authority of mediation and access to ineffable reality, and the other (the client) on the knowledge of social and ritual details of the specific case under consideration. D. Parkin uses three case studies to illustrate the three categories of Kenyan diviners: Arab, Swahili and Giriama. His analysis of simultaneity and sequencing in oracular speech is very useful in analysing the language of divination in other cultures too.

Part five presents a rich phenomenological survey of divination systems in Africa, based on cross-cultural themes and religious universals arising out of African divination patterns. Here the role of binary opposition modes in divinatory rituals are put in their proper perspectives. Peek assesses the divination process anew, providing new insights, comparing methods of search for knowledge in Western and African cultures. Further, he deals with African preferences for foreign diviners and/or foreign clients, their mark of identity, call to office, gender and animal imageries in African divination and so forth.

He emphasizes also the role of the diviner in attaining ambiguity and marginalization through rites of passage by using animal imageries, liminality, norm reversals and ritual treatment of the divining apparatus to give sight, speech, smell and other senses which will enable him/her in the quest for truth and in acts of mediation. Peek ends the section by analysing and reconciling divination's mystical process with its practical results, particularly as evidenced in binary opposition and probability modes. His work is brilliant and tremendously useful in analysing divination patterns in African cultures.

The book is rich in bibliographical surveys of divination in Africa, in particular the list of references provided at the end of the introductory section and part five. This part could very well be developed and expanded into a separate book as an in-depth historical-phenomenological study of imageries and themes emerging out of divination patterns in Africa. Some scholars might argue that even though the book is rich in terms of studies of ritual symbols, little effort is made to explain the meanings of these symbols, with the exception of the essays by Devisch and Peek. It would be even more useful if subsequent editions of African Divination Systems would provide more materials on the meanings of the rich ritual symbols explored in this book.

In addition, some scholars might have wanted to see a clearer picture of the historiography of divination and the impact of change on the institution over time in the respective case studies. Again only a few of the essays attempt to address this issue. Peek (pp. 38, 204 and 206), Burton (p. 42), Blier (p. 80f.), Whyte (pp.165 and 159f.) and Parkin discuss the impact of change on divination. Virin and Rajaonarimanana refer to both the history of origin and development of Sikidi in Madagascar, taking note of the impact of change. Most other essays ignore the history, development and impact of change, while others do not indicate clearly the "historical given" of their works.

These desiderata notwithstanding, the book is recommended for scholars of African religions and culture because, apart from having the advantage of being ethnically based, it provides comparative insights on divination in Sub-Saharan Africa. It seems that in many cases the institution of divination is the single strongest preserver of African culture in the face of increasing activity of religious change in Africa. Despite the strong wind of change, many Africans still find the diviner a rallying point in times of crisis, and regard divination as a genuine way of knowing.

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**SOMALI PASTORAL WORK SONGS: THE VOICE OF THE
POLITICALLY POWERLESS.**

EPOS, Uppsala University, Uppsala, 1993. Pp. xii, 84. 1 map.

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This is a collection of pastoral work songs collected during two months of field work in 1989 in what was then the northern part of the Somali Democratic Republic, now known as the independent Somaliland Republic. Following two chapters that introduce the reader to the Somali culture and the social and economic life of the northern Somali camel livestock breeders, the author gives a portrayal of the role and social significance of poetry in the Somali society. The central chapters, number four and five, present the various genres of work songs according to what tasks they are associated with. Thus, songs that are sang while driving camels to the watering points are presented separately from the songs that are sung while the camels drink the water, which in turn are separated from the songs associated with driving goats to the water, etc. While this may seem a piecemeal division of a rather homogenous material it reflects the Somali peoples' genre-conscious approach to their poetry. Although work songs fall outside of the so-called serious genres of Somali poetry, the author points out that singing in recreational and working situations are excellent opportunities for youth to demonstrate their artistic skills and to communicate...what is prohibited for them to say in other social situations (p. 21-22). The book is written in a straight-forward English and all translations from Somali are immaculate. Despite its modest scope it will defend its place among other studies of Somali oral literature. The following lines taken from a song that is sung while weaving mats for the nomadic hut (p. 61), illustrate how some of the songs manage to convey a very vivid picture of the Somali culture.

Three are valueless:
a gun without bullets,
a new white dress without shoes,
beauty without elegance.

Three are valueless:
the wealth of a miser,
a virgin from a small clan,
beauty without elegance.