

Book Review of *Oral Literature of the Sukuma*

By Immaculate Mirambo

Published by the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of the Apostles of Mbeya

Printed by the Peramiho Printing Press, 1999

59 pages

Price: 900/= Tanzanian Shillings (or \$1.15)

Reviewed by John P. Mbonde

A Sukuma Looks at Her Own Oral Literature

The author is Sister Immaculate Mirambo, a member of the Sisters of Our Lady Queen of the Apostles of Mbeya. She has a BA degree from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya. She is presently the Head of English Department at Loleza Girls' Secondary School in Mbeya.

She has made extensive research on Sukuma oral literature. She interprets it for the good of the Sukuma community and the world at large in matters concerning education, history, philosophy and beliefs, etc.

This book, *Oral Literature of the Sukuma*, has four main chapters. It covers the historical background of the Sukuma people who form 20% (or 6 million) of the total population of Tanzania which is 30 million; it discusses briefly the social, political and economic organization of the Sukuma people; analyzes the general characteristics of the oral literature of Sukuma; and finally explains the general functions of oral literature in the Sukuma community. Hence her investigations in the Sukuma proverbs, riddles, stories, poems, myths, songs, prayers, dances, puns, etc. She states: "Oral literature in Sukumaland can be seen to serve the purpose such as to inculcate positive values, warn, soothe, entertain, praise and encourage members of society. This literature can never be seen as art for art's sake. It always has a direct association to the

society that composes and performs it" (page 56).

The author cites a lot of examples of what embodies this Sukuma oral literature in the typical indigenous language of the people and provides equally adequate translations. Two examples are:

1. *Chumu na ndugu gembe ati sanya mino (Brotherhood is brotherhood, even if there is some misunderstanding, one day they will agree each other)*. Meaning: It is a warning to those who involve themselves in family wrangles; when the family members reconcile they can turn against them.
2. *Lulimi lukabejaga kaya (A tongue builds a village)*. Meaning: To have a good account among the people is a treasure because many people will love and associate with us.

Mirambo makes full use of other scholarly works on the Sukuma people with a bibliography at the end. She also makes a comparison with other oral literature in the Swahili language.

As Sukuma oral literature is so rich, these few pages are just the tip of the iceberg. What is particularly encouraging is that Immaculate Mirambo is a Sukuma writing about the oral literature of her own ethnic group. The book offers a challenge to other scholars, particularly of Sukuma origin, to go deeper in doing cultural research now or never.

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