

and black stand for new growth and physical death, respectively (61).

"*Bannagur*" (colored rice) is an old word in Kannada (63). Rice is also the most plastic medium in family-centered Hindu rituals (63-64). Various foods are prepared from rice. Rice offerings to nature—birds as well as animals—are also a popular ritual in almost all parts of India; in eastern parts of the country it is known as "*navanna*" (new rice). The use of color in foods is surmised to be the influence of tantric rituals and color symbolism on Hindu rituals and festivals. Even some tribals have been influenced by this custom.

The floral *rangolli* drawings offered to the ancestral spirits represent the structure of a family. Even the cobra deity is propitiated by offering white flowers and white food. This might be a case of white magic during a period of benevolence on the part of the deity concerned. When the snake goddess, Manada, is worshipped in Bengal, a white goat or white swan or white flower is offered in order to gain the desired blessings from the deity. Hanchett has collected numerous illustrations for her target area and discusses the entire mass of materials with precision and logic; as well, she used three variants of the "Mangala Gauri" myth and analyzes the ritual for Prati with its operational meanings.

I agree with the author's statements that: "Like actual persons, [the family] grows or does not. It is vulnerable to the 'process-stasis' alternation. It bleeds or blooms in festival symbolism" (279). The rituals and myths found in the target area may be called "a Hindu family drama." The kinship system and the complexity of ritual patterns are interrelated. "In ancestor worship a pattern of organisation of kin expresses a concept of wholeness or completeness" (279).

Appendices A and B as well as the glossary are very useful for future work on the subject. I would have expected more myths on the mother goddesses, more photographs, and more coverage of ritual drawings. Still, the synchronic and diachronic studies of colored rice in relation to the two target villages reflect an insight of the author, who quite rightly brings to light a strong ambivalence about women and deep anxieties about the future of the family as a whole. The present work will be useful for general readers as well as for scholars who would like to do further investigation into the subject.

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ISRAEL

BIN GORION, MICHA JOSEPH, collector; BIN GORION, EMANUEL, editor; LASK, I. M., translator. *Mimekor Yisrael. Selected Classical Jewish Folktales*. With introduction and headnotes by Dan Ben-Amos. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. xiii+271 pages. Bibliography. Paper US\$12.95; ISBN 0-253-20588-3. Hardcover US\$29.95; ISBN 0-253-31156-X.

BIN GORION, MICHA JOSEPH, collector; BIN GORION, EMANUEL, editor; LASK, I. M., translator. *Mimekor Yisrael. Classical Jewish Folktales, Abridged and Annotated Edition*. Introduction and headnotes by Dan Ben-Amos. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990. xlviii+512 pages. Selected bibliography, indices of motifs, types, authors, sources, and general index. Cloth US\$57.50; ISBN 0-253-31158-6.

As years pass by, we become more and more aware of the pioneering, seminal importance of Bin Gorion's *Mimekor Yisrael*. In the beginning of this century, when, according to most authorities of Jewish literature, the history of the Hebrew narratives ended in the Talmudic-Midrashic literature (around the seventh century), Bin Gorion (known better by his original name, Berdyczewski) collected, compared, and appreciated thousands of such tales from medieval sources. The "official" academic circles still regarded the book and its contents as "epigones" of the "classical" Midrashic literature, and the fancy of this strange, rebellious character, Berdyczewski. However, step by step, new readings of these materials, openness to different phenomena of Jewish culture, and new vistas in the study of Hebrew narratives of the middle ages, reconfirmed the revolution that this compendium brought to our understanding of Jewish literature.

The book has a long and complicated history, since the publication in German, in the lifetime of the author himself, of *Der Born Judas* (1916–23, 6 vols.), through the complete publication of the original Hebrew material from Berdyczewski's manuscripts by his son, Emanuel, (who describes in an introduction to this edition the biographical background), and the exemplary translation of the full Hebrew text into English by I. M. Lask (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976, 3 vols.).

But aside from these scholarly-cultural aspects of the book, it also makes wonderful material for reading. Berdyczewski had that special touch of a great writer, whose interest in the ancient sources is not merely academic but also artistic. The decisions about what to choose from the bulk of endless narratives, about the organization of the material, and about the collection of different variants—only in special cases when they are really interesting and meaningful—were intended to make the old Jewish folktales delightful reading for modern audiences. This is why the English translation of the book is such an important cultural event. Unfortunately, the original three-volume translation can hardly become more than a library item for specialists in the field. The paperback edition of selected folktales can, however, fulfill the author's goal and become the source of knowledge about Jewish folktales for the general public. This, hopefully, will replace all kinds of anthologies of folktales, published lately, which are a shame to the wonderful tradition of Jewish folklore.

The abridged and annotated edition belongs to another class. This is a scholarly publication, in the best meaning of the term. Here, the hand of a scholar of the caliber of Dan Ben-Amos is manifest in every part of the book. First of all, in his introduction Ben-Amos succeeds not only in describing the historical-bibliographical aspects of the book but also in surveying the cultural context within which this book was created, and the major genres and developments of the Hebrew narratives in the middle ages.

Ben-Amos emphasizes the close relationships between the ideas and the original writing of Berdyczewski and his work in *Mimekor Yisrael*. He emphasizes the special position Berdyczewski occupied in the Jewish culture of his time, as a possible explanation of this work. However, I feel that something else should also be taken into account here—his acquaintance with the German *Volkskunde* of the nineteenth century and with Jewish folkloristics in his own time (Steinschneider, Grunwald, and An-ski, for example). Ben-Amos also does not seem to do full justice to the (still) greatest work in the field of Jewish folklore: Louis Ginzberg's *The Legends of the Jews*. He mentions the fact that Ginzberg was the greatest scholar among all the compilers of Jewish folktales, but from the description of Ginzberg's work here it would be hard to understand why. The real importance of Ginzberg's work is in his annotations, which are not mentioned at all here, and I think they were one of the sources of inspiration

for Bin Gorion.

However, the greatest achievement of the abridged and annotated edition is in the headnotes—the real contribution of Ben-Amos to this historical project. The annotations are based on the original notes of the author and the additions of his son, Emanuel. Originally they included mainly the direct sources from which the tales had been extracted. These references are also the basis for the present annotations. But the distance between them is as big as the distance of time that elapsed between the two editions. Ben-Amos made every scholarly effort to make these annotations the definitive, up-to-date, reference to the tales. They include accurate references to sources, variants, variants in international folklore, the background (historical and cultural) of every story, the up-to-date scholarship published on each tale, and the literary works that were inspired by them. The annotations are written in a clear and precise way, so that they can be understood by the interested general reader, and are indispensable for the scholar.

It seems to me that the publication of this annotated edition of the *Mimekor Yisrael* is a major contribution to the study of Jewish narratives of the middle ages, a field much neglected until lately. From now on it will be impossible to do any work in this field, or in Jewish folklore in general, without consulting this important book.

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RUSSIA

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