

a detailed index and a scholarly bibliography; both the general reader and the specialist will find that their needs have been met.

As for the epic itself, students of South Asian folklore will of course recognize in it local reworkings of pan-Indian stories and motifs. But it has sharp and distinctive values of its own. A group of its younger heroes are "brothers" drawn from a variety of castes, and as they prepare for their final battle, they deliberately eat a caste-breaking meal together—even though the chief hero's mother is horrified by such behavior (p. 309). The oldest and most central hero, Brahma Nāyūḍu, is an incarnation of Vishnu, yet his treatment of Cennakēśvara, a local form of Vishnu, is cavalier indeed:

When Brahma Nāyūḍu lost his land to Nāyakurālu at the cock fight, he had gone to the Cennakēśvara Temple and said, 'Lord, you are my patron God. I have lost my land to Nāyakurālu at the cock fight, and I am going. Come with me.'

Cennakēśvara said, 'Wherever there is a battle, there you will fight. Who will support me? I shall not come.'

'My Lord, you are Hari, you are guru, you are life breath itself. Come with me,' he said.

When Cennakēśvara refused to come, Brahma Nāyūḍu cursed him, saying, 'So long as we mighty men of Palnāḍu are not here, here you must remain.' Then he locked the door, and taking the opening rod and key, he crossed at Shining Ford. From that day onward, the condition of the temple was this: fragrant grass, burr grass, fenugreek, amaranthus, and goose grass grew there. (pp. 281–282) Both Cennakēśvara and Shiva are later cursed even more severely by others, and respond only by trembling helplessly (pp. 282, 352). Obviously in Palnāḍu familiarity with the Great Tradition has bred a measure of contempt.

The real power in the epic is Palnāḍu itself, with its own gods, its own heroes, its own history. An immense amount of fine, careful, scholarly work has gone into *The Epic of Palnāḍu*, and it is a pleasure to read. Gene Roghair has given us an invaluable window into the world of Palnāḍu; we are very much in his debt.

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#### KURDISTAN

SABAR, YONA, translation, editing, introduction. *The Folk Literature of the Kurdistan Jews: An Anthology*. (Yale Judaica Series, volume XXIII) New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982. Xli+250 pp. Illustrations, glossary, selected bibliography and indexes. Hardbound US \$30.00. ISBN 0-300-02698-6

This anthology is to be both welcomed and criticized. *Welcomed*—as the first *English* collection revealing some of the cultural spirit of that ancient ethnic group, the Kurdistan Jews. The need for such a collection has long been felt for students of social sciences such as ethnic studies, socio-psychology, behaviorism and, especially, some of their applied branches (psycho-therapy and even more so for the student of social work in Israel). *Criticized*—as a collection of several folk-traditions, because the anthology is merely culled from previous publications, and lacks any attempt to in-

tegrate the material into a conceptual framework based on analytic thought. Thus, in terms of methodology and conceptualization, the collection reflects several weaknesses integral to folklore studies as still carried out by many folklorists.

The anthology consists of "selections from the various genres" of oral folk traditions of the Kurdistan Jews: "epic re-creations of Biblical stories, Midrashic legends, folktales about local rabbis, Jewish and general Near Eastern moralistic anecdotes, folk songs, nursery rhymes, sayings, and proverbs" (preface, p. xi). A vast corpus of informative notes is added to the texts, mostly based on bibliographical comparative data derived from parallel versions and different sources. The author, although a linguist, does not trouble himself with presenting the Neo-Aramaic text, as has been done in a previous collection ("Shirat Yehude hat-Targum") by J. J. Rivlin, published in 1959. The linguistic aspect comes through only occasionally, in some of the long and lavish notes. The introduction is meant to convey basic data on the background of the Kurdistan Jews; it reflects knowledge and familiarity of the subject matter, yet is sporadic and arbitrary. Here are two examples: (a) The informative materials included lack continuity. It seems that an attempt has been made to overcome this discontinuity by dividing the chapter into sub-paragraphs and numbering them successively. This sometimes brings up repetition of facts (e.g. data on the number of Jews living in Kurdistan on p. xv is exactly repeated on p. xxv). (b) Some of the sub-titles dividing the introductory chapter are misleading, since the content included in the subdivisions is irrelevant. (See sections iv and vi; especially paragraph 1 in section vi which in terms of its content would better have been included in section iv.)

The information on Kurdistan Jewry in Israel is minimal and superfluous. Furthermore, the introduction does not offer any conceptual explanation as to the method and criteria of selecting the chosen materials.

The collected materials seem to be presented in generic groupings, as stated in the preface. A look at the table of contents clearly shows that the second half the collected materials (chap. xv to chap. xx) are, indeed, presented under generic subject names, while the first half (chap. i to chap. xiv) does not carry any generic subject name. This could be explained by the absence of any theoretical or conceptual framework, as mentioned above.

As an anthology of folk-literature, and in the absence of a theoretical methodological framework, the very choice of materials implicitly suggests a certain academic approach: re-creations of Biblical stories, Midrashic legends, folktales about local rabbis, etc. casts traditional literature and folkliterature into one common frame. The large corpus of comparative notes, informative but not analytic, make up a diachronic (=historical) study. This is a crucial issue in folkloristics, concerning both the discipline and the researcher. In the discipline comparative study has become the main academic concern, the need for conceptual analytic work which would provide some insight into the nature of oral creation ignored. This has been true in folklore studies for the past several decades, and invites well justified attacks from different academic disciplines (e.g. sociology, anthropology, psychology, etc.) from the methodological standpoint, claiming that folkloristics is no more than a pseudo-academic occupation. On part of the researcher the issue is whether *collecting* is indeed the main task of the researcher in his folkloristic work or is it rather the "collectoral-disease."

In case of the anthology at hand another problem arises from the very fact that the author is inquiring about his own cultural background. Here the strength as well as the weakness of this starting point are reflected. Being himself of Kurdistan origin, Sabar's approach seems very sympathetic to the oral spiritual heritage of this unique ethnic group, yet sometimes apologetic (see p. xxviii, end of paragraph no. 4). Due

to his ambivalent involvement with this group, the question of illiteracy common among Kurdistan Jews, which has created a lot of misunderstanding and misrelating among many Israelis, is implicitly dealt with by Sabar and in an inconsistent way: "In every house there was usually at least one who knew how to read the Hebrew blessing . . ." (p. xxvii), "reading and—much less—writing were not common" (p. xxxii). This question of illiteracy, so rarely found among Jews in general, is due to the oral tradition of this unique Jewish group prevailing from times dating back to the first Israelite exile. It is, therefore, very important that it be dealt with from an academic viewpoint concerning the nature of oral tradition as such, not from an apologetic one.

In conclusion, the value of this anthology lies merely in the translation of Kurdistan Jewish folk-traditions into the English. I, personally, would wish for the appearance of a thorough study on this unique ethnic group done by a scholar of Sabar's origin and skills. Until then, it would be worthwhile to mention the possibility of re-editing the presented materials when they are reprinted.

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#### HUNGARY

DÖMÖTÖR, TEKLA. *Hungarian Folk Beliefs*. Translated by Christopher M. Hann. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983. 324 pp. 16 color plates, 60 black and white plates. Bibliography, indexes of names, places and subjects. Hardcover, US \$17.50 (£12.25 in the U.K.; US \$21.88 in the rest of the world). ISBN 0-253-32876-4.

Hungary occupies a position between Asia and Europe in a geographical as well as in a cultural sense. This alone guarantees that students concerned with the folklore of either of these areas will have an interest in Dömötör's book. As soon as one tries to track the cultural, ethnic and linguistic relations of the Hungarians in more detail, however, a host of problems appears. Hypotheses for solutions have been proposed, but most of the problems concerning the remote past of the present day Hungarians continue to remain unresolved. In one way or another these problems also cast their shadow on questions discussed in this book, i.e. the possible origin, ancient form, and probable history of Hungarian folk beliefs.

Dömötör sees her task as to "sketch the main lines of the evolution of Hungarian folk beliefs through history" in a "broad historical outline" (15). She qualifies it however by saying that the book addresses the layman rather than the specialist. She means to say that she did not want to overload it with a minutely detailed apparatus, going into the discussion of regional variations of forms, but instead preferred to "outline the main trend of a particular practice" (15). And yet she does not forgo opportunities to at least refer to the areas where the material she introduces was collected. In this manner even the lay reader is given an initial impression of the large variety of cultural forms that exist within the area where Hungarian is spoken today. The author is especially to be commended for the decision to use as much primary source material as possible. In reading the long quotations from interviews with informants and from the author's own field material, we receive a good impression of what the beliefs still mean for their holders. Not to mention that this procedure makes the volume into a sourcebook of its own kind, one that should not be taken lightly