

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

only because the author addresses herself first of all to a lay public.

The historical outline Dömötör develops is mainly concerned with the 19th and 20th centuries, where primary ethnographic source material is available in sufficient abundance to allow an analysis that does not have to rely on suppositions or the imagination. From this solid ground she here and there points out lines leading to the time of the Conquest by the Magyars or speculates on what forms certain beliefs might have had at that time. Given the scarcity of the material such flashbacks are not very convincing; at their best they are speculative. This situation can hardly be improved by making use for comparative purposes of similar but recent material collected from related ethnic groups like the Ob-Ugrians or Uralic and Altaic peoples. Dömötör is by no means unaware of the weakness of such a procedure, because she calls it "a rather dubious undertaking" (34) to compare material that lies historically and geographically so far apart. However, once in a while she seems to fall prey to the lure of such comparisons, e.g. when she says that it is "extremely probable" that the early Magyars had a ban on group endogamy, a fact she thinks is supported by old Hungarian chronicles and "by the totemism and exogamous marriage rules of the Ob-Ugrians, which persisted until late in the nineteenth century" (39). The supposition for such a statement is most probably that ideas such as totemism are very conservative and tend to be kept up through long periods of time, but is there really any concrete evidence pointing to the conclusion that they do not change in contents or that they have not been adopted more recently? Although for the most part the author carefully weighs the facts and the conclusions she draws from them, these occasional speculative conclusions are not very illuminating. Fortunately they do not really detract from the value of this book, because its main argument is solidly based on historically safe material.

Apart from the few doubts mentioned, I would recommend this book not only because it gives us access to primary material, but also because much of the scholarship Dömötör refers to in her discussion is available only in Hungarian or in short resumés in English or German. Therefore, we have to be grateful to the author for introducing us to the world of Hungarian folk beliefs and at the same time for familiarizing us with the great amount of detailed research and sophisticated scholarship of Hungarian folklorists in the field of folk beliefs.

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