

rather difficult conditions in an exile situation. Thus, this volume is highly recommended as it provides a very valuable supplement to the range of established studies on Tibet, and encourages further research.

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Frank KRESSING
University of Ulm
Ulm, Germany

SOUTHEAST ASIA

MASING, JAMES JEMUT. *The Coming of the Gods: An Iban Invocatory Chant (Timang Gawai Amat) of the Baleh River Region, Sarawak*. Two volumes. Canberra: Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, Australian National University, 1997. 598 pages. Maps, figures, tables, glossaries, references. Paper \$A45.00 (overseas price for both volumes).

The production of this text is a saga in itself, one that has taken half a century to unfold. It begins in 1949, not long after the last Rajah ceded Sarawak to the British Crown. In a remote Iban community, Derek Freeman attended a longhouse festival focussed on a cosmic journey recounted by the *lemembang*, or bard, Igoh anak Impin. Impressed by Igoh's poetic genius, but lacking a tape recorder, Freeman arranged for the bard to repeat the entire cycle of songs, dictating line by line to a literate Iban, Patrick Ringkai. Over several years, Freeman made annotations to this manuscript, even after Igoh himself had converted to Christianity. In 1976 Freeman recruited James Jemut Masing, recently returned from a university in New Zealand, to undertake a translation of the text. Masing's work earned him a doctorate from the Australian National University. Now finally published in a handsomely produced two-volume set from the same institution, it represents a priceless contribution to world literature.

The text itself makes up the whole of the second volume, 219 pages of Iban transcription,

each matched by English translation on the facing page. It falls into eight parts, episodes in the travels and headhunting adventures of the divine hero Lang Singalong Burong, plus a ninth episode collected by Masing at a later date. There is little exegetical material, nothing more than a couple of footnotes per page. A synopsis at the beginning of each episode would have been helpful in finding one's way through a tangled plot line, but the story is on the whole surprisingly accessible, where one might have expected mystical or esoteric language. Clearly, Igoh intended its dramatic impact to be appreciated by his entire Iban public, and not restricted to some elite of ritual specialists. There is only a brief glossary, but this need not impede further study of the text because Iban is well provided with easily available dictionaries, such as RICHIARDS (1988).

The first volume of 130 pages describes the cultural context of the performance. Much of this information can be found elsewhere, but it provides a useful and concise introduction that will be especially appreciated by scholars discovering Iban ritual language for the first time. Chapter one outlines Iban migration, longhouse architecture, and cosmology. Chapter two summarizes Iban rituals, from the least elaborate to the great festivals that accommodate the imposing bardic recitations described in chapter three. Chapter three contains the only discussion of the ethno-poetics of the chants, and it is brief. Nevertheless, there is enough to see a dense use of parallelism, particularly rhyme and alliteration. There is no specific criterion for segmentation into lines, but stanzas are clearly marked by the bard himself, who signals to his chorus, either by a gesture or by a repeated and inverted phrase or both, where to come in with their refrain. Chapter four is the most interesting and novel. It describes the training of a bard, including his formal apprenticeship to an established practitioner, and makes clear the prestige incentives that make (or made, unfortunately) the role of bard worth the considerable effort of practice and memorization needed to attain it. Chapter five and the conclusion sum up the place of the bardic chants in Iban religion.

In recent years, there has been an increased urgency in the recording of Iban oral literature, reflected in a steady flow of publications. Clifford Sather has completed the collected works of Sarawak's best-known indigenous ethnographer, Benedict SANDIN (1994), and the Sarawak Literary Society has further projects in preparation. The result is a truly remarkable corpus of texts, among the finest from anywhere in Asia, in which Masing's volume takes a prominent place.

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Peter METCALF
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, VA