

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

The African e-Journals Project has digitized full text of articles of eleven social science and humanities journals. This item is from the digital archive maintained by Michigan State University Library. Find more at:

<http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/>

Available through a partnership with



Scroll down to read the article.

BOOK REVIEWS

Rhodesia/Zimbabwe By O.B. Pollak and K. Pollak. Oxford, Clio Press, World Bibliographical Series 4, 1979, 195pp., £14.75.

SADEX: The Southern African Development Information/Document Exchange Washington D.C., African Bibliographical Center, Vol. 1, No. 1, June-July 1979- , (6 issues annually).

Rhodesia/Zimbabwe is a selected, retrospective and annotated bibliography which is intended to be up-to-date, to 'describe a country through its literature, and to provide ready access to selected courses for further study'. The main section lists 508 entries, drawn from the authors' *Rhodesia/Zimbabwe: an International Bibliography* (Boston (Mass.), G.K. Hall, 1977; reviewed *ante* (1979), VII, 105-10), and subsequent literature, arranged under some thirty subject headings. The introduction gives a brief history of the country but no guidance on the arrangement of the volume or the cut-off date, which is presumably 1978. There is a useful index listing entries by author, title and subject in a single sequence.

It is immediately apparent that this bibliography suffers from the same imbalance as the one on which it is based; nearly half the entries are devoted to history, politics and related subjects. The arts, languages and certain important social issues such as health and education receive scant attention; there are no works listed on topical subjects as the Rhodesian armed forces in the seventies or housing; mining and industry do not qualify for headings and, together with agriculture (which does), are viewed mainly from dated socio-economic or historical perspectives. The section on specialist periodicals is so unrepresentative as to be almost worthless. Furthermore, little attempt appears to have been made to up-date the 1977 bibliography, particularly in the sparsely represented subject areas. In the 'Flora and Fauna' section, for example, items 491 and 492 have been superseded by a second and enlarged edition of the *Bundu Book of Trees, Flowers and Grasses* in 1972 and *The Fishes of Rhodesia* by G. Bell-Cross (Salisbury, National Museums and Monuments of Rhodesia, 1976), respectively. Two significant bibliographies published in 1977 have been omitted: *Rhodesian Literature in English: a Bibliography, 1890-1974/5* by J. Pichanick *et al.* (Gwelo, Mambo Press) and *Rhodesia National Bibliography, 1890-1930* by A. Hartridge (Salisbury, National Archives of Rhodesia).

Despite these deficiencies, the value of the bibliography as a general reference aid on Zimbabwe is undeniable. It provides a good overall guide to the literature on the country, with the sections on history and most of the social sciences (including politics) being especially strong. The annotations are informative and useful, giving biographical background to authors and references to related works which substantially enlarge its scope (although I would question the authors' astonishing assertion under item 463 that the card catalogue of the National Archives 'is a significant bibliographic guide second only to [their] 1977 bibliography').

SADEX, distributed free to selected institutions and individuals specializing in Southern African development, is designed to be a forum for the exchange of information on research, planning, projects and conferences in or on the region. In addition, each issue contains a feature article, book reviews and a substantial bibliographic section, arranged by country, which is intended to be illustrative

rather than exhaustive. It is a mine of information; the entries are annotated, up-to-date and include unexpected items on a wide range of subjects other than development.

National Archives, Zimbabwe

PAMELA FRANCIS

Customary Law in Practice By J.T. Storry. Cape Town, Juta, 1979, 144pp., Z\$12.00.

This newest addition to the growing literature on African law projects yet another interesting development on the subject. Written with an entirely practical bias, the handbook can be of immense assistance to the practitioner in so far as he can pinpoint quickly the areas in which he should conduct his research.

African law is a subject which is largely misunderstood or misconstrued by a great number of people, law practitioners included. To some extent this is due to the treatment of the subject as 'customary law', a designation which in modern times is misleading and which belies its complexity. Because of the dual system of law which exists in this country one is in reality faced with a conflict of laws; and simply regurgitating statutory provisions and case law, as the author does in his opening chapter, will not provide much guidance in determining whether African law is or is not applicable to a particular set of given facts. Only the more learned, it is submitted, can make full use of this handbook, as it can be dangerous to individuals whose background knowledge is less polished.

The myriad of case law authorities quoted by the author largely fails to show the extent to which legislation and the changing social climate have influenced the quality of decisions handed down by the courts. Indeed, some of the cases are either inconsistent or contradictory, and this leads to a somewhat confused impression of what the law actually is. The author makes no effort at all to comment on the cases which he quotes—some of which were in fact incorrectly decided—and he merely throws them at the reader for him to sift out for himself. To the uninitiated the handbook raises more questions than answers, and one is left wondering to what extent the Court of Appeal for African Civil Cases is bound by its own decisions, if at all.

The handbook also contains certain patent errors dotted throughout. For instance, when dealing with adultery, the author states that the common law will govern such actions if a marriage is by Christian rites. The African Law and Tribal Courts Act, Chapter 237, specifically provides for the application of African law, and this was emphatically reaffirmed by the Appellate Division of the High Court in 1975. Further, prescription does not apply to cases where the rights sought to be enforced or obligations sought to be defended arise solely out of custom. The author quotes two cases delivered before the passing of the Prescription Act (No. 31 of 1975) in support of the contention that prescription does apply. Last, but not least, the author quotes a case which supposedly lays down that African law governs an individual's right to sue for damages for assault; whilst, at least in theory, this may be the correct position, the case quoted by the author expressly lays down that common law is applicable, and that is what the law presently is. Some of the apparent errors are, however, no doubt due to the brevity with which the subject matter is dealt.

Despite such errors, however, the handbook constitutes an important step in the professional treatment of the subject, and its publication is a welcome development.

Salisbury

P. MACHAYA

The Soul of Mbira: Music and Traditions of the Shona People of Zimbabwe
By P.F. Berliner. London, Univ. of California Press, 1978, 280pp.,
£12.00.

Africa: Shona Mbira Music Recorded by P.F. Berliner. New York, Nonesuch
Records, H-72077, Stereo, 1977, no price indicated.

**The Soul of Mbira: Traditions of the Shona People of Rhodesia Recorded
by P.F. Berliner.** New York, Nonesuch Records, H-72054, Stereo, 1978,
no price indicated.

Although most African instruments have roles in addition to their being used and appreciated for sheer enjoyment and entertaining purposes, few have such well-defined additional roles as the mbira of the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Standing out as a sacred symbol for unity, strength and solidarity in Shona society, it seems to embrace the whole life-philosophy of the living Shona man, his close relationship with the life of the past, and the life beyond the past—the ancestry and the overall creative force of life. What then could have been more appropriate than to present a very broad study on this instrument at a time when Rhodesia, with its majority of people living in separation from, and in suppression by, a White minority, finally moved through the shattering experience of armed struggle into the independent land of Zimbabwe, in which there is now a deeply felt urge for unity, reconstruction and reconciliation. The mbira, in itself a symbol for such desires in its old environment, could certainly symbolize those very ideas in the modern and independent Zimbabwe.

In the introduction Berliner draws the reader's attention to the profound relationship between the mbira, its music, its musicians, and society—a relationship which he follows up with clear and adequate description of all its different aspects. He argues that this relationship applies not only to this instrument and its music but also to most Shona music in general, which has carried on living, changing and developing in spite of Western colonial and materialistic pressures. As all Shona music is believed to have originated from its people's ancestry, it is perceived as an all-embracing functional art form and expressive cultural force, and is thus held in highest esteem by the people. Hence it is also protected, at least to a certain degree, from derogatory exploitation. In his preface Berliner furthermore notes the complexity of such music, especially the mbira music, which is rich in polyphonic structure and sophisticated melodic movement, and so draws attention to the subtlety and beauty of such music. Thus African music as a whole, and Shona music in particular, has nothing to do with 'primitive' music.

Berliner states that the main purpose of his study is a multi-disciplinary endeavour, which has involved him in 'research on related cultural aspects of the music such as its history, its folklore, the poetry which accompanied the music, the process of learning the mbira, the meaning of the mbira in the lives of its musicians, the role the music played in Shona culture and analysis of the music itself' (p. xv). With such objects he attempts in nine well-defined and revealing chapters to cover the profound philosophy which has evolved around the instrument and its music since its origin in the distant past.

He begins by giving a comprehensive review of African music among the Bantu-speaking peoples of the continent, focusing on aspects of the human experience of the music, its instruments, and its emotional and expressive values to man in his social environment, and in his relationship with the supernatural forces. Nevertheless, the basic, as well as the intrinsic, ethnographic values are not evaded to any extent—on the contrary, he is able to associate such surface

notions with the inner and deep values of human musical experience within the Black cultures.

Turning more particularly to the Shona mbira Berliner reiterates what has already been established within the anthropological discipline; that is, that the mbira has a long and fascinating history in Zimbabwe among the Shona people. However, he also adds that archaeological evidence ought to be supplemented with historical aspects—a method which he embarks upon with apparent success, drawing attention to Shona culture in general and its folklore and religious experience in particular. By describing the common belief among the Shona that the instrument originated from their ancestors and was then handed down to the people, he points to the profound sanctity of the instrument. This belief carries with it great responsibilities, obliging the people to learn how to make and play the instrument in order to keep the link between the ancestors and the living unbroken. By their so doing, the instrument holds protecting powers, both for the actual player and for the society at large, as well as being the very means of establishing desired contacts between ancestors and the living.

Berliner firmly emphasizes that visual notation in any form is not sufficient for describing the essence of a cultural music such as Shona music, as 'no satisfactory analogy for conveying its quality to one who has not heard mbira music performed' is at hand (p. 52). Nevertheless, he attempts 'skeleton' notations for the sake of conveying the cyclical patterns of melody/harmony and rhythm upon which all mbira music depends, and how such patterns undergo a continuous stream of subtly changing musical ideas, which interact and also change the rhythmic experience. For the sake of making such subtleties more noticeable and clear Berliner has supplemented his visual notations with two L.P. records of outstanding technical and musical quality.

On the record *The Soul of Mbira*, four major types of Zimbabwean mbira are represented, the *Mbira dzaVadzimu*, the *Matepe*, the *Njari* and the *Ndimba*. The music performed is of the highest musical and technical quality and constant references are made in the study to the music itself. A recording of particular and fascinating interest is the performance of the song 'Nyamaropa Yevana Vava Mushonga' on Side 2 on an ancient 25-keyed *Mbira dzaVadzimu* with an old, and apparently most traditional, tuning. According to tradition this particular instrument is said to have been played at Chitungwiza, the ancient court of the great tribal spirit, Chaminuka. The second record, *Africa: Shona Mbira Music*, contains a number of *Mbira dzaVadzimu* tunes and songs. The approach adopted here is more strictly comparative and analytical, excerpts of the songs being presented in order to illustrate fully the fascinating complexity of Shona mbira music. (A third record, *The Sun Rises Later Here* (Chicago, Flying Fish Records, 1978), has no connection with Berliner's academic study of the mbira but it is most interesting to listen to: the manner in which he has been able to blend the indigenous characteristics of other cultural musics with his own Western creative talents in a 'jazzy' way is absolutely amazing.)

Berliner obviously strives to view and present the process of musical expression from an unbiased angle by avoiding 'inadvertent distortions that can result when African music has imposed upon it Western concepts having little to do with the way in which Africans view their own art' (p. 53). This approach is intelligently applied all through the study, and is clearly noticeable, for example, when the relationships between keys of the mbira are described, or the African musician's views on tuning are discussed in terms of the Shona-ized *chuning*, rather than the proper English word, as referring to 'a number of interrelated aspects' (p. 61), and indicating many more emotional and expressive points—and perhaps also indicating more subtle modal concepts—than is the case with the Western term. Furthermore, in regard to the actual distance of degrees within the Shona mbira heptatonic scale, Berliner questions convincingly the hypothesis

presented by a few ethnomusicologists of the equidistant character of such a scale, although the matter cannot be said to have been fully covered yet.

Finally, in his last chapter Berliner attempts to describe the 'law of the mbira' which, he states, is not to be regarded as a 'systematized dogma' but rather as a 'particular code of behaviour' (p. 235). In so doing he again underlines with firmness the sanctity of the instrument and its music. Furthermore, he points out that the ancestors themselves are believed to take an active part in the music-making process—an activity which even more closely associates the living society and living man with the ancestors and the overall creative and life-giving force. That is certainly the deep and profound Shona mbira philosophy, that is, 'the soul of the Mbira'.

Kwanongoma College of Music, Bulawayo

O. E. AXELSSON

African Apostles: Ritual and Conversion in the Church of John Maranke
By B. Jules-Rosette. Ithaca, Cornell Univ. Press, 1975, 302pp., no price indicated.

The New Religions of Africa By B. Jules-Rosette (ed.), Norwood N.J., Ablex Publishing, 1979, 248pp., no price indicated.

The African Apostolic Church of Johane Maranke was established in 1932. Twenty years later, it had spread well beyond its country of origin, Zimbabwe, into Zambia and Zaire. Jules-Rosette's monograph deals with the results of her field research, conducted between 1969 and 1972, among congregations in Zaire, Zambia and Malawi. The bulk of her information concerns one of the sect's most peripheral congregations, in terms of distance from the Zimbabwean religious centre, in Kasai province, Zaire.

Jules-Rosette's data are of particular interest not only because they come from a distant congregation, of markedly different background from the cultures of Zimbabwe, and shed interesting light on the process of cultural diffusion from one part of Africa to another; nor only because they show precise ways in which congregations may differ from one another, at the same time diverging from ideal doctrinal prescriptions emanating from the Zimbabwean centre. Her data also indicate how complex the processes of symbolic combination and cultural adaptation are in independent religious sects. The use of different languages, both African and European, in a single service; the attempt to standardize marriage rules and marriage payments in congregations of different cultures; the reflection of new governmental forms and new technology in instructions to members; the emphasis on literacy and efficiency in the performance of religious roles—all impress upon the reader the specific aspects of coming to terms with social, political and economic change in twentieth-century Africa. Maranke's apostles do not appear as a conservative, tradition-orientated, 'nativistic' sect looking to the past, but rather as groups of people, related by many common ties, striving to adapt to a somewhat threatening contemporary world.

Having noted the interest value of this monograph, one must also note its defects, the most important of which, from an anthropological perspective, are methodological. Jules-Rosette admits to difficulties of language use, particularly in transcribing and translating tapes, but nowhere does she reassure the reader that defective transcriptions were remedied. Her questionnaires were regarded by some respondents as a form of 'examination about the church's doctrine', and she notes without further comment that several 'were checked by the church's secretary for intelligibility, literacy and doctrinal completeness' (p. 54). Her role as a representative of sect interests to various officials in central and municipal

government in Zaire, and to sect authorities in Zimbabwe was, she admits, less than satisfactory. Finally, there is the question of her own conversion to this sect, a course of action which was taken in sincerity and, according to Jules-Rosette, immensely enriched her understanding of the religious symbols, values and behaviour she studied. The degree of ambivalence surrounding this conversion, however, perhaps suggests otherwise: 'the critical conversion experience . . . from loyalty to conversion . . . was never completed' (p. 256). This statement complements an earlier one: 'I would never have considered joining without belief. I simply had no idea what belief was' (p. 73).

Problems of ethics, methodology and belief are, in my opinion, largely responsible for the lack of depth in Jules-Rosette's discussion of important issues, such as competition for the leadership of local congregations and the relationship between competing leaders; the precise patterns of participation of women in sect organization; the relationship of sect members to outsiders. Many opportunities for micro-political analysis, suggested by scraps of data, are not pursued—ignored, perhaps, in favour of the description of ritual action which is somewhat disappointing because it tells us little, if anything, that is new. Nonetheless, *African Apostles* is an important addition to the growing literature on the Maranke sect in Central Africa.

The collection of essays, however, is less useful. One may begin by questioning the appropriateness of the title: in what way are secret societies and traditional spirit mediumship 'new religions' on this continent, when their origins stretch back over centuries? 'Contemporary' rather than 'new' would provide a more accurate description of a collection which, while focusing primarily on independent sects, includes four papers on wholly traditional religious organizations.

In general, the articles in this collection share two major faults. Firstly, with the exception of Breidenbach's interesting and detailed analysis of the Harrist movement in Ghana, all are essentially descriptive. At best, the description is detailed and well-presented, as in the papers by MacCormack on Sande initiation, Kilson on Ga mediumship and Robins on the East African Revival. At worst, even the ethnography is tedious. I do not share the view of the editress that these articles offer 'an understanding of religion's place in culture change across societies' (p. 228), since *analysis* necessary for such an understanding is lacking.

Secondly, an attempt has been made to impose on the contributors a primary concern with 'complementarity between men and women in contemporary African cults and churches' (p. 1). The net result is the appearance of forced comparisons, which are most obvious in those instances where the primary data were clearly not collected with this goal prominently in mind. The rather unusual provision of introductory and concluding essays by the editress emphasizes rather than conceals the disparities in data and approaches, and does little to relieve the reader's bewilderment regarding the ultimate aim of publication. I have great sympathy with a wayward comment made by Fabian and ignored by the editress: 'As we explore the outer limits of the *significance* of new religions, we must also consider the possibility of their *insignificance* in initiating and shaping social realities' (p. 183).

The specific relevance of this collection to the reader interested primarily in Zimbabwe lies in two articles. The papers by the Kileffs on 'The Masowe Vapostori of Seki' is a useful descriptive addition to the rather sparse literature on this sect, which, like the Maranke organization, is indigenous to Zimbabwe; and Jules-Rosette's own essay on the Maranke apostles of Zaire and Zambia fills in many of the details of female participation in this sect which are lacking in her earlier monograph.