

ALEXANDER J. DeVOOGT: *LIMITS OF THE MIND: TOWARDS A CHARACTERISATION OF BAO MASTERSHIP*; 1995, LEIDEN: RESEARCH SCHOOL CNWS; 169pp., (CNWS PUBLICATIONS; 37). Dfl. 45.00.

Manqala games are played in large parts of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, South-America and some parts of Europe. Bao is the variation which is found on the East African coast, and only in the Swahili speaking areas. Ways of playing Bao though differ along the coast, and de Voogt focused his research on the sophisticated variant of Zanzibar. The author deals with this Zanzibar variation of Bao in analogy to chess. The first aim of his research project was to find out what distinguishes a master of Bao from an ordinary player. Psychological methods, derived from the study of chess playing are his main methodological instruments, which make the book a remarkable study in the psychology of players, and the role of memory and calculation. His second aim is to introduce Bao to the field of computer games, comparable to computer-based chess.

Beyond the scope of his interest is an ethnological approach - he does not tell much about the cultural setting of the game, nor the values in the Swahili society. Those who expected to learn how to play Bao from this book will be disappointed - de Voogt only gives a rough description of the rules. On this foundation one can hardly follow the different experiments, based on the various tactical possibilities of the game, he carried out with the players. As a result, he parallels the Bao masters to the grand masters of chess in their way of thinking, mnemonic capacity and tactical strategy. If there was more literature on Bao, compared to the vast writings on chess, and thus the possibility of the masters to acquire more information and knowledge on their game, Bao might become even more sophisticated and the masters could be more brilliant, championships more exciting, and perhaps better accepted in society and public opinion.

It is chapter II (pp 4-21) which meets Swahilists interests best: Here de Voogt describes the game, the rules, the history of Bao, the history and structure of Bao societies and championships, and gives some biographical data on the Bao masters of today. Chapter III includes parts of the specialized vocabulary of Bao playing, the names for moves and tactical combinations.

"Limits of the mind" is a highly specialized psychological study which reveals the lack of anthropological literature on games in Swahili culture.

Eleonore Schmitt