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JAN J. DE WOLF: *BUKUSU TALES*. COLLECTED AROUND 1936 BY RESEARCH ASSISTANTS OF DR. GÜNTER WAGNER (1908-1952). (BEITRÄGE ZUR AFRIKANISTIK, BD.5). MÜNSTER: LIT, 1995. 93 PP.

The book is a measure against oblivion – not of some oral narratives (which actually might still be in circulation among contemporary narrators in Western Kenya), but of manuscript materials which were left unpublished for almost sixty years. Their initiator was the anthropologist Günter Wagner who recorded the tales with the assistance of two Bukusu scribes around 1936 The Institut für Afrikanistik und Äthiopistik (as it is now called) of the University of Hamburg, which holds these assets, permitted Jan J de Wolf, a Dutch social anthropologist and fieldworker among the Bukusu in 1968/69, to organize their publication Compatible in size and volume with Kenyan editions of oral narratives the booklet documents 31 shorter or longer folktale texts. Their fictional characters are various animals like rabbit (wanakhamuna) and leopard (wanangwe), some human role bearers and the 'monster' (or ogre) Kunani. The texts are taken from the original scripts of 1936 where they appear in the previous type of orthography (devoid of tonal marks), whereby de Wolf is confident that present LuBukusu readers will not feel particularly disturbed by this. The texts are left uncommented whereby "future generations of scholars" are expected to assess their ultimate worth, both culture-specifically and in comparative terms. The aesthetic quality of the text notations (dictations? re-narrations?) is surely not very elaborate, but some East African authors like Taban lo Liyong (in Eating Chiefs, 1970) or L G Oguda k'Okiri (in So They Say, 1970) have shown how "creative writers [can] take off from where the anthropologists have stopped" (Taban, p x) From a philological point of view it appears plausible to document oral narratives first in this rather 'rough' form and then to "transmute" them into an artistic text (if desirable) than to document them straight and merely in the diction of creative writing as, for instance, Okot p'Bitek has done, in whose Hare and Hornbill (1978) the primary narrators and their wordings are completely embezzled Publishing 'forgotten' manuscripts of oral literary texts in a methodologically sound way should be established as an own field of scholarly specialization whereby more complex text bases requiring rather sophisticated commentaries can easily be envisaged For de Wolf's edition one wishes a good reception and accessibility among readers in East Africa

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