In this book, specialists will find numerous details in the ample modern ethnographies of the region accounted for as meaningful human creations, contextualized in time, with serial consequences to which others, including later generations, reacted. De Luna writes in graceful, multi-layered, almost sensual prose certain to engage even those readers not familiar with the names of the vanished people, obscure places, and technical practices detailed. With linguistics-based insight, confirmed in impressive detail by imaginative readings of the archaeological data and set in nuanced paleoclimatic and environmental contexts, de Luna has charted the historical composition of the elements of the historical accumulations that modern ethnographers describe as 'culture'. This understanding of ethnography as historical creation, systematic preservation, and compilation opens the potent methodological prospect of reverse-engineering the method: deconstructing recent descriptions of modern practices and ideas and words to discern and sequence their creations as history.

Collecting Food, Cultivating People is an intellectual history of foraging with an intricacy and maturity of insight seldom seen in a first book. It exudes a whole range of important methodological and epistemological best practices. We can surely look forward to a distinguished career of a historian who knows how to allow her ancient subjects to speak for themselves, and then listens respectfully to them across the centuries, even millennia, in subtle, comprehending ways. De Luna's own perceptive phrasings are recurringly arresting, but as she concludes her introduction, the book is a 'story best told in Botatwe-speakers' own words'; she makes that true, in more ways than one.

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A NEW EPIC OF ANCIENT MALI

Sunjata: A New Prose Version.
Edited and translated by David C. Conrad.
Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Co., 2016. Pp. xl + 140. $43.00, hardback (ISBN 978-1-62466-495-3); $14.00, paperback (ISBN 978-1-62466-494-6).
doi:10.1017/S0021853717000652

Key Words: Mali, West Africa, literature, oral narratives, sources.

David Conrad's *Sunjata: A New Prose Version* is a rarity; a scholarly English translation of a performance of West Africa's most famous oral epic that eschews a line-by-line text. Linear translations have dominated the market since the 1970s: Gordon Innes's *Sunjata: Three Mandinka Versions* (1973); John Johnson's *Son-Jara* (1986); and, Conrad's own *Sunjata: A West African Epic of the Mande Peoples* (2004). The last unquestionably successful prose translation was Djibril Tamsir Niane's *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* (1965), first published in French in 1960. Niane's version is a perennial favourite but renders the narrative of its griot or *jeli*, Mamoudou Kouyate, in the style of a novel. By contrast, Conrad's new version of *Sunjata*, which is a reworking of his 2004 translation of a

performance by Guinean *jeli* Djanka Tassey Condé, retains a large majority of the griot's translated utterance.

A brief comparison illustrates his approach. Here is his linear rendition of Sunjata's father's search for a special wife to give birth to the hero:

When Manden was put in the care of Maghan Konfara, (Naamu)
He had the power, (Naamu)
He had the wealth, (Naamu)
He was popular, (Naamu)
He had *dalilu*, (Naamu)
But he had no child. (Naamu)
(You heard it?)
Simbon, Sunjata's father, had no child. (Naamu)
His friends had begun to have children, (Naamu)
But no child was had by Maghan Konfara. (Naamu)

Here is the same section in the volume under review:

> When Maghan Konfara was a *mansa* in Manden, he had power, he had wealth, he was popular, and he had *dalilu* – but he had no child. Maghan Konfara, Sunjata's father, craved a child. Though his friends had begun to have children, he still had no child. (9)

Conrad's light editorial touch loses a little of the performative aspects of the linear version, including the interjections of Condé's *naamu*-sayer ('yes'-sayer), but gains in readability and, consequently, accessibility. It also shaves 72 pages off the 2004 version, allowing (one assumes) the list price of $14 for the paperback, four dollars less than the linear 2004 version.

To what extent is Conrad's new version of Sunjata a replacement for Niane's famous, but ageing, rendition, as an accessible introductory text? Conrad's book may not match the majestic tone of Niane's. It also lacks the narrative neatness and focused plotting *Sundiata* delivers. Condé's story, even after vigorous editing-out of numerous passages of the multi-day performance, is expansive and, at times, meanders. But Conrad's *New Prose Version* of Sunjata conveys more closely the reality of oral performance, delivered in a format familiar to modern readers. It is replete with proverbs illuminating Manding culture: 'The chick destined to be a rooster will eventually crow, no matter what obstacles it has to overcome before it can do so' (53). It shows how that culture uses oral epic to explain the origins of customs, such as marriage traditions said to derive from Sogolon's wedding to Sunjata's father (42–6). Condé's narrative is rich, varied, and detailed. It has the backstory to Sumaworo, Sunjata's major rival for power, including a poignant episode in which Sumaworo's sister enslaves herself to genies so that her brother can gain in strength (70–3). It also has bleakly comic passages. In 'Mistaken Murder and the Question of Exile', seven henchmen of Dankaran Tuman (Sunjata's half-brother and rival) eventually muster the courage to club Sunjata to death while he sleeps, only to find that they have killed the wrong person (54–8). The narrator conveys the relative courage of the protagonists in this laconic phrase: seeing Sunjata approach, 'Dankaran Tuman peed in his pants' (57). There is wisdom for the modern age: 'Do not be too concerned with blackness or whiteness', Condé counsels, 'be more concerned with humanity. We are all equal. We all have life. … So when you come to visit us, you have come to your father's

house' (100). Most episodes familiar to readers from other versions of this tradition are included here, from the buffalo-woman, Do Kamissa, to Jolofin *mansa* and his horses. One memorable episode is absent: Sumaworo's seduction by Sunjata's sister, revealing his vulnerability to the spur of a white cock.

The narrative is accompanied by a wide-ranging and authoritative introduction (lacking only consideration of historical claims made for this oral tradition), helpful notes, a glossary, list of major characters, suggestions for further reading, and two maps. These sections are revised versions of those found in the 2004 edition. Together they create the best English-language introductory volume on Sunjata available today.

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NIGERIA'S TWENTIETH CENTURY

Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century.
By Richard Bourne.
London: Zed Books, 2015. Pp. xxiii + 320. £12.99/$18.95, paperback (ISBN 978-4-78032-906-2).
doi:10.1017/S0021853717000664

Key Words: Nigeria, West Africa, colonial, postcolonial, economic, political, cultural.

Richard Bourne, the author of *Nigeria: A New History of a Turbulent Century*, straddles different worlds: for many years, he was a journalist; an administrator with the Commonwealth Institute; a research fellow at the University of London; and, a director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. This quick list of accomplishments explains the book in terms of the language of presentation, orientation, and key emphases. Bourne aligns himself with the aspirations of struggling people, while not minimizing the role of the state. Indeed, he dedicates the book to Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, an icon of human rights campaigns. Bourne is well read and knowledgeable about Nigeria, and the examples he uses to illustrate his key points, including anecdotes, show the extent of his contacts with people, both low and mighty.

The preface to the book starts with a startling confession: 'Anyone who claims to understand Nigeria is either deluded, or a liar' (ix). But Bourne understands Nigeria in this long book of 320 pages, full of wonderful information, cogent analysis, and bright insights. The history that he narrates here is clear enough, starting from the amalgamation of northern and southern provinces in 1914, through to the struggles for independence from 1939 to 1960, the disasters and civil war of the 1960s, and the political instability instigated and managed by the military from 1965 to 1989, to the period of the late 1990s when 'democracy' returned. As the book presents its data, the democratic moment since 1999 has seen a series of crises. The last section closes with what Bourne calls 'reflections', focusing on four elements that he regards as the most pervasive and destructive: the linkage between politics and money-making; the dangerous role of religion and ethnicity; the destructive impact of oil; and the difficulty of keeping a plural society together.