Richard Werbner. ***Divination's Grasp: African Encounters with the Almost Said.*** Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015. xii + 340 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. $35.00. Paper. ISBN 978-0-253-01895-3.

Richard Werbner's new book details the forms of knowledge and sets of practices involved in "divination" by the renowned experts of the Tswapong Hills in east-central Botswana. This search for health and well-being entails the throwing of objects, termed "lots" and representing bones from the dead, which in the cases discussed here are made up of flat ivory and hoof-shaped tablets and dice. Four principal tablets signify different kinship characters, while the dice indicate certain features and characteristics. An expert keeps the tablets and dice in a skin bag. Upon consulting this expert, a client activates the lots by blowing into the bag. The expert diviner then lets the lots "fall" and diagnoses the source of misfortune and sickness by their position on the ground. The diagnosis involves reference to a poetic archive of idioms and wisdom designed to help explain—and often persuade the clients of—the reasons for their maladies.

The data for Werbner's study were derived from fieldwork with two Twsapong diviners, Moatlhodi Dikgang and Morebodi Kesupetswe. Werbner has had a long relationship with Moatlhodi: he first conducted fieldwork with him in the 1970s, and Werbner describes him as his "mentor." Werbner's fieldwork with Morebodi, by contrast, was in the 2000s, and involved film ethnography, but not the same long intimacy as with Moatlhodi. He describes Moatlhodi as a "classic" diviner and presents us with his persuasive and thorough process of divination. Morebodi's divination is more of a performance, a melding of Christian and Tswapong and other forms of divination, idioms, and practices. Werbner refers to Morebodi as a "charismatic," presumably after the charismatic Christian pastors who have influenced his performances.

Eight of the nine chapters in this substantial volume follow these diviners, their practices and poetics, in their encounters with various clients and with the ethnographer. Werbner's analysis takes two directions. First is the analysis of the divination poetry. Unlike much of the oral poetry from this region, which is generally praise poetry, the divination poetry is obscure and esoteric, rich in metaphor, symbolism, and allusion, and thus open to many interpretations. The diviner must both evoke the poetry from the fallen lots (the bones, shells, and shards), and then provide a convincing account of its meaning. For the diviner these arcane words are directed to solving various practical human problems of health and well-being, especially through establishing correct relationships between the living and dead, light and darkness—between the visible world and the invisible world of ancestral shades or spirits.

The second aspect of Werbner's book is the analysis of divination as a practice. Here the reader benefits from Werbner's remarkable ethnographic field notes from the 1970s along with his filmography from the 2000s, much of it publicly available. Werbner's attention to details, his insistence on

conflict as well as consensus within the divination process, along with his reluctance to draw out overarching and noncontextual meanings, makes some of the book resemble undigested field notes. But the benefit of such microdescription is that the reader never comes to a simplified or reductive account of what Tswapong divination is about. Instead, after reading case after case, the readings of the lots, the complex metaphoric poetry, one gradually comes to appreciate its many different practices and poetics.

Much ethnography, as Werbner points out, depends on the quality of translation. Werbner relies on the notion of the "moral" in particular to translate the key motivations and consequences of the divination process. Clients go to the diviners to reveal the "moral perils of everyday life"; the divination process is a "restless moral questioning," and its poetry reveals a "morally passionate intersubjectivity" (304 and *passim*). This begs the question, however, of what we consider the "moral" to be. Reading through his cases, the consistent object of divination is the correct relationship between living and dead. If this is the case, is "moral" an adequate translation of this quest?

Werbner is reluctant to draw overarching generalizations from his account or make assertive claims for its novelty. His conclusion places Tswapong divination in a comparative perspective by considering a spectrum of modes of divining, from the strictly mimetic (in which objects aid in the discovery of hidden knowledge) to the textual (which is a reading of inscribed signs for knowledge of the occult). According to Werbner, Tswapong divination exists somewhere in the middle of the spectrum. Like the diviners, Werbner is himself an elder, and much of the text respects the diviners' appeal to appreciate ancient knowledge and to listen to the ancestors, even those such as the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard, whose work on witchcraft Werbner passionately defends. This book will be of most interest to those willing to read it with patience and to revel in the artistry that Werbner finds in Tswapong divination.

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doi:10.1017/asr.2016.96

HISTORY

Jelmer Vos. *Kongo in the Age of Empire 1860–1913: The Breakdown of a Moral Order.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015. xiii + 218. Maps. Photographs. Acknowledgments. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. $65.00. ISBN: 978-0-299-30620-5. E-book. $75.00. ISBN: 978-0-299-30623-6.

Jelmer Vos's *Kongo in the Age of Empire* is a very fine addition to the considerable corpus of historical and anthropological writings on the long history of one of Africa's iconic "kingdoms," a literature distinguished by its revealing