

geography (labelled urban planning), court inhabitants (minute descriptions of their location, attire, regalia and interlinkages) and court practices, the book represents an idealization that may never have been realized, unless briefly in the time of Ciam a Ciband (c. 1830–50) or Kabw Muzemb (c. 1880–93). Fourth, the vibrant and non-centralized nature of Kanyok social, intellectual, economic, military and political life is overwhelmed and obscured by the mass of static details about the Mwin Kanyok's central court, the real focus of this book.

In spite of these reservations, Ceyskens has presented a work that must be taken very seriously by historians and anthropologists concerned with Central Africa.

JOHN YODER
Department of History
Whitworth College

JEAN-CLAUDE MULLER, *Les Rites initiatiques des Diï de l'Adamaoua*. Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie (pb €22.50 – 2 901161 52 9). 2002, 129 pp.

The province of Adamawa in Cameroon was, until recently, little studied by anthropologists, apart from its Fulani population. This ethnographic book on the Diï contributes to filling this gap in our knowledge. It is not a traditional monograph, as it does not aim at giving an overview of an entire society and its culture. It does not say much about the kinship, history, political structure or economy – one must read other articles by Jean-Claude Muller to learn about these aspects. Rather, it focuses on circumcision, which is the most important ritual of the Diï and constitutes one of the bases of their social and political organization.

A circumcision requires one chief to organize it, one member of an autochthonous lineage to clear the ritual space, one circumciser (from an autochthonous lineage) to perform the operation, and one blacksmith to provide and sharpen the tools. It thus necessitates the presence of all types of social groups characteristic of a Diï community. No Diï village can exist independently without the organization of a circumcision. All major rituals have a link with some form of circumcision. A new chief must be circumcised a second time in order to prove his bravery and temperance. The rituals accompanying the death of a chief or master-circumciser, or the establishment of a new village, must include the 'improvised' circumcision of a boy. But the most common circumcision is organized when the parents consider their boys ready, and is usually done collectively.

The circumcision is seen as a school giving courage and strong will to children, making them adults. Contrary to the thesis of Bettelheim, postulating a bisexual nature of men and analysing the circumcision as the removal of the 'feminine' attribute of the foreskin, the Diï associate the foreskin with masculine values. The foreskins of the 'brave' children who did not cry or shout when being circumcised are dried and made into a powder which is used as an ingredient in medicine given in other circumcisions, to confer bravery on the future adults and reinforce their virility.

A collective circumcision requires the collaboration of the paternal and maternal relatives of the boy, who engage in a series of gifts and counter-gift exchanges. The boys undergoing a circumcision are fed with rich food that used to be forbidden to women and uncircumcised boys. They are first beaten and made to swear to keep the details of the operation secret. They then dance

with a mask personifying a bush spirit, who runs after children and women to whip them, which stresses the new adult status of the circumcised boys. During the circumcision (as well as when washing the knives), a rhombus is spun to produce the sound that is said to be the growl of a leopard. The circumcised boys are said to have 'hit' or 'tied' the leopard (they will later symbolically 'kill the leopard' and then eat it). After this, the boys stay for three days with the circumciser. During the night, some of them tour the village with adult men to mask their voice and sing licentious songs. They then stay in a hut in the bush until their wounds have healed. When they come back into the village, they are paired with girls, and each pair develops a joking relationship. Men and women then keep in separate spaces, and the women produce their own mask, caricaturing the mask of the men. The women bring the young girls to the river, where they undergo a simulacrum of circumcision during which their labia are pinched with crab claws. The ethnographic description is accompanied by an interesting discussion of the interplay between traditional rituals on one side, and Islam or Christianity on the other, arguing that today circumcision plays a crucial role in building the identity of the Dii.

This short summary does not do justice to the unusual and remarkable wealth of ethnographic and linguistic detail provided by the author, who writes in a French academic tradition that gives unstinting importance to the utmost detail and produces very thick descriptions. Although it might appear unnecessarily detailed for readers unfamiliar with Adamawa, the ethnographic description of the most important ritual of the Dii will provide anthropologists working in the region with an important basis for comparative studies.

QUENTIN GAUSSET
Institute of Anthropology
University of Copenhagen

ALMA GOTTLIEB, *The Afterlife Is Where We Come From: the culture of infancy in West Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (pb \$25.00 – 0 226 30502 3; hb \$62.50 – 0 226 30501 5). 2004, 424 pp.

Occasionally, one reads a book that is worth raving about to academic and non-academic friends alike. This beautifully written ethnography about Beng babies in Côte d'Ivoire is one such book.

While I have been involved in the childhood studies programme in my university, this book pushed the boundaries of what I thought possible by focusing on the culture of infancy. As Gottlieb argues, babies are 'deeply constructed by culture' (p. xvi). She explains why anthropologists have not paid attention to the experiences of babies: they are seen to lack experience and memory, to be more biological than cultural, to be more passive than active, and as incapable of speaking. As a result, babies are seen as pre-cultural and unworthy of anthropologists' attention. Gottlieb contrasts each of these assumptions (many of which I held) with the Beng model of babies, in which they lead spiritual lives because they have recently emerged from the afterlife. As such, they have a memory of their life there, a desire for items that remind them of it, and an understanding of all languages. Thus, she shows how Euro-American assumptions about infancy are deeply cultural.

In debunking the Euro-American folk model of infancy which is sometimes legitimized by the academic literature, she elevates the Beng folk model of infancy, in which infants are accorded a high level of agency, to a theoretical level. Thus, following the Beng folk model, she asks us to consider how 'infants