

H.S. Kabeca Mwaniki

Embu historical texts



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Embu Historical Texts

H. S. K. MWANIKI



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Preface

Embu Historical Texts, by Mwaniki Kabeca, is a commendable effort that shows successfully the *Utamaduni*, culture, of four different tribal groups who lived in Embu, Mbeere Chuka and Kirinyaga Lands. These four groups have been put together to illustrate the *Utamaduni*, which is dead in most places, amazingly well through the mouths of a number of elders of each group. The simple language used, the short sentences, paragraphs with headings and subheadings for easy reference, the conversational and generally flowing style and the deliberate literal translation of vernacular as opposed to grammatical interpretation make its reading not only effective but forces the reader to re-sit the interview the author conducted during his research days. These interviews of each area and lastly of the four areas show beyond doubt not only what is involved in an oral research but also the practical usefulness or otherwise of orally collected material for records.

The author is one of our increasing national scholars who are doing much appreciable studies, which go far in not only correcting the misconceptions of the colonial history which, above other things, preached that there was no African History before the whiteman landed in our land, but contributing much to our relevant knowledge of the past and culture in which we have our roots and general national pride. As I know him, he is a painstaking and conscientious student and likes to present an issue in its entirety. In view of that I believe he would not claim that this volume is a scholarly piece of work although it has taken him long tedious hours, days and months, a minimum of two and a half years in collecting the information sometimes under difficult conditions and informants to get the presented samples. It is, however, a useful substitute for the elders' courtyard, fire places or kitchens where teaching to the youth, advice to all, young and old, exchange of ideas and views and the general educating of the nation were done.

The book is of use and interest to all categories of people,

to the children and lay people; it is an elder, that should be consulted and provides entertainment. To the Local and African History student and teacher, it is source book that provides facts and material for criticism and discussion. To the researcher, be he an African Historian, an anthropologist, a sociologist or any other related discipline, it is a source book that provides the introduction and spring board to field work. The value of this book lies greatly in the fact that the interviews will be preserved as such for future generations even when the informants have either forgotten most of what is now in print or dead. Actually, some of these informants whom I knew personally are already dead! If this were not done already, they would have died with these treasures of information on traditional social set ups, ways of worship, economy and political structures.

I would like to conclude by not only congratulating the author for this much needed piece of work and for demonstrating positively what should be done to preserve our past, but also requesting him to add to these selected few interviews for each area, if possible giving the 'peripheral' areas as much emphasis as he gave to Embu. He should also analyse and bring in scholarly small books, the important aspects of the text repeated sometimes contradictingly. This study could best be done as 'a regional' one as opposed to sectional. To our students' teachers and scholars I extend a hand of welcome to the author's field in the form of constructive criticism and studies on lines similar to what he has demonstrated.

Embu
July, 1974

KAMWITHI MUNYI, E.B.S.

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In this book the author traces the origins, movements and cultural life of four different tribal groups that lived in Embu, Mbeere, Chuka and Kirinyaga areas in the Central Province of Kenya. The volume comprises of four parts: part 1 being text on the Embu; 2 on the Mbeere, 3 on the Chuka and 4 on the Ndia/Gichugu Kikuyu. Most of the material is drawn from oral sources and, as the author himself admits, no attempt has been made to edit it. The idea was to impart to the reader as much of the flavour of these narratives and the feelings which attended their communication as possible. The result is a very absorbing and highly informative piece of work which should be of immense value to students of oral literature and history. It is doubtless a great contribution to the as yet slight body of work of this nature in East Africa.

Mr. Kabeca Mwaniki, the author, is an indefatigable research-worker and scholar with an unusual interest and conviction in the value of oral history. He has already published several books on this theme, the best known being "The Living History of Embu; "A Pre-Colonial History of Embu to 1906", "The Colonial History of Embu 1906-63" and "The Categories and Substance of Embu Traditional Folksongs".