

## MYTH, RITUAL AND THE ORAL

Jack Goody is one of the pre-eminent social scientists in the world. Over the past half-century his pioneering writings at the intersections of anthropology, history and social and cultural studies have made him one of the most widely read, most widely cited and most widely translated scholars working today.

In *Myth, Ritual and the Oral*, he returns to the related themes of myth, orality and literacy, subjects that have long been a touchstone in anthropological thinking. Combining classic papers with recent unpublished work, this volume brings together some of the most important essays written on these themes in the past half-century, representative of a lifetime of critical engagement and research. In characteristically clear and accessible style, Jack Goody addresses fundamental conceptual schemes underpinning modern anthropology, providing potent critiques of current theoretical trends. Drawing upon his highly influential work on the LoDagaa myth of the Bagre, Goody challenges structuralist and functionalist interpretations of oral 'literature', stressing the issues of variation, imagination and creativity, and the problems of methodology and analysis. These insightful, and at times provocative, essays will stimulate fresh debate and prove invaluable to students and teachers of social anthropology.

JACK GOODY is Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology in the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of St John's College. Knighted by Her Majesty The Queen for services to anthropology, Professor Goody has researched and taught all over the world, is a fellow of the British Academy, and in 1980 was made a Foreign Honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2004 he was elected to the National Academy of Sciences and he was elected Commandeur des Arts et Lettres in 2006.

# MYTH, RITUAL AND THE ORAL

JACK GOODY



Cambridge University Press  
 978-0-521-12803-2 — Myth, Ritual and the Oral  
 Jack Goody  
 Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India  
 103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.  
 It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of  
 education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
 Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9780521128032](http://www.cambridge.org/9780521128032)

© Jack Goody 2010

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
 and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,  
 no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
 permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2010

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Goody, Jack.

Myth, ritual and the oral / Jack Goody.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-76301-1 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-12803-2 (pbk.)

1. Oral tradition. 2. Folklore—Performance. 3. Storytelling. 4. Ritual. I. Title.

GR72.3.G66 2010

398.2—dc22

2010033389

ISBN 978-0-521-76301-1 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-12803-2 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or  
 accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in  
 this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is,  
 or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>page</i> vi
Introduction	i
1 Religion and ritual from Tylor to Parsons: the definitional problem	13
2 Oral ‘literature’	41
3 The anthropologist and the audio recorder	58
4 Oral creativity	64
5 The folktale and cultural history	70
6 Animals, humans and gods in northern Ghana	84
7 The Bagre in all its variety	95
8 From oral to written: an anthropological breakthrough in storytelling	117
9 Writing and oral memory: the importance of the ‘lecto-oral’	153
<i>Appendix. Folktales in northern Ghana</i>	162
<i>References</i>	167
<i>Index</i>	174

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Juliet Mitchell for her help and encouragement, to Mark Offord, Mel Hale and Sue Mansfield for their assistance with the manuscript, as well as to Gilbert Lewis and to Stephen Hugh-Jones for our seminar and the latter's comments, and to the memory of Kum Gandah, Ian Pierre Watt and Meyer Fortes, to all of whom (and others) I am indebted, including the typists and data processors who have helped with the various versions of the *Bagre*, as well as to the readers and editor of Cambridge University Press.

The essays, for which I thank the publishers for allowing a reprinting in slightly altered form, have appeared as follows:

Religion and ritual: the definitive problem. *British Journal of Sociology* 12 (1961).

Oral literature. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (forthcoming).

The coming of the tape recorder. *Médium* (2005).

Oral creativity (forthcoming).

The folktale and cultural history. *Oralité et Littérature: échos, écarts, resurgences. Cahiers de Littérature Orale* 56 (2005).

Animals, men and gods in northern Ghana. *Cambridge Anthropology* 16 (1992/3).

The *Bagre* in all its variety. Introduction to *A Myth Revisited: The Third Bagre* (with S. W. D. K. Gandah) (Carolina Academic Press, 2003).

From oral to written: an anthropological breakthrough in storytelling. In *Il Romanzo*, vol. 1, *La cultura del romanzo*, ed. F. Moretti (Turin: Einaudi, 2001. In English, Princeton University Press).

Writing and oral memory. Lecture, Berne, Switzerland, June 2007.