

## GENERIC NAMES FOR THE MBIRA

by

GERHARD KUBIK

Having recently completed a six months' research trip to Angola, sponsored by the Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, Lisbon, I should like to provide some supplementary material on *mbira* names from there and fill one of the blank spots in our distribution map, published in the last Journal.

I found the *mbira* to be an important instrument in Angola, where it occurs in at least four varieties. Generic names in Angola usually belong to the -SANZHI group.

About the same time when I was working in Angola, Dr. Hugh Tracey visited South West Africa. He met the *mbira* in the north-eastern corner of the territory and found the following names: (a) *Dingo* with 8 reeds, for the Kawango tribe (at Kutenda village, Okavango District). The same instrument was also called *Thisamzhi* and *Kasanji* in another language. And (b) *Nsansi*, with 6 reeds and pentatonic tuning for the Kwiriri tribe. Both varieties were board *mbiras*.

With this additional material from Angola and South West Africa we can now complete the south-western corner of our distribution map. The -SANZHI area has to be widely extended. It covers all Angola and the north-eastern part of the Okavango district in South West Africa.

The -KEMBE area can be extended to cover all eastern and most of south-eastern Angola.

I have only traced one more of the other important roots in Angola: -LIMBA, which was, however, applied to a xylophone. The Valwena in eastern Angola have a xylophone with two slats over gourd resonators, called *Zhinjimba*.

The amount of material now at hand provokes some interesting observations: Looking into the three published lists we see that the name *Likembe* and its variants *always denotes a box mbira*. In fact, I have so far not discovered a single case in Africa where this rule was broken. (This does, of course, not imply the reverse. Not all box *mbiras* are -KEMBE.) Conversation with musicians in various parts of Central Africa has also confirmed this observation.

My next observation concerns the term *Chisamzi*: In Angola I found it used in two meanings: (a) in a wider sense, being the generic name for all forms of *mbiras*. Hence one can hear the expression "Chisanzi cha *likembe*", and (b) more frequently in a narrower sense denoting a 10-reeds board variant with a gourd resonator.

One strange observation which I had made in 1964 among the Mbimo (Central African Republic) suddenly gets an explanation:

The Mbimo play a box *mbira* of the usual type seen all over Northern Congo. In addition to its box resonator they hold it into a calabash. (See photograph in the last Journal). That is the reason why I had found the instrument to be known under two names in the Mbimo villages: *Kembe* and *Sanji*.

(Remarkable from the linguistic point of view is that in both names there are no prefixes. This might be ascribed to the fact that the Mbimo, although speaking a Bantu language, live exactly on the border of the sudanic languages, and already show a remarkable sudanic influence.)