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Recordings

This book is published as part of a larger project, published by Mediafrika, including 6 cassettes of *taarab* from Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam.

Music of Zanzibar, Vols. 1-4, Globestyle ORBD 032, 033, 040, 041.

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MYTH, RITUAL AND KINGSHIP IN BUGANDA, by Benjamin C. Ray, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1991, 239pp., illus., photos.

What happens to a researcher who is profoundly interested in a chosen subject of study, if he is cut off for decades from his research area, due to war or other adverse circumstances? He will probably try to act like the inhabitants of the former German Democratic Republic before 1989, who in their case were locked in rather than out: he will read all the available literature, almost sentence by sentence, and eventually end up more knowledgeable about his subject than anyone else.

Such thoughts came to my mind when I was reading Benjamin C. Ray's book. His visit to Uganda in 1972 was under an unlucky star. Ray set out to study religious aspects and practices associated with the *Kabakaship* (or kingship) of one of the most powerful pre-colonial east African states: Buganda. However, in May 1966 (not 1967 as written on p.5, probably a misprint) Milton Obote, then prime minister of Uganda, had given orders to his army general Idi Amin to make an assault on the *lubiri*, the royal enclosure in Kampala. This resulted from a political crisis in which the Kabaka had threatened secession of his kingdom from the rest of Uganda. Kabaka Mutesa II managed to escape and he fled across western Uganda to Burundi, finally to England, where he died years later under mysterious circumstances.

When Ray came to Uganda in 1972, the kingdom of Buganda no longer existed and the royal enclosure was burnt. Fortunately, the destruction had spared the royal

ancestors' shrines scattered throughout Buganda, including the magnificent Kasubi shrine with its ancient architectural shapes. In view of his choice to study the "mythic and ritual aspects of the kingship" and to reexamine various ideas found in the literature about "divine kingship", it was perhaps the most natural and even the only possible solution for the author to visit and study the shrines and conduct in-depth interviews with the guardians.

During his stay in Buganda from March to September 1972 the author visited all the 23 shrines that were still standing, concentrating on some, such as those in the Kaliti area where conditions for research were favourable. Chapter 5 discusses the royal shrines, their geography and ritual, ceremonies such as that of the new moon and the songs associated with them. There are some very instructive illustrations and rare photographs.

Acquiring some fluency in Luganda after a relatively short period — enhanced by reading the most important Luganda historical and ethnographic accounts, such as those by Sir Apolo Kagawa — Ray developed an intraculturally-oriented approach with intensive awareness of the cognitive problems in translation and interpretation. For example, talking to the people, and especially to the late (Prince) Ssaabalangira Paul M. Lukongwa in Luganda, the author quickly became aware of the untranslatability of certain concepts developed by Western ethnographic observers. He writes:

"Ethnographers, of course, are in a position to minimize their own bias and subjectivity by directly interrogating their sources. Knowing that some scholars had looked on the Kabakas of Buganda as divine kings and priestly figures, I asked repeatedly about their ritual powers and their relationship to the fertility of the land. I was told that such questions were based on a mistaken assumption: neither the king nor the royal ancestors had any special ritual powers, nor was the king divine (that is, a deity or *lubaale*); he was an ordinary person. However, as I reflected on the matter, the Kabaka seemed to possess a certain sacredness, for he was Buganda's supreme symbol of order and meaning. But I was incapable of discussing this idea in Luganda because there is no term for the 'sacred' in this sense." (p.8)

As a historian of religions, the author was also bound to collide head-on with the incompatibility between Luganda-language perspectives and the hermeneutics of religious studies in the West. He writes: "There is, in fact, a major division between historians of religions who study religion as an expression of the sacred or Ultimate Reality and those who study religion without making any assumptions about its metaphysical grounds or object. ... The two approaches constitute fundamentally different perspectives on the study of religion. ..." (p.12-13). Ray then opted to "examine the myths and rituals of Buganda as much as possible in their own terms" (p.16). With this aim in mind he discovered an avenue that would not put him into the captivity of a "hermeneutics of faith" (p.12). And he writes:

"Although universal religious 'structures' may exist, I believe that all formulations of them must still be regarded as theoretical constructs that remain open to critical investigation. *Homo religiosus*, which historians of religions sometimes speak of as a sort of universal being, is of course an abstraction. Indeed, historians of religions often suppose that ethnographic texts are addressed to *Homo religiosus* or mankind in general and wish to interpret them in this fashion. But such texts are rarely so intended, and attempts to

interpret them in this way are hardly credible, especially when the interpreter lacks knowledge of the language of the text in question. Here, too, I have not presented the elements of Ganda myth, ritual and kingship as belonging to a wider comparative scheme or system, either a morphological one, such as Eliade's idealist system of archetypes, or a structural one, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss's system of binary oppositions." (p.16)

After scrutinising in great detail the works of James G. Frazer, Apolo Kagawa and John Roscoe, as well as other late 19th century/early 20th century authors writing about Buganda — drawing also on unpublished correspondence between Frazer and his disciple Roscoe (Chap. 2) — the author then presents in Chapter 3 a lucid analysis of a central Ganda aetiological myth: the story of Kintu (the primal ancestor), Nnambi (the woman he met on arriving in Buganda) and Walumbe (Death, Nnambi's brother). He examines the various interpretations Baganda have given to this myth over time, exploring its principal themes, the ritual dimension, and questions of cosmology and ontology. One could have added here a psychologically oriented analysis, although this would probably have gone beyond the author's basic analytical framework. Without going into detail I would suggest that the author might give a little more thought to the striking fact that the figure of the avunculus or 'mother's brother', from the viewpoint of the children of Kintu and Nnambi, carries an extremely negative charge in this myth. A central theme in this myth can indeed be called "The mother's brother as a personification of Death". Now that such an idea should occur to a myth-maker can clearly be understood as a response to a certain socio-psychological situation in the remote past. It even seems to throw some light on questions such as the identity of Kintu, suggesting a possible matrilineal background to the society which Kintu encountered and a compensatory reaction to the looming possibility of brother/sister incest.

In chapters 3 and 4 we find an in-depth analysis of various sources relating to the origin of the Kabakaship, integrating the results of historical research based on oral tradition with the analysis of symbolism in present-day ritual and the regalia attributed to kings such as Kimera, Buddo, etc., much less to Kintu. Here the author also confirms that "In Buganda there was no royal totemic clan. Although the throne descended in the male line, all princes (and princesses) took their mother's totems. The result was that the kings were chosen from different totemic clans, and the kingship circulated among them;..." (p.81). Chapter 4 in particular, entitled 'The King's Four Bodies: Ritual Change, 1856-1971', deals with the question of the royal corpse, the royal jawbone, the royal medium and the royal twin. Regicide and ritual homicide — common features of Ganda kingship in the 18th and 19th centuries — are discussed in their symbolic and mythical perspectives in Chapter 6. In a final chapter 7, various speculative theories about alleged relationships between Ancient Egypt and the interlacustrine kingdoms such as Bunyoro and Buganda (whose inception does not date earlier than the 13/14th centuries) are discussed. E.A. Wallis Budge's comparative work and Charles G Seligman's racial theory are examined. Benjamin C. Ray, like many other authors today, recommends utmost care, and his standpoint is perhaps best summarised in his own words: "Whereas the roots of Egyptian kingship clearly lie in the prehistoric Nile Valley culture of the fifth and fourth millennia BC, the cultural origins of Ganda kingship lie within the far distant Lake Victoria area during the fourteenth century AD. ... If ancient Egyptian kingship

is to be regarded as the baseline of East African culture, its remnants simply cannot be recognised in Buganda and Bunyoro." However, the author stresses that comparison between ancient Egyptian and sub-Saharan societies can be a valuable interpretive technique. "The point is that although historical continuity between ancient Egypt and sub-Saharan Africa cannot be presupposed, comparative analysis may still yield productive results." (p.199)

This book is a marvellous blend of the author's field experience — serving him as an intellectual yardstick — and his very comprehensive knowledge of the relevant literature acquired during the long period of "fieldwork deprivation" after 1972. For me, reading Ray's book is a journey into the depths of the human mind. I think no one who is attached to Buganda or interested in Kiganda culture should skip this book.

Gerhard Kubik, Vienna

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ZENTRALAFRIKA: MUSIKGESCHICHTE IN BILDERN, by Jos Gansemans and Barbara Schmidt-Wrenger, VEB Deutscher Verlag für Musik, Leipzig, 1986, Band I, Musikethnologie, Lieferung 9, 210 pages, 238 pictures (partly in colour), map, musical transcriptions and other text illustrations, ISBN 3-370-00150-0.

As the author of two other volumes in the "Musikgeschichte in Bildern" devoted to sub-Saharan Africa, "East Africa" (1982) and "West Africa" (1989), I know what it means in terms of investment of time and energy, and the inevitable frustrations, to produce one of these comprehensive and large-sized books. The present review is not the place, of course, for delving into the history of the series, but since the series was discontinued after the collapse of the German Democratic Republic in 1989 — with one manuscript (Kubik/Malamusi: "Southern Africa") now lying for years dormant on a bookshelf — it is only fair to say in an 'obituary' that "Musikgeschichte in Bildern" under the editorship of Werner Bachmann was a success, and, of course, a parading show-piece of the productivity of the "First State of Workers and Peasants on German Soil".

Political sarcasm aside, it is also appropriate to remember that working with the Deutscher Verlag für Musik for prolonged periods ensured the likely prognosis of getting a heart-attack. When I wrote "East Africa", the editor used to rewrite every paragraph I had written in little bits, sending me back his versions of my versions at intervals of a week, to be countered by my revised version of his version, etc., endlessly, until one day I had enough of it and wrote to him: "You are making mince-meat out of my manuscripts" — an unimaginable accusation for someone in the former German Democratic Republic.

Jos Gansemans and Barbara Schmidt-Wrenger will probably have their own stories to tell about work on the GDR production line for their volume "Central Africa" which I am reviewing here. I am delighted to see that they did not abandon much of the terrain I had won in 1982, and that their volume fairly fits into the trilogy "East", "Central" and "West" Africa, in its overall concept, so that some continuity