

Dr. M. Kiwanuka17 November 1967.

Social Anthropology and History: A Study of Anthropological and Historical Methods of Investigation with Special Reference to the Kiganda Royal System of Succession.

In 1960 at the proceedings of the Leverhulme History Conference held in Salisbury, Professor Schapiro stated that anthropology and history were totally distinct ways of looking at life. Anthropologists, he went on, were interested in society at any one moment and not in tracing the past evolution of present institutions. Professor Schapiro's view sums up in a nutshell the general attitude of anthropologists towards society. It is a view, however, which seems to ignore the fact that contemporary institutions are themselves products of historical evolutions and cannot be understood without paying attention to their historical dimensions. For his part, the historian has tended to leave the task of analysing the relationship between various social institutions to the anthropologists. Yet their methods of investigation differ because their aims and goals are different.¹

How has the attitude of many anthropologists towards history and the historical processes affected their findings in Africa?

One of the chief difficulties confronting the historian of pre-colonial Africa is the bewildering state of the sources. The bulk and the best of these are oral traditions which in most parts of the continent have not been critically studied nor even recorded. It is true that much research has been done in Africa during the past three decades, but it was carried out largely by social scientists and linguists, whose goals and methods of investigation differed from those of the historian. And despite the latter's acceptance of Professor Schapiro's views, the historian has continued to rely too heavily on the findings of social scientists. This excessive dependence is very largely explicable in terms of the historians' attitude towards African history. Until very recently, many historians did not believe that pre-colonial Africa had a history worth studying.

1. The writer of this paper believes that rigid academic compartmentalism between the Humanities and Social Sciences loses meaning (if it has) when applied to pre-literate societies.

Consequently, the tendency among many historians has been to accept too readily sources provided by social scientists of various complexities or to carry out by themselves superficial researches and present their findings as true pictures of Africa's past. The net result is that historical accuracy has been extremely difficult to achieve.

In dealing with the Kiganda royal system of succession, anthropologists pioneers in the study of african institutions and societies, presented a picture of a static system. What observers saw at the end of the 19th century was believed to represent what society was like centuries before.^{1a}

In this paper I shall attempt to outline the basic principles upon which the Kiganda system of succession was based and to trace the changes which it has undergone during the past 400 years. Today Baganda are divided into over forty clans which are totemic, universally patrilineal and almost entirely exogamous.² Before the colonial and Christian eras the system of succession at family and clan levels was not son to father as it is today. A man's grandson, nephew or brother had as much chance to succeed him as his own son. Evidence suggests that the custom was designed to prevent individualism and consequently to preserve the unity of the clan. At the level of the royal family, the same system of succession was followed and this seems to have been the result of a well established clan system and the great influence of the clan heads.

1a. The best available accounts of the pre-colonial history of Buganda are: Sir Apollo Kagawa's Basekabaka be Buganda (Kampala 1905) (The Kings of Buganda) referred to hereafter as Basekabaka; Empisa za Baganda (the Customs of the Baganda, Kampala 1953 ed.); referred to hereafter as Empisa; Ebika bya Baganda (the Clans of the Baganda)(Uganda Bookshop, 1949 ed.) referred to hereafter as Ebika; J. Roscoe, The Baganda (Cambridge 1911) referred to hereafter as Roscoe; M.B. Nsimbi, Amanya Amaganda ne Nonno zaago (Kiganda place and personal names and their origins, Nairobi), referred to hereafter as Amanya; J. Gorju, Entre le Victoria, l'Eduardo, (Iennes 1920). The most comprehensive and up-to-date account of the political and economic history of Buganda is contained in L.A. Fallers (ed.) the King's Men. (London 1964). The traditional accounts contained in the above books have been critically studied by M.S.M. Kiwanuka, see M.S.M. Kiwanuka (University of London Ph.D. Thesis, 1965) unpublished. The latest account on the Kiganda royal system of succession is by M. Southwold in Jack Goody (ed.) Cambridge Papers in Social Anthropology: Succession to High Office (Cambridge, 1966) pp.82-126.

2. A few of the clans were not exogamous, perhaps because of their size; the Lungfish (Mamba) and the Bush buck (Ngabi) clans for instance were not.

Clansmen claimed that a collateral system of succession prevented the emergence of a royal clan. All clans had thus a chance of providing a successor to the throne and this increased their involvement in the affairs of the royal family. The political and social significance of this arrangement was summed up by Bishop Gorju as follows:

The annals of his (the Muganda) country and the annals of his clans are apt to be confused in his recollection. The genealogy of the Kings was the genealogy of the clans, a story in which they have all participated and have told again and again ever since. The reverse side of the story told in the clan traditions is the part played by the Kings in the history of the clans. So much so that popular memory were to forget the national history. The perhaps exaggerated clan cults would afford an irrefragable foundation for the reconstruction of the political history.^{2a}

But there was one particular aspect in which the Kiganda royal family differed from the general practice of the Baganda. There being no royal clan Baganda kings were vaguely attached to their mothers' clans and in this sense may be said to have followed a matrilineal system. It was, however, a very loose system of matrilinealism and a source of political instability. Its origins are not clearly known³ but the generally accepted view is that the clans were so powerful and influential that they devised this method whereby each could produce a successor to the throne. In theory therefore all the clans were equal and each had the right to present to the King.⁴ A royal wife was regarded by the whole of her clan as "their daughter" and her sons were vaguely looked upon as the sons of that particular clan. This, so the Baganda assert was an effective barrier against the rise of a royal and exclusive hereditary clan and also that it forced the Kings to respect the heads of the clans.

2a. Gorgu, op. cit. p.113.

3. See Sir John Gray: Uganda Journal Vol. 2/4 (1935) pp.259-71. Sir John Gray suggests that the custom originated from a marriage alliance of Kinera, a Lwo conqueror and Nakku, a Native Queen of the Baganda. The myth of Kinera's Lwo origins are discussed elsewhere by the present writer.

4. in practice, however, some clans were considered to be inferior and this forced them to join others in order to improve their political fortunes. See EBIKA, see also ROSCOE op. cit. pp. 133-185.

Evidence to support this view may be found in an examination may be found in an examination of the position of the monarchy before the 18th century. Kings were then regarded by the heads of the clans merely as their peers.⁵

But although there were no laws of primogeniture in Kiganda society, custom and usage had established the practice of fraternal succession and the system seems to have been observed from the beginning of King Mulondo during (16th century) to the end of Semakokiro's reign at the end of the 18th century. It is also clear from the evidence that the eldest brother took precedence over the others and after they had all reigned, their sons would succeed then observing the same rules. Thus the supposed three brothers Mulondo, Jenba and Suna I, reigned one after the other and their sons Sekananya (s/o Mulondo); Kinbugwe (s/o Suna); reigned in succession of each other. During the latter part of the 17th century, the three sons of Kateregga, namely, Mutebi, Juko and Kayemba observed the established practice and so did their sons (Tebandeke s/o Mutebi); and Ndawula (s/o Juko).

The system of fraternal succession to the throne no doubt won the acceptance of the rival candidates for even after a civil or succession war, the victorious candidates generally chose the eldest among them to ascend to the throne first. This is confirmed by the results of the events of Kagulu's reign. After the sons of Ndawula had overthrown their tyrannical brother Kagulu, Kikulwe the eldest of the victors ascended the throne first. Again after the three brothers, Mwanga, Nanugala and Kyabaggu had overthrown their uncle Mawanda, Mwanga who was the eldest among them ascended the throne first.

Although the Kiganda system of succession involved all the people in the affairs of the country, the absence of a royal clan was on the one hand a source of constitutional weakness because there was no unifying factor among the princes except their ambitions for the throne. Instead their loyalties were divided among their maternal relatives and this led to a multiplicity of political factions and intensified rivalry. Consequently wars were no less frequent though they had the advantage of eliminating rivals.⁶

5. See Basekabaka, Empisa, Roscoe, pp.186-270.

6. From the reign of Kagulu to the reign of Kananya every successor to the throne had won it by force of arms.
D.A. Low in Oliver and Mathew, History of East Africa (London 1963), pp. 332-333.

This was what actually happened during the second half of the 18th century. King Kyabaggu came to the throne after forcing his brother Namugala to abdicate. Kyabaggu himself had a large offspring and in addition to his own children there were the princes such as the sons of Mawanda and Namugala. The presence of so many princes made the political atmosphere so insecure that after Kyabaggu had invaded the Busoga states he chose to settle there and declared that his children should assume political responsibility for Buganda. This sparked off a struggle which led to the near elimination of the rival candidates. First the sons of Mawanda, Namugala and other previous Kings combined and fought the sons of Kyabaggu. The latter triumphed over their opponents and executed those who had not yet escaped to Bunyoro. Meanwhile the Basoga united and expelled Kyabaggu and his Baganda subjects. This forced Kyabaggu's return to the land which he had given to his sons. His sons, however, probably did not like their father's return and hence they conspired with their maternal relatives and killed him. But his elimination did not solve the political problem because the sons soon fell out, formed into rival factions and engaged in a struggle which left only two survivors, namely Junju and Senakokiro. The constitutional merit of the wars of this period was to weed out practically all the rivals and leave two men who were full brothers. They too observed the old practice and Junju the elder brother ascended the throne first. Tradition claims that he was "childless" and although he and Senakokiro were full brothers, the ambitions of the latter were such that he soon plotted to overthrow his incumbent brother. Their mother was particularly partial in this whole struggle. She called upon her clansmen to support her young son Senakokiro which no doubt contributed greatly towards his success. Junju was killed and Senakokiro ascended the throne.

Kyabaggu's wars which had eliminated all rivals except two, Junju's "childlessness", put Senakokiro in a unique position. He was the first King to ascend the throne without rivals except his own sons. He was however acutely aware of the manner in which he had got the throne and he was determined to avoid such a catastrophe happening to him. When he learnt that his sons were plotting to overthrow him, he introduced a heinous practice of liquidating all of them except three. Of the three survivors, one was banished to Bunyoro because he was a father of twins and the other survivor was kept in custody. Senakokiro then became the first king in more than a century to die a natural death.⁷ With his reign the royal system of succession changed from fraternal to paternal succession. He himself was succeeded by his son Kamanya. Like his father, Kamanya's only rivals were his own sons and though he did not execute them his successor Suna II, executed all his brothers and thus ensured the survival

7. It is important to point out, however, that both Senakokiro & Kamanya had many political problems to contend with than even their predecessors.

of the paternal system of succession which continued into recent times. In introducing the practice of extermination, it is doubtful whether Semakokiro had any long term plan apart from securing his own position. But though hideous, the practice he introduced enabled his successors to enjoy relatively longer and more peaceful reigns than their predecessors. The effect on royal power was extra-ordinary. Without rivals, the Kings of Buganda became despots of a type which far surpassed that of previous centuries.^{7a}

There are other aspects of the royal system of succession which I wish to mention briefly. It has been suggested that only sons born to the King after his succession were eligible for the throne.⁸ This suggestion stems from a misunderstanding of a Kiganda word Abaana be Ngoma: (children of princes of the drum), which was interpreted in the narrow sense to mean the sons of a reigning monarch. Only a brief examination of the history of Buganda clearly shows that such a custom could not have been observed. First of all the policy of the survival of the fittest on the battle-field was enough to eliminate such a custom even if it had existed. The second observation to make is that since most successors and victors came to the throne fairly advanced in age, observance of such a custom could only have meant that succession went to youths. There is no evidence, however that this was the case. But the fact that this view has been repeatedly expressed in numerous publications demonstrates how a popular hypothesis can be perpetuated as a result of superficial methods of investigation. There is another myth which has been widely propagated, namely that the eldest son of a Kabaka was debarred by custom from succeeding to the throne. **But here again the claim is not born out by the facts.** King Kananya was the eldest son of his father and so was Mutebi who succeeded Kateregga during the 17th century. Moreover if such a custom ever existed the principle of the survival of the fittest rendered useless.

These examples illustrate how anthropological methods of investigation can lead to misleading conclusions. By accepting at face value what the sources say without further examination, pioneer researchers have done a disservice though unintended to the study of African history and societies. It was not that the evidence was not there, it was simply the desire to opt for the easiest route. The historian's enthusiasm in using these sources without further examination has tended to confirm and perpetuate myths and conclusion of dubious validity.

7a. H.P. Gale, Mutesa: Was he a god? Uganda Journal. See also L.A. Fallers, Despotism, status, culture and social mobility in an African Kingdom, Comparative Studies in History and Society, Vol.2, pp.11-32. In the same issue of the Journal, see C. Wrigley: The Christian Revolution in Buganda, pp. 33-48.

8. See The King's Men op. cit.

I believe that the examples drawn from Kiganda history can be multiplied a hundredfold from elsewhere. But the picture is changing. Oral traditions are being slowly studied by historians thereby leading to the discovery of new evidence. With this discovery, the painful work of reconstruction must begin afresh. Researches and brilliant generalizations of one generation are likely to become the inaccuracies of another.

THE KIGANDA KING LIST as supplied by Kaggwa

1.	Kintu		
2.	Cwa		
3.	Kimera	Probably introduced a new dynasty.	
4.	Tembo	g.s.o.p.k.	
5.	Kiggala	s.o.p.k.	
6.	Kiyimba	s.o.p.k.	
7.	Kayima	cousin of p.k.	
8.	Nakibinge	s.o.p.k.	
9.	Mulondo	} Introduced a new dynasty? Brothers	
10.	Jemba		
11.	Suna I		
12.	Sekamanya	} Cousins	
13.	Kimbugwe		
14.	Kateregga	s.o. Sekamanya	
15.	Mutebi	} Brothers	
16.	Juko		
17.	Kayemba		
18.	Tebandeke	} Cousins	
19.	Ndawula		
20.	Kagulu	} Brothers	
21.	Kikulwe		
22.	Mawanda		
23.	Mwanga I	} Brothers s.o. Prince Musanje who was s.o. Ndawula.	
24.	Namugala		
25.	Kyabaggu		
26.	Junju	} Brothers	
27.	Semakokiro		
28.	Kamanya	s.o.p.k.	
29.	Suna II	s.o.p.k.	
30.	Mutesa I	s.o.p.k.	(1857?-1884)
31.	Mwanga II	s.o.p.k.	(1884-1888)
32.	Kiwewa	b.o.p.k.	(1888)
33.	Kalema	b.o.p.k.	(1888-1889)
34.	Cwa II	s.o. Mwanga	(1897-1939)
35.	Mutesa II	s.o. Cwa II	

s.o.p.k. = son of previous king

b.o.p.k. = brother of previous king

g.s.o.p.k. = grandson of previous king.



This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons
Attribution – NonCommercial - NoDerivs 3.0 License.

To view a copy of the license please see:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>

This is a download from the BLDS Digital Library on OpenDocs

<http://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/>

A Digitisation Partnership between Makerere University Library and the British Library for
Development Studies

