

LINEAGE AND CLAN IN A BANTU STATE

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This paper deals with the forms of clanship in a state society and is based upon fieldwork in Tanganyika with the Washambala. The Shambala are a Bantu-speaking tribe of some two hundred thousand members who occupy the Usambara Mountains of northeastern Tanganyika. The Usambaras rise directly inland from the port of Tanga on the Indian Ocean coast and run roughly east and west just south of the Kenya-Tanganyika border. These mountains are not strikingly high but rise abruptly from the surrounding plains and form a cool, well-watered upland which is deeply dissected but nevertheless capable of carrying a dense population.

The people practice hoe agriculture, keep cattle and small stock, and produce some surpluses of food. The main crops are maize, cassava, beans, and bananas. On this base has been developed a centrally organized state, of some antiquity, which is dominated by a royal clan holding the paramountcy and all of the major chieftaincies. This state was strong enough in the past to remain outside of the domination of the Sultan of Zanzibar and to dominate a sizable portion of the Tanganyika coast against his opposition. Such an organization is outstanding in the coastal regions of East Africa composed as they are of small chiefdoms and achieved some notice in the days of early European exploration. Krapf, Baumann, Speke, Burton, Von den Decken, and other early explorers mention the Shambala and comment upon the strong government and the orderly condition of the area.

I shall not concern myself here with the form of the central organization but rather I shall consider the effect of this state system upon the form of clans and lineages in Shambalai.

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### Outline of Shambala Society

The Shambala are an amalgamation of peoples who have migrated into the Usambaras over a very long period of time. The history of Shambalai is the history of migrations, of fighting, and of the settlement of people in their present location. This long continued migration into the mountains has, in the eyes of the Shambala, produced a large number of patrilineal clans which are descended from the original migrants. Most of these clans take the form of loose aggregates of parallel lineages which are able to trace genealogical connection only inexactly, but which nevertheless claim some common ancestor and a name. The component lineages of such a clan are localized and generally possess a depth of about three or four generations. Rules of exogamy extend to the width of the total clan but effective action is nearly always limited to the localized lineage. The unity of the group through the claim of common agnatic <sup>c</sup>descent is explicitly recognized by the members of all of its constituent lineages however, and it possesses a name and a body of oral traditions concerning the life and migrations of its founder and other important ancestors. The genealogical connection to these founders is generally traced in all lineages but is often conflicting between lineages and may be extremely vague and even contradictory in its details. Most of these clans composed of shallow parallel lineages possess no machinery for action on a clanwide basis. There is no clan head, nor council, nor the recognition of a senior lineage, nor any joint ceremonial activity nor clan ownership of property. They cannot in any sense be considered corporate groups but are composed of a series of corporate lineages which are the widest kinship units mobilized for common action. The lineages which make up such a clan do not usually occupy a stretch of contiguous territory but instead are widely scattered throughout

the whole of the mountains and the nearby plains. The members of the various lineages extend hospitality to each other but they do not act together for any joint ends.

Shambala kinship terminology appears to facilitate the formation of clans viewed by the Shambala as composed of parallel lineages all of about the same depth. Terms alternate upwards from ego's generation. Thus father is *tate*; grandfather, *baba*; great grandfather, *tate mkuu*; great great grandfather, *baba* again and so on upwards. The occurrence of such an alternating terminology makes possible the elision of generations. The referent is not clearly distinguished when one refers to *baba*, this may mean one's brother, or grandfather or great great grandfather or some ancestor even further back. Similarly *tate*, which may refer to father, father's brother, great grandfather, or someone beyond this. The likelihood of telescoping is even further enhanced by the practice of naming sons after grandfathers. Thus the generation level referred to cannot be clarified by the names of individuals since the more important names may simply alternate while the less important names of collaterals are forgotten.

The typical genealogy of a Shambala clan, I would suggest, may be broken into three phases. There is first a rather detailed genealogy which is said to be the total membership of a modern localized lineage. This generally covers about three or four generations which I will call the "historic period." Such a detailed genealogy begins with settlement of the founder of the lineage under consideration. Behind this settlement lies a time I shall refer to as the "protohistoric period." Here occur a series of alternating names of ancestors from whom the founders of all the modern localized lineages are traced. Finally in a realm of mythical times lies the name of the clan founder. In this time plane is the migration to the Usambara Mountains and the establishment of the general order of modern Shambala custom.

In most cases, all of the detailed historic genealogies of localized lineages in a clan trace back to the same ancestor in the protohistoric period but relationship is not clear. It is possible to get versions from different men in the same lineage or even from the same man on different days which derive from different points in the total genealogy. This has no functional significance to the clan membership however. The important thing for them is that the lineages are agnatically linked. The exact manner is not of importance, the mere fact of linkage is sufficient for reckoning exogamy. Other matters are handled within the constituent lineages. Thus rites of ancestor worship are occasionally directed to the clan founder by each lineage, but more importantly they are directed to the immediate founder of each localized lineage by the living members of the local group. Further, leadership is localized and pertains only to the activities of the corporate lineage, not to the members of the whole clan.

It appears likely that telescoping has not only occurred at the higher level <sup>of</sup> protohistoric times within the genealogy of the clan but has also taken place within the more immediate past to produce a system of lineages all at the same shallow depth. Tendencies towards fission within these lineages have obviously been countered by the merging of collateral lines which is a process facilitated by the occurrence of leviritic marriage and by a terminology which does not distinguish between lineal and collateral lines.

These various factors acting together produce a clan composed of imprecisely but nevertheless strongly articulated lineages. The whole clan usually has a depth of about nine or ten generations and this depth remains constant because of the continued operation of telescoping. Thus the total genealogy moves forward through time in a manner similar to that first discussed for the Nuer by Evans-Pritchard. Unlike Nuer lineages however, Shambala clans of the type under discussion are not composed of a hierarchy

of segmentary levels in which the oppositions of a lower level create a unity on the level above. Within these Shambala clans there is recognized only one order of segmentation which has produced the series of parallel lineages of which the clans are composed.

In these clans then, the earliest part of the genealogy becomes a sort of formula recalled by all members of all lineages which acts as a charter for the whole clan. These early names lie beyond the limits of historical time in a protohistoric period in which a certain amount of historical fact is incorporated in a complex of myth. Beyond these names, lies the migration story of the clan in a mythical time which remains in the same perspective because of the genealogies which follow from it. Genealogical dating starts, as it were, with settlement in the Usambara Mountains. These histories almost always explain settlement in the present locale and give details of how land was acquired. In this respect they offer justification for the present distribution of land and for the control exercised over it by the incumbent lineage. The whole constitutes what Malinowski has called a "pragmatic charter" for the existing situation.

#### The Divergent Nature of the Wakilindi Clan

I have to at this point given a brief outline of the form of Shambala commoner clans but when one turns to the royal clan, it is found to differ very greatly from this pattern. I shall here offer an explanation for this difference.

In contradistinction to commoner clans, the royal clan forms a deep segmentary system arranged in a hierarchy of numerous levels of segmentation in which the relations between lineages at one level are defined in terms of solidarity at a higher level of segmentation. Yet paradoxically kinship terminology and naming customs are identical with those of the commoner and should in the light of my previous argument lead to a shallow parallel lineage structure.

It appears clear that this difference cannot be explained in terms of the heterogeneous nature of the population of the Usambara Mountains. It is not, I believe, a case in which the royal clan came into the mountains with a different form of organization and merely superimposed this as an overlay on a preexisting system. It is certain that the mountains carried a population before the rise of the Shambala state, but many of the people are of the same origin as is the royal clan, and further, deep segmentary lineage systems are not a characteristic of the area from which these people came. Rather, the system is very similar to that found among the Shambala.

It seems to me most plausible to view the long and elaborate genealogies of the royal clan in terms of their functional significance within the society. The segmentary lineage system of the royal clan, though expressed in a kinship metaphor, is an extremely important vehicle of internal political relationship. Relationships among the various political groups are not acted out every day, but must be understood by the actors through the memory of formative historical events. Such an event may be, for example, the segmentation of a lineage.

For the commoner lineage, this type of genealogical information is of significance only to the point of settlement and the establishment of relations in a particular location. Further, there are strong forces acting to bring about telescoping and merging in the light of the genealogical and historical legitimization of control over a piece of territory.

For the royals however, the broadening of the extent of political control depends heavily upon the legitimization of political power through reference to a previous royal chief. Members of the royal clan are set off from all others by the operation of the principle of ascribed rank. Such

people are, by birth, higher in status and possess an in-born fitness to rule which is not possessed by commoners. This view is buttressed by the strong sanction of rain-making which is believed to be inherited within the royal clan. In addition, members of the royal clan are attributed with great powers as orators and wisdom in juridicial matters. Thus the underscoring of segmentations which precede settlement in a new location are crucial to a chief and to the lineage which he founds. This can perhaps be made clear by consideration of a model of Shambala chieftaincies.

Chieftaincies form a ranked hierarchy of pyramidal form. The apex of the pyramid is the paramount chief whose authority extends over the whole of Shambala society. Below the paramount stand a small number of "big chiefs" (wazumbe wakuu), men who control large segments of territory and who are deemed accountable only to the paramount. Under each "big chief" are a number of lesser chiefs called by the Shambala wazumbe wadodo, "little chiefs;" these men control segments of the "big chief's" territory and are accountable to him and indirectly to the paramount. Finally, below these men stand the heads of commoner lineages, whom in our model would represent a broad, detached base below the ranks of royal chiefs.

Chiefship passes normally to the first son of the deceased chief although this rule is mediated by the fact that new chiefs are chosen by the old chief's council in conference with the heads of the commoner lineages concerned. Further, a new chief must be installed through the action of the chief above him in the hierarchy. Refusal to install a man acts as a veto and the matter is referred back to the parties concerned who must make a new choice from among the brothers of the rejected aspirant. Failing an adult son, a brother of the deceased chief, either real or classificatory may be chosen. Thus primogeniture is not a hard and fast rule in chiefly succession. If a man is patently unfit he will be passed over for some other heir who is more capable.

Nevertheless, chiefships are held within lineages and the ranking of royal chiefs is expressed in a genealogical rubric. Thus the paramount is viewed as a lineal descendent of the founder of the royal clan, while the big chiefs hold positions established by collateral lines which are traced as segmenting from the lineage of the clan founder. "Big chiefs" then are traced as lineal descendents of the founders of these lineages of the first order of segmentation, while "little chiefs" within each big chief's territory hold positions claimed to be founded by collaterals who hived off the big chief's lineage.

Such a system is potentially expansive because of the expansive nature of lineages and the increasing distance between collateral lines of a lineage which progressively remove individuals from the leadership and control of lineage affairs. Out-migration is an important means of funneling-off tensions that may build up over the inheritance of land or political prerogatives. At the same time it acts to increase the base of the state and to enhance the power of individuals within the chiefly hierarchy. Thus segmentations within the royal clan continue to occur and in turn are remembered since it is membership in the royal clan which is the ultimate sanction for chiefly position.

To the observer looking at the system from the outside it appears unlikely that genealogies within the royal clan are absolutely accurate reflections of the past. The present social configuration contains lineages standing in certain relations to each other; their present social relationship therefore postulates a lineage segmentation which is assumed by the members of the lineages. In social terms the actual genealogy may be false, while genealogies which have been altered are functionally true as far as the actors are concerned. The important things with which individuals within Shambala culture are concerned are the depth of the royal genealogies,

the precision with which segmentations are ordered, and the unanimity which prevails with regard to these genealogies.

These things produce a unity in a clan of this type which is of a much higher order than that displayed in the majority of Shambala clans. In most clans there is no means of mobilizing the dispersed lineages for any kind of joint action. The vague feeling of unity and the possession of a common name are the major things shared. These lead to the observance of exogamy for the whole clan but they do not lead to any kind of unanimous action. In the royal clan on the other hand, the possession of genealogies which exactly define the relations between parts of a clan and the possession of an ideology which calls for joint action from time to time on the basis of these relations, produces a corporateness of widely ramifying dimensions, and a strong instrument for the integration of the state.