

THE BANTU  
OF  
NORTH KAVIRONDO

VOLUME I

BY

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*Published for the*  
INTERNATIONAL AFRICAN INSTITUTE  
*by the*  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
LONDON NEW YORK TORONTO  
1949



*A Vugusu mother*

*Oxford University Press, Amen House, London E.C. 4.*

GLASGOW NEW YORK TORONTO MELBOURNE WELLINGTON

BOMBAY CALCUTTA MADRAS CAPE TOWN

*Geoffrey Cumberlege, Publisher to the University*

## PREFACE

THE present book is the first volume of a monograph on a number of Bantu tribes living in the North Kavirondo District of the Nyanza Province of Kenya. It contains part of the results of two periods of field-work which the author has carried through under a research appointment by the International African Institute awarded to him on the recommendation of Professor Westermann. The investigations extended from 1934 until 1938, about two and a half years having been devoted to the actual work in the field. I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the Institute and its directors, and especially to Dr. J. H. Oldham, for having financed the two expeditions to Kenya as well as granting the funds that enabled me to write up my material.

I also make grateful acknowledgement to the Rockefeller Foundation for having extended my original fellowship in the U.S.A. for a second year to be spent on preliminary training for this special task at the London School of Economics under the inspiring tutorship of the late Professor Malinowski. It is to him that I owe the greatest possible tribute. I was privileged to work for many months in close personal contact with this brilliant scientific personality, who also started me off in the field.

My approach to the magico-religious side of native life, to which a substantial part of the present volume is devoted, has been greatly stimulated by Professor Evans-Pritchard's admirable book on Zande witchcraft (*Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande*, Oxford, 1937) which, by a fortunate coincidence, I was asked to review shortly before embarking upon my second expedition to Kenya.

While writing my book I benefited greatly from discussing the various problems with my fellow workers in London (chiefly Professor Raymond Firth, Dr. Meyer Fortes, Dr. Lucy P. Mair, and Dr. Kalervo Oberg) and later, when in Germany, with Professor Westermann and Professor Thurnwald.

In Kenya itself I enjoyed unlimited support for my work both from the Central Government at Nairobi and from the Provincial and District Administrations as well as the various Government Departments. Mr. (now Sir Armigel) de Vince Wade, then Colonial Secretary and later Acting Governor of Kenya, apart from kind hospitality, granted me valuable facilities and made those all-important initial arrangements for me which proved most helpful in establishing close contacts with the local authorities. I would thank also a great many Government officials for taking an interest in my work that went far beyond their routine duties. The study of modern contact conditions and of their repercussions on present-day native life, which forms the central theme of the second volume, could hardly have been accomplished without the assistance and co-operation of the Adminis-

tration and the various departmental services, especially the Agricultural and the Education Departments.

I am further greatly indebted to many missionaries, both Protestant and Catholic, for the understanding and helpful attitude which they have shown on every possible occasion. In particular, I wish to express my gratitude to the Church Missionary Society, the Church of God Mission, the Friends' African Mission, and the Roman Catholic Mill Hill Mission, as well as to Mr. James W. C. Dougall, then liaison officer between the Kenya Government and the Kenya Missionary Board.

Besides, my wife and I wish to take this opportunity to express our grateful appreciation of the generous hospitality which we received in all quarters, both official and private.

Last, but not least, I would thank my African friends and informants, both old and young, pagan and Christian. Without their untiring and unselfish co-operation I should not have got very far. Especially four of them, Christopher Mtiva and William Serenge of South Maragoli, James Tsindakha of Bunyore and Javan Nandoli of North Kitosh, have taken such a genuine and keen interest in helping me 'to get at the facts' that their names must be connected with this book.

Hamburg

April 1946.

Since the above foreword was written I have to extend my thanks to Professor A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and Professor Daryll Forde, the present Director of the Institute, to both of whom I am deeply indebted for having recommended and arranged for the publication of the manuscript *in extenso*. My particular thanks, finally, are due to Mrs. Beatrice Wyatt, the Secretary of the Institute, for her careful revision of the proofs.

July 1947.

## NOTE ON NATIVE TERMS

TO facilitate the use of the material contained in the present book for comparative studies as well as to document certain passages, I have included a number of native terms and quotations in the vernacular, putting them in brackets after their (approximate) equivalents in English. I have endeavoured to render the phonetic transcription as simple as possible. The vowel sounds *e* and *o* always being open in all Bantu Kavirondo dialects, no special symbols have been used to denote their open quality. Futhermore, no distinction has been made between bilabial and labio-dental *v*, a point which, however, will be discussed in connexion with the publication of my linguistic material. *l* and *r* frequently being interchangeable, I cannot vouch for having been entirely consistent in differentiating between these two sounds. *ʃ* (cap  $\Sigma$ ) denotes a voiceless palato-alveolar fricative, *x* a voiceless velar fricative. All other consonants are pronounced as in English. Stress is usually on the penultimate; in all other cases it has been marked by an accent on the stressed syllable (for instance, *tsimbú*).

For readers not familiar with the Bantu system of class prefixes I refer to the chart on p. 26. I may add that the prefix *ovu-* (*vu-*) always denotes the idea of abstraction. Thus: *omuvila*, the sorcerer (plural: *avavila*), but *ovuvila*, sorcery. The different rendering of native terms in different contexts is explained by dialectic differences: for instance, the term for 'witch' is *omulogi* in Lurogoli (the dialect spoken by the Logoli tribe living in Maragoli) and *omulosi* in Luvugusu (the dialect spoken by the Vugusu living in Kitosh); the term for 'cow' is *eyombe* (plural: *edziyombe*) in Lurogoli and *éxafu* (plural: *tjixafu*) in Luvugusu, &c.

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# The Chieftaincies of the North Kavirondo District

- District Boundaries
- - - Boundaries of Chieftaincies (locations)
- ▬▬▬ Railways

Scale 1:700 000

0 5 10 15 20 Miles

