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978-1-107-03080-0 - A History of African Motherhood: The Case of Uganda, 700–1900

Rhiannon Stephens

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A History of African Motherhood

This history of African motherhood over the *longue durée* demonstrates that it was, ideologically and practically, central to social, economic, cultural, and political life. The book explores how people in the North Nyanzan societies of Uganda used an ideology of motherhood to shape their communities. More than biology, motherhood created essential social and political connections that cut across patrilineal and cultural-linguistic divides. The importance of motherhood as an ideology and a social institution meant that in chiefdoms and kingdoms, queen mothers were powerful officials who legitimated the power of kings. This was the case in Buganda, the many kingdoms of Busoga, and the polities of Bugwere. By taking a long-term perspective from c. 700 to 1900 CE and using an interdisciplinary approach – drawing on historical linguistics, comparative ethnography, and oral traditions and literature, as well as archival sources – this book shows the durability, mutability, and complexity of ideologies of motherhood in this region.

Rhiannon Stephens is Assistant Professor of African History at Columbia University. Her work has been published in scholarly journals such as *Past and Present* and the *Journal of African History*. She received her PhD in history from Northwestern University.

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In memory of my father, Dafydd ap Glyn

Son of Doris Keturah Harry

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Note on Language

This book, for the most part, tells the story of people who spoke Bantu languages. In these languages nouns have prefixes that change the meaning of the stem. For nouns describing people, the places they live, and the languages they speak, I have retained those prefixes. So Bagwere, Basoga, Bashana, and Baganda are people who live in Bugwere, Busoga, Bushana, and Buganda and who speak Lugwere, Lusoga, Rushana, and Luganda. Elsewhere, for adjectival purposes, I use only the stem: Gwere, Soga, Shana, and Ganda. But these people did not inhabit a land bereft of people speaking other languages. Some of those they lived alongside spoke Nilotic languages. Where I discuss people from non-Bantu groups, I have retained the forms in those languages as spoken in modern times: Iteso people speak Ateso, Joluo people speak Dholuo, and so on.