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The Northern Bantu

John Roscoe (1861–1932) was an ordained Christian missionary who was elected a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Society in 1912 for his contributions to the ethnographic record of Uganda. John Roscoe joined the Uganda mission in 1891 and upon returning to England in 1909 he began to publish the results of his investigations into the lives of the indigenous people in Uganda. This edition contains an ethnographic survey of six different indigenous Bantu speaking groups living near Lake Victoria, and was first published as part of the Cambridge Archaeological and Ethnological Series in 1912. In this work he describes the social, political and economic life of these groups before European influence from colonialism, drawn from interviews with local people in their own language. This volume contains views on ethnicity which were acceptable at the time this volume was published.

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The Northern Bantu

*An Account of Some Central
African Tribes of the Uganda Protectorate*

JOHN ROSCOE



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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore,
São Paulo, Delhi, Dubai, Tokyo, Mexico City

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108010726

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2010

This edition first published 1915

This digitally printed version 2010

ISBN 978-1-108-01072-6 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

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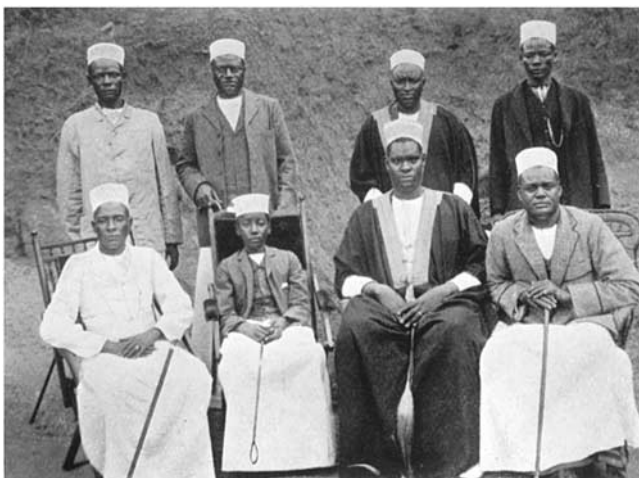
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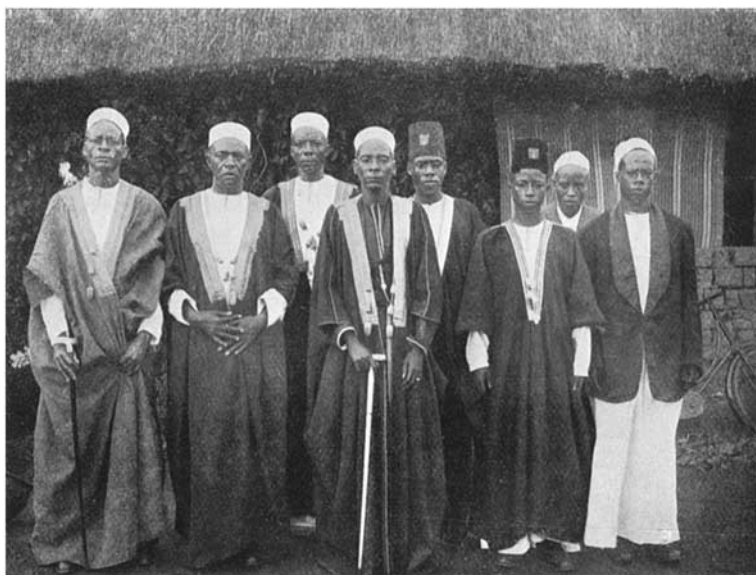
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1 2 3 4

(1) Four Bantu Kings, with their Chief Ministers

1, Andereya Ruhanga, King of Banyoro; 2, Daudè chwa, King of Uganda;
 3, Kamswaga, King of Ankole; 4, Kasagama, King of Toro



(2) King of Banyoro, with his chiefs, in modern Arab dress

THE NORTHERN BANTU

AN ACCOUNT OF SOME CENTRAL AFRICAN
TRIBES OF THE UGANDA PROTECTORATE

BY

JOHN ROSCOE, M.A.

RECTOR OF OVINGTON, NORFOLK
FORMERLY OF THE CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY

Cambridge :
at the University Press

1915

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-01072-6 - The Northern Bantu
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Frontmatter
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
C. F. CLAY, MANAGER
London: FETTER LANE, E.C.
Edinburgh: 100 PRINCES STREET



New York: G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
Bombay, Calcutta and Madras: MACMILLAN AND Co., LTD.
Toronto: J. M. DENT AND SONS, LTD.
Tokyo: THE MARUZEN-KABUSHIKI-KAISHA

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PREFACE

IN a former work I described at some length the Baganda¹, the most advanced and most powerful Bantu tribe of Central Africa: in the present work I give a more summary account of some other important and far less known Bantu tribes in the Uganda Protectorate. Like its predecessor, this volume is based on observations made and notes taken by me during the many years when I resided in Central Africa in the service of the Church Missionary Society. Being stationed at Mengo, the capital of Uganda, I naturally had most facilities for acquainting myself with the Baganda, among whom I lived; but even at Mengo I enjoyed many opportunities for acquiring a knowledge of other tribes of the Protectorate, and I availed myself of my vacations to visit them in their own countries and investigate their customs and beliefs by personal converse with the natives. My acquaintance with the Bantu languages enabled me in every case to dispense with an interpreter: all the information concerning Bantu tribes presented to the reader in this, as in my former, volume was obtained at first hand from the people in their own language. Yet I am well aware that the account which I have given of these tribes, other than the Baganda, is fragmentary and incomplete: the short time which I could devote to the study in my vacations precluded the possibility of a thorough investigation. I feel that I have done little more than scratch the surface of a wide and fruitful field, which will yield an abundant harvest

¹ *The Baganda, an Account of their Native Customs and Beliefs.* Macmillan & Co., London, 1911.

to those who may have the good fortune to cultivate it hereafter. For the tribes in question are as yet comparatively little known and they represent a great variety of stages in social, mental, and material evolution, from the aquatic and fishing Bakene, through the pastoral Bahima and Banyoro, to the almost purely agricultural Bagesu and Basoga. In the Bakene, living actually on the water of the lakes and rivers, we see the modern equivalents of the lake dwellers of ancient Europe: in the pastoral tribes, with their cows, we trace a sort of reflection of the Hebrew patriarchs with their wandering flocks and herds; while from the primitive agricultural tribes we seem to catch a glimpse of our remote ancestors tilling the patches of soil which they had cleared in the vast primaeval forests. Again, a knowledge of the cannibal Bagesu, dwelling on the slopes of the mighty Mount Elgon, with its great caves, its rushing streams, and foaming cataracts, may perhaps throw light on the meaning and origin of cannibalism in general.

But in order to reap the full benefit which a study of these deeply interesting tribes offers to the student of man's early history, it is essential that an exact and thorough investigation of them should be undertaken without delay; for every year sees a further encroachment of European influence on their once secluded domain, every year witnesses a corresponding disintegration of their ancient customs and beliefs, and unless the investigation is undertaken soon, it will be too late to attempt it at all: a priceless record of human history will be lost for ever. It is lamentable to reflect, that while large sums are annually devoted by Governments, learned societies, and the generosity of private benefactors to the study of merely material and comparatively permanent relics of ancient civilisation, so little is given to the investigation of the mental and social state of those primitive living races of men who are melting away before our eyes, and who can still tell us secrets which we shall never wring from all the tablets of Babylon and the pyramids of Egypt. To the student of man's early development the tribes of Central Africa offer one of the best fields still open for research, but in a few years hence they may have ceased to do so.

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Much of the information in this volume concerning the Bahima, the Bagesu, and the Bakene has already appeared in the form of papers contributed by me to the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. I wish to thank the Council of the Institute for kindly allowing me to make use of these papers in the present volume. For that purpose the articles have been recast and enlarged, but their original substance remains. The two chapters on the Banyoro and Basoga, together with those on the Nilotic tribes, are new, though my friend Sir J. G. Frazer has, with my full permission, used some of the information in his comprehensive work *Totemism and Exogamy* before these chapters were compiled. The two chapters on the Nilotic tribes (the Bateso and Nilotic Kavirondo) have been added as an appendix. They are the result, not of researches purposely undertaken among the people, but merely of short visits which I happened to pay them in the course of my missionary work. Finding myself among the tribes I availed myself of the opportunity to glean a little information about them, and rather than keep my notes locked up in my desk, I have added them to the volume in the hope that they may prove useful to others. That is my excuse for publishing them in a book otherwise devoted to Bantu tribes.

My grateful thanks are due to my two friends, the Rev. W. Cox, Fellow of St John's College, Cambridge, and Sir J. G. Frazer, for valuable assistance. The former kindly undertook the trying task of reading through the manuscript and revising it for the press. The latter read through the proofs, and pointed out some omissions, inconsistencies, and obscurities, which I have endeavoured to rectify.

I am deeply indebted to the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press for their liberality in undertaking the publication of the book. I thank them gratefully, as also a number of friends who kindly guaranteed a sum towards the expenses of publication.

For the photographs I am indebted to F. Knowles, Esq., C.M.G., District Commissioner in Uganda, the Revs. H. Brewer, R. H. Leakey, and E. Millar, Miss Brewer and Miss Morris,

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members of the Church Missionary Society in Uganda. These friends have been at considerable pains to obtain the photographs and to forward them to me in England. My own camera broke down and I could obtain no photographs with it.

To the Right Rev. Dr Willis, Bishop of Uganda, I am indebted for a table of Nilotic relationships, and also for the kind assistance he gave me as interpreter when I was taking notes among the Nilotic Kavirondo. To the Rev. A. L. Kitching, the Rev. A. B. Fisher, the Rev. H. Mathers, and Miss Attlee I am indebted for tables and other information of the most valuable nature.

JOHN ROSCOE.

THE RECTORY,
OVINGTON, NORFOLK.
20 *March*, 1915.

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