

ENCOUNTERING ISLAM AND
CHRISTIANITY IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA:
FROM ORALITY TO LITERACY AND TO THE RISE
OF HISTORICAL WRITING IN THE KINGDOMS
OF BUGANDA AND BUNYORO*

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Though the existence of script in some regions of Africa, in ancient Egypt, Kush, Nubia or the Ethiopian highlands led to the spread of literacy and of written knowledge, orality was the norm in many African societies in the past, and in much of Africa, historical and other knowledge remained to be constructed, maintained and conveyed by word of mouth, in poetic, musical and dramatic settings and graphic symbolism closely related to speech. Cultural contacts with Islam and later on with Christianity brought writing systems, Arabic and Latin scripts, literacy replaced orality and prompted the production of written knowledge. The arrival of Islam and somewhat later of Christianity into the kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro brought literacy in its train and led to the development of a rich tradition of historical writing.

Key words: Islam, Christianity, kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro, Arabic and Latin scripts, Arabic and Kiswahili languages, orality, literacy, historical writing

Situating the Problems and Issues

Historical consciousness and a historical narrative had always existed in Africa. Africans had always somehow or other tried to express their interest in and concern for their own history, African societies had always been busy producing their own histories and anthropologies and discoursing on their own

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identities. Old people taught their descendants about the past, there were community historians. Some societies even had official historians. The existence of script in some regions of Africa, in ancient Egypt, Kush, Nubia or the Ethiopian highlands led to the spread of literacy and of written knowledge, creating the possibility of written history as well. Yet orality remained the norm in many African societies in the past and historical and other knowledge remained to be constructed, maintained and conveyed by the word of mouth, in poetic, musical and dramatic settings and graphic symbolism closely related to speech. When Islam crossed the Sahara into the Western Sudan and penetrated down the East African coast, bringing literacy in Arabic in its train, Africans no longer had to rely on maintaining their historical traditions and knowledge by memorising them, and rich African traditions of scholarship emerged, articulated in the Arabic language, and in African languages written in the Arabic script, the so-called Ajami. Writing in some African languages, such as Hausa, Fulfulde, Kanembu, Dyula, Wolof, Kiswahili, Malagasy and some other African languages, using Arabic or the so-called Ajami script developed alongside works of history in the Arabic language.¹

Jan Vansina epitomised the prevailing scholarly opinion maintaining that African civilisations in sub-Saharan Africa were to a great extent civilisations of the spoken word. “The African civilizations in the Sahara and south of the desert were to a great extent civilizations of the spoken word, even where the written word existed, as it did in West Africa from the sixteenth century onwards because only few people knew how to write and the role of the written word was often marginal to the essential preoccupations of society.”² The sheer number of ancient Arabic and Ajami manuscripts located in ancient seats of Islamic learning scattered across the African continent along the so-called African Ink road stretching from Senegal and Mauritania in the west to the Red Sea and along the East African coast down to northern Mozambique, questions this assumption. Few of these manuscripts, which formed part of a significant knowledge production process over the past few centuries and which have enormous historical relevance for present-day Africa, have been studied,

¹ The term Ajami (Arabic: عجمي *‘aġamī*), or Ajamiyya (Arabic: عجمية *‘aġamiyyah*), which comes from the Arabic root for “foreign” or “stranger”, has been applied to Arabic alphabets for writing African languages, especially those of Hausa and Kiswahili, although many other African languages were written using the script. It is considered an Arabic derived African writing system. Since African languages involve phonetic sounds and systems different from Arabic, there have often been adaptations of the Arabic script to transcribe them.

² VANSINA, J. Oral Tradition and Its Methodology. In KI-ZERBO, J. (ed.). *General History of Africa. I. Methodology and African Prehistory*, p. 142.

translated or published, despite growing interest in their preservation and conservation over the past decades among scholars in and outside Africa.

Africans were quick to appreciate the importance of literacy and very quickly took to the production of written histories in the imported classical language of Arabic and in African languages written using the Arabic alphabet. The growth of European interest in Africa since the fifteenth century and especially the presence and work of Christian missions gave Africans literacy in their own languages in Latin script. From the very start Christian missions paid great attention to the teaching of literacy. In many parts of the African continent, Africans who had become literate in the Arabic, Ajami or Roman scripts felt the need to record local historical traditions or to set down what they knew of the histories of their people. The introduction of a script meant that historical and cultural knowledge which had been in the past constructed and conveyed by word of mouth could be produced in locally scripted historical and cultural texts. This resulted in some parts of Africa a rich production of local histories researched and written by communities themselves, of popular historical literature, memoirs, diaries and biographical writings often produced in local African languages by individuals and local communities interested in their past and interpreting their pasts which for them had meaning and significance. The production of local histories flourished in many parts of Africa. This rich corpus belonging to the genre of “production of locality” and bridging the gap between orality and literacy, reveals how local communities conceptualised the past, the world and changes that were happening around them and to them. Africans themselves have not simply produced, inscribed, and voiced historical knowledge and cultural practices in reaction to some overpowering European or Western tradition, they have been producing their own introspections and constructions of the past and culture, and discoursing their own identities.

There developed some rich early historiographies in Africa and some, namely the early historical writing which had started to be produced in the kingdom of Buganda and to a lesser extent in the kingdom of Bunyoro and among some other neighbouring peoples since the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries,³ have continued to thrive.

³ ROWE, J. A. Progress and a sense of identity: African Historiography in East Africa. In *Kenya Historical Review*, 1975, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 23–34, reprinted by Northwestern University Program of African Studies, Reprint Series Number 31.

The Course of Islam in Eastern Africa

According to recent archaeological excavations, Islam came to the East African coast early in the Islamic era, in the eighth century.⁴ It spread through trade and economic migration on dhows with the ocean monsoons around which the Indian ocean trade had been organised as far back as historical knowledge goes, and was brought by traders regularly visiting the East African coast. The arrival of Islam coincided with the increasing urbanisation of the coast. Coastal cities, the oceanic trade and Islam formed the core elements of Swahili identity and of the unique Kiswahili language and civilisation which reached its peak between the 10th and 15th centuries. The Swahili people, who had over the centuries developed their own Islamic culture, were unique in having developed a written literature deeply immersed in the spirit of Islam and in Islamic literary traditions. The Kiswahili language which had evolved in the coastal towns of East Africa and adjacent islands was a written language using the Old Swahili Script or rather the Arabic Ajami script adapted to this language.

For not quite clear reasons Islam, Swahili Islamic culture and language only remained dominant along a narrow coastal strip and did not spread past the coast. The process of Islamic expansion up-country, away from the long Islamised towns of the East African coast, only began in the nineteenth-century. As on the coast in the past, Islam in the interior of East and Central Africa advanced slowly and gradually along a network of caravan routes through trading contacts with some African people and was spread by ordinary adherents, Kiswahili-speaking merchants, who were penetrating the interior of Eastern Africa in search of ivory and slaves.⁵ Through its commercial expansion in the nineteenth century, Islam soon had its representatives scattered everywhere in Eastern Africa. We should not, however, overestimate the extent of Islamic penetration. Outside certain areas, in this early period Islam made relatively little advance. In the interior of Eastern Africa, proselytising was to a large extent incidental, a by-product of trade. The primary interest of Muslim traders was mercantile, not proselytising. The Arabs and Swahili entered the East African interior in search of ivory and slaves, and, rather than new converts to their religion or political power, they sought wealth and prosperity. There was a basic contradiction between converting Africans and selling them as slaves. Since Islam forbids Muslims to enslave co-religionists, to convert too

⁴ POUWELS, R. L. The East African Coast, Chapter 12. In LEVTZION, N., POUWELS, R. L. (eds.). *The History of Islam in Africa*, p. 252.

⁵ ALPERS, E. A. East Central Africa. In LEVTZION, N., POUWELS, R. L. (eds.). *The History of Islam in Africa*, pp. 303–305. ALPERS, E. A. The Nineteenth Century: Prelude to Colonialism. In OGOT, B. A. (ed.). *Zamani. A Survey of East African History*. pp. 229–248.

many Africans to Islam would have diminished the number of those they were permitted to enslave. For this reason conversion to Islam was limited. Along the trade routes, way stations turned into flourishing settlements where the Arab and Swahili traders could (and often did) live comfortably. It seems that the prosperity of Arab and Swahili traders based on the closely integrated trade in ivory and slaves muted their religious zeal.⁶

Many people in Eastern Africa became exposed to Islam and Islamic civilisation and culture both through extensive contacts with the coast and the presence of a small number of Muslim merchants in their midst. Some benefited from the trade and adopted the customs of the coast and Kiswahili, but they did not convert to Islam in any substantial numbers and often it was possible to talk of Swahilisation without Islamisation.⁷ Islam was initially gaining new adherents by a combination of religious ideas and the attractions of Islamic culture and civilisation, the Islamic way of life and dress, the introduction of new languages Kiswahili and Arabic as well as Arabic script. Reading and writing was no doubt one of the most important skills introduced by the Arab and Swahili traders, who propagated their religion especially in the cases when through the proselytisation and the conversion of an influential chief or ruler they could increase their trade. Many of the processes of Islamisation in Eastern Africa were similar to those described for other areas of the African continent much earlier.⁸ The types of the process of Islamisation that have been repeatedly seen and described across sub-Saharan Africa can be exemplified by the initial appeal of Islam seen in the power of Arabic literacy,⁹ the prestige and honour associated with Islam in terms of increasing power, the position of converts in the social hierarchy and the top-down process of conversion. The

⁶ CAIRNS, H., ALAN C. Prelude to Imperialism. British Reactions to Central African Society 1840 – 1890. p. 133. ALPERS, E. A. Towards a History of the Expansion of Islam in East Africa: the Matrilineal Peoples of the Southern Interior. In RANGER T. O., KIMAMBO, I. N. (eds.). *The Historical Study of African Religion*, pp.182–191.

⁷ The coastal influence was most visible in the use of cloth which was rapidly replacing barkcloth, the adoption of the gown or garments and many other goods, including firearms, in cultivating some vegetables, fruits and crops, wheat and rice, in building square houses and in introducing new skills and crafts, including literacy in Arabic and Kiswahili. INSOLI, T. The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa, p. 384; BENNETT, N. R. The Arab Impact. In OGOT, B. A. (ed.). *Zamani. A Survey of East African History*, pp. 210–228; ALPERS, E. A. “East Central Africa”. In LEVTZION, N., POUWELS, R. L. (eds.). *The History of Islam in Africa*, pp. 303–326.

⁸ PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ, V. Similarities and Differences in the Spread of Islam: East and South Africa Compared. In HARON, M., DANGOR, S. E. (eds). *Islamic Civilisation in Southern Africa*, pp. 47–49.

⁹ Later on literacy in African languages using adapted Arabic script, the so-called Ajami.

first agents of conversion were traders and only later on missionaries and holy men.¹⁰

Islam in the Great Lakes Region

One of the most significant areas of Islamic penetration in Eastern Africa in this early period was the Lacustrine area, namely the kingdom of Buganda, where Islam secured a strong foothold. At the time of the visit of the famous traveller and explorer Henry Morton Stanley in the country in 1875, the initial process of Islamisation in Buganda reached a climax, Islam's position was strong and after the arrival of Christianity into the country became its formidable rival.

The kingdom of Buganda and Uganda no doubt belong to the best documented African countries. Apart from official and missionary archival sources, there is also a very rich corpus of historical writings written by Baganda Muslim and Christian converts, many of them eyewitnesses and active participants in the events.¹¹ According to all available sources, Islam came to be known in Buganda under Kabaka Mutesa's father Suna (1825 – 1856) several decades before the arrival of Europeans. Although there were indirect commercial contacts between the kingdom of Buganda and the East African coast long before Kabaka Suna's reign, Sir Apolo Kaggwa in his famous book *Basekabaka be Buganda* claims that some trade goods from the coast such as cotton cloth, copper wires, cowrie shells reached Buganda and were used during the reign of kabaka Ssemakokiro who died in 1794, there are no indications of Islamic influence at that period.¹² The kingdom of Buganda became exposed to Islam both through extensive contacts with the coast and the presence of a small number of Muslim merchants at the royal court who had started to arrive in the country from the 1840s. Some direct contacts with Muslim merchants trading in ivory and slaves were initially established and maintained in the 1840s. From the available sources it is impossible to ascertain the exact date of the arrival of the first Arab and Swahili traders into the kingdom or their number. According to Sir John Gray, the first Arab to reach Buganda was Shaykh Ahmed bin Ibrahim, a Wahabi who visited Buganda in 1844, but this claim is not supported

¹⁰ INSOLL, T. *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*, p. 395.

¹¹ ROWE, J. A. *Myth, Memoir and Moral Admonition: Luganda Historical Writing, 1893 – 1969*. In *The Uganda Journal*, 1969, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 17–40.

¹² Sir KAGGWA, A. *Ekitabo Kya Basekabaka be Buganda [The Kings of Buganda]*, p. 88. See also KASOZI, A. B. *The Spread of Islam in Uganda*, pp. 13–32; also KASOZI, A. B. *The Spread of Islam in Uganda*. 45 pp., map.

by substantial evidence.¹³ Most Luganda sources authored by Ham Mukasa, Apolo Kaggwa, Prince Ggomotoka, Ssekimwanyi or Ali Kkulumba had put the date in or shortly after 1850 when Zanzibari traders tried to open up their sphere of interests as far as Buganda. As on the coast in the past, Islam in Buganda tended to spread slowly and gradually. Ahmed bin Ibrahim is said to have taught Suna about Islam and Suna is said to have learned several chapters of the Qu'ran by heart.¹⁴ According to Oded, manuscript pages from the Qu'ran were discovered in Suna's house after his death.¹⁵ The northern part of present day Uganda, Bunyoro and Acholi-Lango area, had contact with Islam from the north since perhaps as early as 1850, but the Islamic impact on Buganda from the Sudan and Egypt was limited. Zanzibar and the East coast were the main centres of Islamic influence. The process of the Islamisation of the kingdom of Buganda cannot be seen as a straightforward process of 'conversion' from one religion to another, from the ancient Kiganda religion to the orthodox Islamic religion, or an abrupt rejection of the old religion and the adoption of a new one. The process of Islamisation of Buganda was a slow one and gained momentum during the reign of Kabaka Suna's son and successor Mutesa (1856 – 1884) who encouraged trade with Zanzibaris, especially after 1866. At about the same time he decided to adopt Islam, even though he refused to be circumcised. Apolo Kaggwa in his *Basekabaka* states that kabaka Mutesa began to fast during the month of Ramadan for the first time at Nnakawa in 1867 and continued to observe Ramadan for ten consecutive years.¹⁶ He claimed to have converted to Islam and continued to observe Ramadan for over ten years, yet continued to practise the traditional Kiganda religion as well, or returned to it at the time of great affliction or crisis.

A by-product of the presence of Kiswahili-speaking coastal merchants in Buganda was the diffusion of new languages Arabic, Kiswahili and literacy. Literacy entered the kingdom of Buganda in the late 1860s as part of the new religion Islam and the Holy Book Qur'an and for nearly a decade instruction in Islam and Arabic was progressing and flourishing at the royal court. Literacy

¹³ GRAY, Sir J. Sheik Ahmed bin Ibrahim, the first Arab to reach Buganda. In *The Uganda Journal*, 1947, Vol. XI., No.1, pp. 80–97.

¹⁴ See SPERLING, D. C. The Coastal Hinterland and Interior of East Africa, p. 21.

¹⁵ ODED, A. Islam in Uganda. Islamization through a Centralized State in Pre-Colonial Africa, pp. 49–51.

¹⁶ See KAGGWA, A. *Basekabaka be Buganda*, [Kings of Buganda] p. 124, 130. On the spread of Islam also see MUKASA, H. 'Some Notes on the Reign of Mutesa'. In *Uganda Journal*, 1934, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 60–70; MUKASA, H. 'Simudda Nyuma', [Go Forward]. MITI, J. K. *Ebyafayo bya Buganda, Bunyoro, Busoga*, [A Short History of Buganda, Bunyoro, Busoga Ankole and Toro]; GRAY, Sir J. 'Mutesa of Buganda'. In *Uganda Journal*, 1934, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1934, pp. 22–49.

attracted local people and enhanced the popularity of Islam. Reading and writing in Arabic and Kiswahili introduced by the Arabs and Swahili traders was no doubt the most important skill connected with the spread of Islam.¹⁷ Mutesa himself learnt to read and write Arabic and Kiswahili, adopted Arab dress and manners, started to read the Qur'an and maintained diplomatic relations with the Sultan of Zanzibar. He was especially fond of Arabic poetry and could converse fluently in Arabic with European visitors: Charles Chaillé-Long in 1874, Emin Pasha in 1876 or the Church Missionary Society (hereinafter referred to as CMS) missionaries Felkin and O'Flaherty. Mutesa encouraged young chiefs and pages of the royal palace to join him in learning Arabic and the Arabic script. Some pages, chiefs and dignitaries at court became interested in the teachings of Islam and learnt to read and write. Many future leading Christian chiefs, James Miti, Henry Wright Duta Kitakule or Stanislaus Mugwanya were among those Baganda who joined Mutesa and made good progress "reading Islam" *okusoma ekisiramu*, *okusoma* meaning both to read and to pray. The above mentioned Baganda chiefs were reputed to have been excellent Arabic scholars.

Islam's contribution to education and intellectual development through Arabic alphabetisation and literacy was accompanied by the spread of Kiswahili and Arabic languages among the Baganda. During the 1870s the knowledge of Arabic script and of the Arabic and Kiswahili languages spread among the court élite who started to use literacy in everyday life. Literacy became part of Buganda diplomacy. As the CMS missionary R. W. Felkin commented in his book, due to literacy in Arabic, many of the chiefs and commanders of military troops were constantly sending reports to the Kabaka Mutesa.¹⁸ Literacy was inextricably connected with Islam and Christianity, both religions of the Book because it enabled converts to read their Holy Books, the Qur'an and the Bible. As has been mentioned, the concept of reading- *okusoma* became a synonym for the adoption of the new religion, Islam, and later on Christianity. The converts were called 'readers'. The court became Islamised, mosques were built by chiefs and a number of future leading Christian converts, who were young pages at this time, adopted Islam and became literate in Arabic and Kiswahili. Between 1867 and 1875, the impact of Islamisation began to be felt not only at

¹⁷ The effects of contacts with Muslim traders in Buganda were most visible in the introduction of many new skills and crafts, in the cultivation of new crops, fruits and vegetables, such as wheat, rice, tomatoes, pomegranates, guava, onions, tomatoes, papaws and papayas, of spices, sugar, coffee, tobacco, soap, perfumes and woven grass-mat manufacture, in the use of cloth which was under the reign of kabaka Mutesa rapidly replacing barkcloth, the adoption of the gown or garments and many other goods or changes in some royal rituals, namely in royal burial customs.

¹⁸ WILSON, C. T., FELKIN, R. W. Uganda and the Egyptian Sudan 1882, Vol. 2, p. 19.

the court, but in the countryside as well and for a time Islam was proclaimed the state religion of Buganda and Islamic observance made compulsory throughout the kingdom.¹⁹

At the time of the visit of the famous traveller and explorer Henry Morton Stanley in the country in 1875, the initial process of Islamisation in Buganda reached a climax, Islam's position was strong and after the arrival of Christianity into the country became its formidable rival. The famous traveller and explorer Henry Morton Stanley, who visited Buganda in 1875, was the first to teach Mutesa about Christianity and boasted that he had undermined the position of Islam in the kingdom. Stanley was on a trans-continental expedition across East and Central Africa to follow up the explorations of David Livingstone, J. H. Speke, and Samuel Baker and resolve some geographical questions. During his journey of exploration, sponsored by two newspapers, the *New York Herald* and London's *Daily Telegraph*, he visited the kabaka Mutesa of Buganda. Impressed by what he saw in Buganda, the potential of the country and its people, Stanley, journalist, traveller and explorer, turned into a lay missionary who used his stay at the court to undermine the position of Islam in the kingdom of Buganda and to "explain the Bible and the Christian religion to the king".²⁰ Kabaka Mutesa was at that time anxious to widen his country's diplomatic, political and commercial contacts and impressed by the technological superiority of the white men,²¹ he was ready to welcome them in his country in the hope that they would get him the much desired military and technical assets associated with European culture and also help him to understand the wider world that was increasingly impinging upon his country and threatening its independence.

Stanley came to be a forerunner of the missionaries by being the first to teach Mutesa about Christianity and by producing a little book of biblical selections in Kiswahili. He had some parts of the Bible translated into Kiswahili and the Ten Commandments in Arabic were written on a board for Kabaka Mutesa's

¹⁹ Apart from the already quoted sources, such as KASOZI, A. B. *The Spread of Islam in Uganda, The Penetration of Islam into Buganda*, pp. 13–32; ODED, A. *Islam in Uganda, Part One*, pp. 1–142; see White Fathers Archives (WFA), P 200/14, KING, N., KASOZI, A., ODED, A. *Islam and the Confluence of Religions in Uganda 1840 – 1966*, p. 144; CONSTANTIN, F. 'L'islam en Ouganda' In PRUNIER, G., CALAS, B. (eds.). *L'Ouganda contemporain*, pp. 209–220.

²⁰ When describing his visit to the kingdom of Buganda in April 1875 Stanley boasted to have succeeded in his task. STANLEY, H. M. *Through the Dark Continent*. Vol. I., p. 164; STANLEY, H. M. *Through the Dark Continent*. Vol. II., pp. 193–195.

²¹ Stanley made a favourable impression on kabaka Mutesa by actively assisting him in a military campaign against the Bavuma islanders.

daily perusal.²² Together with his African servant and interpreter who Stanley had engaged for the journey to the Great Lakes, a slave from Nyasaland, Dallington Maftaa Scopion, who was freed in Zanzibar, then educated and baptised by the Universities' Mission to Central Africa, and who was well versed in Kiswahili, they prepared a booklet comprising some parts of the Bible translated into this East African lingua franca written down in Arabic script. Maftaa together with Masudi the Arab wrote everything down in Arabic script what Dallington Maftaa had read and translated from the Bible so that the Kabaka and some dignitaries at the royal court could read it. Stanley and Maftaa produced quite a large number of copies of this booklet. "Islam may be said to have prepared the way here," admitted Mackay, one of the first missionaries to Buganda and a bitter enemy of Islam,²³ who after his arrival in Buganda was astonished to find so many copies of the booklet of Biblical texts written in Kiswahili in the Arabic script prepared by Stanley and his scribe Dallington Maftaa still around.²⁴

Christian Missions in Buganda and Bunyoro, the Spread of Literacy and the Rise of Luganda and Runyoro Historiographies

In 1877 the first members of the Anglican Church Missionary Society arrived to be followed two years later, in 1879, by the Roman Catholic White Fathers. When literacy was introduced into the kingdom of Buganda, it was confined to speakers of Arabic and Kiswahili. Here as in many other parts of Africa, the advance of Islam, of Arabic, the language of the Qur'an and literacy in the Arabic script had preceded the introduction of Christianity and of the Latin script. Literacy in Arabic and Kiswahili in the Arabic script and the knowledge of these languages paved the way for Christian missions and their work. After their coming into the kingdom of Buganda, missionaries of both denominations used Kiswahili as a medium of instruction and its knowledge in Buganda no doubt helped them in the work of evangelisation. Christian missionaries had at their disposal some biblical texts in Kiswahili. Roman Catholics had at first used biblical texts translated into Kiswahili by the Holy Ghost Fathers (Spiritans), while CMS missionaries had at their disposal some Kiswahili translations prepared by early Protestant missionaries on the island of Zanzibar

²² STANLEY, H. M. *Through the Dark Continent*. Vol. 1, p. 164; STANLEY, H. M. *Through the Dark Continent*, Vol. 2, pp. 193–195.

²³ Mackay to CMS, 26.12, 1878. *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, October 1879, p. 609.

²⁴ SUNDKLER, B., STEED, Ch. *A History of the Church in Africa*, p. 570.

and on the East African coast.²⁵ But, the position of Kiswahili in Buganda was from the very outset in the eyes of both missions jeopardised by its association with Islam, a rival religion they wanted to eradicate, and soon both missions strove to introduce Luganda as a medium of instruction arguing that the Christian message could be properly understood only if it were taught in the mother tongue.²⁶ From the very start of their presence in Buganda and later on in the rest of Uganda, both Christian missions, paid great attention to the teaching of literacy. While Islam was associated with the introduction of written languages Arabic and Kiswahili and the promotion of literacy in these languages, Christianity promoted literacy in Latin script in local African languages transformed by translations of the Holy Book and other religious and non-religious texts into written languages.

The efforts of both missions met with an enthusiastic response. Reading became so popular in Buganda that the booklets prepared by missionaries of both denominations were circulated in tens of thousands.²⁷ Early missionaries in Uganda left vivid accounts of Baganda “readers” drifting from one mission station, one set of instruction to another, often frequenting both mission stations as well as the Zanzibari camp at Lungujja, and of Baganda lads sitting on the hay-covered floor in the royal palace reading or scribbling on boards or any scrap of paper they could pick up and, lacking paper, sometimes even practising with a stick or just their own fingers in the dust of the royal courtyard.²⁸ The Baganda were introduced to written literature first through Islam and some years later through Christian propaganda. Christian missionaries provided an alternative literacy and belief system. The Qu’ran was communicated to them in sometimes incomprehensible Arabic while the very first books in their own language Luganda were produced to advance the Christian cause.

²⁵ VILHANOVÁ-PAWLIKOVÁ, V. Biblical Translations of Early Missionaries in East and Central Africa. Translations into Swahili. In *Asian and African Studies*, 2006, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 80–89.

²⁶ VILHANOVÁ-PAWLIKOVÁ, V. Biblical Translations of Early Missionaries in East and Central Africa. Translations into Luganda. In *Asian and African Studies*, 2006, Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 198–210.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 205.

²⁸ MULLINS, J. D. *The Wonderful Story of Uganda*. London, C.M.S. 1904 includes early memoirs of a leading Protestant convert Hamu Mukasa. See also MACKAY to Lang, 29 September, 1885, C.M.S. Archives, G3A6/02, and A. M. Mackay, *op. cit.*, pp. 138–140; TOURIGNY, Y. *So abundant a harvest: the Catholic Church in Uganda 1879 – 1979*, pp. 32–49.

As soon as the Baganda learned to read and write, they were keen to practise it.²⁹ Many semi-legible notes containing news of anything said or done at the court have been preserved in both the C.M.S. archives in Birmingham and the White Fathers' archives in Rome, as well as in the Lugard Papers at Rhodes House, Oxford, and in other private papers. It cannot be doubted that this habit of writing anonymous letters and of conveying political secrets by writing was one of the contributing causes of Kabaka Mwanga's persecution of Christians in 1886. As substantial collection of Baganda correspondence prove, later on during the civil wars of 1888 to 1892, the Baganda were becoming more and more skilled in accurately conveying their thoughts on paper and supplementing verbal reports with written communications. Imitating the Europeans and adopting their ways and habits, the Baganda became genuine products of the Victorian age with its passion for recording, corresponding and writing diaries.³⁰

The first book originally written in Luganda ever to be published was Sir Apolo Kagawa's *Basekabaka be Buganda* or Kings of Buganda, first printed in 1901. The famous book of history is probably the best known book in Luganda and has been used by many scholars working on Buganda history.³¹ Apolo Kagawa was a prolific author, though there were others of a similar cast. The interest that Sir Apolo Kagawa took in writing, and the importance he attached to preserving the written word were not exceptional and were shared by most of his contemporaries. Dr. Rowe's picture of Hamu Mukasa and his house with large glass-fronted bookcases, all the drawers, cupboards and boxes stuffed and crammed with diaries, journals, letter-books, ledgers, maps and assorted records and documents, proves that the Baganda did like to write.³² This is also clearly

²⁹ Already in 1891 Lugard reported that coloured cloth, beads and wire were useless as trade goods in Buganda. "They want paper, notebooks and writing materials." See LUGARD to Admin. Gen. IBEA Co., 13.Aug. 1891, In *Africa*, 1892, No. 4, p. 124.

³⁰ ROWE, J. A. The Purge of Christians at Mwanga's Court. In *Journal of African History*, 1964, Vol. V., p. 55-72; ROWE, J. A. Myth, Memoir and Moral Admonition: Luganda Historical Writing, 1893 - 1969. In *Uganda Journal*, 1969, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 1-40.

³¹ The original edition of *Basekabaka be Buganda*, printed in England in 1901 and numbering some 500 copies, was put on sale in Uganda in 1902 at 5 rupees per copy. The price was soon reduced to three rupees. Already by 1912 a second edition containing some new material appeared, including an account of the return of Kabaka Mwanga's body from the Seychelles, where he had died in 1903 in exile. This was followed in 1927 with a third edition also containing new additional sections on some neighbouring countries, such as Bunyoro, Ankole and Toro. This last edition was reprinted in 1953 by the Uganda Bookshop and sold out within a few years. ROWE, J. A. Myth, Memoir and Moral Admonition, p. 17-21.

³² ROWE, J. A. Myth, Memoir and Moral Admonition, p. 17-21.

demonstrated by an ever-growing volume of Luganda written sources, both published and unpublished which have recently been coming to light. The wealth of family papers, for example, has only begun to be explored.³³

Most Baganda of Sir Apolo Kaggwa's generation had acquired literacy after enduring many hardships sometimes incurring physical risk in so doing.³⁴ The civil succession wars of 1888 – 1892 saw the triumph of the Christian converts. The Protestant-Catholic coalition had gained sole control over the political hierarchy and those who were not in communion with them or with the recognised Muslim minority, had no other alternative but to join one of the religious parties.³⁵ Victorious Christians swept all the unsuccessful from their posts. Christianity and literacy, for these two things were inseparably connected, came to be viewed as the key to social and political advancement.³⁶

The turn of the century became the beginning of a busy period in Luganda historical writing, when a number of Kaggwa's contemporaries, both Christian and Muslim, started to write to complement Kaggwa's books, correct him, provide some new information or reassess the historical events from their point of view. Kaggwa seems to have started at an early date to record the turbulent events of the 1880s and 1890s. According to R. Ashe of the C. M. S. mission, already by 1894 Kaggwa had written a tiny booklet on *The Wars of Buganda (Entalo Za Buganda)*, which is, however, no longer extant. Starting with *Basekabaka be Buganda* in 1901, Kaggwa's other historical writings followed: *Ekitabo kye Empisa Za Baganda (The Book of the Traditions and Customs of the Baganda)*, first published in 1905; *Ekitabo Ky'Ebika bya Abaganda (The Book of the Clans of the Baganda)*, published in 1908; and the book of the

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ ROWE, J. A. The Purge of Christians at Mwanga's Court, also ROWE, J. A. Baganda Chiefs who Survived Kabaka Mwanga's Purge of 1886. A paper obtainable from Makerere Institute of Social Research. Kampala, date unknown.

³⁵ LOW, D. A. Religion and Society in Buganda, 1875 – 1900. In *East African Studies*, 1957, No. 8, p. 16–18; LOW, D. A. Uganda and the British, 1862 – 1900, an unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Oxford, Exeter College 1957.

³⁶ ROSCOE, J. Rev. KAGGWA A. Katikiro and Regent of Uganda In *Church Missionary Gleaner*, July 1, 1902, p. 108. Kaggwa himself described how at first he alone adopted new customs and work habits, beginning on 31st January 1890, with his purchase of a watch. Others laughed at him at first, but later followed him. He went on to reform the slopshod procedure of the *lukiiko*, purchased a horse (September 1902); built a two-storey brick house (July 1894); bought a kerosene lamp (January 1896); and a bicycle (1898) and began writing his first book. In 1894, he also adopted the custom of eating while seated at a table instead of upon mats spread on the floor, and of drinking tea instead of banana beer. Quoted from FALLERS L. A. Social Mobility, Traditional and Modern. In FALLERS, L. A. (ed.). *The King's Men, Leadership and Status in Buganda on the Eve of Independence*, p. 183.

Grasshopper clan, *Ekitabo Kya Kika Kye Nsenene*, published in 1904. The latter was the first production on a small printing press which was presented to the *katikkiro* by the Foreign Office when Kaggwa and Mukasa visited England for Edward VII's coronation in 1902. Besides these major historical writings, in 1902 Kaggwa produced his first edition of *Baganda Fables (Engero za Baganda)*, reprinted by Sheldon Press in 1920.³⁷

Kaggwa's major historical works were written between 1900 – 1912, some thirty years after the Luganda language had been committed to writing. After 1912 Kaggwa stopped writing, except for a few occasional articles he contributed to the *Ebifa*, a C.M.S. newspaper. The three most outstanding historical works, *Basekabaka be Buganda*, *Ekitabo Kye Empisa za Baganda* and *Ekitabo Ky' Ebika bya Abaganda*, supplement each other and together cover every aspect of Kiganda history society, dynastic, military, political, cultural and social. Kaggwa's sources were, as in contemporary historical fieldwork, oral traditions. Kaggwa acted as a collector of traditions for the missionary John Roscoe. The information he had collected for Roscoe in Luganda he wrote down and the notes provided the basis for his own writings. As Dr. Kiwanuka suggested, it seems that Kaggwa was prompted to write in Luganda what John Roscoe was already writing in English.³⁸

As has been mentioned, the interest that Sir Apolo Kaggwa took in recording the past and the importance he attached to preserving the written word were not exceptional, they were shared and followed by a number of his contemporaries, Baganda amateur historians, who wrote to complement Kaggwa's books, correct him or provide new information. The literary atmosphere provided by the mission stations and the publication of Apolo Kaggwa's works acted as a stimulus to Luganda historical as well as non-historical writing. Kaggwa was a leading Protestant and his interpretation of history provoked a number of counter-studies by Catholic and Muslim Baganda.³⁹ They had consulted a wide variety of oral informants for the times past and, recalling the days of their

³⁷ PAWLIKOVÁ, V. *Sir Apolo Kaggwa and the Origins of Luganda Literature*. In *Asian and African Studies*, 1975, XI., pp. 197–203.

³⁸ KAGGWA, Sir. A. *The Kings of Buganda*, p. 256; were translated and edited by M. S. M. Kiwanuka and published by East African Publishing House, Nairobi – Dar es Salaam – Kampala, in 1971 as the first volume in a new series of historical texts of Eastern and Central Africa. The part of *Basekabaka* covering the colonial period was, however, skipped from this publication ROSCOE, J. *The Baganda. An Account of their Native Customs and Beliefs*.

³⁹ PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ, V. *The Challenge of Writing a History: Early Luganda Historical Writing and Buganda's Ekitiibwa and Position in Colonial Uganda*. In PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ, V., MOUMOUNI, S. (Eds.). *Voices of Africa's Pasts*, pp. 145–160.

youth, they were able to contribute much from their own first hand experience. Since 1911, when the White Fathers first published their newspaper *Munno*, the Baganda have been contributing historical articles in that paper as well as in *Ebifa*, a C. M. S. newspaper. Alifunsi Aliwali, who acted as a collector of oral traditions for Bishop Gorju,⁴⁰ has been one outstanding contributor to the missionary newspaper *Munno*. From among works by other Baganda historians, the following deserve to be mentioned here: Prince Ggomotoka's massive seven volume hand written history of Buganda entitled appropriately *Makula (Treasure)*,⁴¹ John Miti's unpublished *Short History of Buganda (Ebyafayo bya Buganda)*; Hamu Mukasa's three volumes of historical narrative and personal memoirs entitled *Simuda Nyuma (Don't Turn Back)* and the Rev. Bartalomayo Zimbe's *Buganda ne Kabaka (Buganda and Kabaka)* published on the Gambuze Press in 1938.⁴² As Dr. Rowe has pointed out, there seems to have evolved a literary tradition in Buganda that ageing prominent Baganda of the turn of the century generation should set their pens to paper to revive their generation's *ekitiibwa* (prestige or honour), to recount their lives or expound their principles so that others may profit by their example.⁴³ Many early hand-written Luganda historical texts kept in the Makerere University Library have never been translated and published, some early editions were published only in the original African language and are now almost impossible to get hold of. Works authored by participants and eye witnesses of historical events, namely John Miti or, Rev. Bartolomayo Zimbe are the best available sources on the last two turbulent decades of the nineteenth century history of Buganda. Hamu Mukasa's monumental work entitled *Simuda Nyuma (Don't Turn Back)*, three volumes of historical narrative and personal memoirs also dedicated to the 1880s and 1890s could also be mentioned. An example of African historical texts awaiting translation and publication is also the famous book *Basekabaka*

⁴⁰ GORJU, J. L. *Entre le Victoria, l' Albert et l' Edouard*.

⁴¹ Prince Ggomotoka was the former *ssabalangira* (the head of princes). He began his book in 1920 as the history of the Baganda royal family. Two decades later, at the time of his death, it was not quite finished.

⁴² The first volume of Mukasa's *Simuda Nyuma (Go Forward)*, subtitled "*Ebiro by Mutesa*" (*The Reign of Mutesa*), was published in London in 1938 by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. The second volume *Ebya Mwangwa (That of Mwangwa)* appeared in 1942 and the third volume allegedly sent to Bishop Willis in England, who was to have seen it through publication, was lost. Dr. Rowe discovered a carbon copy of the lost volume at Kwata Mpola House, the home of the late Hamu Mukasa, in March 1964. For details see his article, *Myth, Memoir and Moral Admonition*, op.cit. An English translation of Miti's manuscript was also supposedly sent to Bishop Willis in England at about the same time as Mukasa's lost volume. See *ibid*.

⁴³ For the definition of the term *ekitiibwa* see ILIFFE, J. Honour in African History, pp. 167–168.

be Buganda by Sir Apolo Kaggwa, the first half of which up to the death of kabaka Mutesa in 1884 was translated into English, edited and published as *The Kings of Buganda* by M.S.M. Semakula Kiwanuka in the course of writing his University of London PhD. dissertation.⁴⁴

The Baganda made good use of access to literacy and turned the newly acquired skill into a useful tool for their own and their country's advancement. The interpretation of the past led to the rise of a rich historiographical tradition and became a variable in making and influencing colonial politics and the attitude of the colonial administration to different religio-political groups or individuals.⁴⁵ For a number of reasons Baganda Catholic historiography produced to counter Kaggwa's version of events is less rich than the historiography written by the Protestant Baganda and historical writings in Luganda by Muslim Baganda authors are even more sparse. To quote John Rowe, "by the 1920s two schools of history had emerged – a Protestant school of interpretation, the established school – and a Catholic revisionist school. In the 1930s they were joined (to no one's surprise) by an emergent Muslim school of historiography with its own interpretations and canons of selectivity".⁴⁶ The reason for this later start of Muslim historiography may have been the minority status of Baganda Muslims in Buganda, many of whom after their defeat in 1893 scattered to neighbouring countries. After the defeat of the Muslim faction in the civil wars, the crush of the anti-British rebellion in 1899 and especially after 1900 and the signing of the Uganda Agreement, the religion of the cross triumphed over the religion of the crescent and Muslims fell into third place behind the two Christian groupings, Protestant and Catholic. Islam became an expression of an alternative culture in a colonial society dominated by European or Western Christian culture and civilisation. Islamic identity differentiated Muslims culturally from their colonial masters. Adoption of Islam by new

⁴⁴ It was published by the East African Publishing House in Nairobi in 1971, the second half has only been published in Luganda. The first English translation of *Basekabaka* was made by Simon Musoke at the East African Institute of Social Research in the early 1950s. In the late 1960s there was a handwritten English translation kept in the Makerere University library.

⁴⁵ PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ, V. The Challenge of Writing a History: Early Luganda Historical Writing and Buganda's Ekitiibwa and Position in Colonial Uganda PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ, V., MOUMOUNI, S. (eds.). *Voices of Africa's Pasts*, p. 155. Twaddle, M.: The Bible, the Qur'an and Political Competition in Uganda. In KASTEFELT, N. (ed.). *Scriptural Politics. The Bible and the Koran as Political Models in the Middle East and Africa*, pp. 139–154.

⁴⁶ ROWE, J. A. Progress and a sense of identity, pp. 23–34. Also his *Myth, Memoir, and Moral Admonition*, op. cit. and TWADDLE, M. On Ganda Historiography. In *History in Africa. A Journal of Method*. 1974, Vol. I., pp. 85–100, pp. 86–88.

converts could symbolise a search for a new identity owing no intellectual inspiration to European presence, Islamic conversion could also become an expression of an anti-colonial stance and resistance to European dominance and oppressive colonial regime.

In their historical writings, *Ebyafayo Ebitonotono Kudini Ye Kiyisiramumu Okuyingira mu Buganda* (A Short History of the Coming of the Muslim Religion to Buganda) by Haji Ssekinwanyi, *Ebyafayo bye Ntaloze Ddini mu Buganda* (A History of the Wars of Religion in Buganda) by Abdul Nyzani and *Ekitabo k' Ebyafayo Ebyantalo za Kabaka Mwanga, Kiwewa ne Kalema* (An Introduction to the History of the Wars of Kings Mwanga, Kiwewa and Kalema) by Bakale Mukasa bin Mayanja, to mention just a few, Baganda Muslim authors tried to rewrite the history of the turbulent period, correct mistakes and false interpretations on the part of Baganda Christian historians and argue their own views. Historical accounts, memoirs and participation histories written by Muslims present a corrective Muslim version of the wars of religion in Buganda, of the history of the introduction of Islam into the Lacustrine region or of the Buganda-Bunyoro wars and the British colonial conquest and thus serve as a useful counterbalance to dominant Protestant and Catholic historiographies.

Historical works also started to be written in neighbouring Bunyoro. The two kings, Kabaka Mwanga of Buganda and Omukama Kabarega of Bunyoro, waging a long drawn out guerrilla war, were captured by British troops on 9 April 1899 and deported first to Kisimayu and later to the Seychelles.⁴⁷ The two defeated and deposed African rulers shared their exile on Mahé, the largest of the Seychelles Islands, with Agyeman Prempeh, the ex-king of the Asante Kingdom. During their long banishment the rulers tried to come to terms with the world of new ideas, modernisation, Christianity and education. As the government of the Seychelles reported to London in November 1901: "Ex-king Prempeh and the Queen Mother have been for some time regular attendants at the Anglican Church, and the spectacle of Prempeh, the Queen Mother and the two ex-kings of Uganda, Mwanga and Kabarega, sitting side by side in church is not devoid of interest."⁴⁸ Throughout the long period of their exile, both rulers, Prempeh and his co-prisoner Kabarega, converted to Christianity and learned to speak, read, and write in English, and also saw to it that any member of their entourage who wanted baptism received it.⁴⁹ They also insisted that free education would be provided, especially to children.

⁴⁷ PAWLIKOVÁ-VILHANOVÁ, V. History of Anticolonial Resistance and Protest in The Kingdoms of Buganda and Bunyoro, 1862 – 1899, pp. 226–272.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Otumfuo, Nana Agyeman Prempeh I. The History of Ashanti Kings and the whole country itself and other writings. Chapter 2, p. 28.

⁴⁹ Kabaka Mwanga died in 1903.

Omukama Kabarega, who during his long exile became literate, also became interested in preserving for posterity some information on the kingdom of Bunyoro before its loss of independence. The information was recorded and published by one of his sons, Tito Winyi, who spent the years between 1910 and 1920 in the Seychelles acting as private secretary to his father Omukama Kabarega. Kabarega was in 1923 allowed to return to Uganda, but died at Jinja while on his way back to his kingdom. Tito Winyi succeeded to the throne of Bunyoro as Omukama after the sudden death of his half-brother Duhaga on 30 March 1924. Between 1935 and 1937 Sir Tito Winyi published in the Uganda Journal a series of articles both in Runyoro and English using the initials K.W. (Kabarega – Winyi) to indicate that it was a joint venture of his father and himself.⁵⁰

Runyoro historical writings are not so abundant. Petero Bikunya's *Ky'Abakama ba Bunyoro Kitara*, a short history of Bunyoro, published in 1927 could be mentioned. Twenty years later, a detailed history of Bunyoro Kitara written in Runyoro, *Abakama ba Bunyoro-Kitara*, from the pen of a Munyoro historian John Nyakatura, appeared. Since this early edition originally published in Canada was very difficult to obtain, Godfrey Uzoigwe prepared and published in 1973 a new, English edition.⁵¹

The rich corpus of historical texts in Luganda and to a lesser extent in Runyoro present the Baganda and Banyoro perceptions of the past of the two kingdoms and by revealing the nature of the Baganda-British and Banyoro-British encounters from the their own, African point of view, can serve as a useful balance to other historical sources, especially the European ones.

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⁵⁰ K. W. The Kings of Bunyoro-Kitara. Part I. In *Uganda Journal*, 1935, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 155–160; K. W. The Kings of Bunyoro, Part II. In *Uganda Journal*, 1936, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 75–83; K. W. The Kings of Bunyoro-Kitara, Part III. In *Uganda Journal*, 1937, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 53–68.

⁵¹ Published as *Anatomy of an African Kingdom. A History of Bunyoro-Kitara*. 1973.

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