

PRE-COLONIAL CENTRALIZED AFRICAN STATES: S.5 CLASS.

THE BUGANDA KINGDOM;

Buganda kingdoms present the clearest case of a political system with much government that is an authoritative body performing a wide range of services headed by a single leader, the Kabaka.

The Baganda were fortunate in occupying one of the natural favorable districts in tropical Africa. Rainfall was regular and abundant, the soils were fertile and the staple food Bananas so easy to be produced that one old woman could produce enough to feed ten men. Cultivation among the Baganda was women's work. The men being left to develop their skills as craftsmen.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION;

Buganda had a centralized system of government. The Kabaka was the controller of everything; he was the head of government, commander in chief of the army and controller of land and finances. Few African rulers possessed such power as the Kabaka of Buganda. In other kingdoms the subordinates were great territorial lords with their armies, wealth and thus hard to be controlled. The Kabaka never suffered such frustrations, he could appoint, transfer, or even dismiss whenever he pleased. This high degree of royal power made it possible for the kingdom to enjoy a far greater equality of opportunity than was the case in most other African Kingdoms. A man of spirit could go far in the Kabaka's service.

The Kabaka had another advantage over many other African monarchs. He did not have to contend with the rivalry of ambitious kinsmen. There was no royal clan, for the princess took the clan of their mothers. Only the son of the Kabaka could succeed to the throne. When the Kabaka died his successor was chosen from among his sons by the Katikkiro [Prime Minister] and other important chiefs. The unsuccessful royal princesses were put to death. This cruel 19th century method spared Buganda from many would be civil conflicts as suffered by many kingdoms in the interlacustrine region and so contributed to the kingdom's predominance in the region.

The Kabaka personified the power of the Buganda nation. It was natural that he should behave in such an arbitrary manner. And if some innocent people suffered from his acts this was nothing when compared to the benefits rendered to his people. Moreover his caprices affected few of his subjects.

The Kabaka was the controller of everything; he could make and unmake a chief. He was the supreme head and had no rival. He was the finance controller, commander in chief of the army and chief justice. There was no heredity system of the chiefs. All the chiefs were appointed on

merit; their role was to maintain law and order, collect taxes, repairing roads and cater for public works. Underneath the Kabaka was a series of chiefs appointed by him and these did not have hereditary clans of their offices i.e. could not pass them to their sons. It was believed that a cattle herder could rise to a position of a Katikkiro if he showed merit. Of course the son of a chief had a far better chance to achieve a high position because of the wealth and status of his father.

Each district in Buganda had a Saza chief (county) under who served smaller chiefs and each had specific responsibilities. Since none had inherited his position, he could be transferred from one region to another if the Kabaka feared that he was plotting against him. The most important official in the Buganda political system was the Katikkiro (Prime Minister) to whom the other chiefs were responsible. The Katikkiro though could recommend a chief for his work or for his dismissal; he had no powers to dismiss a chief.

The Katikkiro, Saza chief and other clan heads formed a council (Olukiiko) in which the Kabaka was the Chairman. Its role was to advise the Kabaka on matters of common good and to act as a forum where by chiefs could come and pay their homage to the Kabaka. Working through this group of administrators the Kabaka was able to mobilize his subjects to accomplish public purposes determined by his government.

In addition to maintaining of law and order, raising armies to fight Buganda's wars and tax collection, the Kabaka's administration maintained and built an excellent system of roads. Every chief of lower status was expected to keep the roads between his home and his superior open and in good repair. This permitted good communication throughout the kingdom and fast mobilization of the army in terms of war.

MILITARY ORGANIZATION;

Buganda had a formidable standing army since war played so important a part in the life of Buganda. Indeed one historian has described the 19th century Buganda as an essentially a military machine, any change in the character of the army was bound to have a profound effect on the structure of Buganda society. Such a change begun to take place in the 1860s.

The traditional army consisted of militia bands of peasants using spears, bows and arrows and led by local chiefs. There was also a considerable navy made of large canoes and used for raiding on Lake Victoria. The introduction of firearms by Arabs traders enabled Kabaka Mutesa 1 to establish a praetorian guard, leaving the old fashioned militia to act like auxiliaries. Therefore the creation of a standing army increased the Kabaka's power. At the same time it became possible for young men with skills to rise to prominent positions with rapidity which their seniors working their way up the traditional hierarchy of royal offices, must have envied.

ECONOMIC ORGANIZATION;

The economy of Buganda depended on raiding, long distance trade, settled agriculture, tributes from tributary states and fishing. Buganda had enough fertile soils. The Baganda were agriculturalists whose staple food was Matooke (Bananas). Most of the cultivation was left to women while the men only cleared the land for cultivation. Buganda also cultivated yams, cassava sweet potatoes and cotton.

In commerce Buganda participated in long distance in which they exchanged for manufactured goods as cloths, beads, guns, necklaces and utensils. It is this lucrative trade as well as her control over the route to Bunyoro, her traditional enemy that enabled Buganda to become a regional power. Buganda traded with her neighbors especially Bunyoro exchanging bark cloth in return for iron implements like hoes, spears blades, and arrow heads and salt.

The 19th century Buganda was a highly acquisitive society. Wealth also came from war. Raids against her neighbors were conducted. Raiding mainly slaves, cattle and ivory. The women slaves served to swell the retinue of the Kabaka and his chiefs. Cattle could be used to reward the rank and file, and the men slaves and ivory were sold to the Zanzibar merchants who had reached Buganda in the 1840s bringing with them cotton cloths, and other luxuries but most importantly guns.

Also the people of Buganda were great fishermen especially those who came from Ssesse and Buvuma islands. Fish supplemented matooke and some was sold to their neighbors in smoked form. Some little pastoralist was practiced.

Tributes from tributary States was also part of the economy of the kingdom. These conquered states offered gifts to the Kabaka such that they were not raided. They included Busoga, Toro and some parts of Bunyoro kingdom. Tributes included; cattle, women and other items of trade.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION;

Buganda was a structured society with a super class known as the royal family (abalangira and abambejja) they owned land and property. The next class was that of the notables (abakungu and abataka) they had a privilege of acquiring land and they received monarchy favors, they were actually lords. There was a class of peasants (abakopi) had no chance of owning land and worked on the lands of the upper classes. The last class was that of the slaves (baddu) these were slaves or war captives.

In Buganda there was a possibility of social mobility. One could move from one class to another. To promote political unity in this stratified society, the Kabaka married from all the clans. This

meant that there was a high sense of unity and loyalty to the Kabaka from such clans. The Baganda were further united by a common language- Luganda, traditions, customs and norms.

The Kabaka was a spiritual leader of Buganda. He was considered semi divine and thought to have direct links with the ancestors. Buganda practiced polytheism. The chief form of believe was in 'Lubaale' culture which was centered on warship of the spirits of the dead ancestors. Different Balubaales were called on different issues e.g. lubaale Musoke for rain, lubaale Ddungu for hunting and Nagawonyi for drought etc.

There were special spirit mediums that would approach the spirit for the people and often sacrifices were offered to them. Gods and semi gods were widely worshipped such as Mukasa for Lake Victoria. Therefore religion acted as a source of unity and social harmony. Important religious functions were presided over by the Kabaka who was the religious head. On top of the religious rituals, the Baganda performed other elaborate ceremonies like the birth of twins, marriage and funeral rites. All these stood as symbols of unity.

The rest of the social institutions were in constant change as the Ganda society was receptive to new ideas a tradition that was both a blessing and a misfortune. A blessing in that it enabled Buganda to copy and adopt new ideas easily and a misfortune since it led to Buganda falling prey to the designs of Arabs Muslims, Christian missionaries and later colonialists.