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TORDAY, Emil

Les Banyamwezi, peuple de l'Afrique orientale / A banyamwezik, Kelet-Afrika népe

**Eredeti közlés /Original publication:**

*Man*, 1930, Vol. 30, Jun., 107–108. old.

**elektronikus újraközlés/Electronic republication:**

AHU MAGYAR AFRIKA–TUDÁS TÁR – 000.000.063

Dátum/Date: 2018. július / July

**filename:** torday\_1930\_recBosch

**Ezt az információt közlésre előkészítette**

**/This information prepared for publication by:**

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**Hivatkozás erre a dokumentumra/Cite this document:**

TORDAY, Emil: Les Banyamwezi, peuple de l'Afrique orientale / A banyamwezik, Kelet-Afrika népe, **pp. 1–5. old.**, No. 000.000.063, <http://afrikatudastar.hu>

**Eredeti forrás megtalálható/The original source is available:**

Közkönyvtárakban / In public libraries

Kulcsszavak/Key words

magyar Afrika-kutatás, könyvismertetés (P. Fr. Bösch: Les Banyamwezi, peuple de l'Afrique orientale, 1930)

African studies in Hungary, book review (P. Fr. Bösch: Les Banyamwezi, peuple de l'Afrique orientale, 1930)

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## LES BANYAMWEZI, PEUPLE DE L'AFRIQUE ORIENTALE

Africa, East: *Les Banyamwezi, Peuple de l'Afrique Orientale*, by the Rev. P. Fr. Bosch, 1930, Münster i/W., Anthropos, pp. xi + 552. Figs. 104. Price. Mk. 31.50.

TORDAY, Emil

*Man*, 1930, Vol. 30, Jun., 107–108. old.

The Banyamwezi, or as they are more commonly called, the Wanyamwezi, are one of those peoples who are mentioned in most books by East African travellers, but about whom our knowledge has always been extremely scanty.

Father Bösch deserves our warmest thanks for presenting us with this excellent description of their social life. Thanks to him, we can now definitely classify the Banyamwezi among the Eastern Bantu, as distinct from the Lacustrine peoples.

It is true that at one time they had fallen under Watusi domination and that most of their ruling houses still claim this noble origin, still the Bantu have in their traditional way absorbed their conquerors so thoroughly that the foreign influence has been entirely effaced. The former big Watusi kingdoms have split up into an enormous number of petty chieftainships and the former overlords, though still recognized on such solemn occasions as the investiture of a new "king," frequently find their actual domain reduced to a single village.

In parts of the country we find matrilineal, in others, patrilineal succession, but on the whole, while descent in worldly matters is mainly matriarchal, in spiritual affairs, it is the male line which prevails.

A considerable part of the book is devoted to the study of the people's religion. Monotheism in a vague form is limited to lip service to a deity who enjoys a great number of names (the author quotes fifty-five), among which we find *Mulungu*, or *Muumgu*, a word which

the author derives from *kulunga*, meaning "the perfect one"; but the term *Likube*, "he who is" is the one commonly used. Ancestor worship, closely linked with totemism, is the predominating factor in the life of the Banyamwezi.

Though this applies specially to totemism as it is generally understood, the learned author gives to this word as wide an interpretation as we find it in Father Trilles's study of the Fan, and in Father Henry's book on the Bambara. He attributes the origin of the totem to the metempsychosis of the manes, into certain animals, which are then worshipped in remembrance of the ancestor; but he also finds that animals can be specially consecrated totems as an act of gratitude, and that there are totems "by simple convention," which have no connection whatever with the ancestors.

But it is, as one would expect, only the first kind of totem of which the clans call themselves the children, though the attribution of descent from the totem is said to be alien to the natives' mind. A person is honoured by a special salute called *lugishi*, in which his ancestor is named; this may be the totem of either the male or female first ancestor of his father or his mother.

The totem animal enjoys the usual privileges though it is difficult to reconcile the statements that killing the king's totem can be atoned only by the shedding of blood with the recorded fact that a person killing a lion, the royal totem, "receives sometimes" from the king an honorific distinction "equivalent to the bestowal of nobility." In the *lugishi* salute, the name of the "family" can be substituted for the totem. Apparently, family, kindred, etc., are used as equivalents for clan, while the word "clan" is indifferently used for corporations, guilds, companies, etc.

It may be in consequence of this that Father Bösch falls into the same error concerning the Wanyamwezi as Father Colle (of the same congregation) fell into in his excellent book on the Baluba. His description of the initiation to the "clan" of magicians is obviously an account of the tribal or the real clan initiation common to all Bantu. There is seclusion, re-birth, perfectioning, ordeals, assumption of a new name, but there is an even more important factor pointing in that direction. "Magicians" are called by the Banyamwezi *bafumu* or *banganga*, but though all initiates become *bafumu* (not *banganga*, the common word for medicine man), only very few of them acquire by

further apprenticeship the secrets of magic, and these alone are allowed to perform magico-priestly functions.

The author is fully aware that among the neighbouring, and many other, peoples, *mfumu* is equivalent to chief, i.e., freeman, but, though he explicitly states that a very small number of *bafumu* actually acquire the art of magicians, throughout his book, he refers to these practitioners as *bafumu*, members of a corporation, which he calls a clan though he believes it to be constituted not by common descent, but by voluntary adhesions. These *bafumu* resemble closely to the *um-fumu* of Urundi mentioned in his dictionary by Father van der Borcht. Their priesthood, it should be noted, is hereditary subject to initiation.

Have we not to deal in both cases with freemen of the aboriginal clans who are, as in so many places in Africa, the only persons who can influence the supernatural powers of the country? That would make it intelligible why priests have to be chosen among them and at the same time why a fraction only of the population should undergo initiation considering that the Banyamwezi have absorbed, quite recently, immigrants from a great number of tribes and that these newcomers, belonging to none of the ancient clans, are still in a subordinate social and political position.

The painstaking work of Father Bösch fills a serious gap in our knowledge of Africa and is well fitted to rank in the excellent series which we owe to the enterprise of Anthropos.

E. TORDAY