

EAST AFRICAN STUDIESThe Mombasa Rebellion of 1631:

As already reported in the Research Review, Vol.2, No.2, Dr. G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville spent some time in Rome in July, 1965 searching for documents concerning the Mombasa Rebellion of 1631, but with only partial success.

This work has now been carried a stage further by the discovery of the processus, or formal application for the canonization, of the Africans and Portuguese who were martyred at Mombasa in 1631 for refusing to become Muslims, in the Vatican Archives. This discovery was made by the Very Revd. Fr. Damasus Trapp, O.S.A., after a prolonged search. The documents so far found amount to more than forty folios (or eighty pages) and provide what has never been available before - a day-by-day account of the rebellion. It is still not clear, however, why this process of canonization, which received the approval of Pope Urban VIII for its preliminary stages, was never completed. It is possible that some legal defect was discovered or that it was put a stop to by Portuguese court intrigues; for, although the greater number of the martyrs were Portuguese subjects, it is clear that the origin of the rebellion lay in the murder of the previous Sultan of Mombasa, which had been instigated by the then Portuguese governor.

It is hoped at a later stage to publish a complete account of this matter. It is worth noting in passing that the documents now available show that parts of the gatehouse of Fort Jesus, Mombasa, which hitherto had been thought to have been built after the rebellion, were already in existence when it took place.

Swahili Studies:

In collaboration with the Institute of Swahili Research, University College, Dar-es-Salaam, Mr. J.W.T. Allen has recently photographed more than 10,000 pages of hitherto unknown Swahili manuscripts on the Kenya coast. It is possible that at least an equivalent number, if not more, still remain to be photographed, and this estimate does not include

what is probably an equal number of Arabic documents written on the eastern African coast. In addition, Dr. Jean Martin, of the Sorbonne, has discovered in archives in Paris two important collections of letters and several local histories of former sultanates in the Comoro Islands. Work is now in progress with a view to the publication of a catalogue of all these new discoveries, which are of a far-reaching importance of which the extent cannot yet be assessed.

It is clear, however, that the historical material now available is far greater than was expected, and that it will now be possible to construct a detailed portrait of Swahili civilization for the whole of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Apart from prose works which include not only history but also law, religion, commercial transactions and family records, there is a very large body of poetry, epic, lyric, religious and political. Since 1885, when Swahili was spoken only along the eastern African coastal belt and islands, roughly from Mogadishu as far as the Comoro Islands, the language has spread inland and become the lingua franca of Tanzania (including Zanzibar and Pemba), Kenya, Uganda, Ruanda, Urundi, the eastern half of the Congo as well as pockets in Malawi and Zambia. The Swahili speaking area of Africa can thus now be said to be in possession of a substantial indigenous literature, a new bond of unity superadded to the already existing bond of language.

It is also clear that those Ghanaian students who were the first of their nation to begin Swahili studies in 1964, have an altogether unexpected and unique opportunity to participate in the future in a branch of African studies of which the possibilities are only just beginning to become plain. There are at present a number of Ghanaian students in their first and second years in the Department of Modern Languages who are studying Swahili, and it is very greatly to be hoped that some of them at least will be able to carry out advanced studies in the Institute of African Studies in years to come.

Tarikh al-Mazar'i:

Mr. Charles Darkwah, an M.A. student of the Institute, is now preparing an edition of the Tarikh al-Mazar'i, The History of the Mazrui Family, by Sheikh al-Amin al-Mazui, of which a translation has been made for him by Mr. Ritchie of Mombasa as a result of a grant of funds by the Institute. This history covers the history of this family from its origins in Oman and the Governors of Mombasa appointed from it between 1729 and 1827.

G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville.

"NSUAE" - THE AKAN OATH OF OFFICE

The "ntam" should be distinguished from "nse". Both are referred to as oath in English. Though it is quite correct to regard the Akan ntam as an oath, perhaps the nearest Akan equivalent of the English oath is the nse. An oath (in English) is "a solemn appeal to a god, or something holy or revered as a witness or sanction of the truth of a statement". Like "nse" in Akan society, the English oath is an appeal to the supernatural. In addition, however, to the nse - the appeal to the supernatural, Akan society has another type of oath, also an appeal - not to the supernatural, but to a personal, family or national tragedy. This is the ntam.

Among Akan societies, both types of oath are used and resorted to, depending on the occasion and the circumstances. Sanctions for abusing the nse, since it is an appeal to the gods and the supernatural, are imposed or expected to be imposed, by the supernatural. Society itself has no means of enforcing the nse. The ntam is different. It is an appeal to society itself, to its own past - and is therefore enforced by society. The nse is therefore an oath belonging to God, while the ntam is an oath belonging to Caesar.