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# Sacred Kingship: The African Case

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In this article the sacred kingship in Africa will be analyzed. In order to do so eight cases will be described in some detail, and after that by comparison of the data presented conclusions with regard to this phenomenon will be formulated. The descriptions are limited to traditional black Africa. Neither ancient Egypt, nor modern Islamic states are included. Central themes of research will be the assumed influence of the sacred king on fertility, his eventual regicide in case of bad harvests, and the occurrence of transgressions during his inauguration rituals.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Sacred kings were found all over the world; in incipient, as well as in typical early states, as was concluded in *The Early State* (Claessen and Skalnik 1978). One might even defend the position that in modern, democratic kingdoms as the Netherlands, the remnants of sacred kingship can still be found: King Willem Alexander rules 'by the grace of God', and when a large ship is launched it is the king, or the queen, who baptizes it, and wishes it 'good voyage'. Not wholly in jest the late Prince Claus once remarked that cutting the tapes was the royal 'core business'. Was this also a matter of royal protection? Here I will limit myself to sacred kingship in Africa. Efforts to cover this phenomenon world wide would demand a book, for sacred kings were found in Polynesia (Claessen 2000a), among the Mayas (Schele and Freidel 1990; Schele and Miller 1986), in imperial China (ter Haar 2009; de Heer 1986) and in many other places. In each of these cases a particular brand of sacred kingship was found. Within Africa again some limitation is

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needed. I will discuss only the traditional sacred kingship in Black Africa – thus leaving out modern polities, as well as ancient Egypt.

Many researchers used, and still use, the terms ‘kingdom’ and ‘kingship’. But, when does one speak of ‘kings’? This is a difficult question in anthropology, for the dividing line between a paramount chief and a little king is but thin. I will use the term king for those rulers, who at least ruled a polity that might qualify as an incipient, or a typical early state. I am aware that in the eyes of Vansina (1992a) the traditional African kingdoms did not qualify as states, but in my opinion the kingdoms I use for this analysis all fall within the criteria developed in *The Early State* (Claessen and Skalnik 1978: 640–642; Tymowski 2009, *passim*; Claessen and Hagesteijn 2012: 4–10).

A next question then is: when does one speak of ‘sacred’. On the basis of literature consulted previously (Claessen 1970, 1981, 2000b; Muller 1981), several characteristics of a sacred king can be identified, such as his influence on fertility – which might be seen as his ‘core business’ – the possibility of regicide, the ritual role of certain women, the necessity of transgressions during his inauguration, and so on. In this article these characteristics will be considered as hypotheses, which will be tested against the ethnographical data.

To make the necessary analyses and comparisons possible I will use short descriptions of eight kingdoms where once sacred kings ruled: West African Dahomey, East African Buganda, the north Kongo kingdom of Tio, the central Kongo kingdom of Kuba, West African Benin, the Jukun in the west Sahel, the Nilotic kingdom of the Shilluk, and Interlacustrine Bunyoro. In these ‘ethnographies’ the position of the king, his family, the inauguration rituals, the role of priests, courtiers and women in the life of the king, will be emphasized.

With the help of an analysis and the comparison of the data collected in the case studies the hypotheses will be tested, and some questions not mentioned before will be added.

## 2. ETHNOGRAPHIES

### a. Dahomey

The beginnings of the early state of Dahomey are lost in myths and legends. By careful analysis of these stories it is possible, however,

to construct a fairly trustworthy picture of its past. An effort was made by Marie-Madeleine Prévaudeau in her *Abomey-la mystique* (1936). She relates how long ago Aligbonoum, the daughter of the king of Tado (Sado), gets a child of a leopard, which was named Agasou (Prévaudeau 1936: 37). This Agasou took the kingdom of his grandfather after having killed him (*Ibid.*: 39). After that he goes away north and reaches Allada. His descendants founded Abomey (the capital of Dahomey) (*Ibid.*: 42). Here at a certain moment ruled Dako (Dakodonu), who is succeeded by his son Aho, better known as Wegbadja (1650–1680). This king is considered the founder of Dahomey. Le Herissé, in *l'Ancien royaume du Dahomey* (1911), presents a longer and more detailed version of this story. He begins his expose in Allada, where descendants of Agasou, the Agasouvi, then live (Le Herissé 1911: 275). Between the Agasouvi brothers a quarrel arises and they separate. One of them becomes the founder of Abomey; his group is called the Aladahonu. Dogbari (also known as Do-Aklin [Dunglas 1957, I: 85]), the leader, gets two sons, Dako and Ganhebesu. This last one goes to Allada, to get some fetishes, and while away his brother Dako (Dakodonu) makes himself king of Abomey (Le Herissé 1911: 281). After some time he makes his son Aho, later known as Wegbadja, his successor.

Under Wegbadja the government of Dahomey is organized. A number of functionaries are appointed, and a complex court etiquette is created (Le Herissé 1911: 290; Dunglas 1957, I: 90–94; Cornevin 1962: 97–99). According to Dunglas (1957, I: 87) Wegbadje gets three children by Adonon (to her I will return below), the twins Akaba and Ahangbé (also known as Na Hangbe), and Agadja (Le Herissé 1911: 289). While we have relatively safe historical grounds with Wegbadja, his succession by the twins is not unequivocally clear. The son, Akaba, certainly has ruled (1680–1708). Of his sister this is not so sure. According to Anatole Coissy (1949: 5) she ruled only a short time after the death of her twin brother, but is soon forced to withdraw (*cf.* Dunglas 1957, I: 97–99). Coissy mentions 'le grand féticheur d'Agassou' as being decisive in her succession. This must have been the chief priest Agasunon, also mentioned by Dunglas (*Ibid.*: 95). He is the head of the Leopard cult in Abomey. It is with him that we enter the complex ideological position of the Alladahonu, analyzed in detail by Edna Bay in her *Wives of the Leopard* (1998).

She starts with the consideration that those who gain control by force – as the Alladahonu in Dahomey – ‘would have needed to establish their authority and legitimacy’ (Bay 1998: 50). So they founded a capital, and established a court. Then the construction of legitimacy had to follow. This started with the establishment of the most important women's office, the *kpojito* (Bay 1998: 71). The Europeans refer to her usually as ‘mother of the king’ or ‘queen mother’ – which she was not. This woman was wealthy and powerful (Bay 1998: 72). Bay states that the first *kpojito* was Adanon, the mother of Agadja – thus the wife, or one of the wives of Dakodonu – who is supposed to have established his mother in this function (*Ibid.*: 72). In several myths Adanon is associated with Aligbonun (the girl who got the child from the leopard). According to Bay it was the title of the priestess of Aligbonum. Bay then turns her attention to Dakodonu, and, basing herself on local myths, concludes that he was not a member of the Alladahonu lineage (*Ibid.*: 73), but was adopted into it. Why resort to such a complex fictional construct? This was needed, according to Bay, to establish the eagerly desired legitimacy. She points therefore to the general African belief that there existed a sacred link between the earth spirits and the people who lived in that locality.<sup>1</sup> By adopting Dakodonu in their lineage, the Alladahonu connected themselves with the previous rulers, who clearly possessed that sacred link. The creation of the *kpojito* provided the link with the local cult of the leopard, and Adanon also linked Dakodonu with Wegbadja, who in an incestuous relation, impregnated her with three children (Bay 1998: 75).<sup>2</sup> Adanon was a commoner, and each of her successors as *kpojito* was a commoner. In this way royal and commoner were symbolically joined. She was usually the sister or daughter of an important family at court (*Ibid.*: 181). The Agasunon (mentioned above), the chief priest of the Leopard cult, was the one, who tattooed the king during the succession rituals (Le Herissé 1911: 10–11). Because of this he has a higher status than the king (Burton 1864, I: 352; II: 150). After the inauguration the priest and the king are not allowed to see each other again (Dunlas 1957, I: 93). King Tegbesu (1740–1774) decided that no longer the king, but somebody else should be tattooed in his place. This somebody was the high priest of the Leopard cult in Allada. This decision ended the cumbersome ritual seclusion of the king after his coronation (Argyle 1966: 118).

When a *kpojito* died she was succeeded by another woman, who held her title and her possessions. During formal processions all 'mothers of the king' took part in these occasions. Several European visitors have witnessed such processions, and testified to the participation of these women. The first of these was Lionel Abson (1800: 305), who stated that he saw 'the big mother of the king, who never dies, though she is sometimes killed'. His editor, Dalzel, tells that 'besides the real mother of the king, there is always found also another woman, who holds the title of queen mother' (Dalzel 1800: 137). Interestingly, Richard Burton, who also witnessed such processions, noted that the 'mothers' of the first three kings were absent, and wonders if they were forgotten (Burton 1864, II: 58). As, however, only from Agadja on *kpojitos* were appointed, his predecessors did not have them, so they could not have showed up. The head wife of the king, called the *naye*, had precedence over all other women of the king. She bore the crownprince. She should have been born outside Abomey (Coissy 1949: 5).

In view of the data presented above the king of Dahomey can be considered a sacred ruler (Le Herissé 1911: 9–11; Palau-Marti 1964: 133, 135).<sup>3</sup> According to Argyle (1966: 116–119) the king should not be considered 'divine', for he was not worshipped or adored, but he was certainly more than a normal man – for only he could order human sacrifices or pronounce death sentences (Herskovits 1938, II: 36, 55). Great numbers of people were killed during the so called Customs, a ritual in honor of deceased kings; Skertchly estimated more than two hundred in a 'normal' year (Skertchly 1874: 239; Argyle 1966: 116).

The inauguration of the king included a look at the amulets of Dahomey, a visit to Allada where he (in fact a substitute) was tattooed with the marks of the leopard, and finally the uttering of a sentence indicative for his chosen name (Le Herissé 1911: 11). In a number of prescriptions the sacred aspect of the ruler was emphasized: he must not touch the earth with bare hands or feet; people was forbidden to touch the king; the royal blood should not be shed; he should be healthy and well-formed; hair and nail clippings were carefully collected; the king was supposed not to eat, or sleep; his drinking was carefully hidden behind a cloth; when the king died a (ritual) anarchy took place, during which many people were murdered and

houses destroyed (Norris 1800: 116 ff.; Le Herissé 1911: 165). Once his successor was known, the anarchy ended (Le Herissé 1911: 179). Each year the ruler took a ritual bath. During that bath a young boy, clothed in the garments of the king was killed (Bertho 1946). He was a royal substitute and functioned as a scapegoat, taking the failures of the king with him in the grave (Herskovits 1938, I: 35). Cornevin (1962: 100) considers this a purification ritual, taking place at the beginning of the planting season. This might be an indication of a connection between the king and fertility. The incorporation of Dakodonu in the lineage of the Aladahonou suggests the need to become connected with those who had the traditional bond with the earth spirits. According to Le Herissé (1911: 243–244) the king was owner of all land. Partly, because he had conquered it, and partly because he had bought it, including the earth spirits. There is no mention that the king was responsible for good harvests – thus no ritual killing of the king was needed when harvests failed or his forces diminished (as was the case in many African kingdoms; cf. Claessen 1981: 65, 66; 2011a); the killing of his substitute took eventual failures away. The *akhosu* did not enter the war himself; there was appointed a general, who fought the battles (Le Herissé 1911: 66) – though there have been exceptions on this rule (*Ibid.*: 312).

#### **b. Buganda**

The early state of Buganda is said to have been founded by a certain Kintu. Whether he was a mythical character or a historical figure is not clear (Tymowski 2009: 47). If we accept the possibility that he was a historical person, the views of Benjamin Ray in *Myth, Ritual and Kingship in Buganda* (1991) seem most probable. He states that Kintu was a member of the Lion clan (Ray 1991: 94), and entered long ago (in the fourteenth century?) the region where now Buganda is situated. Kintu did not come alone, but brought his own people (clan? tribe?) with him. He also took with him cattle (for the background of the ‘people of Kintu’, see Newman 1995: 165). In later years cattle was numbered in the thousands in Buganda (Roscoe 1911: 415). Here Kintu met the important clan head Walusimbi,<sup>4</sup> at whose estate he, together with Walusimbi, created something as the Kabakaship. ‘The result was that the Kabakaship was shared by the rest of the clans’ (Ray 1991: 94). Traditions say

that many things have been introduced by Kintu. The alleged grave of Kintu is empty, however. This might indicate his being a mythical personality. We get more grip on historical reality with the rule of Kimera (late fourteenth century; Ray 1991: 77, 86ff.), who is said to have returned from Bunyoro after the death of his father, as a 'lost prince'. Gray (1935: 266), however, suggests that Kimera might have been a new conqueror of Buganda. In several respects Kimera copied the activities of Kintu, which might suggest that he enacted the mythical past. He was welcomed by (the then) Walusimbi's daughter, Nakku, whom he married. He also created several offices, such as that of the *mugema*, who later played a crucial role in the inauguration rituals of a new *kabaka* (Ray 1991: 88). It should be noted here that, according to Apolo Kaggwa, *The Customs of the Baganda* (1934), and John Roscoe (1911: 133–185) certain clans exercised important functions. So, for example, of the 44 *mugemas* that are known till *kabaka* Mwanga II, no less than 34 came from the Nkima clan.<sup>5</sup> The importance of the clans during the inauguration of the early *kabakas* should not be underestimated. Several clan heads presented the incumbent with ritual goods, such as robes, spears, bracelets and a drum. Audrey Richards (1960: 44) emphasizes the crucial role of the clan heads in the inauguration. The sounding of the drum signaled the completion of the ceremonies. The king then wounded a man with his spear, who was killed afterwards as a scapegoat. The *kabaka* entered the next day the house of kingship, where he received new wives and the homage of the clan officials (Ray 1991: 91). In later years the role of the clan heads in the inauguration ceremonies diminished and a new ritual was developed, possibly by the 24<sup>th</sup> *kabaka*, Namugala (Ray 1991: 78). These new rituals, known as those of Buddo (Buddo) Hill, are described in great detail by Roscoe (1911: 192–201). The *kabaka* underwent these rituals together with the *lubuga*, a sister (half-sister?) of the king. As a consequence they spend the night together, which might suggest incest (see below). The following morning the *kabaka* was formally addressed as King of Buganda. Near Buddo Hill the king passed the remaining time of the period of mourning for his deceased father. At the end of the mourning period the *mugema* took the oath of the *kabaka*, which was also taken of the *lubuga*. The *lubuga* afterwards got estates, riches and a high status, but no formal political power. When she died before the

king, a successor for her was appointed (Roscoe 1911: 113). The official wife of the king was the *kadulubare* (Kaggwa 1934: 67). Several of his wives had a high status, and formal obligations. The *nasaza* for example kept his hair- and nail clippings (Roscoe 1911: 85, 135).

When Kintu (or Kalimera) arrived in the region of Buganda, he did not enter a region empty of people. Kottak (1972; cf. Claessen 2014: 14–15) describes in great detail how already some 3,000 years ago the shores of Lake Victoria had a dense population, and how this enforced these peoples to occupy not only the shores but also the hinterland. This led to a beginning stratification, later developing into clans and chiefdoms. It was in such a situation that the first *kabakas* arrived in Buganda (for the background of this migration: Newman 1995: 162–166). As they in that time were not yet powerful, they had to accommodate with the clan leaders, who had legitimate rights to the land.<sup>6</sup> As we saw above, the paramount chief Walusimbi, who was the leader of the clan heads, created together with Kintu, the Kabakaship. This might have been the ceremony during which Kintu became legitimated as ruler over Buganda.

Some years after his inauguration the *kabaka* visited the Nankere priest. The ceremonies here were, according to Roscoe (1911: 210), intended to prolong the life of the ruler. To this end a son of the Nankere priest was killed without the shedding of his blood, suggesting his being a substitute for the king. With this ceremony the period of the royal inauguration finally ended. The king met here for the last time his mother, the *nmasole*, who was till then his most important political advisor. During the rituals several more people were killed. The king visited here also Walusimbi together with his wife Nakku.

The fact that the *kabaka* spend a night with his sister, the *lubuga*, during the ceremonies at Buddo Hill, is for the Belgian anthropologist Luc de Heusch sufficient reason to speak of royal incest (De Heusch 1958, 1984, 1987). The fact that every man in Buganda who had to undergo some ritual was accompanied by a clan sister and that in such a case never was hinted at incest (Nsimbi 1956) did not prevent De Heusch to maintain his views. This act of incest made him, according to De Heusch, a transgressor of one of the fundamental laws of his society. This made him vulnerable when he grew old and his forces were diminishing. The *kabaka*, however,

was not killed as happened in several other societies, but in the course of time a number of substitutes was killed in his place.<sup>7</sup>

Regarding the question of divine kingship, Ray (1991: 41) states 'Buganda did not possess a divine kingship. The Kabakas were not regarded as incarnate deities; their life was not bound up with the vitality of the cosmos; and they were not killed (actually or symbolically) when they became old or ill'.<sup>8</sup> This notwithstanding Gale's view (1956), that the *kabaka* Mutesa was a god in the heathenish pattern of Buganda. The *kabaka*, however, can be considered as a sacred person. This came to the fore in the great number of prescriptions and prohibitions regulating his daily behavior (*cf.* Richards 1960: 43). He was not allowed to touch the soil; he was carried or he stood upon a leopard skin (Roscoe 1911: 153, 154, 197; Kaggwa 1934: 65; Mukasa 1946: 138). It was strictly forbidden to touch the king, his clothes or his throne (Speke 1863: 256). The *kabaka* was supposed not to need food (Gale 1956: 76); it thus was forbidden to see him eat, but this prohibition apparently did not hold for white visitors (Speke 1863: 392). The king was supposed not to be ill; if so, it was kept a secret. The *kabaka* was not allowed to expose himself to the dangers of war. In case of war he was replaced by a substitute, a general, who wore the royal paraphernalia (Roscoe 1911: 348ff.; Speke 1863: 257, 365, 387, 405, 415, 419). Stanley (1891, I: 279 ff.), however, tells us that Mutesa once accompanied the army. The royal blood should not be spilled; rebellious princes that had to be executed were either burned or hungered till death (Roscoe 1911: 99, 189, 221; Kaggwa 1934: 32). To cough or sneeze in the royal presence was punished with death, for it endangered the royal health (Roscoe 1911: 207, 259). In cases of emergency (drought, war, disease), the king consulted his forebears to get advice how to handle (Fallers 1960: 70).

When in the second half of the nineteenth century preachers of Islam, Catholicism and Protestantism arrived in Buganda, many of the traditional ideas crumbled, for sacred kingship does not harmonize with monotheistic religions. In the end Buganda was colonized by the British.

### **c. Tio**

The Tio kingdom was situated north of Brazzaville and the Tio belonged to the Teke group (Bateke). The Teke are known to have lived in these regions already since about 1500 (Birmingham 1981: 43).

According to Newman (1995: 150) they suffered badly of slave raiding in the sixteenth century. Jan Vansina, who devoted a detailed analysis to the Tio Kingdom concentrates on the period 1880–1892 (Vansina 1973). The surface of the kingdom is estimated at about 80,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and the number of inhabitants at about 82,000, which means an average of one person per square kilometer (Vansina 1973: 14, 16). This low density had consequences for the political organization. Vansina (*Ibid.*: 313ff.) distinguishes three categories of socio-political leaders: the squires, who were the local leaders, the lords, who, as ‘chiefs of the crown’ ruled varying numbers of squires, and the king.

The squires ruled a part of the land. ‘The legitimate basis for the authority of the squire was his mastership over the *nkira* spirit of the domain’ (Vansina 1973: 315). The *nkira* helped to ward off catastrophes, protected the inhabitants of the domain, and provided sanctions for the squire. Because of his connection with the spirit the squire was entitled to a tithe of the hunt. Immigrants presented him with gifts to get his support. Trees could only be planted with his approval, and fruit, especially kola, was expected to be given to him. Moreover, he blessed the seeds. He therefore placed the seed in the house of the spirit. ‘The next morning he washed the hands of the women to drive out the fire of misfortune and then gave them the seed’ (Vansina 1973: 318). This clearly indicates a relation with fertility. In many respects he acted as a village leader: settled disputes, kept peace and order. Squires could only come from certain kinship groups, to which also the lords and the king belonged. Theirs was an ascribed status – though the successor should have achieved already some status before (*Ibid.*: 321).

The lords ruled over squires and over other lords. They were ranked ‘by the status of their *nkobi* in the hierarchy of *nkobi*’. (Vansina 1973: 324). This spirit was kept always in a box, the contents of which were an absolute secret even to its master. ‘The power of the lords was expressed by their style of living, much more than by their insignia’ (*Ibid.*: 332). They were surrounded by ceremonies, were preceded by music, and were entitled to the great salute, whereby men, women and lesser squires or lords all came to kneel and bow to the ground, giving one hand into the hands of the lord, thus recognizing his superiority (*Ibid.*: 334). Lords kept a dozen wives and lived in grand style. Their wealth not

only came from tributes and fines, but mainly from trade. In former times in slaves, later in ivory. The succession of a lord was a matter of fierce competition. When the succession was finally decided, the new lord had to be confirmed in his title by the king, who sent the new lord a collar and two bracelets. As squire, the lord benefited of an ideology linking mystical forces to his rule; he was to protect his people and make a good life possible, fighting witches and human enemies (Vansina 1973: 338).

The king was the master of the national *nkira*, Nkwe Mbali, and because of that he was king. In other words, the extent of the belief in Nkwe Mbali indicated the extent of the kingdom (Vansina 1973: 374). 'Whenever a king was installed, he had to go through a long ritual, called *lisee*, by which he became master of Nkwe Mbali'. After that he needed water to cool the realm when the fire of witchcraft might destroy it (*Ibid.*: 375). The king after that had to keep a number of avoidances. He might not see a coffin or a tomb; he had to avoid ill people. He was not to touch the earth without footgear, nor sit on the bare ground and was usually carried in a litter for fear his power would scorch the earth. He was not allowed eating certain foodstuffs (caterpillars, buffalo meat, antelope meat). When drinking he must cover his face. He ate in seclusion. A perpetual fire was lit in his kitchen, which was kept burning by his second wife, *waafitieere*, who also cooked for him. 'His sacredness found expression in the belief that he lost his virility after having passed through *lisee*'. He was allowed sleeping with his wives, but the power of kingship had destroyed his fertility (*Ibid.*: 377). The symbol of royal power was the lion skin, and only the king was allowed to sit on it. In contacts with the king the greatest respect was shown; even the highest lord talked to him in a kneeling position, and all prostrated themselves with great respect when he covered himself to drink (*Ibid.*: 378).

When the king entered the *lisee* a new fire was lit in his kitchen where, from that moment on, his second ritual wife, *waafitieere*, cooked his food. He passed all rituals with his first ritual wife, *ngaasaa*, and a small boy. Every day two lords visited him to show him some of the sacred objects associated with Nkwe Mbali. On the sixth day he was presented with the *ano* rings 'which destroyed the king's virile potency' (*Ibid.*: 380). On the eight day the king ate human flesh. 'This was a magical act setting the king apart from and

above all humanity, as incest did in many other states' (Vansina 1973: 381).

The *ngaasaa* originated in Itoo in the north. She was not an aristocrat, but a commoner and went with the king through the initiation ceremonies. 'When she died the king should not survive her and was killed for he could not rule without *ngaasaa*. If he died she was washed ceremonially' (*Ibid.*: 384). 'Her title meant "master of the cereals" and she was supposed to ensure their fertility'. In this way she was the counterpart of the king's role of bringer of fertility. She was chosen late in life, since she could not conceive children – which guaranteed the effectiveness of the *ano* rings... The second wife, *waafitieere*, was always the daughter of a high lord and sat near the king in palavers. She was supposed to judge in the king's place in court cases; some think that 'she, more than the king, directed the realm' (Vansina 1973: 385). Her status was less exalted than that of *ngaasaa* and her death was of no consequence for the king. Vansina emphasizes that 'among the royal women the king's sisters and mothers were not given special treatment' (*Ibid.*: 393).

The death of the king was kept a secret for nine days; only the two wives and some of the highest lords were informed. He was immediately buried where he had died. During the nine days an image of the king was fashioned, and that image was buried publicly. The burial was preceded by the sacrifice of some slaves whose arms and legs had been broken (*Ibid.*: 386).

In the years after the Second World War the Kongo regions experienced decolonization and civil wars, which destroyed many of the traditional political structures.

#### **d. Kuba**

The state of the Kuba (Ba-Kouba; see Cornevin 1963: 595) was founded in the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the Bushoong (Shongos) subjected a number of smaller tribes. Since the chief of the Bushoong, the biggest group, ruled as a king over the whole (Vansina 1978a: 364; 1978b: 114–115 gives some details about these developments; see also Vansina 1992b). This first king is said to have been Shyaam, to whom many innovations are ascribed; he is a kind of culture hero. Each king was supposed to be a matrilineal descendant of Shyaam.

The king was not only the most important administrator of the Kuba, he was, above all, a most sacred person. Vansina (1964: 98)

even states 'Il est un roi divin et les liens entre la royauté et le sacré marquent tous les aspects de la structure et de la vie politique kuba'. The most important aspect of his sacrality was his influence on the fertility of the earth, 'because of his prior occupancy of the land which gave him an inalienable link to the major nature spirit in these lands' (Vansina 1992b: 71). Moreover, he had power over the rain, which he could send or withhold (Vansina 1978a: 365). As a consequence of these qualities, the king was surrounded with numerous prescriptions and prohibitions. He was not allowed leaving his residence during the new moon. The moon was associated with the fertility of the earth. 'King and moon possessed the same powers' (Vansina 1978b: 208). His sister, who possessed several objects connected with the moon, was allowed going out only when she covered her head (Vansina 1964: 99).<sup>9</sup> To protect his forces the king should not walk far, he should not sit down on the soil, cross a field, see wounded or dead people, or see graves. His contact with the soil would 'burn the earth' (Vansina 1978b: 209). When the king lost his physical forces, he should be killed, for a weak king would not be able to guarantee fertility. It is not sure, however, that such a killing ever happened (Vansina 1964: 100). Hair and nail rests should be kept carefully, as these contained some of his vitality.

In the eyes of the Kuba there was a close connection between the king and the sacred. 'Sans lui ce serait l'anarchie' (Vansina 1964: 101). It was believed that when the king was ill, the crops would not grow and the harvest would be poor. There was also found a negative side in the sacred status of the king: he was a sorcerer. He was associated with the leopard – the symbol of royalty and of sorcery. The king could be very aggressive and have people killed, houses burned or people punished severely. On the other hand the king was open handed and people might ask his help in case of poverty (Vansina 1964: 104).

Though the king was the highest political authority, his actual powers of law giving or jurisdiction were but limited, for there were several councils which had a decisive voice in these matters (Vansina 1964: 105). It was he, however, who could order life sentences (after the advice of a special council). Adultery with a wife of the king would be punished with death. The most important bridle on royal absolutism was the existence of the national amu-

lets, kept by the *myum*, a functionary equal to the king, who kept residence in a distant village. The king was allowed seeing him only during his inauguration. It was believed that these charms would kill him automatically when he ruled as a tyrant (Vansina 1964: 106).

The king had a harem of about six hundred women (the *ngády*), of whom but a few were actually his spouses. These women had authority over the *ngády*. The third formal wife of the king was the chief of the harem (Vansina 1964: 107). Only the king, his successors and the highest chiefs had a harem. All other Kuba were monogamous.

Vansina (1964: 110) stresses the fact that the king lived in isolation. He was king of all Kuba, and was not supposed to have connections with some special group. 'Lors de son intronisation, il doit renoncer aux liens de sang avec son clan, son père et sa mère'. It was also for this reason that the king had sex with a sister or half sister, and later married a grand child of one of his sisters. In this way the king demonstrated that he has broken with his clan – and because of that these relations were not considered as incestuous. Vansina (1964: 111) adds that 'le roi transgresse les interdictions les plus sacrées et en retire une force supplémentaire'. His mother was obliged after his inauguration to marry a number of men in order to obscure the position of his father so that he could not claim a special relation with the king (*Ibid.*).

The death of the king was kept secret for three days. During that period a number of people were selected to be offered during his funeral. Also a slave was then buried alive, and the carver of the *ndop* (the royal twin) was executed. The mother of the king left the capital and settled in a far away village. During the period of mourning a successor of the king was appointed. This was not a simple matter, for he should be the eldest matrilineal descendant in the royal lineage, but also the eldest in genealogical sense. Moreover, the council might appoint not the formal candidate, but instead the most capable of the princes (*Ibid.*: 113).

The inauguration rituals were complicated and took quite some time. During these rituals the incumbent recited a slogan, indicating his views on kingship. After that a man was sacrificed and the new king planted a tree. Then he slept with his first wife.<sup>10</sup> After that began a period of seclusion, during which a number of digni-

taries instructed and insulted him (Vansina 1964: 114). The inauguration ended with the visit of the new king to the *muyum*, who showed him the national amulets, and warned him that he, when ruling bad, would die. He then salved him with kaolin, and send him home. The two were never to meet again (*Ibid.*: 115).

‘Taxation and corvée labor made the political bureaucracy possible. Every village paid an annual tax in cowries, in goods and in food from a special field for the king. Subordinated chiefdoms sent tribute in specified commodities’ (Vansina 1978a: 375). Much of the king’s real power came from his wealth. His harem – the 600 *ngády* mentioned above – produced many goods, especially a kind of velvet, which was traded far. These goods were also used to reward friends, followers and their children. The other pillar under his power was the existence of a constabulary of fighting slaves, of which the king owned about five hundred (*Ibid.*: 367).

All in all, the Kuba kingdom was a stable organization, which existed for about 400 years.

#### **e. Benin**

Benin City lies deep within the rain forest, just west of the Niger River. It was founded by Edo-speaking peoples, whose movement from the savanna into the forest can be followed via a series of earthen work enclosures (Bondarenko and Roese 1999; Newman 1995: 122; Connah 1987: 134). Benin gradually developed into a mighty kingdom, which from the late fifteenth century on became a center of trade. European merchants anchored in the (unhealthy) Bight of Benin, and exchanged European goods for pepper and elephant tusks.<sup>11</sup>

Tradition holds that long ago – in the mid-thirteenth century – the elders of Benin, to end the political chaos there, send to the ruler of neighboring Ife, asking him to send them a prince. The ruler send a son, Oranmiyan, who, however did not like Benin, ‘so after a short stay he departed for home, but not before he had impregnated the daughter of an Edo village chief, who bore him a son, who in the course of time was enthroned under the name Eweka’ (Bradbury 1967: 1; Bondarenko 2003). This Eweka started the royal – *oba* – line of Benin. Bradbury (1967: 1) points out that in this way the kingship was of alien provenance but came into being by the will of the Bini<sup>12</sup> and was nurtured in Edo culture. Bradbury defines the Benin kingdom ‘as the area within which the Oba was recognized

as the sole human arbiter of life and death' (*Ibid.*: 3). He was the only person who could order capital punishment. 'In the late fifteenth century Benin was a well-established state with a large army, conducting long campaigns far afield' (Bradbury 1967: 5).<sup>13</sup> This is more or less the period described by Olfert Dapper in his *Naukeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten* (1676). Dapper's description of Benin was based on the detailed reports of several Dutch merchants.<sup>14</sup> He characterised the Bini as 'Zijn niet seer diefachtigh, nochte geen dronkaerts, maer groote hoereerders' (Dapper 1676, 2: 123).<sup>15</sup> Boys go naked till dressed by the king; girls go naked till dressed by their husbands (*Ibid.*, 2: 124). The army of Benin was large, but from the early seventeenth century on, it was not the king, who led it, but a general with a high status. All subjects were considered 'slaves of the king'; new born children were presented to the king and marked with a sign indicating this status (*Ibid.*, 2: 127). According to Bondarenko (2005: 31) this statement 'reflected attitude to him as to the guarantee of the country and populace's prosperity'.

The *oba* was generally considered to be omnipotent and possessor of all land. Impressive as this may sound, it was not true: land was held by the communities, and slaves were only prisoners of war and criminals (Bondarenko 2005: 31). The king was from the mid-fifteenth century on assisted in his rule by three important councils of state; in fact power was divided between the *oba* on the one hand and the titled chiefs on the other. Apart from these nobles the general and the mother of the king were also very important. The main task of his mother was settling disputes and furthering prosperity and peace in the reign of her son (Kaplan 1997: 75, 100). According to Dapper (1667, 2: 129) she lived in a palace, just outside the city with many women and girls. Her advice was asked in all matters regarding the country. It seems that formerly his mother was killed immediately after the inauguration of her son; this custom nowadays is replaced by the rule that mother and son may not see each other (Duchâteau 1990: 46). Special couriers maintained the contacts between the king and his mother.

Initially, the *oba* had to fulfill many profane functions as well as sacral duties at the same time. 'The struggle between the *obas* and the chiefs took the form of constant and gradually successful attempts of the latter to limit the sovereign's powers by inflicting

new binding taboos on him' (Bondarenko 2005: 32; Bradbury 1967: 28). In view of these struggles it is not surprising that the *obas* more and more emphasized their sacred character. Bondarenko states (1995: 104) that this sacred status was the basis of their power. Jungwirth (1968: 112–113; also Duchâteau 1990: 40) states that the *oba* was related narrowly with the fertility and prosperity of Benin. Diminishing of his strength endangered this prosperity. Duchâteau (1990: 40) summarizes the many rituals, taboos and prescriptions that surrounded the *oba*. It was forbidden to speak of the king sleeping, eating, washing, *etc.* He should not be seen eating or drinking. Jungwirth suggests that it is not improbable that in former times an *oba* was killed when his health diminished. There are no data, however, that confirm this view. There were in any case, yearly rituals to renew his sacred forces (Jungwirth 1968: 113; Duchâteau 1990: 40, 45).

Once or twice a year the *oba* left his palace to make a tour through the city, seated on a horse and surrounded by a numerous suite (Dapper 1667, 2: 129, see also the large picture of such a tour in Dapper). To honor this occasion a number of humans was sacrificed. Normally the *oba* was not allowed to leave his palace; only during the night he could go out – but he should not be seen by anybody and had to return before day break (Duchâteau 1990: 44; Jungwirth 1968: 113).

When an *oba* died a number of slaves and favorites accompanied the king into his grave. Dapper creates the impression that the favorites went of free will, nay even competed for this honor (Dapper 1667, 2: 129). Additionally many passers-by were killed in honor of the deceased. Connah (1987: 135) presents the sketch of a shaft containing the bodies of at least 41 young women, still wearing clothes, bracelets, rings *etc.* suggesting that they were killed unawares of their fate. Tradition says that an *oba* before his death made known to the senior palace chief the name of his eldest son as his successor, which officer then formally named the successor in a public gathering of chiefs (Bradbury 1967: 29–30; Dapper 1667, 2: 130). Jungwirth (1968: 283), however, doubts this statement, for there were several sons with more or less similar claims, and the palace chief presented the son who, in his eyes, was the most capable (or who had offered him the greatest advantages). The eldest son, the crown prince, the *edaiken*, was known long be-

fore the *oba's* death. Only some of the crown princes became successor, however. Sometimes a brother of the king or another member of the family was appointed as the next *oba*. Serious succession strife also did occur. Cornevin (1963: 389–392) presents one of the several existing lists of *obas*. In former times the brothers of the incumbent as possible successors, were killed (Dapper 1667, 2: 131), but later, it seems, they were sent to distant districts (Duchâteau 1990: 44).

#### **f. Jukun**

The Jukun live north of the Benue River and south of the Jos Plateau, where they settled in the fifteenth century (Newman 1995: 119). The most important source on the Jukun is *A Sudanese Kingdom*, by C. K. Meek (1931), the then government anthropologist in that region. He assumed a relation between the old Egyptian civilization and the Jukun, and pointed in numerous footnotes to similarities between the rituals of kingship in both societies.<sup>16</sup> Meek describes the position of the king of the Jukun, in his opinion a 'Divine King', in great detail after stating: 'it would seem reasonable to infer that the Jukun king must at one time have been regarded as a manifestation of the Sun' (Meek 1931: 122).<sup>17</sup> Such an exalted person inevitably was hedged in by numerous taboos and prescriptions. People were not allowed to look him directly in the face (*Ibid.*: 123). The sacredness of the king seriously curtailed his power for no one could approach him directly. A chain of officials prevented this; he thus was informed only very limited on things going on in his realm (*Ibid.*: 334). In fact there was found a complex set of checks and balances against royal tyranny (Tamuno 1965: 203). It was believed that kings did not 'suffer from the limitations of ordinary human beings. They do not "eat", they do not "sleep", and they never "die"' (Meek 1931: 126). He should not put his foot on the ground or sit on the ground without a mat. 'If a Jukun king were to fall from his horse, he would, in former times, have been promptly put to death' (*Ibid.*: 127). The king's sputum was sacred and was preserved in a cloth; his hair and nail-clippings were also carefully preserved (*Ibid.*: 128).

He never was the leader of the army, he was only expected to secure a regular succession of rich harvests (Meek 1931: 129; *cf.* De Heusch 2005: 26). To make this possible the king was able to

control the rains and winds (Meek 1931: 130; *cf.* Straube 1984). There was some division of tasks between the king and the priests by which the king kept the civil tasks and the priests were responsible for the offerings (Meek 1931: 36, 132). During his inauguration the incumbent was made sacral ('converted into a deity', as Meek says). This was a complex ritual: 'the seizure of the person chosen, the stripping of his clothes as the symbol of re-birth, the binding on of cloth as the emblem of his sovereignty, the admonition to rule justly, the period of seclusion during which he undergoes a process of divinization, learns to receive his food in ritual fashion, and is shown the secret amulets, the ceremonial bathing, the replaiting of his hair-lock, the giving of a new name, the re-clothing in the royal regalia, the feast, acclamation of the people, salutation of the tutelary genii, and the formal entry into the royal palace' (Meek 1931: 133). He was also obliged to eat the heart of his predecessor, reduced to powder (Muller 1981: 241). From that moment on the king 'having been reborn as son of the gods, had no longer an earthly father and mother'. In former times, it is said, his father and mother were killed on the day of their son's election (Meek 1931: 137). The rain-priest conferred on the king a black cloth of special rain controlling property, and another priest handed him the seed-corn of his royal predecessor. After this the king and the high-priest (the *Kù Vi*) must never meet face to face again. In the words of De Heusch (2005: 25): through a special rite of investiture... 'the holder is transformed into a "fetish-body"'.

On the tour from his village to the capital he met a woman, the *wakuku*, a widow of the late king. There was some marriage ceremony between the two. After that she became the head of the women of the palace. This ritual legitimized the succession (Meek 1931: 138–139, 341). Shortly thereafter the king wounded a slave with his spear, who after that was killed. The normal life span of a king was seven years, but some kings ruled longer (*Ibid.*: 142). There were rituals to prolong this period (*Ibid.*: 165).

Apart from the *wakuku* several other women did play a role in the life of the king, among them the *angwu tsi*, who in some respects fulfilled the role of queen (Meek 1931: 324, 340). She had her own court and observed the same food rituals as the king. She could not be disposed. No one could sow until she had first ceremonially planted seeds of various crops. The *angwu kaku* was the

king's appointed sister. She must be of the royal lineage and must have passed the menopause (Meek 1931: 325). The king had also a harem, and only the son of a slave woman could be elected as successor – to evade a matrilineal successor (*Ibid.*: 72, 336). It is not clear what Meek meant by this statement, for elsewhere he stated that the former principle of matrilineal succession was replaced by a patrilineal one (*Ibid.*: 37, 61, 73). The king's beer was prepared by the three female officials mentioned above (*Ibid.*: 145). Part of the daily rituals was the drinking of the beer by the king (and the priests). 'Beer is the food of the gods; and when the king drinks the beer he not only receives the same nourishment as the gods, but actually feeds the gods immanent in his person' (Meek 1931: 153). The enclosure of the king was a closed place, only some trusted servants and officials were allowed there.

When drought or a succession of bad harvests demanded it, the king was ceremonially put to death. Also by a serious illness the king would be killed; Meek suggests that the main reason for this killing might have been that the king then was no longer able to fulfil the many daily rituals by which the royal ancestors were fed and the life of the crops sustained (Meek 1931: 164, also 127). Old age in itself was no reason for killing the king; as long as the harvests were good there was no necessity. 'The mode of killing was by strangulation with a string or a piece of cloth' by two executioners, sometimes assisted by one of his wives (*Ibid.*: 166). His death was kept a secret for some time, to allow the councillors to select a successor. According to Meek the real reason for the killing seems to be the belief that 'the king is the crop'. When his death was announced before harvest time there might be no harvest that year (*Ibid.*: 166).

The body of the dead king was desiccated, after his heart was removed and dried. This then was ground into a powder which would be secretly and periodically inserted into the food of the king's successor (Meek 1931: 167–168). The king's horse was killed, and in former times also two slaves; the favourite slave of the king is said to have killed himself (*Ibid.*: 174). Also, in former times, the favourite wife of the king – the *wakuku*? – was killed (*Ibid.*: 176, 342).

Brothers, cousins and senior sons of the king were relegated to outlying villages, to limit their possibility to intrigue against the

king (*Ibid.*: 344). There are no data given on the way of selecting of a successor to the king.

#### **g. Shilluk**

The Shilluk have quite a reputation with regard to ritual regicide, caused by Frazer's romantic description of the Shilluk king 'in constant watchfulness, prowling round his huts fully armed...' (Frazer 1957, I: 352), and by Evans-Pritchard's famous sceptical Frazer Lecture (Evans-Pritchard 1948). Theirs, however, were not the last words on the matter, as will appear in this section. The Nilotic Shilluk were part of the Lwo, cattle keeping peoples to which also belonged the Nuer and the Dinka. The redistribution of these peoples caused other Lwo groups to migrate to the south. The Shilluk, however, followed a different course and migrated to the north, where they settled on the western bank of the Nile, where they gradually replaced their cattle by cultivation (Lienhardt 1963: 139; Lewis Wall 1991: 140). They 'developed an elaborate social-political system organized around a divine king, or *reth*' (Newman 1995: 165; Cornevin 1963: 527), with Fashoda as their capital. Some scholars suggest a deviation from ancient Egypt (see note 13), others posit an influence by Bantu ideas of royalty, but Newman (1995: 165) considers these explanations 'highly tenuous', for among the Lwo did exist royal traditions and they had no need to borrow them from other peoples.

The religious and political head of the Shilluk was the *reth*, who was thought to be the reincarnation of Nyikang, the Shilluk culture-hero, who led them to their present land (Lewis Wall 1991: 136). The supreme being, Juok, was approached through Nyikang. Nyikang was embodied in the king (Evans-Pritchard 1948: 9). As there was no formal cult either of Juok or Nyikang, the king himself must perform certain rituals pertaining to the rain, and the harvests. In addition he had legal functions as a mediator of disputes. On the other hand, it was said that 'the king of the Shilluk reigns but does not govern' (Evans-Pritchard 1948: 16).

'Accession to the *reth*ship is dependent upon two things: royal descent and election by a council of chiefs' (Lewis Wall 1991: 137). Only the son of a *reth* was qualified to succeed to the office. This held also for sons of former kings. Thus, there were a number of candidates for the position. Sometimes a candidate did raise a rebellion, killed the ruling king, installed himself in Fashoda and be-

came the new king. For this reason no eligible son was allowed staying the night in Fashoda, and pregnant royal wives were sent to outlying villages to raise their sons there (*Ibid.*: 137). It is here that Frazer's terrifying picture comes in, and Evans-Pritchard's scepticism finds its roots. Evans-Pritchard does not doubt the occurrence of regicide, but does not believe its ritual character (Evans-Pritchard 1948: 21, 34, 35). Yet, he accepted that the belief existed that once a king was weak or sickly he endangered the harvests and the rain and should be killed (Evans-Pritchard 1948: 20). This was the moment for rebellious princes to act. In a lengthy reaction Mohammed Riad (1959) states that in a number of cases a *reth* actually was killed ritually. He based himself on data from the king list which counts twenty-seven kings (reproduced in Cornevin 1963: 527–528). It appears from this list that in the majority of cases the king was killed by a rebellious prince or died of sickness; but in a few cases a ritual killing can be assumed (Riad 1959: 156–164). Also Simonse (2005: 91) is of the opinion that the fear for political assassination by rivals formed the main problem for a ruling king. Moreover, Simonse (1992: 424) is strongly of the opinion that the ritual killing of the king ‘really took place’ – though he adds that ‘the Shilluk divest regicide of its patently violent character by making the act of killing coincide with the natural death of the king’. In former times, it seems, the king judged to die was enclosed in a hut with a girl, and left for dying of hunger, which often took quite a time. In later years this custom was replaced by the more human method of strangulation (Frazer 1957, I: 352; also Simonse 1992: 415).

Upon the death of a *reth* the process of selecting a successor began. In case when a rebellious prince conquered the throne, no such procedure was needed. The many rites of installation, however, must also then take place. In previous times the assent of the northern and southern sections of Shilluk land had to be obtained. When this did not happen a civil war was likely to break out. ‘Once the successor has been tentatively agreed upon there is a lapse of about one year prior to his installation to allow the necessary preparations for the installation to be completed’ (Lewis Wall 1991: 138). The essence of the installation was to persuade the spirit of Nyikang to enter the new king ‘and by so doing to reanimate the land and to give his consent to the recreation of the order of Shilluk society’ (*Ibid.*). Lienhardt (1963: 153) gives some more details on

this ceremony. There was amongst others a mock fight between the effigy of Nyikang and the king-elect. First, the king retreated, but the second time he was victorious and Nyikang entered him. 'In the installation of the new king the unity and integrity of the Shilluk kingdom under Nyikang and the king are stressed at the same time as the *necessary* nature of its parts' (Lienhardt 1963: 154; italics in original). During the installation the new king is given possession of the ritual objects of kingship: the sacred spear, beads from the Nuba Mountains, a silver ring, and the sacred stool. First, Nyikang sat upon the stool and then the king, in this way expressing his possession by Nyikang (Lewis Wall 1991: 138). A sacred fire burned 'eternally' before his hut. When the king died the fire was extinguished.

Cornevin (1963: 527) states that the queen mother, and the sisters of the king were held in great esteem. Simonse (1992: 291) connects this with the stabilizing influence ('a semblance of permanence') of the queen, who lived on 'when the king, his brothers and sons, fell victim to the internecine rivalry for power'. In view of the dangerous life of the king of the Shilluk, one wonders why so often rebellious princes coveted this position (*cf.* Simonse 1992: 425). It is also mentioned by Cornevin (1963: 527) that the king was to marry a half-sister. In practice she was one of the several royal wives. In how far she occupied a special position was not mentioned.

#### **h. Bunyoro**

The kingdom of Bunyoro (or Nyoro) is situated west of Lake Albert. In former times the kingdom under the name of Bunyoro-Kitara was much larger. Military activities from neighbouring countries diminished the realm considerably, till finally only the central part, under the name of Bunyoro, remained (Steinhart 1981). Before the development of Bunyoro-Kitara the region was lived in by the Cwezi (also Bacwezi) who formed here a number of small chiefdoms (Robertshaw 1999: 126–127). Somehow the memory of this past continues to play a role in Bunyoro (Schoenbrun 1999). Iris Berger (1981: 46) points to the fact that new ruling groups in Bunyoro for their legitimacy and for their sense of historical continuity depended heavily on the religious powers of earlier inhabitants. Via these they traced a line of descent to the (earth) spirits (Berger 1981: 52). Newman (1995: 164)

connects these developments with the Lwo migrations. ‘Some of their camps became royal courts or capitals of kingdoms, the recipients of tribute demanded from surrounding farmers’. Where the Lwo encountered Bantu peoples different developments took place, amongst others the foundation of the emergent kingdom of (Bu)Nyoro, where a Lwo clan, the Bito, established some hegemony. Similar developments took place among the peoples of Rwanda and Burundi, where the Hima clan rose to power (Newman 1995: 164).

The last independent king of Bunyoro was Kabarega (1870–1899), who, according to Steinhart (1987), after a heroic fight was defeated in 1899 by British colonial troops, and Bugandese soldiers, which ended the early state of Bunyoro. Interestingly, Kabarega was visited in 1886 by the Italian traveller Gaétano Casati, who pictured this same Kabarega – under the name of Tchoua – as a dictatorial brute. The king of Bunyoro was responsible for the well-being of the country. To this end during each full moon many human sacrifices were brought in honor of the defunct king Camrasi (Casati 1892: 286). Camrasi was interred in a large ditch, his dead body resting on the knees of six of his wives. Numerous human sacrifices were brought and the ditch, with the unfortunate queens, was closed – in the hope in this way to console the dead king and get blessings for his successor (*Ibid.*: 294).<sup>18</sup> Human sacrifices were quite common: when the queen mother fell ill human sacrifices were brought ‘sur une grande échelle’ (*Ibid.*: 287).

Kabarega was a ruthless ruler; anyone who displeased him was executed (Casati 1892: 288; see also the drawing opposite the page). He was not allowed to be seen eating; wives and children then fled, and only the prime minister was allowed in his presence, but with his backside turned towards the king (*Ibid.*: 290). Rainmakers were held in great esteem, and when successful, were richly rewarded; when rain did not appear, they were severely punished. According to Casati the king was the most important rainmaker, supposed to have absolute power over the rain (*Ibid.*: 294; cf. Zimon 1968: 432). In fact, Casati says that the king delegated this power to one or more substitutes, who in his place made rain. Beattie (1971: 107) states in this respect that the *mukama* was neither a priest, nor a rainmaker; these tasks fell to his specialists, which is more or less in conformity with Casati's statements. These

specialists were responsible for their results to the king (Zimon 1968: 435).

Quite a lot is known about the inauguration rituals of a *mukama* from the detailed report written by K.W.<sup>19</sup> K.W. tells that first eventual competing brothers had to be defeated. Then the rituals started after a white bull and a white cock were slaughtered (K.W. 1937: 289). The incumbent passed the night in a special hut, sat down on a special wooden stool and from that moment on he really became *mukama*. During the night he was allowed to lie on one side only, for moving during his sleep would harm the kingdom (K.W. 1937: 290). The incumbent was washed several times, and changed repeatedly of clothes. While swearing an oath that he would rule his people good, oil was poured on his head. With this oil he was consecrated. Later on he received a hoe, which indicated that he had become a father to his people. Then a woman, named the *mubitokati*, sprinkled the incumbent with water. After that she had to leave the capital and never see the king again (K.W. 1937: 293). Then the *mukama* met his head royal sister, the *kalyota*, who touched his shoulder. In another place the king shot four arrows to the four corners of the world (*Ibid.*: 295). Several times the narrow bond between the *mukama* and cattle was symbolized by drinking milk, and by watching the milking of his cows (*Ibid.*: 297). This is connected with the fact that the Bito were cattle holders. The king also fulfilled several rituals to protect agriculture, such as eating coffee beans and handling a hoe. Also the emphasis on rain making pointed in this direction. Finally the king ate some of the liquid drippings from the corpse of his predecessor (who was laid to dry out) mixed with his food (Beattie 1971: 115). He in this way 'ate his predecessor'; a kind of cannibalism. The king was expected to have an excellent health; to this end he was surrounded with numerous prescriptions with regard to his food and health. The same prescriptions also held for those who prepared his food, or tended his cows (Mworoha 1977: 212). The king was symbolically identified with the country, which implied that he should be in a perfect physical condition. If he should become seriously ill, or was wounded, 'he would be expected to hasten his end by drinking poison' for a weak king endangered the prosperity of the country. When becoming old and feeble, he also was supposed to 'either

take poison or would be killed by one or more of his wives' (Beattie 1971: 105).

The two most important persons after the king were the queen-mother, and his royal sister, the *kalyota*. The queen-mother had the right to grace people condemned to death. The *kalyota* had mainly ceremonial tasks – though once a *kalyota* was appointed as regent over a young king (Mworoha 1977: 212–213). Mworoha emphasizes that contrary to many African kings, the *mukamas* travelled extensively their kingdom to control their realm, and to 'populariser la royauté' (Mworoha 1977: 215). About the relation between the *kalyota* and the king Beattie (1971: 102) states that she held a high position and was appointed by the king, but there was no such thing as a marriage between them. She was head of the women of the royal clan, and held large estates in virtue of her office. Beattie, however, does not exclude sexual relations between brother and sister (Beattie 1971: 96; 1960: 31). These seem to him not connected with ideas about incest, for the Babitoclan was not exogamous. The queen-mother, however, was never a Bito. She always came from a non-Bito clan (Beattie 1960: 25).

### 3. DISCUSSION

With the help of the data presented in the case studies section it will be possible now to formulate the general characteristics of sacred kingship in Africa, and do some research into its underlying principles, in this way testing the hypotheses formulated in the Introduction.

In the first place it seems appropriate to do away with the term 'divine king'. This term was introduced by Frazer (1957 [1911]), and since several scholars adopted it. Oliver and Fage (1962: 44ff., 64ff.), used this term, posing a relation with ancient Egyptian kingship. I already commented upon this assumed relation in note 16, emphasizing its improbability (see also Mair 1977: 40). This relation was strongly advocated by Seligman (1934). Other supporters of the term 'divine kingship' were Monica Wilson (1959), and Fagg (1978). Muller (1981) gives a critical overview of this concept. Murdock, in his *Africa, its Peoples and their Culture History* (1959: 37) says cautiously: 'Either the ruler himself is divine or has unique personal access to the dominant divine powers'. The last addition seems to me correct. Sacred kings it is believed have

somehow access to divine powers – and this aspect is found in all eight cases. Vansina (1992a: 23) stated ‘the king was not divine. He was human, but a sacralized person’. Also Luc de Heusch (2005: 25), Argyle (1966: 116–119) and Ray (1991: 41) distance themselves from the concept of ‘divine’ king. The king was the holder of a sacred status, and because of this disposed of sacral powers. In the words of Gluckman (1952: 23): ‘it is the kingship and not the king who is divine’.

The king is a sacred person. The crown prince – or whoever is the successor – is not yet sacred. He has to be made so with the help of rituals. In Dahomey, he was tattooed with the marks of the leopard by a priest, after which nobody was allowed to look him in the face.<sup>20</sup> The priest and the king should never meet again after the tattooing. For Buganda the moment of sacralisation is less clear, for in the course of time the inauguration rituals were changed. Nowadays the ritual at Buddo Hill seems most important. Here the *kabaka* underwent the inauguration with his sister, the *lubuga*, where he, after receiving ritual goods, was formally addressed as king of Buganda. Among the Tio the incumbent had to go through a long ritual, called *lisee*, during which he became master of Nkwe Mbali, the spirit of the domain and so got the sacred status. After it he needed water to cool the realm in the event that the fire of witchcraft was destroying it, which demonstrated his sacral powers. The inauguration of the king of the Kuba was complex. A man was killed, he planted a tree, and visited the *muyum*, who showed him the national amulets and saved him with kaolin. After this the king and the priest were never to meet again. In Benin it was in principle the eldest son who succeeded his father, but sometimes another candidate was appointed. The successor had to perform the burial rites, which made him acceptable as *oba*. The assumed relation with the rulers of Ife legitimized the incumbent. Among the Jukun extensive rituals were needed to sacralize the successor: he was stripped of his clothes, got admonitions to rule justly, followed a period of seclusion during which he underwent the process of divinization, the beholding of the secret amulets, the getting of a new name, and the formal entry into the royal palace. Among the Shilluk the incumbent had to undergo a period of rituals during which the spirit of Nyikang was persuaded to enter him. The new *reth* got a sacred spear, and a sacred stool. First Nyikang sat upon

the stool and then the king, in this way was expressed his possession by Nyikang. In Bunyoro the incumbent passed the night in a special hut, sat down on a special stool, was washed several times and got new clothes, swore an oath to rule his people good, while oil was poured on his head, which consecrated him. Then a woman sprinkled him with water; after that he and she never were allowed to see each other again. Finally, after meeting his official royal sister, the *kalyota*, he shot arrows to the four corners of the world.

The inauguration of the new king in all cases was a complicated set of rituals.

In most cases of inauguration forms of transgression played a role. This term was introduced by Jean-Claude Muller (1981: 241; 1980, *passim*), who defined it as 'the breaking of strong taboos by the king at his installation ceremonies', such as incest, violence, and/or cannibalism (on incest see also Abélès 1981: 8). In Dahomey incest was mentioned only for *akhosu* Wegbadja, but it seems tolerated in the royal family. No mention is made of cannibalism. Violence was found here in the form of numerous human sacrifices. The *kabaka* of Buganda underwent the Buddo rituals with his sister, the *lubuga*, and spend a night with her in the same hut – in ritual sense sufficient to speak of incest. During these rituals several men were killed. No mention is made of cannibalism. The inauguration of the king of the Tio included the eating of human flesh, which set him apart from and above all humanity. The burial of his predecessor included human sacrifices. Among the Kuba a man was sacrificed during the inauguration, the king rejected the ties with his parents, slept with a sister or half sister, and married a grandchild. In Benin in former times the brothers of the incumbent used to be killed; now they are sent to far away villages. Human sacrifices accompanied the death of his predecessor. In former times the parents of the Jukun king used to be killed on the day of his inauguration. Also a man would be killed. The king ate a bit of the powdered heart of his successor, mixed with his food, which ritual gave him the sacred status. For the king of the Shilluk it is mentioned that he married a (half) sister. In Bunyoro the king ate during the inauguration some liquid from the body of his successor mixed with his food. Some incest between king and *kalyota* seems probable. So, all in all, certain transgressions seem to have taken place in all cases mentioned.

In several theories a narrow connection is assumed between the transgressions, the influence of the king on fertility (of women, cattle and land), and the killing of the king. Abélès characterizes this as the paradox of sacred kingship; on the one hand the highest honor, on the other the vulnerability (Abélès 1981: 2–3). Before going into this relation, first the influence of the king on fertility, and the question of regicide must be analysed; the transgressions were mentioned above.

For Dahomey the influence on fertility is rather indirect. With the adoption of Dakodonu, who ruled the land before the Alladahonu arrived, a link was constructed between the Alladahonu and those who possessed the sacred link with the earth spirits – which implied control over fertility. The yearly killing of a young boy – a scapegoat – taking place at the beginning of the planting season suggests a relation between the king and fertility. As this boy took the failures of the king into the grave, the king could not be held responsible for eventual bad harvests. For Buganda it is only mentioned that in cases of emergency, such as drought, war or disease, the king consulted his forebears to get advice how to handle. The king of the Tio was master of Nkwe Mbali, the spirit of the domain, and thus of fertility. Seed was placed in his shrine, and handed out the next morning to the women who planted it. The king of the Kuba influenced the fertility of the earth because of his power over the earth spirits. He had also power over the rain, which he could send or withhold. The *oba* of Benin was connected narrowly with the fertility and the prosperity of the land. Diminishing of his strength endangered this prosperity. The king of Jukun was expected to secure a regular succession of rich harvests. Therefore he was able to control rain and wind. He made daily offerings to the royal ancestors by which the life of the crops was sustained. The king of the Shilluk, possessed by the spirit of Nyikang, performed regularly certain rituals pertaining to the rain and the harvest. The king of Bunyoro was responsible for the well-being of the country with which he was symbolically identified. There existed a narrow bond between the king and cattle; he often drank milk and watched the milking of his cows. He also fulfilled rituals to protect agriculture. The narrow relation between the king and fertility was found in all cases – though varying in strength.

From the foregoing it follows that, once the king was not – or no longer – able to perform his ritual duties the fertility of women, cattle and land was in danger, and thus the well-being of the population was at risk. It is against this background that the killing of the king should be placed.

In Dahomey the king was not killed; in his place yearly a substitute was killed, taking the failures of the king with him into the grave. There thus was no reason for regicide here. Neither is regicide found in Buganda. During his visit of the *nankere* priest a son of the priest was killed, which might be interpreted as the killing of a substitute of the king. As the *kabaka* had but few connections with fertility, he hardly could be blamed in case of poor harvest. He only consulted his forebears in cases of emergency. Perhaps, it also played a role that the *akhosu* as well as the *kabaka* were powerful rulers in well organized kingdoms, situated in regions with a mild climate, where but seldom was a failure of crops. The king of the Tio passed his inauguration together with the *ngaasaa*, his first ritual wife. She was the ritual counterpart of the king and was supposed to ensure the fertility of the cereals, which in fact was an obligation of the king. When she died the king should not survive her and was killed, for he could not rule without her. If she died before the king, a successor for her was appointed. When the king of the Kuba lost his physical forces he should be killed, for a weak king would not be able to guarantee fertility, one of his sacred duties. It is mentioned that the king of Benin was narrowly related with fertility and the prosperity of the land. Diminishing of his strength endangered these qualities. There are no indications that in former times he was killed in that case. There were yearly rituals to renew his sacred forces. The king of the Jukun led a dangerous life. When he fell of his horse he would be killed (sign of weakness). When drought or a succession of bad harvests demanded it, the king was ceremonially put to death. Also by serious illness the king would be killed. The main reason to do so, it was said, was that the king then was no longer able to fulfil the many daily rituals by which the royal ancestors were fed and the life of the crops was sustained. Among the Shilluk in a number of cases the *reth* was killed by rebellious princes or simply died from sickness. In a few cases, however, a ritual killing could be established. In former times the unlucky king would be placed in a closed hut with a girl

and left to die of hunger, which usually took a very long time. In later times the more human method of strangulation was applied. The *mukama* of Bunyoro was symbolically identified with his country and should be in a perfect physical condition. If he should become seriously ill, or was wounded he was expected to hasten his end by drinking poison, for a weak king endangered the prosperity of his country. When becoming old and feeble he was supposed to either take poison or was killed by one or more of his wives.

This overview shows that in five of the eight cases a ritual killing of the king was found. The ritual killing of the king was found in Africa also in other cases, not included into this article.<sup>21</sup> It is not clear to what extent the killing of the king was a kind of 'ritual rebellion' as described by Gluckman (1952). Was there a kind of general unrest under the population? The detailed descriptions of a regicide by Simonse (2005) shows a gradual process during which the unrest among the population grew more and more, ending in the ritual killing of the ruler. In most cases, however, the lower ranking people had but a very slight knowledge of the health of the king. His life and doings mainly took place within closely guarded surroundings. The decision to end his life thus was a court matter, in which high placed courtiers and some high priests played a role. Often his wives were taking the initiative – and sometimes took care of the killing of the weakened king themselves. There are in these cases no indications of a general unrest or a rebellion among the population. At least they are not mentioned in the literature consulted. In some cases, however, when the death of the king was made known, a general unrest occurred – in Dahomey, for example.

It goes without saying that numerous types of protection of the sacred person were found. As these were more or less similar in each of the cases analyzed here, a summary will suffice. The king must not touch the earth with bare hands or feet. It was forbidden to touch the king, his clothes or his throne. The royal blood should not be shed. Hair- and nail clippings were carefully collected and interred with the king. The king was supposed not to need food, drank or sleep; these activities were carefully hidden. The king was not to risk his sacred body to the dangers of war; a general took his place. He also should evade sick or death people. Sneezing or coughing in his presence meant the death for the 'sick' person.

It will be possible now to look into the connection between the influence of the king on fertility, the transgressions during his inauguration, and the killing of the king. Several scholars have formulated theories to explain this complex. Among these should be mentioned Luc de Heusch and Jean-Claude Muller. De Heusch, inspired by Frazer's theories about the dying king (Frazer 1957 [1911], I: 348–372), combined incest, fertility and the killing of the king into one whole. He made the incest with the *lubuga* the cornerstone of his theory. This transgression disengaged the king from his kin oriented society – as also happened in other African kingdoms. It is curious that he took as his principal example Buganda, where the ritual killing of a king never took place, and the occurrence of incest was rather doubtful (De Heusch 1958, 1984, 1987; cf. Roscoe 1911; Ray 1991). His assertion that the king married his sister as a substitute for his mother – a real Freudian approach (De Heusch 1958: 58–60) – is somewhat surprising, for not based on ethnographical data. This behavior made the king, according to De Heusch, a justified victim for ritual killing. He, however, did not marry his sister; the principal wife of the *kabaka* was the *kadulubare* (Ray 1991: 219). His mother, the *nmasole*, played an important political role as first adviser of the king. She occupied a separate dwelling, and had her own court. Visitors were to wait upon her and give her presents (Speke 1863: 304). In a later publication De Heusch takes a different stance (De Heusch 2005). Here he criticizes Frazer's use of the adjective 'divine', does not return to the Buganda case, uses the concept of transgression, and refers to some cases where the ritual killing of the king did happen. Neither his first approach, nor the second, is very convincing.

The other scholar mentioned, Jean-Claude Muller, also bases his theory on the transgressions committed by the king during his inauguration. These transgressions made him a sinner and a sacred person at the same time (Muller 1980: 161; 1981: 239–250). In this way he did fulfil the double function of scapegoat and benefactor of his people. As long as things went well it was thanks to the beneficial powers of the king, and when bad harvests did occur, people had an argument at hand of how to dispose of the bad king, who once had violated their most important customs. In this way transgressions, fertility, and the killing of the king were brought into one coherent model. Convincing though Muller presents his views, yet

there are some differences between his views and the data from the case studies presented above. In several cases the transgressions were connected with the wish, or the necessity, of disengaging the incumbent from his people (Kuba, Bunyoro), and in other cases, with the same purpose, the existence of his biological parents was denied (Kuba, Benin, and Jukun). In all cases the king was connected with fertility, and as long as he was strong and healthy there were no problems. When, however, the king became old, or weak, he no longer could guarantee fertility and well-being. So he must be disposed of. In none of the cases, however, a connection between the transgressions and the killing was mentioned. Neither there was found a connection with the concept of a scapegoat – though perhaps the killing of a boy in Dahomey might qualify as such. The fact that there was no killing of the king in Buganda or Dahomey was connected by Muller with the great political power of both rulers. The killing of substitutes took place here, however; people apparently assuming that the killing of substitutes would absolve the king of eventual misbehaviour. True though this may be, there is possibly an additional factor preventing the killing of the king in these cases, for neither the *akhosu*, nor the *kabaka* was directly connected with fertility (as was explained above). We thus must look for a more satisfying approach.

Thus far it was established that there was believed to be a strong connection between the health of the king and fertility. Thus, in case of diminishing powers the king should be killed. It seems probable that this behavior was mainly caused by fear. Fear of the aristocrats that harvests would fail, cattle would die, and women no longer would give birth. As the king was believed to have sacral powers that ensured fertility and well-being, and thus was responsible for the magical production of fertility and well-being – he also was responsible for the disappearance of these and killing him would be the only logical and justified step, in the hope and expectation that his successor would do better. Perhaps, also some feelings of reciprocity did play a role. We have served the king, worked for him, gave him food and women, bore his every whim, and suffered the killing of numerous human sacrifices. The king in his turn was expected to procure fertility and well-being. We did our duty; now it is time for the king to do his. It should be emphasized that there was not so much a question of a rebellion, nor a matter of

some general unrest. The decision about the killing of the king was in fact a court matter. The transgressions did not play an explicit role here; they had disengaged the king from his people, which made killing him easier.

The next question thus becomes: how did the king attain such a strong association with fertility and well-being? To find a – hypothetical – answer to this question we have to delve into the past, into the time that agriculture was new, and long before kings came into existence. We might hypothesize that at that time little village communities were the general level of organization. In Africa, but also elsewhere in the world, success in planting and harvesting got the eager attention of less fortunate neighbors.<sup>22</sup> The leader of the fortunate family soon became considered as the man with good contacts with the world of the spirits or the gods. In Africa this belief found expression in the idea that the one who first opened the earth for sowing, had made contact with the earth spirits. They concluded with him a kind of contract that held that, in exchange for certain specific rituals, he got access to the fertility of the earth. Immigrants who wanted to profit of his influence on fertility usually were allowed to settle in the region, in exchange for submission. In this way the chief enlarged his people and intensified his influence, by just being there – as Kopytoff stated (Kopytoff 1999: 91). This belief is still found to play a role in different regions of Africa (Zuiderwijk 1998: 92; Muller 1999; Pels 2004: 11ff.; Van Binsbergen 1979; Cohen 1981 found this belief in a number of Sahel communities). The one who opened the earth and his successors became known as the earth priests, or Lords of the Land (Simonse 1992). A relation with the earth spirits legitimized the sacred king (or chief, or big man). According to some traditions, mainly found in West Africa, the earth priest lost in a number of cases his political prerogatives to the ‘hunter’, a mythical person, assumed to have come from abroad (the forest) and connected with the distribution of meat. He married the daughter of the earth priest and through her he established a relation to the earth spirits, responsible for the fertility of the land and the people (Claessen and Oosten 1996: 368–369). The descendants of the hunter after some time became chiefs, combining political and sacred powers, and, later, sacred kings – who during their inauguration, were connected directly or indirectly, with the earth spirits and thus with fertility. It should be mentioned here that but few of the descendants of the ‘hunter’ de-

veloped into sacred kings; the majority by far remained chiefs, or village heads. Only under exceptional circumstances the level of a kingdom was reached.<sup>23</sup> The sacred chiefs or village heads though run similar risks as the sacred kings (Straube 1984; Simonse 1992). It remains curious that always someone else was ready to take over the office – even after the failed practitioner was killed. Perhaps that the power invested in the office was the main attraction for the new candidate.

There remains one aspect to be discussed here, that of the rainmaker. In four cases only it was mentioned that the making of rain fell under the responsibilities of the king: Kuba, Jukun, Shilluk, and Bunyoro. This seems connected with the regional climate. Generally speaking in the savannas a sufficient amount of rain falls yearly. However, Garlake (1990: 10) points out that the rain usually fell in a single short season. Moreover, it is 'not only marked seasonal, but often unreliable and subject to very great fluctuations from year to year' (*Ibid.*: 10). These misfortunes hit farmers as well as herders. Straube (1984: 4–5) states that in these regions not only the traditional leaders, with their influence on fertility were asked for help, but also the specialists in the art of rain making, the rainmakers. Straube emphasizes that rainmakers were not sorcerers as is often assumed, but ritual specialists, who performed religious ceremonies. They usually had a high status and often some political power; but they also ran the risk of being ritually killed in case of prolonged drought (Straube 1984: 14; *cf.* Simonse 1992). Zimon (1968: 431) also emphasizes the importance of rain for agriculture and cattle breeding. The fact that rainfall is most irregular explains the existence of the many rainmakers and rain ceremonies in the dryer regions of the savannah. Zimon (1968: 432) refers to Bunyoro, where the king had entrusted the making of rain to specialists (see also above). He rightly points to the fact that where rain was certain, no rainmakers of importance were found (*Ibid.*: 435). This held for Dahomey, Buganda, Tio, and Benin. In other cases rain making was one of the many ritual obligations of the king – often delegated to the specialists – perhaps with Shilluk as an exception.

#### 4. SUMMARY

In the foregoing section characteristics of sacred kingship in eight African kingdoms were investigated and compared. The findings

of this exercise make it possible to evaluate the hypotheses formulated in the Introduction, and to add data to the statements made there. The results of the investigation can be summarized as follows:

- The suggestion that positively influencing fertility was the ‘core business’ of sacred kings was amply confirmed.

- This capacity was gained during a complex inauguration ritual that made a simple prince a sacred king.

- During the inauguration the incumbent committed several forms of transgression, such as incest, cannibalism, and human sacrifices, by which he became disengaged of his family, and society and was placed outside and above it.

- The king was surrounded by numerous taboos and prescriptions which were meant to protect his sacred personality – but also to isolate him from his society.

- In case the expected fertility did not materialize this was blamed on the king. As he was held responsible for the creation of fertility and well-being, this failure could result in his being ritually killed.

- There are reasons to think that the fierce reaction to the royal failure was caused probably by fear – fear for bad harvests, the dying of cattle, miscarriages among women, and loss of prosperity.

- It is also possible that feelings of reciprocity did play a role: the king not fulfilling his obligations, while he had been served in all respects.

- Rain making was mentioned only in regions where climatic conditions made it necessary, such as in: Kuba, Jukun, and Shilluk. In Bunyoro rain making was delegated by the king to ritual specialists.

- Many of the women around the king had a ritual function. They were the ‘sisters’ he married, or the women who brewed his beer.

- His mother (real or ritual) usually played an important political role.

Though in most places the sacred kingship in Africa has disappeared under the influence of Christianity, Islam, capitalism, colonialism, or civil wars, the detailed studies by Simonse show that even today in some regions rainmakers still play a role, and still run the risk of being killed ritually when the rain stays out.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This ‘sacred link’ usually implied the control over fertility; Bay does not mention this aspect. See for this: Claessen and Oosten 1996: 368–370; Claessen 2000a: 146, 180, 186; Van Binsbergen 1979: 140–141; Luning 1997 passim; Kopytoff 1999 passim.

<sup>2</sup> According to Le Herissé (1911: 216) unions between brothers and (half) sisters were allowed in the royal family. One may speak here of incest.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Early State* (Claessen 1978: 557–558) it is argued that ‘the basic characteristic of the sovereign is his sacral status’; in one case only (Islamic Jimma) it was found that the ruler was not considered sacred (see *Ibid.*: Table VIII, p. 556).

<sup>4</sup> The literature on Buganda speaks only about clan heads. In view of his position Walusimbi might have been a paramount chief. On chiefship: Claessen 2011a.

<sup>5</sup> Claessen 1970 gives on pages 335–336 a complete list of the clans and their main functions. On p. 337 a list is given of the main functions and their distribution over the clans (based on Roscoe 1911 and Kaggwa 1934).

<sup>6</sup> As elsewhere in Africa they had contacts with the earth spirits, and thus some influence on fertility; see note 1 for additional literature.

<sup>7</sup> For further analysis of this case: Claessen 2011b: 319–335.

<sup>8</sup> As there was no direct connection between the *kabaka* and fertility, the diminishing of his forces did not endanger the prosperity of his country.

<sup>9</sup> There is no further information on this sister. In some places Vansina puts the word ‘sister’ between inverted commas, suggesting that she is rather a ritual person than a real sister.

<sup>10</sup> There is little known about the king's wives. Vansina mentions a first wife and a third wife, suggesting some sort of rank ordering among them. He, however, does not give further details.

<sup>11</sup> See for example the report by Thomas Windham from 1553 (Hakluyt 1907 [1599]: 42–44). The adventures of James Welch, who visited Benin in 1588, are also reported in some detail (Hakluyt 1907 [1599]: 297). A third report, written by Anthony Ingram, mentions trade in pepper and elephant tusks, and the many deaths among the sailors (malaria, and yellow fever). He also describes a reception at court, where the king did receive them kindly and the courtiers followed a strict etiquette (Hakluyt 1907: 298–299).

<sup>12</sup> Bini is the name of the greatest group of people; Edo is the language, spoken by the Bini.

<sup>13</sup> Several authors consider Benin as an (early) state. Dmitri Bondarenko, however, defends the view that Benin was a megacommunity, not a state (Bondarenko 1995, 2004; 2006: 5).

<sup>14</sup> Mechtildis Jungwirth mentions as his sources a certain D.R. (most probably Dierick Ruyters), Samuel Blomert (whose work is lost), and Pieter de Marees (Jungwirth 1968: 51).

<sup>15</sup> 'They are not given to thieving, neither to drinking too much, but are great whore-hoppers' (my translation).

<sup>16</sup> In the time of Meek's research of the Jukun, there was found a wide interest in the possible relations between the old Egyptian civilization and West African kingship. Seligman wrote in 1934 an influential essay *Egypt and Negroe Africa*, in which he considered the 'divine king' an Egyptian phenomenon that became widely spread in Africa. In an important article Amborn (1984) demonstrates that the cultural developments in West Africa followed courses different from those in Egypt and Nubia, mainly caused by ecological differences. In later years, it seems, Meek has dropped his Egyptian conviction. Moreover Frankfort, often referred to in the matter of Egyptian influences makes short shrift of these ideas (Frankfort 1948: p. 383 note 22, p. 348 note 4).

<sup>17</sup> 'The king is not assimilated with a divinity in traditional black Africa as he was in ancient Egyptian civilization' (De Heusch 2005: 25).

<sup>18</sup> It is not clear from Casati's text if he witnessed this interment – or only repeated what him was told.

<sup>19</sup> K.W. is identified by Steinhart (1987: 200) as *mukama* Tito Winyi IV.

<sup>20</sup> In later times the *akhosu* Tegbesu ordered that somebody else would be tattooed in his place, so that this prohibition no longer hindered the king in his governing tasks.

<sup>21</sup> See for example Krige and Krige 1956 [1943] with regard to the suicide of the 'rain queen' of the Lovedu. For other cases: Simonse 1992, and 2005 in which he presents detailed analyses of ritual killings; cf. De Heusch 2005. Muller 1980 discusses the ritual killing of some Rukuba chiefs. Muller (1981) mentions a.o. the Bemba and the Nyakyusa as cases. On the Nyakyusa: Monica Wilson 1959. See also Morton-Williams on the Oyo (Morton-Williams 1967: 53–54). Shifferd 1996 presents data on the Mossi.

<sup>22</sup> To give a few examples: about ten thousand years ago, according to Freidel (1995), hunting and gathering made place in Mesoamerica for agriculture. Not all soil was good; the best lands were the river levees, which could produce extremely high yields. Control of such lands by a family or group of families provided the opportunity to acquire economic, political and social control over other, less fortunate groups. A belief in the interference of the gods developed soon, and the most fortunate families were supposed to be more favored by the supernatural forces than others. This belief, lay, according to Grove and Gillespie (1992: 27), at the basis of the development of sacred chiefs, associated with rain and fertility.

The developments among the Kachin of Highland Burma (Leach 1954; Friedman 1979) show similar aspects. Prosperous farmers became associated with a better access to the ancestors or the spirits, and their less fortunate colleagues started to give presents to the head of the well-to-do family with the request to interfere for them by his ancestors – which he did. This head soon became a hereditary leader, a chief with sacred qualities (Hagesteijn 1989).

Vansina (1992a: 24) points to the convergence of rituals all over the world as for example, first fruits, forms of sacrifice, honors for ancestral spirits, and many more.

<sup>23</sup> This is not the place to go into the complex evolution of chiefdoms and early states. A summary of these developments is given in Claessen 2010. See also Claessen 2002, 2011b, 2014.

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