

THE KINGS OF RWANDA



FATHERS OF A NATION

by

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PART I

The Eye of God:

Rwandan Kings of the Pre-Colonial Age

(ca. 1200-1895 AD)

In an era of ten-second sound bytes and mass media, it is sometimes rather difficult to imagine a society founded on the notion of the political, administrative and religious centrality of a hereditary monarch. The various institutions of the Western world, largely the inheritance of the Enlightenment, have fixed firmly in the public mind a model of democratic government that has been cut to fit a wide range of national situations, often with very mixed results. Informed democracy, while certainly a major step forward in man's uneven progress toward self-realization, has not been the universal panacea promised by so many of the hopeful and far-thinking political philosophers of the 18th and 19th centuries. Many are the failed experiments in democratic government, frequently imposed or inspired by foreign powers, that have littered the African continent in particular since the middle decades of the 20th century.

Long before the notion of democracy ever appeared on the shores of Africa, however, there existed the small southeastern kingdom of Rwanda, originally confined to the open savanna between Lake Victoria and Lake Kivu, and whose modern roots as a sovereign and independent nation date back to the 13th century. Rwanda constituted a triple exception in Africa, for she was a true nation-state. Comprised of three different and yet interrelated groups- the Twa, the Hutu and the

Tutsi- the Kingdom of Rwanda was not the random patchwork creation of some European colonial power which had simply imposed its will on a collection of tribes and/or regions, but rather a true nation in every sense of the word. In addition, and despite the artificial distinctions later introduced by colonial imperialists determined to divide and conquer her, the three groups that comprised her population together constituted one unique and identical ethnicity, that of the Banyarwanda, or "people of Rwanda."

The first signs of a human presence in the area now known as Rwanda date from about 1000 BC, and archaeologists have there discovered the remains of a civilization that had mastered both the production of iron and of pottery. The area was originally populated by Pygmy tribes, ancestors of the Twa, and it was early in the first millennium AD that the Tutsi (originally from the areas north of Rwanda) and the Hutu (originally from the areas south of Rwanda) initially migrated to this beautiful and fertile land of rolling hills, open plains and large, crystalline lakes.

While little is known about the many individuals who reigned over the people of Rwanda as king, or mwami (plural abami), during the ages that preceded the arrival of European explorers in the mid-19th century, a considerable amount of information is available about the rôle of the mwami in Rwandan society. Thanks to the collection of rituals and protocols known as the Gakondo, first passed on by means of oral tradition, and later committed to writing after the coming of the Europeans, it is possible to acquire a strong appreciation of the nature and primacy of the king in the Rwandan state, and to gain important insights into the absolutely pivotal rôle occupied by the monarch in the life of the nation and of the people.



Map of Modern Rwanda

Like many other African sovereigns of the period, the mwami of Rwanda was the undisputed master of the entirety of his kingdom, and his word was quite literally law. His decisions, although often taken in consultation with his counselors, or abiru, were not subject to appeal, and failure to comply with his will was punishable in the most rigorous way possible. The scholar Donat Murego of the University of Louvain, who has devoted much of his work to the study of the idea of "sacred royalty" in pre-colonial Africa, states unequivocally that with the conquest of the Hutu and Twa chiefs by the Tutsi kings in the 13th century, "Tutsi power was established, the Hutu and their former chiefs had been defeated and reduced to servitude. After having sought to take in hand every decision and to control the

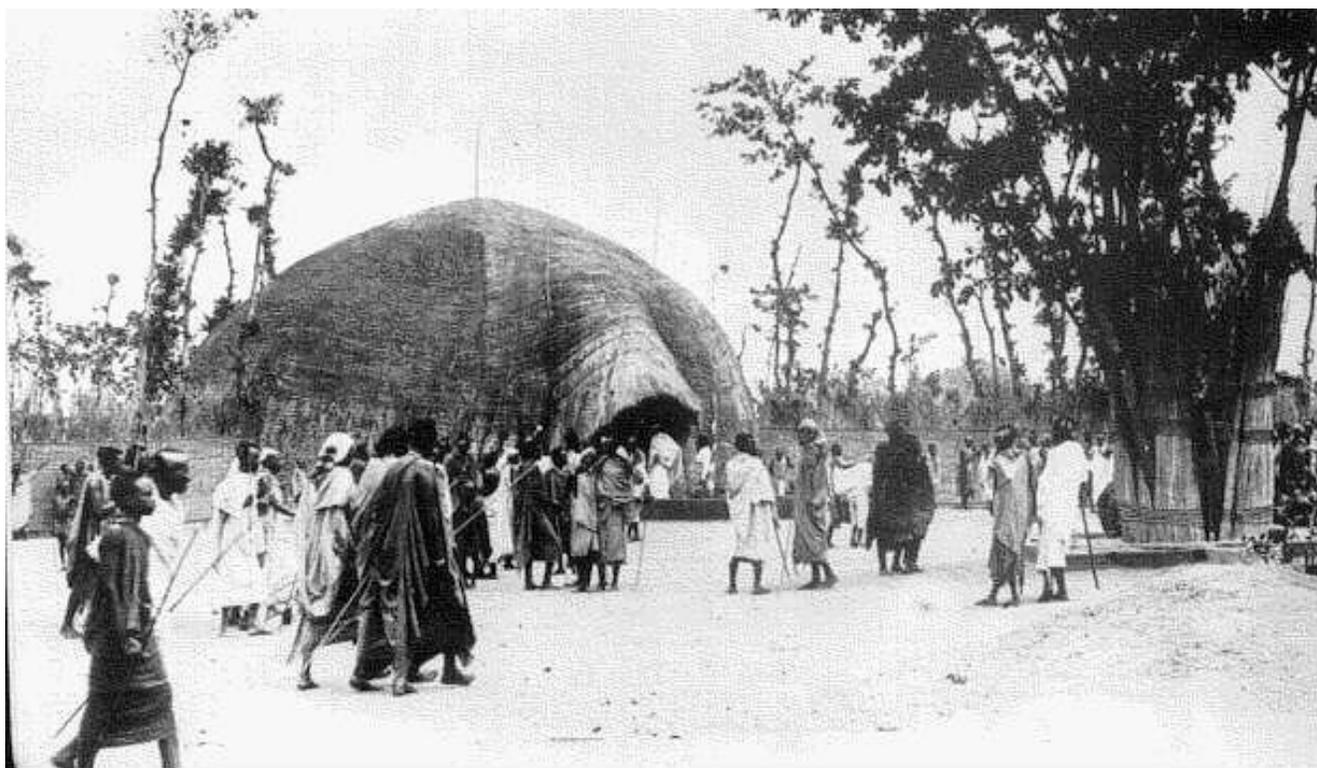
entirety of the administration, the Tutsi monarch finished by placing his supreme authority beyond question. It is he who distributes the privileges; he is judged by no one, controlled by no one. No independent or autonomous structure, having its own powers exists in his sphere, and therefore cannot limit him. From the king flows all power, all authority, all decisions."



Intare Warriors

The life of the mwami was not one of undiluted comfort and boundless pleasures, however, for his real work as cornerstone of the nation frequently demanded great sacrifices of the man solely responsible for the continued welfare and happiness of his people. "Father of the people," writes modern Rwandan historian Benjamin Sehene, "the mwami played the rôle of savior of the nation, particularly in times of

crisis: wars, political rivalries or internal conflicts. It was frequently that he sacrificed himself by going to the forefront of danger; during battles, for example, but also by committing suicide or by letting himself be 'assassinated' and replaced by another if the abiru, ritualists of the Court, decided that this was necessary for the safety of the kingdom." Thus the position of mwami was one that often placed great demands on its titularies, despite the myriad and far-ranging powers associated with the exercise of his sacred office.



The Palace of the Mwami at Nyanza

Over the course of the centuries, and under the strong central rule of the abami, the three different groups of the population lived side-by-side and gradually melded into one, the nation of the Banyarwanda. The people of the nation-state eventually

came to speak a common language, Kinyarwanda, to share a common native animistic religion and to partake in the same social and cultural rituals and activities. In addition, as intermarriage and social interaction between the groups became increasingly common at this time, thus were born both the modern kingdom of Rwanda and the nation of the Banyarwanda.

Below the monarch, who wielded supreme power over his dominion, were the various members of his family, his wives and children, and the chiefs and sub-chiefs who executed his will on the local level and who were directly responsible to him for the payment of taxes and for the general administration of the kingdom. Because of its relatively small size, however, it was possible for the mwami to rule the country quasi-personally for much of its history, particularly as the Rwandan royal court was a peripatetic one until the early part of the 20th century. According to the historian Alexis Kagame, at this juncture in her history the mwami was quite literally considered to be "the eye of God, by which He contemplate[d] Rwanda." In fact, the king was sole possessor of all property of any kind within the borders of his kingdom, and he carried the additional title of Sebantu or "owner of men."

According to Alexandre Pages, "the king inspired in his entourage a very humble respect, mixed with a constant uncertainty. The uncertainty that his dignified yet somewhat haughty attitude instilled in them never ceased to torture these ambitious seekers of fortune. Also, they spied with some apprehension the various movements of his august countenance which, while remaining most frequently closed, sometimes betrayed his most intimate feelings and his most spontaneous inclinations. A rapid flash of anger in his eyes foretold disgrace and perhaps death; a

sunny smile on his severe visage made for the unfolding of radiant hopes. These brusque and capricious changes- which could determine the future and even decide between life and death- kept these souls perpetually in suspense between a fear that could induce shivers and a peacefulness as pleasant as a fresh breeze." Thus, at the apogee of the pre-colonial era of the kingdom of Rwanda, the monarch was both all-powerful and, in the eyes of his many subjects, all-knowing, the veritable incarnation of a god.

The Mwami Cyirima (r. 1482-1506) of the Nyiginya Dynasty expanded the domains of Rwanda to include several new areas, conquering the neighboring chiefdoms of Bumbogo, Buriza and Rukoma. This state, however, was somewhat subservient to its larger neighbors, and was later overcome by the Bunyoro of present-day Uganda. Nevertheless, few truly significant details emerge, as the paucity of written accounts from this period of Rwandan history has forced modern scholars to rely heavily on oral traditions of the age to fill in the many gaps present in the historical record.

After their defeat at the hands of the Bunyoro, the remnants of the Rwandan kingdom relocated west to the Nduga highlands, where they soon came to flourish again as a nation. In the early 17th century, under the inspired rule of Ruganzu II Ndori (r. 1600-1624 AD), the nation expanded in all directions, and Buganza was retaken. Later rulers of Rwanda continued this drive toward expansion, and by the mid-18th century, the Rwandan state had become far more powerful and centralized, thus manifesting more of a historical presence than ever it had before.

The expansion of the 18th century eventually reached the shores of Lake Kivu,

and had as its primary goal not military conquest, but the migration of the Rwandan population into other fertile areas, thereby spreading its agricultural techniques, its social and political structures, and effectively extending the power base of its abami. Outposts of warriors were established along the borders of the kingdom, with the aim of protecting vulnerable frontier areas from unwanted incursions. It was only against other advanced states, such as Gisaka, Bugesera and Burundi that expansion was undertaken using primarily military means.



Lake Kivu

The three groups of Rwanda's population, despite the long-term effects of intermarriage and a common culture, settled into distinctive rôles which, when considered in their totality, were each of great and lasting benefit to the development

of the society as a whole. The Twa maintained themselves largely through hunting wild animals, the Hutu through agriculture and the Tutsi through the raising of livestock. Thus each group played its part in the ongoing growth and prosperity of a nation where different avenues of social mobility were open to all through marriage, service to the state and economic achievement.

The main holdings of the mwami were comprised of a collection of over one hundred estates spread throughout the various regions of the kingdom. These estates were composed mainly of fields of banana trees and thousands of head of cattle. They formed the real foundation of the ruler's wealth, and it was between these many different estates that the mwami would travel with his entourage of chiefly courtiers while on periodic progress throughout the kingdom. The greatest and most luxurious of these estates would also be home to one of the monarch's many wives, with some abami having as many as twenty at a time.

Tribute was to be paid to the mwami by all Rwandans, Twa, Hutu and Tutsi, and was generally collected by Tutsi members of the administration. The mwami was also assisted in his governance by a ministerial council of great chiefs, known as the batware b'intebe. Below this council of chiefs there was a lesser group of Tutsi leaders who were charged with governing the country in districts, each of which had a cattle chief and a land chief. It was the cattle chief who collected tribute in cattle, with the land chief collecting the requisite tribute in produce. Further down the ladder were the hill chiefs, charged with the oversight of a particular area within a district, and the neighborhood chiefs, who kept watch over the smallest of the localities.

The frontier regions were overseen by the military chiefs, who were an important element in the security and organization of the nation. Their rôle was both defensive and offensive, with many military chiefs securing the borders in times of relative calm, while striking out on cattle raids against neighboring tribes under less pacific circumstances. The great chief and the army chief were often one and the same person, and this identification of the military with the nobiliary persisted throughout the history of the kingdom. Finally, the abiru, or guardians of tradition, played an important part in the administration of the mwami, and provided guidance on matters related to the "supernatural powers" of the king, as well as on questions of court ritual and protocol.



H.M. Yuhi V Musinga at the Royal Palace of Nyanza

The kingly power of the mwami was symbolized by the kalinga, a large ceremonial drum frequently decorated with the dried heads and dessicated testicles of vanquished opponents of the royal armies. Rwandan author and historian Benjamin Sehene writes that "an atmosphere of veneration and a grand ceremonial

surrounded the kalinga ("token of hope"), which was kept in a palace, protected day and night by a special guard." This important symbol was painted with the blood of bulls, which gave it a reddish-brown appearance, and was often escorted by three other royal drums, called "He possesses knowledge," "the Country expands" and "the Nations are subject to me." If ever the kalinga were lost or captured in battle, it was universally believed that this setback would certainly signal disaster for the entirety of the Rwandan nation.



The Kalinga

Such was the nature and organization of the independent kingdom that first greeted the eyes of European explorers of the mid-19th century when they ventured into the region of Lake Victoria on their quest to discover the source of the Nile River. John Hanning Speke was the first of the British explorers to mention the Kingdom of Rwanda in his writings, and it was during the time of the great Mwami

Kigeli IV Rwabugiri (r. 1853-1895) that the nation knew its last days of total independence. Under his reign, Rwanda had successfully resisted the incursions of the Arab slave traders who had attempted to penetrate the interior in search of human grist for their satanic mills, and Kigeli IV was himself the first mwami to ever set eyes upon a European within the confines of his formerly secluded kingdom.



A Portrait of H.M. King Kigeli IV Rwabugiri

Kigeli IV Rwabugiri is considered to have been one of the very greatest of the abami, despite a considerable reputation for harshness in dealings with his subjects. His strict administration imposed a draconian regime on the once semi-independent Tutsi and Hutu chieftains of the Rwandan hinterland, frequently confiscating their holdings and eventually breaking their political power in the country. He also established a more modern army, one that was equipped with guns, and which successfully blocked most foreigners from entering the tiny state during the greater part of his reign.

In the domain of socio-political engineering, Kigeli IV relied on a number of feudal structures, such as the uburetwa ("labor for land") system, which was somewhat analogous to the institution of serfdom practiced in medieval Europe. Although his reign officially began in 1853, it was not until 1860 that Kigeli IV Rwabugiri managed to unite all parts of Rwanda under his strong, centralized rule. Despite the fiercely independent spirit of its monarch, Rwanda fell under the control of the German East Africa Company by an act of the Berlin International Conference of 1884-85. The regions of Rwanda and Urundi were ceded to Germany as colonial spheres of interest, and it was during the final year of Kigeli's long reign that a caravan of over six hundred men, led by the German Count von Götzen, finally penetrated the borders of the kingdom.

On May 29, 1894, Count von Götzen was received by the mwami in person while the Royal Court of Rwanda was in residence at Kageyo, near the present-day town of Gisenyi. The German soldiers organized military parades and demonstrations of marksmanship, as well as a display of fireworks. For his part, the mwami made a valuable gift of livestock to the foreign visitors, and appeared to be moderately pleased with the encounter. What he could not know, however, was that this meeting would mark the beginning of a painful and tremendously difficult century for his formerly isolated kingdom, a century that would see her increasingly on the defensive against a carefully planned and minutely coordinated takeover by European rulers whose domains lay thousands of miles away from the sacred enclosure of his simple palace. Unknown to Kigeli and his abiru, the Rubicon had been crossed, and sadly there was soon to be no reasonable hope of a safe return.

PART II

Beneath the Banner of Christ the King:

Rwandan Abami of the Colonial Era

(ca. 1895-1959)

Within a year after the arrival of the German explorers at Kageyo, the great Mwami Kigeli IV Rwabugiri had died, and had been succeeded by one of his sons, who had been chosen by the abiru according to time-honored custom, and who reigned under the name Mibambwe IV Rutarindwa. There was intense dissatisfaction at court, however, as the new monarch was not considered to be an entirely suitable choice, particularly at a time when foreign encroachment on Rwandan soil loomed large on the socio-political landscape.

Consequently, the reign of Mibambwe IV was not a long one, and he was duly replaced on the throne in 1896 by Yuhi V Musinga (r. 1896-1931), another of Mwami Kigeli's sons by his wife Kanyogera (Nyirajuhi V), in what has come to be known as the Coup d'Etat of Rucunshu. In accordance with Rwandan royal tradition, the ousted king was put to death for the benefit of the nation, the kalinga was presented to the new monarch and the supreme authority passed naturally into the hands of the successor designated by the abiru.

The new mwami, Yuhi Musinga, born in 1883, was a far more congenial choice for the majority of the Rwandan Royal Court, and as a result, under the regency of his mother and her brother, Kabare, the young king quickly consolidated his power base within the kingdom. At this critical juncture in the history of the nation, the

leaders moved quickly to strengthen the structures of the state, primarily in an effort to neutralize the increasing incursions made on national sovereignty by the German colonial machine. Despite minor disturbances in a few isolated regions of the country, including the illegal installation of a "mwami in rebellion," Ndungtse, from 1911 to 1912, Mwami Yuhi reigned steadily and wisely over his kingdom, maintaining a firm hand on the reins of power throughout the early decades of his sovereignty.



H.M. Mwami Yuhi V Musinga

Over the years, the promising young king grew into an impressive and eminently royal figure, his demeanor exuding a mixture of stern authority and fatherly benevolence. Photos of the monarch from this period show him to have been a

commanding presence, one who is clearly at the center of attention in all his doings, and yet one who is strangely sympathetic in his majesty. Backed by his regents and abiru, the monarch did his best to stem the increasingly strong tide of demands made by the German colonial powers, but also came to realize that in matters of military technology and mechanized warfare, as well as in sheer deceitfulness, the foreign interlopers clearly held the upper hand.



Mwami Yuhi V Musinga with Members of the Royal Court of Rwanda

Thus were born a number of the concessions made to the German authorities over the course of the years, some of which were to bear bitter fruit in the decades to come. In 1899, the Mwami officially recognized the German "protectorate," known as

Deutsch-Ostafrika, and in 1900 reluctantly consented to the foundation of a Catholic monastery at Save, which was run by the Order of the White Fathers, and which effectively opened the door to the eventual conversion of most of the country to the Roman Catholic faith. Despite the myriad spiritual and practical benefits brought about by the introduction of the faith of Christ into his domains, Mwami Yuhi Musinga remained deeply suspicious of European missionaries throughout the entirety of his reign, and viewed their activities as largely aimed at eroding his supreme royal authority at a time when that authority was already under considerable attack by growing waves of colonial opportunists.

Yuhi V Musinga with the White Fathers Missionaries



In 1908, the German Resident, Richard Kandt, a sort of "overseer" of the colonial protectorate, established his headquarters at Kigali (present-day capital of the Republic of Rwanda), and this move ultimately inspired the quasi-permanent establishment of the Royal Court of Rwanda at Nyanza, which quickly became the epicenter of the Rwandan administrative system. The mwami inhabited a noble and spacious enclosure, the confines of which were considered to be "sacred ground" by his many faithful subjects.



H.M. Queen Kankazi, Mother of Mutara III Rudahigwa

The month of March, 1913, saw a joyous event in the birth of a son (and eventual heir) to Mwami Yuhi V Musinga, but within the coming year, troubling developments

in Europe would come to overshadow the personal happiness of the Rwandan monarch. Increasing political tensions among several of the European powers, coupled with the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in the summer of 1914, quickly led to an almost universal declaration of war on the Continent in August of that fateful year. Franz Ferdinand, nephew of Franz Josef, the reigning Emperor of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, had been shot in Sarajevo, Serbia, by a young Serbian nationalist, Gavrilo Princip, and the resultant tension created by this act drew the majority of European nations into the first epic conflict of the 20th century.

The immediate result of this conflict on the kingdom of Rwanda was the invasion of its territory by Belgian troops, in direct and flagrant violation of treaty agreements previously established to shield the African protectorates from just this sort of aggression. Yuhi V Musinga, caught in a crossfire between the Germans and the Belgians, reluctantly threw in his lot with the forces of Kaiser Wilhelm II, with whose emissaries he already had a long-standing, if somewhat unequal relationship. Thousands of Rwandans were killed in a variety of battles, and Yuhi's efforts to minimize the effects on his kingdom of this almost universal conflagration, entirely the making of the foreign powers, were sadly futile. By 1916, however, Belgian troops had emerged victorious over German colonial forces, and Rwanda was effectively at the mercy of yet another European power.

With the catastrophic disturbances engendered by the protracted hostilities, famine was widespread throughout the country for the entirety of the war, and when the conflict had ended, the Treaty of Versailles of 1919 officially conferred a mandate

over the nations of Rwanda and Burundi to the Kingdom of Belgium. This act was further confirmed by a decision of the League of Nations in 1923, which permitted the Belgian occupiers to administer the nation as a colonial protectorate. Yuhi V Musinga retained his throne, however, as the Belgian authorities recognized that it was far more prudent to try to rule the country through him than to attempt to impose a régime of direct foreign rule. For his part, the mwami, effectively powerless to resist the will of the increasingly demanding Europeans, endeavored to retain as much of his royal prestige and authority as possible, and to somehow shield his people from the harsh realities of foreign control.

As Belgium was also a deeply Roman Catholic nation, however, there were several aspects of the situation which were to prove a great boon to the spiritual life of Rwanda. Conversions of the Rwandan people to Catholicism continued at a healthy rate, and several schools were established by the Church to further educate the growing population of Christian faithful. The modernization and expansion of the infrastructure also moved firmly ahead under Belgian tutelage, providing the means to join once-remote areas of the country to its administrative centers, thus fostering a greater sense of national unity, even under the watchful eye of the foreign authorities. The French language was introduced in schools and soon came to occupy an important place in the public life of the nation, as did Roman Catholic culture and the veneration of Christian saints, both of which were widespread by the early 1930s.

Many of these innovations did not sit well at all, however, with the more traditional elements of the Rwandan Royal Court, and Mwami Yuhi Musinga himself

resolutely refused to be baptized a Roman Catholic. In fact, there exists a letter from the great king to one of his daughters, in which he excoriates her most vehemently for converting to Christianity. During the course of this rather lengthy missive, he bitterly calls down imprecations on her, stating at one point that he would summon the "Thunder God of our ancestors to strike [her] down as a punishment."



T.M. King Mutara III Rudahigwa and Queen Rosalie Gicanda

The growing tensions between the mwami and the colonial authorities came to a head on November 12, 1931, when he was suddenly and summarily deposed by the Belgian powers, supposedly because of his inability to cooperate with his subordinate chiefs, but also as a direct result of his staunch refusal to adopt the Roman Catholic faith. He was immediately replaced by his son, who was to reign under the name of Mutara III Rudahigwa until his death in 1959. Yuhi Musinga was exiled to Kamembe, near the border of the Congo, where he eventually died in 1944.

Mutara III Rudahigwa was a man of an entirely different stripe from his sometimes austere and decidedly more traditionalist father. Also possessed of a regal and commanding presence, he was a Roman Catholic catechumen, and had

been educated in mission schools. He was crowned King of Rwanda on November 16 of the same year, and was soon to win the genuine respect and admiration, both of his own people and of the foreign authorities. At the same time, however, the Belgian colonial administration undertook to further divide and dominate the local populations through a practice of racial identification, eventually imposing in the 1930s the use of ID cards artificially designating citizens as either Tutsi, Hutu or Twa. The introduction of this device into the organic and largely harmonious social fabric of the nation of the Banyarwanda would come to have hateful and disastrous consequences in the coming decades, and would eventually lead directly to one of the greatest crimes against humanity committed in the 20th century.



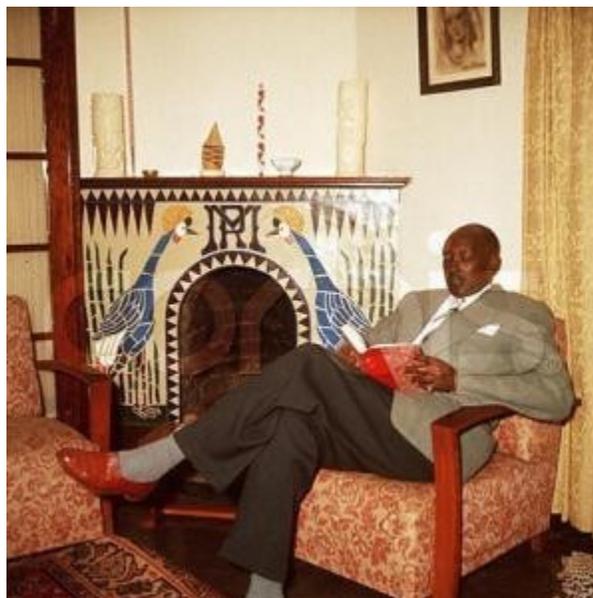
Mwami Mutara III Rudahigwa and King Baudoin of Belgium

The ever-popular Rwandan monarch, more and more committed to his growing faith in Christ, and to the performance of his sacred duty as mwami, celebrated his

marriage to a beautiful young Christian Rwandan, Rosalie Gicanda, on January 13, 1942. On October 17 of the following year, Mwami Mutara III Rudahigwa, under the sponsorship of Belgian Governor General Pierre Rycksmans, became the first king of Rwanda ever to be baptized a Roman Catholic Christian. He took the baptismal names of Charles-Léon-Pierre, and was followed in his full conversion by the vast majority of his chiefs and sub-chiefs, who were also consecrated to faith in the Lord, and who in turn helped spread further the Gospel of Christ throughout the nation. Firmly committed to social justice, in 1945 King Mutara called for the abolition of the feudal land system known as the ubuhake, which he characterized as "unfair," and which was eventually eliminated completely in 1954. He further insisted that the Belgian colonial administration reluctantly accept the abolition of unpaid labor on public works projects, most frequently executed under physical duress. Although resisted by the foreign machine, this move was universally popular throughout the land, and led to an even greater appreciation of the efforts of the mwami to relieve the burdens of his people.

Spurred by his strong faith in the teachings of Jesus, on October 27, 1946, H.M. Mwami Mutara III Rudahigwa officially consecrated the Kingdom of Rwanda to Christ the King, further cementing its ties to both the Church and to the worldwide community of the faithful. Earlier in the same year, Rwanda had become a territory under the supervision of the United Nations, despite the continued presence and direct control of the Belgians. Further inspired by his deep faith in Christ, in 1949 the mwami declared his strong opposition to the chicote, or public corporal punishment of adult males, who were frequently beaten by colonial authorities in

the presence of their families. This move caused great discontent among the Belgian administration, who increasingly began to worry about potential effects of the growing regional and international prestige of the popular monarch.



Informal Portrait of Mutara III Rudahigwa

In 1955, the King of Belgium named seasoned administrator Jean-Paul Harroy Governor General of Rwanda-Urundi. The growing tension between the mwami, who was firmly determined to follow his conscience as a devout Christian and to right the wrongs largely imposed by the foreign occupiers, made a showdown increasingly inevitable, if not ultimately desirable. In 1956, Mwami Mutara officially demanded of the United Nations a swift end to the Belgian occupation, as well as total independence for his tiny kingdom. In addition, the Supreme Council of Rwanda requested that chiefs and sub-chiefs thenceforth be chosen by election, rather than by royal appointment. This demand was later repeated at the beginning of 1959, at the same time as a further request for a precise timetable for the accession of the

country to full independence and autonomy.



Ladies of the Rwandan Royal Court of Mutara III

Although many recognized the growing severity of the rift that had developed between the Mwami, resolutely dedicated to furthering the welfare of his people under the sacred banner of Christ the King, and the Belgians, eager to retain their hold on the physical resources of the nation, few could have foreseen the extent and consequences of the drama that was to be played out in July of 1959. On Friday, July 24, 1959, King Mutara traveled to Usumbura, from whence he planned eventually to journey to New York to put the case for Rwandan independence before the United Nations. The day after his arrival there, the mwami requested a shot of penicillin from Dr. Vinck, a Belgian stand-in for his his personal physician, whom he had seen earlier in the day. The doctor administered a dose of about 1 million units of megacillin, and during the course of a brief conversation with Vinck

following the shot, the King collapsed and died, apparently struck down by a massive cerebral hemorrhage.



T.M. Queens Kankezi and Rosalie Gicanda at the Funeral of Mutara III

Despite claims that this tragic event was the result of some kind of medical anomaly, many believed that the increasingly troublesome mwami had simply been eliminated under orders from Brussels by means of a foul assassination rather thinly disguised as a clinical "accident." This hypothesis is further strengthened by testimony from his half-brother and successor, H.M. Kigeli V Ndahindurwa, who affirms that Mutara "wanted to go to New York, to ask the UN to grant full independence to Rwanda. In Usumbura, where a replacement for his usual physician had given him an injection before the voyage, he collapsed upon leaving the medical office. Shock, infection, heart attack? We are assured that it was an accident, but I know that my brother had never been sick, and that no autopsy was ever performed."

The Rwandan nation was devastated. Deep mourning spread throughout the

land of the Banyarwanda, and the sudden and unforeseen disappearance of this great mwami, truly a shepherd of his people, struck savagely into the psycho-emotional heart of the grieving population. Equally tragic was the fact that this hero of the people had passed away with no male descendants, thus leaving the matter of the succession an open question. Thus began a race against time and circumstances, bravely sustained to ensure that the sorrowing Rwandan homeland should not fall even further under the control of the Belgian administration at this critical juncture in her history. Providence, favoring the right over the might, would supply a genuine blessing in the person of her next ruler, but his ability to positively influence events in this increasingly fragile kingdom would be tragically short-lived.

PART III

Not For the Power, But For the People:

The Reign of H.M. Kigeli V (1959-)

The stunning loss of their beloved mwami left the people of Rwanda shocked and grief-stricken. Even as the nation mourned however, the abiru, who had not not been called upon to order the royal succession since the days of Yuhi V Musinga, made hasty preparations to proclaim the accession to the throne of a new mwami. Sensing that the Belgian colonial authorities would seek to take advantage of this period of instability to forcibly create a regency under their complete and direct control, thereby effectively crushing the hopes of the nation for autonomy, the aged counselors of the kingdom gathered in conclave to settle upon a successor.



H.M. King Kigeli V Ndahindurwa, with Belgian Officials

Despite the lack of a direct male descendant of Mutara III Rudahigwa, however, it

soon became apparent that he *had* made known his wishes with regard to the royal succession. The Abbé Kagame, one of the leading religious figures of the kingdom, as well as a key political personality, declared himself ready to swear an oath that the late mwami had in fact secretly revealed to him his choice for the throne. That his choice should also have lighted upon a member of the royal family, and one of absolutely sterling reputation, held in the highest esteem by both the Rwandan people and the Belgian administration, was considered to be nothing short of providential.



Despite the fact that other candidates were briefly discussed by the abiru, and by members of the Supreme Council, in the end the choice was a clear and resounding one. Mutara's half-brother, Jean-Baptiste Ndahindurwa, was called upon to take up the burden of the throne, and to be invested with the power and responsibility of the sacred office of mwami. It is quite telling, in fact, that the new mwami, who was famed for his goodwill, his devotion to Christ and his care for the people, did not at all consider himself to be a likely candidate for the throne. According to witnesses, early on the day of his designation as mwami, he had simply gone out to tend to his

herds of cattle, much as he had done in the days and months past, and was therefore entirely unaware of all the tumult and excitement surrounding his elevation to the kingship.

The scene at the public funeral of the late king, which took place on July 28, 1959, was understandably anything but a peaceful one. There was both profound grief and considerable tension in the air, as the people and the court prepared themselves for the next move of the Belgian administration in its seemingly incessant campaign to cripple the hopes of the Rwandan monarchy. The aged abiru, however, despite their relatively small numbers and the somewhat decrepit state of the traditional Rwandan protocols of state, were to play their hand brilliantly, effectively trumping the Belgians at their own game. Honoring scrupulously the ancient Rwandan royal traditions, and carefully following the various rites associated with the transfer of power, they took as their central inspiration the ancient formula of succession: Umwami aratabazwa, igihugu kigahabwa undi mwami kitaraye nze ("The mwami is buried, then the country receives a new mwami, without passing one day with a vacant throne").

After the funeral of Rwanda's lamented hero-king on the hill of Mwima, in Nyanza, the announcement of his successor was made in the presence of the assembled mourners and the officials of the Belgian administration. When the name of Ndahindurwa was made known to the crowd, there was a great acclamation from the Rwandan people. Given the enormously positive response to the succession of the young monarch (who assumed the throne name of Kigeli V Ndahindurwa) to the royal dignity, the Belgian authorities, including Governor-General Jean-Paul Harroy,

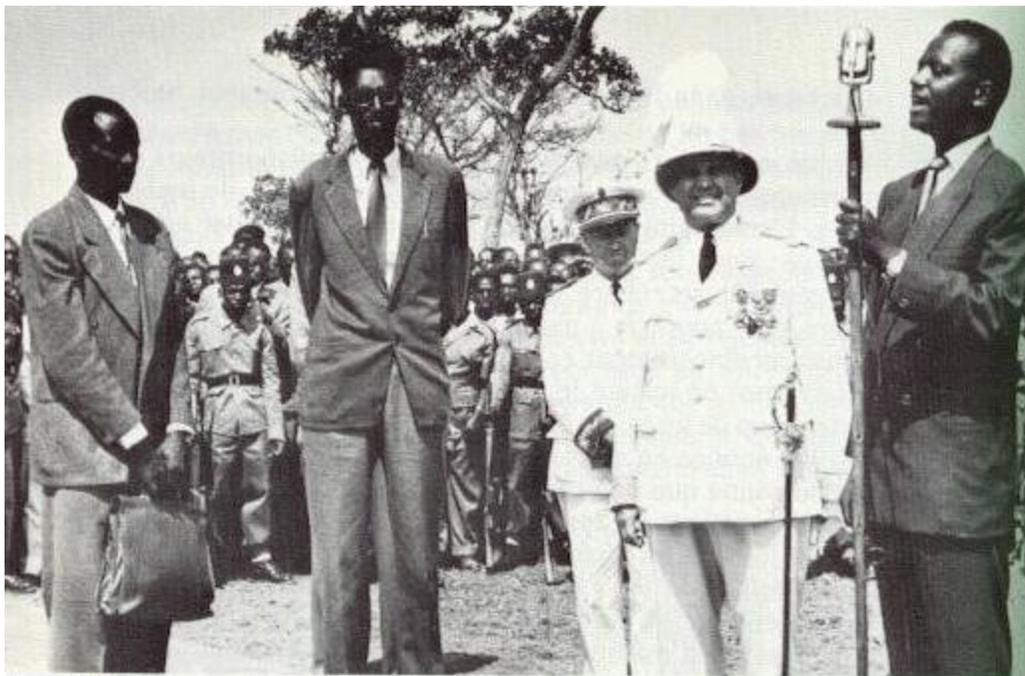
had no choice but to acknowledge that they had been outmaneuvered by the abiru, and they were therefore forced to put a good face on their defeat. In point of fact, however, and despite the deeply questionable nature of their ultimate plan for Rwanda, the Belgian authorities themselves privately expressed a sincere, if somewhat grudging respect for the character and abilities of the man who had just become king.

Born in Kamembe, southwest Rwanda on June 29, 1936, to the exiled King Yuhi V Musinga and Queen Mukashema, the young mwami had been baptized a Roman Catholic, taking the name of Jean-Baptiste. He had been educated at the Groupe Scolaire d'Astrida, had continued his studies at Nyangezi College in Zaire (modern-day Democratic Republic of the Congo) and had worked with the Belgian administration in the Astrida Territory from 1956 to 1958. He was named the sub-chief of Bufundu in 1959, and was widely recognized to be a devout young man of great probity, with a deep sense of social justice and a keen knowledge of his country, its people and their needs.



Mwami Kigeli V of Rwanda and King Baudoin of Belgium

The new king's reign began in an atmosphere of extreme tension and growing unrest among certain elements of the people. With the population secretly stirred to dissent by the Belgian authorities, who sought to undo the positive accomplishments of the late mwami, and to hobble the chances of the new king, incidents of political violence and other types of crime grew throughout the nation. It was not until October 9, 1959, and after considerable difficulty that His Majesty Kigeli V Ndahindurwa was to swear his oath of investiture at Kigali. As a precaution, and because of the volatile nature of the political situation in his struggling country, the new mwami had demanded that explicit mention be made of his wish to reign as a constitutional monarch, so as to avoid any future possibility of nullification of his enthronement by the tutelary authorities. In addition, having requested to reign constitutionally, Kigeli V Ndahindurwa was now possessed of an almost irrefutable argument in favor of the speedy and equitable creation of an independent native government and a new national constitution.



Sadly, however, the course charted by the devoted new monarch was not to be realized in his land. Circumstances and events conspired against the fulfillment of his plans, and it soon became painfully apparent that the Belgian administration, which purported to favor the peace and stability of its "client" nation, was actually in collusion with anti-government factions to effect the downfall of the Rwandan monarchy and the installation of a new and more malleable régime under its watchful eye. By early 1960, the handwriting was most clearly on the wall on a number of different levels, and the Belgians continued to do their utmost to undermine the monarchical prestige of the increasingly popular young mwami. In that year, the portrait of the mwami, which had previously graced banknotes and coins of the Bank of Rwanda, was replaced by images of wild animals, and His Majesty's closest advisors were increasingly placed under close surveillance by the Belgian Sureté. The image of the kalinga also disappeared from public view, and political and racial violence continued to escalate in the once-peaceful kingdom. The evil seeds cunningly sown by the European authorities over the course of the preceding decades had sadly begun to flower just as Rwanda stood on the threshold of full independence.

In a recently declassified note addressed to King Baudoin of Belgium on October 24, 1960 by his Grand Marshal Gobert d'Aspremont Lynden, uncle of the Minister of African Affairs, the Marshal indicates that he sees no difficulty in inviting King Mwambutsa, Mwami of Urundi, to the upcoming wedding of Baudoin in Brussels.

"As for Kigeli, the Mwami of Rwanda," continues the Grand Marshal, **"there is no question, as he will be put aside."** This constitutes one of the most clear and striking indications of the secret plans of the Belgian authority to eliminate Kigeli V Ndahindurwa from his rightful position as monarch of his people, and to install some sort of imperialist puppet government in his place.

H.M. King Kigeli himself has declared unequivocally that the Belgian scheme for his removal was becoming increasingly apparent over the course of the months. "It was evident that Logiest and Harroy wanted to chase me from power," he states. "If I was at Léopoldville [at the time of the Belgian coup d'état], it was because I wanted to meet Dag Hammarskjold, Secretary General of the UN, and to plead in favor of independence. Harroy had made no objection to my departure, very much to the contrary. But when I returned to Rwanda, I found Belgian commandos who were guarding the border with the aim of keeping me from re-entering my country... I never fled Rwanda, as people have said, it was the Belgians who kept me from returning, for they wanted to establish the Republic..." Thus, on January 28, 1961, in both haste and a certain measure of secrecy, the Belgian government arranged for a meeting of local Rwandan burgomasters at Gitarama, under the heavily armed protection of Belgian para-commandos, where these native electors illegally voted for the abolition of the monarchy, thereby leading to the installation of the Republic of Rwanda under its first President, Dominique Mbonyumutu.



King Kigeli V and King Baudoin

King Kigeli, now effectively barred from returning to his homeland by the successful Belgian plot, was offered a suitable residence in Kinshasa by Patrice Lumumba, Prime Minister of the Congo. The mwami eventually did manage to make a journey to New York, where he was entirely successful in his efforts to obtain full UN support for the independence of Rwanda. The General Assembly stipulated that the Belgian government should

1. Permit the repatriation of all Rwandan refugees who had fled their homeland during the oppressive Belgian régime,
 2. Accede to the return of H.M. King Kigeli V Ndahindurwa to his country
- and**
3. Allow Rwanda complete control of the conduct of its affairs as a free, independent and autonomous nation.

The Belgians would ultimately comply with none of these demands, and would openly defy the entirety of the UN mandate, instead unilaterally proclaiming Rwanda to be a Republic at the end of 1961. In July of 1962, they granted full independence to the struggling and beleaguered nation, now bereft of its mwami, the traditional spiritual and political father of the Banyarwanda. According to one of His Majesty's closest advisors, H. E. Chancellor Boniface Benzinge,

As resolved by the United Nations, during the first election before independence, King Kigeli V went to Rwanda to assist the first elections, but he ran into a complication – all Belgian guards at the border had orders to illegally arrest the King if he tried to return. Thus, His Majesty left Tanzania during the night for friendly Burundi, and then from Burundi crossed the Rwandan border with the assistance of a pregnant woman, who posed as if she was about to deliver. When the Belgian paratroopers at the border began to harass the pregnant lady, a case of beer was procured and delivered to the Belgian troops. As the Belgians happily drank their beer, the King crossed the border and arrived in Kigali a little after midnight. By the next dawn, many people heard rumors that the King had returned to their country, and they celebrated. But the Belgians intervened and arrested him, taking him by military helicopter to Bujumbura, where he was placed under house-arrest.

The heavy-handed treatment of the King by the Belgian authorities shocked many in the international diplomatic community, particularly after his successful bid for Rwandan independence at the United Nations. "Fortunately," continues the Chancellor,

before he left Tanzania (where he was living in exile), King Kigeli V informed the former President Julius Nyerere about his trip and how the visit was in accord with the resolutions of the General Assembly of the United Nations. As soon as Julius Nyerere heard of the arrest, he sent a telegram to the Belgian governor of Rwanda and Burundi, the same Mr. Jean-Paul Harroy, telling him that if the Belgians continued to refuse to abide by United Nations resolutions, they should send the King immediately to Dar-es-Salaam. If the Belgians did not [comply], all Belgians living in Dar-es-Salaam would be arrested. Mr. Jean Paul Harroy acquiesced and sent His Majesty back to Tanzania -- accompanied by two Belgians to ensure the King did nothing further to try to help his people. This was the last time King Kigeli V has been in Rwanda.

Since the time of his enforced exile by the Belgians, H.M. King Kigeli V Ndahindurwa has lived the entirety of his life abroad, first in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania (1961 to 1962), and then in Nairobi, Kenya (1963-1971). He has also lived in Kampala, Uganda (1972-1978) and again in Nairobi (1979-1992). In June of 1992, he was granted political asylum by the US government, and has lived in Washington, DC, since that time.



A Recent Photo of H.M. King Kigeli V Ndahindurwa, with H.E. Chancellor Boniface Benzinge

His Majesty regularly travels throughout the world to speak out on issues related to the happiness, security and prosperity of his people, and has received an immense amount of praise, as well as numerous international awards and high rank in various knightly orders and confraternities for his tireless efforts on behalf of justice and peace in Rwanda. He is the founder and head of the King Kigeli V Foundation, which works to support humanitarian initiatives on behalf of Rwandan refugees throughout the world. In addition, he is the Sovereign Grand Master of the Royal Order of the Lion of Rwanda, founded during the reign of his late brother,

H.M. Mutara III Rudahigwa, as well as of the Royal Orders of the Drum, the Crown and the Crested Crane. A devout Roman Catholic believer, he was recently made a Grand Cross of the Real Confraria de Sao Teotonio of Portugal, as well as a Confrère of the Most Prestigious Brotherhood of the Most Blessed Sacrament of the Noble City of Lisbon.

The decades that have followed the forced exile of its mwami have been violent and painful ones for the Rwandan nation, and the way ahead still remains fundamentally unclear. Manipulated and betrayed by foreign interlopers, torn asunder during decades of civil strife and unspeakable brutality, the people of Rwanda have throughout these many tragic ordeals been deprived of the inspired leadership of their traditional ruler, the chief bulwark and support of the social, political and spiritual life of the nation.

The very fabric of the Rwandan state has been fatally compromised by this important lacuna, and the resulting chaos and suffering of the past four decades have sadly dogged the halting development of the struggling republic. None can foretell the full nature or duration of the mandates of Providence, but with faith in the right, and with a firm confidence in his ultimate value to his beloved homeland, His Majesty Kigeli V Ndahindurwa, Umwami w'u Rwanda continues to work tirelessly on behalf of his orphaned people, the nation of the Banyarwanda.

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