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## HOLY GHOST IN THE HIGHLANDS: THE SPIRITANS ON KILIMANJARO, 1892-1953<sup>1</sup>

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Ph.D.

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*To the three, the mountain was a 'Garden of Eden,' a symbol of God's presence in the heart of Africa...*

In July of 1890, three Catholic priests of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost – Alexander Le Roy, Auguste Gommenginger, and Bishop Jean Marie de Courmont – set out from Bagamoyo on an arduous journey across the East African interior. For nearly six weeks, their caravan trekked through the harsh conditions of the semiarid Maasai steppe, negotiating hazards ranging from inadequate water and disease to wild animals such as lions and leopards. Finally, the three arrived at their destination, the majestic snow-capped peak known as Kilimanjaro. Le Roy, in his travel memoirs, notes the sheer awe in which he and his companions found themselves:<sup>2</sup>

*The spectacle that we have before our eyes is something that will remain unforgettable. Underneath a completely blue sky, there in front of us, we see the immense profile of the marvelous mountain. The two peaks [Kibo and Mawenzi] appear to be supported by this enormous pedestal...as a candelabra lit in the course of centuries to the glory of the Creator.*

He remarks further at the almost heavenly appearance of the snow-capped peak, the myriad of colors radiating from its heights, and the manner in which clouds seem to hide and reveal the summit as though moved by the hand of God. To the three, the mountain was a 'Garden of Eden,' a symbol of God's presence in the heart of Africa, and the perfect locale for the spreading of the Gospel.

Over the next sixty years, priests, brothers, and lay catechists from the Holy Ghost Fathers – known also as the Spiritans – established one of the largest and most prosperous Catholic communities in Africa on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro.<sup>3</sup> They founded dozens of mission stations, each featuring not only churches but also schools, hospitals, and dispensaries. Furthermore, they transformed the economic landscape of the mountain by introducing the cultivation of Arabica coffee, which became a lucrative business for thousands. By the 1960s, the Church had become a focal point of life for the Chagga-speaking peoples of the mountain. More than 95% of people living near the missions, nearly 200,000 people, had converted to Catholicism. Also striking was the broader social transformation. The region sported the highest ratio of schools to students, the highest school

enrollment figures, and the most medical facilities per capita of any part of rural Eastern Africa.<sup>4</sup>

The spread of mission Christianity in Africa has been the subject of much scholarship over the past century. Missionaries themselves compiled the earliest writings, often in the form of journals, diaries, and correspondence that were later transformed into full-length books.<sup>5</sup> These works have provided tremendous insight into the experiences of missionaries and the work they performed, but with few exceptions have tended to be more descriptive than analytical. The past few decades have seen the emergence of work by historians that engages more analytically the work of various missions, their relations with local communities, and the overall social, cultural, and economic – as well as religious – implications of their work.<sup>6</sup> Though this literature on Christianity in Africa is rich and diverse, relatively few scholars have focused on the missions of the Spiritans.<sup>7</sup> This dearth is especially striking in that the Spiritans were among the most active Christian missionaries on the African continent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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This article looks at the development of the Spiritan missions on Mount Kilimanjaro from the arrival of the first Catholic clergy until the establishment of the first Catholic Diocese in 1953. In particular, it examines why these missions emerged as the most successful of those opened by the Congregation, and some of the more successful in Africa. I argue that the success of the Spiritans resulted from a confluence of spiritual, economic, and social factors, which together transformed the missions from a foreign presence into a focal point of life on the mountain. This piece draws on a wide range of source materials, both primary and secondary, including letters and correspondence gathered from the Tanzania National Archives, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and the Spiritan Archives in Chevilly-Larue, France. In doing so, it gives a vivid window into life in the Kilimanjaro mission while providing an analytical assessment of its implications for the people of the region.

#### **KILIMANJARO AND ITS PEOPLE**

Mount Kilimanjaro is Africa's tallest peak, rising to an elevation of 19,343 feet in the northeastern corner of what is now Tanzania, a mere 200 miles south of the equator. It is also the world's tallest freestanding mountain, surrounded entirely by the Maasai steppe for at least twenty miles in all directions. Nearly forty miles in width, Kilimanjaro is large enough to generate its own weather patterns. Rather than sharing the semiarid climate of its surrounding land, the mountain gives rise to a wide variety

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of climate zones, ranging from glaciers and alpine desert at the top, to lush, fertile forests on its lower slopes (between 3,000 and 6,000 feet).

It is this latter region that most of the people of Kilimanjaro call home. The ancestors of the current Chagga-speaking population first settled the mountain's southern and eastern sides from neighboring areas approximately 1000 years ago.<sup>8</sup> Attracted to this prime farmland, they developed a thriving agrarian society based on the production of bananas, yams, millets, and various vegetables. Virtually every family held its own small acreage homestead, known in Kichagga as *kihamba*, which provided for the sustenance of the family as well as goods for trade. Aside from the favorable climate, the success of mountain farming owed much to the development of a system of irrigation canals called *mifongo*.<sup>9</sup> These "indigenous wonders," of which there were over 800 at their peak, carried water from the mountain's deep river valleys directly onto the ridges in which people lived. This not only permitted three growing seasons per year, but it also gave women an easily accessible source of water for domestic tasks ranging from bathing to cooking.

By the eighteenth century, the mountain had become home to an estimated 40,000 people. Yet there were no villages, everyone choosing to live within the confines of their own *kihamba*. Political development therefore took place through alliances among clans living along the same mountain ridges. Each ridge essentially became an autonomous community, in spite of the fact that peoples across the mountain spoke the same language, traded with one another, and held the same cultural practices. Leadership lay in the hands of male elders, who acted as governors, judges, and military generals. Also important within the community were specialists such as midwives, rainmakers, healers, and furrow engineers. A century later, political power began to consolidate. Increasing trade with coastal caravans and warfare among the various ridges led clans on the same ridge to unify as chiefdoms, with the most prestigious clans becoming the lineages of chiefs.

The mountain was also a vibrant place in terms of culture. From the time of settlement, the people of the mountain had developed a vibrant set of customs and beliefs, passing these social norms from generation to generation in the form of oral traditions. Perhaps the best example of Chagga culture was the system of religious beliefs and practices. Most Chagga came to believe in the existence of a supreme deity, Ruwa, who lived at the peak of Kilimanjaro.<sup>10</sup> Ruwa created the whole universe, but had

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endowed the mountain with rich resources as a special gift to his chosen people. He continued to be active in the lives of people, bestowing blessings such as supplying life-giving water from the mountain's peak. People on the mountain also believed in the existence of various spirits, called *waruma*.<sup>11</sup> Unlike in Judeo-Christian cosmology where the spiritual and temporal realms are distinct (Heaven and Earth), in Chagga belief spirits remained among the living. Spirits held an intermediate position in the world, existing between Ruwa and the people. Some held control over aspects of the natural world, such as rainfall, and had existed as long as the mountain had. Most, however, were actually the spirits of ancestors. Referred to by historian Anza Lema as the "living dead," the *waruma* continued to be active in the affairs of the living. They could be held responsible for bringing blessings, or for causing great hardship. In turn, people routinely made offerings to the deceased, both as a form of reverence and as a means of addressing problems ranging from drought to a sickly child.

By the late nineteenth century, Kilimanjaro had become a prosperous and culturally dynamic place. Yet, political turbulence lingered on the horizon. Increasing competition over the lucrative caravan trade led to increasing warfare and rivalry among the chiefdoms. Furthermore, in the 1890s, Germany began to exercise claims to the mountain, using military and political coercion to integrate it into its colonial possession, German East Africa. It was at this historical moment that the Spiritans decided to extend their East African mission to include Kilimanjaro.

#### **THE SPIRITANS IN AFRICA**

The Congregation of the Holy Ghost, founded in France at the beginning of the eighteenth century, had since its inception focused on assisting the poor and neglected. In 1848, the Congregation of the Holy Heart of Mary, founded six years earlier by Francis Libermann, merged with the Holy Ghost Fathers, and Libermann was elected as the 11<sup>th</sup> Superior General.<sup>12</sup> Libermann set his sights on providing religious service to poor populations, particularly freed slaves, in France's overseas colonies and former possessions. He had already opened missions in Haiti, Réunion, Mauritius, the West Coast of Africa, and Australia. Over the next twenty years, the Congregation expanded rapidly, opening missions across Africa, the Indian Ocean, and the Caribbean, as well as seminaries and colleges in the Americas, Portugal, and Ireland.

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For their first mission on the coast of Eastern Africa, the Spiritans chose the island of Zanzibar. This was a daring choice. Zanzibar was a very cosmopolitan place, populated by Swahili-speaking Arabs, Indians, and Africans.<sup>13</sup> A thriving hub of trade, it supplied spices, slaves, and other goods to consumers across the Indian Ocean. It was also predominantly Muslim, and governed by the Sultan of Oman and his royal family. These characteristics made the island very different from the Congregation's other sites in the Indian Ocean, which were French colonies and largely French-speaking. As a focal point of the slave trade, however, the island seemed a perfect choice. In 1860, Vicar General Father Armand Fava and a small group of priests opened the island's first Catholic mission. The mission grew quickly, and two years later the Propaganda Fide decided to create the Prefecture of Zanzibar, and give the Spiritans jurisdiction over evangelizing coastal areas on the mainland.<sup>14</sup> This in essence transformed the Zanzibar mission into a stepping-stone for bringing Catholicism to the continent. Over the next three decades, the Congregation opened missions across the East African interior.

The evangelical methodology utilized by the Spiritans is well exemplified by the Bagamoyo mission. A coastal village just north of Dar es Salaam, Bagamoyo had for centuries been a crucial hub in the Indian Ocean slave trade, a point from which slaves captured in the interior were sent by dhows (small Arab sailboats) to Zanzibar and points beyond. In 1866, the new Superior of the Vicariate of Zanzibar, Father Anton Horner, chose this crucial location as the site for the first Spiritan presence on the continent.<sup>15</sup> After two years of preparation, Horner and a group of lay catechists set out for the mainland and, with the permission of local leaders, began to develop a mission. The first step they took was the creation of a Christian Village, a mission settlement adjacent to, yet distinct from, the existing village of Bagamoyo. The idea behind this strategy was that once a strong, autonomous Christian community was in place, neighboring people would become attracted and, over time, the new and existing settlements would merge. The second step involved putting together a faith community by evangelizing local populations. Initially, these efforts focused on three groups of people – freed slaves, young people, and the disenfranchised. The missionaries offered them the opportunity to learn about the Gospel, become candidates, and live in the mission community. The lay catechists acted as teachers, often developing close relationships with their students. Clergy tended to focus more on the overall growth of the mission and administering the sacraments, though many did

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work closely with the people. Good examples of this were the brothers, who often took on the role of construction foremen in the mission communities, and thus worked closely with a diverse group of people. From the first small group of candidates, the mission hoped to create Christians who would both exemplify the Christian lifestyle and go out into the community and spread the Gospel further. In Bagamoyo, this strategy produced mixed results. By 1872, the village had transformed into a vibrant town, featuring over fifty buildings managed by the mission's twenty-five priests and brothers.<sup>16</sup> The mission had also opened the first junior seminary and the first Sister's novitiate in East Africa.<sup>17</sup> Though the town had quite a Christian presence, however, the number of local converts remained small, and almost all of them were freed slaves. Most townspeople chose to remain Muslims.

### **TO AFRICA'S TALLEST PEAK**

Though the Bagamoyo mission did not generate widespread conversions to the faith, it became the center of the Holy Ghost Congregation in East Africa and the springboard for spreading the Gospel further into the East African interior. In the 1880s, the Congregation set its sights on Mount Kilimanjaro. This location appealed to the mission for a number of reasons. For one, it was a common stopping point for many of the slave caravans running between the coast and the great lakes region.<sup>18</sup> By opening a mission there, the Spiritans could continue their mission of serving slave and ex-slave populations. Also, the mountain was a highly populated place, like the coast, but unlike the coast had relatively few Muslims, thus providing a large number of potential converts. Perhaps the most important reason, however, was symbolic rather than practical. The continent's tallest peak seemed an almost mystical – perhaps divine – place. European explorers who had seen it, such as Johannes Rebmann, Charles New, Hans Meyer, and Harry Johnston, described the mountain as magnificent and formidable, and its unique ice-capped top as almost miraculous, especially considering its location so close to the equator.<sup>19</sup> Such a place excited the imaginations of many missionaries, including Raoul de Courmont, the recently appointed bishop of the Vicariate of Zanzibar.<sup>20</sup> With the mission already extending into the interior as far as Nairobi, Kilimanjaro lay well within the lands of the Vicariate. Seeing tremendous potential for the mountain, as both a site for evangelization and a symbol for the Church's broader work, he decided in 1890 to lead an expedition there personally. He chose two priests to accompany him, Fathers Auguste Gommenginger and Alexander Le Roy, both of whom had experience in developing inland missions.<sup>21</sup> The three met in Bagamoyo, and then traveled to

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the coastal town of Mombasa to assemble porters, interpreters, guides, and supplies for their journey.

On 15 July 1890, the caravan of nearly 300 men set out on their journey.<sup>22</sup> For nearly six weeks, they trekked across the interior, passing along the coast and the Usambaras before turning inward toward the Pares and along the newly established border between the British Kenya Colony and German East Africa. Their route was for the most part dictated by the availability of water and the threat of unfriendly communities, wild animals, and disease. The priests acted as directors of the group, each assuming a set of responsibilities. For example, Father Le Roy supervised the porters and the carriage of goods, while Bishop de Courmont took care of navigation and the pitching of tents. The group made swift progress. On 8 August, they reached the shore of Lake Jipe, a mere twenty miles from the mountain. One week later, they held their first Mass at the foot of the mountain.

For much of August, the three priests visited various chiefdoms on the slopes of the mountain, including Kilema, Old Moshi, Machame, and Kibosho. Their goal was to ascertain which would be the best location for their first center of evangelization. After much deliberation, they chose Kilema, a small chiefdom on the southeast corner of the mountain. They made this choice for several reasons. One, Kilema was a place of relative peace, lying outside of an ongoing rivalry involving many of the other chiefdoms. Two, the chief of Kilema, Pfumba, proved to be an accommodating host, offering them both temporary housing and land for the development of a permanent mission. Rather than viewing them with suspicion or threatening them, he went as far as to enter into a bond of blood brotherhood with Bishop de Courmont.<sup>23</sup> Three, and perhaps most importantly, one of the guides who had accompanied them from Mombasa, Nderingo, was originally from Kilema, and successfully acted as a cultural intermediary between the missionaries, Pfumba, and the elders. From Pfumba, they obtained an estate, nearly one thousand acres of prime land in the lush, lower slopes of the chiefdom. With a site secure, Bishop de Courmont and Father Le Roy left for Bagamoyo the following month, leaving behind Father Gommenginger (as superior of the mission) and a small group of lay catechists. Next year, they were joined by Father Martin Rohmer and eleven additional catechists. This small group then set out to transform their vision into a reality.

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chapel and housing for himself and the catechists. He assembled groups of local men to assist with construction, and he even called upon elders to assist him in procuring building materials and access to water. By March 1892, they had completed a temporary chapel and six additional buildings, as well as a furrow to bring water directly to the mission. Over the next two decades, the village continued to expand, with the addition of permanent buildings. The centerpiece of the mission came in 1910, when the priests finished construction of the permanent church. Named in honor of Our Lady of Lourdes, this impressive structure featured French baroque architecture, stone construction, wooden statues and sacred symbols, and stained glass windows.

In addition to creating the physical infrastructure, the missionaries also set out to develop agricultural production. Using the lands given to them by Pfumba, they worked to create gardens for the growing of both food and crops for sale. For the mission, these gardens served several functions. For one, they provided a source of food for the missionaries, lay catechists, and those living in the village. They also provided a means of generating much-needed revenue, lessening the mission's financial dependence on both Paris and Rome. Lastly, they provided employment, not only for those living in the mission but also for men and women in the neighboring community. Thus, agriculture served as a form of evangelical outreach. By 1910, the gardens at Kilema were growing not only local crops such as bananas and yams, but also newly introduced crops from Europe – wheat, maize, and fruits – that thrived in the lush conditions. Arguably the most important crop introduced by the missionaries was coffee. In 1902, the priests brought over several small Arabica coffee trees from Réunion, and found that they thrived in the well-watered, high altitude conditions.<sup>24</sup> Within a decade, the mission had a large garden of trees, producing lucrative coffee beans for export.

With buildings and gardens in place, the missionaries focused their full attention on their evangelical goals. As in Bagamoyo, the Spiritans first focused on establishing the Christian village as a strong religious community with the hope that – through education and outreach – the example set there would attract surrounding peoples. Over the first five years, the population of the mission grew slowly but steadily to nearly 100 people. Most of these individuals were new priests, brothers, and lay catechists from Bagamoyo, while others were freed slaves from coastal caravans and refugees from neighboring Maasai groups. Within the community, the missionaries set up a series of schools that would educate children and adults in both religion and skills

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necessary for the emergence of a Christian society. The first one took form early in 1892. The catechists serving as teachers, they taught a curriculum that included not only basic instruction in Catholic catechism, but also arithmetic and reading and writing in Swahili.<sup>25</sup> By the end of the year, they had a class of forty-five pupils, including such local celebrities as the sons of Chief Pfumba and Chief Marealle I of neighboring Marangu. Over the next decade, schooling became more structured and formal, with the construction of actual schoolhouses, the employment of trained teachers, and the expansion of the curriculum to include science, domestic arts, agriculture, health, and other languages. The mission also moved gradually toward the creation of a Chagga ordained clergy, opening its first junior seminary, Saint James, in 1923.

Aside from the classroom, religious evangelization took place, as might be expected, in the church. The completion of Kilema's first chapel provided a forum for the celebration of the Mass. They tended to be lively occasions, featuring a high-energy atmosphere and lots of music. Initially, Masses featured Latin hymns, to which local people took readily in spite of their unfamiliarity with the language, though over time the priests allowed the use of vernacular language music as well. Most religious instruction tended to take place on site, either through the schools or informal teaching sessions led by catechists. Only on rare occasion did clergy venture out into Kilema to teach in the early years, and this was usually limited to the compounds of Pfumba and prominent clan heads.

By the mid 1890s, the Kilema mission had emerged as a strong religious community, and the Spiritans began to contemplate spreading across the mountain. Initially the often-violent conflict among many of the chiefdoms had prevented this. However, the establishment of German colonial rule in this period led to the subordination of the mountain's chiefs and a subsequent end to inter-chiefdom warfare. The period also saw the arrival on Kilimanjaro of another Christian group, the German Leipzig Lutheran Mission. Eager to avoid violent conflict and rivalry among missions as had occurred recently in Uganda, the District Officer divided up the mountain's chiefdoms into 'spheres of evangelization.'<sup>26</sup> This provided the Congregation with both a framework for evangelization, and also an impetus, as areas left without a missionary presence could revert to the rival group. Between 1895 and 1915, the Congregation's presence spread rapidly, with new mission stations opening at Kibosho in 1894, Mkuu Rombo in 1898, Uru in 1911, and Mashati Rombo in 1912.<sup>27</sup> In 1910, the Kilimanjaro missions separated from

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Zanzibar, becoming an independent Apostolic Vicariate. Growth was even more pronounced after the First World War, when the colony shifted into British hands and became known as the Tanganyika Territory. By 1935, the Spiritans had six main mission parishes, dozens of outstations, and 214 primary schools.<sup>28</sup>

#### THE EMERGENCE OF POPULAR CATHOLICISM ON KILIMANJARO

The peoples of Kilimanjaro initially greeted the Spiritan missions with a good deal of skepticism. For the first two decades of their existence, few sought membership in the churches or conversion to the faith, and those who did tended to be either social outcasts or freed slaves, well outside the mainstream of Chagga society.<sup>29</sup> The difficulty of the missions in attracting followers stemmed from reluctance both to give up existing religious beliefs and practices and to enter into a new social network (the Church) that often conflicted with existing ones (such as the clans). In the 1930s, however, the Catholic missions began to experience explosive growth. Records kept by the mother church in Kilema indicate that there were 29,085 baptized Catholics on the mountain in 1933.<sup>30</sup> This figure increased sharply over the next thirty years, rising to 92,505 in 1953, and to 175,340 in 1961. By the latter, over ninety percent of those living within two miles of a mission were Catholic. The rising popularity of Christianity was not limited to Catholicism, however. The Lutheran missions in nearby parts of Kilimanjaro likewise claimed similar growth in membership. By the mid 1960s, Kilimanjaro had become a predominantly Christian place, with an estimated Christian population of between eighty and ninety percent.<sup>31</sup>

Church membership statistics, however, are only a small indication of the increasing significance of the missions. They also had tremendous success in attracting students into classrooms. In 1934, the 214 primary schools run by the Holy Ghost Fathers had 14,740 enrolled students.<sup>32</sup> By 1956, this figure increased by a factor of five, with more than 90% of young Chagga children in Church-run primary schools.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, the region boasted the largest number of primary and secondary schools of any part of Tanganyika, as well as the highest figures for enrollment. For those students who completed secondary school, several options awaited, including enrollment in mission-run teachers training colleges, seminaries, or higher education opportunities away from the mountain.

Another sign of the rising influence of the missions was the dying out of many existing forms of religious and cultural expression.

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In the 1930s and 40s, many practices that had defined life on the mountain, such as polygamy and initiation, had begun to fall into decline. In their place, many people had come to practice Christian rites such as baptism and confirmation. The work of local healers and medicine men also became less publicly acceptable, with much of their work being driven underground. Perhaps the most significant indication of the rising influence of the mission was the gradual shifting of its control into the hands of the people. In the early years of the mission, the clergy held responsibility for developing the individual stations and guiding the process of evangelization. Few in numbers, however, they relied heavily on lay catechists – at first immigrants from the coastal missions, and later Chagga converts – to carry out the bulk of evangelical work. The missionaries hoped that in time, as they gained more converts and as the system of education developed, the whole mountain could eventually be placed into the hands of Chagga clergy. In 1939, the first Chagga priest, Alfonse Mtana, was ordained.<sup>34</sup> Over the next thirty years, over 78 men followed in his footsteps, each taking over the roles held by missionary priests and brothers. Over this span, Kilimanjaro's mission stations gradually became parishes, their control shifting into the hands of local clergy. A crucial turning point occurred on March 25, 1953, when the Apostolic Vicariate of Kilimanjaro became the Diocese of Moshi.<sup>35</sup> The first bishop was an Irish Spiritan, Father Joseph Byrne. However, seven years later, Byrne was succeeded by Joseph Kilasara, the mountain's first African bishop. The Spiritan era had ended.

Thus, in a span of fifty years, the Spiritans succeeded in establishing a thriving, dynamic, self-sustaining Catholic society on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. Why did this happen? Though Catholic missionaries and their Protestant counterparts had tremendous success in many areas of Africa, in few areas did it become so widespread, and so quickly. Through analysis of the mission's activities and the response of Chagga peoples between 1890 and 1950, it becomes clear that the success of the Congregation is due to an intermingling of spiritual, economic, and social factors.

Spiritually, the success of the Spiritan missions was greatly facilitated by a number of structural similarities between existing Chagga religious beliefs and Catholicism. One of these was belief in a supreme deity. As stated before, unlike many other societies in Africa, the peoples of Kilimanjaro believed that a single divine being, Ruwa, had created the world and continued to influence its daily affairs. Ruwa was, of course, distinct from the Christian God in many respects – he ruled not from the heavens but

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rather from the top of the mountain, not to mention that he was not the father of Jesus. However, the essential properties of the two deities – creator, life-giver, sustainer, benevolent – were very consistent. These consistencies allowed the missionaries to create a conceptual bridge between existing beliefs and Catholic traditions. In essence, they could describe the new by paralleling it to the old, and then elaborating and explaining the difference. The Spiritans even adopted the Chagga word ‘Ruwa’ as their word for God. Though this did risk the two becoming thought of as the same being, it was enormously effective in making the faith comprehensible to people.

Another example of similarity between the two faith systems was between the Chagga *waruma* and Catholic saints. As stated before, the people of Kilimanjaro believed that the spirits of the deceased, especially people who had been particularly prominent, continued to reside in the land of the living and had the power to influence daily events.<sup>36</sup> People would regularly make offerings to these spirits, in hope that they would grant them prosperity and safety, and possibly even intercede on their behalf with Ruwa. The early missionaries found these beliefs to be unacceptable, calling them animistic and pagan, largely due to the nature of the offerings being made – usually involving production and consumption of large quantities of *mbege*, or banana beer, or the sacrifice of an animal such as a goat. Though problematic, the *waruma* did bear some structural similarity to a Catholic institution, the Communion of Saints. As a means of both discouraging these practices while at the same time presenting an important Catholic concept, the Spiritan missionaries explained saints as analogous to, yet distinct from, these spirits. Furthermore, they promoted means of worship that they found more acceptable, such as reciting prayers, saying the rosary, and lighting votives. The strategy proved to be successful. Reverence for saints, over time, displaced the worship of many forms of spirits, and practices such as animal sacrifice fell by the wayside. However, the people of Kilimanjaro retain to this day a strong sense of reverence for the ancestors, and a belief that they are a presence in their lives.

A third area of similarity related not to doctrine, but rather to imagery. Several important symbols in Chagga spirituality had similar counterparts in Catholicism, perhaps the best example being water.<sup>37</sup> In Catholic tradition, water serves as one of the most powerful symbols of God’s presence on earth. From the story of Noah’s ark to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River, the power of water to cleanse, purify, and bring rebirth is reaffirmed across the Old and New Testaments. In Chagga

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beliefs, water was likewise considered to be a divine gift (though from Ruwa), and it had the power not only to enable life in an otherwise desolate landscape, but also to purify and cleanse the individual. Both faith systems even had analogous rituals related to water. While Christians used the rite of baptism to cleanse believers of original sin, Chagga elders used rites of washing as a part of initiation rituals, which were meant to cleanse youth of the impurities of childhood.

The Spiritans quickly recognized the power that water imagery could have in creating a bridge between existing religious beliefs and Catholic ones. In teaching the faith, they focused on the importance of the resource, but claimed the Christian God – and not Ruwa – to be the source of such goodness. They also attempted to add a Christian touch to one of the most pervasive features of the mountain, the irrigation furrows. While completing the first buildings at Kilema, Brother Cere Spiekerman worked with a local specialist to construct a furrow that would carry water from a nearby river to the mission. Rather than naming it after the person who had called for its construction, however, the priests named it after the Holy Spirit, using the Swahili name *Mtakatifu*.

These similarities in imagery, and in turn practice, allowed the people of the mountain to interpret new Catholic practices in relation to that which they already knew. Over time, the conceptual bridges created by the missionaries likely facilitated many conversions to the faith. They also allowed local people to leave some mark on the faith. For example, though Christians came to think of the Christian God as being the creator of the earth, and not Ruwa, they still managed to retain the idea of Kilimanjaro being a sacred place. Mzee Mwasha, an elder from Machame and a devout Christian, explained the creation of the mountain in terms very similar to that of the creation story:

*When God created the world, He made water splendid on the surface of the earth. Water got into His furrows, and as the years got on these got deeper and deeper in the valleys.<sup>38</sup>*

Furthermore, the fact that many Catholic practices could substitute for existing ones (baptism for initiation, for example) enhanced the social acceptability of conversion. People could retain similar forms of cultural expression, and in turn not turn their backs entirely on the ways of the past. It is very likely that increasing comfort with Catholic practices, due largely to their similarity, facilitated broader acceptance of the faith.

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Economic factors were also crucial to the rising prominence of the missions. The arrival of the Congregation and German rule in the 1890s radically transformed the economy of the mountain, with an increasing emphasis being placed on the production of agricultural goods for export. Arabica coffee emerged as the real engine in this transition. Initially, the missionaries who introduced the crop had mixed success in growing the crop on large single-crop farms. In the 1920s, however, crop yields improved as clergy adopted from local farmers the practice of intercropping coffee with bananas, thus allowing the coffee trees to be shielded from direct sunlight. The crop quickly spread from the mission estates to the Chagga *kihamba*, resulting in a huge expansion in production. In 1923, Kilimanjaro had 3,300 farmers growing coffee on 1,200 acres of land.<sup>39</sup> By 1933, the figure had grown to 16,800 growers on 6,700 acres, yielding a crop worth £46,259. Ten years later, nearly 28,000 people were growing the crop on 16,340 acres of land, at a value of £167,737. By 1953, the number of growers had reached 36,880 – over 90% of households – with over 27,660 acres of land in cultivation. The yield, valuing £3,724,184, provided an average of nearly £200 per household. In the 1960s, the numbers continued this incredible rise, due to the skyrocketing price of coffee on the global market.

By bringing coffee cultivation to the mountain's population, both directly and indirectly the Catholic missions introduced a revenue source that transformed many aspects of life on the mountain.<sup>40</sup> Money from coffee funded the construction of schools, churches, roads, coffee processing plants, hospitals, and dispensaries. People also used money to increase their standard of living within the household, purchasing clothing, books, and better quality construction materials. Aside from providing money, coffee also changed how people worked. It brought men more directly into agriculture, an activity that had largely been the place of women. Perhaps the most significant impact of coffee was that it afforded the people of the mountain a tool with which to negotiate the colonial experience. As a wealthy community of prosperous coffee growers, the Chagga were in many ways exemplary in the eyes of the colonial state. This fact, reflected not only in the spread of commerce and education but also in tax revenue, made the British administration leery of enforcing restrictive, unpopular policies there, as it had elsewhere in the colony, for fear of disrupting the industry.

A good example of the political leverage that coffee money afforded can be found in the 1920s. As the coffee industry began to take off, increasing tension arose between Chagga coffee

farmers and European settlers living at the foot of the mountain. Settlers resented not only the fact that their African farmers were beginning to out-produce them (largely due to the practice of intercropping, as opposed to the single-crop farming style used by the Europeans), but also that their success made them less likely to work as laborers on settler estates. Facing high labor costs and new competition, settlers in 1923 began to lobby the colonial government to restrict coffee cultivation in Chagga kihamba.<sup>41</sup> Some even advocated an outright ban. In response, Chagga farmers banded together, forming a cooperative society and calling on the government to support their interests.<sup>42</sup> In most parts of Africa with large European populations, such as the central highlands of Kenya, settler interests frequently took precedence over those of Africans, and often at their expense. On Kilimanjaro, however, the tremendous prosperity of Chagga coffee farmers shielded them from the pleas of the settlers. The government rejected the settlers' arguments, and it not only preserved Chagga cultivation privileges, but also expanded its support.

Lastly, a number of social factors contributed to the rising role of the missions in daily life on the mountain. As mentioned earlier, the Spiritans initially designed an evangelical strategy based on Christian villages, in hope that these communities would become exemplars of good Christian living. For their first twenty years or so, the missions remained relatively autonomous communities within chiefdoms, comprised largely of people from other areas. By the 1950s, however, the chiefdoms themselves had become Christian social communities, with the missions serving as the center of community life. At the same time, existing social networks, particularly clan-based ones, began to fall into decline.

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The rise of the missions as social networks can be attributed to several factors, the first and foremost being the spread of formal education. By the 1930s, mission schools on Kilimanjaro had educated thousands of people, providing them with access to new forms of knowledge and new employment opportunities. Large numbers of these students became Christians in the process, and maintained membership in their local churches. The connections made between students while they were in school thus continued into everyday life. Sharing common experience, faith, and even aspirations, these people increasingly found themselves much more comfortable with one another than they did with those who had not attended school or were not Christians.

*....the missions had established themselves as a focal point for community learning and support.*

*...the missions came to represent a new means of social advancement.*

For this new generation of school-educated Christians, the missions represented not only a social community, but also a source of knowledge. Whereas in previous generations, people looked to local healers and specialists for explanation of the natural world, by the 1940s people were looking to the missions. A good example of this can be seen in changing responses to drought. In 1907, the long rainy season failed, marking the beginning of a two-year period of unusual aridity that resulted in famine.<sup>43</sup> Records from the missions indicate that nearly 1,000 people died in East Kilimanjaro alone, and tremendous social upheaval hit the rest of the mountain as well.<sup>44</sup> Seeking understanding and solutions, people sought out the services of local specialists and healers, who explained the phenomenon as the act of a malevolent spirit, and offered solutions in the form of offerings of beer and goats. The missionaries tried to counter these solutions – which they deemed both unChristian and ineffective – by organizing prayer services. In Kilema, Father Gommenginger set up a several novenas, a series of public prayer meetings at watercourses, and invited people to light votive candles and pray the rosary.<sup>45</sup> In spite of these efforts, attendance at both mission churches and schools declined in this period, indicating that their efforts were less than successful. Forty years later, however, things had changed dramatically. When drought again occurred in the mid 1950s, the churches found themselves flooded with people, recording record attendance. This seems to indicate that the missions had established themselves as a focal point for community learning and support.

Lastly, the missions came to represent a new means of social advancement. For generations, one's social position almost always correlated directly with one's position within the clan or relationship with the chief. With the rise of education and coffee, however, many young people found that they could achieve status in new ways – by becoming highly successful farmers, by seeking employment through the colonial government or private sector, or for a select few, even attending university. A new generation of elites has arisen by the 1940s, many of whom had strong dislike for elders and, in particular, the chiefs. Tension between the old and new elites grew in the early 1950s, reaching a peak with what is referred to as the 'chieftaincy dispute.' Eager to consolidate governance, the British colonial administration called for the creation of a paramount chieftaincy, in essence a single chief for all of Kilimanjaro. The existing chiefs assumed that this individual would be chosen from their own ranks. However, a number of prominent men –all of whom were Christians – resisted the chiefs' calls. They formed a group called

the Chagga Association, which lobbied the government for a paramount chief to be chosen by open election.<sup>46</sup> The group succeeded. In 1952, Kilimanjaro held its first ever election for a paramount chief. The candidate who won, Thomas Marealle, was in many ways a fusion of the old and the new. While he did have some claim to chiefly lineage, he was a practicing Christian and highly educated. His election thus represents to some extent a break from the past, and a sign of the rising social influence of Christians and the impending decline of older forms of social organization.

#### CONCLUSION

The arrival of the Spiritans in the 1890s marked the beginning of a period of tremendous transformation for Kilimanjaro and its people. In a period of just sixty years, Catholicism rose from being a faith of freed slaves and outsiders to being the dominant faith of the mountain. Along with their Lutheran counterparts, the Spiritans managed to transform the mountain into an almost wholly Christian place. The changes, however, reached far beyond the spread of new faith. Missions became social centers that displaced existing forms of social organization. They also laid the foundation for the spread of formal education, making Kilimanjaro into one of the most highly educated parts of Tanzania. Coffee, a crop introduced and supported by the Spiritans, fueled economic growth in the region, facilitating not only a rise in family incomes but also the further spread of missions, schools, technical training centers, hospitals, dispensaries, and roads. As a result of the missionary presence, the mountain had become a fundamentally different place in a very short period of time.

The growth of the Catholic Church on Kilimanjaro, occurring mostly in a span of thirty years, owes much to the dedication of both clergy and lay people. However, a number of local factors facilitated their work. One was the existing faith of the people, which, although distinct in many ways, had structural similarities that allowed for the creation of conceptual bridges between old beliefs and new ones. Another was the success of coffee. Revenue from this new crop greatly assisted the work of the Church, and also helped to locate the missions as economic centers of the mountain. Lastly, the missions emerged as social centers, due largely to their role in running local schools, and provided a form of community for those increasingly alienated by the clans and chiefs.

Today, the Catholic Church on Mount Kilimanjaro remains vibrant. As of a 1990 diocesan census, the Catholic population of the region had reached 568,004, over 67 per cent of the

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whole population. On Sundays, one can find bustling activity at the mountain's parishes, the churches packed for each of the Masses. Though religious life is strong, hardships such as HIV/AIDS and low coffee prices are taking their toll, threatening both the communities themselves and the work of the missions. Our Lady of Lourdes Church at Kilema in many ways embodies these growing hardships. Once a grand structure, it is now plagued by a leaky roof and cracked windows, the result of a lack of money for routine maintenance. In spite of these problems, however, a sense of tremendous pride, faithfulness, and optimism pervades the mountain. As long as this remains strong, the Church will continue to serve as the center of life – and a beacon of hope – for thousands.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>This article is based on a lecture of the same name, delivered as part of Duquesne University's Founders' Week Celebration, 31 January 2008. I would like to thank Fr. John Fogarty and the Spiritan Fathers at Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, for inviting me to speak and inspiring me to write this piece. I also thank Dr. Elaine Parsons and the Department of History at Duquesne for co-hosting my visit to the campus. The research for this article was funded in part by a Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship, 2003-2004, and a grant from the National Security Education Program, 2005. Lastly, I would like to thank Fr. Gerard Vieira and Fr. Vincent O'Toole at the Spiritan Archives in Chevilly-Larue, France, for assisting me with my research.

<sup>2</sup>Alexander Le Roy recorded his impressions of the region and its people in his diary, an edited version of which was published in France in 1914. See Alexander Le Roy, *Au Kilima-Ndjaru* (Paris: Au Secrétariat du Souvenir Africain, 1914). The excerpts (my translation) can be found on pages 200-201.

<sup>3</sup>Also important was the work of several groups of sisters, including the Missionary Sisters of the Precious Blood (who arrived in 1898) and the Sisters of Our Lady of Kilimanjaro (formed in 1931). This article, however, will focus in particular on the work of the Spiritans. For more on the sisters, see Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi: A Centenary Memorial 1890-1990* (Mtwara: Ndanda Mission Press, 1990), pp. 99-101, 105-108.

<sup>4</sup>John Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

<sup>5</sup>In addition to Le Roy's aforementioned text, some examples include Johann Krapf, *Travels, Researches, and Missionary Labours, during an Eighteen Years' Residence in Eastern Africa* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860); and David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (London, 1857).

<sup>6</sup>Notable examples of this literature include John and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution*, v. 1-2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); and Paul Landau, *The Realm of the Word* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1995).

<sup>7</sup>Only a handful of scholars have written on the Holy Ghost Congrega-

tion, and of these most are clergy in the order. See John Kieran, "The Holy Ghost Fathers in East Africa, 1863 to 1914." (D. Phil. Thesis: University of London, 1966); John Kieran "Christian Villages in North-Eastern Tanzania," *Transafrican Journal of History* 1, no. 1 (1971), pp. 24-38; Henry Koren, *The Spiritans: A History of the Congregation of the Holy Ghost* (Pittsburgh: Spiritus Press, 1958); Henry Koren, *Spiritans East Africa Memorial* (Pittsburgh: Spiritus Press, 1994); and Reginald Walker, *The Holy Ghost Fathers in Africa* (Dublin: Blackrock College, 1933).

<sup>8</sup> For detailed histories of the Chagga peoples, see Sally Falk Moore and Paul Puritt, *The Chagga and Meru of Tanzania* (London: International African Institute, 1977); Kathleen Stahl, *History of the Chagga People of Kilimanjaro* (London: Mouton, 1964); and Ludger Wimmelbucker, *Kilimanjaro – A Regional History. Volume One: Production and Living Conditions, c. 1800-1920* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> For more on the *mifongo*, see the above works and also Matthew Bender, "Water Brings No Harm: Knowledge, Power, and Practice on Kilimanjaro, Tanzania 1880-1980" (Ph.D. Dissertation: The Johns Hopkins University, 2006); Matthew Bender, "For More and Better Water, Choose Pipes: Building Water and the Nation on Kilimanjaro," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 34, no. 4 (2008); and Alison Grove, "Water Use by the Chagga on Kilimanjaro," *African Affairs* 92 (1993), pp. 431-448.

<sup>10</sup> For more on Chagga pre-Christian religious beliefs, see Anza Lema, "Chaga Religion & Missionary Christianity on Kilimanjaro," in Thomas Spear and Isaria Kimambo, eds., *East African Expressions of Christianity* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 45-47.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the early history of the Congregation, see Henry Koren's *The Spiritans* and *To the Ends of the Earth* (Pittsburgh: Spiritus Press, 1983).

<sup>13</sup> For more on the history of Zanzibar, see Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987).

<sup>14</sup> Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, pp. 35-36. Propaganda Fide is the pontifical department charged with the spread of Catholicism and the regulation of ecclesiastical affairs in non-Catholic countries. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it actively assigned regions in Africa to specific Catholic missionary orders, in order to prevent duplication of efforts and competition. Aside from the Holy Ghost Congregation, other active Catholic orders in present-day Tanzania included the Mill Hill Fathers and the White Fathers.

<sup>15</sup> Fr. Horner, a native of Alsace-Lorraine, had spent his first seven years as a priest working in Réunion. See Koren, *Spiritans East African Memorial*, pp. 19-21.

<sup>16</sup> Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, pp. 34-37.

<sup>17</sup> Koren, *Spiritans East African Memorial*, p. 15.

<sup>18</sup> The Central African 'great lakes' region includes Lakes Victoria, Tanganyika, and Nyasa. For more on caravans, see Edward Alpers, "The Coast and the Development of the Caravan Trade," in I.N. Kimambo and A.J. Temu, eds., *A History of Tanzania* (Nairobi, East African Publishing House, 1969); Edward Alpers, *Ivory & Slaves in East Central Africa: Changing Patterns of International Trade to the Later Nineteenth Century* (London: Heinemann, 1975); and Donald Low, "The Northern Interior, 1840-1884," in Roland Oliver and Gervase Mathew, eds., *History of East Africa* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 297-351.

<sup>19</sup> These explorers, and others, made Kilimanjaro known to European audi-

ences through published journals and memoirs, as well as letters published in prominent journals and newspapers. For some examples see Johannes Rebmann, "Narrative of a Journey to Jagga, the Snow Country of Eastern Africa," *Church Missionary Intelligencer* 1 (1849-50), pp. 12-23; H.H. Johnston, *The Kilima-Njaro Expedition. A Record of Scientific Exploration in Eastern Equatorial Africa* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Co., 1886); and Hans Meyer, *Across East African Glaciers: An Account of the First Ascent of Kilimanjaro* (London: George Philip and Son, 1891).

<sup>20</sup> De Courmont was appointed bishop of the Vicariate in 1883, a mere fifteen years after his ordination as a priest. For a detailed biography see Koren, *Spiritans East African Memorial*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>21</sup> Koren, *Spiritans East African Memorial*, pp. 55, 63.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed account of the expedition, see Alexander Le Roy, *Au Kilima-Ndjaru*; and also Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, pp. 38-46.

<sup>23</sup> Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, p. 46.

<sup>24</sup> The importation of Arabica coffee into Kilimanjaro and its subsequent implications for both the Catholic mission and the people as a whole has been analyzed by J.A. Kieran. See J.A. Kieran, "Congregation and the Coffee Industry in East Africa," *Cor Unum* 3, no. 3 (1966), pp. 20-26.

<sup>25</sup> Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, pp. 74-76.

<sup>26</sup> This refers to a period of religious strife in the Kingdom of Buganda, along the shore of Lake Victoria in present-day Uganda. In 1886, the reigning ruler Kabaka Mwanga attempted to expel both the Catholic (White Fathers) and Protestant (Church Missionary Society) missionaries living in his kingdom, and ordered the murder of twenty-two of his own servants who refused to renounce the faith. They became known as the Uganda Martyrs, many of whom were canonized in 1964. In response, the missionaries and several prominent Muslims joined together to overthrow Mwanga. However, the three religious groups then turned on one another, leading to a period of violence so severe that, the next year, Mwanga was restored to his throne. This event had tremendous influence on colonial governance throughout Africa, and in many areas led to policies of restricting more than one missionary group from evangelizing the same populations. For more on this period, see Semakul Kiwanuka, *A History of Buganda: From the Foundation of the Kingdom to 1900* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1972).

<sup>27</sup> From *Erection du Vicariat du Kilimandjaro (1910)*, Spiritans Archives, Chevilly-Larue, France (hereafter CSEA), 2K1.11a1.

<sup>28</sup> Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, p. 116.

<sup>29</sup> Anza Lema, "Chaga Religion and Missionary Christianity," pp. 55-56.

<sup>30</sup> From *Bulletin des Oeuvres (1933-1953)*, CSEA 2K1.12.6; and *Kilimandjaro District – Correspondence (1960-1968)*, CSEA 2K1.16A3.

<sup>31</sup> Michael von Clemm, "Agricultural Productivity and Sentiment on Kilimanjaro," *Economic Botany* 18, no. 2 (1964), p. 99.

<sup>32</sup> Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, p. 79.

<sup>33</sup> John Iliffe, *A Modern History*, p. 445.

<sup>34</sup> Diocese of Moshi, *The Catholic Church in Moshi*, p. 92.

<sup>35</sup> The Diocese was named after Moshi Town, which is the district seat and the principal town in the region.

<sup>36</sup> Anza Lema, "Chaga Religion and Missionary Christianity," pp. 45-48.

<sup>37</sup> For more on this point see Matthew Bender, "Water Brings No Harm," pp. 211-215.

<sup>38</sup> Interview with Mzee Mwashu, Machame, Kilimanjaro, conducted in

spring 2004 by Matthew Bender.

<sup>39</sup> Michael von Clemm, "Agricultural Productivity and Sentiment on Kilimanjaro," *Economic Botany* 18, no. 2 (1964), p. 112.

<sup>40</sup> For more on the relationship between the Catholic missions and the coffee industry, see J.A. Kieran, "Congregation and the Coffee Industry in East Africa," *Cor Unum* 3, no. 3 (1966), pp. 20-26; also "The Origins of Commercial Arabica Coffee Production in East Africa," *African Historical Studies* 2, no. 1 (1969), pp. 51-67.

<sup>41</sup> For more see John Iliffe, *A Modern History*, p. 276; also Matthew Bender, "Water Brings No Harm," pp. 128-129.

<sup>42</sup> In the 1920s and 30s, Chagga farmers joined to form two different cooperative societies, the Kilimanjaro Native Planters Association (KNPA), and its successor the Kilimanjaro Native Cooperative Union (KNCU). Both were crucial to the rising success of the Chagga coffee industry. See *Kilimanjaro Native Planters Association*, British National Archives (Formerly Public Record Office), CO 691/116/6; also *Kilimanjaro Native Cooperative Union*, TNA 5/237; and R.J.M. Swynnerton and A.B. Bennett, *Habari yote ya Kahawa ya KNCU* (Moshi: Moshi Native Coffee Board, 1948).

<sup>43</sup> Ludger Wimmelbücker, *Kilimanjaro – A Regional History*, pp. 387-396.

<sup>44</sup> *Documents divers sur l'Afrique Orientale, 1910-1922*, CSEA 2K1.11B3

<sup>45</sup> *Journal de la Communauté de Kilema*, 29-30 October 1907, also 11 October 1908. CSEA 2K2.7.

<sup>46</sup> For more on the chieftaincy dispute, see Tanzania National Archives 5/548. Also John Iliffe, *A Modern History*, pp. 525-526, 568-569.