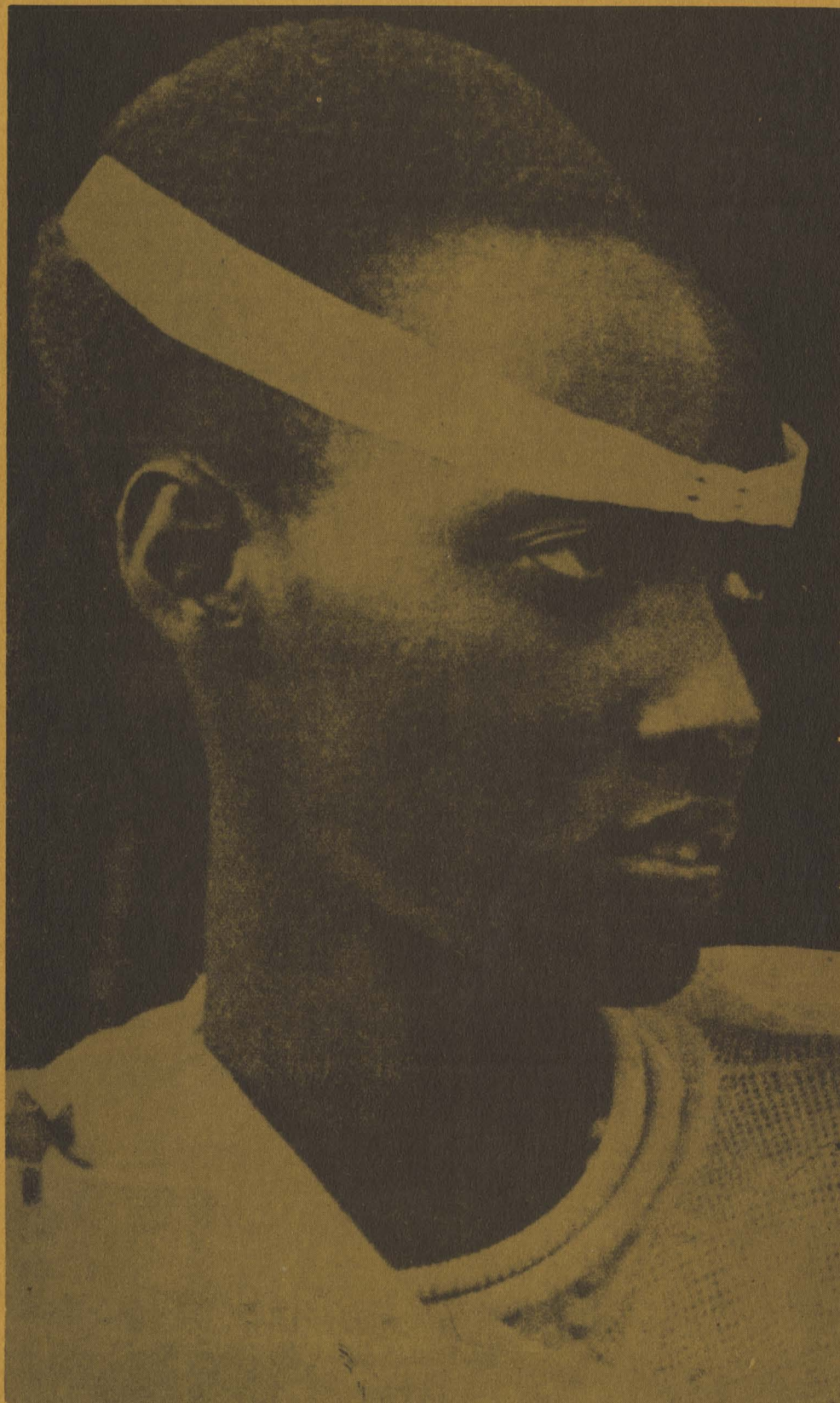


SONGS OF THE WATUTSI



Recorded by Leo A. Verwilghen

Ethnic Folkways Library FE 4428

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SONG OF VICTORY
WAR SONGS
BALLADS
HARP SONGS
PRAISE SONGS
EPIC SONGS
HUNTING SONG
SONGS ABOUT CATTLE

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INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY LEO A. VERWILGHEN

Ruanda, a country of high altitudes and large green hills, occupies the land east of Lake Kivu in east-central Africa, bordering the great sink or trench which cuts Africa in two from north to south.

Three ethnic groups live in close proximity in this country: The Batwa "pygmies", who are racially mixed, are potters, and many of them are servants in the royal court of the Watutsi. The Bahutu, who form the bulk of the population, are agriculturalists, and are the indigenous people of the area. The third group is composed of the Watutsi, whose origins have not been established. Physically they strongly resemble the Nilotic peoples. Slim in build, frequently more than six and a half feet in height, they have long legs, delicate joints, fine aquiline noses, light skin, delicate lips and straight shoulders. Their behavior is diplomatic and refined. Their practice of athletics is highly developed, and high-jumping is a national sport. Spear throwing, archery and dancing are also favorite activities.

Young men called to the court of the Mwami, or king, to learn the customs, manners and traditions of the Watutsi are known as Intore. In addition to learning dancing, the Intore receive an intense education in literature, history and self control. They memorize the traditional national poetry and learn the art of poetic composition. They learn to speak in appropriate language, to act courteously, and to express their thoughts accurately.

The language spoken is called Kyniarwanda. It is common to all the three major ethnic groups of the country, but is probably not the original language of the Watutsi, who are believed to have come from the north with their great-horned cattle to settle peacefully in Ruanda. The cattle have a social significance outweighing even their economic value. They are the symbol of power and authority rather than wealth. And as the Mwami is the supreme authority, to him, by extension, belong all the cattle owned by other Watutsi.

Politically Ruanda is an absolute monarchy in which the king commands the chiefs of the provinces, who, in turn, command the lesser chiefs of the outlying hills. The royal succession is within the family of Abanyiginya.

The Watutsi believe in a single deity called Imana. He is the creating force of all things and is essentially good. The cult of the ghosts of the dead is very widespread, and offerings must be made to these spirit beings. The casting of magic spells plays an important part in the life of the Watutsi.

Monogamy is the rule. The role of the woman is very important. Marriage is never imposed on a Watutsi woman against her will. Once a mother, she is deeply respected, and she is consulted in all affairs of the family. She is truly mistress of the house, and is responsible for the education of the boys up to the age of twelve and the girls until marriage.

True pastoral people, the Watutsi traditionally eat no meat but only milk, butter and honey, though at present they are adding certain other foods. Eating in public is regarded as unseemly. For this reason, the Bahutu for many years believed the Watutsi lived without eating.

Watutsi dress has a national character. The men wear a piece of cloth around the hips and upper legs. Those Watutsi who wear European clothes continue, however, to wear the old style cloth beneath. The women drape themselves very elegantly in long cloths; one arm is usually covered and the other is free.





WATUTSI WARRIOR

Watutsi houses are usually extremely well cared for. The interior is divided into compartments by finely-woven mats which are hung from the wooden understructure of the roof. The room of the parents is separated from that of the children by a curtain of otter skins.

Among the most prominent crafts are basketry for the women and ironwork for the men. Watutsi basketry is of a very high quality. Basket weaving is not practiced for commercial purposes, but is regarded as a "noble" art, requiring great patience. Basketry objects are not sold, but are sometimes given as presents. Ironwork is concerned primarily with the making of countless variations of swords and spears. There are four or five hundred different models of these weapons, each one having its own name and its own history.

Drums are usually very conspicuous in Watutsi music. The drum in Ruanda is the symbol of royalty. It is only by permission of the king that batteries of drums may be played together. Drums are not played with the hands among the Watutsi, but only with sticks. The rhythms are formal and standardized, and each one has its specific name, but this does not preclude the introduction of new rhythms. Drums are beaten on all important social and religious occasions.

But apart from this more conspicuous and intrusive form of music, the Watutsi have a precious repertoire of old legends, ballads, geneologies, love songs, hunting songs, war songs and epics which constitute a vital part of the musical culture and the history of the people. Many of these songs are of the type not performed publicly, but usually within the confines of the home or the court, or some other small gatherings. This present collection is confined to Watutsi singing, which offers an important basis for comparisons with the musical traditions of other peoples of Africa.

SIDE I, BAND 1: UWEJEJE IMANA. This piece is sung by the girls and women of the house of the king's mother at Shyogwe. It dates from the time of King Kigeli IV Rwabugiri. It is a symbolic reception of the victorious king returning from war. Each of the capitals of Ruanda in turn greets the king, telling him it is he who has been marked for success by destiny. A "capital" is any site where a king has lived during his reign. Upon the death of a king, the new king moves from the old city to a new one, with the result that there are many "capitals" in the country.

SIDE I, BAND 2: INKA YI ABAJIJI (The Cows of the Abajiji Family). Sung by the women and girls of the house of the queen-mother at Shyogwe. The song is from the time of Musinga. The theme is pastoral, telling about the cows with the long horns. Each one's name is called, and the song narrates the places where the cattle have grazed and the calves that have been born.

SIDE I, BAND 3: EXPLOITS OF THE URWINTWALI. Sung by Muyunzwe. Urwintwali is the name of a warrior group to which the singer belongs. The song tells of the exploits of this group at war. The Urwintwali was formed during the reign of King Musinga (1920-30).

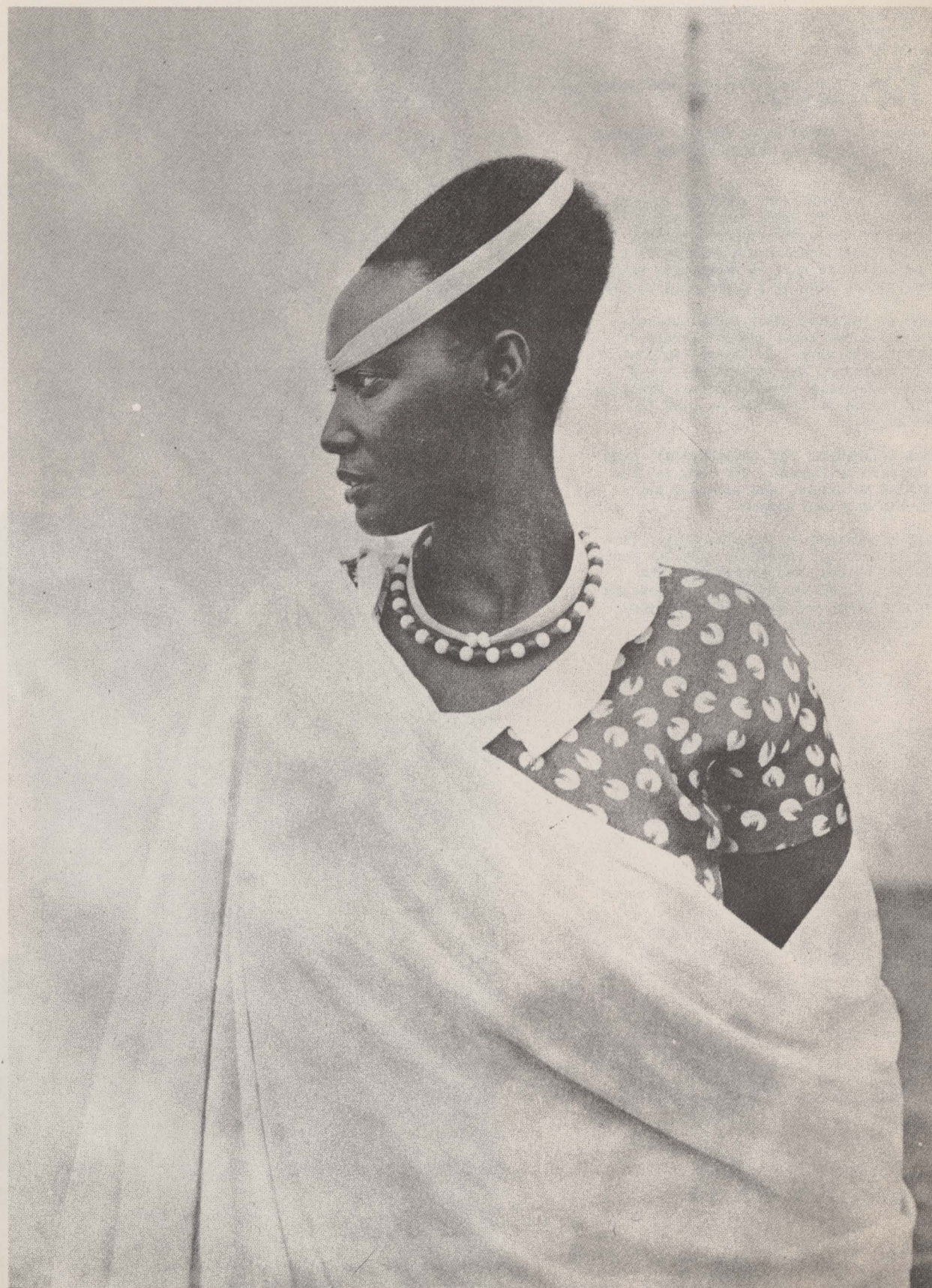
SIDE I, BAND 4: IBABAZABAHIZI. Sung by Muyunzwe. This is the name of another warrior group formed around 1880. The song tells about wars in Kigesi and Nkore, two provinces of Ruanda, and is a kind of dialogue in which the king is asked for aid.

Heroes are called to arms.
A man of Mulima comes to the house of King Musinga.
You hear of these heroes.
They go to battle.
And are you not equally courageous?
All have left, armed with their bows and spears.
You are brave in combat, that I know.
Heroes are attacking the fugitives.
They wildly attack the enemy.

SIDE I, BAND 5: WARRIORS OF THE URWINTWALI. Sung by Muyunzwe. This is another song about the warrior group named Urwintwali, calling the roll of all its soldiers who took part in battle. The first notes of the song have no words, and this type of vocal introduction is called umurego, meaning "tension."

SIDE I, BAND 6: SONG OF KING RWOGERA'S ERA. Sung by Rusendezagekwe. Warriors' song from the time of King Rwogera (1830).

SIDE II, BAND 1: AMAHAMBIA. Sung by Murunganwa. The word Amahamba signifies "Pastoral Song." The singer says that the cow which has calved can bring forth nothing that will not be appreciated. It is a tangent reference to the queen-mother who gave birth to the king.



WATUTSI PRINCESS

SIDE II, BAND 2: INGANJI MU MILIMBA. Sung and played on harp by Ruhumiliza. The song tells about the victory of a man named Milimba:

Carry the coffin,
I will carry another urn,
Oh son of my mother.
We will go to the tribunal,
House of the son of heroes (i.e., the king).
We will ask of him a cow.

This song appears to be of Batwa origin, inasmuch as a Watutsi never would so openly express his wishes for a reward.

SIDE II, BAND 3: IMIGEMBA (The Arrows). Sung by Rwandoka, Ruhumiliza and Naho; harp played by Ruhenzi. Song from the court of Chief Mugugu, composed around 1896, comparing a good warrior to a fighting bull. The bull is frequently used as the symbol of the king or a courageous warrior.

SIDE II, BAND 4: IKIGWITI. Sung and played on harp by Ruhenzi. A warriors' song. The harp in this instance is not played in typical Watutsi style, but from behind, the hand being between the strings and the wood. This method is familiar in Urundi. In Ruanda it is normal to play the strings from above.

SIDE II, BAND 5: AMARARO (The Encampments). Sung and played on harp by Ruhenzi. The song is from the time of King Muhigirwa, and recounts the places where his warriors camped.

SIDE II, BAND 6: MUNYANGAGO (Hunting Song). This type of song is used in connection with the hunting of leopards, otters, and other game. The singer tells of all the places where the hunting dogs have fought with such game, and the kinds of animals they have caught.

