

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JBG-41  
To Install a Chief

Poste Restante  
Arusha, Tanganyika  
6 March 1953

Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

On January 5 of this year the Waarush, an agricultural tribe of some 52,000<sup>1</sup> living on the western and southern sides of Mount Meru in Northern Tanganyika, installed a new Paramount Chief. The installation ceremony was held near the town of Arusha at the Native Authority headquarters of Enaboishu, and was attended by British officials, missionaries, and a further sprinkling of other whites as well as a large number of Waarush. The newly installed chief, who had been selected by vote of males over eighteen years of age (taxpayers), is named Zephania, and he is a Lutheran Mission school inspector by profession. A considerable history of political activity within the tribe, interesting for the light it casts on the attitudes of a people newly facing the need of better political organizations to meet the conditions of civilization, had led up to the election and installation.

The first vacancy in a long time for the chiefship of the Waarush was created by the retirement in February 1952 of Mzee<sup>2</sup>Simeon, whose chiefly service dated back to the days of German occupation during which he became one of the two chiefs separately officiating before the Waarush were amalgamated under a single Native Authority in the late thirties. At the amalgamation he became the paramount chief, and has remained respected by both the government and his people up to the present. The official program of safaris around his chiefdom, with endless barazas or talks and argument, plus numerous meetings of councils and with British administrators - especially since considerable social drinking is involved -, demands great energy and vigor. Unlike the departure from office of many chiefs nowadays, his retirement was at his own request, due to illness after long service.

This vacancy was first filled by a new chief, Andreas, elected by the tribal council. There was a popular protest against this election, and

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1. Total population of the tribe is given as 52,020, being some 48 percent of all Africans in the larger Arusha District, in African Populations of Tanganyika Territory, published by the East African Statistical Department, 15 December 1950. The District Officer, Mr. Derrick Quinlan, had supplied an offhand figure of 35,000.

2. The term Mzee literally translated "an old person" is a tribal title of respect and veneration.

widespread challenging by the Arusha Citizens' Union<sup>1</sup> of Andreas' character and fitness. He had too many concubines (four native-law wives in addition to his legal wife by Lutheran marriage) and he drank too much. There also were protests - a sign of the times - that the tribal council, and the twenty-nine mitaa or sub-chiefdom councils which had elected its councilmen,<sup>2</sup> were no longer truly representative of the people. Under the artificial conditions of a tribe within a mandated or colonial territory, the people were able to appeal with impunity to a higher governmental authority (the local British administration) for a recast. New elections were arranged for mitaa councils and then for the central council, but the newly-elected central body was unable to reach the absolute unanimity required<sup>3</sup> to elect a paramount chief, and requested government to appoint one. The government - significantly, in view of the British concern for UN attitudes - refused to accede to the council's request and eventually it was agreed between government and the tribal council that a new chief should be elected by direct vote of the taxpaying males. Candidacy was limited to Andreas and Zephania, who had been the two candidates predominating in the council votes.

The campaigning consisted of sporadic meetings and speeches around the mountain, most of them organized by the Arusha Citizens' Union in support of Zephania. The election was held in mid-December, in six different meetings held simultaneously at the six court seat places. Two sign posts were erected at each voting site representing the two candidates, and the people gathered around the board of their choice and were counted with a European officer looking on. The election turnout was some 33 percent, and the vote was four to one in favor of Zephania Sumuli, against Andreas of the heavy drinking habits and the four concubines. The voting did not bear out the original view of many observers that the campaign was a fight between the young and more educated, supporting Zephania, and the older people favoring Andreas - the clothed against those in pigtails and skins. Zephania's support was drawn from all age groups.

1. The Arusha Citizens' Union, like the Meru Citizens' Association and the Chagga Citizens' Association, is a member organization of the Kilimanjaro Union.

2. Very briefly, the native authority structure is as follows: The Waarush area is divided into twenty-nine mitaa or sub-chiefdom areas. Each of the mitaa, with from 29 to 700 taxpayers, has a council (engiwana balbal) which includes twelve or more councillors (laikwanak), four elected from each of three age groups, and one additional councillor elected by every fifty detribalized taxpayers. Each mtaa council elects one representative to the central tribal council (englwata olosho).

The Chief of the Waarush in Council is the gazetted Native Authority, which is theoretically (most of the work is actually done in the boma or British local headquarters) responsible for the maintenance of law and order, collection of tax, roads, primary education etc. The Chief of the Waarush (Bwana Olkarsis) in consultation with the central tribal council appoints three assistant chiefs or wakili, a judicial wakili, a wakili who handles office work, and a third wakili who travels around the tribal area. The Chief of the Waarush also appoints, in consultation with the taxpayers of the mtaa concerned, a jumbe or headman for each of the twenty-nine mitaa.

The judicial set-up consists of six Intermediate Courts, each of which has jurisdiction over several mitaa and consists of the jumbes of these mitaa, and an A Court, presided over by the judicial wakili, which is a court of first instance and also an appeal court for the Intermediate Courts.

3. Several anthropologists, including Mr. Fosbrooke who lives in Arusha, have told me that the indigenous native ideal of democratic choice is one of unanimity rather than majority or concensus.

At the installation ceremony was an appearance of traditional tribal celebration combined with at least a splinter amount of imperial pomp. The Provincial Commissioner and the District Commissioner of the Northern Province and Arusha District were there, the former with an aide, resplendent in white uniforms and the pith helmet - in pattern reminiscent of the Victorian era - of the colonial service officer. The native chiefs on the platform were dressed in sober European civilian clothes, one, Mzee Simeon, wearing round his neck the flamboyant ribbon and pendant of the King's Medal for Chiefs, but the assemblage itself on the native side was extremely colorful. First there were classes of



school boys and girls marched in with their red-ribboned drum and fife corps. These were followed by a troupe of Waarush dancers done up in huge feathered headdresses with spears and warrior accoutrements styled after the Masai.<sup>1</sup> The crowd of spectators was also varied and colorful, their clothes displaying myriad combinations of native and European dress. Felt hats, necklaces, copper ear rings, blankets draped with

the standard Masai shoulder knot were a typical ensemble. The abbreviated Moslem fez, denoting minority membership in a tribe more strongly influenced by Lutheran missionaries was also seen. The red ochre of Masai moran and not infrequently



the moran coiffure (containing in this more Bantu or negroid tribe a larger amount of artificially lengthened hair) were dotted here and there. The crowd was noisy but generally orderly, with the exception-

typical of almost any East African public gathering - that the crowd stubbornly ignored admonitions of the unarmed police to remain inside the roped off areas.

1. The Masai, something less than 200 years ago, allowed these agriculturists to occupy this "island" inside Masailand since they wanted the convenience of nearby agriculturists who could supply them with tobacco and grains. In contradiction of Asiatic history, the agriculturists then studiously adopted the culture-trimmings of their warlike nomad neighbors.

The courthouse baraza or veranda had been decorated gaily for the occasion. Miniature Union Jacks were strung across the front of the building and banana leaves and coniferous boughs had been placed decoratively at the columns. A large Union Jack flew from the pole in front. The ceremony got underway after the Provincial Commissioner and party had arrived, beginning with a brief inspection of the school children drawn up in military formation.



Then there was a speech by the Provincial Commissioner, which validated the chief's position and election, telling the Waarush that they had a new chief, and secondly took the form of a pep talk regarding the value of greater efforts to improve the tribe and to better its agricultural economy. There were several disquietudes during the course of the Provincial Commissioner's speech, including one instance when a member of the dancing troupe moved out with great jangling of ankle bells and flourishing of ostrich plumes. The offender had to be looked at as only a veteran British colonial officer can stare before he became quiet.

After the Provincial Commissioner's speech one of the native Lutheran ministers, a respected elder known throughout the tribe, came forward on the platform with Zephania, the new chief. Holding on his arm a poncho-like garment made of the skins of leopard and colobus monkey, the minister spoke briefly of chiefly responsibilities in Kiarush, and then lifted the mantle and lowered it with appropriate solemnity over the head of the white-suited Zephania. With the mantle of chieftdom on, Zephania stood while two other elders of the tribe approached in turn, each bearing a further token. The first, a squat man whose Bantu face showed no Hamitic strain, carried a round-headed ebony cane or knobkerry which probably has its origin as a weapon but

presently is used as a definite symbol of local chiefly authority. It is carried in the hand and, when lifted and shaken, it serves to augment the already lively gesticulation of African elders. The second elder, clad in a service overcoat covering a body cloth and wearing the heavy Masai ear weights, brought a large fly whisk, traditional symbol of elderhood, made out of hair from the tails of several Wildebeest fixed round a handle of inlaid ebony. With further unction the whisk was handed to Zephania.

Crowd reactions to these bits of symbolism were enthusiastic; and would have persuaded the casual onlooker that each one was soundly based upon ingrained tribal tradition and history. Listening was intent during these rites of investiture. As each item was handed to the chief there would be an appreciative gasp and a cheer. The crowd was now tightly packed in the hot morning sunlight. Everyone continually craned his neck for a better view, and the large trees on the courthouse grounds had become weighted to the danger point with people sitting on every limb. If the potency of the ceremony is to be judged by the intensity of spectator attention, Zephania will officiate untroubled until his death.





Immediately after being robed and ornamented, Zephania pulled from his pocket a prepared script and delivered a short speech, which also received wild applause. The program then was taken over by the dancers and became a furious but happy tribal ngoma with the dressed warriors prancing in the usual way, brandishing spears and making the usual straight upward leaps of the Masai, further culture trimmings which these agriculturists have taken over from their erstwhile hosts.

Before examining this ceremony for points beyond tourist interest one needs first to know that the whole show was trumped up. The Waarush have no traditional ceremony of this kind and even the very recent installation of Andreas had no



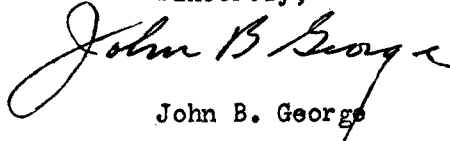
such elaborate trimmings. Leopard skins have no chiefly significance whatsoever for the Waarush. The skins of colobus monkeys, among the Masai, also are not regarded as "the purple" which function is served by the less colorful skins of blue monkeys. The ceremony was mostly copied from the installation fete of the Mangi Mkuu or Paramount Chief of the Wachagga, Tom Marealle - a sort of little brother attitude from the people of Mt. Meru towards the larger tribe of Kilimanjaro. The government did not force the symbols or ceremony upon the natives; had they wanted, the ceremony could have been conducted in everyday European or tribal clothing. But from the viewpoint of someone with prejudice against ornate ceremonials and vestments the local British officials could be accused of encouraging the use of Gilbert and Sullivan props - in this case for a tribe indigenously unburdened with such trappings. The British would seem especially vulnerable at this particular

moment to such a charge, when newspapers and newsreels are full of details of the preparation of robes, embroidery, and other pageantry-gear connected with the approaching Coronation.

The very fact that the ceremony was fabricated for the occasion indicates a seeking for unity within the tribe. This urge to unite, though obviously counter to any permanency of white political tutelage, may further the development of local native organization. After a long period of conflict among themselves, and with their former councillors, who proved unsuccessful in walking the tight-rope between the natives and the administrators, the people of the tribe now

have a chief elected by a large majority. The new and different ceremony could symbolize a new and less undemocratic unity. It might also symbolize, by its very plagiarization and myth, an approach to a new level of political development, like the emergent Gold Coast natives claiming that they once were united, years ago, in the powerful state of Ghana. The wild applause at the ceremony, however, indicated no real grasp of these ideas by the happy natives, with their many beer-gourds being passed from hand to hand. In the opinion of this observer they were mostly seeing a good show and having a whale of a good time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John B. George". The signature is fluid and elegant, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

John B. George

Received New York 3/16/53.