

Versions by Jerome Rothenberg of traditional Bantu self-praises (really descriptive namings) in which the kings on installation sing the groupings of praise-names they've inherited & others newly made for the occasion. From literal translations by Jaques Chiley Chiwale in 'Royal Praises & Praise Names of the Lunda Kazembe of Northern Rhodesia,' Central Bantu Historical Texts III, pub. Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, Lusaka, 1962. Divisions of texts correspond to praises for particular rulers.

PRAISES OF THE BANTU KINGS (1-10)

1

I escort.
I go with the dead I don't escort myself.
I was foolish someone else was wise.
I was a lion but had never stretched my claws.
I have no father & no mother.
I remained.

2

I was the rain's child the rain comes from the east & drizzles.
I am a rain that drizzles.
I soaked some old men without hair.
I am the bed the dead will sleep on.
Sometimes I kept busy once I was looking for a place to cross.
I am the lion's grandson.
I was angry later I roamed their forests.
I am your king.

3

I was a tree that lost its leaves.
Am I dead?
My skin is hard now only some twigs are left for burning.

4

I am the one my name is.
I wouldn't let them bury me.
Tomorrow I will visit someone else.
I killed the king & all his children.
I killed the man who owned the island.
Once I killed his brother.

5

I love.
I overrun the country.
I am awarded lands & people.
I was scornful of their goats & sheep.

6

I was like a lion in the forest.
I had never been afraid of witchcraft.
I killed my victim then I ate his prick.

7

I am the rummager.
I dug out lily bulbs.
I searched for siftings of the corn.
I was hunger in a conquered land.

8

I am beautiful & light-skinned.
I am rain.
I carried the dead children like a stretcher.
I was the road through the cemetery no one could escape me.
I fought buffalos & strangers.
I despised their smalltown ways I only live among the great.

9

I was a marksman.
I was skilled.
I was the husband of my wife.
I wore my shirttails up.
I sported a goatee.

10

I dwelt among the crooked.
I was taught.
I straightened up.

FURTHER PRAISES (1-5)

1

I was your king but suffered for it.
None of my kinsmen suffer more.
I was the "firewood" & injured those who held me.

2

I was like a mushroom that appears & rots.
I heard the graves rejoicing for their dead.

3

Someone called me The Maned Lion.
I was a river that buries the dead land.
Once I was a rotten branch a bat's weight breaks.
I was sand covering the hills.

4

I was lightfooted.
I was heedless through nights of revolution.
I murdered on all sides of me.
I was like a drum I was a drum's voice in the night but sleeping.
I watched the poor rise up against me.
I slaughtered the guards who crossed the lake.

5

I was the lustful woman.
I wanted a throne of husbands in my name.
Soon I would watch the world with many eyes.
Its kings look small to me.