

## Colonial Exploration and East African Resistance

Oscar Baumann's first expedition into Usambara, 1888<sup>1</sup>

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In Tanzanian late 19<sup>th</sup> century history, the rebellion of the people of the "Mrima", the Swahili-speaking coastal region<sup>2</sup>, against German political penetration in 1888-1890 has always been given particular prominence by African as well as European historians alike.<sup>3</sup> In this discourse, the name of the Viennese traveller, researcher and diplomat Oscar Baumann is frequently mentioned. Not only did his travel accounts enjoy good reputation amongst contemporary European observers on both academic as well as non-academic levels. Even until today, Baumann's findings are frequently used by historians and anthropologists as primary sources of detail and importance. His ethnographic collections, still largely unresearched, form an important part of the Viennese Museum of Ethnology's heritage.<sup>4</sup> Mistakenly, however, most of English-speaking research gives Baumann's national origin as German; although he did work for German colonial agencies for some time, he was definitely Austrian.

### 1. Biographical notes

Oscar Baumann was actually born in Vienna on June 25, 1864.<sup>5</sup> Although distantly related to the well-known Viennese business dynasties von Arnstein and von Neuwall (both of Jewish origin<sup>6</sup>), living circumstances of the family - father Heinrich holding a bank job on medium level - do not

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an updated version of Barbara Köfler / Walter Sauer, Scheitern in Usambara. Die Meyer-Baumann'sche Expedition in Ostafrika 1888, in: Wiener Geschichtsblätter 53 (1/1998) 1-25. It forms part of the Oscar Baumann Research Project carried out, under the supervision of the author, by Mrs Köfler and financed by the Austrian Science Fund.

<sup>2</sup> John Middleton, *The World of the Swahili. An African mercantile civilization* (New Haven/London 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, *Resistance and Rebellion in British Nyasaland and German East Africa, 1888-1915: A tentative comparison*. In: Prosser Gifford / Wm. Roger Louis (eds), *Britain and Germany in Africa. Imperial Rivalry and Colonial Rule* (London, New Haven 1967) 667-690; G. C. K. Gwassa, *The German intervention and African resistance in Tanzania*, in: I. N. Kimambo / A. J. Temu, *A history of Tanzania* (Nairobi 1969) 85-122; Norman R. Bennett, *Arab versus European. Diplomacy and War in Nineteenth Century East Central Africa* (New York, London 1986); Juhani Koponen, *People and Production in late precolonial Tanzania. History and Structures* (Jyväskylä 1988) 77-84; Jonathan Glassman, *Feasts and Riot. Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast. 1856-1888* (Portsmouth et al. 1995) 199-264; John Iliffe, *A modern history of Tanzania* (Cambridge 1994) 88-122; Jutta Bückendorf, „Schwarz-weiß-rot über Ostafrika!“ (Münster 1997) 337-409.

<sup>4</sup> See Barbara Plankensteiner, *austausch. Kunst aus dem südlichen Afrika um 1900* (Wien 1998).

<sup>5</sup> A comprehensive biography is still needed. All the older literature as well as much of new research is included in Barbara Köfler-Tockner, *Abschlußbericht zum Projekt „Oscar Baumanns Forschungen in Afrika“* (Wien 2000).

appear very prosperous. Financially supported by the Arnsteins, Oscar managed to finish his secondary education in 1883. Little is known about his early years except his reported enthusiasm for mountain climbing and his interest in geography. In 1881, only seventeen years old, he joined the Imperial Royal Geographical Association in Vienna - one of the main Austrian lobbies for domestic as well as colonial scientific research -, started to give public lectures on the Tyrolian Alps and had some book reviews and other small articles published. Immediately after school and apparently on his own initiative (using however political support rendered by the Geographical Association and possibly his aristocratic relatives as well), he went to Montenegro for a couple of months publishing an interesting travel diary and some anthropological and geographical findings afterwards. Montenegro at that time was an independent principality politically manoeuvring between Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman influences. Certainly, Baumann's first "expedition" did not go unnoticed.<sup>7</sup>

Preparing for an Austro-Hungarian mission into the Congo in 1885, the General Secretary of the Imperial Royal Geographical Association, Oskar Lenz<sup>8</sup>, invited the young and ambitious student to participate. Oscar Baumann, having finished already his military service in the Austro-Hungarian army and studying Geography, Geology and Science at Vienna university, agreed readily. Unfortunately however, he fell ill after some weeks near Stanley Falls, up-stream the Congo, and had to be left behind in one of the camps run by the Zanzibar merchant prince Hamed bin Muhammad al Murjebi (alias Tippu Tip).<sup>9</sup> While waiting for his recovery, Baumann gained command of Swahili - an important achievement given his later activities in Eastern Africa.<sup>10</sup> Later on, he spent time in Fernando Póo until full convalescence. His doctorate thesis on the island - today

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<sup>6</sup> Apparently, this later led to the destruction of Baumann's monument during the anti-semitic purge of Viennese architecture and culture in 1938, shortly after Austria's occupation by fascist Germany. Cf. Walter Sauer (ed.), *Das afrikanische Wien. Ein Stadtführer zu Bieber, Malangatana & Soliman* (Wien 1996) 141-143.

<sup>7</sup> It should be added that Baumann went to Montenegro a second time, in 1889, but then with secret instructions by the Austro-Hungarian War Ministry (cf. Köfler-Tockner, *Abschlußbericht* 12-14). In 1881, the Habsburg Monarchy, pursuing her hegemonial interests, had commissioned the Austrian Academy of Science to undertake systematic geological research and mineral exploration in the Balkans (Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv Wien, Ministerium des Äußeren, Politisches Archiv XL Interna 201/Liasse VII). Officially, Baumann's activities fell into that project, privately he admitted however that there were direct military instructions as well. For a general overview see Arnold Suppan, *Zur Frage eines österreichisch-ungarischen Imperialismus in Südosteuropa: Regierungspolitik und öffentliche Meinung um die Annexion Bosniens und der Herzegowina*, in: A. Wandruszka / R. G. Plaschka / A. M. Drabek (ed.), *Die Donaumonarchie und die südslawische Frage von 1848 bis 1918. Texte des ersten österreichisch-jugoslawischen Historikertreffens* (Göding 1976) 103-136.

<sup>8</sup> Lenz also edited a popular geographical review in Germany in which Baumann had been permitted to publish an article on Montenegro. Cf. Cornelia Essner, *Deutsche Afrikareisende im 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart 1985) 86-87; Dietmar Henze, *Enzyklopädie der Entdecker und Erforscher der Erde* (Graz 1975) 200; 211-217.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. François Bontinck / K. Janssen (ed.), *L'Autobiographie de Hamed ben Mohammed-el-Murjebi Tippu Tip ca. 1840-1905* (Bruxelles 1974); Leda Farrant, *Tippu Tip and the East African Slave Trade* (London 1975).

<sup>10</sup> On Swahili language policies as implemented by the German colonial administration in Tanganjika see Marcia Wright, *Local Roots of policy in German East Africa*, in: *Journal of African History* 9/4 (1968) 621-630.

belonging to Equatorial Guinea - was accepted by the University of Leipzig in 1887 and subsequently published.<sup>11</sup>

In Leipzig he got to know the German traveller Hans Meyer<sup>12</sup> who commissioned the newly-graduated, job-seeking topographer with Alpine as well Africa experience to join him in his second attempt to reach top of the Kilimanjaro.<sup>13</sup> Again, the endeavour failed, this time due to the start of the large-scale revolt against colonial penetration attempts by the German East African Association<sup>14</sup> in 1888 mentioned above. We will turn to this chapter in Baumann's life - which, after survival, gained him widespread popularity in German speaking Europe - a bit later in greater detail.

Having eventually suppressed the rebellion by military intervention forces, Imperial Germany acted quickly to lay the foundations for what was to become her colonial Empire in East Africa.<sup>15</sup> On the one hand, steps were taken to secure political and military control over the coastal as well as the hinterland region. On the other hand, economic utilisation of the newly-acquired colony had to be made feasible as quickly as possible. Not surprisingly, Oscar Baumann was among the researchers contracted by the German East African Association for this purpose. The task given to him was to geographically explore the mountainous Usambara region (where he and Hans Meyer had been arrested the year before), report about possible economic ventures and, above all, make suggestions for alignment and construction of a railway line starting at Tanga. This order kept Baumann busy in 1889 and 1890, and a year later his well-known book on the Usambara Mountains was published.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Eine afrikanische Tropeninsel Fernando-Poó (Wien 1888).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Johannes Hohlfeld, Hans Meyer, In: Deutsches Biographisches Jahrbuch 11 (Stuttgart / Berlin 1932) 211-216; Henze, Enzyklopädie 452-457.

<sup>13</sup> A first attempt to conquer the nearly 6.000 meters high peak had failed in August 1887; Meyer and the Austrian mountain climber Ludwig Purtscheller only succeeded to become the first Europeans on top of the highest African mountain in 1890. Cf. Hans Meyer, Ostafrikanische Gletscherfahrten. Forschungsreisen im Kilimandscharo-Gebiet (Leipzig 1890). On organisational aspects of expeditions in East Africa during that time in general see Petra Kakuska, Expedition Ostafrika. Logistik und Reisealltag in den Jahren 1882-1889 (Geisteswiss. Diplomarbeit, Wien 2000), and in general: Johannes Fabian, Out of our minds. Reason and madness in the exploration of Central Africa (Berkeley et al. 2000).

<sup>14</sup> On the history of the Association see: Fritz F. Müller, Deutschland - Zanzibar - Ostafrika (Berlin-Ost 1959) 97f.; Klaus J. Bade, Friedrich Fabri und der Imperialismus in der Bismarckzeit. Revolution-Depression-Expansion (Freiburg 1975) 287-297; Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Bismarck und der Imperialismus (München 1976) passim; Koponen, Development for Exploitation. German colonial policies in Mainland Tanzania 1884-1914 (Helsinki / Hamburg 1994) 187-197 et passim.

<sup>15</sup> On German colonialism in Tanzania see e. g. John Iliffe, Tanzania under German rule (reprint Nairobi 1973); Juhani Koponen, Development for Exploitation; Jutta Bückendorf, „Schwarz-weiß-rot über Ostafrika!“.

<sup>16</sup> Usambara und seine Nachbargebiete (Berlin 1891). Baumann's findings sparked off a heated debate about construction of the so-called Tanga Line in which different strategic and business lobbies participated. For a systematic assessment of the controversy see Barbara Köfler, Oscar Baumann. Die wechselseitige Beziehung zwischen Forschungs. Und Kolonialinteressen, in: Walter Sauer (ed.), k. u. k. kolonial. Habsburgermonarchie und europäische Herrschaft in Afrika (Wien 2002) 197-223.

After some months of writing and lecturing back home in Vienna (and after another mission to Montenegro as already mentioned), the German Anti-Slavery Committee commissioned Baumann to lead an expedition to the Lake Victoria crossing through the hitherto largely unexplored Maasai region; the Committee had actually taken over a number of colonial activities from the German East African Association which was partly discredited by its unprofessional handling of the Mrima crisis; again political, business and railway construction interests stood in the background. Baumann spent nearly three years to carry out what was to become his longest, farthest-reaching and also most violent attempt to advance into the interior of the continent; more than 60 soldiers equipped by the German administration formed part of his caravan, and on a number of instances they became engaged in fierce battles with African warriors defending their territories against European penetration. Their resistance, however, was brutally crushed by Baumann's militia.

They reached Lake Victoria in July 1892 and Mwanza at its Southern shores in September. Here, they surprisingly turned west, into the Rwanda and Burundi kingdoms still totally unknown to the colonial powers, instead of south as had earlier been agreed upon. According to the official version, Baumann's decision to change the route was made entirely on his own. But taking into account that later he was not reprimanded for having done it; that the business strategy of the Anti-Slavery Committee was directed precisely at the Great Lakes region<sup>17</sup>; that, in implementing these strategies, the Committee itself was seen by German military strategists as sometimes acting out of control<sup>18</sup>; and finally, that colonial borders in Central Africa were still ill-defined and therefore competition - somehow camouflaged by the „search for the sources of the Nile“ hysteria - between Royal Belgish, German and British interests existed<sup>19</sup>, we are justified to assume that Baumann saw himself basically in agreement with his principals by trying to expand the German sphere of influence further into Central Africa. Indeed, official political contacts between the German colonial administration and King Kigeri IV. Rwabugiri of Rwanda were introduced already two years later, and in 1896 the first German base in what is today Bujumbura, the most western destination Baumann had reached during his Burundi trip, was established.

The account which Baumann himself, being the first European ever in the area, has published on this five-weeks-excursion<sup>20</sup> is detailed and well-readable, but suffers from two essential weaknesses not uncommon with European "travellogues" of the time.<sup>21</sup> On the one hand, it conceals almost completely the level of violence necessary for the caravan to force their way into the heartland of the kingdom, the Mugamba region. Local oral traditions fortunately collected by Chrétien offer a very different perspective at these conflicts in which a prominent leader and son-in-

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<sup>17</sup> Jean-Pierre Chrétien, *Le passage de l'expédition Oscar Baumann au Burundi (septembre - octobre 1892)*, in: *Cahiers d'Études Africaines* 29, vol. 8/1 (1968) 48-95, here: 56-59.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, *Local roots* 625. It should be recalled that the German Anti-Slavery Committee's expeditions all were notorious for their brutality.

<sup>19</sup> in detail: Chrétien, *Le passage de l'expédition Baumann* 54f.

<sup>20</sup> Oscar Baumann, *Durch Massailand zur Nilquelle* (Berlin 1894) 68-99.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. the detailed assessment by Chrétien, *Le passage de l'expédition Baumann* 67-95.

law of the King, Ntawurishira, was killed amongst many others. What the accord reveals on the other hand is an enormous amount of misinterpretation of local customs and local society. Baumann whose perception was based only on a few days experience and also hampered by insufficient interpretation (his interpreter died in one of the battles) constructed a bizarre theory according to which a traditional Urundi "moon kingdom" had been recently destroyed and he himself, in fulfillment of old prophecies, had been selected as the new king by the Wahutu people because of the pale (moon-like) colour of his skin... Eventually, after having reached Lake Tanganyika, the party turned again back to the Eastern sea coast and arrived at Pangani in February 1893.

Again a job done, and again the big question what to do next. In 1894, Baumann accepted the offer made to him by the German East African Association to recruit Indian contract workers for plantations in German East Africa.<sup>22</sup> He left for Goa, the portuguese colony, in December and recruitment activities there started soon. Contrary to the advise given to him by the German Consul, however, Baumann accepted applicants from British India as well and was therefore tolerating, if not encouraging them violating British emigration law. He soon found himself in the midst of a major public controversy both between himself and the British colonial administration in Bombay as well as between governments in London and Berlin. Unsuccessfully, he had to leave India; the German East African Association had to apologize to the government (and of course did put all the blame on Baumann); and although he continued to undertake certain research for private German companies and institutions, his relations to the colonial authorities remained strained. Luckily (and due to interventions made by the Imperial Royal Geographical Association in Vienna), he was appointed Austro-Hungarian Honorary Consul in Zanzibar in February 1896 - despite British reservations communicated to Vienna via diplomatic channels.<sup>23</sup>

During his short periode of office - he already died on October 12, 1899, probably due to a tropical disease and only 35 years old - Baumann unfolded a variety of initiatives in order to increase traffic, commerce and research activities between the Austro-Hungarian Empire on the one side and Zanzibar (since the bombardement of 1895 fully under British political influence) resp. the developing German East Africa colony on the other. Even more remarkable, he distanced himself gradually from the growing European circles in the Stone Town, leaving out diplomatic receptions and spending most of his evenings in the Swahili quarter, Ng'ambo. Apparently, his attitude to colonial practices was changing. Having acted himself as "umumarisha" (destructor)<sup>24</sup> only a few years earlier, he now, in 1896/97, played a decisive role in the court case against the founder of the German East African Association, Carl Peters, who had even in Germany become notorious for his atrocities committed against black civilians after the Mrima rebellion.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, one of

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<sup>22</sup> This episode is recalled for the first time in Köfler, Abschlußbericht 119-124.

<sup>23</sup> Regarding this and the following cf. Barbara Köfler, Österreich-Ungarn in Zanzibar. Über die Geschichte des österreichisch-ungarischen Honorarkonsulates in Ostafrika vor 1914, in: Mitteilungen des österreichischen Staatsarchivs 47 (1999) 147-195.

<sup>24</sup> Chrétien, Le passage de l'expédition Baumann 86.

<sup>25</sup> Köfler, Abschlußbericht 125-132.

Baumann's last publications, a short satirical article written for a Viennese magazin, flatly condemned wide-spread hanging imposed lightly as death sentence by German authorities in East Africa. Taken by the diplomatic community in Zanzibar as a clear sign of Baumann's madness, the article was in fact welcomed by anti-colonial sentiments in Imperial Germany.<sup>26</sup>

## **2. On the eve of the rebellion**

Growing Arab as well as European demand for ivory, agricultural commodities (like spices or rubber) and slaves, efficiently supported by economic policies of the Zanzibari Sultanate, had actually increased trade and led to an economic boom along the East African coast, the Mrima.<sup>27</sup> While the court of the Sultan - Khalifa bin Said at the time - was traditionally established on the island of Zanzibar, his rule extended deeply into the mainland but was quite uneven. "It ranged from the mere recognition of the Sultan's regional political and commercial importance by some African rulers in the more peripheral areas, to the exercise of full fiscal, judicial, military and administrative authority by the Sultan's agents in the core (mainly coastal) areas... Thus in most areas under Zanzibari rule, the mode of domination was arguably a form of diarchy: Zanzibari officials and local chiefs shared the power to rule, administer and police their often very small local polities to various degrees and in various ways."<sup>28</sup>

Three important trade routes led from the coast into the interior. The most northern one ("Maasai route") connected the two coastal cities Tanga and Pangani and carried on via the Bondei hills to Mazinde, a trading point at the foot of Usambara Mountains, and further to Gonja, to Moshi on the slope of the Kilimanjaro and finally to Mwanza at Lake Viktoria. It was above all Pangani which had gained importance as the point of start as well as of return of most expeditions which used the northern route into the interior. Tons of ivory were sold at Pangani's market and shipped from there either directly or via Zanzibar to Europa and the US.<sup>29</sup> Market and harbour, trade and manufacturing activities as well as the big sugar-cane plantations in the city's vicinity brought about wealth and prosperity to Pangani. Apart from the Shirazi - traditional Swahili-speaking families closely connected to the Sultan of Zanzibar -, there were broad strata of Indian merchants, Arab traders, people in administration and customs. But there were also peasants and migrants coming into the city from different regions of the hinterland, porters seeking work with the growing caravan business, and of course slaves. In the 1880s, Pangani was an economically prosperous, culturally and socially diverse urban centre.

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<sup>26</sup> Reprinted in Müller, Deutschland - Zanzibar - Ostafrika 172f.

<sup>27</sup> See in general: Abdul Sheriff, Slaves, Spices & Ivory in Zanzibar (London et al. 1987).

<sup>28</sup> Jan-Georg Deutsch, Inventing an East African Empire: The Zanzibar Delimitation Commission of 1885/1886, in: Peter Heine / Ulrich van der Heyden, Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus. FS Peter Sebald (Pfaffenweiler 1995) 210-219, here: 210f.

<sup>29</sup> Glassman, Feasts and Riot 68f.

Beyond Pangani, in the Usambara region which was by-passed in its South-West by the northern route, the society was largely agricultural. Steven Feierman, in his well-researched study of Shambaa peasantry, has outlined a number of mechanisms of economic, ecological and political significance typical for Usambara society.<sup>30</sup> Based on a traditional division of labour women were dealing mainly with agriculture, men with cattle-breeding. Specialised contributions to the society like those of ritual or military experts were honoured by rendering to them cattle or labour. Earlier than mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Shambaa was only marginally integrated into trans-regional trade cycles; only in the second half of the century, traded goods like ivory, cloth, guns and ammunition were increasingly exchanged with cattle (and possibly slaves) and fulfilled important functions both in everyday life and as status symbols.

According to oral traditions, origins of central administration and royal authority went back to the 18th century. Dominant in that system were the Kilindi, the lineage controlling the traditional capital Vugha who had managed to have its authority recognized in the whole area.<sup>31</sup> However in 1862, after the death of King Kimweri ye Nyumbani, rivalries erupted between different presumptive heirs, and the lineage split. Although not ruling in Vugha himself, one of the more subordinate sons of Kimweri, Semboja, emerged as most powerful. His base was Mazinde, the new trading post down the mountains where - under the supreme authority of the Sultan, however - he was able to control inter-regional trade along the northern route as well as access to Usambara.

Feierman has analyzed Mazinde's significance for the development of Shambaa society: "The people of Vugha were all Shambaa. Vugha was organised on the basis of a set of traditional religious principles. There was special emphasis on maintaining its culture with the least possible change. Within the town people were allowed to build houses of only one ancient design - bee-hive houses... The whole shape of the town was determined by a religious conception, with half the town facing east, half facing west, and only the royal enclosure facing south... Mazinde, on the other hand, had Zigua, Kamba and Shambaa population, and the language of daily communication was Zigua. The chief's enclosure consisted of coastal type houses. The town was built on an important caravan route for the purpose of trade and alliance."<sup>32</sup> In comparison to that, Baumann's description of the place again shows the limitations of a travellers' narrative: "The village", he writes, "only existed for approximately thirty years and has been established by Semboja only to collect tribute from arriving caravans. With regard to this purpose, the establishment can indeed be called masterly because it makes it almost impossible for caravans... to by-pass it."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Steven Feierman, *The Shambaa Kingdom. A History* (Madison/Wisconsin 1974) passim. Whether and to which extent Baumann in his book has understood this complex society is a different story and still open to critical examination.

<sup>31</sup> Feierman, *Shambaa Kingdom* 34-39; see also Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals. Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison/Wisconsin 1990) 105-155; Andrew Roberts, *Political Change in the nineteenth Century*, in: Kimambo / Temu, *History of Tanzania* 60-62.

<sup>32</sup> As quoted by Terence O. Ranger, *The movement of ideas, 1850-1939*, in: Kimambo / Temu, *History of Tanzania* 166.

But while these changes in traditional Shambaa society occurred and the significance of trans-regional trade grew, European colonial powers made their interests and presence in Eastern Africa increasingly felt as well. Zanzibari sovereignty was internationally guaranteed since 1862, but in April 1885, borders between Zanzibari territory on the mainland, a British as well as a German influence sphere were delineated (what actually “fundamentally misconceived the nature of Zanzibari rule on the mainland”<sup>34</sup>); this in fact was tantamount to British recognition of German Imperial Protection of those territories which had earlier been fraudulently acquired by the adventurer and colonial propagandist Carl Peters on behalf of the German East African Association.<sup>35</sup> Despite his initial protests, Sultan Khalifa bin Said was finally forced by the European powers in April 1888 to grant a concession to the Association allowing them customs and taxation as well as land rights on the mainland, albeit under the supreme authority of the Sultan.

As agreed under the forced concession, administration on behalf of the Sultan was taken over by representatives of the German East African Association on August 15, 1888. This step however, met with spontaneous resistance developed by broad sectors of the Mrima society. Massive dissatisfaction was expressed along the coast in cities like Pangani, Kilwa, Bagamoyo, Dar es Salaam or Tanga. It was directed against the hegemonial claims put in practice by the German colonialists as well as against what was perceived collaboration on part of the Zanzibari Sultan. The rebellion therefore had its roots in longstanding internal contradictions of the Swahili society as well.<sup>36</sup>

Obviously, the German East African Association acted in a maverick way which went far beyond the mandate obtained from the Sultan and partly against the instructions given by the Berlin government as well. Even contemporary European observers, like the then Austro-Hungarian Honorary Consul Rudolf Fuchs, noted the arrogant and violent behavior of the Association’s representatives who particularly hurt the religious feelings of the population.<sup>37</sup> It quickly became evident - even in the eyes of the colonial “motherland” - that the Association was incapable to rule its concession territory successfully. In any case, reports about the initial conflict in Pangani spread quickly across the coast, most German footholds were taken by rebels within a few days and colonial officers were either held hostages or expelled. Only two years later could the rebellion be

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<sup>33</sup> Baumann, Usambara 176.

<sup>34</sup> Deutsch, *Inventing an East African Empire* 211.

<sup>35</sup> See Müller, *Deutschland-Zanzibar-Ostafrika* 267-286; W. O. Henderson, *German East Africa, 1884-1918*, in: Vincent Harlow / E. M. Chilver (ed.), *History of East Africa II* (Oxford 1965) 123-162; Wehler, *Bismarck und der Imperialismus* 333-367; John Iliffe, *Modern History* 88-106; Klaus J. Bade: *Das Kaiserreich als Kolonialmacht: Ideologische Projektionen und historische Erfahrungen*, in: Josef Becker / Andreas Hillgruber (ed.), *Die deutsche Frage im 19. und 20. Jh.* (München 1983) 91-108; Michael Fröhlich, *Von Konfrontation zur Koexistenz: Die deutsch-englischen Kolonialbeziehungen in Afrika zwischen 1884-1914* (Bochum 1990) 32f.; Koponen, *Development for Exploitation* 45-88.

<sup>36</sup> Glassman, *Feasts and Riot* 29f.; 146f.; 226f.

<sup>37</sup> Fuchs to Foreign Minister Count Kalnoky, dated 14. 01.1889 (Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv Wien, Ministerium des Äußeren, Politisches Archiv XXXVIII/276).

suppressed by a fully-fledged military intervention force - something Imperial Germany had rather wanted to avoid.<sup>38</sup>

### **3. Failed ambitions in the Usambara mountains**

In July 1888, German Hans Meyer and Austrian Oscar Baumann, after having travelled from Trieste to Aden and eventually East Africa, arrived at Zanzibar Town. The original plan to start their attempt to mount the Kilimanjaro in Mombasa had been changed, probably due to the demarcation of the British influence zone and the Zanzibari - German agreement of 1888.<sup>39</sup> According to Zanzibari archival sources (in their publications, Meyer as well as Baumann remain silent about this aspect) they first had to make an application to the Sultan to get permission to lead a caravan into the interior, and to recruit the necessary number of porters. Facilitated by the German Consul-general Gustav Michahelles, permission was given and recruitment - organised by the wealthy Indian trader Sewa Haji who acted as middleman - started; eventually, 200 porters including 30 armed guards were brought together. On August 22, the whole party departed to Pangani.<sup>40</sup>

Apparently, their assessment of the political situation - the first phase of the Pangani revolt had just been crushed by German warships by bombarding the city - was as optimistic (and as misleading) as the one shown by the German East African Association itself: "that we did not see any reason to postpone the start of our journey."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, the huge caravan moved on untroubled to Lewa, a German-owned tobacco plantation in the Bondei Hills, where they decided to split; Baumann and Meyer, together with 50 porters and 10 soldiers, went into the Usambara Mountains while the main group proceeded on the northern caravan track with the instruction to wait for them in Gonja.

The reunion, however, did never happen. When the two "explorers", after having visited the traditional Shambaa capital Vugha, arrived at Gonja they were informed that all the porters, allegedly on instructions given by the Sultan, had returned to Semboja's residence, Mazinde. Willynilly, Meyer and Baumann went there themselves, but in the process several of their porters, the two cooks (who took all the food with them) and all the soldiers deserted. In Europe, it was known by that time already that the rebellion had not been repressed, but that on the contrary Chiefs in the hinterland, like Semboja, had joined it. Mistakenly, it was assumed however that Meyer and

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<sup>38</sup> See Gwassa, German Intervention and African resistance 85-122; Iliffe, A modern History; Bennett, Arab versus European; Glassman, Feasts and Riot; Winfried Baumgart, Die deutsche Kolonialherrschaft in Afrika. Neue Wege der Forschung, in: Vierteljahresschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte 58 (1971) 468-481.

<sup>39</sup> For detailed evidence regarding all the following see: Köfler / Sauer, Scheitern in Usambara 10-25.

<sup>40</sup> Treaty Meyer - Sewa Hadschi: Baumann, In Deutsch-Ostafrika 218f; for the development of logistics and recruitment strategies see Kakuska, Expedition Ostafrika 36-66.

<sup>41</sup> Baumann, In Deutsch-Ostafrika 36; professional military analysts saw the situation differently, like Rochus Schmidt, Geschichte des Araberaufstandes in Ost-Afrika. Seine Entstehung, seine Niederwerfung und seine Folgen (Frankfurt/Oder 1892) 25f.

Baumann had already returned to the coast and were safe. But this was in fact not the case. They both found themselves, with only a handful of porters but with all their goods, in Mazinde, completely in the hands of the local strongman, and without knowing what was going on. "We had no idea that a widespread rebellion had broken out which definitely thwarted our plans."<sup>42</sup>

On September 27<sup>th</sup> Meyer and Baumann were received in audience by Semboja, and it was then at the latest that they recognised the political background of the unpleasant situation they found themselves in. Semboda confirmed that the caravan had been ordered to return by Pangani authorities - later it became clear that the local leader of the rebellion, the Arab planter Bushiri bin Salim, had personally made the decision -, and he strongly rejected all the references to German claims of authority made by his two "guests". Nevertheless, they managed to persuade him (probably by donating to him European goods) to recruit them new porters and to allow them at least to continue geographical research in the Usambara Mountains. They were also able to forward a letter to a well-known German colonial journal in which they informed about their situation and their decision.<sup>43</sup>

Apparently, the two travellers still shared the illusion to be able to continue with their expedition on the basis of an agreement with Semboja. Indeed, the Mazinde ruler was not only an important, but also an independent political player.<sup>44</sup> On the one hand, he maintained links with the Sultan, on the other hand he partially cooperated with the rebels on the coast; after the rebellion he even managed to become acceptable to the German authorities (an expression of "realpolitik" which was heavily criticized by Oscar Baumann). Seemingly, Semboja's political agenda was neither connected exclusively to the Zanzibaris nor to the German nor to the rebels, but can only be understood in terms of the Kilindi power struggle.

For a few days only, the illusion seemed to become reality. Meyer and Baumann, accompanied by twelve of Semboja's people, started ascending the Usambara Mountains, direction Vugha, on September 30. But approximately one week later, an envoy sent by Semboja called the porters back, and the two Europeans had no other choice but to follow. Back to Mazinde, the following days for Baumann were "the most embarrassing ever experienced in Africa".<sup>45</sup> Semboja kept them in his residence, partly by making them promises, partly by direct force, and increasingly expressed his desire to get their European goods as presents. What seemed to Semboja to be his traditional entitlement to get tribute, for Baumann was an expression of "extreme greed". How they managed to dispatch letters to both the German and the Austrian consulates in Zanzibar we do not know; but according to the archival evidence, the Sultan made an intervention to Semboja in their favour.

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<sup>42</sup> Baumann, In *Deutsch-Ostafrika* 90.

<sup>43</sup> Petermanns Mittheilungen, *Geographischer Monatsbericht* 1888, 372.

<sup>44</sup> Kimambo, *Penetration and Protest* 47f.; Feierman, *The Shambaa Kingdom* 203; Glassman, *Feasts and Riot* 243.

<sup>45</sup> Baumann, In *Deutsch-Ostafrika* 113.

Finally, Semboja received practically all their possessions and put them on display thereby surprising visitors who came to Mazinde in later years: "Sultan Sembodjas room was like a used furniture shop. There were plates, cloths, silver, writing desks, chairs. The most surprising thing was the presence of several issues of Petermanns Mittheilungen. The Missionary asked whether Sembodja subscribed to this excellent geographical journal. 'Ah', he said casually, 'its a souvenir of Hans Meyer'." <sup>46</sup> As we know from many other examples, imported goods - arms, cloth, clothes, glass products etc. - formed an important element of prestige for contemporary political leaders. Only after Semboja's death in 1895 Meyer received back at least some of his diaries and his technical equipment.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of October Meyer and Baumann were allowed to depart to the coast. Close to Pangani, however, they were met by a group of about fifty heavily armed men who gave them some information about the rebellion; in the meantime, Pangani - like most other Mrima cities - was in fact fully under control of the rebels, Bushiri bin Salim being one of their most influential leaders. Against their will, the two Europeans were escorted to Bushiri's farm, called Mundo. There, they were initially received friendly and provided with food, but later knocked down, put in shackles like slaves and brought into a guarded hut where they became the mockery of some women for the whole night. The next day, they were even displayed to visitors who passed by to watch the enslaved Europeans - for those it was a traumatic experience, for the local population a clear demonstration of victory which even found its way into a popular song.<sup>47</sup>

In the second night, Bushiri himself entered the room. He turned down their request to have their chains removed, but a certain Abd el Kerim who presented himself as Bushiri's treasurer indicated what was expected from them. In a written document which is today exhibited in the Dar es Salaam National Museum Meyer ordered the German company Hansing & Co in Zanzibar Town to pay to Abd el Kerim's son, Abdallah, 10.000 rupies ransom. After signing the document they were relieved from the shackles and received by Bushiri with oriental courtesy. He invited them for dinner.

Despite their personal suffering, Meyer and Baumann were impressed by the charisma of the rebel leader. Markedly in contrast to the "greedy" Chief Semboja, Bushiri did not attach great importance to expensive clothes or other luxury items. Speaking in Swahili, he gave the two Europeans a detailed record of developments - the reasons of the rebellion, as he saw them, the initial confrontations, the failure of diplomatic interventions. Despite Bushiri's evident propaganda intentions and several subjective overtones, Baumann's report on the conversation with the legendary leader of the Mrima's first great rebellion has to be seen as an important source both for the history of developments and for explanation of Bushiri's own political position. Openly, he talked about his enmity against the Sultan: "I don't care about him, I hate him and I have not been going to Zanzibar Town since twenty years because there they would kill me immediately. Now, I

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<sup>46</sup> Feierman, *The Shambaa Kingdom* 198.

<sup>47</sup> Baumann, *Usambara* 52.

recognize him even less as he is not ashamed to sell our country to foreign people.”<sup>48</sup>

Regarding the German colonialists, he had the following to say: “Had those few Germans come to us in a friendly way, had they refrained themselves to customs administration and tried their best to win us - the Arab party - over, they would today be able to sit quietly in their coastal towns... but on the contrary, they behaved themselves as if they were the masters and we were their slaves. We watched for a while but then we simply chased them away like one chases away playful boys...”<sup>49</sup>

During dinner, Bushiri promised Baumann to find him his lost diaries - a promise which he promptly fulfilled. In the morning then, he accompanied the two unlucky explorers back to Pangani. The city had changed since they had left it: People carried arms and prepared themselves for war, and it took Bushiri’s authority to bring them safely to his town residence (the building later became part of the German Fort). Finally, in the morning of October 19, Meyer and Baumann entered the waiting “Bawara”, a ship sent by the Sultan, and left for Zanzibar where the German Consul-General was anxiously waiting to de-brief them.

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<sup>48</sup> Baumann, In Deutsch-Ostafrika 138.

<sup>49</sup> Baumann, In Deutsch-Ostafrika 139.