

THUM: TRADITIONAL LYRE MUSIC OF THE LUO PEOPLE OF KENYA

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI
INST. OF AFRICAN STUDIES
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A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the

School of Oriental and African Studies

University of London

by

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1980

A B S T R A C T

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The lyre, thum, is the musical instrument par excellence of the Luo people of Kenya. It is played at several ritual and social occasions. This thesis, which is in two parts, is a study of both the music of the lyre, which is also called thum, and the instrument.

The first part focuses on the instrument, contextualising it both historically and synchronically. The history of the lyre outlines its relationship to the ancient lyres of the Middle East and the Mediterranean lands. This is followed by a sketch of the stylistic changes in its music over the last one hundred years. The uses and functions of the music in the society are then examined before describing the manufacture and tuning of the instrument. This part ends with a study of the musician's determination, inauguration, and vocational practice of composition and performance of his music, as well as his social status.

The second part focuses on the three elements of the music: song text, vocal line, and instrumental accompaniment. The song texts are classified into praise songs and threnodies and analysed with respect to their contents and poetic forms. The vocal lines are analysed to show their formal, as well as their tonal and rhythmic structures. The study ends with the analyses of instrumental technique and ostinato accompaniments, and a comparison of the characteristics of these accompaniments to those of the songs they accompany.