

Archival collection: Georges Smets: Research in Rwanda-Burundi, 1935

Archival inventory by:
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Updated by:
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Shelf 4

Title: Georges Smets: Research in Rwanda-Burundi, 1935

Dated (mostly): 1935, 1940s

Dimensions: 2 archival boxes

Language: Mostly French

Summary: The collection contains archival material which was collected during Georges Smets' ethnological fieldwork in Rwanda-Burundi in 1935. The contents of its folders include administrative reports and dossiers of the Belgian colonial government concerning chiefdoms and individual chiefs, as well as Smets' notes on ethnological topics, and descriptions of interviews with both African informants and Europeans. Additionally, the collection contains correspondence to Smets and three photographs of King (*mwami*) Mutara III Rudahigwa of Rwanda, presumably with Queen Nyiramakomali, before the royal palace in Mwanza.

Institution: African Studies Centre, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Repository: African Studies Centre Library, Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Acquisition: The archival material was kindly donated to the African Studies Centre by Margot Trouwborst-Bemelmans, the widow of the Dutch anthropologist Albert Trouwborst, in 2008.

Biographical information and the research in Rwanda-Burundi:

Georges Smets was born in Molenbeek St.-Jean in Brussels on 7 July 1881 and quickly proved his versatile mind in a number of academic settings. After having already achieved a successful and broad academic career in philosophy, history and law, the Belgian conducted fieldwork in Rwanda-Burundi in 1935. Directly preceding this venture, Smets worked as the head of the liberal Vrije Universiteit of Brussels (1929-1932), an institution he would stay connected with for the whole of his life. At the time of his fieldwork, Smets was the director of l'Institut de Sociologie Solvay.

Having obtained funds from ‘Fonds du Jacques Cassel’, Smets and his wife Clery Terlinck set out to the Belgian mandate. There, he travelled within a number of chiefdoms (*chefferies*) and worked with a variety of colonial administrators, missionaries (White Fathers) and African informants in order to collect information on the social, economic and political life of the Barundi. His specific interests included inheritance practices, the market system, the festival of Sorghum (Umaganuro) and the burials of the royal *Bami* and *Bagabekazi* (Queen-mothers).¹

One of Smets’ most important informants seems to have been ‘Baranyanka’, presumably a member of the noble Batare-family (Ganwa). Pierre Baranyanka (late 19th century-1961), labelled a ‘knight of the colonial project’ by Aidan Russell, grew to become one of the most important informants regarding the history and social relations of Burundi.² Russell implies that Pierre likely used this role to improve the political position of his own Batare family. He supported the Belgian conflation of the Tutsi and Ganwa, making the Batare-family the ‘natural rulers’ of the Hutu-majority in the region in the light of the Hamitic racial hypothesis which underpinned Belgian political policy. Following the death of the ruler Kilima (1929) in the northern region of Burundi, the Belgians indeed installed Pierre Baranyanka as the new chief. However, he was seen as an intruder by large portions of the local populace, and in 1934 they rallied around the (ideological) leadership of the diviner (*unupfumu*) Inamujandi, and revolted against Baranyanka and the Belgians. However, the revolt was put down quickly, after which Baranyanka continued his rule and rapidly enlarged the coffee-production of his region, making use of the command of forced labour which came with his political position. It is within this colonial context, Georges Smets began his research a year later. The reoccurrence of the name Baranyanka might place his study within a tradition characterized by considerable African agency during processes of ethnological knowledge-production.

In addition to his interviews and the observing of the local populace, Smets ‘measured’ 214 Batutsi and 179 Bahutu, in order to collect anthropometric data. This data would eventually form the basis for Georges Gerken’s *Les Batutsi et les Bahutu: Contribution a l’anthropologie*

¹ P. Salmon, Académie royale des sciences d’outre-mer, *Biographie Belge d’Outre-Mer, VII-C* (1989). – H. Janne, Notice sur Georges Smets, *Annuaire de l’Académie Royale de Belgique* (Unknown volume) 124-175.

² A. Russell, *Politics and Violence in Burundi: The Language of Truth in an Emerging State* (Cambridge, 2019) 50, 52.

du Ruanda et de l'Urundi (1949).³ Smets himself only published about the ethnological aspects of his study. Georges Smets passed away in Etterbeek, on the 8th of February, 1961.

History of the collection:

Originally, this archival material was part of the collection of the Dutch anthropologist Albert Trouwborst, who conducted fieldwork in Rwanda-Burundi himself in 1958 and 1959. In 2008, his widow Margot Trouwborst-Bemelmans kindly donated a part of his personal archive to the African Studies Centre in Leiden, including the folders of Smets. The rest was left in the care of the Catholic Documentation Centre (KDC) of the Radboud University in Nijmegen. There, René van der Haar, documentalist of the KDC, found a second part of the collection of Georges Smets, which he transferred to the archive of the Royal Museum for Central-Africa (Koninklijk Museum voor Midden Afrika) in Tervuren, Belgium.

In 1982, Albert Trouwborst, who had been granted access to Smets' research material by Smets' daughter Annie Dorsinfang-Smets (1911-2001), had – with her consent - copies made of the archive with funds by the WOTRO foundation and had students set up an inventory⁴:

Ridder-Van Kranendonk, G. de and Vinken, K. (1982): *Handleiding bij de gebruikmaking van de dossiers Georges Smets met een voorwoord van Prof. Dr. A.A. Trouwborst*. A copy of the inventory is included in SMET-2.

Trouwborst also conducted historical research on his Belgian predecessor, which he published in 1981 in the article “L’ethnologie du Burundi pendant l’occupation belge: Première période (1916-1945): L’oeuvre de Georges Smets (1881-1961)”.⁵

More information:

- [Archival inventory Georges Smets in Tervuren](#) (French)
- [-Archival inventory Albert Trouwborst in Nijmegen](#) (Dutch)

³ G. Gerken, Les Batutsi et les Bahutu: Contribution a l’anthropologie du Ruanda et de l’Urundi, *Mémoires du Institut Royal des Sciences Naturelles de Belgique, Vol. 2, No. 31* (1949).

⁴ See also AFRIKA ARCH TROU 4. 3 Correspondence with A. Dorsinfang-Smets;

⁵ A. Trouwborst, ‘L’ethnologie du Burundi pendant l’occupation belge: Première période (1916-1945): L’oeuvre de Georges Smets (1881-1961)’, in: *La civilisation ancienne des peuples des grands lacs, Colloque de Bujumbura 4-10 septembre, 1979* (Paris, 1981) 283-294.

CONTENT AND COMPOSITION

Specification content

Overview of boxes

SMET 1: [Georges Smets : research in Rwanda-Burundi, 1935]

Red folder 'Dossier A': Georges Smets, 'Journal'

- Letter from George Smets to 'Monsieur le President du Conseil d'administration du Fonds Jacques Cassel' (10/10/1934)
 - Smets asks for funds for his research and lays out his goals: Interviews with knowledgeable colonial administrators, and a prolonged stay in the compound of a 'chief'
- Journal: From 26/2/1935: departure from Brussels, until 15/12/1935: back in Brussels
 - Misc. notes on the backsides

Green folder 'Dossier B': 'Georges Smets, 'Kennelijke Bestuursverslagen 1929, Situation générale par territoire), Gegevens Chef (Momako, Kibwebwe, Kiburwa, Bigama)' [Government reports for each chiefdom, 1929]

- For each administrative district, a report detailing the following set topics: Social and family organisation – Regime of landownership – Agriculture – Forests – Industries – Biographical information on 'Chefs' of each district (French)
 - Index Albert Trouwborst: (colonial commissioner and respective district)

-Delegue d'Hondt	District: Rumonge
-S. van Mal	District: Ruyigi
-Delegue Devaux	District: Rutana
-Unknown author	District: Bururi
-Delegue Hendrick	District: Muhinga
-Delegue Monti	District: Muramvya
-Unknown author	District: Ngozi en Usumbura
-Delegue Soubry	District: Kitega

Blue folder 'Dossier C': Georges Smets, 'Les Chefs terres 1931/1933 (Chefferie Baranyanka)'

- Index Albert Trouwborst
 - Developments in each of the 'chefferies' (chiefdoms)

Yellow folder 'Dossier D': Georges Smets, 'Geneologies Chefs' [Genealogical information of chiefs]

- Index Albert Trouwborst
 - Geneologies of :
 - I: Chefs Abatale II, Abezi, Abataga IV, Abahinda, Abatale III, Abavuna, Abarango (Abataga III), clan of Abanengwe, Abibe (in Kitega), origins of the clan of Ababibe ('Mabibe'), chiefs of Ababibe (Northern-Burundi)
 - II: Register of the chiefdoms of Mboneko and Makere
 - geneologies of Abaganwa (written)

- geneologies of Abaganwa (typed, not identical)
- III: ‘Stammbaum der Waganua in Urundi’
- These are original German papers, found in the archives of Kitega (twofold)

Yellow folder ‘Dossier E’: (Green post-it: Dossier Muramvya, Mihubi, Ntaha, Rugezo, Bitukwa, Bagorikunda, Kiswaswa, Martindagu) Georges Smets, ‘Verspreide aantekeningen, vermoedelijk aantekeningen uit bestuursrapporten, Dossiers Mboneko, ook kaarten van chefferies’. [Notes and government reports and dossiers anent chiefdoms]

- Loose notes anent (royal) families
- Paperclip ‘Chefferie Mboneko Organisation politique (historique)’
 - Overview of leaders of boma’s and sub-chiefdoms
 - The dossier of the chief of Mboneko
 - History of chiefdom Mboneko
 - List of subchiefs of chiefdom Mboneko in schematic form, including information such as suitability and amount of taxpayers in 1934
- Paperclip: ‘Corvées et prestations’
- Written letter sent from Kivega in Northeast-Burundi (15/8/1935) (unknown sender) (French)
- Dossier of Muramvya
- Misc. notes
- Typed letter of territorial agent of Mwaro to A. Gille (Territorial Administrator) (24/6/1934) (French), regarding a visit of Georges Smets, the Mwitika hill/burial ground and five Banyanka-drums which were to be protected
- Dossier of chiefdom Mboneko
- Notes on multiples chiefdoms
- Rapports anent Burundi

Blue folder ‘Dossier G’: Georges Smets, Objets etc. (naar onderwerp) geordende informatie, copies, o.a.’ [Notes on ethnological topics]

- Index Albert Trouwborst: Notes by topic

-Abasasi	p.1	Ibirezi-Clous	p.85
-Abashoka		Ikitabo	p.87
-Abakundo		Ikitembe	p.89
-Abanyakarama		Impuzu	p.91
-Abatese		Ingata	p.92
-Alambic	p.2	Intore	p.93
-Abayanga-yanga	p.3	Irari	p.94
-Abiru	p.8	Irrigation	p.95
-Agriculture	p.9	Ivyansi	p.96
-Akahabwa	p.10	Jeu (Ikibuguzu)	p.98
-Akatete	p.11	Karyenda	p.99
-Alimentation	p.12	Kubandwa	p.104
-Amulettes	p.13	Lac magique	p.106
		Maladies d’yeux	p.107
-Allume-feu	p.14	Marchés	p.108
-Arc à musique	p.15	Meules	p.125
-Auges (ubwato)	p.16	Mineral de fer	p.127

-Bahutu	p.17	Monnaie	p.135
-Barques	p.18	Mortiers	p.136
-Baswahili	p.19	Mwambutsa	p.139
-Batutsi	p.20	Nattes	p.140
-Batwa	p.21	Parapluies	p.142
-Bétail	p.22	Peaux	p.143
-Bière de sorgho	p.25	Pêcheurs	p.144
-Bijoux à Mulera	p.26	Perles	p.150
-Bois sacré	p.27	Pipes	p.151
-Bracelets	p.28	Potiers	p.153
-Buha	p.30	Pots	p.159
-Bunyambo	p.31	Ricin	p.160
-Buyogoma – Kumoso	p.32	Rois	p.162
-Charbon de bois	p.33	Ruches	p.163
-Chasseur	p.36	Rugo	p.166
-Chefs	p.37	Saignée d'un veau	p.182
-Coiffure	p.38	Salut des femmes	p.183
-Collerette	p.39	Sangliers	p.184
-Coquilles	p.40	Sauterelles	p.185
-Costume	p.41	Sel	p.186
-Coutumes divers	p.42	Serpents etc.	p.189
-Culte des esprits	p.43	Sorgho	p.193
-Cultivateurs	p.46	Tailleur	p.194
-Eleusine	p.51	Tambours	p.195
-Elevage	p.52	Tas dans champs	p.198
-Eloge des Baganwa	p.53	Tatouages	p.199
-Epoux	p.54	Tombeaux	p.204
-Escabeaux	p.55	Tréfileurs	p.207
-Flèches	p.56	Umusengo	p.208
-Forgerons (cuivre)	p.58	Vache et sorgho	p.209
-Forgerons (fer)	p.61	Vanniers	p.210-213
-Foudroyé (tombe du)	p.80		
-Graisse à ibitembe	p.81		
-Héritage	p.82		
-Huile de palme	p.83		

Red folder 'Dossier H': Georges Smets, 'Interviews Européens origineel + copie' [Interviews with European informants]

- 3x photograph: King (mwami) Mutara III Rudahigwa of Rwanda, presumably accompanied by Queen Nyiramakomali in front of Nyanza Royal Palace
- Typed letter: Regarding the photographs of Mutara III Rudahigwa (28/7/1936) (unknown author)
- Text: Pierre Schumacher, *Les dynasties de l'Urundi dans les traditions du Ruanda*
-Including information on three informants: Kayijuka, Ruzigaminturo, Sekarama
- List of names of Europeans interviewed by George Smets in 1935
-R.P. Bonneau: 4/4/1935
-R.P. Canonica: 29/7/1935

- M. Limbourg: 25/8/1935
- M. Corbisier: 13/10/1935
- M. Coubeau: 28/4/1935
- R.P. Delecauw: 4/4/1935
- Rulindo (dagboek):
- P. Thévenon: 7/7/1935
- R.P. van Hooghte: 16/5/1935
- Schmidt: 24/9/1935
- Verhulst:

-Some of the interviewees were Pères Blancs, or White Fathers of the Society of Missionaries for Africa. The collection of the African Study-centre (ASC) in Leiden contains primary source material anent the life at a mission station of the society, named: *Kroniek van een missiepost van Witte Paters, gelegen aan het Victoriameer in Burundi* (Chronicle of a mission-post of the White Fathers, situated by Lake Victoria in Burundi). A copy of the original, made by the biologist and writer Tijs Goldschmidt, was donated to the ASC by Dr. R. Corbey in 2004. The chronicle describes the period 1880-1930. However, when the ASC moved to a different building, the exact location of the chronicle within the collection was lost. At the moment, we are searching for it in our archival section.

- Written descriptions of the above-mentioned interviews

Green folder 'Dossier I': Georges Smets, 'Interviews Afrikaanse informanten Akizumwami tot en met Bitukwa (getypt) + subject fiches + plans' [Descriptions of interviews with African informants]

- Index Albert Trouwborst
 - Akizumwami p.1
 - Bachinone: 4/6/1935 p.3
 - Bagorikunda p.4
 - Bahori: 20/6/1935 p.6
 - Bakareke: 7/9/1935 p.7
 - Bakundinkwano p.12
 - Barahemana p.16
 - Baranyanka: 15/9/1935, 29/5/1935, 6/6/1935, 24/6/1935, 14/9/1935, 13/7/1935 p.19
 - Barasukana: 11/5/1935 p.62
 - Bareke: 20/6/1935 p.66
 - Basharwa p.67
 - Batutsi de Tshongerero: 26/10/1935 p.68
 - Batwa: 26/10/1935 p.74
 - Bibanza: 14/5/1935 p.80
 - Bichakuruze: 20/6/1935 p.81
 - Bihindikitero: 13/4/1935 p.82
 - Bihizi: 5/5/1935 p.85
 - Biraduka: 14/5/1935 p.86
 - Bishinga: 7/6/1935 p.87
 - Bitukwa: 13/5/1935 p.88

Pink folder 'Dossier O': Georges Smets, 'Teksten, Lezingen, Manuscripten, Verschenen publicaties' (Texts, Lectures, Manuscripts, Publications)

- Texts regarding Umugaro (feast of Sorgho) on a Congress in Copenhagen, 1938
- Text: Georges Smets: 'Quelques remarques sur la technique du Burundi'
- 'Projections conférence Soc. Et. Orient. s/ Urundi (23/10/1941)'
- Text: Georges Smets: *Funérailles et sépultures des bami (sultans) et bagabekazi (reines-mères) de L'Urundi (4/11/1941?)*

SMET 2⁶

- 2.0 Ridder-Van Kranendonk, G. de and Vincken, K. (1962): Handleiding bij de gebruikmaking van de dossiers Georges Smets met een voorwoord van Prof. Dr. A.A. Trouwborst.
- 2.1 ***Dossier J***: Interviews with African informants, typed on used paper (on the back of letters and invoices); from Bugunge until Kikoro; with an index by A. Trouwborst
- 2.2. Most likely ***Dossier F***: "Moeurs et coutumes" (Data from colonial administrators on the social organization in Burundi).
- 2.3 ***Dossier L***: Interviews with African informants, typed on used paper (on the back of letters and invoices); from Ndese until Yuhire; with an index by A. Trouwborst
- 2.4 ***Dossier K***: Interviews with African informants, typed on used paper (on the back of letters and invoices); from Kinyarutama until Ndenderi; with an index by A. Trouwborst. Furthermore: Fiche biographique.

⁶ Smets-2 was added in 2024 when part of the Smets files were found in the A. Trouwborst Archive, including the *Dossiers* (Files) F, J, K,L