

MUBILA EPIC (LEGA, DRC) ENGLISH SYNOPSIS AND COMMENTS

This epic narrative was written down in the field by Daniel Biebuyck, as it was narrated by Kambara Mubila (January 1953).

The bard has a somewhat hesitant start. He presents a person, later named, who seems to have arrived recently in the area of Itambandio (lit. Where-Eagle-Hovers). His people are building a village and making a huge clearing (the underbrush and shrubs are cut but the larger trees are still standing). The Mpinga (lit. Source) River, close to where they are building, is often mentioned in the text. Aware of his hesitancy and omissions, the bard asks the audience to forget about the beginning of his song and to listen to what will follow since he is now confident about its further development.

Comment: The apprentice mentioned by the bard at the very beginning of his text, has a very advanced knowledge of the epic; he is said to be someone who can stimulate the flow of words, relay the bard, or help him out when he draws a blank (*kabigula*).

In the following passage, the person who is building a village is (I) *Yombi* (lit. Darkness), a *mwami*, a term which, in this instance, can be understood as meaning a lineage elder. The sequence of events suggested is as follows: first the virgin forest is cleared of all the shrubs and underbrush that can easily be reached and cut with billhook knives; then, the higher and bigger trees are burnt down. Now Yombi calls his dependents (*bana*) together to execute specific tasks in building the houses. Essential building materials are briefly mentioned: *mbubi*-lianas to tie poles and rafters; poles and rafters; phrynium leaves and straw as roof covering; sheets of bark for the walls.

Comment: The materials collected seem to indicate that Yombi is building the traditional long house, divided into numerous separate rooms. Hunting shacks are also mentioned; they do not demand all these materials. It seems that the building involves both the shacks (in a lightly cleared forest outside the village) and long houses constructed in two parallel rows separated by an open space (dance ground; passage through the village; commons). Women give birth in shacks constructed outside the village.

Forty-one shacks are made because Yombi has forty-one wives (whose names and social identities are not mentioned); special attention is given to the forty-first house that is destined for his junior and preferred wife (*kalembe*). In this long repetitive passage, the bard describes how Yombi, who until then had abstained from contact with his wives, now that the village is built, sleeps in rapid succession with each one of them, except for his preferred wife.

Comment: Numerous sexual and other prescriptions and taboos pertain to the building of a new village and its occupancy, in order to secure its prosperity. This is why, among many other prescriptions, Yombi abstains from sexual contacts. For the listeners this is a funny passage, because Yombi moves from house to house (or rather from room to room in the long house) without any indication of time lapse. At the end of his travails, all forty women are pregnant. The next passage contains a beautifully phrased poetic expression (four of the five words begin with an alliteration, ke-, ka-, ka-, ka-) to say that all young women are now ready to give birth to their first child.

All forty women leave the village simultaneously to go to the forest shacks to give birth. The place of birth is identified as a “garbage heap” (*yala*), a euphemistic expression to divert the attention of evildoers. At the news of this extraordinary event, Yombi is baffled and calls upon a most expert midwife Nyakamabeza (lit. Mrs. Whispers) to take care of the women. The births occur in such rapid succession that she is rushing from shack to shack, too late or just on time for a delivery.

Comment: To describe the restless rushing of Nyakamabeza, the bard uses a choice set of diverse verbs: *akoloka*, *asesela*, *asuluka*, *atingila*, a clear example of his creative genius in search of poetic effects and stylistic diversity.

The birth of each child occurs without any major problems, except in the case of the firstborn Kinkutu(nkutu), lit. the name for a wading bird, but also applied to an undecided, average, mediocre person (a character trait he demonstrates throughout the epic). He speaks at birth and threatens the midwife. Among the children, there is only one female called Mbila (Lone Daughter); some of the males seem to be twins (although the term for twin is not used). Children of the *mitamba* refers to children born of mothers closely related to Yombi (*byalubunga*).

Comment: All children have names at birth. The names cover a wide range of meanings, some are reminiscent of terms for animals, plants, trees, birds, fish, and insects, others are word constructions bearing on

social status or physical and/or character traits. In common parlance, virtually none of the terms, except for Mbila, are used as personal names. It is noteworthy that many of Yombi's sons individually play no role in the epic, but frequent mention is made of the term Banayombi (the children of Yombi), as if all forty sons were still together as a group.

Following the birth of these children, Yombi sleeps with his most junior wife.

Comment: Sexual intercourse is described by the often-repeated poetic expression "Chevrotain dives into the river, the sounds of the dog bell are silent." The reference is to hunting dogs who lose track of the chevrotain when it dives and swims underwater to escape; they become motionless and their dog bells no longer sound.

The preferred wife falls pregnant and immediately gives birth to a son. This son calls himself Mubila (lit. a call; a sieve used to filter banana beer) and Kimandamanda Kyawamulume (Intrepid Manly Hero). He sends the midwife to the village to announce his birth, while huge trees crash in the forest. The hero, who at once shows his cosmic linkages and powers, is born with numerous possessions and attributes: he can speak, he can walk, he has cosmic command; he has a knife, a spear, a shield, a necklace of pods, and a belt of vines; he is born with other items which are mentioned at various stages of the narrative.

Comment: The hero's physical appearance seems frightening (very long nails; eyebrows like elephant tails, and as later indicated, a huge crop of hair and a beard), but nowhere in the epic is any emphasis placed on this ugliness; on the contrary, women praise his beauty.

Right after his birth, the hero reveals one of his major character traits: he is Trailblazer (Kalema), Restless Traveller (Lungenda) and immediately leaves the forest shack to enter the village. As is befitting on one's first arrival to a village, Mubila goes to the men's house (*lusu lwidega*), the center of all male secular and ritual activities, and gives the following instructions: the slit-drum expert must call the Banayombi (the children and other dependents of Yombi; the Yombi lineage) for Mubila intends to build his own village. He has already in mind the village name, Tubala (place where many *mbala*-nut trees grow). In the meantime, Kinkutu, Mubila's most senior brother, criticizes him for his insolence and arrogance and Mubila gives him a threatening warning.

Comment: This important passage sheds early light on Mubila's character: he is preposterous and ruthless; most of the time he acts against the social code; he lacks respect and does not tolerate any criticism, or accept advice. From many points of view, he is an antihero; he doesn't so much lack courage as he does ideal values and morality. His mindset and

actions reflect the early experiences of the Lega migrations and the pre-Bwami type of society.

Mubila instructs his strongest brother Sabikamba (Master Works) to take all necessary iron implements for clearing land and building a village. He, the restless traveller, leaves the village, proudly shaking his head and waving his feather headdress (another power object he has from birth on). The Banayombi follow. He leaves his father in the custody of his second most senior brother Bukulu Bwakitaba (lit. Seniority of Youth). Arriving in Tubala, Mubila assigns the tasks and the village is built in no time. The construction is barely finished when they hear the slit-drum announcing Yombi's sickness, then his death. Mubila, who is still in Tubala, immediately accuses Bukulu Bwakitaba of his father's death, either through sorcery, witchcraft, neglect, or something else.

Comment: There is no indication of physical reasons for Yombi's death. From the Lega point of view, the real culprit is Mubila himself, because he has infringed the laws of father-son and sibling-to-sibling relationships. This act of rebellion and non-conformity may be equated with a form of witchcraft.

Mubila promptly returns to Itambandio and formally accuses Bukulu Bwakitaba of causing their father's death. Bukulu Bwakitaba flees to Byongobitengia village. Although Bukulu later returns to join Mubila, Mubila's ultimate aim is to reach that village and to destroy it (perhaps because they gave hospitality and asylum to his older brother). Following the burial of Yombi, Kinkutu claims Mubila's mother as his wife (as senior brother, he has the right to inherit from the widows of his father, provided they are junior to his mother). The legitimate claim of Kinkutu is rejected by Mubila, not simply because it concerns his mother, but because his unnamed mother is, in Mubila's opinion, the most senior wife even though she was Yombi's last wife. As a result, a lasting animosity between Mubila and Kinkutu lingers throughout the narrative.

Abruptly, Mubila the Restless Traveller decides to go in search of women in Mputi's (lit. a vine; also a variant of Mbuti, Pygmy) village. During the journey, he is already in conversation with the woman Kabungulu (Genet-Cat), his future wife, whom he has not yet met. At this stage, it is revealed that Mubila possesses from birth on a magical whistle (*mpinga za mulinda*), an essential aid in numerous circumstances. In a later passage, it turns out that this whistle is "in his mouth" (refers to the power of Mubila's words, their magic and power of fascination). Mubila impresses Kabungulu (about whom she had already heard) as soon as he arrives in Mputi's village. Right away, he informs her that he has come to seduce her. When she refuses at first, he overwhelms her with his whistle.

Comment: This section offers an unusual evocation of the seductive words of the lover. He addresses Kabungulu as *kagunza*, a dignified mature woman and as “my woman”; he praises her because she is as slender “as a forearm” and has a straight back; it is vain to think one could ever mock her.

Overwhelmed by Mubila, Kabungulu enters her house and engages in sexual intercourse with him.

Comment: The change from night to day is evoked by a set of formulaic expressions occurring in several variations. They center on crickets and the innumerable dendrohyraxes whose calls haunt the forest until the night is well advanced; they also center on the hunter or trapper lost in the forest before dawn and calling for help. The very early morning is suggested by a restless rooster still cooped up and unable to get out. A precise chronological sequence of events is implied in the accumulation of these formulae.

The day has dawned and Mubila leaves the house and departs with Kabungulu and forty captured maidens; he arrives in Tubala; Kinkutu is jubilant for he expects to receive a wife. Mubila distributes the women, but Kinkutu is excluded. Kinkutu speaks about an ancient animosity that opposes the two brothers. Mubila’s mother severely criticizes the arrogance and loud bragging of her son. Mubila pays no attention. Kinkutu complains again about Mubila’s attitude. The criticism is too much for Mubila to bear; he cuts his brother’s nose with a small stick.

Comment: This is a funny way of speaking, for Kinkutu is also the name of a wading bird. The expression may be understood as Mubila silencing Kinkutu by shortening his beak.

Mubila wards off the attack of Kabungulu’s people, starting with a quasi-magical challenge formula: “Pick up that dirt!” He then shouts his drum names in self-praise.

Comment: Mubila delivers part of a series of praises, which he will often use in different combinations and variations. In these praises he presents himself as the only true, solitary child of Yombi, fearless and irascible, who supports the entire group; if he falls everything collapses.

While Mubila is boasting about his heroic feats, an unnamed man spears him in the arm. Mubila calls for Kinkutu’s help. Nyamubila, his mother, intervenes and the reluctant Kinkutu acts at her command and proves to be a strong warrior. Mubila, who plans to go in search of his second senior brother Bukulu Bwakitaba, takes leave of his wife Kabungulu, leaving her pregnant.

Uncertain about his fate, he decides to consult the oracle of the diviner Kagelia (*Cercopithecus*); Kagelia is skeptical, flees away into a tree with the corn Mubila has used to lure him and predicts Mubila's downfall. Furious, before killing him, Mubila curses Kagelia and his breed condemning them to massive onslaught (the reference being to the *kalunga* monkey hunting method).

Comment: The curse has etiological value; it explains why the Lega attach so much importance to this type of hunt whereby groups of monkeys are herded together into a couple of trees, encircled with big hunting nets, and clubbed to death when, in the final stage of the hunt, these trees are also felled.

This is one of the many occasions where Mubila, approaching for the first time a certain male or female interlocutor, establishes a "fictive kinship link" with that person. In this case the hero claims that the respective grandmothers of Kagelia and Mubila are from the same lineage. Kagelia refers to Mubila as "sororal nephew", as if he were a classificatory maternal uncle of the hero.

Mubila consults the oracle of Mumanda (lit. Worm). There he also gets the prediction of his possible demise and therefore slices Mumanda into pieces. Mubila decides to continue his journey although, as the result of the oracles, the possibility of death is, and will always be, on his mind. For the first time there is mention of Mubila's Baya (Inner Counselor), a personalized inner voice and advisor with which, he says, he is born. Baya also warns him about imminent death. Next, Mubila crosses a river and passes the giant Musisi (*Brachystegia* tree), symbol of the invincible power of the forest; he also cautions him against the consequences of his arrogance.

Mubila goes off to Milemba's (lit. Phrynum) village where he elopes with Kababili (Twofold; Hardhearted), his second wife, and forty other captured maidens. He distributes them among his siblings, but once again Kinkutu does not get a wife. In this passage Mubila praises himself as Beloved-one, Great Traveller and Son of Yombi. Kinkutu continues to complain about Mubila's attitude. A certain Nyekundukundu (lit. Sexual-intercourse-movements), the oldest person of Tubala village, not previously mentioned in the listing of Yombi's children (and because of the ambiguity of the name perhaps to be thought of as a brother or a sister of Yombi) seems unaware of the coming dangers.

Mubila's sister suggests that the Banayombi help Mubila against the revenge of the people from Milemba's village; Mubila rebukes her roughly, symbolically stating that women have no business in men's affairs. Faced by the forthcoming combats caused by the rapt of the Milemba women, the twin brothers Kansinsi (lit.

Wagtail) and Muntoli (lit. Sparrow) flee to join temporarily their senior brother, Bukulu Bwakitaba, in Byongobitengia village. Mubila fights the people of Milemba, glorifying himself as: Solitary Child, Irascible Person (he breaks like softwood scaffolding and comes loose from the haft like a big axe: terms that emphasize his quick temper).

Supported by the hitherto unknown magical power of Kabungulu, Mubila keeps the Banamilemba in check. In the course of the fight, Mubila's sister, Mbila, is abducted by a certain Itula (Irascible-Person) from Idimu (lit. Civet-Cat) village, where Nzogu (lit. Elephant) is headman. Kinkutu complains again about Mubila's impudence. Mubila departs for Idimu village, leaving behind the pregnant Kabungulu, giving her advice on the observation of food taboos.

Comment: The passage contains an elaborate formulaic evocation of the change from night to day, reaffirming Mubila's cosmic connections. The expressions are formulated in a peculiar manner. The ideas expressed are as follows. First Mubila speaks to his Baya, then to Dendrohyrax. Next he uses formulas to evoke the night (the strident call of Dendrohyrax; the call of the hunter lost in the forest). The phrases are conceived as if Mubila called upon the crickets and the morning doves to speed up the process of night. Indeed, right after he summons them, the sun breaks through. In the sounds of these forest creatures, Mubila sees predictions about his forthcoming death.

Mubila's wives want to accompany him; Mubila silently refuses. Sarcastically, Mubila asks Kinkutu to go with him, but Kinkutu, who is always depicted as ambiguous, uncertain and somewhat ridiculous, refuses. Mubila leaves for Idimu village, telling the giant tree, Musisi, that the purpose of his trip is to retrieve his captured sister.

Comment: This passage offers a typical, often recurring but flexible, concatenation of formulae for movement and travel.

Mubila arrives at a crossroads called Byankungunkungu (Big Skulls and Skulls). In the course of the narrative, he will often return to these crossroads. He is uncertain which direction to take. Moreover, as night falls, he hears leopards everywhere. He asks Baya in vain for counsel and reflects on the truth of the oracles and the previous warnings of his senior brother. In the end, scolded by Baya for his inaction, he kills most of the leopards and, as is his usual custom, he praises himself. Mockingly, Mubila says that his seniors will have many aprons (*bisaba*) made of leopard hide, to wear.

Comment: The passage contains a set of formulas evoking night and daybreak and implicitly refers again to Mubila's cosmic powers.

When day breaks, Mubila asks Baya which direction to take. Baya advises Mubila to select the middle road.

Comment: This passage includes a succession of transitional movement and travel formulas. The bard, who is called Kambala Mubila, interrupts the flow of his story to tell the entire audience that he has received a goat as a hospitality gift.

Arriving at a very large river (Lwindi), the hero is unable to cross. He hears pounding and thinks that someone might be using poisonous weeds to kill fish in such a large river (the technique is effective only in small brooks and **men-made bayou**). On the advice of Baya and helped by his magical whistle, the hero calls the woman Zalunonge (Squint-Eye) to help him across the river. As she is paddling to fetch him, the meddlesome hero instructs her how she should handle the paddles. On her arrival, impressed by the beauty of the young man, Zalunonge wants to kiss him. Mubila pays no attention. Instead he wants to know who is the owner-master of this wading place. From Zalunonge, he learns that somewhere downstream the as yet unnamed owners are playing dice. Having crossed the river in Zalunonge's canoe, the hero grumbles that he has suffered hunger and cold, he wants some nuts to eat. On this occasion the hero utters a series of often-repeated complaints that he did not listen to his senior and the oracles that tried to hold him back. Now he is travelling far, through a forest without trails and without the clear knowledge of where he is headed.

Sitting on the riverbank, while he has sent Zalunonge to prepare food, Mubila now deals with the formerly unnamed owners of the Lwindi River: Mundelama, Munkumba, and Mukiti. He lures Mundelama (fish), traps him with some banana mush, pulls him out, administers an eye philter, and sends him out to fetch his relatives Mukiti (Water Serpent) and Munkumba (fish), the owners of the wading place. He promises important gifts. Mundelama locates Mukiti and Munkumba playing dice for high stakes; he tells them about Mubila's promise. When they attempt to pursue their game, Mundelama scrambles the dice and forces them to join Mubila. When they arrive at the wading place where Mubila is waiting, Mubila tells the surprised Munkumba to place the promised present (a cowrie-studded hat) on his mouth. There is a hook hidden inside the hat, so Mubila pulls Munkumba out of the water and briefly praises himself. There follows some discussion with the clever Mukiti. In order to appease Mukiti, Mubila tricks him into believing that their grandmothers stem from the same womb, even though Mukiti wonders where this bearded nephew originated. Finally, as instructed, Mukiti places the promised gift (bangles fitted with a hook) on his mouth, but Mubila almost drowns trying to

pull the struggling and reticent Mukiti out of the river. When, with Baya's advice, he succeeds, Mubila praises himself once again.

Back in the village, Mubila asks Zalunonge for his food. She has proudly prepared seven goats and many bananas, but Mubila only wants some nuts.

Comment: The expression "He beats his fist" means that Mubila is emphatic about his demand: in order to underscore a statement or make a formal enumeration, the Lega beat the left fist with their right hand palm.

Next Zalunonge proposes to accompany Mubila to show him the way; he objects saying he himself does not know where he is going. When she insists, he draws his knife and shouts his drum names (this implies that he kills her). Zalunonge's actions and words show tenacity of purpose and Mubila does not tolerate persons who want to influence him. Moreover Zalunonge is, in Mubila's mind, something of a sorceress or witch because of her behavior and appearance (foreshadowed in her name: the Lega do not like persons with a squinting look like Zalunonge).

Back at the crossroads, Mubila finds a bag, a terracotta pipe bowl and a pipe stem (made of a perforated central banana leaf stem). There is also a pile of burning wood. A certain Sawaminzele (Collector-of-giant-snail-shells), who is gathering snail shells (used among other things to make the *musanga*-shell-money) is the owner of all these. When he returns with a load of shells, he finds that Mubila has broken his pipe. In order to determine who perpetrated the deed, Sawaminzele performs a strange divination ritual stepping across his shoulderbag and asking for the culprit to be identified. When finally Mubila comes out of hiding, Sawaminzele challenges him. Mubila throws him into the fire.

Baya again indicates that the central trail leads to Idimu village of Nzogu (Elephant). Mubila enters that village in an arrogant mood, while the Bananzogu (Elephant clan) are playing a rough ball game. Having noted, in a derogatory manner, that this is a village with too many puddles, he asks where his sister Nyawabulela is (lit. Mother of Wabulela, the teknonymic name for his consanguine sister Mbila). When she appears, he leaves his spear with her, and carrying his shield and knife, he engages in a rough ball game, apparently hurting many players. Muswa (Sauce), the son of Nzogu, informs his father, who remained in the village, about the disastrous encounter. The father urges him to bring Mubila to the village (the ball game apparently was taking place at the outskirts of the village). Mubila enters the village and goes straight to the house of Nyawabulela. While he rests, she goes to inform her husband that this is Mubila about whom she often spoke. The husband reflects that the situation is suspicious. Wabulela, apparently the young son of Nyawabulela, is in the house. As is the privilege of a sororal nephew, he

wants to sleep behind the back of Mubila, whom he calls maternal uncle. Mubila refuses; the boy leaves; Mubila sleeps with Nyawabulela. Wabulela informs Nzogu, his father, that the bond between Mubila and Nyawabulela is not real siblinghood (*bubitu*). The boy uses three consecutive, beautifully phrased circumlocutions to bring his point across. Mubila and Nyawabulela are not perturbed by this disclosure and stay together a long time.

Mubila leaves Nyawabulela's house at the very moment Muswa, the son of the village headman Nzogu, calls on the slit-drum (*lukumbi*, a trapezoid wooden drum used for distant communication) members of the Chimpanzee, Leopard, Genet, Kantungulu and Elephant clans for a beer-drinking party, where he will inform them about other matters. From the drum message Mubila concludes that the Nzogu group is looking for war. Nyawabulela agrees that big trouble is ahead. Mubila vows to confront the Nzogu group all by himself. The guests arrive. One after another a member of each group tries to foretaste the beer, Mubila relentlessly insults each one of them. All of them flee. However, Potto (not mentioned earlier among the guests) does not tolerate this ridicule. He grabs Mubila by the arm. Offended by this impertinence, Mubila cuts Potto's forearms. Mubila himself decides to do the foretasting in the presence of the Nzogu group; Muswa tries in vain to fill Mubila's small cup; seven jars of beer disappear into it! Since all the beer jars have been emptied, the embarrassed Nzogu asks Nyawabulela to bring him some dregs of the beer. Mubila takes the opportunity to launch a series of insults against Nzogu: "When eating from banana trees, you start with the green leaves, not the rhizomes"; "Your ears are large enough to serve as doors for the village entrances"; "Where you bend, it looks as if a huge tree crown fell"; "Where you urinate, it looks as if water jars broke"; "Your feet are like pestles"; "Your stampeding sounds as if the sky were collapsing". Provoked by this abuse, Nzogu calls for war. Mubila perseveres with the insults. The headman proclaims that the Nzogu group is now on the warpath. Undisturbed, Mubila leaves with Nyawabulela. Chased by the Nzogu group, he kills scores of them with his spear. Muswa leaves to inform his father again about the disaster. In the meantime, Mubila tells Nyawabulela about the predictions made by several oracles about his forthcoming death. The Nzogu group attacks again and is completely defeated.

Mubila and Nyawabulela now enter the abandoned village site where the Nzogu group used to live. Mubila sleeps with Nyawabulela, then he instructs her to travel to Byongobitengia village to inform his brother Bukulu Bwakitaba (who had earlier fled to that place) that he (Mubila) is dead in Idimu village (Mubila anticipates his forthcoming death). Although he calls Nyawabulela "my woman" and "my wife", Mubila does not fully trust her; he thinks of her as a Nyawalubaluba, Mrs.

Forgetful. Still chased by some surviving members of the Nzogu group, Mubila and Nyawabulela arrive at a crossroads, where, at Mubila's request, she identifies the directions in which some trails lead. Mubila sends her off to Byongobitengia village.

Comment: This passage includes one of the longer drum/praise names that Mubila loves to proclaim loudly. He is Mubila, not a sieve for beer; he is an untouchable flame; he is an Inciter, he is unpredictably irascible (a softwood scaffolding that easily collapses; a large ax that easily breaks loose from its handle); he is dangerous like a Sanda viper.

The treacherous Tulenge Tubitubi (lit. Evil-shrieking-voice), who is in the neighborhood, is irritated by Mubila's bragging; he wants to know who this talkative fellow is and tells the braggart that passage through his domain is forbidden. Mubila flees and Tulenge Tubitubi spears him. Later, we understand that the spear has pierced Mubila from head to toe, and that he is fixed on the spear standing in an upright position. Meanwhile, Nyawabulela arrives in Byongobitengia and transmits the message of Mubila's death to Bukulu. Shocked about this news, Bukulu asks her about the cause of death and she mumbles a muddled self-accusatory answer. Frustrated by the reply, Bukulu kills her with a knife. Before dying, she predicts more dissension among the Banayombi and more hardships for all of them.

Bukulu and his twin brothers Muntoni and Kansinsi leave for Idimu. Bukulu, who follows his two brothers, gives them strange instructions: They must not break certain trees nor ask the name of certain fruits for, he says, "this is the vengeance of Mubila". The implication seems to be that Mubila has magically activated these trees because of his hatred for Bukulu and the twin brothers. Arriving at the crossroads, the three brothers find masses of dead elephants and Mubila, still alive, speared on Tulenge Tubitubi's spear. When Bukulu tries to shake the body, the dying Mubila hurls a spear point in his eye. Thereupon, Mubila "dies". Bukulu asks Kansinsi to notify the kinsfolk in Tubala about the events. He enjoins Muntoli to take revenge. The "dead" Mubila rejoices at these words, shaking his feather hat (this important headdress in Mubila's possession is mentioned here for the first time). Bukulu loudly calls on Mubila's killer to identify himself. Tulenge Tubitubi replies that he is the culprit; Bukulu warns him about future revenge. When Bukulu asks where Tulenge wants to fight him, Tulenge flees to Itulo (Smithing) village, residence of Mubila's powerful enemies. In the meantime, Kansinsi has alerted the people in Tubala village; on receiving the news of Mubila's death, Kinkutu and the others mourn the loss of "their father".

In Tubala, Kabungulu now gives birth to Zakeuti (Ashes), the only son of Mubila. The boy (who has the foreknowledge that his father is dead) calls himself "Dream of the Ashes of Mubila"; he accuses the midwife of being a sorceress and

sends her to the village to ask his kin to cease mourning for his father (he knows that his father will resuscitate). In this complex passage, the bard introduces statements made by different characters.

First, Kinkutu who is involved with the death of Mubila not with the birth of Zakeuti, asks Katuta (Pounder; Drummer), the slit-drum specialist, to summon the Banayombi. In accepting the task, Katuta declares that his drum messages usually call for war. Second, one of the Banayombi, Musombo (lit. a large pot from which Orphans eat food; also Muzombo, *Irvingia* tree) who holds the title Protector-of-orphans reflects that their bereavement should be a call for action, not for sadness. Next, Zakeuti, still in the forest shack, orders his grandmother and his father's second wife to join his mother Kabungulu (note that from birth on the hero's son is ready for action, like his father). In the meantime, Nyikundukundu, the senior of the village, reflects on the futility of his/her previous efforts to convince Mubila not to look for trouble (not to cross the meandering river). Finally, Zakeuti arrives in his father's village; he praises his father as a true man who built an "impressive" village. Next Zakeuti converses with Nyikundukundu demanding that he/she specify the directions his father took.

Three almost simultaneous actions ensue. Zakeuti tells the others to prepare for the journey; he calls his mother, his grandmother, and his father's second wife to join in the journey. Zakeuti knows that great enemies lurk in Itulo and he calls them from a great distance (like his father often does) to forewarn them of his arrival. Kansinsi, who was sent by Bukulu to bring the news of Mubila's death to Tubala village, finally arrives and lauds the great deeds of the dead Mubila. Travelling with the Banayombi in search of his father, the bellicose Zakeuti jumps Musisi, whom he thinks is too inquisitive, and "kills" him (i.e. inflicts some injury). Next, Zakeuti advances through the barricades set up by the Banakasaluguzi (Leaf clan) and destroys them with smoke. Crossing the Nanga (White Pebble) River, the Banayombi halt to let Kabungulu bathe. She tells her son about the power of her loincloth. Zakeuti again calls the enemies in Itulo village, where Kanga (Termite) informs Bungoe (a hero senior to Mubila) to prepare for war. Kinkutu, always uncertain about the turn of events, asks his brother Kyanga (Beloved-one) to consult the oracle. The Banayombi, led by Zakeuti, arrive at the Byankungu (Big-skulls) crossroads, where they find numerous dead leopards and trees with giant aerial roots. Zakeuti concludes that his father was in this place. Kyanga's oracle reveals that the enemies Kanga, Kakutia (Powerful Worker-Fighter) and Bungoe are in Itulo. Zakeuti decides the party will spend the night at the crossroads without sleeping. His uncle Sabikyamba brings large loads of firewood, to keep them warm.

Comment: The section contains variations of the night and day formulas normally used by Mubila, but now readapted by his son. In the preceding passages, following the birth of Zakeuti, the bard stressed the great powers that Zakeuti possesses, but in a subtle and indirect manner so as not to diminish Mubila's total superiority.

As the Banayombi travel, someone is seen following them. It turns out to be the spy Kanga; he flees back to Itulo. Zakeuti sends Kansinsi out as a scout. He arrives at the Longo River that cannot be forded and returns requesting help. Zakeuti steps into the river, stretches out his leg; the waters separate; the Banayombi cross. They enter the abandoned village of Idimu overgrown with thorny vines. They call Bukulu who is with the dead Mubila somewhere along the road. Bukulu sends Muntoli on a reconnaissance mission. When the message is received that the Banayombi have arrived, Mubila's corpse, which is "not yet decayed", waves its feather hat. There follows a brief argument between Kabungulu and her son Zakeuti as to who will approach the corpse first. The Banayombi arrive at the crossroads and meet Bukulu who stares at them with one eye. Zakeuti, who does not know him, rudely orders him to approach, but Kabungulu calms her son telling him that he is his senior uncle. Zakeuti identifies himself and heals the eye with an eye filter that, he says, he has received from his late father. When Bukulu designates the place where Mubila's corpse hangs from the spear, Kabungulu restrains her son; the corpse starts swelling (an indication that that he is alive and angry). Zakeuti touches his father's corpse; the corpse sends bees swarming around the son. Kabungulu chases them with her pubic cloth while addressing the bees with tender words. Next Zakeuti attempts to remove his father from the spear; a deadly viper winds itself around the son who falls near the riverbank. Kabungulu reminds Mubila that this Zakeuti is his son. The viper unrolls, but an even more deadly water serpent approaches. Kabungulu also scornfully chases that snake. Twice, Kabungulu pleads Mubila's corpse with words of praise. Mubila responds with a quiver of his feather hat. Then Kabungulu speaks about herself in the loftiest of terms. She has brought her magical eye filter, pulls the consenting Mubila from the spear and administers the eye medicine. Mubila is resurrected, shouting his drum names. He addresses Kabungulu with flattering words, warns those enemies in Itulo, but ignores his son, as before. The Banayombi rejoice because of Mubila's resurrection.

The decision is made to travel to Itulo in pursuit of Mubila's killer. Sent ahead as a scout, Kansinsi encounters the sly Kakutia and quickly returns to Mubila. The impulsive Zakeuti is ready to chase Kakutia, but Mubila restrains him by quoting proverbs that emphasize the authority of elders and the destructive power of the

enemy. Pursuing their trip to Itulo, the Banayombi cross the Mpinga River. Normal access to Itulo is impossible because the enemies are vigilant, so trickery must come into play. Kabungulu proposes to travel to Itulo to deceive the headman by acting as if she were a run-away wife. It is agreed that Mubila and his companions will discretely follow in the rear, while the attention of the enemies in Itulo is focused on Kabungulu.

When Kabungulu enters Itulo village, as anticipated, she immediately stirs the interest of the headman Bungoe, while two other dangerous opponents, Kanga and Kakutia, are also full of expectations. Kabungulu makes it clear that she only wants Bungoe. Her flat belly and her smile captivate him; he caresses her even though Kanga's oracle predicts possible treachery. As the sun sets, Kabungulu and Bungoe enter his house; he wants to have sexual intercourse; she wards him off. He bolts the door and makes a nasty remark about the role of a runaway wife. The two start fighting. Troubled by the mighty Bungoe, Kabungulu cries out for Mubila's help. Promptly, he enters the house, pulls Kabungulu out, and engages Bungoe in a fight. When he manages to throw Bungoe on a boulder, the latter simply flies away. Mubila sends his brothers Kinkutu, Kansinsi, Muntoli and Bukulu to fight the enemies Kanga, Kakutia and Tulenge Tubitubi. Kinkutu, however, is unable to master Kakutia; Mubila has to come to the rescue. He spears Kakutia.

In the meantime, Kanga has set deadly traps in surrounding rivers and set the fields ablaze. Using his magical whistle, Mubila dries out all the rivers; his brother, Kyandembelembe (Flame), destroys the fires, then Mabuguzu (Giant-elephant) flattens the fields. Thus Kanga's traps are eliminated; Kanga is caught and beheaded. Mubila and followers continue the hunt for Bungoe and Tulenge Tubitubi to Isala (Feather Hat) village. Sent out as a scout, Kansinsi reports that Tulenge Tubitubi is blocking all passages. Zakeuti nevertheless manages to catch Tulenge; Mubila clutches him in a strangle hold and Kabungulu kills him with her pubic cloth.

On his way to find the enemy Kyugukige (Dense-Foliage), Mubila experiences a startling encounter. He discovers a dead turtle in a mushroom patch and a dead iguana in a clearing, events he interprets as apparitions. On reaching the Wankoko River, Mubila hears the sound of the Mantolo (Weaver Birds). Baya informs him that this is a *ngandu*-celebration (i.e. an initiation to a middle level grade in the Bwami association) for Lintolo (Weaver bird) the headman of the Mantolo. Mubila decides to participate in this initiation and, on entering the village, asks for the names of the leading initiators (*nsingia*). Kabungulu disapproves of Mubila's request to be initiated, knowing that custom requires a man's initiation rituals to be held in his own kinship group. Nevertheless the initiation starts with the *musutwa*

rite (a rite of the lower *kongabulumbu* initiations in which a basket containing collectively owned initiation objects is displayed and interpreted).

Comment: This passage is deliberately obscure for numerous reasons: Mubila is a pre-Bwami hero; most Bwami procedures are unknown to the non-initiated listeners; the bard was initiated only into the lowest grade of Bwami and has only scant knowledge about the proceedings and the teachings at higher levels; yet he inserts this passage composed for the occasion to please the large number of high initiates listening to him. The preceptors quote a few standard aphorisms typical for the lowest level of the Bwami initiations.

One preceptor informs Mubila that his older brother Bukulu was the one who led him into this trouble (out of vengeance). Mubila says he desires to receive more precepts. The implication of this statement is that without delay he yearns for higher levels of Bwami (something that is totally excluded in the initiation code of Bwami). Mubila goes so far in the violation of Bwami principles as to place the insignia of the highest grades (*mibanga* - dendrohyrax teeth of the yananio grade and *bisingi* - ornaments of the supreme kindi grade) on his own hat. Next, Mubila appears outside the initiation house and picks up his necklace and belt. One preceptor ventures to say that they forgot the passage about Isabulundu, Master Short-Temper. This ironical remark is enough to drive Mubila mad. The preceptors flee; one of them is killed.

Comment: This entire passage is basically intended to show that Mubila is a character of a pre-Bwami age, an arrogant, disdainful, short-tempered, merciless individual, oblivious of social and ritual precepts, not tempered by the moral and philosophical teachings of the Bwami association.

Mubila goes off to Isala village. Crossing the Nanga River, he meets Solobila (Wading Bird), the wife of Kyugukige; he expresses his admiration for her beauty. Pleased in turn, she reveals the names of persons present in Isala. Upon reaching Isala, Mubila summons Bungoe for a fight. Calling Mubila "my junior" (*mukanda*), because their respective grandmothers stemmed from the same womb (Bungoe's grandmother being the senior), Bungoe is not inclined to fight Mubila and leaves for Byongobitengia village. Mubila engages in a fight with Kyugukige, who is also in Isala village; Kyugukige steals Mubila's feather hat and flies away to Byongobitengia. Mubila complains about the loss of his hat; Kabungulu accuses him of recklessness.

Mubila then journeys to Byongobitengia in search of his hat. But as they cross the Nanga River, where Kabungulu stops to bathe, he hears women quarrelling and fighting over a pangolin. When Mubila asks to see the pangolin it changes into a

kyombi stick. Informed that the women's names are Nyabilumbu (Mrs. Closed-Thighs) and Nyabilumbula (Mrs. Open-Thighs), he calls them witches (partly because of the metamorphosis of the animal into a plant and partly because of their names). However, without further action he hurriedly returns to Isala, where out of sheer vengeance, he slaughters all remaining people.

Mubila calls out to the people in Byongobitengia, but instead he gets a response from the Babumbi (Potters). He heads for their place and lets Kansinsi take the lead because Kansinsi "knows the customs" of that place. The village is filled with pots and jars; children throw sticks and clods of dirt at Kansinsi; the pots break as he flies on the roofs and back down. Kansinsi wipes out the Babumbi in retaliation.

Mubila asks himself how he will catch Kyugukige, who stole his feather hat. For many reasons Mubila feels depressed (he does not know where he is going; he ignores what kind of death awaits him; he has lost his magical feather hat). He warns, however, that he is still fearless and merciless. Suddenly he hears the sound of dog bells. Three young men of the Banatimanga (Flies clan) are hunting. Two are involved in a conversation: one young hunter asks his colleague Kolokondo (Fallen-from-a-tree) to bring small nets to trap a mongoose that just escaped into a hollow tree. Kolokondo retorts: "Why ask for other nets?" His colleague reveals that a truly powerful man is nearby. The implication is that he has heard Mubila speaking, for he repeats Mubila's words that although a man may look depressed, he can still be awesome. Kolokondo replies: "What are you implying? That this man (Mubila) cannot match Mutungilwa (Threader-of-Beads; another senior co-hunter)?" His colleague warns Kolokondo that big danger looms ahead. Having overheard this conversation, Mubila decides to join the hunt. He meets with Kolokondo and ironically asks: "What are you calling me?" Kolokondo, taken by surprise at the imposing sight of Mubila, changes his mind and replies: "I call you one who wears a liana belt as a sign of manhood". The ever-clever Mubila states that the right way to hunt is with the big *makila*-nets not the small *twese*-nets. Impulsively, he plunges his arm into one of the tree holes and is bitten by a mongoose. Furious, for in Mubila's opinion this is all Kolokondo's fault, he thrusts his knife into Kolokondo.

In a provocative mood, Mubila shouts: "Mutungilwa, èèè!" Confused about this call, Mutungilwa ponders that he never allowed anyone to call him in this manner. Uncertain about the meaning of this call, he flees to notify Walikenge, the headman of the Banatimanga, about the arrival of the Banayombi. Mubila dispatches Kansinsi ahead to the village of the Banatimanga. In the meantime, the hero asks his brother Kyanga to consult the oracle. Kyanga reveals that Watunanda (Refuser-of-Belly), the wife of Walikenge, is unable to give birth in their village.

Kansinsi returns with news already revealed in Kyanga's oracle. He also informs Mubila that Mutungilwa was broadcasting everywhere the forthcoming arrival of the Banayombi. Furious, Mubila slaps Kansinsi and sends him back to Walikenge's village. There, Kansinsi meets Mutungilwa leaning against a backrest chair while disclosing the arrival of the Banayombi. Kansinsi spears him. However, he returns without his spear. Mubila sends Kansinsi back to retrieve it; on the road, he has a brief encounter with a certain Mubungu (Deceiver) who, to Kansinsi's complete surprise, knows him by name (note that Mubungu is a dissident brother of Mubila). Kansinsi flies back with his spear and predicts that Walikenge's wife will never be a mother.

On his return, Kansinsi comes across Mubila eating some nuts. Mubila decides not to go to the village of the Banatimanga. Instead, against the wishes of Kabungulu who has foreknowledge of things to come, he plans to travel to the Nanga River where he has heard water drumming. A young woman is floating in the river; she has had a dream predicting that a beautiful young man would come for her. Kabungulu recognizes her as Lusagila (Child-of-Water), and orders the young woman to come ashore. Following some verbal exchanges, the two women start fighting (out of jealousy or because of a previously unmentioned conflict between the two). Mubila looks on amused. At the request of the Banayombi, Mubila finally separates the women, comparing them to bees contesting a *kyombi* fruit.

It is now decided that the party will leave for the Banatimanga village where Watunanda has childbirth problems. A long episode follows in which Kabungulu, Kababili and Nyamubila (Mother of Mubila), each in turn, trick Watunanda into believing that the only person able to help her is Lusagila, Mubila's newest wife. Notwithstanding the suspicions of Walikenge, who is Watunanda's husband, Lusagila reaches the birth shack holding a large iron object and strikes the head of Watunanda. In the meantime, Walikenge continues to express his skepticism about Lusagila's intentions. As a result of these complaints, Mubila and Walikenge decide to go to the birth shack to ascertain what happened there.

Comment: This episode describes in unusual detail the fight between Mubila and Walikenge.

Arriving at the birth house where Watunanda was slain, Walikenge realizes the fate of his wife. Lusagila brags about this evil deed. Walikenge challenges Mubila to a fight. As they prepare for combat, Mubila asks Walikenge from whom he got the powerful *lungubu*-war-medicine he seems to possess. Walikenge enumerates the persons who provided the medicines; in response Mubila sums up the sources of his power. Since Walikenge is a sly and powerful opponent, Mubila puts all the

Banayombi in his shoulderbag. Walikenge's weapons prove to be ineffective against Mubila, so both opponents engage in hand-to-hand combat, they circle round and round, until Mubila floors Walikenge and Kabungulu kills him with her pubic cloth. Mubila triumphantly shouts his drum names.

The hero decides to travel to the Balembo (Nice-ones), where the thief Kyugukige resides. Once more, Kabungulu uses ruse to approach the Balembo by pretending she is a runaway wife. She receives advice from her husband and her son. When she enters the village, Kyugukige is so thrilled to see this beautiful woman that Mubila's feather hat, which he stole, starts waving and trembling on his head. Kyugukige inquires about Kabungulu's destination. She claims she has come only for Kyugukige and simply asks for a stool on which to sit (a sign of hospitality). Kyugukige is excited; the feather hat quivers more and more; Kabungulu asks where he acquired that hat; indeed, it proves to be the one he acquired among the Banayombi. The enterprising Kyugukige places Kabungulu on his lap, has a lot of fun, and then wants to kiss her. She is reticent. In the meantime, Mubila, having placed all the Banayombi in his shoulderbag, is on his way to the Balembo. Kabungulu is now lying on a mat with Kyugukige, but on the verge of surrender, she calls for Mubila. Kyugukige and Kabungulu start chasing each other inside the house. Mubila emerges; he snatches his hat away from Kyugukige and, shouting his drum names, he throws Kyugukige to the ground. Kabungulu kills him with her pubic cloth.

Mubila decides to go to the Bouse (an ancient, almost extinct group, in Legaland) in search of Bungoe. But back at the crossroads, Baya identifies three possible trails to take. Mubila decides that he and his party will rest at the crossroads without sleeping. When he hears the drums at Kanyombo's, he tells Kabungulu that he will go there to participate in initiation dances. Kabungulu retorts: "When shall we ever return to our home in Tubala". Mubila says that they will get there, but not until he has completed his projects to find and defeat his antagonists. Of the possible destinations, Mubila selects the road to Kyeyungu (Big-Egg) village. He asks Lusagila to clean his egg and then fondles it (a prelude to what will happen next). He continues his journey and hears an old woman in that village announcing that they are coming. He dialogues from a distance with this woman called Nyakambalambala (Dressed-with-many-necklaces). She is headed for Idinga village. When he arrives in Kyeyungu village, the local headman Kampasa (Scorpion) and Mubila exchange some information about kinship ties they trace through their grandmothers. Soon, the two of them come to grips; Kampasa steals Mubila's egg and flies away with it to Byongobitengia. Mubila moans for this loss and, in despair, enumerates some of the strange events he has witnessed.

Back on the road, Mubila hears the sounds (of a drum) reaching him from Idinga village. He decides to journey alone to Idinga, for he has the foreboding that this is a dangerous and forbidding place. Reaching the neighborhood of Idinga, he finds that all accesses to the village are shut off. He concludes that a clever person must have done this and is told by Baya that this is the work of Nyakambalambala who is hiding in a tomato patch. On the advice of Baya, Mubila transforms himself into an old man with bent back and long hair. Hearing the rustling of Nyakambalambala, Mubila addresses her as grandmother, he being her grandson. She welcomes him and requests that he recite his ascendancy; he claims to be the son of Yombi, grandson of Idali and great-grandson of Museme (the father of heroes). Since he cannot travel to Idinga by himself (Idinga is presented as some "Other World", a world that only dead people can reach), Nyakambalambala puts Mubila in her basket and deposits him in the men's house of Idinga. Now he explains to her that he has come in search of fishing bait. Skeptical and excited, Nyakambalambala runs around, while a little drum is sounding as she moves (this drum was already mentioned in the previous passage when Mubila heard its sound from a distance). Mubila is obsessed by the sound of this drum. Nyakambalambala tries to mislead him (she does not want to give up the drum), but at Baya's suggestion Mubila makes her sick by blowing his whistle. He puts her in his lap, sends for medicinal herbs, places her on a mat, and finally finds the drum under the mat. He places the drum in his shoulderbag and departs after having killed Nyakambalambala and all the people of Idinga.

Resuming his journey to Byongobitengia, Mubila hears the sound of a dog bell and the call of the hunter Koba Kabalindi (Skinner, son of Those-who-wear-a-high-liana-belt) who is urging on his dog. As the dog passes, Mubila in pursuit of Kanyonga (an animal *Rhynchocyon*), Mubila subdues him with verbal magic and hides him in his shoulderbag. This dog, called Mundi (note that one of Yombi's son was named Mundi), had allegedly belonged to the primordial hero Museme, the great-grandfather of Mubila, and been left in the custody of the hunter Koba Kabalindi. When the hunter encounters Mubila, they argue. At first Mubila denies having seen a dog, then he insults the hunter, and, finally, he bluntly states that the dog is already in his bag. When the hunter tries to pull the dog from the bag, Mubila grabs him, holds him under his armpit, and his wife Kabungulu kills him with her pubic cloth.

Mubila now sends the dog after Kanyonga, but the dog races further and further without catching the animal. Mubila chases after the dog, grabs him, and puts him back in his shoulderbag. Kabungulu and Mubila argue: Mubila insists on pursuing the journey, Kabungulu reflects that he gives up too easily (he was close to getting

the animal and now he abandons the chase). Mubila plans to continue the journey, but his wife, his two senior brothers, and his son prefer to return to Tubala. Mubila hesitates and decides to sleep in situ. Next, he sends Kansinsi as a scout. Kansinsi soon returns since he has been frightened by a large group of loggers of the Balongo (Those-who-talk-too-much) clan. Hearing the sound of axes, Mubila leaves his followers behind. He learns from the loggers that they are working for Nsombi (Destroyer-of-Property). Mubila declares that they are ignorant loggers and that he and his kin will do a better job. Helped by some of his kin, the hero fells the tree in such a way that it flattens the entire Balongo clan.

On his way to the home village Tubala, Mubila halts at a *mubalaka*-tree (*Cynometra alex.*) where he sees Sakamungongo (a large bat) flying around a nest of insects. Small nets are placed around the four holes where the bat family is housed. As Kinkutu pokes with a stick, forty bats are caught in the nets, but their leader Sakamungongo escapes high in the tree. He is finally caught and decapitated. Mubila is astounded when his wife Kabungulu expresses admiration for the size of the bat (*Iusia*, a sexual allusion). Further on his return trip to Tubala, Mubila has the sudden inner knowledge that some game of dice is played in Kibusa's (Wealthy Person) village; the participants are: Mugumbi (Wealthy Person); Kantungulu (type of Tree - *Harungana madagascariensis*); Nsoko (Chimpanzee); and Kibusa himself. Upon arrival in the village, Mubila invites himself to the game. His opponents have a number of magical formulas, but they fail to defeat Mubila, as the dice fall close to Kabungulu's legs. Mubila has them stake everything: chickens, goats, and a giant billy goat. When he forces Mugumbi to stake his wife Kabwala (Necklace; Beloved-Companion), Mubila reluctantly accepts Kibusa's condition that, in return, he will stake Kabungulu. Mubila has barely won the game, when Kinkutu takes the woman Kabwala and possesses her on the village commons in view of her husband. A brawl ensues in which Kinkutu kills Kibusa. The village is set ablaze.

Having sent Kansinsi on a reconnaissance trip to Tubala, Mubila arrives in what he calls "the abandoned village". Some kin, however, have remained there including Lingungu, Nombi (a type of wading bird), and the as-yet-unmentioned Kabile (note that the female Kabile and the male Kimpiriiti, both represented by the sounds of two kazoos, are thought to be the supreme authorities of the circumcision rites). Mubila orders the village to be cleaned. Briefly he tells Lingungu and Nombi about a few of his past adventures. But now Mubila remembers his lost feather hat and his egg. Against the objections of his wives who want him to stay for the night, Mubila feels the urge to leave. Kyanga, one of Mubila's brothers, refuses to give Mubila the stipulations of an oracle; Mubila

curses him, saying that he will never again be a diviner. Mubila caresses his dog and calls on the beings of night and day for the day to dawn.

At daybreak, Mubila goes off accompanied by his son, his three wives, and other siblings who, at first, had been hesitant to join him. However, Mubila has enjoined his senior brother Bukulu Bwakitaba to stay in Tubala. When Mubila and his *comitatus* have journeyed for some time, Bukulu suddenly arrives accusing Mubila of not having been circumcised and Kabungulu of never having had menstruation. Shocked by these words, Mubila returns to Tubala, notifies his kin about this matter and resolves to seek circumcision in the village of Kamembe (a blacksmith). All the Banayombi accompany their leader, while Bukulu and Kinkutu affirm that they have been circumcised long ago in their father's village Itambandio.

Journeying to Kamembe's village, Mubila and his followers encounter Mutu Salugugumo (Hornbill Noisy-Wingbeat). The hero cannot resist the temptation of ordering his people to fell the huge *ibulungu*-tree in which Mutu nests. Mubila kills Mutu as he is scurrying up the tree trunk trying to escape.

As he resumes the trip, Mubila hears the drums in Kamembe's village. He runs into a certain Lingalinga (Reviler); both of them exchange information about their names and social background; Lingalinga then flees to Kamembe's village in order to announce the coming of Mubila. Since Mubila is apprehensive about the circumcision rites, he sends Bukulu ahead. Mubila is nervous, but he hides his true sentiments from Kinkutu (who is probably intent on revenge). Bukulu returns promptly and warns Mubila to be ready for real hardships. At Mubila's request, Bukulu enumerates the number of candidates for initiation and those among his brothers who have already passed through the circumcision rites. In order to accommodate the initiands, Mubila instructs his companions to collect construction materials and build houses. He is now ready to undergo the circumcision rites, but Kabungulu causes problems because she wants to accompany him (women never participate in these rituals). In the midst of her protests, Mubila puts her under his armpit and proceeds. There follows a condensed version of some things that are done during the rites. Kabungulu again reveals her intelligence by asking who is the master of *musimbi* (holder of the rights vested in certain lineages to organize a cycle of initiations). Abruptly she shouts that her husband should not be circumcised unless Ibegania (Knotted-Vine), organizer of these rites, is circumcised first. Indeed, when Ibegania's loincloth is removed everyone is amazed to notice that he is not circumcised. Kabungulu rejoins her companions and, before returning to Tubala, reveals to Nyamubila (Mubila's mother) some of the circumcision secrets observed. Ibegania and Mubila go through the initiation, but as Lingalinga accuses Mubila of not having been

properly circumcised, Mubila undergoes a second circumcision and dies. His body is thrown into the Lulingu River (The Meandering-one). Magical words uttered by Zakeuti prevent the body from drifting away; it gets stuck to a floating tree trunk.

Back in Tubala, Kabungulu learns about Mubila's fate. She knows that, in order to approach her husband's corpse, she needs Kamembe's consent. Again she decides to conceal her identity and before entering Kamembe's village, she strikes him with chest pains. She finds Kamembe moaning, but feigns complete surprise at the news of his suffering. Inquiring about the nature of his sickness, she advises Kamembe to go and cut a finger from Mubila's corpse, to incinerate it, and to incise himself with the potent powder thus obtained in order to achieve complete recovery. To Kabungulu's delight, Kamembe refuses and insists that she must go. When Kabungulu discovers Mubila's body in the Lulingu River, she administers a powerful eye philter to resuscitate him. Mubila "awakens"; husband and wife greet each other warmly. From a distance Mubila reassures his son that he is alive and proclaims that Lingalinga, who acted as a vile sorcerer, must be punished. Zakeuti tricks, then kills Lingalinga. Mubila pursues Kamembe; he kills him and decimates his entire clan.

Mubila joins his mother where he had left her before the circumcision rites and returns with her to Tubala. When the Banayombi assemble, it turns out that their brother Musombo is missing. Kinkutu reports that Musombo got stuck in Nyamagugula's (Hoarder-of-Things) swamp. Mubila sets out to free his brother Musombo. He fights Nyamagugula unsuccessfully and calls for help from Tubala. Lusagila now battles with Nyamagugula, but unable to overpower her, she must rely on Kabungulu's help to defeat her.

Returning to Tubala, Mubila hears the drums of Byongobitengia and once again conceives a plan to reach that place. The hero reminisces about many events he witnessed. The bard describes in unusual detail the careful preparations for yet another expedition and how the hero's wives and the Banayombi, initially hesitant to follow Mubila on his newest journey, rush after him. The group gets as far as Nsele village where Mukompeki's *ngandu* initiations (an intermediate grade of Bwami) are organized. Following a discussion about the selection of the main musician, Mubila replaces him with Kibazonga (Fool), his own expert drummer. The hero meets two women, Nyakankululu (Striped Squirrel) and Nyatumanenze (Rubber Ball), who have never danced. This is an occasion for them to participate with the villagers in joyful dances. But Kinkutu breaks the pleasant atmosphere by taking the drum away. Total confusion follows; there are challenges; the village is destroyed by fire without the initiation of Mukompeki having taken place.

Still on the road to Byongobitengia, Mubila reaches the area of Tumbalake (Flat Wading Place) where he overhears a brief conversation between Iyuka (Fixer) and Kamakala (Drying Rack). As Mubila encounters Iyuka, the ensuing discussion reveals that Iyuka (also known as Isikutuwembe (Crop-of-Hair) is the son of Museme, the father of heroes, while Mubila allegedly is Museme's great-grandson. Mubila wants Iyuka to travel to Byongobitengia to tell them that war is coming. Iyuka is hesitant, but finally accepts to go after Mubila has given proof of even greater power than Iyuka could display.

Following in the footsteps of Iyuka, Mubila enters Kilundu village. Here he learns about a young man Kwimma (Moaning), who since birth has never left his house. Sitting in that house, Kwimma insults Mubila as a Talkative Fellow. In vain, Mubila summons him to come out. Mubila's wives also fail to open the door of Kwimma's dwelling, an easy task for Zakeuti. When Zakeuti drags Kwimma outside, the beauty of the young man stultifies everyone. Immediately captivated by Kabungulu, Kwimma addresses her with seductive words of praise. But Kabungulu contemptuously flings her pubic cloth in his face; he is "dead".

In a village where he passes, Mubila comes across a child that has never stopped crying since it was born. He takes the infant away from the old wet-nurse, Watunanda (She-who-refuses-the-belly), places the child on his lap, and appeases him with song. When the mother, Gonda (Emaciated), surprised by Mubila's unusual song, returns from the fields, Mubila hands the child back to its mother urging her never to leave the child alone. Watunanda, treated as a witch, is burned in her house. Gonda informs Mubila that Iyuka, the son of Museme, has passed there.

Progressing further, Mubila reaches the Longo-Mungima River in which he spots Ngima (a type of fish) swimming. Ngima refuses to respond to Mubila's summons to come close. Mubila chases him in the river but is unable to catch him. Advised by Baya, Mubila lures Ngima with his whistle and kills him.

Moving on, Mubila encounters in an unidentified village a certain Ikuka (a fruit) of the Banampalia (Snail Clan). Because Kabungulu expresses admiration for this man, Mubila gets angry and chases Ikuka. Seeing his father in trouble, Zakeuti rebukes his mother and spears Ikuka. The village is set ablaze.

Mubila continues the long journey, crossing rivers and forest plains. He hears a talkative Kikungu Nkusu (Parrot) and when he meets him, he finds him standing on one leg. Mubila asks his wife for a knife to cut off one of his own legs, for he too wants to stand like Nkusu. Nkusu tells Mubila that standing on one leg is simply one of his habits and thereupon stretches his second leg out. Following a series of insults, Kikungu Nkusu is killed.

Mubila perceives a fog that hangs over the forest. He sends Kinkutu on a reconnaissance mission. Scared, Kinkutu returns to report to Mubila that a large fire made by Batumba-Bikuku (Roaster-of-Pumpkins) is causing all this smoke. Mubila arrives at the palisades of Batumba's village and orders his brother Kyabikamba to demolish them. Batumba reacts aggressively. In vain, Kinkutu attempts four times to spear Batumba, who flies from one place to another always concerned with fanning his fire for roasting his pumpkins. In the long run, Zakeuti gets ahold of Batumba and throws him into the fire. Kyandembelembe, Mubila's brother, sets the village ablaze.

Departing from Batumba's place, Mubila hears the sound of slit-drums. He crosses rivers and forests and arrives at Sasembe's place. Mubila is offended because Sasembe tells him he heard his footsteps crashing on the trail. The two personages engage in an unusual hand-to-hand combat, which the bard describes in some detail. Since Mubila fails to floor him, Kabungulu kills Sasembe with her pubic cloth.

Mubila now fancies that he needs a love philter. With this aim in mind he visits Mpengabo village where a certain Kalimu is an expert in these matters. Mubila refuses every single type of love philter that Kalimu mentions. Since he gets no satisfaction and on the advice of Baya, he puts Kalimu and all the medicines he possesses in his shoulderbag. Returning to the place where he had left the Banayombi and his wives, he tests the efficacy of the Kalimu philter on his wives and is fully satisfied by the successes he obtains.

Mubila is back at the Ndimba River, where he notices a huge crocodile (*kimena*). Impulsively, he intends to go after the crocodile, which is submerged in the water, but Baya restrains him. Instead, he spears the crocodile with a large harpoon, but it bends. Kabungulu invites her co-wife, Lusagila, to get the crocodile, but Mubila holds her back. Next, Mubila orders his drummer, Kibazonga, to lock him up in a drum; Bukulu launches the drum, provided with a web of numerous lianas, into the river. Soon, the crocodile is caught in the lianas. Claiming she has the ways of men, Kabungulu hauls the crocodile out of the river. The Banayombi (seldom active as a group) kill the crocodile with pebbles and "little sticks", thus mocking this powerful animal.

Proceeding further along the river, Mubila hears girls laughing. The fuss is about Nyaluluba's (Forgetful) fish trap. Mubila is eager to open the trap, but the cheering girls react aggressively. Kabungulu intervenes to wipe them out. In the meantime, Nyaluluba, the head of the group, has been sitting alone on a rock, looking passively on. Mubila challenges her. In a rare feat, Nyamubila, the mother of

Mubila, pushes Nyaluluba to the ground and Kabungulu destroys her with her pubic cloth.

Following a long march, Mubila and his people find themselves near the outskirts of Byongobitengia village, a village “that smells of war”, the residence of the thief Kampasa. Mubila and his followers, guided by a scheme to enter this dangerous place, split into three groups: twenty go to the right flank, twenty to the left flank; Mubila, his son, and wives are in the center. Since Mubila knows in advance that Kampasa, a blacksmith, is engaged in forging iron tools, Kabungulu and others have brought iron ore at the hero’s instigation.

Kabungulu shakes the village fence and beguiled by her appearance, Kigingi (Guardian-of-the-village-fence) opens up for her. Approaching the blacksmith, Mubila requires that Kampasa remove the objects he is forging so that priority can be given to the work he wants to be done. Because Kampasa refuses, Mubila and Kabungulu place a curse on the forge and on Kampasa’s work. When threatened, Mubila grabs Kampasa by the neck and orders his wife to open Kampasa’s shoulderbag in which the latter had hidden the egg stolen from Mubila.

When Kampasa’s people attack, Mubila accuses them of being warmongers. Scared of the blacksmith’s quasi-mystic power, he declares to be the grandson of Nyakaseke (the *mukungu*, old-one of the village), the grandson of Muliku (Dense-Foliage) and the great-grandson of Kabikampala (Keeper-of-Bwami-Sacra) and requests a meeting with Nyakaseke.

The village headman Kagelia (also known as Kabamba, *Cercopithecus*) of the Bouse clan intervenes and orders that Mubila be led to his place. In order to impress Mubila, the village headman performs a *mugeleko*: He makes a symbolic statement about his invulnerability by spearing himself and his wife, then he restores his wife to a normal state while he remains speared. Mubila expresses genuine surprise at this feat; in turn Kagelia praises the extraordinary physical appearance of the hero (an allusion to the long nails and eyebrows, the belt of thorny vine, the necklace of pods). Mubila, however, is mainly interested in knowing whether Bungoe and Iyuka have passed in this area. Kagelia’s answer is half clear; he himself prefers to ask the questions. Irritated by these many inquiries, Mubila summons some of his brothers who had stayed close by; the Banayombi suddenly arrive carrying spears; the village is set ablaze. Kagelia witnesses extraordinary events (*mikupi*), but survives.

Mubila invites Kabungulu to search for Nyakaseke. Kagelia objects, but the hero simply tells his wife to proceed. With the intent to flee, Kagelia removes himself from his spear. In the meantime, Kabungulu kills Kagelia’s wife; because of this event, the beleaguered Kagelia challenges Mubila who is calling in vain for

Nyakaseke to reveal herself. Mubila and Kagelia engage in a new test of power; the hero plants his copper shield in front of himself and red ants fall from it. Kagelia plants his shield on the ground and leaves drop down from it. Mubila hurls a spear at Kagelia, but it only penetrates his shield. Unprotected by his fallen shield, Kagelia receives a deadly spear thrust from Zakeuti.

The Banayombi rejoice because they have reached Byongobitengia, which they thought was inaccessible. A *lukundu*-tree hangs over the Lubile River outside Byongobitengia village. Mubila has seen it. He also thinks that Nyakaseke is sitting in a huge *ibulungu*-tree. He refers to her as a witch. Thereupon Kinkutu suggests they fell the *ibulungu*-tree, but the old Nyakaseke hears about the plot and flees. Baya tells Mubila that there is much honey in that *lukundu*-tree. Zakeuti decides to harvest the honey. Hastily, he climbs the tree, inserts his hand in a hole, and is "caught by something". For the Banayombi the only way to free Zakeuti is to fell the tree. However, the cut tree crashes into the Lubile River. Kabungulu weeps for her son while the tree floats downstream straight for a waterfall, with Zakeuti as its hostage. The Banayombi follow on the riverbank while Zakeuti ceaselessly speaks to the tree and Mubila incessantly blows his magical whistle. At the rim of the waterfall, near Wabalenga's landing, Zakeuti manages to jump from the tree onto the riverbank. There, Wabalenga warmly receives him; Mubila joins his son and hugs him, but he suspects Wabalenga.

On a new journey, Mubila meets at the crossroads a certain Idimu (Civet Cat) Kibonga Salukila who repeatedly threatens him with his spear and then withdraws again and again. Advised by Baya, Mubila lures Idimu with some corn, grabs him, and then kills him.

Back on the road, Mubila hears far away the persistent sounds of percussion instruments and singing. When he joins the woman percussionist and inquires why she is engaged in this non-stop activity, the woman, Ntabanzane (Tabanzane), insults Mubila, calling him Arrogant-Troublemaker and Feared-one. Mubila refuses to fight a woman; he encourages Kabungulu to ask more questions, but she declines. When Lusagila is summoned, she fights Ntabanzane unsuccessfully; to rescue her, Kabungulu must intervene with her pubic cloth.

In the course of yet another trip, Mubila bathes in the Lubile River. An unknown youth approaches. Questioned, the youth claims to be from the Bagoma group. Mubila resolves to visit the Bagoma (Where-only-the-dead-go) and against the advice of his wife, he invites the youth to come closer. The young man acts in a friendly manner, but he suddenly steals Mubila's feather hat and plunges into the river rushing to an undisclosed place. Although he is warned that only the dead go to the Bagoma, Mubila sets out on the journey with his dog Mundi and leaving his

egg with Kabungulu. Kinkutu is designated to guard Kabungulu. On the road to the Bagoma, Mubila already hears drums resounding in their village. Baya declares that, among the Bagoma, they are dancing because they seized his feather hat. As he draws close to the village, Mubila removes the dog

Mundi from his shoulderbag, administers an eye filter, and enjoins him to destroy everything in his path. The monstrous dog causes enormous destruction. Amidst the devastation, Mubila is able to recuperate his hat and kill the thief. The dog runs on. After a lengthy chase, Mubila catches him and puts him back in his shoulderbag. On his return, the Banayombi dance with joy because their leader has emerged alive from the Bagoma.

Travelling in the direction of his village Tubala, Mubila crosses the Lubile River and is back at Nyakaseke's. On meeting her, Mubila is surprised that she is able to recite his kinship ascendancy. Suddenly, Mubila notices a nice piece of bark in a tree. Zakeuti climbs the giant *ibulungu*-tree and throws down several pieces of suitable bark. Nyakaseke complains that strangers are now appropriating other people's property. As he tries to climb down, Zakeuti is caught by the tree. It is decided that some of Mubila's brothers will fell the *ibulungu*-tree. To that effect, a large scaffolding is placed around its base (to facilitate the task of cutting above the huge buttresses of the tree). While the tree is being felled, Mubila overhears a conversation between Lusagila and Kabungulu in which there is talk of sorcery and a fight with Nyakaseke. Mubila now asks Nyakaseke for a bark beater; when she finally produces a wooden bark beater, Mubila, knowing that she possesses an ivory one, asks for it. When she stubbornly refuses to give it up, Mubila's wives cut her loincloth, and, lo and behold, an ivory bark beater drops from her vagina! Mubila now pounds the bark using his thighs, instead of a wooden block, as a support. When the work is finished, he puts the bark beater in his shoulderbag and urges his wives not to kill Nyakaseke. The party leaves for a new destination.

On their return to the crossroads, Baya presents Mubila with a choice of three possible directions. He chooses the trail to Mulingu (Huge-leopard). Since Mulingu is treacherous (he hides himself from Mubila), Baya advises that Mubila prepare a tunnel-like trap for leopards (*kafugalilo*). Although the recommended bait for the trap is a black dog (leopards love to eat dogs), Mubila at first wants to enter the trap, but then places a dog in it. Mulingu is easily trapped. Mubila hears his brother Lingungu's drums in Tubala and returns home.

Back home, Mubila has the village swept clean by his people. Then he goes through some transition rite for he wants his hair to be shaved by Kabungulu. Despite Kabungulu's objections that it is hard to shave such an enormous crop of hair, Zakeuti advises his mother to go ahead. Mubila then demands that

Kabungulu pluck her pubic hair. This short and funny passage contains some rare direct sexual allusions. Indeed, on finishing the job Kabungulu says: “Those small pimples (produced by pulling out pubic hair) are more attractive than those bumps of yours (bumps left after shaving Mubila’s huge crop of hair)”.

For no apparent reason, Mubila rushes out after a very short stay in his village. He is headed for Mulima (Bat) village where he plans to seduce a certain Nsanza. She is the daughter of Mulua and the wife of Mbogo (Buffalo). Baya advises Mubila not to start insulting Mbogo. However, as soon as Mubila arrives, Mbogo questions him about his identity, adding a stream of insults about his uncut nails, his belt of vines, and his big necklace of pods. At first, Mubila ignores this chatter. He asks Nsanza for a cup of water (note that this way of speaking is a preliminary to sexual advances); Mbogo warns his wife not to do this. But Nsanza brings the water anyway; furious, Mbogo throws it in Mubila’s face. Now it is Mubila’s turn to mistreat Mbogo. A fight ensues; the hero grabs Mbogo by the horns; they circle round and round the village until Mubila kills Mbogo. Mubila leaves with Nsanza, while bigger warfare is imminent. Returning to Tubala, he sends Kinkutu out on a reconnaissance mission. The latter finds the Banambogo assembled in war council. Back in Tubala, the ambiguous Kinkutu reports on the dangers ahead; he seems to mislead Mubila into believing that the foes are only “Little pigs foraging everywhere”. Mubila and some of his brothers make their way to Mbogo’s village; they carry large hunting nets, but Mubila has not brought his spear. There is a technical argument among the brothers about setting up the nets. Finally, the so-called pigs throw themselves into Mubila’s net, lifting him into the air. Once again, he must rely on Kabungulu to defeat the Banambogo (Buffalo clan). The Banayombi feast on the buffalo meat. The honor to distribute the buffalo meat falls on Mubila’s half-brother Musombo, while Kamatembo (Small-bird), another half-brother, acquires Nsanza as his wife.

Despite Kabungulu’s objections, Mubila renews his plan to journey to Kanyombo. When night changes into day, Mubila leaves his brothers Lingungu and Nombi behind to guard the village. On this new journey, Mubila hears joyful noises in the distance. He meets the old man Kaseibungu (Little-father-of-Ibungu) who reveals that these noises come from the participants in the big net-hunt (*mulambu*) of the Bana(b)wembe (Sufferers-of-eye-disease) led by Idunga (Ambush). Mubila does not like the manner in which this old man speaks and looks at him. When the old man suggests to Mubila that he call Idunga (leader of the hunt), Mubila places a curse on the hunting nets. Idunga who is manufacturing a hat from a turtle carapace (something completely unheard of), asks Kaseibungu who that talkative-fellow is. But Kaseibungu does not understand the question

because of the hullabaloo made by the Banayombi in anticipation of the game meat. When Mubila requests bananas and meat from the old man, there is some argument. When the food is presented, the Banayombi eat it up in no time. Learning from Kaseibungu that all the meat is gone, Idunga challenges Mubila. Presently, Mubila hears the sound of dog bells; Baya advises him to seize the black-spotted one among the oncoming dogs. Mubila grabs the dog and places it in his shoulderbag.

While the old man, Kaseibungu, hides in a little tree, Mubila starts calling the Bana(b)wembe “a one-eyed brood”. Ngilingili (a tree), the son of Isabukali (Master Tough), emerges to attack Mubila, but soon flees. In the subsequent commotion, Idunga is struck by Kabungulu’s pubic cloth, while Kaseibungu flees to the village of a certain woman Buwalinga (Enticer), and Mubila follows him. Calling her “child of my maternal uncle,” Mubila announces that he has come to seduce her (as is later apparent, the woman is married to Kamabeza, but he is absent from the village). She inquires where Mubila is headed for, whether he is going for war or to acquire a medicine. When she is told that he is journeying to Kanyombo, she cautions him that only the dead go there. Suddenly Mubila’s whistle is ineffective (*Jugilagila*). The village is burnt while the Banayombi leave in the company of the Buwalinga who must show them the road.

At the crossroads, Mubila and his followers take the central trail. Soon they meet with Kamabeza, the husband of Buwalinga. He circles around them claiming his wife back. Mubila asserts that she is his woman (a man has a certain claim in his maternal uncle’s unmarried daughter). In the ensuing brawl, Musombo, one of Mubila’s brothers, is speared. Mubila hits Kamabeza, while Kabungulu kills Buwalinga who intended to escape to inform Kanyombo about Mubila’s impending arrival. Mubila orders his son to revivify Musombo and “the others”.

Back at the crossroads, Mubila’s attention is aroused by sounds originating in the secret rites (*kililu*) of the Batutabyale clan (Pounders-of-leaves-used-in-the-distribution-of-food). At first, these noises are a mere echo of the words Mubila says or the actions he engages in (it sounds as if a very smart parrot were speaking). Agitated and shocked, Mubila asks Baya against whom he is struggling in this place? Baya states that this is Kanyombo’s place and that he is clashing with Kampasa “the son of the Master of Mwali village who surpasses Kampana in astuteness” (Note that in an earlier episode the Master of Mwali village was said to be Nkusu Kilalukoa, Talkative Parrot; Kampasa is acting like his father, the Parrot). At Baya’s suggestion, the Banayombi put on feathers. Disguised as “birds” they make their entrance in the village. Mubila asks to meet the Master of the village (who is Kanyombo of the Batutabyale). Baya tells him to look up into the

trees where amazing things can be seen: *kisise*-insect sits in a *bugubi*-tree; *kiselya*-orchid hangs from an *ibulungu*-tree; *nsezi*-fruit grows on a *musage*-tree (Parasol tree) and there are *bilemba*-fruits on a *busezi*-tree; a being (Kanyombo) with a parasol tree growing on his arm and a *muzombo*-tree sticking out his shoulder is sitting in the giant tree. Mubila is disconcerted. Baya assures him that he has come face to face with the magical war medicine (*lungubu*) of the Batutabyale.

In his anguish, Mubila insists that he has not come for battle, only for a drum, to settle the problems of the land. Thereupon, Kanyombo agrees that they take out the drums and dance. Mubila invites his drummer, Kibazonga, to play. The Banayombi engage in a war dance and the drums predict a sweeping famine. While the war dance is on, Mubila displays his powers by restoring the normal order of things. He makes the orchid, insects, and fruits fall, and asks lightning to destroy the trees. This turmoil allows him to steal the drum and put it under his armpit.

A fight erupts with a certain Kankalala (Mongoose), a young man from Kangongongo (Always-sick) village who seems to be invincible. At Baya's suggestion, the dog Mundi tracks down Kankalala and kills him. Kanyombo, who has been watching, jumps down from the tree in which he was sitting. These events set off a battle between Mubila and Kanyombo, while the Banayombi leave for Kangongongo village with baskets full of banana stipes. In the struggle with Kanyombo, Mubila displays his invincibility in a series of great feats: Kanyombo hurls a spear, but Mubila hides in a house pole; next he is out of sight in the fields; when the fields burn, he is back in the village. Kanyombo wonders about the efficacy of Mubila's medicine. As the battle continues, rather evenly, the two opponents enumerate the sources of their medicines and powers. Finally, at the urging of Baya, Mubila lures Kanyombo to the outskirts of the village where Kabungulu awaits him with her pubic cloth

Mubila leaves in search of Kampasa whose mysterious voice is still heard. Mubila and some companions are following their kin the Banayombi to Kangongongo village. Once more, Mubila is disturbed by the call of the parrot-like creature that refers to itself as Kabangobango (Quick-calls), but is in fact "Kampana who surpasses Kampasa in shrewdness" (supposedly, this calling is by none other than the Master of Mwali village, also known as Nkusu Kilalukoa, Talkative Parrot). Halfway through, Mubila hears the sad "iiii" sound of Mbibo (*Nandinia Binotata*) "who is weeping like a child". He traps the animal with delicious-smelling bananas and gives him to his senior brother Kinkutu. The mysterious voice is now spreading the news that Mubila has killed Mbibo.

Kampasa, seeing that Mubila has continued his journey to Kangongongo, sneaks into a house. In the men's house Mubila meets "two old men," one is Kaseibungu

(whom he had met before and now is nicknamed Lukanda, Fastener) and the other one, who is ready to go angling in the Kamiluka (River of Traps; a sexual allusion as a prelude to his forthcoming intentions), calls himself Lulyumba (Angler), child of Shibu (Rainbow). In fact, both individuals are Kampasa's alter ego or the doppelgänger of Kampasa in transformation.

As was predicted earlier by Mubila's drummer, there is great famine in Kangongongo. Nevertheless, Mubila asks for tobacco, then also for food, but in vain. Lulyumba suddenly starts "angling with seductive talk"; he desires Kabungulu. At first, Mubila acts as if he did not hear. Instead, he inquires about the food shortage, then provides the villagers with choice bananas (magically produced in the meantime) while he eats, as is his custom some *mbala*-nuts. Lulyumba perseveres and expresses his craving for Kabungulu, and when night falls he calls all women in Mubila's party to his house. But Mubila refuses to let them go. Lukanda reacts saying that he will tie them up. He brings lianas and starts trying to tie the legs, then the arms, then and the neck of Mubila. In vain! Mubila throws him onto the ground and cuts his head. He chases the other Lukanda (Fastener), who is, in fact, the aforementioned Lulyumba, and kills him. In the two transformations of Kampasa, Mubila has finally disposed of Kampasa himself.

Since in his opinion Mubila "has wiped out all traces" (of opposition, enmity, disorder and ignorance), he is ready to go home. After crossing the Nanga River and traversing the forest domain Kandayimasanda (That-links-bridges), in the course of this final return, Mubila arrives in the proximity of his village at Musisi's (Giant baobab tree who symbolizes the ultimate power of the forest). Here a last, unavoidable challenge awaits the hero. Musisi greets Mubila as "my grandchild", seemingly praising him whereas he always warned and criticized him. In fact, by calling Mubila "grandchild," Musisi evokes a joking relationship between the two of them. When Musisi asks Mubila for something he may have brought back from the long journeys, Mubila cannot refuse. He bangs the drum acquired at Kanyombo's onto the ground and leaves.

Comment: Mubila, the conqueror, loses the symbols of investiture and authority. He was a self-styled ruthless leader in the period of migrations and settlement. He will not be the leader in the new world order, at the time of peace, when the Lega reshape their social and philosophical system around the Bwami association to achieve harmony in moderation.

Back in Tubala village, the Banayombi sweep the grounds and people rejoice and dance into the next day. Nothing more is said about Mubila, but the implication is that he is now reduced to being the headman of Tubala village and the head of the Banayombi lineage.

Comment: This is in conformity with Lega social organization, which is based on a segmentary lineage system. The hero does not become a chief or king; he is not enthroned. This is in line with Lega acephalous political organization. Mubila has defeated countless enemies, but he has not conquered land nor reduced people into servitude. He has not made any allies. There is no apotheosis of the hero because he never went through an initiatory catharsis to become a moral leader.

THE MAIN ACTORS

Mubila is the central hero, the son of Yombi, miraculously born in Itambandio, the last of thirty-nine brothers and one sister. He is the founder of the village Tubala and self-imposed leader of the Banayombi. Mubila is aggressive, holds great cosmic powers, but he often depends on his wife, Kabungulu, to ultimately destroy an enemy. Special aides, supports and qualities of Mubila:

Internal: Baya is Mubila's inner voice, his natural, innate knowledge and foreknowledge. Baya, not designated as either male or female, yet presented as a living entity hidden somewhere under his armpit, is a counselor with whom Mubila dialogues, mostly when he is undecided about persons he encounters or actions he should undertake. By birth Mubila is a great and fast traveller, not afraid of distances. He is a singer who calms an endlessly weeping child. He communicates at great distances and has cosmic powers: he commands changes from night to day in his formulaic dialogues with crickets, damans, doves; with his whistle he dries all rivers out; he acts at one point as a thaumaturge and has the power of transformation.

Quasi-internal: Mubila's whistle "that is in his mouth"; he differentiates between his *mpingu za mulindu* and *mpingu za lugulu*.

External: he is born with titled knife, spear, and copper shield. In the course of the narrative it is revealed that the hero also possesses either through inheritance from his father, capture, normal acquisition or through some mysterious means other objects of great power: the most important of which are: his magical shoulderbag, his magical dice, his feather hat, his magical egg, his beautiful white dice, his magical drinking cup, various powerful war- and other medicines (such as an eye filter), the insignia of yananio and kindi initiates of Bwami; a hat with pangolin scales; a *ntuku* hat (stolen from Ngilingili), a *kanangata*-slit drum, an harpoon-spear; a white chicken for ending the mourning rites; some kind of vine that serves as a swatter to chase flies. He also acquires the powerful, monstrous dog Mundi.

Yombi: the hero's father, a lineage head referred to by the term mwami, which seems to indicate that the original meaning of this term is leader, "one capable to

lead, to exercise authority". At the time the Lega started their migration from the areas in Uganda, close to Lake Albert and Mount Ruwenzori, the Lega had not developed the Bwami association and the content of the epic bears essentially on Lega migrations, encounters of representatives of different groups, internal and external conflicts, formation and dispersal of large Lega subgroups, territorial settlement and scission. Yombi is the powerful lineage head and village headman of the recently built Itambandio, the village "Where-eagle-hovers" and the founder and leader of the Banayombi lineage. This patrilineage is apparently made up little more than the many sons begotten by Yombi with his numerous wives. His social origins and the places where he emerged and from where he migrated are not mentioned. Yombi disappears early in the narrative but his death and the controversies surrounding it lead to the partial dispersal of the group and to a lot of explicit resentment between Mubila and his two oldest brothers, Kinkutu(nkutu) and Bukulu bwa Kitaba.

Nyamubila: the hero's mother is the preferred wife of Yombi known only by her teknonymic name. Her social origins and the manner in which Yombi got her are not mentioned. Her role is limited to the extreme, but sometimes in word and deed she is helpful to her son. Mubila has the greatest respect, even a certain tenderness, for his mother.

The three wives of Mubila have been captured at different stages of the epic. Kabungulu (genet), the daughter of Mputi (Pygmy) of Mulama (Bat) village is the first wife of Mubila and the mother of his only son, Zakeuti, Mubila's. She is astute, whimsical, unpredictable, sometimes arrogant and eager to argue with her husband. She possesses extraordinary powers (commands bees and snakes; defeats enemies with her pubic cloth), which are almost always exercised on behalf of her husband Mubila, at his request or spontaneously. The origins of these powers are not traced. She uses her apparent charms to sexually attract enemies of her husband, without indulging in their desires. The second and third wives are Kababili (Of-two) of Milemba (Phrynium) village and Lusagila (Water-lily), the daughter of Mazi (Water) of Nanga (Pebble) village. They have none of the powers Kabungulu exercises, but all have special functions. Competition between the three women is limited.

Zakeuti (or Zakeite, Of-ashes), the only child of the hero Mubila and his "most junior wife, Kabungulu, is conceived at the moment Mubila is leaving for one of his many expeditions. He is miraculously born in Tubala during the absence and

“quasi-death” of his father (hence his name: Dream-of-ashes” Ndozi Zakeuti). There is no mention of a prolonged or difficult gestation. He has no youth; right after birth he leaves the forest shack for the village where he gives orders to all the other siblings and makes decisions on his own. He knows who his father’s sons are and right away he departs to find his father. He has no fear because he is Salutumbula-nkaka, guardian of a powerful medicine. He has powerful weapons, an eye filter and also possesses some extraordinary cosmic powers: he commands time transition; he separates the waters of a river by putting his leg into them. He is very dear to his father.

The Banayombi are the consanguine siblings of Mubila, but they also seem to include numerous incorporated dependents (occasionally a person is mentioned in the text who is not initially identified as a member of the sibling group). In addition to Mubila and possible assimilated individuals there are thirty-nine male and one female half-siblings. Born in rapid succession mostly of different mothers (but some seem to be twins, although not mentioned as such). All of them are individually named, mostly by complex, composite names that often include a longer drum name. The Banayombi as such, plus Mubila’s mother, his three wives and only son constitute the comitatus of the hero, but not everyone is always part of that group. Most of the half-siblings play no explicitly mentioned role. Others have clearly defined statuses and functions. The principals are: Kinkutu(nkutu), the first-born; Bukulu Bwakitaba, the second most senior by birth; Kisingu Kyandembelembe, the destroyer by fire; Katuta, the drummer of messages; Lingungu, the guardian of the village; Kansinsi, the scout; Muntoli, the second scout; Kyabikamba, the strongest of them all; Kigingi, the guardian of the village entrance; Kyanga, the diviner; Musombo, the protector of orphans. Among the siblings who do not play an explicit role, some may be presented in the course of the narrative under another name as antagonists, several others who play no explicit role, seem to represent refractions or aspects of the hero.

Kinsfolk, real and fictive kin: several persons, male (e.g. Iyuka) and female (e.g. Nyakaseke) persons, encountered by Mubila in the course of his travels, are referred to as grandmother, grandfather, maternal uncle, son of a maternal uncle, or as cognatically related third generation relatives, but the context of the narrative does not provide clues to decide whether the use of these terms is sheer trickery, joke or reality. The same is true when Mubila tells someone that both their grandmothers originated from the same womb. In one context Mubila describes himself as the grandchild (*myukulu*) of Nyakaseke, the grandchild of Mutiku and

the great-grandchild (*kayokolo*) of Kabikabampala. Musisi calls Mubila grandchild; another actor mentions him as sororal nephew. In one statement, made at the request of the woman Nyakambalambala (whose unnamed grandmothers are said to be related) Mubila identifies himself as the son of Yombi, the grandson of Idali, the great-grandson of Museme

Antagonists and enemies: Mubila's antagonists are too numerous to list them all; they are human, anthropomorphized flora and fauna, or a mixture of these entities, but not gods or spirits. The most powerful individual antagonist whom the hero never subdues is Bungoe/Bungwe (a hero who is himself the center of other epics). Some of the individual antagonists whom he overcomes, often after fierce battles, often with the help of his wife Kabungulu, are Kanyombo of the Batutabyale group, Kampasa of the Banasimenge group, Kagelia (also called Kabamba) of the Bouse group, Kanyonga and Kyugukige. Among the principal antagonistic groups are the Bananzogu (Elephants) and the Bananyambogo (Buffaloes).

There is also an ambiguous character, Musisi (lit. the huge *Brachystegia* tree). Who lives near the Nanga River that is frequently crossed by Mubila during his travels. He is not a friend; he is not a real enemy, but a symbol of the unsurpassable power of the forest (conceived as a living individual). At the end of the epic Mubila surrenders to him the symbol of power, a drum that he acquired "in the land of the dead", thus surrendering supreme authority.