

Daniel P. Biebuyck

LEGA SCULPTURE.

Synthesis of the *lutumbo lwa kindi* initiation rituals among the Beiankuku

In this paper I summarize the ritual contexts in which ivory and wooden masks or figurines, and other objects, were used and interpreted in an initiation rite of the *lutumbo lwa kindi*, the highest grade in the Bwami association of the Lega people. In April 1952, I participated in the full initiation ritual of the *lutumbo lwa kindi* grade among the Beiankuku-Banamusiga of notable Kisanga (secteur Beia in Pangi territoire). A similar initiation pattern prevailed in several other *kindi* initiations I witnessed in other ritual communities, such as the Beianangi, Banamunwa and Banisanga.

Eight *lutumbo lwa kindi* initiates participated in the rites; three of the *kindi* belonged to the Banamusiga clan, a small group dispersed in three villages among the Beiankuku and closely associated with them historically and ritually. The other five *kindi* came from the Beiankuku clan; they represented the four maximal lineages that constituted their clan (Banamwenda, Banamugomba, Banamugulu, Banamunyaga). Several of the *lutumbo lwa yananio*, present in the village, but not part of the rites, had already reached the lower initiatory cycles of the *kindi* grade. The group of Beiankuku and Banamusiga lived in sixteen villages.

In my initial discussions with them, the Beiankuku traced their origins, like many other Lega clans, to the lake Edward (Kitatenge) and to the Ruwenzori (Munkundu) mountain areas. They claimed that, like other Lega clans, during migration, they fought a certain Kimbimbi and that subsequently the various Lega clans dispersed in the regions of Atondo and Mingalangala, near the Lualaba River. They claimed that at the moment of dispersal, the Beiankuku clan formed part of a section of Lega clans that moved south and southeastward without knowing the *kindi* initiations. After they had established themselves in the location where they lived in 1952, they claim that a certain Lupanzula, a great-great-grandson of Nkuku (founder of the clan) acquired the *kindi* grade from the Babongolo clan, said to be their maternal uncles. As such, Lupanzula acquired the title of *nyakabundi* (the person who introduced the *kindi* grade into a specific clan group). Because of this historical fact, the three surviving *kindi* members, who were all descendants in the Banamunyaga maximal lineage to which Lupanzula belonged, retained certain privileges and duties in the initiations of *kindi*.

It is noteworthy that the *kindi* Musenge, present at the initiations, was the oldest among the surviving *kindi* but the most junior among the surviving *kindi* in achieving the *lutumbo lwa kindi* grade. The *kindi* Kantamba, who was a younger agnatic relative of Musenge, was the most senior among the surviving *kindi* in having achieved the full grade of *kindi*. This ambiguity obviously created other rights and duties.

Against this background, I analyze in some detail all the *lutumbo lwa kindi* rites in which I participated among the Beiankuku. In all initiations at this level, it is normal to witness some rites in which mostly sculptures occur and others in which only natural and manufactured objects are presented and interpreted. Starting with the spectacular entrance (*lukenye*) of the eight *kindi* and their initiated *kanyamwa* wives into the initiand's village, the initiates, led by two of their preceptors (*nsingia*) moved slowly and silently shaking their bundles of reeds (*masanzi*). As they had entered the plaza of the initiand's village, one preceptor dialogued with the village

senior and the prospective *kindi* initiand, inquiring whether or not they were welcome and whether all necessary preparations for the initiations themselves had been made. They took some rest and settled in the houses reserved for them and were presented with food by the women of the village. When the drummers and singers were ready, they began the proceedings. Normally, the *kindi* rituals would take from four to six days; in the present case they were reduced to three full days by allowing less leisure time.

The first rite, called *Mizegele* (lit. wickerwork rattles), revolved around the presentation to the initiand of the *muzegele* rattle (made in wickerwork and shaped like halters). The preceptors danced holding several rattles bundled together. In this rite, harmonious relationships and respect for old age, and not just for seniority, were emphasized. Among *kindi* there is no secrecy, no attempt to hide things. Group cohesion and continuity are of the essence. It is a great joy to be together for the supreme purpose of following the ideals of the fathers. All these ideas were presented in seven sung aphoristic texts, dance action, and manipulation of objects. At the end of the rite, the initiand received from his male tutor (*mukomi*) the *muzegele* rattle, one of the symbols of his status.

In the second rite, called *Lusaga* (lit. collaret of dried raffia leaves and petioles), the candidate's wife, as the future senior *kanyamwa*, acquired the right to wear the *muzombolo* head ornament (pieces measuring ten centimeters high, made of polished raffia leaf midrib or *lububi* vine, fixed vertically to a small wickerwork disk adorned with cowry shells and topped mainly with chicken and red parrot-tail feathers). Five aphorisms were sung in conjunction with the use of dried raffia petioles and leaves (*ibondol mabondo; masasa*), from which the precious raffia fibers (*mpeku*) are extracted. The *kanyamwa* women were referred to as Bamibiki (members of the raffia fruit clan); they were asked to wear their head ornaments proudly, as their exclusive status symbol. When the sponsor (*kakusa*) arrived, everything could proceed and the *lusaga* collaret was removed from the entrance of the initiation house where it had served as a sign of closure. The rite could now proceed in the manner the ancestors wanted. The rite is not as frightening as the initiand might have thought. The initiand must not attempt to do things he is incapable of achieving.

The third rite, called *Kilinkumbi* (the drum name for pangolin), featured nine small ivory masks (*lukungu* – skull) attached to a small fence (*pala*) erected behind the initiation lodge on the village grounds. One of each of the eight masks belonged to each *kindi* present; the ninth had been kept in trust by the guardian of the tomb (*mukondi we idumba*), who was a fairly remote agnate of a deceased *kindi* whose status was going to be acquired by the initiand. At the center of these nine ivory masks, hung a large wooden mask, in different rites variably referred to as *muminia*, *kikuni*, *idimu*, or *musumbu* – terms that emphasize, in one way or another, the world of the dead (*bafa*), the ancestors (*bashumbu*), and the masters of the land (*banenekisi*) – their power, their social and ritual significance. On top of the fence stood an ivory figurine representing a stylized four-legged animal with a long tail, called *kilinkumbi*, the drum name for the giant pangolin (*ikaga*) after which the entire rite was named. At some distance from this fence, stood an extremely rare wooden cane (named *matakale*) topped by an ivory figurine. At the upper rim of the *pala* fence stood a large wooden animal figurine (generic term, *mugugundu*) to which some pangolin scales had been attached (specific term, *ikaga* – term for giant pangolin, *manis gigantea*). A feather rope linked the *pala* fence and the cane, attached to each. After all this had been carefully prepared and displayed, various dance and song actions took place in front and around the *pala*, without any handling of the masks; they simply remained stagnant on the fence. In the eleven aphorisms sung on this occasion, emphasis was placed on

the oneness (*ikongo*) of the participants, the many persons, alive and dead, who had gone through a long process to achieve these rites in past decades, on *kindi* solidarity, mutual support, and the need to be attentive to advice. Emphasis was also placed on the long path travelled by the initiand – symbolized by the distance between the fence and the staff (linked by the feather rope) – that had finally led him to the place “where all the animals are” (*idambo*, term representing the long-lasting hunts during which the hunters finally arrive at a place where a group of animals gather to lick salt or drink), a manner of referring to the paraphernalia the initiand was going to receive). All this signified that prolonged efforts by the initiand and the cooperation of a broad spectrum of kin and *kindi* (living or dead) had culminated in greatness and quasi-ritual immunity. Ideas about seduction and the *kindi* initiates far-reaching perspicacity and memory were also put into perspective: a *kindi* is like the pangolin “who does not forget when it dawns.” (meaning: the pangolin is a nocturnal animal that withdraws into his hole as soon as day is dawning; the *kindi* knows when trouble is lurking).

The small ivory masks placed on the fence were considered to be the subjects and guardians of the lord of the land (*nenekisi; kikuni*), represented by the *muminia* mask. This large wooden mask is not the representation of an ancestor (as some writers on African art seem to think), but pertains to the historical and socio-ritual concept of unity and cohesion of the participating Banamusiga clan group, Kalitu lineage. The mask had been passed on in virtually a straight agnatic descent line within Kalitu lineage of the Banamusiga, from the aged *kindi* who was currently the guardian (*mukumbilizizi*) on behalf the Banamusiga community to his great-grandfather, the earliest remembered *kindi* to have had charge of this mask. Ownership of this mask seems to be a unique privilege of the Banamusiga-Banakalitu who were known as great carvers from the past. It was used, always kept by the Banakalitu *kindi*-guardian, in lower and higher initiations among the Beiankuku-Banamusiga and other clan groups such as the Beianangi. The wooden animal figurine belonged to a preceptor (preceptors often have one or other exclusive initiation object; it is passed along a patrilineal and matrilineal line of related preceptors).

Finally, the *pala* fence with the masks was placed flat on the ground; the initiand received the small ivory mask that had belonged to a related *kindi*. The initiates, calling themselves Banamombo (Anointed-ones, referring to their well-oiled bodies), left for *itima*, “the place where other initiation objects are.” The aphorisms that were sung and acted out emphasized the following thoughts: “a group that holds too many skulls of dead men is dying out because of too much sorcery in that group.” Because of a group’s lack of true leadership, sorcery, as the symbol of all evils (death, sickness, injury, misdeeds, bad luck), caused that group’s deterioration. They identify that leadership is important to any group as is the potential mutual help one could expect in all difficulties in a close-knit group. By the presence of this large *muminia* mask, emphasis is placed on historical fact (*kindi* came from elsewhere) and historical truth (Lupanzula got it among his maternal uncles, the Babongolo, and thus the Beiankuku-Banamusiga can organize it independently), cohesion and esprit de corps in all occasions. True leadership is the essence of the survival of the group.

The fourth rite, called *Keibi* (lit. small door), featured a small painted door in light parasol wood planks topped by feather tufts used in dance and interpreted. The door was painted with black and white dots, as if it were a leopard hide. Two aphorisms were important: “Spots of the leopard: they frighten the goats” to criticize one who is afraid of the initiations and the conditions they impose, as opposed to the one who encourages people to enter and evolve in

Bwami: “Little elephant (*kalupepe*) calls for the large herd (*idumbu*).” This rite included references to filial piety, the importance of listening to advice, and to the practice of hospitality extended to both kin and strangers.

The fifth was the *Kabubi* rite named after the liana (*lububi/mbubi – Erymospatha*) much used for tying and binding things together and plaiting the rims around calabashes, jars, baskets. One end of the liana was fixed to the ceiling of the initiation house and a feather tuft (*idumbi*) was attached to the other end of the liana. No other objects occurred. Although the rite was organized in the initiation house, exceptionally, lower ranking *kindi* (*kyogo kya kindi and musage wa kindi*) were allowed to witness the action. In nine aphorisms danced and sung, accompanied by drums, emphasis was placed on: the strength of the preceptor (*nsingia*), the power of kinship, and the great help one can expect from a broad range of maternal uncles provided one has maintained harmonious relations with them. One aphorism implied that it is a bad idea to leave one’s own group and to die in an area to which one does not belong.

The sixth, the *Itutu* rite, took place on the roof of the initiation house. A preceptor and his *kanyamwa* wife, together with the initiand and his wife, were seated at the center of the roof. A *kindi* sat on the lowest rung of the ladder made to allow access to the roof. Another *kindi* was seated at the entrance of the initiation house. All the *kanyamwa* present standing near the initiation house looked up at the rooftop. All those who were present witnessed the greatness of the *kindi* and his *kanyamwa*. Before any action took place, the father-in-law of the candidate requested a goat from his son-in-law “because this was a true marriage, the link established through this rite between candidate and his wife being perpetual.” As they climbed onto the roof, they sang that they were climbing the slopes of steep mountains. As they were seated on the roof, they were like “birds in tall trees enjoying the sun”. The *nsingia* waved a large pack of dried phrynum and then some stems (*itungulu*) to signify in several aphorisms the importance of having and maintaining the support of strong and numerous kin (symbolized here in the items used in the construction for which collective labor was needed), not to rely on vain talk, show open-mindedness and generosity. In a final action, both the preceptor and the candidate handled a fire drill, without producing fire at first, then succeeding to do so. All this meant the need to engage only in actions for which one has the qualifications, the means and the support. All these ideas were expressed in the twenty-six aphorisms sung and danced by the initiates and the drummers below at the initiation house.

The seventh rite was *Ibago ya nzogu* (lit., the skinning of the elephant). Here, the preceptor, the *kindi* and *kanyamwa* used an ivory spoon or small ivory knife to symbolically stab the roof of the initiation house; that is, to initiate the forthcoming destruction of the initiation house and the end of the initiations. Throughout the rite, the aphorism and related dance action spoke of the initiation house as if it were an elephant. Everybody came to help cup him up and bring the meat to the village. For the specialized elephant hunter, it is a great achievement and joy when he kills an elephant. And so it is an achievement for the person who is now near to finishing the long journey that lead to *lutumbo lwa kindi*. The pertinent ideas and principles were expressed in thirteen aphorisms sung and danced by *kindi* and *kanyamwa*: to make sure the valuables (*bikulo*) are ready in order to finish the initiation; not to scorn an older participant saying he does nothing else but eat; not scorn those who did *kindi* before; not to engage in controversy; to do everything cautiously; have many children to follow your path.

During the eighth rite, *Kankunde ka kindi*, the large *muminia* mask, seen earlier, was worn slanting on the forehead by a preceptor who, under the mask's fiber beard covering his face, was handling a turtle carapace. In the mask and in the movements of the turtle carapace, he represented "Kikulu, Great Old Kindi who has come for the "dances" and will not leave until everything pertaining to the initiation is correctly done and finalized. The Old Man and the turtle are symbols of slow, cautious, deliberate action. The masker was then fed some ripe banana with an ivory spoon as a gesture of the welcome and care that must be given to an old person and a stranger visiting. The masker, shaking the *muzegele* rattle, then characterized Ntumba (lit. aardvark) being smoothly pulled out of its lair¹ by using a liana string to which two aardvark claws were attached. This sequence represents the smooth progression of the initiation, with everything ready, transparent, and in good order.

In the ninth rite, *Ibugebuge* (lit. a place of danger), the ivory masks were attached to a structure of three standing poles and a laterally attached pole (*pala*), outside the initiation house. While hanging the masks on the structure, the *kindi* talked about themselves as: "bats, one by one inside (the cave; the closed space) they build their house." The *kindi* stood behind the fence; the *kanyamwa* women stood on the opposite side at some distance facing to fence and the *kindi*.

This was followed by an unusually complex set of actions in the initiation house and, near the structure with the masks. Two preceptors were dressed with a large number of feather bunches worn at the hips (*bingonzengonze*), *idumbi* hats with porcupine quills in their mouth, and wooden masks on their forehead and temples. They emerged from the initiation house and moved quickly circling between the standing *kindi*, then the *kanyamwa*. They then returned to the initiation house and repeated this action several times. Each time, after circling two of the standing initiates they stopped, facing each other and shivering. Then they stopped, faced each other, turned their back to each other, then they sat head to head, belly to belly, closely; they tackled each other, shivering, crawling. Finally, one floored the other and laid on him. Only one aphorism was sung: "I climb the *nkungu* tree, a dangerous situation is already prepared/present. Nabakama munkungu ibugebuge likwanga".

The ensuing interpretations were as follows. The term *ibugebuge* itself, which is the name of the rite and part of the aphorism, refers to a dangerous, ritually polluting, situation such as "eating pangolin meat in the forest" (i.e. not informing the initiate who holds the right of the pangolin knife and the initiate who has the right of *kibabulilo* (synging, distributing the scales, claws, and meat of the pangolin); seducing a *kanyamwa* or one of father's wives; claiming to be able undergo the initiation but proving incapable of achieving it. The maskers come around the standing, shivering initiates and tell them that they are in a dangerous situation; that violence is approaching from all sides but the *kindi* is unable to stop it (recalling the customary practice of a *kindi* shaking the *muzegele* rattle to stop attackers from assailing their village). When the maskers circle around the *kanyamwa* women and shiver, they symbolize someone who is trying to seduce a *kanyamwa* (a major ritual offense). In this rite, there are many more references to the evils of combativity, seduction, restlessness, and immoderation – endlessly referred to as major offenses leading to dissention in and dissolution of the in-group.

¹ Hunters chase the aardvark out of its large den with smoke; in these circumstances, the otherwise sedate animal becomes violent and dangerous.

The tenth rite, *Mutulwa*, consisted in opening a basket and explaining its contents, comprising a number of wooden figurines. The basket was guarded on behalf of the *kindi* community by Kantamba, the most senior *kindi* in the group. The figurines were referred to in the sung aphorisms and dance actions by the following names:

- Kakulu ka mpito, Little-old-one of the *mpito*-hat
- Mukobania, Divider, Troublemaker
- Wayinda, Pregnant-Adulterous-Woman
- Kakulikuli, a species of talkative bird, standing for an Elder who gives advice and orders in the village
- Mukulu, Great-One-Who-Is-Given-an-Enema, bearing on the problems one gets when one faces him
- Mulamba, an old small female elephant tusk adorned with circle-dot designs (*bitondi*) representing a young man or woman roaming around and looking for trouble
- Ngozi (leopard), represented by a leopard skull, symbolizes the many kin weeping for the loss of the great *mwami*.
- Nsoko (chimpanzee), represented by a chimpanzee skull; refers to an elder who wronged those he was supposed to protect
- Ngimbi, a small ivory sculpture representing a deadly aquatic snake in an aphorism that warns a non-cautious young person of the dangers he/she may face.

During the eleventh rite, *Kasumba*, dance paraphernalia were displayed near the forest rim on a small table outside the initiation house. For the new *kindi*, they included: a large broad belt made in bongo antelope hide (*mukoma*) and a wickerwork hat (*mukuba*) studded with cowries and topped by part of an elephant tail; for the new *kanyamwa*: a feather tuft (*kingonzengonze*) and a raffia belt studded with cowries (*nyakyandoa*). These objects would be transmitted to the initiands. All are supreme insignia of the highest rank and the few words spoken in the aphorisms emphasized the perpetuity and greatness of the Bwami association and the fame of the high initiates.

In the twelfth rite, *Kinsamba* (lit. a multitude of mushrooms), individually-owned figurines (*igingal maginga*) in ivory or elephant bone were shown to the initiand without comments but with mumblings that resembled the tonal patterns of aphorisms as they are produced on the slit drums. At this stage, the initiand received the figurine that had belonged to a deceased kinsman whom he would, so to speak, succeed.

Following the initiation, I discussed with the *kindi* the names and meanings of the figurines displayed in this rite. Following was the information I was given:

- Kimatwematwe (Sameisomabili; Samatwemabili: Mr. Many-Heads; Mr. Two-Eyes, Mr. Two-Heads), refers to the *kindi*'s power of seeing, acting, judging
- Kakinga, Little-Woman, vagrancy led her into trouble
- Kakumi, Little-Woman, the wife of a *kindi*, she was a *musoga* – beautiful and good one – but adultery ruined her
- Kakazi ka mungu, Little-Wife-of-Great-One, she loved Tongue, i.e. flatteries
- Mukinga, Woman who is nice looking on the outside, but filled with witchcraft
- Kisesa/Kisebula, slanderer, seducer; represented by a warthog tusk: destroyer
- Kyenia
- Isabulema, Mr. Miserable/Mr. Stupid

- Isakati, Mr. Barricade; he marks his resin-producing tree as if it were his exclusive property

The thirteenth and ultimate rite was *Bele muno* (lit. “those here among us” – those who preceded us). In most ritual communities this rite coincided with the previously mentioned Kinsamba. The hats and rattles of all *kindi* present were placed in a circle (called *ziko*, lit. hearth). In the center of the circle stood a large wooden multifaced figurine called Kimino. This figurine was in the custody of Kantamba, the most senior in *kindi* grade among the *kindi* present. It represents the advent of the highest *kindi* initiation and legitimizes for the autonomous organization of a *kindi* initiation. In this rite, the initiand was led into the initiation house by two preceptors who were completely naked; they walked around the *ziko* display; then, all of the participants jumped across the display shouting their drum names. During this rite, there was no song or dance, no names were mentioned, no movements were made – just contemplation.

These rites serve several important functions. The initiand is presented several items that are the emblems of his status – these had been kept in trust by the *kindi* serving as his tutor (*mukomi*). They constitute the redistribution of goods in a wide community of individuals who have contributed to the initiation rites, as is exemplified in the following aphorism: “*Kindi ntaminye uta na bikulo bingi*” – one who does not have many goods/valuables does not complete the *kindi* initiation rites. They are proof of the great successful efforts on the part of the initiand and his immediate agnates to gain the support from several categories of maternal uncles, in-laws, and other cognatic relatives. They generate a feeling of festivity and delight because of the skill and beauty involved in acting, dancing, singing, drumming, for the beauty in dressing, for the harmony and *communitas* created. They provide an opportunity for the *kindi* to reemphasize the principles of the code of ethics, to stress the greatness of the Bwami association and of the *bami*, to evoke its membership known over several generations.

In the Beiankuku rites, the sculptures I observed in the *lutumbo wa kindi* initiations included the following:

- one large wooden mask (*muminia*)
- wooden masquettes (*lukwakongo*)
- ivory masquettes (*lukungu*)
- a small ivory figurine (*kalimbangoma*)
- a wooden quadruped (*mugugundu*)
- a medium-tall wooden figurine (*iginga*) that is part of the collectively-held basket containing several initiation objects
- a basket (*mutulwa*) containing several wooden sculptures and some exuviae
- ivory figurines (*iginga*), each with a specific, hidden, name that had been inherited from the previous possessor

Some of these objects were in “temporary” individual possession; others, were under collective control on behalf of a ritual community by an initiate of a certain specific status representing the lineage of the person who had originally introduced the *kindi* rites and also those who had the temporary custody of baskets containing initiation objects. These objects were brought to the initiation by the persons who had them, hidden in shoulderbags and a basket, and shown only in the appropriate rite.

In a given rite, only one such sculpture might occur; in others, several would be seen; some were danced with fixed on the body or held in the hand or they were secured on a display fence; others were just placed on the floor of the initiation house. None of the sculptures used in these initiations were carved recently or carved for the purpose of the rite; every one of them had been in the possession over three to four remembered generations of dead initiates of *kindi* grade.

In the trusteeship of the objects, there were several anomalies, which were said to be made in order to divert the attention of the repressive colonial government. Since Bwami had been dissolved due to colonial legislation, there had been no initiations in this group since 1948, meaning a period of four years. The succession of objects had thus been interrupted. One such anomaly was that Katamba as the most senior in the *kindi* grade he should not have had the trusteeship of the *mutulwa* basket, which should have been in the hands of the most recent *kindi* initiate (who had died). The wooden statue should have been a part of the collective basket and not be in trusteeship of Kantamba. It had been removed from the basket as a security measure (the baskets contained natural objects that were less conspicuous). Secondly, the collectively-held wooden statue should normally have been part of the *mutulwa* basket. Thirdly, several of the *kindi* present (eight) had more than their own figurine since they were holding them on behalf of kinsmen, alive or dead, who had never been and probably would never be initiated to *kindi*. These “surplus” objects were not shown at the initiation since the possible recipients were waiting for the government to lift its ban on Bwami. By the end of 1958, the ban was indeed lifted as a result of my research, despite missionary reactions against Bwami).