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Source: *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Jul., 1946), pp. 160-178

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#) on behalf of the [International African Institute](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1156321>

Accessed: 27/12/2013 08:22

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## THE BUYEYE

A SECRET SOCIETY OF SNAKE-CHARMERS IN SUKUMALAND,  
TANGANYIKA TERRITORY

*HANS CORY*

### INTRODUCTION

THE object of this paper is to describe the initiation ceremonies into the Buyeye, a society of snake-charmers, the main purpose of which is to give the members a knowledge of all matters concerning snakes, especially the cure of snake-bites. This knowledge enables members to handle snakes with impunity, although they only do so for purposes of propaganda.

It must not be forgotten, however, that, like almost all native societies founded for some specific purpose, the Buyeye has important social aspects, forming as it does a community in which the members are pledged to assist one another in the ordinary affairs of daily life. Their system of mutual help has engendered a strong sense of fraternal solidarity. Up to now the Buyeye (Buyeye, the society; Bayeye, the members of this society) have not sought to gain influence either politically or socially; they cannot even be considered as anti-clerical. In fact their membership includes pagans, Christians, and Muslims. On the other hand their tendency is to keep alive the old beliefs and this, coupled with their general conservatism, is an obstacle to missionary enterprise. It is most unlikely that any direct attempts to suppress the society would ever be successful, for this type of organization is bound to exist so long as the African feels it satisfies a need, and attempted suppression would merely be countered by greater secrecy.

The significance of the Buyeye cannot be properly appreciated unless we remember that it is only one of many Sukuma societies. The Basukuma have no obligatory ceremonies of initiation into the tribe; instead, every individual will join, and be initiated into, one or more societies, sometimes following his own choice as to which he shall join, sometimes taking the advice of a diviner. There are hunting societies, societies of snake-charmers, of porcupine-hunters, societies whose main object is to fight sorcery by magical means. There exists the Busambo, a guild of thieves, a number of others whose scope is purely social, and again others concerned exclusively with ancestor-worship and the practice of divination.

Three societies in Sukumaland are concerned with the treatment of snake-bite: the Buyeye, the Bugoyangi, and the Bununguli. The first two are exclusively societies of snake-charmers, but in the third, the porcupine society, the treatment of snake-bite is only of secondary importance. The Buyeye and Bugoyangi are very closely allied. The Bayeye and Bagoyangi may attend the ceremonies of either society and they also help one another frequently in medical matters.

There exists an abundance of tradition regarding the origin of these societies, but unfortunately it is so conflicting that it is quite impossible, at present, to express an opinion regarding this matter. Certain traditions are common to all these societies and may therefore have a value of truth. They all mention Ufipa, a district near

Lake Tanganyika, as their land of origin. It is said that a few men brought the medical knowledge of treating snake-bite to the districts north of Tabora, where it was accepted by some existing societies. In the course of time these societies specialized in the treatment of snake-bite and snake-charming and neglected their original purposes. Some customs of these original societies are preserved in the Buyeye. There once existed a society called ' Bukango ' to which only women were admitted; to-day one woman still participates in the initiation ceremonies of the snake-charmers without being a member herself. Further, it is customary for the Bayeye to beat the drum of the Mabasa (the society of all parents of twins) before the beginning of their ceremonies. The dances of both societies, Mabasa and Buyeye, resemble each other. The fact that there is no common tradition of origin among all units of the Buyeye is due to the tendency of each unit to deify its local founder.

The description given here of the initiation ceremonies of the Bayeye is based on a ceremony which lasted seven days and in which I myself participated. The ceremony took place some years ago at the village of Kabale in the Usule Chiefdom, District Shinyanga, Tanganyika Territory.

I must warn the reader that any account that one gives of the various ceremonies involved is apt to be misleading in that the writer naturally passes as quickly as possible from one part of the proceedings to another. His account, therefore, probably fails to show how long-drawn-out and tedious (to a European) the ceremonies often are. I would like to mention here that the hidden meaning of many a ceremony is not immediately comprehended; no explanation whatsoever is given and therefore the observer is often afraid that he may be overlooking major points because his attention is absorbed by unimportant, or even accidental, proceedings. The patience of the observer is tried out. For example, one may arrive for a ceremony in the cool of the early morning. Nothing happens, but at noon, when it is really hot, all the participants sally forth into the bush to collect roots. They come back later but again nothing happens until 11 p.m., when it is decided to hold some part of the rites. At last everything appears to be ready. The dancers put on their bells; the elders take their seats—but nothing happens. Someone has discovered that the potsherd is too small for the quantity of roots to be burned in it. Some of the members then go off to look for a larger potsherd. Half an hour passes; the dancers disperse, and when at last a suitable vessel is brought the medicines are prepared without the prescribed ritual. And so it goes on throughout seven days, haphazard to the last degree. The nominal superintendent, the *Ntangara*, cannot be there all the time and consequently leaves many of the details to assistants, whose efficiency is not increased by the consumption of large quantities of beer. However, in spite of all this everyone is very happy, except the European participant who is doubtless too critical as he is not awaiting the free distribution of meat and beer with the same eagerness as his friends. The haphazard nature of the initiation ceremonies does not worry the African. After all, the amount that can be learnt in a few days is small and the novice will remain in close touch with his teacher for years and will have the opportunity of learning as much as he wants then.

It is wrong to presume that all the members of the society are clever medicine-men. How good they are is firstly a matter of ability and secondly a question of how much they are prepared to pay for their instruction. At the initiation ceremony

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I attended, some of the novices who could not afford full payment were excluded from several ceremonies: thus the period of initiation may last two days (the cheapest) up to seven days for those who pay the fees in full. Should a stranger claim to be a member of the Buyeye and wish to participate in a ceremony, he is first required to answer certain questions to prove that he has been initiated. These questions and answers are taught in the initiation ceremony.

#### ARRANGEMENTS WITH THE NTANGARA

*Ntangara* is the name for a member of distinction within the society. This title is acquired by serving a long apprenticeship with an *ntangara*, at the end of which the master gives his pupil a box called *nhangara*, usually made from the bark of the miyombo tree (*Brachystegia* sp.). It contains: *Lupingu*, a shell similar to those worn by chiefs; *Hulukulu*, the feather of this bird; *Shingira shihanya*, the great *shingira* (the word denotes the magical part of any medicine); *various medicines*, partly medical, partly magical.

Should a man (women are not admitted as initiates) wish to join the Buyeye he must first find an *ntangara* and agree with him regarding the entrance fee, the amount of which is variable and is usually paid in instalments. One head of cattle and five shillings can be considered as a fair average price, but it is possible for a poor man to be initiated and receive full instruction by paying an entrance fee of between three and five shillings and doing work for the *ntangara* in house and field. It is customary for several men to be initiated at the same time, because the greater the number of initiates at a ceremony the less each individual is called upon to pay.

As soon as it is decided to hold a ceremony the *ntangara* summons the following people to attend: (1) *A Kifinda*: the master of the ceremonies. He is responsible for all the details, for the division of food, for erecting the ceremonial hut (the *ntanda*), he executes the traditional wall-paintings in the *ntanda*, &c. The *ntangara* himself merely supervises everything and supplies and administers the medicines. (2) Several *Banyangogo*: senior members of the society. The name is derived from *gogo* (a log), and these men have the right to sit upon logs during the ceremonies. (3) *Ninabo wa Bayeye*. The *ninabo* is a woman selected by the *ntangara*; she is required to cook for the *ntanda* and is responsible for keeping a ready supply of gruel in a calabash, as every stranger entering the *ntanda* must be served with this gruel. The *ninabo* is much respected by all novices and she is always a friend of the leading *ntangara*. (4) *Bahemba*. These are the pupils of the *ntangara*, both past and present.

#### IGONZI INOCULATION

*Igonzi* is the first rite and is performed at the house of the *ntangara*.

*Nzoka yagonzaga* means 'the snake is lying in a coil'. *Igonzi* denotes something coil-like; it does not denote a certain snake but the abstract idea of what, for want of a better word, we shall call 'snakehood'.<sup>1</sup>

In the *igonzi* ceremony a string is dipped in water; it is then rubbed in ashes and afterwards put round the belly of the novices. In this way the *ntangara* marks a line

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this article a differentiation will be made between explanations given by the natives themselves and those I have myself contributed; the latter will be in small print.

to guide him in making the necessary incisions in the novices' skin, into which he rubs a medicine called *lukago* to protect the initiate against evil influences. This medicine always consists of two parts. The first part is made from powdered roots of trees, the second is the *shingira* (the magical part of the medicine).

Example of a *lukago*-medicine: powdered roots of *mulugala* (*Cassipourea mollis*); of *mhubata* (*Royena Fischeri*); and of *nbudika* (*Schrebera koiloneurea*).<sup>1</sup>

The *Shingira*:

*ilagaja*: a splinter of a tree from which a man fell. The idea is that a hostile wizard will die like the man who fell from the tree.

*lukuba*: a splinter from a tree which has been struck by lightning, indicating the rapid effects of the medicine.

*kitashika*: a potsherd. As the pot used to fetch water never reached the house, so will the enemy fail to reach the place.

*bundamboku*: a puppy which has not yet opened its eyes. An ingredient to prevent the enemy from finding the place by making him 'blind'.

*busiga wa nzira*: sorghum on the path. A man who carried a bag with sorghum lost some grains on the path. The thoughts of the approaching enemy should be lost; he arrives at the spot but forgets his evil intentions.

*nyo ya nogi*: part of the female sex-organ of a sorceress. This ingredient gives to the whole medicine its magical power. It is used in very small pieces. There is a secret trade among the Bafumu (practitioners) in these ingredients.

The *igonzi* is considered to be the distinguishing mark of the Bayeye. One or two days after this rite of inoculation all initiates gather at the village of the novice who first approached the *ntangara* with a view to being initiated and who is considered as the leader of the other initiates throughout the ceremonies.

#### THE NTANDA

The *ntanda* is the ceremonial hut. It may be one of the huts of the village or a new one built especially for the occasion. In either case all the arrangements for it are in the hands of the *kifinda* whom we have already mentioned. Many of the ceremonies take place in the *ntanda*, which also serves as a schoolroom for instruction both in the secrets of the society and also in general good behaviour. During the initiation ceremonies the novices spend all their time in it unless called out for ceremonial purposes.

On approaching the *ntanda* the first thing that the visitor notices is the

I,<sup>2</sup> *Nshigiti*. This is a part of the stem of the *ndulansongo* (*Euphorbia* sp.) placed upright in the ground near the entrance of the hut. This *Euphorbia* is the *ntemi* (chief) of the Bayeye.

Each Sukuma society recognizes a *ntemi* (chief) among trees. It is a matter of conjecture whether the institution of planting the *nshigiti* is not a remnant of animistic beliefs of a time when ceremonies were performed under particular trees which were of ritual prominence.

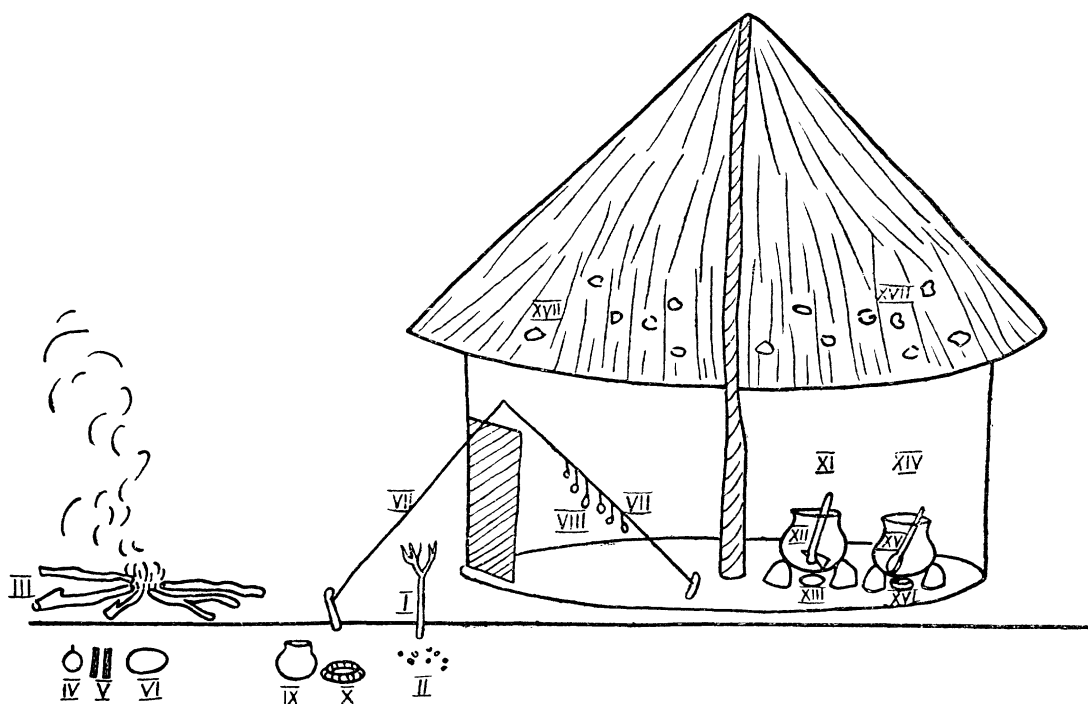
<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to give a reason for the choice of specific trees for the *lukago*-medicine. It may be that trees have been chosen which hold an important position in animistic beliefs or that it is the shape

which induces their use as symbols.

<sup>2</sup> These numbers denote the object as shown on the diagram (p. 164).

The ritual of planting the *nshigiti* includes an offering to the *ntemi*, the *ndulansongo*. (There is an indication that this Euphorbia is not acknowledged by all Bayeye as their *ntemi*-tree and that local variations exist.) This offering consists of—

II, a seed of every type of grain grown in the neighbourhood, placed by the *kifinda* in the hole before the stem is planted. The *kifinda* requires first all the Bayeye present to spit on the seeds and he then places them in the hole, reciting the following prayer: 'Grant that our medicines be strong, that we all remain healthy during the



ceremonies, that our novices prosper in the future and become rich through the power of your medicines.' Scenes of this kind are always very impressive in their simplicity, because they contrast so strongly with the generally unceremonial attitude of natives.

III. About thirty feet from the door of the *ntanda* a fire kindled with fire-sticks burns continually throughout the ceremonies.

In all initiation ceremonies of this type the fire is kindled in the primitive way, thus accentuating the antiquity of the society. This fire is not allowed to go out; I have been told that if this should happen it would be considered a very bad omen and all further proceedings probably would have to be stopped. The importance of this fire indicates its ritual significance.

Under the fire-place are buried the following things :

IV, the fruit of the *ntulanhu* (*Solanum incanum*), split down the middle and filled with *lukago*-medicine. The purpose of the fruit is to protect the place from evil influences.

V, a few wooden pegs made from the *mbudika*-tree (*Schrebera koiloneura*). Each of these is about the size of the little finger. The name of the *mbudika*-tree signifies that its twigs are easily broken, as will be the power of evil influence.

VI, the *shoyatala*, which is a grinding-stone abandoned by its owner. The underlying idea is that any evil influence will be as ineffective as the discarded grinding-stone. If one of the spectators should say or think: 'What a fuss about this Buyeye. The Bayeye have no good *lukago*. I will try to bewitch them with my medicine so that they get confused'; then his medicine would be as ineffective as the *shoyatala*.

Beyond the fire (III) is the

VII, *ndulira* (*ndulira* = gall; here used to represent the poison glands of snakes). Passing from a peg of *lugala* wood (*Acacia mellifera*) in the ground outside the *ntanda* through an aperture in the wall and thence to a similar peg in the floor of the *ntanda* is stretched a rope called *ndulira*. To that part of it which is inside the *ntanda* are attached fruits of the *itindula* (*Solanum* sp.).

VIII. The pegs of the *lugala*-tree (*kulugala* means 'to bind') denote that should a wizard enter the *ntanda* with intent to cause harm, he will instantly become bound or tied and unable to cast his spell. The rope is symbolical of the snakes and the fruits attached to it represent the poison glands (*ndulira*) which have given the name to the whole apparatus.

Under the *lugala*-peg which fixes the rope outside the *ntanda* are buried the following things:

IX, the *lukalabiro* (*kukalaba*, to wash): an earthenware pot such as is commonly used for washing-water. The pot is carefully polished and decorated with red and white spots, red ochre and the excrement of the python being used for the purpose. The pot is the symbol for a hostile wizard who has been overcome by the Bayeye. The medicines of the wizard have been inferior to those used in the *ntanda*.

X, a *nsingo* (*kusinga*, to twist). This is a pad made from twisted *lugowi*-grass (*Cynodon dactylon*). It is normally used for protecting the top of the head when carrying loads; here the *nsingo* denotes the strength and cohesion of the Bayeye society.

The pot and pad are buried together to indicate the fact that the hostile element has been defeated by the strength and cohesion of the society.

The paraphernalia which I have described in the foregoing have mainly the task of protecting the *ntanda*—the centre of the initiation rites—against all hostile intentions. The multitude of protecting medicines discloses the intensity of the superstitious fear in the African's mentality.

Inside the *ntanda* the visitor will find two huge earthenware pots called *mamhonga*, both filled with native beer.

XI. The first pot, which also contains XII, an axe, and under which is placed XIII, a copper bangle, is called *ngosha* (the man). The copper bangle is an heirloom

passed down from father to son and lent for the occasion by the *ntangara*. The axe denotes manhood, whilst the copper bangle indicates the presence of the paternal ancestors.

XIV. The second pot, which contains XV, a pot-ladle, and underneath which is placed XVI, a *lupingu* (see page 162), is called *nkima* (the woman). The pot-ladle denotes womanhood, whilst the *lupingu* (for reasons which may have reference to the maternal ancestors of the *ntangara* in this special case) indicates the presence of the maternal ancestors.

At another initiation I saw a *ngera* (native needle) and a *nsingo* (twisted pad) used as symbols of womanhood and put into the *nkima*-pot. These symbols were explained to represent the female sex-organ.

XVII. *Irunde* (celestial globe). The inside of the roof of the *ntanda* is studded with pieces of raw cotton to denote the stars.

Otherwise the *ntanda* is without any furniture. The novices have to sleep on the bare ground. The walls of the *ntanda* are carefully replastered and decorated with wall-paintings. Some of these are obligatory and should not be missing in any *ntanda*; some are merely additional decorations carried out by visitors. I shall confine my description only to the former.

The artist works in three colours: for white he uses *ndoba* (chalky earth) or *naa* (python excrement); for red he uses *ngula* which is red earth (ochre) bought from the Masai who employ it in painting their bodies; and for black he uses *milage*, paste of soot.

On the left of the door the artist paints three snakes one above the other.

(1) *Nhunga masaka* (overhanging the forest): a red painting of a mythological reptile of enormous length, which is only to be seen in the early morning and then only by the select few who have attained the heights of magical knowledge (it may be a personification of the morning mist); (2) *Igonzi*, a white snake, which has already been mentioned (see page 162); and (3) *Swira*, a black snake, which is a picture of a real reptile (*Naia* sp.).

Passing farther to the left round the wall of the hut we find in sequence: (4) *Ng'weje na kitanga bazugi*: moon and evening star (like the Turkish arms); *kutanga, kutangilwa*, to come early, to precede; *bazugi*, people who cook; to come early at the time before people start preparing their evening meal. (5) *Limi na hangaya*: sun and morning star; *hangaya* from *kugaya*, to die; the appearance of the morning star announces the end of the night. (6) *Kipwa* (in the north of Sukumaland called *chu*): the dry season, represented here by a white circle. (7) *Kitiku*: the rainy season, represented here by a black circle. (8) *Ikingo*: the morning twilight, represented here by a broad red stripe. *Ikingo* is generally used as a symbol of knowledge. (9) *Ita lya bashi*: the rainbow, painted as concentric semicircles (red, white, and black); *ita*, bow; *bashi*, hunters. As in many other native ceremonies the rainbow appears as the symbol of fertility of the soil.

Many of the paintings are very small despite the space available, and although they are of deep ritual significance they are but poorly executed.



## AN ATTEMPT AT EXPLAINING THE SYMBOLISM OF THE NTANDA'S CONTENTS

The following explanations may be debatable. I have followed the principle that nothing is incidental in ceremonies as long as it constitutes an essential part of them and is repeated wherever they are performed. If there are stars painted on the ceiling and a coffee-pot is placed directly underneath, the question arises whether or not the coffee-pot is a part of the ceremonies. If it is, then there must exist some deep connexion between stars and coffee-pots, and if stars represent the 'celestial', the coffee-pot by contrast is likely to represent the 'terrestrial'. If the stars represent 'immortality', the coffee-pot is most likely to represent 'mortality'; and so on. Three snakes painted on a wall may merely be a picture of snakes; but in the *ntanda*, where the idea of symbolism is present in the mind of the initiators, pictures of snakes or any other paintings and objects, if they constitute an essential part of the ceremonies, must necessarily have a symbolic meaning. Often it is not possible to obtain explanations of these symbolic meanings from the Africans themselves. If we keep these points of view in mind the following and other explanations in this paper, while surprising, may after all not appear unfounded.

The finished *ntanda* appears to be symbolical of the universe as conceived by a snake-charmer; it is complete in space and time.

*In space:*

The *heaven* is depicted by  
stars (XVII), sun (5), moon (4).

The *earth* is depicted by  
snakes (1, 2, 3). In this case the mind of the African seems to have given rise to a picture of threefold character: (1) abstract, the *igonzi*; (2) mythological, *nhunga masaka*; (3) real, *swira*;  
human beings (XI male and XIV female);  
the three main features of the Buyeye: (8) *ikingo*, knowledge; (X) *nsingo*, union of members; (9) *ita lya bashi*, prosperity of the society.

*In time:*

*Eternal* time is represented by the two main recurring seasons: (6) *kipwa*, the dry season; (7) *kitiku*, the rainy season.

*Terrestrial* time is represented by the (XIII) copper bangle (*itendele lyaza*), paternal ancestors; (XVI) *lupingu*, maternal ancestors.

## KUKAGA NTANDA

As soon as the *ntanda* is erected the *kifinda* and one helper prepare more medicines to protect the *ntanda* against evil influence. They carve small pegs from the wood of the *ngembe*-tree (*Dalbergia melanoxylon*). From the *ntangara* they get *lukago*-medicine, which they mix with groundnut-oil. This they smear on the pegs. At night-time they leave the *ntanda*, take off their clothes, and put the pegs on different spots into the ground around the *ntanda*. At each peg they throw themselves to the ground, thus emphasizing the effect which the medicine will have on persons approaching with evil intention. After this teachers and pupils settle down in the *ntanda*.

Life between the different ceremonies is varied. Frequent visitors appear. As they approach the hut they sing a set song and the novices respond from inside. A visitor

will often add pictures to those already on the walls and will explain the meaning of them. During their stay in the *ntanda* the novices learn a number of songs. Here are a few examples:

1. All the wizards are angry.  
They realize they must die;  
The strength of the medicines will do it.  
We will remain alone in the world.
2. Don't forget our journey to Lusuwi in Utusi,  
When many Bayeye were killed.  
Therefore if you bring our drums  
Into districts where nobody knows us  
Do not look at the girls.  
This may cause trouble.
3. You will receive knowledge of many medicines.  
Never use them for evil purpose.
4. You mothers of the ant-hills (the snakes)  
With the glaring eyes,  
Do not hurt us.  
We are your children.

A further feature in the life of the novices in the *ntanda* is the so-called *luyege*, i.e. the pupils have to suffer various discomforts. (We find the idea of hardship and trial in all initiation ceremonies.) The *luyege* is not punishment, it is imposed without there being faults on the part of the novices. For instance, the initiate may be made to carry a bow on his head with its string under his nose, or he may be made to carry a heavy stone on his head for some appreciable time. Again a plank may be put across his legs on which the *kifinda* steps. There is also the 'luyege of the trap' when the initiate is made to stand on one leg with his body bent forward. The hardship may be mitigated if the novice pays a few cents.

Another trial is *nditimya*. At night the *kifinda* imitates the roaring of a lion with a drum he has for this purpose. The novices are sent out one at a time to challenge the lion (*anukulagi shimba*).

While in the *ntanda* one must only use the ritual names for certain objects. Failure to do so results in a fine.

These words derive neither from another language nor from an older dialect of the Sukuma language. They are words of picturesque speech. For instance:

Fire (Sukuma *moto*) is called *kamundi*, which word is derived from *kumunda*, to blow up a fire. Chicken (Sukuma *ngoko*) is called *wasumula*, which word is derived from *kusumula*, to run quickly. Pot (Sukuma *nungu*) is called *mumbwa*, which word is derived from *kubumba*, to knead clay. Skin of a wild cat (Sukuma *nyilili*) is called *kashimba*, which means a small lion.

#### THE CEREMONIES IN THE IPORU IDO (small thicket)

On the first night in the *ntanda* the novices are led into the bush for the first time. They are accompanied by the *kifinda*, as leader, and by some *banyangogo*, as his helpers. During the evening a small space in the bush has been cleared and there the three

*mabanga* have been prepared (*ibanga* sing. means 'something absolutely unexpected'). These are three small heaps of earth, each about 20 cm. high and about one yard apart. The first is called *Hansaji*; the second, *Hamgole* or *Ihojo*; the third, *H'ikuru*.

In the *hansaji* heap is stuck a straw of *manya bu saji* (mad grass); in the *hamgole* heap is stuck a twig of the *ng'ochangoko*-tree (*Randia* sp.) and a *kibumbuswa* is buried there.

The *kibumbuswa* is a small darkish termite heap of round shape. It has two symbolic meanings. Firstly it is a symbol of esteem, because if for any reason people are assembled in the bush the elders use these heaps as natural chairs on which to sit. Secondly it is a symbol of communal spirit, because the white ants living as one family in one abode are an example of communal spirit.

Under the *H'ikuru* heap is placed a large piece of the root of the *linzuzu*-tree (*Combretum longispicatum*), and over the heap two arches of the twigs of the same tree are arranged. Over the top of the twigs is stretched the skin of a wild cat (*nyilili*).

Each of the *mabanga* is surrounded by three circles, one black, one white, and one red, drawn with black *lukago*-medicine, flour, and ochre earth respectively (the threefold snake-symbol).

On the way to the *mabanga* the novices sing:

Who ever looks at us with envy  
May become blind.  
Who ever pursues us, the Bayeye,  
May die;  
He may burst like clouds.

As soon as they approach the spot all take off their clothes and proceed, marching backwards. They are led first to the *hansaji*. There they turn round and run a few times round the earth-heap singing:

Look down, you ancestors of the Buyeye,  
Look down at us.

This is repeated at the second and third heap after which they return to the first. The *kifinda* then stands with his legs apart in front of the heap and each initiate in turn crawls between them and shoots off an arrow into the heap, the others in the meantime singing:

I hit by shooting an arrow.

This is repeated in the same way at the *hamgole* and *h'ikuru* heaps. Each time a pupil shoots, the *kifinda* asks: 'What is your name?' and the initiate answers, choosing as his name the name of some snake. He will retain this name as a member of the Buyeye. After the novices have shot off their arrows at the three *mabanga* they return to the *hansaji* heap and sit down. The *kifinda* explains: 'You all have heard others speaking about the Buyeye. You knew the word, but you did not know what it means. Now the secrets of the Buyeye have been revealed to you, but do not forget that they are great secrets. Should one of you speak to the uninitiated about them and betray the Bayeye, such a man is liable to become insane. Like the *saji*-grass he will be blown away from his house. He will run into the bush like a

madman and eat his pubic hairs. Therefore this place is called *hansaji*, the place of the madman.'

After these words the *kifinda* takes a blade of the *saji*-grass, breaks it into pieces, and throws these over the heads of the novices, saying:

As this grass goes with the wind  
So will the betrayer of the Buyeye.

After this all proceed to the *hamgole*-heap and sit down. The *kifinda* explains: 'You are now to become Buyeye, but the way is full of thorns. The lessons are arduous. In the *ntanda* you will have to endure pain. But after you have passed all the necessary teaching your reward will be knowledge. Then you will sit in the circle of the elders on the *kibumbuswa*. On account of your knowledge you will gain esteem.'

The *kifinda* then puts the thorn-twigs on the head of each novice for a second and shows them the *kibumbuswa*.

They proceed to the *h'ikuru* and sit down. The *kifinda* explains: 'All knowledge is useless without respect for the old people and without sociability towards the other members of the Buyeye. During your stay in the *ntanda* you may suffer punishment from them, but afterwards you must not bear any grudge. Nothing is done in the *ntanda* for spite, but only for your instruction. Later if you meet an elder or any member of the Buyeye, always be polite, hospitable, and helpful. He may be a *ntangara*, a man from whom you may be able to learn a lot, or who may, if you insult him, use his knowledge against you. . . . Look here. Under this heap of earth is lying a thing. Can you tell whether it is big or small? You cannot.' (The *kifinda* digs out the big root.) 'You see a big root was hidden here, a *ntangara*, a *nkuru* (an elder). Do you understand?'

The *kifinda* then gives the order to destroy the *mabanga*, after which all return to the *ntanda*, singing:

We are clever now.  
Let us go home.

It was not possible to obtain any explanation from the people for the proceedings in front of the three *mabanga*. Similar ceremonies are performed in all initiation rites, Sukuma as well as those of other tribes. Everywhere this particular part of the ceremonies is looked upon as the most important and secret moment of the whole initiation.

I repeat the proceedings, adding one which is, as will be seen, transferred to another part of the Buyeye ceremonies for a certain reason.

1. Running round the *mabanga*.
2. Lying on a thorn-bed and wearing a belt of thorns. (This is the transferred ceremony.)
3. Crawling through the outstretched legs of the *kifinda*.
4. Shooting off of an arrow.
5. Receiving a new name.

1. The introduction to the actual ceremony is always exhausting for the novices; they are forced to run, sometimes driven to greater speed by use of thorn-twigs; they are always naked and approach the ceremonial place, marching backwards (the latter being symbolic for 'head first' *in situ nascendi*). *This running represents the throes of birth—the first stage of the rite de passage.*

2. In other initiation ceremonies the initiates have to crawl through thorn-twigs or buffalo beans. In the present case—as will be seen later (page 172)—the novices have to lie on a thorn-bed and to wear a belt of thorns. *This use of thorns represents the 'trauma of birth' (birth pains of the child)—the second stage of the rite de passage.*

3. The next phase explains itself. The legs of the delivering person are apart and the head of the child protrudes. *This position illustrates the moment of birth: the third stage of the rite de passage.*

4. The symbolism of this act is less clear, but the corresponding act in other ceremonies throws a light on it. There the novices are led into the bush to the *ntemi*-tree (see page 163). One or two roots of this tree are exposed. As soon as the novices arrive, they are ordered to fall down on their faces before the tree and to shut their eyes. Blood is smeared on their heads; then they are ordered to get up and to shoot an arrow at the exposed root.

In the *Bufumu*, *Bumanga*, and *Mabasa*—all Sukuma organizations concerned with ancestor-worship, divination, and birth of twins respectively—each novice at the moment of shooting off the arrow calls upon his specific clan-animal (Totem). I give an example: If a novice of one of the above organizations belongs to the *Basiha*-clan, he will shoot off the arrow exclaiming: *natula siswe wa lambo*: 'I shoot our father of the grasshoppers.' For the shooting at the root I cannot find an explanation other than one based on the doctrine of the Oedipus-complex which is here manifest in an action.

5. In this ceremony, as in life, the birth is followed by naming. *The initiation into the Buyeye culminates in a very explicit ceremonial of symbolic rebirth.*

The founders of the Buyeye and its minor prophets have borrowed rites from the initiation ceremonies of societies which have a spiritual rather than a practical significance; hence the proceedings of the Buyeye-initiation ceremonies have, to a certain extent, no relation to the purpose of the society. For instance, the shooting of the arrow at the *mabanga* is only an adaptation of the shooting at the roots of the *ntemi*-tree.

The *mabanga* embody symbols of the practical aspects of the snake-charmers' society, namely: keeping the secret of the society (*hansaji*); knowledge (*hamgole*); respect and harmony among the members (*h'ikuru*); and the shooting at these symbols does not make sense, whilst it has its logical place in societies concerned with ancestor-worship. (Always presuming that we acknowledge the existence of the Oedipus-complex.)

#### KALILI (the small bed)

The next morning the *kifinda* and some helpers collect branches from the following trees: *ng'ochangoko* (*Randia* sp.), *nama* (*Combretum Guenzii*), *ntundulu* (*Dichrostachys glomerata*). Near the entrance into the *ntanda* the *kalili* is arranged. The twigs of the *nama* represent the four bars of a bed, the twigs of the *ng'ochangoko* the mattress; the huge thorns of this tree are exposed about 5 cm. out of the soil. While making the bed the men sing:

We prepare the back of the crocodile.

The next task is to pound the *ntundulu*-leaves, singing the while:

Pound the medicine, hurry up.

One man uses the pestle, the others sitting round the mortar with their knuckles pressed against it. As the first man lifts the pestle so the others lift the mortar. As

the pestle descends so does the mortar. From a distance this looks most extraordinary, as only the top part of the mortar is then visible.

The green mash is mixed with a little water. Some of this is sprinkled over the *kalili*, the rest being carefully rubbed on the back and around the hips of the first novice. Then a long twig of the *ng'ochangoko* with its long thorns is put around the hips of the novice and he is led out of the *ntanda*. The novice stretches his arms straight upwards and the thorn-belt is gradually tightened by twisting its ends. Every thorn presses a mark in the body, but does not penetrate the skin. This act is performed outside the *ntanda* and in the presence of many spectators, who throw money, bracelets, and rings on the ground near the door of the *ntanda* as gifts for the actors. At last the belt is released and taken off. After this the back of the novice is again rubbed with the *ntundulu*-mash. The novice is laid down on the ground and the *ntangara* takes a little bow (made from a *nama*-branch) and an arrow (made from *nhenya* grass). Then sitting on the belly of the pupil he shoots the arrow at the centre of the forehead, upper arms, &c., and wherever he thus marks a spot the *kifinda* makes a little incision, on which is smeared the *lukago*-medicine. (The powder is mixed with sheep-fat.) The *banyangogo* seize the novice by the arms, legs, and head and swing him over the *kalili*, singing:

Let us make him walk like a hawk.

Then the novice is laid down on the *kalili* on his back, while they sing:

Sleep in the bed which is not cold, you, our child.

The *ntangara* sits down again on the belly of the novice and gives him a handful of the *ntundulu*-leaves to chew, then he takes a long needle of copper (called *ngera*) and beginning with the lower lip the *ntangara* bores through both lips. So the novice remains for about two minutes during which time the *ntangara* and the other Bayeye purposely show great excitement, the spectators involuntarily.

I was sitting at the head of the novice who acted as my substitute and undoubtedly he had during the whole procedure not the slightest pain. It seems that the *ntundulu*-leaves contract the skin to such an extent that the skin is not easily penetrated by a thorn. I cannot explain why the penetration of the lips did not hurt and why the wound did not bleed. It may be that my *ntangara* had applied, besides the *ntundulu*, another medicine which he did not describe to me, but I doubt this, because the *ntundulu* and its characteristic qualities are well known all over the country.

The uses of the *ntundulu* are manifold in native medicine. It is used, for instance, in treatment with a vapour bath, where the practitioner picks up red-hot stones with bare hands and throws them into a pot of water. Before he does this he dips his hand into a *ntundulu*-lotion.

After about two minutes the *kifinda* takes the little bow and shoots an arrow to the west, exclaiming: 'If you despise the elders you will go there.' The *ntangara* then pulls out the needle and again gives the pupil some *ntundulu* to chew. He is lifted from the *kalili* and brought back into the *ntanda*, where his back is examined. Should there be any signs of blood these are taken to indicate that the initiate is a twin, or that his family has neglected some rite of ancestor-worship, or that he is a wizard. If one of the first two causes is decided upon his family is informed,

and eventually the advice of a diviner is taken regarding the matter. If, however, the novice is found to be a wizard nothing is done, for it is felt that so long as he does not practise his wizardry there is no reason to interfere. In no case is the news allowed to leak out to the general public.

It is my opinion that the idea of ordeal is not the purpose of the *kalili*. The rite of the thorn-bed was probably taken from far older initiation ceremonies in which it was a part of the *rite de passage*, the idea of ordeal being a later addition introduced to cover up the *ntangara's* ineptitude on occasions when he failed with his *ntundulu*-medicine and the pupil bled. This view is borne out by the fact that the result of the ordeal is of no consequence and that an initiate's admission into the society in no way depends upon it. Even in the days when to be suspected of witchcraft was a far more serious matter than it is to-day, neither the *Buyeye* nor other similar societies paid much attention to the results of this kind of ordeal.

The initiation rite or *rite de passage* is usually regarded by primitive peoples as a ceremony to be performed in strict secrecy, but the Bayeye have become exceptions to the general rule by turning it into a public show. Their faith in the *ntundulu* plant has enabled them to stage a performance that stirs the public imagination and acts as a very valuable means of attracting recruits.

#### KWALULA CEREMONY

After the *kalili* rites the novices wash thoroughly, oil their bodies, and adorn themselves with strings of beads and with armllets and leave the *ntanda* for the *kwalula* ('be changed') ceremony. Outside the *ntanda* a number of women, *bakulabera* (women who bring up children), are seated on low stools, one woman for each initiate. They may be relatives of the novices, friends, or just someone summoned by the *ntangara* to complete the necessary number. The initiates sally forth from the *ntanda*, singing: 'It is the time to bring out the children'; and each novice seats himself on a woman's lap. The *kifinda* then beats each novice on the head with a wild cat's skin, singing:

Keep quiet, child.  
Never curse your mother,  
Or you will become a fool.  
Never curse your father.

'Father' and 'mother' here refer to the novice's real parents.

The *kwalula*, a rite symbolical of babyhood, follows the *kalili*. This fact corroborates the opinion that the thorn-bed is a part of the *rite de passage* rather than an ordeal. The idea of considering the initiates as newly born children is found in all initiation ceremonies which have come to my knowledge. At some the novices are washed and are given new clothes, at others they are carried on the backs of friends, when they finally leave the initiation hut, at others they are assembled outside the hut where they sit down with bent heads and are not allowed to speak until they have been given a few coins. Whatever may be the form of the ritual the idea of babyhood is apparent.

#### NSOYA (FEATHER) CEREMONY

This ceremony is arranged in the evening. Each novice takes a red cock which a relative has brought and spits on it, saying: 'I want to see if the omens are good

regarding my admission into the Buyeye.' He holds the cock's head, the *kifinda* its legs, and the latter cuts off its head with one sharp stroke of a knife, and immediately throws its body into the air. The convulsive movements of the bird's body continue for some time, and when they cease its final position is closely examined. For instance, if the body is found to lie on its left side, the novice should arrange a sacrifice for his paternal ancestors; if on its right side, for his male maternal ancestors; if on its back, his female maternal ancestors should be attended to. If the feathers of the tail stick upwards, he should sacrifice to such twins as occurred amongst his forebears. If the beak remains open, he must sacrifice to an ancestor who died alone with nobody present to close his mouth. Provided the novice performs the sacrifice indicated, his admission to the Buyeye will be propitious. (According to the diviner my cock behaved in a way which indicated that all my ancestors were satisfied with my entrance into the Buyeye!)

#### MIHAMBO

All the initiates, led by the *kifinda*, go the next morning into the bush and dig roots of the following trees: *kambolambola* (*Canthium* sp.), *ngubalu* (*Crossopteryx febrifuga*), *nbudika* (*Schrebera koiloneurea*), *nugala* (*Cassipourea mollis*). These are put into a pot with the heads of the cocks from the evening before, and the pot is placed over a fire until its contents have been completely burnt up. During the process they sing:

The smoke ascends. Your mothers on the hills (the snakes) look on.

The charred remains are ground and mixed with *shingira*: viz. twigs of a tree, in the branches of which monkeys slept (monkeys are very fertile), and splinters from a broken pot-ladle. The pot-ladle got broken because there was too much porridge in the pot, i.e. the owner had plenty of food.

Small sticks of the *nsongati* tree (*Diplorhynchus mossambicensis*) are prepared, hollowed, and filled with the ash of the above roots and *shingira*. These sticks are called *mihambo* (*kuhamba*, to plant) and every initiate is given one which he later puts in the ground at the door of his house.

*Mihambo* is the name generally used for digging-sticks. The addition of the medicine makes them into a magic wand of fertility.

#### KWINAMIRA CEREMONY

(*kwinamira*, to drink without implements)

A small ditch is dug inside the *ntanda* into which native beer is poured, to which is added some *lukago*-medicine. The novices, the *kifinda*, and the *ntangara* all spit into the beer, after which each novice lies down and takes one gulp of the liquid, the *kifinda* meanwhile holding an axe and a spade over the head of the novice, singing: 'The *kwinamira* breaks the head.'

This ceremony is symbolical of the fraternal relationship into which the initiates have entered and of the dire results of breaking the rules of that relationship. The saliva represents the person himself. The liquid is the mixture in which all the participants are



represented. There can be little doubt that the same basic idea underlies many European drinking customs.

THE CEREMONIES IN THE IPORU IHANYA (the great thicket)

The next day at about 5 o'clock towards evening the teachers drive the novices to a place in the bush where the *kifinda* and some *banyangogo* have prepared the *ibanga ihanya* (*ibanga* means 'something absolutely unexpected'). It consists of (1) a footprint painted in flour, and (2) a clay crocodile about 80 cm. long, the scales of which are represented by pumpkin seeds.

The *kifinda* unveils the *ibanga* which was previously covered with a piece of cloth and explains: 'This is the footprint of the godhead *Ndimi* (*kudima*, to herd). You see, he himself came here to have a look that everything is done in the right way. . . . This is *ng'wina* (the crocodile). She is our great mother because the crocodile is the ancestor of all the snakes. She is a good mother as long as you follow our laws. But if you kill a snake without reason or if you reveal our secrets she will come as the avenger. She is the mother of all snakes. She is our mother, and therefore all snakes are our brothers.'

It should be noted that we have here a totem not of a clan but of a society, whose members may even belong to other tribes but who recognize their relationship with the totem because they are already well acquainted with such a conception. Here again the Bayeye have borrowed. The crocodile is not their taboo, nor are the snakes protected in practice as is ordered in the teaching in front of the *ibanga*. The Bayeye kill snakes if they need them as ingredients for medicines, but they kill them also without scruple if they are called to help by someone who has a snake in his house. They use snakes in their dances as a very useful means of propaganda and keep snakes in their houses for this purpose. This use of snakes may have given rise to the idea that an intimate relationship exists between the Bayeye and the snakes. Finally such a conception may have resulted in the idea of a common origin and totem.

Remarkable in this connexion is the notion of evolution: the crocodile being called the mother (ancestor) of snakes, which is confirmed by our own knowledge of more recent times.

The lesson being over, the *ibanga* is destroyed. The novices are then led not far away to a place where the *kifinda* and his assistants have made a collection of all the plants used for treating snake-bite. These are named and their use explained. Sometimes the more important of these plants are carried into the *ntanda* and the instruction continued there on the following day.

At last all return to the *ntanda*. Before they enter it they go round the village, singing:

We come back to our house.  
We have been far away.

A study of this simple little song demonstrates the subtle significance of primitive poetry. At first sight the two lines of the song appear to be a bald statement that someone has returned home from a distance, but closer analysis shows that the word 'far' does not refer to distance in space—all the rites took place near by—but that it possesses a mystical significance, and denotes something like 'we have been in another world'. In the few words of the song, so completely lacking in the imaginative ingenuity of our own poetry, is expressed the experience of far-away mystery.

The novices are received in the village with great pleasure. They stop at the *ntanda*-door, and their relatives and friends bring presents of baskets of sorghum.

#### THE CEREMONY OF KALIKAMOGA

(*kumoga*, to shave)

The next morning the novices sit down outside the *ntanda* and the *kifinda* brings the *italange*, which is a sorghum stalk about 30 cm. long split down the middle. It is supposed to be a razor with which he pretends to shave the heads of the initiates, saying to each one: 'May your head be clever so that you get a good sorghum harvest every year.' The novices' heads are then shaved with a real razor.

#### THE CEREMONY OF KUSIMANGUSHA NTANDA

(to extinguish the *ntanda*)

Everything connected with the rites is destroyed. The wall-paintings are covered over with mud and the ritual objects are collected and taken into the bush. While the novices work they sing:

Let us bring it, where it came from,  
Where it has been at all times.

When the novices return to the *ntanda* they sit down there for the last time while the taboos of the Bayeye are explained to them. They are taught: (1) never to have sexual intercourse in the bush but only in a hut; (2) never to kill a snake without having a good reason to do so.

#### THE CEREMONY OF SHANA KALEMERWA

(*shana*, name of a snake; *kalemerwa*, has been subdued)

The novices form a procession beneath the stretched skin of a rock-snake (*sauwaka*) and, led by the *kifinda*, proceed to the houses of their respective fathers, singing:

Go ahead, you snake,  
O mother, go ahead, *igonzi*.

When they arrive at the hut of an initiate's father, they sing:

The snake *shana* refuses to leave  
Until the snake *nhoboko* enters the house.

The snake *shana* has the habit of hiding in holes from which it is almost impossible to drive it. The *kifinda* represents the *shana* and refuses to leave the spot until he has received a small token and until he has seen the *nhoboko* (the initiate) safely home. As soon as the *kifinda* has delivered each pupil to his father he leaves.

So end the initiation ceremonies. The initiates have seen a lot, but learnt not much during their sojourn in the *ntanda*. They have acquired the right to participate in all the ceremonies and practical activities of the Bayeye whenever they wish to do so. All knowledge concerning snakes and the treatment of snake-bite is acquired in the course of many years.

*Résumé*

## LA BUYEYE

LA BUYEYE est une société secrète du district de Sukuma dans le Territoire de Tanganika. Son but principal est de donner à ses membres (appelés les Bayeye) la connaissance de toutes les matières concernant les serpents et en particulier la guérison des morsures de serpents. Ils sont capables de manier des serpents impunément. La Buyeye possède également des aspects sociaux importants : c'est une communauté d'hommes (les femmes n'y étant pas admises) qui ont fait le vœu de se prêter mutuellement aide dans les affaires ordinaires de la vie. Elle n'a aucun but politique et recrute ses membres parmi les païens, les chrétiens et les musulmans. Ils sont de tendance conservatrice. La Buyeye est une des nombreuses sociétés des Sukuma. Les traditions regardant ses origines sont tellement contradictoires que l'auteur est dans l'impossibilité d'émettre une opinion à ce sujet. Sa description des cérémonies d'initiation est basée sur une expérience personnelle d'une cérémonie à laquelle il prit part sept jours durant. Il serait erroné de présumer que tous les Bayeye sont d'habiles médecins indigènes. Leur savoir dépend de leurs capacités et du prix qu'ils sont prêts à payer pour leur instruction.

Lorsqu'un homme désire entrer dans la dite société, il commence d'abord par rechercher un *ntangara*, c'est-à-dire un membre influent, et s'entend avec lui sur le prix d'inscription qui peut consister dans une tête de bétail et cinq shillings. Le montant du prix varie et peut être payé à tempérament. Un homme pauvre peut être taxé d'une somme variant de trois à cinq shillings et payer le reste en travaillant pour le *ntangara*. Un certain nombre d'hommes seront initiés ensemble. Le premier rite s'appelle *igonzi* et est exécuté dans la maison du *ntangara* : il consiste à donner une médecine appelée *lukago* à l'invité, qui le protégera contre les influences mauvaises. D'autres cérémonies se déroulent dans une case appelée *ntanda* qui peut être construite ou non pour l'occasion. Cette hutte servira de classe tant pour l'initiation aux secrets de la société que pour la bonne conduite en général. L'auteur nous donne certains détails sur le contenu de la case et des dépendances : il nous explique le symbolisme des peintures qui décorent les murs du *ntanda*. ' Une fois terminé, dit-il, le *ntanda* semble symboliser l'univers tel que le conçoivent les chasseurs de serpents.' Avant que les maîtres et les élèves ne s'installent dans la hutte, celle-ci est soigneusement protégée par des médecines contre les influences mauvaises. Les novices apprennent et chantent des chants dont l'auteur donne des exemples. Ils subissent aussi des *luyeye*, c'est-à-dire des privations et des épreuves d'endurance et de courage. Durant la première nuit on les emmène dans une clairière de la brousse où, nus, on les fait marcher à reculons vers trois petits tas de terre. Ce qui maintenant se déroule est la plus importante partie de l'initiation. Des actes s'accomplissent qui symbolisent la nouvelle naissance : les novices prennent de nouveaux noms, qui sont des noms de serpents ; on les met en garde contre toute révélation des secrets. On leur enjoint également d'avoir à marquer du respect envers les vieux Bayeye et leurs collègues. Le lendemain a lieu le rite du lit d'épines : l'un après l'autre les novices sont étendus sur leur dos sur de grandes épines pointues plantées en lignes et dépassant de 5 cm. la surface du sol. Le *ntangara* s'assied sur le ventre du novice et lui perce les lèvres avec une épingle en cuivre. Il paraît qu'il n'éprouve pas la moindre douleur grâce aux feuilles hachées du *ntundulu* dont on a auparavant frotté son dos. On lui donne également à mâcher les feuilles de cette même plante. Si par hasard il arrivait que, au moment où on le relève de son lit, on découvrirait des traces de sang sur son corps, ceci indiquerait que le novice est un jumeau, ou bien que sa famille a négligé quelque rite du culte des ancêtres ou enfin que c'est un sorcier. Maintenant les novices se lavent soigneusement, huilent leurs corps, se parent de bracelets et s'asseyent chacun sur les genoux d'une femme en dehors du

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*ntanda*. Ceci symbolise leur enfance. L'acte suivant est une sorte de divination au moyen de coqs rouges, afin de s'assurer de quels sacrifices les novices seraient capables pour rendre leur admission dans la confrérie des Bayeye propice. D'autres cérémonies encore se déroulent. L'une d'entre elles semble être un rite de fertilité, un autre semble symboliser les relations fraternelles de parenté dans lesquelles les novices sont entrés. Dans une autre de ces cérémonies figure une image en terre représentant un crocodile : les novices sont par là avertis que s'ils tuent un serpent sans raison ou révèlent des secrets, un crocodile apparaîtra comme un vengeur. 'Le crocodile est notre mère et tous les serpents sont nos frères.' Plus tard les novices reçoivent un enseignement sur l'utilisation des plantes en cas de morsure de serpents. Les tabous des Bayeye leur sont expliqués. Enfin tous en procession se mettent en marche en chantant vers leurs foyers. Tout ce qui rappelle les rites subis est détruit. Les initiés ont acquis le droit de participer à toutes les cérémonies et les activités pratiques des Bayeye chaque fois qu'ils en éprouvent le désir.

Une connaissance plus poussée concernant les serpents et le traitement des morsures de serpent est acquise durant de nombreuses années d'expérience.—F. C.

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