



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



CULTURAL HERITAGE

FACILITATING THE VALIDATION OF FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL LEARNING

Edit by Uganda Erasmus+ team

THE BAKIGA MY TRIBE

The Bakiga inhabit Kabale and part of Rukungiri districts. They occupy the counties of Ndorwa, Rubanda, Rukiga in Kabale and parts of Kinkinzi and Rubabo counties in Rukungiri district. Due to over population, the Bakiga have been migrating to other parts of Uganda especially to Kabarole, Rukungiri, Kasese, Hoima, Masindi and Mubende districts ; and Rwampara, Ruhama and Ibanda counties of Mbarara district. They have also settled in Masaka and Rakai districts. They are a physically strong people. They speak Rukiga a Bantu language.

ORIGINS

The actual origins of the Bakiga are hidden in varying traditions. Some say that the bakiga originally lived in Karagwe having migrated from Bunyoro during the luo invasion. They are associated with the banyambo of Tanzania .another tradition which seems more sensible says that the cradle of the bakiga was in Buganza in Rwanda they migrated from Buganza in search of fertile land and to escape natural hazards or due to internal political conflicts.

From Rwanda the Bakiga are said to have migrated to Bwisa, to Bugoyi, then to Rutchuru, all in Zaire and they finally settled in Kigezi. since Bakiga are bantu speakers ,this tradition could be true .what may be equally true is that the Bakiga were part of bantu speakers who migrated from Congo region, through M Bunyoro, Karagwe Rwanda and eastern Zaire to finally settle in Kigezi. What has not been established are the exact dates when they settled in each of the areas and route to Kigezi.

SOCIAL SET UP

The Bakiga were organized into clans the biggest which was the Basigi clan. Each clan was composed of several lineages and each lineage had ahead, omukuru wo muryango. A man was not allowed to marry

from his clan. If it happened and a man marries from his clan both the man and the girl would be disowned by their families and their clan.

MARRIAGE

Marriage was a very important cultural institution among the Bakiga. Traditionally no marriage could be honoured without the payment of bride wealth. In the past marriage would be arranged by the boy's father or uncle on the boy's behalf. The final arrangements could only be made after the payment in form of cows, goats, sheep and hoes. The amount paid differed from group to group and from family to family within each group. It is said that it was a taboo to sell any animals given as bride wealth. Such animals could be used to obtain wives for the girl's brothers or father. Sometimes men would get girls offered for free by girls' fathers. This happened most especially on social times, People would drink local brew and would be happy and get drunk. They would dance and if a man would dance well and the father gets happy he would offer him a free girl to marry. The bakiga are a very polygamous society; the number of wives was only limited by the availability of land and bride wealth obligations.

The bride wealth paid on a girl was shared among the girl's principal relatives. Of the relatives the most important were nyinarumi [maternal uncle] and ishenkazi [paternal aunt].if one of them went away dissatisfied, so they said, he could render the girl barren or cause her to have instant ill health by inciting the wrath of the ancestors.

Boys tended to marry to at a slightly late age, between eighteen and twenty years, while girls could be married off between fourteen and sixteen years of age. The normal trend was for girls from richer families to get married later than girls from poorer families. Before marriage a girl would spend a month or so seclusion. During this period, she would be well fed and instructed in the art of home management

DIVORCE

Divorce was a common phenomenon among the bakiga. The common causes were barrenness and laziness on the part of the wife or the husband. Some other matters of misunderstanding between a husband and wife could also lead to divorce. A divorcee was allowed to remarry but she would fetch less bride wealth this time as she would no longer be a virgin.

The majority of the would be instances of divorce were settled by the elders .They would normally be called by the woman's father to listen to both the husband and the wife and try to have the two sides reach an amicable conclusion that would prevent divorce. In such cases it was normally to fine the offending party fighting in a home between husbands and wives was frequent, but it would not normally led to divorce.

RELIGION

The bakiga believed in a supreme being, ruhanga the creator of all things earthly and heavenly. At a lower level they believed in the cult of nyabingi. The nyabingi cult was said to have originated from karagwe.It had its base in kagarama, near lake Bunyonyi.There were special shrines for nyabingi known as endaro.

Through nyabingi's representatives known as abagirwa people would worship and tender sacrifices of beer and roasted meat to nyabingi.

ECONOMY

The bakiga were basically agriculturalists growing mainly sorghum, peas, millet and beans. They also reared some cattle, sheep and goats. Among them were excellent iron smiths who made hoes, knives and spears they were also great potters and produced a wide assortment of pottery. Besides, they made a wide range of carpentry objects baskets and mats and they reared bees and produced honey. The bakiga lived and worked communally. Most economic activities were done on a communal basis. Grazing, bush clearing, cultivation and harvesting were done communally. The men cleared the bush while the women tilled the land. Men worked together to erect round, grass thatched huts for shelter. They practiced barter trade amongst themselves and between their neighbours. The staple foods of bakiga were sorghum, beans and peas. They supplemented them with pumpkins yams and meat and a variety of green vegetables. Sufficient food was prepared so that everyone could eat his fill. It was considered good manners to join in whenever one found a given family at a meal. One would just wash one's hands and join the others without waiting to be invited. If a man had more than one wife all his women had to serve him at each meal. He could eat the most delicious share of the food among the lot or all of it if he so wished. The bakiga made beer from sorghum. The beer, omuramba, played a significant social role. It had a food component and was an alcoholic drink necessary for social gathering. Omuramba was normally taken from a pot placed in a convenient place.

The men would sit on wooden stools surrounding it and by means of long tubes they would drink as they discussed matters affecting their community. The elders would also settle disputes, recite their heroic deeds and their history, and sing and dance around a pot of omuramba. The bakiga were and still are very good zither [enanga] players. They played it alone or in groups.

UTENSILS

The bakiga's domestic utensils included baskets, pots, winnowing trays, and stools, grinding stones, wooden pestles and mortars and mingling ladles. The other household items were drums and harps for entertainment. Spears, bows and arrows for defence and hunting, grass mats (ebirago) for sleeping on and emishambi for sitting on. Previously the bakiga women dressed in cow hides known as ebishato or enkanda. They wore bangles on their legs and arms.

POLITICAL SET UP

The bakiga were a segmented society. Political society authority rested in the hands of the lineage leaders, abakuru bemiryango, many of whom had excellent oratory as well as military skills. They were supposed to be impartial in administering justice. Some leaders such as basubi emerged to prominence because they had mystical skills. They were rain makers. Others were bagirwa, the mediums of nyabingi cult. The bakiga were war like. They resisted the batusi and bahima incursions. As politically segmented society they did not

have a standing army .However they had warlords who would mobilize and lead the people to war in the event of invasion. The war lords were men who had killed a number of enemies in wars without losing any of their men or weapons. Every able bodied male was culturally obligated to be a soldier.

JUDICIAL SYSTEM

The bakiga abhorred anti- social activities and if anyone was caught, he was heavily punished. Such activities included stealing, blocking paths, murder, sorcery and night dancing. In case of murder for example the murderer was buried alive in the same grave as his victim. Virginity was highly esteemed and it was a very serious offence for a girl to get pregnant before marriage. If an unmarried girl became pregnant she would either be taken to the forest and be tied to tree and left for wild animals or, she would be tied feet and arms and thrown over a cliff. Most pregnant girls among the bakiga were taken to the Kisiizi falls in Ndorwa and thrown down in the falls, others would be taken to the punishment island (Akampene) between Lake Bunyonyi and left to die. The lucky ones were simply cursed and disowned by their people.