

WORSHIP OF ANCESTORS, BLESSING AND SOCIAL SUCCESS AMONG THE ANCIENT KWASIO OF CENTRAL AFRICA

Alphonse Kisito BOUH MA SITNA

Ph.D. Assistant, University of Yaoundé I (Cameroon),

E-mail : alphonsekisitbms@yahoo.fr

Abstract: *This article looked at the correlation between the practice of ancestor worship and blessing among the Kwasio, a Bantu (A81) people of Central Africa. From a few surveys carried out in this community, it emerges that the aforementioned cult was based on the principle of the extension of life after death, with the ancestor as the central point. The blessings provided by him take a collective form, conditioned by the practice of ancestor worship, and an individual form, determined by respect for the traditional moral code. Turning away from this pivot exposed all of Kwasio to a decline that could be erased by a propitiatory rite. To better understand this reflection, we mainly relied on primary sources and field surveys carried out with very selective sampling from the period 2003 until 2020.*

Keywords: Ancestor; blessing; propitiation; virtue; prosperity.

1. Introduction

Perceived as the set of ceremonial practices addressed to the deceased (Surgy, 1975: 105), ancestor worship often aims to attract the favors of life (Bonhomme, 2008: 162; Dumas-Champion, 1989: 33-74; Mba-Zue, 2010: 73; Kuipou, 2015: 93-105). In Cameroon, a surprising finding seems to give credit to this end. Here, almost all of the wealthiest people come from regions which still practice this cult (Bahri-Domon, 2020: 8-16) while poverty is rooted among the peoples who turn away from it. Within the Kwasio ethnic group of Central Africa, for example, the Mabi branch, despoiled of its traditional beliefs by Christian missionaries (Mboum, 2020: 15-18), drew up its assessment in 1999. Of the 23,000 individuals that counted this tribe, only 102 had a stable or precarious job (Ndtoungou-Nzambi, 1999: 31). This paradox raises the problem of the correlation that would exist between the practice of ancestor worship and the circulation of the positive vital impulse. In one question, how does this cult convey values that drive success or progress? This study attempts to answer the question by focusing on the specific case of the Kwasio of Central Africa. Its objective is to discover the principles which attract grace. To achieve this, we conducted surveys with a few rare adults and old people who had seen this cult practiced or who still practice it in secret. Oral tradition is therefore the main source of this study, which revolves around two points: collective and individual blessing.

2. The collective blessing

The term blessing comes from the Latin benediction (Larousse online). Word composed of bene (good) and dicere (to say). Literally, to bless is to say good things. It is also to benefit from the favor or grace of Heaven (Dictionary of our time online). When the blessing is collective, it would be summed up in worship (Kabasele Lumbala, 2011: 149). Among the Kwasio, the cult to bless a community is the *Byère* or *Byèri*

also called Mbvuli Malandè (Mboum, 2020: 70-74 and 117). It's about ancestor worship, practiced by all members of the community. It consisted of three stages:

- the choice of the candidate for ancestry;
- the process of becoming an ancestor;
- the rite of collective blessing.

3. Choice of ancestor candidate

Indicating the selection criteria to display the title of ancestor amounts to highlighting the code of ethics of the *Byèri*. As the Kwasio hardly practice this cult anymore, we were only able to identify one criterion. It is for any deceased, to have led a virtuous and prosperous existence on earth. The constitutive elements of virtue are numerous: kindness, self-control, sobriety, honesty, responsibility, wisdom, discernment, righteousness and justice². Like the *Maâty* in ancient Egypt (Mpala, 2007: 87), the candidate for ancestry had to be the incarnation of the divine. Impatient, impulsive, rambling, mean, selfish and murderous people could not claim ancestry³. The *Mbvuni Kina* for example, was a law that prohibited any initiate in *Byèrito* shed blood (Mboum, 2020: 116). As for prosperity, an informant repeated this formula: "*Byèri yih nzong fuma*", translation: "the cult of ancestors is that of enrichment"⁴. The term *pfuma* designates at the same time, the whole of material goods and human resources (women, children, warriors, servants) which one has. These elements were decisive for the size, position or elite social status (*mbih mam Where pfuma wall*)⁵.

We believe, however, that apart from virtue and prosperity, another criterion existed, that of the role of the living to lead the deceased to ancestry. In fact, among all the other peoples of Central Africa who practice ancestor worship, the proper performance of the funeral rites of any deceased person is a determining factor in their access to the status of ancestor. Among the Bamileke for example, Roger Kuipou seems to highlight the role played by the living in the accession by the deceased to this status. Here, any deceased having respected the ethical criteria is supposed to become an ancestor, on condition that his descendants assure him a good execution of the funeral rites (funeral (*born-tong-gni*), mourning (*dihnéwoû*), funeral (*né-tiak-menéna*), exhumation of the skull, construction of the house of the skulls, entry of the ancestor's skull into his house) (Kuipou, 2015: 96). The Kwasio were not on the fringes of this conception because, as we mention later, they had a particular way of burying, exhuming and preserving the skulls of their social models.

Finally, it is important to point out that there was no misogyny in the *Byèri*. Women could be worshiped just like men. In a clan called Biwandi among the Kwasio

2 Interview with Raymond Ngoua, Planter and Patriarch of the Binzugo clan, Kribi on March 05, 2003, 90 years old.

3 Interview with René Guga, retired fisherman and Patriarch of the Mabi, Namassambi [Kribi] on January 05, 2003, 118 years old.

4 Interview with Raymond Ngoua, Planter and Patriarch of the Binzugo clan, Kribi on March 05, 2003, 90 years old.

5 Interview with Abel Biwomong, retired Machinist and Notable of the Chieftdom of Groupement Ngoumba-Sud, Lolodorf on December 22, 2010, 63 years old.

for example, the name of an ancestor-woman has remained. The named Atwambo Ndzaga was counted among the ancestors of the Biwandi clan of the village Nzambi Nénih. Although having been married in a neighboring clan (the Bimbvuri), this woman was buried in her original clan and her head kept in the sanctuary of the ancestors of the Biwandi clan. Was not ancestor (mbvuni) who wanted. Of the hundred or so individuals in the Biwandi clan of Nzambi Nénih village, only four ancestors were venerated (Bonzouer Nsuandèlè, Ndtama Ndzaga, Atwambo Ndzaga and Bimbo Ma Bonzouer)⁶.

In short, any virtuous and prosperous person, male or female, could be venerated, provided that his descendants provide him with the funeral rites necessary for his access to ancestrality. These rites began with burial.

4. Path to ancestor status

The course of the cult of the skulls began naturally with the burial, followed later by the exhumation. Among the Koma of North Cameroon for example:

(...) During the burial, the body of the deceased is positioned vertically in the tomb and the head held in suspension on forked antlers which are positioned in the tomb, the aim being to recover the skull, once the process has been completed decomposition complete (Ngon, 2020).

While the other peoples of Cameroon bury their dead, elected in ancestral terms, on dry land, the Kwasio did so in the bed of a stream that bore the name of *Ngia byèr (è)* Where *Ngia byèri*⁷. This name translates as follows: "the deep secret of ancestor worship" or more clearly "the river of the ancestors"⁸. Indeed, the Kwasio believe that the secrets of a human are hidden in the womb and the most intimate in the intestine. In their language, the expressions *bvungu muo*, literally "shake the belly" and *bvungu ngia* "shaking the intestine" indicates respectively the fact of questioning someone so that they reveal their superficial secrets or their deep secrets. According to Sylvain Mboum, it is in the *Ngia byèri* that the population took their purification baths at 4 a.m., after the worship of *good bye* of the day before (Mboum, 2020: 73). We still find streams baptized *Ngia byèri* Where *Ngia byèr (è)* in the kwasio sphere. The best known flow, among the Mbvumbo, in the Bigbali district of the city of Lolodorf and in Bumè among the Mabi of Kribi.

The cult of ancestors could explain the propensity of the Kwasio to found villages next to streams. According to some informants⁹, the way we block the bed of a stream for fishing at the dam (*luor* in kwasio), in the same way as initiates to *Byèri* temporarily deviated the *Ngia byèri* from his bed in order to bury the chosen one in the ancestral way in the middle of the said stream. The goal is to later recover a clean

6 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old.

7 Interview with René Guga, retired fisherman and Patriarch of the Mabi, Namassambi [Kribi] on January 05, 2003, 118 years old.

8 Interview with Raymond Ngoua, Planter and Patriarch of the Binzugo clan, Kribi on March 05, 2003, 90 years old.

9 Interview with René Guga, retired fisherman and Patriarch of the Mabi, Namassambi [Kribi] on January 05, 2003, 118 years old.

skull or bones. After the burial, the dam was destroyed. Insiders then waited for the funeral, which was held at least a year after the ancestral contender died, to unearth his skeleton or skull. The latter was then removed, polished and dried, because: "(...), The ancients considered the skull as the place of residence of the vital force and of the "science" that the individual possesses. They believed that this force could still be transmitted from the dead to the living or allow the dead to guide the action of the living (Mboum, 2020: 71).

The skull was then inserted into a reliquary or *Nsiœr Byéri*: *Called nshie byeri, they were either rattan baskets or boxes made of bark or made from the base of an elephant tusk. It was in these cylindrical receptacles, a kind of portable funeral urns with a lid, that the bones of ancestors of the family and lineage were kept. The nshieu was surmounted by a Sâkui'i (parrot feather) and closed with a red ribbon. According to Nlinga, "Whenever danger hung over the family, it made a short but shrill noise. It meant he was calling the head of the family. When the latter entered the room where the reliquary was located, he immediately heard a voice with which he initiated a conversation and which said to him: "Be careful because there is a danger that awaits you tomorrow. It is ". He would give her all the details and then tell her what to do. Finally, the voice said: " have you understood? As soon as he answered 'yes' he heard a thud, as if the skeleton had risen to its feet and then suddenly dislocated. And it's all over (Mboum, 2020: 71).*

To distinguish skulls from ancestors or avoid confusing them, the Kwasio had a few tricks. Most often, they carved human statues, respecting the gender of the ancestor (male or female), his physical features and attributes (see photo below). They then fixed this statuette above the upper cover of the reliquary (there was a lower cover to prevent the skull from touching the ground). Sylvain Mboum mentions the other tips: " A few months after his death, the bones were taken cleaned, dried and sometimes decorated with metal inlays in iron or copper which allowed them to be distinguished and identified "(Mboum, 2020: 71).

After this step, the skull, its statuette and its receptacle were introduced into the ancestors' hut, built in a furnished space separate from the dwellings. It should also be noted here the difference between the Kwasio and most of the peoples of Central Africa who keep their ancestor skulls on the ground. Among the Kwasio, the skulls were kept in padouk wood receptacles and the boxes where these objects were placed were very well maintained. We have not received a significant response in reference to the introduction of the skull and its accessories in the sanctuary box. However, in the name of the cultural unity of the black world, we can assume that it had the same importance as among the Bamileke of West Cameroon:

To be an ancestor is to have succeeded in your journey towards the world where the deceased generations live. This journey begins with death and ends with the symbolic resurrection during the ceremony of the skulls. The deceased returns to take a place among the living. This place is materialized by a box, the "skull box" or "ancestor box", which each family must own. It is not a mausoleum but a living and dynamic hut, dedicated to one or more deceased members of

the family. They are present there, physically, through their skulls; they "live" there since they can be consulted, fed, associated with all events or all important decisions of the family. The skull, more than the box, is the symbol of the presence of ancestors among the living (Kuipou, 2015: 98).

It is important to indicate that the burial and exhumation ceremonies were carried out by the initiates of a mystical brotherhood called *Ngui* under the direction of its chief or *Nlu Ngui*. This brotherhood was a secret society whose missions were to defend society against the misdeeds of witchcraft and wizards, to ward off bad spells and to communicate with the ancestors in order to regulate community life.¹⁰

Photo n ° 1 : Statuette of *Byèri* and his reliquary box

(This statuette is a profile view. It was shaped according to the gender (sex) and the face of the ancestor. Placed above a cylindrical box containing relics, it allowed the easy identification of the deceased)



Source: Agyune Ndone, 2005: 38.

5. Phases of worship proper

The actual worship began with a preparation. One had to be pure or purified to touch the sacred objects of worship and enter the sanctuary (Alliot, 1950: 60-61). Insiders were to abstain from sexual intercourse¹¹and any crime, described in the moral code (Mboum, 2020: 74). They then consumed certain mixtures made from plants, such as the dried powdered roots of badamier or *landi* in kwasio, in order to " (...) communicate with living spirits in spheres invisible to the naked eye " (Mboum, 2020: 74).

According to our informants, ancestor worship took place earlier today. But, because of its prohibition by the German colonial administration on the one hand, and French on the other, the Kwasio began to practice it at night, for fear of reprisals. Abbot

10 Interview with Calvin Biang Ndtoungou, Cultivator and Patriarch mbvumbo, Kouambo [Bipindi] on January 09, 2003, 94 years old.

11 Interview with René Guga, retired fisherman and Patriarch of the Mabi, Namassambi [Kribi] on January 05, 2003, 118 years old.

Nicodème Bouh, had regularly questioned a certain Ndtoungou Maloua, nonagenarian and principal officiant of the *Ngui* among the Mabi of the Sambong clan in Londji, in 1966. According to him, ancestor worship began with an entry formula. All the initiates and even the uninitiated, who had the good fortune to be led by tolerant and open initiates, gathered in the sanctuary-hut where the skulls were kept. They then repeated in unison, a formula that greeted revered ancestors and exposed the object of worship.¹²

In the case of the Sambong of Londji for example, their village had been bombed during the First World War by the French and the English (ASOMSHAF: 19-24 / Bouh, 2021: 66). The populations which had served as cannon fodder for the Germans had been decimated and the fugitives, few in number, returned to their lands a few years later. They were in the throes of famine and the women were not giving birth enough. The Sambong clan, feeling that they were wasting away, then began to atone for the bad fate that had invaded the land. The formula for entering the sanctuary, bequeathed by Ndtoungou Maloua was as follows: "*Bota baa guer bvüh, ilaa ga bo bidiu, bura baa bia lèna, buri ki gwu botsiri, buri ki bwama pfuma*"¹³. Translation: "The ancestors are angry, let's feed them, because our women no longer give birth and the hunt is no longer successful, the men no longer produce wealth"¹⁴.

After the formula for entering the sanctuary box, came the phase of sacrifice. It was called: *Suya bombvuni* which literally means: *wash the ancestors*¹⁵. In this phase, the ceremonies did not take place in the sanctuary but in the dwelling of its guardian. According to Abbot Nicodème Bouh, the main officiant (here in this case, Ndtoungou Maloua) returned to the sanctuary hut where the skulls of venerated ancestors were kept. He would bring them to his home and take them out of their receptacles (*nsiærin kwasio*). He would then display them on the floor on clean ground. Once the skulls were on the ground, then began the rhythmic dance of a large battery of tom-toms and drums. During this event, the individual who did not have his ascendant among the skulls deposited on the ground, did not dance¹⁶. No one could give us the reason for this ban or the consequences, if it were violated.

Once the collective and frantic dance ended, each of the initiates went to seize the skull of their ancestor. He called out to him (he had to know his name), begged him, explaining his desires aloud. Ndtoungou Maloua also delivered some formulas: "*O ta, mè mwa mbpi... ..O ta, laa mè mintuo mintuo. O ta, laa mè pfuma. O ta, laa mè bo tsiri*"¹⁷. Literal translation: "Father (in the sense of dad and not in the religious sense), here is my situation.... Father, bless me. Father, give me the wealth. Father, give me some game"¹⁸.

The supplication was done thus. The initiate held the ancestor's skull in full hands while proclaiming his desiderata and dancing at the same time. The sacrifice

12 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old.

13 Same

14 Same.

15 Interview with Albert Mamia Ndtungu, Cultivator and Notable Biwandi clan, Nzambi Nénih [Bipindi] on January 08, 2003, 103 years old.

16 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old.

17 Same.

18 Same.

continued with the rite of anointing the skulls or cleansing. It was the moment to strengthen the bonds between ancestors and descendants¹⁹.

The cleaning did not happen at random. Initially, the initiates chose a young virgin. In the large meeting room, and during the ceremony, she rubbed two padauk woods together in order to obtain a red powder which was mixed with red oil. The ointment created was called *Kang*. It was then used to anoint skulls. Each descendant did it to the skull of his ancestor while simultaneously formulating his wishes. He then invoked his ancestors or his lineage by reciting his genealogy²⁰.

This phase of the sacrifice ended, followed that of sanctification²¹. The skulls were placed in the sanctuary by the officiant. In front of the receptacles, the guarantor of the sanctuary placed a receptacle containing anointing oil (red oil mixed with powder from padouk wood, obtained by rubbing, thanks to a young virgin). Behind the said container, he also placed libations (cooked food (chicken, bush meat, sheep or goat) and a small quantity of wine symbolically poured on the ground). Meanwhile, the other initiates were dancing at the place of worship.

At this level, a new peculiarity is to be noted among the Kwasio. While most of the people pour wine and food on the ground, which makes their sanctuaries unsanitary, among the Kwasio, the officiant laid the libations and allowed time to pass for the ancestors' dinner²². Here, no informant could give us an estimate of this time (30 minutes? 1 hour?, We do not know). The celebrant would then collect the offerings (apart from the poured wine of course), as well as the container of anointing oil, and brought it back to the hall of worship. He then proceeded to distribute the ointment to all participants, initiated or uninitiated. This remainder of oil, supposedly precious, because having touched the ancestral power, became a lucky charm²³. It was regularly used by traders who traveled with small vials containing the precious ointment²⁴.

Finally, the libations that came out of the sanctuary, perceived as the remains chewed up by the ancestors (*my tam bo bvuniin kwasio*), were shared with all the participants of the event, in the large dance hall, as a sign of communion. This food and wine was believed to contain the positive power of the ancestors and their sharing closed the ceremony before the final great ritual bath of purification for the whole country at dawn (4 a.m. or 5 a.m.) in the stream. *Ngia byèri* or *Ngia byèr (è)*²⁵.

19 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old. and maintenance with Calvin Biang Ndtoungou, Cultivator and Patriarch mbvumbo, Kouambo [Bipindi] on January 09, 2003, 94 years old.

20 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old, interview with Albert Mamia Ndtungu, Cultivator and Notable Biwandi clan, Nzambi Néni [Bipindi] on January 08, 2003, 103 years old and interview with Calvin Biang Ndtoungou, Farmer and Patriarch mbvumbo, Kouambo [Bipindi] on January 09, 2003, 94 years old.

21 Interview with Raymond Ngoua, Planter and Patriarch of the Binzugo clan, Kribi on March 05, 2003, 90 years old.

22 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old, interview with Albert Mamia Ndtungu, Cultivator and Notable clan Biwandi, Nzambi Néni [Bipindi] on January 08, 2003, 103 years old and interview with Calvin Biang Ndtoungou, Cultivator and Patriarch mbvumbo, Kouambo [Bipindi] on January 09, 2003, 94 years old.

23 Ibid.

24 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old.

25 Interview with René Guga, retired fisherman and Patriarch of the Mabi, Namassambi [Kribi] on January 05, 2003, 118 years old.

Individual blessing

Blessing among the Kwasio, with reference to ancestor worship, took place under two prisms: succession and propitiation.

Blessing for the succession

A priori, there is no direct relationship between blessing by succession and ancestor worship. However, the objects used to bless were most often passed from generation to generation and the person supposed to bless was not always the father or the eldest in the European sense of the term, but the heir to the power of the ancestors. The latter blessed the obedient and virtuous "child". The rite which was reserved for the latter was neither solemn (except in the case of succession at the level of the lineage or the clan) nor extended. It concerned the chosen one alone and the assignments were made only for him. They seldom concerned other children. However, the latter sometimes attended the blessing of the chosen one and their father told them to follow and apply all the decisions of his successor.²⁶

The blessing itself was invariably done at dawn, when the father (representative of God and ancestors, here the father literally or his heir) was still fasting. The father went to get the stalk of the wild cane (*miandærin kwasio*) containing its roots or was content with charcoal. He then coated said rod or coal with *kang*, the ointment obtained from a mixture of red powder of padauk (*mbilin kwasio*) and red oil, previously placed in the box of the skulls or sanctuary for blessing during ancestor worship. By thus carrying this sacred or blessed oil on it, this wild cane stalk or this charcoal wood became, in turn, a support of blessing. It could then be used from generation to generation. The father would then spit on this object to add his own power to it and the object would traditionally become consecrated (*wéyà* in *kwasio*)²⁷. Why spit on objects to be blessed and why do it on an empty stomach?

The word would carry all its power of blessing early in the morning on an empty stomach, when it has not yet been corrupted by libations.²⁸ As for the sputum, its function was to create favorable conditions for the application of the blessing.²⁹ Before the act of blessing, the object *wéya* was again blessed with the following incantatory formula: " *Wéya wuna, mè ziri wuo purè, Wua vuli mua ma guer matèli, Mbi mè nsili ma léh gina*³⁰. Translation: " I bless this consecrated object again. It will be used to bless the obedient child. Let it be as I just said ". It was then that the father used this salivating object, with his right hand, to coat certain parts of his own body:

- the throat (the trachea artery which makes pass the breath which materializes the spoken word, supposed to be carried out);
- the chest (seat of the heart, feelings and inclinations which must be guided by self-control and goodness);

26 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old.

27 Ibid.

28 Interview with René Guga, retired fisherman and Patriarch of the Mabi, Namassambi [Kribi] on January 05, 2003, 118 years old.

29 Ibid.

30 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old.

- the pubis (seat of the procreative function);
- the back (spine-upright).

After these various signs on the parts indicated above, the *wéya* became the *mash* because he had been blessed twice. The first time with red oil mixed with padauk powder and saliva (*wéya*), the second time by incantatory formulas, gestures and salivation (*mash*). The *mashor* the object ready for the blessing hung on the bedside. When it comes to blessing other people, this object which keeps its strength forever, can be used by those who have previously been blessed by the one who consecrated the object and his successors.

the *wéya*, become *mash*, the father holding this consecrated object in his left hand, then chewed its roots or part of its stem or even part of the charcoal wood. He didn't swallow what he had chewed, but spat it out on his right hand. It was then that he asked the successor to advance (advance! Orsiyàin kwasio). He then coated this mixture with his right hand on the following parts of his successor: throat, chest, pubis and back. Then he said his blessing (object of the blessing and desiderata) and ended it thus: "*Sa mbi sa wè labi buri ritu, yè kaalè sambah na bibang bi kær mana bina, na ma byala mang mi mpongè bè mi mimbiami, koo gi mbi gi wè labi bè ndzina muri kilè yè tih*"³¹. Translation: `` Whatever you say in public will be taken into consideration and no one will humiliate your word, with these words that I speak early in the morning and on an empty stomach, since I am not an illegitimate son (this sentence was optional), whatever you say will come true, your word will never be discredited. " The word is therefore the pillar of blessing.

Atonement and propitiation

Propitiation is understood as a sacrificial act offered by an applicant, in order to obtain forgiveness of his or her sins from the offended person or deity. (Douglas and Judisch, 1984: 222). This reparation being conditioned by an expiation, the rite of propitiation only took place in the event of repentance of the beneficiary vis-à-vis the offended, very often the parent (father or mother) or their successors.

The sinful acts that required atonement followed by a propitiatory rite to be erased were:

- adultery committed by a son with his father's wife³² ;
- the consumption or worse, the sale of four game (*kina* (the antelope), *mbœu* (the lemur), *yil* Where *pfuh* (the viper) and *nkang* (the quail)³³ ;
- disobedience and dishonor vis-à-vis his parents or elders (insults, treason, murder, witchcraft etc.)³⁴.

31 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old.

32 Ibid.

33 Interview with Calvin Biang Ndtoungou, Cultivator and Patriarch mbvumbo, Kouambo [Bipindi] on January 09, 2003, 94 years old.

34 Interview with Albert Mamia Ndtungu, Cultivator and Notable Biwandi clan, Nzambi Nénih [Bipindi] on January 08, 2003, 103 years old.

Adultery

Topping the list, because of its seriousness, trading with his father's wife was seen as a particularly reprehensible sin. Sexual prohibitions were quite drastic in their prescriptions and their offenses were also rigorously punished. The father or successor, because of his prominent rank in the family hierarchy as head, was also the living representative of the founding ancestor on earth. He enjoyed a special status which gave him the right to certain prerogatives. When an animal was killed, for example, it was entitled to certain parts that came to it automatically: the heart, chest, kidneys, lungs and spleen. These parts of a beast were for personal, and even exclusive use.³⁵ If the father would agree to share them with someone else, it is of his own accord and as a special favor given to a friend, an equal, a peer. Sharing was not done with subordinates. Sometimes the class of fathers or successors practiced swinging among very dear friends; a kind of community of women who, admitted at the elite level, were always more loved among others³⁶. This swinging was not considered adultery. On the other hand, the son or the subordinate who committed adultery with his father's wife, forced himself into the intimacy of his father's most personal "good". His act was then perceived as a profaning use of a reserved property which constituted a moral rupture leading ipso facto to an unforgivable curse³⁷.

The consumption of animals reserved for "fathers"

It is very astonishing that comes in second position, as regards the seriousness of an offense (because it does not seem direct to us), the consumption or worse, the sale of animals reserved for the elderly, fathers and successors or heirs. It was wrong to consume them before reaching a certain age or being allowed to do so by your father. It was the antelope *orkina*. A Kwasio saying goes: "*nku mbvuni bo di kina*"³⁸, translation: "it is the initiate in the cult of ancestors who consumes antelope".

After the antelope, came the lemur or *mbœu*, a small forest animal living near streams, where it wreaks havoc by devastating traps loaded with shrimps, catfish etc. This lemur comes back often in epic tales and tales³⁹. Next comes the viper *oryil* or *pfuh* which represented a delicacy for adults, especially the elderly. As for the bird *nkang* Where *quailin* French, his preferred choice remains a mystery. This poultry is neither remarkable in taste, nor of a particular plumage and ramage. Anyway, the adage was quite well known: "*ki sa mi mpangu na binaa naa*", translation: "Do not do your will with forbidden beasts". To have the right to eat them, it was first necessary to meet certain requirements imposed by the elders or simply on the authorization of

35 Interview with Albert Mamia Ndtungu, Cultivator and Notable Biwandi clan, Nzambi Nénih [Bipindi] on January 08, 2003, 103 years old.

36 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old.

37 Interview with Abel Biwomong, retired Machinist and Notable of the Chieftdom of Groupement Ngoumba-Sud, Lolodorf on December 22, 2010, 63 years old.

38 Léon Daniel Mabali Woungly Massaga, Professor of General and Notable High Schools of the Limanzouang clan of Lolodorf, Ambam on February 6, 2003, 42 years old.

39 Interview with Esperanza Manzuer, Notable Bisio of the Chieftdom of Bimil, Bata [Equatorial Guinea] on June 21, 2007, 45 years old.

the father (with of course some compensatory sacrifices in support). These animals were eaten in community, preferably by age group⁴⁰.

Disobedience and dishonor towards parents or elders

Children incurred the curse when they disobeyed or dishonored their parents. To lay hands on one's relative, to publicly insult him, to utter all kinds of indecent words against him, was at the same time to incur a serious curse. It was not necessary for the victim to declare aloud to its author, the crime he had just committed; the act was reprehensible in itself, leading directly to sad consequences. First at the community level, the child in question was perceived as degenerate, excluded and stripped of his traditional rights. It should in no case benefit from the solidarity of the community⁴¹.

Most often, it is on the spot, when the unhappy parent cried out his indignation or his shame that he uttered at the same time, explicit words of curse. The most spectacular and also the most telling by the force of its symbolism, was the gesture of disclosure of the sex by the one who suffered the affront of his child. Exposing his private parts in this way to the eyes of the child symbolizes the last of the affronts, the height of dishonor. The child then became a stranger, no longer having any kinship with his father.

Processes of atonement and propitiation

Called *Sehin kwasio*, the rite of propitiation was done in the same way as that of blessing by succession with some differences. First, the offender had to apologize to the offender alive or dead beforehand in order to clear up his faults. This step required witnesses, generally initiates of ancestor worship, and a sacrifice made of libations for the offended person (Bouh, 2017, 354). The applicant was obliged to make an offering consisting of a domestic animal (very often a goat, a sheep or a chicken) in order to wash away his fault. The latter was not erased until after the sacrifice of this beast, its cooking and its consumption by the offended and his witnesses. The propitiation itself took place in the early morning like the blessing by succession.⁴²

7. Conclusion

This research tried to discover the principles which attract the blessing in reference to the cult of the ancestors or *Byèri* practiced among the *Kwasio* of Central Africa. It turns out that the *Byèri*s based on the principle of the continuity of life after death, especially for virtuous and prosperous people. The blessings he brings come in two forms. In the collective form, the blessing was conditioned by the practice of ancestor worship. In the individual form, it was determined by respect for the traditional moral code. The prescriptions in themselves first revolved around respect for prohibitions and virtue. To turn away from it exposed all *Kwasio* to withering away. A curse that could be erased by a propitiatory rite. Finally, this study revealed some

40 Interview with Donato Nziè, Notable Bisio of the Bimièni clan of the Chiefdom of Bimil and Initiate of Ngui, Bata [Equatorial Guinea] on December 14, 2007, 40 years old.

41 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old.

42 Interview with Nicodème Bouh, Roman Catholic priest, Kribi on February 10, 2020, 91 years old.

original elements in the practice of ancestor worship through the emphasis on cleanliness and water. Although they have become deeply Christians,

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Supplementary references: Oral sources for this article

Last name and first names	Activity or function	Maintenance location	Maintenance date	Age at interview
Biwomong Abel	Retired Machinist and Notable of the Chiefdom of Groupement Ngoumba-Sud	Lolodorf	December 22, 2010	63 years old
Biang Ndtoungou Calvin	Cultivator and Patriarch mbvumbo	Kouambo [Bipindi]	January 09, 2003	94 years old
Boh Nicodemus	Roman Catholic priest	Kribi	February 10, 2020	91 years old
Guga René	Retired fisherman and Patriarch of the Mabi	Namassambi [Kribi]	January 05, 2003	118 years
Mabali Woungly Massaga Léon Daniel	Teacher of the General and Notable High Schools of the Limanzouang clan of Lolodorf	Ambam	06 February 2003	42 years old
Mamia Ndtungu Albert	Farmer and Notable Biwandi clan	Nzambi Nénihi [Bipindi]	January 08, 2003	103 years
Manzuer Esperanza	Notable Bisio of the Chiefdom of Bimil,	Bata [Equatorial Guinea]	June 21, 2007	45 years old
Ngoua Raymond	Planter and Patriarch of the Binzugo clan	Kribi	March 05, 2003	90 years
Nziè Donato	Notable Bisio of the Bimièni clan of the Chiefdom of Bimil and Initiate of Ngui	Bata [Equatorial Guinea]	December 14, 2007	40 years