

Reçu CLT CIH ITH
Le 27 MARS 2018
N° 0131

Reçu CLT CIH ITH
Le - 5 AVR. 2018
N° 0211



REPUBLIC OF KENYA

MINISTRY OF SPORTS AND HERITAGE

NATIONAL INVENTORY OF ICH ELEMENTS

4.0 RITUALS AND PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH KIT MIKAYI SHRINE OF THE LUO COMMUNITY



Kit Mikayi Shrine

The rock has become a centre of serious soul searching and mediation for various churches since different sects camp at the rock for many days and weeks until their prayers are heard and answered. To enter the cave, there is only one “door” a small green ravine. There is one spot inside the cave that no individual is allowed to step on except the designated elders since it is regarded as a holy ground. The holy ground is a swamp area with sludge-like black

mud at the centre of the cave and beneath it is a river, which flows to Lake Victoria. The cave serves as alter for sacrifices by the local community. The history of Kit Mikayi is as old as the settlement of Seme area.

To avoid ill luck, a visitor to Kit Mikayi pays some fee to the appointed shrine curator and the offering appeases the spirits. A story is told of a visitor who was smuggled into Kit Mikayi by a villager without paying the fee. He collapsed and died seven metres from the revered place. Another narrative claims that a woman who visited the cave without paying the required fee disappeared mysteriously. A search mission discovered her body on the shores of Lake Victoria. Since then women visiting Kit Mikayi must throw coins on the spot while shaking their shoulders in a style locally known as *goyo otenga*. Water from an underground stream in the cave is used by Legio Maria sect for divine purposes. They call it *Pi Hawi* (holy water). Members of the sect, who have built a church next to Kit Mikayi, believe the water has powers to treat gynaecological complications in pregnant women.

During dry spells, villagers come with two live chicken which they kill by hitting them against the rock, then roast them. A black sheep is also slaughtered and offered for sacrifice. The internal organs of the chicken and the blood of the slaughtered sheep are placed in between the rocks as a sign of presentation to God and the villagers feast on the remaining meat while singing and dancing in order to invite rain. One corner of the cave is called **Thuon Gweno** and is believed to be the home of a large snake that mediates between the villagers and their ancestors. The snake is rarely seen and whenever it is seen then it is presumed that trouble is soon coming. Thousands of black bats hang on the cave's walls and are said to accompany the snake on its occasional sojourns to the lake. The snake leaves in the form of a windstorm that sweeps towards the lake and returns in a similar style. One villager by the name **Outa Ogingo** saw it and died instantly.

The beauty and size of the rocks, how they were formed and arranged defeats the human mind and has remained a mystery to both geologists and historians. Because of the historical events and present significance of Kit Mikayi to the people within the region and surrounding areas, this gives the prominence of the rocks as a tourist site attraction in western Kenya.

4.1.1 Associated Tangible and Intangible Heritage



During ritual and associated practices certain tangible objects are used. These include but not limited to clothing, birds, animals such as goats and sheep of varying colours, wax or candles, coins, household items such as jugs and mugs, pictures etc. The intangible objects include prayers, songs and dances, ululations, the feeling of the presence of supernatural powers and other deities etc.

4. 1. 2 Persons and Institutions involved with the shrine

All persons men and women from all background can access Kit Mikayi irrespective of their ages, race, creed, ethnicity, religion and nationality. Kit Mikayi can be visited for a myriad of intentions; either for tourist purposes, for prayers, to undertake rituals and associated practices and festivals, oath taking etc.

Though owned and managed by the Seme tribe a section of the larger Luo community, other institutions associated with Kit Mikayi are the Kit Mikayi rock management Committee, Kit Mikayi Rock tourist Cooperative Society, the National Museums of Kenya, The Department of Culture, Ministry of Lands, Survey of Kenya . Others are Universities and research centers as well as religious organizations and churches.

4. 1.3 Customary Practices Governing Access to the element or aspect of it

Though most areas within the shrine are easily accessible, certain parts/sections of the shrine can only be accessed by designated people of given ages that belong to the community. Names of certain herbs and concoctions used in the treatment of certain ailments are the preserve of members of the community. There are also rituals whose performance is restricted to members of the community.

4. 1. 4 State of the element: Viability

Kit Mikayi shrine is still viable. As one walks in the shrines compound, you notice that the shrine is well kept with trimmed lawns and hedges. You will be met by local curators who will take you round and explain to you the history of the shrine. According to the Chairperson of the committee that manages the shrine, visitors numbering in their thousands from all over the world visit the shrine annually. These visitors include tourists, researchers, religious people, ritual takers, students, politicians, surveyors and anybody with a stake on the shrine.

4. 1. 5 Threats to Transmission

Though there are no noticeable threats to viability of the element, the frequency at which bearers are dying is becoming a major concern among the community. This is happening as bearers die without having passed their knowledge and skills relating to the rituals and associated practices to the young generation.

4.1.6 Safeguarding measures

The Kit Mikayi and its associated rituals and practices are aspects of culture that the Seme community among the Luo of Kenya has safeguarded for many years. Due to its centrality in the lives of the Seme community, past and current safeguarding measures put in place to include the establishment of a management committee to oversee the day to day management of the site. The land surrounding the site has also been fenced as a way of demarcating it. With assistance from the National Museums of Kenya and the Department of Survey the community has established buffer zones to protect the shrine from encroachment by farmers, pole harvesters as well as fuel wood gathers.

The National Museums of Kenya has facilitated the process of gazettelement of the site as a monument, cultural and historical site in line with the National Museums and Heritage Act 2006. This legal framework gives protection of the site.

The opening up of the shrine to all people within and outside Kenya is a way of safeguarding it. People visiting the shrine are culturally required to leave a small token which is then used to maintain it. It is worthwhile to note that all these measures have been taken with the widest possible participation of the community.

4.2.0 Domain: Ceremonies

4.2.1 Child Birth (Nyuol Nyathi)

During pregnancy and a few weeks to birth, elderly women are only supposed to stay close to expectant mother to prepare for child birth. In the course of pregnancy expectant mothers are culturally forbidden from engaging in extra marital affairs. It is practically so in times of wife inheritance where in the case of polygamous marriages, all women would be inherited save for the expectant mother who will be inherited after she delivers.

At delivery, elderly women disconnect the baby from its mother by cutting the umbilical cord. Culturally women of the same age with the expectant mother are not allowed to witness their colleague giving birth. If delivery takes place outside the matrimonial house, mother carries her baby while led by an elderly woman into her matrimonial home where the baby will stay indoors for three days in case of a baby girl and four days in case of a baby boy.

To facilitate lactation, a sheep/goat would be killed on the first day and cooked meat and soup will be served to her. On third day for a baby girl and the fourth day for a baby boy, a ritual known as *Boro remo mar dhiang'* is performed. A bull or cow is killed and its blood collected. This is the day the baby will formally be taken out of the matrimonial home and

formally given a name of a late relative who was very famous. The pronouncement of the name is made by a close relative from either the paternal or maternal side. The name to be given to the new born is revealed to the person to pronounce it in a dream. During naming a traditional medicine man or jamanyasi/ajuoga serves in a calabash some medicine to the mother of the newborn to cleanse her womb. The father of new born will then hug the wife in a ritual known as *Kalo Nyathi* or welcoming the baby to the family.

After this ceremony the mother of the newborn is supposed to sunbath the newborn so that the baby absorbs enough vitamin D. The lactating mother is given a lot of food and is expected to eat as much as she can to gain weight and have enough milk for the newborn. People from the community can now come to see the newborn accompanied with some gifts as a sign to thank God for the wonderful gift and to formally welcome the baby to the world.

Women who are unclean (on menses) or those who have just had sex are not allowed to hold or carry the baby. During this time where the child is very delicate, young children under the age of menses or who have not engaged in sex are allowed to carry the baby along with elderly women who are post menses age. These are the same people who prepare food for the mother of the newborn mostly meat and milk.

After two weeks, the baby is shaven clean in a ceremony known as *dayo* or *nyamrerwa* led by an elderly woman. After the shaving ceremony all women are free to carry the baby. The father of the baby can now share a bed with his wife but are culturally discouraged to engage in love affairs so as to ensure maximum safety of the baby; and to discourage early conception of another pregnancy by the lactating mother before the baby gets to about two months. In cases of twins a ceremony where alcohol and food are prepared complete with songs and dances was organized. Here the mother of the lactating woman dances with her son in law but avoid close contact in a ceremony known as *miend rut* (RUDE). The ceremony was meant to appease the gods not to bring forth to the family twins again as they were viewed a curse to the family.

4.2.2 Significance

Child birth ensured the addition of new members into the family. It is a way of ensuring continuity of the lineage. Children were a source of happiness and pride to their parents. Barrenness was looked down upon and barren women could not be assigned certain responsibilities in society. The arrival of a child would automatically elevate the social status of the parents of the child in society.

4.2.3 Viability

The element is highly viable since children are born every day. However, certain cultural practices associated with child birth have started to wean due to urbanization where families are forced to stay in small houses with limited space where children and their parents sometimes share a room.

4.2.4 Tangible materials associated with the element

Child birth among the Luo community is associated with many tangible materials including: Sheep/goats, bull or cow, calabash, traditional medicine, food, gifts for the new born, milk, and alcohol.

4.3.0 Initiation Nak (Nagoleke)

Takes place at age 12. The ceremony involves removal of six lower canines as a sign of transition to adulthood. The logic behind the removal of the six lower canines is to facilitate oral administration of medicines during sickness as their presence would perhaps hinder the process. At this age the boy spends his nights in *simba* (other boy's houses). While here, the boy is taken care by the father or an elderly person. The induction of boys takes place at the *duol* or *abila*. As young adults, boys take care of cattle and participate in farming while those close to the lake go fishing. Young adults would also be involved in traditional games such as wrestling to instill on them skills meant to defend the community.

Girls would spend the night in the house of an elderly woman. This ensured that the girl is inducted into adulthood through non formal education by her grandmother. She is expected to collect firewood, water and grind millet; and perform household work/duties. The idea is to instill discipline and make the girl responsible as she grows up into adulthood.

4.3.1 Significance

This was a symbol of transiting from childhood to adulthood. It also marked the period where transfer of responsibilities to the young adults was made. It is also the time where children are taught livelihood activities such as taking care of animals, fishing and farming. During initiation, children also were taught life skills such as defending themselves and the community when under attack.

4.3.2 Viability

Though the element is still viable, its practice and enactment is fast diminishing due to many children attending to formal education and have less time to undergo initiation rites. The removal of teeth to allow oral administration of medicine when one falls sick has also weaned due to the development of modern forms of treatment that may not necessarily need to be oral.

4.3.3 Tangible materials associated with the element

Tangible materials include cattle, firewood, water, millet and grinding stone.

4.4.0 Marriage for Boys (*Kend mar Yawuowi*) and Marriage for Girls (*Kend mar Nyiri*)

Marriage for boys was organized by suitors mainly a sister or an Aunt married elsewhere. These find the right girl for their son/brother. Ordinarily, they identify the potential girl to be married and an arrangement is made for the girl and the boy to meet at the sisters' or Aunts home. On this occasion, the boy is accompanied by his close cousins and friends to ascertain that the proposed lady is worth marrying. At times several girls would be paraded where he chooses one through the advice and consent of either the sister or aunt who organized for the meeting.

Once the young man makes his choice and subject to approval, organization for the payment of bride price will be taken to the girls' home in the form of cattle. These would number up to 20 in addition to a she –goat. After receipt of the bride price by the girl's parents, the identified girl is brought to the bridegroom's home through eloping by the cousins and brothers of the bridegroom.

Once at the home of the bridegroom, the cousins and brothers spend time with her and welcome her in her new home. They entertain her before she fully gets adapted to her new environment. On the first day of her stay at the boys' home, the girl gets into the boys house (*simba*) and after dinner, all boys leave save for the eldest (supposedly married) to ascertain that the matrimonial act takes place. If it's not done on this day, he will continue paying vigilance until it happens. The performance of the matrimonial act gives the lady the status of a wife and the boy formally becomes the husband. At this point, she still doesn't engage in domestic chores until after two weeks.

After a month of staying in her new home, her friends and sisters pay her a ceremonial visit called *Ndaria* to ensure that their friend/sister has fully settled in her new home. During *Ndaria*, a goat or cow is killed for the visitors to feast depending on their numbers. After feasting, the visitors spend the night at the boy's grandmother's hut where boys from the boy's side join them the next day in a bid for the boys to find potential wives.

After all the ritual and ceremonies have been performed, the lady now becomes fully assimilated into her new home and is given her own farm and cattle to take care of. The newlyweds stay at the parents homestead until he gets at least a son then he moves out of his father's homestead to establish his own. In the unlikely event that a son doesn't come quickly, the duo is allowed to move and establish their new home even with a baby girl.

Like boys, girl's aunts or sisters married elsewhere or friends of her parents organize for potential suitors to meet the girl. After being introduced to the suitor and she accept him, the suitor then initiates the process of paying bride price. The rest of the formalities are like those for the boys.

At times, a girl may just decide to go to her matrimonial home accompanied by her sisters, her age group aunts and friends. As she leaves her parents homestead to her new home, a ceremony is performed with songs and dances. This ceremony is known as '*Tero Ndaria*'. On arrival at her new matrimonial home, she heads straight to his *samba* where food will be served. At night, the other girls leave for his grandmother's house and the two spend the night at his *simba* to enjoy their matrimony under the vigilance of the bridegroom's eldest brother to ascertain that the act has been performed. After this, the duo is considered to be husband and wife and legally married.

After two days, the girls who brought *Ndaria* go back to their homes to deliver a report of the mission. If the report is delivered while the group sings and dances, it's a symbol that all is well and their daughter was well received and accepted. If the report is delivered in silence, it's a symbol that something went wrong and the girl was not well received or accepted.

4.4.1 Significance of Marriage

Marriage was associated with transiting from childhood to adulthood. As two adults marry they acquire societal responsibilities. They are expected to have children and provide continuity to the family and society. Marriage gives the parties respect as unmarried people despite their age are accorded low respect in society.

Marriage unites two families that are not related by blood and therefore promotes peace, harmony and cohesion in society. It builds relationships and promotes friendship among people.

4.4.2 Viability

The practice is still viable among the Luo community in Kenya as people get married almost on a daily basis. There are some cultural practices associated with marriage that have started to depreciate due to changing social times. Religious influences have also permeated into the element rendering it less of the cultural hype that was associated with it.

4.4.3 Tangible materials associated with the element

Tangible materials associated with the element include: bride price in the form of cattle, a she-goat, food and a cow.