

## FUNCTION OF A LEGA MASK

BY

D. BIEBUYCK

I propose to deal with the use, significance and meaning of an interesting wooden mask, which I acquired during my investigations into the structure and ceremonials of the Bwamé-association of the Balèga.<sup>1)</sup> I therefore intend to give a full identification of the mask, to show its place in the considerable range of functional types of Lèga masks and to describe the uses made of it during the initiations. Relevant songs and their meaning, as explained by Balèga themselves, will be given.

This article is one of the first contributions I make towards a better understanding of this well-known and highly-appreciated Lèga Art, about which everything has yet to be said.

### IDENTIFICATION OF THE MASK (see Pl. III)

1) *Provenance.* This mask was acquired when staying within the Beiankuku administrative unit of "notable" Késanga. This unit is now incorporated in Beia-sector, Pangi Territory, Maniéma District, Bukavu Province, Eastern Belgian Congo. Beiankuku themselves are situated in the extreme eastern part of Pangi Territory, not far beneath the 3° lat. Their area is adjacent to the neighbouring Banasalu (N) and Beianangi (W and S), and to the Balèga groups of Shabunda Territory.

People called Banasalu are dispersed in seven village-groups, each of which consists out of two or three villages. What is nowadays said to be Banasalu-clan, in fact, comprises several heterogeneous kinship groups. Three of its five sub-clans only form a true agnatic nucleus; the fourth sub-clan groups the descendants of the illegitimate son of the sister of the three founders of the previous sub-clans. The fifth sub-clan (Banamuséga) is a kidandè-group, i.e. an assimilated group, which has maintained a rather independant position. These Banamuséga, who surely belong to the Nkulu genealogical division of Balèga, occupy one village-group (three villages) in the area of 'notable' Késanga. A high

---

1) Balèga, in literature incorrectly described as Warega, are a patrilineal people of Eastern Congo. True Balèga are dispersed in three Territories: Mwènga, Shabunda and Pangi.

Field-work among the Babèmbè, Balèga and other related groups was carried out under the auspices of "L'Institut pour la Recherche Scientifique en Afrique Centrale — IRSAC", Brussels. Over three years' field-work was devoted to investigations into the institutions of these groups.





Fig. 1. Muminia-mask.



Fig. 2. Muminia mask worn during kongabulumbu initiations.



Fig. 3. Scene of nkunda rite.



Fig. 4. Other scene of nkunda rite.



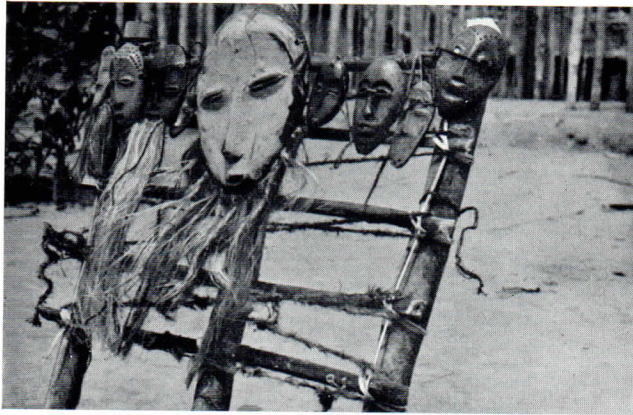


Fig. 5. Ivory masks and wooden idimu mask, fastened on a fence, during kèlènkumbi rites.



Fig. 6. Ivory masks and wooden muminia mask hung on a fence, during kèlènkumbi rites (Beianangi).



Fig. 7. Maskers, wearing muminia and idimu, during ibugèbugè rites.



Fig. 8. Final scene of ibugèbugè rite.

number of kinsmen are living in Shabunda Territory (Bakabango Chefferie of chief Molégé and Bakisi Sector of chief Kyalala) or are dispersed elsewhere in Pangi Territory.

2) *Donor*. Wakènga, a man of about 55 years. Wakènga belongs to Banamuséga sub-clan, Banagomba maximal lineage, Banakalitu major lineage. At the time he gave me the mask, he was an initiate of lutumbo lwa yananio degree of the Bwamé-association.

3) *Use*. The mask is exclusively used in several initiations of the Bwamé-association, as will be seen further on. A few words must be said about this association. Bwamé is universally represented among Balèga. It is by far the most important aspect of Lèga culture and pervades all institutions. Membership is theoretically open to everybody. Women and men have access to a different set of rites and initiations; their respective degrees, though not overlapping, are unseparable. Each degree is entered upon through a long cycle of rites, most of which are secretly practised. Each initiation presupposes a long preparatory period, a considerable amount of valuables to be exchanged, lavish food-distributions, participation of a high number of initiates. Each degree, too, has its own set of insignia and paraphernalia, its initiatory objects, its marks of recognition, its songs and dances.

4) *Age*. There are no concrete data available about the time the mask was carved, nor about its sculptor. Banamuséga only remembered how the mask had been passing from hand to hand, during the last four generations. Wakènga acquired the mask when his little father, Nyamugali, died; Nyamugali got it on the death of his senior brother, Muzoni; Muzoni had been awarded the mask on the death of his father, Mwaté; Mwaté, finally, had received it when his father, Igulu, died. As Banamuséga were well-known carvers, it is almost sure that the mask has been sculptured by a Munamuséga. Whether at a time when they were still living among the Bakabango of Molégé, or after they had settled in the present area, cannot be retraced.

In any way, from these data a few points must be bore in mind. The mask has never passed on to another kinship group, as is the case for many Lèga carvings. It only changed hands, when the agnate who was in its possession died. This means, that the mask had a very important meaning to the group. The several agnates who have possessed the mask, within the last four generations, had not acceded to the same degree in the Bwamé-association. This means that the mask did not belong to a certain degree and that it was primarily a possession of a kinship group and, only secondarily, initiatory object of the Bwamé-association.

For any discussion of style and morphology, it must be kept in mind how important is a clear distinction made between artificial administrative units and true kinship groups. Secondly, how with regard to kinship groups, structural arrangements must be taken into account, e.g. absorption of strange groups, as in the present case.

5) *Name*. This type of masks is variously called: muminia (indispensable for the initiations; used in many initiations); idimu (ancestor) kékuni (The Beautiful).



6) *Material*. Made of muntonko-wood, very hard wood used e.g. for shafts.

7) *Colour*. Black, but white clay (mpèmba) has been fixed around the eyes and nose. The decorative design on the forehead and cheeks has a white background with black dots in relief. Black colour is obtained in following way: the liquid (matongu) of a resiniferous tree (ikamba) is pounded together with ashes of musagé-tree. The application of white clay around the eyes and nose only, is not common on Lèga masks. Wooden masks either, completely, lack white clay or the whole face is covered with it. The present case remembers us of Lèga war-usages. When on the war-path, Balèga rubbed white clay around the eyes and mbilu-ashes on the eyebrows.

8) *Dimensions*. Height: 261 mm. Width: 199 mm. Compared to most Lèga masks, this one is unusually large. As opposed to the majority of Lèga masks it was intended to be mainly worn before the face. Holes all around its rim show that it might be attached to a costume, or that feathers or a snake-skin could be fixed to it.

9) *Particularities*. The mask has a long beard (luzèlu) attached to its chin. This is very common: nearly all wooden masks and a high number of ivory masks wear a beard. This beard, made of raffia-fringes (mpèku) was fastened to the mask just before the initiations, the former one having decayed. It should be pointed out that this beard of raffia-fringes is not normal; it ought to be made of lusaga, fibres made of the husk of the stipe of a banana-tree.

The decorative design, called tatoos (nyona), is uncommon on Lèga masks.

Stylistically, the mask shows many of the common Lèga characteristics (e.g. the concave space with eyes and nose in relief), though the indication of the ears, the form of the eyes and the decorative design are uncommon details.

10) *Incidence*. Muminia-masks are extremely rare nowadays. Several groups never knew an analogous type of masks. Others have lost their muminia in the past, because of Arab raids against the association, because of administrative measures or through mere accident (e.g. fire). Because of a continual pursuit of their association, some initiatory objects had been hidden away in the forests and, there, mouldered away or were eaten by termites and mice. Next to that, it must be remembered that Lèga sculpture has been vanishing away during the last decades, so that it had often become impossible to replace a mask by another one. It thus happened that muminia-masks were, in some cases, simply replaced by a mask of another functional type. When in 1948 the association was definitely abolished by Government measures, a final blow was given to a possible revival of Lèga art, whereas many sculptures again got lost.

During our investigation into the association, we only saw two true muminia-masks: the one we got of Banamuséga subclan and another one of Banamuningi-clan (incorporated in Beianangi administrative unit (see Pl. IV, fig. 6). The mask of our collection was used during initiations among the Beiankuku, Beianangi and Babongolo (of Kama-sector, Pangi Territory).

## FUNCTIONAL TYPES OF LEGA MASKS

A first important distinction must be made according to the material used. Balèga manufacture masks in wood, in ivory and in elephant's bone. Ivory- and bone masks are exclusive property of members of the highest degree (lutumbo lwa kindi) of the Bwamé-association. Wooden masks have a more diverse use and can be classified, only, when we take into account the extremely important criterion of type of ownership.

1) *Individual ownership*. As a general rule, each mwamé of lutumbo lwa kindi degree has one ivory (or bone) mask (lukungu). These masks, measuring from a few centimeters up to 180 mm., are rather to be called "masquettes", as they are not intended to be worn. Bamé of the inferior stages (kyogo, kantamba or mélungu) of kindi-degree are not allowed to have an ivory (or bone) mask, nor do they have a wooden mask.

As a general rule, each mwamé of lutumbo lwa yananio degree has one wooden mask (lukwakongo). These masks have various sizes, but rarely exceed 180 mm. They never are of "masquette" manufacture; they may be carried in the hand, drawn by their beards, tied on the arm, on the forehead, on the back of the head, on the temple, or they may be held under the chin, etc.

In this connection, attention must be drawn to several points.

a) When a mwamé of lutumbo lwa kindi dies, his mask is not thrown away, buried or destroyed. During the mourning ceremonies it is displayed on his grave; afterwards, it passes on to an agnate or sororal nephew who has been initiated to lutumbo lwa kindi degree. The same procedure takes place, when a mwamé of lutumbo lwa yananio degree dies.

b) When a mwamé of lutumbo lwa yananio accedes to the first stage (kyogo) of kindi degree, he has to get rid of his wooden mask. The mask will then be given to an agnate who has to be initiated to lutumbo lwa yananio degree (this, of course, presupposes that he, already, has acceded to the whole range of inferior degrees: kongabulumbu, bombwa, ngandu, musagé wa yananio). If none such close agnate is immediately available, the mask, temporarily, passes on to another mwamé of lutumbo lwa yananio (agnate or sororal nephew).

c) Regional differences and other usages must be taken into account.

It often happens that old bamé of lutumbo lwa kindi degree, who have assisted to the initiations of many kinsmen, have no more an ivory mask. This concords with the concept that old bamé are no longer subject to taboos and that their only role is to participate in the various food-distributions and exchanges.

Some bamé of lutumbo lwa kindi degree have a wooden "masquette" as a mark of recognition. These masquettes are smaller than the other wooden yananio masks, are of a delicate finish and, stylistically, entirely resemble to ivory masks.

In some regions, a mwamé of lutumbo lwa kindi, who is in possession of the large ivory statue of collective ownership, has no mask.



Among the Beiamunsangè-clan, no mwamé of lutumbo lwa kindi possesses an ivory mask, nor a wooden "masquette".

In several areas, a mwamé of lutumbo lwa yananio, who holds in trust the basket with kasisi initiatory objects, may not have a wooden mask.

Among some groups, a mwamé who has in his provisional keeping the mulama-basket of yananio-degree has no wooden mask. In some regions, a mwamé recently initiated to lutumbo lwa kindi degree and who has still in custody the mutulwa-basket may not have an ivory mask.

We noticed local usages whereby wooden masks of the common yananio-type passed from hand to hand within the limits of a minimal or minor lineage-group. That means that, if several individuals of that lineage-group have acceded to lutumbo lwa yananio degree, only the last one to be initiated has a wooden mask and that he has received it from the mwamé who, within the lineage, had acceded to that degree just before him. This, however, only meant a different social arrangement and not a shift in function.

2) *Collective ownership.*

a) Ownership defined by the cyclic handing over of baskets, containing initiatory objects.

To this group belong wooden masks which form part of the functionally highly important baskets, which contain numerous initiatory objects. Such baskets are characteristic for the yananio and kindi degrees. For each clan there are only a few of them, but the intricate relationship between their number and the internal structure of the kinship groups cannot be discussed here. They are handed over from hand to hand, as new members of a given kinship group accede to the degree to which it belongs. That means that every mwamé, lastly initiated to yananio or kindi degree and within the kinship unit, whose unity is symbolized by a collective basket, holds it provisionally in trust until a succeeding mwamé will get it.

In many regions, the baskets of yananio degree, called mulama, contain wooden masks. These masks are of two types: with horns (kayamba) or without horns (idimu). They are large in size and almost completely covered with white clay. There may be only one such mask to a basket, or more. They are rarely worn, but mostly displayed on the ground or shown in the hand.

In a few regions only, the baskets of kindi degree, called mutulwa, contain wooden masks of the same type.

b) Right of ownership traditionally confined to a certain lineage, members of which have it in their keeping in the name of the whole clan.

Masks of this category are either in wood or in ivory. Both of them are called, without discrimination, idimu, muminia or kékuni. In some regions, the wooden ones are, preferably, called samunyamwa. Both are large in size and characterized by their impressive beauty and finish. Of these large ivory masks, which seem to have been more frequent

before the Arabs, I only know one which I could obtain and which has now been deposited in Tervuren Museum. To this category, too, belongs the wooden mumunia we are dealing with here. Functionally again, the wooden masks of this type are the most interesting ones, whereas the ivory masks are exclusively confined to lutumbo lwa kindi degree.

Within the lineage these masks pass from hand to hand, within an almost direct line. They are only handed over on the death of the agnate who had it in his keeping.

It may be worthwhile to notice here that dimension, artistic achievement, nature of material and type of manufacture have something to do with this classification according to types of ownership. It should further be stressed that it would be impossible to classify Lèga masks according to their ritual function. This may vary from region to region. Moreover, as will be seen from the present example, a same mask may be used in very different contexts and with very different meanings. Neither could they be classified according to the ways of wearing or using them.

With reference to their meaning, Lèga masks have something to do with the ancestral idea. This may already appear from their names: lukungu, skull; lukwakongo, death gathers in; idimu, ancestor, or malumba, graves, as masks of lukwakongo-type are often called in songs. In this, they mainly stress the continuity of the group, in general, and of the bwamé-association, in particular. It must be made clear that they don't form part of the ancestral cult, which was formerly directed towards the human skull itself. As for Lèga sculpture in general, the social significance of the masks is by far more important than their ritual meaning. They are mainly social symbols, marks of recognition and concrete means for teaching.

#### VARIOUS USES MADE OF THE MUMINIA MASK

I will describe here how the mask was used, and what meaning was put into it, during initiations into three different degrees of Bwamé-association, say kongabulumbu (lowest degree), lutumbo lwa yananio (one of the highest degrees) and lutumbo lwa kindi (uppermost degree of the association).

##### 1) *Kongabulumbu initiations.*

The mask was used at two different stages of these initiations (see 2).

##### a) Musutwa-cycle.

At the very beginnings of the initiations, some 40 bamé of different degrees had gathered in a rectangular closed hangar (lusu) built in the village itself. After the first two songs, the initiate (mutèndè) was ushered in by his kékundi (an initiated agnate in charge of helping and advising him). He had to step over the legs of two sitting bamé, and was now placed at the nsingia's (song-, dance- and initiation-specialist) disposal. The nsingia now took him around the "hearth" (ziko), which consists out of a number of initiatory objects covered with a goat's skin. Thereafter, the initiate is invited to sit down close to



the "hearth". But immediately, a song draws his attention to a masker sitting in a back corner of the hangar and niddle-nodding. The mask is tied before his face, its beard hanging downwards to his chest. The masker wears no other paraphernalia. First song: "Twiso tulèngè kwèndaga walèngèbèzia", little eyes let us fly; where one goes, he sends his eyes ahead. Meaning: Initiate, to-day you enter into a spot unknown to you before. You can't guess what is awaiting you: whether good or evil. Be careful, rely upon the counsels given by your kékundi, fulfil the requirements of the bamé! Have you prepared everything, that you may give the things which will be asked for?

Without changing anything to the previous dispositions, a second song is started: "Kétumbélwa amona muntu, kébé kwitumba kwisola", Kétumbélwa (litt. The Boaster) sees somebody; bad thing to boast (about things you can't realise), to talk big. Meaning: To brag is as much as to scorn. A braggart seeks troubles! If you only pretended to be able to get bwamé, if you only feigned to have all necessary valuables for it, if you only made as though respectful towards bamé, you will bitterly account for it to-day. The dance-specialist now draws from beneath the skin two lianas, the one being bended as a bow, the other symbolizing an arrow. He makes as if aiming at the masker, whilst the third song is started: "Nabulaga nkasuméta mbèzi, musungu wa kalèngania wosa", I was thinking I will hit a mbèzi-monkey; the arrow of him who takes aim misses (its mark). Meaning: Everybody loves the beautiful and the good. But you initiate, you want to accede to Bwamé and you have neither the necessary qualities nor the indispensable valuables.

The same scene continues, when bamé start the fourth song: "Walèkeidè sulukutu wabèlilè wandio liso", (The arrow) which owl has shooted, has smashed eagle's eye. Meaning: Initiate, you are but a child, beware of seeking troubles, for all your guilts and faults will be imputed to your seniors (fathers and elder brothers).

During the fifth song, the sitting masker goes on with niddle-nodding, while quite a number of bamé dance around the "hearth" without paying any attention to him: "Lukundu lwanwaga nzogu lwatulungula mwéno", the lukundu-ordeal which elephant has drunk has thrown our village into disorder. Meaning: If you are accused of causing illness, don't try to deny by "stepping over your child". If it died, grievances would be double and might disrupt the unity of the village.

The dance-specialist now rubs with a leaf around an eye of the mask. It symbolizes a funnel (munoko) used for curing eye-sicknesses. The sixth song is started: "Mutwa wa makèsè, wa masambo, bamuloga nsongo", the bush-dweller of makèsè-honey, of masambo-honey, they bewitch him with an eye-sickness. Meaning: An eye-sickness may be cured by instilments of medicines; you may get rid of all the dirt that sticks on to you by getting initiated to Bwamé.

Next follows the seventh and final song. The masker remits the mask to the dance-specialist, who ties it before his own face. He then dances around the "hearth", niddle-

noddling and holding the beard in his hand: "Utatotiè mabèga ntyukabèga bwa Munga-ménwa", who does not tire of shavings, will shave (the abundance of hairs) of Bumps-on-his-head. Meaning: A youth who loves to quarrel with elders will perish.

After this song the mask is put aside. Initiations continue, bamé showing the various initiatory objects to the initiate.

b) Kagolè-cycle.

Having danced outdoors, for some time, bamé again gathered in the hangar for kagolè-cycle. At the end of it the mask was used again.

Following scene illustrates the first song. The dance-specialist wears the mask before his face and goes here and there in the hangar, chatting and chattering with the bamé in a deep and hoarse voice, making all kinds of funny gestures. He is followed by the initiate, who does nothing. Both of them act as squatters. "Sakébégabéga mukandama muto wa ntongè", Big wrongdoer Mukandama (litt. who causes confusion) junior brother of Ntongè (litt. a fish, considered as being the leopard of the water). Meaning: Don't glory in having done this or that, perhaps you might hurt some people and cause your own ruin. The song recalls the story of a famous warrior who was killed, because he was continually boasting on having slain the grandfathers of the grandchildren he was living with.

The dance-specialist now fastens the mask to the side of his bwamé-hat, the beard hanging down along his cheeks and shoulder. By means of an ivory spoon (kalukéli) he takes some banana-paste from a leaf and begins to eat, slowly and with difficulty, as an old man. The second song is started: "Késabulunda walolaga bukékulia ndéga", Glutton you will see how it (sc. kakulu, little old thing) eats a paste of dried pounded bananas. Meaning: When an old man comes to your village, be a delicate host: give him a nkèka-chair, order ndéga-bananas to be prepared by your wife, invite him to eat indoors that children don't laugh at him.

The dance-specialist, wearing the mask before his face, sits down on the ground, the initiate closely behind him. Contorting the body, he slowly moves forwards, pulling the initiate behind him. The third song is sung: "Kambuluta kambuluta, tata kabè ku musona", Kambuluta (litt. Little-puller) pulls me, my father clearer of the way to wrath. Meaning: When somebody, continually, revives enmities of long standing, say he wants to trouble you.

The masker now floors the initiate on his back, while bamé sing the fourth song: "Mukungo mukungo wakumbaga mu lisilia", many a thing upon many a thing is done on the other side. Meaning: When two elders, continually, quarrel and fight, it will cause a complete disintegration of the village community.

The masker undoes his loin-cloth; the initiate standing behind him seizes hold of his penis and so they crawl here and there in the hangar, the masker shouting and protesting. The fifth song is started: "Ta mwana aninamanyènyè, ta mwana", it's not a child that



does me wrong, its not a child. (The verbal form 'aninamanyènyè' has been derived from the word 'manyènyè', which means: the delight felt on ejaculation). Meaning: Never seduces your father's or elder brother's wife; never floors your brother on his back; when fighting, never catches hold of his neck or penis. When quarelling, never pulls your father's or brother's belt; perhaps it might break and to see their nakedness would be a big fault.

The masker has dressed again. He goes here and there in the hangar, making strange noises, as monkeys do. He is followed by the initiate. Sixth song: "Mutubu mbèzi za mubunga lugobogobo", Mutubu (miopithecus), monkey of the reforesting land, tardily and cautiously. Meaning: Don't act precipitately.

In the next scenes the mask is no longer used. This seems the more remarkable, as in a few songs which immediately follow the dance-specialist represents the idea of force, of stoutness.

c) General remarks.

1) No woman is present at the kongabulumbu-initiations. Kongabulumbu, called "heart of bwamé-association", must be considered as a kind of prolongation of the circumcision-teachings.

2) The scene described for musutwa-cycle is very uncommon.

3) In some regions, no mask is used during the songs described here under kagolè-cycle.

4) The complete impassivity and abstinence of the initiate should not be considered as resulting from sanctioned attitudes towards masks. This kind of annihilation of the initiate is a dominant trait of all initiations.

2) *Lutumbo Iwa yananio initiations.*

During these initiations, which variously take from two to four days, the mask was only once used. Use of it was made during the mukumbi-cycle of rites, whereas it did not occur in lukwakongo- and tulimu-rites, in which the wooden masks of smaller size and of individual ownership were used.

It was interesting to notice the different function accorded to an idimu-mask, belonging to the basket of initiatory objects, and to our mumunia. During the mukumbi rites themselves only the idimu-mask, entirely covered with white clay, appeared. It was exposed on a pit covered with leaves (this pit symbolized the earth of the small mukumbi-rodent and, at the same time, the grave of a dead mwamé). It was also worn, in turn, by a mwamé who had assumed the role of guardian of the grave (mukondi) and by the dance-specialist (nsingia). Various songs were sung on this occasion, stressing respect to be shown towards elders, the tremendous power of elders, their perspicacity, their craving for peaceful settlement of all quarrels.

The idimu-mask was then put aside until the final rite of nkunda (litt. queen of bees). A dance-specialist had fastened four wooden masks all around his head: the mumunia-

mask before his face; the idimu-mask on the back of his head; two smaller masks of lukwakongo-type on each temple (see Pl. III, figs. 3 and 4). He was dressed with two mpaga-skins (thos), one on his back and one on his breast, and with many other paraphernalia (bingonzèngonzè), particularly feathers. In his mouth he held the skin of a genet (kabungulu). He was followed by a second mwamé of yananio-degree, wearing a lukwakongo-mask fastened to the side of his hat (see Pl. III, fig. 3) and a snake-skin fringed with chicken feathers (mwalu). A third mwamé of yananio, not wearing any mask, followed, carrying a small basket. Coming from behind the huts, they quickly and noiselessly ran about and, finally, entered the hangar, where the other bamé were awaiting them. They impersonated people in search for honey. For that purpose too, the dance-specialist, called mutagi wa buki (gatherer of honey), carried a wooden axe with him. The second mwamé had taken along with him a bunch of dried leaves (kasèza), as honey-gatherers are used to drive away bees with smoke. The basket, carried by the third mwamé, was meant to contain the honey harvested.

Having entered the hangar, they make a stand before the pit which has, previously, been uncovered. The only song of the rite is started: "Nkunda abuè, lupapula lutaga buki", Nkunda comes; the procedure of chasing away with smoke: a means for gathering-in honey. The gatherers have found honey and can now set at work! A mwamé gives them small pieces of wood drawn out of the pit. They symbolize the honey harvested.

This interesting scene has but a simple meaning. Nkunda here signifies the kakusa, an older mwamé of great prestige and power, of wide knowledge and profound experiences, who has inspired and helped many of his kinsmen to obtain Bwamé. A kakusa is, at any time, making reconnaissances, on the trail of a new candidate. Inside and outside his lineage, he is stimulating the youth and selecting the best ones among them. At the same time, he is a true gatherer of honey. This honey means nothing else but new initiates who will contribute to the maintenance of the continuity of the association and who, on becoming initiated, will lavishly provide valuables and food to the older bamé.

### 3) *Lutumbo lwa kindi* initiations.

The mask was used for kankundè- and ibugèbugè-rites. No use was made of it during kélénkumbi-rites, although this rite consists in presenting the small ivory masks (lukungu) to the initiate. In the regions we are dealing with, these ivory masks are hung on a kind of fence; they are always accompanied by a large wooden mask. In Beiankuku area this mask, of idimu type, was the same as used in yananio initiations (see Pl. IV, fig. 5). In Beianangi-Banamuningi area, this mask was the counterpart (the only one we know) of our muminia (see Pl. IV, fig. 6). There is nothing strange about the different usages in both neighbouring regions. With reference to this rite, both masks could fulfil the same functional requirements. In fact, the wooden mask, called kékuni (The Beautiful, The Powerful) in this context, impersonates a powerful mwamé of kindi, who is nènèkésé (master of the land) at the same time and who, by his qualities and behaviour, symbolizes



all the highest virtues of the association. His person is the unifying link between all other *kindi*. Masks of both types could symbolize this concept, as both of them are collectively owned and are considered as being tokens of unity and continuity.

a) *Kankundè* rite.

Bamé of *kindi* had gathered near one of the two entrances of an oval hangar (*lubungu*), specially constructed in the village for *kindi* initiations. A piece of cloth had been hung before this entrance, some open space being left between it and the ground. A piece of wood had been laid transversally at the entrance, as a kind of threshold. Inside, two bamé of *kindi* were sitting near each door-post. A masker was crawling on hands and knees between them. The mask—our *muminia*—was fastened to his skull, its beard covering the masker's face. This way of wearing the mask was intended to stress, for the onlookers, the movements of the head, as the masker was moving his face close to the ground. He was holding the shell of a tortoise (*nkulu*), which could be seen through the mask's beard.

Singers and drummers, standing outside, now started the first song: "*Mukulu wa nkulu akèlèla ku kindi*", elder brother of tortoise sets out for *kindi*. Meaning: an old *mwamé* of *kindi* is coming to my village, it is highly probable that I will get initiated to *kindi*. During this song, the masker slowly moves his head forwards, as tortoises do, so that his beard and the shell are visible through the open space left.

The masker now pushes the shell up to the transversally placed stick, which symbolizes a fallen tree (*mugogo*); he raises the shell against it, then lets it fall. A second song is sung: "*Mukulu wa nkulu asuluka mugogo*", elder brother of tortoise crosses a fallen tree. Meaning: An old *mwamé* of *kindi* has arrived in my village; he wants me to become initiated. He will not leave me before everything has been settled, even if he had to stay for a month.

One of the bamé sitting at the door-post now gives some banana-paste to the masker by means of an ivory spoon. While eating, the masker shakes the head and niddle-noddles. Third song: "*Bakulu ba nkulu nasiga bèkulia lusèlu*"; The elder brothers of tortoise I leave them eating banana-paste. Meaning: Bamé of *kindi* don't eat underdone food. Therefore regale them with things appropriate to their status.

The shell is put aside; the masker now hides two rattles (*mézègèlè*) behind his beard. Rattling he moves on towards the entrance, trying to get outside. But bamé, waving *magungu*-leaves in their hands, obstruct the passage. Fourth song: "*Namènyaga anyampu mu mukumbi kasi ntumba*", I had thought that there was a *mukumbi*-rodent in it (sc. earth) and look! it is an *orycteropus*. Meaning: We thought him to be a man of high qualities and good behaviour, but it appears that he is but a wretch. I thought these initiations are easily acquired, have not much meaning, but look! it now appears to me that they are something of outstanding importance.

The masker goes on rattling and moving here and there, while bamé put a few

pieces of wood on the threshold and shake magungu-leaves. Fifth song: "Ntumba ntapupoè na malèlè mwasèna nkuzi" an orycteropus is not chased away by (smoke of) dried leaves, cleave fire-wood. Meaning: without giving many valuables and making lavish distributions of food, nobody can accede to the higher initiations.

Bamé pull at a liana, which has been fastened to the mask. The head of the masker slowly pierces underneath the cloth. Sixth song: "Mwakala mbubi ntumba zègama mu mulundu", Cut lianas, orycteropus sticks in the lair. Meaning: The valuables you have at your disposal are not sufficient; quickly go and fetch some more of them at your sisters'.

They continue to tug at the liana; the masker emerging from the hangar is caught by the bamé. Seventh song: Ntumba atomoka mu mulundu", orycteropus emerges from the lair. Meaning: Initiations can start now, for all necessary valuables are available.

Remarks:

1) To Bamé belongs the privilege of eating tortoises. These animals are, jointly and ritually, eaten in the village of the traditional possessor of the knife of the ant-eater. Shells of tortoises are widely used in Bwamé initiations.

2) Orycteropus is not a sacred animal, but its claws are secret tokens of bamé.

3) The sudden transition of symbolism is a common characteristic of all Lèga initiations. Though the symbolic representation varies, a unity of meaning may, however, be noticed.

b) Ibugèbugè rite.

A fence had been set up in the village. Every mwamé of kindi had hung his ivory mask on it and was standing behind the fence. In front of them, at a few meters distance, were standing the batunyamwa, women of the bamé of kindi degree initiated to women's bunyamwa. Two dance-specialists were now leaving the hangar. The first of them wore the muminia mask, was dressed with skins and feathers and held a bunch of feathers and spines (idumbi) in his mouth. He was followed by a second masker, dressed with the same paraphernalia and wearing the idimu mask, described above (see Pl. IV, fig. 7). They first ran, serpentining, around the rows of bamé and batunyamwa and then returned to the hangar. This first appearance was meant to be a 'kakèngèlèzio', a reminder: beware, we are dangerous, we are engaged into "ibugèbugè", things which are highly sanctioned. They then came back and sat down, in front of each other, between the first two standing bamé, niddle-noddled and shivered. This scene was repeated for several times, on the side of the men as well as on the side of the women. On the side of the man, it was referring to war and evil coming from everywhere but not hurting a mwamé of kindi, who was carrying his rattle (muzègèlè) as supreme token of his being untouchable. On the side of the women, it stressed the idea of the inalienability of a kanyamwa and of the insolubility of the marriage-link with her.

The second masker now clasps the first one 'a tergo', and so they stride along between the two rows of men and women. This contains a teaching for the initiate: if you are a



swanker, bamé will turn their backs on you. This scene is said to refer also to a former war usage. When war was approaching, two bamé of kindi posted themselves at the confines of the territory, back to back, and shaking their rattles in order to avert war.

Both maskers now mimic a sham fight. This again, is considered to be a teaching to the initiate: You are now becoming a big man, don't ever more think about fighting!

They next pass underneath one another's legs. This means "kubasia munyobè gasamba magulu", to remove your companion (compeer) from between the legs, i.e. a truly big mwamé pardons offences and scorns.

Finally, the masker wearing idimu is floored on his back and the masker, wearing muminia, goes to lie on him (see Pl. IV, fig. 8). This is a last teaching: don't seduce your compeer's wife in the bush; when fighting with somebody, don't ever floor him on his back.

For all these different scenes, the same song is sung: "Nabakama mu nkungu ibugèbugè lékwanga", I climb on a nkungu-tree, dangour is found ready. Meaning: Who seduces his father's wife, who jokes with a mother-in-law, who pretends to be able to pay the initiatory valuables and he is not, who quarrels with a big mwamé, who secretly eats a sacred animal without advising bamé about it, etc., will find sanction ready.

In itself this mask has a very high significance. Owned by one lineage in the name of a large group, it impersonates the idea of the ritual unity and social cohesion of this group. In this, it entirely has the same meaning as collectively owned baskets and large ivory statues. From this "social status" it derives its wide-ranging function in rites of the Bwamé-association. In these rites, it essentially stresses the idea of seniority, of greatness, of power and dignity, of supreme authority and untouchability. It is intended, there, to be a kind of synthesis of the supreme virtues of Bwamé, of its basic laws and of its grandeur. In order to express its full content of meaning, it has to be worn by the dance-specialist, who is said to be "mutéma wa bwamé", heart of Bwamé.