

MAGYAR AFRIKA TÁRSASÁG  
AFRICAN-HUNGARIAN UNION



AHU MAGYAR AFRIKA-TUDÁS TÁR  
AHU HUNGARIAN AFRICA-KNOWLEDGE DATABASE

---

TORDAY, Emil

Bushongo Mythology

***Eredeti közlés/Original publication:***

*Folklore* (London), 22, 1, 1911, március/March 31., pp 41–47. old.

***Elektronikus újraközlés/New electronic publication:***

AHU MAGYAR AFRIKA-TUDÁS TÁR – 00.000.005

Dátum: 2012. július 14.

***Az elektronikus újraközlést előkészítette***

***/The new electronic publication prepared by:***

B. WALLNER, Erika és/and BIERNACZKY, Szilárd

***Hivatkozás erre a dokumentumra/Cite this document***

Torday, Emil: Bushongo Mythology, *AHU MATT*, 2012, **pp. 1–8. old.**, No. 000.000.005, <http://afrikatudastar.hu>

***Eredeti forrás megtalálható/The original source is available:***

Néprajzi Múzeum Könyvtára

***Kulcsszavak/Key words***

Mítosz Afrikában, eredetmítosz Afrikában, bushongo mitológia, bakuba, bushongo, bambala, babinji, bashilele, Bumba – fehér színű ősi isten, Loko Yima – a királyi család alapítója, Woto mitikus király és ős, Nyimi Lele – Woto fia, a bashilele nép alapítója, Nyimi Longa mitikus bushongo király, Minge Bengela mitikus bushongo király, Moaridi – hivatalos történész és énekmondó a bushongo királyságban, az észak–afrikai muzulmán mint a bushongo királyság alapítója, myth in Africa, myth of origin in Africa, Bushongo mythology, Bumba – the white colour ancestral god, Loko Yima – the founder of the royal family, Woto mythical king and ancestor, Nyimi Lele – son of Woto, the founder of the Bashilele nation, Nyimi Longa mythical Bushongo king, Minge Bengela mythical Bushongo king, Moaridi official historian and bard of the Bushongo Kingdom, North African Musulman as the founder of the Bushongo Kingdom

---

AZ ELSŐ MAGYAR, SZABAD FELHASZNÁLÁSÚ, ELEKTRONIKUS,  
ÁGAZATI SZAKMAI KÖNYV-, TANULMÁNY-, CIKK- DOKUMENTUM-  
és ADAT-TÁR/THE FIRST HUNGARIAN FREE ELECTRONIC SECTORAL  
PROFESSIONAL DATABASE FOR BOOKS, STUDIES,  
COMMUNICATIONS, DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATIONS

\* magyar és idegen – angol, francia, német, orosz, spanyol, olasz és szükség szerint más – nyelveken készült publikációk elektronikus könyvtára/ writings in Hungarian and foreign – English, French, German, Russian, Spanish, Italian and other – languages

\* az adattárban elhelyezett tartalmak szabad megközelítésűek, de olvasásuk vagy letöltésük regisztrációhoz kötött/the materials in the database are free but access or downloading are subject to registration

\* Az Afrikai Magyar Egyesület non-profit civil szervezet, amely az oktatók, kutatók, diákok és érdeklődők számára hozta létre ezt az elektronikus adattári szolgáltatását, amelynek célja kettős, mindenekelőtt sokoldalú és gazdag anyagú ismeretekkel elősegíteni a magyar afrikanisztikai kutatásokat, illetve ismeret-igényt, másrészt feltárni az afrikai témájú hazai publikációs tevékenységet teljes dimenziójában a kezdetektől máig./The African-Hungarian Union is a non-profit organisation that has created this electronic database for lecturers, researchers, students and for those interested. The purpose of this database is twofold; on the one hand, we want to enrich the research of Hungarian Africa studies with versatile and plentiful information, on the other hand, we are planning to discover Hungarian publications with African themes in its entirety from the beginning until the present day.

## BUSHONGO MYTHOLOGY

Emil TORDAY

*(Read at Meeting, November 16th, 1910)*

The Bushongo are a people better known under the name of Bakuba, a sobriquet given to them by their neighbours and meaning "the people of the lightning"; strictly speaking they ought to be called Bashi Bushongo, i.e. "the sons of Bushongo." The population of the kingdom of Bushongo cannot much exceed one hundred thousand, and is composed of tribes originating from various distant parts of Africa. The backbone of the kingdom is formed by the Bambala, who originate from the Soudan, having immigrated from the neighbourhood of lake Tchad; the western part of the population comes from the Upper Congo; and in the south we find a branch of the Baluba, whose original home was somewhere near Lake Nyassa. This diversity of origin accounts for a corresponding diversity of tenets, although to a certain extent there has been an interchange of customs and beliefs.

The version of their mythology given by the Moaridi, the Bambala elder who is the official historian of the kingdom, is as follows: – In the beginning the world consisted only of water, and there was absolute darkness. In this chaos Bumba, the Chembe (God), reigned alone; he was like a man in form, but of enormous size, and white in colour. One day he vomited the sun, the moon, and the stars, and under the influence of the sun the water began to dwindle away and sandbanks to appear above the surface. Again Bumba vomited, and brought forth the leopard, the crested eagle, the crocodile, a small fish, the tortoise, the lightning, the scarabeus, and the goat. Next he vomited a great number of men, but only one of them was white like himself; this was Loko Yima, the founder of the royal family. The men and animals thus created took up the task of peopling the world, vomiting mammalia, birds, reptiles, fishes, insects, and plants. The lightning soon began to cause much mischief, so Bumba exiled it to heaven, whence it may come only rarely to the earth, so as to enable the people to obtain fire from the trees it has struck.

Bumba then gave every village its particular tabu. This tabu is called the "ancestral prohibitions," as distinguished from the moral code, which is called "the royal prohibitions." This moral code is condensed into twenty prohibitions; these prescribe that the king, parents, and the elders are to be honoured, that the life and property of friend and foe are to be respected even in time of war, that an enemy in need must be helped, and, in one word, that a noble life must be lived.

At this time the Bushongo lived near a large lake, and this lake contained palm wine instead of water. The story goes that one day a woman defiled the lake, and in consequence of this the palm wine disappeared and in its place there was a

deep ravine in which there grew four varieties of young trees, that had never been seen before. When these trees grew up to a great height, a pygmy discovered how to obtain palm wine by tapping them.

The first king, Loko Yima, was succeeded by his daughter, who taught the people how to build houses. Her son and successor was Woto, who gave people personal names, and to whom the use of iron was revealed by Bumba. He introduced circumcision and the ordeal by poison.

Woto is said to have committed incest with one of his sisters, and after some time she bore him a son, who was called Nyimi Lele. When their shame became known, popular indignation reached such a pitch that Woto bade his son leave the country, and Nyimi Lele travelled to the south and became the founder of the Bashilele nation. This did not suffice to assuage popular feeling, and Woto at last decided to leave the country. Before doing so he took revenge on his persecutors by causing their fowls to die and by making their millet rot. Finally he tried to appoint some man of no origin as his successor, but was outwitted by the rightful heir, Nyimi Longa. Before starting on his journey, Woto set fire to his village, and it was his wife Ipopa who invented the use of vegetable salt, by tasting accidentally some of the ashes.

Nyimi Longa was succeeded by his nephew, Minge Bengela, under whom the Bushongo nation emigrated. The production of fire by friction was revealed to a man named Kerikeri, who lived in the time of the twenty-seventh ruler; how the secret of it was given away by him to the beautiful daughter of the king, is one of the prettiest stories of Bushongo mythology.

The initiation ceremonies were instituted in order that the boys might not brave their parents, and might be taught to fear neither foe, nor beast, nor fire, nor water, nor ghosts. An account is given of the invention of the bull-roarer, which is used in connection with these ceremonies.

The second version is that of the Bangongo, the people who originate from the Upper Congo. Here we find from the beginning a complete world, only inhabited by an aged couple. These old people lived on the banks of a great water, when one day the sky suddenly opened and there appeared an incarnation of the divinity,—(according to Bangongo ideas, God is intellect; thus an idiot is a god-less man, and a great artist a man full of God),— called Bomazi, who predicted to the old people that a child would be born to them. This happened, and when the child, a girl, grew up, Bomazi married her. She bore him five children, each one of whom became the ruler of a people. Two of these children, Moelo and Woto, were twins. The son of the former committed adultery with the three wives of the latter, and, as his father refused to banish him, the incensed Woto left the country for ever. He had not left the village for more than a few days when his brother had cause to regret his departure, for there was no sun, and Moelo could not see, when he took a wife, if she were pretty or not; nor, if he plucked a fruit, if it were ripe or unripe; nor, if a man approached him, if he were friend or foe. So he called three of his men, and bade them go forth and find Woto and request him to give some remedy for the darkness. "In order that your mission may be successful," he said, "it is imperative that you should not quarrel on the way nor pause on your journey to

fish." But one of the messengers did stop to fish, and quarrelled with the two others, and all three returned unsuccessfully. So Moelo punished and retained the quarrelsome man, and his dog in his stead with the others. With the animal's help they found Woto, who gave them three birds,-the Natal cuckoo, the cock, and the weaver bird,-and bade them let these loose in their village and then go to sleep. "When you hear the cuckoo, do not move; when you hear the cock call, do not move; but, when you hear the weaver bird, leave your huts and see." They returned and followed his advice, and, when the third bird sang zwa zwa zwa, they all came out, and there shone the sun in all its glory.

At this time disease and death were unknown, but a man with a deformed tongue invented them. To escape him, the whole tribe emigrated; but the mischievous man followed them, and since this men have been subject to illness and death.

The Bangongo have a story, somewhat similar to the Bambala tale, of a lake of palm wine, relating how people learned to drink water, how the lake, whence they used to fetch their supply, was polluted by an obstinate woman, and how the palm-trees grew in consequence of this. The invention of iron is attributed to ghosts, who made their revelation to a man in his dream. It is said of Woto that, while travelling in the forest, the pygmies sprung out of the crevices of old trees in consequence of his magic incantation.

The above account, like the Bambala mythology, has, of course, not been related to me as a continuous story; both have come to me in the shape of short stories, and it has been my work to put them together. Anachronisms are frequent, but I did not think it wise to try to have them explained to me, as questions of this kind invariably put the story-teller in a bad temper. I cannot now go into the details of the Baluba mythology. It may be sufficient to state that it resembles in its main points the account given of other Baluba peoples.

Mythology may contain a good deal of real information, however much clothed in fiction, for him who knows how to read between the lines; for example, the Bushongo legends have enabled me to fix the ancestral home of these peoples. In this, of course, ethnography and physical anthropology are also to be considered, and it must give pleasure to the lovers of folklore to find that the cultural, linguistic, and physical features have all corroborated the evidence of mythology. But the stories I have related may possibly contain even more than mere information about the ancestral home of these tribes; they may perchance give us an indication as to the civilizations with which this people, occupying culturally such a high position amongst Africans, have in remote times come into contact. History tells us that a great king of this people has travelled widely to the west, and this might lead to the supposition that European influence accounts for the cosmogony and the occurrence of very un-African patterns in their art. As for the former I must leave this an open question, but for the latter there is strong evidence against such an assumption. The most un-African shapes are found amongst tribes related to the Bushongo, who have never been under the influence of the traveller king, and who are the most conservative and most averse to strangers of all people I have ever met. Furthermore, there is evidence that in other parts of Africa the leg-

ends of the creation equally resemble the stories of Genesis, and express the same ideas, put into a negro shape. I call your attention, in connection with this, to the tenth chapter of Mr. Dennett's *Nigerian Studies*.

There is another interesting fact to be considered. According to tradition the divine ancestor of the tribe was a white man, and this might suggest that it was some North-African Mussulman who was the founder of the nation. This is not more absurd than the fact that the rajah of Sarawak or the king of the Cocos islands should be Englishmen. But this again is difficult to bring into accordance with the fact that the loom was only introduced within historical times, viz. the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Then there is the man Woto. It cannot have failed to strike you that, differing quite considerably from each other, both accounts make Woto the moving spirit of the migration. In connection with him I must mention to you two incidents that impressed me greatly. One occurred in the country of the Bashilele, an independent branch of the Bushongo, where I could obtain no information of the past of these people owing to their reluctance to discuss these matters with the first white man they ever saw; so I threw out baits and mentioned names like Bumba, Etoch, and Moelo, but without the slightest effect; but, when I happened to name Woto, there was a general outcry of recognition.

The other puzzled me still more. The stories have been told several times to me, and there were always some slight variations, omissions, or additions. But one sentence was never altered, was never forgotten, and was always told to me with an expression that clearly showed that special importance was attached to it. This was in connection with the incident when Woto meets the pygmies in the forest. They are always made to say, and that in the very same words,—"What a man! No men, howsoever strong they may be, may try to seize him. Women alone shall hold him captive." There may be nothing remarkable in this; but, when it is repeated over and over again, and every informant uses the same terms, and all refuse to enter into explanations, it becomes as bad as a nightmare.

These Bushongo stories are only a small part of the legends preserved by them, and they have furthermore a remarkable treasure of interesting proverbs.

KÉPEK/PHOTOS



**Plate I: Bushongo Hunting Fetish "Tambo"**



**Plate II: Bushongo "Nyenge Mask"**