



The Kitui Akamba: Further Investigation on Certain Matters.

J. H. Blackwood Murphy

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THE KITUI AKAMBA: FURTHER INVESTIGATION ON CERTAIN
MATTERS.

By J. H. BLACKWOOD MURPHY.

PART I.—THE KITHITO AND ITS USES.

A *kithito* is made of various ingredients by a medicine-man, and is held in great fear by the Akamba. It is used in the taking of oaths, and any Mkamba swearing falsely on it will not only die himself, but his wife, parents, brothers, sisters, and children are all likely to die.

If the Nzama (the tribal council composed of *atumia* (elders)) have difficulty in deciding a case, they order one or both parties^(a) to “eat *kithito*,” as it is called. If one party—as usually happens—refuses to take the oath and swear on the *kithito* that his words are true, the case is immediately decided in favour of the other.

Another use is—two or more Akamba may be made to swear that in future they will abstain from strife, or that they will be satisfied with the portion of spoil allotted to them after a raid, or the division of the property of their deceased father.

A third use is that a person who has had property stolen from him—a blanket, for example—may “eat *kithito*,” and at the same time say, “May the thief be killed by the *kithito* unless he returns my blanket immediately.” The report of the curse upon him soon reaches the wrongdoer, who almost invariably returns the stolen property. If he does not do this he may ask a friend of his to come to an arrangement so that the curse may be removed. If the swearer agrees to remove the curse, he kills a goat and, taking the contents of one of its stomachs (*ngondu*), he sprinkles it over the *kithito* and then strikes^(b) it, saying, “Truly I ate *kithito* for the purpose of killing ——— (if the thief’s name is not known he says, “the person who took my blanket”). I wish to withdraw the curse.”

The Contents of a Kithito.

The following are the more usual contents of a *kithito*. This list is by no means complete, but a very powerful *kithito* would result from the following:—

Seeds of maize, millet, and all grain grown.

Earth collected immediately after the rains have broken.

Small iron filings collected from the place where an iron-worker has been working.

Teeth and dung of a hyæna.

Red beads (called *kito*).

Crushed root of the *wanyu* plant.

Crushed bone from the cranium of a person not lately deceased.

These would appear to be generally recognized among medicine-men as the essential contents.^(c) Others used when possible :—

A paste made from the cut-up and heated eye, nose, foot, and tail of a newly killed hyæna.

A paste made from the crushed-up and heated brains of an infant that has miscarried.

(Two medicine-men have stated that they put in a few parings from their own nails, and a little hair taken from their head, together with a chip off their own axe-head.) Bees-wax is used for keeping the contents from separating, and the *kithito* is bound round with fibre from the *musingeli* tree.

When an oath is about to be taken—in a place other than the usual resting-place of the *kithito*^(d)—the following procedure is gone through. First some stones are placed on the ground. Each *kithito* has a number proper to itself. Three, seven, and eleven are all used—seven is the commonest; it is *never* an even number. Resting on the stones are placed twigs of the *mwa* tree, and on these the *kithito* is placed. (The *mwa* tree is chosen because it is connected with death. When a corpse is buried, twigs of the *mwa* tree are placed on the three stones that are put over the grave. It is apparently not used for any other purpose, and if found in the vicinity of a newly built hut is cut down. There appears to be no objection to using it in the construction of the thorn fence which encloses the cattle at night.) If the twigs of *mwa* were omitted, the *kithito* would lose much of its power, *i.e.* take longer to kill.

The oath-taker stands near the *kithito*, with his right foot advanced, and placed on small stones of the number proper to that *kithito*. He says in an audible voice such words as, “If I speak false, may the *kithito* eat me,” or, “If I do not cease quarrelling with —— may I be eaten by this *kithito*.” At the word “eat” he strikes the *kithito* with a small stick of the *mukulwa* shrub. (This stick must be freshly cut, either by one of the elders, *atumia*, a medicine-man, or the person about to swear.)

Should anything in this ceremony be irregular, such as the use of other kinds of sticks in substitution of the *mwa* or the *mukulwa*, or the number of stones not being that required by the particular *kithito*, or the swearer having his right foot touching the ground, the effect would be the same, although in the case of a man swearing falsely it would probably take longer for the *kithito* to act. This is said to be true whether the irregularity was intentional or not.

The swearer is only required to strike the *kithito* once, but it is more common for him to do so three times. Five times is not uncommon. He moves round to the

other side of the *kithito* each time. An even number of times is not allowed. I made particular inquiries as to whether a swearer only striking the *kithito* twice or four times would be liable to death from the *kithito* if he had sworn falsely. Those I asked said that it would be impossible for a man taking the oath only to strike the *kithito* an even number of times, as the elders sitting round would be bound to remark it and would make him do it again. Some of them eventually agreed that if such a thing could possibly happen—which they did not believe—no ill would befall the perjurer. The remainder I asked refused to admit the possibility of such a thing happening.

The stick of *mukulwa* shrub is thrown away when the case is finished. Should there happen to be others to be sworn, however, the same stick may be used for all. There does not seem to be any prohibition against using it, say, on the following day; but the custom is to have a new one cut.

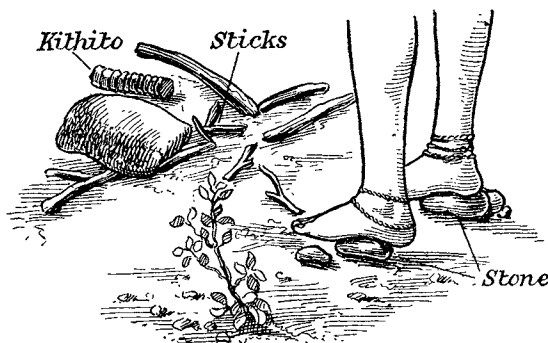


FIG. 1.—KAMBA KITHITO OATH. THIS SHOWS HOW THE PERSON TAKING THE OATH IS INSULATED FROM THE EARTH ON STONES.

Before a case, or a series of cases, the owner of the *kithito* must always swear on it and say, "I made (or bought as the case may be) this *kithito*. It is mine. It is properly made. I am not deceiving men, and if I am not speaking the truth, may I be eaten by it."^(e)

After every case involving the taking of an oath on a *kithito* a goat must be slaughtered, the *atumia* (elders) eating the meat,^(f) and the contents of the stomach being sprinkled over it.

Further Remarks.

Formerly no woman was allowed to swear on, touch, or even see, a *kithito*; but now, occasionally, women take oaths.

A *kithito* is never handled with the naked hands, but the left hand is carefully smeared with wet wood ashes or the fat of a sheep. The former is much the better. When being carried it is supported in a bag, and is always borne in the left hand; the reason for this is that the right is used for taking food and snuff. It is carried

at the full extent of the left arm and to leeward of the bearer. Should the wind be blowing from his left, the *kithito* must be carried behind him still at the full extent of his left arm. When not required, it is kept by its owner in a secret place far from the haunts of men, for it would bring misfortune to the villages and cultivated land if kept near them. It is deposited in a crevice under a large boulder or boulders, carefully sheltered from the rain which would destroy it. (The popular belief is that if the rain fell on it, the rain would fail.) I have known one kept in a honey barrel 12 feet or so above the ground, but this is, I think, unusual. The crevice is cleared of all herbage and the *kithito* placed on its proper number of stones. Trees in the vicinity of a *kithito* have been known to wither, but, generally, it does not affect either wild animals or non-cultivated trees or plants. One *kithito* stays in a crevice which has been the home of a snake for years, and the latter suffers no inconvenience. (Although the majority of those I asked said that a wild animal touching a *kithito* would not suffer in any way, two said that they would die immediately, and one that when the animal got near the place he would sense the presence of something evil and flee away.)

The price of a *kithito* is from seven goats to one bull and four goats ; the average price is about one bull and three goats. They can be hired for one goat for each time of using. The medicine-men who make them are either Meru, Wabai (*Embu*), or Tharaka. The taking of the oath is only allowed during the dry season, unless it is taken at the usual resting-place of the *kithito*. If a *kithito* were to be carried about during the rains, they would fail. The same thing would result from the non-performance of the slaughtering of the goat, after the oath has been taken.

The power of one *kithito* is not the same as of others. Some take two years to act, while others kill a perjurer in seven days or even four or five days.

When a man who is carrying^(a) a *kithito* gets tired, he is not allowed to change the bag containing it from one hand—the left—to the other ; he must put the bag down on his left side till he has rested. Should he wish to eat, he turns off the path and deposits the *kithito* some distance away, very often under a tree. He then goes on at least 100 paces and prepares his food, after having smeared his hands with the sap of the *mukengesia* plant. When he has eaten and helped himself to snuff, he returns, takes up the *kithito* and resumes his journey. If he meets anyone on the road he signals to him to leave the road, and take to the bush on his left ; he does the same, and when they have come abreast they gradually bear in to the path again.

(Besides the above, each *kithito* has its own peculiar customs. Thus : when a man has prepared his food, he must take a little, go to where he has left the *kithito*, and sprinkle it over with it, returning afterwards to eat his meal, after again smearing his hands. This plant *mukengesia* is always carried by the bearer of a *kithito* for fear he might not be able to find any on the way. Or again : the bearer reaches a river. He must put down the *kithito*, take a little of the sand of the near bank, and,

crossing over, sprinkle it on the far bank, bringing back some of the sand of the far bank. He can now take the *kithito* across. Or, he may have to sprinkle the *kithito* with a little water from each river that he has to cross. Again, he may have to sprinkle it with sand. Again, he may have to keep silent till his journey is accomplished, and not exchange greetings with anyone. The owner carefully instructs the hirer in all the different matters that have to be observed in connection with the particular *kithito*.)

A person swearing something on the *kithito* which is untrue, but which he believes to be true, suffers in the same way as if he knew it was untrue.

It seems to be considered that the power of a *kithito* does not change with age, though two of those who furnished the above information said that the power increased.^(b)

I have been as careful as possible not to ask any direct questions. But, where the above account differs from that given by Lindblom,¹ I have taken considerable pains to obtain evidence to support the statements as given by me. The following are the points on which my information differs from his :—

Page 168, para. 1.—The *mwa* twigs are placed on the stones, not round them.

The number of stones is never even.

Page 169.—If the twig is not of the *mukulwa* bush, the oath is not “ of no force,” but the *kithito* will take longer to kill.

Page 170.—The owner need not be a *mtumia*, though he usually is. Several makers of *kithito* stated that they would sell to anyone who paid the price. Anake may purchase if they wish, but it appears as if the younger men did not relish being owners of such a powerful thing as a *kithito*.

Page 170, para. 1.—Only carried in the left hand. Anyone approaching is signalled to, not shouted at.

Page 171, para. 2.—A woman may now take the oath on a *kithito*, though not formerly.

Page 173, para. 2.—Apparently the only way in which an oath can be nullified is by striking the *kithito* an even number of times. When an oath is taken it is customary to make the taker swear further that he will not take medicine to counteract the power of the *kithito*.

Notes to Part I.

(a) “ Both parties.” If it is evident that one party must have sworn falsely, and neither has died after the period in which the *kithito* acts, the elders conclude either that the *kithito* is lacking in power, or that something at the swearing was not in order. The parties, accordingly, take the oath on another *kithito*. If the same thing happens again, the property in dispute is divided.

(b) After striking the *kithito* the striker does not have sexual intercourse with his wife. Opinion is divided as to whether he abstains for the period required for the *kithito* to take effect or until he hears that the thief has had sexual intercourse. Several Akamba I asked said that he

¹ *Archives d'Etudes Oriëntales: The Akamba*, by Gerhard Lindblom. Paris: Ernest Lereux, 28 Rue Bonaparte.

abstains sufficiently long to leave no doubt but that the thief has heard of the striking of the *kithito*. At all events, all are agreed that he abstains for at least three days. If this is not observed the oath-taker will himself be killed by the *kithito*, and the thief will suffer no harm.

(c) A much-to-be-desired ingredient is fat from a recently dead human being. Food, as far as I have been able to discover, is never included.

(d) The same word *kithito* is used for amulets that nearly all Akamba wear. It is not uncommon to see them hung in cultivated land to protect the crops from thieves.

The *kithito* is not ordinarily used among people of the same family, on account of its power of killing off the relations of the perjurer as well as himself. The oath in a case like this is taken on *ndundu*, which only brings death to the perjurer himself. I hope to give an account of this later.

(e) I cannot find anyone to explain the sense of this. It is obvious that if the object is not a *kithito* it cannot do any harm to the owner. All admit this, but say that the procedure shown is the correct one.

(f) Until the meat of the goat is eaten by the *atumia*, the oath-taker is liable to death from the *kithito* if he has sexual intercourse.

(g) Sexual intercourse is forbidden to the carrier of a *kithito*. Disobedience of this is followed by death.

(h) A *kithito* is usually handed down from father to son in the same family.

PART II.—THE NGAÏ NGOMA.

This dance is a comparatively new introduction into Kitui District. The fashion in dances changes from time to time. The *Ngai* dance seems to have been introduced from Machakos by the wife of Kibui wa Nthengi and a medicine-man called Kaike in 1913. It apparently originated from an Arab called Mbarak b' Rashid, who offered to clear the Europeans out of Machakos District, as he said he had cleared them from the Coast.

The Obsession known as Ngai.

If word reaches a village that the *Ngai ngoma* is being danced at some place in the neighbourhood, not necessarily in the vicinity, anyone is likely to become possessed of a spirit and fall down, usually with spasmodic twitchings of the muscles. The spirit usually enters a woman who has not yet given birth or who has only one or two children. If she falls into the fire or on to thorns she suffers no hurt. She cries out "Iii! Iii!" She may now become insensible, but it is more common for her to appear to be suffering from malaria. She is given medicine, but it has no effect, and her relations send for a *mutsima* (plur. *atsima*). A *mutsima* is a person who knows the mysteries of *Ngai*, which her relations begin to think that she is suffering from.

Below is described the way in which a man becomes a *mutsima*. The *mutsima* is instructed in these mysteries by night in dreams. Some of them claim to have ascended to the sky and received instruction from *Ngai* himself (*i.e.* God).

When the *mutsima* arrives where the possessed woman is, he usually finds her vomiting, or that her abdomen has swollen enormously. He takes hold of her right hand and immediately knows that it is truly *Ngai* that she is suffering from.

He says to the spirit inhabiting the woman, "Why do you trouble this woman?" The woman replies and says that the spirit—*aimu*—wants an *ngoma*. The *mutsuma* asks what sort of *ngoma*, and the woman replies the *Ngai ngoma*. The *mutsuma* now knows something the spirit wants. He does not ask her. (The following are things that have been wanted—a tarboosh, a red cloth, a lesa of a kind called *kisuto*—this is a cloth worn by women and having a design of small spots; a bullock's or a horse's tail, a china basin—used for pouring water over oneself when heated by dancing; a string of bells—which are also used at dances.)

The *mutsuma* sends someone to fetch the thing required, but very often it is not immediately procurable. If this is the case, he takes half a calabash of water, puts it on the ground, squats beside it, and, dipping his fingers in, says, "Oh! Spirit! I know it was you who made this woman ill, and that now you want things difficult to get. I ask you to let this woman get a little better, and I will search for the things you want and bring them." He further promises that if the spirit departs for the time being he will have the *Ngai ngoma* performed as soon as possible. The spirit then leaves the woman, who goes and gets some food.

When the things required have been obtained the *mutsuma* brings them to the woman, who again becomes possessed by the spirit, and she examines the things brought. The *mutsuma* takes her hand and says, "If you are truly *Ngai* leave this woman now, and I will have a *ngoma* for you to-morrow or the day after." The spirit then departs for the second time.

The *mutsuma* then tells the woman's husband or brother to fetch a man who can conduct the dance. This is done, and when he comes the *Ngai* dance commences.

The Dance.

The man who conducts the dance is known as *ngui*. This applies to the person in charge of all dances, but the *Ngai ngui* is usually a medicine-man, whereas at other dances the *ngui* is chosen for his voice or his ability to improvise songs.

The *ngui* now takes a small stick of a certain tree (*muskali wauseni*), and rubs it on a stone with a little water until a paste is formed. He then dips his finger in it and smears a little on all the victim's joints, forehead, and in front of her ears. He then makes her sit on a goat skin. (The goat need not have been killed.) A small fire is placed between her knees and on it some *ubani* is thrown. Her head is covered with a cloth, and the fumes of the *ubani* kept in by this cloth are allowed to swirl round her face and neck.

The *ngui* sits near the victim (or victims, as there are usually quite a number) and strikes his drum, while his helpers, of which there are usually three or five, also beat drums. The *atsima* sit round also beating drums, and they all sing. An example of what is sung is: "I am *Utis* the lightning, or *Kitundumo* the thunder, or *Mubiti* the whirlwind, or *Ndambi* the rain-clouds."¹

¹ This is said by the woman after she commences dancing. She is here proclaiming what spirit it is that possesses her.

The spirit again enters the woman, and the *ngui*, taking both her hands and telling her to get up and dance, helps her to rise, which she does with great difficulty owing to the spasmodic twitchings of her muscles. She then starts dancing and singing songs made up as she goes along. The dance consists of a slow walk, with knees very much bent. It is very similar to the silent, cautious tip-toe of a person about to sandbag another unconscious of his presence. Her upper limbs move as if scratching some invisible object, below and in front of her. Many women who have come to the dance join in, behaving similarly.

It is at this juncture that the possessed one utters anti-European sentiments, saying something like this: "The Europeans have come into our country to harm us. They forbid us to dance when we want to and imprison those who disobey them. We will not put up with this!"

When they are tired out with dancing,¹ the *ngui* takes the patient's hand and says, "We will now rest till to-morrow." This same procedure is carried out for two or three more days. On the last day the *ngui* usually kills a chicken and leaves it near the road. Anyone now passing along the road is liable to become possessed, and the woman for whom the chicken was killed recovers. A chicken is slaughtered for each person possessed.

When the spirit is tired of dancing it leaves the woman for good, but if she takes part in a *Ngai* dance elsewhere, it is very likely to return.

The *Ngai* dance takes place in the daytime, except in the vicinity of the Government Station, where it is danced at night.

The Ceremony by which a Person becomes a Mutsima.

A Mkamba who wishes to obtain the power of curing *Ngai*—that is, to become a *mutsuma*—has to pay four to six shillings to a Mkamba who is already a *mutsuma*.

Having taken his fee, the *mutsuma* takes a red cloth with three white lines near the edge and spreads it on the ground. He then puts a little wood-ash in water and mixes it well, putting a smudge of the mixture at each of two adjacent corners of the cloth and one half-way between. Half-way between each corner smudge of ash and the centre one, he puts a mark with a kind of red paint which is bought in the Indian shops. It is called *mungethua*. He next takes two cents and threads them together on to one of the wood-ash smudged corners. He now takes the cloth and grasps the corner where the threaded cents are, between the right thumb and the first metacarpal, keeping all the fingers extended and close together, the palm downwards and in a horizontal position. Thus the cloth hangs by the two cents, they and their corner being above the level of the hand—the right hand—and the remainder of the cloth hanging below.

The *mutsuma* then says to the would-be *mutsuma*: "Hold the cloth as I am holding it now when you want to cure anybody of *Ngai* [this 'cure' only means

¹ They dance for about four hours.

the sending away of the *aimu* for the time being, such as between the first and second, or between the second and third, visitations], and take hold of the right hand of the possessed one, saying, as you shake it, 'I am a *mutsuma*. I am holding your hand. Come out and leave this woman and she will be well. It is wrong to trouble this woman so much.' The *aimu* will then leave her for the time being. You then should take the two cents from the corner of the cloth, and, threading them on a piece of string, tie them round the sufferer's neck, saying, 'Do not trouble this woman again.' The woman should then be free of the *aimu* till the things required are brought or till the *ngui* arrives to conduct the *ngoma*."

The fee of the *ngui* is said to be twenty-four shillings.

The anti-European sentiments expressed by the possessed one are not commonly uttered at the present time, and I am inclined to think with Mr. Chamier, the present District Commissioner, that when uttered they are only uttered as part of the *ngoma* as originally brought to Kitui.

The *Ngai ngoma* has been forbidden on account of—

- (a) The anti-European and anti-Government sentiments.
- (b) The high fee charged by the *ngui* which many Akamba cannot afford to pay.
- (c) The fact that in curing one person by holding the *ngoma*, many others are afflicted, so that it is a continuously increasing nuisance.
- (d) It is not a Kamba custom of standing, and has only been introduced lately.
- (e) The Akamba elders have stated that "it is a bad thing, because the *aimu* are bad spirits, and the holding of the *ngoma* to cure a few people gives other bad spirits an opportunity of entering many more people. Many people have died as a result of this."

There is little doubt but that the fact of this *ngoma* remaining in fashion for so many years, as compared with its predecessors, is due to the good living made out of it by the *ngui*. Although the Akamba elders say that they think it is a bad thing, there are very few, if any, who would go so far as to refuse to call in a *mutsuma* and later have a *ngoma* if their own wives appeared to be suffering from *Ngai*.

An Account of the forbidden Ngoma Ngai, compiled from the descriptions of H. R. Tate,¹ Esq., and Herr Pfitzinger, the latter translated by H. R. Montgomery, Esq.

Origin.—It is reported that either the dance or the accompanying ceremonies emanated from Sheikh Mbaruk, an Arab, who sent a message to the Akamba of Machakos, saying that the performance of the *Ngai* dance would stir up trouble between the Government and the Europeans in Ukambani as he had done in the same manner on the Coast.

¹ D.C., Kitui, 1901-1903.

The dance is said to have been brought from Ulu in 1913, when there was an epidemic of cerebro-spinal meningitis there, by a Mkamba named *Malela* (headman Ndumbo), who had brought the secret of its ceremonial from the 'Mbanthi. (Tate.)

“*Malela* of Thua knows the mysteries of *Ngai*; he told Paulo (a native teacher), all this trouble came from Mwana wa Makunoke, who fought with the Government long ago (Mbaruk b' Rashid Mazrui, 1895).”—H. R. M.¹ (Pfitzinger.)

Effect.—“Women of all ages are more affected by the obsession known as *Ngai* than men are.” (Tate.)

Symptoms.—“When *Ngai* enters into a man he groans and becomes ill with purging or throat trouble, or his body swells, or some other sickness, and if medicine will not cure him, he is troubled for many days until *Ngai* is taken out of him.” (Pfitzinger.)

“The first symptoms are general malaise like the prelude to fever. Sometimes the person attacked falls by the way or into the bush and becomes insensible *pro tem*.” (Tate.)

“When *Ngai* gives people this trouble, he gives them the power of insight into the mysteries^(a) and the power to cure people, and to give *Ngai* sickness to people who are whole. These secrets people can buy from those that had the power before, and sell to other people.

“A person who buys and knows the mysteries of *Ngai* is called *mutsuma* (plural *atsima*), and every *mutsuma* is told the doings of *Ngai* himself, either by ascending to the heavens^(b)—so says *Malela*—or at night in dreams.

“Many *atsima* are youths, and a few are women; but it is mostly women who become obsessed, and few men.

“People who are affected by *Ngai* sickness do not know it is *Ngai* until they are told so by the *mutsuma*.

“A person groans and becomes very sick, and calls for^(c) a *mutsuma* and asks him about it. The *mutsuma* gives her his hand, and examines her body and says: ‘It is true that you have *Ngai* sickness.’ If she wishes he will tell her how to be cured.

“Now the sick person is given things such as a fez, or a leso, or loin-cloth, or a red cloth, or a gourd, or a knife, and when the things have been looked at, the *mutsuma* comes again and the real dance begins.”^(d) (Pfitzinger.)

The Dance.—“Before the dance commences the person suffering from *Ngai* is made to sit on the skin of a goat that has been killed. The *mutsuma* then heats a knife and throws ashes on her (the sick person's) body, and places a gourd of *tembo* on her head. He then walks round her and takes the gourd and throws the *tembo* into the air: ‘Son of God, son of Lalu (a famous witch-doctor now deceased—H. R. M.), son of Chungu (*chungu*, plate of water, a reference to heaven whence comes the rain) behold *Ngai*.’”^(e) (Pfitzinger.)

¹ H. R. M. is H. R. Montgomery, late D.C., Kitui.

“The hierophants smear wood-ashes on the faces of those sitting in the centre (the patients), who are told to lick it. Those who have come to the dance bring a calabash full of *tembo*, which they drink and throw a few drops in the air, saying—‘May *Ngai* drink and cause the patient to dance so that the evil spirit may come out!’” (Tate.)

“The dance now begins. Drums are beaten by the *atsima*, who, if they give their hands to others during the dance or before its commencement, transmit the power of throwing off the spell of *Ngai*. Payment is sometimes demanded for the supposed magical touch. It is claimed by the *atsima* that they can transmit the power through a third party, if the patient is too ill to attend.” (Tate.)

“The *atsima* sing various songs. An example given is: ‘I want to go up into heaven to see the main-clouds (*ithima*).’ The songs are addressed to *Ngai*, who sent the spirit into the obsessed. All who wish to join the dance and enter into the spirit and aroma thereof buy and wear red fez caps^(f) and white clothes; they also carry a small knife. Malela claims to have visited the upper regions and held communication with *Ngai*.” (Tate.)

“The sick person sits in front of the people, and sings songs of her own choosing . . . she sings, laughs, and plays with the articles given her, and is very glad, and says many things just as people will at other dances.

“One woman said the following when I was watching a dance: ‘Europeans come to trouble us and to hurt the people. They discountenance *Ngai*. They want us to die, but I will not die. Europeans imprison many, many people, and send them to the *boma*, but when they are released we will start again to dance *Ngai*. We will not stop these things.’ Half of this was said in Kiswahili and half in Kikamba. Others say things that cannot be understood.

“They dance till they are tired. Then the *mutsuma* shakes the sick person by the hand, and tells them, ‘We will now stop till to-morrow or the next day.’” (Pfitzinger.)

“The dance is danced both by night and day, but more by night.” (Tate.)

“People dance for three or four days. If the *ngui* kills a chicken in another place or in the road, people who pass will become obsessed with *Ngai*, and the sick person becomes well. But she cannot be cured in one day; time after time she will become obsessed if she dances with the other people, or in her own house, or anywhere.” (Pfitzinger.)

Notes.

(a) The fact that anyone who has once been possessed knows the mysteries of *Ngai* has been denied by the many *ngui* that I have asked. The procedure that is gone through to become a *mutsuma* is described above.

(b) Though several *atsima* claim to have ascended to the sky and received instruction from God himself—*Ngai*. This claim is not believed, at least, by the great majority of the Akamba I have asked.

(c) This, I believe, should read “. . . very sick, and one of her relations calls. . . .” etc.

(d) The woman actually becomes possessed three times. First, when she becomes ill, and the *mutsuma* being called pronounces it to be “*Ngai*,” and promises the spirit to bring the thing or things asked for; the spirit then leaves her. Second, when the things are brought, and the spirit having entered the woman, examines them, and is promised a *ngoma* in a day or two; the spirit then leaves her. Third, when the *ngoma* has started and she rises to dance.

(e) The *mutsuma* does not conduct the *ngoma*. This is done by the *ngui*. I can find nothing to show that a knife is ever used in this dance. The beer *tembo* mentioned here and following is part of the ceremony in the *Kilumi* dance and is not used in the *Ngai*. Nor do the *atsima* smear wood-ashes on the faces of the possessed. The person possessed during the course of the dance signals to the *atsima* to bring something, at the same time pointing to the fire used for keeping the skins on the drums taut. If they bring a little fire, she shakes her head and they bring ashes. She nods and they put them on the ground. Then she dances near the ashes and, stooping down, smears her own face with the ashes. The payment for the magical touch referred to is one goat or four shillings.

If a man during the dance comes and says to a *mutsuma*, “My wife or sister is too ill to come here, give me the power to remove the *aimu*,” the *mutsuma* gives him his hand and says, “When you go to your wife, take her hand and say, ‘This is the hand of a *mutsuma* (i.e. this is the hand that a *mutsuma* has touched), who asks you to stop troubling this woman, and who will come himself to-morrow to attend to you.’” This is done, and the woman will get temporarily better.

What is sung by the *atsima* was given to me exactly as recorded by Mr. Tate.

Ngai does not send the spirits into the obsessed. They enter of their own wish. As far as I can gather at present, *Ngai* takes very little apparent interest in the doings of human beings, and, although recognized as a good spirit, is not looked on as able to do much for mortals. It is interesting that three different *ngui* with whom I have spoken said that *Ngai* was a misnomer for this *ngoma* which, they said, should be called “The dance of the Evil Spirits.”

(f) Red fez caps and white clothes are not used in this *ngoma*, but in a *ngoma* called *Chesu* or *Jesu* which was in fashion immediately prior to the *Ngai*. The knives also belong to this *ngoma Chesu*.

The account by Herr Pfitzinger goes on to tell of a youth who acts as servant and takes the place of the husband from the first possession of the woman until the *aimu* is finally driven out. This is not a *Ngai ngoma* custom but is connected with the above-mentioned *Chesu ngoma*, of which I hope to give an account later. It may be that in the beginning *Ngai* also had this custom carried on into it from its predecessor, although all those I have asked said that this was a custom peculiar to *Chesu*. Neither Tate nor Montgomery mention this custom in connection with either of these two *ngoma*. Lindblom refers to neither of these two *ngoma*; his researches stopped in June, 1912, but before this both these *ngoma* were danced in Machakos District, where he was.

Further Notes.

I cannot trace the *Mkamba* called *Malela* referred to by Mr. Tate. The word *Mbanthi* is the name of a clan or section of the Akamba of whom there are quite a number on the coast, notably at Rabai. Another name for this clan is *Weithanga*.

Mbathi is another name for the *Ngai ngui*.

A woman who is not freed of the Spirit by a *mutsuma*, or to whom the things asked for are not brought in reasonable time, is nearly sure to die.

When the *mutsuma* has diagnosed the complaint as *Ngai* the husband of the woman usually asks one of his friends to allow his daughter to act as a servant and sleep with the sufferer, so that should the *aimu* return, the child may comfort her, and also help in the household duties. As I have said above, a boy is not employed in this *ngoma*. There is no taboo on the husband of the woman having sexual intercourse with her during the intervals between the three visitations of the *aimu*, though death would be the result of this during a visitation.