

## **HISTORY OF THE ABATIRICHI**

Apart from the Abatirichi, the people who live in Tiriki Location are the Abalogoli, Abanyang'ori (Terik), and the Abanyole.

### **Genealogies of the Abatirichi**

Their ancestor was called Khoba; he was the father of Alulitsi who was in turn the father of Chisienya (Kisienya) and Wanga'. Of these two, Chisienya and his descendants became the forbears of the Abatirichi. Alulitsi's other son called Ameyo went to the country of the Kipsigis. His grandsons Nandunda and Chinechine.

(Alulitsi's sons) were the immediate ancestors of the Abatirichi. Thus Khoba was the father of Alulitsi; father of Chisienya; father of Ameyo, Nandunda, and Chinechine; Nandunda was the father of Khoba II; father of Digo; father of Shirashibi; father of Mumbo; father of Khoba.

Ezekiel Shipira is the son of Lusichi; son of Mwikhali; son of Simwa; son of Didi; son of Buyekha; they all died here. Buyekha was the son of Nandunda who died at Vihiga; son of Chisienya who died at Ekhomo (Kima) in Bunyore; Chisienya and Wanga were Alulitsi's sons. Alulitsi was the son of Khoba who died in Gem near Yala.

Yosef Imbunya is the son of Mujimba; son of Khadiri who died at Vihiga; son of Masayi who died in Maragoli; son of Alusekha who died in Tiriki; son of Chisumba; son of Imbitsi; son of Khagoyitsi; son of Lutiali; son of Khacheni; they all died here.

Ruben Shikuri is the son of Indubiri; son of Khandeka; son of Mukusi; they all died here (Tiriki). Mukusi was the son of Namumali; son of Shiroko; son of Chibereri; they all died in Maragoli; son of Nyende; son of Mimia; son of Nakuti; son of Mohio; son of Angubu; they all died in Bunyore (Ekhomo). Zakaria Indula is the son of Ambonye; son of Muteli, Nyanje; son of Makatayi; son of Wanzukha; son of Wanyanje; son of Tuyia; son of Makumba; son of Mwangu; they all died here.

### **The meaning of "Tiriki"**

"The Abatirichi are those people who have adopted the customs and circumcision habits of the people called 'Terik'." The people who mixed with the Terik to become the "Abatirichi" after adopting the customs of the Terik who had already migrated were:

- The Abalukhoba. They were the descendants of Khoba whose sub clans include: The Abamumbo, Abalukhombe Abikhaba, Abashitsutsa, and Abalukhoba
- The Abamuli. Some of their people are in Bunyore and Nandi. This is the clan of Hezron Buyoywa'
- The Abatura.
- The Abamohia of Hamisi sub-location. Some of them live in Bunyore, Elgeyo, and Kano.
- The Abasengo. Some of their people live in Idakho, Kisa and Wanga.
- The Abakhatiri. Some of them live in Bunyore.

## **Their Migrations**

Apart from the Terik who originally came from the Elgon area, the rest of the above mentioned clans of the Abatirichi originally came from Egypt. They came in canoes on the River Nile as far as Jinja in Uganda. They then lived here for some time. Later they resumed their journey and, moving eastwards, came to the lake (Victoria) once more. From here they changed course and moved on until they arrived in Asembo. It was here that they separated from the Joluo; some of the Joluo walked along the lake shore but the rest crossed the lake (Victoria) into South Nyanza.

After this separation the people who came this way (the Abatirichi) travelled as far as Gem and then turned northwards until they reached Butere. Then they moved on to Luanda in Bunyore and thence to Ekhome. Once here, the main group separated from that one led by Muwanga (the future Abashitsetse of Wanga); it was also here that they kindled the "obwali" fire. Then they began to spread out in Maragoli — in those days the Abalogoli had, as yet, not come into Maragoli. They spread out as far as this (Tiriki) area.

In all these movements right from Egypt the Luo were also travelling behind them. The original Abakhoba and the above named clans of the Abatirichi did not practise circumcision (i.e. until they came into contact with the Terik in Asembo). They also understood Dholuo although they were Abaluyia.

### **People they came in contact with**

**Egypt:** Apart from the Joluo and the Baganda, they do not know of any other people who lived there. Every tribe had its own language. They emigrated from Egypt because they wanted more land. Egypt's soil was also poor, dry and unproductive, hence their decision to emigrate. Coupled with that there was incessant starvation in that country due to the fact that rain was scarce and inadequate. Now it so happened that while they were still in Egypt they used to sight clouds in this direction; accordingly they decided to go and settle in the rain country where the clouds were always visible.

**Jinja:** They found it uninhabited; the Baganda and the Basoga were still farther down at Kampala.

**Asembo:** It was also uninhabited; the Terik found them there. Gem, Butere, Luanda, Ekhome, Maragoli, Tiriki, were also uninhabited when they came there.

The events which led to the migration of the Terik from Elgon were as follows: The Terik originally lived in the Elgon area as pastoralists. Now at one time there was a very severe and prolonged drought as a result of which the Terik lost a great many of their cattle. The Terik therefore decided to migrate and take their few surviving cattle farther south to the lake area (Victoria). The drought was so severe that all small streams dried up. And so when the Terik emigrated, they eventually arrived in Asembo where they found the Abalukhoba and the other clans of the Abatirichi. In those days the ruler of the Abatirichi was Chisienya.

When the Terik came to Asembo, they found the Abalukhoba rich in foodstuffs — beans, yams, eleusine, millet, sorghum, and vegetables. They also kept a few cattle. So they used to exchange foodstuffs for meat with the Terik. They made friends and mixed with them and thus avoided hostility or fighting. However, because the Terik practised circumcision, after the establishment of good relations, the Abalukhoba and their other Abaluyia companions adopted the circumcision habits of the Terik. Thereafter, they always moved together. Thus they now became known as “Abatirichi” with the customs and circumcision rights of the Terik.

### **Why the Terik migrated from Tiriki to Nyang’ori**

From the time the Abatirichi and the Terik met in Asembo they lived together as a group and even their subsequent migrations were undertaken together. It was not until the Europeans came that the Terik decided to have their own separate location. Accordingly, a boundary was drawn dividing the location into the present two locations of Tiriki and Nyang’ori. Nevertheless, the two communities continued to live on friendly terms; the only people who were on bad terms with the Terik were the Abalogoli.

The name “Nyang’ori” by which the Terik are known originated in the following manner: During the severe famine of 1907 the Terik used to steal cowpeas from the fields of the Joluo. As a result of this the Joluo nicknamed them “the stealers of cowpeas”. And they now became known as the “Nyang’ori”.

### **The separation of the Abatirichi and the Abawanga**

When the Abatirichi migrants reached Kima (Ekhomo) they kindled a fire by means of the “obwali” instrument; after that Wanga and his people separated and went to their present location (Wanga). There was not any disagreement between the two parties; they merely separated in search of more land. The party which went to Wanga was led by Wanga, Alulitsi’s younger son and brother of Chisienya. Chisienya led the group which moved this way (i.e. to Tiriki).

### **Governmental System**

The traditional ruler of the Abatirichi was called “Omukali” (the great one); they did not have a “nabongo” (see Wanga Location). The Omukali had power over war and peace; he settled disputes and kept the peace. He was the war leader of his people. The Omukali settled cases; he had his own elders who helped him in the task of government. Every clan of the Abatirichi had its own Omukali; the whole sub-tribe did not have one common ruler. Interclan disputes were settled by the clan-heads concerned. The Omukali was neither a rain-maker nor a magician nor a harmful herbalist though he was the sacrificial priest of his clan.

The Omukali wore a skin-cloak of various animals (e.g. bushbuck, a monkey, and a calf) a cowry shell head-dress adorned with ivory, a bracelet on the wrist, and arm and leg bangles. In addition he had a staff, a sword and a flywhisk. All these things were heritable.

The Omukali was nominated by his clansmen; the reigning Omukali could not appoint him (his son) without the consent of the elders of the clan. On the other hand any one of his sons could be appointed depending on his personal qualities. When the Omukali died, he was buried, naked, in a lying position, on his right hand. The grave was dug in the doorway of his hut; he was not buried with any object. The new Omukali was installed immediately the funeral was over.

**N.B.** From the time the Abatirichi adopted the practice of circumcision from the Terik in Asembo there have, so far, been twelve circumcision groups, that is back to 1958. Each circumcision group has one name. The group has four “age grades” each lasting six years; that means the oldest members of the group are at least twenty-four years older than the youngest. A circumcision group would also appear to vary between six and thirty years.

Source: Gideon Were, *Western Kenya*, EALB, Nairobi, 1967