

THE PEOPLE OF BUNYALA (NAVAKHOLO)

The ancestor of the Abanyala was Munyala son of Mukhamba who lived on the Buyemba hill in Uganda near Tororo. They were originally one people with the Abanyala of Port Victoria.

Their migrations

After leaving the Buyemba hill, they went to the Busia (Mahero) forest. Their Teso neighbours drove them from here and so they went to Emirere where they lived in the neighbourhood of the Abakhayo on one side and the Abamarachi on the other. From here they went to Ebumakunda in Bukhaya (near Okwara's).

While they were still living here (Ebumakunda), their ruler called Mahero asked Namunyuluhunda, the ruler of the Ababukusu, for military help against the mounting hostility and aggression of the Teso. Then the Ababukusu went to their rescue and as a result the Teso withdrew. For their part the Abanyala migrated to Matungu where they stayed for a short while. Shortly afterwards, they migrated farther and crossed the Nzoia at the Kwete's or Emahola's ford and went to the Udieri hill in Bunyala.

After leaving the Udieri hill they next went to the forest (Bunyala Forest). They lived there for protection from the invasions of the Abakabasi and the Ababukusu. When they arrived, the Abanyala did not have any food. They had therefore to go and work for the other people (Abatsotso) who thus gave them some food. However, they never begged from the Abakabasi; they were enemies. The Abanyala never molested travellers passing through their country; they only used to attack the Abakabasi. They spoke their present language.

Hostility against the Abawanga

The Abanyala refused to be ruled by Mumia. Then Mumia brought in the Germans with fire-arms, together with the Nubians, the Swahili, the Baganda, the Masai and the Abawanga troops to subdue them. The war lasted two whole days. In the end, the Abanyala were defeated and a lot of their people were killed.

Mumia's troops even captured women and children with their mothers. They took herds of cattle, goats and other spoils; they burnt all the foodstuffs in the granaries and the homesteads and captured a lot of people. They captured many women but when they captured a man they usually killed him. Many Abanyala people went to Lutomia's (Wanga Mukulu) for asylum since they were on good terms with Lutomia's subjects. However, a few of them fled to Bukusu for refuge.

After the end of the war all those Abanyala who had fled, including those who had gone to Tomia's, came back. But a few of them did not return. However, the Abanyala did not go back into the forest; they simply settled in the open country. Then the Abanyala returned all the rifles they had captured and Omumia and his people released the women and the children they had captured. In those days Obilo (C.W. Hobley) was the D.O. at Muinias (1895-1900).

The reasons for their migration from the following places

Ebuyemba: They emigrated from Ebuyemba because they were overcrowded and, also, they were fond of living in the forest. The Abanyala who stayed behind at Ebuyemba are known today as Abanyuli. On the other hand, the Abanyala of Port Victoria only moved down there at the same time as the ones here (Navakholo) were coming up this way.

Mahero son of Ngao was the leader of the group which came over here; he died at Busia. After he had arrived here with his group of migrants, he was attacked by a serious illness and so he had to go back to Busia where he died. He left his son Kisauri on the throne here.

Busia: They were driven from here by the Teso.

Ebumakunda: When they reached here they were prevented from further movements by the Abamarachj who stood in their way. They therefore halted there.

Matungu: They arrived and lived there peacefully.

Udieri Hill: The hill itself was uninhabited when they first arrived but the Abakabradi were living in the surrounding lower heights.

The Abanyala were coming up this way whereas the Abakabradi were travelling downwards when they happened to meet. They then fought and in the event the Abakabradi were defeated and forced to withdraw thus enabling the Abanyala to come up. It was after they had driven out the Abakabradi that they went into the Bunyala forest. The Abanyala and the Abakabradi were not originally one people.

How they were governed after coming here

The Abanyala who were in Mukulu were ruled by Sakwa but those who were here were ruled by Kisauri and his descendants. Succession to the throne proceeded in the following manner: Kisauri son of Mahero was succeeded by his son Ngao; he was in turn succeeded by his son Manyuru, Manyuru was succeeded by Ndombi who was succeeded by Paulo Butoto.

They were ruled by an “omwami” (ruler). He protected the people, judged cases, and maintained peace in the country. He himself never went to war but he gave his consent to his “abasesia” (war leaders) to go to war. The “omwami” could not be dismissed; he wore a big copperbracelet on his hand, a cowry-shell head-dress and the “ikutusi” and leopard cloak.

He received all the fines paid by criminals, meat, beer, and a cow in the event of a successful cattle raid. The rest of the raided cattle were distributed among the raiders themselves, the leading raider getting the lion’s share. The “omwami” was neither a rain-maker nor a medicine man nor a sacrificial priest. He had his elders who performed these functions. The ordinary people were not allowed to wear the “omwami’s” regalia. Whenever a person killed a leopard he took its skin to the “omwami”. The “omwami” bought all the insignia himself apart from the copper bracelet which he inherited from the late “omwami”

The successor was usually named by his father before his death. Alternatively, he could be nominated by the elders should the father die before making his will. The successor then speared the cow in whose skin the late ruler was to be buried.

The “omwami’s” chief wife was called the “omukhayé” (the lady). Her duties were to prepare food for the guests and to take care of the royal insignia. Before the old ruler died, the mother of the successor to the throne was the one who took charge of the royal insignia, the cowry-shell head-dress, the copper bracelet, the cloak and the spear. The old ruler usually chose any of his sons who could rule the people well to succeed him. The successor was then installed by his elder brother.

Further information

Mahero was Shiundu’s maternal cousin; he had earlier surveyed the district before he led the migration. After the war with the Abakabrasi, the Abanyala were attacked here by the Nandi and the Masai who used to raid their cattle. Then these “Abasebe” went to Mumia and gave him the cattle they had raided and told him that the Abanyala used to molest and kill caravans. Hence the war with the Abawanga, the Europeans, and the rest which took place.

From long time ago they grew eleusine, millet and sorghum, sweet potatoes, cow-peas, monkey nuts, and bananas. They usually lived in the forest but they farmed in the open fields. They brought cattle, sheep and goats with them from Ebuyemba.

Genealogies

Mukhamba was their earliest ancestor. His son Munyala was the founder of the sub-tribe. Munyala’s son was Mukenge. Hamisi Maunde is the son of Maungo; son of Matani; son of Mutimbi; son of Mayusi. Sakaria Kisebe is the son of Wamuchwa; son of Ateya; son of Wanje, they all died here; son of Mukali; son of Wanjala, they both died in Mumbo near Busia; son of Masiribayi; son of Makosola both of whom died at Ebuyemba. Oman Maliha is the son of Siriwa; son of Maliha, both of whom died here; son of Ngau who died at Mahero near Busia; son of Wanaguda who died at Ebuyemba; son of Ngau who died at Ngare Narok; son of Siuna, who died at Ngare Narok.

Their migrations

A man called Masiribai, a Masai, came from Ngare Narok along with his father, his sons, and his cattle. Nasokho son of Munyala was the reigning “omwami” at that time and it is now six generations since Nasokho died at Ebuyemba. When Masiribayi and his companions left Ngare Narok they went to Eldoret where the Masai of Laikipia lived. They failed to get on well with Masiribayi because they used to raid his cattle. This made it necessary for him to migrate.

The Ngare Narok Masai were then known as El-ksamod. These Masai came to Eldoret after the migration of Masiribayi and fought with the Masai of Laikipia. When Masiribayi emigrated, he travelled and reached Sang’alo near Elgon. He found there the Abasonge clan of the Abanyalase. He then migrated with them down to Ebuyemba. He built homes there and settled. Nasokho was the “omwami” of the Abanyala in those days.

Shortly afterwards, there was a very severe drought. Then the Abanyala besought their “omwami” to give them rain so that crops may grow, but Nasokho tried without success. Then his subjects became very angry.

But Masiribayi told them that provided they were willing, he could bring them rain, so long as they promised to abide by his instructions. And they willingly did so. Then he instructed all their women to get their seeds ready for planting. He asked them to let him know when the planting was over. And they did so. Later, that same week, it rained a great deal. Then everybody was extremely pleased. Then the Abanyala decided that the “omwami” who had given them rain ought now to be their “omwami”

Then their crops did well and, in time, they harvested. They harvested the eleusine and took some of it to Masiribayi to show their gratitude. Then they decided to dismiss Nasokho. And so they now lived under Masiribayi.

Later events

After the death of Masiribayi, there was a war between the Teso and the Abanyala. Then Mahero son of Masiribayi who was the “omwami” in those days migrated from Ebuhenba and went to Busia.

But the Teso continued to attack his people. Then Mahero thought it necessary to migrate, lest the Teso annihilated his people. Accordingly, he surveyed the country as far as Ematungu, Ebuma kunda, and Emirere (now in Wanga) and saw that it was suitable. Then he beat the drum, summoned his subjects, and told them to make some beer and to drink it; this done, they were to emigrate, leaving their drinking tubes in the beer pots.

When they emigrated, some went down to the lake (Port Victoria); others stayed behind at Busia (the Abalumbi or Abakwe); and another group came this way under Mahero. One group of the Abanyala which separated when Mahero migrated from Ebuyemba to Busia later became the Abanyuli. The Abanyala are different from the Abagwere and Basoga.

When Mahero’s group left Busia, they went to Matungu and travelled as far as Mirere, Makokhwe, Mung’ang’a, and the Mundika ruin; they extended as far as Mutsekhe (across the Lusimu). All these places are in Wanga. After this they came to Budieri in Bunyala.

When they came into Bunyala, they found the Abamakhanga and the Abakoolo clans of the Abatachoni, the Ababukusu, and the Abakabrasi. The Abatachoni moved out voluntarily, but the Ababukusu and the Abakabrasi only did so after they had fought with the Abanyala. More land now became available. Then the Abanyala who were at Matungu and elsewhere came here and joined the rest when more land became available. It was then that they went into the forest because of the fear of the attacks of the Ababukusu and the Abakabrasi.

They lived here independently until the Europeans came when Omumia decided to bring them under his rule at the time that the Government was appointing chiefs to the various Locations. Then, when they objected to this, Omumia brought his regiment of the “Abasebe” and the Abanyala defeated them. Then again, after one week, Omumia

sent in troops of the Baganda, the Nubians and the Abawanga. Once again the Abanyala defeated them, killed many of them, and captured many of their rifles.

Omumia therefore left them alone and appointed chiefs to those Locations which he had subdued: Murunga was posted to Bukusu; Mubasu to Kabras; Wambani to Butso; Were to Buholo~ Kadima to Bunyala (Port Victoria) and Samia; and Omulama governed Marama, Kisa, and Bunyore For their part, the Abanyala remained under Ngao, Ngao was the first to serve under the European government though they merely confirmed him in his Position as ruler, as he was the “omwami” when they came’.

Source: Gideon S Were, Western Kenya, Historical Texts, EALB, 1967