

Traditional System of Government:

Their ruler was an “omwami”. He ruled all the Ababukusu. Each clan had an elder called “omukasa” who assisted the ruler in the task of government. The “abakasa” were his subordinates. The “omukasa” was the adjudicator of cases and disputes. He referred the more difficult cases to the ruler who then settled them with the assistance of the other “abakasa”. The custodian of the laws of the Ababukusu was “*omwirwatsi*”.

The people appointed all these officials, based on their personal character. The “omwami” could be dismissed for bad behaviour. The war leader was called “naitirian” (a Nandi word meaning headman). The dying ruler usually named any of his sons with good character to succeed him. The elders then installed him.

The ruler wore a skin cloak (“ekutusi”), an armband called “lichabe”, and the cowry-shell crown. He had the traditional four-legged stool. When the old ruler died, the new one inherited these insignia. The “omwami” was buried lying on his side in a cowhide.

Maina, The Omukasa (ruler) of the Ababukusu, had eight wives and two sons called Wakhulunya and Namunguba. Now, it so happened that Wakhulunya fell in love with one of his father’s wives. On one occasion Wakhulunya went with that woman to the Bubuya hill to pay a visit to a man called Sanjamolu of the Ababuya clan. When his father heard all this, he was very stunned. Shortly afterwards Wakhulunya came back with the woman. His father became very angry with him. Worse still, one night Wakhulunya slept in the house of that woman and was caught there.

Maina summons a council meeting

In view of all this, Omukasa Maina summoned a meeting to settle the situation, which had thus arisen from the action of his wife and son. He was concerned lest this should have a bad effect on his family. And so he beat the drum and summoned the abakasa (plural of omukasa) of the Bamasaba, Babukusu, Barwa (Kalenjin), and of the Bamia (Teso)”.

When the abakasa arrived, he told them he had summoned them because Wakhulunya had taken his wife and he therefore wanted their counsel. He then asked the Omukasa of the Abamasaba called Masaba for his view and the latter told him that Wakhulunya ought to be killed because he had committed a terrible crime. Likewise, he asked the omukasa of the Abarwa called Mirikwa for his opinion and he too said that the boy should be killed.

He then asked the omukasa of the Abamia called Chetung’eng’i for his counsel and the latter told him that the boy should not be killed. Finally, he asked the abakasa of the Ababukusu whose names were Welembe of the Abamwala clan, Mung’oma of the Ababichachi clan, and Cheronno of the Abafumi clan for their counsel. The three of them told him that Wakhulunya should not be killed. Instead, they suggested that a cow be killed and a purification rite performed.

And so, Masaba, Mirikwa, and Mama the boy's father were angry because Wakhulunya would not be killed as the verdict of the Bamia and the Babukusu was against the death penalty. In the event, only the purification rite was performed.

Maina's Prophecy (Curse?)

After slaughtering the purification cow and the rites performed, Maina summoned another council meeting at which he pronounced his blessing (and curse) on the various peoples. Thus he told Masaba (of the Bamasaba) "(You) Masaba, the poles of the roof of your house will not burn, i.e. will last many years. And in the house where you will beget your child there will you also circumcise him," i.e. emphasising once more the facts of the future longevity of life and the immobility of the Bamasaba. The same blessing was pronounced on Mirikwa (of the Abarwa).

He then gave his blessing to Chetung'eng'i of the Bamia: "You, i.e. the Bamia, will be of a mobile and unsettled disposition. You will migrate from place to place and will not grow any *chisaka* (type of vegetable) in your abode; but other people will have the good fortune to grow plentiful *chisaka* in your old settlements, i.e. Che-tung'eng'i. His people were, therefore, in a sense, cursed as they would not stay in any one place long enough to grow and harvest crops. On the other hand, other people would grow good crops in their former settlements, as they would find them almost virgin.

Finally, he turned to Mubukusu and told him thus: "You, i.e. Mubukusu and his people the Babukusu, will migrate from place to place. You will not even circumcise your child in the place where you will beget him, i.e. you will not stay there long enough to do so. The River Nzoia will be your (country's) boundary. However, a black snake will prevent you from trekking further afield; it (you?) will go round Mount Masaba (Elgon) and the Bukusu Hill twice." Thus, Maina ended his prophecy.

The disappearance of Maina

After Mama had pronounced his blessing, people sojourned on the Bubuya and Bukusu Hills for a short while and then Mama took his stool and disappeared with his barren wife called Nabusambia. He was never seen again, neither was his stool though people looked for him everywhere on the Bukusu Hill. After waiting for a long time, they gave up all hope of his return.

The summoning of the council meeting

Maina's son called Namungumba called a meeting of the elders (of the Ababukusu). Among those attending were Kisombe of the Barefu clan and Namukongo of the same clan. Based on the uniqueness of their relationship with the Batukuika clan (their relationship was such that they could indulge in all manner of talk and exchanges with the Batukuika clansmen without causing any offence or embarrassment) they were allowed to preside over the meeting. Hence, it was that the members of other clans (present) such as the Buchema, Babulo, Bameme and the Bakhwami who, under ordinary circumstances, would have conducted the proceedings were passed over. And so, passing the verdict, Kisombe said that the Batukuika were guilty of having upset the ruler, i.e. Mama, thereby causing his regrettable disappearance.

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