

Hunting

HUNTING TRADITIONS

(i) Hunting was very common, in the old days. Often people hunted to get meat. But in other cases they hunted to keep away the wild animals which destroyed their crops. In this second case hunting was an important affair of a village or olukongo. Every adult man in the area was to join in. Even in the case of hunting for the sake of getting meat, only a few people stayed at home.

A signal for hunting was given early in the morning by blowing the horn in a particular manner. All the strong men then came out with their spears, knives and dogs. In some areas bows and arrows were used. There were definite rules for hunting, and everyone was expected to obey them strictly. This was to avoid accidents such as someone piercing another with his spear or arrow. Also, such discipline made it possible for those who speared the animal to get their rightful share of the meat.

The dogs had bells (bikhule or amabwobo) round their necks so that their whereabouts could be known. A dog which co-operated in killing got its share of the meat.

(ii) In some parts of Luhyaland the first person to hit the animal with his spear or arrow shouted, 'I am the first' and claimed the biggest share of the meat. The number of marks on the animal also added to the amount of meat one got.

In west Luhyaland the practice was slightly different. A person who speared first shouted out the symbol of his clan. For instance, the Abakhoone shouted: 'Ndikho ndi gonza'; the Abamulembo said, 'Ndikho ndi omurwa owarula siongo nyama'; the Abadongo said, 'Ndikho ndi rachiebo', and so on. After killing the animal, the members of his clan shared the meat according to a rule. If a member of another clan also speared the animal before it died, he too would get a definite share.

(iii) Hunting was sometimes done by digging pits or making traps. Pits were useful for killing huge animals like the hippopotamus or fierce ones like the leopard. A large pit was dug and a thin covering sprinkled with soil or grass was put on its mouth. When necessary, bait was put nearby. The unsuspecting animal was then easily caught. The people finished it off by spearing it the next morning.

Traps or snares were many, and varied from place to place. A popular one was that of a huge stone with an attached spear blade pointing downwards, which hung at a convenient height on the narrow path of the desired animal. The stone was secured to the ground by a rope which acted as a kind of lever or pulley. The slightest touch on this rope or string brought the huge stone down with the spear into the body of the animal. This trap was called likenga in some areas.

Other animals were caught by using nets made of strings. Birds were sometimes caught by the loop of a string which was attached to a bent branch capable of springing up when

touched. Children caught birds by using the latter method, as well as by using a vegetable sticking-paste which they applied on blades of grass.

(iv) The animals commonly hunted in the different parts of Luhyaland included the following:

Bush buck	Imbongo
Hippo	Ifubu
Gazelle	Eshitsusu
Rhino	Amuga
Warthog	Injiri
Buffalo	Imboko
Thomson's gazelle	Ajili
Eland	Ikhulo
Elephant	Inzofu

The smaller animals like the mole (ifukho), the squirrel (nakhamuna), and the hare (esituyu) were hunted by children. The birds hunted included the guinea fowl (likhanga), the quail (isindu) water ducks (amayoyo). The children were more interested in smaller birds such as the weaver-bird, and the bird called *ikherekete* which looks like a chicken but is smaller.

HUNTING STORIES

This short story shows that in some hunts the hunters were not so lucky and they killed no animals. It also tells something about the character of the sort of man who remained at home while others went to a hunt. The story goes like this:

One day the people blew their horns and the men went to a bushy area to hunt. It was a very hot day. The people tried their best, but they killed no animals. They saw a few squirrels and hares but no bucks. When the time for lunch passed, many people were getting tired of the hunt. Some began to steal away back home.

One of these hurried to the nearest hut because he was very thirsty he wanted some water to drink. Now the owner of the house was a mean person, who ate with no one except his wife, and even refused to go to a village hunt.

As the hunter approached the hut, he saw that the man and his wife were just starting to eat. When they saw him, the wife hid the steaming food (obusuma) in a hurry behind some pots, but the hunter pretended not to see this.

He entered the hut, greeted them, mumbled something about the hot weather, and then sat down. The husband and wife did not seem to want him to stay, but he did not mind.

Then the husband asked him about the hunt. This pleased the hunter who told them about some funny incidents during the hunt. One of them was this: 'I missed one warthog very

narrowly. It came from my right towards my left. I waited until it was straight ahead of me, just as far as where the steaming obusuma is. As he said this, he pointed at the food they had hidden. 'I threw my spear but, unfortunately, I missed it'. The man and his wife laughed no more. They realized he had seen them hiding the food and they were very ashamed. So they brought out the food and ate it with him.

Another Hunting Story:

One day Ojwolijwoli (the wise hare) went to the elephant and said, 'I am going somewhere for a visit tomorrow but I have no buttock. Could you lend me yours and I shall return it after the visit?'

The elephant did not like the idea. But Ojwolijwoli pressed him hard with much argument, explaining that there was no harm to the elephant if the part of its body was cut away temporarily. In the end the elephant very reluctantly agreed. And Ojwolijwoli cut away the part and took it home. Of course he was not going to pay anyone a visit. He just roasted the meat and ate it over a number of days. The elephant waited for two days three days, four days, but Ojwolijwoli did not appear as he had promised. The elephant developed a big wound full of maggots where the flesh had been cut.

In the end he sent a buck, Nambongo, to find out what had happened. When Nambongo told Ojwolijwoli the story, Ojwolijwoli said, 'That is all right. I shall give it to you. But first I must give you something to eat, as you have travelled a long way and must be tired and hungry.' Then Ojwolijwoli cooked part of the meat he had cut from the elephant. The meat tasted delicious, and Nambongo asked where it could be found. And Ojwolijwoli answered that the animals from which he got such nice meat were plentiful on a nearby hill. If Nambongo wanted to kill one, Ojwolijwoli would 'be glad to take him to the hill for that purpose.

Nambongo wanted to, so they went. When they got there, Ojwolijwoli told Nambongo to stay down while he himself went higher up. He said, 'Stay here and watch, and when you hear a little noise, 'Ndiiii' do not do anything. But when you hear a heavy noise, look down and stick your horns forward and they will kill the animal.' Ojwolijwoli then went up and threw several small stones which made the little noise, 'Ndiiii.' Then he pushed a huge stone and let it roll towards Nambongo. The latter looked down and stuck out his horns ready to kill the animal but the stone crushed him to death and Ojwolijwoli made meat of him. This happened to all the messengers whom the elephant sent.

HUNTING TROPHIES

Meat was the most important one. Then there were the skins which were used for a number of purposes. Some were used for sleeping on, for instance, that of the buffalo. Others provided flat strapped shoes for protection against thorns. Yet others were worn as dresses or decorations, for instance that of the colobus monkey (its skin is called ituru in western Luhya land).

Colourful robes and headgears were made out of this. Rare articles were made out of other things like the hairs of the tails of the giraffe (obutiga), which made rare bracelets worn round the ankles, the wrists and the neck by women. The tail of the zebra (imbwori) was a rare and expensive flywhisk used only by chiefs and famous medicine men. The feathers of certain birds, too, were much sought after. For instance, the feathers of the Ostrich (amawudo) and those of a little, rare bird with long tail feathers called isimbikhira. The latter was used in western Luhyaland on ceremonial headgears which were used only on the most honoured occasions such as going in procession to the funeral of a mother or father-in-law; or when one' has killed a lion or leopard.

The ivory of warthogs, hippos, and even elephants, was used for making a crescent-like article (igweli), which was worn by elderly men on the forehead as a sign of riches and power. Other articles, like horns, were worn for decoration on happy occasions.

Medicine-men and witchdoctors got many articles useful for their trade from dead animals. The fat of a lion is still used as a famous medicine for rubbing into the body. The claws of birds and animals were used by witchdoctors.

OTHER TROPHIES

(i) **Fish:** Fishing was a special type of hunting. It was an important occupation among the Luhya living close to Lake Victoria and the lower valleys of Rivers Nzoia, Sio and Yala. Two sub-tribes in Luhyaland are particularly famous as fishermen: the Banyala of Buongo and the Abasamia.

In the old days they used fishing traps of different kinds. The following examples:

Olukhwira:

Made of reeds plaited with ropes and then built in a special manner along seasonal river valleys, or along the lake side where water was not too deep. Once fish entered it, they could not get out. They were then either speared or caught by smaller traps.

Omukono:

This was a trap made of sticks and ropes which was sometimes put in olukhwira to catch fish entering there. Also, once fish got into it they could not get out.

Obulalo:

This was a structure built with poles across a river. On top it was sometimes used as a bridge, while below the omukono traps were put in to catch fish.

Liwuli:

These were made of papyrus and arranged in a in a pattern in waist deep lake water like a seine (likokhoolo). They caught plenty of fish. Women used the following traps: esiwu, esibamo, olubanzo and ikhafwa

The types of fish caught included: tsingeke, tsiningu, tsisiire, ebidonge, tsimonye, and plenty of smaller fish. These names, of course, were only used where fish was plentiful.

(ii) **Honey:** Bees were kept in omulinga or they made their own home in a tree or cave. Honey was taken at night after lighting a fire close to the bee-hive. The bees were harmless in this way. In addition to being food, honey was also used for medicinal purposes especially for treating chest diseases.

(iii) **Plants and Wild Fruit:** These were popular, but varied in different areas. Some of the wild fruits included: tsinduli, emisaali, emikhuwa, eminugu and otsyoga. Girls and young boys loved going to the bush to collect them.

Roots were used as medicines.

The sap of certain trees, for instance cacti and euphorbia, was heated and turned into a kind of 'gum' for sticking knives, axes and spears into their wooden handles.

Adapted from: Life in Kenya in the Olden Days: The Baluyia, By John Osogo, Oxford University Press, 1965, ISBN 0 19 644012 2