

Part I

The Public Setting of *Lemba*: Management of Society and Its Resources

“Les auteurs ont . . . des notions très vagues sur les populations de la rive droite du Congo inférieur.”—J. VAN WING, *Études BaKongo*, (1959)

Chapter 2

Economic, Social, and Political History of the *Lemba* Region

Environment, Resource Use, Adaptation, Trade and Currency

The *Lemba* region is defined by natural boundaries, the Zaire and Kwilu-Nyari River systems on the south and north, respectively, and by the ocean on the west. These river valleys are, however, quite different one from the other. The Kwilu-Nyari, which begins in the area and flows through a fertile alluvial plain, offers excellent possibility for cultivation. The Zaire valley, by contrast, is the end-point of the great and mighty river system of Central Africa. It is marked by its deeply eroded canyon and dangerous cataracts, making it hostile in places to boat travel and useless for cultivation. Fishing is the only resource common to both rivers. The Atlantic coast, by comparison, offers some possibility for fishing, and was in the past an important site for the gleaning of salt. Tributaries of the Zaire and the Kwilu-Nyari, and rivers such as the Loango flowing directly into the ocean, offer these same possibilities for fishing, and are in part navigable.

Between these major rivers mountains rise to a level of 750 meters in the region of Mboko Nsongo, containing deposits of iron, copper, and lead in some quantity. These minerals have been instrumental in the wider region for centuries as material for the tools of cultivation, hunting, warfare, and trade.

The terrain eastward of the mountains levels off into the vast, sandy Teke Plateau. Westward toward the ocean, a deep rain forest covers the Mayombe. The central area is covered with a mixed vegetation, and rain forests are present where slash and burn agriculture has not been followed by secondary scrub woods and savanna grassland. The soil of the region is characteristically tropical. Where forest exists, the lush tree growth protects the delicate balance of the elements. Where

clearings have been cut out of the forest, mixed cropping produces an initial rich harvest, but soon the devastation of soil leaching because of high rainfall reduces the terrain to less productive and barren grassland or even rock-like laterite.

Until recently hunting was an important subsistence activity in the entire region. Its important status is attested to by the knowledge of the net, trap, and stalking techniques found in adjoining regions such as the Cameroons where hunting still survives as a primary activity.¹ Of edible animals, elephants, buffalo, a variety of antelope, and smaller animals as well as birds of many kinds constituted the source of food. This status is still reflected in the symbols of *Lemba*. Archaeological research in the region has documented the existence of a variety of prehistoric lithic industries and of ancient hunting traditions dating back for millennia.² Knowledge of metalworking had been introduced by the middle of the first millennium A.D. Metalworking, according to north-bank oral traditions, was known by the "Teke" peoples who gradually gave it to the "Kongo" peoples. Iron arrow tips and knives, as well as spears, were used widely in intensified hunting. By the eighteenth century, however, guns were introduced in massive quantities on the coast, replacing the bow and arrow and lance as main hunting instruments. These guns were rapidly incorporated into the regional smithing industry, whose artisans soon reworked old barrels, made bullets of lead, and manufactured gunpowder locally.

Trade had a devastating effect on some types of wildlife. Several decades after the beginning of ivory trade in the seventeenth century—before the gun—delivery of ivory to the Loango coast declined as a result of an annual elephant kill of between 3000 and 4000 animals, a rate which nearly depleted the herds.³ Not until the late nineteenth century, following the end of the international slave trade, were ivory tusks to become important again. At that time elephants were again hunted—this time with a gun—nearly to extinction in the region.⁴ By the mid-twentieth century only a few small elephant herds still remained in the Mayombe forest and in swampy lands along the Zaire River. The gun had a similar effect on other wildlife, so that less and less did the highly romanticized life of the hunter, important for the male image, correspond to the actual role of hunting in the economy.

The tradition of cultivation remained that of the hoe, ax, adze, and bush knife from the time ironworking was introduced in the region. Malaysian crops—yams, bananas—entered the region and with African crops—possibly millet, the palm (*Elaeis guineensis*), various cucurbits, and fruit trees (*Canarium schweinfurthii*, for example)—

constituted the staple foods until the seventeenth century. Portuguese trade with Brazil beginning even earlier than the seventeenth century brought manioc, maize, and beans into the diet, exerting a significant change in cultivation patterns. Manioc, in particular, introduced a heavier use of fields with the resulting tendency to clear wide areas of forest. By the late nineteenth century, that is after several centuries of manioc cultivation, the central and northern region of the Lower Congo/Zaire had been largely deforested, and what was left was falling year by year before the ax and hoe. Dupont, who made these observations as a foot traveler in 1887, also suggested that the firewood need of the metalworking industry of the region from Mboko Nsongo to Mindouli had contributed its share to the extensive depletion of the forest.⁵ Later, around 1885–1900, colonial governments began to levy agricultural taxes to support caravans, porters, and soldiers, a practice that placed further pressure upon the land. Export possibilities in the late nineteenth century for palm oil, palm nuts, ground nuts, and rubber gum (from 1869) introduced cash cropping, which became the major burden upon the population and the environment. We will return to the nature of trade at the end of this section.

The foregoing paragraphs have reviewed natural resources available in the *Lemba* region, and the technology used to exploit rivers, soil, metal, wildlife, domestic crops, and trees. In a region as diversified as this, trade is a logical human activity for the redistribution of localized resources. For example, salt, gathered at the ocean, was traded for metal from the highlands. Active trade of this kind existed long before European merchants arrived in the sixteenth century with their goods. But as coastal trade intensified, it not only stimulated this internal trade, it created a unique coastal trade. The resulting mixed internal and external commercial system had the effect of thrusting into sharper juxtaposition the value equivalency of nearly all cultural objects, from food, drink, animals, clothing, metals, to the human being.

Local markets, tied to the four-day week, fed into the long-distance trade routes and their markets, key among which were Mpumbu at the pool, controlled by Tio lords; Manianga on the Zaire; the copper markets from Mboko Nsongo to Mindouli; San Salvador, the capital of the Kongo kingdom; and the ports of Loango Bay, Cabinda, and Malemba and Ambriz on the coast (see figure 2 above). Long-distance caravans of up to 500 persons carried thousands of tons hundreds of kilometers in this trade.

The extremely complex question of resource value in the *Lemba*

area has to be limited in this study to the period from approximately 1850 to 1920, which commercially means the transition from full slavetrading to so-called legitimate trade, followed by the early colonial era. Within this scope I am primarily concerned with illuminating the value of the units used in *Lemba* inaugurations and traded by *Lemba* adherents in markets of the region.

An 1885 market list from the mining area of Mboko-Nsongo, in the heart of *Lemba* area, offers a glimpse of the "internal" trade of the region.⁶ On sale were:

a large antelope,	gun powder
cut into pieces	copper wire
tripe	lead ingots
rats on sticks	goat skins
smoked fish	raphia cloth
chicken	mats
yams	baskets
sweet potatoes	egg plant
manioc roots	corn
manioc bread	pepper
peas or beans	bananas
cabbage	ground nuts
green legumes	palm nuts
mushrooms	sugar cane
red earth	tobacco leaves
salt	calabashes of palm wine

In another market at Ngoyo, upstream from Manianga, in 1877, local items (left column) were exchanged for foreign goods (right column).⁷

bananas	cloth
pineapples	beads
guavas	wire (brass?) (<i>mitako</i>)
limes	guns
onions	powder
fish	crockery
casava bread (<i>chikwanga</i>)	
groundnuts	
palm butter	
earthenware pots	
baskets	
nets	

These items fill the major categories of resources in the *Lemba* region. Much of the list consists of locally-grown food, Malaysian and American. These items, perishable and thus not suited for long-distance trade, nevertheless constitute the mainstay of prestations used in local social transactions. Palm wine is the smallest unit of this exchange system, being measured either in terms of the "cup"—what one man can drink—or in terms of the calabash or the demijohn. The "cup" is an etiquette measure, used to open a transaction or ritual, to lodge a request, or to close a deal. It is an important sign in prayers and purification rites. The "chicken" is a larger unit in this system of exchange, used for interpersonal gifts as rewards or tokens of appreciation, as well as for sacrifices. Naturally, these uses imply the consumption of chicken, making it both a nutritional and a transactional resource. The "pig" is the largest unit in this social currency. It is not mentioned in the Mboko Nsongo market list, but from all evidence including the *Lemba* inauguration reported from the area, pigs were common and greatly appreciated. Pigs were reserved for major rituals in which their exchange constituted a sign of reconciliation or obligation met between clans. The pig was considered (and still is) the appropriate unit of recompense for human blood shed in a quarrel.

These three units—the "cup" (*mbungu*), the "chicken" (*n'susu*), and the "pig" (*n'gulu*)—should be considered abstract values in regional society, because they are frequently substituted for in concrete exchanges by other items or by currency of another sort. Palm wine is preferred in the "cup," but other natural wines, or European-type liqueurs in bottles, will do, as will cash. In a 1915 *Lemba* initiation in the Mboko Nsongo region, for example, mention is made of "pig of five baskets of raphia cloth."⁸ In local parlance, the authentic items are identified as "wet" cups, and "blood" chickens or pigs, while substitution in cloth or money constitutes a "dry" cup, chicken, or pig. Goats and sheep may sometimes be substituted for pigs; however, wild game is not entered into this exchange system.

In the Mboko Nsongo market list several categories of items may be singled out as important in the legitimate trade following the slave trade, most of which continue to have a local use value. Foodstuffs include especially groundnuts and palmnuts and oil. Other items are long-standing trade items, and can be understood in terms of their historic uses. "Red earth for body paint" was a highly popular cosmetic but already a major export item in the seventeenth century for use in European textile dyes. Salt, which probably came from the coast, was cherished in seasoning and preservation. Remaining items

relate to metalworking (copper wire, lead, gunpowder), and cloth “money” (raphia, baskets).

Mboko Nsongo constituted a strategic point in the mining region that extended to Mindouli. Copper, iron, and lead were the main ores mined, smelted, and sold to blacksmiths, jewelers, and traders. The copper trade around Mboko Nsongo alone constituted a major heavy industry. Dupont describes the largest of three mines in 1885, Songho, as a cut 250 meters long into a hillside, more than 10 meters deep in places. Such mines were owned by surrounding village communities and worked by local inhabitants. A special copper market once a week attracted buyers from all directions.⁹ Mboko Nsongo’s special “red” copper may have reached as far into the interior as the Alima River upstream on the Congo/Zaire,¹⁰ and certainly in trade to Loango and Kongo coasts, where shipments as early as the seventeenth century are reported. For example, two ships sailed from Loango for Brazil in 1641 carrying 39,613 pounds of copper.¹¹ A trading agent on the coast estimated that the Loango coast—that is, its interior—could supply up to forty tons annually of the metal.¹² The most stable use over the centuries of copper from these mines, however, was in currency and jewelry. The *ngiele* copper rod is described variously as being as thick as a little finger and one inch long, or half an inch in diameter and three inches long, bent at the ends.¹³ The rod constituted one of the region’s main currencies until the 1880’s when the European brass wire, the *mitako*, took its place in connection with colonial trade. The *ngiele* resembles the copper bracelet used for jewelry and for ritual in several orders of authority, especially *Lemba*. *Lemba*’s bracelets, poured into sand or clay molds in the ateliers of Vili and Yombe smith-jewelers, represented the artistic climax of this copperwork. Beyond *Lemba*’s borders, some lords of Tio wore such Vili-made copper bracelets with reliefs on them.¹⁴ Even after imported European *mitako* brass money had replaced the copper *ngiele* as regional currency, the bracelets continued to be manufactured for *Lemba* initiation. Production of copper still continued in 1885 when Dupont visited Mboko Nsongo. Metals such as iron and lead were used for other specific purposes: iron for hoes, axes and adzes, knives and gun mechanisms; lead, sometimes for bracelets, but usually for gunshot.

The value of these metals, in trade or commercial power, varied over the centuries. I have found no exchange equivalents for the Manianga copper *ngiele*, although Vansina reports an exchange of one hundred *ngiele* (no doubt the smaller type) for one *ibuunu* of cloth among the Tio, and one hundred *nzi* shells for one *ngiele*.¹⁵

The *mitako* introduced by European traders had by 1880 become the colonial currency in the Mpumbu region at the east of the *Lemba* area. However, this unit, like the *ngiele*, soon experienced an inflationary spiral, reducing its value. On July 1, 1910, the Belgian colony introduced the Congo franc (5 francs = 1 *mpata*) as the currency of obligatory taxes; it also appeared in *Lemba*.

Cloth currencies seem over the centuries of coastal trade to have held a more stable valuation than metals. *Raphia* cloth, made from two types of palms, was a major exchange item in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when coastal trade began. Its smallest unit was the *libongo* (*mbongo*) or the *makute*, about the size of a large handkerchief, made on local looms. These *raphia* pieces were sewn together into a short loincloth, constituting what some coastal traders viewed as the “fathom”—one and one-half to two yards.¹⁶ *Raphia* cloth continued to be woven in the twentieth century, and as *Lemba* initiation texts demonstrate, it continued to be used longest as ceremonial currency. However, very early on in the coastal trade European and Indian cloth came to be highly appreciated, both for its practical and stylish purposes in apparel and as a medium of exchange; in effect a major exchange item which, like *raphia*, tended not to lose its value as quickly as metal currencies. One type of cloth might replace another, but throughout the centuries units of cloth appeared in exchange for ivory, metal, slaves, guns, camwood, and within African society, for ritual purposes. Coastal trade established cloth as a common denominator of *raphia*, woven in the interior and used in internal transactions, and of the European unit known, depending on the language as the *pièce*, *péçà*, *long*, and *cortado*: a cloth approximately six yards in length—the same as the piece of cloth sold in the Kinshasa market in 1977!

Before correlating the various resources, currencies, and cloth units so as to glean an estimate of *Lemba*'s worth in these terms during the period from 1850 to 1920, we must consider the impact of slavery on the local society and economy. Internal slavery no doubt existed in the seventeenth century, but in terms of our twentieth-century understanding of the phenomenon, the internal slave status was both more humane, and more varied, than the international slave status. Bond slaves, debt slaves, war prisoners, hereditary but well-placed slaves, all had their place in society. Jural slave status did not always necessarily mean *de facto* low status. In *Lemba* we see how slaves often belonged to the ruling elite. None of this, however, makes the coastal slave trade less despicable.

International trade was by 1600 exporting copper, ivory, red

camwood, and raphia cloth. With the diminution of ivory, and the increase in demand for slaves on American plantations, Loango coast rulers and trading officers—the *mafouk*—began by 1650 to supply slaves to their Dutch, Portuguese and English trading partners. Traffic that began as a trickle had by 1680 reached 4000 persons per year from Ngoyo, Cabinda, and Loango.¹⁷ By 1750 in Cabinda alone, 5000 to 6000 slaves were being exported annually; by the 1780's the three ports of Malemba, Cabinda, and Loango Bay were processing 15,000 slaves annually.¹⁸ At the beginning of the eighteenth century a slave was worth from ten to fifteen pieces of cloth or 350 *makoute* in raphia.¹⁹ An increasingly favored item traded for slaves was the gun, obsolete castoffs from European arsenals. During the increase of the Congo coast slave trade in the early eighteenth century, a slave could be had for about eleven to twelve guns, each worth around thirty *makoute*, or half a *pièce* of cloth.²⁰ At its peak in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, the slave trade on the north-bank ports annually imported up to 50,000 guns and an assortment of other items against roughly 15,000 slaves.²¹

The volume of all trade declined during the late eighteenth century because of growing opposition to the slave trade, increasing police action on the high seas against it, and internally because of a growing scarcity of slaves and an attendant rise in the price. This increase has been calculated in terms of the *pièce* of cloth per slave for Cabinda and Malemba.²²

1702–13	10 to 15 <i>pièces</i>
1750–60	20 to 30 <i>pièces</i>
1770	30 <i>pièces</i>
1770's	40+ <i>pièces</i>
1780's	54 <i>pièces</i> + 10 <i>pièces</i> brokerage fee

The volume of the slave trade continued to decline in the nineteenth century and had ended completely by 1870. "Legitimate" trade now took its place, with the internal suppliers providing ivory once more, gum copal, palm oil, nuts, groundnuts, pepper, malachite, and baobab bark, in exchange for tobacco, rum and other liquors, cloth, gunpowder, guns, and assorted manufactured goods.

Lemba's role in the trade will be discussed more fully in the next section of this chapter. Here the commercial value of certain aspects of *Lemba* may be situated in respect to the foregoing review of trade and exchange of resources. An argument has sometimes been made for the specificity of domains of exchange in traditional African

economies; a given commodity or resource is said to be specific to certain types of social and commercial transactions.²³ Such a characteristic is minimal if not altogether missing in the *Lemba* economy; wherever exchange is recorded, equivalents between items are also given. We have seen that in the late-nineteenth-century marketplaces of Mboko Nsongo and Ngoyo near Manianga, both subsistence and trade items were on hand. The same holds true for the exchanges within *Lemba*, ostensibly for “ritual” purposes. The mechanism of equivalence in all cases is the “wet wine/dry wine,” “blood chicken/dry chicken” comparison, permitting a specific domain of transaction defined functionally by a given item—chicken or wine—to substitute for another item—cash.

The question has also been raised as to why, given this equivalency mechanism, no single currency emerged. The answer may be that any single currency is vulnerable to inflation, as demonstrated by the copper *ngiele* in long-distance trade, and in the brass wire *mitako* in the early colonial period. Furthermore, a given abstract and general currency tends to be only as stable as the political order of which it is ultimately a value symbol. There is greater security in the simultaneous use of several currencies or value symbols deriving from objects which meet widespread human needs, as do cloth, wine, chickens, and pigs. Thus, *Lemba* transactions, like those in the history of much of the trade, tend to occur in combinations (bundles) of items.

For example, a *Lemba* inaugural in the Mboko-Nsongo/Kingoyi/“Bakamba” region around 1910 (analyzed at length in Chapter 4) cost the neophyte priest and his clan twenty-five pigs, numerous chickens, palm wine, and manioc loaves. Since pigs are hardly mentioned in the international trade literature—for reasons having to do with the transportation of pigs—it is necessary to convert this cost to items already mentioned. The author of the report has given “equivalencies” of the payment of dues: “a pig of 5 *ntete* baskets, raphia cloth”; elsewhere in payment of his defilement, the priest collects “10 pigs or 1 person.” The *Lemba* inauguration thus cost approximately twenty-five pigs, plus wine and chickens, and so forth; or 125 *ntete* baskets raphia at one pig/five baskets; or two and one-half persons, at ten pigs/one person. One person (slave) thus equalled fifty *ntete* baskets raphia in the Mboko Nsongo region at the turn of the century.

A report on *Lemba* from Yaa to the north gives as two persons the fee for the profanation of the *Lemba* priest (Text 2.23 below), a figure comparable to that in Mboko Nsongo. *Lemba*’s worth may be

compared to yet other types of transactions at the turn of the century. At the Pool, where Vansina has extensively reported on equivalencies, a person varied in value from 200 *mitako* to upward of 1200, averaging around 500 to 600 *mitako*.²⁴ The only items which exceeded slaves in price were boats, at around 1000 *mitako*, and huge quantities of ivory (say 2,500 pounds for 12,500 *mitako*, thus five *mitako*/pound). In terms of these equivalencies, the *Lemba* inaugural would have cost anywhere from 1000 to 2000 *mitako*, at 1885 rates of exchange; that would be the price of a big boat, or 200 to 300 pounds of ivory.

Of course by 1910 the *mitako* had totally disappeared having been replaced by Belgian and French currency. Thereafter *Lemba* inaugurals begin to be paid in this currency. One *Lemba* inaugural in eastern Mayombe from the first decade of this century cost the neophyte and his supporters wine, chickens, manioc, and other banquet items, as well as two *mpidi* baskets raphia, two *nkwala* mats, and 565 francs, the equivalent of several years trading or wage labor. The bulk of the payment had here been converted to the new currency, although the inaugurated office was a continuation of the old.

However measured, *Lemba* may be seen as a significant institution in the region from the Pool to the ocean. I have tried to relate this significance quantitatively to *Lemba*'s inaugural fees, where such data are given. This measure of value may shift from subsistence resources such as chickens, wine, pigs, goats, etc., to labor power in slaves, to clothing and currency in raphia cloth and colonial "money." These quantitative measures do not however indicate just how *Lemba*'s qualitatively defined rights worked. I hope to show in subsequent parts of this book that *Lemba* arose with the copper and ivory "boom" of the seventeenth century, and remained a structuring institution for the era of heavy coastal trade that was to continue for several centuries. To the east this seventeenth-century development gave rise to the Tio order of lords, symbolized by the *nkobi* shrine basket, and in most places heavy copper bracelets worn by the lords and priests. *Lemba* priests and Tio lords converted their prowess in trade into social influence, becoming a mercantile elite which controlled—"calmed"—markets and trade and organized caravans.

Social Structure

Three centuries of trade with the coast established caravan routes across the north-bank territory; pulled out of their home communities

hundreds of thousands of slaves and drove them over these routes to waiting ships; created floating “broker” colonies, tariff walls, invasions, and wars. Yet most ethnologies of the twentieth century describe the region’s people and their organization in terms of territorially discrete tribes bounded by firm borders and identified with single names.²⁵

To gain an historically accurate picture of the movements of people in the past 300 years in this region, it must be assumed that at various times the relatively quick wealth that was to be found in trade and resource exploitation unleashed great forces for change; the seventeenth-century “boom” in Manianga copper and inland ivory brought its “rushers” and “brokers,” left its victims, and generally turned things topsy-turvy, and the eighteenth-century slave trade and the nineteenth-century legitimate trade on the coast had similar effects. The ethnic maps mentioned above tell us very little about wandering bands who came northward across the Zaire possibly toward the copper region, occupied the mines for a time, and settled there. Nor do such maps tell the story of Vili traders who came eastward from the coast, also seeking to capitalize on mining and trading and eventually settling in commercial enclaves up and down the coast and throughout the Lower Zaire where trade was the foremost public activity. Not only the Vili were thus involved in trade. Traders and caravans moved regularly across the entire area. At Manianga market, persons were noted in the 1880’s from Ngoyo and Kakongo on the coast, Ntombi Mataka, Ngombi, Ilembi, Kingoma, Kilanga, Kinzore, Suki, Nguru; Mebelo, Zinga, and Nzabi up river, all coming into contact with those from Ndunga, Mbu, Bakongo, and Bassesse (a Tio group specialized in making raphia cloth).²⁶ These part-time traders could easily become full-time traders, as had the Pombieros at the Pool, or they could control trade as did the Yombe chiefs. All are to be compared to the Hausa, Lebanese, and Portuguese colonies of West and Equatorial Africa, the Indians of East Africa, or the Chinese of Indonesia. In all cases these ethnically identified groups acquired an identity linked with their trading profession.

An inverse process occurred too, in which populations of diverse origin “melted” into a single new identity defined by a locale or territory. By the nineteenth century the coastal “Vili,” for example, included slave remnants from Teke, Yombe, Kongo, Songe, Mondongo, Bayangela, Babongo, Bayansi, Mboma, Sundi, Mbamba, and Mbete.²⁷ Also, many south-bank populations fled en masse northward from 1885 on, to escape colonial labor caravan recruitment.²⁸

The Sundi invasion of the north bank of the Zaire from the seventeenth century on, and the way it has been recorded, is the most annoying example of confusion in the literature. Ethnographers such as Laman (edited by Lagercrantz), Soret, and Murdock have identified the central-north-bank "Sundi" and have shown spearheads of Sundi occupation extending northeastward into Teke country, northwest into Kamba and Kunyi country, and westward into Yombe country.²⁹ Ethnographers, like some Sundi informants, suggest that the regions were "uninhabited" in the seventeenth century and that the Sundi moved in without resistance to create their homogeneous culture. Closer probing and circumstantial evidence indicate the contrary. "Sundi" or "Kongo" communities often subjugated "Teke" mining camps, obliging the smiths and craftsmen to work under their hegemony. At Nsundi-Masiki (Lutete, BaKongo) south of Mindouli, these Nsundi immigrants moved alongside other groups such as the Kimbanga with extremely deep local genealogies and old cemeteries, and an affinity to Teke clans (Kimbanga = Imbaaw). The Sundi thus situated themselves among pre-existing populations, intermarried with them, and declared their Kongo-oriented hegemony over them.

The most serious difficulty in the studies positing a homogeneous ethnic group in Lower Zaire is their distortion of the organizational principles of the north-bank societies. Scholars who identify an indigenous equivalent for "tribe" or "*ethnie*" usually use the term *mvila* (also *luvila*, pl. *tuvila*). Deleval, for example, does this, but then wonders why so many people in the north "Yombe" are ignorant of their "tribe."³⁰ This query suggests that he may have been dealing with slaves who have no legal genealogical identity, and that like many other scholars he misunderstood the character of the *mvila*. The *mvila*—given such names as Nsundi, Manianga, Bwende, Kuimba, Yombe, etc.—should be defined as an exogamous, matrilineal descent category traced back to a putative common ancestor, with emphasis on its categorial nature. The *mvila* is not primarily an organized group; it is rather an element in a social worldview within which nine or twelve exogamous and therefore intermarrying *tuvila* are posited to have existed "in the beginning," and from which various bifurcations and branches may be traced. The list of particular names included in this set varies from version to version and from region to region; along the Zaire it tends to link with a royal, Kongo origin legend (*tuuka Kongo dia Ntootila*). In one area in the Mayombe it has to do with the westward movement of Manianga refugees in a great famine.³¹ The persistence of these

origin legends which integrate numerous *tuvila* into one scheme, and the *de jure* exogamic principle defining a single *mvila*, suggest quite clearly that this unit cannot be a homogeneous territorial "tribe" as the culture-area ethnographers would have it. It is a matrilineal descent category, a clan.

The *dikanda* (pl. *makanda*) by contrast is the local organization which carries the same name. For example, one may be a member of the Nsundi clan because one's mother was Nsundi; one lives in or is a member of a Nsundi *dikanda*. These "local" clan sections may ordinarily be found in three closely proximate settlements, each inhabited also with other clan sections of other extended clans. While the extended clan is the category of origin, and is exogamic only in principle, the *dikanda* bearing the same name is the organized exogamic group. The internal communities of exogamic and corporate local clan sections (*dikanda*), led by either a single head (*mfumu nsi*) or a type of committee executive, help each other in defense of their common land, in assembling alliance prestations, and in warfare where they are prohibited from killing one another "because they are of the same blood." These local clan sections are thus genealogically defined through memorized records used in time of need such as land defense, identification of a person's rights, and a variety of other situations.

Because these local clan sections are genealogically chartered, incorporated, and land-based, in time they experience natural segmentary growth. Junior, senior, and middle "houses" (*nzo*) emerge, each expecting its parcel of land in the local clan estate and its place "around the fire" in the men's house, that is, expecting to participate in collective clan affairs. Under certain circumstances the "house" may become the effective exogamous unit.³²

Within the "house" are found lineages (*mwelo-nzo*, "door of the house"). These are residential clusters in settlements. They are also the effective familial units within which decisions regarding personal life and production are made. Rey has emphasized the former strategic importance of this unit among the Kunyi in organizing slavery and has devised the term "lineage mode of production" to characterize it.³³ It is the effective unit through which the "natural" matrilineal unit augments its productive and reproductive potential. As MacGaffey has pointed out, a woman's reproductive capacity cannot be transferred by rules of matrilineality alone;³⁴ there must be some form of nonmatrilineal recruitment such as slavery or clientage to augment the unit, to form a new estate out of the old one over time, to use Gluckman's phrase.³⁵

The major alternative principle of recruitment is, of course, patrilineality (*kise*, from *se*, father), which in native thought contrasts to matrilineality (*kingudi*, from mother), the normative principle for the formation of the clan, local section, house, and lineage. Most persons can identify their matrilineage and clan, knowing who their mothers are. However, patrilineal identity is the distinct mark of a freeman (*mfumu dikanda*), one whose relations to his "four corners of character" (*ndambu ziya za muntu*) are legitimated by his own, his father's (his *kise*), his mother's father's, and his father's father's lines.

Patrilineality and matrilineality are rooted in the ideology of descent which, while varying some across the territory being surveyed, generally regards matrilineality (*kingudi*) as a type of container for the individual, conveying membership in a group; whereas patrilineality is thought of as the spiritual nurturance or identity, strengthened in the fetal stage by the semen of the father, which turns into blood creating the personality. Among the Vili and Yombe this paternal substance has been called *xina*, a name and a prohibition; inland it does not bear this name, but its contents are identical. Normative naming practices hyphenate a man's name to his father's. Filiation is thus, strictly speaking, bilateral in that a person traces his links if possible to all ascending groups, both patrilineal and matrilineal. However, descent is best characterized as double unilineal according to which principle complementary rights and links come together into the individual. Local and general clan membership are always gained consanguineally, from the mother. Spiritual identity, personality, and perhaps the name are gained agnatically from the father.

The leading premise which flows from the foregoing beliefs is that an individual, indeed human society itself, must contain both principles, complementarily, to be complete. This theme is repeated at many levels of organization such as kinship terminology; it is the basis of judicial decisions on incest and marriage; it is present in much ritual, such as the *Lemba* inaugural; and it is articulated in legends.

Kinship terminology distinguishes the two ideas in the first ascending generation of one's immediate parentage by calling one's father and his classificatory brothers "*se*" (pl. *mase*), or "*tata*," and calling the father's uterine and classificatory sisters "female fathers" (*se dia nkento*). Conversely, mother and her classificatory sisters are termed "mother" (*ngudi*), and her brothers, uterine and classificatory, "male mothers" (*ngudi nkazi*). Thus the male/female,

patrilineal/matrilineal dichotomy is incorporated into the immediate organization of kin. The alternative ascending generation is, however, again labelled uniformly as “*nkaka*,” uterine and classificatory grandparent on both sides. One’s own generation terms are also lumped together with reference to siblings, both uterine and classificatory brothers (“*mpangi*”) and sisters (“*nkazi*” or “*busi*”).

The first generation descending, is, like the first ascending, distinguished according to one’s own embodiment of the matrilineal and patrilineal principles. A male ego speaks of the children within his own local clan or lineage as “*bana bankazi*,” reckoned by the female principle; a female ego calls her own children “*bana*,” but generalizes within her own clan to speak of “*bana bankazi*.” By contrast, a person speaking of the first descending generation of children born to a local clan’s or lineage’s male members would call them “patrilineal children” (*bana bambuta*), children born to the clan or lineage, applying the complementary patrilineal principle (*kise* or *kimbuta*).

The role of the patrilineal children (*bana bambuta*) needs to be emphasized in connection with the principle of complementarity and of primary-group formation. In a given community, they are natural allies in that, having grown up in the midst of their fathers, they share common spiritual paternal substance (*kise*). They act as priests and arbiters on behalf of their fathers, conducting burials and mediating all contacts between the living and the ancestors of their fathers’ matrilineage, as well as intervening in time of crisis—for example, segmentation rituals to guarantee peace. Finally, they act as political supporters and priests in creating and inaugurating consecrated offices of authority. Their role is crucial in the *Lemba* rites.

The ability of the local clan thus to retain its children, either as allies scattered throughout adjacent communities, or as continuing residents in their birthplace, depends on prowess in providing them with a livelihood in land, trade, or other form of support and opportunity. Normally, a free male child (*mwana*) goes to live with his mother’s brothers at puberty; a girl (also *mwana*) when she marries moves to reside with her husband. Should the husband die, or they divorce, she would be free, with her children, to move to her clan home with her brothers and maternal uncles. Hereditary slaves or others lacking a means of livelihood in their home clan could prevail on their fathers to offer them a temporary opportunity; the fathers, in turn, could attract their children with such generosity in the hope of creating a following. Such people were often called “people wealth” (*bantu mbongo*) or “children of the village” (*bana bavata*). In the precolonial period a

large clientele could be assembled in short order by the establishment of a landed estate, proper marriage policies, and the retention of both one's clan children (*bankazi*) and one's patrilineal children (*bambuta*), thereby making the village or town the dominant political unit (*mbanza*). There is some evidence that *Lemba* concentrated on strategic alliances between clans and their patrilineal children.

Marriage within the local clan is regarded as incestuous, both for spiritual and practical political reasons. However, marriage could be used effectively to build up the clan's following and to keep its own people together by retaining slaves and dependent clans, and by marrying and reproducing extensively with these local groups. Power was proportional to the number of people that could be organized into such a local unit—the unit of production—or into a cluster of several under one head. But the major drawback of such an approach to organization and influence was that it isolated the community of intermarrying clans and lineages, rendering it vulnerable to encroachments from its neighbors, and cutting it off from trade and exchange partners. In other words, although this was and is an attractive possibility for the short-run acquisition of influence and power, it is beset with dangers.

The solution to this dilemma was marriage with influential clans and lineages in neighboring settlements, thereby creating alliances which could be used to maintain peace and commerce. A survey of the north-bank region reveals two basic approaches to political organization through marriage: the *endogenous* approach, in which one marries within the local polity and settlement; and the *exogenous* approach, in which one marries between polities and settlements. The former tended to be used as a strategy to centralize power, wealth, and offices of authority; the latter, as a strategy to create regionally interlocking networks. In the former matrilineal cross-cousin marriage or a classificatory equivalent prevailed, in the latter, patrilineal cross-cousin marriage or its classificatory equivalent. Both could be found together in specific communities, with the one or the other receiving conscious preference.

The significance of this differential structuring of marriage types has been worked out at great length in the social-anthropological literature.³⁶ The salient points for our purposes are the following. If the matrilineal cross-cousin marriage form is not carried out as a so-called "circulating connubium," it becomes an asymmetrical relationship between unequal groups in which the offspring's position may be controlled. In the region with which we are concerned, a

lineage or clan that can exercise influence over its female children and get them to marry its women's sons succeeds in short-circuiting the bride payment normally made to fathers and benefits politically as "fathers" or patrons of the offspring. This is above all true if such daughters are members of client groups, residing with and bound to their fathers' group.

In the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage, by contrast, women-giving over several generations becomes a reciprocal act between two exogamous groups which, because the bride's father is not also the mother's brother of the groom, tends to be a significant exchange of wealth each time an alliance is extended. Furthermore, this exchange, because reciprocal, enhances the status of the wife-giver at each juncture in the relationship, since goods are received in compensation for or as a gauge against the services and well-being of the bride. In practice this type of marriage relationship is maintained between landed free clan sections, or between lords and their dependents who, although in a status of jural subservience, in fact command sufficient people and wealth that they receive the recognition of status equals.

Alliance ideology recognized the integral contributions of the patrilateral cross-cousin marriage to the high ideal of "blood reciprocity" (*mvutudulu a menga*), the return of descent substance to its point of origin in a marriage transaction. The son who married his father's sister's daughter—or a classificatory equivalent—did this. In the central *Lemba* region such a person was pointedly named Masamba, one who crosses over, returns, or clears the way (*sambila*, *samba*) between two groups.

Kinship terminology in the central *Lemba* region reflects the preferred status of such a return-blood marriage. Same-generational patrilateral kinsmen are frequently called "grandparents" (*nkaka*), whereas their matrilateral counterparts are termed "grandchildren" (*ntekolo*). One's "fathers" (*mase*) are of a higher status: to marry into their group or to receive a wife from them is to marry "up." Furthermore, one is thereby balancing the credit sheet of the alliance relationship or even establishing a mutually enhancing exchange relationship which will stand well in the subsequent generation.

This discussion of the structural principles of north-bank social organization—probably of all local societies of the *Lemba* region—has established a basis for demonstrating how explicit policies and historical forces created alternative patterns of public order.

Throughout the north-bank region there were localized estates or domains known as *nsi*, or *tzi* (pl. *zitsi*) whose chief, *mfumu nsi*, was

a lineal descendent (or proxy) of the dominant clan section of the locality. The *nsi* was land based, and right to its estate was claimed by asserting prior arrival and attachment to the lineal group possessing the area's main cemetery grove (*makulu*). Chiefship of the domain was consecrated to ancestor spirits buried in the grove, or to BiKinda, Simbi, earth, water, or other fixed spirits at that location. The domain frequently bore the same name as the chief. Where such domain chiefs consolidated their power, their identity could take the place of inhabitants' clan identities.³⁷ Under such circumstances the clan (*luvila*) of the chief of the domain (*nsi*) could, drawing on the power of the cult to the local spirit, gain prominence throughout an area and take on the appearance of a homogeneous cultural zone which ethnographers have mistakenly called "tribes"—Sundi, Mbenza, Mpudi a Zinga, for example.

The emergence of such a dominant clan domain created another problem, with its own unique solution. If a ruling clan became all pervasive in an area, absorbing lineages and children to itself, with whom did its members marry, given the clan endogamy prohibition? One solution (the endogenous approach) has already been illustrated, namely the mating of nobles or aristocrats with their clients, dependents, and slaves, that is their patrifilial children. The difficulty in this approach is that it isolates the endogamous group in an instable asymmetric marriage system. Another solution often chosen was for the dominant clan to segment into two separate entities through sacrifice of a pig, a ritual act intended to "sever" the unified blood. The ease with which a symbolic solution to a structural problem was found indicates the ideological nature of descent blood as an expression of corporate strength. Nsundi enclaves on the north bank are known to have taken this solution to the above dilemma.

In addition to these solutions of relatively greater centralization and relatively lesser centralization, there is a third alternative which became the *Lemba* organizational model. Where *Lemba* achieved its greatest structural consistency, on the periphery of and between kingdoms and aristocratic domains (*zinsi*), symmetrical marriage relationships were maintained between members of modest clan estates, *as well as with* their influential dependents, clients, and slaves. The marriage form sanctioned by *Lemba* was the symmetrical exchange between relatively powerful local clans. Only a "reciprocal blood" marriage of the type that would most readily have been the patrifilial cross-cousin marriage would have fit this expectation. Such a marriage stimulated exchange of moveable goods—an expected

goal in a mercantile society; it wove a fabric of peaceful ties between communities, thus overcoming isolationistic tendencies; and it created a *nonterritorial estate* which emphasized movement, trade, influence, knowledge, and the maintenance of horizontal relationships across the dividing lines of local societies. It is fitting that the name of such an estate should have been “peace,” *Lemba*, and the self-image of its rituals, therapy.

Political Systems of the Lemba Region

Thus far in this chapter I have sketched the natural resources of the *Lemba* region and the way subsistence exploitation as well as trade in these resources tied the various sectors of production into a complex economy. The great influx of trade in the seventeenth century brought this regional economy into integral involvement with the international economy of the maritime nations. I then sketched the social organization of the region, noting that this trade—especially the slave trade—introduced major upheavals, migrations, and power shifts into the populace, so that to speak of organization one must note movements of people. The common social structure of the region provided the terms of localized variations, particularly in marriage practices and offices of authority.

In this section I shall elaborate more fully on the distinct institutional forms that emerged within the common social structure: first, the coastal kingdoms of Loango, KaKongo, Ngoyo, Vungu, and the Yombe chiefdoms; second, the Teke federation in the east; third, the Nsundi enclaves which play a prominent role in this region’s history; finally, I shall give fullest attention to “life between the kingdoms,” where *Lemba* took on its most sophisticated form as “government medicine.”

THE COASTAL KINGDOMS

The literature offers several alternative origins of the coastal kingdoms of Loango, KaKongo, Ngoyo, and Vungu: either origin from a common northern parent kingdom, Ngunu, or secession from the Kongo kingdom, or separation from one another. Despite this ambiguity over origins, the literature is clear that these kingdoms predate the coastal European trade and that they have similar historical structure.³⁸

The internal structure of these kingdoms rested on the local chief of a given area and the resources and spirits of the earth. The chiefs paid tribute to the intermediary level of authority, usually the provincial governors, who paid it to the ruler himself, the MaLoango, the MaKongo, and the MaNgoyo. Each king maintained control over coastal trade within his kingdom, organized through a minister of trade (*mafouk*), for each of the three major ports, Loango Bay in Loango, Malemba in KaKongo, and Cabinda in Ngoyo. The international trade system was therefore controlled through the same centralizing structure as the internal tribute system. In Loango, where the provincial centralizing structure is best described and most likely to have been significant because of the local seat of Loango as a kingdom, the provincial governorship was an integral part of the maintenance of the overall structure. In the seventeenth century, Loango was ruled by a matrilineally related series of brothers or cousins, princes of the Kondi clan, who acceded to the throne after having successively held the provincial governorships. These provinces, Cane (Caye), Bukkameale, Diny, and Kesok, were ruled by the governors called respectively Manicaye, Manibock, Manisalag, and Manicabango. On the death of the MaLoango, office holders of the provinces would shift to another province, Manicaye becoming the new MaLoango, Manibock becoming Manicaye, Manisalag becoming Manibock, Manicabango becoming Manisalag, and a new Manicabango being appointed from the ruling dynasty's princes.³⁹ Whether KaKongo and Ngoyo developed this system to the same extent as Loango is not clear.⁴⁰ In Kongo, where the candidate to the throne was also known as ManiKai, the leading dynasty had broken into two factions by the seventeenth century, suggesting that succession was as often from father to son as from brother to brother.⁴¹ By the eighteenth century—thus by the time of accelerated coastal trade—this condition, which Europeans found detracted from royal power, had appeared also in Loango. Patrilineal succession suggested that power was shared by two intermarrying dynastic lines within an enduring state structure.

In Loango, as in the other coastal kingdoms, the king was spoken of as the “supreme lawgiver and protector of the people, the ultimate sanction of all administrative activities on a local and national level” who held a semi-divine status—a unique relationship with Nzambi the Creator—holding the title of *Ntotela*, supreme ruler, *Ntinu*, supreme judge.⁴² Rituals of first fruits, rainmaking, and eating and

drinking in isolation were attributed to him. The lighting of a central state flame maintained throughout his rule was part of the MaLoango's inauguration; it was distributed to the provinces, offering a source of fire to the people's hearths. Despite its prominence over Ngoyo and KaKongo and the divine trappings of its king, Loango was dependent on its southern neighbor for the ritual observance of the oracle to Bunzi, earth deity, whose main shrine was located in Ngoyo territory. In the late nineteenth century the relationship between the three rulers was seen in Loango as that of husband Loango (*nunni*) to wife KaKongo (*mokassi*), with Ngoyo as priest (*itomma*), terms that crop up to describe many ceremonial relationships including *Lemba*.⁴³ In Ngoyo, on the other hand, the three kingdoms of the coast were seen as having equal status in Bunzi's pantheon, with the first rulers being brothers born to the union of Bunzi, a female deity, with MeMbinda, the first human.⁴⁴ In all instances there existed a complementarity between cult and capital, priest and king, similar to that which existed in chiefdoms of the region (the *nsi*) and kingdoms, all of whom either participated in the shrine of Bunzi or some equivalent earth or water or place deity. The king's power, as reflected by these several cultic arrangements of Nansi and the earth shrine Bunzi, was shared with a female and priestly element. In the structure of the kingdoms the queen mother and princesses of the royal clan held prominent, legislative authority, helping represent the interests of the royal clan and themselves being the ground in which were born future leaders. In Loango this female figure was called the *Makunda*, either queen mother or sister to the MaLoango who protected interests of women throughout the kingdom and sometimes took over ruling clan interests during the interregnum.⁴⁵

In addition to the female dimension of power embodied in the *Makunda* role and the Bunzi shrine, alternative power was held by the cadaver priest (*Nganga Mvumbi*), an interregnum figure who took over the kingdom and ruled until the new king could be inaugurated. In Loango, where this system is best described, the *Nganga Mvumbi* became relatively permanent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because of the inability of the royal clan to consolidate its power and to stage the very costly inauguration of a king, part of which was the lavish burial of the incumbent. By the end of the nineteenth century in Loango, cadaver priests were already succeeding each other, and the interregnum of MaLoango had gone on for decades! Corresponding to this disintegration of kingship, trade control along

the coast became dispersed among many brokers (*mafouk*) whose brokerage role had spread quite thin, each controlling only a small section of the total trade.

While the kingdoms on the coast are described as having progressively lost their power, falling to forces of disorganization from the eighteenth century on, the opposite can be said for the chiefdoms of the Yombe interior. Although these chiefdoms continued to pay token tribute to coastal kings, their own fortunes had risen through trade along the caravan routes into the interior. What few accounts exist of caravans suggest that great wealth was to be made from taxes levied on caravan organizers. Although eighteenth-century and earlier sources may not have been aware of the political structure of trade in the interior, late nineteenth-century accounts describe the existence of a tariff wall, made of poles and bamboo, between the Guena (Loeme?) and Kwilu Rivers at the boundary between the coastal Vili in the kingdom and the forest of Mayombe, allowing passage at only three points where brokers gathered taxes on all merchandise imported or exported.⁴⁶ Veistroffer observed in 1880 that the "king of mayombe" had reduced this to a single passage.⁴⁷ Others described further tariff walls and gates to the east of the Mayombe in the direction of Kunyi territory.⁴⁸ German merchant Robert Visser relates that the Mayombe trade barriers on the Loango were broken through by force as late as 1885 by the steamer *Pollux*.⁴⁹

These Yombe who ruled as either hereditary clans or nineteenth-century "nouveau riches" created by control of the trade were legitimated by the same general religious concepts and symbols as the coastal kingdoms. In addition to the genealogical legends of the division of society into eight,⁵⁰ nine,⁵¹ or twelve original and many more *de facto nsi*,⁵² earth deity Bunzi was central to these symbols. Further charms were collected by Yombe chiefs as they were created and became available, such as the *nkisi tsi* cult.⁵³ The chief of Tseke Banza in Mayombe, for example, who had amassed a fortune on the slave trade, retained the right of investiture over subchiefs in his mini-kingdom for the price of two slaves, in exchange for all sorts of "fetish powers."⁵⁴

Historians of coastal political entities become very uncertain about the late eighteenth century; they are prone to complain, as does Martin, that losses of political coherence occur for reasons that the literature does not document well: "By 1770, the Mayombe hinterland was a collection of small independent chieftancies. When and why this happened is not clear from the sources."⁵⁵ Closer attention to

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the social history of the region in terms of control of this trade and the structuring of society into a network of interconnected marriage and trading partners gives a fuller picture of the situation. It also allows us to indicate the role of *Lemba* as a legitimating symbol and social institution.

Already by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, observers were suggesting that the coastal kingdoms, with their matrilineal dynasties, often broke up into contesting factions and, permitting patrilineal succession, constituted rather fragile state systems by comparison to European states of the time. The kings married polygynously, usually with commoner and client women. Through sheer numbers these women and their children (*bana*) provided the rulers with political support and prestige. Noblemen married similarly, although on a smaller scale, only sparingly marrying noblewomen. These latter, by contrast, married monogamously, usually with a client or slave male, and sometimes they did not marry at all, retaining a series of male concubines. Noblewomen were closely guarded, since they were the mothers of potential rulers, and the noble male progeny had to be restricted as narrowly as possible to avoid succession feuds in the royal clan. The queen mother herself, who could choose her spouse or lover(s), was closely guarded by her brothers and uncles.⁵⁶

This account, referring mainly to Loango, falls well within the picture of social structure drawn up earlier. But it is a variation well on the “endogenous” end, in which noble or aristocratic matrilineages protectively restrict their consanguineal offspring (from their women), while prodigiously producing “people power” (*mbongo-bantu*) from their males.

Hyacinthe de Bologne, a very observant early-eighteenth-century Capucin, describes in vivid detail the behavior of the princes of Sonyo, among the Solongo, farther to the south but still within the region that was becoming *Lemba* area. Father Hyacinthe noted that it was respectable for the groom to pay a bride price to the bride’s family after she had borne a child. This payment obligated him to her for his lifetime, with the sanction of both their families. However, the princes were in the habit of doing something additional which Hyacinthe regarded as “coutume vraiment païenne!” They would contract a bride payment with one woman, and then go off and have children by another, leaving the first union unconsummated. He had difficulty understanding this bizarre form of marriage—“ce mariage disordonné”—which occurred primarily among the prominent people of

the land, rarely among the commoners, and never among slaves.⁵⁷ What was also bad, in Hyacinthe's view, was that the fifteen or so "seigneurs" of Sonyo who paraded around as legitimate heirs to the throne—when there should have been only one—preferred to marry in this manner with their close relatives, even their "sisters." Hyacinthe advised priests to beware of the lords of Sonyo who would try to trick the church into sanctioning such a marriage not allowed by ecclesiastical law. For example, Don Compte Barreta de Sylva wanted to marry Dame Lucie Barrett (*sic*), his sister-in-law. He told the priests that he had paid the bride price for one Marie Nquemque. But when the time came for the ceremony in church, Dame Lucie was brought in disguised as Marie Nquemque, whereupon the priest announced he would excommunicate anyone who tried "marriage fraud," and had the charade stopped.⁵⁸ Most of the 400 marriages that Hyacinthe had performed were among commoners. The nobility and royalty desired to marry their close kin in the church, but would rarely consummate these relationships.

The picture that emerges of alliance patterns on the coast in the early eighteenth century is one in which the landowning freemen, nobility and royalty, marry close relatives who happen to fall within the Roman church's restricted list, presumably between cousins. Hyacinthe is not clear as to the degree of cousin, but the church forbids first cousins, parallel and cross. These cousin marriages are those in which the bride payment is used, *per contractum*, but they are the marriages which often are not consummated. On the other hand, these princes frequently have several "concubines" and other wives, with whom they have many children. Among commoners and slaves contractual marriages are consummated.

Hyacinthe reserved his most severe judgement, however, for an ancillary "pagan" rite performed in connection with the noble or royal marriages, contracted but frequently left unconsummated. The wife is obliged to "marry with the devil," and then she enjoys superintendence over the other wives of her husband. Only her sons succeed to paternal inheritance.⁵⁹ This combination of a marriage between lineages of high status, for apparently political alliance reasons, with ritual as well as economic sanctioning, and in which sons of the woman accede to their father's positions, would describe exactly the set of practices known as *Lemba*.⁶⁰

In due course the princes of Sonyo, Ngoyo, KaKongo, and Loango succumbed to the threats and promises of the European missionaries and began to have children within monogamous unions between noble

and royal clans. The direct consequence of this action was to increase significantly the number of legitimate heirs to the thrones, thereby virtually guaranteeing the disintegration of the matrilineal royal succession process. If Hyacinthe's "marriage with the devil" on the part of noble and royal women was indeed *Lemba*, it would have offered an alternative alliance structure to the narrow royal household, with one queen mother, a king, her brother, and only one or two contending princes. It would have constituted a sanctioned alliance between several prominent exogamous clans.

Evidence that we are dealing with *Lemba* here comes from further sources. A nearly identical marriage structure is reported among the late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century Kavati (*nsi*) domain of Madula, in the north Yombe, inland from Loango. Noblewomen rarely marry. It is their custom to keep a series of male concubines until they tire of such an arrangement. Having borne only a few children, they live out their later years in their "home" lineage settlements with their brothers. They take on chiefly roles, and if especially winsome, make diplomatic calls to vassal chiefs to collect tribute. Those few noblewomen who marry formally are exchanged in marriage with their counterparts in neighboring domains and villages to stabilize the two groups' relationships. Noblemen marry polygynously, mostly with slave women. Commoners and slaves marry, as they can, with an exchange of the bride price. But the formal noble marriages between domains and villages are usually made in *Lemba*.⁶¹ These accounts all suggest that *Lemba* emerged within the broadening power base of coastal populations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the coastal kingdoms were experiencing their initial trade upsurge with European merchants.

In this setting, *Lemba* was one of the large corporate sacred medicine cults (*min'kisi*) of the region. It is helpful to describe this ritual context briefly. In Loango an excellent historical record of medicines provides a "barometer" of change from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. The earliest direct reference to *Lemba* is Dapper's in the 1660's, where it was seen in the royal court.

Malemba is a *moquissie* of great significance, worthy to be seen as sacred by the king, for whose bodily health it serves: for, as long as he does not become ill, he is surely kept well by it. It consists of a small four-cornered mat one-and-a-half feet large, with a string at the top, on which are hung several small calabashes, cuttlebones, feathers, dry shells, iron bits, bones,

and such things, all colored with *tukula*-red which represents in this connection something special. To celebrate it a boy takes a small drum and strikes it in a distinctive way, accompanied by the resonance of rattling shell whistles. To this is added spitting of consecrated kola, and annointment with *tukula* and consecrated water out of a small pot with an asperge onto the *moquissie*, then onto the body of the *nganga*, then that of the king, to the accompaniment of singing or chanting appropriate to the occasion. Even the nobility who are in attendance receive for their efforts annointment of their bodies of a few red stripes (of *tukula*), receiving thereby the honor of *Lemba*, which they then carry away and hang in its place, its small pot, its asperge and satchel.⁶²

Other major public medicines noted by Dapper in seventeenth-century Loango included *Tiriko*, a shrine located in nearby Boarie, with four anthropomorphic pillars to hold up the roof. The priest of *Tiriko*, accompanied by a boy, daily prayed for the health of the king and the well-being of the land, as well as the growth of crops, the luck of merchants and fishermen.

Boessi-Batta was another *n'kisi* of major importance focused on bringing into one's homestead objects acquired in long-distance trade, thus especially pertinent to merchants. It consisted of several parts: a large lion-skin sack filled with all sorts of shells, iron bits, herbs, tree bark, feathers, ore, resin, roots, seeds, rags, fishbones, claws, horns, teeth, hair and nails of albinos and other "unnatural" creatures (*ndonodos*); to this satchel were added two calabashes covered with shells (*Schnackenhörnern*, *simbos*) and topped with a bush of feathers, decorated with iron hooks, and colored with *tukula* wood (red). Atop this calabash a mouth-like orifice had been carved, into which was poured wine to activate the *n'kisi*. The whole set of objects, satchel and calabashes, was placed atop a table-like construction outside the door of the house. When they would go out to fetch merchandise, even at a distance, adherents to *Boessi-Batta* would take the moveable part along with them, even though it weighed ten to twelve pounds. The *n'kisi* appears to have paralleled the movement of articles of trade. On returning with new wares, the priest would draw lines on his body and incant in a rising tone of voice as he unpacked the *n'kisi* ingredients. Presently his eyes would exorbit, and he would become possessed by the spirit of *Tiriko*. Drinking a liquid to calm himself, he would declare the wish of *Boessi-Batta*, the fee, and measure to be taken or other *min'kisi* to be used.⁶³

Another *n'kisi* of seventeenth-century Loango was *Kikokoo*, an anthropomorphic wooden shrine standing in the seaside village of Kinga, at the side of a large cemetery common to the region, perhaps to Loango Bay itself. *Kikokoo* protected the dead against witches (*doojes* [*ndoki*?]) who in their nocturnal craft would drag off the souls of the dead to slavery and forced labor. *Kikokoo* also was to assure the arrival of ships with fish and merchandise.

N'kisi Bomba was celebrated, noted Dapper, in a special feast associated with the coming out of the *Khimba* initiates dressed in a head garb of feathers and skirts of palm raphia, and carrying a red and white hand rattle. He noted their frenzied drumming, their mock-mad behavior. This is the final public phase of the *Khimba* initiation which according to later observers included adoration of Mbumba Luangu, the rainbow serpent.

Other *min'kisi* reported by Dapper included *Makongo*, consisting of rattles, drums, small sacks, and red fish hooks; *Mimi*, a small house shrine in a banana grove with a throne holding a basket of objects including a "paternoster" of seashells and a wooden statue of Father Masako (?); *Kossi*, a sack of white snail shells, filled with white clay, used in rites of crawling between one another's legs, eating, washing, donning bracelets and bands of protection against lightning, thunder, and sickness; *Kimaje*, a pile of potsherds on which priests deposit old ragged caps and other worn out ritual paraphernalia and dedicate their new replacements, so as to assure the new moon and new year's coming, as well as protection on the seas; *Injami*, a shrine found in a village near Loango, represented in a huge statue in a house; *Kitauba*, a huge wooden gong used in swearing the oath or sending sickness to another; *Bansa*, another statue covered with red powder; *Pongo*, a "wooden" calabash or container covered with shells (*simbos*) and filled with many carved symbols, used in "black magic"; and *Moanzi*, a pot partially buried in the ground between dedicated trees, holding an arrow and a string on which hung green leaves, and whose adherents wore copper armrings and avoided eating kola.⁶⁴

This seventeenth-century inventory of *min'kisi* sharpens the impression we already have of Loango. The kingdom is still intact, as repeated reference to the well-being of the king suggests. Many shrines and medicines combine the well-being of the king with plentiful harvests, good fishing expeditions, abundant trade goods, and control of rain, a common attribute of centralized African power. *Lemba* is referred to as a "big" *n'kisi*, and in many respects Dapper's account resembles later accounts, including the ritual elements and

the emphasis on a gentry. This is however the only account of *Lemba* that includes a king in the rite.

There is some indication, in the symbolism of the *min'kisi Kikokoo* and *Boesi-Batta* that the kingdom is beset by serious problems resulting from trade, including the slave trade. *Kikokoo's* characteristics are laced with slave-trade attributes, the theft of souls, their forced work, and the coming in of trade goods. *Boessi-Batta* appears even more sharply to express the concern for protecting the inner world of the household and homestead from the danger of things brought from afar. However this sense of protection at the house door is ambiguously charged with attractiveness of these same goods. The importance of *Boessi-Batta* in seventeenth-century Loango is indicated by the fact that it was exported with African slaves to Haiti, where, as shall be seen in Chapter 8, significant symbols of the contrast of the household with the beyond remain in the Bosu shrine of voodoo ceremonialism. Objectively, the seventeenth century saw the control of trade by the kings of coastal kingdoms, through their brokers, slipping from them into the hands of a mercantile elite. This elite, on the coast as well as inland, was mostly synonymous with the *Lemba* priesthood. The shifting base of power growing from control of the trade was also reflected in the structure of shrines. Generally, fixed territorial shrines such as *Tiriko*, *Kikokoo*, *Mimi*, *Kimaje*, and *Bunzi* did not get transported across the ocean in the rites and lives of slaves, as did some of the "portable" shrines or medicines. However, the fixed shrines such as *Bunzi* moved beyond the orbit of royal families and their priests, and came to be found in various chiefdoms (*zinsi*) of the coast and Mayombe, even inland as far as Kibunzi, in the form of what later observers called "pseudo-*Bunzi*" shrines and cults.

By the mid-nineteenth century, for which better sources are available on Loango's *min'kisi* system, a picture emerges that is quite different from Dapper's seventeenth-century account. The fate of the centralized, earth-cult inspired kingdoms on the coast is such that little mention is made of the king, let alone his well-being. Trade, adjudication, thief- and witch-finding medicine is widespread, and there is a serious concern for the fertility of women. The German Loango expedition of the 1870's describes this setting.⁶⁵

Bunzi is considered an important palaver oracle, as well as a rainmaker, relating to the wind that brings rain. Pechuel-Loesche however considers this male version a pseudo-*Bunzi*, an unorthodox variant of the traditional earth shrine in Ngoyo.⁶⁶

Gombiri, a female *n'kisi*, which protects Loango Bay and locates witches and murders, has replaced the now extinct *Kikokoo*, which it is noted served the Loango king as his major shrine. *Mansi*, mentioned by Dapper, is a protective shrine on the ocean coast which rose to great popularity as an oracle in the 1840's and 50's but disappeared in the 1860's after its main altar was demolished by an unknown person, animal, or storm. *Ngombo*, the widespread divination oracle, is used in Loango in the mid-nineteenth century.⁶⁷

These sources list a long series of *min'kisi* concerned with adjudicatory and retaliatory functions, no doubt necessitated by the collapse of formal appeal courts in the kingdom. *Tschimpuku*, a woven bag, *Mpusu*, a four-cornered basket with tightly-fitting lid, is companion-piece with *Malasi*, a two-headed hippo-shaped sculpture; *Mboyozu-Mambi*, a pot lid resting on three legs, and *Mpangu*, a wooden block wrapped tightly with a chain—these are all juridical *min'kisi* found in Loango during the mid-nineteenth century, concentrating their songs, techniques, and symbolism upon measures that were thought to bring clarity and justice to the increasingly tangled social relations present in the port city. *Mboyozu* was said to have been a direct successor of the now extinct *n'kisi* *Maramba*, mentioned in the sixteenth century by English sailor Battel.⁶⁸ Openly aggressive techniques of private self-defense and assertion are concentrated in *min'kisi* described by Bastian.⁶⁹ *Simbuka* can “kill with a quick strike”; *Kunja* lames, *Kanga ikanga* creates a headache in its victim, causing him to run off wildly into the wilderness; *Mabiala Mandembe* (*Mapanje*), sometimes given human form, drives its victim, especially thieves, mad.⁷⁰

Against these methods of active aggression, there were many protective *min'kisi*. *Mandombe*, embodied in an iron chain, protected its devotee in war and fighting; *Imba*, a bracelet with a shell affixed to it, protected its wearer from drawing blood in a fight or palaver. These latter, as well as the foregoing, are individualized *min'kisi*. But they suggest that collective institutions were unable to satisfy, or render security. Related to the theme of seeking security is *Njambe* (*Injami* of Dapper's seventeenth-century account). Using the medicine to drive away sleep and achieve ecstasy, an individual could take white seeds from *nganga Njambe* and to the accompaniment of musicians reach possession (*sulo umbuiti*).

Possibly because of the pervasive insecurity and the history of slavery on the Congo coast, medicine in this period turned toward the security of children, that is, fertility. Whereas in the seventeenth

century generalized medicine had included fertility of crops and women, along with happy trading, now there is a proliferation of medicines for pregnancy and childbirth. *Mpemba* (also *pfemba*, *umpembe*) became very popular and consisted of one or several treatment centers drawing scores of women seeking advice and entrance to the rituals of *Mpemba*. Pechuel-Loesche thinks these shrines were derived from a famous midwife in Loango who had special techniques or power.⁷¹ The movement gave rise to the celebrated *Mpemba* statues of women holding their breasts, and sometimes a child on their laps.⁷² This *n'kisi* was off-limits to men, and its activities were carried out only in a moon-lit night. *Mbinda* supported marriages and healed women's problems; it too was strictly a woman's affair, carried out in the moonlight, with the women shaven and naked. Men, hair, tobacco smoke, liquor, and water were taboo to its adepts. *Sasi*, a drink administered by a female *nganga*, was created for pregnant women in childbirth, and for newly born children. *Kulo-Malonga* stopped excessive menstrual bleeding; *Bitungu* cured sterility in women; *Dembacani* and *Cuango-Malimbi* cured impotence in men.⁷³

A variety of particular "secular" treatments could be added to these to suggest that Loango medicine in the middle of the nineteenth century resembled the Occidental concept of medicine more closely than the foregoing public medicine in certain respects. There were treatments for stomach ache, both simple and serious. *Mpodi* the cupping horn accompanied by skin incisions was used for all kinds of complaints. Bone setting was done in the case of fractures by the *Lunga* doctor and splints of bamboo or some other stiff bandage-like material were applied to support the break. Infections and swelling were handled by skin punctures with a knife, upon which was applied powder of the kola nut and other seeds. There were snake-bite remedies and many more herbal and manipulative treatments.

The largest category of public medicine evidencing growth, along with adjudication, aggression and fertility medicine, is that relating to trade and entrepreneurial undertaking. *Mangossu* is the lord of trade, travel, marriage, or any enterprise. The priests of this famous oracle were well recognized, but had a hard time finding a permanent home for the shrine since its spirit was a restless wanderer. *Tschivuku*, a man's *n'kisi*, was embodied in a woven ball kept in a rack-like shrine hut in a village, to assure successful trading. Its observation consisted, among other things, of the men returned from their trading journeys playing a sort of kickball with the *n'kisi*, laughing and carrying on, while the women remained out of sight.⁷⁴ *Mpinda* was a large bust,

three-fourths human size, an *n'kisi* of the land, who protected river trade. Pechuel-Loesche mentions an unnamed trading *n'kisi* consisting of a red trunk kept in a "factory"—trading warehouse—containing all sorts of medicinal objects (see plates 19, 20).⁷⁵

Lemba fits well into this taxonomy of nineteenth-century medicinal "growth" and development. Güssfeldt and Bastain of the German Loango expedition illustrate *Lemba* as combining fertility, marriage, adjudication, and trade control in a unique synthesis that became the wide regional system to which this book is devoted.

Farther back from the village, surrounded by a papyrus fence, there is a hut called the *Lemba* house. It is accessible only by a couple which is associated with the *Lemba* fetish. All others are forbidden entrance. This consecrated house is used to store precious things, much as the Parthenon in Athens was a state treasurehouse.⁷⁶

The closest marriage relationship a man may have with a woman is in *Lemba*. She becomes his *nkazi Lemba*. She wears the *Lemba* charm. The bracelet (*malungu*) is an expensive affair, and the charm requires a decorated house, thus only the wealthy can afford it. Between the doors of the well-locked *Lemba* house, which constitutes the treasure-house of its possessor, are planted two trees, a baobab for the man, and a cottonwood (*mafuma*) for the woman. . . . the key of the house is given the wife with the *Lemba* ring, and her alone. This ring, worn on the right arm, is consecrated together with a roundbox (*ludu Lemba*). The second wife has a house too, and wears a small medicine satchel on her arm. . . .

When husband and wife meet for marriage in the *Lemba* house, the man dons a large copper ring, and the woman a smaller one, the charm being consecrated with a spittle of wine. Whoever is initiated into the secrets of *Lemba* can as "*Tata Lemba*" pass on the order to a "*mwana Lemba*", and when the latter, the *Lemba* child, becomes ill, he must come to his spiritual Father *Lemba* to be healed through his medicine. In a *Lemba* marriage husband and wife are obligated to mutually trust one another and confess all shortcomings to one another, lest they become sick when eating together.⁷⁷

Not a trace of royalty is evident. The widespread existence of *Lemba* copper bracelets and drums in museum collections from the coast and from Mayombe dating from this time, as well as the accounts of

broadening wealth in coastal societies following the complete collapse of royalty, give this account credence.

In the coastal societies, then, *Lemba* emerged in the seventeenth century in connection with copper trade and consolidated its strength in the eighteenth century. As royal clans found themselves overwhelmed by various political and economic problems, a wealthy mercantile class emerged to control the interior trade and the various posts that were needed to administer it. Traditional rules of exogamy and exchange ordered relationships between these clans, partially related to domainal *nsi* estates, partially linked to trade. *Lemba*, as both rite and organization, legitimated this new structure. Later chapters will show how it adapted conventional religious symbols to its own purpose, and developed a pervasive and unique ideology of healing relating to its concept of a stateless political order.

THE TEKE FEDERATION

The Tio king, Makoko, like those of Loango, Kakongo, Ngoyo, and Vungu, was ordained by a powerful, permanent spirit linked to a territorial domain. This was the spirit Nkwe Mbali, thought to be as old as Tio kingship itself. There are no good historical indicators of the date of origin of the Tio kingdom, although legends in the wider region—from Kongo to the coast of Loango—suggest its origin well before the fifteenth century. The ideology of the local authority rooted to an estate and ordained in a territorial or place-specific spirit is widespread in the Equatorial African region, as it was on the coast. Vansina believes that Tio kingship arose out of the acknowledgement of mystical superiority of one of the local authorities—“squires”—followed by a modest tribute payment in exchange for insignia of legitimation. The king thus became a *primus inter pares* among the regional domainal squires. This mystical—ideological—origin theory of the state among the Tio is defended by Vansina because of the low population densities of the region, which would rule out conquest as an explanation, and because of the structural similarity of the role of local squire to that of the king.⁷⁸

The Tio kingdom was already an ancient and important presence by the sixteenth century. Various named Anzicans, the Tege or Teke, or the kingdom of Macoco, this political entity is one of the best documented of Central Africa in the literature of travelers and chroniclers. Its territory covered extensive river trade routes north of the Congo/Zaire, and along its northern tributaries. Its miners and smiths developed advanced techniques of metalworking. Although

Vansina doubts any integral association of the kingdom's formation to the introduction of metal-working technology, royal symbolism closely associates the kingship with smithing. Royal anvils, a sacred fire, the royal smith, and the second title of the kingdom, *ngandzuunu*, "owner of anvils," gave the king an aura of mastery over this important technology. Teke miners and smiths worked the metals of the Mboko Nsongo and Mindouli region before the Kongo and Sundi invaders took over. Indeed, Teke forgers were often captured to teach smithing to the new Kongo masters.

In the mid-seventeenth century a major reform was introduced in Tio political structure related to emergence and spread of autonomous lords. The implications for the present study are considerable, since these lords possessed many characteristics in common with the *Lemba* priests, including their major insignium the *nkobi* charm box. The *nkobi* lords ruled over the squires, collected tribute from them, and were recognized by them as *nkani*, mediators of tribute to higher-up lords, and ultimately the king. About twenty lower-level *nkobi* lords became the *nkani* of the local squires. A few of these lords, and several major lords, constituted the first-rank *nkobi* lords of greatest prominence.⁷⁹

A *nkobi* lord's autonomy was indicated firstly by his freedom of movement although he collected tribute and drew his spiritual strength from local squires. Each *nkobi* was rooted in a local *nkira* spirit and its local shrine. But the *nkobi* lords could travel; they had their own histories. Each *nkobi* had its own name, its master title. For example, Impaw *nkobi* was held by the lord Ngempaw, whose *nkira* was Ngaalito which resided in the forest of Kongo. Such lore constituted the foundation charter of the *nkobi*. The *nkobi* were graded according to their importance, and a lord's rank varied accordingly. This expressed the competition between major lords and made the system vulnerable to personal political ambition and historical opportunities. The major *nkobi* were in theory twelve in number, although actual lists varied. One reason for this was that the famous *nkobi* had "mothered" children which contained some of their ingredients. This mechanism of regeneration of the *nkobi* had the effect of extending the reward and the tribute system.⁸⁰

The ambivalence of the lords' relationship to the king was expressed in two, clearly diverging, sets of myths of *nkobi* origin. The one set hold that one day a huge *nkobe* appeared at the king's capital, Mbe, after people from all over had waited for a long time for it. The king then distributed the twelve major *nkobi* to his deserving depen-

dents praising his *nkira* earth spirit Nza, the creator himself.⁸¹ This may be called the royal, centralizing, myth of *nkobi* authority. A second set of myths represents a more autonomous legitimation for the nobility. Accordingly, the *nkobi* came from Lord Ngia in Imbwe near Abala region, or even farther away from a great chief at Mpiina Ntsa on the Ntsaa plain. After he had brought the twelve *nkobi*, a war broke out near Mbe, the Tio capital, and in the peace settlement that followed it was agreed that the twelve *tukobe* should be divided between the lords of Ntsaa and Mbe. In this version the *nkobi* give a legitimate authority which does not derive from the king but which can be acquired by persons of wealth. Its antagonistic character to kingship is well expressed; it is a mythical way of saying that power flows from one's following and the number of guns one owns.⁸²

Vansina suggests that the *nkobi* was a mystical force behind the lords' authority, a glorification of competition and power struggles, and an assertion of authority with regard to the kingdom and its ideologies. The *nkobi* lords were major judges, they controlled the trade, they were polygynists with many wives. Their courts were well built, even palisaded; their paths were cleared; their fields were big. Despite this clear autonomy, a new lord had to be confirmed in his title by the king, from whom he received a brass collar. The *nkobi* was somewhat independent of the king's approval. The king's inaugural incorporated formal recognition of the lords, in that at this occasion the rank and the role of the lords would be spelled out. But the real administration of the kingdom was carried out by the lords, who acted as judges, controlling trade and tribute, while the king granted ritual authority.⁸³ It is, says Vansina, as if the Tio kingdom had really two constitutions: one a very old one based on kingship and the domains; the other somewhat more recent (seventeenth century) based on the ranking of the *nkobi* and their lords.⁸⁴

Two developments related to the *nkobi* reform of the seventeenth century bear special attention in a study of *Lemba*. The first is the role of trade in the rise of the Teke lords; the second is the similarity of the *nkobi* of the Teke lords with *nkobe Lemba*. No doubt the great river trade that linked Central Africa to the Atlantic coast provided the basis of the lord's growing autonomy. In his review of the Teke role in controlling the ivory, raphia, and slave trade, Vansina notes that "Teke" came to be known as a category of slave in Colombia as early as 1560, and later in the seventeenth century as a special class of slave in Brazil, the "Ansiku." Of particular importance is the Teke control of trade at the giant market of Mpumbu at Malebo Pool. Historical

texts show strong centralized kingship up to the middle of the seventeenth century; the king is in charge of provinces and functions such as trade. Ngobila is the special administrator who controls the river. After 1700, however, references to the kingdom become scarce. Now the chiefs of the plains, especially Mboo, acquire legitimacy through the *nkobi* ideology, reflecting a rise in wealth from the influx of goods brought from Loango over the Tio-Laadi route and later a similar influx over Nkemi and Ntsei.⁸⁵

Vansina also interprets the invention of the political *nkobi* to reflect the growing affluence of traders linked with metallurgy in the Abala area along the Alima river to the north of the Tio kingdom as well as in the Mindouli area. The *nkobi* were not given to the lords for political recognition of dependents so much as they were bought by them as "super-charms." Only wealthy lords could afford them, thus demonstrating their ties with the wealth of mining, forging, and trade.⁸⁶ To what extent this also explains *Lemba* may be determined by comparing the ingredients of both *nkobe* traditions. The similarity is striking. The Tio lords' *nkobi* contains kaolin, camwood, three other varieties of red obtained from stones, several types of shells, indeed shells from Lower Congo,⁸⁷ also metal objects such as hammers, anvils, and imported manillas called *ntsaa*, war bracelets and anklets fashioned in Nsundi and Loango, necklaces of beads and cowries. Around the *nkobi* shrine are found miniature bells, *mvaba* signs of authority, anvils, and full-sized bracelets, red copper *ngiele*, a ring of the *ntsii* chief, or ordinary *ngiele* and brass rings with relief worked at Loango, carrying the onia broom emblem of justice (see plate 12).⁸⁸ These objects are in many cases identical to the contents of *nkobe Lemba*, as fuller analysis in later chapters will reveal. For the Tio lords they reflected *unu* (power) and were all trade objects, expressing power gained from prowess in trade. *Lemba* was then a Western extension of the Tio *nkobi* system. The differences were that the Tio lords were attached loosely to a king, an *nkira* domain source, and the *nkobi* were hereditary. But in their function and much of their insignia they were identical to *Lemba*. Their rise in the mid-seventeenth century corresponds to the rise of an independent mercantile elite in the coastal kingdoms.

THE NSUNDI SYSTEMS

Nsundi (Sundi, Soondy, Masundi) in ethnographical and historical literature describes societies of both banks of the Zaire River, from the Matadi/Vungu area in the west all the way to the Pool in the east. The

major areas north of the Zaire River, including the coastal kingdoms of Loango, KaKongo, Ngoyo, and Vungu.⁸⁹ Although the Kongo king did cite himself as ruler of these kingdoms in praise epithets and may have received gifts from them, it is unlikely that this represented significant hegemony over the north-bank region. By the early sixteenth century, when Europeans had begun to frequent the Congo coast for purposes of trade, diplomacy, and missionary work, the region north of the river under Kongo (Nsundi) control is depicted as a small area directly north of the Nsundi capital—no more than Dondo Mazinga and Nsanga districts—between Vungu and Tio territory.⁹⁰

As the northern province of the Kongo kingdom, Nsundi was ruled by the Mani-Nsundi (MaNsundi) who was appointed by the Kongo king. Until the late sixteenth century, the MaNsundi was frequently the eldest son of the Kongo king, appointed to rule this key province before acceding to the Kongo throne. Nsundi's central place in the kingdom derived from several historical and economic factors. First, the original conquest of Nimi a Lukeni in the thirteenth century probably came from Vungu and Nsundi, so the Kongo king had natural allies there. Further, once trade between Mpumbu at the Pool and the coastal ports such as Ambriz had developed, Nsundi was strategically situated for the control of caravan trade routes running right through Mbanza Nsundi and Mbanza Kongo.

Nsundi's integral place in the early Kongo kingdom is evident from the well-known events and personalities involved in early contact with Portugal in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Nzinga a Nkuwu was ruler of Kongo in 1491 when Portuguese explorer Diogo Cão visited his court at Mbanza Kongo. At this time Nzinga a Nkuwu's son Nzinga Mpemba ruled at Nsundi. When Nzinga a Nkuwu died in 1506, another brother Mpanzu a Kitima contended with Nzinga Mpemba for the throne. As is known to readers of Kongo history, Nzinga Mpemba had embraced the new religion of Christianity, whereas Mpanzu supported the autochthonous spirits. In the battle between the two brothers, the Christian Nzinga Mpemba killed the "pagan" Mpanzu. Nzinga Mpemba was inaugurated as Affonso I, whose long rule represents in many ways a high point in Kongo history. Trade with Portugal flourished, at least at first; diplomatic relations were opened with Lisbon; ambassadors and students were sent from Kongo to Europe; missionaries opened schools; and craftsmen came to construct churches in the capitals of Kongo. However, already during his reign Affonso witnessed the development of the slave trade and intrigue against his authority.⁹¹

Following Affonso's death the Kongo kingdom was further paralyzed by the take-over of Portuguese mercantile and political interests, by insurrections of vassals, and by the invasion of warriors who not only sacked the capital but also drove through northern and southern Kongo territories, establishing small but fearsome military enclaves. One of these military colonies was created on the north bank near or in the Mindouli/Mboko Nsongo mining fields, ostensibly for the control of trade and minerals which were becoming important in the coastal trade of the late sixteenth century.

The fluctuating stability of the Kongo throne after the death of Affonso affected affairs within the provinces; for example, the extent to which the king could dictate policies in the provincial governor's (*mani*'s) appointments, the choice of hereditary princes, and the extent of tribute to be collected. Nsundi continued to be fairly stable as is well documented by resident missionaries like Father Jérôme de Montesarchio. In theory the Kongo king was to be chosen by the electors of the royal family. He in turn selected the provincial governors from among candidates presented by local provincial clans. The king could also in theory nominate governors of the provincial districts, although in Nsundi this right was assumed by the provincial governor (Mani-Nsundi). Chiefs of the provincial districts were elected by matrilineal relatives of the incumbent.⁹² In Nsundi there were at least twelve such districts whose names appear consistently over several centuries and still today as names of modern villages, towns, or clan estates: (from east to west) Binza, Kinsitu, Boenze, Nsanga (north of the river), Wembo (just south of Mbanza Nsundi), Sevo, Kwilu, Kasi, Ngombe a Kinu, and Mpemba Kasi, Mazinga (north of the river), Ntanda Kongo, Kilemfu, Lemba, and Nkanga Nsundi (see figure 3 above).⁹³ Each district had its Mani, representing the ruling local lineages. Each in theory paid tribute to the provincial Mani-Nsundi who represented the King. A centralized, hierarchic structure existed of the sort seen in the coastal kingdoms and among the Tio, although the scale here appears to have been greater. With the growing influence of the Portuguese, such titles as "duke" and "marquis" appeared in respect to the local offices and landed estates, as well as "*fidalgos*" for nonterritorial posts. These are little more than overlay on pre-existing office titles. The "duke" of Nsundi, given permission to nominate "marquises," appointed the marquis of Nsanga, Kifuma, Zimba, Ngombe, Mazinga, etc., officers already known to be *mani* of the various districts of Nsundi.

After the decline of influence of the Kongo kingdom in the late seventeenth century, trade shifted from just south of the river to the northern area and to the far southern area of Cassange and Loanda. Glimpses of Nsundi provincial structure thereafter suggest a continuing centralized polity, with the autonomous *n'tinu* MaNsundi being inaugurated with the regalia and the insignia of the leopard skin like neighboring groups, required to battle for his rights to the throne, to kill a matrilineal kinsman, and to pay his own consecration fees instead of receiving the nomination from Kongo. In the inauguration of the last MaNsundi, NaMenta, in the early nineteenth century, no mention is made of the Kongo king, or of any influence from Mbanza Kongo.⁹⁴ All is left to the *nkazi a nsi*, the "wife-clan" Mpanzu, customarily designated as the inaugurators and wife-givers of the Nsundi king-designate. Mpanzu "kidnapped" NaMenta early in his life to prepare him for his role. When he reached puberty they castrated him not only to keep him from fornicating with unmarried women but also to guarantee his symbolic "otherness." After collecting the coronation tax from Nsundi, Mpanzu and the candidate waged war with the other contenders to establish their right to occupy the *mbanza*. Having routed their opponents, they proceeded to decorate their candidate-king with the ingredients of the royal medicine, *kiyaazi* (from *yaala*, to rule), including chalk to anoint him and leopard skin upon which to place him.

Then they placed a rod over NaMenta's shoulders, set a leopard-skin diadem on his brow, a necklace of leopard's teeth round his neck, a plaited cap (*mpu*) on his head, and a loin-cloth about his loins.⁹⁵

A free-born woman of the Kimpanzu clan was brought before him and designated *n'kazi* or *nkama*, queen. Because of the king's sterility, she went to bed with the king's brother. This structure of the nonconsummated royal marriage resembles that in Loango and Sonyo nobility.

Because of widespread poverty in Nsundi by the early nineteenth century, the last Nsundi *n'tinu* was not given proper burial on his death in 1835 either by the combined supporters of the Mpanzu (the coronators [*n'kazi*]), by the children and grandchildren (*mayaala*) of the Nsundi, or by the Nsundi themselves. As in Loango, however, other types of offices and practices maintained the skeleton of hierarchic tribute and title exchange for a time, even though the royal

office of king (*n'tinu*) had now lapsed. In a sense the kingship had already lapsed much earlier, becoming a mere expression of symbolic authority, the king being no more than a charm of power.⁹⁶ Elsewhere, closer to the north-bank trade which continued throughout the nineteenth century, the symbols of Nsundi authority and the titles that were conveyed took on new substance and even expanded.

In the region of the Manianga market along the trade route in the old districts of Sevo and Nsanga, the Nsaku clan carried on the practice of granting designation of the *Mpu* title of chiefship to local authorities in exchange for tribute in slaves, pigs, and cloth. It had been an ancient duty of an Nsaku (Nsaku Lau, Nsaku ne Vunda) autochthonous priestly class, "senior of the Kongo clans," to ordain the Kongo king and to counsel him in his decisions.⁹⁷ Now in Nsundi, an Nsaku ruler named Ntotila Fuanda, born to his mother Matele in Kinkuzu, in the Sevo district south of the river, had received the *Mpu* from Ntete, governing at Kinkuzu, as had Kata Mandala at Dunga (also in Sevo) and Makita at Ngombe Matadi (just north of old Mbanza Nsundi). Fuanda crossed the river northward, establishing his rule at "Kimbanza," where he bestowed the *Mpu* upon subject chiefs in exchange for tribute in slaves, pigs, and cloth which he forwarded annually to Ntete in the south (see figure 3 above). The clans receiving the *Mpu* from Fuanda north of the river were Nsundi and Kingoyo.⁹⁸ As in several other instances the titles of chiefly office are bestowed upon a candidate by office-holders or priests of another clan. Here, the Nsaku priestly clan carries out this function.

The fundamental feature of such a structure of authority is the mutual complementarity of two exogamous clans, the acknowledgment of one as "royal" (*kimfumu*) providing the candidate, the other as providing the queen (*kinkazi*) and possibly the sacred emblems of authority (*kiyaazi*). A variation is that the one exogamous clan becomes "priestly," the other "secular." The regent must in this case be "detached" from his kin group through a ritual murder of a matrilineal kin, his castration, or ritual acts such as a series of taboos. Finally, there is always reference in Kongo chiefly and kingly power to the "children" (*baana*) and "grandchildren" (*batekolo*), who collect the offspring of males of the ruling house (the *mayaala*) who, themselves unable to accede to the royal throne, have a strong vested interest in creating and maintaining their "fathers" in authority. These are the elements of Western Congo social structure out of which centralized structures of authority have repeatedly been erected. The exchange of titles for tribute between the *mayaala* and *nkazi* on the

one hand, and the *mfumu* on the other, assures the perpetuation of the system. But in order for the complementarity to work, the flow of tribute goods must be maintained. Where this depended on trade, it is apparent that fluctuations in trade set off crises in the structure of local authority.

The authority system that developed among the Nsundi clans northwest of Manianga perhaps as early as the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century followed the structures outlined here. Historical and legendary accounts refer to Mwembe Nsundi as the capital of a complex of chiefdoms extending from the Zaire River northward into the copper mining area of Mboko-Nsongo, westward into Mayombe, and eastward as far as Mindouli.⁹⁹ Mwembe Nsundi's location is specified further as being in the watershed area between the Luala and the Luangu Rivers, which is the point where the northern Mpumbu to Loango caravan route crossed the copper-mining region.

The presence in legendary history and in contemporary place-names in the general Eastern Mayombe-Manianga region of the name Mwembe, and documentary evidence of several clusters of chiefdoms spawned by invading Nsundi clans in the seventeenth century and later, make appropriate its designation as a "Mwembe system." Recurrence of the name "Mbanza Nsundi" suggests that the north-bank Nsundi societies are the result of cultural migration in which entire place-name and authority structures were transported from a home region recreating new settlements from blueprints of the old, analogous to North American place-names such as New York, New Berlin, New Orleans, New Mexico, New Hampshire, etc. Mbanza Nsundi (Nsundi Center, chiefship) was used in the settlements created by those who rushed to the copper mines of Manianga and the control of lucrative trade along the highland caravan route from Mpumbu to Loango. Archival materials help us to describe one such Nsundi enclave around Mbanza Mwembe (see figure 3 above).

At Mbanza Nsundi (north of the river, not to be confused with ancient Nsundi provincial capital) the Nsundi clan [in ca. 1700] divided and scattered to find a new land. One group settled in Mbanza Mwembe, attaching to its name Nsundi the term "Mwembe" to differentiate itself from the first group, with which it then married. At Mbanza Mwembe the clan prospered, adding numerous settlements at Ngombe, Ngombe-Masaka, Kombe, Diada, and others. Thus installed, the clan organized itself separately in the tradition from which it came. A chief was

named to reside at Mbanza Mwembe; the villages put at their heads chiefs (*mfumu bwala*) or judges (*nzonzi*) to settle disputes.¹⁰⁰

Instead of intermarrying with local autochthonous clans—whom the Nsundi oral historians sometimes allege were not there, the land having been “empty” when they came—they saw fit to divide the leading clan into two exogamous halves, permanently severing the “blood” through the sacrifice of a pig and a common feast. On the model of pre-existing Nsundi polities, they devised a system of local chiefs and judges. In due course the royal model could be recreated around a ruler and other basic elements, just as had been done in Kimbanza by Ntтила Fuanda.

Nkombo Mafwana, chief of Mbanza Mwembe, who in the meantime found that the land of that region was not suited for him, left to found a new settlement at Ntombo. There he called a meeting of his chiefs and had himself named *Lulendo* (power) chief, with authority over the entire clan. He received the investiture from Mayombolo, chief at Mbanza Nsundi, and was succeeded in the *Lulendo* office by Mangovo Kabi, Nsango Lumba, Makai ma Diengila, Ngoma Ngonde, and Mazanza, the last of whom had just been inaugurated when the Europeans arrived.¹⁰¹

The inauguration ceremonies followed appointment typically by election of the incumbent *Lulendo* chief's brother, or maternal nephew within the royal house, and ratification by all the clans.

In his new *Lulendo* enclosure of trees, the *Lulendo* chief underwent isolation. No member of his clan could see him, only his wives and the “children” (*bana*). A priest was attached to the investiture to teach him his prohibitions (*longo*). After the royal charm (*Bueno nkisi*) had been brought by the chief of Mbanzi Nsundi, the sword of authority (*Mbele a lulendo*) would be brought before the new chief, seated on his leopard skin. Two slaves who served as executioners (*bayala mabangu*, “rulers of the sword”) would bring two of the new chief's matrilineal nephews. For the first and last time in his life he would take the knife and cut off his kinsmen's heads, bathe himself in their blood. He would then receive *Bueno*. Never again could the chief touch his sword; it was kept by his guards and used for the execution of criminals.¹⁰²

The ritual murder of a kinsman indicated the intention to set the candidate apart from his lineage as well as the creation of an order of law and administration on a scale larger than any of the local clan estates. In the particular polity under discussion (Mwembe Ntombo), sources suggest that the Lulendo's duties centered on settling feuds through the intervention of his soldiers and holding an appeal court over which he was the supreme judge. His soldiers consisted mainly of "*bana*" born to slave-women and therefore totally dependent on him for their well-being. Sources say nothing of tribute, but it is hard to imagine a centralized polity with an "army" and a "court" lacking any type of tribute. It is known that Lulendo's powers were held in check by the children (*bana*) and dependents (*bamayaala*) who not only ratified his election from the ruling clan but also saw to it that he would not "take the clans with him" by dying of disease in old age; they choked him to death when he became too old to rule effectively.

In the sources on this Lulendo chiefship in the southern-most of the Mwembe Nsundi enclaves there is mention of a Kiasi chief akin to the autochthonous Kinsako priest of Kongo and Nsundi, or the Mpu priest, or the Bunzi priest in Ngoyo, a mediator of the local spiritual forces needed to legitimate the invading, conquering, military office. In Mwembe, the Kiasi bore the title of Ma Muene (lord); he also levied market tribute. Like the Lulendo chief, he was inaugurated by a priest from Mbanza Nsundi.

When the seclusion was over the masses entered the Kiasi's enclosure to find him sitting on a leopard skin laid over elephant tusks. The chief of Mbanza Nsundi would give him his regulations of office, and trace in *mpemba* chalk on his body: a transversal line on the forehead, on the nose, and a line on each leg. Then he would be given the *miasi* emblems of office, a collar of leopard teeth, and bracelets of iron for each leg and arm, as well as earth from the burial grounds of the previous Lulendo and Kiasi chiefs.¹⁰³

These Nsundi political systems were thus a series of loosely affiliated small conquest states or chiefdoms radiating out from a number of centers such as Mwembe Nsundi in the copper- and iron-mining area around Mboko Nsongo, situated on the highland Mpumbu to Loango trade route. The emigrating enclave that established itself as a small state sought legitimacy via a link back to its own traditional source (Mbanza Nsundi) or via the benediction by the autochthonous spirits of the earth (Bunzi, Bikinda, Mpu, Kiasi, for

example). In all instances there seems however to be a concern for the establishment of a royalist model of governance. In this sense the Nsundi invaders differ from many other north-bank political traditions. *Lemba* constitutes the other major transformation of the basic structure of public authority legitimated by the autochthonous priesthood of the earth.

LIFE BETWEEN THE KINGDOMS: MARKET LAWS AND *LEMBA'S* MARRIAGE POLITICS

Between the kingdoms on the coast and the Teke federation, and where no Nsundi chief had asserted his local hegemony, there existed an acephalous political system. We may contrast it to the centralized model of the polity found in foregoing discussion by noting that there was no office created by either a ritual murder of a kinsman or through appointment by another central figure. There was generally no tribute payment to another chief. No grand judge could be found in the form of the N'tinu who acted as appeal court. There were no standing armies nor loyal dependents like the Lulendo chief's soldiers in Mwembe Ntombo to impose order. A colonial report in 1938 described the political system in the same negative terms as those used in ethnology of the time:

As always, the "northern" region has shown itself more resistant. Not one *chef médaillé* has succeeded in imposing himself in these chiefdoms whose populations traditionally, for that matter, never submitted to the authority of one man. Well before our occupation the indigenous people lived in a sort of anarchy, not recognizing any authority other than the hardly effective family chief holding authority more often religious than political.¹⁰⁴

A positive description of this political system would need to include the following characteristics: (1) several types of local chiefs, including the lineage or clan chiefs (*mfumu dikanda*, *mfumu nsi*) and the various types of judges (*nzonzi*); (2) several ceremonially-rich *min'kisi* which recognized authority, including *Mpu*, *N'kondi*, and *Lemba*; (3) the so-called "market laws" (*min'siku mia zandu*), a set of prohibitions and practices that spelled out the rules of peaceable trading, and regulated the measures of adjudication and punishment for their violation. These dealt with most public affairs such as trade,

hunting, and marriage, and were maintained by councils of judges (*zinzonzi*).

The local chiefs were attached either to descent communities or residential communities and markets. These two types of polities or organizational principles interacted to provide a dynamic balance of power and a coverage of administrative function. The lowest level of lineage chief was the head of the *mwelo* "door" of the house. His role was not really titled unless as judge. Such an "elder" assured the well-being of his dependents: to provide them with land, trees, and other rights, and to see that they were properly married and cared for. The role of the "clan chief" (*mfumu dikanda*) was a more inclusive version of this; his duties as well covered the subsistence of kin dependents and their proper marriage relationships. His was the role of the men's hut chiefship where clansmen and their dependents gathered daily for eating and palavering. The clan chief had also to assure that the ceremonial duties of the local clan section were taken care of by the patrilineal children and "grandchildren," as priests of their "fathers."

The "village chiefs" distinguished between the principle of landed estates and the populace on it. The assumption was that one or two clans were landowners, claimants of the ancestral cemetery grove, thus the presumed autochthonous inhabitants of the immediate area. Several titles, reflecting regional characteristics and historical differences, belong here. All gave the titleholder the recognized acknowledgement of being a freeman. Perhaps the most widespread title for the role of head of such a landed estate was *mfumu nsi* (landed estate chief), a term in widespread use in the Mayombe. The term was also known in the Manianga region where the office holder wore a twisted copper bracelet that passed within the matrilineal line of succession. Such clans as Mazinga, Nsundi, Kikwimba, Bwende, Kimbanga, and others were noted *mfumu zinsi* of this region. In some areas the title *mfumu yetila* or *yetisi* was used, but it connotated chiefship of the village.

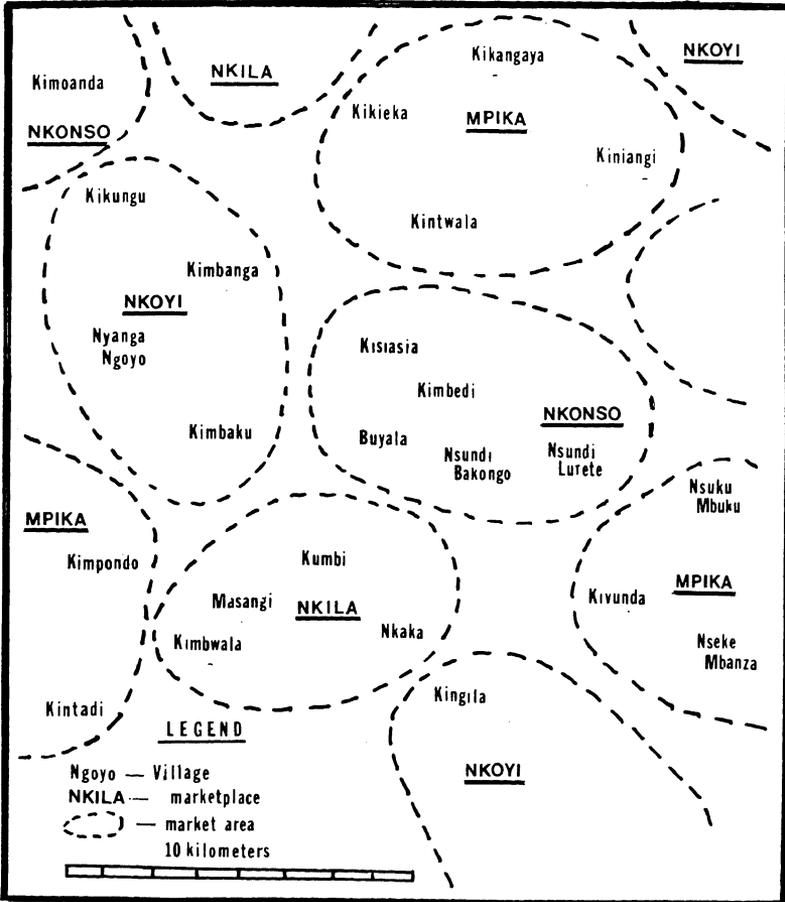
Comparable to the estate chief is the "crowned" chief *mfumu mpu*. Some informants in the North Manianga said it was identical to the domainal chiefship, reflecting freeman status in a land-holding local clan. The *Mpu* chief, like the others of this category, was inaugurated into office and supported by the collective "children" born to the clan's men. Through the isolation of the *Mpu* candidate from his matrilineal kinsmen, the patrilineal children were able to generalize the

loyalties of their fathers, to broaden allegiances so that fractional differences within the matrilineal clan of their fathers would not destroy them as a landed, corporate group. *Mpu*-ship was often allocated to a person who was "sick." Structurally, the *Mpu* was situated in the free clan so that his consecration to ceremonial office was complementary with the structural positions of power elsewhere in the clan. The *Mpu* could be used as an appointed title in a centralized kingdom such as Kimbanza at the northern fringes of Nsundi, but in a neighboring acephalous setting, it would be generated from "below" to thwart political fragmentation.

Thus far the political structure of the *Lemba* region, as described, is not distinctive from low-level organization elsewhere in the general Kongo region. However, examination of the more inclusive levels of political structure reveals a striking contrast to the kings and prominent chiefs found elsewhere. The "laws of the market" (*minsiku mia nzandu*) and supporting roles, functions, and ceremonies, reflect a unique political system. The market system in north-bank society operated around the four-day week (see figure 4). Each market, located on an open plain between several villages, was "ruled" by a market committee of chiefs or judges from these surrounding communities. While the notion of a sovereign was absent in this system of acephalous governance of markets, the functions of large-scale government were very evident. The market was regarded as a "court," with the right to impose capital punishment. The market committee and its constituent communities constituted a "market area," which could combine with neighboring market committees to solve large-scale disputes. Often village or clan chiefs would have tenure in two markets for more effective regulation of disputes. The "laws of the market" thus regulated both trade in the markets as well as the fabric of society that kept the markets open and viable. Munzele has listed the major market laws from the Kivunda area:

- 1) Theft is prohibited on all paths.
- 2) Fighting is prohibited.
- 3) Beginning a feud in any village or market district is prohibited on pain of paying for it in persons.
- 4) A person may not enter the market area or sit there before the market heads have given the signal.
- 5) *Kimbanzia* grass, because it is sacred, may not be picked or removed in any way from the market; it stands for the health and prosperity of the clan, the benediction from God, the ancestors, and the clan.

Figure 4
 Market areas and villages of the Kivunda region, Luozi (the Manianga); corresponds to Nsundi Masiki region in figure 3



6) Only the market committee has the right to invoke the death penalty on a person.

7) A severe punishment falls upon any individual or clan who kills or harms a palm wine tapper, for palm wine is the ingredient of social intercourse.

8) A judge (*nzonzi*) or a messenger carrying the judge's staff may not be harmed or seized, on pain of being punished in the market place.¹⁰⁵

The market chiefs would meet in the market center prior to trading to “open the market” while contingents of men, women, and children from surrounding villages waited at their respective entrances (see plates 2, 3). This committee determined what would be sold or exchanged, whether criminals—murderers, recidivist thieves, adulterers, or violators of the market laws—in any of the “entrance” groups (*mafula*) deserved being “planted in the market,” a euphemism for the method of capital punishment whereby the victim would be mercifully given great quantities of wine, seated in a hole, and buried before a sharpened bamboo stake was driven into his head by his possessor or close superior. The market council might also decide that hostilities between groups were so great as to require canceling the market on that day. If and when trading was opened, it was done in the center of the market by delegate groups from the “entrances.” Women and children were rarely permitted access to the center, for fear that they would be seized as pawns or hostages in on-going feuds, or as debt payment. Following a peaceful market, men would gather under a shelter to drink and talk.

Where feuds broke out between participants in a market group—over land, women, hunting accidents—the absence of central judicial institutions became evident immediately. Even the fabric of warfare reflected the lateral alliances rooted in the market structure and in marriage ties and descent, as well as in the organization of the landed clan villages with their clients and slaves. All of these social domains structured feuding and peacemaking, as the following example of the “War of Kidiba,” fought in ca. 1880, in the Nsundi Lutete area, illustrates. (For villages mentioned refer to figure 4.)

The “War of KIDIBA” between the people of Kisiasia and the people of Kimbaku took place on account of MFWEMO-MAYAMBI of the Mazinga-Kingila clan and his wife MANGEYE-KIDIBA of Kikwimba of Kimbaka. (MFWEMO-MAYAMBI was a slave at Kisiasia.) KIDIBA ran away from her husband; she didn’t care to live with him any longer, even though they had two children, a boy, BANUNDA-DIATA, and a girl, KILENGO. When she ran from her husband she went to live with another man named MUNSWANGALA who lived at Masangi, of the Mazinga clan of chief KIODI. This angered MFWEMO-MAYAMBI greatly, so he gathered the people of Kisiasia so that they could go and seize a hostage (*bwila nkole*) at Kimbaku: a woman in replacement. Meanwhile KIDIBA had left Masangi to go to her lineage home at Kimbaku. When the people of Kisiasia saw that it was

MFWEMO's wife, they seized her and brought her to Kisiasia to her husband. But MFWEMO's anger was not satisfied: "We must go to war (*nwana muzingu*) with her uncles (*bankazi*) at Kimbaku." Our elders (here in Kisiasia) told him though "there is no need to go to war over your wife. Let us be satisfied that she is in our hands again." But MFWEMO would hear nothing of it. "We must go to war over the matter," he insisted. The elders then told him, "we cannot follow you in this matter; if you must fight, it is your affair."

Then the warriors (*makesa*, young men) of Kisiasia agreed to go to war as MFWEMO wished. They went near Kimbaku to wait for the lineage headman (*mfumu dikanda*) of the woman KIDIBA to warn him with a gun salvo (*sika bizongo*). The people of Kimbaku replied, "Never mind, we have warriors also and they know how to fight too." And so those from Kimbaku fought against those from Kisiasia.

Then other villages entered the conflict: Kintwala and Kimwanda were brought into the fight on the side of Kisiasia, and Masangi and Kumbi on the side of Kimbaku. MAZALA and MUNANU of Kintwala, of the Nsundi clan of BINKITA, were killed and hurt with a ball in the eye respectively. MANAKA of Kimwanda was killed too. When the people of Kintwala and Kimwanda saw that they had each lost a man, they went to Kimbaku and killed NZUZI, a sister of chief ZIONA of the Kindamba clan, who was in the same house with BAYEKULA of the Kisiasia. She [Bayekula] was unharmed.

Now, seeing all the killing, the elders and judges (*bambuta vonzonzi*) sought to call it to a halt, and sit to talk out the matter (*zonza nsamu*). They agreed that KIDIBA was in the wrong for having left her husband. She was charged with payment of "one corpse" (*futa mvumbi*), that is seven people. Further, they judged that MUNSWANGALA of Masangi was also at fault for having taken a married woman from her husband. He too must "pay a corpse," or seven people (to the clan victimized), plus seven cloths (*mbongo*). MFWEMO was judged for having started the war, and charged with paying "one corpse and a half" in people (of his lineage), BILONGO, MAKWENIA, MIHAMBANTU, KIHENI, and he himself MFWEMO-MAYAMBI paid for the corpses killed in the war. They further paid their debt as follows: out of MFWEMO's lineage, KUKINGA went to MALEWO of Kisiasia where he became a slave of the Kimbanga clan; TEMBOSO, a woman, was sold to DIAKOKA at Kintwala; MAKUNDU, a male

was sold to MUNDELE at Kimbedi. Further the members of the Mazinga line (MFWEMO's) sold the land they had bought (*kudisa ntoto*) to the Kimbanga clan of Kisiasia, to allow MFWEMO to pay his debt to Kimwanda for the man they had lost on his account.¹⁰⁶

Seizing a hostage was a favorite manner of taking justice into one's own hands. Yet it was not one's direct antagonist from whom a hostage was taken, rather from another stronger community which, when informed of the strategic purpose of the kidnapping, could impose settlement terms on the original antagonist, its status subordinate. As in contemporary international terrorism, this method could also result in the embroilment of a dozen villages in many market units, and in numerous deaths. The laws of the market had extremely harsh recompense terms for the guilty, once the passion of the young warriors had subsided and the cool rhetoric of the judges had taken over. Not merely the *lex talionis* of an eye for an eye was invoked, but seven persons for every human casualty in the war. Thus Mfwemo's entire clan and its land were dispersed to pay for the three deaths inflicted in the war.

Another war in the same region in 1912 was provoked by an impatient hunter who had lost his dog to an errant ball from a fellow hunter's gun. In the settlement the aggrieved hunter shot at (but missed) the judge. The council of judges fined him eight pigs and other articles, to be paid to the market-area groups participating in the judgement, as directed by the laws of the market.

The judicial structure of both cases reflects the absence of a hierarchic appeal court. The conflict is absorbed through lateral alliances within which the judges from the very groups involved, and their neighboring judges, effectively impose upon the antagonist and their patrons radical and binding punishments. Given the strategic role of judges, it is not surprising to see in these regions, in connection with the market-law system, elaborate rhetorical usages, songs, proverbs, call-and-response sanctions, and rituals of conflict arbitration. The category of charm called *N'kondi* existed at the level of the clan, village, and market, as a ritual contract between persons or groups who vowed not to make war, or to seize hostages from each other's populace. Such *N'kondi* were canine or anthropomorphic wooden figures into which blades, screws, and iron nails or hardwood pegs were driven as the oath was sworn never to engage in mutual hostilities, or following hostilities, to arouse *N'kondi's* anger (*mfunyia*

= ferocity = wedge) against the antagonist, thus sanctioning them to hold to their promises. Sacrifices of animals, usually goats, were made as the *N'kondi* priest drove "blood wedges" into *N'kondi*, and evoked promises from the two partners:

Between your village and my village we have an accord, you may not seize hostages from us, and we will not seize hostages from you. If one of our people does something to the other group, we will meet to talk and will not fight.¹⁰⁷

The other major charm of public order, beside *N'kondi*, was of course *Lemba*. It is described by Munzele as an *n'kisi* integrating people, villages, and markets (*Lemba i n'kisi wabundisa bantu, mavata ye mazandu*). It permitted persons from one market area to travel and trade in another market area. One who carried *Lemba's* insignia—*nkobe*, bracelet, staff—conveyed the information that he had received *Lemba's* instructions, and was therefore trustworthy. He must be received in the market, for he was a person of peace, a carrier of light (*n'nati a mpemba*). *Lemba* priests and priestesses were the prominent citizens. In the above narration of the War of Kidiba, the narrator's father, Nsundi-Mukila of Kintwala, freeman from Nsundi and a well-known judge, and his wife Kibuni, freeman of Kimbanga (Kisiasia), were initiated into *Lemba*. Likewise, Mundele-Mbenza, who shared in Mfwemo's "spoils," was a *Lemba* priest as was one of his wives. Mundele-Mbenza was a slave who because of his recognized intelligence and integrity had been elected by his masters to represent their interests; he was a prominent judge and *Lemba* priest.

The promotion of a slave figure to judgeship and *Lemba* priesthood reflects the crucial role of marriage politics as another, major, factor in the maintenance of alliances between clans, villages, and market areas in the "region between kingdoms." The landed estate system that extended from the Loango coast into Mayombe and eastward into Teke country found local villages comprising a major matrilineal clan with its *mfumu nsi* or *Mpu*. Client and slave lineages (clan fragments) usually comprised a type of hierarchy of exogamous sub-communities, closely intermarried. The dominant clan of the domain extended land and women to its client males, but needing their support in every way and receiving from them women and labor and political support. Most of the client lineages derived from women or girls who had been seized in feuds or traded for debts and then had married a male of the dominant clan. They usually came from neigh-

boring free clans. In the Manianga region dominant lines married closely into their clientage, particularly during the first few generations of their habitation. Men of the leading clan, during the nineteenth century, could have from five to ten wives, mostly of slave origin. In order to assure plentiful progeny in the dominant line, its women were married to client men, thus keeping them at home with their children.

As has been seen in the review of coastal polities such as Loango and Mayombe, the women of dominant (noble or royal) clans had a sharply restricted progeny, thereby reducing greatly the number of heirs. In the acephalous political context, priorities were reversed. Preference was given in dominant *nsi* clans to marriage of their women with numerous client and neighboring free clans. Often elderly women of these lines would have had three or four consecutive husbands—serial polyandry—to maximize their effectiveness as alliance creators whose progeny belonged to the dominant group. A given dominant clan would thus maintain from five to ten key reciprocal alliance ties with neighboring clans to offset the tendency to become an isolated endogenously-marrying polity. Alliances between free clan sections and between a dominant landed clan and its more powerful, populous, client lineages were the alliances most often initiated, both husband and wife, into *Lemba*.

For example, in the Kimbanga village of Kisiasia, where I conducted fieldwork in the 1960's and 1970's, about six *Lemba* households had existed in 1920 at the end of *Lemba*: two representing Kimbanga freemen married polygynously to client women, two more representing Kimbanga women married to men of sizeable client clans. Several other Kimbanga women were married in *Lemba* to freemen of neighboring clans. These interclan alliances constituted traditions of permanent "blood reciprocity" (*mvutudulu a menga*) in which a son by marrying his father's sister's daughter or some classificatory equivalent returned to his father's clan the hereditary substance his clan had received when his father married his mother. In one instance *Lemba* slave priests perpetuated the spiritual tradition of their fathers where they had had no female progeny. *Lemba* was thus a symbol as well as a structure assuring the continuation of a descent line and corporate community through the correct exchange of women. *Lemba* represented the patrilateral flow between clans of an on-going alliance, binding clan to clan and extending the requisite network across the countryside to assure effective commerce. In the absence of any other centralizing structures, *Lemba* assumed the functional equivalence of the state.

In summary, it is possible to see underlying similarities in the *Lemba* region's political systems and the way they were expressed in sacred symbols. On the one hand there were everywhere polities linked to landed estates, many small-scale such as the domains of the Teke, of the Central highlands, and the Mayombe. A few such as the Tio king Makoko, the coastal kingdoms, and some of the Nsundi chiefdoms were larger in scale. But these territorial, landed polities were invariably legitimated by localized earth or water spirits such as Kwe Mbali of the Makoko and Bikanda or Bunzi farther westward. These were autochthonous spirits related to specific places, either waterfalls or tracts of land, as were the estates they symbolized. On the other hand there were the "moveable estates" linked to justice, trade, or conquest. The Tio lords and the *Lemba* priestly couples with their moveable shrines were consecrated to a variety of spirits, some of which derived from localized shrines such as the Tio local shrines or the western Bunzi; other symbols were legitimated in nonterritorial spirits and forces such as Bunzi's daughter Lusunzi, the trickster Mani-Mambu, the androgynous demigod Mahungu. All contributed to the estate of *Lemba*, created and sustained by exchange, alliance, and trade.

Chapter 3

Biographical Sketches of *Lemba's* Demise

Introduction

An institution as widespread in scale and as deep in historical duration as *Lemba* cannot be made homogeneous by ethnological and historical reconstruction. Change, internal tension, regional variation, and the institution's disappearance must be accounted for. This chapter introduces biographies of *Lemba* priests and aspirants to show how the drastic changes that occurred at the hand of the Congo Free State and as a result of Belgian, French, and Portuguese colonialism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries confronted individuals with alternatives leading to the fragmentation of *Lemba* and its ultimate disappearance from the cultural and political landscape of Lower Zaire.

The caravan routes that *Lemba* supported and controlled were used extensively to move the machinery and baggage of early colonialism from the coast to the Pool. From ca. 1885 the demand for porters drawn from local populations along the routes was accompanied with threat, seizure of family hostages, and meager payment. By 1887 the exigencies of the southern caravan route along the Zaire River had through death or desertion depleted the supply of porters. Many of the villages in the Ngombe area had fled north across the river.¹ More widespread labor recruitment became the practice in the Free State backed up by "in-kind" food taxes levied to support the armies and caravans. Labor recruitment for portage and for the construction of the Matadi-Leopoldville railroad became so heavy that numerous revolts erupted, and the loss in lives was high. Chinese laborers had to be brought in to supplement the African labor force. By 1896-7 portage along the northern route from Loango to Brazzaville reached the limits of its labor potential carrying a mission of ninety tons overland (3000 loads at sixty pounds [thirty kilograms] per porter). Here too there was a revolt, the "Sundi revolt," which was put down repressively. Completion of the Matadi-Leopoldville rail-

road by 1900 permitted the abandonment of portage on both banks, much to the relief of local African populations, reeling from epidemic diseases, high death losses, and famines from overtaxation on the time and resources for food production. Portage seems to have continued on a sporadic basis in the French colony until 1915 when the auto route was completed from Loango to Brazzaville. The Congo-Ocean railroad to Pointe Noire was completed in the late twenties.²

Although the cessation of colonial portage alleviated the heavy burden of labor recruitment, its total substitution by rail and auto-route transportation had the long-term effect of replacing *Lemba's* economic function of three centuries, the revenue from which had generated *Lemba's* ceremonial fund. Shorn of this traditional base, *Lemba* could only sustain its economic viability by cutting deeply into resources now claimed by the colonial taxes and *corvée* labor demands. Disenchantment with *Lemba* grew within the populace. One old Kivunda observer noted that *Lemba* priests and priestesses only met now to fatten themselves on pork. Colonial authorities perceived the competition for resources; thus French authorities banned *Lemba* in the early thirties for "exploitation and extortion of fees" destined for the colony's tax coffers.³

Other dimensions of the colonial intrusion affected *Lemba* adversely by dividing its ranks into competing interest groups. There were those who accepted the colonial chiefship and allowed themselves to be drawn into the taxation system. Those precolonial chiefs who refused, sending forward instead vassals, deputies, and even slaves to receive the medals, benefits, and supports offered by the Europeans, found their authority overturned by these one-time subordinates.⁴ Colonial collaboration was now necessary to preserve one's influence, although it destroyed one's authority through taxation abuse.

Others abandoned *Lemba* to become mission catechists. There were those who might once have been drawn into *Lemba*, but for reasons having to do with the clash of old ceremonial demands and new colonial taxes, perceived *Lemba* as having become too expensive, although still the preferred ritual solution to their ills. Christianity offered a way out of the impasse.

Finally, there were those who acknowledged the apparent bankruptcy of the old rituals, but refused to play along with either the colony or the missions. Like Kimbangu, the Kongo prophet, they forged new African rituals, bypassing the foreign priests and pastors

to create an African response to challenges of colonialism and competition of a strange world religion thrust upon them.

Accepting Colonial Authority: Ngambula, Mampuya, Sobisa

All three of these *Lemba* priests accepted colonial authority. Two (Ngambula and Luvuangu-Mampuya) became medalled “*mpalata*” chiefs under the Free State/Belgian colonial system. Another (Sobisa) was named chief by his clan, although still very young, because it was thought he could better cope with the intricacies and foibles of colonial officials. In all cases the colonial government imposed difficult choices on individual *Lemba* adherents.

Ngambula’s life story, told by Bittremieux in the twenties,⁵ reflects these pressures on a successful leader in the old system. Ngambula grew up a freeman of the Vinda clan in the Nkangu region of the Mayombe. After his childhood and adolescence in his father’s village in the late decades of the nineteenth century, he entered the N’kimba initiation school, where his N’kimba name Tu Masungi was added to his childhood name N’lele Mbutu. For his recognized leadership he was chosen to be a local N’kimba master.

After his happy youth a series of crises appeared around him and in his life. A drought so severe occurred that the Lukula River near his home dried up. This, in addition to the hardships of colonial labor, led to famine. As if drought and famine were not enough, locust plagues descended on the area. Most significant for his personal future, however, was an experience that grew out of a court case involving his clan.

Ngambula remembered attending the palaver in the court of the great Yombe chief Mabwaka of Mazamba, in Kangu region. Many *mfumu nsi* chiefs came with double-gong musicians, staff carriers and special advocates, favorite wives and their servants. Nobility were seated on mats or leopard skins shaded by umbrellas. The debate was over livestock, women, and other issues compounded into a major confrontation between two clans. Speakers for the two sides would take turns, arguing eloquently and waving their arms about. Ngambula remembered particularly the musical chime resounding from the bracelets of the *Lemba* priests. After the settlement was reached and payment made in small livestock and wine, food was distributed,

ending the adjudication on a festive note. Ngambula remembered the delicious mutton, and how he felt fortunate to be at so auspicious an occasion in the court of the great chief Mabwaka, with so many *Lemba* priests displaying their engraved copper bracelets while toasting the health of their wives.

But above all Ngambula remembered his great consternation when after the feast he was told that in secret bargaining he had been given to chief Mabwaka as a pawn in payment of his clan's debt settlement. He felt stigmatized, suddenly having been turned into property and a trade good. However he remained in Mabwaka's court and was well taken care of.

The next memorable event of Ngambula's life was Mabwaka's death. Succession deliberations by the clan counselors failed to identify a competent brother or nephew, so they turned to an outsider, and favor fell on Ngambula. According to the custom of the land, he could not become the MaKangu, chief in the Kangu dynasty; he had to be made an *mvuanzi* chief, whose own direct line is nullified. In an act of "chiefly incest" he took an *pfumu Vinda* wife from his own family, thus severing his own line of descent. He was now a member of no lineage, in order to be a chief over many. The people of Mabwaka accordingly consecrated him as priest of the earth cult *Mbenza*. Never again could he take *k'oze* (a dark fruit) in his hands, or climb a palm tree. On an *Nsona* day he was placed on a dais (*vunda*) with his chiefly staff in his hand; four palms were planted around him; and a palm canopy erected over him. He was placed on a leopard skin and anointed with white chalk (*pezó*) and red powder (*ngunzi*), and given a fly whisk, while a healer danced about him (*banguka*). He was given the new name of Mboma Simbi, designating his new status as an *Nkita* spirit devotee—perhaps even an *Nkita* spirit, notes Bittremieux. Amidst much dancing, drumming, and drinking, and made up with red and white stripes all over his body, he was brought from seclusion to his palace (*m'bongi*). He was now called the MaMboma, and his staff accompanied him everywhere.

The next important phase of Ngambula's life began with his head wife's request to become his *Lemba* partner. Initiation to *Lemba* would be expensive, but he agreed. The consecration was organized, and many *Lemba* priests and priestesses were assembled. Part of the ritual was held in the village, part in the bush, characteristic for *Lemba*. The *Lemba* shrine consisted of the *n'kobe* (to be elaborated in Chapter 7), a pair of small drums, and the copper medicine bracelets worn by the priest and priestess. Sacred *Lemba* trees were

planted in the grove behind the house: *mfuma* the silk cotton tree, *lubota*, *nkumbi*, and *kuaku*, as well as other plants. Based on the proverb *menga ma tsusu, simba: kuambula* (chicken's blood, hold it and let it go), he received his *Lemba* name, Ngambula.

Ngambula was now N'kimba master, priest of *Mbenza*, the MaMboma chief, and priest of *Lemba*, all the roles of authority to which a turn-of-the-century Yombe could aspire. In the eyes of Belgian colonial officials Ngambula met the criteria of a nobleman. In the Free State and early Belgian Congo tradition of autocratic authority, Ngambula received from the colonial administration yet one more title, *Mfumu Palata*, the "medalled chiefship," linking him to the colonial state, making him eligible for protection, and obligating him to recruit laborers, collect taxes, and maintain order. Ngambula regarded the colonial chiefship as an enhancement of his authority. But the difference with this title was that the tribute collected in its name passed on to the central colonial coffers for the maintenance of a distant state. Where the tax was "in kind" (food, for example) it was used to feed soldiers and porters. But it was neither circulated in the market nor redistributed to the local populace in the form of a lavish feast.

Across *Lemba* territory, individuals like Ngambula struggled with this issue of collaboration with the colonial government. In Manianga, to the east, two other *Lemba* priests, Luvuangu-Mampuya of the Kingoyi clan in Kimata and Sobisa of the Kimbanga clan in Kisiasia, were typical of those who cooperated. Luvuangu-Mampuya had already received the colonial chiefship when he participated, with his wife, in the last regional *Lemba* inauguration at Nseke-Mbanza in 1919. He represented the type of figure who in due course becomes a *chef de groupement*, an administrative level created beyond traditional chiefdoms, to consolidate small-scale domains and clan chiefships of north-bank segmentary society. The creation of a tribunal with jurisdiction over the *groupement* lent this level of colonial administration a certain legitimacy in the eyes of the populace, and thus some sense of coming to terms with the new government. Meanwhile, Luvuangu-Mampuya retained his *Lemba* insignia, insisting as late as 1965 that he was still *nganga Lemba* and that therefore he could not talk of his secrets. He would die with his *Lemba* adherence, his ritual objects going with him to the grave.

The Kimbanga of Kisiasia, as has been pointed out in the previous chapter, had several *Lemba* priests in their midst at the turn of the century when the Free State's agents appeared. Nzuzi Pierre, clan-

section head, suggested in 1970 that the thinking in 1915–20 on cooperating with the Belgians was that they would hardly disappear, so it was necessary to deal with them as resourcefully as possible. When taxes were first levied in 1910–15, a woman was delegated to organize this work since women had the groundnuts needed for the African soldiers. At the same time it became necessary to name a new clan-section chief, *mfumu dikanda*. Skipping over many older men who were eligible, clan counselors elected youthful Sobisa. Their reasoning was that since he knew how to read he would better understand the problems of the new era. But he was not the only one who could read. Their decision was also based on criteria exercised in initiating him into *Lemba*. The ideal *Lemba* man had courage, rhetorical ability, and sound judgement. Thus even though *Lemba's* public functions were usurped by the colonial state, *Lemba's* leadership criteria continued to be exercised. Still, the divisive forces of the new order drew *Lemba's* initiates farther and farther apart as individuals accommodated themselves to new roles.

Populist Religion and the Missions: Katula

Ngambula discarded his ancestral medicines and charms in 1917, two years after he met Scheutist Fathers at Kangu mission, because he had a dream in which the white-robed Catholic priests surrounding him persuaded him to take up the “truth, the word of God.” Despite the strength of the dream, he kept his *Lemba* name and identity, and postponed baptism until he was on his deathbed some years later.

Another *Lemba* priest who converted to Christianity, but unlike Ngambula became an active evangelist and teacher of the new faith, was Katula Davidi of Nseke-Mbanza in the eastern Manianga. Katula with his young wife had participated in the last *Lemba* inauguration of the region in 1919 along with Luvuangu-Mampuya and his wife. Whereas Luvuangu-Mampuya had stubbornly held to *Lemba* while joining the colonial administration, Katula was persuaded by the forceful preaching of Swedish missionaries to give up his *Lemba* insignia. He only kept the hollow *n'kobe* box as “souvenir” after discarding its contents. Reminiscing to me in 1965, he noted that *Lemba's* membership criteria had been particularly important in maintaining a high level of leadership in precolonial society. What attracted him to Christianity, and particularly to Protestantism, was the possibility with a few years schooling of becoming leader of a local

congregation and teacher in the local school, with literacy the key to interpretation of the Scriptures.

Although Christianity attracted many for this reason, it was in its way divisive. By the twenties, mission societies had divided up the entire Congo, and Protestant and Catholic missions competed everywhere for African souls. A friendly missionary priest or pastor was a powerful ally in dealing with the foreign colonial government. The tendency for Africans to identify with and support “their mission” and “their missionaries” led to the alignment of the foreign Catholic/Protestant schism with pre-existing African divisions and distinctions, precipitating numerous religious feuds.

Protestant populism particularly undermined the priestly class of *Lemba*. Although both Catholicism and Protestantism—indeed, *Lemba* as well—publicly maintained the ideology that their way was for all, Protestant missions were more prone than other religious persuasions in Congo to make everyone a “priest.” Early converts were often slaves ransomed and brought up by the missions. Early translation and wide dissemination of KiKongo Bibles amplified this effect. Catholics handled access to religious truth more cautiously, insisting on properly consecrated priestly roles and graded Bible-story books and catechisms. Both types of Christianity drew many converts from the ranks of those who had aspired to the powerful traditional medicines and cults, but who for a variety of social or economic reasons had failed.

The Common Man's Dilemma: Ndibu

Ndibu, who at the turn of the century lived in Kingoyi, east of Mboko Nsongo, felt called to join *Lemba*, the highest ranked *n'kisi*. However even with the patronage of his clan he could not afford it, given the gradual shift of resources from kinship and ceremonial expenditures to colonial taxes. A feeling of blockage led him to Christian baptism. Ndibu's autobiography, written for Swedish missionary Laman, describes beautifully the situation of a common man.⁶

To begin with, Ndibu's marital status was complicated. In youth with the help of his father he chose a girl as his bride. Since she was too young to take immediately, he married an older woman first, again on suggestion of his father. The older woman died soon after. At the same time his father died, leaving behind two wives. Before the burial could be held, his father's estate and the fate of the two women and their

children needed to be decided. Ndibu hoped to receive some money from his father's estate, but was informed that not only had his father left no money, but that the slave-women and children would become his. Ndibu reluctantly accepted this proposition. His clansmen comforted him that women would be better than money, which would be spent leaving him with nothing. A woman could be of help and solace.

The date for his father's burial feast was set. Mats, cloth, *pièces*, and other supplies were gathered, and the tomb prepared. Many friends came. Great quantities of gunpowder were consumed in salvos to make it an "honorable burial." Several elephant tusk horn ensembles performed to stimulate the dancing. The festival so strengthened Ndibu that he was able that night to go to bed with one of the women he inherited, and, as anticipated, she became pregnant.

Ndibu, on returning from drawing palm wine one day, found his neighbors gathered in his court. They announced to him that he had just become a father of twins, a girl and a boy. Under pressure from his neighbors he called the priest of Funza to initiate him, his wife, and their newborns to the twin cult of Funza. In the Mboko Nsongo region Funza is held to be a spirit in the *bakisi* class, the origin of all *min'kisi*. Nzambi is the invisible source of unity in the universe; Funza is Nzambi's visible and material side, patron of twins and the source of the multiplicity of powers. Parents of twins when initiated become not only priests of Funza but high priests of all the *min'kisi*, since their twin children are special spirit-children.

All this was awesome to Ndibu, but he went along with the initiation rituals. Each step of the initiation involved persons from the family and elements of the natural universe, both being sacralized with a song. The priest pronounced instructions for raising twins, such as not to treat them unequally and always to remember that they were spirit emissaries. And he stressed that Ndibu and his wife were the parents of twins, as the song for crossroads indicated:

I am the source of Nsimba;
I am the source of Nzuzi;
I have given birth to Nsimba;
I have given birth to Nzuzi—
Easily, easily,
Like the cricket, like the grasshopper.

Ndibu took his responsibility very seriously, doing all he must to abide by the codes of twin parenthood in Funza. But then disaster hit, leaving him fearful and disillusioned. He wrote:

Look what happened. When the children began to grow up and to stand, one of them took sick with a swollen stomach and suddenly died. Oh! how sad. The little girl had been such a beautiful child. But we prepared it for burial in a grass mat, and dug a grave for it at the crossroads. As it was the female child that died, we mounted a *mukuta* basket, took Lemba-Lemba plants, and Nsanga-dinkonde and a Lubota tree and planted them on the child's tomb. Then we prepared a mortuary statue, assembled the medicines, and told the remaining child not to become angry because of the death of its twin Nzuzi. In doing this we hoped that the *bakisi* would leave our land alone, since they might have thought that the prepared *mukisi* was conveying a sign to seize parents of twins somewhere else. We also distributed a token of palm wine. . . . But then in 1912 the mother of the twins herself died. In that same year I decided to be baptized.

In spelling out his motivation for baptism to Christianity, Ndibu expresses less a religious conviction for his actions than an existential desire to clarify his muddled life situation, to find meaning in his sadness and relief from fear of *bakisi* that haunt parents of twins.

When one gives birth to twins, one makes association with all the *bakisi*, and one should not fear a *mukisi*. When the *bakisi* call to go prepare them *n'kisi* medicine, you go. The instruction is to join the *bakisi* of the earth with those of the water.

Only two of the *bakisi* refrain from killing parents of twins: *Lemba* and *Lumani*. These alone. *Lumani's* priest has adequate drink and food and would never seek out parents of twins. *Lemba's* owner, even if he were angry, would never harass a parent of twins. But to get this privilege, parents of twins must pay the extravagant sum of five or six pigs. Were this not the case, people would initiate only to *Lemba*. Especially parents of twins, for *Lemba* and *Lumani* are the only *bakisi* that do not harass parents of twins.

Even after baptism, Ndibu considers *Lemba* to be the ideal ritual solution for parents of twins. He blamed his lowly economic situation for his inability to make it into *Lemba*.

There were no doubt many more individuals like Ndibu who saw themselves alienated from the sources of power and protection offered in the traditional religious system. Populistic Christianity offered by the missionaries, backed up by some political protection and the hope

of education, held forth a solution to many in Ndibu's rank. Others found this a new type of alienation and did something about it by participating in the prophet movement that broke out in the Lower Zaire in 1921.

Seeking Redemption in the Colonial Setting

Despite the drain on indigenous labor and resources of portage, railroad construction, and colonial taxes, and despite the gradual undermining of indigenous chiefship, the negative rhetoric of missionaries toward indigenous religion in Lower Zaire, for nearly a generation after the beginning of colonialism *Lemba* chapters continued to control exchange circuits, to play a role in peacekeeping, and to hold initiatory séances. In the thinking of the populace and *Lemba* priests with whom I spoke, the sudden appearance of African prophets, more than anything else, destroyed *Lemba*.

Luvuangu-Mampuya and Katula both walked to Nkamba and Kiese near the Zaire River to see for themselves what Kimbangu and the other prophets were doing. *Min'kisi* were being discarded *en masse*. What impressed people most was that whereas the old magicians and healers had only been able to heal, the new prophets could "raise the dead." Although few *Lemba* priests joined the prophets, many functions of the old, ceremonial organizations and of chiefship were adopted by the prophetic communities.

Who were the prophets of 1921, and why did they appear just then? This subject has prompted voluminous research; it must suffice here to review a few of the explanations I have developed elsewhere.⁷ Of the new roles of leadership that developed in Belgian colonialism, the catechists who worked with European missionaries probably came the closest to acceptance in the knowledge and power of the new order. Their authority centered on access to the Bible, the sacred source of European authority (an *n'kisi*, in effect), knowledge of which, with the attendant skill of literacy, opened up new vistas. Despite their access to the source of European religion, it had become apparent to some catechists by the first decades of the century that their authority merely served European colonial superiority. Especially Protestant catechists, to whom full spiritual power had been promised, were liable to growing disenchantment. Complaints began to be heard about not being able to study beyond the second or third grade, to study medicine in Europe, or to earn the same salary for

services rendered as the Europeans. The growing gap between expectations and realizations produced myths of secret or hidden knowledge kept from the Africans by the missionaries.

Kimbangu and his apostles, drawn from the ranks of disenchanted catechists or catechist-aspirants, were perceived to have been granted the true power of the Holy Spirit and the Bible, bypassing the mediation of European missionaries. Even though Kimbangu and his main followers were arrested after a few months of public ministry and exiled for life, their revolution destroyed what remained of the authority of the old political-religious institutions like *Lemba*. By taking upon them some of the trappings of authority such as the staff (*nkawa, mvwala*), and the redness, whiteness, ecstatic possession, the power of purification, and the power to heal and raise the dead, the prophets had laid claim to the symbols of the paralyzed traditional offices of authority. A new era had begun.