

## Precolonial Taboos and Punishments, Rubanda County

This short piece is transcribed from a two pages titled ‘Abominable things to do in the past’ that were included in a series of Kigezi district native court case extracts and statistics compiled 1958-60<sup>1</sup>. They were translated from Rukiga and keep its language structure. This is followed by three photo-images of the original phrases in Rukiga<sup>2</sup>, though these have 25 entries while the translation has 24. The original English document is in two columns headed with ‘Abomination’ and ‘Because’ and has been re-arranged.

They predate European conquest and reflect pre-colonial beliefs concerning social order and taboos combined with the common world-wide prejudice that leprosy was a loathed divine punishment.

### ‘Abominable Things to do in the Past’

Abomination: A person cannot eat wild animal skin

Because: If he does it had to become a leper

Abomination: To kill a leopard without drinking a native medicine

Because: A person after killing a leopard had to drink a medicine, if not so had to become a leper

Abomination: Any child was not allowed to enjoy fire before his grandmother or grandfather had not spent four days in the tomb

Because: Any child who had to enjoy it had to change the body and become a leper

Abomination: Any unmarried boy or girl had not allowed to eat a liver meat

Because: Any unmarried person who ate it had to produce only boys or girls

Abomination: Any girl who was pregnated, having no husband to support her, by making a fire and enjoy it, after producing a child had to suffer, because nobody had to make her a fire and enjoy it

Because: Anybody from her father’s home could not make her a fire and sit near it or enjoy it. If anybody does it had to become a leper

Abomination: No, a woman who could beat her husband with a skin garment in which she carries a baby

Because: A woman who could beat her husband with a skin garment in which she carries a baby had to die

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<sup>1</sup> School of African and Oriental Studies, Special Collections PP MS 38/2/1/5

<sup>2</sup> The photos were taken under time pressure, apologies for lack of quality

Abomination: No a woman who could sit upon the drum, while not yet changed in producing girls or boys

Because: If she does, she had not to change, producing only boys or girls

Abomination: Any girl pregnated while no husband was to be married freely

Because: A witch doctor had to be called, if she is charged bride price, and all cows from the girl had to get home while going backwards

Abomination: No a child used to eat while sitting between his father's legs

Because: Any child used to eat while sitting between his father's legs had to be attacked with smallpox

Abomination: Any girl being pregnated, having no husband, had to eat alone

Because: Without drinking a medicine, they had to become lepers

Abomination: Nobody could threaten a girl with an axe

Because: Had to become a leper to anybody who does it

Abomination: It is hateful for anybody to eat a leopard or baboon

Because: If anybody eats them can be a leper

Abomination: A couple cannot beat one each another, with a mortar pistle

Because: A couple, who can beat one with a mortar pistle became a leper

Abomination: Nobody had to produce or bear a child into the house in which had been put a dead body

Because: Anybody who does it had to be a leper

Abomination: A boy hood could not make a mortar and finish by himself

Because: If he finished it by himself had not to bear a child in future

Abomination: Any child was not being permitted to eat a heart meat

Because: That no child could grow up if he eats it!

Abomination: After a girl is married they had to put water upon the seat or stool and her husband wait the water and drop it in his hand

Because: It means, if anybody wants to intercourse her may not stop her from birth

Abomination: Any day the boy gets married his father had to live in boy's mother until four days passed

Because: Without doing so a boy and his wife will never get a child

Abomination: Nobody who could eat with a pregnant girl who has no husband

Because: Anybody eating with a pregnant girl having no husband had to become a leper

Abomination: A woman cannot milk the cow in her husband's clan

Because: If she milks them they all had to die

Abomination: No person who could marry and put his wife in the house in which a dead body had been kept

Because: If anybody does it had to become a leper

Abomination: Nobody who could eat while either standing or sitting near his father's tomb

Because: Had to become a leper if anybody does it

Abomination: Nobody can even now kill, skin or wear a leopard's skin without drinking a native medicine

Because: If he does one of them without doing so becomes a leper

Abomination: Most of the people do not eat a rough coloured cow's meat

Because: Can become a leper if he does eat it

Abomination: Any person cannot eat either a dog or an eagle

Because: Can become a leper if he does eat them

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42.

Eg. abansi namazura g'emiziro eyabaire ezubwa Kas namaku  
ru gayo. Eziya nyemiziro

- |                              |                                 |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 Omuntu okutany entand yany | Omuntu gagwo.                   |
| maishwa                      | Omuntu owabaire agrya abemba    |
| 2 Omuntu okwita engwe atany  | 2 Omuntu kuyabaire eita         |
| ware omubazi                 | engwa atanyweire mubazi abemba. |
| 3 Omwawa okutota omwiro      | 3 Owabaire agwote atemba        |
| gwebyesi byashenkuru nari    | shyinkuru.                      |
| 4 Omusigazi nari empangalet  | 4 Owabaire agrya azara          |
| tibanja empindura            | abwo bonke nari abashiki bonke. |
| 5 Omwoshiki yatwarira enda   | 5 Owabaire bota abany           |
| ahamabega gashu, hazu        | horo ogwe bora bakaba           |
| akimara kuzava bamuhem       | babemba.                        |
| bora omwiro kwote.           |                                 |
| 6 Omukazi tatera ibya engwo  | 6 Yagimutera ibya nafa          |
| 7 Omukazi tashubama aba      | 7 Yagishubamaho nanyu           |
| ngoma, atakabindwira         | nazava abwo bonke nari          |
| omukuzara                    | abashiki bonke.                 |
| 8 Omwoshiki kuyabaire atw    | 8 Kubabaire bamufugisa          |
| ra bakamijugise              | zitatwira omufumu hazu          |
|                              | zitatwira ekibumu, kandi        |
|                              | kubabaire batanyweire em        |
|                              | zi babemba.                     |
| 9 Omwawa akaba atarira       | 9 Owabaire abiriramu            |
| ebiyokurira ashubama omuma   | abugama                         |
| guru gashu                   |                                 |

10. Omwishiki kujabaire atigaga akishwera yawera nawe. 10. Kuba batanywe intyamba babwera nawe babwera
11. Omwishiki akaba atagewe empango. 11. Kujabaire agigewe atashwera.
12. Omuntu nazira ukurye ingwe nari ukobel. 12. Owabaire abirya abwera
13. Omukazi talera ibya Omuhini nari, ibya kugu mureze. 13. Owabaire agutera ondijo abwera.
14. Omwana ukutazirwa umujya yomushaka. 14. Owabaire azairamu umujya yari gwarumutagaraho abwera.
15. Omusigazi ukutabijya enshe kuro, akagifumura. 15. Owabaire agifumura atazare.
16. Omwana muto ukutanyo ensigo. 16. Owabaire agiye atare.
17. Omwishiki kujabaire ashwe rwa, baramube bawe amaze akakitebe, nro ibya ategereho engaro. 17. Amakuru nku abashambana nawe, baramutira buzero.
18. Mutabari wamuntu kujabaire atasyo omukazi woku banze ishe amara umwajyira ibiro 4 wararamu. 18. Ngu yaba ababamaze namutira buzero.

17. Omwishiki kuyabaire aha  
ra alanye nabato

17. kuyabaire aya nabo <sup>bajemba</sup>  
~~babereka~~

20. Omukazi takama eute  
omurugande rwaba.

20. Yajikama eute zona nizite.

25. Ca  
if h

21. Omuntu okutashwera  
omujya yomushaka

21. Yajishwera mu nabemba

22. Omuntu akaba akura  
ahakitura kyashye

22. Owabaire ariaho abemba

24. Omuntu tany embw  
nabikona

23. Orukubiyi nabemba.

24

23. Okubaga engwe nari  
okugita nanga okujwara  
oruhu rwaye.

24. Bakaba bamuhaye, kubabaire  
batamuhorize rero yagira  
umurya.

25. Okutany eute yoba

25. Owabaire ariye abemba

