

The Southern Kikuyu

before 1903

Volume II

L.S.B. Leakey



The Southern Kikuyu before 1903

This online edition of my father's book "The Southern Kikuyu before 1903" is being released following the increasing number of requests for the second edition which I published in 2007.

My intention is to put returns from this version towards a further hard copy paper-back edition in future. Many people have indicated their wish for a "proper" book for their library and this is my plan going forward.

The three volumes remain an incredible and authentic record. That so many have demonstrated their real thirst for the information would have pleased my father and his age mates enormously and it makes the volumes even more worthwhile.

This is the first online unabridged edition.

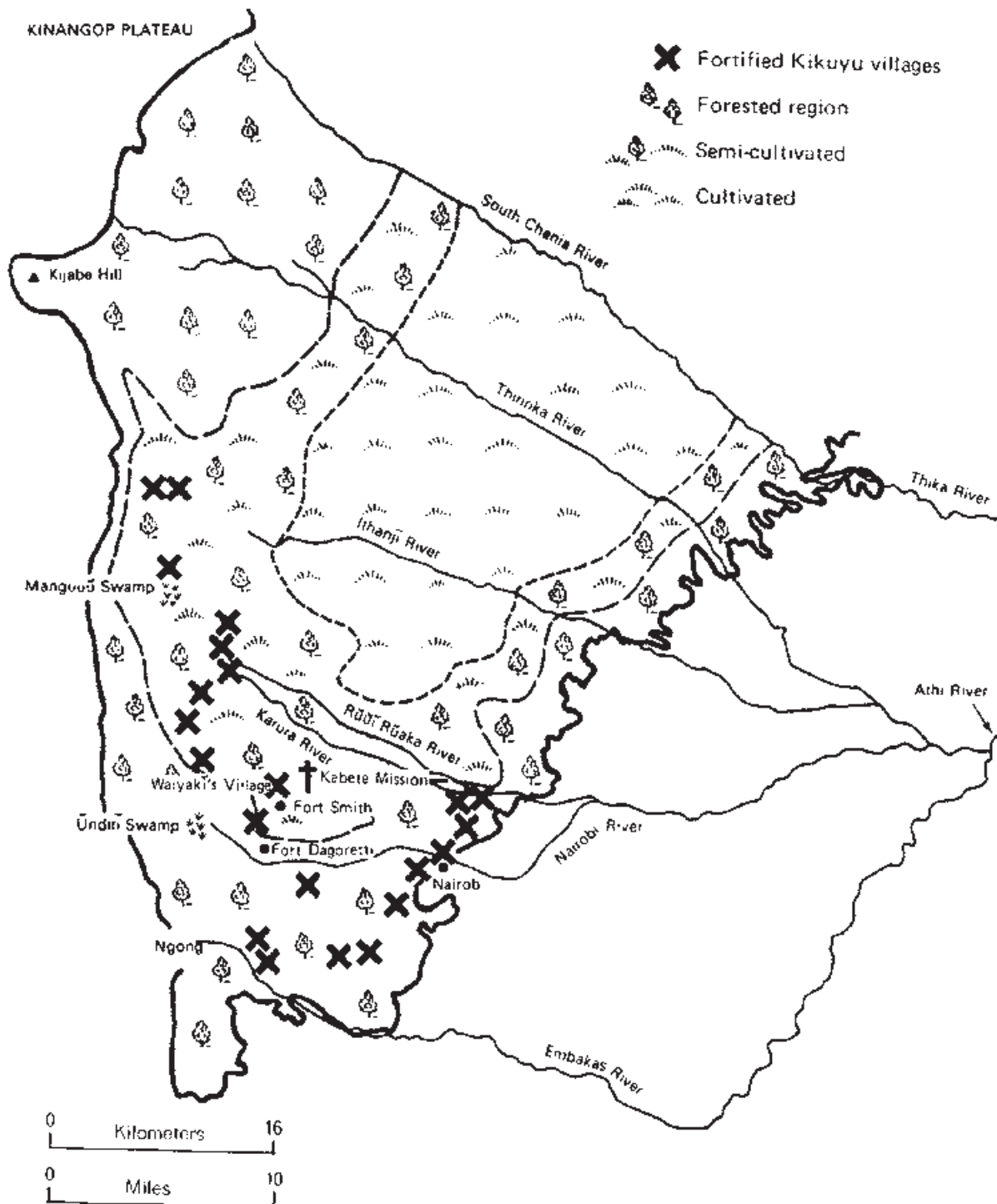
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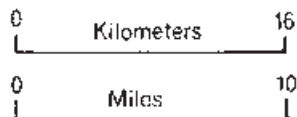
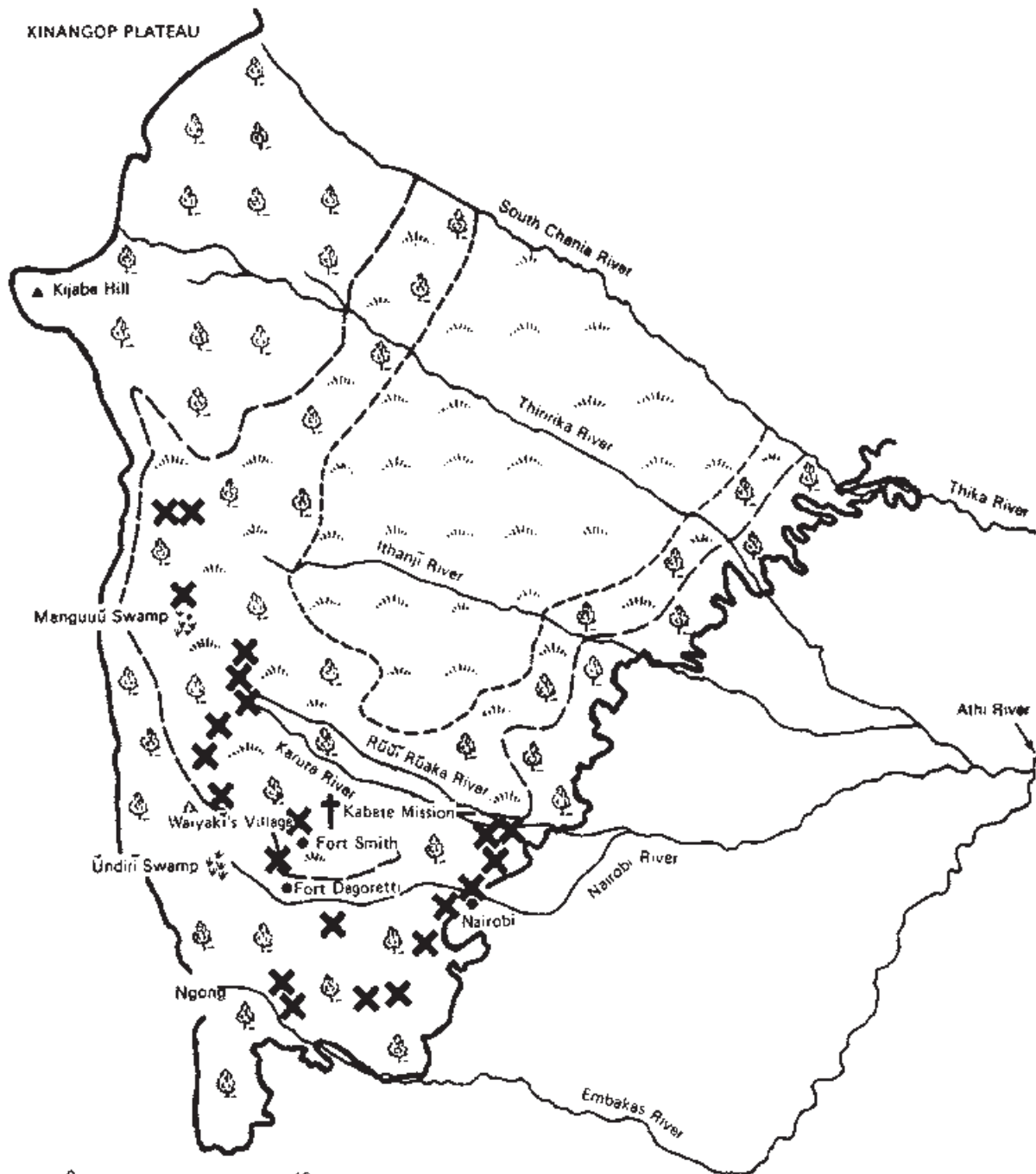
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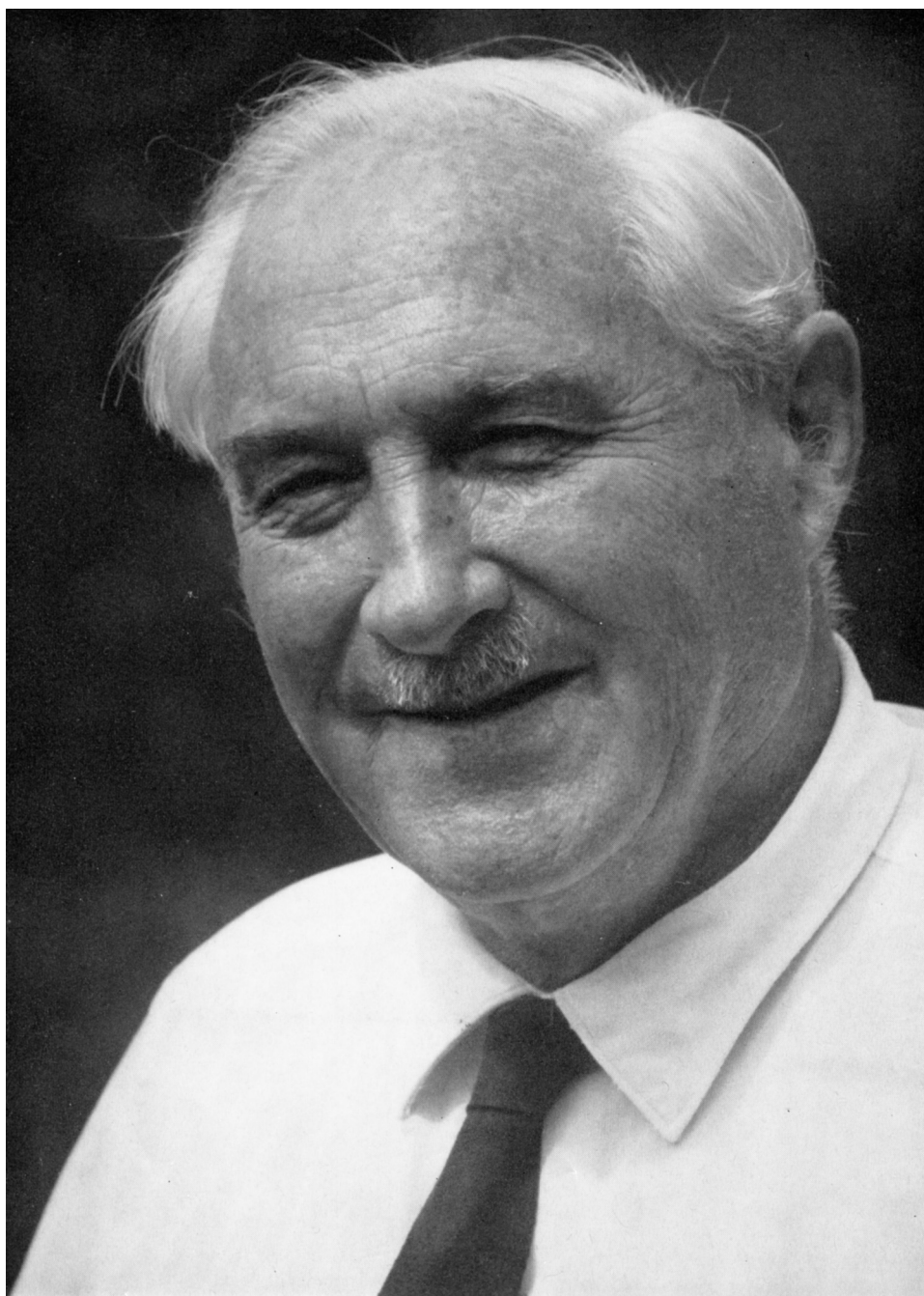
*The Southern Kikuyu
before 1903*

Volume II



XINANGOP PLATEAU





Frontispiece : L. S. B. Leakey

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Preamble

One of the often unnoticed tragedies of an era of technological advance and improving communications is the passing from living memory of customs, language and beliefs as small insular pockets of culture are overtaken by the sweep of modernization.

This impressive book is a complete record of the ways of the Kikuyu people, before and during the period of European influence which accompanied road and railway building and political and economic changes in the late 19th century. It is the major anthropological achievement of the late L.S.B. Leakey, my father, and the culmination of his lifelong study of the people among whom he was born and raised. Written in the graceful, readable style characteristic of scholarship in the thirties, it draws on the memories of the Elders whose confidant Dr. Leakey became. A once rich source of tradition and culture, passed on intact from generation to generation, was in danger of drying up without trace. This study revised and republished now, some ninety years after it was first undertaken, will secure this fascinating collection of information for posterity now that all the last inheritors of the old Kikuyu way of life are dead.

Thanks to Dr. Leakey, and to the collaborators who worked on the manuscript after his death, the Kikuyu customs and traditions have been set down - from descriptions of the daily activities of the people, digging, planting, harvesting, care of animals, trading, marriage, tribal raiding, dancing and lawgiving, to the customs connected with sex, clothing and food, and the details of ceremonies linked with *rites de passage*, religious beliefs, magic and medicine. It is a picture of successful self-regulating community, in which a strict set of rules and punishments established order and enabled the tribe to survive within its environment.

The autonomy of tribal life all over the world is now being eroded, for better or worse. But this well-rounded study, intricate in its mass of detail, yet straightforward in approach, seeks to make no assertions or comparisons with other cultures. It will thus be an important unbiased primary source for social anthropologists, ethnologists and social scientists, as well as being of great value to all those interested in Africa and its history.

By popular demand, I am publishing the Third unabridged Edition in high quality paperback format.

Richard Leakey

September, 2019

Printed and published in the Republic of Kenya.

Foreword

This study of the Kikuyu people as they were in the past is being published forty years after the manuscript was completed and four years after Louis' death. That it has finally seen the light of day is due to the dedication and unremitting hard work of my sister-in-law Gladys Beecher and of Jean Ensminger, now a postgraduate student of anthropology at Northwestern University, to whom both my sons and I are deeply grateful.

In spite of his absorbing interest in the prehistory of East Africa Louis had long been interested in recording the customs of the Kikuyu people since he had been brought up among them and knew their language as he did English. He also felt the urgency of recording their traditional customs for the benefit of their descendants before contact with Europeans had altered them beyond recognition.

This project was made possible during 1937 by an unexpected two-year grant from the Rhodes Trust, in Oxford. Louis had some hesitation in accepting, since he was deeply involved with prehistoric research, but the opportunity seemed too good to miss and was unlikely ever to be repeated. Accordingly, we moved to Kenya and after a preliminary stay with Chief Koinange at Kiambaa, not far from Nairobi, where Louis negotiated with councils of elders, we settled into camp at Nakuru, 100 miles north of Nairobi. Louis was accompanied by two Kikuyu elders who had been designated to give him information; while he worked with them I excavated a Neolithic site.

The methods Louis used to record the mass of information he obtained and to check and verify it are described in his Preface. It was a gargantuan task, if it was to be carried out with the thoroughness and attention to detail that Louis considered essential. The work finally ran into three volumes and amounted to 650,000 words. Louis steadfastly refused to abbreviate the manuscript and insisted that it should be published *in toto* or not at all. This led to it being rejected by a number of publishers who would have been willing to publish a shorter version.

The manuscript was stored away for years when some parts were lost and some destroyed by insects. During this time Louis made spasmodic attempts to find a publisher but it was not until 1968 that

negotiations with an East African press promised success. These negotiations also broke down in the end, and eventually Academic Press undertook publication. Louis then began revising the manuscript with the assistance of Jean Ensminger, who was considering taking up anthropology as a career when she returned to U.S.A.

When he died in 1972, Louis had revised some chapters but by far the greater part had to be corrected and reorganised before the manuscript could be published. I then approached my sister-in-law Gladys Beecher and we agreed that the work could not be submitted to the publishers until the Kikuyu words and phrases had been corrected for spelling and checked by someone with her expert knowledge of the language. Gladys most kindly undertook to tackle this aspect of the work, but at the time, neither she nor I had any conception of the monumental task ahead of her. As it turned out, not only was her familiarity with the Kikuyu language of inestimable value, but her knowledge of botany enabled her to check and correct the names of plants and trees used by the Kikuyu for ceremonial and other purposes.

Jean Ensminger was still in East Africa at this time and continued to work on some chapters of the book, but we realised that to reorganise, correct and retype the whole manuscript would require at least six months. Jean most generously agreed to devote her time to the work and delay her postgraduate study for one year, provided she could receive a minimal subsistence allowance. This was made possible by the kindness of the L.S.B. Leakey Foundation, of Pasadena, California, who voted a grant to assist both Gladys and Jean. In fact, Jean did not complete the correcting and typing for just over one year.

It gives me immense pleasure to see this work in print; I believe it to be one of the best studies Louis ever carried out and I know that its eventual publication was one of his most cherished ambitions. I thank most warmly Gladys Beecher, Jean Ensminger and all those who helped them to bring it to fruition.

M. D. Leakey

June, 1977

Editors' Preface

In this book Dr Leakey tried, with the help of his committees of Kikuyu elders, to paint a complete picture of life as it was lived in South Kikuyu country in the last century. His picture is of a tribe living, as doubtless many other tribes did, within its own area, very much to itself, and with few outside contacts.

Within the tribe, so long as it kept to itself, everyone was provided for in one way or another. Individuality was discouraged. There were rules and regulations governing every aspect of life and the rules had to be obeyed. Those who kept all the rules were good and righteous, and those who broke them were evil, as they might bring ceremonial uncleanness and bad luck to their families by so doing. Purification ceremonies were frequently performed to put right anything that had gone wrong, and law breakers were heavily fined. A habitual offender, however, could not be tolerated and became an outcast.

The detailed rules of behaviour are set out in this book. The countryside is described and the daily avocations of its people—digging, planting, harvesting, clearing new ground when this was necessary, the care of flocks and herds, the planning and building of homesteads, tribal raiding, trading, marriage, dancing and the administration of justice. All these are set out along with customs connected with sex, clothing and food, and the ceremonies performed in connection with *rites de passage*, when a person, or group of persons, passed from one stage of life to the next, and took on a new set of responsibilities. The old Kikuyu religious beliefs are described too, and the work of medicine-men, both in making magic and in dealing with sickness. The overall picture is of people going about their business in a community that provided everyone with a place and an occupation, and that made use of the natural resources at its disposal.

At the end of the nineteenth century the railway to Uganda was built, and it passed through the edge of South Kikuyu country. The Protectorate of British East Africa was established, and later Kenya became a British Colony. Kikuyu country became linked by road as well as by rail with other areas; towns were built, many people left home and went to work in other parts of the country, and the Kikuyu people no longer lived as an enclosed community.

With changed conditions many old customs have, of course, become obsolete. Many could not be practised, anyhow, in urban or semi-urban society, and many of the Kikuyu people have become Christians, and no longer practise the old religious ceremonies. Moreover, now, since Kenya has become an independent state, the Kikuyu are part of the Kenyan nation, which is internationally recognised, and which plays a part in international affairs. They have become, as it were, citizens of the world, but they will be interested in this record of their tribal past. Dr Leakey had meant to write another book describing how life has changed for the Kikuyu people from last century to modern times. It is our loss that he was never able to do so.

When we began work on this manuscript we had no idea of the magnitude of the work that remained to be done. We were working from a draft of a three-volume manuscript written nearly forty years ago, but never fully revised, proof-read, or organised for publication. Our first task was to familiarise ourselves with the text, at the same time indexing all of the Kikuyu words and Kikuyu names of trees and plants, as many still needed to be translated or identified. As with any manuscript, there were a great many editorial corrections to be made for spelling and grammar, as well as repetitious passages to be deleted.

A great deal of reorganisation also had to be done, as the manuscript was still basically in the form it had taken during Dr Leakey's discussions and interviews with the elders. In the course of this reorganisation and cross-checking we discovered some minor, and a few important, contradictions in the text, probably because the notes for different chapters came from different discussions with the elders, and in some cases from entirely different elders. Such contradictions are, of course, to be expected in research of this kind, and can in some cases be attributed to local variations, or alternative modes of behaviour. What made the contradictions unusually difficult to resolve in this case was the fact that all of the elders whom Dr Leakey had consulted in this work, as well as Dr Leakey himself, were no longer living. In fact, there are no elders living today who are old enough to have participated as adults in the ceremonies and social life of the 1880s and 1890s, which is the era with which this book deals. We were extremely fortunate, however, to have had the help of two elders (now in their seventies and eighties) who had made themselves familiar with these traditions, and who felt that they ought to be recorded. They were able, in almost all cases, to help us sort out the contradictions, to clarify confused passages, to correct Kikuyu mis-spellings due to typographical errors, and to translate difficult Kikuyu passages, especially those in the songs, which have all but been forgotten today. We tried, when a

meaning was doubtful, to get confirmation from more than one person before deciding what we ought to say, and this was usually possible. We regret that a few words remain untranslated, and that some passages are vague or ambiguous.

Dr Leakey wrote his book in the present tense, and this has been changed to the past tense. The present tense, where it is used, refers to the time of publication, and not to the time the manuscript was written (unless so indicated as 1939), but beyond this, little effort has been made to "modernise" the book from an anthropological standpoint. Whatever Dr Leakey might or might not have done along these lines, we were not able, nor did we desire, to make any vast alterations of this nature. The methodology, research and theory of this book, therefore, stand as written in 1939.

We are most grateful to all the people who have so kindly helped us. For the many hours which they spared us, we wish especially to thank Ex-Senior-Chief Josiah Njonjo and Mr Ishmael Ithong'o, and the people whom they consulted. We are particularly grateful to Mr Kirika, and also Mr Kanuri, Miss Kabuye, Dr Gillett, Dr Bally and Dr Ojiambo, who all helped us with the botanical section, to Dr Kariuki and Dr J. Cooper who helped us with veterinary terms, and to Dr Mwathi for his help with medical ones. Thanks are also due to Mrs D. Bolnick, Mrs E. Ensminger, Mr J. Mead, Miss I. Sedgwick, Mrs O'Meara, Miss A. Thurston, Mr C. Trapnell and the Church Missionary Society for other assistance.

Working on another person's manuscript is not easy, but we hope that the result of our efforts will be of value, and that Dr Leakey would have given his approval to it.

G. S. B. Beecher and J. Ensminger

Nairobi, 1977

Preface

Having been born and bred among the Kikuyu tribe and having grown up speaking their language as easily as I do English, I had long planned to write an account of their tribal customs, but my archaeological researches from 1926 to 1936 caused me to postpone undertaking this work. Ever since my childhood I have taken every possible opportunity to learn the details of Kikuyu life and customs, and much of this information has been collected in notebook form.

Since early childhood, I was always painfully aware that many matters were withheld from me, partly on account of my youth and partly because I was a white man. Even the fact that I took part in modified initiation rites in company with boys of my own age and became a recognised member of the *Mūkanda* initiation age-group did not open the doors to all the information that I wanted. There was much which, by age-long custom, could be imparted only to those of the status of *kīama* elders (council elders).

In 1934 I paid the requisite fees and was admitted as an elder of the first or junior grade, and in 1938 I became an elder of the second grade. In this way I became entitled to information that I could not otherwise be given.

As I could not become a third grade elder until I had children of my own attaining the age of puberty, and as I could not become a fourth grade elder unless I wished to have initiation ceremonies centred on my own homestead, it was clear that I should not get all the information that I needed through my ordinary means of contact with the tribe.

Therefore, when, in 1937, I came out from England with a grant from the Rhodes Trust to start writing my account of the customs of the Kikuyu tribe, it was clear that I first had to find some other means of obtaining and checking certain categories of information. Through the medium of Senior Chief Koinange, I was able to explain the position to a large number of senior and influential tribal elders. I pointed out that inevitable changes were accompanying European civilisation and education, and a great many of their ancient rites and ceremonies had already ceased to be practised; it seemed likely that when the present generation of elders died much of the information would be

lost for ever. I then pointed out that the ancient Britons were living in much the same state of culture as themselves when the Romans brought their civilisation to Britain, and that we, the descendants of the ancient Britons, knew little about the customs of our forefathers because the Romans had not left any detailed accounts of ancient British law and custom. I stressed that their own descendants would be in much the same position of ignorance if a detailed account of Kikuyu law and custom was not prepared now, while there were still elders living who could describe the position as it was at the end of the nineteenth century, when European influence first began to make itself felt. I urged that for the sake of their own descendants, if not for any other reason, I should be allowed to have information which, as a white man, and as one who was only a second grade elder, I was not really entitled to receive. I further asked to be allowed to prepare this information in book form.

In due course I was given the necessary permission, subject to certain minor exceptions, and I set to work to obtain the information I needed with the full consent and co-operation of the elders.

My method of work was as follows: using the information that I already possessed as a basis, I sat with groups of senior elders and took down from them detailed notes on the various subjects I wished to deal with. After obtaining notes on, for example, birth customs, from such a group, I worked over these notes with a small committee of selected elders and prepared a first draft of my chapter on that subject. My small committee consisted of the four following elders: Rūhiū wa Rībīro, Mbatia wa Gatūmūga, Gaturu wa Mūrīthi and Macaria wa Kamau. Fresh information was obtained, for we were able to work slowly with ample time, whereas when working with the larger group, I had to work fast because they were men drawn from a wide area who wished to return to their homes as soon as possible.

Having obtained a satisfactory first draft of a chapter, I collected a second large group of elders distinct from those who gave me the first set of notes. I and the four members of my small committee met them and presented the facts to them as I had recorded them in my first draft. They were asked to comment on them. This process resulted in a certain amount of correction, and many new details were obtained. Moreover, by checking with an entirely different group, I was able to discover which facts were local variations and which were customs of much wider application.

Having obtained a first draft and these additional comments for most of my chapters, I took the two best members of my committee to Nakuru, where I prepared my second draft with their continual

guidance and help. For the more complicated chapters, the data in the second draft were presented once more before a small group of senior elders back in Kikuyu country, and approved by them, with occasional minor corrections, as representing the facts.

Certain chapters in the book were not dealt with in this way for special reasons. For my chapter entitled "Magic", as well as for the accounts of magical ceremonies conducted by a medicine-man (*mündũ mügo*), I obtained my information from a special committee of eight elderly members of the profession, including some who were general practitioners, and one specialist in each of the following matters: herbal remedies, divination and magical protection. Working with this committee I obtained my preliminary notes and then, under the guidance of the whole committee, I prepared the first draft of the chapter on these subjects. I then asked them to appoint two of their number to assist me in preparing the still more detailed second draft.

As far as the chapter on "The *Itũika* Ceremonies" (handing over of tribal responsibility from one ruling age-group to the other) is concerned, I had to work on a less satisfactory basis. Although there were many men alive who belonged to the generation which took over the authority at the last *itũika* ceremony of the nineteenth century, only a few were left who actually took part in the ceremonies as delegates representing their generations. Of these I was able to find only two who had sufficiently clear memories to be of value. In addition to this, there was some political objection to my receiving more information, and I believe, frankly, that the account in that chapter is far from complete.

The chapter on "Witchcraft" is the least satisfactory in the whole book, for no one who in the past had been a genuine dealer in witchcraft (*ũrogi*) survived, or, if any were still alive, the ever present risk of being found out and put to death made them unwilling to admit to it.

Readers will note that my chapter on "Crafts and Industry" is little more than a catalogue of the Kikuyu objects of material culture with the briefest of descriptions. For this I myself am solely to blame. The time available to me for obtaining my material and for writing the book was limited, and I judged it (rightly or wrongly) to be more important to obtain as full an account as possible of law and custom. I should have liked to expand the chapter on "Crafts and Industry" into a whole book, had this been possible.

I feel sure that there are people who will be critical of the fact that I confined my account to that section of the Kikuyu tribe that lives south of the Chania River; I will therefore meet this criticism in advance. The laws and customs of the Kikuyu of the Fort Hall and

Nyeri districts are basically the same as those of the southern section of the tribe, but in matters of detail they differ so significantly that a generalised account could only be misleading. It would be necessary, in a book dealing with the whole tribe, to add greatly to the length of each chapter and show what the differences in each custom were in different areas. This would in turn have required a much greater length of time than was at my disposal.

Another criticism that will certainly be levelled against my book is that it is a straightforward description of customs, without a critical analysis and without any attempt to compare and contrast the customs with those of other tribes. I plead guilty. I frankly believe that my first duty in writing this account is to lay the facts before other social anthropologists, and record them for the descendants of the Kikuyu who have provided the information. It is not without fear of being accused of false modesty that I state that I am fully aware that this book is both wholly inadequate and incomplete. Any book that is based completely upon second-hand information instead of upon a combination of information and personal knowledge is inevitably bound to be incomplete, and this book deals mainly with Kikuyu customs as they were up to the end of the nineteenth century, before I was born.

I have made the account as full and as complete as my time and opportunities would allow, and it is my sincere hope that in the few years that still elapse before the old generation of Kikuyu pass on to the spirit world, some of the young, educated Kikuyu will take my book, and, using it as a basis, obtain and record much more information from committees of elders called together by themselves.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to all those who have helped in this work. The Trustees of the Rhodes Trust generously provided the funds which enabled me to devote my time to this task, and words cannot adequately express the measure of my thanks to them. The Kikuyu elders, once the reasons were explained to them, co-operated with me wonderfully, and have made possible an account which would otherwise have been impossibly superficial. Government chiefs, headmen and, more particularly, Senior Chief Koinange, did everything in their power to help me, and Chief Koinange added to his other kindnesses by placing his guest house at the disposal of my wife and myself whenever we wanted it. The Kenya Government, and especially the officials with whom I came into contact in Kikuyu country, gave me every possible assistance, and I particularly want to thank Colonel Anderson, who put a Government bungalow at our disposal when we most needed it.

It is with regret that I have to record that, although they gave me every assistance, some Government officials expressed the view that this study was of "purely academic interest and had no practical value". From this view I differ very strongly indeed. I believe that it is impossible to study and understand the present day problems in the Kikuyu tribe without a knowledge of what their laws and customs were before the impact of European civilisation.

Special thanks go to Mrs Spiers of Nakuru, who very kindly undertook the original typing of my manuscript, a task made doubly difficult, I fear, by the illegibility of my writing, and I cannot thank her enough.

Finally, I extend my warmest thanks to all those elders who gave so much of their time to help me record the facts correctly, and in particular to Rũhiũ wa Rĩbiro, whose able mind and clear way of expressing intricate matters made the work infinitely easier.

L. S. B. Leakey

Nairobi, 1939

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Orthographical Notes

The Kikuyu spelling used in this book is that which was recommended by the United Kikuyu Language Committee, and is what has been used in A. R. Barlow's *Studies in Kikuyu Grammar and Idiom*, T. G. Benson's *Kikuyu-English Dictionary* and A. R. Barlow's *English-Kikuyu Dictionary*, edited by T. G. Benson, and the Kikuyu Bible.

The Kikuyu alphabet used is that in T. G. Benson's *Kikuyu-English Dictionary*, with *mb*, *nd*, *ng*, *ng'*, *nj*, *ny*, and *th* treated as separate consonants, as they represent, in fact, specific sounds; the alphabet, therefore, is in the following order: *a*, *b*, *c*, *e*, *g*, *h*, *i*, *ĩ*, *k*, *m*, *mb*, *n*, *nd*, *ng*, *ng'*, *nj*, *ny*, *o*, *r*, *t*, *th*, *u*, *ũ*, *w*, and *y*. (*D* and *j* are never used without an *n*, and Kikuyu has no *f*, *l*, *p*, *q*, *s*, *v*, *x*, or *z*.)

Pronunciation

The Vowels

- a*, *i*, and *o* are pronounced as in Swahili and French.
- e* is pronounced as in Swahili, and like the French *è*.
- u* as in Swahili, and like the *o* in the English word *who*.
- ĩ* is half-way between *e* and *i*.
- ũ* is half-way between *o* and *u*.

All these can be either long or short. This sometimes is shown in writing by the use of two vowels (e.g. *aanake*), but only if there is a grammatical reason for it (*aanake* is *a-anake*, where the first *a* shows that the word is plural), or where two words are differentiated only in length, so that there would be confusion if they were written the same.

The Consonants

b is pronounced with the lips not quite touching; *c* is usually pronounced in Southern Kikuyu as *sh*, though in some parts of Kikuyu country it is pronounced as *ch*; *g* is as in the English *get* (never as in the English *gem*), but with the back of the throat not quite closed; *h* and *m*

as in English; *mb* as one sound, like the *mb* in the English words *tremble* and *humble*; *n* as in English; *nd* as in the English word *and*; *ng* as in the Southern English words *hunger* and *anger*, or the Northern English pronunciation of *singing*; *ng'* as in the Southern English *singing*; *nj* as the *nge* in the English word *tangerine*; *ny* as in the name *Sonya*; *r* as in English, but with the tongue not quite touching the teeth or palate; *t* as in English; *th* as in the English *the* or *this*; *w* and *y* as in English.

Archaic Forms

In many of the old sayings, old songs and old prayers quoted in this book there are words and expressions that are archaic in form, and the spelling of some of them is according to the pronunciation of North Kikuyu. This is because they have been handed down in their ancient form. Variations naturally arise in different parts of a widespread tribe, but old expressions often retain the old form.

Chapter 14

Birth and Infancy

Birth

Among the Kikuyu, children were greatly desired, and both male and female children were equally appreciated. Every Kikuyu elder, in the course of the prayers which he said regularly to the ancestral spirits, as well as in those to God, prayed that his family might be fruitful and that children might be given to him. Every woman (although she said no prayers) hoped that she would have many children so that she would be regarded as “blessed among women”. A barren woman, or one whose children were still-born or died very young, was an object of scorn among her more favoured sisters, and she would do everything in her power to avert such a disaster.

In spite of the fact that children were so desired by the Kikuyu, their laws and customs were such that no woman was allowed to give birth to as many children as she was capable of producing naturally, since much greater importance was attached to having healthy children, than to having many children. In view of this, Kikuyu law and custom ordained that no married woman might conceive another child until the previous one had been weaned, and since weaning did not normally take place until a child was about two years old, Kikuyu babies were spaced out to about one in every third year. If any child died before the age of two, however, the mother was permitted to conceive again as soon as she could.

The reasons given for this deliberate spacing of children were that a woman who was suckling a child was not considered strong enough to perform this duty, as well as her household duties, and at the same time to carry a new child in her womb. It was, in fact, believed that women who conceived while they were still suckling another child would harm both of them, and that neither the child in the womb nor the one suckling would grow strong and vigorous.

The details of the many ceremonies relating to the various aspects of childbirth are outlined in this chapter.

Pre-natal Treatment

As soon as a Kikuyu woman realised that she had missed two consecutive menstrual periods she considered it certain that she had conceived, and she informed her husband of her pregnancy. For one or sometimes two more months he continued to have sexual intercourse with her, since by so doing he was regarded as contributing to the growth of the child within the womb. This process was referred to as nurturing the child (*kūrerā mwana*), and if a husband neglected to do this, he would be considered guilty if the child was born a weakling.

When the woman was about four months pregnant all full sexual intercourse between the husband and wife was expected to cease, but a husband might, and usually did, continue to visit his wife's hut and to sleep with her at intervals. He might fondle her breasts and also have a restricted form of intercourse affecting only the external genitalia. Any man who attempted to have full, unrestricted intercourse with his wife after about four months of pregnancy was regarded as endangering the safety of the child in the womb. His wife would, in such circumstances, go to her mother-in-law and ask her to speak to her son and warn him against such practices. If he still persisted, she had the right to go and sleep in her mother-in-law's home as a protection against her husband's advances. A wife who encouraged her husband to come and sleep with her night after night in the middle and later stages of her pregnancy would be reprimanded by the older women and warned that she was endangering her child.

When a woman felt that her time was nearly come, she sent for a skilled midwife to come and examine her. If the midwife found that the baby was not lying in the womb in a position that was favourable for birth, she proceeded to massage (*moya*) the woman's abdomen, and would try by such external pressure and massage, to turn the child to the correct position. When massaging in this way, the midwife removed all the rings from her fingers and used a quantity of castor oil so that she would not chafe the patient's skin. The Kikuyu knew well that any but a "head presentation" involved difficulties, and, in addition to this, they regarded children born in any other way as unlucky.

Midwives

Among the Kikuyu, the only women who were allowed to practise

Once a husband had performed the ceremony described above, he did not normally sleep with the mother of the new baby again for several months, but if he had only one wife, and wished to do so, he might, provided that he took care not to cause another pregnancy. In many cases, however, a man with only one wife was still a member of the warrior class, in which case he could indulge in restricted sexual intercourse (*nguiko*) with unmarried girls, and satisfy his sexual desires in that way. Moreover, a man was entitled to have sexual intercourse with any of the wives of any married warrior in his age-group, if they were willing to do so (as they usually were). Abstinence from sexual contact with his wife while she was suckling her child was not therefore a hardship, and did not necessarily involve continence.

Abnormal Births

If Surgical Aid was Needed

The word abnormal is used here in a very wide sense to cover all births that were not treated by the Kikuyu as normal. It sometimes happened that if the operation of clitoridectomy had been clumsily performed, or if the girl had been careless in tending the wound during the days immediately following the operation, scar tissue formed across the top of the *labia majora* in the area where the operation had been performed. This scar tissue could result in constriction of the genitalia, making the process of childbirth difficult, or even impossible, without surgical aid.

In such circumstances the midwife used a razor to sever the scar tissue between the two *labia*. By this act, however, the midwife was considered to have become ceremonially unclean, and in consequence the woman's husband had to produce a small he-lamb or a small he-goat, which was immediately slaughtered and eaten. The stomach was taken from this slaughtered animal and made into a rawhide bracelet, which was placed round the midwife's left wrist to show that she had been purified. After this, if the birth was in other ways normal, the procedure was the same as that which has already been described for normal births, except for the final act of ceremonial sexual intercourse. The husband might not, in any circumstances, perform this ceremonial sex act himself, "because his wife had been operated on a second time". Instead he had to ask a man belonging to his own age-group (a man who might legitimately have intercourse with her) to

if the birth was abnormal in other respects, in accordance with whatever the custom was for such abnormal births.

If the First Person to appear was an Unmarried Man, Unmarried Girl, or a Child. If any of these was the first person to come upon a woman in childbirth in the fields or in the bush, he or she had to sound the alarm immediately, in order to summon the aid of a married man or woman. If there was any village within reach they could run and summon help. If a warrior or an unmarried girl realised that the baby was just about to be born, they would take the woman's own cloak and hold it so that the baby was born into it and not on to the ground, but they would have to take care to avert their eyes so as not to see what was happening, for in unmarried people that was immodest. Once married help was obtained, the subsequent procedure would depend upon whether it was a married man or a married woman who came first on the scene.

Birth of a Child to an Unmarried Mother

In spite of the Kikuyu law forbidding a man to have full sexual intercourse with an unmarried girl, it did sometimes happen, and sometimes a girl became pregnant when she was not married, or even betrothed. There were definite laws as to the fine that could be exacted as penalty for this, but we are only concerned in this chapter with the customs connected with the birth of a child to such a person.

Sometimes a girl who had had one child out of normal wedlock had a second in similar circumstances. Such a girl had little chance of ever having a normal marriage, and a hut was built for her in her father's homestead. She then continued to have children by any man whom she chose to take as a lover.

If a young girl was unmarried and pregnant for the first time, the birth took place in her mother's hut if her mother was alive and past childbearing age. Otherwise, a special small hut was built for her behind her mother's hut and here she gave birth to her baby. This special hut was not spoken of as her *nyumba*, but as her *thingira* or men's hut, since *nyumba* was a word used to describe the home of a married woman. Apart from these minor differences, such a girl had her baby according to the normal customs for married women, with the exception of the following.

The girl's father, or if he was not alive, her eldest brother, had to provide the animals for the sacrifices which otherwise would have

and the urinary bladder to her waist at the back of her skirt. They then sent her to the medicine-man, who had been waiting to complete the purification on behalf of the woman's father. The warriors ate the joints of meat that had been brought down to the river and put on one side until the ceremony was over.

The medicine-man took the woman to a second stream, never the same one as that where the warriors had performed their ceremony, and there he purified her. Afterwards he removed the urinary and gall bladders and sent her home, telling her that on no account was she to speak to any person until she had entered her own hut. (The details of this purification ceremony by the medicine-man are dealt with in Chapter 28).

The performance of this ceremony removed the curse from this particular girl, but in no way interfered with the spells on other girls who were mentioned when the stone was buried. They in due course would each have to bring a ram to the warriors in order to have the spell removed from them.

It should be noted that apart from actual barrenness, if a young woman again and again had still-born children, or miscarriages, this was also attributed to the witchcraft of the warriors, and they had to perform the ceremony for removing the curse as just described.

The methods the warriors used for removing curses from women varied considerably from one territory to another. The above account, therefore, must be taken as an example of what was done in only one place, not as the description of a recognised custom, applicable everywhere.

Birth Ceremonies among those Kikuyu who Belonged to the Ūkabi Initiation Guild

The whole of the foregoing account of birth customs and ceremonies deals only with those practised by members of the Kikuyu initiation guild, and not with those practised by that section of the community that belonged to the Ūkabi guild. The members of the second guild combined natural birth and the second birth ceremonies, and it will be more convenient, therefore, to examine their birth ceremonies in the next chapter, together with their "rebirth" ceremonies.

time of the initiation ceremonies described in the next chapter, and they continued to learn into adult life.

Discipline

All Kikuyu children were subjected to a good deal of discipline which, however, differed much from that given to European children. In spite of the fact that both boys and girls, after the second birth ceremonies, had a good deal of personal freedom, they were brought up to regard the orders of parents and adults as absolute, and any child that failed to be obedient was punished either by being whipped, or by being made to go without a meal. In serious cases they were made to sleep out in the courtyard of the home instead of inside one of the huts. This latter form of punishment was much feared because the children were afraid of the ogres who might come and carry them off in the dark.

Also, all uninitiated boys were liable to be sent on errands, and be made to act as "fags" for any warrior who chose to order them about. Failure to obey a member of the warrior class would result in a severe thrashing. On the other hand, boys who served the members of the warrior class well got all sorts of rewards in the form of bits of meat from the warriors' meat feasts, the loan of ornaments for dancing, etc.

Girls, however, were not subject to the orders of anybody except their mothers and older sisters, and no woman or initiated girl could send a young girl to run messages for her unless she was a close relative.

Puberty Rules

There was no special rite or ceremony connected with the puberty of a boy, for the Kikuyu said that no one could know exactly when a male first reached puberty. Girls, on the other hand, had their puberty marked by the appearance of their first menses, and by Kikuyu law and custom, every girl was supposed to have been initiated into the adult status of a *mũirĩtu* before she reached puberty. As, however, initiation ceremonies were organised only once a year, it sometimes happened that a girl had her first menses before she was initiated. This was considered to be a very serious matter indeed, and the following is an account of what was done in such circumstances.

If a woman discovered—as she would certainly do—that a daughter

Although there was no special ceremony connected with puberty in boys, it is convenient to mention here some of the things that boys did after puberty in order to satisfy their sexual desires.

According to Kikuyu custom, boys were seldom initiated until they were 18 years old and more. As a result, there were often a number of years during which their sexual desires were great, and yet there was no outlet legally open to them. Although the younger boys up to 14 and 15 were allowed to play at sex with young girls, as we have already described, the older boys from 16 and onwards were not allowed to do so. This was partly because it was feared that they would be tempted too much and might abuse the little girls, and partly because such big boys thought it beneath their dignity to play with such small girls. However, if there were a few girls who were about 13 or 14 years old but who had not yet been initiated, and who had, for some reason, not shown any sign of having their menses, the big boys would play at sex with them, even to the extent of mutual masturbation, like the warriors and initiated girls. For the most part, however, big boys satisfied their sexual desires by self masturbation, and occasionally they would find some married woman who, through being barren, was willing to have sexual intercourse with anyone in the hope that her barrenness would come to an end. Any boy who did so had to be very careful, for if he was found out he would never be initiated in his own country, and would probably have to go to Maasai country to be initiated there.

Occasionally, too, big boys were tempted to have sexual intercourse with animals, such as goats and sheep, but this was utterly taboo, and a crime which was punishable (see Chapter 23).

Morals

As they grew older, boys and girls, prior to initiation, were allowed to play at having sexual intercourse. In fact most boys of 14 or 15 years built themselves little booths near the homestead which they proudly called their *thingira* (men's hut), and to which they invited their companions, both boys and girls, to come and eat sweet potatoes in the evening and play sexually in imitation of their initiated brothers and sisters. As the parents were fully aware of what went on and knew that these boys and girls would lie together, they constantly warned them that in no circumstance were they to attempt to have actual sexual intercourse, and that they had to content themselves with fondling

Chapter 16

Initiation and Circumcision

As we have already seen, the life of a Kikuyu individual was punctuated by a series of *rites de passage* which marked his progress from one stage to another in the social life of the community.

Of these *rites de passage* there was no doubt at all in the minds of the Kikuyu that the most important was the one which marked the transition from childhood to adult status, the ceremony that is commonly spoken of as initiation, and which had its outward and visible sign in the operation of circumcision in the case of the males and clitoridectomy in the case of the females.

We have also seen in other chapters that the population of South Kikuyu was divided into two major divisions: those initiated in accordance with the Kikuyu guild custom, and those who were initiated in accordance with the Ūkabi guild custom. In all *rites de passage* we find that the customs of the members of these guilds differed somewhat, and it is therefore not in the least surprising to find that in that ceremony which marked the difference between the two guilds and which put the seal of the guild upon the individual (irrespective of whether he was born of parents belonging to the opposite guild), the differences were greater than in connection with any other series of rites and ceremonies.

In this chapter we shall first of all consider the rites and ceremonies of the Kikuyu initiation guild and we shall then turn to the ceremonies of the Ūkabi guild. Before passing to these detailed studies of the two different guilds, we must consider certain facts that affected both equally.

After the coming of Europeans it became a common practice for Kikuyu boys to undergo the operation of circumcision and to go through the initiation ceremonies at about the age of 14 or 15. It is therefore of the greatest importance to note that every Kikuyu elder consulted, was very particular and emphatic in stating that this was never the case before the coming of the white man, and that in the normal course of events no boy was allowed to undergo initiation into warriorhood until he was at least 17 or 18 years old. Moreover, those

half-gourd on them. As he did so, the two elders retired and joined the other elders behind the hut, where they now started eating the meat. Meanwhile, in the hut, the husband divided the joints among his own family, and every bit of meat was eaten then and there.

The eating of the meat both inside and outside the hut could not start until all the goats and sheep of the homestead had been brought in from grazing, and all the members of the family, other than those specially exempt, were present in the homestead, for this was a family sacrifice.

After thus paying his *mbūri ya mwana* to the other council elders, a man who was a member of the ruling generation but who had never before had a child initiated might proceed with the further arrangements, such as arranging with whom his child should stay for the ceremony. This will be discussed below.

Preparations for the Initiation of a First Child of a Man who was not of the Ruling Generation

Any man who was not a member of the ruling generation who wanted to have his first child initiated had first of all to become a second grade elder. Then he had to pay the *mbūri ya mwana* fee as already described, after which he had to pay the fee called *mbūri ya mūkuha* (a sheep or goat for the awl). This had to be either a fat ram or a fat he-goat, but it did not have to be of one colour only or without blemish, for it was not a sacrificial animal, but merely a fee paid to the ruling generation for the right to start having his children initiated. It had to be paid at some time between the sacrifice of the *mbūri ya mwana* and the fifth day of the post-initiation training period. Normally, it was handed over well before the initiation ceremonies started, because a man knew that once these had begun he would have many other things to occupy his mind.

The man who had to pay the fee went to the man at whose homestead the child was going to stay during the initiation ceremonies, and said, "I want to pay my *mbūri ya mūkuha*". The other replied, "Bring it on such-and-such a day and meet me in the bush near here". On the appointed day, the man paying the fee went with it, accompanied by three elders of the ruling generation from his own village and one elder of his own (non-ruling) generation. At the rendezvous he found the man at whose home the initiation was to take place, accompanied

pared by the advisers and the *mūruithia*. The advisers drank some from the mouth of this bottle gourd, and blessed themselves with it. Then a little of it was put into a horn and the *mūruithia* and his advisers blessed the ram with it before it was slaughtered.

The special stools to be used by the *mūruithia* and his advisers were brought out into the courtyard and they spent most of the day sitting on them, directing operations, and occasionally having a little of the ceremonial honey beer from the bottle gourd which was now hung up on the forked *mūthakwa* post by the saddle quern.

While the *gīthūnū* lodge was being built, the ram being slaughtered, and the initiates resting, a number of people had been sent off to cut sugar-cane and bring it to the homestead. This was to be crushed next day for the beer required for the following day when the shaving ceremony would take place.

In the middle of the afternoon, when the *gīthūnū* was nearly finished, all the friends and relatives of the initiates dispersed to their own homes, and later, at the time when the goats and sheep of the homestead started to come home for the evening, the next series of ceremonies started. These began with the entrance of the initiates into the *gīthūnū*, and were the opening ceremonies of the period of seclusion and instruction, which is the subject of our next section.

The Kikuyu Guild Period of Seclusion and Instruction

First Day

In the late afternoon, when everything described in the previous section had been completed, the ceremonial honey beer was taken back into the headquarters hut and the initiates were summoned from the fires where they had been resting, and entered the lodge or *gīthūnū*. They lined up in their order of precedence, and entered the lodge in double file, the girls' file being to the left of the boys' file. Once they had entered the *gīthūnū*, the essential ceremonies of this first day of seclusion could be started.

First the advisers and *mūruithia* sat down upon their stools by the tray where the meat and the skin had been put. Then the senior adviser took the piece of breast skin with the meat attached to it, and took two bites from the meat. He then leaned forward and put the strip of skin on the right-hand middle finger of the *mūruithia*, and, holding

With the necklace on his neck, the *mūruithia* and his advisers then went out into the courtyard and drank beer with the sponsors, who only sipped a little as they were not really old enough to drink beer. This was called *njohi ya kūrūtūrūra atiiri* (beer for sending away the sponsors). The sponsors then went to their own homes, for they did not sleep at the initiation homestead as they did in the Kikuyu guild custom. After the sponsors had departed, the advisers escorted the *mūruithia* to the headquarters hut, which he entered with his wife. They went to their bed and slept there, but they did not and might not have any sexual contact by Ūkabi guild custom. The initiates did not have any lodge built for them, but slept on the floor of the headquarters hut.

The advisers, having seen the man and his wife into the hut, went home themselves, for they, like the sponsors, did not sleep in the initiation homestead.

The Day after the Operation

The first thing that happened early on the following morning was that the *mūruithia's* wife put his necklace of blue beads back on to his head again. He then went out followed by the initiates in the order of their seniority. The initiates sat about warming themselves in the sun until such time as all the preparations for the day's ceremonies were completed.

First of all the advisers arrived from their own homes, and they and the *mūruithia* ceremonially drove the flocks of the homestead out to graze. While doing this, they carried the bottle gourd of ceremonial beer and all their insignia of office. The reason for this ceremony was to bless the flocks, so that when, later in the day, they were symbolically raided by the male initiates, the blessing might pass on to them. This was called *kuumagaria mbūri* (escorting the flocks).

The first two male sponsors to arrive were sent off to get stems of *mūrangarī* and *mūkarakinga* wood, and from this wood each male sponsor proceeded to make a bow stave for his charge. They also set to work to make three arrows for each of their charges. Two of these had to be of the type called *ndiiri* or *ndiringū*, which were made as follows. From a piece of *mūtamaiyū* wood a shaft about 20 in long was carefully cut. To one end of this was fitted a disc of leather about $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. in diameter. This was pushed down so that it was about $\frac{1}{2}$ in down the head end of the shaft. Beeswax was then softened in the hand and

Chapter 18

Warriors and Maidens

When the girls and boys who had been initiated during a given year eventually performed the ceremony of *gũthiga* and passed out of the novice stage, they entered upon an entirely new life as warriors and maidens. Although officially they were now adults with all the rights and privileges of adult status, they did not in practice gain any of these privileges and rights at once, because the senior warriors and maidens were very jealous and would not allow the newly initiated adults to exercise their rights without the payment of fees. These fees were not demanded of the individuals, but of the new age-group as a whole, and were paid by the members of the new age-group in each territorial unit to the members of the senior age-group in that same territorial unit.

Mention of the word age-group, which is the nearest English equivalent to the Kikuyu word *riika*, demands some amplification, and this must therefore precede our study of the life of warriors and maidens in South Kikuyu.

Age-groups among the Kikuyu

To the Kikuyu mind, the word *riika*, which we translate as “age-group”, conveyed the idea of a group of people who were bound together by the fact that they had undergone certain *rites de passage*, not as individuals, but as a group.

We have already studied certain of the *rites de passage* of the Southern Kikuyu and we have noted that some of them, such as birth and “second birth”, were ceremonies affecting individuals, while others, such as initiation, though affecting individuals in one sense, really affected a whole group of individuals. The Kikuyu word *riika* was applied to three quite distinct types of age-group, and for the sake of clarity we shall first have to examine each of these briefly and then invent terms to differentiate them.

Chapter 19

Marriage and Sex

The Kikuyu conception of marriage was so different from the European one that before we consider the details of the Kikuyu laws and customs relating to marriage and sex life it is essential to review briefly the general principles.

Among the Kikuyu there were many types of legal union between a man and a woman, but by no means did all of them rank as marriages. The position and status of the children resulting from such unions was always legalised, however, so there was therefore no such thing as an illegitimate child. Even a child born as a result of an illegal union was accorded a legal status and position which was fixed by long standing customs and depended upon the relevant circumstances.

Furthermore, it must be kept in mind that the children born from a perfectly legal relationship, (but not a marriage) were by no means always the legal children of their parents. They might rank as the legal children of some other man or even of some other woman, for Kikuyu custom provided, among other things, for the marriage of a woman to a woman. Such a female husband would arrange for her wife's children to be legally begotten on her behalf by a man who did not, however, become their legal father.

Another important aspect of marriage was that a married woman could, in circumstances which will be described in detail, have perfectly legal sexual intercourse with men other than her husband, but the children born of such unions were counted in law as the children of her legal husband. Or again, there could be perfectly legal unions between an unmarried woman and a man in certain clearly defined circumstances, and the offspring of such unions were ranked as the legal children neither of the man nor of the woman, but of her father, or, if he was dead, of her brother.

It was from the legal and not the physical father that all children took their clan names, and from this it follows that, although there were strict rules against incest, a man could and might easily marry a woman who was closely related to him by blood, but who was legally no relation at all. Both inside and outside the confines of marriage there were strict laws governing sexual relationships between men and women, but these laws had no bearing whatever upon the legal status

The Marriage Payments

Before we consider the whole complicated procedure of *kūraacia*, we must discuss the meaning of this word. It has become a common thing in Africa to hear Europeans—even those who have been in close contact with the Kikuyu, such as missionaries and Government officials—speak of the Kikuyu custom of *kūraacia* as though it consisted of “buying a wife”, and in recent years, under the stress and influence of European contact, it has been partially true to say that the transaction constituted the purchase of a wife. Here, however, we are concerned with customs as they were before the coming of the Europeans, and it is perfectly clear that to the Kikuyu mind, the word *kūraacia* had nothing to do with buying and selling as such, but signified the making of certain payments for definite purposes other than the mere enrichment of the family of the girl who was to be married. The chief aim was to make the contract legally binding, the second to make the children of that marriage legal members of the family which paid the *rūraacio*, and the third to stabilise the marriage. It is best, I think, to translate *rūraacio* as a “marriage insurance”, for, above all else, it acted as a guarantee of good faith on the part of the contracting parties.

Under the system whereby *rūraacio* was handed over, the parents and family of a girl would not accept *rūraacio* and allow a girl to marry a man unless they were reasonably sure that she would remain with her husband and be a good wife to him, for if a woman left her husband without just cause and without having been unfairly treated by him, her parents and family became liable to repay the whole of the *rūraacio* with interest.

On the other hand, if a man ill treated, or otherwise gave his wife just cause to leave him, he lost both his wife and the considerable number of stock that he had handed over as *rūraacio*. For this reason, a man's family would not allow him to make a marriage that was not likely to be a success if they could possibly help it. Moreover, if it became known to the members of a man's family that he was mistreating his wife, they at once remonstrated with him, and pointed out what he had to lose if his wife left him through his own fault, and they did everything in their power to make him behave better. Similarly, if a girl's father and mother heard that their daughter was acting in a way that was likely to wreck the marriage, they at once spoke to her and warned her of the consequences, pointing out how seriously it would affect the whole family.

Building the Bride's Hut

While the period of ceremonial mourning was in process, the bridegroom and his friends and relatives collected and prepared all the materials with which to build a hut for the bride. On the fourth day, when the bride's friends had gone home, the hut was erected, but not furnished. However, a fire was lit in it that evening with embers taken from a fire in the field (or in the case of members of the Ūkabi initiation guild, fire made with fire sticks), and a few children were sent to spend this, the fifth night, in the new hut, so that it would not become unlucky because no one had slept in it on the day that it was built. That night the bride again slept in her mother-in-law's hut, and again her husband was kept away from her, for this night was the fifth, and five being an uneven number, ceremonial sexual intercourse might not take place.

Furnishing the Bride's Hut

On the fifth day all the women of the bridegroom's home spent the day getting the hut ready for the couple to occupy that night. Some of the women brought stones to make the hearth. Others cut firewood and stacked it on the platform over the hearth. Still others brought two new cooking pots and two new stools which they anointed with red ochre, while the bridegroom's father provided a new oxhide sleeping mat. The setting up of the stones for the new hearth was done by the mother-in-law herself.

Another group of women spent the day preparing some bulrush millet gruel and cooking *njahĩ* beans. Finally, towards evening, the women all helped to build up the woman's bed, upon which the bride and bridegroom would sleep and consummate the marriage.

Consummating the Marriage

In the evening of this, the fifth day, after the furnishing of her new hut had been completed, some of the younger women of the bridegroom's family fetched the bride from her mother-in-law's hut and escorted her to her own new hut behind that of her mother-in-law. She pretended to be very unwilling and had to be pushed and dragged

In connection with divorce proceedings, both the husband and the girl's father or guardian had to pay court fees of one fat ram each to the council elders, and in addition, the husband, whether being divorced or divorcing his wife, had to pay one more fat ram to the council elders when the case was over. This was called *ndūrūme ya gūtharia nyūmba* (the ram for pulling down the hut), and until it had been paid he could not pull down the hut of the divorced wife, which had to be done, as he might not leave it standing empty in his homestead, nor might he allow anyone else to occupy it.

When the divorce proceedings had been completed, the young divorced woman could marry again in accordance with the normal procedure already described. The only difference was that over and above the ordinary marriage payments, the new legal husband was required to pay 10 goats and sheep and one *ngoima* animal extra, in order to become the legal father of a divorced woman's child by her first marriage.

In the few rare cases of a complete divorce after a woman had borne her husband two or more children, she never remarried, but went and lived in the home of her father or brother. A hut was built there for her, and she bore children by many different casual lovers whom she took as she pleased. All her children in such cases belonged to her father's family or clan.

Legal Separation and Remarriage

It is perhaps incorrect to use the word remarriage to describe a union between a man and a woman who was separated from her husband but not divorced. Yet since such unions were legally recognised, although they had a different status from other marriages, it is not easy to find a better English word than remarriage.

The circumstances which gave rise to such a position were usually as follows. If after having two or more children a husband and wife reached a position of complete disagreement and failed to live together amicably, divorce seldom took place; in fact, only two records of such a thing happening ever came to my notice. This followed from the fact that after the lapse of a sufficient number of years for the birth of two or more children to take place, the members of both families did their utmost to prevent a divorce, owing to the complications that would be involved. It was also felt that since every girl was given a number of opportunities to break off the engagement before her

a young woman should act as midwife, she had forthwith to be ceremonially purified before she could resume normal life.

The sex life of a man and woman who were living as husband and wife under any of the alternative forms of marriage which I have described was governed by the same rules as those for a man and woman married by normal marriage customs.

There were certain exceptions to the rule that a man might not have sexual intercourse with his wife anywhere except in her hut. The commonest of these was for those men who belonged to the soda miners guild (*ariā menjaga igata*). These people, as we have seen in Chapter 13, took their wives with them when they went into Maasai country to Lake Magadi for soda. Their work was such that they were often away for a month at a time and it was a recognised thing that in their case they might have sexual intercourse with their wives in the caves, booths, and other shelters where they slept during their absence from Kikuyu country. Because of this fact, it was taboo for any man who was not a soda miner ever to have sexual intercourse with a soda miner's wife, even if the men were of the same age-group; if they did so they would become unclean.

Sex Life outside the Marriage Bond

As we have already seen, Kikuyu married men and women were not restricted by custom or law to sexual intercourse with their wives or husbands. There were, rather, a number of laws and customs which provided for sex acts between married men and women who did not stand in the relationship of husband and wife.

The commonest extra-marital sexual relationships were between a man's wife and the male members of that man's initiation age-group; in fact, the male members of any initiation age-group might address the wives of all other co-members as "my wife" (*mūka wakwa*), for these women were in theory the wives of all the males of their husband's age-group. Thus any man had the legal right to have intercourse with the wives of men of his own initiation age-group. The following exceptions and rules, however, had to be observed.

1. A rule which overrode all other sexual "rights" was that which forbade the exercising of any of these rights with a woman who was a blood relation. The taboo against any form of incest was the most strict of all.

Chapter 20

Kinship and Family Life

Kinship

In order to understand the family life of the Kikuyu and to appreciate the reasons which lay behind the behaviour of the various members of a family to one another, it is essential first of all to study and understand the kinship system of the tribe. This can be best achieved by examining the terms of address and reference used by members of a family.

The first preliminary, therefore, is to give a table showing all those relatives and relations-in-law who in a Kikuyu family had special terms of reference and address, and then we shall have to analyse this table in order to find out why these various people were classified together.

Since the commonest form of Kikuyu family was organised on a patrilineal and patrilocal basis, we shall first study the position in relation to such a family. Then we shall briefly consider minor variations of kinship which were due to unusual marriages, such as the marriage of a woman by a woman, and the various forms of matrilineal marriage recognised by the Kikuyu.

In the following table the correct term of address and reference is given as used by both men and women. In a large proportion of cases the terms were the same for both, but in other cases the terms differed greatly. Although there may be a few omissions in this table, it has been made as complete as possible. Relatives or relations-in-law for whom there was no special term of address have been intentionally omitted.

In Kikuyu, terms for relatives differ according to whether they are used in the first, second or third person. Sometimes quite different words are used, and sometimes the difference is shown by a suffix which is part of the word. Thus *baba* means my father, but your father (sing.) is *thoguo*, and his or her father is *ithe*. It is only in the plural that these persons are distinguished by a possessive adjective (*ithe witũ*, our father, *ithe wanyu*, your father (plural), and *ithe wao*, their father). *Taata* means

were married, she did not refer to them as *mwana wakwa* once they had homes of their own, but referred to them as *mwana wa mūiru wakwa* (child of my co-wife). She did, however, still address them as *mwana wakwa*.

Family Life and Behaviour

Having examined the Kikuyu kinship system, we must next turn to the rules of behaviour which governed the relations of a family in their dealings with each other.

Actual and Classificatory Relationships

Between Fathers and Sons

As we have already seen, a man addressed his father and his classificatory fathers as *baba*, and they addressed all their classificatory sons as *mūriū* or *mūrū wakwa*. Towards any man who stood in the relationship of *baba*, a male was expected to show great respect and obedience, and in fact, from earliest childhood a boy was taught by his mother to obey his various fathers without question.

From time to time a boy's actual legal father would exhort his sons to show even greater obedience and respect to their classificatory fathers than to himself. When doing so, a father would argue something as follows: "My son, take good care to be very obedient and dutiful to your other fathers, for although I am your own father, they are very important to you. Even if you anger me greatly, I am never likely to refuse to help you, since you are the son of my body, but if you anger your classificatory fathers, they may refuse to help you, and after I am dead they might disinherit you."

A male was taught, in fact, that he would all his life be dependent to some extent upon his various fathers, and that he must therefore take care not to anger them. A young man knew that in the ordinary course of events he could rely upon his own father to provide him with goats or rams for meat feasts, or for paying the necessary fees after he had become a warrior, but he equally knew that if it was a question of the goats and sheep needed for marriage payments, or for the payment of a fine if he had committed manslaughter, he would need to look to all

Chapter 22

Death and the Disposal of the Dead

Death, coming as it does inevitably to all in due course, was viewed by the Kikuyu with a considerable degree of fatalism. Though death was never in any ordinary circumstance welcomed, of course, the Kikuyu did not have the haunting fear of death which grips the people of many other civilisations.

A Kikuyu who knew that his end was near usually faced the fact calmly and with equanimity, and this can be accounted for in a large measure by the belief that all departed spirits were reunited in a single spirit world. Kikuyu religious beliefs did not countenance the idea of a heaven and a hell, and when about to die a man was not tormented by the fear that after all he might be destined for the wrong place. As a departed spirit, too, his life would not be unpleasant, for his needs would be seen to by those members of his family who remained on earth and by their descendants, and eventually his spirit would be reincarnated and take its place once more among the living.

According to the Kikuyu, death took place because *ikundo rĩa mündũ ũcio nĩĩathenga* (literally, the knot of that man has been removed), which had reference to the Kikuyu method of keeping an appointment. When a Kikuyu made an appointment to do something on a particular day in the future, he tied a series of knots in a piece of string to represent the number of days that would elapse before the appointment. Then, on each successive day he untied one of the knots, until finally he came to the last knot and knew that the appointed day had been reached. So the conception of death was that the appointed days of any individual were numbered by some unseen supernatural power, and when the last knot had been untied, the day appointed for death had come. In other words, the Kikuyu believed that the day of death was fixed at birth, and when "a man's days had run" death had to intervene. As nothing could alter that, there was no use in worrying.

Moreover, this philosophical attitude toward death also meant that the relatives and friends of a dead man did not mourn unduly. Although