ANIMALS IN LELE RELIGIOUS SYMBOLISM

MARY DOUGLAS

LELE religious life is organized by a number of cult groups. For a long time they seemed to me to be a collection of quite heterogeneous cults, uncoordinated except for a certain overlap in membership. In one of them, the Diviners' group, entry is by initiation only, though the candidate is supposed to give evidence of a dream summons. In another, the Twin Parents, there is no initiation. Parents of twins have no choice but to pay the fees and become Twin Diviners. In another, the Begetters, candidates must have begotten a child, pay fees and undergo initiation. Members of this group, who have begotten children of both sexes, are qualified for entrance into another group, which makes a cult of the pangolin\(^1\) (*manis tricuspis*) (see fig. 1). Lastly there are Diviners of God (*Bangu bangambvi*) who are supposed to acquire their power not by initiation, but by direct communication with supernatural beings, the spirits. The primary objects of all these cults\(^2\) are fertility and good hunting.

The Pangolin cult is the only one in which an animal is the cult object. In the other cults parts of certain animals are reserved to initiates: the head and stomach of the bush pig to Diviners, the chest and young of all animals to the Begetters. Or parts of animals or whole animals may be prohibited to them as a condition of their calling: Twin Parents must not eat the back of any animal; so many animals are prohibited to the Diviners of God that they practise an almost vegetarian austerity.

Regarding these practices the Lele offer very little explanation of the symbolism involved. The different animals are associated traditionally with the different cults. The symbolism of the bush pig is relatively explicit. It is the Diviners' animal, they will say, because it frequents the marshy sources of streams where the spirits abide, and because it produces the largest litters in the animal world. In very few other instances is the symbolism so clearly recognized. In most cases one would be justified in assuming that no symbolism whatever is involved, and that the prohibitions concerning different animals are observed simply as diacritical badges of cult membership.

If this be the correct interpretation of the different observances, one must equally accept the view that there is no single system of thought integrating the various fertility cults. At first I felt obliged to adopt this point of view. Believing the Lele culture to be highly eclectic and capable of assimilating into itself any number of cults of neighbouring tribes, I concluded that the connexion between the various cults was probably only an historical one, and that in the absence of historical or ethnographic data from surrounding areas, it was impossible to take the problem any further.

Although I could never get a direct answer that satisfied me as to why the pangolin should be the object of a fertility cult, I kept receiving odd scraps of disconnected information about it and about other animals in different religious and secular contexts.

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\(^{1}\) The pangolin is a scaly ant-eater.

\(^{2}\) The Begetters are an exception, their initiation being mainly a *rite de passage*. They give indirect support to the other fertility cults by honouring virility and penalizing impotence.
Gradually I was able to relate these ideas within a broad framework of assumptions about animals and humans. These assumptions are so fundamental to Lele thought that one could almost describe them as unformulated categories through which they unconsciously organize their experience. They could never emerge in reply to direct questions because it was impossible for Lele to suppose that the questioner might take his standpoint on another set of assumptions. Only when I was able to appreciate the kind of implicit connexions they made between one set of facts and another, did a framework of metaphysical ideas emerge. Within this it was not difficult to understand the central role of the pangolin, and the significance of other animals in Lele religion. The different cult groups no longer seemed to be disconnected and overlapping, but appeared rather as complementary developments of the same basic theme.

**Animals in the Natural Order**

The Lele have a clear concept of order in their universe which is based on a few simple categories. The first is the distinction between humans and animals.¹ They observe polite conventions in their dealings with each other and hide themselves when performing their natural functions. Animals satisfy their natural appetites uncontrolled. They are regarded as the ‘brute beasts which have no understanding’ of the Anglican marriage service. This governing distinction between men and animals testifies to the superiority of mankind. It gives men a kind of moral licence to hunt and kill wild animals without shame or pity.

A subsidiary characteristic of animals is held to be their immense fecundity. In this, animals have the advantage of humans. They give birth to two, three, six or seven of their young at a time. Barrenness in humans is attributed to sorcery: barrenness in animals is not normally envisaged in Lele ideas about them. The set incantation in fertility rites refers to the fecundity of the animals in the forest, and asks why humans should not be so prolific.

The third defining characteristic of animals is their acceptance of their own sphere in the natural order. Most animals run away from the hunter and shun all human contact. Sometimes there are individual animals which, contrary to the habit of their kind, disregard the boundary between humans and themselves. Such a deviation from characteristically animal behaviour shows them to be not entirely animal, but partly human.² Two sets of beliefs account for the fact that some wild animals occasionally attack humans, loiter near villages, even enter them and steal chickens and goats: sorcery and metempsychosis. I do not propose to describe them here.

Apart from these individual deviants, there are whole deviant species. Breeding

¹ See my article ‘Social and Religious Symbolism of the Lele of the Kasai’, *Zaire*, ix, 4, 1955, in which I give in detail the various situations of cooking, eating, washing, quarrelling, &c., in which these categories become evident.

² Domestic animals and vermin are major exceptions. Before the recent introduction of goats, pigs, and ducks, the only domestic animals which the Lele kept were dogs and chickens. There is a fable which describes how the first ancestors of these, a jackal and a partridge, came to throw in their lot with man, and how both dogs and poultry are continually begged by their forest-kin to leave the villages of humans. Conventional attitudes to both of these in a number of situations are consistent with the notion that a domestic animal is essentially an anomaly. For rats, which infest the huts of humans, Lele feel nothing but disgust. In conformity with their attitude to other anomalous animals, they never eat dog, domestic rats, or mice, and women extend the avoidance to a number of other rats and to all poultry.
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habits, sleeping, watering, and feeding habits give the Lele categories in which there is consistency among the secondary characteristics, so that different species can be recognized. Carnivorous\(^1\) animals have fur and claws as distinct from vegetarian animals, such as the antelopes with their smooth hides and hoofs. Egg-laying creatures tend to fly with wings. Mammals are four-footed and walk or climb, and so on. But some species defy classification by the usual means. There are four-footed animals which lay eggs, and mammals which fly like birds, land animals which live in the water, aquatic animals which live on the land.

AVOIDANCES IN CONNEXION WITH ANIMALS

These problems in animal taxonomy struck me first when I inquired into the food prohibitions observed by women. Some animals they avoid simply because they are anomalous, no ritual sanction being involved. For example, there is a 'flying squirrel', the scaly tail, which women avoid, because they are not sure what it is, bird or animal.\(^2\) I have described elsewhere\(^3\) their self-imposed prohibitions on foods which they consider disgusting apart from any religious symbolism. Here I am concerned with the provisions made in Lele religion for regulating human contact with animals. Restrictions on the contact of women with one species or another is the most usual ritual rule.

A wide diversity of animals are classed as 'spirit animals' (\textit{hut a ngehe}). I could not clarify in what sense these creatures are spirits. In some contexts they are spoken of as if they were spirits or manifestations of spirits. In others they are animals closely associated with spirits. They can be divided according to the restrictions which are imposed on women's contact with them.

Women may never touch the Nile monitor (\textit{varanus niloticus}) or the small pangolin (\textit{manis tricuspid}). Concerning the pangolin I shall say more below. The Nile monitor is a large aquatic lizard. The Lele describe it as a cousin of the crocodile, but without scales; like a snake with little legs; a lizard, but bigger, swifter, and more vicious than any lizard. Like the crocodile, it is a large, potentially dangerous amphibian.

Women may touch, but never eat, the tortoise and the yellow baboon (\textit{papio cynocephalus kindae}). The tortoise is a curious beast. Its shell distinguishes it from other reptiles but, as a four-footed creature, it is anomalous in that it lays eggs. The baboon is interesting in several ways. Unlike other monkeys it is reputed not to be afraid of men, but will stand up to a hunter, strike him, talk, and throw sticks at him. When the troop of baboons goes off from the grass-land to the water, the females pick up their young in their arms, and those which are childless hitch a stone or stick into the crook of their arms, pretending that they too have babies. They go to the water, not merely to drink, but to wash. Moreover, they shelter in deep erosion gullies which are associated by the Lele with spirits who are thought to dig them for their own inscrutable purposes. Some of these gullies are very deep and become rushing torrents in the rains. As one of the ordeals of initiation, diviners have to

\(^1\) For brevity's sake I use here some terms of our own categorization. Lele use no one word to render 'carnivorous' exactly, but they indicate carnivorous animals by the term \textit{hutapok}—animals with skins, or 'furry animals'. I do not know any Lele term for 'oviparous' or 'mammalian', but it is clear that the manner of reproduction provides criteria for classification as surely for the Lele as for our zoologists, for their descriptions never fail to mention an animal's breeding habits.

\(^2\) Significantly, its zoological name is \textit{anomalurus Beecroftii}.

\(^3\) Zaire, op. cit.
climb down into one of these gullies and carry back mud from the bottom. Baboons, then, are unlike other animals in that they will stand up to a man, they experience barrenness, they wash, and they undergo one of the ordeals of initiation.

There is one animal which women never eat unless they are pregnant. It is the giant rat (*crictomys dissimilis proparator*) which has a white tail and burrows underground. It is associated with the ghosts of the dead, perhaps because of the holes in the ground. The ghosts of the dead are often referred to as *bina hin*, the people down below. The habit of sleeping in a hole also seems to be associated with the spirits. Several of the spirit animals which women have to avoid are characterized as sleeping in holes, but I am not confident about this category, as there are other burrowing animals which are not classed as spirit animals. The porcupine (*hystrix galatea*) and the giant pangolin (*manis gigantea*) are spirit animals which women may not eat if they are pregnant. The ant-bear (*orycteropus afer*), which digs holes to escape from its pursuers, may be eaten by women except during the four months immediately following a certain fertility rite.

Water creatures are all associated with spirits and pregnant women must avoid them. The wild bush pig (*potamochoerus koiropotamus*), as I have already said, is a spirit animal because it frequents the streams and breeds prolifically. Pregnant women avoid it. There are two antelopes associated with spirits, which women must avoid during pregnancy. One is the water-chevrotain (*hyemoschus aquaticus*) which hides itself by sinking down into the water until only its nostrils appear above the surface. The other is *cephalophus grimmi*, whose idiosyncrasy is to sleep in daylight with its eyes wide open, so soundly asleep that a hunter can grab it by the leg. This habit associates it with the spirits, who are supposed to be active at night and asleep in the day. The little antelope is thought to be a servant of the spirits, resting in the day from its labours of the night.

So far as I know, this is the complete list of the animals whose contact with women is normally restricted. There are local variations. In the north crocodiles may be eaten by pregnant women; in the far south women’s post-natal food includes squirrels and birds, i.e. animals of above (*hutadiku*) as opposed to ground animals (*hutahin*). In reply to my queries, Lele would merely reiterate the characteristics of the animal in question, as if its oddity would be instantly appreciated by me and would provide sufficient answer to my question.

No doubt the first essential procedure for understanding one’s environment is to introduce order into apparent chaos by classifying. But, under any very simple scheme of classification, certain creatures seem to be anomalous. Their irregular behaviour is not merely puzzling but even offensive to the dignity of human reason. We find this attitude in our own spontaneous reaction to ‘monstrosities’ of all kinds. Paul Claudel understood it well, in depicting the disgust of a seventeenth-century grammarian confronted with a female whale suckling her young in mid-Atlantic:

Vous trouvez ça convenable? C’est simplement révoltant! J’appelle ça de la boufonnerie! Et pense que la nature est toute remplie de ces choses absurdes, révoltantes, exagérées! Nul bon sens! Nul sentiment de la proportion, de la mesure et de l’honnêteté! On ne sait où mettre les yeux!

1 *Le Soulier de Satin*, Troisième Journée, Scène II.
The Lele do not turn away their eyes in disgust, but they react to 'unnatural behaviour' in animals in somewhat the same way as did the author of Deuteronomy —by prescribing avoidance.

Every beast that divideth the hoof into two parts, and cheweth the cud, you shall eat. But of them that chew the cud, but divide not the hoof, you shall not eat, such as the camel, the hare and the rock-badger . . . these shall you eat of all that abide in the waters, all that have fins and scales you shall eat. Such as are without fins and scales, you shall not eat.¹

The baboon, the scaly tail, the tortoise, and other animal anomalies are to the Lele as the camel, the hare and the rock-badger to the ancient Hebrews.

**The Pangolin**

The pangolin is described by the Lele in terms in which there is no mistaking its anomalous character. They say: 'In our forest there is an animal with the body and tail of a fish, covered in scales. It has four little legs and it climbs in the trees.' If I had not by chance identified it at once as the scaly ant-eater, but had thought of it always as a scaly fish-like monster that ought to abide in the waters, but creeps on the land, its symbolic role would not have eluded me for so long.

Anomalous characteristics, like the scaly tail, would set the pangolin apart but would not explain its association with fertility. The fertility of humans is thought to be controlled by the spirits inhabiting the deepest, dampest parts of the forest. The symbolic connexion of water with fertility and with the spirits who control human fertility, is fairly explicit for the Lele. All aquatic things—fishes, water-animals, and water-plants, as well as amphibians—are associated with the spirits and with fertility. Creatures which have the same outward characteristics as aquatics, but live on the land (the pangolin), or which are essentially land animals but frequent the water (the water chevrotain), are also associated with the spirits. In this context the pangolin's association with fertility becomes clear.

According to the Lele, the pangolin is anomalous in other ways. Unlike other animals, it does not shun men but offers itself patiently to the hunter. If you see a pangolin in the forest, you come up quietly behind it and smack it sharply on the back. It falls off the branch and, instead of scuttling away as other animals would do, it curls into a tightly armoured ball. You wait quietly until it eventually uncurls and pokes its head out, then you strike it dead. Furthermore, the pangolin reproduces itself after the human rather than the fish or lizard pattern, as one might expect from its appearance. Lele say that, like humans, it gives birth to one child at a time. This in itself is sufficiently unusual to mark the pangolin out from the rest of the animal creation and cause it to be treated as a special kind of link between humans and animals.

In this respect the pangolin would seem to stand towards humans as parents of twins stand towards animals. Parents of twins and triplets are, of course, regarded as anomalous humans who produce their young in the manner of animals.

For a human to be classed with animals in any other connexion—because, for instance, of unmannerly behaviour—is reprehensible. But to vie with animals in fertility is good. Men do not beget by their own efforts alone, but because the spirits in the forest consent. The parents of twins are considered to have been specially honoured

¹ Deut. xiv. 7; Lev. xi. 4-5.
1. Pangolin caught near the Lele village of Yenga-Yenga, September 1953.

2. Fishing basket left overnight outside the village.

3. Member of Pangolin Society holding dead pangolin.
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by the spirits. They are treated as diviners and are exempt from the initiation which ordinary men must undergo if they wish to acquire magic powers. Twin children are spoken of as spirits and their parents as Twin Diviners (Bangang bamyayeh). They pay an entrance fee into their own cult group, and learn ‘twin-magic’ for fertility and good hunting.

The most striking proof of the high ritual status enjoyed by parents of twins is that the usual ritual disabilities of women are disregarded in the case of a woman who has borne twins. She attends the conferences on twin-magic on exactly the same footing as the men, performs the rites with them, and at her death is supposed to be buried with all the other diviners. This is quite out of character with the normally subordinate position of women in Lele ritual. Parents of twins are regarded as having been selected by the spirits for a special role, mediating between humans and animals and spirits. Pangolins perform a corresponding role in the animal sphere.

HUMANS, ANIMALS, AND SPIRITS

Lele religion is based on certain assumptions about the interrelation of humans, animals, and spirits. Each has a defined sphere, but there is interaction between them. The whole is regarded as a single system. A major disorder in the human sphere is presumed to disturb the relations which ought to exist between all the parts. Major disorders in the other spheres are not expected to occur.

Animals live their lives, each behaving according to its kind. Their sphere does not impinge on the human sphere. No animal will molest a human, enter a human habitation, or steal chickens and goats, unless made to do so by sorcery. Nor will an animal become a victim to a hunter unless the spirits are willing. For their part, humans cannot expect to intervene in animal affairs, even to sight or pursue, still less to kill an animal, unless their relations with the spirits are harmonious. The approval of the spirits is assured if human relations with each other are peaceful and if ritual is correctly performed. The goodwill of the spirits notwithstanding, the hunter’s success may be spoilt by sorcery.

The hunt is the point at which the three spheres touch. Its significance far surpasses its primary object—the supply of meat. The whole range of human aspirations—for food, fertility, health, and longevity—is controlled by the spirits and may be thwarted by sorcery. If the hunt fails, the Lele fear that their other enterprises also are in danger. Not only do they feel angry at a wasted day and meatless fare, but they feel anxious for the recovery of the sick, for the efficacy of their medicines, for their whole future prosperity.

In the delicate balance between humans, animals, and spirits, certain humans and certain animals occupy key positions of influence. Among humans, the Begetters’ Group honours those who have been blessed with a child. At their initiation rites ribald songs mock the sterile. The Pangolin cult honours those who have been blessed with children of both sexes; the Twin cult honours those who have been blessed with multiple births. The qualification for membership of any of these cults is not something which a man can achieve by his own efforts. He must have been chosen by the spirits for his role as mediator between the human and the supernatural. In theory, the candidates for the Diviners’ Group are also believed to have been made aware of
their vocation in a dream or by spirit-possession, though in practice men are known to fake this qualification. Once initiated these men have access to magical powers which can be used on behalf of their fellows.

In the animal world certain creatures mediate between animals and humans. Among these the pangolin is pre-eminent. It has the character of a denatured fish: a fish-like creature which lives on dry land, which bears its young after the manner of humans, and which does not run away from humans. In order to see the full significance of its fish-like scales, one should know more of the symbolic role of fish for the Lele.

Fishes belong so completely to the watery element that they cannot survive out of it. Bringing fish out of the water and the forest into the village is an act surrounded with precautionary ritual. Women abstain from sexual intercourse before going fishing. Fish and fishing gear, and certain water-plants, cannot be brought into the village on the day they are taken from the water unless ritual is performed. The woman who is carrying the fish sends a child ahead to fetch a live firebrand with which she touches the fish. The other things are left for one night in the grass-land before being taken into the village (see fig. 2).

I might interpret this behaviour by saying that they wish to avoid any confusion of the dry and the watery elements, but this would not be a translation of any Lele explanation. If asked why they do it, they reply: 'To prevent an outbreak of coughing and illness', or, 'Otherwise the furry animals (hutapok) will get in and steal our chickens, and coughing will break out among our children.' But these are merely elliptical references to the communion between spirit, animal, and human spheres. The furry animals which steal chickens and cause illness are not ordinary carnivorous animals, but sorcerers' familiars, whose access to the sphere of living humans is made more difficult if the proper distinctions between human and animal, day and night, water and land, are correctly observed.

In accordance with the symbolism relating fishes with fertility and with spirits, pregnant women and novices for initiation must totally avoid eating fish. Certain fishes are more specially associated with spirits than others, and diviners are supposed to avoid eating them. Fishes do nothing to bridge the gap between human society and the creatures of the forest. Unprepared contact with them is potentially dangerous and is hedged with ritual. People in a marginal ritual condition avoid them altogether. But pangolins, part fish, part animal, friendly to humans, are apt for a mediatory role. This, I suggest, is the context of the underlying assumptions by means of which the Lele cult of pangolins is intelligible to themselves. This is why killing and eating pangolins, with proper ritual observances, are believed to bring animals in droves to the hunter's arrows and babies to women.

**Pangolin Ritual**

In a village of forty men and fifty women, all the adult male pagans save one were Begetters, sixteen were initiated Diviners, three men and their wives were Twin Parents, four men were Pangolin initiates. I was present and able to record the results of a number of hunts in the dry season of 1953.

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1 I have given an outline of the most important of these distinctions as they appear in ritual, in 'The Lele of the Kasai', in *African Worlds*, ed. Daryll Forde, 1954.
All the villages to the north, and many to the south of my village had adopted a new anti-sorcery cult, Kabengabenga, which was sweeping across the whole Kasai district. It promised hunting success, health, and long life to its initiates by threatening automatic death to anyone who attempted sorcery after initiation. Men and women in Kabengabenga villages brought pressure to bear on their kinsmen in other villages to follow their example and rid themselves of sorcery, and those who hesitated were accused by the initiates of culpable neglect if any of their kinsmen fell ill or died. Deaths in Kabengabenga villages were attributed to the boomerang action of the cult magic, so that anyone who died was held to be convicted of attempted sorcery. The mission and the Administration had taken strong action to stop the spread of the Kabengabenga cult, and in our own village the young Christians threatened to run away if the village were initiated.

Tension was running high in the village. Hunting failures, personal or communal, were attributed to sorcery; so also was sickness. Scarcely a night passed without someone shouting warnings to unnamed sorcerers to desist, to leave the sick to recover, to leave the hunter in peace to kill his quarry. They were begged to consider the reputation of the village in the eyes of other villages. One old man declared: ‘The villages to the north and the villages to the south have taken Kabengabenga. They are all watching us. They used to say: “The men of Lubello kill quantities of game, without taking Kabengabenga.” Now we go out hunting, and we come back empty-handed. That is a disgrace. They watch us and say we have sorcerers in our midst.’

Alternative explanations for misfortunes were offered. The senior Pangolin man said that after a strange woman had entered the village recently, it was discovered that she had borne twins; no twin-rites had been performed to prevent her entry from spoiling the village; the twin-parents should now perform rites and send the village on a hunt that would make good the breach of the twin-ritual.

On 6 August the twin-parents duly consulted together. A twin-parent is supposed to be an ‘owner’ of the village (muna bola) in the sense that his or her anger would render hunting fruitless unless a rite of blessing were performed. One of them, therefore, drew attention to her ulcerated leg, and protested that, in spite of the callous disregard of others in the village, she held no grudge against them for their neglect. If she had been heard to complain, it was in pain, not in anger. She performed the ritual of blessing. Instructions were given for a hunt for the next day.

7 August. The hunt was moderately successful; although four duikers escaped, two small ‘blue duikers’, one water chevrotain, and one young bay duiker were killed. The success was attributed to the performance of the twin-ritual.

There was no more communal hunting until 12 August. Individual hunters complained of their lack of success, and considered the village to be ‘bad’. The senior official diviner of the village, the ilumbi, was informally approached and asked to take up his magic for the next hunt. It required some courage and tact to ask him to do this, as he was widely thought to be the sorcerer responsible for the bad condition of the village. On the eve of the hunt, he ordered those who had quarrelled to pay fines, and announced that he would do magic. Before the hunt one of the Pangolin men spoke a blessing, in case his grief at the obstinate and rude behaviour of the young Christians should spoil the hunt. They drew three covers, saw little game, killed only one adult and one young ‘blue duiker’—a quite negligible bag. The
ILUMBI felt discredited. He announced that the animals which he had seen by divination had been escaping behind the hunters; next time he would do different magic.

13 August. In the dawn an old man got up and harangued the sorcerers, asking what they ate if they didn’t like animal meat? Dogs? People? What? He warned them that he did not consent to the illness of children in the village.

During the day it transpired that the twin-ritual was still outstanding. The village had been tricked into believing that the successful hunt on 7 August had been the result of twin-rituals whereas, in fact, the junior ilumbi, himself a twin-parent, had persuaded the others to let him try a ‘spirit magic’ which had been highly successful a month earlier. Everyone was angry at the deception. The senior Pangolin man, who had originally diagnosed that a breach of twin-ritual had ‘spoil the village’, declared that if only the twin-parents had been frank, the diviners themselves would have stepped in to perform the necessary twin-rites. Twins (mayehe) and spirits (mingehe) are all the same, he said, and initiated diviners do not need to beget twins in order to do twin-rites. Angriest of all was the senior ilumbi, hurt in his pride of magic, who now saw the reason for the failure of the hunt he had arranged on 12 August. More serious than being made to look a fool, he had looked like a sorcerer chasing away the game. In the next village the ilumbi had been hounded out for failure to produce game, and in the old days he would have been made to take the poison ordeal. He was obliged to dissemble his anger, as the village could be ‘spoit’ by the ill will of any of its ritual officers.

In the next week men refused to go on a communal hunt as the village seemed obviously ‘bad’, i.e. infected with sorcery. Individual hunters had some success: a duiker was caught in a trap, a man chanced on a wild sow just after she had farrowed and easily shot her and killed her young; and a large harnessed bush-buck was shot. In spite of these successes, there was an atmosphere of frustration and acrimony in the village.

On 24 and 27 August the women went on two long fishing expeditions. While they were away there was little food, and work in the village just ticked over till their return. On 28th two pangolins were killed. When the women came back the atmosphere in the village had changed overnight to one of general rejoicing. The village evidently was felt to be vindicated in the eyes of its Kabengabenga critics. A neighbouring village asked to be allowed to send a candidate for initiation into the Pangolin cult. Among the ritual specialists annoyance about the overdue twin-rite still rankled, but the Pangolin rites had to take precedence now.

The junior Pangolin man announced on behalf of the initiates that the village was ‘tied’ (kanda), that is, that sexual intercourse was banned until after the eating of the pangolin and the shedding of animal blood in the hunt that should follow the feast. Etiquette appropriate to the presence of a chief in the village was to be observed. He used the words: ‘Kum ma wa: The master is dead. Let no one fight.’ Kum can be translated as master or chief. Unfortunately a quarrel between children dancing broke out, adults took sides, and blows were struck. A fine had to be paid to the Pangolin group for this breach of ritual peace.

29 August. A meeting was called. The village was in a ferment because a man had been caught seducing the wife of the senior Pangolin man. The latter refused to carry on with the Pangolin initiation and feast.
30 August. There was a spate of early-morning speeches. The senior Pangolin man was reproached for turning household affairs into village affairs, and for making the village suffer for his private wrong. Someone pointed out that if the pangolins were left to rot, the people of the next village, who wanted their candidate vested with Pangolin power, would think we had refused to eat the pangolin to spite them. All those who had quarrelled were roundly taken to task in public speeches. All were convinced that to go hunting while the senior Pangolin man was feeling angry would be useless.

31 August. Village opinion, originally sympathetic to the senior Pangolin man, now turned against him. He was insisting that full adultery damages should be paid before he proceeded with the Pangolin rites. There was anxiety lest the pangolins should go bad; they had already been dead five days. If they were to go bad without being eaten with proper ritual, the whole village would go ‘hard’ and suffer for a long time, until Pangolin magic had been done again. Repeated injunctions were made to keep the peace until the pangolin hunt. Two more cases of fighting occurred.

2 September. Fines for fighting were all paid up, and the major part of the adultery damages had been given. Ritual was performed to make the way clear for hunting the next day. The two ilumbi, the four Pangolin men, and the twin-parents met and agreed to do two rites: twin-ritual and Pangolin ritual, for the hunt.

3 September. Before the hunt, two twin-parents aired their grievances; one on account of her ulcerated leg, which she felt no one took trouble to diagnose and cure; the other complained that her husband had abandoned her for a new young wife. Her husband’s colleagues replied for him that it was nonsense to suppose that a man would leave a woman through whom he had attained three of God’s callings or vocations (mapok manjambi). He was, through her, an initiate of the Begetters, of Twins and of the Pangolin. She was reminded of the danger to the village if a woman who was in these three senses one of its ‘owners’ were allowed to nurse her anger.

The hunt that followed this concerted ritual effort was a failure. Seven animals in all were seen, but only two small duikers were killed. There was great anger and agreement that the village was bad. However, blood had been shed and the Pangolin feast could proceed. After the Pangolin rites had been performed, people assured each other, we should all see great quantities of game being brought back. The pangolin would draw animals to the village. The next day was fixed for the feast.

That very afternoon a third pangolin was killed. There was great satisfaction, ‘Just as we were saying “Tomorrow we shall eat pangolin, and invest new members” . . . behold, another pangolin comes into the village!’ They spoke as if the pangolin had died voluntarily, as if it had elected to be the object of Pangolin ritual and to offer itself for the feast of initiates; as if it had honoured this village by choosing it.

At night the junior Pangolin man announced that no one was to fight, above all no one was to fight secretly. ‘If you must fight, do it openly and pay up. He who fights tonight, let him be rich. The fine will be twenty raffia cloths.’

5 September. The Pangolin feast and initiation rite were eventually held. I was unfortunately unable to see the rites. I was told that emphasis was laid on the chiefship of the pangolin. We call him kum, they said, because he makes women conceive. They expressed shame and embarrassment at having eaten a kum. No one is allowed to see the pangolins being roasted over the fire. The tongues, necks, ribs, and
stomachs were not eaten, but buried under a palm-tree whose wine thenceforth becomes the sole prerogative of the Begetters. Apparently the new initiate was made to eat some of the flesh of the first two pangolins which were in process of decay; the more rotten parts, together with the scales and bones, were given to the dogs. The senior initiates ate the flesh of the more recently killed animal. All were confident that the hunt on the following day would be successful.

6 September. The hunt went off in good heart, twenty men and eight dogs. It was an abject failure. Powerful sorcery was evidently at work, since all ritual had been duly performed. People discussed the possible significance of a leopard that had been heard to bark in the precincts of the village that night, and of leopard tracks that had been seen on the way to the hunt. The leopard is one of the forms which the ilumbi is supposed to be able to take, and the ilumbi was suspected of having gone ahead of the hunters in leopard's guise, and scared off the game. The ilumbi himself, realizing that suspicions of sorcery were again directed at him, suggested that he would gladly go with the rest of the village to take Kabengabenga magic, if only the Christians did not hold such strong objections. He evidently saw it as a means of clearing his own name. In his youth he had twice taken the poison ordeal and confounded his accusers. He also suggested to me privately that he might leave the village and live elsewhere, as his enemies had never forgiven him for the disputes over women in which he had been embroiled.

In the meanwhile, the village was still 'tied': the ban on sexual intercourse had not been lifted since 28 August, and could not be until blood had been shed in a hunt following the feast of Pangolin initiates.

9 September. A hunt took place in which one small duiker was killed. The ritual requirement was fulfilled, and the ban on sexual intercourse was lifted, but from every other point of view it was felt to have been a failure.

Accuracy of Lele Observation of Animals

Writing strictly from the point of view of religious symbolism it is not relevant to ask how accurate is Lele observation of animal behaviour. A symbol based on mistaken information can be fully effective as a symbol, so long as the fable in question is well known. The dove, it would seem, can be one of the most relentlessly savage of birds. The pelican does not nourish its young from its own living flesh. Yet the one bird has provided a symbol of peace, and the other of maternal devotion, for centuries.

However, it would be interesting to know whether the symbolism described above is based on fables or not. I must confess that I was able only with great difficulty to identify most of the animals. Many of the rarer ones I never saw alive or dead and in any case should not have been able to recognize them at sight. I was fortunate in securing the kind collaboration of Monsieur A. J. Jobaert, Warden of the Muene Ditu Game Reserve, who knew the Kasai and several of the local languages well. By sending him the native names in two local languages, together with a description, I obtained translations into French, Latin, and English, and these names were checked again by Mr. R. B. Freeman, the Reader in Taxonomy at University College, London. My remarks are based on identification obtained in this roundabout and

\[1\] Lorenz, *King Solomon's Ring*.
unreliable way. The point I thought it most important to check was whether the Lele are right in considering the breeding habits of pangolins anomalous: first, do pangolins give birth to their young one at a time? Second, how unusual is this among the smaller mammals? In pursuing this inquiry I was interested to find how little scientifically tested knowledge there is concerning the manner of reproduction of mammals, common and uncommon. Such information as is available serves to justify the Lele in both these views.1

One interesting point that I am still unable to elucidate is the principle on which the Lele discriminate between the small pangolin \(\textit{manis tricuspis}\) which they call \textit{luwawa}, and the giant pangolin \(\textit{manis gigantea}\) which they call \textit{yolabondu}, making a major cult of the first but not of the second. Zoologists may be able to give information about the distribution and habits of the two species which may throw light on the question. It may require an historical solution, since pangolin cults are found in other parts of the Congo.2

\[\text{Résumé}\]

\textbf{LES ANIMAUX DANS LE SYMBOLISME RELIGIEUX DES LELE}

La vie religieuse chez les Lele est organisée au moyen de divers groupes cultuels, et l'admission à ces groupes s'effectue par l'initiation ou par des moyens surnaturels. Les buts primaires de tous ces cultes sont la fécondité et le succès dans la chasse. Les membres du groupe des procréateurs, qui ont procréé des enfants des deux sexes, sont éligibles pour admission au culte du pangolin, le seul où l'animal soit l'objet du culte. Dans d'autres cultes, des parties de certains animaux sont réservées aux initiés ou, dans certains cas, des parties de certains animaux (ou même l'animal tout entier) leur sont défendues. Bien que des animaux différents soient associés par tradition avec les divers cultes, les Lele offrent très peu d'explications du symbolisme impliqué. Il est possible, néanmoins, d'envisager leurs idées dans un cadre compréhensif de suppositions concernant les animaux et les êtres humains et de déceler les divers groupes cultuels comme des développements complémentaires d'un seul thème fondamental. Les Lele reconnaissent des distinctions bien définies entre les êtres humains et les animaux, dont la première, celle de la conduite contrôlée, témoigne de la supériorité de l'humanité. Les animaux, cependant, possèdent un avantage sur les humains du fait de leur fécondité immense, et l'incantation employée dans les rites de fécondité fait allusion à cette caractéristique. La troisième caractéristique déterminative des animaux est leur acceptation de leur domaine dans l'ordre naturel. Ceux qui s'écartent du comportement typiquement animal sont considérés comme étant en partie humains, et des espèces toutes entières, qui sont éloignées d'un tel comportement, sont reconnues, bien que certaines d'entre elles ne puissent pas être classées par les moyens habituels. Certains animaux, tels que les polatouches et les tortues, sont évités, surtout par les femmes enceintes, parce qu'ils leur semblent anormaux; d'autres sont considérés comme répugnants, ou sont parmi les animaux associés avec les esprits. Les créatures aquatiques, telles que les crocodiles, appartiennent à cette dernière catégorie, mais il n'est pas évident dans quel sens quelques animaux tellement différents, qui sont ainsi classés, sont en effet des esprits. En général, on fuit les créatures qui se comportent d'une façon bizarre ou singulière, leur bizarrerie étant considérée comme une raison suffisante pour cette interdiction. Il est évident, d'après leur façon d'en faire la description, que le pangolin, avec son corps écailleux qui ressemble à celui d'un poisson, sa queue et ses quatre jambes, est considéré par les Lele comme étant anormal et le fait de

2 D. Biebuyck, \textquote{Répartitions et droits du Pangolin chez les Balega}, \textit{Zaire}, vii, 9 Nov. 1953.
mettre bas ses petits un à la fois, comme les êtres humains, est suffisamment exceptionnel pour le faire distinguer des autres animaux. Le rapport entre le pangolin et la fécondité n’est pas nettement exprimé, mais la connexion symbolique entre l’eau et la fécondité fournit peut-être un indice, car le pangolin possède certaines des caractéristiques des animaux aquatiques. Le pangolin paraît se trouver dans la même situation envers les êtres humains que les parents de jumeaux envers les animaux, car malgré le fait qu’il est reprehensible d’être classé avec les animaux sous tout autre rapport, il est louable d’être leurs rivaux en fécondité, et les parents de jumeaux sont considérés comme ayant été choisis spécialement par les esprits pour agir en médiateurs entre les humains, les animaux et les esprits. La chasse est l’endroit où les trois domaines se rencontrent et elle a une grande signification dans la vie religieuse des Lele. Si la chasse n’est pas fructueuse, on croit que les autres entreprises contrôlées par les esprits pourraient, également, échouer ou pourraient être contrariées par la sorcellerie. Le rôle du pangolin, en tant que médiateur entre les domaines humain et animal, se manifeste dans la description de diverses chasses véritables, car l’on croit que tuer et manger cette créature avec les observances rituelles appropriées apporte des animaux au chasseur et des enfants aux femmes.