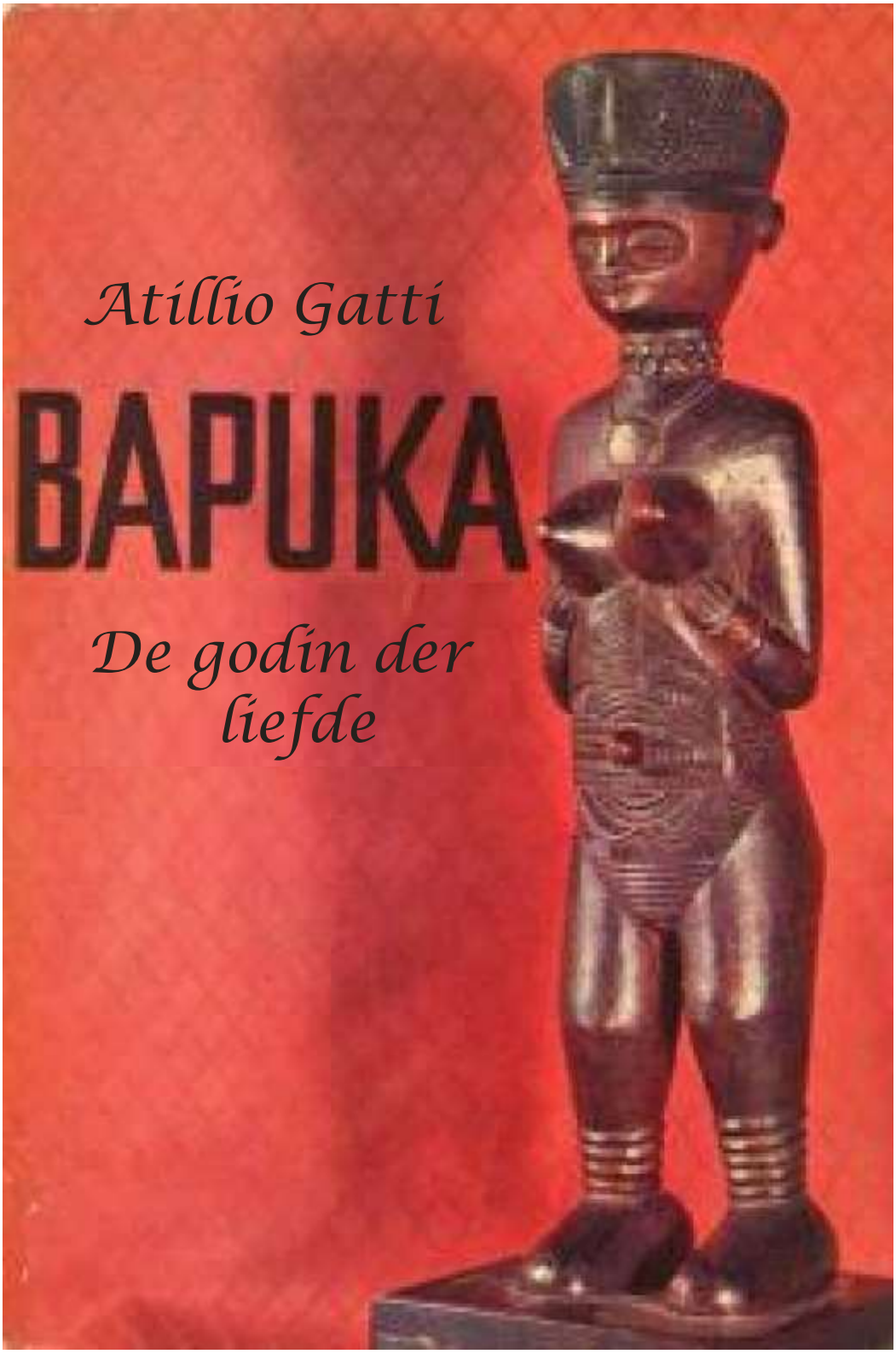

GATTI, ATTILIO: - Bapuka. Zus. 6 Bde. Zürich, Orell Füssli, 1949, 32 Foto op 10 Tafeln /152 S., The book was summarized and explained below,

Thanks to the publisher Orell Füssli who allowed us the publication of the image from the book.

Contents

1. Preface

Attilio Gatti (1896-1969) was an Italian-born explorer, author and compiler of documentaries, who traveled extensively through Africa in the first half of the 20th century. A member of the Royal Italian Society for Geography and Anthropology, he was one of the last great explorers of this continent. He led thirteen expeditions to Africa and did so from 1922 to 1948.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvPff7Zg9Lc

On YouTube, one can watch some of the films he made on his travels. In the fifties, when the small screen in living rooms was still a rarity, his films about the tribes and the rich flora and fauna of this continent, could still count on a great interest.

Gatti's wife Ellen accompanied him from his eighth expedition. The tenth expedition (1938-1940) led him through Belgian Congo, and the eleventh expedition (1947-1948) to the Rwenzori Mountains on the border of Uganda. It must have been an impressive sight for most of the natives, who had never seen a car, when suddenly in their village a caravan arrived, consisting of a few passenger cars, large caravans and trucks, which moments later set up camp in an open area.

Commander Gatti became one of the first Europeans to see the then legendary okapi and also the virtually unknown bongo, a brown lyre-horned antelope with white stripes, and was able to capture some to donate to a zoo. He was known to Africans as "Bwana Makubwa," "great chief," and knew the Pygmy peoples, the Watussi and the Masai tribe of the Congo very well.

In his travels he met, among others, Twadekili, a clairvoyant and magically gifted shaman, who shared her hut and her life with her partner... a giant python. Just as plant energies can heal some diseases, so too, and all the more strongly, can animal energies, provided one knows how to control them.

Gatti, who had previously been skeptical, repeatedly witnessed magical rituals which we hardly think possible today and which he faithfully recorded with the eye and pen of a skeptical but trained observer. They are - still - rare and valuable testimonies of lost, yet so rich cultures, which until then had defied the centuries.

Gatti wrote many articles and books about the indigenous peoples south of the equator, often knew their language and had very good contacts with, among others, local chiefs and magicians. He filmed African life and recorded it in a number of films and in more than 53,000 photographs. His testimonies contain valuable scientific and anthropological material about

many cultures in their original, still unspoiled environment. These are cultures which, after contact with Western European and North American civilization, have all but disappeared.

We have translated his fascinating book entitled 'Bapuka' from the German, abridged it and retold it in our own words, adding a brief explanation here and there. Gatti, who was in the U.S. at the time, wrote it in English. Curious that it was never published in that language. Possibly such experiences and descriptions are 'too paranormal' and too suspicious for the 'enlightened' American citizen.

2. Bapuka, the goddess of love.

The voyage with the Kigoma

In November 1928, Colonel Attilio Gatti and his traveling companions were on board the "Kigoma," an old steamboat still propelled by wheels that had once sailed on the Mississippi. In 1907 it was bought second-hand by a Belgian company, broken up and shipped across the Atlantic to Matadi in the Belgian Congo. Then these parts were transported across the crystal mountains and reassembled in the shipyards of Leopoldville. With this, the Kigoma had become the proud flagship of the Congolese fleet and provided a number of connections on the Congo River.

The ship had four decks. The lowest deck was reserved for passengers traveling in 3rd class, on the deck just above it passengers traveling in second class had some more comfort, and the deck above it was reserved exclusively for first class passengers. The fourth deck was much shorter and built on the foreship. There lived the Belgian captain, a broad-shouldered Fleming, with his native wife. From there he followed the ship's course on his many charts, wrestled with an endless array of official documents, and also watched to see that his native helmsman did his job properly.

It was still early in the afternoon. The tropical sun was burning mercilessly. Gatti found himself on the deck of the first class, wondering if he wouldn't be much better off taking his usual nap in his cabin, instead of walking around here with his camera, hoping to get some nice shots of the many crocodiles and hippos sliding down the sandbanks into the water.

"Parle, sale cochon!"

Suddenly his attention was drawn to some tumult coming from the lowest deck, that of the third-class travelers. There were too many of them in too small a space. A small, old white man there seemed to be particularly angry with one of his two boys. Gatti recalled that the day before, this man had sailed to the Kigoma by rowboat from a tributary with a lot of luggage, including wooden crates that were now piled up on the stern.

This little roaring man seemed to have lost all self-control. One could hear him cursing and ranting. What had happened? Some of the crates had been knocked over by the rocking of the boat, the lids of some of them had come off, and to the general mirth of the passengers a number of beer bottles were rolling back and forth on the ship, while his boys were trying to prevent them from rolling into the water. That, however, was not how the man understood it. He was boiling with rage and scolded both his boys: "If you drop even one bottle into the water, I'll break your bones".

Reinforcing his words, he pulled out a whip. It was heard to crack on the naked back of one of the boys, followed by a soft but repulsive groan. Mercilessly, the flogging continued for a while. Then, hoarse with rage, he exclaimed: "Parle, sale cochon!"

All the travelers were deeply shocked. The tumult had also attracted the attention of the captain. He had suddenly appeared on the lower deck, grabbed the old man by the collar and told him threateningly that he had to behave himself, that he had to go to his cabin immediately and stay there until he got permission to leave. This, however, was not at all to the liking of this old Frenchman. "Parle, sale cochon!" he called again to one of his boys. And again the whip cracked on the boy's naked back, again a soft groan sounded. This time it was too much for the poor boy.

"Captain! Man overboard!"

Completely naked and covered in sweat and blood, he ran to the edge of the boat and jumped into the river, which was swarming with crocodiles. Gatti, still holding his camera, reflexively pressed the shutter of his camera, shouted as loud as he could, "Captain! Man overboard!" and ran at lightning speed to his cabin from which he reappeared a few seconds later, his rifle ready to fire.

He saw the poor black boy desperately fighting the current, but also saw how already two crocodiles were swimming towards the boy. Without hesitation, Gatti fired twice at one animal, quickly reloaded his gun and then killed the other. Again he called out to the captain, "Stop the Kigoma, the current is too strong for the boy." The boat came to a stop. A native man on the lower deck suddenly gave an order and some natives jumped into the water without hesitation and swam to where the boy's bald head had last been seen. Just in time they were able to grab him and a little later the half unconscious body, bleeding from chest and back, was hoisted aboard.

A little further into the water, a fierce fight ensued moments later. Deprived of their human prey, other crocodiles were already beginning to devour their two slain counterparts in violent, floundering and spinning movements

Gatti rescues Skaimunga

The black boy recovered somewhat from his desperate leap into the water. When he saw Gatti afterwards, he greeted respectfully. He said his name was Skaimunga, a rather unusual name for someone traveling around the Congo. His gratitude to Gatti was particularly great. Yes, he said, his life now belonged to his white savior, and he could dispose of it as he saw fit, Skaimunga added. He even said that he was very eager to work for the white man, from the moment his debt to his current boss, the Frenchman, would be paid in full.

Gatti asked Skaimunga how it could be that he was in debt to his employer, after all he was the one who worked for the old man and therefore had to earn a wage after all. Skaimunga owed him the answer to this. He had been working for the Frenchman for years and, he told him, had never received a real wage, real money, but only some worthless trinkets, now and then a bit of tobacco, now a blanket, then a cheap shirt or a pair of old shorts. Moreover, the man threatened to hand Skaimunga over to the police if they left him before all his debts were paid. In short, it soon became clear to everyone that the Frenchman was using and abusing the two boys as slaves.

Gatti remained particularly fascinated by this young boy's honest answers. Who was this Skaimunga anyway? Where did he come from? Why did he look so different, with his shaved skull, from any other resident of the Belgian Congo known to him? And what did those curious, strange tattoos on his body mean? How did such a righteous boy end up as a slave with such a brutal boss? When Gatti asked the boy for more explanations, the boy repeatedly replied, "I don't know! I just don't know!" Gatti thought he was about 25 years old. Skaimunga himself did not know, nor did he know where he was born, nor who his parents were, nor what tribe he belonged to. Nor did he know who had put those tattoos on his body or what they meant. He did not know when and how he came to be employed by his so brutal master....

Nor did he understand why his master, who was regularly drunk, would call out to him: "Parle, sale cochon! What did he want to find out from him? And why did the man beat him so cruelly? "Tell me where I can find the gold, silver and diamonds of your tribe. Speak, filthy pig!" roared the Frenchman then. And at this he struck Skaimunga with the whip. But what could the young black answer? Ivory, he knew, but gold, silver, diamonds, emeralds? What was that? Convinced that Skaimunga would belong to one rich tribe or another but deliberately refusing to say so, and fearing that other prospectors would suspect this as well, the Frenchman had perhaps shaved him bald for this reason. For the distinctive way in which this boy wore his hair tresses might give others away as to where he belonged somewhere. "But," Gatti asked Skaimunga, "can't you at least tell me where your father's land is? And how you left it?"

In response to Gatti's insistence that he tell something about his tribe's home town, Skaimunga simply replied, "That is where I was born," pointing to the southwest, "Far, far away from here. All I vaguely remember is the lamentations of many women, angry men in long white clothes who had come to our village, the rattling of chains, the taste of bitter tears. They killed my mother when I was very small. I still remember her cold and stiff body. The rough

hand that pulled me from her arms and beat me until I was unconscious. I swear that this is the truth, I swear by the holy name of Bapuka."

"Bapuka." The strange word had been dropped. That name said nothing to Gatti, utterly nothing. But he became more and more fascinated by this quite remarkable boy.

All the blessings of Bapuka

When the captain was considering handing the whole matter over to the Leopoldville police, Gatti, in a sudden inspiration, asked if he himself could take Skaimunga under his wing. The captain thought for a moment and replied that the boy would have to want to do that himself, and then Gatti would have to come to an arrangement with the Frenchman. Skaimunga could not believe his ears. Of course he wanted nothing more than that. Of course he wanted to work for his savior. And as for the debt to his employer, it amounted to at most a single dollar. Gatti did not hesitate for a moment and placed this money in the hands of the Frenchman. As if the latter did not understand what was happening, he tore the banknote into pieces, threw it on the ground and spat on it, without saying another word. Gatti promised Skaimunga that he would buy blankets and decent clothes at the first opportunity and ordered the ship's cook to prepare a good meal for his protégé. Finally, he advised the boy to just forget about that bad man and everything he had done and take a good rest for once. "I will rest and forget," Skaimunga agreed. "Then I will become strong again and I will gladly work for you. For you are not only my good master. But with what you have done, you have also been like a father to me, and may all the blessings of Bapuka accompany you."

"Bapuka," Gatti repeated to himself. "Bapuka" It was the second time Skaimunga had let that name slip by. Maybe it's about a spirit or some kind of god of the forest, he thought. The siren of the Kigoma bellowed three times. The ship set in motion again.

Two days later, the Kigoma docked at Leopoldville. For Gatti and his helpers it was a busy time. All his equipment had to be unloaded, the administration with the authorities had to be arranged, and he was looking back for his twenty helpers, who had accompanied him on his earlier trips and whom he hoped to recruit again here. After a few more hectic days, he had distributed to each of his helpers and his boys their clothes and blankets and explained to them what their task would be throughout the expedition to the towns of Chitadi, Kanda, Bukama, Elizabethville and finally to the Rhodezian border.

The authorities had told Gatti that the road was somewhat difficult to travel, but it soon became apparent that some parts of that road simply did not exist, and they had to guide their caravan of cars between steep mountains, through streams - bridges simply were not there - through pristine jungle and treacherous areas of sand, rocks and mud. The suspensions of the many heavily loaded cars suffered greatly, broke down here and there and had to be replaced, cars got stuck and had to be pulled out. Trucks sank into the mud and had to be completely unloaded before they could be pushed back onto safe ground. "When we finally reached Sakania, the border between the southernmost province of Belgian Congo and the northernmost province of Northern Rhodesia" (note: present-day Zambia), Gatti recounts, "I was a terribly tired wreck. His four companions and the Africans were in no better shape. Therefore, the moment they had brought all our equipment through customs, he decided to set up camp near

the town of Ndola. Once there, they stayed for about ten days to rest before starting their new safari.

And there he had time to reflect on Skaimunga. The assignment Gatti had given him, as soon as they left Leopoldville, was to provide the entire camp with plenty of fresh meat. For someone so familiar with nature, this seemed to him a better task than putting Skaimunga to work in some tent. And he had shown that he was particularly dutiful, completely reliable, and more than up to the task. Not only did he manage to provide the whole camp with enough meat, an antelope, a few gazelles or a fat warthog, and this in places where a normal person thinks he won't find any game at all, but he also found time to help build bridges, push cars that were stuck and unload or load trucks.

Bapuka helps the righteous man

One day, when Gatti had just awakened from his afternoon nap, Skaimunga suddenly stood before him with three beautiful guinea fowl in each hand. "Those are special for my father and his white friends" he said. He looked exhausted and covered in mud, sweat and scratches. But his eyes shone like those of a faithful dog who had just accomplished something of which his master was proud. Gatti estimated that he had traveled a longer distance to get these guinea fowl than the entire convoy could travel in a full day, for in the region they were in, there was hardly any game to be seen. Skaimunga involuntarily made a particularly great impression on Gatti. He had hardly any clothing, was primitive, poor and apparently very alone in the world, mag repeatedly expressed an unusual, sincere and deep appreciation for his new employer. "Nothing I can do for my father is too much," he replied with his usual modesty "and Bapuka always helps the righteous man who has faith in her." There that so mysterious name fell again, now for the third time.

Gatti thought for a moment, the phrase "the righteous man" sounding somewhat familiar to him after all. And then, as if by sudden inspiration, he said: "Skaimunga, the tribe of the Baila and the Mashukolumbwe, near the place where the Kafue flows into the Zambezi River, are the only ones who call themselves 'the just men'. They worship a goddess they call Bapugha. Could it be that your Bapuka is the same? Perhaps then you are also a Baila or a Mashukolumbwe?" Maybe in a few days we will be in Kafue and you will finally get where you really belong and we can leave you there.

But that was not at all to Skaimunga's liking. He continued to stare silently ahead for some time, as if in his deepest being he was exploring. Then he said slowly and measuredly, "No, Musungu, I do not know the Bbaila, nor the Mashukolumbwe. And the goddess who speaks to me is not that of the Bapugha or the Baila. Her name is Bapuka. I know that for sure. My mother often spoke of her when I was a small child. At this, he would point in the direction of the setting sun and say decidedly, yet with a certain nostalgia, "There, far away, that is where I was born."

So eager was Gatti to help him, but he didn't know how. Then he asked, "Perhaps you would prefer to go on alone to find the place where you were born? If you really want to, I will give you food and money, along with a letter for all the white musungus you will meet on your way, asking them to help you." "No, Musungu," Skaimunga replied in a confident tone. "Bapuka wanted your path to cross mine. She told me that we must go a long way together.

Only when she says our paths should separate again, only then should we leave each other". "Then how does she speak to you?" urged Gatti. "In my dreams" he replied somewhat coyly, as if suspecting some disbelief on Gatti's part. He waited a moment and then continued somewhat hesitantly, "it is difficult to talk about such things with white musungus."

When Gatti rejoined his staff a little later, he brought up the topic again. "Skaimunga always points south," he said; "but on the map there only shows a big white spot. It is an as yet unknown area. Natives say there is nothing there. There are only dangerous and impenetrable swamps that certainly extend to the border with Portuguese Angola, and perhaps further too. Everyone who ventured there has had to return, and a number of others have never been heard from again. Nobody knows what happened to them".

A new itinerary

The whole subject continued to haunt Gatti. He thought about it, lay awake, and discussed the matter with his associates again and again. They finally decided to send the whole caravan, contrary to their earlier plans, in a southerly direction, through a piece of unknown territory, and then via the Transvaal and Swaziland, finally to reach Natal. Not an easy decision: how do you get through a swampy area with no roads, with a heavily laden caravan and camping cars, to then continue the journey through the inhospitable Kawandi and Mankoya plateaus of Barotseland, to the lowlands of the Zambesi River. There they aimed to reach the town of Lealui. It was the official residence of Yeta III, then king of the Barotse. Gatti had already met him on a previous trip. And Gatti thought that it was the only man who might be able to help them on their further journey of discovery.

He further hoped that Skaimunga would be very pleased with the change of itinerary. But that did not seem to be the case at all. In fact, it seemed that Skaimunga was trying to avoid Gatti. Perhaps he was afraid he would be asked too many and too difficult questions, just as he had not understood those hated questions from the little Frenchman about emeralds and diamonds. Gatti decided to leave Skaimunga alone for a while. This boy was doing an excellent job, by the way. As soon as the caravan had stopped somewhere, he was seen leaving with his spear, bow and arrows in hand. Not much later he returned, laden with game for the entire camp.

The journey continued towards Laelui, the native capital of Barotseland. It was not easy. The low, more or less flat ground of the Barotsse valley was almost completely flooded. It became a laborious search how to lead the trucks along and even through the many deep puddles. Regularly a truck got stuck, so that another truck had to pull it afloat again, if it did not get into trouble itself. During the first day on the flooded plain, the caravan covered a distance of only 22 km in 14 hours. On the second day, they only covered a pitiful 9.5 km. Finally, they managed to reach the village of Lealui. There they were hospitably received by King Yeta and some of his courtiers and sorcerers. Hundreds of warriors came out of their huts and gathered around the travelers, raising their spears high to welcome them.

One imagines it, a number of "walking huts," a motor caravan in 1928, suddenly showing up in these desolate places for a people who hardly knew of the existence of a car. It must have been particularly impressive.

However, the cheerful welcome quickly turned to surprise and even charged silence when Gatti asked for their help to sail down the Zambezi River with their canoes and rowers. Gatti wanted to reach the confluence of the Zambesi and the Lungwebumgu and then sail up the Lutembwe through the many and dangerous swamps.

He tried to relax the atmosphere by giving the king and his elders some gifts, making it clear that the king received them entirely selflessly and that he did not have to give anything in return.

Yeta responded with restrained gratitude. He then said that his tribe wanted to honor all his visitors with a big dance that same evening, and as soon as it stopped raining. Immediately afterwards, he also gave some of his staff a command in a foreign language, whereupon they immediately removed themselves. Gatti wondered what that might mean. A little later he gave his staff the necessary directives to park the vehicles neatly, set up camp and straighten out the tents. Completely by chance, he saw that two large boats - they seemed to him to be state boats - were leaving at top speed from the foot of the hill in a southeasterly direction. "Where are those canoes going?" he asked the king. "And what's the hurry?" Yeti, however, did not wish to answer this.

That evening when it had stopped raining, the tribe performed the promised welcome dance and another exchange of elaborate courtesies and gifts followed. The king's gifts included a couple of giggling young women who wanted to be of service, but were kindly refused by Gatti. They were also given firewood, milk, goats and chickens, which were accepted with thanks. When the festivities ended, Gatti did not yet know why the two boats had gone out. That became particularly clear to him late in the evening, however, because suddenly he heard someone coming up behind him, saying in English and in a cultured British voice, "We want you to refrain from traveling through the great swamps."

Now it was clear to Gatti where Yeta had sent the two canoes in such a hurry, to Mongu. The canoes had traveled a distance of seven miles across the flooded plains to get the only man who could persuade him to abandon their travel plans: the provincial commissioner of

Barotseland. "In the past two years," he began, "seven white men have gone into the swamps to dig for mineral resources, hunt or make trade deals with the natives. A few weeks later they were back there: sick. One by one they died of a fever unknown to us. None of our doctors could cure them. Others also went in that direction, but they never returned and no one ever heard from them again. That is why we decided to close this area to whites.

Up to Semusha , no further!

This was obviously difficult for Gatti and his team to hear. Were he and his team not explorers then? Did he not have the best suited equipment and the best educated whites for this purpose? Surely there was also a doctor in his group? And getting the opportunity to draw a white spot on the map was an important goal of the trip. Gatti suggested that he sign a statement absolving the provincial commissioner of all responsibility in advance and the government of all blame in case something happened to Gatti and his team. The commissioner thought for a moment. He also thought that there was something to be said for Gatti's arguments, but certainly did not want to get them killed. Finally, he said, "If you promise not to go beyond Semusha, I will allow you and the rowers you need to go as far as that. Then I will even give you all the help you need."

To Gatti, that proposal seemed better than nothing at all, and so he accepted the offer. "You have our word that we will not go beyond Semusha," he promised. "Not as long as you hold this position," he added gently. With this last quip, he wanted to hide his disappointment somewhat. "I will hold you to your promise," the commissioner replied, "but know that I will hold this position for several more years." "I will send you my helpers tonight," he concluded, "with the same canoe that is now taking me back to Mongu."

Gatti thought about what was possible, who would go with the canoes and who would stay in the camp. It was clear that the journey was not doable with the cars. The vehicles had already suffered so much in the past few days on the route, which was so difficult, that a lot of revision and repairs were needed. He assumed that this would easily take two weeks before everything was back in order. Also, so much material had already been collected on the journey that they did not want to run the risk of damaging much of their already collected material due to the high humidity that prevailed in the marshes. Among other things, there were the many films that had recorded the lives of many tribes, and the more than ten thousand negatives that also had to survive the trip undamaged.

On the other hand, he estimated that the journey by canoe to Semusha, could also take up to two weeks. So that worked out well. Gatti, Skaimunga and twelve rowers designated by King Yeta would take place in one canoe, the camp doctor and someone designated by the commissioner would take place with twelve other rowers in a second canoe. Finally, a third canoe, the largest of the three, was manned by fourteen rowers and contained the luggage and food supplies. And the other members of the expedition could occupy themselves with checking and repairing the wagons. All the necessary preparations were made, and on February 1 the canoes left, for a trip of 75 miles up the Zambezi and then about 50 more miles up the Lutembwe, towards Semusha.

A terrible journey

On February 2, Gatti noted in his diary that he had seen nothing but water all day: the water of the river and the water of the ever-persistent rain. They were soaking wet, down to their skin, and all day they were plagued by swarms of mosquitoes. On February 3, 4, 5 and 6, too, that was all that could be recorded about their journey. On February 7, the weather was hardly different, but Gatti added to his diary that all his muscles seemed cramped from having to sit in the same position in the canoe over and over again. Also, a hippo had swum under the canoe in which the doctor was sitting, and had caused the boat to capsize with everyone and everything. Fatigue, cold and soggy clothes made the doctor severely ill. Gatti mentions that the man had a fever of over 41 degrees. How much exactly, he could not say, because that was the maximum the thermometer could indicate.

That afternoon, at 4 p.m., they reached a small settlement called Noyo, where they were able to catch their breath in the village. The village chief knew of their arrival, although Gatti did not understand that he was aware of it. He had not heard any tam-tams along the way that

might have announced their trek, and there had been no natives to see along the way. The village chief provided them with a rather large and high hut, where they took up residence. Gatti, too, had begun to suffer from the fatigues of the journey. His diary mentions on February 10 that he hardly remembered what had happened after their arrival in Noyo. He had also developed a high fever and was delirious.

It turned out to be a special kind of swamp fever. There was a regularity to it. One had an insanely high fever for three days, the next three days it subsided, but one feels incredibly tired, then there are three days when one feels relatively well again, after which the whole cycle begins again, with the danger that one gets a little weaker each time. The only one who tirelessly and with great dedication performed quite a few tasks was Skaimunga. He appeared to be immune to this curious fever.

When Gatti and the doctor had recovered somewhat, Skaimunga assured Gatti that they should continue to Semusha. They finally reached that place on February 14. It seemed to be nothing more than a small, pathetic village inhabited by unfriendly natives. Almost every traveler was exhausted and sick; they had had to fend off crocodiles, hippos, leopards and snakes. Also, the persistent rain, for days on end, made everyone particularly dejected. As if it were all not enough, twenty-two of the thirty-eight rowers became so feverish that they died. Most were in one stage or another of this swamp fever, while others from fatigue could hardly do anything. "That our journey on the water would be completed in two weeks, we could now forget entirely," Gatti thought.

"Tonight," his diary records on March 5, "the chief of Semusha came to tell me that the distant tamtams had told him that the provincial commissioner was very ill, and everyone was worried about us and we were asked to return immediately. The chief, in turn, had made our situation known and asked for reinforcements to pick us up. Promptly he received the answer that a large canoe had left a week ago, but that hippos had overturned it with all the people on board being devoured by crocodiles and that no one now dared to come and help them." The chief urged Gatti to leave the sick rowers with him and with only one canoe, to start the return journey. Only a single man remained healthy and active the entire time, and totally unexpectedly and in a very curious way, went on to play a vital role in their existence: Skaimunga. But we are not there yet.

A penetrating dream

For the next six days, Gatti was too ill to record even one word in his diary. The cycles of swamp fever had so worn him and the doctor down that they were almost constantly in a coma. When Gatti awoke on March 13, he finally felt a little better. The doctor, too, seemed fever-free. But something very strange was going on with him. With an unusual look in his eyes, he looked at Gatti penetratingly and said, "I had a dream. Let's go".

"Let's go where?" asked Gatti in amazement.

"To the place I saw in my dream," he said impatiently. "It is on this hill, only four hundred meters from here. On granite stones there are beautiful ancient paintings of Bushmen. Let's go there".

"Do you feel good in your head?" brought out Gatti in surprise. "You, who with incessant skepticism have never believed in anything real, you now suddenly hold your dream for reality."

"Yes, it is real" assured the doctor, "I also know it sounds strange, but what I saw in my dream really exists".

That's where the village chief happened to arrive.

"You know" said the doctor, "I will tell him".

"Hey, Village Chief", he called, "can you take us to those big granite stones, which are on the other side of this hill and where you can find very old pictures of people hunting animals".

The village chief's mouth fell open in surprise. "No Musungu knows about this" he said, and also everyone from the tribe avoids this place. Our ancestors told us that evil spirits reside there, and no white man has ever gotten this far. Now how can the white man speak as if he has already seen that place. And if he has, why does he need me as a guide?"

Gatti could hardly hide his surprise at the village chief's answer. What a curious coincidence. Quickly he recovered himself, and to avoid the doctor confusing the village chief even more he said, "Know, the white doctor has never really been there, but the spirits of his ancestors told him all this last night in a dream."

This explanation seemed to make a lot more sense to the village chief; he sighed with relief. "If Musungu's ancestors have gone to so much trouble to tell him all this," the village chief continued, "then they will protect him when he goes to the big stones." And he went on to break the news to his entire tribe. The effect of this did not fail to be noticed. The initial surprise of this turned into a general joy. Perhaps the evil spirits that reside there are not so powerful after all as the ancestors of the Musungu, they surmised. And now the whole village wanted to go there.

Ancient rock paintings

"Well," Gatti decided, "let's go and look at it, four hundred meters is not so far." And everyone followed him. And indeed, the granite stones were exactly as the doctor had described, but there were no images on them at all. "I'm sure there must be," wailed the doctor, and he began to remove with his bare hands the grass that partially covered the stones. When no drawings emerged, he even began to remove the earth that partially covered the stones. A yep, in less than ten minutes the first drawings came to light, and as he continued to excavate those stones, more showed up.

Clearly recognizable was a horned antelope, and a man just shooting an arrow from his bow. They were amazingly realistic.

"That's just what I saw in my dream" said an overenthusiastic doctor. And a moment later he found the image of seven more antelopes and three hunters. Also depicted was a palm tree, a tree that has been extinct in this area for thousands of years. Gatti took photographs of all these wondrous drawings.

In southern Rhodesia (note: now Zimbabwe), such ancient rock paintings are not uncommon, but in the north, the outside world knew nothing at all of their existence, and so far these are the first and only rock paintings uncovered in northern Rhodesia.

By nightfall, when the great enthusiasm for this discovery had died down, Gatti and the doctor began to feel the fatigue of the past days. Skaimunga came to tell him that it was high time Gatti went to bed. The swamp fever started a new cycle that day, March 14. Gatti lapsed into a near-fatal sleep moments later.

The sun was already high in the sky when, with some difficulty, he opened his eyes again. He knew he had been delirious, but had lost all sense of time. He saw Skaimunga enter the tent, go to the daily calendar and tear off a leaf from it. Gatti had taught him to do this every day. To his surprise, he saw that the calendar read March 19. He tried to think: 19, 18, 17, 16, 15, 14.... So it had been five since Skaimunga had insisted that he go to bed.

"Sakimunga," Gatti asked in a weakened voice, "where is the other Musungu, the doctor?" "In his tent," replied the boy. "But he's still so sick that his mind still hasn't stopped talking through his mouth. The rowers are all very sick too". The doctor still has delirious fevers, Gatti understood, and he wondered agonizingly if they would survive all this and if discovering such ancient petroglyphs was worth all this hardship.

Bapuka spoke.

Skaimunga continued to look at Gatti somewhat hesitantly, seemed to hesitate for a moment, and then suddenly said, "Musungu, I had a dream last night. Throughout our journey to Lealui, I tried desperately to hear that distant voice. But the ears of my mind were not quiet enough. There was a lot of work, too many sick people to take care of, and that distant voice became so weak that I couldn't hear it anymore. But yesterday, late in the evening, when it was particularly quiet in the whole camp, I heard Bapuka's voice again. Before I went to sleep, I thought of her very intensely, and my most fervent wish was that you might be well again. And yes, a short time later I heard them very clearly. She was talking about you and the other Musungu. She said that to save your own life and that of the doctor and your rowers, you must come with me, the two of us, and all alone in a small canoe, for a journey of two suns. We must leave today"

Gatti had some difficulty realizing what Skaimunga had said to him. Was he really to take those words seriously? In his pitiful condition and on the verge of delirious fever, did he really have to sit in a canoe for two days, leave his weakened helpers all alone for the sake of just a dream and therefore embark on a journey into the unknown? Any right-thinking person would tell him that this is an utterly idiotic undertaking from which he will almost certainly not return.

On the other hand, what were the options? Everyone was sick and getting weaker by the day. It was impossible to continue the journey like that. It wasn't the first person to come up with what seemed like such an idiotic story, either. It was Skaimunga. Could you just ignore his advice? Even if it seemed like a desperate last chance, Gatti felt he had to take it.

It seemed to him the best thing he could do to save his people. He further remembered his promise to the provincial commissioner not to go beyond Semusha. But Skaimunga told him he could go without breaking his word. The drums that had woken him had told him that the government's White Man had died of swamp fever in the small hospital in Mongu the previous evening.

Gatti had a hard time with this. The man had warned him so much about the many dangers. On the other hand, he felt liberated from his promise, and the white man's death also made it clear what fate his helpers would probably suffer if Gatti resigned himself to his condition and did nothing at all. Suddenly he saw ready in the whole situation, got laboriously out of his bed and began to get ready for the journey.

I don't know where to, Musungu.

"To where did Bapuka say we should sail?" asked Gatti to Skaimunga, "And what should we do there when I can hardly stand on my legs?" "I don't know that Musungu" replied Skaimunga. "But we must go in the direction." And he pointed west again.

"That's the strangest story I've ever heard!" muttered Gatti, "but let's go to the canoes." "Everything is ready," said Skaimunga, "this way, Musungu." Wearily, Gatti stepped to the river, supported by his best boy.

The canoe was small, but there was enough room for one of Gatti's folding chairs, which Skaimunga had secured to the boat with ropes. He had also installed a large tarp over the canoe so that they could protect themselves from that wretched rain. Furthermore, the boat was equipped with enough food, and in the middle of it was placed a sturdy clay bowl in which Skaimunga had lit a small fire so that they could both warm themselves a little.

Gatti took a seat on his little chair and looked around for a while. "Where is your spear and where is my rifle?" he asked. "Those who look forward to life" replied Skaimunga, "cannot carry the weapons of death with them at the same time." He gave the canoe a push and stepped carefully into it. The boat slid gently into the river.

Skaimunga paddled all the while and the boat slid gently further into the water. The monotonous splashing of the raindrops on the sail, the distant fatigue, and the soothing warmth of the fire, made Gatti sink into a deep, peaceful sleep quite quickly. When he opened his eyes again the next day, it was already late in the afternoon. The rain had stopped and the sun was carefully peeking through the misty clouds like a still misty faint ball. Musungu," Skaimunga broke up the monotonous paddling "we are close."

"Close to what?" asked Gatti.

"Close to where Bapuka is leading us."

Curious how Skaimunga could be so sure of his direction, Gatti wondered. On several occasions his boy was forced to deviate from his course to avoid crocodiles or whole piles of floating branches. The swamp, by the way, was dotted with small floating islands that he had to sail around each time.

"Look Musungu!" he whispered. "Look, there, just under the sun."

Gatti saw something like an undulating horizontal in the distance, which apparently indicated that there must be solid ground yonder.

Smoke rises from many Huts

"Smoke," Skaimunga said excitedly. "Smoke rises from many Huts."

Gatti didn't immediately see the smoke, but if it was really there, it probably meant that people had to be living there.

"Musungu," Skaimunga continued, "raise your hands to show that you are not armed."

Gatti did as his boy asked him. Skaimunga did the same. Both saw the smoke rising from behind the huts. But there was nothing yet to be seen of any inhabitants.

Suddenly, Gatti's companion called out as loud as he could, "I am Skaumungaaa! I am here with my Musungu, as Bapuka wishes!" No one responded. Skaimunga paddled some more, to a place where some canoes were moored against the shore.

Then his shouts were suddenly answered, "Only those who do as they are asked can dock here safely." And there came a tall old man slowly stepping forward. Something solemn emanated from him. On his head he wore a crown of scarlet feathers. He looked at the two inquiringly. "Welcome, Musungu," he continued. "You were expected." And he cast a thoughtful, somewhat curious yet oh so endearing glance at Skaimunga.

"This is Skaimunga," Gatti began when both had stepped out of the canoe. "He is a very good man and a loyal helper in whom there is no evil hidden at all." With an innately mild smile, the man replied, "I am thoroughly convinced of that." And he continued, "Of the subjects of Bapuka, I am her highest servant." From this, Gatti decided that he must be some kind of chief priest or powerful magician. Now other villagers also emerged, men, women and children. And curiously, some women had painted their faces white.

"Without knowing it," the man continued, "you, white man, have healed Bapuka's wounds." And even though Gatti had not yet spoken to him about his situation and that of his sick fellow men, the man continued, "I will cure your illness and that of your traveling companions. As soon as you regain your strength, you must leave again to help them. For those who have received Bapuka's antidote are afterwards forever cured of swamp fever."

Then he gave three of his subjects an order that Gatti did not understand. When he looked at them more closely, he noticed that they had rings in their ears, almost like the ones Skaimunga wore, only they were much larger. Also, the way their hair was done resembled Skaimunga's.

The wizard asked if Gatti and Sakimunga would follow him and he led them to the narrow entrance of a cave. It took a while for their eyes to get used to the darkness. A dim light fell through a small opening in the rock. Gatti and Skaimunga now saw that they were in a circular space that was about 15 meters wide and high. In the center stood a statue as much as 3.5 m high. There were also the three men who had been given an assignment. They awakened a fire that burned gently just in front of the statue, which was now much better lit as a result. Gatti and Skaimunga could see it in all its splendor: it was a primitive but impressive carving. Softly, with a lump in his throat, Skaimunga whispered, "Musungu, that's Bapuka. That's how I always saw them in my dreams." It was as if he wanted to say more, but he couldn't find the words. It was as if in a matter of seconds he saw his entire difficult young life pass before him and understood that his trials were finally over. He fought his tears for a moment, slowly recovered, took a few deep breaths in and out, and continued to gaze at the statue in indescribable awe for quite some time.

Gatti, too, was quite touched. He could hardly believe his eyes. Never before had he heard that the inhabitants in this part of Africa worshipped such a goddess and that they could depict it in such a large and beautiful work of art.

It was the wizard who was the first to break the silence back.

"Musungu," he began in a heavy voice, "ten times ten full moons have passed three times since the day Arab slave traders came here with the old Barotse king and claimed to be friends of ours. But their hearts were false, full of malice and cunning. They came to kill our women, to kidnap our children and men and sell them as slaves. Then we swore that we would kill anyone who ever dared approach our village again.

Bapuka also sent me dreams

As if in an inspiration, Gatti suddenly heard himself say, "I swear never to bring others here." "So is Bapuka's wish," the magician agreed. And in a voice that betrayed deep emotion he repeated, "Ten times ten moons have passed three times. That is how long it has been since my old father was killed by the false men. And when I defended my only son, they had almost killed me. But they did not succeed. Bapuka, the goddess of love and of life, healed me". He paused for a moment. Tears rolled down his cheeks. "And she promised me that my only son, who had been kidnapped along with my wounded wife, would one day be returned to me. And Musungu, too, Bapuka sent me dreams. The night before this day, I saw a friendly, unarmed man arrive, accompanied by an unarmed young black man. Musungu, Bapuka cannot be mistaken. You are the white man. All her blessings will protect you, for without suspecting it

you have healed her wound, mine and my son's, look, you have brought back my lost son." He waited a short time and continued, "I must teach him the ancient secrets, the magical powers of Bapuka's worship, so that he can serve her after my death. As my father did. And his father's father. And a long, long line of our ancestors before him."

Then he grabbed his son tightly and continued, "Now he is no longer Skaimunga, but his name becomes Ingulu. Look!" And with a slightly trembling hand he pointed to the tattoos that had been applied to his son's body and the very same tattoos that also adorned the wooden statue of Bapuka. "I applied them myself to my son's skin when he was six months old."

"Ingulu," Gatti repeated quietly to himself, in their language perhaps meaning he who has been reborn. Good thing his tribesmen call their returned son that. But I have known him as Skaimunga for so long, and it is that name that evokes so many memories for me. To me, he remains Skaimunga.

A pile of pale green dry leaves

"Three times ten times ten moons or three hundred moons he missed his son," thought Gatti, "That adds up to about 24 or 25 years ago. At that time, at the turn of the century, Rhodesia was still a completely wild country in which the law of the jungle prevailed and slaves were still traded as merchandise."

A little later, some of the chief's servants arrived with a basket containing a pile of light green dry leaves, which looked a little like sage but gave off a strong, bitter smell, and handed it to Gatti. Then the chief spoke up again: "Every day at sunset you and your sick people must chew a leaf like this, do it very slowly and chew it until there is almost nothing left in your mouth. Do this for nine days and then continue your journey. These leaves only grow near our village, so they are very rare. I can't give you more of them. Here every pregnant woman should take one daily, not only until her child is born, but also for the next nine months when she is breastfeeding. Then her child will be forever fortified against the dangerous swamp fever."

It was gradually approaching evening. It had started to rain again. The chief took him to a large empty hut where a fire was burning and where delicious food had been prepared. And after supper it was not long before a virtuous and deep sleep overtook Gatti. When he awoke the next morning, the medicine for swamp fever was the first thing on his mind. So he took a leaf from the basket and began to chew it slowly. When he finished this a little later, it seemed that a long-lost strength returned to his body, his mind was filled with new and clear thoughts, and his heart was strengthened with hopeful feelings. Something deep inside him gave him the inner certainty that all would be healed and that his whole expedition would be brought to a successful conclusion. Did he, too, already feel the blessings of Bapuka?

There are still words to be said.

A little later the village chief appeared in Gatti's hut. "The day has only just begun," he said in a dignified tone, "but before you leave for your traveling companions in Semusha there are words that must be said."

"My son," he began, "has opened his heart to me. He also told me of the miseries of his past. His sufferings were great and numerous. But just as he was about to die, you saved him. When he thought himself lost, you set him free. All the time he was with you, you were his loving father. From now on, Bapuka will be a loving mother to you. When chains bind you, Bapuka will set you free. If your life is in danger, Bapuka will save you". And with a regal and tender gesture, he offered Gatti a heavy wooden statue. Gatti looked at it, and looked again. He could hardly believe his eyes. It was an exact, 35 cm high replica of the statue of the goddess Bapuka, the statue he had seen in the cave.

The village chief waited a moment. Then he continued, "This is the only statue of Bapuka in existence. She herself has commanded me to give it to you. Her blessing will accompany you always and everywhere, as well as all those who surround you with their love."

Gatti tried to thank him, but he could not get a word out of his lips. The emotion had become too much for him. Fortunately, the old man immediately understood that it was the confusion of immense gratitude that prevented Gatti from speaking. "Go now to your sick friends," he concluded, "they need you," and he went stately in the direction of the river.

Gatti still had not recovered from his surprise. Heeding the man's wish, he took his helmet, the basket of leaves and followed him to the canoe. There he found Skaimunga working diligently to prepare the boat for departure. He ordered one of his tribesmen to row back with Gatti. He himself would - quite understandably - stay with his father. Two other members of his tribe would follow in a second canoe. Gatti knew that the moment of parting would be difficult.

"May peace remain with you forever," Gatti said to the village chief. The latter nodded appreciatively and kindly. Then he looked at Skaimunga. With tears in his eyes, Gatti held out his hand to him. Sakimunga grasped them with both his hands and pressed them forcefully against his heart. Neither of them could utter a single word. For a long second - Gatti would never forget that look - they looked into each other's eyes. Then Gatti turned his head away and got into the canoe....

Only after the river had carried the boat a few dozen meters downstream did Gatti hear the last words Skaimunga called to him: "Musungu, may the peace and love of Bapuka always accompany you!" He could hardly suppress his emotions, and almost weeping, his very last two words sounded, "Forever!" All the while, Gatti looked in his direction and nodded his head gently. Then he brought both his palms to near his heart and held them there. The fast-flowing river quickly increased the distance between them. They kept looking at each other, until a bend in the river took them from each other's eyes.

The return trip went without a hitch. Gatti distributed the dry leaves he received from the village chief to his sick travel companions. All recovered. But moreover, they received an extra dose of energy with which they could get back to work on the scientific research of the local flora and fauna. Their description of the different tribes in Semusha, Noyo, and Lealui also progressed. Likewise, they described the course of Zambezi River, at that time a virtually

unknown area. As promised, he never revealed the place where the worshippers of Bapuka resided. However, her role was far from over for Gatti.

And later?

Gattit says that on his many journeys through Africa, he found himself in many perilous situations, from which he escaped each time in a remarkable way. He moved to New York where he met Ellen in 1931, whom he married and who from then on accompanied him on all his African travels. Later, when the two of them went to live in Lugano, Switzerland, on the lake of the same name, the wooden statue of Bapuka - it adorns the title page of this text - was given a place of honor in their living room, in a special niche, in the middle of a cupboard where all the books they had written about their travels were kept, along with their translations. To ensure that the statue would not fall over, Gatti had fitted it with a heavy pedestal of solid African wood.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bvPff7Zg9Lc

The years went by. Gatti says the marriage was particularly happy. About thirty years later, Ellen became seriously ill. She had expressed two wishes more than once in her old age. First, she did not want Gatti to survive, convinced that a life without him would be too empty. And then, when her time would have come, she hoped that she would not have to suffer for long, to spare him the agony of having to watch helplessly.

In early September 1962, at five minutes after midnight, Ellen's coma, which had lasted thirty-six hours, came to an end. Gatti writes, "When the last breath, like a soft sigh, released itself from her lips, I bent down and gave her a final kiss on the forehead."

Just then he heard a heavy blow from a falling object. He turned around and saw that the statue of Bapuka had fallen over and was lying in pieces on the ground. Gatti has never found an explanation for this curious "coincidence. He concludes his book by asking if it might have been a last word from Bapuka to the two of them.

Afterword

Those who - even today - have a solid understanding of that curious part of reality do not call this event a coincidence at all. Such mantically gifted people argue that the pagan nature spirit Bapuka invested all her strength in her protective role towards the tribe that worships her, as well as towards Gatti and Ellen.

Non-Trinitarian religions, they say, are characterized by a rather insidious "harmony of opposites." It is the adherents of such religions themselves who find that their gods are unreliable. Such beings anoint their worshippers, but also wound them, depending on their whims.

For example, while the Greek supreme god Zeus dictates laws to the Greeks, he cheats on his wife Hera with female mortals and rapes Leda, the wife of the Spartan monarch.

Such arch good nature spirits as Bapuka, - so clarify competent seers - are the ethically good tips of the iceberg of treacherous creatures that rule the primordial chaos. Bapuka, with her protective role, exhausts herself utterly in her life force, and once drained, she falls into the hands of cynically-powerful demons.

Beings like Bapuka are, Biblically speaking, only safe within the protection of the Holy Trinity. Once outside this framework, therefore, they completely exhaust themselves in their life force. Which shows itself in the story of Bapuka in the material breakdown of her wooden statue. So much for this view.

Our desacralized culture obviously considers such stories and the many other testimonies of Gatti during his travels in Africa, south of the equator, to be pure nonsense. The many books he wrote, now more than sixty years ago, are hard to find today. Sometimes you still come across them, but then not in the 'religion' or 'New Age' section, but somewhere among children's literature, next to the stories of Winnetou and Eagle Eye.