
PRESENTING THE COLLECTION

W. Östberg

“HE WHO CARRIES THE SPEAR” — GERHARD LINDBLOM'S FIELDWORK IN EASTERN KENYA. 1911—1912

A man who had captured a spear in combat was given the name *Mutietumo*, He Who Carries the Spear. The pioneering Swedish ethnographer Gerhard Lindblom (1887—1969) received that name from the Kamba people of eastern Kenya. He had contracted blood poisoning in one foot after failing to tend a tick bite properly. During a couple of weeks' convalescence he limped around with the support of a spear. Some quick-thinking person associated the white man using a spear as a crutch with the honourable old name of the spear-bearer, and so he was called Mutietumo.

Gerhard Lindblom worked in Ukambani, as the Kamba region is colloquially known in Kenya, in 1911—1912. This was before the pioneer of modern

anthropology, Bronislaw Malinowski, had conceived the idea of long-term fieldwork when he happened to be stranded on the Trobriand Islands off the coast of New Guinea during the First World War. By then Lindblom was already back home in Sweden, busy completing the monograph *The Akamba in British East Africa* (1916), which would win him international esteem and which still serves as a good starting point for studies of the development of Kamba society. Lindblom also brought an extensive and well documented collection of Kamba material culture to the Museum of Ethnography in Stockholm. He later became director of the museum and also professor of general and comparative ethnography at Stockholm University.

The Truth of the Objects

Lindblom's Kamba collection is one of the museum's most important African collections. His camp in Ukambani was quickly transformed into a stockpile of calabashes and bracelets, hoes and bows, stools and musical instruments, knives and necklaces — all the material manifestations of Kamba society. He collected everything that could be preserved and transported to the museum in Stockholm.

What do we learn about the Kamba from all the objects that Gerhard Lindblom brought home? The stools testify to age distribution in the society and to craft skill, the pots are evidence of craft and trade, the neck rings represent marital exchanges and value conversions, the bows are testimony to defence and hunting. But the “artefacts” that were particularly important for creating and maintaining a surplus, for building relations to other people, and for reproducing society were the livestock. In a museum collection, however, there is no room for cows, sheep, and goats, and so this important motor driving the economy was left outside the account.

But, one can of course object, Lindblom did collect cow bells and milk pails. Yes, he did. But are a few bells and pails able to capture the power of the herds roving

the plains of Kitui, the negotiations about bride wealth, the relations between livestock partners, the violence of the livestock raids? The museum collections emphasize what is immobile and fixed in form. But life is not like that. What represented survival, dynamics, and drama in the life of the Kamba has no place in a museum. To learn about such processes we have to go to Gerhard Lindblom's monograph *The Akamba in British East Africa*. The large Kamba collection teaches us that it takes documentation as meticulous as Lindblom's to make the artefacts speak.

Lindblom thus set out to do large-scale fieldwork a few years before Malinowski. Yet it can hardly be said that Lindblom did anthropological fieldwork according to the method that characterizes anthropology more than any other: participant observation. Malinowski's policy was that

The anthropologist must relinquish his comfortable position in the long chair on the veranda of the missionary compound, Government station, or planter's bungalow, where, armed with pencil and notebook and at times with a whisky and soda, he has been accustomed to collect state-