




## “Grandpa, I want to be adult!” – The significance of Karaba’s kiss or threefold revelation of puberty rite in Kirikou and the Sorceress



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### KEYWORDS

- initiation
- initiation rites
- puberty rites
- symbolic initiatory death
- growing-up

### KULCSSZAVAK

- beavatás
- beavatási szertartások
- serdülőkori avatási rítusok
- szimbolikus beavatási halál
- felnőtté válás

### ABSTRACT

My study deals with the French-Belgian-Luxembourgish co-production *Kirikou and the Sorceress*, a film adaptation of a West African folktale. I examine in it the elements that go back to the archaic age and are related to the customs of the archaic age society, they lead us all the way to the initiation ceremonies. I outline the path traveled by the hero, I present the important stations, through which Kirikou acquires sacred knowledge, faces death, fights against evil, and by reaching these milestones – symbolically – undergoes the temporary initiation rite of adolescence. In the study, following Eliade, I describe the trinity characteristic of puberty initiation rites of archaic societies, as well as its appearance in the film.

### ABSZTRAKT

„Nagypapa, én felnőtt akarok lenni!” – Karaba csókjának jelentősége vagy a beavatás hármasságának feltárulkozása a *Kirikou és a boszorkány* című mesében | A tanulmányomban a *Kirikou és a boszorkány* című francia-belga-luxemburgi koprodukciónban gyártott animációs filmmel, egy nyugat-afrikai népmese filmes adaptációjával foglalkozom. Vizsgálom benne azokat az archaikus korra visszanyúló, az archaikus kori társadalom szokásaihoz kapcsolódó elemeket, amelyek egészen a beavatási szertartásokig vezetnek bennünket. Felvázolom a hős által bejárt utat, bemutatom azokat a fontos stációkat, amelyek elérésével Kirikou megszerzi a szent tudást, szembeáll a halállal, megvívja a küzdelmét a gonosz ellen, és e mérföldkövek megtételével – szimbolikusán – átesik a serdülőkori átmeneti beavatási rítuson. A tanulmányban – Eliade nyomán – ismertetem az archaikus társadalmak pubertáskori beavatási szertartásaira jellemző hármasságot, valamint megjelenési formáját a filmben.

*“I would like to emphasize the importance of research in the field of non-formal education in addition to traditional areas of investigation of the history of education, since for thousands of years the preservation and transmission of cultural goods and knowledge has been taking place in this scene and is still taking place today. When building our future, we cannot ignore the experiences of the history of non-formal education.” (Kéri, 1997)*

### Introduction

The composer of the film is Youssou N’Dour is a Senegalese composer, singer, performer, actor and politician, former Minister of Tourism of Senegal, who, as a percussionist, builds on traditional Senegalese Serer music, mbalax from Njuup. The Rolling Stones considers Youssou N’Dour the greatest living musician in Africa, who has shown himself in many musical genres.

This is the reason for the extraordinary musical authenticity, which evokes religious community holidays and initiation rites right from the start of the film. We can hear such Authentic African musical instruments which play an important role in African community life based on traditions and in initiation ceremonies. The music playing ancient melodies and rhythms forms an organic unity with the story, we hear initiation music and a carefully coded initiation story unfolds before us.

The personality of the screenwriter also merits a lot of attention. Michel Ocelot is a French writer, designer, screenwriter and director of animated films and television shows, earlier he was the president of the International Animation Film Association. Although he was born on the French Riviera, he spent his childhood in Guinea, West Africa, and returned to France when he was a teenager.

Guinea is adjacent to Senegal in the north, so the Senegalese composer and the screenwriter of French origin – who spent his childhood in the area adjacent to Senegal – have therefore equally well known the African culture, including the Senegalese and neighboring areas, the fairytale treasure of this area. All the more so, because Ocelot was deeply involved in fairy tales and often built on fairy tales in the fantasy genre. He is also a devoted admirer of ancient Egyptian culture and art, ancient Greek vase art, Japanese Hokusai and many illustrators.

The mention of biographical details here is not self-serving. Both artists have great culture and deep knowledge of African traditions. The film, as a work of art, bears traces of this cultural awareness and this makes it really exciting.

### **Birth and birth as an archaic religious act**

At the beginning of the story, we come to know the circumstances of Kirikou’s birth. Kirikou is born on the ground by his mother. We could not pay attention to this small moment if we did not know that in archaic societies there is a the religious idea that creates a close connection between woman, earth and fertility. In these traditional societies, female fertility echoes and repeats the fertility of Mother Earth (Terra Mater, or Tellus Mater). So, female fertility follows a cosmic pattern, and the sanctity of woman derives from the sanctity of earth, from its sacred and fertile power (Eliade, 1957).

Laying newborns on the ground after birth is also a reflection of this sacred connection. *Humi positio* was widespread even in ancient Rome and was part of the institution of Roman law. The father had to lift up his newborn child from the ground (*de terra tollere*) in order to declare that he recognized the child as his own. References to the creative power of Mother Earth appear in many places in ancient Greek literature. E.g. in Aeschylus: Libation Bearers Electra prays to Hermes, the Earth, and his father as she is pouring a sacrificial libation drink onto the grave of his father, who was murdered by his mother, Clytemnestra, and her new mate. “*Supreme herald of the realm above and the realm below, O Hermes of the nether world, come to my aid, summon to me the spirits beneath the earth to hear my prayers, spirits that watch over my father’s house, and Earth herself, who gives birth to all things, and having nurtured them receives their increase in turn.*” (Aeschylus, 1926:124-127)

Kirikou already talks in his mother's womb. After his birth, he asks his mother to wash him, but the mother replies that he who is born alone can wash himself. So the newborn Kirikou descends into a gourd shell immediately after birth and he is taking a bath. We also know ancient examples of heroes and demigods being able to act independently immediately after birth. A good example of this is Herakles, Zeus and Alcmene's child, against whom the enraged Hera sent two giant snakes to kill the newborn in his cradle, which Herakles dealt with easily, strangling them with his bare hands. *"But when I had wound my body in sinuous coils, and, hissing fiercely, darted my forked tongue at him, Tiryns's hero laughed, and mocking my magic arts, said: "My task in the cradle was to defeat snakes, and, though you are greater than other reptiles, Acheloüs, how big a slice of the Lernean Hydra would your one serpent be?"* (Ovid, IX:62-69) In traditional societies, the purpose of the ritual bath after birth is the ritual cleaning. After the dissolution of the forms, the act connected to the symbolism of water enables a new kind of existence and opens up new dimensions for the existing. (Eliade, 1957:129-132)

Just as the human mother follows as a model and repeats the act of creation that took place in ancient times, when life was born from the womb of Mother Earth, so the little Kirikou repeats the actions of the mythical heroes who took risks and went into battle to protect the community living there and who are remembered in the myths and tales of the village community.

### **Trials awaiting the hero**

After his birth, the little Kirikou encounters two problems that need to be solved. One is that the source of the village's income has dried up for unknown reasons. The villagers refer to the dried-up spring as a cursed spring and accuse Karaba of withholding the life-giving water from the people. The second problem is that Karaba, the powerful witch with terrifying magical powers, is keeping the village in terror. He had already captured a significant number of the men in the village, using his magic to turn them into fetishes, whom he put in his service and to protect his house. His fetishes – the enchanted men of the village – therefore work for him and keep the entire countryside under their control.

After the ritual bath, the little hero joins his uncle, who sets out against Karaba on the way of the crimson trees. Disguised as an old villager's hat, Kirikou accompanies his uncle to Karaba helping him on his way. Karaba believes that the moving and talking hat under which little Kirikou is hiding, is a magic hat, so she asks the man for the hat. In return, he promises not to harm the village. When she realizes that she has been tricked and that the hat is not a magical hat, she demands all the gold in the village in revenge. Since the women do not give all their gold jewelry, he sets fire to the village. There is nothing to put out the fire, because the "cursed source" had dried up earlier. Therefore, after the fire, Kirikou sets out to uncover the secret of the cursed spring.

## The revelation of death

Hiding in the vein of the spring, he penetrates into the hollows of the earth, where he crawls on his stomach to a ravine, where he sees an animal that has grown to a huge size from the amount of water it has absorbed. The monster was also sipping water when Kirikou arrived. The hollow inside the earth evokes the Underworld. Everything is dark and scary, like in the realm of death. There is no sign of life outside of the monster. The water-sucking monster is destroyed by Kirikou with a knife stolen from a woman preparing lunch. When Kirikou defeats the water-swallowing monster, water gushes out from the spring again. The jet of water shoots out so violently that it sweeps him along with it. In the meantime, he swallows water, which makes his body go limp and look dead. The villagers stand around him and start to cry. The scene refers to a very important moment, this is the hero’s encounter with death and his return from the grip of death, i. e. walking through the symbolic death of initiation. (Eliade, 1957:195-197)

Since birth, Kirikou has been searching for the answer to why Karaba hates people and why he wants to destroy the entire village. His mother and the villagers cannot answer his questions, but his mother helps him by telling him that outside the village, on the other side of the forbidden mountain, lives the sage of the mountain, who is Kirikou’s grandfather. He can know the answer to every question, because only He knows the truth. Kirikou immediately sets out to learn Karaba’s secret from his grandfather. His mother gives him his father’s dagger for the dangerous journey. Many trials await Kirikou on the way, as the road to the forbidden mountain passes near Karaba’s house. After the spring, which was once sacred and whose water gave life to the village, now the holy mountain is another manifestation of hierophany. The mountain can be considered the appearance of the *columna universalis*, the *axis mundi*. Where the hierophany breaks through the planes, there is a connection between the underworld, the human and the celestial spheres. (Eliade, 1957:36-42)

The way leads towards the forbidden mountain through a rock gorge that opens at a red anthill. The rock gorge fits organically into the symbolism of the rite of passage. A threshold usually refers to a transition in the same way as a narrow passage or a bridge. (Eliade, 1957:179-184) The anthill opens by itself to those who are worthy of it. The dangerous road to the forbidden mountain is divided into several sections. The first stage goes to Karaba’s house. Kirikou must make his way to the witch’s house through the underground passages of a stinky badger. The repeated journey into the depths of the earth can be understood as a clear reference to the moment of initiation, which is called *regressus ad uterum*, when the initiate returns to the womb of Mother Earth to be reborn in a new ontological quality. Before rebirth, the neophyte faces symbolic death. This is also indicated by the fact that the little hero finds bones and blood everywhere in the underground cavities.

The fight with the beast is meant to repeat the heroic story of the great ancestors. Little Kirikou manages to force the smelly badger to back off. His struggle and his journey are helped by squirrels. With their help, Kirikou disguises himself as a bird and reaches the forbidden mountain. A warthog chases him along the way. The beast

is difficult to get rid of because it can smell it, so it chases Kirikou. The little hero finally escapes by riding the beast and after finding its weak point, manages to tame the animal into a horse. He arrives successfully and enters the anthill. Inside the anthill, the mountain opens up giving him way to his grandfather.

### **The revelation of holiness and the acquisition of sacred knowledge**

“Grandpa, I want to be adult!” – declares Kirikou. “Can you make me big right now?” – asks he. At this point, there is a direct reference to the theme of growing up and coming adult. The peaked shape of the mountain, with the stepped pyramid-like platform inside, the figure of the wise man sitting on the top of the platform, his whole position with his tall peaked hat and his whole thin body extended upwards, represents the connection between the three spheres, the *columna universalis*. Kirikou asks questions and his grandfather answers. With each question and answer, Kirikou moves up a step, getting closer and closer to the sage of the mountain and closer and closer to knowing the truth. Here he learns that it was not Karaba who deprived the village of its water and did not eat the men as people say. Karaba does hate people, but he hates them because she is suffering. Once upon a time, the villagers stuck a thorn in his back. The thorn is deeply embedded and can only be pulled out with a tooth. If the thorn were pulled out, he would experience pain that he would not be able to suffer. If she knew that someone was going to pull it out, she would kill him. Her power and magic also is due to the thorn.

### **Karaba’s kiss, or revelation of the sexuality**

To coax Karaba out of his sheltered house, Kirikou steals Karaba’s jewelry and buries it in the forest. When Karaba get to know the incident, he sets out to kill Kirikou and retrieve his jewels. While searching the ground for the jewels, Kirikou pulls the thorn out of his back with his teeth. Once free of pain, Karaba will change and become good. He wants to thank Kirikou for freeing him from pain. Kirikou asks for her hand in return. Karaba is surprised because Kirikou is only a child. Then Kirikou asks Karaba for a kiss. The scene would be completely incomprehensible and uninterpretable if we didn’t already know from previous signs that Kirikou is asking for the same thing here as he expressed during his visit to the wise of the mountain. Eliade mentions a trinity in connection with initiation with the goal of becoming an adult. We have already seen two elements, the third: Karaba’s kiss. With the revelation of the sexuality, Kirikou matures into a young adult. You can now gain Karaba’s hand.

The village is already mourning for Kirikou. They are afraid they won’t be able to see little Kirikou again. When the young couple returns, the villagers at first do not recognize the young Kirikou, who is only recognized by his mother. Then the anger of the village turns against Karaba, because of the males who were killed. Finally, Kirikou’s grandfather, the wise of the mountain, is arriving and leading back the men who have been transformed back from fetishes to humans.

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• The latest verification date for online references in the study is 1 December 2023.