On Some Matabele Customs

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They worship devils, and in particular one special divinity which resides in a certain stream a few miles from Falaba; we were invited to witness a function on this spot, and according to report sacrifices of cloth and beads were thrown into the water and disappeared. Our interpreter told me that they believe in a future life, and when anyone is buried pray at the grave that he may be shown the road to heaven, provided he has done good in his lifetime. They are polygamists, and the marriage ceremony is simply one of consent by both parties. At present they are in a very degraded condition; disease of syphilitic origin and drunkenness is very common amongst them, and they will probably soon disappear altogether. Their only good quality seems to be that they are industrious and they display some skill in iron-working, but this latter pursuit is practically destroyed by the presence of the Sofas as lords of the country.

Thus their history may be summed up as follows; an offshoot of the powerful, healthy Mandingos before the latter became Mahomedan, increasing to a population of certainly 200,000, and becoming wealthy by their position on the trade route and their own industry, then becoming corrupt and physically degraded, they fell an easy prey to the Sofa robber hordes, and are now rapidly vanishing out of existence.

This is really a summary of the regular course of events in all the numerous tribes on the west coast, and affords a commentary on the character of Arab rule which is of immense value at present.

(The MS. Vocabularies which accompany this Paper may be consulted at the rooms of the Institute.)

On Some Matabele Customs.

By LIONEL DECLE.

Chargé de Mission Scientifique du Gouvernement Français.

Marriages.

POLYGAMY is the rule amongst the Matabeles, and the King Lo Bengula has eighty-four wives. The marriage ceremonies and customs differ greatly from those observed by the other South African tribes. When the father of the girl has given his permission to the marriage, the intended husband kills an ox or a sheep, according to his means, and sends or takes part of it to the village of the young woman's father; coming outside the hut, where the latter lives, he screams out "Here is meat for your child." The young men of the town then come out and drive the herald away, but he is soon brought back and every one feasts on the meat.

G 2

When the girl goes to her husband, most of the young girls of the village accompany her. Sometimes, when he is wealthy enough, her father gives her an ox or a cow to take with her, and when she comes to her husband's place she has to take some dung of the animal presenting it to the bridegroom, who washes his hands with it. The bride must also bring with her a kalabash filled with water and beads, and when she comes into her future husband's house she pours water over him and his people and puts the beads on her head; then, placing the kalabash in front of the bridegroom, she smashes it with her foot: this seals the marriage.¹

The girls who have accompanied her are supplied with places of rest; the bridegroom slaughters an animal, and a dance with beer drinking takes place that night and the following day. The day after the bridesmaids go and collect wood in the veldt in the morning, the husband gives them a goat to eat, and then they go home.

Contrary to the custom of most African races the husband does not here pay for his wife before marrying her, but when his wife bears a child it belongs to her father unless her husband pays to his father-in-law cattle varying in number according to his means. Sometimes—although this is seldom the case—a man will go and ask for a girl, giving then cattle to her father, but that does not dispense with the usual payment after the child is born.

When a woman is childless her husband has a right to claim her sister or her next nearest relation. No relations are allowed to marry unless very distant—but the relationship is only considered on the man's side; in fact the rule is against marrying anyone with the same "isibango" (surname); for instance, a Kumalo cannot marry a Kumalo.

Another custom is most strictly observed: a man can never look at his mother-in-law or at his wife's aunt, neither can a woman look at her father-in-law. A man can also send one of his wives away if he does not like her, and she can then marry another man.

Before marriage women are allowed all freedom. When a man is dead his widows usually become his brother's wives, although it is not compulsory on the women; and if they choose they can marry again, but in that case the new husband must pay his father-in-law if a child is born.

Burials.

As soon as a Matabele is dead his relations tie the corpse in a blanket or a skin in a sitting position. The relations cry and howl, and the people in the village come and join them. A grave is dug outside the village—there is no special place of burial—which is covered with stones and bushes.

After the funeral the near relations and whoever has come in contact with the corpse must go out of the town and stay away for

¹ This custom only takes place in the case of a young girl being married.

several days until they have been doctored and cleansed. Every town has separate huts outside for this purpose.

As a rule they get the dying person out of his house into a small hut to die there.

If a man of importance dies the people from all the surrounding villages come and cry for him: they cry and howl on arriving and on departing only.

The different tribes under King Lewanika on the Upper Zambesi are :—¹

Lat. 15° 10' S., Long. 23° 7' E.	{ In the Lialui Valley (Barutse proper)	{ Marutse (reigning tribe). Mambunda (mixed with the above, originally from North-west).
Lat. 17° 10' S., Long. 24° 20' E.	{ Near the sources of the Ndjoko River	{ Monkoïa.
Lat. 15° S., Long. 22° E.	{ North-west of the Barutse, on right bank of Zambesi	{ Balubale.
Lat. 17° 10' S., Long. 24° 20' E.	{ North and north-west of Shesheki ...	{ Matotela (slave tribe).
Lat. 17° 40' S., Long. 25° 30' E.	{ North of Victoria Falls ...	{ Matoka, amongst whom are also found Baleas.
Lat. 17° 55' S., Long. 26° E.	{ East of Victoria Falls	{ Mananza.
Lat. 16° S., Long. 26° E.	{ North of Baloka country, between these and the Mas- hukolumbwes ...	{ Matombe.
Lat. 15° 30' S., Long. 26° E.	{ North of Matombes	{ Mashukolumbwe.
Lat. 17° 35' S., Long. 25° 30' E.	{ Near the junction of the Lynyanti with the Zambesi	{ Masubia, some of whom are called Mashokotuani.

There is also a nomadic tribe, the Makwenzo, the Bushmen of the north of the Zambesi, whilst on the south they are called Masarwa.

¹ The geographical positions are approximate.

MEASUREMENTS OF NATIVES FROM THE UPPER ZAMBESI.

The Nos. of the measurements are those given in Chap. II of the "Anthropological Notes and Queries" of the British Association (1st Ed. 1874).

1. Height of vertex from ground.
 5. Height of umbilicus from ground.
 7. Height of fork from ground.
 13. Height when sitting on ground.
 14. Breadth of shoulders (*i.e.*, between the acromia).
 16. Circumference of chest at armpit.
 18. Circumference of haunches.
 20. Circumference of neck.
 21. Circumference of waist.
 26. Fathom or span of outstretched arms.
 30. Head; greatest circumference from the glabella.
 31. Arc from notch at root of nose toinion.
 34. Greatest length from glabella backwards.

No. of Subject.	TRIBE.	1	5	7	13	14	16	18	20	21
1	Marutse	ft. ins. 5 6	ins. —	ins. —	ins. —	ins. —	ins. 36 $\frac{1}{4}$	ins. —	ins. 15	ins. —
3	"	5 9 $\frac{3}{4}$	—	—	—	—	34 $\frac{1}{4}$	33	14	30 $\frac{1}{4}$
4	Masubia, about 25 years old	66 $\frac{3}{4}$	39 $\frac{1}{2}$	30	34	—	33 $\frac{3}{4}$	33	12 $\frac{1}{4}$	29
5	*Marutse,	71	43	31	34 $\frac{1}{2}$	—	35	36	12 $\frac{3}{8}$	30
6	Masubia,	68 $\frac{1}{4}$	40 $\frac{1}{4}$	30	34 { (correct)	10	35	33	12 $\frac{3}{8}$	31
7	*Masubia,	66 $\frac{1}{4}$	39	30	31 $\frac{1}{2}$	8 $\frac{1}{2}$	33 $\frac{1}{2}$	30 $\frac{1}{2}$	12 $\frac{1}{2}$	30
8	*Monkoia,	66	42	34	31	6 $\frac{3}{8}$	32 $\frac{1}{4}$	32 $\frac{1}{4}$	13 $\frac{3}{8}$	27 $\frac{3}{4}$
9	*Monkoia,	66	40 $\frac{1}{4}$	31	32 $\frac{1}{2}$	4 $\frac{1}{4}$	32 $\frac{1}{2}$	33	13	28
10	*Masubia,	70	40 $\frac{1}{4}$	33	33 $\frac{3}{4}$	5 $\frac{1}{4}$	35 $\frac{3}{4}$	33	13 $\frac{3}{8}$	29 $\frac{1}{2}$
11	*Mashokotuani,	66	39 $\frac{1}{2}$	30	33	6 $\frac{1}{2}$	34	32 $\frac{1}{2}$	12 $\frac{1}{2}$	29
12	*Monkoia,	68	42	33	31	4 $\frac{1}{2}$	35 $\frac{3}{4}$	34 $\frac{1}{2}$	13 $\frac{1}{2}$ (short)	28
13	*Monkoia,	67 $\frac{1}{2}$	42	34	31	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	30 $\frac{7}{8}$	32	12 $\frac{1}{2}$ (4" long)	28 $\frac{1}{2}$
14	*Masubia,	70	43 $\frac{1}{2}$	35	32	7	34 $\frac{1}{2}$	34 $\frac{1}{2}$	12 $\frac{5}{8}$ (3 $\frac{1}{2}$ " long.)	29 $\frac{1}{4}$
15	*Masubia (chief),	69 $\frac{1}{2}$	—	—	—	—	32	—	12 $\frac{1}{2}$	28

The subjects marked * have been sketched.

MEASUREMENTS OF NATIVES—continued.

No. of Subject.	TRIBE.	26	30	31	34	Width of mouth.	Width of nose.
1	Marutse	ins.	ins.	ins.	ins.	ins.	ins.
4	Masubia, about 25 years old	—	24	—	—	—	—
5	*Marutse,	67½	22½	15½	22½	—	—
6	" 28	72	24½	17	23½	—	—
7	Masubia,	72½	22½	16½	22½	—	—
8	*Masubia,	69	22½	16½	22½	—	—
9	*Monkoia,	70	22	15	22½	1½	1½
10	*Monkoia,	68	22½	15	22½	2½	1½
11	*Masubia,	76½	23½	16	22½	2½	1½
12	*Mashokotiani,	66½	21½	16	22½	2	1½
13	*Monkoia,	72½	22½	16	23½	2½	1½
14	*Masubia,	67½	23	15½	23½	much projecting	1½
15	*Masubia (chief),	73½	21½	15½	21½	2½	1½
	" 35	74	21½	18½	21½	2½	1½

MEASUREMENTS OF NATIVES—continued.

No. of Subject.	TRIBE.	Wrist.	Colour. Broca's Nos.	Eyes. Broca's Nos.	Hair. Broca's Nos.	Teeth.	Beard.
4	Masubia, about 25 years old	ins.	35	1	27	filed	None.
5	*Marutse, " 28 "	—	28	16	27	"	{ Mustache and small beard on chin.
6	Masubia, " 25 to 30 "	—	35	11	34	"	{ Do. do.
7	*Masubia, " 35 "	—	35	11	41	"	{ Do. do.
8	*Monkoia, " 30 "	6½	27	1	41	"	{ Do. do., with a little on sides.
9	*Monkoia, " 22 "	6	27	between 1 & 2	34	"	{ No beard.
10	*Masubia, " 22 to 24 "	6½	27	1	41	"	{ Do.
11	*Mashokotuani, " 25 to 28 "	5¾	27	1	41	"	{ Small mustache and chin beard.
12	*Monkoia, " 28 "	6¾	27	2	41	"	{ Do. do.
13	*Monkoia, " 20 "	6½	27	1	34	"	{ None.
14	*Masubia, " 25 "	5½	27	1	34	"	{ Chin beard shaven off.
15	*Masubia (chief), " 35 "	5½	27	1	34	"	{ Chin beard pretty thick.

SPECIAL NOTES ON ABOVE.—Every one of these, except No. 11, had splendid teeth. The way in which the teeth are filed is the following; for instance :—No. 4, No. 5, No. 11, . The Matolelas and Malokas usually knock off two of their upper teeth, and sometimes also the two lower ones in the centre.

Diagrams of feet have also been taken.