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West Africa : Ethnography.

Cardinall.

Customs at Death of King of Dagomba. By A. W. Cardinall, 52
Assistant District Commissioner, Northern Territories, Gold Coast.

The following are some very incomplete notes on the customs observed at the death of Alasan, the last King of Dagomba. Dagomba is situated partly in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast and partly in North Togoland. The capital was Yendi, and was until 1914 under German rule. Dagomba is the oldest of the Moshi-speaking states which, in the fourteenth century, controlled a district comprising practically all the country in the great bend of the Niger, and resisted so often and successfully the invasions of the Mahommedan peoples from the north. To this day relations most cordial and familiar are maintained between the courts of Yendi in Wagomba, Nalerigu in Mamprussi, Fada n' Gurma in Gurma, and Wagadugu in Moshi—the capitals of the four kingdoms having the same language and political constitution, and whose rulers trace their descent from the same ancestors.

On 16th January, 1917, Alasan died suddenly during the national festival of *damba*, the harvest-home of the yam and cereal crops. His death was announced to me in these words: "Our eyes are red." It was but 3 a.m., and I naturally was somewhat hasty at the disturbance of my slumbers, and to my query as to what it meant, the answer came: "We have now no more honour." The interpreter deemed it advisable to explain that he thought the messenger meant their king was dead. They then asked for permission to beat "their big drum," so that all men should know of the misfortune. At the same time the beating of this drum would notify the chief of Bagale that his master is dead. This is necessary, since he is the hereditary guardian of the house whither kings' souls go after death. It consists of one hut only, which I was told has never been allowed to fall into disrepair, and was erected over the tomb of a former ruler, one Sitogo. As soon as the chief of Bagale hears the drumming, he takes a pot and places it inside the door of this house with water and corn in it. He leaves the door open and retires again. The soul can then enter and eat. The chief of Bagale's senior wife must close the door before morning, and may never sleep with her husband again. Bagale is a good hundred miles from Yendi as the crow flies.

Ordinarily, the king's death is kept secret by the ministers of the crown (eunuchs) and elders of Yendi, but when Alasan died, there was in his hut one of his wives, and she ran out immediately and began throwing her property over the wall of the royal compound, lest it should be seized by the king's servants. Other wives realised what had happened; and the news soon spread throughout the compound, so that the chief eunuch was obliged to publish it abroad.

Mounted messengers were at once sent to all the more important chiefs; on this occasion one went to the Mamprussi court at Nalenga. Formerly they were sent to Moshi and Gurma as well.

These messengers draw rein outside the compound of the chief to whom they have been sent, and call out that they have ill tidings. The people of the compound come out, and recognising the messenger, endeavour to catch him. He must seek sanctuary at the market-place, for, if caught, he can only regain his freedom by being ransomed by his family. Should he reach refuge he is called back and gives the message: "The king has gone to his farm."

Mahommedan influence is increasing in the courts of these pagan chiefs, and the custom has grown up that a *malam* should attend the king. It is his function to offer up prayer during the time of his master's illness, and should the latter die, he receives as slave the servant on whose lap the royal body rests while being washed in preparation for burial. It is noteworthy that the king's body should not come in contact with the earth, and in life he often sleeps across the laps of his slaves.

The actual burial of the king is superintended by the chiefs of Sunson and Sabsuga, but cannot be performed till the eldest surviving son of the king arrives. Otherwise there seems no definite rule as to the number of days which must elapse between death and burial.

The grave is about 6 feet long and, when excavated, about 2 feet deep with a lateral recess on one side. This cavity is plastered up with clay, *darwa-darwa* leaves and sticks being used to support the clay, which is made from the excavated earth. No door is left. Thirty-three new native iron hoes are put on the floor of the recess, on them three or four skins of cows, newly slain, and then three pillows, leather-covered, which are made ready while the king is still alive, but not used before. The body is clothed in white trousers, white gown, and white cap—all of native cloth—and new sandals are placed on his feet, and one ring and one bracelet on the left hand of silver made from melted coins (formerly Hausa bracelets). The body lies on its left side—with knees bent slightly and arms bent but not clasped, all being on the pillows.

The grave is in the king's own compound, and in a special hut wherein he may not enter during his lifetime. When the body is being carried to this burial hut, a cow is slaughtered on the way thereto and across its body is carried the king's corpse. All who have been faithful to the king, or have had no sexual intercourse with any of his wives, touch the animal's blood and rub it on their forehead, or dip a Kola nut in it and chew it. The meat is cooked and eaten. This is an ordeal, for everyone who has touched one of the king's wives would surely die when partaking of the meat; even if unawares he receives a piece of the meat, death will find him out. The remainder is roasted and kept as an ingredient for the ordeal poison.

Immediately the king is buried his wives gather by the grave and renew their lamentations, and this they do whenever a chief arrives for about a month or so, when, too, the heads of all the king's children are shaved. But before this, the king's own children are numbered, grandchildren and bastards being excluded. I was told that the late King Alasan's own children numbered 197, of whom 100 died. (The number 197 included children who were sucklings or who had died as such, *i.e.*, who ordinarily are not reckoned as yet human beings.)

The shaving day is a day of great festivity, with much beating of state drums and firing of guns. An accident from the latter on this occasion requires no revenge, even if death ensues, for anyone dying from this cause should rejoice that he follows the Yendi king into the tomb.

Three days after the burial, the fetish priest kills a cow over a large hole, which he has made, and wherein a fire has been lighted. A large pot is placed in the hole at the same time. Anyone may eat of the meat, but nothing may be taken away, the remnants being buried in the hole. It is noteworthy that the hide is eaten, the hair being first singed off. This custom appears to be a survival of the old *régime*, before the present dynasty seized the kingship.

On the third night after the shaving the chief of Gukpiogo, who is also on this occasion called the chief of the dead, will come at midnight with his followers, all of them walking stark naked to the grave of their king, and it is said that on their arrival, all the ghosts of the dead kings of Yendi will be present. Twice they run round the compound in which the corpse of the king is buried; they then enter it and satisfy themselves that all has been done correctly. Consequences most dire would follow if anyone attempted to look at them, so proclamation of their visit is made on the two evenings before their arrival, and after dark no one goes out, nor is any sound made, for not even may a dog bark and live. After the visit they withdraw secretly; the chief of Gukpiogo receives a cow for this custom.

The next day the chief of Gundogo comes. He is called "Mba-nā," and brings

a cock to tie in one of the rooms of the king's widows. He cuts yams into rings to fit on each widow's head, breasts, wrists, ankles, and belly. Save in the case of necessity, the women are not allowed to go out except by permission from the "Mba-nā," when 200 to 300 cowries are paid to him. Each time a cock crows all the widows must answer on the last note of the bird: "*Bien sā-i, Bien sā-i nānī*," meaning, "We do agree, we do agree with thee."

They observe this custom until the final funeral rite is performed, and the widows, having washed in medicinal water, have to shave all over and then each one of them is free to go to her town to choose a husband for herself.

From time to time while the funeral is going on, the alarm is beaten (with the state drum) and people are wont to gather, to show that they keep watch. And on the last day a horse, a donkey, and a dog are slain for the departed king's service.

The house over the grave is then knocked down, the ruins being left one year. They are then cleared away, the grave is opened and men stir the bones with sticks. The stakes which closed the tomb are knocked down, and the hole is filled with the excavated earth. Above this is placed a stone, a brass pan standing on it. These pans may still be found in many places; but in Yendi they are gone, and only the stones mark the various royal graves. According to my informant, the object of stirring the bones is to change the position of the body. A. W. CARDINALL.

China: Art.

Read.

A Second Chinese Bronze with Scythian Affinities. By Sir C. Hercules Read.

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In MAN, 1920, 1, I gave a note of an interesting Chinese bronze vessel, probably of mediæval or even later date, though its design displayed evidences of the survival of motives of prehistoric times. Plate A accompanying this note showed the two longer sides of the oblong vessel, one with a winged quadruped, the other a tiger, each combating a snake. On each of the two shorter sides was a bird with a horned head. In respect of the presence of these two birds, the bronze differed from the figure of an otherwise identical vessel from the *Kao ku t'u* reproduced as Fig. 3 in the Note. This figure was ornamented with a tiger, a dragon, a phoenix, and a tortoise, the two latter taking the place of the horned birds on the bronze in Plate A. The tiger, dragon, phoenix, and tortoise are, of course, all familiar symbolic creatures in Chinese art, and it is, I think, of interest to bring to the notice of the readers of MAN the existence of a second bronze vessel identical with that in my previous note, with the single exception that it has a tortoise on one of the ends, though the horned bird appears on the other. It is, therefore, clear that this horned bird is intended as a phoenix, however elementary its attributes may be, and that essentially this second bronze is the same as that shown in the *Kao ku t'u*. The two bronzes are, however, so nearly identical in all other directions that the same mould could have served for both. The single handle of that now in question is broken away, and it is doubtful whether the specimen ever had a second, while four bosses project from the upper edge. This specimen is the property of our Fellow, Dr. C. G. Seligman. C. HERCULES READ.

Africa: Linguistics.

Thomas.

The Plural in Biafada. By N. W. Thomas, M.A.

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In his *Comparative Study* Sir H. H. Johnston gives a list of the plural prefixes of Biafada; it entirely neglects, as being non-Bantu, one of the most remarkable features of the language—the internal polarity of certain nouns—that makes it a near relation of Fula and Serer. Each noun has a double plural change