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103. On the Thunder-Stones of Nigeria: Being Extracts from a Report by Dr. Pierce M. Dwyer, President of the Ilorin Province of Northern Nigeria.

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tion. Stone celts and arrow-heads are regarded as "thunderbolts" and "lightning-stones" almost everywhere where their true nature is forgotten. Western Africa is no exception to this general rule. Sir R. Burton, the Rev. T. J. Bowen, Major A. B. Ellis, and others, all refer to this belief in this region. Burton and Winwood Reade have told us that on the Gold Coast stone axes were called "thunderstones" (*sráman-bo*) and "god-axes," and were carefully preserved for their supposed medicinal virtues. A specimen was found by Mr. Kühne on an altar or shrine at Ashanti. In that region, too, they were called "god-axes," and were regarded with superstitious reverence. On the Slave Coast, according to Ellis, stone axes are called *so-kpe* ("fire-stones") by the Ewe-speaking peoples, and are believed to be thunderbolts associated with Khebioso, the lightning god. The same writer tells us that Shango, the god of thunder and lightning of the Yoruba-speaking population of the Slave Coast, has the epithet of *Jakuta* (i.e., "hurler of stones"), and that stone implements are regarded as his thunderbolts. The superstitious reverence with which stone axes were regarded in Benin itself is abundantly manifest from the frequent representations of these objects upon the elaborate bronze castings, especially upon some of the larger human heads and the state maces. Upon the latter the surmounting human figure is frequently represented as holding a neolithic axe blade in the left hand. By analogy we may assume that in Benin the stone axes were "thunderbolts," and became objects of veneration as symbols of the thunder-god; the blood libations being, presumably, of the nature of propitiatory offerings. This small celt with its mounting of bronze curiously recalls to mind a jade celt found at Tonneins (Lot-et-Garonne) described in the *Bull. Archéol. du Tarn-et-Garonne* (1872, p. 9). This is about the same size as the Benin example, and the bronze mounting similarly encloses the upper portion of the celt, though it differs in character from the West African mounting, as might be expected. I have seen one other Benin mounting for a celt, though from this the celt itself was missing.

Together with the stone celt, I have thought it worth while to figure two little bronze models of celts from Benin (Figs. 2 and 3). These were part of a number of similar celt-models which were found associated together, and were said to have formed a necklet. Each is a perfect miniature representation in metal of a stone axe of a form very similar to that of the actual stone celt which I have described. They are engraved somewhat deeply on both faces and edges; the zig-zag lines which cross one another, and form in one specimen an angular figure-of-8 on each face, may perhaps be symbolical of lightning, and so have served further to connect these model *heraunia* with the god of lightning. They are perforated for stringing, and weigh rather over half-an-ounce apiece. The "thunderbolt" in this case has become a semi-conventional symbol of the real article.

All three specimens are now in the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford.

HENRY BALFOUR.

Africa : Nigeria.

Dwyer.

On the Thunder-stones of Nigeria: *Being extracts from a Report by Dr. Pierce M. Dwyer, President of the Ilorin Province of Northern Nigeria.* **103**
Communicated, by Sir Frederick Lugard, K.C.M.G., High Commissioner, through Sir John Evans, K.C.B., F.R.S.

It may not be out of place in a report if I give . . . a brief *résumé* of the religion of Shonga, which is spread all over Yorubaland and Hausaland.

Shonga is the god of Thunder and Lightning and his wife is Oya, the Niger river. All the members of this religion are known by the peculiar way in which they do their hair, which is piled up in a crescent shape, along the long axis of the head, and by the red and white bead necklace and leaden bracelets. There is one supreme idol called Orisala, which takes the form of a woman; but each town has its own special idol, which is a slave to the Orisala.

The high priest is called the Arobade, and is a man of great importance at all times, but of supreme importance at the time of the yearly feast, which lasts seventeen days. At the time of this feast a ram is killed, and the blood is smeared over the idol and over the priests. They kneel when praying, and look, as a rule, towards the town of Old Oyo, where the first king, who was a Shonga man, died by committing suicide.

In connection with this religion is one fact of, to me, extraordinary interest, which is that they worship, under the name of Adura, ancient "axe-heads" or "Celts"; they declare that these stones are the messengers from Shonga and endowed with peculiar properties when "fresh." When a house is struck by lightning and destroyed it is a sign that the inhabitants have offended Shonga, and it is necessary for the chief priest to extract the thunder-stone from inside the house. This is a sight well worth seeing. A big feast is held, and then the priest and a couple of his followers go alone inside, and, after a time, they come out with the stone. It is here that I was absolutely non-plussed to account for the extraordinary spectacle shown by the man who carried it. He held in his hand an iron dish in which rested the stone in what appeared to be liquid cow dung, and he was convulsed with the most marvellous muscular twitchings and shakes. I do not think it possible that any man could voluntarily throw his muscles into such a state of tremor. The natives declare it to be due to the freshness of the stone, which is, of course, all nonsense. As soon as the stone is found, the owners of the house have to pay a certain fee to the priest in order that he may gain Shonga's pardon for some crime they have committed.

Of course, if no house is struck by lightning, the priest sees that a fire takes place from other causes in order that he may gain his fee, but he is always able to produce the "Adura" stone.

I cannot trace where these stones come from, and have many times offered heavy bribes to the priest to tell me, and have always received the same answer, "They come from Shonga." When we remember the peculiar superstitions that exist at the present day in Europe, and especially, if I remember rightly, in France and Germany, as to these stones—one being that they are used by departed souls to knock at the gates of hell or purgatory—I consider it most interesting to find the same kind of superstition out here. . . .

I will now show how this religion works on legal lines. If a person offends some of the Elders, or commits some crime, a few days after his house is burnt, the priests arrive and find the stone, and the accused has to pay a large sum for pardon.

Instead of his house being burnt, he may be accused, and if he denies, he has to undergo the trial of *Agbarisi ku*. This is performed thus: a skull of a person who has been killed by lightning is placed on the ground, base upward, a bowl of water in front of it, and a man with a rattle near. The accused has to throw off his clothes and beg that if he is guilty he may also die by Shonga in seven days. He then drinks from the bowl of water, in which first either the skull or a thunder-stone is dipped.

Another test is for him to visit the idol house and drink water in which it has been dipped, after it is first smeared with medicine.

PIERCE M. DWYER.

Obituary: Brown.

Rudler.

John Allen Brown, F.G.S., born September 3, 1831; died September 24, 1903.

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By the recent death of Mr. John Allen Brown, the Anthropological Institute has lost a valued member, whose name has been on its roll for the last fourteen years. Born seventy-two years ago, Mr. Brown had reached manhood before the question of the antiquity of man had ripened for full discussion. That discussion he followed with keen interest, and on his retirement from business, rather early in life, he devoted himself

[* The thunder-stone.—Ed.]