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23. Skin Dressing: A Description of the Process of Converting the Raw Hides of Game or Domestic Cattle Into Articles of Native Wearing Apparel.

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del Sol. Allowing for the difference between a much conventionalised sculpture and imaginative feminine needlework, a connection may be traced between the figures of the tapestries and the Puerta del Sol, where the small human figures in the border carry votive heads.

Zululand: Skin-dressing.

Vaughan-Kirby.

Skin Dressing: A Description of the Process of Converting the Raw Hides of Game or Domestic Cattle into Articles of Native Wearing Apparel. By F. Vaughan-Kirby, Game Conservator, Nongoma, Zululand, January 24, 1914.

23

The following description of the Zulu method of skin dressing, by Mr. F. Vaughan-Kirby, was sent me by the Natal Government early in 1914, in answer to my request for information on the subject, through the kindness of Mr. J. R. Boosé, C.M.G., the late Secretary of the Royal Colonial Institute. At some of the informal conferences of Northern Museum Curators there had been



[From a photograph by F. Vaughan-Kirby.

NATIVES USING THE I-ZEMBE.

expressions of opinion on the part of some members that pigmy flints had been used in pre-historic times for the purposes of skin dressing, an opinion which I and others did not hold. As a means of throwing light on the point I tried to get information as to the methods of skin dressing followed by present-day unrisen peoples, and as Livingstone's short account (*Missionary Travels*, London, 1857, p. 193) gave some clue, I endeavoured to follow it up by obtaining more complete information. Mr. Vaughan-Kirby has very evidently taken great pains in collecting the particulars and noting them down, and as a result we have for the first time a very complete description of Zulu soft leather manufacture. The use of the slain animals' brains as an aid in softening the skin is a point of resemblance with the method used by the North American Indians when engaged on a like job, otherwise, except the stretching of the skin, which it would be difficult to encompass in any other way, the methods adopted by

the two peoples are quite distinct. For purposes of comparison I include, among the illustrations, one of the Mokololo tools brought home by Livingstone and now in the British Museum. It does not look likely that the pigmy flints could have served the same purpose as that of the Zulu skin-dressing tools.

H. LING ROTH.

In the present instance—of which the following is a description—the hide selected was that of a three-parts grown “blue” wildebeest (*Connochoetes taurinus*).

The hide was first soaked in fresh water to soften it, the time of immersion being from 10 a.m. on a Sunday morning till 8 a.m. on the Tuesday = 46 hours.

Upon its removal from the water the hide was “pegged out” for the preliminary scraping, with the hair side down. The plan of pegging out is dissimilar to that adopted when it is merely intended to dry the skin. In the latter case holes are cut at intervals round the edge of the hide, into which wooden pegs are inserted and then driven into the ground, the skin being raised about 4 inches from the earth. For the present purpose the holes were cut at intervals round the edge, and into these tie-ropes (made of stripped bark of certain trees, and called *mugcosi*) were inserted, by means of which the hide was drawn out tightly to

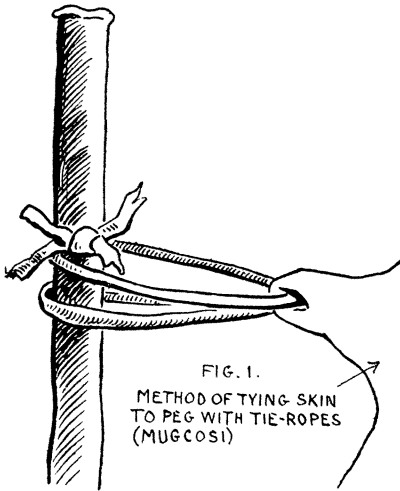


FIG. 1.
METHOD OF TYING SKIN
TO PEG WITH TIE-ROPS
(MUGCOSI)

long, stout wooden pegs driven firmly into the ground, above which the skin was raised about 18 inches (Fig. 1).

The object of the tie-ropes is to enable the hide to be kept tightly stretched; as the skin is pared down and becomes thinner it stretches, and when this occurs the tie-ropes are tautened up.

The hide having been properly pegged out, work was commenced upon the upper side (actually the inside of the skin) with sharp iron instruments known as ‘*mazembe*. The edge of this instrument (Figs. 2 and 3) is kept very keen and never allowed to dull; a metal pin, 8 inches in length, being used for this purpose (Fig. 4).

To prevent chafing of the hands when using the ‘*mazembe*, the latter is bound round with grass-rope, soft strips of hide, or any similar substance. The operation of scraping is, in the vernacular, known as *uku pala* (to scrape).

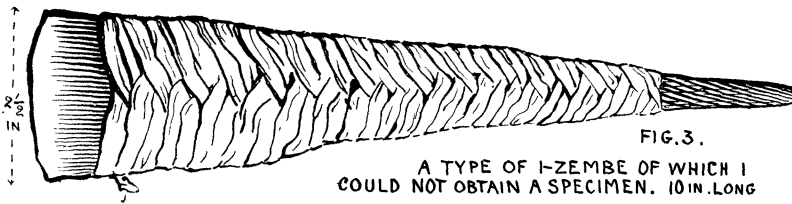
Throughout this operation the skin was kept very damp, water being sprinkled upon it at frequent intervals. The *pala*-ing occupied from 9 a.m. till noon, when the skin was removed and returned to the water till 1 p.m., when it was again taken out and re-pegged. Scraping was then renewed, but this time other tools were brought into use, and the ‘*mazembe* laid aside. These are known as ‘*zi-ndhlandlwa*, and vary considerably in their construction. A specimen of each kind (Figs. 5 and 6)* used on the present occasion was secured by me, and will be found



FIG. 2. I-ZEMBE. 8½ IN. LONG.

* Specimens of the instruments as illustrated by Figs. 2, 5, and 6, together with specimens of the skin in process of dressing and finished, are exhibited in Bankfield Museum. For these we have to thank Mr. Vaughan-Kirby.—H. L. R.

in the collection. It is only necessary to say that the one made by driving nails through a rounded block of wood (Fig. 6) is the least satisfactory of the two. Only two kinds of wood lend themselves to the proper construction of the block, viz.,



that of the 'mGanu tree (from the acid fruit of which a deliciously refreshing but highly-intoxicating drink is brewed), and of 'mKiwane, the wild fig. These woods shrink upon the metal and hold the nails firmly in position, which no other local wood will do. The specimen procured is of 'mGanu wood. These 'zi-ndhlwandlwa are used upon the surface with a series of criss-cross strokes, that is, in such a manner as to produce (temporary) marks upon the cuticle resembling "cross-hatching" in pencil drawing.

About an hour after these 'zi-ndhlwandlwa were brought into use a distinct nap (Zulu 'mSendo) became visible on the skin, and at once other instruments (as I must call them) were taken up and worked in conjunction with the 'zi-ndhlwandlwa. These simple but highly effective instruments were none other than the broad leaves of the 'mHlaba (a species of aloe or cactus bearing brilliant orange-red flowers, and whose leaves are burnt in the fire, the ash being then finely powdered and used in the preparation of the native *ugwai* or snuff). The individual leaves used for the purpose of raising a nap on skins is styled



iHlaba. The leaf is scored slightly down the mid-rib, then doubled over, tied with a piece of grass rope, and the cruel hooked thorns removed from the portion held in the hand. (I have not secured a leaf of this aloe, but will endeavour to do so later on.) The method of using the *iHlaba* is as follows: The leaf is cut about 18 inches in length, and is held in either hand at the base, the pointed end away from the operator and the thorns thus turned towards the point. The instrument is then worked forwards and backwards, the effective stroke being the forward one (away from the operator), as in the draw-back it is slightly raised from the surface of the skin.

It may be mentioned here that in the days prior to the introduction of fencing wire, nails, &c. into the country the entire work of the 'zi-ndhlwandlwa was performed with these 'mHlaba leaves, just as the work of the 'mazembe was performed with iron instruments of native manufacture—now unprocurable.

'Zi-ndhlwandlwa and *iHlaba* were now plied vigorously until 4 p.m., the skin being constantly moistened throughout the whole period, and then it was removed

from the pegs and returned to the river for the night.

On the following morning work was resumed, the skin being re-pegged. The *zi-ndhlwandlwa* and *iHlaba* were again requisitioned, and for three

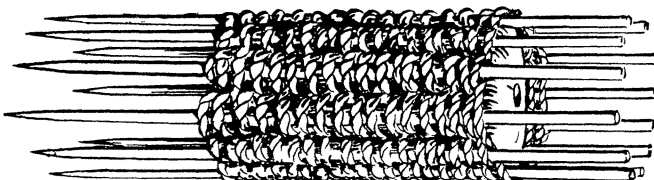


FIG. 5. I-ZIDHLWADHLA, No. 1. 8 IN LONG

hours the work progressed steadily. A critical stage was now entered upon, as the use of the 'zi-ndhlwandlwa had to be discontinued at a certain point, and

a number of tests were made for the purpose of ascertaining if that point had been reached. The principal and simplest test appeared to be running the fingers over the surface of the skin with the hands held as in piano playing, when the *touch* conveyed the desired information to the operator. Another plan was to feel the surface with four fingers of one hand, and passing the other hand underneath the skin with the fingers in juxtaposition to those of the other hand, to test the skin between them. A third test was made by running a stout needle into the skin from above, the ease or otherwise with which it entered forming the desired test.

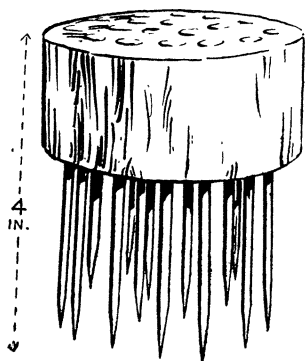


FIG. 6. I-ZIDHLWADHLA No. 2

It was considered well to discard the '*zi-ndhlwandlwa*', and from this time the '*iHlaba*' alone were used. Their harsh, powerful thorns very soon raised a nap on the surface, and after two hours more of vigorous work the skin was left an hour. Resuming work at 2 p.m. the scraping process was declared completed at 3.30 p.m.

A quantity of clean water was then thrown over the surface of the skin, and by using the backs of sheath-knives, pieces of plank, etc., it was squeezed almost dry.

The skin then presented the appearance of a white blanket with a close, short nap; upon parting this nap with the fingers the skin below was seen to be greyish-blue in colour, owing to the roots of the hair showing through.

The skin was then treated with the following: 2 lbs. maize meal mixed with cold water to the consistency of thin gruel. This was rubbed lightly over the dressed surface for fifteen minutes, and the whole was left dry. The object attained was the "clearing" of the '*msendo*' (nap), and getting rid of all tendency to *bunch up*. That night the skin was placed in a native hut, and early next morning again put out to dry. This being accomplished, the skin was once more drawn out of the pegs, but this time with the *hair side uppermost*, and the operators, taking their '*mazembe*' in hand, proceeded to scrape the hair off completely.

Meanwhile the material for softening the skin (or, as it may now be termed, the '*sidiwaba*' = native woman's petticoat) was being prepared.

Three substances are used for this purpose, viz.:—

1. The kernels of the nuts contained in the very astringent plums known as (*a*) '*matunduluku*.* These grow upon a bushy shrub (the '*umtunduluku*') found in the bush country (not on the higher and more open hills), and which attains a height of about 15 feet. Specimens are forwarded of these nuts, the kernels of which are of a very oily nature. This substance produces the cleanest results as well as the most odourless; it is usually the most easily obtainable, and therefore most frequently used.



FIG. 7.—MAKOLOLO SKIN DRESSING TOOL IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

From "Local Prehistoric Implements." By H. P. Kendall and H. Ling Roth. *Bankside Museum Notes*, 1st Series, No. 12, 1912, p. 15.

2. The kernels of the nuts of the castor oil plant, '*inhlakuva*', which of course is well known. It produces dirty results, and an evil odour and of great permanency, but renders the

* The nut has been identified at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, as the fruit of *Ximenia caffra*.—H. L. R.

material extremely soft. It is, I fancy, preferred by the native women who wear the (i)'*zidwaba*, and who are in no way inconvenienced by the offensive smell.

3. The brains of cattle, goats, or wild game. This produces fairly clean results and not *too* offensive an odour after about six months' use, but during that period of probation the garment is about as evil a thing as can well be imagined.

The '*matunduluku* nuts were used on the present occasion. About two pints of the shelled kernels were ground up into a thick paste upon a native grinds one, this paste being then mixed into about three pints of water "just off the boil," when a thin brownish-coloured gruel, extremely oily and soft to the touch, resulted.

The '*sidwaba* was now placed on the grass (after the dried maize-meal had been shaken off) prepared side up, and the hot liquid poured over it, the latter being thoroughly but lightly rubbed into the nap for ten minutes. This done the '*sidwaba* was rolled up *very* tightly, and green damp leaves of any tree or shrub bound round it, and the whole enclosed tightly in a piece of sacking. Thus it might remain indefinitely, but of *necessity* for only as long as was required to enable the preparation to soak in thoroughly. In the present instance it was removed 48 hours later, when the final operation of *shuka*-ing (rubbing soft) was commenced. This is done exactly in the same way as any ordinary skin is *shuka*-ed, the operator sitting down in the shade, and rubbing and twisting one part of the skin, held in one hand, upon another portion held in the other hand. This work was done at odd times, but when put away was always similarly rolled up, bound in leaves, and enclosed in sacking.

Altogether the *shuka*-ing took about eight hours to complete.

On examining the dressed piece it will probably be seen that the nap is lying pressed down. The garment should be held up between two people, one of whom with a *thin* supple switch strikes the surface sharply at different points, when the nap at once rises. As much of the length of the switch as possible should be permitted to fall upon the surface, not merely a few inches of the point.

It only remains to say that the skins of male animals produce the longest nap or '*msendo*, and those of full grown animals a longer nap than those of younger animals.

F. VAUGHAN-KIRBY.

Papua: Ethnography.

Murray: Ray.

The People and Language between the Fly and Strickland Rivers, Papua. By the Hon. J. W. P. Murray, Lieutenant-Governor of Papua. Communicated, with Notes, by S. H. Ray. 24

His Excellency the Hon. J. W. P. Murray, Lieutenant-Governor of Papua, has very kindly sent me a vocabulary, collected by himself and the resident magistrate for the Western Division (Mr. S. D. Burrows), during a visit to Lake Murray, a large swampy tract which lies in the angle formed by the junction of the Fly River with the Strickland, in Western Papua, about 7° S. lat. and 141° 30' E. long.

The lake is reached by ascending the Herbert River, a tributary of the Strickland, for about 18 miles. It is a large sheet of water, dotted with innumerable islands. Round the banks and islands a grass is growing which seems to be extending into the lake, and has already covered a large area of it. This is, in parts, strong enough to support a man walking on it. The natives use a paddle with a broad, round, flat blade, which enables them to press down the grass and pass over it in their canoes. The clear water is about 25 miles long, and at the widest about 4 or 5 miles. A depth of 5 fathoms is not uncommon.

Lake Murray was discovered by Messrs. Massy-Baker and Burrows in June