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38. A Pokomo Funeral

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From the style of the design it would seem to belong, not to that magnificent period distinguished by the fine painted and moulded ware which, artistically speaking, is one of the glories of aboriginal America, nor to the later period characterised by the appearance on the coast of the inland art which flourished at Tiahuanaco in pre-Inca times, but to the period which immediately preceded the conquest of the coast by the Inca, a period of technical progress but artistic decadence. As to the individual represented in the ornament, whether he be god, noble, or warrior, it is impossible to say. The remains from the coast in museums and private collections far outnumber those from the highlands, and from those remains we can gather many details concerning the appearance, dress, and weapons of the coast people. But for the most part their history, mythology, and social system are a sealed book to us.

The beaker is the property of Mr. James Curle, to whom I owe cordial thanks for permission to publish it in *MAN*. T. A. JOYCE.

Africa, East.

Werner.

A Pokomo Funeral. By Miss A. Werner.

38

The following account of a Pokomo funeral is translated from some notes sent me (in German) by Herr Becker, of the Neukirchen Mission, Kulesa, Tana River. I have supplemented them with some information derived directly from natives, though this is much less than I could have wished. Unfortunately, I was not able to come in touch with Wapokomo at a distance from any of the mission stations, so have no independent confirmation or otherwise of the statement that the custom of preventing the earth from touching the body is entirely due to Christian influence. In view of the fact that most, if not all Bantu tribes (not counting those who, like the Gikuyu, have adopted Masai burial—or non-burial—customs) take some sort of precautions to insure this result, this statement does not strike one as probable. But the Pokomo, being placed in rather peculiar conditions (not to mention the strong probability that they are partly of Wasanye descent) seem in some respects to have departed from normal Bantu customs, and it would be rash to dogmatize; though I could not help suspecting that much of the information supplied to me by members of this mission was unconsciously coloured by strong prepossessions. Herr Becker's account has been somewhat condemned in places.

“Ceremonies on the death of a Pokomo belonging to the orders of Ngadzi (*Wakijo*) and Ganga (*Mugangana*), at Munyuni. (The Mwina tribe, in whose district the village of Munyuni is situated, occupy a position midway between the tribes of the Upper and the Lower Tana, their dialect approximating more to that of the former, while they also share with them the custom of circumcision, and belong to the same Ngadzi society; from Benderani downwards the ‘lodge’ is that of the Lower Tana.)

“When I arrived at Munyuni on November 29 (1912), I heard that a man, the father of one of our Christian youths, had been suddenly taken ill, so that he could neither walk, speak, nor hear. By Pokomo customs, in such cases, all friends and relatives of the patient come and seat themselves in, or in front of, his hut. Conversation goes on and no special emotion is shown; even when it is known for certain that death is approaching, no one sheds a tear. As soon, however, as the last breath is drawn, everyone, as if at a word of command, begins to shriek and wail in the most dreadful fashion. This is a universal Pokomo custom. On the present occasion, when the wailing had lasted 20 minutes or half an hour, preparations were made for burial. One man bought a cloth, in which the corpse was to be wrapped, others began to dig the grave, and others made ready two boards, from a worn-out canoe, one being laid in the bottom of the grave, which is made so narrow as only just to admit the corpse. Above the level of the corpse, the sides

of the grave are cut away, so as to leave a ledge on which the second and broader plank is to rest, so that the corpse is quite covered and the earth does not touch it. This practice, however, is of recent origin and has been adopted from the Christians. Another man sharpens a knife, with which the dead man's whole body is shaved, the hair being put into a quite new earthen bowl, half filled with water. The bowl containing the hair and water was placed at the head of the grave; the corpse was then wrapped in the new cloth and two Wagangana (sorcerers) came into the hut with a drum (*Ngoma*), which they beat, but in a fashion different from that followed on other occasions. It was a deep, eerie sound that was produced, reminding one of a funeral march; the women sang and wailed at the same time. After the drum had been beaten inside the hut for about ten minutes, they came out and stood behind the hut, turning one end of the drum towards the spot where the dead man lay. While they went on drumming in this position, two other men came and made an opening in the back of the hut. (The corpse of a man must not be carried out at the door, though this is done in the case of women and boys.) The body was now brought out, wrapped in the new cloth, a fine ostrich feather, the badge of a mukijo (elder), projecting from the cloth at the head end.

"The corpse was now placed in a canoe exactly in the middle. (This does not necessarily imply that the grave was at a great distance. The Pokomo transport any loads, even for short distances, by canoe, though if not loaded they usually prefer to cross the numerous bends of the river on foot.) The women followed, still singing and wailing, and got into the canoe, half of them sitting on each side facing the corpse. A second large canoe (*waho*) was placed alongside the first, and in this the men embarked carrying the drum. Two poles were now laid across both canoes, and a man sat on each, his weight keeping the poles firm so that the canoes remained side by side without being lashed together, as is done in the so-called Sangale (two canoes placed parallel with a platform lashed between and across them; used sometimes for the transport of European invalids, and in all cases where a wider craft is required than the usual dug-out). The paddling was done by one man in the stern of each canoe. . . . As soon as the funeral party had left all was quiet in the village, but directly they returned there was another outburst of wailing, which continued all night in the house of the deceased, but stopped by day, to begin again at ten p.m. on the following night. At seven a.m. on the day after the funeral all the dead man's friends and relatives had their heads shaved. Large quantities of honey wine are always consumed on this occasion. When any relative arrived from a distance the death wail was raised again by all present. The widows are expected to remain in seclusion and only speak in whispers till the great *nyambura* (funeral feast) has taken place. . . . The customs followed on the Lower Tana differ in some respects, but the main points are the same as those detailed above."

One of the native Christians at Ngao informed me—quite independently of the above; in fact, some weeks previous to the funeral described by Herr Becker—that "long ago" (*kae*) they made the grave much shallower than they now do, and laid no plank over the body, but, he added, they used to heat sand (*mbika* = "to cook," was the word he used) in an earthen pot and pour it over the grave (after it was filled in). If this was not done they believed that the deceased would "cause them to dream." This man was somewhat shocked when told of the Gikuyu and Masai custom of throwing out the dead, of which, evidently, he had never heard.

Another native Christian wrote out for me an account of some funeral ceremonies, which is headed, "Miiko ya Kufwa," i.e., "prohibitions connected with death." After mentioning the shaving and putting the hair into a bowl of water, he adds that the corpse is anointed with oil, and, in the case of a mukijo or a mugangana, marked on the forehead and breast in white, black, and red, the pigments employed being ashes,

soot, and *zazi* (red ochre). According to this account the widow is not allowed to leave her house for six months after the death. Though not explicitly so stated, this seems to be the time when the funeral feast (called by this writer *nyambura*) is held. I translate his account of the latter.

"Then, if his (*i.e.*, the dead man's) son or his brother gets money, he buys much honey and puts all things ready; then he fetches all his brothers and sisters, and they assemble together a second time and wail. Then they take rice and begin to grind it, and then they call the *wakijo*, and when everything is prepared for the *ngadzi* they assemble again, many people, and brew much honey wine (*mochi*). The *nyambura* is beaten and the *ngadzi* sounded, and many people and youths (*orani* or *worani*) dance for two days, and then they all drink *mochi* and get very drunk during three days, and then all the men and women go home; so the *nyambura* is ended, and the *ngadzi* is returned to its (hiding place) in the bush (*badani*)."

I have not yet been able to ascertain what particular kind of drum is called *nyambura*. The *ngadzi*, from which the order takes its name, is a friction-drum. A specimen of this has been presented to the British Museum by Mr. Hollis.

A. WERNER.

Archæology: Prehistoric.

Grist.

What is a Natural Eolith? By C. J. Grist, M.A.

39

Mr. Hazledine Warren, in "Problems of Flint Fracture" (*MAN*, 1913, 20), makes reference to the production of natural eoliths by stream action. It so happens the increasing demand for ferro-concrete makes it now possible, in some gravel-pits, to examine with ease stream-fractured flints by the million, all washed clean and graded to size. A search among these products of Nature leaves the impression that either streams do not make eoliths, or Mr. Warren has not made clear what he wishes to be understood by *his* word *eolith*.

As he reminds us, he has been a practical student of flint fracture since 1889 and has given much thought and experiment to the eolithic problem, may I venture to suggest that he should explain how he distinguishes his natural eolith from a primitive human implement on the one hand, and on the other from a mere shapeless fractured flint.

With Mr. Warren's experience of over twenty years in applying experimental results to natural conditions, and from the careful and mature consideration which he tells us such work requires, a lucid statement from him on these points should do much to remove difficulties—difficulties of the pressure-made as well as of the stream-made eolith. It should, for example, make clear why his own experimentally fractured flints were called eoliths which were exhibited on the lantern screen by Professor Boyd Dawkins at the lecture—"The arrival of Man in Britain in the Pleistocene Age." Lack of information tended to render that exhibit as useless as a show of broken tea-cups.

C. J. GRIST.

Archæology: Prehistoric.

Bell.

Subcrag Flints. By Alfred Bell.

40

Will Mr. Warren kindly point out any stream in a "flint" country where such a "rain of blows" is to be seen "steadily delivered against other stones wedged "in its bed?" (Such a violent action would be more likely to tear the bed of the stream up.) Very little has been done in ascertaining the constituents of the "subcrag stone bed" or tracing out the provenance of the varied mixture that goes to its making. As to whether it is entirely a marine deposit is quite a matter of opinion. After fifty years of crag work, I take the line that much of it was accumulated long before the crag waters came into our area, on an open land surface of London Clay, including the bulk of phosphatic nodules or coprolites, plutonic and