

NOTES ON THE GEDAMOCH CEREMONIES AMONG THE BORAN

ACCORDING to tradition, this, the most elaborate of all Boran customs and round which is centred the whole life of the tribe, dates back at least 16 generations to the days of Hurati Dugga, who was Chief Priest (*kalu*) at that time. At this man's birth, close by, were noticed a *kalacha*, the Gedamoch emblem, as well as certain other insignia which gave rise to and are used in the snake-worship still indulged in at the present time.

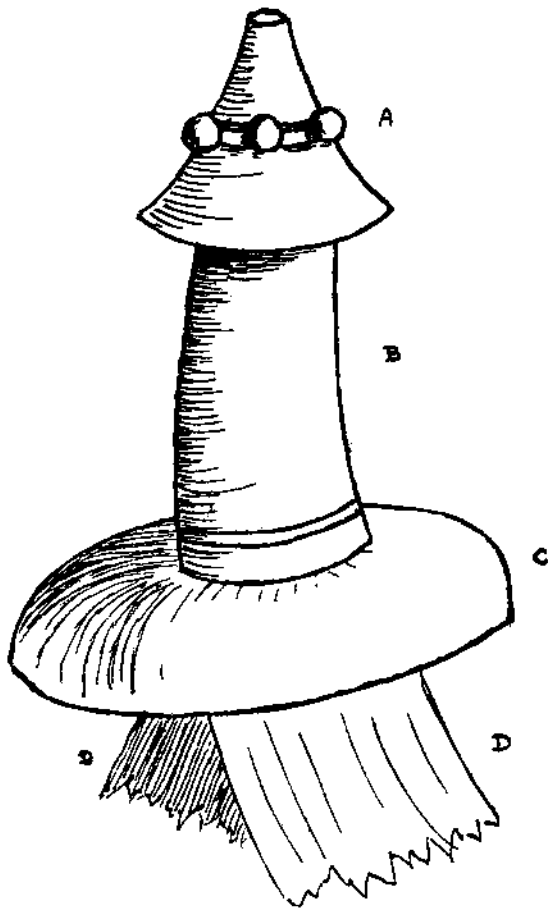
The Gedamoch ceremony is held every eight years, when all members of the particular *lube* or age-rank are initiated together. The final ceremonies of the present *lube* are due to be performed in 1923.

A man is not qualified for initiation until the lapse of five Gedamoch, *i.e.*, 40 years, from the date when his father completed his initiation. If, as often happens, a man dies before he can be initiated, his son may take his place, but does not undergo the full ceremonies. He only performs certain sacrifices in the name of his father, and then must wait till the turn of his age-rank comes round.

The Gedamoch ceremonies last for eight years for each *lube* concerned, and so, as soon as one has completed its initiation and performed the final sacrifices, the next is ready to begin and so to continue the cycle.

When, therefore, a man has qualified to become a Gedamoch, his first duty is to apply to a member of the preceding *lube* for a supply of *kumbi*. This consists of small quantities, about a handful in all, of resin (*kumbi*), flour, tobacco and the bark of the *miawa* tree. No particular meaning is assigned to this, but it must be symbolical, and may be thought to

THE KALACHA



- A. SEVEN BOSSES SUPERIMPOSED ON A RAISED RIM RUNNING ROUND THE EMBLEM.
- B. UPRIGHT PORTION MADE OF POLISHED LEAD.
- C. CIRCULAR BASE OF WHITE POLISHED SHELL-LIKE SUBSTANCE RESEMBLING IVORY.
- D. LEATHER STRAPS FOR FASTENING EMBLEM TO FOREHEAD OF WEARER.

represent three of the essentials of life, viz., the flour representing food; the resin and *miawa* safeguards against disease, for both are largely used medicinally; and thirdly tobacco, which is certainly regarded as a necessity. Mixed with soda, tobacco is chewed regularly by both sexes from childhood.

Having possessed himself of the *kumbi*, the new-fledged Gedamoch must wrap it in a piece of native-woven cloth called *buddu*. This is a rough cotton cloth, almost like sacking, woven by Conso and other Abyssinian tribes, and is of the most primitive description. If possible, the Gedamoch should wear a *buddu* cloth, but if this cannot be done, it is imperative that a piece be found large enough to hold the *kumbi*, and he may then wear modern trade cloth with the *kumbi* tied in one of the corners.

His turban should also be of *buddu*, but, failing that, he may wear *rufo*, a black and white check pattern cloth sold by traders, but considered by the Boran—the wish being probably father to the thought—to be copied from a piece of *rufo* which appeared miraculously at the birth of the Priest Hurati Dugga, mentioned above.

The Gedamoch must guard his *kumbi* most jealously, and it must never leave his possession until the completion of the ceremonies eight years later. When he washes his cloth, he must carefully remove the *kumbi*, and place it in an *okolli*¹, used for milking cattle, and return it at once when the cloth is dry.

Next he must obtain a *kalacha*, of which a sketch is here given. This he fastens by a leather thong to his forehead. These emblems are family heirlooms, and are extremely interesting, being apparently of phallic origin, although there are, as far as I am aware, no other traces of phallic worship in the Gedamoch ceremonies.

The upright portion varies in length, but is generally about three or four inches long, and is made by melting down

¹ The *okolli* is a kind of bucket (without handles) made of giraffe hide, and used for milking and for drawing water from the wells. Large numbers of giraffe are hunted by the Boran for the sake of their hides, the animals being rounded up by horsemen, and speared at full gallop from the saddle.

metal beads (Boran, *imo*; or Somali, *galinshid*), imported in large numbers from Kismayu and Barawa. The base is circular and about two inches in diameter. It is white and polished, and made, apparently, of some kind of shell found in large numbers in the Arusi country in Abyssinia.

The Gedamoch must wear his *kalacha* every day until the completion of the ceremonies, and may only remove it in the daytime if he is compelled by the smallness of his family to herd cattle. This permission is given, as, under no circumstances, must any outside object, as, for example, boughs of trees, etc., touch the *kalacha*. It is taken off at night, and handed to the Gedamoch's wife, who carefully places it on a pot filled with milk until next morning, when she returns it to her husband. No one else may handle it, nor may the man himself put it on the milk pot.

On entering his novitiate, the Gedamoch leaves his own village, and he and six other Gedamoch of his *lube* live together in the same village for the next eight years. The first year of the period is called *Gun jara*, or "The Year of the Coming of Age."

Throughout the eight years, the Gedamoch lives under certain restrictions. He may only eat meat that has been slaughtered, and then only certain parts of the beast; he may not eat any of the various edible roots used by the tribe; he must carry a staff instead of a spear; may take no part in the digging or clearing of wells, nor may he anoint his head with oil. He is treated with great respect, and looked up to as a holy man in close communion with the deity. Every wish of his must be gratified owing to his power for good and evil. One peculiarity, however, may be noticed, namely, that he does not use ordinary Boran words in speaking of certain articles of everyday use. For instance, meat is *dams* instead of the usual Boran *fon*; milk is *sile* instead of *anan*; spear is *sulud* instead of *waran*; to milk a cow is *saramma* instead of *elmade*; cattle is *lola* instead of *lon*. These words are used only by Gedamoch, and may possibly be relics of a lost language.

Except for this, his life is more or less normal, and for the present he only performs the ordinary sacrifices not in any way

connected with Gedamoch. The fourth year of the period is called *Wal arrgi*, or "The Gathering Together." At this time all Gedamoch of the particular *lube* collect together in a holy place, and a meeting is held. Careful inquiries are made to see that all is in order, *i.e.*, that all the Gedamoch are duly qualified for initiation, and after the performance of sacrifices the Gedamoch disperse and return to their villages.

The fifth year is the *Gun dada dib*, or "The Year of The Anointing with Oil." Sheep are sacrificed, and the Gedamoch cuts up the fat into dice, and threads them on a string which he wears round his neck. He unravels his *gutu*, which consists of a small plait of hair (about the size of a rat's tail) which has been allowed to grow for years on the crown of his head, somewhat after the fashion favoured by Banyanis. Only the son of a past Gedamoch, and therefore a prospective Gedamoch himself, has the privilege of wearing the *gutu*, and then only after he has killed big game, *viz.*: elephant, rhinoceros or giraffe. Prior to that he is a Ginda, and may not clean, comb or oil his hair in any way.

After unplaiting the *gutu* he frizzes out his hair in a circle horizontally round his head. Fibre is interwoven, until the combined result sticks out as much as twelve inches all round. This is called *guduru*. He remains in seclusion in his hut for seven days, and then, after performing sacrifices, is free to walk about, although henceforth for the remainder of the eight years sunset must never find him outside his village.

In the sixth year, called *Dela iyesa*, the sons of dead members of the particular *lube* shave their heads, and perform the sacrifices referred to above, in order to qualify for their own initiation 40 years later.

The seventh year is called *Bararri*, and male children of the Gedamoch are then circumcised. In many cases, of course, owing to the long period of waiting imposed by the 40-year interval between a father's and his sons' initiations into Gedamoch, these children have long been grown up and some may have married. Prior to circumcision, all the children are called Raba, and any children these Raba may have must be cast out the moment they are born and given to the hyenas. This is not looked upon as a hardship, as the Boran are con-

vinced that poverty and misfortune would inevitably overtake anyone foolish enough to violate this law. One only of such sons may be reared, and he is brought up as a girl, and is made to wear female clothes and do his hair like a woman. When this boy's father becomes Gedamoch, he is circumcised and restored to his sex.

There is a growing tendency nowadays to avoid this infant sacrifice by giving out these children to strangers to rear so that they may be restored to the family when the requisite time has elapsed. In such cases the parents and grandparents of these children are never allowed to set eyes on them until their restoration. Often, too, these Raba victims are rescued and reared by the neighbouring Moslem tribes, and then they seldom, if ever, return to their families. Although all their offspring are doomed to destruction, it is not considered in any way immoral or disgraceful for Raba to marry and have children, and there is no question of illegitimacy or the like. All Raba wear their hair rough, and keep a round patch shaved on the crown. This, incidentally, is also the mark of an unmarried girl.

Circumcision is performed in the cattle enclosure before the cattle are driven out to graze. The foreskin after removal is placed on the back of a cow or heifer, which is then called Dungo, and is sacred. Together with its calves, if any, it becomes the property of the mother of the child. Any child too young for circumcision, *i.e.*, less than about eight years old, has a small incision made on its right thigh, just sufficient to draw blood, which is then smeared on the Dungo cow, and the full operation is postponed until the child becomes old enough.

The eighth year, also called *Gun jara*, sees the culmination of the Gedamoch ceremonies and the man's return to normal tribal life.

When the full eight years are practically over, all Gedamoch of the *lube* congregate at one or other of various holy places. These are generally trees dedicated to, and thought to be inhabited by, the local Deus Tutelarlis. Each Gedamoch must perform his final ceremonies at the particular holy place used by his forefathers. This rule is rigidly enforced, and

many Boran have to travel hundreds of miles to perform these sacrifices. Death is the penalty for performing them elsewhere than at one of the recognised places.

The Gedamoch arrive with their wives, families and stock, and lay out their village with the doors of all huts and cattle enclosures facing the holy place. On the approach of the great festival (*jilla*), great preparations are made for carrying out the elaborate ritual necessary. This takes place in the month called Wajabaj'ji, corresponding roughly to our July.

On the day before the *jilla*, the Gedamoch's sons, now called collectively Gormich, wreath their heads with *kalala* bush, which has been collected in each case by the eldest son or head Gormich. At night they carefully remove their chaplets and shave their heads. At cock-crow next morning, the head Gormich, having sacrificed a bullock, shaves off his father's Guduru, which is later put into a pot filled with milk and water. This is then laid for a moment on the back of a cow, which is thereby rendered sacred and called the Guduru. The contents of the pot are then poured out and buried in the cattle enclosure. In the meantime, all the cattle have been driven out far into the bush to graze, and all non-participants in the *jilla* carefully hide in their huts, as any person or stock looked upon that day by a Gormich at once dies.

The Gormich then go out, and again put on their *kalala* chaplets, and go in procession to the holy tree, whither the Gedamoch, who are no longer wearing the *kalacha*, have already gone. On seeing the Gormich approach, the Gedamoch retire to their huts, and remain in seclusion for the rest of the day. The Gormich remove their chaplets and, after laying them at the foot of the tree, rush out in a long line to the bush. All must keep together, and anyone breaking station is soundly beaten with the rhinoceros-hide whips which all are carrying.

About 8 a.m. they return, shouting and singing as a warning to people to get under cover. They then collect seven of their number, of whom one must be of the Digafu clan, as this is said to be the parent clan of the tribe, and go in procession to the Gedamoch's hut, where the following strange dialogue ensues. It probably has some mystic meaning, but

seems to consist merely of a succession of plays upon words.

The Gedamoch is in hiding in an inner part of the hut, and at first makes no reply to Gormich who calls: "Aba" (Father) three times. Then

GORMICH: Aba (Father).

GEDAMOCH: Ya? (Eh?).

GORMICH: Aba, sichakafina (Father, we are listening to you).

GEDAMOCH: Chure (a skunk).

GORMICH: Chur debis (Remove the calf's excrement).

GEDAMOCH: Mada (a squirrel).

GORMICH: Mada gabis, madi ares (May the spring well up, may your temples grow white hair).

GEDAMOCH: Karkares (the name of some small animal).

GORMICH: Karra, saa, nama, hori (May herds, milch kine, men and wealth be yours).

GEDAMOCH: Ijoli aba hada insalfan; ato insalfatin sala ijjes. Wagoba aka korrroma gedaisan. (The children have no awe for their father and mother; without any shyness did they kill an oryx. Their age-rank have necks like those of bulls).

The Gedamoch then proceeds to recite his exploits in war and the chase, after which the Gormich enter the hut. In readiness for the *jilla*, each Gedamoch has already had prepared a large woven-fibre pot (*madala*) of curds (*etitu*), which has been placed in the front part of the hut. The Gedamoch and his wife still keep out of sight in the back of the hut as the Gormich enter, and the latter take hold together of the *madala*, which is then opened by the Digalu member of the seven, and taken outside the hut. There they all stir it, taste it, and return it to its place. Then, if necessary, the Gormich go round repeating the process in the huts of the other Gedamoch. When the *madala* rites have been performed for all the Gedamoch, the Gormich return in a body to the cattle enclosure of the head Gedamoch in the village, who must also be a Digalu. There they remove their *kalala* chaplets for the last time, spread them about in the enclosure, and the ceremonies are at an end.

The Gormich disperse, bathe, and take part in the feasting, dancing and singing that follows. Only Gormich eat the contents of the *madala*, and the Gedamoch may eat only the hump of the bullock slaughtered for the feast. The next morning the Gedamoch return to ordinary life, and later return to their old villages, the last act of all taking place twenty-seven days after the *jilla*, when they untie their bundles of *kumbi* and scatter them in the cattle enclosure.

As far as I can gather, women take no part in the ceremonies, except as guardians of the *kalacha* at night, and except for the day before the *jilla*, when it is their duty to collect dung and plaster with it a calves' hut in the cattle enclosure.

Moreover, the whole rites would appear to be carried out with the greatest solemnity and decorum, with none of the drunkenness and little of the licence usually forming the chief features of native ceremonies.

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