

SOME NOTES ON THE VILLAGE OF SHI

The old Bamenda division was the size of the principality of Wales but whereas mount Snowdon is only 3,400 feet high the highest mountain top in Bamenda towers two thousand feet above lake Bambuluwe which is situated at over 6,000 feet. In such rugged mountainous country villages are often inaccessible and when in 1943 I entered this interesting village of Shi on the Mbaw plains it had only once before been visited by an administrative officer. The officer who had previously visited it was Mr J. C. Drummond-Hay; for in his report dated 5.9.24 he writes: "VIII. Si. Chief Niase claims that he is of Ya family and that his forefather Mondup came from Kimi and settled at Si on the Nambwe mountain. Mondup was succeeded by Mbwa and he is Mfai, Niase's father." The account given to me is somewhat fuller.

I asked the village head to give me the history of his people whereupon he called in his father's full sister, an aged crone who bore the title of *munku*. The village head explained that she knew much more about the history of his people than he did. This instance was the first that I had met where a woman had been voluntarily called in to assist in recounting the tribal history. I have myself, at times, elicited the help of old women to clear up certain points. Usually they are clear and concise, but, if shy and perverse, they are an exasperating waste of time.

Munku did most of the talking. She said: "Our people are Tikar from Kimi ¹.

Ndutuf was the Kimi chief's son who led our people out of Kimi. We left at the same time as the Banso whose leader was called Fongshu ². We set out together but on the way we separated. I do not know where we separated nor why it occurred but our leader Ndutuf founded Naanka Tshom which is not far from this present settlement of Shi. The names of our chiefs since we left Kimi are:

- 1) Ndutuf
- 2) Nkanle
- 3) Nzo
- 4) Mbuak
- 5) Tibba

- 6) Nsuo also called Mfai
- 7) Ndiribra
- 8) Nyangune
- 9) Nyesse³
- 10) Nyebou (present V. H.)

"All these chiefs, up to Nyangune (No. 8) are buried at Naanka Tshom, the other two are buried at Shi. Nyangune went to Bamenem on one occasion. The journey was too much for him because on his return he never reached Shi but died at Ntem.

"When we arrived here we found that the Ngu⁴ had forestalled us. They also came from Kimi but had migrated before we did. We understand that the Ngu people migrated with the Bamum⁵ and with the Nshi, a people who, like the Bamum, are in the French Cameroons.

"The reason that we all left Kimi was because there were too many sons of chiefs there. They were constantly quarrelling and fighting. So a number of the sons decided to migrate and found chiefdoms for themselves. They took their lineages, slaves and retainers with them and moved off. The name of the Kimi chief when we migrated is now forgotten.

"Ndutuf fought the Banyo Fulani⁶ but was conquered. Ever after we were subject to Banyo.

"We did not have wars with other towns because they, like ourselves, were the slaves of the Banyo Fulani. In those days all roads led to Banyo, and all one's possessions went to Banyo. We took orders from Banyo. In spite of this they treated us as though we were goats. They would suddenly arrive and collect a few of us whenever they wanted to and take them away. As a consequence we moved up into mount Sambe⁷ and built there. In this way we got sufficient warning of a raid to escape capture. We left Naanka Tshom in the time of Tibba and returned in the days of Nsuo. Shi was built when the Germans arrived.

"We got our iron ware in those days at Mt. Nuron, not from Kimi, but from Sonkola in the French Cameroons, one day's march from here.

"There is another village in French territory on the Mabe (Mairin) river that has the same name as ourselves, Shi. It is an offshoot from here and it arose as follows. Mbuak's son, Nimingong, founded French Shi. He wanted to be an independent chief so he went off with his people and founded this new settlement. There are no other offshoots from here.

"The few Nyin people who now live at Mbiriba came from Nnyu which is now no more. This place was that deserted village, bounded by two war trenches, quite near here, which you passed when coming here now from Ngu. The pestilence which ravaged this country six or seven years ago scattered us and more or less wiped out Nnyu. The sickness was belly trouble. People complained of pain in the belly, had diarrhoea and died⁸.

"These Nnyu people spoke a dialect of our language. They came from Kimi Pettel⁹, half a day's walk from here in French territory. Kimi Pettel is an offshoot from Kimi." At this point the chief took up the narrative. "As we came from Kimi so we return thither to be made chiefs. All chiefs who came from Kimi do so. The Ngu chief, if he does not himself go to Kimi, sends some one to represent him there. I do not know what the Banso, Bamun, Ntem or Wiya chiefs do¹⁰. Kimi is two days walk from here in French territory. We speak the same language as do the Kimi people.

"When a Shi chief dies, a new one is selected by the elders of Shi. He is then handed to the **munku** who places on, and takes him off, his father's stool three times. A new **munku** is installed in the same way but she is placed on and taken off her stool four times¹¹. This instooling ceremony takes place before the new chief sets out for Kimi¹².

"When I go to Kimi I take a goat with me and on reaching the chief's palace I wait outside in the courtyard until the purpose of my visit is known. I am then taken before a court official with the title of Gisimo and placed in seclusion in a house for three days.

"On the fourth day the Kimi chief calls a big meeting and I am brought before it by the Gisimo. He, holding me by my two hands, places me on, and takes me off, a special stone, called

'the stone of Kimi' (Kimi ngo) 13. As he does so, he says to me, 'if you are destined to be chief you will not get any fever but, if you are not the proper man to be chief, you will be attacked with fever. I am single hearted and not double hearted towards you' 14.

He then broke three sticks to signify three days. Three days went by and no fever shook me, also I was hale and strong so I knew that I was the right man to be chief. Also my father had agreed that I should succeed him as chief. If my father had not agreed that I should be chief after him, his spirit would have troubled me in the three days of seclusion and I would have become sick, but I remained well and strong.

"Thereupon the Kimi chief assembled his people and taking me out before them placed me on his knee like a little child. He then fed me as though I were a little child 15. Three times he fed me. As he feeds me he says that if I am a bad man, or have done evil, or am double hearted the food he is giving me will make me very ill; but if I am a good man, have done no evil and am single hearted then I shall be firm and strong like the stone on which he is sitting—the Kimi ngo. The Kimi chief then gave me three spears, a matchet, a cup and a loin cloth and I now returned to my town.

"The spears, at the death of their holder, are added to those of his predecessors. We had a bundle of such spears but it was lost in a Fulani raid. Also, at my father's death, the town scattered. A great sickness came. It was that belly sickness that wiped out Nnyu, our neighbouring village. Many people died here in Shi and so the place was deserted for a while.

"When we reassembled much of our property had disappeared, including my father's three spears. As a consequence, the only three Kimi spears one have are the ones given to me."

"The same ceremony is gone through by the woman who is to be the new *munku* in her own town. She does not go to Kimi but is placed on and taken off four times on a special stone in this very town of Shi".

As an administrative officer I had work to do elsewhere and had to leave this town with its interesting history in mid air as it were.

M. D. W. Jeffreys

Notes

a) See Jeffreys, M.D.W. "who are the Tkar?"

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- 1) Kimi, also known as Rifum to the Bantou and as Rankin to the Tkar in the French Cameroons was the religious centre of the Tkar group of people. On the death of one of the divine kings of Kimi civil war broke out with the result that there was a mass migration of groups of peoples. Each group led by a son of the King. This migration accounts for the arrival of the Wya, the Bantou and the Bamun all at about the same time.
- 2) The Bantou state they do not know the name of the chief who led them from Kimi. Some Bantou say his name was Saanga but there is no unanimity on this point.
- 3) In the chiefs' names given to Mr Drummond-Hay, twenty years earlier, one recognises Nias as Nyesse, the father of the present village head. According to Drummond-Hay, Mfal was Nyesse's father actually an ancestor, a great-grand father. Mondup, I suppose is my Ndutuf. Nambu mountain is I presume my Samba mountain. In which case Mondup did not found Shi in the mountain as Shi was founded in German times after these people had come down from Mount Samba.
- 4) The people of this village claim to be Tkar and to have come from Kimi. They still maintain ceremonial contact with Kimi. Thus, the present Ngu village head, on being installed as chief, was unable to find the metal anklets which formed part of the royal regalia of the last chief. He then sent to Kimi for another pair. These were shown to me and consisted of an iron wire loop wound round with thinner copper wire as in Fig. 1.

On becoming chief, he sends a *chinda* or herald to the Kimi chief to announce to him his accession. The Kimi chief sends his own herald with that of the Ngu chief to the local river, the Mbam. The Kimi herald takes a calabash with water from this river and returns with it to the Kimi chief who, in the meeting house and before his councillors, blesses this water by placing his hand in it saying as he does so: "I give you, Ngu chief, a single heart, were I to confer on you a double heart, trouble would befall you, May you live like a person with a single heart and not be a double hearted man."

The Kimi chief now hands this water to the Ngu herald to take back to his master with the message that the Ngu chief is to wash in this water and thus become strong. However, when Mr Drummond-Hay visited Ngu in September 1924 he made the following entry. "Chief Shuru (of Ngu) says that his grand-father came from Numbaw and founded the present village of Ngu, which is on the site of Maba, the first village of the Ya family. Shuru says that his grand-father, Bantum, was the son of Yattaba of Numbaw, his father, Munche, was acknowledged by the German administration as chief of Ngu, Munche was succeeded by his son, Lipo, and on his death Shuru succeeded him. This is the only Mbatow town to be found in this area."

- 5) According to Bamum history, the Basso migrated at the same time as they did, not afterwards. The Bamum say, in Njaya's history, that a woman led the Basso. However, in the Bamum account of their migration the tables are turned. The Bamum claim that a woman led the Bamum while her brother led the Basso.
- 6) Nibutef is too far back in time to have encountered the Fulani. In the other accounts of these Tikars being involved with the Fulani: the time is usually in the fourth or fifth chief's reign, counting from the present or reigning chief. As Shi was in the plain it was probably attacked before others of these Tikars settlements, say in Tibba's reign.
- 7) Also known as Mt. Nuron. It is a large granite massive ring high out of the Mbaw plain and would be quite inaccessible to cavalry. Fighting then would be on foot, the locals would have the advantage if knowing the terrain.
- 8) It seems that this account of an outbreak of diarrhoea refers to the severe bacillary dysentery epidemic that ravaged the French Cameroons in 1936-37.
- 9) *Pettel* is a Fulani word meaning little or small. *Kimi Pettel* is contrasted with *Kimi Manga*, where *Manga* is a Fulani word meaning great, big. Most of the migrations came from *Kimi Manga*.
- 10) Neither Basso nor Wiya maintain any ceremonial contact with *Kimi* any longer. The *Ntem* chief sends his sacred, carved, wooden stool by a *chinda* who announces to the *Kimi* chief the name of the new *Ntem* chief, to secure the *Kimi* chief's approval. This continuing connection with *Kimi* is of interest. Though the international frontiers cut a tribe in two yet the tribal machinery continues to function. Chiefs in British territory do not feel that they are properly constituted chiefs until they have been confirmed by the paramount chief now in French territory.
- 11) This account provides the first instance that I am aware of where a woman officiates in a coronation ceremony. This point should be followed up because so very little is known of the role played by woman in ritual. Thrice for a man and four times for a woman is a practice also found among the Ashante of the Gold Coast.
- 12) The *Ntem* chief claims that it is he who enstools the new *Shi* chief and that if the *Shi* chief thereafter goes to *Kimi* he does so on his own volition and that it is quite a waste of time to do so.
- 13) The use of stone seats for divine kings and their councillors is widespread. Thus the English "*Curia Regis*" presided over by the King sat on stone seats. Then there is the stone in the English coronation chair. These *Tikar* chiefs belong to the order of divine kings.
- 14) The meaning of being single hearted and not double hearted remains obscure.
- 15) It is evident that one is here dealing with the integration or incorporation stage of a rite of passage. The new chief has to start life all over again as a little child. This step is also found in the coronation ceremony of the *Wiya* and *Rom* chiefs, who declare that it is also a step in the coronation of the *Ntem* chief though he denies it.

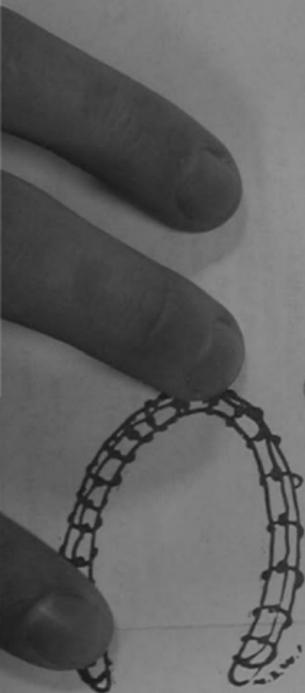


Fig. I



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