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THE KAVANGO
PEOPLES

FRANZ STEINER VERLAG GMBH · WIESBADEN
1981
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INTRODUCTION

GORDON D. GIBSON

In 1960, some years after the writer had visited the Kavango people in what is now Botswana, he was encouraged by Prof. Daryll Forde to organize a collaborative volume which would summarize the ethnographic information about the cultures of the lower Okavango River in southern Africa and serve as a basis for particular comparative studies. When it turned out that some of those who had carried out anthropological research among the Kavango peoples could not participate, the project was set aside. As time passed new studies of the cultures of the area appeared, enriching the published sources upon which a survey volume could be based but also increasing the magnitude of the work and its complexity. Now, many years later, with the collaboration of Thomas J. Larson, an anthropologist with long experience among the MbuKushu, and Cecilia R. McGurk, a graduate student, it has become possible to complete this summary of the accessible information about the five tribes who inhabit the banks of the lower Okavango where it flows through the northern Kalahari Desert.

Kavango, the name given the peoples treated in this volume, is not their traditional name for themselves, for they identify their ethnic units as Vakwangari, Vambundza, Vasambiyu, Vageiriku, and Hambukushu. (In referring henceforth to the individual tribes, we omit the plural prefixes Va- or Ha-) The name Kavango is their name for the river upon the banks of which most of them dwell. But the river is most commonly referred to in English and German sources as the Okavango, a spelling based upon the name applied to the river by the Ovambo and Herero peoples. Because this name has become established, we have chosen to retain it for geographical designations. (The Portuguese, who adopted a form of the name used in Angolan languages, call the river the Cubango.) Until recently most published sources referred to the people settled along the lower course of the Okavango river as the Okavango people, but in recent publications, in Namibia at least, they are called the Kavango people, giving proper attention to their own usage, and we are happy to conform. We hope the use of two similar words, Kavango for the people and Okavango for the river and region, will be more helpful than confusing.

This survey encompasses only the people of the lower Okavango, the portion of the river that runs in a generally easterly direction and then turns southward toward the swamp. Excluded are the Mbwela, Nganela, and Nyemba people of Angola who occupy the banks of the middle Okavango, which runs in a generally southerly direction. Excluded also are the Yei, Tawana, and other peoples of
Ngamiland, the northwestern corner of Botswana, some of whom are settled along the lower Okavango in Namibia.

Since the Kavango peoples occupy an area on the borders between three countries, each of which has its own colonial history, the published materials are to be found in four European languages — Afrikaans, English, German, and Portuguese. Probably because this was an area that was remote from the administrative capitals of the respective countries and also from their district seats and because all the tribes were split between two or more countries by the boundaries established by the colonial powers, the Kavango peoples did not receive much attention from the governmental agencies of the states upon whose borders they resided. On the one hand they suffered less interference and their cultures underwent less rapid change than those of most parts of southern Africa, while on the other hand communication with these remote people remained difficult, they received less aid in times of hardship, and their needs were less well represented to the colonial governments than was the case for peoples located closer to the administrative centers. Also, they have been less well covered by administrative studies and surveys — a fact that accounts in part for the poor quality of the census and other administrative information now available.

As the Kavango peoples are closely tied in their way of life to the river, a large one that in this region runs through a desert, special attention is given to the Okavango River and to the ecological zones that border it. Though the environmental situation is not unique in Africa, it has been thought sufficiently uncommon to justify the use of more space than is usually devoted in ethnographic works to a description of the habitat.

TECHNICAL TERMS

Though we have sought to standardize our terminology, there are a few differences and special usages which require a word of explanation.

In the description of settlements and dwelling arrangements, Larson speaks of "local communities" where the other authors refer to "villages." Within this maximal cluster the lipata occupied by an extended family is termed a "homestead" by Larson and a "household" by the other authors if it is part of a larger unit, or a "village" if it stands alone. The animal enclosure attached to a local community or village is generally termed a "kraal" by Larson and a "pen" by the other authors; in any case, the "kraal" is to be understood as an enclosure for animals only and not an enclosed dwelling space for humans and cattle together, as the term is often used in South Africa. All the authors employ the term "clan" for the maximal named matrilineal descent group, though the social unit referred to does not conform to the strict definition sometimes imposed upon the term, in that the Kavango clan is generally neither localized nor corporate and often is not exogamous.
THE SOURCES

Among the earlier accounts, related by hunters, traders, and military officers, the work of Henrique de Paiva Couceiro (1892) must be ranked well above the others for its attempt to provide factual information on the inhabitants of the lower Okavango, its detailed descriptions of various of their customs, and its accompanying maps and sketches. Though leading a military exploring expedition, Paiva Couceiro seems to have made a wholly peaceful passage through the various ethnic enclaves, due no doubt to his sympathetic attitude toward the people and their way of life and to his considerable diplomatic skills. It is a great pity that his journey was so hurried, for given a more leisurely traverse he might well have produced an ethnographic document of major importance.

The reports written by earlier explorers — Green (1857, 1876), Andersson (1861), Brochado (1867), Duparquet (1880), and McKiernan (1954) — are of minor value and do little more than record the presence of the ethnic units that we are here concerned with. The geographical discoveries of these authors are mentioned in the General section.

For deeper coverage, though representing the cultural situation of more recent times, we are fortunate to have, for all five of the ethnic units, studies prepared by persons who either resided long in the region or are (or were) trained observers, or, in the case of the Kwangari, by a person (Romanus Kampungu) who is himself a member of the ethnic unit about which he writes.

In addressing the subject of Kwangari marriage customs, Fr. Romanus Kampungu, a missionary among his own people, prepared two manuscripts, both undertaken in the course of work toward a doctorate in canon law. The first, intended to be a very comprehensive study of the Kavango people, was unfortunately not completed. Though entitled “Okavango Marriage Customs,” it deals principally with the traditional history of the Kwangari and the closely related Mbundza peoples, and it provides more detail in this aspect than is available elsewhere for the other units of the Kavango group. Besides history, this work takes up also the clan organization. Kampungu’s second manuscript, entitled “Concept and Aim of Okavango Marriages,” was submitted for the doctorate in 1966 to the Faculty of Canon Law of the Pontifical University of the Propaganda Fide in Rome. While not as useful generally as the first as a source of ethnographic information, Kampungu’s second treatise nevertheless provides details concerning marital practices and attitudes. Some of the information is presented in the form of answers to questionnaires that Kampungu had sent out to Catholic missions at Tondoro, Bunja, Nyangana, and Andara. As the sources are given, the replies can be segregated according to the ethnic units from which they came.

In assessing the value of Kampungu’s work, one must be concerned with the purpose for which he undertook it. The major portion of the dissertation is designed to demonstrate that customary marriage among the Okavango peoples conforms closely to Christian ideals as defined by Catholic dogma. By arguing cogently that the primary purpose of marriage, as conceived in both Catholic and Kavango
thought, is the procreation of children, he is able to present polygyny in its most favorable light: “If a husband happens to marry a barren woman and he would not part with her, because of his great attachment of her, he usually marries a second wife, capable of bearing children, to redeem his name of ‘real man’ ” (Kampungu 1966: 76). Child betrothal and the practice of the levirate after the death of a husband he sees also as customs that serve primarily to carry out the purpose of begetting offspring. He firmly rejects as unfounded “the generalization that African spouses in the Kavango Territory know no real conjugal love, a love that transcends the purely carnal appetency inclining human beings to marry,” attributing such statements to gross ignorance of Kavango customs and society (op. cit.: 335).

The other principal sources of information on the Kwangari people are two relatively brief administrative reports, one published in 1902 by a German military doctor named Jodtka during the period when South-West Africa was a German protectorate, and the other a highly colored description of some Kwangari customs published in the Report on the Administration of South-West Africa for 1932, one of the annual reports submitted by South Africa to the League of Nations during the period when that body was functioning. The section pertaining to Kwangari customs in this latter work is unsigned but was probably written by H. L. P. Eedes, at the time the administrator of the Okavango region, to whom we have tentatively attributed it in the bibliography. Jodtka’s account, which deals entirely with material culture and the economy, seems generally factual and dispassionate. Eedes’ report is longer and deals not only with the economic base but also with social life, marriage customs, and morality. This latter author’s derogatory attitude toward the people of the area he controlled is all too apparent. For example, he describes large settlements as places where “eighty to ninety souls will ‘herd’ together, like so many wild animals” (Eedes 1933: 60–61), and in another passage he refers to the practice of child betrothal and bride services as “child prostitution” (op. cit.: 62). Even in the treatment of the material culture there is a marked contrast between the accounts prepared by Jodtka and Eedes. The former describes at some length the large baskets and raised structures used for storing grain (Jodtka 1902: 546), while Eedes declares that “no system of storage of grain or wild fruit is undertaken” and uses this as a basis for deploiring the improvidential nature of the people, whom he terms “lazy, shiftless, and indolent” (Eedes 1933: 59). We have drawn upon Eedes’ report very cautiously, mindful of the ways in which the author’s ignorance and bias might have colored his observations and reporting.

There is no broad study of the Mbundza tribe, but many aspects of Mbundza culture and history are treated by Kampungu, for the Mbundza and Kwangari are closely related. The only published work that pertains specifically to the Mbundza that we have found is a detailed account of their death and funeral practices by the Catholic missionary, Fr. Manfred Försg, who served among the Mbundza from 1963 to 1973. Though quite detailed, more than the usual amount of information on this topic has been included for the Mbundza because comparable information for the other Kavango peoples has not been found.

The Sambyu are dealt with in a unpublished ethnographic and social anthropo-
logical study by a South African anthropologist, J. L. Bosch, prepared as a doctoral dissertation. Though it provides some historical information, much of this pertains to the period of white contact. The work is most useful in its treatment of social organization, for in presenting the clan, family, and kinship systems and in discussing the life cycle of the Sambyu, Bosch provides a more detailed analysis than is available for any of the other Kavango peoples. Individual chapters are devoted also to the economic base, material culture, laws pertaining to inheritance and succession, and religious and magical practices.

The sources for the section on the Gciriku are primarily the writer's notes, recorded in 1953 during a three week stay in Shakawe in Botswana, in an area where Gciriku emigrants had settled. These are supplemented by the published writings of two Catholic missionaries, Fathers Augustin Bierfert and Josef Wüst, the former having served in the Okavango region from 1910 to 1945 and the latter from 1911 to 1942. The missionaries had as their principal goal the understanding of the religious and moral systems of the Gciriku so that they could bring about changes which they held to be desirable, and they did not refrain from interfering in situations which they felt to be morally intollerable or where they thought the welfare of the people required it. In drawing upon their writing we have kept their purpose and attitude in mind, and hope that the biases of the social scientist may counterbalance those of the priests. A linguistic study also exists for this group, carried out by W. J. G. Möhlig, and in this there is a concise sketch of Gciriku history and culture which we have found useful.

For the Mbutuku we are fortunate to have the collaboration of Thomas J. Larson, whose field studies have been carried out over a 28 year period and who must be ranked as the leading authority, outside the tribe itself, on the culture of that people. In preparing the cultural summary on the Mbutuku, Larson has drawn also upon certain valuable older sources, particularly the writings of Fr. Albert Froehlich of the Andara Mission in Namibia; Major A. St. Hill Gibbons, a British explorer of the late 19th century; Dr. Siegfried Passarge, a German geographer; Aurel Schulz and August Hammar, a pair of big game hunters of the late 19th century; and Captain A. G. Stigand, a British colonial administrative officer. The unpublished dissertation submitted by Louis L. Van Tonder in 1966 is also useful.

There is a general treatise on the Kavango peoples by J. P. van S. Bruwer entitled *Die Matrilineire Orde in Okavangoland*, which exists in typescript form. After introductory chapters that deal briefly with the history, geography, and development of the Okavango area (or that part of it which falls within the borders of South-West Africa) and some general features of the culture, including religion and political patterns, the main body of this work is devoted to a study of the system of matrilineal descent, kinship, and marriage. According to J. L. Bosch, who did fieldwork among the Sambyu, Bruwer's information on the Kavango people was based upon his, Bosch's work (J. L. Bosch, personal communication). Though we have not used Bruwer's work as a primary source, we have found it useful where problems arose in the interpretation of other sources. (We are grateful to Mr. Nell P. Van Heerden for providing an English translation of Bruwer's work.)
A striking picture book on the Kavango peoples by Alice Mertens has recently appeared, and may profitably be used to add further visual documentation to this ethnographic summary.

Some very detailed 1:100,000 maps of the Okavango valley in its middle course were prepared on the basis of Franz Seiner's survey in 1910–1912 and published in company with his report on a trip to the Omaheke in 1913. These maps show the course of the river, the extent of swamplands, islands, many place names, and tribal and sub-tribal lands. In addition to the 1:100,000 map, reproduced in six sections on two sheets, there is a 1:25,000 map of the grey sandstone zone in the vicinity of Libebe's and a 1:500,000 map of the Kungfeld. A similar set of maps, also at a scale of 1:100,000, but without the quantity of place names shown on Seiner's maps, is published in de Almeida's Sul d'Angola (1912).

More recent maps at a scale of 1:500,000 have been published by the South African government (1940), and the region is also included in the more accessible World 1:1,000,000 series of maps, published in several editions. One edition, that of 1943, shows a great many place names along both sides of the river.

We are grateful to Mrs. Priscilla Linn for excellent editorial assistance in preparing this volume for publication. We wish also to acknowledge the support provided by the Smithsonian Institution from its public and private funds.
I

GENERAL FEATURES

GORDON D. GIBSON
Ecology

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Geography

The five so-called Kavango peoples here under consideration reside in villages situated chiefly on islands in the river and flood plain and on the river terraces bordering the flood plain of the lower Okavango River in Angola, Namibia (South-West Africa), and Botswana. The section of the Okavango River concerned extends from about 17° 18' S, 18° 21' E upstream to about 18° 51' S, 22° 17' E downstream, a distance along the river of some 520 km. (323 miles). A few villages of Kavango peoples are to be found also on the lower courses of some omurambas, the dry river beds that join the Okavango valley on the south. In addition, some settlements of Kavango people are situated away from the rivers in the so-called Mbunda or Mbundu region that stretches between the lower Cuito and Okavango Rivers and the lower Luiana and Cuando Rivers, an area that is divided politically between the Caprivi Strip of Namibia, Rivungo Circumscription in the southeastern corner of Angola, and the northeastern portion of the Northwest Districts, Botswana. Along the Okavango River the tribal territories of the five peoples are considered distinct by the members of these ethnic groups, though villages of any one of them may be found in territory nominally attributed to one of the others. In the Mbunda region distinct tribal territories are not officially recognized.

The river

The Okavango (called Cubango in Portuguese sources) and its northern tributaries rise in highlands of Huambo, Sambo, and Bihe in west central Angola where the average annual rainfall is in the order of 1200 to 1400 mm. (Angola, S.M.A. 1970: fig. 27). The main stream flows generally southward at first, being augmented by tributaries entering it chiefly from the east. In its middle course, from about 15° 10' S, the river turns southeasterly, cuts through rocky outcrops in a series of rapids, and enters the Kalahari sand zone where it flows through the wide valley that its channel has carved. The Cuchi and Cuebe, eastern affluents in this region, add significantly to the river's volume (Borchert 1963). As it reaches the southern border of Angola and the region of the people here under consideration, the course of the river and of its valley turns gradually eastward. In this stretch it is joined by an important tributary, the Cuito, which flows from the northeast. In
Mbukushu country the river turns gradually southward again, crossing the Caprivi Strip of Namibia and entering Botswana as a broad meandering stream that in the sand-covered peneplain soon divides into a number of branches that flow generally southeastwardly in a "sleeve" of swampy land up to 15 km. wide for a distance of about 70 km. At about 18° 50' S the main channels diverge and the waters disperse in the morasses and streams of the Okavango Delta. The Okavango River, with a length of more than 1100 km. from its headwaters to the apex of the delta into which it flows, thus forms the main channel of an extensive internal drainage system which lies primarily to its east.

Most of the water reaching the Okavango Delta is lost there by evaporation and subsidence. In years of high rainfall a shallow lake (Lake Ngami) forms at the southwestern corner of the swamp. The swamp but not the lake is drained by intermittent streams that mark the lower border of the delta. These lead the waters to the Botletle, a slow-moving desert river that flows southeasterly to Lake Dow and sometimes on to the Makarikari Depression, a salt pan in the eastern Kalahari where the remaining moisture finally disappears. In years when the Okavango discharges an extraordinarily large volume, the waters of the delta overflow to the east by way of the so-called Selinda Spillway to reach the Chobe or Linyanti River, a tributary of the Zambezi.

The rains in central and southern Angola normally begin in September or October, increase in frequency until they attain a maximum in January, and continue in decreasing quantity until March or April when a dry season ensues; the level of water flowing in the Okavango River consequently rises and falls annually. Because of the length of the river and the breadth and depressed gradient of its lower course, the times of high and low water occur progressively and significantly later at successive stations down stream.¹ In the lower Okavango region the river begins to rise in December, reaches a highpoint in March or April, then drops steadily until October or November. Thus it is normally highest in the season when the rains are diminishing and remains above its average level for a couple of months after the rains have ceased.

Borchert (1963) provides data on the volume of water carried by the Okavango at Cuangar. Wellington (1967: 21) says the river may rise as much as 15 ft. (4.6 m.) in flood stage. Even in periods of extended drought the river does not cease to flow.

Steiner’s detailed map (1913) of the course of the river shows that the flood plain varies in width from nil where the river flows between high banks to as much

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¹ According to available maps, Nkurenkuru, a village on the Namibian side of the Okavango in Kwangare country, lies at 1110 m. above sea level, while Seronga at the head of the Okavango Delta and some 500 km. downstream lies at an elevation of about 970 m. Thus the average gradient of the lower Okavango is roughly 28 cm. per kilometer (less than 0.03 %). At Cuangar the river is nearly 100 m. wide, its maximum depth is about 5 m., and its maximum velocity is about 57 cm/sec. (Borchert 1963: fig. 7). From Cuangar to Muhembo (at the Botswana border) the Okavango varies from about 50 to about 200 m. in width, when contained within its banks.
as 3 km. in certain parts of the valley. The flood plain is partly or wholly under
derwater during the rainy season and when the river is high. As the water level drops,
lakes and ponds of various extent remain in the flood plain. During the period of
high water the river is navigable in boats and canoes for long distances, but at low
water the numerous stone bars hinder river travel. Soon after crossing into Bot-
tswana the flood plain widens to about 6 km. and the river follows a tortuous course;
beginning about 35 km. southeast of the border it divides and subdivides until there
are numerous channels, some connected to others and some blind.

Geomorphology

From Caiundo (15° 42' S, 17° 28' E) south, the region through which the
Okavango River flows constitutes a northern arm of the Kalahari Desert. Here light
colored eolian sands and water deposited gravel, some compacted into calcareous sandstone, cover the underlying rock in depths of more than 250 km. (Wellington
1967: 8). Except for a few places where the sub-surface shale and basalt formations rise in island-like peaks, stone is to be seen only where it has been exposed by the
river. Rocky (quartzite) banks border the Okavango for a few kilometers above and
below Andara in Mbkushu country, and islands in the river there are formed of rocky masses. Beds of quartzite, sandstone, and limestone are revealed sporadically in the Okavango valley to a few kilometers above the point where the river enters Botswana; below that point the valley is devoid of stone.

From Kwangari country to the border of Botswana the valley is from 2 to 6 km.
wide and forms a trough lying 30 to 70 meters below the surrounding countryside.
On the sides of the valley above the flood plain, remnants of old river terraces are
discernable (von François 1891: 207, Borchert 1963: 60-61). (Within Botswana
available maps and surveys do not indicate the surface topography well enough to
permit definition of the river valley, but presumably it is shallower here than up-
stream.)

The relatively sterile sandy soil of the region (Borchert 1963: 60-67) is enriched
in the flood plain of the Okavango and on its terraces by silt deposited by the river.
The mouths of the usually dry stream beds that adjoin the Okavango valley, called
omuramba (pl. omiramba) in Namibia, also are covered with a layer of fertile
sediment.

Outside the Okavango valley the neighboring countryside consists of a sandy
plain with dunes. There are only minor variations in surface topography over vast
stretches, except for a small cluster of rocky eminences (the Tsodilo Hills) that lie
some 40 km. SW of the Okavango River in the northwestern corner of the North-
west District, Botswana, and rise some 1000 m. above the plain. In this nearly
featureless area shallow depressions occur here and there in which water sometimes
collects in the rainy season forming ephemeral lakes, some connected by channels
that lead to the Okavango. During most of the year the "pans" and "vleis" are dry,
and some of the pans are covered with a hard cake of light-colored deposits of silt
and minerals. In northeastern Namibia some longer and deeper omiramba (watercourses) lead to the Okavango from mountainous regions to the south. Natural waterholes and wells dug in these dry channels reveal the presence of water beneath the surface.

The so-called Mbunda or Mbundu region lying between the Cuito-Okavango and the Luiana-Cuando Rivers is a thinly inhabited sandy expanse that is crossed in its southern portion by a peculiar system of nearly parallel troughs that extend in almost straight lines for as much as 200 km. and lie 2 to 5 km. apart where they are discernible. The direction of those lying between the Okavango and the lower Cuando is approximately WNW to ESE. In years of plentiful rainfall these "chanas" fill with groundwater which does not appear to flow. In the dry season in normal years water is readily reached in wells dug in the deeper parts of the chanas. In times of extended drought, however, the water table falls and water becomes inaccessible even in deep wells.

**Climate**

Mean monthly temperature at Dirico ranges from 17.5° C (63.5° F) in July to 26° C (79° F) in October (1958–59 data, Borchert 1963: tab. 13). Frost sometimes occurs at night in late June and early July. Humidity is high during five months of the year (Borchert 1963: 69).

Average annual rainfall, determined from records kept over periods of from 8 to 39 years at various stations along the lower Okavango River in Namibia, ranges from 534 mm. to 621 mm. (S.A.W.B. 1953). Similar annual averages are reported for Shakawe in Botswana (Larson ms. 1971a). The rains generally begin in October, reach a maximum in January or February, and taper off to an end in April. Violent thunder storms occur sporadically in the wet season. The entire region falls in a semi-arid climate zone according to the Thornthwaite system of climate classification (Angola, S.M.A. 1955: Carta III).

The amount of rain falling in a year varies greatly. At Nkurenkuru in Kwangari country the average annual rainfall over a 36 year period ranged from a low of about 210 mm. (8 1/4 in.) in 1941 to a high of about 875 mm. (34 1/2 in.) in 1925. In one year out of four the annual rainfall was less than 400 mm. (15 3/4 in.) (S.A.W.B. 1953: fig. V). Though this would be an amount insufficient for growing maize in other parts of southern Africa, here in the river valley, plantings made on sandy rises not far above the flood plain draw upon subsurface water and may be relatively successful even in relatively dry years. However, droughts in the growing season can be harmful: Bierfert remarks (1938: 19) that if rains fail in January, the young maize plants sprung from seed sown in December wither and die. Apparently much depends upon the elevation of the fields and the rise of the water at flood stage.

In the region of the lower Okavango there is a climatological deficit of water during the period April – October. Though heavy rain storms may temporarily
cause streams to flow in some tributary water courses during the rainy season, the water generally disappears into the sand before reaching the Okavango. On the whole, the rainfall is never greater than the absorption capacity of the soil, and for this reason the area lacks small permanent streams (Borchert 1963: 70–71).

Wind storms in the dry season frequently make navigation on the river dangerous (Larson ms. 1971a).

**FLORA AND FAUNA**

**Flora**

As it encompasses several botanical sub-zones that are more or less distinct, the region frequented by the lower Okavango people is favored with a wide variety of plants including numerous valuable timber, fruit, and nut trees and bushes. In its general aspects the region falls within the great dry forest zone of southern Africa. The floral sub-zones are related directly to the river or to soil and moisture features of the surrounding countryside. The botanical characteristics of the region are described by Baum and Warburg (in Baum 1903), Seiner (1913), Schönfelder (1935), Gossweiler (1939), P. F. de Almeida (in Guerra et al 1956), and Borchert (1963).

Along the river papyrus grows in backwater pools while other sedges and reeds including Phragmites mauritianus, which is much used for making mats, border the river, covering low lying riverside beds. The lush grass of the flood plain is grazed by cattle and cut for thatching. Water-loving trees and bushes occur in the flood plain sporadically and form thickets in places. The wild date palm, Phoenix reclinata, grows in the flood plain and on islands; and the fan palm, Hyphaene ventricosa (ngone)\(^2\), whose leaves are used for basket making, is found both near the river and at pans outside the river valley. The heavy soil of the riverside sub-zone is favorable to various species of Acacia, some of which yield edible gum and seed pods that are valuable as fodder. Also found here are Diospyros mespiliformis (unyandi, Rhodesian ebony), a tree whose trunk is carved into canoes and stamping blocks; Combretum imberbe (munjondo), which has a wood so hard that it can be used for hoe blades; and Gardenia jovis-tonantis, a riverside bush that supplies the raw material for axe and hoe handles.

Found growing above the flood plain but still within the valley, in addition to some of the above mentioned plants, are other species of Acacia; various types of Ficus, especially F. sycomorus (mukuyu, wild fig), which forms huge trees in this environment; Kigelia pinnata (urunguntingu, sausage tree), whose wood is used for canoes and mortars; and Parinari mobola (sand apple), with an edible fruit. Sclerocarya birrea (ufongo [marula]), a valued fruit tree growing in stony places, bears plum-shaped fruits that are eaten by men and animals and are sometimes

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2 African plant names are chiefly from Bosch (1964: 336).
crushed and fermented to make a wine. The pits of the fruit yield a useful oil and the wood is used for carving.

Useful trees typical of the uplands away from the river valley are *Baikiaea plurijuga* (*ohahe, mucusi*, Rhodesian teak), whose timber is prized for carving and whose seeds yield an oil that is applied to the body (Baum 1903: 61); *Burkea africana* (*mutundungu*, wild syringa), whose hard wood is used in building houses and whose bark and fruit are sometimes used as a fish poison; *Guibourtia coleospermum* (*musibi, ushivi*), used for canoes and whose seeds when crushed and cooked release an oil that is used on the body and the hair (Baum 1903: 60–61); *Peltophorum africanum* (*mupororo*), also used for carving; *Pterocarpus angolensis* (*uguruwa*, bloodwood), whose wood is highly prized (but large trees now rare) for carving into dishes, mortars, canoes, paddles, spears, and objects made for sale and, when powdered (*rukura*), as bodily adornment; *Ricinodendron rautenenii* (*mangeti, ugongo*), which bears a nut that is valuable as a foodstuff; *Strychnos cocculoides* and other species of *Strychnos*, with edible (though sometimes poisonous) fruits; *Swartzia madagascarensis*, whose fruit is used medicinally and as a fish poison; and *Ximenia caffra* and *X. americana* (sour plums), whose fruits are edible and whose seeds yield a useful oil. *Landolphia gossweileri*, a woody vine growing in the woodlands and at the edges of pans, bears a much-liked fruit (Baum 1903: 55–56).

The *chanas* (stream beds, usually dry) and other low-lying areas outside the river valleys, generally covered with tall grass but few trees and bushes, are favorite grazing places for antelope. *Adansonia digitata* (baobab) is found near such low places and, sporadically, also in the river valley.

**Fauna**

Each of the major ecological zones — river, flood plain, valley and upland forest, and sandfield — has its typical fauna. Many of the wild creatures are important for the people of the region, either as sources of food and raw materials or as predators and potential enemies. Crocodiles and hippopotamus abound in the Cuito and Okavango Rivers, and 36 species of edible fish have been identified in the waters of the Okavango Delta (Larson, 1971a). In the flood plain are to be found leguans, reedbuck, and various types of waterfowl including geese and ducks. In the forest live warthogs, impala, kudu, roan and sable antelope, blue duiker, zebras, elephants, lions, leopards, guinea fowl and francolins. Certain antelopes (elands, hartebeest, gnu, Grimm’s duiker), rhinoceroses, giraffes, ostriches, bustards, and various feline and canine predators occur in the more open country. Snakes, some venomous, and scorpions abound in certain areas. Termites and bees add significantly to the human food supply. Though game was once plentiful, excessive hunting has reduced the variety of large animals to be found in areas close to human habitation. Elephants and ostriches in particular have almost disappeared except in the more remote parts of the region.
Population

While census summaries for the lower Okavango region have been published by each of the countries that administer a part of it, few of the reports provide useful figures on a tribal basis. In the Angolan publications, for example, population data are listed primarily by administrative divisions, and though tribal analyses of the regional figures are provided, the Kavango peoples are grouped together with some others as “Ngangela” and not subdivided further. We will present the regional data first as they are the more complete.

In Angola the figures given for blacks (i.e., for the “população não civilizada”) in the pertinent posts in the circumscriptions of Baixo Cubango and Cuando (Angola, D.S.E.E.G., 1943, 1953, and 1964) are shown in Table 1. The apparent increase from decade to decade may be due as much to improved census taking as to population growth. As we can see from the following reports and censuses, it cannot be assumed that all the inhabitants of these posts are members of the five Kavango tribes.

In Botswana the most recent census publication provides regional rather than tribal figures. In 1971 about 13,000 people lived in villages along the Okavango from the northern border of the country to the head of the swamp and along the

3 Population figures on a more detailed basis probably exist in unpublished records maintained (formerly, at least) at Angolan administrative posts. One set of such records that has been published (Lobato de Faria, 1948) provides a rough indication of the ethnic make-up of Baixo Cubango Circumscription, as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bushmen</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cazamans (&quot;Black Bushmen&quot;)</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vanhembas (Nyemba)</td>
<td>5,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuangares (Kwangari)</td>
<td>3,956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiocos (Chokwe)</td>
<td>2,577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambuelas (Mbwele)</td>
<td>1,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ganguelas (Ngangela)</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mucussos (Mbukushu)</td>
<td>1,459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Diricos (Goitiku)</td>
<td>917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luchazes</td>
<td>561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucenas</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 19,671

(The above figures include people living in the post of Caiundo which lies north of the region inhabited by the Kavango peoples). From these figures it appears that almost 7,000 Kavango people (those indicated by asterisks) were living in the posts of Cuangar, Dirico, and Mucusso in 1948. Since the total population of these three posts in 1950 was about 14,000, half the inhabitants must have been people of other tribes. (Mbundza and Sambuyu are not named in Lobato de Faria’s list, and it appears that they were identified as either “Cuangare” or “Dirico.”) Indeed, large numbers of Nyembas and Mbweles had settled in the area of Dirico Post (Lobato de Faria 1948: 27).
northern margin of the swamp (Botswana 1972: Table 6). However, peoples of various tribal origin occupy this area (Larson, ms. 1971a), and considerably fewer Mbukushu, Gciriku, and other peoples of our group live here.

Table 1. Angolan regional population (blacks only).\(^4\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baixo Cubango</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuangar post</td>
<td>3,700</td>
<td>7,425</td>
<td>10,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dirico post</td>
<td>4,869</td>
<td>4,888</td>
<td>9,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mucusso post</td>
<td>1,633</td>
<td>1,731</td>
<td>2,775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuando</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luiana post</td>
<td>4,948</td>
<td>5,994</td>
<td>7,865</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|               | 15,150| 21,038| 30,541|

In Namibia (South-West Africa) total population figures published for the Okavango district at various times are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1921–22</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1939</th>
<th>1947</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1970</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20,000(^5)</td>
<td>14,000(^7)</td>
<td>15,537(^8)</td>
<td>25,540(^9)</td>
<td>27,871(^10)</td>
<td>53,569(^10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10,500(^6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures of 1921–22 and 1930 are, of course, mere estimates. The large increases shown for 1947 and 1970, though unexplained in the sources cited, are due, at least in part, to influxes of refugees from Angola, though the published population figures for Angola in 1950 do not show a corresponding decrease. Again it must not be assumed that all the inhabitants of the region are members of the tribes that are the subject of this study. Indeed, the number of Namibian Kavango people in 1970, wherever located, was reported to be 47,605 (South African Institute of Race Relations, 1972: 342), so that at least 6,000 of those enumerated in the Okavango District of Namibia in 1970 were members of other tribes.

In round numbers one is led to estimate the total population of the middle Okavango region, from the Cuatir River (which joins the Okavango on the east at about 17° S and forms the boundary between the Cuangar and Caiundo posts) to

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4 A census of the population was undertaken in some parts of Angola in 1971. We have not been able to determine if the results have been published.
5 South-West Africa 1923: v.
7 South Africa, R.A.S.W.A. for 1930: 64.
8 South Africa, R.A.S.W.A. for 1939: 216.
9 Union of South Africa [1946]: 82.
Table 2. Population of Kavango Tribes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Before 1925</th>
<th>1925–1934</th>
<th>1935–1944</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kwangari</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>11,960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbundza</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>3,160</td>
<td>2,556</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sambyu</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>1,360</td>
<td>1,936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geiriku</td>
<td>4,040</td>
<td>239*</td>
<td>3,634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbukushu</td>
<td>2,480</td>
<td>5,919*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>13,000</td>
<td>23,000</td>
<td>6,158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1936</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3,4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>a, b</td>
<td>c</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kwangari</td>
<td>3,956</td>
<td>7,729</td>
<td>5,016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbundza</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,286</td>
<td>3,0008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sambyu</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>1,513</td>
<td>6,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbukushu</td>
<td>6,432</td>
<td>6,799</td>
<td>25,540*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1947?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reference</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>g</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Bechuanaland Protectorate ms, ca. 1940. 4. Bechuanaland Protectorate [1947]: Table II (f).

Notes to table 2.

a. Brincker’s figures for three Kavango tribes are probably estimates formed by missionaries who visited the region.

b. In 1921 the South West African government estimated the number of “Banu” in Nkurenkuru (presumably including under this designation all the Kavango and other people living along the Okavango River and in the Caprivi Strip) at 20,000 (South-West Africa 1923: vi).

c. Identical figures are reported for 1932, 1933, and 1934, except that the number of Kwangari is shown as 11,160 for 1933 and 1934.

d. Identical figures are reported for 1938 and 1939.

e. The data cited are for Baixo Cubango Circumscription only; data for Cuando Circumscription would have to be added to arrive at Angolan totals.


g. Some 200 Mbukushu were said to be living in Zambia in 1967 (personal communication from Barrie Reynolds, cited in Larson ms 1971a).
the northern margin of the Okavango swamp in Botswana and eastward in Angola as far as the Cuando River\textsuperscript{11}, at about 70,000 in 1960.

Estimates and counts of the individual tribes at various times have been published in official and unofficial sources (see Table 2). On the basis of these data the following rough estimates of the total number of Kavango peoples (the 5 tribes of this survey) at 10 year intervals from 1940 to 1970 seem reasonable: 30,000 in 1940, 40,000 in 1950, 50,000 in 1960, and 65,000 in 1970.

**Physical anthropology**

Some measurements and observations made on selected samples of living Kwangari and Mbukushu people have been published (Almeida, Maria Emilia, 1956, 1958a, 1958b). The sample consisted of 109 Kwangari males and 100 Mbukushu males aged 20 to 50. Height, weight, chest diameter, and various cephalic and nasal dimensions were measured so that indexes deemed important for differentiating human populations could be derived. The author concludes that the two peoples are not significantly different in height, weight, and thorax perimeter, but that significant differences do exist in cephalic and nasal indexes. The Pignet index (21.92 and 22.48 for Kwangari and Mbukushu respectively) is said to be the highest reported in "Portuguese Africa".

**The Kavango Languages**

The Kwangari Language is ruKwangari, the Sambyu siSambyu, and the Mbukushu SiMbukushu or seGova (Westphal 1958: 4). The Mbundza language, ruMbundza, once was a dialect distinct from that of the Kwangari, but by 1965 only a few elder members of the tribe could recall it and most Mbundza people spoke the Kwangari tongue (Kampungu 1965: 398; Förg 1967–68: 42 f.). The former Gciriku language, ruManyo or siMbogedu, was practically wiped out at the beginning of the 20th century when most of the young men of the group were killed in battle and men of other Okavango tribes, predominantly Kwangari, Sambyu, and Mbundza, married Gciriku women and came to live in Gciriku territory (Möhlig 1967: i–ii).

Experts on the Kavango languages find them to be closely related but differ in the number of dialects they distinguish. Westphal (1958: xxx) includes the Kwangari, Sambyu, Gciriku, Mbukushu, and possibly the Mbundza as distinct tongues, all falling within his "Okavango dialect group." Möhlig says that while the Gciriku and Sambyu can easily understand one another, the Gciriku and Kwangari languages are

\textsuperscript{11} Some 700 Mbukushu were reported (Eiselen, n.d.) to have been living along the eastern bank of the Kwandu (Cuando) River in the Eastern Caprivi Strip.
not mutually comprehensible. Kampungu (1965: 399) opines that although the Kwangari, Gciriku, and Sambyu dialects are "linguistically similar," the Mbu Kushu language differs from them though it has some words in common with the former three. However, the comparison of the Gciriku and Mbu Kushu languages provided by Schapera and van der Merwe (1942) reveals many close lexical and grammatical similarities.

Guthrie, as reported in Bryan (1959: 66), considers the Kwangari group of languages to compose a "single unit" and places one of them, "Mpu Kushu," in his zone "K" along with the Chokwe, Lwena (Luvale), Lunda, and Luyana tongues. Such a classification agrees well with the traditional history of the Kavango peoples.

Crabb, however, places the languages of the Kavango people along with those spoken by the Herero and Ovambo peoples in what he terms the Southern branch of the Southwest Bantu language group. This decision appears to be based in large part on the mutual occurrence of e- as the prefix for Class V nouns. The absence in the Kavango languages of the pre-prefix o-, a feature that is found in all the other Southwest Bantu tongues, Crabb concludes, is a "loss" that probably can be attributed to the influence of surrounding languages (Crabb, 1962: 18-25).

The description of Ngamiland languages undertaken by Schapera and van der Merwe (1942) includes the Mbu Kushu and the Gciriku dialects; it is limited principally to an exposition of the noun classes, a short comparative vocabulary, and mention of a few syntactical features. Westphal (1958) and Dammann (1957) have published lengthier studies of the Kwangari language, and though they differ in approach, their findings are in close agreement except in the analysis of verbal modes and tenses. Dammann's work includes a glossary of about 2500 words. Möhlig (1967: 53) has made a more exhaustive study of the Gciriku language, and though this is primarily concerned with prosodology, he also examines the syntax and gives a short comparative vocabulary of modern Gciriku and ruManyo. The only information we have found on the Sambyu language is that included incidentally in a social anthropological study by Bosch (1964) and consists principally of vocabulary.

Kwangari is the Kavango dialect with the most published materials; these consist of Christian religious writings, primers, and a few native language journals.

Some of the common features shared by the Kavango languages are: voiced and voiceless homorganic nasal clusters (nasals homorganic with following consonants), both plain and nasal vowels, a click which appears to be a borrowed phenomenon and occurs in only a few words in the Okavango languages, and a quinary numerical system.

According to a report on a recommended orthography for the Kwangari language (S. W. A., Dept of Education, 1968: 28-29), the click in that tongue, represented as c when voiceless, can also be voiced, gc; nasal, nc or ngc; or aspirated and nasal, nch. (Möhlig uses dc for the voiced click.) Dammann (1957: 1) says that although the Kwangari use both dental and palatal clicks, they are not phonemically distinguished; Möhlig (1967: 13-16), in discussing the click sound in Gciriku, says that the point of articulation is not phonemically significant.
\(l\) and \(r\) are in complementary distribution in Kwangari and Samyu with \(l\) replacing \(r\) only before \(i\). Crabb (1962: 25) states that \(l\) never occurs in Geiriku except in the one word, \(njala\), hunger, but Möhlig (1967: 12) says that \(l\) and \(r\) are in complementary distribution in Geiriku with a few exceptions such as the name Geiriku.

The consonantal sound system of Kwangari is illustrated in Table 3, which is based upon the works of Dammann (1957), Westphal (1958), and the South West Africa Department of Education (1968). Five vowels, represented by \(a, e, i, o,\) and \(u\), are recognized, both in short and long forms, the latter being represented by double symbols.

Table 3. The Kwangari consonantal system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>bilabial</th>
<th>labio-dental</th>
<th>dental</th>
<th>alveo-dental</th>
<th>alveolar</th>
<th>palato-alveolar</th>
<th>palatal</th>
<th>velar</th>
<th>glotal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stops (explosives)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(vl)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>(vd)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spirants (fricatives)</td>
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<td>(vl)</td>
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<td>(vd)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasals</td>
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<td>(vd)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lateral</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trill (rolled)</td>
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<td>Affricates</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Dammann (1957: 1) and Westphal (1958: 5) list a labio-dental \(v\). Westphal includes also a bilabial fricative, also written \(v\), which occurs alone or before \(y\) but changes to a plosive (\(b\)) in \(mb, mby,\) and \(bw\) (op. cit.: 6).
2 Westphal (loc. cit.) uses \(w\) for two sounds that he considers to be plosive, one bilabial and the other velar.
3,4 Westphal (loc. cit.) considers the \(t\) and \(d\) sounds to be alveolar.
5 \(n\) is palatized (\(\eta\)) when followed by \(g\).
6 Westphal considers the \(r\) to be flapped.
7,8 Westphal (loc. cit.) considers the affricates to be post-palatal.
9 Westphal represents by \(h\) a sound that is post-palatal and voiceless (op. cit.: 6).

Schapera and van der Merwe (1942: 50–51) indicate that for the Mbutuku and Geiriku languages there is concord between subject and verb, subject or object and adjective, possessor and thing possessed, and in some cases agreement between subject and a relative clause, and object and a verb. Westphal, though recognizing a general "harmonizing chain function of prefixes" (Westphal 1958: 62, 95), notes
that there is not always prefixal harmony between the nominal and verbal segments of a sentence. Möhlig (1967: 115–116) explains that verbal concordants can be either subjectival or objectival. Also, he says, if a noun has more than one prefix, the other prefixes in the sentence agree with the first nominal prefix unless it is a locative.

The negative in the Kwangari and Gciriku dialects is formed commonly by inserting a negative word before a positive one, but it is also formed in some instances with a negative affix (Westphal 1958: 62; Dammann 1957: 66–67; Möhlig 1967: 216).

Westphal (1958: 62) says that Kwangari differs from the other Bantu languages in that it does not use the infix -w- to express a voice corresponding to the English passive. Dammann (1957: 65) postulates that Kwangari at one time had a passive much like other Bantu languages, but that it disappeared through contact with non-Bantu tongues. A -w- infix does exist in Kwangari though it is rare, and whereas Westphal (1958: 62) claims that it is not used in a passive sense, Dammann (1957: 64) identifies it as a passive derivation.

The analyses of the modes and tenses of the Kwangari and Gciriku languages made by Westphal, Dammann, and Möhlig differ markedly in the resulting classification and in the terminologies employed. Westphal (1958: 77 ff.), rejecting the analysis of verb forms according to a preconceived pattern, eschews identifying names and merely serializes the tenses for comparison among themselves. Dammann (1957) and Möhlig (1967), on the other hand, attempt to relate the modes and tenses to European grammatical categories.

Tonal patterns in ruKwangari are treated by Westphal (1958) and in the language presently spoken by the Gciriku by Möhlig (1967).

**Orthography**

The literature on the Kavango peoples suffers from a confusion of spellings, Bantu sounds being variously represented in the works written in Afrikaans, English, German, and Portuguese. Tone is ignored in transcriptions of the Kavango languages, except for some linguistic works.

Though a standard orthography for the Kwangari language has been published by the South West Africa Department of Education (1968), it is not strictly phonemic. Inasmuch as linguistic works are not available for the languages spoken by the Mbundza, Sambyu, and Mbukushu peoples, we have not attempted to adhere to a standard orthography in this survey.
Orgins of the Kavango Peoples

The Mashi-Kwandu Connection

Migration legends recorded among the Kwangari, Gciriku, and Mbukushu agree in tracing their origin and also that of the Mbundza and Sambyu back to the region of the Mashi or Kwandu river, a western tributary of the Zambezi. Some of the stories tell of hunters that had gone out seeking areas richer in game than those close by and had returned with news of an uninhabited river lying to the west that had much game — the Okavango.

Brelsford (1956: 6) and Reynolds (1967) say the Mashi or Kwandu people of recent times are a hunting and gardening tribe who were formerly subject to the Lozi. Old people among the Mashi recognize their relationship to the Mbukushu and other Bantu peoples living along the lower Okavango. Brelsford considers the Mashi along with the Subiya and Shanjo, all of whom live in southwestern Zambia, to be “probably relics of the earliest inhabitants of Central Africa.” They are described in early records as being semi-nomadic, “practically amphibious,” and living in mat and grass shelters on ant hills in the swamps of the Kwandu (Brelsford 1956: 6, 11). Reynolds (1967: 153) characterizes the Mashi as a people living in isolated villages hidden on separate islands in the reeds, noted for their restless nature and the frequent movement of their villages.

According to legends of the Lozi, when they themselves entered the Zambezi valley, they forced the Mashi, Subiya, and Shanjo to move to the southwestern borders of the valley: this is estimated to have been in the 1600s (Brelsford 1956: 6). Gibbons (1904, I: 218), who thinks the Mbukushu came from farther north, places their arrival in the Kwandu valley at about 1750 and their migration to the Okavango about 1810.

Route of Migration from the Mashi to the Okavango

When it is in flood stage, the Mashi River is connected by water with the Okavango Swamp and through it with the Okavango River. Despite this water connection, one of the origin legends collected among the Kwangari refers to the crossing of a vast prairie abounding with wild fruits (Kampungu 1965: 188). The migration thus may have taken place across the region now known as the Caprivi Strip where the distance between the Mashi and Okavango Rivers is less than 200 km. (160 mi.). Streitwolf, who explored the Caprivi region in 1908, found Mbukushu people living there along with Subiya, Yei, Fwe, and some Bushmen (Streitwolf 1911: 226–227).

The Handa and Ambo Connections

There is legendary evidence that the westernmost of the present Kavango peoples derive in part from ethnic units living farther west, namely the Handa (of
the Nyaneka-Nkumbi ethnic group) and certain units of the Ambo group. For further details of these connections see the section on Kwangari Traditional History.

Related and Neighboring People

Closely Related People

Certain other small groups of people going by various names have been sometimes classified with the Kavango peoples. However, little is known about most of these minor groups, and their relationship to the Kavango people remains obscure. We list them here along with several references:

- Fwe (cf. Brelsford, 1956: 10, 11, 18)
- Mashi or Kwando (cf. Brelsford 1956: 6, 10, 11; Reynolds 1967)
- Mulonga (cf. Brelsford 1956: 11)
- Shanjo (cf. Brelsford 1956: 6, 10, 11, 17, 18)
- Simaa (cf. Brelsford 1956: 10, 11, 17)
- Ndundo or Ndundulu (cf. Carta Etnica de Angola 1970: no. 87; Brelsford 1956: 10)
- Nyengo (cf. Brelsford 1956: 10; Carta Etnica de Angola 1970: no. 89)

The Kavango people along with the Nyengo and Ndundo are classified as “Xindonga” in the Carta Etnica de Angola.

Neighboring People

San (“Bushmen”), mostly !Kung, apparently inhabited the lands both north and south of the lower Okavango river before the advent of the five Bantu tribes who now dominate its banks. Small bands of these hunting peoples still live in the area. The territory north of the lower Okavango has been only sparsely settled in historic times; Ngangela and Nyemba inhabit the banks of the middle Okavango, and small groups of Mbwela are situated on the smaller streams. To the west various Ambo tribes are densely settled. To the east are Fwe, Subia, and Yei (along with some Mbukushu). Bantu peoples settled near the borders of the Okavango swamp to the south of our region are Yei, Tawana, and Herero. All these neighboring peoples have infiltrated the Lower Okavango region to a degree and have established their separate villages along its banks. In addition, some peoples from farther away, especially Chokwe and Mbunda from the northeast, have come to the Lower Okavango in sizeable numbers. Census data for these various alien groups are, however, lacking. A small number of so-called “River Bushmen,” who call themselves !tse, “River People,” also have settled along the Okavango River in Mbukushu country (Larson ms 1971a).

12 The reference here is to the Ambo or Ovambo people of the Angola-Namibia border and not to the unrelated Ambo of central Zambia.
Recorded History

EARLY EXPLORATIONS

Portuguese Contacts

Merchants who had settled in coastal Angola were the first Europeans to establish trading relations with the Kavango peoples. A map dated 1851 showing the five lower Okavango tribes located along the river in their present order was published with a geographical account of southern Angola written by a merchant of Mossamedes, Bernardino J. Brochado (1867). According to a report in the Portuguese press, Brochado visited the Okavango region in 1849 (Macqueen 1857–58: 354). Frederick Green, a South West African white hunter and trader who in 1855 reached Libebe, the Mbukushu capital, reported that Mbari (Portuguese speaking black Angolan) traders were regularly sent there by Portuguese merchants on the coast to exchange guns and gunpowder for ivory and slaves. Indeed, the Mbukushu were so well supplied with Portuguese gunpowder that they could provide it to the Batawana living to their south (Green 1857: 535–539). In 1876 another Portuguese merchant, Antonio F. Nogueira, published information on the Okavango valley and routes of access to it from western Angolan towns (Ferreira Ribeiro 1885: 38 ff.).

In 1890 Henrique de Paiva Couceiro, at the time a junior military officer, led a column of 140 men on an exploratory trip down the Okavango river as far as the Gomar Islands (Gomare in present Botswana) at the southern extremity of Mbukushu territory. His purpose was to make the various chiefs vassals of the Portuguese and to investigate the navigability of the river. Paiva Couceiro’s report (1892) is the first to provide substantial ethnographic information about the lower Okavango peoples. A larger military expedition led by the Governor of Huila District, João de Almeida, proceeded along the left bank of the Okavango in 1909 to establish a line of forts at major population centers, a maneuver induced by apprehension over German developments on the right bank and the encroachment of German nationals in Angola. Almeida’s report (1912) also includes ethnographic sketches. In 1910, forts in each of the five tribal areas were garrisoned (de Almeida 1912: 244); thus Portuguese control of the Angola portion of the lower Okavango region, though variable through the subsequent colonial period, dates from Almeida’s expedition.

Contacts from the South

Karl Johan Andersson, a Swedish hunter, naturalist, adventurer, and merchant who had established himself in South-West Africa, in 1859 reached the Kwangari region of the lower Okavango. His account (1861: 219–261) provides but few ethnographic details of the Kwangari, then under chief Sikongo. Frederick Green,
travelling north from Lake Ngami in Bechuanaland, had earlier (in 1855) reached the Mbukushu capital, and 10 years later visited Kwangari country (Tabler 1973: 47). English and other northern European hunters, traders, and prospectors for gold operated on the lower Cuito as well as on the Okavango for several decades prior to 1900. (In Tabler 1973 see biographical sketches of George Black, Axel Eriksson, Frederick Green, James Harrison, Robert Lewis, Gerald McKiernan [an American], James Todd, and Henry Wilmer.) In 1880 Père Charles Duperquet published a brief account of the Kavango peoples together with a sketch map showing their locations (Duperquet 1880; 1953), based upon information he had obtained from South-West African hunters; the report is interesting mainly from a historical standpoint.

In 1884 Germany formally declared the territory of South-West Africa a protectorate; the government, however, made no attempt to bring the Okavango region on the northern border under control until after the turn of the century. German hunters began to penetrate the region of the lower Okavango after 1885, and some lost their lives at the hands of the Africans, a consequence, writes de Almeida (1912: 195), of their practice of abusing the native peoples and plundering their villages. Reprisals were carried out against Kavango tribesmen following some of these incidents (cf. Bosch 1964: 22).

In 1901 a Lieutenant Volkman led a small military party from Grootfontein to the Okavango where he established contact with the Kwangari chief (Volkman 1901). In 1902 a medical officer, Jodtka, rode along the Okavango through the territories of the Kwangari, Mbundza, and Sambyo. His report (1902) provides some ethnographic information, particularly concerning the political divisions and the economy of the region. In 1903 Volkmann returned to the Okavango to punish the Kwangari for robbing a party of Catholic missionaries and refusing to permit them to establish a mission (Leutwein 1906: 178–188).

From 1904 to 1906 the Germans in South-West Africa were heavily engaged in a conflict in the central part of the country with the Herero and Nama peoples who had revolted against the colonial government. After peace had been restored, attention could again be given to the northern border. In 1908 Chief Lieutenant Fischer led a patrol to the Okavango to gather information and had a brief meeting with Chief Himarwa (Fischer 1910: 44–46).

In 1908 the governor of South-West Africa appointed Captain K. Streitwolf to the position of Imperial Resident for the Caprivi Strip and ordered him to investigate conditions in that region. On his return from a trip by ox cart from Windhoek to the eastern extremity of the territory, Streitwolf trekked from the Zambezi to the Okavango, passing through the sparsely inhabited country that separates the two rivers, where he found a few settlements of Mbukushu and other Bantu peoples and some bands of Bushmen. His account (Streitwolf, 1911) is an adventure story with some geographical and historical value but with little ethnographic detail on the peoples encountered.

More recent history is presented in the sections on Missions and Administration.
Catholic

The Oblates of Mary Immaculate. This order was in 1894 given permission by the government of the German protectorate of South-West Africa to commence missionary work in the northern part of the territory (Gotthardt 1946: 9). The initial attempt in 1903 to establish missions in Kwangari and Mbundza territory was strongly rejected by chief Himarwa of the Kwangari and by his brother, the chief of the Mbundza. Although military aid was sent from Grootfontein to protect the missionaries, they withdrew due to harassment by the chiefs.

In 1907–1908 O. M. I. missionaries attempted to found a mission in Mbukushu territory where chief Libebe had indicated he would like to have a “teacher.” However, Mathiba, chief of the Tawana, the dominant tribe in Ngamiland, was opposed to the entry of German missionaries in the territory. His resistance and the hardships of travel and climate again led to abandonment of the effort.

About that time the government of the protectorate determined to establish a police post on the Okavango and to bring the region within the police zone of South-West Africa. The O. M. I. missionaries feared that, despite the sacrifices they had endured, Protestant missionaries would be given preference in the territory now coming under government control. They hastened, therefore, to prepare for another attempt, this time to establish a mission at the capital of Nyangana, chief of the Gciriku. In April, 1910, five O. M. I. missionaries were welcomed by Nyangana and given permission to build. The chapel was ready by Christmas, Nyangana began to attend Sunday services, and his son, Mbambo, eventually became a catechist. The missionaries exerted their influence through Nyangana to encourage settlement of the Gciriku people near the mission, and the bulk of the Gciriku people moved over from the Angola side despite efforts of the garrison of the nearby Angolan fort to prevent it.

In 1911 Libebe again asked for a teacher, sending with his request the cows that had been taken from the missionaries who died at his capital in 1909. The next year two missionaries left Nyangana for Andara by canoe to found the second O. M. I. mission on the Okavango.

Table 4. O.M.I. Missions in 1946

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Station and tribe</th>
<th>Fathers</th>
<th>Brothers</th>
<th>Sisters</th>
<th>Nursing sisters</th>
<th>Teachers M</th>
<th>Teachers F</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andara (Mbukushu)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bunja (Mbundza)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>471</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nyangana (Gciriku)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sambiu (Sambyu)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>344</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tondoro (Kwagari)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>564</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2709</td>
<td>1320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only after the death of Himarwa in 1925 was a mission established in Kwangari country. A station in Mbundza territory followed in 1927 and one in the Sambyu region in 1929 (Gotthardt 1946: 39–48).

The personnel and membership of the O.M.I. missions on the Okavango in South-West Africa in 1946 are given in Table 4.

Redemptorist Fathers: Missionaries of the Congregation of the Holy Redeemer founded a station at Cuangar in 1959, this being the only mission established on the Angolan side of the lower Okavango river by 1961 (Silva Rego 1964: 79).

Protestant

Missionaries of the Finnish (Lutheran) Missions in Ovamboland toured Kwangariland in 1922 in hopes of establishing a mission, but they were refused permission to do so by the chief. In 1926 a house was erected at Nkurenkuru for a missionary who occasionally visited the region, and in 1929 a permanent Protestant mission station was established there (Kampungu 1965: 123–131). In 1939 the Finnish Mission Society was reported to have three churches claiming 651 members in the Okavango territory of South-West Africa (South Africa, R.A.S.W.A. 1940: pars. 846 and 854). These are confined to the Kwangari and Mbundja areas.

Mission Growth

The growth of the missions is attested by the figures of Table 5 (from Bruwer 1966: Table 1):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1954</th>
<th>1958</th>
<th>1959</th>
<th>1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Missions</td>
<td>4,362</td>
<td>8,661</td>
<td>11,264</td>
<td>10,767</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant Missions</td>
<td>2,711</td>
<td>3,939</td>
<td>2,646</td>
<td>4,624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7,073</td>
<td>12,600</td>
<td>13,910</td>
<td>15,391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Abel (1959: 181) estimated that about half the Okavango people had accepted Christianity.

Education

In 1962 the only education provided in the Okavango territory of South-West Africa was that offered in mission schools. The Finnish Mission ran schools in 12 places, all located in the western half of the lower Okavango region. The Catholic missions operated schools in 27 places, distributed throughout the lower Okavango territory. The total number of mission schools in 1962 was 46, claiming 3,444
pupils under the tutelage of 91 teachers (South Africa 1964: Table LXXXI and Fig. 43).

Administration

As the lower Okavango region lies on the border between three states of southern Africa and is remote from their respective administrative centers, it came under governmental control later than most other regions of those countries. The philosophy and practice of administering tribal peoples was, of course, different in each of the three states.

ANGOLA

Though Portugal had initiated trading relations with the kingdoms of northwestern Angola as early as 1485 and had established permanent settlements on the coast in the 16th and 17th centuries, its small military forces were too fully occupied in attempting to control the peoples of the north to give attention to the southern hinterland. Only after the Berlin West African Conference of 1884–85 and succeeding disputes with Britain concerning colonial sovereignty over the lands of south central Africa did the Portuguese government move to explore and establish its presence in the lower Okavango region. This is did by means of a military expedition in 1890. Fear of German colonial expansion prompted a second expedition in 1909 (see the section on Portuguese Contacts).

The five forts built in 1909 along the lower Okavango by João de Almeida, Governor of Huila District, were divided between two military commands, those at Cuangar and Bunja falling within the Baixo Cubango unit with headquarters at Caiundo in Ngangela territory, and those at Sambilu, Dirico, and Mucusso falling within the Baixo Cuito unit with headquarters at Dirico. In 1910 the forts were garrisoned by some 227 military men, with officers in charge at Cuangar, Dirico, and Mucusso (de Almeida 1912: chart following p. 244). The purpose seems primarily to have been to secure the border and only secondarily to exercise control over the local population. In fact, in 1914 hostilities broke out at Cuangar between Portuguese and German colonial forces, a distant reflection of the Great War going on in Europe (Freitas Soares 1937: 16).

In the period 1932 to 1935 the military posts became civil administrative centers as well. Cuangar was made the seat of Baixo Cubango circumscription in 1967, and in an administrative reorganization in 1968 circumscriptions of Cuangar and Dirico were established within the newly formed District of Cuando Cubango (Milheiros 1972: 20, 117).

In general, Angolan administrative officers were charged with collecting taxes, compiling census data, and resolving disputes — duties they performed with the assistance of a few policemen, an interpreter, and some clerks. Details concerning administrative matters in the lower Cubango region are lacking in the literature examined.
BOTSWANA

In the half century before Britain assumed protection of Bechuanaland, the Lower Kavango peoples (Mbukushu and Gciriku) residing within the lands claimed by the Tawana tribe were treated as subject peoples. "The early Tawana chiefs, especially Mogalakwe (c. 1830–40) and Letsholathebe (c. 1840–74) divided the tribal territory into many districts, each of which was placed under the control of a ward-head or some other prominent member of the ruling community living in the capital. This man was termed the modisa (overseer) of the district, and all the people living in it were regarded as belonging to his ward" (Schapera 1952: 99). Sovereignty over the Mbukushu, however, was not always solidly in Tawana hands, for the Rotse king Lewanika (1884–1916) also claimed the Mbukushu as his vassals and obtained tribute from them (Sillery 1952: 193–194).

Bechuanaland became a British protectorate in 1885 and the Tawana Reserve (Ngamiland) was proclaimed in 1899. By 1922 a Resident Magistrate was stationed in Ngamiland whose main responsibilities were to advise the native authorities, keep the peace, and look after white interests. Otherwise administration remained in the hands of the chief and his regional representatives, all of whom were Tawana. In 1951 provisions were made for adding local Native Authorities to the Tawana government, but the Mbukushu were not recognized in this reorganization (Hailey 1953: 151, 209, 265). At that time the Mbukushu and Gciriku people of Botswana resided chiefly in Lebodu ward whose head was a man of Kwenia tribal origin (Schapera 1952: 99). The Resident Magistrate had been replaced by a District Commissioner stationed at Maun whose responsibilities now included supervision of a tribal trust fund, hearing cases involving capital crimes, and promotion of the general welfare. He was assisted by a police officer, veterinary officers, a medical officer, and a complement of native assistants.

In more recent times in the Okavango District of the Northwest Province of Botswana (independent since 1966), a Mbukushu headman has been elected to serve as assistant to the Tawana headman appointed for the area. The Okavango District has also been represented by a Mbukushu councilor in the provincial government seated at Maun (Larson ms 1971a; Van Tonder 1966: 167–170).

Government Services

The agricultural, medical, and educational services being provided in the Okavango region in the 1950s have continued since independence. A weekly clinic is held at Shakawe with a doctor and nurse in attendance (patients seriously ill are flown to Maun for hospitalization) and elementary schools are in operation at Shakawe, Sepopa, and Seronga (Larson, ms 1971a).
General Features

NAMIBIA

During the period of German supremacy in South-West Africa, a police post was established at Nkurenkuru (Kuring Kuru) in Kwangari country in 1910, ostensibly to counterbalance increasing Portuguese influence in the region (Singleton 1911: 521). At that time most of the south bank of the Lower Okavango was not settled, though tribesmen living on the northern bank cultivated some fields on the southern side. Details concerning official relations with the Kwangari and other Lower Kavango peoples during the short period of German police presence at Nkurenkuru have not been found.

South-West Africa passed from German to South African control during World War I, and from 1915 to 1920 the post at Nkurenkuru was manned by South African police. During this period an effort was made to restrict the entry of whites into the Kavango tribal areas. In 1920 a civil government replaced the military government in South-West Africa and a sub-Native Commissioner was posted in the Kavango area. Only missionaries and officials were granted permission to enter the region. Government was by tribal law and custom, except that the commissioner was authorized to act to prevent the destruction of life and the oppression of the people by their chiefs (South Africa, R.A.S.W.A. for 1922: 10).

The administration of native areas was regularized by the Native Administration Proclamation No. 15 of 1928 which established an official hierarchy of commissioners and defined their duties and responsibilities. Native chiefs and headmen were recognized by the government as having authority to settle minor disputes. The Kavango area (and a portion of the Caprivi Strip as far east as the Mashi River) was administered by an Assistant Native Commissioner stationed at Rundu (Runtu) at the Mbudza-Sambyu border. His duties included settling disputes appealed to him by local headmen and chiefs, collecting taxes for a tribal trust fund, maintaining law and order, keeping the roads in repair, attesting the contracts of natives recruited for labor outside the tribal territory, endorsing the permits of Europeans passing through the region, etc. He was assisted by a clerk and a complement of native policemen and workmen. The Trust Fund into which all taxes were placed was reserved for development of the region (South Africa, R.A.S.W.A. for 1937: pars. 273 and 282).

In the 1960s the declared philosophy of the white administration was to interfere as little as possible with traditional law in the settlement of minor matters. The Bantu commissioner, however, had authority to investigate cases of rape, manslaughter, and murder and to refer them to higher courts. The chiefs and their headmen were required to assist government officials in registering taxpayers, preventing and combating animal diseases, maintaining human health standards, assisting with the maintenance of fences and boundaries, providing labor for government farms, policing the region, removing underbrush, and protecting wildlife. They were required to report all outbreaks of illness among animals and humans, deaths, crimes, the presence of strangers of foreign animals, forbidden practices, illegal importation of weapons, and illegal assemblies. They were expected to in-
form their people of all new laws and requirements laid down by the white administra-
tion and to convene their people when the native commissioners or the super-
intendent visited the area (Bosch 1964: 246 ff.).

*Contract Employment*

From German times to the present it has been the policy of the white govern-
ment of South-West Africa to encourage young people of the Kavango region to
engage in labor on a contract basis in the "Police Zone" of the country, working on
white-owned farms, in the copper mines at Tsumeb, in the diamond mines at the
mouth of the Orange River, or in the fishing industry on the coast. Recruiting is
carried on by the New South West African Native Labour Association
(S.W.A.N.L.A.). Abel (1959: 181) reports that for the Kavango tribes as a group,
about 60 percent of the young people stay away continually on contract work in
the European zone. The Odendaal Report, however, declares that only "approximate-
lly . . . 4 percent of the people of this (the Okavango) group are absorbed in the
diversified economy of the Southern Sector of the Territory" (South Africa 1964:
35–37). In Botswana labor is recruited at Shakawe by the Witwatersrand Native
Labour Association (W.N.E.L.A.).

*Trade*

In addition to contract employment, cash is obtained through sales of cattle to
local traders, of agricultural products, and of handicrafts, particularly wood car-
vings. Food and other trade goods are purchased from the cattle merchants. The
most important exports are of lumber and wood carvings. The trade in the Namib-
ian area is largely carried on through the S.W.A.N.L.A. which operates shops at
Nhurenkuru, Rundu, and Mukwe. Trading licenses are issued to African natives by
the Namibian government, but only a few blacks have taken advantage of the
possibility in the Namibian sector. In Botswana trade is in the hands of various
trading concerns that operate groups of stores in the Northwestern Province.

As early as 1909 Kavango laborers brought home European goods purchased
with their wages. Animal skins, ostrich feathers, and ivory once were major items of
commerce sold to European traders by people in the area (de Almeida 1912: 379;

*Slavery*

At the time of first European contact slavery was common in the Kavango area.
Raiding for slaves was practiced against more distant peoples and compensatory
slavery was found even within the same tribe. The Tawana chief Sekgoma, in a visit
to the Geiriku in 1894, seized some of them as slaves (Gibson ms 1953: 76). The Geiriku, on the other hand, were feared by the Mbunda, a people situated to the north, because of their raids for slaves and foodstuffs (Gibbons 1904, I: 226). Compensatory slavery came about in various ways, most often by murder, theft, or default on a loan (Bierfert 1938: 57–58). In the case of a convicted murderer, the condemned one’s sister or sister’s daughter might be offered as a slave to save the life of the condemned man. Such an offer could not be refused (Gibson ms 1953; Bierfert 1925: 294).

In time of famine, people were sometimes sold by their relatives in exchange for cattle: two head for a man, three for a woman, one for a child. One woman, suffering from hunger, is even said to have sold herself into slavery for 20 lbs. of grain (Bierfert 1938: 65). Children were sold also for goods other than food. A man might sell his sister’s child in exchange for clothing or goods; the child’s father was powerless to prevent the sale, but received a part of the goods. The chief sometimes seized the children of his tribesmen and sold them into slavery for his personal benefit.

The owner of a single slave tried to acquire another of the opposite sex who would become the consort of the first. Children born to the slave couple would themselves be slaves. If the slave had been accepted as compensation for a murder, the children born to the slave couple were divided among the relatives of the one who was killed.

Though slaves were fed by their masters, they were not well provided for and often lacked clothing and received only scraps for food. Their poverty often led them to theft, for which they were severely beaten. Slave children worked at menial tasks, such as gathering firewood and tending the cooking, not participating in play with free children. They are reported by missionaries often to be mentally retarded (Bierfert 1938: 61–62).

Until 1909, when Portuguese authorities took control of the north bank of the Okavango in this area, slave dealers came yearly from the north, offering arms, gunpowder, blankets, and clothing in exchange for slaves. A gun was the price of a man, a gun and a bag of gunpowder the price of a woman, and a blanket and some cloth or gunpowder the price of a child. The slave dealers who operated in the Kavango area are not well identified. One informant named the “Imbare” (acculturated black Angolans) as slave traders (Gibson ms., 1953). A missionary reported that the slave dealers were “brown men . . . who had themselves carried in sedan chairs” (Bierfert 1938: 51).

After establishing control over the Kavango tribes, both the Portuguese and South-West African governments made efforts to free slaves and to prevent further slavery. Reports of debt slavery, however, continued to become known.

In 1922 the South-West African government acknowledged that slavery existed among the Kavango tribes. An investigation had shown that chiefs, headmen, and the owners of homesteads were keeping slaves; indeed, it was said that more than half the population along the Okavango River lived in a state of slavery. A person who had been exchanged for cattle could regain his or her freedom by repayment
of the cattle. The condition of slavery was inherited, and the purchasing of freedom became increasingly difficult in later generations because the owner of a second or third generation slave would demand not only the cattle paid for the parents or grandparents but all the progeny including those that were slaughtered or lost. The condition of slavery was said no longer to be absolute, whereas formerly slaves could be killed, sold, or punished by their owners. Slaves were required to work for their masters but were allowed also to have their own fields and control over the crops harvested from them. When a slave searched for wild foods in the bush, a portion had to be given to the master. Slaves might be allowed to leave the Kavango region as contract laborers in the police zone to the south, but when they returned they might not be allowed to keep all their wages; indeed, in some cases the master claimed all the earnings (South Africa, 1923: 19).

The above picture of wide-spread slavery was contradicted by the South African government in a report issued the following year, in which it was stated that only a few cases of selling into slavery had come to light during the year. The estimate of the proportion living in slavery was reduced to about 5 to 10 percent (South Africa 1924: 18).

In 1924 the South-West African government decreed that all slaves must be freed and prohibited all trade in people. This, however, did not put an end to slavery, and some who persisted in keeping slaves were punished by the authorities (Bierfert 1938: 51, 52, 56, 60). The government reported in 1925 that it was the chiefs who were the principal offenders, but that they were now conforming to the law, except in the case of those who wished to remain in servitude (South Africa 1926: 84). Thus the condition of slavery apparently carried with it some benefits, probably in the form of security if not also in the form of food and care.
II

THE KWANGARI

CECILIA R. McGURK and GORDON D. GIBSON
Introduction

When visited by Andersson in 1859, the Kwangari occupied only the left-hand (Angolan) side of the Okavango (Andersson, 1861: 222). The situation was essentially the same in 1899 (Baum 1903: 65) and in 1910 (Singlemann, 1911: 520). In more recent times they have occupied both banks of the Okavango, from about 18° 22' E to 18° 53' E. However, small groups of Kwangari are to be found also living as minorities in regions controlled by other tribes of the Kavango group.¹

Chiobe (see map) was the first Kwangari village encountered by Paiva Couceiro in his exploratory trip down the Okavango in 1890. Some villages farther upstream at Cabanga (Kavanga) and Culola were inhabited by Mbwela people who recognized the sovereignty of the Kwangari over their lands (Paiva Couceiro, 1892: 120–121).² Thus the Kwangari at that time controlled the left bank of the Okavango up to about 17° 4' S. Paiva Couceiro (op. cit.) identified Nzini (Nzinze) as the last Kwangari village he encountered on his march eastward, and Amuporo (Namupuri) and Terere as the first of the Mbundza, there being an uninhabited stretch separating the two regions. The smooth line distance along the river between the extremities of the region occupied by the Kwangari in 1890 was about 81 km. (50 miles).

History

TRADITIONAL HISTORY

The tribal Name

Kampungu (1965: 167–168), himself a Mukwangari, suggests three possible etymologies: Wo nkwa ngari meaning “Those Lying on Their Backs,” Va kwa ngari meaning “People of Ngara” (Ngara was the name of a Kwangari leader), and Va kwa ngari meaning “Those with Ngara Ornaments.” The ngara ornament made of squirrel tails decorated with beads is worn by Kwangari women, particularly those living on the north side of the river. Green (1876) refers to the Kwangari as Mbwenge.

1 Although the Kwangari are shown on one map (Redinha 1971) to be living along the Candombe River, a tributary of the Lulana which itself flows into the Mashi, the source for this information was an administrative report and the presence of Kwangari in this area has not been confirmed (Jose Redinha, personal communication).

2 Baum (1903: 61–62), who passed through Cabanga (Kavanga) in 1899, reports that the chief of that village had to pay a tax to the chief of the Kwangari on wild animals taken, had to provide men to cultivate Kwangari fields, and was prohibited from selling ivory to European traders, a restriction that he managed, however, to circumvent.
Origin Legends

According to legends recorded by Kampungu (1965), the ancestors of the Kwangari, Mbundza, Sambyu, and Gciriku migrated westward together from the Mashi or Kwandu River which lies 500 km. (300 miles) east of present Kwangari country. They called themselves Yamasi (i.e., People of Mashi). The migrating ancestors stopped for a while on an island at Shiguru near the present border between Sambyu and Gciriku territories. When they were ready to move farther up the Okavango it happened that a Kwangari woman was having a difficult childbirth, and she, presumably with others of her group, remained on the island while the Sambyu and Gciriku people proceeded. Later the Kwangari and Mbundza advanced to Handa, leaving the Sambyu and Gciriku behind.

The Kwangari and Mbundza peoples, whose chiefs belong to the same clan, that of the Hyena, reckon their descent from two “sisters” known respectively as Mate and Kapango. (The chiefs of the other Kavango peoples belong to different clans — the Hunger or Frog clan among the Sambyu and Gciriku, and the Lion clan among the Mbukushu.) The ascendancy of the Hyena clan among the Kwangari and Mbundza is explained in a legend that goes back to the time of the migration from Mashi country.

The separation of the Kwangari and the Mbundza is recounted in various stories which agree that it occurred because of a dispute between their ancestral mothers over food animals, first wild game and later cattle. The first dispute, according to one version, took place when the two sisters and their parties reached the present Mbundza territory. Kampango’s husband was a good hunter while Mate’s husband was not. After Mate begged her sister for food for her children and was refused, she and her people decided to move farther up the river and finally reached Makuzu where they settled (Kampungu, 1965: 190–191, 196, 207).

At Makuzu the migrants came into contact with the Handa and Nyemba peoples. [The Handa of Mupa (the southern branch of the Handa, also called “Little Handa”), who live on the Cuvelai River west of the Middle Okavango, are one of the Nyaneka-Nkumbi speaking peoples (Estermann, 1960b: 21 ff.). The Nyemba are a “transitional” tribe of people who speak the language of the N’ganga but are similar in many customs to the Handa and other peoples of the Nyaneka-Nkumbi group (Estermann, 1979: 46).]

In Makuzu, according to one account (Kampungu, 1965: 192), Mate married a Handa man, and her descendants, the present ruling family of the Kwangari, count their origin from the Handa. One member of the ruling family of the Kwangari identified the home of their Handa ancestors as the regions of Sipungu and Kasima (? Cafima) (Kampungu, 1965: 241). Some protagonists of the Handa origin of the Kwangari do not accept stories of their earlier origin from the Mashi.

During Mate’s time the Kwangari group was joined by Nyemba people who were fleeing from their chief, probably because of cruelty (Kampungu, 1965: 207–208).

3 Makuzu may be the place shown as Mucujo on recent maps.
Kampungu computes the date of Mate's rule (the time of original settlement at Makuzu) as about A.D. 1600. This estimate is based upon the reported approximate ages of the successive rulers at the times of their deaths, estimates of the ages of their mothers at the times of giving birth, and allows a 90 year period for possible unknown rulers between Mate and Utali (born ca. 1680) (Kampungu, 1965: 294 ff.).

Various legends tell of the acquisition of cattle by the Kwangari in these early times and the refusal of the Kwangari to share their newly acquired riches with the Mbundza (Kampungu, 1965).

Succession of Chiefs

The Kwangari remained for a long time at Makuzu. Muntenda, probably a matrilineal grandson of Mate, succeeded to the chieftaincy. Because his sons were cruel, the common people took refuge with other tribes (Kwanyama, according to one version) who sent out war parties against the Kwangari. Eventually Muntenda was killed in a battle (ca. 1750) (Kampungu, 1965: 198–200).

Muha, thought to be a nephew of Muntenda, then succeeded as chief, and after him Nankali, Muntenda's half sister, during whose reign friction with neighboring tribes developed and the group moved from Makuzu to the islands of Sihangu near Mukukutu. Kampungu estimates the date of this move to be about 1775. (Mukukutu lies at the mouth of a stream of the same name — see map.)

According to the chronology considered by Kampungu to be most correct, Simbara, a full sister of Muntenda, was the next ruler. In about 1785 the group left Mukukutu and settled at Karai, living first on an island for protection and later moving to the left bank where a large palisaded village was built. The remains of this village are still to be seen (Kampungu, 1965: 298–299).

About 1800 Simbara was succeeded as chief by her daughter, Mate II⁴. Mate's husband, Hamatwi, was a Handa. During this period the people were living in several palisaded villages in the Karai area. In about 1818 two men who were descendants of women of the royal family who had been captured years earlier by the Kwanyama came with a body of Kwanyama supporters to seize the chieftaincy. The invaders succeeded in murdering Mate, the chief, and all her family, but were themselves killed by the Kwangari. Their graves, like that of Mate, the murdered chief, are revered because all were of the royal family (Kampungu, 1965: 301–310).

Kapango II, a sister of Mate II, declared herself chief, but she was not acceptable to Mate's people who preferred Siremo, Mate's grown son. Kapango II returned to her home at Mutengo Omuramba and (soon thereafter?) moved her village farther east, to Nkonko (see map). Kapango then sent her sons and others out to raid Siremo, but the raiders were repelled. Siremo and his brothers then attacked

⁴ Roman numerals distinguish persons who bear the same names as others who have already appeared in this history.
Nkonke where they in turn were repelled. One of Siremo’s brothers died from a poisoned arrow on the return journey, and his grave has become a rain shrine.

Fearing further attacks, Kapango with her people fled to Nyembaland where she prepared for war with Siremo. Her sons went to the Kwanyama to seek aid, and the latter readily agreed to participate, hoping to capture cattle and people. An attack took place (ca. 1822) in which Siremo was killed and some children of the royal family, Nasira, a girl, and Mpasi and Sikongo, boys, were captured and taken back to Haimbiri, King of the Kwanyama (Kampungu, 1965: 311–320).5

Nasira was important later in Kwangari history. Because of her extraordinary beauty, Haimbiri, chief of the Kwanyama, formed an informal relationship with her and wanted to marry her despite the taboos against marriages between people of royal blood. He was dissuaded by the tribal elders, however, and instead gave Nasira, who was already pregnant, to his medicine man, a Nyemba. Nasira had several husbands and finally became first the wife of the Kwambi chief Nauyoma, then at his death, the wife of his brother and successor, Ysete. She bore several children from her various liaisons, including two daughters, Mpande (born ca. 1823) and Siremo II, also called “Mukwankali,” or “Chief on both sides,” and a son, Himarwa.

In the war with the Kwanyamas in which Siremo I was killed, his brother Mpepo survived. Mpepo, in turn, sought the help of the Kwanyama and with it overcame his aunt Kapango and her people and had her and her daughters thrown into the Okavango River (Kampungu, 1965: 331, 333–335).

Mpepo then was the chief of all the Kwangari. The royal village at that time was situated on the left bank opposite Nkurenkuru. Mpepo abused his privileges as chief, violating the wives of his subjects, and they consequently deserted him. It is said that he was killed by “Bushmen,” i.e., San (ca. 1833). Before he died he had sent for Mpande, Nasira’s daughter, who had not yet reached puberty, to live among the Kwangari so that she might continue the royal lineage, as there were no girls of the royal line living in Kwangari country. Mpande’s aunt (her mother’s half sister Nehova) was called to live near the royal village, to rear her. Mpande was still too young to rule when Mpepo died, so she sent for two cousins to serve as interim rulers. These cousins, Sikongo and his brother Mpasi, were living in Kwanyama country. First Sikongo6 ruled (ca. 1833–1870); he was said to be a very just chief and the period of his reign to have been one of peace and prosperity. When he died Mpasi became chief (ca. 1870), but his rule was cut short because he was an epileptic and either died of the disease or was killed by his people because of it (ca. 1880). Mpande then finally became ruler, and she moved the royal village to Katwitwi. This time she sent for her brother Himarwa to take the chieftainship. Himarwa came from Kwambi country where his father was chief, arriving in Kwanga-

5 Heintze (1972–73) gives ca. 1815–1833 as the period of Haimbiri’s reign.
6 Sometimes spelled Shikongo or Chicongo in older sources.
riland just after Mpande's death (ca. 1886) (Kampungu, 1965: 336–342). Himarwa moved the royal village back to its previous site, opposite Nkurenkuru.

After Himarwa became chief, dissension arose between his followers and the descendant of Mpande. The initial cause for this split seems to have been the fact that Himarwa disapproved of his nieces' and nephews' selling their own subjects into slavery. Nasira's brother Siteketa and her sons Muteto and Sikongo II saw their chances of succeeding Himarwa diminishing in favor of Himarwa's other nephews, Kandjimi and Sirongo, who had remained with him, and who were considered to be Kwambi by Nasira's people. Fearful of an attack against them, Nasira's people moved away, but in 1897, the year when rinderpest broke out and the people suffered starvation, they returned to Kwangariland for a period (Kampungu 1965: 344–345).

RECENT HISTORY

In 1909 a war of succession erupted between Kandjimi and Siteketa, the sons of Siremo and Mpande respectively. Kandjimi had already killed his brother Sirongo who was a rival for the position. Now he succeeded in killing Siteketa, and the remnants of Nasira's group fled to Ruenge (the Luenge River). Thus ca. 1910, Kandjimi succeeded Himarwa as the chief of the Kwangari (Kampungu, 1965: 229, 355–364).

Since the establishment of white control over the Kwangari, the succession of chieftainship on the south side of the Okavango has been as follows: in 1924 Mbuna followed Kandjimi under the regency of his sister Kanuni, but his reign was cut short when he was killed in a fall from his horse. Kampungu (1965: 234) says Muteto was the next in line of succession, but when he arrived at Kandjimi's village to assume power he found that the South African authorities had already appointed Mbuna chief. Kanuni ruled after Mbuna's death until she was deposed in 1941 by the native commissioner in favor of a male ruler. This next chief, Sivute, is said to have been an alcoholic and of cruel temperament; at the request of the native commissioner he made his village at Musese, close to the administrative post. After Sivute's death in 1958, Kanuni again came into power as regent with her son Mbandu destined to succeed (Kampungu, 1965: 369–375). Information is lacking concerning the succession of chiefs on the north side of the river under Portuguese control.

THE KWANGARI ROYAL LINEAGE

Mate (F): lived ca. 1500–1600
Muntenda (M): b. ca. 1712, ruled ca. 1750

7 Musese is the name of a place in Mbandza territory; there may be two places of this name.
Fig. 1. The Kwangari royal lineage
Muha (M): ruled ca. 1760
Nankali (F): b. ca. 1715, ruled ca. 1775
Simbara (F): b. ca. 1718, ruled ca. 1785–1800
Mate II (F): b. ca. 1758, d. ca. 1818, ruled ca. 1800–1818
Siremo (M): ruled ca. 1818–1822
Mpepo (M): ruled ca. 1822–1833
Sikongo (M): b. ca. 1801, ruled 1833–1870
Mpasii (M): b. ca. 1803, ruled ca. 1870–1880
Mpande (F): b. ca. 1823, ruled ca. 1880–1886
Himarwa (M): ruled ca. 1886–1910
Kandjimi (M): ruled ca. 1910–1924
Mbuna (M): ruled 1924–25/26
Kanuni (F): ruled (at first as regent) 1924–1941
Sivute (M): ruled 1941–1958
Kanuni (F): ruled 1958–?
Mbandu (M): heir apparent

Economy

SUBSISTENCE

FORAGING

Hunting

The Kwangari are not noted as hunters. A legend recorded by Kampungu (1965: 245) explains that the Kwangari were given cattle by an ancestral spirit who, in this way, compensated them for the lack of hunting and fishing skills which the Mbundza possessed. Jodtka (1902: 547) notes that so little hunting was practiced that wild game animals were emboldened to come into the vicinity of the villages. Paiva Couceiro (1892: 128), however, says the Kwangari did hunt hippopotamus and elephant. Bedes (1933: 60) reports that some chiefs and leading men who owned horses occasionally hunted eland, the slowest and largest of the antelopes.

Fishing

Fish are an important item in the diet and various means are used to catch them. Men build wiers across the mouths of sloughs and fix traps at their openings. They also practice active fishing with spears, nets, and hook and line, the last two methods being European introductions. Women take fish chiefly with long conical baskets that are used as scoops or as hand-held traps. In the busiest fishing season, from October to December when the river is low, women sometimes stand in lines across the stream to catch the fish that pass (Jodtka 1902, 574).
Gathering

Several varieties of wild fruits, nuts, edible roots and tubers are available in the Okavango territory. Most of these wild foods grow outside the settled area, and the Kwangari people rely upon Bushmen to bring them in. Jodtka (1902: 547) says the local Bushmen, who are subject to the Kwangari, are required to bring them wild foods and honey. In exchange the Bushmen are allowed to wander around in the fields during the reaping season to glean the grain left after the harvest (Eedes 1933: 59).

FARMING

Cultivation

Maize, sorghum, millet, beans, groundnuts, voandzeia, pumpkins, and melons are cultivated for food. Jodtka (1902: 546) considered cultivated foods to be the mainstay, and he judged the supply produced to be more than enough for local needs. Eedes (1933: 59) insists that crops are grown only to supplement the wild foods that are gathered, and that the latter are the basis of subsistence. In addition to food plants, tobacco, calabashes, and castor oil beans are grown.

Most fields are situated on the terraces of the river valley above the flood plain. Tobacco and pumpkins, however, are grown in plots close to the river (Jodtka 1902: 548).

Fields are cultivated for a few years, then allowed to return to bush. In preparing a new field the brush is cut and the limbs of trees are chopped off and burned. To kill the trees left standing the bark is knocked or burned off the trunks. Some fruit trees, however, are kept (Baum 1903: 63). The fields are sown without further preparation of the soil, the seed being dropped into shallow holes made with a hoe (Jodtka 1902: 548). No transplanting is done and no system of drainage is followed. A heavy shower of rain may wash away portions of the fields (Eedes 1933: 59). The plants are cultivated with two-handled hoes (Baum 1903: 63). No fertilizer is used, the available dung being thrown away or burnt as rubbish. There are no fences around the plots and some damage is done by free-roaming stock.

Kampungu (1965: 367, 441) says the people do not fertilize their fields from fear of being accused of sorcery if their harvests are unusually large, i.e., of having rututa, the power to increase one's own yield at the expense of others.

Storage of Vegetable Foods

Grain is stored in huge bottle-shaped baskets raised on posts. These are located both in the villages and in the fields (Jodtka 1902: 546). Eedes (1933: 59) states that there is no system of long term storage of grain or wild fruit. Immediately after
reaping the Kwangari dispose of (sell?) what grain they consider to be more than necessary for a single year.

Animal Husbandry

Paiva Couceiro (1892: 127–8) considered milk mixed with cooked cereal to be the main foodstuff. However, rinderpest, a bovine epidemic disease, decimated the herds in 1897–8, and Jodtka, visiting the Kwangari a few years later, reported (1902: 547) that milk was not used by the Kwangari and that cattle were kept only for their meat, even though some men at the time had large herds. Eedes observed that cattle are a sign of wealth but the difficulties of herding, watering, and caring for cattle militate against the amassing of large herds. Cattle are required, however, for certain ceremonies, and are slaughtered frequently for cleansing and propitiatory rites. Eedes estimated the average holdings to be under two head per person. He noted that the cattle suffered by being kept in the valley throughout the year, many being lost in the dry season when the grass on the riverbank had been depleted whereas abundant grazing was available outside the valley and beyond the dunes (Eedes 1933: 60).

Jodtka (1902: 547–548) denies that the Kavango people keep goats, sheep, or swine, but Almeida (1912: 378) does record the presence of goats. Both note chickens. In Eedes’ time (1932) a few horses and donkeys were to be seen but were in poor condition. Jodtka says dogs were scarce but well cared for, whereas Eedes (1933: 60) says dogs were never fed or watered in the villages, were in poor condition, and lived chiefly on human excrement. Many, he says, were lost to crocodiles when they went to the river to drink.

Domestic fowl are not fed and exist on what they pick up in or near the village. During the reaping season the tips of their beaks are cut off to prevent them from eating the grain which has been laid out for threshing (Eedes 1933: 60).

The Economic Calendar

Fields are prepared as the new rainy season advances (October to December) and are planted in January. A period called epemba “eating new fruits” begins in March with the harvest of beans. Some beans are taken to the royal village for a first fruits ceremony (vitorondondwa) in which the chief gives permission to harvest other crops. Then follows kuteza “gathering vegetable crops” and in May or June comes kuhwaga “harvesting grain.” A final rite, yiyiwo marks the close of the agricultural year. The time between the harvest and the start of the next rainy season is considered a resting period. Before the next year’s crops are ripe, however, the

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8 For further details of agricultural ceremonies, many of which have been banned by white authorities under missionary influence, see Religion and Magic.
stores of grain may run low and the people resort more to fishing (Jodtka 1902: 547–548; Almeida 1911: 380; Eedes 1933: 60; Kampungu 1965: 343–344, 374).

The Daily Round

The daily work of a married man (*mugara*) consists of herding the cattle, attending to village repairs, making reed mats and other articles such as handles for axes, hoes, etc., tanning skins for women’s clothing, supplying the village with wood, and working in the fields. The daily chores of a married woman (*mukadi*) include preparing the daily meals, fetching water from the river and wood for cooking, making household and fishing baskets, fishing, making beer, stamping grain, sowing, weeding, and harvesting the crops depending on the season, and feeding and caring for her children. If a man has more than one wife, his first and chief wife (*mugori-kadi*) is responsible for the smooth running of the whole household. Young boys assist their fathers while young girls help their mothers. The young men (*mumati*) work their own sections of land and assist their fathers in all their affairs (Eedes 1933: 61).

Foods and Beverages

The subsistence base according to Lobato de Faria (1949: 20–21) is *massango* (millet), *massambala* (sorghum), and sour milk. Porridge appears to be a regular staple for daily fare as well as for ceremonies. Jodtka (1902: 546) says cakes made of sorghum and baked in the ashes are the chief food.

Eedes (1933: 65–66) lists several beverages and their methods of preparation. The most important is *shikundu*, a “non-intoxicating” drink made of millet or sorghum meal mixed with water. The mixture is cooked, allowed to ferment in a calabash or clay pot, and drunk on the following day. This is practically the only food consumed in the morning. Various kinds of beer are made from mashes of grain, honey, or wild fruits which are allowed to ferment for one to two days.

MATERIAL CULTURE

THE VILLAGE

Kwangari villages have a circular outline. In earlier days the village was often built beside the river for purposes of defense and protection. A fence of cut thorn bush surrounds the village. The outer palisade, about 3 m. in height, is built of wooden poles, sharpened at both ends, and set closely together. Internally the village is divided into numerous yards and passageways. The partitions are made of reed mats, about 6 m. long, which are laced between wooden poles set in the
Fig. 2. Plan of the Kwangari royal village, located on the Angolan side of the Okavango River, upstream from Cuangar. (Redrawn from Kampungu 1965: 307.)

Key to plan of the Kwangari royal village and uses of its parts.

A. Main courtyard (sina, charango). Recreation, butchering.
B. Royal apartment (erombe).
   1. Courtyard for public parlor.
      2a. Fore-parlor.
   3. Private parlor. 3a. Fore-parlor.
   4. Royal house. 4a. Verandah.
   5. Royal larder (utara).
      5a. Bench for grain storage baskets. 5b. Trestle (musikiro) for milk gourds.
   7. Passage to cattle pen.
C. 8 to 20. Apartments for other families (nos. 14, 16, and 17 are nobles).
   8. A typical family apartment (munkano).
      8a. Parlor.
      8b. Private parlor. 8d. Food storage.
      8c. Sleeping hut. 8e. Kitchen.
   2. Passage (mukara) between walled apartment enclosures.
D. Palisade, with main gate facing east.
E. Cattle pen (ohambo) located on ground sloping away from the village.
F. Calf pen (shiyongo).
S. Hut for young members of the royal family.
V. Visitors' hut.
ground at intervals of about 4 m. Villages vary from 20 to 65 m. in diameter, the size depending upon the wealth and number of relatives of the village head. Usually a large tree, standing in front of the village and not far from its walls, is utilized as a place for meetings and communal gatherings (Kampungu 1965: 354; Eedes 1933: 60–1).

Often headmen and the chief have two ilbatas (villages), one near the river for the dry season and the other away from the river, out of the range of floods, for the wet season (Almeida 1911: 380).

A diagram of the royal village is given by Kampungu (1965: 307) (Fig. 2). Each enclosure is occupied by a household with its own sleeping hut, kitchen, etc. The huts are round structures built on a skeleton of vertical poles set to support the walls and the conical elevated roofs. The roof frame is made of half a dozen wooden poles tied together at the vertex; these are interwoven with withes and thatched in regular layers with grass. The lateral walls are made of reed mats with the plaiting well joined and close. The mats encircle and are fastened to the posts that support the roof (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 128; Baum 1903: 66; Almeida 1911: 380; Eedes 1933: 60; Lobato de Faria 1949: 20–1).

The village headman’s chief wife, his other wives, his sons and their wives, his daughters and their husbands, and any other relations living with him all have their own huts, some set in separate compartments of the village. Besides dwellings there are also other structures which serve as resting shelters, cattle pens, dairies, granaries, etc. (Eedes 1933: 60).

**Division of Land**

The land belongs nominally to the chief. A person may, however, select an unoccupied piece of land for his village and fields, and may take possession of it without consulting the chief or making any payment to him. Should he decide to leave the area, a person may sell the land which he has developed and take all the profit for his own. The chief has the right to order the occupant of a piece of land to leave, but as long as the occupant is law-abiding and does not become too rich, the chief seldom issues such an order (Eedes 1933: 58).

**INDUSTRIES**

Mats of many sizes, plaited from split and flattened reeds, are used for village walls, temporary shelters such as those in which girls are secluded at puberty, beds, etc. Eedes (1933: 60) says mats are used for hut roofs, but all other sources refer to huts as being thatched. Jodtka (1902: 526, 546) describes small tightly-made baskets for household use and huge bottle-shaped baskets that are raised on stilts and used for grain storage.
Knives, hoes, spear heads, axes, and iron and copper ornaments are made by blacksmiths from pieces of scrap metal and, according to Eedes (1933: 60), from iron and copper ore, though he provides no information on smelting techniques or processes.

Cooking, beer, and water pots are fashioned of clay (in an underground room! — Eedes). They are formed and fired by women specialists. One piece wooden stools, vessels, plates, and bowls are shaped with the adze from sections of tree trunk. Because of the introduction of European utensils and implements by returning laborers, however, the use of native-made utensils and implements is dying out (Almeida 1911: 380. Eedes 1933: 60).

Weapons in use are long and short spears, bows and arrow (sometimes poisoned), daggers, clubs, and imported firearms (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 125; Eedes 1933: 60).

Male specialists hollow dugout canoes from the trunks of *mucussi* (*Batikiaea plurijuga*) or *nucibe* (*Guibouria* sp.) wood. These barks are used on the river for transport and other purposes. Though well made and dependable, the canoes do not last very long. They are propelled either with small oars or with a pole 4 to 7 meters long (Eedes 1933: 60; Almeida 1911: 380).

**Dress**

**Clothing**

As of Eedes' writing (1933: 68), some of the men wear a modified form of European dress, but most men and all the women still adhere to traditional dress and ornamentation. For a man this consists of an apron of cured cow's stomach or duiker, leopard, or wildcat skin, scraped clean. It can be long or short, is about 10 cm. wide, and is held in place by a belt of cured ox-hide. A small cured skin also may be worn behind. When travelling or working in the bush, rawhide sandals, locally made from cowhide, are worn (Eedes 1933: 68; Almeida 1911: 380).

The customary woman's dress consists of front and rear aprons of cured cow's stomach, duiker, or goat skin. Cloths (acquired from trading stores) which hang down to the knees are sometimes worn in place of skins. The aprons are held in place by two belts of cured ox-hide. Under this there is a broad girdle of from 10 to 12 strings of ostrich egg-shell beads which drape over the hips. In cool weather a kind of round cape is worn; it is made of several skins sewn together with animal fiber thread. Women wear no sandals (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 123; Eedes 1933: 68–69; Almeida 1911: 380).

The quality of the clothes, the quantity of *rakura* (*powdered wood of Pterocarpus angolensis*) smeared on the body, and the number of necklaces worn by a person are indicative of his or her wealth and social position. Aprons of cured giraffe or eland stomach are highly valued and indicate that the wearer is influential and rich in livestock (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 122–123; Eedes 1933: 68–9; Almeida 1911: 380).
Ornaments

As ornaments Kwangari men formerly wore bangles of iron wire, copper, brass, or grass on the arms, brass bands below the knee, leather arm bands, and for some, manda ornaments (see below) (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 124 f.). More recently Eedes (1933: 69) reports their wearing banglies made from the neck skin of the larger antelopes which still contain portions of the mane. Around their necks they wear bead necklaces made of iron, copper, or glass, or dongo (shell?) beads.

Paiva Couceiro (1892: 123 f.) found high status Kwangari women wearing coils of iron, copper, or brass wire from the wrist to the elbow on one arm. Lower status women wore smaller bracelets. He and other visitors also mention necklaces of metal and shell beads, and medallion-like ornaments called mandas — circles of white china, some up to 9 inches in diameter, hung from collars of beads — worn by noble women. The china mandas are imported imitations of omba shell ornaments — the flat round ends of large cone shells. These are worn by some Kwangari women, but as they are valued at an ox apiece, very few can afford them. According to Almeida (1911: 380), the women place large "manillas or copper rings" over the ankle. In their hair they stick ostrich feathers. Some men and girls also use pandis — small circles of ostrich eggshell strung together, clinching the arm above the biceps; formerly long strings of such beads were worn around the waist (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 123 f.).

The men always carry long, wide-bladed knives stuck under their belts (Eedes 1933: 68—9).

Toilet

The Kwangari women wear various coiffures, all with the hair very long and frequently formed into long thin braids which are extended by intertwining mugoro fibers with the real hair. White porcelain beads are also threaded into their hair. The whole coiffure is then smeared with rukura (powdered wood) (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 122—123; Almeida 1911: 380; Lobato de Faria 1949: 20—1).

The men generally shave their heads, except for a circular patch in the center where the hair is twisted into short strings, each with a ball at the end and colored red with rukura. Some boys leave a band of hair over the head. Both men and women smear their bodies with cow’s butter or castor oil and rukura (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 122; de Almeida 1911: 278). In addition to solid ornaments, the Kwangari “princess” also wore a necklace of ox fat which melted slowly to keep her body shiny (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 137).

Mutilation

Most men and women have the upper and lower incisor teeth chipped at the
corners and filed. The operation is carried out on children at about age 7. To avoid excessive bleeding, the operation is performed in the morning, in the dry season, and when the subject has been fasting. At the time of the operation the parents of the subject must observe certain food and sexual restrictions so that the patient’s teeth will not decay and fall out. The operation, they say, is performed for beauty’s sake only (Castro e Almeida 1959: 384–386).

A small proportion of Kwangari men and women have the face tattooed or the upper body ornamented with keloids. The former is more common for women, the latter for men. In tattooing, cuts are made in the skin and powdered charcoal or a dye is rubbed in. In making keloids usually the skin is burned with a hot metal instrument or a hot coal, but sometimes the skin is cut. The designs produced are geometrical. A subject undergoing keloid ornamentation observes food and sexual taboos if he is adult, or his parents observe the taboos if the subject is still a child (Castro e Almeida 1959: 386–388).

Most men and women have the ear lobes pierced. The operation is performed on children at about age 4, the mothers observing some food and sometimes also sexual taboos (Castro e Almeida 1959: 381–384).

Charms and Accessories

Most men wear charms consisting of small pieces of wood or dried roots on a thin leather string around their necks to ward off evil or sickness. The purposes of many charms are secrets closely guarded by the wearers. Charms are purchased from a witch-doctor.

Many men wear a small piece of mukorokoso or mugoro root around the neck as a charm; should the wearer be sleeping alone in the bush, some shavings may be cut from the charm to put on the fire, causing a strong scent to rise and ward off wild animals (Eedes 1933: 68).

A hardened and cured portion of the entrails of the aardwolf is worn by most women around their necks. This charm gives off a pungent smell which is highly prized. A woman may also wear a piece of cured root (muganangoro) around her neck. Should she quarrel with another woman, the latter may say that she will never again eat food offered by the former; in this case reconciliation can only be effected by the second woman’s returning to apologize and biting the charm worn by the first. If she fails to do this, it is commonly believed she will be struck by lightning (Eedes 1933: 68–9).

Men carry tobacco or snuff hanging from their belts, in a case made of a horn or in a cylindrical bottle skillfully carved from dense wood. To remove snuff and place it in their nostrils they use a small iron spatula which is carried stuck in their hair (Almeida 1911: 380).
Individual Life

BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

DESIRE FOR CHILDREN

Children are spoken of as the “true riches.” They are viewed as an economic asset because of the assistance they give their parents and their maternal and paternal relatives in farming. They are also appreciated for the role they play in the funerals of their parents. Children raise the social standing of a man and a woman within the community, and a marriage is considered to be solidly established only after the first child is born. It is believed that each conception directly depends on the frequency of intercourse, and the more children a woman has, the more it shows her husband’s affection for her (Kampungu 1966: 59, 91, 242, 248).

BIRTH

A pregnant woman performs her daily chores up to the day of confinement. A woman gives birth in a specially built hut (nkukozomawre), and she is delivered by other women of the village. If the woman does not feel well during the confinement, her grandmother is called to the village. If serious complications arise, a medicine man is summoned, but otherwise no man is allowed near the hut in which the birth takes place. The umbilical cord is cut with an iron arrow head. The afterbirth is buried in a hole dug near the hut (Eedes 1933: 67).

It is not considered a disgrace for an unmarried woman to give birth. In such an event the father of the child is called to the village to name the child, and often the couple are persuaded to marry; but should the woman be attracted to another man, she may marry him instead and take the child with her. The biological father will, however, contribute to the child’s support in a small way (Eedes 1933: 68).

Induced abortion is not common. In cases where a woman become pregnant by another man during the extended absence of her husband, the family, fearing the husband’s anger, will arrange for an abortion to prevent the husband from discovering his wife’s unfaithfulness. The medicine (unspecified) used to cause an abortion is obtained from a medicine man (Eedes 1933: 68).

ABNORMAL BIRTH

If a child is stillborn, the corpse is buried along with the afterbirth in a hole dug near the hut where the mother is confined. The mother does not return to her husband’s hut until she has been “purified by time.” When she considers the purification period to be over, she kills a fowl by cutting off its head and cleanses her husband by rubbing the body of the fowl against him, allowing the blood to
sprinkle over his body. Then from a medicine man she obtains medicine (unspecified) to assure that her next child will be born alive (Eedes 1933: 68).

According to Kampungu (1966: 225) the birth of twins is considered a great blessing, and the child that is followed by twins is thought to be a highly privileged person, destined to be favored by nature. According to Eedes (1933: 68) some families regard the birth of twins as a good omen, but others take it as a sign that their lives are almost over. Among those who believe the birth of twins to be unlucky, a medicine man is immediately called in to cleanse the mother. He takes the mother and all the inhabitants of the village down to the river where he makes incisions in their legs and rubs medicine into the wounds to avert the evil that might follow the unnatural event. The father of the twin’s mother pays the doctor an ox or cow. The medicine man must use the heart of the animal to cleanse his own wife before he can return to his hut.

STERILITY

Though it is the woman’s lineage that suffers if a couple is childless, sterility in a woman is considered less a disgrace than impotence in a man. When there are no children, it is the man who is usually suspected of being at fault unless he has proven his fertility with another woman (Kampungu 1966: 60). A woman will not stay with a man who is impotent, but a man may not necessarily reject a sterile woman, for he can take a second wife to bear him children. A man may also marry a woman known to be barren in order to hide his own sterility (Kampungu 1966: 76, 237).

A woman’s barrenness is attributed to sorcery, abnormality of her womb (it being turned or displaced), a deficiency of blood, or violations of sexual taboos. The cure for barrenness is medicine and a secret rite. A woman’s relatives bear the expense of the latter. In the secret rite a medicine, called nkambi, consisting of roots or herbs, is placed in the woman’s vagina. Some of the nkambi is put in a container to ferment, making a purgative which the woman takes so that her womb and uterus may be “straightened.” This purgative is allowed to ferment until worms appear, it being thought that as the medicine gives life to the worms, so will it make the one who drinks it produce new life. During the treatment the woman and her husband must avoid adultery, and the woman may not eat with anyone other than her husband. Any woman who wishes to eat with the woman undergoing the treatment must first pay a fine (Kampungu 1966: 242–244).

If it is thought that the man is the sterile partner, he is given a purgative and other medicine to drink. In the case of kureha “sterility” or urema wo sigara, “impotence,” the penis is worked up in order to take out the “bad fluid” (Kampungu 1966: 245–6).

It is the duty of the one who cures another’s sterility to name the child born as the result of the treatment, otherwise the sterility will return (Kampungu 1966: 221).
INFANCY

As soon as a woman gives birth there is great rejoicing, and an ox is slaughtered by the father of the woman and a small feast is prepared for the relatives and visitors. The infant is immediately cleaned and rubbed with animal or vegetable fat and smeared all over with red pigment (otukula) (Eedes 1933: 67).9

When an infant is a day old its hair is shaved off by its grandmother, and if it is a male, a small arrow and walking stick are placed in its fist and the infant is carried by its father to the entrance of the village and shown the outside world. A small girl, just able to walk, accompanies the father as the “wife” of the infant. If the newborn infant is a girl, a small basket of flour is placed in her fist, and similarly, a small boy just able to walk accompanies her to the gate of the village as her “husband” (Eedes 1933: 67–8). The father repeatedly applies ashes to the infant’s navel until the cord falls off (Eedes 1933: 68).

NAMING

It is customary that the first born child, if a boy, is named after his father’s father, and if a girl, after her father’s mother. The mother has a choice in the matter, however. If the person after whom a child is named is alive, then a formal relationship of namesake is established and mutual duties (unspecified) are imposed. If the person after whom one is named is dead, then he is said to be raised in “nominal reincarnation,” kupindwisa (Kampungu 1965: 279, 283). A child’s father’s name is sometimes added to his own, e. g. Sivute sa Mpasi, meaning Sivute son of Mpasi. Teknonymy is generally practiced — i. e., adults with children are addressed as “father of X” or “mother of X” (Kampungu 1966: 216). In addition, it is common for children to be named after events which occurred on the day of their births. The original meanings of many of the names have been lost, but Eedes gives a list of common names that refer to the circumstances of the birth (Eedes 1933: 66).

CHILDHOOD

As soon as they are old enough, young boys (mudigantu) assist their fathers in herding the stock, especially the calves. Boys are also used as messengers. The boys of a village sleep together in one hut, as do the young girls. They engage in sexual intercourse from an early age (Eedes 1933, 61–62). Boys are not circumcised (Lobato de Faria 1949: 20–21).

9 Eedes calls this “red ochre,” but lukula (or rukura) is the powdered wood of a tree, Pterocarpus angolensis.
Individual Life

The young girls (munonagommukadi) assist their mothers in such duties as preparing food, making beer, fetching water, etc. A girl receives instruction in domestic affairs from her mother or another maternal relative (Kampungu 1966: 99).

**MARRIAGE CUSTOMS**

**PUBERTY**

Girls undergo special puberty rites, but there are “practically” no puberty rites for boys (Kampungu 1966: 250).

A girl is termed mangupepe when her breasts begin to show (mangupepe means “rounding of the breasts”). Two rites, etembu and rufuko, are performed. In the etembu rite, which is held at menarche, the girl is secluded for about a month in her mother’s village in a special hut built of reed mats. During this time dances are performed nightly. A girl may not leave her hut during the day, for she is not allowed to see men. She may, however, come out at night and speak with the women of the village who provide her with food. The rufuko rite is known in the Okavango region only to the Kwangari tribe. Kampungu (1965: 331–332) describes it as a solemn group of transition rites performed in a royal village for a chief’s daughters, as well as for commoners who also reside in such a royal village. According to Eedes (1933: 61), the rufuko (lufuko) ceremony was introduced by Kwangari chiefs, such as Himarwa, who came from Ukwambi. Eedes describes it only as a “marriage test,” a “distorted version of the ohango rite of the Ondongas or the efundula rite of the Kwanyama.”

He declares that few girls undergo the test and that the majority of parents scorn and ignore summons to attend. Kampungu (1966: 250) states that a girl’s puberty rites are performed to provide magical protection against the dangers of childbirth to the now nubile girl.

Eedes (1933: 62) asserts that in order to educate young girls in sexual matters they are brought into their parents’ sleeping hut and told to watch them engaging in sexual intercourse. All the young girls of a village sleep in a separate hut, or etambo, and as soon as the girls have acquired their sexual education from their parents, the young boys of the village, who also have their own separate sleeping hut, are allowed to enter the girl’s etambo and have sexual intercourse with the young girls. After what is judged to be a sufficient amount of such sexual experience, a girl is given to one youth and the couple lives in a hut in the girl’s parents’ village. The young man has to give his manual services to the girl’s parents during this time. Should the youth become tired of the work or prove incompetent or lazy, he is dismissed and replaced by another young man. Parents usually arrange for their daughters to live with four or five different men before they reach puberty, which

10 The rufuko or olufuko ceremony as practiced by the Kwamari differs markedly from the efundula of the Kwanyama. Both are described by Estermann (1976). An essential element of the olufuko and efundula rites is a test to determine whether the initiate is pregnant.
according to Kampungu (1965: 337) occurs at about age 15, but according to Eedes (1933: 62) at about age 12. If the man is already married and has established his own home, he lives with the girl in her mother’s village after a presentation of gifts, and takes the girl to his own village when she reaches puberty and they are married (Eedes 1933: 62).

Pre-marital cohabitation as described above takes place when the girls are very young, often only five or six years old according to Eedes (1933: 62), and a girl who refuses is beaten or otherwise punished. Seldom do girls refuse such cohabitation, however. Kampungu (1966: 85) confirms that early cohabitation occurs, but objects to Eedes’ claim that the girls are so young. Based on the answers he received to questionnaires sent out to missions in various places in the Okavango, he places the girl’s age in such an early marriage at about eight. He supports this conclusion by pointing out that before a girl can cohabit with a man, she must be able to stamp grain for food, and that a girl of 5 or 6 would in many cases still be sleeping with her parents and would not yet be strong enough to stamp grain.

**Betrothal**

It is not a woman’s role to seek a husband, and it would be degrading for her to do so, except in the case of royal women (see below). Every young man seeking a wife must institute a formal courtship with the family concerned. A spouse is generally sought outside the circle of one’s usual acquaintances, and a boy often takes a friend with him when he goes to seek a wife. Without the consent of a girl’s parents there can be no marriage. In former times the parents often chose their daughter’s husband for her, but nowadays the girl’s consent is as necessary as that of her parents (Kampungu 1966: 77–78, 102).

Formerly, in the case of infant betrothal or in the marriage of a girl not yet mature enough for cohabitation, the man, usually through a female relative, gave a girl musere, a copper ring or bracelet, or karanda, small strings of beads, as a sign of betrothal (Kampungu 1966: 185).

In the usual courtship a boy is required to visit a girl’s family to ask for the girl three times before her parents consent to his proposal. Some families require visits over the period of a month before giving their approval. Morality, wealth, and diligence are all traits taken into consideration before a decision is made. In the first stages of the negotiations, the girl’s family is supposed to be very rough and disrespectful towards the boy. This gives them time to test the suitor’s determination and to make their decision, and also gives them an advantage in case of future marital difficulties. Should difficulties arise, the parents of a girl can then say, “we refused many times, but you pressed and insisted in having our daughter” (Kampungu 1966: 185).

According to Eedes (1933: 61), the custom at the time he wrote was to regard the man having sexual relations with a girl at the time of her menarche as her future husband. He was sent away to return only when the girl’s seclusion had ended.
When the girl was released from her confinement, the clothes she was wearing were removed and sent to her father's family as a memento of the event, and she was dressed in a new outfit. Her fiancé was then summoned to the village and the couple were married.

In the marriage ceremony, animal or vegetable fat mixed with red powder (olu-kula) is smeared on the bride by the bridegroom's sister and on the bridegroom by the bride's sister. The couple are feted with a feast of meat, porridge, wild fruits and beer, given by the bride's parents. The feast lasts a day and ends with the beating of drums, rifle shots, and clapping of hands, when the groom takes his bride away with him to consummate the marriage. If for some reason the marriage is not consummated, it is considered void. Consummation normally takes place on the first night of a marriage (Eedes 1933: 61; Kampungu 1966: 84.)

A period of bride service during which the bridegroom works for the bride’s parents is customary among the Okavango. This occurs both during the period of cohabitation before the girl has reached maturity and, for a first wife, during the first year of marriage, when the couple are residing with her parents. A bridegroom is expected, in addition, to give some gifts to his parents-in-law and other in-laws, though this is not defined as formally as bridewealth among many other Bantu peoples (Kampungu 1966: 47–48, 98, 186; Eedes 1933: 62). The wife-receiving family calls the bride “our bride” and “our wife” while the husband-receiving family calls the groom “our prince-consort” or “our husband” (Kampungu 1966: 72).

Formerly a spouse was procured for a royal person by a procedure called kusenga. According to Kampungu (1965: 438), kusenga was practiced only to obtain a husband for a royal woman, but according to Eedes (1933: 62), it was used also by a male chief to take another man's wife for his own. In this custom chosen messengers were sent to interview the prospective spouse, and in an unguarded moment they would throw fat or oil over his or her body. Kampungu says the ointment was thrown at close proximity between a man's shoulders, while Eedes (1933: 62) says it was particularly thrown into a woman's face. Kampungu further states that a man thus anointed had to consent under pain of death and confiscation of his property and that of his relatives if he refused. The first sitenya, chief-consort, of the present chieflyness, Kanuni, was taken by kusenga from his wife by whom he already had a child. Men chosen as sitenya often ran away to other areas, leaving their property and relatives in danger. If a woman, having been chosen in this manner, refused such a marriage, all her father's livestock would be confiscated and she would have to leave her husband in any case. She would not be allowed to live with another man while she resided in that particular tribal area, and not being able to live alone, she would move into a neighboring area under a different chief, but even there she would not be allowed to re-marry until she paid her new chief a

11 Paiva Couceiro (1892: 131 f.) describes a kind of group marriage rite in which girls aged about 12 are betrothed to boys aged about 20. However, he may have observed a yipiwu dance (see below), mistaking it for a marriage ceremony.
head of cattle as a compensation for the fat wasted on her by her previous chief (Eedes 1933: 62).

Marriage Taboos and Preferences

In addition to incest taboos assumed to exist with close relatives (though not specified in the sources examined), it is considered taboo also for a man to marry his sister's granddaughter. Kandjimi (Kwangari chief in the first part of the 20th century) made an unusual and forbidden match when he married his brother's daughter, but it is argued that since she was a "commoner" through her mother's lineage, the seriousness of the misdeed was somewhat diminished (Kampungu 1965: 418, 449).

Marriage appears to be permitted between members of the same clan when the parties belong to different subclans. Kampungu declares most cases of intra-clan marriage to be due to marriage preferences (1965: 474), but he does not specify what the preferred forms are.

Residence

The term epata (family, household) refers to both the locality where a family lives and to its actual members, their spouses and children (Kampungu 1966: 63). The epata may be either a nuclear or a polygynous family. An Okavango marriage is uxorilocal or uxorineolocal. In the case of a man's first marriage, the couple resides in the village of the bride's parents while the husband works for his wife's family and the girl undergoes further initiation into the ways of conjugal life and training in domestic affairs and their management. If the husband already has his own residence, as in the case of a man taking a second wife, he takes his bride away on the night of their wedding (Kampungu 1966: 99–100).

In the case of a couple residing with the wife's parents, separation from them comes only after the birth of the first child, at the earliest. A ceremony called maruga (hearthstone) celebrates the birth and the establishment of a new family. After the hearthstone ceremony the husband is allowed to take his wife to his own matrilineal relatives, if he desires. Eedes (1933: 61) states that if a couple remain with the girl's parents, after a year another feast (called tatu vasugumasuka), somewhat like the wedding feast, is given by the girl's parents, and the bride is then assigned her own cooking quarters. Today, according to Kampungu (1966: 92, 98–100), after the hearthstone ceremony a young family usually establishes an embo, residence of their own; but if they do not, they usually live in the embo of the husband's father, if he is alive, or in that of his maternal uncle or other relative.
AIMS OF MARRIAGE

For a man, marriage means prestige. Once married he can associate regularly with other married men, sit with them and join the conversation, and at public meetings he may discreetly voice an opinion. By his marriage and by fathering children a young man proves himself to be a “true man” endowed with a productive virility. Marriage extends a man’s circle of relatives. A man’s helpers are usually his relatives, and a man with few relatives, or none at all, is spoken of as empogwe, i.e., isolated or destitute. A woman receives many of the same benefits from marriage. After she marries she can speak at public meetings, own property, and bring suit against another in court. One of a woman’s chief purposes in marriage, however, is to beget children who will extend her lineage (Kampungu 1966: 55–56).

As long as a man is single he cannot give hospitality, for he has no epata (family, household) of his own. On meeting a bachelor, his relatives may ask him, “are you going to look for our daughter-in-law?” A single man may be referred to as kureha (kureha), “sterile” or “impotent” (Kampungu 1966: 57).

Marriage provides comradeship. Husband and wife call each other mukwete, “my friend.” Girls are taught to be “mothers to their husbands,” and not infrequently a husband will call his wife “mother” (Kampungu 1966: 88, 209).

POLYGAMY

Monogamous marriages are said to far outnumber polygamous ones. The word for polygyny is masupareka, from esupa, “sexual jealousy” (Kampungu 1966: 66).

A man may take a second wife if his first is barren and he wishes to have children, or he may take a second wife who is barren if his first wife is difficult to get along with and if, for economic reasons, he does not wish any more children.

Formerly it was a privilege of the chief to have as many wives as he wished, but the first one was considered his mugolikadi (“queen,” “chief consort”). He could marry any female he chose, whether she was already married or not. Though the choice was usually made at the time the girl reached marriageability, sometimes a girl would be chosen and betrothed for a mumbanda (secondary wife) before puberty, and cohabitation would then occur after her nubility rites (Kampungu 1965: 437).

LEVIRATE AND SORORATE

Brothers can inherit each other’s wives (levirate) and sisters can “enter one another’s huts” (sororate) after the death of the husband. If no marriage is contemplated between the brother or sister of the deceased and the latter’s widow or widower, then the brother or sister is supposed to “drive away death” from the hut
by the *nontondo* ceremony. This ritual cleansing involves intercourse between the deceased’s brother or sister and the surviving spouse, who is then free to marry whomever he or she chooses. If there are many wives of one man to be “cleansed,” the brother will bring other male relatives with him to assist in the *nontondo* rite. If this custom is not observed, any man who marries one of the widows can demand payment of livestock, etc., from her deceased husband’s brother as compensation for his failure to carry out the cleansing ceremony. On returning to his own village, the brother who has engaged in ritual intercourse has to cleanse his own wife with the heart of an ox slaughtered upon his return, and may not have sexual relations with his wife until he performs this cleansing ceremony (Eedes 1933: 63).

A deceased woman’s sister has intercourse with her widowed brother-in-law for a period of two days and two nights. If she then does not choose to remain with her deceased sister’s husband, she returns to her village after being given some beads and a fowl by her relatives as a sign that she has carried out her duty to her sister’s husband (Eedes 1933: 63). Kampungu (1965: 421—2) states that a woman must be single in order to “enter” her deceased sister’s hut. Eedes (1933: 63) reports, however, that if a woman is attracted to her deceased sister’s husband, she remains with him after *nontondo*, and if not she returns to her husband’s village, implying that a woman may leave her husband for her widowed brother-in-law.

A man’s sister’s son can inherit his mother’s brother’s wife, but the converse is not true, because of an avoidance relationship between a man and his sister’s son’s wife. Inheritance by the sister’s son usually occurs only if the deceased has no brothers (Kampungu 1965: 420).

**ADULTERY**

By order of the S. W. A. government, adultery on the part of a man is punished, usually with a fine of 5 head of cattle, and it is also condemned by the Kwangari themselves. The female partner in the crime usually pays much less, or nothing at all, on the hypothesis that women are passive victims (Kampungu 1966: 61). One historic example of the attitude toward adultery is the case in which the subjects of Chief Mpoko deserted him because he gave himself access to all the women of his village (Kampungu 1966: 108). One particular type of sexual offense which Kampungu (1966: 145) gives as a sufficient cause for divorce is called “dog’s promiscuity” in which a woman is accused of incestuous adultery with a close relative, e. g., a brother.

Adultery involves many taboos and beliefs. It is believed that an infant will die if touched by an adulterer, and that if a man commits adultery while his wife is pregnant, the baby will be born dead. If a woman is unfaithful while she is pregnant, it is believed that she will die in childbirth unless she first confesses, either to a “mother” or grandmother or to one with whom she is on a joking relationship, and is subsequently doctored by a medicine man. In order to protect the lives of the mother and child, a man who has committed adultery while his wife was pregnant
should avoid touching them and should abstain from sexual relations (Kampungu 1966: 127–129).

DIVORCE

If a marriage comes to an end, the spouses say, “it is the affair of the heart,” referring to the unforeseen state of things which brought about the termination of the marriage. Parents advise their sons that “a man should marry and settle down; we are not a divorcing clan.” A man in the habit of divorcing women is called kukwaru-kwaru, which is a reduplication of the verb “to marry.” Parents are likely to refuse such a man permission to marry their daughters (Kampungu 1966: 63–64, 88).

A woman ideally wants a husband who will maintain the homestead, supply her with material necessities and comforts, and take a leading part in the cultivation of fields, among other things. A man wants his wife to be diligent, thrifty, hospitable, cook well, and take care of her household objects. Laziness and poverty on the part of the husband or slovenliness and indifference on the wife’s part are often listed as causes of divorce (Kampungu 1966: 211).

A woman who is mistreated by her husband may formally leave him and return to her people. The marriage is then spoken of as kuteka, “broken.” The wife will return only if her husband comes to her family seeking a reconciliation. The marriage is then kutekwarisa, “restored” (Kampungu 1966: 207–208).

Often when a problem arises between a married couple, they are brought before an arbitrating party (nowadays this may be the church) by the woman’s mother’s brother (Kampungu 1966: 219).

A marriage with a chief, which is established by chiefly selection and appointing (described above), may only be terminated by death and may not be casually broken. The separating spouse can be punished by death and subsequent confiscation of all possessions (Kampungu 1965: 281). A chief’s wife who leaves him, or a woman selected by a chief to be his wife and who refuses to marry him, may not marry another man in the tribal area. If she moves to another area, she will not be allowed to marry until she pays her new chief a beast to compensate for the fat wasted on her by the previous chief (Eedes 1933: 62).

Social Life

CLANS

From what Kampungu writes concerning the descent system, it appears that the Kwangari have a matrilineal segmentary organization in which six levels of segmentation are discernable: monogamous and polygamous families, extended families (of
village coresidents), genealogically defined lineages, localized subclans, dispersed clans, and phratries of linked clans. The most clearly defined of the larger units are the *makwakoro* (sg. *ekwakoro*), a term which Kampungu (1965: 462) defines as “totems.” “Totem” as used by Kampungu primarily means “clan” (1965: 454). Where subclans are recognized, it is they rather than the clan that are exogamous. The clans and subclans named by Kampungu are presented below. Certain sub-clans which are assumed to exist, though not specifically named by Kampungu, are shown in brackets.

Vakwasipika: Those of the Hyena
   [Vakwasipika proper]
   Vakwandumbe or Vakwahefu: Those of the Eland
   Vanswagara
Vakwanyime: Those of the Lion
Vakwanzovu: Those of the Elephant
Vakwanyati: Those of the Buffalo
Vakwanzadi: Those of the Hawk
Vakwangandu: Those of the Crocodile
Vakwangombe: Those of the Cow
Vakwambahu: Those of the Locust
Vakwankora: Those of Hunger
   [Vakwankora proper]
   Wakwaufuma: Those of the Toad or Frog
   [Matava]
   [Kavunda]
Varigi

1 Translation dubious; Westphal (1958: 21) gives *simbungu* for hyena.
2 Westphal (1958: 26) gives *hefu* for eland.
3 The Vanswagara are said to be non-totemic (Kampungu, 1965: 464).
4 Kampungu (1964: 462) equates *nzadi* with *stymbi*, a species of falcon.
5 Kampungu (1965A: 462) translates Vakwankora as “hunger, toad, edible species of frog”;
   *efuma* is frog in Kwanyama (Tobias 1954: 74).
6 Matava and Kavunda are village names and thus may represent extended families rather than subclans.
7 The Varigi are said to be non-totemic servants of the Vanswagara and scattered here and there in Kwangariland (Kampungu, 1965: 464).

Although most clans bear the names of animals, no mystical relationship between the clan members and the clan totem or eponym is found today. Kampungu (1965: 459), however, points to popular jokes, such as those in which one person accuses another of eating his relative when he eats the animal whose name his clan bears, and to the jesting rebukes a member of the Lion clan receives when lions kill someone’s cattle, as evidence that a totemic relationship once existed.

The origins of the clans and the reason for the ascendant position of the Hyena clan are explained in legends (see Traditional History). It is said that in a period of a
great famine people were forced by circumstances to eat what they could catch without sharing it, and at that time the various groups of people acquired such names as "Lion-Eaters," etc. Those who were not skilled in hunting depended only on the rains to bring froth frogs or toads that they could catch and eat; from this they came to be called the Frog or Hunger People. Among the Mbundza, who have the same clans as the Kwangari, there is a story that there were once two brothers named Vakwazadi and Vakwanyatji [sic. wa-, a plural prefix, is incongruous here] who were good hunters and killed buffalo daily, so that their village came to be called the buffalo village (Kampungu 1965: 463). It is not explained, however, how Vakwazadi and his people became the falcon clan, though a phratry-like relationship between the two clans seems to be implied.

Since commoners as well as rulers belong to the royal clan, Vakwasipaika (Kampungu 1965: 466), the ruling group appears to constitute one of two or more sub-clans within the so-called royal clan.

An Okavango native is said to "belong" primarily to his mother's clan through whom he traces his descent and secondarily to his father's clan (Kampungu 1965: 455). The members of a clan refer to one another as ekwakoro, "clansman." Dead as well as living persons are enumerated among the members of a clan, since the Okavango peoples believe that their relationships do not cease at death (Kampungu 1965: 456).

Marriage is possible between members of the same clan, particularly when the members belong to different sub-clans. Where sub-clans exist, they apparently are exogamous (though Kampungu is not clear on this point). Intra-clan marriages are not customary, though some clans, for instance the Vakwankora, are renowned for endogamous marriages; marriages are frequent between members of the Matava and Kavunda subclans, located about two miles east of Tondoro and respectively on the SWA and Angola sides of the river (Kampungu, 1965: 474–475).

There are two kinds of joking relationships based upon clan membership. In one the joking occurs between members of the same clan and lineage, and in the other between members of different clans that belong to a larger grouping of related clans (a phratry — if that term can be applied to a matrilineal system). The related clans are ranked according to the seniority of their founding ancestors, called masimbi, who are in all cases males. Seniority among the masimbi is based upon their traditional birth order (Kampungu 1965: 478). The joking relationship between members of different clans is called ukwasipango, while a person who stands in this relationship is called mukwasipango. It is customary for such persons to revile each other or to accuse one another, jokingly, of witchcraft. When one dies, his joking relative says "you are not dead, you are simply pretending, you killer of human beings," and then bitterly mourns the passing of his joking partner. The surviving member of a joking pair usually gives an ox for the guests to eat during the mourning, at which he also is present (Kampungu 1965: 477–478).
KINSHIP TERMS

The data presented in the accompanying table are derived primarily from Dam- 
mann (1957) and Westphal (1958). These two sources are in agreement with respect 
to the meanings of most of the terms they treat. Only a few kinship terms are 
mentioned by Kampungu. Where disagreements obtain, they are explained in notes 
appended to the table. In the cases where somewhat different orthographic con-
ventions have been adopted by Dammann, Westphal, and the Education Depar-
tment of South-West Africa (S.W.A., D.E., 1968), the official orthography has been 
employed here. Where the sex of ego is a factor, it is indicated in the table.

KWANGARI KINSHIP TERMS

I. Consanguineal Relatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vernacular term singular</th>
<th>Plural/polite</th>
<th>Approximate translation</th>
<th>Sex of Ego</th>
<th>Relationship of referent to ego</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mama</td>
<td>womama</td>
<td>grandparent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MF, MM, FF, FM (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tate</td>
<td>dotate</td>
<td>father</td>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td>FB (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nane</td>
<td>wonane</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>M, MZ, FZ</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hekuru</td>
<td>wohekuru, vahekuru</td>
<td>great father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tategona</td>
<td>dotategona</td>
<td>little father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nanegona</td>
<td>wonanegona</td>
<td>little mother</td>
<td>FZ, MZ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mukuru</td>
<td>omukuru, yakuru</td>
<td>elder parallel-sex sibling</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>eB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mumbya</td>
<td>ombya, vambya</td>
<td>younger parallel-sex sibling</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>yB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Dammann (1957: 42–43) gives the following paradigm for the possessive forms of tate, 
nane, and mama:

tate - my father
guho - your (sg) father
ghwe - his, her father
nane - my mother
nyoko - your (sg) mother
zina - his, her mother

mama - my grand parent
nyokokuru - your grandparent
zinakuru - his, her grandparent

To decline most other kinship terms not formed from the above, a possessive "pronom" 
is appended to the nominal stem which may then be somewhat modified.

2 Mumbya is differently defined by Dammann and Westphal, Dammann (1957: 45) making it 
"younger sibling of the same or different sex [from ego's]" while Westphal (1958: 20) 
makes it "younger sibling of the speaker's sex."
Social Life

\[ \text{mpanza} \quad \text{vampanza} \] cross sibling and cross-sex parallel cousin
\[
\text{munwana} \quad \text{oguyazina} \quad \text{guyazina} \quad \text{men's child}
\]
\[
\text{zinyanane} \quad \text{ozinyanane} \quad \text{mother's mother}
\]
\[
\text{sipwa} \quad \text{simphumpha} \quad \text{father's sister's child?}
\]
\[
\text{munu} \quad \text{vany} \quad \text{mother's brother's child}
\]
\[
\text{munona} \quad \text{vanona} \quad \text{child}
\]
\[
\text{munami} \quad \text{vakadona} \quad \text{firstborn child}
\]
\[
\text{mbeli} \quad \text{nsira} \quad \text{lastborn child}
\]
\[
\text{mutekuru} \quad \text{omutekuru} \quad \text{grandchild}
\]
\[
\text{zimthekuru} \quad \text{omutecuru, vatekuru} \quad \text{grandchild}
\]
\[
\text{ngono} \quad \text{gwate gona} \quad \text{sister's child}
\]
\[
\text{mbya} \quad \text{grandchild}
\]

II. Affinal Relatives

\[
\text{mukadi} \quad \text{vakadi} \quad \text{wife}
\]
\[
\text{mugara} \quad \text{(the plural means "lovers")}
\]
\[
\text{yan} \quad \text{ngumwe} \quad \text{female in-law of generation above or below ego}
\]
\[
\text{tamwe} \quad \text{otamwe} \quad \text{male in-law of generation above or below ego}
\]
\[
\text{swara} \quad \text{oswara} \quad \text{sister- or brother-in-law}
\]
\[
\text{buro} \quad \text{varukwahedi} \quad \text{namesake}
\]

3 Kampungu (1965: 298) explains that mpanza is a sibling or parallel cousin of opposite sex to ego's; Dammann (1957: 49) defines it as "a relative with whom avoidance is observed."

4 Sipwa is "cross cousin" according to Westphal (1958: 22), but "male or female cousin" according to Dammann (1957: 47–48).

5 Sitekurumphuma is defined only by Dammann (1957: 47) and his informants disagreed as to its meaning.

6 Yange, "my husband," is, according to Dammann (1957: 45), inflected as follows:
\[
\text{yan} \quad \text{my husband}
\]
\[
\text{yage} \quad \text{your (sg) husband}
\]
\[
\text{yendi} \quad \text{her husband}
\]
Unfortunately, the sources available do not provide information sufficient for the compilation of a complete table of the Kwangari kinship terms and all their referents. In the accompanying presentation the degrees of relationship assumed to fall within the compass of a particular kinship term but not specifically attributed to it by one or another of the sources are enclosed in brackets. Doubtless several of the terms have wider application than is indicated. The various degrees of genealogical relationship encompassed by a single kinship term may be readily distinguished when necessary by the addition of more specific words.

In polite, respectful speech, plural forms of the kinship terms are used in referring to all seniors, and in address both singular and plural forms are used (Westphal, 1958: 222). For most terms, two plural forms exist. In general, the kinship terms are used in a possessive mode, both when employed in address and in reference. In forming the possessives the terms for “father,” “mother,” “grandparent,” and “husband” are irregular in declension (see notes 1 and 5); for the other terms possessive “pronouns” are appended.

In addition to the knonymy mentioned above, there is also a kind of reflexive use of parental terms — i.e., an adult may refer to his child as “my father” or “my mother” rather than as “my son” or “my daughter,” respectively (Kampungu 1965: 475-5).

**TERMS PERTAINING TO WIDE CATEGORIES OF RELATIONSHIP**

The term *name*, “mother,” can be used for any senior person, male or female, of ego's clan (Kampungu, 1965: 475). In addition, there are several other terms that appear to designate broad categories of relationship, though none are very precisely defined in the sources available:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Singular</th>
<th>Plural</th>
<th>Approximate translation</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>ekoro</em></td>
<td><em>vakoro</em></td>
<td>“relative”</td>
<td>Kampungu,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1965: 455</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>munwamali</em></td>
<td><em>omunwamali,</em></td>
<td>“relative”</td>
<td>Dammann,</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>vanaamali</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>1957: 45, fn. 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>munwazina</em></td>
<td><em>vanaazina</em></td>
<td>“relative”</td>
<td>Kampungu,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1965: 456</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>ekwakoro</em></td>
<td><em>vakwakoro</em></td>
<td>“relative of my clan”</td>
<td>Kampungu,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1965: 455</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>kamenthu</em></td>
<td><em>okamenthu,</em></td>
<td>“childhood friend”</td>
<td>Dammann,</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>vakamenthu</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>1957: 49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Dammann translates *munwamali* as a “polite form for cross sibling of the same mother” but adds this note: “[Thus] according to my informant. According to N. [another informant] it designates generally a relative of either the paternal or maternal side; cf. B. [ourquin] yall ‘blood’” (Dammann, 1957: 45)

2 *Kamenthu* is “father’s father” according to Westphal (1958: 22) but Dammann (1957: 49) translates it as “childhood friend or complex degree of relationship.”
Politics and Law

CHIEFTAINSHIP

Uhompa, "chieftainship," is said to come from Karunga, the Supreme Being. The Kwangari refer to it as uhompa wo mwaverwa, "hereditary chieftainship." Though the chief's proper title is hompa, in addressing him it is common among the Kwangari to use the expression tete kuru, "Old First One," a denomination borrowed from the Ovambo. Even though not in positions of authority, all members of the royal family are called chiefs (Kampungu 1965: 113, 410–12, 433–4).

DEATH OF A CHIEF

At the death of a chief an ox is slaughtered and its skin is used in the burial ceremony. The day after the death the corpse is wrapped in the ox's hide and tied with bast. Amidst great drumming the body is carried to the cattle enclosure where a grave has already been dug, and is buried vertically (Lobato de Faria 1949: 20–21).

When the ruling chief's death is proclaimed in the traditional manner by announcing "the fire is out," all fires in homes throughout the land are extinguished as the news spreads. Soon a new fire is kindled in the royal village with a firedrill. Burning coals or logs from this fire are then used to start new fires in all the other villages. A fire started in this manner need not be kept burning, but is allowed to burn itself out. The mourning lasts about a month and the next ruler is usually installed as soon as possible. In the past the mourning of the deceased chief continued for an entire year. Chiefs or their delegates would come from other tribes and lands for the mourning. Today male mourners bring with them their guns and fire them a few times as they approach the chief's village. Women on approaching the place utter shrieks of grief (Kampungu 1965: 431, 425–6).

According to Almeida (1912: 378), at the death of a chief his wives continue to reside in the royal village, and the new chief establishes himself there if he does not already have his own village and family. Kampungu (1965: 190–397) states that it has been the prerogative of a new chief to decide whether he will remain in the village of his predecessor or establish a new one at another location. According to Lobato de Faria (1949: 20–21) the royal village can be moved only when a year has passed since the death of the former chief. This appears to be the mourning period which Kampungu (1965: 431) mentions as formerly lasting for an entire year. Lobato de Faria says that the cattle remain in the corral in which the chief is buried and are moved only if some of them die.
ELECTION AND INSTALLATION OF A CHIEF

To be eligible to succeed a deceased ruler, the candidate’s mother must be a member of the royal clan. The successor to the throne may belong to a different “dynasty”, i.e., lineage, of the royal clan from that of the deceased chief (Kampungu 1965: 423–4). In the past, succession seems always to have involved fights among the surviving relatives. The subjects of a chief have a right to express their wishes as to who will be the next ruler. Other considerations being equal, the normal pattern of succession is for a chief’s younger brother (his mother’s younger son) to succeed him when he dies. Should he have no uterine brother, then his eldest sister’s eldest son succeeds him. If a brother or matrilineal nephew is lacking, then a chief’s sister or sister’s daughter may succeed him. Men are usually preferred to women as chiefs, however, and there are instances in Kwangari history of female chiefs either abdicating or being deposed in favor of male rivals. (See Traditional History.)

A male chief’s children are commoners and are called “children of a chief” in contrast to the children of a female chief who are members of the royal lineage. A male chief’s sons have high status in the tribe and invariably become important headmen (Kampungu 1965: 364, 417–418, 423–424).

On the day of the new chief’s installation, many head of cattle are slaughtered for a feast. The installation is actually an enthronement, and the phrase used, kutura hompa mo sipundi sendi, means “to put the chief in his chair.” An enthusiastic populace acclaims the new chief’s installation with a dance in which men carry the kasindani, a type of spear made of a single long bar of iron worked into a blade, with the long handle covered with the tail of an animal, usually an ox, and the tassel left hanging. Beer and other victuals are served. Formerly among the Kwangari a rite called li lie ngombe li lie muntu, “let it kill an ox, let it kill a man,” was performed as part of the enthronement ceremony; here one or more individuals were stabbed to death with the spear used to slaughter cattle for the feast. This ritual sacrifice was considered to be a confirmation of the position of the new chief (Kampungu 1965: 429–30).

ROYAL PREROGATIVES AND DUTIES

Up until about 1930 chiefs were absolute rulers, but with the growth of white influence in the area the chiefs lost much of their authority. Chiefs are also religious leaders, acting both as intermediaries between their people and their royal ancestors, and as the representatives of the Supreme Being. As such they enjoy certain privileges and are entrusted with specific duties.
Royal Duties

The chief is the supreme judge of disputes as well as the maker and guardian of the law. He is the source and repository of wealth, dispenser of gifts, leader in war, officiant at religious ceremonies, and in some situations, a medicine man (Kampungu 1965: 433). He is surrounded by retainers, adherents, and bodyguards (mar-enga). According to Eedes (1933: 64–65), the chief or another member of the royal family is the “rainmaker for all the tribes,” and as such is the keeper of the hereditary rain-making medicine. (It is not clear whether Eedes is referring here to all the Kavango peoples or the Kwangari alone.)

When a Kwangari subject wants to obtain some great favor from the chief, such as refuge from his pursuers or help in time of great famine, he smears ashes or dust on himself while saying “chief, I entreat you while putting on earth” (Kampungu 1965: 434).

Royal Privileges

Royal descent is the basis for royal privileges, though the ruling chief has more privileges and authority than other members of the royal clan. Young royalty are notoriously arrogant and sometimes behave cruelly toward commoners (Kampungu 1965: 433–4).

Ownership of Land and Tributes

The chief’s household and the royal village were usually larger than those of ordinary tribesmen. As recently as 1930 about 30 families lived with the Kwangari chief. Other non-ruling members of the royal clan customarily had their own separate villages (Kampungu 1965: 435).

The chief has the first choice of land for building and ploughing, and his fields are very large. Repairing his village, building, ploughing, weeding, and all sorts of manual work are carried out by the chief’s subjects. It is the chief’s prerogative not to do any manual labor, though the Kwangari chief Himarwa made an exception to the rule by not evading even the dirtiest work and could be found pulling weeds himself in his gardens (Kampungu 1965: 312, 435). The chief has the right to call upon all the men he needs when a new village is to be built, and they are penalized if they refuse to assist (Kampungu 1965: 436). The chief claimed one tusk of any elephant killed in his country (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 136).

One form of tribute afforded the chief is mazanza, “large royal fields,” which all the village take turns ploughing. During the ploughing the chief usually slaughters a few head of cattle for the workers to eat.

Kwangari subjects are expected to make beer for the chief. This is done especially on the occasion of the chief’s official visit when he travels from village to village with a large retinue. However, in S.W.A. the Native Commissioner of the
Kavango forbade this practice in about 1950 as being too extravagant (Kampungu 1965: 436–7).

Women render a tribute of produce during harvest time, but this practice has never been strictly insisted upon since it is hazardous for women to visit the royal village alone, and was especially so in the past when the royal village had a reputation as a place of sexual immorality (Kampungu 1965: 436–7).

Matrimonial Prerogatives

Formerly a male chief could have as many wives as he wished and a female chief could have any man of her choosing as her consort. Chiefs also had broad sexual prerogatives and the behavior of certain chiefs toward their female subjects was notorious. Chief Kandjimi is said to have sometimes sent a man in the village he was visiting on some distant errand so that he might cohabit with his wife. At other times he would simply tell the husband to sleep outside with his children while he, Kandjimi, slept in the hut with the wife. On the other hand, if a man was even remotely suspected of having access to a Kwangari chief’s wife, he was usually punished by death and even his relatives could be executed and their property confiscated. However, the death penalty was seldom inflicted upon the relatives of the male adventurer; payment a few head of cattle usually sufficed to assuage a chief’s anger (Kampungu 1965: 438–440). The sitiinya, the consort of a female chief, also was subject to a strict code of conduct, and if he had an affair with another woman, both he and his accomplice would be put to death and also their relatives, and their property would be confiscated. When the vambanda, “chief’s wives,” passed by, one dared not look at them for fear of losing his life. When visiting their relatives, a chief’s wives were accompanied by guardians who would report back to the chief on their actions.

The Power of Life and Death

A chief formerly could use any means to further his personal ends, even if it meant the death of one of his subjects, called mupika (literally “slave,” but also “servant, subject”). He could kill anyone with impunity. If the chief thought one of his subjects had become too rich, he might put him to death on a false charge such as of witchcraft. The battlefield, however, was actually the best place the chief had of ridding himself of someone he disliked (Kampungu 1965: 440–441). If the actions of a chief became intolerable to his subjects, as in the case of chief Mpepo, described earlier, who violated many of his female subjects, the vasigona (literally “poor,” but also “subjects”) would take measures to depose him.
HEADMEN

The Kwangari territory is divided up into small areas or districts. According to Eedes (1933: 58) there are no headmen or councillors for these areas, because, he explains, the chief fears men in such positions would become wealthy and influential and threaten his power. Two other sources, however, do mention the existence of headmen. Kampungu (1965: 425–6) notes that headmen, nturagumbo, perform rain ceremonies, and that a male chief's sons often become big headmen. Almeida records that chiefs often consult the seculos, headmen, and the oldest men of the tribe when making serious decisions. He says that some of these headmen who live in more distant areas, and especially those belonging to other tribes, are relatively independent and consider themselves as minor chiefs or chieftainesses. They are accustomed to taking contributions in kind and in cattle from their people and always take a portion of the game killed (Almeida 1912: 378).

Each village has its own head who is responsible for the maintenance of law and order. It is his duty to report any unusual happening, such as murder, stock theft, rape, etc., to the chief (Eedes 1933: 58).

There are allusions in Kampungu's history of the Kwangari tribe to the power wielded by members of the royal family other than the chief. These nobles often had their own villages, and wars sometimes broke out between them over the right of succession to the chieftainship. When, for example, Siremo was chief, Kampango, his aunt, waged war against him with "her sons and her people" (Kampungu 1965: 313–7).

In contacts with Europeans, the Kwangari chief entered into gift exchange relationships (see, for example, Baum 1902: 66).

Religion, Magic, and Medicine

RITES AND CEREMONIES

Rites of Passage

For ceremonies pertaining to birth, puberty, marriage, etc., see the section on Kwangari Marriage Customs. Although a chief's death and burial have also already been described in the section dealing with Political Organization, the funeral rites of chiefs and commoners have not been detailed.

Death and Burial

A burial ceremony (pontoko) usually takes place on the same day as the death and is principally carried out by a brother or near relative of the deceased (whether women prepare a female corpse is not stated.) All clothing is removed from the
corpse, only a few beads being left on the body. The corpse is smeared with animal or vegetable fat, bent into the fetal position, tied, and wrapped in an animal skin. So prepared, it is buried facing west, the direction taken by all parting souls. Men and women are buried in the main cattle corral (hambo) and children in the calf corral (shinyongo). Pregnant women who die are either buried on the water’s edge or thrown into the river, with the fetus still in the womb (Edes 1933: 62–3). Orphans are not buried in the cattle corral but are wrapped in reed mats and buried on the dunes.

Depending upon their rank and importance, mourning for non-ruling adults usually lasts up to five days. Children’s rites are similar to those of adults but usually last only two to three days (Kampungu 1965: 431). All the deceased’s relatives and friends attend the wake (nonkari) which is held in the village where the death occurred. When crying at a wake a person holds his hands clasped behind his head (Edes 1933: 67). On the last day of mourning an ox belonging to the estate of the deceased is slaughtered and its heart is used by the man who conducts the interment to cleanse himself and those who assisted in the actual burial or otherwise came in contact with the corpse. The cleansing is effected by touching a person’s body with the heart of the ox and sprinkling him with the blood. The one who performs the cleansing ceremony (kuditaika) must also cleanse his own wife. It is believed that if this ceremony is not performed, those who assisted in the interment will become sick and die, and that the wife of the one who presided at the burial will not be able to feed her children, for any food she prepares or gives to them will make them violently ill (Edes 1933: 62–3).

See the section on Marriage Customs for details on the cleansing of the deceased’s spouse through sexual intercourse (nontondo).

New Fire Ceremony

Kampungu (1965: 431), himself a Kwangari, was unsure whether the rites of the new fire and the extinguishing of the old fire, which are also performed at the death of a chief, are observed every time a new village is established. In the past the rite of new fire was carried out at nyambi-nyambi, the rain ceremony, and probably also at smaller scale rain offerings performed by local headmen or niturugumbo. (For further information see Chieftainship.)

Seasonal Ceremonies

There are three rituals which have been banned by the missionaries because they provide occasions interpreted as sexually immoral. Together these ceremonies form a mystic calendar. They are rufiko, the transition rite for royal girls (discussed under Marriage Customs), yitorondondwa, the rite at the beginning of the harvest, and yiyiwo, at the end of the harvest. The latter two have been mentioned in the section on Subsistance Patterns.
Yitorondondwa is performed by youths from the royal and neighboring villages. They go from village to village as far as the Kwangari-Mbundza boundary and back again, traveling more swiftly on the return trip. At night there is epera dancing. Epera is classified primarily as a festive or social dance, but here we find it danced in conjunction with harvest ceremonies. In the epera dance two drums are used and both sexes participate, facing one another in parallel lines. As a person from one line advances to the space between the lines, he or she is met by two people from the other line. The dancers wear rattles, nonkiti, around the legs. The rattles are usually made of caterpillar cocoons filled with smaller objects, usually seeds of the "camelthorn" (Acacia giraffae) tree. Epera may last the whole night and is performed outside the village. Singing is an indispensable part of the epera dance (Kampungu 1965: 358-60, 374-5).

The yiyywo ceremony also moves from village to village, but more solemnly. Young people of both sexes participate. The men perform a dance in which they strike sticks together. The men in the host village perform the hango, a jumping dance. The participants, moving from village to village, may also perform the epera dance and then spend the night in a host village. Both sexes sleep together during the yiyywo festival, and it is to this principally that the missionaries object, as well as to the dancing and the "good occasions of committing sexual immoralities" that the dances provide (Kampungu 1965: 374-5).

Rain Ceremonies

There are several rain ceremonies. One called nyambi-nyambi, "God-God," which goes from village to village, and moves from one end of Kwangari territory to the other, was last performed in 1928. It is held at the beginning of the rainy season, usually in October. Being a complicated ceremony, it lasts an entire day in each village. The men go out early in the morning to hunt, after performing one part of the ceremony, and the women remain in the village to prepare a feast. The feast is eaten outside (? the village). The ceremony of the new fire is performed and the names of all the dead chiefs are recited, with the villagers answering mhn, "yes, be it so." Nyambi's name is always included in this recital (Kampungu 1965: 190-1).

Rain offerings are made at the graves of former royalty, though these need not have been rulers. A black ox used to be sent by the Kwangari to former Chief Muntenda's grave at Makuzu during bad droughts. The ox, a symbol of black clouds, was sacrificed at the grave which lies in the ruins of Muntenda's village. According to a text recorded by Kampungu, the ox does not balk but willingly lets itself be driven, and as it approaches the spot, runs of its own accord, leaving its drivers behind and goes straight to the grave. About two or three miles away from the grave, the drivers must deposit all that they have brought with them and approach the spot without even a stick in hand. As they come nearer, the drivers drop to their knees and crawl up to the grave. When they arrive at the grave they
find the ox already dead. Only adult men are allowed at the grave site. As soon as they have skinned the slaughtered ox, it begins to rain and the rain continues for two days (Kampungu 1965: 200, 316–7).

Eedes (1933: 64) notes the existence of a rainmaker (hompongoma) who is usually a chief or other member of the royal family. (Though Eedes does not say so, this is probably the chief of the Mbulushu who is reputed to serve as rainmaker for several tribes.) The rainmaker is maintained by all the chiefs, whom the rainmaker does not personally visit, but to whom he sends members of his family as agents just before the rainy season to collect his fee and the black oxen that will be sacrificed. These agents are feasted by the chiefs they visit, and while they are traveling through the country of a particular chief, all work is suspended. The rainmaker possesses the hereditary rainmaking medicine, a secret he closely guards. The person in possession of this medicine mistrusts his relatives, fearing their aspirations to his exalted position, and often has them murdered, usually with poison. The rainmaker lives on a large island where he practices his craft. It was once common, Eedes reports, for the rainmaker to sacrifice either one of his own children or that of a relative. On a chosen day the selected child was laid on the ground under a large tree and the rainmaker stood over him holding a trailing vine. As soon as the rainmaker pulled the vine off the tree, the child was seen to be dead, apparently having been killed by the vine piercing the body, although no wound could be seen. This sacrifice was said to cause very heavy rains to fall, which eventually washed away the body of the sacrificed child. In recent times child sacrifice has been replaced by the sacrifice of black oxen. The hearts of the slaughtered oxen are moved in circles over the secret medicine and the blood is sprinkled about as food for the ghosts that inhabit the island (Eedes 1933: 64–5).

Should a stranger enter the rainmaker’s island hut, it is said that he will at once be blinded by flashes of lightning and thick mist and be deafened by terrific claps of thunder (Eedes 1933: 65).

WITCHCRAFT

Eedes (1933: 64–65), our only source dealing in detail with witchcraft, does not make the distinction between witch (murodi) and medicine man (nganga) that is made by those who report on other Okavango tribes; he translates murodi as “witch doctor.” Kampungu (1965: 322) mentions only the nganga, “medicine man.”

Smelling out Witches and Trial by Ordeal

Both male and female diviners practice the detection of witches. Witches, according to Eedes, (1933: 63), do not know each other and they are not distinguished by their dress. However, they are greatly feared and respected. In “smelling out” (nombali) a witch, the diviner heats a knife until it is red hot and then draws it
across the palm of his hand, at the same time mentioning the names of the persons who are suspected of bewitching, stealing, or poisoning. The name uttered at that moment when the knife burns the operator’s skin is taken to be the name of the culprit, and he or she is at once either fined or sentenced to trial by ordeal.

A woman who thinks that she is losing her husband’s affection can obtain a love potion from a doctor or herbalist and mix it with her husband’s food to render the man impotent in relations with other women. The husband, when he discovers his impotency in his illicit affairs, will engage a diviner to “smell out” the person who has bewitched him. When his own wife is revealed to be the guilty party, the husband beats her, ties her up with straps, and keeps her prisoner until she gives up all of the love potion, which is then thrown into the river. She is then ordered to leave her husband’s village. The husband can obtain an antidote to restore his potency (Eedes 1933: 63–4).

In another method of “smelling out,” the operator moves a small calabash, mouth down, in circles over a skin placed on the ground, while at the same time mentioning the names of the areas or districts in which the suspect may reside, until the calabash sticks at a particular area. In the same way the name of the village and finally the name of the guilty person is discovered (Eedes 1933: 64).

When a person is “smelled out” by one of the above processes, he must usually undergo a type of trial by ordeal. For example, he may be forced to drink poison (mwade) supplied by a herbalist (munongo), or required to place his hands and lower arms in boiling water. If a person is killed or injured while undergoing these trials, he is assumed to have been guilty and the injury is taken to be his just punishment; but if he survives such trials he is believed to have proven his innocence and is set free. (No details are given on who forces the suspect to undergo an ordeal.) Eedes (1933: 64–5) states that a poisoner is not a recognized doctor or herbalist, but is an individual well versed in the manufacture of poisons who is the secret agent of a group of local witch doctors. A poisoner uses a small calabash in the manner described above also to divine who is coming to consult him and to ascertain the strength of the dose of poison that will be needed by the visitor (Eedes 1933: 63–4).

Spies and Witchcraft

Undari (a collective noun) are spies who are warriors sent in disguise among those against whom an attack is to be launched. Spies ascertain the vantage point from which to attack, the number of the opposition, and their means of defence. The Kwangari believe that undari are invisible and can enter a village unnoticed and eat a meal with the enemies, taking back with them some pieces of food as a sign that they have accomplished their mission as spies (Kampungu 1965: 356).
Traveler’s Blessing

A blessing is given a person who is setting out on or returning from a long journey. A relative, usually an elder person, places in his hands either ashes or pulverized coals, and dips his right thumb into this powder. With his thumb he touches the traveler’s forehead, both cheeks, breast and sometimes the knees. The rest of the ash is dusted over the traveler’s head (Kampungu 1966: 47).

SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

The Supreme Being

The Supreme Being is called Nyambi-Karunga. The missionaries employed an incorrect term, mukuru, (“old one”) for God (Kampungu 1965: 413).

Ghosts and Spirits

Ghosts or spirits are called undumba by the Kwangari. It is believed that the spirits of witches (and also herbalists according to Eedes) return and wander around the villages during the night. If they find a sick person they kill him and take his spirit to live with them. Spirits of deceased sorcerers are believed to inhabit the body of living sorcerers and the latter sends these spirits out at night to steal food for him. Spirits leave a trail very much like that of a dog, but much smaller (Kampungu 1965: 324–5; Eedes 1933: 69).

The spirit of a departed chief becomes a lion or leopard. An animal with a chief’s spirit will not attack human beings, but if hungry, will eat cattle from distant areas. It will not harm any member of the late chief’s family; in fact, it will come to the heir and allow the heir to fondle it and remove the fleas from its body. The heir will tell it to flee from the country as some of the people, not knowing who it is, may kill it (Eedes 1933: 69).

When a cow calves, the owner draws the first milk and cooks it at his first wife’s cooking place. He then throws some of the milk against the village palisade and summons the spirit of his departed grandfather or grandmother to drink the milk. By giving this milk to the spirit the owner ensures that they will look after the cow and calf and cause them to thrive (Eedes 1933: 69).

When the first grain is reaped, the porridge made of it is cooked at the first wife’s cooking place. The family is then called together and some of the porridge is thrown against the village palisade. The spirits of the departed members of the family are summoned to eat the porridge. If this rite is not observed, it is believed the spirits will cause the rest of the crop to be eaten by birds, or a member of the village to die (Eedes 1933: 69).
Offerings are made at the graves of deceased royalty to invoke the blessings of the ancestral spirits and to insure protection from evil and misfortune. A person of royal blood, no matter what he might have been in life, is entitled to these privileges. Offerings consist of fat, milk, and porridge. Fat, which symbolizes consecration and purification, is also used in the marriage ceremony and for anointing (kusinga) a chief's spouse (Kampungu 1965: 309). (See also Paiva Couceiro 1892: 130).

OMENS AND TABOOS

Sidira (pl. yidira) is a taboo. Examples of sidira are: Throwing a basket at someone, whistling at night, throwing fire at night, eating lion's meat, cohabiting with a menstruating female, pointing at a grave without bending the fingers, and a whole range of special prohibitions (no details given). If a sidira is broken, it is believed to cause illness or misfortune (Kampungu 1966: 121).

Siyowo (pl. yiyowo), from the verb kuyowora “to portend, symbolize,” is an omen of misfortune. For example, if a mole is seen outside showing its teeth, the one who saw the mole will mourn. Not only does a siyowo portend evil but is believed also to cause it (Kampungu 1966: 121–2). Eedes (1933: 67) gives several examples of omens and their attendant evils.

Marwa (a word used only in the plural, from a lost passive verb, “to be mourned” or “to be cried for,”) is a kind of omen attributed to less discrete events. For example, if a Kavango fisherman who is usually successful in catching fish does not find any fish in his net, it is taken as an evil omen and may mean the death of a relative. Marwa, unlike siyowo, portends evil but does not cause it. According to Kampungu (1966: 122), marwa is not found in Kavango languages other than ruKwangari.

Impure States

In performing various practical activities, the Kavango peoples observe rules of ritualistic purity or chastity. For example, assisting at childbirth requires ritually chaste hands; a midwife who has recently had sexual intercourse does not dare touch a baby or assist at childbirth. Abstinence from sexual relations is also observed by a woman nursing her child. Extra-marital relations are considered to bring about a serious state of impurity, and a person who has engaged in adulterous acts is a source of danger to others (Kampungu 1966: 87–8).

It is believed that a woman during menstruation is a source of danger to others and must therefore maintain ritual purity. If she should be seen shedding blood at another's epata (household), she has broken a taboo and must undergo a prescribed rite to avert the evils that would follow such a breach. If she refuses, she may be brought to court and fined as well as forced by the court to undergo purification. In the purification rite a small domestic animal, usually a fowl, is killed and its
blood is sprinkled (? on the impure party). A breach of the menstrual taboo, either as mentioned above or by engaging in sexual intercourse during the menstrual period, is thought to produce a dangerous chronic cough. Girls are considered particularly dangerous during their first menstrual period (Kampungu 1966: 122, 126).

Food and sexual taboos are imposed especially upon persons who are in a transitional state (see Mutilation) or an unnatural state (see Sterility and Adultery).

TREATMENT OF THE SICK

Curing Ceremonies

A person is cured of illness either by special ceremonies, medicine, or both. Illness is believed often to be caused by evil spirits and to be cured by casting them out. Sorcery, urodi, is thought to lie in the breast of the one possessed, and medicine can be used to rid a person of this evil power.

One treatment, called kuzambela, is used especially for a patient whom the angry ancestral spirits have made very ill. It involves the sacrifice of an ox. The rites, as described by Kampungu (1965: 341, 366), include putting the animal's lungs and heart, soaked in blood, in a container, and then having each of the sick person's relatives who are present, beginning with the eldest, hold the vessel over the patient's head while moving it back and forth. The names of the family's ancestral spirits are recited during this procedure and the name of Karunga, the Supreme Being, is called upon. Eedes (1933: 64) states that the blood of the ox's heart is allowed to drip over the face and upper portion of the patient's body and that at the same time a "witch doctor" moves a calabash in circles over a piece of skin while he recites certain requests on behalf of the spirits of deceased relatives of the afflicted person. Eventually the calabash sticks and the request upon which this happens is taken to be the wish of the tormenting spirit. A spirit's usual request is that an animal be slaughtered for it. This is immediately done and the patient often recovers swiftly. Another method of casting out evil spirits, called Kusamba, involves beads or white grain, but no details are given.

A person whose illness includes having visions of a terrible red creature, thought to be Nyambi or God, is exorcised by the nyambi dance, one type of the nongoma (drums) dance. The nongoma dances are a series of solemn performances which last the whole night and are accompanied by beer drinking. Three drums are used for these dances, which are held inside the village in the sinyanga (see village sketch). A dancer stands in one place and moves his body to imitate various animals. Singing is indispensible in nongoma dances.
There are many men and women herbalists (munongo, plural vanongo) among the Kavango who treat the sick with herbal and other medicines. These herbalists are well known and respected by the chief and the tribe. Great faith is placed in their powers of healing, and an herbalist is often called in to attend personally to the chief or to a member of his family. They are usually paid in cattle, goats, fowl, or grain for their services, the fee charged being determined by the nature of the illness and the period of treatment (Eedes 1933: 64).

An herbalist’s medicines consist of powders ground from roots, bark, leaves, monitor lizard claws, nails of hares, portions of python skin, claws of hawks and eagles, excrement of aardvarks, and feathers and claws of plovers. The usual way of administering the medicines is by means of a draught, but an enema is also sometimes given, a reed being used to blow the liquid into the rectum. Another treatment involves rubbing ointment into incisions which are made all over the patient’s body. A patient is often made to drink the blood of a freshly slaughtered animal or fowl, this draught being reputed to cure the majority of ailments. Herbalists often practice some “witchcraft” in addition to dispensing herbs and medicines (Eedes 1933: 64).
III

THE MBUNDZA

CECILIA R. McGURK
History

Introduction

No comprehensive studies of Mbundza ethnography have come to light. This summary is based primarily upon an article by Pater Manfred Förö, O.M.I., that treats customs of death and burial and related beliefs (Förö 1967–68). Additional information comes from more general sources and from studies of neighboring peoples that make incidental reference to the Mbundza.

Förö's information was obtained by interview with elderly members of the Mbundza tribe, among whom he served as a missionary from 1963 to 1973. He reports that a number of the customs he describes are no longer common due to influence from the missions and from neighboring peoples. For information on subjects other than those of his primary interest, Förö has depended upon Bruwer, Kampungu, Bosch, and Möhlig (Förö op. cit.: 43).

In recent times the Mbundza have occupied both banks of the Okavango River from about 18°55' E to 19°38' E. On the south side, where the region is more densely populated, Mbundza territory extends for 54 km. from Rundu west to Manyondo.

The tribal name is often spelled Bunja, and this is the official spelling of the capital town.

History

TRADITIONS

Förö thinks the Mbundza lived at one time in the Mashi region of the Kwandu River, but together with Bruwer he believes that at an earlier time they lived in the lakes region of central Africa (cf. Bruwer 1966: 22) and cites Mbundza traditions in support of this hypothesis. In more recent times the location of Mbuza royal graves, which can be traced successively from west to east, supports a Mbundza claim that they once lived farther to the west and migrated down the Okavango River to their present location.

The chiefs of the Mbundza and Kwangari are said to be the descendants of sisters, Kapango and Mate, who, according to legend, traveled together from the Kwandu to the Okavango. They separated because of a dispute that arose between them over cattle that the Kwangari had and the Mbundza lacked. The Mbundza and Kwangari have the same clans, and the royal clan of each is the hyena clan, Vakwasi-pika. Kapango's people are said to have been driven east from Makuzu where the tribes originally settles, finally locating at Mazwa (Kampungu 1965: 191 ff.). About 1880 the Mbundza were ruled by a queen "Kapongo" (Duparquet 1880: 455), very likely the same Capango whom Paiva Couceiro (1892: 142–143) found at the head of the tribe in 1890 and describes as an old woman. She bore the name of the legendary founder of the Mbundza who, according to Kampungu (1965: 396), lived about 1600. In 1903 the chief was Nampadi, who was followed suc-
cressively by Karupu, Mudini, and Kasiki (Kampungu 1965: 399). There is a history of intermarriage and intrigue between the royal houses of the Mbundza and Kwangari (Kampungu 1965: 233, 266 ff.).

RECORDED HISTORY

When H. de Paiva Couceiro passed through Mbundza territory in 1870 he found the tribe living on the Angolan side exclusively, in the region they still occupy. The lands of the Mbundza extended for a distance of 46 km. along the left bank of the Okavango (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 142–143). During the first decades of the 20th century the Mbundza began moving to the south side of the river, and disputes arose between them and some Bushmen who were occupying the region at the time (Förg op. cit.: 43).

Individual Life

CHILDBIRTH

Young girls were formerly married at a very early age without an elaborate puberty ceremony. Abortion was rare. If a mother died with her child and no one in the mother’s family could be found to take the child, it was buried with its mother. Albinos were usually put to death by burial in a termite mound. A deformed child was considered a bad omen and, according to the severity of the deformity, was either allowed to live or was buried in a termite mound. Twins were considered lucky and were called “children of Karunga,” i.e., of God. Since the birth of twins is an unusual occurrence believed to involve supernatural powers, the mother and her twins have to undergo special treatment by a nganga (see Cleaning). Formerly in the case of royal twins, one was killed to ensure an uncontested succession to the throne. In times of famine one of a set of twins would sometimes be killed, though it was not a common practice. In the case of fraternal twins of opposite sex, the girl would be allowed to live while the boy would be buried in an aardvark’s hole. When one twin died naturally, the other was expected soon to follow (Förg op. cit.: 52–53).

If either spouse of a married couple has extramarital relations while the woman is pregnant, it portends bad luck or death during birth for the mother or for the child. To avoid these consequences a woman who has committed adultery during pregnancy will seek treatment by a nganga before the birth and confess her guilt. A woman may also confess and be treated to ease a difficult birth (Förg op. cit.: 47).
DEATH, BURIAL, AND MOURNING

One who is seriously ill is cared for by relatives. Formerly, an invalid who showed no improvement was taken into the woods or to an island in the river to remove him or her from sorcery. If there was still no improvement, the invalid was brought back to the village and placed in a mat hut, rutambo, or in a sleeping hut, or might be laid out in the open within the confines of the village. A sick man with many wives is usually cared for in the hut of his head wife, the mugoliiki. Distant relatives are notified of an ill person’s condition.

If someone loses consciousness, those present sometimes begin to wail as if he were already dead. If he regains consciousness, it is believed that he was dead but heard the voices and returned to life. One who is dying is placed in sitting position, for it is inconsiderate to allow someone to die lying down. It is also the custom for the one who is dying to confide his last wishes to a trusted relative who makes them known to the rest of the family. A family will conform to these wishes for fear of the wrath of the dead (Förg op. cit.: 54–55).

When death comes, all but a few of the closest relatives, who begin weeping, are silent. Elders comfort the bereaved and keep a close watch over them for fear that they might harm themselves. The death of an ordinary person is made known right away, but the death of a chief is not announced for several hours. At the death of a chief the best medicine men are summoned to prevent the chief’s spirit from returning in the form of a dangerous beast, a sign of bad luck for the land. The fire in the royal village is extinguished and a messenger is sent through the land to announce that “the fire is out.” The chief of the Kwangari tribe is notified and the path to the royal village is blocked with a large branch (Förg op. cit.: 55).

When children ask about a death, they are told, “a hyena took him away” or “he chases antelopes,” i.e., he is very far away. The verb “to die” is not generally used when one is speaking of a specific person who has recently died; a euphemism is used instead (Förg op. cit.: 54).

One believes that after death he will return to Karunga, from whence he came, but otherwise the other world for the Mbundza is an enigma. There is a belief that the spirits of many dead people wander about on earth trying to make contact with their living relatives.

PREPARATIONS FOR BURIAL

After a death has been confirmed (the big toe is bitten as a test), preparations for burial begin. The family members leave the hut to those (unspecified persons) who will prepare the body and wait outside the entrance. Some men, not necessarily close relatives of the deceased, begin digging the grave. The digging of a chief’s grave is often difficult, for the earth changes into stones due to the strong magical powers of the chief, and digging must be begun elsewhere.

Those who prepare the body for burial close the eyelids of the corpse and
sometimes rub butter on the body between the navel and the chest so that the dead will not depart with a "dry heart," i.e., in anger. A chief does not have his eyelids shut so that even in death he may oversee his land. The corpse of a sterile man or woman has a piece of charcoal placed in the anus with the words, "you, who brought no children into the world, do not return to [haunt] us, we who are blessed with children." At the death of a woman the front leather apron is passed through her legs and attached to the belt around her waist. After the necessary preparations the corpse is placed in the fetal position. If this is not easily feasible because of rigor mortis, the body is forced into this position by striking the elbow and knees with a wooden pounder. (However, this is not done to chiefs.) If the deceased is wealthy, the body is next wrapped in the hide of a slaughtered ox and bound with palm leaves. The meat of the ox is eaten by all those present, and the chief claims another ox as a tax. Before the M bunza had cattle, they used the skins of various species of antelope as shrouds. Poorer people are wrapped in old reed mats. Those who have assisted in the preparation of the body may not come into contact with anyone else until the former are cleansed of their ritual impurity (Förg op. cit.: 57).

No particular time is prescribed for burials. The corpse of an adult is carried to the grave on the shoulders of two men who must be members of his clan. The bearers may not carry the body out through the main entrance to the village, so a few posts are removed from a side wall to make an opening for them.

If an infant dies, the MM carries the child to the grave if it is a girl, or the MF if it is a boy. If all grandparents are deceased, the mother can carry her own child to the grave, but usually other elderly women of the woman’s family undertake this, lest the mother who carries her own child become infertile. Miscarried fetuses are also buried by elderly women. An infant is carried to its grave in its own carrying sling, which is then buried in the mud near the river after the mourning period, to encourage further fertility. If an older child dies, the father or grandfather carries it to the grave regardless of whether it is a boy or a girl. If the customs described above are not followed, ritual impurity results, and if one is not cleansed, a chest disease will be incurred.

Children may accompany an adult to the grave if the one buried is a parent or sibling. Since deceased adult members of the tribe are usually buried in the cattle corral, which is off limits to women, the latter do not accompany the bearers to the grave (Förg op. cit.: 58). A man whose wife is pregnant or has just been treated for sterility by a nganga will not take part in a funeral, either for a chief or a commoner (Förg op. cit.: 60).

The cattle corral always lies to the west of a village. The village head, ntuz-gumbo, whether male or female, is buried in the middle of this enclosure, with other members of the family buried around the inside edge of the corral. Since the cattle corral is always in actual use, nothing remains to mark the graves.

Strangers and non-relatives are buried outside the corral. If someone in a recently relocated village dies, he or she is usually buried in the cattle corral of the old village. The sleeping mats of the deceased are generally thrown into the river, but if the river is distant and the body is not buried in the cattle corral, the mats are laid
in the grave. If someone is buried outside the village, an isolated spot is chosen. A grave outside of the cattle pen is protected from wild animals by covering it with thorny branches (Förg op. cit.: 59–61).

If someone has been brought to an island in the river during an illness and dies there, the body will very likely also be buried there. The remains of those who have died by drowning or who have been killed by a crocodile are buried on the banks of the river unless the village is nearby, in which case they will be buried in the cattle corral. If someone is killed in the forest, the remains are returned to his or her village if not too distant. If elderly people without families die of hunger, they are thrown without ceremony into the river to save the area from famine. Deceased pregnant women, whose deaths are thought to harm the chief, are usually wrapped in an ox hide and tied to a tree trunk under the water level of the river, otherwise a small incision is made in the body to protect the chief from misfortune or death, and the body is buried in a grave. If a subject has an affair with one of the wives of a chief, he is strangled and thrown into the river and his mistress often shares the same fate (Förg op. cit.: 60).

Two or more men dig a grave using a stick or a reed stalk to measure the length, and a hoe, a hatchet, and a basket to remove the dirt. The roots and stones dug up are sorted and piled together near the open grave. If these fall back into the grave, it implies that the dead person is throwing them at the living and that death will come to another member of the deceased’s family.

An oval-shaped hole is dug, and when it is waist deep, the grave diggers excavate a burial chamber in the wall on one side. Graves are quite shallow, not only due to limited equipment but also from fear that the dead may return if the hole is too deep. The burial chamber, located at the base of the grave and made just large enough to accommodate the corpse, is called the “bed of the dead.” A small mound of earth in the burial chamber serves as a pillow for the corpse. Förg’s informants gave piety, propriety, and respect as reasons for the burial chamber. They also said its purpose is to prevent the dirt from bearing down heavily on the corpse and to prevent one from walking on the body (Förg op. cit.: 60).

A deceased chief is buried by members of his clan (Vakwasipika, Hyena). Only those of the clan next in rank to the royal one (Vakwanzovu, Elephant) can help with the burial of a chief. The deceased chief’s successor may in no way come in contact with the body. He is not present during the preparation of the body and does not take part in the general mourning. A tribal chief does not attend the burial of his subjects, though during the days of mourning he may visit the deceased’s village.

Except for the chief, the dead are buried with their heads to the west so that the setting sun can remove all the evil associated with death. (The living always sleep with their heads to the east, for it is believed that otherwise they will dream of death and fall ill.) It is taboo to position the corpse so that the face is turned towards the dunes. Thus, in Namibia, bodies (except those of chiefs) are laid in the grave on their left side, facing the river, so that “they can look over the land of the living,” and in Angola bodies are placed on their right side, also facing the river.
The members of the Mbandza royal family are buried in specially reserved burial grounds. Tribal chiefs are placed in the grave in a squatting position, facing the east. When the grave is again filled with earth, a salute is fired using an old muzzleloade gun. No side burial chamber is dug for a chief. However, a kind of shrine built of planks is erected over the grave. The grave sites of members of the royal family are enclosed with stakes. Just before the rainy season, rain-making ceremonies are performed at the site of graves of the royal family. The site is first cleared of grass and weeds by the grandchildren of the deceased (Förg op. cit.: 61).

When the body of the deceased is in place in the burial chamber, the one who is to close the grave begins sprinkling the dirt remaining in the grave over the body. Next he stands up, turns, and standing in the grave with his back to the body, brushes the earth lying around the edge of the grave onto his breast so that it hits his body and falls slowly into the grave. Every so often he brushes the dirt that has fallen into the grave over the body and presses it in place with his hands. Sometimes the burial chamber is separated from the vertical shaft by planks. When the grave is about half filled it is packed down with the feet, since one does not want the grave to cave in. A collapsed grave is a sign that a sorcerer has been at work there. The surface of the grave is made to blend with the ground around it so that it will not be noticeable to children. The roots and stones removed from the grave are either laid near the grave, or if the grave is in the cattle corral, they are removed altogether. To thoughtlessly throw them away is considered a scornful act that can anger the dead.

When the grave has been filled to the point that the body can no longer be seen, everyone present throws in a handful of earth. Even infants have earth placed in their hands to throw in the grave. Some of those present may speak a word or two of farewell. Orphans at the grave of their parents tell one another, “From now on you yourself must use your own hands, for the ones who have nourished you are dead” (Förg op. cit.: 61).

Almost every personal ornament has some relation to the magical power of its owner. These are removed from a corpse for it is believed that otherwise the deceased will appear in a dream to the members of the family and request that this be done, which is bad luck. Other objects are as a rule not placed in a grave, though if a village head has been associated with magical forces during his life, an old basket which has been pierced is added to the grave. By doing this one prevents the deceased from returning to earth in the form of a ghostly animal. Strangers, however, are buried with their personal belongings.

Chiefs are allowed some ornamentation, though even they have their necklaces and armbands, as well as any other ornaments related to magical powers, removed. A small piece of wood is placed between a chief’s jaws so that he can continue to give aid to his country in word and deed. It is also believed that a chief or an esteemed village head takes with him after his death a child from his lineage to serve as a personal helper. The child will carry out personal services in the other world, e.g., lighting the elder’s pipe, a common duty of children.

Sorcerers are believed sometimes secretly to remove parts of a corpse to use in
the preparation of their charms. The covert removal of a shinbone by a sorcerer is a custom said to be borrowed in relatively recent times from tribes living in Angola. The tubular shaped bones are used to manufacture a secret weapon. Medicine men clandestinely remove the front part of the cranium of a child as well as certain extremities for their concoctions. Such medicines are given to those who have killed enemies in battle. By using a horn filled with such medicine one hopes to confuse the enemy and kill them in flight (Förg op. cit.: 62).

MOURNING

Silence is maintained on the way to and at the grave. On the return journey to the village a ritual wailing, nonkali, begins, and continues through the mourning period. Neighbors who hear the wailing set out for the village of the deceased. At the entrance of the village the usual announcement of the visitor does not take place; rather the visitors enter silently, ask for the residence of the deceased, and go there as though the deceased were still alive. Then follows the usual long greeting ceremony, musingu, in which the visitors are informed of the death. A member of the family is sent to the more distant relatives with the news. When a group of relatives approaches the village, the approaching women begin to weep and are answered by a woman who has been assigned that duty.

The duration of mourning varies according to the social standing of the deceased.

Wailing is taken up from time to time, even at night. Children are mourned for about three days, while a tribal chief is mourned for one month. If someone dies away from home, the mourning takes place in his own village.

When everyone has returned to the village after a burial, the fires of all the households are extinguished. The widowed spouse is given water with which to moisten his or her mouth. In the evening an elder of the group starts a new fire by twirling fire sticks. According to the social standing of the deceased, one or more oxen are slaughtered to prepare a meal for the visitors. The heart and lungs of one of the beasts are given to a grandchild while the spouse receives the haunch.

The principal dish during the mourning period is the usual millet gruel. During the mourning period, however, the mourners abstain from alcohol. The women and girls, except for the widow, prepare the meals, while the men and boys gather the firewood. Men and women eat separately as they do normally. The equipment and utensils of the deceased are not used in the preparation of the food. The widow and those who were actively involved with the preparation of the corpse and the burial do not eat with the rest, but eat at one side of the group with their meal served to them on pieces of broken calabash. Children and nursing women also eat apart from the guests.

As a sign of her sorrow the widow must not show too eager an appetite lest she be thought guilty of the death of her husband. During this time no one dares accuse
a sorcerer, and those present show no sign of the fact that they might eventually be suspects.

All work other than that involved in the preparation of food is forbidden. The women who pound the grain do it so carelessly that part of it falls over the edge of the mortar onto the ground. The grain thus lost is said to be in memory of the deceased. Sexual relations are taboo until after the mourning period. Dancing is forbidden. Sometimes men play instruments in a solemn fashion to accompany the voices of the mourners. If someone plays too loudly, however, he is asked to soften it, since it is feared that he will draw other people into death. If someone persists in playing loudly, he is compelled to continue playing all night to signify that he will have to play for eternity since he has come into contact with death.

The mourning period is terminated by sweeping away the ashes of the fires that were extinguished on the night of the death. These ashes and the remaining unburnt logs are taken, by an appointed person, outside of the village on the west side. This person, go kulya mutwe, is the one who during the lifetime of the deceased received the heads of the latter's slaughtered cattle. It is also this person's responsibility to bury the worn out clothes and unusable objects of the dead in a pile by the river.

If the surviving spouse is a man, his hair is either shorn completely or shaved in a type of tonsure. If a widow is left, her usual head ornament, yihihiti, is removed. Her clothes, except for her leather apron and some jewels (beads, etc.), are set aside as a sign of grieving. The same is done for children (Förg op. cit.: 63–65).

If the sleeping hut of a deceased villager is to be used after his death, the mat walls are pierced with a stick in a spot about 1/2m. above the ground so that the "breath" of the dead can escape. If several people die in a village in a short period, or if someone is ill for a very long time, the village will be relocated for fear of sorcery, either after the period of mourning or after the harvest.

THE CLEANSING CEREMONIES

*Editayiko*, one type of cleansing ceremony, takes place 3 to 8 days after the death of an ordinary villager. For chiefs the interval before the ceremony is longer. The following people and objects must be cleansed: the surviving spouse; the children of the deceased; those who helped with the preparation, transport, and burial of the corpse; the opening to the village through which the body was carried; the door posts of the deceased's sleeping hut; the tools used to dig the grave; the utensils of the deceased — his tobacco pipe, his hemp pipe, *sinkuli*, if he had one, his bed, and other personal objects. An ox is killed as an offering to commence the ritual. The heart and lungs are placed in a wooden container, *karonga*, and the above objects and people are sprinkled with the blood that collects in it. People are usually sprinkled on their hands and feet and often over the whole body. Fat is taken from the stomach of the ox and neck and arm bands are made of it. Men wear these on the right wrist, women around their neck, and children on both wrists. The widow or widower throws a coal toward the setting sun to remove all bad luck associated
with the death. Three days after this ceremony the fat strips are removed and roasted. The roasted fat is placed in a mortar and pounded with red pigment. The paste thus obtained is used for another cleansing ceremony (described below). If someone dies away from his village and is buried by the village head who belongs to a different lineage, a messenger will notify the family of the deceased. The family usually then sends an ox so that the village head and his family may be cleansed. In case the family cannot be identified, the tribal chief is consulted.

If a small child dies, the parents cleanse each other and sacrifice a chicken. Before this ceremony, children of the village must not eat with the bereaved parents and the couple must live frugally. After the loss of a premature child, the parents of the mother must cleanse her husband.

At some time in the days following the editayiko rites the relatives of the deceased go with the widowed spouse and a nganga into the woods for another cleansing rite. In this it is the responsibility of the nganga (doctor) to cut down a tree so that it falls close to the widow or widower, thus blowing away the spirit of the dead with the wind generated by the fall. If this is not done, the spouse will continue to mourn the deceased and a future mate will be drawn into the domain of the dead. Once back in the village, one pounds some mupako-tree bark into powder to be used in a rite which takes place late in the afternoon of the same day. For this rite everyone goes with a nganga to the river bank, carrying the mupako powder in a calabash. At the river bank two holes are dug in the earth and the surviving spouse must stand in them. The nganga makes small incisions in the legs of the bereaved spouse until blood has dropped into the holes in which he or she is standing. The nganga then rubs the mupako powder into the wounds. If the one treated has survived a second spouse, the number of incisions will be greater. This rite is performed to keep the person's legs from later swelling up. The river washes away the contamination in the drawn blood. In the case of a widow, her breech cloth is removed and given to her mother to prevent future infertility and she is dressed in a new cloth. The nganga then takes the calabash in which the mupako meal was kept, places it on the head of the widow or widower, and breaks it into pieces with his hands. On the path back to the village the patient must not turn back toward the river.

A woman who has had a miscarriage must undergo similar rites, both in the woods and on the river bank. After the second rite the nganga starts a fire into which runkwana-bush leaves are thrown. The woman must stand over this fire with her legs spread apart to prevent further miscarriages.

A widow mourns her husband for approximately one year, during which time she usually lives in her husband's village or that of his parents. The ekokoto rites performed at the end of the mourning period are intended to make it safe for the widow once again to resume normal social relations. Her hair is braided into a new hairdo and her entire body is rubbed with the ox fat-red pigment mixture described above. The ekokoto ceremony is the responsibility of the deceased husband's family. It is accompanied by singing, marunkalinkali, and by cries of joy from the women present.
After the cleansing ceremonies described above, the relatives of the deceased have a celebration at which beer may once again be drunk. Many people from other villages are invited. In the morning they go to the gravesite and a family member sprinkles it with beer, *murovu*, saying, “Give us life, cause the grain to grow, you who have gone to Karunga.” All then return to the village, lamenting the dead with *malirankali* wailing. In the village, singing and dancing of the *epera* dance take place. Some of the verses of these songs are in old RuMbundza and refer to the sorcerer who is guilty for the death. The festivities must end before sundown.

In the practice of “driving out the dead” the widow or widower must have sexual intercourse with a member of the deceased spouse’s clan. Apparently this takes place only if the widow is not ready to marry her husband’s brother or maternal cousin, or the widower, his wife’s sister or cousin; i.e., if the practice of levirate or sororate does not take place. Either the family of the deceased or the surviving spouse chooses his or her partner for this ritual act. The two must remain in a hut together for the first night and food is brought to them. After the second night the two decide whether or not to marry. If the woman decides that the marriage will not take place, then she is free to marry another man; if the man decides that they will not marry, then he must give her a gift, e.g., an ox or an ostrich egg shell necklace. They indicate their decision either by sitting close together on a mat outside the hut if they plan to marry, or on opposite ends of the mat if they do not wish to marry (Förg op. cit.: 64–68).

**Politics and Law**

**CHIEFTAINSHIP**

The chief or chieftainess is considered a demi-god, for he or she serves as the intermediary through whom appeals are made to the royal ancestors and to Karunga, the high god. The chief attempts to maintain a good relationship with the other world in order to ensure rain, fertility of the land and its inhabitants, success in hunting and fishing, and safety and booty in war. A despotic or weak chief is thought to jeopardize the welfare of the people, and in the past the chief was sometimes murdered for these faults. Formerly also intrigue among rival members of the royal clan sometimes led to murder of the chief by poisoning his beer or food. To show his strength a new chief, upon succeeding to power, would kill an ox and one of his subjects during a special dance, *kambembe*. It is said that formerly a chief was not buried alone, but that his close attendants, body guards, messengers, and advisers followed him to the grave. If great misfortune struck the royal family, a sorcerer was sought as the guilty party (Förg op. cit.: 51).
CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

Formerly persons accused [sic] of sorcery were without exception condemned to death. It was the duty of both the chief and the relatives of the sorcerer to punish him or her. Often one accused of sorcery would flee or be relocated by relatives in another areas. When caught, the condemned one might be poisoned or bound and thrown into the river at a spot near the Bunja mission called Place of the Sorcerers. In still another form of execution, the accused was taken into the woods, beaten half to death, and burned in a hut (Förg op. cit.: 52).

Murder was expiated by blood vengeance. If one guilty of murder managed to escape, the chief would enlist the aid of the neighboring tribal chiefs to catch him. If this failed, the chief would seize members of the murderer’s family as slaves for himself and for the family of the victim. However, a murderer who returned and was able to reach the royal village before being caught and clasped the legs of the chief or his milk calabash would be spared. If the victim’s family did not insist upon an execution, then compensation would be arranged in the form of cattle and other objects of value. Finally an ox was slaughtered and the blood used to cleanse the murderer and his family.

There was no punishment for accidental killing. Incest was usually not punishable by death, but the guilty man was severely chastised and chased off. If a man caught his wife in the act of adultery, he could kill her on the spot. Sometimes theft was punished by death. The relatives of the thief were notified and often gave their approval when it concerned an inveterate thief.

Prisoners of war were kept as slaves. (Förg op. cit.: 52).

Religion and Magic

SPIRITUAL BEINGS

The Mbudza believe that Karunga, the Supreme Being, is responsible for death in general. Only in very few cases, however, is Karunga directly blamed for an individual’s death. For example, if someone is in full possession of his faculties just before his death, a sorcerer will be sought out as the cause of the death, but if someone who is crippled or who is aged and helpless dies, then it is said that Karunga took him or that he died a natural death. If someone dies a slow death, however, Karunga is symbolically given the blame, e.g., as in the expression, “Karunga tortures him,” but in fact a sorcerer is thought to be the guilty party.

Ancestral spirits, wadimu, are believed to cause illness but not death. Offerings are made to appease these spirits when someone falls ill, but should an illness become more serious, then it is blamed on a sorcerer (Förg op. cit.: 50).
OMENS AND TABOOS

Taboos proper are called *yidira*. *Yidira* encompass certain codes of behavior as well as avoidance related to actions, people or objects. These taboos include a large category of actions which imitate practices associated with sickness and death. Strong taboos are imposed upon people who have come into contact with the dead and have not yet undergone a cleansing ceremony.

Bad luck. *Marwa*, an inexplicable occurrence, is a kind of omen that signifies but does not cause bad luck (Kampungu 1965: 121). Bad luck may be caused by cursing. If one curses a member of his own family, it is taken as a reprimand or reminder, but if one curses someone not belonging to his kinship group, it may bring serious bad luck or even death (Förg op. cit.: 44–45).

*Siyova* is an unusual event which is usually a bad omen but can in certain cases be a good sign. *Siyova* is both the indicator and cause of some kind of serious bad luck. Often an animal is the conveyor of this type of bad luck.

*Tama* is a category of antisocial acts such as sexual trespasses which can bring about the death of the trespasser’s absent spouse, usually through an attack by a wild animal.

*Mponde* is a condition of uncleanliness brought about through spilling blood. It includes the murder of fellow tribesmen and the killing of clawed animals such as lions, leopards, hyenas, and dogs. Sexual relations with a woman during menstruation also brings about this state of uncleanliness. One who is ritually unclean must be cleansed before he may resume normal social relations, otherwise he may infect others with illness or misfortune (Förg op. cit.: 48).

WITCHCRAFT AND SORCERY

Sorcerers, *varodi*, are thought to be the principal causes of death. They are usually depicted as grey-headed or older people. People who have suddenly grown thin are suspected. The spirit of a sorcerer can leave his body and exercise its power far afield. A sorcerer’s motives for killing are principally hate, jealousy, and envy over someone else’s good fortune. Their victims become their helpers in the form of evil spirits, *undumba*. These spirits live in the dunes close to settlements. They eat unnoticed from the plates of inhabitants, secretly take grain from their containers, and can kill people if ordered to do so by a sorcerer. If someone hears his name called at night, an animal noise, or a human voice and no one else hears it, then he fears bad luck or death through sorcery and must go to a *nganga*, medicine man, for treatment. Sometimes sorcerers poison their victims. It is said that at night, singly or in groups, sorcerers dance a secret nude dance called *nzongo* if they are plotting to kill people. Other dances are performed to cure people from sorcery (Förg op. cit.: 49–50).

When someone had died, the sorcerer guilty for the death is sought out magically. Two methods are used. The first is called “consulting the body,” *sintali/mu-
emba, and takes place before burial. For this one cuts two strong branches, sharpens one end of them and ties them together with twigs and bast fiber from the mugoro tree or cattle tendons, to make a sort of litter or bier. On this the body is laid. All those present are lined up and the litter with the body is carried on the shoulders of several men. The body is then addressed the question, "Tell us who killed you. If it was Karunga, tell us, but if it was a sorcerer, show him to us." If the body remains immobile it means Karunga is directly responsible for the death. If a sorcerer is responsible for the death, the body will "lead" the bearers to him among the others present and the sharpened ends of the bier will stab him. In both cases the body is then asked where it would like to be buried, in the cattle corral or in the open fields. When the bearers arrive at the desired place, the body "pulls" the litter downward and the bearers stop. The grave is dug there.

Consulting an oracle is the second principal way of exposing sorcerers. It takes place after the burial and the mourning period. The deceased's family takes an ox to a nganga (medicine man) and petitions the nganga to consult the oracle, kuzanekeka katemba, concerning the guilty sorcerer. (The nature of the oracle is not stated.) If the nganga gives the name of the sorcerer, this person is sought out and will have to undergo trial by ordeal, usually by poison. Often other members of the tribe will drink from the poison first and vomit it up to prove the trial is fair, since no one but the sorcerer will be affected by the poison. The accused sorcerer is then made to drink the poison, and if he does not vomit, he usually confesses before he dies. If he does vomit the poison, however, he has thereby proved his innocence and a deadly enmity is established between the family of the victim and that of the accused (Förg op. cit.: 56).

A nganga (medicine man) has both powers of divination and curative powers, and it is to him that members of the tribe go for help from sorcery or to be cleansed of ritual impurity (Förg op. cit.: 54).
IV

THE SAMBYU

CECILIA R. McGURK
Introduction

Most of the information presented here is derived from a single source, a doctoral dissertation entitled Die Shambiu van die Okavango by Johannes Ledewiens Bosch, submitted in 1964 to the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa. Bosch’s study is based upon fieldwork that he carried out in April to December 1961 and upon published and unpublished documents that were available to him. As Bosch’s dissertation includes a detailed table of contents, it has not been thought necessary to provide page references here for information derived from it. Only information obtained from other sources is referenced in this chapter.

History

TRADITIONAL HISTORY

According to their oral traditions, the Sambyu were originally hunters and gatherers living in the vicinity of the Mashi (Kwandu) River in southwestern Zambia. Their ancient chief Kapinga, his brother Nyumba, and his sister Mushinga lived in the Mashi area. Mushinga’s husband, Mpote, a renowned hunter, went out one day with some other hunters to track elephants, following them as far as the banks of the Okavango which they found uninhabited. They continued no farther, but broke off two long reeds (indicative of a well-watered valley) which they carried home to show the chief. Kapinga was favorably impressed by the news and soon set out for the Okavango with his people. The trip was a long one, for the children and livestock could not travel rapidly. When they reached the Okavango they explored westward along the river until they met the chief of the Mbundza people in the vicinity of Mupini on the south bank of the river. Their reception by the Mbundza was friendly, and from these people the Sambyu “bought” a valley in which they settled and where they lived chiefly on fish and game. According to some informants, the Sambyu at this period lived along a tributary watercourse.

The Sambyu apparently remained in the Mupini area for some time, but eventually, after being insulted by the chief of the Mbundza, moved eastward to the site of present day Uvungu-vungu, also on the south bank. Although Chief Kapinga and his people had brought seed grain and stock with them from the Mashi area, at Uvungu-vungu they lived solely by hunting, fishing, and gathering. All informants agree that, except for Bushmen who roamed along the river as well as in the arid country away from it, the Sambyu were at the time the only inhabitants in this region along the Okavango which they still occupy.

After the death of Kapinga, his brother Nyumba became chief; Nyumba is remembered as the one who ordered his tribe to plant grain. After a reign of two years, Nyumba was succeeded by his sister, Mushinga, who is considered to have ruled well for many years until her death, though she became blind. Mushinga moved the royal residence from Uvungu-vungu to Gove on the south bank.
Mushinga was succeeded by her daughter, Kandimba, who ruled for many years during the latter part of the 19th century, and was as popular as her mother. During Kandimba's reign the Sambyu people abandoned the south bank of the Okavango River and occupied only the Angolan side.

Under Kandimba the Sambyu expanded and became strong. When Lewanika, the Lozi chief, was beaten in a rebellion in 1884, he fled to Kanyetu, the younger of Kandimba's sons, for help. With Kanyetu's assistance Lewanika regained his throne and in gratitude gave Kanyetu part of Uruiy, a region thought to lie on the border between Zambia and Angola. Kanyetu remained at Uruiy only a couple of years before he returned to his home at Shiyana. Later he moved to the island of Malio in the Cuito River.

Nyangana, chief of the neighboring Gciriku, feared the emerging power of the Sambyu and enlisted the help of Sekgoma (chief of the Tawana 1891–1906) to fight Kanyetu. War between the Gciriku and the Sambyu broke out around 1890 and lasted a couple of years. Kanyetu was defeated and presumably drowned himself.

During this period also there were conflicts with the Mbundza and the Kwangari. In addition, the Kololo, under both Sebetwane and Sekeletu, spread terror by their plundering throughout the lower Okavango region. These years saw the dispersal of the Sambyu, some of whom fled as far as the Zambesi.

Chief Kandimba was succeeded by her eldest son Mbambangandu I (Shinguruve) who, along with his children and his sisters and their children, took up residence at Mangarara.

RECORDED HISTORY

Paiva Couceiro (1892: 147) reports that the Sambyu lands extended for a distance of 48 km. along the Okavango. The villages named by him as terminal are located at about 19°56' E and 20°18' E. His meeting with Chief Mbambangandu was peaceful and there was an exchange of gifts. A majority of the inhabitants of the chief's village, says Paiva Couceiro, consisted of his more than 40 wives.

In 1903 the Sambyu fled from the Okavango in fear of reprisals for their part in the massacre of some of a party of Boers and the capture of a young Boer girl. The Sambyu removed to the Lumuna River where the chief, Mbambangandu I, and his successor, Sharunguro, both eventually died.

In 1909 Almeida found the Sambyu region occupied though the inhabitants of the chief's village fled at the approach of the Portuguese (Almeida 1912: 195). Seiner in 1911 found the right bank of the Okavango River in Sambyu territory abandoned (Seiner 1913: map, section C, note). By 1916 chief Ndango and some of his people had returned to settle on the right bank, according to Bosch. In 1922 the Native Administrator of Ovamboland, Major C. H. L. Hahn, called the Sambyu together to announce that all slaves were to be freed, and the chief thereupon emancipated a few dozen people.
Chief Ngango died in 1924 and the administration rejected the senior successor, choosing instead a younger nephew of the deceased chief, Mbambangandu II, on the grounds that he had been resident in the area a longer time. In 1939, when Mbambangandu II had become blind, he was replaced by Mwengere, a woman.

In recent times the Sambyu have occupied many small villages along both banks of the Okavango. On the south side, in Namibia, Bosch found an elderly informant who could name 24 village heads who lived between Rundu and Mashare in the period 1920 to 1930. In 1961 he determined that 60 percent of the Sambyu village heads on the south bank were born in Angola, indicating the relatively recent establishment of many of the villages and a high rate of migration.

Economy

Subsistence

The system of land ownership

The village chief “owns” all the land around the village, but he receives no payment of any kind for the use of this land. Anyone is entitled to take as much land as can be cultivated and whatever unoccupied plot he wishes. In a dispute over land, however, the chief is always called upon to settle the matter. Every adult male and female cultivates his or her own fields. Within a household there is no communal land. The boundaries between individual fields, as well as between the lands used by two villages, is demarcated with fences or strips of uncultivated land.

Agricultural activity

Twelve months are distinguished by the Sambyu; most month names refer to economic activities appropriate to the season.

New land is cleared between harvest and the beginning of the planting season. Underbrush is burnt or cut out. Large trees are usually left standing, but when they are removed, it is done by building a fire around the trunk. The remaining stump is usually left in place.

Formerly a sort of hoe-pick (litemo) was the only tool used to work the land. Today modern implements (chiefly one-bladed plows acquired from trading stores) are commonly used, except on the north bank of the river where it is said the litemo is still widely used.

If the land is sandy, manure is first worked into the earth before sowing. After the first heavy rain of the season the land is tilled with an ox-drawn plow and the seed is sown. Formerly the sowing took place after the appearance of the first shidire (a type of hawk) of the new rainy season. Maize is the first crop to be
planted. The sower, who is customarily the wife of the plowman, follows the plow at a little distance. Sorghum and millet are planted about a month later, usually in December. The crops are weeded a few times until they are large and healthy.

Considerable damage is done to the crops during the growing season by elephants, and noise-makers made of scrap metal are erected around and in the fields to scare them off. Scaffolds also are built in the fields, upon which watch huts are constructed. When elephants are sighted, they are chased away with torches and noise.

Everyone helps with the harvest. The harvest of maize is called *kupakura*, and those of millet and sorghum are *kutyora*. Work parties from other villages are often called in to help with the harvest and are recompensed with beer and frequently with meat. Bushmen are also employed, not only as seasonal workers, but also as permanent help to watch the animals, etc. They are given modest wages or paid in kind.

The heads or ears of grain are transported in high-sided sleds drawn by oxen and are stored in temporary structures in the village. If the village is far from the fields, grain is placed in simple frame structures erected in the fields where the heads are collected before being transported to the village. The storage structures, which sometimes have a floor, are built on a framework approximately 30 to 60 cm. high, made of mats, reeds, and stalks. Thorny branches are placed on top of the grain.

A hard floor of clay, about 1.5 m. in diameter, is prepared near the storage bins for threshing millet and sorghum. The threshers, male and female, take their places in a circle around the grain which is lying in a pile on the floor. Sticks are used to beat the heads until the grain separates. Threshing continues for several weeks. The workers do not sing as they thresh, but the word “puma” is chanted in time with the striking of the sticks. Winnowing must wait for the wind, which normally comes up at this season and is used to blow the chaff away. Maize is husked as it is needed.

Nothing is done to protect the grain from precipitation before it has been threshed and put away. The threshed grain is stored in baskets in storage huts outside the village. The baskets of grain are elevated on frames above the ground to prevent extensive insect damage. Every man and woman has his own storage hut and sometimes these are used for storing tools as well. The storage huts are built beyond the village limits so that the food supply will be spared in the event of fires, which often destroy whole villages.

In a family, the woman’s stores are used first, then the man’s. If a man has more than one wife, he must eat food prepared from the stores of each wife.

Seed is sometimes set aside from the best plants and separately threshed for future sowing, but this preferential treatment is not often encountered. The seed for sowing is stored in gourds or pitchers.

Vegetable gardens are protected by fences made of branches. Pumpkins, peanuts, beans, potatoes, gourds, watermelons, and a native melon (? *Citrullus vulgaris*) are planted in these gardens which are often sown on the sites where the underbrush from the fields has been burned. Gourd noise makers are placed in the garden to scare away francolins that damage the crops. Tobacco is planted under a tree or
around an anthill. It is dried in place and ground up to make snuff or rolled together in a ball, for keeping.

There is a slack period of a month or two between September and November during which farmers need not concern themselves with farming. The river at this time is low and reeds are easily gathered, and the period is used for weaving mats and fabricating or mending other articles.

DOMESTIC ANIMALS

Until the Sambyu moved to their present territory they had few cattle, for they lived in tsetse fly country. Today every village has a cattle pen, and cattle, which are individually named, play an important role in Sambyu rituals and ceremonies. The Sambyu cattle are of a mixed breed, predominantly the Sanga type. They are quite resistant of hoof and mouth disease which is prevalent in this area. Cattle are seldom slaughtered exclusively for their meat but are widely used for their milk. The cows are milked only in the evening; this is the chore of the men and children of the village. Formerly a bovine was slaughtered by thrusting and assegai through its heart; nowadays it is beheaded with an ax.

Grazing land is almost exhausted in this area and efforts have been made on the S.W.A. side of the Okavango River to encourage the herders to settle inland along the omurambas where there is abundant pasture land. When the crops are in the fields, the children are put in charge of watching the cattle. At other times the cattle are allowed to roam freely, except in the evenings when they are herded into the pen. They feed chiefly in the morasses along the river, and as a result the supply of reeds used for weaving mats is often significantly diminished.

Formerly the cattle were used for riding but not as draught animals; today they are used for pulling plows and sledges. Cattle are often borrowed among villagers, a practice called kushiteka. As payment for taking care of a borrowed cow, the borrower may use the milk it gives. If he takes exceptionally good care of it, he may receive a calf or two from the owner of the animal. If the cow dies while in the borrower’s care, the skin, horns, and meat, if possible, are sent to the owner; otherwise, the owner is reimbursed for the original price of the animal.

A menstruating woman may not enter the cattle pen for fear of polluting the animals.

Goats are said not to be native to the Sambyu, but to have come to them from the Tawana. They are chiefly used for meat and are not milked. They are kept in a separate enclosure.

Horses and donkeys are not common among the Sambyu. Though few horses survive, they are highly desired as a prestige item. Donkeys were first introduced in 1950.

Pigs were introduced by the whites. They are either allowed to run loose in the village or are kept in a pen outside the village.

Chickens live in little huts or “tents” of tree bark, built especially for them.
They are often slain sacrificially and their meat is eaten, but their eggs are not a very popular food.

Dogs and cats are plentiful in the villages, but their meat is not eaten.

HUNTING AND FISHING

Several of the former chiefs had the reputation of being great hunters and under their leadership the Sambyu subsisted primarily on wild game. The rituals which today take place in connection with this activity point to its importance in the past. Drives are organized only for small animals.

Elephants are taken with deadfalls, with iron spikes set in the ground to injure their feet, and in camouflaged pits.

Before and after the hunt there is a special ritual in which all participate, the purpose of which is to avert mana, a hostile invisible power.

Formerly fish were caught with a poison that paralyzed them (this is now outlawed by the government in Namibia). Men fish with knotted nets, mats used as nets, bows and arrows, spears, hand lines, and traps. Women make weirs in the shallow water among the reeds, leaving openings through which the fish swim to be caught. Women also use large funnel-shaped basket traps for fishing.

FOOD AND DRINK

The most common Sambyu meal consists of porridge with side dishes of relish. Porridge and the relish are eaten together, followed by porridge and sour milk. In the past it was believed that milk could not be drunk until after one had eaten meat, but this taboo is no longer observed. Great quantities of snacks are prepared in addition to this for consumption at any time of day.

The porridge is briefly cooked, very thick, and is made of millet, sorghum, or maize meal. Millet porridge is the most popular. Sometimes a porridge is made from the roots of a wild plant called muñika (said to be much like the castor-oil bush). Rumbororo, a thin millet porridge, is fed to infants.

Side dishes of various foods are usually served cooked. The woman formerly ate her portion out of a small clay pot while the man ate his out of the cooking pot. Meat is considered the most desirable side dish and it is always cooked. Only the hide is not eaten. Large fish are cooked after the entrails have been removed, while small fish are cooked whole. The heads and particularly the eyes are considered great delicacies. Beans, peanuts, mushrooms, pumpkins, honey, wild onions, and a number of native fruits and vegetables are also eaten as side dishes, as well as grasshoppers, bullfrogs, and a type of caterpillar which can be dried and stored for a year.

Fresh milk is consumed only by children; otherwise milk is allowed to sour in pots or gourds. Sour milk and buttermilk are served with the meal, and buttermilk
diluted with water is drunk by adults after a meal. Butter is made and stored for later use. Cream is skimmed off whole milk and boiled; the butter fat that rises is used in cooking and as a cosmetic.

The Sambyu also prepare a number of foods that can be eaten anytime of the day. Green beans, baked peanuts, water lily bulbs, swamp grass, spiny cucumbers, small gourds, maize, potatoes, eggs, watermelon, honey, and a variety of native fruits and vegetables are all eaten as snacks. Children occasionally roast mice and crabs as snacks. Generally the foods eaten as snacks are different from those used in side dishes, or are prepared differently. (Bosch describes the preparation of dishes in considerable detail.)

Salt is obtained from deposits nearby, or, more commonly today, is purchased at a store. Salty water, obtained by pouring water over the ashes of millet and maize stalks, is sometimes substituted when dried salt is unavailable.

Shikundo is a light beer made from millet and sorghum which have been allowed to sprout and then are ground separately. The sorghum meal is mixed with water, the millet meal is added, and the mixture is set aside to ferment. Sugar can be added to make a stronger drink. Shikundo beer is drunk during the day before the main meal or at night in place of a second meal. Another kind of beer was formerly brewed from dried peas purchased from trading stores, but its sale is not outlawed by the government.

Kashipembe, a liquor distilled from “bushman apples” (maguni) by the Mbundu, formerly was obtained from them by the Sambyu. In recent times alcoholic beverages have been available in traders’ stores on the north side of the river.

MATERIAL CULTURE

According to Bosch, the architecture and the arrangement of the Sambyu village exemplify the complete metamorphosis that the traditional Sambyu patterns have undergone in the past fifty years. He points out that the present style of building among the Sambyu and a large part of their material culture have all been significantly influenced by the Nyemba and other neighboring peoples. The Mbundu (Mbal?) traders, bringing wares obtained from the whites and from other African peoples, have also been instrumental in the introduction of new articles and styles. In spite of the close contact the Sambyu have had with peoples among whom there are craftsmen skilled in wood and metal work, the Sambyu have not themselves

1 As Bosch uses the names Vimbali and Shimbundu interchangeably for these traders, one is not sure whether he is referring to the Ovimbundu who inhabit the highlands of central Angola or to the Mbal who have been identified by Estermann as “acculturated, detribalized Africans, speaking a language derived chiefly from Kimbundu, and living near white settlements such as Mossamedes, Porto Alexandre, Humpata, and along the railroad from Mossamedes to Lubango (Sa da Bandeira)” (Estermann 1939: 74–86). For this reason they are referred to here as Mbundu (Mbal?).
developed many artisans; three-fourths of the craftsmen living in the Sambyu territory are members of other tribes.

VILLAGE ARRANGEMENT

A village may be built anywhere without permission from the Sambyu chief. Formerly only a member of the royal lineage could found a village. The basic, firmly established village plan requires that the cattle pen be always built on the western side, with the village head’s group of huts next to it. Such a placement of the pen enables the east wind to blow its dust away from the village. Nowadays the entire village is surrounded by a fence of thick poles of mahangu (millet) stalks, and similar palings enclose each lipata or group of houses belonging to one household. Formerly there was a fence only around the pen and none around the village. A stranger may never enter by the side gate of a village but must stand outside the main gate and call until someone comes out to meet him.

A lipata consists of a sleeping hut, a cooking hut, and a rest house. The sleeping hut is built first and then the other structures are added according to need. Often a man will have his own rest house. If his is a polygynous marriage, however, he may also have a separate hut for his belongings; if not, then he will sleep in the main hut with his wife. There is a common sleeping house in the village for children, a rest house for strangers, as well as a sleeping hut, a cook house, and a rest house for each household. A visitor who is a complete stranger stays in the visitor’s rest house and eats alone. One who is an acquaintance sleeps in one of the cookhouses, or if a friend or relative, stays in the huts with the villagers themselves.

CONSTRUCTION OF HUTS

There are two types of huts today, circular and rectangular. The rectangular house varies in plan from approximately 3 m. x 3 m. to 5 m. x 8 m. and is usually divided into three or four rooms. The walls are built between forked posts set into the ground and rising to a height of from 1.5 to 2 m. In a rectangular hut the wall posts stand at the corners and at the center of the longer walls. Stringers are laid across the forks at the tops of these stakes. The ridge pole of the sloping roof is supported by taller forked posts set inside the hut. Rafters run from the ridge pole to the outlying horizontal beams, with their forked ends projecting at the edge, and are tied in place with bast.

The round hut has an average diameter of approximately 4 m. The frame for the conical roofs is usually made on the ground and is set on top of the circular wall after it is completed.

Grass, either tied in bundles or loose, is used to thatch the roofs of both types of houses. Canes are placed across each layer of grass and then covered with more grass. The thatch of the rectangular hut is allowed to project up to form a comb on
Fig. 3. The Sambyu royal village (*mbara*). (Redrawn from Bosch 1964: 88.)

Key to the Sketch of the Royal Village (*Mbara*)
(The royal village under Mwengere, at the time of Bosch's study, had a population of 46, with 19 belonging to the royal sib.)

1. Sleeping house of the chief and her husband. This house is situated in a separate section of the village, but the chief's other huts are outside this enclosure.

2. and 3. Chief's resthouses.

4. Chief's cookhouse, which is actually used for storage.

5. Chief's husband's resthouse.

6. Sleeping and cooking houses of the son of the chief's younger brother.

7a, 7b, 7c. Resting house, sleeping house, and cooking house of the chief's daughter; these structures are not separated from the sleeping and cooking huts of the daughter of the chief's older sister.

8a, 8b. Sleeping and cooking huts of the daughter of the chief's eldest son.

9a, 9b, 9c. Sleeping, resting, and cooking huts of the chief's eldest son.

10. Huts of the son of one of the chief's younger sisters.

11. Huts of the son of the former chief, Mambangandu.

12a, 12b, 12c, 12d. Huts of a member of the chief's father's matrilineage.

13. Hut of a member of the chief's husband's matrilineage.

14. Living area of the chief's daughter and her husband and children.

15. Goat and calf pen.

16. Cattle pen.

17 and 18. Dove and chicken coops.

19 and 20. Storage huts.


The village covers an area of approximately 30m. x 15m., and is encircled by a fence made of sturdy posts, as is each separate section of the village. The cattle pen and garden are encircled by fences of cut thorn tree branches laid on the ground.
top, while the grass of the round hut’s roof is bound into a sharp point at the summit.

On the inside the walls are plastered with mud, and occasionally the outsides are also plastered, but usually the structural framework is visible from the outside. The rest house is a shelter made like a circular hut but with no side walls.

An older style of Sambyu house was rectangular and elongated, and differed from more modern houses principally in its construction, being made of branches set vertically in two parallel rows and bent together at the tops where they were secured with palm fiber cordage. This framework was then covered with mats: five on the long sides and one on each end. The interior was partitioned off with small mats; one side was used for sleeping, the other side for storage. On the storage side a stick with several forks in it was planted in the ground, and baskets, pots, etc., were hung on it. Food was also stored on this side. On the sleeping side beds were built on posts, up to a man high, topped by transverse poles. Palm leaves were woven through the transverse poles and the sleeping mat placed on top.

HOUSEHOLD ARTICLES

When a Sambyu woman marries, she is expected to bring three baskets and a woven beer sieve to commence domestic life. New mats and large storage baskets are made by the husband. Men also make cooking pots, though only a few Sambyu men are skilled in this work and generally obtain clay vessels from the Nyemba. Nowadays cooking is done mainly in three-legged cast iron pots purchased at trading stores.

The usual Sambyu basket is circular and made of grass or palm leaves by the coiling technique. The rim may be finished off with twisted cordage to give it strength. The Sambyu also weave flat platters used in winnowing grain. Three sizes of mats are made from reeds that have been cut open and pounded flat. Storage tanks are formed from woven mats set on edge, bent into a circle, and then covered with clay.

Special craftsmen fashion many kinds of household articles from wood. From whole sections of tree trunk they carve pails of various sizes, small ones for carrying beer to the fields and large ones reinforced with hides for storing beer at home. From tree trunks they also carve mortars in which grain is pounded to meal. The mortars and pestles are often decorated with incised designs. Spoons and dishes are also carved from wood, and the latter also are often decorated.

FARMING IMPLEMENTS

The Sambyu hoe-pick (litemo) is long-handled and consists of a pole with a knob at the lower end into which the iron blade is hammered. Iron for hoes is generally obtained from the Nyemba, though it is said that the Sambyu themselves once were
proficient in smelting iron ore. Nowadays axe and adze blades are usually made from old automobile springs.

HUNTING WEAPONS

The weapons principally used for hunting before the gun was introduced were the assegai and the bow and arrow, and these weapons are still found in use. The assegai is about 1.5 m. long and has a metal point. Arrows are named according to the shapes of their points. The shaft of an arrow is about 1 m. long; it is feathered on one end, and a metal or wooden point is fastened on the other end with sinew. Different kinds of points are used for different kinds of game. Axes, walking sticks, and knives are also used in hunting. Sheathed knives are obtained principally from the Nyemba. Guns, originally introduced by the Mbundu (Mbala?) traders, are said at one time to have been manufactured by the Sambyu themselves.

CANOES

Wooden canoes are fashioned out of whole logs by professional craftsmen. The bow and stern taper into sharp points and the bottom is flat. Green wood is used in the construction of canoes and the bow point is cut first while the tree is still standing. The tree is then felled, the stern shaped, and the interior hollowed out. The entire process of making a canoe takes place at the site where the tree is found, the craftsman living and sleeping there until the boat is completed.

When a tree is chosen to be used in making a canoe, the craftsman throws tobacco on a piece of charcoal upon which he ceremonially spits. He then makes an offering and asks the spirits to help him make a fine vessel. When the canoe is finished, a ceremony is performed to assure the safety of the person who will use it. In this rite porridge is placed upon one point of the canoe to be eaten by the grandchildren of the canoe maker.

FISHING EQUIPMENT

Fishline is two ply cordage twisted by rolling certain kinds of plant fibers on the thigh. Hooks are purchased in trading stores. Coarse cordage of palm leaf fiber is used in making fishing mats — mats used as nets.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

The Sambyu, according to Bosch, have borrowed several of their musical instruments and most of their songs from their neighbors, the Mbukushu and the Nyemba.
Drums are the only instruments used to accompany singing and dancing. They are made in various sizes by hollowing out logs; the heads are of goat skin.

The *kagrorongongo* is a rasp bow about 45 cm. long with a string made of palm fiber. To produce sound the musician takes the string between his lips and rubs a thick stick across the notched bow; occasionally he strikes the string with another stick.

The *shivumba*, a bowed trough zither, is about 65 cm. long with several strings stretched lengthwise across the hollow side. When it is played, one end is placed in a metal vessel or a gourd and a bow is drawn over the strings.

Two kinds of "thumb pianos" are in use. One with twelve keys, called the *lidumu-dumu*, was adopted from the Mbuskushu. The board, with a hole in the center, measures about 20 cm. by 8 cm. Nine long keys form the lower row and three shorter keys the upper. A bit of wax is stuck under each key to tune the instrument. A gourd or tin container is held lightly underneath the board while the keys are plucked with the thumbs. The other form of thumb piano, the *ndingo*, is played without a resonator. Bosch says it was borrowed from the Kwambi.

**CLOTHING AND ORNAMENTATION**

Traditional Sambyu dress is made of skins, principally antelope and goat. Skin clothing is rarely seen today on the S.W.A. side of the river, where it has been widely replaced by Western dress, but is still fairly common on the north side of the Okavango.

For men the traditional dress consisted simply of a loin-skin without decoration, but this has been replaced by fabric. Although this latter is still commonly worn, it is rarely seen around white centers such as mission posts.

For women the traditional dress consisted of two skin aprons, one worn in back and one in front. The skin from the hind quarters of an antelope formed the rear apron with the legs of this piece tied around the waist. The rear apron was often decorated with black and white beads. The skins have now been replaced by cloth; and other than being used occasionally on children's garments, bead ornamentation has been largely abandoned. Today the whole outfit has been widely replaced by skirts, though often a breech cloth is worn underneath the western dress. Cloth dresses are also worn, the most popular having large puffed sleeves and gathered skirts.

In addition to what has been noted above, an omnipresent garment in a woman's wardrobe is the *mwaye*, a large square shawl worn under one arm and over the opposite shoulder where it is fastened in a knot. The *mwaye* covers the entire trunk; even an infant in a sling on its mother's back is covered by the *mwaye*. Occasionally head cloths are seen, and at menarche a girl wears a piece of animal skin around her breasts.

The slings used for carrying infants were traditionally made of calf or goat skins, but now cloth is widely used. This sling is provided by the father of the child at
birth. Skins are prepared by smearing them with what remains after the ufuongo
(Sclerocarya birrea) nut is ground for its oil. The skin, coated with oil, is left
overnight and then kneaded for about a day.

Formerly shoes were made of hide, but these are no longer encountered.

Bodily adornment consists mostly of beads. There are three kinds: large black and
white beads, small black and white ones, and beads made of the shell of ostrich
eggs. Glass beads, originally supplied by the Mbundu (Mbalis?) traders, are nowa-
days purchased in stores. The large mpande ornaments (the bases of conus shells),
worn only by the royal sib, were also provided by the traders. A man’s wealth is
reckoned by the number of mpande shells his wife has, one shell being the equi-
valent of one bovine. Porcelain imitations of these shells also are popular. Cowrie
shells are sometimes worn as ornaments in the hair on thick fiber braids called
ngara. Bracelets woven of grass are worn only by children. A betrothed girl formerly
wore a notched stick in her hair to symbolize her status; nowadays she wears
copper ankle bands received from her fiancé. When she marries, she is given beads
by her husband which she wears in bands below her knees.

From childhood a girl’s hair is braided and decorated. Mugoro roots are plaited
into the hair to make many thin, shoulder length braids, and castor bean oil or fat is
smeared on the hair. The fiber braids are replaced when they show signs of wear.
The hair on the neck and forehead is shaved closely with a razor blade. Nowadays
most women wear their hair short, though wigs in the traditional style, made of tree
roots, are sometimes worn for dances.

A number of cosmetics are used by the Sambyu, rukura being the most
common. To prepare it an old uguva (Pterocarpus angolensis) tree which has been
dead for a long period of time is burned, then scraped, and the shavings are mixed
with fat. The face, hair, arms, and legs are all rubbed with this red-hued mixture.
Plain butter fat is sometimes used as a cosmetic. Mayura (the powdered bark of a
wild fig tree) is mixed with butter fat and rubbed on the face to give a brownish
tint. Beads carved from the root nodules of mudingambi (Cyperus sp.) are worn
around the neck for their fragrance. Ngwvero is a gourd containing a salve which
serves as a perfume. This salve consists of fat, rukura, and munde, a fragrant
mixture of grass and shoots of the murara (Peltophorum albircarium) tree. A
woman receives some of this mixture from her mother or mother-in-law when she
marries. When a woman carries an infant in a sling with her to the fields, she also
carries a pouch of munde to deodorize the sling, should the child relieve himself in
it. Various animal fats and vegetable oils are used as cosmetics. A distinction is
made between butter fat, kidney fat, intestinal fat, and stomach fat.

The Sambyu chip their front teeth to leave an inverted V-shaped space; this is
done for beauty.

Tattooing is not native to the Sambyu, according to Bosch, but was adopted
from the Nyemba. Tattoos are seen principally on women. The incisions are made
with a knife or a blade of grass, or sometimes a type of field bean. Tattooing can be
performed by anyone, but if it is done by a nganga, “doctor,” he will treat the
patient with a type of medicine which is believed to make her alluring to men, the
aim of the tattooing process. Sometimes an incision running from the hairline to
the tip of the nose, as well as incisions above the eyebrows and on the cheeks, are
made on a girl at puberty and rubbed with charcoal. The process is repeated when
the lines become faint.

Individual Life

EARLY LIFE

THE RITES OF BIRTH

A birth must take place outside the sleeping hut. Immediately after birth the
umbilical cord is cut, and this, along with the afterbirth, is buried at the place of
birth. The mother and child remain at this spot until the infant’s umbilical cord
drops off. The sap of an aloe plant, *tishasha nkogra*, is then dripped on the infant’s
navel to promote healing, and a piece of this plant is put in the ground at the place
where the umbilical cord was buried. The rapid growth of the aloe cutting assures
the infant’s rapid growth, and the plant serves to mark the place of birth. When the
umbilical cord has fallen off, beads are placed around the infant’s neck, arms, legs
and loins. The Sambyu say, “If you go without beads around your neck, your
parents will die, leaving you an orphan.” The beads, provided by the mother, may
be of any color, though white ones are most commonly used. As soon as a boy
learns to walk, he has the beads around his wrists, ankles, and loins removed; a girl,
on the other hand, retains all her beads.

When the umbilical cord falls off, the mother, who has been considered “unclean” up to this time, goes to the river with the child whom she carries on her
back. At the river she smears *rukura* mixed with fat on herself and the child.
Mother and child may now return to the sleeping hut where she and the infant sleep
on one side of the hut, her husband on the other. The new mother abstains from
sexual intercourse for a period of several months.

A newborn is believed to be particularly susceptible to evil powers, and it is the
responsibility of his relatives to assure that the child is protected, as soon as
possible, against these influences. Special ointments and medicinal drinks are
prepared and administered to the infant to guard against an illness called *lidongo* which
is contracted when an infant comes in contact with a non-relative who is “unclean”,
* i.e., one who has had extramarital sexual relations. Stomach cramps and vomiting
are symptoms of this illness, which is considered fatal.

On the day of the birth a symbolic “sacrifice” is made for the infant. The father
rubs fine white chalk on the infant’s chest and between his eyes to express the
father’s gratitude to his ancestors and guarantee the well-being of the infant. This
act is performed beside the sacrificial staff (a forked stick) in the resting house
(*shinyilanga*). In the absence of white chalk, charcoal may be used. The ritual is
repeated by a woman of the child’s matrilineage. Then another person spits cere-
monially upon the infant and claps his hands as a sign of gratitude. All visitors bring
the child small presents, but it is taboo for strangers to come near a newborn. After
these rites the mother tries to nurse the infant. In addition to mother’s milk, the
infant is fed a fine porridge of millet from the day of birth.

On the day a child is born a new fire is started at the place of birth by the child’s
father, grandfather, or father’s sister’s son. The fire is kindled with small sticks in
the traditional manner, and not taken from an already existing fire. Today matches
are used, for they are also considered to make “new” fires. The new fire is purely a
ritualistic fire and cannot be used for any other purpose. It is kept burning until the
umbilical cord falls off, after which it is allowed to burn itself out. No other fire
may be started from this one.

NAMES

After the umbilical cord has fallen off, a child is given a name by its father. The
child is usually named after the father’s parents, ancestors, or someone rich or
famous. In the royal family there are about seven names for each sex which are
frequently employed. These names may also be used by commoners. There is a
special relationship between a person and his namesake, and a circumscribed form
of address is spoken between them. This form of address is used by those who share
like names, though the similarity may be coincidental. The person after whom a
child is intentionally named will send the child an animal or other gift, and each
will be expected to stand by the other in need.

A man is known by his given name added to the name of his father, but the name
used most often to address a person is the nickname received from comrades during
puberty.

Special terms are used for children at different stages of development. A nursing
infant is distinguished from a child who has been weaned, but at this stage the sexes
are not distinguished. One term is used for a boy before and just after puberty and
another is applied to a fully mature young man. There are different terms for a girl
before and after puberty, and yet another is used during her first menstrual period.

THE NURSING PERIOD

After the mother is cleansed, she returns to her everyday work, carrying her
child on her back or hip. Only when she has particularly strenuous work to do will
she leave the child in the care of its older sister or with other young girls.

When a child begins to crawl, the ritual of shaving its head takes place. A feast is
prepared for all the relatives of the child’s mother and father, and this occasion
marks the resumption of sexual relations by the child’s parents. Before the cele-
bration the mother collects the father’s semen in a pot so it may be rubbed on the
child’s breast at the ceremony.
A woman should not become pregnant while she is still nursing a child, although the weaning may be accelerated if she should find herself pregnant. A child is customarily weaned at two or three years.

A Nursing infant is not "ritually important" until after the first year, or until it is able to crawl or laugh. Some informants say that if an infant should die before it is weaned, it is buried with no ceremony. Sometimes, formerly, an infant was buried with its mother if the latter died, but this apparently was not a common practice.

CHILDREN'S GAMES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

When children of both sexes are about three years old their mothers begin to instruct them in proper conduct and the forms of address which should be used in daily village contacts. The taboos and customs of the tribe are also taught. Boys are usually clothed only in a loincloth. In addition to and over this, girls wear a skirt which falls to the lower leg. Formerly girls wore two skin aprons, one in front and one in back.

The age at which a child leaves the parents' sleeping hut varies. If a boy or girl has a grandmother in the village, the child will go to live with her almost as soon as it is weaned and will receive most of its instruction from her. If there are older children in the village with their own sleeping hut, a boy will go to sleep with them when he is about five years old, while a girl will remain with her parents (?) or her grandmother) for about a year longer. Boys and girls live together in the sleeping houses until the girl's breasts begin to develop, at which stage she moves out to live separately and her grandmother begins to instruct her in sexual matters.

From about the age of six, children of both sexes are given duties to perform, but they still are allowed a generous amount of playtime. Children of both sexes play together. There are organized games with teams, and games imitating adult life. As soon as children can walk, they also begin to swim, bathe, and play in and by the river, where they learn the skills of fishing at an early age.

A boy's duties consist mostly of tending the animals and fetching water, while a girl's duties consist of watching the younger children and otherwise helping the village women. When a boy is about ten years old, the small bow he has been using is replaced by a full sized one and he is expected to begin to do a man's work. He may at this time go to work for his mother's brother. His fortitude is tested by his sleeping on coarse hides, carrying heavy objects, and rising early in the winter to face the cold river water.

PUBERTY

Every boy in the sleeping hut has a gourd full of milk and spherical tubers from which he drinks before retiring at night; this is believed to help the development of
his sexual organs. The roots are replaced after a while and the milk is examined for worms. When a worm does appear, it is taken as an indication that the boy has reached sexual maturity and is ready for marriage. Physical maturity also gives a boy the right to participate in the marriage game. However, only with marriage will his independence be recognized and will he be considered a fully mature member of the tribe.

Circumcision is not practiced by the Sambyu, nor is there any trace of its having been a custom in the past. The Sambyu do, however, practice tooth shaping for both sexes. At some time before puberty a boy or girl indicates that he or she is ready for the operation in which a notch is made between the upper front incisors. This is done by chipping the teeth, using the metal head of an axe as a chisel and a piece of wood or iron as a hammer. If a tooth should break during the operation, one's ancestors must be consulted and an offering made to them. The only explanation given by the Sambyu is that the mutilation is decorative.

Much of a young boy's or girl's free time is spent in playing the marriage game, an imitation of actual village life among married couples enacted by pre-pubescent girls and as yet unmarried, post-pubescent boys. They imitate all aspects of daily life up to and including the sexual act at "night," at the end of the game. For sexual experience, young men choose only girls who would be eligible for them to marry, i.e., actual and classificatory cross-cousins. This game does not affect the existing engagement of a young person to another young man or woman; however, a player would not choose his or her betrothed as a partner.

The duties of the participants are much like those of their parents in actual village life. The boys hunt while the girls stay in the little "village" erected for this purpose and prepare the meal they have brought from home. When the boys return, they all eat, perform the tasks normally carried out by their parents in the evening, and then they go to bed. The girls have already been taught by their grandmothers various ways to facilitate intercourse at an early age. After a certain time it is declared to be morning and the game is ended. This game takes place during the day and is particularly encouraged by the mothers of the young girls.

As soon as a girl begins her first menstrual period, she goes to her mother's mother, or, in the absence of the latter, to another of her mother's female relatives, or to her father's mother. Her breasts are covered with a piece of cloth or skin, and she is secluded from everyone except the few female members of the tribe who are directly involved in her initiation ceremony. The girl is confined to a hut in the forest and kept company by a few pre-pubescent girls. At night they secretly slip back to the village so that the initiate can sleep in the little hut constructed of mats behind her instructress's hut. At this time the girl receives instructions on the responsibilities of married life from the woman chosen to be her teacher. The initiate and her young attendants must rise very early every morning so that the former may be rubbed with ashes by her instructress or by the oldest woman in the village before the girls return secretly to the forest. The initiate may not bathe during this time, nor may she change her clothes.

Young boys will sometimes harass the initiate during this period. Although boys
are actually forbidden to approach her, the initiate cannot complain to anyone in authority, for theoretically no one is supposed to know of her seclusion. She is therefore allowed to defend herself in any way possible without being held responsible for the consequences.

The seclusion lasts two or three weeks. Although the groom, who must make certain preparations, is the only one told of the girl's seclusion before the dancing begins, the village usually knows about it through the preparations for the approaching marriage being made by the girl's family. A day or more before the girl is brought out of seclusion the initiation dance is begun. This is a dance of praise and gratitude that a girl has become a marriageable woman. Beer is served throughout, and the size and length of the dance is determined by the wealth and status of the initiate's parents. This dance always follows the period of seclusion and it in turn is followed by the marriage, which formerly was never delayed. Rarely today, a girl may not betrothed by this time. In such a case, the celebration ends with the puberty ceremony which recognizes that the girl has become a mature woman. As such, she receives her own hut.

In all cases, whether the girl is betrothed or not, dancing takes place only at night until the last day of the ceremony when there is also dancing during the day. On the last day of dancing the bride is brought from seclusion. Her breasts are uncovered and she is rubbed with fat and dressed in new clothes and beads sent by the bridgroom. She is then taken to the little hut made of mats behind her instructress's house where she remains until the groom's sister comes to fetch her. She is led by the latter to a stool on a new mat in the middle of the dancing. After a little while she and her young attendants, who are still at her side, stand up and begin to dance a special woman's dance until the bride tires. She ends the dance by approaching the village headman, grabbing him by his beard, and handing him a knife or an axe.

BETROTHAL AND CHOICE OF MARRIAGE PARTNERS

The traditional pattern of marriage gives preference to actual and classificatory cross-cousin alliances. The missionaries have placed restrictions on marriages between persons having the same set of grandparents, but concealment of this relationship is possible because of the classificatory nature of the Sambyu kinship terminology. In order to discourage those practices related to the betrothal, premarital relations, and early marriage which they deem undesirable, the missionaries confine the young Sambyu girls to the mission schools until they reach the age of 16.

The preferred marriage for a boy is one with his actual or classificatory mother's brother's daughter (shiroyshande). A young boy is expected to work for his mother's brother and the latter has the right to claim this service. The service rendered by a boy for his mother's brother is translated into bride-service if, as the boy matures, he becomes engaged to that uncle's daughter. Should a boy, having reached puber-
ty, become engaged to someone other than a cross-cousin, then he will be expected to work for his fiancé's father in payment of his bride-service. The Sambyu avuncular system, in which, for example, the mother's brother plays an influential role in the choice of a boy's mate, has been reduced in recent times not only by missionaries, but also by the presence and influence of patrilineal peoples from neighboring areas.

Nowadays, betrothal generally maintains its traditional form, except when the betrothed are Christians and the girl has been kept in the mission school until she is well past puberty. A number of people can initiate the search for a suitable bride for a boy. The father of a mature boy can begin the necessary steps towards finding a wife for his son without consulting the latter. Often it is a grandfather or grandmother who encourages a boy to look for a wife. The mother's brother has the prerogative to arrange a match for the boy with one of his daughters. He may override the boy's own choice of a prospective bride, breaking this engagement in favor of the cross-cousin match. A betrothal is always arranged with the assistance of a go-between, who is usually a person who has taken the initiative to find a wife for a boy. If the boy himself has taken the initiative, then he must ask someone to act as go-between.

When a boy's parents have decided upon a match, his mother or sister will go to the girl's village to begin negotiations. This intercessor will take the prospective bride a copper ring or armband as a gift. If the female go-betweens are not successful, then a boy's father or other male relative or friend negotiates with the girl's family. When an agreement is reached, the girl accepts the presents brought to her by the negotiators. The agreement is reaffirmed by regular visits between the two families and by an exchange of presents between them.

The engaged young man must now work for his future bride's father to prove that he will make a good husband. Pre-marital sexual relations between the betrothed are discouraged, but are not actually punishable if they occur. It is believed that such relations can cause infertility. Sexual activities should take place only between young people who are not engaged to each other, and those only within the confines of the marriage game.

During the engagement period the betrothed are supposed to get to know and grow fond of each other. Should a girl decide she will not go through with the marriage, she will indicate that the contract is broken. The young man may take his case to the village head who will then try to persuade the girl to change her mind, but should the head fail, then the girl's family must make certain compensations to the boy and his family.

The engagement lasts until the girl reaches puberty. If she has already reached it, there is no period of engagement, and the marriage ceremony takes place immediately upon completion of the negotiations.

As already mentioned, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage between two persons who call one another shiroshande is the preferred pattern. In this manner the bonds between two matrilineages are reaffirmed by repeated alliances between the two. It is important to note, however, that shiroshande also refers to father's sister's daugh-
ter. If the parents of a marriageable boy are aware that the children of his father’s sister live relatively far away from the boy’s village, they will send the boy to look for a mate within the father’s sib. When among strangers there is a special rule of etiquette which dictates that a boy sneeze first and then identify himself by the name of his father’s sib. If the people among whom he finds himself share the same name, they will then take the boy to the offering staff and rub chalk or fine charcoal on him, and he will reciprocate with the same gesture. This is done in honor of the ancestors of the visitor’s father. If the boy finds a cross-cousin among these people, a betrothal may be arranged between the two, though for the girl it may mean breaking another engagement or dissolving an existing marriage, but this would not be done if the engagement or marriage already involved a cross-cousin. Some informants state that if the woman has children by her first marriage, her cross-cousin still has the right to marry her. If the children are small, they will remain with their mother; if they are older, they will go with their father. Other important influences in the choice of a marriage partner are the reputation of the group’s industriousness and their economic status. In addition to the preferred cross-cousin marriage, a man may marry his umama or mutekururu provided that they do not belong to his matrilineage. Forbidden matches for a first marriage are those between a man and his mukuruande, mpandjande, shimpumba, monande, and uranda. (See pp. 130 ff. for definitions of these terms). About 50% of the marriages surveyed were found to be between a man and his shiro, his umama, or his mutekururu. Although the sampling of royalty was small, among those marriages surveyed, 78% of the marriages in the royal village were found to be such preferential matches.

A man may not marry within his matrilineage (liiru). With a man’s second or third wife, however, the restrictions may be somewhat relaxed.

Although rare, there have also been instances of a man’s taking a classificatory “sister” (mpanjande) as his wife. Though she may not be a close consanguineal relative, this is generally forbidden, and the marriage is not accompanied by a ceremony. Formerly a chief was able to take any woman he wished as his wife without a ceremony.

A form of levirate is practiced and is unaccompanied by a marriage ceremony. In the event that a man dies, his younger brother takes the former’s widow as his wife. Any children subsequently born are counted as children of the biological father and not of the deceased.

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY

Marriage usually takes place immediately after a girl’s initiation rites, and is not a separate ceremony unless the girl has been initiated earlier. (Bosch makes no mention of the ceremony for a second marriage of a widow or divorcée.) The
matrilinages of both parties must be represented at the wedding. The ceremony is performed in the village of the bride’s father who furnishes food and beer for the celebration. The groom’s father provides the new clothing worn at the ceremony by the bride and groom.

Shortly before the marriage a young man solicits gifts from his relatives for his bride. At the termination of the initiation rites, in a normal marriage, the bride is brought out of seclusion and is presented with beads or copper rings by the groom’s oldest sister. She then joins the group of dancing guests. If the bride objects to the match that has been arranged for her, she runs away before the wedding ceremony begins, but this is rare.

The bridegroom is bathed by his oldest sister and remains in seclusion in the village or in the nearby woods until the bride’s oldest brother comes for him and presents him with a small gift of beads. When the bride has finished dancing and has seated herself, the groom is taken to meet her; he at once shoots an arrow between the girl’s legs, saying, “This is my bride.” The couple now receives presents from the guests. A grandparent of either the man or the woman then instructs them on their duties to each other and to each other’s family.

The couple are next taken to the new sleeping hut built in the bride’s parent’s village by the bridegroom’s father and are rubbed with a mixture of fat and red pigment. The first sexual act after the marriage is interrupted in order to collect the man’s semen in a pot. The husband and wife will then rub some of this on each other and save the rest for the following evening. The following evening a mixture of semen, fat, and “medicine” is rubbed on the breast of every small child in the village. The wife then cooks a porridge in which she puts the remaining semen from the previous night. All the village children are called together to eat some of this porridge. The new wife eats the last portion. This is all done to insure a woman’s fertility. On the first day after they are married a couple is expected to remain in their hut and not walk about in the village.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE

For about a year or longer — until the first child is born — the couple lives in the wife’s village. During this period the wife’s mother and grandmother supervise the new bride in her role as a wife, and the husband substantiates his ability to provide for his wife while he performs the bride service which he owes her family. Since the man remains in his wife’s village for a year, he will be able to help through a full agricultural cycle.

Soon after their marriage the husband and wife enter into the economic and social life of the village. They are given land on which to build a sleeping hut, an eating and resting house, and a cooking hut, as well as agricultural land. A man is expected regularly to make gifts to his wife’s family and to provide all the household articles for his own household, except for the baskets and the grain sieve which the woman supplies.
A marriage is considered unfulfilled without children, who should appear as soon as possible after the marriage. Intercourse may take place at any time except during a woman’s menstrual period or during the period of mourning following the death of a village member. It may also take place in any sleeping hut, in contrast to extramarital relations which are generally thought of as taking place only in the woods.

A woman makes a traditional payment, usually of a goat or other animal, to her husband upon the birth of her first child. Until this payment is made she may not address him by his name. A woman treats her husband with deference, but after the birth of her first child her attitude relaxes. As her husband gains prestige through the number of children he fathers, so also does her own status rise in the eyes of other people.

Teknonymy is customary, that is to say, after the birth of his first child a man is referred to and addressed as, “father of —,” which is considered more respectful than using his given name.

INFERTILITY

There are many taboos related to infertility. A woman may not eat the meat of animals which have died from certain causes, nor may she herself bury a child lost by miscarriage for fear of infertility (see Death and Burial). A woman’s indulgence in extramarital sexual relations is believed to cause both infertility and labor difficulties. The taboos against extramarital sexual relations are strongest during the period immediately following the marriage. An infertile woman is often suspected of having had excessive sexual contact with her betrothed before her marriage. In a childless marriage, the woman is always the first to be accused of infertility. A barren woman is taken by one of the grandparents to a medicine man, who may stipulate an offering to be made to her ancestors or may advise that the womb is “stopped up” and must be washed out with medicine. The man and woman may not wash themselves or cut their hair until the woman becomes pregnant. The treatment for the woman also often includes sexual intercourse with the medicine man. If childlessness persists, then the man is treated.

If a man does not wish to give up an infertile wife, he may take one or more other women as secondary wives; the first wife will not lose her status as head wife.

An impotent man is scorned as being a woman. An infertile man may not arrange for someone else to beget his children, but his wife may secretly become pregnant by another man and tell her husband that the child is his.

If a woman has repeated miscarriages, she will go to the medicine man for a special treatment which involves, among other things, tying a small piece of mukenger (Combretum calacarpum) root to the woman’s waist to represent her first child.
PREGNANCY AND CONFINEMENT

The Sambyu believe that a child is conceived through sexual intercourse, the mother contributing the blood, the father the "form." The father's role in the conception is considered to be more important than the mother's. Although there is no real preference shown as to the sex of the child, generally a man desires a son and a woman a daughter. Sexual intercourse can take place up until a few days before the woman gives birth. There are many taboos which a woman must follow in order to have a normal child, and the taboos against extramarital relations for both the man and the woman are particularly strong at this time. Only at the time of the first labor pains does a woman withdraw from everyday life. She is taken to a small shelter built of mats and set up near her sleeping house. There she is tended by her grandmother, mother, or elder sister, who assumes the role of midwife.

A woman is given certain medicines to facilitate the birth. In the event of complications the medicine man is called in. A difficult labor is always believed to be the result of adultery. If neither partner confesses to having committed adultery, the medicine man determines the guilty party through the use of the katemba, "divination medium." The elders then make offerings to the ancestors and take other ritualistic steps to facilitate the delivery.

After the birth the midwife and the women living nearby are responsible for the care of the mother and child. The mother may eat only food prepared by these women, and she alone is responsible for feeding her infant. The father of the infant, who is not allowed to be present at the birth, arranges the necessary rituals and ceremonies for the newborn. He is first allowed to handle the child at the time of the naming ceremony.

When the umbilical cord falls off, the woman is ritually cleansed and returns to her sleeping hut. While it is still dark the woman throws rukwa (red paint) in front of the door of every sleeping hut in the village. The paint is prepared by mixing powdered ugwua (Pterocarpus angolensis) wood with fat.

To avoid pregnancy, particularly during the period when she still has an unweaned child, a woman may use any of several known methods. In case of an unwanted pregnancy, she may go to the medicine man for an abortion.

It is said that formerly twins born during a famine, crippled infants, and albinos were put to death or thrown into the river, but this cannot be documented past dispute. There is a ritual today which takes place after the birth of twins, albinos, and cripples which involves washing the child and placing the wash water together with the afterbirth in the stomach of a calf which has been slaughtered for the occasion. The stomach and its contents are then buried in an anthill. The purpose of this ritual is not explained.

MARRIED LIFE

If after the first year of marriage the wife's family approves of her husband, the
young couple will move to the man's village. This pattern of bilocal residence is apparently a recent result of foreign influences. Formerly, when the Sambyu lived in a few large villages, the man and wife were often from the same village.

Family Organization

The first wife of a polygynous marriage, the mugrolikadi, is in a position of authority with respect to the other wives, wambandsa. Her hut is always to be found on the western side of the village near the animal pen. In the absence of her husband she assumes his position.

A woman's main chores consist of caring for the children, preparing food, and weaving baskets. Harvesting and threshing are now done by both men and women, though formerly they were women's work. In field cultivation, first a man's land is worked, then his wife's land. Fetching water is also a woman's duty.

Men hunt, while both sexes fish. Wood is gathered by both men and women, and wild food is collected by everyone. Men make the large baskets in which food is stored, and they care for the animals. Building houses is exclusively a man's responsibility.

Daily Routine

The family arises before sunup, or later if it is a slack time of year, and the man goes directly to the fields; the woman first grinds the day's meal, then joins her husband. There is no morning meal, except for someone who is starting on a trip, or sometimes for the boys who care for the animals. The main, and often only, meal of the day is eaten at about 3 P.M. if there is a daughter or grandmother to prepare the side dishes while the wife prepares the porridge, or at around 5 P.M. if the woman must fix it all herself when she returns from the fields. If the main meal is early, a second, light meal will be eaten later in the evening. Before and after eating, the hands are washed, though formerly it was taboo to wash one's hands after having drunk milk. Men and women eat apart. Everyone but the mother of a family eats in the resthouse; she joins the others after the meal. After a task is completed which has required the help of many people, a feast is held.

After the harvest there is a lull in work. Men gather to weave baskets and mats. Women gather to chat and do small chores. It is a time for visiting relatives. Evening visits to a neighboring village occur if beer has been made there.

Cooking is done in a cooking hut or, if it is raining hard, in the sleeping hut, but never in the resting house. The sleeping hut is not otherwise occupied during the day; even a sick person is usually taken outside during this time. Dogs and chickens are not supposed to enter the sleeping hut. This hut is used in the day as a place to store cooked food and beer. Cleaning of the houses is minimal; occasionally the floor is swept with a bundle of grass.
Individual Life

GAMES AND ENTERTAIMENT

Evenings are a time of relaxation and instruction for the young people. The most popular forms of entertainment are dancing, telling stories, asking riddles, and for men the wera game.

Dancing

There are two kinds of dance: either for purposes of entertainment or for ritual. The latter form of dance, except for the litembo dance, is prohibited (by the government?) on the S.W.A. side of the Okavango. Pleasure dancing takes place outside the village, ritual dancing inside. In all pleasure dances the men and women form separate lines facing each other. In choosing a dance partner, a man must observe the same incest taboos as he would in choosing a wife. Dancing with an unsuitable partner is a punishable offense. The kakuruka dance, which is danced by women and girls during the litembo ritual, is claimed to be the only indigenous Sambyu dance; it is accompanied only by handclapping.

Games

The only game adults play is wera. This is the widespread African game in which stones are moved around a series of holes in the ground, to capture the opponent’s pieces. Wera is primarily a man’s game. Much cheating takes place and quarrels are common, sometimes leading to murder. Although a woman is not forbidden to play, a married woman is normally supposed not to participate with men, but only with other women.

BREAKING THE MARRIAGE "CONTRACT"

Unwillingness to cooperate with the sexual desires of one’s partner and impotence are sound grounds for separation. Divorce is usually handled by the village court unless the couple has been wed in the church, in which case, in Namibia, the Bantu Affairs Commisariat handles the divorce. A couple unable to come to agreement between themselves may take their case to the district head who will decide the case and fine the guilty party an animal, which is given to the family of the other spouse. Formerly such quarrels were seldom taken to court. A man would simply leave his wife if she displeased him, or a woman would leave her husband if he mistreated her.

In separation the woman usually is allowed to keep anything her husband has given her, though the husband has the right to claim it if he wishes. A woman takes the small children while the man takes the older children. After a separation the
behavior of the ex-spouses towards one another depends upon their kin or non-kin relationship to each other. If they are cross-cousins, they may not visit each other, for cross-cousins are allowed a certain familiarity with each other, and a divorced wife may raise objections to her ex-husband’s re-marrying. If they are not cross-cousins, a divorced couple may visit each other and send gifts to the children who remain with the other parent.

If one spouse dies, the surviving spouse must be ritually cleansed before he or she may begin his new role as a single person, or before he or she may remarry.

OLD AGE, DEATH, AND BURIAL

OLD AGE

Among the Sambyu, wisdom is attributed to the elderly, who preserve and transmit the tribal traditions. The older a man or woman, the more duties and responsibilities assumed in religious, social, and judicial life. An old person is addressed by the honorary title, litimbi.

The senior male member of a matrilineage is always its guardian and as such is responsible for the welfare of its members. In a legal dispute the chief or district head always takes the opinions of the oldest men of the area into consideration.

An elderly woman instructs the young girls of the village in their roles as women in Sambyu society. She is now exempt from the taboos regarding infertility, i.e., dietary restrictions, and can be involved in many areas that otherwise are considered a man’s domain. She is also exempt from the taboos placed on a woman during her menstrual period.

DEATH AND BURIAL

All deaths are attributed to some form of hostile supernatural powers. After a death the person who is either consciously or unconsciously responsible is always sought out. He can be anyone, from a close relative to a distant stranger.

The type of funeral and the kind of cleansing ceremony that take place at a person’s death depend on the manner of death and the deceased’s status in life. If the deceased was important and wealthy, the body is buried in the animal pen; less important and poorer people are buried outside the pen, under a tree, or in the woods.

All deaths impose a taboo on sexual intercourse within the village where the death took place. Both the villagers and the visitors who have come for the funeral sleep in the deceased’s rest house, in two groups separated according to sex. The deceased is mourned with loud wailing and all work in the village is suspended. No one watches the body, nor does a nganga, medicine man, touch it, for fear that through the medicine man evil spirits might harm the corpse. There is no procedure,
however, for cleansing the corpse to avert such evil spirits. The body is prepared for burial by allowing it to stiffen in the fetal position.

The burial takes place as soon as possible after the death, occurring at any time of day, but usually avoiding the hottest hours. The relatives of the dead are responsible for burial, but there is no particular relative who must necessarily assume this responsibility. The grandchildren, watekuru, however, do play an important role at a funeral, for according to most informants it is they who usually dig the grave and attend to other details of the funeral. If the person chosen to execute these tasks should refuse to touch the body, he will be accused of being a sorcerer (murodi) and held responsible for the death of the deceased. Those who have touched the corpse or dug the grave may not touch food or offer it to anyone for fear of contamination.

The grave is a deep round hole which has been dug in the earth with hollowed walls at the base forming a small chamber. The corpse is wrapped in the skin of a bovine, or if this is not available, in a mat. Two strong men place the body in the grave so that it faces west. Pieces of mats are used to close the opening to the underground burial chamber so that earth will not fall in on the corpse as the hole is filled. The grave shaft is then filled with earth and all the plant and shrub roots which have been rooted out in digging the hole, in addition to a thorny branch or bush, are heaped on top of the grave. A person's possessions are not placed in the grave unless the deceased happens to be a stranger in the area without relatives. Then all such belongings are put in the grave.

Mourning for an ordinary villager usually lasts two or three days after the burial, but for an important village chief, the mourning may last as long as five days. Sexual abstinence is maintained for the duration of this period. No one may serve beer during the mourning period and children eat apart from adults. The villagers take up their wailing and lamentations at sunrise and at sunset.

After a few days the cleansing ceremony takes place. A bovine is killed and the heart and lungs removed. The blood from these organs is sprinkled on the hands and feet of those who have taken part in the burial. A feast for all those present is prepared from the remaining meat. After this ceremony everyone returns to normal daily routine. The hut of the deceased may either be cleansed in a similar fashion or torn down. The members of the deceased's tira may use the materials of the razed hut to build other structures. After the burial the grandchildren kindle a new fire in order to assure that the deceased's spirit will obey their commands. This fire is allowed to burn itself out. No further rituals take place at a grave site, and often the locality is forgotten. If several successive deaths take place in one village, the inhabitants will re-locate themselves.

Cleansing Ceremonies for Widows and Widowers

A widow and her children remove all their clothing except their breech cloths and take off all their jewelry as a sign of mourning. Should she refuse to do this, the
widow would probably be accused of witchcraft by her late husband’s family. She must also eat sparingly and not show herself to be too anxious to rejoin her relatives or to marry someone else (except in the case of levirate — see below), for the people of her husband’s lira will be watching her closely and at the slightest provocation will accuse her of being responsible for her husband’s death.

The cow used for the cleansing ceremony is provided by a woman’s lira. Bands made from the inner layer of fat of the slaughtered cow are placed around the arms and neck of the widow. Her knees and elbows are rubbed with charcoal. When the necklace of fat falls off, a woman is free to marry. If the widow is claimed by a younger brother of the deceased immediately after the death, then this cleansing ceremony is not performed. If this does not occur at once and if a relative of the deceased later wishes to marry the widow, he must send her family a bovine. A widow will sometimes remain with her husband’s family as long as a year after he has died.

If a man’s wife dies, he undergoes a similar cleansing ceremony. Before he undergoes the cleansing he may not remarry or visit another village, for the spirit of the dead one is believed to be still with him.

To further cleanse the bereaved spouse from the dangers of death, he or she is seated by a tree which the relatives of the deceased chop down in such a manner that it falls near the widow or widower. The wind caused by felling the tree is believed to drive away the dead person’s spirit. The surviving spouse is next led to the river where small incisions are made on his or her legs. A gourd is placed in front of the person and he or she tramples it to pieces. Sometimes two small holes are dug in front of him or her and filled with bark from the mupako tree. A fire is then kindled using runkwanana wood and the bereaved person must pass over this before returning to the village.

From among the relatives of the deceased a sister or brother is chosen by the other members of the lira to spend the night with the bereaved spouse in the funeral hut, repeatedly to engage in sexual intercourse with him or her. If on the following morning the two seat themselves in the middle of a mat placed in front of their hut, they are henceforth considered married, but if they seat themselves on the edges of the mat, they simply terminate the ceremony and the brother or sister returns to his or her spouse.

CLEANSING AFTER ABNORMAL DEATH

After Miscarriages

After a miscarriage the top of an anthill is cut off and the fetus is placed inside the anthill by its mother’s mother. The top is then replaced and is finally secured by the ants. If the miscarriage occurs at an early embryonic stage, the mother is not considered to be in a state of uncleanness, but if it occurs at an advanced fetal stage, a cleansing ceremony must take place three weeks to a month later. Until it does, the father must abstain from sexual relations with any other woman. This
cleansing ceremony is much like that described above, but in this case the parents of the child engage in sexual intercourse to terminate the ceremony.

The Death of Twins

After the death of twins, a woman and her children go to the river to have their legs incised and to be cleansed. The children receive a pitcher of water with which they return to the village, yelling, "Bring rain!" and they then throw the water on the place of birth. These children are henceforth believed to have the power to stop lightning.

The Death of a Stranger

After the death of a stranger his relatives come to the place of death with a goat or cow to cleanse the village and its inhabitants. All those who have touched the corpse or assisted with the burial, as well as their wives, are sprinkled with the blood of this animal. The posts encircling the village, the place of death, and anything else connected with the deceased are similarly cleansed. These steps are taken to prevent the death from causing any illness among the villagers, particularly among the women.

OTHER CUSTOMS PERTAINING TO THE DEAD

A mother who dies at childbirth is buried with her child in a hole or in an anthill. One does not mourn an infant that dies before it can crawl, or a person killed by lightning. One struck down by lightning is buried where killed, or as some maintain, is left on an island in the river. A person who dies from starvation is merely thrown into the river with no ceremony [presumably this would only occur during a famine]. Invalids, pregnant women, and lepers are all buried in the normal fashion. Pollution from the dead, which is prevented by the cleansing ceremony, is believed to cause a "female illness," according to some informants. If the person whose child has just died gives someone else food, it is thought that the latter will die of a cough. It is taken as a bad omen if a person comes across a young lion, a young tiger, a snake, or an extraordinarily large hare at the ancestral grave.

BURIAL OF A CHIEF

A chief seldom dies while still ruling, for his successor usually replaces him when he becomes ill or senile. We do not know whether the burial of a reigning chief differs significantly from that of a former chief. (The graves of only three Sambyu chiefs are found within present Sambyu territory.)
Since the introduction of firearms, a twenty-gun salute has been given at the death of a chief. Formerly the path to the village was blocked off with a large branch. Every village head who can afford to do so sends a bovine to the funeral, and every able person attends the funeral, remaining in the chief's village about five days. The mourning, however, may last a month or more in accordance with the wishes of the reigning chief.

A chief is buried on an island in the river or on the river bank. Boards obtained from a canoe are used with strips of python skin to place the chief, fully dressed, in a sitting position in the grave. Thick stakes are placed around the grave to form a fence with an opening on one side. The grandchildren of the chief carry out all the arrangements involved in the funeral.

On occasion the elders go to the reigning chief to ask him to make an offering of a large black ox at the site of his predecessor's grave for the benefit of the community. The grandchildren of the deceased chief must be present, otherwise the offering will not produce the desired results. In addition to this offering, each year at sowing time a chicken, goat, or cow is sacrificed at the gravesite.

Social Life

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

THE COMMUNITY

When the Sambyu returned to the Okavango about 1915, they lived in a few large villages for protection and defense. In 1961 Bosch found them to be dispersed in 364 small villages. The Sambyu area is one of ethnic mixture, for only 30% of the village heads are actually of the Sambyu tribe.

The Sambyu territory in Namibia is divided for administrative purposes into eight districts, each of which has a district head. In turn, each of these districts is divided into several sub-districts which are simply geographic areas with no political function. The smallest political, geographic, and social entity is the village. Each village is under the jurisdiction of a village head. Although a village usually is composed of one or more extended families, it can consist merely of a nuclear family which has been able to establish its economic independence, though for other purposes such a group is necessarily part of a larger unit.

THE DESCENT SYSTEM

The Sambyu are organized in non-localized matrilineal clans (likoro), and these are subdivided into matrilineages (lina). A clan never acts as a ceremonial unit nor does it have a head. The eight clans found among the Sambyu are:
1. Vakwafuma: Those of the Frog
2. Vakwandjade: Those of the Hawk
3. Vakwanyou: Those of the Elephant
4. Vakwanyayi: Those of the Buffalo
5. Vakwankora: Those of the Parrot
6. Vakwanyime: Those of the Lion
7. Vakwangombe: Those of the Cattle
8. Vakwashipika: Those of the Hyena

The first of these is the royal clan, which provides all chiefs for the Sambuyu. Other members of this clan are respectfully called “little chief.” In 1961 none of the district headmen and only three village heads belonged to the royal clan.

The clans are believed to have different ethnic origins, and the names are taken as names of nations (rudil).

The animal after which a clan is named does not appear to have a totemic significance to the members. This is to say, the animal is freely hunted, and if its flesh is edible, it is eaten. Furthermore, there seems to be no belief that the clans originated from the animals whose names they bear.

Normally a person is not addressed by clan name, and if people wish to know a person’s clan affiliation, they must specifically inquire about it.

To call a man by his father’s clan name is a form of praise. For a man to identify himself as the child of his father’s clan is to emphasize his importance and to clarify his position in the community. A man may identify himself by his father’s clan name on certain formal occasions, as when appearing in court or when giving a battle cry. An important use of a man’s father’s clan name is in the sneezing ritual: a man who is among strangers will voluntarily sneeze, and then identify himself as “Son of (father’s clan) and Grandson of (grandfather’s clan)”. The purpose appears to be to establish his relationship when he is seeking a suitable wife, that is, a woman of his father’s or grandfather’s clan.

Informants did not agree whether the Sambuyu matriclan is exogamous. A survey, however, showed that only the most numerous Vakwandjade, the Hawk clan, have a significant percentage of interclan marriages. Thus the clan may be said to have a definite tendency towards exogamy although there may not be a formal restriction to this effect for all clans.

Some informants held that all the clans descended from one ancestress, although none was able to provide genealogical information to specify the relationship. It is said the Vakwandjade were hunters who hunted buffalo with copper rifles which they themselves made. The rifle makers then re-named themselves the “Copper People”, while those who merely hunted with these rifles took the name Vakwanyayi (Buffalo People). Other informants held that there were several sub-groups of the Nžade clan itself, and noted, for example, that some Ndjadi people are known more specifically as Vakwandjade of the “Clouds”. Bosch does not indicate whether the sub-clans are exogamous.

A clan is made up of a number of matrilinages (lira), each consisting of people who claim to be descended from a common ancestress — usually one who lived not
more than three generations earlier. A member of a clan calls all other members of
the same clan lira lietu, "my lineage relative(s)", or more literally, "we of one
womb". The term mukwarero is used for the lira of one's spouse. The exact kinship
ties within a lira are sometimes difficult to trace due to the emigrations during the
last fifty years, the slave trade, and intertribal wars, all of which have contributed
to the disruption of the traditional kinship system.

Only a few can trace their genealogy farther back than three generations on the
maternal side, or farther back than their father's father on the paternal side. This
does not hold true for the royal family, however, whose members are expected to
memorize their family tree in as much detail as possible. Eight generations are
known in the royal genealogy, though only five from the present ruler back.

The "big man" of a lira is the senior male member of the group. His seniority is
traced through the eldest sister of each generation, as far back as the common
ancestress. A mother's brother may take his sister's children to this senior guardian
for material assistance or advice. However, no special term of recognition is used
between such a guardian and the members of his matrilineage, who look up to him,
other than the general term lira lietu.

KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

Kinship was the traditional basis or organization of Sambyu groups formerly
when they lived in a few large villages. Today, although there are some bonds of
kinship between the inhabitants of one district, the web of kinship is in no way
defined by geography. Every child is taught the classificatory relationship and
terms of address for all the people around him, whether or not he knows their
actual biological relationship. Only within the matrilineage are the terms ndowirik-
wanande (MB) and shimpumba (s ZC) used. All other kinship terms can be used both
maternally and paternally.

Kinship terminology (see notes at end of table)
1. vamama, "grandparent"
   m/f Ego: G+3: (optional: ndovakurona, "great") MMM, MMMZ, MMMB, MMMZH,
   MMMBW, MMF, FMM, FMMP, MMFB, MMFM, FMMZW, FMFZH, FMF.
   G+2: MM, MMB, MMZ, MMBW, MMZH, MMMZD, MMMZS, MMMZDH,
   MMMZSW, MF, FM, FMB, FMF, FMFW, FMZH, FMMS, FMMZD,
   FMMSW, FMMDZH, FF.
   m Ego: G+3: WMMM, WMMMB, WMMMZ.
   G+2: WMM, WMMP, WMMS.
   f Ego: G+3: HMMP, HMMPB, HMMPZ.
   G+2: HMM, HMMP, HMMP.

2. vama, "father"
   m/f Ego: G+1: F, FB, FZH, FMZS, FMZDH, FMZDS, FMZDDD, MZH, MMZDH,
   MMZDDD.
   G0: FZDH, FMZDDH, FMZDDS, FMZDDD.
3. *vanane,* “mother”
   m/f Ego: $G^{-1}$: FZDS, FZDDH, FMZDDS, FMZDDDH, FMMZDDDS, FMMZDDDD.
   $G^{0}$: FZDS, FZDDH, FMZDDS, FMZDDDH, FMMZDDDS.
   $G^{-1}$: FZDDS, FZDDH, FMZDDS, FMZDDDH, FMMZDDDS.
   $G^{0}$: FZDDS, FZDDH, FMZDDS, FMZDDDH, FMMZDDDS.
   $G^{-1}$: FZDDH, FMZDDS, FMZDDDH, FMMZDDDS.
   $G^{0}$: FZDDH, FMZDDS, FMZDDDH, FMMZDDDS.

4. *vanana vovakurona,* “older father”
   m/f Ego: $G^{+1}$: FeB
   $G^{0}$: FZS, FMZDS

5. *vanavanagrona,* “little father”
   m/f Ego: $G^{+1}$: FeB
   $G^{0}$: FZS, FMZDS

6. *vanane vakurona,* “older mother”
   m/f Ego: $G^{+1}$: MZ

7. *vananegrone,* “little mother”
   m/f Ego: $G^{+1}$: MZ
   $G^{0}$: FZD, FMZDD

8. *nkwirekunde,* “my uncle”
   m/f Ego: $G^{+1}$: MB, MMZS, MMMZDS

   m/f Ego: $G^{+1}$: [FMeBD], [FMeBS]
   $G^{0}$: eB, eZ, MeZD, MeZS, MMeZDD, MMeZDS, MMMeZDDD, MMMeZDDDS, [FeBD], [FMeBS], [FMeZSS], [FMeZSD], [FMeZSDSS], [FMeZSDSS]
   $G^{-1}$: [FMeZSS], [FMeZSD], [FMeZSDSS], [FMeZSDSS]
   $G^{-2}$: [FMeZSDSS], [FMeZSDSD], [FMeZSDSS], [FMeZSDSD]

10. *mugrunwe* (pl. *mugrunwe*), “my younger sibling”
    m/f Ego: $G^{+1}$: [FMyBD], [FMyBS]
    $G^{0}$: yB, yZ, MyZD, MyZS, MMyZDD, MMyZDS, MMMyZDDD, MMMyZDDDS, [FyBD], [FyBS], [FMyZSD], [FMyZSS]
    $G^{-1}$: [FMyZSS], [FMyZSD], [FMyZSDSS], [FMyZSDSS]
    $G^{-2}$: [FMyZSDSS], [FMyZSDSD], [FMyZSDSS], [FMyZSDSD]

11. *mpandji,* “cross-sibling”
    m Ego: $G^{+1}$: FMBD
    $G^{0}$: FBD, FMZSD, [Z], [MZ], [MMZD]
    $G^{-1}$: FZSD, FMZSD
    $G^{-2}$: FZSD, FMZSD
    f Ego: $G^{+1}$: FMBD
    $G^{0}$: FBS, FMZSS, [B], [MZ], [MMZD]
G⁻¹: FZSS, FMZDDSS
G⁻²: FZDSS, FMZDDSS

12. kamentu, "parallel sibling"
   m Ego:  G⁺¹: FMBS
           G⁰: FBS, FMZSS, [B], [MZS], [MMZDS]
           G⁻¹: FZSS, FMZDDSS
           G⁻²: FZDSS, FMZDDSS
   f Ego:  G⁺¹: FMBD
           G⁰: FBBD, FMZSD, [Z], [MZD], [MMZDD]
           G⁻¹: FZSD, FMZDS
           G⁻²: FZSD, FMZDDSD

13. shiroshande, (pl. viroshande), "my cross-cousin"
   m/f Ego: G⁰: [MBS], [MBD], [MMZSS], [MMZSD], [FZS], [FZD], [FMZDS], [FMZDD]

14. monande (pl. vanavande), "my child"
   m/f Ego: G⁻¹: MMMSBS, MMMBDB
           G⁺¹: MMBS, MMMBDB (also called monande mona vamana)
           G⁰: MBS, MBD, MMZSS, MMZSD
           G⁻¹: S, D, BS, BD, MZSD, MMZSD, MMZDDSS
   f Ego:  G⁻¹: ZD, ZS, MZDD, MZDS, MMZDDDD, MMZDDDS, MMZDDDDD, MMZDDDDS

15. shipumba (pl. vimpumba), "niece/nephew"
   m Ego:  G⁻¹: ZD, ZS, MZDD, MZDS, MMZDDDD, MMZDDDS, MMZDDDDD, MMZDDDDS

16. shitekurumpumba (pl. vitekurumpumba), "grand niece/nephew"
   m Ego:  G⁻²: ZZSS, ZZSD, ZDDS, ZDDDD, ZZSDSS, ZZSDDS, ZZSDDD, ZZSDDDDD, ZZSDDDDS, ZZSDDDD, and their spouses
   f Ego:  G⁻²: SS, SD, DS, DD, ZSS, ZSD, ZDD, MZDDD, MZDDS, MZDSD, MZSD, MZDDD, MZDDDD, MZDDDDDD, MZDDDDDS, MZDDDDDD, and their spouses

17. mutekuru (pl. vatekuru), "grandchild"
   m/f Ego: G⁺¹: MMBDBS, MMMBSD, MMMMSBS, MMBSS
           G⁰: MMBDDBS, MMBDS, MMBSD, MMBSD, and their spouses
           G⁻¹: MBDDBDSD, MBDDBSDD, MBDDBSDDD, MBDDBSDDDD, and their spouses
           G⁻²: SSS, SSDS, DDS, DDD, ZSS, ZSD, ZDDS, ZDDD, MZDDD, MZDDS, MZDSD, MZSD, MZDDD, MZDDDD, MZDDDDDD, MZDDDDDS, MZDDDDDDD, and their spouses

18. urandavande (pl. uvarandavande), "my great grandchild"
   m/f Ego: G⁻³: ZZDDS, ZZDDDD, ZZSDDD, ZZDDDDDD, ZZDDDDDS, ZZDDDDDDD, and their spouses
   f Ego:  G⁻³: DDD, DDS

19. vlande, "my husband"
   f Ego:  G⁺²: FF, MF, HFF, HMF
           G⁰: H
           G⁻²: SS, DS, SDH, DDH
20. **mukadande** (pl. **vakadi yande**), "my wife"

m Ego:  
G^2+:  FM, MM, WMM, WFM  
G^0:  W  
G^-2:  SD, DD, SSW, DSW  

21. **mugrolikade**, "first (great) wife"

m Ego:  
G^1+:  MBW, MMZSW, MMMZDSW  
G^0:  W (first wife of a polygynist)  

22. **rukwaredi** (pl. **varukwaredi**), "sibling-in-law"

m/f Ego:  
G^1+:  FBMBDH, FBMSW  
G^0:  ZH, BW, FBWSW, FBDM, FMZRSW, FMZSW, MZH, MZSW,  
MMZDSW, MMMZDDH, MMMMZDSW, MMMMZDDSW  
G^-1:  FMZRSDH, FMZSRSSW  
G^-2:  FMZRSDDH, FMZRSDDWSW, FZSRD, FZRSD  

m Ego:  
G^0:  WB, WZ  
f Ego:  
G^0:  HB, HZ  

23. **mbushande** (pl. **vambushande**), "my spouse's sibling's spouse"

m Ego:  
G^0:  WBW, WZH  
f Ego:  
G^0:  HSW, HZH  

24. **tamweyande** (pl. **vatamweyande**), "my male in-law"

m/f Ego:  
G^{+2}:  MMMBHDH  
G^+1:  MMMBHDH  
G^0:  MBHDH, MMZSDH, [FZDH], [FMZDDH]  
G^-1:  DSH, BSH, ZDH, MZSDH, MMZDDH, MMZSDH, MMZDDDH  
G^-2:  WM, WFB  

25. **ngumweyiyanze** (pl. **vangumweyiyanze**), "my female in-law"

m/f Ego:  
G^{+2}:  MMMBWSW  
G^+1:  MMMBWSW  
G^0:  MBWSW, MMZSSW, [FZSW], [FMZDSW], [FMZDDSSW]  
G^-1:  SW, BSW, ZSW, MZSSW, MZDSW, MMZDSW, MMZDDSSW, MMZDDSW  
G^-2:  WM, WFMZ, WM, WMMD, WMMDZ  

m Ego:  
G^+1:  WF, WFMZ, WMMD, WMMDZ  
f Ego:  
G^+1:  HF, HFMZ, HMZ, HMZ, HMMMD, HMMMDZ  

26. **mushuparume** (pl. **vashuparume**), "uncle/nephew-in-law"

m Ego:  
G^+1:  WMB, WMMZS, WMMMZDS  
G^-1:  ZDH, MMZDDH, MMZDDDH

Notes to the Table of Kingship Terms

The letter symbols used have the following meaning: m = male, f = female, G = generation, F = father, M = Mother, B = Brother, Z = sister, S = son, D = daughter, H = husband W = wife, e = elder, y = younger. In compound forms, the capital letter symbols are to be read as possessives, except for the last letter in the compound, thus MB = mother’s brother’s daughter. In the generation symbols the superscripts indicate ascending (+) or descending (-) generation with respect to ego.

All terms shown in the table are used both in reference and address. The terms for mother, father, and grandparents are always used in the plural (with the prefix wa-) out of respect.

The terminological systems used for male and female ego are somewhat different. Bosch
"PRIMARY" AND "SECONDARY" TERMS

Bosch calls usages that result in kin classes that are consistent with the matrilineal principal "basic" or "primary" terms. "Secondary" terms are usages that depend upon other factors such as potential marriage, seniority (in the case of siblings), and namesake relationships.

Bosch says that secondary terms have partially or completely replaced some primary terms, and that these substitutions account for some of the differences between the terminologies used by males and females and for some of the alternatives permitted in both systems. For example, the custom by which a man may inherit as a wife the widow of his mother's brother is consistent with certain "secondary" terminological usages; use of the secondary term in this circumstance is general and does not depend upon a man's actually marrying the widow. Thus it is usual for a man to call his MBW mugrolikadiyande, "my great wife ["my little wife"?], and to call his MBS and MBD monande, "my child," instead of shiroshande, "my cross cousin," the term used by a woman for that relative. Furthermore, both men and women may call their FZS (potentially their mother's husband) wawngona, "little father," and their FZD (potentially MHZ) vananegona, "little mother," instead of shiroshande, "my cross cousin." Also, a man uses sibling terms rather than parental terms for his FMBS and FMBD, and sibling terms rather than child terms for his FZSS and FZSD. The spouses of these cross-cousins are also called by terms which are consistent with the above "secondary" usages.

The term mbushande, "my spouse's sibling's spouse," is used reciprocally between persons who bear the same name, whether related or not.

A non-kinship term, shi(r)kwarume, "wife stealer," is used jokingly by a man for his FF and for his DDH.

provides more specific information for a male ego, and the usages for a female ego have been developed in part from some general statements which he provides.

Alternative terms are in use for certain kin types. In the table above, brackets enclose usages that are permitted or even considered "primary" by Bosch (see below), though not in common use; the more common usages are shown without brackets. Thus mukuruande, "my elder sibling," and mugrunyande, "my younger sibling," are the preferred terms for relatives belonging to ego's own generation and lineage; mpandjande, "my cross sibling," and kamenze, "my parallel sibling," are preferred for descendants of males belonging to ego's father's matrilineage. In the case of a few alternatives no preference is indicated. Thus the terms shitekurupumba, "grand niece or nephew," and mutekuru, "grandchild," seem to be interchangeable in G² for a male's matrilateral descendants, without preference.

The terms mukadande, "my wife," and viande, "my husband," are used in a joking sense for persons of alternate generations, as shown in the table, except when ego and alter are members of the same matrilineage.
PATTERNS OF CONDUCT AMONG KINSMEN

Any kinship term in the Sambyu system may designate more than a single person, and there is a variation in a person’s conduct toward those whom he groups under a particular kinship term depending upon the closeness of the relationship. While both lineal and collateral kinsmen may be called “mother,” “father,” or “child,” the qualifying term vo shidira (?) “on the side”) may be added to the kinship term to indicate that the person is a collateral rather than a lineal relative.

The patterns of conduct customary with each category of kinsmen in traditional Sambyu society are as follows:

Vavava, (actual) “father.”

The extent of the actual father’s influence over his children in comparison with the influence exerted by the children’s mother’s brother is affected to a great degree by the personality of the father. A son is expected to obey and respect his father. A father instructs his son in his duties and responsibilities in daily village life. A father is free to punish and discipline his son.

Between a father and daughter the attitude is one of mutual respect. As a girl grows older she and her father avoid one another and communicate generally through the girl’s mother. When handing something to or receiving something from her father, she will flex her knees in respect. This curtsy, although now disappearing, was customary whenever a person of inferior status had direct contact with one of superior status.

Vavava Vo Shidira, “father’s brother.”

Of all the people addressed as vavava, those who exert the most influence on behavioral patterns are the brothers of one’s biological father. A monande never enter a vavava vo shidira’s sleeping hut without an invitation, nor may he “sit on the bed” of the latter. (This is always the expression used when speaking of intimate behavior between two people.) A vavava vo shidira may not hit or punish his brother’s children, nor is teasing permitted between them. In addressing this vavava the plural form of “you” is used to show respect.

A girl permits herself even less freedom with such a vavava: she may not come into physical contact with him or sit or stand near him. Their speech with one another is marked by extreme politeness, and when a girl gives her vavava vo shidira food, she always curtsies. Also, they may not dance together, joke with each other, or enter each other’s sleeping hut.

Vavane, (actual) “mother.”

A boy has a less formal relationship with his mother than with his father, but must still show her respect by not teasing or joking with her. Indecent language is

2 In recent times the system has undergone modification due to foreign influences.
forbidden in her presence. In attempting to control a disobedient child, a woman may threaten him with punishment by his father or his nkwiri. Despite a boy’s occasional intractable conduct with his mother, when he is older he always looks after her welfare, particularly as she grows aged. A mother and her mature son, however, must not have any physical intimacy; they may not sit next to one another or dance together.

A daughter is closer to her mother than is a son, for the former receives her instruction in daily tasks from her mother, but she is also not allowed to tease her mother.

*Vanane Vo Shidira,* “the sisters of a child’s father and mother.”

A child does not joke or talk very much with his or her father’s sister, and their relationship is characterized on the whole by formality. A boy can go in her hut but cannot “sit on her bed.”

A mother’s sister is treated with respect and fondness. She commands respect similar to that of the actual mother and does not joke with her sister’s children. She instructs children in various matters but may not strike or punish them.

*Nkwirkwande,* “my mother’s brother.”

Traditionally in Sambyu society, unless the biological father has an overridingly strong character, it is the mother’s brother who has the most influence over his sister’s children. Formerly a boy always went to live with his nkwiri, and it was to his nkwiri that he was fully answerable for his conduct. A boy has great respect for, and even fear of his nkwiri, since it is from this relative that he receives most of his discipline, which is often in the form of physical punishment and in the past is reported sometimes to have been fatal. In return for the labor a boy furnishes to his mother’s brother he receives only his food.

A girl will also often go to live with her mother’s brother. It is considered particularly desirable by her family for her to do so after she is married. Her nkwiri pays particular attention to her welfare, for she is the one through whom his lineage will be continued.

The most intimate nkwiri-shimpumba relationship is between a man and his younger uterine sister’s children; it is attenuated for more distant relationships of this type. A man or woman in need of advice or assistance will go to his or her nkwiri.

In the system of matrilineal descent and inheritance practiced by the Sambyu, it is the maternal uncle from whom a young man expects eventually to inherit wealth and power. Though some object to the authority exercised by the mother’s brother, none argue against the pattern of inheritance and succession.

*Vamama,* “grandmother” or “grandfather.”

An informal, teasing relationship exists between a vamama and his or her grandchild. They jokingly insult each other, often with sexual overtones. A female vamama always makes sure that her grandchildren have enough to eat, and a
maternal grandmother, as senior member of the matrilineage, has a responsibility for the general welfare of her grandchildren.

The members of one’s father’s matrilineage are all termed namama because “these are the people who gave birth to my father.” A young man can joke with them because preferably he takes his spouse from his father’s matrilineage.

Shiroshande, “my cross-cousin.”

The freest behavior is between persons who call one another shiroshande, of the same or opposite sex. No kind of behavior between cross-cousins is reprimanded. They can joke with each other, insult each other, play, or dance together. When a shiro has become engaged, the playfulness subsides, though the joking still takes place. Bosch gives a number of examples of teasing that takes place between cross-cousins, most of which involve calling the other a witch or accusing him or her of witchcraft.

The teasing relationship existing between potential marriage partners such as viro (the plural of shiro) is extended further to incorporate all the members of the other person’s clan, including those belonging to distant groups. However, some people hesitate to confirm this relationship, for to joke with a stranger is considered to show an inclination towards witchcraft. Persons who call one another shiroshande should not act as though insulted or become angry because of the teasing and insults which are expected in such relationships.

Certain of a man’s relatives, including his viro (cross-cousins), are entitled to receive specific parts of the cattle or wild game which he kills. In practice one person from each of the privileged kinship groups is selected to receive the designated portion. Beer is also divided in a similar fashion among one’s relatives. The person who customarily receives the ribs of a kill from his shiro gives the latter a sack of grain every year. After a few years the one who has received the grain will present his shiro (the donor) with an ox or cow. Although the gift of grain may be substituted by clothing or other goods, the gift of the animal never varies.

Mukurwande and Mugrunyande, “my elder sibling” and “my younger sibling.”

In childhood brothers and sisters are constantly in each other’s company. After reaching physical maturity they are not supposed to sit together or joke with each other, but they still remain very close companions. An older brother always lets his younger brother do most of the work; two brothers may fight and argue, but with their sisters they are more restrained. Sisters, however, often quarrel among themselves. The eldest brother is the guardian of his lineage, and both the eldest brother and eldest sister are always obeyed, respected, and sought out by their younger siblings for advice and help.

Monande Vo Shidira, classificatory children.

A person treats his monande vo shidira as well as or better than he treats his own children, for he never scolds or punishes the former. A man and his female monande vo shidira avoid one another and do not joke with each other. A woman
often chooses a classificatory *monande* to inherit from her, and a female *monande vo shidira* frequently chooses to live with her *vanane vo shidira*, for she receives better treatment from her than from her own mother. Only children of *muku* (elder sibling) and *mugru* (younger sibling) are treated in this manner, and not those for whom this is a secondary term, e.g., the *shiro*.

*Rukwayedirwande*, “my affinal relative.”

A person’s relationship with his *rukwayedi* is much like that with his *viro*, i.e., very informal. One can take anything one wishes from this person without the formality of asking. However, adultery with such a person is especially to be avoided; the Sambyu believe labor difficulties at birth will result from such relations, which also may cause great hostility among members of the same family.

*Ngunweyiyannde* and *Tamweyiyannde*, “my father-” or “my mother-in-law” and “my son-” or “my daughter-in-law.”

Persons of the opposite sex who use these terms reciprocally avoid physical contact and may not “sit on each other’s bed.” A man will stand by his father-in-law in times of need, and a son-in-law and his father-in-law are bound to protect one another’s belongings. The relationship between a man and his father-in-law is much like that between a *nkwiri* and his male *shimpumba*; for example, a man will work more for his father-in-law than for his own parents. He will also dispense beer for him at celebrations.

*Mbushande*, “my namesake.”

The term *mbu* is used reciprocally between persons of the same sex who have the same name, and is also used reciprocally between the spouses (of either sex) of a pair of siblings. In the latter case, when the *mbus* are of opposite sex, intimacy is avoided but gifts are exchanged between them.

An older person, in particular, treats his younger namesake with great fondness and gives him gifts. A person may call the wife of a *mbu*, *mukandane*, “my wife.” *Vambu* may not curse each other since that is tantamount to cursing oneself, so if a *mbu* is a *vanama*, as often happens, this forms an exception to the normal behavior between a person and his *vanama*. If a man marries the sister of his *mbu*, the two men will be particularly obligated to help each other and take care of the other’s belongings in his absence. Emphasis is placed on the fact that two *mbu* usually marry members of the same matrilineage.

*Kamentu*, “same sex sibling.”

This term can also be used between people whose fathers are simply members of the same clan. Informality and familiarity mark their relationship; *kamentu* may take food from each other’s hut. It is not, however, a teasing relationship. Persons who are *kamentu* take care to avoid extramarital relationships with each other’s spouse, not wishing to risk changing a friendly relationship into a hostile one.
Mpendjande, "my opposite sex sibling."

A uterine brother or sister is called mpandji vo ku lira. The relationship between adults who call one another mpandji is one of restraint and respect, as already described for mukurwande and mugrunyande of opposite sex.

The code of behavior toward a mpandji is especially strict for a particular one of these relatives who is termed the mpandji grokugrana, the person by whom one swears. In describing the restrictions, the Sambyu emphasize their application to men, but acknowledge that a woman also must observe restraint with her mpandji grokugrana. The term mpandji grokugrana is used reciprocally between persons of opposite sex; that is, a man swears by a woman and a woman by a man. If a man is the eldest child of his father, then his mpandji grokugrana is either the eldest daughter of his father’s nkwiiri or the daughter of his father’s male shimpumba. In the same manner, if a person is the second child of his father, then he swears by the second child of one of the above. Out of 60 people interviewed, half named as their mpandji grokugrana the child of their father’s nkwiiri and half named a child of their father’s male shimpumba. Because of cross-cousin marriage it is not unusual for a person and his mpandji grokugrana belong to the same matrilineage.

A man will preface a declaration with “mpandjande, . . .” or may actually invoke the name of his mpandji grokugrana, to emphasize the fact that he is telling the truth. After he has called on the name of his mpandji grokugrana, it is said that he has cursed his sister and must remunerate her with a piece of cloth or an animal.

A man may not touch or come near his mpandji grokugrana, and if by accident he should bump into her he must give her a string of beads or a copper ring. It is absolutely forbidden to tease her or even address her by her name. A woman may not pass by the place where her mpandji grokugrana eats. No request is denied a mpandji grokugrana. The classic example of this, as told by the Sambyu, is a situation in which two men are engaged in furious battle or a duel to the death, and the mpandji grokugrana of one man appears and orders him to stop fighting. Without hesitation the man addressed will withdraw from the battle.

A child is taken at an early age to meet his mpandji grokugrana. For many people this is often the only time they ever see this relative.

Should a man, despite the incest taboos, wish to take a restricted mpandji grokugrana as his wife, he will simply spend the night with her, automatically sealing the marriage contract. The irate parents will lecture the couple and warn them that they may never abandon each other, for should they separate, the man will be considered an outcast by the woman’s parents and will have to remunerate them with several heads of cattle.

Uranda vande, “my great grandchild.”

The restrictions on a person’s behavior towards his uranda are second in stringency only to those concerning his mpandji. Particularly where opposite sexes are concerned, all intimacy is forbidden.

If a person has an eye infection, however, it is believed that his uranda can treat
him more successfully than any medicine man, and so it is this person who prepares and administers the medicine.

*Mushuparumeyande,* “my spouse’s nkwiri.”

A person must answer to his *mushuparume* for the well-being of his wife. Their relationship in informal and not marked by any particular restrictions, except that it does not permit joking.

*Shimpumba,* “sister’s child.”

A man’s female *shimpumba* is the one through whom his lineage will be perpetuated. Generally he treats her with respect, unless she neglects her duties; then he may scold or physically punish her if she is still young.

A man’s male *shimpumba* is his heir and the future guardian of the matrilineage. A male *shimpumba* is treated much like a younger brother. He can enter his *nkwiri*’s hut and is allowed a certain amount of freedom within his village. He works his *nkwiri*’s land and cares for his animals. He also acts as “butler” at any occasion in which beer is served. Today, due to foreign influences, the *nkwiri* has lost much of his influence to the father of the child.

Since the Sambyu area has been so recently settled, and most present village heads are therefore also the founders and builders of their villages, it is difficult to verify the strength of avuncular succession in modern Sambyu society. However, out of 43 village heads interviewed, 17 said that their *shimpumba* lived in their village, 25 said that their *shimpumba* either lived nearby or, if far away, still visited often, and only 6 said they did not have close ties with their *shimpumba*.

**Politics and Law**

**POLITICAL ORGANIZATION**

In Namibia (we have found no information on administration in Angola) the Sambyu are ruled by a chief who functions within the bounds dictated by the white administration, applying Bantu law and custom insofar as permitted. The chief appoints two kinds of headmen, those who serve as district governors or as governors of particular groups of people (e.g., the members of another tribe residing within Sambyu territory), and those who assist the chief with his duties. Neither the chief nor his headmen are allowed to require any form of payment from the people under their control. At a lower level are the village heads. The chief and his appointed headmen are also the heads of their respective villages.
REGIONAL ORGANIZATION IN NAMIBIA

Village

Though it may be considered the smallest political entity, the village is not a wholly independent unit because of the matrilineal descent system which binds the members of a village to a larger network of people. The average village houses only twelve people. The dispersion of the Sambyu among many small villages is a phenomenon only of the last thirty to forty years.

Dimukunda

There are a large number of small sub-districts (dimukunda) which embrace one or more villages, named according to local characteristics. These sub-districts play no political or social role and appear to be an administrative device borrowed from Ovamboland.

Major Districts

The Sambyu territory in Namibia is divided into seven major districts, each with its own headman. The size of the district depends on the density of the population and extends from 3 to 20 miles along the river. These districts and the headmen governing them are a white institution and were not part of the traditional Sambyu organization.

District Heads

The district heads are directly answerable to the chief. District heads investigate all misdeeds and complaints in their regions. Some cases are tried in a district court composed of the district head, his assistant(s), and the neighboring village heads, while other cases are sent to the chief's court. If the outcome of a case in a district court is unsatisfactory to one of the parties involved, an appeal may be made to the chief's court. All fines collected are transferred to the chief, though he may share these at his discretion with the headmen. Although a district head may receive a share of the fines he collects as well as an occasional gift of a bovine from the chief, he does not receive a fixed income for his services.

Most district heads appoint one or more assistants who serve either as general aides to the headman, or, in the case of very large territories, as his representatives in the more remote corners of the territory. An assistant district head also investigates complaints and notifies the parties involved of upcoming trials. An assistant's compensation varies and depends on the generosity of the head for whom he works.

Out of seven Sambyu district heads in 1961, only one was a member of the Sambyu tribe. Bosch suggests that the non-Sambyu heads are found in areas where the Sambyu are in a minority.
There are no records of the terms of office of headmen. The pattern of succession with regard to the position varies from case to case, and it is always decided by the chief in consultation with the village heads of the district concerned. A headman may be removed from office by the chief should the latter judge him to be unfit. When a person assumes the position of district head, his fire is extinguished and an elderly man or woman of the new headman’s lineage kindles a new fire.

THE CHIEF

The chief of the Sambyu in Namibia no longer exercises his or her former power. This is partly due to the establishment of the white government, but it is also due to the spread of the Sambyu into small villages and the influx of members from other tribes. The chief is assisted in his or her duties by the eldest members (matimbi) of the tribe living in the vicinity. A chief may be aided by one or more lirenga, personal assistants who act as bodyguards, advisors, and servants. These assistants can be either male or female. Formerly a chief had three or more such assistants who served as messengers and servants and were responsible for preparing meals, taking care of the chief’s pipe, and carrying the royal chair wherever the chief went.

Besides the services of the various district headmen within their districts, the chief in 1961 (a woman) also received the services of a special headman or sub-chief who lived nearby and acted as her personal assistant rather than as the head of a specific district. This sub-chief happened to be a shuro, “cross-cousin,” of the chief and was considered the most important of the Sambyu headmen. He accompanied the chief on her visits to the various districts.

At the time the Sambyu chief in Angola belonged to the same lineage as the chief in Namibia, though to a junior branch. Both chiefs were women, and of the eight chiefs whom Bosch lists as having governed the Sambyu people, exclusive of the present chief in Angola, three have been women.

Today in Namibia when a chief dies, abdicates, or is replaced, the Bantu commissioner calls a meeting at which the elders, the village heads, and other members of the tribe choose a new chief. The choice must be acceptable to the government. In 1924 when the chief Ndango died, the rightful successor, Sharunguro, was not found acceptable to the white administration because, among other reasons, he lived in Angola, so another chief was chosen.

The new chief does not remain in the former chief’s village, but rather razes it and founds a new royal village. One of his or her grandchildren extinguishes his or her old fire and ceremonially kindles a new one. The new chief is also treated by his nganga, “doctor,” with the strongest of medicines to avert any evil influences. It is said that a sorcerer who attempts to kill a chief will die.

The chief formerly had a royal seat which was carried wherever he or she went. If the chief was a man, it was his privilege to wear a serval skin. Female chiefs and the wives of male chiefs wore several mpande shells as a sign of their rank. (It was taboo for them to touch the skin of a leopard).
Respect must be shown the chief. Formerly respect was expressed with more formality than it is today: the knees were flexed and the hands clapped in the presence of the chief, while the word "mbu" was uttered. Sometimes a person knelt down and rubbed his chest and arms with earth. One expression of respect is the phrase, "You are the rainbow."

The chief receives no kind of compensation from the state for his or her services, so that the only income received comes from the fines levied in court. Sometimes a worker who has left the village for employment elsewhere will give the chief a small portion of his earnings upon his return. Although a chief is entitled to free service from his subjects, he or she almost never takes advantage of this privilege nowadays.

When a village head dies, his shimpumba sends a bovine the the chief as notification of the event.

**BOUNDARIES AND INTERTRIBAL RELATIONS**

The traditional boundaries of the Sambyu territory in S.W.A. were formed by the Omatako-omuramba at Ndongo to the east and the Fontain-omuramba to the west. Today the territory is not quite as extensive. In recent times relations between the Sambyu and neighboring tribes have been peaceful, though intertribal wars were common in the past.

Messengers are frequently sent between chiefs to notify one another of events within their respective areas. At the death of a chief, the chiefs of neighboring Okavango tribes send a bovine for the funeral. All the chiefs of the Okavango area attend the funeral of one of their number.

**CITIZENSHIP AND STATUS**

Formerly strangers desiring to live in Sambyu territory were regarded with suspicion and watched very closely. Today a person carries a letter of introduction from the chief of the area he is leaving to the chief of the area into which he is moving. Members of other tribes who have lived for a long period of time among the Sambyu with children born in the tribal territory are treated like Sambyu by the chief. A Sambyu who finds himself in trouble in another territory will call upon his relatives to help him rather than upon the Sambyu chief.

**LAW**

**TRADITIONAL LEGAL INSTITUTIONS**

Formerly, when the Sambyu lived in one or two large villages, the chief together with the tribal elders composed the highest court of law. The nganga, or "doctor,"
with his methods of divination, was almost always consulted in a legal dispute. Influential or rich people and relatives of the chief were favored before the court, while poor people were often forced into slavery if they could not pay their fines.

Today there is a court for each political division; the village, the district, and the tribe; and each is presided over by the principal authority of the area. Since district heads are creations of the white administration, their courts were not a part of the traditional Sambyu organization. The verdict in a case heard either by the district court or by the chief’s court is significantly influenced by the elders of the area. The role of the district head or of the chief within the confines of the court consists principally of determining and imposing fines. If the Sambyu chief himself is involved in a case, then a neighboring chief presides over the trial.

If a person is dissatisfied with the verdict of a lower court, he may appeal his case to a higher court. However, if a case is appealed to the chief’s court and this confirms the verdict of the lower court, the original fine will be increased. In such a re-trial all the evidence is reexamined and the district head involved in the first trial is required to be present. A person who is not satisfied with the fine imposed upon him may flee from the area. Further appeals may be made before the Bantu commissioner’s court which informally hears cases at the quarterly tribal gatherings in the presence of the tribal governing body. If an appeal is made to the Bantu commissioner’s court and this court rejects the original verdict, then the chief’s court must schedule another trial.

CRIMES AND MISDEMEANORS

There is no sharp line drawn by native law between crimes and misdemeanors. Violent crimes, however, such as murder, assault, and rape, fall unquestionably within the criminal category. The fines collected for such offenses are usually divided between the victim (or his family) and the chief. In cases involving civil violations of a less serious nature, agreements are often reached between the parties involved out of court. If the damage done cannot be repaired, then the court determines the value of the damage and a fine, customarily in the form of cattle, is imposed. The compensation is always more than the value of what has been lost, sometimes amounting to twice the original value. Formerly household articles or agricultural tools were claimed as fines. Nowadays fines are usually paid in cattle, though cash fines are sometimes levied. Fines are not fixed for specific crimes but rather depend on the circumstances: e.g., the number of crimes committed previously by the offender, the status of the person against whom the crime was committed, the personality of the offender, etc. All fines collected by the court are transferred to the chief, and he may share them at his discretion with the headmen.

Broken contracts are often a cause for lawsuits. Common contracts pertain to betrothal and marriage; the loan of cattle (the kushiteka practice); hiring extra help to mind the animals, plow the fields, or build a hut; and engaging the services of a nganga. Women and children cannot make contracts without the approval of their fathers or male guardians.
If a girl breaks her engagement to a man or becomes pregnant by a man other than her betrothed, her parents will reimburse the finance for the service and gifts he has given them.

A man may leave his wife if she fails to fulfill her marital duties, repeatedly commits adultery, or incurs suspicion of sorcery. A woman may leave her husband on grounds of cruelty, non-support, or abandonment. If a woman leaves her husband, the latter waits until she has remarried and then places a claim against the new husband for turning his wife against him. The former husband usually wins such a case. If the wife takes her case to court, the court normally seeks to effect a reconciliation.

Adultery is not considered a misdeed for a man, though white influence is changing this attitude. In a sample of fifty court cases, one half involved adultery or other marital difficulties. Informants say that such cases have arisen only since white contact; formerly marriage contracts were broken by the two partners simply leaving each other.

If one person accuses another of witchcraft, lying, or theft without good reason or proof, the accuser can be charged with slander.

Cattle theft is considered one of the most serious forms of thievery. Usually the robber is required to reimburse the owner with twice as many animals as were stolen.

A person who illegally enters another’s village is not regarded as an offender, but should he enter someone’s sleeping hut uninvited, he is liable to be accused of witchcraft.

In the past a murderer was fined eleven cattle, ten of which went to the victim’s family and one to the chief. A murderer who was unable to pay his fine was either put to death or taken into slavery by the victim’s family who often killed him in revenge. In recent times a fine of from 10 to 20 head has been exacted, one or more going to the chief. In addition to the fine, a murderer must provide a beast for his own ritual cleansing. In this ceremony, called kupupauro, the heart of the animal is struck against the legs of the murderer and those of his family, then the meat of the animal is eaten.

The shedding of blood during children’s games is not fined. If a person kills another accidentally, the fine is greatly reduced. Assault that leads to bloodshed is fined according to the gravity of the injury. Beer parties often lead to quarrels and fights, and in such instances all involved are required by the authorities to pay a fine in cash.

COURT PROCEDURES

Cases which involve one or two members of a village and concern domestic matters are called malikundero. All other cases are called shipangura.

Each village head, in locating his village, makes sure that there is a tree just outside the village walls where court trials and other meetings can be held. If it rains, the resthouse in the village shelters the court.
Anyone, except pre-pubescent girls and unwed boys, may attend any court session. These “immature” persons may only attend a trial when they are personally involved in it. All men and women present are allowed to participate in the discussions, but the most influential advisors are the elders (matimbi). The complainant states his or her case first, after which the accused is allowed to defend him or herself. Witnesses for both sides are then called upon. In reaching a decision the chief or district head is guided by the elders.

Nowadays a person on trial must take an oath. If he is subsequently found to be lying, he is fined. Formerly a person swore by the life of someone chosen at random from the crowd. If by chance such a person later fell ill or died, the oath-taker was judged to have lied.

Eyewitness and material evidence are given great weight in a trial, but hearsay is also admissible. If the complaint concerns something that happened long ago, witnesses will be required.

In former days one guilty of a crime often fled the area, for the injured party could kill a thief or assailant in revenge with impunity.

Capital punishment was once widespread. Executions took place outside the village, with the blood relatives of the guilty party in mandatory attendance. Those who participated had to be ritually cleansed afterwards. A person was executed either by drowning or burning. Murderers unable to pay the usual fine of eleven cattle, particularly repeat offenders, were often dealt with in such a manner. A person condemned to death could sometimes gain leniency by throwing himself on the ground and clasping the legs of the chief’s wife or mother.

Formerly physical punishment was administered to those who could not pay their fines. It was imposed by the chief and carried out by his helpers (marenga) who flogged the subject with a whip made of hippopotamus hide. Mutilation, however, was never practiced by the Sambyu. Busybodies and quarrelsome people were formerly banished from the area, as they still are today.

Nowadays when a fine is levied, the guilty one is asked if he has the means to pay, and if he does not he is given a few days to borrow what he needs from his relatives. An outstanding debt increases in amount over time. The animals which are given as compensation to the injured party are never slaughtered and shared after the trial.

Mitigating circumstances before the court include instances in which a person has done something out of ignorance, or is very young or mentally retarded. An attempted crime can be prosecuted even if it was not carried out. Acknowledging guilt acts in a person’s favor.

Death does not clear a murderer’s guilt, for a guilty person’s heir not only inherits his assets but his guilt as well. The family of a deceased offender is responsible for paying his fines. If a wronged person dies, his matrilineal relatives or his father take up his case.
INHERITANCE AND SUCCESSION

Most of the possessions of a household are treated as belonging to the man. A man is entitled to reclaim all the gifts he has given his wife should they separate, but in practice he rarely does so.

The eldest living brother of the deceased is usually responsible for dividing the deceased’s goods among his heirs. These heirs are the siblings of the deceased and his matrilineal relatives in the first descending generation. The senior male shimpumba (sister’s child) in particular is often the most important heir, especially if there are not many members of the sibling group living. Cattle usually make up the most valuable portion of a person’s belongings, and a man’s shimpumba inherits most of these. Children of the deceased receive nothing, but are occasionally given something by the heirs. Sometimes a woman’s daughters inherit her personal belongings. Often a widower will take his deceased wife’s fields and gardens as well as her food store if her matrilineal relatives do not live in the vicinity.

Positions of status and rank are transmitted through the senior female member of a group of siblings and pass to her eldest male or female child. Within a matrilineage, the most closely related male shimpumba succeeds to his nkwiri’s social position.

Language and Folklore

In addition to an extensive vocabulary list (siSambyu to Afrikaans), Bosch provides a few notes on the Sambyu language.

Bosch gives twenty-one examples of Sambyu folk tales through which we can trace certain characteristics. Most of the stories given are moralistic; sometimes the moral is stated at the end of the story in a sentence, while at other times it is left to be inferred by the listener. In some of the allegorical tales animals are the main characters. In several of the stories there is a talking bird which tells on wrongdoers and comes back to life if it is killed. Virtues such as modesty, kindness, and industriousness are lauded, while laziness, stupidity, and selfishness are condemned. The righteous and the wronged are recompensed, whereas murderers, thieves, and cheaters are all punished. Two of the tales are creation myths dealing with the origins of men and women, fire, thunder and lightning.

Religion, Magic, and Medicine

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

THE SUPREME BEING

According to Bosch, before white contact the Sambyu had a rather vague concept of a supreme being. N’ambé is the name by which the Sambyu most common-
ly refer to the supreme being in invocations and special offerings, but two other names, Karungu and Shuku, are also used. Karungu, a term common farther west among the Ovambo, has been adopted by the missionaries as the name for God; Shuku is a term introduced by the Nyomba.

Because of contact with many different African peoples and with missionaries, the concept of a supreme being varies greatly from person to person. Generally Nyambi is considered to be an invisible, powerful, and mysterious being who created everything. According to the Sambyu creation myth, Nyambi allowed the first people to descend from the sky to a certain rock in Botswana called Liwe lia Nkumbi or Tyodilo. (The "Tyodilo Hills" lie 65 miles southwest of Shaka and 60 miles south of Andara.) Some say that two Bantu and two Bushmen originally descended and that the former went to the river while the latter went to live in the woods. Others say that a number of different peoples descended until one day a fat person broke the rope so that no more could climb down. All living creatures are believed formerly to have lived in the sky with Nyambi.

Nyambi or Karungu is said by some to be the sun, or by others the man-god. Bosch interprets the ring of wet grass sometimes hung on the offering post as a vestige of a former sun offering. Those who call the sun "the man-god" call the moon "the woman" and the stars "the eyes of the people" or "the children of Nyambi." Nyambi as the sun-god reveals himself in meteors; when one is observed, a person must scratch the back of his head and spit while calling out "Nyambi gives life"; others then take up the cry.

The power of Nyambi is not clearly distinguishable from that of the vadimu, "ancestral spirits." Some say that Nyambi has power over rain, drought, and the sending of natural plagues and illnesses.

SPIRITS AND GHOSTS

Ancestral spirits, vadimu (pl.), mudimu (sg.), are believed to control the fortunes and misfortunes of their living descendants. To succeed in various undertakings, particularly hunting and, to a lesser degree, agriculture, a person must observe a great number of ritual practice to appease the spirits.

A spirit retains the status of the person it inhabited in life. Generally only a person's own vadimu can influence him or her, not the vadimu of other lineages, though the ancestral spirits of the royal clan, particularly of former rulers, are in many respects considered responsible for the welfare of the people as a whole. The spirits of the senior members of the senior branch of the matrilineage are the most important for a living member of the matrilineage. Since religious ceremonies are carried out by the nuclear or extended family rather than the lineage, the matrilineal ancestors of both the man and woman are invoked and sacrificed to at these ceremonies.

When a person dies, his monyo, "soul," which the Sambyu say is like the wind, is thought to go to live in the sky, or as some say, with Nyambi. Once the monyo
has reached the heavens it becomes a *mudimu*. *Vadimu* receive all their necessities (food, beads, etc., see below) from their descendants; if these descendants should neglect them, the *vadimu* will punish them. All people who die, other than infants, regardless of the manner of death, become *vadimu*.

After a burial the grandchild of the deceased starts a new fire in the village of the latter by friction. If fire is made this way, anything the grandchild asks of the new *mudimu* will be granted. As with other fires of ritualistic importance, this fire does not need to be kept burning. Once it has gone out it can be relighted with matches.

A *mudimu* makes his desires clear to his living relatives in two ways: through dreams and through divination by a *nganga*, “doctor.” Bats are thought to be *vadimu* who have come to see a sick person. When bats appear, a *nganga* must consult the *katemba* (divination medium, see below) to determine if the *vadimu* wants a blood offering.

After a body is buried, another being known as *undumba* or *urumba*, “ghost” or “evil spirit,” comes into existence. This ghost is said to be a miniature replica of the deceased except for the addition of a tail. Ghosts are invisible except to sorcerers and doctors. Usually they live in the woods, but on occasion they walk around among living people and eat with them without being noticed. Their world is a duplicate of the one they inhabited when alive, with the same statuses, occupations, and personalities that their human counterparts had. They are feared, for they can be used by sorcerers to harm their living relations. Every sorcerer has a group of these ghosts living with him. *Vanganga*, “doctors,” can combat the evil influence of the *urumba* with medicines and certain treatments. It is said that a person can commit suicide to take revenge on a relative by having his *urumba* return to make the hated person ill.

**OFFERINGS**

Offerings are made at an offering stake. This stake, made of any kind of wood, is a short stick with several forks in it; it is placed in the ground with the “fingers” pointing up. Formerly a stake could be made only of the *Kigelia pinnata* tree brought with the Sambyu when they immigrated to the Okavango region. (When the Sambyu came from the Mushi area they brought with them, in a clay pot, a branch of the tree from which they fabricated offering staffs. When they reached present day Uvungu-vungu they planted this branch on the bank of the river where it grew into a tree. From this tree, a *Kigelia pinnata* or sausage tree, other sacrificial staffs were in turn cut. The tree gave its name, *uvungu-vungu*, to the village built there. This tree was still living when Bosch wrote and is said to be the only one of its kind in the Sambyu area.) Each village has one or more offering stakes which are placed by the rest house in the village or alongside the village head’s hut. In some areas today these are buried in the ground so that the tip is just at the surface of the ground with offerings made above this spot; the stake is thus concealed out of fear of Western condemnation.
A fire, kindled from time to time at the offering stake, is used solely for cooking certain parts of the animal sacrificed. Formerly menstruating women and immature children were strictly forbidden to approach the offering stake. When an offering is being made for an ill person, everyone who has had extramarital sexual relations with the patient must remain at a distance. Although elderly men and women usually conduct an offering, in many situations they consult the katembu to determine who should lead the ceremony.

Before a man leaves for a hunt, he rests his gun against the offering stake and throws tobacco on a live coal there. When the tobacco begins to smoke, the man spits on the gun and the smoking coal, praying, “Karunga help me and give me meat.” White chalk or ashes are then rubbed between the man’s eyes, on his forearms, and on the gun. He may also spit on his chest as he arises, while asking for the help of the vadimu. If a man has poor luck hunting, he takes this as a sign of his vadimu’s displeasure and consults the nganga to make an offering. With the help of the katembu the nganga also determines which of the hunter’s relatives present should make the offering. The hunter and the relative chosen hang ostrich egg-shell beads on the stake, leaving them there for a few days. Red maize is also considered a good offering for the hunt as it symbolizes the color of the blood that will flow when the hunter makes his kill. After a kill an offering is made either in the field or back in the hunter’s village.

Offerings for success in fishing follow the same pattern as those for hunting, but people never use fish as offerings. The good favor of the ancestral spirits is considered especially necessary for a successful catch.

Formerly no one began sowing before the chief did. Once the village head learned that the chief had begun to plant his crops, he had all the farming implements from his village, as well as white chalk and some seed, assembled at the offering stake. The vadimu were then called upon to give their blessings and the whole assemblage was left there overnight. No one worked the following day, but two days later everyone began preparing the village head’s land; the day after that everyone began to work his or her own land. An offering stake was often planted in the grain field while all those present threw some seed around it.

Maize is always the first crop to ripen, and at harvest time a head of maize is hung on the offering stake and the spirits are called: “Vadimu, come take the new maize.” Then quantities of maize are cooked, first for the village head to eat, then for the others to consume. In the same way as maize, all crops are brought to the offering stake as they ripen, sometimes several at a time, but never maize and millet together.

Illnesses are never attributed to natural causes but rather to sorcery or the displeasure of the spirits. The members of the lira, “matrilineage,” of a sick person gather for both minor and grave illnesses. If the illness is minor, they usually decide to offer a chicken. If the illness is serious, the nganga is called in. He divines the cause of the illness, either prescribing medicine, which is administered by one of the relatives, or stipulating the necessary offering, usually an animal’s heart and blood.

One remedy consists of passing a live chicken over the head of the patient. If the
latter does not get better, the chicken is sacrificed to the spirits; if the patient's condition still does not improve, a goat is sacrificed. If all these steps fail, an ox is slaughtered and not only the heart and blood, but the flesh as well is offered. All the meat of the animal sacrificed is consumed by those present. Other offerings include maize, porridge, and various valued articles such as beads, but the best offering is always an animal.

Another treatment performed by the nganga involves placing coals in a small katemba and passing these around the one who is ill.

Any sickness that affects the whole land is attributed to Nyambi rather than to the vadimu. Plague or smallpox outbreaks require that an old man from the chief's village go out and cry, "Nyambi, give us life!" After this all the elderly men and women of the chief's village gather to make an offering. Bosch thinks that during such times there is a taboo on sexual relations.

During a number of dances offerings are made to the spirits for treating certain sicknesses or physical indispositions. Most of these dances take place during harvest time when a person who has eaten a newly harvested product becomes ill. When this happens the matrilineal relatives of the patient consult the katemba to determine which dance should be held. Beer is made and all the neighbors are invited. The sick person is fed porridge little by little until he or she can keep it down. The dance usually lasts for a day and a night and is repeated if the person does not recover. All dances of this type are held in the village since they are ritualistic rather than entertaining; dances for pleasure are held outside the village.

Bosch describes various dances performed today or in former times to cure specific illnesses or conditions. One such dance, no longer held, called kambembe, previously performed only for the chief, included the sacrifice of a slave whose body was thrown into the river. Usually the person killed was either believed to have had an affair with one of the chief's wives, or else, being very attractive, was considered a potential threat in this respect.

Adequate rainfall is the responsibility of the royal clan and their vadimu, though ordinary citizens may participate in the rain-making ceremonies as well as request their performance. Rain-making ceremonies take place each year at sowing time and during droughts, and usually are performed at the grave of a former ruler.

The first 'call for rain' is made by the old women in the vicinity of the royal village who go to the river singing "Nyambi, Nyambi, give us rain!" Men and young women are not allowed to come near. The old women go into the river, wash themselves, and get dressed again. That night they all sleep together and do not work the next day. An offering does not accompany this ceremony, nor are there any dietary restrictions.

If this little ritual does not bring rain, then the elders go to the chief with a bovino, usually a large black ox, for sacrifice, and the chief or eldest of his lineage presides at the offering. The chief's grandchild (musetekuru) performs the sacrifice; after he has eaten everyone else present may eat. All meat which is not eaten by sundown is left at the grave of a former ruler as an offering.

If all the preceding efforts fail, the chief turns to the rainmaker of the Mbukushu
tribe, who still today is called upon by all the chiefs of the neighboring tribes as he was in the past.

When a person sets out on or returns from a trip, the traveler’s father spits in his or her hand and gives a blessing. Spitting is considered a kind of offering.

No ceremony is held for the erection of a new hut, but when a new village is founded, a new fire is ceremoniously kindled and part of the first meal in this village is offered to the spirits who are asked to guard the village. The village head’s mutekururu kindles the new fire using a fire drill. The sticks used to kindle ceremonial fires are kept by the village head and are passed on to his shimpumba.

MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT

A person can bring about harm to him or herself and others both by neglecting certain duties and by committing taboo acts. Some kinds of wrongdoing can be corrected by ritual cleansing. Those who control magical powers are the vanganga, “doctors,” who employ supernatural forces to help people, and the varodi, “sorcerers,” who use their powers towards evil ends.

“DOCTORS”

A nganga uses rituals and medicines to protect and bring good fortune to those who seek his aid. He also explains unusual occurrences, interprets the wishes of the ancestral spirits, and determines the causes of illness and misfortune. The vanganga play a relatively small role among the Sambyu in comparison with the Nyemba and the Mbukushu. Bosch explains this by reference to the time when all the Sambyu lived in one or two large villages. Then the chief was the central figure whose word was law, and he was either the most powerful nganga himself, or had the greatest one as his or her personal advisor. Therefore a number of smaller vanganga were not needed, as they were among the Nyemba who were a widely dispersed people.

The efforts of the missionaries and government to eradicate “witchcraft” have pushed these practices underground. Bosch was able to find the material accessories, such as a kutemba and a ngombo, only in the heart of the Sambyu territory, far from centers of white influence. Most of his information on this subject he obtained from Sambyu inhabitants of the north side of the river. Most Sambyu go to the north side of the river to seek the advice of reknowned Nyemba vanganga and will not hesitate to make a journey of several days duration to reach an esteemed nganga.

Though the role of nganga is not actually inherited, sometimes a nganga’s sister’s son will take over his practice after his death or while he is still alive. A woman can become a nganga, but this is not common. There are various reasons for someone to become a nganga: cure by a practicing nganga for a serious illness, material benefits, or a dream of an ancestor who was a nganga.
A nganga aspirant receives intensive training which lasts about a month. The best place to receive training through a practicing nganga is said to be either in the vicinity of the Cuito River or among the MbuKushu. Refresher courses are also given at these two places and medicinal supplies are obtained there. While in training the apprentice must observe both sexual and dietary restrictions. The trainee's body is rubbed with black medicine and iguana fat, and a medicine is thrown in his eyes to enable him to see the urumba. He may wear only a loin cloth during his training period, and when this period is over and he returns to his village, he refrains from all social activities for about a month. The nganga who has trained the student gives him a few final tests to assure his thorough knowledge of the material. For example a trainee must kill a designated animal without weapons. He also has medicine rubbed into cuts on his arm, and if he does not fall ill, he passes the test.

The instructor makes the young nganga's first katomba to show him how it is done. All other equipment and medicines the young nganga must provide for himself. The teacher usually receives two bovines for his services.

Some vanganga hold a position of greater status than others. A great nganga wears a beaded necklace which strikes fear into the hearts of sorcerers, varodi; while lesser vanganga simply wear red copper bracelets. A great nganga is said to be able to diagnose an illness simply by looking at the patient. It is said that a powerful nganga will often yield to the desire to increase his material wealth and will become a sorcerer who influences people negatively. Such a one will finally completely abandon the powers and privileges he had as a nganga.

DIVINATION EQUIPMENT AND PROCEDURES

The katomba is usually the hollow shell of a small gourd or of the maguni ("wild lemon" or "Bushman's apple" [? Strychnos cocculoides]). The word katomba, in fact, is the diminutive form of the word litemba which means skin or rind. The top of the gourd is cut off to form a small bowl and a spike cut from a specific type of root is secured on the inside of the gourd with a mixture of elephant and hippopotamus dung, white chalk, and red clay.

When a katomba is used to answer questions, it is placed upside down on the skin of a duiker and spun by the nganga while he repeats the names of people or the possible ways someone could have died. The katomba indicates the correct answer by coming to a stop at a name or word and refusing to spin any further, in spite of the nganga's efforts. The mixture inside the gourd is used by the nganga when he visits people who may be hostile towards him. He puts a knife point full of it into his mouth, and if he sees the people are friendly towards him he swallows it, otherwise he spits it out.

The ngombo is a wooden or fiber bowl used in everyday life as a food vessel but converted by a nganga for divination after its owner has suffered a violent death. The katomba is used for common queries, while the ngombo is used for more serious affairs or when the katomba's answer do not suit the nganga.
The *ngombo* is filled with a mixture of different medicines and a number of small assorted objects. After shaking this bowl the *nganga* interprets the position of the objects on top of the pile.

An axe handle is sometimes used in divination much in the same way as is a *katemba*, by being spun around until it stops, presumably at the right answer.

Ordeals are also employed in divination: *Mashoma* is a test given someone who has been accused of being a sorcerer — the accused must pick a copper ring out of a pot of boiling water. If he or she is burned, he or she is guilty, and if not, he or she is innocent. *Mwade* is a poison cup which consists of roots of a small bush which have been ground and soaked in water for several days; the accused is then made to drink it. If one vomits, one is said to be innocent, but if one dies of the poison, one is said to have been a *murodi*.

CHARMS AND PROTECTIVE MEASURES

When a village is built or whenever the village head deems it necessary, a *nganga* is asked to protect the village and its inhabitants. To protect the villagers, particularly from illness, sorcery, lions, wolves, and leopards, he strikes them with the tail of a bovine, wildebeest, or zebra which has been dipped in medicine. To protect the village he buries three charms in different parts of the settlement. Should a *nganga* screen the entrance to a hut with palm leaves, it is believed that his magic causes any intruder to be stopped by a large snake. A *nganga* can also place a strip of skin by the fence of the cattle pen to protect the animals, and sometimes he places on an axe handle by the gourds of milk to allow the cattle to spend the night safely in the fields.

*Rututa* is the power or charm obtained from a *nganga* by which a person assures the protection and abundance of his or her own crops while placing a curse on another’s crops. One must bury the charm in the middle of one’s land and from this spot one begins not only his sowing but also his harvesting. He or she can also bury a charm in the granary to assure a constant supply. *Mushengumoko* is a charm provided by a *nganga* to protect a person’s crops against theft and *rututa*. The farmer buries roots in every corner of the land, or else burns them so that the smoke blows over the fields. He or she can also bury a finch’s heart in his granary to protect his stores. It is believed that through the use of *rututa* a person’s store of grain can be increased at the expense of the stores held by others.

A *nganga* can perform love magic or make a man strong by rubbing medicine into incisions on his neck, arms, or shoulders. To assure good fortune or protection, a person undergoes a similar treatment with facial incisions. Medicine is then placed in a gourd at the offering stake and the hands, feet, and face must be washed in it every morning.
SORCERERS

Sorcerers, varodi, are those who use malevolent spirits to the detriment of society. Accusations of sorcery can have serious consequences for both the accuser and the accused. If the accused proves his innocence, the accuser must pay him two bovines. Formerly a murodi who was proved guilty was without exception put to death.

A child can be the unwitting victim of witchcraft. Children may not come near a place where strangers have spent the night or have built a fire and may not touch the wood used for the latter purpose, for fear of witchcraft.

When someone dies, those who have come in contact with the person before the death are immediately suspected of sorcery. As already mentioned, a widow must be very prudent in her actions following the death of her husband lest she be accused of bringing about his demise through sorcery. If someone does not mourn the death of a relative, he or she will be suspected of sorcery. Equally, someone who does not touch the body of the deceased is suspect, for it is believed that sorcerers will die if they touch the body.

A sorcerer cannot be recognized by outward appearance, but must be identified positively by a nganga. It is said that formerly when a member of the royal clan died, the chief would determine the person responsible for the death by having two men carry the body around among the people until it touched the guilty party.

Those who are very thin are often believed to be sorcerers because they eat so often with the urumba that they do not get enough food. Someone who is considered very ugly, has birth marks, or often gets cramps is also sometimes thought to be a murodi. A person who commits incest is believed to have inclinations towards sorcery. Someone who is afraid to drink from the poison cup and who begins to sweat and tremble is regarded as being a murodi. If a sick person dreams of someone in particular, someone causing harm, then the person in the dream is thought to be a potential sorcerer.

Less powerful varodi enlist the help of those who are more powerful, then they work together to harm their victims. At night they ride aardwolves, reaching far away places in one evening to kill or bewitch someone. They eat the flesh of their victims, choosing those who have sweet rather than bitter flesh.

The murodi's powers are obtained from the likithi who lives deep in the woods. He is a gigantic hairy man with one eye, arm, ear, etc., and an enormous sexual organ. Those who encounter him lose their way in the woods and the women die from being raped by him.

Evil spirits, urumba, help sorcerers. Hatred, envy, or coveting a kinsman's wife or goods are frequently the motives attributed to sorcerers who let their relatives fall ill. Jealousy is believed to be the motive of people who bewitch their rich neighbors. The power of a woman murodi is believed to be much stronger than that of a man.
Formerly persons revealed to be sorcerers were always put to death, with the murodi's relatives taking a leading role in the execution. The manner of death depended upon the executioners. Sometimes the suspect was tied to a large rock or heavy tree stump and thrown in the river. At other times he or she was placed in a sitting position in the middle of a pile of wood shaped like a hut and burned. After a sorcerer's death he or she can return in the form of a talking animal to harm people. If a nganga is not quickly consulted when such an animal appears, the person who has seen it will surely die.

It is believed that a deceased chief can turn into a rainbow-colored snake, who goes to live in a deep place in the river and sometimes stops passing canoes with an unseen hand. Only by throwing copper rings into the water or by cutting one's arms or legs so that the blood drips into the water can the canoe be freed.

**Taboos and the Consequences of Breaking Them**

*Menstrual taboos*

A menstruating woman may not offer food to anyone for fear this will cause the recipient to die from a cough; she may not sleep on the same bed as her husband for fear their cattle will die; and she may not pick up a milk pail, lest it cause a calf to become emaciated and lose its hair.

*Shidira* means taboo. Once someone has violated a taboo, the action usually cannot be reversed, but a person is not usually considered unclean as a result if it. Cases involving certain animals and objects which are considered *shidira* are an exception to this. Should a hunter kill a *shidira* animal, he may not return to his village until he has been cleansed. A *nganga*, however, may touch and even eat the flesh of *shidira* animals.

*Tama* is a harmful influence on a person caused by certain actions committed by the person or by the person's relatives. These influences always manifest themselves while someone is hunting or is in a boat on the water. *Tama* resulting from extra-marital sexual activity negatively affects the hunting of elephants, buffaloes, and hippopotamuses. Should a man die on a hunting expedition, his wife is blamed for his death and must pay his relatives one cow.

*Ciciri* means literally "the shakes." The distinction between this term and *tama* is not always clear except that an action that brings about *ciciri* has less grave consequences, consisting usually of a hunter's loss of courage so that he is fearful and trembles in dangerous situations.

A man can ward off *tama* by spearing medicine on his gun and in incisions on his arms. If one person affected by *tama* is in a boat with other people, the boat will be attacked by a hippopotamus, but only the person under the influence of *tama* will die.

If a hunter is unsuccessful or observes certain phenomena, such as a chameleon or a snake losing its skin or a fish eagle screeching above him on his hunt, it is called *shiyowo* and augurs an unpleasant occurrence in the future, often the death of a
relative. Nothing can be done about it and the observer must simply await the event.

Certain dreams are believed to be omens of misfortune while others are said to bring good luck. Bosch gives extensive examples of dreams and their interpretation, as well as of tama, ciciri, and shiyovo.

In anger one person may curse another, but only when a curse is uttered by a sorcerer or nganga is it dangerous.

MEDICINE

When someone is ill the nganga must determine whether the sickness is due to sorcery or to the displeasure of the ancestral spirits. If the nganga ascribes the illness to the latter, then he must also determine the offering to be made. The treatment of an illness depends to a certain degree upon its nature, but almost all treatments involve blood letting. Incisions are cut in the patient’s flesh in the area of pain, and the nganga sucks the unhealthy blood out of the subject through a cow’s horn.

When a person is well again the nganga shaves the patient’s hair off and smears the body with medicine. All body wastes are placed in the sand, mud, or water, and sometimes the nganga washes the patient. The patient’s clothes and blankets are taken away by the nganga. The nganga receives payment in the form of a bovine, clothing, or money.

When someone is poisoned, his or her relatives slaughter a bovine or a goat and the nganga collects some of the blood, adds medicine to it, and makes the patient drink the mixture to induce vomiting. Incisions are then made on the patient’s body so that in the future any poisoned food will be vomited.
V

THE GCIRIKU

GORDON D. GIBSON
Introduction^1

NAME

Gciriku is adopted here as the ethnic label. As the name of the group it goes back at least to 1851 (Brochado 1867: 196 and map dated 1851), and it is the name most widely used in the literature, though variously spelled. According to Bierfert (1913: 44), “Diriku” is the Bushman name for the region occupied by the group under consideration. Indeed, the presence in the word of a click (gc) supports the view that it is a Khoisan term, there being very few other words in the Gciriku language incorporating this typically Khoisan sound. Paiva Couceiro (1892: 152) noted that both the people and the region were called “Boguedo” and “Cangungo” (the latter being the name of a former chief) as well as “Dirico.” Fiuza (1948a: 29) implies that the names “Ogedo” and “Diriku” both mean “hunter” and refer to a former way of life. Möhlig states that VaMboxedo or VaMbogedo, variant forms of a name used by the Sambyu and Kwangari respectively for the Gciriku, means “Those who live downstream.” (But he gives a similar explanation of the name Gciriku, and one wonders whether there has not been in the translation of both terms a confusion of referent and meaning.) Before they migrated to their present location from a point farther upstream, and for a generation afterward, they called themselves VaMano, a name they themselves explain as deriving from the verb kumanamana, “to speak slowly and plainly” (Möhlig 1967: xxii).

The Lozi, whose king Lewanika took refuge among the Gciriku in 1884, referred to them as “Namarwa” (Gibbons 1904 I: 153, 211). The Nyemba, situated to the north, call them “VaMbwela” (Möhlig 1967: xxii).

The name Gciriku has been written in a variety of ways, the click in particular being represented variously or not at all. Other spellings found in the literature are: Derico (Brochado 1867: 196 and map), Dirico (von François 1891: 210; and de Almeida 1909: 196), Diriko (Gibbons 1901: map; and Seiner 1913: map), Ma’gwikwe (Passarge 1905a: 84; 1905b: 230; 1905c: 709 [Passarge offers the same spelling for the name of a Khoisan group and asserts that it fits them equally well, adding credence to the Khoisan origin of the name]), Magarike (Schwarz 1928: 157), Wadiriku (Bierfert 1925, 1935, 1938), Gcereku (Schapera and van der Merwe 1942), Waxiriku and Ziriku (Publications of the Catholic Mission, Runtu, S.W.A.), /giriku (Bryan 1959: 66), Djiriku (South Africa 1964: 77), and Dciriku (Möhlig 1967). Gciriku is the spelling adopted by the Administration of South-West Africa (S.W.A.D.E. 1968: 9).

The tribe and its region are also sometimes referred to by the name of their long-time chief, Nyangana. McKiernan, who visited them in 1878, refers to the region as “Nangani’s country” (McKiernan 1954: 167). Bierfert (1935: 265) explains that missionaries who established themselves in the area in 1910 decided to

^1 The author is grateful to the Social Science Research Council, U.S.A., for support of his field research in 1953.
give the name of the chief, Nyangana, to the portion of Gciriku territory that lies south of the Okavango in order to distinguish it from the Angolan portion north of the river which had already been designated Dirico by the Portuguese. Nyangana was accepted as the official name of the Gciriku tribal territory in South-West Africa by the German government at the time and later also by the South Africa government. It was still in use as a name for both the place and the tribe as recently as 1957 (Cf. Abel 1959: 180–181).

LOCATION

The Gciriku inhabit the high banks bordering certain sections of the Okavango and Cuito river valleys, and their villages are to be found in three of the present political states of Africa: Angola, Namibia (South-West Africa), and Botswana. Yet the area where they predominate and where the Gciriku chief has been recognized as politically preeminent is small, shown on recent official maps as extending only about 45 km. along both sides of the Okavango River west of its confluence with the Cuito, and about 5 km. up the Cuito. The region called Ngciriku, which falls under the control of the Gciriku chief, thus may be defined geographically as the section of the Okavango River Valley extending from the mouth of the Omatako Omuramba, sometimes called the Shoshongo or Shafumbo (a usually dry river bed, with wells and springs along its lower course, which joins the Okavango from the south) to the mouth of the Cuito which joins it from the north. There are also Gciriku settlements in the lower valley of the Omatako Omuramba (Möhlig 1967: xvii) and in the lower valley of the Cuito from the point where it is joined by the Chirundu to the Cuito-Okavango confluence.

Delimitation of the area occupied by the Gciriku people at the time of first contact with Europeans is a more complex matter. In places their villages are interspersed with those of other people with whom there has been much intermarriage. Maps of the Okavango valley showing the location of the Gciriku are to be found in Brochado (1867), von François (1891), Paiva Couceiro (1892), Gibbons (1901), de Almeida (1912), and Seiner (1913), and these are not in total agreement. McKiernan, who visited the Okavango River area in 1878, notes that “Nangani’s country is from the mouth of the Shoshongo to a river that enters the Okavango from the north, a short distance below his village” (McKiernan 1954: 167). The region extending east of the mouth of the Cuito River for a distance of about 70 km. appears to have been occupied by peoples of various origin, including Nyemba and Mbuella (de Almeida 1912: 383) and was not controlled by either the chief of the Gciriku or the chief of the Mbuluku. A similar uncontrolled region adjoined the Gciriku tribal area in the west; in fact, this stretch of the valley was unoccupied in 1910–1912, at the time of Seiner’s survey (Seiner 1913: 272).
Migration across and along the Okavango occurs, but information as to its extent and major direction is sparse. In 1890 there were no settlements on the right bank of the Okavango in Gciriku territory (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 152). Nineteen years later de Almeida reported that many Gciriku had fled to the banks of the Cuito, Luiana, and Cuando due to fear of the Germans, Hottentots, and Bushmen (de Almeida 1912: 196, 198, 202). Abel reports that the northern bank of the Okavango had been abandoned several decades before his visits (in 1952 and 1957) because of the arrival of Portuguese military forces, but that the people had returned following the installation of a more moderate administration.

Local seasonal movement also occurs, the people shifting from low lying land to higher land when the river rises and the waters spill over onto the flood plain (de Almeida 1912: 385).

Some Gciriku families found living in Botswana in 1953 said they had moved there within recent decades to escape the danger that their children would be seized by Kavango chiefs and sold into slavery. The census data (see Chapter 1) indicate a considerable movement into Botswana since 1940.

History

TRADITIONAL HISTORY

The earlier home of the Gciriku is said to be a distant land in the northeast, near a body of water which Bierfert (1913: 45) refers to as “Lake Machi” and locates in the southwestern corner of former German East Africa.\(^2\) After leaving this homeland, the tribe settled on the middle Kwandu (or Mashi) River in southeastern Zambia, where they stayed for some time. Hunting parties ranging out from the Kwandu reached the Okavango, and seeing that the area had no settled inhabitants, the tribe migrated there, some locating on the main river and some on the Cuito, a tributary. Muruata, the young hunter who led the Gciriku hunting party, became the first Gciriku chief on the Okavango (Fiuza 1948a: 29). In relating stories about their migrations to the Okavango, the Gciriku speak of their clans as migratory units. The Vakankora and the Vakanyimi clans are said to have migrated together, following the trail of elephants. After arriving at the Okavango they separated because of a dispute. The Vakanyimi became the ruling clan of the Mbukushu, while the Vakankora became the ruling clan of the Gciriku. They sent messages to the rest of their people, possibly still settled on the Kwandu, to come to the

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\(^2\) Whether Lake Machi is mythical, mislocated, or real and equivalent to one of the lakes of central Africa is problematical. The name itself suggests that not a lake but the Mashi River, on the Angola-Zambia border, is meant, though that name for the river, which is also called Kwandu, could have been transplanted from elsewhere.
Okavango. Bierfert notes that chief Nyangana was the tenth chief of the tribe since its arrival on the Okavango, estimating therefore that in 1935 the tribe had been present on the Okavango for about 200 years (Bierfert 1938: 14).

The Tswana people, who established themselves in Ngamiland (the northwestern region of present day Botswana) at the end of the 18th century (Schafer 1952: 6), became dominant in that area in the 19th century and eventually extended their control over some of the tribes of the Okavango River area. In 1890 they took an active role in Mbutkushu tribal politics by supporting one faction and opposing another in a succession struggle (Sillery 1952: 193). According to one Geiriku tradition (recorded in Ngamiland in 1953), around the turn of the century chief Nyangana invited Sekgoma, the Tswana chief, “to come and teach his people to obey him.” Sekgoma came with many men and with horses and guns. Saying they were going to treat the Geiriku weapons magically, the Tswana tricked the Geiriku into surrendering them; after burning the guns they had collected, the Tswana opened fire on the people. According to traditions recorded by Möhlig, Nyangana sought Tswana support in a war with the Sambyu. After defeating the Sambyu the Tswana tricked the Geiriku warriors into surrendering their arms, killed off the able bodied men, and took Nyangana to Ngamiland as their prisoner. All the able bodied men were killed by the Tswana and eventually the women married men from other tribes, especially Kwangel, Mbandza, and Sambyu (Möhlig 1967: xxi—xxiv, 147. See also Dependency).

RECORDED HISTORY

The earliest known references to the Geiriku are in the writings and map of Bernardino Brochado, a Portuguese explorer who is reported to have visited the area in 1849; “Derico” appears on his map at approximately the present location of the Geiriku people on the Okavango River (Brochado 1867: 196 and map). Gerald McKiernan, who met chief Nyangana in 1878, seems to have made the first contact from the south of which an account has survived (McKiernan 1954: 167).

In 1894 or 1895 a Boer trader lost his life in Geiriku territory, reportedly by order of chief Nyangana. Whites living at Lake Ngami in 1895 (Gibbons 1904, I: 212) or 1896 (Bierfert 1913: 44) encouraged the Tswana chief, Sekgoma, to send a punitive expedition against the Geiriku. Nyangana’s village was sacked; some of the people were killed; many were taken as captives to the Tswana capital at Tsau near Lake Ngami, and Nyangana himself was brought to trial there. In 1898, through the intervention of a British magistrate stationed at Maun, the capital of the Ngamiland District of Bechuanaland, 1200 Geiriku were freed and some of their cattle, also taken by the Tswana, were returned to them. Nyangana was allowed to return to his home as a Tswana vassal (Gibbons 1904, I: 212—213; Bierfert 1913: 45).

Portuguese troops led by João de Almeida, governor of the district of southern Angola, in 1909 marched along the northern bank of the Okavango in the stretch where the river forms the southern border of Angola, to occupy and pacify the
region, to subjugate the tribes on the Angolan side at the same time protecting them against peoples from the south, and to promote commerce. On Sept. 7, 1909, the column camped at the village of the Gciriiku chief “Inyangana,” near the confluence of the Cuito, and in the days following built Forte Dirico (de Almeida 1912: 196).

A Catholic mission was established in 1910 at Kandenge, on the southern side of the Okavango across from Nyangana’s village, by German missionaries (Bierfert 1935: 265; 1938: Chap. 1).

**ACCULTURATION**

The major sources of culture change in recent times have been the Catholic mission and its school along with the practice of contract labor. Shortly after it was founded, the mission established a school, and as of the latest report, it still operates the schools in Gciriiku territory. European law and custom are accepted as the norm by Christianized Gciriiku, especially with regard to marriage. Catholic missionaries were asked by the chief to serve as judges in suits at law and functioned in that capacity for a period (Bierfert 1938: 53–54).

Gciriiku men go out on labor contract, especially to Grootfontein (a trip of some 400 km.). They often bring back clothing, household equipment, and iron which is then worked into tools and weapons by Gciriiku smiths.

**Economy**

**SUBSISTENCE**

**FOOD QUEST**

*Annual Cycle*

**October**

The fields are cleared by burning the bush and trees; holes are dug and planted. (This was the old routine. Nowadays field work begins only after the rains (Gibson, ms.).

**November—December**

(This is considered the beginning of the year.) Work in old fields begins with the rains. After the weeds have come up, they are hoed and the fields are seeded.

If a plow is used, fields are plowed after the second rain, then planted.

**April—June**

Maize is harvested first, then sorghum and millet, then groundnuts. Tobacco, pumpkins, beans and watermelons are harvested sporadically or as they ripen.

**September—December or January**

Fish are caught in the river with baskets, during low water. (Bierfert 1938: 17 ff.)
Gathering

The relative importance of wild vegetable food in the diet is not reported. In a year of poor crops, the people are described by Bierfert as having “fled to the Bushmen” to live on berries and similar fruits (Bierfert 1925: 294). Only a few wild foods are mentioned specifically in the literature: Women collect berries (probably *Grewia sp.*), *nucibé* (*Sclerocarya birrea* [marula]) fruit and fruit kernels (the latter yielding an edible oil), wild onions, and other greens (de Almeida 1912: 47, 384). *Ntimba* fruit (*Dialium engleranum* Henriques) must be taken to the chief when it first ripens and can be eaten by others after the chief has tasted it. Though most collecting is done by women, men gather the fruits of trees which must be climbed (Gibson, ms.). *Nucibé* kernels are stored for use in the rainy season (de Almeida 1912: 379).

Hunting

De Almeida (1912, p. 384) considered hunting and fishing the principal occupations of the Kavango peoples east of Kwangari. Elephants, rhinoceroses, hippopotamuses, ostriches, antelopes, boars, hares, and leguans are among the animals mentioned as taken in hunts by a variety of methods (Bierfert 1925: 292–294; Passarge 1905c: 711). In recent times hunting has declined in importance due to the scarcity of large game animals; waterfowl and small game are still taken (Möhlig 1967: xxvii).

Formerly hunters using rifles or spears, accompanied by hunting dogs, joined together in communal hunts. These took place particularly on islands where the hunters arriving by canoe surrounded the island. Two or three men remained in each canoe while the rest beat the bushes or waited quietly in clearings until the animals appeared. The hunter whose weapon first struck an animal was considered the owner (Bierfert 1925: 292–294).

Individual hunters pursued game in the bush country of the river valley. Also, animals were taken in deadfalls, pitfalls, and snares. Thorn branch fences, up to 3 or 4 km. in length, were erected to lead game animals to gaps in the fences. Pitfalls, 3 to 4 m. deep and tapering inward toward the bottom, were dug at some of the gaps and covered with branches, earth, and grass. Snares were set over shallow pits at other gaps in the fence; the snares were fastened to branches which the caught animal dragged behind him leaving a trail that was easily followed (Bierfert 1925: 292–294).³

³ Paiva Conceição (1892: 28) illustrates a dead-fall placed at the end of a fence trap.
Fishing

Fishing is today more important than hunting. Men, women, and children use different fishing methods (Möhlig 1967: xxvii). Men catch fish in basket traps set in weirs in the shallow parts of the river. Women and children trap fish with conical baskets by plunging them mouth down in pools left by the receding river in the flood plain. The baskets may also be laid down, mouths side by side, in shallow flood pools, and the fish driven into them. Trapping fish is possible only from September to January when the river is low (Gibson, ms.). Fishermen must watch their fish traps closely lest the crocodiles steal the fish from them (Bierfert 1938: 20).

Women dry small fish and sometimes exchange them for other food. Dried fish are stored for the rainy season (de Almeida 1912: 198, 379, 384).

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

Domestic Animals

Dogs, goats, sheep, bovine cattle, and chickens are kept. Dogs are used in hunting, specifically to put game animals at bay and to retrieve small animals that have been shot but not killed. They also protect the home against marauding beasts. Goats and sheep are killed for food when needed. Cows are kept for both milk and meat. They are said to do well in the area, and in recent years the government of Namibia has set aside a demonstration zone between the Sambyu and Geiriku areas where cattle breeding and care are taught. Herding is done by men and boys, even when the cattle are owned by women (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1925: 295; Bierfert 1938: 20; von François 1912: 211; Abel 1959: 181).

Children, both boys and girls, acquire cattle and goats as gifts, usually from their fathers, but sometimes from their mothers' brothers. Large herds are desired, and bovine cattle are rarely sold or killed just for food, though cattle are sometimes sold to obtain tax money or to buy food in times of famine. If an important visitor comes from a distance, he may be given an ox to be killed for a feast. Cattle are sacrificed if a diviner has determined that it is necessary, and the meat is used for a feast. Men kill the animals and women cook the meat. Cattle are slaughtered by shooting, by spearing through the heart, or by hitting them on the back of the head with an ax, this latter especially if the heart is to be used magically for curing. Cattle are killed by strangulation only if stolen, so that the deed will be noiseless, or in time of famine, so that relatives will not hear the commotion and come to claim meat. Since the introduction of the plow, oxen have been used in plowing.

Dairying

Geiriku men tend not only their own cattle and also those of their female
relatives, but formerly also cared for the cattle of the Tawana fief lord (Passarge 1905c: 711).

Boys herd the cattle, sheep, and goats, starting to assume this responsibility when they are seven or eight years old. A man goes out with his cattle only if he has no sons. Cattle sometimes are allowed to graze unattended; in the evening they return to the vicinity of the homestead to graze and are easily herded into the pen. During the growing season cattle must be tended carefully to keep them from trampling the crops (Gibson, ms.). Cattle often wade across the river to graze on the other side, or they may be taken across in canoes (Abel 1959: 180).

Milking is always done by males. Small children, both boys and girls, may suck milk directly from the teats of their cows, but when the girls grow up they become “afraid” of the domain of men. Milk is not used as a staple food and is mostly used to make butter. It is collected in wooden pails, and if to be consumed as milk, is allowed to thicken, then is drunk from a calabash ladle.

To make butter, milk collected in milk pails is poured into a large calabash. The root of munkudi (Acacia hebeclada?) is added to make it thicken quickly. After the milk has been collected for a few days and added to the same calabash, the calabash is suspended from a pole and a boy shakes it until butter separates. The buttermilk is poured out and the butter left in the calabash. More milk is added, and the process repeated. After the third filling and shaking, the butter itself is shaken out; it is heated to separate the fat from the water and solids. The butterfat is stored in a calabash or in a clay pot with a skin drawn over the mouth.

Butter is added to cooked grain and meat. Buttermilk is eaten with porridge, and if there is plenty, some may be given to the dogs. Mixed with red pigment, butter fat is used by women as a hair ointment.

AGRICULTURE

Abel (1959: 180) declares the chief crop is millet. Maize, sorghum, millet, cowpeas (Vigna sp.), groundnuts, ground beans (Voandzeia subterranea), pumpkins, sweet potatoes, melons, and sugar cane are planted for food. Calabashes, castor beans, and tobacco also are cultivated (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 18). Beans are planted in the grain fields with maize, sorghum, and millet. Sweet potatoes are planted in low spots where water will stand.

Shifting cultivation is practiced, but information on the rotation of fields is lacking. In clearing a new field, men cut the trees. If the area is dense forest, the trees when fired provide enough heat to clear the whole area; if the area is bush, women hoe the grass and low bushes and all is raked together and fired with the trees. Cultivated fields are close together, separated only by narrow footpaths (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 19).

In the traditional pattern of hoe cultivation, before the adoption of the plow, fields were planted before the rains came. Work parties of women dug holes with hoes and placed the seed. In second-year fields, parties of men and women worked
together to cut the grass; then women alone did the planting. Sometimes they waited until after the first rains to cut the weeds, loosen the soil, and plant (Bierfert 1938: 17–18).

In plow agriculture, as practiced in recent times, they wait until after the second rain, then plow to cut down the weeds and loosen the soil. Men manage the ox-drawn plow; women follow behind planting the seed. If the men are away on labor contracts, children drive the oxen and women help inspan them.

Weeding is done with short-handled hoes, men and women working together. In a new field, one hoeing is sufficient; an old field may require two or three hoeings. Hoeing (and, formerly, planting) is carried out with work parties. Beer is prepared in advance and a beast is killed. Friends and relatives come from considerable distances to join the party. Work proceeds from early morning to early afternoon. Sometimes the workers sing during work, sometimes the men only grunt rhythmically (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 18).

FOOD STORAGE, PREPARATION AND CONSUMPTION

Storage and Preparation

Grain is stored in large baskets which men weave from reeds. Storage baskets are kept behind the huts; clay and dung are smeared over the outside and top of such a basket to seal it and to keep out the rats, and a roof is often constructed over it to keep it dry.

Though men milk the cows, make butter, and slaughter and butcher animals, all other food preparation including the cooking of meat is done by women. Women thresh and winnow grain. In threshing, the grain is stamped on a clay floor, using a long pole with an expanded, flattened head at each end. When winnowing millet, special care is taken to separate out the bitter chaff (Gibson, ms.; Abel 1959: 180).

Diet

Cultivated plants provide the major portion of food in years of good rainfall, but the diet varies with the season. De Almeida, who visited the Geiriku in August, 1909, and thus in the dry season, judged that they lived chiefly on fish and wild vegetable food (de Almeida 1912: 379, 384). A staple dish is porridge made of stamped grain, served with butter. Maize is sometimes roasted in the ashes. Most vegetable foods and meat are boiled.

Meat is relatively rare in the diet. Among Geiriku in Bechuanaland in 1953, a goat was killed for food about once a month in each village. The relative importance of fish is hard to evaluate but increases in the period of low water.

Some milk is drunk in a thick, sour form. Children sometimes drink fresh milk, and in times of crop failure the people are said to depend more upon milk (Bierfert
1938: 20). Goat’s milk is not used because of its taste. Butter is used with porridge and meat. Buttermilk also is eaten with porridge.

**Eating**

The mother distributes the porridge. First the adults are served in a special bowl. Children may be served in a separate bowl, or they eat out of the cooking pot. All eat with their fingers, and children lick out the pot afterwards (Bierfert 1938: 42–43).

**Alcoholic Beverages**

Women brew beer, both for home consumption and for sale. Selling beer is a favorite method for women to earn pin money (Gibson, ms.). Beer is brewed chiefly from sorghum (Abel 1959: 180).

In making beer, grain is soaked in warm water to sprout it. On the next day it is cooked, then allowed to ferment, while the husband goes to notify his friends of the coming beer party. On the third day the beer is strained and is ready to serve.

Beer of different strengths is brewed — strong or medium for men, weak for women and children. In years of good harvests, beer is brewed both at harvest time (late May), when there are rounds of beer parties, and at the beginning of the rainy season, when beer is served to participants in agricultural work parties (Bierfert 1938: 16–17).

Fermented maize porridge is sometimes made for children who participate in agricultural work parties. Fruit wine is also made, but details are lacking.

**Disasters**

Droughts and famines have been common along the Okavango, and epidemic diseases have taken a toll of both men and animals. Rinderpest struck the cattle in 1897, influenza killed many humans in 1918, and terrible famine occurred in 1933 (Bierfert 1938: 20).

When crops fail, usually due to poor rainfall, people seek wild foods or send their slaves and servants out to collect wild foods for them. Also because of frequent crop failures, people have attempted to build up their herds of domestic animals and are able to subsist on cow’s milk to a greater extent than formerly. In the famine of 1933, some people found it less painful to sleep in the daytime and to work in the fields only at night (Bierfert 1925: 294; Bierfert 1938: 20).

Eggers, who visited the Gciriku (in 1899 ?) after the rinderpest epidemic, reports that the people had no cattle, and that they had not cultivated their fields for two years for fear the Tawana would come take the harvest. They were living on
fish, wild vegetable foods, and the proceeds of a meager trade in ivory and ostrich feathers (Eggers 1900: 187).

MATERIAL CULTURE
CRAFTS AND MANUFACTURE

Basketry, Woodworking, and Pottery

Men weave mat baskets for storing grain; women make smaller coiled baskets. Both men and women weave reed mats which are used for walls around villages, for housewalls, and for working and sleeping surfaces when laid on the ground. Reeds for mat-making are pounded flat with a double-ended wooden pounder, about 25 to 40 cm. long.

Men carve wooden equipment: dugout canoes, oars, vessels for food, milk pails, scoops, plates, seats, mortars and pestles for stamping grain and for powdering red bark for cosmetics, bellows, drums, handles for hoes, adzes, and axes, spear shafts, and knife handles and sheaths, the latter ornamented with human or animal representations. They cut posts for huts, fences, and the shades which are used also for grain drying platforms (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 15, 16; de Almeida 1912: 384).

Men are potters, making bowls, beer pots, and cooking vessels of various sizes (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 16).

Metallurgy

Most work is done in iron, copper, and brass — the first being used to make blades for knives, hoes, axes, adzes, and spears; the latter two for leg ornaments. The forge is located outside the village, under a shady tree. The anvil (iyundo) is a heavy iron wedge, 8 to 10 cm. long, driven into a thick log. The hammer is a piece of iron, about 25 cm. long and 7 cm. thick. The bellows (mudii), carved from a single piece of wood, are in the form of two wooden pipes, each with an air chamber at the back end. Each air chamber is covered with a soft skin to which a short stick is bound for pumping. The pipes lead to a common opening at the front, and over this is fitted a clay nozzle which extends into the fire (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 15; de Almeida 1912: 384).

Up until about 1935, Geiriku smiths smelted iron from native ores. A charcoal fire was used with an air blast created with four or five sets of bellows (Bierfert 1938: 15). Schönfelder (1935: 50) notes the presence on the lower Cuito River of iron-bearing sandstone and states that at several locations he found slag heaps which indicate smelting by the native peoples. In recent times the Geiriku have obtained iron from European sources. (Men who go out to work on contract commonly
bring back pieces of scrap iron when they return.) Hence the smelting of local ores has died out. Möhlig (1965: xxvii) declares the Geciriku do not know either smelting or forging.

Smiths and Their Crafts

Smiths are persons who have chosen to learn the craft having first become helpers to skilled iron workers. After a few months apprenticeship, the helper is given some iron to see if he knows how to handle it or whether he needs more training. Three specialized processes and roles are recognized in the craft: the smith (mandunda) who is the master and directs all operations, a helper (called mukakudukuta) who works the bellows, and another (called mukakusambura) who hammers the iron.

Apprentice smiths purchased their equipment; the hammer and anvil together in 1953 cost one cow. In addition, tongs (ruwoko) had to be made or purchased. Spear heads were sold for from 1 to 3s, depending upon the size; hoe blades for 5s; long knives from 1 to 3s. Wire was made up into coils for leg ornaments for a charge of 1 or 2s, unless the customer was a relative, for whom the smith worked without pay. Women purchased the wire from foreign traders and had it formed to order.

CLOTHING AND ORNAMENTS

Normal Garb

The traditional clothing was of skin, but for many decades cloth has been available in trade and in 1953 had partly replaced skin. Skin clothing and sandals are made by men. Children up to three or four years of age go naked (Bierfert 1938: 65). Older children and adults wear a G string secured by a belt. Girls and women wear front and back aprons, the front apron usually being a piece of trade cloth looped over the belt, and the rear apron the skin of small animal. Both sexes keep the genitals covered, even while bathing or fishing. In the village generally no footwear is used except by educated men who wear European clothing; for rough country, sandals are worn.

Nowadays men often wear shorts or trousers, shirts, and jackets of European style, this being true especially of men who have gone away to work as contract laborers for a period. Baptized women wear European dresses, in contrast to unbaptized women who are uncovered above the waist (Abel 1959: 181).

Ornaments

Both sexes wear necklaces of glass beads or metal chain, purchased from Euro-
pean traders, but women do the beadwork. For festive occasions women wear beaded belts with long bands of beads hanging down behind over their skin aprons. The bead belts and bands are worked in geometric designs (Gibson, ms. and photos; Bierfert 1938: 65). Women wear circlets and coils of heavy brass wire and have it made up by smiths. Girls and women wear strings of glass beads wrapped around their lower legs, below the knee. Shell ornaments are worn by some people on the forehead or chest as magical remedies (Gibson, ms. and photos; Bierfert 1938: 35; de Almeida 1912: 384).

**Toilet**

The heads of boys and men are shaved from time to time, so that the hair is seen in various stages of growth. Some boy’s heads are shaved in patterns; some women also have the head shaved (see medical therapy).

Most women and girls, even before adolescence, wear elaborate coiffures. The hair along the midline from the crown to the neck is formed into two thick rope-like rolls, joined at the crown; that on the sides of the head is twisted into long thin strands which hang down the back, often below the waist; and that in front of the crown is formed into tight curls or is thickly plastered. Strands of beads are sometimes worn around the back of the head or are draped over the head.

Women smear their hair with a mixture of oil or fat and rukura, the powdered red bark of *Pterocarpus angolensis*. The bark is powdered in a mortar until as fine as meal, then mixed with butter, castor bean oil, or with the oil of *Sclerocarya birrea* kernels. Butter is smeared on a couple at marriage (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 18; de Almeida 1912: 384).

**Mutilation**

Mutilation of the teeth and earlobes is practiced. Neither male nor female circumcision is a custom; girls pull the labia minora to enlarge them. Tattooing may be practiced by some.

The permanent upper incisor teeth of boys and girls are pointed soon after they appear. This is done by a specialist who chips the corners and sometimes files the edges. If a child’s teeth are not pointed, he is said to be like a donkey (Gibson, ms.).

Some individuals have one or both ear lobes pierced for ornaments.

**TOOLS AND HOUSEHOLD EQUIPMENT**

**Furniture**

Houses are equipped with little furniture. Beds are set up outdoors in warm
weather, indoors in cool or rainy weather. They are rectangular structures raised about 30 cm. above the ground on four branched posts. Poles lying across the side stringers support an open mat of cord and reeds. The sleeper covers himself with a reed mat.

Men sometimes sit on chairs made in the style of a European folding camp chair, or on carved stools. Women usually sit on the ground.

**Weapons**

The bow and arrow, spear, and knife are the traditional weapons for hunting, and presumably were also used in warfare. Arrows are fitted with tanged iron points, some being barbed, or with wooden points for hunting birds (Gibson, ms.). Since at least 1908, some Geiriku have been in possession of firearms (de Almeida, 1912: 385).

**General Tools**

Wooden bladed shovels are used. Iron bladed tools include axes, adzes, hoes, knives, and nowadays, iron bladed plows, which are acquired in trade (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1925: 293).

**Utensils**

Containers are made of wood, clay, basketry, and gourd. Mortars carved out of wooden blocks are used in stamping grain and in powdering bark for cosmetic purposes. Wooden pots and bowls are often fitted with covers. Nowadays metal vessels acquired in trade have replaced locally made vessels to a degree (Gibson, ms. and photos; Bierfert 1938: 16).

**Structures**

Houses are rectangular or circular in plan, with tall, thatched roofs. Rectangular houses are about 4 m. long and from 2 to 3 m. wide. Posts set in the ground at intervals form the framework for the walls, and horizontal stringers are tied to the tops of the wall posts. The roof beams slope upward from the tops of the walls to a short ridge pole. The walls are covered either with woven mats of flattened reeds which are fastened inside the wall posts, or mats of round reeds held together with twined cord, these being fastened outside the wall posts. The doorways are rectangular openings between the wall posts, stretching from ground to roof. Circular houses have vertical walls of posts set close together; the spaces between them may
be filled with clay or with reed stalks. The roofs are conical. Roofs are thatched with long, weather resistant grass (Gibson ms.; Möhlig 1967: xxi).

The seclusion hut (made for a girl at first menstruation or at marriage) is a temporary structure formed of a single woven reed mat, set on edge and curled into the shape of a cone with a narrow vertical opening.

In addition to houses, large rectangular shades are built, some as much as 7 m. long and 6 m. wide. The supports are crotched posts set about 1.5 m. apart in a double row. Horizontal stringers lie in the crotches and cross poles upon these. Thatching grass is laid across the poles. Some houses have a shade attached to the wide side, where the door is placed, making a kind of front porch.

Fences of posts spaced widely apart, to which reed mats are tied, surround the villages. Several openings are left in the mat wall for entrances.

SETTLEMENTS

Paiva Couceiro describes Chief Nyangana's village as protected by a palisade and situated in a thornbush thicket, access being only by a narrow path cut through it. The village was divided internally into a number of compartments, some separated by rows of paling and some by woven mats. There was an audience room, a hunting room (enclosing a separate structure with a conical thatched roof, the floor of which was strewn with bones and horns), an apartment for the chief's wives, roofed over with mats laid horizontally, and the chief's private quarters (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 153–154). Möhlig (1956: xix–xx) says the typical settlement community (mundi) is a cluster of several family homes (lipata). Each lipata is enclosed by a fence of mats fastened to posts, and a palisade fence or a mat fence surrounds the whole community. It may contain 20 or more family homes. Each mundi has a dance and meeting place (sira), a common threshing yard (rupare) paved with termite hill earth, and a community cattle pen (hambo).

Villages are located chiefly on high islands or wooded terraces above the flood plain. They are readily moved, however, and may be found near the river in the dry season. When a move has been decided upon, the mats for walls and fences are rolled up and, together with household equipment, are transported along the river in canoes (Gibson ms.; de Almeida 1912: 384–385; Abel 1959: 180).

When a village is first established, new fire is made by twirling firesticks which are cut especially for the purpose. The fires of the individual huts are taken from the new fire, but no effort is made to keep the original fire burning continuously.
PROPERTY, EXCHANGE, AND LABOR

PROPERTY

Property System

Property which is considered individually owned (i.e., reserved for the use of and disposition, within limits, by an individual) consists of domestic animals, food, tools, furniture, utensils, clothing and personal equipment. Land (village and farm sites) is not “owned” exclusively except during and a few years after occupation. Land unoccupied for several years may be freely used by any person.

Property in Movable

Property in movables is acquired by manufacture, gift, inheritance, exchange, purchase, natural increase, capture, or theft.

Children receive domestic animals as gifts from their fathers or mothers' brothers. Additional animals are obtained through inheritance. The natural increase of an animal belongs to the owner of the mother animal.

In hunting, the hunter whose weapon first strikes an animal, or whose dog first seizes it, owns the animal, regardless of who else has assisted in its capture or slaughter. Persons may freely take fish, lizards, or birds out of other person's traps or snares, then reset the trap or snare, but to take large wild animals from a pitfall or large snare is regarded as theft. The difference apparently depends upon the amount of labor expended in making and setting the trap (Bierfert 1925: 292-293).

Formerly chiefs sent out raiding parties to take slaves, and anyone captured was considered property of the chief.

Inheritance

Inheritance rules seem to vary with the nature of the property in the estate. For most kinds of property, a man's heirs are his sister's children, and a woman's heirs are her own children (Bierfert 1938: 42). A man's widow, however, does receive some property (e.g., beads), and a man's brother receives his clothing. Möhlig (1967: xxvi) says a mother's brother and his sister's child are each other's chief heirs. Nowadays, however, under the influence of the mission, patrilineal inheritance is becoming the rule.

Among Gciriku in Ngamiland, livestock are said to pass from a man to his own children. If a deceased man's children are sub-adult, his younger brother keeps the animals until the sons of the deceased owner are grown. Then the eldest son divides the stock among his brothers and himself, keeping a larger portion for himself. He gives some to the younger brother of his father who cared for the animals during
the son’s childhood. This rule of inheritance appears to be a new pattern imposed by the patrilineal Tawana under whose government the Gciriku in Ngamiland live. The obligation of a man to consult his mother’s brothers and sister’s sons before selling cattle implies that they retain certain proprietary rights in the animals.

Disputes about inheritance are settled by the chief, who then takes some of the property for himself.

**EXCHANGE**

**Buying and Selling**

Though formerly all trade was by barter, money has been in general use for several decades. Cattle are not generally raised for sale, but nowadays some may be sold to traders in order to raise money for taxes or to buy food in times of famine. Grain and beer are more usually sold for pin money (Gibson, ms.). Dried fish also may be sold (de Almeida 1912: 198).

Domestic animals may be sold by the owner if he is an adult male. However, men consult their uncles, brothers, and nephews before selling cattle, and these relatives may refuse to allow a man to sell all his herd, for then he would be poor. Women (and presumably children) must ask their adult male relatives for permission before selling domestic animals.

Artisans (woodworkers and smiths) regularly sell their products or exchange them. Bargaining is practiced. Diviners and doctors are paid, in money or objects, in advance of their services and consult their familiar spirits to decide whether the fees offered are large enough. Doctors are also paid in advance of treatment and are paid again to procure medicine. A final payment is made if the patient is cured.

**Price and Value**

Produce and domestic animals are sold at prices current at the closest trading centers. Woodcarvers sold the products of their industry at the following prices in 1953: wooden boxes, 1s to 4s; milk pails, up to 7s 6d; drums, 10s to £1; canoes, £2 to £4 10s, or one cow (prices stated in South African currency).

In former times slaves were sometimes sold for cattle: two head for a man, three for a woman, and one for a child.

Diviners and medicine men charge their apprentices a fee for instruction. In 1953 the fee amounted to from £5 to £10, or one cow.
Exchange Transactions

Someone who cares for a sick person may claim payment for the service, unless it is a member of his own matriclan. The chief may call people together to work for him and will pay them only in food.

LABOR

Division of Labor By Sex

Men only do smithing, woodcarving, and hunting, make pots, stamp reeds for matting, cut poles for fences, make huts, cut trees to clear land, make clothing and sandals, and make and play drums. Men normally plow, but women and children plow if the men are absent. Men and boys tend domestic animals, milk cows, and churn butter, and men slaughter and butcher animals. Women catch fish in conical baskets (with the help of children), collect wild vegetable food, cook all food, brew beer, plant seeds, thresh and winnow grain, harvest grain and beans, make baskets, hoe grass and brush to clear land, do beadwork, and make a cosmetic powder which chiefly they use. Both men and women weed gardens, dig sweet potatoes, and make twined mats for village fences.

Occupational Specialization

Weeding, hoeing, and planting are often carried out with a work party (njambi). Beer is prepared in advance and a beast killed. A man tells his friends, relatives, and neighbors, even those who are far away, that on the next day he will have his njambi. The workers come early in the morning, and the owner keeps them working until he thinks they have done enough, then in the early afternoon tells them to stop and come for food. Sometimes a woman makes a njambi for children, calling other children besides her own to help. She makes fermented maize meal for them instead of beer (Gibson, ms.). In the planting season, work parties may go from place to place, hoeing fields in the morning and feasting in the afternoon (Bierfert 1938: 18).

(For information on contract labor, see Acculturation and Culture Contact.)

TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION

Most travel for traditional purposes — i. e., for hunting, gathering, fishing, and change of residence location — is by canoe, on the rivers. When people go on long trips on the river they do not need to take provisions, for hospitality within the tribe is general (de Almeida 1912: 385; Bierfert 1925: 293).
During flood stage, a period lasting about six months, the water is deep enough to make canoe travel possible over the flood plain. Yet the current is not swift nor the river deep; cattle can cross the river with ease, walking more than half the distance (Baynes 1923: 371–372).

The dugout canoes used by the Gciriku are said to be a little smaller than those of the Kwangari. They are propelled with a long oar, used both as a hook for pulling and as a paddle, depending upon the bed and current of the river (de Almeida 1912: 384).

In recent times men have traveled out to European settlements for work, transport being provided by the European managed South West Africa Native Labor Association.

**Individual Life**

**STAGES OF LIFE**

**INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD**

*Names and Naming*

A child is named about two weeks after birth. The name is given by the child’s father, or in his absence, by the father’s brother or sister unless the child’s mother was unmarried, in which case it is given by her father. The name is generally one that belonged to a recently deceased relative, selected so that the spirit of the deceased relative will adopt the namesake as *mbusande*, “godchild,” and treat it as his or her own.

*Childhood Activities*

Children are taught how to fish, hunt, make pots, etc. by their relatives. Men teach their sons, sisters’ sons, and grandsons; women teach their daughters, brothers’ daughters, and granddaughters. If a son likes hunting, he may ask his father for permission to go with a good hunter to learn from him. Children also help in plowing and may be called together to form a weeding party.

When boys are 7 or 8 years old, they start to go out with the cattle, especially during the growing season, to keep the animals out of the gardens. If they do not stay with the animals all day, they at least go out to drive them home in the evening. Boys usually go in pairs to perform this work.
ADOLESCENCE

Puberty and Initiation

A pubescent girl is called mfuko or mutembo. At the beginning of menarche, the girl's mother makes the fact known by trilling loudly and the other women in the village join in. At a little distance from the village, a small reed mat hut is erected for the girl and she must remain in it until the next moon. During this period she may speak with no male, and none may come close to the seclusion hut. Food is brought to her by an older relative, an aunt or grandmother, who also instructs her in sexual matters and her future duties as a wife. The instructor is called sikhongwa. Sometimes older women dance around the hut. After the month of confinement, the girl is washed, salved, ornamented, and, if she is to be married at this time, is led into the village where her future husband has prepared a house. The marriage feast then takes place.

OLD AGE

Status and Treatment of the Aged

Old people care for themselves so long as they are able. When they no longer can do so, mothers are looked after to some extent by their children, but old men must go to the village of a sister's son or other clan mate. Scanty food and clothing are furnished them. The terms of respect normally used for older relatives often are omitted, and their lives may be wretched (Bierfert 1938: 46–48).

DEATH AND BURIAL

Dying

If a person is very ill, the relatives learn of it and come to watch and to bury the corpse in case of death. If a dying person declares that his or her illness is due to witchcraft, the one responsible will later be sought out (see Sorcery).

Funeral

In the case of men and women who own cattle, if the deceased has a bull, it is killed to provide a skin for the burial. Otherwise an ox or cow is killed for the purpose. The body is sewn inside the skin, and burial takes place at once, even if it is night. If the deceased has no cattle, the corpse is not enveloped for burial. Burial is in a grave as deep as a standing man's shoulder. The grave is dug in the cattle pen
if it is for a headman, his son, wife, or sister's son; other persons are buried outside the pen and outside the village. The body lies on its side, with the legs extended: the head faces west. Formerly a corpse was buried with the legs flexed. The whole village assembles for a burial, even when it takes place at night.

If a woman with an infant dies, the infant may be buried alive with the mother; some infants have been rescued alive from graves by other women and raised as their own (Bierfert 1938: 49–50, 79–80).

A corpse is buried by the people of the village where the death occurred. If it is a village of clan-mates of the deceased, they will not seek to be paid for their services; otherwise, presumably, they will. The death is reported to the parents and relatives of the deceased if they live at a distance and do not quickly hear of it.

Mourning

Mats are set up to enclose a place behind the death hut where the widow (if the deceased was a married man) and other women may cry in seclusion. Crying takes place only on the day of the burial. Relatives of the deceased who live at a distance and hear of the death too late to attend the burial come to the village where the death occurred. They come weeping but are stopped when they reach the village so that they will not make those already present start to weep again.

Social Readjustment to Death

If the head of a village dies and if his widow is taken by his younger brother who also remains in the village, then the hut of the deceased is used by the widow. But if a younger brother of the village head dies and someone comes to take the widow away, the hut is torn down. If it is felt that there has been an unusually large number of deaths in a village where the headman has just died, the village is moved.

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

MARRIAGE

Basis and Regulation of Marriage

Marriage is said to be based on love with importance also placed on character. A man's suit for marriage may be resisted by the woman's parents or guardians on the basis that he is lazy, poor, or disobedient.

Formerly girls often were married before puberty. This is now illegal in S.W.A., and "civilized" people, i.e., those who accept mission teaching, will not permit their daughters to marry before menarche. If a girl becomes pregnant before mar-
riage, an attempt is made to identify the responsible male; then if the girl and boy desire it, and if the boy is acceptable to the girl’s parents, a marriage is arranged.

Marriage with close relatives is not condoned except between cross-cousins. The separation otherwise should be four generations in depth (Bierfert 1938: 66) or three generations if traced through males (Gibson, ms.). Thus patrilateral parallel-cousin marriage is permitted if there are three or more generations depth of separation. A man may not take his wife’s sister or his wife’s daughter as a second wife in polygamy.

Only one likoro (matriclan), Vakafuma, is considered exogamous, and this is because it is the royal clan. Otherwise, marriage within a clan is permitted between distant relatives.

The preferred mate is a person classified as a cross-cousin (siromsande), even a first cross-cousin. Cross-cousins are not considered too closely related “because they had different mothers.” There is said to be no preference between the mother’s brother’s daughter and the father’s sister’s daughter.

Mode of Marriage

Bride service (siondera) is required of a husband. This is agreed to in advance as part of the marriage negotiations. He must help his wife’s parents in house building and gardening upon request. If he takes up residence in the village of the wife’s father, he is expected to help the latter with plowing and mat making. The time spent in bride service does not amount to more than three or four days a year but is due for as long as the man remains living at his wife’s parents’ village, and even after leaving it he may be called upon by his wife’s parents.

Arranging a Marriage

Some marriages are arranged between children by their parents. The engaged children call one another man and wife, and begin at an early age to play at marriage. This sort of arrangement is said to have been practiced because young men have difficulty in finding young wives, due to the tendency for old polygamists to appropriate all the adolescent girls for themselves. In the case of “child marriage,” however, the actual marriage ceremony is celebrated after the girl matures. During the “engagement” period the boy should send small gifts to his future mother-in-law, but he should avoid close association with her (Bierfert 1938: 67). More commonly, a young man and an adolescent girl agree to marry. Then the man either goes himself to ask the girl’s father for approval or sends a representative to speak for him. It is customary for the suitor to be refused at first, and he or his representative may have to repeat their request as many as ten times before the father accepts the serious intent of the suitor. The father will consult the girl’s mother and sometimes also her mother’s brother and her elder siblings. He then
questions his daughter in private, to ascertain whether she loves the suitor. In order to convince her father of her love, the girl may have to threaten to kill herself if she is not permitted to marry. Finally the father consents, but before approving the suitor, he extracts a promise that he will perform bride service, and requires him to return another time to claim his bride. If the girl has not yet reached puberty, the marriage is delayed until that event is celebrated.

Nuptials

Normally the wedding is celebrated with a feast which also marks the girl’s nubility. If a marriage has not yet been agreed upon by the time the girl reaches puberty, the puberty feast itself will be delayed.

If the girl has already reached puberty before marriage, then when the girl’s father agrees to her marriage she is taken to her bridegroom’s village and starts living with him without performance of any special ceremony. A month or two later, the couple returns to the bride’s father’s village for the wedding feast.

If the marriage coincides with the girl’s nubility, the groom comes to the girl’s village and they start to live together in a temporary shelter made of a large mat set on edge and curved inward to form a cone. The girl will have gone through a period of seclusion and instruction immediately prior to the marriage-nubility celebration. The girl’s father provides a beast for the celebration. This is preferably a cow but may be a goat or sheep.

When the girl emerges from the seclusion for menarche, the feasting begins. On the first night the girl dances, plays, and is the center of attention; the others dance around her. Toward morning she is led aside and decorated with beads. Her husband is called to sit beside her. Then the woman who instructed the girl during her seclusion smears both with butter. They sit on a mat all the next day, watching the others feasting and dancing. They are not allowed to get up and walk or eat, except a very little meat and water. The purpose of this is to teach the girl to behave as an adult so that she will remain at home.

As friends arrive for the feast, they go first to pay respects to the couple and a woman who sits near them with a pot of beer. The visitors present small gifts called *vijumbera* (a spoon, a mug, or a small amount of money) for the parents of the bride or groom and are then given beer. The marriage feast lasts two days.

There may be two marriage feasts, both called *hyungo*, one given by the parents of the boy and one by the parents of the girl. If the couple plans to stay with the girl’s parents, the latter give the first feast and the presents are divided among the groom’s relatives. Later a reciprocal feast is given by his parents, and the gifts received are divided among the bride’s relatives. But if the couple is to stay with the groom’s parents, the latter give the first feast. The smearing with fat occurs only at the first feast, and only at the first feast must the couple sit all day on a mat and abstain from food.

Though no bridewealth is transferred at marriage, the groom may make a gift to
the parents of the bride some time after the marriage if he is pleased with the girl’s behavior and his treatment by her parents.

Divorce

Divorce is freely permitted, except for members of the noble clan. A woman divorced by a member of the noble clan may not freely remarry, and a man who marries a woman of the noble clan may not divorce her. Contravention of these rules is subject to a heavy fine, for which the relatives of the offender are held liable (Bierfert 1938: 66).

If a bridegroom dislikes his bride or her parents, he may leave her and she is then free to remarry. If a wife dislikes her husband, she makes life miserable for him by not cooking his meals, staying away all day, refusing to sleep with him, and not answering when he calls. Finally the man realizes he is no longer loved, his life is miserable, and so he leaves, taking his property with him. He explains the situation to her parents and tells them she is free so seek another husband.

Under mission influence, marriages have become more stable (Möhlig 1967: xxvii).

SECONDARY MARRIAGE

Levirate

If a husband dies, his brothers and maternal uncles confer to decide which one of them should come to take the widow and her children. Preferably, the levir is a younger classificatory brother of the deceased, by a different father and mother. But if none of these is willing, then a close brother, preferably younger, is chosen (Gibson, ms.). If the one selected is unwilling to marry the woman leviratically (kupinga), he must at least perform the leading out ceremony (kuruputa), and is responsible for finding her another husband (Bierfert 1938: 66). A man marrying a widow as a junior wife takes her and her children to his father's village, not to the village where he already has a wife. He generally does not go to live in her village because there have been no marriage negotiations with the woman's parents.

Sororate

If a man is left a widower with children and the wife’s parents love the husband and children, they will ask him to choose another of their daughters to be his wife so that he remains in their village.
Residence

Not only are avunculocal, patrilocal, and uxorilocal modes of residence all found, but the mode of residence may also shift during married life. A man may take his bride to this father’s village at first, but a few months later, after the marriage ceremony or after children are born, he normally goes with his wife and children to live in the wife’s former home village. The husband builds a hut and makes a garden there, and if he is rich, takes his cattle there.

However, the younger brother of a headman should remain in his brother’s village, to be its head after his brother dies. If the younger brother marries his elder brother’s widow, he of course does not remove her to another village. Even the son of an important man, i.e., a village head with cattle, may remain in his father’s village. In this case, the father would petition his son’s wife’s father for permission to keep his son with him. In Botswana, where patrilineal rules are strong, it is said that when the head of a village dies, his son should not leave but should remain with his father’s younger brother who has inherited the village.

With respect to the chief’s family, however, the case is different. The younger brother of the chief will be ordered by the chief to leave his village because the chief fears that his younger brother may attempt to kill him, and the younger brother will hasten to go as he also fears for his life. The chief’s elder sisters remain with him, but the younger sisters go to live at the village of the younger brother. The chief’s mother and father remain with the chief.

In 17 households of married, subordinate village men (i.e., not village heads) in two villages in Ngamiland, the men (household heads) were residing as follows:

Avunculocally (some with cross-cousin marriage): 6
   [Relationships of men to the village head: ZS: 4, MZDS: 1, MZDDS: 1]
Patrilocally: 5
   [Relationships: yB:2, S:1, yBS:2]
Uxorilocally, wife residing avunculocally: 2
   [Relationships: ZDH:1 MZDDH:1]
Uxorilocally, wife residing patrilocally: 4
   [Relationship: BDH:4]

Household. The Geiriku household normally consists of a man, his wife, and their sub-adult children. Members of a household sleep in the same house, except that pubescent boy sleep in a village men’s house, while girls may sleep in a girls’ house when they start to develop secondary sexual characteristics. The husband, if polygynous, is a member of two or more separate households; these often, but not always, being in the same village. Not every man who is head of a household is

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4 For kinship abbreviations, see note, p. 193 in section on Kinship
necessarily married — a young unmarried man may have a separate hut in his father’s village.

Each household with an adult female is an economic unit with a single store of food, meals being prepared by the women for the members.

**Nuclear Family Relationships**

Members of a family act with much independence, each one watching out for his own advantage from an early age. Disobedience in children is only mildly punished, resistance to punishment is admired, and children are often given their own way. Within the family, marital relations are openly discussed, both those of the parents and of others, with the children participating. “Each one freely and frankly voices his opinion, and his opinion also counts for something” (Bierfert 1938: 42–44). Children are said to love their mothers but not to think highly or their fathers (Bierfert 1938: 291). Fathers bless their children soon after birth, praying that they may be strong, healthy, and happy. During their childhood, children may be given animals by their fathers, and fathers are involved in the marriage negotiations for their children.

Parents and elder brothers and sisters are respected. One does not joke with them, even politely. A younger brother may remind an elder brother of duties he may have forgotten but has no authority over his elder sibling. Brothers and sisters help one another in times of sickness.

Mothers come to help their daughters when the latter are expecting. If a mother dies while her children are still infants and no one else will care for them, the babies may be thrown into the river to drown (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1925: 291).

**Polygamy and Concubinage**

Polygamy is practiced. Bierfert says it was restricted to rich and noble persons, but Gibson was told that wealth is not a factor, that some poor men also have several wives. Cases of common men having as many as five wives were reported, and a former chief was said to have had 20. Chiefs took whatever women they wished as wives, even if married, and did not have to beg approval from the women’s fathers or guardians. Men who married women of the noble clan, however, were not permitted to take additional wives, for their noble wives would not permit it (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 66).

Concubinage, in which a man makes an alliance with a woman for an indefinite period but without the sanction of formal marriage, also occurs. A concubine is called *zikumbo*. Concubinal relationships are permitted with the wife’s classificatory sister or the wife’s classificatory sister’s daughter, but not with the wife’s brother’s daughter. They are also permitted with the widow of the mother’s brother, but not with the widows of the brother, father, or son. A man may take any person eligible as wife as a concubine. A child born to a concubine is considered to belong to her people.
A female slave offered in compensation for a murder often became her new master’s concubine.

Extended Families

Though nuclear families are economic units in housebuilding, in the cultivation, storage, and preparation of food, etc., the members of a village act together as an extended family for some purposes. All cattle kept by members of a village are penned together, and presumably are herded together. Decisions concerning the slaughter or sale of an animal are arrived at jointly though the animals are individually owned. In sharing responsibility for crimes of their members and in seeking retribution for wrongs committed against them, relatives, i.e., the residents of a village, stand together. Punishment of an outsider who has injured a member of a village is often imposed by the group, who may, for example, decide to thrash a thief.

SEX AND REPRODUCTION

SEX

Sexual Stimulation and Control

Obscene joking is permitted and practiced between persons who are approved potential mates, especially cross-cousins of opposite sex, and also between grandparents and grandchildren of opposite sex. When boys are old enough, they begin to notice how their parents sleep together and then are sent to sleep in the boys’ house. Girls are sent to sleep in the girls’ house when their breasts begin to develop. When girls play together, older ones teach the younger ones to pull their labia minora (mbigo) to enlarge them.

General Sex Restrictions

Marital relations are forbidden during the period of fishing and hunting (Bierfert 1938: 67). Also, for a month or two after a woman gives birth, she sleeps with her infant, separate from her husband, and avoids having relations with him.

Kinship Regulation of Sex

It is thought that people who commit incest will have deformed children. Children start to sleep together at an early age — as early as 6. At first boys “play” with any girls, even their own sisters. When their parents find them together, they
beat the boys and tell them not to engage in sexual play with their sisters. By age 8 or 10 boys have learned to play only with girls who are of the proper kin relationship for marriage.

Adolescent boys visit adolescent girls in the girls’ hut at night. The boys must be either from another village or, if from the same village, must be cross-cousins of their respective partners. A boy may sleep with a girl older than himself, though he would not marry such a one.

REPRODUCTION

Premarital Relations

Before marriage, pubescent girls use contraceptive preparations which they learn about from their grandmothers. The leaves of a certain plant are chewed up, flattened out, and rolled up for insertion into the vagina.

Sterility

Male impotency and male and female sterility are treated with medicines. Medicine for a barren woman is put in a small gourd and the woman washes her face and breasts with it. The medicine is left in the gourd, and when worms appear in it, one of these is pressed against her belly, completing the treatment (Kampungu 1966: 245–248).

Pregnancy

An expectant mother continues to reside in her husband’s village, if she has been living there, or may return to her own people if she feels that her husband’s relatives are not kind enough to her. If she stays in her husband’s village, her mother may come to stay with her, to help her.

Childbirth; Difficult and Unusual Births

A mat screen is set up behind an expectant woman’s hut, and she goes out to it to give birth. A woman in labor is assisted by various other women. A grandmother, on either side, should be present; if there is none, the woman’s own mother should be present. A midwife (muvate) is called, and she has medicines to use in case of difficult birth. If these do not help, they go to a diviner who will usually advise killing a goat or chicken and sprinkling the blood over the woman to appease the ancestors.
In case of a difficult birth, the midwife administers a medicine which is her secret. Between drinks of medicine, the woman in labor is required to call out the names of any men she has slept with illicitly, for these relationships are believed to cause the difficulty. If the birth is still difficult, the midwife speaks to the husband, who is waiting outside the yard where his wife is confined, and requires him to confess his concubinal relationships while he, also, is given drinks of the special medicine. The husband goes to seek another doctor if the birth continues to be difficult.

When a woman dies after the birth of her child, it is because she has not confessed some adulterous relationship. If the child does not come out, it is because the husband has not confessed his extramarital affairs.

Postnatal Care and Infanticide

After giving birth, the mother returns to her house and remains there with the infant until the stump of the cord has fallen off. Then she may come out again.

Formerly, misshapen and sickly children were killed.

Illegitimacy

Pregnancy and birth out of wedlock are not treated as serious offenses. The child of an unmarried woman is named by her parents and grows up in their village.

Adoption

Adoption is not practiced while a child's parents are living. In the case of an orphan, the child's mother's sister will adopt it. If there is no one to accept small orphan children, they may be thrown into the river to drown (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1925: 291).

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

RECREATION

Beer drinking and feasting, smoking, music making, and dancing are leisure time activities. Beer is brewed particularly at harvest in late May and also at the start of the rainy season, in November or December, when friends participate in garden work parties. Families entertain one another at beer parties and alternate in brewing and playing host. Feasting, with the slaughter of cattle or smaller animals, occurs
particularly on the occasion of a wedding or a visit by an important person who has come from afar (Gibson ms.; and Bierfert 1938: 17).

Dancing, singing, and the playing of musical instruments are mentioned briefly by de Almeida, who writes of a seven-stringed instrument (doubtless like the seven-stringed "Ovambo guitar" [Kirby 1965: 243]), drums, and marimbas (de Almeida 1912: 384). Group choruses, in which women and children clap and sing while a few men beat a rhythmic accompaniment on drums, is a common leisure-time group activity.

Singing during garden work is reported by Bierfert. Some songs are standard, others are composed spontaneously. Some deal with historical persons and events, others refer to the activity at hand. Older women dance around the hut in which a girl is secluded at menarche (Bierfert 1938: 18, 67).

An early report says Gciriku men smoked marihuana (liamba), the pipe being passed from person to person (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 154).

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

Visiting and Hospitality

At about 10 or 12, children may go to visit relatives, remaining with them for a few weeks or months; a child may remain several months with a maternal or paternal uncle or aunt. A father objects, however, if his child visits its mother’s relatives for an extended period, and a mother objects if the child visits its father’s relatives for a long time.

Strangers are well cared for, even at the expense of short rations for the host, for it would be a disgrace to deny food to a visitor. If he (or she?) finds the host away at the time of a visit, the visitor may help himself to food from the larder of a friend for the period of his stay. But to take an ear or two of grain from a field is counted as theft, and in the past one may have been sold as a slave if caught (Bierfert 1925: 293–294).

Formal greeting and leave-taking routines are practiced.

Social Life

SOCIAL STRUCTURE

Rule of Descent

The Gciriku are matrilineal. Only ancestors on the maternal side are prayed or sacrificed to. Only matrilineal relatives are considered true relatives. Descendants of a man through males sometimes refer to one another as children of the same ntwedu, "bull," but the only recognition of such a grouping reported is in reference
to degress of separation required by the incest regulations (Gibson, ms.: Bierfert 1938: 26–27).

Lineages

Generally, children of the same great-great-great grandmother through the female line know that they are related, call themselves “children of so-and-so,” and say that they are of the same “womb.” Lineages thus have a depth of about five generations.

Members of the same clan who are not separated by more than five generations have privileges with respect to one another’s property—i.e., they can take property and consume it in time of need without fear of reprisal.

Clans

The following eight likoro, “matriclans,” were listed by a Gciriku informant living in Botswana. Each is named after an animal or natural phenomenon. Kampungu (1965: 464) provides different translations for some of these “totems,” as shown in parentheses.

Gciriku Clans

1. Vakanyasi, “Buffalo People”
2. Vakanyimi, “Lion People”
3. Vakankora, “Kora Bird People” (Hunger People)
4. Vakayovu, “Elephant People”
5. Vakasipika, “Servant People” (Hyena-Eland People)
6. Vakangombe, “Cattle People”
7. Vakandjadi, “Rain People” (Falcon-Hawk People)
8. Vakafuma, “Giant Frog People” (Famous or Toad People)

The animals named are symbols only; they are not taboo as food to members of the respective clans.

The royal clan, from which chiefs are drawn, is Vakankora according to most informants.

5 Bierfert (1938: 40–41) provides a somewhat different list of seven clans, which he says are found in all the tribes on the Okavango. To the above list, his list adds a “parrot” clan and excludes the two which have nonanimal names: “servant” and “rain.”

6 Kampungu (1965: 466) says the Gciriku rulers and princes “belong to the ‘Wakwankora’ (hunger, toad) totem,” but the Toad (Frog) People are the Vakafuma. One of Gibson’s informants also named the Vakafuma as the chiefs’ clan. The Vakafuma and Vakankora clans belong to the same macro-clan, and it is perhaps that unit that should be considered nobility.
The clans are not exogamous, marital restrictions being based on generation depth of separation rather than on clan. A man who marries a woman in the noble clan, however, is under other restrictions with respect to plural marriage (see Regulation of Marriage).

The *makoro*, “matriclan,” is not a residential unit, has no leader or head, and never meets as a body to take corporate action. Members of the same clan, however, do have certain obligations to one another. Destitute or impoverished people seek help and refuge with clan-mates. If a man is sick, he will seek out the village of a clan member (even one so distant that the exact relationship cannot be traced) to ask for help. Then, if he dies, he will be buried by his clan-mates, with the one who cared for him reporting his death to his relatives. The one who cares for a sick clan-mate may not demand cattle as payment for his services. In old age, every man seeks to go to the village of a clan-mate, preferably to the home of a sister’s son. An old woman remains with her son or daughter, again a clan-mate (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 45-46, 70, 72).

**Phratries**

The legendary histories of the clans indicate that the present number resulted from the fission of three earlier groups. Some of the separations, at least, are attributed to the divergent movement of hunting parties or to disputes arising from the division of game. The following groupings or phratries are suggested by the legends, the first named clan in each being the oldest:

I. Vakanjadi  
   Vakayovo  
   Vakanyasi  
II. Vakankora  
   Vakanyimi  
   Vakafuma  
III. Vakangombe  
   Vakasipika

**Tribe and Nation**

Tribal separation between the Gciriku and Mbuyuku is suggested in the legend concerning the fission of Phratry II, to which the nobles of both tribes belong.
KINSHIP

Kinship Terminology

The principal terms are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Closest referent</th>
<th>Extensions or meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mama</td>
<td>grandparent (ref. and add.)</td>
<td>FFB, FFZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nyakuru</td>
<td>grandparent (ref. only)</td>
<td>FB, FZH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vava</td>
<td>father</td>
<td>MZ, FZ, MZS, MBW, FFW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vasavona</td>
<td>father’s younger brother</td>
<td>MMZS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nane</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>MeZD, FeBS, WeZ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naneona</td>
<td>mother’s younger sister</td>
<td>PyBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nkwliri</td>
<td>mother’s brother</td>
<td>opposite sex child of man of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mukuru</td>
<td>elder sibling</td>
<td>father’s likoro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muenerya</td>
<td>younger sibling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mpanja</td>
<td>patrilateral parallel cousin, opposite sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siro</td>
<td>cross-cousin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mona</td>
<td>child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>timpumba</td>
<td>sister’s child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sitekurumpa</td>
<td>child of sister’s child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mutekuru</td>
<td>grandchild</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>kwa</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>kuwana</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viya</td>
<td>husband</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mukadi</td>
<td>wife</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tanwe</td>
<td>spouse’s father, daughter’s husband</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngumwe</td>
<td>spouse’s mother, son’s wife</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nukwaredi</td>
<td>spouse’s sibling</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kuginga</td>
<td>wife’s younger sister</td>
<td>WMB, WZD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sikumbo</td>
<td>wife’s half sister</td>
<td>“concubine”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>musu parume</td>
<td>wife’s mother brother</td>
<td>“concubine”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* F = father, M = mother, B = brother, Z = sister, S = son, D = daughter, C = child, e = elder, y = younger, (m) = male speaker, (f) = female speaker.

The use of the personal name in address and reference is avoided with certain highly respected kinsmen. Thus a child does not refer to this mother by her personal name; but when the child has become an adult and his mother is old, he may refer to her by her proper name (Bierfert 1938: 47).

A man takes an oath by calling the name of his mpanja (FBD or FZSD) who is his most highly respected relative.

Kinship terms are usually employed in the possessive form, e.g.: vava “my father,” nane “my mother,” nkwirekwande “my mother’s brother,” sirosande “my cross-cousin,” mutekurande “my grandchild,” viyande “my husband.” The terms for father and mother are inflected to indicate the person and number of the

7 Literally, “I copulated with your girl.”
possessor; in other terms the possessive suffixes are inflected. Some terms are generally employed in a plural form to indicate respect.

*Kin Relationship*

Formal address and behavior, with no joking, are required between a man and his mother, sister, and elder brother. Less formal behavior, but not free joking, is permitted with a man's father and younger brother.

Bierfert declares that children neither obey nor venerate their parents and that their love depends only upon the amount of food they receive. Fathers have no right to punish their own children and are reprimanded by the children's mothers if they do. At meals the mother distributes the food, serving her husband and herself first in one bowl and her children later, either in a second bowl or out of the cooking pot. Each child must contend with the others for his portion (Bierfert 1938: 42–43).

Fathers instruct sons and mothers instruct daughters in the common male and female economic activities. Parents, elder brothers, and uncles look out for one's interest and are consulted before important actions are taken. An old mother is looked after by her children, but an old father is treated as a stranger (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 45).

*Grandparents and Grandchildren*

Free joking is permitted between a person and his grandparents of the opposite sex; only polite joking is allowed with grandparents of the same sex.

A girl's grandmother instructs her in sexual matters, when the girl is secluded at menarche. A grandmother on either side is expected to come to help her granddaughter in childbirth.

*Avuncular and Nepotic Relatives*

One respects his or her father's brothers and father's sister; the father's elder brother is most respected of all; there is no joking with these relatives. Mother's sister and mother's brother are treated less formally; one may engage in polite joking with them and also with the mother's brother of one's spouse.

A mother's brother may tease his sister's child politely, and they may engage in polite joking. Also, a man may joke with his wife's mother's brother, calling him *musu parume* "I stole your girl."

A mother's brother may freely take property belonging to his sister's child, and one may take things from his or her mother's brother without fear of punishment. A mother's brother may teach his nephew to hunt. Eventually an old man expects
to go to the home of his sister's son to live out his days and be cared for in his old age.

If the relatives of a confirmed male thief decide that he must be killed, it is his maternal uncles who must carry out the decision. A mother's brother used to be able to sell his sister's child into slavery, even against the wishes of the child's father.

Cousins

Cross-cousins of opposite sex start playing together and sleeping together at an early age. Obscene joking is permitted between cross-cousins, especially those of opposite sex, and a man may joke freely as well with the child of his mother's brother's daughter. A young person may also joke with his parents' cross-cousins. Food offered to the ancestors in treatment of a sick person should be eaten by the patient's cross-cousin.

Parents-in-Law and Children-in-Law

One treats his spouse's relatives with about as much respect as one's own parents and does not joke with them. However, one does not avoid them after marriage. A man has an obligation to perform bride service (slondera) for his parents-in-law, whether he resides in their village or not. In many respects, he remains a stranger in his wife's parents' village, unless the wife's father is his mother's brother.

siblings-in-Law

Though marriage with the wife's sister is prohibited unless the wife has died, one may joke freely with her.

Behavior towards Nonrelatives

In general, strangers and aliens report good treatment at the hands of the Ceiriku. Missionaries working among them have been honored and protected from harm, but when attempting to interfere negatively with native customs, they have also been abused and attacked (Bierfert 1938: 55). Hospitality to strangers is customary, yet early accounts record the killing of certain white travelers (Passarge 1905b: 230). Both Paiva de Couceiro and de Almeida report hospitality and cooperation during the early visits by Portuguese forces. Though the chief fled from de Almeida's column, presumably out of fear and suspicion, he soon returned (de Almeida 1912: 196).
Community Structure

The South-West African census for 1932 enumerates 4,040 Gciriku distributed among 101 “kraals” or villages. Thus the average number of persons per village is about 40 (South Africa 1933: 141). One village visited by the author had a total population of 50 and contained 14 houses, 13 inhabited by nuclear families (some with polygynous husbands), and one a house for unmarried boys. If there had been unmarried adolescent girls in the village, a separate house would have been made for them. Eleven of the men lived monogamously, two had two wives each and rotated between the houses of their respective wives, and one had a second wife in another village. In another village visited briefly, there were 15 houses, one for boys. In all cases recorded, either the head of the household was closely related to the village head, patrilineally or avuncually, or the wife of the head of the household was so related. (See Residence).

Headmen

The headman (*nturazumbo*) of a village is responsible for law and order in his village. He (or she?) is appointed by the chief for life (Möhlig 1967: xxvi). He is also responsible for the health and safety of his sisters and their children: if a member of his extended family falls ill, he must sacrifice an animal for it.

In the main homeland of the Gciriku, on the south side of the river, the tribal territory is divided into 11 headmanships (sg. *mukunda*), each being headed by a foreman. The foremen decide suits brought before them by the residents. Foremen are appointed by the Chief (Möhlig 1967: xxv). This middle level of administration appears to have been introduced by the government of South-West Africa.

Social Control

Persons freely accuse one another of lying, even within the family, except that so to accuse the chief is dangerous. In crowds, bystanders make caustic remarks, thus indicating their disagreement with assertions made by anyone. Individuals who inform the chief about those who disobey his orders are rewarded (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1925: 291–292; Bierfert 1938: 55).
Informal Ingroup Justice

Formerly in cases of murder, the murderer was killed by the relatives of his victim. However, either a slave, or if none is owned, a child of the sister of the accused, could be offered instead — to be kept as a slave, not to be killed. This kind of substitution had to be accepted.

A confirmed thief might be condemned to death by his relatives; his matrilineal uncles would catch him, drown him, and abandon his body in the river. Children who habitually stole were either sold as slaves or drowned; the one suffering the loss assumed the right to sell a pilfering child (Bierfert 1925: 294; Bierfert 1938: 50).

TRIBE

Chiefs

The Gciriku chief is called hompa. Succession to the position descends first to the younger uterine brother of a deceased chief, then to one of his sister's sons. If there is no eligible man, a woman may be named chief.8

A list of the Gciriku chiefs in order of accession, compiled from various sources, follows: Siputu,12 Muriata10,12 Simwemwe,10,12 Ngara (F),10 Mwievu,10 Muduva,10,12 Kangungu,9 Mahoma,9 Muhera (F?),10,11,12 Nyangana,9,10,11,12 Sampapi,10,12 Haingura (F),11 Sasipapu,10,11,12 (F indicates a female chief.) Information as to the reigns is scanty. Muriata is credited with first leading the Gciriku from the Kwando to the Okavango (Fiuza 1948a: 29). Kangungu was chief at the time of an invasion by the Makololo under Sekelatou and lost his life in the battle (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 152); this was about 1859 or 1800 (Wüst 1940b: 268). Nyangana was chief at the time of McKiernan's visit in 1878 (McKiernan 1954: 167) and remained chief until his death in 1924 (Bierfert 1938: 10)13 Sampapi reigned until about 1945 (Gibson, ms.). Sasipapu had acceded by 1948, but his control extended only over that part of the tribe residing in South-West Africa. In Angola Uheka had been installed as nominal chief (Fiuza 1948b: 29). In Ngamiland a village head who called himself "Nyangana" claimed to be the chief of the Gciriku in that country (Larson ms. 1953: 103).

8 A photograph captioned "Queen of the Dirico," published in Portugal em Africa (1953, No. 56: 94), may be the female chief Haingura.
9 Paiva Couceiro 1892: 152.
10 Fiuza 1948a: 29.
11 Gibson ms.
13 Nyangana is pictured in Bierfert (1938) and in Seiner (1913).
Ngara was the daughter of Simwemwe; Mwievu and Muduva were twin brothers who ruled jointly; Nyangana was the nephew of Muhera; and Sampapi and Sashipapu were nephews of Nyangana, according to Fiuza (1948a). Mahoma was Kangungo’s son, according to Paiva Couceiro (1892: 152), and succeeded contrary to the rule of matrilineal succession because his mother was of the royal family; Nyangana, he says, was Kangungo’s sister’s son. Gibson in 1953 collected a short genealogy of the chief’s line:

```
   Mavanje
     /   \
 Wayera ▲ Muhera (1)
     \   /  \
  ▲ Katiku △ Nyangana (2) (died 1924)
     /   \
 Haingura (3) ▲ Sasipapu (4)
```
A chief and his younger brother and successor fear one another. The chief fears that his potential successor will kill him in order to take the throne, and the younger brother fears he will be killed by his fearful elder brother. The chief, therefore, orders his younger brother to leave the royal village, and the latter sets up his residence elsewhere. His younger sisters go with him. For example, in 1890 Atijpara, brother of Nyangana, had established his village at the western extremity of Gcirikuland (Paiva Couceiro 1892: 87). Nephews of the chief also are sent away to establish their own courts. It is uncertain whether female chiefs and successors are subject to similar fears.

When a chief dies, a selection of the successor from among those eligible is made by a council composed of the firenga, the sitenga, and the village headmen (Gibson ms.). Möhlig (1967: xxv) says the chief is elected from the male members of the royal class by the entire people.

A chief has numerous privileges and responsibilities. He or she may call upon the subjects to provide labor but then must provide food for the period of their employment. The chief may take cattle and sheep by appropriation. Male chiefs may have many wives; the “old chief” (Nyangana?) is reported to have had 20 at one time. A chief did not have to ask approval of a girl’s father before taking her in marriage, and could even take a married woman away from her husband at will.

Chiefs gain power by giving property and privileges to certain people. People so honored act as informers and as police for the chief, catching those who disobey his orders so that they can be punished.

Certain wild animals are considered royal, and must be presented to the chief, in whole or in part, before other tribesmen may partake of the meat. If an eland is killed, the breast meat and fat must be presented to the chief; any other person who eats these parts would be executed. If a hippo is killed, a knife cannot be put into it until the catch is reported to the chief, who must be given all the meat. The meat of an elephant killed close to the chief’s village must be carried to the chief, but if it is killed far away, only the tusks need be brought. If a rhino is killed and eaten, the one who killed it must pay the chief one ox.

A male chief often engaged in hunting. Paiva Couceiro (1892: 153) reports that Chief Nyangana was an excellent shot and a great hunter, especially of hippopotamus; he used a rifle obtained in trade from an Englishman for ten tusks of ivory.

The chief acts as a judge, settling disputes, determining penalties, and seeing that sentences are carried out. In inheritance cases, he claims some of the property as a fee for settling the dispute. In cases of theft, if the one found guilty cannot make restitution, the chief himself is expected to do so. In cases of witchcraft when someone is found by a diviner to be guilty of murder, the chief formerly had the accused one put to death. However, the judgements pronounced and the severity of the punishment often depend upon the relationship of the accused to the chief. Nyangana is reported to have excused a distant kinsman who slaughtered one of his cows for food, but had a 12 year old girl drowned because she continually pilfered his food (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1925: 294).

In acting as a judge, the chief never sentences himself, his close relatives, or
influential people. Only a few people have the courage to oppose the chief (Bierfert 1925: 295).

**Cabinet**

The chief is assisted in the exercise of his or her authority by a primary councilor (*lirenga*), a group of secondary councilors (*sitinya*, pl. *vitinya*), and the village headmen (*ntwaxumbo*, pl. *vantwaxumbo*). The *lirenga* is the “prime minister” and “war chief.” He transmits orders to the village headmen, and he leads raiding parties for the chief. The *lirenga* is chosen by the chief for his good sense; he need not be a relative of the chief or even a member of the royal clan. The younger brother of the chief who expects to succeed to the position of chief and who has set up a separate village, chooses a *lirenga*, even while his elder brother is still living.

The *vitinya* are the husbands of women in the chief’s family — his sisters and his sister’s daughters. They work for the chief in his fields and attend his court as councilors.

Village headmen are summoned by the *lirenga* to the chief’s court to hear his orders and to relay them to the people.

Möhlig (1967: xxvi) mentions also confidants of the chief called *mutimbi* (p. *vatimbi*), male or female, who also act as judges or are assigned special duties.

**DEPENDENCY**

As descendants of peoples living on the Kwando River under the sovereignty of the Lozi, the Kavango peoples seem to have owed allegiance (and perhaps paid tribute) to the Lozi chief. However, they were situated at the extremity of the region over which Lewanika, the Lozi chief (ca. 1870—1916), claimed authority, and this authority was curtailed when European powers established an international border at the Kwando River (Reynolds 1967: 20–40). The nature of the relationship between the Gciriku and the Lozi is revealed in part by the fact that in 1884 Lewanika, in order to escape an uprising of some of his people, fled to the west and eventually took refuge among the “Namarwa” (presumably the Gciriku, for his host was their chief, Nyangana), where he remained long enough to plant a garden. Lewanika is said later to have remembered Nyangana’s hospitality gratefully (Gibbons 1904, I: 153, 221).

By 1890, if not earlier, the Tawana, a Tswana tribe which had established itself about a century before in Ngamiland, a region to the southeast, extended their control to the lower Okavango (see Recorded History). Passarge, who visited the area in 1898, reports that a Tawana fief lord (*kchossani*) had been appointed to collect tribute at the start of the dry season each year, paid in grain, skins, and iron implements, as well as ivory and cattle. The grain was supposed to amount to one-tenth of the harvest. The fief lord also could send his cattle to be herded by his
vassals. As a subject tribe, the Geiriku were required to station a representative in the Tawana capital (Passarge 1905b: 300; Passarge 1905c: 711).

In recent times in South-West Africa, the Geiriku tribal region has been included administratively in the Kavango Native Territory which the government in 1937 declared reserved "for the sole use and occupation of natives." The territory is under the control of a Bantu Native Affairs Commissioner, who is stationed at Runtu in the Sambyu tribal region. Direct government of the people remains in the hands of the tribal chief, assisted by his counsellors and certain elected "foremen." The chief is the highest judicial authority with respect to his people, but his judgements may be appealed to the Commissioner who may then set them aside and require a retrial. Though Roman-Dutch law is the officially recognized legal code, in fact native law and custom are administered in the chief's court (South Africa 1964: 53, 69).

**LAW AND JUSTICE**

*Legal Norms*

Punishable crimes are murder, adultery, seduction, rape, theft, and unpaid debt. Certain offences are handled informally, others by the chief. The basis for differentiation seems not to be the nature of the wrong, but rather the initiative of the victim who may seek assistance from the chief if his and his relatives' efforts to secure redress are of no avail. Tribal law and custom seems often to be adjusted arbitrarily in response to pressure from influential people (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1925: 295).

*Liability*

Not only an offender but also his close relatives are responsible for breaches of legal norms. Thus debt may be recompensed by the enslavement of the debtor's children, murder by the enslavement of the murderer's sister, and habitual theft by punishment by the relatives of a habitual thief, because they share responsibility for his behavior. According to one informant, the chief was liable for theft by one of his subjects if the thief himself could not make restitution.

*Offenses and Sanctions*

Sanctions mentioned are capital punishment (often by drowning), enslavement, beating, fines, confiscation, and restitution.
Murder by Witchcraft

The one held responsible is discovered by divination. If the accused denies guilt, he or she must undergo trial by ordeal. A convicted witchcraft murderer formerly was killed by order of the chief in this manner: wood was piled up like a house, the accused one was placed inside, and the “house” burned. Bierfert (1925: 291) declares that to kill someone with no reason is considered an offense, but to take someone’s life out of vengeance is permitted.

Sex and Marital Offenses

In case of premarital pregnancy, no punishment was sought, for the girl’s family expected to gain a child if the male responsible did not marry the pregnant girl. In recent times, such cases are brought to trial and a penalty is sought.

In rape, the victim’s relatives complain to the head of the village where the raper resides, and punishment (a whipping) is administered by the relatives of the culprit.

If a wife was seduced and left her husband to go with the seducer, the injured husband formerly had no other recourse than to persuade his relatives to help him seek vengeance, either by killing the seducer or by capturing some cattle belonging to him or his relatives.

A man who commits adultery is liable to be killed by the offended husband and his brothers, but the erring wife is not punished. Before killing an adulterer, the avengers announce why they are killing him in order to forestall retaliation. If an adulterer runs away to avoid being killed, leaving a wife, the injured man or his brother may claim the woman as his own wife (Gibson, ms.). Bierfert (1938: 66) indicates that, since the establishment of European influence, cases of adultery are brought to trial before the chief and a fine is sought as a penalty in place of capital punishment. He notes also that “offences against nature never come to our knowledge."

Property Offenses

Most cases concern the theft of live stock. A convicted thief is required to return the stolen goods or to replace them. In addition, the crowd which goes to collect the fine may decide to beat the thief as punishment. If a thief cannot make restitution, his relatives, especially those on his mother’s side, must pay. If a man thinks another has stolen his animal, he has the right to search the suspect’s cattle pen.
Nonfulfillment of Obligations

When a person died leaving unpaid debts, his sister and her children became liable, and if unable to pay the debt themselves, were in danger of being sold as slaves to raise the amount required (Bierfert 1938: 51–58).

Religious Offences

Bierfert in one place denies that blasphemy occurs, arguing that the Goiriku lack a sufficiently strong concept of a supreme deity to make this important, but in another place he says that if a child uttered one curse word it could cost him his life (1938: 42, 44).

Justice

A principal public activity of the chief is that of judge, yet most disputes are brought to him only after the litigants have failed to reach a settlement among themselves. The chief presides in his court. He is assisted in arriving at a decision by his councilors and other important people in the vicinity. The litigants are allowed to bring their relatives who sit in the court and may attempt to influence the course of justice. Often there is a large gathering, and the chief may even convene all the people in the area to listen to a case. The chief governs procedure in the trial; however, he as well as any adult present may question the witnesses (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 30, 57).

Ordeal is used in cases of witchcraft, the culprit identified by a diviner being required to put his hand in a pot of boiling water or to drink poison (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 32).

Execution of Justice

When a decision is reached, for example, that a fine must be paid, the successful litigant and his relatives go immediately to collect it. Decisions to administer a beating or capital punishment presumably are carried out by persons charged by the chief with that duty, but details are lacking.

WAR

Raiding is said to have been frequent before the period of Tawana overlordship, and to have ceased during that time (Passarge 1905b: 300).

The chief sent out raiding parties to capture livestock or to take prisoners who
would become servants. Raiding parties were led by the *lirenga* on behalf of the chiefs. Chiefs apparently raided villages in neighboring chiefdoms, and also sometimes those in their own tribal area, particularly villages that failed to pay the annual tax. Chiefs and their younger brothers and successors are said not to have raided one another (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1925: 295).

On occasions of sudden warfare, according to Brochado, the people dwelling on the banks of the Okavango protected themselves by diving into the river and hiding there for hours, sometimes going across or along the river under water, and only raising their heads out from time to time for air and to observe the course of events on the land (Brochado 1867: 197).

The headman of the Mbunda village on the Cuito River north of Gcirkiku territory complained in 1899 that Nyangana “had deprived him of the whole of his country from the Okavango to Marunga” (a village about 100 km. above the Cuito—Okavango confluence), and that Nyangana’s people “made periodical raids, usually at harvest time, when they carried off everything they could, killing the men and selling the women and children to the west coast slave traders.” He wanted a complaint lodged with Lewaniika, the Lozi chief, who was looked upon as overlord of the entire area (Gibbons 1904, I: 226).

Religion, Magic, and Medicine

RELIGION

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

General Character of Religion

Information on the aboriginal religion is published in the works of Catholic missionaries who have worked in the area, particularly Fr. August Bierfert who deals specifically with the Gcirkiku, and Fr. J. Wüst whose articles pertain to the religion of both the Mbukushu and the Gcirkiku. Concepts of a supreme deity, the soul, and sin are subjects of primary importance to both authors.

In an early article, Bierfert (1913: 46) declares that the Gcirkiku worship three deities: the sun, because it gives them light and warmth; the ancestors, who bless their activities and protect them from misfortune; and the still-living chieftain Mokoja, who is revered as a rain god.

In later writings, Bierfert and Wüst represent the Gcirkiku and other Kavango peoples as believing in both a supreme deity and in ancestral spirits, though the practice of ancestor worship is said to have been introduced within the past century from a neighboring people, the Hauiko or Wanjemba (Nyemba) of southeastern Angola. The Supreme Deity (*Karunga* in Gcirkiku, Sambyu, Bunja, and Kwangali; *Njambi* in Mbukushu) is conceived as more a molder of existing things than a prime
creator. He is responsible for the form of topographic features and of plants and animals, and was formerly thought responsible for rain. He is usually invisible but may reveal himself in dreams. He punishes people for offenses and for failure to heed evil omens but is not without compassion. He dwells in heaven, conceived of as a large land; He sees and hears everything and knows what men think. The Supreme Deity gives man his soul; human souls exist with him before birth of their human hosts, and they return to him after death; animals lack souls (Wüst 1940a).

Formerly people prayed to the Supreme Deity more than in recent times; He is considered biased, rewarding some who pray to him but not others. He does not punish those who libel him. A person's life span and the agent of his death are predestined by the Deity. He is responsible for disasters and for good and bad fortunes (Bierfert 1938: 22 ff.; Wüst 1940a, 1940b). Formerly offerings were made to Karunga, as people now make offerings to their ancestors.

The Gciriku now worship their ancestors on the maternal side; this they do by making offerings of food (cows, calves, chickens, hens, and cooked meal, or in an emergency, tobacco) to them, not only on occasions when diviners determine that one's ancestors are making someone sick because they crave food, but also at regular intervals (see Propitiation).

Mythology

There are religious myths which explain the origin of men and women, their original innocence, the origin of knowledge of procreation, the origin of marriage, the origin of death, the separation of human from deity, betrayal of God's trust in humans, the condemnation of humans to everlasting death, and the exclusion of the chameleon and the spider from this fate. Wüst suspects that elements of Christian Sunday school teaching may be incorporated in some of these myths (Wüst 1940a).

Though there is a legend of migration from the northeast, the Gciriku also have a creation myth concerning a hill which lies southeast of their riverine location (probably Tsodilo Hill, 18°45' S, 21°46' E). On a dome shaped summit they report finding the footprints of animals and people. Karunga, they say, here let people and their animals down from heaven on a rope. Later, when he became angry with people because of their bad behavior, he dissolved the connection and left people to their fate (Wüst 1940a: 40).

Eschatology

Bierfert and Wüst describe a ritual which occurs about every five years in which the ancestral spirits are summoned for a feast (see Propitiation).

Children are named for recently deceased relatives, so that the spirit of the deceased relative will give his or her namesake supernatural protection.
Luck and Chance

Misfortune, like some illness, is believed due to the hostility of a neighbor. Falling from a tree or being seized in the river by a crocodile, for example, are accidents which are blamed on the ill will of others; following such an event a diviner might be engaged to seek out the guilty party (Bierfert 1938: 28–29).

Sacred Objects and Places

Posts set up in the villages appear to have had a magical function. Paiva Couceiro (1892: 154–155) describes such “fetishes” in various compartments of Nyangana’s village. Some posts had horns or arrows inserted in transverse holes made in them, and the horns contained magical substances such as powdered wood from a tree struck by lightning, the nails of lions and leopards, and chicken blood. A pot of chicken feathers and bits of wood was set on top of one. The posts were of ungoło wood and striped from top to bottom in yellow, white, and red, using colored clays.

According to Bierfert’s early report (1913: 46), a wooden figure representing an ancestor stood at the entrance to the chief’s courtyard to guard his health. If the chief became sick, the god was punished by suspending it between two poles for several days.14

RELIgIOUS PRACTICES

Propitiation

Early in the morning, the chief gathers his people to thank the rising sun for giving the people a new day. When the first rays of light are visible, the people clap their hands softly as they face the east (Bierfert 1913: 46). Offerings are made to the spirits of deceased matrilineal ancestors on two sorts of occasions: when a diviner has determined that a particular ancestral spirit is causing a descendant’s illness, and at infrequent intervals when general offerings are made to the spirits of all the deceased ancestors for the tribe as a whole (for the former, see Magical and Mental Therapy).

An animal to be offered to the ancestors is first salved, while the chief marks a cross on its back with oil and red coloring. After a short prayer the animal is felled with a heavy blow at the nape of the neck. The flesh of a sacrificed animal is eaten only by men.

14 Bierfert in a later publication (1938: 40) denies the use of “idols,” and declares that even the clan animals are not “worshipped.”
About every five years there is a ceremony to thank the spirits of all the ancestors. Outside the chief’s village one or more poles (called ruzo) are raised, and some branches or bunches of grass are fastened to their ends. The women of the village grind millet meal and cook a stiff porridge. Shortly before sunset the people gather, the men and children carrying short sticks. First the chief calls the ancestors by blowing an antelope horn whistle and asking them to sit on the tops of the poles. He then thanks them for the protection they have provided during the past five years. After the prayer of thanksgiving, each person takes a handful of the mush from the family pot, forms it into a ball, pokes a stick into it, and flings it into the air as an offering to the spirits. Though the balls of mush fall back to earth, it is explained that the spirits have difficulty in seeing them because of the failing light and will come down to look for them during the night (Bierfert 1938: 27–28; Wüst 1940b: 266–267).

Wüst reports that the Gciriku formerly made burnt offerings of millet (1940b: 268).

Avoidance and Taboo

Food taboos are imposed on individuals for the duration of their lives, but the procedure followed in determining the proper taboo is not reported (Bierfert 1938: 34).

Revelation and Divination

Divination is employed to discover which ancestral spirit or which living person is responsible for someone’s illness or misfortune. Diviners also may be called upon to discover stolen goods. Some divinatory procedures have been described above (see Magical and Mental Therapy). Another device used by a diviner is a horn or calabash filled with medicine. The magical device is questioned by the diviner, the calabash responding either in words or in senseless whispers, the horn, standing upright to indicate agreement or nodding to indicate disagreement. Still another device used is a collection of animal bones, bird beaks, and bird claws. The diviner tosses and shakes these objects in a bag or bowl, then pours them out. After studying them for several minutes, with attention to the relationship among them, he suddenly lifts his head and looks sharply at each of the spectators gathered around. Eventually his gaze rests on one individual; he examines him from head to foot, and then accuses him by pointing him out with his forefinger, without saying a word (Bierfert 1938: 33).
Doctors and Diviners

Diviners are usually men. A diviner, mukagutaha or mukakwianekeka, acquires his power by killing a relative to obtain a familiar spirit (mudimu). If it is a grown person that he kills, it must be a relative (otherwise, presumably it could be a non-relative child). The relative might be the diviner's father or mother or young sibling or sister's child. The victim is killed magically, and only the diviner himself knows who it is. When he does his divining, it is the spirit of the dead relative that helps him and answers his questions when he throws lots or when he looks into a cup of water for the answer to a question. Such a captive spirit may become lonely and ask for a companion; then the diviner is forced to kill another person so that its spirit can join the first one. In order to avoid having to kill another relative, the diviner prefers to take the spirit of his own unborn child (his wife then having a miscarriage). The spirit of such a one will not ask for a companion because he has not yet learned to value friendship.

Often a man is both a doctor and a diviner and is instructed in both activities by the same master. Instruction in herbal medicine will be given first. Toward the end of the instruction period, the master tells the novice to dig up the root of a plant which is in front of him. The novice does not see the plant, so the instructor rubs some medicine in his eyes, and then the novice sees and digs up the plant. The root bleeds a red liquid, like blood; this is the blood of the relative that has been chosen to die to provide the familiar spirit. When the novice and instructor return to the village, they find that the relative has indeed died. Though some may suspect the novice is responsible, he denies his guilt. Later, however, he may freely admit it as the basis for demanding a high fee: “Because I have killed my own child, you cannot expect me to divine for nothing!”

If a doctor is also a diviner, he diagnoses the disease, prescribes the treatment, and administers it himself. If he is not successful, he may recommend another diviner. A diviner may be called not only to discover the cause of illness or misfortune, but also to discover lost or stolen property and to seek out the thief. In his search for a thief, a diviner may use a mirror to lead him. A diviner is paid before beginning his work. He may be offered a knife, a mug, or an animal for his services. He consults his familiar spirit and may then reject the offer and instead specify something else. One case is reported in which the patient, dissatisfied with the naming of an old woman as responsible for his sickness, offered a diviner a double fee to find someone else guilty, which the diviner did (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 29).
SICKNESS

Theory of Disease

Some diseases are attributed to the displeasure of the sick person’s ancestors, who make him sick because they are hungry, thus requiring food offerings to placate them. Other diseases and accidental injuries are attributed to witchcraft or to the curses or malicious wishes of hostile neighbors. It is also believed that a curse directed against someone may affect his wife or child instead, and also that a person can be responsible for the illness of a neighbor without any deliberate intention.

Sorcery

It is thought that people can be killed by sorcery, and a sorcerer is supposed to be responsible for a death if the dying person declared that his sickness was due to sorcery. The sorcerer responsible is discovered through divination. If someone is revealed by divination to be responsible for another’s death through sorcery and denies his guilt, he is made to undergo trial by ordeal. If found guilty, the accused is put to death by order of the chief.

Sorcery is believed practiced by both men and women. The technique is not inherited, but must be learned. Though women can be taught by men, they are able to make more powerful magic than men. Both good and bad magic can be taught. Frequently a sorcerer teaches his son or his sister’s son (see Doctors and Diviners).

Magical and Mental Therapy

A diviner is employed to determine the source of one’s difficulties and the treatment necessary. In order to discover which ancestor is responsible for a person’s illness, a diviner uses a clay pot and a prepared animal skin. He spreads the skin on the ground and he turns the pot upside down upon it. Sitting on the ground, the diviner then grasps the pot with both hands and turns it around in the same spot while pronouncing the names of the patient’s deceased ancestors. When the ancestor responsible for the difficulty is named, the pot appears to become fixed. The diviner kneels down, places both arms on the pot, and tries to turn it by main force, but cannot, thus confirming the name of the ancestor responsible. In the same manner, he determines whether the ancestor wishes to receive an offering of meat or of meal (Bierfert 1938: 27).

If misfortune is believed to result from a living enemy, the diviner may use a different apparatus and procedure — sometimes it is an artificial bird, composed of the shell of a turtle decorated with berries, to which the head of a sand grouse is
attached. The “bird” is balanced on an awl, held by the diviner, which penetrates through the underside of the shell. The diviner inclines the awl slightly in the direction of one person or another, and the “bird” bows and turns in the respective direction. Further details are not given (Bierfert 1938: 28–29).

Doctors also may be called to treat sickness, and they administer a variety of magical remedies. For some sicknesses, drums are beaten; for others, the patient must dance to the beat of drums until he collapses. Tubercular patients are made to inhale fumes of the village rubbish heap through the neck of a bottle gourd. A barren woman is given a wooden charm to wear on the hip. Headaches are warded off by wearing the shell of a turtle on the forehead or chest (Bierfert 1938: 34).

A doctor (or diviner?) may place a restriction (kudirera “to restrict”) on a certain food for a patient for therapeutic reasons, and the restriction is supposed to remain for life (Gibson, ms.; Bierfert 1938: 34).

Often the diviner determines that the patient’s ancestors require an animal sacrifice or other food offering (njambo). The food is put into a basket and the patient’s brother or sister carries it over the patient in a circular motion while imploring the ancestors to take it and make the sick one well. Then the basket is placed on top of the shade structure and left until the next day, when it is again placed over the sick person and the ancestors are called. The food is eaten by the patient’s siro, “cross-cousin.” If an animal has been sacrificed, only the heart is passed over the patient; if a chicken is offered, the whole of it is njambo.

Medical Therapy and Personnel

Bierfert (1938: 35) declares that “the medicine man makes very sensible use of wild medicinal herbs for the people. They also understand bleeding and massaging well.” But no details are provided. De Almeida (1912: 384) notes, “They have curers — excellent surgeons — even though syphilis is common among them, imported from the south.”

The only medical specialists reported are midwives (see childbirth).

When a doctor (nganga) is called, an initial fee (5s or 10s in 1953) must be paid. Then when the doctor goes to procure the medicines necessary, a similar fee is paid. This latter payment is shown to the doctor’s familiar spirits. No further payment is made unless there is a cure. If the patient is cured, the patient’s head is shaved and the clothes removed and given to the doctor. There is also an additional charge, up to two head of cattle, for a cure.
VI

THE MBUKUSHU

THOMAS J. LARSON
Introduction

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author has engaged in field studies of the Mbukushu in Botswana at various times over a 28 year period with major periods of research in 1950 and 1951 and shorter visits in 1969, 1970 and 1972. During his stay among the Mbukushu he studied the Simbukushu language and worked with several interpreters. He has been particularly assisted in his study of the traditional forms of Mbukushu life by various officials of the Botswana Government, especially Mr. Alex Campbell and Mrs. Doreen Nteta, curators of the Botswana National Museum and Art Gallery; Mr. Brian Wilson, the hydrology officer; Mr. S. L. Lawrenson, District Commissioner of Ngamiland in 1950; Regent Chieftainess, Mrs. Moremi of the Tawana in 1950; Professor I. Schapera; Professor Godfrey Lienhardt of the University of Oxford; Professor John Blacking of the University of Witwatersrand; and Professor Edward H. Winter of the University of Virginia. He is especially grateful to Mbukushu chiefs Disho II, Mbambangandu II, and Mahongo; headmen Mbamba and Shuka; the magicians Samarango, in 1950, and Thenyemba, Manyima and Joseph during the later visits; and to his faithful interpreters John Temane, in 1950, and Matsaudi Kaveto and Goitsemodimo Xauga in later years. He wishes to acknowledge also the hospitality and assistance of the Little Queen, Herikathi Mashova Dikua, and of all the kind Mbukushu people and other Africans who assisted him during happy days spent along the Okavango River. Special thanks are due to various officers of the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) for many courtesies and services they provide over the years of his field work. The author also wishes to thank the United States Government for partial support in the field in 1950 under the G.I. Bill, and the Explorers Club and the National Geographic Society for support especially during the later field periods. Most of all he wishes to express his gratitude to his wife, Carolyn Larson, for her many sacrifices and much assistance during the period of his Mbukushu studies.

ORIENTATION

Identification

The people who call themselves Hambukushu are the easternmost tribe of the Kavango group. Mambukushu, the singular form of the tribal name, is apparently the source of the variant spellings found in the older English and German literature, namely Mampukushu, Nampukushu, Mampukushu, Mambukusche, Moombokoosho, and Mpukushu; in Portuguese it is always Mucusso. Henceforth in this account the stem form, Mbukushu, will be employed as the tribal name. (For its meaning see Traditional History.) The Mbukushu refer to themselves also as Haguva, "the people"; singular, Guva (sometimes spelled Gova).
Location

Most of the Mbukushu live along the edge of the savanna forest sandbelt, on the fringe of the Okavango flood-plain. Though settlements of Mbukushu may be found in a region extending from the Luengue River in Angola to Tsau in Ngamiland, and from near Rundu in Namibia eastward to the banks of the Zambezi near Kazungula, the area in which the Mbukushu are considered preponderate is much smaller. It lies along both banks of the Okavango River from about 20°45' E and 18° S to about 22° E and 18°30' S. The heaviest Mbukushu concentration is found in the region of the islands and along the banks of the Okavango River at Andara in Namibia. According to Mohango and Mbambangandu II, Mbukushu chiefs who fled from Angola in 1968 and 1967 and settled in Botswana as refugees, the Mbukushu formerly lived along the Luengue River which further downstream becomes the Luiana. They also say there are Mbukushu living at water holes in the region called Mbunda or Mbundu, the sandbelt region between the Luiana River and the Okavango River, and also in a region to the south as far as Gabemokone at the northern edge of the Okavango Delta. There are also settlements of Mbukushu reported along the Linyanti (Chobe) River on the northern or Namibian side, and in the sandbelt between the Chobe and Okavango Rivers (Streitwolf 1911 and Nettleton 1934).

In the Mashi region it has been reported (Goold-Adams 1898, Nettleton 1934, Reynolds 1967, and others) that there are several hundred Mbukushu living along the banks of the Kwando (Mashi) River which forms the border between Angola and Zambia.

Internal Migration

Though their country is trisected by national borders, the Mbukushu have, until recent times, been free to change residence when they wished, moving from one community to another along the Okavango River. About 1969, however, the border between Angola and Namibia was declared closed by authorities in Namibia due to warfare in Angola.

History

TRADITIONAL HISTORY

According to Mbukushu oral traditions collected by Van Tonder (1966: 37), they anciently came from a far away land of central Africa which they called Musuma. When they left Musuma they traveled down the Kabompo River and reached the border of Barotseland where this river joined the Zambezi.¹ Later the

¹ There is a Musuma River in Angola which joins the Luanguinga, a western tributary of the Zambezi. The Musuma lies at about the same latitude as the Kabompo, which is an eastern tributary of the Zambezi at 14° 10' S. — Ed.
tribal ancestors migrated farther southward, living first on Mumbeta and then on Mutonga, islands in the Zambezi.

In Barotseland the Mbulushu say they lived in little homesteads along the banks of the Zambezi River in the vicinity of the Katima Molilo Rapids, and to the south where the river forms the eastern border of the Caprivi Strip (Gibbons 1904: 207; Stokes and Brown 1966: 251). During the rule of the Lozi Chief Mwanaserunda, about 1750, the tribe was obliged by the dominant Lozi to leave the Katima Molilo region because they were feuding with other people of the area (Gibbons 1904 I: 145). The Mbulushu migrated then to the Mashi region of the Mid-Kwando floodplain along the border of present day Angola and Zambia (Gibbons 1904 I: 217). Some Mbulushu are believed to have settled on the Linyanti (Chobe) River (Nettelton 1934); others were permitted to settle with the Toka. According to both Gibbons (1904 I: 218) and Nettelton (1934), the Mbulushu lived in the Mashi region for about 60 years or until about the beginning of the 19th century. Then a large section of the tribe followed elephants to the Okavango River, settling in the region of the islands at Andara. Some migrated southeastward along the river and established their villages among those of the Yeyei and the River Bushmen.

In Barotseland they had been known as the Hakokoho, "People Who Came from a Far Place." By the time they reached Rgarara on the Kwando they were known as Havamaisiko, "It Is Their Way." When they reached the Okavango River, they found a wild fruit growing there called mbukushu. Those who settled on the islands in the river then took the name Hambukushu, "People of the Wild Grape" (Van Tonder 1966: 37–38).

### SUCESSION OF CHIEFS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Chief</th>
<th>Locations and Migrations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>Sinyungu</td>
<td>The ancestors of the Mbulushu lived in the land of Musuma at a place called Sigroma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dinyando</td>
<td>They left the land of Musuma and started moving southwards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>Sihurera</td>
<td>They reached Barotseland and moved down the Zambezi River to Mumbeta where they settled.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Later they moved to Mutonga (see map).</td>
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<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>Kasimana</td>
<td>They moved westward to Rgarara on the eastern side of the Kwando from whence they</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>discovered the Okavango. They then migrated south-westerly to Strongo on the Angola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>side of the Okavango, then moved to Diwat, and eventually settled on the island of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sipanana (Sibana) in the Okavango River (see map).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>Mashambo</td>
<td>Remained at Sipanana.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>Mbungu</td>
<td>Remained at Sipanana.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Rukonga</td>
<td>Remained at Sipanana.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(a woman)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>Dihwe I</td>
<td>In this generation a split occurred separating the tribe into three groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(son of Rukonga)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Mumbeta may be Mabeta Island in the Zambezi, see map ~ Ed.
The Mbukushu

Generation Chief, Locations and Migrations

A

dIyeve remained at Sipanana. He sent his brother Kutenda and his sister Mututa away.

B

Kutenda and his followers established a settlement on Dikuyu Island.3

C

Mututa and her son Makushe went to Karatya where Makushe became chief.

Musua. Remained at Karatya.

Monika. Remained at Karatya.

At the death of Monika, this branch again divided: C1 C2

Siguru Simende

VIII Dimbu I, also called Dibebe (Libele) and Ndara. 1850–1900. Remained at Sipanana.

Mokoya. Driven away from Dikuyu by Dimbu and returned to Ragara on Kwando R. After death of Dimbu Mokoya moved to Zukwe on the Okavango, then to Shadziki. Later moved to Gruge (location uncertain), then to Shanyime, then to Muheombo, then to Luiana River (see map).

IX Dibebe II (1900–1929)

First at Sipanana, then moved to Zomukue, then to Tahue (Tahoe) Is. (see map).

Mbamba, also called Mbambangandu I. Chief at Shadziki following departure of Mokoya.

X Dimbu II, also called Andara (1929–1939).

Remained at Tahue Is. After flight of Ndyami, Dimbu II became chief of Mbukushu at Luiana R. also.

Ndyami, chief on Luiana R. Attacked by Dimbu II, fled to Shanyime. Also considered chief of the Mbukushu at Shadziki.

Mahongo (IXth generation)

First at Shanyime, fled to Botswana in 1969.

Mbambangandu. First at Ruyana, fled to Botswana in 1969.


Kutenda, chief at Shadziki following death of Ndyami.

3 Dikuyu Is. may be the island shown as Diwuyu on Seiner’s map (1911) (See map) – Ed.
For the Mbukushu located on the Zambezi River, Stokes and Brown (1966: 251) say the earliest remembered chiefs were Lukonga, Liswani, and Cute, all of whom ruled the tribe in the Katima-Molilo region. Sinyungu Matiko (a woman), Mahuka, Mbunung, and Kanyumbe are remembered as chiefs of the tribe during its stay in the Kwanze River region. Mashambo, the son of Matiko, led his people to the Okavango River (Gibbons 1904 I: 218). 4

**Economy**

**SUBSISTENCE**

**FOOD QUEST AND THE ANNUAL CYCLE**

The Mbukushu place agriculture first in importance among their subsistence activities and cattle-raising second. Fishing, hunting, and gathering follow in descending order.

Crops are usually planted in December but can be planted later, depending upon the rains. If the first rains are not sufficient, the crops are replanted. Frequent replantings are necessary in drought years. Fields are cultivated about three times during the growing season. Some crops are harvested in March, while most of the harvesting is completed by April or May.

In November and December, when the rains bring the first green grass in the forest, the cattle are grazed there until about April.

The dry season normally extends from the end of April until late October or November. In May, after the harvest, the cattle and goats are permitted to graze on the stalks of grain in the gardens. In the dry season the grasses of the forest are too dry and the cattle must be grazed in the flood-plain where subsurface water maintains green pasture. During the dry season the Mbukushu spend much time repairing their houses, opening new or enlarging old fields, repairing fences, and making new storage facilities.

**GATHERING**

The Mbukushu gather a large variety of edible roots, nuts, fruits, vegetable foods, medicinal plants, plants used for charms, insects, and honey from the flood-plain and forest sand-belt. While some of the above may be collected the year around, others are taken during the season when they are most desirable as food. They also catch reptiles, small mammals, and birds to eat. Much of the gathering is carried out by women and children. Everyone has equal access to the wild fruits, herbs, grasses, and timber of the area.

**FOWLING**

Almost all birds (with the exception of the scavengers) are taken for food. Also magicians use feathers, such as those of the secretary bird, for headdresses as they

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4 Kampungu (1965: 404) provides a somewhat different list of Mbukushu chiefs — Ed.
are considered to have magical qualities. In the river and flood-plain, ducks and
geese of a number of species are, or formerly were, hunted with snares, traps, clubs,
and guns. In Botswana now game laws limit fowling. Though the game laws are
strictly enforced, there is still much poaching.

HUNTING AND TRAPPING

While the Mbukushu are not as good hunters as the Bushmen who depend upon
game for survival, in the past many Mbukushu specialized in this activity and
became especially skilled in hunting such river fauna as the hippopotamus, lechwe,
puku, situtunga, otter, and reed rat. Men hunt with spears, harpoons, bows and
arrows, and guns. Also they employ snares, pitfalls, deadfalls, enclosures, and set-
guns. Formerly game drives were organized. Nowadays in Botswana strict game laws
and expensive game licenses greatly restrict hunting.

FISHING

Fishing is very important in the economy of the Mbukushu and is practiced the
year round. Many methods are employed including weirs, poison, traps, spears,
nets, fences, and hook and line. Some men specialize in fishing. During the receding
of the floods many women and children engage in fish drives in pools and lagoons,
catching the fish in baskets.

Recently in Botswana the government Fisheries Department has been providing
instructions in the use of nylon nets, modern techniques and equipment, and the

DOMESTICATED ANIMALS

Occasionally one sees wild animals which have been tamed. Dogs are the most
common domesticated animal, and these are thin, yellowish mongrels used primarily
for hunting and as watchdogs. Cats, far less common, are kept as pets and for
catching rodents and snakes. Though most cats and dogs have to scrounge for food,
some people make an effort to feed and care for them. The dogs and cats are
afflicted with many parasites and suffer greatly from neglect and indifference.

Cattle and goats are raised for milk and meat. Few Mbukushu keep pigs. Sheep
have never been successful in the Okavango country because of diseases. A few
of the river people now keep horses which they value very highly. Donkeys are plentifull
and are used as pack animals and for riding. Herd boys sometimes ride oxen, and
oxen are used for pulling sand sleds and for plowing.

Cattle have been kept by the Mbukushu since they came from Barotseland. In
1896 rinderpest, an epizootic disease, decimated the herds (Passarge 1905b: 297).
In recent times cattle have increased in Botswana because of the government's continued efforts to combat tsetse fly in the Mbulushu area.

No feed plants for animals are cultivated. A few people with cattle-posts far out in the sand-belt forest have boreholes. Otherwise livestock are driven to water at the river or at lagoons in the flood-plain.

Traditionally animals are branded by notching the ears; nowadays many farmers brand with hot irons. The cattle are rounded up and driven into large pens at least once a year when government veterinarians appear to inoculate them against foot-and-mouth disease.

Cattle enclosures adjoin the homesteads. Some people possess enough livestock to have distant cattle posts where they employ Bushmen to serve as herders. Cattle, horses, and goats are kept in separate kraals at night. It is the responsibility of men and older boys for care for the cattle. Boys herd the goats. Often cattle and horses are unattended during the day. Women are not permitted in the cattle kraal.

Cattle are valued mainly for their milk and milk products. Milk is drunk both fresh and sour. Butter is produced and some is boiled to separate the fat which is used as an ointment for the skin and hair. Cattle are milked in the kraal, then turned out to pasture.

It is becoming more common to sell cattle for slaughter than formerly. Cattle are also slaughtered or sacrificed for weddings, funerals, and special feasts. However, goats are more commonly slaughtered for food. Cattle and goats that have died from disease are eaten.

The magicians, medicine men, and many of the farmers have a practical knowledge of animal diseases and of folk medicines for their treatment. In Botswana, government veterinary agents give instruction in animal husbandry, provide medicines, and make frequent visits to inoculate herds and treat ailing animals.

Names of Animals

All animal pets and most domestic animals such as cattle and horses are given proper names.

POULTRY RAISING

Though chickens are greatly relished both as food and as egg producers, poultry raising is very haphazard. Hawks kill most of the chicks that run loose in the villages. However, some people make an effort to shelter small chicks in pens. Chickens are generally not fed but must seek such wild food as is available.
Tillage

The Mbukushu in Ngamiland (Botswana) consider themselves to be the best farmers of all the Okavango peoples settled there.

The most important crops are first, pearl millet (*Pennisetum glaucum*), then sorghum (*Sorghum vulgare*). Following in importance are several species of beans, peanuts, melons, *nyimu* (a root crop), pumpkins, maize, gourds, and peppers. Some tobacco, sugar cane, and castor oil beans, are grown. The latter are usually planted in the household courtyard. Tobacco is sometimes grown at the site of old cattle kraals or in special fenced gardens. In Botswana the growing of *rambanse* (marihuana) has been outlawed.

The gardens are located in the land between the sand-belt and the flood-plain. At present in Botswana there is adequate garden land which can be used for the asking. All agricultural lands are fenced against domestic and wild animals. Land is cultivated for many years until its fertility is lost. The Mbukushu do not use fertilizer other than the ashes of trees remaining when the fields are first prepared by clearing and burning. When fields are left fallow, grazing cattle assist in restoring the fertility with their manure. However, the manure that accumulates in the cattle kraals is not used for fertilizer. Regular crop rotation is not practiced.

Men plow with oxen; women cultivate with hoes. Both men and women sow seed. Men make the fences of poles and acacia thornbushes. Formerly, raised platforms were built in fields and boys sat on them to scare away birds and other wild animals. Scarecrows are frequently used.

The Mbukushu depend upon their rainmaking chief to produce rain for them. Never have they attempted to irrigate; they transport water only for a few small gardens close to the river.

In Botswana, the government agricultural department attempts to educate the farmers in better methods of agriculture. Agricultural experiment and extension work is carried out at Shakawe in Ngamiland. The Four B organization (similar in its purposes and organization to the Four-H Club in the United States) trains farmers and young people at Shakawe in Ngamiland (Larson 1971a: 362–363).

Cereal Agriculture and Vegetable Production

In planting millet, a farmer plows a furrow while his wife or someone else walks behind dropping seeds or throwing them broadcast. The seeds are covered by the earth turned up in the next furrow. Maize is often planted in the new furrow by poking a hole, dropping a few seeds in it, and stamping the soil over it. Beans, peanuts, squash, pumpkins, and melons are planted between the rows of maize and millet.

The maize and millet heads are harvested before birds can destroy the crop and
are put in large conical bins to dry. Women thresh millet by placing the heads of grain on a hard ground area and beating them with long sticks to loosen the grains. Before the rains begin in October or November, the grain is threshed and stored in cylindrical containers made of river reed mats which are raised on platforms. They are sealed over with a mixture of cowdung and clay and are provided with a mat covering or a thatched roof supported on poles. Beans and peanuts are stored in the same way. Melons and pumpkins are stored in dry places in the dwelling houses. Most people have huts and storage facilities at their farms if these are a few miles away from the homesteads. There are also storage facilities in the homesteads (Larson 1971a: 344–355).

DIET

The staple food is porridge made of millet or sorghum meal; it is eaten year round. Next in importance is maize or “mealie meal” (also eaten as porridge), then beans, peanuts, nyima (a root crop), pumpkins, and melons. Fish, meat, and fowl are greatly relished and eaten whenever available. The Mbutshu diet is varied with wild plant relishes, wild fruits, and nuts. Many people take much of their nourishment in the form of millet beer. Tea, coffee and milk are all greatly desired. Sour milk is especially relished (Larson 1971a: 473–485; Van Tonder 1966: 230–234).

Though salt may be obtained at trading stores, many people still gather natural salt from dry lake beds. Numerous wild herbs and seeds are used for flavoring food. Pepper and curry, purchased at trading stores, are especially desired. Wild honey is gathered from beehives in trees. Sugar is purchased from trading stores. The sugar-cane grown locally is chewed but not processed to extract sugar (Larson 1971a: 481).

**Eating**

Though people may eat whenever food is available or prepared, farmers go directly to their fields without eating and return home at noonday to rest and eat. Children are generally fed in the morning. The main meal for a family is eaten in the evening. The men eat together, being served by the women. Women and children generally eat together, apart from the men, the women serving the small children. Sometimes, however, whole families may be seen eating together around a fireplace (Larson 1971a: 484; Van Tonder 1966: 233–234).

Food is not wasted but there is also no lack of food. Relatives share food in time of drought, since fields do not always suffer equal damage (Larson 1971a: 473).

In Shakawe and other towns and villages there are cafes — huts where food is served along with various kinds of native beer (morovu).
Water and Thirst

Water is obtained from the Okavango River or from pools in the flood-plain; it is not infected with bilharzia. Water is transported in metal buckets, oil drums, and clay pots. Oxen pull sand-sleds loaded with large metal drums to the river for water. Women and girls may make several trips a day to fetch water for drinking, cooking, beer making, and cleaning purposes.

Alcoholic Beverages

The Mbulushu produce several fermented drinks. To make the most common variety, millet or sorghum grain is soaked in water in large wooden troughs (or, nowadays, in petrol drums) for two days. The swollen grain is then spread out on mats placed in the shade, covered with more mats, and allowed to germinate. On the fifth day the sprouted seed is pounded in a stamping mortar. Water is added to make a mash and this is boiled for an hour or so, allowed to stand overnight, then boiled all the following day. After the mash has cooled, maize meal is added and the mixture is allowed to ferment overnight. On the following day the brew is poured, dipper by dipper, into a long tubular woven strainer. As the strainer is squeezed, the beer trickles out. The dregs remaining are thrown out to be eaten by chickens, dogs, and donkeys.

Morovu is both the generic name for beer and the name of the most common sort. Mutoto is a special beer made of mixed millet and sorghum using a more elaborate process than that described above, with more boilings and additions of maize meal. Mondevera, a beer made only of millet, is said to have been adopted from the Kgalagadi. Kadi is an intoxicating beverage made of the berries of the wild mongoro bush which ripen in June and July — it also is an introduced drink, adopted from the Tawana and Kgalagadi. Mangudo is brewed from honey. Othimba is a beverage made from thimba fruits added to maize meal and sprouted millet — it is drunk ceremoniously and is not generally made to sell (Larson 1971a: 485–493; Van Tonder 1966: 235–237).

Beer drinking is one of the most popular pastimes of the Mbulushu. For many women the making and selling of beer is a major source of income. In the rural villages people gather under the utara (shelter) to drink beer. At a party, a woman pouring the beer tastes it first to show that it is not poisoned. Then she hands it to the senior person or to the one who has made the purchase. Frequently a large basin is passed around for all to taste. In Shakawe there are many enclosures with huts erected solely for the sale and consumption of beer. Each such establishment is the enterprise of a woman who sits by her beer pots to serve her customers. On cold nights a fire burns and the people sit on benches facing each other. These beer parlors are centers for socializing and recreation (Larson 1971a: 591).
NARCOTICS AND STIMULANTS

Tobacco is grown mostly for home use. Most adults smoke tobacco in pipes or rolled up in available paper. Tobacco is made into snuff by grinding it and mixing it with wood ashes. Tobacco and snuff are carried in little leather bags or in goat or antelope horns.

Formerly many people smoked dagga or rambanse (marihuana), but now in Botswana smoking or selling it is forbidden by law and is punishable with a prison sentence. Marihuana was smoked in special clay pipes or in pipes made from horns of antelopes such as the gemsbok. The smoker inhaled the fumes through water held in his mouth. Dagga smoking was a communal activity, but women were not supposed to participate. Men sat in a circle while smoking and, it is said, frequently became violent (Larson 1971a: 485–593; Van Tonder 1966: 234–238; Schulz 1897: 201–3).

MATERIAL CULTURE

CRAFTS AND MANUFACTURE

Work in Skins

The Mbutukushu and other Okavango River peoples are skilled skin workers. Leather is prepared by scraping the fresh skin and applying the brains of the same animal as a curing mash to soften it.

Clothing made from skins includes: finely sewn karosses (robes) made from the hides of wild carnivores; fur bags and hats usually made from wild carnivore skins; women’s aprons made from tanned hides of small antelopes; sandals made of cowhide; and men’s trousers, though most men today wear western dress. Utilitarian objects made from skin include: drumheads made from raw cowhide; blacksmith’s bellows made from goat skin; and lashings for sand-sleds and houss frames made from strips of giraffe, buffalo, and cowhide (Larson 1971a: 498; Larson 1975: 118; Van Tonder 1966: 265–266).

Cordage

The Mbutukushu produce cord and rope from acacia and sansevieria fibers. Fibers from the roots of the moshosho bush are twisted into strands called yiho to be braided into the hair of women or made into wigs. Magicians also use cordage in their headdresses (Larson 1971a: 497).
Mats and Baskets

The riverine peoples have a vast supply of grasses and reeds for mats and baskets. All baskets are coiled and sewn. Beautifully designed hand carrying baskets with tight fitting lids are produced, as well as small and large sifting and grain carrying baskets which are often decorated with geometrical designs in brown and light straw color fibers (Larson 1971a: 495–496; Van Tonder 1966: 260–261). Grain storage bins are made from large mats of river reeds. Sifters, used in preparing meal for making beer, and beer strainers are made from strong grass stems. Fish nets are made by knotting and looping strong fiber cordage. Sleeping mats are made by laying strands of thin river and meadow reeds in a row and sewing them together with fiber cordage. Woven mats made from pounded reeds are used for house walls and palisades (Larson 1971a: 497–498; Larson 1975: 114–118; Van Tonder 1966: 262–263).

CLOTHING AND ORNAMENTS

Normal Garb

Formerly men wore leather sandals and soft buckskin loin cloths. Most men today wear European clothing obtained at the mines in South Africa. Married women dress very elaborately. While traditionally they were naked above the waist, below it they wore (and many still wear) a black cloth loincloth which is drawn up between the legs and fastened to a leather cord or string. In back they wear a soft leather apron which covers the hips and extends to the back of the knees. This kuandura mapi is elaborately decorated with bands of beads in individual patterns. White and black beads are the traditional Mbutu colors, but brightly colored beads are also used. When a Mbutu girl reaches puberty, she is presented a majambaro, leather apron, by her grandmothers. Other of her immediate female relatives contribute the beaded bands which are fastened to the upper margin of the apron and swing freely with each motion of the wearer. Many women now wear cotton print dresses instead of the traditional attire. In rural communities children wear leather loin cloths until the girls reach puberty and until boys can purchase European clothing (Larson 1975: 118).

Special Garments

Magicians wear segmented reed and porcupine quill skirts, headdresses with yiho fibers attached, and porcupine hair. Some headdresses are ornamented with feathers of the secretary bird and ostrich. Magicians’ attire also includes: necklaces of seedpods and mane hair of the wildebeest and zebra, rattles of insect cocoons or pods inserted with seeds which are worn on their legs, and genet cat skins (Larson 1971a: 529–531).
Paraphernalia

Women and men carry skin and fur handbags which have straps to go over the shoulder and across the body. As symbols of adult dignity men frequently carry fly whisks of wildebeest or zebra tails. Many men and boys carry clubs. Both men and women wear amulets, good luck medicines, and charms of various types (Larson 1971a: 23–24).

Clothing Manufacture

Men tan skins while women sew skins together to make karosses (robes) and leather clothing such as trousers and aprons. Women do the beadwork (Larson 1971a: 498).

ADORNMENT

Women and men both wear hair and copper anklets and armbands. These are made from the tail hairs of various animals coiled into a circle of the desired size and held together by wrappings of hair and by copper beads formed around the clustered hairs. Other bracelets and legbands are made of solid copper or of coiled copper wire or iron wire. Much emphasis is put upon the adornment of the women who wear strings of ostrich-eggshell beads and cowrie shells in their hair, around the necks, and as belts. Carnivore claws are used as necklaces, as well as multi-colored commercial beads which are very popular. Some of the ornaments, such as the traditional cone shell bases, are heirlooms said to have been handed down through many generations (Larson, 1953). Women and girls who have reached puberty wear numerous strings of beads around their necks and criss-crossed across their bodies (Larson 1971a: 22–25). A young woman cannot be properly initiated into womanhood until she has acquired all of the jewelry she is expected to wear in her new status at the climax of the ritual (Larson, 1975).

Toilet

Today both men and women usually prefer to wear their hair cut short. According to earlier writers, men formerly wore their hair in ringlets (Gibbons 1904 I: 202; Schulz 1897: 248–249). Though most men are clean shaven, some wear moustaches and thin beards. The woman’s traditional coiffure, dimborondo, includes long braided fibers, yaho, attached to her own hair and falling to below the waist to give the appearance of long black hair. On top of the dimborondo are worn crests of braided bast fiber treated with fat, red colored powder, and castor bean oil. Nowadays many women make these coiffures as removable wigs. Formerly the
dimborondo served the woman as a pillow when sleeping. The coiffures are decorated with cowrie shells, beads, and old brass buttons from army uniforms. Women anoint their bodies with fat and castor oil and rub on red powder (mukula), made from a red colored wood.

Mutilation

The Mbukushu, unlike some neighboring peoples, do not practice circumcision or clitoridectomy. Some women and men pierce their ears for earrings. Both men and women have a good luck symbol tattooed on their foreheads. This is a V-shaped cut into which a dark green dye is rubbed. The dye (modirera) is poisonous and can only be left on the skin a few minutes (Larson 1971a: 24–25; Nettelton 1934). Upon initiation, boys and girls have their upper central incisors chipped with a small axe to form a V-shaped notch (Schulz 1897: 248).

Jewelry manufacture


PROCESSING OF BASIC MATERIALS

Work in Bone, Horn, and Shell

Bones are sharpened and used as awls and punches. Snuff bottles are fashioned out of horn. Ostrich eggshell beads are obtained from Bushmen or are produced by Mbukushu refugees from Angola.

Woodworking

Some men specialize in woodworking. From logs or sections of logs they carve out one-piece canoes, long drums, friction drums, milk pails, and stamping blocks. From smaller blocks of wood they carve spoons, forks, and ladles, knife sheaths, and wooden bowls with tight-fitting lids and animal figures decorating the handles.

Knife sheaths are hollowed out by heating the knife blade red hot and burning it into the sheath. All but the dugout canoes are scorched with hot irons to darken them, ornamented with carved designs, and treated with beeswax. Other items carved whole from wood include clubs, walking sticks, and canoe paddles. They

Carpentry

A few Mbukushu have learned carpentry while engaged in contract work at the mines in South Africa. They cut boards from local trees and from them make boxes, furniture of European style, and wooden houses.

Ceramics

Among the Mbukushu, pottery is a craft of men specialists. After the millet harvest when much beer is consumed, pot making may become a full time occupation, largely because of the demand for multisized beer pots (Larson 1975: 111). Small medicine bowls and jars for water and food storage are also produced. Pots are made by a coiling method. Clay, obtained from the riverbanks and anthills, mixed with crushed potsherds is the raw material. They are fired after being decorated with surface incisions and the application of colored designs.

Metallurgy

According to informants, the Mbukushu formerly smelted iron from native ore. Iron and copper were obtained from the Tsumeb region of South-West Africa (Passarge 1905: Schulz 1897; Larson 1971a) and pigiron from Barotseland (Turner 1952). Nowadays the Mbukushu blacksmiths work with scrap metal from broken plow shares, discarded main springs of trucks, etc. They are skilled artisans with their primitive bellows and charcoal fires, and are highly regarded.

Mbukushu blacksmiths produce blades for hoes, axes, hatchets, knives, adzes, and scrapers; they also fashion bracelets, legbands, spear points, harpoons, arrowheads, needles, and awls, harness pieces for oxen and horses and donkeys, and hammers and other pieces for the repair of guns, plows, and chains (Larson 1971a: 494–495; Van Tonder 1966: 263–264).

BUILDING AND CONSTRUCTION

Masonry

This is a recently acquired skill. Crude bricks are made from clay, poured into moulds, dried in the sun, then fired in brick kilns. Bricks are used for house
construction mostly in such towns as Shakawe, Sepopa, and Seronga (Larson 1971a).

Dwellings

The Mbukushu construct a number of different types of houses and shelters. Typical homesteads include dwellings of various shapes, some of which have been adopted from other peoples. The most common Mbukushu house has a rectangular floor with walls made of rectangular mats fastened to the outside of a wooden framework. Formerly the walls of such houses were made of clay mixed with cow dung. A doorway is made in the middle of one long side; there are no windows. The roof is gabled and thatched with grass, while the floor is either natural earth or possibly plastered with clay mixed with cow dung (Larson 1971a: 498–503; Van Tonder 1966: 253–256).

Another type of house has a circular floorplan, with walls made of mats fastened to a framework of poles set in a circle and a conical roof thatched with grass. An older type of Mbukushu house was oblong with rounded ends, made of detachable mats fastened to a wooden framework. A shelter for sleeping is formed by placing a stiff woven mat on edge in a circle and allowing the sides to slope inward to make a conical structure.

In front of most houses is an open-sided, flat-topped shelter, called utara.

Furniture

Furniture is placed around the perimeter inside a house. Traditional furniture consisted of wooden stools. Nowadays one finds chairs with rawhide lacing seats, pole frame beds with rawhide thongs to serve as springs, and tables. Clothing is hung on wooden pegs and over lines strung in houses. Pots and other utensils are placed on racks or on the floors of huts. Often the floors are covered with mats. A special reed mat (dinahu) or a skin kaross is laid on the floor for sleeping. In the middle of a hut is a place for the fire, though each household also has an outdoor fireplace under the utara (shelter). Most huts have protective medicine or shrines located near the door to shield them from harothi (sorcerers). Nowadays some houses have religious pictures on the walls, obtained from Catholic missions in Namibia. Many people have small radios and phonographs purchased from mine location stores in South Africa (Larson 1971a).

Housekeeping

Houses and other buildings have to be repaired frequently. Floors are smeared with a fresh mixture of cow dung and clay when necessary. Houses are frequently swept out and cleaned and the courtyards raked and tidied up.
Economy

HOMESTEADS

For defense against wild predators and goats, the houses and other structures belonging to a family are often enclosed by walls 6 to 8 feet high. They are made of reed mats fastened to posts set in the ground and are designed with openings which mats may shut at night. A homestead may be protected by one or more of these enclosures; such a homestead, then, has a front and a rear entrance. However, many homesteads nowadays are not enclosed with mat walls because the number of predators in the region has decreased.

Every homestead has one or more goat pens, low structures with a gabled roof, made of vertical poles set in the ground. Chicken houses, sturdy basket-like enclosures, are raised up on poles to protect them from small predators; chicken enclosures are also built on the ground.

Married couples with their small children occupy individual houses. Teen-aged girls have separate huts, built within the family enclosure. A group of young herd-boys may jointly occupy a boys' hut in the village. Older boys and single people generally have their own huts. When the senior man in a family dies, the structures belonging to the family may be torn down and the usable timbers salvaged for construction of new houses in a different place.

A cattle kraal is built close by the homestead; it may be relocated after a number of years. The homesteads and kraals are generally close to the agricultural lands. The houses are frequently arranged around a central shade tree or along a trail. There are paths or little streets between houses.

SETTLEMENTS

In Ngamiland, a *mayembo* or community is a group of homesteads falling under the political jurisdiction of a local headman, called the *nduna* or *thindashaditunga* (head of all homesteads). Some Mbukushu communities contain as many as 35 homesteads; others may have only a few. The larger Mbukushu communities are found near the border between Namibia and Botswana. They become generally smaller south of Kakao. Toward the south the population is less dense and the communities more widely scattered. (The small towns of Sepopa and Seronga are composed of Mbukushu and Yei people, living in separate homesteads.) Gabemokone, a town lying east of Seronga, is populated mainly by Mbukushu. Communities and homesteads are moved as the neighboring agricultural lands become exhausted or when the habitations and surrounding areas become too contaminated by human waste. The communities usually take their names from their locale, while homesteads take their names from their heads.

In addition to their homesteads, some people have cattle posts in the forest far from the river with huts where the owner stays when visiting and with crude shelters for the herd-boys like those made by the Bushmen.

Some people who live in Shakawe have distant farms with huts built on them for
relatives who live there and tend the fields. Farm settlements are much like the regular homesteads though generally much smaller and the shelters are generally cruder. They have kraals for cattle and oxen and grain storage facilities.

*Sanitation*

People defecate in the forest near their villages and urinate at urinals in the households. Refuse is burned, discarded near the villages, or buried in holes dug in the sand.

*Fire*

Most Mbukushu nowadays use matches for kindling domestic fires. They also know how to make fire by friction and also with flint and steel.

Fields are burned to clear them. The forests are too open to be subject to serious forest fires. Occasionally in the dry season there may be a fire in the flood-plain which gets out of control.

Blacksmiths make charcoal for the forge by burning a felled log, then smothering it with earth and debris while it smoulders slowly.

**TOOLS AND APPLIANCES**

*Weapons*

Harpoons, used for spearing hippopotami, have a detachable iron-pointed shaft with a recurved barb. There are many types of spear points for hunting animals, ranging from a simple blade to points with numerous barbed heads. Fish spears are also made, some having thin wire-like prongs fastened to a single-pointed shaft. Arrowheads of numerous types are produced, some with barbs. Mbukushu blacksmiths make some arrowheads to sell to Bushmen in exchange for ostrich eggshell beads, meat, and skins. Many types of knives, some as long as swords, are made and fitted with wooden handles and wooden sheaths. One type of knife is single edged and does not have a wooden sheath. All other knives are double edged. Mbukushu blacksmiths have in the past made their own firearms, though they have depended for many years on old Portuguese muskets and trade weapons brought to them by Mambari (acclimated black Angolan) traders. These muskets shoot scrap iron (Larson 1971a: 496; Van Tonder 1966: 256–259).
Utensils

Earthen jars made locally as well as pails and buckets purchased at trading stores and 44-gallon gasoline drums serve as waters containers. In addition, drums are used for boiling mash in making beer. Leather bags are used for transporting grain in sand-sleds and canoes. Utensils used for cooking are three-legged cast-iron pots, buckets, and frying pans purchased at trading stores, and clay pots produced locally. Metal trunks are used for storing utensils and personal possessions.

PROPERTY, TRADE, AND LABOR

PROPERTY

Real Property

The Mbukushu believe that all natural resources such as land, the river, and their products belong to Nyambi, God, who created them. Ownership of the land, therefore, is vested in the people collectively, and no one may sell land. Parcels of land, however, may be assigned exclusively to individuals for gardens. Farmers erect brush fences around their gardens and others do not trespass upon fenced lands. Land not under cultivation is open to all for grazing livestock and for hunting and collecting. One may hunt, fish, and gather natural products throughout all unfenced land. A person may not claim ownership of wild game on land he or she cultivates but he may sell any natural products that he has taken the trouble to hunt, gather, or process.

The right to use a parcel of land may be obtained through the local community headman. (In Botswana the local Tswana chief stationed at Shakawe has the right to distribute land to all Africans regardless of their tribal affiliation). As long as land is being used by a family or group of kinsmen, it may be retained by them. When a family line terminates without heirs, the land use rights revert back to the tribe for redistribution as needed. Garden lands are allotted by the head of the community to the head of a household who in turn will allot land to his wives and his sons' wives. Usually each wife has her own strips of land within the family enclosure, which is surrounded by a thorn bush fence. The land remains in the custody of the husband, however. The right to use a parcel of land may be loaned to another, and this right must be returned to the previous holder upon request (Larson 1971a: 338–344; Van Tonder 1966: 205–208).

Movable Property

The harvest is stored separately and owned individually by husband and wife. An equal portion of each harvest is then taken and put together in a smaller store from
which the wife draws her supplies when preparing the daily meals. Although the wife owns her share of the harvest outright she must still get her husband’s permission if she wants to dispose of it or sell it to strangers. The supplies are kept separately and individually owned so that when the respective families of the husband and wife are in need of food they may be given supplies from the store owned by the person to whom they are related. Separate storage also simplifies the distribution of property in case of divorce or death.

The homestead together with all the huts and structures is the property of the husband. Household equipment and personal effects are individually owned by members including the husband and wife. The following equipment and occupational things belong to the husband: axes, knives and canoes and paddles, furniture, mats, chairs, etc. The stamping blocks, baskets, basins, and ladles, fishing baskets, sieves, beads and copper rings all belong to the wife or wives. Blankets belong to both, except that a man owns the blankets he uses in travel. The wife can generally dispose of her personal effects as she wishes without asking the consent of her husband.

Livestock are owned outright by both men and women. A man is master of his own herd of cattle, but his wife might have one or two head of cattle, which she has inherited; though herded with her husband’s cattle, he has no claim to them. The milk of these animals also belongs to her, and with the consent of her husband she can do with it as she pleases. Upon her death her eldest son inherits her cattle, and he must see that her other children receive their share as the progeny increase.

Individuals own their personal clothing, jewelry, head ornaments, charms, and anything else they have acquired by trade or purchase. Adult mine laborers own all the things they have purchased at the trading stores, though a young man on returning from a first contract at the mines may be obliged to turn over his pay and purchases to his father if the family is in great need.

Formerly a chief had complete control over the property and labor of his subjects. He could demand gifts of food and services at any time.

Inheritance
(See Succession to Chieftainship for the inheritance of a chief’s property.)

The traditional inheritance pattern is for a man’s eldest sister’s eldest son to inherit most of his mother’s brother’s cattle. However, in Botswana where the Mbukushu come under the control of the patrilineal Tawana, this matrilineal custom is being superseded. Personal property is inherited by the sons or daughters of a deceased father or mother, respectively. All the personal belongings of a dead man are distributed among his brothers by his mother’s brother. The cattle of the decedent are distributed by his mother and her eldest brother as follows: The mother receives one and his sisters later receive the progeny of the one given to the mother. The mother’s brother receives one, or two if the son was a wealthy man. The decedent’s own children receive two; these are given to the eldest son; and as
the progeny of these cattle multiply, he must give each of his brothers and sisters a beast. The deceased man's sister's children receive three or more which again are given to the eldest, and as they multiply he must give the offspring to his brothers and sisters. His wife gets one cow and his eldest brother one or two which are also distributed, as they multiply, to the other brothers. A man may also leave all his cattle to a favorite younger brother rather than to the oldest brother. Disputes over inheritance are settled by the chief or the katapa, who make decisions according to traditional law and custom of the Mbukushu (Van Tonder 1966: 206).

A widow takes with her all her personal belongings and household utensils when she leaves to join the levir of her deceased husband. She also takes all the food and grain in the dead man's house. None of the brothers of the decedent is allowed to touch the food. Under Mbukushu tradition the land rights of a deceased man pass first to his widow. Later, under Mbukushu tradition, land rights pass in the matriline, first to brothers, then to sister's sons. Nowadays in Botswana, where Tswana law and custom prevail, land passes from father to son (Larson 1961a: 339). All the property of a deceased woman is distributed among her own children and sisters. When a child who has cattle dies, the cattle are inherited by the mother's brother's family. They are kept there until the deceased child's eldest brother claims them. As these cattle increase the offspring are distributed to the deceased child's junior siblings (Van Tonder 1966: 206–207).

Gift Giving

A man rewards his sons, who serve him as herders, with an occasional gift of a cow in order to build up their herds for the future. He also makes frequent gifts of trade goods (cloth, dresses, jewelry, or blankets) to his wife, his parents, and his mother's brother. A woman gives her husband trade goods (clothing, pipes, tobacco) from time to time. When a mine laborer returns from the mines, he gives the members of his family gifts. Gifts are given on the occasion of weddings, when there is an exchange between the two families, of child betrothal, and of funerals, when relatives bring gifts to the bereaved family. At a funeral the host provides a cow, called the ngombe omokoka, "beast of the decedent," for the feast. The guests usually bring presents of grain. Generosity to relatives is expected as they will eventually reciprocate in turn.

No one hoards great quantities of wealth but rather distributes it among his relatives at social functions or loans it when it is needed. There is much interchange of food and personal belongings within families. No destitute person is denied hospitality by his relatives if they have anything to give him or her.
EXCHANGE

Medium of Exchange

Money is commonly used by the Mbukushu today. Formerly they used cowrie shells as money, while barter was and still is common. People still today often exchange garden produce and livestock for other commodities and for labor. Formerly grain and implements such as hoes, axes, spears, etc. were used for payment of bridewealth and for paying court fines. Nowadays, under Tswana influence, cattle are given as bridewealth. Taxes and fees were paid in grain (Larson 1971a: 410–411). The rain-making chief was paid for his services in baskets of grain and livestock. These implements, baskets of grain, and livestock had fixed values.

Today the values of certain products and commodities vary. Canoes are priced according to their size and excellence of craftsmanship. Wild forest products fluctuate in price according to supply and demand. Beer, however, sells at a standard price that has not varied for years.

Domestic Trade

Andara at times during the 19th century was an important trading center. Today Shakawe is the largest trading center of the Okavango District of Ngamiland (Larson 1971a: 411–412). Stores are located also in smaller towns and there people from many communities gather to trade and socialize. In every community there is usually a designated market place. However, craftsmen often go through a town or community from door to door selling wares, while some Mbukushu traders make long journeys through the delta streams to Maun to trade. Most marketing is at the local level and very little is exported with the exception of cattle purchased by white traders. Some surplus grain and cattle are purchased by WENELA (the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association) for the mine recruits quartered at the WENELA depot at Shakawe.

Bushman come into the towns to trade ostrich egg shell beads, wild animal skins, and wild game meat for tobacco and iron implements (Larson 1971a: 411, 414, 419, 422).

LABOR

Every household supplies the basic labor for routine tasks such as building and repairing houses and fences and clearing new lands for cultivation. Herding is also a major occupation, but if a household lacks sufficient members to carry out this task, it may employ young men from other families or may hire Bushmen to serve as herdsmen at the cattle posts. Herdsmen are paid in livestock, cash, or in any way
agreed upon in advance. For major agricultural tasks, such as clearing new fields or harvesting crops, the head of the household may solicit aid from his neighbors by letting it be known that he wants assistance on a particular day. Anyone who wishes to participate may come, bringing his own implements. The party works together from early morning to noon, when the host provides beer and food. Those who offer their services in this manner expect to receive help with their own fields at another time on a reciprocal basis. This custom of work exchange is called ndyambi. For community projects, the headman may call up the people from the entire area under his jurisdiction to assist.

Almost every able-bodied Mbutu man contracts to work in the mines in South Africa for one or more periods of enlistment (9 months). In recent years some have gone to work in the mines at Arapa in Botswana. Contractual labor of this sort is in the hands of the labor association (WENELA). However, only those men who can be spared from the agricultural work contract for work in the mines.

Division of Labor By Sex

Women and girls do the work of the household and care for the children. They cook, make beer, make baskets and sleeping mats, do beadwork, carry water, gather small firewood, assist with planting and cultivating, gather wild foods and materials in the lands, fish with baskets and participate in the fish drives, and assist with repairing huts. A few become prostitutes. Men are in charge of the livestock; boys herd goats and cattle, which are milked by men and boys alike. Men are the potters, tanners, blacksmiths, wood-carvers, canoe makers, brickmakers, and housebuilders. They prepare land for new fields; they plow and sow, cut and transport timber, paddle and pole canoes, and drive oxen pulling sand-sleds; they hunt, fish, and assist with bringing in the harvest. Only men go to work in the mines in South Africa, and some go to seek employment in Maun, the provincial capital. A few men hold government positions, such as agricultural demonstrator, policeman, fireman, or fisheries officer. Men hold all political positions in Mbutu society (there are no female village heads). Generally the magicians are men, although women occasionally take up this latter profession (Larson 1971a: 422–432). Sons generally follow in the special craft skills of their fathers as blacksmiths and potters and canoe makers. Any person has the right to select his vocation and to attempt to acquire its skills. Magicians go through many years of apprenticeship to learn their profession.

TRAVEL AND TRANSPORTATION

Burden Carrying

Women, girls, and boys (but not men) carry bundles of sticks from the forest and fields back to the homestead on their heads. Men use sand-sleds for hauling cut
wood from the forest. Women and girls walk balancing heavy earthen pots and buckets, baskets, sacks of grain and other goods on their heads. Women and girls carry infants on their backs in carrying skins.

*Travel*

There is seasonal movement from the villages to the farms, and some hunters make long trips into the Kalahari Desert to hunt. But beyond this, the Mbukushu are a very mobile people and frequently move their settlements within the districts where they reside.

Individuals also travel much within the region, and in the past frequently crossed the borders between the three countries where they live. Even in recent times there has been frequent travel to Andara in the Caprivi Strip, Namibia, where there is a hospital (Larson 1971a: 405–407, 465–470). Occasionally Mbukushu make the trip to Maun, the capital of the northwestern district of Botswana, by dugout canoe. However, river travel is dangerous because of the many hippopotami, and nowadays most Mbukushu travel by transport truck to Maun and to the other towns located on the western and southern edges of the Okavango delta. They especially visit the northern towns—Shakawe, Seronga, and Seppoa—to trade. Only rarely do Mbukushu travel outside the northwestern district, though a handful of wealthy and educated Mbukushu have visited Gaborone in eastern Botswana, and some have traveled abroad. In Namibia a few Mbukushu students and teachers have gone to Windhoek for training (Larson 1971a: 428). However, there are Mbukushu homesteads in most of the larger towns located on the west side of the Okavango Delta where visiting Mbukushu may find hospitality. One can easily purchase food from housewives or receive it free of charge from relatives en route. For trips on the river in canoes, or on horseback, people carry their own supplies and plan stops at known communities.

*Routes*

The main travel routes are the Okavango River and the network of lagoons, channels, and the effluent streams of the Okavango Delta. Along both sides of the river at the edge of the sandbelt are sand-sled and foot trails for people traveling between the communities along the river. The WENELA road extends from Maun to Shakawe in Botswana and beyond into Namibia. This is a heavy sand track which only four-wheel vehicles can negotiate. There are many trails which lead out into the Kalahari to cattleposts and hunting regions (Larson 1971a).
Animal Transport

Sand-sleds are commonly used for transporting wood, reeds, and agricultural produce from village to village and to the canoe landings. Oxen are yoked and harnessed to the sand-sleds with a chain or heavy rawhide. The riding of oxen, more common in the past, is still practiced by herdboys. (Larson 1971a).

Though men are accustomed to walking far on hunting expeditions, nowadays horses and donkeys are employed for extended trips. The Mbukushu make crude leather saddles for horses and donkeys. They are ridden and also used as pack animals (Larson 1971a: 400–401; Van Tonder 1966: 241–243).

Water Transport

The Mbukushu, like other riverine peoples of the area, use wooden dugout canoes for river travel. The canoes are propelled by poling or paddling with one man at the stern and one at the bow. They are capable of carrying heavy loads and are usually loaded to full capacity. Rivermen travel by canoe only in the daytime and they remain in the shallow parts of the river to avoid danger from crocodiles and hippopotami hidden in deep water (Larson 1971a: 465–470). Mbukushu are reputed to be the best deep water canoemen on the Okavango. Schulz and Hammar say they have seen Mbukushu rivermen shoot over Popa Falls while standing upright in their crafts during canoeing competitions (Schulz 1897: 241).

PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

NUMBERS, MEASURES, AND TIME

When Mbukushu count, they say the numbers and also indicate them with finger and hand motions that are generally understood.

Weights are judged by reference to certain standard stones of various sizes and weights kept in a homestead of the local community. For height and bulk, comparisons are made with commonly known objects.

Epochs are indicated by reference to memorable events in the past. Time of day is indicated by pointing to the position of the sun in the sky. The Mbukushu recognize four seasons roughly corresponding to summer (December to February), fall (March to May), winter (June to August), and spring (September to November). There are twelve months. The seasons change roughly with the changes in temperature and the coming and cessation of the rains, phenomena which control the yearly cycle of economic activities (Larson 1971a: 345–355, 548–551; and Van Tonder 1966: 246–249).
BIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Many plants are named and their medicinal and other uses are known. (A collection of plants used and named by the Mbukushu has been deposited in the herbarium of the University of the Witwatersrand.) Magicians have knowledge of human anatomy, and most men know the anatomy of domestic animals. The major organs of the body are named.

Individual Life

INFANCY AND CHILDHOOD

PERSONAL NAMES

Several months after the birth of a child, he is given a proper name. The families of the two parents gather for the child’s name-giving ceremony. The father takes the infant’s hand and places it on a bowl which contains a gift from the person who is providing the name; then he, or another relative who is officiating, gives the child his blessing and his new name. If it is a boy, he may receive the name of his father or grandfather; if a girl, the name of a female ancestor. Names are generally taken from the child’s matrilineal ancestors. Sometimes the infant’s brother or sister will name him. Often the mother’s brother will name the child and officiate at the naming ceremony. Nicknames can be given later (Larson 1971a: 234; Van Tonder 1966: 335–336).

ETIQUETTE

Mbushushu children are trained to be courteous, to exchange proper salutations, and to respect their elders and people of special status. Proper etiquette must be observed during meals, when entering and leaving households, drinking at parties, visiting, taking part in court cases, traveling on the river, visiting shrines, and calling upon the spirits of the ancestors. Kinsmen are addressed by prescribed kin terms. Children are punished for not observing proper etiquette.

PLAY

Small children play the marriage game mashashavua, in which boys and girls pair off as man and wife. Several other games played by adults and children alike include: weru, a board-game (in which the “men” are called “cattle”) known throughout Africa; manyombo and fungu-fungu, both guessing games, and kapose, a game of strength. Boys play at hunting games and games of skill such as spearing
tubers on high-jumping, while little girls play with home-made dolls and make clothing and furniture for them (Larson 1971a: 676–678). Van Tonder mentions other games such as digrombora, a rope jumping event; and kujindo, a form of water tag (Van Tonder 1966: 288–291). Story telling combined with singing is a favorite pastime for children and adults. Today school children play soccer. Many small children make toys from millet stalks.

ADULT LIFE

DAILY ROUTINE

During the growing season men and women rise early to go to the fields where they work until about noon. They then return to eat and rest for several hours. They may return to work in the fields later in the day unless relatives are helping them, in which case everyone then retires to the utara (shelter) to drink beer. All the family gather for the evening meal in the courtyard, then retire early to bed. Ordinarily women rise early to stamp grain for the day and prepare food for the children and household. Women are occupied throughout the day with routine household duties and child care. Livestock are tended by boys and young men. In the afternoon and evening people socialize in the village or visit relatives in other villages. After the harvest there is more time for hunting, fishing, visiting, beer-drinking and other leisure-time activities (Larson 1971a: 422–424; Van Tonder 1966: 71–72).

Personal Hygiene

Most people bathe at least once a day. Usually after work in the afternoon the women bring water up from the river or lagoon for bathing. Twigs of a certain plant are used as toothbrushes. Hair is washed frequently and is brushed and combed. People also bathe at the river or lagoons. Some are brave enough to swim in the river and lagoons, but the people in general are very much afraid of crocodiles (Larson 1971a: 91–92; Van Tonder 1966: 241).

STATUS, ROLE, AND PRESTIGE

In traditional Mbutu society, the Rain Chief had the highest prestige. Regional chiefs followed, with many privileges, much wealth, and power. Next came the lineage heads — the senior women of the maximal lineages, then the attendants of the chief’s court, then the common people. One gains prestige with age. In recent times, under administration from outside the tribe, the prestige of chiefs has diminished (Larson 1971a: 291–300; Van Tonder 1966: 83–84; 170–183).
Talent Mobility

One gains prestige by amassing wealth, for with wealth comes influence. Successful blacksmiths, canoemakers, magicians, or skilled miners may acquire wealth and prestige. Women who have many living children or who are good basket and beadmakers also gain prestige.

Manipulative Mobility

Some families seek to raise their status through marriage into wealthier and larger families. Some attempt to marry their daughters to influential manduma (community headmen).

RECREATION

Conversation

While drinking beer the Mbukushu discuss their experiences at the mines, their gardens, their cattle, their travels up and down the river, visits of friends and relatives, money trading ventures, and prices of trade goods. They gesticulate and speak loudly, often many at the same time, but seldom resort to blows.

Humor

The Mbukushu laugh and joke at great length with each other, especially when they are gathered around a pot of beer. They love practical jokes; their folk tales and jokes are often about sex, and many expressions refer to the genital organs. Elderly people spend much time around the campfires singing and telling folk tales to the young people.

Gambling

Some of the men who have worked in the mines in South Africa have learned to gamble with cards and dice. The cattle game (weru) can also be played as a gambling game (Larson 1971a: 676–679).

Music and Dance

The Mbukushu spend much time dancing and singing and playing instruments.
Their many songs, often very repetitions, are sung during the telling of folk tales and at dances and ceremonies.

**Musical Instruments**

These include long drums, friction drums, hand pianos (played with a gourd or metal can resonator), musical bows, musical rasps, clapping boards, castanets, rattles, thumped hoe blades, and whistles. Only men and boys play drums, and it is chiefly they who play hand pianos, musical rasps, and rattles. Women use board clappers and thump hoe blades to accentuate dance rhythms (Larson 1971a: 668–675; Van Tonder 1966: 304–305).

**Dancing**

There are numerous Mbukushu dances, some, like the children's thiwini dance, being purely recreational, while others, such as those performed during girls' puberty rites, are more strictly ceremonial. Hathimo, a dance for driving away evil spirits, and mendengure, for driving away madness, are led by a magician. Their purpose is to appease the ancestral spirits, and they serve as a kind of group therapy. Many dances are performed in connection with the rengo (harvest festival). In the ceremonies of the Zion Church of God there is much dancing by the Mbukushu converts (Larson 1971a: 666–668; Van Tonder 1966: 272–287).

Magicians dress in special costumes while dancing. Drums, rattles, musical rasps, and whistles accompany the dancers. The group dances are formalized, whereas the dances of the magicians seem more individualistic.

**Literature**

The Mbukushu have a rich oral literature which includes folk tales, riddles, proverbs, and epic tales. Stories are often interrupted by songs which are led by the story-teller and repeated many times by the audience. Some common story themes are the interactions of animals and humans, the adventures of cultural heroes, moral lessons, long journeys, hostility toward authority figures, and practical jokes played by animals upon each other. The proverbs and riddles give advice and teach moral lessons (Larson 1971a: 551–562; Larson 1972a: 1–118; Van Tonder 1966: 301–304).
DEATH

*Attitude toward Death*

The Mbukushu are fatalistic and not overly concerned about death because they believe the spirit lives on in a shadowy invisible state in the vicinity of one's kin. The corpse has magical significance, for it is thought that sorcerers employ corpses in their secret rites. The bodies of babies and small children, it is believed, can be made into evil fairies by sorcerers.

*Causes of Death*

Sorcery is believed to be the cause of most deaths, though death can result also from natural events. Suicide is all but unknown among the Mbukushu (Larson 1971a: 278–279; Van Tonder 1966: 383–385).

*Dying*

Omens of impending death and predictions of death are common. The relatives of a sick person gather when death seems close at hand. When death has occurred the female relatives and children begin to wail in the courtyard. The lamentations may continue intermittently for as long as a week if the person was old and important in the community (Larson 1971a: 279–283; Van Tonder 1966: 375–382).

*Funeral*

Burial takes place a few hours after death. Men and women are generally buried outside the homestead, small children in the cattle kraal or at the edge of the forest. A grave is dug to a depth of about six feet. The corpse is prepared for burial by an aged person who folds the arms over the chest and wraps the body in a freshly skinned ox hide. The corpse is transported to the grave by male relatives and is placed in the grave on its side and facing west. Frequently a few cherished personal possessions are buried with it. Each person at the funeral drops a little sand on the wrapped body, then the grave is filled by members of the deceased person's matrilineage. Branches and logs are often placed on top of the grave to prevent hyenas from digging up the corpse. After the burial of an important adult the meat of the ox slaughtered to provide the shroud is cooked, or if this was not done, an ox is slaughtered for a feast. The grave is neglected and its place often forgotten (Larson 1971a: 279–283; Van Tonder 1966: 383–387).
Social Readjustment of Death

When a man with young children dies, his widow and children are cared for by his mother's sister's son (his mukadiraanz). If there is no such kinsman, then the deceased man's own eldest brother assumes the responsibility. A year after a man's death his brothers plow his lands for his widow and she receives the full harvest. In later years, however, she must do her own plowing.

When the elderly husband of a woman with grown-up sons dies, the head of her minimal lineage may go off with her sons to found a new homestead (Van Tonder 1966: 205; Larson 1977: 93–97).

Cult of the Dead

The spirits (hathimo) of deceased persons are thought to return to haunt and influence their living relatives. There are two distinct cults for praying and sacrificing to deceased ancestral spirits, one for chiefs and the other for commoners. Only chiefs may pray and sacrifice to the spirits of deceased chiefs. Commoners pray and sacrifice to the ancestral spirits of their respective lineages. For a family, the most important ancestral spirit is that of the kakurukathi keto, the matrilineal great grandmother and founder of the maximal lineage. In the chiefly lineage male and female ancestral spirits are of equal importance (Larson 1971a: 510–518; Larson 1971b; Van Tonder 1966: 310–312).

The spirits appear to their living kinsmen in dreams and make demands upon them. They must be appeased or the one receiving the dream will die. For this reason gifts are made to the spirits of the ancestors. The senior male member of a lineage (who is usually a brother of the female lineage head, the kakurukathi keto) makes sacrifices to the lineage spirits for the members of his lineage.

MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

MARRIAGE

Basis and Regulations of Marriage

A man is not considered successful unless he is married and has a family. Marriage is entered into for economic reasons, for advantageous ties to other lineages and clans, for increasing the members of a woman's lineage (for a man's children do not belong to his own lineage), and for increasing a man's followers in his predominately patrilocal household. Sons increase the economic and political strength of a household, daughters bring in bridewealth and bride service to a family, thus both are desired. A couple hopes to have many children because many often die in infancy. Strong, beautiful, hard-working, modest, and faithful women
are sought as wives. Dependable men who do not drink too much and who work hard are the most desirable husbands. Men are not particularly concerned that their brides be virgins, but they do expect them to be faithful after marriage. Men, however, may have secondary wives and concubines.

Formerly betrothals were often arranged at infancy (*kuandekera*, "infant betrothal") and marriage took place at the termination of the girl’s puberty ceremony, providing the boy was old enough and experienced enough to care for a wife and family. Nowadays most young men go to work in the mines in South Africa and do not marry until after returning. Also, engagements today are more commonly arranged by the principals themselves, by courting (*kusheshu*).

The preferred marriage among the Mbukushu is between a man and his father’s sister’s daughter. Marriage with the mother’s brother’s daughter is also common. A man may marry the daughter of his father’s brother if they did not grow up in the same homestead. A person should not marry someone within his or her own lineage and clan (Larson 1971a: 158–159; Van Tonder 1966: 103–104). Mbukushu do not like to have their young people marry persons from other tribes, though inter-marriage does occur frequently with Gciriku and with River Bushmen.

**Mode of Marriage**

Marriage takes place after a period of engagement. Traditionally it was contracted between young adolescents. Nowadays early marriage is less common because many men go away for long periods of contract work in the mines. There is an exchange of gifts between the families, and the bride’s family receives both bride-wealth from the groom’s family and bride service from the groom.

**Arranging a Marriage**

The procedure for making an engagement is this: The parents of a young man will send a sleeping mat (*dinaha*) to the parents of the chosen girl. A gift of firewood is also sent to the girl’s parents. If they are agreeable to the proposed engagement, these gifts are accepted. However, if the parents of the girl refuse the engagement, the mat and firewood are returned. If the girl’s parents are agreeable, they send a pot of porridge to the boy’s parents. The prospective groom receives a necklace of red beads from his parents which he gives to his fiancée (Larson 1971a: 251; Froehlich 1951a). The two families exchange gifts of food frequently and breads and bracelets are presented to the girl. If one of the families subsequently breaks the marriage pledge, it is expected to present a cow to the other family.

**Nuptials**

Generally upon the conclusion of a girl’s puberty ceremony she is married.
Attended by her old *sihongua* (a grandmother on either side), the girl sits patiently in front of the new hut, built by her family, until her fiancé arrives. The old *sihongua* gives the couple instructions about intercourse and married life: then she enters the new hut, built by the bride’s family, to prepare the newly-made sleeping mats, provided by the bride’s family, and to prepare the first symbolic fire. She then tells the couple that they are married and may spend the night together to consummate the marriage. Numerous other symbolic acts are performed by the old *sihongua* during the next two days. On the third day the families begin to prepare for the wedding feasts. In six to seven days the bridal couple is summoned to the wedding feast at the bride’s household. The groom’s father first leads him to the cattle kraal where two beasts are pointed out to him. The bride’s father-in-law states that the *ngombe o kudia* (the beast to be eaten at the celebration) can now be slaughtered. The second beast, the *ngombe o matauero*, symbolizes the bride’s family’s approval of the marriage. The first beast is slaughtered by the father of the groom and the father’s brothers. Half the meat is prepared for the wedding feast and the remainder is put on the roof of the *utara*, shelter, to keep it away from the dogs and hyenas. Great quantities of beer and food contributed by both families are brought to the *utara*, and members of the two families take their places in the shade and await the beginning of the festivities.

The groom’s relatives then present their gifts of beer and food to the newlyweds. Each of the groom’s male relatives receives a calabash of beer and a piece of the neck meat of the beast. After drinks have been given to the bride and groom, all the wedding guests may drink. Meat is then brought in for all the male guests. The bride and groom are led into their hut by two age mates and there they are served their portions.

The newlyweds are soon once again visited by an old *sihongua* who takes some of the meat which she accuses them of hiding from her. This symbolizes that the young couple must start out their marriage by being generous. After the bridal couple returns from the hut, everyone takes part in the songs and dances of the *odihao*, wedding celebrations, which continues until early the next morning. The remaining meat is distributed among the family of the groom. The groom’s family then give gifts of beer and food to the bride’s mother’s eldest brother. The groom’s family thank the bride’s family for the feast and return home to start making preparations for the feast they will give in return. The meat given by the bride’s family is distributed to the members of the groom’s family, each relative receiving a certain portion according to custom. The brother of the groom’s mother begins to make the arrangements for the feast which occurs about a week later. All the groom’s relatives contribute to this feast, and word is sent to the bridal couple that all of the bride’s relatives are invited. The second feast follow much the same pattern as the first one, except that the bride’s family now receives cattle and other gifts from the groom’s relatives (Larson 1971a: 256; Van Tonder 1966: 351).
Bride Service

When the celebration is over, the young couple returns to the bride’s father’s household where they will live for several years while the groom works for the parents of his bride. This is considered to be a payment given in exchange for his wife’s labor and for the children she will bear for her husband’s household and her own matrilineage and clan. All Mbukushu grooms are expected to give bride service for at least a year, even if their families have given the full bridewealth. If the groom’s parents are not able to pay the bridewealth, their son may live with and work for his wife’s parents for as long as four or more years. Eventually most couples will take up residence at the homestead of the groom’s parents (Larson 1971a: 253–257; Larson 1977: 91; Van Tonder 1966: 349–366).

Termination of Marriage

Divorce is fairly common. A man may divorce his wife for adultery, desertion, too much interference from her parents, laziness and disobedience, talking too much, or rude and insulting behavior. A woman may divorce her husband for negligence in sexual obligations, excessive attention to other wives, cruelty, laziness, failure to provide for the wife and her children, desertion, or unreasonableness in sexual demands. Divorce is judged in the community court by the nduna, local headman. Fines are frequent and return of bridewealth is required when a wife is found guilty of charges in a divorce case (Larson 1971a: 269–270).

In a polygynous household a woman who does not get along well with her husband’s other wives will return to her father’s household. Or, alternatively, a wife can always seek support from her uterine brothers, members of her lineage (Larson 1971a: 249–261).

SECONDARY MARRIAGE

Remarriage

Widows and divorcées are quite acceptable as wives. The bridewealth is much reduced for a woman who is a divorcé or a widow.

Levirate

Traditionally it is a man’s mukadiragnana, “small brother” (i.e., his mother’s sister’s son), who takes a widow as his leviratic wife and assumes the care of her children. If the deceased man has no “small brother,” then his eldest brother serves as the levir (Van Tonder: 205–208). In Ngamiland where the customs of the
patrilineal Tawara prevail, the younger brothers of the deceased husband have prior rights and duties as levir, and are followed by the older brothers.

*Sororate*

When a married woman dies, her husband has sororal rights over her mother's sister's daughter. Regardless of whether a wife of a chief or a commoner dies, with or without children, her family is under obligation to provide a new wife to her widowed husband. He is not required to give any brideweight or bride service for this new wife (Larson 1971a: 249–266; Van Tonder 1966: 349–366).

**OTHER MARITAL ARRANGEMENTS**

*Irregular Unions*

Some Mbukushu live as man and wife without marriage. No brideweight or bride service is paid in such cases.

*Celibacy*

Spinsters and bachelors are rare, except for elderly widows who do not remarry. People who were formerly married and who have not had offspring are often unable to attract a second marriage partner.

**THE FAMILY**

The smallest household unit consists of a woman, married or unmarried, with her children. The nuclear family consisting of a married man with his wife and children is more general. Extended families consisting of a man with one or more wives and their children, as well as additional relatives living in the same homestead, are common. In some homesteads, an aged father may be found residing with one or more of his married sons. An extended family can also include a man's son-in-law who is performing bride service (Larson 1971a: 167–170; Van Tonder 1966: 87–155).

*Residence*

The Mbukushu are very flexible in their residence patterns as they move freely in and out of communities along the Okavango River. At first a couple stays with the
bride's parents where the groom gives bride service until one or two children are born. Then the young family often goes to live in the groom's parents' or elder brother's homestead. Some couples go to live in the husband's mother's brother's household where the husband expects to receive an inheritance. Other families establish new independent settlements. When a Mbutu marries someone of another tribe with different customs, the parents of the couple decide which custom will be followed. In Mbutu territory an outsider in a marriage with a Mbutu girl frequently follows the Mbutu customs (Larson 1971a: 249–266; Van Tonder 1966: 349–366).

*Household*

A household starts with a young married couple, then expands into an extended household if the man takes additional wives. When his sons marry, they leave for a period of bride service, but then return to set up households within the father's village. The homesteads, in fact, are basically extended households. The extended household may further expand by the addition of daughters who have left their husbands, more distant relatives, servants, and friends. Sons, it seems, remain with their fathers in order to inherit his cattle when he dies. After this happens, the younger sons often move out to form their own homesteads, though sometimes they continue to live together, especially if their mother is still living. The eldest son usually remains as the new head of his deceased father's homestead (Larson 1971a: 182–187; Van Tonder 1966: 64–67).

*Family Relationships*

A husband and wife generally respect each other. A woman's brothers defend their sister, look after her interests, and see to it that her husband treats her fairly. Children respect and obey their parents and elder kinsmen.

*Polygamy*

While men often desire more than one wife for economic reasons and for the building of a larger following, monogamy is the most common form of marriage today. A man usually takes another wife if his first proves barren (Larson 1971a: 249–266; Van Tonder 1966: 349–366). A small percentage of men have two or three wives. A man's wealth and prestige are factors favoring polygyny. Sororal polygyny is not permitted by custom. The bridewealth for second and third wives is not as much as is given for the first wife.

A man's first wife is considered his senior wife, but all wives have about equal status in an extended household. Secondary wives may live in the same homestead
as the first wife, but frequently wives who do not get along well with each other live in their own father's or brothers' homesteads (Larson 1971a: 195–231; Van Tonder 1966: 357–366). Each wife maintains her own household. Food is provided by each wife for her husband and her children. The husband and head of a household is expected to provide for each wife and her children and to treat all wives equally.

**Extended Families**

The ideal family form is considered to be that in which a man with his married sons live in the same homestead. Alternatively, the sons may establish separate homesteads in close proximity. The father is head of the household.

The extended family functions as an economic unit in working the land. Each person keeps his own food stores and equipment; however, they recognize a collective responsibility. Usually a group of brothers cooperate with each other and their father and with his brothers in economic activities. They borrow each other's oxen and agricultural equipment and assist each other with food and other essentials during time of drought and need (Larson 1972: 195–231; Van Tonder 1966: 110–155).

**Adoption**

An orphan is taken care of either by his father's brother's family or by a person in his own lineage such as his mother's sister or a mother's brother. A Mbutkushu child is never adopted by someone who is not related to him. Children are not exchanged. There is no ceremonial ritual for adoption (Larson 1971a).

**Social Life**

**DESCENT GROUPS**

**Rule of Descent**

Descent is traced matrilineally. Kin relationship is recognized on both sides of the family but it is the maternal side which is important ritually, socially, and particularly in the observances and sacrifices of the ancestor religion. Though there are patrilineal influences from the Tswana, the matrilineal principle is still strong among the Mbutkushu in Ngamiland and Namibia (South-West Africa). All a woman's children are members of her matrilineal lineage and clan.
Lineages

Two levels of lineage organization are recognized. Maximal lineages, four generations in depth, consist of the matrilineal descendants of a *kakurukathi keto* ("founding ancestress") or MMM. Minimal lineages, three generations in depth, are composed of persons who refer to themselves as the children of the same *dira* ("stomach"). Occasionally the members of a minimal lineage gather to pray, to perform ritual offerings to the ancestral spirits, and for the *hathimo* ceremonies, though anyone may join a congregation at a *hathimo* ceremony (Larson 1977: 86–89; Van Tonder 1966: 158).

Clans

A Mbutu clan, *diko*, consists of all the people who claim to respect the same totem and to be related matrilineally to a common female ancestor. They belong to numerous maximal lineages. The dozen or more clans cut across the whole society or tribe. The clans and lineages serve mainly for identification, for tracing descent, for the regulation of marriage, and for inheritance of wealth and position. Men and women of the same clan should not marry or have sexual intercourse. Each clan has a totem with a history and legends tracing its origin. If the totem is an animal, the clan members should not eat its flesh. The clans are scattered throughout the society, and members do not live together or gather, either as a political unit or as a close social unit. Yet clan members should help one another and settle their differences peacefully. Clans do not hold territory (Larson 1971a: 171–179; Larson 1977: 83–86; Van Tonder 1966: 156–166; Froehlich, personal communication 1951).

The main clans today and their totems are as follows:
1. *Hakambara* — Elephant (?) clan; totem elephant, *nhuvu*.
2. *Hakanyime* — Lion clan; totem lion, *nyime*.
3. *Hakangando* — Crocodile clan; totem goat skin, *mango*.
4. *Hakanyachi* — Buffalo-hunter clan; totem buffalo, *nyachi*.
5. *Hakangrembe* — Finch clan; totem finch, *grembe*.
6. *Hakasimu* — Cattle clan; totem cattle, *simu* or *thimu*.
7. *Hakamvura* — Rainmaker clan; totem hyena, *dimbungu*; also the stones of the Tsodilo hills.

The Hakanyime (Lion clan) and the Hakamvura (Rain clan) are royal clans. A chief belongs to one of these and takes his wife from the other. Blacksmiths belong to the Hakangando (Crocodile clan). The Hakambara (Elephant clan) are the servants of the chief (Larson 1977: 83–86).
Tribe and Nation

The Mbutu constitute a nation in a cultural sense for they speak a common language, have a distinctive social organization and social customs, and recognize their separateness from other people wherever they live. They are controlled by their own chiefs who rise to power within the Mbutu political system. However, they do not nowadays form a single political unit under a paramount chief, but rather are controlled by more or less independent chiefs in the three territories where they reside, Angola, Botswana, and Namibia. This situation is largely an artifact of the political division of this part of Africa imposed upon it by outside forces (Larson 1971a: 180–182). We therefore treat them as constituting three separate tribes politically, though they share a common tradition.

KIN GROUPS AND RELATIONSHIPS

THE KINSHIP TERMS

Lower Order Terms

Consanguineal kinsmen are distinguished by sixteen basic kin terms, some of which are extended also to affinal relatives, and eight additional terms are employed for affines alone. Some (those ending in -ana) are diminutive forms of others in the list. [(The terms ending in -ange, being possessive forms, presumably are used with this ending only in reference or address to one’s own relatives — Ed.)] Distinctions are made with regard to generation in most of the kin categories and in regard to sex and birth order in some. Where the basic term does not distinguish the sex or birth order, a qualifier may be added. Instead of the referential classificatory kin term, certain relatives are customarily addressed by teknymous terms or by their given names. The sources are Larson (1977: 85–89, and unpublished materials) and Van Tonder (1966: 87–109). The lower order terms are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Consanguineal</th>
<th>Affinal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. kakurukathi kelo</td>
<td>MMM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. muma</td>
<td>FF, FM, MF, MM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. nyakudiange</td>
<td>FF, FM, MF, MM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3a. nyakuida tate</td>
<td>MMF, FFF</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3b. nyakuida naue</td>
<td>FFM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. tate</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>HF, GDH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. tateana</td>
<td>FB</td>
<td>ZH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. naue</td>
<td>M, MZ, FZ</td>
<td>WM, CSWd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. nauana</td>
<td>MZ, FZ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. mudiang</td>
<td>MB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. mukuruange</td>
<td>EB, EZ</td>
<td>WZH</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Mbukushu

Term | Referents | Affinal
--- | --- | ---
10. **minange**

| **10a. minange mukuruange** | B, Z, hB, hZ | FBW, WB, WZ, WZH, sZH, HB, HyBW |
| | | HeBW |
| **minangeana** | yB, yZ, FBC, MZC | WZC |
| **11a. mukadzirana** | MZS | |
| **12. thirothange** | MBC, FZC | |
| **13. muanange**

| **13b. muanangeana** | S, D, sBC, vZC, vBC | HB, WBC, HBC |
| | sZC | |
| **15. mupange** | SS, SD, DS, DD | BW |
| | H, W | |
| **16. mukuruange**

| **16a. mukuruanga** | W | |
| | SS, SD, DS, DD | |
| **17. muntuanga** | | |
| **18. ditikodiange** | | |
| **19. hemuemo**

| **19a. hemuenyange** | | |
| | HF, WF, DH, HFB, HZC | |
| **20. hemuenyangeana** | | |
| | HF, WF, DH | |
| **21. ngumueno**

| **21a. ngumuenyange** | | |
| | HF, WF, DH | |
| | WMZ | |
| | MBW, WM | |
| | HM, WM, SW | |
| **22. ngumuenoana** | | |

| **23. nyekerathange** (address only?) | | |
| **23a. nyekerathange minange** | | |

| **24. muthananga** | | |

---

**a)** relative age may be distinguished by adding *omukurure* for elder, *omubviro* for younger.

**b)** sex may be distinguished by adding *omukadi* or *omukamadi* for female, *omume* for male.

**c)** if these relatives are still children they are called *muizimbi*

**d)** this term is applied only after the SW bears a child.

**e)** if these relatives are much younger than ego, he calls them *minange*.

---

**Higher Order Kin Terms**

- hapange
- diko diutate
- hanyikerathange

*“matrilineal relatives”*  
*“paternal relatives”*  
*“affinal relatives”*

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**RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN KIN CATEGORIES**

**Grandparents and Grandchildren**

There is a relationship of privileged familiarity between lineal relatives of alternate generations. A girl’s mother’s mother, who is a senior woman in the matrilineal lineage, is responsible for her granddaughter’s behavior and proper upbringing. Both grandmothers train their granddaughter before puberty and take an active role in her puberty ceremony. The mother’s father is more important to grandchildren than the father’s father because the former is a senior official of the child’s lineage and functions in religious ceremonies pertaining to ancestor beliefs and worship. It is from his mother’s brother that a child inherits position and possessions. Grand-
parents and grandchildren assist each other in numerous ways, and there are close ties of affection and mutual obligation between them. Children greatly respect their grandparents because soon they will become ancestors who can return to haunt the living descendants in their dreams (Larson 1971a: 159–160).

Avuncular and Nepotic Relatives

The mother's elder brother is the guardian of the ancestral shrines and a link between a youth and his ancestors. The muedjange gives his nephew assistance, advice, occasional gifts, and special attention. A nephew must show respect for his maternal uncle at all times. From him he receives his inheritance and position and one day his office in the clan and lineage structure (Larson 1971a: 153–154). The mother's brother and all members of the mother's family and lineage are obliged to see that their nephew is raised properly and worthy of being a benefactor and future custodian and progenitor of the lineage. He must exhibit his best behavior when interacting with his lineage relatives.

Affinal Relatives

Sexual intercourse between a man and his wife's mother is forbidden. They respect each other and assist one another. They may on occasion avoid one another, but this is not traditional and is due to Tswana influence. According to Van Tonder, in South-West Africa a man is on familiar terms with his mother-in-law and calls her naue "mother"; but after the birth of a child by the respective wife he calls her ngumuendo. A woman and her father-in-law respect each other. He may not sleep with her or share the same sleeping hut with her. A woman may go to her father-in-law for assistance and advice. Sometimes she works for him. They may not joke about each other. A man respects his father-in-law and treats him like his own father. A son-in-law gives way to his father-in-law on the path. Nowadays the relationship between a man and his sons-in-law are more relaxed. A close relationship exists between a woman and her mother-in-law because they usually live and work together in the same homestead. They may not sleep in the same hut, however, and the younger woman must obey and assist the elder. Once a woman has had her first child she is in a more favorable position in her in-law's village (Larson 1971a: 160–166; Van Tonder 1966: 105–109).

A man observes certain restrictions with his sisters-in-law and may not have sexual intercourse with them. If he does so, he can be brought to court, and if found guilty, will be fined. A man may not sleep in the same hut as his wife's sister or his brother's wife. They step aside for each other on the path, and they assist each other with work. Brothers-in-law are polite to one another and may greet and assist each other. However, they may not sleep in the same hut. Sisters-in-law speak freely to each other and frequently live in the same homestead, but do not sleep in the same household or hut because their husbands might be present and open familiari-
ty in such company is forbidden. However, they may nurse one another’s babies and otherwise assist one another and may eat from the same dish (Larson 1971a: 160–166).

Mbukushu are generally polite to one another regardless of the degree of relationship. They quickly establish their own relationship by asking about the members of their respective clans. If they are of the same clan, they know that they are at least distantly related to each other and thus may not intermarry. The Mbukushu nowadays are on good terms with the other African peoples with whom they come into contact.

*Kinship Regulation of Sexual Intercourse*

There are prohibitions against intercourse with a member of the immediate family or with a member of one’s own lineage. In Ngamiland the Mbukushu claim to observe restrictions against intercourse with a member of one’s own clan, but in Namibia such restrictions are not always closely observed (Fr. Froelich, personal communication). Accusations of incest may be brought in court and one found guilty is punished (Larson 1971a: 171–180; Van Tonder 1966: 357).

**SEX AND REPRODUCTION**

**SEXUAL STIMULATION**

*Prepuberty Stimulation*

Children play at marriage, and intercourse between children is encouraged. Young girls are instructed by older girls in how to enlarge their vaginas, using the sap of a wild plant. As soon as a girl reaches menarche, she is forbidden to engage in intercourse until she is married.

*Among Women*

Women put great emphasis upon dress and ornamentation. They anoint their skin with salves and rub castor oil on their bodies and coiffures. Perfumes are used. The traditional dress with the beaded rear apron is considered sexually very attractive. Women use love potions and love charms; those who are barren employ medicines to make them fertile. Many of the dances are considered by the Mbukushu to be sexually stimulating. Kissing and caressing are common, and much profanity is used when people are socializing and drinking beer together, occasions when there is joking and telling of stories (Larson 1971a: 271–276; Larson 1972a).
SEXUAL RELATIONS

Intercourse

The favorite position for intercourse is on the side, with the man lying between the legs of the woman. Men say they understand woman’s orgasm and try to let their partners attain it.

Sexual Restrictions

Intercourse is forbidden in the cattle kraal. A man may not indulge in intercourse during the night before he starts on a river journey or a hunting expedition. Intercourse with menstruating or pregnant women is forbidden. Immediately after birth women also abstain from sexual intercourse; the post-partum sexual taboo lasts for several months (Larson 1971a: 234).

Extramarital Relations

Men frequently visit concubines, especially during periods when their wives are taboo to them. Concubines may be patronized secretly or with a wife’s permission (Larson 1971a: 266–267; Van Tonder 1966: 332, 367).

HOMOSEXUALITY

Homosexuality is uncommon. Occasionally a man chooses to wear women’s clothes and becomes then a mushere uava kathi (a friend of the women), or a morome ni mokathi (man-and-woman). Such a person does women’s work and associates with women. He may also prefer other men for sexual purposes.

REPRODUCTION

It is the great desire and ambition of every married couple to produce as many offspring as possible. Girls are desired as much as boys, for they bring bridewealth to the parents, provide labor for agriculture, and perpetuate the woman’s lineage. Men say they like to have more than one wife to produce more offspring, but in fact most men have but one wife (Larson 1971a: 232–238).

A pregnant woman must observe certain food restrictions, avoiding the flesh of any animal killed by a carnivore, for example. Some women are forbidden to eat millet for fear it will make them bilious. A pregnant woman continues to engage in household tasks until the start of labor. She often will obtain protective medicine
from a magician and will take other precautions to protect herself and her infant at birth (Larson 1971a: 232–233).

If a woman becomes pregnant while still nursing a baby and fears that the nursing will suffer, she may procure an abortion by drinking divato, a medicine prepared from a wild bush of that name. About two weeks after the abortion she is ritually cleansed and then may resume normal sexual relations with her husband.

SOCIAL CLASSES

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

There is an age stratification based upon birth order that is reflected in the kinship terminology. Advancement to new levels of development and new statuses are celebrated by rites of passage, e.g., at birth, puberty, engagement, marriage, and death. However, there are no age classes. Old age is respected. The junior members of a family or other social group show respect to elders and to all those senior in age and position (Larson 1971a: 139–171; Van Tonder 1966: 87–166).

Ethnic Stratification

Though in Botswana all Africans are called Motswana, i.e., people of Botswana, Mbukushu nevertheless distinguish themselves from peoples of other tribal groups and encourage their young people to marry within the tribe. The Mbukushu consider most other Bantu-speaking peoples as more or less their equals; however the Bantu-speaking Kalagadi and the non-Bantu San (River Bushmen and Kalahari Bushmen) are considered inferior in status (Larson 1971a: 288, 304).

Classes

There is little social stratification in the Mbukushu territory, only the Rain Chief and his immediate relatives at Andara, and old Chief Disho II, are considered to belong to a higher class than the remainder of the Mbukushu people. The chiefs of the Mbukushu who reside in Ngamiland live much like anyone else. At the tribal headquarters at Andara in Namibia the chief lives at the royal court.

SERFDOM AND PEONAGE

Formerly the Mbukushu kept Bushmen as slaves. Anyone who could afford it could keep slaves. People came into servitude through debt, conviction of crime, or voluntary submission (Larson 1971a: 434–436; Van Tonder 1966: 200–205). A man could marry an enslaved woman or treat her as a concubine.
During the 18th and 19th centuries the slave trade was very important among the Mbuyushu chiefs who traded both slaves and ivory to the Mambari (mestizo Angolan) and Arab traders who visited their country. The Mbuyushu raided for slaves in the Bushmen camps, as well as in their own villages and those of the closely related Geiriku. In exchange for slaves they received cloth, guns, powder, lead, articles of clothing, beads, and liquor (Green 1857: 311–312; A. St. H. Gibbons 1904 I: 202; Goold-Adams 1898: 153; Reid 1901; Seiner 1910: 345; Nettelton 1934: 358; Larson 1971a: 405–407).

FRIENDSHIP

Some Mbuyushu form a special relationship of friendship and reciprocity in the economic sphere with a Bushman family or with a family of another Bantu tribe.

The custom known as bushange, meaning "my friend," is a formal gift exchange relationship established between two families, generally a Mbuyushu family and a Kalahari Bushman family. In carrying out the exchange, the members of one family go to live with each other for about a week during which period they exchange gifts. Also, on occasion, the man of the family goes alone to visit the other and to take him gifts.

INGROUP ANTAGONISM

Antagonism within the Mbuyushu social structure is due mainly to jealousy engendered by polygyny or disputes over inheritance. Such jealousy is often channelled through sorcery and is most common within lineage and extended family groups. In the past there was much rivalry among the aspirants to the chiefship. This often led to fission within the tribe, as followers of one chieftain would break away to live in another part of the tribal territory (Larson 1971a: 44–45, 477–582).

Politics and Law

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

COMMUNITIES

Community Structure

Formerly each homestead was enclosed by a reed or pole wall. Now, because lions, leopards, and hyenas are not as common, the homesteads are more open. Each homestead generally has an adjoining cattle kraal and gardens not far away.
The families composing a homestead are closely related. Homesteads are grouped for political purposes into local communities. The homesteads of a local community are generally located close to one another and come under the jurisdiction of a headman (Larson 1977: 97–103).

**Headmen**

The head of a household is called *wilheto*. The head of a homestead is called *ndurωombo* or, in Namibia, *njami*. The head of a local community is called *nduna* or *thindashaditunga*. Formerly headmen at all levels moved into their positions by matrilineal succession, i.e., a headman was succeeded first by his uterine brothers, then by his eldest sister’s eldest son. Today in Botswana many community heads (*manduna*) are appointed by the Tawana tribal headman at Shakawe and the Tawana patrilineal rules of succession and inheritance are followed (Larson 1971a: 160–166; Van Tonder 1966: 110–155). The *manduna* or community headmen represent the chief among their people and represent their people in the higher courts at the capital. Community heads who are not fair and honest in trials and their dealings with their people can be removed from office by higher authorities in the Tawana government.

**Local Community Council**

Each *nduna* has his council composed of the heads of the individual households as well as of the homesteads that make up his community.

**CHIEFS**

**The Traditional Paramount Chief**

Formerly the Mbukushu came under one paramount chief, the *fumu* or *fumu-shokura* ("elder chief"), the spiritual leader and the great rainmaker, who lived at Andara, and still today the Mbukushu in Botswana maintain ties with the tribal chief at Andara. Formerly the chief ruled supreme over his people in all matters. A chief would not tolerate one of his subjects possessing more cattle or any other form of wealth than himself. He could have such a person accused of sorcery and put to death. On the other hand, a chief was responsible for making rain, and thus providing good harvests, and for assuring the general welfare of his people. Chiefs used some of their wealth (food supplies) for ceremonies for their subjects and kept some as a reserve in case of famine and drought, but they also took ivory and wild animal skins from their people, sold their subjects into slavery, and forced them to pay an annual tribute for their services as rainmaker. Other tribes in the region,
even as far away as the Barotse of the Zambezi Valley, would also send payments to the Mbukushi rainmaker-chief in the form of young maidens, animal skins, grain, cattle, and ivory (Larson 1953: 250; Gibbons 1904 I: 213–214; Mattenklodt 1931: 195–196; Schulz 1897: 245; Statham 1924: 131; Stigand 1923: 416).

**Succession of Chieftainship**

Succession is matrilineal. In the past, among rival pretenders, whoever possessed the rain medicine had the best claim to the position of chieftainship, providing he was also favorably situated in the matrilineal line of succession.

When a chief dies his property is not divided among his relatives but is kept within the close family of his successors and is guarded and watched over by the next chief, who knows that much of his influence and prestige will depend upon his wealth and its display. Only one ox is given to the eldest son of the chief's first wife, while all other property goes to the successor. The former chief's cattle, his wives, his lands, and his personal belongings such as clothing and weapons, all are inherited by the new chief. Even the senior wife of the deceased chief is inherited by the next chief and becomes his senior wife. The new chief also takes over responsibility for raising the deceased chief's children.

When the chief dies the fires of all his subject people are put out. Then fresh fires must be lit from a new fire made by the new chief. When the new fire is kindled, the chief prays to *Nyambi* and to the ancestors for prosperity.

Aspirants to the chieftainship and the chiefs themselves were constantly conspiring against one another, attempting to dispose of rivals by sorcery or poison (Schulz 1897: 223, 243–245; Gibbons 1904 I: 212–215; Sillery 1952: 193–194; Larson 1971a; Van Tonder 1965: 170–183, 207–208).

**The Chief's Wives**

The chief's wives are called *herekathi* (pl. *haherekathi*). They are ranked according to their seniority. One wife was designated Rain Woman and her children, in former times, were subject to sacrifice to fortify the rain medicine.

When a wife is taken for a new chief, all her grain is also taken with her.

When a chief's head wife dies, the wife who is second in seniority does not take her place. Instead, the chief goes to the head wife's family and selects a new head wife from among its members. The new senior wife must look after the former head wife's children; those who can look after themselves are sent back to the family of their deceased mother. The possessions of the chief's late wife are not given back to her family but remain in the house of the chief and are at the disposal of the wife who takes the place of the deceased woman. The house of the deceased wife is torn down and a new house is built for the new wife (Van Tonder 1966: 207–208).
The Royal Household

The members of the royal household include the chief's mother (hasumu ana), the chief's brothers and half-brothers; their wives (the herekathi ana); and their children (hanaifumu). The chief's own children, called muana fumu, are included, though they have no claim to succession. A chief's sister's son, a potential successor to the throne, would live in the chief's homestead only if he married the chief's daughter - his cross-cousin.

The chief's mother has especially high status and is consulted on important matters. The brothers and sisters of the chief also have high status and special privileges, as do his wives. The chief's grandchildren (hekuru fumu) are the most privileged and adored members of the chief's household. They can enter the chief's private quarters at will to bother him and can take what they please in the way of food. When older they share his secrets, dress him for ceremonial occasions, assist him with sacrifices of the rain child, and his grandsons bury him when he dies.

The chief has his own inner court and private places where he eats and sleeps. In his household there are separate households for his relatives and for his servants and retainers (Larson 1971a: 291–292; Van Tonder 1966: 170–182).

The Tribal Chiefs Today

Nowadays in Namibia the Mbukushu chief rules under the authority of the central administration and his power and privileges have been curtailed accordingly. He can be removed from office by the government upon appeal from his subjects or for other reasons. With the assistance of his council of headmen he determines tribal policy. The chief is the second highest judicial authority and tries all the more important court cases in his jurisdiction. Also, some of the old tribal duties remain: he controls the rain medicine and rainmaking apparatus; he keeps the tribal fire which represents his nation and the people; and as the ritual leader he officiates at the annual harvest festival, the rengo (Larson 1971a: 291–292; Van Tonder 1966: 170).

In recent times in Ngamiland there have been two Mbukushu chiefs among the Angola refugees resettled at Etsha near Gomare. These are Mahongo and Mbambangandu II. Earlier another Mbukushu chief, Disbo II, lived in Ngamiland for many years without political power other than that of traditional rainmaker. Though he was recognized as a Mbukushu chief in exile from South-West Africa, his followers all fell under Tawana rule (Larson 1971a: 291–292; and Van Tonder 1966: 170–182).

The Chiefs' Assistants

The community headmen (called manduna in Botswana) and the katapa, a respected elder, are members of chiefs council. They advise the chief, especially in
deciding suits brought before the chief as judge. The *ngambera* are male assistants who serve as messengers, guards, police, and interpreters. Anyone speaking to the chief does so through the *ngambera*. The *mukamarombo* is a highly trusted male henchman who cooks the chief’s food, makes his beer, and is in charge of his household. He serves food to the chief’s guests in his court (*mbara*). There is also a female *mukamarombo* who serves the chief’s wives (Larson 1971a: 305–314; Van Tonder 1966: 183–193).

**International Relations**

Until the international borders were closed in 1969, the Mbukushu of all three adjoining territories moved back and forth quite freely to visit and live with their kinsmen in any of those territories.

**LAW**

**Legal Authority**

Formerly homestead headmen, advised by village elders, settled affairs at the local level. Ultimate authority resided in the chief whose decisions in serious cases required the approval of his council.

In recent times there has been a hierarchy of courts in each of the three countries. In Namibia there is the *ndango* or homestead court composed of family heads and presided over by the homestead headmen, the *ngotha* or community court composed of village heads and presided over by the local community headmen, the court of the *kapata* or chief’s advisors presided over by the chief, and the chief’s court in which the *fumu* (paramount chief) is assisted by his *ngambera* who serve as police, messengers, and interpreters. Cases requiring the death penalty are tried in the court of the Bantu Affairs Commissioner at Rundu. In Botswana, courts under Mbukushu headmen exist at the homestead and community levels; a higher district court (*kgotla*) at Shakawe is presided over by the district head (usually a Tawana who functions with the assistance of an appointed Mbukushu headman). Capital crimes come under the higher provincial court at Maun, presided over by the District Commissioner. A supreme court sits in Gaborone, the national capital (Larson 1971a: 304–318, 323–326; Van Tonder 1966: 183–197).

**Law**

Mbukushu law is based upon tribal custom and taboo, with some additional laws decreed by the chief and his council. In Botswana, Tawana law is administered in

**Crime**

In the lower courts common cases are those concerned with marital disagreements, non-support, desertion, infidelity, divorce, concubinage, rape, incest and other sexual offenses, seduction, cattle theft, assault, and slander. Cases of murder are rare, though some occur involving mine laborers returning to their homes who pass though the area and become embroiled in disputes over women (Larson 1971a: 314–334; Van Tonder 1966: 183–208).

In cases of murder, in former times, the family of the victim would attempt to take revenge upon the guilty person. An accused murderer could seek refuge in the chief’s compound, and the chief would then attempt to settle the case for compensation rather than for blood. In cases of accidental homicide, the families of the victim and the guilty person would attempt to agree upon the compensation (*dichimba*) to be paid, or it would be decided by the chief (Larson 1971a: 314–334; Van Tonder 1966: 170–208).

In the past the Mbuksushu diviners “smelled out” sorcerers using *magical means*. Persons found guilty of sorcery were put to death by being bound and thrown into the river, by burning, by being speared to death, or by *magical means*. The employment of diviners to discover witches and the use of magical means of punishment still occur in the more remote communities.

**Judicial Proceedings**

In Botswana a person with a grievance takes it to the appropriate authority, usually a community *nduna* or the district headmen. Trials are generally held promptly. The authority summons the parties with their witnesses or, in serious cases, the police are sent to bring in the accused. Community and district courts are convened in established places, usually under a large shade tree. When a case is to be heard it is first announced by the presiding official. The plaintiff states his accusation and calls his witnesses. Then the accused states his defense and calls upon his witnesses. Anyone in the audience may arise and give his opinion or present evidence. After conferring with his council, the chief or *nduna* will either give his verdict or, if he wishes, refer the case to a higher court. In Shakawe (but not in other places) a court recorder keeps a record of the proceedings (Larson 1971a: 306–318; Van Tonder 1966: 170–197).
Execution of Justice

In cases of theft, suit is brought for recovery of the stolen goods. The court may impose fines, corporal punishment, or jail for other offenses. Repeated crimes receive more severe penalties. Standard fines are established for assault, battery, mayhem, slander, and libel. Lineages assume responsibility for their members, taking up a collection to pay their fines but also taking pains to assure that convicted members do not repeat their offenses. Family heads are responsible for the acts of family members, and parents are liable for the damages caused by their children (Larson 1971a: 183–197, 232–247).

WARFARE

The Mbukushu do not have a history of warring with other tribes. Chiefs relied upon their manipulation of the rain medicine to maintain Mbukushu independence. Chiefs, however, did sometimes engage in raiding among their own people. A chief might send his ngambera (guard) to raid a rich fellow tribesman of cattle, or to raid for slaves both among Mbukushu and among the Bushmen and other small groups living near the river (Larson 1971a; Gibbons 1904 I: 217; Stokes and Brown 1966: 251).

Religion, Magic, and Medicine

BELIEFS

The High God

The Mbukushu recognize a high god (Nyambi) who is above all, all powerful, has created everything, and owns everything. He is invisible like the wind, lives in a faraway heaven where he is above all and everything, and is quite unconcerned with the earthly affairs of little insignificant men (Larson 1971a: 504–510; Larson 1971b: 54; Van Tonder 1966: 240, 307–311).

Ancestral and Other Spirits

The Mbukushu are more immediately concerned with the hathimo, the ancestral spirits. There are four categories of these: evil spirits of commoners, good spirits of commoners, evil spirits of chiefs, and good spirits of chiefs. If a person was good during life, his spirit is a good spirit, if bad during life, his spirit is a bad spirit. When good people die they go to heaven and live in Nyambi’s village, bad people go to the village of Shadapinyi. The souls of the deceased live on indefinitely, on earth and in

In addition to ancestral spirits there are evils fairies (harumba), ghosts (divombothie), and huge river monsters (dikongoro) created from the bodies of chiefs. Fairies (harumba) are formed by sorcerers from the bodies of babies. Harumba are said to be about the size of monkeys; they have red or yellow eyes, their feet are turned backwards, as are their bellies, and they have long tails. They appear only at night. They are used by sorcerers to carry out evil deeds (Larson 1971b: 56). Ghosts (divombothie) come from the corpses of great men and hunters and enter the bodies of animals; they are less harmful than the haromba. The worms from the corpses of dead chiefs get into the Okavango River and become dikongoro, great river monsters. Certain baobab trees are feared at night as the abode of evil fairies, and certain forests are avoided as inhabited by them. Certain places in the river are avoided as the homes of river monsters.

**Animism**

Fire is the “giver of life,” and the chief is the great fire (Van Tonder 1966: 239), but fire can also be malevolent. When fire kills it is the evil work of Shidipinyi (the evil messenger of God) or of hartoiti (sorcerers) and ghosts who come between Nyambi and the spirits of the ancestors.

**Mythological Origins**

It is told that men and animals originally came down from heaven on a spider web, setting foot on earth first in the Tsodilo Hills which lie in the Kalahari Desert to the southwest of Mbukushu country. God (Nyambi) at first lived on earth with man and returned later to heaven with his wife and son (Larson 1971c: 37; Froehlich 1953: 484–492).

**Sacred Objects and Places**

Each lineage has a sacred place where the members gather for sacrifices to their ancestors. The chief keeps the rain bowl, which contains the powerful ingredients for making rain, in a secret place in his courtyard (Larson 1971a: 171–546; 624–625; Van Tonder 1966: 313–316).
PRACTICIES

Propitiation and Prayer

It is only with an act of submission through prayer and sacrifice to the ancestors that the people can gain the approval and receive the blessings of Nyambi. To receive rain, the vital substance, it is necessary to give life, for no life can survive without giving and receiving life. Formerly, to fulfill this obligation the new born baby of the rain woman, one of the wives of the chief, was sacrificed at the beginning of the rainy season by the paramount chief who as also the rain chief (Van Tonder 1965: 309–310).

The Mbukushu make offerings of food to their ancestral spirits before undertaking journeys or starting new projects or ceremonies, to cure illness, and to insure the welfare of lineage members. The senior man and woman of the lineage officiates in these ceremonies. The members of a family in the same lineage make prayers and offerings at their sinjaku, where no work, play, or anything else is done. This is in or near their homestead. All other prayers, offerings and sacrifices are made at the place where blessings and aid are most needed (Larson 1971a: 504–510; Larson 1971b: 58–61; Larson 1973: 1–8; Van Tonder 1966: 313–316, 240).

Avoidance and Taboo

Each clan has taboos pertaining to its totem animal or object. One must not eat the flesh of his totem animal. If one does so inadvertently or through necessity, he must cut off a piece of the meat and throw it into the forest as a gift to the spirits of the ancestors. If one eats the flesh of his totem without the ritual offering, it is believed his skin will peel off. Also, there are numerous other food taboos and avoidances which must be observed before one sets out on a long journey, a hunting expedition, a long trip on the river, or other dangerous and important missions (Larson 1971a: 178–179; and Van Tonder 1966: 313–323).

Revelation and Divination

For divination, magicians make use of the magical gourd called hanga, gemsbok horns, throwing bones, hatchets, and mirrors. With these instruments they seek to discover the cause of sickness, make predictions, locate lost objects, animals, or persons, smell out evil sorcerers, and diagnose cases of hathimo. In the case of hathimo (possession by an evil spirit), the nganga attempts to determine what kind of food is desired by the possessing spirit, or if this is not successful, he attempts to discover the identity and other desires of the spirit (Larson 1971b; Larson 1971a: 597–605).
Organized Ceremonial

The *reno* or harvest festival is the most important ceremonial event of the Mbukushu. It is celebrated at Andara in Namibia, and in recent years has also been carried out at Etsha in Botswana where refugees relocated from Angola participate. It takes place in May, usually at the time of a new moon. After the firing of a gun at the appearance of the new moon, the Rain Chief dressed in a dancing costume of leopard and otter skins and ox intestines leads the dancing, feasting, and drinking of new millet beer. The *reno* may last from three to four days depending upon the number of people present and their enthusiasm. On the last day one of the old *muikuru fiimu* announces that the people now have permission to harvest their crops, eat the food of the harvest, and make beer from new millet, and that they also may now build new houses (Larson 1971a: 640–646; Van Tonder 1966: 249–252).

MEDICINE

THEORY OF DISEASE AND MISFORTUNE

Sorcery

The Mbukushu believe strongly in sorcery as the cause of death, disease, and misfortune. People are believed to practice sorcery for profit, revenge, or for jealous motives. Sorcery is suspected especially within the extended family and the lineage. The Mbukushu claim there is much more sorcery today than formerly because their modern courts will not deal with it. They believe their magicians (*hanganga*) can detect sorcerers (*harothi*), though it is dangerous to expose those who are powerful (Larson 1971a: 596–604; Van Tonder 1966: 323–330).

Other Causes

Not all misfortune, however, is attributed to sorcery. The Mbukushu say that Nyambi (God) causes some sickness, and that some injuries are due to natural causes — accidents. Some misfortunes and sicknesses also are attributed to violation of a taboo or failure to heed the demands made by ancestral spirits (*hathimo*) who appear to people in their dreams (Larson 1971a: 575–579, 605–623; Larson 1971b; Van Tonder 1966: 324–329).
MEDICAL PRACTICES

Diagnosis and Magical Treatment

Magicians (banganga) practice divination (hanga) to diagnose the causes of physical and mental illness and misfortune. When one is visited in a dream by ancestral spirits, a magician is called to interpret it. The magician uses medicines, dances, prays to Nyambi (God), and casts spells to appease the troublesome spirits and to set the mind of the patient at ease. Magicians sell their patients amulets and charms to ward off the evil effects of sorcery directed at them (Larson 1971a: 586–604; Larson 1973: 1–8; Van Tonder 1966: 323–330). In cases of hathimo, an illness caused by possession by evil spirits, and mandengure, a kind of madness in which the afflicted person will flee to the forest, eat feces, or show other abnormal behavior, a curing ceremony is performed that involves dancing and singing by a chorus of women and girls. At the climax of the ceremony the nganga administers a medicine made from boiled roots of the muyuvi plant (Peltophorum africanum Sond.). When the medicine is regurgitated, it is a sign that the patient is casting out the evil spirit (Larson 1971b: 58–61).

Magicians

The profession of nganga, “magician,” is both an honorable and a profitable one. Often the son of a nganga will decide to take up his father’s profession. Others are influenced through their dreams to do so. The Mbutu magician (naganga) undergoes many years of apprenticeship under the direction of a skilled practitioner. Some magicians specialize in a particular aspect of the work while others become general practitioners. Those who become famous are much in demand (Larson 1971a: 596–604; Van Tonder 1966: 323–328).

Practical Treatment

Many people have a general knowledge of folk medicine. The magicians, also, often are skilled in native medicines and first aid. As a last resort, people with serious illness or injury may use the medical services provided by the governments or seek treatment from the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WENELA) or the missions in their areas (Larson 1971a: 597–605).
ABBREVIATIONS

Angola, S.M.A. Angola, Serviço Meteorológico de Angola.
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1-4, 2-5, 3-6. Pretoria.
See also the 1:100,000 maps accompanying Aimeida 1912 and Seiner 1913 and the 1:750,000
map accompanying Schönhelder 1935.
2 A Geiriku village with cattle pen in the foreground.
3 View inside the Geiriku village (Muhembo, 1953).
4 A Mbutu potter at work (Shakawe, 1969).
5 Mbutu woodcarvers (Seronga, 1950).
6. A Mwukushu woman making a sleeping mat.
7. Mwukushu basket weavers (Shukawe, 1950).
8 A Mbutu man preparing river reeds for mats.
9 Making mats for grain containers (Kwegudi, 1969).
10 A Mbukushu woman sifting millet (Serongi, 1950).
11 Grain storage vats filled with millet (Muhembo, 1953).
12 A Mbutu fisherman tending his traps at a fish weir in a lagoon (1950).
13 Geiriku women with fishing baskets (Muhambo, 1953).

14 Geiriku children: boys with close-cropped hair, girls with long twisted strands (Muhambo, 1953).
15, 16 Geiriku children fishing in a lagoon (Muhembo, 1953).
17 A temporary shelter for a Geiriku girl at puberty.

18 A Geiriku mother may carry her infant on her hip, even when seated.
19 Mbukushu girls wearing beaded skirts and headdress wigs.

20 A Mbukushu woman carrying her infant in a back sling of antelope hide.
21 A Mbukushu man playing a friction drum (nyamanita).

22 A Mbukushu magician performing the kathina ceremony (Kuangwe, 1972).
23. Mbukushu drummers rest their drums on the body of the magician in a khathimo ceremony.

24. Magician with rattles in the khathimo rite.
25 Mbukushu men playing *wera*, the "cattle game".
26 A Goziku beer party (Muheumbo, 1953).
The Mbukushu chief, Dinho II, wearing the rainmaker’s sacred necklace and cone-shell ornament (Shakawe, 1969).


