The Kingdom of Sukur :

A NORTHERN NIGERIAN ICHABOD

By Anthony Kirk-Greene

With photographs by the Author

These field notes were made during a prolonged tour of the Madagali District of Adamawa Province when I was District officer, Mubi, in 1954. Since then I have been able to amplify a number of facts through library research. As I am unlikely for some years to enjoy the opportunity of revisiting Sukur to check my final data, I have agreed to publish this preliminary study now : regardless of the possible original merits inherent in its offering a first-hand[1] detailed description and analysis of Sukur, I sincerely hope that this contribution may provide useful background material for future anthropologists working in Northern Adamawa.

I should like here to acknowledge my debt to the valuable MS notes, scattered in various administrative files, notebooks and diaries in Mubi and Yola, made by D. F. H. MacBride, Administrative Officer, and H. S. Kulp, missionary, compiled during their visit to the area nearly thirty years ago. So excellent did I find their data when rechecking points in Sukur that I realised it would have shown both negligence and ingratitude on my part had I not drawn deeply from their illuminating and authoritative observations.—A.H.M.K-G.

IN the Northern Cameroons a considerable stretch of the Anglo-French Trust Territory boundary is marked by the natural frontier of the Mandara mountains. This superb range, which, as the Magar chain, marks the north-eastern limit of modern Adamawa province, runs like a spinebone from the northernmost lofty peak of Zaladuva (over 4000ft.), the sight of which encouraged Barth on his journey tc Yola in 1851[2], to the southerly offshoot of Bagale hill overlooking the river Benue opposite Jimeta.

Among the many weird and wondrous spurs that jut forth from the western slopes of this range, none is more remarkable yet less recorded than the massif of Sukur. This mountain fastness, towering some 1800ft. above the Yedseram valley and the plains of Madagali district, is no isolated, inaccessible peak ; it boasts a fine plateau, whose good soil and adequate water supply enable it to carry a community of its own,

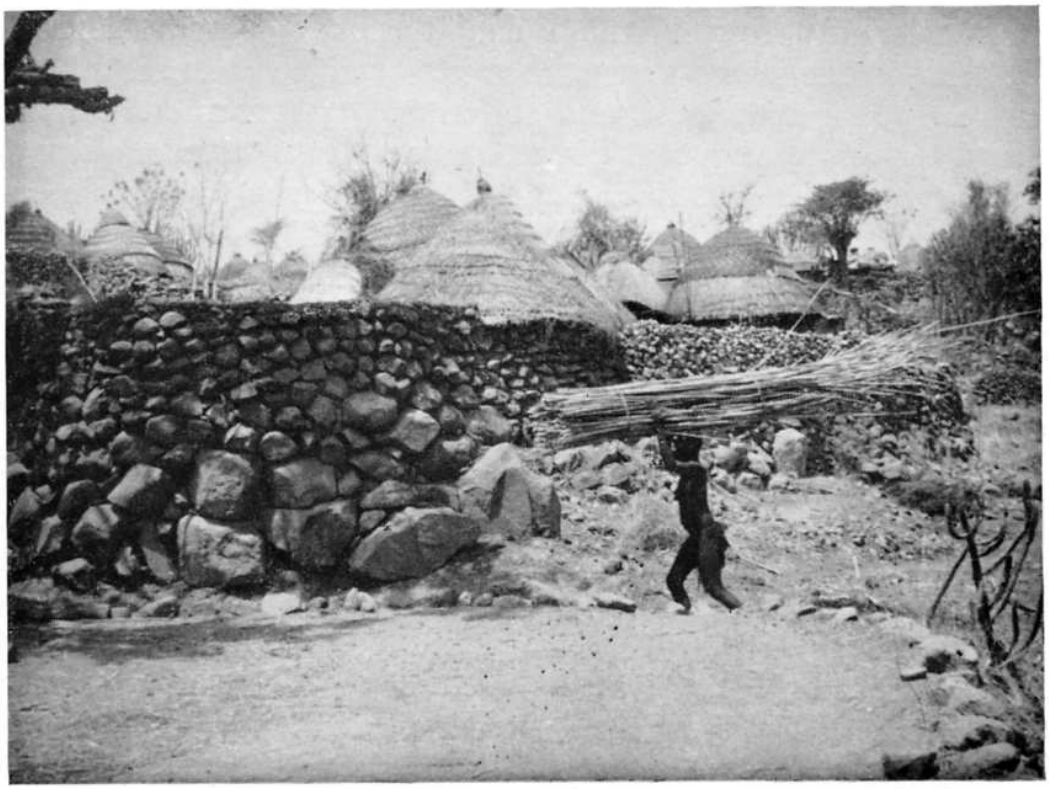
Sukur consists primarily of the hill village of that name and of the hamlet of Damayi on the north-eastern corner of the plateau. Recently settlement has taken place on the opposite (western) Mildu-Palam massif, where the villagers who fled from the tyranny of their chief Jainyi founded a colony of Sukur people. It is evident from the many empty compounds, now deserted and overgrown in the cornfields, that the original village of Sukur used to support a large population on its plateau, but the ravages of the notorious Hamman Yaji between 1915 and 1923 caused widespread death and emigration. At the end of his régime the population barely exceeded 1000[3] ; by 1953, when I was Touring Officer in the area, it had recovered to 5033.

But not on geophysical grounds alone does Sukur dominate the scene. Throughout the region of northern Adamawa, and among several peoples of the contiguous Kapsiki area of the French Cameroons, Sukur stands as "the supreme repository of the dynastic concept of divine kingship"[4]. No other pagan personality, even in this region of accepted pagan authoritarianism, enjoys such spiritual pre-eminence as the Llidi, the chief of Sukur. The power of this sacerdotal royalty reaches out among the 200,000 Marghi, Higi, Kapsiki and consanguineous peoples. All over the land the neo-biblical cry is heard : *sili ginda tidibu*, "his glory is great" —glory with its full scale Old Testament connotation of unquestioned religious authority.

HISTORY : PRE-1800

Before the rise of the Fulani in what was eventually to become, in the XIX century under Modibbo Adama, the kingdom of Fumbina, the Yedseram basin appears to have consisted of four independent pagan kingdoms: the Fali-Cheke axis of Mubi-Gella ; the Kilba-Marghi union based on Hong, which included martial Wamdeo and Uba ; Ngolo, now the Higi hills of Cubunawa focused on Bazza[5] ; and Sukur. To the south was the riverain Batta empire under Kokomi ; to the north-east, militant Mandara ; to the east, a Mabas dynasty that dominated the extensive Matakam plateau, and, beyond them, the virile Fali, based on their capital at Basina ; while, to the north-west, lay the Kanuri empire of Bornu and the Baghirmi kingdom.

Each of these four Yedseram valley states centred round a prominent mountain feature, whose ample plateauland and plentiful water resources offered to the plains farmer a tenable sanctuary against slave razzias, be they by Bornu, Mandara or Fulani cavalry. In contrast, the minor mountain peoples could not withstand more than a few days' investment.



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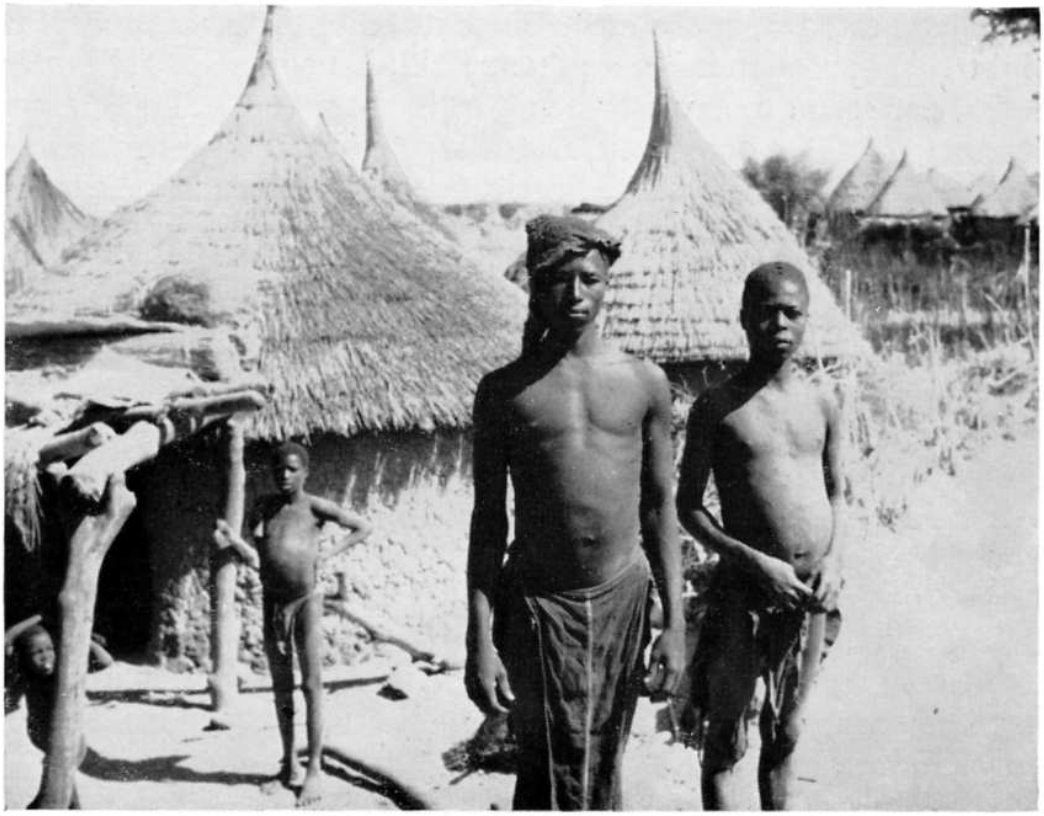

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History tells how the Fali round Mubi, like the Batta under chief Geloya on Bagale hill[6], resisted the Fulani for many years. The Higi round Mokolo, on the Bazza spur of Ngolo, remained comparatively unscathed, secure in their mountains and suffering perhaps an occasional slave raid but never any attempt at direct conquest until the fanatical Moda and Gulak campaigns of Lamido Sanda (1872-1890). Sukur, in her Olympic aloofness, remained completely inviolate, and it was not until the catastrophic interregnum of 1914-23 and the introduction of German rifles that she finally yielded to the Fulani overlord.

Sukur is the oldest of all the Marghi villages to the east of the river Yedseram, with the exception of the diminutive enclave of Majini on the northern foothills of Gulak. This was the original Marghi settlement in the area, but it shrank and its inhabitants retired to Shambula ("the people who have decreased") as Sukur expanded. Like her contemporary states of Hong, Ngolo and Mubi-Gella, the Sukur dynasty is intimately connected with the mystic shrine of Gudur, and before we turn to the history of Sukur a note on Gudur will be useful.

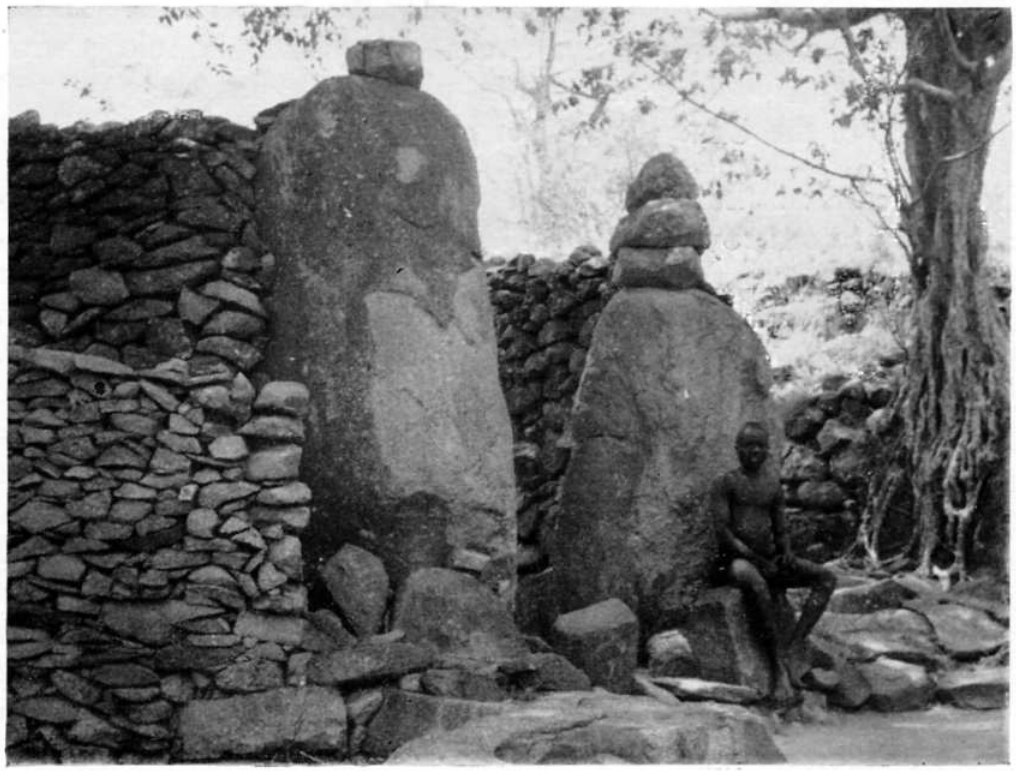
Gudur, also known as Mpsakali or Cakiri, is a village in the French Cameroons, in the *circonscription de Mokolo*, about half-way between Madagali and Marua. It was the cult-distributing centre for many Adamawa tribes, the home of a supreme priest-kingship system believed to be connected with the moon since its chief protagonist appeared only at night[7]. A jar containing a potent fluid, kept in a special hut behind iron doors, also seems to have played a part in the rites[8]. Should any uninitiated person open these doors, misfortune would spread over the area : pestilence would visit men and cattle, hurricanes would destroy villages and locusts would devour the harvests. Gudur figures prominently in the lore of such French Cameroons peoples as the Muffu and Guissiga, while so many of the northern Adamawa peoples claim descent from there through Sukur that it has been neatly labelled the pagan Mecca of pre-European Adamawa, with Sukur as its Medina. Even now a special compound is set aside at Sukur and at Wula Mango for lodging the envoys who tread the sacred road to Gudur, and in Sukur there live hereditary ambassadors to Gudur. These emissaries frequently journey to Gudur. Sometimes they travel as pilgrims to obtain fresh cults ; sometimes as suppliants, to restore the vigour of those already in the possession of the Llidi ; sometimes, in the case of a serious menace from leopards, all seven of these traditional ambassadors will be sent with a gift of thirty iron bars, for is it not known that in the beginning all the leopards were despatched from holy Gudur ?

It is curious that the language of Wula can be understood at Gudur but not that of Sukur, I was assured : isolated by her altitude, perhaps. Meek distinguishes many resemblances in Sukur vocabulary and phonology with Higi, Fali and Marghi ;[9] Greenberg has placed the language in the Bata-Marghi group of the Chad division of his Afro-asiatic class.[10]

The earliest rulers of Sukur are said to have been the Duwa or smiths. The origin of the present royal clan, the Gidam, is obscure, but tradition relates that three brothers from the kindred responsible for fixing the sacred hairlock of Mboi, the priest-chief of Gudur, emigrated to Sukur. The eldest, Sakul, leading a ram, was met by the daughter of the smith. She offered him water to quench his thirst and then ran back to the village to tell what she had seen. All the menfolk rushed out of their huts to meet this stranger, but they could not see him ; they could only hear his voice, promising them that he would make himself visible if they would produce the smith's daughter again. As soon as she appeared the stranger revealed himself. He was then led into the village and the maid was given him as his bride. The priests of the local cult had been reduced by death and the stranger was at once made priest-chief. He thereupon slew the ram at the threshold of his palace, and stepping over its body he entered the royal domain and ruled for many prosperous years. Another legend, based on essentially the same story, relates the dynasty to a slave of the Mai of Bornu. It may be noted that many legends treat of a founder who was a hunter and therefore a supplier of meat, and that in Adamawa the ceremonial stepping over a sacrifice is a common feature of dynastic installation. Sakul's two brothers travelled on beyond Sukur, Ntwokh to found the Wula dynasty and Gulak to found the town bearing his name today.

There is yet another legend about the founding of Gulak.[11] Sira, a son of the chief of Sukur, was born with only one testicle. This condition of being *yisuva* is looked on with abhorrence by the Marghi as an omen that the deformed child will bring death to his father.[12] Should an ox or a stallion be born with the same deformity a Marghi will at once sell the beast. For this reason Sira, when he reached the age of puberty, was rejected by his father and exiled to Gulak, where he founded the dynasty. Later he was reconciled with his father, who acknowledged him as the *Til*, or chief of Gulak, and caused a special path to be built over the mountains to join Sukur and Gulak. Traces of this are still visible to the industrious investigator who cares to sweat his way up Gulak hill, and today the Arnado Gulak retains a special position among the Marghi hierarchy.[13]

By the end of the 18th century Sukur appears to have reached her prime



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and become the foremost kingdom in the Yedseram valley. This position, however, was not due to spiritual supremacy alone. There is every reason to believe that until the rise of the Mandara empire Sukur ranked as a considerable military power. From their mountain stronghold the Sukur army raided the Matakam along the escarpment to the north and east. The present Llidi assured me that they used to raid as far as Marua : it was here that they captured the inhabitants of Damayi, renowned for the excellence of their dancing. These people were taken back to Sukur and settled in the hamlet that still bears their name, so that the Llidi might for ever after be able to find amusement in their exceptional dances and the rhythms of their tall, tripod drums.

Local traditions about Sukur's military might receive strong support from the visible evidence of the unique paved causeway that leads from the north-western gate to the Magar valley nearly 2000ft. below. Five to ten feet wide, it is almost two miles in length, and it furnished this impregnable fortress with a passage for its cavalry to clatter down the escarpment and harry the plainsmen. This truly remarkable causeway, which even now ranks as a feat of engineering by its easy gradient and by the span and smoothness of the paving stones, many of which weigh hundreds of pounds, is said to have been built by countless gangs of slaves. These captives were mostly Matakam, though claims are made to have enslaved some Fulani. The causeway was planned and completed during the reigns of Duvu and Fula, the second and third Llidis.[14]

These [two] Llidis also built the royal compound. It occupies today half an acre, which is twelve or fifteen times the size of a normal house. It is surrounded by a six to eight foot high wall built up with unmortared stones, and boasts a paved pathway. In the rains the Llidi uses the eastern entrance and the western during the dry season. Outside the compound are two enormous monoliths known commemoratively as Fula and Duvu. One is about twelve feet high, the other eight, with a circumference of perhaps fifteen feet. They are said to have been hewn from Kamale, the fantastic 700ft. sheer finger-peak that dominates the frontier escarpment a few miles to the south. One legend has it that these were brought to Sukur by two of the first inhabitants, who were always quarrelling about which was the stronger : this feat of strength resolved the argument. Another legend claims that one of the early Llidi commanded that Kamale peak should be brought to Sukur. The *samari* marched forth and started to hew out the base of the mountain. When they were nearly through, they sent back to Sukur two pillars to show the Llidi that the rest of the rock would soon be his. But that night the quarrying was mysteriously filled

in, and the men of Sukur gave up the task, contenting themselves with the two pillars.

Stone architecture is, indeed, among the most impressive features of remarkable Sukur. It is evident in all the compounds, the walls and many of the paths through the village, besides the great causeway. Such architecture is rare in Nigeria, and in Adamawa the only other place where I have seen it is in the Higi villages tucked away high above Michika, rarely visited by Government officials. In Sukur the huts are constructed of stones laid without mortar one on top of the other, and in the construction of the entrance porches some very skilful work obtains. Many of the huts have wooden planks laid across the stone walls to provide a store under a grass roofing.

HISTORY : THE MODERN PERIOD

Barth, in his 1851 passage through the Marghi country, wrote :—[15]

> This part of the mountain-chain forms the natural stronghold of a pagan king whom my Kanuri companion constantly called "Mai Sugur", but whose proper name, or title, seems to be "La".

In a footnote he adds :—

> Sugur is said to be fortified by nature, there being only four entrances between the rocky ridges which surround it. The prince of Sugur overawes all the petty neighbouring chiefs ; and he is said to possess a great many idols, small round stones, to which the people sacrifice fowls of red, black and white colour, and sheep with a red line on the back.

Sukur next appears in Adamawa history in 1902. Ardo Bakari, the District Head of Madagali, fled to the hills when the Germans under Dominik threatened to depose him and substitute his son Hamman Yaji in his stead. Bakari besought the Llidi, Kuratu, to hide his Fulani followers in the mountains. Kuratu agreed, planning to kill his guests. Meanwhile the German patrol had doubled back to Madagali from Dikwa. Dominik climbed Sukur hill, arrested the Llidi and captured the Fulani refugees. Bakari was shot and Hamman Yaji installed as District Head.

It is significant that Sukur's first contact with Europeans should have involved Hamman Yaji, for it was he who subjugated and ravished this pagan kingdom with the help of European arms. A few quotations, relevant to Sukur affairs, from that remarkable document, Hamman Yaji's diary,[16] will reveal the extent of his troops' slave-raiding and pillaging :—

1912, Dec. 27 : The pagans of Sukur brought me two cows as a peace offering.

1913, May 12 : I sent my soldiers to Sukur and they destroyed the house of the *arnado* and took a horse and seven slave girls and burned their houses.

July 20 : I sent my people to Sukur and we killed fifteen and wounded very many and captured fifteen.

1916, Oct. 19 : I sent my soldiers to Sukur and they captured eighteen slaves.

1917, Aug. 16 : I sent Fad-el-Allah with his men to raid Sukur. They captured eighty slaves, of whom I gave away forty. We killed twenty-seven men and women and seventeen children.

1920, Oct. 23 : While I was at Nyibango I heard that the pagan named Diskin had raided Wappara, so I made arrangements and sent Fad-el-Allah with his men to raid Sukur. They captured from them thirty-nine slaves and twenty-four goats and killed five men.

The murder done by Hamman Yaji's rifles is equalled only by the scale of the brutality practised by his soldiers. The following instances were told to me by several old men of Sukur. They correspond only too well with similar tales from other pagan peoples in the area and with what was guessed by, rather than known to, Government before it deposed Hamman Yaji in 1927 ; there is no reason to disbelieve these eye-witness accounts.

On one raid Hamman Yaji's soldiers cut off the heads of the dead pagans in front of the Llidi's house, threw them into a hole in the ground, set them alight and cooked their food over the flames. Another time they forced the wives of the dead Sukur men to come forward and collect their husbands' heads in a calabash ; on yet another occasion, to take all the heads down to Madagali for the Fulani to see. One witness told me how he had seen children have a coil of wire hammered through their ears and jaws by the soldiers, while another related how, when Hamman Yaji learned of the great significance attached to the Sukur burial rites, he ordered his troops to cut up the bodies of the dead so that they could not be given a decent burial. There is nothing to be gained in quoting more illustrations of such bestiality, save to record the testimony of eye-witnesses and to prove, if anything more were needed, the cruelty of Hamman Yaji's régime in northern Adamawa.

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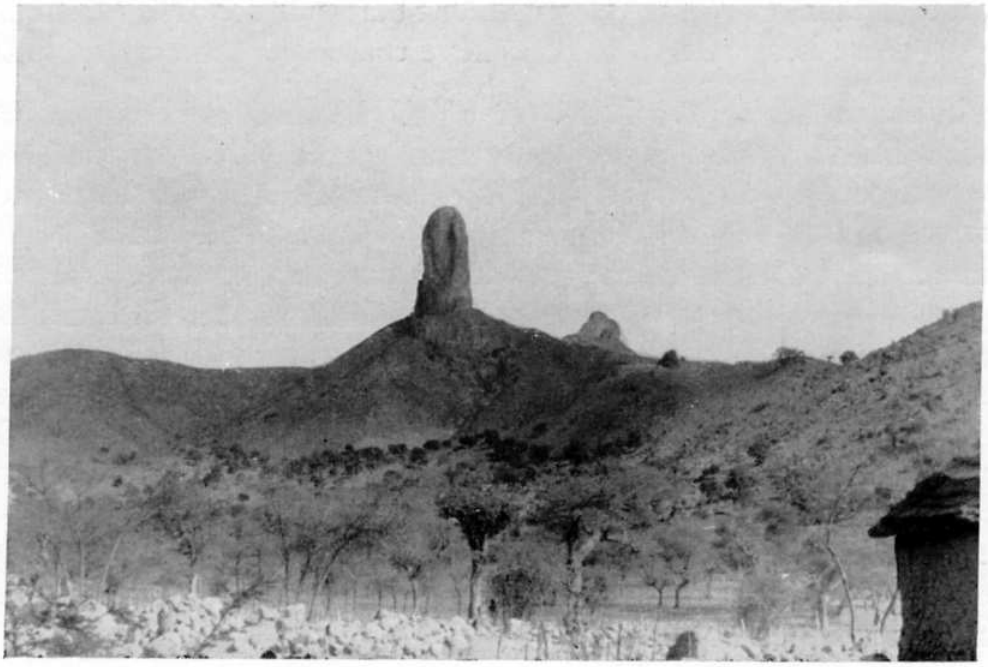

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We have seen (for example, in the last-quoted entry from Hamman Yaji's diary) that the Sukur people now and again retaliated. There is a tradition that, on another occasion, the pagans ambushed a party of fifteen soldiers sent from Madagali to capture some Kanuri traders who had boldly brought four cows and some potash to Sukur. They succeeded in killing them all, as the troops had unloaded on their triumphant journey back to the plains. Hamman Yaji's retribution naturally followed on a full military scale, and against arms of precision even pagan courage was hopeless.

The Llidi, Diskin, fled to bush when Hamman Yaji's first raiding party entered Sukur in October, 1912. He returned a few months later and organised the assassination of the puppet ruler left behind by Hamman Yaji. For a while Sukur regained semi-independence. Then in 1923 Hamman Yaji invited Diskin to Madagali, telling him he wished to discuss their position *vis-à-vis* the new British administration and guaranteeing him a safe conduct. On the way down to the plains Diskin was ambushed and shot. Thereupon a scurrilous member of the royal family, Jainyi, who had purchased Hamman Yaji's favour, proclaimed himself Llidi. With his divine authority backed up by Hamman Yaji's no less effective temporal strength Jainyi found the electoral council willing to give its cowed assent to his accession.

Though the British assumed responsibility for this area of the Northern Cameroons in 1921-23, Sukur remained, thanks to Hamman Yaji's efforts, a secret unrevealed till 1927. In parenthesis, one may wonder why a reading of Barth's *Travels and Discoveries* did not give rise to awkward administrative questions about the fate of this erstwhile powerful pagan kingdom. With Jainyi on the throne to send him what slaves he wanted, Hamman Yaji could ignore the existence of the village : Yola lore maintains that even the Lamido of Adamawa had never heard of it ! Its name appeared on no tax-roll and it was only by chance that the Touring Officer of the Northern Mandated area heard of its name from a Fulani *iekada* (unofficial but important member of a District Head's entourage). Even after Hamman Yaji's exile, Sukur remained unvisited for some years, for the new District Head was fully occupied in abolishing the more obvious abuses of the Madagali set-up ; while the Administration found nothing to complain of in Sukur, whose Llidi was so prompt in fulfilling the essentials of pagan administration in the Adamawa of the period, namely the collection of tax and the rounding up of wanted, fugitive criminals.

Jainyi kept the collection of tax in his own hands, refusing to allow his *bulama* or ward-heads to touch the money. He gathered every penny

personally from each taxpayer, paying in the total village assessment to the District Head of Madagali and pocketing the substantial balance. In prosperous years this plan worked satisfactorily, but in 1933-34 the crash came. There was an acute shortage of currency in Northern Adamawa and in consequence the tax money was not forthcoming with its customary expedition from Sukur. The Touring Officer had to make two visits to the village and enforce considerable distraint. This was followed by prolonged inquiries, in the middle of which the Llidi fled to Humzu in French territory.[17] For a brief interregnum the Council ruled, and in early 1934 Maltai, the present Llidi, was appointed.

Maltai was not *prima facie* eligible, as he was a *Madugo* (a royal scion whose father died without attaining the throne) instead of the desired *Maina*[18] (an heir-presumptive, as the son of one who had ruled). The Sukur council argued that the essentials of nomination by proper electoral authority and of ritual installation *comme il faut* had not been observed with Jainyi : without the latter's trickery, Maltai's father, Banga, would have succeeded his brother Diskin. Furthermore, they pointed out that had it not been for the interference of Hamman Yaji, which enabled Jainyi to advance his generation before its turn, the succession would rightly have passed to Maltai. As a final argument, they quoted precedents to show that it was permissible to transfer the kingship to another branch of the royal house after the community had suffered a series of public misfortunes, such as Hamman Yaji's reign of terror, the locust invasion of the '30s, and the recent tax trouble that had brought in its wake a wrathful Touring Officer and painful distraint of property.[19]

When I last talked to Maltai, in 1954, he had completed his twentieth year as Llidi, and apart from a little rheumatism he continued actively to climb up and down the Sukur massif. The only serious shock that had occurred during his reign was in 1953, when a zealously democratic section of the Madagali District Council brought forward a motion to abolish the custom of offering the Llidi the leg of every beast that was slain. The Sukur members and the orthodox Marghi threw up their hands in horror and swore that should such an impious recommendation be implemented they would have no alternative but to perform an equally sacrilegious act by circumcising the Llidi and thereby destroying his divinity. The Llidi's party won the day.

DIVINE KINGSHIP OF THE LLIDI

In this historical review of Sukur mention has been made of the spiritual power of the Llidi. The prestige he enjoys as the vicar of the gods is enormous, stretching far beyond the physical boundaries of his position as

village-head of Sukur. To the Marghi, Higi and kindred peoples, the Llidi is the agent of the great priest of Gudur, the ultimate fount of all *tsafi* and spiritual authority. Some recent examples of the Llidi's immense power and prestige will help to illustrate this.

In 1930, at the beginning of the scourge of locusts, the Llidi collected one penny from every male in the Mandara region and from many villages beyond, French and British. The purpose of this fund was to enable the Sukur smiths to smelt enough iron so that their colleagues at Gudur might construct a cauldron which would confine all the locusts in the world. The people of Sukur itself made a special contribution of one gown, one sheep and one *mangul* (cone) of salt each, some of which were sent to Gudur while the rest were retained by the Llidi and his priest-councillors. The plague, however, continued on its usual seven-year cycle, and voices were not lacking to explain the failure of the Llidi's supernatural powers by the "regrettable" British prohibition of the final rite of sacrificing two virgins. In 1935-36, as the plague drew to its end, the Llidi gave another demonstration of his authority : a sacrifice of thanksgiving was to be made whereat every male should kill a cock and every female should crush an egg between her thigh and her belly. The message was passed from market to market, well beyond the realm of Sukur, so that the Touring Officers of the time record in their 1936 diaries an unprecedented shortage of eggs and chickens. As a further example, the Llidi once ordained that every Wednesday should be observed as the sabbath when none should toil, and for many months not a man worked his farm on Wednesdays.

As a divine being the Llidi used never to be allowed to eat in public, nor leave his village. These, like many of the Sukur customs, are passing into desuetude. His meals, however, are still cooked and served by a special wife, and it is taboo for the dishes to be placed on the ground ; they must be set in a particular tripod. When the Llidi has finished eating, he coughs, presumably a carry-over from the practice of eating alone. Other royal taboos which are now lapsing include his living entirely on beer when his favourite wife was in a menstruous condition or when summoned by the District Head to Madagali—the latter custom perhaps derives from a safeguard against being poisoned by the Fulani of Hamman Yaji's type. Analogous, too, is the earlier rite of secreting the Llidi's urine and spittle when he was away from Sukur, to be carried back to the village and thereby thwart any attempt made to harm his person.

It is not surprising that, as a corollary to this immense divine authority, the Llidi enjoys a considerable amount of political and secular importance. The Llidi may do no manual work, and even today his farm in the centre

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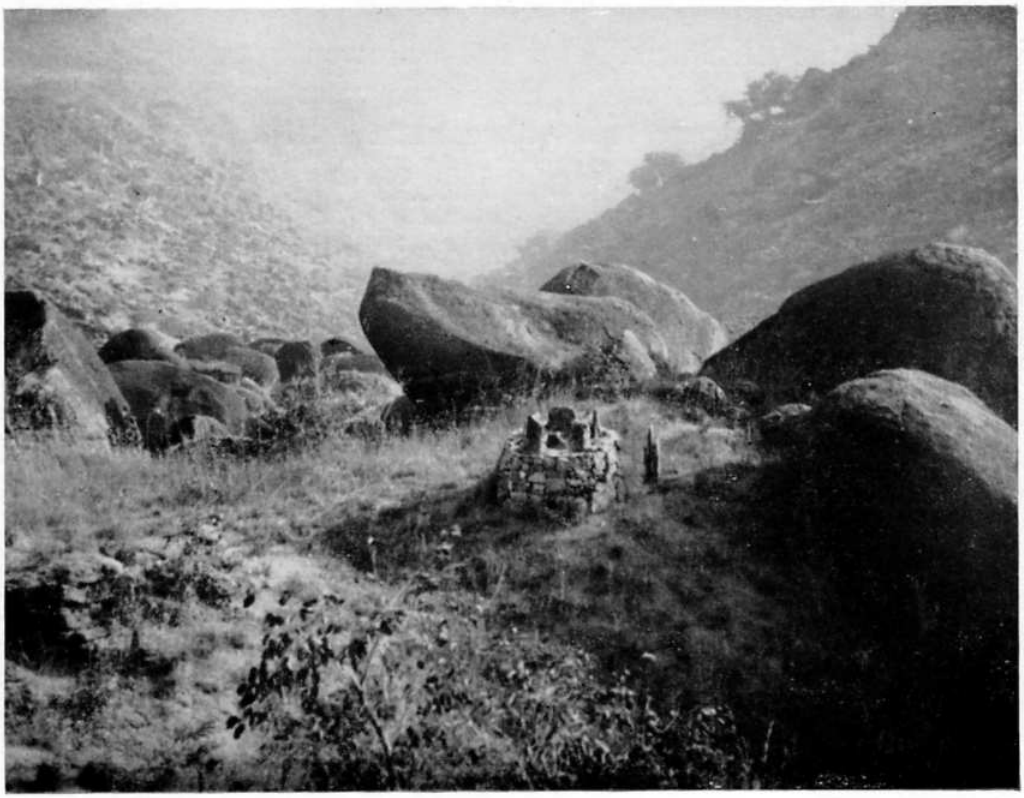

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of the village is cheerfully cultivated for him by the whole community. At one time it was planted with a special guinea-corn which was prohibited to all but the Llidi and his family, but nowadays every kind of corn and maize can be seen on the hillside. The royal farms were, of course, formerly tended by slaves, and the whole village used to turn out for planting, mid-season hoeing, harvesting and threshing on the Llidi's farm. The whole operation had to be completed between sunrise and sunset, and should any commoner dare to return to his compound before the work was done his goods and chattels would be seized by the royal attendants. It is said that the Llidi alone may eat guinea-fowl. The inhabitants of Sukur refrain from killing game animals in the bush because they believe that their wives, if pregnant, will suffer abortion, or if already mothers, will lose their children within a month.

The people of Sukur look on their chief as the pivot of their prosperity, the fount of their weal or woe, the source of their rain, their corn and their harvests. To fulfil his responsibilities the Llidi supplements his Gudur *tsafi* powers by divination. The usual medium among the Northern Adamawa pagans is the landcrab.[20] Meek gives a good account of the practice :—

> Three pieces of nut shell are placed near the crab's hole, together with a number of stalks of grass, each stalk representing some question or individual. Thus if a man had died his friends might ask a diviner to ascertain how he had died, and the diviner would assign certain causes of death (e.g., witchcraft, poison, natural causes) to each stalk of grass. If it had already been determined that witchcraft had been the cause of death the diviner would be asked to name the witch. Names of suspected individuals would be assigned to the stalks of grass. The answer is obtained by watching to see if the crab deposits a piece of shell on one of the stalks of grass. In order to obtain a clear decision the crab is expected to deposit the shell on the same stalk of grass three times running.[21]

On my last visit to Sukur I had an interesting experience of this. I had arrived at Madagali, urgently and without notice, late at night from Mubi, eighty miles away, and early the next morning decided to climb up to Sukur. The whole idea was spontaneous and no one knew of my intention till I drove off to the foot of the Sukur massif, about twelve miles distant. There was a heavy harmattan blowing and visibility was poor. Another D.O. and I clambered up the magnificent paved causeway in this thick harmattan mist, so dense that it was quite impossible for anybody to have spotted us till we were right in the village. We found the Llidi poring

over his crab in its calabash of damp sand. Without looking up he said : "Half an hour ago my crab told me of the approach of fair-skinned strangers" . . . Fulani or Europeans, that is.

There is a current belief that the Llidi continues to exercise his unopposed right of *jus primae noctis* with the brides of Sukur. Certainly his impeccable arrangements of carriers, supplies and rest-house labour suggest a feudal though benevolent despotism in the village. Within the last few years he is known to have levied a percentage fee on payments made by the Touring Officer for supplies and for repairs to the rest-house, and the lodging fees at the latter are received by the *Sarkin barriki*, or rest-house keeper, only in his capacity as treasurer to the Llidi. In Sukur this appears to be no more disliked than was the rendering of tithes to the church in mediaeval England, and only an intimate friendship with one of the *samari* (village teenagers), cultivated over a number of visits, enabled me to learn of, *inter alia*, this practice, accepted and approved in Sukur. Naturally, a blind administrative eye was turned in this case.

But undoubtedly the most important political element in the Llidi's status is his position *vis-á-vis* the other Marghi chiefs. Gulak, Duhu, Palam, Mildu, Wula, and even some Higi villages such as Kamale, are among those who, though they choose their own *Til*, do not recognise him as confirmed in his appointment as village-head until the Llidi has given his official approval by conferring the sacred *zonko* or hairlock.

This *zonko* may be that of the previous Til, as is the case among the western Marghi. Among the Madagali Marghi, however, it is more usual for the Llagama, the Llidi's envoy, to shave the head of the new Til and leave just a *zonko*. At Gulak the late Til's hairlock is cut off, placed in a bag and hung up in the royal compound, while the new chief sacrifices a black goat to it. While the Llidi himself never confers the hairlock on a Til, sending his Llagama to perform the ceremony in exchange for a quantity of presents, for an installation at Gulak or Duhu his royal, ancestral drums and dynastic horns are specially brought from Sukur. *Wurum*, the secret iron sceptre, is never allowed to leave the hilltop.

The hairlock of the Llidi himself is particularly sacred. Into it have been plaited the hairs of his ancestors, which must under no circumstances be seen by the human eye. Tradition relates how the Fulani adventurer Bauchi Gordi, plundering the Mubi area at the beginning of the 19th century just before the Jihad was declared, made public his suspension of the priest-chief of Muviya by forcibly shaving the pagan chief's hairlock. The Llidi told me that he wore his cap even when asleep, and when his scalp is shaven he carefully twists his cap round the inviolate hairlock so

that it is never exposed. On the occasion of my final visit to Sukur, I asked the Llidi's permission (I knew him well by then) to photograph him and some of the wonders of his mountain stronghold. He spent twenty minutes in dressing, his servants helping him to heap on gown after gown, with a rich magenta one on top. The *ensemble* was surmounted by a tall, bright scarlet fez, without a tassel but swathed in yards of white cloth. After the ceremony, the Llidi confided in me, no courtier would be allowed to help him disrobe until he had privately taken off his outer fez and adjusted his hairlock.

THE COURTIERS AND THE SMITHING GUILDS

The welfare of Sukur is in the hands of a number of courtiers and priests, grandiosely referred to as councillors. Only in religious matters is a certain amount of conciliar control exercised over the Llidi ; otherwise, no local government enthusiast would describe the hierarchical set-up as democratic. In this context, I should like to make a general observation on the authority systems obtaining in pre-European pagan Adamawa. It would seem, by and large, that the central authority characterised by the priest-chief and his hereditary councillors was never expected to prevent crime or accept responsibility for the good behaviour of the extended families unless there was group violence ; arrest, injunction, execution of a judgement, all were foreign to the traditional pagan authority system. The concept of social discipline and responsibility that the British administration demanded from its Native Authorities and independent pagan chieftainships was totally alien to the pre-European pagan culture, with the result that its implementation was a slow process, accompanied by many setbacks and disappointments. Nowhere has this been clearer than in the northern Adamawa districts, where the pattern of court ineffectiveness and refusal to arrest malefactors has been evident right through from the Za incidents of the early thirties to the present day.

From notes made at a time when the conciliar structure at Sukur was in effective force,[22] and subsequently rechecked, the following appear to have been the main officeholders :—

Llidi.		Divine king.
Lluffu.	Councillor.	President of the council. Representative of the commoners. Comparable with position of the Waziri in the typical Moslem emirate. Casting vote in election of Llidi.

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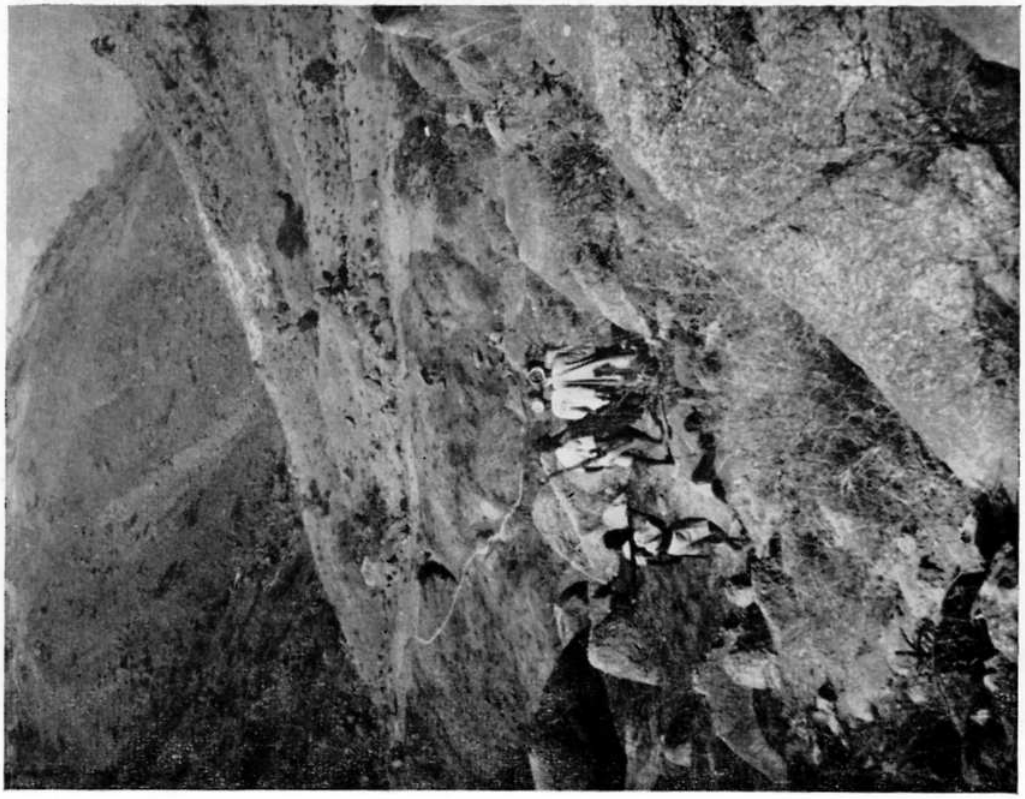

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Makarama I.	Councillor	In charge of royal ward in Sukur village. Chief executive officer. At the coronation it is he who hands the Llidi the royal gown.
Makarama II.	,,	Head of the *talakawa* or commoners. In the days when it was taboo for the Llidi to visit certain quarters in the village,[23] the two Makarama acted as his executive officers in these wards.
Medella.	,,	War leader. Priest of Tson cult.
Llagama.	,,	Head of the barber smiths. At an installation it is he who confers the *zonko* on the Llidi ; also on minor chiefs in the area when the Llidi has approved their appointment.
Fate-Llidi.	,,	Llidi's titular "father". (No man can be made Llidi while his natural father still lives). He is expected to speak to the Llidi without restraint, checking any undesirable tendencies in the Llidi's rule by forthright, paternal reproof.
Barguma.	,,	Responsible for the funeral arrangements of the Llidi undertaken by the Dainkirba (see below). Supervises the tombs of and the sacrificial offerings to former Llidis. Is also comptroller of the royal household.
Dallatu.	Priest.	Priest of Diba (harvest) cult.
Lli-Suku.	,,	Priest of Gumzum cult. Royal butcher.
Mbusofai.	,,	Priest of Mijirik (fertility) cult.
Disku.	,,	Priest of Tson cult. Responsible for the women of the royal compound.
Dainkirba.	,,	Head of the funerary smiths. Appoints the day for the start of the bull-killing ceremonies. Lays out and buries the dead Llidi. Forbidden to visit royal compound when the Llidi is alive.

Among other important office-holders note must be made of :—

Birma.	In charge of royal concubines and children.
Tdif.	Personal attendant of Llidi, like an acolyte.
Lligum.	Chief drummer.
Zarma.	Royal herald.

All nobles had the right of direct approach to the Llidi, but commoners had to seek audience through the Barguma or one of the two Makarama ; or privily through one of the eunuchs on guard at the palace.

The two smithing guilds, the funerary and the barber, enjoyed special status. It is a tenable thesis that the local monopoly of iron may have contributed to Sukur's pre-eminence in the past.[24] Today Sukur-smelted iron bars, known as *dubul*, can be found in any pagan market of northern Adamawa, and if no longer legal tender they nevertheless have an accepted value (about 1/3) and are a necessary element in brideprice.[25] The Tuva kindred look after the forging and also have the responsibility of the hairlock ceremony. Smiths normally refrain (or are more likely restrained) from marriage with non-smithing families, and, as among most Marghi, they are regarded as social outcasts : nobody will eat with them, and their liking for unclean animals (only a smith would eat the spitting-cobra I shot at Gulak) emphasises their untouchability. Exceptionally, the Llidi may marry the virgin daughter of a smith, on the grounds that as neither tills the soil they are both of comparable consanguinity. As monopolist undertakers, the income of the funerary guild is considerable. They are feared because of their secret formulae for brewing potent medicines.

It has already been noted that during a chief's lifetime entry into the royal compound by the Dainkirba was forbidden. Neither may the Llidi enter the Dainkirba's house. From this it followed that the Dainkirba's compound was recognised as an asylum for any murderer who fled from the plains and was able to reach the plateau before capture.

The Llagama, head of the barber smiths, was the principal castrator, a profession held by some in northern Adamawa not yet to be quite extinct. Barth writes how in Kukawa:

> I had also some interesting pagan instructors, among whom I will only mention Agid Burku, a very handsome youth, but who had undergone the horrible process of castration. The abolition of this practice in the Mohammedan world ought to be the first object of Christian governments and missionaries . . .[26]

In West Africa, the leading exponents of this art were the Mossi, but in this part of the northern Cameroons the most skilled operator was the Llagama of Sukur. His work reached a peak during the reign of Hamman Yaji at Madagali, though there has always been a pair of eunuchs, the Birma, on guard at the royal compound to look after the royal children : to enter the children's hut, perched on a virtually inaccessible rock above the palace, I had to pass through the narrow quarters of the Birma. Under Hamman Yaji the male prisoners, mostly from Matakam and Moda, were sent up to Sukur for gelding before they entered his compound as custodians of the harem. Two such victims were alive when I was last in Sukur ; both had been castrated and then appointed as *dogarai* or royal bodyguards. Behind the Llidi's house is a small rock on which the operation was always performed. An eye-witness described how the wretched man was placed sitting on the edge of this stone, his hands bound to a stake in front of him and his legs forced wide apart by four slaves, with another four grasping his body in a manner reminiscent of the way in which a boy is manhandled in the typical circumcision operations of the Adamawa tribes.

The Romans distinguished three types of eunuchs : *castrati*, who were deprived of all external generative organs ; *spadones*, who retained the penis but lost both testicles by excision ; and *thlibiae*, whose testicles were artificially crushed. At the Sukur surgery (if the word is not too magnanimous) the practice was to cut out the testicles with a small iron blade and then pour hot oil on the wound. If it healed at all, the eunuch would be on duty within two weeks. More often the victim died, with as little ado as his fellow-sufferers in the northern deserts who were buried waist-deep in sand to allow the wound to heal, or those in the Orient who were hopefully planted in a dunghill for nature to do her best. Mbuka and Dali (the present Llagama) were acknowledged as experts, but the casualty rate was enormous. They told me they expected to lose 90% of their cases. This is a figure that tallies with Barth's estimate that "scarcely one in ten survives" and with the report given to Bovill in Kano that out of 100 Ningi pagans castrated on one occasion for the Kano harem only ten survived the ordeal.[27]

ANNUAL CEREMONIES

The annual ceremony of charcoal-burning, *Zoku*, takes place towards the end of the rains. After a sacrifice by the Llidi, the womenfolk are sent out to collect iron, and when the heavy August-September rains have washed it out the Llidi commands it to be brought in. In many of the

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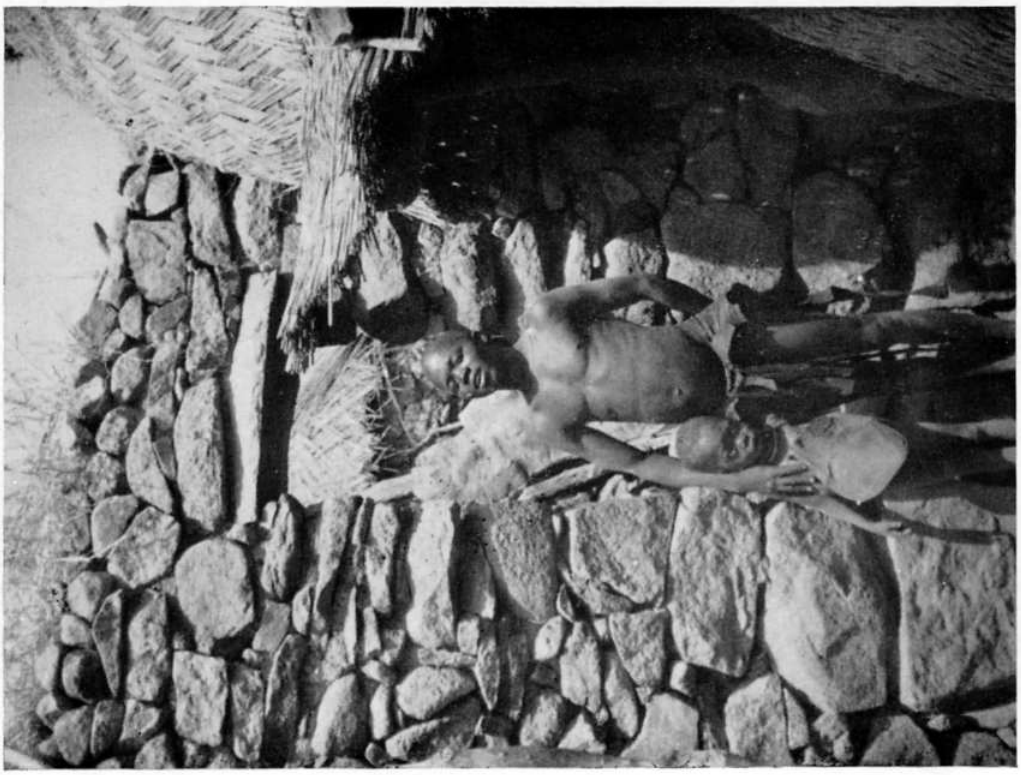


11.

plains Marghi villages the people used to keep a special envoy for Sukur, known as the Dokara. Among his duties of mediator with the Llidi, for which he was rewarded with diplomatic immunity, was that of arranging this charcoal-burning for Sukur's industry, in return for which he was paid about forty iron bars.

The *Yawal diba* shrine is a pot resting under a large tree at the intersection of the main paths in the centre of the main village. The first beer brewed from the freshly-harvested guinea-corn is poured into this pot. It is sealed till the following harvest, when the seal is broken by the cult's priest and the beer inspected. If it has fermented and risen, it augurs well for the year ahead. The old brew is then drunk by the elders and a new lot poured in.

The *Tson* cult has its shrine, also a hollow stone, on the inside terrace by the south-eastern porch of the Llidi's compound. Meek has given an account of the ceremony. Part of the harvest brew is dedicated at the *Yawal diba* festival, one of the three principal agricultural festivals of the eastern Marghi, and is stealthily imbibed by favoured youths during the dry season.

The cult of the *Buge* has its shrine in the building behind the Government rest-house, made of stone and mud, rectangular in design. It is unroofed, though a grass mat may be laid over it during the cult's festival at the end of the rains. The building is then covered with gowns and the people dance in front of it and drink beer copiously. Inside, in a splendid solitude perhaps symbolic, and certainly reminiscent, of his territory's aloofness, sits the Llidi, drinking his beer, unseen but spying on his subjects through the loopholes in the mud walls. Close to this building is yet another shrine, that of *Palta*. This is a hollow stone which is filled with beer at harvest time, its top cemented over with clay till the following harvest. Taking a tip from MacBride, I asked to be allowed to look inside : though it was but February, the stone had already been drained !

The shrine of *Gumzum* is the stone in the royal compound. On this all animals destined for the Llidi are slaughtered.

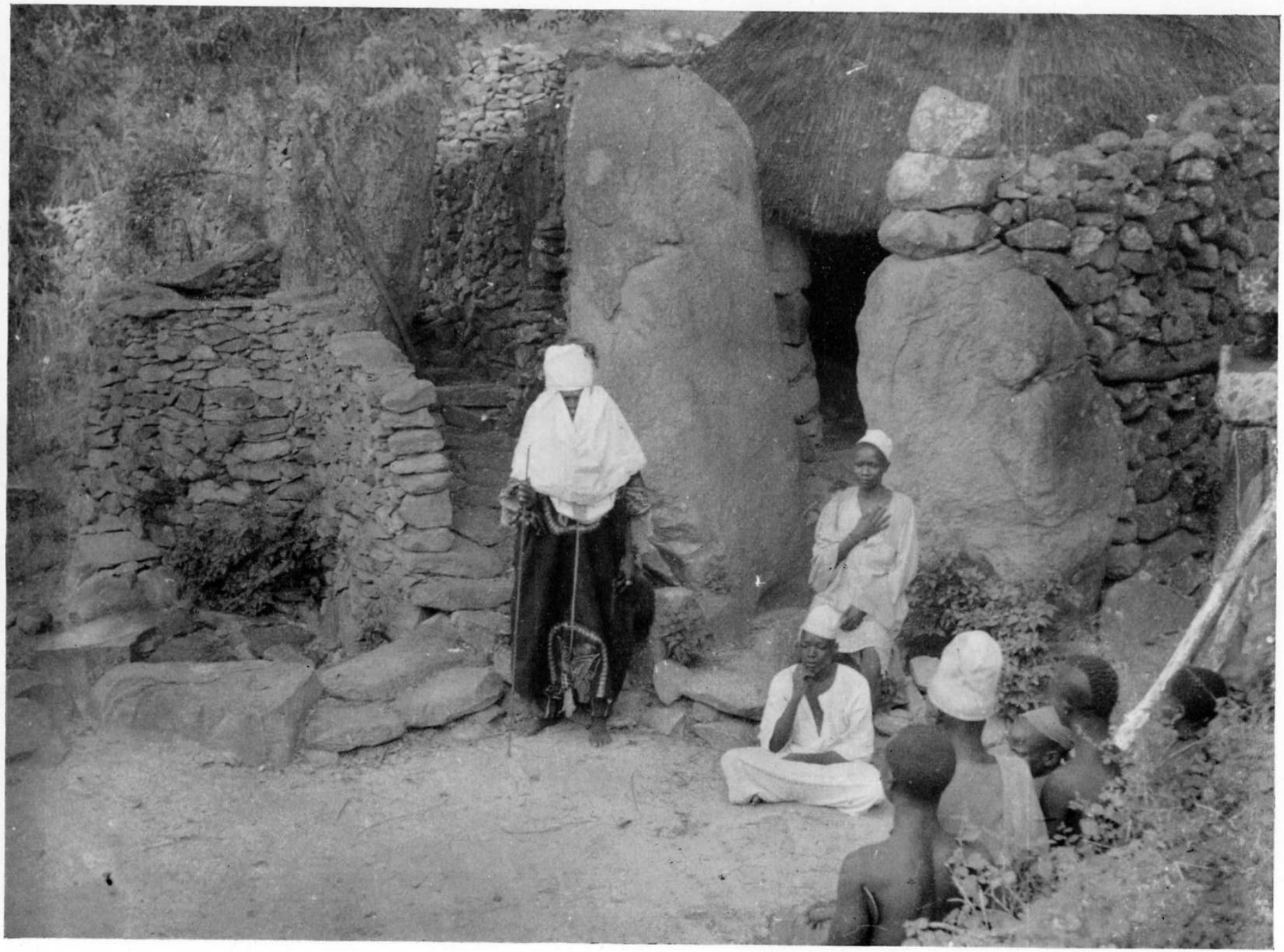
Special mention should be made of the unique bull-killing ceremony that obtains in Sukur during the *Yawal diba* festival. Young bulls are bought from the Fulani when they move their herds to the hill pastures round Madagali in the harsher months of the dry season. These are fattened in special subterranean chambers abutting the porch of a compound. The floor of the stalls that I looked at were well below ground level, with an opening in the *zaure* wall through which the bull was fed

from inside the porch. They also had an outside trap through which staled bedding and dung was removed. Penned thus for two years in a semi-cellar, fattened with grass, fodder and leguminous shrubs, the bulls grow so sleek that their eyes close up with fatness and they can hardly stand. On the day of the ceremonial slaughter appointed by the Dainkirba, the walls of the cattle stall are broken to let the bulls out. They are paraded round Sukur. In the evening the killing takes place. For this ritual slaughter, the bull is bound in a sitting position, its head strained forward and upward by ropes attached to a crossbar. As soon as the exposed throat is stabbed, the wound is pressed tight to prevent the escape of blood and death is caused by internal haemorrhage—a slower and more painful method of slaughtering a bull than that of Moslem butchers or Mexican matadors.

Dancing follows, in which the smith fraternity, distinguished by their tall white caps, take a prominent part. The meat is handed over to the relatives of the bull-owner, while the bones, marrow, offal and blood are pounded into a paste to be stored in pots and used as a relish throughout the coming months. The first day's killing is done by the Bakka ward by right. The other wards follow in turn until the final day, which is reserved for the royal ward ; the last bull of all must be slaughtered by the Llidi's son. A householder who keeps a bull is regarded as bringing honour to his ward as well as confirming his wealth and social standing. People will often contribute communally to buy a bull between three or four compounds. Womenfolk are wont to abuse their neighbours whose husbands cannot claim the social prestige of owning a bull, so that when a man does buy a bull there is another feast to celebrate the purchase. In Sukur the ceremony takes place every two years[28]; in neighbouring Wula and Vemngo there is a similar festival, taking place in the intervening years ; both these villages, however, observe the ceremony in the same year, leaving to Sukur the pride of holding its own festival without a rival attraction.

The bull-killing ceremony is still not widely known of, even in Adamawa. It is also practised among the neighbouring Matakam, and since MacBride and Kulp first described the ceremony in the mid-thirties I have come across two further published accounts of the Matakam festival.[29]

Finally on ceremonies, a word about Sukur's burial customs. In common with the practice of most of the pagan peoples that straddle the Anglo-French border in this region, burial does not take place until three days after death. Commoners are buried in a shaft chamber grave, men being placed with the head to the west and lying flexed on the left side so



13.

that they face north. A male goatskin is wrapped about the loins and a female goatskin round the head. Women are buried in the same way, except that strings of bark are tied round the wrist, with "tails" at the back and front, instead of the goatskins. A thong binds the mouth to the back of the neck, crossing over the mouth itself. Earth is heaped into the shaft without any attempt being made to prevent it touching the body.

Chiefs are buried in the Pabir fashion. A grave is dug, flagon-shaped, into which the body is lowered on an iron bier in a sitting position. The head is kept erect by means of an iron prong, the spike of which is stuck into the wall of the grave, and the arms are extended with the help of more iron staves under each elbow and knee. The corpse is fully dressed in gown, trousers and sandals, and is covered with leather shields. The grave is then filled with charcoal up to the chief's shoulders, the mouth of the grave blocked with a boulder, and the edges filled up with rubble and cemented over with red plaster. A mound of loose earth is erected on top of the boulder and the summit is again strengthened with plaster. Round this mound a circle of stones is built. There is no attempt at mummification.

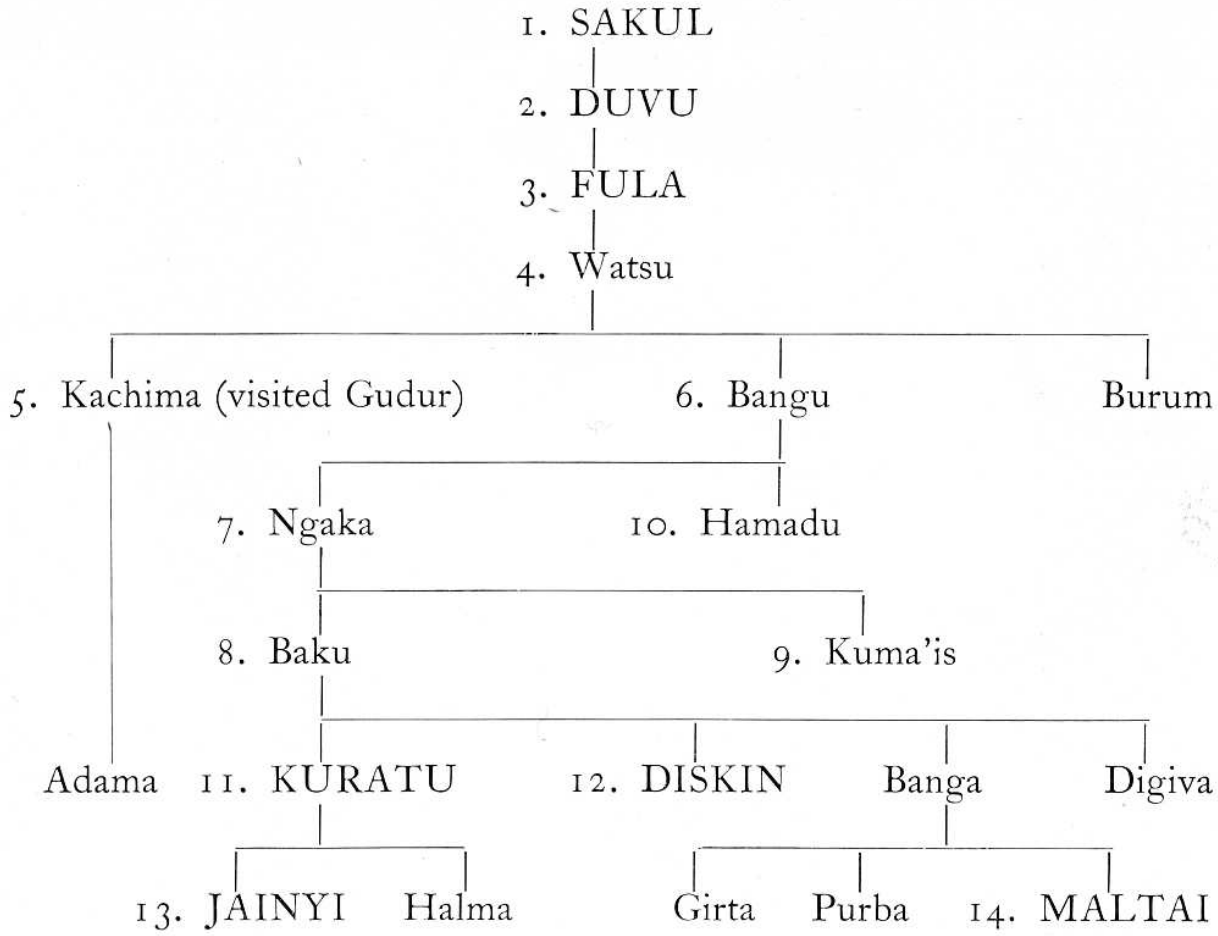
ENVOI

Such, in brief, is the unique kingdom of Sukur. Unconquered by the Fulani and yielding only to modern arms, it still retains all of its tangible individuality, much of its physical remoteness, and some of its spiritual supremacy. Yet time marches on, to the metronomic beat of "Progress" : though the cry of *sili ginda tidibu* was till a few years ago still ringing throughout the realm of Sukur, the triumphant chorus will soon be marked *diminuendo*. Already the antiphon is beginning to swell in volume : Ichabod, the Glory is Departed.

ANTHONY KIRK-GREENE.

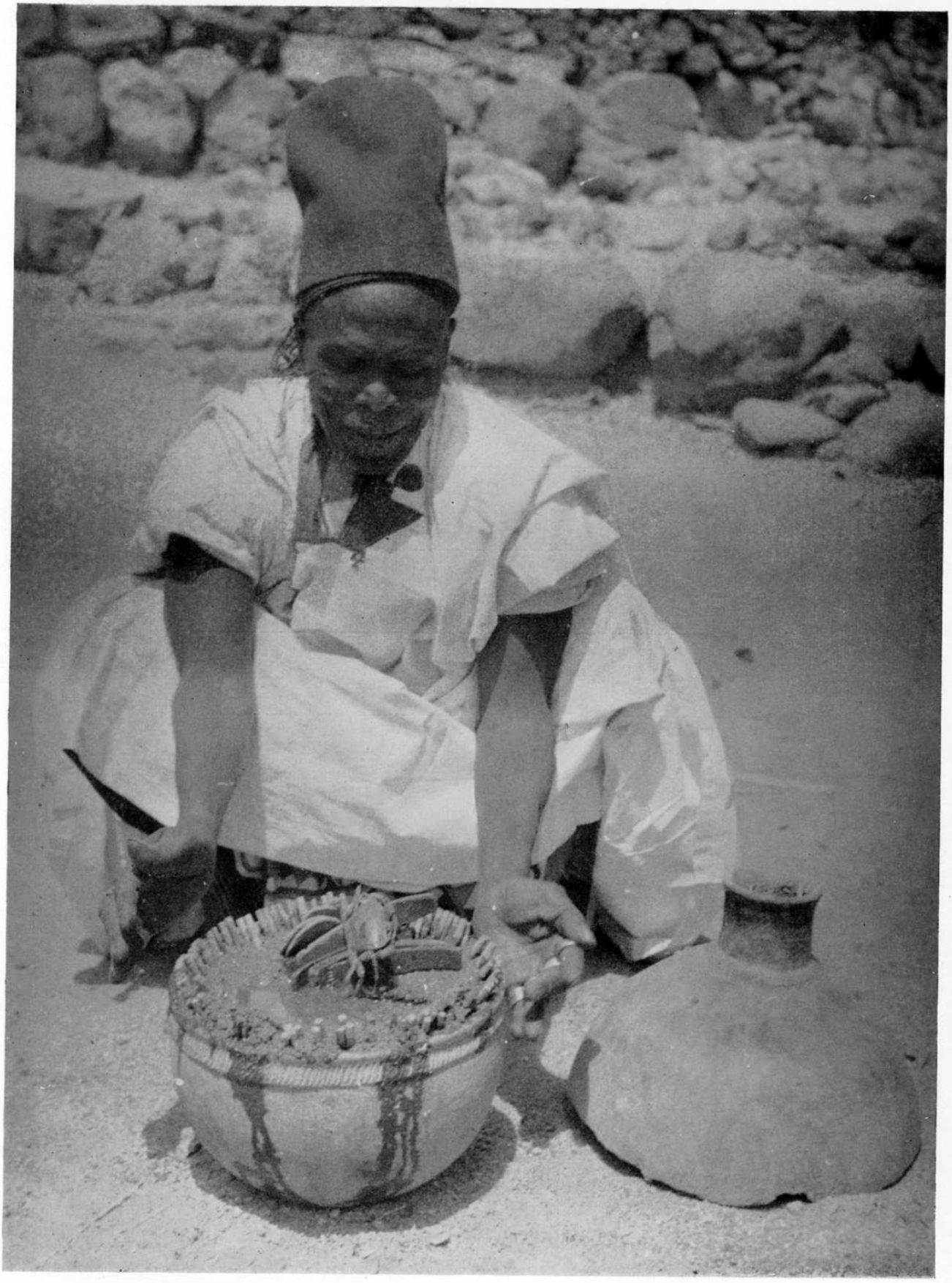
APPENDIX

The following genealogy is taken from MacBride's MS notes :—



The Llidis mentioned in the text are in capitals.

MacBride points out how telescoped this genealogy is, allowing only five generations from Watsu down to the present Llidi whereas genealogies of Gulak recount eleven and of Duhu nine.



FOOTNOTES

1. The only other worthwhile analysis of Sukur I have been able to trace, that of C. K. Meek, the eminent Nigerian anthropologist, is to a large measure vitiated by its acknowledged reliance on second-hand testimony and forced brevity. Meek writes : "It was not possible to pay a visit to Sukur and the following notes were obtained as a result of a short conversation at Madagali with the Chief and two of his sons. The Chief asked me to be excused staying in Madagali more than a few hours, on the grounds of his religious duties" : *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, C. K. Meek, 1931, p. 312.

   Today local lore in Madagali and Sukur holds that Dr. Meek's informant was by no means as satisfactory as could have been desired : the passages on Sukur's dynastic history will help to explain this innuendo, in all probability a justified one.
2. "I was gratified with the first sight of the mountainous region : it was Mount Deladeba or Dalantuba, which appeared toward the south, and the sight of which filled my heart with joyous anticipations." *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, H. Barth, 1857, entry of June 5, 1851.
3. Meek, *Loc. cit.*
4. The phrase is MacBride's.
5. See, for example, "The Higis of Bazza Clan", R. L. Baker and M. Zubeiru Yola, *Nigeria*, No. 47, 1955.
6. The story is to be found in *Adamawa Past and Present*, A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, 1958, pp. 138-139.
7. "Notes sur le Mariage chez des Paiëns du Nord-Cameroun", A. Léger, *Africa*, 1935.
8. See "Wörterverzeichnis der Heidensprachen des Mandara-Gebirges", F. Strümpell, *Zeitschrift fur Eingeborenen-Sprachen*, 1922.
9. *Loc. cit.*
10. *Studies in African Language Classification*, J. H. Greenberg, 1955, p.48.
11. I was lucky enough to have as my informant the young son of Arnado Gulak. We had known each other since he was in the Middle School, Yola, and he was particularly valuable because he was that rarity, an educated boy who had gone back to his remote village immediately on leaving school.
12. When I was Touring Officer in northern Adamawa in 1954 I came across an unusual instance of this belief. A Marghi called Wkarta discovered his son in a state of monorchism when the boy reached the age of adolescence, and drove him from his compound lest such a freak should bring bad luck upon the household. The boy was taken by a Fulani, who converted him to Islam while he worked for him. When I met the lad, he was about sixteen ; he had undergone an operation by a native doctor and the second testicle had dropped. His father was now anxious to take him back. The boy refused to go.
13. During the course of the crisis over the appointment of a new Fulani District Head in Madagali in 1953, the attitude of the Arnado Gulak was second only to that of the Llidi Sukur in importance in influencing the other village-heads' reaction to the Lamido's nominee. To add to my troubles, the Arnado had comitted suicide just as I took over the area, so the situation was intriguingly delicate.
14. J. M. Fiévet, in his *L'Enfant Blanc del'Afrique Noire*, 1954, p. 215, mistakenly attributes the causeway's construction to Hamman Yaji.
15. *Op. cit., II*, 397-398.
16. I am grateful to the Government of Northern Nigeria for permission to quote from this document. It remains restricted, though I am hoping that the time may soon come when it will be opened to *bona fide* research scholars.
17. In Sukur today it is said that on leaving the District Officer's room in the rest-house where an enquiry into his conduct is being held, Jainyi tripped. He took this as a sign that Sukur

was no longer healthy for him. In 1936 he was tried before the Lamido's court on another offence and convicted.

18. The use of Kanuri terms like Maina, Madugo and Bulama is interesting.
19. One of Adamawa's early Touring Officers once said that an administrative officer posted there in those days required only three items of camp equipment: a chair, a watch, and a box of matches.
20. For further details, see the chapter "Das Krabbenorakel" in *Mandara*, Rene Gardi, 1956, where he describes the Mandara practice.
21. Meek, *op. cit.*, p. 227.
22. This list is based very closely on MacBride and Kulp, c. 1932.
23. In the belief that attack is the best method of defence, the Llidi Jainyi complained that the Administrative Officer who conducted the enquiry into Sukur maladministration in the early 1930s had forced him to appear in areas of the village that were taboo to him. Independent testimony, however, showed him that the Administrative Officer was fully aware of the taboo and had always deferred to it.
24. Barth adopts this attitude for much of the Marghi country.
25. For example, "Tax and Travel among the Hill-Tribes of Northern Adamawa", A. H. M Kirk-Greene, *Africa*, 1956, pp. 369-379.
26. Barth, *op. cit.*, entry of April 3, 1851.
27. E. W. Bovill, *The Golden Trade of The Moors*, 1958, p. 244 (note).
28. MacBride and Kulp give a triennial ceremony. There was much confusion among my informants; the majority of evidence pointed to every two years, but I am not quite satisfied. As my tour of duty in the northern Adamawa touring area did not span one of these feasts, I have been able to add nothing to MacBride's description of the actual killing.
29. Gardi, *op. cit.*, "Das Fest des Stieres"; "Fattening of Cattle at Gwoza", H. Tupper Carey, *Farm and Forest*, 1944.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. A Sukur compound, with the stone wall of one hut built into the compound wall.
2. A Sukur friend of the author's, in front of typically peaked huts.
3. The two giant pillars outside the N.E. entrance of the royal compound, alleged to have been hewn from the Kamale peak.
4. Two Sukur boys wearing the hyrax fur caps which are not discarded until after their initiation ceremonies.
5. The author and two friends in front of Sukur village.
6. Kamale Peak.
7. Sukur boys on a hill climb.
8. A grave in the Adamawa mountains.
9. On the march in the Adamawa mountains.
10. The Chief of Sukur (the Llidi).
11. Entrance to a Sukur compound, showing the stone architecture.
12. A narrow compound path between stone walls.
13. The Llidi, or Chief of Sukur, wearing full-dress regalia outside his palace. These robes are rarely worn and seldom seen. On the left is a stone dais from which the Llidi addresses his people during the beer festivals.
14. The Llidi practising his crab-divination, by which he can foresee the approach of anyone from the plains below.

Note.—For reasons of space it has been necessary to hold over NEWS FROM BRANCHES until the July issue.—*Editor.*