THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF BEER AMONG THE BALOBE DU

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No one can remain long among the Balobedu without being impressed by the part played by beer in the lives of the people. On almost every occasion or ceremony of importance there is beer in evidence at some stage or other—beer passing from one group to another, beer given in honour of someone, beer as a thank-offering—so that, to the Balobedu, beer is not merely an intoxicating drink to be imbibed on festive occasions, but has great value, economic, social and religious. In order, however, to understand why this is so, it will be necessary briefly to examine how beer is made, what kinds there are, and how a beer-drink is conducted; for, though these facts may not in themselves have very great interest, they must form the basis of any enquiry into the social significance of beer.

KINDS OF BEER

The kinds of beer in use among the Balobedu may be divided into two main classes, viz., those made of mealies and mpoho, a certain kind of kaffir-corn; and those made from the fruit of the merula tree. But merula beer, delicious though it is, does not play the part that beer made from mpoho does in the lives of the people. It has no religious significance and its rôle in social life is not great, owing primarily to the fact that it is restricted to a particular season, when the merula fruit is ripe, and can not be made at any other time. Merula beer never passes from one group to another; in fact, it is never carried about at all but is always drunk at the place, in the fields, where it has been made. If, therefore, anyone wishes to invite his friends to drink with him, they all have to proceed to his gardens.

Beers made of Mealies and "mpoho"

Byaloa. There are several kinds of beer made from mealies and mpoho. Byaloa, the kind most commonly drunk; takes from one to two weeks to prepare. About half a bag of mealies is put in pots, covered with water, and left for a few days to swell out and become soft. Meanwhile mpoho is prepared. It is taken in the proportion of one mpoho to two mealies, put into pots, covered with water and left for a day. Then the water is poured off, and the grain is put into another pot and covered
over with leaves. It is now left to sprout. In spring this takes a day and night but in winter longer. When the mpoho has begun to sprout, it is spread out to dry in the sun. On about the third day the mealies are taken out of the water and put in a dry pot overnight to be stamped next morning. They must not be too finely stamped and the husks are never removed. Half of the dry mpoho is also ground and then mixed with the stamped mealies. At this stage the large beer pots come into evidence. They are half-filled with boiling water, into which the mixture of mealies and mpoho is thrown, and then the pots are filled up with cold water. This process of mixing the mealies and mpoho with hot water is called “ho loba byaloo.” The mixture is left overnight in the beer hut and next morning at about midday it ferments. It is then cooked for several hours and left till the following day. It now looks like a thick porridge. The remainder of the dried mpoho is then finely ground and added to the porridge-like mixture (ho mela), and when this ferments it will be beer. In spring it takes a day and night to ferment; in winter three to four days. Before being drunk, beer is always strained through a woven grass beer-strainer.

**Mapoto.** Mapoto is a lighter beer which takes only a few days to prepare. It is made of cooked mealie-meal to which ground, sprouted mpoho is added. When this mixture ferments it is drunk. This kind of beer is not as well liked as byaloo, but it forms part of the ordinary diet of the people. It is therefore not unusual for a visitor at a kraal to find mapoto on the menu when he is offered a meal. Mapoto has this advantage over all other kinds of beer, that it can last for as long as a week after brewing, and for this reason, whenever medicinal roots have to be administered in food, it is mapoto that is used.

**Kepye.** A non-intoxicating beer that is popular with women is kepye. It is sweet and hardly distinguishable from porridge and is used chiefly for feeding babies. Whenever a woman visits her old home, she will return with kepye, as a present from her mother to the old women of her husband’s kraal. Kepye is made in much the same way as mapoto, only the porridge is thicker and the mpoho, instead of being added after the porridge has been cooled, as in the case of mapoto, is mixed with the hot porridge.

**Kapea.** Kapea is one of the strongest drinks. It is made of fine mealie-meal over which boiling water is poured, and left overnight. In the morning the mixture is cooked a little, and ground, sprouted mpoho is added. When this has fermented, it is cooked a second time and when cool, more mpoho is added. When this has again fermented, it is ready
for use. *Kapea* thus undergoes a double process of fermentation and this is probably the reason for its strength.

*Kekoakoako*. *Kekoakoako* is the strongest drink of all, is hardly ever taken by women and is indulged in only rarely by men. Owing to its intoxicating nature, it is strictly prohibited at the chief's kraal. *Kekoakoako* is made like ordinary *mapoto*, but on fermentation is cooked a second time, after which more *mpoho* is added for a further fermentation to take place. *Kekoakoako* and *Kapea* are always drunk privately by a man, with perhaps a friend or two. They would never be used for a beer-party. *Byaloa* is the only beer used at beer-drinks except during the *merula* season, for the other kinds of beer are either too strong or, as is the case with *mapoto* and *kepye*, are looked upon merely as foods. But the strength of *byaloa* is not always the same: early in the morning when it has only begun to ferment, it will not be as intoxicating as later on when it has been fermenting for some time. In any case, however, a considerable quantity has to be taken before it becomes intoxicating.

**Merula Beers**

*Mokhope*. Merula beer or *mokhope* is a delightfully cooling summer beverage. The *merula* fruit which has fallen on the ground is gathered in heaps in a cool spot in the fields. Then large pots are brought from home. By means of sharpened rib bones of animals the pips are taken out of the fruit, and then placed in one pot while the juice of the rest of the fruit is squeezed into another. The skins are thrown away. Water is poured over the pips which are then kneaded or ground with the hands or with sticks until the water is white. This white water or *letobe* is left in the field overnight and next morning the "fur" of the pips is skimmed off the top. This "fur" takes up half the space in the pot. Next the *merula* juice is mixed with the *letobe*, and left for a day or two to ferment, when it is ready for use.

*Phepha*. A very intoxicating drink called *phepha* is made of *merula* fruit mixed with mealies and *mpoho*. *Merula* pips are prepared in the usual way to form *letobe*. Then unripe *merula* fruit is cooked in water for about an hour, after which mealie meal is mixed with it to form a thick porridge. To this porridge the *letobe* is added, as well as sprouted *mpoho*, and the mixture is then put away to cool. It will be fit to drink in a very short time. If the *mpoho* is put in it in the early morning, this beer has to be drunk before midday else it becomes so strong that one cup is enough to make you dead drunk. For this reason *phepha*, like *kekoakoako*, is strictly prohibited at the chief's kraal.
In contrast to mokhobe, phepha is always drunk at home where it is made privately by those who like it. It is never drunk at a beer-party.

**BEER-DRINKING**

Before discussing the various ceremonial occasions on which beer is drunk or pointing out the importance of beer in social life, it will be as well to mention that among the Balobedu, as among ourselves, we do find that beer may be drunk solely for the pleasure of drinking. A man may brew beer and invite one or two of his best friends to spend the day drinking with him; or a larger beer-party may be held and the neighbours invited to come to the merry-making. At large social or ceremonial gatherings such as big dances, etc., there is nearly always a considerable amount of beer; it helps to liven up things and to attract a crowd. Thus when an important legota (or induna) receives a message to the effect that the Bogwera (boys in the last of the three initiation schools) are coming to dance at his kraal, he will brew large quantities of beer in their honour. People will gather from all sides to be present at the dancing and the occasion is one of considerable importance. As it is a mark of the highest distinction for the bogwera to dance at his kraal, it is inconceivable to the Balobedu mind that any legota could possibly neglect to provide beer for the occasion.

When a beer-party is held there is always a certain amount of ceremony observed before the beer is partaken of. If it is beer given in honour of any person, he will occupy a special place on a skin mat. The host must always be the first to taste it, but before doing so, he will say what it is for. If it is beer to thank someone for a past service or favour, the host will tell this to his neighbour, referring to the beer as "water" (for others must praise the beer; he himself must pretend it is nothing at all, nothing better than water). His neighbour will repeat his words to the next man, saying, "Do you hear what he says? This beer is to thank so and so, etc." This will be repeated right the way round, each man lorcha-ing as he repeats the words, i.e., gently clapping his hands and bending sideways in respectful salutation, uttering some praise-word such as "thobena" or "morena." Finally the message reaches the guest, who will then thank his host for the honour, and this message will go the round in the same way till it reaches the host. After having tasted the beer, the host dishes some in a special calabash for the guest of honour. It would be a great insult if anyone else were to be served before him and he would show his anger by saying "madi a elela batabi"—the blood flows on those who stab—as an indication that the beer ought first to have been given to him, the stabber or person concerned.
In the old days it was not the custom for women to drink beer together with men; but nowadays the sexes often drink together, though they sit apart, women on one side, men on the other.

No beer-drink can be held without the sanction of the legota in whose district the party is held. Thus the legota must be invited to every beer-party given in his district. If he is personally present he will see to it that any unruly conduct is suppressed, for he is responsible to some extent for the good behaviour of everyone in his district. As is natural, there is sometimes considerable drunkenness at these beer-parties and then fighting may break out. If anyone is injured in such a disturbance, only the man who has done the injury is held responsible. If, however, the beer-drink has not been duly reported to the legota, then the man who has given the party will be held responsible, for he has failed in his duty to get the permission of the district head. But a beer-drink seldom develops into a drunken orgy, because, apart from the fact that so much has to be imbibed before it becomes intoxicating, the legota usually exerts a considerable amount of control. At a beer-drink at which I was present, I offered some cigarettes around and several men began smoking. Makope, a woman legota, who was present, soon put a stop to the smoking, however, as she said it might make them vomit! Probably she thought it would make the beer go to their heads. Merula beer-drinks are not subject to any of these rules and it is only necessary to invite the legota to the first beer-drink held.

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF BEER

A Food

Beer made from mealies and mpoko is a highly nourishing food, and forms part of the normal diet of the Balobedu. Kepeye is used for feeding babies, mapoto is very like a slightly fermented porridge, and so sustaining is byaloa that after the reaping, when beer-drinks are being held daily in different villages, many men go entirely without other food for days. As a food, therefore, beer plays an important part in the economic life of the people. But it is a very special kind of food, for it affords enjoyment above that of any other food. In addition to its value as a food, beer is a common means of exchange or payment for services rendered, and is in evidence in a number of transactions that in other tribes are conducted by means of mealies and goats.

A Means of Payment

The man who cuts skins in the correct shape for loin-cloths and skirts is, in Balobedu society, a specialist. Everybody tans skins but not everyone has the skill needed to cut out clothes. The payment for
cutting out skin clothes is made in the form of *byaloa* and usually comes with the next harvest, when the skin specialist is invited to a beer-party given in his honour, or calabashes of beer are sent to him. *Byaloa* is the kind of beer that is always used for "thanking" people, though it is permissible in the case of minor services such as the making of an axe-handle, for *mokhope* to be used.

In the payment for medical services, too, beer figures largely. When on the fifth day after birth, a doctor is called to *thusa* (help by fortifying) a child out of the hut in which it was isolated, *byaloa* must be prepared for him then or sent to him later on. There are many other cases of minor treatments in which "thanking" beer must be sent to the doctor. When a doctor has been called in by a district head (*legota*) to *upa* the fields; i.e., to scare away troublesome birds by means of medicine, his payment comes when the crops are reaped. Every woman on this land is expected to take a small basketful of mealies and *mpoho* to the *legota*, and with this he brews beer for the doctor.

When anyone wishes to get people to help him weed his fields or to reap, in fact to help him with any piece of work, he holds a *lechema*. His neighbours are invited to come and help him and it is an understood thing that there will be *byaloa*. They all work together and sing special *lechema* songs and the occasion is a very joyful one. The wise man will, of course, serve only a little beer while they are working, reserving the greater part till later when the work has been completed!

Tanning a large ox-skin, or rather, rubbing it to make it supple, is neither an easy nor a very pleasant task, so a *lechema* is usually held for this, too. The man asks his wife to make beer, and when this is ready, he either sends a son or goes himself to invite the neighbours to the *lechema*. On the appointed day all turn up and spend the day tanning the skin and drinking beer in between whiles "to give them strength." This is done on the men’s *kgoro* and while they work they sing. A common song on such an occasion is one sung in two parts, called *mnyakobo botale*, which literally means "owner of the skin, cleverness," referring to his wisdom in providing for winter. On this occasion, besides beer, another treat is in store for the workers, for the scrapings of the skin are cooked and when ready, are eaten by them while they sit in a circle round the skin. Thus the *lechema*, from the economic point of view and apart from its value as a pleasant gathering, is a means of getting work done by payment in beer. Women may also hold a *lechema*, and very often if a woman’s husband is away from home or too busy to make her a storehouse for her mealies and corn, she will hold a *lechema* to get this done for her.
**Tribute**

Beer is also used for paying tribute. In return for the land he holds from the *legota* of the district, every village head is expected to send beer to him or hold a beer-party in his honour at harvest time. This need not be done every year, however, and when the crop is a small one no tribute (*lebebe*) need be paid. If a man has not enough land for his needs and there is no more to be had in his own district, he may approach a neighbouring *legota* for a field. In return for this he will at harvest time send beer to thank this *legota*, too, for the field. The *magota* in their turn every year send five or six large pots of beer to Modjadge, the queen, in recognition of the land they are holding, and it is a pleasant sight to see the girls, in single file, wending their way to the royal kraal singing joyful songs as they go. The heavy pots on their heads lend a certain grace to their movements.

When a man has been given permission to build his village and settle on the land of a *legota* he will, on the completion of the village, invite the *legota* to a beer-drink “so that he may see it.” In all these instances it is *byaloa* that is sent; but we do find that at the beginning of the *merula* drinking period, it is the duty of every headman to invite the *legota* to the first *mokhope*-party he holds. This is called *mokhope oa chidi*—the *merula* beer of the black medicine—because, just as none of the first fruits may be eaten before they have been tasted in an attenuated form with medicine, so no *mokhope*-party should be held prior to this first one in honour of the *legota*.

**Putting others under an obligation**

If the giving of beer is a means of fulfilling one’s obligations or paying for services rendered, it can also serve the purpose of putting others under an obligation to you. If a woman makes a lot of beer (about ten calabashes or so) and takes this to her son-in-law, he is in honour bound to give her a goat or more in return. Advantage is quite frequently taken of this custom by poor people to get help from their relatives-in-law and even from friends, and it will then be understood that help is needed. To give the required help is purely a matter of honour, for if nothing is given in return for the beer, the matter cannot be taken to court. But this would never happen and such conduct is, in fact, inconceivable, especially on the part of a man to his wife’s people. This usage is, however, not merely an economic one for it has wider significance. It is a method of gift exchange, the function of which is to keep up friendly relations between a man and his wife’s family. Once or twice every year, every mother-in-law brings beer to her *tsetse* in return for which he
will give what he can—£1 or 10s. or a goat. A man feels very proud when these gifts of byaloa are brought, and may even boast about them to show how well he is liked by his relatives-in-law. If, on the other hand, his mother-in-law neglects to bring these gifts, the tsetse will feel slighted and will probably complain bitterly about it when he is drunk.

**SOCIAL AND RITUAL VALUE OF BEER**

**Reconciliation Beer**

Beer is of far more than mere economic importance in the lives of the Balobedu, for it has also great social and ritual value. A beer-drink is a happy sociable event and nothing makes people more friendly to one another than common participation in a beer-drink. For this reason beer is the usual means of bringing about any kind of reconciliation between persons who have injured one another. A case that I witnessed illustrates this function very clearly. It was a court case at the head kraal in which an old man had married a young girl. The girl had obviously been married against her wishes and ran away to some relatives. The old man complained to her parents, who took measures and forced her to return. They also paid the customary fine to the injured man, and apparently there was nothing left for the court to do. To my surprise, however, the court, having approved of the prompt steps taken, ordered the parents to brew beer for the injured party and thereby re-establish proper equilibrium between the families concerned. If father and son have a quarrel and go to law, there cannot be a fine; instead, the guilty party is ordered to make beer for the other and so put an end to the quarrels.

In the old days it was essential that a bride should be virgin and one of the most important articles taken by a girl on leaving home with her companions for the bridegroom's kraal was the virginity calabash. It was carried by the leader of the girls and was decorated with beads and red ochre. The bride was always examined by the old women of the boy's kraal, and if she was found to be virgin, the calabash would be kept and they would utter cries of joy. If the bride was not virgin, a hole was pierced in the calabash and she was sent home with it. Such an occurrence was regarded as an injury to the boy's family and might be a cause of endless trouble. The girl's family would therefore do all in their power to re-establish the good relations thus jeopardized. Beer would be brewed and with this the girl would be sent back to conciliate the boy's family—another good example of beer used for reconciliation. The custom of examining the bride has, however, fallen into disuse and
though the virginity calabash is occasionally still carried by the bride it is extremely rare.

**Beer connected with Marriage and Sexual Relations**

In view of the importance of beer in establishing friendly relations, it is not surprising to find that in marriage, where two families are being gradually drawn together by various means, beer also plays its part. The visits of the boy to the girl's kraal, after they have become formally betrothed, extend over a number of years and are not directly concerned with courting the girl, for in the beginning he may not even see the girl. They are largely the means of drawing the two families more closely together. The *tsetse*, as the bridegroom is called, is an honoured guest and is always treated with great hospitality. A beer-party is usually given in his honour and on these occasions he has a special round, ornamented calabash placed in a little dish, and from this he drinks his beer. He and his companion, the *makate*, are given a grass mat to sit on, a very high honour, and remain a little apart from the rest of the gathering. The *tsetse* drinks only moderately, knowing that a special pot of beer, brewed for him by the girls, will be awaiting him in the hut. All through he remains quiet, restrained and obviously on his best behaviour.

For the first three months after marriage the bride may not even speak to her husband but works for, and is under direct supervision of, her mother-in-law. This stage is terminated by the bride being taken back to her old home by her father-in-law and an old woman of his village, who bring with them a goat called the goat "to pour out her present state." This marks the end of the days of the girl's virginity and is a necessary pre-requisite before the marriage can be consummated. While the girl is at home her mother brews beer (*byaloa*) which she is to take back with her to her parents-in-law. This beer is important, for it will "open a way for her mother to her new home." Up to now the mother could not visit her daughter at all.

Before the marriage can be consummated a further ceremony is necessary, called *ho takantsoa*, which amounts to a mixing of the "essence" of the two people concerned, a sort of mutual inoculation. The doctor scarifies both parties on various parts of the body, mixes their blood and applies the mixture, together with medicine, to the wounds. An essential part of this *takantsoa* ceremony is that weak beer (*mapoto*) which has been specially prepared is brought in a vessel into which both boy and girl are made to spit. Newly-dug roots, given by the doctor, are thrown in the *mapoto*, and after three or four days when the sap has become well mixed with the *mapoto*, the young couple ceremonially
drink together from the same calabash. *Mapoto* is the only beer that can be used here for no other beer will keep so long. The whole ceremony is supposed to remove the danger of sexual intercourse to the boy and to make the couple one.

It is also dangerous for a man to have intercourse with a woman who has procured an abortion. He will contract *ndere*, the dreaded coughing disease (tuberculosis ?) unless he is specially doctored, and in this case the medicine must be taken in *mapoto*. The doctor will give him roots or herbs to put in the beer, but the most important ingredient is always part of the abortion itself mixed with dung. The medicine used for weaning babies and make them "forget" the breast is also given in *mapoto*.

**Beer in Initiation Ceremonies**

It is essential during the *Wodika* (circumcision school) that there should be plenty of beer for the older men. That is perhaps one of the reasons why the school is always held after the harvest, and it is the reason why the school can never be held if the crops have not been good. There must be plenty in the land. But apart from this fact, which can hardly be considered as significant, there is one occasion during the course of this school on which beer is of great ritual value. The most important change, the turning point for the boys in the school, is marked by a ceremony in which beer plays a conspicuous part. This takes place towards the end of the school and is the first aggregation rite by which the boys are to be incorporated into the group of the adults. The women are ordered to prepare *byaloo* which is brought to the school. Into one of the pots the doctor puts medicine consisting of black powder, and each boy has to sip a little of the mixture. Hitherto they have not been allowed to drink anything at all, not even water, and the beer is the first liquid, therefore, that passes their lips from the beginning of the school. From this moment several taboos are lifted; the boys may drink water and eat meat, both of which were taboo before. Most important of all, however, is the fact that from now on, instead of having to face west in the morning when they are being instructed at the sacred fire, the boys must face east. This symbolises a change from the darkness and ignorance of their childhood to the light of manhood. This stage of the initiation ceremony is called *ho fetolela* and the medicine is said to "stop the sickness in the wind" from the east, and prevent the boys being hurt by anything when they return home.

At the end of the *khoba*, the initiation ceremony of a girl at puberty, when the girl is finally aggregated into the stage of womanhood
and allowed to take off the red ochre and clothes she had to wear during initiation, special beer is brewed to mark the occasion. This is called byaloa ea dikhoba, and all the women of the neighbourhood are invited to come and drink it. Sometimes, if the crops have been plentiful, beer may be made to "wet the throat" of the woman (never her own mother) who has been the girl's "school mother." This beer is partaken of on the kgoro at the end of the period of isolation, about a month before the red ochre and old clothes are discarded. It is called keteke beer but is sometimes also called byaloa ea dikhoma.

**Beer connected with Death Ceremonial**

On the day of burial of a married man or woman beer is prepared, which, when ready, will be used for the special purification that has to be undergone by the widows or the widower. This is called thoni beer. When a death has occurred in a village, the people and more particularly the near relations, are supposed to be "hot," for the spirit of death has touched them. After the burial, therefore, the doctor sprinkles medicine over everyone in the village and over the hut in which the death occurred. This hut is also freshly smeared with dung. Everyone now has to shave and from this moment till the end of the mourning period no one is to cut his hair. The widows, however, stand in special danger, and they therefore have to receive special treatment. When they have been shaved, the doctor ties a medicated string called thoni round their heads, and in this is placed a hedgehog quill, which is supposed to make them forget their husband and not fear him when they think of him. They have now to be isolated in the hut of the deceased until the thoni beer is ready. In a few days time, when the beer is ready, the doctor is called. He will put medicine into the pot of beer and take it with him into the hut. With a medicated knife he cuts the thoni and then gives the widows the thoni beer to drink, after which they are allowed to come out of the hut and mix with the rest of the kraal. In the case of the death of a woman, her husband is isolated until the thoni beer is ready, but he does not wear a string round his head.

The mourning period lasts from a few weeks to a year, depending on whether the deceased was a mere child or an important headman. The end of the mourning period is marked in every case by the drinking of kechila beer. The word kechila means dirt or defilement, and it is to get rid of the defilement of the mourning and death that the beer is drunk. Before drinking this beer, however, it is necessary to find out by consulting a doctor, whether the death was caused by Modimo or by witchcraft. If any person is pointed out as having caused the death, the
relatives of the deceased send someone to him to say, "Come and shave us," for they are all shaved on the day of kechila. The man will understand the accusation and will immediately gather round him his own friends prior to setting out to the mokome or smelling-out doctor, who will make the final decision. All the relatives of the deceased, those on his mother's side as well as those on his father's, are present when the kechila beer is drunk; but before this is done the rakhadi (father's sister) will call upon the ancestors to tell them the cause of the death and ask them for their blessings and protection. She does not include the name of the deceased in the list of ancestors, because it is thought that he is acting as a child or servant, who works for the older spirits, fetching their water and making their fire, and a child is never told important matters. Only when his spirit begins to cause trouble, perhaps a year or two later, will he be called upon and propitiated with the rest. By drinking the kechila beer the defilement of death is finally got rid of and the bonds the living relatives uniting renewed and emphasized.

Installation of a new legota

In the case of the death of a legota there is a further ceremony after the kechila and here again there is beer in evidence. The entrance to the kgoro used while the legota was alive has to be closed and a new entrance made by the doctor. At this ceremony for barring the old entrance (ho thiba kgoro) all the people under the legota are asked to be present. Much beer will have been brewed and for three or four days there will be feasting. The queen must always be informed before this ceremony takes place and in cases where the legota was related to her she will send one of her councillors to represent her at the feast. On this day all the fires in the village are put out and the cooking stones thrown away. Then new stones are obtained and a new fire kindled in the new legota's kitchen hut and from this, first the kgoro fire, and then the others in order of precedence are re-kindled. Towards sunset beer is offered to the spirits and a little later the spirits (dajane) are heard in the bush near by. They come with a great noise, blowing reeds and flinging stones into the village. (The part of the dajane, who, of course, are only heard, never seen, is played by old trusted men from neighbouring villages). A man from the village then takes a pot of beer to the bush for the dajane and they subside, appeased. Thus the ancestors make it quite clear that this is an important occasion for them too, and that they take as lively an interest in family affairs now as they did when alive. Sometimes the new legota decides to establish a new village, in which case the thiba kgoro ceremony must still be performed, only his instalment comes later when his new hut is built.
Some months later, beer is prepared, either in the legota's own village or by his representative or "mother" (mmabona) at the queen's, in which case the legota has to supply the mealies and mpolw. Then he and his father's younger brother, who in the interval between the two regimes had acted for him, his messenger, and his father's sister and various other women who carry the beer, repair to the head kraal. Through the mmabona they inform the queen that the beer is there and they want to show her that this man is their legota, so that she may know he is her son. The beer is drunk by the men and woman of the two villages, the queen being present and partaking of the beer. The legota will now remain with the queen for a few days and will receive presents from her. It is thus, by means of beer and presents, that the bond between the queen and every new legota is established and made firm.

If a new village is to be built for the legota, all the people on his land must do their share in building the chief sleeping and kitchen huts. In addition, all must contribute beer for the occasion. Then on the appointed day all come together, the doctor chooses the spot and doctors the fence and chief gate, poles are cut and grass fetched, and in a short time the work is completed. There is great joy and merrymaking and the beer for this occasion is known as "beer for building for the legota." In this manner the people on his land show their acceptance of their new legota.

**PART PLAYED BY BEER IN THE RELIGIOUS LIFE**

While beer plays an important part in the economic and social life of the people, it can be said to dominate their whole religion. In almost all religious rites beer is essential. The importance of beer in religious matters is primarily bound up with the sacred character of mpolw, the grain from which it is made. Beer is the food of the gods; but the beer of the gods is made of pure mpolw, ground and mixed with water, and called matatsoa leselo—the washer of the winnowing basket. That mpolw is not regarded in the same light as other grains is clearly shown by the fact that in the old days it could not be planted before the spring Komana ceremony had been held, nor reaped until after the autumn Komana, by means of which the queen, on behalf of the tribe, invoked the blessings of the tribal ancestors.

The blood sacrifice is rare among the Balobedu, the beer-offering being the usual method of propitiating the ancestors. When the gods are causing illness, beer is offered to the ancestors by being poured on the shrine (tukula) or on the ground, while they are called upon in prayer.
Often, in cases of sickness, the tukula ox, the ox of the spirits which represents the ancestors, is also given beer to drink, for it is thought that the gods are hungry.

In the consecration of the tukula ox beer is also important. Every lineage should have such an ox which must be replaced by another when it grows old, when a new legota is installed as successor to his father, or when the ancestors make it known that they want meat, e.g., in cases of extreme illness. The killing of this beast is a very solemn sacrifice. First of all the divinatory bones must be thrown by the doctor to discover the wishes of the ancestors as to the colour, etc., of the new tukula beast and whether any special person is to do the killing of the old one. Matatsoa leselo is also prepared, and before the beast is killed, it has to be brought before the chief hut of the kraal where, standing beside the shrine, it is made to drink this beer. The empty calabash is left beside the tukula. When it has finished drinking the women mokhulu kwane (sing out in a high pitched cackle) to show their happiness, and if the beast passes water it is thought to be a good sign.

The beast is then taken to the cattle kraal where it is killed in the proper manner. The eating of the sacrificial meat takes place outside the chief hut at sunset; but before any of it is eaten the new tukula ox is brought to be consecrated and presented to the gods. It is given matatsoa leselo to drink out of the same calabash as the last ox and while it drinks the rakhadi, i.e., the father’s sister, an old woman past child-bearing age, who is the officiating priestess in all religious ceremonies, prays and asks the gods to accept the new beast. The meat is then eaten by all present, while small pieces from all parts of the ox are placed on the shrine for the spirits. The bones must all be carefully collected and buried in the mound forming the shrine.

The most important religious ceremonies are those connected with the agricultural year and here, too, beer is important. Every year, in the old days, before the crops could be planted, a ceremonial visit was paid by certain people from the royal kraal to Daja, the sacred forest where all the old chiefs are buried. They took with them beer for the gods, which was poured on the graves to conciliate them and put them in a good mood for the Komana which followed. This Komana was a ceremony held principally for rain, and it was said that through the Komana the chief talked to the ancestors to ask for rain. This being the case, it was essential that there should be much beer at the Komana.

The Daja and Komana ceremonial is no longer held; but the thanksgiving beer-offering at harvest time still takes place every year. It is
considered very important indeed and may be said to be the only time when the people of their own accord remember the gods. Every year, before any of the new mpoho may be partaken of, the lineage gathers at the village of their head for this ceremony. Special beer, made of mpoho only, has been prepared for the religious part of the ceremony, but also a large quantity of ordinary beer, for when the gods have been given their share, general feasting follows. The family all gather round the shrine where the khadi, pouring out a little matatsoa leselo, calls upon the ancestors by name, thanking them for the harvest and asking for their further blessing. She then sips a little of the beer and passes the cup round. After this ceremony in which the living as well as the dead members of the family have been united by means of the beer-offering, general feasting follows. At this period mpoho beer is also carried to the different graves of chiefs and important magota as a gift of food, to invoke their blessings.

The occasions that have been enumerated on which beer plays a part, are not exhaustive, but they serve to show how varied are its functions in Balobedu life. Beer is essential in the religious life of the tribe; it is in evidence in almost all ritual and ceremonial—as a celebration of important occasions, binding together different groups or individuals, effecting a reconciliation where things go wrong, while in the economy of the tribe it is not only used as a means of payment and for tribute, but is very important as a food.

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