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ADEVU AND *CHIWARA* RITUALS IN WEST AFRICA COMPARED TO HUNTING RITUALS AND ROCK ART IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

In May 2013 in Accra, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed by Vice Chancellors of the University of Ghana (Professor Ernest Aryeetey) and the South African University of the Witwatersrand (Professor Loyiso Nongxa). Almost immediately, ethnographers and archaeologists from both countries met to discuss matters that related to anthropology in Ghana and South Africa. Of particular interest were accounts of hunting rituals, stimulated by discussion of research reported by Frobenius (1931) and Thackeray (1986, 2005, 2013). Here we report the results of our initial research, associated with the principle of 'sympathetic magic'.

ADEVU IN WEST AFRICA AND RITUALS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Among the Ewe in Ghana, there are hunting rituals during which *adevu*, a term derived from two words (*ade*, hunting, and *vu*, dance or music), features prominently. Amu (1997) provides the following definition of *adevu*: "Hunter's music and dance performed by miming serious hunting as pertains during hunting expeditions (enactment of hunting expeditions). The dance is performed also in honour of any hunter who has successfully killed a wild or huge animal". Amu (1997) also defines *adevu* as "A hunter's dress costume used for the performance of the hunter's dance". It is known that Ewe hunting costumes include the use of animal skins together with the skulls of animals or parts of skulls worn on the heads of the hunters. A hunter would adopt the posture and behaviour of a quadrupedal animal, and he would be symbolically killed in the ritual by other hunters enacting the hunt. *Adevu* rituals were undertaken in order to facilitate a hunt. They were also performed to celebrate a successful hunt. Hunters performing this hunting ritual are known to reach altered states of consciousness (trance). The question arises as to whether *adevu* and other rituals in West Africa are related in any way to hunting rituals and trance-related rock art in South Africa of the kind known at the Melikane Shelter (Fig. 1) in Lesotho (Lewis-Williams 1980, 1981; Thackeray 2005, 2013).

Thackeray (2005) has discussed the Melikane painting in the context of South African *iguba* hunting rituals of the kind published by Lichtenstein (1812), among peoples who spoke Nguni (Bantu) languages (including isiXhosa) and who interacted with Khoisan. A hunter would take on a quadrupedal posture of a herbivore, and would be symbolically wounded and killed by others enacting the hunters, in the belief that such *iguba* rituals were essential for a successful hunt:

> Before a party goes out hunting, a very odd ceremony or sport takes place which they consider as absolutely necessary to ensure success to the undertaking. One of them takes a handful of grass into his mouth, and crawls about on all fours to represent some sort of game. The rest advance as if they would run him through with their spears, raising the hunting cry, till at length he falls upon the ground as if dead. If this man afterwards kills a head of game, he hangs a claw on his arm as a trophy, but the animal must be shared with the rest (Lichtenstein 1812, Part 1: 269).

Such rituals are definite evidence for the principle of 'sympathetic hunting magic' in South Africa. The isiXhosa term *iguba* (referring to hunting rituals in which hunters feigned killing an animal) was recorded by Dohne (1857), and discussed in the context of the 'sympathetic hunting magic' ritual described by Lichtenstein (Thackeray 1986), and in the context of the Melikane painting (Thackeray 2005).

At least some examples of rock art in southern Africa, including the scene of therianthropes at Melikane in Lesotho (Fig. 1) copied by Orpen (1874), Vinnicombe (1976) and Thackeray (2005), are likely to be associated with trance-related beliefs (Lewis-Williams 1980, 1981), death, and rituals associated with the principle of 'sympathetic hunting magic' (Thackeray 2005, 2013). It may not be coincidental that hunting rituals associated with *adevu* among the Ewe in Ghana are also related to the concepts of death, success in the hunt, and trance.

HYPOTHESIS H1

We propose as a working hypothesis (H1) that West African rituals (including *adevu* among the Ewe) and *iguba* rituals in South Africa, have common heritage, both relating to the principle of 'sympathetic hunting magic' whereby a ritual is performed to mimic the wounding and killing of an animal, in the belief that this will facilitate success in a forthcoming hunt. This hypothesis can be assessed in the context of rituals and belief associated with various African animals, including roan (*Hippotragus equinus*), which has a widespread distribution, occurring in Ghana, Mali and East Africa, as well as in southern Africa.

The possibility that *Tyi Wara* (or *Chi Wara*; alternatively *Ci Wara*) rituals in Mali (Fig. 2) developed in part from hunting beliefs associated with roan antelope, and incorporated in agricultural rituals, needs to be considered in the context of an etymology of *Tyi Wara*, from *tyi* (wounded, pierced) and *wara* (wild animal), as proposed by Thackeray (2005). Remarkably, a ritual performed at Logageng in the Northern Cape of South Africa, and photographed in 1934 (Fig. 3) is similar to West African *Tyi Wara* rituals, incorporating a person under the head, skin, skull and horns of a roan antelope, adopting a quadrupedal posture (*cf.* Fig. 2). At least three stripes are painted on the skin of the roan antelope at Logageng, and are interpreted as

FIG. 1. *Three therianthropes in a bending-forward posture, Melikane, Lesotho. After Orpen (1874), Vinnicombe (1976) and Thackeray (2005).*

FIG. 2. Tyi Wara (Chi Wara *or* Ci wara) *ritual associated with roan antelope* (Hippotragus equinus) *and other animals among the Bambara in Mali, West Africa. Two individuals bend forward, holding sticks in each hand to represent front legs. The wooden carvings represent hippotragine (roan) antelope. Photograph by Pascal James Imperato.*

symbolic wounds associated with the principle of 'sympathetic hunting magic' (Thackeray 2005, 2013).

In South Africa, Bantu words for wounds or painted stripes are based on the form *-tshi*, similar phonetically to Khoisan *!gi* which are stripes or scarifications inflicted on hunters in the belief that these 'wounds' will contribute to success in a forthcoming hunt (Thackeray 2013). Our H1 hypothesis is supported by linguistic evidence, in the sense that South African words based on *-tshi* or *!gi* are phonetically similar not only to an Ewe word, *si*, which refers to wounding, cutting, scarification or painting, but also to the Bambara word *Tyi* (as in *Tyi wara* or *Chi Wara* or *Ci Wara*) which means to pierce (*cf.* wound) (Thackeray 2005). Perhaps not coincidentally, the Khoi term for a supernatural potency is *Tsui //Khoab*, where *tsui* means wounded (Hahn 1881) and *//khoab* means roan antelope (Thackeray 2005).

ADEVU AND THE PRINCIPLE OF 'SYMPATHETIC HUNTING MAGIC'

The Ewe *adevu* is associated not only with hunting but also with war. It is generally associated with the music and dance form of spiritually powerful hunters and/or warriors, although other members of the public may perform it in context of entertainment. Some of the drums on which the music is performed are supposedly vested with special powers. Their membranes are of the skins of roan and other animals which are thought to have powerful spirits. The lead drum, the most powerful, is

FIG. 3. *Sketch based on a photograph of a 'buckjumper' recorded at Logageng, Northern Cape Province, South Africa in 1934. A person adopts a quadrupedal posture under the head and skin of a hippotragine antelope (roan). At least three stripes appear to have been painted on the skin, probably representing symbolic wounds (Thackeray 2005). The individual bends forward, with a stick in each hand to represent front legs.*

normally covered with calico, red fabric or strands of plant fibre and is often protected from public view. Performers of the music and dance are mostly men of the African Indigenous Religious faith. They adorn themselves with indigenous regalia that may comprise plant-dyed fabric to which animal hair (tails/whisks) and other charms are attached.

According to oral accounts narrated by elders of Kpando in the Volta Region of Ghana, warriors usually perform *adevu* to 'charge' or psyche themselves before going to battle. In contemporary contexts of performance, such as during the funeral rites of deceased chiefs and other elderly statesmen and warriors, *'asafo'* or the guards of chiefs of Kpando use knives, machetes and clubs to mimic the act of hunting, stabbing and cutting the throats of their victims. Some of them test or show off their magical powers, *'ade-dzo'*, by attempting to cut or stab themselves or cut their tongues with sharp knives without drawing blood. In effect, a well-fortified warrior is not expected to be harmed by a knife wound and is attributed with the ability to kill a live animal through the pointing and flipping of his fingers. Seasoned priests and priestesses of the Indigenous Religion fortify hunters and warriors through the use of herbs (Apoh & Gavua 2010). The flipping and pointing of fingers of a hunter (or a warrior) to kill an animal or enemy could be viewed as 'sympathetic magic' since it provides an assurance to the hunter or warrior of the effectiveness of his magical potency which could ensure a successful hunt for prey or success over enemy.

In secular contexts, including festivals and other celebrations an *adevu* dance is performed by anyone who has learnt the act of taking the right steps and making the right throat and hand cutting and stabbing gestures to accompany the adevu music (Fig. 4).

CONCLUSIONS

Beliefs associated with hunting would have had a widespread distribution in Africa prior to the domestication of plants such as sorghum, and prior to the dispersal of domesticated animals (notably sheep, goats and cattle) within the last 3000 years. Hunting rituals such as those reported by Lichtenstein (1812), and rituals of the kind associated with the Melikane rock painting and the 'buckjumper' (Fig. 1) in southern Africa (Thackeray 2005, 2013) may have prevailed among ancestral Khoisan as well as Bantu speakers who immigrated into the African sub-continent within the last 2000 years from West Africa and elsewhere on the continent. Anthropologists and archaeologists from the University of Ghana and the University of the Witwatersrand are pursuing research related to the H1 hypothesis, suggesting that West African rituals (including *adevu* among the Ewe) and *iguba* (as well as related

FIG. 4. *A Kpando-Dzoanti performance of an* adevu *dance. Note the knife and the tail of an animal in his hands. Photograph by W. Apoh.*

rituals in South Africa) have common heritage, both relating to the principle of 'sympathetic hunting magic' whereby a ritual is performed to mimic the wounding and killing of an animal, in the belief that this will facilitate success in a forthcoming hunt. Such beliefs may have considerable time depth in African prehistory, recognising that an Apollo 11 Cave therianthrope *(art mobilier* from Namibia, dated at 27 000 BP and associated with hippotragine horns), may relate to the principle of 'sympathetic magic' (Thackeray 2013).

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