

Notes on Animism and Magic Practices on the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea

By

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The *lugehaneta*, a worshipping place of the tribesmen of the Goroka district.—In August of 1964 our Nanzan University Expedition arrived at Goroka in the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea. On my frequent explorations of the neighboring villages I found a small garden which was formerly of great importance and kept in high esteem. They call it there *lugehaneta* or shortened to *luhaneta*. I could locate such sacred places in several villages though they are falling into oblivion. One or two men were everywhere in charge of the sanctuary as curators or guardians, or, as the local people say, as *gizapawe*. Here I wish first to describe the *lugehaneta* which I found in the village of Wanima about 3 km. to the North of Goroka. This worshipping ground lies some hundred meters away from the village piazza, a little lower than the plantation at the fringe of which it is situated. The place is surrounded by a belt of *Cordyline* scrub¹ about 15 m. in diameter. At the center of this belt the sanctuary is further fenced in, at present some of the poles of the fence are still there. For the poles only wood of a special tree, locally called *jopa*, was used which is more durable than any other wood. In the center of this inner enclosure stands, on a little mound, a plant, called *gizahere*, about 2 m. high. This plant has a sturdy and fleshy white stem, in color similar to an onion tuber. Several branch stems come out of the main stem. The leaves of the plant are very long and slender.

1. H. Aufenanger. The *Cordyline* Plant in the Central Highlands of N. Anthropol., Vol. 56, 1961.

Sometimes it produces a white blossom. It looks as if belonging to the Liliaceae. Korarue, a man from the locality, told me that under the plant lies hidden a stone, called *maitaha*. The diameter of this miniature garden measures about 2 m. The place had always to be kept utterly clean and free from weeds. Young people, both male and female, were never admitted to it. Old men and women entered at fixed periods the exterior fence, slaughtered, steamed and ate pigs there. The young folk did the same but outside the *Cordyline* fence. Only the official guardian was allowed to enter the interior fence. From the acts of worship offered on this sacred spot a good crop from the plantations was expected and health of children and good growth of the pigs. That it was also of importance for the conduct of war is evidenced by informations like this: "Our enemies sneaked into the vicinity of our *lugehaneta* and shot an arrow into one of the fence poles while shouting: 'Come, leave the Wanima! Join us!' Then the pole hit by the arrow was taken along into the men's house of the enemy. There they honored it by dancing and slaughtering pigs and feasting. Later they waged war on the Wanima. The Wanima, after the loss of the fence pole, soon became blind and lost their strength. Their attackers killed everybody and destroyed everything which they came across. Only afterwards the remaining Wanima became aware of the true reason for the weakness. To take now their revenge they did the same to the enemy which they had suffered at their hands. In the darkness of night they carried a sacred fence pole away from the worshipping ground of the enemy". Already a single fence pole is believed to be charged with power. They speak to the pole as to a person, the pole strikes people with blindness and takes their strength away. The name of the guardian of the *lugehaneta* of the Wanima is *Gabinimo*. The plant in the center of their sanctuary still stands in full splendor atop its mound. Though under the influence of Christian missions the cult there has been discontinued, the people still are filled with awe when passing by the worshipping ground of their ancestors.

The *lugeha* of the Naminamiroka.—The village of these people lies on a mountain and consists of two groups of inhabitants. One group are the Anpazuha, the other the Hitunu-zuha. They have one worshipping ground in common, there called *lugeha*. Each group appoints its guardian for the sacred place. The guardian of the Anpazuha is called *urako*, that of

the Hitunuzuha *natnono*. Their sacred enclosure lies on the mountain slope. I could not see it myself, but I was told that no *gizahere* plant is planted at its center, instead of it a pole, called *okiza*, still stands there. One part of the mound is said to contain a stone of the Anpazuha, another part a stone of the Hitunuzuha. Both stones are valued as treasures by each party. The pole at the center, standing there for both parties, is called *kizuha*, because it is taken from the wood of a tree called by this name. Only the two guardians of the *lugeha*, are able to find the tree from which wood for the sacred pole can be taken, and bring it to the worshipping ground. Ceremonies are performed there especially in times of famine. First the ground itself had to be duly inaugurated. A part of the plantation ground was planted. Before the plants could develop tubers, *Cordyline* leaves were brought and spread out on the ground. On the leaves the sacred stones were laid and on the stones fat of pigs. Then the stones together with the leaves and the fat were burried in the ground near the pole. The pole is still standing there, protruding from the ground about 50 cm. high. One of the two stones is covered with only a thin layer of earth, the other one is even partly visible. As far as I could see, the visible stone was a whitish sandstone. The native bystanders resolutely prevented me from removing the earth a little from the stone and also they themselves did not dare to do this for me and to show me the stone, this would bring instant death down upon them. The visible surface of the stone had about the size of a child's head. I was told that there was once a fence of brushwood planted around the small mound. While the bundles with the sacred stones were burried in the earth, the elder men sung: "*Mururi, mururi, gosi, numunaro e, wosino,*" a text now no longer understood. Formerly, the houses of the village, arranged in two parallel lines, stood very close to the sacred ground, the first houses only a few meters away. At the great ceremonies the participants were sitting in a circle around the *lugehaneta*, eating pork, sweet potatoes, etc., and chewing sugar cane.

As to the meaning of the feasting on the sacred ground we will hardly miss the point if we interpret it as a communion ceremony in which men dine together with the powerful numen they worship on their mysterious *lugehaneta* ground. Dining with spirits as a special token of friendship with them is widely practiced in New Guinea, also here on the Highlands this custom

has been frequently observed. As far as I could make out, the sacred stones in Naminamiroka are natural stones without any additional work on them by human hands. My informants on the spot pointed out to me the special importance of the entrance to the sacred ground. When a ceremony was going on inside, the guardians of the ground were on duty as sentinels on the entrance, one on each side sitting outside the fence. When I visited the place, my guides, though they could not be talked into moving the stones, did not hesitate to pose for a photo standing on top of the mound which contains the stones. On the mound grows now an ordinary tree already about 6 m. high. Of the former fence only a few *Cordylines* are left.

The *lugehaneta* of the Kapiyufa.—An old man with the name Erepe gave of the worshipping ground the following definition: "It is a garden of 'the great man there above the clouds'". So the tribesmen call their god Mezauwe. On this heavenly being I shall write with more details elsewhere.² It is not certain however that the above given opinion on the god is common among the natives of the district. The official guardian of the sacred ground is called *yawirise*. He has to see to it that the *gizahere* plant on the central mound is always growing well and that it is always clean. If this plant does not grow well, the fruits in the plantations will not grow well either. The *gizahere* is a rare plant; if it dies, a new one must be bought for a high price. The guardian carries it with utmost care and bowing his body all the way to the sacred ground. Should somebody dare to eat leaves of this plant, he will have to vomit, his body will swell and death will follow. But in the Chimbu district this plant is highly priced as medicine for pigs. If the guardian does not handle it with all care, many tribesmen will have to die. An old man demonstrated to me how the guardian carries the plant moving almost in a sitting position Erepe told me also that the pigs are killed outside the enclosure. Their blood must flow in the direction of the fence. If the *gizahere* plant sees the blood, it will grow well and so will do the other plants. If the guardian neglects the sacred garden, the *gizahere* plant will wither and so will do all fruits in the plantation. When the tribe was faced with a serious problem, a fire was made on the sacred ground and bamboo burned in it. If the

2. Idem, Mezauwe der große Mann dort oben. Zft. f. Rel. u. Miss. wissensch., forthcoming.

bamboo cracked with a strong sound, the guardian shouted: "Mezauwe!" and then all those present did the same. Of a stone in the *lugehaneta* of this place I heard nothing, but it can be assumed that there is a stone hidden in the sacred ground.

The *lugehaneta* of the Gafuku.—A man with the name Agape gave me the following information: "The official title of the guardian is there *gizapawe*. An old man with name Baukarowe was the guardian of our *lugehaneta*. He is still alive. When a guardian died, a huge gathering of men, women and children was held in the village. At it a big man stood up and, pointing at the first-born son of the dead guardian, said: 'Here is the son of the dead *gizagawe*. He must take over the office of his father'. The thus newly appointed guardian sent some young men into the forest to cut wood for making a fence around the sacred ground. They brought this wood to the place where the inaugural ceremonies for the new *lugehaneta* were to be performed. The next morning the people brought abundant food and every man brought a pig. The guardian, bringing along a pig on a line, proceeded with his family to the ceremonial ground. The other families followed him. The guardian sit down where the enclosure was to be made. The other people laid down their food in a wide circle. The fence was made where the old one was before. All weed was cleared out from inside the smaller and the larger enclosure. The posts for the new fence were pointed. Each man took a post and rammed it into the ground. After the erection of the fence the guardian planted the *gizahere* plant on the small mound inside the new fence. He then came out from the fence and closed its entrance. If an unauthorized man should ever have dared to plant the sacred plant, he would have lost his life. At these ceremonies no *nama* ghost flutes³ were played. After the ceremonies people had to abstain from plantation work for a whole week. The plant in the *lugehaneta* nobody dared to touch for fear of immediate death".

The *lugehaneta* of the Nagamifuya.—Unai reported: "Before the work in the plantations begins, leaves of the plant *meguha*, also called *napanuha*, are fetched. These leaves are cut into small pieces and mixed with fat of pigs. Then the spurs of the *napanuha* plant and the blossom of the *moipa* plant are planted in the garden [i.e., the *lugehaneta*]. While this is done,

3. K. E. Read: Nama Cult. Oceania, Vol. 23, No. 1.

a big man [a respected person], entrusted with this function, speaks mysterious words. These words having been spoken, the individual families plant their own gardens. When this work is done, they have to stay away from their gardens for three days". Later Maki, the guardian of the *lugehaneta*, informed me that a blue stone, pig dung, an *akeporona* plant and roots of the *rapisi* tree were bundled together and buried in the ground of the *lugehaneta*. On top of the central mound a green *Cordyline* is planted, alone or together with a *gizahere* plant. The blue stone is of the same kind as the *mataha* stones. The common word for stone is *gehan*. Only men can enter the *lugehaneta* garden. The fence around it is made of the wood of the *upaiha*. Men, women and children carry this wood to the *lugehaneta* with extreme care. All chips are carefully picked up and put into the fence. Such blue stones as they are used here in the *lugehaneta* can be found on the river banks.

The common motif behind the erection of the *lugehaneta* is the desire for a good growth of the fruits in the plantations, of tribesmen and of animals, and for protection against the dangers of war and other threats. The planting of the *gizahere* plant in most cases may be explained by the rarity of this plant and by its remarkable lusty growth. In my opinion the growth of this plant should be transferred to the plants in the plantations. As said above, the other plants either wither away with the sacred plant or grow with it. As to the sacred stones, stone worship is commonly practiced on the Highlands, especially in the Wagi Valley.⁴ In some localities also a sacred post has its place in the *lugehaneta*. Besides it, also all fence posts occupy a sacred position. The posts of the fence, as already said, are spoken to as if they were persons. The dark clay and the blue stone seem to be of equal importance. If one knows of the enormous importance of the *Cordyline* on the Highlands, one is not surprised that it can be used instead of the *gizahere* plant.

Magic and medical practices of the Goroka.—The Gafuku man Xube reports: "Earthquakes are called *imima*. An earthquake is caused by a woman with the name Mibena. She is sitting somewhere on the ground looking at the good growth of the fruits in her plantation. She moves about in a happy mood, thus causing an earthquake." The natives fear the earth

4. H. Aufenanger: The War-Magic-House in the Wagi Valley. *Anthrop.* Vol. 54, 1959.

might turn around and burry them. The name Mibena seems to be composed of an element of *mikasi* 'earth' and *bena* 'woman', so that the meaning would be 'earth-woman'.

Extraction of blood from the stomach, the tongue, the nose, the penis and other parts of the human body is performed in various ways. The young men insert a long and thin rattam liana into the mouth and deep down into the stomach. They believe that the liana reaches even the loins. The liana is taken double so that both ends of it are held and kept in the hand of the operator. When the liana has reached the stomach the operator moves it up and down. Blood is then vomited together with the content of the stomach. This makes the man feel easy and capable of marching long distances without fatigue, and besides women and girls will fall in love with him. The swallowing of a rattam liana, called *onaha*, is a secret among men and it seems it is still practiced.

The extraction of blood from the nose is achieved by pressing leaves into the nostrils.⁵ With miniature bows and arrows people shoot themselves mutually at their tongues, which procedure is called *rawa*. *Menoni izapa* is the name for shooting with a small arrow at the glans penis of which the prepuce has been moved back. As Xube assured me, this kind of blood extraction the men formerly performed frequently on themselves after it had been demonstrated to them on a water in the youth initiation which lasted for about two weeks.

On details of the youth initiation Seso, a Gafuku man of the village Lumabaka had this to say: early in the morning of the first day the candidates were taken to a water where the "birds" were shown to them, that is the sacred flutes and how to play them. Then reed was pushed into their nostrils so that they bled. This blood they let run into the water. The leaves of the reed, called *hata*, had been put together and folded breadthwise. The edges of the leaves have many small pricks which hurt the membrane in the nostrils and cause bleeding. As an explanation of this procedure the informant said: "As unborn babies in the wombs of our mothers we were kept with the head down so that much blood of our mother gathered in the head. This surplus blood of the mother must be taken out again if the young man is to become strong in fighting".

The following little story tells us something about the origin

5. H. Aufenanger und G. Höltker, *Die Gende*, p. 103.

of the sacred flutes. On the western bank of the Asaro River a huge bamboo cluster is growing on a rock. The name of the rock is Urupoka. Of this bamboo it is said that some sounds were heard when the wind blew from a southerly direction. An insect, called *upeni*, had bored a hole into the wall of a bamboo into which the wind blew. The bamboo uttered the sound: "U-me-ri-si-re-re". This gave the tribesmen the inspiration to cut bamboo flutes. But measured by the importance of the sacred flute in the cultural life of the natives, this explanation of its origin is rather inadequate. Seso, my informant, knew also that every woman who had seen a sacred flute was killed without mercy. In all probability is the mythical bird after which the flutes are named, the casowary. This big bird is made an object of worship far and wide in New Guinea, for instance in the Prince Alexander Mountains and in the Wagi and the Chimbu Valley. The significance attributed to the casowary in the Goroka district is demonstrated by the following facts: if somebody had eaten something in the territory of a former enemy, then he was not allowed to visit and feed a casowary which he had reared, otherwise the man would have to die. Death would also come to him if he, after a coitus with his wife, would visit or feed the casowary. The captured casowary must be allowed to move about freely within the enclosure where he is kept and must not be tied to a post or fence. Such casowaries are killed only at festivals in which many pigs are slaughtered. The killing of the casowary is not done by its owner. Before it is killed, the fence of its enclosure is decorated with garlands of flowers and leaves and feathers of the paradise bird. Then the casowary is led out and killed by a stroke on its head with a wooden club. The children of the relatives of the owner of the casowary take the decorations on the fence home. In the district of Mingende in the Wagi Valley I once saw a killed casowary being carried away on a litter like a human corpse. The owner of the casowary steams it in an earth-oven. He sends part of the meat into every household of the village and eats the rest with his own family members. The bones of the casowary are sharpened and carried along in the arm-girdle. Still today we can see natives who carry a dagger, made of casowary bone, stuck into the hair of their forehead with the point of it in front. Others carry such a dagger, the point downward, in front of their face. Casowary daggers are dangerous weapons in hand-to-hand fighting. As a specially beautiful hair-

do is prized a ring of casowary feathers worn on festive occasions. In former times warriors went to battle with this head decoration. For the Koge district on the left side of the Wagi River I could gather evidence enough of the mystic significance of the casowary worship.

Unai, a man from the village Nagamiyufa, gave me the following informations: before a garden was dug up, the digger stuck a stick in the ground some distance in front of him. An old woman or also an old man muttered a spell over the stick. The spell effected that the work could be finished soon and the stick reached.

The small bow which is used to extract blood from one's own or some other person's tongue or other part of the body is called *ogimisi*. The common term for bow is *gimisi*. The big war bow is called *chiza*. The small bow used for blood extraction was made new each time, because if it had been found by a malignant sorcerer, he could have used it with a murderous intention against its owner. The bow-staff was made of bamboo, the bow-string of the flower-stalk of the *akepa* reed. Also the small arrow was made of this flower-stalk. When with the pygmies in the Schrader Mountains I saw a little boy making a small bow within three minutes. As arrow-heads only stone-splinters were used formerly, which are now replaced by glass-splinters. The perforation of the tongue with the small arrow of the bow for blood extraction is still done by people who still honor their old customs.⁶

The perforation of the lower bridge of the nose.—In the Goroka district one can see many men whose nose bridge is perforated. It is not the tip of the nose which is perforated as it is among the Gende,⁷ but the hole is made just where the cartilage of the nose ends. Of this custom I have been given the following explanation: when somebody's pigs were always sick, a big man (*ozaha*) said: "Your pigs will not grow because you have not perforated your nose". He then perforated the nose of the man in trouble with his pigs with a bone from a bat from above downward. To prevent the hole from closing, a little stick was inserted into it. In the village Nagamiyufa I heard that they use there the very thin bone of the hind-leg of a pig for nose perforation.

6. H. Aufenanger und G. Höltker, *Die Gende*, p. 102.

7. *Die Gende*, p. 79.

Miscellanies on the culture of the natives in the Goroka district on the Eastern Highlands of New Guinea.—

On the origin of man.—Aito, a man from the village Kefamo, had this to say: "At the beginning there were two men, Save and Ropi, living in Okifuya to the North of Goroka. Save and his wife Inue had a light skin whereas Ropi and his wife had a brown skin. We do not know where they came from, but all people descend from them. Robi's grave is found in Umihehe-saro near Kefamo. Save is burried near Okuka". [According to Seso from the village Lumabaka, the first ancestors lived in Yoiparo, to the North of Goroka].

The dead.—In the village Kefamo I heard that all dead are burried. In former times however only some men and women were burried, all others were cremated. The dead women were cremated on the Gomeha River. The dead men were cremated on a special cremation ground near the village. Around this ground were planted bushes of casuarines, bamboo and cordyline. The cremation ground for men is called *papoloka*. The ashes of the corpses were thrown into the Gohamega River. Wrapped in cordyline leaves they were carried to the river by two men. As remuneration for their services the ash carriers were given a steamed pig by the brother of the dead. While the corpse was burnt on a pyre, the mourners slaughtered and steamed pigs in a earth-oven. All enemies who were killed in battle and whose corpses the conquerors had taken home, were boiled and eaten, never cremated. Likewise, young and strong men of handsome appearance who were killed in battle and whose corpses were taken home by their companions, were cut into pieces, boiled in bamboo tubes and eaten.

Nobody likes to come near a grave for fear of the ghost of the dead. If somebody says: "I have seen a *horosi* ghost", all run away. If somebody has eaten a meal with enemies, then the ghosts of the dead of the village appear and beat him so that he vomits the eaten food.

Three birds, *nipiza*, *arikuta*, and *huteri*, are considered as souls of the dead. If such a bird appears, people lay food on the ground and say to the bird: "Come down and eat this food!" In Wanima I saw a man with a crippled arm. A tree which he had felled near a graveyard had smashed his arm; this was in the opinion of the people the punishment for his sacrilege. About twenty years ago a man from Yamanufa in the Goroka district was killed. It happened that a clan brother

had eaten some vegetable which had been steamed in their earth-oven by former enemies. In the afternoon of the same day this man fell into a fire and burnt his entire face. This misfortune was a punishment inflicted on the trespasser by the ghosts of the dead for disregard of a prohibition handed down by the ancestors. The latter two instances show that the dead consider the graveyard as their property which they protect against trespassing and damage, and that also in the other world they do not want to have anything to do with their former enemies. For enmity and revenge no limit is set by death. Should surviving clan members wish to come to terms with their enemies, for instance by eating together with them, the dead will not fail to show their disapproval.

A charm.—When a pig has run away into the bush and did not return, marks were cut into a bamboo lengthwise down. These furrow-like marks were painted red and a charm was spoken over them. Then people said to the bamboo: "Our pig has not yet come back for several days. Bring it back!" After that the bamboo is laid into fire. After a while it cracks with a terrific sound. If the cracking happens soon, the pig will return soon; otherwise later.

Magic for fighting.—Before a battle a pig is steamed in an earth-oven. Into the opening of the oven through which water is poured into the oven, a cordyline was inserted. Into each leave of the cordyline a knot was made. After a while a man who had already killed an enemy, untied the knots while saying: "*Siwi, siwi, gopa okuko, ripirika tawe, xo nama ikanama ho, hu*". The meaning of these words is no longer clear. Then the man swung the cordyline over the heads of the warriors and threw it away. The untying of the knots obviously signifies the removal of all obstacles in the coming battles.

Trunks of fern.—On the houses of the Goroka district as well as along the Wagi and the Chimbu River one can frequently see black trunks of fern.⁸ Likewise such trunks are seen on the stakes which are used to support the sugar-canes so that the wind cannot bend them down. Again and again I asked what function these fern trunks have to fulfil, but nobody could give me a satisfactory answer. One thing however can be taken for granted, that in the Goroka district the fern is the sacred plant

8. H. Aufenanger: *The Sun in the Life of the Natives in the N. G. Highlands.* *Anthrop.*, Vol. 57, 1962.

of the sun, as it is also the case, in my opinion, in the Wagi and the Chimbu Valley. Near Goroka one sees often houses with three turrets, each of them covered with a black fern trunk. I was told that only a great warrior was allowed to have three turrets on his house. The custom to adorn houses with fern trunks is now more and more forgotten.

Death charm.—Men and women could kill other persons by a charm called *guma*. *Guma birikewe* means 'to beat them with death charm'. As Yindunoshu, a man from the village Tafeto, told me, this death charm is applied only during night so that nobody could notice the machination.

Menstruation.—When "the moon kills the woman"—as the men call the menstruation period—the women abstain from work. At this time the men fetch sweet-potatoes from the gardens themselves, and they also do the cooking. The women just tell their husbands: "I have touched excrements, so I cannot touch your food". But the pigs are still fed by menstruating women. They also give no food to their sons but still to their daughters. It is said that if sons accept food from their menstruating mothers, they would become lean. The Gafuku and the Asaro, as I have heard, have no menstruation houses, but the Bena, who live to the East of Goroka, have. There four women together own a menstruation house. Men are afraid of contact with blood of females.

The Anthropological Nanzan University Expedition to the Highlands of New-Guinea took place from August 1964 to the end of the year. Six scientists took part in it: two ethnologists, two archaeologists, one linguist and one psychiatrist. The expedition was very successful. The scientists were able to make their studies in various parts of the Highlands including the Simbai-pygmyes' district and the anthropologically untouched area of Lake Kapiago. The results will appear in various anthropological periodicals.