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B. Hogeosi

10.1-16

Circumcision.

Initiation rites of the
Western Swana.

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1 When boys are to be circumcised, they are accompanied by men to the circumcision school. The law of circumcision is that the period of duration is six months at the school. Boys are allowed to go to circumcision when they are twelve years of age or more. Girls also go to the ceremony of initiation into womanhood when they have attained that age. The boys are circumcised in this manner: A whole group is circumcised at the same time though they are not all of the same age. They may be twenty in number, they all get circumcised. The circumcision commences when the month of October begins to be visible and it is once a year. Names which indicate that the boys have been circumcised are such as these: Lekxema, Hloaise and Fukise and Khabisi. When there is famine or war, circumcision is suspended because there is no food. That is the reason for the suspension of circumcision during the years of famine or war. Circumcision is controlled by anyone who wishes to have his child circumcised, he then informs the chief that he has a son whom he wishes to have him circumcised during a certain month. The chief then informs his tribe that a boy or a girl of so-and-so is being circumcised. Therefore those who want to have their children circumcised should bring them along so that they may be all circumcised in a group. They then find a doctor to throw divining bones so as to see what to do when he undertakes to circumcise these people, because when they have to go to a circumcision school, a bull has to be slaughtered. The boys should all be circumcised, but there are some to be found who do not wish to be circumcised. If a boy refuses to be circumcised, he is merely taken for an animal, he is called 'legal' if he is a male. Such a female is called 'lethisa'.

2 The parents of the children are those who have their sons and daughters circumcised just as they like. When this circumcision takes place, no one receiving anything by way of remuneration. We may say that it is only their teacher who

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gets something though it is small, because he takes the skins of the animals that are being slaughtered at the circumcision school. The people who are circumcised do not pay anything else, the circumcision is free. There is secrecy about what is done at the circumcision school, it is known only to those who are concerned. This secret is kept away from those who have not been circumcised. When the boys are about to go to be circumcised, they first learn a circumcision song so that they may know how to sing it. Before they are circumcised, they have to stay with the men at the kgotla so that they should not meet with others or with women until they are circumcised. The time fixed for circumcision is when things are (melting?), the month of October or December, even then only when the month is waning. Those who are being circumcised are separated with the people because they are going to their custom which cannot be seen by children and by those who have not yet been circumcised. Strips of skins are made for the boys to wear. Cattle skin dresses are made for the girls. These people are concealed so that they may not be seen by children or by those who have not been circumcised. They engage in conversation but they do not converse with strange people. There is a special place for the circumcision ceremony, a place prepared for that purpose only. It is pitched on the mountain and the circumcision hut is a hut planted on the ground and is made of thin sticks and grass. If we look at the picture of a circumcision school, we shall see a hut planted on the ground. The boys are not smeared with blacklead mixed with fat like the girls. But they do dress. Now when they are already there, having come into their place, it is then that they begin to do their work which consists of braying skins and weaving grass hats. Their teachers dress when it is said that the boys 'thobela', it is when they are being circumcised. When it is said that 'We are returning from throwing away the boys today', it means that they ~~are~~ have gone through the initiation ceremony. They

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are circumcised on the day they enter the initiation school. When they enter the initiation school, their hair is shorn. The man who circumcises the boys is Ratladi, he gives the boys a good thrashing if they do not do as he teaches them. When it is said "Mogetla mo mothung" (a tail on a person) it is meant his flesh, and it is cut with a knife. The person who circumcises the boys is an elderly man who has a knowledge of circumcising. The boys who have been circumcised are also fit to circumcise because they know all the methods which are used there. What is important and worth mentioning is that the fore skin is removed from the penis. Circumcision is conducted as follows: If the people belong to the Bataung clan, the first to be circumcised are those of the Moeketsi family, the Hlalele family, the Rathulo family, and the Raphiri then come the Balwena and Bafokeng. The man who says this is Ralethibela a Motaung of Rathulo. He says that he knows these things perfectly well. The method of curing them is to wash daily. The person who circumcises the boys is not one who is permanently appointed and it is not one particular doctor who circumcises the boys. The choice rests with the children's parent who started the circumcision, he gets a doctor which he prefers. Now the skins which have been cut off are kept. They are buried because they are the life of a person or the flesh of a person. When they have gone out of the circumcision school, they are given names such as these, new suitable names: Lekxema, Kxabisi, Lenepa, Fokisi, Kxemisi and Lefosa and so on. They have praise songs also and they are taught laws and manner of speech which are their own. When they sing their praise they say:

Nna ke Fukisi ramopane oa dithebe,

Thebe tea hao di kopane Fukisi.

Mena motho thabeng, tlo o nthometse thupa ya lesana.

Ke tlo o sapa krongwana tea majaki di nhlolile

Di tsala botona bophatshwana.

The praise song of Lekxema says:

Lekxema is an ostrich he outruns horses with
iron shoes

The gaol has no means of escaping it
 Even if one knows the European language.
 Women, the inventors of many stories
 Go to draw water from the fountain and they backbite us.
 The praise song of Lenepa says:

Lenepa o otlile kxwana mpeng
 Kxwana ya oa ya bonwa ke besadi ba le hole
 Mafokotsane bo Madinakana
 Lefokotsane le kxatlile kweifi.

Malethebela spoke and said:

Ke le monna oa Mosotho ke le Motaung
 Oa xa Rathulo oa Taung xa Mokxele ke ipoka ke re:
 Matswanafiki a kwedi ya Loetse
 A tsamaya a farafara didiba
 Rona le rangwane re a etsisana
 Di tle di tswane ka 'mala sakeng
 Bitse ha ba tloha ba re na a ba lailwe?
 Ke ofe mosadi? Ke yo mothoana Hloaisi,
 Tlong le di kwasa beso-moholo
 Ke mpudi oa lona ke laletse.

A re: Jaanong ke bolela lengae la ka thabeng

ke re: Thswana mamanyedinyedi,

E thswana kwedi o selwa kae?
 E selwa dilomong, lomong tsa mathebe.
 Mpya ya ka ya lekesi ya patisoa.

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The boys are taught behaviour and laws so that they may respect the daughters of other people and not get into trouble with the children of the people. Again a boy must not marry a girl after he has pregated her. What they are taught is to hunt and to fight battles and how they should treat each other with their wives when they have married. When they are at the circumcision school, they are not seen by a person who has not been circumcised. Their manner of sleeping is to lie on their backs because they cannot lie on their stomachs. There is a fire of the hyena which burns in the kxotla the kindler of the fire being unknown.

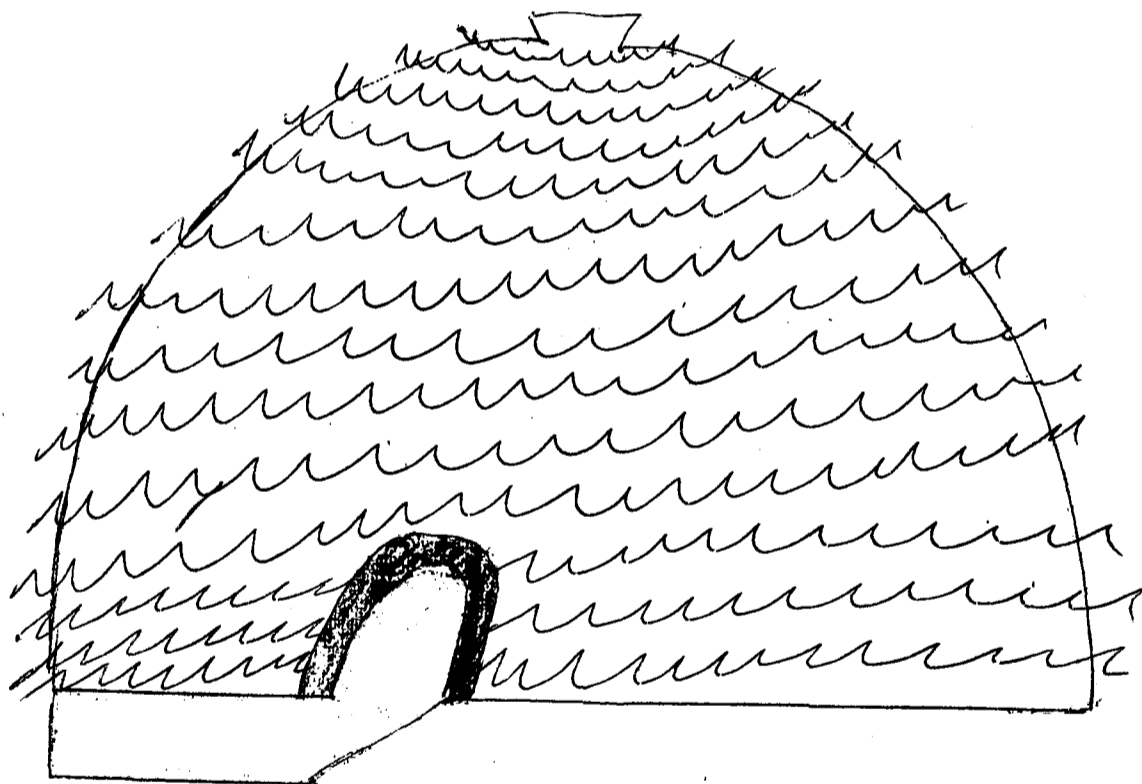
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But that is known only by the older people. Sometimes one dies after circumcision. The men go to tell the parents of the dead boy. Only the men go to bury him and they do not go with women. Food for the circumcised boys is brought by women who have been initiated into womanhood. If the boys have been singing, they stop when the women approach. The idea is that the women should not hear what they are singing about. The women stop at a fair distance from the circumcision school, the teachers of the boys go to them to fetch their food. Their teachers then feed them. The boys who are being circumcised eat any kind of food but they do not drink beer. They use medicine to prevent their being bewitched. When they have completed the six months period, they then go out with a singing of their praises. Their hut is burned down. At the end of their circumcision, they wash themselves. Their reception is a great one. Before the return home, they are doctored, and when they get home they hold a race with the girls, after that they go to the kgotla and sing their praises. When they finish that the young girls come along and put beads round their necks and bracelets round their arms. Circumcised boys and girls are now men and women. Notwithstanding this, they cannot speak or act as they like in the presence of their parents. They must behave themselves well. When a boy has been circumcised, he has the right to marry as well as to answer for himself when he is before the kgotla. As those who are circumcised go according to their groups, so are they also known according to those groups. Each group has its own name. Just as it is said, this group is the Lekxema group, that one is the Kxabisi group etc. These names are given to them by their teachers. They are given these names so that it must be known who belong to this one or that one. These names are given again and again just as it is desired by those who gave them. They are given to new groups as well. Ralethibela says that he has mentioned all the names of the groups of his people. The girls are initiated into womanhood

in a different manner from that of the boys, and I can explain correctly by ascertaining accurately from the women. If the boys got circumcised at the same time though they are not of the same age, they are called the boys of one group. Those who were circumcised first though younger than those who were circumcised at a later date, it is said that they are old by reason of their having circumcised first. Those of the older group respect those of the younger and those of the younger respect those of the older one. But those who belong to one group do not respect each other.

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NTlo ya Bogwera kwa Thabeng.
The hut at the Circumcision School.

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