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Burial customs of aranyane Kgatla.

Death.

1. According to the custom of the ancient times, when the Basotho went to war, and some of them fell on the field of battle, they, were never buried, they were left there to be devoured by the vulture. Yes, the dead were left on the battle field, pieces of flesh were cut off the corpses to be used as charms and these pieces were warmed up and with them medicines were made for use in times of war. The warriors ate them when they went out to the war, the man eater.

The wounded were taken away to be nursed by young women with porridge lumps and meat. One instance is that of a man named Motswedi of the tribe of Mfatlha, who was once stabbed by the Bakgatla of Chief Lentswe. Because of his stature, they had taken him for a chief. In the same battle, Lentswe the chief of the Bakgatla of Kgafela was killed by Maseka, a man of Matsieng, one of the Matebele of Malla.

When an old man was dead, they cut off pieces of flesh from his hip and thigh to mix them with charms for rain. He was buried in the night time under the thorn bushes of the cattle kraal by men only. The women remained at home with bowed heads in the "lapa".

The men cut the corpse off at the knees and shoulder-blade and wrapped up the deceased in his kaross made of sheep skin or skins of carnivorous animals.

The men removed the kraal hedge carefully and dug a hole enough to put in a water pot. They put in a water pot containing the corpse and they then placed a flat stone on top of it and covered it. They put back the kraal hedge carefully again so

that the wild animals should not be able to open or dig in the ground. On leaving the spot, they do not look back.

Old women were buried under cut thorn bushes in the back yard. They were also cut and put in a water pot. If there was a large grinding stone for kaffir corn, a hole was made under it and a milk skin sack belonging to the deceased was buried in it. The deceased was buried with her kaross, and sandals. She was made to sit on her haunches on the milk skin sack bound with the kaross. The people of the ancient times say that by doing so, they meant that the grandchildren of the deceased should live long on earth.

Death was known only by the old people, children never knew anything about it. If a person died at night, he was buried at that time. If he died at daytime, they hid him until night fell.

The chief was buried alone at the cattle kraal; not all the people knew, only the headmen knew about the chief's burial.

According to the custom of the ancient times, when a chief died, even his wife never knew. It was not the law that she should know of the chief's death. The only time she would know was when the tribe was informed, sometimes after a long time.

The spot where he was buried was doctored with special charms. If a person attempted to dig at the spot, he would not succeed, he would find the ground as hard as a stone.

If the chief happened to be dug up by people and they took certain parts of his flesh, the tribe of that chief scattered and that tribe would have no chief, no law.

At Marula, the chief of the Bakgatla of Maseku died and the Europeans failed to plough there. Whenever they tried to plough there, the plough broke.

Where a chief has died, it is impossible for a servant of the chief to dig. The chiefs of father died at Moseka and Taiditsane and all the people have failed to dig up these graves. It is only the people of those places who are able to dig them up.

The chief and all the people were buried during the night. The chief is buried with the greatest secrecy by the men of the chief's village, so that no one should know. A hole is dug at the cattle kraal, he is put into a large dish and carefully covered so as to avoid detection. By burying a chief in this manner, the intention was that the cattle should trample over him and that he should not get dry, otherwise the rain would vanish causing drought in the land.

If rain did not want to fall, kaffir beer was made and was emptied at the place where the chief died, some people slaughtered an ox and meat was taken to the place.

People from whom pieces of flesh were taken to make charms were those who were brave in battles and those once killed a lion. Charms got from them were mixed with medicines to be strewn over the weapons. These medicines were known as "dikope"

From old men old women and the Baroka (rain-makers), charms were taken for causing rain to fall. Other graves were not visited, only the grave of a Koroke and that of a chief were visited, and that was for the purpose of asking rain, as was done on the grave of the chief of Maseku who died at Marula.

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When the Bakgatla of this area needed rain, the women went to draw water in pot lids and this was taken to the chief's grave. When they got there, they poured the water on it and said, Rain-rain. When they left it, they were wet already and they ran home. The chief and a Moroka were the gods of rain in the ancient times.

When the twins were born, as a confined woman was looked after by old women, who no longer gave birth, they killed one and left the other. The remaining one died from natural causes.

The twin babe was killed by the old women and put in a pot and buried in the hut. The spot was smoothed carefully and covered until it dried perfectly well.

All the children known as "ogakemetea" (wonder children) were killed and buried by the old women. When the old women killed twins or children born before their time, they said, that was uncleanliness or abomination; they would keep away rain. Other Bakgatla said, if the top teeth of a child came out first, the women would kill it saying that it will keep away the rain. If they did not kill it, they sent it to the home of its grandfather.

If a person who had chest sickness died, he was buried at a wet place so that the rain would continue to fall. They said that if he was buried at a dry place, the land would be dry. He was always buried in a shadow or at a wet place. Where a person's relatives were buried, it was said that there were ancestral spirits at the place and not a ghost. A person does not say that he saw a ghost, he says "I have seen a "setlotlwaane" (spirit). They say that the spirits were black, they had no fire. The old men say that the fire came with Europeans.

If a person saw one of the spirits of the dead, he knew that he came to fetch one among the living. It is said that the spirits held discussions just like ourselves. People did not talk about very much there.

Children knew nothing about death. If a boy or a girl died at the circumcision ceremony, two boys were sent, one carrying the clothes of the deceased, the other the deceased's pot for holding fat. They took these home. On arrival one of them broke the pot containing red ochre, the other one put the clothes down. By breaking the clay pot in the "lepa", the child's mother gave up hope and knew that her child had died at the circumcision school.

There was a certain witchdoctor Saka, of the Bakwena clan. If a person did not die from natural causes, he was capable of doctoring the grave so that the whole family of the wizard who bewitched the deceased should die, and it did die. He doctoring on many occasions at Seleka's of Lotib-ssedi, the people died, fire wood burned so that only ashes remained and the houses were shut with branches. He knew the charm for doctoring the graves very well, he doctoring his axe and made it to cut the grave.

When a person has died, people do not go to the lands that day. People do not go to cut thorn bushes to make a hedge. They could all go to do their work the next day.

The bereaved person does not do any work. They draw water for the bereaved too for a few days. Women who are relatives only sleep with her for a week. When children ask where their mother or father is, they are told "He or she has been taken away by the wolf" and the children say nothing further.

When a person has been bewitched, it is said he is not dead, he is made to sleep and the person whom has caused his death will dig him up during the night to go and make him "makokonyane" so that he may make him to do his work for him. If a person is a "lekonyane", he is alive, he eats and does work for his wizard only. This wizard cuts off his tongue and makes him stupid with medicines. "Lekonyane is fed with bran from kaffir beer only. It is well known by the Basotho that some of the people are not dead, they are alive and are "makokonyanes" who are made by the wizard to weed his garden at night.

People like this were once found among the Bakgatla tribe when the tribe was still at Ilhatlhane. There was a person who was weeding his fields with people of this kind. He was seen by people at night. A certain man who was a Letebele, once worked as a kitchen boy. In the evening he made his "lekonyane" to wear a white apron and said, "Go and wash utensils in the kitchen. The Letebele man was found out by his employer. He asked him where the other person was. The Letebele denied all knowledge of the man and the white man drove him away from his service saying that he was a cheat. He even had him arrested but he refused at court to point out the "lekonyane".

Wizard cut the tip off a persons tongue so that he may not be distinct. In the days of long ago they were hidden in large milk skin sacks and covered up.

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