

THE PEOPLE ON THE SOUTH-EASTERN
SLOPES OF ELGON

(FROM THE KWIWA TO THE MUBERI)

BY C. W. WOODHOUSE

As is common near large isolated mountains which offer a certain amount of shelter and protection to fugitives, the volcanic mass known as Elgon presents a considerable variety of race and language among the residents on its slopes.

On the south-eastern portion of the mountain and its lower foothills, which are being considered in these notes, the population may be conveniently placed into five divisions which comprise :—

1. (a) The 'El-geborit' dwelling at the foot of Elgon from the Kwiwa to the Kumelil. (b) The El-kabeywa, Dorobo-like people who are closely allied to the 'El-geborit,' many of this tribe being among them.

2. The Kipsatok or Elakassissi's people.

3. The Kitosh settlers living among the El-geborit.

4. A few Uasin-Gishu Masai settlers.

5. The Esomek, comprising the cave-dwellers at the foot of Elgon. These, as far as their history and the settlements of the other tribes, were there as far back as tradition relates.

On taking the other histories of these tribes in the above-mentioned order they appear to be as follows :—

EL-GEBORIT

The history of this tribe appears to go back for some 150 years, but this may be overestimated.

The number 150 was arrived at by allowing twenty-five years for each person in the genealogy of the tribe down to Tendet, who is now about twenty-five years old and has children of his own.

The founder of the tribe (as stated by the present chief) was a man named Sangüt, who fled from the Kamasia country somewhere within touch of the large river running into the lake near the El-keyo, probably the Kerio river. The cause of his

departure was that his people had been raided and severely beaten by a tribe from the north vaguely called Koromoja people.

Sangüt fled to Elgon to somewhere near the Kipkolkol river, and apparently lived the life of a hunter. He was very successful with elephants and selling the tusks, obtained a wife from the Esomek (cave-dwellers), and at the time of his death possessed a certain amount of stock, cattle, goats, &c.

He was succeeded by his son Kipsambo who was succeeded by his son Kitariah Kapsangüt. By this time the tribe was growing in wealth and importance and were strong enough to beat off most of their invaders. They had, of course, been joined by various refugees. They were said to have lived an entirely pastoral life, subsisting on blood, meat, and milk. Their country was among the lower slopes on the east of Elgon, above the Omasa Keliondet, a very fine grazing country. They were not great hunters but obtained their ivory and honey from the Dorobo.

Kitaria was succeeded by Kipitek, who appears to have been the most prominent man of war the race had produced. His central village was on the Rongai river, a tributary of the Keliondet. He successfully raided the Sabei, the Kitosh, and the Lago (or Lako), capturing much booty. This period appears to have been the zenith of the tribe. In his old age he suffered a very severe reverse at the hands of the Koromoja, most of the warriors being absent raiding. A great many cattle, women, and children were captured, many of the latter being slain.

The reverse was so severe that the tribe was driven from the neighbourhood of the Rongai to their present location. He was succeeded by the present chief Kiptolulia (Arap Kipitek), who is now an elderly man.

Kiptolulia's half-brother Arap Sangalu is considered chief of the El-kabeywa and Chebogo's people, forest-dwellers and hunters on Elgon.

Kiptolulia's sons include Tendet, the eldest, Arap Kembé, and others. Both of these men have children.

During the outbreak of rinderpest of some years ago their cattle were largely destroyed, and at this period they were

forced to adopt the practice of the Bantu natives and cultivate *shambas*, which they still do, although they have a fair number of cattle, sheep, and goats. The fields in which they cultivate eleusine, matema, and maize are carefully fenced in with branches of trees to protect them in some measure against the attacks of game, &c.

Elephants occasionally visit the *shambas* and do a considerable amount of damage.

Their habits at the present day are very similar to other members of the Masai-Nandi stock.

The huts are made in the Masai fashion, plastered with cowdung and inclosed within a fence composed of interlaced branches. The grain stores are after the Kavirondo (Bantu) pattern, being supported on posts and having the usual conical removable lid. They are often placed outside the protecting fence.

If an ox is captured by the warriors it is taken to a temporary hut built away from the village and there slaughtered and eaten (recalling a Masai custom). There appears, however, to be no restriction made about other people eating meat in the village, except that the animal must be slaughtered away from the *boma*.

Milk, porridge, blood, and the flesh of game are also consumed. The El-geborit are clever cattle-men and appear to understand cattle, in contra-distinction to the Bantu native. The young calves, goats, and the sheep are herded separately from the adult animals, usually by a very small boy. They keep fowls but do not appear to have any dogs.

All adults are circumcised. They state that in former years they held circumcision feasts every five years after harvesting the crops (August).¹ For a considerable time before the actual circumcision the boys and girls about to be operated on assemble at the chosen spot, and spend most of the day (and night, too, if it is not raining) in dancing and singing. The operation itself is said to be performed by a Dorobo.

The arms of the tribe include both the Masai form of spear and the small, leaf-headed, 'long-necked' spear. The edge of

¹ Before they cultivated crops they used to buy grain for beer each year.

the latter is protected by a narrow rawhide covering similar to the Suk.

Their shields are of the Nandi and also Kitosh patterns. They have bows and arrows, the latter tipped with the *keliot* poison. The usual type of Dorobo elephant spear, weighted at both ends, is found among them. The enemy they consider most to be reckoned with are the Koromoja, small parties of whom have been seen south-east of Elgon within the year.

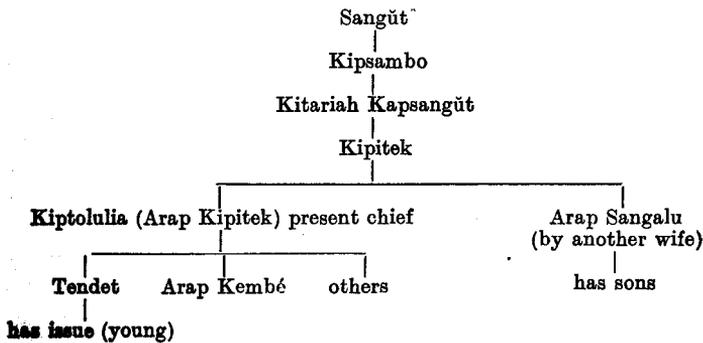
At the present time they are very anxious to return to their old country on the Rongai and Keliondet rivers, as they are getting uncomfortably crowded by the Kitosh settlers and the grass is getting eaten down. Up till now, by the exercise of a rigorous quarantine, they have entirely escaped the present outbreak of rinderpest.

This may have been due to the expressed intention of Kiptolulia of slaughtering any animals brought near his own.

A very noticeable feature of the tribe, although they are hardly touched with civilisation, is their courtesy and politeness.

Their speech appears to be Nandi or very closely allied to it. Masai and Bantu Kavirondo are also spoken and understood by nearly all the tribe.

A genealogy of the chiefs is appended :



THE EL-KABEYWA AND CHEBOGOS

These people, of whom Arap Sangalu is the recognised head, comprise a rather heterogeneous lot of tribes. They are all forest-dwellers with the habits and speech of Dorobo.

Included among them probably are aboriginal Dorobo, but many are, or their fathers or grandfathers were, refugees and stragglers from other tribes, i.e. El-geborit, Nandi, El-keyo, El-kony, Sengwerr, Kasmania, Uasin-Gishu Masai, Kisartok, Sabei, and possibly even Suk.

They have been forced to adopt a Dorobo's life from either poverty caused by famine, disease, or war, or have fled from their tribes for some other reason.

Their speech appears to be a Nandi dialect similar to that spoken on the Mau, though some words are not the same, i.e. *kebau*, their word for rhinoceros—as opposed to *kichanet*, and the word used for leopard appears to be *chablanget*, which is Nandi, the Mau Dorobo word *melilda* not being understood. (The Mau Dorobo use *both* words.)

There are, as among all Dorobo, different degrees of skill in hunting in different members of the tribe. The game mostly sought for are rhinoceros and elephant, although giraffe, buffalo, and even buck, such as hartebeeste, are successfully killed. A certain number of giant pig are killed by them. The staple food is honey, the forest being all portioned out in areas, the said areas belonging to certain families. Good beehives are constructed, and wild honey, especially at the foot of the mountain, is very plentiful. Arap Sangalu stated that his family take ten to eleven nests of bees every day to support themselves, but this may be an exaggeration. Bee stings have apparently no effect on these people, and it is apparently immaterial whether they use smoke or not in extracting the honey. The head, however, is usually covered with the fur cape, as they state that they are afraid of getting their eyes stung.

In the forests an animal much sought after for its flesh is a variety of Sykes's monkey, which is very plentiful.

They are skilful weavers of wicker-work, and after the people at the foot of Elgon have harvested their grain the El-kabeywa bring down baskets constructed of bamboo slips in exchange for flour. Their dwelling-places are the usual temporary Dorobo form of hut, but Arap Sangalu, who is the possessor of some cattle and goats which are kept above 10,000 feet, has several large flat huts constructed of interlaced

split bamboos and divided inside by partitions. The outside is plastered with clay and cowdung, the roof similar and flat, and any interstices 'chinked' with moss or lichen as some protection against the bitter wind. A remarkable sight at Arap Sangalu's main residence is the occurrence of a small cultivated patch of stunted tobacco, curious on account of the altitude and inclemency of the climate.

The *keliot* poison is prepared from the *branches* of the *Akokanthera* tree, but great care is exercised in choosing the special tree from which the branches are cut. A leaf from each of a large number of trees is tasted, the tree having the most bitter flavour being selected. Afterwards the poison is prepared in the usual way.

Elephants, buffaloes, and rhinoceros are hunted with the usual weighted spear with the detachable shaft and head. The hunter on approaching the game (keeping *very* carefully to leeward) strips himself of everything and creeps up to the nearest animal, always keeping as far from the head as possible. On getting to within three to four yards he rises to his feet, takes a couple of short steps to gain impetus, and hurls the spear at the buttocks or flank of the quarry. He has previously chosen his line of retreat, and, without a glance at the success of his aim, turns and flees at the top of his speed, not pausing till the coign of vantage—river-bed, tree, or rock—previously chosen is reached. He then waits, and in an hour or two cautiously investigates by a circuitous route. If the animal has run; as is usually the case, he follows at a respectful distance until death takes place. As he follows he frequently ascends a tree to view the surrounding country. In the case of elephant or rhinoceros they state that they get the beast in one day if they are lucky, but two or three days is more common.

In the open country the arrival of the vultures informs them of the death of the elephant or rhinoceros. In these cases a man is usually dispatched to some prominent hill in the neighbourhood, whence he watches for the birds. They state they can see vultures at what to a European equipped with binoculars appears to be an incredible distance.

Monkeys, giraffe, and buck are attacked with the usual

poisoned arrow. They seem to be far better marksmen than the Mau Dorobo.

Pitfalls are dug, the pitfall designed for leopard being very ingenious. A small *boma* or *zeriba* is built, with a passage leading up to the entrance; and a goat placed inside. The pit is dug in the passage, and on the leopard entering to obtain the goat he falls into the pit. This is only employed by people like Arap Sangalu who have a few goats, and in the case of a leopard who has taken to regularly killing their stock.

These people are said only to marry among themselves; the women of the people below Elgon are said to die on the mountain, not being able to stand the exposure.

The price paid for a wife is said to be five goats and five bags of honey.

Arap Sangalu was raided by Koromoja a few years ago and states he lost forty head of cattle. The El-kabeywa dislike intensely coming down into the Kitosh plain, as they state they get sick, probably from malaria.

Arap Sangalu's sphere of influence is said to extend from the Turkwell (Suam) to the Elgumi people.

THE KIPSATOK

There are two villages on the Kitaban river belonging at present to Elakassissi, who is government headman for this district.

The history of these people appears to be as follows:

Arap Kembé, the father of Elakassissi, left the Sabei country some fifteen or twenty years ago, owing to having been beaten and chased by some northern tribe. During their flight over Elgon they are said to have been pursued and many killed and wounded. Severe weather when they were crossing the higher slopes decimated the remaining fugitives, who were worn out with travel and war and died of cold and exposure.

Arap Kembé came to Kiptolulia and asked his permission to settle. Kipitek may, or may not, have been alive at this time, but was an old man. Arap Kembé received permission and built near the large caves on the side of Elgon (Kitabau

River). In the course of time Arap Kembé was succeeded by Elakassissi, who is ambitious and shrewd.

He quickly realised that his position in the country was not prominent and was not likely to be unless some change took place. He presented some ivory (which the El-geborit say he stole and he says he bought) to Mumia. He then organised two successful raids against small chiefs of the Elgumi, and obtained about two hundred and fifty cattle. A present of cattle was sent to Mumia. He made himself of use and help to any white men who wished to climb Elgon. (The trail which crosses the mountain from north to south comes past his village.)

Finally, when Mumia was asked by the administrative officer who was the head of the tribes at the foot of Elgon (Masai-Nandi), Elakassissi was named and was made headman.

Lately he has been visited by rinderpest, and has at present ten cattle of his own left. His brother has only five. His manner of living and habits are similar to the El-geborit, although some of the huts in his village are of Kavirondo pattern.

THE KITOSH SETTLERS

Every year more and more of the Kitosh people (a Bantu-speaking race which appears to have a strong leavening of Nilotic (Nandi) blood) move up from their plains and settle near Elgon.

Their habits and customs are well known and have been described, but one or two notes are of interest. All males are circumcised. They make very strong villages defended by a large mud wall and a deep ditch. They were apparently formerly more addicted to stock-keeping than agriculture, although at present they are starting to grow large areas of sim-sim as well as their ordinary food-stuffs.

Many of their customs and habits appear to be copied from the Nandi, i.e. the cap made of the stomach of a goat, the method of dressing the hair, the ear ornaments, the distension of the lobe of the ear, and their arms and their ornaments (arm clamps, &c.).

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They are an enterprising race and are bound, now that war and raiding are eliminated, to increase very materially in the next few years. At present they envelope and are crowding out the El-geborit.

THE UASIN-GISHU MASAI.

A few villages of Masai are scattered haphazard among the above tribes. They are all fugitives from the time when the tribe was broken up and destroyed by the pastoral Masai.

They do not call for any comment except for the fact that they are all becoming very rich in cattle. They own some faint allegiance to Nyakuli.

THE ESOMEK.

These are the cave-dwellers who have inhabited the large and numerous caves found in the first cliffs at the foot of Elgon. They may be closely allied to the El-kony, many of whom are living in the open now.

Their lives until lately have not been happy. Each passing raiding party would usually pay a visit and endeavour to smoke them out.

If they came down from the caves they were always in danger of being cut off, as in most cases the cave is approached by a tortuous path, in one case so steep and narrow that the observer wonders how the cattle get up and down. In this instance the rock passage through which the path runs is worn into a series of depressions made by the feet of cattle.

The entrance to the caves is strongly defended by a palisade, and the interior is divided up into cattle and goat pens, cubicles for the owners, store-rooms, &c., in a very ingenious manner. They have been often described and so call for little comment here.

Two caves are uninhabited owing to the millions of fleas in them. The story related in connection with this is that a heifer was bought from the Kitosh on the plains and brought up. The heifer had fleas on it and these, finding the floor of the cave (composed of several feet of cowdung) a most congenial spot, bred and multiplied enormously and drove the owner

out. In the interior of this cave is a pit which is visited by natives who brave the fleas, as the earth in this pit is saline and salt is extracted.

In these notes in many names both the English and native article has been used for the sake of clearness, i.e. 'the' El-geborit, 'the' El-kabeywa. It would probably be more correct to say 'The Geborit,' 'The Kabeywa.'

THE MELON OF THE KALAHARI DESERT

By R. B. WOOSNAM, F.Z.S.

It was suggested to me that it might be of interest to some of the members of this Society to hear something of the results of an attempt which I have made to acclimatise the wild melon of the Kalahari Desert (*Cucumis caffer*) in the Southern Game Reserve of this protectorate. There is always an element of doubt in the introduction of any new plants into a country strange to them. But although the first seeds of this melon, which were planted last year, practically came to nothing I am glad to say that the second attempt during the present year has met with quite encouraging results.

Before I tell you of the progress of the experiment I ought perhaps to give you some idea of the kind of country and general conditions under which this melon flourishes in its native wilds.

The Kalahari desert, which forms the stronghold of this wild melon, may roughly be said to be comprised by the north-western part of South Africa and extends from Lake Ngami, down past Kuruman and Prieska and Kenkart to the Orange River. This wild melon is, I believe, only found in any quantity in the northern parts of the Kalahari in N.W. Bechuanaland and the Bechuanaland Protectorate, and it is here that I have met with it. It is called by the Bechuanas *kengwe* and by the Dutch and English *sama*. In size it varies from an orange up to a man's head or larger, and is of a dark green colour banded with lighter green stripes, and when fully ripe