

AFRICAN BEEKEEPERS: NOTES ON METHODS AND
CUSTOMS RELATING TO THE BEE-CULTURE OF THE
AKAMBA TRIBE IN KENYA COLONY.

By J. K. R. THORP.

AUTHOR'S NOTE.

These notes were compiled from information I obtained when I was stationed in the Kitui District in 1935-1936.

My debt to Lindholm's *The Akamba* is apparent throughout, and I acknowledge it with gratitude. My thanks are also due to Mr. J. H. Driberg and Mr. K. B. Williams for their kindness in reading the manuscript and for much helpful criticism from the anthropological and bee-keeping points of view, respectively, and to my wife and Mr. P. Whiteing for preparing the diagrams for publication.

Being almost completely ignorant of both apiculture and anthropology, I am aware that I must have made many mistakes and I have probably drawn many false inferences. Bee-keeping customs, like other customs, vary considerably throughout Ukambani, and it is not pretended that this account of them is anything like complete.

It must also be added that the spelling of some of the Kikamba words might possibly cause a shudder from an expert.

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MARSABIT,
NORTHERN FRONTIER,
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“The Lord spake by inspiration unto the Bee,
Saying, provide thee houses in the mountains, and
In the trees, and of those materials wherewith men
Build hives for thee; then eat of every kind of fruit,
And walk in the beaten paths of thy Lord.”

—(KORAN, Ch. XVI. SALE'S TRANSLATION.)

INTRODUCTION.

The Akamba are one of the largest of the many tribes inhabiting Kenya Colony. Racially, they belong to the north-eastern group of the Eastern Bantu.

Their country, Ukambani, lies, approximately between $0^{\circ}15'$ and 3° south and between $37^{\circ}15'$ and 39° east. To the west the natural boundary is the ridge which slopes from the Kikuyu Highlands—Ulu, Yatta, and Kikumbulyu. To the south the boundary is the Athi River, and to the north and north-east the Tana (*Kiluluma*) River. To the east and south-east there is no definite natural boundary, and Akamba, Galla and the Nyika tribes intermingle. The present-day political boundaries are somewhat different, though following, in the main, the natural boundaries. The tribe is divided into two Administrative Districts, with Headquarters at Machakos and Kitui.

This country has two rainy seasons, one in November and December, and the other beginning in March and usually tailing off in May, though on occasions it may be prolonged to the end of June or beginning of July. The rains, however, are often irregular and may occasionally fail altogether, thereby causing severe famine. Nowadays, modern methods of transport and Government famine relief can, normally, cope with the situation, but in the famine of 1898-99, it was estimated that as many as 75% of the population must have perished in parts of the country.

We are, however, concerned only with bee-keeping, and in this connection the effect of these periodical droughts remains practically unaltered. Without rain there can be no flowers for the production of honey, and while it is true that the owners of hives are no longer wiped out wholesale by hunger, the fact that they must concentrate on procuring food to keep themselves and their families alive prevents them from attending to their hives. The result is that the majority of the hives containing bees fall a prey to roving bands of honey pirates, the empty ones fall to pieces for want of repairs, and the next season arrives to find only the fortunate few in possession of their full complement of beehives.

Every Mukamba is a bee-keeper; the possession of beehives is as an essential part of the tribal culture as is the possession of cattle and goats. As with these, the number possessed by an individual varies considerably—from one or two to one or two hundred. A Mukamba who takes no interest in bees (and there probably are a few) can be likened to an English public school boy who takes no interest in games—it is not done.

In a normal year, the honey season will be in full swing by the beginning of June. Hives are usually left in the trees during the whole season, and when the bees have filled a hive in the

first instance, honey will be extracted at intervals of six to twenty days over a period of one or two months, or longer, according to how long the bees can continue to make honey. Hives, however, may be taken down from the trees for removal to a more suitable site or to the village for repairs.

The bees, of course, are by now quite resigned to making their homes in the hives provided for their use and to losing most of their honey. Nevertheless, they still seek homes in hollow tree trunks, holes in rocks and so on, and to these retreats they are still followed by honey-seeking Akamba.

I.—TYPES OF HONEY-BEE FOUND IN UKAMBANI.

The generic name for all bees is *nzuki*, although the usual reference is to the honey-bee proper which enters hives; this is the fierce black African wild-bee.

The composition of the hive is generally known, and named as follows:—

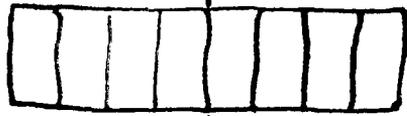
- (1) *Inya*=the queen (i.e., mother).
- (2) *Zaki*=the workers, recognised as females.
- (3) *Ng'aa*=the drones, recognised as males.
- (4) *Ebondu*=as far as can be ascertained, the young queens.

This bee is an excellent producer of both honey and comb.

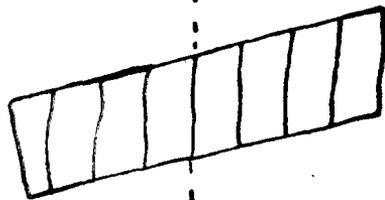
Two other kinds of bee appear to be recognised by the Akamba, and the following descriptions of them have been given. They are said to be rather rare, and as no specimens could be collected for identification it is impossible to make any definite assertions concerning them. It may even be that they are not distinct species at all, but the same bee in different stages, or different sexes of the same bee.

- (1) *Ngilu*.—A small dark bee, slender of body and of a very mild nature. Usually makes its comb in trees, but sometimes in the ground, and will occasionally enter hives. It is, however, a poor producer of honey, and is not regarded with favour by the bee-keeper. It does not try to make any permanent home like the true honey-bee.
- (2) *Mbua*.—A small black bee, somewhat larger than a house-fly, which has no sting. It lives in holes in the ground in small colonies, where it produces excellent honey. Bee-keepers frequently try to procure some of its honey to put in empty hives, as it is said to possess great attractions for *zaki*.

Long section of hives
containing honey comb.



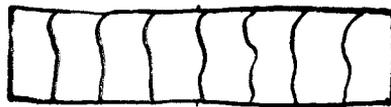
(1). UYINGA.



(2). WIEU.



(3). UTAMBISYO.



(4). MBIS'YA N'GONDU.

GROUND. 90°

NOTE ON (4). The diagram is supposed to represent Combs having bulges caused by different sized cells etc. The name would probably be given in any of the other three instances should the combs be similarly formed.

TEXT FIGURE 1.

II.—HONEY AND HONEYCOMB.

The position of the combs in the hive will vary according to the angle at which the hive (see III below) is set. The four principal variations are named by the Akamba, as follows:—

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-----|-----|-----------------------|
| (1) <i>Uvinga</i> | ... | ... | See Text Figure 1 (1) |
| (2) <i>Wieu</i> | ... | ... | See Text Figure 1 (2) |
| (3) <i>Utambisyo</i> | ... | ... | See Text Figure 1 (3) |
| (4) <i>Mbis' ya ng'onde</i> | ... | ... | See Text Figure 1 (4) |

The best honey (*uki wa nzuki*) is made from a plant called *kiungu*, a creeper which has tendrils, tripartite leaves and red fruit. Other plants which are recognised as producing very good honey are *mwango*, *mwondo*, and *kasalu*. The list is by no means exhaustive. *Mwondo* is a species of *Malva* with a red flower, and *mwango* an acacia which has pale yellow or white flowers (Lindholm). Akamba have stated that a good honey of a dark rich colour is produced from bullrush millet, the ordinary food crop of the country. This, however, has not been confirmed and is open to considerable doubt, seeing that it is a grass.

The bees are said occasionally to produce a poisonous honey, but I have been unable to discover its source. They do, however, very frequently make a very bitter honey from a species of rubber tree called *kiang'ati* or *kiaa*, which tastes not unlike quinine. A bitter tasting honey is also made from a thorn bush called *inyua* which is common in many parts of the country.

Honey and, to a lesser extent, honeycomb are popular as a food. For the men, the larvae are a delicacy, but they are not eaten by the women. It is also said that women should not eat honey when pregnant, it being believed capable of injuring the foetus. Honey is not usually sold to traders. Its principal use is for the making of mead, the drinking of which is a privilege of the old men (*atumia*): women, young men, boys and girls are forbidden to touch it. If, however, a young man can show that he has really "settled down" he may possibly be given permission to drink it.

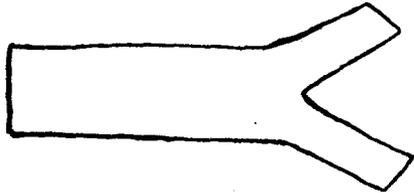
Honey, either in a raw state or, more usually, in the form of mead plays a large part in religious ritual. For example, unprepared honey is used for offerings to the spirits of the ancestors (*aiimu*) when rain or food is desired. Again, when a man dies honey from his hives is eaten by those taking part in the funeral ceremonies. Unless he had broached a hive shortly before his death so that the honey is actually ready, his hives must be opened in the first instance by a brother. (See X.—Inheritance of Beehives.)

In former days, the larger part of the honeycomb (*masoso*) was thrown away; some of it might, perhaps, be eaten, more especially in times of famine. The Akamba have gradually learnt

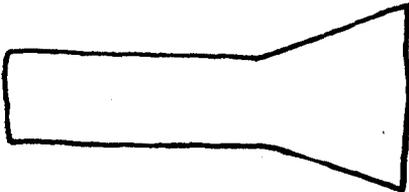
Six types of barrel (Mwatu) hive.



(1). MUGANU.



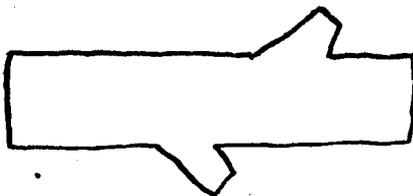
(2). MUWA



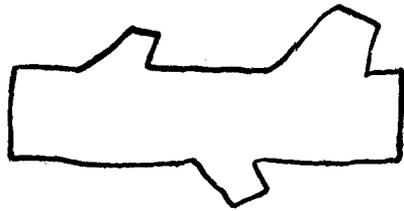
(3). MUSWANYO.



(4). KIBALU.



(5). KITHANTHATU.



(6). KINYANYA.

TEXT FIGURE 2.

that beeswax is valuable to other people, if not to themselves, and a considerable trade in this commodity has developed.

Honeycomb has a few other uses—for example, it is used for holding together the component parts of a *kithitu*, which is an instrument necessary for the taking of a special kind of oath.

III.—BEEHIVES.

The Akamba beehive is the (in Africa) familiar barrel made from a hollowed-out log, and the generic name for such a hive is *mwatu*. It may vary in length from about a half to one metre. Six species of *mwatu* appear to be distinguished. (See Text Fig. 2.)

- (1) *Munganu*—the single-barrel hive.
- (2) *Muwa*—the forked-barrel hive.
- (3) *Muswanyo*—the tapering-barrel hive.
- (4) *Kibalu*—the single-barrel hive with one projection.
- (5) *Kithanthatu*—the single-barrel hive with two projections.
- (6) *Kinyanya*—the single-barrel hive with three or more projections.

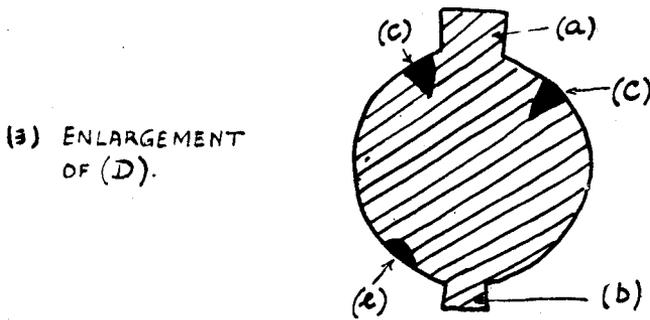
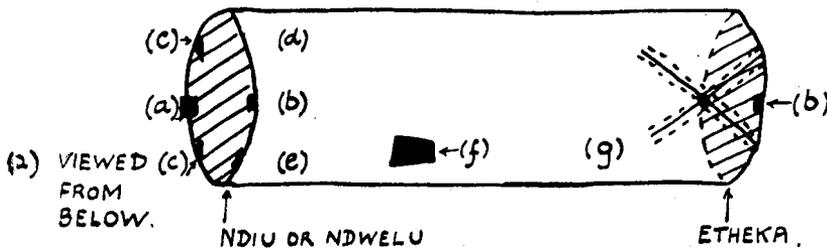
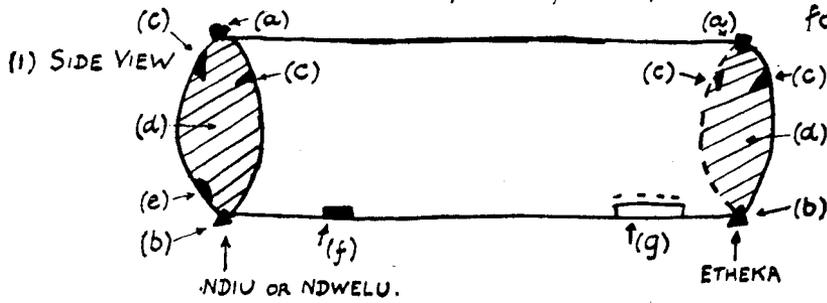
Special trees are used for the construction of hives:—

- (1) *Matula*.—This is usually considered the best, and among other good qualities it can withstand the onslaught of termites. The place name *Matulani*, “the place of the *matula* tree” is common.
- (2) *Ilala*.—A palm tree found, especially, near the Tana, Athi and parts of the Thua Rivers. It has tough, stringy wood, and a hive made from it stands a good chance of remaining unbroken if it falls out of a tree. Probably the doum palm.
- (3) *Mwongu*(?).—Possesses the qualities of (2) above. A hive made from this, Akamba say, may last for ten years or longer.
- (4) *Kiumu*.—A wild fig, of which there are many other varieties in Ukambani. It is not so good as the other trees mentioned, but is serviceable and easily obtained.

These are the principal trees used in the construction of beehives. So far as can be ascertained, there is no customary obligation to use them and, if he is foolish enough to do so, a man is at liberty to make his hives of any other wood he pleases.

There is no particular class nor clan of beehive makers—anyone can make them, and indeed, it is part of a boy's education to learn how to do so. Nevertheless, in more recent times certain people have specialised in this work and earn their living by making and selling them.

Diagram of a Mxamba hive (Composite;
no hive exactly corresponding to this will be
found)



- (a). Kittumbi
- (b). Kiraio
- (c). Kibaisyo
- (d). Mberqio or Mbalaw
- (e) Itho ya Ngai
- (f). Kiburqu
- (g). Ubaro.

TEXT FIGURE 3.

IV.—THE PARTS OF THE HIVE.

The ends of the barrel are closed by flat pieces of wood which fit inside the rim. These may be fitted with holes for the entrance of the bees [see Text Fig. 3 (e)]. Frequently there is only one entrance and that in the middle of the owner's mark [see Text Figs. 3 (2 "g") and 4 ("x")]. The latter method would appear to be fairly common throughout *Ukambani*, though it has been stated to be peculiar to a certain clan living in Kikumbulyu in the south-west, on the Machakos side of the Athi River. (See Lindbolm's *The Akamba*, p. 494.)

The end from which the honey will be extracted is called *ndiu* (or in some places *ndwelu*), and the other end *etheka*. The end which will be opened is determined purely by common sense. If one end is a little wider than the other, for instance, it will probably be *ndiu*. At the opposite end, *etheka*, the owner will put his village mark (*ubano*), (see below). The actual lid is called *mbengeo* (or in some places *mbalau*). A hole by means of which the hive may be fixed to the tree is called *kibungu*.

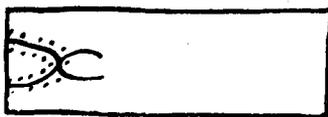
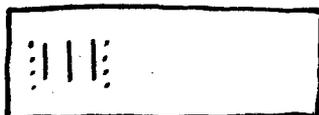
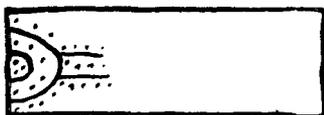
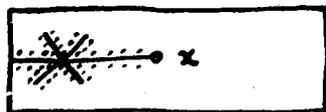
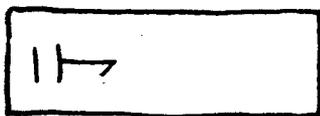
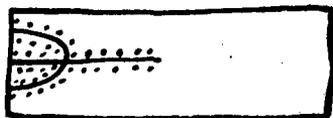
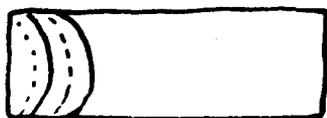
The lid, *mbengeo* or *mbalau*, possesses the following parts [see Text Fig. 3, (3)]:—

- (1) *Kithumbi*.—A projecting handle which fits in a groove, keeps the lid from twisting round and makes its removal easy. [Text Fig. 3, (3a).]
- (2) *Kikaio*.—A smaller projection from the bottom. It fits in a groove and does not project like (1) above. [Text Fig. 3, (3b).]
- (3) *Kibaisyo* (pl. *ibaisyo*).—Two wooden pegs which fit in on each side of the handle (*kithumbi*) to keep the lid from falling out. [Text Fig. 3, (3c).]
- (4) *Itho ya ngai*.—Sometimes used for entrance holes which may be made in the lid, but more usually for an entrance hole in the mark (*ubano*).

The tools used in the making of a hive are as follows:—

- (1) *Thia*.—This consists of a long handle (*thia*) and an iron blade (*ithoka wa kwasa*) which is fitted to one end by means of a leather ring (*nduyu*). This was formerly of rhinoceros hide. This tool is used for scraping out the barrel.
- (2) *Ng'omo*.—A kind of chisel or adze with the blade fixed almost at right angles to the handle. The base is fixed in a piece of hide, formerly rhinoceros hide.
- (3) *Mutiothoka*.—An axe with a very small blade which is used for doing the heavy work—shaping the log, etc.
- (4) *Kwal'ya mbengeo* (or *mbalau*).—A small iron tool used for making the lid.
- (5) *Kyoo*.—A small tool for making the mark. This is sometimes cut, sometimes burnt in the wood.

Examples of the clan mark. (UBANO).



(X). The entrance hole for the bees is sometimes situated in the mark.

TEXT FIGURE 4.

Every clan has its own mark (*ubano*) which is put on cattle, arrowheads and beehives. (See Text Fig. 4.) But even within one clan each village may have a special mark and an individual may vary it slightly, so that it is hardly true to call them "clan marks." Moreover, the three marks (i.e., cattle, arrowheads and beehives) of one clan or village appear to bear no resemblance whatsoever to each other, though it has been submitted that they were originally identical. (See Lindbolm's *The Akamba*, p. 135.)

In the hypothetical case of two villages discovering that their marks are the same, a meeting of the elders from each village would be held and they would come to some agreement as to who should make the necessary alteration.

If anybody alters or obliterates the mark on a beehive other than his own, either innocently or for the purpose of theft, it is believed that he will die shortly afterwards. Should he, however, remove the part of the hive bearing the mark and insert a new piece of wood, this automatic sanction will not operate. (For examples of marks on beehives, see Text Fig. 4.)

V.—PREPARATION OF THE HIVE.

When the hive has been constructed, seasoned, and is ready for use, it is singed inside with a bunch of lighted twigs to remove any small projections, etc., for the Akamba know that bees like the inside of a hive to be quite smooth. This is usually done with the leaves and twigs of certain trees, viz., *mutaa*, *juutu* or *munondo*. These are all aromatic woods and the smell left in the hive after they have been burnt is attractive to bees. It has been said that the smoke of certain wood is used to keep snakes away from the hive. (See Lindbolm's *The Akamba*, p. 495.)

The hive is carried by the owner or one of his sons to the place where it will be put in the tree. It is usually carried on the back, being kept in place by a cord of plaited grass or banana leaves passed around the forehead. All the work connected with bee-keeping is essentially man's work, so that although it is usually the women who carry things it is the men who carry the hives. Women, however, often carry honey in the *ngusu* (see Text Fig. 5 and Plate 52) after it has been extracted from the hive.

African bees are well-known for their fierceness. Horses and other large animals have been stung to death. Indeed, they have battle honours, for at Tanga in 1914, the British forces were routed by bees, the German troops having set trip-wires attached to the numerous beehives in the woods which they knew the enemy would occupy. The Akamba, accordingly, treat their hives in a special manner with a view to lessening the fierceness of the future inmates. "A kind of lizard, *inyolo*, is put into it (the hive) and a bit of honeycomb is rubbed against a bit of mutton,

Receptacles for honey and honeycomb.

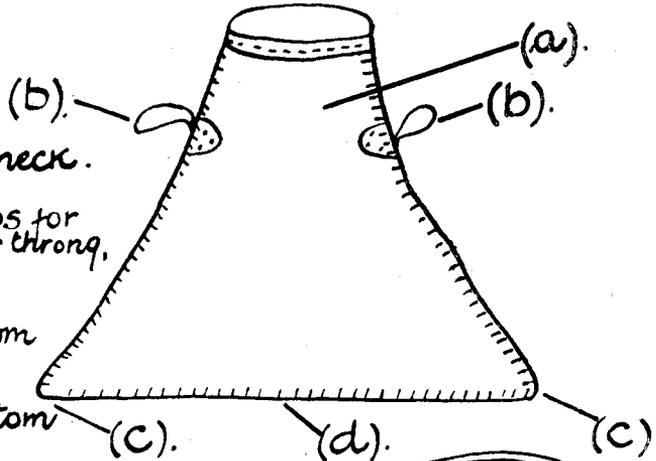
(1). NGUSU.

(a). KANYWA - the neck.

(b). KILYULU - loops for holding leather thong for carrying.

(c). KUTU - the bottom corners.

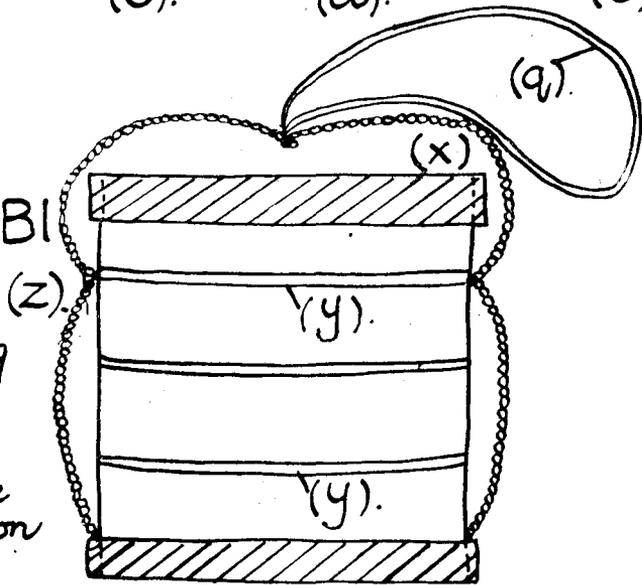
(d). WAU - the bottom



(2). KITHEMBI

(q). MUKWA - leather thong for carrying.

(x). NDAA - lid made of hide. The hair is usually on the outside.



(y). UKAKO - hide bands, there are usually two or three.

(z). MAKANDA - plaited rope of baobab bark fibre

TEXT FIGURE 5.

PLATE 52.



“... women, however, often carry honey in the *ngusu* ...”
(Page 265)



“... steps are made up the trunk by means of wooden pegs ...”
(Page 267)

PLATE 53.



A fork which is considered "good-for-placing-a-hive-in" is called *kitumbi*.
(Page 268)

Note the swarm of bees below the hive.

PLATE 54.



"A branch is cut short and put through a hole
in the bottom of the hive."
(Page 268)



"... this stick has a hook at one end to put over
the branch and is called *mboloi*..."
(Page 268)

after which the bees are ordered not to be fierce, but to behave as peacefully as the lizard. Both this and the sheep being very harmless animals, the procedure is evidently a kind of homeopathic magic. To make bees gentle in this way is called *kubobia*." (See Lindbolm's *The Akamba*, p.495.) Some honey is put in the hive, which may also be smeared with honey, in order to attract the bees.

VI.—SETTING THE HIVE.

The place where a man will put his hives partly depends on the prevailing system of land tenure, partly on the space available and partly on the intrinsic goodness of a locality from the point of view of honey production.

The Akamba system of land tenure, like other African systems, is difficult to understand from the angle of Western legal terms and is probably subject to considerable variation in different localities; it is not intended to advance any theories on the subject here—they would probably be wrong. It appears, however, that two main principles govern the holding of land. The one is covered by the term *weu* and the other by the term *ng'undu*. *Weu* is common land and may be used by anybody for cultivation, grazing or placing beehives. This is open, sparsely inhabited country. *Ng'undu* is land held by a form of individual tenure and is found in thickly inhabited country. What are causes and what are effects does not concern us here, but only the fact that a man cannot put his beehives on another man's *ng'undu*, but only on his own. It follows that where *ng'undu* applies the owner of a large number of hives may have to go a long way in order to find common land where he can place some of them. If he has not sufficient land of his own, he can, of course, make an agreement with a neighbour with regard to putting hives on his land; this, however, is not always possible as he may require it for his own. There may not be many trees, and in any case the number of hives which can be worked successfully in a given area is, naturally, limited. Again, the locality in which a given individual lives may not be a good one for the production of honey.

Certain trees are favoured for placing hives, the foremost being the *mwamba* (baobab), where it is found growing. Fifteen hives in one of these giants is nothing remarkable. The *makuyu* is another favourite. Steps are made up the trunk by means of wooden pegs. (See Plate 52.) Hives are, of course, placed in the honey-producing trees which have been mentioned (see II above), when they are found large enough. Any tree may be used if it is considered suitable, but hives are never placed in trees sacred to the ancestral spirits (*aiimu*).

Hives are frequently put in what appear to be quite inaccessible places, and it is not very unusual for a man to receive

a serious injury, or even to lose his life, by falling from the tree when putting up or extracting honeycomb from the hive. There are three ways of setting a beehive, the first being used whenever possible.

- (1) *Wedging the hive in a fork.*—An ordinary fork of a tree is called *mwaka*, but one which is considered “good-for-placing-a-hive-in” is called *kitumbi*. (See Plate 53.) The fork is often improved artificially by cross sticks bound in place with fibres.
- (2) *A branch is cut short and put through a hole in the bottom of the hive.*—The hole is called *kibungu*, and the branch stump *uambo*. (See Plate 54.) The bees often enter by this hole instead of having special entrances.
- (3) *Slung beneath a branch on the end of a long stick.*—This stick has a hook at one end to put over the branch, and is called *mboloi*. Hives are sometimes slung on cords only, but the correct method is to use the *mboloi*. (See Plate 54.)

When methods (1) and (2) are used, the end of the hive bearing the owner's mark (*ubano*) will always be facing outwards from the trunk of the tree.

As regards the placing of a man's first hive, custom would appear to differ in different localities. Some Akamba have said that a man may do it himself, others that it must be done by a son or brother, not necessarily, apparently, a full brother, elsewhere, by a paternal uncle; otherwise the bees will not enter the hive. From the time of placing this first beehive the owner cannot cohabit with a woman until the bees start building a comb. If on his next visit the bees have started building, he can cohabit again on the following night. When he finds that the bees have started building, he will usually brew some beer and pour out a libation to his ancestral spirits (*aiimu*), in thanksgiving.

VII.—EXTRACTING THE HONEY AND HONEYCOMB.

When by inspection the time appears ripe to open the hive and extract the comb and honey, the owner will probably bring with him at least one helper. Lindbolm says (p. 498) “During this work he may not have coitus (sexual taboo). A man who has other people to help him gets them to take an oath by the *kithitu* to abstain from sexual intercourse this prohibition seems to be in force for about ten days onward, or during the time which is considered to pass until the bees have again begun to bring honey to the hive. When this time is at an end the owner of the hive has a look at his bees. If they have abandoned their nest or have not begun to collect honey, he is certain that his assistants have broken their oaths to abstain

from coitus. He then prepares *ngondu*, a purifying medium, and spreads it together with a piece of mutton on the beehive." As a general rule the bees will start working again almost immediately, and six days is usually sufficient time to allow them to fill the hive. Ritual intercourse or abstention plays a large part in all Akamba custom, and bee-keeping is certainly no exception. Thus, if the first lot of honey from *new* hives is eaten by a person who will have sexual intercourse before the bees return to the hive it is believed that the bees may cease working or make bad honey.

Honey is extracted from the hive in two ways. If the hive is firmly fixed in the tree, i.e., if either of the first two methods described earlier in these notes is employed, the honey will be taken from it where it stands. If it is fixed by the third method, i.e., slung beneath a branch by means of an *mboloi*, the hive will be lowered to the ground before the honey is extracted. The actual method of extracting the honeycomb does not vary and it will suffice to describe in full the normal case, viz., when the hive is left in the tree.

About an hour after sunset the tree which contains the hive is approached. It is cool. The bees have entered the hive for the night and are silent. A large fire is lighted close to the tree and by its light one member of the party climbs up to the hive, taking with him a long, thick rope made of baobab-bark fibre, called *mwii*. To one end of this is attached a smooth triangular block of wood some 15 cms. long, called *n'gon'gusu*. He takes up a position (usually very precarious) close to the hive and throws down the free end of the rope, which is caught by a man waiting below. The end to which the block is attached is thrown over a convenient branch near the hive and let fall. Meanwhile his assistant below is attaching a receptacle, called *kithembi*, to his end of the rope—at about two feet from the end, which is left free for a moment. He has also prepared a bunch of thin sticks bound together like a miniature Roman *fascis*, called *umui*. (The name for an ordinary brand is *kisinga*.) One end of this he now lights in the fire, after which he ties it to the loose end of the rope so that it will hang below the *kithembi*. The man in the tree hauls these up, helped by the man on the ground as soon as the other end of the rope reaches him. The man on the ground then holds the *kithembi* in position near the hive by keeping his end of the rope taut during the rest of the proceedings.

The operator in the tree now takes the brand in one hand, blows on it to make it burn brightly, and then moves it slowly with a circular motion close to the lid of the hive. If the bees have a way out they may use it and will usually cluster on the outside of the hive; more often, however, they remain inside with the queen, who by now has been driven to the further extremity of the hive. After a few moments, when the first angry buzzing has given place to a more regular hum, the lid is carefully

removed, the brand being kept close the while to hold the bees at bay. It is advanced to the mouth of the hive, driving any bees that remain inwards from the first comb. This is then cut out with a knife, shaken to remove any stray bees, and placed in the *kithembi*. The process is repeated until about two-thirds of the comb has been removed. The hive is then closed, the *kithembi* and brand lowered, and the operator descends from his perch. On reaching the ground he examines the honey, removes any stray bees from it and from his person, pushes the knife through the combs and puts on the lid. After the rope has been carefully coiled the party makes its way homewards, the remains of the brand being used as a torch to light the road.

In a case where the hive is brought to the ground in the first instance the procedure is practically the same. One man climbs the tree with his rope, fastens it to the hive and gently lowers it to the ground, where the honeycomb is extracted in the manner just described. One end of the hive is propped up on a log or stone. When the work is finished the hive is hauled up into the tree and made fast.

Only when the hive is to be taken away will all the honeycomb be removed; otherwise about one-third is left in the hive. Very great care is taken to try and leave comb containing eggs and larvae untouched, and should one half of a comb contain honey and the other half eggs or larvae, the former will be cut away and the latter left. This, however, is not always possible owing to the shape of the hive and the indiscriminate way in which the queen lays her eggs. It is very seldom that the operator gets badly stung; how well the bees are controlled and how little feared is shown by the fact that the combs (except for the first one or two) are usually cut out from the midst of the bees, it being necessary to stretch the arm down the length of the hive. These combs when taken out are a solid mass of bees, which are removed by gentle shaking and scraping. During the whole proceedings very few bees perish—indeed, the method is in striking contrast to the old European way of clearing a “skep,” involving as it did all the horrors of the sulphur pit.

The comb when brought to the village is pounded to extract the honey.

VIII.—METHOD OF CARRYING AND STORING HONEY.

Two other items in the bee-keeper's equipment must be described. They are no longer universally used, their place often being taken by empty kerosene tins or tin basins purchased from traders.

- (1) *Ngusu*.—A triangular skin bag, which is slung on the back by means of a leather thong (*mukwa*) round the forehead. It may be carried by women. (See Text Fig. 5, 1 and Plate 52.)

- (2) *Kithembi*.—A wooden barrel with a skin bottom and lid (*ndaa*), usually about 45 cms. to 50 cms. in height and 25 cms. to 30 cms. in diameter.

It is customary to use the *ngusu* for carrying honey; for storing, it is put in the *kithembi* and slung from the roof poles of the hut. The *kithembi*, as noted earlier, is also used when taking honeycomb from the hive. The *ngusu* is so constructed as to hold as much honey as may be taken from a well-filled hive of average size.

To take honey from a hive is *kutwa*. To look for wild honey is *kulaka*.

IX.—CUSTOMARY LAW RELATING TO THEFT OF BEEHIVES AND HONEY.

The theft of honey and the breaking of beehives has always been considered a very serious crime among the Akamba. Lindbolm (p. 160) says "the reasons why the fines are so high would seem to be that the beehives are hung out in the wilds at a long distance from the owner's village so that it is impossible to watch them a honey thief is an extraordinarily despicable person, and this has penetrated so deeply into the national consciousness that, even if a man is nearly dying of starvation, he can only in extreme cases bring himself to take honey from the beehives without permission." In order to protect his hives, the owner will use various magical means, and will try to spread the news that they are so protected. As a result of this, the thief may find a snake waiting for him as he descends the tree, or may find his hands caught fast when he touches the hive. (Lindbolm's *The Akamba*, p. 500.)

Nevertheless, theft occurs and has always occurred. In famine years it may become very serious indeed. The customary punishments for honey-theft vary considerably in different parts of Ukambani, and the experts differ in their accounts. The following punishments are all considered customary:—

- (1) A fine of one goat and one cow, to be eaten by the officiating elders, and all property to be returned.
- (2) The owner of the hives (irrespective of the number stolen) to be paid seven goats and all property to be returned.
- (3) Lindbolm records a case where the offender paid one bull and five goats, and states that for a second offence the amount may be doubled, for a third trebled, and so on.

- (4) Application of *king'oli* in all cases. (In pre-Government days, *king'oli* was a form of capital punishment deriving its name from a general meeting of the tribe to discuss public policy, and to try cases punishable by death, i.e., witch-craft and other anti-social crimes.)
- (5) Application of *king'oli* on the third offence.

I make no attempt to show which of the above might be the true custom; it is more than probable that they are all true customs, varying according to time and place. There is no doubt, however, of the seriousness of the offence, and the modern Native Tribunals always impose heavy sentences for honey-theft. Lindbolm remarks that in Taveta, near Kilimanjaro, it was formerly the custom for the number of cells in the stolen honey to be counted, if found, and the owner could claim a goat for each cell.

X.—INHERITANCE OF BEEHIVES.

“When an owner of beehives dies, his nearest relations proceed to his hives and throw small stones or clods of earth against these to attract the bees’ attention, saying, ‘Wake up, you bees! Your owner is certainly dead, but because of that you must not cease to work and gather honey!’ It appears from this as if the bees are thought to have a close personal relationship with their owner.” (Lindbolm’s *The Akamba*, p. 499.) This may certainly be the custom in many parts of Ukambani, but I cannot picture them throwing stones actually at the hives, for they know their bees too well to risk playing any tricks with them.

The son or sons of a deceased man inherit his beehives. The heir, however, must not take the first lot of honey from them himself; to do this courts death. An elder is appointed to perform the necessary ceremony, and the honey must be removed by a paternal uncle.

XI.—CONCLUSION.

Lindbolm (p.497) states that during his stay in Ukambani he never heard anything of the honey-indicating bird [*Indicator indicator* (?)]. The bird, however, is certainly well-known to many Akamba in the Kitui area, and it has been pointed out to me on several occasions. It appeared to be a dark grey and white bird, rather larger than a House Sparrow, and uttered a loud, high-pitched “Chee . . chee . . chee . . chee . . .” It is called *nzelizeli*, or *nsese*. As in other parts of the world, it is said to lead one to honey as a general rule, but must be followed with caution as it occasionally leads one to a wild animal or a snake.

This unpleasant alternative is known by the word *kalimasoso*, which appears to be an abstract noun connoting "the possibility of finding a wild animal where one expected to find honeycomb," or as a general term denoting whatever unpleasant thing one finds there. I have been told that an Mukamba is never afraid to follow the bird except through dense bush, as he can see for himself whether or not there is any danger.

The Mukamba bee-keeper is deeply attached to his bees and will talk to them and even pray to them. He respects their apparent intelligence and marvels at their industry. He knows how to look after them and how to control them; and when he is in a position to control them he is without fear. Nevertheless, he is never foolhardy, and none knows better than he the potential power possessed by these tiny creatures; a power which they will use without hesitation in defence of their homes.

CORRIGENDUM.

Mr. G. H. E. Hopkins has drawn attention to the fact that in Dr. Leakey's "Notes on the *Falconidae* in the Coryndon Memorial Museum," pages 103-122, and in the "List of Members," page 136, of the last number of the *Journal* his initials have been given incorrectly. "E. S. Subuga" in the penultimate line of page 103 should read "E. Nsubuga," a bird-boy formerly employed by Mr. Hopkins.