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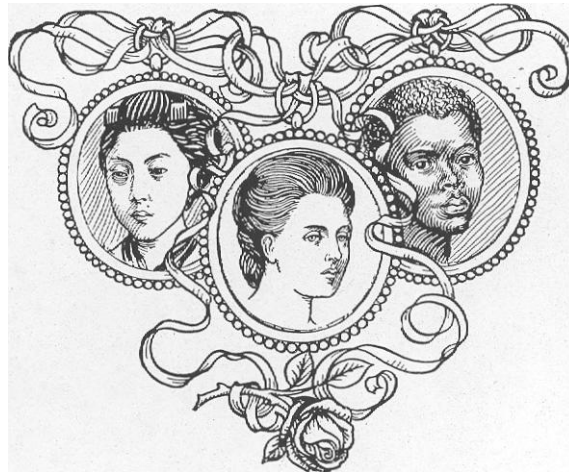
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WOMEN OF ALL NATIONS
A Record of Their Characteristics,
Habits, Manners, Customs and Influence

Edited by
T. ATHOL JOYCE, M.A.
N. W. THOMAS, M.A.



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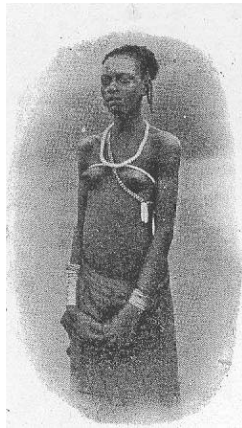
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THE CONGO FREE STATE

TORDAY, Emil

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The Congo State – The People of the Congo – The Pygmies – The Negro Population – The Slaw Trade – Women the Steed-traders – Both and Infancy – Congo Love and Courtship – Personal Adornment – Congolese Dress – Ornaments – Congolese Coiffures – Marriage Customs - Child Marriage – Congolese Wedding Dance – Conjugal Infidelity – Social Conditions on the Congo – Death and Burial – Widow Sacrifice – Cannibalism – Physical Attractions of Congolese Women – Negroes – Cleanliness – Preparation of Food – Religion – Home Life



The Congo State. Young Bakuba girl.
(By permission of the Ethnographical Museum, Tervueren)

The Congo Statue

The mouth of the River Congo was discovered by the Portuguese navigator Diego Gão in the fifteenth century, but no part of the river was known until Livingstone first reached it at Nang-we when, however, he believed it to be the Nile. It was first explored by Sir H. M. Stanley, who called it the Livingstone, a name which has passed into oblivion. The actual Congo State was by the King of the Belgians, and extends over an area of about 800,000 square miles, with a population which has been estimated variously between eight millions and forty millions, the correct figure being probably about twelve millions.

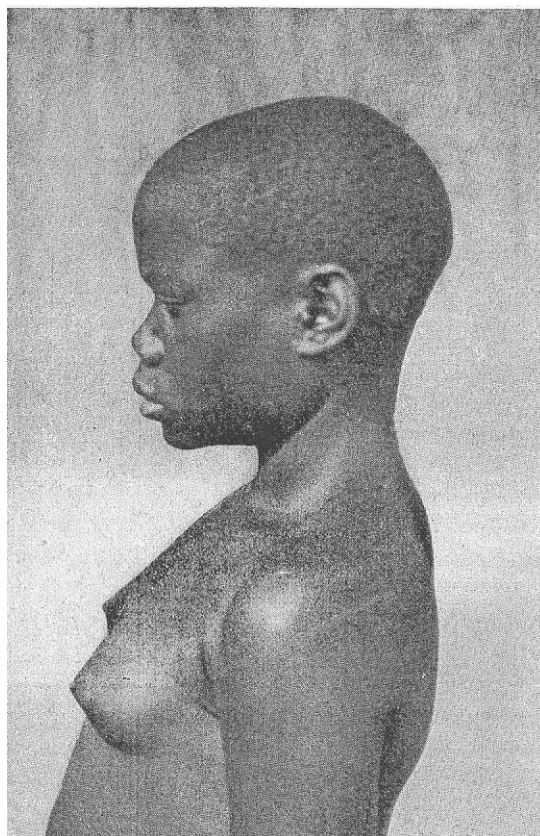
The population is continually decreasing, in consequence of an epidemic of sleeping-sickness, which ravages Central Africa from the West to the East coast a great part of the State was under the domination of the Arabs until the year 1892, when they were driven out by an army composed of native troops commanded by Belgian and Scandinavian officers. It is now actually governed by a central administration in Brussels, represented by a Governor-general at Boma. The government is absolute, but it seems likely that the country will become the fifteenth a Belgian colony under the control of the Tie century but Belgian parliament.

The People of the Congo

The inhabitants of the Congo form many tribes, which differ greatly in their customs. It cannot be of interest to the general reader to enumerate them; so I shall endeavour to arrange them in groups, each group containing those which show the greatest similarity. In this attempt I shall not classify them according to their origin in remote times; for, contrary to general belief, the negro is not very conservative and easily assimilates himself to the people with whom he has been brought in contact in his wanderings. And indeed, as far as their origin is concerned, all is conjecture. A people without writing or historical monuments which forgets even its traditions in less than a century, can give us no clue, and the ethnographer alone can arrive at a more or less satisfactory conclusion.

It must, nevertheless, be mentioned that the original inhabitants of the country were probably the Pygmies, of whom some specimens

were recently seen in London. Few of these interesting little people are now left, and these are spread in diminutive colonies all parts of the country. They are very simple in their habits and have, for the most part, not yet risen above that stage of civilisation when agriculture is still unknown, and when man still lives only on the products of the chase, and the roots and wild fruits provided by the forest. Only a few condescend to barter their superfluous game for the agricultural produce of their mote civilised neighbours.



A Pygmy Woman.

**The Pygmy women are purchased as wives for three or four arrows!
(Photograph by Sir H. H. Johnston, G. C. M. G., K. C. B.)**

The Pygmies

Pygmies cannot be called fine specimens of humanity; their physique is slight, their height varying from four feet to four feet six inches.

Their heads are rather big in proportion to their bodies. Their skin varies from a dirty yellow to a brown tint, their hair is short and scanty. In consequence of the active life they are obliged to live they are very thin, to such an extent that their bones may be easily seen through the skin. A more offensive odour attaches to them, but this is probably due to the want of cleanliness so common to people of the forest.

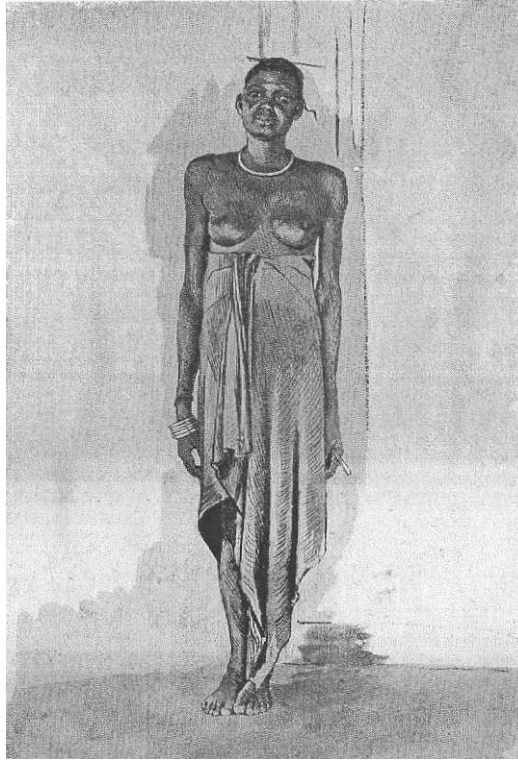
Some "savants" believe them to be related to the bushmen but a multitude of physical and social differences throws great doubt on this subject.

All other Inhabitants of the Congo are invaders, Their physical characteristics divide them into two groups, the Norther, who show similarity to the real Negroes, and the Southern, much more refined in features, who exhibit traces of "Hamitic" blood.

The Negro Population

In a general study like this it all perhaps be best to divide the population into two groups, the Negroes as they naturally are, and the Negroes who have been influenced by foreign invaders, such as the Arabs or the Portuguese.

Although they have derived much profit from the Eastern civilisation brought to them by the Arabs, and some little from the Occidental imported by the Portuguese, their patriarchal habits have been greatly changed for the worse where they have been in contact with these foreign dealers in human cattle. The slave trade has destroyed the ties of relationship, and has brought the head of the family to consider its members as mere merchandise.



Galitzia – A betéké Woman
(Drawn by Sir Harry Johnston, G. C. M. G., K. C. B.)

The Slave Trade

Slavery has always existed amongst the Congolese, but, where they have been left to themselves, the slaves are considered as the children of their owners, are treated as a rule with great kindness, and are many times better off than the European “slaves” in mines and factories. Where the natives have been brought into contact with Portuguese or Arabs they have been taught to consider their wives and children as a source of wealth, easily exchanged for articles of comfort and luxury.

It has been the good fortune of the author to be in contact with both kinds of inhabitants, and he has found that the cannibal of the interior is by far the wiser and better man of the two.

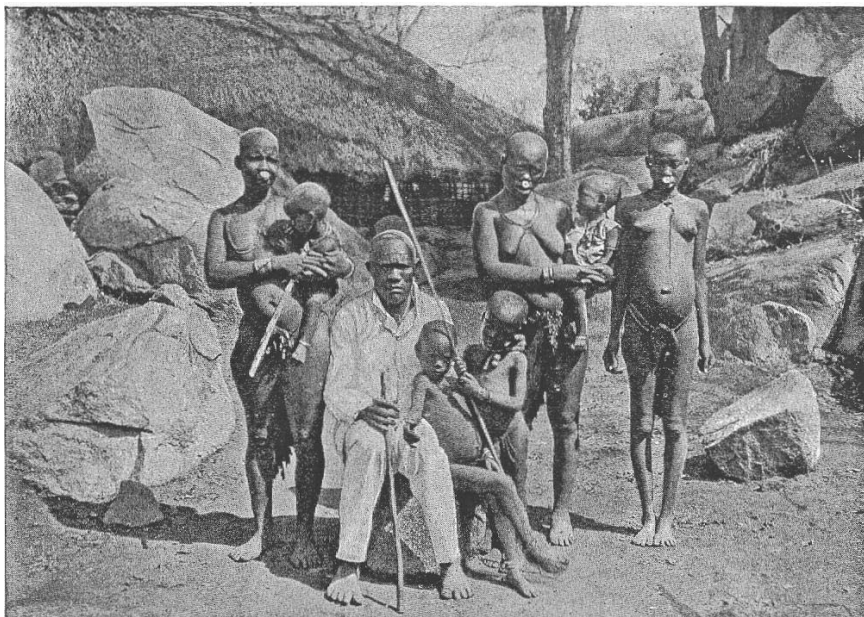
Only a short sketch of a woman's life in those parts of the country where the slave trade flourished will be given, and then I shall pass to the more cheerful picture of life where patriarchal habits still persist. Happily it is true that the latter prevail over the greater part of the country, in fact the whole of the interior.

Women under the Slave Trade

The parts of the Congo which for centuries have been the great slave-providing districts are situated ill the East, where Arab and Wanyam-wesi raiders have carried on their operations, and in the Shout and South-West, where the Portuguese have been at work. It is painful to have to admit that the Portuguese were by far the worst offenders. It is true that the Arabs in their expeditions did not consider human life, and showed the greatest cruelty, but as soon as they were settled they certainly improved the welfare of the people by teaching them order, agriculture, cattle-raising, and many useful crafts. Their Draconian laws against theft, adultery and murder, although inhuman in our eyes, would not have been considered so in the England of a century ago, when people were hanged for petty theft, and they have certainly bettered the moral standard of the aborigines. The great drawback to their domination did not lie in the fact that they kept slaves, but in the manner in which these were seized and in the fact that they were exported. It is evident that family ties were by this means destroyed, and flat the position of women, the most coveted form of merchandise, was degraded. And this is still felt, for, in spite of the expulsion of the Arabs, much of the evil still exists, and a man will still barter his women relatives for the necessities of life.

The Arab invaders were warrior merchants, cruel indeed; but we can not help admiring their courage and the spirit of chivalry which they displayed. A few bold adventures, without any assistance from a mother country, they were able by their own pluck to conquer and keep for a long time a territory larger than England and inhabited by a dense population of cannibal warriors. No such mitigating qualities can be found among the Portuguese traders. The majority of whom wean convicts, who had left their country for that country's good, and who had formed the scum of its population. The Arabs conquered with the sword, the Portuguese with gin. The natives could fight the one,

but were powerless against the insidious attacks of the other, and what good qualities the “course of Africa” – alcohol – left to them were destroyed by the vicious example of the white man. That part of the country which had been under Arab domination is slowly returning to a better state of things, but no such happy prospect can be expected in the other territory.



Congo Babies from the Lori Tribe
Their mothers ha their lips pieced and distended by an ivory disc.
 (By permission of the Ethnographical Museum, Tervueren)

Birth ad Infancy

Let us consider now the Congo woman's life, where the savages are only guided by their natural good instructs.

When a child is born the greatest interest is taken on the event by all the inhabitants of the village. Old and young women bustle round the mother; men stand outside the hut and discuss gravely with the father. Everybody compliment him, and declares that never has such a

strong and fat child been seen before. Just as in Europe, family resemblances are discovered over a glass of "malafu" (palm wine), which the proud father offers freely to his guests. And then the people of the neighbouring villages flock in to see the new-born infant; the poor simply look at it, whilst the wealthy, who can afford it, take the baby into their arms; this entitles the mother to a little present, which is bestowed gladly in proportion to the donor's means. If the young mother is a slave, her owner will continually bring her dainties, whilst his wives will nurse her. In choosing the child's name, that of some important man is often selected; and this is a very great compliment which is repaid by considerable presents.

One or two days after the child's birth the mother leaves her hut. This is the time of life when the Congo woman looks most beautiful. I always found that maternity greatly increases her beauty, an atmosphere of happiness seems to surround her, and she simply shines with it.

From this moment the baby does not leave its mother any more; carries in a kind of bag on her back, or later, on her hip, it clings to "mammy" and follows her to the fields, joining in the chase for crickets and locusts. But sometimes the child is taken by the father, who, as fathers always will, spoils it by indulgence. Among some tribes, the Bayaka for example, it is the father's privilege to carry the child; and to show that all his care is bestowed on the baby, he abstains from washing as long as the infant is unable to walk, though under ordinary circumstances the Bayaka are an extremely cleanly people. If we consider the great importance these people attach to personal ornament, it is a proof of great love to find that women with infants in arms do not ornament or paint themselves for such time as the baby is unable to walk by itself.

When the child is about a year old, her brothers, sisters, and cousins claim the right of looking after her, and, in fact, she takes the place of a doll. A doll is the substitute for a natural object of the affection inborn in mankind, and is especially strong in little girls; but the baby has no cause for complaint, except perhaps by reason of an excess of caresses.

"*Ne frappez pas un enfant, même avec une fleur,*" is a rule amongst these people; children are never punished, and seldom scolded. It would be easier to obtain pardon for murder than for a harsh word spoken to a child.

Thus it may be imagined what anguish a mother must feel in the Baluba tribe, where the child is liable to be claimed by the "*N'Ganga*" (witch-doctor) for religious sacrifice until it has cut its first tooth. But after this event has taken place this claim cannot be made, and the mother rejoices and feasts are often given in honour of the occasion.

Deformed children are hardly ever seen; the Spartan law of suppression at birth is in full force among most of the tribes. The Bayaka form an exception; no deformity could persuade these people to destroy a child.

How far fathers take an interest in children may be shown by a very curious habit (now tending to disappear) which prevails among the Bangala, and consists in the fact that when a child is to be born its father goes to bed, and is nursed in just the same manner as the mother!

Small children of any nationality are very beautiful, and the Congo children do not form an exception. I do not think that any child has eyes so beautiful as a baby from this country; they are big and shaded by long eyelashes. It is unnecessary to mention their teeth, which justify their great reputation.

Congolese children are very playful, and it may be new to the reader to know that games are found here similar to those in England. Blind-man's-buff is in great vogue, and a form of snap-dragon is much in favour. Any round fruit will serve as a ball, and the "*gombe*" game is not unlike lawn-tennis.

On Lake Tanganika the favourite game is "*bao*," a game of intelligence, highly interesting, which the author has many a time played with little boys and girls, and, he confesses it with a blush, in which he, as a rule, got the worst of it. For negro children are *very* intelligent, probably more so than European children of the same age.

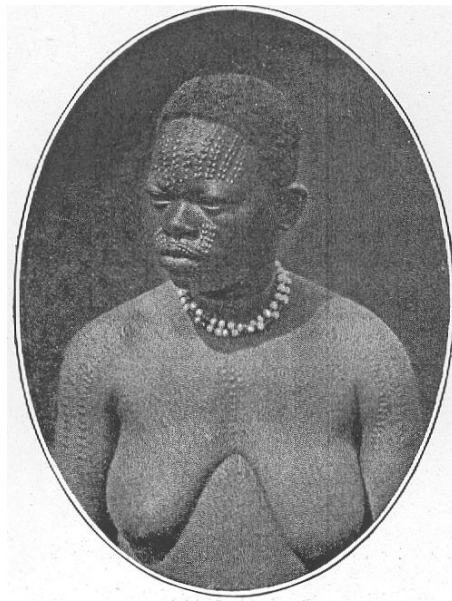
It has been said by many travellers that the Congolese do not know gratitude, and are not really affectionate. How untrue this is! I shall never forget how, when I left a certain region, the little children were sobbing and two little girls, Marisaka and Djimbu, to whom I had shown some kindness, were clinging to me and imploring me not to go away! And this happened in a country where cannibalism is openly practised!

Between games and instruction in her future duties the little girl grows up, to be, at the early age of twelve or thirteen, on the point of changing into a woman, and now the question of love becomes important.

Congo Love and Courtship.

Capello and Ivens say on this subject* :

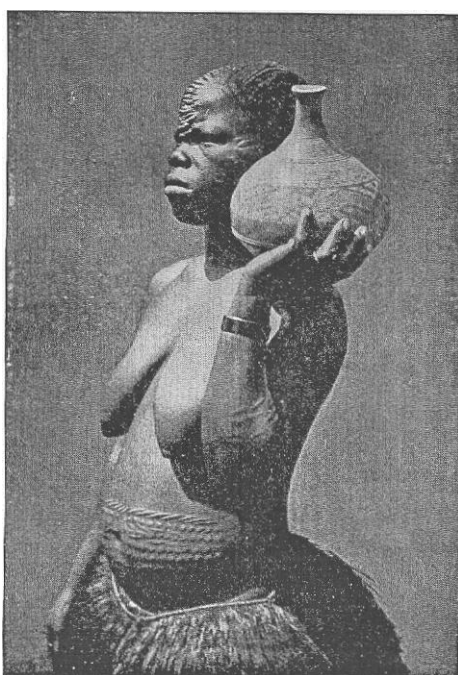
“Let us consider for a moment whether the negress does or can love in the lofty sense of that word. If she loved, if she had the consciousness of that sublime sentiment which opens to us on earth the gates of heaven, she would manifest it in her actions, and by its aid attain to some belief, some religious faith, inasmuch as her very felicity would help her to comprehend that there must be something better and purer above this material mundane life. But who is capable of inspiring her with such a feeling in the brutalised state of slavery in which she lives? Her husband? Most certainly not He simply encircles her with an iron girdle of obligations and despicable labour, compels her to live in the dirt, like his dog, and toil and travail for his pleasure ; she in her part dares not touch or even look at him without. Permission, she may not eat at the same table, far Bless from the same dish as he, and must not accept liquor from his hand.”



A Bazoko Woman, with typical scar tattooing

* “From Benguella to the Territory of Yacca.”

Some years ago, I should have subscribed in all sincerity to this statement, and certainly shared the Portuguese explorers' opinion. But since I have lived amongst natives uncorrupted by the slave trade, I have formed a very different opinion. It is all true concerning the women described in the early part of this article, but not a word of it can be applied to the Congolese women, whose intrigue, and often contributed my modest mite to its happy conclusion.



BANGALA WOMAN
Showing the ornamental scars on forehead.

When arriving in a village it often struck me that a few of the girls were more carefully dressed, oiled and painted than the others. On inquiring the reason of this from some old woman, I invariably got the reply "She is in love, the dear child, and of course wants to be beautiful." And is it not a proof of love, that the heart of the Congo girl often runs away with her head and that important chiefs' daughters wed poor slaves?



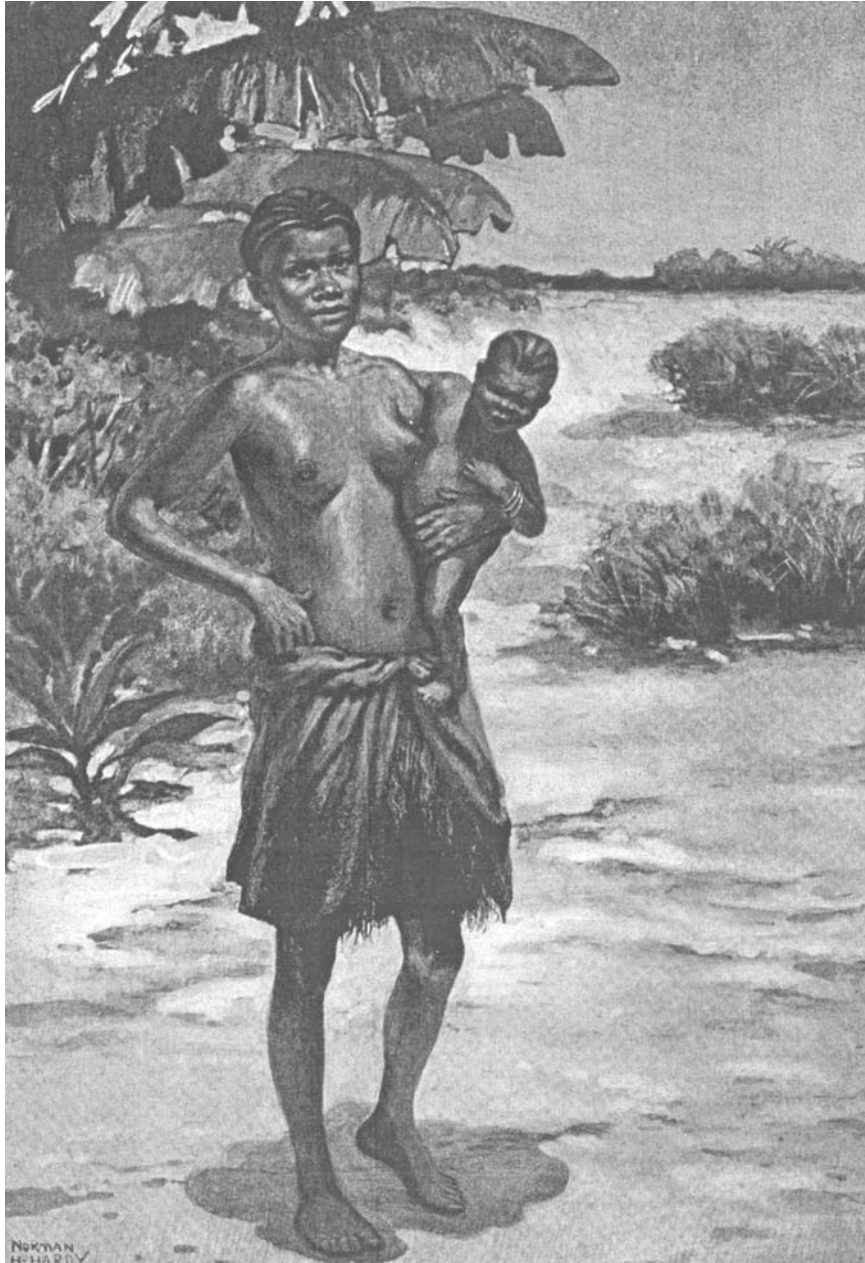
Bapoto Women.

**Showing the process of scar tattooing; the implement used is a short knife
(Photograph by Neville P. Edwards, Littlehampton)**

Many a time has a father complained to me that his daughter has refused the husband chosen by him for political reasons; because, as she declared, she loved another man, and in countries, where human sacrifice is practised, the wife freely descends into the grave of her deceased husband, to be with him in death. Moreover the Bayeke woman, when her husband has been killed in war, charges like a fury on the enemy, tribe has remained uncorrupted by slave trade and *aguardiente* (gin). I feel competent to speak with perfect knowledge on the subject, having watched with Pickwickian benevolence many a love be his number ever so superior, in an attempt to revenge the death of her beloved.

Human hearts are the same whatever be the colour of the skin, and the Congolese girl loves her "*Bakala*" as much as Miss Smith loves her young man.

Now how does the Congolese woman, who wants to please her lover, try to increase her beauty?

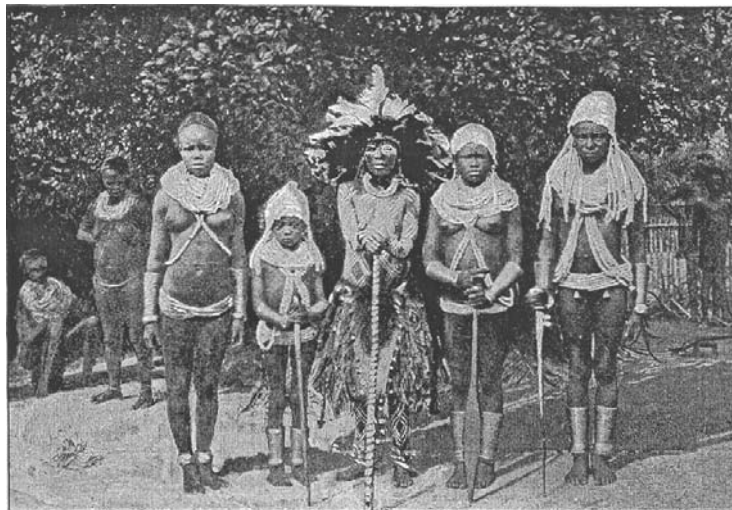


**Bambala Woman: Kwilu River, Congo Free State
(Painted with red earth. Drawn by Norman H. Hardy)**

Personal Adornment

The most important form of ornamentation consists in cicatrisation, which is performed by making cuts in the skin. The wounds are prevented from healing for a time, sometimes by inserting some irritant substance, and the resultant scars form a more or less artistic design. Of course this process is most painful; but once finished, it lasts for a lifetime. Cicatrisation differs greatly from tribe to tribe, and I shall give a short description of the most characteristic forms.

The Batéké make parallel longitudinal cuts in their cheeks, descending in a column from the temples to the mouth ; the Bayansi ornament the forehead with a single or double row of crosses, and a similar design is worked on the breasts. Several incisions of varying forms run from the throat to the abdomen, passing on each side of the breasts.



Bapoto Women Ornamented For A Religious Ceremony.
The figure in the centre is the Fetish Priest.
(By permission of the Ethnographical Museum, Tervueren)

The Bazoko cicatrise the face only, which is covered with big incisions; the Bapoto do the same, but the incisions are much smaller and much more numerous.

The Wangata have a straight column formed of parallel incisions running from the top of the forehead to the nose, aid a design representing a palm, leaf on each temple; the Bangala have the same marking only more pronounced, the central line being carried from the nose to the summit of the head: Their marks stand, out in high relief, and form a kind of crest. The Sango and Sakara ladies pinch up knots of skin on their foreheads, tying them round until they become permanent. They have about five of these skin "beads" arranged in a perpendicular line between the nose and the forehead (*see* p. 324).

Most of the women have their backs elaborately scarred.

Painting is practised nearly everywhere; the favourite pigment, a bright red, is obtained from a tree, and is called *tukula*, but other vegetable and mineral pigments are equally used. Mourning is, as a rule, indicated by white paint, but an exception is formed by the Ubangi women, who on these occasions blacken their faces, while the Bamba-la women paint theirs brown.

The money spent by a Congo lady on her dressmaker would certainly not ruin her parents, and I have never heard of any of them resorting to cheating at bridge in order to satisfy the pressing demands of the milliner. Thus among the Budja, Bapoto, and some other tribes no dress whatever is worn, the tattooed decoration being all that is considered necessary, and when one comes from a sojourn among them into the country of the Bazoko, where a costume of *one bead* fastened round the waist is found, nay where even elderly women wear a small piece of pleated cloth nearly as big as one's hand; or to the Sango, who find a hair from an elephant's tail all they desire, one feels already again in the civilised world. And one must incline with respect before the rich costume of a Banza lady which consists usually of a few leaves or a bunch of grass; but it must be mentioned, that *décolletage* is not unknown amongst them, Since on festive occasions; these ladies remove their everyday costume and wear a dress consisting of a feather stuck into the hair.

Clothes made of native or imported cloth differ considerably; the size of the garment varies from a scrap of cloth four inches square, to a piece extending from the armpits to the ankles; married Bakongo women even have a dress composed of three pieces; one in front, one behind, and one over the breasts.

The Bangala women wear a kind of short ballet dancer's skirt, as shown in the illustration on p. 320, which is made by hanging quanti-

ties of dried palm leaves round the hips. O vanity of vanities! The prettier a girl, the shorter the dress! The Bokele women, wear similar dresses, but only behind.

The inhabitants of the Kwilu wear a piece of native cloth round their loins; but it is essential that no part above the legs should be covered behind.

Ornaments

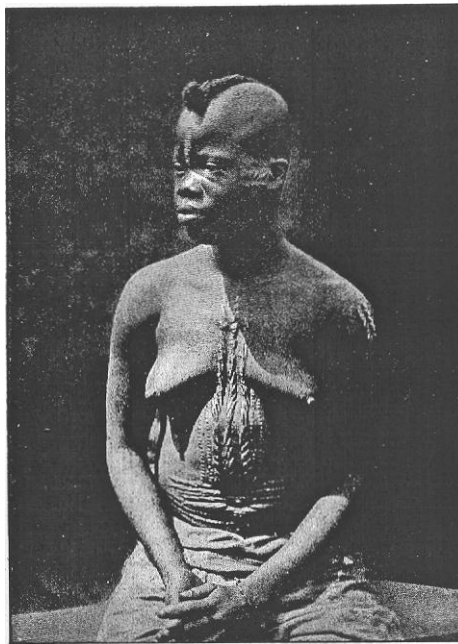
But if these daughters of Eve are satisfied with little dress, they averse to ornaments. It is wonderful to see the ingenuity they display in adding to their personal adornment. Amongst the most eccentric must be mentioned the Ubangi ladies, who have holes made in their ears in which they hang heavy weights, with the result that their ear-lobes frequently become lengthened to eight or ten inches. Some pass a stick through the septum of the nose; the Bakumu and Banziri pierce their upper lips, and wear in the hole a disc of wood or ivory of the size of a crown or even bigger several holes in the lower lip as well, while others pierce the upper part of the ear in several places and hang string tassels from them. The Baluba women have the four front incisors knocked out, and most of the women have their teeth filed.

It may be considered the rule, that the less dress a woman wears the more ornament she requires; of course I only mean Congolese women. Thus the Budja, who wear no clothes, have, around their necks, collars of forged brass often weighing as much as thirty pounds, and anklets nearly as heavy on their feet.

Bracelets are worn nearly everywhere; those of the Kasai, made of iron, are especially beautiful. The legs are also ornamented with brass circlets, which often reach from the ankles to the knees ; in many tribes brass wire is wrapped round the legs and arms in spirals to the knees and elbows. Rings of iron, brass or ivory, are worn on all fingers, and often on the big toe, and the Banza women wear a ring in the nose. Many women of the "Province Orientale" have one side of the nose pierced and wear a button of iron or silver in the hole; whilst the Bubu in the Ubangi carry in their upper lip a piece of crystal two inches in length; if they cannot afford crystal, they use copal gum.

Necklaces are made of most varied material; all kinds of teeth (human included), beads, feathers, iron trinkets, wood and ivory carvings,

seeds and shells, etc. These necklaces are not always very comfortable, such, for instance, as that shown in the illustrations on pp. 322 and 325, which are made of brass, are forged on to the neck, and sometimes weigh as much as thirty pounds.



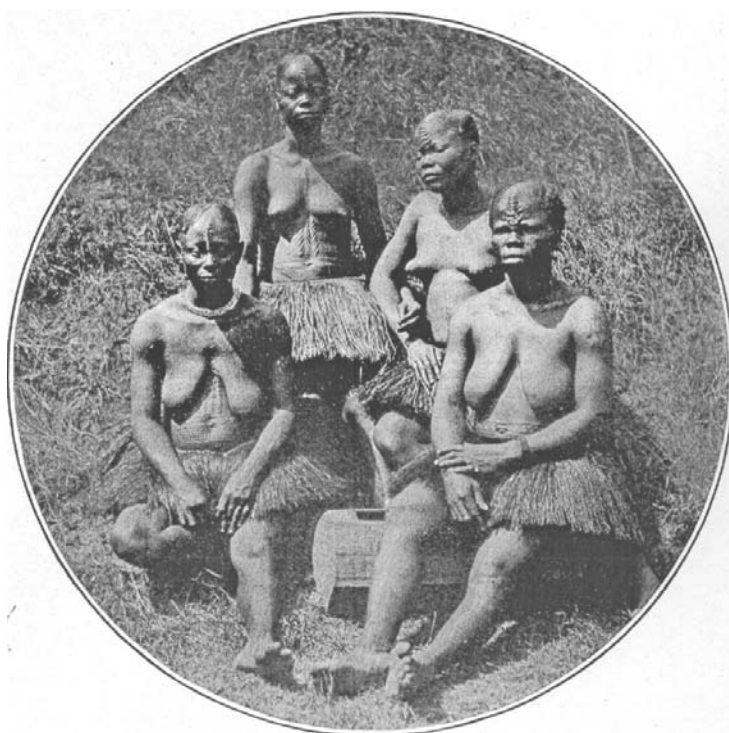
A Wangata Woman with shaven head and scar tattooing

Fans are almost unknown; in one tribe only, the Bakumu, women use a very primitive kind made of palm leaves.

As amongst all primitive people, hairdressing is naturally a great feature among the Congo people. In some parts the first process in the toilet is to extract the eyebrows and eyelashes, no hair being allowed to remain except on the head.

In the lower Congo, the hair is cut short, greased with palm oil, and powdered red. The upper country head-dress varies from tribe to tribe. The Bangala shave the hair in front and behind the ears, but let it remain on the occiput, and on the side. The Sango women have very long locks, but they make them longer still by adding to them quanti-

ties of hair from the dead or from prisoners, or by twining them with palm fibres painted black (*see*, p. 323). The Sakara form their *coiffure* of plaits literally covered with beads; these plaits are parted on the nape of the neck, and are brought to the front to form a kind of cap, which resembles the bonnets of the Dutch women (*see* p. 324); or they are sometimes built up like mitres. The more complicated *côilf ores* take many weeks to complete, but once, brushed they last, for a long time. Some, the Manyema for instance, wear a circular wooden ring at the back of the head over which they draw the hair; others, like the Southern Baluba, weave their hair with the aid of basket-work into a kind of halo, decked with beads and cowries by way of jewellery. Nearly every lady wears in her hair a long pin of wood or ivory, which she finds very handy to scratch with at times. It is a fact worth mentioning that in some Azandé tribes women shave their heads while their husbands allow their hair to grow.



Typical Bangala Beauties.
Showing palm-leaf petticoats and scar tattooing

Marriage Customs

After having enumerated the means by which maidens try to please, let us pass to the result of all these preparations, and mention the different customs relating to marriage.

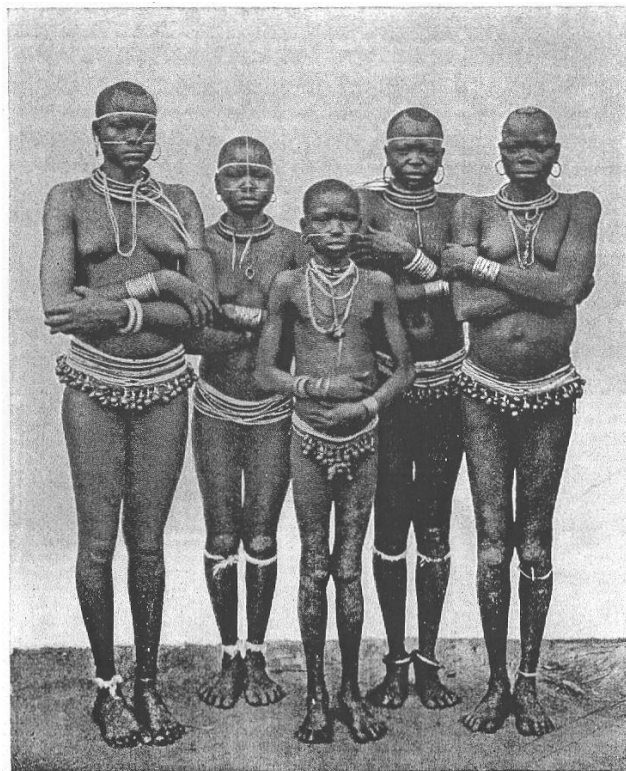
There are so many of these customs in the Congo that it is not possible to generalise; it may only be stated that polygamy is nearly universal, and often practised to the furthest limit; thus certain chiefs provide themselves with several hundred wives. One honourable exception are the Banza, who never take more than a single wife, and pride themselves on their conjugal fidelity.

The Musserongo have a complicated nuptial ceremony. Three months before the daté fixed the bride retires to a hut outside the village, where she is painted red with *tukula* wood. Then the bridegroom pays to the father-in-law the price of his betrothed wife, but it must not be thought that, in virtue of this purchase, she becomes his slave; the money only represents the expenses of the parents; and in case of divorce, or premature death, must be returned. The father, after having received the price of his daughter, goes to the "*Ganga*" or fetish man, who; by making offerings to the "Bingu" spirit obtains fecundity for the new couple. On the day of the marriage the bride, accompanied by all the young girls of the village, dancing and singing, is led to her husband's house. The next day a great feast is given by the young husband, to which all friends are invited.

Amongst the Bakongo the engagement lasts for a long time, as young girls are often engaged at the tender age of four, and cannot marry before eleven or twelve years of age. This involves great expense to the bridegroom, for whenever he visits his bride he must bring considerable presents to her parents.

The Azandé deserve to be specially mentioned. Here the chief allots wives to his people without consulting their taste; this tribe is an instance in favour of the *Mariage de raison*, as the Aiandé are peculiarly fond of their wives, and the couples brought together by the caprice of the chief are generally extremely happy, and some of the ladies show remarkable fidelity to their husbands. The husbands, too, show themselves most affectionate towards their wives, but are exceedingly jealous, and object to strangers even looking at their spouses. In consequence the women are very shy. Not so the Mangbettu, their neighbours, where husbands are only too often hen-pecked, and

where women have great influence in the assemblies deciding the destinies of the tribe. Their right to take part in such decisions has greatly influenced their minds, and has given them a spirit of independence and authority rarely found amongst the women of the Congo. There are some women- chiefs found in this tribe who govern with great justice and prudence.



Women of the Welle District
Notice the nose ornaments and elaborate girdles.
(By permission of the Ethnographical Museum, Tervueren)

The Momfu are perhaps the only tribe where it is the men's duty to do the agricultural work; they clear the forest, plant and gather the crops, while their wives only attend to the work of the house, such as cooking, the care of the children, etc. In this tribe wives and husbands

eat from the dish together with the children, and this people considers woman as the equal of man in consequence of this they are despised by their neighbours.

The pygmy ladies are bought by their husbands for three or four arrows.

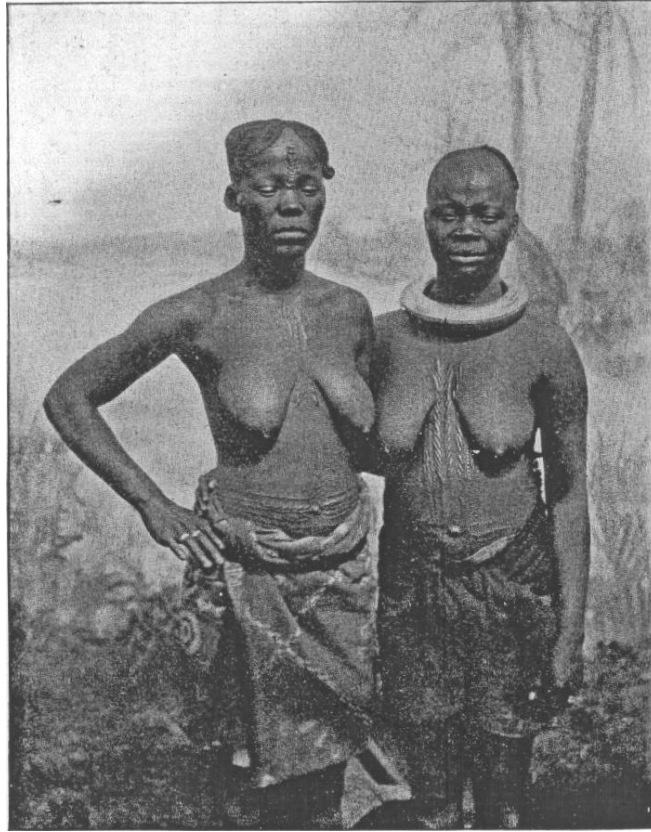
The Mogwandi are nearly always monogamous because of the scarcity of women; and in order not to be left unprovided with a mate they are wise enough, if they come across a little girl of three or four years, who promises to become pretty, to arrange to marry her on paying the price to her father. As they, too, must bring a present every time they visit their bride, it may be imagined that the possession of a daughter forms a real source of wealth to the head of the family. But it is always understood that if later the bride bears no children to her husband, a part of the presents must be refunded.

Child Marriage

The inhabitants of the Kwilu are familiar with child marriage; any little boy may declare a little girl his future wife, and then, when she is of age, he may marry her. If she does not like him, she may refuse him, and this often happens; but in this case the man to whom she gives her preference must pay to the jilted lover, as it were, damages for breach of promise. In this country a man is not allowed to look at his mother-in-law; if he should see her coming he must run into the bush to avoid her.

A curious kind of child marriage exists amongst the Batetela. When a female infant is born, a man may drop an iron bracelet into the water in which she has been washed for the first time, and present the mother with a fowl – he thereby has a right to consider the child his betrothed wife; in case of twins, both girls marry the same man.

Amongst the Bayanzi, nobody but the husband and the brother may call a married woman by her name; all others must mention her as the wife of So-and-so.



**Wangata Women,
One of whom wears the brass neck ornament – weighing upwards of 25 lbs.
– which is characteristic among the women of the Upper Congo**

Urua Wedding Dance

In Urua, when the bride is related to the chief, the marriage is celebrated with great festivities. Everybody dances, shouts, and sings in the village, and drink flows in abundance. In the afternoon the bridegroom arrives, and, surrounded by his friends, executes a dance of an hour's duration; then the bride is brought in on the back of some strong matron; the crowd surrounds her, and her human steed executes a wild dance without putting her down; during this dance the bride lets her body and arms hang down and swing about. When the woman who carries her can do no more, the new husband approaches, and

presents the bride with beads, tobacco, and other trifles. These are thrown by her amongst the crowd, who shout and fight to obtain part of the plunder, as it is considered to bring great luck. Then the bride is put on the ground and executes with her husband a *as de deux* which cannot be described. Suddenly the husband lifts her in his arms, and runs off with her to his hut.

Conjugal infidelity

Conjugal infidelity is severely punished. In the Kwilu the co-respondent becomes a slave of the betrayed husband, whilst the wife receives a good thrashing. Amongst the Bangala the faulty wife has her ears cut *and her calves pierced with red hot lances*. The Azandé kill the faithless wife, and the rival has his hands and ears cut off. In the Ubangi the unfaithful woman is killed. The Mogwandi are very severe with a woman who leaves the conjugal home. She is put in the middle of the village, devoid of all dress or ornaments, and the inhabitants defile before her, insulting her and reproaching her with her bad behaviour. Some strike her and spit at her this done, she is driven by the screaming crowd back to her husband's home.

Marriage for a limited time, as recently advocated in England, exists amongst the Basutanda. Here the young girl is stolen by her sweetheart, who hides with her in the forest till a child is born, when they return triumphantly to the man's village. But there the romance ends for the wife re turns to her parents as soon as the child can be separated from her, and she is only entitled to a part of the game obtained by her husband as long as she is not "stolen" by another man. Amongst the Mogwandi, where, as already mentioned; women are scarce, it often happens that a husband lets his wife to another man for a term of ten months. If during that time a child is born it belongs to the lessee; the lease may be prolonged by a supplementary payment.

The Bakuba, who have been in contact with the Arabs, not only often ill-treat their wives, but if tired of them they exchange them with a friend. Nevertheless, these people expect conjugal fidelity from their wives. Ifâ; chief's wife betrays her husband, she is bound to a tree and flogged, and then sent to the co-respondent, who may keep her, but must pay – an enormous fine; in the case of an ordinary woman, both she and her lover are killed.



Sango Girls

Showing the method of hair-dressing peculiar to this tribe. The natural locks are lengthened by adding to them hair taken from prisoners or dead women, or by twining them with palm fibres, painted black.

Social Conditions on the Congo

As a rule the social condition of women is not bad they have to do the agricultural work, and manage their household; but field work is light in this country, where the soil is of very great fertility. An intelligent woman can easily attain to honours; and women chiefs are not uncommon. Amongst the Balunda there were always two chiefs; the King "Muata. Yamvo," and the King's mother "Lukokesha," who was almost of greater importance than the King himself. The actual Balunda empire was founded by a woman.

As far back as the fifteenth century a great queen was known to travellers in the Congo; this was Zinga, or, as she was later called, Donna Anna Zinga de Souza, who governed an important country with great ability. A contemporary traveller says "that a certain chief Kambolo left an important state to his successors, who would still enjoy its possession if a woman, gifted with courage much above her sex, called Zinga, had not taken to arms, and having gathered the dissatisfied has dethroned Kambolo, on whom she gained great victories that put her in possession of a whole kingdom."



Sakara Girls

**Their hair is braided with beads. Two of these girls have the curious knots of skin down the forehead – a form of personal adornment affected by this tribe.
(By permission of the Ethnographical Museum, Tervueren)**

The Baboma are at the present time governed by a female chief, and the great Mokanda Bantu ben Msiri, King of Garenganza, is absolutely under the guidance of his wife, to whom is due the peaceful condition of the Katanga, and the great friendliness shown by the inhabitants to Europeans.

Mungo Park, in his travels, always found that native women were of great help to him in evading difficulties with the savage tribes which he visited, and any explorer who succeeds in obtaining the favour of this sex may rely upon being unmolested, for, even in tribes

where they have nominally no to describe many of them, irrespectively of authority at all, women always succeed in. the end in making the representatives of the stronger sex do as they wish.

Women are so closely connected with funeral ceremonies that I shall be obliged whether the person to be buried be a man or a woman. In all cases it is the women's duty to lament the dead, and as a rule the ladies of surrounding villages come to join in the chorus.

Death and Burial

In the lower Congo, when a person has died; the body is put on a kind of scaffold under a shed and smoked over a fire of green wood. When the corpse is sufficiently dried, it is wrapped in cloth; the richer the deceased, the more cloth is used; thus a wealthy person when prepared for burial looks like an enormous bale of cloth. The body is then exposed in a hut for a period which may extend to several months. On the day of the funeral all the people of the country gather in the village of the deceased, and, to the sound of drums, tom-toms, whistles, and the howling of the women, the corpse is carried to the grave, where all who have guns fire them off. Then eating and drinking begins, finishing up with a general dance which does not terminate until morning. The tomb is decorated with the deceased's belongings, such as pots, empty bottles, household articles, which are killed by breaking them, that their spirits May follow their owner to the other world.

In the Kwilu diminutive huts are erected in memory of the dead, in which offerings are placed by relations and friends, consisting of food and palm-wine: it is, perhaps, thought that the soul returns to partake of them. Great importance is attached to the faithful discharge of this duty for, if neglected, it is believed that the deceased is sure to visit the culprits in their dreams and cause them the most terrible nightmares.

When an Abarambo woman dies her husband disappears into the forest and lives there, sometimes for months, lamenting his deceased wife. A widow does the same; when she returns to the village it is considered that she has forgotten her husband, and is prepared to try another union.



A Married Bangala Couple

Notice the woman's shaven, and the scar tattooing on the forehead and scalp

Window's Sacrifice

The Banza have a most disgusting ceremonial; the corpse is put on a chair-like scaffold, and, a fire is lit under it; the grease, dropping from the corpse, is carefully collected by the mourners, who smear it on their hands and bodies, believing that they thus inherit the virtues of the deceased.

But it is difficult to speak of the Sakara burial ceremonies without shocking the reader.

On a bed, in an immense round grave, his head reposing in his favourite wife's arms, the deceased lies dressed in his richest costume round him in a circle lies the Strangled corpses of his other wives, who have refused to survive their husband. The grave is surrounded by a circle of slain slaves, whose bodies, after the grave has been closed, will serve as a dish to the invited guests.

The Barua have a somewhat similar custom; a deep hole is dug, and the chief wife, supported on her elbows and knees, crouches there, serving as a seat to the corpse; the second wife serves as a foot-stool, and the other wives sit round the body; all are buried alive!

The wives of the Bena; Kanioka do not submit voluntarily to this treatment, so their legs and arms are broken, to prevent their escape from the grave.

One month after the death of a Baluba chief some of his wives are sent to join him in the next world; they are buried, alive round the husband's grave.

Amongst some tribes in the Lado district the widows, together with a number of slaves, are clubbed by a shouting, enthusiastic crowd. When they fall, men and women rush up to them and drive their knives in the still quivering bodies; then the victims are thrown into the grave.

A dying chief of the Bakundi himself names: the wives he wishes to be sacrificed after his death.

The inhabitants of the Bomu river are specially cruel in their sacrifices. If a chief happens to be ill he retires into the forest with the fetish man and a few faithful followers. His Wives anxiously await the news of his recovery, for on that their lives depend if he dies his followers spread the news that he has recovered, that his wives may not take the alarm and escape. Great preparations are made for his reception, and the women, full of joy, prepare a great feast, and adorn

themselves with their choicest ornaments. Suddenly warriors surround them and inform them of their terrible destiny. Some show despair, but most of them take the awful news with resignation, having always known that it would be their fate; some even seem quite happy to follow their husbands to the other world.

The day after the decease all wives who have not borne children; and one mother of a male child, are shut up in a strong hut, together with numerous slaves who formerly belonged to the deceased. The people begin to lament the dead, and when the noise has risen to its highest pitch, fire is put to the hut in which are the victims. If they try to escape, they are caught by the warriors and thrown back into the flames.



A Chieftainess Of The Welle District With Her Attendants
(By permission of the Ethnographical Museum, Tervueren)

But some wives have been reserved. These are now brought, and except the two prettiest, are slain above the corpse. The two former, after having their arms and legs broken, enjoy the "privilege" of being buried alive with their husbands. By a refinement of cruelty, holes are

left in the grave to allow the air to pass in, and thus prolong for a while the agonies of these two miserable women.

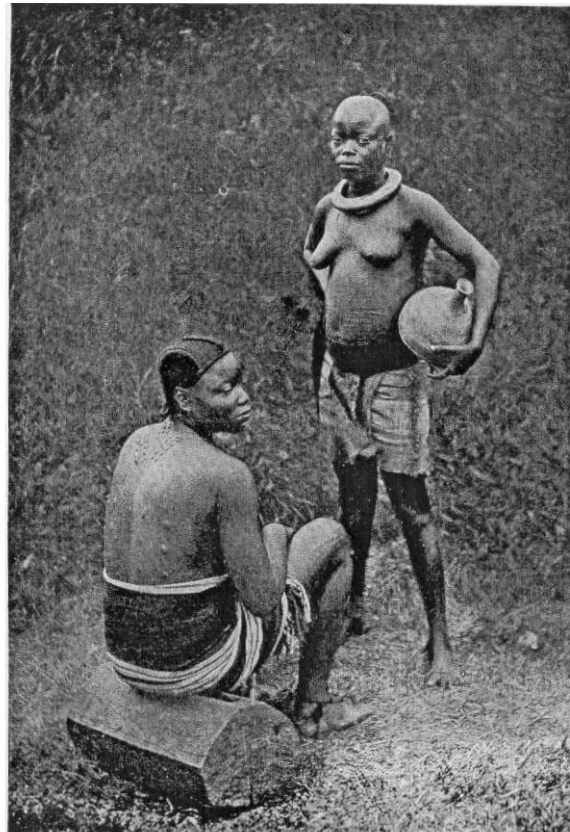
Touching, compared with these customs, is the practice found amongst the Banza; if they have lost some one dear to them, they have his image carved in wood by a skilled artist; this figure is kept in the hut of the mourner, and is an object of great care and veneration.

A large proportion of the inhabitants of the Congo are cannibals; it is true that this statement, as a rule, applies only to men, for the women are us ally debarred from taking any part in the banquet; but as they often provide the most appreciated part of the feast, it is impossible not to enter into some detail with regard to this horrible custom.

Cannibalism may arise from several causes ; in some parts, where game is rare, it has resulted from a craving for animal food; in others, it has been caused by the belief that by eating the body of the slain enemy his virtues are transferred to the person who eats him; whilst in others (as some countries in the Aruwimi) a man considers himself a kind of family vault, thinking that no fitter tomb can be found for the dead than the interiors of his relations; moreover in this country the eating of the corpse is regarded as a religious duty to the deceased.

Nowadays, of course, cannibalism is only practised in secret; but when the first explorers came into the country, not only was it practised openly, but the Europeans, being alone amongst an unsubjugated population, were obliged to tolerate it, and sometimes forced to be among the spectators. One of the earliest white men to visit the Bangala; M. Coquilhat, thus describes a "Feast of man eating".

"After a quarter of an hour's walk through the outskirts of the village, we turned a corner and stood before the whole scene. On the left is the band of wooden drums, iron gongs, and ivory trumpets, and the varied sounds of these instruments unite in terrible din on the right, trembling with excitement, stand the spectators line upon line, in their best dresses, ornamented with feathers, caps, and skins, and paint. The musicians and the crowd form a circle round the place of sacrifice, and a grove of palm and banana trees surround the whole with a picturesque screen. In the middle of the circle, alone, sits the unhappy victim on a small chair; he is completely naked and blackened with soot. He seems to be twenty years of age, in good health. Not being bound, he contemplates the audience with interest, and it may be seen by the movement of his chest that his breath is perfectly regular and calm.



Wangata Women
Showing method of shaving the head and scar tattooing
(By permission of the Ethnographical Museum, Tervueren)

"The preparations are long, and whilst these are made by a few men with methodical coolness, the crowd joins in a furious dance, and the musicians beat their instruments madly. A stake, reaching to his shoulders, is placed behind the victim, and his body and his arms are tied to it. The hands, extended behind his body, are fixed to small sticks driven into the ground. A second stake is fixed into the ground before his chest, and his feet are fixed in the same manner as his hands. Then, about four yards in front of him, a long and very flexible pole, about twelve feet high, is driven vertically into the ground. A man jumps and seizes the top and hanging to it by his hands in such a

manner as to draw it down, near to the victim's head, which is put in a roughly made net attached by a string to the end of the pole.



Bakuba women
Showing the wire armlets
(By permission of the Ethnographical Museum, Tervueren)

"The innocent victim follows, without emotion, the details of these preparations. Sometimes one of the dancers leaves the crowd and leaps about in front of him. The executioner runs round the assembly, brandishing his enormous Bangala knife, the curved blade of which seems to be shaped to the human neck. Many times he goes near the victim and feigns to try the knife on him. Finally a white line is traced on the spot at the ^Vback of the neck destined to receive the final blow. The victim remains unmoved. The executioner says a few words to

one of his assistants; the fatal moment approaches. The victim is blind-folded and his body powdered with white paint.

"The vassals and slaves of the chief file past several times, attired in their war ornaments, brandishing their lances, shields, and knives; then follows a group of dancing women. At last the executioner advances, gloriously attired in blue and scarlet, with a magnificent cap of black feathers on his head, preceded by his wife and surrounded by a great number of people of both sexes. They all proceed round the victim in a kind of dance.



Baluba Woman

**The hair is elaborately dressed, but the clothing is singularly scanty
(By permission of the Ethnographical Museum, Tervueren)**

"All people retire from the circle; the executioner takes off his cloth and bends back, so as to touch the ground with one hand on the left side of the condemned; a little white clay is put on his cheeks; he now makes a movement as if to measure his blow, and suddenly strikes. The head describes a circle in the air as the bent pole is released, and falls to the earth at some distance."

The Bangala and Bapoto are great man-eaters, but as a rule they do not eat women, considering them much too expensive; whilst the Sango show a great preference for women and children.

When the first Europeans came to the Congo, a traveller once met a man walking freely about the market place. His body was marked with red and white lines, and it was said that he was a slave who was to be eaten. As nobody could purchase the whole man, he was sold in pieces, the lines on the body being marks of the purchasers, the red lines being the marks of one tribe, the white those of another. This slave seemed to be perfectly indifferent to his fate; he walked quietly up and down and stopped when some buyer wanted to mark the piece purchased and listened with interest to the discussion of the price!

The Bayanzi do not despise human flesh in a state of complete putrefaction; they even, like hyénas, exhume corpses for consumption.

Much more could be written on this subject, but a return must be made to matters more intimately connected with the central figure of this chapter—woman.

Physical Attractions of Congolese Women

Are the women of the Congo beautiful? This is a very difficult question to answer, for the beautiful is what pleases, and certainly the negro women are far removed from our standard of beauty. It must be kept clearly in mind that the European, when first he arrives in the dark continent, can scarcely distinguish a man from a woman, and all natives seem to him to have the same features. But the more he lives amongst them the easier he finds it to distinguish sexes and individuals and later on he is able to deal with the question of good looks.

The Congo women are slenderly built. During a stay of several years in the country I did not come across ten women who could really boast of *embonpoint*. They are not tall, but very well proportioned, and, as far as their figures are concerned, classical beauty is far more frequent among them than among their white sisters. Their back has a graceful "fall," their ankles and wrists are neat; their feet and hands are in proportion; most ladies' gloves made in Europe would be too large for them, and Cinderella's shoe alone might fit their tiny feet. Less pleasing are the racial characteristics exhibited by the head and features. The scalp is covered with woolly hair, which, as a rule, is

abundant. The chin is weak, but no more beautiful eyes exist than those of a negro girl – great, bright, almond-shaped eyes shaded by marvellously long eye-lashes. In contradistinction to the pure negro, the Congo inhabitants often have normal lips; their noses are frequently slender and not uncommonly aquiline in shape. Their teeth are like so many pearls, but, unhappily, they are often deformed by filing. Their language is soft, melodious, and very picturesque. They like to speak in metaphors, and give great emphasis by intonation to what they say. They are very fond of a friendly chat, and are naturally inquisitive. When all other means failed to get on friendly terms with the inhabitants of a village, I used to take out some illustrated magazines and look carelessly over the pictures. The people for a time would keep at a distance, but slowly the women would begin to separate from the group and approach to have a peep. More and more would come, the "Eh," and "Oh," and "Ah," increased in strength, and at last one would take courage and request me to tell them what all these pictures meant, and of course I was quite disposed to do so. They seemed very curious to know all about Europe, especially about women. What long hair they had! How white they were! And a man never had more than one woman! As a rule they greatly approved of European beauty, and, when told about the social condition of their sisters "far, far beyond the seas," much envied them.

It is a popular belief that all women are open to flattery. In the Congo, at any rate, the occasion of paying compliments to ladies must never be let slip; they are highly pleased by it. But they are vindictive too an affront to a tribe is resented more by the women than by men, and they are always ready to incite the latter to take a bloody revenge.

They are very kind-hearted, and in countries where food is scarce, and where men may refuse to sell provisions, a woman will never refuse the traveller the necessaries for his maintenance. Amongst the Balunda it was formerly the custom, if a foreigner came to a village, for some woman of the locality to undertake to provide his food during his stay; no compensation – was required for this; if the traveller could afford it, he gave her a present at parting.

Women of tribes near the rivers are very cleanly, and bathe several times a day; the "negro smell" attributed to them becomes imperceptible after a prolonged stay amongst them. In the same way, we do not smell the "European smell" although it exists, and is not much appreciated by the negroes. At any rate, it seems a proof that their odour is

less penetrating than ours if we consider that it is far less offensive to game. It is a fact that traps laid by negroes in the same manner as by Europeans are more successful than those laid by the latter.

Negroes and Cleanliness

Among tribes of the forest, often living at a great distance from the water, women scarcely ever wash. The toilet consists of spreading over their bodies a mixture of red wood stain, called "*tukula*"; or "*n'gula*" and palm-oil, which is scraped off about once a month with a piece of bone or wood, and then renewed.

All women possess a piece of fibrous wood with which they continually brush their teeth.

Preparation of Food

When it comes to the preparation of food, a duty which devolves on the women, the greatest cleanliness is found everywhere. The chief food is a kind of paste made of manioc flour boiled in water. This is stirred with a wooden spoon, and the housewife never touches it with her hand in preparing it, and in dishing it up. The preparation of this flour, which is pounded in big mortars, is one of the most important occupations of women; and the preparation of palm-oil is also part of their work. All women work; but in some tribes the favourite wife may be an exception for a short time. The food is the same as for man; but in some tribes certain dishes are not permitted to women. The Bambala women are not allowed to eat goats or game; the Bayaka women are forbidden to eat fowls or eggs, and it is supposed that if a woman breaks this restriction she becomes mad, tears off her clothes and runs away into the bush. When found she is caught and fastened to a log with a fork at one end in which her neck is fixed; thus secured she is brought to the magician. He knocks on the log three times, and the woman faints; he then pours water on her face, and the spell is broken.

On the other hand Bahuana women are allowed to eat frogs, whilst the men may not do so, and among the Marungu women alone are permitted to eat mulberries.

The principal food is manioc bread; but the dainties appreciated by Congo people are of a nature to make a European epicure shiver. Locusts, crickets, all kinds of caterpillars, and white ants are some of them.

Religion

As for religion, very few of the inhabitants of the Congo country have an idea of a The so-called idols brought from the Congo benevolent divinity, but the belief in an evil spirit is general are not believed by the natives to possess any supernatural power by themselves, it is only the "*Kissi*" or magic force that the fetish man smears on them that is powerful. No prayers are addressed to these "idols"; their duty is to prevent mischief from happening to their owners, and, if they do not fulfil it, big nails or knives are driven into them to remind them of their obligation.

Home Life

The habitation of the Congo woman is a hut, quadrangular, rectangular or round, according to the tribe, and, as a rule, made of straw or leaf. Each married woman possesses her own house, and the husband lives with his wives alternately; the wife with whom he stays provides him with food.

There is an unwritten law in accordance with which pottery-making and the selling of provisions is reserved for women.

Woman's greatest pleasure lies in singing and dancing, and the time of new moon is considered the right season for these amusements. The Congo woman's voice resembles that of a child and has no great compass. Many women smoke tobacco and take snuff; in the Bakuba and Basongo-Meno tribes they smoke hemp, the effects of which are very intoxicating, and highly injurious to the health ; but the process forms a part of the religious ceremonies of these tribes.

Among many tribes, geophagists or earth-eaters are found, who devour a kind of kaolin earth, pretending that it frees them from pains in the stomach.

And now if one should want to know which is the most accomplished, the best, the most beautiful and most desirable woman of the Congo, go and ask the first young warrior to be met there. The invariable reply will be: "Why, it's the girl I love," so it is evident that opinions differ widely on this subject.



Bazoko Women Making Pots