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A Comparison of the Role of Prophets in Samburu and Maasai Warfare

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The Samburu and Maasai are closely related pastoral societies which have age-set organisations and share a common language and religious beliefs. Both, furthermore, have prophets (*iloibonok*), who can divine the future, inflict sorcery, and cure misfortunes. In Maasai, this role has historically included wider political influence, particularly in the 19th century when the prophet Mbatian is said to have united the Purko and Kisongo tribes against the Laikipiak Maasai. In Samburu, however, no prophet ever emerged in such a leadership position. This difference is traced to the different ways these societies are organised, particularly where their *moran* age-sets are concerned. The Maasai stage large age-set ceremonies for all the young men of an area, who are blessed by a leading prophet. The Samburu, however, since they have no such territorial units, recruit their age-sets on the basis of descent in small ceremonies held within each clan settlement and without the participation of a prophet. These differences in political and age-set organisation are traced, in turn, to different ecological conditions, and particularly to the different tasks of the *moran* age-set in economic production. Whereas Samburu *moran* spend a great deal of time in mobile livestock camps in a relatively dry environment, Maasai *moran*, living in a richer environment, congregate in defined and permanent localities, living in their own "warrior villages", the *manyata*. In such a situation, a prophet of Mbatian's stature, having wider access to the *moran* as a whole, could wield considerable influence.

Research on Samburu prophets was undertaken from 1974-6 while I was a Visiting Research Associate at the Institute of African Studies, University of Nairobi, and forms the basis of my Ph. D. dissertation (University of London) on concepts of health and disease among the Samburu and Rendille of northern Kenya. I would like to thank Dr. Paul Baxter, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester; John Berntsen, Department of History, University of Wisconsin; and Neal Sobania, Department of African History, School of Oriental and African Studies (London) for their attention and kindness in reading and discussing this manuscript. Responsibility for views expressed here are, of course, my own. I would also like to thank Dr. Katsuyoshi Fukui, National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka; Dr. Jiro Tanaka, Primate Research Institute, Kyoto University; and Mr. Shun Sato, Tokyo University, for their kind invitation to the First International Symposium, Division of Ethnology, the Taniguchi Foundation, and for many stimulating discussions while in Kenya.

Both the Maasai and the Samburu are descended from a proto-Maa speaking group that migrated south from the southern Sudan into Kenya's Rift Valley some-time before 1700 AD. Where the Maasai (by whom I mean the Southern or Pastoral Maasai groups, including the Purko and Kisongo clusters) occupied the savannah grasslands of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania, several groups splintered off from this main migration, including the Uasin Gishu and Laikipiak, to the western and eastern highlands, respectively, of the Rift Valley. The Samburu occupied the semi-desert regions of north central Kenya to the south and east of Lake Turkana, allying with the Cushitic speaking Rendille [JACOBS 1965b: 144-54; SPENCER 1973: 152; LAMPHEAR 1976: 194].

Both the Maasai and Samburu depend for subsistence on a pastoral economy in which human labour is organised around the fundamental tasks of livestock production. Both societies are characterised by an age-set organisation in which male youths, called *moran* (after *murata*, or circumcision), who have been circumcised in adolescence during a specific recruitment period, pass together through successive rituals until their promotion to elderhood, at which time they may marry, usually fourteen years after initiation.

Although similar in economy, social structure, language and cultural expression, Maasai and Samburu vary widely in their political organisation, a situation reflected most clearly in the recruitment of their age-sets, and their role in the political and economic spheres of these two societies. Of particular interest in this paper is the role of the *moran* age-sets in warfare, and the influence of Maasai prophets on their activities.



Photo. 1. Samburu *moran*

The history of East Africa is rich in accounts of warfare between various pastoralist groups competing for access to, and control of livestock, grazing, and water resources. In the 19th century, competition between Maasai groups led to the annihilation of the Laikipiak and Uasin Gishu Maasai, and the temporary consolidation of the Purko and Kisongo Maasai tribal clusters in southern Kenya.

Alan Jacobs argues at length that the 19th century wars between various Maasai groups revolved around the competition of leading prophets (*oloiboni*, *iloibonok*) or “ritual experts”. The Purko-Kisongo, Uasin Gishu, and Laikipiak groups are each described as following their own prophet, and the final defeat of the Laikipiak by the Purko-Kisongo alliance is considered a victory for their prophet Mbatian, whose “fame lay not only in the fact that he was instrumental in breaking the power of the northern *iloikop* [i.e. Laikipiak], but that he also defeated a rival *oloiboni* of comparable fame.” [JACOBS 1965a: 77]

Although the Samburu also fought the Laikipiak in the 19th century, there is no indication that their prophets played any decisive role in this warfare, perhaps because of their more recent arrival in Samburu society from Laikipiak origins in the mid-19th century.¹ Modern Samburu prophets play only a marginal role in the political affairs of the society, for they are concerned primarily with rituals of healing, prophesy, and sorcery, a situation also found among the modern Maasai prophets [JACOBS 1965a: 84].

Jacobs suggests that special conditions prevailing in the 19th century enabled a prophet of Mbatian’s stature to rally the widely scattered Southern Maasai groups against the Laikipiak. I would like to examine why such an influential leader has never emerged among the Samburu. The key to this question, I suggest, lies in the different ways the two societies recruit, organise, and control their *moran* age-sets.

The Maasai *moran* are organised into large territorial groupings, live in large warrior-villages (*manyata*), and undergo collective age-set rites, closely supervised by a leading prophet. The Samburu have no such territorial organisation but live in segmented clan settlements, their age-sets, which are organised around local patrilineal descent groups, being linked neither by a territorial framework nor by large ceremonies supervised by ritual leaders. A detailed examination of the role of prophets in the affairs of the *moran* in both Maasai and Samburu society provides a useful vantage point from which to compare the two societies.

The role of prophet (sing. *oloiboni*, pl. *iloibonok*, from the Maasai verb *a-ibon*, to predict) is characteristic of Maasai societies. Claiming descent from a founding ancestor adopted by the Kisongo Maasai before 1750, *iloibonok* families spread the institution to the Uasin Gishu, the Laikipiak, and the Samburu by the 19th century

¹ At present, there are four *iloibonok* families in Samburu. Three, the Leaduma family (Lorokusho section), the Lengila family (Pisikishu section), and Lemeteki (Masala section), trace their descent to Laikipiak origins. The earliest known prophet in Samburu, Charrar Leaduma (of the *Lkitekui* age-set, initiated about 1851) is said to have arrived in Samburu during his moranhood (circa 1851–65). A fourth prophet, Lekominka, traces his descent to the Sanja family of prophets in Meru.

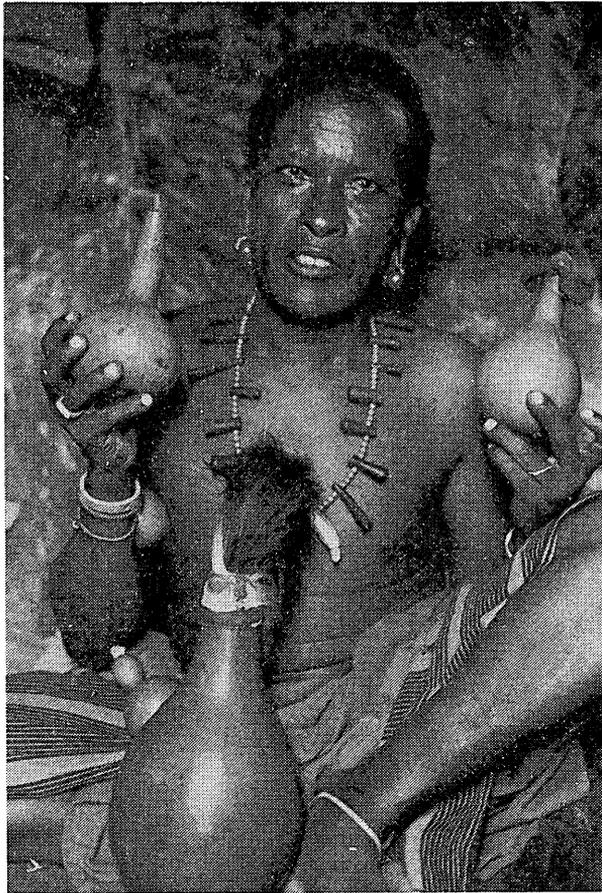


Photo. 2. A Samburu prophet holding *entasim* medicines, with divination gourd (centre)

[JACOBS 1965a: 72–4, 321]. All male members born into an *iloibonok* family are said to possess the inherited and mystical ability to “see” past, present, or future occurrences, either by the use of divination objects or by spontaneous visions. The *iloibonok* are more than prophets, however, for they also possess the ability to manufacture mystically powerful medicines that can both protect from or inflict acts of sorcery resulting in blindness, infertility, disease or death. In Samburu, these two powers are known as *enkidong*, or prediction (from the *enkidong* container of divination objects), and *entasim*, the substances employed in sorcery and healing rites.

In Samburu today, the prophets are primarily concerned with selling their services of *enkidong* divination and *entasim* medicines to communities concerned about the infertility of their wives and livestock, the safety of the *moran* age-sets threatened by enemies and predatory animals, and the risk of disease and mortality in their children. Although welcomed for their protection against such misfortunes which are often thought to be the result of acts of unknown assailants, the prophets are also feared

and mistrusted since it is thought that they may have originally sold the substances of this sorcery to malicious individuals.

The prophets occupy an ambiguous position in Samburu society. As “mystical intermediaries” between the forces of the supernatural world and events on earth, they are both feared and avoided, yet sought out for their services. In addition, as owners of large herds, they are respected in a society that measures wealth in cattle, yet they are resented for the effortless way they acquire their herds: payments for curative services. In sum, however, prophets are valued members of the community, respected for both their wisdom and powers of protection.

In a politically acephalous society such as Samburu, the prophets form a particular sub-section, set off from the wider society, but do not take on any major role in the political affairs of the society. Attending the elders’ councils as any stock-owner would, the prophet may be an important role in political decisions, such as offering his divinatory skills to determine the location of grazing, predators, or enemies, and perhaps providing protective medicines to those travelling in dangerous areas. Such a role, however, is marginal, and the majority of Samburu communities make similar decisions without a resident prophet.

In Maasai, the prophets perform similar duties. Certain prophets, however, can take on a wider political role, owing to their participation in the large territorially incorporated age-set ceremonies. Maasai age-sets are recruited and organised on the basis of their residence in large territorial units which Jacobs terms localities.



Photo. 3. A Samburu prophet (centre) with his son (right) divines the presence of Boran raiders to the east.

The age-sets are ritually unified by their collective participation in the *Eunoto* ceremony, at which junior *moran* become senior *moran*; and the *Olgnesher* ceremony, when senior *moran* pass into junior elderhood, an event which marks the end of that *moran* set, and precedes the initiation of a new one.

The Maasai elders responsible for these rites request the leading prophet (*oloiboni kitok*), who has a wide reputation based on his skills and family standing, to provide *entasim* for the *moran* participants. According to Berntsen [1973: 31–72], the leading prophet in previous times was able to take on a more direct role in the affairs of the *moran* due to his close association with the ritual age-set leader (*ol aunoni*) and the age-set spokesman (*ol aiguenani*), and could advise, predict, and protect *moran* engaging in large-scale warfare (*njori*).

In Samburu, the prophets take no active part either in the ceremonies of the *moran* age-set or in the supervision of their political activities, these tasks being assumed directly by local elders. The Samburu do not have the large and inclusive *Eunoto* and *Olgnesher* ceremonies, but rather have small localised age-set ceremonies called *ilmugit*, the primary criterion for participation in which is membership of one of the various local descent groups spread throughout the Samburu area.

Samburu society is composed of eight patrilineal descent sections (*Imare*i, *Imareita* or “ribs”), which are divided into two moieties of the Black Cattle and the White Cattle. Each descent section is composed of several clans, which are the basis of settlement organisation. Although many clan settlements may be interspersed in one area, White Cattle clans are found more in the eastern lowlands, near the camel-keeping Rendille, and Black Cattle clans more to the west, in the highland cattle-keeping regions of the Loroghi Plateau and Mt. Nyiru.

The localised descent group, or clan-settlement, is the most important unit of economic production and political organisation in Samburu. Each settlement is mobile and autonomous, decisions being made in council meetings by each local group’s married men. Although several settlements may act together in herding activities, moving, or defense, there exists no wider political organisation than the segmentary descent system to unite local groups.

The Samburu organise the recruitment of their *moran* age-sets strictly within their segmentary descent system. Boys are initiated by circumcision and undergo further age-set ceremonies within their local settlements with clan brothers and to the exclusion of outsiders, although several settlements belonging to the same descent section will time their ceremonies to occur simultaneously.² Unlike Maasai *moran*,

² The Samburu have a daily calendar based on the duration of the new moon, e.g., “The 11th day of the moon”, etc., of which even numbered days up to the full moon (the 14th day) are propitious for ritual events. For monthly and annual time-reckoning, the Samburu use both seasonal reckoning (based on the long and short rains in the spring and fall), and the more concise Rendille annual calendar which names each month according to its ritual significance. The Rendille, furthermore, employ a weekly calendar naming each day of the week, and a seven year cycle using the weekday names, but this weekly system is not used widely in Samburu.

who live in large *manyata* with age-mates recruited from many descent groups, Samburu youths spend most of their moranhood with local clan age-mates, living either in their parents' settlements or in temporary livestock camps.

The responsibility of the Samburu *moran* for the herding and protection of the settlement herds in mobile livestock camps is an important economic task, and distinguishes Samburu moran from their Maasai counterparts. Rainfall in Samburu is often less than 500 mm a year, and erratic in timing, quantity and location. Accordingly, the Samburu divide the bulk of their livestock into highly mobile camps (*lalei*) of non-milking stock with a small residual herd of milkers and calves maintained locally in the sedentary domestic settlements of married adults and younger children. Management of the livestock herds in the distant camps demands a strong and self-sufficient labour force capable of spending prolonged periods, often six to twelve months per year, away from the home settlements. In this context, the role of the *moran* in production is clear, and their ritual separation from the society facilitates and emphasises this division of labour which is necessary to maintain the livestock.

Recognition of the economic role of the *moran* age-set in livestock production has not been extensively described in previous studies of pastoral societies. Paul Spencer, who has portrayed in great detail the age-set system of the Samburu, views the age-set organisation primarily as a vehicle which "enables the elders to retain power in the society and to practise polygamy on a large scale" [SPENCER 1965: 101]. The prohibition restricting the *moran* from marrying until the circumcision of

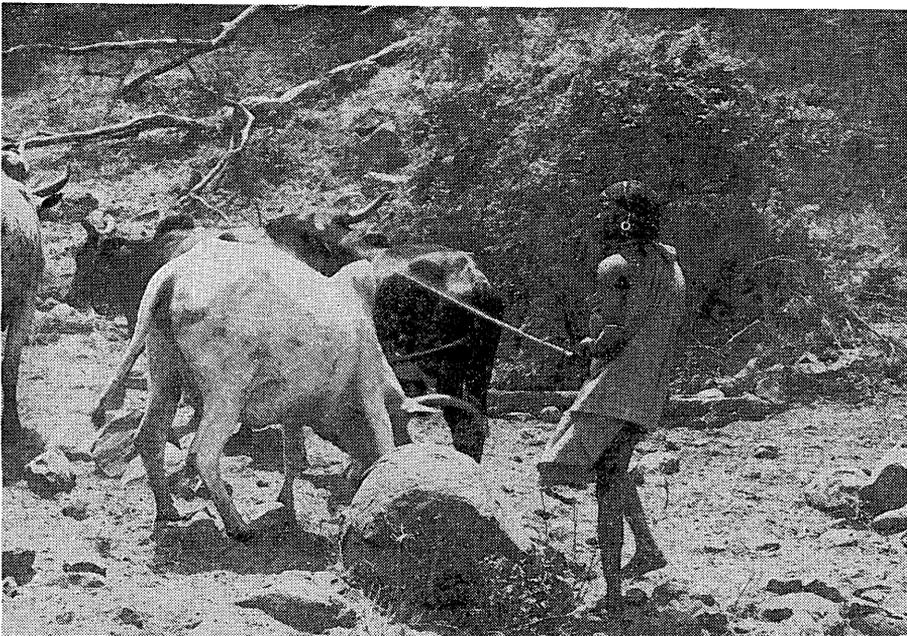


Photo. 4. A Samburu *moran* herding cattle in the highlands

a new age-set thus allows the elders to acquire more wives. Although Spencer's focus is not on the role of the *morán* in economic production, he does refer to disagreements between the *morán* and the elders, particularly over decisions related to livestock property and women.

Spencer describes at length how the elders exert their control over an often rowdy and forceful *morán* group. *Morán* are recruited and organised on the basis of their clan affiliation, and their ceremonies and behaviour are supervised by their "firestick" elders (*olpiron*), who are local clan agnates two age-sets senior to the *morán*. According to Spencer, the control of the "firestick" elders over the *morán* ultimately rests on their curse which, though rarely invoked, is always implicitly threatened. [SPENCER 1965: 184]

The elders' curse (*ol deket*) differs from sorcery (*enkurupore*) in that it is a moral and public indictment whereas the latter is immoral and private. Any justifiably grieved Samburu can call on God to punish an offender, but his curse will be the more effective, the greater his seniority over, and the closer his kinship with the offender. Although I agree with Spencer that the curse is an important force employed if coercion is necessary to assert the elders' control, the segmentary descent system itself provides strong bonds of loyalty and cohesion within the society, and *morán* will usually defer to the elders' authority for the sake of the unity and welfare of the local descent group as a whole.

Control of the *morán* in Samburu is effected both by loyalty and service to the clan settlement and by the threat of the clan elders' curse. In Maasai society, however, neither means of control operates, for descent group affiliation is not the primary organising concept. Both age-sets and residential groups are recruited territorially, and not by segmentary descent affiliation.

According to Jacobs, the Pastoral Maasai are a loose confederation of distinct and autonomous tribal clusters (*oloshó, oloshon*) such as the Purko or Kisongo, each composed of defined localities (*enkutoto, enkutoton*) which are the primary units of economic production and political organisation. Each locality is made up of local settlements composed primarily of age-mates (and their families) who, when *morán*, participated together in the local *Eunoto* ceremony and lived together in the large warrior villages (*manyata*).

Although Maasai society is composed of six patrilineal and ideally exogamous clans (*ogilata*), these are not localised and do not have strong political influence. They are important in that co-residents within both the *manyata* and adult settlements tend to associate along descent lines, but any one settlement or locality is composed of members from several descent groups. In Maasai, both age-set recruitment and local settlements are organised by residence in the geographically defined locality, which has a congress of age-set representatives who make decisions for the locality as a whole. Furthermore, localities representing the entire tribal cluster will occasionally meet to discuss wider political issues, with councils made up of the various age-sets from each constituent locality. [JACOBS 1965a: 174-5, 178, 218, 236]

One can only hypothesise why Maasai and Samburu vary so sharply in their

respective social organisations. A significant factor is the richer quality of the Maasai rangeland, where over 60% of the area receives more than 750 mm of rain per year, compared to less than 20% of the Samburu area. These differences have no doubt permitted the Maasai to establish a more sedentary settlement pattern, where livestock can be managed within each locality, an area defined by Jacobs [1965a: 73-4] as “a self-contained ecological unit with its own permanent water resources”. The proximity of water and grazing to the settlements on a year round basis has contributed to releasing the Maasai *moran* from the more extensive livestock duties performed by Samburu *moran*, and perhaps enabled the system of fixed *manyata* residence to develop. Furthermore, the permanent concentration of a large body of *moran* contributed to the greater military organisation of the Maasai.

The *manyata* system appears to have inhibited direct control over the *moran* by the elders. Although Maasai “firestick” elders also supervise the age-set ceremonies, as in Samburu, they do not possess a strong power to curse, as they are not in a direct kinship relation to all of the *moran*. Furthermore, the Maasai practise of circumcising their sons two sets below themselves, so that the firestick elders are simultaneously “fathers” of that set, inhibits the use of the curse, since an elder would be reluctant to curse his own son’s age-set. Spencer [1965] describes how this conflict is avoided in Samburu, where elders circumcise their sons at least three sets below themselves, so that no sons are in the firestick relationship.

The descent system enables Samburu elders to exert control over the *moran* by appealing to descent group unity on the one hand and threatening to use their descent-based curse on the other. In Maasai, no such means to reduce conflict between the two age-sets exists. How, then, are the Maasai *moran* “kept in their place”? It is here that the role of the leading prophet becomes crucial.

At the request of the “firestick” elders of the territorial unit as a whole, the leading prophet blesses the circumcision knife and provides *entasim* medicines for the *moran*. Although not necessarily present at every locality ceremony, the prophet’s essential participation in the ritual life of the *moran* enables him to assume a ritual authority which is capable both of unifying and threatening the *moran* group as a whole.

According to Berntsen [1973: 82-5], it was formerly feasible for the influence of the leading prophet to extend beyond his ritual role into the political sphere. The prophet had a strong relationship with the age-set spokesman (*ol aigunani*), offering both advice and protection over affairs of warfare. This power could help explain how certain Maasai prophets, particularly Mbatian, were able to exert wide political influence and even direct leadership during the Maasai wars of the 19th century.

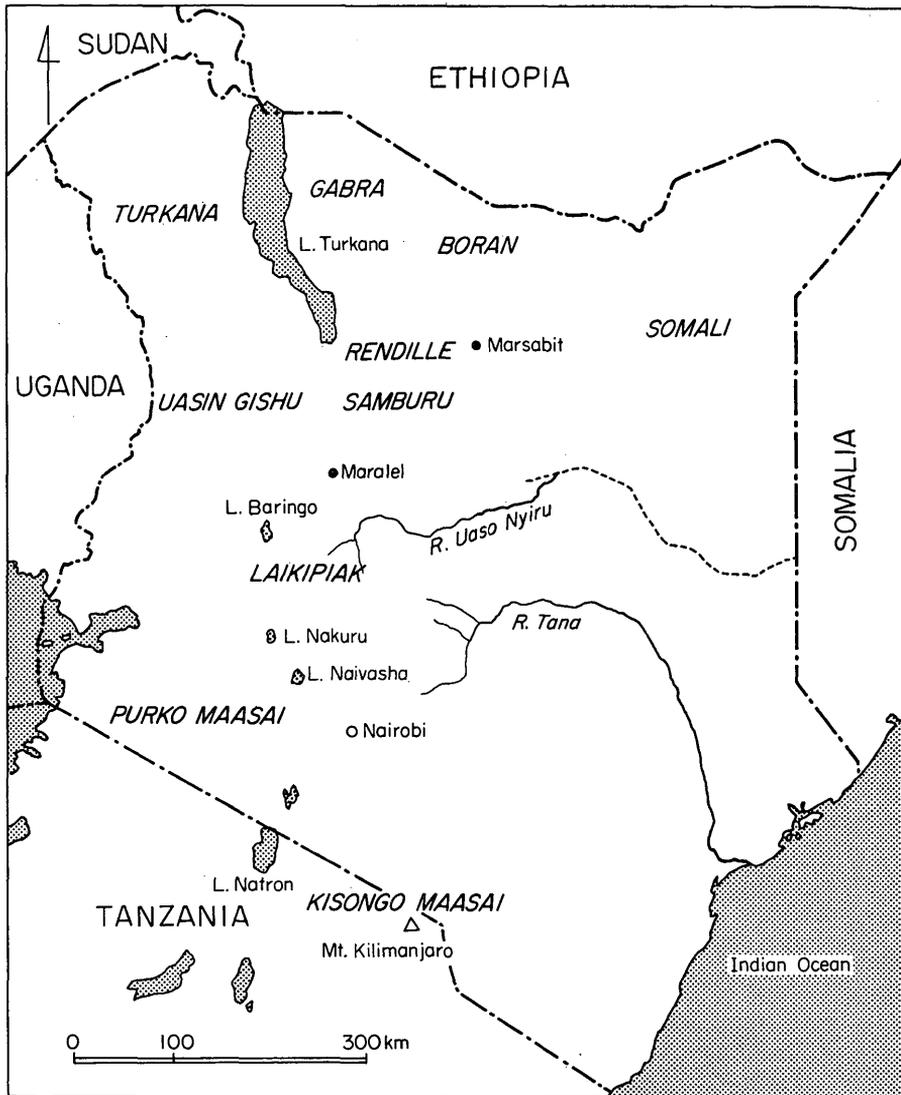
The 19th century was a period of great movement, relocation, competition, and conflict among the pastoral groups in and around the Rift Valley of East Africa. During the first half of the century, several groups attempted to make small but important territorial gains: the Samburu and Rendille took Mt. Marsabit from the Laikipiak and Mts. Nyiru and Kulal from the Boran, while further south the Laikipiak



Photo. 5. The prophet prepares *entasim* medicines.

displaced the Samburu and Rendille from the Loroghi plateau and the Uaso Nyiru River [SPENCER 1973: 152]. The Purko Maasai, further to the south and west, gained the narrow but rich Rift Valley corridor around Lakes Nakuru and Baringo from the Uasin Gishu Maasai [BERNTSEN 1973: 113]. By 1850, the dominant pastoral groups in Kenya's Rift Valley were from north to south, the Turkana and Boran (to the west and northeast respectively of Lake Turkana), the Samburu and Rendille (east and south of the Lake to the Uaso Nyiru River), the Laikipiak (on the Rumuruti-Loroghi Plateau), the Purko Maasai (in the southwest, from Lake Nakuru to Natron), and the Kisongo Maasai (in the southeast, towards the Maasai Steppes, in northern Tanzania).

Whereas the warfare undertaken in the first half of the 19th century was motivated by the desire for territory and for livestock to feed a growing population, that of the second half of the century resulted from the need to feed a starving one. Both human and stock populations were decimated by a series of droughts and epidemics, including cholera, pneumonia, small pox, and rinderpest. Large-scale fighting en-



Pastoral Tribes in Kenya (19th Century)

sued between pastoral groups, which resulted in the annihilation or disintegration of socio-political groups such as the Uasin Gishu and Laikipiak Maasai.

According to Jacobs [1965a: 75] the Laikipiak nearly defeated their southern rivals, the Purko, until Mbatian, the leading prophet of the Kisongo Maasai, ordered the Kisongo *moran* to reinforce the Purko and thus brought about the defeat of the Laikipiak, sometime between 1870 and 1875.

It is not clear from Jacobs' description whether Mbatian provided direct political leadership to the Kisongo-Purko Alliance, for it is also known that the Damat and Loita Maasai tribes also joined the Purko, which suggests that, with the increased

possibility of a total Laikipiak defeat, other groups, such as the Kisongo, stood to gain by joining the fight, particularly to accumulate livestock in such depressed times. It is clear, however, that a prophet such as Mbatian would have had the power and ability to direct such a military alliance as reported in Maasai, owing to his unique position of ritual authority and political influence among the Kisongo *moran*. What should be apparent from this discussion, however, is that no such figure did or could arise among the Samburu. The Samburu role in the Laikipiak wars was largely defensive, and although raids were carried out in the eastern lowlands by the Ariaal Rendille (lowland Samburu)³ against the Laikipiak, they were largely spontaneous and carried out by independent clan units, without a cohesive territorial fighting organisation, nor a political leader or military strategist in the form of a prophet to guide their actions.

In conclusion, the prophets have a stronger role in Maasai than Samburu because of the different ways these societies recruit and organise their *moran* age-sets. Where Maasai age-sets are recruited on the basis of territorial residence and undergo large and inclusive ceremonies ritually united by the influential role of the leading prophet, Samburu *moran* have no allegiance wider than their local descent group, and are associated in small clubs (*olpul*) affiliated to particular clan settlements.

In Samburu, it is the clan elders, through their curse and descent affiliation, who control and direct the activities of the *moran*. The Maasai, lacking a strong descent organisation, rely upon the mutual efforts of the local elders, the age-set leader (*ol aunoni*), the age-set spokesman (*ol aiguenani*), and the leading prophet (*oloiboni kitok*) to provide leadership and control over the *moran*. Through their ritual role in the age-set ceremonies, the Maasai prophets have obtained strong positions of authority and influence in the society which are absent in Samburu.

Underlying these differences, I believe, is the greater nomadic mobility of both Samburu *moran* groups and Samburu domestic settlements. The Samburu area of

³ The Samburu living in the eastern lowlands near the Rendille are known as the Ariaal Rendille or the "Masagera" Samburu i.e., "Those Rendille who follow the Masai". The economy of the Ariaal is based largely on camel production (unlike the highland Samburu who own mostly cattle), and their settlement patterns, material culture, and herding practices resemble Rendille very closely. Furthermore, Ariaal settlements are almost fully bilingual in Samburu and Rendille, owing to the large number of wives recruited from Rendille, and they are often thought to be Rendille. However, the Ariaal are included in the Samburu segmentary descent system (primarily in the *White Cattle* moiety), and do not participate in the ritual life or the descent-based political organisation of the Rendille. Properly speaking, the Ariaal Rendille are "lowland Samburu".

During the Laikipiak Wars in the 19th century, the Ariaal made repeated attacks on the Laikipiak and their Rendille-speaking allies, the Kiriman, around the Uaso Nyiru River, and acquired large livestock herds from these raids. Further north, the Ariaal and Rendille fought the Laikipiak around Mt. Marsabit and Laisamis. The fact that the Ariaal and Rendille live in large settlements, with populations reaching 500 and a *moran* force of 20-30 per settlement, probably contributed to their greater fighting organisation against the Laikipiak than the smaller Samburu communities in the highlands near Maralel.



Photo. 6. *Moran* repairing a well in a highland cattle camp

northern Kenya is predominantly an arid semi-desert with certain highland areas including the Loroghi Plateau and Mt. Nyiru to the west, and extensive lowlands to the north and east. In this predominantly dry environment, the *moran* serve primarily as herders and protectors of the livestock in mobile camps, and secondarily as “warriors”, raiders, or protectors of the settlements.

Throughout the dry periods, the *moran* are responsible for seeking water and grazing resources wherever they appear for the bulk of the livestock, and particularly for the cattle.⁴ Furthermore, the larger domestic settlements of married adults and young children are often compelled either to move in their entirety or periodically to break-up, as independent families join other clan kinsmen in settlements with more productive resources. Because of the highly variable rain and grazing conditions, Samburu society is often in motion, as families or whole settlements move towards

⁴ The Samburu keep herds of cattle, donkeys, and small stock of goats and sheep. The Ariaal keep camels, cattle, and small stock. Where the small stock can generally be herded close to the settlements by the younger children, the cattle and camel herds must seek pasture and water over a larger area, and are herded in mobile and distant camps. In Samburu, the *moran* are responsible for the cattle camps, although older girls and uncircumcised boys will also participate. In Ariaal, uncircumcised boys will manage the large camel herds in the desert, while the *moran* assume responsibility for the cattle herds in the highlands. This division of labor is enforced by the prohibitions separating the *moran* from the camels, such as “only a married man or uncircumcised boy can milk the camels, as they don’t like the smell of women or *moran*”.

highland areas in times of drought, or to lowland areas in times of overcrowding in the highlands. Descent affiliation becomes the primary criterion for joining new settlements, and thus the segmentary descent system serves as the most adaptive organising principle in this pastoral society.

The Maasai area of southern Kenya and northern Tanzania is much richer than that of their northern Samburu neighbours. With 60% of the land receiving more than 750 mm of rain per year, Maasai settlements are sedentary, close to permanent water, and near sufficient grazing resources. Lacking the need for extensive livestock herding camps, the Maasai *moran* are free from day to day herding tasks and able to congregate in their own sedentary villages, the *manyata*.

Freedom from herding and the *manyata* system has no doubt encouraged the Maasai to develop a strong military organisation with which to raid neighbouring tribes for livestock. Pastoral societies must necessarily maintain, if not expand, their livestock production of milk and meat, the staple foods of the human population, and the surest way to increase herd production is to increase herd size. In times of acute shortage, the quickest way to increase herd size is undoubtedly to steal cattle, preferably from other tribes. The Maasai are surrounded by mixed agricultural societies such as Kipsigi, Kamba, and Kikuyu, who have historically been in defensive positions in regard to the large and organised raids of the Maasai.

The Samburu and their Rendille allies, however, are surrounded by other pastoralist tribes including the hostile Turkana to the northwest, Boran and Gabra peoples to the north, and Somali to the east. Although the Samburu environment is harsher than that of the Maasai, it contains perhaps the richest grazing and water resources in northern Kenya, and thus has a relatively dense human and cattle population (4.3 and 18.75 per km² respectively). The Samburu are subject to frequent attacks from their neighbours, particularly the Turkana, and for the most part are on the defensive.

Although my argument may appear to reduce the differences between the Maasai and Samburu social and political organisations to simple ecological factors, it is not intended to be deterministic. Rather, my aim has been to show how a rigorous examination of one particular social institution, shared by two closely related societies, can deepen our understanding of these societies.

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