

## Burial Communities and the Undermining of Royalty in Colonial Africa

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## **Burial Communities and the Undermining of Royalty in Colonial Africa<sup>1)</sup>**

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Funerary processes are a central part of the formation and sustaining of ideas of community and, thus, integral to ideas of shared “heritage,” which is among the concerns of this volume. Some of the reasons for this situation are fairly obvious and well-rehearsed in the anthropological literature. Death challenges the ideal of a continuous and unchanging order where ideas of community are forged. It occurs at unpredictable moments and introduces individual biological discontinuities that funerary processes seek to negate (e.g., as discussed by Bloch and Parry 1982: 223). In mortuary practices, the idea of society is partly in question. Establishing continuity at times of disjunction may not be straightforward; it may lead to protracted and conflictual situations, especially where questions of succession and inheritance are concerned. Nonetheless, funerary practice arguably contributes to forging and reaffirming a sense of common orientation in the face of challenging circumstances.

### **1. The Death of Rulers**

Such contribution is especially true in the case of the demise of rulers where the stakes are the largest.<sup>2)</sup> Since the dissemination of the influential writings of James Frazer, whose classic study, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (Frazer 1911–1918), was originally published in two volumes in 1890, the elaboration of the funerary rites of rulers has been considered critical to determining, reasserting, or reshaping the spiritual and political positioning of communities thrown into potential turmoil by royal death. For Frazer, the example of kings or chiefs to whom some special, often supernatural (or, in Frazer’s terms, “divine”) status is attributed was central. Particular attention was reserved in *The Golden Bough* for the role of human sacrifice in kingly funerary procedures, especially the murder or suicide of rulers, with numerous examples drawn from sub-Saharan African practice as it was understood at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Where the Classical examples that had first inspired Frazer’s interest had died out, the recent and, as it were, ongoing relationship between the death of rulers and sacrifice continued to be evident in accounts in different parts of Africa and provided a powerful contemporaneous trope in scholarly contexts and in justifying colonial interventions.

In the case of rulers, death itself is sometimes denied. Euphemism replaces blunt statements. Thus, a person’s death is not discussed directly, and names can be changed

such that the deceased is no longer referenced by the name they had in life. Care is exercised over such matters in many African societies where circumlocution often replaces the blunt assertion of the fact of a person's death, especially in the case of the "passing" (as expressed less harshly in English) of a ruler or chief. Thus, in the Akan language (of Ghana),

... the very act of dying is expressed by the verb *wu*. The substantive of *wu* is *owu*, indicating death, decease, demise. Thus it is linguistically correct to announce the death of a person with the blunt statement *wawu*, he is dead. But the verb *wu* is scarcely used in specific instances with reference to persons of rank, nobility, and close relations. (Bookman-Amisshah 1986: 77)

A significant number of the proverbs for which the Asante are renowned concern the death of significant people. Indeed, in the past, it was potentially a capital offense to announce directly that the king was dead. I recall being in the United States when the Asantehene Otumfo Opoku Ware II (the ruler of a major Akan people) died in 1999. Some Ghanaian acquaintances felt considerable unease at the prominence given to his obituary in the *New York Times* and other major newspapers. Traditionally, the news should be passed round in an indirect format, such as "the great tree has fallen or been uprooted," "a large umbrella [is] gone," "he is absent elsewhere," or "he has departed or gone out" (Rattray 1927: 108). Other aphorisms refer to funerary processes. Thus, the implications of the phrase "a stool has fallen" would be widely understood as referring to the practice where the body of the deceased ruler was washed on a stool before burial; the stool would then be turned on its side and blackened by offerings (including, historically, human blood) and smoked. Thereafter, it acted as a memorial shrine. Other euphemisms deploy the same symbolic significance implicit in referencing trees and umbrellas; that is, the cooling protection afforded the people by their ruler and, by contrast, the heat and desiccation induced by his absence. The historian, Thomas C. McCaskie, reports an Asante funerary dirge that includes the following lines:

Nana [the Asantehene] has removed his umbrella  
We shall be scorched by the sun.  
(McCaskie 1989: 425)

Other practices found elsewhere in Africa include referencing the deceased by names they did not have in life. Thus, each stage in the life cycle of the ruler is marked by a name change: his birth name is altered when he is installed as chief or king, and, at his death, he is given another name, potentially confusing field anthropologists seeking to study kinship systems and rules of succession. This practice occurs, for instance, among the Antaisaka in the southeast of Madagascar, suggesting that such authority is regarded as enduring—hence the effort to suppress death, even in linguistic etiquette.

In the past, when the Asantehene died, the Queen Mother would send a message to several wives from the royal harem to prepare themselves to accompany the king to the

spirit world. It was considered an honor to be identified for this role, and others might offer themselves to join those selected, compelling their relatives to assist by killing them. The dispatch of royalty was achieved through strangulation to avoid spilling blood (a method practiced in other parts of the continent). 27 wives of one 19<sup>th</sup> century Asantehene accompanied him in death (Rattray 1927: 432). Attendants, from caterers to those caring for substantive requirements or merely providing minor domestic conveniences (e.g., carrying a bathmat or sponge), also died to care for the needs of the Asantehene in the netherworld (Rattray 1927: 107).

However, the first thing is to ensure that the powers to be passed on are intact. Thus, many kingdoms seek to ensure that the ruler is not enfeebled in any way, thereby impairing his spiritual constitution. Hence, to achieve this, some in the past have practiced regicides. In Frazer's words, "The least relaxation of his vigilance, the smallest abatement of [a ruler's] strength of limb or skill, put him in jeopardy; grey hairs might seal his death warrant" (quoted in Arens 1984: 355). It is reported that the Kuba king in what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo would once have been killed if he showed any physical weakness, though a crippled king in the 20<sup>th</sup> century posed a particular challenge when faced with expectations that were changing under the influence of colonial rule. Among the Jukun in northern Nigeria, nothing was left to chance: chiefs were appointed for seven years and, thereafter, killed. The neighboring Rukuba saw the seven years as a probationary period and would depose (though not kill) chiefs who did not measure up (De Heusch 1969: 99).

Elsewhere, precautions are taken that, as the ruler ceases to breathe, his powers are not inadvertently expelled at the same time. Blocking orifices is a relatively common practice. Among the Bari in modern-day South Sudan, C. G. Seligman recorded a particularly rigorous process. The body of a rain-maker was sealed up when he died with the explicit intention of ensuring that his spirit did not escape, potentially bringing sickness to his people. This act was done by plugging all possible points through which the spirit might escape. One of Seligman's correspondents reported:

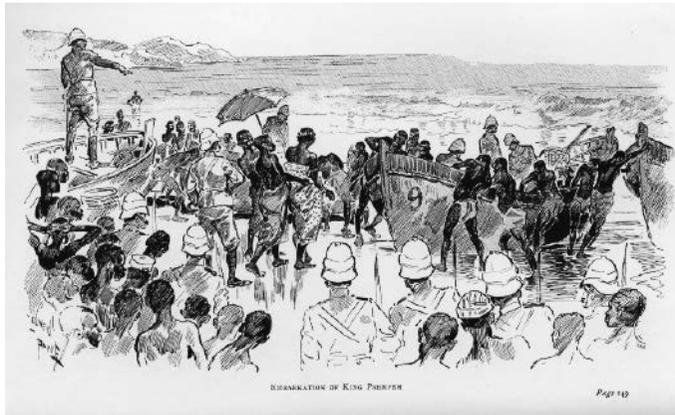
When the rain-maker is dead, he is plugged, his ears are plugged, his nose is plugged, his eye is plugged, his mouth is plugged, he is plugged, his fingers are plugged. And then he is buried. It is done thus so that ... the spirits may not go out, so the son may manage the father so that he obeys (him), so that the spirits obey the son. (Seligman 1932: 292)

Among the Shilluk (also in South Sudan), if the king should become infirm, he is sealed up, literally, by walling in his body while still alive so that he is never seen again. Among the Bemba in northern Zambia, the ruler, the Chitimukulu, was strangled so that his last breath should not dispel the spirits that sustain the chieftaincy (see Richards 1968; Vaughan 2008). The medieval phrase found in English, French, Spanish, and Italian, "The king is dead, long live the king," is apposite. The common idea focuses less on the fact that the king is dead and more on the requirement that the kingship must be preserved. Regicides remove uncertainty and unpredictability from the process and are, historically, among the methods of ensuring continuity.

## 2. Colonial Intervention

Frazer, of course, was forming his ideas against the background of developing colonial ambitions, especially in Africa. The last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a surge in efforts by several European nations to establish hegemony in Africa, directly or indirectly. The central question here is, what happens when an external authority intervenes? How has the sense of communal purpose fared before such tampering with indigenous practices, the imposed discontinuities of the colonial era, leading to subsequent globalizing tendencies and new expectations? It is partly a question of how colonial authorities sought to manipulate practices they purported to find disagreeable—indeed, seeking to eradicate practices such as sacrifice was one justification for the colonial process. Beyond that, it is also a matter of what happened when rulers were exiled, not least when they returned, whether alive but with diminished authority, or for reburial after dying in exile. How did ideas of community and “heritage” stand in that context? This study focuses on two examples involving the exile of rulers: the deportation of the Merina Queen from Madagascar and the Asantehene from Ghana; one at the behest of French colonial authorities and the other, British; one where the Queen died and was buried abroad, her body only subsequently returning much later for reburial, and the other where the live monarch returned from exile and, when he ultimately died, his mortuary processes were conducted in Ghana.

As elsewhere, the emergence of colonialism profoundly restructured the geography and politics of sub-Saharan Africa. The effects are evident from at least the deliberations of the Berlin Conference of the 1884–1885 period onward and, in some regions, arguably from way before that date. It led to the drawing of lines on European maps of Africa, reifying definitions of territorial boundaries where previously indigenous understandings of the geographical reach of states and chieftaincies had been constantly in flux. It dismantled local systems of authority, imposing external governance or manipulating political or religious systems of leadership so they were no longer autonomous. Thus, it also affected fundamental changes in mortuary practice, sometimes deliberately as an attempt to impose Christian values and practice in line with missionary perceptions of “correct” behavior, sometimes as a deliberate act of suppression, and sometimes as unintended consequence. The exiling of traditional rulers was one element in the advent of colonialism. Among the first to suffer exile was the deposed Zulu ruler Cetshwayo, dispatched first to Cape Town and subsequently to London in 1879. For the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially the late 1890s, the list grew longer. In Ghana, Otumfo Nana Prempeh I was exiled first to Cape Coast Castle in 1896, then along the coast to Elmina before being deported to Sierra Leone; eventually, in 1900, he was moved to the Seychelles in the Indian Ocean (Figure 1). There, accompanied by his exiled mother, father, close family, and entourage, a so-called Asante camp, comprising approximately 75 persons, was established on the main island of Mahe. Also on the Seychelles by then were the Kabaka of Buganda and his neighbor in Uganda, the Kabarega of Bunyoro, both sent into exile from East Africa in 1899. For his part, the Oba of Benin in southern Nigeria was exiled to Calabar on the Niger Delta after the British Punitive Expedition of 1897.



**Figure 1** The Asantehene, Otumfo Nana Prempeh I, being boarded onto a ship in 1896 on the coast of what is now Ghana to be taken into exile. From R.S.S. Baden-Powell, *The Downfall of Prempeh* (1898), p. 149.

The French likewise used the instrument of exile when faced with what they perceived to be unfavorable responses to colonial intentions. Béhanzin, the King of Abomey in what is now the Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey), was exiled by the French to Martinique in 1894. Samory Touré, the founder of the Wassoulou (or Mandinka) Empire, extending from what is now Sierra Leone through Guinea and Mali to northern Ivory Coast, was captured and exiled to Gabon in 1898. Gabon was also the first place of exile of Sheikh Amadu Bamba, who established the influential, but essentially pacifist, Mouride brotherhood in Senegal. He was subsequently moved to Mauritania in 1903. In Madagascar, resistance to French colonization led to the exile of Queen Ravalona III and her husband, Prime Minister Rainilaiarivony, first to Réunion in 1897 and then in 1899 to Algeria.

Some of those dispatched overseas died in exile; others eventually returned to resume a diminished role in the political and ritual life of their former kingdoms. Colonial attempts to wrest authority from exiled rulers involved restricting and sometimes fracturing former hierarchies. However, royal authority was always invested in more than a simple political process, and governance was a matter of ritual procedure, the inherent “power” of certain types of proclamation, and the means by which continuities with ancestral authority were asserted. Therefore, mere exile was not necessarily the end of an indigenous sense of community focused on the ruler. The critical issue from an indigenous perspective was to ensure the continuity of royal powers. From a colonial perspective, it was to rein them in and, where the model of indirect rule was the preferred strategy, to manipulate them to colonial advantage. The emergent question surrounded the issue of what to do about the repatriation of rulers, whether alive or dead. If ideas of common heritage were invested in the kingship, then managing the fate of the person or body of the ruler and the method of their burial provided a critical moment in

determining the idea of community and heritage that might be engendered under colonial rule and beyond.

### 3. The Exile of Queen Ranavalona III

General Galliéni arrived in Madagascar in 1896 as Governor-General with instructions to rule through the existing structures of monarchy and aristocracy established by the Merina in their conquest of much of the island in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, he was determined to do otherwise. By February 1897, in direct contradiction of his orders from Paris to maintain the monarchy but restrict its influence to Imerina, he decided to depose and exile the Queen. A letter was sent to her to that effect. In the middle of the night, she left, spirited away on a palanquin on the arduous journey to the coast and thence by ship to the neighboring island of La Réunion. She was permitted to take her personal belongings and jewelry with her but was obliged to leave behind her crown, scepter, and, ironically, the Grand Cross of the Legion d'Honneur, which she had previously been awarded by the French government. She was in Réunion for two years before being transferred to Algiers, where she lived in a large villa overlooking the town, receiving occasional visits from well-disposed British missionaries from the London Missionary Society. She died there in 1917.

However, this was only a part of Galliéni's strategy. The ritual of the royal bath (*fandroana*), an annual rite during which royalty dispersed blessings to the citizenry, which was repeated by heads of cantons throughout the kingdom, was suspended (Molet 1956; Bloch 1992). The annual festival introduced in its place was the French national celebration of Bastille Day on July 14. However, most radically of all, Galliéni moved to de-sacralize Ambohimanga, the principal necropolis of the Merina royalty outside the capital, by removing the remains of the kings and queens from their traditional resting place and re-entombing them at the Rova (palace) of Antananarivo. Below is an eye-witness account:

On the night of Monday, the 15th of March 1897, the residents in the northern quarter of the Capital were startled from their sleep at a little after midnight by the unusual sound of bands of music and a great concourse of people passing by their houses... numbers of people being in palanquins or on horseback, and a very much larger number on foot; at intervals were bearers carrying some large and evidently weighty articles, while smaller things were being borne in the hands or on the shoulders of a large proportion of the crowd. Bands of music headed and closed and were in the midst of the procession, which extended for at least a mile first to last. We wondered what it could all mean, but we soon heard that the weighty objects were the huge silver coffins of some of the old Hova [that is, Merina] kings and queens, containing their corpses; that the numerous articles carried by so many were the various kinds of property buried in the royal tombs; and that the large number of people in palanquins or on horseback were the chief people of the country (at least of the Hova tribe), who were escorting with all respect the remains of their ancient sovereigns to their new resting-place in Antananarivo." (Sibree 1898)



**Photo 1** The remains of Queen Ranavalona III being returned to Madagascar in 1938, 21 years after she died in exile in Algiers. (Photograph courtesy of the late the Revd. J. Hardyman)

Two 19<sup>th</sup> century rulers were already buried at the Rova in Antananarivo.<sup>3)</sup> When their graves were opened to admit the new corpses, their burial goods were removed. The grave goods were then added to those of all the rulers brought from the countryside and subsequently displayed in public view in what was described as the new national museum. Thus, an astonishing act of colonial grave-robbing was effected. In 1938, over twenty years after her death, the remains of Ranavalona III were returned to Madagascar and reburied in Antananarivo (Photo 1).

Tampering with the royal dead in these ways was a hegemonic act with profound implications hard to imagine being countenanced were the ruler still in place. Royal burial practices differed from those of ordinary villagers. Traditionally, no form of secondary burial was practiced for royalty. Andrianampoinimerina, the founder of the Merina kingdom, died in 1810. He was buried in a silver coffin made from melted-down Maria Theresa dollars, placed in a wooden canoe-like container formerly used for the burial of rulers. Such royal burial was a one-off event, concluded within weeks.

Another difference from the practice customary for the burial of commoners was that the bodies of the deceased Merina royalty were buried individually rather than in a communal vault. As a royal burial place and the center of Andrianampoinimerina's original kingdom, Ambohimanga's significance as the principal ritual center of the kingdom was powerfully affirmed. In principle, once entombed, the bodies of royalty remained individuated rather than mingled with others, as in the practice of communal burial for everyone else. They were not to be disturbed; there was no secondary reburial

process, as was otherwise the norm (Bloch 1971). In the case of commoners, the deceased is buried once, but some years later, the body is removed from its resting place and, amid great celebration, is rewrapped and paraded around the tomb or sometimes the wider district before being re-entombed in its final resting place. The process is called *famadihana* and ensures the flow of blessings from deceased ancestors, considered as central to sustaining the vitality of the living (Mack 1986: pt. 2).

Thus, reassembling the dead in tombs, albeit at the royal site of the Rova of Antananarivo, was in effect to subject royalty to the procedures of ordinary citizens and symbolically dismantle statehood by grouping like common people those who should be kept separate. Furthermore, to subject the belongings buried with royalty to the sight of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century “museum visitor” was to expose the sacred to the secular gaze as a further act of desecration.

Galliéni exiled the Queen and effectively dissolved the monarchy. He also dismantled the supporting symbolic system, which sustained the authority of the royalty and aristocracy, though the “Hova” (the aristocracy) are reported as going along with the arrangements. The return of Ranaivalona’s remains when it was permitted 21 years after her death was at the behest of the colonial authority. Again, in defiance of customary practice, her remains were placed together with those of an earlier Queen, Rasoherina, rather than buried in a personal tomb (Photo 2). Her body had been appropriated for purposes other than maintaining royal suzerainty, as had those of her predecessors. A Republic ensued where monarchy was erased as effectively as in the French Revolution. There are now no publicly recognized members of the Merina royal dynasty.



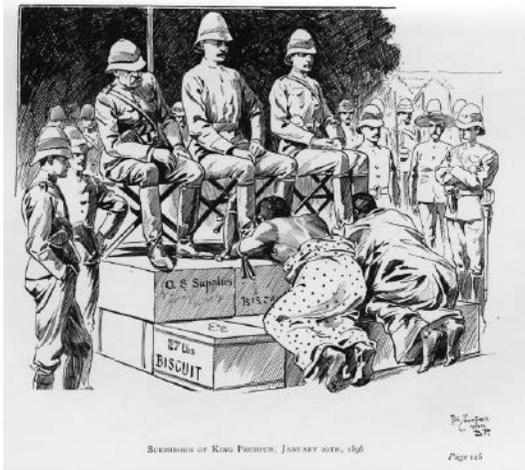
**Photo 2** The royal tombs with the remains of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Merina rules reassembled at the Rova (royal palace) in Antananarivo, Madagascar. A fire in 1995 destroyed most of the tombs and only the remains of Ranaivalona III were saved. They have since been reburied in the traditional royal burial site at Ambohimanga. (Photograph courtesy of the late the Revd. J. Hardyman)

However, with the monarchy disbanded and the court effectively neutralized, it is notable that the scale and elaboration of the *famadihana* process escalated for commoners as for members of the former court. The practice of *hira gasy*, popular musical entertainment with satirical and moralizing themes, was developed in the context of the second burial process. It is tempting to suggest that this intensification of burial and reburial practices emerged at a time when the practices associated with royalty were suspended. Although an anti-colonial movement emerged in the immediate wake of the colonial takeover (and was one of the principal factors that led to the exile of the Queen),<sup>4)</sup> *hira gasy*, with a focus on burial practice, contributed to recreating a sense of community at a time when the flow of blessings traditionally passed from the ruler to the populace through the *fandroana* and other processes was threatened. It may also in part be related to the effects of labor movements in the colonial era, with people often dying far from their communal tomb and their bodies needing to be repatriated later, adding emphasis and significance to the secondary phase of the complete funerary cycle. However, in the context of the attempts to impose colonial government and remove the focus of the Merina state on the ruler and the court system, such elaboration of funerary practice acted to reinvigorate ideas of commonality, as they continue to do until the present day.

#### 4. The Exile and Return of Prempeh I

In Ghana, the British took the Asante capital of Kumase in 1874 and burned the royal palace to the ground. The Asantehene, Prempeh I, was detained by the British in 1896 at the behest of Major Baden-Powell (better known these days as the founder of the international scouting movement) and sent into exile overseas, where he remained for 27 years (Figure 2). When he returned to Ghana in November 1924, he appeared to have changed. He was literate, an Anglican convert, and monogamous. He returned as a private citizen. However, his status was ambiguous. After all, he returned to Kumase, the Asante capital, and (to all intents and purposes) was regarded by traditionalists as ready to resume the role of Asantehene within the context of colonial rule. Further, to educated Asante people, his conversion to Christianity might have seemed to portend a move they would welcome toward modernity (Akyeampong 1999). Either way, the fact that the British had finally agreed to his return implied that his authority would have to be acknowledged, and his status as *Mr. Edward Prempeh* would become unsustainable (Photo 3). The problem was confronted gradually; by March 1926, a diplomatic compromise was in place. Prempeh was appointed Kumasihene, the ruler of his capital at Kumase—a title he had previously held at the same time as being Asantehene. Without formally acceding to full entitlement, his position at the center of the Asante life was effectively restored.

Among the tasks Prempeh set for himself in this new role was to restore the unity of the kingdom by attending to the disposition of the royal dead. In a letter from 1927, Prempeh bemoans the state of the royal graves under colonial rule in terms that are very redolent of contemporary understandings of ideas of heritage. In a letter he sent to the



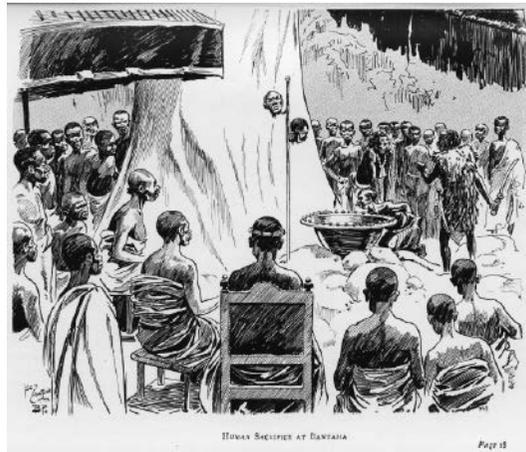
**Figure 2** An illustration from the colonial perspective of the Asantehene's acquiescence in British rule shortly before being sent into exile. From R.S.S. Baden-Powell, *The Downfall of Prempeh* (1898), p. 126.



**Photo 3** A historic photograph of the Asantehene returning from exile as 'Mr.' Prempeh. *West Africa* VII 406 (November 8, 1924), p. 1243.

colonial authorities, we read: "I find now as I wrote to you that cemeteries at Hamanho and Adjwama burial grove are unsuitable by reason [of] long years of ... [neglect]. The Hemanho in particular is encroached by the Court Building and is not suitable at all. It is a shaming thing ... that our Hallowed Dead are overlooked. We CANNOT FORGET them. They are our HEROES and HEROINES of Ashanti" (Otumfuo 2003: 182; capitalization original). He goes on to request permission to exhume the royal bodies buried at these sites and rebury them at more suitable places (which was done that same year). Next, his thoughts turned to those who had died and were buried in exile in the Seychelles. He started the process in 1928. Eventually, the remains were repatriated to Ghana in 1930, allowing for a "General Funeral Custom," a version of traditional royal burial procedures extending over fifteen days.

Furthermore, Prempeh began a campaign to restore the remains of the Asantehenes, taken to a temporary shelter before the destruction of the traditional royal burial site at Bantama and for the mausoleum to be rebuilt. He wrote in 1929 to the District Commissioner for Kumase on the issue, saying that "Today we are finding that our own houses are improved but these sacred places (the royal burial places) are in disrepair. They are no longer an honour but are a source of shame instead. In these days elaborate tombstones for the deceased relatives are rising up all over the countryside; not a village but has some special reminder of the dead. Our dead Kings deserve no less of us and we want now to restore these holy places" (Otumfuo 2003: 182). What was involved was not only the rebuilding of the structures and rooms that had formerly housed the royal dead but also the return of a central symbolic object: a vast brass pan that had been removed from the mausoleum's environs at Bantama and resided at the time in the



**Figure 3** An imaginative reconstruction of the purported use of the large brass plate which was once kept at the royal mausoleum in Kumase. From R.S.S. Baden-Powell, *The Downfall of Prempeh* (1898), p. 126.

United Service Museum in Whitehall, London, the center of the colonial government. The brass pan was documented by T. E. Bowditch in 1817 when he visited Kumase as a British emissary in 1817. He thought it was an object associated with human sacrifice, a view sustained by a drawing in Baden-Powell's notes recently found in archives in Accra, a version of which appeared redrawn in his account of his time in Asante (Figure 3).<sup>5)</sup> This understanding of its significance as a place of human sacrifice was subsequently challenged by the government anthropologist R. S. Rattray. Prempeh himself recounted traditional accounts of its mythic origins as either descended from heaven on a gold chain or taken from the Denkyira, who originally held dominion over Asante. "It is," he insisted, "a very important thing for the Ashanti—and all the souls of the Ashanti are within it" (Otumfuo 2003: 53, 182). The pan was an *omnium gatherum*, whose cargo was nothing less than that of the Asante people. The royal mausoleum itself was called Aya Keseho, taking its name from *Aya Kesse*, the large brass pan. The place, the burial site of royalty, and the very origins of the Asante people were thus localized in a large flat brass bowl held, not at the center of the Asante people but in Whitehall, the center of the colonial government in London. The Bantama Mausoleum was rebuilt, and the Chief Commissioner formally reopened it at the end of the "Great Funeral Custom." However, it remained empty, and the Asantehenes were not relocated as the large brass pan had not been returned. It remains empty today, and the pan is currently in the care of the National Army Museum in London.

Prempeh died in May 1931, seven years after his return from exile. Significantly, arrangements for his funeral were made by his family and the Kumase chiefs rather than (as in the case of Ranavalona III's return to Madagascar) the administration. From the Asante perspective, the fact that elements of the funerary arrangements were a version of

the process for Asantehenes was a tacit admission that, although Nana Prempeh was only ever formally acknowledged as the Kumasihene on his return to Ghana, the position of Asantehene had been restored. However, some concerns arose from adopting this procedure over 40 years after his predecessor's mortuary rites. The main strictures of the colonial government concerned the protection of the many foreigners in Kumase. It was feared that the atrocities that notoriously followed the death of an Asantehene might have been repeated. The market and the palace at Manhyia, where large crowds gathered, had a police guard and several foreigners fearing the worst applied for police protection. There were rumors that several people were killed, though unconfirmed as being associated with funerary procedures. Proceedings went along peacefully and, hence, the preferred colonial version of the customary process was followed. The special arrangements to ensure public order were revoked in little more than 24 hours (Tordoff 1965: 281).

The burial began with the funerary procession, winding its way from Manhyia to the Anglian Church of St. Cyprian. On arrival and at the request of his family, the band of the Gold Coast regiment played in his honor. The priest-in-charge conducted the burial service, after which the ornate coffin was taken to Bantama as a gesture toward tradition before being carried to Breman for interment. A year later, the traditional secondary process was conducted under the auspices of his successor, Prempeh II, who opened the proceedings wearing a war dress exclusive to Asantehene, with reference to Osei Tutu I (the founder of the Asante kingdom) (Otumfuo 2003: 182–185). The Golden Stool was transferred to his care, along with other national properties. The kingdom had been restored largely through a choreographed series of actions surrounding burial practices and the disposition of royal remains.

## 5. Conclusion

The most obvious difference between the two cases discussed here is that Ranavalona III died in exile and had no identified successors, while Prempeh I returned after many years as a deportee and could oversee the restoration of a modernized monarchy by careful diplomacy. In both cases, burial procedures (where, when, and following which protocols) were central to the kind of community that emerged and the sense of history and heritage it engaged. Victor Turner's well-patinated idea of "communitas" as the social bond cemented through participation in sacralized rites of passage emphasized the indissoluble links between ritual, collectivity, and the production of common memory (Turner 1969). To the extent that it has been criticized it is in its insistence on the overriding primacy of the ritual process. Interpretations of ritual process can readily become reductive. Ritual slips easily into being presented as unchanging, unresponsive to historical circumstances, paradigmatic, and locked into an ethnographic present. The idea of society itself is reified. Nonetheless, whatever the viability of that characterization, the predatory intentions of colonialism provoked change. The logic of sacred power had to be renegotiated. Ritual (explicitly and implicitly) embodied transformations.

Another crucial difference between the two case studies is that the actions of the

French colonial regime regarding the Merina royalty historicized one form of monarchic power, turning it effectively into a “heritage” phenomenon in its modern sense, exposing and commodifying what had been concealed and mystical. However, *famadihana* became ever more elaborate, and the concept of “burial communities” remains real in contemporary times, even if (as with virtual Internet communities) people buried together or attending funerals in an ancestral village have long since moved away and may not now actually know each other personally or retain the ambition to be buried together. In the case of the Asante, we can see a much subtler process by which the sites and remains (literally) of royalty were ritually transformed to accommodate external circumstances. When the last Asantehene, Otumfo Opoku Ware II, died in 1999, his funerary rites followed the new dispensation.

Arguably, where heritage-related discourses *assert* ideas of commonality through processes of objectification in monuments and narratives, funerary practices *create* communities through their primary role in overcoming the dislocations of individual death. Death threatens social cohesion. The funerary process is an occasion for recalibration. Further, this is not a reified process but a responsive one. In that light it provides a model of processes more widely evident in contemporary ritual practices.

## Notes

- 1) The author would like to thank Taku Iida and the other invited participants for their constructive comments on the paper presented at the conference on which this volume is based. A book published subsequent to the conference, John Mack, *The Artfulness of Death in Africa* (2019), explores some of its themes in an expanded continental perspective.
- 2) For an excellent review of the topic see Gillian Feeley-Harnik (1985).
- 3) The bodies removed from Ambohimanga and the nearby site of Ilafy were those of Andrianampoinimerina, Ranavalona I, Ranavalona II, and Radama II. On arrival in Antananarivo they joined the remains of Radama I and Rasoherina, which were already buried separately at the Rova.
- 4) For an authoritative account of the events see Ellis 1985.
- 5) The original was discovered by Fiona Savage whilst undertaking research in the national archives in Accra for her doctoral thesis at the University of East Anglia.

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