Chapter 8

Circumcision and various other ceremonies of the heathen, and their wakes and funeral rites.

The devil has made himself an instructor of moral rites and of means to salvation here, in order to give their superstitions practices his own colouring. The practice is to circumcise boys during the first eight days (after birth), but those that are not circumcised in this period are still circumcised later.\(^{a}\) No special person is appointed (to carry out the circumcision), and it is done by whoever can most successfully undertake it. Mothers give their children regular baths until they are six months old, and after that bathing becomes a habit with them. They all keep jars of water at the doors of their houses, and into these they drop white pebbles, two or three of them, together with bones of darim. They say that they put them there so that their male infants will be courageous and not effeminate. The stones represent their dead (ancestors).

Two days after the birth of a child, to the mother's house comes the relative who alone has been entrusted to carry out the following ceremony. He takes the baby boy and places him on a shield which is lying on the ground, then he sprinkles cola on his head. When this has been done, the man in charge of the rite gives a yell, and a crowd of armed men, who had been awaiting the call, leave their homes. A great hullabaloo follows. But those (Portuguese) living there are warned beforehand, to prevent them taking alarm, and they are told not to rush out, because this is a ceremonial rite involving (the heathen's) corofins (gods) and idols. When the baby sees this crowd of armed men, what can it do? Once the performance is over, the man in charge gives the baby back to its mother. They do this in order to find out how much spirit the child shows, and in order to give it a training in courage from the very beginning of its childhood. Girls are not tested this way, for they say that since females lack the organ of courage it would be a waste of time to apply the means of developing it. However, when they reach the correct age they are sent to their initiation ceremony, as described in the last chapter. It seems that this children's ceremony corresponds to our confirmation, although this comes at a later age. I say this because some people call the ceremony "preparing or arming novices."\(^{b}\)

\(^{a}\) This is the normal period; after two months because of the sickness common in the Serra and the district around.
Something may also be said here about their forms of penitence. These pagans have two kinds of oral confession. One is the confession made by women as labour approaches, the other the confession made by all categories of persons when on the point of death. Here the devil, in order to be more welcome, has dared to introduce nothing other than a counterfeit of our sacrament (of penitence)! The wretched women make their confession in a form so wide and truthful that one is astonished. The devil has persuaded them that a successful labour depends on their admitting their sins and misdeeds. So this they do, recounting in front of many witnesses what they have done since their last confinement, not only referring to their immoral acts but even naming their accomplices, in sum, confessing all the sins they have to date committed. If after the confession the labour proceeds successfully, they attribute it to the confession; but if it goes badly, those standing around say that the woman has concealed (something). And if after a successful labour the baby then falls sick, they attribute this (also) to an incomplete confession. The devil makes these women so fearful and so blind that they cannot keep silent no matter what the ill-deed has been, since there are so many occasions when, if things go badly, others will blame them. If the women are ashamed to confess by word of mouth, they pick up pebbles and by counting these out indicate the number of times they have misbehaved.

The confession made at the hour of death is different. A pagan falls ill and his condition worsens. He is not known to have committed any obvious sins. But the poor wretch has committed some misdeeds secretly, including some which are not known to anyone else. Feeling himself in the agonies of death, he makes a voluntary confession, which they call bantine, and in this he states what he has done. Hence he believes that he dies with a clear conscience and in good standing. This happened in the case of Tora, a great magician, who on taking leave of this world openly admitted that it was he, after God, who was the cause of the serious illness of the King of Serra da Leoa, whose native name is Ferabure and his Christian name Philip. This confession being taken as true information and proof of his ill-doing, there were immediate discussions as to the penalty which ought to be laid on the dead man's family.

(b) This is general throughout Ethiopia.
Another form of confession enters into the judicial process, and this is the one which is uttered when people are put to the torture. They also have religious censures here, which are called cenar. If anyone steals anything from someone else, if (for instance) he keeps a slave who has fled from his master, the injured party goes to the person who controls the operation of the censure, to ask him to provide a means of getting his goods back. He does this in the way described above when I was discussing Obei and Maneman, and this is called, "sending the debtor to the devil". If after a cenar has been directed against him, no ill comes to him he is considered to have been innocent. But if the opposite happens, it is all attributed to the censure, \( \frac{1}{7} \) of the goods are taken from him and everyone flees from him. However, if he seeks pardon and arranges to satisfy the injured party, they absolve him by saying certain words and by sprinkling him with a little water.

Another form of cenar is more a prohibition. This form is used in connection with crops, which are about to be harvested. Near the crops, these in control of the cenar fix on sticks near the crops straws which have been sprinkled with cola, and no one then dares to touch the crops. This practice of leaving bundles of straw (as a magical deterrent to thieves) is commonly employed for the protection of the possessions, farms, and fruit-trees of these pagans. Sometimes the bark of trees is used (instead). These objects are employed here by the savages as a means of protection and a guard for their property, just as in Europe we use sworn (watchmen) and vineyard-men. Here, since the savages are more fearful of the power of these objects, if a pagan or a (Portuguese) resident leaves a village or a kingdom for any reason to go to another, leaving behind his funco, or house containing belongings or foodstuffs, it seems to keep anyone from touching them if he places on them a tortoise-shell sprinkled with cola. In times of epidemic, they hang up the pods of a certain kind of long seed which they tie together with malia, and rub over with cola.

To conclude, for any particular threat they have special objects which they call (magical) agents, such as straw, etc. They do this all over Ethiopia.

(c) Called mafau.

(d) Sworn men and vineyard-men of the Serra.
Although in the chapter on the Banhui I have already described the improper matrimonial contracts of the pagans in Guinea, and the abuses which are associated with them, it occurs to me that, since another point must be mentioned here which was not made previously, I ought to state what the position in this Province is regarding this matter. It is almost the same. All these pagans make use of a go-between (in forming marriages) on one side or the other. Husbands use wives and vice-versa. Thus a man who wishes to take a new wife speaks with the oldest one in his house and asks her if she would like to have as companion the woman who is sought. If she says yes, immediately she (?) goes to the house of the father of the young woman. A present is taken and the matter discussed with him. At the end of the discussion a request is made for his daughter. If she is willing, the present is then given to the daughter's father. The response is carried back to the black matchmaker, and if she is happy with what has been achieved, she returns with wine, an axe and a cock, and seeks out the maid-in-law whom she has served as a go-between. Such contracts are neither natural nor binding, hence any time that the new 'housekeeper' wishes to return (to her father), she does so, pretending she is ill in order to leave her husband. She tells her own go-betweens and companions about her desire to return, and they always take her away, acting in their capacity as wives. If it happens that in a moment of anger her master sends her away, he immediately informs the household of the woman's father that she has left. Knowing that she will be there, he sends someone to look for her, or goes himself. The father-in-law asks him why his daughter has left. She then says whether she wishes to return to her husband. The decision regarding a good or bad ending to the affair depends on the 'housekeeper' herself.

I have already spoken about cabondos. As well as these improper matrimonial contracts, there is another one, the only one which is a true one. It is called cumane marriage, which means marriage by word, this being the meaning in the native language of cumane when pronounced with a long final vowel. These contracts, when they employ them, are, I am told, binding. This is according to our understanding of the chapter "Gaudemus de divortio", since the first wife has the right to claim hers is a true marriage by the law of grace, should her pagan husband be converted by her. We know of no form of marriage which is binding here other than this cumane contract, since it so binds the woman that she can never leave her husband and logically he can never leave her.
Now let us discuss the practice of funereal lamentations or wakes. This practice is very common in the Province. The wakes follow a death: this normally brings tears and grief, and as these pagans have a tender disposition, their weeping greatly affects all those around. When someone dies they immediately send the news from the village where he died to all the villages where his relatives are to be found, that is, where they actually live. These relatives are very numerous. For instance, King Farma had 72 sons and 52 daughters, whose living descendants, so the boast is made, number today more than three thousand. And Fatoma of Mangue, King of Faiwa, who is now aged one hundred and twenty, has 150 children, male and female. However, as regards this large number of children, it must be pointed out that many of them are the father's in name only. Men accept as their children those whom their wives conceive and bear, (including those begotten) by men to whom the wives are given as cabondos (hospitality concubines) or, in the case of kings, those born to the wives who are given as a favour to vassals, relatives and friends. As a result, and since their wives are numerous, which is normally the case with kings and great lords, because they employ them on the farms and their labours supply the household with food, it can never be accurately stated how many of these men's children are actually theirs. Nevertheless, as the children are many and as they live dispersed among various villages, it is necessary to announce the death (of their father) in all these places. As soon as those carrying the news of the death reach a village, all the inhabitants begin to weep as if the dead man was a native. /f.72r/

His sons and other relatives immediately leave to attend the burial, and each one brings whatever he can afford to the funeral party; gold, if he has any, cotton cloths, basins of various kinds, coral beads, drinking-vessels, crystal, etc. When they reach the village where the dead man lies, as well as saluting him from afar with heart-felt weeping and other signs of grief, they enter the village uttering loud cries, which increase as they meet the concourse of people who have come to welcome them. When the son sees his dead father, he strips off his clothes and throws himself on the ground, calling out a thousand pitiful things which move the hardest heart to pity. Note that if the dead man was a king, the news is taken to his superior, who goes there himself or sends permission for the burial to proceed (in his absence). Sometimes if the superior lives far away, the poor corpse lies unburied for three or four days while they await the message. They never celebrate the funeral rites of anyone, however humble, without his superiors being informed. The deaths of great lords and kings are not

(c) When the kings of Cape Mount die, their deaths are not revealed until a new king has been appointed and accepted.
revealed for several days, to prevent disturbances. When important people
die, they sacrifice human beings, as was described when discussing the
Island of Bussis and Bissau.

Ordinary people are buried with less ceremony, but the mighty are
buried in the following way. They dig a deep hole in the earth, capable of
receiving as well as the body of the deceased the bodies of those other
persons who are buried with him. The burial of others is done to celebrate
the dead man's victories (in life), if he was a king or a general, so that
his triumphs are perpetuated at death. Or, as is more commonly believed,
(the others are killed) to serve him in the other life, as can be seen
from (later in) the chapter. There would have been much of this at the
death of Tora if he had not been a Christian. When the grave is dug, they
carry the corpse there, finely adorned with all the personal riches which
the dead man was able to collect during his lifetime for this very evil use.
They cover the grave so skillfully that the earth does not touch the dead man;
and at the summit of the vault they leave a hole through which passes all
that they throw down on to the mouth of the poor wretch. They place there
certain gifts, such as food and wine. Over the tomb they erect houses, and
decorate some of them with cloths and beautiful mats, or sometimes with
even finer ornamentation in quantities related to the wealth of the king.
What I have just described applies in general to all Guinea, so what will
be the amount of ornamentation on the tomb of a king of Bussis, or of any
other king with that king's pride? If mice and other creatures consume the
cooked foods and spill the wine left /f.73/ in these places, the parents,
children, or other close relatives who did this service to the deceased by
providing these delicacies, are filled with joy. But if nothing happens,
they are saddened, and say that the dead man does not care for them since
he rejects their food. They then make sacrifices in order to learn why he
rejects those that are his friends; and after that they start again,
bringing fresh delicacies. If the mice eat these, the matter is settled.

Great kings they bury by night in the beds of creeks which penetrate
to the hinterland, in the mud so to speak, or in fresh-water streams,
after the flow of water has been diverted into another course. (They do
this) because the riches that are buried with kings, riches taken from
the goods which are brought to the wake. Others say that they are buried in
these places so that their followers, not knowing where the grave is but
knowing that it is in soft soil from which (the dead) could easily be
recovered, will (be encouraged) not to go to other kingdoms. After the
burial the grave is filled in and the stream returned to its bed. On these
occasions they divide the possessions (of the deceased) into three parts.
One part he takes with him, another is spent on the funeral and wake, and
the third is used to provide suitable dress for the mourners. When the period (of mourning?) is over, this (?) dress is handed over to Lobo, that is, the individual in charge of the wake and the burial of the dead man. Others say that part of the possessions is applied to works of piety.

When the division of the possessions and the burial are completed, the wake begins. This consists wholly of eating and drinking excessively, and holding great parties at which they beat drums and bhamalous and play other musical instruments. They claim that the corofins (spirits) in the other life enjoy this, and that they say: "I have someone who remembers me and laments for me!" In the period before the burial, they keep up their dancing and their jousting display in front of the corpse, as we saw when Tora died, when they said a thousand vain things about the dead man, that he was this or that. Afterwards, the noise is so great for the space of eight days that no-one can sleep by night or day. They all go about bare, with (only) their private parts covered; they have their heads shaven, and carry sticks in their hands. They look like madmen. Their custom is to shave off their hair as a sign of mourning, just as very melancholy/noble women do in Europe to give undue expression to their feelings (when they lose) what they have greatly loved.

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(f) "Arridet locus Alexandri ab Alexandro" ( ), Lib. 3, c.7. For heathen wakes, see Barradas, Lib.5; Operio, cap 14; St. Luke, cap.8 (v.52 "they all wept and bewailed him") and especially St. Matthew, cap. 9 (v.23 "the minstrels and the people making a noise"); note the minstrels.

(g) The Manimam gashes his arms when lamenting; the women scratch themselves, and drink from puddles on the ground, or from dish-covers; they go about bare but decent, and on their hands and knees like dogs.
They gird around them dried banana leaves, and they bind more round
their brows, which they also do to check headaches. They hang round their
necks collars of nachul in various colours. This is how the women mourn.
The men, as well as shaving their heads, which both sexes do, but the
men shave them more severely, make bracelets of matampa, very beautifully
woven, as many as six of them, some of which they place high up on the right
arm and some on the right foot. The food of all during this period is
bananas and mafafas, which they eat from the left hand. This they do for
about a year. They sleep on banana leaves. Thus, until they leave off
mourning they eat no rice, meat, or fish. This is the first wake, called
the burial wake, which lasts for eight days. The second wake comes a year
later, and ends the mourning. If the dead man was a king or great lord,
many people gather for this, and it resembles in every way the first wake.
Then they cut straw and dress up in their best, and in this way the period
of mourning is brought to an end.

When a king wishes to have a feast and give a banquet to his nobles,
he calls it a wake for his ancestors, and he invites to it all his grandees.
Sacrifices to the devil are made at this time, by killing goats, cows, etc.
or even human beings, as Fatema, King of the Boulons, did when he had a young
girl killed. She performed a dance, beautifully dressed, and then was
killed, in order to demonstrate the great power of this barbarian, as if
power consisted only in the performance of acts of tyranny. However, some
of these kings are better disposed, and are unwilling to agree to such
abominations. This was the case with Sacena, uncle of King Philip of Serra
Leona, who said that those he had already killed during his lifetime were
enough. Farma the Older, King of the Logos, also forbade human sacrifice,

(h) Both of nachul and a sort of black pepper.
(i) And some on the neck.
(j) They sit on the ground.
order to spare the life of a great lord, the son of his lord Feramacera.
In our day, Tora, though a Christian king, would not agree to do this.
His wives wept with joy when they saw that, by the mediation of the priests
of the Society of Jesus, God had granted them the favour of (continued)
life. They lacked words to thank heaven for its blessing. But this custom
(of killing others at burials), this evil practice, used to be common here
that the slaves of a certain Portuguese man, when they saw that their master
was dead, began to wail. When asked why they had burst into tears, they
replied that since they would not survive long now that their master was
dead they were lamenting (their own deaths) because they had no-one to do it
for them. They believed that the Portuguese would follow the same custom as
infidel savages; they imagined that we practiced the same nonsense and
foolishness as these savages, and would, like them, measure out eternal acts
in terms of the transitory occurrences of this life. Whereas only the sum
of virtues and the riches of the spirit matter, not material things as they
imagine; since it is certain that where Sovereign Good manifests itself,
nothing can be lacking. In the possession of this is abundance; while its
loss leads to final loss, that is, to a legacy of eternal torments,
earned and acquired, in this life here, by abominable commerce in vices and
turpitude. For (Justice) is an attribute of Divine Bounty as much as is
Mercy. So much for the wakes and related superstitions which are the normal
practice among the heathen of Ethiopia. Now we shall speak of the state of
the Province before the conquest by the Manes.