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Secondary Funeral Rituals among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana: The Bichabob Tribe Example

Henryk Zimoń

Death concerns each person individually and each social group differently. The tragic event of death carries many negative phenomena with it: the feelings of sorrow, emptiness, disintegration and threat, with which the African peoples deal as a community, experiencing them within the family, lineage and clan group. Funeral rituals,¹ which are of social character, are an irreplaceable help in coping with the burdens of this critical period. They belong to rituals of passage (family, occasional, non-periodical rituals), which are connected with a change of a person's status and social position.²

The term 'double funeral' is used by ethnologists and scholars of religion to define the structure of funeral rituals. It comprises burial rituals and rituals of the final, i.e., secondary funeral, which ultimately finishes the mourning period, includes the dead in the ancestors' realm and integrates the community of the living. The problem of the double funeral was, for the first time, drawn attention to by the French ethnologist Robert Hertz (1882-1915) in his pioneering extensive article entitled *Contribution à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort*, published in 1907.³ This study is considered to be one of the most original 20th century analyses referring to death and funeral rituals.⁴ Hertz refers to the community from Indonesia, especially from the island of Kalimantan (Borneo) as well as other peoples from outside Indonesia.

1 In accordance with contemporary terminology, the author understands ritual as a whole of different cycles or stages of rites, which are parts of the whole ritual.

2 Arnold van Gennep, *Les rites de passage: Étude systématique des rites*, Paris: Librairie critique Émile Noury 1909, 4.

3 Robert Hertz, "Contributions à une étude sur la représentation collective de la mort", *L'Année sociologique* 10, 1905-1906, 48-137. In English: "A Contribution to the Study of the Collective Representation of Death", transl. by Rodney & Claudia Needham, in: Robert Hertz, *Death and the Right Hand*, Glencoe: The Free Press 1960, 27-86.

4 Phyllis Palgi – Henry Abramovitch, "Death: A Cross-Cultural Perspective", *Annual Review of Anthropology* 13, 1984, 388.

The subject of the article is a description, analysis and interpretation of the course of secondary funeral rituals among the Konkomba people from northern Ghana on an example of the Bichabob tribe in the villages of Nalongni, Sobib and Kumwateek, inhabited by the clans of Nalatiib, Sobibtiib and Bumwateeb. The source basis includes first of all the results of ethnological and religiological field studies that I conducted among the Konkomba people in the region of Saboba from July, 1984 till January, 1985 and from September, 1990 till August, 1991. I participated in secondary funerals between the second half of February till the beginning of May, 1991 in six villages: Nalongni, Sobib, Kumwateek (Bichabob tribe), Puo Tindaando (Bigbem tribe), Lemo (Nakpantiib tribe) and Sambul (Bimokpom tribe). These rituals take place in a given village every 3-4 years and they last from five to seven days, constituting an important social and religious event. All the dead people who have died in a given village since the last secondary funeral are mentioned in these funeral rites. The fulfilment of the first funeral rites (*likpuul* in the Konkomba language) finishes the phase of excluding the dead from the visible world of the living.⁵ It does not, however, mean the end of the funeral ritual, whose complementation takes place in the secondary funeral (*likpotoor*).

The Nalatiib clan members inhabit three villages: Nalongni, Toma and Dicheen, situated in the nearest neighbourhood of Saboba. The unitary clan consists of one major lineage, which is divided into three minor lineages, namely Bwarado, Kotiengo and Wajado.⁶ Secondary funerals, lasting seven days, took place in Nalongni at the same time in both minor lineages of Kotiengo and Wajado between 15th and 22nd March, 1991. The Sobibtiib clan members live in the village of Sobib, which lies 5 km to the north from Saboba and is situated on the road leading from Saboba to Nambiri

5 On burial rituals among the Konkomba people of northern Ghana cf. Henryk Zimoń, "Rytuály pochówkowe starszych mężczyzn u ludu Konkomba z północnej Ghany", *Roczniki Teologiczne* 45/2, 1998, 137-154; Henryk Zimoń, "Rytuály pochówkowe starszych kobiet u ludu z północnej Ghany", *Roczniki Teologiczne* 52/2, 2005, 129-143.

6 The Bwarado lineage members come from the progenitor Bwara and they live in the village of Toma, which directly borders with Saboba on the west. Members of Kotiengo (whose the progenitor was Kotien) and Wajado (descending from the progenitor Waja) inhabit the village of Nalongni, lying 3 km west of Saboba. The hamlet of the Wajado lineage members is in the western part of Nalongni village, called Chachakapaab, separated from Kotiengo lineage with a zone of homestead fields. The inhabitants of the neighbouring village Dicheen (situated 2 km to the south-west from Saboba) also belong to the lineage of Wajado, since their ancestor was Wasaa, a younger brother of Waja. Cf. genealogy III of the Nalatiib clan of the Nalongni village, given at the end of David Tait's book (*The Konkomba of Northern Ghana*, London: Oxford University Press 21964). Bwara and Kotien were sons of father Ipiin (Kunap) and mother Lomok, and grandsons of the first ancestor, Utindaaya. Waja and Wasaa were sons of Makpandaan (Ipiin's younger brother), whose father was Utindaaya.

and Chereponi. The clan of Sobibtiib is a unitary clan consisting of one major lineage divided into two minor ones: Ngambwa and Uweendo.⁷ Secondary funerals took place at the same time in both these minor lineages. The secondary funeral in which I participated in the lineage of Ngambwa lasted seven days and it took place between 6th and 12th March, 1991. The Bumwateeb clan members from the tribe of Bichabob inhabit the village of Kumwateek, which is situated 2 km to the north from Saboba. The clan of Bumwateeb is a unitary clan consisting of one major lineage divided into two minor ones: Kukudo and Nandodo.⁸ The secondary funeral in the village of Kumwateek lasted six days and it took place between 3rd and 9th March, 1991.

Preparatory activities

The first day of the secondary funeral (15 March, 1991) in the village of Nalongni fell on a market day in Saboba called *kakaŋ*.⁹ In the lineage of Kotiendó they mentioned nine dead people, including two men (Nayempwan, Mpwanja), one boy Jagir and six women, whereas six dead people came from the lineage of Wajado (a man Pwanji Nantor and five women). In the village of Sobib the first day of the secondary funeral (6 March, 1991) fell on the third day of the market in Saboba. Two dead men came from the lineage of Ngambwa (Sobib): Gungul, Yakpa, Talee, Gani, and one dead woman Akua. The first day of the secondary funeral (3 March, 1991) in the village of Kumwateek fell on the market day in Saboba. Five dead people were mentioned in the village (a youngster Banami and four women). On that day beer was brewed in three villages for the first time. It was needed on the third day of the secondary funeral, when

7 The Ngambwa lineage members descend from the ancestor Ngmasayir, while the members of Uweendo lineage – from the ancestor Uween. Ngmasayir and Uween (the former's younger brother) were sons of Namii, the first ancestor of the Sobibtiib clan. Henryk Zimoń, *Sakralność ziemi u ludu Konkomba z Afryki Zachodniej*, Lublin: Redakcja Wydawnictw KUL 1998, 124.

8 The Kukudo lineage members descend from the ancestor Kuku, while the Nandodo lineage members come from the ancestor Nando. Kuku and Nando (Kuku's younger brother) were sons of Tamanga, whose father was Nabo, the first ancestor of the Bumwateeb clan.

9 Traditionally, a week among the Konkomba has six days. Each of them is connected with a market day in some locality in the neighbourhood. These are the names of successive days of the week near Saboba (in brackets – the place of the market): *kakaŋ* (Saboba), *chempu* (Yendi), *lamo* (Sambul), *sakpa* (Saangul), *kpaŋeln* or *maŋe* (Wapuli, Garimata), *bichayala* (Demon). In the village of Nalongni the day *bichayala* is called *lafe*. Cf. Henryk Zimoń, "Sanktuarium ziemi – centrum kultowe ludu Konkomba w północnej Ghanie", *Roczniki Teologiczne* 40/2, 1993, 30, note 30; D. Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana...*, 18f.

the causes of the death of all the people from those villages who had died since the previous secondary funeral were explained.¹⁰

On the second day before noon five bull-calves, three cows and one heifer were killed in the homesteads of Kotiendo and Wajado lineages (Nalongni), five bull-calves, one heifer and two cows were killed in the homesteads of the Ngambwa lineage (Sobib), while four bull-calves and three heifers were killed in four homesteads of the village of Kumwateek.

Towards the evening a group of youngsters and children from Kotiendo lineage (16 March, 1991), with a big drum carried by a boy, went anti-clockwise round the homestead of dead old man Nayempwan (the head of this homestead) and performed a victory dance called *njeen*. Similarly, other groups of youths and children from the lineages of Wajado (Nalongni) and Ngambwa (Sobib) went around the homestead of an old man Pwanja Nantor (the oldest inhabitant of Nalongni village from Chachakpaab hamlet) and the homestead of an old man Gungul, and performed a victory dance. Before and after supper the female and male dancers took part in the dances in the villages of Nalongni, Sobib and Kumwateek.



Photo no. 1
A triumph dance (*njeen*) around the homestead of dead Gungul
(the village of Sobib)

10 Beer, which was necessary on the fourth and fifth days of the secondary funeral, was also brewed during the following two days.

Purification of widows

I participated in the purification ritual of five widows in Nalongni which took place in the evening of the second day of the secondary funeral (7-8.30 p.m.) in front of the homestead of Nayempwan, the oldest dead head of a homestead from the Kotiendo lineage. Purification ritual was carried out by a man Ngmandar, the second oldest head of a homestead from Wajado lineage (Chachakpaab hamlet), accompanied by a woman Manim Madakl (Lasim's mother from the lineage of Wajado of Dicheen village). Wives of dead owners of homesteads took part in the ritual: Imbinye and Bilembi (first and second wives of Nayempwan), Nimbiwil, Limwar and Ntingma (first, second and third wives of Mpwanja). The widows sang mourning songs (dirges) in Imbinye's hut. A mat was laid out outside the homestead, on the left side of the entrance to it, and the widows brought a big bowl with water for a ritual washing. Ngmandar put a horn and medicines made from plant roots on the mat. The ritual was begun with a speech by Ujaka-udo, the third oldest man in the lineage of Kotiendo:

Ancestor Kotien, you are the owner of this horn and these medicines. If somebody dies, a horn and medicines are used to perform a purification ritual. Arise, accept this cold water and support these medicines so that we can perform this ritual in an effective way. The earliest ancestors Bwara, Makpandaan, Waja, come together and take this cold water. Ancestors Waja, Kotien and Bwara, accept this red hen and strengthen these medicines, which you know.

Next Ngmandar made an offering of a red hen, pouring its blood over the horn and the medicines. Then water was heated which contained plant medicines (made of roots and leaves). Supporting each widow by turns, Ngmandar helped her sit on the mat four times. In turn, the widows washed themselves with heated water with medicines. After the ritual washing, Ngmandar shaved the heads of two widows after their dead husband, Nayempwan, while a younger man Kilamoo (Kpabbwanja's son) shaved the heads of three widows after their dead husband, Mpwanja. Each of the widows held a chicken in her hands that was given to her by her brother. Ngmandar made a circular movement over the head of each widow with her chicken in order to remove ritual impurity (*tijon*), caused by her husband's death, off her. Finally, Ngmandar raised each widow, sitting on the mat, four times and gave each a necklace, made by him, of the thin roots from the tree *bukokul*.

Successive purification rites took place at the forked roads, at some distance from the homesteads, where the widows had been led by Ngmandar

and Manim Madakl. A large hole, earlier dug by Ngmandar, was found in the angle space (triangle) of the forked roads. Each widow, beginning with Imbinye, washed herself with warm water and plant medicines in that hole. Then, she took off a band (a narrow piece of cloth) called *tiyoor*,¹¹ which covered her reproductive organs, left it in the hole and put on new clothes. After the purification ritual Ngmandar and Manim Madakl led the widows to the hut of Imbinye, where they stayed throughout the night, not talking to each other. At 5.30 in the morning before the sunrise Ngmandar arrived at the hut and gave each widow a toothpick in the form of a stick. Each of the widows, grateful, gave Ngmandar two cola nuts. Since that moment the widows could talk to each other and to other people.¹²

Water, as a one of nature's elements, plays an important role in myths and cults of the Konkomba and other African peoples. Clean and still water symbolizes life, fertility and moral purity. In cosmogonic myths, water is the eternal primary matter and the origin of all existence. Water is believed to be the equivalent of the maternal womb, a reservoir of embryos of life, and symbolic re-birthing of the worlds and of 'a new human being'. Water is also considered as the dwelling place of spirits and sacred powers.¹³ Among the Konkomba people, the water used in the funeral rituals symbolizes purification, removal of the ritual impurities (*tijon*), regeneration as well as forgiveness and hospitality. In many rituals of the Konkomba and of other African peoples, the shaving of the head is a frequently encountered symbol of purification from contamination and impurities and as a change in social status. Among the Konkomba, the shaving of the widows' heads during the first and secondary funerals (less frequently those of widowers' in the first burial) symbolizes separation of the soul from the human body.¹⁴

The purpose of purification rituals in the lineages of Kotiendo, Wajado (Nalongni) and Ngambwa (Sobib) was to remove the impure state in which the widows had stayed since their husbands' death. Beginning with

11 H. Zimoń, "Rytuály pochówkowe starszych kobiet...", 133 and note 16.

12 Similar purification rituals of widows took place on the second day of the secondary funeral in the lineage of Wajado in Nalongni and in the lineage of Ngambwa in Sobib.

13 Cf. Jean Rudhardt, "Water", in: Mircea Eliade (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 15, New York: Macmillan 1987, 350-358; Leonard J. Pełka, "Woda", in: Tadeusz Gadacz – Bogusław Milerski (eds.), *Religia: Encyklopedia PWN*, vol. 9, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN 2003, 434; Mircea Eliade, *Traktat o historii religii*, trans. Jan Wierusz-Kowalski, Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza 1966, 188-203, 209-214.

14 On hair symbolism cf. Jacek Jan Pawlik, *Expérience sociale de la mort. Étude des rites funéraires des Bassar du Nord-Togo*, Fribourg: Editions Universitaires 1990, 102; Edmund Ronald Leach, "Magical Hair", *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 88/2, 1958, 147-164; Christopher Robert Hallpike, "Social Hair", *Man* 4/2, 1969, 274-298.

the third day of the secondary funeral the widows wore a white cord on their necks, which symbolized widowhood.

Dances and widows' visits to homesteads

At night groups of properly dressed dancers from a number of villages, including the youth as well as younger grown up people of both sexes, danced *kinaachon* in front of the homestead of dead Pwanja Nantor, the oldest inhabitant of Nalongni village (Chachakpaab hamlet) and they sang accompanied by big and smaller drums. Some of the dancers were adorned with crests; they had single or double bells, horns, flutes, fifes as well as little bells attached to the calves (legs). In the case of a man's death the dancers carry quivers with arrows and axes symbolizing the dead hunter's tools. The men and women in separate and bigger and bigger circles leapt and tapped their feet slowly and rhythmically, moving around the drummers, who were on the outside yard of the homestead. In Nalongni I met the greatest number of male and female dancers (over 200 people). Dressed in colourful clothes, the women also performed a dance called *ji-nani*, moving rhythmically to the right and left, carrying on their heads a set of vessels and cloths tied in the shape of a big oblong cone.



Photo no. 2
The dancers in front of the homestead of dead Pwanji Nantor
(the village of Nalongni)

In the lineage of Ngambwa (Sobib) groups of male and female dancers from eight villages in Ghana and three villages in Togo participated in the dances, while in the village of Kumwateek the dancers came from 11 localities in Ghana and seven in Togo. The dancers were abundantly treated to beer (e.g., in the lineage of Ngambwa they had 10 pots and two buckets of beer at their disposal).

Dance accompanies both joyful and sad events in the life of the Konkomba. In this way they manifest their emotions, tensions and swollen conflicts, which the dance makes weaker, neutralizes and channels in the proper direction. Dance enables the Africans to gain support in the social group and allows expression of grief through movement. Among the Konkomba, dance takes place in a circle which gives the participants a sense of community and security and which symbolizes the unity of life and death and a bond between the deceased and the living. Moreover, according to Edward Zwolski, the space enclosed in the circle protects from harmful forces and death, which are frightened away by the thumping of feet and the sound of instruments.¹⁵ The exuberant and dynamic dance allows the Konkomba to articulate fear, sorrow, despair, anger and sadness. It also enables them to recover from the fear caused by the encounter with the death of those people who were closest to them and who enjoyed common respect due to their age and social status. Dances that emphasize and celebrate life serve to oppose death. By means of dance, Africans pay homage to the elder diseased and also express reverence and respect for them. Moreover, dances remind the Africans of and reinforce their belief in the afterlife of those ancestors whose lives were long, successful and happy.¹⁶

With breaks, the dances in the villages of Nalongni, Sobib and Kumwateek lasted throughout the night and they finished in the morning of the following day about 10 a.m. Dances have to finish before the beginning of the most important stage of the secondary funeral ritual on the third day, which is divination.

Early in the morning (7.45-9.45 a.m.) of the third day of the secondary ritual (17 March, 1991) five widows from Kotiendo lineage visited many homesteads. They were led by a female leader Manim Madakl. The widows, dressed in white, held in their right hands a calabash, which they al-

15 Edward Zwolski, *Chorea: Muza i bóstwo w religii greckiej*, Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX 1978, 12.

16 Cf. Zuzanna Pędzich, "Taniec w rytuale żałobnym i jego zastosowanie w terapii", *Polska Sztuka Ludowa: Konteksty* 58/1-2, 2004, 117-120; Godfrey Wilson, "Nyakyusa Conventions of Burial", *Bantu Studies* 13, 1939, 12-17, 23 f., 27, 29.

ways used in the period of widowhood. The widows and other women visited the homesteads of the following owners successively: Mapula, Weinjimi, Bimala, Ujaka-udo, Yadul, Manim, Ubindam (from Kotiendo lineage) and the homestead of Kofi (the son of Pwanja Nantor) from the lineage of Wajado, where there were many male and female dancers and spectators. In a few homesteads (Weinjimi, Ujaka-udo, Manim, Ubindam) the widows were treated to beer. Besides, they were presented with vegetables – pepper, ochre, *kpaka* seeds (used as an additive to gravy) as well as with cola nuts and money.

Early in the morning of the third day of the secondary funeral (8 March, 1991) visited five widows from Sobib all the homesteads in the lineage of Ngambwa. They were led by a woman-leader Npobi (Gungul's daughter). They were treated to beer in a few homesteads and they received 50 cedis in each.



Photo no. 3

Npobi and five widows visit all the homesteads in the lineage of Ngambwa (the village of Sobib)

Divination rites

On the most important day, the third day, of the secondary funeral divination rites (divination – *tibwar*) took place. These divining rites aimed at

an explanation of the circumstances and causes of the death of all the people who had died in the villages of Nalongni, Sobib and Kumwateek since the previous secondary funeral. We will limit our considerations to the lineage of Ngambwa in Sobib, where divination rites were performed by two men – diviners: Tadiin from the village of Takpamba (Togo) and Bicha – from the homestead of Taakum, the oldest inhabitant of the lineage of Ngambwa. Tadiin performed the function of the main diviner or master (*ubwa*), while Bicha was the master's assistant (*ubwateng*). The diviners were accompanied by their disciples: Bisir and Iymba from Takpamba (*ubwacheen*). The rites concerned five dead people, including the men: Gungul, Talee, Yakpa, Gani, and a woman Akua. At 11.35 a.m. the diviners arrived at the homestead of Mukoo, the fifth oldest man in the lineage of Ngambwa. Old men Bayei and Tibi came to greet the diviners. Bicha made an offering of beer on two divining staffs (long sticks), saying:

Today we are small children. Spirit of the Earth, rise and accept this beer. We have been asked to explain the incidents of death, and not to destroy. Spirit Tinoon,¹⁷ accept this beer and help us. Twin spirits¹⁸ and gnome spirits,¹⁹ accept this drink and help us. We do not want to cause unhappiness. Let the spirits of the dead speak and tell us what the cause of their deaths was. Gungul, younger brother Yakpa and sister Akua, tell us the truth. Our first mothers buried here, this is your beer for all of you.

Next the diviners and the old men present there went to the homestead of the oldest dead farmer, Gungul. The divination rites took place in the outside yard and it lasted from 12.00 till 4.30 p.m. Its participants included the inhabitants of Ngambwa lineage (men and women) as well as the relatives and related people by affinity of the dead woman Akua. The diviners

17 Tinoon is the protective spirit of the Sobibtiib clan and is responsible for marriage and the married couple.

18 The Konkomba and other African people have an ambivalent attitude to twins. They arouse joy, since they are the symbol of fertility, but also fear because they are considered to be dangerous and abnormal. The tribes of Bichabob and Bimonkpom are happy when twins are born. Dead twins (men and women) as ancestors are considered as fertility spirits, affecting the yields of the earth and the fertility of people and animals. Cf. Henryk Zimoń, "Religijny wymiar wybranych rytuałów u ludu Konkomba z północnej Ghany", in: Irena Bukowska-Floreńska (ed.), *Studia etnologiczne i antropologiczne III*, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego 1999, 120.

19 According to the beliefs of the Konkomba, gnome spirits (*bininkpiib* or *biponib*) are mischievous spirits living in the bush, which can do harm to people, bringing infertility and different diseases, especially mental ones. Gnome spirits can also help people in exchange for the memory in prayers and offerings. H. Zimoń, "Religijny wymiar wybranych rytuałów...", 120 f. Cf. also Henryk Zimoń, *Afrykańskie rytuały agrarne na przykładzie ludu Konkomba*, Warszawa: Verbinum 1992, 123 f.

and the elderly people of the lineage: Taakum, Bayei, Lundan, Tibi and Mukoo were sitting in front of the entrance hut, while young men and separately women were sitting at a certain distance.

Reflecting on the successive incidents of death was begun with Gungul, the oldest inhabitant of the homestead at present belonging to the old man Tibi (Gungul's younger brother). Taakum said:

Gungul, we lived in this village together and we made discussions. When you fell ill, I visited you and asked you with whom I have to rule in this village. You only beckoned with your hand as a farewell. Today you are staying near god Uwumbor. We do not know what it is like there. Today we want to ask whether we have to leave this village or stay here.

Finally Bwali (a delegate from the minor lineage of Uweendo from the village of Sobib) stated that the village inhabitants did not know the reason for Gungul's passing away, and that was why they asked to be given the cause of his death. Then he threw 10 kauri shells on the ground.

The diviner Tadiin explained the position of the shells, holding a divining staff and a bell in his hands. He called his ancestors Ugan, Bambol and Batul and made reference to the richness that Gungul left in that homestead as well as to the quarrel of its inhabitants. He also clearly confirmed that Gungul was not a thief nor a sorcerer (*usoon*) had killed him. He accused the homestead inhabitants of negligence towards their ancestors and of quarrels which lasted till then. Tadiin's statements were frequently confirmed by the diviner Bicha. Next Tadiin, together with his divining staff and the bell, went out from the homestead in the direction of the homestead field. After he came back from the field, Tadiin asked the dead ancestors and the protective spirits of the clan to give the cause of Gungul's death since he himself was helpless.²⁰ He confirmed that Gungul was neither a thief nor a sorcerer and he did not desire anybody's goods. Gungul only demanded his children's help when he was seriously ill and suffered. Bicha stated that the homestead inhabitants quarreled about what Gungul had seen before his death and what his ancestors were not satisfied with. Tadiin added that the spirit of the Earth and the protective spirits of the clan took offence and that is why propitiatory offerings had to be made. Because the Earth was defiled (*kitiñ bii*), which was caused by disagreement and quarrels between the homestead inhabitants, an offering of a chicken has to be made to the spirit of the Earth so that concord and welfare should reign in the homestead.

20 Literally, he stated: "I'm an egg, not a chicken" and he acknowledged that he did not know the cause of the death, but his spirit (*nsindaan*) did.

Then two diviners began divination rites, using three sticks. Most frequently Bicha (20 times), but also other men (Tibi – six times, Taakum – four times, Jaṇambi [Jaṇabi], Gungul’s son – once) placed the sticks when Tadiin was absent, and determined the meaning of one of them for the old men. After each placing of the sticks, Tadiin approached with his divining staff, often supported by Bicha with one hand, and Tadiin decisively hit with his divining staff twice: first, the ground and second, one of the chosen sticks.



Photo no. 4
Divination rites with three sticks (the village of Nalongni)

According to the diviners, the causes of the five people’s deaths were different, including discord and quarrels in the homestead, bringing about defilement of the Earth, which did not please the ancestors and the spirit of the Earth (Gungul); bad conduct and no contact with the inhabitants after emigrating to the region of Salaga, lack of the purification ritual after killing a dangerous animal (Talee); a sorcerer’s activity (throwing bad sorcerer’s medicines over the farm), richness and jealousy of the wives and children and other inhabitants of the village as well as negligence in practicing the native ancestors’ religion since Bayei, dead Yakpa’s father, in his

21 H. Zimoń, “Afrykańskie rytuały agrarne...”, 46-49.

homestead has spirit Tigari's shrines, whose owner and protector is his son Baakar²¹; the work of a woman sorcerer who killed Gani; hatred of somebody from the village of Naachang towards Maanumbi's husband and the wife Akua, who died in hospital in Yendi during the birth of her fourth child.

After the divination rites were finished in the lineage of Ngambwa in Sobib at 4.30 p.m., the diviners and the old men went to the homestead of an old man Mukoo, where, under a tree close to the homestead field, the diviner Bicha made an offering of beer to twin spirits, spirit of the Earth Bangaatingbann²², to mischievous gnome spirits of the bush and protective spirits of the clan. In his prayer the diviner said that the Earth was defiled because of the quarrels and discord between the inhabitants of Sobib village. He asked the supernatural beings for agreement, joy and health for the inhabitants of that village. Also, he made an offering to twin spirits, gnome spirits and other supernatural beings of 16 pellets made of sorghum flour (three pellets for each dead man and four – for the dead woman Akua) and pieces of cooked food (throwing it on the homestead field) as well as an offering of beer.

The causes of death since the last secondary funeral were mentioned by the diviners in the villages of Nalongni, Sobib and Kumwateek while divining from kauri shells. According to the old men, this initial stage of divination was the most important, and divination from the three sticks only confirmed and explained in detail the causes of death given before. It should be emphasized that divination during the funeral also has a didactic dimension because it teaches the listeners respect for the tradition, observance of social norms and the moral order both in individual and community life.

After the divination rites were finished in the villages of Nalongni, Sobib and Kumwateek, the diviners, their disciples and the old men ate a meal prepared by the women and they treated each other to beer. The diviners in the village of Sobib received a payment in kind, and Tadiin was given four rear legs of cattle and three pieces of poultry, while local Bicha got one leg of cattle and three pieces of poultry. On the other hand, each of the diviners from Nalongni received payment in the form of a considerable sum of money (5,000 cedis) as well as gifts of three legs of cattle and ten pieces of poultry, including two roosters. The diviners from Kumwateek got money as a payment: 2,200 (Pabina) and 1,500 cedis (Uyemi), but besides that, each of them received gifts in the form of kauri shells (25 shells each) and two legs of cattle as well as two pieces of poultry.

22 Bangaatingbann is the proper name of the Earth spirit of the Sobibtiib clan. H. Zimoń, "Sakralność ziemi...", 81, 124 f.

The last days of secondary funerals

The fourth and fifth days of the secondary funeral are the visiting days of guests in all the homesteads of Nalongni, Sobib and Kumwateek villages. The fourth day is called the day of great beer drinking (*ndaan saakpi-in daal*). Because there would not have been enough of the beer prepared by the village inhabitants, the visiting relatives, related people by affinity and sometimes other guests brought beer in larger and smaller pots. Huge expenses connected with the secondary funeral are testified to by how much livestock, especially pigs, were killed in the morning of the fourth day. 14 cattle and 52 pigs were killed in Kotiengo lineage, whereas in Wajado lineage (Chachakpaab hamlet) they killed two cattle and 16 pigs. In the eight homesteads of Ngambwa lineage of Sabib that I visited they killed one cow, one bull-calf and 22 pigs. 24 pigs and one sheep were killed in eleven homesteads of Kumwateek village.

Throughout the day hundreds of the Konkomba people from Saboba and many villages successively visited all the homesteads of Nalongni, Sobib and Kumwateek villages. In each of them they were treated to beer and received a piece of meat. The guests, in turn, gave the hosts of the homesteads a certain amount of money (e.g. 50 cedis), which is regarded as a help in covering the huge expenses connected with preparation of the secondary funeral. The fifth day is called the day of little beer drinking (*ndaan kpaadaal* or *ndaan sasa daal*). This day is also meant for visitors.

Towards the evening of the fourth and fifth days many women danced in front of Taanyan's homestead in Nalongni. Their dances were watched by many elderly women.

In the early morning of the sixth day of the secondary funeral (20 March, 1991) in the village of Nalongni the leader Manim Madakl led the widows of the dead Naymempwan and Mpwanya to the former's farm in the bush. The procession led by the leader included the following: five widows dressed in white and holding a calabash in the right hand, one daughter and four sons of the dead old men as well as seven other accompanying people, among them ritual partners.²³ After 30 minutes we reached the farm in the bush, where yams (bulbiferous plant) were cultivated.²⁴ We

23 Members of some major lineages and clans are bound with the relation of so-called ritual partnership and they are called *mantotiib*. According to David Tait (*The Konkomba of Northern Ghana...*, 127 f.), clan sisters, who are the women descending from the same clan and participating in funeral rituals, are also called ritual partners (*mantotiib*).

24 Apart from cereals (sorghum and millet), yam is also an important though secondary edible plant among the Konkomba. The name "yam" (*inhame* in Portuguese) comes from *niam*, a West African word from the Mande language. It was adopted in the Euro-

stopped in front of a hut where yams were stored and several yams were taken out of the hut. The sons of dead Mpwanja, Nikim (wife Nimbilwil's son) and Ntase (wife Limwar's son) also brought yams from Mpwanja's farm. Manim Madakl led the widows counterclockwise three times around yam clamps. Next she placed each widow three times on the leaves of the tree called *dawa dawa* lying on the ground and then raised her and began to sing a short mournful song three times to which the widows together responded with singing. Then each of the widows sang a mournful verse three times. Leaving the farm, four people took the yams and they all returned to Taanyan's homestead in the procession led by Manim Madakl. On the way the widows could neither speak nor watch back.



Photo no. 5

Leaders Bicha and Npobi return with five widows from the farm of dead Gungul (the village of Sobib)

In the early morning of the sixth day of the secondary funeral in the village of Sobib (11 March, 1991) the leaders Npobi and Bicha led the wi-

pean languages *via* the Portuguese language. Yams (*Discorea*) grow into green creepers which produces big underground bulbs attached to the root. The bulbs are rich with starch and of considerable size, reaching the length of dozens of centimeters and the weight of several kilos. Cf. Donald Gilbert Coursey, "The Cultivation and Use of Yams in West Africa", *Ghana Notes and Queries* 9, 1996, 47; Lech Ratajski, *Afryka*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna 19662, 66 f., H. Zimoń, "Afrykańskie rytuały agrarne...", 21, 34 note 1.

dows of the dead men Gungul, Yakpa and Gani to Gungul's yam farm in the bush. After coming back from the farm the older men and Npobi treated each other to beer in the entrance hut (vestibule) of dead Gungul's homestead. The beer had been brought by the widows of the dead men. The female leader Npobi behaved like a man, talking to Taakum and other old men and drinking beer with them.

In the village of Kumwateek there was no need to visit the yam farm of the dead old man because no dead men were mentioned during the secondary funeral in 1991.

The rituals of visiting the farms in the bush in the villages of Nalongni and Sobib meant a farewell of the widows, children and other participants to the dead old men Nayempwan and Mpwanja as well as Gungul, Yakpa and Gani. Their household duties and agricultural work were the material basis for the existence of the dead persons' families and the whole lineage and clan community living on agriculture. The farm of the dead old man from the Bichabob tribe is visited during the secondary funeral, in the tribe of Nakpantiib it is visited twice, i.e. during the first and secondary funerals, while among the tribes of Bimonkpom, Binalob and Bigbem it is visited during the first funeral, a few days after the burial.²⁵

The secondary funeral, in the villages of Sobib and Kumwateek, did not concern the oldest inhabitant of the village and therefore they did not shoot at a pole (called *lipil*) and a rooster. I took part in such a shooting event on the sixth day of the secondary funeral in the hamlet of Chachakpaab in Nalongni village (20 March, 1991), where they made a mention of the dead old man Pwanja Nantor, the oldest inhabitant of the village.

In the afternoon of the same day shooting took place in the hamlet of Chachakpaab. Outside Kofi's homestead the following men gathered: Ujaka-udo, Tabindoo, Bindoo, Balaween (from Kotiendo lineage), Kofi, Manawi, Lalil (from Wajado lineage of hamlet Chachakpaab), Baadak (from Wajado lineage of village Dicheen) and a boy Nantor (Pwanja Nantor's son). There, a pole of *liful* tree was prepared. This pole, called *lipil*, consists of an upper part of a target with the width of 20 cm and the length of 50 cm, ended at the bottom with a narrower base in the form of a holder with the width of 10 cm and the length of 30 cm. The target of the pole was divided with a black line in the centre into two parts, and next the old men Ujaka-udo and Kofi marked it with numerous points in red, white and black colours successively.

After preparing and painting the pole the men returned to Kofi's homestead. Ujaka-udo followed by Nantor and six men walked in single file

25 H. Zimoń, "Rytuály pochówkowe starszych mężczyzn...", 148.

anticlockwise around the homestead of dead Pwanja Nantor three times. Ujaka-udo, leading the group, supported himself with a metal walking stick, which he was holding in his right hand; Nantor carried a bow in his right hand, a quiver with arrows on his back and a calabash on his head on which the painted pole, supported by him with his left hand, was placed. The procession stopped three times in front of the door of the vestibule leading to the homestead. Each time Ujaka-udo took the pole from Nantor's head and three times touched with it the ground and the straw covering the hut over the entrance to the homestead.

After the homestead was circled three times the participants of the procession went with the pole and the rooster to the shooting place located in the homestead field. Ujaka-udo used his walking stick to dig a hole where he put the pole, and then beat down the earth strongly. A number of the Nalatiib clan members – men, women, youth and children – the inhabitants of the villages of Nalongni, Toma and Dicheen gathered at a safe distance from the pole in order to watch the shooting. Men, youngsters and Nantor gathered at a distance of about 20 meters from the pole. First Ujaka-udo threw the metal stick at the pole, and he was followed by Nantor and Kanja (Tatuk's son from Dicheen village), who shot at the pole from their bows. Next other youngsters and younger men shot at it from their bows and rifles. During the breaks in the shooting Ujaka-udo tied a rooster to the pole and then they resumed the shooting from the bows and rifles at the pole and the rooster. After the shooting was finished, a few older men came up to the dead rooster and the pole full of bullets and a big number of stuck arrows. At this point Ujaka-udo, Nantor, carrying the killed rooster on the head, and other shooters returned to Kofi's homestead.

Shooting aroused much emotions and joy. The fact that more than one hundred people took part in this ludic event points to a great interest shown by the men, women and children. Shooting at a pole and a rooster takes place only after the death of the oldest man of the lineage and the clan, in this case old man Pwanja Nantor, Kofi's father. It has a symbolic meaning since it emphasizes the social position of the oldest member of the community and is aimed at honouring him as a famous hunter.

In the afternoon the farewell of the dead women to the inhabitants of the homesteads of Kotiendo and Wajado lineages in Nalongni took place. Each dead woman was symbolized by a big calabash, called *likpiyil*. The farewell concerned the women from other clans that started to live in Nalongni after getting married as well as the women coming from Nalongni that married representatives of other clans and started to live in their husbands' villages. Among the Konkomba the secondary funeral of married women is performed both in the husband's village and in the village from

which the dead woman came. After the dead woman is buried in the place where she lived, her relatives carry her calabash to the oldest man of the major or minor lineages from which the dead woman came. The calabashes of the women coming from other clans are brought to their secondary funeral to the husband's village.

The celebration of the farewell of dead women began in the old man Ujaka-udo's homestead. The women danced around six calabashes *likpiyil* lying on a round saucer. Beer was poured into one of those calabashes. A circle was marked anticlockwise around this calabash with another one filled with beer and next beer was poured out on the ground. The homestead inhabitants put banknotes (50 cedis) into each calabash. Then the women carrying calabashes *likpiyil* on their head went to Bimal's (the son of Kpabbwanja) homestead, where everybody also danced around the calabashes lying on the ground, and the same ritual activities were performed. The women carrying six calabashes *likpiyil* then visited a few other homesteads of Kotiendo lineage, after which they went to Chachakpaab hamlet, where they visited a few homesteads belonging to Wajado lineage.



Photo no. 6
The celebration of the farewell of six dead women
(symbolized by the calabashes *likpiyil*) to the inhabitants
of the village of Nalongni

The visits to homesteads made by the women carrying calabashes, symbolizing the dead women, together with other women and girls were an occasion to have fun, dance and drink beer. At the same time in this way the dead women symbolically bid farewell to the inhabitants of the homesteads from the Nalatiib clan, from which they came or where they had lived as the wives coming from other clans. After the secondary funeral the calabash *likpiyil* is taken to the village from which the dead woman had come and it is kept in the homestead of her oldest brother. The dead woman's body is always buried near the homestead of her husband and it is only her spirit, symbolized by the calabash, which comes back to the patrilineal clan and the lineage of her descent.²⁶

The seventh and last day of the secondary funeral in Nalongni fell on a market day in Saboba (*kakaŋ*). That was the reason, why the elders of the minor lineage of Kotiendo put off the last act of dividing the property (*li-faal*) belonging to the dead Nayempwan to the following day, which was Friday on 22 March, 1991. At 8 a.m. Nayempwan's personal belongings were taken in a suitcase from the homestead of Taanyan to that of Ubindam, who was the oldest inhabitant of Kotiendo lineage and Nalatiib clan. Ubindam was the first to speak:

The sons and all of you present here should get something of this property. I cannot wear anything from the dead. No person can take everything. Each of you should get something. How could I use anything belonging to my younger brother? You understood what I said... Whatever you want to take, take it. If somebody doesn't take anything, he cannot feel any grudge for not getting anything.

Next Tasum (the oldest son of Nayempwan and his first wife Imbinye) opened the suitcase and spread out his father's belongings on the earth. Biyam (Nayempwan's brother) took the cloth, Ujaka-udo took a traditional cape, somebody else took a towel, Alfred Kotin – two coins, Ifunyo – a cape, and I – pressing asked by the present – chose a warm cap, which I offered to Ubindam.

On the seventh and last day of the secondary funeral (12 March, 1991) the property, clothes and cloths belonging of Gungul and Yakpa were also distributed in the village of Sobib.

Distribution of personal belongings of the dead men Nayempwan in Nalongni and Gungul and Yakpa in Sobib ended the secondary funeral ritual in the minor lineages of Kotiendo and Ngambwa. A similar distribution of the personal belongings of dead old man Pwanja Nantor took place among

26 The author's own observation. Cf. also D. Tait, *The Konkomba of Northern Ghana...*, 139.



the relatives from Wajado lineages (Chachakpaab hamlet) in Nalongni. Contrary to the villages of Nalongni and Sobib the division of the property belonging to the old men from Kumwateek village takes place in the evening of the sixth day of the secondary funeral.²⁷

Conclusions

Robert Hertz introduced a term 'double funeral' into ethnology. Among the nonliterate peoples it comprises both the burial rituals and the rituals of the secondary funeral. The rituals of the first and secondary funerals among the Konkomba of northern Ghana belong to the most extended of all rituals of passage. The Konkomba, like other African peoples, do not treat the fact of death as immediate and ultimate. They perceive death as a process of several years. The present article describes and analyses the secondary funeral in the Bichabob tribe on an example of the inhabitants of three villages: Nalongni, Sobib and Kumwateek. They last from six to seven days and they constitute an important social and religious event. The important events of secondary funerals include: purification of widows, dances, the widows' visits to the homesteads, divination rites on the third day, which aimed at an explanation of the circumstances and causes of the deaths of all the people who had died in the villages of Nalongni, Sobib and Kumwateek since the previous secondary funeral, visits of a large number of guests, frequently treated to beer, in all village homesteads on the fourth and fifth days, visits on yam farms belonging to the dead old men made by the widows led by two leaders and other participants, shooting at a pole (*lipil*) and a rooster in the case of the death of the oldest member of a clan, farewell of dead women descending from other clans to the inhabitants of the villages where they started to live after getting married, division of the dead old men's property on the last day of the secondary funeral.

Following Hertz, in African peoples a certain kind of symmetry or parallelism between the fate of the body and the fate of the soul of the dead can be stated, like it is found among the Indonesian peoples. Similarly to the dead person's body, which is shapeless and repulsive in the transitory period, his/her homeless soul evokes fear and horror in this time. Unable to enter the world of the dead, it stays close to the grave or on the outskirts of the area inhabited by the living. In the transitory period death as a social phenomenon presents a painful process of spiritual disintegration of

27 In the secondary funeral in the village of Kumwateek no distribution of the personal belongings took place in 1991 since no dead old men were mentioned.

the social group and means a temporary exclusion of the dead from the community.²⁸

The costly celebration of the secondary funeral, which requires a substantial financial spending on food and beer, is held in every village every three or four years in remembrance of all who died since the last secondary funeral. It is only after the secondary funeral that a dead old man (or an old woman) can attain the dignity of an ancestor and his property (land, wives, sacred objects and power) is inherited and taken over via mediation of the oldest member of the lineage by the dead person's relatives who are his lineal descendants, that is brothers and sons, according to the principle of primogeniture.

According to Hertz's statement based on the Indonesian material, we observe similarities and parallels among the Konkomba and other African peoples between the rites introducing the dead to the world of the ancestors and the rites introducing the dead people's relatives to the community of the living.²⁹

The performance of different rites and symbolical activities of the secondary funeral emphasizes that the dead and the community change their roles and functions. The dead person is transformed from somebody who threatens the community to its guardian as a member of the invisible community of the dead. The secondary funeral ultimately finishes the mourning period after the dead, it confirms the triumph of the community over death, emphasizes the value of life, which is the highest value for all the Africans, and leads the community through the hard time of sorrow, threat and crisis caused by the death of its members. Besides, the secondary funeral integrates the family, lineage, clan and supraclan groups; its means changing the status and helps the living people to accept the new state, and introducing them into the normal relations with the clan community and other people. Only elderly people (men and women) – due to their age, social status and offspring – can reach the dignity of ancestors after death. A necessary condition for the change of their status is the performance of the rituals of the first and secondary funerals.

28 R. Hertz, "Contribution à une étude...", 57-61, 75, 77 f., 85-87, 131, 137.

29 *Ibid.*, 87 f., 95-105, 120.



SUMMARY

**Secondary Funeral Rituals among the Konkomba of Northern Ghana:
The Bichabob Tribe Example**

Robert Hertz introduced a term 'double funeral' into ethnology. Among the nonliterate peoples it comprises both the burial rituals and the rituals of the secondary funeral. The Konkomba perceive death as a process of several years. The author participated in secondary funerals from the second half of February till the beginning of May, 1991 in six villages: Nalongni, Sobib, Kumawateek (Bichabob tribe), Puo Tindaando (Bigbem tribe), Lemo (Nakpantiib tribe), Sambul (Bimonkpom tribe).

The article describes and analyses the secondary funeral in the Bichabob tribe on an example of the inhabitants of three villages: Nalongni, Sobib and Kumwateek. Important events of secondary funerals, which last from six to seven days, include: purification of widows, dances, the widows' visits to the homesteads, divination rites, visits of a large number of guests, visits on yam farms belonging to the dead old men made by the widows, shooting at a pole (*lipil*) and a rooster in the case of the death of the oldest member of a clan, farewell of dead women descending from other clans to the inhabitants of the villages where they started to live after getting married, and division of the dead old men's property.

The costly celebration of the secondary funeral is held in every village every three or four years in remembrance of all who died since the last secondary funeral. It is only after the secondary funeral that a dead person can attain the dignity of an ancestor and his property is inherited and taken over via mediation of the oldest member of the lineage by the dead person's relatives who are his lineal descendants. Through the rites of the secondary funeral the dead person is transformed from somebody who threatens the community into its guardian as a member of the invisible community of the dead. The secondary funeral ultimately finishes the mourning period after the dead, it confirms the triumph of the community over death, emphasizes the value of life and leads the community through the hard time of sorrow.

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