

Habaa Katoo, Banda-Ahenkro¹

On their way from Kakala the Nafana people stopped at a place called Nafa Benu to the west [of Banda-Ahenkro; in Côte d'Ivoire] where the great grandmother of this family, by name Yaamuu, had a daughter who the chief wanted to marry. However, her brother, by name Gbanda, was a brother to the chief and the girl, by name Ehɔɔ, a niece to the chief, so the family did not want her to marry him. As a result the Yaamuu and Gbanda took Ehɔɔ from Nafa Benu to this [Banda-Ahenkro] side of the mountains.

Because the man was a brother to the chief, the chief decided that he would trace Gbanda and his relations. He traced him to this side, and stayed with them here. But the chief continued to press to marry the daughter. So the man took his daughter and left and went to Sura, a place behind the gap south of Chuli. While they stayed there, the chief continued to look for them. The chief engaged his son, by name Zuzu, in searching for the man and his daughter. Zuzu engaged in a sustained search and found them. He informed the chief of their whereabouts, and conspired to get the daughter to sneak down to sleep with the chief unbeknownst to the father. She conceived, and the father got to know, after which the father said that although things had not happened as he wished, he would give his daughter in marriage to the chief but the father and mother wouldn't visit here. Anytime the chief would try and catch them, the daughter would send word to them and they would run and hide. It got to a point that the chief learned that it was because of the wife that the family couldn't be caught. He told the young men in town that tomorrow '*nyu shie*' (word travels), which they knew meant that anytime they decided to try and catch the parents, the woman would inform them. All knew that he meant Sura. So the chief and his men went and took them all of the sudden.

After the chief brought them from Sura (known from that time as Nyu Shie), the chief asked the father of his wife why he was running. He told the chief that, as his daughter was the chief's niece, if she married the chief and had a son, he wouldn't be entitled to the stool, whereas if she married another man, her son would be eligible. The chief assured his brother that, provided God is there, if there is a son, he will know what to do—"Since there is God' (*Habaa*, in the Kakala language)—so with that assurance they were OK and all stayed together.

Habaa was the son of Ehɔɔ and the chief. The chief's name was Wlojo. They were staying in harmony here when a war broke out between the Asante and the Nafana. They left to Jamma, north of the Volta (this was at the time of Sie Dongi). While they were there, another war broke out between the Nafana and the Mo. The life of Sie Dongi was taken in this war. When you go to war and the chief is killed, but you don't get his head, you haven't captured him and haven't won the war. The Nafana escaped with the body, crossed the river to this side, and buried him.

After they came back from Jamma, they weren't well settled here when they heard that the Kulango were waging war against the Nafana. They knew that they couldn't fight the Kulango, so they sought a treaty. The Kulango people said that before they will agree the Nafana had to

send a man and a woman as pacification. Because of their close relationship with the chief, Lele Abena and Yao Bediako from Habaa Katoo were sent.

When the two were taken to the Kulango chief, it took seven days to discuss what was involved. Because the Nafana could not speak Kulango, and vice versa, the discussion took place in signs. One day during the course of discussions, the Nafana man had wanted to spit, and he did it miraculously—he held out his hand and spit and it did not hit anyone—this impressed the Kulango chief. Kulango children had been disturbing the Nafana because he couldn't speak the Kulango language. Because of this the Kulango chief gave them a stick to chase the children. This is now the linguist staff which belongs to Habaa Katoo, and whoever serves the chief should hold that stick. The Chief Linguist is always from Habaa Katoo.

Negotiations were concluded with a white cola, a needle and some gold. These items were witness that the Kulango and Nafana would never come into conflict. The chief at this time was Sie Yao.

To conclude the peace, the Kulango and the Nafana were to share the cola—each to chew some in front of the public. The Nafana chief chewed his part, but the Kulango chief did not and gave it to his forerunner to throw into the river. The man threw it into the river. The following day the Kulango people went to catch fish and caught a big one. This fish was brought to the house of the chief where it was used to prepare soup with fish. As the chief was eating, he saw the cola and it shocked him—that the cola had reappeared in the very fish he was eating. He died from the shock. From that time the Kulango people united with the Nafana and agreed that they would no longer be in conflict. The issue was settled in Bouna, and the Kulango chief who died was Popi.

[Question: What happened to the people given as hostages?] The Kulango chief sent them to stay at their original village in Côte d'Ivoire (Nafa Benu). They were there when the man decided they should run away, but the woman stayed behind. Even up to today, they have relatives there from the woman who today speak Kulango. The man came to stay here.

When the family members were sent to Kulango, Sie Kofi had interest in a dance of the Kulango people called *Kete*. During the night when the Kulango people were playing he would join them. When they came back here, he begged his uncle to be able to go back and learn the dance. He was allowed, and he learned the dance. When he qualified, he stole a flute and harp and brought them here. The Kulango could not come for the things because of the relationship that had developed between themselves and the Nafana. These items are now at the Palace, and Sie Kofi was the one who brought them. *Kete* is performed at the funerals of important people or outside on important occasions when the chief travels. The flute and harp are played by men.

After the wars, when people were settled again, Nyua Kwabena asked his mother to represent the women of his house. When you are given that position, you don't do other work, so he had to find some means of living for her. During the wars when people were fighting, Nyua Kwabena collected pieces of guns. He took these to a blacksmith and had them made into gong gongs. He gave these to his mother, who used to go around and play them for alms. The specific kind of

gong gong playing that she did is called Latolo. Latolo is still a women's secret dance—men are not allowed to see. The women still play this occasionally—for example at the funerals of clan leaders. The gong gongs are distinguished by the fact that they have a hanging piece inside that makes a noise. Latolo is exclusively for Habaa Katoo and only for virtuous women within the family (those who are virgins at marriage). In addition to Latolo, Nyua Kwabena gave beads to be worn by young woman who had undergone circumcision and had been proved to be virgins. Habaa Katoo's beads were the first beads to be used in this way. They are kept in a brass jar. Today every house has its own beads, but Habaa Katoo started this practice. Habaa Katoo is the leader of the women. This position came to the house because of the role that leaders of the house played in war. The beads held by the family come from Kakala, so the family was given the honor of leading the women because of their service. The Royal Family uses the beads kept by Habaa Katoo in their rites because these are the most sanctified ones. Other families have acquired their own.

Another obligation of Habaa Katoo as leader of the women is to provide the ancestors with drinking water and food. The female head of house pours libations for the Royal Family alone.

[In a follow up interview on July 18, 2001, the family augmented the above with the following]: During times of war, the women and children of town were left in the care of Pɛ Koshia. This was when all the people were gathered together at Bui. At the time he was a young man, and he came to have this position because his uncle was a leader of war. His brother was Sie Kro and their sister Leleɛ Kotia. Her role was to be the female side leader of the family and to keep the ritual items used in marriage and circumcision rites.

The ritual items have been handed down from the time of Yaa Moo, the mother of Habaa. Yaa Moo's husband went to a river known as Taplakpɔɔ where he offered a sheep to beg the river for ritual materials with which they could decorate their brides. The river produced the items which the husband took to Yaa Moo. After some time they brought the items back to the river, but they only returned some of what the river had provided. The river rejected them. The family consulted an oracle that said that the river did not want them back, and indicated that instead they needed to offer another sheep, which they did. From that time the items became the property of the family.

Male Heads of Family

1. Habaah
2. Nyua Kwabena
3. Bediako
4. Sie Yaw Sie
5. Kwaku Gyakorby
6. Sie Kwame (at time of interview, 2001)

Female Heads of Family

1. Nɔɔnoko
2. Leleɛ Kokonyɛ
3. Leleɛ Tiowafu
4. Leleɛ Banda
5. Afua Kuma
6. Afua Banda Wo (recently deceased at time of interview, 2001)

Interviews on July 8 & 21, 2001 with Afua Kumah; Abraham Forjour; Adoa Tami.

Interviews conducted by Dr. Ann B. Stahl and Mr. Enoch Mensah.

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