

Society, Culture,  
and Drinking Patterns

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# Contributors

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## chapter 1

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# The social functions of beer drinking in Bantu Tiriki\*

Walter H. Sangree

The Tiriki people (*badiliji*) live in the southeastern portion of North Nyanza District, Kenya Colony. They are one of the twenty-two culturally similar but politically discrete Bantu tribes living in North Nyanza and Elgon Districts of Nyanza Province that are today collectively known as the Abaluhiya or Abaluyia.† British rule was established in Nyanza Province in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Since approximately the First World War, European influences have changed many of the life patterns of the Abaluhiya with increasing rapidity. Beer-drinking patterns, probably because of their intimate connection with basic aspects of Tiriki social organization, have changed less rapidly than many other Tiriki social patterns.

*Pax Britannica* and control of famine and disease have caused the dense initial population to increase probably several times over in the last 50 years; and as a result, serious overpopulation now exists in the southern portion of North Nyanza. Tiriki Location, the contemporary homeland of the Tiriki as legally instituted by the Kenya government, has a total area of just over 70 square miles, of which about 18 square miles are uninhabited

\* This chapter was written especially for this book. The material used is drawn in large measure from two unpublished manuscripts (3, 4). The field work upon which it is based was carried out by the writer and his wife during a 16-month residence in Tiriki between December 1954 and June 1956. The field trip was made possible through a grant given the writer by the Fulbright program.

† Although based primarily upon his field work undertaken among the Abaluhiya Maragoli and Vugusu, Wagner's studies (5-8) give some insight into the general cultural traits of the group as well as an indication of the degree of variation found within Abaluhiya tribes.

forest reserve or mission lands. In the remaining 52 square miles, about forty thousand Tiriki make their homes and practice their traditional hoe agriculture. This brings the average population density in the inhabited part of the location close to 750 people per square mile.

Overpopulation is the most pressing reason for the Abaluhiya people's ever-growing practice of seeking employment in regions outside of Nyanza Province. As the population increases so does the absolute dependency on wages from jobs in East African urban centers and on European "Highland" farms lying to the east of Nyanza Province. Today probably over half of the Tiriki adult males are off-tribe (*mulugulu*) at any given time, for the most part performing wage labor. Mostly it is the men between the ages of about 18 and 40 who seek wage labor off-tribe; consequently, the tribal population appears to the visitor to consist overwhelmingly of women, children, and old men.

This study focuses on the functions of beer drinking in contemporary Tiriki. In order, however, to appreciate present day Tiriki attitudes towards beer, we must consider some background material on the nature of indigenous uses of beer, as well as data on European contact, especially missionary activity. In these first few pages, a brief picture of contemporary Tiriki is presented, and the nature of widespread mission-spawned activity is sketched. This is followed by a summary description of the bi-cultural nature of the indigenous Tiriki social organization. Then the principal organizational attributes of the clans and age groups are given, and the principal beer-utilizing ceremonies of each are indicated. Next the incidence and control of misbehavior while drinking, and drunkenness are discussed. In conclusion, the relationship between beer-drinking practices and the spread of Christianity is outlined.

### The Tiriki Scene

The Tiriki scene, when viewed by the present writer for the first time, struck him as being ideal material for a Peter Brueghel landscape. Here was a bucolic beehive; the women were the workers, and the men were the drones. Women do the agriculture in Tiriki. Of a morning, women are to be seen everywhere. They balance water-filled kerosene tins on their heads as they climb homewards from valley streams; little groups of them hoe the fields; they spread maize kernels or beans to dry on huge flat-topped granite boulders that protrude at frequent intervals from the cultivated land; they carry loads of firewood back from the forest on their heads. Children are also much in evidence. Small boys brandishing sticks, some naked and some wearing dirty torn shirts, chase cattle out of maize fields back to the path and road edges where they are permitted to graze. Younger children, both male and female, race around in little groups in the occasional grassy spots, often playing soccer with a green mango or some other improvised ball—even while carrying their infant charges on their left hips.

Generally, the men do not become a conspicuous part of the scene until

around noon. At that time the tribal elders leave the community meeting grounds, where they have passed the morning chatting and hearing cases brought before them for settlement. For the next hour or so they can frequently be seen sauntering along the pathways on their way to the nearest beer drink. Typical clothing for the Tiriki elder is an ancient army greatcoat, worn over equally ancient shorts, and two hats—one pushed down on top of the other. One can always spot an elder on the lookout for beer, for in his right hand he will be clutching an immense sheath, 7 or 8 feet long, which encases a beer-drinking tube, and under his left arm he will be carrying a battered four-legged stool. The beer pots are the center of the elders' social life. It is while seated around a communal pot in a banana patch and sipping beer through long tubes that the elders exchange gossip, recollect the exploits of deceased comrades, and discuss and, in effect, often settle disputes of one sort or another even before they are presented to them for arbitration in the community courts. Around midafternoon, when the elders' beer drinks are already well under way, the younger men who are not away working collect around beer pots of their own or settle in the back rooms of local African stores to drink European beer or illegally distilled liquor (*iwalagi*). Most of this younger set is comprised of men home "on leave" from jobs off-location and men who hold salaried positions in the administrative bureaucracy.

During the weeks following the semi-annual harvest when there is plenty of grain with which to make beer, drinks are virtually an everyday occurrence; from evening until after dark it is common to hear if not see old men chatting as they saunter home after a lively beer drink. In the words of the Tiriki elders, "It's a tough world" (*shibala shidinyu*) on those days when a beer drink cannot be found within walking distance.

Throughout most of the day one or another *askari* (tribal policeman or messenger) or headman can be seen pedaling his bicycle along the graded dirt automobile road that runs the length of the tribe, on his way to and from the location center at Hamisi. Occasionally an overcrowded bus traveling between Kisumu and Eldoret grinds by covering all it passes with dust. Mission-directed or mission-derived church and educational activities probably provide the passing traveler with more evidence of European inroads upon Tiriki life than either the British-sponsored tribal administrative system or the European transportation technology.

From any high point in Tiriki, several primary schools are usually visible; they are often located on hilltops, and they are easily recognizable from a distance because the long rectangular shapes of the thatched school buildings contrast with the thatched conical roofs of the ordinary round huts generally found in the homesteads. Children in rows doing calisthenics frequently grace the school grounds. On Sundays many of the schools, all of which are mission run, are used as churches. Women make up three quarters or more of most church congregations. After the Sunday morning services, processions form at the school-church grounds and then stream over the

country paths under the midday sun on their way to banana grove "memorial services," singing and drumming syncopated songs of salvation.

The first Christian mission station was established in Tiriki in 1902 by a group of evangelically oriented American Quakers. Their mission at Kaimosi, Tiriki, known as the Friends African Mission, has remained the principal center of missionary activity in the tribe. In recent decades, the Salvation Army and the Pentecostal Assembly of East Africa (Canadian in origin) have also gained a considerable number of Tiriki converts. In addition, primarily since 1950 or so, Roman Catholic Mill Hill Mission activities, and the proselytizing efforts of several independent African Christian sects have met with growing success in Tiriki. Today a comprehensive network of community churches and primary schools, operated, for the most part, by African pastors and teachers, extends to within easy walking distance of everyone in the tribe. It will be seen that these mission-spawned church groups provide a very important core of religious beliefs and social loyalties for otherwise increasingly disorganized segments of the Tiriki population.

The Protestant missionaries in Tiriki operate intermediate schools for boys and for girls, a primary teacher's training center, a Bible school, and a well-equipped hospital, all of which draw students or patients not only from Tiriki but also from other tribes. The missions have been almost entirely responsible for the establishment and administration of the school system in the tribe, the value of which is becoming more and more appreciated by the Tiriki as they seek better jobs in Nairobi and other East African urban centers.

The weekly scene varies little from one part of the tribe to the next. The terrain and climate are similar enough to make the seasonal shifts in agricultural activities and abundance about the same throughout the tribe, but, as one proceeds northeast, the country grows less crowded, the huts are progressively further apart, and the rusticity is more pronounced. The hills and valleys are less precipitous, and there are fewer granite outcroppings; European-imported Australian eucalyptus trees more often break the eye's sweep, and large tracts of dense hardwood rain forests protected by the Friends African Mission and the African District Council preserve a picture of what most of northeastern Tiriki looked like as late as 1902 when the last elephant was seen roaming the area.

### Social Organization and Drinking Patterns

The Tiriki indigenous social structure is a blend of two distinct social traditions. Tiriki social structure can be likened to a rope of three strands: clans (*zimbamba*), age groups (*maxulu*), and territorial units (*zisomo*; *zimbihya*). The clan organization is clearly of Abaluhya origin. Although clan groupings in Tiriki have been deprived of much of the political significance they generally retain in other Abaluhya tribes, they are nevertheless the organizational arena in which a large number of the Tiriki's signifi-

cant social relationships are carried out and the bulk of the tribe's cultural tradition preserved. The age-group and territorial organizations are, in contrast, of Nilo-Hamitic origin. Even though they supply the principal indigenous political framework for the Tiriki, the tribe remains Bantu in language and predominantly Abaluhiya in culture.

Clan organization supplies the underlying framework for the ancestor cult which is the tribe's principal indigenous religious system. Today the clan-based ancestor cult has largely been supplanted by Christian practices. The traditional ancestral supplications, so replete with beer-drinking ceremonials, are only carried out by a rapidly dwindling minority of tribal elders, but they are well remembered by all adult Tiriki, and they continue to color contemporary attitudes toward beer drinking. It seems relevant, therefore, to outline the nature of these ancestral supplications.

The homestead ancestral shrine (*lusambwa*) is the place where the rites of the ancestor cult are most often performed. Often (and preferably) the keeper of a homestead shrine is also the homestead head, and the eldest son of the deceased previous homestead head. The shrine is usually under the eaves of the granary in which the crops of the homestead's senior wife are stored. Eleusine from this granary is employed in making the beer (*malwa*) used in supplications at the ancestral shrine. The granary is usually about 15 or 20 feet in front of the entrance of the senior wife's hut.

The ancestral shrine, situated on the side of the granary facing the hut, consists of two parts. One part is a slender branch of the *lusiyoŋa* tree which is renowned for its great size, toughness, and resistance to rotting. Known as the branch of the ancestral shrine (*musaala gu lusambwa*), it is placed so that it extends from the ground up to the eaves of the granary. The second part of the shrine is several—usually three—small stones, called "the stones of the ancestral spirits" (*majina ji misambwa*), that are planted around the base of the *lusiyoŋa* branch. One stone is placed there for the deceased father of the homestead, the second stone for the present homestead head, and a third stone is added by the homestead elder, usually for his eldest son, after that son has a wife and children of his own.

Occasions characterized by trouble or stress and times of transition and celebration (which also inevitably carry elements of stress) traditionally give rise to supplications of the ancestral spirits at the *lusambwa*. Illness, for example, may induce a homestead head to hold a supplication. Perhaps, with a diviner's aid, the head will conclude that the illness has come because the ancestral spirits are feeling forgotten and consequently are no longer giving their strength to the people of the homestead. Thus, it may be decided to hold a special supplication and gathering of remembrance (*liluxiza*) at the ancestral shrine. Before the widespread acceptance of Christianity by the Tiriki, supplications and offerings were inevitably made at the ancestral shrine of the homestead principally involved on the occasion of wedding or funeral celebrations, at the conclusion of a youth's initiation, etc.

When a major supplication is to be held at the ancestral shrine, the homestead head has some beer brewed, usually by his first wife, and a specially selected chicken (*ingoxo ingasizwe*) slaughtered. Then, in the company of the community ritual elders (*bassalisi*) and as many other elders (*basaxulu*) of the community (both clansmen and neighbors) as wish to attend, the homestead's ritual elder puts a few drops of blood from the slaughtered bird on each of the ancestral stones. Next he places a bit of eleusine porridge or mush on the stones, and finally he tops the offerings with drops of beer. As the homestead ritual elder sprinkles on the beer he supplicates the ancestral spirits and asks their blessing. The supplication is generally simple and direct, and repeated at each stone. The following is an example:

*Guga belu mungwi malwa bulahi!*  
*Xumenyi ni milembe!*  
*Bandu bosi bizanga; misambwa yanzi mungwi malwa bulahi.*  
*Xandi xujendi bulahi; xumenyi bulahi.*

Our forefathers, drink up the beer!  
 May we dwell in peace!  
 Everyone is gathering; be pleased, oh ancestral spirits.  
 And may we be well; may we remain well.

The traditional way of showing friendship or hospitality—indeed, of doing anyone a special favor in Tiriki—is to serve food followed by beer. Thus, it is quite in keeping that similar activity should be extended to the ancestral spirits when trying to restore their favor and aid. The ritual elders of the community, who come to help beseech the ancestors, eat the sacrificial chicken (on very special occasions, a goat or some other large animal may be used instead) and drink beer through beer tubes (*zinsexa*) from a pot placed between the ancestral stones. After the beer drinking is ended, a small pot of beer is left for the ancestral spirits dwelling too far away to partake of the main drink.

There are many different occasions, all more or less stressful, on which the ancestral spirits are beseeched and remembered at the homestead ancestral shrines. Not only are supplications at the *lusambwa* held as part of the regular *rites de passage* and at times of illness, but they also are performed as part of special lustral ceremonies (*miiluxa*) held to purify warriors after they have killed in battle (before tribal warfare was abolished), to restore peace between kinsmen or neighbors who have been fighting, and to neutralize the particular contamination (*buxwana*) believed to accompany the birth of twins. Also, the occurrence of any of a whole category of acts and events which the Tiriki and other Abaluhya believe are unnatural and dangerous (*luswa*) demand that lustrations be held by the ritual elders to prevent disaster from befalling the individual, persons, or groups involved. Although many of these lustral ceremonies are not held at the ancestral shrines, it is common in conjunction with such ceremonies to leave offerings of food and beer and to supplicate the ancestral spirits at the ancestral shrines of the homestead or homesteads involved.



The Tiriki assume that the ancestral spirits are delighted to join any special gathering of living descendants, and a basic concern is that the ancestral spirits should feel that they are remembered and welcome participants at all such important occasions. All Tiriki agree that the ancestral spirits have a special predilection for beer; indeed the presence of beer is believed to be a beacon that will make the ancestral spirits aware of a special occasion among the living as nothing else will. Once attracted by the beer, the ancestral spirits are supposed to be flattered if they discover that they have not been forgotten at the festive gathering; pleased by the offerings of food and drink and the remembrance showed them, the ancestral spirits may be moved to grant the party makers their continued and even special support.

To this day, when a man of property dies, a beer-drinking postfuneral meeting (*lubego*) of the lineage and neighborhood is held to honor his memory and settle his estate. The inheritance patterns articulated on such occasions are in strict accordance with lineage and clan affiliations. Some of the more devout Christian relatives of the deceased join the women (who today are nearly 100 per cent Christian) in drinking tea on such occasions, but the majority of Tiriki elders persist in feeling that only a beer drink will really make the deceased feel kindly disposed towards his living relatives; certainly most pagan elders expect to have such a memorial beer drink held for them after they die.

The Tiriki age-group organization is not an indigenous Abaluhiya institution, the Tiriki assert, and all evidence indicates that the age-group organization is something they have received from the Terik.\* During the last 150 or 200 years Abaluhiya lineage segments and family groups have been migrating from the north and west into the region, now known as Tiriki, which was already thinly inhabited by the Nilo-Hamitic Terik who are a herdspeople and an offshoot of the Nandi tribe. The Terik allowed the Abaluhiya to settle in the region provided they agreed to become incorporated into the Terik military organization.

The Terik age groups supply the principal organizational frame for their military regiments; thus, perforce, every Abaluhiya immigrant was obliged to undergo initiation into an age group, if of military age, and, in any event, to accept post-puberty circumcision and age-group initiation for his sons. Initiation converted the Abaluhiya immigrants into full-fledged members of the Terik tribe; thus these Abaluhiya immigrants became known as Tiriki (*badiliji*), the Bantu linguistic rendering of "Terik."

Differences of opinion and belief concerning female initiation (the Terik clitoridectomize the women as a prerequisite to marriage, while the Tiriki find the custom repugnant, and have constantly refused to do so) have

\* The Tiriki are unique among the Abaluhiya in having joined with the Terik in their Nandi-type circumcision and age-group organization. No data on the Terik-Tiriki initiation and age-group organization has been published. However, the works of Huntingford (1) and Peristiany (2) do give accounts of the very similar Nandi and Kipsigis age-group organizations.

proved an effective deterrent to intermarriage between Terik and the Tiriki, and thus probably have in large measure been responsible for the Terik and Tiriki maintaining discrete linguistic and cultural identities in spite of their intense and extended military, political, and ritual interaction. Today the Terik are outnumbered by the Tiriki perhaps ten to one; but continuing respect is shown them by the Tiriki because they were the people who first permitted straggling remnants of Abaluhiya lineages to settle in the region, and first initiated these newcomers into the Terik age groups.

The Tiriki age-group organization has ramifications that extend far beyond the military realm. To this day it is of enormous political significance, and it affects directly or indirectly most of the major areas of social activity. The social groupings, rankings, statuses, and roles it institutes are manifest in everything from the largest tribal and subtribal groupings to everyday intrafamilial relationships. Indeed the age groups traditionally supply the principal political and ritual basis for Tiriki corporate action. The nature of the Tiriki age-group organization is, briefly, as follows.

There are seven designated age groups, each embracing an age span of approximately 15 years. The system is cyclical, a span of about 105 years being covered from the time a named group starts through the cycle to when it appears again at the cycle bottom. Boys are circumcised and initiated into an age group after puberty. The initiation involves an extensive cycle of rituals performed during a 6-month, initiate-seclusion period, and is held approximately every 4 years. Thus each age group generally receives recruits from three successive initiations.

Before the abolition of tribal warfare by the British around 1900, the age group immediately senior to the group still receiving initiates was responsible for carrying on offensive and retaliatory raids. At approximately 15-year intervals, handing-over ceremonies were held which caused each age group to move up a grade to the social functions of the group immediately senior to it, and which also opened a new age group to initiation. One result of these ceremonies, then, was the retirement of the warriors to positions of senior warriors, who mostly confined their warrior activities to advisory roles and defensive efforts, while the erstwhile initiates succeeded to warrior status. The former senior warriors for their part became judicial elders, and the former judicial elders became ritual elders.

The formal change-over ceremonies, held every 15 years, have not been held since before 1900—probably having been forbidden by the British in an effort to prevent the installation of a new group of warriors. The cycle of age groups, however, still continues; a new age group is now opened to initiation about every 15 years, simply in conjunction with the beginning of every third or fourth initiation period. Furthermore the graded statuses of the four adult age groups (in traditional terms: the warriors, the senior warriors, the judicial elders, and the ritual elders) are still observed, even though the social roles expected of group members in each status have changed considerably.

Initiation marks the change from the vastly inferior status of women and children to the full tribal status of manhood. In the strictest sense only a man initiated into a Tiriki age group is a real Tiriki; women and children are merely tribal appendages—Tiriki only by virtue of their husbands' or fathers' age-group memberships. A whole set of customs, attitudes, social responsibilities, etc., running the gamut from separation while eating and in most recreational activities to markedly different social responsibilities, divide the initiated from the uninitiated. Then, within the initiated portion of the tribe, the four graded social statuses mentioned above affect the type of social activities and the homestead, community, and tribal responsibilities undertaken by members of each age group. During the course of initiation, it is graphically and forcefully impressed on all initiates that one must show deference and respect towards members of age groups senior to one's own, and that members of the two "elder" age groups must be shown particular respect and honor. Also, a man regards others of his own age group as special comrades. When a choice must be made between age-group loyalties and other affiliations, both indigenous and of European origin, the age-group loyalties almost always win out.

Beer is as important to the ritual of initiation as it is in supplication ceremonies of the clan-derived ancestor cult, perhaps even more so. Indeed an under-average grain harvest usually militates for the postponement of initiation for a year because granaries must be full to supply the grain necessary for the four tribe-wide beer drinks and the many smaller beer drinks that tradition demands be held during the 6-month initiation period. The seclusion period following circumcision is divided into four major stages, each with its own ceremonial and instructional program, and the opening of every stage is marked by a beer drink held in the circumcision groves (*bibanda*) scattered throughout the tribe. Such a drink is attended not only by the initiates but also may be attended by all members of the tribe already initiated. In addition the arrangement meetings held by the elders before circumcision must all be lightened with beer, and several ceremonies which terminate initiation, held in the hilltop sacred groves of each subtribe, in the subtribal communal meeting grounds, and in the homesteads of the initiates, all call for the consumption of quantities of beer. Finally, the initiation elders in charge of the circumcision and initiation procedures, and their assistants, expect the families of the initiates to keep them well supplied with beer for refreshment during the entire initiation period.

Initiation occurs during only 6 months out of every 4 years (just in the last decade the initiation ceremonies have been abbreviated and the total initiation period length reduced to 3 months), but informal community beer parties, where men tend to gather around different beer pots according to age groups, are held with considerable frequency whenever sufficient grain is available for beer making. During the harvest season (the fertile soil and plentiful rainfall of Tiriki generally manages to produce two grain crops a year), it is not uncommon for two or more beer drinks to be held

a week in a community, and it is rare indeed for a beer-thirsting elder not to be able to find a beer drink to join in another community within easy walking distance. After the harvest the frequency of drinks gradually tapers off. For a month or so before the new harvest, there is often no beer at all. This is the period when there is generally nothing home grown left to eat but beans (which are considered a very inferior repast indeed), and sometimes people must even buy grain from the north to sustain themselves. Although starvation is extremely rare during these periods, and actual famine conditions have occurred only three times during the last 50 years (each famine was quickly alleviated by government shipments of grain), people feel deprived; chatter constantly turns to "hunger" and thirst.

The informal community beer drinks reflect the Terik-derived multiclan community organization of the Tiriki, and do much to foster a sense of community solidarity. Community elders, after hearing and settling local disputes over such matters as divorce settlements, delinquent bridewealth payments, assault, adultery, property damage, and the like, retire to a beer drink whenever possible to rehash the highlights of the morning's proceedings and often to discuss—and sometimes, for all intents and purposes, settle—a case that they know will be pending in the near future. Also, at such gatherings, news is exchanged and perhaps opinions developed about current British administrative efforts at soil conservation, taxation, and livestock control; or perhaps the latest mission scheme is hashed over, such as a plan to build a church in a community where a rival Christian sect is already established. The most influential elders chiefs of every community regularly travel to the Tribal Center to attend the Chief's weekly tribal meeting, and it would be a mistake not to recognize how much the nature and the effectiveness of the chief's tribal policies are determined by the discussions the community elders hold around the beer pots.

Younger men of the junior age groups seldom join an elders' banana grove beer drink; but they often have concurrent drinks, sometimes in a neighboring grove but more often today in a nearby hut. Of course warfare, except for the occasional soliloquy on an adventure while in the King's African Rifles during the second World War, is no longer a topic of conversation and debate for the younger men, but the merits of various off-location jobs and of different European employers are often discussed; more strictly local matters such as amatory exploits and the latest neighborhood dance are also reviewed. Ridicule, generally in the form of jesting and mimicry, leveled during a beer drink against the individual or clique commonly felt to be indulging in undesirable behavior, serves as an important mechanism of social control within the community and tribe.

The frequent and widespread drinking of beer described in the preceding pages may have conjured up for the reader a mental image of chronic tribal overindulgence, in which life for most of the year is a never-ending round of drunken parties and hangovers. Actually this is far from the truth, for several reasons. In the first place, both traditionally and today neither the

women nor uncircumcised youth take part in these drinking parties; indeed except for the occasional ceremonial sip, and filched gourdful, only the women past menopause have ever been permitted to drink beer. This, as we shall see later, significantly affected the spread of Christianity in Tiriki.

Second, Tiriki beer is low enough in alcoholic content so that it cannot normally be expected to produce intoxication unless drunk rapidly in rather large quantities. Made traditionally of eleusine flour (today mill-ground maize is substituted for hand-ground eleusine) which is roasted, watered, and then allowed to ferment in huge earthenware pots, the resultant thick fermented liquid is placed in somewhat smaller pots and diluted with hot water at the time it is drunk. Although a strainer at the end of each beer tube prevents the drinkers from getting the more solid portion of the brew, they are nevertheless sipping a thin gruel. The prevalent Tiriki feeling is that the stomach is full and the appetite for both food and drink assuaged before any but the mildest intoxication can occur. To the present writer's knowledge no laboratory analysis of the alcoholic content of Tiriki beer has been made, but he found that a couple of tumblers (about 15 ounces) of undiluted Tiriki beer, quickly quaffed, produced the same sort of mild euphoria and slight feeling of unsteadiness that he usually experiences after rapidly drinking two 12-ounce cans of American beer on an empty stomach.

The Tiriki elders, who probably frequently consume more than a quart of beer during the course of an afternoon's drinking, typically saunter home with bloodshot eyes, heavy breath, and unsteady gait, expressing their feeling of well-being through song, soliloquy, and effusive greetings to all passers-by. Nevertheless, the writer never saw an elder lose control of his actions as a consequence of his attending a community beer drink. If there are those who might actually become intoxicated from the beer, the web of social attitudes and expectancies around beer drinking evidently are such as to preclude their drinking enough to lose control or express their euphoria in a disruptive or abusive manner.

A mystical attitude of almost religious reverence is still widely held by the elders towards locally brewed beer, undoubtedly because of its traditional use in ritual and ceremonial occasions. The majority of the elders have given up maintenance of the ancestral cult ritual and have ceded religious leadership, at crisis rites and on other special occasions, to the Christian clergy. Of course, in doing so, they have disavowed major responsibility for troubles that befall the land and the people. They still feel, however, that the ancestral spirits are bound to be attracted by beer, and thus be near at hand at every drink. Even though the ancestral spirits may be no longer religiously supreme, the pagan elders still feel that no good and probably evil results from displeasing the ancestral spirits by misbehavior around the beer pots.

Traditionally beer drinks are considered an effective way of ridding oneself of the company of witches. The Tiriki say that the witches (*baloji*) are those individuals who because of an innate evil predisposition use both magi-

cal and natural means to bring harm and death to other members of the community and tribe. It is believed that witches fear to join the beer drinks because the ancestral spirits wouldn't tolerate the presence of witches, might cause them to sicken and die, and then relegate their ghosts to the bottom of Lake Victoria. Continued misbehavior at beer drinks (indeed, continued unusual behavior in any quarter of life) is grounds for suspecting an individual of being a witch; thus a man is prone to take seriously an admonition by the elders to behave with more decorum while drinking. Nowadays these traditional attitudes provide a subtle incentive for any person who has difficulty in holding his liquor to give up drinking altogether and become a pillar of one of the Protestant Christian churches in Tiriki, all of which preach total abstinence.

Some pagans interpret a man's conversion to Christianity as evidence of his being a witch, while the Christians, for their part, assert that the ancestral spirits are in fact nothing other than Satan's agents; some Christians even go so far as to say that the ancestral spirits are probably ghosts of deceased witches.

A growing number of Tiriki beer drinkers are essentially little concerned about the power of the ancestral spirits and have lost much of the traditional feeling of reverence towards beer. For them, the fear that misconduct while drinking may displease the elders, bring them the elders' curse, or, even worse, move the elders to direct their vast resources of magical power against them, serves as an effective deterrent against rowdiness while drinking, and indeed against chronic misconduct in any sphere of life. The elders have a virtual working monopoly over the use of destructive magic, because it is believed that using such magic deprives the practitioner of his fertility; thus only elders no longer concerned about having more children feel free to employ whatever power of this sort they may hold. Within the elder group itself misconduct at a beer party is extremely rare because the ostracism to which the delinquent elder will be subjected not only deprives him of the opportunity of attending future beer drinks but also bars him from the other regular judicial and social prerogatives of elderdom.

Drunkenness occasionally occurs in Tiriki today, and its incidence is probably on the increase. The writer knows of no case of drunkenness occurring from local beer alone. Sometimes a bit of local illegally distilled liquor (*ivalagi*) is added to the local beer, but seldom is the amount of alcohol drunk increased enough by this to result in anything more than a slight increase in the volume and speed of chatter around the beer pot. Instances of drunkenness are almost always the result of two or three friends acquiring a pint or more of illegally distilled liquor and then retiring to an empty hut or shady spot to quaff it off in a matter of minutes. This results in a few moments of extreme garrulousness and hyper-activity quickly followed by stupor and sleep.\*

\* The popularity of European-type bottled beer is on the rise among younger members of the tribe in spite of its high cost relative to the price of local beer. Legal European-distilled liquor, however, is out of the price range of all but a handful of

Seldom are Tiriki violent or destructive when drunk, and, unless a person tries to interfere with a beer party when in this state, it is not common for any corporate or community action to be taken against a drunken man. If an intoxicated person harms someone or destroys property, it is up to the injured party (or parties) to bring the matter either before the local court or directly to the British-instituted subdistrict court. The result of either action is usually that the defendant is obliged to pay the injured party appropriate indemnity, plus a small fee to the local elders, or a more substantial fine to the subdistrict court. The community, in the person of the community elders, occasionally takes action against an individual (or group) who has become troublesome in his use of local distilled liquor. To date it remains impossible for an individual or group in Tiriki to attain sufficient privacy either to make or to distribute locally distilled liquor for any length of time without the community elders becoming aware of the fact. Since to do either is a Crown offense, indiscreet, impolitic, or undesirable behavior on the part of any or all so involved may lead to tipoffs by the elders, arrests by the Kenya Police, and consequent jail terms for the offenders.

#### Persistence and Change

The preceding pages should suffice to show the close relationship between Tiriki drinking patterns and Tiriki social organization. Not only does beer have strong mystical connotations because of its constant traditional utilization in religious and ritual ceremony, but in addition it will be recalled that those not in the age groups—the uninitiated, the outcasts, and the strangers—were not permitted to partake in any of the beer drinks, except occasionally on a highly tentative basis.

The coming of the missionaries and the subsequent multitude of religious and social changes they have fostered have in no way destroyed the intimate relationship between drinking practices and social organization; indeed the missionaries have probably strengthened it. Certainly the course of missionizing in Tiriki has been strongly affected by both the missionary viewpoint on alcohol and the traditional Tiriki orientation.

The missionaries introduced a new notion to Tiriki, namely that beer is evil (*damanu*) and beer drinking a sin (*bwoni*). All the missions in Tiriki, with the exception of a small, rather recently established Catholic mission and one small, politically suspect separatist church, preach and profess that the drinking of alcoholic beverages is incompatible with leading a Christian life. During the early portion of the writer's stay in Tiriki,

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Tiriki; thus those who seek hard liquor must almost invariably themselves distill or purchase the local version of "moonshine" (*iwalagi*). Made from sour maize mash, almost colorless and clear, it is very strong and often quite raw. Occasionally the wrong fraction of distillation occurs; several hours of agony preceded the death of one man who drank without restraint from an untried batch during the writer's stay in Tiriki.

missionaries reported to him that the Tiriki have been less receptive to Christianity than the surrounding Abaluhiya tribes, and that all but the most intelligent Tiriki men still reject Christianity because of the appeal of beer. The Tiriki elders, both pagan and Christian, very quickly made it clear to the writer that they themselves classified all beer drinkers as good Tiriki (age-group members in good standing), and all abstainers as Christians (and highly suspect, if older men). Thus abstinence has come to be a general symbol to both missionary and African of Christian church membership.

A review of who has been converted to Christianity, who have remained steadfast members, and who have become "backsliders," during the last 54 years (1902-1956) in Tiriki, reveals that, quite consistently, those who have become and remained Christians are either people who are uninitiated and therefore unqualified to participate in age-group beer drinks or people who have been discouraged or completely forbidden by the elders to participate in age-group activities of which beer drinking is an integral part. Indeed, during the first 25 years of missionizing, very few people except those excluded from the Tiriki age groups were attracted by the alternative affiliation and status offered by mission church membership. In other words, virtually all the converts to Tiriki missions during this period were tribal aliens, outcasts, women who wished to escape from uncongenial husbands, and children wooed by food and clothing or sent by their parents to work on the mission coffee plantation for money, and sometimes also to attend school.

Then in 1927 the government-appointed Tiriki chief, Chief Amiani, was converted to Christianity. Although a member in good standing of his age group when appointed as headman in 1911, he tried to continue in a senior-warrior, executive-type role as chief even after he had reached the age when his age group had retired to a judicial role. Thus, by 1927, his waning popularity both within his own age group and with the other age groups may have inclined him to turn to the missionaries for a new source of support and prestige.

Around 1932 the mission persuaded the converted Tiriki chief to legislate against Christian women being forced to brew beer for their pagan husbands. Women had customarily brewed the beer for their menfolk's beer parties, which are an integral part of initiated male sociability and also of the initiation feasts. The women, however, were never included in the parties. After this legislative decision, women started joining the churches in increasing numbers, and today hardly a woman can be found who is not a church member. Thus they have escaped the drudgery of brewing beer.

The chief's edict did not succeed in making Tiriki a beerless tribe; it did, however, shift the burden of beer preparation from the women to the men. Further, the traditional millet (eleusine) beer was completely forsaken for beer made from maize in which the fermentation process is seeded by the addition of a few millet sprouts. The shift to maize beer undoubtedly would



have taken place even if the women had continued to make beer, because of its relative cheapness and its quickness and ease of preparation. Tradition, however, which assigned all grinding to women, obliged the men immediately to turn to maize flour as the base for their beer because maize could be ground into flour at the mission-introduced power mills, while eleusine had to be ground by hand.

Church membership has come to mean a great deal more to the women than simply an escape from beer-making. Traditionally, women's legal, economic, and principal religious statuses were all mediated through their agnatic or affinal male kinsmen. The churches have not really enfranchised women in these areas because the principal church authority positions are held by men. Today, however, husbands are often absent from home for extended periods of work in European areas, and the local church groups fulfill many of the social functions once performed by the adult men for the women of their homesteads. Not only do the church groups minister to the more strictly religious needs of the women, but also the village church pastor may act as a woman's jural representative in the absence of her husband, father, or brother. Finally, the women now organize agricultural work bees, with accompanying semi-formal tea parties, on the basis of local church affiliation. Indeed, church tea parties have become the women's equivalent of the traditional beer parties of the men.

During the last two decades the economic advantages of European-type schooling, which can be acquired in Tiriki only through mission-run schools, have become more and more widely recognized by both Christian and pagan. Consequently many pagan fathers have been sending their sons to school even though this often means that the sons have nominally become Christians. After adolescence most of these students submit to the traditional Tiriki initiation with its beer-filled ceremonies. In consequence they are regarded as "backsliders" by both the missionaries and steadfast African Converts. Many never reinstate themselves in the Christian churches and never return to school to complete their intermediate and secondary education. A minority, however, curb their appetite for tribal beer and sociability, make their peace with the missionaries, and return to school to complete their intermediate and secondary education.

Some of these go on to become primary school teachers and sometimes church pastors. Thence, with the aid of their superior education and mission and church backing, a man may achieve a position in the British-instituted tribal government. Shortly after getting the governmental job, he almost inevitably starts attending the community beer drinks of his age group. Consequently he gains the companionship and judicial support of the local and tribal elders, and is but little disturbed when he is suspended from his church leadership positions. Formerly a man usually lost his school-teaching job if he started drinking beer; but today, with a growing shortage of teachers, the missions seem to be more tolerant of beer-drinking school-teachers.

Today, just as 25 years ago, men excluded from the Tiriki age-group organization (uninitiated aliens, witch suspects, and outcasts), form most of the senior African mission church leadership in Tiriki. Young men, eager to further their education and help launch their political careers through mission affiliation, form most of the junior male Tiriki church membership and leadership. It is the uninitiated Tiriki, however, those who cannot and never could partake in the age-group beer drinks—the women and children—who comprise the overwhelming majority of Tiriki church membership. The Tiriki age-group elders are quite content with the younger men's present relationship with the missions; the younger men profit by mission education and church connections without incurring a lasting loyalty among aliens, witch suspects, and women, thanks to the missions' stand on beer.

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