

a religious cattle-cult, rain-charm, ancestor-worship, a cult of trees, and others. Since also archaeological data indicate that tribes akin to pre-dynastic Egyptians lived as far south as the Sudan and only later penetrated into northern regions, the countries of the Upper Nile may be regarded as a home of this group of peoples. This theory is supported by the fact that a civilization similar to that of the Tehenu is also found in the Eastern Horn (Punt). The Nilotic pole-cult (burial-pole) may be mentioned as a witness of this influence.

In comparatively recent times Nilotic tribes borrowed political institutions and views similar to those of Sennaar and Abyssinia. As such Fräulein Schmidl mentions the idea of the sacred kingdom, marriage in the royal family between brother and sister, the high position of the king's mother, the killing of princes.

These elements, and particularly those of the Tehenu period, exist, however, not in the Upper Nile region only, but have, like many features of the Capsien civilization, found a large distribution. The similarities in the material and mental culture between present-day Africa and ancient Egypt may find their explanation in this common basis.

#### *Land Tenure among the Ibo of Nigeria.*

This brief note on land tenure among the Ibo of Nigeria may be of interest, as there is a good deal of confusion on the subject of land tenure in West Africa, due partly to the preconception among many Europeans that all native lands are 'communal', and partly to the fact that native custom is not static but varies according to conditions and modifies itself when necessary.

The various types of land in Iboland may be classified as follows: (a) Lands which are sacred or taboo, (b) virgin forest, (c) farmland held in common by the members of a village, kindred, or extended-family, (d) individual holdings.

The first class of lands includes sacred groves surrounding the shrines of public cults (such as *Ale*, the earth deity, and *Ekwesu*, the spirit of evil). It also includes the taboo lands or 'evil bush' known as *aja ofia*. In both these cases the ownership is regarded as vested in deities or spirits and no one would normally attempt or be allowed to use any fraction of it for farming purposes. It is a sign of the times, however, that cases have occurred in crowded areas of individuals clearing a patch of extensive taboo land in order to plant yams, being prepared to take the risk of being killed by spirits. If a farmer is bold enough to take this step (without interference from the elders) and farms for two years in succession without suffering misfortune, he becomes the owner of the land, which henceforth ceases to be regarded as taboo.

The next type of land is the virgin forest which has remained unused for farming purposes because nobody has required it or because the village had

forbidden farming there lest it should lose its use as a means of defence or as shade or as a source of supplies of wood or fibre. If a piece of uncleared forest is of no obvious use to the village, any one is at liberty to clear it for farming purposes, and the land so cleared becomes his private farm.<sup>1</sup> He cannot be deprived of it and he can pledge it or transmit it to his children. But if there is any uncertainty as to whether the village may require the uncleared patch, the would-be farmer must first obtain the permission of the local elders.

The third class of land is farmland held in common by an entire village, kindred, or extended-family, being formally apportioned out afresh each time it is farmed.<sup>2</sup> It is land held in reserve for the benefit of the whole group (in addition to individual holdings) and cannot therefore be pledged without the consent of the group as a whole. Firstly, as regards farmland common to the whole village, this is generally known as *ale oha* (land of the people) or *ale nweko* (land held in common). In some districts<sup>3</sup> there are still large tracts of rich lands held in this way, but they are usually at a considerable distance from the village, the farmlands nearer home being held by individuals or small families. In other districts (e.g. at Ache and Inyi) the only farmlands held communally by the village or village groups are infertile lands of little use save for growing cassava. The richer lands have long since been apportioned out among the various kindreds and families. In other localities (e.g. at Owerri) there is no farmland held by the entire community.

Land held in common by a kindred or extended-family is known as '*ala ndicie*' or '*obozoku*' (ancestral land). As already stated, it is land apportioned annually to members of the kindred (in addition to their private holdings), and it can only be pledged to strangers by consent of the whole group. Where the kindred has split up into various branches it will generally be found that the land formerly held in common by the whole kindred has been subdivided among the various branches. Thus at Owerri the Onumono kindred, which consists of several branches, has now no land held by the whole group. The land formerly possessed by the entire kindred has long ago been parcelled out among the various branches. One of these is the Umu Okore. Like the other branches the Umu Okore received its share of land, but being hard pressed for money it decided to pledge a portion of this land.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Laws of Manu (India): 'He who clears a piece of land is the owner of it' (ix. 44).

<sup>2</sup> Unless it is so extensive that formal division is unnecessary.

<sup>3</sup> Thus at Adâyi (Nsukka Division) land is so abundant that most of it is held communally and the necessity has not arisen for apportioning it out to families and individuals.

<sup>4</sup> The head of a family may have to pledge a piece of family land to pay off a debt left by the previous head, and he may insist on doing so against the wishes of the family, if the family has offered no assistance in paying off the debt.

Some time ago, it is said, the land so pledged was redeemed by the present head of the Okore group and retained by him for his personal use, on the ground that none of the elders of the Umu Oroke had assisted him in redeeming the land. This led to a dispute, and at a meeting of the elders of the local group (Ororo Njo) it was held that the head of Umu Oroke had acted within his rights. If the other members of the Okore family wish to share the land they must pay to the head of the family some share of the redemption price.

It should be noted that strangers who have joined a local or kindred group have no automatic right to a share in the common land of the group. They may, however, be given a share as an act of grace, and would be expected to give a gift of a few yams at harvest to the senior elder or elders of the group. The same remark applies to slaves. In some villages (e.g. at Itika in Awgu Division) there is an old-standing complaint that land and economic trees<sup>1</sup> lent to slaves have, since the abolition of the status of slavery, become the property of the ex-slaves. Some of the former slave-owners or their heritors are content to leave their ex-slaves in possession, but others are eager to recover some at least of the land and trees, and to prevent the ex-slaves from pledging the land.

Next there is the land on which compounds are built, together with the adjoining plots. This land belongs to the household occupying it. If the household removes to another site it retains its rights in this land. By common consent the household may give this land or a portion of it in pledge, but as a rule the household (or it may be an 'onunne') prefers to retain full rights over former sites for religious reasons. To give such lands in pledge would usually be regarded as an offence against the ancestors who lie buried there.<sup>2</sup> Sites of former habitations are known as 'uhu' land.

Finally, and most important of all, comes the land which is individually held. This is land handed on by father to son, or acquired by clearing virgin forest or in return for a loan. In many village-groups there is scarcely any land at all within the recognized boundary of the group which is not held by individuals. Lands so held can be pledged by the holder without reference to any one, and it is common practice for a man to pledge his land in order to cancel a debt, pay a bride-price, or even to raise the means of paying his tax. Land which has been pledged is normally redeemable at any time<sup>3</sup> at

<sup>1</sup> e.g. Oil palms, coco nuts, oil bean, and mahogany trees.

<sup>2</sup> It is surprising therefore that Archdeacon Basden who has lived among the Ibo for 34 years should have stated at the International Congress of Anthropological Sciences that among the Ibo the ancestors do not appear to have much influence on land tenure. They have a great deal of influence.

<sup>3</sup> But not of course until after harvest if the land is under cultivation. A pledgee at Akabo (and no doubt other localities) is protected against arbitrary treatment by a rule that if the owner of the land demands its return before it has been farmed he has to refund twice the amount of the loan he had received.

the same rate at which it had been pledged, and there is an Ibo proverb which says, 'A thing which is pledged is never lost' (*ihe ibe efui-efu*). In point of fact, however, pledged land is often permanently alienated. It may be pledged, for example, for a sum far in excess of that normally given and so may remain unredeemed for generations, and become in fact unredeemable, as all evidence of the original transaction had been lost. In this way rich men have acquired land in perpetuity. In some communities, e.g. at Ama-Imo (Owerri Division) it seems to have been the custom that if a man received a second loan in respect of a piece of land he had to repay double the total amount of the loan if he wished to redeem the land. In practice this virtually amounted to a sale. The same custom, in slightly different form, was found at Ihe in the Awgu Division, where it is possible for a landowner who wishes to hinder an ill-disposed relative from inheriting his land to fix the redemption price of land he has pledged at double the amount of the loan. In order to formalize this proceeding he demands from the pledgee an additional payment of thirty pieces of the minute iron hook currency which is still used in parts of the Awgu Division. The value of these thirty pieces is little more than a halfpenny, so that the additional payment is merely a legal formality. At Owele, Abo-Ogugu and various other localities it is even possible to sell land outright by demanding from the buyer or pledgee an extra payment of eight yams, one fowl, and twenty pieces of iron-hook currency or some oil and palm fruit. This practice is of course uncommon, as no one would permanently alienate land except under great stress. Nevertheless, it is increasing, and cases have even occurred in which the pledgee has endeavoured to secure the land in perpetuity by means of a written document.

It remains to add that just as land may be pledged for a loan, so it may be leased for a season or longer. The rent charged may be nominal. Thus a man may lend a piece of land to a friend free of charge, expecting merely to receive a pot of palm wine and a feast at harvest. Or if the plot of land were substantial he might demand a rental of twenty or thirty yams. In the Awgu Division cases came to my notice of plots of land being hired out to strangers at a rental charge varying from 3s. to 8s. per acre per annum. (*Communicated by* DR. C. K. MEEK, M.A., D.Sc.)

### *Mission d'études en Afrique Centrale.*

En vue de recueillir des documents pour une étude de grammaire comparée bantou-soudanaise, le Dr G. Van Bulck put effectuer en compagnie du P. Monnens, doyen de la faculté de Missiologie de l'Université Grégorienne (Rome), de janvier 1932 au mois d'août 1933 une mission d'études le long de la frontière linguistique bantou-soudanaise à travers le Cameroun et le Congo Belge. Afin de préparer l'étude de cette question épineuse des langues bantouïdes (semi-bantou), on partit de Dakar, pour gagner ensuite le