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The External Coherence of Pokot Ritual Behaviour

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The external coherence of Pokot ritual behaviour

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[Plates 31 and 32]

Introduction

Human ritual behaviour involves a component of sign-symbolism which notably heightens the complexity of its analysis. For participants and observers alike, the meaning of ritual may be ambiguous and arbitrary. Furthermore, the meaning of ritual and its content may change independently of each other with time and circumstance. Using the *Nkula* ceremony of the Ndembe people of Central Africa as his data, Professor Turner has amply demonstrated for this Symposium the internal coherence of ritual behaviour and the complexity of its discovery (this Symposium, pp. 295–303). The present paper is written from a different point of view—it emphasizes the external coherence or 'fit' of ritual with other aspects of a way of life. The data presented here include the behaviour observed during some of the ritual events by means of which (and at a very generalized level of meaning) the Pokot of East Africa anticipate the summer solstice (1).*

The 'other aspects' of the Pokot way of life which are of importance here are, mainly, two: the nature of the Pokot community and the patterns of Pokot courtship and marriage. These two aspects, it is acknowledged, are only a small part of what Professor Leach, in his paper for this Symposium, has called the 'cultural matrix which provides the context for the rite under discussion', and of which a detailed knowledge must be gained before the meaning of a ritual may be interpreted by other than intuition (Leach 1966, this Symposium). A complete cultural matrix, of course, is a matter of several monographs, or more; in a paper of the present length, a selection is necessary, and since the fit of the solstice ceremonial cycle, the community, and patterns of courtship and marriage appears particularly close, a focus on these would seem allowable.

The major features of Pokot economy and environment have recently been described (Porter 1963, 1965; Schneider 1957, 1959), and these subjects are only briefly covered in the following section on the ethnographic background. In a subsequent section, the events of the solstice cycle of ceremonies are described, beginning with the ritual known as *Sintagh*, and concluding with *kicitit*, the violent sexual behaviour which accompanies Sintagh. The paper concludes with a summary and discussion of the way in which Sintagh appears to help define the Pokot community and kicitit to mitigate some of the harsh realities found therein, particularly with respect to courtship and marriage.

* The numbers in parentheses refer to the notes at the end of this paper on pp. 518–9.

The ethnographic background

Environment and technology

The Pokot are a farming and herding population of about 100 000 persons who exploit a remote and marginally productive area of northern Kenya and Uganda. The majority of Pokot, about 60 000 persons, inhabit West Pokot District of Kenya, where fieldwork was carried out among both farmers and herders (2). Outside of the District's borders, the Pokot compete with Sebei, Karamojong, Dodoth, Turkana, and Samburu peoples in an uncertain and often hazardous search for subsistence.

The interpenetration of strongly contrasting environments is a regular feature of Pokot District and adjacent areas. Wet, highland moors may be within only a few miles of low, semi-desert plains. Pokot settlements range in altitude from about 10 000 ft. to less than 3 000 ft. above sea-level. Pokot farmers cultivate finger millet, sorghum, maize and tobacco. In some regions, such as Tamkal Valley, they utilize irrigation canals to conduct water from points of permanent supply to less-favoured areas. Pokot herders tend Zebu cattle, goats, sheep, and camels. Herders regularly exchange a portion of the yield of their livestock—meat, milk and hides—for grain and other produce (especially calabashes and tobacco) grown in the surrounding mountains. Apart from such modifications as one might expect as a result of contrasting modes of subsistence, or as a result of the variability of local materials in different environmental areas, Pokot housing, storage, and tool technologies are basically similar for farmers and herders. This is true also of dress and ornamentation; herders, however, tend to display the full panoply of ornamentation more regularly than do farmers (see figure 4, plate 31). In effect, a shared technology and the exchange of subsistence produce tends to link groups of herders with specific mountain areas and their inhabitants.

The Pokot community

Although there is some tendency in the literature (Huntingford 1953; Peristiany 1954) to regard Pokot farmers and herders as leading separate or divergent ways of life, my own field data indicate a somewhat different situation—the integration of farmers and herders within the same community. This is close to Schneider's view that Pokot 'pastoral and agricultural economies are not mutually exclusive' (1953, p. 150). Economic integration has been described for other East African peoples, especially the Jie-Turkana (Gulliver 1955), and the Galla (Huntingford 1955, pp. 25–33). For the Pokot, there is every indication that integration is as much social, religious, ideological, and so on, as it is economic. More than 40 years ago Barton observed (1921, p. 81) that the mountain Pokot are generally regarded as 'the repositories of tribal tradition'. This integration of Pokot farmer and herder does not imply that no differences exist between them. Such differences do exist, and their continuing reconciliation within the community is a chief dynamic of Pokot society.

Pokot communities are relatively amorphous and transient groupings of farmers and herders. Clearly defined frontiers between communities are lacking, but each community is subdivided into a number of units known as *korok*, a socio-topographical term for an area of settlement (Conant 1965).

For farmers, a korok is commonly a shoulder or spur along a mountain wall. The

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residents are likely to be members of two or three patriclans, between which marriage is forbidden. No single korok in the mountains could sustain its population level without violating rules of incest. Exogamic relations between korok are highly developed and reflect the strong patrilineal bias which characterizes Pokot reckoning of kinship, inheritance and residence.

For herders, a korok is a slightly elevated area between major stream beds cutting across the plains. The inhabitants of a plains korok may belong to as many as 30 or 40 patriclans. Between many of these marriage is allowable and, in fact, takes place. The impermanency of Pokot pastoralists, however, is such that no one korok on the plains contains the different kinds of people necessary for practising, teaching, and learning the behaviour patterns distinctive for Pokot culture. Put in other terms, neither the farming nor the herding korok contain the 'minimal common cast of characters supporting the drama of the biogram, in biology, or in social science, its analogue of the way of life', which is an essential characteristic of a community (Arensberg 1961, p. 250).

A cast of Pokot personnel sufficient to enact the Pokot cultural 'biogram' is recruitable only in a grouping of farming and herding korok, between which there is an exchange of subsistence produce, a degree of intermarriage, and a sharing of specialists—potters, carvers, metal-workers, and a variety of ritual personnel. Of these last, the *werkoiyon* are of particular note here. The werkoiyon are the great oracles consulted on a number of occasions: raiding, deployment of livestock, planting, harvesting, and formation of circumcision groups and age-sets. The oracles maintain their permanent homesteads in the mountains, and must be visited there by the pastoralists in order to arrange for their services. In addition, the only permanent places for ritual gatherings are also located uniquely in the mountains. The residents of all neighbouring korok, farming or herding gather at these sacred groves in periodic assemblies which are an important feature of the Pokot way of life.

In Pokot society, affinal and consanguineal relationships are overlain by associations based on memberships in circumcision groups, age-sets, and trading partnerships (Peristiany 1951; Schneider 1953, pp. 236–282). There is evidence that all of these associations tend to be community-specific. For example, age-sets (which are of the cycling variety), are slightly out of phase between the communities of Sekerr-Masol, and Cheptulel-Kide (the first term of the binomial referring to the predominantly farming area of the community, and the second term to the pastoral region). This difference in age-set phasing facilitates (or perhaps results from) marriages between farmers and herders in each community. Ideally, members of the same age-set should not marry each others' daughters, an ethnic-wide restriction which effectively reduces the power of older Pokot males to use their accumulated cattle wealth in bargaining for younger women. However, a mountains-plains marriage carries with it many advantages: the farmer gets a high bridewealth for his daughter from a cattle-rich plainsman, and the herder gains a set of affines with whom he may exchange the surplus yield of his livestock. On the Masol plains, for example, about 20% of the wives are from korok in the Sekerr mountains (3).

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Courtship and marriage

Pokot farmers and herders share a common idiom for the expression of many values, such as a girl's beauty, a man's valour, and a variety of emotive states. All of these are considered most eloquently and effectively presented or communicated by reference to analogous characteristics of cattle (4). The use of this idiom is particularly evident during courtship and negotiations for bridewealth and marriage. If, for example, the bridewealth for a farmer's daughter consists in fact of mead, beer and grain, these items will be referred to in terms of their equivalent livestock values.

A young herder on the plains must expect to collect and eventually turn over between 15 and 30 head of cattle and up to 100 goats or sheep for his bride. In the mountains, bridewealth rarely amounts to more than three or four head of cattle and 20 goats or sheep. And, as noted above, sometimes no animals are involved at all, except by analogy. 'Payments' of bridewealth by both farmers and herders are by instalment, ideally completed by the time a second child is born. Whatever items compose each instalment are immediately distributed among the bride's male kinsmen. Each of these, in turn, uses his share to settle debts, to raise a bridewealth for himself, or perhaps to contribute to the bridewealth of yet another kinsman. This continual redistribution of bridewealth creates a network of dependency relations among Pokot males. It also means that a bride's patrikin especially are committed to seeing that the marriage endures, and to avoiding, at all costs, the possibility of a return of the bridewealth. A bride or wife mistreated by her husband will find a sympathetic audience among her peers, but rarely among her kinsmen, including her parents. The few ways open to a wife to improve her situation include organized shaming of her husband, and threats of poisoning, witchcraft, and suicide (Edgerton & Conant 1964).

Negotiations for bridewealth are marked by eloquent but shrewd bargaining and acrimonious debate carried on almost without regard for the wishes of the girl as to whom she wants to marry. This is one source of the extraordinary degree of antagonism characterizing Pokot marital relations. Another source of this antagonism is the gross difference between the sexual expectations which are generated during the early years of socialization and the sexual behaviour stipulated for husbands and wives.

Pokot household arrangements are such that young children are sometimes witnesses to parental intercourse, which they sometimes imitate in their play. This, while evoking verbal admonishment from adults, is not seriously discouraged. At age 5 years or so, children begin sleeping away from their parents in a hut known as *siriono*', often located in the homestead of a relative or neighbour. Such a hut may sleep as many as a dozen youngsters, ranging in age from 5 to 16 or 17 years old. All but the youngest are girls. Boys more than 8 or 9 years old are excluded from siriono', and fend for themselves in gangs. A gang may spend most of a night making the rounds of all the siriono' huts in the neighbourhood; at each one, an older boy in the gang attempts to sneak into the hut while the gang's younger members keep watch outside. A raid is judged successful if the youth achieves intercourse without waking the occupants, or even the girl herself (5).

A youth who succeeds in intercourse of this kind may after identify himself to the girl, and she then may (or may not) agree to a private meeting, or tryst, away from siriono'.

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For boys, such trystings are not common until their late teens, but girls as young as 8 or 9 years old may have lovers more than twice their age. Even before beginning to sleep in siriono', girls may begin pestering their parents to make arrangements to begin the process of scarification of the abdomen, lower back, and groin. The welting is considered aesthetically pleasing and, specifically, to increase pleasure during intercourse. The entire pattern is usually completed by the time a girl reaches puberty, some years after she has begun her series of trystings. According to adult informants, who relish their own adventures as well as gossip about current liaisons between boys and girls, trystings are characterized by continual presentations of gifts as inducement to coitus, athletic sexual performance, and courtly behaviour toward the girl at dances and on other public occasions. A girl may break off trysting if performance by the male in any of these respects is unsatisfactory.

For boys, trysting generally begins only after passing through a circumcision group—the first test and recognition of Pokot manhood. A circumcised boy, *tikoti.m*, even if but one step from the bottom of the male status-ladder, nevertheless has circumcision mates and kinsmen upon whom he may legitimately call for assistance in finding the gifts necessary for trysting or courtship. When the formation of a circumcision group is greatly delayed, as frequently is the case on the plains, herdboys may achieve somewhat equivalent status by slaying an ox in the ceremony known as *sapana*. Whether as a circumcised youth, a sapana initiate, or both, an older boy gains kinsmen and age-mates through whom he has access to real wealth, in the form of livestock or crops, part of which he may convert into gifts for his girl. He also has earned the right to act gallantly, to jump high at dances, to long desperately for an ox, or to sing of his own bravery during circumcision.

At first menstruation, a girl is warned that she must not have more than one lover during a monthly period (6). The responsibility of selecting among her lovers marks an explicit intrusion of adult relationships into adolescent courtship. Several Pokot proverbs point up the danger of selecting a suitor on the basis of gallantry or physical beauty alone. Instead, a youth's ability to give gifts, and keep on giving, should be the major criterion of selection. As they approach menarchy and thereafter, girls appear to demand more and more of their suitors: a blanket, a cloth or skin, quantities of beads and bangles.

In selecting on the basis of ability to make these gifts, a girl is, in effect, testing a youth's resourcefulness, and, specifically, his ability to get what he wants by imposing himself on age-mates and kinsmen. How generous are his older brothers? Can he exploit his mother's kin, particularly her elder brother? Although these kin may produce gifts for trysting purposes which are small as compared to later payments of bridewealth, a youth is nevertheless being tested for competence within his own network of dependency relations. Despite these calculated aspects of trysting, or perhaps very much because of them, Pokot courtship may lead to enduring emotional bonds between partners. These attachments, however, are subject to abrupt cancellation when girls reach marriageable age (seldom less than 16, and not uncommonly about 20 years old).

Prior to marriage or before a pregnancy is three months old, girls are clitoridectomized, an operation which males are free to watch. The clitoris and several centimetres of the superior portions of the labia minora are removed (7). The operation is followed by a period of seclusion, during which girls are instructed by older women never to exhaust their husbands sexually, to lie still during intercourse so that the semen may be well planted,

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and that a husband's advances may not be refused except during menstrual periods, late pregnancy, lactation, and times of mourning.

For the bethrothed, clitoridectomized, and possibly pregnant girl, there is a stereotyped behaviour which requires brief comment. In collecting a bride from her father's homestead, a groom must entice the girl from her hut by the offer of a cow or goat. The bride may then cling to the tethering stake in the middle of her father's milking yard, and demand yet another gift. Her kinsmen may have to break her grip on the stake by force and eject her from the homestead. *En route* to her new home, she has the right to cling to trees or bushes at every stream bed and demand promises of further livestock from her husband. Her kinsmen, who are among her escorts, keep track of these demands and the promises made to meet them. And even though, possibly, already pregnant by her husband, a bride may refuse intercourse until she is promised more livestock. This behaviour is not to be interpreted only as reluctance to leave her home, or as dissatisfaction with the choice of a husband, although both of these may be involved. The demands made by the bride for livestock are quite separate from the bridewealth transaction—they are, in fact, the only guarantees she has for her own immediate well-being and the later welfare of her children.

It is difficult to imagine a greater contrast than that which exists between youthful sexual experience and that of married adults. Perhaps not surprisingly, adultery is nearly universal. The earlier experiences of trysting are replicated, however, only at the risk of discovery and punishment (8).

The solstice ceremony

Sintagh

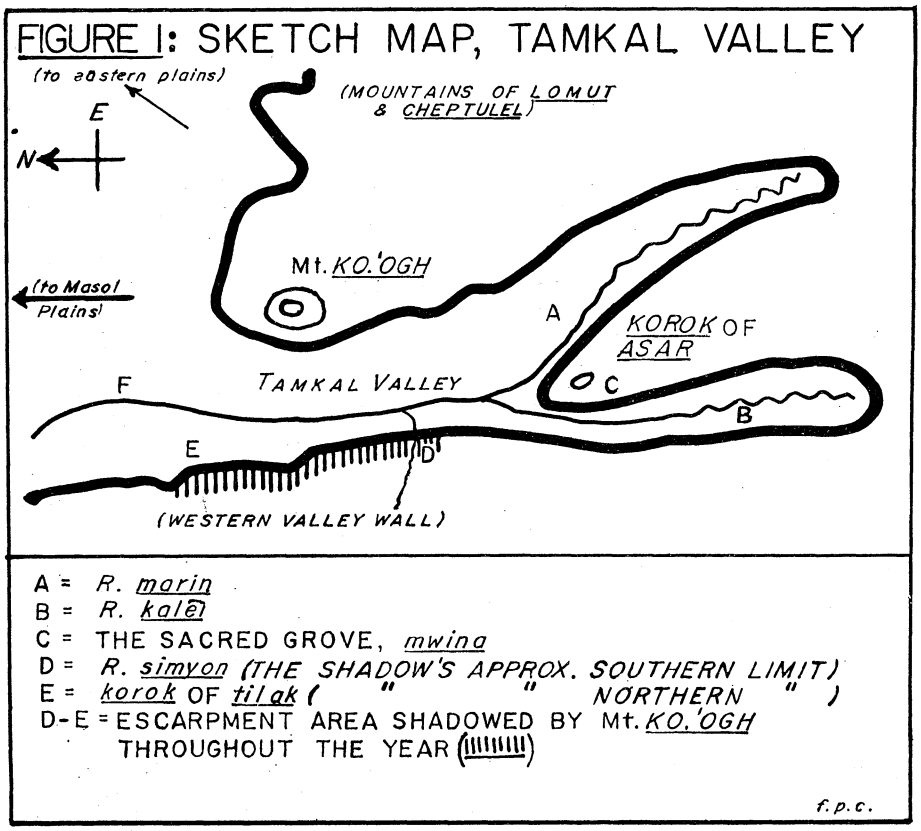
There is little agreement among the Pokot (or in the literature on them) about the nature and meaning of the sun, *asis*. As Beech noted (1911, p. 19), the Pokot are 'delightfully vague' about their beliefs, and almost any commentary on them runs the risk of injecting a degree of false precision (9).

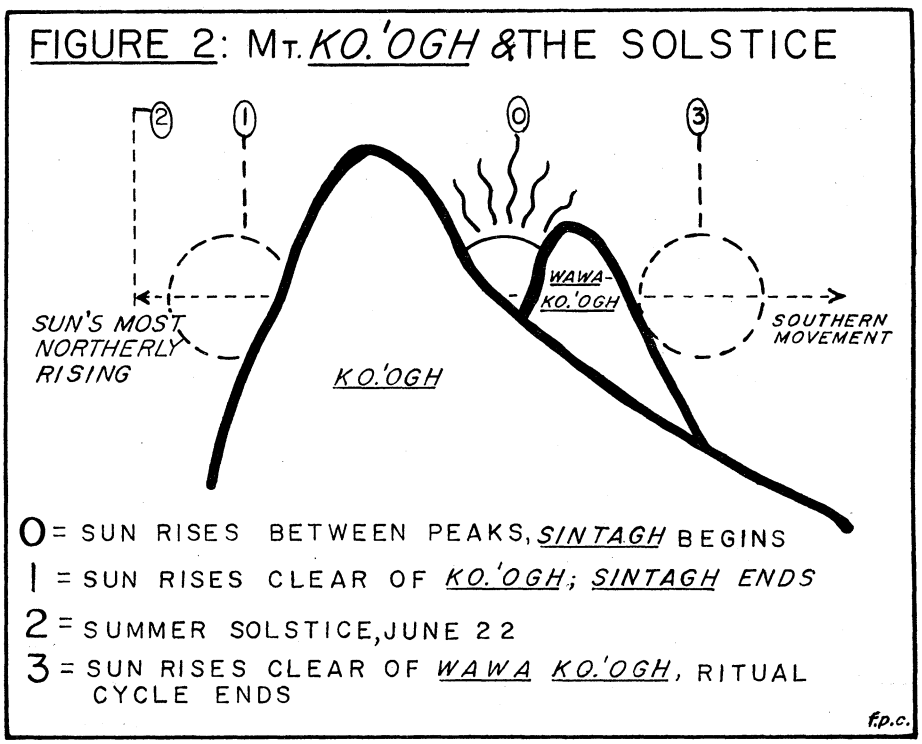
Asis appears to refer both to the sun as a physical object in the sky (*iyim*) and to some sort of creative force or power, sometimes anthropomorphized as *Tororut*, a remote deity. The sun-as-creator or Tororut is credited with having blessed the Pokot with knowledge of cattle, grass, planting, and harvesting. The general well-being and condition of the Pokot is constantly under survey by Tororut while 'he' travels the sky from dawn to dusk.

As an object in the sky, asis is said to be born each morning and to die each evening. This renewal is one of the blessings of the sun as a creative force. At the solstices in June and December, the sun's renewal is threatened; shadows become 'heavy' (*nikis*); they touch a thing, a place, a person, and they do not move. A child in the womb may be crushed; the infirm may be unable to breathe. This quality of 'heaviness' may persist for a week or more, but in West Pokot District only the solstice in June evokes a cycle of ceremonies apparently designed to get the sun moving again. The different ceremonies of the cycle are *Sintagh*, *Pocoro'*, *To'omo*, *Karel*, and *Sima.r*, in that order (10).

Sintagh itself begins soon after the dawn shadow of a mountain, known as *Ko'ogh*, reaches the River *Simyon* on the west-facing escarpment of Tamkal Valley (figure 1, point D). This is nearly the most southerly point shadowed by Ko'ogh during the year. The most northerly reach of the dawn shadow is *Tilak*, a shoulder or korok of the same

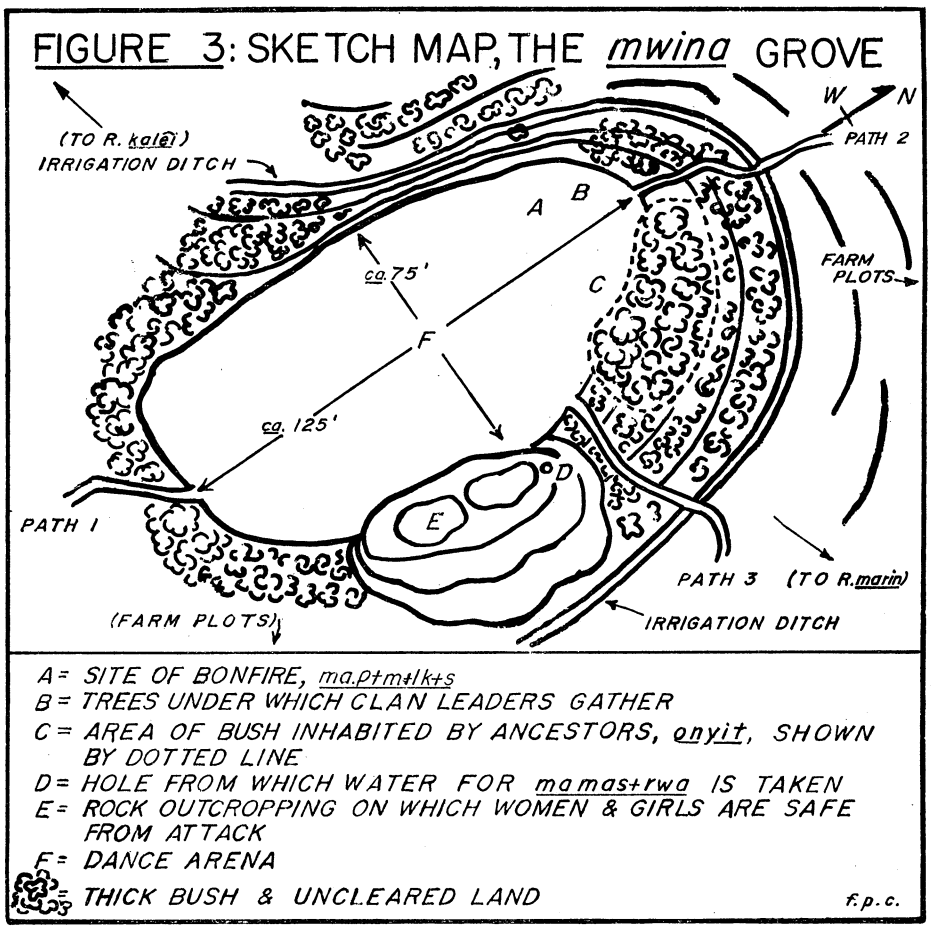
escarpment (figure 1, point E). Just before the June solstice, the sun at dawn is 'caught' between the peaks of Ko'ogh (figure 2, point 0). Although some informants spoke of the sun as being 'reborn' each day, there was no explicit agreement that, at the summer





solstice, the sun is re-born from Ko'ogh Mountain (11). The ceremony of Sintagh continues until the sun rises on the north side of the larger of the two peaks of Ko'ogh (figure 2, point 1), and the other ceremonies of the cycle end when the sun rises on the southern side of *wawa-ko'ogh*, the 'child of Ko'ogh' (figure 2, point 3). In 1962, Sintagh lasted from 4 to 9 June, with the actual solstice taking place on 22 June. The events of Sintagh itself are set out in table 1 below.

The ceremony of Sintagh is initiated with the lighting of a bonfire (*ma.pimilkis*) which the ancestors (*onyit*) are called upon to witness at the sacred grove known as *Mwina* (figure 3, points A and C). The smoke from the fire is closely watched (figure 5*A*, plate 32)



as an omen for the future: a persistent deviation from the perpendicular signifies the displeasure of the onyit, and a sheep or ox must be slaughtered and eaten as a pacification of these ancestors (12). On alternate days, following the lighting of the bonfire, a series of dances (*tumwo.n*) are held in the Mwina grove. On days between dances no work is allowed in the fields, nor must there be any major movements of cattle. On the final day of Sintagh, in an event referred to as *mamasirwa*, the feet or footprints of participating dancers are sprinkled with water taken from a hole in the rocks at the Mwina grove (figure 3, point D; see also figure 5*D*, plate 32). This action is said to ensure the return of participants at four future celebrations of Sintagh. The sprinkling is done by the 'owner' of the Mwina grove, the eldest member of the clan which first settled in the korok of *Asar*, where the

grove is located (figure 2, point C) (13). The 'owner' of Mwina receives no gifts from persons participating in Sintagh, nor does he enjoy any particular socio-political status by reason of his connexion with the grove or the ceremony held there.

The grove itself is an oval area having a longer axis of about 125 ft., and a shorter axis of about 75 ft. (figure 3). It is located on the top of a korok or mountain spur between the Rivers *Kalei* and *Marin* (figure 2, points A and B). An irrigation ditch (*orapogh*; figure 3) surrounds the grove, but this apparently bears no relation to the performance of Sintagh itself. While cattle may be grazed in the grove, farming is allowed only below the level of the irrigation ditch. Three paths give access to the grove; paths 1 and 2 (figure 3) were used by dancers making their entries on to the arena, while path 3 was used by spectators, most of whom gathered on the out-cropping of rocks in the south-eastern quadrant of the grove (figure 3, point E). These rocks constitute a sanctuary where girls and women are safe from sexual attack during Sintagh.

Participants from different korok or settlement areas gather together to practise dances before actually entering the grove (figure 5*B*, plate 32). During the three days in which dancing took place, residents of the korok of Asar were the first on the dance ground. Entries by groups are accomplished with considerable spirit—at a dead run, in single file, with spears and sticks held as if to throw. Men, arranged by age groups, are first; married women follow, then uncircumcised boys and unmarried girls. Persons already on the dance ground are forced into the centre by the new arrivals, who run around the arena in diminishing circles until those in the centre are compressed into a tight knot. The pattern of dance then changes, and all participants expand to fill the arena until, once again, they are encircled by the arrival of a new group. Although numbers are difficult to estimate under such fluctuating conditions, at least 500 persons took part in mamasirwa, the concluding dance, with easily twice as many spectators in the immediate vicinity of the grove.

Table 1: The main events of Sintagh

Date	Events
4 June	The bonfire is lit in the Mwina grove about 9.30 a.m. There is no work in the fields or major movements of cattle for the rest of the day
5 June	Dancing, *tumwo.n*, begins about 11 a.m., but is relatively disorganized until about 3 p.m. Informants argue whether or not participants have been avoiding the noon shadow. By 4 p.m. most groups have made their entry at least once on to the Mwina grove. Several rapes and attempted abductions take place. Dancing is desultory by 6 p.m. and the grove is deserted by 7 p.m.
6 June	Work and dancing is tabu, *nonggi*. Some beer is reported nearly ready for drinking. Stories are circulating about successful rapes and a girl is said to have suffered severe injury of the back
7 June	Dancing begins in organized fashion about 2 p.m. and continues until 6 p.m. Brews begun on 4 or 5 June are maturing, and the effects of drinking are more apparent. Between 5 and 6 p.m. there are four rapes at the Mwina grove; two girls may have been willing
8 June	A nonggi day, with heavy drinking and fighting throughout. Reports of one 'successful' abduction and at least six others attempted
9 June	The sun is said to have risen clear of Ko'ogh. Dancing concludes about 4.30 p.m. with mamasirwa. Continual fighting and quarrelling. Many reports of rapes and captures. Some stories are probably much embroidered and possibly refer to the same women. The Mwina grove is deserted by 8 p.m. and most participants are on their way home

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Such, in outline, are the main events of Sintagh. Some participants are known to have moved on to the ceremonies at the groves of Pocoro' and To'omo. Subsequent reports indicated that these ceremonies also were marked by *kicitit*, the violent sexual behaviour sanctioned during the solstice cycle.

Kicitit

Behaviour identified as kicitit during Sintagh ranged from word-play with sexual implications to pitched battles fought to accomplish or prevent rape and abduction. In its mildest form, that of the joking advance, kicitit contributed to the atmosphere of permissiveness, not unlike that of an art students' ball or a *mardi gras*, which was generated during the ceremony. Sexual joking was particularly common between persons related as affines or as cross-cousins.

In its more violent aspects, kicitit frequently took the form of a young man's attempt to catch the hand or arm of a girl in the dance line at the Mwina grove and then to drag her off into the near-by bushes (figure 5*C*, plate 32). Most frequently, after a brief scuffle, the girl would break free and either disappear into the crowd of dancers or make a run for *kokwa-munung* ('meeting-place of youngsters'), the rocks which are considered as sanctuary for girls and women. Pre-clitoridectomized girls, especially, used kokwa-munung as a grandstand from which to watch for the arrival of their trysting partners or suitors. When the right youth showed up, a girl would leave the rocks to join the dance line until pulled from the arena and into the bushes. A little later, the same girl would be back on kokwa-munung or on the dance arena.

A sincerely unwilling girl might be aided by her friends and kinsmen in fighting off her attacker, who would then call for support of his friends and kin. Several such fights ended with the girl, half-choked and in hysterics, being pulled from the arena and raped. On several occasions older men intervened in the fighting when the violence threatened to become general.

The behaviour thus far described all comes within the meaning of kicitit, a lexeme which might best be translated as 'sanctioned rape'. Outside the context of the solstice ceremonial cycle, intercourse forced upon a girl or woman is known as *patalat* (in some contexts, translatable as 'stamping'). Only kicitit, however, is free of risk of revenge by the kinsmen of a victim.

Kicitit also is translatable as 'marriage by capture'. The behaviour here includes abduction, confinement, and enforced intercourse. Just as kicitit contrasts with patalat in the sense of 'sanctioned' *versus* 'unsanctioned' rape, so does kicitit contrast with *kopuno*' in the sense of 'sanctioned marriage-by-capture' *versus* unsanctioned 'elopement' (when the girl is willing) or 'marriage-by-kidnapping' (when she is not).

During the 1962 performance of Sintagh, there were four examples of kicitit as marriage-by-capture. Three of these involved prior arrangements between the 'attackers' on one side and the girls' 'defenders' on the other. The fourth case involved these prior arrangements and advance notice to the girl herself. Case studies were collected of five additional captures which took place at performances of Sintagh in 1960 and 1961. In all nine cases the male aggressors were younger sons; eight of these were still unmarried, and the ninth had a history of wife-beating. He and one other male principal were from pastoral korok; all the others were farmers.

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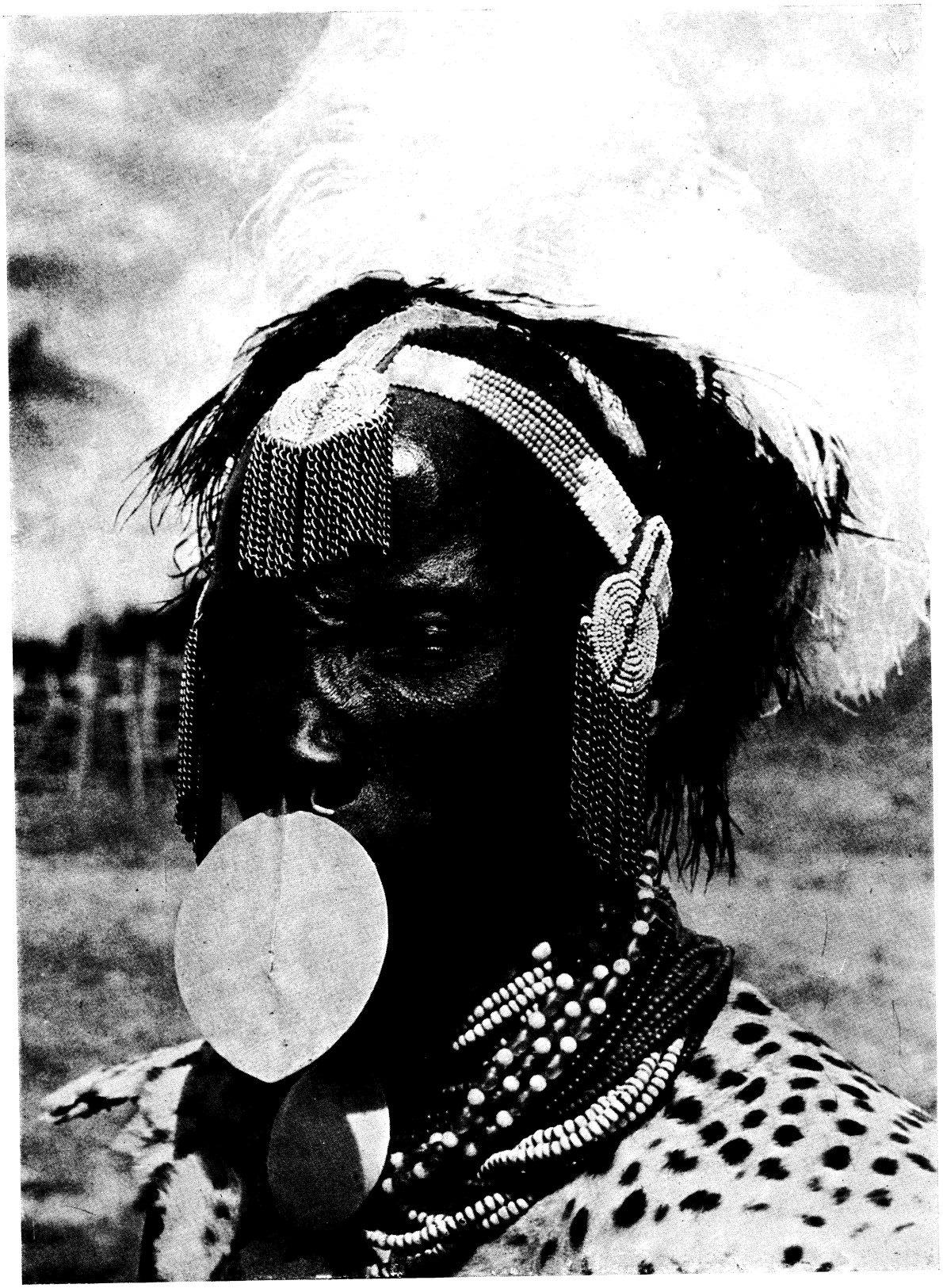

FIGURE 4. A Pokot male on the Masol plains. The nose-plate, beadwork, wire chains, and ostrich feathers are all trade items which are also utilized, but less frequently, by farming Pokot in the mountains. The head hair is felted and packed with wet clay. This dries to make a helmet-like skull-cap which only circumcised adults are entitled to wear. The skull-cap is just visible under the feathers.

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FIGURE 5. Four scenes from a film record of *Sintagh*, a ceremony celebrating the summer solstice. *Scene A:* smoke from a bonfire is watched as an omen at the beginning of the ceremony. *Scene B:* residents of different settlement areas gather separately to practise dances before entering into the ritual grove. *Scene C:* an example of *kɨcitɨt*, the sexual behaviour which takes place during Sintagh. The arrow points to a girl who is resisting being dragged from the dance line and raped. *Scene D:* the final event of Sintagh, known as *mamasɨrwa*. The arrow points to a paraffin tin containing water collected from potholes in the rocks on the edge of the grove. The water is being splashed on the feet of dancers or their footprints in order to ensure their return to Sintagh in the future.

Of the women involved, all were from farming korok. One was a widow whose husband had been killed by a leopard, and a second was pregnant by her husband who had 'chased' her for being physically ugly. Of the seven remaining women, all were unmarried and three had been clitoridectomized. Two of these had the reputation of being flagrantly promiscuous and entertaining more than one lover during a monthly period. The third apparently suffered from epilepsy or some other convulsive disorder. A similar complaint was reported for one of the four younger girls, who were neither clitoridectomized nor married. One of these was known to be in love with her trysting partner, whose offer of bridewealth had been rejected by the girl's kin. No special circumstances could be learned of the remaining two girls.

A girl who is not captured willingly will be confined and held under constant guard at the home of her abductor. Intercourse will be forced upon her repeatedly (14). Friends of her abductor sit outside the hut, in which she may be roped and gagged, and chant the virtues of her new husband. If, at the end of two weeks, all persuasion has failed and the girl is still trying to escape, she must be set free. If captured during Sintagh, this would place her release at about the end of the cycle of solstice ceremonies, but informants did not agree that this circumstance served as any kind of signal for the release of a captured wife. At the conclusion of the 1962 solstice cycle, and for some months afterwards, there were no indications of attempted escapes by any of the four younger girls who had been abducted. Three of the abductors, in fact, offered token payments of bridewealth as gestures of good-will toward their new affines.

Summary and discussion

The introduction to this paper noted that the content of ritual and its meanings may change independently of each other. A familiar example is the celebration of Christmas in contemporary American society. The compulsive gift-giving which is now part of the ritual requires, for its interpretation, placement in a wider frame of reference than Christian dogma or church history. This wider frame of reference is what Professor Leach has pointed to as the 'cultural matrix'. The way in which a ritual or a ceremony 'fits' this matrix I have called its 'external coherence'. For Christmas and gift-giving, socio-economic aspects of the American cultural matrix are clearly more involved than, say, the political. For Sintagh and the sexual behaviour it sanctions, external coherence is gained by reference to the nature of the Pokot community, and to patterns of courtship and marriage. There are, obviously, other ways in which Sintagh fits the matrix of Pokot culture, but few appear as directly involved as these two.

As described earlier, a Pokot community spreads over the mountains and plains, respectively occupied by farmers and herders, living in a number of settlement areas known as korok. If we take two of the most pervasive parameters of description, those of space and time, the Pokot community may be seen as tending toward spatial amorphousness and temporal distinctiveness.

This emphasis on temporality may be observed generally in the network of livestock dependency relations and subsistence exchange linking farmers and herders within the same community. Pastoralists, of course, are necessarily transient with respect to space, but

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are impeccable accountants of genealogical, associational, and economic obligations through time. A Pokot farmer, while committed for certain purposes to a given estate, is no less knowledgeable than a herder in maintaining his economic accounts, and, in addition, must operate within the context of inter-korok relations as established by long histories of inter-marriage. In brief, 'when' appears to be a more critical determinant of Pokot inter-personal and inter-group relations than 'where'.

More specifically, it has been noted that there are no sharply delineated frontiers between contemporary Pokot communities, and that these tend to gain separate identities by the timing of widely recognized events. For example, all Pokot males enter into a system of age-grading, but the cycle of age-grades and their subdivisions in one community may be out of phase with those in another. The same is true for the formation of circumcision groups, another regular event in Pokot life, and one which gains—and adds to—local distinctiveness by its timing relative to the formation of other such groups in different communities.

The celebration of the summer solstice itself reflects this emphasis on distinctive timing. The solstice is a discrete, annual event marked by a series of ceremonies, beginning with Sintagh and ending with Sima.r. Ceremonies in the cycle draw on different constellations of korok for their participant personnel, the dramatis personnae for each ceremony consisting of the residents of korok surrounding the local grove, and those pastoralists from korok on the near-by plains who have regular economic or social ties with the farmers. As the celebrations of the solstice end at one grove and begin at another, some personnel, especially younger Pokot, also move from grove to grove.

Sintagh itself begins when the sun rises between the peaks of Ko'ogh—also a discrete, annual event, but one (like the solstice) broken down into a series of events of locally distinctive timing. With the exception of the opening bonfire and the concluding sprinkling of water, the events of Sintagh (listed in table 1) make up a series of dance-days alternating with tabu-days. Each dance-day contains its own timed sequence of events, which begins with the residents of the korok of Asar making their entry onto the arena, and continues until the personnel from all of the participating korok have staged their separate, war-like entries. The concluding act of mamasirwa captures the participants and ensures their return to the Mwina grove. This event may be seen as a significant counter to the threat of loss of contact by subsequent dispersal of the participants over a large and vaguely defined area. It also assures a repetition of Sintagh within the larger context of the complete cycle of solstice ceremonies.

Undoubtedly for the average Pokot, the permissive, even rebellious atmosphere which steadily mounts during the course of Sintagh is surely a more compelling reason for participating in the ceremony than a concern with periodically re-assembling a dispersed community. Individuals attending Sintagh dress to display themselves to the best possible effect, especially as this may be measured by responses of persons of the opposite sex. One aspect of male–female interaction during Sintagh has been described as kicitit, a broad spectrum of sexual behaviour which ranges from bawdy word-play to public sexual assault and marriage-by-capture. This behaviour is integrated into the Sintagh ceremony by virtue of a number of rules—for example, the rock ledge as an area of sanctuary within which women and girls may not be molested, or the rule requiring the release of a captured

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woman if she is still trying to escape at about the time the entire cycle of solstice ceremonies is ending. These and other rules argue strongly for kicitit as an integral part of the ritual behaviour during Sintagh. If this is indeed the case, the ceremony gains considerable external coherence by reference to a second aspect of the Pokot cultural matrix—the prevailing patterns of courtship and marriage, especially as these tend to produce inequities within a community of cattle-poor farmers and cattle-rich herders.

In reviewing the case histories of persons involved in kicitit as marriage-by-capture, some common circumstances surrounding the principals are obvious. For example, of the male principals, all are younger sons and poorly placed to command sufficient livestock for marriage. Kicitit is their answer to the problem of finding wives. Nearly all of the women involved in these cases are marked by some physical or personality disability which would appear to make them unusually poor risks for the investment of livestock, a scarce commodity, as bridewealth.

As sanctioned rape, kicitit expresses much of the antagonism existing between the sexes. At no time was this antagonism more apparent than in the ferocity with which some rapes were accomplished during Sintagh of 1962. The genesis of this sexual antagonism has been seen in the very different sexual experiences of Pokot males and females during childhood and adolescence. Even within the context of the trysting or courting relationship, the emphasis on sexual prowess, gallant behaviour, and gift-giving, involves a degree of anxiety and frustration over performance in any or all of these respects. The rewards, or the disappointments, of trysting may be directly expressed during Sintagh without fear of penalty. Kicitit, either as marriage-by-capture or as sanctioned rape, and as an integral part of Sintagh, fits the Pokot cultural matrix as follows: first, an endemic and high level of sexual antagonism is openly expressed; secondly, loyalties within age-grades, circumcision groups, or constellations of kin are tested by the help a male requires for the capture or rape of an unwilling female; and thirdly, the social groups within which these loyalties are placed may rid themselves of problem personnel—males who cannot command bridewealth, and females who will not or cannot gain husbands.

In short, much of the behaviour observed during Sintagh is neither arbitrarily nor randomly derived from the matrix of contemporary Pokot culture. A century or more ago the external coherence of Sintagh was almost certainly different from what it is at present, and a century from now it may be as different again. For example, the nature of the Pokot community, as of Pokot culture itself, no doubt has changed in the past, and will do so in the future. As these changes take place one would expect to find their reflexion in the internal arrangements of the solstice cycle of ceremonies—perhaps with respect to their timing, or perhaps with regard to the distribution of the groves where they are held. Similarly, as patterns of courtship and marriage change, sexual behaviour might be more, or less, emphasized within the solstice ritual.

This is to say, simply, that the ceremony of Sintagh closely fits the matrix of Pokot culture. At any given point in time, the nature of this fit, the external coherence of Sintagh, provides a necessary background to the discovery and analysis of the ceremony's internal meaning—as explicated by the Pokot themselves, by reference to the sun, Ko'ogh, kicitit, and so on, or, especially, as interpreted by outside observers employing quite different analytical frameworks.

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Notes

(1) A film and commentary on the ceremony of *Sintagh* were presented at this Symposium. The author wishes to express his appreciation for assistance from the Royal Society and the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research which made participation in the meeting possible.

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(2) In the earlier literature, and on government records, the Pokot were known as the 'Suk', a term of uncertain etymology, and never in use as an autonym. *Pocon*, singular, *Pokot*, plural, are the proper ethnic names. Only the plural form is used in this article.

In the orthography used here, tones are not indicated. Letters have their approximate values as in Standard English *except* as follows: –i–, high front vowel; –ɨ–, high central vowel; –a–, low central vowel; –o–, low back vowel; –u–, mid- to high-back vowel; –ei, ai, ou, oi–, diphthongs; –ng–, velar nasal; –ngy–, palatal nasal; –gh–, voiced velar fricative; –kh–, unvoiced velar fricative; –c–, palatal fricative; –tc–, palatal alveolar plosive. An apostrophe (') marks a glottal stop. A period (.) marks vowel length. Consonant length is marked by doubling the consonant.

(3) A figure based on a survey of 52 households in Masol.

(4) An analysis of the analogies employed in this idiom is being prepared for publication. Female informants claimed that they have no difficulty in identifying themselves or their friends in the verses of the *tumba.eigh*, the ox-songs which ostensibly relate the beauty of cattle, the horns, the shape of the head, markings, appetites for different grasses, and other entirely bovine characteristics.

(5) While intercourse without waking one of the partners seems unlikely, it apparently is not uncommon among the Pokot. It is referred to as *tcorsyo.n*, derived from the lexeme for thievery or stealing, and is the most common euphemism for marital coitus. A standard description of a promiscuous woman is either one who has intercourse with more than one lover during a monthly period, or who has intercourse with sleeping men or boys. The collection of semen for purposes of magic is said to be accomplished in just this fashion.

(6) The Pokot describe the role of the female in reproduction as simply providing a place for the semen to 'grow'. Semen (*sim*) is said to contain the equivalent of an homunculus (see above, note 5).

(7) The Pokot claim that clitoridectomy is necessary for easy childbirth. Informants were delighted to learn that there is as much difference of opinion among Europeans as themselves on the function of the clitoris in vaginal intercourse (see, for example, Ford & Beach 1953, pp. 20–24, *et seq.*).

(8) Adultery is fined by attachment of livestock, the amount depending on the flagrancy of frequency of the violation of 'proper' marital behaviour. In extreme cases corporal punishment is administered by the residents of a korok, who stone or beat the offender, male or female.

(9) Barton, for example, writes that '*Asis* (the sun) is a term used to denote what a European might designate "God"....But there is no trace of sun worship' (1921, pp. 88–89). Schneider (1953, pp. 104–105) sees Asis as a manifestation of *Tororut*, 'a high god or creator'. Huntingford (1953, p. 89) equates Tororut with 'sky'. Dundas (1910, p. 60) cites *Ellap* (*probably* eilat, thunder) as the god 'who sends the rain'. See Schneider (1955) for the fullest published discussion of Pokot religious ideas.

(10) The Pokot were highly resistant to questions about the location and content of the solstice rituals other than Sintagh, which I was permitted to observe.

(11) The equation of Ko'ogh with the place of the sun's re-birth struck the Pokot as interesting, but they refused to accept the analogy as their own. The equation was suggested to me by one of the songs sung during the clitoridectomy of a girl. The song makes the analogy (*tcanggoi*, literally, a 'riddle') between the vulva and a nearby gorge, the Maric Pass. If the Pokot make this kind of equation on their own, my own interpretation of Ko'ogh and the sun seems not too far out of line.

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(12) In 1962, the smoke, for the most part, ascended directly upward. Among other things, this was taken as a sign that the presence of the author at the ceremony was permissible.

(13) The 'owner' of Mwina is the senior representative of the *Cepasaiyi.t* section of the *Talai* patriclan. He is sometimes referred to as *poipimwina*, 'elder of Mwina'. For a comparison with the location of ritual groves among the Jie, see Gulliver (1955, pp. 10–11).

(14) While torture may be used to effect intercourse, permanent injury of disfigurement should not result. In one case which informants recalled, a girl's hip was dislocated during her confinement, and thereafter she was unable to 'walk straight'. The members of her korok demanded, and got, a full bridewealth from the kinsmen of her captor.

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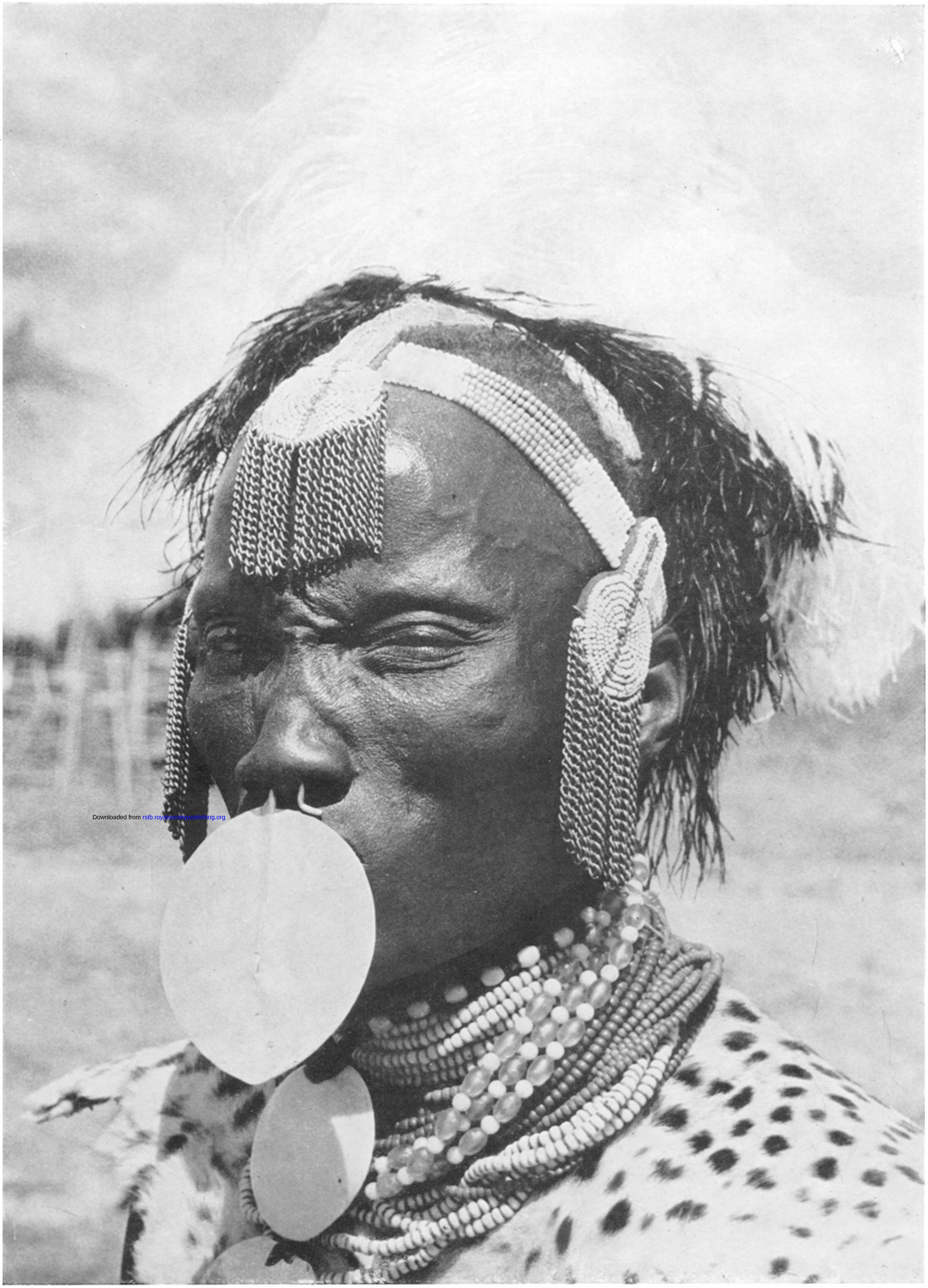

FIGURE 4. A Pokot male on the Masol plains. The nose-plate, beadwork, wire chains, and ostrich feathers are all trade items which are also utilized, but less frequently, by farming Pokot in the mountains. The head hair is felted and packed with wet clay. This dries to make a helmet-like skull-cap which only circumcised adults are entitled to wear. The skull-cap is just visible under the feathers.

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A

B

C

D

FIGURE 5. Four scenes from a film record of *Sintagh*, a ceremony celebrating the summer solstice. *Scene A:* smoke from a bonfire is watched as an omen at the beginning of the ceremony. *Scene B:* residents of different settlement areas gather separately to practise dances before entering into the ritual grove. *Scene C:* an example of *kicitit*, the sexual behaviour which takes place during Sintagh. The arrow points to a girl who is resisting being dragged from the dance line and raped. *Scene D:* the final event of Sintagh, known as *mamasirwa*. The arrow points to a paraffin tin containing water collected from potholes in the rocks on the edge of the grove. The water is being splashed on the feet of dancers or their footprints in order to ensure their return to Sintagh in the future.