

AN ETHNOARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDY OF
MORTUARY PRACTICES AMONG THE
POKOT PEOPLE

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DEDICATION

To my beloved mother Anna N. Wasike for her love and care,
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ABSTRACT

This study deals with traditional mortuary practices among the Pokot people who occupy West Pokot District in Western Kenya. This study aims at helping future archaeologists in interpreting the burials among the Pokot people.

The methods employed in this study include, a series of interviews, both oral and selected, direct observation and the ethnographic literature. All these methods enabled me to obtain data on mortuary practices among the Pokot people, which was later analysed according to sex, age, social status and cause of death. The results were quite informative as sex, age, and social status were found to be the most influential factors on traditional burials among the Pokot people.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The origin of death, which consequently leads to burial is still a mystery in many African societies. However, what has been speculated about the origin is that death is normally unnatural. The death itself is full of emotions, and thus the study of death is dynamic in nature, because the beliefs concerning death keep on changing among different people with time and complexity of the societies.

It is unfortunate that little has been discussed on death among African communities as an academic discipline. It is therefore at this 'block' that scholars, especially the ethnoarchaeologists and social anthropologists, have preferred dealing with aspect which concern death, but beyond it. These aspects include, burial customs, burial rites, burial ceremonies, mourning, burial sites and even beliefs on death.

The institution of burial has received comparatively little attention from archaeologists and anthropologists. In spite of inefficient details on African burials, human burials have been very useful in interpreting the past cultural features of a pre-historic population. In some cases, burial materials have revealed the type of religion which existed in a particular place and period. Burial studies have been a source of evidence in reconstructing past human culture

and activities in different societies.

Burial in cemeteries or in common graves is a recent phenomena to most African societies, it came with the Europeans. However, the African have their own traditional systems which they vary with different societies. Such differences have been partly brought by different beliefs on death.

In this study, I intend to employ a suitable illustrative framework which can be used as an analogy in archaeology for interpreting mortuary remains within the Pokot community. To achieve this, I carried out a field study in the region, by conducting a series of interviews with the assistance of a structured questionnaire. (appendix A)

Although Christianity is influencing most of the present burials among the Pokot people, some individuals (traditionalists) have withstood modern burial practice acculturation. Such people are very important in the accomplishment of this study. Thus, particular emphasis will be focussed on the Pokot traditionalists, who still practice traditional burials.

I conducted research on the traditional mortuary practices of the Pokot people of West Pokot District during the months of November, December 1990 and part of January 1991. The research was successful because I managed to collect traditional mortuary data of 50

samples.

There were several objectives of this research, but the main ones were as following: (i) to collect data on the traditional mortuary practices of the Pokot people, so as to be used in this study and (ii) to obtain a data that can be used as analogies by future archaeologist in order to interpret mortuary remains within the area under the study.

I employed several methods in collecting the data. These methods included, oral traditions, a series of interviews, which touched on the beliefs and taboos which concern the death and burials. Also, interviews covered the social background of the deceased, as well as economic influence on traditional burials among the Pokot people. Personal observation and ethnographic background of the Pokot people were also important in this study.

The 50 samples, are analysed in the study. Out of 50 samples, 45 were reported cases while the rest(5) were actual burials which I observed. The data deals with some aspects which gives the reader detailed information about the mortuary practices in Pokot society. There are:- sex, burial position, age, social status, cause of death, location of the grave, and grave goods.

The reader, may wonder why I picked the Pokot community and not other people. I picked on the Pokot people because, it is a group of people that little work has been done not only on mortuary practices, but also other aspects such as politics, economic situation and general living situation. However, where, the culture of Pokots has been studied by scholars, little has been done on their mortuary practices.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF MORTUARY PRACTICES

INTRODUCTION :

In this chapter I will embark on a definition and description of related concepts to the study of mortuary practices. The significance of the study of mortuary practices to archaeology will also be included in this chapter. Methods employed to accomplish this study will be highlighted.

RELATED CONCEPTS :

Burial customs are many and vary widely among different communities. However, they may even further differ in the same community when some factors are left to determine them. Such factors may be social status of the deceased, the nature of the society to which the deceased belong, sex, age, cause of the death or the traditional beliefs on death and burial.

There have been many attempts towards the understanding of mortuary practices which have been advanced by respective scholars. Several assumptions and theories have widely dominated their attempts. However what is common among their works, is that most of the tradi-

tional burials are determined by either social status of the deceased, the age, sex, complexity of the deceased's society or sometimes the cause of the death.

O'Shea (1981:40, cited in Chapman I 1981:40) advanced the theory of mortuary differentiation which attempts to correlate the social configuration of a society with its practices for the disposal of the dead. In his theory, he made attempts to explain the existing relationship between the organization of a living society and its practices for the disposal of the dead. O'Shea (1981) argued that archaeological ability to get social information from mortuary remains is itself dependent upon the passage of time, during which the sample of the society's dead is accumulated. It is at this point that the concept of complexity of deceased's society comes in.

In many centuries and even in the same community, we find numerous ways employed to dispose of the dead, with no indication or proof of any kind that such are traceable to immigrant peoples. Bendann (1930:13) made an assumption that the varied methods of getting rid of a dead body are dependent upon sex, age, environmental and other related considerations.

Bendann (1930:16) made a further contribution by claiming that although disposal of dead is such a common feature, the methods of disposal are often dependent

upon certain attitudes which are reflections of the cultural background of the society in which the deceased belongs. In some societies, the death of a member is much more than just the removal of a member in a society. In such a society, the cultural attitudes towards death is always great. There is also a tendency of special respect the living have for the dead because of their beliefs.

Social status among a society is a crucial aspect of mortuary practices. Bendann (1930:197) has argued that rank differences affect the burial of the dead. The burial of a common person is extremely simple as opposed to a superior person. An inferior person is buried immediately, and an ordinary person is buried the day after his death. However, men of high rank are buried later.

Ucko (1969:269) has cited some examples in which the wealth and status of individuals is reflected in provision of grave goods. Ucko (1969) has argued that inclusion of grave goods in grave is seen as a way of respecting the deceased by the living and only the individuals of high ranks are buried with goods.

In his work, Ucko writes:

High-ranking and wealthy priests of certain cults of the Yoruba of Nigeria are given funeral rites of great splendour together with a profusion of valuables which are

displayed at the funeral. These valuables, which are provided by the kinsmen of the dead person; do not however find their way into the grave, but are taken by the deceased's fellow priests of the same cult association (1969:267).

On the same contribution on social status, Saxe (1970 cited in Brown 1971) made an assumption that the forms of differentiations in mortuary rituals take, vary significantly with the dimensions of the social status of the deceased. Here it is assured that, the extent of the burial ceremony will depend upon the contribution of the deceased to the society when he was living. An important person to the society is normally given a colourful burial ceremony as opposed to the bad person. Goody (1962:142) informs us that most of the burials among the Ashanti peoples are conducted according to one's behaviour when one was still alive. This depends mostly upon the social contribution to the community of the individual being buried. Goody (1962:142) says that, among the Ashanti people, the wrongdoers of one kind or another are given forms of burial that radically distinguish them from those who observed the social norms.

Tainter (1975:1) has argued that most of the recent cross-cultural studies of ethnographically recorded mortuary systems have shown that both the complexity of society as well as social status occupied by the deceased are expressed at the burial in various

forms. For instance, in a society where the social organisation is complex, the burial systems will differ from the societies with lesser complex social organisations. It is also on this line that we assume that burial differentiations, can be brought about due to a ranking system in the society. It is also this structural system that we experience burial casters in a society.

In most African societies, the cause of the death is only speculation. Most traditional Africans believe that death cannot be natural even in a situation where death is caused by normal accidents. They usually live in the word of superstition. The causes of death are normally associated with other concepts such as curse, or violence. However, what is certain among such societies is that death which is caused by old age is unchallengeable and less is speculated over its cause. However Goody (1962:142) has brought in another concept in this study by saying that, some burials are conducted according to the causes of death. Death, caused by committing suicide is given a certain type of burial that clearly distinguished it from normal cases.

The distance at which death occurs from the homestead plays a crucial role in deciding the type of burial. Binford (1971) made a contribution on how

distance can affect the mortuary practice of a given society. Binford assumed that deaths which occurred far away from homesteads were accorded special treatment such as cremation and dismemberment to avoid transport expenses. However deaths caused by epidemics were buried corporately in mass graves due to this accidental coincidence.

Wedgwood (1927:395 cited in Binford 1971) has argued that in Malanesia, the distinctions made by people in life are reflected in those made at death. However general observation has shown that the most common and simplest distinctions are that of age and sex. Wedgwood (1927) has further illustrated his argument by citing the simplest distinctions of burial forms as that of adults and children and between males and females. However, there are other marked distinctions which separate people in burials systems. Wedgwood (1927) cited such marked distinctions as wealth and usefulness to the living society. Some people are given different burial ceremonies because of their wealth or their valour.

Wedwood (1927) has also talked about the effect of cause of death of the mortuary practices. He has said that those people who have alienated themselves from society or endangered it by bringing upon themselves an

abnormal death are frequently cut off from the general communion of the dead. Here he means that people who cause their own death are not buried because of traditional beliefs in evil spirits which can be harmful to the living.

The differentiations in mortuary treatment are very important in this study. Some scholars, such as Binford (1971) and Wedgwood (1927) have argued that the differentiations in mortuary treatment related to social position are observed in various forms. Very high status persons may be buried in specific locations, after elaborate and unusual preparation of the body. The body may also be accompanied with specific material symbols of office and large quantities of contributed goods.

However, in each society there are also low status people. Such people, when they die, may be differentiated by membership group affiliation and sex only, with no specific treatment related to status.

Binford argues that:

The heterogeneity in mortuary practices which is characteristic of a single socio-cultural unit would vary directly with the complexity of the status hierarchy, as well as the overall organisation of society with regard to membership units and other forms of modalities (1971:14-15).

REVIEW OF PREVIOUSLY WORK WITH THE POKOT :

Prior to my present study of mortuary practices among the Pokot people, no detailed work appears to have been done on this aspect of society. However, other scholars have carried out research on the Pokot.

Some scholars such as Beech (1911) Huntingford (1953), Meyerhoff (1982) and Barber (1968) have researched and written on the Pokot society. However, the results have been fascinating especially on burial customs.

Much of contemporary archaeological conjecture and interpretation regarding the processes of cultural change, cultural differentiation and the presence of specific burial customs among the Pokot is inadequate. This has been partly caused by inadequate research by previous scholars, who only made their conclusions after studying a small area of the district.

It is also unfortunate that, most of the scholars were foreigners and too specific within only a few areas in the district. For instance, Meyerhoff (1982) dealt only with a small population of Pokot of Wei-Wei area, an area near Marchi Pass, a small location in Sigor Division. In her work, she only talked about general life of the Pokot, putting much emphasis on the economic

life of these people. Although, she talked about social organisation of the Pokot, touching on some concepts such as diseases, division of labour, circumcision and several other customs, she overlooked the burial practices of these people.

In his work, Huntingford (1953) concluded that only the males were buried and not women, unless the woman was very old and respected in the society. However, this has changed, as present oral tradition includes women in burial records.

Huntingford (1953) has studied the burial practices of other societies such as Nandi, Dorobo in his book entitled Nilo Hamites. But he talked shallowly on the Pokot people. However, we can not just blame him for this without considering the possible factors which contributed to this. There is the assumption that, his inadequate work on Pokot was caused by the hostility of the Pokots towards the whites especially in Kacheliba Area where Pokots border the Republic of Uganda.

According to Beech (1911) only the rich men were buried in cow-dung in his kraal which is vacated by his family and relatives six days after his burial. But, warriors, uncircumcised boys, girls and women were laid outside in bush for wild animals such as vultures and hyenas. Beech (1911) was bias, because his research was

based only one clan of the Pokot (Kasauri) but other clans bury their dead regardless of sex.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MORTUARY PRACTICES :

The study of mortuary practices among societies has contributed a lot to archaeology as an academic discipline, especially where written records are not available.

Chapman (1987:198) states that the main challenge which faces the archaeologist is to measure the extent to which there are material traces of mortuary practices found in the archaeological record. The truth is that, there are very few records. Thus the significance of my study will be to provide an ethnoarchaeological record dealing with mortuary practices among the Pokot people which can be used for archaeological reference.

Burial and funeral practices contain valuable information which can be used to trace the socio-cultural characteristics of pre-historic societies. Chapman (1982:201) has argued that mortuary practices have symbolised culture of certain societies. Very little which has been done on mortuary practices and cultural structures of the Pokot people. It is through this study

that we can be able to trace their culture concerning burial before the coming of written history.

It is through such study of mortuary practices that we can be able to find out the exact rituals that are performed among the Pokot people. By knowing this, we can be able to compare them with other societies, with an aim of understanding why there is variation in mortuary practices within and among societies. Still on the same point, such a study will enable archaeologists to know how variations are structured by socio-cultural aspects. Binford (1971) has argued that cross-cultural analysis of the relationship existing between the social differences of the living and cultural differences in the treatment of the body after death is very important in archaeology.

However, Chapman (1987:204) argues that the interest of archaeologists in death has been centred upon reconstruction of the socio-cultural aspects in the society the deceased belonged.

Goldstein (1981:57, cited in Chapman 1987) has defined the mortuary system as a multidimensional system. He argues further that, by studying mortuary practices of a given society, we can be able to know the body treatment, burial context within the grave and disposed of the body in a particular society.

Mortuary practices reveal the type of religious beliefs of a society. Nida (1954:14) has argued that death and its rituals are generally accorded the greatest religious ceremony, because death is taken as the transition to the spirit world. Viollien (1911:12-3, cited in Binford 1971) informs us that some archaeologists and anthropologists study burial to gain information on religion and beliefs of certain communities. In a situation where individuals have been buried with items such as weapons, agricultural tools or food such as meat, the conclusion has been that the deceased, belonged to the society where people believed in life after death.

Some burial items have been used to reveal the type of person buried. For instance a person buried with a spear, arrow or shield, is said to have been a warrior or a hunter. However, some cases have been reported where a whole human skeleton are uncovered in association with spear and animal bones. The archaeological interpretation is that the journey between the two worlds (old and new) was so long that man needs meat for the journey. But upon his arrival in the new world the deceased uses his spear for hunting.

Mortuary practices have been used as a means to trace the changes over time in some societies. Espe-

cially where changes of mode of disposal of the dead have been reported.

Since much of mortuary rituals are preserved in the archaeological record, the analysis of burial patterns can potentially yield detailed information concerning the social organization of prehistoric groups (Tainter 1975:1).

The study of mortuary practices can be used as a means of tracing the chronological sequences in socio-cultural aspects of a society. These chronological sequences can be very useful in dating, when the horizontal stratigraphy is employed. Clark (1960:130) noted that "... it is possible to obtain a fair idea of the relative age of individual graves even when provided with no closely datable grave goods" (cited in Ucko 1969:276).

JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

Little work has been done on traditional burial practices, not only on the Pokot people but also on other African societies. Like any other African society, the Pokot mortuary practices is concerned are of great importance as the study of mortuary practices. Such a study is useful not only to the archaeologists but also to the anthropologists. However it is unfor-

tunate that the traditional burial systems have been ignored by many of the scholars. The scholars who have researched the Pokot society have only concentrated on other aspects, thus overlooking burial systems.

The literature on mortuary customs among the Pokot people is scanty and incomplete hence it does not give useful information for archaeologists.

Despite the external influence (Christianity and Islam) on mortuary practices among the Pokots, their traditional mortuary practices are still a living and indispensable part of their culture.

My study of the Pokot will be of great value not only to the present archaeologists and anthropologists, but also to those in the future. The Pokot are a small sub-group of the Kalenjin whom less research has been done on. However, it is my hope that my contribution will be of great encouragement to others to dig deeper into the Pokot people.

HYPOTHESIS :

The following hypothesis has been proposed:

Mortuary practices is brought about by age, sex, social status, traditional beliefs on death and burial, and cause of death.

METHODOLOGY :

Dancey (1981:1) defines Archaeology as a field of study that seeks answers to questions about the nature of human culture and society as it existed in particular times in the past and also deals with the cultural and social changes over time. However, much emphasis has been put on material culture which provides a traceable basis for the past activities. On the other hand ethnoarchaeology, has been related with social aspects in the discipline of archaeology. It is unfortunate that we are forced to carry out research on a living community which may be less informed about the past cultural activities due to constant modernization. Field work has been recommended by several ethnoarchaeologists who have carried out research. Field work has been considered by several scholars as an important means in the accomplishment of such research studies.

There are certain methods which have been commonly employed either due to their suitability or ease. These methods included oral interviews both formal and informal, direct observation and the use of archival sources.

The aim of my research is to discuss at length the social aspects of the distinct mortuary practices

among the Pokot community. In this study, there was collection of data which was later systematically analysed with an aim of establishing some ideas which can be useful archaeologically. The data was obtained through several means, but with particular assistance of a questionnaire. My data aimed at testing the previously stated hypothesis.

The research took place in the months of November, December, 1990 and the early part of January 1991 in West Pokot District (see Fig. 3) this period was considered as suitable because of availability of informants as there was less involvements in domestic activities.

Despite the fact the travelling was difficult and expensive, the research covered most of the parts of the district; however, with less attention paid to the Kacheliba where Beech(19 indicates that most of the dead bodies are thrown in the sacred bushes.

My research included the collecting of both primary and secondary data. In this case, primary data constituted the major source of information on mortuary practices of the Pokot people. This included the use of formal survey forms (see Appendix A) for both selected interviews and oral traditions on death and burial practices of this society.

Out of the grand total of 50 people, 45 were interviewed, which amounts to 90%. The other method employed in collecting primary data was direct observation. A total of 5(10%) burial ceremonies were observed. Fortunately every small detail on certain aspects of the burials were seen and recorded with precision. However this technique covered only about 10% of the whole sample.

On the other hand, there is secondary data. This data was obtained from the ethnographic literature with particular reference to the former research by the earlier scholars. All these works contributed much information especially on the geographical background of the area occupied by the Pokot; history, origins and culture of the Pokot people. The library review also touched on the general beliefs of the Pokot people on death and burial.

INTERVIEWS: FORMAL SURVEY FORMS:

I managed personally to conduct a series of formal and informal interviews with different individuals, a large number of which were traditional elders in the community. A total of 30 individuals were interviewed. These interviews covered administrative divisions in the district in order to establish the differ-

ences existing among different Pokots of the same district. These divisions included, Kapenguria, Sigor, Chepereria and Kachelibo.

This interviews were carried out to establish some principle facts about the contemporary Pokot burial practices. However my interview was accompanied by utilizing a standard structured questionnaire for recording the information gathered (see Appendix A).

This questionnaire covers certain aspects such as age, sex, social status, cause of the death, burial position, general beliefs and concepts of life after death. Certain taboos on deaths and burials have been included in the questionnaire. The questionnaire has also covered the influence on Christianity and Islam on the tradition burials.

INTERVIEWS: SELECTED INTER- VIEWS :

My interviews covered people with special roles in the society. However, I did interview ordinary people. Because of the large number of the people in the area, I selected individuals whom I interviewed. My selection was based on the social status, occupation, age and sex.

My selection constituted a number of people such as circumcisors, village elders, teachers, midwives, traditional healers and funeral preachers. After collecting the data I later revisited the people to avoid elements of doubt and cross-checked the information I had gathered.

A lot of changes are taking place in the customs of the Pokot and hence the information is no longer centred on a particular clan of the people. I must admit that the people I interviewed were important for their information. One of the people I interviewed bitterly told me that "In no distant future the Pokot tribe with its customs will disappear in the thin air". He added that "I am afraid because the next generation will not be able to speak Pokot dialect."

Though there were problems in communication, I listened carefully to oral traditions and this was supported with probe questions for the purpose of clarity in the study.

According to the Pokot people, the funeral preachers and burying experts do organise burials properly in a traditional manner. Normally, the whole process of a funeral takes a short time because of the customs of the Pokot. For instance, the traditions of the Pokot hold that the dead body does not share a night

with the living in the same house.

Normally these funeral experts are the masters of pre-burial and post-burial ceremonies. The work of the funeral preachers among the Pokot people includes the offering of the dead body to the supreme being in the next world, thus signifying the notion of life after death.

Further findings in the interviews carried indicate the work of the burying experts in the society as to dig the graves, prepare the dead body and bury it. They are feared in the society because they are considered as members of the "soul world" where dead spirits live. However, they are normally few in number and after every burial ceremony a clan ceremony is performed. They are also given a cow as their salary.

Despite the fact that this group of the people is rare, I managed to interview two funeral preachers and two burying experts.

Though the oral traditions are the custodian of most of the culture of the people in different societies and that they transport the cultural past of the people into the cultural present, they have some disadvantages. Vansina (1965) has argued that oral traditions are dictated by societies in which they grow.

The past research shows that oral traditions are limited in generating information because of the strict observance of the social ^{norms} ~~norms~~, thereby restricting the informants from revealing relevant customs for the study.

In some research, oral traditions have been biased which makes the data difficult to interpret. Vansina (1965) has pointed out that oral traditions often lead to contradictory information because there are disputes among the informants. This makes ignorance and misinformation part and parcel of the research.

For the meaningfulness of the research and the study, I strictly interviewed and gathered the relevant information from a group of people who still practice traditional life which includes mortuary customs. For this reason, the data collected on burial practices among the Pokot are important and valid not only to the archaeologist but also to anthropologists. However, modern roots have deeply penetrated into the culture of the Pokot people, so much that most of the present burial ceremonies are mixed (modern and traditional). However, I feel that oral traditions can contribute to whatever archaeological evidence is available as demonstrated by my work.

DIRECT OBSERVATIONS :

I employed the observation technique by personally attending various burials taking place in the area of my research. I witnessed 10 burial ceremonies of which only 5 were important to my study because they were traditional. Otherwise the rest were either modern or mixed. However, I admit that the number I observed was small relatively to the information I gathered from the informants. There are certain reasons that can explain the cause of these disappointments. Firstly, the Pokot traditional burial ceremonies take place during early hours of the morning or late hours of the day (Vissen 1944). Thus it was extremely hard to attend such ceremonies because of poor communication.

Another reason is that Pokot people like doing their own rituals secretly and any new element among them, was avoided at all cost. For instance, I was unable to take photographs during burial ceremonies because it is strongly forbidden, no matter who you are and on what grounds.

Thus I can say that I witnessed only 5 traditional burial ceremonies. Of these 5 burials, 3 were males while the rest were females.

This technique was paramount to my study, because it gave me ample time to study and examine actual

behaviour as opposed to what was said, thought and explained by the informants in the field. I was further encouraged when my observations matched with the oral information I gathered.

Through this method, I confirmed various aspects of mortuary practices among the Pokot which made my work easier. These aspects included, recorded occupation of the deceased, social status, position of the grave, the shape and size of the grave, body orientation and treatment, estimated age, sex, and cause of death. This was particularly important, since it also gave me the opportunity to be able to analyse and compare the recorded details of the contemporary practices with interviews and previous studies.

ETHNOGRAPHIC LITERATURE :

I also used ethnographic literature from the library and analysis of the existing works on the burial practices among other societies, but with particular reference to the Pokot people. However, little has been done on the Pokot concerning mortuary practices. Literature on other societies has been equally important especially when it comes to the cross-cultural analysis.

RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS :

As usually, there are various problems that a researcher encounters when he/she is out in the field. The researcher often came across uncooperative respondents. The Pokot people are not keen to talk about what happens at death partly because they think they will be termed a primitive society.

Some of them claimed that they were restricted by their social norms and taboos. Normally the customs of the Pokot people forbid such an undertaking (i.e. dealing with sensitive part of their culture), particularly by strangers. However nonetheless, after a lot of consultations which claimed most of early time in the field, I managed to go through with the help of the elders.

There was a big problem which concerned the breakdown in communication during the oral interviews. Most of the traditionalists among the Pokot people do not understand either Kiswahili or English. Thus it was extremely difficult to communicate smoothly so as to reach the point.

Another problem was the small sample size at my disposal. This was caused partly by the tremendous

influence of Christianity and to lesser extent by Islam. These two regions have brought a lot of foreign cultural elements, many of which have been adopted by the majority of the Pokot people. Thus the burial customs and other ritual ceremonies performed during the funeral have also undergone many drastic changes. Such influence, especially of Christianity, has penetrated deeply even formerly unknown areas by the whites in the district causing changes to traditional burials. The impact being so tremendous that the present generation consider the traditional burials as history. This impact has caused many Pokot people to conform to a new style which sees the abandoning of old customs of mortuary practices which would have been useful for ethnoarchaeology.

Although there was a problem of reaching the funeral preachers and the burying experts. Their contribution was very useful in this study.

The sample which I have finally ended up with is assumed to be the representative of the traditional burial practices that can be found in this district.

CHAPTER THREE

ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE POKOT PEOPLE :

Introduction:

This chapter deals with the cultural and geographical background of the Pokot community in West Pokot District. An understanding of some of geographical facts may provide help to the reader in understanding the area under the study. This chapter will further venture into the origin and composition of the Pokot people. The traditional norms and beliefs on death and burial are also presented. This chapter will also widen its scope to examine social status among the Pokot community and also the role of traditional and foreign religions is included.

BACKGROUND OF WEST POKOT DISTRICT

Geographical analysis on West Pokot District

Location: West Pokot District is situated in Rift Valley Province along Kenya's western boundary with Republic of Uganda. It is bordered by four Kenya District, namely Turkana to the north and north-east, Baringo to the south-east, and Elgeyo-Marakwet and Trans-nzoia to the south. The position of the District

in relation to the neighbours is depicted in Figure 1.

Size: The district has an area of about 9100 km² which is about 5% of the Rift Valley Province. Administratively the district is divided into four divisions, namely, Kapenguria, Cheporenia, Sigor and Kacheliba.

History of West Pokot District:

Until independence, West Pokot District was called West Suk District (West Pokot District Atlas 1985). West Pokot is a district, where social and economic development started later than in most other parts of Kenya. It was remote from the centres of early social and economic development in the centre of the country, and its rugged topography made access to many of its resources difficult.

The population density is considerably below that of other districts with similar potential. On the side of development, much has been done, especially of late. The district is served by a well-tarmac road, which passes through the heart of the district from Kitale to Lodwar. However, there are several small murrum roads which penetrate through the formerly inaccessible areas, especially in areas of well-pronounced agricultural activities.

Spreading of christianity and Islam have created great impact on the social life of the indigenous people in the district. Schools and Health facilities have been greatly improved, thanks to the missionaries. Food production is increasing and at the moment is rapidly replacing the earlier subsistence and barter economy.

Physical Features

The attitude varies greatly over the district. The highest point is 3370m above sea level, on the Cherangany Hills which are located in the south-east section of the District. The Wei-Wei and Kerio River basins are less than 1000m high. The many hills and ridges are the catchment areas for many streams and springs, most of which flow towards Lake Turkana, either as part of the Swan (Turkwel) or Kerio River catchment. Most of the rivers in the south are part of the Nzoia River or Lake Victoria catchment. Most of the rivers vary from permanent to seasonal depending on the geographical conditions in which the river is located.

Climate:

Rainfall pattern and probability vary regularly in expected patterns from lowlands to highland areas. The annual rainfall varies from less than 400mm per year in the lowest regions to more than 1500mm per year in the

highest areas (West Pokot District Atlas 1985) the long rains season is often from March to September with maximum rainfall being concentrated in May and August. The short rains come in October.

ORIGIN AND COMPOSITION OF THE POKOT PEOPLE

The General Composition of People of West Pokot District.

The Pokot people are an exceedingly proud people, colourful in personality, appearance and social practices. They constitute a sub-group of the Kalenjin, a Nilo-Hamitic linguistic family (Highland Nilotes). They are widely known as 'Suk'. However the Pokot do not recognise 'Suk' as their tribe and hence they hate being called Suk. Oral tradition says that the word 'Suk' came from the Maasai Community. It means a short sword carried by the Pokot hill people.

Apart from the Pokot themselves, we have other tribes who have now settled permanently in the district. These are the people who have migrated from their native land due to either hostilities or shortage of land for farming. Such immigrants are commonly farmers. These include tribes like Kikuyu, Nandi, Luhya, Kamba,

Turkana and Karamojong. The presences of these tribes in the district has a great impact not only on the economic life but also on social life. Their influence is so strong that, in areas where the distribution of these tribes is equal to that of the Pokot, social life is transformed to modern. The mutual relationship between the newcomers and the Pokot is so strong that, interactions in many fields have been reported, including intermarriages.

General observation indicates that the Pokots are probably the least sedentary of all Kalenjin people. An estimation shows that about 40% of all the people in the district are pastoralists.

ORIGIN :

The origin of the Pokot people is still a mystery. However, according to Beech (1911) evidence of the origin of the Pokot people tends to support the oral tradition which may be taken to be substantially correct. There were two original Pokot groups living on the Elgeyo Escarpment. These were namely the Chok and Seker. However due to fugitives and adventurer from the Samburu, Nandi, Turkana and Karamojong, the Seker and Chok, began to intermarry. And as the a result of this intermariage is the modern Pokot.

This origin is supported by linguistic evidence. For instance, the Pokot language is full of loan words from their immediate neighbours. It is because of this that the Pokot language is sometimes referred to as a Nandi dialect. And the word end is the connecting link between the Pokot and the Nandi peoples. Further linguistic evidence shows that names of some places appear in the different groups of the people. For instance, Sigor is a famous name in the Pokot society, and it is also found in Elgeyo Marakwet and also within the Tugen people of Baringo District.

Huntingford (1953) indicates that the Pokot are composite people who are made up of two Highland Nilotes. Their origin and style of living is greatly affected by their neighbours. Although their origin is still unclear, it is assumed that they are from Nandi stock because of their living style. Their style of living reflects that of Nandi people especially when it comes to subsistence farming.

Another element of the Pokot people is traced from the Karamojong who occupy the northern part of the Republic of Uganda (Huntingford 1953). These Pokots are normally nomadic who spent of their time wandering around with their animals. The study of their culture is extremely hard and their daily life is strongly deter-

mined by the people they interact with and climatic conditions of that area. Their population is relatively small and scattered.

The linguistic evidence further indicates that the Pokot people were both agriculturalists and pastoralists from the beginning of their existence. However, some recent authorities claim that they might have been influenced by the Nandis before settling into their present day district. There is ample evidence however, to show that the Pokot were both pastoralists and agriculturalists. The agricultural group is known as pipa-pa meaning 'corn people' and the pastoralists were known as pi-pi-tic meaning 'cattle people' (Beech 1911).

The Pokots are divided into various groups at present. These groups are determined by location and natural environment which they occupy. The Hill Pokot stay in hilly country south of the Marich Pass which rises to 10,520ft on mount Sundany. This group is mostly pastoralists with subsistence farming of millet, tobacco, maize, cassava, finger millet and bananas. Oral literature on the Pokots indicates that the pastoralists are further divided into groups, namely the Kasauria who occupy the western plain which stretches towards the Republic of Uganda. This group has been greatly influenced by its neighbour, the Karamojong.

Another division is the Katiat who occupy the eastern plains from the eastern side extending towards Lake Baringo.

Few years before the coming of the Europeans, the Pokot people constantly suffered much from their northern neighbours, the Turkana, in terms of raids. The situation by then was so tense that there were no settled boundaries (Huntingford 1953). There was a shifting indefinite boundary, crossed by raiding parties from either side. But the general movement was always in favour of the numerically stronger Pokot people.

Huntingford (1983) further reports that, it was clear to most scholars that the tribal territorial structure in disputed areas was particularly fluid. The Pokot could not be contained merely by declaring a boundary. However, when the government took the upper hand in the matter, the Pokot had consolidated their hold in the Turkwel Valley and by the early 1920's all the area originally under dispute were in hands of the Pokot people.

SUBSISTENCE PATTERNS OF THE POKOT PEOPLE .

Considering the nature of their land, the Pokot people keep a large number of livestock. This includes

cattle, sheep, goats and donkeys. However, the Pokot people who border the Tugen of Baringo look after camels.

Subsistence Farming

General observation indicates that the coming of the other tribes in West Pokot District such as Kikuyu, Luhya, Kamba and Nandi have greatly created an impact on the economic situation of the Pokot people. The Pokot people are now practising arable farming on a larger scale in areas where conditions are conducive for farming. Apart from growing the indigenous crops such as millet, sorghum and finger millet, they also grow tobacco and maize on both commercial and subsistence basis. In recent periods they have even started taking care of orchards.

According to Meyerhoff (1982), two thirds of the Pokot people who live in the Cherangany Hills are farmers, since there is sufficient rainfall, though seasonal. The rest are pastoralists who live in drier areas on the floor of Rift Valley. These two groups, however, share essentially the same social and ritual practices. Each group making up what the others lack by trading grain for milk and other animal products.

To guard against crop failure, each family plants different crops at different altitudes and periods. Men

and women share work in the fields and during busy periods the households of a neighbourhood often form co-operative teams working in each others farms in rotation. However, some teams put themselves out for hire. Normally the payment is in form of local beer (Komuny).

Cattle Keeping:

Most of the pastoral Pokot spend much of their time searching for pasture for their cattle. They rarely stay in one spot for more than a few months. They also wonder around trespassing on the territorial boundaries of their neighbours. Sometimes in the past their movements were limited due to constant wars with the Turkana on the north. It is because of these movements that the Pokot people are sometimes referred to as nomads. It is unfortunate, that such movement among the Pokot people, it is extremely difficult for them to have well defined burial customs which can be easily studied.

Cattle play an important role in the lives of the Pokots. Apart from providing milk, blood and meat as food, the hides are used for clothing and bedding. The livestock are used for rituals. The wealth of a Pokot man has is measured in terms of the number of the livestock he owns. Cattle are rarely slaughtered for meat. Only young steers and old bulls may be consumed commu-

nally at very special occasions such as Sapana (the transition of young men into adulthood).

Looking after the cattle is done by the young boys aged between 10-16 years. However during the migration period, the young men aged between 19-25 years look after them because it is risky and tiresome as a large area may be grazed. Milking is done by women, children and sometimes by uncircumcised boys.

Trade:

Barter trading between the Pokots and their neighbours has a long history. Different trading centres in the district have been allocated a particular day of a week as a market day. For instance, Chepareria is on Thursday, Tuesdays in Chesongon, Wednesdays at Ortum to mention but few of them. During these market days many people are attracted from different areas. Some people come from as far as 80 km.

Oral research done on trade in the district indicates that some people cross their district boundaries to these markets either to buy or sell commodities. The impact of such trade, has been the creation of mutual relationship among the participants. The commodities on the markets are many and different, ranging from food stuffs, farming tools, metal tools including weapons, to livestock.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION AMONG THE POKOT COMMUNITY

The Pokot are among the least acculturated tribes of East Africa. They have traditionally remained aloof from the pressure of modernisation and development (Meyerhoff 1982). But however new roads through their lands and social projects with the goal of progressive change are threatening their fragile and cherished culture.

There is less literature on the kinship of the Pokot people. However the husband is the head of the house while the mother is responsible for the welfare of the family. The Pokot people are the patrilineal.

In day to day life, sex roles are clearly defined with women bearing the greater burden of labour. Meyerhoff (1982) reports that, the Pokot live by rules evolved over generations to make their way of life secure. They do not condone individuals resorting to witchcraft or sorcery. However rituals and mystical powers which allow access to the spirits rest with the community elders.

The Pokot people are divided into clans. The names and nature of these clans depends on the environmental situation in which they are found. There are several clans among the Pokot, but 5 of them are well defined. These include, Kasauri, Kacheripko, Mosop, Krui and Kacheptulel. Each clan is characterised dif-

ferently although the language and some cultures are similar. However, Pokot are exogamous clans (Beach 1911).

Kasauria clan, is characterised by pastoralist who wander with their livestock throughout the year. The land is communal property. They are warlike people. Men are not circumcised, but women are circumcised. They occupy Kacheliba division.

Kacheripko clan is full of pastoralist. They are the people who like staying in homesteads. They occupy some part of Kacheliba Division. They are closely related to the sub-clan known as Kasuom. Mosopot clan is made up of mixed farmers. They are the people who stay in cold areas. They occupy Kapenguria Division. They circumcise both males and females. Krui and Kacheptulel clans occupy Sigor Division and some parts of Cheparenia Division. They practice both pastoralism and crop farming. They are warlike people and they are unfriendly to their neighbouring clans.

The Pokot have age-sets which are mostly determined by circumcision periods. For instance Maian is the age of those recently circumcised and includes youths of between the ages of about 15-30 years. Nyongu is the next age to the Maina ranging between 45-60 years of age. , Kablelach is the age of above 60 years. (Beach 1911)

Beach 1911

Raiding of livestock from other tribes has been part and parcel of the traditional culture of the Pokots. It has been a way for young men to display their quality as warriors. Oral tradition says that such an act of rustling is considered as one of the few ways for young men to start building a herd which they would need to get a wife and other needs in future life. However, with time the nature of cattle rustling has changed. In many cases it has degenerated into ordinary thuggery, murder and theft, without any relation to the original traditions.

Inheritance:

The death of a person raises the question of what must be done with his property. When an old man dies, the property is inherited by the oldest son. However, in the case of a mother dying, her belongings are inherited by the youngest son.

Although it is not common for an individual to inform his close relatives or friends that after his death he wished certain cattle or other property to be given to someone in particular, the wishes made before death are adhered at all costs. This idea is orally supported by a common notion among the Pokot community that the word of a dead person is not violated. However, it is only in the heat of the moment that the proper-

ty is shared randomly. For instance property of a dead person who do not have defined relatives or friends is shared randomly. Otherwise inheritance among the Pokot people is systematic.

Although death among the Pokot community is taken as an enemy, it does not immediately dissolve a marriage. Except under special circumstances, a widow remains attached to her husband's people and must continue to bear them children. On the other hand, a widower still has certain claims upon his wife's parents especially if she has died without having children. After the burial ceremony, the surviving spouse is ritually purified and observes various morning rites for about a week.

SOCIAL STATUS :

Not all Pokot people are equal. Some people are known to cause misfortune while others are known to promote the well being of the land and the people. All these people are treated in accordance to their contributions to the society. The people with 'eyes' are considered people with an innate ability to spoil good things with their eyes. They are referred to as Wutin. Some of them are dangerous to human beings especially to strangers and children. Others affect animals, resulting in diseases, reduction and death of their young. Such people in the Pokot society are

negatively treated even after their deaths.

On the other side of the coin, are people with specific good qualities. Such people are considered to be with 'a pure heart' or tilil. They are the modest, quiet ones who look after their parents and do not transgress the codes of the society. They normally officiate in rituals, can say the blessings and promote the welfare of the society.

HOW STATUS WAS MEASURED AMONG THE POKOT PEOPLE:

There are two types of social status among the Pokot people. These are, achieved and ascribed status.

ACHIEVED STATUS:

This is a situation where people are selected on personal skill, wisdom and merit. Usually the people who belong to these statuses are endowed with special knowledge in order to discharge their services to the society. These people are appreciated in the community because their duties are indispensable.

In achieved statuses we further have divisions namely high status and low status. I will start talking about high status among the Pokot people.

PROPHET:

He is traditionally known as Werkoyon. This social status is restricted only to the males among the

Pokot people, The Pokot belief that common people dream but only the prophets have visions. Among the Pokot, dreaming itself is a treatment experience while a prophetic vision is not only exceptionally but dangerous.

During the prophetic vision, the head departs alone on its journeys. The Pokot belief, that the travelling head is the spiritual counterpart of the physical one, a replica embodying its vital forces. The prophet's physical head during the vision travels through time and space in order to discover the most favourable solution to pressing problems. (Peristiany 1975).

The language of prophecy is a mixture of human and divine speech. The prophet knows the mind and the will of Ilat (god of above) the god nearest to humans. He also communicates with the mind of man, with the spirit of the deceased and with animals and plants. He travels through the air, treads the soil and explores the bowels of the earth. He thus, unites in his person all the worlds known to the Pokots. Peristiany (1975) reports prophets among the Pokot has the power to decide when a new age-set should be initiated, when war is to be waged, when people and cattle should be moved, the proper time for planting and the settling on or cultivating new lands.

The nature of the prophet is ambiguous. However what is certain is that he is considered as a son of the Ilat. Throughout their history, prophets have been intimately connected with the Pokot struggles for survival. Apart from advise based on his vision of the raid, the prophet assists his warriors by equipping them against adversity while by a reversal of his actions, he weakens the resistance of the enemy (Peristiany 1975).

In his work, Peristiany (1975) further looks at the role of the prophet as intermediary between various manifestations of life between humans and the nearest god to man. The prophet also actualizes the ideal of life and death. However his power is greatest during the times of wide-ranging danger and most limited during the humdrum period of everyday existence, (Peristiany 1975).

Oral traditions, indicates that prophets were few among the Pokot and most of them are said to be 'foreigners' from other societies such as Nandi.

RAINMAKER:

He is the second on the list of importance in Pokot society. He is traditionally known as Monung. However Chepsokoyan also mean rainmaker. Rainmakers are mostly found among the Kasauria, a clan among the Pokot. The Kasauria occupy the disadvantaged land frequented by drought and famine. It s this necessary

to have such specialists to soften life when the solution is extreme. Among the Pokot, a rainmaker must be a male, a person who is very influential and important in the community.

Like among other African societies such as Bukusu of Bungoma district, Kenya, the ability of the rainmaker, among the Pokot, to procure weather is admired by many and considered beyond dispute. The rainmaker has the power to bring rain, he halt devastating droughts and grisly famines. There are usually conditions for a rainmaker in Pokot society:

- (i) The person must be clean in both his deeds and words, so that he can be able to communicate with supreme being;
- (ii) He must be old, presumably over 70 years;
- (iii) Must be male with mixed sexes of children;
- (iv) He should also be a grandfather who has grandson who is married;

Rainmakers are considered a mediator between the living, dead and the unborn, plus their god. In clans where prophets are not available, a rainmaker performs both duties of prophet and rainmaker. Usually when his work is fruitful he is given some gifts by the people. Such gifts are like livestock, crops, animal products, tobacco and milk. Besides the gifts, the rainmakers are honoured by the society.

The rainmaker leads the society in offering some

sacrifices to their god. Such a ceremony is called putiori, where a certain type of sheep is killed, preferably black in colour. Then the skin of the sheep is shared by the people around, who make some rings for their figures. After this ceremony they wait for 3 days for rain to come.

TRADITIONAL HEALER

↳ The traditional healers are both male and female. Males are traditionally known as Chepsagitian while females are called Chepsokoyon. Apart from healing, they are also considered as ritual elders. Their work resembles that of traditional priests, i.e. they preside over priestly functions. For instance, they offer sacrifices at traditional shrines which deal with community supplications.

Among the Pokot, the traditional healers have access to the magical powers and their ancestors. Like Luhyas, their functions include the expulsion of bad omens (epidemics), neutralizing of witches, to advise or bless the warriors before waging a conflict against enemies. In clans where prophets are not there, the male traditional healers act as the Werkoyan (prophet).

Traditional healers should be a person with a good memory to know a large number of roots of trees as herbs. He usually employs traditional techniques, thus he uses herbs to cure human as well as livestock dis-

eases where possible. However in a situation where diseases are beyond his reach, he usually turns to Toro rot (god) for assistance by offering animal sacrifices. But where god is said to be slow, he calls for assistance from the ancestors.

Usually, male traditional healers are more respected in the society than the female traditional healers. This is supported by common notion among Pokot which sees women as sub-standard in everything they do.

Traditional healers are expected to be married with children. They must be over 40 years of age. Oral traditions indicate that the power of healing among the Pokot society is sometimes inherited. Here is a situation where the son or daughter of a healer takes interest in healing the sick. With time the son or the daughter becomes experienced and thus takes over from his/her parent. Sometimes healing is seen as a family activity where every member of the family of a traditional healer becomes a healer. In a situation where the notion of age and family status is over-ruled by inheritance, traditional healers can be as young as 20 years of age, depending on his/her ability.

FUNERAL PREACHER:

Traditionally, the funeral preacher is a man. He is grouped among the ritual elders. The funeral

preachers are normally very few in number among the Pokot. In some clans they do not have these funeral preachers, so that they can only get the services of a funeral preacher through hiring from other clans. traditional shows that a funeral preacher does not toil to acquire his status.

During the funeral ceremonies, he is in control of both the pre-funeral and post-funeral gathering. Like in many African societies, among the Pokot, the funeral preacher should be a person of moral integrity, who neither performs witchcraft or engages himself in adultery nor killing. Usually a person gets to be a funeral preacher after he has displayed excellent work as a burying expert. Hence, to be a funeral preacher you must have been promoted from being a burying expert. He usually puts on an official gown during the funeral function.

The funeral preacher is a counsellor, a teacher, and peacemaker. Although funeral preachers are found in almost every clan, they are sometimes interchanged, especially in a situation where some funeral preachers command more respect from the society because of their distinguished work.

The few cases, I managed to interview, said that the self imposed funeral preachers normally collapse and met their death when carrying out their duties at the

grave side. However quick ritual ceremonies of such a collapsed funeral preacher can save his life. I asked one of the funeral preachers, on what criteria a person is chosen to be a burying expert and then promoted to funeral preacher. The response was that "it is only god and the ancestors that can answer that question."

The funeral preachers must be aged person of over 50 years. They should also be married with children. The funeral preachers work hand in hand with burying experts.

RICH ELDER:

Traditionally the rich elder is known as Mongoriyon. His wealth is measured in terms of the number of the livestock and the children he has. Because of his wealth he is respected by society and thus he is taken as the community elder. In his office he is considered as a judicial elder, who settles disputes especially among the warring lineages. He is expected to help the society during periods of problems, for instance during a famine. Where life is unpleasing, he promotes social cohesion and monopolizes the utilization of natural resources.

He is a person who has many wives, thus many children. A rich elder is supposed to have quiet a number of domestic workers. In return they are given food in terms of crops and milk. In cases, a person is

considered a rich elder because of large number of cattle, wives, children and workers at his disposal.

POTMAKER:

A potmaker among the Pokot people is a specialist in making of pottery items such, as cooking pots, bowls, pots for storing water, pots for brewing beer and smoking pipes. However there are other pots which are ceremonial and ritual.

There are two groups of potmakers among the Pokot people. One type belongs to the group of potmakers who make only pottery items which can be ordinary used. Such pottery items can be traded within and among societies. Oral traditions show that such potmakers are restricted from making ceremonial and ritual pottery items.

However, the other group is that of ritual potmakers. These are the potmakers who are allowed in the society to produce ceremonial or ritual pots. However these potmakers can manufacture other ordinary pots for daily use. Ritual potmakers command higher respect in the society than the ordinary group of potmakers. Ritual potmakers are expected to be pure in their deeds and words also married with children. This type of potmakers is restrict only to the males. No female potmaker is allowed to make ceremonial pottery items.

BLACKSMITH:

There are normally very few blacksmiths. Their origin and spread among the Pokot community is still unknown even to the traditional elders. However traditions claim that the blacksmith among the Pokot are foreign because they said to have come from Karamojong community.

Their work involves the making of iron tools including arrows, spears, bangles, swords (suk), rings hoes and axes. Making iron tools causes them to be in their own class of social status. They are normally respected among the society.

This group of people is wholly restricted to the males only. There is less literature on iron making in Pokot society. However what is clear about this occupation is that, it can be inherited or achieved by individuals. Oral traditions show us that most of the blacksmith among the Pokot are found among the clan of Kasauri.

CIRCUMCISOR

A circumcisor is traditionally known as Mutini among the Pokot people. His work involves the initiation of the sub-adult age-set into manhood and also gives the initiated boys advice which guides them into manhood.

This act of initiation of the youths into adulthood is done to both females and males. Males are circumcisors who prepare the boys into manhood while the clitoridectomists prepare the girls to become women.

The occupation of initiating the youth to adulthood is very facing and needs a lot of keenness when performing the act. Oral tradition reports some ugly incidences which are experienced during the 'operation' of both girls and boys. Many boys and girls have lost their lives during the operation because of the over-bleeding which is caused by carelessness of the 'operators'. Normally, when such a misfortune occurs the person responsible for the operation is fined in terms of livestock and banned completely from the occupation.

Although many 'operators' achieve their position, through working, oral tradition claims that the job of initiating the youth is inherited among the family or sometimes in the clan.

Oral research shows that, clitoridectomy among the females is fading out due to the pressure from religions and governmental authorities. Further findings show that, the more 'remote' the area is, the higher the incidence of clitoridectomy.

The payment of the 'operator' is in terms of live stock, such as sheep and goats. But in a situation where the 'operation' involves other ritual (cleanese)

ceremonies, the victim pays a cow or more.

A circumcisor is expected to be a person who is quite slow in making decisions. His first born must be a boy. He is suppose to be aged more than 40 years. A clitoridectomist is an elderly woman with a mixture of both sexes of children. They are not as common as circumcisors. However, both of them have common characteristics in the community as both of them play an important role in introducing the youth into adult life.

The circumcisor is a person who is well respected among the society, especially among the people circumcised by him. Usually there is a mutual relationship between the circumcised and the circumcisor.

Burying Experts.

Burying experts are a group of people who are only important in society during the funerals. This group of burying experts is made up of males only. The age of them varies from 30 to 40 years, before being promoted to funeral preachers.

The recruitment to this status is still unknown. But what is certain is that they are recruited by the ancestors.

Midwifery.

Like in any other society this status is restricted to females. The status requires midwives to be

married with children. Their work deals with birth complications, thus they have a great influence on the married female population.

Where pregnancy is unwanted, the victim contacts the midwife for a traditional abortion, especially when the pregnancy is caused by rape, incest or sometimes when the woman is not ready for the next child.

They are normally respected in the society and they are paid animals for their services. For instance when the child born is a girl the animal paid should be like she-goat and vice-versa when it is a boy.

On the other side of the coin there is low achieved status.

Diseased People.

This group includes the individuals who have suffered from strange and incurable diseases. Such diseases may include tuberculosis, epilepsy, leprosy and whooping cough. Such people are normally considered to be social misfits in the society. However in some cases these people own wealth in terms of children and live-stock. In spite of their wealth and special talents, they are still taken as invalid in the society. Oral tradition indicates that their impurity among the society is a great barrier to social mobility and status mobility.

Some individuals have become impotents or barren because of some diseases. Such people as impotents or barren are isolated in the society because they are considered 'social misfits'. Usually they are not appointed to hold some responsibilities in the society because their appointment is not only a mistake but it is also a taboo to appoint them.

Traditionally strange diseases which may cause barrenism or impotence are considered as a punishment from the supreme being. The outcome of such diseases are taken with a lot of mixed feelings among the people.

Witches

Witches are normally few in number and they are considered as outcasts because they are harmful to society. They can be either males or females, but normally male witches are more active than females because of their easier mobility.

They are usually isolated in the society because there is a belief that their association with the community is a violation against the supreme-being. They are active during the night, and they are associated with occurrence of deaths of both humans and livestock. But sometimes they are held responsible of natural calamities as a punishment from the supreme-being.

In a situation where a witch has children, these children are also discriminated against. Normally when

witches are found guilty they are killed.

Ascribed Status:

The people who poses ascribed status are usually appointed by the council of elders to hold high ranks in the community without considering their merits. However, their appointments is based on age and sex. They are disliked by the most of the people because they are seen as handicapped with leadership qualities. However they are nominated to village elders only. There are also other status in which an individual is entitled to have because of their age or sex. These are housewife, adult, youth and infant.

As it is in achieved status, we also have low and high status in the ascribed status. I will start with high status.

Village Elder:

A village elder is a person of average age and means of living. A village elder can be either a male or female. The function of a village elder is to arbitrate in the traditional courts. Although this status is shared by both sexes, males village elders are highly respected as opposed to female village elders.

His office deals with certain aspects in live, such as divorce cases, bride wealth contests, civil wars

including members of the same clan or surrounding ones and also cases dealing with land disputes.

The village elders are expected to be married with children. They are also envoies between warning groups of the clan. In the society, they are the people who ensure that peace and order are maintained. His salary is paid in the form of livestock and crops by the parties he deals with.

It is important to note in part that, not all the elders in the village becomes village elders. They are normally few of them who become village elders. Sometimes this status is inherited by the son from the father, especially where the father displays distinguished services to the society.

Adult:

An adult in Pokot society, is a person who has been circumcised and is ready to take care of any great responsibilities in the society. Such responsibilities are like leading other young adults into war, or raids. On the other hand female adults are ready to be married and look after the welfare of the family. Among the Pokot society the adults are useful because they are a source of inspiration in not only in the family but also in the society. The age of the adult

among the Pokot community ranges from about 23-40 years.

Housewife:

A housewife is greatly respected in Pokot society because she is seen as the source of the family. Her respect is determined by the number and sex of children she has. A mother who has only female children is less respected because there is a belief among the Pokot that males are gifts from the supreme beings. In a situation where a wife bears only female children, the husband is allowed by the traditional customs to marry other wives. Likewise, a wife who is barren is considered an outcast in the society and hence her husband is allowed to marry other wives or divorce her.

In the low status in ascribed status, we find youths and infants:

Infants:

Young people are very important among the Pokot. The infants, are considered as the gifts from Tororot (supreme being) to the society, especially the male infants. The illness and death of infants is considered as a warning or punishment from above, and may be because of the wrong activities of the parents. The age of infants range from 0-5 years but during the burial,

infants age range from 0-10.

The infants are associated with the ancestors in the society because of the belief that ancestors are born again as infants and that is why they name infants after dead people. Infants spend most of the time with their mothers. The death of infants is taken as a punishment to the parents from the ancestors or their gods.

Youths:

Youths are aged between about 10-20 years. They are usually separated according to their sex. The girls spend most of their time with their mothers while boys with the male adults. They are given a traditional education in accordance to their needs.

Both sexes undergo initiating ceremonies, where they are taught how to become responsible mothers, warriors, or fathers. Their deaths are greatly mourned over because they are seen as the key for the next generations.

How Status is Gauged:

There are various ways of measuring the status of the people. However, general observation shows that most of the high social statuses are occupied by males. For instance, the prophet and rainmaker. This is a

situation where sex and age determine social status of the individuals.

Oral traditions indicate that some individuals acquire certain high status because of their personal qualities. Such qualities may be as, oratory or expertise in dealing with problematic issues. For instance, such individuals are funeral preachers, traditional healers, rainmakers, prophets, potmakers, village elders, midwives, blacksmiths and circumcisors.

Those people who are married and have children are placed in certain category of social status. Among the Pokot society, the children are so important that some social statuses are determined by them. For instance, funeral preachers, midwives and circumcisors must have children. Apart from children other factors are also considered, such as livestock and talents.

Some social status are dictated by the age of individuals in the society. Among the Pokot people age plays an important role in social status, because there is a social ladder that one climbs in accordance to her/his age. For example, for one to be a rainmaker, he should be over 70 years of age, married and must have a grandson who is circumcised. While a village elder should be over 45 years of age married with children. Midwives must be aged women with children.

Like in many other African societies, a person owning a lot of livestock, crops and being over 45 years of age and married to many wives with many children of both sexes, stands a good chance of becoming a rich elder. Such property indicates one's economic and social competence. (see Table 1 below):

POKOT SOCIAL STATUS CATEGORIES

A VERY HIGH SOCIAL STATUS	B HIGH SOCIAL STATUS	C MEDIUM SOCIAL STATUS	D LOW SOCIAL STATUS
A ₁ Prophet married with children	B ₁ Individuals with special duties to society e.g. potmaking singing blacksmith orating	C ₁ Warrior married labourer with children	D ₁ Un-circumcised adult
A ₂ Rainmaker married with children	B ₂ Circumcisor both male and female Burying expert	C ₂ Married adult, with children Housewife	D ₂ Natural dis- advantaged e.g. lepers, individu- als, suffering from tuberculosis epileptics.
A ₃ Traditional healer, who is married with children	B ₃ Mid-wife	C ₃ Circumcised male or female -unmarried -youth	D ₃ Married without children e.g. barren impotents
A ₄ Funeral Pre- acher -rich indivi- dual (owner of children and livestock	B ₄ Polygamous -many wives and children	C ₄ Infants	D ₄ Witches both females and males
A ₅ Village who has many wives and children			

Table 1: Social Status among the Pokot

RELIGION IN WEST POKOT DISTRICT:

The Role of Traditional Religion among the Pokot people

Beech (1911) has been reported saying that nothing could be more delightfully vague than the religious ideas of the Pokot people. The Pokot lack a set of doctrines, a regular cult, a mythology, temples or even shrines. Moreover people do not agree about various concepts, although Beech (1911) exaggerated when he stated that it is difficult to find two men having ideas on this subject exactly coincident (Beech 1911:19).

Among the Pokot society, people do not like and are not used to talking about religion directly. Religion is part and parcel of life and expresses itself in life. Various notions about the traditional beliefs have been associated with religion among the Pokot community. However in his final assessment Beech (1991:20) states that the Pokot people were like the Athenians of the Holy Bible, worshipping an unknown God.

As it is with other Highland Nilotic peoples, there is one God, known as Tororot, who is equal with the sky yim. Tororot is the one who is far or who is very high.

Tororot is the father or master of both the sun and lightning. He is the greatest of the Pokot deities. Oral tradition shows that not only the Heavens but the very notion

of the above, are equated with Tororot and his likeness no one has ever contemplated (Peristiany 1975).

Peristiany (1975) reports that, Mount M'telo is considered as Tororot's abode on earth. It is the most venerated Pokot side. This mountain may not be scaled and no fire may be ignited in its vicinity. Oral tradition shows that during great festivals, only the elders who are nearest to death, may sit facing in the direction of the sacred mountain.

It is sometimes said that Tororot may be incensed by the wrong doing of his children. When such a situation occurs, Tororot may visit on them various calamities, more as a warning than a punishment. However the form and the extent of the warning vary with the social range of the offence.

When the living situation has gone astray various forms of sacrifice are performed by specialists. The sacrifices may be in various forms such as animals. However such sacrifices are performed when the collective prayers have failed.

Tororot is considered as the most efficient helper to the living. He owes many duties to the people. Visser (1989) describes the duties of the Tororot in many areas. He says that, Tororot hears and listens to the requests made by his children such as rain, children, pasture and property through prayers. In some cases Tororot is seen as a ruler, shepherd, the molder and he is also the final cause of every-

thing. For instance Pokot people use the same reasoning with reference to a barren woman who has unsuccessfully gone through all rituals, Tororot, made her like this. (Visser 1989).

Apart from the sky (Tororot) we have the sun and Flat as 'small gods'. The sun is known as Asis in the Pokot language. The sun is described as the Munung po maril meaning the child of whiteness. The colour white signifies the purification of his deeds. He also considered as the touch of the eaten. His main role is to be the eye of the adobe. He sees everything that happens on the earth and is considered as a witness. The people direct their prayers to him (Peristiany 1975). Normally the burial position is determined by Asis. Bodies are buried facing the direction where the sun rises (east).

Ilat is a god of the above. Many of his tangible signs are found on earth. Ilat is directly connected with earth because it is seen in rain, rivers and lakes. However one of his specific function is to act as the messenger of Tororot rulers people are wrong. They are usually warned by Ilat to change their steps through droughts or diseases. However, oral tradition indicates that grown up men and women are usually addressed by him in the dark of night so that only his voice may be heard (Periastiny 1975).

Apart from the normal gods that are found among the Pokot community, there are other kinds of extra-ordinary beings. These extra-ordinary beings perform different roles in the community and their importance and closeness to the people varies among themselves.

Visser (1989:111) has tried to illustrate their relationships to the people in the community (see table 2).

Mbithi (1969) reports that, the Pokot people believe that natural calamities such as drought, epidemics locus invasions, deaths, wars and foods are beyond human control. Such activities are attributed to God's activity or to a spiritual being. Usually natural calamities are said to be punishment from God. The most serious punishment from God among the Pokot is death.

REVIEW OF VARIOUS ASPECTS OF EXTRA-ORDINARY BEINGS:

NATURAL FORM	SYMBOLS	ATTRIBUTE	QUALITIES	CHARACTER	SPATIAL DISTANCE TO MAN	MAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS
Tororot	Sky	Father	Healing and listening	Good on distance	Very far	Great respect
Asis	Sun	Family	Seeing	Usually Good	Very Far	Respect
Illot	Rain	Extra-ordinary		ambivalent	participative	limited respect
Dnyot		Sometimes extra-ordinary being	Negative actions	Negative	around man	fear and awe
Oy			Negative effects	usually negative	close	fear
Kuko		snakes/ porcupine	Quiet		close	respect
Wutin			potential harmful	acceptable	special place	accepted within limit
Ponin			manipulating of evil	bad/jealous	among people	fear/ rejection
Mutin			manipulating of evil		among people	fear/ rejection

Table 2
 Source: By Visser (1989:111)

TRADITIONAL BELIEFS OF POKOT PEOPLE .

As is common in many African traditional communities, there exists a widespread belief on what happens after an individual passes away in the Pokot community. There are also other beliefs not necessary dealing with death but dealing with what happens in the daily calender. For instance sickness, natural calamities, death of livestock and sometimes earthquakes.

GENERAL BELIEFS ON DEATH AND BURIAL.

Death:

Among the Pokot, death is considered as a cruel punishment from the supreme beings, Tororot and it is the last and greatest evil of all, nor can anything soften its sting (Beech 1911).

There is a common strong belief on death among the Pokot people which holds that, death cannot be natural unless it happens to a very aged person who has grand-children. Otherwise there is a common notion which says that a person has been bewitched! However in cases where a bad person dies, the society believes that the supreme being has been annoyed by his deeds and thus punished him by taking away his life. Such a bad person who dies is normally not given ceremonial burial rites, as they believe that the curse will extend its carelessness to the living members of the

family or clan. Death is taken as the biggest and most painful punishment from the above not only to the family of the deceased but also to the whole society.

Oral traditions holds that beliefs on death are determined by the cause of death, the social status of the deceased and also his age and sex.

Burial.

Oral traditions show that the burial itself, is considered as a journey to a next world. The act of burying an individual is taken as an act of escorting the deceased to a next world. This moment of burying is said to be the most sad moment that the bereaved family undergoes, especially when death claims the soul of the bread earner in the family. However they normally console themselves by believing that such a sorrowful moment in life is, but a stage which one has to go through.

During the normal burial period, there is a lot of fear and tension. It is because of this fear and tension, that only relatives and close friends are left to carry out the whole process of burial. However in a situation where, the relatives and close friends are lacking to bury their deceased, burying experts and funeral preachers are given the responsibilities of organising and burying the body, for

which they are paid in return.

As is common in many African traditional societies, Pokot people discourage the presence of strangers during the burial. In a burial ceremony an individual or individuals who are viewed with suspicion of having caused the death of the deceased are stopped from attending the funeral ceremony. This also applies to strangers. The presence of such individuals at the burial ceremony is believed to cause a direct confrontation between the deceased and the living. There is also a belief that the killer may die if he avails himself at burial ceremony. Sometimes the presence of the killer at the ceremony may cause the deceased to pronounce a curse upon the living.

CONCEPT OF THE LIFE AFTER DEATH .

Among the Pokot community life is considered as a complete circle, where one must go around in his/her life time. Therefore death is taken as one part of a circle which an individual experiences. What is certain among the Pokot, is that when an individual dies, he/she goes to the next world. Though this is the common notion that governs the situation after the death, there are some individuals who are believed to have reached the end of the cycle and hence there is no life beyond the grave. Such individuals may be murders, witches, people who meet their deaths through violence such

as suicides, and the outcasts in the society. Such people are not buried, but they are thrown in the bushes or left in the bushes.

Normally, an elder (over 45 years) who is rich and married with children is buried after one or two days of his death. This is because of the belief that life from earth to a next world is a continuation and thus there is no need of wasting time.

Naming of the new borns after the ancestors has been reported among the Pokot people and this provides ample evidence that Pokot people believe in life after death.

ANCESTORS.

The 'spirits of the below' have a link with the patrilineal ancestors, the Kuko (the ancestral spirits). There is a belief that the ancestors too live below as the Werkoyon (prophet) or seer as I was remained during an oral interview. However Visser (1989) reports that, the ancestors reside in the underworld a place in and under the soil.

There is a common belief among the Pokot that a dead person can appear from the underworld in the form of an animal. In other contexts such animals as the puff adder and python appear. A python visiting a house is appeased with some milk and tobacco; because it is a hungry ancestor.

If people refuse to appease the ancestor, normally one of members of the household will die. Similarly, Pokot people treat pythons with respect when found coiled up in the homestead. There is a belief that this python is an old man is an ancestor who has honoured them with a visit and given them his blessings (Visser 1989).

Beech (1911:20) claims that children honour their parents by putting or throwing some tobacco on their parents graves. The children also take care of the graves of their parents.

When a long period elapses after death and no living member of the deceased patrilineal family has called out the spirit in name, during the naming ceremony of a child, the spirit despairs returning to life. It normally comes back to harm the living kin. The living are however protected by their spirit allies who are considered 'good news'. The harmful spirits are 'black ones'. When the people have lost the memory of their kin, spirits become a menace to all living people in the form of famine droughts, strange diseases and sometimes fools. These spirits lead a life very similar to that on earth. Oral tradition shows that the ancestral spirits continue to take an active role in the fortune of their living descendants. The ancestral spirits reward the living with good health and prospering for those who treat them with respect and obedience. On the other hand

the spirits punish those who neglect them or who offend them. The punishments may take different forms, such as sickness economic loss or other misfortune.

Each family is held to be under the direct guidance of its own ancestors; who in turn are interested only in the affairs of their descendants.

The Pokot belief that a man who enjoys the protection of the gods will not die without leaving behind male progeny (Persitiany 1975).

Often a good relationship between the ancestors and the living people is kept mutual by the constant offering of sacrifices in form of livestock and farm products. In a situation where, evil spirits are a menace to the living, sacrifices are also offered, next to the respective graves of the ancestors. However in a case where these sacrifices fail to appease the evil spirits, alternative means are employed which are sometimes extreme ones. For instance burial transfer. There is a belief that the ancestor was not pleased with either the burial position or grave location.

Mourning

As soon as anyone dies or the news of the death is broken, the women around the dead or in the homestead start wailing loudly. This conventional signal normally attracts most of the neighbours, who join in the wailing. The extend of mourning among the Pokot de-

depends on sex, age and social status of the deceased. And the mourning ceremonies are more than a mere formality, because it provides a recognised channel for the expression of true grief.

Taboos on Death and Burial

Normally there is no mentioning of the name of the dead person, regardless of his/her achievements, unless the name of the deceased has been re-used for new borns. However Pokot believe that the act of mentioning the name of a dead person brings harm to a family: sickness, lightning and sometimes more deaths in the clan because the spirits of dead person are still living within the society.

Oral tradition shows that 'loose talk' about death is strongly discouraged among the young; and the mentioning of death is even more harmful during night than daytime because, the ancestral spirits are believed to be more active.

Generally the Pokot people are not keen to talk about what happens at death partly because they think that they will be termed as primitive society (Woodburn 1982).

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the information collected in the field, so as to understand some important burial aspects among the Pokot community and also to test the hypotheses of this study.

There are 50 Pokot burial cases as per data collected, out of which 5 are actual burials (which were observed by writer) which amounts to 10%. The other 45 (90%) are reported cases. Out of 50 cases, 7 cases are of individuals who were either thrown in the bush or left out in the bush after their death.

During the field work, several aspects were employed so as to come out with illustrative data. Such aspects included age, sex, occupation, cause of death, grave goods, location of the grave, body treatment, body orientation and the social status of the deceased. All these aspects were also used to interpret data collected, with an aim of finding their influence on the burial system of traditional Pokot People.

Table 3, shows the whole Pokot mortuary data collected during the research.

TABLE 1. (continued)

NO	AGE	SEX	STATUS	REASON FOR	ILLNESS	LOCATION	DATE	ASSESSMENT	REMARKS
1	60	F		Illness		Kraal	1971	1	B ₄
2	40	F	Married	Illness		Kraal	1971	1	C ₄
3	60	F	Married	Illness		Kraal	1971	1	C ₄
4	60	F	Housewife	Illness		Kraal	1971	1	C ₄
5	72	M	Rainmaker	Illness		Kraal	1971	1	C ₄
6	60	M	Unmarried	Illness		Kraal	1971	1	C ₄
7	90	M	Village elder	old age		Kraal	1971	1	A ₅
8	60	M	Unmarried	over-drinking local beer		Kraal	1971	2	B ₄
9	60	F	Landnoter	Illness		Kraal	1971	1	C ₄
10	60	F	Additional male	nose bleeding		Kraal	1971	1	A ₃
11	40	M	Infant			Kraal	1971	1	C ₄
12	30	M	Warrior	Illness in war		Kraal	1971	1	C ₄
13	60	M	Rainmaker	Illness		Kraal	1971	1	A ₅
14	60	F	Midwife	death		Kraal	1971	1	B ₄
15	60	M	Unmarried	witched		Kraal	1971	1	B ₄
16	60	F	Village elder	Illness		Kraal	1971	1	C ₄
17	60	M	Unmarried	drinking beer		Kraal	1971	1	B ₄
18	40	F	Potmaker	Illness		Kraal	1971	1	B ₄

No.	Age	Sex	Occupation	Cause of Death	Time of Death	Place of Death	Time of Death	Age	Notes
19	30	F	Wise old	old age	1952	1952	1952	30	
20	40	F	Housewife		1951	1951	1951	40	
21	60	F	Village elder	leprosy	1951	1951	1951	60	
22	50	F	Traditional healer		1951	1951	1951	50	
23	13	M	Child		1951	1951	1951	13	
24	23	F	Herdsman	bitten by bee	1951	1951	1951	23	
25	23	F	Herdsman		1951	1951	1951	23	
26	2	F	Infant	bitten	1951	1951	1951	2	C ₄
27	10	F	Child		1951	1951	1951	10	C ₃
28	1	M	Infant	ning	1951	1951	1951	1	C ₂
29	24	F	Youth	over-	1951	1951	1951	24	
30	48	M	Farmer	natural death	1951	1951	1951	48	
31	70	M	Farmer		1951	1951	1951	70	
32	71	F	Farmer	natural	1951	1951	1951	71	
33	40	M	Dip attend.	road accident	1951	1951	1951	40	
34	15	M	Labourer	malaria	1951	1951	1951	15	

NO	AGE	SEX	OCCUPATION	DEATH	CAUSE	LOCATION	TREATMENT	JJD	CLASS
30	48	F	housewife	road acc	0	OHL	BL W S FE R	1	A ₄
36	7	F	housewife	road acc	2	OHR	BL W S FE R	2	C ₄
37	80	F	Witchcraft	road acc	0	OHL	BL W S FE R	1	D ₄
38	87	F	Traditional healer	old age	0	Kraal	BL W S FE R	1	A ₃
39	80	F	Rainmaker	natural death	0	Kraal	BL W S FE R	1	A ₃
40	77	M	Village elder	killed	0	Kraal	BL W S R FE	1	B ₁
41	44	M		suicide	0	OHR	BL W S FE R	2	A ₄
42	71	F	Midwifery	suicide	0	OHL	BL W S FE R	1	A ₄
43	19	F	Youth	suicide	0	OHL	BL W S FE R	3	A ₄
44	77	M	Village elder	old age	0	Kraal	BL N R FE	1	A ₄
45	43	M	labourer	light-	0	OHR	BL N R FE	1	C ₁
46	80	F	rich elder	illness	0	Kraal	BL W S R FE	1	A ₄
47	80	M	rich elder	illness	0	Kraal	BL W S FE R	1	A ₄
*48	80	F	Traditional healer	nose	0	OHL	BL W S FE R	1	A ₃
49	80	F	housewife	illness	0	OHL	BL W S FE R	1	A ₄
50	18	F	students	malaria	0	OHR	BL W S FE R	1	A ₄

DEFINITION OF ABBREVIATION

MALE

KRAAL

Body Living Sideways

Right Hand

AGE, SEX AND SOCIAL STATUS.

Age and sex are important aspects in determining mortuary practices among the Pokot people. In a situation where social status is not applicable in determining kind of the burial a deceased must be given, an individual is accorded a formal mortuary treatment based on her/his age and sex.

There are 50 burials from the data, out of which 34 cases (68%) are males and the rest were females (32%). The burial locations were noted. General observation shows that there is a great influence by sex on burial location.

Out of 30 males who were buried, 20 were buried inside the Kraal (66%) in the homestead. The remaining 8 males were buried in the homestead outside the hut on the right hand side when facing the hut (26%). The rest, 2 males, were laid in burial cairns, which constitutes only 6.7% of the total number of males buried.

There are 13 females who were given proper burials. Eight of them were buried in the homestead, outside the huts on the left hand side when facing the hut (16.5%). There are two cases where the females were buried outside the huts in no specific direction. Another two cases were also recorded, where bodies of females buried inside the Kraals (see Table 3).

Infants: (0-10 years old)

Infants in the Pokot society, are individuals who are aged between 0 - 5 years. However, there are differences when it comes to burials, because a deceased is considered infant when he/she is aged between 0-10 years. There is no body treatment of infants in Pokot society. They are normally buried naked, outside their mother's hut next to the walls. The specific sides on which the graves are located depend upon the sex of the dead infants. The male's graves are located on the right hand side when facing the hut, whereas for females it is the opposite. Further findings from the field indicated that infants are buried near the walls of their mother's huts because of a traditional notion that an infant still needs care from its mother, even after its death.

There are 5 cases of infants in the data, which amounts to 10% of the total sample. It is unfortunate that none of them were actual burials. In these 5 cases, 3 were males and the rest were females. Their burial locations were reported and recorded. Four of them were buried in the homestead next to the walls of their mother's hut. The fifth infant was not buried. Instead he was thrown in the nearest bush to the homestead. The informant of this occurrence, established the reason for this act as caused by the cause of the

death of the infant. The cause of the death was not known to the parents of the infant, thus he was not buried. However, among the four infants, one was reported to have been buried in ash deposit. The reason for such burial location was also given, as the ash deposit was next to the wall on the left hand side when facing the hut. Thus, the infant female was buried there.

Ritual ceremonies surrounding the burial of the infants of both sexes are normally few among the Pokot people, especially in a situation where death involves an infant of ordinary parents in the society. The period spent between the time of the infants death and its burial is so brief that it is a matter of a few hours. This is supported by a common belief in the Pokot community that the spirits of young ones are harmless to the living thus their burials are not complex.

Youths (11-27 years)

Male and female youths are aged between 6-27 years. They normally take long periods to graduate from youth to married life because of the nature of the age-set system in the Pokot community. For instance, for a male individual to become married he must serve the society as a warrior for about 10 years. However, females get married immediately after initiations (cir-

circumcision). However this category is only applicable during life time, but during burial a youth is a person who is aged between 11-27 years. There are also other individuals who exceed this age but are not married. Such individuals are accorded the same burials as youths.

General observation shows that this category of individuals in the Pokot society does not have much complexity in their burials. They are buried naked outside their mother's huts, unless their causes of death are abnormal. For instance individuals committing suicide or being killed in raids are not buried at all, instead thrown or left in the bushes. In this class of youths, there is always the assumption that social statuses are uniform, thus the location of the grave and other burial ceremonies are based on the sex of the deceased. For example, male youths are buried outside their mother's hut on the right hand side when facing the hut, whereas for the female youths it is the opposite site.

There are 9 cases of youths and unmarried individuals who amount to 18% of the total sample. Out of these 9 cases, 5 were males and 4 were females. Out of 9 cases, 3 were not buried. Instead they were either left or thrown in the bushes. The reasons for not being buried, were not however, the age or sex, but the causes

of their death. Two of the 3 individuals who were not buried were killed in raids and the third individual committed suicide. All these 3 individuals met their death in violent incidence, thus they do not deserve a burial. The other six individuals were buried in the ordinary way, where age and sex were the sole determinants.

Married Adults (28-44 years)

Male adults who are married, but have not reached the age of elders (i.e. 45 and over years) are accorded a different burials from that of male elders. However female adults who are married are given the same burial with that of female elders. Generally the burials of the individuals in this category are simple, where males are buried naked outside their huts on the right hand side when facing the hut, whereas females are laid outside their huts but on the left handside when facing the hut.

Elders: (45 years and over)

Male elders aged more than 45 years, married and who have children and livestock are buried inside the Kraal. Apart from social status and sex, age also influences the burial system in the Pokot society. However, males with special duties to the society and

well aged males are accorded special burials where they are laid in stone burial cairns. This type of burial treatment and location signifies some special characteristics of the deceased when still alive, such as being a prophet or rainmaker.

There is less stratification in burial location among the females in the Pokot community. Regardless of age, females are commonly buried outside their huts on the left when facing the hut.

Male elders of recognised social status are buried inside the Kraal. The research reveals that there were 22 cases where individuals were buried inside Kraals. This amounts to 44% of the total sample. Twenty cases were males who occupied high social status in the society such as traditional healers, rainmakers, circumcisors, village elders, rich elders and funeral preachers. The other two cases were females who occupied equal social status with males. These females held some high responsibilities in both family and society levels. For example, one was a widow who had a lot of richness and who took the responsibilities of her husband after his death. The second was a traditional healer who served the society (see Table 7).

Bodies being buried naked in the graves is a common practice among the Pokot people. However most of the male individuals occupying high social status

are not buried naked. Normally, after ritual preparation of the body, the body is wrapped into a fresh cow's skin and laid in the grave dug inside his livestock Kraal. This is mostly applicable to the males. There are 15 cases of bodies being wrapped cow skin. Out of these 15 cases, only one body was female. The explanation to this was that the female was a traditional healer, hence she was not buried naked (see table 6). Two cases out of 15 cases were actual burials which accounts for 13.3% (see table 6).

The age categories among the Pokot people is shown on Table 4.

CODE	YEARS	TITLE	BURIAL CATEGORIES
1	45+	ELDER	ELDER
2	28-44	MARRIED ADULT	MARRIED ADULT
3	19-27	YOUNG ADULT	YOUTH AND UNMARRIED ADULTS 11-27 YEARS
4	14-18	UNMARRIED ADULT	
5	6-13	SUB-ADULT	INFANTS 0-10 YEARS
6	0-5	INFANT	

SOCIAL RANKING AND STRATIFICATION

Social ranking and social stratification do exist among the Pokot people especially among the male elders, who are aged over 45 years. These are the type of people who occupy high ranks in the society. They include, prophets, rainmakers, traditional healers, rich elders, village elders, funeral preachers and circumcisors. Such people are normally given complex body treatment before being laid to rest. They are normally accorded elaborated burials, which reflect their social status in the society.

According to social ranking in the Pokot society, the highest social ranks are occupied by prophets and sometimes by the rainmakers (especially in a clan where there are no prophets). These individuals are normally accorded different body treatment and burial ceremonies from other individuals like traditional healers, rich elders, circumcisors and funeral preachers.

The burials of a prophet and a rainmaker were reported during the research. A prophet and a rainmaker were buried in burial cairns. However, it is unfortunate that there is only one prophet in the whole data.

Among the Pokot community, burial cairns are considered as sign of greatness. Although burial cairns are rare in Pokot, the research reported two of them.

The burial cairns need collective energy from people hence, in a situation where burial cairns are used, this shows that a lot of people were involved. Thus it is assumed that individuals who are buried in cairns, commanded great respect in the society.

Normally burial cairns are constructed among the Pokot people. Before the cairn is constructed, ceremonial burial takes place, outside the Kraal, but next to it. The grave is dug, some stones are arranged inside the grave, on the side where the head rests (faces). After which the body is laid inside the grave. Some small stones are then filled in the grave, so as to protect the body from the soil. The grave is then filled by soil to the level of the surface. It is after this level, that the stones are laid on the grave to form a stone dome. After the stones have been laid on the grave to form a stone cairn, some stones are arranged around the cairn, thus forming a ring around the burial cairn. Normally, burial cairns are easily destroyed by either animals or children, especially, in a situation where migration has taken place leaving behind only the burial cairn. Usually when such a situation happens, special stone pillars are erected to indicate the location of the burial cairn. The construction of burial cairns takes a lot of time because it is the mourners who bring the stones. Hence, mourners who come later

as after two months still bring stones to put on top of the grave to form the cairn.

Although burial cairns are found in most of the Pokot clans, research shows that they are more common in Kasauri clan. This is an assumption that they borrowed the practice of burial cairns from their immediate neighbours, the Turkana. But some people think that environmental conditions influence the nature of the burial among the Pokot people. For instance Kasauri clan occupies an area full of stones, thus is easier to construct a burial cairn than in other areas in the district where stones are rare.

The individuals of high social status are buried inside the Kraal after elaborate burial ceremonies have been performed. There are 22 cases of Kraal burials, which amounts to 44% of the whole sample. On examination, all these 22 cases were of high social status. They included rainmakers, traditional healers, funeral preachers, village elders, rich elders, circumcisors and other prominent individuals. Out of 22 cases, only 2 females were buried inside the Kraal because of their social status. Of the two females, one was a traditional healer while the second one was a midwife. Both of them were useful to the society. However general observation shows that Kraal burials are accorded to males elders who command some respect in the society

(see Table 6).

Body treatments during burials are very important. Very little is known about the body treatments among the Pokot community. However, what is certain is that individuals occupying the high social status are given complex body treatments to reflect their social position in the society. Individuals of recognised social status are buried when their bodies are wrapped in cow skin. There are 15 bodies which were wrapped in cow skin, which amounts to 30% of the total sample. The rest were buried naked or thrown in bushes. Out of 15 cases, there was only one female whose body was wrapped in cow skin. She was however a traditional healer. However, it is important to note that not all females occupying the high social status among the Pokot people are wrapped in cow skin. The rest 14, cases were males bodies of high ranks in the society who included the rainmaker, prophet, village elders, rich elders, circumcisions and funeral preacher.

The medium social status individuals and low status people are accorded simple burial. They are buried naked without any colourful burials ceremonies. On examination, the burials of such individuals are simply differentiated by the sex and age. Males of medium social status are buried in the homestead next to their

huts (when married). There are 8 cases, where medium status male adults and male youths who were buried outside the hut on the right hand side when facing the hut. The male adults who were married were buried outside their huts whereas male youths outside their mother's hut. Thus it is important to note that distance of the grave from the hut is archaeologically important when carrying out an excavation among the Pokot settlements.

On the other hand, females are buried in the home-
stead outside the huts on the left hand side when facing the hut. This applies to most of the females regardless of their age and social status in the community. However married females are buried outside their huts whereas female youths are buried outside their mother's huts. There were 8 females bodies which were buried in this manner as indicated in the data.

Although blacksmiths perform an important role in the betterment of life in the Pokot society, they are considered medium social status when it comes to their burials because of their origins. The blacksmiths among the Pokot people are said to have come from the Karamojong community of the Republic of Uganda. Rral traditional holds that when they die among the Pokot, they are accorded ordinary burial ceremonies which resembles that of medium social status individuals. However, it is unfortunate that I was not able to gather any burial information regarding the blacksmiths among

the Pokot people.

Witches, impotents and barren women are considered 'social misfits' in the society. On the ladder of social status among the Pokot people, they occupy the lowest rung. Such people are not buried because of their low social status in the Pokot society. This is supported by a belief that, their evil spirits are harmful to the living when buried. There was one witch and a barren woman reported. Both of them were thrown in the bushes.

There are some social status in Pokot society, although they are useful, the individuals, occupying them are not buried when they die. For instance, a warrior is very important in Pokot community because he occupies a medium social status. But when he dies he is not buried, instead he is either thrown or left in the bush. This is supported by a common belief among the Pokot people that the evil spirits of a warrior are harmful to the living because a warrior had killed many innocent people during his service, thus, he is treated as a murderer.

However, on examination, the data have shown that burial practices among the Pokot, are dictated by social status, age and sex. This relationship is shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Age categories, sex, social status and body treatment

Elders 45 years Healers, Prophets MW VE RE ST FP		Married adult 28-44yrs		Unmarried adult and youth 11-27yrs		Infants 0-10 years	
SEX	BURIAL	SEX	BURIAL	SEX	BURIAL	SEX	BURIAL
M	O	F	*	F	O	M	*
M	O	F	O	F	O	M	O
M	X	M	*	M	O	F	O
M	X	F	O	M	O	M	O
F	O	F	O	M	O	M	O
F	X	M	*	M	O		
M	X			F	O		
M	O				*		
M	O						
M	O						
M	O						
M	*						
M	X						
M	O						
F	O						
M	X						
M	X						
M	X						
M	X						
M	X						
M	X						
M	X						
F	*						
M	O						
M	X						
M	X						
F	O						

KEY: O Buried Naked
 X Buried when wrapped in a cow skin
 * Thrown into the bush
 MW Midwife
 VE Village Elder
 RE Rich Elder
 F Female
 M Male
 ST. Special Talent

Table 6

Sex And Social Status Cross-Tabulated Against Burial Location

HIGH SOCIAL STATUS		MEDIUM SOCIAL STATUS		LOW SOCIAL STATUS	
SEX	BL	SEX	BL	SEX	BL
M	K	M	AO	F	*
M	K	F	OHL	M	*
M	K	M	*		
M	K	F	OHL		
F	OHL	M	*		
F	K	M	*		
M	K	M	OHR		
M	K	M	OHR		
F	K	F	OHL		
M	K	M	OHR		
M	K	M	OHL		
M	K	F	OHL		
M	K	M	OHR		
M	K	M	OHR		
M	K	F	*		
M	BC	M	OHR		
M	BC	M	OHR		
M	K	F	OH		
M	K	M	OHR		
M	K				
M	K				
M	K				
M	K				
M	K				
M	K				
F	OHL				
F	OHL				
F	OHL				
F	*				

Definitions of Abbreviations

- M Male
- F Female
- OHR Outside the hut on the right side
- * Thrown/left in the bush
- K Kraal
- AD Ash Deposit
- BC Burial cairns
- OHL Outside the hut on the left side
- OH Outside the hut in homestead

CAUSE OF DEATH

The cause of death plays an important role in dictating the mortuary practices among the Pokot people. There are several cases reported where causes of death have determined the burial locations.

The individuals who meet their death through violent means are not buried. For instance individuals who commit suicide or who are killed in raids or road accidents are thrown or left in the bush. This is supported by the common belief in Pokot society which says that the spirits of such individuals are evil to the society, and burying them in the homestead is welcoming the evil spirits into the society.

There are 7 cases where individuals were not buried. The causes of their death were also recorded. After analysis, it was found that 5 out of 7 cases, the death were caused by either suicide, raids, or road accidents. However in a situation where the cause of the death is not known, such an individual is also not buried. There was one of such type, where an infant died, but the cause was not established by its parents.

Males struck dead by lightning are given a different burial ceremony. For instance there were 3 cases where 3 males were struck by lightning. Two of the 3 individuals were male elders who by the virtue of their social status were supposed to have been buried in the

Kraal. But because of the lightning as a cause of death were buried in the homestead like any other ordinary males in Pokot society. There is a belief which supports this in Pokot tradition, which holds that a person who is buried in a Kraal (puuri) is supposed to have died from the other causes but not from being struck by lightning. This is so because there is a belief that when such individuals are buried in the Kraal the lightning will struck the Kraal, hence killing the livestock in the Kraal.

Individuals who are said to have been cursed, so as to die, are given ordinary burial ceremonies, which are dictated by other factors such as sex, age and social status. Curse is a common aspect among the Pokot people especially in a situation where death claims the soul of high ranking individuals such as prophet, rainmaker, and rich elders. However, in a case where death is uncertain, the cause is commonly speculated to have been a curse. There were 5 cases where death was caused by curse. The results were that, all these 5 individuals were buried respective to their age, and social status.

Some individuals are said to have died naturally. Such persons' death are said to have been caused by natural death. Natural death is different from old age

EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS

Peoples' wishes about the disposal of their bodies

Like in many African traditional communities the Pokot people have individuals who do express a desire or make a choice of where their bodies should be laid to rest after they die. However, some individuals express their desire of being buried with some grave goods such as a traditional stool, spear or pot, to name but few.

Although such wishes are rare among the Pokot community, they are usually respected and strictly adhered to. These wishes are taken with seriousness because of a common belief that, failure to observe them, means direct confrontation between the ancestral spirits and the living. The impact of such direct confrontation is normally unpopular, as it causes more deaths.

It was found that only one male wished to be buried with his traditional stool. However, when I contacted the funeral experts for more information about wishes made by the deceased, they informed me that, the deceased's will is important in determining the burial rites, and it can be harmful to the society when wishes are violated.

Oral interview, indicates that, in a situation where such wishes are not honoured, the deceased is thought to come back to the living in the form of either evil spirits or frightening dreams. These evil spirits

and dreams pester the living until the society realizes its mistake. Sometimes the mistake is known in time and thus they look for solution. The solution may take many forms. However, what is common is secondary burial (i.e. removing the skeleton of the individual to a place of his own choice) or making some ritual sacrifices on his/her grave.

Normally evil spirits, are treated as an enemy. They are normally held responsible for bringing havoc to the society. Havoc may take different such of as sterility of women, deaths of both humans and livestock and sometimes occurrence of complications in birth, which may claim lives of both mothers and infants. All these casualties can be partly caused by ancestors who's wishes were not honoured.

Oral tradition among Pokot shows that some individuals may even express their desire that only specific individuals attend their burial ceremonies. Such wishes are also equally observed.

GRAVE GOODS

Burial goods have been employed in explanation of characteristics of past communities. However burial goods are rare in most Eastern African societies.

Although several scholars such as Tainter (1973)

and Hertz (1960) have cited inclusion of goods in a grave as one way of showing one's high social status in a society, among the Pokot people, inclusions of goods in grave are considered as a taboo. However Pearson (1982) has argued that inclusion of grave goods reflect the role of the deceased in the society when still alive

In my survey, there was only one individual who was buried with his traditional stool.. Further information on this individual indicated that such inclusion was only on the wish of the deceased people.

There are several beliefs among the Pokot people which discourage the inclusion of grave goods. These beliefs differ among different clans, for instance among the Kasauria clan, everything which belongs to the earth must remain on the earth. They strongly believe that inclusion of grave goods is a taboo to the living which may cause trouble in form of sickness and more deaths. This belief among this clan is so strong that bodies are buried naked regardless of age sex, or social status of the deceased.

Among the Mosopot clan inclusion of grave goods is a mistake which brings punishment to the whole clan from the ancestors. This clan believes that burying the dead with his/her belongings will detain the deceased in the vicinity, hence causing misfortunes to the living

people.

The Krui and Kacheptulel clans believe that inclusion of grave goods is a taboo which is harmful to the living. However, in a situation where inclusion of grave goods is taken as a mistake, the grave is normally uncovered so as to remove the goods inside. Usually such activity is accompanied by ritual ceremony.

The Kacheripko clan believe that everything on this earth, must be inherited by the living, no matter how small or useless the belongings may be. Hence inclusion of goods into grave is taken as a direct confrontation among the living, dead and the social norms which guide the clan.

It is at this point that we can rule out the possibility that grave goods association signifies status differentiation among the Pokot people. However, the most common cultural material which is associated with burials in Pokot society is a cow skin, which is used to wrap the dead body.

Thus archaeologically, grave materials among the Pokot are lacking and hence, there is no archaeological interpretation that can be made from grave goods among the Pokot people.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE GRAVE:

There are specific people from each clan who are left to prepare the grave. But in a clan where such people are not there, the burying experts are hired from another clan to perform the work.

The size and the depth of the grave depends on the body size and age of the deceased. Among the Pokot society the depth of the grave depends the age of the deceased. For instance, the older the deceased, the deeper the grave and vice-versa.

Normally, the grave is dug, and then some stones are arranged in the grave but on the side on which the head rests on; this arrangement of stones give the deceased 'comfort' when he is laid to rest. These stones are arranged as a pillow. However such arrangements are done for high ranking individuals. The grave among the Pokot takes the shape of a rectangle because the body is normally laid slightly bending.

Among the Pokot, the grave requires a lot of manpower to construct. The complexity of the grave depends upon the social status of the deceased. Normally medium and low status people are accorded simple burial where the grave is dug shallowly and no interior modifications are made.

The body is wrapped into fresh cow's skin before being lowered into the grave. A bull is killed for

the purpose of getting a fresh skin for the deceased. However this applies only to the high ranking individuals.

After the burying of the body in grave, the grave is then filled with some stones. After a layer of stones there is a layer of fine soil which is filled in the grave until it forms a dome shape. This is followed by the arrangements of stones along the perimeter of the grave.

After the whole ceremony of burying has been done, some branches of thorns are put on top of grave to keep away children or animals which can be destructive.

In conclusion, we can postulate that the individuals who occupy high status in the society are accorded complex burial which requires a lot of energy, thus many people are involved in their burials.

There is ample evidence which holds that burial of high ranking individual is manpower consuming. For instance, burial cairns require collective energy among the people in the society. A lot of stones are needed during the burying of the individuals in burial cairns.

An excavator who uncovers a human skeleton in burial position with association of stones will be in a position to interpret the findings easily because this shows that the person buried was a high ranking individ-

ual in Pokot society and that he was male.

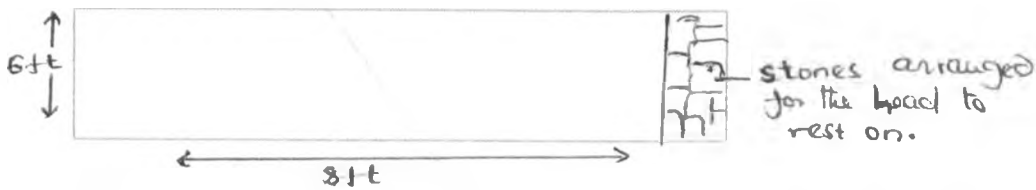


Fig. 4: A Sketch drawing of Pokot Grave for high ranking individuals

THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM ON THE POKOT BURIAL PRACTICES.

The research conducted on mortuary practices among the Pokot people provides ample results that, very few traditional burials are performed now. Most of the present day burials are carried out systematically by either Christian or Muslim organisers. However general observations show that Pokots are more Christian than Muslim.

The impact of foreign religions on the society has been so pronounced that the present day mortuary customs even among the non-believers differ in some important ways from the traditional burial customs. In some areas, the influence of the foreign religions has totally replaced the traditional practices. Some individuals are laid in graves without taking into consideration social dimensions such as, age, sex, social status, burial position and the location of the graves.

Besides the above social influence, some Christians are now being buried with grave goods such as money,

good dresses, shoes, watches, bangles, rings hats, earrings and sometimes even neck ties. Coffins are commonly used in burial.

On the other side of the coin, Islam has equally influenced the Pokot community. The individuals who have been converted to Islam, bury their death bodies wrapped in white sheets in either public cemeteries or in the front yard of their homes. As happens to Muslims universally, the Pokot Muslims orient the dead bodies facing Mecca, the holy city of the Muslims.

GENERAL INTERPRETATION

It should be noted that ceremonies among the Pokot people vary in a number of ways. Males are normally given a more elaborating mortuary practices as opposed to adult females who are buried uniformly regardless of their age and social status. Females are buried naked, outside the huts on the left hand side when facing the hut.

Males's burials in general show more variability because there are several aspects involved in their burials, such as age, social status and the cause of death.

General observations indicate that males of recognised social status in the society and aged over 45 years, are buried in the Kraal. Male elders who occupy specific duties in the society such as prophets,

such as hyenas and vultures to prey on. This is aimed at differentiating the good individuals from the bad individuals in the society.

POSITIONING OF THE INTERMENTS:

The variability in positioning of burials was recorded for numerous attributes, a summary of which is presented in the Table 3, under body treatment and orientation.

BODY TREATMENT:

There is a general trend which shows variability between the males and females among the Pokot people. However some body treatment or position are similar in both sexes. For instance, there is a general characteristics, where the bodies of both sexes are oriented towards the East (where sun rises). But variations come in, in the positioning of the hands. For example, males are laid in manner in which the top part of the body rests on the right side whereas females rest on the left side. In general the body is laid in the grave not lying but resting on its side. In both sexes the legs are positioned in a bending manner facing up.

The cause of death is an important aspect in determining burial location. Individuals who die in violence, such as suicides or being killed in raids are not buried, instead, they are either thrown or left in the bushes. Their burials would mean direct confrontation between the living and the ancestors.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS: IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY TO ARCHAEOLOGY

In this summary chapter I bring together and highlight burial practices, among the Pokot people, also the general overview of the whole study is provided. However much emphasis will be put on data analysis when drawing conclusions on the study.

In chapter one, I have introduced my work by defining death and burial as they are the main concepts in this study to archaeology.

In chapter two, I ventured deeper by informing the readers of the importance of his study to archaeologists and anthropologists. The theoretical framework was dealt with in this chapter whereby I borrowed a lot of ideas concerning this study from several authorities as indicated in the bibliography. The methods which were employed to accomplish this study were discussed at length with their limitations in chapter two.

In the third chapter of the work, I dealt with the ethnography of the Pokot people, with an aim of introducing the Pokot people. General background of West Pokot District was included in this study, touching some geographical aspects such as climate and topography. These concepts are important in this study because they give a reader a clear view of the area. The origins and composition of the Pokot people and other popula-

tions in West Pokot District have been discussed at length. subsistence patterns have shown that most of the Pokot people depend upon livestock for their living, although, others practice subsistence farming especially in areas with conducive conditions for agriculture.

Social Organization among the Pokot community has shown that the Pokot people are divided in age-sets. Social status among the Pokot people have been discussed at length in this chapter with great emphasis on the role of different social status in the community. General observation has shown that the social status of the individuals is also displayed during their burials.

Traditional religion of the Pokot people has been discussed in chapter three. The Pokot people believe in their supreme being god called Tororot who is the controller of both life and death. Tororot is the final word. Besides, Tororot, there are other small gods who act as Tororot's messengers, these include sky, rain and moon.

The Pokot people have their own traditional beliefs on death and burial. The research has found the Pokot people believe that death is cruel punishment from the supreme being, and thus death can not be natural. The cause of death is usually associated with curse. Burial itself is taken as a journey to the next

world and the act of burying is considered as an act of escorting the deceased to next world.

The research has also reported that the Pokot people believe in life after death and life is considered as a complete circle where one must go around in his/her life time. Therefore death is a part of the circle which an individual experiences. However, what is certain among the Pokot people is that when an individual dies, he goes to the next world. Hence ancestors are very important in the society.

Chapter four of this work is however the climax of this study. The data are presented and interpreted. The results were quite telling as most of the oral interviews and theoretical literature agreed in many aspects of burial systems in Pokot society. General observations showed that age, sex and social status play a major role in deciding the type of burial ceremony an individual is accorded. However, there are other factors which also influence the mortuary practices among the Pokot people; such as cause of death, and ones wish.

There are some burial aspects in this study which have been found to be very important to archaeology. They include, social stratification, which includes burial locations, body treatment and burial position.

The Pokot community is stratified. As in life, this stratification also influence the mortuary prac-

tices of the Pokot people.

Location of graves within the homestead indicates that apart from the usual use of the homestead, it is also a family cemetery. According to the mortuary data, 43 cases out of 50 cases, were buried in homestead which amounts to 86%. Further research shows that there exists a strong relationships between social status, burial location, sex and age.

Male individuals who occupy high social status, well aged (over 45 years) and rich are buried in kraals or in stone cairns. These two burial locations indicate that human remains which may be excavated in a kraal or cairn commanded some respected from the society. There were 22 cases of kraal and 2 cases of cairn burials which amounts to 48% of the total sample.

Other ordinary individuals are buried within homestead, with slight differences which are brought about by sex. Usually males are buried on the right-hand side, when facing the hut, whereas females on the lefthand side when facing the hut.

Among the Pokot people infants are buried outside their mother's hut on the periphery or near the walls. The male infants are laid on the right hand side when facing the hut whereas the females infants are placed to the left.

Body treatment is yet another burial aspect which is very important in archaeology. Like in ancient history where kings of China, Egypt and Japan were accorded complex body treatment as opposed to the ordinary people. The Pokot people also have different body treatment among individuals which are based on social status.

There is a stable relationship between social status, sex, age and body treatment among the Pokot people. Male individuals who occupy high social status are buried when their bodies are wrapped in cow skin, as opposed to the ordinary persons who are buried naked. There were 15 cases where the bodies were wrapped in cow skin before being laid to rest, which accounts to 30% of the whole sample. Out of these 15 cases only one female body was wrapped in cow skin. The rest (35) were either buried or thrown in the bush naked.

Thus body treatment can be very suggestive in determining social status, sex and age in mortuary site. Such suggestions can be used as an analogy in interpreting excavated human burials in the area under the study.

There is also a general pattern in orientation of the body among the Pokot people. Usually bodies are laid facing where the sun rises. However variations have been reported in body position. Male bodies are

laid with the head resting on the right palm, whereas the females rest on the left palm.

This study has shown that burial position is very important in deciding the sex of human remains of a Pokot individuals in a burial site.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, the interpretation of mortuary practices of Pokot people has shown that it is inappropriate to over emphasize other burial aspects at expenses of others. For instance, it is inappropriate to generalize that grave associations are very important in determining the mortuary practices, while the data show that grave goods command the least influence.

However, the study has been very informative especially where social status, age, sex are concerned. For instance males of high social status among the Pokot are accorded complex body treatment as opposed to females and other individuals who occupy medium and low social status positions. Male individuals of high ranks are usually buried ceremoniously with their bodies wrapped into cow skin in kraals or cairns, while the females, medium and low status individuals are buried naked outside the huts. The disadvantaged individuals in the society and those people who are considered

'social misfits' are given different mortuary ceremonies which radically differentiate them from other individuals. These people include witched, murder, impotents and barren women.

The study has also revealed that although there are variations in mortuary practice, more variability is found among the males than among the females. Apart from age, sex and social status of the deceased, the cause of death has a part in deciding the type of burial. Individuals who meet their death through unordinary ways, are not buried, instead they are either abandoned or thrown in the bushes. These include persons committing suicides or killed in raids.

The goals of this study have been accomplished. This has been wholly possible by the detailed data which characterized the mortuary practices among the Pokot by examining the following aspects:- social status, sex, age, cause of death, burial location, burial position, body treatment and general beliefs on death and burial. All these aspects can be co-ordinated to produce contemporary literature that can be compared with archaeological burial remains.

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APPENDIX A
STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE USED IN THE FIELD

TOPIC: STUDY OF TRADITIONAL MORTUARY PRACTICES OF THE POKOT
PEOPLE

TYPE OF INFORMATION

1. (i) area of the study: Where is it located?

(ii) Which clan is dominant in this area?

PEOPLE TO BE INTERVIEWED

2. (i) Name: _____

(ii) Current occupation or social status?

(iii) Can you explain to me the general beliefs on death
and burial in your clan?

(iv) How has modern burial customs influenced traditi-
onal burial customs? _____

3 (i) What is your age?

(ii) How do you bury the dead according to:-

(a) sex _____

(b) age _____

(c) social status _____

(d) cause of death _____

(iii) How are the following being determined

(a) Burial position _____

(b) Burial location _____

(c) Grave structure _____

(d) Grave good _____

(iv) Can you explain the reasons for this differential
types of mortuary practices

(i) _____

(ii) _____

(iii) _____

4 (i) Have you attended or witnessed and traditional
burial?

(ii) What was the age of the dead? _____

(iii) What was the sex? _____

(iv) What was his/her occupation? _____

(v) Were there any body treatments? _____

BURIAL POSITION AND LOCATION:

(i) How was the body laid out in the grave depending
(a) on sex? _____
(b) on age? _____
(c) on cause of death? _____
(d) on social status? _____

(ii) Where was the location of the grave and why

(iii) who organised the burial ceremony?
e.g. (a) body treatment? _____
(b) digging of the grave? _____
(c) positioning of the body in the grave? _____

(iv) Are the dead buried with any grave goods? If yes
which grave goods and if not, what are the reasons?

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ACTUAL BURIAL (OBSERVED)

1. (i) Area of study _____
(ii) The dominant clan of the area _____

2. (i) Age group of the dead (actual age) _____
(ii) occupation _____
social status _____
sex _____

(iii) what was the location of the grave and grave
structure _____

(iv) Body treatment e.g. naked. wrapped _____

3 (i) What was the cause of death _____
(ii) what was the position of
(a) body _____
(b) grave _____
(iii) Any grave goods _____

(iv) Other ceremonies and mortuary rituals before and
after the burial.

LOCATION OF WEST POKOT DISTRICT
IN KENYA.

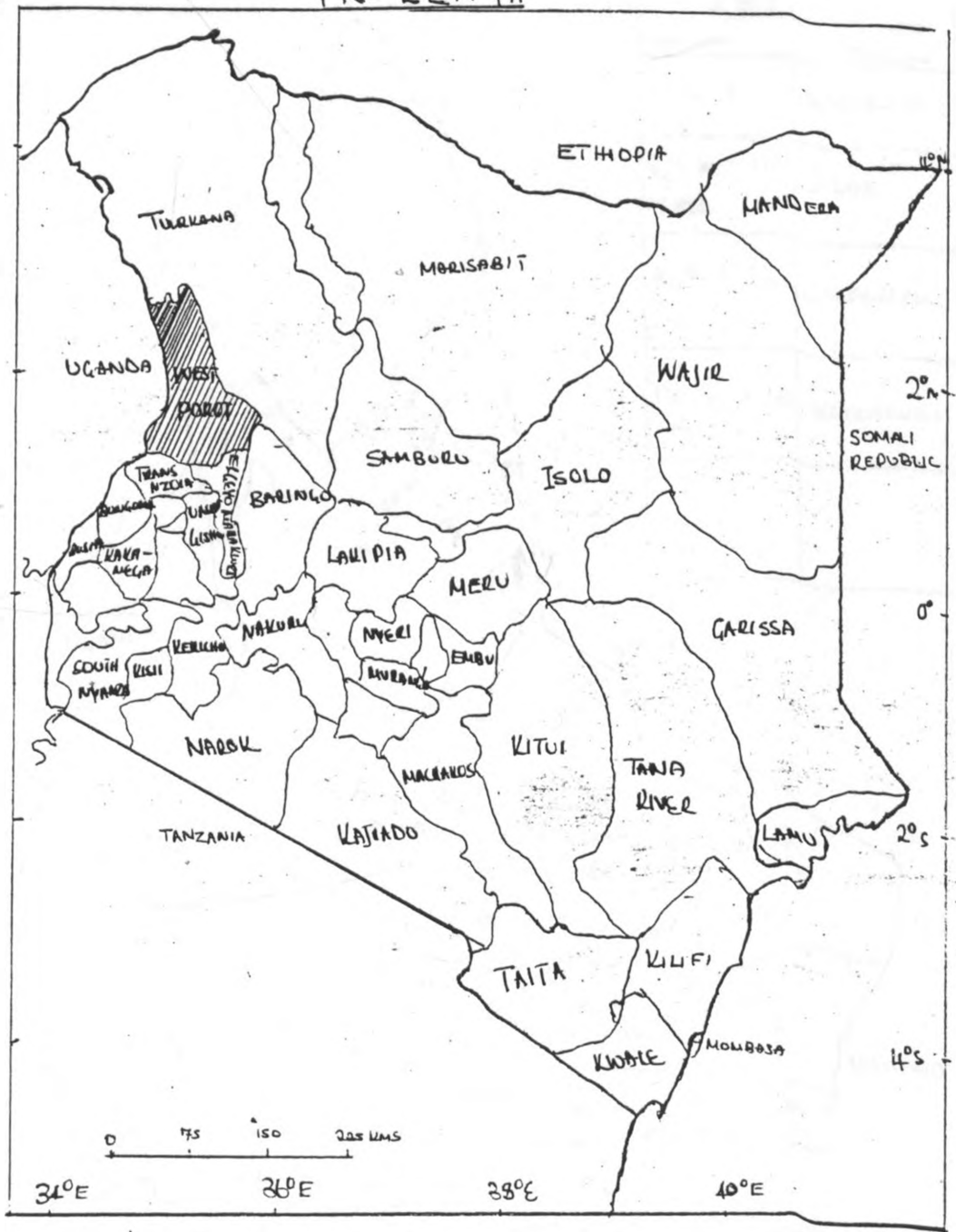
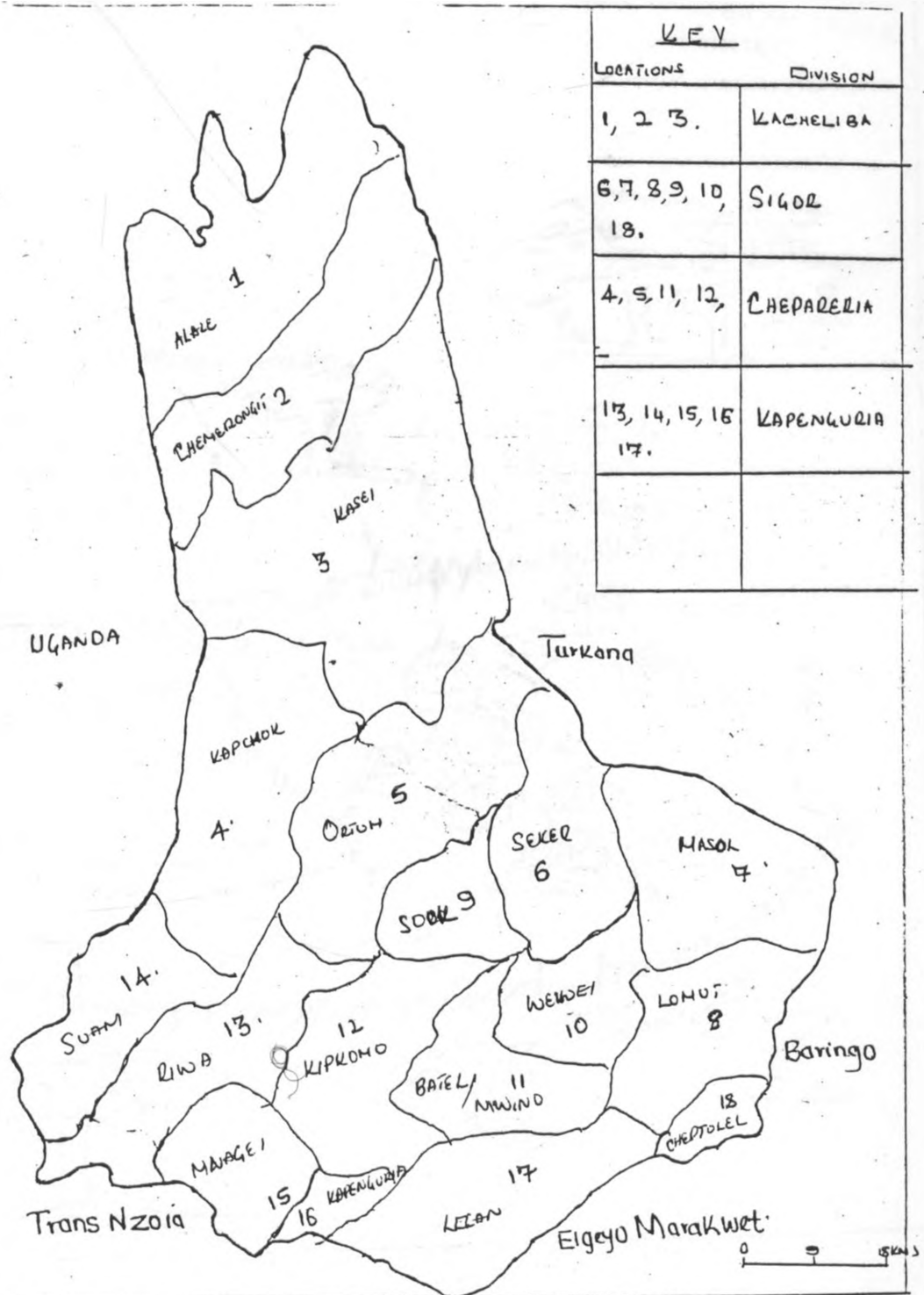


Fig. 1

Source: Atlas of Kenya 1970

AREA IN DIVISION UNDER THE RESEARCH STUDY



SOURCE: District Atlas West Pokot 1985.

Fig-2

HOMESTEAD OF POKOT PEOPLE AND LOCATION OF DIFFERENT GRAVES, WHICH ARE INFLUENCED BY AGE, SEX AND SOCIAL STATUS OF THE DECEASED

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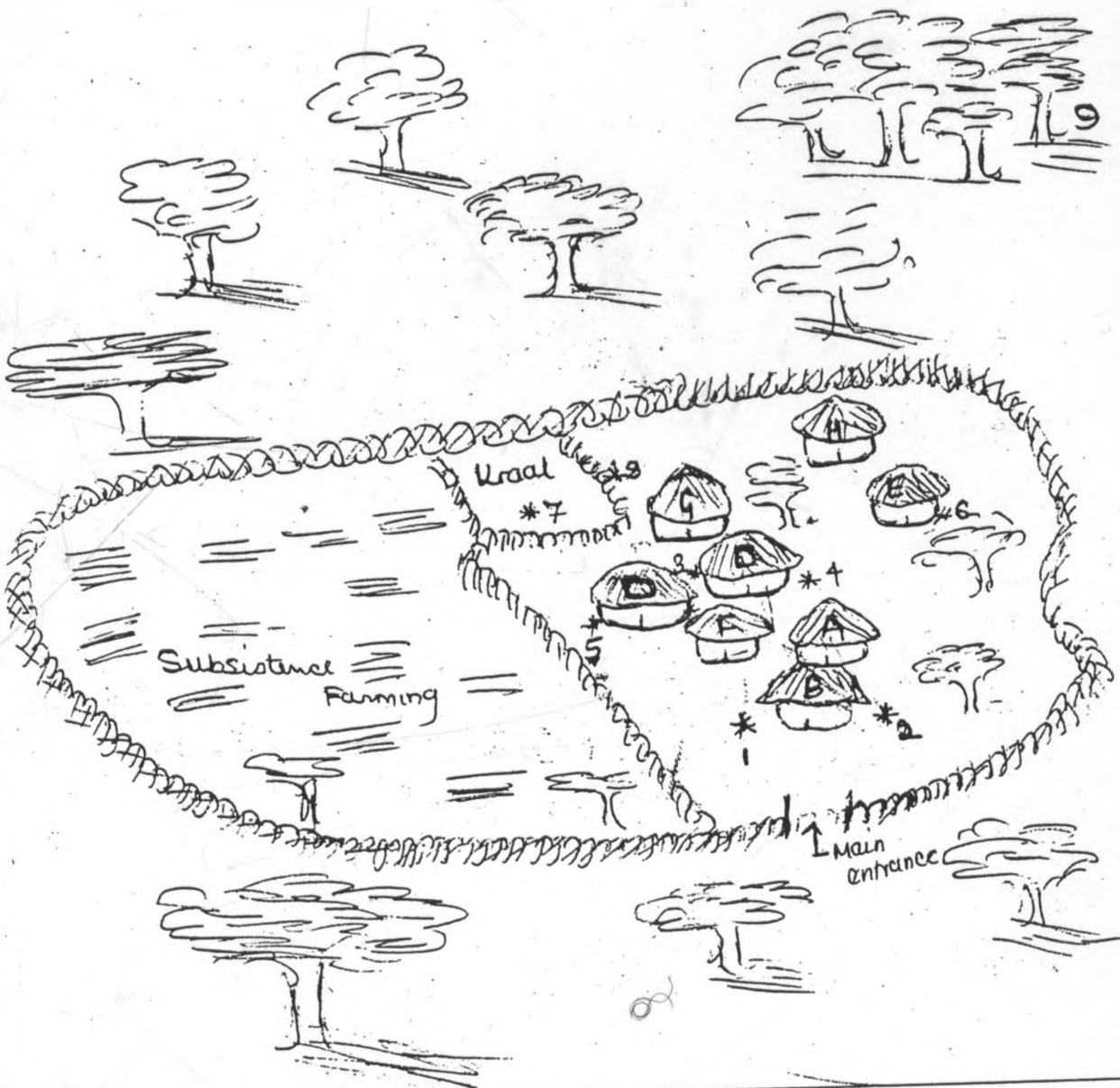


FIG. 3

Key to Graves

- | | | |
|------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Female | 6. Male Infant | A-Husband's hut |
| 2. Male | 7. Kraal Burial | B C D E - Huts for wives |
| 3. Female | 8. Burial Cairn | F G H - Hut for children |
| 4. Male | 9. Thrown in the nearest bush | |
| 5. Female Infant | | |

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