

The installation of the Reth
of the Shilluk - Kwongo Dak Padiet - 1993

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Introduction:-

The installation of the Reth of the Shilluk attracted the attention of many scholars both inside and outside the country. The description of the rituals and ceremonies which take place during the installation process appeared in many articles in Sudan. Notes and Records since 1918. Some of the first Scholars who dealt with the subject are P.P. Howell and W.P.G. Thamson.

In recent decades and particularly after the establishment of research and cultural institutions in the Sudan, the coronation of the Reth of the Shilluk became one of the Subjects which attracts the attention of Scholars and researchers who work in the field of traditional culture and folklore. In this context it is necessary to refer to the efforts of the Institute of African and Asian studies (IAAS) and the Sudanese Folklife Research and Documentation centre (formerly Folklore Research and Documentation centre) in the documentation of the rituals and ceremonies performed during the coronation of Reth Ayang Aney Kur in 1975 . In 1992 Reth Ayang Aney Kur passed (died) and his Successor Kwongo Dak Padiet had been elected to become Reth . I was among the team of the Folklife Research and Documentation Centre who was appointed to attend

the Funeral Rites (Mourning Dance) which was performed by the elected Reth in Owkel the Village of Ayang, the Previous Reth.

The Election of Reth Kwongo Dak Padiet:-

There are now three Families upon whom the prince is chosen to be Reth. These Families are :-

The Family of Kwathker of the present Reth Kwongo Dak Padiet the successor of Reth Ayang Aney Kur. The Family of Gwang. The Family of Nyidhok. Reth Kwongo Dak Padiet had been elected according to processes and rules followed in choosing the new Reth which could be stated as follows :-

1. He should not be left – handed.
2. He should not been injured.
3. He should be born during his father reign .
4. He should not be the elder Son .
5. He should not be condemned in any crime of murder.
6. He should be well disciplined .

Taking into consideration all these conditions Reth Kwongo Dak Padiet has been selected as a Reth to succeed Reth Ayang Aney Kur who passed in 1992 . (died) All the senior chiefs of the country were summoned to Fashada to attend his election.

In the year of 1993 the installation of Kwongo Dak Padiet had been performed in Fashoda. A group of researchers from the Centre were able to attend the ceremonies and a documentary Film has been prepared. For personel circumstances, I was not able to attend the ceremonies of the installation. However, depending on the film I did not notice any major differences in the coronation ceremonies which are Performed during the installation of Reth Ayang Aney Kur and

that of his successor – Kwongo Dak Padiet . Depending on all these documents (Written or filmed) I tried to give a brief summary of the main Processes and cultural activities which were performed during the installation of Kwongo Dak Dak Padiet :-

The funeral Rites :-

According to the Shilluk customs the elected Reth Kwongo Dak Padiet was obligated to perform the Funeral Rites (Mourning Dance) of the Reth Ayang Aney Kur.

The Kwanyiker who are mainly responsible for beating the drums began their work by digging the ground and putting the drums (Bulo) in the holes leaving their mouths upwards . Then they began to beat the drums to indicate the first signal of the ceremony .

Almost all the Silluk came to participate in the ceremony to pay their last respect to the Late Reth. Such an important event is marked by the sacrifices of bulls and sheep . All these ceremonies were performed in Owekel the village of the previous Reth according to the customs followed by all Reths of the Shilluk.

After the completion of the Funeral Rites of Reth Ayang Aney Kur , Kwongo Dak Padiet began his preparation for the coronation processes .

The Coronation :-

Among the first steps of the coronation process is the finding of Mrs. Grey Skin which is used in the rituals of the coronation. This process started at Akurwa . Many others preparations followed to ensure that the procedures of the coronations were completed. Such preparations are usually done with very strict regulations of the clans who are assigned to take their responsibilities in the coronation processes.

One of the most important ritual in the coronation is the search of Nyikango and his Son Dak. People of the clan who are responsible for the ritual leave to Akurwa to bring Nyikango from the river for the official induction of the elected Reth. At that particular time people were gathered in front of Nyikango Shrine (singing and dancing) to persuade him so that it will be easy to get him from the river. His Son Dak is headed in the place when Nyikango has been looked for and brought for the coronation.

Before Dak is taken by that clan for coronation the member of the clan who is responsible for bringing Nyikango from the river is empowered with ritual ceremonies so that his task will be successful.

On arrival , the people kneel down in front of the river and say some prayers before Nyikango was found when he was found he was brought from the river in a canoe .

After the process is completed they came back to Akurwa. After the refreshment for two days the procession started towards Fashoda. According to the customs, the elected Reth Kwongo began to inspect all the houses in Fashoda . Then the process was followed by the meeting of the clan who confirmed their readiness for the coronation.

When Nyikango and his Son Dak were approaching Fashoda, the elected Reth left Fashoda for Debalo with Wichdiwad (Clan). On arrival to Debalo all the fires in the whole village were put out to clear the way for the rituals which are to be performed in the following day. The chiefs who came to Debalo accompanying the Reth gathered in front of Reth to pay respect to him.

Many rituals were performed to prepare the Reth for coronation. Then the Reth blessed the sheep and bulls by putting his hands over them. After a while Kwakel clan brought Nyikwer to join the procession of the

Reth to Fashoda. The Reth left Deballo with Kwa Julo at his right and Kwa Kel on his left on their way to Khor Arebjur .

The most interested ceremony is the mock fight with sorghum millet stalks which takes place between the army of Nyikango and the other army of the Reth. As soon as Nyikango approached Khor Arebjur the Reth crossed with Nyikwer. At a certain spot the Reth was captured by Nyikango and they started to go towards the Khor called (pabur) where the Reth was made to spin around holding Nyikango with his both hands Until he reached Fashoda.

In Fashoda Reth Kwongo Dak Padiet and his Sub – Chief were taken to a roughly made huts near Nyikango's Shrine to take care of a small herd of cattle brought from Deballo. During that period the Reth was treated as a small boy and hence, the work was done at about four o'clock early in the morning so that nobody could see him. It was believed that the ritual will bring fortune to the Reth during his reign.

Then he was washed and was taken in front of the Nyikango's shrine and placed on silver coronation seat covered with white cloths and the Images of Nyikango and Dak are held over him in order that he might be possessed of their powers. With him are his Sub-chief and the Chief of Kwanyiyek (Clan) holding the legs of the Reth as he is sitting on the seat. He remained in a open place for some time, with the group holding some white cloths as a Shelter around him. Meanwhile Nyikango's army were beating their drums and Singing Nyikango's Songs. Here the Reth was said to be shaken by the power of Nyikango as he was possessed by him .

At the end of two days the Reth was taken to the Four High Temples (Athurwic) on a mound, and stayed in them for another two days. At the end all the senior and ordinary Chiefs gather together in Fashoda at a final advisory council (Loko), where the Reth was given the right to take up the post of King (Reth).

The Chiefs then made their speeches giving him advice to perform his professional task justly, and after the speech of the best orator the drum was beaten as a sign of praise. At the close of the speeches two silver bracelets were put around his wrists, as a sign of his office. When the speeches were over, the Reth Kwongo Dak Padiet rose up and addressed the company. Then ritual was over .

This is a brief discription of the main rituals and cermonies which had taken place in the coronation of Kwongo Dak Padiet which will be more elaborated by the film produced by the National Corporation for Culture and Arts, represented by the Folklife Reseach and Documentation Centre in 1993.

References :-

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