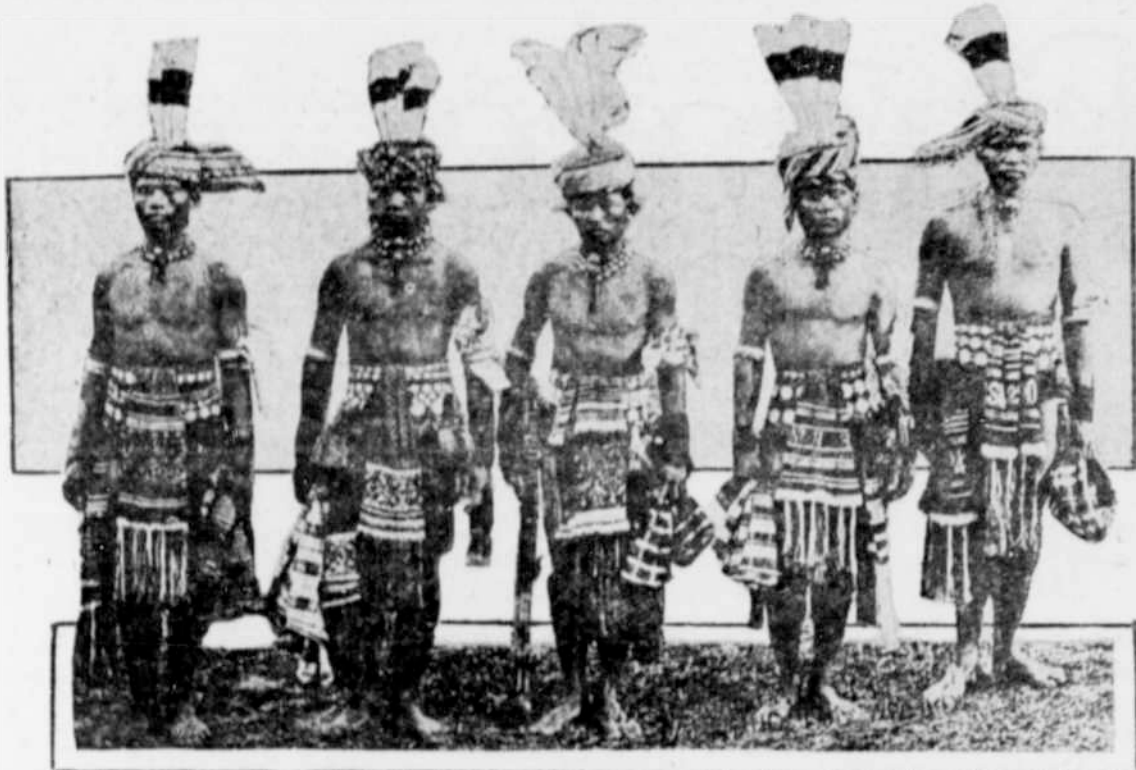


Cannibalism Declines in Last Stronghold

Noted Polish Explorer Reports Passing of One of World's Oldest Customs

SEMI-CANNIBALS IN FESTIVE DRESS



Dyaks, members of a semi-cannibal tribe in the Congo, dressed for a festival. Note the odd musical instrument carried by the man in the center.

Returning recently from a year's journey throughout the French colonies in West Africa, Dr. Ferdinand Ossendowski, the noted Polish writer and explorer, stated that only in rare instances was there any mention of cannibalistic practices. In the account of his recent trip ("Slaves of the Sun"), Dr. Ossendowski mentions but two or three forest tribes that are now known to practice the eating of human flesh.

Human Flesh Relished

This is a remarkable change from the situation prevailing in many parts of Africa even as late as 25 years ago. At that time cannibalism was common in Africa. Most of the African cannibals ate human flesh because they relished it and not because of necessity or religious rituals, although there were tribes where cannibalism was a part of their religious ceremony.

The Niam-Niam and Monbuttu nations, until very recently, carried on wars for the purpose of obtaining human flesh for consumption. It was not an uncommon sight at one time to see human flesh for sale in the market places of large communities in West Africa. The Bangala, a tribe of very high culture residing in the Congo, practiced cannibalism on a large scale up until just a few years ago.

Eating Dead Relatives

In some places the eating of dead relatives was combined with the killing of all who were aged or sick. Sometimes the flesh was eaten raw and sometimes cooked. Among some

tribes both in Africa and Australia dead bodies were kept and prepared in a peculiar manner. They were then consumed as a rare delicacy by the innocent children of nature. Sometimes it was a religious custom to consume the bodies of deceased relatives as a mark of respect. At other times a murderer feasted on the body of his victim in order to keep from being haunted.

Bloody Rites

Some of the bloodiest cannibalistic rites in Africa were practiced in Dahomey. There twice a year the cruel "Customs" were held. These were ceremonies consisting of the sacrifice of hundreds of victims for the repose of the soul of the king or one of his ancestors. For these ceremonies the king's army raided nearby towns of other black monarchs for victims. When a sufficient number of prisoners was obtained, they were dressed in ceremonial robes and placed in a stockade surrounded by high stacks of thorn bushes.

Female Warriors

Then the king assembled his Amazon Corps, of female warriors, and signalling, bade them charge the stockade. Through the thorn bushes they went, their bodies torn by the thorns, and into the stockade where each seized a prisoner and brought him or her triumphantly to the king. The first Amazon to scale the barrier and return with her prize, presented the poor unfortunate to the monarch, who, borrowing the Amazon's sword, decapitated the victim.

This was the signal for the sacri-

fice to begin. Amid yells, screeches and screams, the victims were put to the sword while the king and his nobles looked on. Sometimes as many as 500 prisoners were slaughtered. Afterwards, great fires were built and the bodies crisply roasted.

Women Barred

In Grand Bassam, now a thriving West African port under French control, it was once the custom to hold a festival every time a new village was founded. At such times every one taking part in the festival was forced to partake of the human victims sacrificed. Among the Basutos, an independent nation of South Africa, it was not long ago the custom when a very brave foe was killed, to immediately pluck out and eat his heart, under the belief that such

consumption gave courage and strength. Certain tribes such as the Bakubi of Angola, never permitted women to partake of human flesh. The reason for this was that it was believed that such flesh was good for the soul, and since it was held by them that women had no soul, there was no necessity for their indulging in the cannibalistic rites.

South Sea Cannibals

It should not be supposed that cannibalism in recent times has been confined to the African continent. On the contrary it is not unknown today, in Australia and the South Sea Islands where Christianity has not gained a firm foothold.

Cannibalism was formerly general in Australia among the black people who inhabited that continent. In the Luritcha tribe it was customary to feed weakling babies on the bodies of stronger babies captured in raids on villages. Even today, despite the watchfulness of the Christian authorities, an individual or tribe will revert to the eating of human flesh. Among the Dyaks of Borneo, whose favorite sport was head-hunting, it was the general practice to torture the victim, and then consume the flesh under the watchful eyes of priests.

Ferocious Tribes

The Cucumaa, a tribe of Peruvian Indians, have been discovered of recent years to be one of the most fiercely cannibalistic peoples known. They would eat the bodies of their dead, grind up their bones and drink the dust mixed with fermented drink. This tribe is the most savage on the South American continent. Among some of the very remote Eskimo tribes today, women suspected of witchcraft are horribly mutilated and even killed. The history of certain West Coast tribes of North America shows the existence of secret societies of magicians who practiced cannibalism, such practice being necessary for membership in the societies.

Only Priests Eat

In the southeastern part of New Guinea, there are still certain tribes where the murderer is not permitted to partake of his victim. In some cases the entire clan to which the dead man belonged is barred from the feast. It is interesting to note also that in Mindanao, the largest island in the Philippines, the only persons who were so privileged were the priests who led the warriors.

Originated With Whites

It must not be concluded from the foregoing that only the darker races have been addicted to cannibalism. Indeed, quite the opposite is true. Cannibalism was prac-

ticed by the ancient inhabitants of France, Germany, Italy, China, Tibet and all of the region around the Mediterranean Sea. Patricide was practiced with cannibalism. When the Romans visited Great Britain, they discovered the inhabitants devouring each other at every opportunity. On the authority of Herodotus, the Greek historian, we know that the Finnish people of his time were very much addicted to cannibalism.

An interesting survival of the early cannibalism of the Irish is seen in their present-day celebration of the wake. Today food is brought to the room in which the corpse lies and everybody eats and drinks heartily. But in the old days before Ireland was civilized, the body of the deceased was the piece de resistance of the repast.

Worst Cannibals

Probably the worst record for cannibalism was held by the Aztecs of Mexico no longer ago than 1521. This populous nation which had reached a very high stage of barbaric culture, waged war for the sole purpose of obtaining victims to sacrifice to the war god, Huitzilopochtli. The wretched prisoners were taken to the temple by the priests, their hearts torn from them and thrown into the

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