

THE PACIFICATION OF THE MAASAI AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE PROPHET'S TRIBUTE

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Summary

Maasai regard the success of their warfare in precolonial times as largely due to the oracular power of the dynasty of their Prophets. In return for his advice, a Prophet who instigated a raid would be given a prime share of the cattle gains. Following the abolition of intertribal warfare with colonialism, the dynasty of Prophets have retained considerable power among the Maasai. In a transformation of their former role, they now sustain their herds through continued tribute of cattle from the Maasai themselves in exchange for ritual protection from super-human agencies that are felt to pose a widespread threat. The thrust of this paper is to examine the contemporary ideological framework that links Maasai attitudes towards cattle with the oracular power of their Prophets. The herd of the Prophets are assumed to play a role in their mystical ability to divine and control misfortune. It is the ideological aspect of tribute that underpins the continuing economic success of the Prophets.

Résumé

La pacification des Masai et la transformation du tribut du Prophète.

Les Masai considèrent qu'ils doivent une large part de leurs succès militaires pré-coloniaux aux pouvoirs divinatoires de la dynastie de leurs Prophètes. En contrepartie de son oracle, le Prophète instigateur d'une action guerrière devait recevoir une part de la production bovine. A la suite de l'abolition des guerres tribales par la colonisation, la dynastie des Prophètes a conservé un pouvoir considérable chez les Masai. Leur rôle premier s'est transformé. Désormais, ils entretiennent leurs troupeaux grâce au tribut continuel de bovins que leur donnent les Masai eux-mêmes, en échange d'une protection rituelle contre les esprits qui sont supposés faire régner la terreur. Le but de cet article est d'examiner le cadre idéologique contemporain qui relie les attitudes Masai envers leur bétail au pouvoir divinatoire de leurs Prophètes. On en arrive à la conclusion que le troupeau des Prophètes joue un rôle dans leurs aptitudes mystiques à produire des oracles et à déjouer le mauvais sort. C'est l'aspect idéologique du tribut qui sous-tend le succès économique permanent des Prophètes.

Key Words

Africa, Maasai, Tribute, Prophets

Mots clés

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Introduction

Following EVANS-PRITCHARD (1940 : 16-19), social anthropologists often emphasise that their interest in cattle is a concern for the chain of relationships between people through their values regarding possessions, and the argument then shifts from cattle to kinship, ritual and other aspects of culture. There is a

danger in the present paper also that cattle will seem to disappear from the argument, so let me stress at the outset that cattle are necessarily central to any discussion on the Maasai, and if I seem to say less about cattle as such, it is because the panorama of which they are a central feature is so vast. The "tribute" in the title is about the relationship between Maasai and their Prophets and cattle are central to this relationship.

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The reputation of the Maasai as the dominant political force between Lake Victoria and the East African coast during the nineteenth century appears related to the ecology of this region. They lived in an ideal area for pastoralism, and except for a narrow corridor to the north, were surrounded by agriculturalists whose sedentary form of life made them vulnerable to raiding. Oral traditions and historical evidence suggest that while the Maasai may only have migrated to this area in the eighteenth century, it was inhabited by pastoralists long before then, invaded by successive waves from the north, each displacing their predecessor to occupy this niche. Seen from this point of view, the Maasai simply happened to be the most recent wave when colonial intervention, invading from a different direction, confined them to their present territory, but also gave them a more permanent tenure.

The same oral traditions relate to Maasai *moran* (warriors) coming from the north and finding a boy with remarkable powers of divination. They adopted him and he later became the founder of the Loonkidongi dynasty of diviners who still inhabit the Maasai area, attached to one of their clans. In this paper, my concern is with the leading members of this dynasty whose skills of divination had a political dimension. It is in this sense that it is useful to refer to these leading Loonkidongi as *Prophets*; they were not only highly regarded as diviners, but could also claim a following. It is held to be this combination of inspired divination and military skill - Prophets and moran - that created the unassailable position of the Maasai until the period of colonial intervention when their cattle were severely weakened by disease and drought and the Maasai themselves were depleted through starvation. Whether similar Prophets served pastoralists previously in the area or were an innovation of Maasai occupation is not known. More certain is that among the Maasai, the Loonkidongi were very powerful and more intriguing still is that they continue as Prophets among the Maasai today. Here, I wish to trace the continuity of their power to exact tribute from the era of precolonial warfare to that of colonial and postcolonial peace. In terms of cattle and ultimately wives, the Loonkidongi were and are the richest elders in the area. Given the close symbiotic relationship between the people and their stock, polygyny, large families and large herds of cattle have a close bearing on one another; and more Loonkidongi, and notably those that are Prophets, achieve the ideal of affluent elderhood than any other sector of Maasai society.

Prophets as quasi-warlords, moran as their agents

Maasai regard their earlier Prophets as having been remarkable adept and the key to their dominance in the area. The best contemporary account we have of the flavour of a Prophet's court is by MERKER (1904 : 18-21), a German administrator in what is now Tanzania. He noted that the Maasai spoke of the Prophet's "sacred person with awe and reverence, and no-one who has not received a summons dares to lift his eyes to the mighty one... (His) settlement consists of a large number of adjacent villages, some of which serve him and his innumerable wives as dwellings. Mbatian had about two hundred wives, and the youthful Sendeu (Mbatian's son) has twenty. No strange man may set foot in the village dwelling of the Prophet and his wives, or appear in its neighbourhood. Close by are the remaining villages of which one is set aside for councils and receptions and for those elders most in the Prophet's confidence as assistants and advisers living with their families, while the remainder are inhabited by warriors (*moran*), who constitute the defence of the settlement and the bodyguard of the Prophet on his journeys."

Maasai success depended on their effective control of the bushland that provided the necessary grazing for their own cattle in the Maasai area and for their enemies further afield. Earlier accounts focus on the predatory aspects of their raiding to boost their herds. With the curtailment of raiding, more contemporary accounts focus on the more defensive measures to maintain the herds they have as an aspect of husbandry. The thrust of oral traditions and of Merker's account focuses on the Prophet's uncanny talent for instigating successful raids, providing the Maasai moran with war medicines that would enhance their prowess as warriors and detailed instructions stemming from his ability to "see" in his visions the opportunities and hazards they would face. There is an aura of infallibility in the popular reputation of the Prophet. Accounts of his seances refer to the incomprehensible obliqueness of his pronouncements, adding an atmospheric touch of hazy mysticism to his vision, probing into the unseen, placing him above ordinary men, and adding to his reputation for protecting his clients at an ultrahuman level. Other accounts suggest that he could describe the features of the landscape that would be encountered by the moran on a raid. He would instruct them exactly where they would find water, where they should rest and for how long, and most critically, he would indicate the

markings on the cattle he wanted them to seize for his own herds, leaving them to divide the remainder of their plunder among themselves.

More sceptical early writers noted that much of the Prophet's skill depended on a highly developed spy network. MERKER (1904 : 19, 91), for instance, wrote : "Through a well-organized spy system Mbatian always kept himself informed of the whereabouts and condition of his adversary, so that the warriors, thirsting for plunder, could always attack those settlements that were just preparing a military expedition against the Maasai... The Prophet keeps himself informed of the strength of the various warrior villages, as well as of all matters that have a bearing on war in relation to the tribes domiciled in the neighbourhood, so that he is in a good position to weigh up the chances of success with very fine accuracy. He is well posted, even in the enemy's trifling and unimportant affairs, and weaves all this knowledge cleverly into his answer so that it sounds oracular, and is understood as such by the spokesmen and warriors." From the British side of the border that divided the Maasai area, HINDE (1901 : 31) gave a similar picture of "a well-organized secret service. Lenana (Mbatian's other Prophet son) receives almost daily information, not only from all parts of his possessions, but from wherever the Maasai have wandered, giving him details of all he wishes to know. No one has been able to find out who are the spies, and the organization is so efficiently controlled that Lenana's knowledge of events is supposed by his people to be due to magic, or as they call it, *N'gai* (God)."

How far a Prophet's network of informers gave him such detailed information and how far Maasai simply placed a blind faith in his judgement is necessarily a matter of speculation. However, it seems certain that this faith played a key role in Maasai success, and there is little doubt that the Prophets themselves and the Loonkidongi generally fostered their reputations as a matter of professional expediency.

The Prophet's link with the moran was especially close. They complemented one another as specialists in different kinds of bushcraft and in their single-minded interest in building up herds of cattle through raiding. The success of this partnership was popularly seen as arising from the inspired divination of the one and outstanding physical prowess of the other. But this was underpinned by the moran being organised for success in a disciplined manner and with a will to succeed based on supreme faith in the Prophet. Before any raid, the senior leader of the moran, their "spokesman", was

responsible for memorising the Prophet's instructions. Taking their warrior ostrich headdress as a metaphor, he was the "head" at the centre and those who advised him were the "feathers", as if arranged around the head in an immaculate array and representing all shades of opinion among other moran. With these advisers, the spokesman was expected to listen and to devise a consensus. He was their "head" also in the sense of being their brain and at the centre of all strands of opinion. Apart from being selected for his natural abilities as a leader, his reputation was enhanced by his close association with the Prophet in their preparations. There is in such descriptions a replication of the Prophet's court. The spokesman too, was surrounded by a network of advisers and a bodyguard, and was aloof from the fighting to the extent that he was not allowed to fight. His aides were expected to restrain him physically if he tried. He had to keep a cool head, bearing in mind the advice of the Prophet, but also having a clear notion of the state of battle. Every move, initiative and set-back was reported back to him through his network. If the fighting turned against the Maasai, they would fall back around their spokesman. If he was killed, they would be without a head and the battle could end in rout. The moran had their clear objectives and a lifestyle that had always led them to be heavily dependent on one another with their spokesman at the nerve centre of their organisation. They would make a concerted effort to achieve these objectives as a disciplined force, sensitive to opportunities and hazards as these arose.

On their way home with their cattle gains, discipline was maintained until they were safe from pursuit inside the Maasai area. The spokesman and his aides would then select the cattle for the Prophet, again following his instructions, and for themselves and any other leading members of the expedition after wider consultation. The remaining gains were not allocated individually but were broadly divided among other moran according to their tribal section and moiety. It was at this point that discipline was relaxed and often snapped. The more successful the raid, the greater the chance that expectations would be unrealistically inflated. Within each section, attempts at arriving at a consensus based on democratic discussion might narrow the differences, with the more forceful and experienced moran overawing the weaker. But this could lead to minor brawls where some still resented their lesser share, building up at times to a groundswell of dissent and more serious conflicts. In proving their battle-worthiness to receive cattle, moran had to be

prepared to excel in this final stage. The idiom of moranhood, from the time that the age-set was first inaugurated, was based on displaying a readiness to resort to force in order to show their true mettle. Those with established reputations who had received a worthy share by common consent would not be involved. In the force were those who still had ambitions to establish such a reputation against those they despised. The earlier uneasy consensus on dividing the gains would be moderated in this final flurry, which was in effect the final decisive stage of an inconclusive debate. A measure of an effective spokesman was the extent to which he could retain the confidence of his followers by devising a reasonable framework for dividing the spoils, anticipating the outcome and limiting the brawls in the concluding stage. He and his aides held aloof from the affray, and once it had resolved itself the spokesman especially was expected to outline the new consensus as in debate, confirming the revised allocations and restoring discipline and the sense of unity before their return home in triumph with their gains. For those who had tried to assert themselves against the odds and had been beaten, there would be praise ; next time, they would be told, show your worth instead on the battlefield and you will have a large share. Those who had distinguished themselves in battle, but had shown meanness in other ways were denied cattle ; now be generous, they would be told, and next time you will be given your worthy share. Above individual prowess, the moran held high the ideal of a collective strength through self-denial and sharing. It was this, they maintained, that placed the Maasai above any individual prowess among their enemies.

Nevertheless, the final affray reveals another aspect of Maasai life that wholly subverts this ideal of moranhood. When the Maasai say that "cattle have their own law", they refer to times such as these, when strong conventions that hold them together as a people are superseded by personal concern for their own herds. among moran, respect for age mates or for senior elders can be cast aside instantly if there is felt to be some threat to the family herd, amounting to an affront against their person, leading sometimes to violence. This has an even greater relevance when they become elders. The transition to elderhood is seen as one in which they split up to found their own families, and from this point loyalty between peers becomes clouded by a more personal concern for building up their herds. By comparison with the moran, elders are seen as selfishly concerned with preserving their property ;

stock, wives and offspring. But above the elders, it is the Loonkidongi and notably their Prophets who have the most notorious reputation for being greedy for cattle and for wives. The ultimate greed in Maasai is associated with sorcery, and beliefs in sorcery lies at the heart of their dependence on Prophets today.

The powers of prophets turned inwards : the Maasai as clients

The view of the Loonkidongi Prophets as warlords seeking to boost their control over the Maasai on the one hand and their herds on the other lies somewhere between myth and history. There always way, of course, a strong mythical element in the beliefs that surrounded the Prophets, and today the Maasai view of their own past has to be seen as the foundation for a contemporary myth that continues to surround the Loonkidongi in changed circumstances.

This way in which success in a raid led to affray among moran in their bids for a larger share of the spoil has a close parallel in the precolonial history of the Maasai and their Loonkidongi Prophets. Once the Maasai had established their domination over surrounding agricultural peoples, they turned in the nineteenth century to an internecine struggle against other Maa-speaking pastoralists for dominance throughout the region ; and then, following the disastrous cattle epidemic of the 1880s, to civil war among themselves as rivalries built up between tribal sections for survival. Oral traditions stress the key role of the Prophets in these developments, fostering this infighting in their own desire for cattle and power. Mbatian was the last acknowledged Prophet for all Maasai, and the rivalry between his sons, Lenana and Sendeu, was a critical feature of the civil wars that followed.

With a determined colonial administration and an imposed peace, apart from the odd skirmish in remoter parts, the Maasai ceased to be a dominant people ; the moran ceased to be warriors and the Prophets could no longer indulge in visions that fostered external aggression. Yet throughout the present century, the Maasai have continued to enjoy a high popular esteem, the moran continue to portray themselves as warriors in defence of their herds, and the Prophets retain a critical position in protecting Maasai as their clients. The critical change so far as the last are concerned is that their herds no longer derive from war gains, but are now exclusively cattle donated by Maasai in return for this protection. In this adherence to tradition, the role of

successive administrations in avoiding confrontation with the Maasai is clearly important, and so are economic factors such as tourism, more recently. Again, moranhood itself is concerned with being more than just warriors, and the survival of this institution in times of peace was the subject of an earlier study (SPENCER, 1965), albeit under more direct control of the elders (WALLER, 1976). Here, it is the transformation of the role of the Prophets I wish to consider. They too have survived as a dominant institution, but the mechanism whereby they continue to build up larger herds and larger families than normal Maasai has necessarily had to adapt, and with this change, as I understand it, there appears to have been a shift in the ideological premise underpinning their regime.

The powers of the Loonkidongi dynasty have always been closely associated with sorcery. Their medicines were to counteract sorcery and these were supplemented by knowledge of sorcerer's poisons. As well as being diviners, the success of the most powerful Prophets was held to be due to their superior sorcery in fighting rival Prophets, including those among the enemies of Maasai. Today, still, no successful Loonkidongi can afford to relax. The more influence he wields and the larger his herd, the more jealousy he is thought to excite from his rivals. However, confined within their official boundaries, this has become a wholly Maasai affair.

All Loonkidongi are popularly seen by Maasai as potential rivals for power : "they have no brothers." Feuds between branches of the family are conceived in terms of sorcery and counter-sorcery and fed by gossip and rumour among the Maasai. According to popular belief, successful Loonkidongi tend to die young or to lose their reason through the sorcery of their rivals. Even those who die in old age are thought to have lost power through sorcery and any sign of senile dementia is seen as "madness". Mbatian himself is held to have died in a demented state caused by the sorcery of his jealous half-brother, Mako, who was himself killed and his sons deprived of the power to "see" by Mbatian's counter-sorcery. In the literature on the Maasai civil wars, it is the rivalry between the sons of Mbatian, Sendeu and Lenana, that has been widely reported. This is elaborated further in popular belief which holds that this rivalry continued within this branch of the family after the imposition of peace. For the Maasai, this is an unravelling saga and the death of each of their successors is seen as the next step in the dynastic feud. It is a pattern that persists, with established Prophets and

ambitious diviners perceived as the principal actors in a contemporary myth. This is primarily staged among Loonkidongi, while other Maasai and lesser diviners are largely onlookers, perpetuating this myth. But they can never look on from a totally safe distance. At any time, the casualties of this feuding may be anyone in the area who happens to have fallen foul of their sorceries. Among the Maasai, solution to the fundamental problem of coping with sorcery is the services of a more powerful sorcerer. And this is the role of the Prophets.

In the nineteenth century, Supeet was Prophet for all Maasai. Since then, Supeet's power and his following have become divided among his descendants of whom about ten today are regarded as Prophets, each with his domain, typically just one tribal section, although some have two or three. As compared with earlier times when the thrust of the Prophet's vision went beyond the frontiers of his domain to opportunities and threats in alien areas, there is in the contemporary scene a switch to a concern for threats to human life within the domain. Each Prophet is the ultimate ritual expert for his domain, advising them on the performance of their major ceremonies. This advice is intended to protect all Maasai within the domain from widespread misfortunes, and their confidence in his power is normally unshakeable. He is, they argue, "our father". If misfortune persists, such as drought or epidemic, then it will be argued that the Prophet has saved them from something worse, or with less faith in themselves that it is they who have misunderstood his instructions - even just one trivial ritual detail.

The protection given by a Prophet is again grounded in his empathy with the bush and all its dangers. He is held to have a unique knowledge of his domain, though he may live on its boundary, or often even further afield. The unquestioned acceptance of his patronage over the domain ensures that he is well informed of its affairs. Delegations to him include spokesmen and other leading elders. Casual visitors may call on him with further gossip.

Beyond his network of contacts, a Prophet's knowledge and power are believed to reside in his ability to "see" right into the area of his domain and to cast spells on it. In Loonkidongi terms, the domain is *his* possession and he is endowed with this power over it for this very reason. Descriptions of his seances are very similar to those of his predecessors in former times. When he advises his clients on their ritual procedures, he is said to give a detailed description of the remoter parts of the bushland that he has never actually visited.

He can “see” the snares set up by sorcerers, and the hidden opportunities that exist for him in his turn to ensnare these sorcerers and protect his clients. A Prophet’s domain is his possession, and it is this that enables him to “see” and to empathise. He is powerless to “see” into the domain of some other Prophet and would risk being ensorcelled if he were to trespass there. Loonkidongi generally live in the boundary areas between Maasai tribal sections, lying just outside the domains of any Prophet.

Cattle are thought to be at the very heart of a Prophet’s power. His ability to “see”, like skill in divining, is associated with the special relationship that he has with cattle. In Maasai belief, cattle are a link between themselves and God who provides the grass they eat. Sacrificing an ox and sharing its meat brings them closer to God. In certain important ways, cattle are regarded as knowing beasts with their own perception of the bush when grazing, and this is more intimate and closer to God than the knowledge of the Maasai who herd them. It is oxen who lead the herd in grazing, and it is from selected propitious oxen that Loonkidongi fashion their oracles, providing them with the means of divination and access to this special knowledge during the time of day when cattle are out grazing.

The basis for “seeing” goes a step further. After each major sacrifice, the Prophet is driven a herd of cattle in payment for his advice. His personal interest in adding to his herd is taken for granted, but beyond this the cattle are drawn from all parts of his domain and bring their special knowledge from all parts. It is this that gives the Prophet his unique ability, through the cattle that are now in his herd and provide his food. With every delegation and gift of cattle the rapport with his domain is updated and revitalised. No other Loonkidongi can have access to this range of knowledge : least of all any Maasai, for unlike Loonkidongi, Maasai are assumed to be just ordinary people without this special rapport with cattle.

The Prophet’s empathy through cattle is extended to his special relationship with the moran of his domain. This is popularly expressed in the tradition that it was moran who first discovered and adopted the hero-ancestor who founded the Loonkidongi dynasty. Subsequently it was a combination of the insight of the Prophets and the resourcefulness of moran that gave the Maasai their commanding position. Today still, moran are expected to play a prominent role in any public ritual involving the Prophet, and it is they who protect his domain from outside aggressors while he protects it

from unseen threats from within. The prominent role of the moran, especially their spokesmen, makes them a conspicuous target for rival Loonkidongi bent on discrediting the Prophet in order to usurp his domain. Such rivals are the sorcerers that are feared, and one of the principal tasks of the Prophet is to protect the moran and above all their spokesman who is the most conspicuous among them and most at risk.

The Prophet’s powers of vision extend to all areas of the domain, and notably the bush where Maasai herds are vulnerable, where the unseen hazards lie and where there are the plants and substances used in their medicines. Like the Prophet, the moran are concerned with protecting their area, although at a different level. Their lifestyle gives them a bush-sense that is alert to the play of visible forces. They build their warrior villages with no fences to emphasise this vigilance at all times and their continuity with the bush. They despite the village domesticity of the elders and maintain their own intelligence network in the defence of their territory and herds. In different ways, both the moran and the Prophet lie outside the milieu of normal village life, and their different kinds of vigilance are seen to extend to all parts of the bush where enemies might be concealed.

It is with this close association in mind that the moran today have a special role in any delegation to the Prophet for advice before their major festivals. The Prophet’s seance is conducted at night in his hut, where he and leading elders of the delegation sit down one side, drinking beer (or often spirits today), and selected moran sit down the other side, singing for the Prophet to make him happy until he is lulled into a trance. Their songs are infused with their recent experiences of the bush, and this is an essential background for the Prophet’s ability to sense what is happening in his domain. Only with their help to make him happy can he “see” what is right and what is wrong with their land. Typically, this is the first time many of them have met him and they are overawed in his presence. They shiver with apprehension ; if he shivers too, it is because he has become angry at what he “sees”. He then holds up his hand for silence and in oblique terms that no-one else can quite follow, he tells them what he has seen. The memory that persists among his visitors tends to recall the atmosphere generated in the seance rather than what was actually said. After the session, the moran go outside to dance and the elders continue to drink and discuss their affairs with the Prophet.

A second session takes place the following morning when the Prophet is sober and clear-headed. He consults his oracle in the presence of key members of the delegation to prescribe the ritual remedy, giving them packets of "medicine" and crisp instructions. These extend to the exact location of the festival and every other detail relevant to their protection from possible sorcerers. All this advice must remain a secret, and only the most reliable delegates who can be trusted to remember it accurately and discreetly would have been selected. No-one else would enquire too closely about the advice or their motives would be suspect. The advice is vital information for any sorcerer who might wish to tamper with the festival site beforehand.

When giving his advice, the Prophet specifies the size and composition of a herd of cattle as payment for his advice. This is driven to his village, usually some time after the sacrifice and festival when the lack of any major disaster is universally acclaimed as his doing. There can be no question of doubting the benefits of his advice and influence, for as they say, if there was any doubt expressed and delay in payment, then the Prophet would withdraw his protection and wreak a havoc of his own within his domain as only he could. It is inconceivable that his clients - his "children" - should withhold what is rightfully his.

In this way, the triangular relationship between Prophet, moran and cattle in precolonial times appears to have been transformed, fighting with adversaries who to a greater extent are seen to live within rather than beyond the boundaries of Maasai. What was the Prophet's share of war gains has been transformed into a form of tribute from his subjects in return for the protection he can offer. The external warring has become an internal feuding. And in an era when all other East African kingdoms have crumbled, the Maasai continue to pay homage - through cattle - to their Prophets.

Conclusion

There is a certain anomaly in the continuing power of the Loonkidongi to enrich themselves through the Maasai. They are an exception to the widespread reputation of Maasai as a highly egalitarian society in which the privilege of birth does not distinguish between high and low status, or between rich and poor. To account for this, it is necessary to qualify the premise of equality. In Maasai, this premise has a direct bearing on the general principle of cattle husbandry that all Maasai should have

equal access to Maasai land and water for their herds. The extent to which they can use this access to build up large herds of their own depends on their dedication and their ability to turn opportunity to advantage : good luck in pastoralism is not entirely a matter of chance. Some are more successful than others and their premise of quality is one of opportunity rather than of achievement, sanctioned by a divine Providence. This is a common feature of the "cattle complex" in East Africa and elsewhere. I have compared this attitude towards their cattle with a capitalist ethic that aims to take every opportunity and effort to maintain and increase their capital : the herd (SPENCER, 1984). Throughout the region, pastoralism is a family business, and closely associated with bridewealth and other marriage payments in which the cattle paid for the bride are regarded as an investment in her fertility which will provide the family with sons as future herdboys and daughters as a future source of revenue through incoming marriage payments. In marrying and breeding, they cultivate the symbiosis that the family and its growth has with the growing herd. In building up larger herds, certain elders can attain a higher level of polygyny and produce larger families to look after these herds. Ultimately, as in the capitalist economy, there is a limit to this growth and this brings the Maasai into competition with one another. Beyond the appearance of sharing food, mutual help in herding arrangement, and respect and often an easy camaraderie in public, there is also a general awareness of differences in wealth and an underlying envy. Thus the Prophets and other Loonkidongi whose skills bring them cattle achieve what all Maasai aspire to, only more so. Similarly, sorcerers motivated by greed and envy have qualities that Maasai recognise up to a point within themselves. In other words, the notion that Loonkidongi "have no brothers" and their association with sorcerers are not altogether alien to Maasai in their dealings with one another. The Loonkidongi, Prophets, and the image of the sorcerer stand apart from day to day life, but each of these is essentially a perverse aspect of a Maasai ideology, arising from the rich opportunities of pastoralism for those with luck and the will and energy to succeed.

It may be significant that the early literature gives only a remote suggestion that the Maasai among themselves were directly troubled by sorcery. The fact that sorcery is today regarded as a serious and widespread problem suggests shift in ideology as the thrust of competition for cattle has shifted from external aggression to internal rivalry. This raises the question of whether perhaps the Prophets, through their visions and advice, may have played a major role in fostering this

slant on popular belief as their income from warfare declined with the imposition of peace. Even lesser Loonkidongi diviners would have benefited from cultivating doubt and suspicion among their Maasai clients, thereby increasing their dependence. This is to suggest that the credibility of this suspicion as a common experience extending to lesser diviners, jealous Prophets, and irascible Maasai may well have increased during the past century as one aspect of the changing climate as Maasai dominance has declined.

Be that as it may, today each tribal section maintain that they need their own Prophet to protect them from sorcerers whose power is derived ultimately from the esoteric knowledge of the Loonkidongi. As Maasai sometimes wistfully point out : "If we did not have Loonkidongi (as sorcerers), we would not need

Loonkidongi (as Prophets for protection)." This is, however, to underrate the competitive basis of Maasai society and the immense opportunities for growth of their herds. The legendary greed of the Loonkidongi is just a further step beyond the popular view of self-interest among Maasai elders. The sorcerer is in effect a grotesque caricature of one aspect of elderhood, and in Maasai terms the Loonkidongi happen to be very successful elders. One might with equal conviction claim that if there were no Maasai, there would be no Loonkidongi.

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