INTO THE HEART OF SISALA EXPERIENCE: WITNESSING DEATH DIVINATION

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An ethnographic inquiry into two Sisala burials and the inscrutable power inherent in the fervor of those events.

> For Beauty's nothing but beginning of Terror we're still just able to bear, and why we adore it so is because it serenely disdains to destroy us . . .
>
> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*

ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS form the subject of this paper. On 23 October 1967, in the town of Tumu, Ghana, I attended a "death divination" performed by the praise singers of a Sisala funeral, the *goka*, over the corpse of the drummer of the chief of Tumu. Near midnight came a moment in which I saw before my eyes and felt within my body a phenomenon totally unnatural to my previous experience–I "witnessed" the raising of the dead.

But here I must pause. To proceed further would be to describe the experience itself, and to do so I must first say something about my situation as an anthropologist in the field, particularly the circumstances which led to this moment of perception, or "seeing." For it is from this experience that I have proceeded with my tortuous inquiry into the heart of Sisala culture and experience.

From September 1966 to March 1968 I lived with and conducted research among the Sisala people of northwest Ghana.[1] During my stay I lived with my steward, Kojo, in the "Old D.C.'s bungalow" in Tumu. Built sometime in the 1930s, of mud and thatch, it was both spacious and dilapidated. Rats, bats, and occasionally poisonous snakes infested the thatch roof and darker recesses of the structure. As I was to learn later, the house was thought to be inhabited by the ghosts of former British colonial officers, a few of whom had perished of disease and were buried nearby. While I never encountered their ghosts, I was wise enough to buy a female cat; she grew fat on a diet of vermin, produced two litters of kittens, and thus kept me safe from harm.

On most days I would arise before dawn, eat breakfast, and begin my work while the morning was still cool. By late morning, when the temperature had risen to over a hundred degrees, I would return home, take a bath, eat dinner, and take a nap. At about four in the afternoon I would get up and, with iron discipline, type my field notes. As dusk set in I would again leave the house and visit with friends and informants, often tipping a beer or two at Kwami's bar, in the Tumu *zongo* (central town). At about eight o'clock I would return home, eat supper, read detective mysteries and other escape fiction, and go to bed by ten or eleven.

Those who have worked in the tropics can attest to the importance of discipline. Without it one can unravel in an environment of strange faces, intense sun, and the perpetual buzzing of stinging insects. Still, there were times when this regimen was put aside; a public ceremony, a market day, or a case of homicide would disrupt my schedule and often I would be away from the house for an entire day, sometimes more. After such a prolonged immersion into the people's lives, I would feel a

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

pressing need for privacy and would usually spend the next day alone in my house, typing field notes and reading novels.

I mention this because on the two days prior to my "witnessing" the raising of the dead, my routine had been disturbed–I had spent a night and day in another village, attending a death divination and burial. During this time I was constantly in the press of people, paying respects, asking questions, and engaging in general conversation. I spent the night under the stars, lying on a blanket huddled with other burial visitors around small campfires. I did not eat much. When I returned to Tumu, on the afternoon of October 22, I was exhausted. During that day I also did not eat much, and I slept poorly that night. The next day, October 23, I was informed that the drummer of the chief of Tumu had died, and that his burial was to be an occasion of great power, or medicine (*daluri*). Thus I spent another day without adequate meals, rest, or privacy.

I have no doubt that the events of these three days contributed to my altered, or supernatural, experience. Since these days considerably upset my normal routine, I did not type my field notes until October 27, 28, and 29. The notes for this period are quite extensive; they fill over forty pages, and are the concrete evidence of my experience.

Beyond this I have had to recreate in my memory events which happened thirteen years ago, a task involving almost divinatory powers. In describing these events I have therefore chosen to cite my field notes so as to distinguish my recollections in 1967 from my present ones. Nonetheless I can personally attest to the events that occurred, as can the informants I cite.

THE SISALA AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FUNERALS

The Sisala people are found in the savannah woodland of northwest Ghana. Approximately forty thousand people live in the tribal area, in compact villages which dot the sparsely populated landscape. Subsistence is based upon hoe cultivation of cereal crops; large livestock is also kept, but is of secondary dietary importance.

Sisala social organization is based upon the principle of patrilineal descent. The patrilocal extended family (*janwuo*), and often the minor lineage settlement (*jechiking*), constitute the corporate economic and minimal ritual unit of the society. Beyond the minor lineage the Sisala reckon descent through the male line to successively larger and more inclusive groupings, or segments. The largest is the clan (*viara*), in which members maintain the belief in common descent. Prior to British colonial contact and the establishment of secular chieftaincy, in the early part of this century, clans often united separate villages in times of war.

There is a strong sense of village affiliation. The average village consists of one to five localized descent groups, or clan settlements, each with its own headmanship, based upon seniority. Village headmanship is ritual and is vested in the founding, or autochthonous, lineage. The village headman, or "custodian of the earth" (*tinteintina*), is responsible for ensuring the well-being of the village, through his auspicious office as custodian of the village shrine (*vene*).

The strong emphasis upon village affiliation and solidarity stems in large part from a history of warfare and slave raiding, prior to British contact. In the early

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

1860s, during the time of Ashanti expansion into northern Ghana, the Dagomba kingdom employed a group of Songhai-speaking Zabirama horsemen as traders and mercenaries to raid for slaves, which were given as tribute to the Ashanti.[2] By the 1880s the Zabirama had become independent of their Dagomba masters and had established their own rule over a large part of northwest Ghana, with their central power base within the Sisala area. Their rule, however, was short-lived, for they were defeated by the British in 1897. Nevertheless this brief period of warfare caused considerable disruption and population movement; clans which at one time were unified in a particular area were forced to scatter. Sections of larger clans thus came to settle in villages far from their ancestral homelands. The solid alliance of migrating clan and host village was most likely motivated by the need for mutual defense.

The funeral (*yoho*) and associated mortuary practices consist of a multitude of ceremonies and rites (some obligatory, others optional) and perform a great number of functions, including ushering the soul of the dead into the next world (*lelejang*). Sisala mortuary customs form a tripartite structure: the burial, the funeral proper, and postfunerary rites dealing with inheritance and the final incorporation of the deceased as an ancestor. The burial is a private affair, in most cases involving only the deceased's minor lineage and close relatives. The eldest son or a close male kinsman delivers a eulogy over the grave, to ensure the passage of the deceased man or woman into the world beyond. It is usually performed quickly.

The funeral, on the other hand, is a public occasion and may or may not directly follow the burial, depending, among other things, upon the season of the year in which the death occurs. Most funerals take place during the dry season, when farmwork has been completed and people are free from basic work responsibilities. Those who attend the two- to three-day ceremony include the villagers of the deceased, his clansmen, in-laws, age mates, friends, lovers, and grandchildren. The funeral formally begins with the funerary sacrifices (*kuchura*) and the bringing of the "effigy" of the dead man (*gungun*) into the outer yard of the minor lineage settlement where the funeral takes place. The remaining rites, ceremonies, and distributions of wealth are performed both by and for individuals and groups of individuals variously related to the deceased. As the funeral moves toward the final day the more solemn mood gives way to a sense of gaiety and celebration, and the funeral usually ends with social dancing where lovers meet and old friends renew acquaintances.[3]

FOUR CRUCIAL DAYS

The Burial of Ali

At three o'clock in the afternoon on 21 October 1967, one of my key informants, Bajuaso "J.B." Monto, came to my house to inform me that an old man in his village had died. "Apparently one of the old men named Ali, of the Bachingbala minor lineage in Sobelle had complained of feeling very cold, had gone into his house and thereupon died. A week prior, the eldest man of Bachingbala lineage, one Digbu, had also died" (Grindal n.d.:972). The ominous proximity of these two deaths was seen by J.B. and his fellow villagers as a portent that the burial would be a "hot" occasion involving ritual danger, or *bomo*. From my house J.B. and I drove to the village of Sobelle, about five miles from Tumu over treacherous dirt roads.

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

We arrived at about five o'clock and went to Ali's compound, in Bachingbala, where the corpse was being prepared and dressed. On the west side of the room the corpse of Ali lay on its side, covered from head to foot with a large cloth; cowhide protected the body from the dirt floor. The corpse was already putrid, oozing malodorous juices. An old woman was sitting next to the dead man with a fan. Even though the corpse had been washed about three hours earlier, the stench of the room was horrible; overpowered, I turned away and walked into the inner yard of the compound.

There four or five *bukaliba*, or "sextons of the dead," were digging the grave, in the center of the compound. Two feet deep by then, the grave was to be L-shaped—six feet long, six feet deep, and with a ledge a foot and one-half to the side, to prevent dirt from falling on the corpse. The bukaliba were good-natured men; they seemed to enjoy what they were doing, and they laughed and joked while they worked. While we were talking they asked me to pick up a hoe and bucket and help them. At the time I thought it inappropriate and politely declined.

While we were talking and waiting the elders of the other compounds in Bachingbala came together to Ali's compound. Sensing that they were disturbed by my presence and that of J.B., we walked with them to the outer yard of the lineage. "I was then informed by the elder, Yagboi, that the burial of the dead man had to await the arrival of his 'real daughters,' for by custom they were supposed to look at the dead man before he was dressed and buried. One daughter had already come, from the village of Boti, but they were awaiting two daughters from Kung" (n.d.:973).

I sensed that I was being deceived and that they really wanted me to go; they suggested that I come back in the morning, since the burial would not occur during the night. Exercising some instinct for anthropological self-preservation, I replied indignantly that I had known Ali, that I had come to pay my respects, and that they as hosts should welcome me. After some further conversation and embarrassment I was welcomed and told to remain in the outer yard. They offered J.B. and me a place to sit and later brought us boiled peanuts and kola nuts.

At about six o'clock the sun suddenly set, and those assembled built fires to warm themselves in the chill night air. I cannot now recall what J.B. and I talked about; for the most part we were silent. I felt some nervous agitation and excitability in anticipation of the events which were to follow.

J.B. mentioned that the people present were from Bachingbala as well as from his own lineage, Navaibala. By legend the people of Bachingbala came from a nonlocal clan, and the clansmen of Navaibala had befriended them. Thus it is the clansmen of Navaibala who bury the dead of Bachingbala.

At eight o'clock in the evening an event occurred which severely disturbed the burial grounds (n.d.:974):

> Some man from Sulbelle [a neighboring village] came into Bachingbala complaining bitterly that his wife had run away and that the Navaibala people refused to give her back. He threatened to ambush the Navaibala people with his bow and arrows when they went to their farms. Hiletuo [an elder man] arose and said he didn't care; whereupon the younger men of Navaibala—those who actually go to the farm—said that Hiletuo should not speak for them. Most of the comments by the angered husband of Sulbelle were greeted by laughter from those assembled. Then some of the men of Bachingbala said that the Navaibala people should take the quarrel back to their own yard since the Sulbelle man was making a very serious

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

threat. Many there assembled felt that he should be taken to the police, for they felt that if he were actually to murder somebody and they had already been warned, their case would not rest so well in the court. Finally after about half an hour, the man left. It was the consensus that the man was only shouting threats. If he had done this in the olden days, they would have beat him up and sent him limping home. This might have been a cause for war between the two villages.

Following the man's departure the mood of the burial place was upset. I was later to learn that the old man had foolishly married a young woman, who was tucked away with her lover. The young men, especially, were agitated and talked about taking revenge upon this insult. J.B., similarly excited, begged to take his leave and thus I remained alone by my fire.

With the exception of Ali and Digbu, who had died a week earlier, I did not know anyone in Bachingbala. I sat by my fire throughout the night, anxiously awake and quiet, watching the others huddled about their fires, talking in hushed tones. During the long night I heard the occasional rise of loud voices and cries, and expected that one of the daughters from Boti or Kung had arrived at the burial place. But I did not inquire, because I knew that Yagboi, the spokesman of the lineage, was upset by my presence and was occupied with the burial preparations in the yard of Ali's extended family. I passed the night in anxious meditation, startled periodically, as were the others, by the darting nightjars and the calls of nocturnal animals.

I slept on and off through the night, awakening briefly at four o'clock and awakening again at dawn to a commotion: the elders had come from Ali's compound into the outer yard of the lineage. They brought with them a *vugura*, or diviner, from the lineage of Bayorbala, one of the "lower compounds" of Sobelle. They then sat down and proceeded with the "death divination" (n.d.:976):[4]

After many of the people had come, the older men of Bachingbala sat down in the outside yard with the vugura to divine the cause of death. After the vugura finished his initial ritual, he said that the old man in front of him should start looking for the old man's death. If he finds the cause, he should sacrifice to all the shrines or vene. And if he doesn't he will have another dead person in the house. Then the vugura began taking things out of his bag and laying them in piles. He did this silently. He proceeded to put some objects back into his bag, and those that remained on the skin, he began to move about with his hand. Then the vugura with his left hand, and Digbu's brother, with his right hand, began divining among the objects on the skin. After a short time the vugura spoke, "The man who died swore an oath on the ancestors (lele) and the swearing caused his death." The swearing resulted from an old quarrel between the old men—Ali and Digbu. They both had a quarrel and they swore on one another. And since they didn't reconcile, after the first died, the second soon followed. The vugura went on to say that if somebody does not perform a sacrifice in the house, a third person will surely follow.

During the death divination J.B. returned from his lineage compound, Navaibala. He witnessed the divination and I asked him what he thought (n.d.:977-78):

Oftentimes when two men argue, they may call upon the ancestors (lele) to judge the case. They swear by saying—*lele ne yiriba riba di sariya* or "ancestors call to judge the law." If you say this, the ancestor will judge the case. To "swear" however, is a dangerous thing for it ends people's lives. If two young men quarrel, they can appeal to an elder man to settle it. But if two elder men quarrel, who is to try the case, except the ancestors. For if the quarrel is to continue, more people in the house will die.

After consulting the vugura the men of the lineage waited for Basi to arrive; he was the senior elder of the upper lineages of Sobelle, and his presence was necessary before the burial could occur. During this time I wandered back to Ali's compound.

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

By this time the compound was crowded with members from the immediate family, especially the "daughters," who had arrived in the night from the villages of their husbands. The bukaliba were putting the finishing touches on the grave and, as previously, seemed to relish their work with good-natured humor. I asked one of them why Ali was to be buried in a lone grave, since communal graves were customary. He replied that there was a pollution in the house because of the quarrel between Ali and Digbu, and that they could not wait for the purificatory sacrifices of the daughter's son. The other bukaliba then laughed and said that the body was already a putrid thing and needed to be buried quickly.

Then one of the bukaliba took my hand and led me to the edge of the grave. He asked whether I wanted to go down into the grave and inspect their work. I was overcome by a most profound sense of revulsion, nausea, and trembling. The stench of Ali's corpse pervaded the yard. It seemed that I stood for an eternity on the edge of the grave; then I became possessed by a most disquieting fear that were I to go down into the grave, the bukaliba would use their iron hoes to smash my head and include me as a burial sacrifice. As I bolted back my fearful manner was greeted with hearty laughter by the bukaliba. They told me I should become a bukaliba myself, that the work was enjoyable and that it allowed one to witness many wonderful things.

I returned to the outer yard of the lineage. Basi had just arrived and the burial was about to proceed. The clothes in which the dead man was to be buried were brought out and presented to Basi. They were then given over to the bukaliba, who proceeded to cut out the pockets and to make a slit in the cap. The bukaliba then went into the house where the dead man was lying. They took off his old clothes and put on the pantaloons, the cloth, and finally the hat (n.d.:979-80):

> As they finished the dressing which took only a matter of two minutes, they forced the corpse into a sitting position, crossing its legs, and covering the upper part of the body with a cloth so the head could not be seen. They then dragged the corpse on the cow skin first outside the house and then outside the lineage into the main yard. One of the bukaliba supported the corpse in the sitting position, while the others dragged him. While he was being dragged many of the mourners followed very close to the corpse. The corpse remained outside for a short time—about 3 minutes—then it was dragged back into the compound, and quickly buried—the feet being lowered first, the left arm raised as it was lowered. After the bukaliba had laid him in the grave, one of the dead man's brothers went down and spoke a few words into the man's ear in a very soft whisper. These I wasn't able to hear.

I was impressed by the rushed pace of the burial, brought on by the decaying state of the corpse. During the dressing and burial the bukaliba had yelled at each other to hurry. The rushed pace, the constant press of seminaked bodies, and the stench left me overpowered, exhausted, and dizzy.

A Day of Wandering

After the burial I left Sobelle at about ten in the morning of October 22. J.B. remained behind with his people and I drove home alone. I must have arrived back in Tumu at noon or one in the afternoon, because I remember that Kojo, my steward, asked me whether I wanted to eat. The road from Sobelle to Tumu, though hazardous, is only four and a half miles long. This trip normally took about twenty minutes; that I was on the road for two to three hours is difficult to account for.

I recall that when I left Sobelle I felt both excited and sickened by what I had witnessed. The putrid smell from Ali's corpse was on my clothes, on my skin, under

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

my fingernails, in my hair. It even filled the air of my dusty Volkswagen. Yet as I drove the feeling of sickness gradually left me, and I felt that the smells had become part of me. I almost enjoyed my odor: the combination of caked sweat and dirt, the aroma of boiled peanuts, and the bitter taste of kola in my mouth.

I also recall, as indeed would seem logical, that I stopped along the road; beyond the following guess I cannot say what happened. Between Sobelle and Tumu, at some distance from the road, there was a deserted lineage settlement. I had once asked J.B. who had lived there, and I remember that he had laughed and said that all this was a very sad story. Apparently there had been a quarrel in the house, two brothers argued because of their wives, and there was a homicide, or killing by witchcraft. We left the car and walked to the settlement. J.B. was frightened and wanted to go back to the car, but I persisted. The place was dusty, with broken-down walls, collapsed roofs, and remnants of broken pottery scattered around. It looked and smelled of death.

Whether I stopped my car that morning in October and again walked to this place I do not know, although it seems probable. When I returned to Tumu, in the early afternoon, I told Kojo that I was not hungry; rather than remaining at home, as was my habit, I wandered through the town of Tumu. At that time most of the townspeople were indoors, because of the intense afternoon sun. Thus I walked the streets and paths mostly alone, meeting but few people. My mood at the time was sheer exhilaration; I truly felt that I had the powers of divination. Thus I would walk by a closed doorway in the central town, or zongo, and I would divine the house to decide whether or not death lurked within its rooms.

I then walked northward, toward the lineage settlement of the chief of Tumu. As I approached the Siguoljang compound I suddenly stopped, for I became aware of the smell of death. I remained there a long time alone, looking at the roof and walls of the settlement. Then I saw a very strange thing: on one of the flat, mud rooftops were the talking drums of Tumu.[5] I was then struck by a force so powerful that I could only passively witness the intense exhilaration and sense of destiny that washed over and through me. I have never forgotten that experience.

The Burial of the Tumukuoro's Drummer

I cannot say exactly how I slept that night, but on the next day, October 23, I felt fatigued. I do not believe I took a bath before going to bed, nor did I eat much the next day. My field notes record that I arrived at the burial place at four in the afternoon, accompanied by Bajo Kanton. Also at the burial place were his brother, Isaaka Kanton, and his nephew, Dramani Kanton, both of whom I knew well (n.d.: 984):

> The xylophones were playing and some people had assembled, quietly wailing. The goka or praise singers were calling people to mourn, making them cry with their praises. I turned to Bajo and asked him to translate for me, and he laughed a bit saying it is almost impossible to translate what these goka say, because they speak a different language. He did, however, say that the goka were now calling the house people to come and dance. "Your old man has died. He has obeyed the ways of the ancestors. Who now will rule your house?"

At about five o'clock the bukaliba from the dead man's "burial lineage" came out, carrying the clothes in which the deceased was to be buried (n.d.:984-85):

> As they were beginning to cut the pockets out of the clothes, an argument developed. Apparently, the eldest son had not been present to select the clothes that the dead man would

wear. The bukaliba from the dead man's house said that the burial should be postponed, while those from the burial lineage felt that he should be buried right away. Those from the upper compounds were saying that they were being cheated out of burying the dead men.

It was apparent at the time that the argument had not been resolved, nor would it be resolved easily. As the quarrel continued one of the bukaliba from the dead man's compound grabbed the clothes and ran back inside his compound. His colleagues immediately retreated to the newly opened grave and descended into it. The bukaliba from the "burial lineage" did not follow, though one of their number walked to the brink of the grave and shouted insults to those below. Receiving no response except muffled laughter, the men of the burial lineage soon dispersed.

The hide-and-seek antics of the bukaliba continued into the night, imbuing the burial place with an ambiance of both humor and danger. As the level of excitement and tension grew, an interesting ceremony occured at around nine o'clock (n.d.:988):

Outside the compound—a distance away from the burial place—were heard cries. When I went to see, I saw a group of men, mostly middle aged, brandishing axes. Some would be crouching on the ground as though they were hiding in ambush, then suddenly they would spring out at the people standing around, usually going after children, and give a sudden yell as though they were going to attack. Then gradually they moved into the yard of the lineage still playing at ambushing and scaring all of the children in their path. From there, they went into the dead man's compound and stood just outside his house singing "man songs" or *bayila*. When they finished, they left their axes at the dead man's house, and walked out to the outer yard of the lineage. In addition to the men, there were some women following behind them waving sticks. Those who participated in this were Tumu men—from any of the compounds.

Bajo explained to me that the men were imitating the ways of warfare, the ways in which they hunt and ambush the enemy in the bush. They first attack with bow and arrow; when the arrows are gone, they then move in with axes and spears. When attacking the warrior gives a shout, which paralyzes a person with a "weak heart." I was becoming more and more excited by the events of the evening; I knew that an event of great significance was about to occur, and I was ineluctably drawn to it.

Not recorded in my field notes is an event which I recall now with great vividness. When the bukaliba of Singsoljang emerged from the grave, they were laughing about their victory over the bukaliba of the upper compounds. This was not a solitary grave, but a communal one, which had been reopened to receive the body of the Tumukuoro's drummer. I recall that I walked to the brink of the grave and stared into the dark abyss, which contained the bodies of generations in varying stages of decomposition. In contrast to my repulsion at the burial of Ali, I was drawn by the odor of death which emanated from the dark and putrid grave. I teetered on the edge, enraptured. Suddenly Bajo grabbed my arm and pulled me back; a close friend, he embraced me tightly and told me to calm my heart. In the background the bukaliba laughed—a hearty laughter welling up from the depths of their souls.

An Altered State of Consciousness

Sometime late in the night Bajo and I parted company. Not having known the Tumukuoro's drummer nor the members of his extended family, I was again alone among strangers in the outer yard of the burial place. Near midnight I heard the goka singing in the inner yard, and I proceeded alone through the passageway to the dead man's compound.

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

At the entrance to the inner yard I was stopped by an old man brandishing a battle-ax. He rudely told me to get out, and threatened to strike me. When I held firm, not caring what he might do to me, he drew back and took his place among the other old men sitting against the south and east walls of the compound. I remained standing near the entrance, which was to the south.

The body of the Tumukuoro's drummer was propped against the west wall of the compound, near the door to his rooms. Above his head, on the roof, were the talking drums. The corpse was seated upright and cross-legged on a cowhide, covered from the head by a cloth. The goka, "praise singers," were bent over the corpse, beating upon their hoes of iron and singing *bayila* ("man songs"). As they sang they danced forward and back: approaching the corpse they lowered their heads, as though to speak into the ear of the dead man; then they would jerk their heads up and move a few steps backward.

As I watched them I became intensely aware of their back-and-forth motion. I began to see the goka and the corpse tied together in the undulating rhythms of the singing, the beating of the iron hoes, and the movement of feet and bodies. Then I saw the corpse jolt and occasionally pulsate, in a counterpoint to the motions of the goka. At first I thought that my mind was playing tricks with my eyes, so I cannot say when the experience first occurred; but it began with moments of anticipation and terror, as though I knew something unthinkable was about to happen. The anticipation left me breathless, gasping for air. In the pit of my stomach I felt a jolting and tightening sensation, which corresponded to moments of heightened visual awareness.

What I saw in those moments was outside the realm of normal perception. From both the corpse and the goka came flashes of light so fleeting that I cannot say exactly where they originated. The hand of the goka would beat down on the iron hoe, the spit would fly from his mouth, and suddenly the flashes of light flew like sparks from a fire.

Then I felt my body become rigid. My jaws tightened and at the base of my skull I felt a jolt as though my head had been snapped off my spinal column. A terrible and beautiful sight burst upon me. Stretching from the amazingly delicate fingers and mouths of the goka, strands of fibrous light played upon the head, fingers, and toes of the dead man. The corpse, shaken by spasms, then rose to its feet, spinning and dancing in a frenzy. As I watched, convulsions in the pit of my stomach tied not only my eyes but also my whole being into this vortex of power. It seemed that the very floor and walls of the compound had come to life, radiating light and power, drawing the dancers in one direction and then another. Then a most wonderful thing happened. The talking drums on the roof of the dead man's house began to glow with a light so strong that it drew the dancers to the rooftop. The corpse picked up the drumsticks and began to play.

I cannot say whether what transpired took a matter of minutes or even an hour. Nor can I be sure about the sequence of events which I witnessed. But after a while the power which had filled the compound began to cool, and the body of the Tumukuoro's drummer was once again sitting propped against the west wall of the compound. The goka, tired and dripping in sweat, were leaning against the east wall.

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

I remained where I was for some time, trembling in the aftermath of the experience. It was then that I turned to the old men sitting at my right, and discovered that they were staring at me. As our eyes met the old man who had threatened me with the ax began to laugh. He was joined by the other men and then the goka. It was the same hearty laughter I had heard before among the bukaliba. As I recall, I too laughed.

When I returned to my house I went to bed and fell into a deep sleep. When I arose in the morning I felt refreshed and ate a hearty breakfast.

The Aftermath

I arrived at the funeral place by eight in the morning on October 24. The funeral had not yet moved from the compound to the main yard, but the xylophone had already been set up, and numerous people were gathering. Bajo was kneeling before the xylophone, beating out a complex rhythm with a pair of sticks on the edges of the wooden keys, rather than more toward the center, where the tone was more melodic. He appeared energetic and happy.

When he saw me he laughed and said, "You saw the ancestors dance." I recall responding, "Who heard the Tumukuoro's drummer?" Again he laughed and said, "Some did and some didn't."

I then began to describe to Bajo the events of the previous night. When I mentioned that the old man had brandished the ax at me, Bajo was startled. He arose and began to feel my arms and my chest. Deciding that I was all right he became angry, saying that the old man should not have done that, although it was understandable; it was a dangerous thing and could have harmed me.

Singing "Man Songs"

The funeral for the Tumukuoro's drummer was most characteristically a funeral for a powerful man; the rapidity of the burial and the quick arrival of the funeral guests were evidence of this. The spectators were eager and excited to see the events. My field notes for this period are quite extensive (fifteen pages).

At 8:30 preparations were underway in the inner yard for the *kuchura*, or funeral sacrifices. A diviner (*vugura*) had been consulted and the animals had been selected: a black cock and a black bull. The animals were then sacrificed. At this time the procession with the Tumukuoro arrived from his compound, and he was seated in the funeral place. His coming signaled the start of the funeral.

As in the case of the funeral of any old man or woman, a gungun ("effigy") is brought to the funeral place; it consists of the personal belongings of the dead person, wrapped in clothes and laid on a cowhide. It is then placed against a post. To the Sisala the gungun is a representation of the corpse. As people arrive at the funeral place, they first pay their respects to the gungun by wailing. In the case of the Tumukuoro's drummer, bringing out the gungun was an emotionally charged affair. The effigy was carried into the funeral place on the shoulders of four men; surrounding it was a procession of men brandishing battle-axes and singing "man songs" (bayila). The gungun was periodically dragged on the ground, then raised back upon the mens' shoulders. Following behind were many women waving sticks and similarly singing "man songs." This procession resembled in many details the events surrounding both the burial of Ali and the death divination of the

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

Tumukuoro's drummer: the effigy seated on a cowhide covered by a cloth; the back-and-forth motion of the dancers; and the singing of "man songs."

The dominant characteristic of the funeral was in fact the singing of "man songs." As the ceremonies progressed into the afternoon, the bayila became more intense, and were accompanied by the frenzied killing of animals (n.d.:1003-4):

> The group went into the dead man's compound singing "man songs" and waving their weapons. Then they threw down a battle axe. At this, the compound head gave up a goat. When the goat was given them, they ran after it, and grabbed it with their teeth, and killed it. From the compound they brought the goat to the funeral place, one of them carrying it in his teeth. First presenting the goat to the chief, they then danced around the funeral place, one person holding the goat in his teeth, the others singing. From there, they would dance around the gungun. Some would stand on top of the stand supporting the gungun making speeches. These speeches consisted essentially of praise.

This ceremony was repeated four more times by different groups of kinsmen, or by close personal friends who were moved by strong emotions. Several times while one man was holding the animal by its throat, another came up and tried to take it away from him, fixing his teeth also in the animal's throat.

J.B. explained to me that they were pretending to be like flesh-eating animals; when a leopard attacks it will drag its prey by the throat. Warfare is very much like the fighting of flesh-eating animals (n.d.:996):

> J.B. mentioned that the man was killed by death. This we can't conquer. With a man, his body is not brought quietly; rather they sing war songs and act out warfare. But every man cannot go to war, that is why we sing the war songs. Man can't conquer death, but he can conquer an enemy in warfare. In the old days, we fed on flesh before we learned how to farm. So when you got your meat, you dragged it on the ground.

From the funeral itself I wrote down four of the bayila: the first two were sung when bringing out the gungun, the latter two during the killing of the animals (n.d.: 995-96, 1004):

> (1) "If we were really united (of one mouth), nothing could have conquered us" ("a ne fa jo wuolo ia ni bulla"). Here they are referring to death as not being able to conquer them.
> (2) "A leopard or lion is born of man, they shouldn't think that he is a monkey's child" ("sibina nankana bie ma si bina mang ne lola"). When somebody is brave, they say he is born of a man and not a woman; whereas monkeys are cowards.
> (3) "We are born on a mat of arrows, but we are told that we cannot use them" ("ba lolla bil hame boso le ampe bul la bira si yuo yee"). In general, this means that they are ready for war, but they are being stopped from fighting. Again the significance is that death, unlike human enemies, cannot be conquered.
> (4) "We step, we step on a millet stalk, we step" ("la nuasa yee la ni muasi nu ma sakeliwie ne la ni nuasa"). This implies that they are going to war; if any people are in the way, they will step on them like a millet stalk.

What Really Happened?

From the time I spoke with Bajo on the morning of the funeral until I left Sisala-land, I never again spoke to anyone *directly* about my death-divination experience. During the funeral, however, I had occasion to talk again with Bajo, J.B., and Dramani Kanton, during brief periods punctuated by the ritual events of the funeral. We talked mainly about the goka and the raising of the dead (n.d.: 989-90, 996-97):

> The goka were praising the dead man—what the man's ancestors had done and what the dead man had done in his life as well. Bajo mentioned that the goka have sweet mouths. They can praise a man and make him give up his wealth without knowing it. If the goka praises a

man, the man might run into his house, bring out a goat, and give it to the goka like that.

There are some interesting "stories" told to me by Bajo and J.B. concerning the goka praising the dead. When the old chief Kanton "died," his eyes were open and he could still talk. For he had a powerful "juju" (daluri). When the "juju" was removed, he could really die. There is another story that when one Braimah, a very great hunter in Tumu, died, the goka were singing to him right before his burial. One of the goka then threw an axe to the corpse, and the corpse moved to pick it up. J.B. mentioned that when his father died, his corpse shook when he died. In Tumu there is another story of a man, Detiki, who "refused" to be buried. This happened about 30 years ago. When they tried to bury him, his legs parted over the grave so that he could not be put in. His head also shook negatively. When this happened, the goka began praising him, saying that his ancestors had gone and that he should also go. After this, the man's head shook "yes," and they buried him.

Later Dramani Kanton explained that the dead man's soul is already gone. In fact, it often goes away days before he dies. When the goka sing to the corpse, the man is completely dead. But if the man has strong *daluri* or "medicines," the spirit of the daluri can make the corpse hear and can cause the corpse to move.

INTO THE HEART OF SISALA EXPERIENCE

I remained in Tumu until March of 1968. I attended subsequent funerals, where I always took notes rigorously; but no subsequent event impressed me like those of the four days in October of 1967. In reflecting on those four days I must begin by speaking of Kojo, my steward, since it was through him (in ways often uncanny) that I came to the heart of Sisala experience.

Kojo, when I knew him, was a quiet, strong, proud man, a man of impeccable discipline. He stood about five feet four inches tall, and was lean and wiry. I would guess that he was in his late fifties or early sixties, but he struck one as timeless. Kojo spoke pidgin English, mainly because he had frequently worked as a steward in English-speaking households. While in my employ he also worked as caretaker of the Tumu "rest houses." He lived behind my bungalow, in a small, two-room house provided by the government. His sister, who also lived in Tumu, brought him his meals in the evenings.

My relationship with Kojo was always that of employer and employee; even though we talked about many serious and dangerous things, he never set aside his even, impeccable manners.

The following example is a case in point. Before I ate supper in the evening, I would often instruct Kojo to kill a chicken and prepare a soup. In the late afternoon, while typing my field notes, I would watch him, sitting on the back stoop of the house, pulling feathers from the dead bird. As in all things he did, there was a quiet serenity to his actions. When supper was served he would bring the chicken, but without the heart, liver, and other organs. When I asked him about this the first time, he laughed and said that he thought I would not like it. When I told him that I did, he said he would prepare it for the next time. When the next time came, the organ meat was again missing. I became angry with him, telling him that we had talked about this before; his response was simply "Yes, master." This happened repeatedly, and I ceased asking; only once during my stay did Kojo prepare the organ meat of a chicken or any other animal. He was impeccable in his disobedience. I now think that Kojo ate the hearts and livers, probably dried in the sun and prepared with herbs; he undoubtedly believed that he derived strength and power from them.

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

There were occasions when I was impressed by his physical strength. I recall once having received from the town of Wa a forty-four-gallon barrel of gasoline. At the back of the bungalow there was an enclosure with a wide, four-foot-high ledge inside. It was my intention to raise the barrel onto the ledge and put a faucet in it, so that I could then fill up jerry-cans to carry to my car. I instructed Kojo to prepare a ramp, while I attached the faucet; then we both tried to roll the barrel into place. After two unsuccessful tries Kojo asked me to stand aside; he stepped up onto the ledge, gripped the faucet with one hand, and with a single clean jerk, lifted the barrel into position.

I was also impressed with Kojo's mental, or psychic, powers. Some time after my arrival in Tumu, the female cat which I had bought to rid the house of vermin had her first litter. During her pregnancy, and even before, Kojo would occasionally spend the long afternoon hours gazing at the cat from the back stoop of the house. To see the two together was a picture of serenity, with a hint of strong, uncanny power.

Late one evening I saw the cat begin labor; I asked Kojo whether her time was coming, and he said yes. I then went about the house and gathered a box and some cloths, preparing a birthing place for the mother cat. When I had finished I turned to Kojo and asked him what he thought. He quietly laughed and said that the cat would get out of the house in the night to have her young. I disagreed with him, showing him that the room was sealed off completely and that the screens, which had recently been installed, were quite strong. Kojo again laughed and said that the cat knew ways.

When I awoke early the next morning, I saw a baby kitten in the box, but the mother cat was nowhere to be seen. One of the screens had a gaping tear in it. When Kojo arrived I remarked that it was strange that the cat had had only a single kitten. Kojo paused a moment and then said that there were two more kittens; when I asked him how he knew this, he asked me to follow him.

We walked to the north and the east in the cool morning air, meandering between patches of savannah thorn bush. Between the patches were paths. At times I would walk at Kojo's side; at other times, as the path turned, I would follow behind him. It seemed that he was being guided by some sense other than sight, for he kept his eyes straight ahead at all times. I cannot say exactly how far we walked, but it took some twenty minutes to reach our destination.

Kojo then stopped and with his left hand gestured at the ground. There, still moist and sticky, lay two kittens. I was dumbstruck. I asked Kojo how he could possibly have known—the mother cat had just given birth! Kojo smiled and said, "I know that cat."

I then suggested, as any American might, that we take the kittens back and put them in the box. Kojo said to wait. We remained for a while, I seated on the ground, Kojo squatting in typical Sisala fashion. After some minutes the mother cat appeared opposite us, about twenty feet to the north. She crouched, silently gazing into Kojo's eyes; the two were like predators, locked in mortal combat—Kojo's gaze was that of an animal.

Kojo then suggested that we go back to the house. After we returned the mother cat brought her remaining kittens back to the box in the kitchen. It was then Kojo's turn to be amazed; he had never seen a cat bring its kittens back to the house so

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

soon after their birth. During her period of nursing Kojo was particularly observant of the cat's behavior.

I mention this incident because it led to subsequent conversations between Kojo and me about the nature of cats. One evening, while both of us were gazing at the cats, Kojo said, "Cats are like women." "What do you mean?" I asked. "You remember, you paid four cedis [about four dollars] for the cat. The man who bought the mother of this cat also paid four cedis. The gift you gave for your wife is that which was given for her mother."

I also talked with J.B. and others about the nature of cats. When a Sisala man acquires a female cat and brings it home, his wife or wives must leave the house, lest the cat become jealous and run away. If a man wishes to celebrate an occasion relating to his masculinity, he will invite his friends and sacrifice a cat in his house; before he does this, his wife or wives must leave the compound. When his friends arrive, he will sacrifice the cat by putting it in a bag and crushing its skull against the ground. The cat is then skinned, roasted over an open fire, and consumed in an atmosphere of male gusto and bravado.

If I am not mistaken, it is a male cat which is eaten; female cats are kept and sold. For tomcats only get into fights and run away from home. Female cats protect the home, because they are the creators of families; yet because cats tear flesh with their teeth, they are "men." According to Sisala, only men can eat a flesh-eating animal; a woman or child who did so would weaken, become sterile, or die.

Kojo and the Human Heart

At the time of the two burials and my witnessing of death divination, Kojo was attentive to my condition, although he never said a word. During the following three-day period, I typed my field notes, working in long spurts and again upsetting my normal routine. As I would wander about the house trying to regain my energy, I would often speak with Kojo. Our relationship continued to be formal; I did most of the talking while Kojo listened attentively, sometimes nodding, sometimes smiling, and a few times looking at me with serious concern.

I talked with him about the incident at the death divination when the old man threatened me with an ax. Before I could continue Kojo interrupted me and told me to stop talking. He said that I should not speak so freely about dangerous things; the old man had almost killed me and I was fortunate to be alive.

At the time what Kojo said did not seem to bother me, concentrating as I was on typing all I had seen. On another occasion I spoke jokingly about how the bukaliba had invited me into the grave and suggested to Kojo that maybe I should become a bukaliba. At this remark, Kojo became quite upset and admonished me for my foolishness; this was the first time he had ever shown anything approaching disrespect. "Don't you talk foolish, master. Those men, they be doing nothing but trying to kill you. They be laughing and playing their tricks all the time. They don't care about nobody but their fun. They like you. They like be playing with you. They almost kill you, master."

What Kojo said impressed me profoundly; as the days passed, his warning increasingly affected me. Again I felt the sickness in my stomach, the rapid palpitations of my heart, the shortness of breath. Kojo again watched me with serious concern.

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

Some days later he approached me and asked if I would come to his house. His request startled me, since he had never before asked such a thing; nonetheless I went with him. When we reached his house he went into the back room, while I remained in the yard. When he emerged he was carrying a cowhide, in his right hand, and a woman's stool with a black, pasty substance on it, in his left. He invited me to sit on the cowhide, and then placed the stool and its contents before me. Kojo explained that this was a porridge (*kulung*), medicine for my heart, and that I should eat it.

For some reason I did not resist. I took some porridge with my fingers and tasted it; it was horrible! My stomach convulsed and I turned away, only to feel Kojo kneeling behind me, his hands on my shoulders. Instantly a feeling of calm fell over me. Kojo then moved his hands slowly over my chest, saying softly, "Don't lose your heart here, master, this is not your home." I cried.

The Heart of the Culture

What I experienced at the Sisala death divination was an event of great power. To say that it goes to the heart of Sisala culture is almost to speak literally. The Sisala people believe that mystical power resides in the hearts and livers of men and flesh-eating animals; *bantuduo*, or "chest power," is a measure of a man's virility and character, especially in the face of adversity. If a man has bantuduo, he is able to kill without feeling, not letting his heart "bump" when he hears his victim cry. He is able to hunt fearlessly, to become by guile invisible to a flesh-eating animal, and then to strike a spear into its heart. He is able to maintain a strong erection, and thus the fidelity of his wives. He can stand before events of great power with a steady heart.

Death is such an event, to be experienced in accordance with the strength of one's heart. My witnessing a death divination was in excess of my own strength. While I became elated and energetic in my newly acquired knowledge, I also sickened. My heart changed. I was no longer content t › be a polite, middle-class American anthropologist. Instead, I wished to let my upbringing fall like a veil, so that I could share the secrets of those men who divine over the dead.

When Kojo invited me to his house, it was his intent to purify my heart of the power which I had witnessed. When I ate of the blackened porridge, on the four-legged stool of a woman, on a cowhide, I participated in a rite of purification which, with some variation, is performed when a man kills another man, when a hunter kills a large, flesh-eating animal, or when a neophyte is initiated as a bukaliba. The porridge was made of thickened millet, to which were added herbs and bits of the heart and liver of a flesh-eating animal. As Kojo saw it, my heart, or "chest power," had become weakened by the power I had witnessed. The symptoms of nausea and stomach convulsions, my heart palpitations, and my giddiness of mind Kojo saw as bad signs, for they threatened my chest region—the mystical center of my soul and manliness. In Kojo's eyes, I was in danger of losing my soul.

The Sisala people believe that at one time in the primeval past (*fa fa*), human males lived like flesh-eating animals. They existed in a state of nature, in which, if they were clever, if they could exercise guile, they could achieve immortality by killing rather than being killed. Such are the hunters, the warriors. Yet men, despite all their vanity, become domesticated; for the most part, the male adult in Sisala

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

society is not a warrior or a hunter. He is the head of a household, which consists of his wife (or wives) and children. If he is the head of an extended family, he is a *diatina*, and thus has custodianship over the family's ancestral shrines. If not, he is at least the "owner" (*-tina*) of his medicines and powers, some acquired from his fathers, some from his reincarnations, and still others from his experiences or acquaintances. In his capacity as a -tina, he has the right to sacrifice to his shrine, whether as a hunter to his *tome*, as a diviner to his *luri tome*, as a goka to his *goka tome*, or as a medicine man to his daluri. A man who claims power claims the power to sacrifice.

The act of homicide, the biting of the throat of a flesh-eating animal, is in contradiction to the act of sacrifice. When a man sacrifices to his medicines or his ancestors, he is asking for the blessings of peace, fertility, and filial piety. He is in supplication to the ways of the ancestors and by extension to the ways of god (*wia*). He is in supplication to culture, which orders human emotions and thus prevents the violent chaos which leads to affliction and death. The ritual process of the burial and funeral expresses this transition between homicide and sacrifice, and with it an articulation of the most central symbols and meanings in Sisala culture.[6]

When the ancestors danced before me on the night of 23 October 1967, I experienced a culmination in a ritual process that had begun for me two days earlier. Sisala burials are events involving mystical power and danger. The soul of the corpse is in limbo, an ancestral ghost (*lelekuome*), whose existence haunts the burial place. The vugura who divines the death, the bukaliba who bury the dead, and the goka who speak into the corpse's ear are shamans, men spiritually set apart from other men. For the two days prior to my experience I was frequently in the presence of these powerful men, witnessing their arts.

It does not now seem so strange that I witnessed the ancestors dance, for I had been prepared for it. What I experienced, I now believe, was a synesthetic integration of my senses, whereby I perceived the rhythms of the music, the movement of the feet, the light of the campfire, and the hidden presence of the dead buried below combined in bright, yellow-white fibers of motion. I witnessed the collective power of the drummer's household and the whole lineage of the chief of Tumu. I experienced what the others around me experienced: the passionate resurrection of the power of the ancestors.

On the following morning the funeral sacrifices occurred. The selected animals were offered to the soul of the dead man, that he might take them to his father, and his father to his own father. The animals were then butchered and the meat carefully divided among the categories of kinsmen. The soul of the dead had found its home, and the shamanistic power of the burial place was cooled. In the case of the Tumukuoro's drummer, however, this power continued to linger in the singing of bayila, or "man songs."

Before I left Sisala-land to return to the United States, I gave away my cats. By that time I had eight of them: the mother cat, the three female cats of her first litter, and the four kittens of the second litter. I gave them to friends who, in the main, were touched by the gifts. I asked Kojo whether he wanted one, but he said no, and smiling, added, "I shall watch over your family, master."

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

The preceding description and analysis of my passionate encounter with Sisala culture require some comment. In another context I should want to interpret the Sisala cultural experience comparatively, using the already existing ethnographic literature on northern Ghana, and using other accounts of personal ethnographic experience.[7]

But the central issue arising from this kind of study is an epistemological one: How can the reader know whether the experiences which I have related are real? And if one can assume for the moment that they are real, how does one verify this reality in accordance with the canons of anthropological thought? As one colleague commented, after reading a draft of this paper, "Where does 'psycho-ethnography' leave off and fanciful post hoc embellishment begin?"

In order to respond to these questions, it is necessary first to describe the writing of the paper, that itself was an experience within an experience. During the summer of 1981 I had the opportunity for extended solitude. Almost every evening and night, for a period of a month and a half, I devoted my total attention to the reading of my field notes. I did not eat much, and for brief periods I actually fasted, sustaining myself only on coffee. In so doing I was able to create a mood which was in some ways analogous to that which I had experienced during the events of the death divination.

In the fourteen years which have passed since I lived in Sisala-land, the experiences of those days have remained semihidden from my consciousness. That I chose in the summer of 1981 to resurrect them was in part an act of divination: when, in reading my field notes, I came to the description of Ali's corpse, I was struck by the odor and could remember clearly the events which took place. The memory of this smell allowed me to see through the lines of my field notes and to reconstruct the other smells, the sounds, and the feelings of nausea and anxiety. When I read the passage describing my standing on the brink of the grave, I was again struck by the bukaliba's hearty laughter—both terrible and beautiful at the same time—which moved my heart to trembling. These experiences helped to guide my inquiry. Like the psychoanalyst who plays the verbal games of "free association," or the Sisala vugura who lays upon his cowhide the objects of his trade, my purpose was to reconstruct an experience which was hidden beneath my consciousness.

Witnessing the death divination was an experience of great passion and mystery. As such it does not lend itself to empirical verification or replication under experimentally controlled conditions. Had I chosen, assuming it had been possible given the circumstances, to set up some objective recording device, such as a camera or tape recorder, the event simply would not have happened. Truly to witness such an event precludes one's being a detached observer. The empirical verification of death divination is a moot issue.

The canons of empirical research limit reality to that which is verifiable through the consensual validation of rational observers. An understanding of death divination must depart from these canons and assume that reality is relative to one's consciousness of it. Thus to understand death divination, one must know and be a part of the naturally and culturally constructed events which create the experience. The best way to accomplish this is through the ethnographic art of participant observation.

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

For me the reality of the death divination was constructed of many events:
—numerous consecutive hours in the burial and funeral places of the Sisala
—a meager diet of boiled peanuts and kola nuts, and the bitter taste of fasting
—the blood and cries of sacrificial animals
—the smell of generations of death in a hot, tropical climate
—the intense sun and the ubiquitous presence of stinging insects
—the hearty laughter and trickster ways of the bukaliba
—the darting nightjars and the sounds of birds, dogs and leopards
—the passionate songs and cries of the goka as they divined in the night among the kinsmen and ancestors of the paramount chief of the Sisala.

In conclusion, I can say with intuitive certainty that on the night of 23 October 1967, I witnessed the raising of the dead. This experience was real and was seen as such by those who sat to my right in the divination place, as well as by the goka who conjured the miraculous transformations. By the greatest luck, I stepped into a configuration of events which brought me, on the third day, late at night, to the narrow passageway leading to the compound of the Tumukuoro's drummer. By crossing the threshold of the compound and thereby blocking the only way in or out, I believe that I closed a "circle of power." It was as though everyone present simultaneously touched a live electric wire. No words were said; indeed, what could be said?

In the years which have passed I have had no desire to replicate this experience except, perhaps, in describing it. It happened once, unintentionally, and it wounded and sickened my soul. I thank God for Kojo, who rescued me from what could have been a most cruel and unreasoned fate. Now I care only to reflect upon those days with intellectual detachment.[8]

NOTES

1. My research in Ghana was supported by a grant from the Foreign Area Fellowship Program.

2. Jeffrey Holden (1965) and Ivor Wilks (1961) have written in detail about the Zabirama conquest of northwest Ghana.

3. Numerous ethnographic accounts have dealt with the importance or mortuary customs in the cultures of northern Ghana (see n. 7, below). Most notable is Jack Goody's (1962) account of the mortuary customs of the Lo Dagaa. As the western neighbors of the Sisala, their customs are quite similar, especially in the importance given to separate burial, funerary, and postfunerary customs. Notable in this work, and even more in Goody's (1972) later work on Lo Dagaa myth narratives, is the richly symbolic character of the customs; the time, wealth, and energy invested in their performance; and their passionate articulation of the ethos of the culture.

4. In giving this account of the death divination, I should note that my informant, J.B., who had been sitting closer to the performance, translated the events afterwards. In so doing I believe that he not only described the events but also interpreted them. As Eugene Mendonsa (personal comm.) has stated, the Sisala "*vugura* does not come to conclusions which he dictates to the client, but rather divination is so structured as to allow the client (and his group) to come to his own conclusions. The diviner explains the meaning of the code-objects and the way or order in which they have emerged from the bag. In so doing, he suggests and offers, possible directions of inquiry to the client; but the real inquiry is done silently and the client may come to conclusions which are never voiced in front of the diviner."

5. The "talking drums" are the property of villages, or of clan sections within villages. Their

purpose is to communicate, through a tonal drum language, cultural events such as the death of an important person or an act of warfare. These messages are relayed by drummers in adjacent villages to create what has been popularly termed the "jungle telegraph."

6. Apropos of the contradiction between homicide and sacrifice is the Sisala concept of "black animals," or *pungbinu*. A black animal is perceived as having ritual and mystical significance not accorded other animals. In the domain of nature the lion, the leopard, the elephant, the crow, the vulture, the crocodile, and the hyena are all black animals. They are all said to tear flesh with their teeth and are dangerous (bomo). In the domesticated realm black animals include the horse, the cow, and the sheep—animals whose teeth do not tear flesh. While the former are killed, the latter are sacrificed.

The following is an articulation of these symbolic values:

Homicide	Sacrifice
wild animal	domestic animal
flesh-eating animal	herbivorous animal
pollution	purification
primeval reality	existing reality
raw	cooked
nature	culture
nonautochthony	autochthony
left	right
blood	earth
ties of blood	ties to land

7. There is a considerable ethnographic literature on the Voltaic peoples of northern Ghana. General ethnographic surveys of the region, which include references to the Sisala, go back to the beginning of the century: Tauxier (1912), Cardinall (1932), Rattray (1932), Manoukian (1952), and Goody (1954). Current ethnographic studies include works by the author (Grindal 1972a, 1972b, 1973a, 1973b, 1975, and 1977) and Mendonsa (1973, 1975, 1976, 1977). Mendonsa's research is particularly concerned with divination and aspects of religious cosmology. Finally, there exist excellent ethnographic treatments of divinatory ritual, mortuary customs, ancestor worship, and cosmology of the eastern and western neighbors of the Sisala: the Tallensi (Fortes 1937, 1940, 1945, 1959, 1961, 1966) and the Lo Dagaa (Goody 1959, 1962, 1972).

Many fieldworkers enter intimately into the consensual reality of the people they study, sometimes in dramatic ways that involve altered states of consciousness (ASC) and paranormal occurences. Goodman (1972), while investigating dissocation and glossolalia in "apostolicos" churches in Mexico City and Yucatan, unwittingly experienced a dissociative state (Goodman 1972:71-73). Owen (1981), while studying witchcraft in Dominica, became a victim of, and exhibited mental and physical manifestations consistent with "voodoo." These she partially explains as a result of internalizing cultural expectations and stress related to fieldwork. Myerhoff (1974) reports on a deliberate peyote-induced participation in the shamanic realm of her Huichol informant, Ramón. Deren (1970), not an anthropologist, presents a singularly beautiful account of her ASC experience during a Haitian voodoo ceremony. As the validity and authenticity of these experiences is a primary concern for anthropology (especially in light of Castaneda's literary fiction), de Mille's work (1980) should be consulted in this context.

A concern with ASC and paranormal occurences in anthropological literature may be traced to Lang's (1894) and later Humphrey's (1944) call for more information about these states. Besterman (1928-29), Gorer (1935), Hallowell (1942), and Lowie (1956) provide examples of experienced ethnographers who not only collected informants' accounts, but who themselves had personal encounters with divinatory powers. The works by Long (1974), Angoff and Barth (1974), and Van de Castle (1974) represent comparative examinations by anthropologists attempting to relate ASC and paranormal occurrences in their fieldwork and to discuss possible implications within the profession. Bourguignon's works (1968, 1972) on ASC are concerned with definitions, geographic distribution, and relevant sociocultural variables. Fischer (1976) offers an arousal model, which analyzes ASC in terms of sensory stimulation and information coding. Tart (1972) is concerned with epistemological issues of ASC and its study, through relevant scientific strategies using state-specificity and state-boundedness. Tart (1969) and Ornstein (1972) discuss, on the theoretical level, the possible effects of various esoteric philosophies on our concept of humans. Ruby's edited work (1982) looks at various forms of self-reflexivity in ethnographic literature, and seems especially relevant to the present piece. Other related concerns are questions of sensory restriction/ deprivation

Journal of Anthropological Research 1983.39:60-80.

(Zubek 1969), synesthesia (Merriam 1964), and the study of physiological responses to certain kinds of sound (Neher 1962).

8. I am particularly indebted to the researches of Ken Hoeck (personal communication), which have illuminated my understanding of the ASC experience.

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