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FISHERY DESIGNS painted on a Bororo chief symbolizes the giant armadillo.

Ritual

A simple interment

By VLADIMÍR KOZÁK

DEATH CAUSES GREAT CONCERN among peoples of all levels of culture. Among primitive peoples, anxiety about death is especially keen because of the widespread belief that the spirit of the dead person may be displeased and may remain in the community to haunt and disturb the survivors. Consequently, it is extremely important to the survivors to dispose of the remains of a dead person in the prescribed manner and to demonstrate their concern for the deceased through the proper rituals. For this reason, the



WEIR IS BUILT across a stream near the village after a death. Fence is used to

trap many fish needed to feed village people during the long funeral rituals.

DRUGGED FISH try to escape weir and are netted when they enter its chutes.

of a Bororo Funeral

ends full month of highly elaborate ceremony and preparation

ritual practices accompanying death are often among the most elaborate and impressive ceremonies to be found in the primitive world. No more spectacular funerary ceremony is known to ethnology than that of the Bororo Indians of Brazil.

The Bororo now living on the São Lourenço River in the state of Mato Grosso call themselves *Orarimogodogue*—Fish People. Their settlement consists of a number of large thatched houses arranged in a circle around an open dance plaza. Each hut is occupied by a group of closely related women, together with their husbands and chil-

dren. One special house, larger than the others, is built in the center of the plaza. There the unmarried men sleep, and married men work and perform many of their ceremonies, taking advantage of the seclusion it provides from the women and children. All persons in the Bororo village are divided into two groups, or moieties, membership in which is hereditary. The moieties co-operate in work and compete with each other in recreation.

The Bororo were once among the fiercest tribes of Brazil, and warred against whites and other Indians alike. Today the few villages that remain

are pacified and are being affected to an increasing extent by contact with Western civilization. But in much of their ceremonialism these people still retain their native customs.

When a death occurs among the Bororo, all the members of the society put aside the activities of their normal routine for several weeks and together perform some thirty separate rituals that constitute their elaborate and protracted funerary ceremony.

A few years ago, the author, with the co-operation of the Brazilian Indian Service, had an opportunity to visit the Bororo village of Bayamoga



LARGE CATCH is smoked and dried on split-ended sticks set up close to fire.



SHAMAN, into whose care all of the caught fish are first given for ritual

treatment, here places a large fish on palm leaf and cuts it in small pieces.

on the São Lourenço River, and to photograph the events that followed a death that had just occurred there. This story gives only the highlights of these events—a complete report would require an entire monograph.

When a Bororo is gravely ill, without hope of recovery, his friends and relatives decorate him with feather ornaments and anoint his body with urucu, a brilliant red paint made from

the oily seeds of a shrub. As death nears, the assemblage begins to chant softly. Then, one by one they approach the dying person and pay him their last respects by briefly placing a hand on his forehead.

As soon as breathing has stopped, the body is quickly covered with a sleeping mat, for the corpse must not be seen again by the women or chil-

dren. The mourners, especially the women, wail loudly and further express their grief by cutting themselves so deeply with sharpened mussel shells that their blood runs onto the mat that covers the corpse.

At sundown the body is wrapped in the sleeping mat. If the deceased is a man, his bow and arrows are wrapped with him, and the bundle is taken out to the plaza. All the villagers gather



AFTER BITING FISH, shaman passes it on to his wife, who also bites it. Only then can rest of Bororo eat. The rite is

preceded by shaman's hypnotizing himself into a trance, during which he is "possessed" by *Rope*, a powerful spirit.

Mr. KOZAK, of Brazil's University of Paraná, has visited many of the Brazilian Indian tribes. This report was prepared in collaboration with Dr. ROBERT L. CARNEIRO, Assistant Curator of South American Ethnology at THE AMERICAN MUSEUM, and DR. GERTRUDE E. DOLE, a Lecturer in Anthropology, New York University.

around the corpse and sing funeral songs throughout the night to the accompaniment of the monotonous and rhythmic sound of gourd rattles.

The next morning, while a few young men are busy digging a temporary grave near the men's house, the kin of the deceased gash themselves as before, leaning over the covered corpse so that the blood will flow onto it. Laceration of the arms, head, breasts, and legs is repeated many times during the subsequent weeks of funerary rituals. As another gesture of mourning, the nearest kin tear out some of their hair, while more remote relatives cut their hair short. Thenceforth, the mourners' hair is left uncut until the mourning period of a year or longer is over.

When the temporary grave has been dug in the plaza, the body is interred so that it lies less than a foot below the surface of the ground. At frequent intervals, quantities of water are poured on it to hasten decomposition.

To sustain themselves during the ensuing weeks of exhausting rituals, the Bororo lay in large stores of food. During the early stages of the funerary ceremony the men catch great quantities of fish. A lake near the village supplies them with *jaú*, a large member of the catfish family, which sometimes attains a weight of 150 pounds and which the Bororo shoot with bows and arrows.

Smaller fish are taken in rivers by drugging them with *timbo*, a vegetable poison obtained by crushing certain vines. *Timbo* stupefies or kills fish, but does not affect the quality of the flesh for human consumption. (The active ingredient in *timbo* is rotenone, now widely used in this country as an insecticide.) For this operation the men build a weir across a stream. The fish try to escape the poisoned water through a chute in the weir. As they pass through, they are caught in large nets, then dried and smoked over a low fire, furnishing several days' food for the entire community.



WOMAN scrapes well in an *acurí* palm, above, after top has been chopped off. Sap seeps upward, and while it collects

a leaf covers the cavity. When well is full, below, a woman draws off the sap by using a long reed tube as a pipette.





Once now, decorated with feathers, is given to outstanding hunter by the

None of the fish may be eaten, however, until ritually treated by the shaman, or medicine man. First, he induces a seizure of trembling, during which he is thought to be possessed by *Bope*, a powerful—and sometimes evil—spirit often invoked by the Bororo to help them locate game and fish. Shaking with the power of his spirit helper, the shaman bites into each piece of fish, thus driving out evil spirits and symbolically consecrating the fish to *Bope* in return for his help in catching it. When this act is completed, the shaman passes the fish to his wife, who also bites it. Only then can other members of the society partake of it.

THE Bororo believe that deaths are also caused by *Bope*. He is identified, in their minds, with the jaguar, and when a death occurs, the Bororo take revenge for their loss by killing a jaguar. This, too, is surrounded with ritual. A few days after a death, the shaman determines where a jaguar can be found by consulting the corpse in its grave. After the corpse has communicated the location of a jaguar, the shaman tells the relatives of the deceased, who then request an outstanding hunter of the opposite moiety to undertake the task of finding and killing the jaguar. To help him in the venture, the bereaved family gives the hunter two presents. The first is a gourd whistle, the sound of which represents the voice of the dead man's soul. The second is a braided cord,

relatives of deceased. Hunter must use bow to avenge death by killing jaguar.

made from the mourners' hair, which the hunter wraps around his left wrist to prevent it from being injured by the snap of the bowstring.

EVEN though the shaman has "learned" the location of a jaguar from the spirit of the deceased, several days may pass before the hunter succeeds in finding one. The ensuing struggle between hunter and hunted is a feat of great daring and skill. As soon as a jaguar comes within shooting range, the hunter releases an arrow. He then immediately lifts his bow into a horizontal position and extends it toward the jaguar, pointing the far tip directly at the beast to parry its attack (a single arrow is seldom lethal). This maneuver must be accomplished with great speed before the jaguar pounces. Enraged by pain, the jaguar leaps at the end of the bow, clawing and biting it. Eye to eye the two struggle, the hunter warding off the beast with his bow held rigidly in both hands. When the jaguar recoils to pounce, the hunter quickly looses a second arrow and again raises the bow to protect himself. When the jaguar finally falls to the ground, weakened by the wounds, a last arrow is shot to end the struggle. If the hunter does not deliver this coup de grâce, he may lose the contest, for the jaguar may still have enough strength to attack when the hunter least expects it.

With the help of a companion, the hunter carries the dead jaguar



WOODEN FLUTES, ornamented with bird down and feathers, figure prominently





in the ceremonies, as do whistles, and
rattles and trumpets made from gourds.



BLACK DESIGNS are painted on inside
of jaguar skin, *above*, which is worn

by shaman, *below*, in ritual dance to
appease spirit of the ceremonial kill.





MEDICINE MAN, at the left, holds rattle as he leads strenuous dance. Men and

women jump, then kneel, to raise and lower palm fronds held between them.

back to the village. Its claws and teeth are pried loose and made into ornaments to be kept as mementos by the close kin of the deceased. The hunter is rewarded with a necklace made of shells and nuts, an elaborately decorated bow, and arrows. The animal is skinned and the inner surface of the pelt is decorated with black paint specially prepared by the shaman. This is presented to the relatives of the deceased in a series of rituals that involve singing and dancing.

The night of the kill, one of the village leaders conducts a dance to the accompaniment of songs addressed to the spirit of the jaguar. With the jaguar hide on his shoulders, a chief or a shaman leads the ritual intended to appease the dead jaguar, while the people of the village dance. Men, women, and children all perform this very important ritual, which continues far into the night. At first many people



EXHAUSTED DANCERS squat on temporary grave as a friend, drenched with clay to

represent a mythical beast, sprinkles them with water. This action cools the

dancers and hastens disintegration of body. Feathered pole is a grave marker.

join in the dance, which consists of simple, rhythmical steps or hops. As the dancers become tired, they drop out of line one by one, and eventually the shaman may be left dancing alone.

IN preparation for the actual burial festivities, the Bororo ornament themselves elaborately and with meticulous care. They paint their faces and bodies with a variety of fantastic designs in different colors, and may plaster their hair with the red urucú paint. Some wear skirts, capes, and head wreaths made from palm leaves. Hair that was torn out in mourning is spun into cords that are braided and wound around the head in the fashion of a turban. Other striking decorations are chest ornaments made from the claws of the giant armadillo; bird beaks worn as pendants; necklaces of jaguar teeth; chaplets made of a beautiful local flower that resembles our morning glory; and enormous "sunburst crown" feather headdresses, which sometimes incorporate the tail feathers of as many as thirty macaws. These spectacular headdresses are highly prized by the Bororo, because macaws are now scarce in their forests. They will part with one to an outsider only in exchange for a gun.

One of the highlights of the Bororo funeral ceremony is the impersonation of mythical beasts by men dressed in various costumes and performing imitative dances. Two such creatures inspect the corpse about two weeks after its interment in the plaza. Disguised with leaves of the buriti palm, they circle the grave several times. Finally they stop and open it to check the state of the body's decomposition. Their decision is known in advance: the flesh has not yet decayed enough to be removed from the bones. The grave is closed, and the festivities continue.

ANOTHER mythical creature is represented by a man whose body is painted white with clay, and who wears feathers in his nose. This beast impersonator runs again and again around the spot where the corpse is buried, trying to call the dead person's soul out of the grave. During this performance, other men in the group shake split bamboo poles, producing a sharp clapping sound.

Still another beast impersonator emerges from behind the huts, and rushing across the plaza toward the grave, beats it with a long stick in a



PALM SAP, which has been allowed to ferment slightly, refreshes a dancer

who has temporarily dropped out of the ceremony. His headdress is palm frond.

renewed effort to call forth the spirit of the dead Bororo.

The ritual dances of the Bororo depict in lively and vigorous fashion many aspects of their relations with the spirit world. All the dances take place in the village plaza, and most of them continue for hours at a time, requiring tremendous physical endurance. As one by one the dancers become exhausted, they drop out of line. Weary and covered with perspiration, each one squats unceremoniously on the shallow grave, while someone pours a pot of water over him. These shower baths have a twofold purpose: they refresh the dancers and also moisten the ground, thus hastening decomposition of the body.

Before the dancers return to strenuous activity, they may sip palm "wine." This weakly fermented beverage is prepared from sap of the *acuri* palm, a tree that grows in profusion near the village. To collect the sap, a man climbs to the top of the tree and cuts off the uppermost fronds. Next, his wife ascends and, with a shell, scrapes the pith from the heart of the

palm, leaving a deep well in which the sap collects by upward seepage. She covers the opening with leaves, and by the next day the well is full. A number of women then suck the sap into reeds, which they use as pipettes. When a reed is full, they close the top quickly with a thumb and transfer the sap to large pots. It is then taken back to the village and left in the shade for a day to ferment.

FOR a change of pace from the ritual dances of the funerary ceremony, the Bororo engage in an unusual kind of relay race. Two teams of young men—each team representing one of the two moieties of the society—oppose each other. Men of the two groups cut stems of buriti palms, trim them to a uniform length, and tie them into two huge circular bundles resembling cart wheels. Each one is about three feet in diameter and may weigh more than one hundred pounds. With a "cart wheel" on his shoulder, a lead-off man from each team begins running toward the village. When he tires under his heavy burden, the bundle is taken over



ONLY MEN take part in washing bones in swamp near village. Shaman touches

skull in a kind of benediction before all bones are taken back to the plaza.

by a teammate, who, as he in turn tires, is relieved by a fresh teammate, and so on. The race is so exhausting that no rituals are held the next day.

When the rituals are again resumed, they continue with undiminished variety and vitality until the repertory of dances is completed. Then, early one morning, about a month after the initial burial, the skeleton of the deceased, now nearly free of flesh, is disinterred. A few men take the bones to a nearby swamp, wash them without ceremony, and carefully remove all the remaining flesh.

After being washed, the skull is set by a small fire to dry. When thoroughly dry, it is put into a basket with the other bones and carried back to the village, escorted by a procession to the accompaniment of cane flutes and gourd trumpets.

As the procession approaches the village, it is met by the nearest female

relative of the deceased, who shoulders the basket and carries it to the men's house. As she sits outside the house, holding the basket in her lap, the other female kin of the deceased once more gash their arms and breasts, and allow their blood to run onto the basket. The men once again shake their gourd rattles and sing the songs and lamentations they intoned at the time of death.

MEANSWHILE, several men begin to decorate the skull, which is placed on a newly woven mat resting on the jaguar skin. After smearing it with resin, they press red, blue, yellow, and white feathers on the surface in a traditional pattern. Women may witness the decoration of the skull; in fact, while it is being adorned, they spill the blood from their fresh mourning wounds on it.

The other bones are decorated with urucú and bands of feathers, and



DURING DECORATING, women gash their skin and allow blood to drip on skull.



CLEANED SKULL is put on a specially woven mat, then men decorate it with

feathers. Mussel shell placed on mat is used by mourners to cut their flesh.



Notice cuts on arm of woman at right, whose hair is cropped as mourning sign.



MULTICOLORED feathers, held on with resin, completely cover skull, which is

surmounted by feather crown. Still on its mat, skull is put on jaguar skin.

placed in the special basket that is to be their final repository. Then the skull, still resting on its little mat, is placed in the basket on top of the other bones. The edges of the basket are sewed together with a wooden needle and fiber cord, and until its final burial a few days later, it is hung in the house of the deceased's relatives.

ON the day after the bones have been decorated, some of the men go into the forest to carve and decorate a number of bull-roarers. These are flat, fish-shaped pieces of wood, 3 to 4 feet long and 5 to 8 inches wide, which are whirled in the air by means of a long cord. As the piece of wood rotates it causes the cord to twist, and

the combined action produces a strange, moaning whir. The rest of that day and all of the following night the bull-roarers are whirled, and their noise is believed to represent the voice of the evil spirit *Bope*. (No woman may see the bull-roarers, for the sight, it is believed, would kill her.) The bones are carried to their final resting

AFter a month of rituals, the basket containing bones is taken to the swamp and sunk in a deep pit. Man in center



place to the accompaniment of the bull-roarers' whir.

At the swamp, where the final interment of the bones takes place, a deep pit is dug, and the basket is lowered into it. There is no further ritual. Only a long bamboo pole decorated with feathers is left to mark the last resting place of the bones, on the proper dis-

position of which the Bororo have lavished approximately a month of their time and so much of their energy.

IN January, 1958, Marshal Candido M. Rondon, who was a great friend and protector of the Indians of Brazil, and the first director of the Brazilian Indian Service, died. During Rondon's

last visit to the Bororo, he spoke in the Bororo tongue with Cadete, an old chief whom he had known for more than sixty years. After a long conversation, Rondon translated for a companion: "He said that I am old and have not long to live, and that I should come here to die, for only the Bororo know how to bury me properly."

is standing in the burial pit, while others in group help him in placement of simple bamboo pole to mark the grave.

