

The *monahu ndao*

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In this paper the author describes an animistic ritual formerly performed annually by inhabitants of southeastern Sulawesi in which they called upon the ancestors (*sangia*) for blessings on the new year.

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by Hendrik van der Klift

One of the most notable ceremonies amongst the heathen To Mekongga and To Laki of Southeast Celebes must surely be the sacrifices and the asking of a blessing on land and homes at the start of the native (agricultural) year. Those who, over time, migrated to other places, built new villages, or went to live in other villages, return to meet together in their original tribal villages. And whether these ceremonies are called *me'akoi* 'sacrifice' or *monahu ndao* 'annual celebration' (literally 'annual cooking') or 'festival before making,' 'doing of the garden work' (*monahu* = to cook; *ndao* = make, do, produce; *mondao* = perform garden work, do everything that is needed so that the rice, etc. can be planted) the objective is the same. The help and blessing of the ancestors and of the *sangia* is sought, help with the work and blessing for the harvest, and on one's children; protection against disease and an increase in one's livestock. Every place where the people gather together has its own history and its own *sangia*. There are various of these sacred places in southeastern Celebes, amongst others:

- the Opa swamp, for part of the population of South Kendari;
- the swamp that lies between the villages of Mowewe, Tinondo, Kesio, Lalolai, and Laika mborosa (a kampong belonging to the village of Sambilambo), where the River Woimea, or Woi mohala, originates, for the people of Kendari and the district belonging to Kolaka, i.e. Mambulu;
- further away, the Ulu Mowewe (there, where the mountains which enclose Mowewe on the west, east and north sides come together) (*ulu* = head, origin; *Mowewe* = the name of the river flowing through the Mowewe valley); this is the ancestral place of all those villages [p. 69] to the north and east as far as and including the village of Tawanga;
- the small Obeko lake for the people of Sanggonaasi and Laikalanda;
- Lalomba for the small villages of Wala Singi, Kaluri, Lalo'eha, Ulunggolaka and Ulu-mangolo.

All these peoples venerate a different *sangia* in these above-named ancestral places. The *sangia* was previously a man, who demonstrated by special qualities and by special signs to be a person of a higher order, belonging among the gods. His life and death was highly unusual, distinct from ordinary human beings. Usually he left instructions regarding the

¹ [footnote 1, p. 68] The *monahu ndao* is the ceremony which must precede the commencement of work in the rice fields among the To Laki and To Mekongga of Southeast Celebes.

customs to be observed; but sometimes he is also feared, and therefore venerated (see my essay: the *me'akoi*).²

After this necessary explanation, let us return to our theme. Concerning the *monahu ndao*, I was able earlier to provide some information (see *Zendingsblad van de Classis Rotterdam* No. 34, 1st Feb. 1919). After further investigation I can now complete my description of this site, which is so noteworthy amongst the To Laki and around our base in Mowewe.

The *sangia* of the above-mentioned group of villages having Mowewe as its ancestral village was called, at the time of his sojourn on earth, Pasaeno. He was conceived and born in a wonderful way. When his mother, I Wesande, as a young girl was out looking for *onaha*³ leaves. she was overcome by a mighty thirst. She looked in vain for water, until she found a large leaf from an *otoho* tree,⁴ filled with water. She drank it and, having arrived home, noticed not long afterwards that she was pregnant. Most astonished, she explained to her reproachful relations that she had not had dealings with any man. So she went to the place where she had drunk the water, stuck a pointed stake in the ground and said: "If my child is the child of a *sangia*, then by tomorrow this stake will have turned around, with its tip pointing upwards." [p. 70] By the following morning, this had really happened. But once again I Wesande said: "If my child is the child of a *sangia*, then by tomorrow this stake will again be sticking into the ground in the usual fashion." And that is what happened. Now her relations, too, were convinced, and the home was made ready for the great birth.

When Pasaeno was born, the sun could not be seen for seven days whilst I Wesande was in labor. An earthenware bowl was lowered from the sky, so that it might be used as a bath for the new-born baby. The man who was sent to fetch bathwater could not find any, for there was as yet no river there. But suddenly water gushed forth out of the ground close by him. This became the River Mowewe.

When the child was separated from his mother, he ran to the foot of a palm tree and said: "Here you must all always come to sacrifice and offer prayers. Here you must make known your desires concerning blessings on your agriculture and children, and you must pray for protection against disasters." He also laid down the details of the sacrifices, lived a long life on earth, married, and had children. Once he was invited by the *sangia* of Konawe to the latter's house in the district of Kendari (Konawe or Unaha). People carried him there. The *sangia* of Konawe wanted to convince himself that Pasaeno really was a *sangia*. He arranged a huge feast and gave Pasaeno leave to eat with the common people. Pasaeno broke out crying loudly, declaring that he could not do this. Now they were convinced that he was a *sangia*, and he ate together with the Sangia of Konawe.

² [translator's note: Van der Klift (1920).]

³ [footnote, p. 69] *Onaha* is a broad-leaved, or broad-bladed, type of grass. The long leaves are covered with thorns. The grass is used for weaving mats. [translator's note: In actuality a kind of pandanus.]

⁴ [translator's note: An *Artocarpus* species.]

To distinguish between the *sangia*, here follows a description. The *sangia* are divided into two kinds. One sort, the most notable of them, consists of the *sangia* from Luwu, who originally came from Palopo. The first of these, ancestors of the *anakia* (nobles) now living in Southeast Celebes, are known as the Sangia Mekongga or Sangia Bandera and the Sangia Konawe. They belong to the *sangia* of the first rank. The other *sangia* are called *sangia pine'ata* (= *sangia* of the slaves, i.e. the lower people). Pasaeno, and all those whose lot it was to remain at the above-mentioned places of sacrifice, belong to the latter category. From this it seems [p. 71] quite clear that the inhabitants of Southeast Celebes were already venerating *sangia* before the arrival of immigrants from Luwu (who now constitute the ruling and *anakia* classes). Because of their greater knowledge, these were regarded as being demigods and were respected and feared as such. They were regarded as the lords and owners of the land, with power to decree life or death over the people. The present *bokeo*, ruler of Mekongga, is a descendant of the Sangia Mekongga. Descendants of the Sangia Konawe live in Sanggona, La Toma, Pondidaha and Kendari.

When Pasaeno felt that he was about to die, he summoned his children and gave orders that his body should be placed in an open coffin under or amongst the branches of the *rododo* bushes. After four days they were to come to look, and he would not be there any longer, but risen up into the sky. This is what happened. At the place where Pasaeno's umbilical cord was buried, a coconut palm grew. When this tree was old and died, areca trees sprang up from its roots. "This is how it will always continue," the people say.

Until the present day, Pasaeno's commands are followed. It was on August 28th, 1920, that I was given the opportunity of being present at the *monahu ndao*, one of the institutions established by Pasaeno.

For this purpose the people had already gathered together several days previously at Ulu Mowewe. Ulu Mowewe is a quiet and idyllic place. From the village itself, which was built by the roadside on the orders of the Administration, one must travel for at least two hours in a northerly direction through grassy plains and woodland. Finally, near the foot of the mountains, one reaches a flat expanse of grassland. On the northern edge of this expanse stood the former settlement of the To Mowewe, having served as such for perhaps several hundred years. Here people still go every year to hold the *monahu ndao*.

A few days before the actual ceremony, there is *molulo* and a communal meal. This so-called *molulo* is a prescribed religious activity. Brass drums are used, and also just a [p. 72] hole in the ground. A piece of tree bark is placed over this. On both sides, a thin stake is placed in the ground. These stakes are joined together by a length of rattan, which is held up in the middle, over the hole, by a thin upright stick. This stick rests on the piece of bark. The hole thus serves as a resonating chamber. The whole contraption is called *okanda* or *kanda-kanda wuta*. If the taut rattan thread is struck, a dull, hollow sound is produced. This was probably the first sort of drum among the To Laki. This type of *okanda*, however, is not specifically confined to the Mekongga, for the Minahasans also know and use it.

After *molulo* has been held for several nights, there comes the climax of the gathering: the sacrifice and prayers. People now become increasingly expectant. The *molulo* took place in the open. As a rule, it is now observed in the houses. Night is the appointed time for the *molulo*. And although most people go to sleep late at night, eight people must remain awake, namely four young men and four young women. Now and then the *kanda* is struck, and a dance or circular progression is performed. This kind of *molulo* is called *molulo ngganda*, from the sort of instrument that is used. There is also the *molulo dimba* and the *molulo nggarandu*. The singing with the *molulo ngganda* is usually the *huhuu*, a song with a soporific, monotonous tone. First the men sing and, after a pause, the women. Forming a ring and holding one another by the hand, the dancers—taking shorter and longer steps—move steadily round and round the *kanda*. When it is the turn of the women and girls to sing, they are from time to time cheered on (*morai-rai*) by the men and youths. People are in a jovial mood, and from time to time the bystanders make jokes (*rumake-rakei*) aimed at the dancers.

At around 8.30 a.m. in the morning, the *bu'akoi*, priest, gave permission to the company to set off to the sacred place. To my inquiry whether he had any objection to my accompanying them, he replied that he did not, provided that I wore a sarong and a headcloth, went barefoot and wore short trousers. I was ready to do so, but my friend, the *kapala motuo*, explained briefly and succinctly [p. 73] that it was sufficient for me to wear a headcloth. He himself fastened a new headcloth around my head. First the *bu'akoi* 'priest' set off with the majority of the people, while we followed later on. The place we were headed toward is called *wawo raha*, which means 'above or to the north of the house.' We crossed part of the grassy plain and came to a dark wood. We could already hear the shouts of those ahead of us. When we came close, we saw a little clump of old areca palm trees. There were seven of them, and several little young areca palms. People were squatting around one of the tallest, clearing the surrounding area of weeds. They were searching between the tree roots, indeed, they were scraping the earth away from in between them. Only later did I understand why they were so busily engaged this way.

Whilst all this was taking place, several men were busy preparing poles. This was so as to erect a table for sacrifices, which is called *potade*. It consists of four posts set to form a square. The surface of the table is made of thin sticks about 1½ meters above the ground. The table is supported at the back by an upright fence.

Beneath the dense trees it is semi-dark. The sun's rays hardly penetrate, so thick is the covering of leaves. Scattered around are many *towo'a* and *do'ule* plants, all sacred plants—not only for the inhabitants of southeastern Celebes, but for almost all the people living in Celebes. The *towo'a* is the *Dracaena*⁵ of the Minahasans, called *tawa'ang* in the Tontemboan language. There are also several banyan trees standing amongst the other sorts of trees.

⁵ [translator's note: *Dracaena terminalis*, synonym for *Cordyline fruticosa*.]

When the *potade* is ready, the *bu'akoi* places a fuya⁶ banner (*otombi*) next to it and then takes up his position in front of the sacrifice table, facing west. He spreads a mat out over the table. Then he places a *siwole* (a flat woven basket) on it, with a small porcelain bowl filled with water, a brass armlet (*kalaro*), four pieces of tobacco wrapped in dried leaves in the form of cigarettes, a quartered areca nut, and a betel fruit (*wua bite*).

When this is all in place, the *bu'akoi* holds out the finger tips of both hands, touching the [p. 74] *siwole* for a few moments and then touching his forehead. At his bidding, several people come to stand on either side of him. They place their hands, palms facing upwards, against and next to those of the *bu'akoi* (*mesawo*). Then the *bu'akoi* prays. He starts with a loud voice, but mumbling nearly unintelligibly he concludes as follows:

O Somba Sangia, inaku la mongoni
Somba Sangia, kumongoni, aku morini
Somba Sangia, kumongoni aku monapa
Somba Sangia, kumongoni aku mentidoha
Iamu mokula, iamu morunggu
O Somba Sangia.

Translation:

O, revered Sangia, I pray
 Revered Sangia, I pray for cold
 Revered Sangia, I pray for gentle coolness
 Revered Sangia, I pray for health
 That it may not be hot, that there may be no sickness.
 O revered Sangia.

First come the oldest and most respected of the people and then all the others in larger numbers, until all have passed by. With each group, the *bu'akoi* prays the above prayer. When the prayer is over, the *bu'akoi* coats the middle finger of everyone with water from the bowl, and also applies water to their foreheads. Finally, he puts some water on his own forehead. Then everyone puts their hand on their forehead, gives a shout and goes away. The *bu'akoi* perspires profusely as a result of his work. At the time of these rites, no joking takes place. After everyone has had a turn, the *bu'akoi* removes the mat, the *siwole*, the armlet, and the bowl. The areca nut, the betel, etc., remain on the table.

Meanwhile the little mat that had been used is spread out at the foot of the areca palm, and the *bu'akoi* sits on it. Now any with special requests, men and women, may come to him. The men kneel on the right, the women on the left of the *bu'akoi*. Mostly people seek a blessing for children. First of all, the [p. 75] man hands the *bu'akoi* a folded *onese* leaf. The *bu'akoi* unfolds it, and inside there is a coin, a dime or quarter. The *bu'akoi* stuffs the coin under the roots of the areca palm. Then I understood why people

⁶ [translator's note: bark cloth.]

had been clearing the roots and the area around the tree. It was also in order to find coins. None were found. “Who took away last year’s coins?” I asked the old *kapala*. Somewhat embarrassed, he replied: “Perhaps small boys, or perhaps they got lost!” I presume that the old man and the *bu’akoi* probably knew more about the matter.

After the *bu’akoi* has stuffed the coin firmly between the roots of the tree, then the supplicants, husband and wife, place their hands on the tree root and the *bu’akoi* prays:

Somba Sangia, toono neio mongoni ana langgai (ana omore)
Somba Sangia, mowei pinongonino.

Translation:

Revered Sangia, these people are praying to have a small son (small daughter)
 Revered Sangia, grant them their request.

Then the *bu’akoi* rolls some earth from under the tree-roots into the *onese* leaf and gives it to the man or the woman. They take it with them and keep it carefully. While the *bu’akoi* is busily engaged in receiving and storing away the money, in offering up prayers, etc, the *kapala motuo* gives a sign to a group of seven young men, standing ready, and straight away each of them climbs up into an areca palm. The ripe areca nuts are hanging there. That is the reason why they climb up there. Now the areca nuts rain down everywhere. People grab at them, shouting out and hunting for more, and there is no trace left of the reverent stillness, even though the *bu’akoi* is carrying on with his work.

Finally, the whole ceremony is over, and the people proceed back to the village. Then, once again, they have to take part in the *molulo*. But not many wish to do so. A *bu’akoi* strikes the *kanda wuta*, but there is little enthusiasm, and only ten or so people are listening. [p. 76] Then the food is got ready, but people do not eat communally. Everyone eats alone or in small groups.

Towards midday, the final part of these rites takes place. This is the so-called *molese’ako* which means the closing stage of the celebrations. A few young men have fetched a bamboo and leaves, namely *towo’a* and *do’ule* leaves. They run with these to the place of the *molulo*, opposite the old house. There they stand facing the door opening, until a woman appears in the doorway. She pretends to be astonished and four times utters a sharp, shrill cry: “Aaahuomadèdèdèdèdè!”

At these cries, the young men run to the foot of the stairs and show her what they have brought. When I enquired about this, it seemed to me that formerly the men were welcomed by means of these cries when they were returning home from a raid (*mongae*). Women always had to utter these cries and indeed four women at the same time, women from the same family, as this activity was a hereditary one. In the same way, at a simulated contest mirroring a raid (*umo’ara*), the women had to incite the men with these cries. It was called *kumarerei*.

The bamboo is now laid down on the *otombi* (offering place), which has been erected next to the place of *molulo*. Not long afterwards the three *bu'akoi* from Mowewe appear. All the people gather together. Also two young coconut fruits are produced. First one then the other are placed on a mat along with a block of wood. Now one of the *bu'akoi* makes a circular incision with a sharp knife around the top of the coconuts. With the same knife he loosens a piece of fiber from the husk and places the above-mentioned brass ring in between. Only very unripe coconuts may be used, and no more than two of them. Everyone now stands in a circle around the *bu'akoi* and the coconuts. But they are in suspense. A thin slice must be cut from each coconut. Whenever that thin slice falls with the inside white part upper-most, then there will be much rice that year, and the prayers will be answered. But woe betide them if the slice which is cut off falls with the green outer part uppermost, as that is an omen of disaster. The pieces sliced off fall one by [p. 77] one. A cry goes up. The slices have fallen propitiously and it will therefore be a good year.

The *bu'akoi* opens the coconuts and pours water into the bamboo, first a stream of coconut water, then a stream of ordinary water, and so on. The *towo'a* and *do'ule* leaves are stuck in the top of the bamboo, and it is then ready. Now the *bu'akoi* carries the bamboo in a circle around the people four times, followed by a woman with an empty bamboo. This must also always be done, and the work of this woman is hereditary in her family. Then two *bu'akoi* kneel on the mat, each with a little dish in his hand. The third *bu'akoi* takes the bamboo and, holding it over their heads, makes a hole in it from underneath. The fluid flows out onto the heads of the *bu'akoi*. Now all the people press around with cups, bowls, etc. The *bu'akoi* steps back and swings the bamboo above their heads so that a rain of liquid is poured out over them all. What is left over is taken in little pots, pans, and bamboos by the devotees for relatives who had remained at home.

One further night of *molulo* must now be observed, and then the *monahu ndao* for this year is reckoned to be over. As can be seen from what has been written above, the number four plays a notable role amongst the inhabitants of southeastern Celebes. This is apparent in other areas of life as well, and it will be mentioned again at some ensuing suitable opportunity.

Rate-rate, October 1920

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