

# Basel Mission Archives

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"Clerk to Basel"

**Title:** "Clerk to Basel"

**Ref. number:** D-01.59.VII..142

**Date:** Proper date: 02.01.1893

**Description:** A continuation of his reports on Buem customs. Hunter's dance: This takes place when a young hunter kills any of the larger animals - e.g. a buffalo. He must send the flesh home before returning himself, and when he does return, he must stay in the first house he sees. The next day he is smeared with earth from an ant hill, puts on a straw hat with a cloth bound round his head, and palm leaves around his neck. In his left hand he carries a bush and in his right hand his gun. He makes the movements he made in the bush when he first saws the animal. The people present throw flour (rice flour or corn flour) over him. The head of the dead animal is wreathed with palm leaves and a bus again, sprinkled with local flour, and carried in front of him by a nephew. The latter moves his head as if he were possessed by the spirit of the animal. Horns are blown. When they reach the main street, everyone hails out 'Well done hunter'; the hunter gives 6 pieces of meat to the chief huntsman, he congratulates him, and the hunter breaks out into a wild dance. He then goes to his house, the animal's head is put down, and the hunter goes from house to house thanking people. The next day a special soup is made of the intestines and the best part of the head, and all the other hunters are invited to the feast, after which the smoked flesh is distributed to every family in the town. The hunter in return is presented with beads and cowries, and rubbed with the red die of a certain tree. The element of feast and dance representing the killing of the animal is repeated twice before the hunter can go out again confident that if he meets a large animal he will not be wounded. Carrying of the dead: Clerk says that the custom is very like that of other Gold Coast tribes. No mention is made of how the carriers were selected. Funeral customs: On death the body is laid out in the street - the only exceptions from this rule being suicides and victims of leprosy and smallpox etc. If a child it is laid at the side of the street, if an adult, in the middle. The man and women group themselves separately to mourn and cry - if it is a child's death this is over soon; if an adult the mourning and firing of guns goes on for one to three days depending on rank. Before the burial three dances occur - Agbla, Okpanyo, and Okpese after which an elder with a gong-gong calls 'ofofof' and asks the corpse to carry on any revenge which may be necessary in the world of the spirit. An adult is buried wrapped in a mat, with his own clothes, and clothes given him by his relatives, and a bag of cowries. If he owns a slave then especial honour is done to him in that one side of the grave is hollowed out, and when the corpse has been put inside it is walled off from the open grave so that no earth will fall on the body. Because of this, says Clerk, everyone strives to have bought at least one slave. Following this the elders of the town decide when the second part of the funeral custom is to take place - until then the widow(s) or widower of the deceased live with shaved heads in the house of the closest relative of the deceased and are fed by his

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or her relatives. On the day of this custom all the people who belong to the town prepare food which is then divided among the families by the family of the deceased - if you go through the town on the morning of such a day all the people are to be found grouped around the bowls of food. After the distribution of food the chief takes dried clay and puts it down in the street in the presence of the men of the town. On the clay he lays a tobacco leaf, and pours wine over it three times and calls to the deceased, the dead, and the fetishes, to give life and to divert death from the town. After which all those present drink palm wine. Then a certain food is cooked and distributed among certain people, the whole house cleared out, sprinkled with water in which a certain herb has been steeped, and the rubbish taken out of the town.

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