

Notes and News

The Kings of Niimi

THERE are no longer any kings in the Gambia. The last king died about three years ago, but he had long since ceded all his rights to the Gambia Government in return for an allowance of £500 a year. That was Musa Molloh, ex-king of Fulladu. There was, however, another king who yielded up his sovereignty at the time the Protectorate was established in 1892: Demba Sonko, King of Niimi. I do not know if he received any allowance from Government, but he used to be greeted with a salute of, I think, eight guns whenever he paid a visit to Bathurst. He died about 30 years ago.

There were six towns in Niimi, from which were chosen in succession the new rulers of the kingdom. Seven families provided the kings. The town of Essau held two such families.

Originally Niimi was ruled by queens, all belonging to the Jammi family, but in course of time the men desired to take the power into their own hands. When this happened two branches of the Jammi family, three of the Sonko family, and two of the Mane family all succeeded in making good their claims to the kingdom by virtue of their descent from the queens. The list of queens and kings, which has been carefully preserved, appears at the end of this note. It will be seen from this that some of the families only succeeded in their claims a considerable time after the fall of the queens.

The appointment of the kings was accompanied by a good deal of ceremonial, which varied according to the particular family to which he belonged. He also had to undergo a period of probation. The candidates for the kingship usually lived in exile, for obvious reasons. They were never popular with the reigning king, who feared lest they should plot against him. Whenever a king died his successor would be called from exile by the headman of the town to which he belonged. This headman now became the *suma* or headman of the royal town. In the case of the Sonkos the prospective king was required to take up his residence in a specially prepared hut for six months. Two slave women were told off to attend to his needs. He was not allowed to wash nor to change his clothing during his stay in the hut, to which he was definitely confined. At the end of the probationary period, a path was cleared between the hut and a large baobab-tree. Care was taken to clear away all inequalities and obstructions from the path. The king was allowed to wash and to put on clean clothing. He was then conducted to the foot of the baobab-tree and required to stand facing the hut, in which an additional door had been cut. A sword was laid on the ground at his feet. About five yards distant, between the king and the hut, a slave was stationed,

standing sideways on to the king. At a given signal the king stooped down, seized the sword, and chased down the path after the slave in an endeavour to cut him down before he could dash through the hut into safety, for the king might not follow beyond the hut. Should the king stumble or fall it was regarded as a bad omen for his reign. It did not appear to be of any great moment whether he succeeded in cutting down the slave, the essential point was that he must not stumble. The king was usually an elderly man, whilst care was taken to select a particularly speedy and strong slave. After this ceremony the preparations for the definite inauguration of the king were pressed forward. The ceremony of the baobab-tree was based on the exploit of an ancestor, who, when being chased by his enemies and on the point of capture, came to a baobab-tree, presumably fallen, at which he put his horse, thereby escaping from his enemies who were forced to ride round.

The ceremony of the inauguration was a simple one. The king put on his special cap of yellow cloth, which none but he could wear. He was handed his staff of office by the *suma*. He then in a speech outlined his policy. The last king was out to meet all requirements. He said, 'I intend that there shall be peace, but not too much peace; I want war, but not too much war.' After this he assumed the administration of the kingdom, which had hitherto devolved upon the *suma* or the *alkaito*, but more usually the *suma*.

The court officials consisted of the *alkaito*, the *kandolu*, the *suma*, the *sila-tio*, the *buki-nekkolu*, and the *mofala*. In addition there were other administrative officials: the *nemango* and the *alkali*. The *nemango* was the governor of an outlying district, the *alkali* was the headman of a town or village.

The *alkaito* was the king's representative. He was a slave, selected by the king for his ability and fidelity. He would frequently be sent on the king's business to outlying towns. On these occasions he had the privilege, granted to no one else, of an escort of *buki-nekkolu*. He had power of arrest, subject to confirmation by the king. He took charge of all prisoners; supervised and frequently inflicted floggings by order of the king; but he never performed the duties of executioner. He also collected taxes. In the absence of the king he could hold court, but could not impose sentence of death. Sometimes after the death of the king he assumed the administration of the kingdom, though apparently the *suma* should more properly have done so, pending the installation of a successor. Another important duty was that of an adviser, or councillor, of the king.

The *suma* was the *alkali*, or headman, of the royal town. He was usually a *kanda*, that is adviser of the king. He took charge of the king's possessions and of his gunpowder. He also performed the ordinary duties of an *alkali*. The headmen of the towns still function as formerly, their duties and powers having been very little restricted, if at all. They were appointed by their own townspeople, according to the local custom and practice. The king could remove them from office for misconduct or inability, in which case they

were usually either killed or driven from the town and their yards and houses destroyed. They could settle disputes by moral suasion and advice, but could not hold anything in any way approximating to a court of justice. They were responsible for the people under their charge, and had to provide soldiers, food, and labour as required by the king.

There were also officials termed *nemango*, who appear to have exercised functions analogous to those exercised by a chief of the present day. They were placed in charge of outlying districts, and were responsible to the king for their actions. They could hold court, impose sentences of fine and imprisonment or flogging, but not of death. They had their own messengers, but were not allowed *buki-nekkolu*, who were the king's personal bodyguard.

The *kanda* (pl. *kandolu*) were notables, distinguished for their wisdom or prowess in war, upon whom the king leaned for advice, and who might, therefore, be looked upon as his councillors. The king could select as his *kandolu* any one he liked, but for reasons of expediency usually selected some one with a powerful following in the kingdom. Disregard of the advice of these men, if it was accompanied by unpopularity with the people, frequently led to rebellion, hence it was incumbent upon the average king to listen well to the advice of the *kandolu*.

The *sila-tio* was the captain of the army. He might be either freeman or slave. He had officers, but they had no special title.

The *buki-nekkolu* were the men forming the personal bodyguard of the king. They were slaves and were under the command of the chief *buki-nekko*, and were always in attendance on the king. They were distinguished by their hair, which was worn long and tied with a woman's head-tie; they wore no hat. Their arms consisted of swords, spears, and latterly guns. The chief *buki-nekko* carried the king's staff. In procession he preceded the king, who was followed by the main body of *buki-nekkolu*. The wearing of hats by these men meant that the king was dead.

The remaining official was the *mofala*, or executioner. He wore a uniform of scarlet cloth, consisting of a short tunic and trousers, the latter being rather tight. His pay consisted of every tenth man, whom he could retain as a slave. Like our own hangman he was very much ostracized. The place of execution consisted of a clearing in the bush, not very far from the town. An ordinary sword was used, and the head had to be cut off with one stroke. If that failed the victim was left to die, or, very rarely, to recover. The corpses remained where they fell; no attempt was made to bury them. It is related of one king, not a king of Niimi, that when he died the hyaenas and the vultures refused to eat him, out of gratitude for the bountiful feasts he had provided for them during his lifetime.

The women of the king's household were placed in the care of members of the household; eunuchs were not employed.

After the king's death, his hut was occupied until the completion of the

charity, that is, prescribed period of mourning. It was then vacated, and the king's staff of office, with other personal possessions, was left inside and allowed to decay and rot away in the course of time.

KINGS AND QUEENS OF NIUMI

NAME OF QUEEN OR KING	NAME OF (HER) HIS NATIVE TOWN
<i>Queens</i>	
Mama Handami Jammi	Bakkendik
Wami Jammi	
Furo Jammi	
Karunku Jammi	
Kajenki Jammi	
Kabol Kaboyati Jammi	
Yunterangjang Jammi	
Kalimakoi Jammi	
Yaiyando Jammi	
Bakijo Joandang Jammi	
<i>Kings</i>	
Samike Jammi	Bakkendik
Dabing Jileng Sonko	Essau Manserring Su
Kolibunkari Sonko	Berrending
Tanwar Kotto Jammi	Bakkendik
Nyanasu Wali Mane	Kanuma
Dabing Baking Sonko	Essau Manserring Su
Mansa Demba Kotto Sonko	Berrending
Musa Yambiri Jammi	Bakkendik
Kanjankai Mane	Kanuma
Yamusa Jammi	Sittanunku
Mbai Sani Sonko	Essau Jelenkunda
Kumbajo Wali Mane	Bunyadu
Dabi Kambi Sonko	Essau Manserring Su
Dijang Sonko	Berrending
Musa Ndenkel Jammi	Bakkendik
Sira Jikol Mane	Kanuma
Samajara Kotto Jammi	Sittanunku
Kasung Jeleng Sonko	Essau Jelenkunda
Sonko Jaja Mane	Bunyadu
Mbinki Sonko	Essau Manserring Su
Tamarata Kotto Sonko	Berrending
Sira Musa Kotto Jammi	Bakkendik
Kankudolo Sonko Mane	Kanuma
Sira Mansajang Jammi	Sittanunku

NAME OF KING	NAME OF HIS NATIVE TOWN
<i>Kings</i>	
Tentu Sonko Dessiba	Essau Jelenkunda
Jellimuta Mane	Bunyadu
Kumba Mbinki Sonko	Essau Manserring Su
Marang Kolli Sonko	Berrending
Sira Musa Ndebban Jammi	Bakkendik
Ndebbali Kotto Mane	Kanuma
Kunda Jemmu Jammi	Sittanunku
Kasanbai Sonko	Essau Jelenkunda
Kassi Yamang Mane	Bunyadu
Kumba Kambi Mbaiki Sonko	Essau Manserring Su
Jennu Wuleng Sonko	Berrending
Siranka Wali Jammi	Bakkendik
Jali Kasa Mane	Kanuma
Sambare Mai Jammi	Sittanunku
Alimarang Sonko	Essau Jelenkunda
Mansajumu Fati Mane	Bunyadu
Birram Banka Sonko	Essau Manserring Su
Dusu Kolli Sonko	Berrending
Bessang Wali Jammi	Bakkendik
Tamba Baja Mane	Kanuma
Hali Sona Jambang Jammi	Sittanunku
Nandanko Suntu Sonko	Essau Jelenkunda
Jali Kambi Mane	Bunyadu
Mbaiki Sabu Jammi Sonko	Essau Manserring Su
Tamba Jabunai Sonko	Berrending
Birram Jammi	Bakkendik
Maranta Fatuma Jaju Mane	Kanuma
Jilali Kasuwuji Jammi	Sittanunku
Birram Teneng Tamba Sonko	Essau Jelenkunda
Kollimanka Jambong Jite Mane	Bunyadu
Burungai Jirayandi Sonko (1826, 1832) ¹	Essau Manserring Su
Demba Adama Sonko (1833, 1856) ¹	Berrending
Buntung Sani Sonko Jammi	Bakkendik
Mamadi Sira Jammi Mane	Kanuma
Wali Jammi	Sittanunku
Maranta Sonko	Essau Jelenkunda

Manserring Su=Royal House

(Communicated by Major R. W. MACKLIN, M.C., Commissioner in the
Gambia.)

¹ Dates, authenticated by documents, at which these kings were alive.