

à la formation et à la transformation des civilisations. Après avoir souligné quelques points caractéristiques, qui parfois ont été mal interprétés, l'auteur passe en revue les principales critiques formulées contre l'école historico-culturelle. Par le simple exposé objectif de la méthode il a déjà écarté bien des malentendus, redressé plusieurs exagérations, réfuté plusieurs objections qui portaient à faux, indiqué l'écart possible entre la norme idéale et le résultat pratique obtenu. Il ne s'est même pas fait faute d'indiquer certaines lacunes, limites ou déficiences. Dans sa réponse aux objections, il insiste principalement sur les distinctions entre 'Kulturkreislehre' et 'Kultur-historische Methode', entre 'Kulturkreis' et 'Kulturgruppe-Kulturschicht-Kultureinheit', entre la méthode et les diverses applications prévues ou à prévoir dans cette méthode, entre la méthode et les résultats provisoires auxquels on a abouti.

Passant à l'œuvre positive par excellence, l'*Ursprung der Gottesidee* de Schmidt (spécialement le quatrième volume), l'auteur essaie, dans quelques considérations préalables, de dissiper certains malentendus qui se sont répandus dans le monde scientifique autour de l'hypothèse de dégénérescence des pygmées, autour du terme *Urmonotheismus*, autour de l'objectivité de l'école (ethnologie tendancieuse). Dans l'examen proprement dit, il envisage une triple question. (a) 'Est-on sur la bonne voie, ou s'est-on engagé sur une voie sans issue?' Après un examen approfondi, le Dr. Van Bulck répond hardiment, pour autant que les circonstances actuelles permettent de prévoir l'avenir: oui, on est sur la bonne voie. (b) 'Pouvons-nous le considérer comme un travail définitif sur lequel il n'y a plus à revenir?' La réponse est catégorique: non, il ne s'agit pas d'un travail définitif. (c) 'Pouvons-nous continuer l'examen des autres civilisations africaines d'après la même méthode?' Étant données les difficultés d'un genre tout autre, on restera fidèle à la méthode historique sans doute, mais de nouvelles applications seront requises. Et l'auteur termine son étude par un bref aperçu général sur les problèmes nouveaux et les perspectives nouvelles.

Peut-être, on pourra ne pas adopter certaines de ses explications. Il faudra reconnaître cependant que le Dr. Van Bulck a fait preuve dans cet exposé d'un grand esprit de méthode, de clarté et de rigoureuse logique. Si, comme ses *Beiträge zur Methodik der Völkerkunde* (Wien, 1931) doivent le faire augurer, l'étude qu'il annonce répond à celle que nous venons de résumer, il aura certes réalisé une mise au point de la méthode historico-culturelle des plus utiles. (*Communication du Professeur N. DE CLEENE.*)

A Ritual Currency in Nigeria—A Result of Culture Contact.

THE Northern Provinces Report for 1932 mentions the surprising reappearance of cowrie-shells, the ancient and long-abandoned currency of Nigerian tribes, on the big markets of Bida and Agaie in Nupe country. The cowries,

it appeared, were brought in from outside, and Nupe traders were found to have bought up cowries in Abuja and other places in the neighbouring districts of Gbari country. The Administration investigating further this curious occurrence was driven to the conclusion that this reappearance of cowrie-shells was due to the economic crisis which had just then swept the country. Prices of native produce were so low, and the economic situation in certain communities so bad, that the smallest coin existing in Nigeria, the 'anini' (a tenth of a penny), proved still too large a unit of currency for the poverty-stricken peasants. Cowries were traded on the markets of Abuja at the rate of 500 to the penny, in Bida and Agaie 250 to the penny. (The latter rate was the original rate of exchange when cowries were abandoned for British currency.) The fact that some of the cowries showed traces of having been dug out of the earth led to the conclusion that the natives had buried large stores of cowries when this 'money' was declared valueless, and had now resorted to it again. The Gbari of Abuja were actually proved to have kept their cowries in the hope that some day they might become legal tender again, for only in 1924 they had requested permission from the Emir that payments in trading transactions might be made half in cowries and half in money. The Administration had to warn the chiefs that cowries would never become legal money again, and even to prohibit formally dealings in cowrie-shells. The recent reappearance of cowries was not long-lived however. With the slight economic improvement of the country they seemed to have disappeared again; according to a Government report the buying of cowries in Abuja Emirate had come to an end in October 1933.¹

During my work in Gbari country I came across certain facts which may explain this curious result: an evidently valueless currency being swept up from nowhere by the tide of the economic depression. It must be realized first of all that cowries never were proper 'money' in our sense, not even at the time when they were still legal tender. That is to say they were never exclusively an instrument of economic transaction, nor more specifically a means of exchange. Cowries were used, and are still widely used, at the same time for certain magical purposes, for 'medicines', ritual ornaments, and such like. The Gbari, for example, adorn their sacred grave-huts with cowrie ornaments or fit a mosaic of cowries into the beautifully paved circular platforms over the graves of the old men. The most significant use of cowries, however, occurs in the Gbari funeral rite itself. Here, under the pressure of modern conditions, the overlapping of economic and religious functions has led to an interesting development.

¹ For this information I am greatly indebted to the District Officer of Bida Division who kindly gave me access to the Government records. After I had written this note on the reappearance of cowrie shells in Northern Nigeria I learnt that in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria a similar development had taken place, owing to the abolition of the 'anini'.

When we were attending a Gbari funeral near Minna we were surprised to see a number of women who had come from neighbouring places sitting outside the compound, where the ceremonial mourning was just going on, selling cowries. They had basketsful in front of them, and the relatives of the deceased and the guests were busy buying the cowrie shells. In the course of the funeral they were then used for the following purposes: first, the chief mourners distributed gifts of cowries among the guests and visitors as farewell presents before they left (my wife was given about two handfuls by the sister of the deceased); each mourner and guest threw a handful of cowries into the open grave at the burial; finally, all the people who had undertaken certain services in connexion with the funeral, the drummers and musicians, the young men who were officiating as grave-diggers, and the women who, two days afterwards, paved the platform over the grave, were 'paid' in cowries. In none of these cases would it have been fitting to use real money. (Following this point up later on, I discovered that the Gbari soothsayer is also paid in cowries.) So far then, the cowries represent to-day something like a ritual currency reserved for the symbolic payment of certain services of a ceremonial and religious nature.

Yet a distinctive economic feature is not absent: for the cowries presented to the guests, the payments made to the musicians and, above all, the handfuls of cowries which mourners and guests throw into the grave at the burial, have the meaning of a competitive act. Together with the cowries the mourners place in the grave pieces of cloth, and the more costly the cloth the more honour does it reflect upon the donor. It must have been the same with the gift of cowries, originally: this 'gift to the dead', a public display and sacrifice at the same time of wealth, had the meaning of an index of social status and ambition. We have before us one of those characteristic forms of displaying wealth by destroying it which we know from so many primitive cultures. To-day, with cowries almost worthless, the accent has shifted, the whole function of the institution has changed. For one reason or another the economic element, still evident in the competitive gift of cloth, has not been retained in connexion with the gift of money. The result has been this separate 'ritual currency', displayed and given away in an act of mere ceremonial significance. In this connexion it is important that on any other occasion musicians or drummers are paid in real money; and that the small presents of money which are given by the bridegroom to the bride's parents during courtship and marriage (a diminutive 'bride-price') represent again real payments. Here practical aspects decided the issue, linking these transactions with the obtaining general system of currency.

The use of cowries as described here explains to a certain extent the continued existence of hoards of cowries in the country. Yet normally, it appears, the single household of to-day would possess too small an amount to cope with the traditional funeral expenditure. It is thus that the trade in

cowries which we had the opportunity of seeing in action came into being. In a small way cowries are still used in local trade, between two villages or two compounds, but not for the main trade in stock of the country, agricultural products, and not on a large scale. Buying and selling of millet, yam, or corn in larger quantities is only done in real money ('for must we not pay our taxes in money?'). But if you are buying a little beer from your neighbour's house, a little fruit, or an odd calabash of corn you may have run short of, you pay in cowries instead of the 'anini' or two this would cost. The women, the traders *par excellence* of the country, thus collect the scattered hoards of cowries in their hands, keeping them for the occasion when a supply of 'ritual currency' will be needed. And here we have the last curious twist in this process of economic readjustment: for it looks as if this negligible trade which is still done in cowries, the last survival from an economic system smashed by 'culture contact', were kept alive not so much by economic necessity as such as by the necessity to provide that special 'ritual currency' which in itself is nothing but a result of the same impact of culture contact. (*Communicated by Dr. S. F. NADEL.*)