

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RFG - 11
Gorowa Tribe
I-Origin

c/o Barclays Bank (D.C.& O.),
Arusha, Tanganyika
July 18, 1955.

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, N.Y.

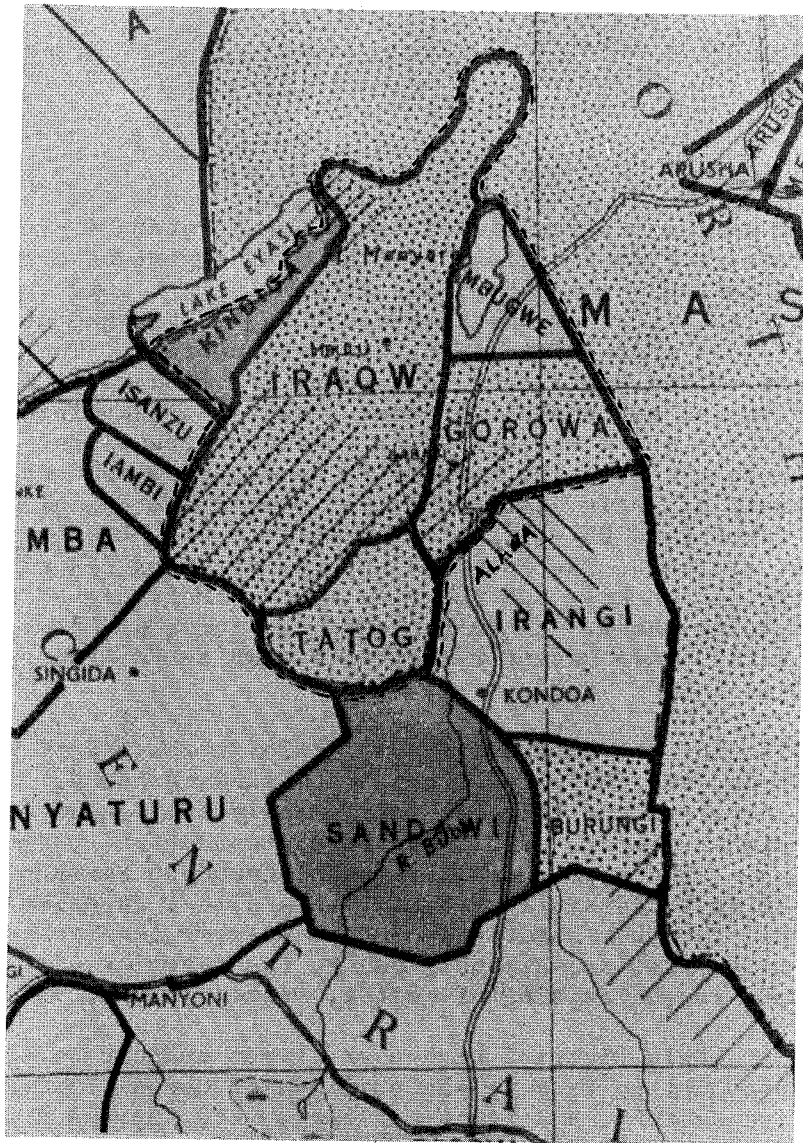
Dear Mr. Rogers:

Of the four Administrative Districts in the Northern Province of Tanganyika, Mbulu District is certainly not the most important economically and politically, but it outranks the others in anthropological interest. The populous Moshi District possesses the advanced Chaga Tribe who have achieved a relatively high level of prosperity through raising coffee. The town of Arusha and the headquarters of the Provincial Government are located in Arusha District. In addition to a group of successful European farms, the two African tribes of the District--the Arusha and Meru--both grow coffee on the slopes of Mt. Meru as well as subsistence crops. The Meru Tribe have caused some political uneasiness as a result of their discontent over the alienation of some of their land for European farms (see BG - 1). The Masai are undoubtedly the most widely known tribe of East Africa. The enormous expanse of Masai District is producing more and more cattle for market, and there is every likelihood of improving and expanding cattle raising there. A number of large European farms, ranging in size up to 20,000 acres, have recently been alienated on Esimingur Mountain and elsewhere in the District.

In Mbulu District, by contrast, very little in the way of cash crops is raised by the Africans, and the sale of cattle at markets is only starting (RFG - 10). The Africans are peaceful and friendly and appear to be contented. Apart from an occasional dispute over intertribal boundaries, they take little interest in politics. There is a small block of European farms on Oldeani Mountain where wheat is successfully grown. This almost constitutes a sub-district of its own. Another handful of European farms scattered along the base of the Rift Escarpment exist precariously due to the vagaries of rainfall and make continual experiments in the raising of coffee, maize, papain, and sisal.

The tribes of Mbulu District have been almost unknown to the English-speaking world. One must go back to the writings of the old German explorers and travelers to find sketchy, and sometimes inaccurate, accounts of these tribes. As recently as 1949 Mr. W.E.H. Stanner, in a report to the British Government on anthropological research needs in Tanganyika and Uganda, referred to Mbulu District as a "blank space on the ethnographic map." Since then the situation has greatly improved. Substantial anthropological studies have been made of three of the four main tribes, and I have just completed a short survey of the fourth. It is to be hoped that the findings of these anthropological investigations will be fully published in time; then instead of being the least known the tribes of the District will become among the best known in East Africa.

That these tribes were neglected so long was not due to lack of intrinsic interest, for with their variety of languages, cultures, and races, they constitute a field laboratory for anthropological research. The great Bantu language family of Africa is represented by the Wambugwe Tribe. The Tatog Tribe (also known as



Tribes of Mbulu District and their Neighbors
(from "Tanganyika Atlas")

Barabaig and Mangati) speak a language, related to Masai, which used to be classified as Nilotic or "Half-Hamite," but which has recently been reclassified by Dr. Joseph Greenberg as belonging to the Southern Branch of the Eastern Sudanic Language Family.¹ The largest tribe in the District are the Iraqw whose language was traditionally considered to be Hamitic, an opinion shared by Dr. Greenberg who assigns it to the Cushitic group. The only systematic study of this language which has been published is by Mr. W.H. Whitely.² In a recent conversation, he told me that his comparative linguistic studies had left him in doubt as to the affinities and origin of Iraqw and that the question had best be left open at present. The fourth tribe, the Gorowa, have a language which is related to Iraqw, the two being mutually intelligible. In the Eastern part of the District a small tribe called Hadzapi or Kindiga inhabit the forests and swamps bordering Lake Eyasi. These are primitive hunting people who speak a click language related to the Bushman and Hottentot languages of South Africa. Thus the five tribes of the District represent four distinct and unrelated languages. In addition there is the Magugu community with settlers from 76 different tribes, most of whom know their own tribal languages and customs as well as the official Swahili of the settlement (see RFG - 7).

Presumably each of these language groups originally represented a different racial type. Little research has been done on this problem as yet, though, and inferences concerning race which are based on language differences must be drawn with caution. In any case there has been considerable intermarriage among the tribes, so that racially they are all now somewhat mixed. In regard to culture, a number of common traits are found throughout the District, in some cases with regional variations: for example, house type, weapons, clothing, and methods of cultivation. There is room for a valuable comparative study to be made of the cultural differences among these tribes, and of the origins and modes of diffusion of the common elements; but sufficient anthropological information has not yet been published for such research. It is true that the old German ethnographers listed a number of culture elements in this region, plotted them on maps, and analysed their origins. Their conclusions, though appearing to be the result of honest scientific method, were in some instances the inevitable result of the assumptions with which they started the investigation; namely, that the White Race is intrinsically superior to others, that the "Hamites" were at least partly White in race, and therefore that all good things in East Africa were introduced by the Hamites.³ These writings have had considerable influence--not always for the best--on African anthropology, and also on political events in Europe. The pernicious racial doctrines of the German Nazis, for example, were supported in some measure by questionable ethnological theories concerning Tanganyika tribes. My own observations in the field are not entirely in accord with the view of "Hamitic" superiority.

¹ Joseph H. Greenberg, "Reclassification of the African Languages," Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, Vols. 5 and 6, 1949-50.

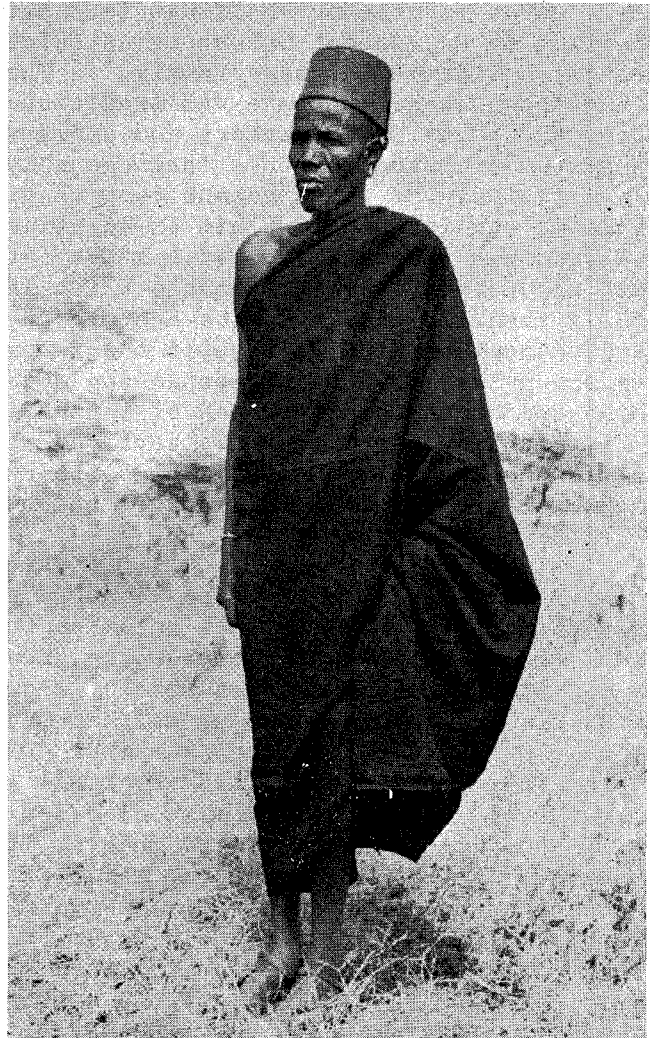
² W.H. Whitely, "Studies in Iraqw," Makerere College, Kampala, 1953.

³ A concise account of these theories may be found in a small book by Otto Reche: "Zur Ethnographie des abflusslosen Gebietes Deutsche-Ostafrika," Abhandlungen des Hamburgischen Kolonialinstituts, Bd. 17, 1914.



Gidas Court Elders

L.to R. Gaudie Maros,
Sigan Gwelgwa,
Foyan Shawo.

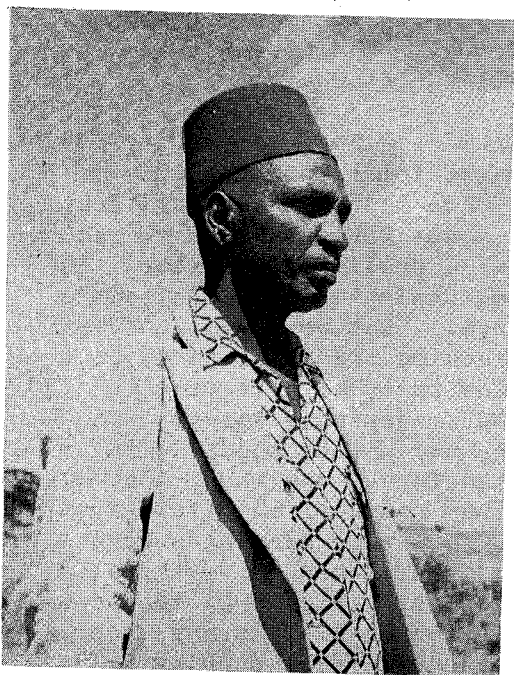


Since three of the Mbulu tribes--the Wambugwe, Barabaig, and Iraqw--had been more or less adequately investigated, the Gorowa was the only important tribe of the District which remained unstudied. Partly for this reason and partly in the hope of getting some useful information on primitive medicine, I planned to do a short study of the tribe. Altogether I have now been in the Gorowa country three and half months, most of this time being spent in the Gidas subchiefdom which is the most remote part of the tribal territory and probably the least affected by modern civilization. Because of their similarity in language, it was always assumed that the Gorowa and Iraqw were similar in their customs and way of life, but nobody knew for certain how similar. A young Harvard anthropologist, Dr. E.H. Winter, completed a two-year study of the Iraqw Tribe earlier this year. I met Dr. Winter in Kampala last February and spent considerable time with him going over his notes so that I would have a basis of comparison. As I have now found out, the two tribes seem to be quite close in those aspects of culture in which I am most interested, the greatest differences being in the fields of political organization, economy, and land tenure. Therefore I do not anticipate that I will carry my Gorowa investigation much further. Although there is no lack of interesting special problems to be

investigated among the Gorowa, I feel that for the time being Dr. Winter's forthcoming report on the Iraqw will give a fair picture of the general culture of both tribes. In this, and in one or two subsequent reports, I shall put on record my main findings concerning the Gorowa. My knowledge of the Iraqw being very sketchy, I shall make no comparisons with them at this time.

Before going on to narrate the traditional history of the Gorowa, I should mention that there are two other tribes which are linguistically related to the Iraqw and Gorowa. These are the Alawa or Wasi and the Burunge, both located in neighboring Kondoa District. Although they enter into early Gorowa history, so little information is available at present that I shall not attempt to characterize them. The historical account which follows was told by the three court elders at Gidas with whom I held many long sessions - Gaudie Maros, Sigan Gwelgwa, and Foyan Shawo. Other elders of the tribe also came to our meetings. Most of these men knew some Swahili, but they preferred to discuss the finer points of their customs, beliefs, and history in their own language, and so I made frequent use of an interpreter.

In the dim past, so the tradition goes, the present Gorowa, Iraqw, Alawa and Burunge were united as one people. This parent tribe resided in a place called Yaer-Qantsar. For reasons and under circumstances which are not remembered they migrated to this part of Tanganyika. Gorowa elders have different opinions about the direction in which Yaer-Qantsar was located. In short they do not know. Chief Amri Dodo identifies it with the Blue Nile in Abyssinia, but this idea may well have been suggested to him by an outsider-- perhaps during his visit to Oxford (cf. RFG - 9, p.7) and I consider the question open until further evidence is presented.



Saki Yahi - One of three Gidas Headmen. (The Red Tarboosh is worn as a symbol of office at Gidas. They are not Mohamedans).

The history of the tribe in this region begins with a short dynasty founded by Dadiya "Naat" (Dadiya the Red). Nothing is known about him except that his epithet came from the color of his clothes, to which reference is said to be made in traditional songs. The genealogy of the dynasty runs:

Dadiya
|
Gormo
|
Muhanga
|
Hayimu

Although the Gorowa eventually assumed the name of Dadiya's son (Gormo is the singular form of Gorowa), the actual history begins with the last of this dynasty, Hayimu Muhanga, who was apparently a peace-loving chief. Under his rule the warriors became restive and anxious for war and demanded that Hayimu produce an enemy for them to fight. He agreed to do so, but several times procrastinated. Finally they kidnapped his son and told Hayimu that they would not return him until an enemy tribe appeared. Hayimu then gave in to them and said, "Return to your homes. When you see a great cloud of dust

approaching it will be an enemy coming to fight you." It happened as he promised. On the third day they saw a cloud of dust approaching, and they brought Hayimu his son. The dust was caused by a Tatog army coming to fight them. A fierce war ensued. Chief Hayimu and his son ran away from the country and were never seen again.

During this war the original tribe was split into two divisions. The Alawa and Burunge migrated south into what is now Kondoa District. The Gorowa and Iraqw settled in a place at the foot of Mt. Hanang which was called Maangway (the Iraqw call it Maangwatay). In a later phase of the war they were driven from the Hanang area. At that time they divided into the present two tribes. The Iraqw travelled north and settled in Kainam above the Rift Escarpment. The Gorowa migrated eastwards to the Bagara River valley and the plain of Masagharoda. They crossed the Bubu River and continued to Helmet-Irangi between Babati and Bonga. There they contacted the Wambugwe and Irangi, who were then one tribe.

This tribe was hostile to strangers. They had a custom when a foreigner appeared of planting a spear in the ground and requiring the stranger to salute it. On failing to do so he was speared to death. The first Gorowa to appear, not knowing of this custom, were thus killed. A war developed between the two tribes in which the Gorowa were badly defeated. The reason was that they lacked iron spears, having only wood-tipped spears and clubs for weapons. In the period of peace which followed the Gorowa obtained iron and the art of forging spears from their old enemies. When they were re-equipped with modern iron weapons they precipitated another war with the Wambugwe-Irangi by deliberately killing an important elder of the tribe. In this war they were successful, the enemy being defeated and cut in two. One half was driven north to Mbugwe and became the present Wambugwe Tribe. The other half retreated south to the Haube Plateau in Kondoa District and became known as the Irangi Tribe. The Gorowa then settled in the region south of Mt. Ufiome from Babati to Galapo.

Up to this point Gorowa history is semilegendary. The present generation have no means of testing its accuracy and accept it uncritically. In the retelling it has taken on a uniformity which must not be mistaken for verification of the facts. Traditional history offers the only means through which we get glimpses of persons and events in the ancient days of a preliterate tribe. But in its legendary aspect it may express the ideals and aspirations of the people as well as preserve the facts of their early existence. Can we assume that if motives of self-aggrandizement or justification are lacking tradition hands down the facts unchanged? Modern archeology seems to show that, allowing for the exaggeration of poetic heroism, Homer's account of the Trojan wars was not too wide of the mark. In the case of Gorowa traditions, two points speak in favor of its accuracy: the admission of their defeat by the Tatog, and their lack of iron spears. In fact their traditions state that they had no iron at all when they first encountered the Wambugwe-Irangi, using at that time digging sticks and wooden hoes for cultivation. On the other hand, their creation myth tells that when God first created man he gave the founder of each tribe a gift, and the Gorowa received a hoe. In discussing this myth with the elders, it was clear that the image in their minds was of a dark-skinned Adam wielding a shiny iron hoe, perhaps with a Birmingham label on it. According to another accepted tradition, the Gorowa had no cattle until they obtained them from the Tatog after the disastrous war with that tribe. If the Gorowa are truly Hamitic their

traditional history gives little support to the theory of the superior civilization of the Hamites. On the contrary, they would seem to have been originally destitute savages who received most of their cultural amenities from Bantu and Sudanic peoples. The problem of iron and cattle in East Africa, however, must be solved on more substantial grounds than traditional history alone: the findings of archeology and ethnology must be taken into account, but this can not be done in the field where books and other facilities for scholarship are lacking.

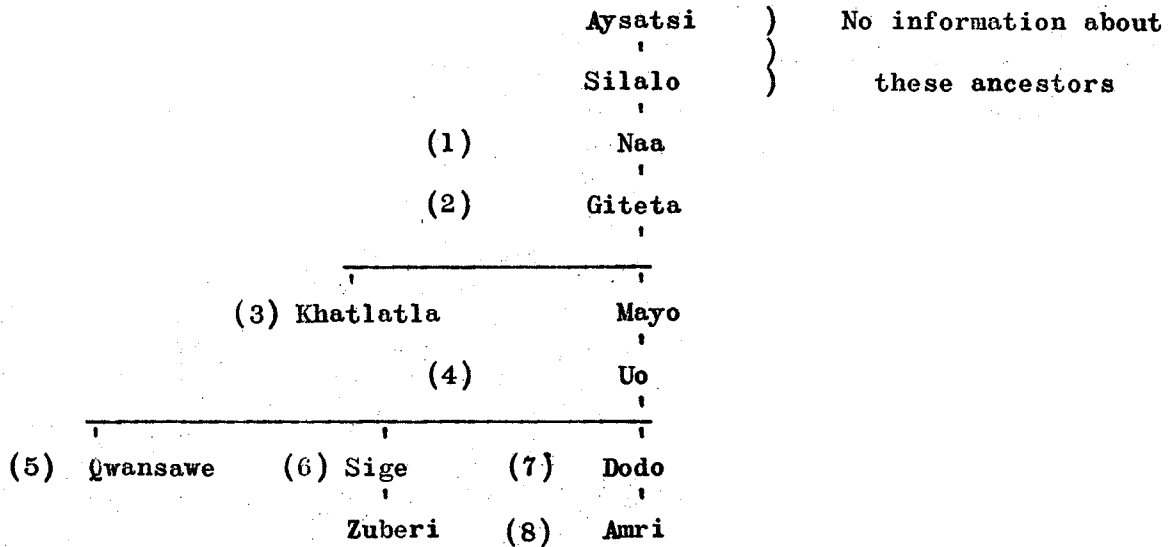
There is still another way of testing and correcting the historical traditions of a tribe. That is by comparing them with similar traditions from other tribes in the region. When such information is available from all the tribes which are mentioned in the Gorowa account it will be possible to collate the details on which there is agreement and critically evaluate the contradictory points, thus arriving at a more reliable narrative. At present I have only the Wambugwe traditions for comparison, but these provide a valuable clue for establishing a landmark in chronology. From genealogies of the Wambugwe chiefs, I calculate that they have been living in their present location for at least two hundred years. Therefore the encounter between Gorowa and Wambugwe must have been still earlier. The Wambugwe state that they broke away from the Irangi and migrated to Mbugwe at a time when the land was troubled with famine and plague. There is no tribal memory of being defeated in war by the Gorowa, but that bitter fact might understandably have been forgotten. In fact both views may be essentially true. A war might have been fought leaving famine and plague in its wake, conditions which caused the Wambugwe and Irangi to seek new homes. The Gorowa, perhaps being more adaptable, might then have occupied the devastated land, though their military victory had not been as decisive as their traditions state.

In the subsequent period of Gorowa history the personalities, places, and events which emerge are more concrete, but there is less consensus among the elders in regard to the facts. This information has been handed down through diverse, and sometimes antagonistic, descent and territorial groups, and there is lack of agreement on some of the main points. What seems to have happened is this.

A member of one of the leading families, a man called Naa,¹ somehow came to be recognized as chief of the Gorowa. His main function, and that of the chiefs who followed him, was to represent the Tribe in foreign relations, that is in making territorial treaties with the Irangi, who seem to have been an expanding tribe continually attempting to colonize in Gorowa country. He bore the title of Wawutmo and was either recognized as a paramount chief by the then existing local chiefs called Gause (sing. Gausmo); or else having acquired power some other way he then established these subchiefs by appointing his own relatives. He probably had some control over the organized military forces of the Tribe. According to some of the elders, he achieved his pre-eminence in the first place through his reputation as a magician, though he was not a

¹In this letter, and in any subsequent field reports, I shall not try to give a phonemically correct rendering of Gorowa word, but shall only approximate this by using the available typewriter characters. But I am sure that any literate Gorowa would immediately recognize these words. The

rainmaker. In any case he founded a clan which was named after him, the Harnaa Clan, and established a ruling dynasty which has lasted through six generations, including the present Chief Amri Dodo who is the eighth Wawutmo.



Genealogy of Gorowa Chiefs in Male Line
Numbers Indicate Order of Ruling Chiefs

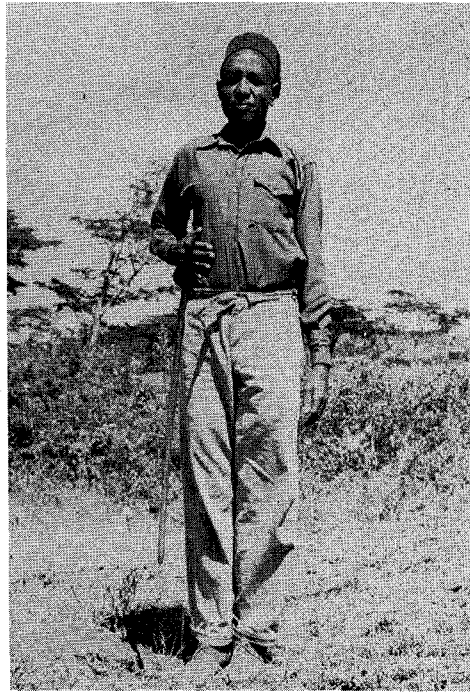
During this period of the chieftainship the Gorowa seem to have been essentially peaceful, and there is no history of further wars on a greater scale than the repulsing of an occasional cattle raid by the Masai or Tatog. In the time of the earlier chiefs the Gorowa are said to have occupied the triangle of country with the base formed by the line from Dareda to Babati to Galapo and the apex being Bereku in the south. They were probably spread thinly, as at present, and did not hold this hilly land very securely. Later the Irangi, who cultivated more intensely and settled more permanently, pushed the Gorowa back from the south, so that the boundary between Mbulu and Kondoa Districts came to be drawn well to the north of what was once Gorowa territory. The infiltration of Irangi and other tribes into Gorowa territory continues to this day.

The Gorowa reacted to this peaceful invasion by clearing and settling in new lands to the west, Gidas being one of the early regions thus settled. The Gorowa methods of settling and cultivating are rather shifting. A man builds a house and clears some fields for cultivation. He reckons that in five to seven years his house will require rebuilding and his land will have lost its fertility. Then he moves to a new location. The traditional system of land tenure involves no sense of permanent ownership; nor does it encourage progressive farming methods or measures for soil protection. Up to now it has

Gorowa language uses a number of sounds which can not be represented by our alphabet: for example, unvoiced "l", glottal and pharyngeal stops, and series of consonants ~~xxx~~ glottalized, palatalized, and nasalized. Thus the name Naa has a glottal stop between the vowels and might be written Na'a.



Lori Sige - Former Subchief
of Gidas



Feo Kongolo - Subchief of
- Gidas

worked satisfactorily because there has been plenty of unoccupied land which was lightly wooded and could be easily cleared for cultivation. In contrast to this, the Irangi have a more developed sense of land ownership which permits a denser population. It also led to deterioration and erosion of the soil until the Agriculture Department took note and instructed the people in methods of soil protection (cf. DER - 9). This instruction seems to have been welcomed, and from where I write this at Gidas I can see the distant Irangi hills lined with contour terraces and trash bunds. Neither erosion nor terracing are to be seen among the Gorowa.

The recent history of the Gorowa has been comparatively uneventful. The Germans arrived in the later days of Uo's long reign. There was no bloodshed at that time, as in the case of the Wambagwe and Barabaig, and Uo was confirmed in his chieftainship. On his death, the German Government appointed the eldest son Qwansawe as chief, though the elders are said to have disapproved. It has sometimes been assumed by colonial powers that the principle of primogeniture must be followed in succession to chieftainships, when in fact no such principle was known to the tribes concerned. Matrilineal tribes have been subject to even greater misunderstanding. These tribes, such as the Irangi, where a man takes the clan of his mother and usually hands on his property and social and political position to his sister's son, find themselves under pressure from at least three sources. Colonial governments favor succession to hereditary political office in the male line; missionaries have felt that Christian children should take their father's name and inherit his property according to the customs prevailing in Europe and America; and when Islam appears on the scene the social predominance of males and the principles of

father-right are insisted upon.

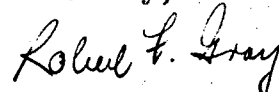
Qwansawe was followed as Wawutmo by his brother Sige who became deeply involved in boundary disputes with the Irangi. Then came the long twenty-year rule of Dodo, under whom the present political set-up, with tribal headquarters at Babati, was established. Dodo became a Mohamedan, and the dynasty will no doubt hold to that faith as long as it remains in power. In RFG - 9, I recounted how Amri was appointed chief shortly before his father Dodo died. It is generally believed that if Amri died, resigned, or for any reason left office, he would be succeeded by Sige's son Zuberi who is now Deputy Chief. Zuberi is intelligent, capable, and honest, but unlike Amri he has had little education.

The Gorowa rainmakers all belong to the Manda clan, and the same is true for the Iraqw. Therefore it is almost certain that the Manda clan had joined the parent tribe before it was divided into Gorowa and Iraqw. The Gorowa believe that the Manda originally came from the Nyaturu Tribe, while the Iraqw place their origin with the Iramba. But in ancient days the Nyaturu and Iramba may have been one tribe. In distinction to the Iraqw, where the rainmakers have been, and still are, powerful and wealthy, the Gorowa rainmakers are distinctly subordinate to the political authorities of the Harnaa Clan. They are comparatively unimportant except in strictly ritual matters, to which further reference will be made in a later report.

The Gorowa are divided into three territorial sections--Babati, Bonga, and Gidas--each section being under a subchief or Gausmo. By tradition the Gause had always been appointed from the Harnaa Clan. This remained the case until last year when Lori Sige resigned as Gausmo of Gidas; a commoner from a different clan was appointed to take his place--Feo Kongolo. The Babati section has become so large that it was decided to subdivide it, making the Galapo area into a separate subchiefdom. I shall be interested in seeing whether the new Gausmo is a Harnaa man. If a commoner gets the post it may indicate a democratic trend which will eventually lead to the chieftainship being put up for general election.

There are no elders in Gidas today. They have all gone off to a meeting at which the D.C.s of Mbulu and Kondoa Districts are supposed to be present. The purpose of the meeting is to settle the Gorowa-Irangi boundary in such a way that everyone is satisfied. But students of Gorowa history know that there will be no final settlement of the ancient boundary dispute. It is one of the historical forces which have held the Gorowa Tribe together.

Sincerely,



Robert F. Gray.

Received New York 8/1/55.