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IRON, BRASS AND BURIAL : THE KAPSIKI BLACKSMITH AND HIS MANY CRAFTS

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Introduction

The Kapsiki[1], one of the many tribes living in the area South of the Chad basin, occupy a stretch of the western edge of the Mandara mountains, on both sides of the border between Cameroon and Nigeria (see map). Called Higi in Nigeria and Kapsiki in Cameroon, they in fact can be considered one ethnic unit, numbering around 150.000. As most of the neighbouring groups they have a primarily horticultural subsistence economy; they cultivate millet and sorghum, maize and groundnuts and raise

[1]The Kapsiki/Higi have been studied at both sides of the border, though the ethnographic emphasis is on the Cameroonian side. Therefore I shall use the term Kapsiki or Kapsiki/Higi for both halves of the tribal conglomerate, indicating the Nigerian side with "Higi" and the Cameroonian side with "Cameroonian Kapsiki", whenever that distinction is called for. Fieldwork among the Kapsiki/Higi has been carried out in 1971, 1972-73, 1979 and 1988, and was financed by grants from the Association for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) and the University of Utrecht, Netherlands.

cattle, sheep and goats. Traditionally living on the edges of the small plateau that characterizes their Cameroonian habitat, or on top of the mountain ridges in the Nigerian part, they cultivated the stony, terraced slopes like most people living in the Mandara area. Before the "pax colonialis" this location offered the best protection against slave raiding (DOMINIK 1908, BARTH 1857/8, DENHAM 1826) while still allowing for subsistence cultivation (KIRK-GREENE 1956). After the establishment of colonial rule, they gradually moved down from their hilltops (BAKER & ZUBEIRO 1955), and fanned out onto the plateau or into the lower river valleys, establishing themselves as agressive and able farmers on the one hand, and as an emerging group of traders and middlemen on the other (MOHRLANG 1972, VAN BEEK 1988b).

The villages of the Kapsiki/Higi are quite clearly recognizable units, as the habitation used to be less dense than e.g. among the Mafa, their Northern neighbours (PODLEWSKI 1966). Kapsiki villages are defined by a demarcated territory, a name, a set of specific patriclans with their migratory histories (VAN BEEK 1982a), and a religiopolitical organization. Their size varies from 500 to 2500 people; relatively large villages are common in this part of the Mandara mountains. Though some are more dispersed than other, all villages share a similar social and political structure, as well as an important we-feeling as members of the same settlement. The village is the most important level of social aggregation and identity. Internally it is divided into wards, clans and lineages, the descent groups usually being scattered over the various wards.

These groups were important during the bouts of fighting within the village in former times, but had little hold over the lives of the members beyond these "temps forts". Their functions in resource management and marriage arrangement were and are limited, compared to the grid they offered for differential social identity (VAN BEEK 1987). The smallest social unit, the compound, inhabitated by a monogamous or polygynous family with some parents of the man living in, was and is far more important in daily life and production. Kapsiki society is characterized by a pervading sense of privacy and individual autonomy (VAN BEEK 1982b), which precludes a close corporate control but enhances adaptability in change.

The blacksmith : a "general specialist"

It is in this settting that "la forge et le forgeron" operate. The blacksmiths[1] in this Kapsiki/Higi society form a 5% minority inside the total population (VAN BEEK 1978:182), and as an endogamous group with associated professional occupations, often have been dubbed a "caste" (PODLEWSKI 1966, LEMBEZAT 1961, HURAULT 1958).

[1] Though the *rerhè* perform many functions and specializations beyond the realm of the forge, I shall use the term "blacksmith", as an equivalent to the french "forgeron", as a translation that has won general acceptance. The term blacksmith in principle denotes both men and women belonging to the social stratum of the *rerhè*; if in particular women are meant, this will be indicated

Their position in the village society is characterized by ambivalence between difference and belonging, between their substantial contribution to the village economy and the view society in general has of them, as a low stratum of society comprised of dirty and dangerous people. Let us first turn towards their manifold functions, in order to arrive at their symbolic position later.

Blacksmiths may be called "general specialists", as they perform the majority of those functions and crafts calling for specialization : funeral, music, divination, magic and medicine, pottery, and finally forging iron and casting brass. As specialists the blacksmiths have their own organization, which partly depends upon their choice occupation, partly is shapen by the social structure of the village. They have their own chief blacksmith as the central figure, closely associated with the village chief. He is, in his turn, assisted by some helpers for specific functions.

Funeral is of prime importance for the blacksmiths among the Kapsiki/Higi. They are the "people of the dead" before all, and the *melimu* (non-smiths) view the *karerhè* (blacksmiths) primarily as undertakers. A village without blacksmiths has a huge problem, as "who is going to bury the dead ?" The chief blacksmith is the one who directs the complicated proceedings of a Kapsiki funeral (VAN BEEK 1978:355 ff), seconded by his son to lead the drumming, and by a representative of another smith family to dig the grave. As part of the ritual - which is a core ritual in Kapsiki society - the blacksmiths dress the corpse, dance with it for the consecutive days, provide the music with drums and

flutes, prepare the corpse for burial, direct the digging of the grave and actually bury the dead after three days of intense ritual work. After the actual burial they conduct some minor rituals during the construction of the tomb, and terminate the proceedings with a final ritual at the tombsite. Especially in large villages, funerals form an important source of blacksmith-income; not only the blacksmith-functionaries are paid (often in goats), but the musicians too receive a substantial reward for their services. Beyond that, funeral means a high time for the blacksmiths, as it is during funeral that their position in the villages is at its strongest.

Music, too, is closely associated with the dead. Not all musical instruments are played exclusively by the blacksmiths; a kind of banjo, some kind of open flutes and one drum type are not reserved for blacksmiths, but may be played by *melimu* too. Yet the blacksmiths are the real musicians, having a monopoly over all instruments played at the "rites de passage", esp. funeral. Music is the prerogative of the younger blacksmiths, and among their many occupations, brings in a sizeable income (only the practice of medicine pays better). Their musical contribution to village life does not stop at the large rituals and festivals, as they routinely serve as praise singers for the village elite, like the chief and his helpers, serving in the same capacity as the "griots" in adjoining societies (HAAFKENS 1979). For this function they use both types of Kapsiki guitars *(gagara, ngwulèngu)*. The types of drums used in burial depend on the social importance of the dead, while the types of flutes vary with the growing season of the crops (VAN BEEK 1978:185).

Divination, though not exclusively a blacksmith domain, nevertheless is dominated by them. Some non-smiths may perform divination, but are not expected to do so for a clientèle. Divinatory techniques vary; the most important ones are the crabedivination and the divination with stones, both of which have been amply documented by now for the Mandara region. A highly intriguing variant is divination through a small "bird" that tweets in the night; the "bird" responds with its "song" to questions put by its blacksmith-owner. The "birdsong" is then interpreted by the blacksmith to his client, using the melody layer of the tonal Kapsiki/Higi language (VAN BEEK 1978:397ff). However, the number of divinatory techniques is not restricted; any new technique entering the area, may be picked up and used. As a craft, it is important but does not pay well. The intermediary position of the blacksmith is nowhere as clear as in this occupation, but so is his marginal status : he is considered an answering device, a non-person whose personal influence should be eliminated as much as possible from the answers arrived at.

Magic and medicine form a closely linked duo in Kapsiki society (VAN BEEK 1975), and - like divination - are dominated by the blacksmiths. Knowledge of traditional *rhwè* (medicine/magic) is among the most restricted of cognitive domains; composition of medicination is kept very secret, as it forms a considerable source of income. In order to know what blacksmith commands what medicine, a Kapsiki has to shop around in his or her personal network of blacksmith-relations. Some blacksmiths, who are very proficient in it, gain a regional fame

and status through it, that may run counter to their low general status. Among the blacksmiths, the women have their own medicinal specializations, most often directed at healing childrens diseases. One important technique reserved for blacksmith-women is the *kwantedewushi,* (to dig out things), a technique to remove from the body foreign objects, that have been projected into it by magic or contagion.

Pottery is - as in most of this area - another craft strictly reserved for blacksmith-women. Each and every smith-woman is a potter, while no female non-smith will dare to make pottery. Some potters are - of course - more proficient than others; while all smith-women may make their own pots and most sell a few of the smaller items, only a few produce large vases and pots in substantial numbers. Though some pottery may be sold at the market, most of it - especially the larger items - are produced on command. The technique used in pottery is coiling, in which rolled strings of wet clay are added upon each other.

This overview brings us to the final, and for the sake of this paper central specialization, the working of metal. Three types of metal work can be discerned : smelting iron, forging iron and brass casting. The smelting of iron traditionally was not an important feature of smith-work among the Kapsiki /Higi; in the little kingdom of Sukur, just North of Kapsiki/Higi territory (KIRK-GREENE 1958, SASSOON 1964) the majority of smelting was done, and the Kapsiki blacksmiths relied on this iron as their outside supply. In doing so they helped to create a curious dependence on Sukur, as with the iron also

political power, at least the religious paraphernalia sacralizing the "chefferie", stemmed from Sukur (VAN BEEK 1988b)[1]. In Sukur, however, smelting seemed to not have been an exclusively blacksmith occupation : the whole village participated in the smeltings (KIRK-GREENE 1958, VAN BEEK 1978:187, *cf.* MAUNY 1971). The Kapsiki blacksmiths concentrated on the true blacksmith vocation : the forging of the iron bars. These *duburu* were the form in which the raw iron was available for the blacksmith, but also functioned as a limited purpose money in Kapsiki society (MEEK 1931). In brideprice payments they still hold their place (VAN BEEK 1987).

Brass casting, as a smith technique is associated with the southern part of the Kapsiki territory, as the Kapsiki/Higi are at the Northern rim of the diffusion area of the lost wax technique (LUKAS 1977). Brass is less central to village life (as we shall see, the opposition between brass - actually brass - and iron is quite important) than iron. Still, the few blacksmiths who perform this craft, do earn a substantial income through it, as the tourist trade has picked up on "les bronzes kapsiki". Those blacksmiths who cast brass, perform few other specializations, at least do not normally play any musical instrument. In ritual, the craft of brass bears some relation to cyclical rites, *i.e.* the defense of the crops against certain parasites.

Viewing the different functions of the Kapsiki/Higi blacksmith, the combination of these

[1] In this respect the Kapsiki/Higi with their limited centralization of power are quite comparable with their western neighbours, the Marghi (VAUGHAN 1964).

specializations should be explored. No blacksmith performs all crafts, few specialise only in one. The following table gives the combination of specializations for the blacksmiths in Mogodé (each cell indicating the number of black-smiths performing both crafts) :

	guitar	flute	forging	brass	violin	burial	medicine	divination
drum	5	2	-	1	1	4	9	7
guitar		5	3	-	1	1	5	2
flute			2	-	1	-	2	-
forging				-	1	1	2	2
brass					-	2	2	2
violin						1	1	1
burial							1	4
medicine								6

Three groups of blacksmith crafts can be discerned :

1. Drums - burial - divination - guitar
2. Brass casting - burial - divination
3. Forging iron - guitar - flute - medicine

The first cluster of occupations has the chief blacksmith as its prototype : the younger blacksmiths in this group play the guitar or banjo, their older kinsmen are the main undertakers of the village.

The second group of blacksmiths, the smallest one in the village, claims a Southern origin : they combine brass casting with partici-pation in burial rites. Their divinatory techniques are different from those of the first cluster, and their youngster may play the drums, but no other instruments.

The third group, those of the actual smithing blacksmiths, are not central in burial. Though they may play the flute or the guitar, they do not use the drum, being the main funeral instrument.

Playing the one-stringed violin and the practice of medicine and magic can be combined with all other specializations. This division of labour, ritual as well as in production, can be subsumed in the following table :

Clusters of blacksmith specializations :

type	chief smith	brass smith	master of forge
major craft	burial	brass casting	iron forging
origin	Sukur (North)	Gudur (South)	Sukur (North)
ritual impact	rites de passage	cyclic rites	protective rites
instruments	ritual (drums!)	few	non-ritual

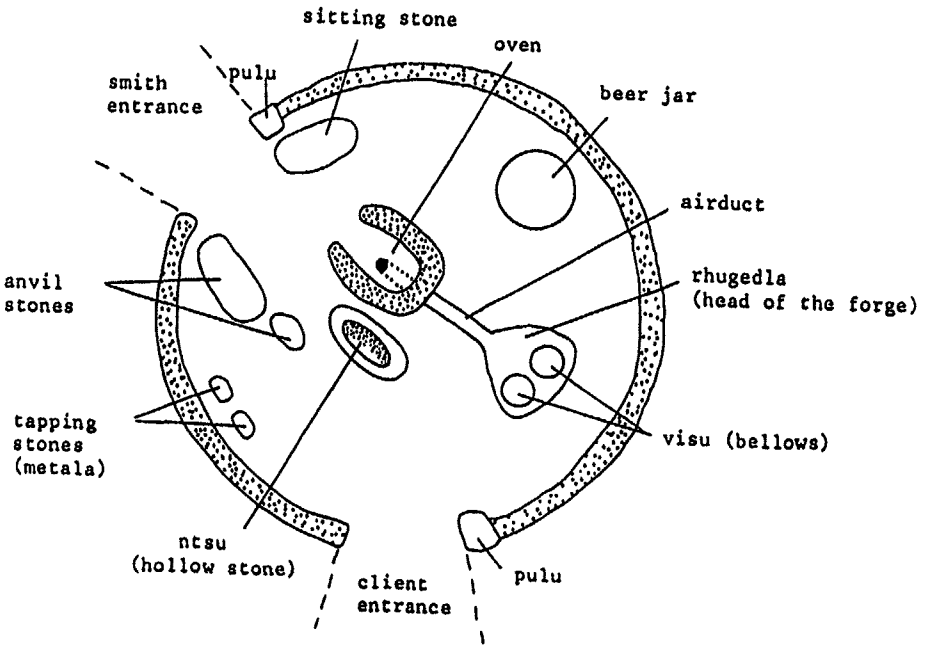
Following the migration traditions, one could postulate two basic kinds of blacksmiths : those from Sukur and those from the South (though these blacksmiths too trace their descent to Gudur which is the place of origin for Sukur also). The Sukur blacksmiths perform two major tasks in the village, forging of iron and burial; these two tasks are kept somewhat separate. Historically, the blacksmiths migrating from the South added the brass casting to the craft specter, and were assigned an inter-mediary position between the two Sukur types.

The forge in Kapsiki society

So we have seen that the specific smithing techniques (iron and brass) are part of a larger gamut of blacksmith occupations, and cannot be viewed in isolation. The other crafts, burial, music and medicine at least, are continually present as a background to the role of the metal working techniques within the village society.

The village forge is the one in which iron is worked. It is housed in a low hut, with small entrances and a loosely thatched roof (see picture). The plan of the *gedla* is quite standard :

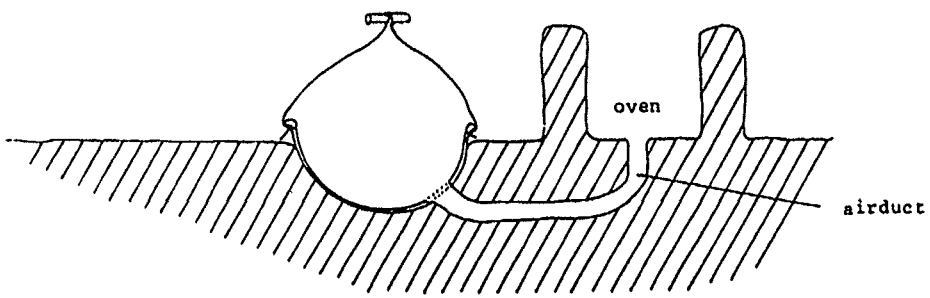
Plan of the forge



The tools of the Kapsiki/Higi blacksmith are relatively simple : a hammer (*ndevelu*), a pair of thongs *(meke)* and a poker *(metukumu),* all of which the blacksmith may have fabricated himself. Stones furnish the anvils, one for large objects, and another for smaller work, usually. An old grinding stone serves as water trough to harden the glowing iron. One stone is used for seating. The oven is made from a U-shaped banco wall about 30 cm high. The cast for the bellows (*rhu gedla,* 'head of the forge') is made from banco too, with two vases embedded in them, pierced in the middle to let through the air. The leather bellows are attached to these vases and a pottery shaft *(ntsefa)* leads the air from the bellows-cast to the oven. Finally a few vases to put the fire away and an occasional large jar for water storage finish the contents of the *gedla.*

The brass oven is based on the same principles of bellows, oven and tools, with one major change : the oven is out in the open, beyond the village perimeter in the bush.

Cross-section of brass-oven



The technique used is the standard "cire perdue" one : the smith fashions a wax model of the object *(duku),* covers it carefully with a mixture of red clay and chopped grass, leaving in a straw for the wax to escape. He then heats it in the over, and retrieves the wax flowing out. Against the opening he puts a cup with the mixture of ore or residu of former castings. Setting the empty mold upright in the oven, he heats it up till the ore is molten. With a pair of thongs he quickly inverts the cast, so that the wax flows into it, the air leaving through the pores in the cast. After cooling in water, the mold is broken, the smelting cone broken off and the brass object made ready for the client by retouching it with a file.

The two forges, iron and brass, though both part and parcel of smith work, are each other's structural opposites; this shows in the places and ways in which they are built, in their functioning in the village as well as in the ideology accompanying them.

The iron forge, *gedla,* is built in the village, near the compound of the smith who is going to work in it. In principle more than one *gedla* per village is possible, but not usual. The construction is performed by a large working group, consisting of *melimu* (non-blacksmiths) recruited from the clan to which the blacksmith belongs, from the ward and from kinsmen and friends of his neighbours. One *melimu* lineage is responsible for the particular blacksmith, i.e. the lineage into which the (ancestor of the) blacksmith has been adopted (see below, VAN BEEK 1978:176). They are the ones who will "command" the *gedla,* i.e. henceworth be responsible

for its well being and functioning. A representative of this lineage, member of a family which has shown proclivity at doing so over generations, is *ndemara gedla* ("the chief of the forge") or *ndedzeve* ("the one with the hand"). His task is to supervise the proceedings, both the construction and later eventual repairs. In actual construction this *ndedzeve* puts the stones marking the two entrances of the *gedla* in their place : these form the *pulu*, a term used for the priviliged seating place in the forecourt, the ritual place of the elders (VAN BEEK 1985). The construction is done collectively and rapidly. The smith himself puts the stones and implements into the structure, and fashions his tools. Before using a new forge, the blacksmith has his wife make a sacrificial jar. Taking this new jar into the *gedla,* he puts it in front of the oven, takes a mouth full of red beer and spits the beer over jar and oven, saying "My god, my god, let us be healthy, let the wounds stay outside". After pouring on the jar, he sacrifices a chicken on it in the standard Kapsiki fashion (VAN BEEK 1988). This sacrifice is performed each year at the start of the dry season, when the roof has been repaired. It is the *ndedzeve* who furnishes the chicken and indicates the day for the sacrifice.

A brass oven, in contrast, is built in the bush, beyond the village perimeter, out of contact with any fields whatsoever. It is the blacksmith himself who chooses the site and performs the construction (which does not include a hut, just the oven). After finishing he sacrifices a chicken on the *rhu gedla,* the bellows. Though he too, like any blacksmith has his *ndedzeve,* a non-smith who "commands" him,

this one does not enter into either construction or maintenance of the oven. Even the chicken for the sacrifice has to be furnished by the smith. So, building a brass oven is very much a solo undertaking. It is done in the dry season after the harvest.

The functioning of the iron forge is a social event; when not working for the market, the blacksmith works on command for a particular client. After arranging a date, the client comes with charcoal and iron, the latter in the form of bars (*duburu*), and assists the blacksmith at the bellows. His wives brew some beer and feed both men, who drop some beer and food in the oven first : *wusu tanga, shala ta da* (your thing, my god). Any onlookers and passersby are welcome to look at the work, though the temperature within the hut rises quickly and makes a long stay uncomfortable. Thus, forging iron is done in continuous interaction between smith and client, as a part of village social life. Iron working does not interfere with the ripening season of the crops : the forge can function throughout the wet season, just as it may serve in a ritual against a millet parasite.

> For this ritual, called for when *ngwèdè* larves, threaten the crop, the village chief cries out in the evening before that nobody should leave for the outfields that particular day, as the ritual, also called *gedla,* would be held in the oldest forge in the village. Together with the *ndedzeve,* representatives from other wards gather around the forge. When everybody is present, the *ndedzeve* sets out alone to gather the ingredients for the ritual : a few larves, some medicinal onion, some varieties of sorghum and some leaves. The blacksmith in question then pulverizes this with his iron hammer, mixing some charcoal in to blacken it : the sorghum should become "dark", *i.e.* dark green. The ward representatives then add their harvest of larves, beans, ocre,

couch and sesamum. The resulting mixture, called *gedla* too, is divided between the men, together with a dish of cooked beans and sorghum *(zhazha)*. The men leave without talking, looking straight ahead and put the stuff at some cross-roads in their wards, where many villagers pass by, but out of way for "foreigners", *i.e.* people from other villages.

The functioning of the brass oven stands in clear contrast with the iron forge. Built outside the village it is operated by the blacksmith alone, assisted often by his wife. No client is present (today tourists are!) and though he may work on command, during the actual casting there is no contact with the client. The whole process is separated from the village, not in the least by some strict taboos. Whenever the brass oven would be in close contact with fields or crops, the harvest would not *"serhe"*, bear well. In that case one would seemingly harvest a large amount, but in fact very little produce would show up in the granary. Brass can only be cast during the dry season, after harvest, owing to the same taboo, and people who cultivate should not come into contact too much with brass. The Kapsiki word for brass is *mnze*, the same word as for bee and honey, due to the fact that beeswax is used for making the forms. The millet and sorghum do not "tolerate" the bees, the Kapsiki state, as bees "never stay in the same place, and likewise the grains would not stay in the *tame* (granary)". The only time at which contact between *mnze* and the crops is called for, is in case of crop sickness.

When the *mcafcéa* occurs, a sorghum disease rendering the leaves of the young plants yellow, the *mnze*-smith receives some grease from a sheep from his *ndedzeve*. The blacksmith mixes this with a piece of indigenous

"aubergine" (*manciha*), a piece of medicinal onion (*hwèbè*) and some gombo into a thick paste, which he then puts in several fields of the village where the disease shows. This ritual is performed about every other year, and is not advertised by the village chief; neither is the mixture distributed through the ward chiefs or other people. In contrast with the *gedla* this ritual is a hidden affair.

One curious consequence is that people are not aware of the actual technique of brass casting. Iron working is public, brass casting is private knowledge. Both the non-smiths and the blacksmiths who do not perform the brass casting, had the idea that it was the beeswax which changed into brass : for them it was not casting but transformation. They emphatically denied the existence or presence of ore or raw brass in the proceedings; no, the *mnze* became the *mnze*, as there was no difference between the two; at least no third element was involved between the wax model and the end product. Though the process cannot be called secret, it is private (VAN BEEK 1975) and the knowledge of it very much restricted. Even the sons of the blacksmith who performed this craft in Mogodé were not aware of the process; not only had their father never taught them the craft, but they had never watched him either.

The opposition iron - brass is not only important among the blacksmith minority, but also in the society of the Kapsiki/Higi in general. Throughout the communal rituals in Kapsiki religion - "rites de passage" which nevertheless have a definite place in the ritual calendar - iron and brass are used as symbols with opposite semantic loading.

Most clearly this can be shown in initiation, for boys and for girls. This yearly event, reuniting the whole village just before and well after the rainy season, marks the coming of age of boys and the first marriage of girls. Though the proceedings are much too complicated to be sketched here, the symbolism of their respective outfit is striking. The *gewela*, the boys to be initiated, wear a new leather skirt and are decked out with three different types of adornment : cowry shells (a band over their shoulders), fiber from the wild pineapple (around their head, wrists and ankles) and brass (various objects : one at their temple, rings, bracelets and around their waist). Their weapons they carry, mainly a spear, in the last phase of the initiation is adorned with the neck furs of a ram. The *makwa* (girls), who for a considerable part of the proceedings are initiated alongside the boys, are dressed in different types of objects. Their main skirt is an iron one, *livu*, which is central in the ritual and will remain an important ritual vestment for her whole married life. A ceinture made from cows leather and some wild beans fibers to cover their buttocks complete it. As further adornment they wear iron bracelets around wrists and sometimes around their ankles, as well as iron rings around their fingers.

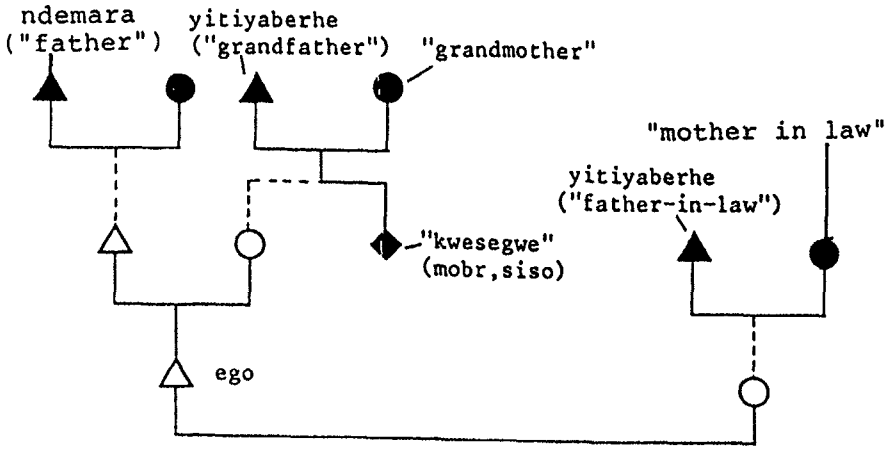
So, among other objects that are a part of the adornment and of the symbolic system, the contrast between iron and brass is obvious. The brass of the boys is associated with *gamba,* bush, with all things and animals beyond the confines of the village, roaming freely without attachments, like the "bees who never stay in the same place". Their other

adornment, the *peha* and the neck furs of the ram *(mnta)* are associated with the bush too, i.e. with the wild vegetation and the setting and rising sun. The iron used in decking out the girls points to stability, immobility and belongingness, and on the other hand to fertility and life, at least to defense against evil and illness. The rest of their outfit, the ceinture and the fibers, bear a similar message relating them to the village property and riches as well as its territory. So through the differential use of iron and brass the new people coming into the village community as fully fledged members, are defined a mobile population of warriors and a immobile population of child-bearers. Yet, the dialectics of Kapsiki religion (VAN BEEK 1989) indicate that the social reality may be quite at odds with its symbolic representation. In fact, in the social life of the Kapsiki/Higi, the men are the stable part, belonging to the village and its territory. The women, as they go from marriage to marriage and from husband to husband (VAN BEEK 1986b), form the floating population that moves through the village without ever developing strong roots to it (VAN BEEK 1987). So the symbolism, as often the case among the Kapsiki /Higi, expresses not the way things are, but the situation perceived as an ideal. This opposition between immobility and mobility pervades Kapsiki society (VAN BEEK 1975) and similar sets of symbols are found in other spheres of life. Still, the opposition brass - iron does form an important feature of this system.

Blacksmith and society

The blacksmiths are not only craftsmen and "general specialists", they do form a part of Kapsiki society in many ways. Though strictly endogamous, they make up part of the "normal" clans in the village; the blacksmiths have no clans or lineages of their own, but are "adopted" into the *melimu* clans. Of course, no biological links can be traced, but yet the blacksmiths call their non-smith clansmen *wuziyitiyeda,* "brother" (son of my father) or *wuzhatayitiyeda* (daughter of my father) which are standard between clanbrothers, reserving the other sibling terms *wuzemiyeda* (son of my mother) or *wuzhtayitiyeda* (daughter of my mother) for their smith-brothers and sisters. Smiths have become clansmen through the mechanism of immigrant-adoption : whenever a newcomer arrives in the village, he makes home with someone in and of the village who will act as his host, and as his social father should he decide to stay. Though a clear sense of "roots" permeates Kapsiki society, the majority of villagers stem from someone who does not factually descend from the founders of the village, but from immigrants *(ndenza),* a fact realized by most and appreciated by none of them. In the case of the Kapsiki/Higi blacksmiths, all of them wandered in after the founding of the village. Yet, in the case of the blacksmiths, this process of adoption is even more important than among the non-smiths themselves. A blacksmith has to have a *ndemara*, someone in command, a social father, so he has to be adopted anyway. Even in the cases where according to oral tradition the village was

founded by blacksmiths (like Sir), a later adoption by the smiths into the incoming non-smith lineage was inevitable. Likewise, adoption of an incoming blacksmith by another blacksmith is out of the question. The smiths need this arrangement for several reasons and purposes. First of all, the blacksmiths are considered not fully mature individuals. Formerly associated with the "slaves of the village", nowadays with the "children of the village" (the difference is not as big as it seems at first glance), the blacksmiths' social status is too low to act for themselves in any problematic situations arising between them and the *melimu*. For instance when involved in a court litigation it is the *ndemara* who speaks for the smith, not the blacksmith himself. A variant of this adoption system is found in the marriage proceedings. Each bride, smith or not, that moves from her fathers compound to the one of her groom, has a "second father" close by : a kinsmen of her father who watches her well being and to whom she can flee in case of serious marital or domestic problems. Also the blacksmith bride. Her "second father" always is a non-smith, a *melu* from her father's clan who lives in her vicinity. He will be called "father" by her and "grandfather" by her children. Consequently, each blacksmith has a double set of kinsmen : the *rerhè*-ones, representing the "real" kinship, and the non-smith ones who form their kinship entrance into the society at large. For all relevant kinship relations the attachment of the blacksmith with the majority is guaranteed.



Another link between the two strata is provided by friendship, an important feature of Kapsiki society. The blacksmith men have a tendency to choose their friends from the other group, the non-smiths, at least within the village. Of course, the number of blacksmiths is low enough to render this kind of choice quite probable, but it is more than a random phenomenon. Blacksmith women, e.g., have practically no friendships outside their group. Friendship between a *melu* and a *rerhè* is fully acceptable. They walk, eat and drink together; however the difference in food taboos does give the relationship a specific flavour. The non-smith cannot eat and drink what his friends wife has prepared. So a slight hierarchical tendency remains, the *rerhè* eating and drinking more at his friends house than vice versa. Both friends can also take small items from each others houses at will :

the *melu* will snatch up a piece of pottery or a length cord, while the blacksmith, acting with a little bit more circumspection, will take only food that is inedible for his friend; thus he might take a varan or turtle that the non-smith has happened to catch. So, even when friendship is important as a cross-caste link, the relationship between blacksmith and non-smith never reaches the relaxed easiness of a friendship between peers.

Throughout, the relation between the two groups is a hierarchical one; the blacksmiths are definitely lower on the scale than the non-smiths. Most clearly this can be seen in the composure of the blacksmiths versus the village chief. All *rerhè* are considered to be the "claque" of the chief; whenever he speaks, they clap their hands softly in the background, either to support his statements or to draw attention to his speaking turn. "If there are no blacksmiths, people never will get silent", the Kapsiki say. In social drinking, blacksmiths may never drink from the same vase as the others; therefore they carry a plaited cap that they use for drinking. It is filled by all non-smiths present, each pouring a little bit as a gift to the smith. Declining to give the *rerhè* either beer or food is unheard of; they are, as mentioned, the "children of the village", and can never be refused. The smith compound, as a result, is a more or less public domain. Anyone feels free to enter a smith compound, stay around when he performs divination for others or to watch him forging. So a smith does not enjoy the privacy that the *melu* so strongly cherishes and defends (VAN BEEK 1982b).

This accessability of the smith compound is balanced by the blacksmith through his control over information flow; his may be a public domain, his knowledge is characterized by secrecy. Medicinal and magical techniques and divination offer good examples for this tendency, as does brass smelting, mentioned above. The endogamy enhances their possibilities for information control. As much of this information is associated with problems of life and death, the same blacksmiths that form a lower stratum in society are respected individually as healers and feared as sorcerers. "There is no blacksmith without magic" the Kapsiki emphatically state. Though some are more proficient in this field than others, all blacksmiths are routinely associated with magic, both of the healing and the destroying kind. When a blacksmith dies, only his peers will dare to enter the dances; no *melu* will venture into the *nehwene rhwè* (mourning for the magic), where the blacksmiths sport their largest magical objects. Watching the proceedings with fascinated misgivings, the non-smiths keep themselves out of the fray in this competition of magical force. So, the lack of adult status in normal social intercourse, for the blacksmith is balanced by his more than adult status in religious matters. Characteristically, during funeral times the blacksmiths govern the proceedings. Neither the family of the deceased nor the village notables have the power to move them from their ways, either hasten a burial or change the dance. Ritual times are smith times, all the more at death ritual.

The stereotypes people have of blacksmiths correspond with this ambivalent position of the

smith as lower but dangerous. The *rerhè* are deemed to be more intelligent than the non-smith, having more *ntsehwele* (cunning, VAN BEEK 1982b). They are the ones who are never deceived by masquerades in stories, they "see through" the front non-smiths put up. They are said to work hard, i.e. continuously, never sitting still for a moment and to be quick to adopt new procedures, techniques and ways to promote themselves (the Christian missions tended to be dominated by them in their first phase). Blacksmiths reportedly do not become angry as quickly and easily as the "normal" Kapsiki; finally among blacksmiths no deviant people (like witches or clairvoyants) are said to exist. These stereotypes, of course, tell more about Kapsiki society than about the blacksmiths proper, but they are illustrative of the general role of the blacksmith in Kapsiki/Higi society : the *rerhè* is the mirror of society, the opposite of the "standard" Kapsiki :

non-smith	*blacksmith*
privacy-oriented	no privacy
social adult	social child
knowledge private but not secret	knowledge public but secret
wealth important	cunning important
agressive	containment of emotions

Other oppositions would be possible to mention (VAN BEEK 1978:217), but these suffice to show the blacksmith as a specific variant of Kapsiki culture, in such a way that he gives an oppositional reflection of the mainstream values of this society. Their special position is expressed in one dominant idiom,

that of pollution. The blacksmiths are "dirty" for the non-smiths, they stink. Two reasons account for that. Firstly, the blacksmiths eat different food than the *melu,* i.e. they consume several kinds of meat that the non-smiths deem inedible. Animals like horses, varans, turtles, snakes and donkeys are "smith-food". Elsewhere (VAN BEEK 1982c) I have argued that this taboo system can be interpreted as a social definition of self for the blacksmiths : they tend to eat those animals that show similar differences with the other beasts, as the blacksmiths with the non-smiths; thus, the blacksmiths eat carnivores, carrion birds, black birds and "musical animals". The major reaction of the non-smiths follows the notion of "pollution" : blacksmiths are *rerhè* just because they eat the food of the blacksmith, not the other way around. The second reason for pollution is the association with death. The blacksmiths are the people of death, undertakers, musicians and diviners, all things needed for a proper burial. This too, for the Kapsiki, is a major reason for their smell. Corpses smell, in fact the smell of a corpse is the vilest the Kapsiki can imagine. So blacksmiths take care of that what is both the nearest to them and the most despised, a kinsman or woman who is turning into something utterly reprehensible. Non-smith people may touch corpses without turning into a blacksmith, this type of pollution can be washed off, as long as it occurs incidentally. In fact, the sisters sons of the deceased play a considerable part in the burial proceedings. Still, the continual and repeated association with death, makes for a permanent pollution.

So the blacksmith among the Kapsiki/Higi stand between society and its environment in several ways. Both types exemplify some major relations between man and nature. The agricultural production is made possible by the forge, but - at least ritually - the reproduction is guaranteed by it, esp. the iron one. The women are tied to the village, people are protected against harm and illness coming from outside, and the chances on fertility are maximalized. So the iron forge with its whole gamma of ideology and relations, mediates between men and women, between danger and stability. On the other hand the brass forge mediates between the village and the surrounding bush, between man and animal, between crop and wild vegetation, between hunting and agriculture. Finally the tomb, as the third linchpin of blacksmith work, mediates between life and not-life, between kin and non-kin. Thus, the Kapsiki blacksmith, with his manifold functions and various crafts, as a general specialist in this society, mediates between nature and culture. In doing so, he is loaded with some of the dangers of the outer world, be it bush, fertility or death; as mediator he is filled with the same ambiguity with which man faces this existential world.

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THE BLACKSMITH AND THE RAINMAKER AMONG THE VERRE

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The Verre, numbering about 50000, live in the country south of Yola, the capital of Gongola State, in north-eastern Nigeria. The terrain varies considerably. Some Verre communities inhabit the flattish country south of Yola Town, others still live in the hill country, others in the country of low hills and stream valleys around Yadim, the market centre where I lived. In the 19th century they experienced extensive raiding from the Fulani. In the colonial period they were placed under the Fulani Emir of Adamawa, and, at the present time, the chief of Karlahi, who is the senior Verre chief, is nominated by the Adamawa Emirate Council (other chiefs being simply ward chiefs). Fulfulde became *lingua franca* of the area, though now Hausa is tending to replace it. Verre over forty generally adhere to traditional beliefs, though many have Muslim and some Christian names. The world religions have been more successful among the younger generation, and, in the area where I worked, Verre Christians outnumbered Muslims.

Verre live in compounds, usually fenced by matting, containing a household, or households,