

Why Dogs Rummage through Hearths

(as narrated by Liwalaa Ntakbi in Nasom on 16/03/2022)

Introduction

Steeped in the Konkomba phenomenological knowledge system, this story offers explanation as regards dogs' penchant for rummaging through hearths. The story relates how a dog employs wit to get other animals to abandon the dinner prepared by *ubor* for his subjects who helped him do some work on his farm. After eating his fill, the dog saves the rest of the food in *ubor*'s wives' hearths for another day. To watch the Likpakpaln narration [click here](#).

Story

'There once lived a certain *ubor*,' Ntakbi commences his tale without the usual formality of announcing his intent to tell the story first since he did that at the outset of the storytelling session.¹

'M-hn!' responds his audience.

He continues thus:

One day *ubor* called for *nkpaawiin* and cooked beans for the 'after-*nkpaawiin*' get-together guests.² When the food was ready, all the animals, together with all *ipiel* and *uboja*, gathered at the palace. As the beans was being served, some fell near the hearth so *uboja* ate what was on the floor as they awaited the rest of the food. This infuriated the other animals, especially *ipiel* and *ilaanten*, so they criticized *uboja*

The latter also got angry and decided to isolate himself from the rest of the guests. While lying at a reasonable distance, *uboja* suddenly barked – and you know that whenever *uboja* barks, there must be something approaching. After barking, *uboja* shouted, 'Did you say a hunter? Yes, there are lots of them here'

On hearing this, all the animals fled for fear of being killed by the hunter. *Uboja* had all the beans to himself and ate his fill. After that, he buried the rest in *ubor*'s wives' hearths. Since then, whenever *uboja* is hungry, he rummages through the nearest hearth in search of the beans he buried at *ubor*'s 'after-*nkpaawiin*' get-together. *(The storyteller breaks into gestures as he relates this last sentence of his narration.)*

Notes

1.

In Konkomba storytelling culture, one can plunge directly into his or her story without seeking permission from the audience or without announcing his/her intent to tell the story. This is mostly the case when a storytelling session has been ongoing for a while, or if the storyteller has already told one or more stories and is seeking to add another one

2.

In Konkomba culture, it is customary to host one's work party to a get-together after nkpaawiin. Typically, heavy foods such as tuo zaafi (aka TZ), fufu, or yam slices can be served together with pito (a local beverage/beer made from guinea corn) and/or patasii (local gin akin to vodka). While this get-together is used to express the nkpaawiin caller's gratitude, it is also a platform for communal bonding in a more relaxed atmosphere outside the serious, heated work environment on the farm. Note that 'after-nkpaawiin' get-togethers are only associated with very physical farm-labor-related ikpaawiin – such as clearing of farmlands, plowing, making of yam mounds, etc. During most ikpaawiin, however, food is usually served but no get-together is held afterward, except in cases of physical farming activities such as those mentioned above among others.

A Glossary of Likpakpaln Words

ubor

the political head of a Konkomba community. Ubor is usually the eldest male member of the royal family. He inherits that position from his father after the latter's demise. Thus, Konkombas practice the patrilineal system of inheritance.

nkpaawiin

communal activity or labor. Among Konkombas when one is swamped with work, he or she can ask for help from others, who would usually respond generously in their numbers provided the 'help-seeker' has been participating in ikpaawiin (plural form of nkpaawiin). Ikpaawiin are mostly called when one has a lot of farm work, is building, flooring or roofing a house, shelling maize/corn, cracking groundnuts, or thrashing guinea corn among other physical activities. Such occasions are not just for working but also for communal interaction and bonding.

uboja

Likpakpaln word for a male dog. In everyday usage, uboja is sometimes inappropriately used for a dog – male or female – instead of the correct gender neutral noun, ubo. In the context of this story, therefore, when the storyteller says that is why uboja rummages through hearths, he is not restricting this habit to male dogs. He is referring to dogs in general – male or female..

ipiel

plural form of upiel, which is the Likpakpaln word for an antelope.

ilaanten

Likpakpaln word for monkeys. The singular form is ulaanten.