



Decorative Carving on Wood, Especially on Their Burial Memorials, by the Bètsilèo Malagasy
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the household charms are placed there, and there also invocations are made and prayers offered.

In reply to a question of the Chairman as to the Malagasy word for "gold," Mr. Sibree said that this was *vòlamèna*, lit. "red money," and probably a comparatively modern introduction; the word for "silver" being *vòlafòtsy*, "white money."

DECORATIVE CARVING ON WOOD, *especially on their BURIAL MEMORIALS*, by the BÈTSILÈO MALAGASY.

[WITH PLATES XVI AND XVII.]

By the Rev. JAMES SIBREE.

BEFORE speaking of the subject proper of this paper, I should preface it by saying that it ought to have been read by my friend and brother missionary, the Rev. G. A. Shaw, and not by myself. Four or five years ago, when he was still in England, a meeting was arranged by Professor Max Müller, I believe in connection with this Institute, at which Mr. Shaw was to have read a paper, or, at least, given a short address, explanatory of the series of rubbings which he made in Madagascar, and which are here exhibited. Unfortunately, Mr. Shaw's engagements were so numerous in connection with the London Missionary Society, that he was unable to attend the meeting which had been proposed for him; and as he afterwards returned to Madagascar, the rubbings have remained in the keeping of your Secretary ever since. I much regret that Mr. Shaw could not himself explain them, as he lived for several years in the Bètsilèo province, and had consequently much fuller acquaintance with the subject, than anyone not resident in that part of the country could possibly have. However, I have myself taken great interest in these carvings, and during two journeys made through the district I tried to gain what information I could about these examples of native Malagasy art; so I will make no further apology for submitting what little I know about them to the Institute.

To those who have paid attention to the indigenous art developed amongst the uncivilized races of mankind, and are acquainted with the elaborate and varied ornamentation used by the Malayan, the Polynesian, and the Melanesian tribes, there is something very surprising in the almost total absence of ornamental art amongst the Hova and some of the other peoples inhabiting Madagascar. If we look at any illustrated book describing the inhabitants of the Pacific Islands, or, still better,

Types of Carved Ornamentation (in wood) employed by the

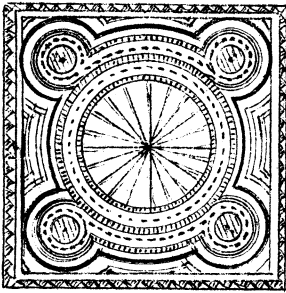


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

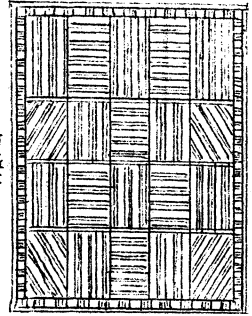


Fig. 3

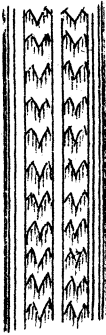


Fig. 4

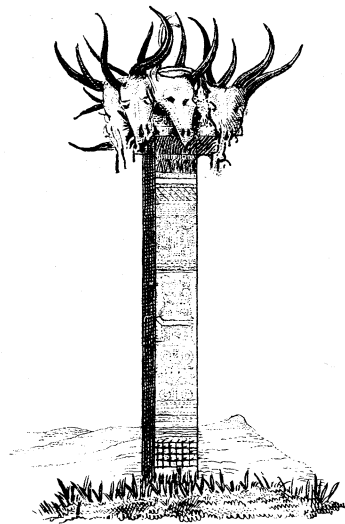


Fig. 8, Memorial Post with
Ox skulls.

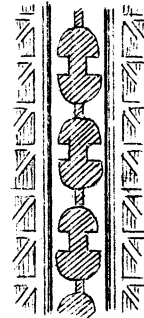


Fig. 5

Fig. 6

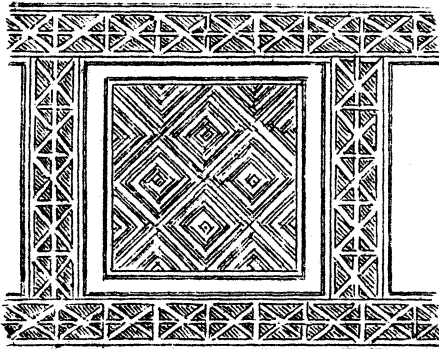
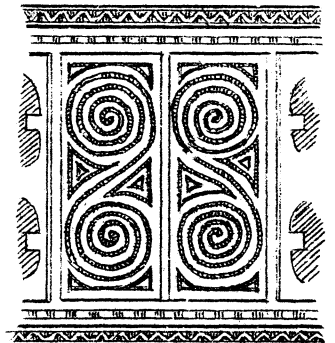


Fig. 7



Drawn by James Sibree, chiefly from

Bétsiléó Malagasy in their Burial Memorials and their Houses

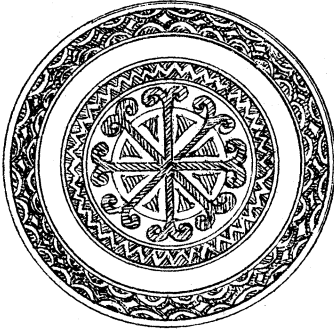


Fig. 9



Fig. 10

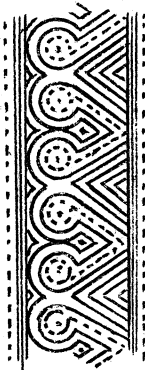


Fig. 11

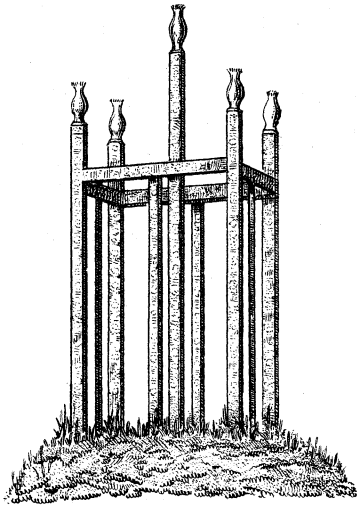


Fig. 15. A Bétsiléó Cenotaph

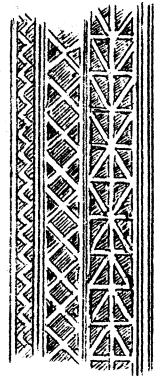


Fig. 12

Fig. 13

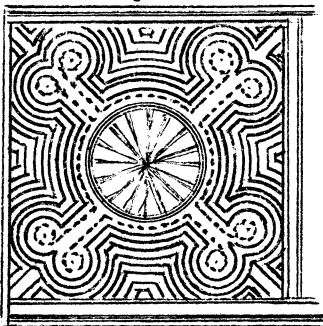
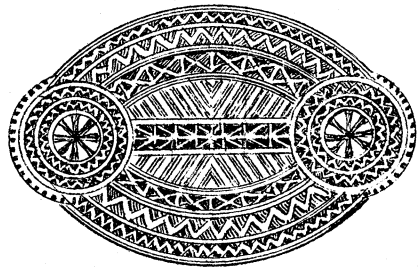


Fig. 14



Rubbings made by George A. Shaw.

if we carefully study the magnificent ethnological galleries of our British Museum, or the Pitt-Rivers collection at Oxford, we shall find that every group, and sometimes every solitary island, has each its peculiar style of ornament, special to itself and easily distinguishable from that of other groups or islands. Their canoes and paddles, clubs and spears, houses and beds, dishes and spoons, pipes and snuff-boxes, gourds and bowls, are all ornamented, sometimes most elaborately and beautifully; and this decoration extends to their own persons in the practice of tattooing, and in the patterns woven into the cloth or matting of their dresses, or stamped upon the bark cloth they procure from various trees. But we see hardly anything of all this in Imérina, the central province of Madagascar. It is true that many of the large stone tombs built of late years have some architectural pretensions, and decorative carving is employed on them, but the details are mostly copied from drawings of European buildings, and cannot be properly considered as examples of indigenous art.¹ I was therefore much interested during a journey to the south of Madagascar, made some fifteen years ago, to discover that amongst the Betsilèo there is a decided and special style of ornament, which is used in their houses, their tombs, and many of their household utensils, as spoons, gourds, dishes, &c.; and that a kind of tattooing is very common amongst them, in which some of the same ornamental details are also introduced. It should perhaps here be noted that this tribe of Malagasy occupy the southern central highlands of Madagascar. They are darker in colour than the Hova, and although physically bigger and stronger, were conquered by them in the early part of the present century. They are variously estimated as numbering from 600,000 to a million and a half. Probably they are really somewhere between these two estimates, *i.e.*, somewhat over a million in num-

¹ The only examples I can recall of anything distinctively characteristic of the Hova Malagasy as regards decoration are: slight ornamentation of the long gable timbers or "horns," and also in the dormer windows, of the old-fashioned native houses, which sometimes have a chevron or "dog-tooth," or small semi-circular ornament cut on their lower edges; also the conventionalized square flower and leaf pattern, used on their finer silk cloths or *làmbas*; and, perhaps, some of the patterns in the straw-work of their fine mats and baskets. In the interior ornamentation of some of the royal houses at Antanànarivo there seemed to me to be a certain distinct style prevalent. This is chiefly seen in the painted decorations of the upper parts of the walls, and sometimes of the ceilings, which, both in the colouring and large bold style of the patterns, always reminded me somewhat of Assyrian ornament, as shown in the decoration of the palaces at Persepolis. There is very little that is decorative in Hova pottery, but a special kind of vessel made for cooking the beef at the New Year's festival is rather elegant in shape, much resembling some of the Anglo-Saxon pottery. These vessels are circular and somewhat flattened, and are frequently ornamented with a series of lines and zigzags, very closely resembling those on the early fictile productions of the Germanic races.

ber. I had occasionally heard from missionaries who had lived in or visited the Bètsilèo country that there was a good deal of decorative carving in this southern province; and in the "Antanànarivo Annual" for 1875, the Rev. J. Richardson made a slight reference to this in a paper on "Remarkable Burial Customs amongst the Bètsilèo." But no one, so far as I am aware, has yet described at all adequately the character of this ornament, or the different varieties of tombs and burial memorials seen in the Bètsilèo province; and although my observations were only those made on a rapid journey through the country, on my way to the south-east coast, and on a subsequent journey to Fianàrantsòà, the capital of the province, three years ago, they may perhaps have some interest as a slight contribution towards a fuller knowledge of the subject, and may, I hope, lead those who are resident in the province to give it that thorough investigation which it deserves.

I first noticed something new in the tombs in the tract of country between Isàndrandàhy and Ambòsitra. Within two or three hours' journey from the latter place I observed that the upright stones placed near graves were not the rough undressed blocks or slabs common in Imèrina, but were finely dressed and squared and ornamented with carving. (In Imèrina, I may here remark, the Hova tombs consist of a vault made of large undressed slabs of blue granite rock, with stone shelves, upon which the dead are laid, tightly wrapped up in a number of native cloth *làmbas*, the outer ones of silk. The door is of stone, with pivot hinges, above and below, fitting into sockets; and the whole structure is usually finished with a square erection of dressed stonework, in two or three stages, often with a kind of headstone, on which, since the introduction of letters, is frequently cut the name and titles of the head of the family. When the corpse of a person of rank and position cannot be obtained for burial in the family tomb, as occasionally happens in war, a rough undressed slab of stone is erected as a burial memorial. These are often ten or twelve feet high, and are termed *vàtolàhy*, which means literally "male-stone"; and I have sometimes thought that this word, and the shape of the stone, may indicate some ancient connection with phallic worship.) On the evening of one of the days of my stay at Ambòsitra, I walked out with the Rev. T. Brockway, our L. M. S. missionary at that station, to the top of the rising ground on the western slope of which the town is principally built. Here there was an old *amòntana*¹ tree, and memorials to some of the early kings of the Bètsilèo. The chief of these was a piece of timber seven or eight inches square and about ten feet high,

¹ One of the finest trees of the interior, a species of *Ficus*.

having pieces of wood projecting from a little below the top, so as to form a kind of stage. Each face of the timber was elaborately carved with different patterns arranged in squares. Some of these were concentric circles, a large one in the centre, with smaller ones filling up the angles; others had a circle with a number of little bosses in them; others had a kind of leaf ornament; and in others parallel lines were arranged in different directions. The narrow spaces dividing these squares from each other had in some cases an ornament like the Norman chevron or zigzag, and in others, something similar to the Greek wave-like scroll. The whole erection with its ornamentation bore a strong resemblance to the old runic stones, or the memorial crosses in Ireland and parts of the Scottish Highlands. The north face of this memorial post was quite sharp and fresh, but the others were worn by the weather, and the carving was filled up with lichens. I was greatly interested with this carving, as being almost the first specimen I had seen of indigenous Malagasy art; and I greatly regretted having no appliances with me for taking a "rubbing" or a "squeeze." Not very far from this memorial there were some others, consisting of two pairs of posts, each with a lintel, like a gateway, except that the opening was filled up by a large flat upright stone. These posts were carved much in the same style as the single one just described, but were not so massive, and were more weathered. The tops of the posts were carved into a shape somewhat resembling a vase. I then remembered that two or three days before we had passed a newly set-up memorial stone carved in three large squares, with much the same kind of ornament as these posts had in wood.

I now regret still more not having obtained some sketch of this group of burial memorials, because, on visiting Ambòsitra three years ago, I found that the whole had been utterly swept away. The Hova governor had appropriated the site for his official residence and courtyard, and the picturesque tombs of the old Bètsilèo chiefs and the fine trees had been destroyed to make way for a great brick building, raw and common-place, whose erection had been a heavy tax upon the unpaid service of the people.

On our journey from Ambòsitra to Fianàrantsòà, at about two hours' distance from the former place, we passed a tomb by the roadside with a carved wooden post similar to those at Ambòsitra. I got down from the palanquin, and examined it; some of the carving was similar to what I had already seen, but there were other graceful forms which were new, and some of the compartments were like the English Union Jack. But it was on the following day, when passing over the elevated line of road

between Zomà Nandihàzana and Ambòhinàmboàrina, that I was most astonished and interested by the profusion with which these carved memorials were scattered along the roadside, as well as in all directions over the tract of country visible on either hand. Leaving an elevated valley—if one can so describe it—a long, nearly level hollow on high ground, with hills on either side not a mile apart, and gently curving round to the south-west,—we came out at last to an uninterrupted view, and in sight of a rounded green hill, about a quarter of a mile to the west of the road. This place is called Ikangàra, and has a few houses and a little church on the top. But between it and the road there was a large number of tombs and memorial posts, so my companion and I went to inspect them. They were well worth a visit, as in a small space there were grouped together many different kinds of monuments, with wood carving in great variety. Within a short distance were some forty or fifty tombs, and on examining them there appeared to be the following kinds :—

(1) The largest tombs—there were two of them—were of small flat stones, built in a square of some twenty to twenty-five feet, and about five feet high. But around them was a railing of carved posts and rails, those at each corner with the vase-shaped top already described; these were connected by a transverse rail, and this again was supported on each of the four sides by upright posts which finished under the rail. All the upright timbers were carved in patterns like those seen at Ambòsitra and on the road the previous day.

(2) Another kind of tomb was formed by a square structure of small flat stones, four or five feet high, and perhaps a dozen feet square; but on the top was a square enclosure of four carved posts with the vase-shaped heads, connected by lintels, and with an intermediate upright. This structure was about four feet square, by seven or eight feet high, and in the centre was a single carved post. (See Fig. 15.)

(3) A third kind of monument was a massive block of granite, from eight to ten feet high, and from eighteen inches to two feet square, with carved posts at the four corners and touching them. On the top these were connected by carved cross pieces, and upon these the skulls of the bullocks killed at the funeral of the person the monument commemorated were placed. Many of these horned skulls remained in their places.

(4) Another kind of memorial was a massive square post of wood, about twenty feet high, and fifteen inches square, carved on all four sides from top to bottom. There were four or five of these enormous posts here. In one case there was a pair of them, as if to form a kind of gateway; two or three were

split nearly all down their length by the action of the sun and weather.

(5) Still another kind was an oblong block of dressed granite, with an iron hooping round the top, in which were fixed a dozen or more pairs of slender *iron* horns. There were two of this kind of monument at this place, and we afterwards saw others on the road.

(6) Besides the foregoing there were numerous specimens of the smaller carved post such as we had already seen at Am-bòsitra, with the vase-shaped head and a small open staging near the top, on which were fixed upright sharp-pointed pieces of wood. These were for placing the ox skulls upon. (See Fig. 8.)

It may be here noted that the humped and long-horned ox being the largest animal known in Madagascar, this animal, especially the bull, is very often used in native proverbs, royal speeches, songs, and circumcision observances as a symbol of power and authority, while the horn is frequently employed as an emblem of strength, much indeed as it was employed by the Hebrews and other Asiatics. Among the Sihànaka people lofty round poles are erected near their tombs, and at the top of these a forked branch of a tree is fixed, carved into a close resemblance of a pair of horns. And in the Tanàla, or forest region, the extremities of the gable timbers of the houses are fashioned into the form of horns. Among the Hova these are simply crossed, and slightly ornamented, small wooden figures of birds being often affixed to them, but they are still called *tàndro-tràno*, or "house horns." In royal proclamations the soldiers are styled "horns of the kingdom." There are many interesting customs among the Malagasy showing that the ox has retained the semi-sacred character it bears among many nations; in some tribes only the chiefs are allowed to kill the animal, evidently because the chief or king is also the high-priest of the tribe; while among other Malagasy peoples the ox is only killed at certain seasons which have some religious significance. The native kings are saluted as *òmbeldàhy*, or "bulls"; and the same expression frequently occurs in forms of benediction at the circumcision and other festivities.

To return, however, to the interesting group of tombs at Ikingàra. Many of these memorials were sorely weathered and defaced, and others were falling, or had fallen, and were rotting away. But there was a great variety of pattern, many of them being well worth preserving and copying.

On the roadside, before we turned from the main path to look at Ikingàra, were a number of the more simple tombs, of a kind that seem peculiar to the Bètsilèo. They consist of a plain square, almost a cube, of thin undressed stones laid very

evenly. In some instances these had upright slabs at the corners and centres of the sides, so that they were not unlike Hova tombs, but the majority were of small stones only, laid horizontally. From the number of handsome tombs and memorials near this little town, we judged that it must have been an important place in former days. We stayed some considerable time examining this ancient cemetery, and then proceeded on our way southwards.

Our road lay along the top of a long ridge, with a valley on the west and an extensive plain on the east, with numerous hills, and old fortifications on their tops. Over the plain were dotted small villages and numberless green *vàla*, or homesteads of the Bètsilèo, enclosed in a circular and impenetrable fence of thorny mimosa or *tsiàfakòmby*, i.e., "impassable by cattle" (*Cæsalpinia sepiaria*, Roxb.). About a quarter of an hour after leaving Ikingàra, we came to an old fortification running along the crest of the ridge and called Ianjànonakèly; a low stone rampart extended for a hundred yards or more along the hill, and there were many tombs. Indeed we were struck by the number of tombs and carved monuments on the roadside all the way to Ambòhinàmboàrina. The most common form is the plain square tomb of thin, small, undressed stones, and the upright *vàtolàhy*, or block of granite, from eighteen inches to two feet square, and eight to ten feet high. While the *tsàngam-bàto* (i.e., "upright stones") in Imèrina are all of rough undressed slabs of blue rock, these in Bètsilèo are of fine-grained, hard white granite, in massive blocks, and dressed to a beautifully smooth face. They are often in couples, and in one instance there were two stones, with an elaborately carved post between them. But the combinations of the different kinds of memorial were very numerous: there was something new every few yards; and all over the plain, near every little cluster of houses, we could see these white memorial stones.

South of the Matsiatra river, and nearer Fianàrantsòà, I noticed that there were very few of the upright square memorial stones compared with what we saw the previous day, and that there were no carved wood pillars at all. All the tombs, which hereabouts were very numerous, were the plain square or cube of undressed flat stones. The majority of these, I was surprised to find, were hollow, many having trees—*hàsina*,¹ *fàno*,² and others—growing out of the middle, which has a circular opening, and overshadowing the whole tomb, a sight never seen in Imèrina. From this it was clear that the chamber in which the corpses are deposited does not project at all above the ground, as it does in Hova tombs; and I afterwards

¹ *Dracæna angustifolia*.

² An acacia-like tree, *Pintadenia chrystostachys*.

ascertained that this chamber is excavated at a considerable depth beneath the square pile of stones, which is therefore not a grave, but only marks the place of one far below the surface. I noticed also that there was in most cases a long low mound of earth extending from one side of the tomb to a distance of from thirty or forty to eighty feet and upwards. This, it appears, marks the line of a long tunnelled passage gradually descending from the surface to the deeply sunk burial chamber. Mr. Richardson says that some of the Bètsilèo tombs are "as much as sixty feet deep, and are approached by a gradually descending passage opening some forty or fifty feet distant from the burial chamber. The tombs of the rich are sometimes fifteen or sixteen feet square, and are quite on the surface of the ground; and the four walls and roof are formed of five immense stone slabs, which are brought from great distances, and involve almost incredible labour. I measured one slab of granite, which was more than eighteen feet long, ten feet wide, and nearly three feet thick in some parts. I was once in a tomb eighteen feet long, fourteen feet wide, and ten feet high, formed of five stones, in one of which, to the west, had been cut an opening, and a rude stone door, working in stone sockets, had been fixed there. The finest memorial stone I saw was almost circular, and was four feet in diameter and about twenty feet high above the ground. Sometimes these stones are covered with carved oxen and birds. The most honourable superstructure is a solid mass of masonry erected over the stone tombs just described. These are square in shape and about six feet high. A cornice is worked round the top, and on this are laid the skulls of all the oxen killed at the funeral, regularly arranged. I have seen one, now rapidly falling into decay, on which were no less than 500 such skulls! The most symmetrical I ever saw was a new tomb, on which, in the outer square, were arranged 108 skulls of oxen in most regular order, every other skull being that of an ox whose horns had grown downwards. There were also two other squares of skulls arranged behind this one. It was a strange sight to see so many skulls of oxen with the horns, arranged thus and bleaching in the sun."

All through the country south of the so-called "desert" or uninhabited region, near Ivòtovòrona, we were struck by the tattooing on the chest, neck, and arms of many of the people. In some cases the men had figures of oxen, and in others an ornament like a floriated Greek cross; while the women had a kind of tattooed collar, which looked like deep lace-work or vandyking on the neck and chest. But I have never seen tattooing on the faces of the people.

I regretted that, our journey being made chiefly for the

purpose of seeing districts further south than Bètsilèo, we were unable to visit some of the larger old Bètsilèo towns, such as Ifànjakàna, Nàndihizana, Ikálamavòny, and others, where I was told there is a great deal of the peculiar carving to be seen, not only in the tombs, but also in the dwelling houses and furniture. We did, however, see two specimens of this native art as used in building: first, just before entering the Tanàla country, and again, immediately on leaving the forest on our return home. The first example was at a village of forty houses called Iválokiánja, about two hours south-east of Imáhazòny. Here we went into one of the houses in the village for our lunch; it was the largest house there, but was not so large as our tent (eleven feet square), and the walls were only five feet six inches high. The door was a small square aperture, one foot ten inches wide by two feet four inches high, and its threshold two feet nine inches from the ground. Close to it, at the end of the house, was another door or window, and opposite were two small openings about a foot and a half square. The hearth was opposite the door, and the bed-place in what is the window corner in Hova houses. In this house was the first example I had seen of decorative carving in Malagasy houses; the external faces of the main post supporting the roof being carved with a simple but effective ornament of squares and diagonals. There was also other ornamentation much resembling the English Union Jack. The gables were filled in with a neat platted work of split bamboo. The majority of the houses in this and most of the Bètsilèo villages are only about ten or eleven feet long by eight or nine feet wide, and the walls from three to five feet high. A stranger seeing many of these native houses for the first time would say that they had no doors, and only very small windows, for the doors are so small and high up that entering such a house is a gymnastic feat requiring considerable agility, and more amusing to an onlooker than pleasant to the performer. All ideas of dignity must be laid aside.

The other example we saw of carving used for house ornamentation was at a small cluster of half-a-dozen houses called Ifandriana, some three hours before reaching Isàndrandàhy, on the way from Ambòhimánga in the Tanàla. The three centre posts of the timber house in which we stayed were all covered with carving of much the same character as that used in the memorial posts already described, but it was not quite so well executed. The nearly square window shutters had each a circular ornament carved upon them, much like the conventional representations of the sun, with rays, proceeding from a centre (see Figs. 9 and 10). During a more recent visit to the Bètsilèo province, I had opportunities of seeing some other

interiors; and in these not only were the three posts of the house and the windows carved, but also the wood-work enclosing the fixed bedstead—quite a little room of itself—as well as other timber-work about the building. In a paper contributed by Mr. Shaw to the “Antanànarivo Annual” for 1878, he remarks:—“The most distinctive indigenous art of the Bètsilèo is the carving, which is noticed by everyone travelling in any part of the province. There is an endless variety of patterns, though a great number are formed by combinations of three or four simple designs, that appear, in some form or other, on nearly every house-post or door, which are highly ornamented.”

One of the most perfect examples of the carved memorial post we saw the same day, in the morning, at the picturesquely situated village of Ivèhitrámbo. This place is perched like an eagle’s nest on the summit of a lofty cone of rock, on the edge of the interior plateau, and overlooking the great forest, the country of the Tanàla tribes, above which it towers about 2,500 feet. This memorial was close to the village, and was very perfect, the carving very sharp, and the stage near the top, consisting of several pieces of wood crossing one another, in good preservation, with about thirty ox skulls and horns still in their places (see Fig. 9). I made a sketch of one face of the post and its carving, which, I regret to find, I have left with other papers and drawings at Antanànarivo.

It may be added that in many cases figures of oxen and men are carved in some of the panels or compartments of these memorial posts, but the ornament is chiefly conventional. The Bètsilèo name for these memorial pillars is *tèza* or *tèzan-kàzo*; the root *tèza* means “durability, anything firmly fixed,” and also, “fixed upright.”

In his little book entitled “Madagascar of To-day,” Mr. Shaw says: “Perhaps the most elaborately carved post I saw during my residence of eight years in the Bètsilèo was at a small village about a day’s journey north-west of Fianàrantsòà. This was the central post of a high house belonging to one of the chiefs. It was twenty feet high and carved from top to bottom. Each of the four surfaces, about eighteen inches broad, was divided into sections by cross-cuts forming squares with the edge of the post. In each of these were different designs formed according to the individual tastes of the many men who were probably impressed into the service of the chief to perform the work. Some consisted of radiating triangles, whose apices met in the central point; some were filled with pairs of circles touching each other at the circumference; others were concentric circles, and the corners of the squares filled with smaller curves springing from the outermost circle;

other squares were filled with zigzag lines running parallel to each other, or running diagonally across the square, while others were rough imitations of birds, bullocks, crocodiles, &c.”

Before leaving the subject of Bètsilèo art it may be added that gourds, fifes, tobacco boxes (a piece of finely-polished reed or bamboo), and other articles are often very tastefully ornamented with patterns incised on the smooth yellow surface, the lines being then filled in with black. These patterns consist of lines, zigzags, scrolls, and diaper grounds, often very artistically arranged.

As already remarked, my visit to the Bètsilèo in 1876, was too short and hasty to allow of a thorough examination of these interesting examples of indigenous art. And not thinking of meeting with such specimens of carving I had not prepared myself beforehand with any appliances for taking drawings or copying them in any way. But, as will be seen from the rubbings here exhibited, an article in the “Annual” for 1876, which I have largely reproduced in this paper, did, to some extent, have the effect I desired in drawing the attention of some of my brother missionaries to the subject, and, especially in inducing Mr. Shaw to make a number of rubbings of the more characteristic specimens of the ornament employed. Still, these by no means convey a proper idea of the rich effect of many of these sculptured memorials, for hardly anything but photography and the autotype process could adequately reproduce the many varieties of elaborate carving that are to be found; but much might yet be done by careful measurements and sketches and enlarged photographs. Many of the finest specimens of carving in the memorial posts and tombs are being fast obliterated by the action of the weather, and if not secured within a few years, the patterns carved upon them will soon be past recovery. Indeed, when passing by Ikingàra three years ago, I found the interesting group of burial memorials already described fast disappearing. Some of those I had seen in 1876 were quite gone, either rotted away by the rain and damp, or fallen to the ground and half buried in *débris*, and the whole presenting a much less striking appearance than during my first visit twelve years previously. (Of course these remarks apply chiefly to those carvings which are out of doors; those in houses have a much greater chance of preservation, but even here the desire to have larger and more modern-fashioned dwellings, especially of sun-dried brick, will probably cause the destruction of many of these old-fashioned adornments.) Besides this, it is very probable that the incoming of ideas and fashions from foreigners will eventually lead to the discontinuance of this primitive style both of memorial and of

ornament, although I have more recently found that such carvings are still executed, and such memorial posts still set up by the people. (For example, here is a small piece of carved wood sent to me a few months ago by one of my old students, a native of Bètsilèo, and stationed at a large village a few miles to the south-west of Ambòsitra.) Still, as examples of indigenous art, it is very desirable that they should be copied as soon as possible, and perhaps it might be practicable to secure a few examples of the best carved pieces of wood themselves, and have them carefully deposited in some place of safety for reference and preservation. Apart from their intrinsic interest, these carvings may prove of value in showing links of connection between the Bètsilèo and some of the Malayan and Oceanic peoples, and thus aid us in understanding more clearly the race affinities of the people of Madagascar. Mr. Shaw observes, "It is a significant fact that the simple designs [of the Bètsilèo carvings] are almost identical with the same species of ornamentation in Polynesia. On a carved hatchet handle from Mangaia (Hervey Islands) in my possession are some patterns precisely like those on the spoon handles represented in the accompanying diagram. The wooden and horn spoons and wooden bowls for rice are also remarkably well carved, of good shape, beautifully smooth, and gracefully ornamented."

I will add here a few remarks with regard to the rubbings made by Mr. Shaw which illustrate this paper :

And first, I would say that it is by no means easy, either with red chalk (with which some of them are done), or with heel-ball (which has been used for others), to get very satisfactory impressions, because the surface of the wood has generally not been planed, but, apparently, roughly chiselled to a far from smooth surface ; besides which, the weather has, in the case of the older out-door work, still further roughened the face of the memorial posts and the shutters ; and so it is often difficult to give perfectly the sharpness of the carvings. It should be remembered, too, that these rubbings are "negative" impressions, the carving which shows in the wood being that which is left *white* on the paper, while the projecting untouched portions are *black*, so that the exact effect of the carving cannot be given by a rubbing.

On carefully going through the set of rubbings here exhibited, they appear to me to very fairly represent the majority of the patterns to be found both on the memorial posts, and on the roof-posts, shutters, and other internal wood-work of the Bètsilèo houses. There are, however, I think, still a few other patterns which are not given here, and probably these are, in some cases, too high up to be conveniently reached. It will be

seen that a great variety of effect is given by innumerable combinations of a few simple forms. Thus, we have circles of many kinds: with rays, with Maltese crosses, chiefly of eight arms, with concentric circles, with Catherine wheels, with spirals, and with inner and outer bands of chevrons, of small quarter circles, of triangles, of wavy lines, of herring-boning, of short transverse lines, of small dentils, and of the Union Jack pattern, while sometimes they have scrolls terminating in small circles bounding the outer lines. In some cases the rays are numerous and are each herring-boned; while half-circles are frequently employed very effectively, and occasionally we find a combination of almost all these forms on one shutter. A combination of small circles with lines arranged diagonally, so as to form a series of triangles, is a very characteristic pattern in these carvings. In a few instances there is a barrel-shaped panel filled up with small circles and the diagonal or Union Jack ornament in bands and rows (Fig. 14). The square panels or divisions on the posts are frequently not only carved with circles similar to those just described, although on a smaller scale, but the angles are filled with lesser circles, springing from their outer lines, and in some cases with independent circles, nearly as large as the central one. Another species of decoration is effected by a kind of hatching, or lines cut in the wood, and running in various directions—upright, horizontal, and diagonal—so as to form diamond-shaped, or square, or triangular patterns (Fig. 3). In some of these, in the centre is a small Greek cross, and then lines following this outline, one after another, the rest of the compartment being filled with a square pattern. In other cases an L-shaped figure is repeated all over the square; and in others again are concentric half-circles, or half-circles with a band of chevrons.

But perhaps the most favourite ornamentation of all, judging from the profusion with which it is employed, is what I have called the "Union Jack" pattern. This appears almost everywhere, forming transverse bands dividing the panels, upright edgings to the angles of the posts, portions of circles, &c., and is sometimes repeated all over the panel or compartment, so as to form an effective kind of diaper. This pattern, together with narrow bands of small triangles forming a kind of dog-tooth, and a simple narrow dentil, forms almost all the framework, so to speak, of the panelling or divisions of the face of the posts, dividing them from each other by a series of lines. A sort of floriated cross occurs more rarely, sometimes with the four arms of different lengths, *i.e.*, the two upright ones shorter than the transverse ones, and of exactly the same pattern as that used for tattooing the arms and chests of the

Bètsilèo men (Fig. 13). I have also noticed two other styles of pattern which are best understood by a glance at the rubbings (Figs. 4, 5).

I have been unable to ascertain whether there are any traditions among the Bètsilèo as to the origin of this peculiar style of ornamentation, or whether the different patterns employed have any religious or symbolic meaning.¹ Not having resided in the province, I have had no opportunity of making any inquiries of this sort, although many questions now suggest themselves as interesting. I hope that my brother missionaries stationed among the people will try and ascertain something more on these points.

It will be understood that even this collection, valuable as it is, cannot give an adequate idea of the size of some of these memorial posts, many of which, as already mentioned, are twenty feet high, and eighteen inches square in section, while those here represented in two of the rubbings are only about four feet high. It would indeed be a rather formidable task to take a complete copy of these largest memorials, and would require many appliances and assistants, as well as an amount of time such as missionaries can rarely give to pursuits outside their more immediate and special work. I trust, however, that the rubbings here exhibited will give some clear idea of these productions of the Bètsilèo, and will show the decided love of ornament which they manifest in their peculiar style of wood carving. And I greatly hope that some one will yet give more thorough attention to the subject, and will make a more complete collection of copies—measured drawings, rubbings or squeezes, and photographs—so that these interesting specimens of an indigenous native art may be fully described and figured before its most characteristic examples have passed away beyond recall.

Note on the Illustrations.—The sketches which are reproduced in *fac-simile* in the accompanying lithographs I have made, with two exceptions, from Mr. Shaw's rubbings; and I think they fairly represent the most characteristic styles of ornament used by the Bètsilèo in their wood carvings. Figs. 1, 3, 6, 7, and 13 are examples of panels on memorial posts, or on the wooden pillars of their houses; Figs. 9, 10, and I think 14, are shutter decorations; whilst Figs. 2, 4, 5, 11, and 12, show bands and borders dividing the larger panels. The drawing (Fig. 8) in the centre of

¹ In the discussion that followed the reading of this paper, one of the members expressed a strong opinion that these ornaments must have had originally some religious signification. He also pointed out the fact (which I had not myself noticed) that in all the circles the rays were thirteen in number, therefore probably bearing some meaning. Miss Buckland remarked that many of the patterns closely resembled those on articles from the Nicobar Islands.

one group is from a photograph, a stereoscopic view; and Fig. 15 is from a pencil sketch I made at Ikangàra.

The paper was illustrated not only by a large number of rubbings, but also by photographs of Madagascar, and of the Malagasy; and by wood carving, gourds, spoons, Bètsilèo and Hova baskets and mats, charms, and *làmba* of silk, cotton, and *rofia* fibre, &c.

DISCUSSION.

Mr. BALFOUR said:—It would be interesting to know if any of the conventional native patterns exhibited can be traced to original realistic designs, or to quasi-ornamental patterns which still retain some symbolic meaning. In the light of modern researches one is more and more tempted to investigate, as far as possible, the past history of forms of ornament, with a view to tracing them back to their prototypes, whose application for decorative purposes may have been suggested in a variety of ways. Possibly an examination of a large number of examples of the more frequent patterns, and of forms apparently related to them, may reveal some interesting series of transitions, showing the evolution of the conventionalized, purely meaningless, though decorative forms. In seeking for the early stages of patterns it is, as a rule, desirable to examine more especially those which either are not symmetrical themselves or are disposed in unsymmetrical combinations.

Mr. SIBREE said he had not been able to ascertain whether the various styles of pattern in the carved memorials of the Bètsilèo had any symbolical or religious signification; and not having resided in that province he had been unable to get much information about them. Probably careful inquiry by those stationed among the people would elicit much more of interest in connection with them.

JUNE 23RD, 1891.

EDWARD B. TYLOR, Esq., D.C.L., F.R.S., *President, in the Chair.*

The Minutes of the last meeting were read and signed.

The following elections were announced:—

Dr. G. A. WILKEN, of the University of Leyden, as an Honorary Member.

Professor DMITRI ANUCHIN, of the Imperial University, Moscow, as a Corresponding Member.