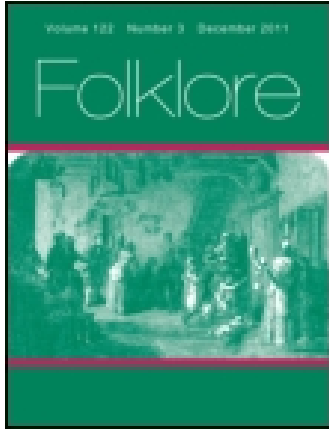


On: 03 October 2014, At: 03:52

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Folklore

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rfol20>

Garó Marriages

Sir J. G. Frazer

Published online: 01 Feb 2012.

To cite this article: Sir J. G. Frazer (1921) Garó Marriages, *Folklore*, 32:3, 202-209, DOI: [10.1080/0015587X.1921.9719199](https://doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1921.9719199)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0015587X.1921.9719199>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is

expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

GARO MARRIAGES.

BY SIR J. G. FRAZER.

IN an article under this heading in the last number of *Folk-Lore*¹ Mr. T. C. Hodson says: "It may help to remove misunderstandings if this examination of Garo marriages begins with a transcript of the exact text of the passage in the *Assam Census Report for 1891*, on which Sir James Frazer bases his view that 'among the Garos marriage with a mother's brother's widow appears to be a simple consequence of previous marriage with her daughter.' The text is as follows: 'Mr. Teunon informs me of a case in which a man refused to marry the widow who was in this instance a second wife, and not his wife's own mother; and the old lady then gave herself and her own daughter in marriage to another man. In a dispute regarding the property which followed, the *laskar* reported that the first man having failed to do his duty, the second was entitled to the greater part of the property.' In this case, therefore, the marriage with the daughter followed as a consequence of the marriage with the widow."

On this I have to observe that my view, which Mr. Hodson quotes quite correctly, was not based, as he seems to think, on the single passage of the *Assam Census Report for 1891*; but that it was based on five passages of four different writers, all of them high authorities on Indian ethnology—the late Colonel E. T. Dalton, the late Sir W. W. Hunter, Sir Edward A. Gait, and Major A. Playfair. The passages are not quoted by me in my book, but exact

¹ June 30th, 1921, p. 133.

references are there given to them all in a footnote to the passage on which Mr. Hodson comments.¹ I have again consulted all five passages, and, as they seem to me to be relevant and to confirm the view which Mr. Hodson criticizes, I will here quote them for the sake of readers who may be interested in the question, and to whom the works from which the quotations are made may not be easily accessible. I will take the passages in the order in which I have referred to them, which is also the chronological order.

(1) Colonel E. T. Dalton writes thus :

" The Garó laws of inheritance and intermarriage are singular and intricate, and it was after many enquiries in different quarters and testing the information received in various ways that I recorded the following note on the subject :

" The clans are divided into different houses called *maháris* (Buchanan calls them *chatsibak*) which may be translated *motherhoods*. A man cannot take to wife a girl of his own *mahári*, but must select from one of the *maháris* with whom his family have from time immemorial exclusively allied themselves. In some of the now noblest families there is but one *mahári* with which, as a rule, they can intermarry. This however is not irrefragable, and should maidens of that particular house be wanting, the young men may choose, or more correctly speaking, be chosen by a daughter of some other. If it be not on this account necessary to look elsewhere, a man's sister should

¹ *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, ii. 254 (not 454, as cited by Mr. Hodson). The footnote runs as follows : " E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 63 ; (Sir) W. W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Assam* (London, 1879), ii. 154 ; *Census of India, 1891, Assam*, by (Sir) E. A. Gait, vol. i. *Report* (Shillong, 1892), p. 229 ; Major A. Playfair, *The Garos* (London, 1909), pp. 68, 72 sq. According to Sir E. A. Gait, it is the husband of the *youngest* daughter who is bound to marry his widowed mother-in-law, and this is natural enough, since it is the *youngest* daughter who is her mother's heir among the Garos " (*Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, ii. 253 sq.).

marry a son of the house of which his wife is daughter, his son may marry a daughter of that sister, *and his daughter may marry his sister's son who, in such case, comes to reside with his father-in-law and succeeds to the property in right of his wife and her mother.* Inherent in males there is no right to succeed to property of any description, and this is all to secure a transmission of pure blood ; but though a son cannot inherit his father's property, his mother cannot be ejected from the position she enjoyed conjointly with her husband. The successor must recognize in her the mistress of the house not only as his mother-in-law, should she stand in that relation to him, but also as his wife, though the marital rights be shared with her own daughter. It is consequently not uncommon to see a young Garó introducing as his wife a woman who, as regards age, might be his mother, and in fact is his mother-in-law and his aunt." ¹

In this passage the words which I have printed in italics (" who, in such case, comes to reside with his father-in-law and succeeds to the property in right of his wife and her mother ") clearly imply that a man marries his cousin, the daughter of his mother's brother, and comes to reside with his wife in the house of his father-in-law (his mother's brother) during the life-time of his father-in-law : it is not until after his father-in-law's death that the son-in-law succeeds to his father-in-law's widow, who, in the case contemplated by Colonel Dalton, is both his mother-in-law and his aunt (his father's sister). Thus a man's marriage with his cross-cousin (the daughter of his mother's brother) necessarily precedes his marriage with his widowed mother-in-law ; he marries his mother-in-law because he had first married her daughter ; the marriage with the mother-in-law is a consequence and effect of a previous marriage with her daughter.

¹ Colonel E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1872), p. 63.

(2) Sir W. W. Hunter writes thus :

*“ Right of Succession.—A remarkable custom among the Garos is that a man who marries the favourite daughter of a household has to marry his mother-in-law in the event of the death of his father-in-law, and through her succeeds to all the property, which thus descends through the female line. The sons receive nothing, but have to look to the family into which they marry for their establishment in life.”*¹

Sir W. W. Hunter does not mention the marriage with a cross-cousin, but the words which I have printed in italics make it quite clear that the marriage with the mother-in-law follows the marriage with her daughter and is a consequence of it: a man marries his mother-in-law because he had first married her daughter.

(3) Sir Edward A. Gait, speaking of the Garos, writes thus :

*“ There is a curious custom, by which the husband of the youngest daughter has to marry his mother-in-law (who is often his own aunt) when she becomes a widow and failing to do this, he loses his claim to share in the family property. Mr. Teunon informs me of a case in which a man refused to marry the widow, who was in this instance a second wife, and not his wife's own mother; and the old lady then gave herself and her own daughter in marriage to another man. In a dispute regarding the property which followed, the laskar reported that the first man having failed to do his duty, the second was entitled to the greater part of the property.”*²

This is the passage quoted by Mr. Hodson, but in quoting it he has omitted the opening sentences, which I have printed in italics. Yet these sentences are essential to the passage, the remainder of which cannot be

¹ Sir W. W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Assam* (London, 1879), ii. 154.

² *Census of India, 1891*, by (Sir) E. A. Gait, vol. i. *Report* (Shillong, 1892), p. 229.

fully understood without them ; for they describe the general custom, while the part quoted by Mr. Hodson deals only with one particular case of the custom. The words omitted by Mr. Hodson clearly imply that marriage with the daughter precedes marriage with her mother ; a man marries the youngest daughter of the house, and afterwards, when his father-in-law dies, he marries his widowed mother-in-law in order to enjoy her share of the family property. This is entirely in accordance with the view which I have adopted, that among the Garos marriage with a widowed mother-in-law is a simple consequence of a previous marriage with her daughter.

When we examine the particular case of the custom reported by Mr. Teunon, we find that it does not entirely conform to the general rule laid down by Sir Edward Gait ; for in it the widow, whom the man was expected to marry, was not, as Mr. Hodson has rightly pointed out, his mother-in-law, since we are told that she was " not his wife's own mother," and that she was a second wife. Apparently we are left to infer that the man had married a daughter of the first wife, that the first wife, his real mother-in-law, was dead, and that in default of her he was bound to marry the second wife, the step-mother of his own wife. Only, it seems, on this hypothesis can the particular case be found to conform to the general rule. Thus the widow whom, in this case, the man was bound to marry was not his mother-in-law but his step-mother-in-law. In referring to the case in my book¹ I overlooked the exact relationship between the parties and erroneously spoke of them as mother-in-law and son-in-law respectively, whereas I should rather have described them as step-mother-in-law and stepson-in-law. I am obliged to Mr. Hodson for indicating the mistake, and I will take care to have it corrected in future editions. But while the particular case is so far exceptional, it appears not to affect

¹ *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, ii. 253.

the general rule that a son-in-law is bound to marry his father-in-law's widow for the sake of enjoying her property ; indeed, it extends the rule by showing that the obligation exists even when the widow is not the mother, but only the stepmother of the man's own wife.

But the case in question is exceptional in another respect in so far as it seems to imply that, when the widow has an unmarried daughter, the man who marries the widow is bound to marry her daughter also. This obligation, so far as I remember, is not mentioned by any other of our authorities on Garro law. It is with reference to this obligation, implied, but not definitely stated, in a single instance, that Mr. Hodson can affirm, quite correctly, that " in the case cited marriage with the daughter was a consequence, not a cause, of the marriage with the widow." But in saying so he has overlooked the general custom (clearly implied in the sentences which he has omitted from his quotation) that marriage with a man's widow is a consequence of a previous marriage with his daughter. Hence, if my interpretation of the particular case under discussion is correct, we may say that in this case both the marriage with the widow and the marriage with her daughter were, or rather would have been, if the man had consented to them, direct consequences of his previous marriage with a daughter of the deceased first wife. But, as Mr. Hodson observes, the story is not quite clear ; hence any interpretation of it is necessarily somewhat precarious.

(4) Major A. Playfair, our highest authority on Garro law and custom, writes as follows :

" I have mentioned that there is an exception to the rule that a girl may choose her husband. This exception occurs when one daughter of a family is given in marriage to the son of her father's sister. Should she not have such a cousin, she must marry a man of her father's 'motherhood,' who is chosen for a substitute. The daughter's husband then becomes his father-in-law's

nokrom, a term which I have fully explained in the chapter on inheritance. When a girl is thus given in marriage to her cousin, the couple take up their abode with the former's parents. At the death of his father-in-law the *nokrom* marries the widow, thus assuming the anomalous position of husband to both mother and daughter." ¹

Here, again, it is plain that marriage with the widowed mother-in-law follows, and does not precede, marriage with her daughter ; a man first marries his cousin and takes up his abode with her parents ; afterwards, when his father-in-law dies, he marries the widow, his mother-in-law.

(5) Further, Major A. Playfair, in treating of inheritance among the Garos, writes as follows :

"Although a man cannot inherit property, his *machong* [motherhood] assumes a right to control what his wife has brought him. In order that the control shall not die out in the event, for instance, of the husband's death, he has the right to choose a male member of his clan to represent him. This representative is known as his *nokrom*. He is not an heir, for as a male he cannot inherit, and the person whose *nokrom* he is has nothing to leave, but he is the channel through which the 'motherhood' of the husband maintains its hold on the property of the wife. When possible, this *nokrom* is the son of the man's sister, and he is expected to marry his uncle's daughter, and the widow also when his uncle dies. In the event of there being no sister's son, a member of the man's *machong* [motherhood] is adopted as *nokrom*." ²

From this passage we learn that a man is expected to marry his cross-cousin, the daughter of his mother's brother, in the lifetime of his uncle, and that on his uncle's death he is expected to marry the widow, his mother-in-law. Thus once more we are informed, on the best authority, that marriage with a mother-in-law, the widow of a mother's

¹ Major A. Playfair, *The Garos* (London, 1909), p. 68.

² *Ibid.* pp. 72 sq.

brother, follows as a consequence from a previous marriage with a cross-cousin, her daughter.

I have now quoted all the passages to which in *Folk-lore in the Old Testament* I referred in support of the conclusion which Mr. Hodson has criticized. They seem to me unanimously to confirm that conclusion, which accordingly, for the sake of readers who do not possess my book, I will here repeat unchanged :

" Thus among the Garos marriage with a mother's brother's widow appears to be a simple consequence of previous marriage with her daughter ; in other words, it is the effect, not the cause of the cross-cousin marriage, and is determined by the purely economic, not to say mercenary, motive of obtaining those material advantages which are inseparably attached to the hand of the widow. Hence a study of Garo customary law seems peculiarly fitted to explain the origin and meaning of cross-cousin marriage ; for it enjoins, first, the exchange of sisters in marriage,¹ second, the marriage of a man with his cross-cousin, the daughter of his mother's brother, and, third, marriage with the widow of the mother's brother. If I am right, these three customs are related to each other in a chain of cause and effect. The exchange of sisters in marriage produced as its natural consequence the marriage of cross-cousins ; and the marriage of cross-cousins in its turn produced by a natural consequence the marriage with the mother's brother's widow. All three customs arose simply and naturally through economic motives. Men exchanged their sisters in marriage because that was the cheapest way of getting a wife ; men married their cross-cousins for a similar reason ; and men married their widowed mothers-in-law because that was the only way of enjoying the old ladies' property." ² J. G. FRAZER.

¹ This is stated by Colonel Dalton in the first of the passages quoted above, p. 203 *et seq.* (" a man's sister should marry a son of the house of which his wife is daughter ").

² *Folk-lore in the Old Testament*, li. 254.