

Stories from Africa



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Collection of Extracts

Pygmy Dogs Excerpts

Paul Schebesta

Originally from *My Pygmy and Negro Hosts*, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1936

From the Ituri Forest:

“The hunting dog with wooden bell around its neck is the faithful companion of the Bachwa and Bambuti pygmies. The marriage dowry varies in different localities, in one village it may be a matter of ten spears, with a hunting dog thrown in, in another village it is only five spears and a hunting dog, while in yet another the suitor may only have to give a dog, five arrows and ten iron hair-pins.”

Paul Schebesta

Originally from *Among Congo Pygmies*, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1933

“‘Os, Os, Os.’ It is the call to the huntsman. The jungle reverberates to the cry of the leader, who stands ready with his bow in his hand and packed quiver on his back. At length the cries cease, and the man looks round as his hunting dog comes bound up.

Rapidly he fixes the wooden collar around its neck and sends it off into the forest. The young huntsman starts after his dog and the other youths follow him. It must have been six hours later when the first hunting dog, rattling of the wooden collar, came running into the camp. The rattling of the wooden bells was an indication of a successful hunt; for the pygmies, if they return exhausted and empty-handed, usually silence the bells with leaves, so that

the dog may reach the camp without making any noise.

The spoil is then divided, first claim going to the marksman whose arrow has given the quarry its final wound and the owner of the hunting dog which has tracked the victim through miles of jungle also has a claim on the game, the head being his special perquisite.”

Photo from Schebesta



Jungle Hunt

Esther Daniels Hoener

Quoted from *Jungles Ahead!* NY, Friendship Press, 1952

Njana walked over to the “talking drum” and beat out his message: “*Kukulé! Kukulé! Kukulé! Kukulé!* Hark! Every man his spear! Every man his spear!”

“*Ndip! Ndip!* Before the dawn...Before the dawn...We got to the forest...The hunger for meat has overcome us...In the morning...from the village of Njana, we go on a hunt...”

Eyene, young son of Njana, called the hunting hounds. When he took the collars with the pod-shaped iron bells from the bark wall, the dogs whined in excitement. The barkless Basenji of the central African forest, small, short haired, quick footed, is an ideal hunter in thick underbrush. The dull jangle of the bells is an exhilarating sound to hunting dogs; they too will eat meat on the morrow. Eyene tied the brace of trembling dog with bush vine to the central pole of his mother’s kitchen. The dogs lay down, protesting the hours till dawn.

The dog bells made a pleasant sound as the company filed through the damp underbrush behind the village cocoa garden in the dense growth of the forest. On signal from the leader, who was following animal tracks, the party spread out in a great circle through the forest. Nets were spread, each holding his position as planned. The husky youths took charge of the dogs. The drummer boys scattered behind; they began an excited rhythm. Eyene caught his breath, set his jaw, and beat with all his might.

The rhythm broke with the clatter of bells and the youths urged the dog, “Catch Catch!” Excitement mounted as the dogs scurried back and forth, sniffing the ground through the underbrush. A dog zigzagged past.

There was never a doubt as to when a dog routed an animal. Eyene heard the sudden flurry, a frantic scurry, the jangle and clatter of bells. Excited whines from the dogs, a crackling of brush. Then shouts of encouragement from the youths. A chant went up. Every man stood at attention in a threatening attitude like a line of driver ants, alert, vibrating with readiness. The forest echoed the wild, glad sound. Traditional hunt songs rose above the din but the men holding the nets stood quiet, not speaking a word lest the animal turn from the nets in flight.

Like a flash, an antelope brushed a net. The man nearest quickly thrust his spear in perfect aim. Eyene knew it because he heard the hunter claim in a loud voice, “To me belongs the thigh quarter.” He who arrives first when an animal brushes another’s net has claim to the choice portion of the meat.

Together they had an average day’s catch of four large antelope, three small. The larger animals were strung on poles and borne proudly on the shoulders of the men.

The Spirit of Assa

Lona B. Kenney

Quoted from "*Mboka, The Way of Life in A Congo Village*", (aka *Mboka, A Congo Memoir*)
Crown Publishers NY, pages 190-192

Memoir published in 1972. Author seems to have been in Belgian Congo in the 1950s.
Introduction says toward the end of Belgian control (ended in 1960) of the Congo.

Eventually, the conversation about the riverside people and the Ngombe turned to stories about dogs. Grandfather was fond of dogs, so were many others, although in quite a different way – they liked them roasted. Grandfather did not own a dog now, for he was still loyal to the memory of his old basenji dog, which had given its life to save grandfather from a leopard. When one morning Molali had brought home a small basenji puppy, probably stolen, which he planned for his evening meal, grandfather had been so angered that, forgetting that his son was an adult and the father of a family, he had seized an iron rod that he kept in one corner and had tried to thrash Molali with it. Molali jumped from side to side like a little boy, trying to dodge his father's blows and begging his forgiveness, but his voice only guided the blind old man in the right direction. In fact, our shared love for animals made me overlook grandfather's leopard tooth necklace. It was not surprising, therefore, to see his animation grow now, and hear him tell one dog story after another. The last legend of the evening was the most enjoyable.

"Dogs have not always belonged to me," grandfather, who had become slightly hoarse, began his story. "Before belonging to anyone, the mbwa (dogs) were free and lived in the forest in long tunnels underneath the earth where no one could follow them. Only the males came up to catch fish that they brought back to the females and the puppies, for the females

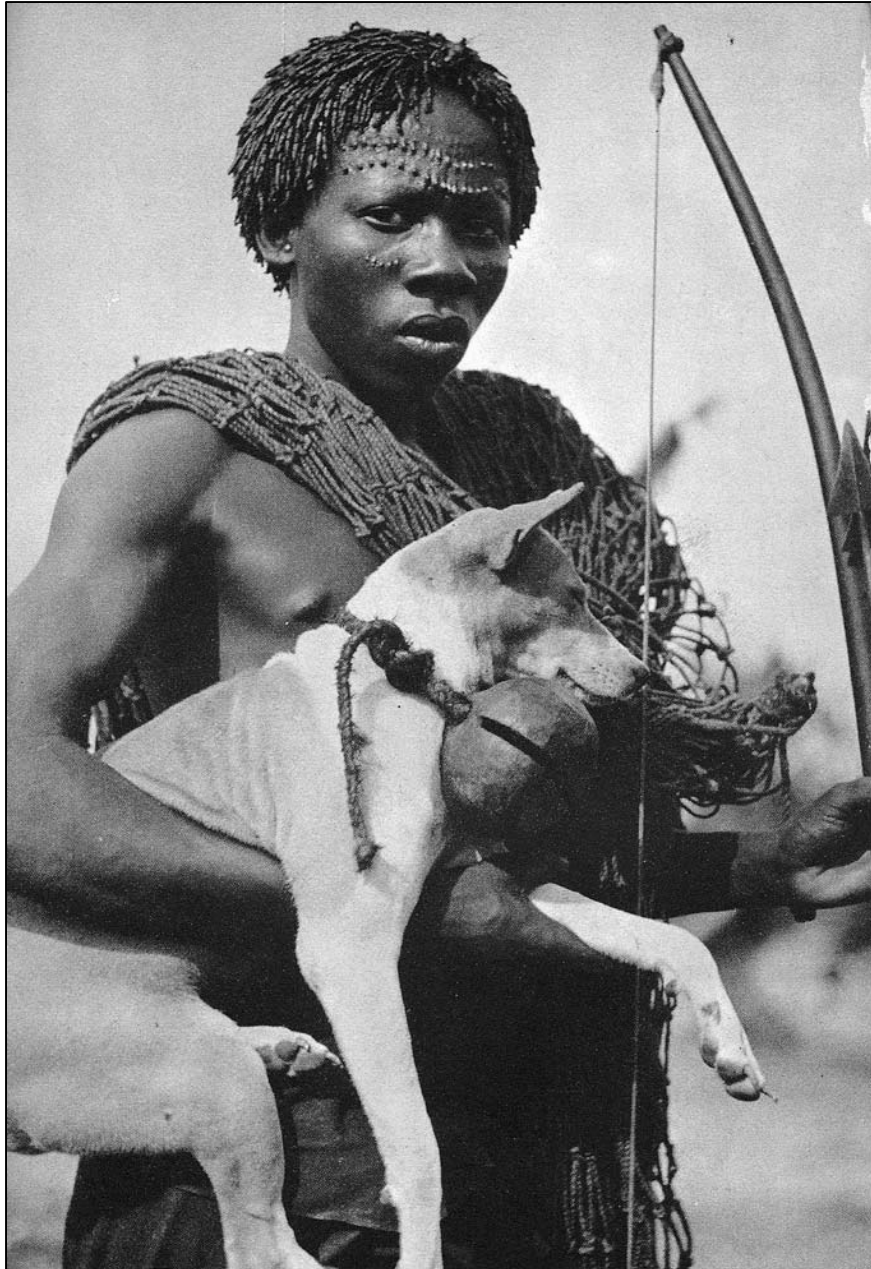
were forbidden to leave the tunnels. One day, however, a female, like so many other females everywhere, disobeyed the rule and was snatched by Assa, the Spirit of Wrath, whose tongue is as long and forked as that of a snake, and from which oozes a poisonous froth. He compelled her to lead him to the dogs' tunnels, where he viciously bit them all. Poisoned by the spirit of Assa, they fought among themselves and ended up by devouring one another. Alone the little bitch that had shown Assa the way was spared. In due time, she gave birth to a litter of puppies and from that time on dogs became the slaves of Assa. Assa mistreated the dogs; he starved and abused them and finally began eating them. All those dogs that had any strength left fled to villages, seeking protection from Assa, who no, having long since finished off his remaining dogs, tries to carry away our own. These days when a dog disappears from our mboka it is never certain whether it has been taken by a leopard or by Assa. Those who have followed their stolen dogs' bloody trails have often overheard their dying complaint and a wicked voice hissing, 'Asssa, Assa!' Sometimes a dog manages to escape the venomous forked tongue dripping with slaver, and attacks his master, for he is possessed by the angry spirit of Assa."

The grandfather sighed, and added astutely, probably for his son Molali's benefit, "And if the dogs should begin to fear that they might be eaten, they will return to Assa."

But Molali did not appear impressed.

Did you not say, when you told us this story the last time, that dogs had first belonged to birds?" he remarked and quickly retreated out of reach of his father's walking stick.

And I couldn't help thinking of how all these beautiful legends, transmitted orally from generation to generation, were destined to change over the years, influenced by failing memories of the old, and perhaps also by the personal inspiration of creative storytellers like my grand old friend, Baloki's and Molali Moke's grandfather.



Asongo—Meno hunter, armed with hunting net and bow and arrows. The Basenji dog, incapable of barking, drives the game toward the men who are hidden near the nets.

Leopard in My Lap

Michaela Denis with photos by Armand Denis

Originally from *Leopard in My Lap*, Julian Messner, Inc., NY, 1955

The Asongo-Menos hunt with nets and take their Basenji dogs with them; large wooden bells with metal clappers are strung round their necks. These dogs cannot bark, but they emit a strange howling noise and drive the game toward the hunters by the tinkling of the bells.

We bought four of the dogs to take with us on our expeditions into the forest, two of the southern type and two of the north-ern. We took them back to Kenya with us, but the two southern dogs died. Loali and Wangu, the northern dogs, survived to interest and delight all dog-lovers who saw them. They are magnificent pure specimens, uncrossed by any European breeds. Tawny in color, they have frown marks on their foreheads, small eyes, upstanding ears, and curly tails. The dogs from the southern Belgian Congo are of the same color, but taller and rangier, with tails like greyhounds. I have seen a white Basenji and another type, black with orange eyebrows and a white line down the nose.



Africans like dogs and are good judges of them. On our travels Loali and Wangu were much admired for their glossy coats and liveliness, for we kept them in top condition. One native offered us the equivalent of fifteen dollars for them—a fabulous amount of money to an African. *(From Leopard in My Lap)*

The Leopard, the Dog and the Tortoise

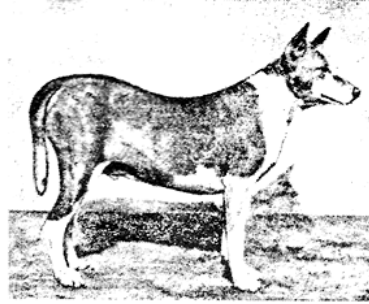
A Legend Mr. Darby of Lukolela told to Rev. J. B. Myers
who recorded it *The Congo for Christ*, S. W. Partridge, 1895 – Revell, 1904 (pp 53-55)

“A dog and a leopard lived near together in the forest. Each had his own hole in the ground, and in it he lived. One day the leopard gave birth to ten children. The dog came to see them, and the leopard said to him, ‘Hey! Mister Dog! You stop here and watch my children while I go and hunt some food for them. When I come back, if I find that you have taken good care of my family, I will give you a piece of meat for yourself.’ ‘All right,’ said the dog. The leopard had scarcely got hidden among the trees when a tortoise came along. ‘Hello, dog!’ said he, ‘how are you to-day, and what are you doing here?’ ‘Oh,’ said the dog, ‘the leopard has gone out to hunt, and he has left me to watch his children and when he returns he is going to give me some meat.’ ‘I say, dog,’ said the tortoise, ‘it is no use waiting until the leopard returns, bring out one of those young leopards and let us kill and eat it.’ ‘I dare not,’ said the dog, ‘when the leopard returns and finds one of his children missing he will immediately kill me.’ ‘Oh, never mind the leopard,’ said the tortoise, ‘he can’t count, and the young leopards are all alike, he does not know one from the other, so can’t tell if one is missing.’ At last the dog brought forth one of the young leopards, killed it, and he and the tortoise ate it. In the evening the leopard returned when it was dark. ‘Well, dog,’ said he, ‘are the children all safe?’ ‘Oh, yes,’ said the dog. ‘Very well then, come and let us have some supper.’ Next day the leopard again went in search of food and left the dog in charge of his family. The tortoise came again as before, and another young leopard was eaten. So it went on for five days, and only five of the young leopards were left. At the end of the fifth day, when the leopard returned, he said, ‘Dog, are the children all safe?’ ‘Yes,’ said the dog. ‘Let me see them!’ The dog began to tremble, but, acting

on the advice of the tortoise, he brought out one young leopard at a time, and then returned it to the hole before bringing out another. In this way he made it appear as if there were ten young leopards. The leopard was satisfied. They ate their suppers and went to bed. Next day the leopard went off hunting again and again the tortoise came up begging for another young leopard. The dog was afraid, and told him how the leopard had counted children the day before. The tortoise said that it was very easy to deceive a leopard. All he had to do was to trust to him (the tortoise) and he would see that all was right. So they ate another young leopard. At last only one of the family remained. ‘Dog,’ said the leopard, ‘my heart yearns for my family; let me see them one by one.’ So the dog went to the hole and brought out the young leopard and showed it to its mother. Then he carried it back into the hole and brought it back again. This he did ten times, so making the leopard believe that all her family remained in the hole.

“Next day the tortoise came again, and he and the dog ate the last of the young leopards. ‘Now, dog,’ said the tortoise, ‘when the leopard asks you how many children he has, you tell him, None. If he says, Where are they? Tell him that you and I have eaten them, and then run off as hard as you can to the towns, and live among the people there, for they like dogs, but always try to kill leopards.’

“In the evening, when the leopard came home and asked the usual questions, the dog replied as the tortoise had instructed him. Then the leopard became very angry, and ran after the dog as fast as he could, and the dog also ran as fast as he could until he reached the town. When the people saw him, they said, ‘Hello dog, have you come to live with us? That is good! Abide here always.’ Just then they heard a noise in the forest, and looking around, they saw the leopard. They immediately got their guns and spears and drove him off. He returned and told all his brother leopards, and from that day to this, whenever a leopard can carry off and eat a dog, he does so in order to revenge the death of the young kinsfolk.”

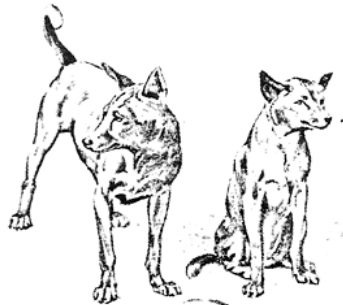


45. Pariah dog from the Congo
(after Brehm)

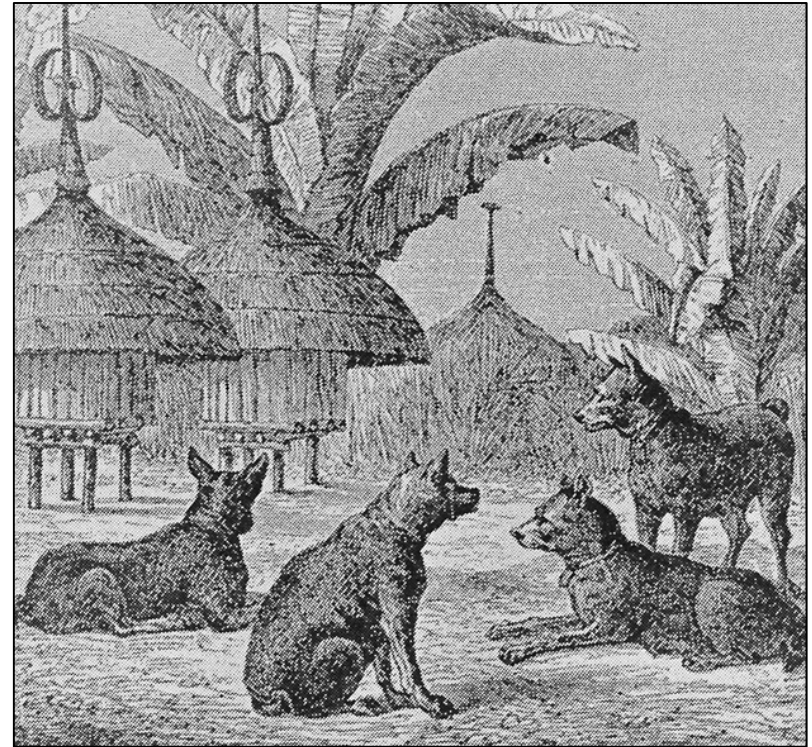
46. (left) Pariah dog of the Babwende,
Congo (after Stanley)



47. Nyam-Nyam dog (after Schweinfurth)



49. Babangi dogs, western equatorial Con-
go (after Johnston)



Unsources photo labelled Nyam Nyam Dogs

*From "The Origin of the Domestic Animals of Africa" by H. Epstein and revised
in collaboration with I. L. Mason*