

Kenya (known as the *emovuo olkiteng* ceremony) is the first to be held; the ceremonies of all other sections follow this particular ceremony. In most sections every full age-set (or age-group, *olaji*) is subdivided into two subsets (or divisions, *olporror*, known as the "right-" and "left-hand" divisions) which are alternately inaugurated by an *enkipaata* ceremony approximately every seven years.

The *eunoto* ceremony (from the verb *aun*, "to plant"), held separately by each division, consolidates the warrior age-set proclaimed by the *enkipaata* ceremony several years earlier. It marks the culmination of warriorhood and accomplishes the transition from junior to senior warriorhood. The ceremony brings together all the circumcision groups (or "warrior companies," *isirito*) from the different localities of the section territory and constitutes it as a corporate social body. At *eunoto* the ritual leader (*olaunoni*) of the entire age-division in each section is elected.

When both the right- and left-hand divisions of the age-set have celebrated their *eunoto* ceremonies, the two divisions are finally joined into the full age-set (*olaji*) in a single, great ceremony – the *olng'eshar* ceremony of the Kisongo and the *enkang' olorikan* of other sections. The *olng'eshar* ceremony precedes the equivalent ceremonies in other sections and, thus, has the distinction of completing the age-group formation initiated by the Keekonyokie section. At the *olng'eshar* ceremony a single, permanent name is adopted for the age-set which applies to all sections of Maasailand.

In short, for most sections age-divisions are formed every seven years, and every two divisions are linked together into a single age-set on a cycle of approximately 14 years. Alternate age-sets are, in turn, linked in a relationship of strong solidarity, referred to as "firesticks" (*ilpironito*); the elder of two alternate age-sets serves as the sponsor of the younger by ritually "making fire" for – and thereby socially creating – it. The firestick relationship between alternate age-sets is, as will be seen, a symbolically charged and socially important relationship in Maasai society.

#### b) Ordinary and Ritual Food

Maasai dietary rules vary, as does the strictness of their application, according to age and sex. Among men the dietary code serves to distinguish one age-grade from another. In an account of the Maasai food system it is therefore necessary to constantly refer back to the sharp distinctions in Ma-

sai society between males and females, children (the uncircumcised youth) and adults (circumcised men and women), and the age gradation among men in terms of the age-set system. Of particular importance, as will become clear in the course of the paper, is the differentiation between "warriors" (*ilmuran*) and "elders" (*ilpayani*).

I shall begin with an outline description of the main food items and their contexts of use, and then move on to a more detailed treatment of the particular dietary rules and restrictions applying to the warriors. The descriptive account closes with a note on the diet in the context of the major age-set rituals outlined above.

Milk (*kule*) is the traditional staple and daily food par excellence. Cows are milked twice daily by women and girls, at sunrise before the cattle leave for pasture and at sunset when they have returned to the kraal. The only fixed meal times in the Maasai household are in the morning and evening just after milking. These meals, typically consisting only of fresh milk, are taken in the privacy of each house. A polygynous husband usually takes his meals alternately in the houses of each of his wives. The young herdboys, who often leave with the cattle before the morning meal, take a gourd of milk with them to drink during their long working day.

Women have total control over the distribution of milk in the house. Wives allocate the milk to their husbands and children according to their own judgement. After each milking a certain amount of milk is always stored away for the small children who remain in the homestead during the day, so that they may drink whenever they get hungry. Some milk is also kept for unexpected visitors, and especially for groups of warriors who have the right to demand milk whenever they pass.<sup>6</sup> To have enough milk is a sign of plenty and prosperity in the house. Milk is thus not shared between houses or homesteads; it would be a sign of deplorable misery.

Men drink only cow's milk. Women and children may – when milk is scarce – drink the milk of small stock. Milk is taken either fresh (*kule nairowa*), sour (*kule naauto*), boiled (*nailana*), or curdled (*eng'orno*). Curdled milk is especially rel-

<sup>6</sup> As will be described below, the warriors occupy a unique position in the Maasai food system and are subject to certain dietary restrictions which, during junior warriorhood, prohibit them from drinking milk in their mother's house and from their father's herd. In compensation for their collective services to the community they are expected to be fed and sustained by the community as a whole. Hence they demand – and receive – milk wherever they go in the section territory.