

milk alone. This usually takes place between *eunoto* and *olng'eshher* in order to allow warriors to marry and settle down in their separate homesteads. Both ceremonies are referred to as *eokotoo ekule*. It is said that in former days the latter formed part of the *olng'eshher* and *enkang' olorikan* ceremonies. Finally, there are the local meat-eating feasts (*enkang oonkiri*) that follow upon the section-wide *olng'eshher* and *enkang' olorikan* ceremonies which allow the new elders to eat meat individually in their homesteads. In this way the life-cycle of an individual is expressed in the dietary idiom through the imposition and gradual removal of the *enturuj* restrictions, just as the sequence of age-set rituals can be seen to articulate the contours of the Maasai food system.

The essential features of the food system may now be summed up: (1) The Maasai ideally subsist on pastoral foods alone and consequently reject other sources of food; (2) the dietary ideal applies with greater strictness to warriors and elders than to women and children; (3) the warriors have a unique position in the food system, reflected in the *enturuj* restrictions and the fact that they are exempted from the proscription against slaughtering cattle for food; (4) milk and meat form a contrastive pair in the pastoral food system, articulated by the prohibition on mixing milk and meat; (5) roasted meat and honey mead are symbolically equivalent and play a central role in Maasai ritual.

These are the features we set out to elucidate in the rest of the paper. They become meaningful and comprehensible in the context of the fundamental principles of Maasai cosmology and social classification, to which we now turn.

2. The Symbolic Universe: An Outline of Maasai Cosmology and Social Classification

An account of Maasai cosmology may appropriately begin with a consideration of the homestead or kraal camp which to the Maasai is a model of their social universe and cosmos as a whole. The spatial organization of the homestead and its symbolic connotations condense and codify – in a spatial idiom – the fundamental features of Maasai cosmology.

As I have devoted an earlier paper to this topic (Århem 1985c), I shall here only briefly outline the basic principles of the social and cosmological symbolism centred on the pastoral homestead. They revolve around the contrast between homestead (*enkang'*) and bush (*entim*) and the spatial dichotomies articulated by the internal divisions of the homestead itself.

a) Homestead and Bush

The homestead consists of a rough circle of houses surrounded by a thorn fence. Various cattle gates in the thorn fence – as many as there are livestock owners – lead into the open space at the centre where cattle rest at night. Sheep, goats, and calves are kept in separate enclosures at the perimeter of the homestead, between the circle of houses and the open space at the centre. The houses are owned and built by the women. Here men, women, and children sleep at night and take their meals during the day. Children are born and girls circumcised in the houses. Newborn calves are also kept in the warmth of the house. The house is the domain of women. The homestead as a whole, in contrast, is owned by the man, and the open space in the centre of the homestead is the domain of men and cattle. Here the men gather at dawn and dusk. Men and cattle are closely associated in Maasai thought. Their central place in the homestead reflects their central place in Maasai culture as a whole.

The concentric dualism of the homestead receives cosmological significance in the context of the major age-set rituals. The *enkipaata*, which proclaims the opening of the circumcision period, the *eunoto*, when junior warriors become senior warriors, and the *olng'eshher* and *enkang' olorikan* ceremonies, when warriors become elders, take place in ritual villages which are larger-scale and more elaborate versions of the homestead. In fact, the spatial layout of the ordinary homestead is modelled on, and informed by, the ritual villages.

During the *eunoto* ceremony the junior warriors are socially reborn as senior warriors in the *osinkira* house at the centre of the ritual village. The *osinkira* house is conceptually opposed to the ordinary houses at the periphery of the homestead as male to female, centre to periphery, but also as sacred to ordinary space. Just as the ordinary houses are the place where women give birth to children, the *osinkira* house is the sacred place where men – the *olpiron* elders – give birth to senior warriors in a social sense.

This cosmological dimension of the concentric dualism comes out with even greater clarity in the *olng'eshher* and *enkang' olorikan* ceremonies. Here the entire village is transformed during the ritual into a cosmos in miniature. The *enkang' olorikan* ceremony among the Purko, which I have examined elsewhere (Århem 1985c), dramatically reenacts the widespread Maasai creation myth in which God (Enkai) lets cattle descend from the sky along