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TOPIC: LEGEND

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LEGEND OF BAT CATCHING IN THE CAVE

In the olden days, in this village of ours, if a woman from the MATAQALI or clan of the VATUKARORO is pregnant and given birth to a child, she would be liking food such as bats and other things. These food are known to be their BA (fence)

Under this village, there is a big cave in which there are plentiful of bats. These bats in the olden days are used especially for food for the newly mother from the VATUKARORO mataqali or clan.

In the process of getting the bats for the cave, they are a special clan whose traditional duties is the getting of or catching of the bat.

Before these people, especially men, are going down to the cave, they would at first present and offer a YAQONA ceremony to their MALO or chief in regards to their going down to the cave.

When the yaqona is already mixed, the chief in that ceremony would ask the people preparing to enter the cave about the person who is going to lead them and the one who is also going to climb first.

The man who is going to climb the inside of the cave first would take the first drink in that yaqona ceremony. All of the men would drink in that ceremony until the yaqona is finished.

After the yaqona drinking ceremony, the chief would tell the cave climbers to wear their traditional dress i.e the skirt dress made

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from VASILI leaves. These leaves skirt are already prepared. Once they have their skirt dress on, they would march down to the cave.

Before entering the cave, themen would be ~~having~~ two long sticks in which to climb on the hill inside the cave. One of the big stick is eight yards long and this one is used as the ladder from the bottom part of the cave to another opening of cave which is a bit further up. This opening of the cave which is a bit further up on the cave is the place where the bats are. The stick is placed nicely on the floor of the cave and the men would climb on it. The man who had drank the yaqona first would lead the men into the climbing. They would be using burning reed leaves as their light because the cave is as so dark.

In climbing the first stick, they would be doing so as of they were climbing a coconut tree. Once they have reached their first leg of climbing, they would bring another stick which is about seven yards long and place it from that spot to the opening in which the bats are present.

The second leg of climbing is a dangerous one because for the climbers to move and secondly in this last leg, they would be climbing in total darkness. The men would be climbing by their stomach like a lizard. The man who has drank the yaqona first during the ceremony would also take the lead in this second leg of climbing. He would climb first and once he has reached the opening, he would hold on to the end of the stick, so to steady it while the rest of the men is going to climb up. During the leader's climbing, the stick would be shaking and swaying since

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there is not an exact position in which the stick could be on to. Thus when he will reach the top, his first duty is to hold on to the end of that stick making it to be steady.

When the climbers have reached the second cave (I.e the opening of up on the wall of the cave) they would prepare with their short broad **sticks**. Each men would be having one. This tick are used is the beating of the bats.

Once all the men are ready, they would move silently towards the inner side of the cave. They would be walking in total darkness. The leader would take the lead and **he** will be looking at the place where the bats are hanging together in large numbers. All the rest would be following him with their beating sticks ready to strike.

Once the leader have seen a group of bats, he would call out 'BODEI'. This means to be ready. The leader would at first ~~disturb~~ that ~~group~~ group of bats he had seen. As the bats started to fly, the men would start beating the,. They would ~~start~~ start beating until ~~the~~ all the bats are dead. ~~After that they would call out~~ 'BODEI'. After that, they would move further inside the cave beating all the bats.

The procedure will remain the same, as the leader will see a group of bats, he would call out 'BODEI'. The men following would be ready and when the leader disturb the bats, the beating is then started.

Once the men have collected enough, they would tell the leader that they **are** full now and there are plenty of bats caught. The leader would then tell themen to alight their reed leaves torch. They will then return.

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The bats are collected and put into its baskets or SOVA. The leader would be the first to climb down. When the first to climb down has safely landed, the rest of themen would lowered the baskets of bats, using the rope for him to take it. They would do the same ~~xx~~ on the second leg of climbing down to the bottm of the cave.

When the leader and the basket of bats are safely placed, the rest of themen shall follow.

The baskets of bats are taken by the climbers to the MATAQALI or clan where the newly mother is present. The leader of that clan would be providing a yaqona drinking ceremony for the climbers when they shall return. The chief or leader would also be providing a feast for the men. That is all.

- Talking about the climbing of the bats, you mentioned before our recording that this bats are unique in that they possee tails.....
Yes that is true. These bats have tails like mouse. But their tails is a bit shorter than that of a mouse. The rest of the body is all bat.
- Is there any TUKUNI or legend about this particular kind of bats with tails?
No. I have no idea of any legend about them. I could not recall any of my ancestors telling me a story about this kind of bats. I usually hear from them how these bats were brought. These bats are also a chiefly food. These bats are known to us as BEKABEKA.
- You mentioned about the two caves inside the cave, could you tell me more about this cave?

Yes, there are two caves. The big one is the one which the village is upon, and another one which is on the wall of the big cave. This is where the bats are/.

- You mentioned that bats are brought from the cave if a woman gives birth from the chiefly clan.....

The bat catching is only done if the woman need it. It is from them to decide whether they like it or not. If the newly mother from the chiefly clan wants to eat bats, the chief would send for the climbers. As I have told you already, there are only a special clan who are capable of climbing the cave and thus bringing the bats down. These climbers comes from the clan of NAVUNIKAVOA.

- These bats are

The bats are taken to be eaten by the newly mother. The food prepared is termed as the BA (fence). In the very old days, women who gives birth will have dalo stmes known as BABA to be their food. The food is given to them or to newly mothers is derived from this, which is called the BA. Hence the bringing of the bats to the newly mother is thus called BA.

- ? I wish if you could tell me if anyone from the village wanted to eat some bats, how will he/she go about. Will he/she go straight to the cave?

No, if anybody from the village wanted to have some bats, they would have to see the owner of the cave, i.e the climbers. That person should present a yaqona to the climbers if he or they wanted to go to the cave to bring some bats. The procedure is just the same. It would be ask who is going to climb into the cave first, and all the rest after.

The climbers would dress in leaves skirt and also put darl spots on their face before going to the cave.

- I wish if you could tell me the meaning of the YAQONA drinking ceremony before the going to the cave, as you have mentioned. The owners of the cave, is like the priest of the cave. The yaqona, I believe is like a safe-guard to the climbers or the protection of the climbers while in the cave. This always typical in the life of our elders in the olden days. The people who wanted to go into the cave must drink the yaqona first for their safety. It is the duty of the priest who will provide the yaqona drinking ceremony. As soon as the priest will allow them to go inside the cave, he will ask them, who is the leader. The rest will ~~remain~~ ~~qui~~ remain quiet. The priest would give the first cup of yaqona to theman who has volunteer to take the lead. This cave whoch is under thevillage is a very big cave and also it is very dark.
- Could you tell me how the climbers would go inside the cave. They would wlak in single file, one after the other. As soon as they will reach where the stick is to be placed, they would gather around and lt the leader climb first.
- Mentioning about the stick, could you tell me more about this particular stick used for climbing?
The stick is 8 yards long and that shows it is a big one. It is also quite big in thickness.
All these I heard from my wife's father. He is one of the climbers during their time. It is the person who told me everything about cave climbing.

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This cave (i.e the bigger one) opens from one end to the other end. In the olden days, when I grew up, if someone wants to walk through the cave, they would go in groups with leaves-burning as their torch. If you will enter from the dry end of the cave you will have to swim as you will near the other end. When it comes to swimming the light would be put off and everyone would swim toward the entrance of the cave where the light is entering through. There would be total darkness when the swimming is going. During that time, the ~~only~~ TABU is ~~that~~ nobody in that swimming group should try to overtake or swim past another swimmer. All should follow their live, the one who will swim in the front always have to take the lead and be in the front.

The elders used to say that if anybody tries to overtake another swimmer, a big snake would arise from the water blocking their way to the other end ~~at the~~ of the entrance. If the snake shall arise, the journey can no longer continue and the swimmers will return to the entrance which they had previously entered. The only TABU is that while walking or swimming inside the cave, nobody should try to overtake another one. The snake will only come up if it is seen that someone passing another one. At that short moment, all would return without reaching the other end of the cave. This happenings is not so today but eventually this happened in the olden days.

- I wish if you could tell me, for instance if seven men are going to collect bats, will all of them going to climb or some of them will remain on the floor of the cave?

No. All of them would climb. Only the leader should take the lead everythime. All of them would be carry their sticks and

the empty baskets. Once they will enter the second opening, the leader would be the first to enter further into the dark cave. Once the leader is going to see a group of bats, he would shout 'BODEI'. The man following hearing this word would separate from one another and positioned themselves at different angles. This only to prevent one from hitting the other. Once the men are at different positions, they would start beating. The bats flying low in the open air. They would be doing this in total darkness. The climbers would continue with the same procedure as they move deeper into the dark cave. Once the climbers know that they have beaten enough bats, the leader would announce for the re-lighting of the leaves. Once the cave is lighted, they would collect the dead bats and put them on the baskets. The man who told me about this story, and he is also one of the climbers, said that the cave which the bats are in is very small compared to the bigger one. So the climbers find it easier to manoeuvre themselves.

- Mentioning about the opening (i.e second one) could you tell me how far it is from the bottom of the bigger cave?

As I have told the second cave needs a seven yards stick and the first one a eight yards stick. The bigger cave is in the first one.

- You mentioned that these bats are brought when the newly mother needs it. For instance if the newly mother wants to eat this bat everyday, will the climbers go to the cave every day or.... There is no other option but to follow what is needed from the chiefs household.

Another method of catching the bats is the using of the SONI which is a little tree with plentiful of thorns. This little tree are tied to long bamboo. In the afternoon the ancestors would be preparing for this thing and early the next morning, the men would stand guarded at the entrance of the cave with their bamboos. When the day started to break, the bats are seen coming in large numbers heading towards the cave.

As the bats pass over the entrance, the men would put their bamboos up so that the on-coming bats will bump into the SONI tree sull of thorns. The wings of the bats would be struck into the thorns and hence the men would lower the bamboo and hit the bat to death. This is one method of bat collecting.

- Would there be traditional dressing in this method of the bat-catching?

No. Only the men who are going to climb will be dressed in skirts. As for the bat catching at the entrance, there is no traditional dressing.

- Could you tell me the meaning of why the traditional dressing is required for the climbers. Would there be any consequences if there is a time when the traditional dress is not worn?

As far as I am concerned I have no idea for the significance of the traditional dress... I heard that when the climbers would be dressed up, they would be like dressing for a traditional war or MEKE (dance). That is how they do it.

- Talking about the climbers and their duties, could you tell me if there is any tabu for them (climbers) to follow before or after the climbing of the cave?

I have no very clear picture about the tabu. But I heard that the climbers would follow the basic tabu and that is the climbers would not sleep with their wives the night before they would go

out to the cave. This tabu should strictly followed. The climbing is quite a difficult task because all the things which are done is carried out in total darkness. The carrying of the baskets with the stick are pass from one man to the other during the dark hour. The light would only be lit when the collecting of the bats is to be done.

- Mentioning about the bringing of the bats, could you tell me how this is prepared for the newly mother as you have mentioned? The bats are brought and put straight fo the pots to be cooked. As for the chief, he would preperere a yaqona and a small feast when the climbers return, they are going to enjoy this feast.
- You mentioned that the bats are brought and put striaght to the pot, could you tell us how this food is traditional prepared fo cokking among the ancestors in the olden days? When the bats are brought it is taken straight to the pot, with some water and cooked. The skin is not peeled or anything done in it. Straight to the pot. That is all I could tell you about the climbing of the bats.

THANK YOU.

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