

HISTORY OF TROKOSI

The giving of virgin girls to the gods was part of many ancient religions and the practice was very similar to that of trokosi.

In India

Indian children sold to Hindu temples were considered “married to the gods,” and were then made available to Hindu men who frequented the temple. This fact was largely secret. Even some missionaries refused to believe it was as prevalent as missionary Amy Carmichael claimed. They said she wasted her time looking for children who did not exist. Undaunted, with the help of converted Indian women, Amy scoured the country as a spy. From 1901 to 1913, she had 130 such children in her care. Hundreds more were later taken in by Dohnavur Fellowship. The Dohnavur Fellowship was started in India as Amy Carmichael’s home for rescuing girls from temple prostitution. She was not alone in resisting the practice. Indian reformers were also outraged by it. ¹

The practice continues today in the Hindu practice known as devadasi, in which a virgin marries the Hindu gods and claims to draw closer to them by copulating with men.

In Africa

In Ancient Egypt

Sacred prostitutes were also known in ancient Egypt. “The temple also had a priestess with a superior at the head; they included hierodules, sacred prostitutes, whose actions... were supposed to provoke the sacred marriage of the gods in the sky, the source of fertility on earth”.

From Religions of the Ancient East, Vol. 141, Etienne Drioton, Georges Conenau & Jacques Duchemee-Gullemin, Hawthorne Books, NY, 1959, p. 1107. Located in MBI Library.

In West Africa

In West Africa the practice has gone on for at least several hundred years. Similar practices using similar terminology were found in the royal court of the Kingdom of Dahomey (in what is now Benin), in the 1700's and 1800's. Wives, slaves, and in fact all persons connected with the royal palace of Dahomey were called "ahosi", from "aho" meaning "king", and "si" meaning "dependent" or "subordinate."^[24] By one estimate there were 5,000 to 7,000 ahosi living in the palace at Abomey^[25], and no men lived there except for a few hundred eunuchs were charged with controlling the women. After sunset no men at all were allowed in the palace except the king, and he was guarded by women guards called Amazons. The king controlled every aspect of the lives and even the deaths of the ahosi. Visitors to old Abomey today are shown a mass grave and told that the king's wives "volunteered," on his death, to be buried alive with him in order to accompany him and serve him in the world to come. One researcher pointed out, "Of course, one should not make the mistake of ascribing modern democratic meaning to the word "volunteered" as if the wives wanted to die or had any choice in the matter.^[26] Ahosi who became too powerful or too independently-minded were simply sacrificed (literally and physically) in the annual office ceremony lasting several days in which the power of the king was renewed by hundreds of human sacrifices, usually performed by public beheadings.^[27]

The practice was documented by A.B. Ellis who was an eyewitness of the practice in the Dahomey Empire (now Benin) in 1895. According to Ellis, one god called "Khebioso" had 1500 wives in Dahomey alone, the women being called "kosio". He said they cared for the shrines of the gods, but their main business was religious prostitution. According to Ellis, most of the gods of the Ewe-speaking people at that time had such women who were similarly consecrated to their service and were commonly considered "wives" of the gods.^[28]

One might argue that those ahosi were wives of the king and lived in the palace, not wives of the gods living in the shrines. But that distinction is not as clearcut as it might first seem, for the palace was the

center of Dahomean religious life, and the place where sacrifices were made and rituals to the ancestors were performed. Over time, then, it was an easy jump from being ahoṣi living lives totally controlled by the king in the palace where sacrifices were offered and rituals were performed, to being trokosi living lives totally controlled by a priest in a shrine where sacrifices were offered and rituals were performed. It was a very easy transition indeed. Even in the time of the Kingdom of Dahomey, one reads of the vodun or gods successfully demanding that someone become a devotee or vodunsi (wife or follower of the god).^[29]

In Ghana

As people migrated within West Africa, the practice spread. Sandra Greene has noted that in Ghana, the practice dates to at least the late eighteenth century. At the time the Amlade clan Sui became very powerful, and began to demand female slaves from those who sought its services. The practice called "replacement" also began in Ghana at that time. Under this practice, if a shrine slave died or ran away, the family was required to replace her with another girl.^[30] At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Nyigbla became the chief Anlo deity, and its' shrines also began to demand slaves for its services. Involuntary slavery, however, was not at that time and in that place common, since Nyigbla also instituted a practice called foasi, whereby two servants were recruited annually on a more-or-less voluntary basis. At that time, the slaves were often married to members of powerful priestly families.^[31]

The king controlled every aspect of the lives and even the deaths of the ahoṣi. Visitors to old Abomey today are shown a mass grave and told that the king's wives "volunteered", on his death, to be buried alive with him in order to accompany and serve him in the world to come. Of course, one should not make the mistake of ascribing modern democratic meaning to the word "volunteered," as if the wives wanted to die or had any choice in the matter.ⁱ Ahoṣi who became too powerful or too independently-minded were simply sacrificed in the annual office, a days-long ceremony in which the power of the king was renewed by hundreds of human sacrifices.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ p. 306, "Daughters of the Church"
by Ruth A. Tucker & Walter L Liefield
Academic Books, Zondervan
Grand Rapids, MI 1987.

p. 240-241, "From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya"
by Ruth Tucker
Zondervan, 1983.

For footnote numbers, see History of Trokosi, Wikipedia text.