

# Legends of Our Common Heritage 2

## Bong, The Hunting Dog!

Hunting in Mankon used to serve many purposes. It was a strong element of a patriarchal culture in which elderly men passed down skills to younger ones of the community. It was also a past time in which men came together to discuss social issues affecting the community. The story that comes hereafter evolves around a hunting dog called Bong, in other words "Goodness", or "Generosity." At the end of the story, you will agree with me that Bong was more than a hunting dog, he was a legend.

Bong was owned by a member of the Bakoro clan in Mankon. In the eyes of the naive and profane, Bong could easily be dismissed as an underfed and malnourished pet. But Bong was something else in the hunting field.

On a typical hunting day, men and male children gathered early in the compound of whoever was to head the day's expedition. They brought along with them machetes, spears, dane guns, hunting nets and of course their dogs. The younger boys' arsenal included clubs, short spears and a punctuation of their parents' large hunting bags draped over their shoulders. You could inadvertently see the excitement on their faces as they fantasized about how they would kill the biggest animal in the hunt, (they usually didn't kill anything anyway, but were just as contented with the small rodents, "mbab ntah," that were easy preys). Bong shared in this excitement the way a master of the art would.

With twinkling little eyes, he darted around as if warming up for the trip at hand. When the hunting party departed for the fields, Bong stayed close to his master. But once they got there, Bong got to work without any ado. With a watery nose he sniffed into every burrow, animal track and animal hide-out. Excitement reached a crescendo when Bong dispersed either a herd of deer or a colony of hedge hogs. He would pick out one of them and begin the chase.

At this point, the master's voice, ever so close, would call out endless incitements to whip up the flow of Bong's adrenaline. "Catch it Bong. Go after it. Bong the only one. Your master won't go home in vain Bong." As if this was not enough, the din produced by whistles, the barking of other dogs and the screams of juvenile hunters simply enhanced Bong's prowess. Stretched to full length, ribcage barely protected by thin skin, tail pointed and tongue protruding, Bong could chase the fastest animal across several hills and valleys, leaving his master and the rest of the party far behind. The jingle of the hunting bell fastened around his neck was the only indication of his whereabouts. When the game was finally killed, Bong would mount guard close to it, that's if he couldn't carry it back to his master, and bark until his master came around.

At the end of the expedition, the party converged at a road junction and shared the day's catch among themselves and anyone who came across the sharing exercise. Bong was given nothing but he contented himself with blood left on the leaves on which the sharing had been done. After

lapping the leaves clean, Bong followed his master dedicatedly back home. During the evening meal, Bong had nothing but bare bones devoid of any meat, even marrow. Do not forget that even the entrails of animals were delicacies reserved for children. Nevertheless, Bong always skipped so athletically into the air to catch a bone that was so "generously" thrown his way. After the meal, he was sent outside to guard the compound while the family slept. Bong was a true symbol of his clan and everybody loved him. Did I say everybody? No. There was an exception. It was common knowledge in the clan that during a poor hunting trip, a greedy hunter had caught an animal in his net. No one saw him so he dug a hole and buried the animal in it with the intention of returning at dusk to collect it. He then feigned a fever, excused himself and went home. But when he returned after dusk, the animal was gone. How did it happen? Bong had discovered the trove, unearthed the animal and dragged it to his master. That was the only catch of the day! The big eyed hunter later learned what had happened and hated Bong for the rest of the dog's life. Bong eventually passed away and although many clansmen named their pets after him, non of them ever had all the qualities and virtues of Bong, the hunting dog.

Fellow tribesmen and women, as we remember Bong today, who among us can boast of equal generosity, dedication and selflessness vis a vis his master and community in Mankon? Today we focus on individual motivations and turn our backs on our tribe. That is a vice. The time has come for a turn around. Let us give generously to Mankon without expecting our land to return it to us. When we start doing that, we will realize how strong, progressive and indomitable we can be as children with a common heritage. And some day, posterity will remember our good name as we do that of Bong today. That in itself is a virtue.

The most correct answer to last week's "Njalah" is "kuku"

Here is this week's "Njalah":

"I am the king's staff lying across the foot path." What really am I?

Until next week, let the gods of our land protect us. If any misfortune has to occur, let it happen before we arrive or after we have left the scene. Never in our presence!

Munyong-Abieri

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