

OEMBOE DONGGA

DOOR

D. K. WIDENGA



OEMBOE DONGGA

HET KAMPONG-HOOFD OP SOEMBA
The Kampung head on Sumba

EEN VERHAAL UIT HET
LEVEN VAN EEN HEIDEN
A novel from the live of a pagan

DOOR

D. K. WIELENGA

MET OORSPRONKELIJKE ILLUSTRATIES



UITGAVE VAN J. H. KOK TE KAMPEN — 1928

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FOREWORD.

This is not a mission book in the ordinary sense of the word, because it does not tell of the powerful effect of the Gospel in the Marapu world.

It is also not a mission story, telling how a Marapu-man came to the Light, because it ends with a question mark.

But the book wants to introduce the reader into the reality of the Marapu, as it is restless and insecure, in fear of all kinds of dark powers and forces, ruled by fate and chance .

Not the "true life story" of Umbu Dongga is given here, because he is only a name that I needed as the center of a description of the daily life of the Sumbese, as revealed in far different times and in different circumstances.

Only the personal names and the places in this book are fictitious, so it's more than "a story based on truth", where the author only uses his own imagination.

I wanted to give not a story from popular life, but a description of popular life in the form of a story. As much as possible the Sumba man speaks for himself, talking in his image-rich language with rhythm and cadence, when he has to deal with issues or problems to solve.

It is therefore a book for those who not only want to become acquainted with the spiritual life of a natural people in general, but who also want to have an answer to the question of how they think and speak, live and act in the ordinary day, with all its troubles and worries.

Yet it is a missionary book because you will learn to know the great poverty and the sad misery of the Pagan with its human gods.

Umbu Dongga's life, so full of unrest and questions: the message is that only light from the Gospel can clear the many mysteries of life.

Even though the dark shadows of Paganism are often shown here, the rays of light of the Gospel also begin to shine brightly on this mission field. But that is a different history.

This book aims to show the great difficulties of missionary work among a heathen people, so you are increasingly aware that no culture or civilization, not a human word or a human deed, but only God's Word and Spirit can bring salvation in darkness and death.

Knowledge of poverty and misery suffered by your neighbor may bring us, however, not only thanks to their own wealth and happiness, but should lead us to actual fulfillment of the prayer: Your Kingdom come.

Mission knowledge will increase our mission love.

D.K. Wielenga
August 1927.

I. THE INCURABLE SICK MAN.

DONGGA was a man of power and brute force. He was not particularly experienced in conducting a dispute, much less he had a quick, smooth, rattling tongue at his disposal, which allowed him to kill his counterparty during negotiations, but he had a heavy roaring voice that could command. The sound of that voice, the sparkle of his dark eyes, and the gesture with which his right hand always grabbed at the handle of his large machete, was more than sufficient to add authority to his words.

His thinking head and mouth, however, he had in the person of Ana Kami, a personal servant, who from an early age grew up with him, and who like a shadow was always near him wherever he went.

Ana Kami was a cunning man. Inexhaustible in inventing trickery at selling stolen horses. He was a master in trimming horse ears, so that the original owner's mark grew unrecognizable and the ears were not so damaged that it could be seen that they had been tampered with.

He knew the secret of a certain type of grass, turning a thin bony animal in a few days into a seemingly smooth well-fed horse. The Arab in the harbor was allowed to look at the animal from all sides in the bright sunlight and to feel it, he would discover nothing and think he would have made a "bargain" if he were given the horse for seventy "Rijksdaalders". It was however a "bargain" because if the beast got his mysterious feed no more, it visibly began to lose weight and was in days not much more than skin and bones. Not worth thirty Rijksdaalders.

When he had played this trick several times, he thought it better not to offer horses for sale himself anymore. That was not necessary however, because another servant of the lord, if necessary dressed with a bark headscarf and a shoulder cloth of the same primitive material as a mountain man, was sent for sale.

Ana Kami was, above all, skilled by the spinning out of many long arguments. Like a winding river eel, he managed to keep his opponents busy for hours, without ever giving a hold of himself. He always acted as spokesperson for his lord, who was merely there to give authority to his words. In all quarrels with neighboring villages and regions, over meadows or garden areas, about dowry and penance, he was too smooth on everyone and always had the last word, so that the victory was always on his side.

He was no less experienced in all kinds of religious matters. Better than many old religious prayer mediators he knew the detailed litanies of prayer. He carefully paid attention to the fact that when making sacrifices, the right ritual was applied in the right order.

He was also an expert in all adat matters at marriage, birth and funeral. The mutual family relationships of various tribes, genera, families, houses of their own area and surrounding areas for him was an open book. When difficulties arose concluding a marriage or sharing an inheritance, he was never consulted in vain.

The fact that Umbu Dongga was considered one of the main area-heads, a man of wealth and therefore of influence and authority, was surely due to Ana Kami, his second-ego.

Together they sat on the open front gallery, basking in the morning sun .

Umbu Dongga cut a small lime pot out off the tip of a horn of a karbauw (water buffalo), while Ana Kami was busy knotting a fish net.

One can sit still for hours without speaking, but not without some tinkering. The hands must have something to do while talking or thinking.

While they sat so quietly next to each other in silence, Ana Kami diagonally to the right behind his lord, the silence was constantly broken by a sharp barking cough inside the house.

Umbu Dongga drew a heavy wrinkle in his forehead after spitting out a fire-red spurt of Sirih, and he began to complain to his body servant.

“Do you hear that Habuku coughing ? It is no longer possible to listen to. He has been barking all night long and it already takes many days and nights. ”

It was a sad case with Habuku and he was in a bad state. He had been sick for months and it didn't get any better. His master had first thought that it was only slave tricks and had therefore sent him a few times to the gardens.

But one evening he was brought home, seated on a horse, after a heavy spitting of blood. He really couldn't work anymore.

The formerly good-looking man was now almost unrecognizable, so thin he was. His robust voice had changed in a short lame pronounced whisper.

In the dark house they had made a small partition for him. His chest went up and down in silence, because there was anything but fresh air in that booth. No ray of sunlight penetrated there. But the smoke from the fire did penetrate in his room, because there was no chimney in the house and the smoke was looking for a way out everywhere.

It was a pity for the man, for it had always been such a loyal, good servant, and his lord had almost never complained about him. That is why Umbu Dongga had taken him to the family home now that he was so sick. He belonged to a servant family that had already grown up from parent to parent in the family, so he was treated in some way as a "child of the house". With the purchased slaves, who went from hand to hand, people were not so concerned. They were allowed to die lonely like a dog in a remote garden shed.

But for him, besides many chickens, Umbu Dongga had even slaughtered a pig to please the spirits. However, nothing had helped. All kinds of medicine with all kinds of incantations had been applied without any consequence of recovery.

The master of the house could no longer keep his thoughts to himself and said to Ana Kami, his right hand: “It is a shame of the man, so great, so strong and so willing in the work. And now he will die. I am unhappy lately. First my riding horse became lame, then five horses were stolen from the herd. Each time chickens die and the pigs also become lean. And now that hassle with my people. Habuku is almost dead. The one coughs, the other has it in his stomach and the other in his head. It is more than bad nowadays. I will become poor if it continues like this.

Would the village spirit be angry? But didn't I kill a young buffalo a few months ago at his sacrificial stone?

Are the souls of the forefathers offended? But I do not know whether I have done anything lately, which is contrary to the old customs and habits.

That trip to Ai Langga, to fetch horses, might not have been entirely right, but after all, I sacrificed a fat pig with protruding tusks. In the past, in my younger years, I did a lot, which was actually not allowed. I did not mind eloping with a young woman or even forcing a married woman. But I sacrificed a long time ago for that. So that is over. It is therefore incomprehensible to me how everything nowadays runs against me.

Especially these sick people: where can I find the cause and how to put an end to it? "

Ana Kami had silently listened to his lord, but now he ventured the remark:
"If the White Lord came to have a look, he is skilled in all kinds of medicine. It is said that he has a hundred bottles and jars of various medicine drinks. Every morning dozens of people arrive at his yard. He helps everyone. Even he pokes in the dirtiest wounds with a stick, spreads ointment on them and bandages them, o great waste, with clear white rags."

"If we would call him to come and see Habuku and also asked for advice about the many diseases in our village? "

"You must be silent, how can you call for the White Lord for a sick slave. How can you think he would come for that? "

Ana Kami did not give up so quickly and his answer was:
"That White Lord is incomprehensible. He doesn't ask if anyone is lord or freeman or slave. He helps everyone. I heard recently yet, that he first helped a dirty old slave, because he came first, while the great Umbu Horu van Lalatang had to wait his turn. If you let him call, he certainly comes. And where your own sacrifice and medicine do not benefit, maybe his mental power could be able to deal with the evil spirit of sickness to expel. "



While they were still reasoning, a slave came with the message that a white stranger approached with a small group.

Immediately, Umbu Dongga gave the order to close the village gate and to admit no one, only after it was first clear what was the reason of the visit.

One of his subjects hurried in order to comply. He closed the gate with the heavy cross trees and waited for the visitor with a drawn knife.

But when he recognized the White Medicine Man, he called with loud voice: "There is a friend. Open the gate."

By many hands the beams were quickly pulled away and the White Lord with his entourage was allowed to come in.

He was on his journey to a distant landscape and wanted to spend the night here. The sun was almost full in the afternoon height, so that rest was necessary, while the next village, suitable for night stay, was too far away for it sunset.

The appearance of the Witten Lord set everyone in motion.

Umbu Dongga dropped from his front gallery and held out his hand by way of greeting. Quickly there approached a few men to receive the horses, to unsaddle them and store them under the house.

After he had further ordered the boys to go out to cut green grass for the horse of the guest, all climbed into the house, sitting down in the front gallery, where some new mats had been rolled out.

After the usual rites, consisting of offering necessities for chewing Sirih, the normal conversation about "from where" and "where to" started. In the introduction it is only allowed to discuss very general topics. How far it was. How hot it was. How bad the road was and how deep the river.

In the meantime Ana Kami had arranged for one of the boys to ask for a chick in an adjoining house. The beast had been brought to him and with a quick movement he had turned its neck. He had taken a razor-sharp knife from his Sirih bag and then cut open the belly of the chick. With a cautious hand, he had removed the guts and spread it on his flat hand.

With a tight, unmoved face he approached his lord and said: "The bowels of the chicken are good and the voice is good."

Only now was the guest really welcome and could be treated as a friend with whom they could talk confidentially.

It wasn't long before the conversation was about diseases and the sick.

"My lord should have a look at my sick servant Habuku and give him some medicine", soon became Umbu Dongga's request.

Umbu Dongga stood up and ordered Ana Kami to show the way.

The stairs from the front gallery to the inner house consisted of a skull with large buffalo horns. So people were in the inner house in two major steps. But it was dark, especially for eyes that came out of the bright sunlight from outside.

Groping gently with their feet, they walked on the floor of rattling bamboo and pinang slats; for these are quite loosely adjacent, with large openings here and there.

The partitioned loft was soon reached. Ana Kami, who seemingly could see like a cat in the dark, said, "Here he is." But there was nothing to be seen in the dark loft. An oppressive smoke came from the so-called doorway, where an invisible hand slid an almost invisible cloth aside. There was nothing to see, there was more to smell; a terrible smother of dirt and pollution. And you could hear the soft moan of a seriously ill person. But where that sick person lay, left or right, that was indistinguishable.

A servant woman brought a small torch, a stick with strung resinous pips, lit by the smoldering fire. At that flickering flame, the lying figure of a man, emaciated into a skeleton, became somewhat visible.

It seemed as if he would soon die, his breath rattling. It was incredibly smothery in that stuffy, smoky booth. Even for a healthy person breathing was difficult here.

At the request of the White Lord, the poor sick person was carefully picked up and brought outside into the open front gallery. The fresh air did him good. His chest heaved a little less laboriously and his eyes were less tight.

It was a hopeless case, for he was in the final stage of consumption (tuberculosis), so common in those dirty houses and villages.

He was laid down on the far corner of the long front gallery and after having difficulty swallowing a powder, he fell asleep after an hour.

The guest was given a slightly elevated position in the front gallery. After young coconuts were brought in, drunk and emptied with a spoon, all went for an "afternoon nap".

However, the peace on the open front gallery did not last long.

Because, when the sun started to sink a little and the shadow of the trees began to extend, all kinds of people entered the village with all kinds of messages.

Umbu Dongga with its many subordinates and its many possessions, has a lot of things to manage and a lot of questions to answer.

Now and again someone comes to report how things are going with this or that garden: a wild pig has penetrated into it at night and has stirred up the ground nuts. Another comes to say that the stone fence of another garden has been knocked down by the buffalo in various places, so that repair is urgently needed.

A third comes to ask: "The garden on the riverbank is cleansed of weeds, can I have corn to plant?"

Another comes with the request for some gold flakes; for the planting is so pale and it is necessary that the "garden spirit" receives a sacrifice.

Then someone comes in and says that three suspicious men are driving across the plains, allegedly searching for lost horses. Someone is sent after them to watch them from afar, so that they will not silently snare and take a horse stray from the herd. Therefore also the guard of the only traceable place of the river, a distance of ten kilometers, must be warned.

Another comes to say that the herd at the top of the mountain valley is increased by three mare foals and two stallion foals; but that the large fur-spotted mare has broken a leg and is therefore slaughtered and eaten.

Two men arrive, pulling with difficulty a lame horse. After an expert examination has been made and it has been generally concluded that the beast will remain unusable for the rest of its life, it is decided to sacrifice it to the spirit of the plain, for one can use some rain. This makes it a steady arrival and departure of people.

In the meantime, Umbu Dongga, the lord of everything, sits cross-legged in his front gallery, leaning back against one of the crooked house posts. He listens to the messages and answers the questions, but his hands are not empty.

Occasionally he chops with rough hand the rough shape for the handle of a cutting knife; others will carve and polish it; or he cuts pieces of horn for the halter of a horse. He is always busy tinkering.

Also the guests and the people who come to bring a message cannot sit empty. There is a fishing net on one of the rafters and everyone who comes may tie it a bit. A few large pieces of grindstone lie on the floor of the front gallery. And there is always a sharp knife to sharpen. Sitting completely empty without doing anything is not possible.

As the sun went down, the time had come for a meal to be offered to the White Lord and his followers. People climbed into the house from the front gallery. To the right of the entrance is the place for the guests. Along the entire width of the house is an elevation of narrowly slit and closely connected bamboo slats. Here you can sit and lie and sleep.

A rooster would be slaughtered for dinner. At the first visit of the White Lord a goat was brought; now this was no longer necessary. A large, fat rooster was enough. The rooster was passed on and felt, to show that it was a nice fat beast He was heavy on the hand. Then Ana Kami took the beast in his hands. Securely closed, his fingers encircled the struggling animal. An old religious prayer mediator sitting next to him would do the prayer to the house spirit. And he started:

"Hear my voice, o chicken!
Likewise you who passed away and you spirits!
This is a chicken anyway.
The habit is that you eat of it
and that you drink next to it.
Give it to be a good chicken.
Give it to be a sincere chicken.
So that I can look into the matter
and can investigate accurately.
This is the chicken, which transmits messages.
So let it be a sufficient chicken.
Let it be a satisfactory chicken.
So that I can read it in his guts.
So I don't forget.
So that it is not lost
from gender to gender.
I expose you my case
I raise my voice to you
Answer my voice."

Ana Kami pulled out his cutting knife and cut the beast's neck. He calmly let him bleed to death; the blood dripped from the floor to the ground through the large slits.

When the animal was dead he gave it to a boy, who brought it to the fire, between the four main poles of the house, where all kinds of cooking pots were already on the fire.

The fire was flashed a little with a fan and after being roasted in the fire for a few moments, the rooster was quickly plucked from feathers.

Black by the smoky fire and roughly stubbornly plucked, it was brought back.

Ana Kami once again pulled out his cutting knife. The beast was split open lengthwise by one well-aimed stroke.

The belly was torn open with a steady hand, the intestines were removed and placed on a rusted, flaked plate.

However, the smoky oil wick of a spout lamp did not provide enough light to examine everything accurately. A torch of resinous pips was ignited. Brightly flaming, it crackled high. Serious heads bent over the board, but the signs were favorable. No fouling or gut disease was detectable. The sacrifice was accepted.

Rooster and entrails were now put back together in a large wooden dish and brought back to the fire for further preparation.

The boy returned and gave Ana Kami a bunch of tail feathers. This one got up and put it between the thatched roofing, right above the entrance to the house.

To the question of the White Lord why he did that, the answer was: "That is for the house spirit, that he may know that we have not forgotten him. It is his share in this meal. "

"If I were the spirit here, I'd rather have the meat than the feathers."

"What does my lord say?"

"Well, that a domestic spirit is easily satisfied here. We humans will eat the meat, and it's a fat rooster, but the house spirit must settle for a bunch of feathers. Even the dogs are more lucky, because they will soon get the bones and the pigs under the house, will be feasting on the intestines and the waste. How can the spirit of the house approve of this? "

"But doesn't he see our good will?" We have thought of him and called on him to come?"

"But Ana Kami, if you bring a chicken to your lord tomorrow and you ask him for a favor, what do you do then? Perhaps slaughter it quickly and then put some feathers in a basket and give it to Umbu Dongga, while you yourself take the meat and eat it? How angry would Umbu Dongga be and say: keep the feathers for yourself and give me the meat. He would throw the basket of feathers at your head. "

"That is certainly true, but with the house spirit it is something else. He is satisfied with the feathers. Such is the habit of time-honored days. For it is the sign that the guests did not forget him, the spirit of the house, when they were here and ate.

But what is the habit of my lord? "

And then a conversation started about how God, who had created everything, possessed everything.

"He doesn't ask for a chicken or a pig or for a buffalo. That is easy to give. But He asks for more. He asks the whole person. He demands that we obey Him according to all He says in the great Book.

When I eat, I pray too. But not as you do. While that old man was just praying with a loud, dry voice, people talked to each other so that he was almost unintelligible. When the house spirit is really that great, then you must come to him with more respect. If a slave speaks so indifferently to his lord, he is beaten.

And not wrongly. Should the house spirit approve of you muttering him a few words and giving him a few feathers of all the food?

No, when you pray for help and strength, for health and blessing, you must go straight to Him who created everything. And then you must come as a child, asking respectfully with a straight heart. You always check whether the intestines of a chicken and the liver of a pig or a buffalo are good. That really doesn't matter. Your own liver must be good and the contents of your abdomen must not have any twists. "

"Lord, you are right, because you can see in that great Book everything you want to know. But how can we see our own liver and our own intestines? "

"No, you cannot do that either, but you must learn to understand what the great Book of Him, who braids and weaves the people, tells you of the way of life and the path of death."

That is how a conversation started, which was interrupted by the women who served food in wooden and stone and iron trays.

After dinner everyone disappeared to his sleeping place and the night's rest was disturbed only by the barking of a dog and the neighing of a horse that did not have enough grass. In the morning as the sun rose, the White Lord left and the peace returned to the calm village. Ana Kami, with a few elders, had been twisting half the night with the four-string oracle line.

In order that Oemba Dongga would not be too impressed with the words spoken by the White Lord, they wanted to show that they also knew something, even though they had no "book" to consult.

The result of the investigation was: "the village spirit is angry because at the last raid they had slaughtered a pig but not a young buffel. That is why the protector of the village, who otherwise ensures that no angry souls or evil spirits can penetrate, has withdrawn temporarily. So the village is unprotected and the spiritual enemies have free play. We need a sacrifice to reconcile this guilt and possible other sins that are committed in secret. "

In the middle of the square between the two rows of houses is the ancient sacrificial place. It is a heap of rough stones, piled up into an elongated square; one meter high, two meters long and about one meter wide. In the center is a thick tree branch, whitewashed by the sun, with a sharp pointed branch turned upwards. There are still some chins of pigs that were sacrificed in the past, as proof to the village spirit that the obligations have been met.

After a discussion with Umbu Dongga, it was decided to recall the village spirit, to calm his anger and to ask him to deliver salvation from the evil diseases.

One of the elders, the most important of the prayer men, went around along all the houses, because all households must participate in the reconciliation ceremony. Everyone has to give him a sacrifice, which he will soon make on behalf of all. The head of each household handed him two small baskets, braided with leaves of the coconut tree. One contained cooked and the other uncooked rice. The baskets were paired together with thread of different colors; a colorful mix of white with red, black with green, yellow with purple.

It serves as a distinguishing sign of every house, so that the village spirit can know from whom the sacrifice is, and that it will later be possible to say: "the black-and-yellow yarn was mine, that was my sacrifice."

Moreover, they had given some fine gold flakes. He collected the rice baskets in a large basket and the gold flakes in a coconut shell.

When he had finished his tour, he went to the sacrificial rock and sat down opposite the upright branch.

He sat there alone in bright sunshine. From the front gallery, every household carefully watched what was being done, listening to the loudly spoken prayer words.

"In effort and worry
we come to you, o village spirit !
We are all together.
Every house wants to speak.
I lift my voice to you with strength
and lay our case down for you.
Come and descend to us
on this erected stone
and on this planted wood.
Hear our voice."

Now he got up and taking the small rice baskets tied together from the large basket, he arranged everything on the ground for the sacrificial rock. He placed the coconut shell with gold flakes on the right beside him. With the empty basket in front of him, he sat down again. Starting with the family of Umbu Dongga, he took the rice baskets from his house and prayed in his name:

"O Lord Village Spirit!
I am guilty.
I've done
what I shouldn't have done.
I've failed
what I should have done.
I sacrificed a pig
and it should have been a buffalo.
In my ignorance it happened,
for my heart was lost.
I am guilty down to my loins.
I'm guilty right up to my head.
Hear my voice. "

Then someone from the house of Umbu Dongga appeared and brought a little chick, already killed and roasted over the fire.

The prayer mediator took it, tore the belly open with his fingers and pulled out the entrails. After careful examination, which showed that everything was fine and the village spirit had heard the voice, the beast was thrown into the basket with a few flakes of gold from the coconut shell.

The same with the small rice baskets.

Now it was the turn of the next house and with that offering in hand, his loud voice sounded:

“O, Lord village spirit!
I am guilty.
Adultery has happened
in my house
and the sleeping mat is contaminated.
My heart was lost
and my eye was blinded.
I am guilty to my loins.
I am guilty to my head.
Hear my voice. ”

A chick was brought and placed in the basket after examination. Thus, every house was dedicated and the sacrifice piled up in the basket, as an atonement for guilt.

Praying was over and general silence prevailed in the square and in the houses.

Now a boy jumps out of the house of Umbu Dongga, pulling a young dog on a rope, a real skinny wretch.

Trembling with fear, struggling as much as possible, the beast was dragged to the sacrificial rock. The prayer mediator took a white bleached piece of thigh bone from a buffalo that had been slaughtered before, and with two well-aimed strokes on its head the dog was dead after a few convulsions.

Then the old man stood up. He took the basket of offerings in his arms and slowly stepped toward the village gate.

The boy, dragging the dead dog on the rope across the ground, followed him closely. The procession was closed by a man, quietly beating a hand drum.

They guided the evil spirits out, who had caused all the calamities of illness and adversity, outside the village, now that the village spirit no longer wanted to admit them.

So that none of the evil spirits will flee, trying to hide in one house or another, a great noise suddenly arose. Under loud screams of women and children, in every house sticks were struck on the floor, against the wall, against the roof, against the posts, on pots and pans. Under this deafening noise, the mediator stepped past the houses and finally disappeared through the village gate.

He has barely disappeared from sight or everything becomes quiet again. It's finished. One is freed from guilt and all misfortune will give way. The sacrifice of the dead dog with all the rice baskets was brought far outside the village and thrown down into a deep canyon.

When the mediator had returned with his entourage, there was a celebration. Drums and gongs were brought out. Cheerful, the music invited to dance, men's dances and women's dances.

Umbu Dongga slaughtered a buffalo calf as a thank you to the village spirit. The liver was favorable in lines and people were comfortable. One would be saved for further disasters in the near future.

But in the evening Habuku died.