

INTRODUCTION

TO THE

LEGENDS OF THE

ABAU OF IDAM VALLEY

AND OF THE

AMTO OF SIMAIYA VALLEY

WEST SEPIK PROVINCE

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Recorded and Edited by

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Revised with additional illustrations 2009

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Circumstances of Fieldwork

I have conducted three research exercises in the riverine area of the West Sepik Province.

The first (26.12.67 – 20.2.68), the **Upper Sepik Ethnographic Expedition 1968**, was a survey and collection of ethnographic material from among the Abau of the Sepik mainstream between Papua New Guinea/Indonesian border and the Dio River, including the Yapsie (August) and Idam valleys (see map, **Figure 1**); and from among the Yuri of the Border Mountains north-west of Green River Patrol Post.

Material from this expedition was divided among The Australian Museum, Sydney; the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin; the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden; and the PNG Public Museum and Art Gallery, then in Port Moresby. An unpublished Report is held by each of these museums and by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research Inc., New York City, which partly financed the Expedition.

The second exercise (6.6.69 – 23.8.69), the **Upper Sepik Ethnographic Expedition 1969**, was a survey and collection of ethnographic material from the Waris, Sowanda, Amanab, Senagi and Biaka peoples of the Border Mountains between Imonda and Green River Patrol Posts; from the Namie people of Yellow River; from the Busa and Nagatman peoples of the swamps north of the Sepik between the North and Dio Rivers; and from the Abau of the Sepik mainstream between the Dio and Yellow Rivers.

Material from this expedition was divided among the four museums named above. The unpublished Report is held by each museum and by the Wenner-Green Foundation. This expedition was entirely financed by the museums in Sydney, Berlin and Leiden.

The material recorded in this article was gathered primarily during the third exercise (10.5.72 – 8.5.73), the **Commonwealth Art Advisory Board Upper Sepik Expedition**. My then-wife, Ruth Craig, and I were contracted by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board to acquire works of art from the peoples of Central New Guinea and the Upper Sepik region for the National Gallery of Australia. As a gesture of goodwill, the Australian government in 1973 gave the collection in its entirety to the Papua New Guinea government and it is now part of the collections of the PNG National Museum and Art Gallery.

It should be understood that the 1972-3 collection, and therefore the ethnographic data, is in three categories:

- (a) material collected among the Mountain-Ok tribes at the headwaters of the Fly and Sepik Rivers (Central NG) whilst we were based at Telefomin (June 1972);
- (b) material collected during a leisurely canoe journey from the Idam Valley, where we were based, to Ambunti, including the May and April Rivers, and a brief

- excursion through the Washkuk Hills (December 1972 – January 1973). Some material was collected from the Abau people of the Sepik mainstream but the majority was from the Iwam and other peoples further downstream;
- (c) material collected, whilst based in the Idam Valley, from the Abau of the Idam Valley and from the Amto of the Simaiya Valley to the east.

The material in the two *Oral History* publications refers primarily to the ethnographic data and collections in this third category.

This Introduction, and the legends of the Abau and Amto, were published in 1980 in two issues of the now-defunct journal, *Oral History* (Volume 8, Nrs 4, 5). The Introduction and the Amto legends appeared in the Nr 4 issue of the journal and the Abau legends appeared in the Nr 5 issue. The photographic plates in the Introduction were poorly reproduced and the distribution of these issues of *Oral History* was severely limited. For this website edition, I have divided the material into three sections: this Introduction, the Legends of the Abau, and the Legends of the Amto. In the Introduction, I have made some alterations and additions to the text, upgraded the illustrations, re-ordered some of them, and added some bibliographic references. Plates and Figures are inserted into the text except that Figures 14 and 15 are at the end of the Introduction, following the References. Some illustrations have been moved or added to the Legends sections and I have modified the text slightly.

The purpose of placing this material on the USCNGP website is to make it available to the people of Papua New Guinea and to provide for researchers, who are unable to find a copy of the *Oral History* issues, a context of information against which the Abau and Amto ethnographic collections, that are part of the USCNGP database, can be appreciated.

1.2 Structure of this Presentation

My approach in setting out the material has been to allow the legends to become the centre of attention and to use drawings by the men (**Figures 14.1 – 17; 15.1 – 37**), sketches of artefacts and photographs to provide a visual context. I have written only a brief Introduction dealing with the geographical, historical and some ethnographic aspects of the area; I have not attempted an intellectual analysis of the culture or the legends. I have been deliberate about how I have selected the visual material and although some of the drawings by the men are quite obviously related to the oral context (by virtue of identical subject matter), most are not and I have allowed my subjectivity free rein.

1.3 The Drawings

Drawings were executed on large rectangular pieces of white paper with large black, felt-tip markers; powdered poster colours (red, orange, yellow and brown) were made available for colouring in the designs. Red was the most favoured colour.¹ Materials were made available to anybody who wished to draw, regardless of age or gender. However, I have included here only the most competent designs, which happen to be those by the more mature males; they were the ones who, traditionally, executed such designs on war-shields and sago palm petioles. The most versatile and prolific of

¹ For **Figures 14 and 15**, scaled down copies of the original drawings were made and I took some liberties with colouring, occasionally using blue or green where the originals were red or orange.

these artists was without doubt Soni, younger brother of Yagoli, the headman (*luluai*) of Bamblediam village, Idam Valley (**Plates 1, 2**).

I must emphasise that the people do not explicitly connect certain designs with certain legends, but rather that certain designs represent certain phenomena, which may also happen to be the subject of episodes in the legends. For many Abau designs I was unable to get any meanings at all but where meanings were provided by informants, I have provided these. The Amtos always were able to provide meanings.

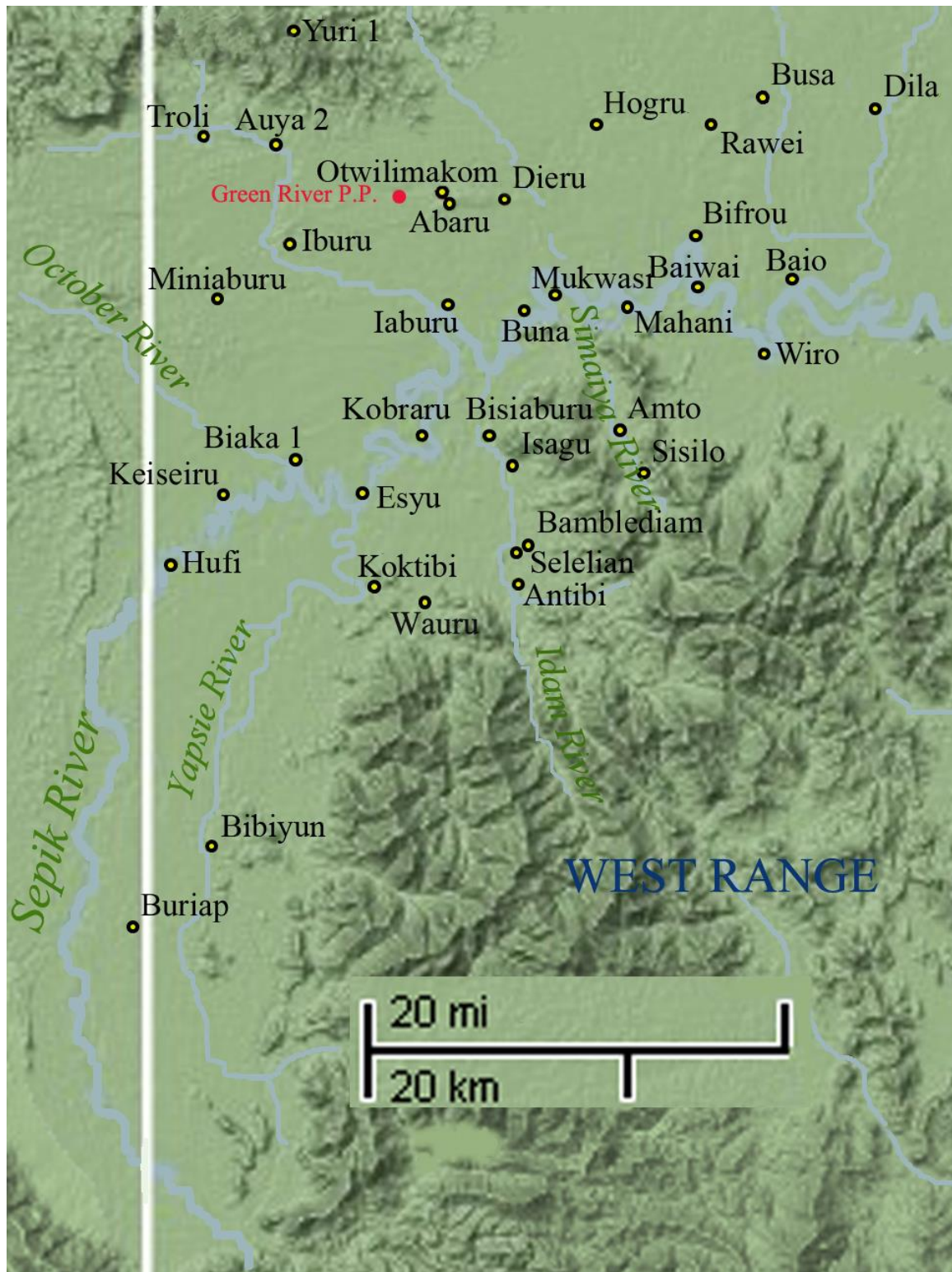


Figure 1. Villages of the Upper Sepik basin

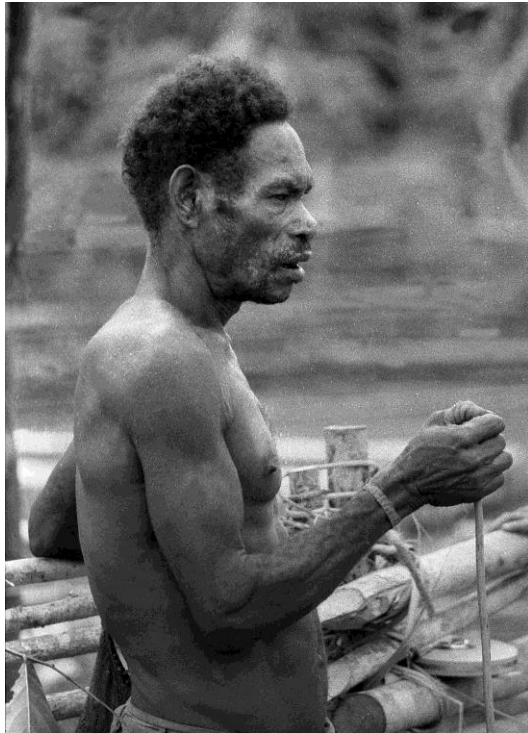


Plate 1. Yagoli, *luluai* of Bamblediam

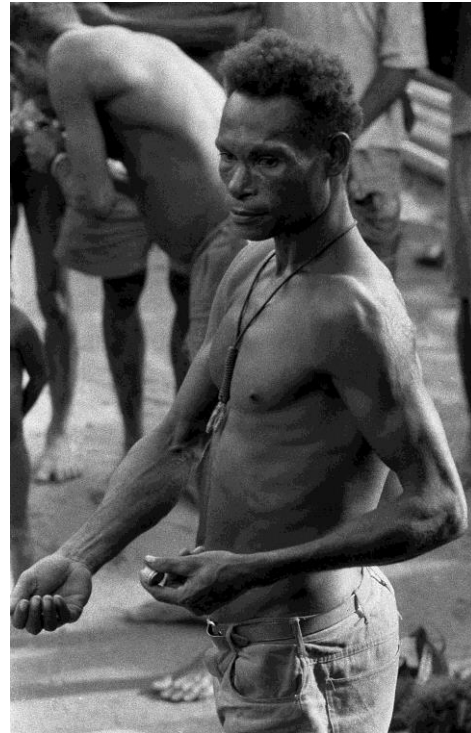


Plate 2. Soni of Bamblediam

1.4 Translation of the Oral Material

The stories were recorded on tape in the vernacular without any interruptions by me. I noticed that the telling of the story was almost a communal undertaking, with much prompting and assistance by persons other than the main narrator, for a mixed audience of men, women and children. It was also always a male enterprise, though it is quite likely that the women have their stories too, just as they have their own songs. Most of the Abau stories were recounted by Unafio of Selelian village, Idam Valley (**Plate 3**).

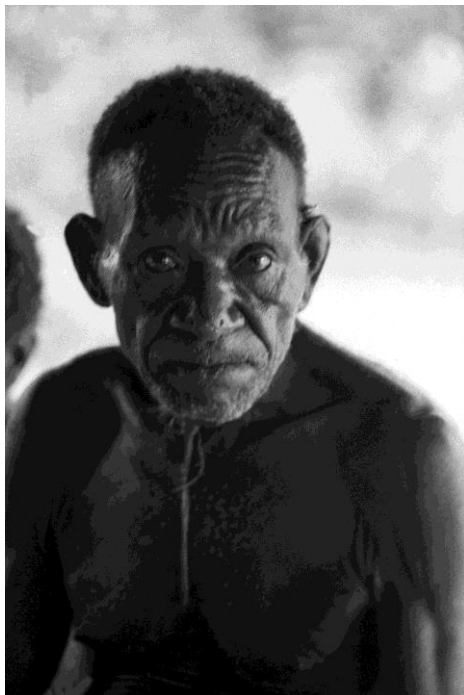


Plate 3. Unafio of Selelian, Idam Valley

After the story was completed on tape, I obtained an oral translation into Pidgin English by one – sometimes more – interpreters, obtaining clarification as the translation proceeded. During this process, I wrote down the text in English. No written text in vernacular was made because I was not sufficiently familiar with the language to do this competently; the tapes are preserved, however, should anyone wish to do this in the future. The text was not written in Pidgin English either, as there were some peculiarities in the use of Pidgin by these people that made it difficult to arrive at a formal Pidgin translation. Much discussion took place to clarify certain vernacular passages and it would have been too time-consuming to record these discussions in written Pidgin. I have taken some liberties in translation to provide a version that flows readily in the English language. Thus some nuances of vernacular imagery have no doubt been lost and could be salvaged only by a person fluent in the language and culture of these people.

Despite the limitations of the material I have presented here, I believe it to be worthwhile nonetheless, as little has been published from this area (Craig 2002).

1.5 Geographical and Historical Context

The Sepik emerges from among the northern foothills of the Central Range not far from the Border with [West] Papua. Flowing north, it swings into, then out of, Indonesian territory and continues in a wide arc to flow east past the southern edge of the Border mountains, picking up the waters of the October, August and Green Rivers (**Figure 1**). Continuing eastwards, it skirts the northern edge of the West Range, collecting the waters of the Idam and Simaiya Valleys from the south and the Dio, Hordern, North and Yellow Rivers from the vast swamps to the north. It then arcs southwards to join the May River before trending eastwards towards the sea.

Abau speakers numbered between 4500 and 5000 people in 1980 and inhabited about 1700 square miles (4350 square kilometres) of territory along the Sepik mainstream between the International Border and Yellow River, as well as the valleys of the August, October, Green and Idam Rivers. In 1970, Amto speakers numbered only about 200 persons. The linguistic situation in the upper Sepik basin and Border Mountains is heterogeneous (**Figure 2**).

The Abau were first contacted by the German-Dutch border-marking expeditions of 1910 (Schultze-Jena, 1914; Uittreksel, 1910). The German party, under the leadership of Dr. Leonhard Schultze-Jena, ascended the Sepik as far as the northern foothills of the Star Mountains in what is known as Atbalmin territory.

The next visit was that made by members of Behrmann's 1912/13 'Kaiserin-Augusta-Flus-Expedition' (Behrmann 1922, 1924). These men carried out thorough geographical surveys, mapping the course of the Sepik with remarkable precision, and collecting ethnographic material, much of which is now in the Museum für Völkerkunde, Berlin (Reche 1913; Kelm 1966 a, b; 1968).

Thurnwald (1914, 1916) investigated the October and West Rivers in January 1915, the Green in February 1914, the Yellow in March 1914, and climaxed this series of expeditions by following the Sepik past Schultze-Jena's furthest point to reach the Telefolmin of the upper source basin in September 1914. Thus he was the first European to contact highlanders of Papua New Guinea.

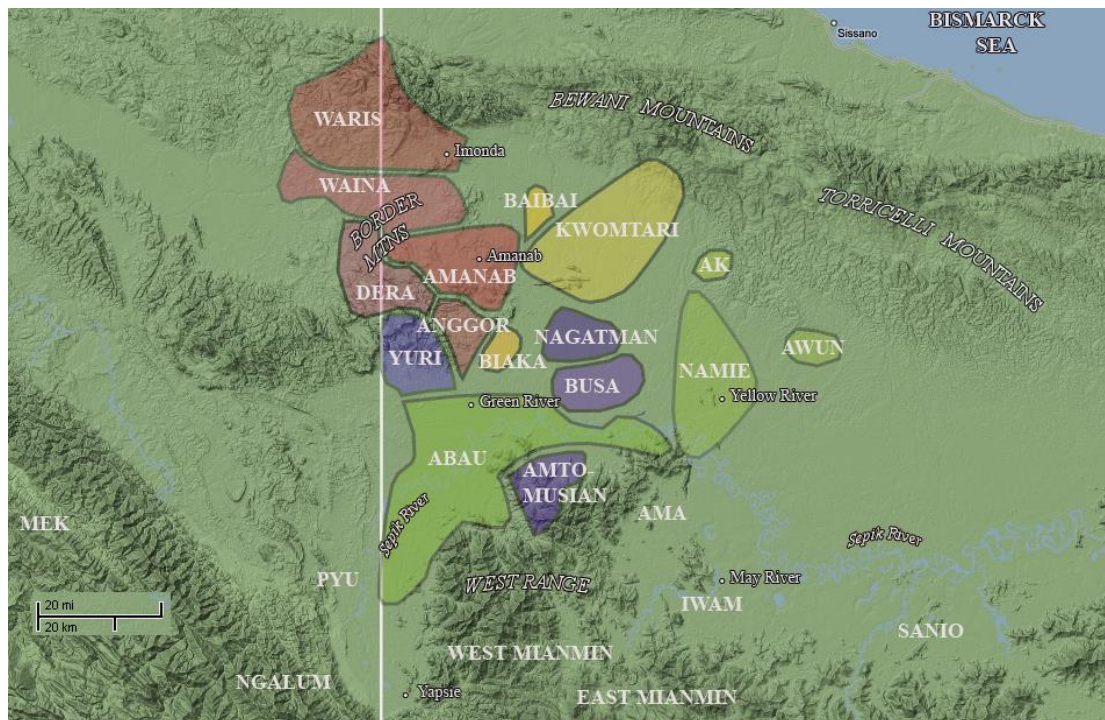


Figure 2. Languages of the upper Sepik basin and Border Mountains (Trans NG Phylum: brown; Sepik Phylum: green; Kwomtari Phylum: yellow; Isolate languages (each unrelated to any others): blue)

Thurnwald returned to his base camp at Meander Mountain (near where Yellow River joins the Sepik) to hear the first rumours of the outbreak of World War 1, which previously he knew nothing about. He decided to continue his exploratory work. He returned to the Sand River and followed it to its source in the coastal range in November 1914 and followed the North River to its source in December 1914 – January 1915. He then returned to his base camp at Meander Mountain to find that it had been ransacked by an Australian Army force sent to bring him in. Frustrated at finding him gone, they had apparently thought to starve him out of the wilderness by destroying his supplies. Despite the considerable discouragement of finding his valuable notes, films and ethnographic material missing, he took his time presenting himself to the authorities (the fate of his ethnographic collections is explored in Craig 1997).

Ambunti Patrol Post was established in the 1920s but the upper Sepik area was probably not travelled again until Karius and Champion rafted down the Sepik to meet the ‘Elevala’ at the mouth of the October River on 19th January 1928. From Champion’s account (1966), they had minimum contact with Abau.

During the 1930s, there was some Administration activity in the upper Sepik. In 1932, Acting District Officer E.D. Robinson travelled from Ambunti up the Sepik to the Dutch border and a short distance up the Yellow River (Robinson 1932). In 1935, Patrol Officer J.K. McCarthy accompanied the Administrator, Brigadier-General W. Ramsay McNicoll, on a boat up the Sepik as far as the Dutch border. McNicoll made a large collection of ethnographic material for the Rabaul Museum but all was lost when the boat carrying the collection disappeared between Madang and Rabaul (McCarthy 1963: 139-49). McCarthy led a patrol from Aitape on the north coast to the Yellow River and back in 1936. Notably, he discovered that many people in the

upper Sepik basin spoke some Malay, a result perhaps of centuries of visits by, and trade with, Malay bird-of-paradise hunters (McCarthy 1936).

The Eve-Hodgekiss Oil Search Ltd expedition constructed an airstrip at Green River in 1938. H.D. Eve died of scrub typhus later that year, contracted while surveying in the middle reaches of the Bapi (Hordern) River (Sinclair 2001: 194-7). A large collection of mainly tobacco smoking tubes from the upper Sepik area, collected by Eve, is in the Australian Museum in Sydney.

No doubt labour recruiters, crocodile shooters and prospectors moved through the area before World War 2, but this part of history is as yet unwritten.

The Patrol Post was established at Green River in 1949, a year after the establishment of the Patrol Post at Telefomin and the same year in which Vanimo Patrol Post was established near the international border on the north coast, and Kiungga Patrol Post set up on the Fly River in Papua. This exercise, conducted by Ivan Champion as Acting-Director of District Services and Native Affairs, was in anticipation of the occupation of Dutch New Guinea by Indonesia (Champion 1966:217).

After 1949, regular administration patrols were carried out, the airstrip at Green River was upgraded, a small airstrip was built in the Idam Valley but abandoned soon after because of drainage problems, and an airstrip was built on the upper August River to service the small Yapsie Police Post there. The Christian Mission to Many Lands has had a small Mission Station at Green River Patrol Post for many years, but with the departure of the linguist, David Baliey, was (I understand) abandoned for a while. There have been no significant economic developments in the area but I believe there is now a secondary-level school at Green River.

1.6 Origins of the Abau

There are three means by which people could enter the Green River area with relative ease:

- by following the Mamberamo-Idenburg-Sobger upstream from the west;
- by crossing the Bewani Mountains of the coastal ranges at one of a number of saddles at the heads of coastal streams;
- by following the Sepik upstream from the east.

Judging by the complex pattern of languages in the West Sepik Province, all three means of access may have been used.

A survey of the languages of the Amanab Sub-District, carried out by members of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Loving and Bass 1964), has revealed a situation of linguistic fragmentation (**Figure 2**). Some seventeen languages are related at the level of Family, Stock, Phylum, or not at all. The largest language group is the Abau and it appears to be intrusive as it separates Busa and Nagatman isolates to the north from the Amto-Musian isolate to the south, and the Biaka of the Kwomtari Phylum to the north from the Pyu of the same Phylum to the west and south-west (Laycock 1973, 1975; Wurm & Hattori 1981, Map 6).

That Abau is intrusive is supported by a number of oral traditions. Nanau of Buna related a story in 1968 that the people of Buna and Iaburu came from down the Sepik:

Two brothers were camped near the mouth of the May River. While they were constructing a fish dam, a quarrel arose between them. One tried to kill the other but the threatened man – Maliwhei – removed himself and his family up the Sepik to the Dio River. They were later followed by other immigrants. One of Maliwhei's sons, Kuben, stayed at Buna and in turn had two sons and two daughters. Their issue split into two 'lines', one remaining at Buna and the other removing to Iaburu at the mouth of the Green River."

In this context, it is worth noting that Laycock has stated that Abau and Iwam (spoken by the people of the May River area) are apparently related languages, sharing 30% cognate vocabulary (1965:113).

Another tradition, reported in 1968 by informants at Bibiyun on the mid-August River, is that the Yimnai originally lived in the Simaiya valley, east of the Idam valley. They exhausted the supply of game – mainly wallaby – and moved west, near to present-day Bisiaburu on the Idam; part of that group then moved up the August River to present-day Bibiyun, and to Buliap on the Sepik within West Papua. During this migration the people did not bring coconut or areca nut palms, for they suffered continual raids by enemy groups who chopped down their trees. This suggests there were people already resident in the area and that these Yimnai immigrants were intruders.

The people at Biaka, opposite the mouth of the October River, could give no detailed traditions, but said their ancestors had come up the Sepik. However, they were able to relate a tradition that the people further up the October River, at present-day Biaka Nr 2, were once a part of their group. These people left after quarrels over pigs damaging sago trees and because a large snake had killed one of their men.

Two Biaka Nr 2 informants gave an alternate story that their 'fathers' had come from the Idam and their 'mothers' from among the Kwa-Yablawai women of the Siop-Sepik junction upstream.

The people at Hufi, on the Sepik near the International Border, said their ancestors had come from Buna. They had camped for a while at Nanambi on the August River and then moved across to that part of the Sepik upstream from present-day Hufi. Soon after Indonesian occupation of Dutch New Guinea, they consolidated a number of up-river camps in West Papua to a single large village at Hufi, just inside what was then Australian Trust Territory. The picture is, therefore, a consistent one of movement up the Sepik from the vicinity of May River. Such movements could have been in response to pressure by the Mountain-Ok Mianmin on the hill and river peoples of the May (Schwartz 1965:12). There may have been people already on the Sepik River when this migration occurred. It is likely that the ancestors of the Amto were members of this original population and were related to the mountain tribes of the West Range and May Hills.

My scarce data indicates that, in several significant respects, the Amto culture is as different from Abau culture as are the two languages. There seems to have been enmity between the two groups until relatively recent times. When the *pax australis* effectively terminated open hostilities, intermarriage began to occur and the cultures

and traditions of the two groups began to merge. Our Amto informant and interpreter, Ikid (**Plate 4**), is married to an Abau woman of Bamblediam village, Idam Valley. Our main Abau interpreter and informant, Auyamas (**Plate 5**), although living in Selelian (an Abau village two kilometres upstream from Bamblediam), is related to the Amto through his mother's kin and claimed that several stories recounted as Abau in origin were in fact Amto in origin. Thus I have included the creation myth of Dinuknau with the Amto legends although it was recounted by Auyamas and a fellow-Abau. A good deal more research would be necessary to clarify this situation.

1.7 Housing

The Abau used to live in large community houses (**Plate 6**). This was reported by the early European visitors to the area (Uittreksel 1910: Plates 20, 21; Behrmann 1922:332-3; Thurnwald 1914:340, 342), and confirmed by the present-day informants and my own observation of such structures along the river banks and occasionally used by the people even today (Craig 2008: 38-41). Administration officers, ostensibly concerned over the health and fire risks of community dwellings, pressured the people to abandon these in favour of single-family dwellings set out in a village pattern. (This distaste for communal living is common among Anglo-Saxons and our cities are characterised by the single-family dwelling; the exceptions are almost entirely institutional: boarding schools, religious retreats, old folks homes, asylums, hospitals, etc.)

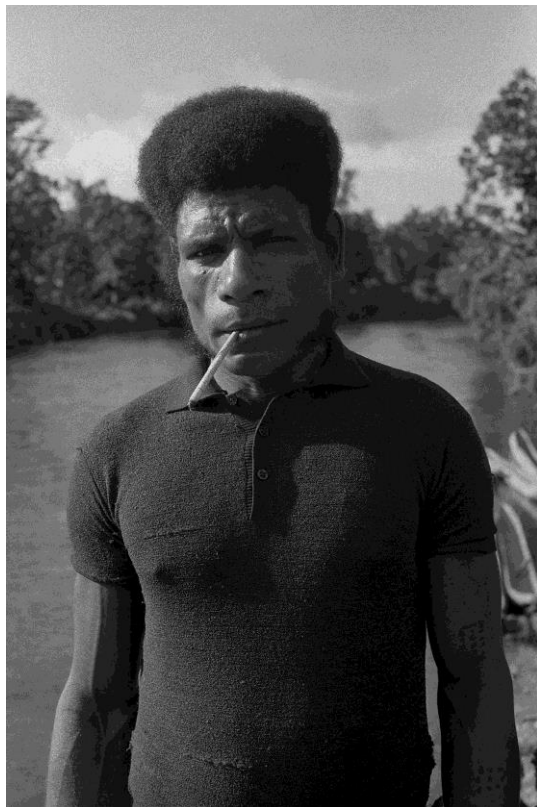


Plate 4. Ikid of Amto, Simaiya Valley



Plate 5. Auyamas of Selelian, Idam Valley



Plate 6. Community house, Idam Valley

The Amto also traditionally lived in community houses, similar to those built by the Abau. I saw two in current use by small groups who gathered at the main Amto village for census but normally did not live there (**Plates 7 – 10, Figs. 3, 4**).



Plate 7. Community house, Sisilo, Simaiya Valley

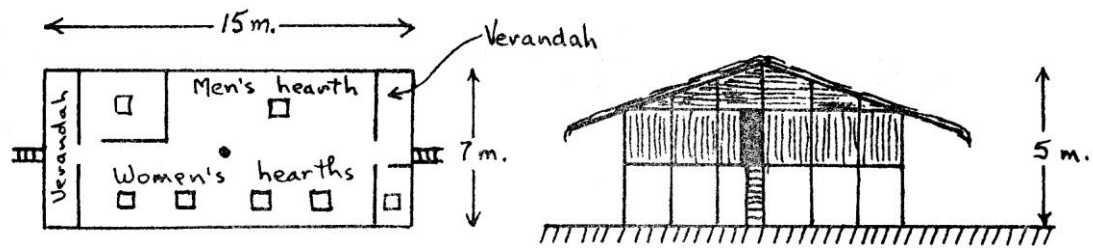


Figure 3. Community house, Sisilo, Simaiya Valley (see Plate 7)



Plate 8. Community house, Simaiya Valley

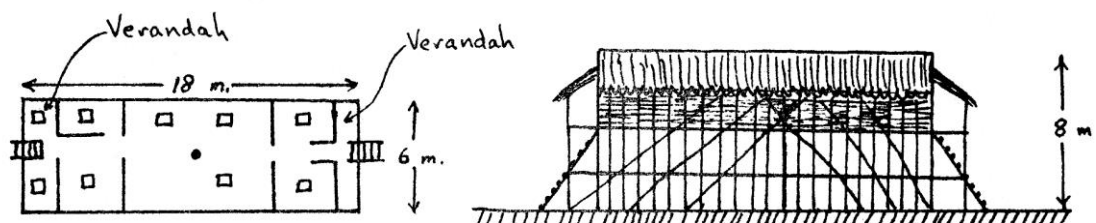


Figure 4. Community house, Simaiya Valley (see Plates 8-10)



Plate 9. Entrance to community house, Simaiya Valley



Plate 10. Interior of community house, Simaiya Valley

Both Abau and Amto community houses preserve a token separation of the sexes, with the demarcation of men's space and women's space. I was accommodated in such a house at the Amto settlement of Sisilo in the Simaiya valley. The women's hearths were located along one long side of the building, the men's hearth on the other side. The children slept with the women but moved freely about in the men's space as well.

Thurnwald estimated the life-span of a community house would not have exceeded four years. He describes collapsed deserted houses and says that new houses were often found erected on fallow garden land because the clearing of new patches in the jungle involved too much hard labour. No doubt the garbage falling through the floor of the house contributed to the rejuvenation of the fallow land. The legends, and my observations, suggest however that these houses were also erected in newly-cleared garden areas and the garden planted out around the dwelling. It is probable that the houses survived longer than the gardens.

These houses are flimsy structures by comparison with the substantial houses of the Middle Sepik. The posts are hardwood saplings seldom more than 10cms in diameter. The floor level is characteristically over two metres off the ground. The roof is a simple gable structure, using prefabricated sections of roofing consisting of sago leaves 'stitched' onto palmwood battens. The walls are the mid-ribs of the sago palm frond cut into the required length and lashed with cane so that the convex face of one piece nests into the concave face of the next piece, and so on, thus providing a reasonably effective weather seal. Flooring is of blackpalm bark. Each hearth is a moulded clay, square 'dish' set upon a basket of stones suspended at floor level from

four hearth-posts, one at each corner; firewood is dried in racks above the hearth. Meat and fish also may be preserved by smoking above the hearths.

A special type of house is noteworthy. This is the dance-house (called *fokiya* by the Amto and *afok* by the Abau). It is constructed according to the plan in **Figure 5**, and is peculiar in having a large rectangular dancing-floor supported only at the edges. A large centre-post goes through a hole in this floor and supports the ridge-pole but not the floor. The slow, knee-bending action of the dancers causes the floor to spring slowly up and down in rhythm with the dancing. I saw such a house, in a most dilapidated state, upstream from Sislio in the Simaiya valley.

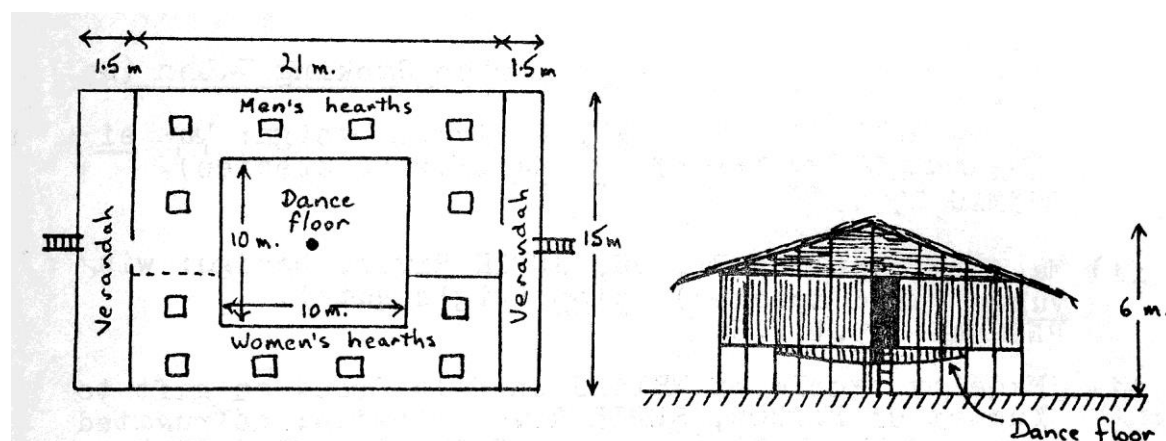


Figure 5. Floorplan and front elevation of community dance house south of Sisilo, Simaiya Valley

This type of house seems to have been built not only by the Abau and Amto, but also by other tribes of the West Range and among the Mianmin of the Mountain-Ok tribes further south. Schwartz describes such a house at the Mianmin settlement of Usage on the Upper May River (1965:18): 'All families and some unmarried men have a place in this large house. Each place is a portion of a raised platform around the edge of the square dancing floor; each is marked by a hearth, of which there are fifteen ... there is no segregation of the sexes.' This description, confirmed by Morren (1986:185) suggests a house with a plan similar to that in Figure 5, except that the Amto segregate the sexes.

It is remarkable that this type of sprung dance floor, integrated into the centre of a communal living structure, has been recorded for the Murut of North Borneo (Rutter 1985: 62-4), and may have existed in other areas of the island. There is a possibility that the idea of a sprung dance-floor was introduced into the upper Sepik and West Range by 'Malay' (Borneo?) bird-of-paradise hunters. The unearthing of a stone figure at Amanab in the Border Mountains in 1964 (**Plate 49**; see also Swadling et al. 1988, Plates 56-7) and its iconographical similarity to another stone figure unearthed at Nafri south of Humboldt Bay on the north coast of West Papua (Friede 2005, Catalogue Nr 8) suggest 'Malay' trading posts were established in the upper Sepik area and could have been a source of influence on local cultures. Around 2008, a pair of stone figures were unearthed near Amanab (**Plate 50**), one of which conforms iconographically with the one found there in 1964.

1.8 Arts and Crafts

Graphic designs occur on several classes of object using several techniques.

a) **tobacco-smoking apparatus** – the designs on bamboo smoking tubes are incised with a rat's tooth engraving tool (**Figure 6**) and consist of inter-locking motifs of circles, spirals, triangles and rhomboids. The bamboo tube is used in conjunction with a long gourd smoking tube or a section of bamboo (**Figure 7**) which also has a design, burnt onto the gourd with embers of a strip of coconut husk. The design is usually at the proximal end (closest to the mouth). The design is simple, usually curvilinear, and representing some characteristic of an animal, bird or insect (**Plates 11 – 14**).

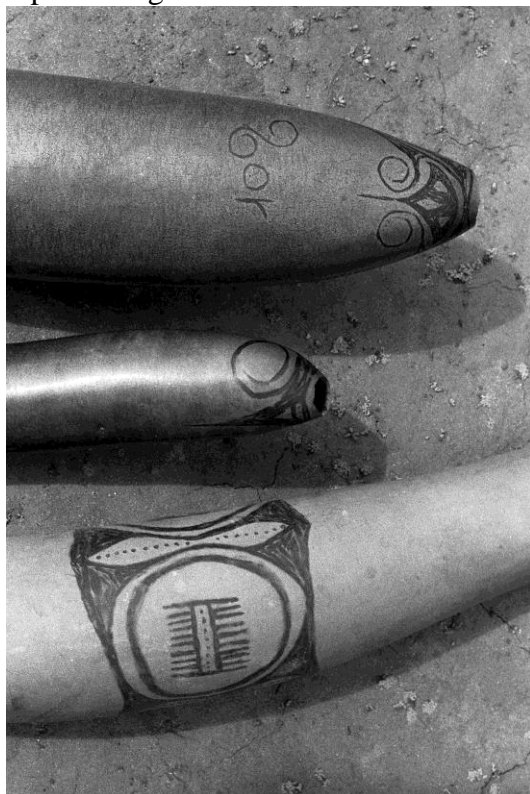


Plate 11. Designs on gourd smoking tubes (top & centre) and gourd lime container (bottom), Bamblediam, Idam Valley

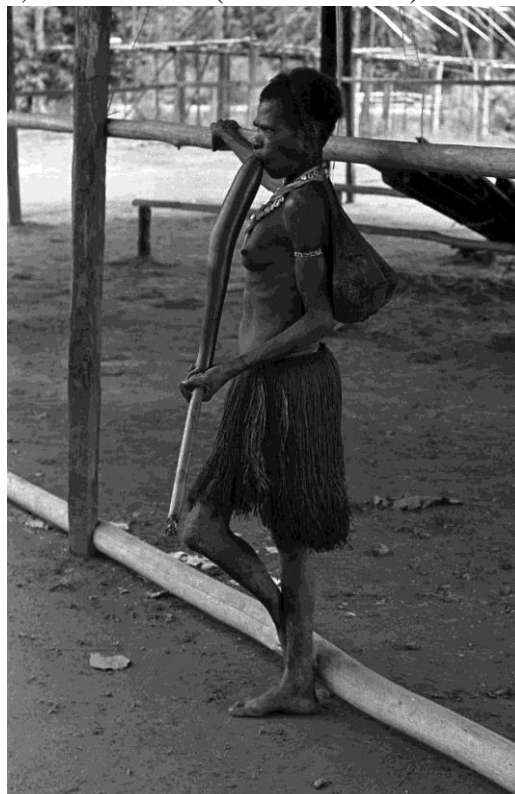


Plate 12. Woman using smoking tubes Antibi, Idam Valley

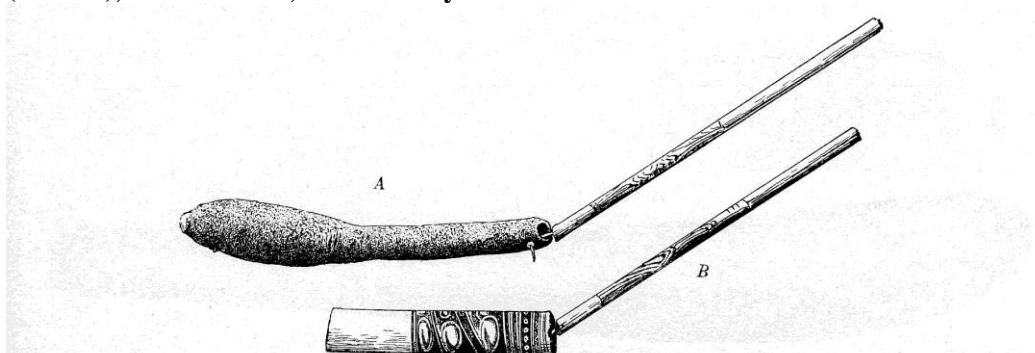


FIGURE 196. Two-piece smoking apparatus. Sēpik river: after Schultze (1914, pl. xlii, *h, i*). A, gourd container and holder. Settlement 47, about 4° 15', just east of 141°; B, bamboo container and holder. Village 30, between the junctions of the North and Sand rivers with the Sēpik.

Figure 7. Smoking apparatus collected by Leonhard Schultze-Jena in 1910. Haddon 1946, Figure 196. A: on the Sepik directly west of Bibiyun; B: Wagu village

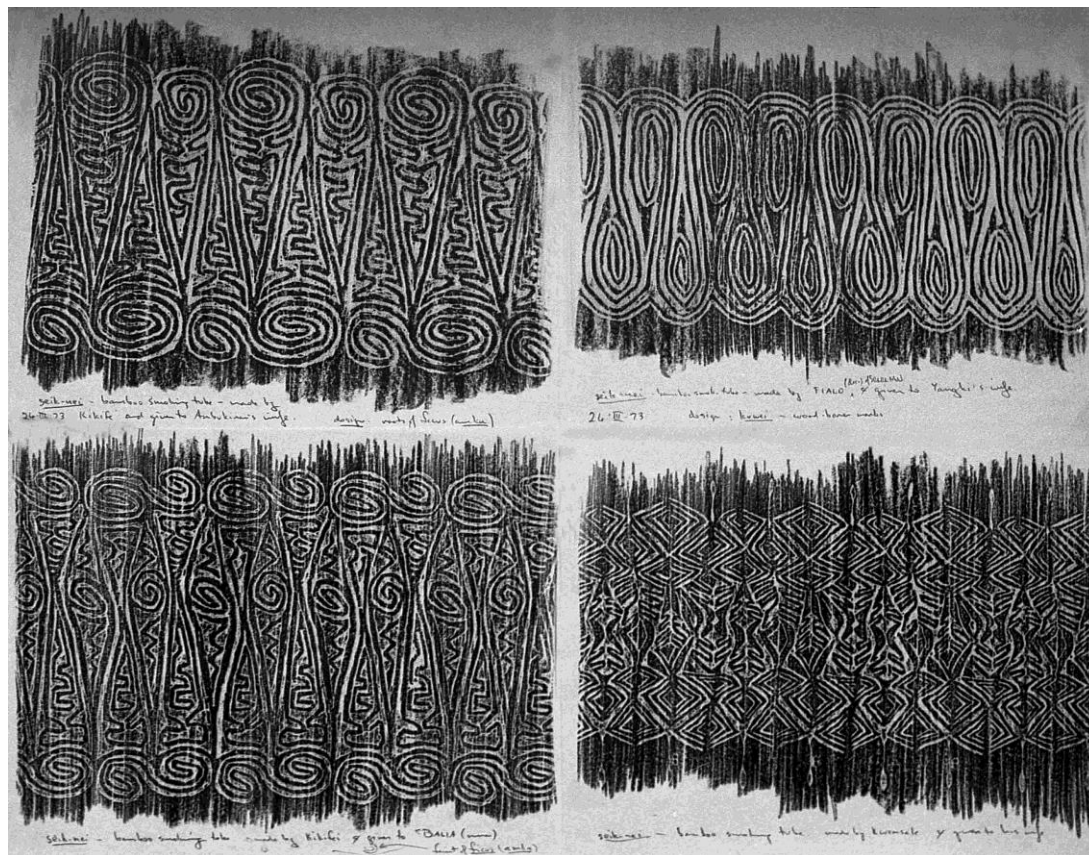


Plate 13. Rubbings of designs on bamboo smoking tubes, Bamblediam, Idam Valley

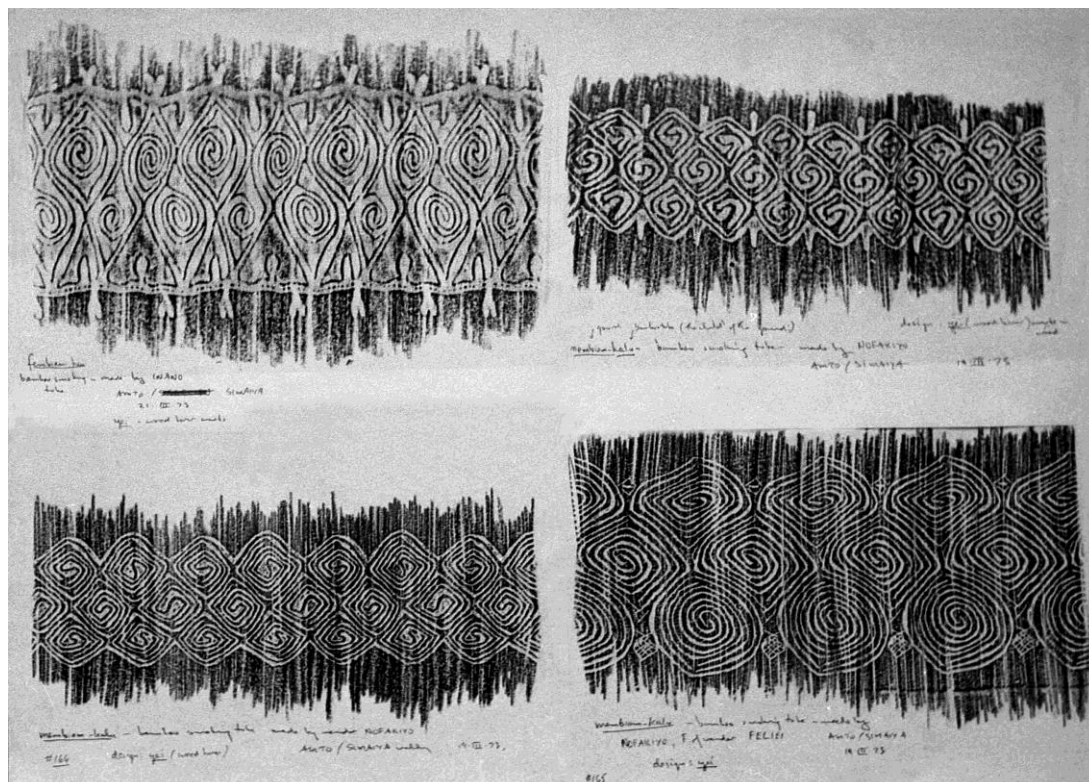


Plate 14. Rubbings of designs on bamboo smoking tubes, Amto, Simaiya Valley

b) **phallocrypts (penis covers)** – there are of two types, both made from gourds bearing designs, and a third type which has no designs, also made from a gourd. Photographs published by Behrmann (1922:25, 96, 243; see also Uittreksel... 1910, Plate 15) show men of this area wearing the long, straight or curling variety of phallocrypt (**Plate 15**); today these are rare and the usual type is egg-shaped (**Plate 16**). Both types have curvilinear designs burnt onto them with coconut husk embers representing attributes of animals, birds or insects (**Plate 17; Figure 8**).

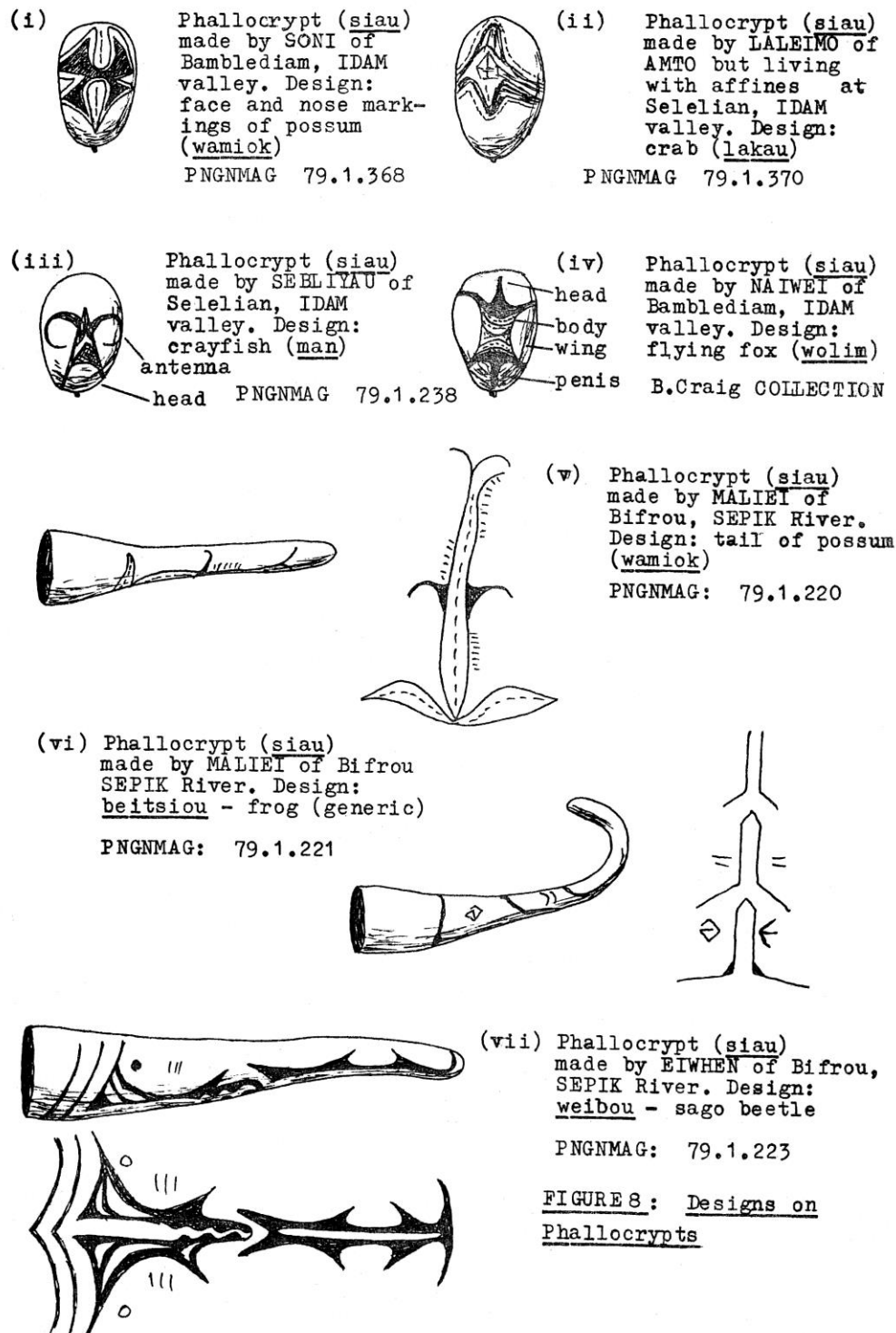


FIGURE 8: Designs on Phallocrypts

Photographs taken by the Dutch border-marking expedition of 1910 (Uittreksel...1910: Plates 4 – 11, 13, 15, 19) reveal that the phallocrypt was worn throughout the Border Mountains, from the Sepik to the coast, and was decorated and of a tear-drop or egg shape. Some designs on phallocrypts from this region are reproduced by Preuss (1899, Plate 6; Figures 34 –36) and are similar to those of the Abau. It is possible that the egg-shaped phallocrypt became popular with Abau men, in preference to the curling or straight phallocrypt, during the past fifty years, the new style being introduced from the north.

The third type of phallocrypt is plain. It is a much larger gourd than either of the decorated types, being upwards of 35 cm long (**Plate 18**). It is worn only during certain sickness-curing ceremonies, usually in association with a sago-spathe mask or headdress, and I have recorded it also among the Yellow River people to the east (Craig 1975b; see also Kelm & Kelm 1980, Abb.35 and Mitchell 1975: 426 and Plates 7, 8). A description of the similar use of a large tear-drop shaped phallocrypt among the Waina-Sowanda, north on the Border Mountains, has been published by Gell (1971).

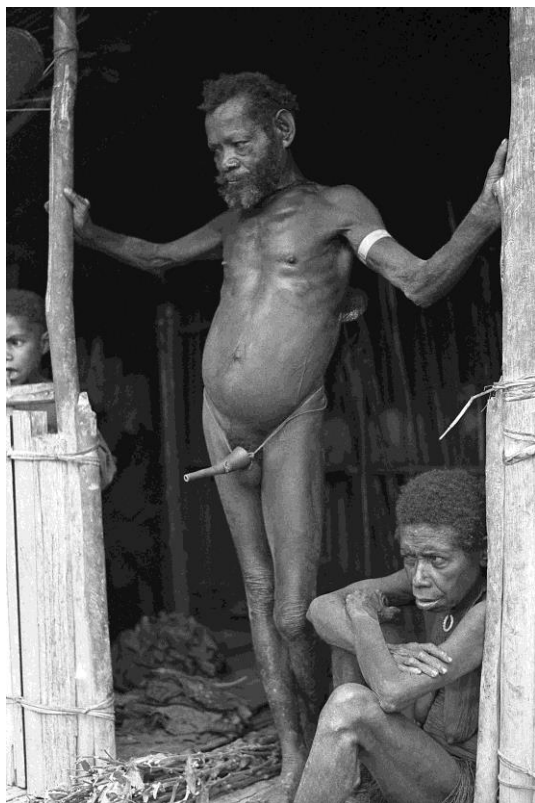


Plate 15. Man of Abaru, Green River

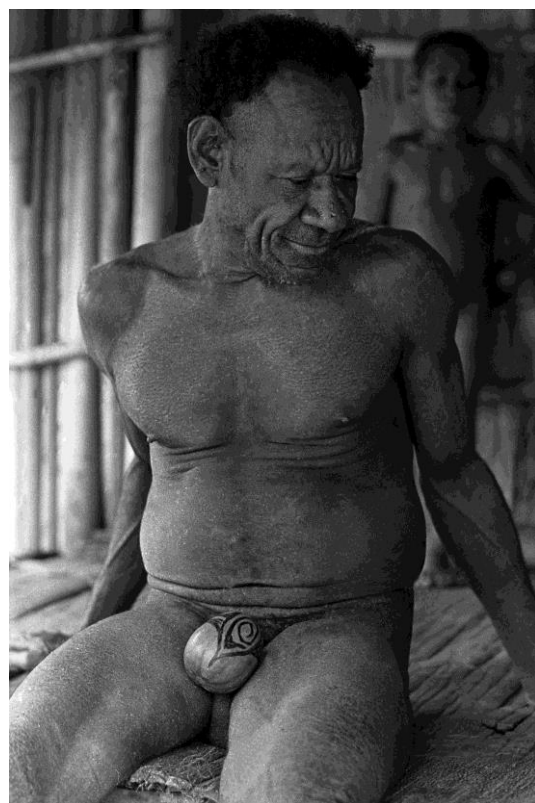


Plate 16. Man of Iburu, Green River

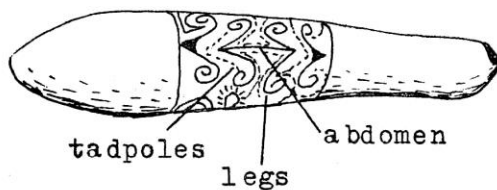


Plate 17. Phallocrypts from Selelian and Bablediam, Idam Valley

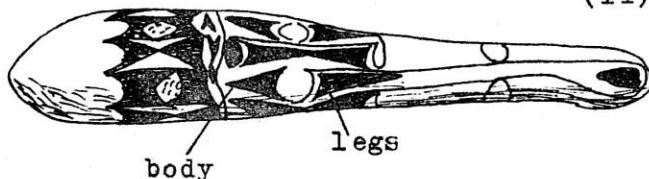


Plate 18. Bablediam man beating hand drum and wearing ceremonial phallocrypt

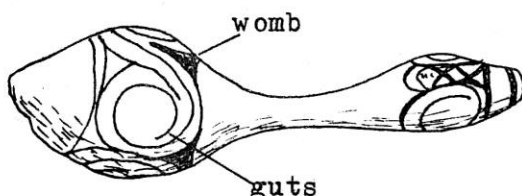
c) lime containers – these are made from gourds, have a variety of shapes, and are invariably decorated by burning designs into the surface of the gourd with coconut husk embers (**Plates 19 – 22**). The designs are closely related to those on gourd phallocrypts and gourd smoking tubes, being curvilinear and referring to attributes of animals, birds and insects (**Figure 9**). Similar designs occur on a gourd lime container in the Washkuk Mountains near Ambunti (Kelm 1966b, Plate 130) and a bamboo lime container from the Middle Sepik (Kelm 1966a, Plate 430, right). A gourd with a motif identical to one recorded at Bibiyun on the mid-August River (the ‘star’-shaped motif on the gourd in **Plate 20**) was collected at Lake Sentani in Irian Jaya (Kooijman 1959, Plate 75).



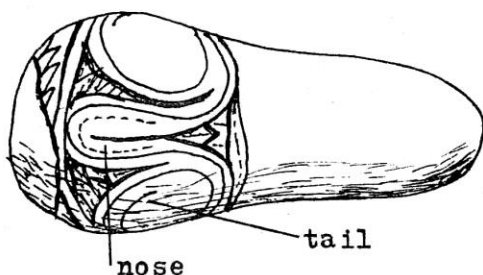
- (i) Lime container (aidep)
made by SALAK of Selelian
IDAM Valley.
Design: beitsiou (frog -
generic) PNGNMAG 79.1.238



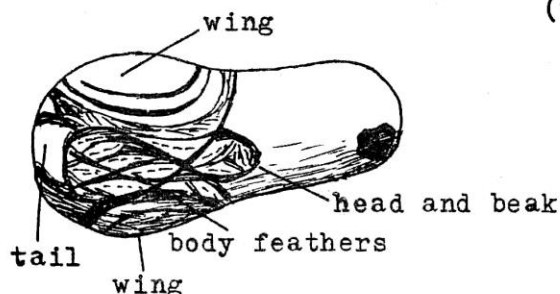
- (ii) Lime container (aidep)
made by WAKIN of
Bamblediam, IDAM
valley. Design:
kumobou (probably Giant
Water Bug - Lethocerus
species)
PNGNMAG 79.1.408



- (iii) Lime container (aidep)
made by FOSIN of
Selelian, IDAM valley.
Design: guts and womb
of pig. PNGNMAG 79.1.236



- (iv) Lime container (aidep)
made by SONI of Bamblediam
IDAM valley. Design:
wamiok (possum species)
PNGNMAG 79.1.240



- (v) Lime container (aidep)
made by KWOMSALEI of
Bamblediam, IDAM valley
Design: weliou (Burdekin
Duck - Tadorna radjah)
PNGNMAG 79.1.230

FIGURE 9: Designs on
Gourd Lime Containers



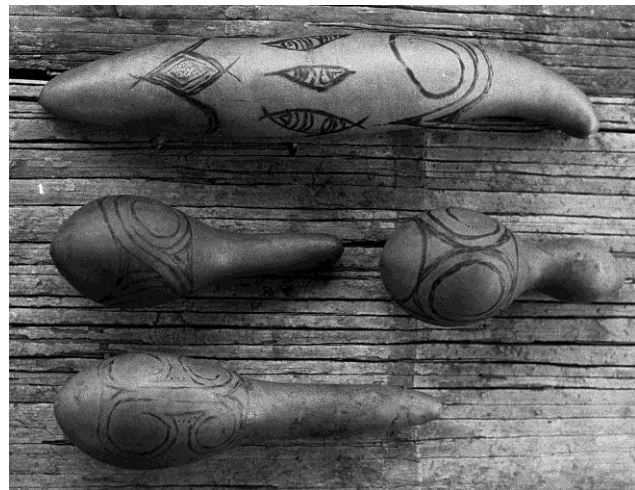
Plate 19. Gourd lime containers, Selelian and Bamblediam, Idam Valley



Plate 20. Gourd lime container, Bibiyun, Yapsie (August) River



Plate 21. Gourd lime containers, Bamblediam; and (Plate 22) from Bisiaburu, Idam Valley



d) hand drums and trumpets – the designs carved on the distal ends of hand drums and trumpets (**Plates 23 – 26**) are related to those carved on shields and the technique is the same – relief bands outline the design in black, the motifs usually painted in brown or red ochres, sometimes with the red juice of *Bixa orellana*, and the background painted white. This type of decoration occurs on hand drums throughout the Border Mountains, Yellow River, Sepik Hills and Mountain-Ok areas. The drums are a slender, hour-glass shape, without handles, and with a lizard skin tympanum. Kelm has published several drums and trumpets collected by the Germans in 1912 – 1913 (1966b, Plates 221 – 231).



Plates 23-25. Designs on hand drums at (left to right) Otwilimakom, Green River; Bisiaburu, Idam Valley; and Hufi, Sepik River

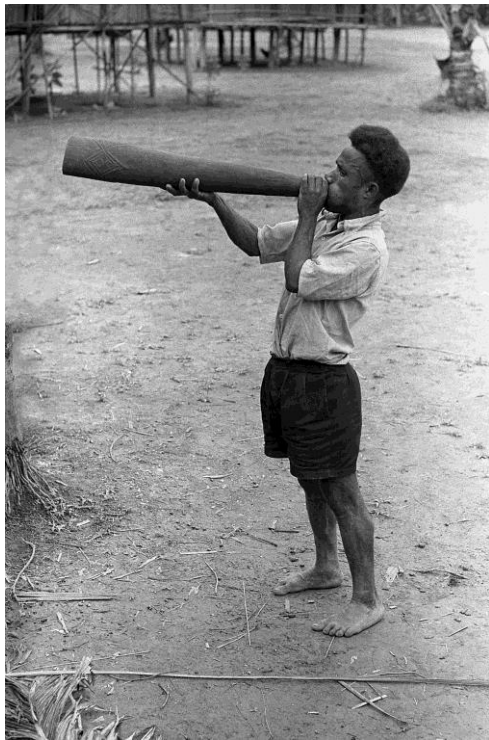


Plate 26. Man blowing trumpet, Miniaburu, Hauser River

e) arrows – designs may be executed on the reed shafts by scratching, on the black palmwood foreshafts by carving (**Plate 27**) and on the broad bamboo blades by engraving (**Plate 28**). All of this work is done with the rat's tooth engraver, a double-ended tool (**Figure 6**). The scratchings on the shafts are usually simple linear designs; the engravings on the bamboo blades are also simple linear designs. More interesting, however, are the carved and painted foreshafts. The foreshaft is a piece of black palm about 20cms long, joining shaft and bamboo blade.



Plate 27. Fight arrows, Otwilimakom, Dio River

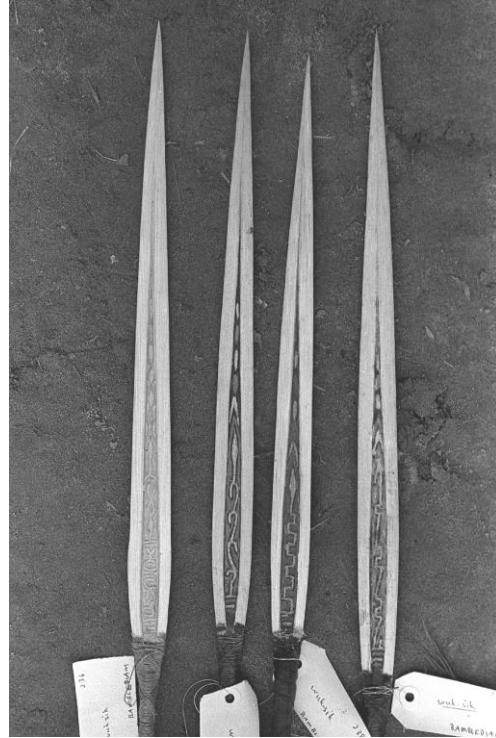


Plate 28. Bamboo-bladed fight arrows, Bablediam, Idam Valley

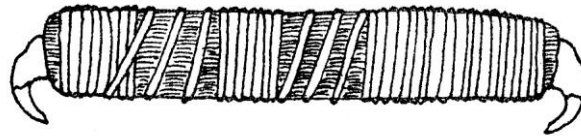


Figure 6. Rat's teeth incising and engraving tool

Complex linear and curvilinear designs of relief bands, utilising spirals, rhomboids, circles and zig-zags in interlocking patterns, are carved onto these foreshafts (**Plates 29, 30**) and the carved-out areas are painted red and white. Similar designs are carved on the palmwood arrow-heads of two piece arrows.

These arrow-designs are closely related to those on arrows all the way from the north coast at Aitape, throughout the Border Mountains, Upper Sepik basin, West Range, the Sepik Hills and the territories of the Mountain-Ok of central New Guinea, including the Sibil Valley peoples of West Papua (see Craig 1990, 1995, 2005b).

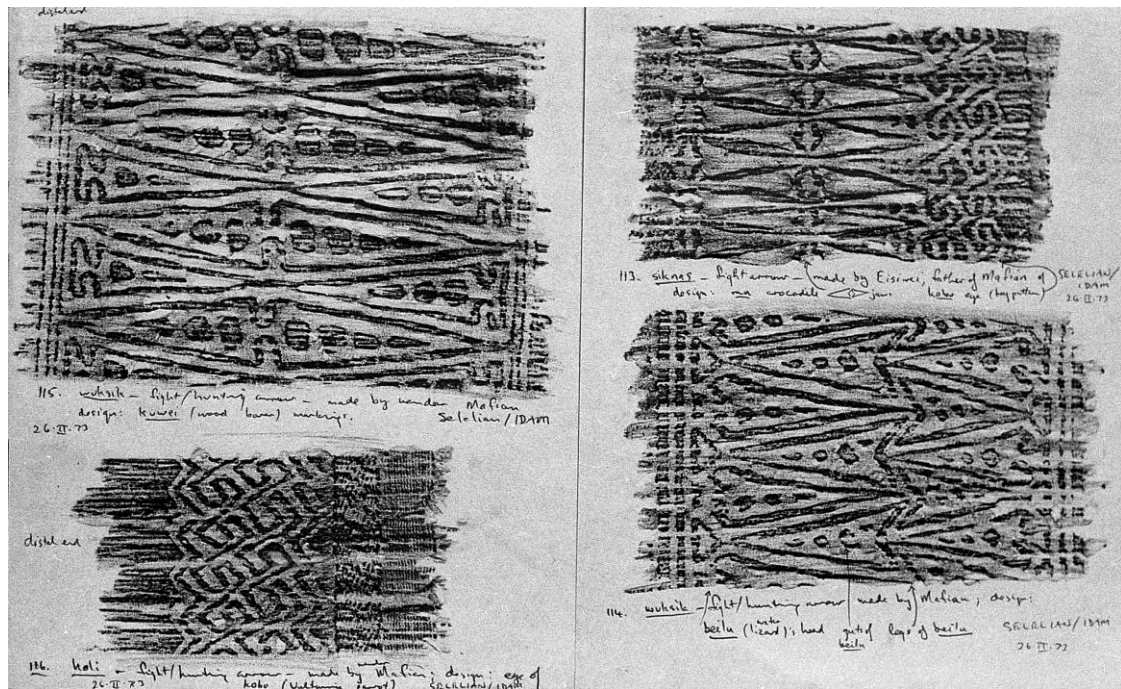


Plate 29. Rubbings of designs on arrows of Selelian, Idam Valley.

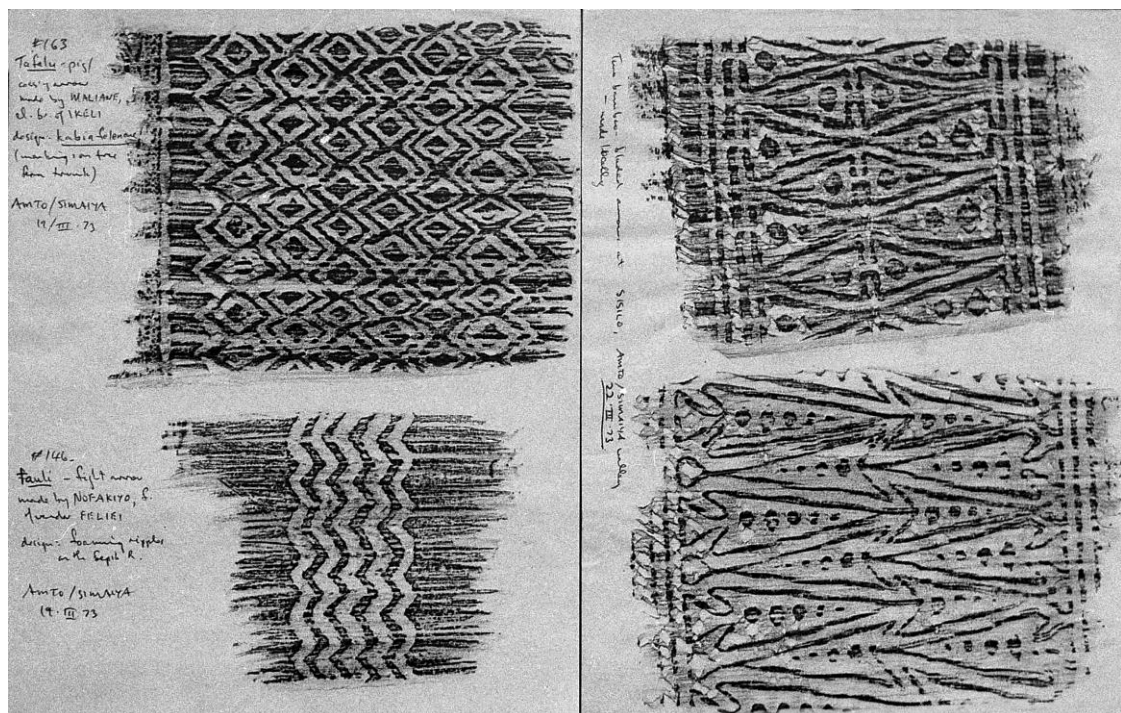


Plate 30. Rubbings of designs on arrows of Amtö, Simaiya Valley

f) **shields** – these are made from the very large, thin buttress roots of a species of *Ficus*. The traditional method was to chop out a board from the buttress to the required size and shape, then smooth both sides with a stone-bladed adze (**Plate 31**), nowadays with a steel axe or bush knife. The design was drawn on one surface with black soot and then cut out with a sharp stone flake (nowadays a steel knife) and a cassowary bone chisel (**Plate 32**), leaving the black-painted lines as relief bands. The lowered areas are then painted with red, brown or yellow ochres, white lime or clay, grey-blue clay, or sometimes with the red juice of *Bixa orellana* seeds (**Plates 33-35**).

The carrying device consists of two bark straps – one horizontal tied to each edge of the shield just above the centre of gravity and a second strap from a hole at the top centre to the middle of the horizontal strap. The shield is hung on the shoulder of the bow-arm while the other hand is free to fit an arrow and draw the bow (**Plate 36**). Examples of Abau shields have been published by Kelm (1966b, Plates 201-2, 204-20) and by Craig (1976, 2005a). Old shields used to block doorways (**Plate 37**) have given rise to the opinion (Haberland 1966) that these boards were not shields but door boards.



Plate 31. Alba of Buriap using a stone adze at Bibiyun, Yapsie (August) River



Plate 32. Bamblediam youth carving a design with a cassowary bone chisel



Plate 33. Kikifei of Bamblediam painting his shield



Plate 34. Shield made c. 1969 with steel tools by Damda of Amto, Simaiya Valley



Plate 35. Shields made by men of Mukwasi, Sepik-Simaiya junction



Plate 36. Rawei man (Busa speakers) demonstrating use of shield, bow and arrows

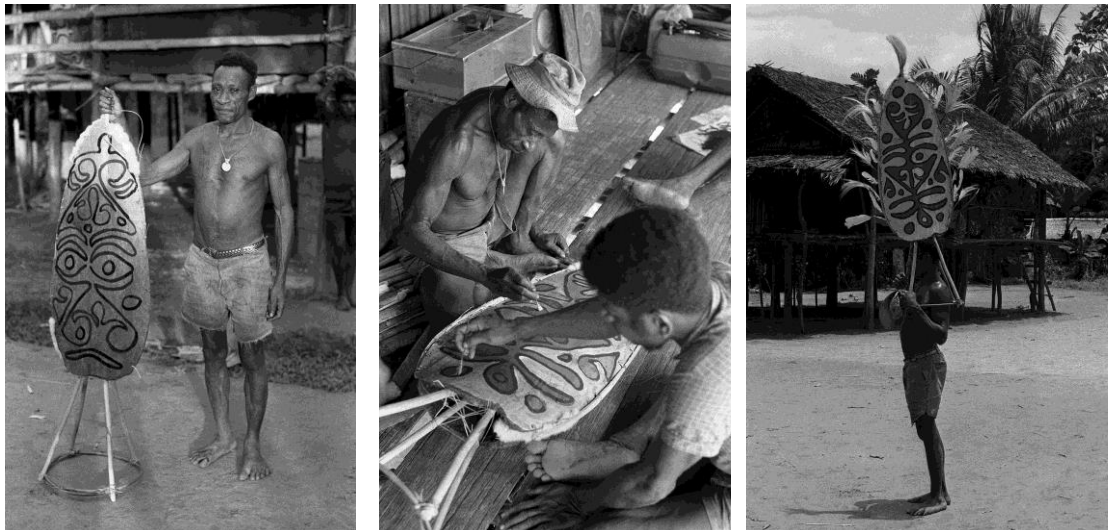


Plate 37. Old shield blocking doorway at Antibi, Idam Valley

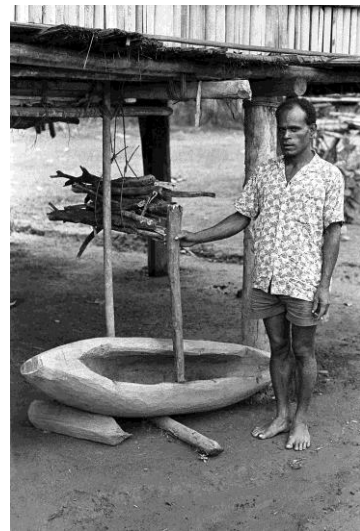
g) painted sago-petiole masks – two petioles (the flattened base of the sago palm frond) are bound to a conical framework, to which is attached a grassy fringe. This mask (*yafi*) is used in certain sickness-curing ceremonies; the masked man also wears the ritual phallocrypt and bone belt. Such masks also have a role in fertility ceremonies. Among the Abau, the designs painted on the masks (**Plates 38 – 43**) are identical to those carved on shields. However, the Amto seem to have some designs that only appear on shields, and others that only appear on the masks, whilst others occur on both kinds of objects. Kelm (1966b, Plates 232-240) illustrates several Abau painted petioles, and two painted bark slabs, one of which was found attached to the front gable of a house.



Plates 38-43. Mafian of Selelian, Idam Valley, painting a sago-petiole mask (*yafi*)



h) sculpture – there is no tradition of sculpture among the Abau if we disregard canoes (**Plates 44, 45**) and slit-gongs (**Plate 46**). A carved stone head was found as an archaeological item not far from Green River Patrol Post (see Craig 1975a) but the Abau did not know anything about it. There does seem to have been a tradition of carving a likeness of Sainou, brother of the culture-hero Yumon, among the Amto, though it is not clear whether the models shown to me (**Plates 47, 48**) were indeed close facsimiles as claimed or rather crude copies of (coastal?) Sepik masks sold to tourists and no doubt seen by the men of this area when working as contract labourers on coastal plantations.



Plates 44-46. Iwodma of Antibii, Idam Valley, cutting out a canoe; canoes at Mahani, Sepik River; man of Iaburu, Hauser/Sepik junction, with slit gong and beater



Plates 47, 48. Carved wood representations of Sainou, brother of the Amto culture-hero, Yumon

This brief sketch of aspects of the material culture of the Abau will have to suffice; detailed analyses of the ethnographic collections of the area are being added progressively to the Upper Sepik-Central New Guinea website (www.uscngp.com).

1.9 Concluding Remarks

The Abau are a people remarkably free of structured rituals and detailed rules and regulations. To my mind, they are the most existential people I have met. By fundamentalist Christian standards, they are virtually a-moral and seem to value a more-or-less free and spontaneous expression of feeling. This proved difficult for the fieldworkers to cope with at times but, in some circumstances, was refreshing. From our point-of-view, it enabled us to be very much ourselves, to show our frustration, anger, joy and satisfaction without inhibition. Nevertheless, our freedom to be very human did not prevent many of the villagers from regarding us as spirits – indeed spirits of the dead parents of Yagoli, the headman, returned with three children born to us in the land of the dead. Only after absorbing the content of the legends that follow can it be appreciated how readily we were so regarded.

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Plate 49. Stone figure (E.1169) unearthed at Amanab Patrol Post in 1964. Height 20 cm. Image courtesy PNG National Museum



Plate 50. Stone figures unearthed near Amanab, 2008. Present whereabouts unknown. Height of male figure c. 40 cm. Image courtesy Kym Downes, Vanim

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- Plate 6. 1972-3 BM 38:22
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