

THE STORY OF CAPE YORK PENINSULA

PART II

Torres Strait Saga

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(Read at a meeting of the Society on 28 February 1963.)

In this second paper on Cape York Peninsula I propose to tell something of the history and folk lore of the Torres Strait Islanders, bringing the story of these remarkable island people up to the present day.

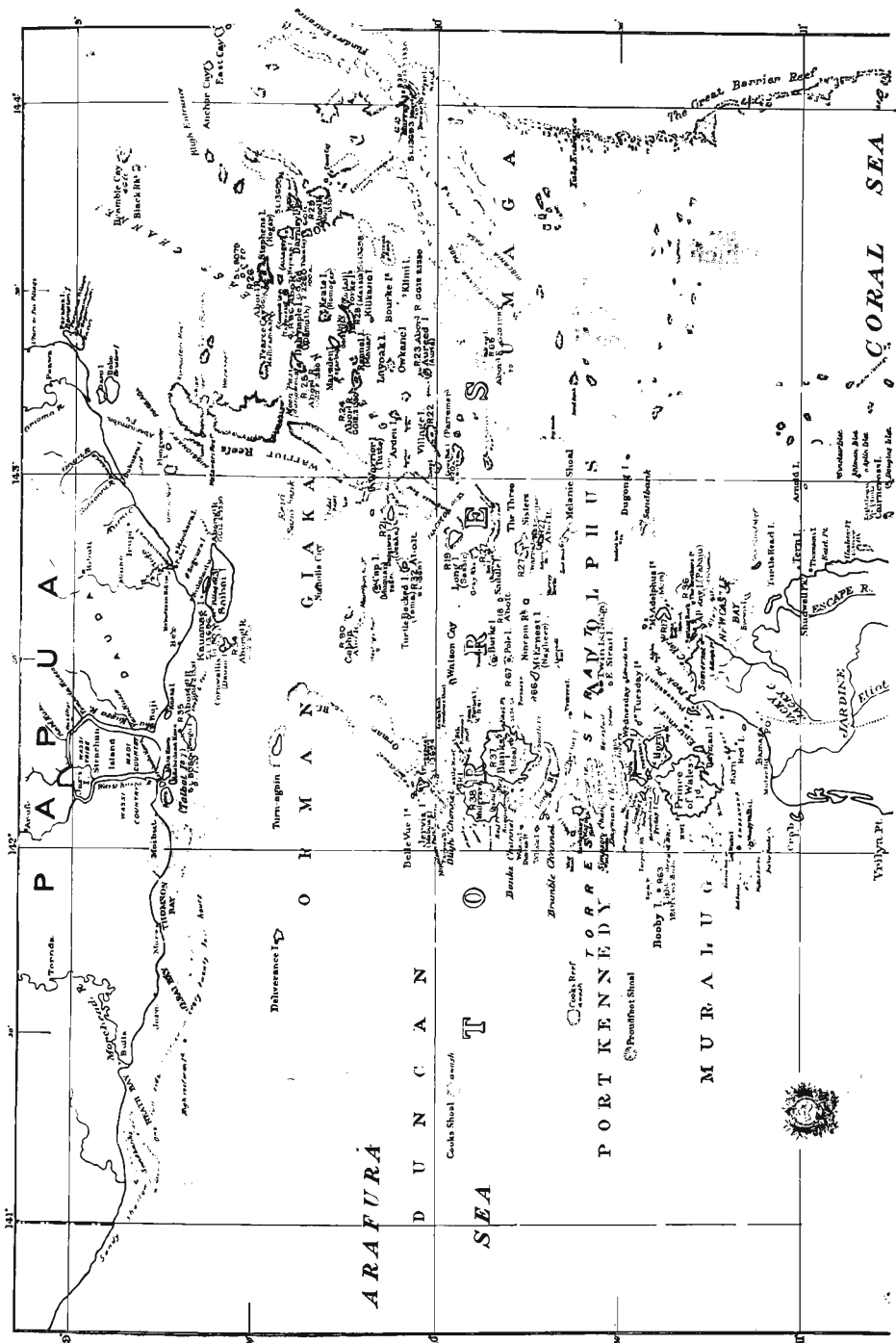
They are in some respects one of the most outstanding coloured races to be found anywhere in the world. Anthropologists and ethnologists hold divergent views on the racial origins of the Islanders; research upon their beginnings which is lost in the mists of Time has been largely neglected by scientific investigators, but the differing hypotheses are to some extent a reflection of the great controversy that has raged for many years, extending over almost a century, on the origins of the Polynesian race in general.

VOYAGERS OUT OF THE SUNRISE

The great Polynesian migration, or properly, migrations, extended over many centuries in the spread of this ancient race to every islet of the eastern Pacific. Fleets of brown-skinned voyagers came out of the sunrise and penetrated as far as the New Hebrides and New Zealand, and even to the coast of Peru, making voyages across thousands of leagues of ocean. Compared with these voyages the wanderings of Aeneas, and of Ulysses, and Jason's quest of the Golden Fleece would be the equivalent of a week-end holiday cruise down to Moreton Bay.

Some of them, I believe, stopped in the Straits waters, among the archipelago of islets, some of them fertile, others little more than sandy cays. Like Ulysses' wanderers who would fain stay in the country of the Lotus Eaters, they were weary of the sea and the ceaseless wrack of storm and thresh of tide rip.

Many of the Pacific voyagers, by whatever route they came, settled in Samoa, whence they spread from island to island over all the eastern archipelagoes.



ISLANDS OF THE TORRES STRAIT



HISTORY'S GREATEST ENIGMA

Here is possibly the greatest enigma in the story of the human race—an amazing hypothesis—and yet something more than a hypothesis—that the Polynesians of to-day are the descendants of a highly developed Neolithic or pre-Neolithic civilisation; a Stone Age culture, with possible later links with Ur of the Chaldees and ancient Egypt of 1500 B.C. in the reign of Queen Hatshepsu or Hatshepsut; a forgotten culture which remains to these people only a tenuous fugitive race memory in song and legend; a culture which left as mute evidence of its former grandeur and power the ruins of a great city at Ponape in the Carolines—the capital of what may have once been a vast and thickly populated empire; the evidence on other islands scattered from mysterious Easter Island to the New Hebrides of citadels with ramparts of basalt; of colossal stone structures, cyclopean monuments and huge monolithic statues; paved arenas; of ramparts and walls of basalt blocks over 30ft. long, brought from great distances.

What catastrophic, cataclysmic event of pre-history destroyed this civilisation that might have been old when Carthage was young? It was a strange civilisation in which art and culture flourished side by side with a cruel and pitiless religion—a religion whose priests, who had never heard of Roman augurs, inspected the quivering bodies of their sacrificial victims for omens and auspices perhaps a thousand years before the fires of Moloch burned upon the Numidian plain; a people whose stonehenges antedated the Druids of Gaul and Britain; a civilisation that flourished centuries before the Aztec conquerors of Mexico worshipped with human sacrifice the frightful Huitzilopochtli, the Mexican Mars. Is there any link between this lost civilisation and others the cities of which have been found swallowed in the jungles of South America and Cambodia? Is there a link between a pre-Inca culture and the Polynesians as Thor Heyerdahl has postulated? Was it volcanic eruption or earthquake, or was it some terrible epidemic of disease which wiped them out, the survivors fleeing to other parts of the Pacific to make new island homes, leaving their descendants with no written record, except the strange script of Easter Island (Rapanui) which occur in association with huge carved images of grey trachytic lava and broad platforms of massive uncemented masonry, and which are an enigma to archaeologists, who are at a loss to account for their presence on shores so remote from the known centres of early civilisation? Truly their name was written in water. Of their origin,

of how they flourished, whether they decayed, or sank abruptly into oblivion like fabled Atlantis, we have no clue. It is a tale that has been told many times in the terrible magnificent pageant of human history.

But for the present let us take a look to-night at the Torres Strait Islanders—our own Australian people, who to-day have put their barbaric past behind them, pursue the arts and industries of peace, and enjoy a unique system of self-government, under the paternal protection of the State. There are between 6,000 and 7,000 of them—a seafaring race wise in the ways of winds, tides, and currents.

The Torres Strait Islanders have their homes on some 20 islands out of the 200 or so islands which dot the one hundred miles stretch of treacherous and turbulent waters between Cape York Peninsula and the New Guinea coast. Some of these islands are little more than coral cays; others, like Prince of Wales Island (Muralug), 70 square miles in area, and steep, thickly wooded, and fertile.

SEVERAL ETHNIC GROUPS

Living in a sea-girt region 100 miles by 150 miles, the Islanders can be roughly divided into a number of ethnic groups, dissimilar in some respects, similar in others. There is considerable variation among these groups in language, customs, and physique. The men of Murray Island (Mer) and the Darnley (Erub) Islanders are tall, athletic types of fine physique, many of them with handsome features. The Murray Islanders, in particular, are physically and mentally superior to the average among the Islanders in the other groups. They are a big-framed, proud, and independent people who regard other Islanders, as well as the mainland aborigines, with contempt, arrogantly conscious of their racial superiority and of a warrior ancestry that reaches back into the dim past. Many of them are employed on railway construction and maintenance work in North Queensland. The blood of the Murray Islander is dominant throughout the Islands. Their origin has never been clearly determined, but it can be accepted that their ancestors migrated to the Islands.

The Murray and Darnley Islanders, more so than any other ethnic group in the Islands, have a close affinity with the Polynesians, although some Melanesian characteristics are present.

THEY LIVE FROM THE SEA

The Islander lives from the sea, but his seafood diet, including dugong beef, is augmented and garnished by taro, yam, and other vegetables. His medicines were the product

of the Zogo, but until the coming of the white man there were no diseases and no epidemics. Their laws in past times were made by the mamoose, or chief of the tribe, and before the coming of the missionaries, the Zogo, or native priests, like their counterparts the African witch-doctors, wielded a mysterious and terrible power over the lives of the people. The Zogo served strange awesome gods made of tortoise shell, with mask-like faces, and the god and the Zogo House, or temple, was decorated with festoons of skulls, the triumphant trophies of the headhunters. The cult of *puri puri* was widespread. It had the same dire effects as the bone-pointing sorcery practised by the Australian aboriginal: it could produce sickness and ultimate death by the magic power of suggestion.

The Islanders have been classified ethnographically as constituting five main groups. In the western islands are three sub-groupings or tribal aggregates—the northerners of the Boigu, Dauan, Saibai region; the middle islanders of the Mabuiag, Badu (Mulgrave Island) region, and the southerners of the Moa, Bamaga, and Muralug (Prince of Wales Island) region. The Saibai, Boigu, and Dauan Islanders, who live close to the New Guinea coast, show racial affinities with the Papuans. The Saibai are smaller in physique than the Murray and Darnley Islanders, but the men of Dauan are big robust types. Saibai Island, four miles south of the New Guinea mainland, is slowly sinking into the sea. Because of its gradual subsidence in 1949 the Saibai Islanders were moved by the Queensland Department of Native Affairs to Bamaga, near Red Island Point, 28 miles south of Cape York.

The men of Moa and Mabuiag are broad-shouldered and powerfully framed. All these Islanders have the Melanesian strain, some to a greater degree than others. The western islands of Badu, Moa, and Mabuiag are mountainous. Among the central islands Three Sisters, Yorke, Yam, and Coconut Islands are low-lying islets. In the eastern group of islands, Murray, Darnley, and Stephen are volcanic in origin, and consequently fertile, their food crop production being prolific by comparison with the other island groups. By compensation there are lush feeding grounds for the dugong on the reefs adjacent to the central and northern groups. Dugong beef is a staple diet in the Torres Strait Islands, but it is particularly so for the central and northern peoples. The Mabuiag men are sometimes inclined to run to fleshy corpulence because of their heavy diet of dugong beef.

NO KINSHIP WITH ABORIGINES

The Torres Strait Islanders have no racial kinship of any kind with the Australian aboriginal, although as I shall show later one of their tribal semi-legendary heroes was a warrior from the mainland who is believed to have been either aboriginal or part-aboriginal. The history of the Islanders before the coming of the white man has come down to us largely through tradition and folk lore, song and dance. Many of the stories of their race were collected by Professor A. C. Haddon and his associates in the reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition which visited the Strait Islands in 1904. Since then no systematic archaeological research has been done in the Torres Strait region. As has been pointed out recently by Pilling,⁽¹⁾ an American scholar, Haddon's researches still constitute the major anthropological source for these islands. The only recent notes on the archaeology of the Torres Strait Islands concern two mummies, preserved without the injection of chemicals, which are included in collections at the Queensland Museum. Pilling says they were collected many years ago on one of the Torres Strait Islands, probably from natives of Murray, Darnley, or Stephen Island, where formerly the dead were preserved by a type of mummification. In this connection our President, discussing with me one day last year the enigma of the origin of the Torres Strait Islanders, informed me that mummification, as practised by the Darnley Islanders in earlier times, was identical in method with that practised in ancient Egypt.

Could it be that these earliest Polynesian wanderers have a link with ancient Egypt and that the practice of mummification was a dim race memory handed down to their descendants through thousands of years, even though those self-same descendants had long forgotten the country of their origin—beyond the Persian gulf—a memory whose source was lost beyond recall in the vanished Bin of Time!

EPIC FOLK TALES

Long before the white man came to the Islands the Islanders were the Vikings of the Torres Strait and New Guinea waters. Many of their traditional stories have the same epic quality one finds in the Norse sagas and the Nibelungenlied. Greatest of the heroes of the Torres Strait Islanders, an almost Olympian figure in the history of the Islands, is Kwoiam, or Kuiaim, warrior chief of Mabuiag. His life of blood and violence, as depicted in island folklore,

(1) Arnold R. Pilling, *Aboriginal Culture*, History Department, Wayne State University, 1962.

has all the overtones of a Greek tragedy by Aeschylus. The cult of Kwoiam was highly developed on Mabuiaġ.⁽²⁾

Haddon describes Kwoiam as a "*berserker*," a word which has come down in history and literature from Scandinavian writings to designate the warrior who fought with frenzied fury against impossible odds.

Kwoiam's feats of prowess in war resemble those of the mighty Achilles, invulnerable champion of the Greeks in the Trojan War, whose mother, the nereid Thetis, had dipped him when an infant in the River Styx, which made every part of him proof against mortal wounds except the heel by which she held him. It is not known definitely how long ago Kwoiam lived—it is conjectured in the forties to the sixties of last century—but Haddon had little doubt, as the result of his researches among the people of Mabuiaġ, that he was a real person and not an imaginary figure, and many marvellous feats were credited to him. Kwoiam organised and trained the warriors of Mabuiaġ and he and his sea rovers were the scourge of the Islands. There has been no Australian Homer to tell of the epic past of the Torres Strait Islanders, or Kwoiam would be the central figure. Certainly his exploits, as handed down in folk tales, would rival those of Achilles, but he had as many crafty stratagems to destroy his enemies as Ulysses who invented the Trojan Horse for the overthrow of ancient Troy.

THE SAGA OF KWOIAM

Haddon incorporated in the reports of the Cambridge Expedition many folk tales, and among them was the Saga of Kwoiam, as given to him by Waria, mamoose (chief) of Mabuiaġ, in 1904. Kwoiam has been visualised as tall and lean, with a slender waist and thin legs; he was repeatedly described as being "bone, not meat," but one informant said he had a powerful chest. His head was said to be like that of an Australian aboriginal—"all same belong mainland." He was also credited with having a bulging forehead, a high crown and prominent occiput, which in the opinion of the Islanders was characteristic of the mainland aborigines. Another peculiarity Haddon was told he possessed was having "straight hair," or hair like a mainlander. Haddon notes that the term "straight" in this instance must mean "curly" as opposed to "woolly." However, all agreed that Kwoiam's hair was like that of an Australian (native). To quote from Haddon:

"Psychologically, the Mabuiaġ people recognised an

(2) A. C. Haddon, *Headhunters, Black, and White*.

affinity between Kwoiam and the Australians. Like them he had 'a wild throat' and 'a half-wild heart.' One informant said 'Mainlanders fight all the time just like Kwoiam,' and he added 'Now he come a little bit good,' meaning that the Mainlander is not so pugnacious as he was formerly."

And if legend is to be accepted as having some core of truth, however overlaid with imaginative fancy, we have the proof that Kwoiam was a North Queensland aboriginal. Kwoiam was reputed always to have fought with a characteristically Australian aboriginal weapon—"a javelin," says Haddon, "hurled by a throwing stick." Actually, then, we can establish that Kwoiam was an aboriginal warrior, with the spindly legs of an aboriginal; that his favourite weapon was the typical long narrow spear of the aboriginal (not a javelin); and that the throwing stick was the aboriginal woomera.

AN ABORIGINAL WARRIOR

In the legend, Kwoiam's antagonists were never mentioned as using this weapon, which by the final sentence of the saga, was relegated by general consent to Australia from whence it was derived. Haddon says that evidence points to the conclusion that Kwoiam was either a full or half-bred North Queensland native whose mother had migrated with her brothers to Mabuia. As a warrior Kwoiam must have been of considerable tonnage for in order to ascend the dangerous eminence of chieftainship he would have to overcome in single combat by death duel all the champions of Mabuia who came against him. He and his sea warriors raided as far as the mouth of the Fly River.

On Kwoiam's death he was apotheosised by the Mabuia people and there and in the islands to the south his name lives in legend as a great hero. Haddon was informed by Mr. J. Cowling of Mabuia that the natives of Cape York Peninsula also talked of Kwoiam. Haddon first heard the story of Kwoiam in 1888 from Nomou, then chief of Mabuia. He records his regret that he did not take down the very words of Nomou, but he had accurately preserved their sense. It ran something like this:

"The fame of Kwoiam caused the name of Mabuia to be feared for many a long day, and although the island was rocky and comparatively infertile, Kwoiam covered it with honour and glory, thus showing how the deeds of a single man can glorify a place in itself of little worth."

ALLIANCE WITH WHITE CHIEF OF BADU

Kwoiam is reputed to have entered into an alliance with Wini, or Wongai, the white chief of Badu. Theirs were the brains and organisation that spelt disaster to Kabara and his Moa Island warriors. Kabara, chief of all the Moa Island tribes, had waged sporadic war on the Badu and Mabuiag people. Kwoiam and Wini planned to overwhelm Moa by a series of onslaughts in overwhelming strength. Wini had armed his warriors with cutlasses, several cases of which he had obtained, with other booty, from the wreck of *H.M.S. Antagonist*. The *Antagonist* in 1863 was travelling from Sydney to Port Essington, where a military outpost had been established, and the ship was carrying supplies to the men of the garrison. While the vessel was sailing through Torres Strait she ran into a storm and was stranded on a reef near Badu. The ship was abandoned and the crew, taking to the boats, made the 500-mile voyage to Port Essington. Wini assured his warriors the cutlasses were invincible weapons which had won the Lamars (white men) many victories, and he drilled his men in the use of the cutlasses, showing them how to cut and thrust and parry. When they were ready and the cutlasses had been honed to razor sharpness, the massed warriors of Badu crossed the channel separating the two islands, and fell upon the men of Moa, killing many of them. Effecting a junction with Kwoiam's forces, Wini and Kwoiam swept the Moa Islanders from the sea with a great armada of war canoes. Kabara died a hero's death on his fighting deck, and with him died most of his warriors. It was the eclipse of the fighting men of Moa, although some of the Islanders with their women and children escaped to Hammond Island.

THE WHITE DEVIL OF BADU

Wini has gone down in history as the White Devil of Badu. Wini is referred to by John MacGillivray. Gia'om (Barbara Thomson), he says, supposed him to be a foreigner, and it was thought he was an escapee from New Caledonia, which was established as a penal settlement in 1854, but it is more likely that he escaped with his companions from Norfolk Island which is much closer to Badu than New Caledonia. Moreover Wini came on the Badu scene at least five years earlier than 1854. By sheer ferocity and cunning Wini gained ascendancy over all rivals, procuring the death of the most powerful, and intimidating the others, so that he became undisputed ruler, with a harem of wives and considerable property in land and goods. This was in October 1849. MacGillivray says that the natives of the neighbouring Banks Island (Moa) were described by Gia'om as evincing the same

hostility towards Europeans. Gia'om herself owed her life to her fancied resemblance to a long-deceased daughter of an important Muralug (Prince of Wales) native named Piaquai, and she had, as has been told in *Wild White Men*, to become the wife of Boroto.

The very name of Wini spread terror through the archipelago and the coastwise channels of the fringing reefs of the great Northland.

Wini's warriors were under strict orders to kill any white men who landed on Badu and to attack any visiting ship. The islanders say his ghost still haunts the scenes of his barbaric splendour and tyranny. Wini's end came suddenly. One day a white man came in a small ship with other white men and the attacking canoes of the Badu Islanders were blasted out of the water with volleys of musketry. Then the white men landed and his warriors deserted Wini, fleeing to the bush. Wini was shot down on the beach and his body flung to the hungry sharks. The date was 1865, and the belief is prevalent, although never officially proved, that the man who killed the White Devil of Badu was the late Frank Jardine of Somerset.⁽³⁾

INTER-ISLAND WARFARE

The unwritten history of the Torres Strait Islanders and their continuous inter-island warfare has some barbaric resemblance on a much smaller scale to the pitiless Peloponnesian war in classic times of the Greek States. But the civil war of the Torres Strait was waged in the 19th century before the introduction of white civilisation as a result of the founding of the pearling industry. The determination of the allied Mabuag and Badu warriors to wipe out the Moa Islanders is history that is read in the reading books of the school children of Torres Strait. In the central islands the deeds of the mighty chief Kebisu, mamoose of Tutu (Bligh's Warrior Island), and his daring sea raiders continue to-day to be re-enacted in pantomime on the dancing grounds of the islands. Representations of Kebisu's raids on ships and islands are still presented in the form of ceremonial dances. Some of these dances were staged at Cairns for Her Majesty the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh during the Royal Tour of Queensland in 1954. A feature of the visit in the early seventies to Warrior Island of *H.M.S. Basilisk*, commanded by Captain John Moresby, was the entertainment arranged

(3) See pp. 87-89 *Wild White Men in Queensland*, Cilento and Lack, Special Centenary Journal R.H.S.Q. Vol. vi, No. 1, Sept. 1959; also monograph, *Wild White Men of Early Queensland*, Cilento and Lack, pp. 28 to 31, 1963.

by Kebisu and his warriors for Captain Moresby, and the officers and men of the *Basilisk*.

The Murray (Mer) Islanders, at the north head of the Barrier Reef, were among the fiercest raiders and head-hunters of the Islands, and were noted, even among the savage Islanders, for their warlike propensities. All adult males went to war. Most famous leader of the Murray Islanders was Id (pronounced Eed). They were allies of Kebisu, whose stronghold was in the Central group of islands, including Tutu (Warrior Island), Yam, and neighbouring islands. The Murray Islanders waged constant warfare with the Darnley Islanders, their nearest neighbours. The Darnley Islanders, led by their valiant chief Rebes, were finally overwhelmed by the combined strength of Id and Kebisu, after fighting on sea and on land, and suffered virtual annihilation. Rebes was killed by Id in single combat.

THE COMING OF THE LAMARS

The Torres Strait Islanders believed that the white men who came through the Strait waters in great ships, from the days of the Spanish and Dutch voyagers onward, were *lamars*—ghost people who forever sailed the shoreless seas of Eternity. These *lamars* had to be killed again because it was feared they would bring death and disaster to all the people of the islands. MacGillivray records that the Islanders believed in the transmigration of souls, and that upon death the Islander was changed into a white man and as such passed the second and final period of his existence. Sometimes a man or woman of consequence would recognise a castaway as the reincarnation of some loved son or daughter and intervene quickly before the warriors lopped off another *lamar's* head. That is why Barbara Thomson was saved. That is what happened to John Ireland and William D'Oyley, two boys who survived the wreck of the *Charles Eaton* in 1834. At Darnley Island and Prince of Wales Island, as well as on Cape York, the word used to signify a white man also means "ghost."

MacGillivray records that when the children were teasing Gia'om (Barbara Thomson) they would be gravely reproved by their elders, who told them to leave her alone. "Poor thing! She is nothing—only a ghost! (*igur!*) *Uri longa mata markai.*" (*Uri longa*—a thing belonging to the sea; *mata*—only; *markai*—ghost.) The Australian aborigines held similar beliefs. MacGillivray states that on Cape York some natives even went so far as to recognise in several of the officers of the ship the ghosts of departed friends and to whom they might have borne some fancied resemblance, and in con-

sequence they were claimed as relatives and entitled to all the privileges of the tribe. The ghosts of dead Murray Islanders were said to go to Boigu, the most westerly of the Torres Strait Islands.

BLIGH'S ENCOUNTER WITH SEA RAIDERS

Bligh well knew the quality of the Islanders as "dexterous sailors and formidable warriors," for so he described them in his report to the British Admiralty on the attack made in 1792 on *H.M.S. Providence* and her consort, the brig *H.M.S. Assistant*. The ships had to fight off with carronade and musketry fire a fleet of war canoes manned by the black bowmen of Tutu—thirsting for the blood—and heads—of the *lamars*. The ships first encountered several war canoes manned by Islanders north-east of the island Bligh named Darnley. They were preparing to fire bows and arrows against seamen in a cutter from the *Providence*, and a number of the raiders were killed by a discharge of muskets. When the ships were between Dungeness and the island Bligh subsequently named Warrior, a large number of war canoes loaded with raiders put out with the evident intention of attacking the *Providence*. Ignoring a discharge of musketry, the fleet of canoes swept on towards the warship. Round shot was fired at the eight leading canoes, the first of which was raked from stem to stern and sank, those on board leaping into the sea and climbing into the following canoes. Flights of arrows wounded three seamen on the *Assistant*, and subsequently one of them died from his injuries.

Flinders came in contact with the Murray Islanders on 29 October 1802 when the *Investigator* anchored off the island. As soon as the anchor was dropped, about 50 natives paddled out from shore in their canoes and bartered with the crew. The natives were well armed with bows and arrows, but no attack was made.⁽⁴⁾

Cook, who landed on Possession Island in Endeavour Strait on 22 August 1770, accompanied by Banks and Solander—the day on which he took possession in the name of King George III of the whole of the eastern coast—has recorded seeing "a number of people upon this island," and "one man who had a bow and a bundle of arrows, the first

(4) The canoes Flinders saw were "about 50ft. in length and appeared to have been hollowed out of a single tree, but the pieces which form the gunwales are planks sewed on with the fibres of the coconut and secured with pegs. Their vessels are low forward, but rise abaft, and being narrow, are fitted with an outrigger on each side to keep them steady. A raft of greater breadth than the canoe extends for about half the length, and upon this is fixed a shed or hut thatched with palm leaves. These people, in short, appear to be dexterous sailors and formidable warriors, and to be as much at ease in the water as in their canoes."

we have seen upon this coast," and in another passage, "two or three of the men we saw yesterday had on pretty large breastplates, which we supposed were made of pearl oyster shell; this was a thing, as well as the bows and arrows, we had not seen before."

The only use the Torres Strait headhunters had for pearl shell was to make breastplates of the gleaming plaques, or triangular flashing eyes in the human heads they shrunk and kept as trophies of their raids. Neither they nor the mainland aborigines, whom they held in contempt, had any use for pearls. The aborigines cooked the oysters over their fires and spat out the pearls into the sand as they ate the oyster flesh in their strong white teeth.

WAR CANOES AND WEAPONS

The big canoes used by the Torres Strait Islanders all came from the delta of the Fly River. The logs were cut and hollowed out at Wabad (Wabuda) and Dibi (Dibiri).⁽⁵⁾ The late Rev. James Chalmers referred to canoes being made at, and exported from, Dibiri and other villages near the mouth of the Fly River, on the left bank. From Dibiri the canoes passed through Wabuda to Kiwai, and along the Daudai coast to Mawata, whence they reached Saibai. Here they were re-rigged with two outriggers, a gunwale was introduced, and the canoes decorated with figureheads and otherwise ornamented. Thence the canoes found their way to the other western islands, the men of Saibai playing the role of middlemen. Each island had its price for a canoe, Muralug paid in pieces of iron which they obtained from wrecks. For more than a century prior to 1889, when the Torres Strait was charted, shipwrecks of European vessels were of the utmost significance in the life of the Torres Strait Islanders as a source of iron and for other materials.

Many of the canoes of the Islanders were as big as Roman galleys or Viking longships, measuring between 70 and 80 feet in length. Each canoe had its name, another Polynesian custom, and in fact the same practice was followed by the Vikings. The canoes had 20ft. outriggers on each side which made them almost unsinkable in stormy weather. In the waist of each ship was a fighting deck of planks for the headmen and their retainers, who were armed with stone-headed clubs and shark-tooth swords. Like Harold's axe-wielding Danish house carles who formed the shield wall at Hastings they were the bodyguards of the leaders on each ship. The high sides of the canoes shielded the bowmen who could unloose a

(5) A. C. Haddon, *Journal Anthropological Institute*, xxx iii, 1903.

constant shower of arrows in a seafight or a raid on a *lamar* ship.

They were expert marksmen who kept their hand in with the same professional pride as the English bowmen of Crecy and Agincourt, or in more recent times, the gunslingers of the old American West.

Their bamboo bows were from seven to eight feet in length and only the most powerful muscled men could string them. Long before the white man invented the diabolical dum-dum bullet by notching the nose of the bullet, the Torres Strait bowmen used dum-dum arrows — arrows with detachable heads of compressed bamboo shoots which on impact sprang open causing fearful wounds. The string of the bow was a broad strip of cane fixed to one end of the bow and fitted with a noose to go over the other end.⁽⁶⁾

The most expert bowmen were reputed to be the small sinewy men of Saibai, a swampy low-lying island only a few miles from the New Guinea coast. They waged incessant war with raiders from New Guinea, and in their turn raided New Guinea villages. Wyatt Gill⁽⁷⁾ stated in 1876 that the tribe occupying the portion of New Guinea opposite Dauan and Saibai were always at war with their neighbours.

All anthropological research, all the reports that have been studied, agree that the raiders did not make prisoners of women, and they were never molested.

BANNER'S BARGAIN WITH KEBISU

Something happened in 1868 which was the beginning of the end of the old barbaric way of life for the Torres Strait Islanders. In that year Captain William Banner of the Sydney brig *Julia Percy* fished the first cargo of pearl shell from Warrior Reef. The story of that bargain, and of how Banner overawed Kebisu and his warriors by a demonstration of the effectiveness of his fore and aft cannon, has been told elsewhere.⁽⁸⁾ In return for tomahawks and iron, which to Kebisu and his sea raiders were as valuable as the pearls and pearl shell were worthless, Banner and his crew won a rich harvest. Pearl shell was then worth £150 a ton in Sydney. For every pearl found by Kebisu's skin divers the reward was a tomahawk and Banner collected many large pearls.

Banner made friends with Kebisu's favourite son, the boy

(6) Flinders, *A Voyage To Terra Australis*, notes: "Their clubs are made of casuarina and are powerful weapons . . . The heavy end is usually carved with some device. One had the form of a parrot's head with a ruff round the neck, and was not ill done."

(7) *Life in Southern Islands*, 1876.

(8) See *Triumph In The Tropics*, Cilento and Lack, p. 223.

Maino. This boy grew up to be the last mamoose of Tutu and Yam. He became a celebrated figure in the islands, and was personal A.D.C. and bodyguard to Sir William Macgregor in New Guinea. The former Protector of Aborigines, Mr. O'Leary, who knew Maino personally, says he was an able administrator and one of the most outstanding men, white, black, or brown, he had ever known. Maino died about 1925, and Mr. O'Leary was present at the funeral ceremony on Yam Island. Maino was then a very old man; there is some doubt about his actual age.

The first missionaries arrived in the Strait Islands in 1871. In that year the Revs. A. W. Murray and T. MacFarlane sailed from the Loyalty Islands with eight South Sea teachers.⁽⁹⁾ Murray and McFarlane sighted Erub (Darnley) on 1 July 1871 and on 3 July a native named Tepeso, the first Christian teacher, took up his work there. Teachers were left on two other islands, Dauan and Saibai, and also on the mainland of New Guinea. South Sea Islanders engaged in pearling and beche-de-mer fishing were living on some of the islands. More South Sea teachers, brought by Rev. W. Wyatt Gill, followed in 1872, and in the same year Maitaka, a Samoan teacher of the London Missionary Society, arrived to evangelise the people of Mer. Five South Sea teachers had been established on Dauan at the time of Gill's visit in October 1872. Murray remained about two years on the islands and McFarlane returned to the Torres Straits in 1874, remaining there for 16 years. The famous James Chalmers, known to the natives, and later to the world, as "Tamate," joined the mission in 1877, though his main field of work was on the mainland of New Guinea.

Administrative control began in the Torres Strait Islands in 1862, with the appointment of John Jardine, police magistrate at Rockhampton, as Government Resident in the Torres Straits. From the small settlement originally established on Albany Island he shifted to Somerset on 1 August 1864.

Somerset was for eleven years the headquarters of the rapidly expanding pearling industry, but Thursday Island was considered to be a more suitable location. The erection of the Government buildings and town of Port Kennedy was begun in 1876, and in 1877 the Government Resident (Mr. H. M. Chester) transferred from Somerset to the new Residency.

Prior to 1879 the Queensland Government had no official jurisdiction or authority over the Torres Strait Islands which

(9) Records obtained from Department of Native Affairs.

were the haunt of many unsavoury white characters, among them the blackest villains of the Southern Seas.

Unscrupulous beche-de-mer fishermen in the early days of the industry ruthlessly exploited aboriginal and Polynesian labour and kidnapped labour was also provided by "black-birders." Beche-de-mer fishing and the associated trochus and pearl shell fishing eventually came under the strict regulation of the Queensland Government and the worst abuses were minimised, if not actually stamped out entirely.

QUEENSLAND'S BOUNDARY EXTENDED

In 1872 the boundary of Queensland was extended to include Thursday Island and other adjacent islands in Torres Strait within 60 miles of the Queensland coast. Letters Patent of 30 May 1872 made the then Governor of Queensland, the Marquis of Normanby, governor of those islands whereof the annexation was authorised, and in August of the same year the Queensland Parliament, then a bi-cameral legislature, passed resolutions requesting the Governor to annex those islands. The *Government Gazette* of 24 August 1872 sets forth the Deed Poll transferring the islands to Queensland.

But there were other islands between Australia and New Guinea still outside the ocean boundary, where fugitives from justice had been able to live outside the Colony's jurisdiction and figuratively thumb their noses at its laws. So the boundary had to go east, so as to include those islands. Pursuant to additional Letters Patent of 11 October 1878, the Parliament of Queensland, in June 1879, passed the *Queensland Coast Islands Act* which enacted that by proclamation those islands should be part of Queensland territory.⁽¹⁰⁾ By proclamation, published in the *Government Gazette* of 21 July 1879, on and after 1 August 1879, as well as the Torres Strait Islands within 60 miles of the coast, all the islands of the Great Barrier Reef constituted part of the State's territory.

Annexation brought greater security to the Islanders. Law and order came to the Torres Straits and the worst excesses

(10) The Act (43 Vic. No. 1), which was assented to on 24 June 1879, provided in the Schedule that "Certain islands in Torres Straits and lying between the Continent of Australia and the Island of New Guinea, that is to say, all Islands included within a line drawn from Sandy Cape northward to the south-eastern limit of Great Barrier Reefs, thence following the line of the Great Barrier Reefs to their north-eastern extremity near the latitude of nine and a half degrees south, thence in a north-westerly direction embracing East Anchor and Bramble Cays, thence from Bramble Cays in a line west by south (south seventy-nine degrees west) true, embracing Warrior Reef, Saibai, and Tuan Islands, thence diverging in a north-westerly direction so as to embrace the group known as the Talbot Islands, thence to and embracing the Deliverance Islands and onwards in a west by south direction (true) to the meridian of one hundred and thirty-eight degrees of east longitude.

of the white pearlers and beche-de-mer fishermen were curbed. This was particularly the rule following the appointment in 1885 of Hon. John Douglas as Government Resident Magistrate on Thursday Island. Douglas made periodic tours of all the islands and was known personally to all the natives. The Islanders acknowledged him as the representative of the Crown. "During my two visits," Haddon wrote, "I found that Queen Victoria was a very real person to the natives."

In 1896 the then Queensland Commissioner of Police, Mr. W. E. Parry-Okeden, said in his report that the islands within the jurisdiction of Queensland lay chiefly between the 144th and 147th parallel of longitude and between the 9th and 17th meridians of south latitude. In matters of government the islands were worked upon a system instituted by the Hon. John Douglas, under which the hereditary native chief or mamoose of each island was installed as chief magistrate. He was given a Queensland ensign as insignia of office and had native police to uphold his authority and repress crime or disorder. He presided in the courthouse, built by the natives themselves, and dealt with minor offences committed by natives under a simple penal code drawn up by Sub-Inspector Urquhart and sanctioned by Mr. Douglas for use in the native courts.

Mr. Douglas received from the Government £25 annually, being £1 per year for each native policeman, and also one suit of Queensland Native Police uniform for each paid man. This, with a trifling amount spent on tobacco, formed the total expenditure on the organisation.

The only island on which the Native Police were armed was Saibai, close to the mainland of British New Guinea, where they were provided with Snider carbines and ammunition to enable them to repel the attacks of the Tugeri, a marauding tribe of headhunters who made descents on the islands from the New Guinea coast.

MISSIONARY ENTERPRISE

The Church of England Mission of St. Paul's on Banks Island (Moa), where native priests are trained, was originally established in 1904 for the benefit of those South Sea Islanders who had lived in Queensland for more than 20 years, or had married Torres Strait women and were for these reasons not deported with other Polynesians at the time of the introduction of the White Australia policy. The Queensland Government in the early years of the century gave the Church of England a grant of £250 per annum. To this mission there went in 1908 as teacher Florence Buchanan, a little English-woman. "Her face," wrote Bishop White, "always reminded

me of a medieval saint . . . the memory of her work and example will never be forgotten on Moa.”

The Anglicans succeeded to the missionary enterprise which the London Missionary Society had pioneered. A Roman Catholic mission was established at Thursday Island in 1885 and subsequently a mission was opened on Hammond Island. The Anglicans began their mission work in the Torres Straits Islands proper in June 1915, when the Rev. J. J. Done went north to superintend the mission work in the Islands. Three months later, Rev. G. A. Luscombe was appointed to St. Paul's, Moa, and took charge of two other settlements as well. From having been Congregationalists the Islanders of Moa suddenly became Anglicans—and Anglicans of the High Church. Haddon records that the change-over in Church organisation from one branch of the Christian faith to another was made without difficulty. In place of the simplicity of their former services and the democratic tendency of their church government they got the ornate vestments of the High Church of England, its Catholic ritual, and its hierarchy of bishops. John Bruce, school teacher on Mer, in a letter to Haddon, wrote: “This change was realised without a murmur.” They “at once began to follow the form of the English Church service, so different from the simple services they had been used to!” The former Islander deacons became churchwardens, or in some instances lay readers. Another church servant whose services were retained was the prodder, who went around during the service prodding awake anyone who went to sleep! When the priests were absent from the Island the churchwardens were responsible for the services.

PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION

During the last decades of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century the Queensland Government progressively introduced legislation intended to give protection to the native peoples under its jurisdiction. The first such Act, known as the *Native Labourers' Protection Act of 1884*, was an act restricting employment of aboriginal natives in Queensland waters in connection principally with beche-de-mer fishing, and “to prevent the kidnapping of Australian natives as well as South Sea Islanders.” There followed a number of Acts known as the *Aboriginal Protection and Protection of the Sale of Opium Acts of 1897 to 1934*, the aim of which was segregation to enable the people to survive.

In 1939 the Queensland Parliament passed the *Torres Strait Islanders Act*. At that time many of its provisions were unique in that they gave to a coloured people with a limited

civilisation of not much more than fifty years, and in some cases not more than twenty years, the right of self-determination or Home Rule, subject to the paternal blessing and practical help of the Government. Principal provisions of the Act are: recognition of the right of the Islanders to elect their own representatives to a legally established Council; adult franchise is from 18 years; the right of the Councillors who also constitute the native court to discipline their own people within the provisions of the Act and generally to co-ordinate justice with helpful advice.

The Council, which is the equivalent of a local parliament, also has the responsibility for the oversight of hygiene and any other matters affecting the health of the people, consistent with medical advice.

Limited magisterial duties are allocated to the Council which has the right to collect fees for the benefit of their Island. Offences beyond ordinary domestic matters must go to the magistrate on Thursday Island. On every island three Councillors are elected. These Councillors, who are responsible to the Director of Native Affairs, meet in triennial inter-island conferences, which are attended by upwards of 40 councillors, with their own Islander chairman and with Islander minute secretaries. At these conferences an agenda affecting every phase of the people's lives, and prepared by the councillors, is debated and recommendations made. The next Conference is scheduled for 1964.

COMPLETELY SELF-SUPPORTING

The completely self-supporting Torres Strait Islanders are engaged in large-scale pearl shelling, trochus gathering, and boat building. Their annual gross earnings exceed £500,000. Their marine products are handled by the Island Industries Board, a giant co-operative which conducts stores on seventeen islands and one mainland settlement. The Board arranges agreements with oversea buyers for the sale of marine produce won by the Torres Strait Islanders' fleet. This fleet, numerically the largest in Australia, consists of 24 vessels. During 1961-62 this fleet won marine produce valued at £102,000. Some 750 men are employed in the marine industry alone. Apart from manning their own luggers and cutters, Islanders comprise the major portion of the work force engaged on privately owned luggers. Employment elsewhere is provided for hundreds of other Islanders.

A school for native pearl shell divers operates with notable success. Its aim is to enable Islander-owned vessels to work deeper shell beds. Another important industrial enterprise

which strengthens the economic security of the 7,000 Torres Strait Islanders is pearl culture, which is operating on five locations.

Although skilled technical labour is at present provided almost entirely by the Japanese, Islanders are engaged in this industry in a four to one ratio. No work which can be done by an Islander is performed by foreign labour.

ISLANDERS' PART IN WORLD WAR II

When the Second World War broke out the Torres Strait Light Infantry Battalion of up to 1,000 men was organised. Every able-bodied man in the Islands was a volunteer in this magnificent body of infantry. They served under white officers; all N.C.O.'s up to the rank of sergeant were Islanders. Six hundred men were on garrison duty in the Thursday Island and New Guinea area. Apart from the infantry, Torres Strait Islanders manned the pearling luggers to carry supplies and harass the enemy along the New Guinea coast.

With the end of the war, the Islanders found themselves discharged seamen or soldiers with no vessels available for the resumption of their livelihood in the pearl shell industry. The Commonwealth military authorities were leisurely about making arrangements for the repatriation of the Islanders to their homes, claiming that no transport was available. The Islanders had a champion in Con O'Leary, who defied the authorities and took matters into his own hands. He recalled with a reminiscent grin, "We helped ourselves to several luggers that were lying idle in Port Kennedy, upped anchor, and sailed them back to the Islands; nobody tried to stop us although I was threatened with arrest!"

The Islanders came home to find themselves without employment. Although there was an overseas market for pearl shell and trochus shell they had no luggers with which to follow their sea calling. Many of them were at the bottom of the Arafura Sea—sunk by Japanese gunfire; others had been wrecked, and some were still retained, for no apparent reason, by the Commonwealth authorities. The outlook of the Islanders was desperate: the elation of victory and war's end was replaced by disillusionment and frustration.

The Island Industries Board, backed by the Queensland Government, came to the aid of the Islanders. They were assisted to purchase pearling luggers wherever they could be found. The market for small ships was combed. Vessels were bought in Port Moresby, sailed by Island crews to Thursday Island, and refitted on the slipway established by the Board at Port Kennedy. Ultimately the Islanders had a

better fleet than the one they had owned before the war. The rehabilitation of the Islanders was speedy and effective, and established them as an efficient industrial unit to challenge the Japanese divers who in pre-war days had monopolised the pearling industry in Torres Strait.

The next step was to provide better housing for the Islanders and improved education for their children. In 1948 the Queensland Government took over the area known as Bamaga on Cape York Peninsula, a reserve of 44,500 acres. A sawmill was erected there and the timber resources of the Peninsula developed, the primary purpose being the building of houses for the Islanders. For the house-building programme Island carpenters were trained in working gangs on Thursday Island; to date 250 new houses have been built.

Many new schools have been constructed on all the islands. The State Education Department provides trained teachers to take charge of these primary schools which are attended by approximately 1,000 children. Children are brought to Thursday Island to attend the State Primary Schools there, and the Department has purchased at Thursday Island a building for use as a hostel, capable of accommodating up to 80 children. Here they will receive a higher education than is possible on their home islands. Several children are in fact already studying at secondary schools in southern towns.

Some 20 girls recruited from the Islands are employed as trainee nurses at the Thursday Island General and Tuberculosis Hospital. Upon completion of their training some of these girls return to their home islands for employment in the small hospitals established there.

On every inhabited island welfare clubs which organise social life and entertainment have been established, and there are also picture theatres on the larger islands, financed and organised by the Island councils.

These are the people who have graduated from savagery to civilisation in little more than half a century. On Darnley Island and Badu Island are memorials which show how far these proud Island people have come on the road to enlightenment and a happier and richer life, although the fear of *puri puri* has not entirely died out. At Treachery Bay, on the coast of Darnley Island, at the northern end of the Barrier Reef, a concrete cross stands on a pedestal set in a large stone canoe. It was erected by the Darnley Islanders to commemorate a number of historic events in their island story. Firstly, it records the massacre in 1793 by their ancestors of a party from the ship *Chesterfield*. Secondly, it commemorates the raising of the British flag on the island which took place soon after this massacre; and thirdly, the adoption of

Christianity by the Darnley natives. Every year a service is held at the site on 1 July, the anniversary of the arrival of the first missionaries, Murray and McFarlane, in 1871.

On Badu Island, north-west of Thursday Island, is a concrete replica of a lighthouse with an arrangement of mirrors to catch the sunlight. It commemorates Charles Walker, a friend and benefactor of the Torres Strait Islanders, who is buried on the island. The monument takes this form because the natives say that Walker always "let his light shine."

To-day they are a healthy, self-reliant and intelligent people who cherish a pride of race and independence. They are small in numbers, but they have a definite place in Australia's national destiny.

