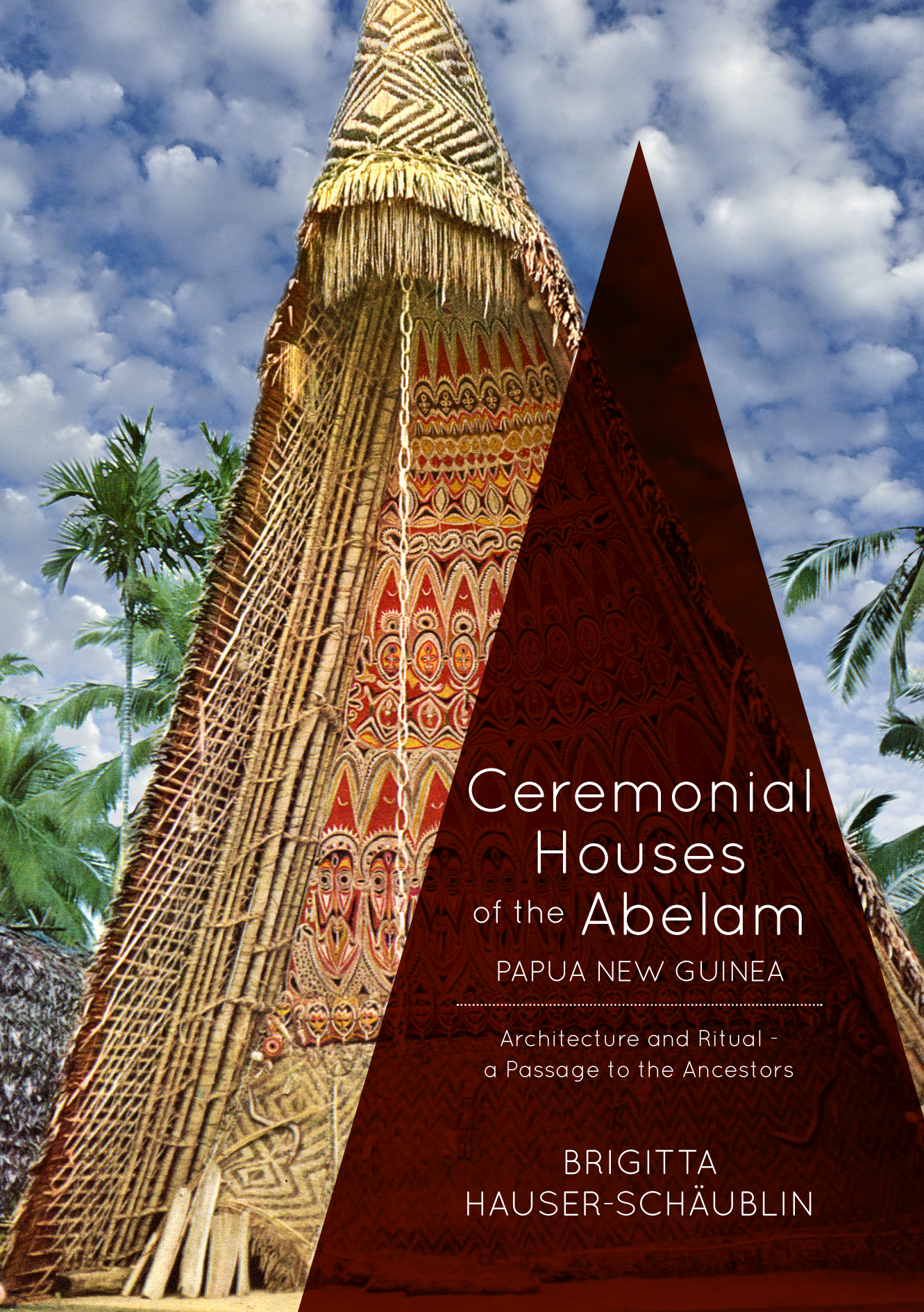

Ceremonial Houses of the Abelam

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Architecture and Ritual -
a Passage to the Ancestors

BRIGITTA
HAUSER-SCHÄUBLIN

Ceremonial Houses of the Abelam

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Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin

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Frontipiece: Ceremonial house, Kaumbul hamlet, Kalabu.

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Preface

This book was originally written as the first, monographic part of a two-volume study on ceremonial houses in northern New Guinea, which I finished in 1985. Following a fruitful academic exchange with the Museum für Völkerkunde in Dresden, the two parts of the study were published jointly in 1989 under the title 'Kulthäuser in Nordneuguinea' as Volume 43 (Monographien 7) of the Abhandlungen und Berichte des Staatlichen Museums für Völkerkunde Dresden, in the Akadamie-Verlag in East Berlin. It was the Year of Change in Europe and the German Democratic Republic was in a state of dissolution. The sweeping transformation of the economy and the alterations in the state institutions (to which the museums belonged) spelt the end of the Akademie-Verlag in its existing form. As a result of the turbulent times, the publication, carefully edited by Frank Tiesler and Lydia Icke-Schwalbe, all but foundered on the West German book market (and beyond) and never received due attention. Moreover, since it was published in German the international audience hardly took notice of the book's findings, and, of course, the Abelam people, whom the book is about, were rather at a loss with the original German version.

I decided to have the book translated into English roughly 20 years after first publication, following discussions I had with anthropologists who have kept visiting the Maprik area up to now, such as Noel McGuigan and Ludovic Coupaye; both of them have described the ongoing change in the Maprik region. Their reports made me realize that my own work actually described cultural practices of the 1970s that have virtually come to a halt today – many of them even seem to have been forgotten. Thus, the present book represents a cultural snapshot in time, a bridge, so to speak, between the studies by Kaberry (1941, 1942, 1965) and Forge (1966, 1967, 1970, 1973, 1979) which, unfortunately, never appeared in monographic form, and the more recent studies conducted in the area (see Introduction).

I am grateful to a number of institutions and persons who not only enabled field research (1978-79, 1980 and 1983), but also generously supported the publication of the study in German and English. These include the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Freie Akademische Gesellschaft Basel (herein especially the Fritz-Sarasin-Stiftung); the Board of Trustees of the Fonds zur Förderung von Lehre und Forschung an der Universität Basel; UBS Culture Foundation, Zürich; the Stiftung zur Förderung des Museums für Völkerkunde Basel; the Völkerkundemuseum Basel (now Museum der Kulturen Basel) and its former director Prof. Dr Gerhard Baer and the former curator of the Oceania department, Dr Christian Kaufmann; the photo studio at the museum as well as the graphic studio there (Christina Schäublin); Prof. Dr Meinhard Schuster, former head of the Institute of Ethnology at the University of Basel; the Education Department of the canton of Basel-Stadt; the various research institutes in Papua New Guinea; and the Staatliche Museum für Völkerkunde in Dresden that merged with the Museum für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig in 2004 to form the Staatliche Ethnographische Sammlungen Sachsens (Director Dr Claus Deimel). The translation was done by Nigel Stephenson, himself an anthropologist who has conducted fieldwork among the Wam people of the East Sepik Province and who therefore knows 'the Sepik' from first-hand experience and has a 'feel' for village life in Papua New Guinea (Stephenson 2001).

The publication of the English version of the study was supported by the UBS Culture Foundation, Zürich, and the Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft Basel. I wish to express my deep-felt gratitude to all the institutions and people involved!

Many people have granted me support, either directly or indirectly, through the various stages of research – preparing fieldwork, during fieldwork itself, while analysing the data and during the writing phase. These include: Meinhard and Gisela Schuster; the late Werner

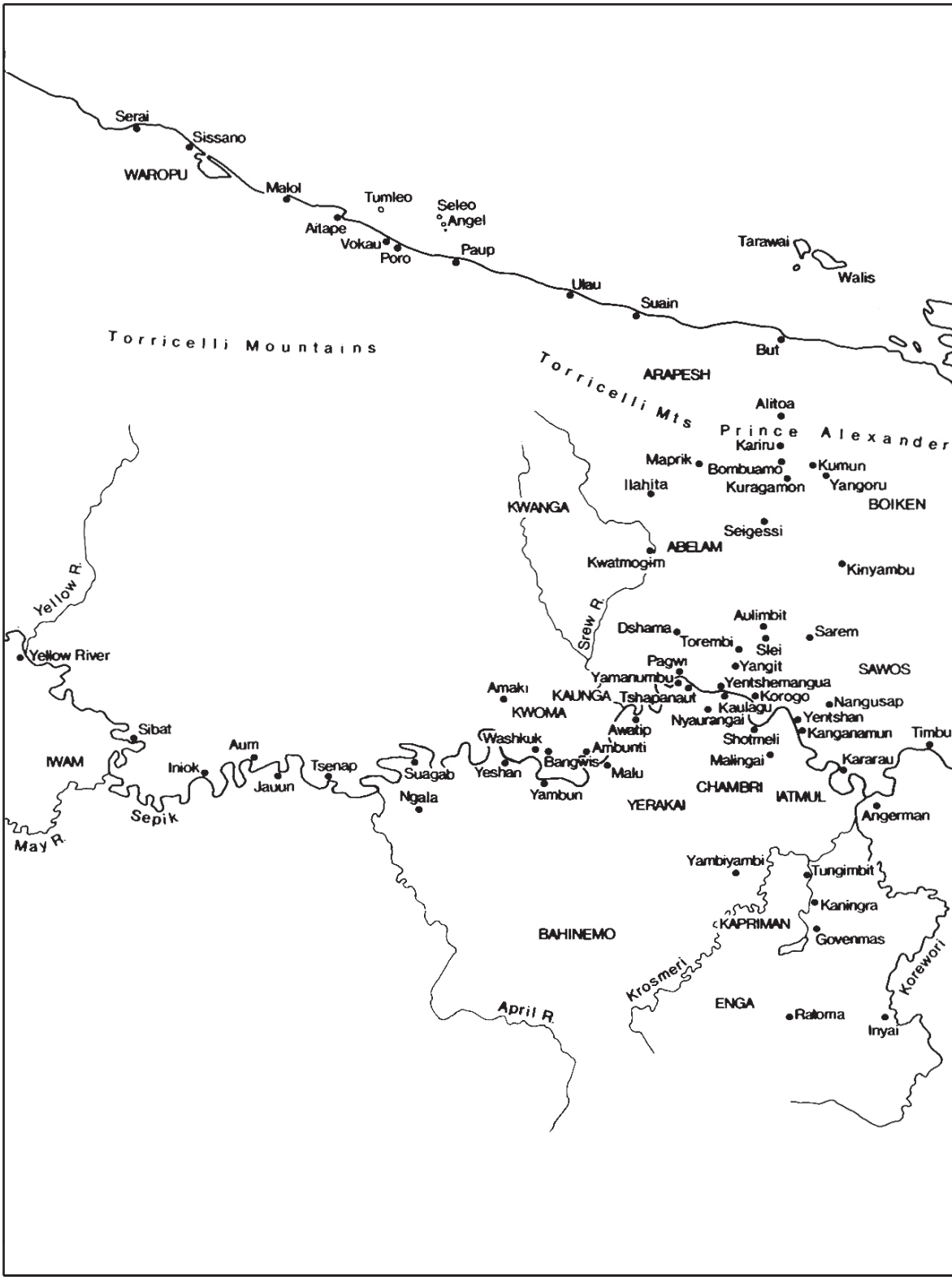
Stöcklin, who generously granted me access to his documentary material; the late Anthony Forge who allowed me to view his records (especially his field photos), both during visits to Canberra and here in Basel; Fred Gerrits whose elaborate documentation 'The House Tambaran of Bongiora' (2012) served as a rich documentary source and also provided the basis for the reconstruction of the *puti* initiation scene in the ceremonial house at the Basel museum; Barbara Huber-Greub who conducted her studies as a PhD student in the neighbouring village of Kimbangwa (Huber-Greub 1988) during my own fieldwork period, and Erika Schittly-Widmer who stayed in the Arapesh/Abelam village of Lonem for three months in 1980; they both provided me with valuable comparative perspectives to those acquired during visits to other villages. Ever since I started working on ceremonial houses, Gaudenz Domenig, with his vast knowledge on architecture and architectural history in Asia, has been an inspiring and critical friend and an invaluable source of information. Paul (Jim) Roscoe has been a trusted friend and colleague for many years with whom I have been able to exchange ideas and discuss issues concerning differences and common features between the Yangoru Boiken and the Abelam, and on the Sepik area in general. Even after I switched my focus from Melanesia to South-east Asia after concluding my work on the Abelam, Jim remained a valuable friend and partner in discussions. The same goes for Nancy Lutkehaus, Markus Schindlbeck, Werner Stöcklin and the late Douglas Newton.

In the context of the translation of the book and my revitalized interest in the work on Abelam culture, the people of Kalabu, in general, and my closest friends in the village, in particular – namely the men and women who hosted us in their hamlet and all the people who shared their knowledge with us and allowed us to partake in their lives – have become very close again: Pis (also called Kamboiragwa), his wife Numbu as well as their son Lomini and his wife Maine; Waina (who had the exceptional gift of translating, but also of explaining, the complex and often perplexing texts of the speeches recorded on the ceremonial ground) and his wife Mauten; Rorotabu and Kwanggup; Olai and Lina; Tambandshoe, Kitnyeikyak and Mbalesibe; the important old bigmen Gueguin, Aguilangui, Nambisenta, Dondombale as well as the artists Waiwu, Kwandshendu and Waulemoi, who not only disclosed the links, but also opened our eyes for the relationship between painting and initiations.

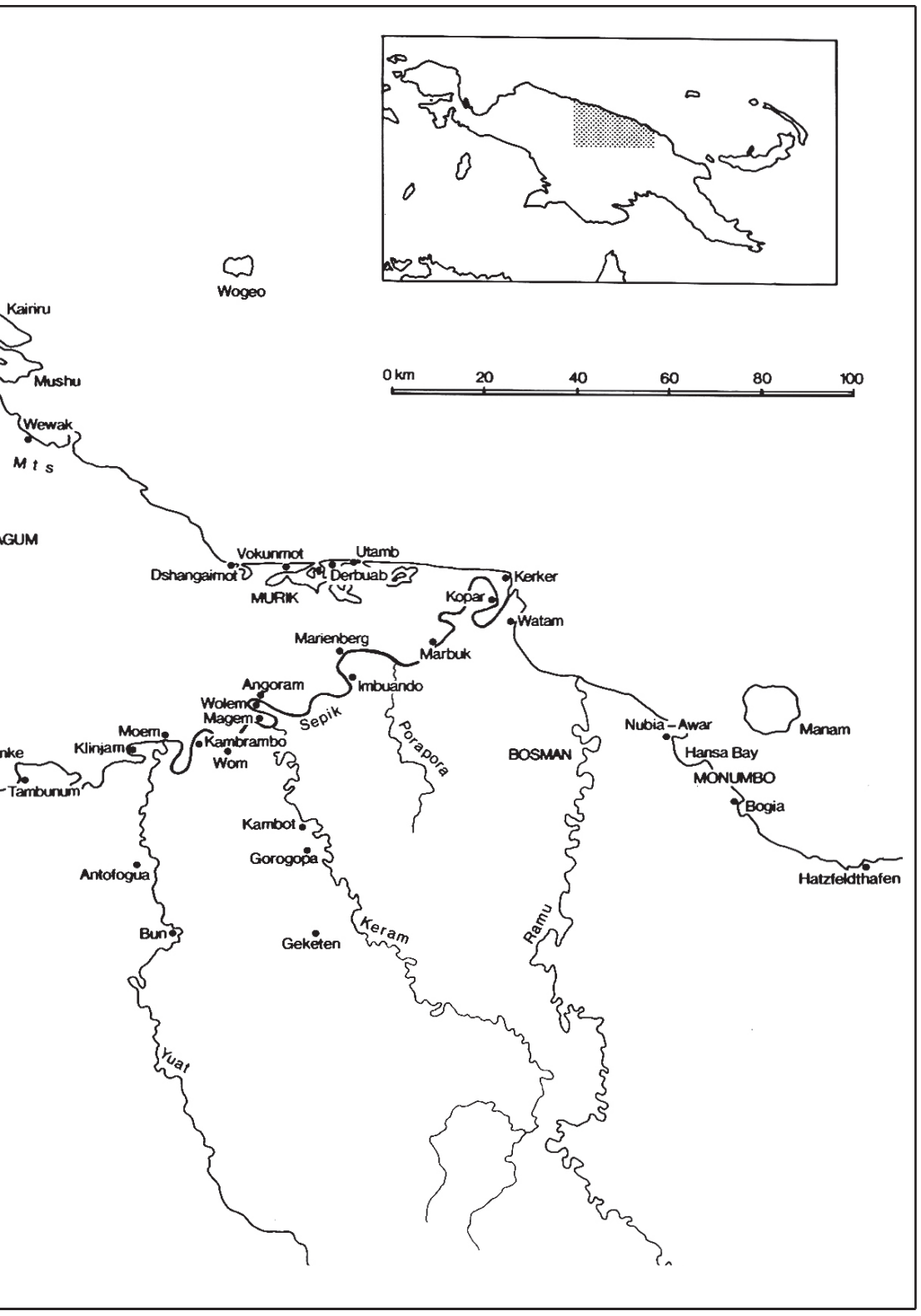
But my thanks also go to all the inhabitants of Kalabu I and Kalabu II who always stood by us and made us feel welcome – barring the few occasions when, after a night of heavy drinking, single young men aggressively took up position in front of our house. Looking back I can say that our fieldwork in Kalabu was a happy and rewarding experience and certainly one of the most stimulating researches, both intellectually and emotionally.

My deepest gratitude, however, goes to my family, that is, my late parents and, above all, my husband without whom this research would not have been possible. In his role as partner and co-researcher he spared me the fate of experiencing fieldwork as a period of hardship and loneliness. He was always by my side, contributing thoughts and ideas and closely observing with me what was going on around us. On the strength of his technical knowhow and his ability as a climber he was able to explain even the most minute construction details hidden away in the lofty darkness of a ceremonial house. He was alone responsible for the construction drawings of the various types of ceremonial houses, including the different, often complicated vine bindings. As a result, he was in charge of the construction of the ceremonial house in the museum in Basel.

Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin
Basel/Göttingen, December 2013



Map 1. The Sepik River Region and North Coast of Papua New Guinea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MONUMBO
Bogia
Hatzfeldthafen
Kambot
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Geketen
Keram
Ramu
Yuat

Introduction

This book is based on 16 months of fieldwork conducted between 1978 and 1983 in Kalabu village in the north-eastern Abelam area (Map 2). At that time I was curator at the Ethnographic Museum in Basel (now the Museum der Kulturen Basel). What induced this study was, for one, my earlier research (1972/73) among the Iatmul people of the Sepik River, south of the Abelam (Hauser-Schäublin 1976), which had shown that the Iatmul (above all Kararau, but also other villages located along the northern bank of the Sepik) maintained intensive relationships with villages to the north of them; the Iatmul also locate their origin in that area (see also Schindlbeck 1980, Wassmann 1991 and Claas 2007). In addition, the large Sepik collection held at the Basel museum, especially the collections of Alfred Bühler, René Gardi and Anthony Forge, disclosed the wide range of variation and the many "transitional forms" (but also significant differences) between the Abelam and the Iatmul in terms of artistic expression (see Haberland 1965, Forge 1966, 1973, Hauser-Schäublin 1994). The Basel museum was also in possession of a complete gable front of a ceremonial house from the north-western Abelam area, which was to serve as a model for a true-to-original reconstruction of an Abelam 'haus tambaran' (in Tok Pisin, *korambo* in the local Abelam idiom) in the refurbished museum. The gable front (complete with façade painting and additional decorative elements) had been purchased and taken from an existing ceremonial house in Kuminibus by Franz Panzenböck in the early 1960s and sold to the Basel museum in 1965 but lacked any information concerning the iconography. I therefore set out to do research on these architecturally and artistically unique ceremonial houses as well as on the "art" (collection documentation) of the Abelam (see also Koch 1968). In the course of this research, it became clear that the Kuminibus façade was too big for the new exhibition hall in the museum, which, in turn, prompted the idea of having a new one made that would fit the hall. We gave the commission to the village of Kalabu, where a new facade was constructed under the guidance of a number of leading artists and painted in the typical Kalabu style.

This kind of applied research (in view of the planned exhibition) called for an extensive enquiry into the architecture and construction of ceremonial houses, regional variation, the design and use of ritual artworks as well as an in-depth investigation of the painting procedure, the preparation of pigments, the motifs in painting and their meaning. In other words, the starting point of my research was 'material culture', or, to be more precise, the concrete material modes of expression common to the people of Kalabu. However, it soon became apparent that behind the materiality stood a fascinating world of established concepts, practices and experiences concerning communal life, ideas about death and rebirth, maleness and femaleness, as well as notions relating to cultivated crops, the realm of the forest, rivers, streams and pools, the earth itself and celestial bodies. So, what started as an investigation in form and material properties soon developed into a study focussing on the ceremonial ground (*amei*) and ceremonial house, including the carvings and artworks enshrined therein, in their capacity as interface between the living community and the realm of the beyond.

Studying and Writing Abelam Culture

This book takes the form of a monograph, a genre, that is, which has rather fallen into disrepute since the Writing Culture debate. The issues raised in that debate about the role of the researcher, the fieldwork situation, the network of relationships in which the research unfolds, and the process of textualization – that is, the selection and processing of information and its rendering into an accountable scientific text arranged into chapters – are important. I nonetheless believe that the advantages of the monographic approach outweigh the drawbacks. The present ethnography was not composed on the basis of hypotheses that needed validating or refuting; for this I have used other forms

of publication (Hauser-Schäublin 1984, 1987, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2003, 2011). Instead, I see this work as an example of 'thick description', in which the people concerned, that is, the Abelam actors, are given the opportunity to speak. The work includes extensive passages from men's disputes and discussions on the ceremonial ground that offer insights into the Abelam world of perception and experience, which, as such, go beyond the actual scope of the book.

During research my primary focus was on the knowledge and worldview of the old bigmen, the *numandu* – until, that is, we were physically threatened by a group of young men at a bride wealth ceremony in a neighbouring village. They criticized us for not bringing 'development' and 'progress'. The world of the old men was no longer of interest to them, they maintained, for the *numandu* had nothing more to say. We should pack our gear and get out, they added, lest they smash everything with their fancy boots (see Hauser-Schäublin 2011).

Of course we had long already realized that some of the villagers no longer participated in traditional exchanges and rituals and that the village now also featured a 'haus lotu' (church). In the neighbouring village of Kimbangwa, we had witnessed at the inauguration of one of the last ceremonial houses to be built (for the time being?), how the Catholic missionary had set up a table on the ceremonial ground, serving as an altar, to hold mass for a tiny group of 'believers' in front of this new 'house of God'. The majority of people was impatiently waiting in the background for him to finish and leave, so that they could, at long last, commence with the opening of the *korambo* which was to serve as the abode of the ancestors and other beings of the beyond. There was also a so-called 'klab' (club) in Kalabu, near the church, where young men, in particular, staged binges from time to time – usually after selling the coffee they grew as a cash crop – which often ended in brawls. Other facets of change included the establishment of a Kalabu settlement outside the provincial capital of Wewak, where people from the village lived, either permanently or temporarily (e.g., following conflicts in the village). Other families had left for Hoskins in West New Britain to work on the palm oil plantations, for little money and in run-down settlements. Still, despite the pitiful working and living conditions there, villagers at home still dreamt and spoke of Hoskins as a vision of a better life come-true. (I visited the Kalabu migrants at Hoskins in 1985 and found quite the opposite: people there longed for their village back home.) Young men in Kalabu dreamt of a job in town, of money and cars, claiming the traditional system of mutual work on the basis of reciprocity to be outmoded and declaring paid employment as the proper and only basis of labour. Their minds were not changed by the fact that many young village men, after dropping out of school, had previously left for towns on the coast in search of work and adventure, only to engage in crime, violence and homicide and return to the village disillusioned, broke and with a high level of aggression. We also noticed an ever-widening gulf between young men and their seniors, suggesting that the different generations were increasingly guided by differing models, values, norms, concepts of authority and obedience and notions concerning the 'meaning of life' in general. Even then, in the late seventies and early eighties, we witnessed situations where the tension between holding on to 'tradition' and searching for a new, self-determined 'modernity' came close to breaking point.

It was clear that the life of the Abelam was changing fundamentally and that the attempts of the old bigmen to hold on to their self-contained worldview were condemned to failure, at the latest with their passing, perhaps even earlier if the 'purposeful abolishment' that Tuzin (1997) described for the Ilahita Arapesh were introduced. Thus, the *numandu*'s repeated requests that I write down and document as much of their traditions ('kastom') as possible was in happy accord with the research assignment set out by the museum in Basel.

Characteristics of Abelam Ceremonial Houses

Since Richard Thurnwald passed through the Maprik region on his journey from the Sepik to the north coast in 1913 (see Melk-Koch 1989: 175-189) and since my own research some thirty years ago, Abelam ritual life has changed markedly. In 2009 McGuigan reported that no new ceremonial houses had been built for years and that initiations were only rarely staged. The ceremonial house is, as the following chapters will show, not only an imposing architectural construction (see chapter II) but embodies also a worldview informed by belief in the power of ancestors and other beings of the beyond (see

chapter IV). In conjunction with the ceremonial ground, it also stood for the space occupied by humans in the extended universe (see chapter V). According to practically all recent ethnographic accounts, the Abelam today are almost all practicing and staunch Christians.

The 'haus tamberan' reflected the 'old faith' and seems, today, to have 'run its course' in the face of successful Christian proselytization. Coupaye reported recently (pers. comm.) that, a few years ago, village councillors had decided to shoot all free-roaming pigs in order to save villagers from having to fence their new food gardens each year, a work-intensive chore. Today only a few people keep a couple of pigs in pens. In earlier days, however, pigs in their capacity as intermediaries between the realm of the forest and village, and between the living and the dead (see chapter III), were the pivotal media of exchange between the ceremonial moieties. Without pigs there would have been no yam cult (see chapter III), no initiations (see chapter IV), and no ceremonial houses.

Nevertheless, as Anthony Forge showed in his work, cultural and social change is never a linear process but rather comes in waves. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Abelam experienced a series of revitalizations after cultural activities had languished under the impact of the Second World War and its after-effects (see also McGuigan 1992: chap. 2). In the course of this revitalization, 'old' Abelam traditions were revived, and the region experienced a building boom so far as ceremonial houses were concerned, albeit one inspired by an enthusiasm that again subsided and is now long over. Still, today people tend to reflect on these times, and many deplore that they have forfeited almost all of their technological and organizational knowledge and competence (McGuigan, pers. comm.)

Who knows, the present book, which contains an extensive documentation of these exceptional edifices, might in the end lead to a future renaissance of the ceremonial house. After all, located as they usually are at the most elevated spot in a settlement, *korambo* have always stood as a symbol of local pride and identity.

In terms of architecture and construction, the Abelam ceremonial house (and concomitantly, the less elaborate constructions among the Wosera, Boiken, and Ilahita and Mountain Arapesh) is unique. Built on a triangular ground plan, the trilateral pyramid often rises to a height of 25 metres, towering above the coconut palms that surround it. The façade paintings – mounted and attached to the building's framework in one piece – rank among the most impressive artworks in and from Papua New Guinea (see also Hauser-Schäublin 1989).

In the second part of the original German publication of this work (not here translated) and in an abridged article version (1990), I attempted to explain these exceptional constructions in the light of regional architectural history. In summary, one could outline the development as follows: the shape and construction of the Abelam ceremonial house grew from the architecture of the stilt houses common to the swamp and riverine areas on the Sepik and along the north coast of New Guinea. To be more precise, they developed from the design of ceremonial, or men's, houses built on stilts and equipped with two-sided cantilevering gables. My comparative studies showed that on these buildings one gable front was often more pronounced than its counterpart (in terms of either height or decoration). A typical case was the men's house in Kinyambu, a village in the grasslands to the south-east – that is, in the transitional zone between the Sepik swampland and the Maprik/Yangoru hill country – which we found in a state of disrepair in 1979 **(pl. 2)**. Here the front gable was noticeably higher and more forward inclined than its counterpart at the back (see Hauser-Schäublin 1989. Comparable transitional forms have been described by McGuigan. Apart from a similarity McGuigan discovered between Wosera ceremonial houses and those of the Ilahita (Tuzin 1980: 131-141), he identified several architectural details that suggest origin in the south. Thus, for example, the tip of a 'haus tamberan' in Kamge village displayed a carved bird similar to ones that feature on men's houses along the Sepik River. The female figure with open legs,[1] which serves as a support for the gable on men's houses on the Middle Sepik, is also to be found in

[1] As described in chapter IV, a female figure with open legs through which the novices have to crawl frames the entrance to the initiation chamber in the ceremonial house. Worth mentioning here is that in this specific initiation scene a raised floor is drawn in, granting the chamber the guise of a stilt house, so to speak. During the event, the initiators stand on the drawn-in floor, hidden from the novices, and play instruments said to represent spirit voices.

modified form in the Wosera area (McGuigan 1992: 228-230).

As the Abelam gradually moved up from the Sepik swamplands towards the drier hill area of the Maprik region (see chapter I), the shape of their ceremonial houses underwent gradual changes: their 'stilts', for instance, became shorter and finally vanished completely (**pl. 3,4**). There was no longer the need to build a floor to keep the ritual carvings and the men from being inundated during the seasonal flooding of the Sepik River. This is why Abelam ceremonial houses have the shape of enormous roofs placed directly on the ground. With the omission of the building's substructure, the front side became a single elaborately decorated inclined gable, while the back gable was abandoned (**pl. 5**). Next to these architectural developments (analogous processes are to be found in the Papuan Gulf region), which were related to the gradually changing habitat, the system of land use also changed. This gave rise to completely new settlement patterns and forms of dwelling and, of course, in conjunction with swidden horticulture, a different mode of social organization. The comparative study was useful and necessary in order to situate the Abelam ceremonial house (which I also see as a result of an intensive interaction with Austronesian architectural practices) within the broad range of house forms in northern New Guinea.

Recent Research

Not only have conditions and cultures changed over the last twenty years or so, so has our knowledge about the various groups living in the southern foothills of the Prince Alexander and Torricelli Ranges. The last two decades have seen a number of ethnographic studies of the area, including work on the Kwanga (Obrist van Eeuwijk 1992, Brison 1992), the Bumbita Arapesh (Leavitt 2000), the Wam (Stephenson 2001), the Abelam of Nyamikum (Coupaye 2009a, 2009b, 2013), the Abelam of the Wosera area (Schroeder 1992, Curry 1996, 1999/2000), as well as on the Wosera and the area to the north-west (McGuigan 1992). McGuigan's comparative study of art and ritual (especially initiations and initiation scenes) is a valuable supplement to Gerrits' documentation on the ceremonial house of Bongiora (2012) as well as to my own research. Based on earlier, largely monographic studies (above all Tuzin's work on the Ilahita Arapesh, Roscoe on the Yangoru Boiken, Scaglion on the western Abelam, and Losche on the Abelam of Apangai), several authors have contributed comparative studies on the Sepik region as such (see Lutkehaus et al. 1990, Lutkehaus and Roscoe 1992, Leavitt and Brison 1995) and a number of trans-cultural analyses on individual aspects or re-interpretations of earlier studies (e.g., on the Mountain Arapesh). Particularly valuable in this context are the works of Roscoe (1994, 1995, 1996, 2003, 2009), Scaglion (1999), Smidt and McGuigan (1993), Losche (1995, 1995/96, 1997, 2001) and Lipset and Roscoe (2011). However, the findings of these (and other) authors have not been incorporated in the present study. The publication of the English version of my study represents a next (intermediate) stage. In the meantime, cultural change and ethnographic research continue their steady progress.

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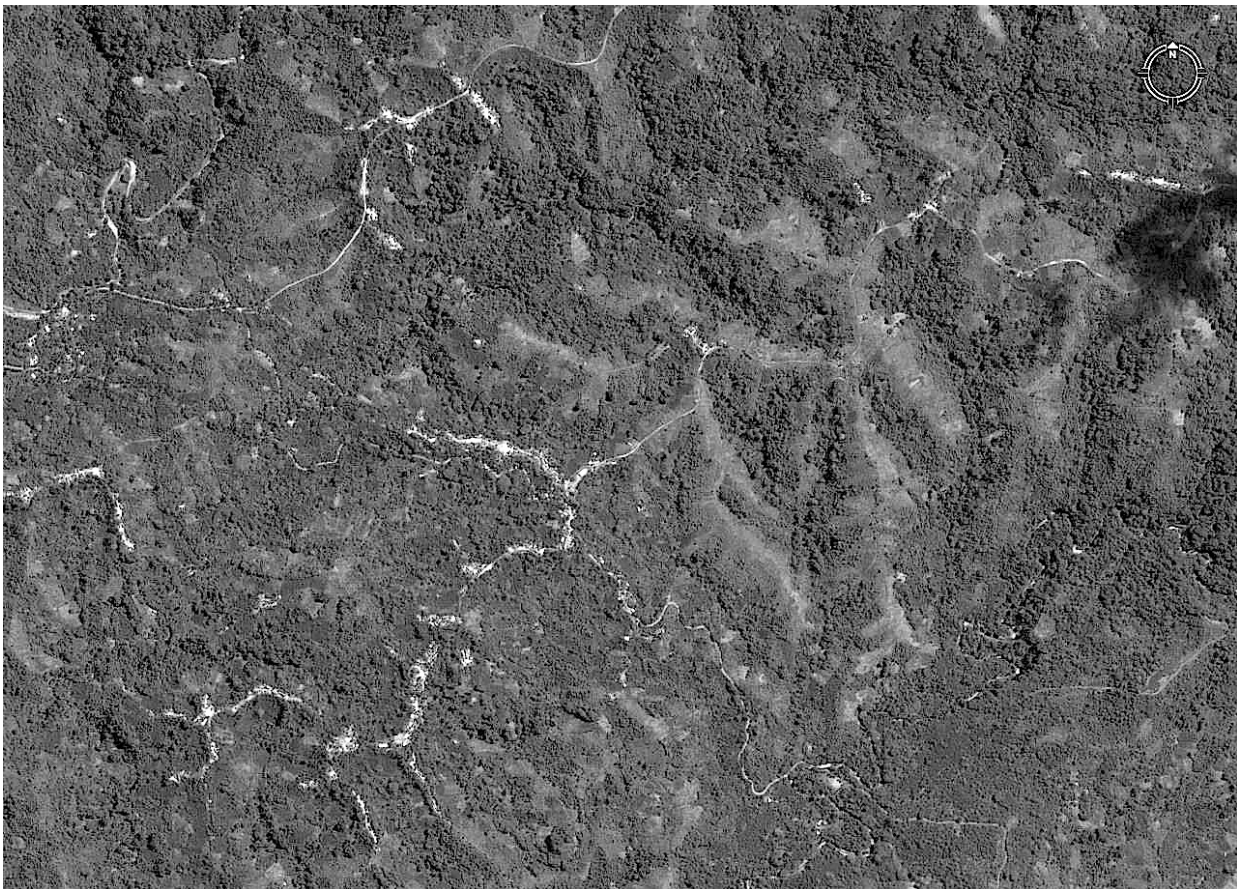

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1. Kalabu village, Google Earth (2007), cf. Map 3.

2. Men's house at Kinyambu in the grasslands to the south-east, that is, in the transitional zone between the Sepik swampland and the Maprik/Yangoru hill country. Note: The front gable is higher and steeper than the rear gable. Photo: J. Hauser 1979.

3. Ceremonial house at Kumun, Boiken area. Note that the building has low lateral walls, whereas its front resembles an Abelam ceremonial house. Photo: J. Hauser 1979.

4. Ceremonial house at Numbunggai (Wosera area). Note the pent roof with fragments of a plaited mat below the carved crossbeam. Photo: René Gardi 1956.

5. Ceremonial house at “ Gaimale” as photographed by Richard Thurnwald in 1913. Note the lower part of the façade that strongly juts outward from the crossbeam to the ground. The construction resembles a pent roof similar to those on the front side of men’s houses built on stilts in the swampland of the Sepik.

6. The Austrian-German ethnologist Richard Thurnwald passed through the Maprik region in 1913. He was the first to document ceremonial houses and their many variations. This ceremonial house in “Ambatigi” features a small gable painting and a pent roof covered by a plaited mat below the carved crossbeam. Photo: R. Thurnwald 1913.

7. Ceremonial house of “Raurigim” with a high lower part of the facade. Note the projecting roof at the top; this small roof has already sagged due to rain penetrating and disintegrating the vine bindings of the construction. Photo: R. Thurnwald 1913.

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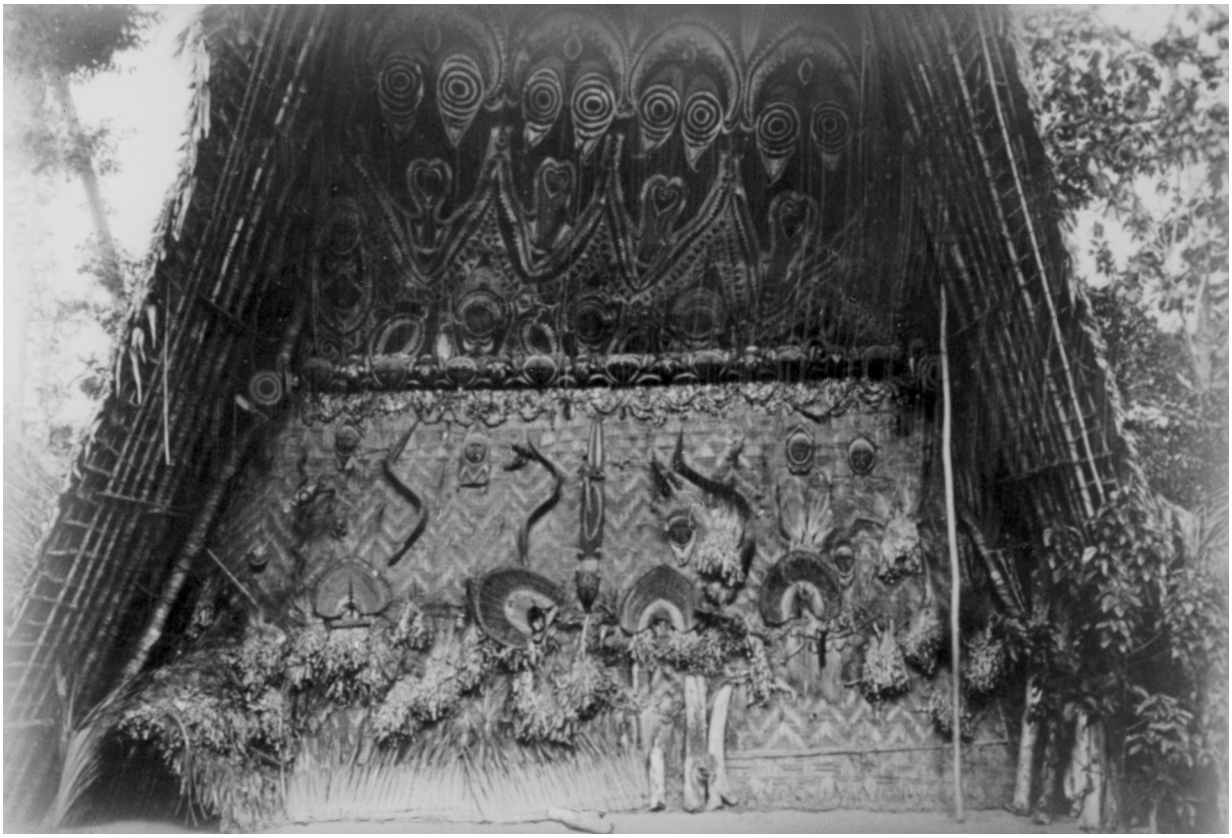

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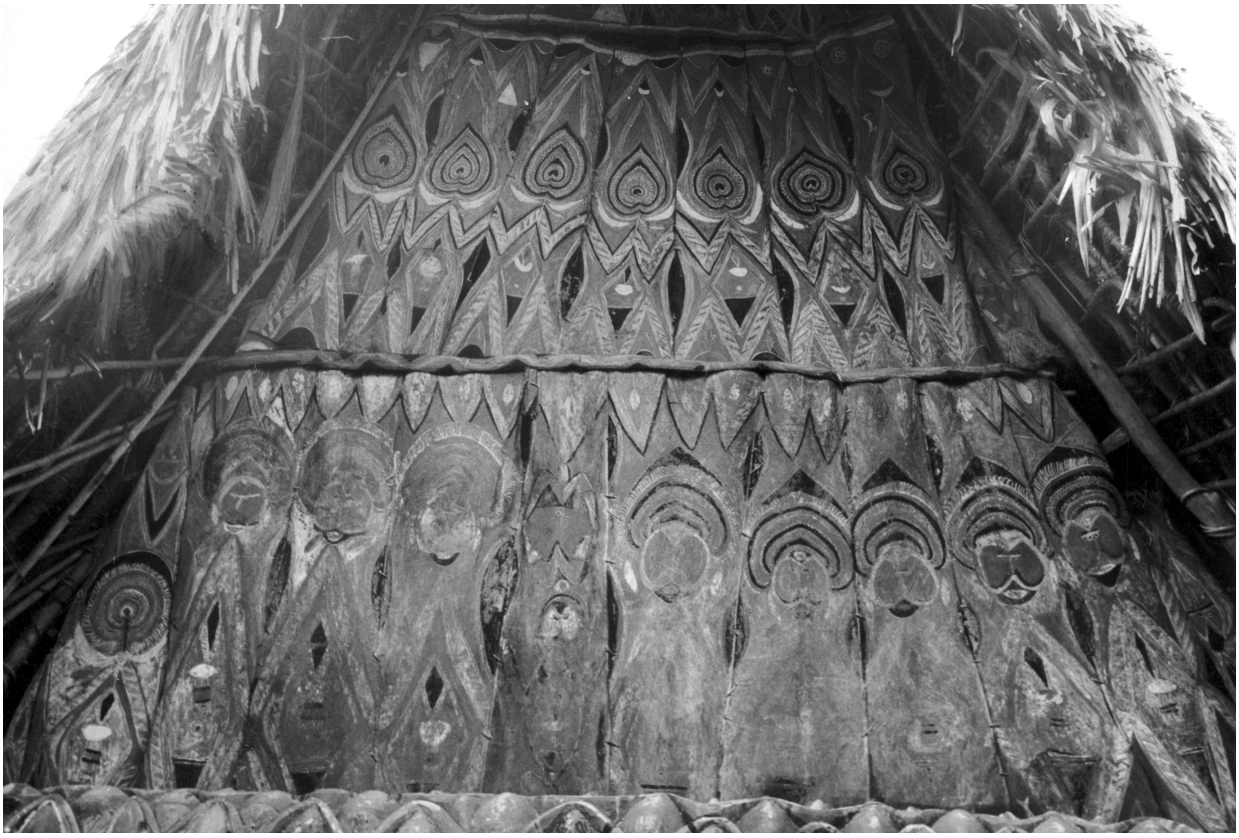

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8. Detail of a ceremonial house with head-dresses (*wagnen*) of male ritual dancers fixed to the plaited mat. Photo: R. Thurnwald 1913.

9. Ceremonial house on piles with a painted façade and a carved lintel. Arapesh village Kariru. Photo J. Hauser 1979.

10. Painted façade of a ceremonial house at Numbunggai. Photo: R. Gardi 1956.

11. Ceremonial house at Kwatmogim (Wosera). Note the protruding twin tips of the ridge beam. Photo: R. Gardi 1956.

(overleaf)

12. Very tall ceremonial house, typical for the north-western Abelam; Kuminimbis village. Photo: G. Koch 1966.

13. Newly-built ceremonial house at Dshame. Note the spears stuck into the projecting roof (covered by a plaited mat) and the vine chain hanging down from it. Photo: G. Koch 1966.

14. Strongly forward inclined ceremonial house, typical for the north-western Abelam, at Aunyelum. Photo: R. Gardi 1956.

15. Broad and rather crouched type of a ceremonial house in Aunyelum. Note the pent roof and the carved figures on it. Photo: W. Jakob 1938.

(overleaf)
16. Small ceremonial house at Ulupu.
Photo: A. Bühler 1956.

1. Migration, Settlements and Social Structure

The Abelam and their Setting

The southern foothills of the Prince Alexander Range are marked by hundreds if not thousands of tree-covered rises separated by innumerable smaller and larger streams and rivers in the valleys between. On the northern fringe, where the hills gradually become higher and steeper, one still comes across extensive stretches of primary rain forest; further to the south, in the main settlement area of the Abelam, there are only small patches of primary forest left, with secondary-growth vegetation in various stages predominating. The Abelam practice slash-and-burn, or shifting, cultivation; each year a new piece of land is cleared of trees and shrubs and undergrowth burned in order to establish a new garden plot. The gardens are protected by fences made of wild sugar cane,[1] which requires a tremendous amount of effort. Traditional crops include various types of yam, taro, greens, beans, bananas and tobacco; in more recent years these have been supplemented by sweet potatoes, papaya, maize and watermelons. After the first harvest the gardens are worked for a further season – but only for secondary crops – and then left fallow for a number of years.

To the south, the hills gradually pass over into an extensive, sparsely vegetated grassland plain which gradually flattens out to the Sepik River. At regular intervals large stretches of these rather barren grasslands are set on fire. Overall, Abelam country is very fertile, regularly yielding abundant harvests, which explains why the Abelam area is one of the most densely-populated regions in Papua New Guinea. Unlike the people of the equally heavily populated Highlands, the Abelam are able to pull through bad harvest seasons by reverting to sago as a staple. However, overall crop failures are rare even though yields do vary from year to year, and from garden to garden. The last serious crop failure seems to have been after the great earthquake of 1935 (Everingham and Ripper 1983: 102-103), which led to widespread and devastating landslides and destroyed many gardens located on the steep slopes.

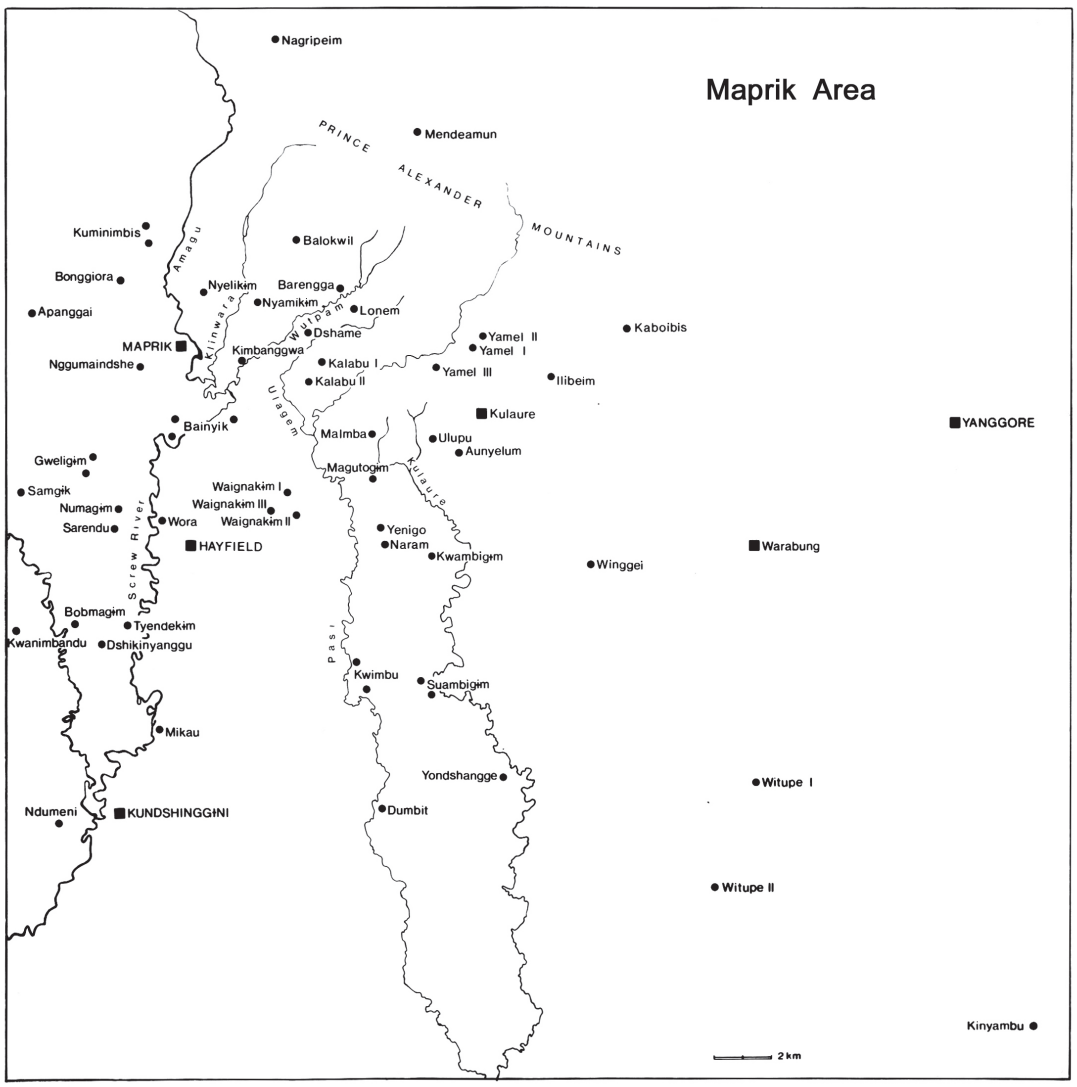
The climate in the Abelam foothills is generally quite pleasant, with midday temperatures usually not going far beyond 30°C and night temperatures ranging somewhere between 20°C and 25°C. Often there is a light, cool breeze with a tendency towards strong gusts of wind so that one seldom experiences moist oppressive heat as down on the Sepik River. The dry season normally lasts from April through September, the rainy season from October to March, but even in the so-called dry season afternoon downpours are quite frequent. Abelam settlements (**pl. 1, 65**) are usually located on the hill ridges providing a good view over both the nearby and the more distant surroundings. In earlier days, when warfare was still endemic, this was a strategic necessity. In recent years some of the settlements have been shifted to lower ground where, today, the people have their coffee and cacao gardens, providing easier access to the small feeder roads and to fresh water. Despite these clear advantages and the absence of the need to build villages in high-up, inaccessible locations for defensive purposes, the Abelam still prefer to reside atop narrow mountain ridges where there is always a cool breeze blowing.

Ever since Margaret Mead (1938), the term Abelam has been used to denote the approximately 37,000 people living in the above-sketched district known as Maprik, after the administrative centre that was established there by the Australians in 1937. The language spoken by the Abelam people is part of the Ndu Family[2] and is referred to as Ambulas today.[3] Abelam (alternately Aplasim, Aplam, Abelap) is a term used by the Arapesh to refer to their southern neighbours. The Abelam have no

[1] Nowadays the Abelam refer to wild sugar cane (*Saccharum spontaneum*) often by the Tok Pisin term 'pitpit' which subsumes a variety of kinds. I have taken all my botanical terms from Lea (1964).

[2] Laycock (1965, 1973, 1975)

[3] Wilson (1976)



Map 2. Maprik Area

collective, indigenous, generic term to describe themselves. They in turn call their northern neighbours, the Arapesh, Bukni, irrespective of the various dialect groups found there.

The Abelam subdivide their settlement area according to geographic and linguistic criteria. In the village of Kalabu I recorded the following zoning of the Abelam area: Ulupu, Malingeine (also called Aunyelum), Winggei as far as the boundary to the Boiken: *yembe* (= 'no'; in the Kalabu dialect 'no' is *kayak*, in the north-western dialect *kapuk*).

The Boiken area as a whole is referred to as Nyinggum by the Abelam, and as Sauashe[4] by the Arapesh. The villages Malmba, Magutogim, Yenigo and Naram are collectively called Kugim;[5] this denotes a regional (and not merely a linguistic) entity. Oral traditions suggest that these, today independent, villages once used to form linked smaller social units (*kim*). Kalabu, Kugim, and Waignakim together constitute the dialect group called *mamu-kundi* (*mamu*

[4] The term is reminiscent of "Sawos"; this is what the Iatmul call their northern neighbours; see also Laycock (1965: 144).

[5] Lea (1964: 44) writes "Korkum".

= how, *kundi* = language, speech). West of Dshame and Kimbanggwa there follows the dialect group *shamu-kundi* (*shamu* = how). In addition, this western area is subdivided by region into Maindshe and Mamblep. Maindshe refers to a rather vaguely bounded area including the villages of Maprik, Nggumaindshe (Maprik II) and Serakim; Mamblep comprises the modern villages Kuminimbis, Bonggiora, Chikinambu, Kukwal, Wambak, Kamandshabu and Dshilimbis. The people of the grasslands, that is, the southern Abelam are assigned to the *kamu-kundi* (*kamu* = how) dialect group, while the Abelam groups furthest south, possibly including the Sawos, are referred to as Tuma.[6]

Abelam villages consist of a large number of hamlets. The present study focuses on the village of Kalabu, where Phyllis Kaberry conducted fieldwork more than 60 years ago. Since then, Kalabu's population has grown considerably. During Kaberry's time it numbered approximately 490 people, in the late 1970s more than 800. At the time of my study, the village comprised 50 hamlets straddling a long-drawn-out mountain ridge which commences near Waignakim and ends just short of the Arapesh village of Lonem. The village[7] is divided into two parts called Kwale-Kalabu (today Kalabu I) and Baba-Kalabu (today Kalabu II),[8] and thus spans a length of roughly seven kilometres but with stretches of dense secondary bush, new gardens or the odd burial ground separating the hamlets from each other (**pl. 1**, **map 3**). The villages are connected by a well-trodden path that follows the mountain ridge from its northern top to its south-western bottom end. In the following paragraphs I deal, in the main, with the geographical origins of the clans that joined to become Kalabu. My reconstruction is based predominantly on Abelam oral traditions as they were recounted to me in Kalabu.

Regional Migration and the Foundation of Kalabu

Although today the Abelam apply the term 'village' to describe their settlements, the designation does not adequately capture the traditional concept of settlement. The thinking in terms of villages, that is, the notion that a row of settlements within a given territory constitutes an enduring entity in social, political and ritual terms, and that the inhabitants should find solutions to the problems that arise within their community on a collective and consensual basis, appears to be an idea that was implanted, or at least fostered, by the Australian colonial administration.

For the Abelam, histories of migration are of prime significance, often and readily told because they are able to convincingly underpin a group's claim to the land it is living on. Even if only reviewing the histories of in- and out-migration in one single village, the dynamics of social formation become plainly evident, evincing that movements of population segments were occurring continuously in the entire Abelam area. Since pacification and the definition of modern community boundaries mobility has dropped to almost zero. The recent developments have definitely nurtured the concept of the 'village' as a corporate unit.

The oral histories and also the traditional songs never refer to village names as found on modern maps today, only to the names of ceremonial grounds (*amei*); these are identical with the names of the appertaining hamlets. As, today, the Abelam also commonly use village names[9] it was often very difficult to locate specific hamlets mentioned in the oral histories, especially since the same names are frequently encountered in different areas.

To a large extent the Abelam migrated to their present settlement area from the south[10] although there was some movement in the opposite direction at later stages (see below). This northward migration ended roughly in

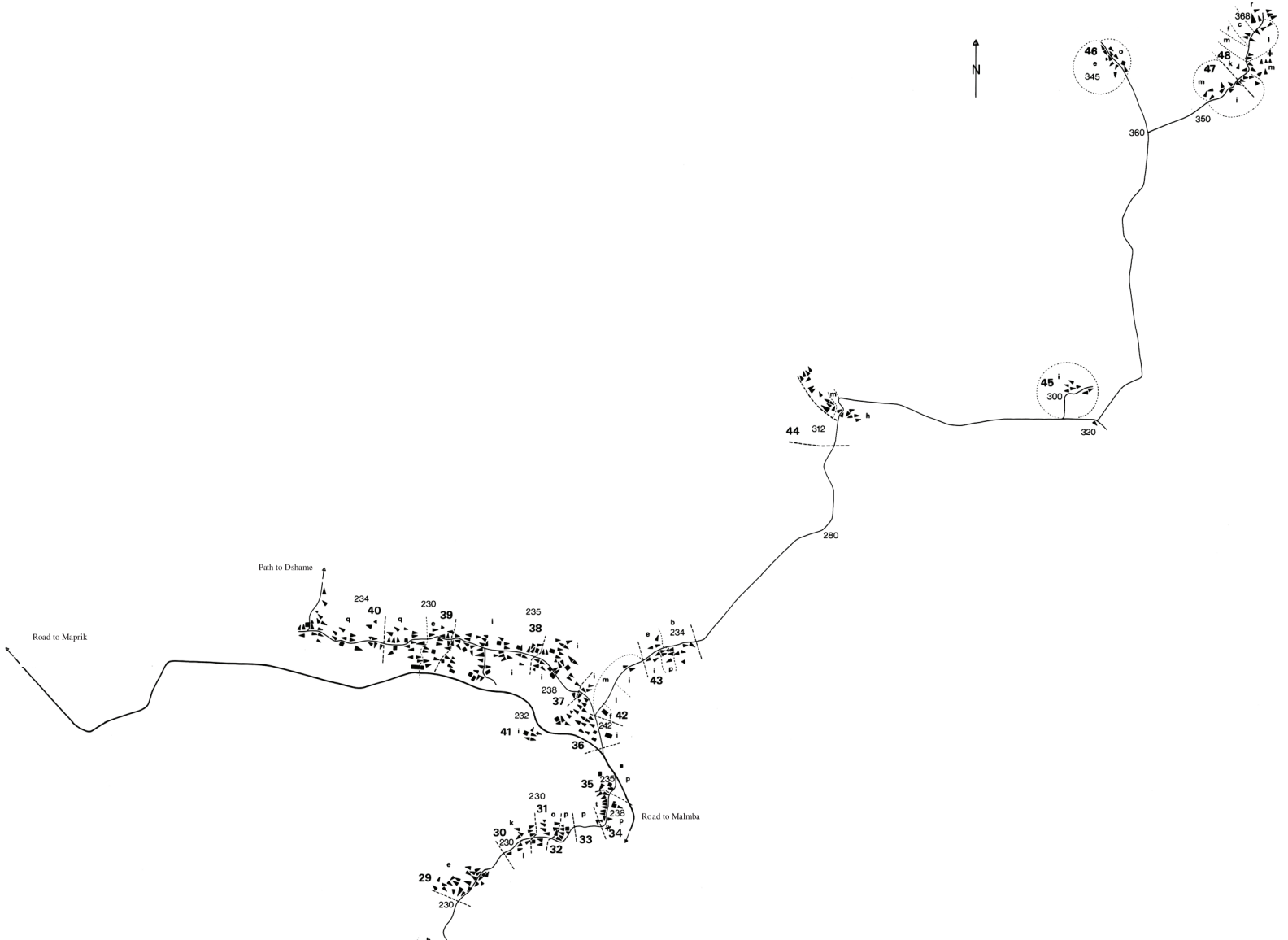
6 See Wilson 1976; she mentions only three dialect groups: Maprik, Wosera and Winggei (and additionally Kwasengen, which used to be called West Wosera, but which she classifies as a separate language). See also the classification by Kaberry (1941).

7 Gerd Koch stayed in Kalabu during a collecting expedition in 1966.

8 Kaberry (1971: 46) locates the boundary of the two village halves erroneously between the hamlets Mapme and Yambusaki.

9 Unfortunately I have no information as to how and when the present village names came into common usage. My research associates in Kalabu explained that, for example, the name Mamblep actually used to be of the same order as Kalabu. Nowadays, Mamblep refers to an official Census Division; at the same time, original hamlet terms have been raised to the level of village names. In fact, at least today, the old hamlets rank as almost autonomous units.

10 Laycock (1965: 192-197); Forge (1966: 24-25); Tuzin (1976: 71-76); Scaglion (1976: 49-50).


N
Path to Dshame
Road to Maprik
Road to Malmba
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345
47
48
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360
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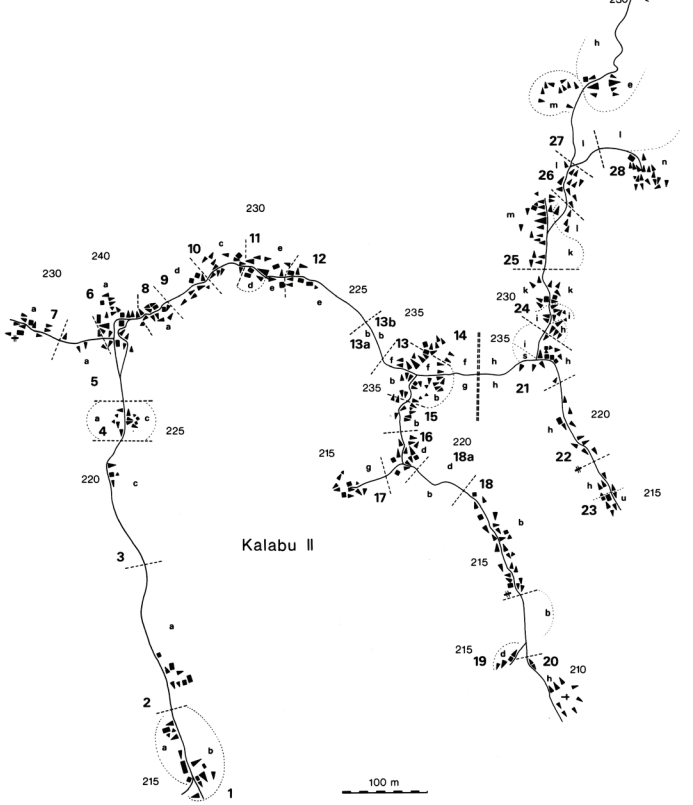

Map 3. Settlement Pattern of Kalabu

The three-digit figures indicate elevation above sea level; the single and two-digit figures refer to hamlets; the letters mark land ownership of individual clans (*kim*).

Hamlets:

1) Uranggemel
2) Labungge
3) Wuembatik
4) Songganggu
5) Yembigo
6) Numbunggen
7) Pelkeire
8) Banggiare
9) Toletagu
10) Ndsherednye
11) Kaumbul
12) Uitagu
13) Wapinda
13a Moenggwa
13b Malpenamu
14) Ulpe
15) Bindshinar
16) Tuindshere
17) Tamangge
18) Matungge
18a) Wamolanggo
19) Kualeng
20) Tipmabel
21) Ndunyinggi
22) Kamogwa
23) Uraskil
24) Dshanggungge
25) Yambusaki
26) Dingge
27) Nyambak
28) Abaloe
29) Mapme
30) Katndshanggu
31) Apinggwande
32) Kalanggua
33) Kwandshesagi
34) Mairagwa
35) Kamabil
36) Glossa
37) Kumunggwande
38) Suapel
39) Dshanggungge
40) Baigu
41) Digute
42) Wendanggi
43) Wallapia
44) Wamdangge
45) Walembil
46) Yamami
47) Yanggula
48) Malpimbil

Land Ownership by *kim*:

a) Nyalmakim
b) Mainggegim
c) Dshamapate
d) Yapitikim
e) Kundigim
f) Magnapate
g) Uitikim
h) Smoigim
i) Luimogim
k) Buknisuagim
l) Waignapate
m) Atogim
n) Mutagwakim
o) Nyambisuagim
p) Koranggim
q) Nunggigim
r) Kolambigim (from Lonem)
s) Dshiknikim
t) Kwatmogim
u) Sagnakim

the mid-19th century with the discovery of the, heretofore, unknown sea. However, this push to the coast was only passing and occurred in the form of trade journeys by men from some of the northern Abelam villages who used to visit coastal villages such as Kouk, Sowam, Boiken and But, mainly to fetch saltwater which they filled into long bamboo containers and carried back to their villages in a two-day journey over rugged terrain. Another, occasionally applied, method was to soak dry tree trunks in seawater and then collect the salty ash after burning them. Before discovering the sea and sea salt, the Abelam produced salt from the stalks of sago palm leaves. We may assume that, if the Australian colonial administration had not intervened and pacified the area, the Abelam would have continued their northward push as far as the coast and founded settlements there. This is what appears to have occurred among the Boiken people, the Abelam's eastern neighbours, where the south-to-north migration had already reached the coastline (and some of the offshore islands)[11] before colonial occupation.

Each of today's Abelam villages has its own migration path to tell of, and each route is associated with a number of settlement sites along the way. For the Abelam these histories are of importance and the people are usually able to name and describe a number of these preceding settlement sites. Most of the migration histories I was able to record start with a location where the Abelam are said to have emerged from a hole in the ground, or a pool, or where at least – as told in the large majority of accounts – the people are said to have split up and dispersed over the whole area. This place called Ndumeni ('the people split up')[12] was, without fail, located in the south. In search of the area where Ndumeni was said to be we got as far as Kundshinggini (or Kunjingini) where, to the west, we came across a place called Ndumeni near Mun, or Mul. The people living there told us the same story about the people splitting up in a nearby place where there now is a forest (which we, unfortunately, were not allowed to enter). But the hole, or pool, from which, according to some versions of the story, the people are said to have emerged – often the name Umbite Targwa was given; occasionally Umbite Targwa and Ndumeni were described as being separate places, sometimes as the same location – the resident Wosera people claimed to be located further south, in the area of Dshama.

In Ndumeni, the people were classified according to the birds that today serve as clan totems (*dshambu*). A man from Ndumeni mentioned that the people who moved northwards belonged to the bird species *kuyen* and *kumun* respectively. In Kalabu these two birds were each ascribed to one of the village halves: I was told that the people from upper Kalabu were called *kumundshu*, those from lower Kalabu *kuyendshe*.[13]

For Kalabu, the following place names were mentioned as intermediate stations on the people's move to the north: Ndumeni Kausagu, Ndungguru Maindsha (northern Wosera, near present Maprik II village), Pelenggil Yamboin (area of the present village Waignakim), Tipmabel Wamangge (one of the first hamlets to be settled, now located south of the main village). Waignakim and Kalabu are said to have formed a single local population group in the early days (possibly divided into separate village or social moieties), settling in the area of present Waignakim. A story tells of how two brothers (possibly a reference to the two moieties) quarrelled, after which the elder brother and his family left, while the younger brother (=*waigna*) stayed on. Still today, Kalabu and Waignakim are referred to as siblings.[14]

Kalabu is the elder brother, Waignakim the younger one. Both originally came from Ndumeni. When the people split up in Ndumeni, they set off together. The ancestors of Waignakim and Kalabu belonged to the same clan (*kim*) and shared the same *dshambu* ('totemistic' clan emblem in bird shape). Only when they arrived here in Waignakim the two brothers quarrelled and separated. At the time the men of Kalabu had organized a large feast (*banggu* – a feast that forms part of an initiation) and summoned the people of Waignakim to join in: 'You're all invited; come to the ceremonial ground and there we will eat together. We will share yam soup and pork with you.' The men of Waignakim set off for Kwatmogo

[11] On this, see Laycock (1965: 194).

[12] See also Aufenanger (1977: 285).

[13] Lea (1964: 47) notes a similar distinction into two halves for the village of Yenigo. Among the eastern Abelam a moiety system using the same terms is said to exist. Scaglion (1976: 56) mentions the local division of villages into two sections named *kumundij* and *kwiendji*.

[14] The following story was told by Tapukuin, Kumunware *amei*, Waignakim.

Palnamba, the boys and the men first, the older men following behind. Two old men went there together. In Kalabu two young girls who had never yet menstruated were sitting in their menstruation hut. They were just sitting there. When they saw the two old men they looked at their penises and started laughing, upon which the old men said 'You just wait, children, we'll see to you later.'[15] When the old men had caught up with the younger ones they told them: 'Don't accept any meat or soup, just betel nuts and tobacco!'

At the feast the men only accepted the snout and the tail of a pig. With these they returned to Kumunware. They made a palm-leaf container and placed a rotting piece of wood within; at the front end they attached the pig's snout, at the back end the tail. With this they returned to Waignakim. The women and children were waiting on the *amei* for the men and the pork they were supposed to bring home. The men put down their load and opened the leaf container. 'What happened,' the women and children asked, 'you've only brought home a piece of rotting wood?' Then the two old men recounted how they had been insulted, upon which the people decided that they no longer wished to have Kalabu in their vicinity. They took some wild taro leaves[16] and sent them to Bainyik, Numagim, Sarendu, Gloskim, Tyendekim. They all came, together with Yaremaipmu;[17] they got together to make a raid on their elder brother (Kalabu). At the time, a man from Kalabu[18] was out hunting possums. He had laid out his net and sat waiting for the possum, when the spirit of a deceased woman from Kalabu who had married a man from Waignakim appeared to him. The spirit woman told the man who was waiting for a possum: 'They will come and kill you all. Go up to the village and warn them.' The man went to his *amei* and told the people what he had heard. But nobody believed the words of a dead woman. Only the man himself and his family fled to the bush where he waited. At dawn the next day he heard the men of Waignakim and their allies attacking Kalabu and burning down the houses. Many people were killed. The man and his family stayed in hiding in the bush but he heard the fighting going on from a distance. Those people in Kalabu who were not killed were only able to save their own skin; all their ornaments, the carvings in the ceremonial house they had to leave behind; all they could save was their life.

In Kalabu a slightly different version of the story was told.[19] Here it was not about a fight between Kalabu and Waignakim, that is, between two brothers, but a quarrel between Kalabu and Yaremaipmu situated in the vicinity of Kalabu and Waignakim:

During a feast staged by Kalabu to which Yaremaipmu had been invited too, the Kalabus gave their guests from Yaremaipmu merely a fake pig as a gift (only snout, tail and feet were real). Enraged about this insult, Yaremaipmu got together with Waignakim which did not really want to fight against its elder brother. A woman from Kalabu had been married to a man from Yaremaipmu, but had died. She knew about the plans for war and warned her brother by appearing to him at night while he was out hunting possums. When he told the people of Kalabu about his encounter very few were willing to believe him. Only a few followed the woman's advice and went to hide in the gardens, and it was only these people – their *nngwalndu* was Sagulas – who were able to save their lives. All the other people of Kalabu who had not taken refuge in the bush were killed during the attack by Yaremaipmu and Waignakim. The survivors moved to Tipmabel Wamangge; the Yaremaipmu moved down to the grasslands near the Sepik.

From a historical perspective the two stories deal with the last really momentous event experienced by the people of Kalabu. An alternative oral tradition[20] renders a far more extensive account of the origins of Kalabu. In this version the motive for moving to the new settlement area is to be found in a conflict over water on the one hand, and the fertility of the land in the new habitat, on the other.

It is said that we come from Ndumeni; but we don't know where this place is. We only know that we originally came from the village of Umbite Targwa in the Wosera area, where now Dshikinyanggu lies. Our ancestors left that place and moved to Kambangeru Amagu, and from there to Kwatmogo Palnamba where we stayed until moving on to Pelenggil and Yamboin. This hill range starts where today the

15 A different version holds that the girls began to laugh because one of the men had no penis.

16 Wild taro is sent to allies as a sign requesting their assistance for a coming battle.

17 Today located south of Kwimbu, probably identical with Yondshangge.

18 In another version recorded in Kalabu he is identified as the son of the deceased woman.

19 Told by Kwandshendu, Kundigim, Kalabu II.

20 Told by Kitnyeikyak and Shabakundi, Smoigim.

bridge over the Pasi, Tshipui, stands. That's where we lived. The Waignakim didn't have good drinking water; they took their water from the streams Binem and Kuindshagu. The Kalabus, on the other hand, had good water which they took from the streams Kuguran and Tshawinggup. One day, the Kalabus were staging a large feast to which they invited Waignakim. The women of Kalabu offered their guests some of their clean drinking water. When the Waignakim tasted it they were jealous and said to their hosts: 'You Kalabus have good drinking water, but we have to do with bad water.' Upon this a quarrel erupted and the two groups began fighting.

Two men called Nyinggui and Bapmu whom we regard as the ancestors of Kalabu I and Kalabu II once went out to explore the bush with their dogs. They reached two streams, Palkem and Digut, which they crossed before they came to the Ulagem stream; they followed its course until they arrived at the Tipmabel Wamangge hill. There they killed a pig which they left behind in order to follow the top of the ridge until they reached the mountain Nyambak from where they had a good view. There they cut a thick rattan palm before returning to Tipmabel to singe the pig they had shot and to cook it in an earth oven. The pieces of meat they placed in leaf containers. Each man carried such a leaf container filled with meat. On their foray through the bush they had taken with them some taro. The large tubers they had cooked with the pig, but the smaller sized tubers they placed in the ashes of the fire where they had cooked the pig. Carrying the pork with them they returned to the village where many people were waiting their return. They distributed the meat, telling the people: 'We found good land and good bush up there. We could go and settle there; down here we're always fighting with Waignakim.' This is what the two men told them, but the people preferred to stay where they were; and there were many quarrels again with Waignakim.

A few months later the two men returned to Tipmabel Wamangge to see whether the taro had grown. It had indeed and promised a good harvest. When the tubers were ripe the men dug them up and took them to Pelenggil Yamboin where the people were happy with what they saw. They talked about moving up to the top of the ridge. The men got together to clear the forest, establish gardens and make room for houses. Then they built new houses and went to settle there. An ancestor of the people of today's Smoigim followed the men to find out where they were settling, upon which the Smoigim man occupied a new tract of land for himself. He too cleared the bush and built houses. Then the men got together and decided to leave Waignakim for good. All the people of Pelenggil Yamboin moved away and settled down in Tipmabel Wamangge. Some of them continued up the ridge as far as Matungge, Tuindshere, Bindshinar, Lakuite, Malpenamu and along the side-ridge to Tamangge. So, everybody settled down.

Sagulas is a carving; not so long ago the wood began to rot, leaving behind only a very small piece which is now in Kuminimbis.[21] The carving is from the time when we still lived in Pelenggil Yamboin. At the time, our ancestors took all the shell ornaments they could carry with them. A little girl, Laui, however had nothing to carry, so when her father saw her he told her: 'Take grand-father and carry him.' Laui went to fetch a string bag and her father helped her to place grandfather[22] inside the bag. Laui carried him up to Tipmabel. When Nyinggui and Bapmu saw the carving they exclaimed: 'But we can't leave the name Sagulas empty! (i.e. not have a carving for him). This carving is no longer any good; let's make a new one.' The two men went down to the river Pasi, to the place we call Ngilemi. They cut down a tree and carved from it two Sagulas figures. From the bottom part of the trunk they made father Sagulas, from the middle part, Sagulas the son. When they had finished work they sacrificed a pig and cooked yam soup. After that they carried the two figures to Tipmabel. In the meantime, Nyinggui's and Bapmu's two sons, Gesagu and Gemboin, had moved on and cleared the forest where now Wapinda and Kaumbul stand. They also cleared the bush of Ndunyinggi and built houses there. After that the two Sagulas figures were separated: father Sagulas was taken to Kaumbul, the son to Ndunyinggi. Originally, when we were still living in Umbite Targwa and in Waignakim we only had one *nggwalndu*, and its name was Sagulas. We also had only one bird,[23] and its name was *wama* (white cockatoo). It was when we moved to Tipmabel and made two carvings that we split up; many families came forth, as well as many birds and *nggwalndu*.

The two men (Nyinggui and Bapmu) laid down the boundaries where today Lonem, Dshame, Malmba and Yamel stand. This we owe to the two ancestors and the two children who strove to be like their fathers. They were the first; their families (i.e.

[21] It is actually not the remains of a carving, but an object in one piece in the shape of a *kundi ure*, a musical instrument in the shape of an hourglass.

[22] A literal translation, since *nggwal* actually means grandfather although it may also refer to a spirit being as represented in carvings; in this case it denotes the carving Sagulas.

[23] Birdlike clan totem, *dshambu*.

clans) don't own much land because they were too busy waging war. They put down the boundaries, but it was the families that followed them that laid claim to the land. We of Kalabu owe our territory to Nyinggui and Bapmu and their two sons Gesagu and Gemboin. It was not all that long ago that the coconut trees they planted in Tipmabel Wamangge fell down.

The two men we owe Kalabu to were Kundigim men. The first child that Bapmu fathered he called *magnanyan* which means 'the first child'. This child was the founder of the Mag-napate clan.

The following story tells of how the two brothers (Kalabu and Waignakim) split up, again seen from the perspective of a man from Kalabu.[24] However, it is only one episode in a much more encompassing story about the village. The account begins with the mythical origins of the Abelam, and then goes on to mention a few of the stopovers that the Kalabus made on their journey to their present settlement area. At the same time the story makes clear that the Kalabus did not move to a no-man's-land but to a territory that was sparsely populated by Arapesh groups. Barengga (Barengga is a Kalabu term for the Arapesh village that is famous for the large amounts of *bare*-greens it once produced) was then located where it still stands today.[25] The story tells of how the people from the two villages established contact and how the Kalabus taught those who only produced sago how to grow yam.

The people of today's villages once used to live in a waterhole. At the centre of the hole lived the people of Kalabu. One day, a man rose up and asked: 'Why are we still here? Many others have already left the hole.' So the people of Kalabu set out and left the hole in Umbite Targwa. There was quarrel in the waterhole, that is why they left. They reached Kwatmogo Palna where they settled down. But again there was quarrel between the people (i.e. between Kalabu and Waignakim). A man picked up the faeces of a pig and threw it at the house of his elder brother. In front of the house the elder brother's wife was sitting, cooking a soup. The faeces fell into the soup. When the elder brother returned home he (i.e. Kalabu) began to fight with his younger brother (Waignakim), after which the elder brother left the village with his family. He took nothing with him but the carved head of a ceremonial figure and a carving showing a white cockatoo. First he settled down in Pelenggil Yamboin, but again the brothers quarrelled with each other, so the elder brother left for Kwalinggu Tipmabel, the first hamlet to be founded in Kalabu. That is where the people split up; some went to found Ndunyinggi and Yambusaki (Kalabu I), the others to Wapinda and Kaumbul (Kalabu II). They carved two *nggwalndu*, both called Sagulas; one was father Sagulas, he is kept in Kaumbul; the other was the son Sagulas, he's in Ndunyinggi. Both figures have the white cockatoo *dshambu* (birdlike clan emblem). The Kundigim and Nunggigim (Kalabu II) had it, so did the Luimogim (Kalabu I). The men of Kalabu fought against the Bukni (Arapesh) from whom they took further *dshambu*, upon which they divided into more (clans).

Luimo and Wambina[26] were two brothers. They saw the hill called Nyambak and liked it. So they went to clear the forest there. After the trunks, branches, twigs and leaves had dried, they set fire to them. A man from the (Arapesh) village Barengga called Miaren saw the smoke rising. He was standing on top of the hill Weipu Ipalem and saw the smoke rising from Nyambak. He climbed down from the hill and came to the river Wutpam, after which he climbed up the hill Nyambi until he reached the stream Ulagem which he followed until he came to the small stream called Dshiknyi. From there he climbed up Nyambak, passed the waterhole Palnamba and finally reached the top of Nyambak from where he had seen the smoke rising. There he asked Luimo and Wambina a question but they didn't understand him. The two Kalabu men asked the man from Barengga a question too, but he couldn't understand them. They spoke different languages. So they made signs with their hands. But the men stayed together, and the Kalabu men gave the man from Barengga something to eat. Then Miaren returned to Weipu Ipalem where he had killed a wild pig. He wrapped a piece of meat in a palm leaf and returned with it to Nyambak; here the men ate the meat together, after which they lay down to sleep. The next morning, Luimo and Wambina roasted a few yam and taro tubers in the fire. Together the men ate them. But Miaran had never eaten yam or taro; he knew only sago. Through making signs they agreed to meet again; they arranged to meet on the fifth day from now at a place we call Noutim Bertngge which lies on the ridge of a hill. Miaren returned to Barengga. When the day of the meeting

[24] Ndukabre, Buknisuagim, Kalabu I.

[25] The village located at the top of an extremely steep mountain is now almost deserted. The inhabitants of Barengga are said to have originally come from Sowam on the north coast.

[26] Luimo is regarded as the founding ancestor of Luimogim clan, Wambina as the founder of the Kundigim.

came, Luimo and Wambina took with them various kinds of yam, taro and coconuts. They followed a number of streams until they arrived at the village where Miaren lived. It was afternoon. Again they shared the food and then lay down to rest. The next morning the two Kalabu men told Miaren: 'Put fire to these trees!' Then they showed him how to plant yam and taro in the right way so that they would grow properly.

Until then, the people of Barengga had only eaten sago and pandanus, they hadn't known about yam and taro. It was the people of Kalabu who taught them about these crops and how to grow them. Since then Kalabu and Barengga belong together. Barengga is Kalabu's daughter.

Other stories tell of how the people of Kalabu fought against a number of small Arapesh groups who used to live where today the hamlets Glossa, Baigu and Wamdangge stand, either killing or driving the people off. It was only with Barengga that Kalabu appears to have entertained amiable relations at the time. During the period of early settlement, characterized in the main by clearing the bush for houses on hilltops and planting coconut trees as claim markers, the ancestors of the present-day village of Suambugim still lived in the immediate vicinity of modern Kalabu. Their first settlement in the area is given as Noutim Bertngge which, today, constitutes one of the hamlets of Lonem. From there they moved to the hill ridge of Abusit, west of the Kalabu hamlet of Yambusaki. Finally they moved to the area of present-day Waignakim where they founded a new Noutim Bertngge:[27]

Once we all lived at one place, where today Waignakim is. The people of Suambugim lived on the mountain where now Lonem stands. From there they fled after a strong wind had suddenly risen[28] to the place called Noutim Bertngge.[29] At the time the people of Kalabu lived in Pelenggil Yamboin, Abusit Worunggwande and Kulagel,[30] but also in the hamlets Ambing, Wuinbabel, Ambangga, Kandanggwa, Mingin and Kandanggileko. The Kalabus lived next to the Suambugim. At that time they were allies in war and stood by each other. It once happened that a Suambugim man stole something that belonged to a Kalabu man. The Kalabu heard someone tampering with his fruit (*bap*), he heard them falling to the ground upon which he grabbed his spears and ran to a small stream called Asambil. He looked around and saw the man taking his fruit from the tree with a hook. He was angry and shouted at him: 'Why are you stealing my fruit. Didn't you see that I had marked the tree as my property – but yet you climbed the tree?' The Suambugim was very ashamed and started climbing down. But suddenly he became scared and climbed back to the top of the three. The Kalabu man stood there and thought for a moment. Then he said: 'Okay, let it be, now collect all the rest of the fruit!' The Suambugim man did as he was told, using his hook to pick all the remaining fruit; he stayed up in the tree. Then the Kalabu man put his spears down at a distance and demanded that the other come down from the tree: 'Come down, and we'll prepare the fruit together.' Upon this the Suambugim man climbed down and the two heaped all the fruit into a pile, went to collect firewood and cooked the fruit in a fire. They removed the flesh putting the stones, or kernels, in a leaf container. They filled four containers, and after they had finished they placed the leaf bags in water (to soak and soften the stones or kernels). The two men arranged a time to meet again to retrieve the fruit stones from the water, and then parted, each returning to his village. On the arranged day both men returned to the place where they had left the fruit stones to soak. They met and together they retrieved the leaf containers with the fruit from the water. The removed the hulls placing the edible pits back in a leaf container. They filled two containers. Secretly the Suambugim man had brought something along from the village and hidden it in the bush lest the other man saw it ahead of time. Now he spoke: 'Wait here, I'm quicckly going to the bush,' after which he vanished into the bush, returning with a shell ring and a stone axe. He gave the shell ring and the axe to the Kalabu man upon which the latter exclaimed with surprise: 'Why do you give me these things? You're presenting it to me like a gift, but there's no reason to give me a gift since we prepared these fruit together; you will take half back with you, I'll take the other half.' The Suambugim man then replied: 'I'm sorry, I did not wish to shame you; I know you're not angry with me. You told me to collect the fruit from the top of the tree. I was ashamed

27 The following story was told by Tambandshoe, Magnapate clan, Kalabu II.

28 It occurred in the middle of a ceremonial dance during which the men were wearing large feather headdresses. A gust of wind hit the headdress of one of the dancers, breaking his neck immediately. After this the Suambugim deserted their mountain settlement.

29 The new settlement was again named Noutim Bertngge.

30 All of them settlements on the territory of present-day Waignakim.

and afraid and I wanted to run away. But you had pity on me, and we prepared these fruit together. We decided to divide them equally. You must take the ring and the stone axe, because we prepared the fruit in joint labour.' The man of the Agotim clan answered: 'Fair with me if you take all the fruit. I don't want any of it because I've received a gift from you.' Upon this the men returned to their villages, one carrying four containers filled with fruit, the other with the shell ring and the stone axe. A little later, the Kalabu man went see the Suambugim man and said to him: 'This stream is yours, you may cut the sago there. This hill ridge is yours. The sago palms, the ground, this breadfruit tree, all the fruit trees, they belong to you because you gave me something very precious. I showed it to the village big men and the other people too. They decided I should tell you what I have just said.' The Suambugim man answered: 'I was never at war with another village that would have driven me from my home up on the mountain. It was the wind. Because of the wind I had to leave my mountain and come to settle down here. My only wrong at the time was not to ask you about the fruit I took. You were angry with me for that, shouted at me, which made me feel ashamed. That is why I gave you something, but this must not bother you and you should not go on to make so many promises. Let's do it like this: we simply share the food.' The Kalabu man agreed to this.

'I think that I shall soon leave this area. All that I leave behind will belong to you,' the man from Suambugim spoke, meaning the land. The land appealed to Kalabu which is why the village joined Waignakim. Kalabu and Waignakim were located on the same ridge, the one that ends at the stream Waimba. But Waignakim and Suambugim were enemies. Kalabu didn't participate in these battles, it just watched. But the men of Kalabu felt sorry for Waignakim because Kalabu is the elder, Waignakim the younger brother; so they supported Waignakim against Suambugim. The battle began at daybreak and went on until the sun was high up in the sky. Then they put fire to a ceremonial house in Suambugim; the house was ablaze. A Suambugim woman was sitting in her menstruation hut and saw the cult house burning, upon which she ran and entered the cult house, pulling from the burning house a large carving, a woven mask and a ceremonial pot (*amukat*). She dragged the objects to the edge of the village, towards the bush. It was then that a Kalabu man saw her; he wanted to pierce her with his spear. But the woman said: 'Wait, look, all this is yours. Take it!' The woman fled while the man went to look; he took with him the woven mask and the ceremonial pot which we call Ndunyambui. After that, the fight was over. The Suambugim fled after one of their great warriors had been killed. His name was Kiligut. Following this, Kalabu and Waignakim sang:

Kiligut yin nggai Noutim nggai, Bertngge amei
Kiligut went to the village Noutim, to the ceremonial ground Bertngge.

Suambugim tagwa wurena yi nggai dshamba. Rapna yina nggai dshamba.
The Suambugim woman (metaphor for the frightened warriors of S.) sets off and goes to the main village. Sets off and goes to the main village.

Kiligut ndu ndi reut renemba kwout kwane, Bertngge amei,
Kiligut is very afraid, he lies down on the ceremonial ground Bertngge.

nde kulegi koru. Naui Kiligut mine me yanggi yangge waru.
The men have held him back. My friend Kiligut, you are making off.

Kwaguia nggu tu kunek a yagukunek a. Tau ye kyakunek.
I want to bathe in the stream Kwaguia, to lie down and die. I die like (or 'as') an old man.

The Suambugim fled, leaving behind four things: a large carving, Bani, a woven mask, a ceremonial pot which we call Ndunyambui, and a further carving representing a white cockatoo. They left these things in Noutim Bertngge. A slit gong called Suambugimtagwa has rotted away in the meantime.

As the various stories given above show, migration is triggered by a variety of reasons, including population growth (Umbite Targwa), sibling conflict (Waignakim) and increasing claims to land (Kalabu/Suambugim, pp. 9-10).

A further example[31] involving a ridge that had been in possession of Kalabu for many decades explains how people were forced to leave their settlement in punishment for violating the village code of conduct. The hill ridge Kato Apupik used to be the home of Malmba village. Today the area is used by Kalabu as garden land; but the stones of the old ceremonial ground are still there to be seen.[32]

31 Told by Kitnyeikyak, Smoigim, Kalabu I.

32 The same goes for the first Suambugim settlement near Lonem.

In earlier days the people of Malmba used to live on the hill Kato Apupik. One day they went down to the Ulagem stream, crossed the river Pasi and climbed the hill Pilmak where they planned to plant long yam. The garden was ready for planting and the men had arranged to meet there to do the work. Only two men, Kwatebagui and Uluanggu, did not join them. The women had remained in the village to cook food for the men. One of the women, Danggam by name, left the village to collect greens. The two men were watching her. Kwatebagui said to Uluanggu. 'You cannot have intercourse with her because the men are planting long yam today; they would never forgive us for such misbehaviour and we would get into trouble.' Uluanggu answered: 'No, I want her.' Then he raped her. The woman returned to the village where the food had been cooking in the pot for quite a while already. When she looked to see whether the food was done, she discovered that the tubers at the top and at the bottom of the pot were cooked but those in-between were still raw. She put more wood on the fire, but to no effect. She cried. All the other women had already emptied their pots because their food was ready. Upon this Danggam emptied her pot too and, together with the other women, she carried the food to the men in the garden who were planting long yam. The women began distributing the food by portions but the people noticed that Danggam's tubers were still raw, upon which her husband asked her: 'What has happened, why is your food still raw?' The woman burst into tears and spoke: 'A man had intercourse with me.' Her husband rose, ripped out a stem of wild taro, tore off a leaf and placed it on the ground. 'Place the food on this leaf!' The woman did as she was told. She emptied her pot on to the wild taro leaf, dividing the food into portions. The men ate the uncooked food, then they went to plant the long yams. After they had finished they returned to the village towards late afternoon. Meanwhile the women had cooked yam soup which they served to the men who ate it. Then the men decided to kill Kwatebagui and Uluanggu. They wanted to harm the two men's spirits (*tale kra kus*) so that they would die. They ordered the spirits: 'Go to Kwimbu, there the men of Kwimbu will kill you!'

But to Kwatebagui and Uluanggu they said: 'Put on your decorations and go on a journey.' The two men fetched all their ornaments and each one his large lime gourd, and set off. They followed the course of the Pasi, on and on; they passed Naram, came to a stretch of grassland called Seranyankra and finally reached Kuindshambi and Waragwa (both of them *amei* of Kwimbu). In Kuindshambi they met only an old woman. All the men had gone to hunt wild pig. The two men took a palm-leaf sheath, sat down on it to chew betel, and waited. The old woman came to them and asked: 'Who are you?' The men answered: 'We're Kwatebagui and Uluanggu from Malmba,' upon which the old woman replied, 'Wait here, I'll send a few kids to fetch the men who are out on a hunt. When they see the men, they'll tell them about you, then the men will return to the village.'

Shortly later the men returned to the village. They only threw a brief glance at the two, then they got out their spears and killed the two Malmba men. They killed the two men, their bodies lay in Kuindshambi and Waragwa. Upon this the men of Suambugim picked up the bodies and carried them to the boundary of Malmba, where the Ulagem and Pasi flow together. The men of Malmba came down from their hill and carried the bodies back to the village, where they buried them. After having buried the two men, the people of Malmba left their village; they left their village on top of Kato Apupik, moved on and settled down in the place where they still live today, in Ndusaki Kounoure.

The story was followed by a short song which goes as follows:

Uluanggu Kwatebagui akina akina,
Uluanggu and Kwatebagui climb and climb,

kwandena kwandena yu, Kuindshambi ameimba
then they turn off and go to the ceremonial ground of Kuindshambi.

titnbun tyu yewi tugya.
Titnbun-lemon and leaves of the *yewi*-lemon[33] are chewed and spat out.

A section of this original 'Malmba' population[34] is said to have moved on to Dshame. Some people maintained that some sections of present-day Malmba and Dshambe had been populated by groups whose common origin goes back to the area of today's Maprik I and II villages. Malmba and Dshambe were allies in war. Kimbanggwa[35] and Bainyik, both enemies of Kalabu I, are said to have arrived in their present settlement area from the south. After an internal conflict one group moved

[33] *Titnbun* and *yewi* normally serve as metaphors for fighting and killing.

[34] It is not clear whether the people called themselves 'Malmba' at the time.

[35] See Huber-Greub (1988).

from Bainyik to Kalabu where the people were adopted by the Waignapate clan; according to another version this group actually became the Waignapate clan.

Of Lonem it is said that the village only came into existence after Kalabu was established at its present location on the ridge. The founders of Lonem were an immigrant group from Ilibeim (an Arapesh village to the east) that had left its previous habitat after a heavy flood (in consequence of unknowingly killing a spirit being in its waterhole). The founding group is said to have also included a number of Arapesh who had been pushed back and driven off by the men of Kalabu. People in Kalabu also said that their village, together with Barengga, had ceded land to the people of Lonem or, at least, not opposed appropriation by the people of Lonem.

The story goes as follows:[36]

There was once a woman in Nggwalnggamerap. Together with her daughter she went to a pool that was inhabited by a spirit being (*wale*). This place was called Alplipmu. There she prepared some bark fibres from which she wanted to make string for a net bag. Whilst busy working, she discovered an eel in the water. The woman looked at the eel; it looked rather weak, moving ever so slowly. Finally it reached the edge of the pool, right there where the woman was sitting. She took a knife and killed the eel, throwing the body on to the bank where her daughter was busy collecting greens. They built an earth-oven and cooked the eel. When it was time, they took out the eel, but the meat was still raw, upon which they took the eel back to the village where they cooked it again. But still the meat was raw, so they threw the eel into the bush.

The spirit being appeared (to the people) telling them: 'A boy and a girl must climb to the top of a coconut tree and stay there.' During the night a mighty storm arose and the whole village was flooded. The water swept through the village and all the people drowned except for the boy and girl at the top of the coconut tree. The water nearly reached them, but then the flood receded. The children took a coconut and threw it down but they didn't hear it hitting the ground below; instead they heard it landing in the water with a splash. They waited for a while and then threw down a second coconut; this one hit the ground upon which they climbed down from the tree. When they saw that all the people were dead they left the village and went to Ainggulim where they stayed for a while; then they moved on to Guindshambu near Yamel, and from there on to Apeboam Wasamba, and finally to Bunen; here they built a makeshift roof from the leaves of a wild palm under which they slept.

A man from Barengga had observed the two children, upon which he turned to a man from Kalabu, saying: 'Two beings have passed into our territory. What shall we do with them?' The Kalabu man answered: 'We can't chase them away; let them stay where they are in the bush.' The two children stayed where they were. The people saw smoke rising from the bush. The two married, and the woman gave birth to a boy who became the founder of Kwarogim. The second son was the founder of Klambigim, the third son the ancestor of Mamboigim. Thus, many clans came into being. Today Lonem is a strong village but their ancestors originally came from the area of Ilibeim.

This example expands the pattern as far as in-migration and settlement by the forefathers of present-day Kalabu is concerned. Nevertheless, the accounts given up to here do show that a village is not to be viewed as an isolated unit but in the context of the history and movement of population groups in the immediate and wider area. Some migrations involved large distances, as the case of Suambugim goes to show. In addition, several of the accounts provide evidence to show that not all migrations occurred along an east/west or a south/north axis, but that groups also travelled in the opposite direction, from the northern hill area to the grasslands in the south. One such case refers to a group of northern Abelam that migrated southwards to an area adjacent to the Sawos.

A group that once used to inhabit the area of present-day Malmba fled the location after a killing (there are two versions of the story: 1. a woman was killed by a spirit being at a pool in the bush, 2. a woman was killed by her husband after their child, which she should have taken care of, accidentally strangled itself), southwards via Witupe to Kinyambu, a village that is considered Boiken today (see **map 2**).

During a visit to Kinyambu we found that the people still well remembered their old place of residence and were holding on to the story of what had happened at the old village site and made them desert their home in the first place. Furthermore, the villages of Kalabu and Ulupu (both about a three-day-journey away from Kinyambu) were still regarded as allies.

[36] Told by Rorotabu, Waignapate, Kalabu I.

It was told that these two villages, together with Kinyambu (although it is not clear whether the village carried its present name at the time) once drove off the Witupe people who used to live in the area of today's Yenigo.

In fact, one old man in Kinyambu, at the time about 70 years of age, still could speak Ambulas; he declared that the subsequent generation, that is, the people around 50 only spoke Boiken. Both Kinyambu and Witupe are villages that grew from the amalgamation of groups from different areas (including the Sepik River). The diversity of origin is reflected and retained in the disparate names of the various resident clans. The ancestors of the present-day Naram once used to live further to the north. The stages on their migration route indicate that the journey took them via Mamblep through the northern fringe of the Abelam area to the Arapesh, and then back down south to their present location.

However, as far as I was able to ascertain these north-south migrations were merely secondary movements, in other words, they were always preceded by an extensive south-to-north passage, often involving several stops and stages. There is evidence that a group from the grasslands pushed northward as far as the mountainous Arapesh country. This refers to the ancestors of the village of Nagripeim, who originally came from the Wosera plains and settled down amidst the Arapesh, gradually substituting the Arapesh language for their own idiom. This astonishingly high mobility in the Abelam area never involved whole villages as such, but smaller social units (lineages, families, residential groups, etc.). However, as the Abelam grant no significance to long and deep genealogies and, accordingly, do not pass them on from one generation to the next it is difficult to say anything about the size and structure of these migrating groups. Only in a few single cases accounts include basic information on the size and kin structure of the in- or out-migrating group.[37]

Social Dynamics of Local Units: Fissions and Alliances

Villages – the Abelam use the same term for village, hamlet and house, *nggai* – constitute operative units only in a very restricted sense. This becomes evident if one takes a look at inter-village relations in terms of war and alliance. A list of the villages which the people of Kalabu collectively ranked as enemies and with whom they regularly waged war proved of little validity when I discussed it with the different clans and residential units since those villages which the great majority of Kalabu I clans called enemies were often the allies of clans from Kalabu II, and vice-versa. This means that, on occasion, members of the same village supported opposing parties in war; but, as my informants were quick to point out, direct confrontations between members of the same village on the battleground[38] were painstakingly avoided. War between two villages was formally ended by a special peace ceremony in the course of which the two parties ritually exchanged men, thus establishing trust and friendship. Occasionally, settlements also formed alliances against a common enemy village. On the whole, relations of amity and enmity were of temporary nature and subjecta to frequent shifts contingent upon changing constellations and unfolding events, and always with a view to the development of conditions and opportunities.

As in other villages the oral traditions recorded in Kalabu show that in- and out-migrations consistently involved smaller social units, and not the village as a whole. Very often the cause of emigration was a conflict, usually involving a killing, making continued co-residence practically impossible. Thus, for example, members of the Kundigim clan left the village after a passionate, but fatal, affair of love and jealousy, and went to settle near Winggei. The story[39] of this event was told as follows:

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[37] As mentioned above, the migration of entire groups has practically come to a standstill due to the colonial system of fixed land demarcation. Nevertheless, the Abelam still find ways of resettling, especially after suffering a traumatic experience in the home village. Thus, for example, in order to get away as far as possible from the place where his favourite son had died, one Abelam man, together with his two wives and the remaining children, had gone to stay with a relative who ran a plantation-like business near Wewak. In 1983, we heard that he was planning to move back to the village after one of his wives had given birth to a son whom he deemed worthy of replacing his deceased child; accordingly, he had given him the same name.

[38] Still today the old men are proud to show the old battlegrounds, which were located on the boundary to enemy villages. Battlegrounds were always laid out pair-wise.

[39] Told by Tambandshoe, Magnapate clan, Kalabu II.

A man called Tamandshambui of the Kundigim clan had died, leaving behind his widow alone. The husband's agnates had forbidden the woman, Danggyan, to become involved in a new love affair, but the woman refused to listen to her husband's elder brother. One day, Tamandshambui's elder brother talked Danggyan's lover into accompanying him to Wora. The two men set off. When they were near Bainyik, Yalamira of the Nyalmagim clan, Danggyan's lover, said he felt sick upon which the Kundigim man said: 'Then you better turn back. It's no good if you're seriously ill when we reach Wora.' So Yalamira turned back, but the Kundigim man secretly followed him back to the village. There he got ready his spears, took a piece of firewood and went to Danggyan's house. The woman had left early that morning, carefully closing the entrance to her house. The man opened the entrance, climbed inside, carefully closing the house again the way it had been left. Inside the house he opened the grave of his deceased brother[40] and looked at the bones. There he waited. When the shadows grew longer he knew that the women and children would soon be returning to the village.[41] He heard the people coming home; the women started cooking, and then they ate. He heard the people talking with each other. Night fell. One woman after the next retired to her house. Then he heard a woman saying to Danggyan: 'You have no child of your own, take one of mine to sleep in your house.' Danggyan answered: 'My house is just next to yours; I don't need to have a child staying with me,' upon which the woman, who was Danggyan's sister, replied: 'Your brother-in-law has often scolded me for not sending one of my children to sleep with you, but if that's the way you want it, then there's nothing I can do.' He heard the women retiring to sleep. Then all was quiet in the village. Shortly before midnight he heard Danggyan's lover knocking on the wall of the house. He asked quietly: 'Are you already sleeping?' She answered: 'No, I've been waiting for you, come inside.' She helped him to open the door after which Yalamira climbed in. The man hiding in the house of his dead brother heard this all. He also heard how Danggyan gave her lover something to eat. After that, the two had intercourse and then went to sleep. Upon this the Kundigim man climbed out of the house. He dropped a piece of a coconut shell to see whether the two would awake. They didn't. Then he dropped a second a piece, but they still didn't move. The man lit a brand and held it into the house, but the two didn't awake. He noticed that they were not sleeping on their sides, but on their backs. Then he took his bone dagger, placed it on Yalamira's chest and thrust into his body with the aid of a stone. The dagger passed straight through his body, tearing a hole into the palm-leaf mat underneath. The man was dead instantly. The woman sat up with a start. She tried to run from the house but her brother-in-law held her back. 'Why did you kill him,' she cried, upon which he answered: 'It was not me, it was your wrongdoing that killed him. You didn't listen to what I told you.'

Now the other people of the hamlet came running. They held down the Kundigim man. Danggyan let her relatives enter the house. Then she packed everything she owned into her string bags, including all her shell rings, and went to the house of her elder brother. But because it was the time of the *ka*-harvest he was staying in his garden hut and had not returned to the village. Only his wife and children were there. She woke them up and told them what had happened. The woman went to her husband's house, opened it and took all his shell rings, putting them in a string bag. All the other things she left behind. Danggyan also went to fetch her sister who gave Danggyan her child to carry. So they left Kaumbul and went down to Kamogwa, near Paskwa where today the breadfruit trees still stand; here her brother had his garden. He was sleeping in his garden hut because it was the time of the *ka*-harvest. The three women and their relatives arrived at the site of the garden in Gambangge Samba. They woke the brother; he asked: 'What's wrong?' The women told him what had happened upon which he said: 'The things that belong to me are not important; what is important is what has happened to this woman. Let us go away together.' The elder sister heard what her brother said, lit a torch and began collecting the *ka* yam, one tuber of each kind. The women put the tubers into their string bags. The brother asked: 'Did you leave behind a sign in the village?' The women answered: 'We took with us many things that belong to us, but we took some wild taro[42] and fixed it to the house where the two men are lying (the deceased husband and the slain lover); we also hit the slit gong.' He answered: 'That is good.' Then they went down to the Pasi River, crossed it and continued to Magutogim. They didn't enter the village but passed by on the outskirts. Then they reattched the Kulaure River which is the boundary to Winggei. They entered the forest. They made a halt next to a *bendshin* palm. From its rootstock many new *bendshin* were sprouting. They dug a hole under the rootstock, which became their home. There they

[40] Previously a deceased person was buried in his own house; the house was then deserted and left to rot.

[41] It was the hamlet called Kaumbul.

[42] A sign marking mortal enmity.

stayed for a long time; occasionally they foraged through the bush. One day they came upon a place where pigs were fed. The people from the village regularly brought food for their pigs to this place. After the people had left, the fugitives stole the food from the pigs and ate it themselves. They were so hungry they didn't leave behind a single crumb. The people of Winggei noticed this, saying: 'The pigs always used to leave behind some leftovers, but now no longer; what's behind this?' – When some time later a man and his wife went to feed the pigs, the woman took her husband's lime gourd and, jerking the spatula back and forth several times, left the place (making it sound as if the man had left the location too). Instead, the man went to hide. Shortly later he saw two people approaching; they shooed off the pigs and began collecting the food in a palm leaf container upon which the Winggei man came out from his hiding place, gripped one of them and asked: 'Why are you stealing my pigs' food? I noticed this because the pigs were not growing as they should have done.' The two answered: 'Don't' kill us straight away, we're from Kalabu. There was a big quarrel back home and we had to leave the village. A man was killed; that's why we and our relatives left the village. And that is why we've been stealing the food from your pigs.' 'Stay here,' the Winggei man said, 'one of you go and fetch your relatives.' But then he changed his mind and said: 'No, we'll go to the bush together to fetch your kinfolk.' After they had found them, they all went to Winggei. It was late at night when they arrived, and everybody was already sleeping.' They moved very quietly in order not to wake anyone. The man took them to his hamlet. He opened the entrance to his house and they all settled down inside for the night. When morning came the Winggei man left the house, climbed up a betel palm and came back with two branches carrying betel nuts. He went to the *amei* (ceremonial ground) and called out to the men: 'Come here, we've got something to talk about! All the men who belong to the same *dshambu* as I, come here!' When the men had gathered on the Tshatu *amei*, the man spoke: 'Take a look at these two betel branches. What should we do with them: eat them or plant them?' He stood waiting for an answer. Then the men rose and said: 'We say the following: we should not eat these betel nuts, instead we should plant them.' Satisfied with the answer, the man asked: 'Do you all agree?' They all agreed. The branch that carried nuts ready for eating he took to his house and left it there. The other branch that carried nuts which were ripe for planting he left at the *amei*. Then he opened his house and told the two men from Kalabu to come out: 'Come outside and bring your relatives with you!' He took them to the ceremonial ground; each Winggei clan selected a person. Again the Winggei man rose and spoke: 'You said we should plant the betel. Now I want us to select a piece of land so that the betel can grow in the same place. It's not good to divide them up.' The people agreed: 'We'll clear some bush, build houses and look after the people from Kalabu.'

The children of the two Kalabu men grew up, and the girls reached the age when they wanted to get married. But they didn't marry men from Winggei or from any other village; instead they married within their own clan and had many children. The hamlet that the people of Winggei gave them they called Yembure, or Balekasik ('pig feed'), because it was there where the two men had taken their food from the pigs. Later, they staged a feast on their hamlet's *amei* to which they invited the people of Winggei. The descendants of the two Kalabu men still live in Balekasik which is part of the village of Winggei.

Later we visited this hamlet in Winggei, where the people confirmed the story. Although the original Kundigim people by then had given up the *mamu* dialect for the *yembe* idiom and had adopted the eastern Abelam art style they still emphatically held on to their claim to their land in Kalabu (since Kundigim was one of the founding clans of Kalabu it owns a lot of land). Although this section of the Kundigim has been residing among the eastern Abelam for approximately the last 110 years, the prospect still worries the members of the Magnapate clan in Kalabu who – due to increasing land shortage – have been using Kundigim land ever since (the Kundigim clan has only very few living representatives in Kalabu).

For reasons that are no longer clear, a section of the Magnapate clan left Kalabu and went to live in Nunggwaya; the Nunggwaya still count themselves as Maprik people although they speak a different, albeit related, language (Kwasengen). Upon arrival the Magnapate descendants named their new residence site after their old hamlet in Kalabu (Kaumbul) which has probably helped to keep the memory of their place of origin alive. However, the reasons for emigrating were no longer to be ascertained, not even in Nunggwaya.

Some intra-community conflicts ended with the departure of one of the parties, and the spatial distance put an end to open strife (thus probably preventing the entire village from breaking apart). However, this was not always the case. In Kalabu the people still

recall, although only faintly, the fate of the now extinct Kandigim clan, which used to be aligned with the Uitikim (both groups had Bira as their *nggwalndu*). Although the cause of the conflict is no longer known, the people remember that the entire Kandigim clan that used to reside in the hamlet of Tuindshere was wiped out after a fight. A more recent conflict[43] which broke out in the early 20th century took a slightly different course: as the story goes, Ndunyinggi and Yambusaki (both of Kalabu I) were staging a ceremonial yam exchange during which the Yambusaki men outrivaled their opponents with the more prestigious tubers. Outraged by this defeat, a Ndunyinggi man raped a Yambusaki woman, after which a number of Yambusaki men retaliated by subjecting a Ndunyinggi woman to the same ordeal. In Dshanggungge, a place located between Yambusaki and Ndunyinggi, it came to a fight between the two factions in the course of which an Agotim man (his name was Dshapa) killed a Buknisuagim man (Wanke) with his spear. The slain man happened to be the brother of the killer's wife. The woman carried her brother body's from the scene of the killing back to Buknisuagim ground. She never returned to Yambusaki and her husband's clan, leaving her children behind. Following the killing, the residents of Yambusaki fled their settlement, taking refuge on the northern boundary of their territory where, together with some people from Lonem, they founded a new hamlet, called Malpimbil.

The Buknisuagim also left their hamlet and went to establish a new settlement on land belonging to the Nunggigim, which they again named Dshanggungge. In Yambusaki the houses fell into ruin and soon the bush reclaimed the site. It was only years later, and after sacrificing a pig, that the people of Malpi cleared the bush again and re-established the ritual ground of Yambusaki. They built new houses and a new ceremonial house. After harvesting their long yams they once more staged a ritual contest with Nndunyinggi. Following the exchange, the Yambusaki carried the decorated tubers back to the ceremonial house, upon which the Nndunyinggi set fire to the Yambusaki spirit house, destroying it together with a few nearby yam storage huts.

The slain Buknisuagim man was buried in Wapinda so as to not jeopardize peaceful relations between the different clans in the village. For this purpose the victim was posthumously classified as a member of Kalabu II, thus redefining the sacrilegious deed as an admittedly heinous, yet bearable act that could be made good through compensation. Six bamboo poles, each adorned with twelve shell rings and decorated with *yol* leaves and *mimoe* flowers as a token of peace were presented on the *amei* of Wapinda and exhibited 'like yam', as the people described. Later, a descendant of the Buknisuagim victim built his house at the site of his ancestor's grave, but not before one of the slain man's brothers had exhumed his skull which still had the spearhead sticking in the eye socket. Today, this descendant occasionally, and very secretly, brings out the skull and decorates it in memory of the tragic event.

Settlement dynamics not only involved fissions and out-migrations, but also the opposite: mergers and affiliations. If a kin group was facing extinction due to a lack of male descendants it was quite common for a 'stranger' to be adopted from another village. This was the case with the Luimogim, the most important clan in Kalabu I with the largest landed estate. As the story goes the clan founder, Luimo, had no son of his own which is why he adopted an orphan from another village:[44]

Two men from Kalabu[45] set off for Wosera with the intention of visiting a number of allied villages. In Kwanimbandu[46] they joined a few men sitting in front of their houses. They saw the Kwanimbandu men picking up wild sugar cane and sharpening the stalks with their knives. In the nearby bush, where the people usually dump their rubbish, there was a small boy. As soon as someone threw away some peels the boy would grab and eat them. When the men saw this they would take the sharpened pitpit[47] stalks and throw them at him. Seeing this one of the Kalabu

[43] Already Kaberry (1971: 51) mentions this conflict; she notes that there were no mortal casualties. But she probably was not given the full story as, at the time, the conflict was still quite recent and the people involved were still alive.

[44] Told by Dondombale, Mutagwakim, Kalabu I.

[45] In a different version told by Sauke of the Smoigim clan, one of the men was Luimo, the founder of the Luimogim. In yet a different version told by Gilisenta of the Koranggim clan, the second man's name was Woswose; he was the founder of the Koranggim.

[46] In another version: Dshikinyanggu.

[47] Pitpit is a Tok Pisin term for the stalk of the wild sugar cane and similar kinds of reed.

men got up and said: 'Why are you shooting at this poor boy? You shouldn't treat him so badly.' The men answered: 'He's a nobody, we don't want him around.' The Kalabu man objected: 'You're doing wrong, this boy no longer has a father or a mother.' This is why the men wanted to kill him.

At first the Kalabu man also wanted to throw the remains of his food to the boy but then he got up, went to the boy and gave him half of his food. The other men protested: 'Why do you bother yourself with this scum? Send him away!' But the Kalabu man responded: 'No, I'm not going to send him away.' The Kwanimbandu men gave their guest a branch of ripe bananas. Some of them he ate, two of them he passed to the boy telling him: 'Take the bananas and go. When you reach the boundary of your land, eat one of the bananas and leave the skin on the path so that I'll know where you are.' The boy did as he was told. Along the way he ate a banana, dropped the skin on the path and went to hide in the bush. Back in Kwanimbandu the men sat around and chatted. The Kalabu man thought to himself, I can't leave him waiting so long, and, turning to his companion, he said: 'Come on, we should be getting back.' The two men set off for home. On the way they found the banana skin. The man called out: 'Where are you, come here!' Like a young dog the boy came forth and walked towards the men. Then the three of them walked on. When they reached Bainyik they rested, ate some of the food the people had given them and had a wash. The boy's skin was covered with wounds from the pitpit that the people of Kwanimbandu had thrown at him. He looked really scrawny, nothing but skin and bones. They left Bainyik, climbed down and crossed the Ulagem and then climbed up the hill to Numbunggen (Kalabu II). From there they continued to Ndunyinggi (Kalabu I). At home, the man hid the boy at the back of his house and went to see his wife.[48] She brought him some food upon which he told her: 'Go and fetch some wood so that I can make a fire; the wood's at the back of the house.' The wife went but found no wood, only this skinny-looking creature. She returned to her husband and told him: 'There's no firewood there, only this scrawny little boy.' He answered: 'That's what I meant, go and fetch him.' The woman turned round saying: 'You're a good husband for bringing a child home to me. We'll take care of the boy.' The two raised the young boy. The man went to the bush in search of a vine we call *kiwi*. He brought a piece home. He took the rib of a sago palm leaf and burnt it to ashes. Then he pounded the vine, mixing the juice with the (salty) ash.[49] From this he cooked a soup which he gave the boy to drink. This rid the boy of the worms in his intestines; he had always suffered from a large, swollen tummy. We always use this medicine to remove worms from the bowels.

The swollen tummy receded. The man and his wife gave the boy good food to eat; he grew to become a handsome young man called Dshikniputi. During this time the men of the village were preparing an initiation, an *ulke nau* (initiation grade) to be precise. The men erected a *mangge* tree trunk on the ritual ground. They hit the boys with sticks and nettles, the older boys with sticks, the younger ones, who were being carried on the backs of their fathers, with nettles. After this the initiates went down to the stream, and then returned to the enclosure next to the ceremonial house where they were fed with soup. They stayed there for a long time, fed on soup. The men began to prepare the initiates' headdresses for the final dance. The boy's adoptive father made a *noute* headdress for his son. Then the final dance was held (**pl. 63**). The next year the men prepared and staged *nggwalndu* (the next higher initiation stage). Again headdresses, *wagnen*, were prepared for the final dance. At this point the people of Kalabu informed the residents of Kwanimbandu that they were holding a large feast and that they were invited. All the people of Kwanimbandu came to the feast, lining up at the edge of the ceremonial ground. Then the initiates came forth from the enclosure, marvellously decorated. As they entered the dance ground, the slit gongs sounded. The young men were also decorated with string bags adorned with many shell rings. Dshikniputi came forth on to the ceremonial ground, pacing it out in a circle. When the men of Kwanimbandu saw him they cried because he had become so handsome. The dance went on all night. In the morning the dancers removed their headdresses. Dshikniputi was given a new name: Tapukuin. His father helped him to remove the headdress, upon which Tapukuin said to him: 'You made this headdress for me, now I shall do something for you.' He went to hang up his string bag with all the shell rings on the edifice where the dancers went to rest when they felt tired (**pl. 67**). He told his father: 'Give this string bag with the shell rings to my (adoptive) mother.' The man placed the string bag round his wife's neck.

The guests left for home. Tapukuin began making spears from *yaman* wood. He made a whole set of spears which he used to carry around with him in a bundle, a second set of spears for battle. To the

[48] Sauke declared the wife's name was Sipmanggian.

[49] From the burnt sago rib.

north of Wamdangge (at the time the northernmost hamlet of Kalabu) there were several villages which belonged to the Bukni (Arapesh). He fought against them, killing many people and driving off the ones he spared. His father said: 'You are destroying all these people,' to which Tapukuin answered: 'You fetched me from the south, now I'm doing something for you in return. You stay in the village; either the Bukni will kill me, if they don't succeed, I'll kill them. He killed or drove off all of them, pushing the boundary continuously to the north until he reached Lonem. He stopped there and returned to the village. A short while later some men from Lonem came and said: 'You must move back the boundary between our territories. Come with us so that we can talk about the matter on site. You have banned us from the forest that actually belongs to us; that's the area where we go to cut down trees.' So the people of Kalabu and Lonem went and shifted back the boundary between the two lands to where the boundary still runs today, near Ainyerik, close to Malpimbil. Before that, the boundary was near Lelrit Teinggele, then it was shifted back.

Time passed, and finally Tapukuin, who had lived in the hamlet of Manul, died. The people buried his body, then deserted the hamlet out of grief and moved to Ndunyinggi where they stayed. Where the hamlets of Manul and Komunyinggi used to be there is only forest now.

Because men from the Luimogim and Smoigim clans had once adopted the boy Nggoule, Nggoulabouli (the original boy's name from Kwanimbandu), we, the direct descendants, the Dshiknikim, still have the right to use the sago palms on the land of the Luimogim and Smoigim and to clear bush there.

In a different version[50] an explanation is given why the adopted son and his descendants are not described as Luimogim, but as Dshiknikim instead: when Nggoulabouli grew up he was once forbidden to drink water during an initiation. Wambina, Luimo's brother, tried to seduce his brother's wife called Wamatagwa but she rejected him. In revenge, Wambina went to the garden where Nggoulabouli had been working. There he chewed some 'pitpit' spitting out the fibrous parts and leaving them there. In the evening Luimo went to the garden to see how far Nggoulabouli had got with his work. He saw the remains of the 'pitpit' and interpreted them as a sign that his adopted son had broken the taboo on drinking water. When he met him, he hit him (unjustly) with a cane (*dshikni*). Grieved by this injustice Nggoulabouli left the Luimogim and founded the Dshiknikim. Some time later, a few sections of the Dshiknikim emigrated and successively founded the hamlets Dshame, Nyeligim and Yanggula[51] near Balokwil.

The relationships of clans with those of other villages are quite varied. It could occur (several cases are reported) that a woman from an enemy village fell in love with a man from Kalabu and, under the threat of death, left her village and came to stay with him; this was regarded as a form of marriage and no sanctions were imposed. Later, a child from such union would be sent back to the enemy village as a kind of 'replacement' where it grew up and founded a family. Despite the potentially hostile relations between the other clans, the two immediately involved kin groups would retain amiable relations and support each other during preparations for yam feasts or initiations. It could even occur that the members of the two groups would warn each other of impending raids by their own village.[52]

Next to marriage-based relationships between villages others developed from given circumstances, from a contingency basis, so to speak. The relationship between Kalabu and Kuminimbis is a case at hand; it started quite inconspicuously, but then matters snowballed, as the following story tells:[53]

The story of Sagulas begins when he came to Kalabu from Tipmabel and Wamangge, after which the hamlets Kaumbul and Wapinda were established. The people cleared the bush and built the two hamlets. After that Sagulas went to Kuminimbis. But before that Sagulas had lived in Wapinda and Kaumbul. In those days there was war between Kalabu and Malmba; during a battle a man from Kalabu was killed. At the time, two men from Kuminimbis called Tilewi and Yanoure were staying in Kalabu. When they had arrived there the Kalabu men had told them: 'The Malmba have killed some of our men. We are sleeping at the grave of the dead. We're busy

50 Told by Gilisenta, Koranggim, Kalabu I.

51 Nggumbale, a Dshiknikim of Yanggula, regularly visited Kalabu which he described as his home village.

52 In the case of extra-village marriages it occurred quite frequently that a spouse would warn his or her relatives in the natal village of impending attacks; see also the story of the raid of Waignakim (Yaremaipmu) on Kalabu.

53 Recorded in Marap hamlet of Kuminimbis from a man called Nawe.

preparing a feast to honour the deceased, and now you have arrived. Come and take part in the event and listen to what we have to say against Malmba.' The two men Tilewi and Yanoure sat down and listened to the speeches. Then they said: 'Show us the fighting ground so we'll know where to find it.' The Kalabus went with the two men to the spot on the border called Anggimba. They asked: 'Where were the two Malmba men standing when they killed men of Kalabu?' The Kalabu men showed them and said: 'The two Malmba men are mighty warriors. They came as far as here, then they threw their spears at our men; after that they went back.' The two Kuminimbis men looked at the spot closely and then returned to Kalabu. They went to sleep. The next morning they ate a little and then went back to the fighting ground. The Kalabu men went with them. Again it came to a battle with Malmba. Time passed by, and still the battle waged. When the sun had passed midday, the message came that the two Malmba warriors were on their way. In the past it had happened many times that the two had arrived much later to do battle, after which they had killed Kalabu men with their spears. It was afternoon by the time the two Malmba men appeared. They came storming on to the fighting ground, brandishing their spears. The Kalabu men said to each other: 'See, here they are again, the two warriors from Malmba.' When Tilewi and Yanoure heard this, they went to their positions; beforehand they had cut a narrow path into the bush where they lay concealed waiting for the Malmba warriors. The latter stormed on to the ground, upon which the Kuminimbis men speared one of them; it was the warrior who had previously killed the man from Kalabu who had been married to a woman called Timat. The other warrior turned round – then he too was speared. All this happened at the place on the border called Anggimba. The Malmba carried their dead back to Ndusaki and Kounure.[54] The Kalabu returned triumphantly to the village, to the hamlet of Kaumbul. The Kalabu people were overjoyed with what Tilewi and Yanoure had accomplished. A large feast was staged. In the evening everyone went to sleep. At dawn, the Kalabu men brought two rows of shell rings, one for Tilewi, and one for Yanoure. But the two men said: 'We are not married yet, we're still single. We can't accept the rings just because we helped you in battle. We would prefer if you gave us a woman, for instance Timat[55] whose husband was killed by the Malmba.' The Kalabu men thought about this for a while, and then brought along Timat whose husband had been killed by the Malmba, and whose death now had been revenged by the two Kuminimbis men. Timat's father spoke: 'Let it be so; I have no son, only this daughter. It is right for you to have her because you revenged the death of her husband. She will go with you to Kuminimbis, providing that I can visit her from time to time.' Then he added: 'This man here, Sagulas, he can go with Timat (instead of a second woman) and also stay in Kuminimbis.' He went to his house to fetch Sagulas. He wrapped the carving in leaves and gave it to his daughter to carry to Kuminimbis. On their way back the three of them quietly slipped passed Nyamikim, followed the Amagu River until the two men and Timat reached Kuminimbis.[56] At that time there were no roads, only narrow paths through the bush.

Since that day the relations between the two villages, to be precise between the hamlets Kaumbul in Kalabu and Marap in Kuminimbis, have been very close. From time to time Kalabu men visit Kuminimbis to see 'their' Sagulas[57] (**pl. 19**), to talk about how the mutual relationship began and to renew the bond of friendship by offering each other hospitality.

As in the story above, there are many cases where relationships extend beyond a group's immediate territory. The unit that I have successively referred to as 'village' appears to have been quite an unstable entity, regularly threatened by the competing interests of its constituent parts. I believe settlements actually only became real villages when, in connection with the system of extensive shifting cultivation – in my opinion the driving force behind the ongoing migration movements over the last centuries – the overall population had grown to such an extent that there was no 'empty land', that is, no 'no-man's-land', left, forcing social groups and local units to develop more efficient, also more complex, strategies of social integration. Several leads point in this direction, for example the establishing of subsidiary, or satellite, settlements for strategic purposes (see below).

54 The *amei* in Malmba.

55 Timat is said to have been a member of the Kundigim and Magnapate clans.

56 In the hamlet Marap.

57 The musical instrument *kundi ure*, a cylindrical resonance body used in conjunction with bamboo tubes, is decorated with carved patterns that differ in style to the more recent ones. Sagulas is no longer used in his original function but serves as an important ritual object (like bones, shells and stones) in the context of the yam cult.

In the myths and stories about migration and the settlement of the Kalabu area, some of the more important hamlet names have already been mentioned. Thus the hamlets of Tipmabel Wamangge, located on a side ridge (**map 3**, No. 20), are considered as important places in the process of settlement[58] but it seems they never played a prominent role as social or ceremonial centres. These were established immediately after arrival on the main ridge: Wapinda is regarded as the primal hamlet (in terms of historical order), not necessarily as a place of settlement (**pl. 23**) but as ritual ground, *amei*, with a ceremonial house. The ceremonial house of Kaumbul (**pl. 24**), where 'father Sagulas' was taken to, ranks as equal (but for other purposes). Kaumbul and Wapinda (**cover, pl. 69**) constitute the centres of Kalabu II (Baba-Kalabu). Subsequently, Ndunyinggi and Yambusaki (**frontispiece, pl. 22, 68**) became the ritual centres of Kalabu I (Kwale-Kalabu). As regards the constitution of these centres and especially with respect to the division into Kalabu I and II I received conflicting information. While the majority of sources maintained that all Kalabu ancestors had immigrated via Tipmabel Wamangge[59] and had then separated to settle in the two village halves, others told a different story. According to the latter, the ancestors of Kalabu I came directly to Kwale-Kalabu from the area of present-day Waignakim, with Nyambak (No. 27) featuring as a significant intermediate station and playing a similar role as Tipmabel Wamangge on the other route.

As far as the names of the founders of Kalabu and its constituent parts go, the picture is equally vague. Nyinggui, who was subsequently declared the founding ancestor of the Nyinggigim (also referred to as Nunggigim), and Bapmu are both assigned to the Kundigim, while, according to a different version, they are ascribed to the Magnapate (both of Kalabu II). One account holds that the Magnapate emerged from the Kundigim; often they are also described as contemporaneous and equivalent clans. The Magnapate and Kundigim in fact do own significant parts of Kaumbul's and Wapinda's landed estates. Together with his brother Wambina, Luimo, the Luimogim ancestor, held responsibility for Kalabu I. This clan with its *amei* Ndunyinggi owns extensive areas of land in Kalabu I.

Kalabu has four main, and old, ritual centres: Kaumbul and Wapinda in Kalabu II, and Ndunyinggi and Yambusaki in Kalabu I. The relationship between Kalabu I and II has always been marked by rivalry, and occasionally by armed conflict. However, the latent but ongoing antagonism – paraphrased as having 'the enemy in the village' – never led to an irrevocable split since the centrifugal forces were effectively offset by social ties at the lower level, in other words, by the cooperation between hamlets on opposite sides of the village divide. Thus, for example, Wapinda (II) and Ndunyinggi (I), including their offshoot settlements, shared responsibility for the most important type of ceremonial yam, *mambutap*, thus obliging them to cooperate. Similarly, Kaumbul (II) and Yambusaki (I) (again with their satellite settlements) together assumed responsibility for the yam species *kitpi* and *undinggil*. Failing cooperation between these linked core hamlets, the life-sustaining yam cycle could not have been implemented. Thus, the Yambusaki men plant their yam in the gardens of the men of Kaumbul, and vice versa. The same pattern applies to Wapinda and Ndunyinggi.

The four main hamlets separately founded a number of offshoot settlements: Ndunyinggi founded Kumunggwande (see village map No. 3, 37), Yambusaki established Mairagwa (No. 34), Wapinda founded Suapel (No. 38) and Baigu (No. 40) grew from Kaumbul. Mapme was jointly established by Kaumbul and Yambusaki. Today, all these 'outstations' (with the exception of Mapme), which were established for strategic purposes, are located near the road. At one time, Malmba and Dshame, situated to the north of the original Kalabu, were planning on forming an alliance for the purpose of attacking Kalabu. In order to prevent this, Kalabu established a number of outstations, driving a wedge between the enemy axis and thus preventing them of building a permanent front. In the course of time, these outstations grew into satellite settlements, upholding ties to the 'mother' hamlet to the present day. The same applies to the village's northernmost hamlet, Malpimbil, a joint Kalabu/Lonem settlement. The outpost was established in cooperation with

[58] Kaberry (1971: 45) gives Numbunggen as the oldest Kalabu hamlet.

[59] Even the oldest informants declared that when they were children the coconut palms that had been planted upon original occupation had no longer been standing. As coconut palms grow to an age of roughly 100 years we can date first settlement back at least 180 years.

Yamami to prevent a league between Yamel II and Balokwil. Particularly the places that were founded for defensive purposes looked like fortified settlements; they were surrounded by strong fences and watched over by guardsmen; the path leading to the settlement was equipped with a portcullis which was built into the fortification and could be let down in case of an attack or impending danger. Such portcullises (*yit*) were erected near Malpimbil (against attacks by Yamel), near Mairagwa (against Malmba), near Kamogwa (against Magutogim), near Matungge (against Waignakim) and near Pelkeire (against Kimbanggwa). In view of endemic warfare it makes sense that the Abelam preferably built their settlements on mountain ridges accessible by only one or two narrow paths which could be easily controlled and defended. It helps to explain why Kalabu never suffered total, or even partial, destruction as other villages in the area did (e.g. Suambugim, Magutogim and others).

Structure of Social Units

Up to now I have used terms like kin group, social unit, clan or family without providing a clear definition of the entities involved. I left this ambiguity standing because there is no adequate term to describe the immense variability of social reality.[60] The Abelam themselves use the term *kim*, which I shall translate as clan, for units of different order,[61] although, one of the characteristics of the clan as an anthropological concept, the importance of a genealogical unilineal mindset, is largely lacking. Many clan names contain the suffix *kim*, for example, Kundigim, Luimogim, etc.; at the same time *kim* (or *-gim*) often appears in village names,[62] for example, Waignakim, Nyamikim, and others. In the context of the original settlement of Kalabu we already came across a number of clan names; it appears that in the founding phase the Kundigim (and Magnapate) and the Luimogim played principal roles; in fact, in a way one could describe them as founding clans, but it is impossible to reconstruct the process of segmentation that created the present multiplicity of descent groups out of the few founding clans. Still, even the Kalabu people acknowledge a number of internal connections between the clans which suggest interrelatedness. Next to that we find partnerships between individual clans based on the notion of mutual complementarity under the overall principle of social duality. Links between the clans on the basis of shared descent and/or alliance were given as follows:

Kundigim/Magngapate/Nyinggigim/
Mainggegim/Uitikim/Nyalmakim Kalabu II
Dshamapate/Yabitikim

Luimogim/Koranggim/Dshiknikim
Smoigim[63]/Sagnakim[64]
Atogim/Waignapate/Mutagwakim Kalabu I
Buknisuagim/Nyambisuagim/Kwatogim

The clans, whose common bonds are expressed in the rows above, invariably belong to either one or the other village part, with one exception. Next to the mainspring 'kinship' there exists a further ordering principle that crosscuts pre-given clan alliances, involving different styles of fighting instead. This means there are clans that are said to fight with spears, and others who fight with sorcery (*kus*). The division of clans according to this principle which, to the Abelam, is of equal value is as follows:

Fight with spears:
- Magnapate
- Luimogim (as well as Dshiknikim)
- Atogim (as well as Mutagwakim and Waignapate)
- Koranggim
- Nunggigim

Fight with sorcery:
- Kundigim
- Smoigim
- Buknisuagim (and Nyambisuagim)
- Mainggegim/Uitikim

60 Already Kaberry (1971: 58) commented on the elasticity of clans.

61 See also Kaberry (1941: 253) who spells it g∂m.

62 See also the account of the split-up of Kalabu and Waignakim. The fact that villages comprising several separate clans today carry the *kim*-suffix suggests that at one time in the past local and social unit used to be identical.

63 The main Smoigim lineage belongs to Kalabu I, a junior lineage to Kalabu II. The following metaphors are used to designate the two groups: *lipma-noa* (*noa* – mother): Smoigim Kalabu I; *lipma-sik* (*sik* – child): Smoigim Kalabu II. *Lipma*, a yam species (*Dioscorea bulbifera*), is considered the oldest crop among the Abelam. Unlike *ka* and *wapi* it is planted by women.

64 Now extinct.

The following clans hold an intermediate position, meaning, their constituent lineages belong to either the one or the other mode: Dshamapate, Yabitigim, Nyalmakim, as well as Kwatogim, Koranggim and Smoigim.

The men of the Yabitigim clan use the spear for fighting; at the same time they hold responsibility for the fertility rituals for long yams. This duty rules out the use of lethal sorcery.

The Abelam use *kim* synonymously for both clan and lineage. In some cases a distinction is made within a *kim* between *tipma* (coconut) and *nyinde* (those who came later). This distinction is especially important in the context of land disputes, as the *tipma*, the senior lineage, is in a better position to put forward claims than the *nyinde*, the junior lineage. It proved exceedingly difficult to gather genealogies, since the people's genealogical knowledge rarely went beyond the father's father generation. It seems that this has to do with the insignificance of linearity as a principle, a characteristic that is also typical of many Highland cultures. This feature stands in stark contrast to the importance of linearity among the neighbouring, linguistically and culturally related Iatmul people of the Sepik River. In principle, *kim* membership passes down from father to son, as does succession to land ownership. The eldest son holds a special position in this respect, providing he is physically and mentally sound.[65] However, exceptions to the rule of succession prove to be so frequent that one occasionally has reason to doubt its validity. Adoptions are commonplace so that looking back on my 16-month fieldwork I am no longer sure about the actual size of the families in my census, that is, how many children were adopted and how many were biological offspring. Ultimately, I am only certain in the case of a few single families as to which children were adopted, which the mother had factually given birth to and which children the parents had given up for adoption. Commonly one of the children is given back to the mother's clan, except if the parent's marriage was based on sister exchange.

This non-emphasis on linearity also has to do with the Abelam naming system. In the course of his life a man changes his name several times; the vacated name is immediately free to be taken over by another member of the same *kim*. Thus, for example, when a boy named Waina received a new name upon first initiation, his name went to a man from a different lineage of the same clan, and when this man died the name was taken over by a brother of the original Waina shortly later. In discussions it is quite common for a man to be referred to by alternate names by different speakers. This – for outsiders at least – rather confusing practice could be seen as an indicator that reckoning in genealogical terms has become back-grounded to a system of periodical name change. Notably, *nggwalndu* ('grandfather'), commonly used as a term designate ancestor spirits, does not carry the connotation of clan founder from which all members of a clan are believed to have descended.

Apart from the *nggwalndu* mentioned already by Kaberry (1941: 253-255, 358-359) and totemic emblems in the shape of birds (*dshambu*), clans also feature a number of other differentiating social signifiers.[66] Table 1 below gives an overview of the various *kim* and the ideational tokens ascribed to them by clan members, while Table 2 lists the land ownership of the individual clans on the basis of facts.

For now I simply list the various clans' signifiers in form of an introduction to the topic. Their mode of employment, function and meaning should become evident in the course of this study. They include the following:

amei: ceremonial ground of a *kim*'s hamlet of origin where the clan stages initiations and yam feasts; *amei* does not refer to the ceremonial ground(s) in the various hamlets where the clan's members actually reside.

dshambu: 'totem' in bird-shape; all *dshambu* are named after birds, to which the Abelam also classify bats, flying foxes and cassowaries. Slit gongs usually have *dshambu* names. Members of a clan are forbidden to kill birds of their own totem lest the group be afflicted by illness and death. In case of a clan internal conflict a man may proclaim a taboo on a specific activity by invoking his *dshambu*; this is binding for all clan members until the conflict

[65] Especially in initiations, see p.167.

[66] The list I recorded differs from that of Kaberry (1941: 254) in different respects. In my opinion the divergences are not due to the cultural change that has swept the area since the time of her fieldwork. I believe it has more to do with the fact that descent is not a fixed concept among the Abelam.

Table 1: Classification of the Clans and their Attributes

kim	*amei*	*dshambu*	*dshambu-nyingga*	*nggwal*	*baba* (male)	*baba* (female)
Mainggegim	Wapinda	Kwandshing	Kwandshing-tibu	Wanke	Galigat	Kagatik
Uitikim	Wapinda	Kwandshing	Kwandshing-tibu	Bira	Galigat	Kagatik
Magnapate	Wapinda/ Suapel	Wama	Kwalmbongga	Sagulas	Kumun	Ulpi
Kundigim	Kaumbul/ Mapme	Nyimbya	Nyimbyangga	Sagulas	Inela	
Yapitigim	Kaumbul	Kurpag	Gambatimain	Imagwate	Gelaue	Katotagwa
Dshamapate	Kaumbul	Gelaue	Rambangga	Imagwate	Gelaue	Wutemein
Nyalmakim	Numbunggen / Kaumbul	Wora	Yapingga	Katu	Gelaue	Babawora
Luimogim	Ndunyinggi	Kumun	Kumunsaige	Sagulas	Kumun	Kwandshetagwa / Moulepuka
Smoigim	Ndunyinggi kwale (upper) baba / tagu (lower)	Kandi Kwaretagwa	Kumunsaige	Sagulas	Mando Kandi	Babeinde Moulepuka
Koranggim	Ndunyinggi / Mairagwa	Kwandshe	Masha	Sugurumbum / Bani	Kumun	Kandi
Dshiknikim	Ndunyinggi	Kumun	Kumunsaige	Mairambun	Kumun	Kwandshetagwa
Atogim	Yambusaki	Paal	Paal	Tipmanggero	Bonebel	Ulma
Mutagwakim	Yambusaki	Paal	Paal / Paalentsak	Tipmanggero	Benggrap / Bonebel / Kwatnggile	Ulma
Waignapate	Yambusaki	Paal	Paal	Tipmanggero	Bonebel / Kwatnggile	Ulma
Buknisuagim	Yambusaki	Wora	Yapingga	Manggyale / Tipmanggero	Gelaue	
Nyambi-suagim	Yambusaki / Mapme	Nyameo	Kamangwate	Tipmanggero	Kwatnggile	Ulma
Kwatmogim	Mairagwa	Wora / Gelaue	Ramba	Manggyale	Kwatnggile / Benggrap	Ulma
Nunggigim	Kaumbul	Maingge	Mainggetibu	Sagulas (Kaumbul)	Uremaingge	Luagus
	Dshanggungge / Baigu / Suapel			Windu / Benggram (all the other hamlets)		

	wapinyan	*mbale*	*wasa*	*wale* (river)	*wale* (pool)	**Notes**
	Nggilendu	Marambu	Kipakwandshing	Marambu		Nggwalndu's wife given as Danggulanggyan. *Mbale* together with Smoigim: Daumo
	Yerukwa (Kikwa)	Suanggele	Agguambal	Marambu		Uitikim and Mainggegim are said to belong together
	Yeyuwi	Malkapi	Wasakumun		Ulpi / Ramuko	Yeyuwi became *nggwalndu* in Suapel
	Windu	Kolekuk	Kaumoule	Maregumbun	Wuimo	*baba*: partly inconsistent information; Inela and Uangguatagwa mentioned
	Kyagolagin	Wuinbamu	Gelein	Lutma		
	Kyagolagin	Wuimbamu	Tsimbukwaru	Kweimbe		
	Bira	Suanggele	Wora	Upunggilmo		
	Butukwe / Kagwaragwa	Yapite	Kumun / Nggilegware	Atoleri	Yabumi	Sagulas' wife is called Laui
		Suanggele	Amakandi	Mando	Garangewi / Babeinde	Tagu-Smoigim: male *baba*: Kandi; female: Monlepuka. Kwale-Smoigim: male *baba*: Mando; female: Babeinde *dshambu*: Kwaretagwa
	Ragapa Butukwe	Suanggele / Yapite	Nyimalik	Atoleri / Mando	Nyimalik	Koranggim is said to belong to Smoigim / Luimogim
	Butukwe / Kagwaragwa	Yapite	Kumun	Gambaningwa / Umbunwa. Markulugo	Ulma	Sugurumbun said to be father, Mairambun the son
	Rigimbil	Ganyamo	Paal			
	Maninggral Worunggral	Rimui Ulma	Kwantnggile Paal	Markulugo	Rimui	Kwatnggile, Bonebel and Ulma are also *wale*. Mutagwakim is related with Koranggim and Atogim.
	Yarakakigwa / Salauyen	Ganyamo	Paal	Markulugo	Ulma	Tipmanggero's wife is called Kwasepaing; Waignapate said to have emerged from Atogim.
	Worunggral / Maninggral	Ganyamo	Wora Paal	Ramurabu	Ulma	The Buknisuagim are related with the Kwatmogim
		Ganyamo	Paal Tsirige	Wuigno / Dangguko	Ulma	
	Mundagein	Ganyamo	Rombel	Ntsatgo	Uasamigo Soali Guiamel	
		Taurip	Wasakumun			

has been resolved. When a person invokes such a taboo, *dshambukut*, he identifies himself with his totem bird by calling out in public the name of his *dshambu*, for example, "I am an eagle". Through *dshambukut* a man can also annul his marriage. In song, men's personal names are often replaced by reference to their *dshambu*.

dshambu-nyingga: 'Leaf totem' – Clan-specific totems comprising distinct leaves. These may not be used to wrap food in (as done with other leaves)[67] as this could bring on harm, sickness or even death. Leaf totems are especially prominent in the context of building a new ceremonial house, where each *kim* is responsible for covering one strip of the roof with sago-thatched panels. To mark the different sections assigned to the various clans *dshambu-nyingga* are tied to the roof battens. *Dshambu-nyingga* are also used to invoke taboos. For example, if a man destroys his ceremonial pot (from which men drink yam soup during feasts) out of grief or anger about a recent death and then plants his *dshambu-nyingga*, it means that no more feasts can be held involving the ritual moieties, until the man and his ritual partner (*sambera*) stage a ceremonial exchange of pigs; on the occasion the man must first trample on his *dshambu-nyingga* and then tear it out of the ground.

nggwal (*nggwalndu*): literal meaning: grand-father. The term is used for the large, wooden anthropomorphic, reclining sculptures that are kept in the ceremonial house as well as for the large painted faces on the façades of spirit houses. They are not considered as clan founders or culture heroes; still, they are regarded as beings that are intimately linked to one or several *kim*. These spirit beings are believed to reside in the carved *nggwalndu* figures only during special events (particularly during initiations). They are summoned by the sound of the slit gongs. As soon as they detect the smell of pigs being singed over the fire they come to dwell in the wooden figures. All *nggwalndu* figures are male. Nevertheless, occasionally I heard mention of the wife of *nggwalndu*.

baba: the term refers to the woven helmet masks (see Hauser-Schäublin 1984: 335-337). There are male masks, called *kiau-baba*, as well as female masks, *narambaba*. *Kiau-baba* are beings that like to fight, *narambaba* embody peaceful spirit beings.

wapinyan: literal meaning: yam child. These are small anthropomorphic upright, wooden figures that are kept in the spirit house. *Wapinyan* are looked upon as the children of *nggwalndu*. A term with almost the same meaning is *kalamandshe*. *Wapinyan* are predominantly male.

mbale: literal meaning: pig. When killing an enemy, a warrior utters the pig's *kim*-affiliated name. The same is done when the men probe the growth of long ceremonial yams. Hereby the grower digs a small hole into the side of the mound where the yam has been planted to see how far down the tuber has grown. The clan-specific pigs are always ferocious boars (*karambale*). When a man goes to battle he identifies himself with his *mbale* and shows this by holding a boar-tusk decoration (*kara-ut*) between his teeth. The name of an *mbale* may be given to a man or bestowed on a pig that has been reared in the village. Such a pig cannot be exchanged beyond the village boundary, in other words, it must be killed in the context of a village-internal feast.

wasa: literal meaning: dog. The Abelam use a single term to designate the clan-specific pig and dog emblems: *wasak*. Dog names were used in earlier days at times of war to notify the sentries that it was time for a change of guard or that food was being brought to them. For example, the call for the dog by the name of *paal* was: "Paal, *was, was, was*."

I was told that there also existed *amei*-related dog names, for instance, *paal* for Yambusaki, *amakindi* for Ndunyinggi, *marambu* for Wapinda. These were only ever used in war, whereas village-based dog names were also used in everyday life.

wale: these are spirit beings that dwell in streams and rivers. *Wale* names are used to designate certain clan-affiliated locations in streams and rivers that are inhabited by spirit beings of the same name; mainly along the Pasi River, occasionally along the Ulagem.

wale: spirit beings inhabiting swamps, pools or springs. Their names are also used to designate the small waterholes that are fed by underground sources. Water from these pools is used in the cultivation of ceremonial yam to

[67] One day one of my closest associates had the shock of his life when, taking a bite from the beetle pepper I had offered him, he noticed the leaf which the pepper had been packed in, thinking it was his *dshambu-nyingga* leaf. Only when he inspected the leaf more closely did he see, to his visible relief, that it was a very similar but actually different species.

make the tubers grow large. Both types of *wale*, i.e. those inhabiting streams as well those living in stagnant waters, are said to become manifest in the shape of *ndua*-pythons; in this case they are addressed by their *wale* name.

Comment: Although just about all the 50 Kalabu hamlets have a public ground of their own, some of them even an *amei* with a ceremonial house, the villagers described only very few places as real ceremonial grounds. In Kalabu II these are Wapinda, Kaumbul and Numbunggen. The hamlet Suapel, actually located on land owned by Kalabu I, is considered a subsidiary settlement, while Mapme (Kundigim and Nyambisuagim) is classified as a joint satellite settlement of both village halves. In Kalabu I, Ndunyinggi and Yambusaki rank as main *amei*. Kalabu I's offshoot settlement, Kumunggwande, comparable to Suapel in Kalabu II, was not listed; instead Mairagwa was mentioned, apparently a settlement that was jointly founded by Ndunyinggi and Yambusaki (Koranggim and Kwatogim). The four original hamlets, which already played a leading role in the context of first settlement, are clearly the most important. Ascription of clans to the various *amei* is quite straightforward. Mainggegim, Uitikim and Magnapate are reckoned to Wapinda (and the satellite Suapel); Kundigim, Yabitigim and Dshamapate belong to Kaumbul (and the offshoot Mapme); Nyalmakim to Numbunggen and, in second place, to Kaumbul, probably the original place of settlement; Luimogim, Dshiknikim, Koranggim and Smoigim belong first and foremost to Ndunyinggi, while Atogim, Mutagwakim, Waignapate, Buknisuagim and Nyambisuagim are connected with Yambusaki.

Contrary to the spontaneously asserted links between clans, in which no clear distinction between Kaumbul and Wapinda clans was made, closer analysis reveals that clans are primarily localized units. Usually an *amei* is owned by more than one clan. Kaumbul is owned by Kundigim and Yabitikim; Wapinda by Magnapate and Mainggegim; Ndunyinngi by Luimogim/Dshiknikim and Smoigim, and Yambusaki by Atogim/Waignapate and Buknisuagim. It goes to show that, as a rule, always two clans crosscutting clan alliances are involved. The sharing of an *amei* by (mainly) two clans falls in with the local division into *kwale tibit*, 'the upper half,' and *baba tibit*, 'the lower half.' This division is actually the weakest form of distinction and only comes to the fore in hamlet-internal disputes. Nevertheless, the two entities are of relevance insofar as in affairs

Table 2. Land Ownership of the Individual Clans in the Hamlets

Mainggegim	Uranggemel, Malpenamu, Moenggwa, Wapinda, Bindshinar, Matungge, Wamolanggo, Kualeng, Wallapia
Uitikim	Wapinda, Tamangge
Magnapate	Wapinda, Ulpe, Wendanggi, Wamdangge, Malpimbil
Kundigim	Kaumbul, Uitagu, Nyambak, Mapme, Yamami, Wallapia, Dshanggungge
Yapitigim	Toletagu, Kaumbul, Tuindshere, Kualeng, Wamolanggo
Dshamapate	Wuembatik, Songganggu, Ndsherednye, Malpimbil
Nyalmakim	Uranggemel, Labungge, Songganggu, Numbunggen, Pelkeire, Yembigo, Banggiora.
Luimogim	Ndunyinggi, Dshanggungge, Glossa, Kumunggwande, Suapel, Digute, Wendanggi, Wallapia, Walembil, Yanggula.
Smoigim	Tipmabel, Ndunyinggi, Kamogwa, Uraskil, Dshanggungge, Nyambak, Wallapia, Wamdangge
Koranggim	Kalanggua, Kwandshesagi, Mairagwa, Kamabil, Wallapia
Dshiknikim	Ndunyinggi
Sagnakim	Uraskil
Atogim	Yambusaki, Nyambak, Wendanggi, Wamdangge, Malpimbil, Yanggula
Mutagwakim	Abaloe
Waignapate	Yambusaki, Dingge, Nyambak, Katndshanggu, Wendaggi, Malpimbil
Buknisuagim	Dshanggungge, Yambusaki, Katndshanggu, Malpimbil
Nyambisuagim	Apinggwande, Yamami, Mapme(?)
Kwatmogim	Mairagwa
Nunggigim	Baigu, Dshanggungge
Kolambigim (from Lonem)	Malpimbil

involving the village as a whole, each of the two clans selects and allocates space to members of other clans on the basis of clan alliances to participate in the disputes and festivities respectively.

A closer look at land ownership relations within the village[68] reveals that certain clans possess definitely more land than others. The most powerful landowning units include the clans Luimogim[69] (and Korangim), Mainggegim, and Kundigim[70] (with Nyinggigim). Inquiry into land ownership relations usually also reflects which clan has established a satellite settlement in which location and reveals which clans belong to the first settlers and which to the later arrivals insofar as the latter only own land in the secondary settlements, but not in the four main centres. These later arrivals include the Nunggigim, who are associated with the Kundigim; the Koranggim[71] (affiliated with the Luimogim); the Nyambisuagim (with the Buknisuagim); the Dshamapate (with the Yabitigim) and the Mutagwakim (with the Atogim). In two cases land ownership and *amei* association are not the basis of the clans' present strength: instead it is their size and/or the fact that they have very strong personalities in their ranks: the first case refers to the Nyalmakim; this clan is not only numerically strong, it also has in its ranks one of the most prominent artists who is known and respected far and wide; the other is Kwatogim, actually quite a small clan today, but furnished with strong personalities who are in a position to show strength and autonomy during public events, particularly during village disputes.

As far as the *dshambu* of the landowning clans in the hamlets of the four main *amei* are concerned, Kaumbul, Wapinda and Ndunyinggi display no consistent pattern; only the clans centred on Yambusaki share the same *dshambu,* in this case *paal* (hornbill); at the same time one should mention that paal is also the *dshambu* of Kalabu I as such. Its counterpart in Kalabu II is *wama* (white cockatoo). On the other hand, according to the early migration stories *wama* is also regarded as the *dshambu* of Kalabu as a whole. The two village halves also have separate *dshambu-nyingga*: in Kalabu I it is *kwambi,* in Kalabu II *aupa* (both are types of greens). Magnapate was the only clan that mentioned *wama* as its immediate *dshambu*. Otherwise, differentiation appears to be prominent, especially in Kalabu II. For the Nyalmakim and Buknisuagim Kaberry (1941: 254) recorded not only the same *dshambu* but also the same *nggwalndu.* My own records show for Nyalmakim and Buknisuagim identical *dshambu-nyingga* and *kiau-baba*, but the de facto land ownership relations suggest that they have different *amei*-associated *nggwalndu,* a fact that was confirmed by my main informants. The Buknisuagim not only feature attributes that point towards Kalabu II, in the opposite direction the Nyalmakim's *mbale* suggests affinity with the ceremonial ground of Ndunyinggi in Kalabu I. My field data also show that Nyalmakim and Buknisuagim entertained marriage relations. At the time of fieldwork the clearest example of this relationship was a man of about fifty. He was a prominent artist who not only knew a great deal about the history of the Buknisuagim, his mother's clan, but also held rights to the group's landed estate.

As mentioned in passing above, the *nggwalndu* are associated with distinct *amei.* The *nggwalndu* of Wapinda are Sagulas, Wanke and Bira; Kaumbul has Sagulas, Imagwate and Katu (jointly with Numbunggen); Nduyinggi profess Sagulas and (jointly with Mairagwa) Sugurumbun; Yambusaki has Tipmanggero and Manggyale. Everyone agreed that Sagulas was the joint *nggwalndu* of Kalabu I and II, a fact that is also evidenced by the early migration histories in which a distinction is made between 'Sagulas the father' in Wapinda/Kaumbul, and 'Sagulas the son' in Ndunyinggi. Clan relations also find expression in the names of their *kiau-baba*. With six signifiers in common, Maingeggim and Uitikim appear to be closely related. Dshamapate, Yabitigim and Nyalmakim, which people described as belonging together independent of the above listed signifiers, share the same male *baba* called Gelaue; in the case of the Dshamapate the *baba's* name is the same as that of their *dshambu*. The commonality of the Yambusaki clans is reflected in the shared names of their male, and above all female, *baba* (with the exception of Buknisuagim). The other female *baba* names disclose no further

[68] Since Kalabu owns extensive land in the surrounding hills where the gardens are located, it was impossible to record all ownership relations.

[69] Kaberry (1971: 47) describes Luimogim as being an offshoot of Smoigim; my data suggest the opposite.

[70] According to Kaberry (1971: 48) the Kundigim are of Arapesh origin; here too I do not agree.

[71] Kaberry (1971: 47) maintains that the Koranggim are an offshoot of the Smoigim.

relationships. In the context of *wapinyan* names it is striking that the Nyalmakim use the same name for their *wapinyan* Bira as the Uitikim do for their *nggwalndu.* Furthermore, Yeyuwi, which Kaberry (1941: 254) lists as the Magnapate *nggwalndu* but which I identify as the name of their *wapinyan*, serves as the *nggwalndu* name in the satellite settlement of Suapel. We have a similar case with the Kundigim's and Nyinggigim's *wapinyan* by the name of Windu which was occasionally said to be a *nggwalndu* name (belonging to the Nyinggigim). Since none of the *nggwalndu* figures seem to be associated with specific stories of origin – with exception of the historical Sagulas carving (**pl. 19**) – it appears that their names are interchangeable with the *wapinyan* appellations, at least to a certain extent; both are represented by anthropomorphic figures. In fact, in other villages, Yeyuwi and Benggrap, for example, are quite common *nggwal* names. Moreover, the fact that *nggwalndu* and *wapinyan* belong to the same category is borne out by the frequently made reference that the *wapinyan* are the *nggwalndu's* children.

Providing that they are not unique, the names of *mbale* occasionally reappear in the context of the *wale* that are associated with pools in the forest (as in the case of the Mainggegim, Mutagwakim and Dshiknikim); sometimes the *wale* carry the same names as the female *baba* (e.g., all the Yambusaki clans as well as Smoigim and Magnapate). Next to that, the Yambusaki *kiau-baba*, Kwatnggile and Bonebel, also figure as *wale*, as does Mando among the Smoigim. I am aware that this multitude of relationships is rather confusing to the reader, but in the course of the study I hope to be able to unravel the puzzle, at least to a certain extent.

As I have tried to show, the various clans are complexly interrelated on the basis of the different signifiers. Some of the interrelations are the result of fission, where descent groups split off from the original founder clans, or as in the case of the Luimogim/Dshiknikim, of adoption. In other cases, smaller groups of different origin joined to form alliances, at times even merging to become a unified *kim*, for example through intense inter-marriage, only to split up again later when the pressure of population growth led to internal conflicts; Buknisuagim and Nyalmakim may be an example at hand. The Nunggigim clan, originally formed by people from Kalabu and Dshame, enjoys a considerable degree of autonomy; it has certain features in common with the Kundigim, for example, with regard to their *wapinyan* (Windu).

Single clans take over responsibility for different kinds of crops. For example, the Luimogim/Smoigim are responsible for the growth of the short yam (ka). They are consulted when the crops fail to grow properly, due to their contact with the ka-spirit house in Waignakim where the 'spirit' (or 'soul') of the short yam (in shape of a stone) is kept and attended to. In this fashion the different clans are associated with various food crops including edible sugarcane, bananas and litchi (*litchi chinensis*). From a Kalabu perspective all the various 'yam spirit houses' are located outside the village, in other settlements. When need arises, that is, in case of the danger of crop failure or in anticipation of an especially abundant harvest, the clan responsible for the crop in question sends an envoy carrying money and shell rings to the appropriate village. Apart from 'spirit house' connections, the respective clans also command secret magic songs and a broad knowledge of growth-enhancing substances and the way to apply them. Moreover, each clan also owns at least one special stone which is used for smaller yam rituals.

Since every *kim* is responsible for a specific crop, the clans are mutually dependent; next to this internal network, each clan entertains relations to another village, namely to the place where the 'yam spirit house' of its specific crop is located. Kalabu is exceptional in this respect, since it has two such special houses, one for yam, the other for taro; they are located in the hamlet of Kaumbul and its satellite settlement (Baigu) respectively, and are under the care of the Yabitigim and Kundigim.

Mutual dependency between the various groups on the basis of crop responsibility enhances cohesion between the clans, not only with regard to the cultivation of the long ceremonial yam but, as my informants frequently pointed out, also with respect to the less prestigious, everyday crops. Thus the village, contrary to the parochial interests of its partially discrete clans, also constitutes a cooperative and autonomous unit, equipped with a superordinate authority that is respected by all and which finds expression in the recognition of a common nggwalndu. The village *dshambu* and *nggwalndu* play a prominent role in the context of ceremonial food exchanges with other villages;

the correspondent agencies in the village halves, i.e., Kalabu I and II, have the same function in village-internal competitive exchanges. Given their importance in village exchanges, the people are usually also well acquainted with the main signifiers of neighbouring communities, especially with their *dshambu:* Malmba: *paal* (hornbill), Kimbanggwa: *dsham* (a wasp), Maprik: *kwandshetagwa* (flying fox), Nyamikim: *tshelagwip* (a night bird), Waignakim: *saigetagwa* (cassowary), Mamblep: *maingge* (a parrot), Bainyik: *ndua* (python), Lonem: *kuyen tshalenggi* (tree kangaroo).

Affiliations: Constraints and Choice

Up to now I have dealt with the clan relations on a rather high level of abstraction. Here I change my perspective and review where Abelam individuals stand, and how they operate, within the clan system. For this purpose I draw on a few case studies. As I explained above, all tracts of land – both within and outside the village – are assigned to *kim*. Perennial shrubs, most of them planted generations ago, mark the boundary between the single tracts. In principle only clan members are allowed to inhabit and cultivate the land of their specific *kim.* In theory – that is, according to Abelam reasoning – a child belongs to the *kim* of his or her father, and upon marriage women go to settle in their husband's hamlet. However, as to be expected, the stipulated rules are hardly consistent with the very much more complex social reality, a fact that I quickly came to realize when I compared the data I had compiled in the weeks and months before. Thus, for example, I noticed that people would claim to belong to a specific *kim*, on one occasion, and give the name of a different clan, on the next. In a number of cases I was able to work out why people gave differing answers concerning their *kim* affiliation. The following case studies help to explain:

Case 1: Kamboiragwa

Kamboiragwa's forefathers were members of the Smoigim clan (Kalabu I). A long time ago it happened that a Buknisuagim man had no son of his own, so he offered the Smoigim a shell ring in exchange for a boy in adoption. The boy had just been born, and his mother was still residing in her 'birth hut'. The Smoigim agreed and the boy was adopted. Kamboiragwa and his brother Mbalesibe are the direct descendants. They lived on Buknisuagim land, had their gardens there and also used the sago that belonged to this clan. During a quarrel a 'real' Buknisuagim man once accused them of not being real Buknisuagim upon which Mbalesibe moved away and went to settle on Smoigim land. Kamboiragwa stayed with the Buknisuagim but he often got to hear, especially when quarrels arose, that he had no real claim to the land he was living on and that he could be expelled at any time. Depending on the situation, Kamboiragwa also attached importance to a further relationship: as his father had died young, Kamboiragwa had been brought up by his mother's brother, a man called Agilanggui of the Mainggegim clan (Kalabu II), who lived in Wapinda. Kamboiragwa's mother arranged for her son to take part in initiations in Wapinda, mustering the required pigs and shell rings herself in place of her deceased husband.

For this reason Kamboiragwa still belongs to the *amei* of Wapinda, and not to Yambusaki, the Buknisuagim ceremonial ground. Asked why he had not chosen to stay with the Mainggegim for good, his mother's and mother's brother's clan, he explained that his mother's brother and his relatives had failed to help him raise resources for his wife's bride wealth,[72] which is why he did not want his children to be born in Wapinda. Although Kalabu I and II rank as potential rivals, occasionally putting Kamboiragwa in an awkward situation (not fully belonging to either of the two), his membership in the same *ara* (ceremonial moiety) as his mother's brother and his Buknisuagim relatives usually helped to bridge local antagonism. Thus, depending on circumstances, Kamboiragwa referred to himself as either a Smoigim, a Buknisuagim or a Mainggegim man, which is why people sometimes derogatively called him a 'middle man', a man who belonged nowhere. Kamboiragwa's grown-up son, unhappy with this ambiguous status, stated his intention of definitely joining the Smoigim (also his mother's brother's *kim*). When after an amorous affair – he was already married, mind you – he decided to take a second wife, the Mainggegim gave him refuge and promised him land for a new house for himself and his new wife. Kamboiragwa and his wife, expecting having to pay a substantial bride wealth, were adamantly against the new

[72] He never gave his brothers-in-law shell rings for his wife, a fact that she often holds against him.

union; equally the new wife's kin. As her relatives fetched home the young woman by force one day, nothing came of the marriage, at least not immediately. At the same time, voices were raised saying that the Mainggegim should lay claim to children born on their land. The claim was stated in general terms at first, but it soon became clear that they were being levelled at Kamboiragwa's descendants, specifically his grandchildren. By the time of my third stay in Kalabu in 1983, the marriage to the second wife had factually been contracted although payment of the bride wealth was still pending. The wife however did not live on Mainggegim land, but with the parents of her (then absent) husband on land that belonged to the Buknisuagim.

Case 2: Waina

Waina was the son of Wambusugu, a man who had originally been associated with both the Waignapate and Buknisuagim, but in the end had opted for the Waignapate clan. Waina's mother's stepsister (a Smoigim woman) had no children of her own, so Waina was given to her. This woman had remained on Smoigim land even after her marriage. Waina's biological mother, born into the Mainggegim clan and orphaned as a child, was adopted by a Smoigim man shortly after her father died. Waina himself finally settled on Smoigim land, after a brief intermezzo with the Buknisuagim with whom his father once had been affiliated and on whose land he had lived. Waina, in other words, was 'following the mother's path'. When his father, Wambusugu, was on his deathbed he handed to Waina an old *baba* mask from Bainyik, the Waignapate's place of origin, and told him the clan's migration history; but he did not pass on the story that contained critical aspects of clan history to his two other sons who, like himself, actually belonged to the Waignapate. The reason for his decision was because he did not deem his other two sons suitable to become guardians of their clan's history.

Case 3: Tambandshoe

Tambandshoe once said: "My first thought goes to the Agotim, my second to the Magnapate, my third to the Yabitigim." He explained this as follows: one of his ancestors, an Agotim man, married a Magnapate woman. Together they had a son, Iropel. The parents died, leaving Iropel an orphan. His relatives decided that he should go to live with the Magnapate. Iropel, who changed his name to Tigabel in his new clan, later had a son called Boindshambi who himself had a child called Mimpapi who, in turn, had children that were divided between the clans. Three of them went back to the Agotim, the firstborn remained among the Magnapate. Tambandshoe's father was one of the children who returned to the Agotim.

His mother was a Yabitigim woman. Today Tambandshoe lives on Magnapate land because his eldest brother had left the village for good, so Tambandshoe had to take his place. His two brothers remained with the Agotim. During our research period one of the brothers, after living for many years on Agotim land, moved to the Luimogim, 'following the path' of his deceased adoptive mother. Tambandshoe claimed that he was entitled to clear land and use the sago palms of both the Agotim and Magnapate; to Yabitigim land, however, he only held right with permission of the clan elders.

Particularly the last example shows that a man with proven links to various clans has at least temporary usufructuary rights to the estates of various *kim*. By the same token, the different clans may demand services from him, for example, in the form of contributions of pigs and yams for ritual exchanges or shell rings for bride wealth payments. Often clans ask for more than mere material contributions or services and demand children for adoption. In such a case the child receives its name from the adoptive father, lives with the adoptive parents for months or even years but occasionally returns to stay with his or her real parents. As Kamboiragwa (Case 1) failed to pay bride wealth for his wife Numbu, her brother later demanded Kamboiragwa's daughter in return. But since Numbu only gave birth to two children and felt very close to her only daughter, Lona, the latter was allowed to spend much of her childhood and youth with her real mother; but when Lona married in 1978, the greater part of her shell ring bride wealth went to Numbu's brother, and not to Kamboiragwa.

In reverse, Kamboiragwa laid claim to one of his brother-in-law's daughters. The girl, who was about 11 at the time, had spent most of her childhood with her real mother, but when Kamboiragwa's daughter Lona got married, he demanded that the girl come to stay with him. At first, the little girl kept running back to her real parents and occasionally even refused to

help Numbu with work in the garden, otherwise a daughter's normal duty. In 1981 the girl was living with her adoptive parents, apparently content. By 1983, however, she had returned to stay with her real parents, possibly motivated by the fact that Kamboiragwa's daughter had left her husband after being abused repeatedly, and because he had refused to take part in communal work as demanded by his father-in-law. By 1982/83 some of the shell rings Kamboiragwa's brother-in-law had received at marriage had been returned to the husband's family. Kamboiragwa explained that he had given Lona's daughter a name from the Buknisuagim estate, which is why the child belonged to him and not to Lona's husband's family.

As far as adoptions are concerned it frequently occurs that a boy returns to the land of his real father at some point, usually after quarrels with his adoptive kin. I discussed this issue with some men, later also with a few women; one of the views I got to hear goes as follows: "You can ask a man for betel nuts and tobacco; you take them and consume them. But children are not the same as betel nuts and tobacco; they are something big, something you don't give away for good, because you never know how your child will fare later."

One woman said: "If a boy has a quarrel with a *kim* or even several *kim,* his father's *kim* is the only safe haven. His adoptive father's *kim* no longer counts. Nothing is stronger than your real, your physical father." She then went on to underpin her point with a few examples.

Cases where boys are given to the matrilateral *kim* in compensation for the mother's change of clan affiliation at marriage are well documented although I never actually tried to quantify the number of adoptions by the mother's, or, to be more precise, the mother's brother's clan. On the basis of the many cases I know of, I estimate that roughly 30 percent of all married couples with children assign one child to the mother's clan, at least on a temporary basis. Of all cases,[73] matrilateral adoptions appear to be the most stable and lasting. In other words: in cases of matrilateral adoption the chances that the adopted boy, when grown up, will return to his natal *kim* are distinctly lower than in other instances. Moreover, it is not unheard of that adult men choose to switch to their 'mother's place' and settle down on the land of her *kim*. This often occurs when the mother or mother's brother falls ill or dies.

Ceremonial Moieties and Exchange Partnerships

As the above examples have shown, a man's multifaceted *kim* relations[74] – for women they are of much less significance – often find expression in everyday life in so far as a man cultivates different gardens with members of diverse *kim*. Thus he may have a garden together with men of his own *kim*, but also cultivate a plot in a garden that he shares with men from a different clan. These multilateral clan relations are often regulated by membership to a ceremonial moiety, *ara*, as in the case of Kamboiragwa. These ceremonial moieties, which stand in a younger brother / elder brother relationship and termed *numanara* and *waignara* respectively, are not localized. They crosscut village halves as well as clan boundaries. One of the key functions of the ceremonial moieties is to stage competitive yam exchanges and initiations, with one *ara* initiating the members of the other half, and vice versa. Without this interleaving of the two *ara* – the term actually refers to plaited palm-leaf sitting mats – Abelam ritual life would not exist, not only as far as initiations are concerned but also with regard to the yam feasts. Next to the initiation ceremonies, pivotal to the beliefs about the beyond, both spatial and temporal, the two moieties regularly engage in ritual competitions in which the two *ara* try to surpass each other with prestations of crops, pigs and shell rings. Because so many of a man's affairs are regulated by his *ara,* association with either one or the other moiety is unambiguous, unlike *kim* membership. I never came across a case where a man with close relationships to several clans on both sides of the *ara* divide said he belonged to both moieties. Tambandshoe, for example, belonged to the *waignara*, contrary to his father and brothers. As far as I could tell, brothers who are members in different *ara* never supported each other in yam exchanges,

[73] Lea (1964: 50) gives an adoption rate of 16.9 percent for Yenigo and 19.4 percent for Bengragrum.

[74] I have left aside the issue of kinship terminology (see Kaberry 1941: 251) because the use of kin terms depends to a large extent on social context, in other words, which clan relations the speaker wishes to emphasize. In everyday communication people hardly ever make use of kin terms.

but only those of their own moiety. But, at the same time, one should add that they never faced each other as immediate ritual partners in exchanges.[75]

In principle, the *ara* are endogamous units, which means that spouses usually belong to the same moiety, but to different *kim*. Of course there are exceptions to this rule. But if a daughter marries outside her ritual moiety her father will demand a significantly higher bride wealth than if she was to marry a man from her own *ara*. The reason for this is that her future children, especially her sons, would be enhancing the strength of the opposite moiety, their father's *ara*. Moreover, during the ritual exchanges between the two moieties – yam or pig feasts (**pl. 50**) or contests involving cooked food where the food gifts are openly displayed on the ceremonial ground, arranged according to *ara* (**pl. 51**) – it would mean that a woman would be compelled to support her husband, and not her brothers and fathers as she actually should.

It occasionally occurs that members of the same *kim* belong to different *ara*. This happens when large clans (often after internal conflicts) break into different segments, as is the case with Kundigim which splits into *tipma* (coconut) and *nyinde* (those who came later). As in the case of the Smoigim clan that is divided into the *tagu*-Smoigim and the *nggwale*-Smoigim, clan division may entail that the lineages form independent alliances with other clans from Kalabu I and Kalabu II. Links to different village halves came into play above all in war when two segments of the same *kim* supported opposite sides.[76] Clan segmentation is usually followed by a switch of one lineage to the opposite moiety, as happened among the Luimogim, Agotim and Nyalmakim. But in such a case the two groups rarely enter into a direct ritual exchange partnership.

There is no evidence to show that *kim* and *ara* membership is directly interdependent, but certain tendencies do become apparent. Reviewing my material on *ara* relationships at the individual level, that is, between two ritual partners (*sambera*) it shows that committed sambera relationships exist conspicuously often between clans, or clan segments, that are closely related on the strength of historical ties; the Waignapate and Atogim of Yambusaki are an example at hand, also the Kundigim and Nunggigim. The same goes for the Smoigim lineage allied with Kalabu II; here there exists a close *sambera* link to the clan that is spatially located closest to it, in other words, the Mainggegim.

The spatial aspect seems to be of special significance insofar as an *amei* is not always represented by two separate clans, but invariably by both *ara*. In Numbunggen, for example, where only the Nyalmakim clan owns land, there are two lineages belonging to different moieties. Moreover, in the majority of cases, ritual partners reside in the same or in adjacent hamlets; seen from this perspective, the division of an *amei* into *kwale tibit* (upper half) and *baba tibit* (lower half) appears in a new light. Cases where direct *sambera* relationships crosscut village halves are very rare; this suggests, at least at first sight, that these ritual bonds constitute spatially bounded competitive relationships not exceeding the personal and hamlet level.

In this context a further relationship called *ndugendu* (literally: 'man-village-man') deserves mention; it refers to a close bond between two men belonging to the same *ara,* best translated as 'friendship'. Men in such a relationship share secrets with each other, support each other during competitive food exchanges and often have a garden together. Common clan membership is not a prerequisite. The relationship is passed on from father to son. Most of them go back several generations and once grew from a shared experience by two men who then became friends (for instance during a raid or in war). A wife calls her husband's friend *wuna ndu*, which means 'husband'; without having to be specially asked she gives him food when he comes to visit and looks after him, but sexual relationships are out of bounds although this is often a subject of banter.[77] When mention is

[75] See also Losche (1978: 2) on this. Losche says that occasionally a man could have exchange partners in both *ara*. Among the Western Abelam, the *ara* are not set apart on the basis of the elder brother / younger brother distinction but according to initiator / initiate instead.

[76] This is why Mainggegim and Smoigim have a common 'pig name', Daumo, see table on clan signifiers (Table 1, pp.24-25)

[77] For Yenigo, Lea (1964: 61) mentions the term *nauindu* (in Kalabu a synonymous but rarely used term for *ndugendu*) where it designates a predominantly sexual exchange relationship. For Kaberry (1941/42:91), *naui* is a relationship between two men born in the same year.

of a woman's *ndugendu* relationship it means she has a secret lover whom she meets only in the bush. Male *ndugendu* relationships must be viewed in the context of their *sambera* affiliation because, by implication, an individual fellowship between two *sambera* becomes a pair relationship.

As I hope to have made clear above, the ceremonial moieties not only crosscut *kim* and hamlets, but also village halves. Yet, it is not possible to identify or establish any kind of ordered pattern that shows specific *kim* and/or hamlets belonging to a distinct *ara*, not least because great care is placed on the circumstance that the two moieties remain numerically roughly equal. This is achieved, usually after long and intensive disputes, by having single members switch sides from the superior *ara* to the other side, until an approximate balance is achieved.[78] When I mentioned that there are only very few *sambera* relationships that extend beyond the village halves, this does not mean that they are not of significance. They actually are, not least because *ara* do not merely constitute an aggregate of individual relationships, the moieties, although not clan- or hamlet-bound, indeed represent a special aspect of social organization; in other words, they constitute social groups that step into joint action especially in the context of the preparation and staging of initiations. In competitive food exchanges the members of each *ara* support one another, but within limits. It can occur, for example, that the *waignara* of Kalabu I challenge the *numanara* of Kalabu II. In this case the members of the same *ara* in Kalabu I and Kalabu II respectively only support each other with contributions of food if the men are also linked by strong kin ties. Thus, for instance, my main assistant Waina often supported his eldest sister's husband by the name of Tambandshoe, who lived in the other village half, and vice versa. Since Tambandshoe's daughter had married across the moiety boundary, he often felt torn between supporting the members of his own *ara*, and helping his son-in-law. When, on the occasion of a ceremonial yam contest, Tambandshoe openly supported his son-in-law he got into serious trouble with his own *ara* partners, particularly with his brothers-in-law, to the effect that, in 1983, one of his affines, a direct exchange partner of his son-in-law, severed all ties to him.

This shows that exchange contests between opposite moieties of Kalabu I and Kalabu II involving support from *ara* co-members actually do occur, but within limits and never to the extent that would lead to a split between the two moieties of the same village half. The solidarity of village sections (i.e., Kalabu I and Kalabu II respectively) seems to have clear precedence over moiety allegiance because the former regulate land ownership. Incidentally, ceremonial moieties do not restrict activity to their own village. Ritual ties also exist between different villages but it appears that in this case the actual *ara* step back and the respective village halves take over the lead. Similar to the pattern of warfare where the enemies of Kalabu I were not necessarily the foes of Kalabu II, each village section has a ritual partner village of its own. This kind of relationship between separate villages is called *mbalwapi* (literally: 'pig-yam'). The term indicates what the focus of these exchange contests was.

From the above description of the historical migrations and the structure of local units, kin groups and clans it has become evident that Abelam villages face centrifugal forces that threaten to tear them apart, and centripetal forces that hold the village together. In the course of unrolling the historical background and the pattern of social organization I have tried to retain the Abelam perspective, sticking as closely as possible to the accounts the people gave me and the actual practice I was able to observe.

Commentary: The Maprik Area as a Region in Motion

To end this first chapter I take a look at the complex conditions and the interplay between competitive and cohesive forces that shape Abelam life from a different perspective. As the many migration histories go to show, the original Abelam settlement area lay further south, somewhere between the Sepik River and the most southerly foothills of the Prince Alexander Range. This knowledge is deeply rooted in Abelam consciousness. Due to other economic, i.e., subsistence, conditions we can surmise that Abelam social and cultural life was

[78] See also Losche (1978).

[79] On the basis of my ethnographic material I can say nothing about the time frame involved.

different then.[79] In collective Abelam memory, the sago palm features as a 'given' compared to horticulture and especially the cultivation of yam which they see as a comparatively recent and, above all, revolutionary development. While the sago palm has practically no significance in Abelam mythology,[80] compared to the Sawos,[81] some myths tell of the introduction of yam. Sago is still important to the Abelam since it provides the main source of food, together with bananas, in the period between the last planting and the first harvest of garden crops, but it does not have the same significance as it did for their forefathers who lived in the swampy grasslands to the south. In the course of the push northwards, into areas where sago palms are restricted to low-lying valley floors and where practically each tree has to be planted by hand – in contrast to the Iatmul and Sawos people who rarely ever plant sago palms since these grow naturally in the swampy environment – slash-and-burn agriculture and, in conjunction, an extensive method of land usage took over. Initially, shifting cultivation probably had a centrifugal impact on the settlement pattern, since the people needed far more land for their gardens each year as when they had subsisted on sago. Moreover, the people not only cleared land for the crops they used for immediate consumption, additional acreage was required to produce surplus taro, yam, sweet potato to be used as seed crops. Unlike the Iatmul settlements on the Sepik, which are more compact than the neighbouring Sawos villages to the north, the adjoining Wosera villages located in the grasslands and southernmost foothills form quite dispersed settlements, with the single hamlets operating almost as autonomous village communities.[82] It is only in the northern hill country, i.e., in the Abelam area, that at some point in time a process of integration seems to have set in, realigning the hamlets into a kind of superordinate village organization of higher complexity. This process was probably the result of increasing population pressure and incipient land shortage (which today is becoming critical). The accounts of internal quarrels and fights leading to the eviction or emigration of single clans or clan segments suggest that the source of the conflicts, at least to a certain extent, lay in the imbalance between growing population groups and decreasing natural resources (examples: conflicts over clean drinking water, intolerance towards groups such as the Suambugim settling in the immediate vicinity of Kalabu). Growing consciousness that groups expanding in size depend on an increasing acreage of arable land probably also explains the Abelam's forward push into fertile Arapesh territory to the north and west, leading to the partial expulsion of the sparse population residing in the area.

For strategic reasons and because the 'empty land' was continuously being occupied by 'incoming' groups, the Abelam began settling on steep hill ridges; here they had the advantage of view and its was easier to defend the long drawn-out village and the surrounding garden land. Conversely, hamlets that joined forces in war stood a better chance of successfully raiding a neighbouring village, driving off its inhabitants and occupying the land for themselves. In the final analysis, the interests of the settlement as a whole and those of its constituent, in many ways autonomous, social units were the same and this became manifest in the joint effort to defend the village. However, defence did not always mean active participation in war; sometimes single hamlets entertained friendly relations with the enemy of their own village, in which case they simply stayed out of the fight.

Without growing land shortage and rising population pressure,[83] a result of the switch from almost complete reliance on sago to a system of crop cultivation, the northern Abelam villages would probably never have developed in their present form. Still, in view of the often widely dispersed settlement pattern, the forces that hold the village together as a unit in structural terms are not immediately evident.

In summary, it shows that the Maprik area has experienced strong and frequent population movements over the last decades and centuries, with many kin groups splitting up

[80] Unlike their neighbours, the Sawos and the Iatmul, the Abelam have only very few myths. This absence of myths (especially with reference to ceremonial houses and initiations) may have to do with the insignificance of the principle of descent in social structure.

[81] See Schindlbeck (1980).

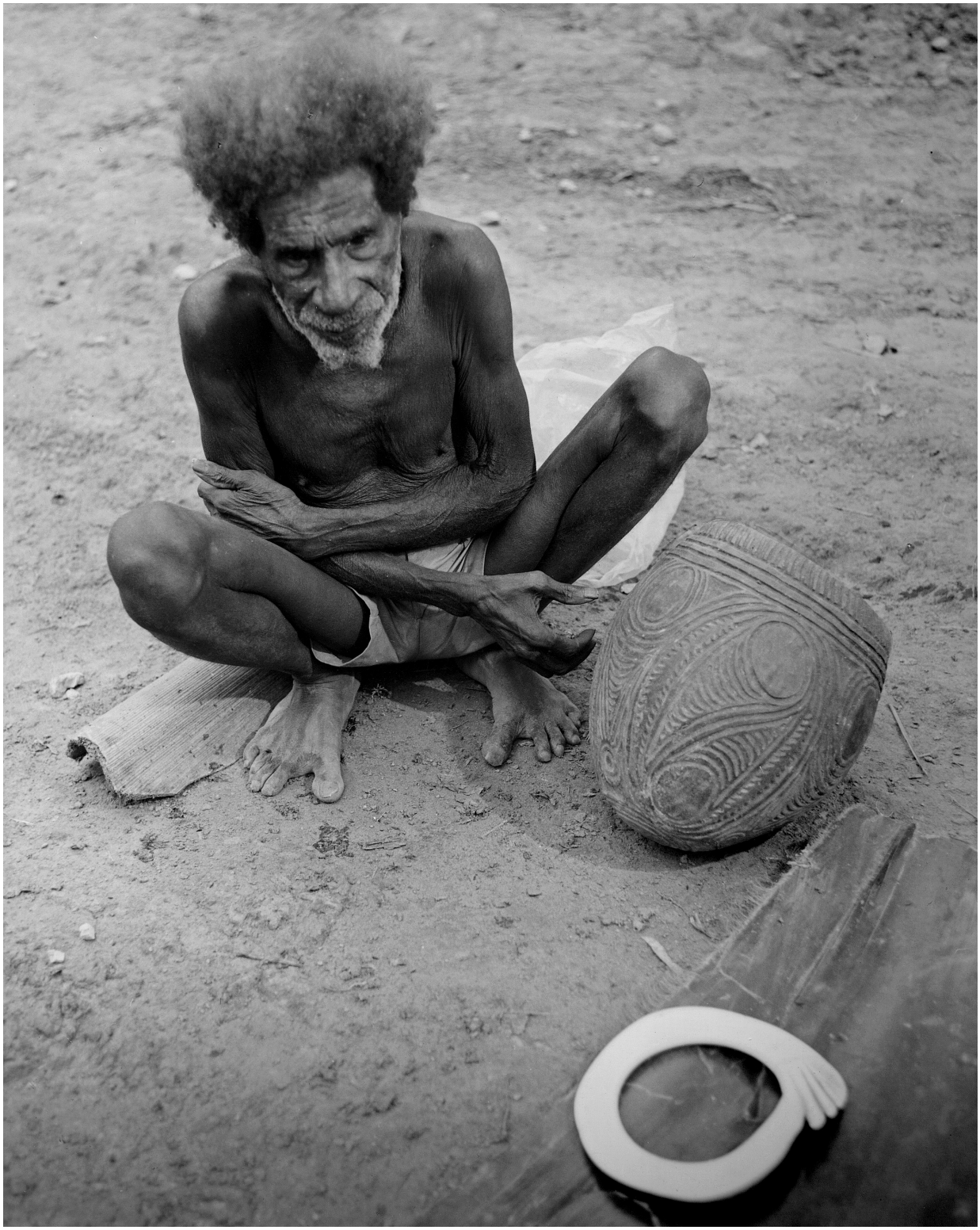
[82] In the Wosera area one comes across 'village' names which rank as hamlet names among the northern Abelam, e.g., Pelkeire or Patiko. Lea (1964: 47) and Gorlin (1973: 55-56) made reference to these settlements in the south; for Ilahita, Tuzin (1976: 76) assumes a development of "from hamlet- to village-based settlements"; for the Kwanga, see Schindlbeck 1983.

[83] See also Lea (1964: 158) on this subject.

and becoming locally dispersed, but also with many disconnected groups, at least in terms of geographical origin, merging to form new corporate units.

The fact that, in the end, this often quite radical population turnover never led to the formation of a uniform culture but to the growth of a large variety of locally distinct cultural forms is something that has always fascinated me. Although a large number of cultural elements are superficially shared by many villages and areas within the Abelam language group, there are notable differences in the way they join together to form a coherent system, in the relationship between the single traits, in the manner they are valuated from one village to the next, and between the various areas (or dialect groups). One of these cultural elements constitutes the focus of the present study. I am speaking of the Abelam ceremonial house, which I initially, and erroneously – so my hypothesis at the beginning of my fieldwork – believed to be uniform across the whole Abelam region. The longer I worked on the subject, the more regional variations I discovered, and the more the range of variety increased. Thus, I cannot, and do not, assert the claim of covering all the aspects and facets of the cultural feature in question, although I believe that we – that is, my husband and I[84] – were able to document by means of fieldwork all the important aspects as far as architecture and construction are concerned.

[84] The detailed drawings of the ceremonial houses were done by my husband. Since the actual mode of construction becomes clear only from the inside of a house, the profiles show the construction as seen from the midline looking towards the inside roof.



17. The ceremonial pot (*amukat*) and the shell ring in the care of the aged artist Waiwu once belonged to the Suambugim who used to live in the area of present-day Kalabu.

18. Bani, the large anthropomorphic carving (at the back), was left behind by the Suambugim when they fled the village.

19. The *kundi ure* Sagulas ranks as the oldest testimony of the Kalabu people. It was once brought to its present location from their earlier settlement site near Waignakim. Note the carved bone in the foreground.

18

19

2. Ceremonial Houses: Architecture and Construction

Location and Features of Ceremonial Houses and Grounds

Amidst a sea of green, the Abelam ceremonial houses (*korambo*) tower above the small islands of coconut palms, which mark the location of villages along the mountain ridges. With ridge peaks often topping 25 metres, the *korambo* dominate the village scene (**frontispiece, pl. 67**) consisting of women's houses, men's sleeping houses, storage huts for yam and taro, and menstrual and birth huts respectively. Basically, all ceremonial houses have a similar outer shape: they are built on a triangular, occasionally slightly trapezoid ground plan, with the building tapering from front to back. The front side, where the low entrance is located, is also triangular in shape. The ridgeline has a strong backward slant. At the rear end, the ridge beam ends about 2.5 metres above ground level; this is roughly the height of the tip of the rooftree on a normal dwelling house, which, on its part, ends approximately 60 centimetres above the ground. On all types of buildings the leaf coverings reach to the ground so that the houses actually look like roofs placed on the ground.

In front of the ceremonial house is a large round plaza, the *amei*. It is surrounded by dwelling houses and storage huts, and always kept clear of grass. The *amei* constitutes the hub of village social, political and ritual life.[1]

As mentioned in the course of the last chapter, Abelam villages do not form compact settlements; instead they consist of numerous, often quite dispersed hamlets. It follows that an Abelam village usually possesses several ceremonial houses and *amei*. Kalabu, for example, has 48 hamlets and 11 ceremonial houses (in different states of repair).[2] Only large, or at least strong, clans have the capacity to mobilize sufficient helpers to initiate the construction of a new ceremonial house, and bring it to completion. The task not only requires ample manpower but also large quantities of building material and nourishment (including tobacco and betel nut) as well as shell rings (nowadays also cash) in order to purchase a large number of pigs to compensate the helpers for their work; at the same time the animals serve as sacrifices to the ancestors and spirit beings who watch over the building process. As I have already explained, Kalabu owns four main ceremonial grounds, two in each village half (Kalabu I and II). Here all the important ceremonies are performed, especially those relating to the yam complex. Kalabu's four main ritual grounds also appear in most ceremonial songs, which are passed down patrilineally from father to son. They acquire significance through the role they played in Kalabu's migration history and the 'disseverance' of the famous Sagulas figure into a 'father' statue and a 'son' statue. In Kalabu II, the Kundigim and Nunggigim rank as founder clans, in Kalabu I it is the Luimogim. The Kundigim are also the principal land owners (see **map 3**). Indeed, still today these hamlets maintain ceremonial houses. They are named after the *amei* on which they stand, but have no special or secret name. Next to their customary names, hamlets and ceremonial grounds respectively are occasionally referred to by ritual names in songs. The number of *amei* is not a priori specified. Table 1 showing the clan signifiers (see pp. 24-25) lists 11 *amei*, but in principle it stands open to every hamlet to establish a new *amei* by building a ceremonial house and staging the required ceremonies and feasts. There exist a number of *amei* which used to be important ritual centres in earlier days but have lost all significance today; some of them stand deserted, others even forgotten.

[1] Bühler (1960b: 203) comments: '...the significance of the religiously and ritually important parts of the village is often so dominant that it shapes the entire settlement pattern. Ceremonial complexes form the core of a settlement, thus they are constitutive for the other parts of a village. … However, the fact has often been overlooked that it is not the ceremonial houses as such that form the primary focus of a settlement, but the associated ritual grounds instead.'

[2] In 1983 there were nine ceremonial houses left.

Occasionally the construction of a new ceremonial house is the result of a rivalry between two clans, with each group claiming that the other is not up to the task. In 1969, for example, the people of Nyambak and Yambusaki simultaneously started building new ceremonial houses in a contest to see who finished first.

After the spirit house of a traditional *amei* has collapsed and the ceremonial ground has been left unattended to for a while (**pl. 46**), it takes some time before the hamlet's inhabitants decide on building a new house. Usually this does not happen upon own initiative exclusively, moreover it is the clan spirits who utter their request for a new *korambo* by appearing to some of the elders in their dreams. The spot where the main posts come to stand and the house's general alignment are predetermined by tradition. In ten of eleven cases in Kalabu, the façade of the ceremonial house faces east, in one case west, not on a strict east-west axis, more in the sense of general directional alignment.[3]

The construction of a new ceremonial house involves the clans as well as the respective *ara*, that is, the ritual moieties. The latter come into play above all when it comes to thatching the roof. Each moiety is responsible for covering one side of the house; the work is carried out in a competitive spirit. On the occasion, the women of one *ara* cook for the men of the opposite side, and vice versa (the actual exchange and distribution, though, is executed by the women's husbands). Before the exchange, the food is displayed and laid out on the ritual ground in two lines according to moiety, and critically compared.

In the middle of every *amei* there is a round stone called *bapmu*. Invisible boundaries radiate outwards from this centre to the houses surrounding the ritual ground, dividing the space according to clan membership. In everyday life the boundaries are of no significance, but during public events (yam feasts, death watches, bride wealth payments, disputes, etc.) they play a critical role, assigning to the different clan representatives their place in the spatial alignment; however, the boundaries are not necessarily congruent with the those of clan land ownership, which may run along different lines. In the context of public discussions on or near the *amei* the latter are backgrounded, in favour of the more significant ritual boundaries.

[3] See Domenig (1980: 169)

If a man wishes to attend an important discussion on an *amei* of a hamlet where his clan does not own land, he will always find ways of legitimizing his presence by drawing on his densely meshed and multilayered kinship network. Although he probably has no intention of contributing to the dispute or brandishing his spear and uttering threats as participants often do when disputes become heated, it is safer to follow events from the shelter of one of the surrounding houses where he knows he will be protected by the owners, should matters suddenly erupt into violence. These hubs of social and ritual life, the *amei*, feature a number of particular attributes. Thus, for example, to each ritual ground located in front of the ceremonial house belongs a second *amei* situated at the back of the *korambo*, called *toiembo*. This ground is very much smaller than the main one at the front. While men disapprove of women and children stepping on to the *amei*, but do not actually sanction transgression, the *toiembo* is effectively considered a secret area where initiates and novices in seclusion spend time during initiations. Even outside ritual periods and ceremonial cycles only elder, and fully initiated, men are allowed entry.

The fact that *korambo* are equipped with two ceremonial grounds, a public and a secret one, says a lot about the nature of Abelam ritual life, as I hope will become evident in the course of this study.

Next to the round stone at the centre of the *amei*, which represents the (female) moon, further stones are arranged alongside the projecting roof of the *korambo* at the front; on which side is of no significance. The arrangement consists of upright, occasionally oblong, or simply a number of bizarrely shaped stones (*kumbumaak*). They bear the name of either a slain enemy, a clan spirit (*wale*) or a deceased big man of the hosting hamlet. Female names are very rare. The stones are considered aggressive by nature. During festivities on the *amei* they are decorated with small spears tipped with orange-coloured *ban* fruits, wild taro leaves and, occasionally, red hibiscus flowers. Immediately next to the stones ornamental plants are grown whose leaves and flowers are employed in certain ceremonies or used for body decoration. Next to the *kumbumaak*, refuse matter from the feast such as empty betel nut husks and branches, and coconut shells is heaped. It

evidences ostentatiously the amount of food and stimulants consumed during the feast, a clear hint to visitors from neighbouring villages as to how opulently feasts in Kalabu are staged. This refuse is referred to as the 'scraps of *nggwal'*.

Just as each 'public' *amei* has a secret counterpart at the back of the ceremonial house, the openly visible *kumbumaak* stones also have secret matches: in a house set apart called *weingga*, a number of stones are kept which only very few men ever get to see. They belong to the most secret and sacred objects that Abelam culture has to offer, and play a pivotal role in the yam complex (see below).

Unlike the *kumbumaak*, the round moon stone at the centre of the ceremonial ground is generally not associated with aggression and hostility. At events to which former enemy villages are invited – upon arrival, the visitors habitually storm on to the *amei* brandishing their spears – little *kaanda* trees are planted as symbols of peace, reminding all those who set eyes on it to curb any inkling of violence. Generally, the moon stone serves as the focus of ceremonies that presuppose a peaceable disposition on the part of all participants, lest the outcome and success of the rituals be put in jeopardy. Thus, for example, the moon stone features at the centre of all ritual acts relating to the growth of ceremonial yam. From the moment of planting to the time of harvesting, the stone, sometimes even the *amei* as a whole, is symbolically fenced in with the aid of long sticks laid out on the ground. Except for the men engaged in yam growing, no one is allowed to step over the symbolic boundary or even approach it, and any mention of sorcery or violent death is strictly forbidden.

Although at first sight, and apart from size, of course, ceremonial houses are similar in shape to normal dwelling- and storehouses, they differ in terms of various external and internal features of construction. As far as the roof is concerned, spirit houses are always covered with thatched panels (made from sago leaflets folded across a slat and fixed by a second slat), while the roofs of all other house types are made of palm fronds split lengthwise (**pl. 26**).[4] All ceremonial houses have projecting roofs (*nimbi*)[5] of different size[6] made of thatched panels and additionally covered with a plaited mat. At the top, flanking the protruding ridge beam (or, to be more precise, the ridge beam's extension) there are spears sticking in the roof. The *korambo*'s gable front is divided into an upper and a lower half, separated by a carved crossbeam called *tikit* (**pl. 22**). Normal dwelling houses and storehouses for everyday yam and taro do not have this feature. The lower half of the ceremonial house's façade, where also the low, tunnel-like entrance (*korekore*) is let in, is covered on the outside by a mat, *kimbi*, that reaches to the ground. Only a view from the inside reveals that, behind the mat, there is a wall of thatched sheets of the same kind as used for the roof cover (**pl. 42**). The lower section of the gable front beneath the carved crossbeam is not vertical, but juts outwards towards the bottom. A large painting, *mbai*, executed on a surface consisting of numerous sheets of flattened sago frond midribs that are sewn together, forms the upper, strongly forward-leaning part of the gable front.

Occasionally façade paintings also decorate storehouses for ceremonial yam but usually the people make do with woven mats or undecorated flattened sago palm spathes that are joined together. The entrance to dwelling houses, which have vertical front walls made of palm ribs, is always raised so that pigs and chicken cannot get inside (**pl. 26**). In terms of basic construction, ceremonial houses differ to other house types mainly insofar as they are equipped with four lateral posts, two on each side, with the two posts at the front higher than the two at the back (**fig. 1**). Resting on these posts – of all supports found in the building they are sunk deepest in the ground – are the massive roof side beams called *kwambut* (**pl. 42**). Usually these reach as far as the carved crossbeam (*tikit*) at the front of the building. All my Abelam building specialists emphasized the beams' importance in terms of statics. Be this as it may, it is notable all the same that the normal dwelling- and storehouses are not equipped with lateral props and beams and appear to do fine without. Of course, they are smaller in size,

[4] The houses on stilts, introduced in the area by the Australian administration and later encouraged by the Papua New Guinean government, also have roofs made of leaf tiles.

[5] The indigenous terms I use are from Kalabu; in other areas different terms are common.

[6] Generally it appears that the steeper the house's gradient, the bigger its projecting roof, see also Domenig (1980: 45-48).

but in principle they are subject to the same law of statics, albeit on a different scale.

Apart from the differences in construction between dwelling houses and ceremonial houses, one also has to distinguish between various types of ceremonial houses. *Korambo* may look similar at first glance, but closer inspection reveals that they differ substantially as far as style of architecture goes.[7]

Different Forms of Ceremonial Houses

The *miaat-korambo*

The central northern Abelam (Kalabu, Dshame, Kimbanggwa) maintain that their original ceremonial houses were of the type called *miaat*, with a strongly forward-inclined gable front. At the time of fieldwork[8] there was only one *miaat-korambo* (**pl. 20**) left (in Buknitibe hamlet of Dshame II). Typical of this type are the leading edges of the roof which pass in a straight, forward-inclined line, at an angle of approximately 25°. The painted façade slopes at an even greater angle, roughly at 37°. This elegant and audacious ceremonial house type features a number of distinctive construction elements: inside the building, immediately behind the façade, stand two massive ridge posts (*yanetikwa*) located to the left and right of the longitudinal axis, and running counter to the cantilevering roof (**fig. 1**);[9] above, the *yanetikwa* intersect at the level of the ridge beam, *nyit*, which rests on their forked ends. Just behind the front pair of lateral supports that carry the roof side beams (*kwambut*) three crucks are positioned. They are strongly forward inclined (at angle between that of the slope of the roof edges and the façade) and have an important support function (intersection point below the ridge beam). Between the three crucks a number of thin bamboo poles run in the same direction. Apart from the full crucks (round timber), which reach from floor to ridge beam, the *miaat-korambo* is equipped with additional crucks to stabilize the roof construction; below they end freely at the level of the roof side beams. The three foremost full-length rafters located immediately behind the façade intersect above the ridge beam (**fig. 2**).

All these strongly forward-leaning rafters are stabilized by horizontally running 'limbum'[10] boards (seven on each side); they are fastened to the rafters by vines.

The rafters and crucks are braced with innumerable so-called *miaat* vine bindings. These braces run in different directions, usually connecting three rafters with the interjacent bamboo poles. The full crucks, found in all types of ceremonial house, are arranged in pairs (facing each other on the right and left side of the roof respectively); they are only gently forward inclined. The foremost pair, *watnamba*, is attached to the strongly forward-leaning rafters by tension joints made of vine ropes called *miaat*. They are a prototypical feature of this kind of ceremonial house, giving the type its name: *miaat-korambo*. Although these bindings are found in other types of ceremonial houses too, they are much more prominent here (**pl. 29**). In a *miaat-korambo* nearly all these vine bindings reach from the façade at the front to the first pair of *watnamba* crucks within; these crucks have a very significant function in terms of structural stability. Next to the ridge beam, the *miaat-korambo* is equipped with an additional longitudinal pole, the back end of which is clamped to a crossbar fixed to the second pair of full crucks, about two metres below the ridgeline. This steeply ascending pole, called *nyan*, is lashed to the ridge beam, pressing it upwards (**pl. 44**). *Nyan* and *nyit* usually end at the same level above the gable front. Attached to them is a thin pole, *yapitak*; it extends beyond the canopy and is visible from the outside.

The sides of the roof extending beyond the gable front (including the plaited mat below) feature no wooden rafters, only bamboo poles. Notably, these strongly forward inclined bamboos end blindly at the level of a pair of notched and painted 'limbum' boards that

[7] Forge (1966: 26) speaks throughout of the Abelam ceremonial house and notes, for example, that it has no central ridge post. However, among the northern central Abelam such posts are quite common and have been in use at least since the 1950s.

[8] That is, between 1978 and 1983.

[9] Gaudenz Domenig (1980: 7) uses the German term 'Kraggiebel', here given as cantilevering roof. According to him the term describes a saddle roof with more or less trapezoid roof areas, with the ridge extending beyond the eaves and with receding roof edges, in other words, with a protruding and cantilevering gable front.

[10] Tok Pisin term for a variety of palm trees with no common botanical denominator. The wood of the 'limbum' palm is used for spears, digging sticks and, since recently, floorboards.

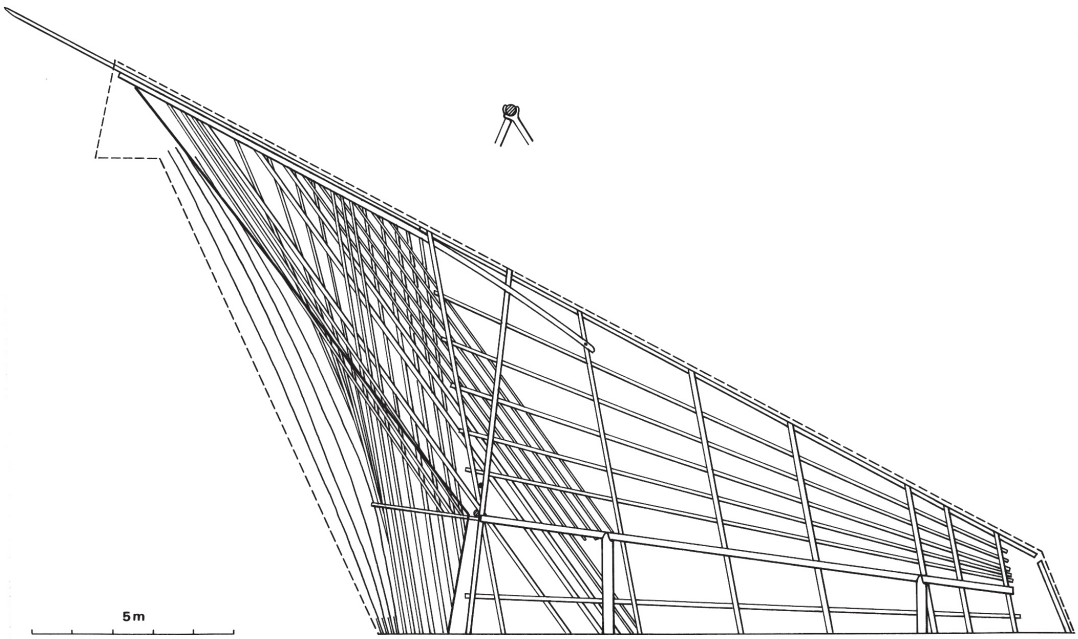


Fig. 1: Side view of the *miaat korambo* in Buknitibe, Dshame.

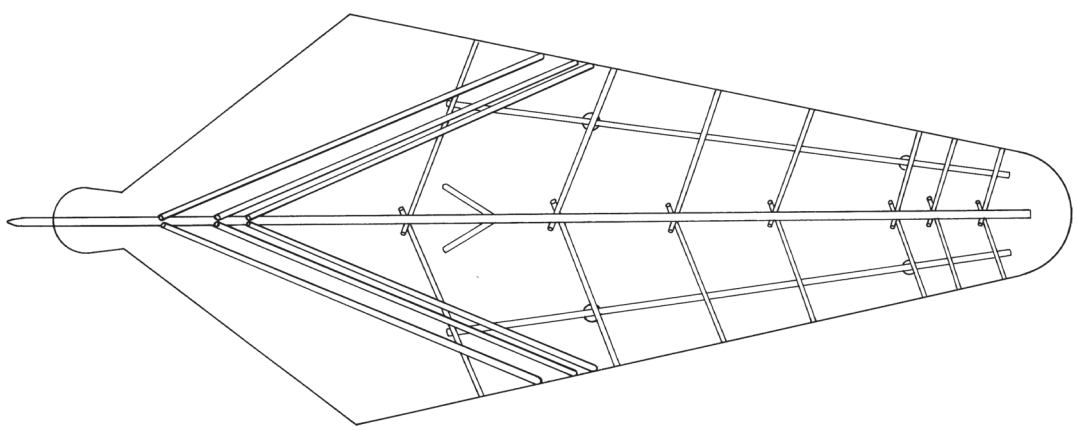


Fig. 2: Ground plan of the *miaat korambo* in Buknitibe, Dshame.

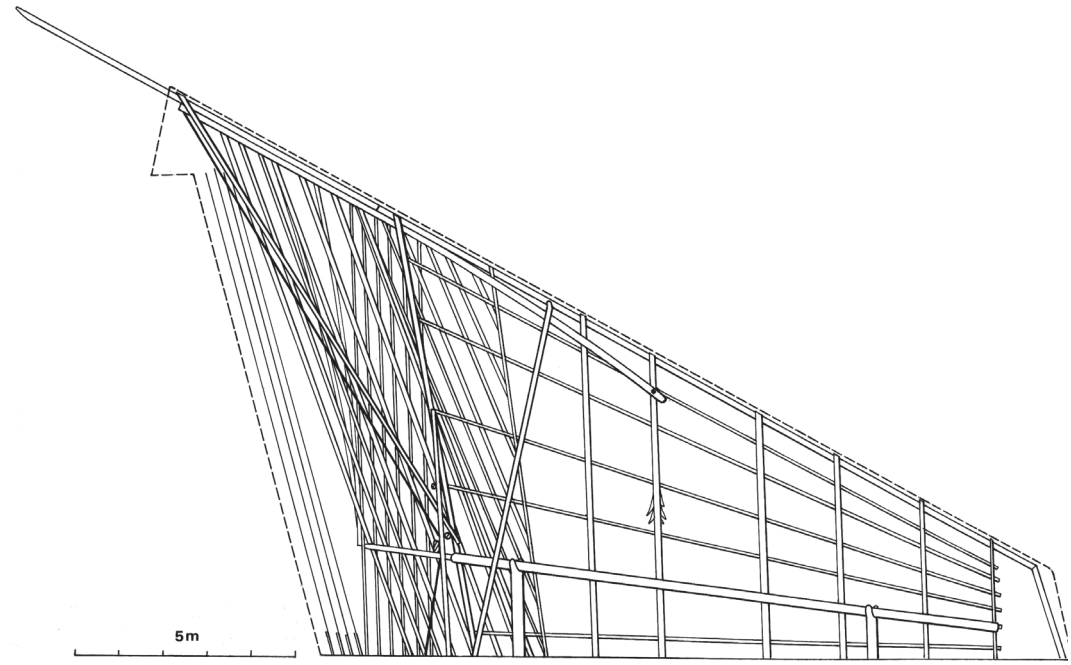


Fig. 3 Side view of the moderately inclined ceremonial house of Nyambak, Kalabu.

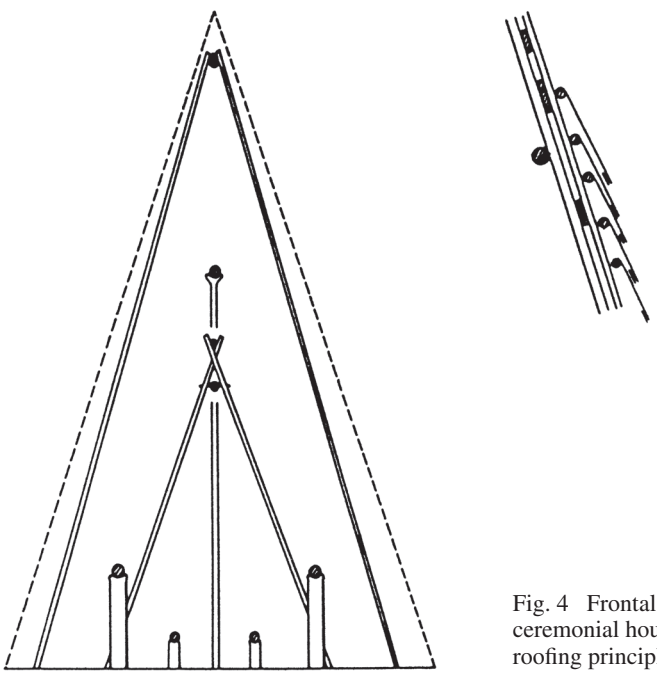


Fig. 4 Frontal view of the moderately inclined ceremonial house of Nyambak, Kalabu (including roofing principle).

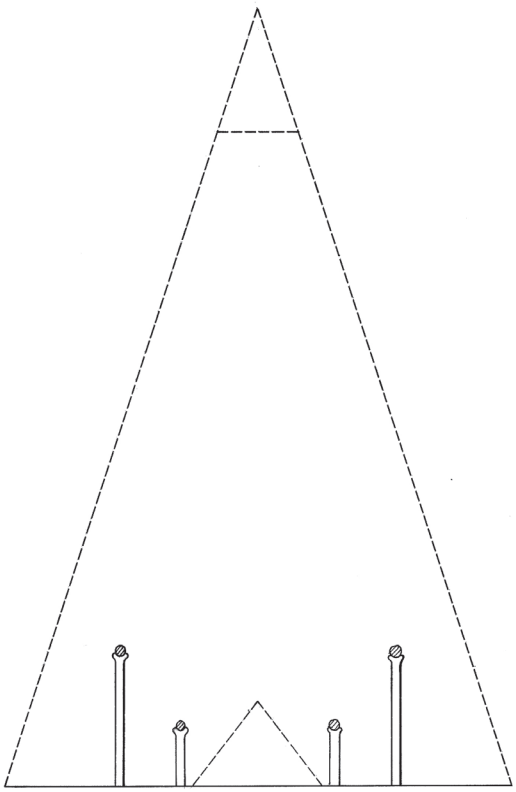


Fig. 5 Frontal view of the moderately inclined ceremonial house in Kimbanggwa.

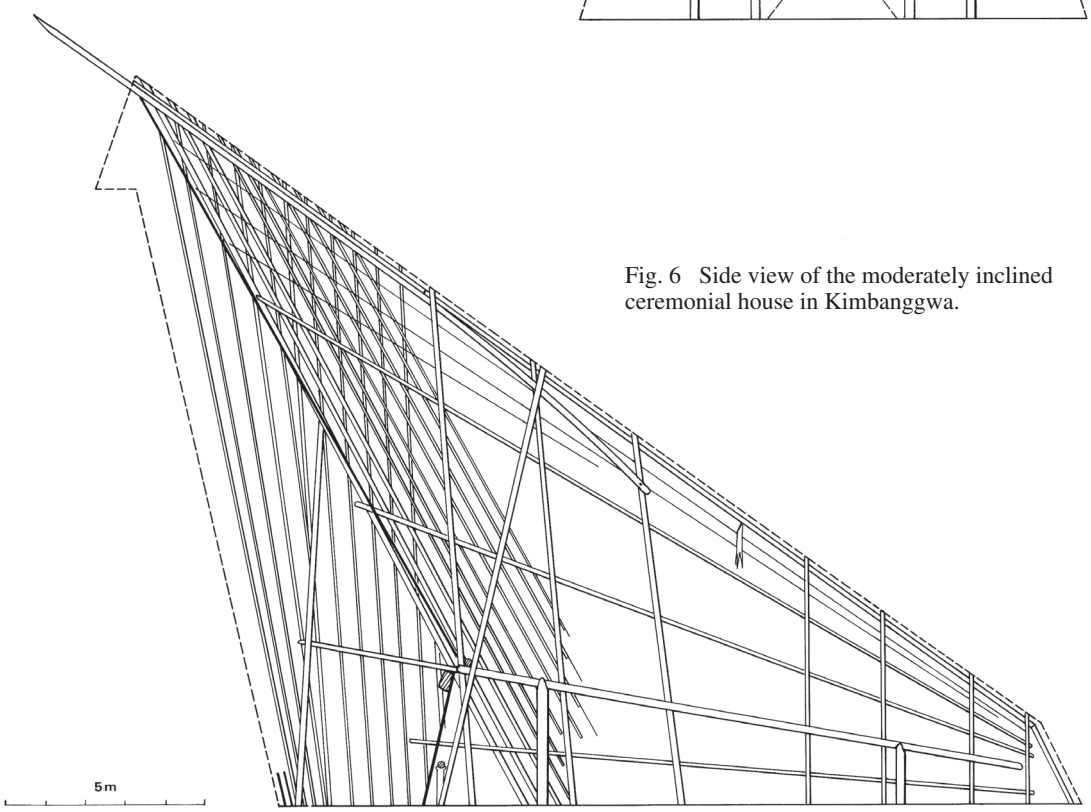


Fig. 6 Side view of the moderately inclined ceremonial house in Kimbanggwa.

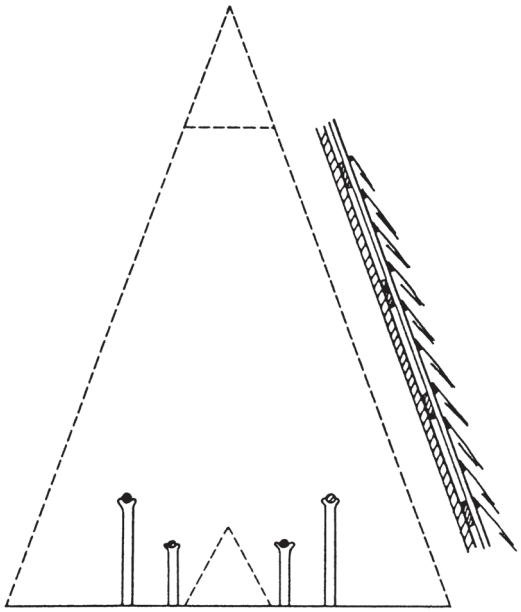


Fig. 7 Front view of the moderately inclined ceremonial house of Dshanggungge, Kalabu.

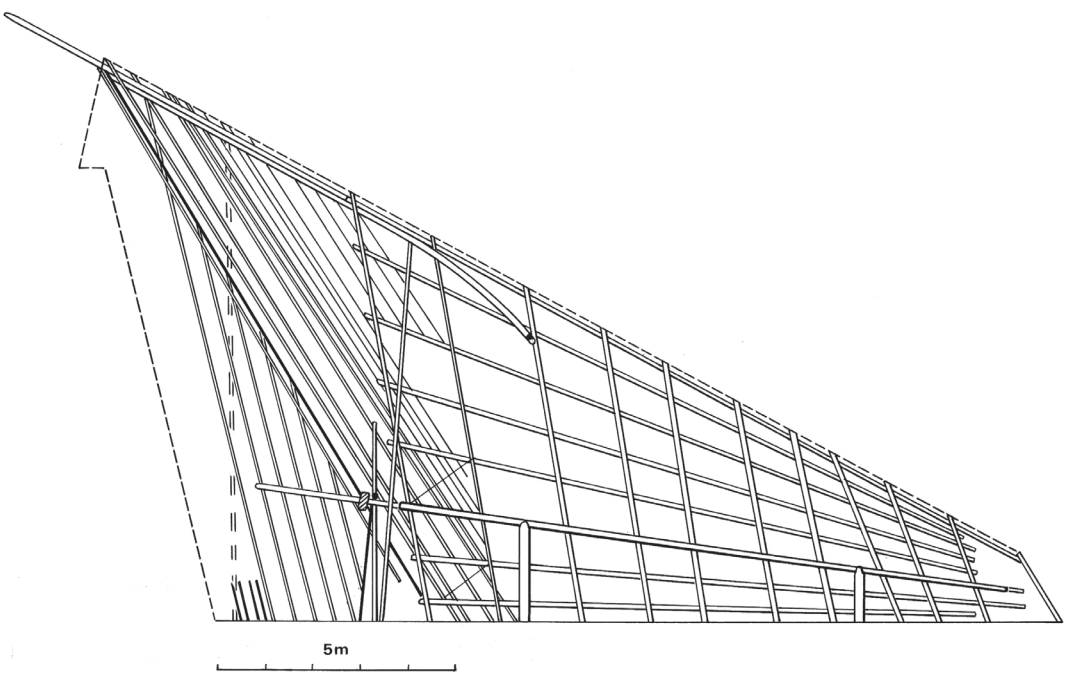


Fig. 8 Side view of the moderately inclined ceremonial house of Dshanggungge, Kalabu.

protrude from the gable front on both sides, at the height of the carved crossbeam (*tikit*); inside the house, the 'limbum' boards extend to the front end of the roof side beams. The bamboo rafters are lashed to each other at intervals of 50 to 80 centimetres by almost horizontally aligned *miaat* bindings running slightly counter to the angle of the bamboo poles.

The peak of a *miaat-korambo* juts out so far over the ceremonial ground that the vine chain suspended from the centre of the canopy hangs vertically over the moon stone below.

The Abelam say that the *miaat-korambo* (as well as the moderately inclined ceremonial house that grew from this type more recently) represents a crouching cassowary.

The Moderately Inclined Ceremonial House

Among the northern central Abelam, over the last few decades, the gable fronts have become noticeably more precipitous, and less forward inclined. Most of the ceremonial houses among the eastern, central as well as southern Abelam feature almost vertical gable fronts today; the painted façade is still forward inclined but the leading edges of the two roof sides are almost vertical.

Both the *korambo* of Nyambak and Dshanggungge in Kalabu (**pl. 21**), and one ceremonial house in Kimbanggwa represent an intermediate type. In profile, the roofline is still forward inclined, but not as distinctively as in the case of the *miaat-korambo*. As far as construction is concerned, we have, immediately behind the façade, three pairs of crucks (**fig. 3-8**) standing at almost the same angle as the leading edges of the roof sides. In the case of the Nyambak *korambo*, we also have two wooden poles (*biterapu*) flanking the façade painting on each side (**fig. 3**); at the top they intersect just above the ridge beam, below they end at the height of the roof side beams; in Dshanggungge and Kimbanggwa the *biterapu* reach to the ground. Behind these poles, and running in the same direction, there are several bamboo poles some of which do not reach ground level, as they do in *miaat-korambo*. In the case of Nyambak, we have at the front, on the outside, four pairs of parallel bamboo poles that join above the ridge beam; in Dshanggungge and Kimbanggwa these bamboo poles stand at a distinctly steeper angle. Unlike the Dshanggungge and Kimbanggwa *korambo* (as well as the *miaat-korambo*), the roof of Nyambak is equipped on both sides with almost vertical crucks with slightly backward inclined tips, otherwise a feature more typical of the *naure-kumun* type of *korambo*. In Dshanggungge and Kimbanggwa these crucks are forward inclined. Dshanggungge has on one side a supporting pole that extends to the ridge beam; the Kimbanggwa *korambo* is additionally equipped with two supports, one on each side, which are sunk in the ground, set in from the crucks; the posts end above in the upper third of the construction; their task is to support the front section of the roof. All three buildings feature a central ridge support, or king post (not two posts as in a *miaat-korambo*); in Kimbanggwa and Nyambak the ridge support meets the ridge beam at almost right angle. The secondary ridge beam, *nyan*, is fixed to a crossbar at the height of the third pair of crucks, underpinning the main ridge beam. On all three buildings, a decorated 'limbum' board protrudes from the face of the house on the inside of each roof, at the level of the *kwambut* beams inside the house and the carved crossbeam on the outside.

The *Naure-Kumun* Type

In Kalabu I was told that when the neighbouring Arapesh began constructing spirit houses in the Maprik style they built them with steeply ascending, almost vertical gables; later, the Kalabu took over this style from the Arapesh. The great majority of ceremonial houses in Kalabu (and in other villages too) are now built in this new style, called *naure kumun*. These houses do not have strongly forward inclined rafters in the front section of the building as the *miaat korambo* and intermediate type do (**pl. 22, fig. 8**). Instead, one finds at the front, on the visible part of the roof sides (**fig. 10**), only slightly forward sloping wooden and bamboo rafters (e.g. Yambusaki and Wapinda, **pl. 22-24**); in Kaumbul they are almost vertical. Accordingly, the leading edges of the roof sides slope forward only a little; occasionally they are even almost vertical (**fig. 11, 12, 13, 14**). Usually the projecting roof is larger in size than on the strongly inclined spirit houses. The gently forward leaning rafters at the front of the house intersect above the ridge beam (**fig. 9**); their lower ends are sunk in the ground, usually beyond the façade on the outside (**fig. 11, 12, 13, 14**). In the case of the steeply

sloping ceremonial house, the inclination angle of the crucks has been adapted to match that of the (non-load-bearing) rafters; this is especially evident in the case of Kaumbul. This house type also possesses a central ridge post, *yanetikwa*, as well as a secondary ridge beam *nyan*, which is lashed to a crossbar fixed to a pair of crucks and which underpins the main ridge beam. The Yambusaki house has, in addition, two lateral, vertical supports, *taksapa*, which stand on the roof side beams and end above at the level of the second 'limbum' purlin (*lelai*) from the top. In terms of function, the posts are comparable to the two supports located at the gable front of the Kimbanggwa ceremonial house. The two wooden poles located within the building on both sides of the inclined façade intersect above the ridge beam; below, they end freely at the intersection of the roof side beam, the protruding 'limbum' board and the carved crossbeam. In the case of Yambusaki, the *biterapu* finish above this intersection (**fig. 20**).

Characteristics of the North-western Abelam Ceremonial House

The house types described up to here do not principally differ from each other; rather, they constitute a continuum in form. Among the north-western Abelam, however, the ceremonial house displays a number of features not found on other *korambo*.

What is striking, above all, is its very tall and bold, forward inclined shape (**pl. 25**). In profile, the front of the roof does not run in a straight even line from top to bottom. Instead, from the ground to about the height of the carved crossbeam, the leading edges are almost vertical; from there they lean strongly to the front, right up to the peak. The angle of the front edge of the roof equals approximately the angle of the façade. A second noticeable feature of this type of house is that the roof does not extend as far beyond the façade painting and the woven mat underneath (called *wama-ut* here) as in other cases. Compared to other *korambo*, the canopy of this house type is quite small. The protruding roof sides feature less decorative elements on the inside; in addition, no wooden rafters are used for the front, visible section, only bamboo poles. Inside the building, we have the following arrangement (**fig. 15**): on each side of the house there are two massive supports on which the roof side beams rest. The front posts are distinctly taller (approx. 4.5 metres) than the two at the back (approx. 2.5 metres), which explains the beams' steep inclination. The *kwambut* beams extend well beyond the front lateral posts. Near the front end, they are crosscut by the first pair of gently forward inclined crucks; these intersect below the ridge beam above. Where the crucks crosscut the roof side beams there are two additional pairs of wooden rafters. They have no load-bearing function – they intersect above the ridge beam – and run parallel to the forward sloping façade. Above the intersection of the first pair of crucks and the massive *kwambut* beams, numerous bamboo rafters lead off to the ridge beam above, at the same angle as the façade. These bamboo poles that constitute a main element of the gable construction are joined together by vine bindings running at right angle. Here these ligatures are not called *miaat*, but *yembumbile* instead.

A look inside the house reveals that the bamboo poles that feature on the lower roof sides outside do not continue to the top of the roof inside, but end above the intersection of the first pair of crucks with the *kwambut* beams. Thus, the inside view confirms what the outside profile of the house suggests, namely that the gable design is divided into a lower and an upper section. Another main feature characterizing the ceremonial house of the north-western Abelam is the absence of a central post to support the ridge beam. What is also missing is a secondary ridge beam (*nyan*), which, in other house types, is clamped to a pair of crucks with the aid of a crossbar in order to jack up the main ridge beam; nor does the ridge beam rest on a support at the back end of the house, as it does in other *korambo*. Without the support of a central ridge post, the life span of these ceremonial houses is distinctly shorter than that of edifices equipped with a *yanetikwa*. Tellingly, the ceremonial houses among the north-western Abelam tend to pitch forward before finally collapsing; in contrast, the *korambo* of the northern central Abelam never topple over, thanks to the central post supporting the ridge beam; instead they cave in at the sides when the vine bindings holding the ridge beam to the crucks begin to rot and come apart. When the people finally decide to tear down the remains of a *korambo* they fell the central post, but in a very fast action because, as soon as the post gives way, the building collapses into itself.

A further feature absent in the ceremonial houses of the north-western Abelam are the six or seven 'limbum' purlins (*lelai*) on each side which run parallel to the roof side beams below.

What also catches the eye is that, unlike on other houses, the sago thatched panels are not fastened to longitudinal (batten-like) bamboo tubes, but merely to thin bamboo strips. Here the Abelam make no terminological distinction between whole stems and strips of bamboo with the same function. The difference in architecture between the houses of the north-western[11] and the northern central Abelam is considerable. Possibly this is the result of an earlier, even stronger spatial division of the two Abelam groups,[12] with separate traditions growing from a common basis.

Dwelling Houses and their Construction

Occasionally Abelam villages feature more houses than adult individuals. Traditionally, men and women have separate sleeping houses, although, today, it occurs occasionally that a married couple shares the same dwelling. In such a case the people usually comment that the husband was simply too lazy to build two houses. The rate of marital conflicts, often involving physical violence, is noticeably higher in these arrangements than when husband and wife dwell separately. The women's huts (*rangga*), where the wives live with their children, are regarded as the actual dwelling houses, even though the family is seldom around during the day; they are equipped with fireplaces where the women cook food for the family in the evening, on rainy days often even during the day. If the husband is not around at mealtime the wife puts aside a bowl of cooked food and some drinking water.[13] A man's house (*kwangga*), which is usually located next to his wife's house – except in the case of polygynous households, in which case the wives usually live in different hamlets – serves mainly as a place to sleep (*kwa* – to rest, to sleep). Women rarely enter their husband's house, children practically never except if their father beckons them to fetch or bring something. A man also keeps precious and secret objects such as shell rings, ornaments or one or the other mask in his *kwangga*. Husband and wife usually also have separate storage huts (*kandinnga*); here the women store the taro (*mai*) they have grown and a type of yam called *lipma*, while the men use theirs for *ka* and *wapi* yam. Occasionally, especially in houses where ceremonial yam is stored (**pl. 26)**, a man also keeps objects that are related to the yam complex, for example, *baba* masks, yam stones or carved figures (*wapinyan*). If a married couple jointly shares a storage house, the *ka* tubers are kept, neatly arranged, in the middle of the house;[14] the round taro tubers are placed on the ground along the sides, separated from the *ka* by an aisle. After harvest, storage houses present themselves almost like small treasure chambers, with all the crops neatly cleaned, sorted and carefully stored by kind.

House building is basically men's work. Once in a while a woman might contribute by bringing home a suitable piece of wood from the bush but this is usually only meant as a hint to her husband that it is time for him to build a new house for her. However, women are indirectly involved in house building in the sense that they do all the cooking for the male work crew.

The construction of a new dwelling or storage house commences by sinking in the ground two upright, slender tree stems of different length in a line. The distance between the two poles equals the length of the planned roof, while the alternate height of the stems indicates the angle of the backward-sloping roof. Then the ridgepole is attached to the posts; sometimes they are equipped with forked tops. A ladder-like scaffold is erected and anchored to the two slender posts; later, the structure serves as a platform for thatching the roof with palm fronds. Bamboo poles are used for rafters; they are placed on each side leaning against the ridgepole and then lashed to it in pairs with vines. The rafters are stabilized from the inside with the help of two or three bamboo battens on each side. Split palm fronds serve as roofing material; they are tied to the rafters with the

[11] Apart from the *korambo* in Kuminimbis described above, we investigated a second ceremonial house in the same village and one each in Apanggai, Maprik and Bonggiora for the purpose of comparison.

[12] Scaglion (1976: 49-50) maintains that the western Abelam immigrated to their present settlement area from the west.

[13] After getting up at daybreak, sago, bananas and one or two tubers are cooked in the fire and eaten. The first pot-cooked meal is consumed around 11 a.m., occasionally followed by a second one in the course of the afternoon and a third one in the evening.

[14] Some species are not stored on the ground, but suspended from a roof-beam.

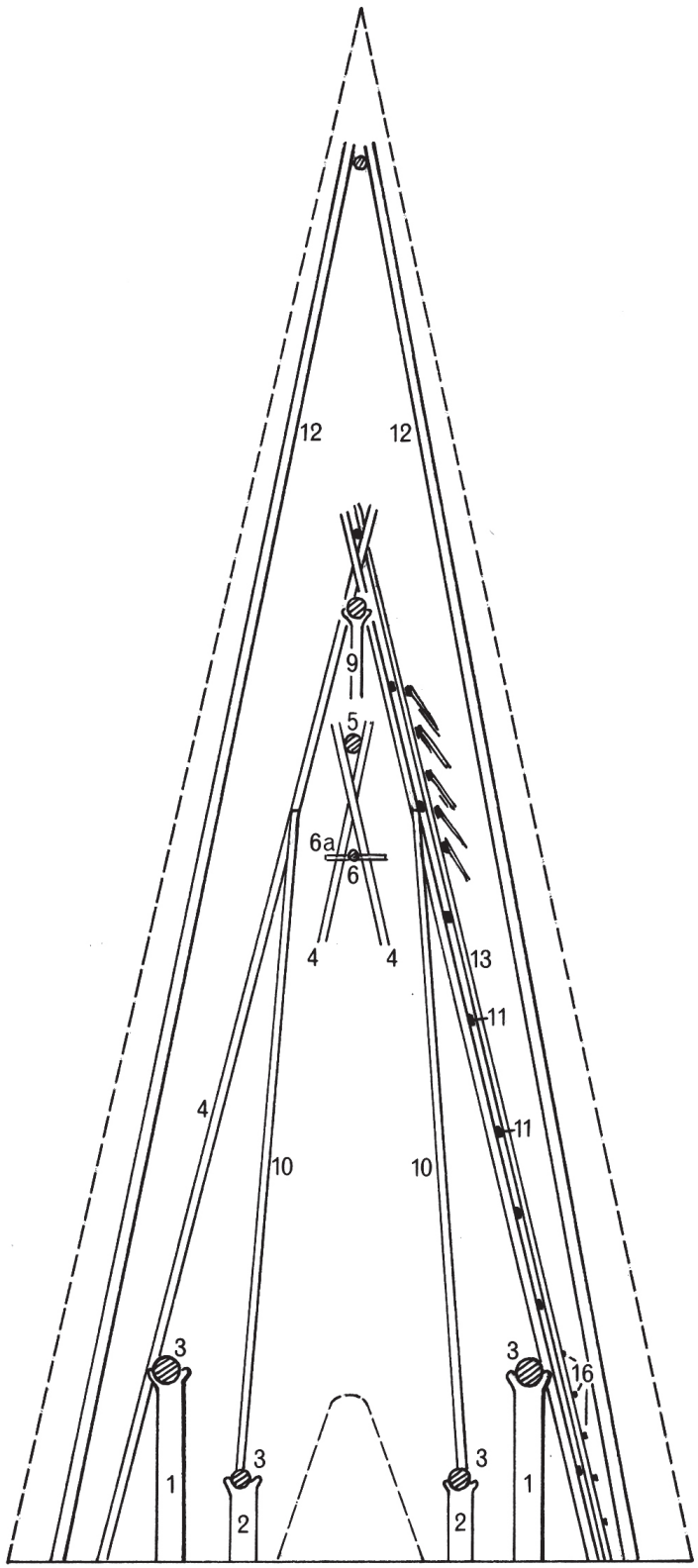


Fig. 9 Front view of the *naure kumun-korambo* in Yambusaki, Kalabu. (Legend see p. 58.)

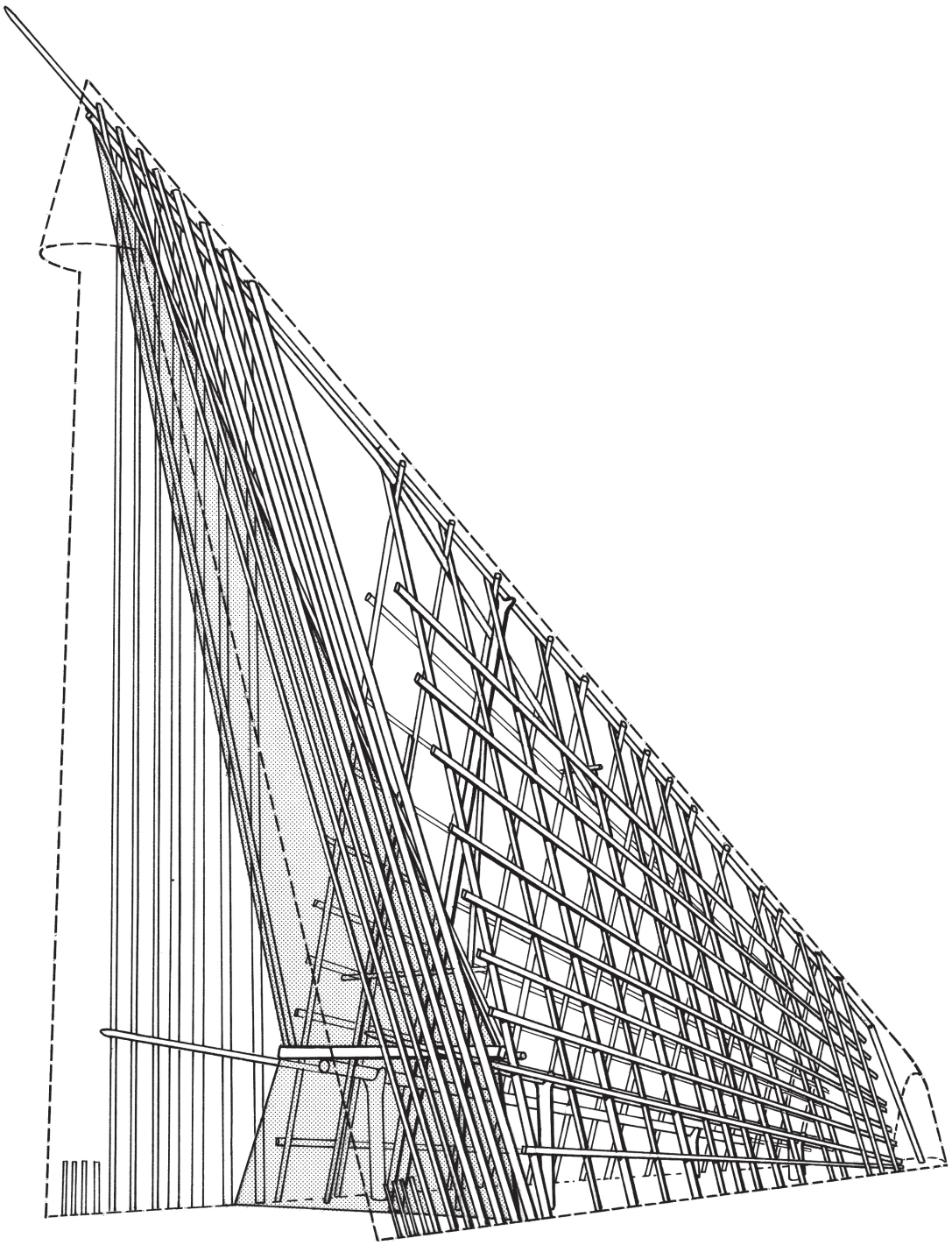


Fig. 10 Perspective view of the *naure kumun-korambo* in Yambusaki, Kalabu.

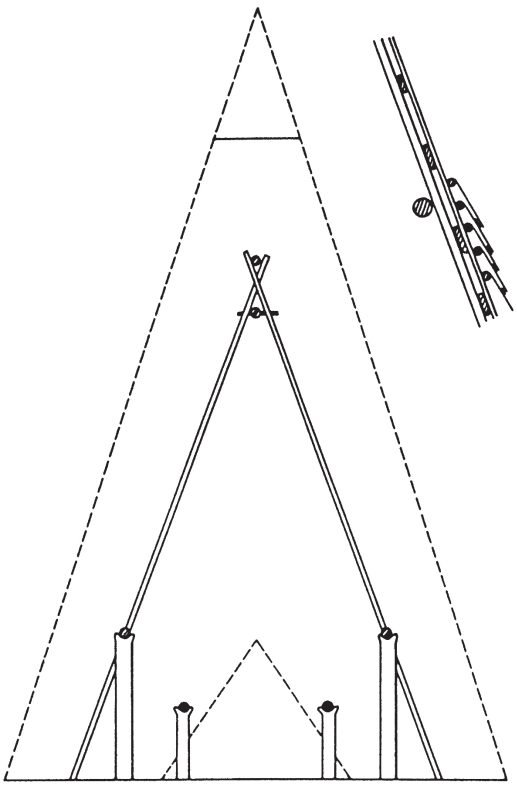


Fig. 11 Front view of the *naure kumun-korambo* in Kaumbul, Kalabu (including roofing principle).

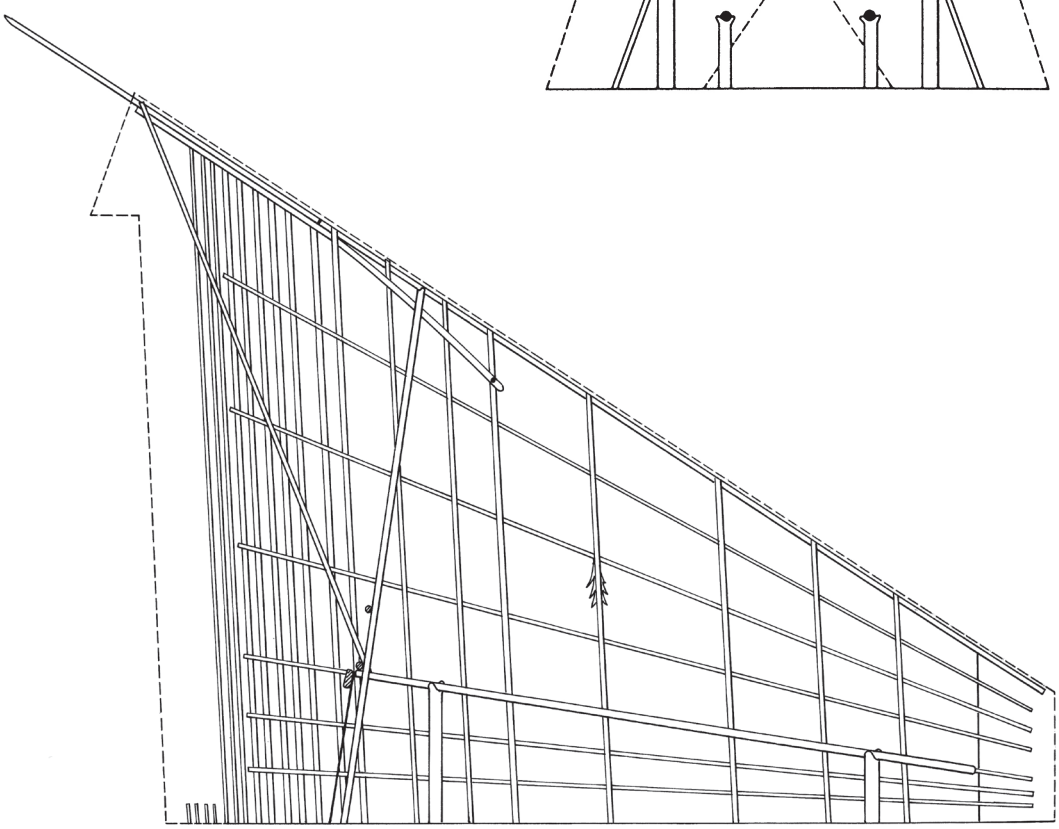


Fig. 12 Side view of the *naure kumun-korambo* in Kaumbul, Kalabu.

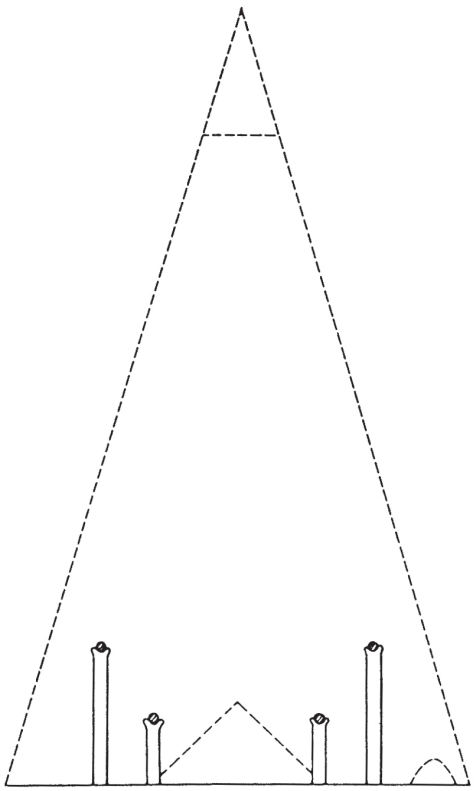


Fig. 13 Front view of the naure *kumun-korambo* in Wapinda, Kalabu.

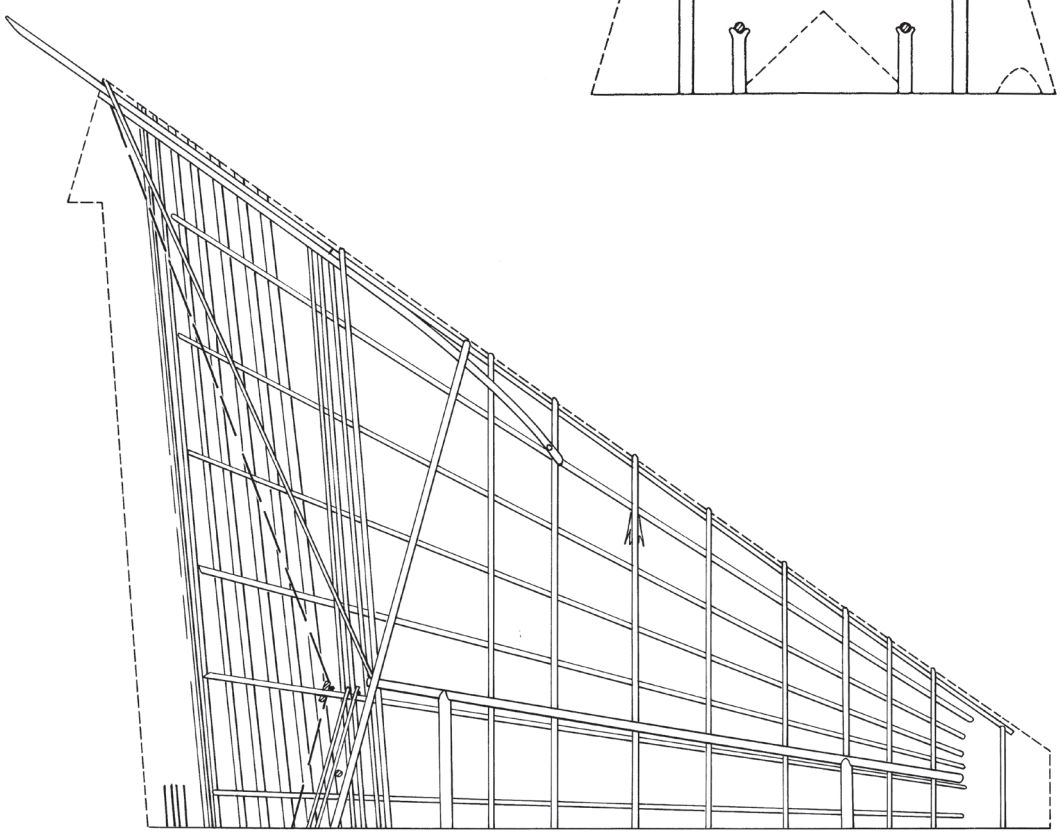


Fig. 14 Side view of the *naure kumun-korambo* in Wapinda, Kalabu.

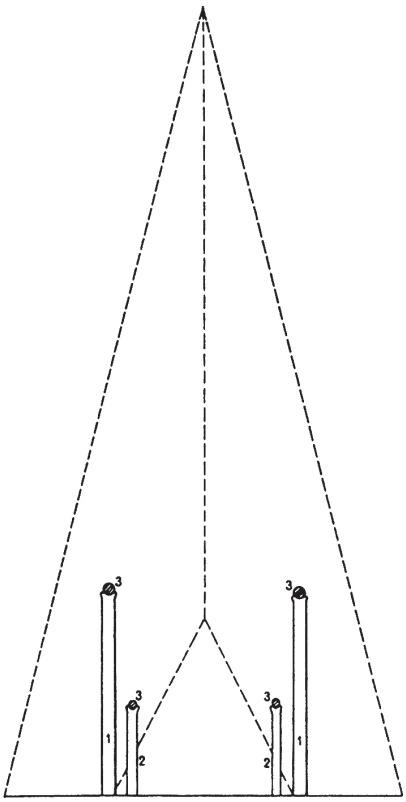


Fig. 15 Front view of the *korambo* of the north-western Abelam, Wewungge, Kuminimbis.

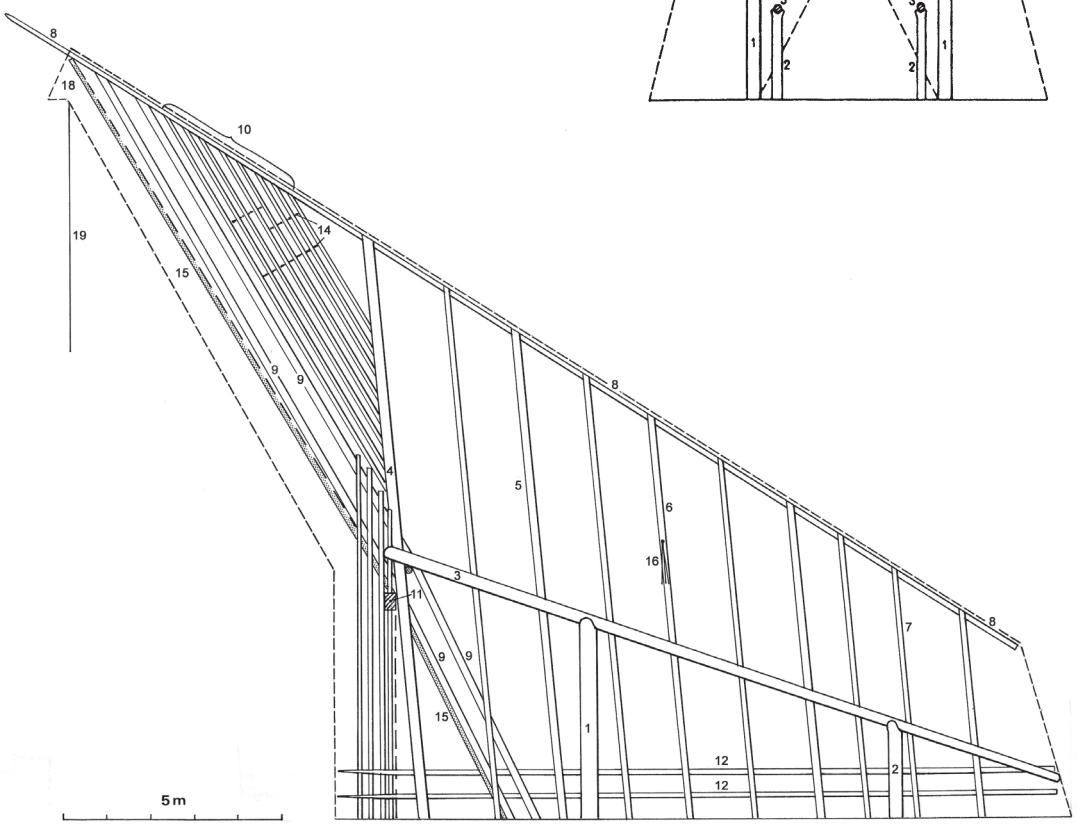


Fig. 16 Side view of the *korambo* of the north-western Abelam, Wewungge, Kuminimbis.

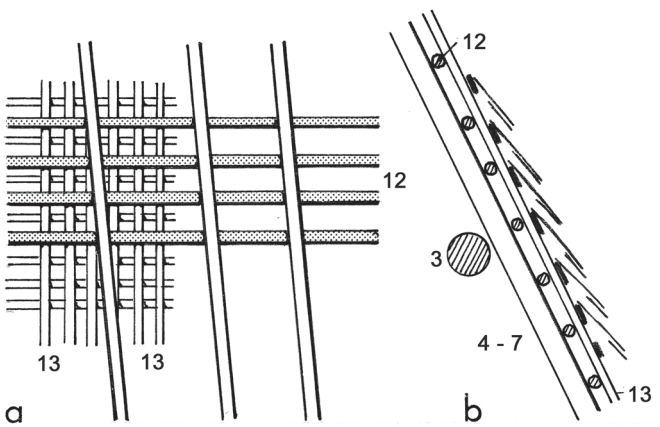


Fig. 17 Principle of roof cladding among the north-western Abelam, taking the example of Kuminimbis,
a) top view
b) side view

Numerical legend to figures 15 to 17:
1 *magnagwat*
2 *bunbungwat*
3 *tagwanggalle*
4 *yapandu*
5 *bande*
6 *mindshaligi*
7 *kwomitu*
8 *numandu*, also called *nyitmangge*, wrapped with split bamboo (*shinggityen*)
9 *wokenmangge*
10 *vi wokenkama*
11 *tambugwat*
12 *lale kama*
13 *pu kama*
14 *yembumbile*
15 *benggo*
16 *mindsha*
17 *saigetambu*
18 *kwandshengga*
19 *nggalut*, traditionally they end in the shape of bird nests, *apuigwat*, below.

thick distal end and the thin top end of the two pieces joining in the same spot, but running in alternate directions.

All the work, starting with the erection of the two central posts to finishing the framework, is done by the owner (in the case of a woman's house by her husband); the roofing, on the other hand, is carried out in communal labour. The owner usually receives support from his male relatives and from men of other hamlets whom he has helped in the same kind of work in the past. The trimming of the sago fronds is done by young unmarried men (married men are forbidden to do the work lest the sago palm dies off); they also carry the bundled fronds from the low-lying valleys where the sago grows to the village at the top of the ridge, up the steep and often very slippery paths. The actual thatching is done by the older men. Working from bottom to top they first finish one side before tackling the other. In the meantime the women have been busy preparing food which they bring to the men as soon as one side is finished, including tobacco and betel nuts as part of the remuneration for their work. After a rest, usually around midday, the men start on the second side of the roof. Trimming off the protruding rafters, bonneting the ridge, removing the provisional ridge supports and constructing a front wall of round sago midribs are chores that the owner does on his own in the days and weeks that follow. From the outside, dwelling and storage houses are hard to distinguish, but usually the front walls of storage houses are worked with greater care. Instead of the round upper parts of the sago midribs the men often use the flattened sago spathes; these are joined together by ornamental stitches, a technique that men learn during initiation and which is kept secret from the women. Occasionally the men additionally plait a mat from white bamboo strips and the brown skins of palm fronds – again a technique that is kept secret from the women. Normally the mats feature the same pattern as found on the ones decorating ceremonial houses. It consists of concentrically nested diamonds (**pl. 26**) and represents the moon (*bapmu*). The mat (*kimbi*) is then set in above the entrance and decorated with flowers, leaves and fruits. Occasionally a storage house used to store ceremonial yam is embellished with a painting on the pediment, a carved crossbeam and a woven mat, just like on a ceremonial house. Only old big men own such houses; although they strongly resemble

ceremonial houses they are designed and constructed in the same way as normal dwelling or storage houses.

Construction of a Ceremonial House

Whereas the building of a dwelling or a storage house demands comparatively little work input – helpers are only required for the roofing for which they receive food, tobacco and betel nuts in return – the construction of a ceremonial house is a major venture that requires, apart from labour, the investment of practically all the valuables that the future owners hold in stock. Usually the men of the hamlet where the new house is to be erected have to consign all their shell rings; these are required in exchange for pigs. Later on, the head painter too has to be recompensed with shell rings (or pork) for his knowledge and work, today, occasionally in cash. In addition, the owners need to mobilize tremendous amounts of food in order to cater for all the helpers that come to work on the appointed workdays. This is one reason why ceremonial houses are usually built in the months between May and November, or at least during a period when the villagers expect an abundant crop in their new gardens (this varies according to village and region). Work commences with the harvest of the first yams from the 'old', or secondary, gardens (i.e. second year running). After weeks and months on a diet of bananas and sago, the people desperately look forward to the arrival of the first yams. However, a large part of the harvest goes to feed the helpers involved in construction because it would be taken as an insult if they were served only sago soup and cooked bananas. Harvesting the tubers, which, at this point in time, are still quite scarce requires the input and cooperation of many households; the same holds for the large amounts of betel nut and tobacco which are required to keep the workers happy; they are considered luxury articles, and each betel nut and each tobacco leaf is scrutinized meticulously by the workmen, eliciting either praise or reproach.[15]

It is impossible for the clans and lineages of the respective *amei* to procure all these resources – shell rings, yams, betel nuts and tobacco – on their own. But they can acquire them by mobilizing support from extended kin networks and members of the same *ara* in other villages. Organizational skill is not only the cornerstone of a successful new ceremonial house, it also provides the opportunity for a leading clan to demonstrate corporate strength.

In 1979 my husband and I had the occasion to witness and document the construction of a new ceremonial house in the hamlet of Kumunware of Waignakim, Kalabu's neighbouring village to the south[16] (**pl. 28-36**). At the site where the new *korambo* was to be erected an old ceremonial house had once stood; the two front lateral posts were still standing, but they were higher than the supports that had been prepared for the new building.

When Thurnwald travelled from the Sepik to the northern coast in 1912/13 he passed through the Maprik area, stopping off at various villages, among them Waignakim. The pictures he took show that the Waignakim ceremonial houses were built more in the style of the southern Abelam than that of the northern area. Thus, for example, they tend to be much lower than those in the Mamblep–Dshame–Kalabu district.

The construction of a new ceremonial house cannot commence without sacrificing pigs to the *nggwalndu* in the name of which the new house is being built. This is reflected in the Abelam saying "the pig built the *korambo*." The metaphor is a clue to the large number of pigs needed for sacrifice before a new *korambo* is finished; at the same time it insinuates the otherworldliness of pigs (see p. 117). Since construction involves both ritual moieties, each *ara* procures a pig which is given to the opposite moiety in the name of the *nggwalndu*; the exchange not only expresses cooperation between the two groups, but also, and even more pronouncedly, the notion of competition. When the men dig the holes for the four lateral posts – the deepest in the whole building, up to two metres in depth – the people paraphrase this

[15] From time to time we got to hear disapproving comments if a man failed to distribute tobacco and betel nuts to the men who had helped him with the roofing, due to the fact he was a follower of the Seventh-Day Adventists.

[16] During the roughly three-month construction period we visited Waignakim regularly. Since the men did not work on the ceremonial house every day, it occasionally happened that a certain part of the house had been finished before we arrived on our next visit. The sequence of construction was a frequent topic in our discussions with the men of Kalabu. The following description is based on observation, oral accounts and a photo documentation given to us by Dr med. Werner Stöcklin, Riehen, Switzerland; see also Stöcklin 2004..

as 'the pig has broken into the garden'.[17] The picture refers to the habit of pigs of breaking through the fences that protect the gardens and churning up the ground to get at the tubers; the image equates man with pig on the basis of the similarity of action – both men and pigs dig up the ground. At least this is the exoteric meaning of the metaphor. The image receives an added dimension when one considers how the holes are dug. In order to be in a better position to remove the soil from the deepening hole, the men dig a second hole next to it, with a channel-like trench connecting the two. This trench in which the digger stands is called *serkambi*; tellingly, the same term is used in gardening to designate the cavity that is excavated when digging up ceremonial yam.

On the esoteric level,[18] pigs are looked upon as the manifestation of spirits of the dead who move to and fro between this world and the beyond, which, in the real world, finds its epitome in the ceremonial house.[19]

Before sinking the four posts they are smeared with grey mud (*dshanggele*; it is also applied as a grounding to the sago 'sheets' used for painting) in order to protect the *kwatmu* wood (ironwood) from insects and rot. When a post has been sunk it is buttressed with the aid of stones.

If there are no old posts or holes from a previous ceremonial house to go by – in Waignakim the men took the measurements for the new construction from the distance between the two remaining front posts of the old house – the size of the planned building is first specified. In an initial step, the men lay down the distance between the two supports for one side of the house. In the case of a moderately sized *korambo* three men place themselves in a row with outstretched arms, fingertips touching. If it is to be a large house (as e.g. Yambusaki) it takes four men. With the basic dimension fixed, a man experienced in measuring out the ground plan of ceremonial houses – in Kalabu there was only one such man, by the name of Gueguin – determines the position of the two posts on the opposite side. No further measurements are taken; all other important fix-points are determined by discretion and experience.[20]

When I studied the sketches more closely I quickly realized that the distance between the two front posts (*magnagwat*) and that between the two rear posts (*bunbungwat*) could not be incidental. It showed that the sum of the lengths between the two *magnagwat* and the two *bunbungwat* equalled the distance between front and rear post. If you project the distances between the two *magnagwat* and the two *bunbungwat* on to the distance between *magnagwat* and *bunbungwat* you come up with the golden ratio. For Yambusaki this fits exactly, for Kaumbul, Wapinda, Buknitibe and Kuminimbis it comes very close; however, it does not apply to Nyambak, Dshanggungge and Kimbangwa.

At the upper end, the four posts are equipped with natural forks or, if not, broad notches are excised. Before the heavy roof side beams are put in place, the men measure the posts for height with the aid of long bamboo poles or thin tree stems. If it shows that, for example, the two *magnagwat* do not stand at the same height, the larger one is dug up from its hole and shortened at the lower end. The same goes for the two *bunbungwat*. When all posts have the required height, the heavy roof side beams (*kwambut*) are heaved up on to the supports.[21] The *magnagwat* are sometimes named after slain enemies; thus, for example, the two front posts of the Wapinda ceremonial house are named after Nggilepal of Malmba and Banggilo of Kimbanggwa.

When the basic ground plan of the new ceremonial house has been established by the placement of the four posts and the two *kwambut* beams, the men construct a scaffold (*nyangga*, literally: child house; **fig. 18**). For this purpose two tall tree stems are sunk in the ground, to the left and right of the central axis, forming a pair. The stems are joined by crossbars at intervals of approximately 80 to 100 cm, creating a kind of ladder. In Waignakim the

17 Unfortunately we did not get to see how deep the holes actually were.

18 The Abelam are masters in the use of metaphors, of which they have many; in Tok Pisin they are called 'tok piksa' – picture talk, in the indigenous language they are referred to as *andsha kundi.*

19 See Hauser-Schäublin (1984).

20 Unfortunately we were never able to persuade Gueguin – a knowledgeable old man who impressed us by the aura of his personality – to show us on the ceremonial ground of his home hamlet (Wapinda) how the ground plan of a ceremonial house was marked out; he simply used to shake his head. Probably the situation was to him too hypothetical because he was being asked to do something outside its normal cultural context.

21 All wooden poles used in construction are trimmed in the bush before they are hauled to the village.

scaffold consisted of three such 'ladders' inside the house, and one at the front, outside, which ended just below the peak of the future canopy. The tallest ladder is supported additionally by two props on each side (in this function these stems are called *nggoinyangge*) and fixed to the foremost ladder inside the house by horizontal supports (f**ig. 18a, 18b, 19**). The two ladders at the front are also connected by a platform (*guagnendshambe*), which indicates the lower rim of the canopy at the same time.[22] The tree stems used for the foremost ladder are termed *wagnenyaui* (*wagnen* – the large disk-shaped headdress made of painted flattened palm spathes and/or feathers attached to the back of the head of the (ceremonial) dancers; *yaui* means as much as 'garden'). At the top of the *wagnenyaui*, towering above the peak of the ceremonial house, the leaves of a rattan palm called *paal* are attached. Occasionally a certain type of plaited basket reserved for men who have passed the *nggwalndu* stage of initiation is also displayed up there. The basket (*kimbi*) contains orange-coloured *ban* fruits; these are said to represent the *nggwal*'s betel nuts (**pl. 28**).

The ladders within the house are joined at the top on each side by purlins that slope from front to back; against these, rafters are leant in a row, following a base line that matches the future ceremonial house's triangular ground plan. Affixed to these on the outside are purlins, which also serve as rungs to stand on during the construction of the house. When finished, the scaffold has approximately the shape of a small ceremonial house. Now construction on the real house continues. Long and very sturdy wooden poles are leant in pairs against the scaffold on both sides, again forming a triangular ground plan. In order to hoist them up, a strong vine rope is attached to their upper ends; then they are hauled up, the scaffold serving as leverage, until they are in position. Between each pair of wooden crucks (*watnamba*) a pair of bamboo poles is placed. Unlike the posts (*magnagwat* and *bunbungwat*) on which the *kwambut* beams rest, the crucks are sunk only a few centimetres into the ground.

This accomplished, the men haul the ridge beam from the bush to the village, using a strong vine rope that is looped through a hole at the upper end of the tree trunk. When they arrive at the ceremonial ground, the men shoulder the heavy timber and carry it up the scaffold from the back – occasionally with the thick end of the trunk first – until it comes to rest on the intersecting *watnamba*. The felling of the tree chosen for the ridge beam, and heaving it up the scaffold, is done by the men of the *amei* responsible for the new *korambo*, provided that the respective clan or clans command sufficient manpower. Among the north-western Abelam, the front end of the ridge beam is decorated with a carved human face. Heaving the heavy ridge beam (*yapa* – father; or *nyit* – heaven) up the scaffold is considered as one of the highlights in construction. The beam is loosely wrapped in a *paal* vine, which is termed *nggwal* when the ridge piece is in position. Then the beam is lashed tightly to the crucks and trussed with vines. When the foremost *watnamba* pair is securely fastened, the men vigorously invoke the names of the *nggwalndu*. Coconut husks are inserted in the joint and the whole contraption is lashed with vines (**pl. 29**) and covered with wild taro leaves (*myamba*). This spot is described as *nggwalnduna auw* (*nggwal*'s woven ornamental band). The work is considered secret, which means that the women are not allowed to

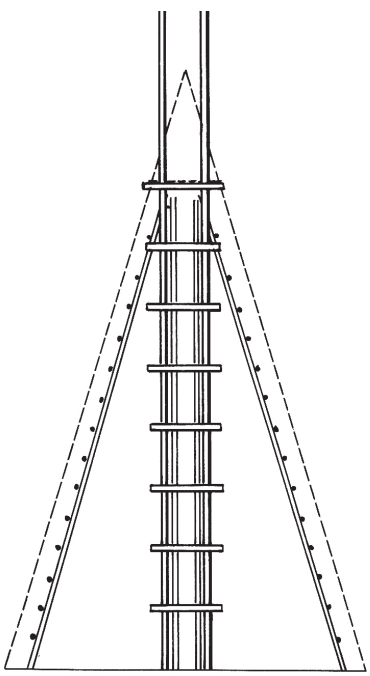


Fig. 18 Front view of scaffold (*nyangga*)

[22] This outside part of the scaffold resembles the one used by the neighbouring Iatmul people when building a new men's house; see also Pieper 1939: 57.

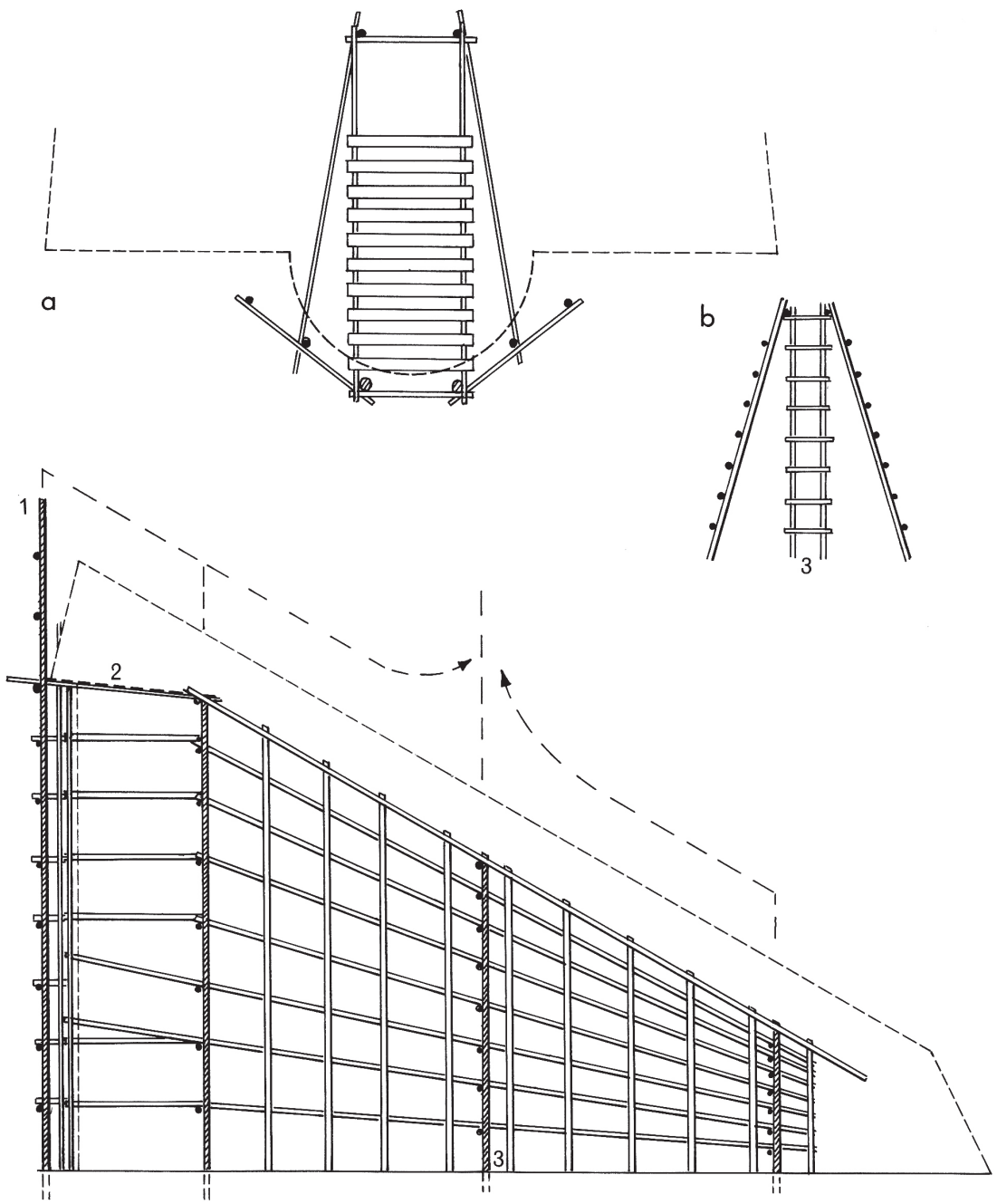


Fig. 19 Side view of scaffold.
a) *guagnendshambe* platform, b) central ladder on scaffold;
1 *wagnen yaui*; 2 *guagnendshambe*; 3 *nggoinyangge*

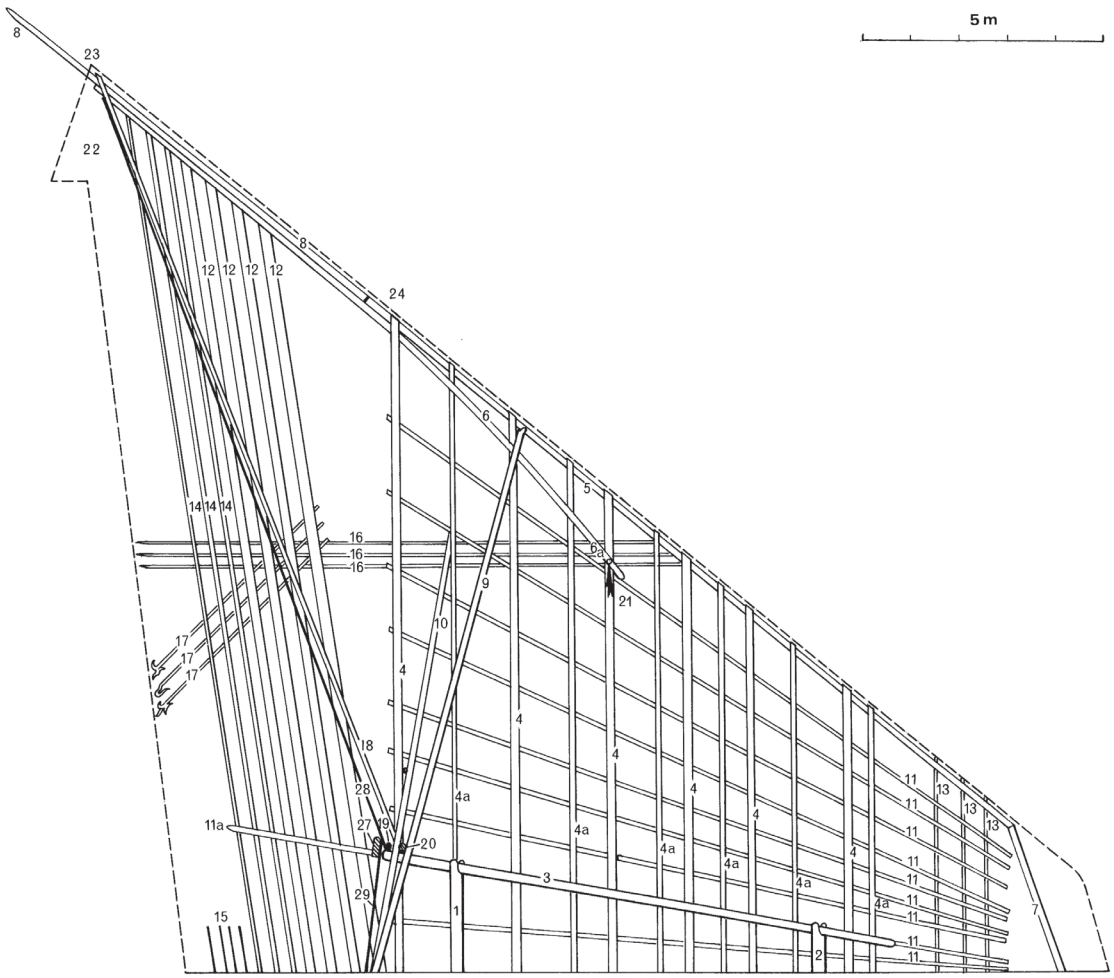


Fig. 20 Side view of the *naure kumun-korambo of* Yambusaki, Kalabu
(including numbers indicating constituent parts).

Specifications to figures 9, 20, 23a/b:
1 *magnagwat*; 2 *bunbungwat*; 3 *kwambut*; 4 *watnamba* (wooden cruck); 4a *watnamba* (bamboo rafter); 5 *yapa*, also called *nyitmangge*; 6 *nyan*, also called *moim*, 6a *nyelle*; 7 *gini sitik*; 8 *yapitak*; 9 *yanetikwa*; 10 *taksapa*; 11 *yakua*, also called *lelai*; 11a *daungge*; 12 *benggomangge*; 13 *wenggokama*; 14 *miaatbande*; 15 *narkassa*, the foremost one *nggugyeseri*; 16 *yawakama*; 17 *vi warya*; 18 *biterapu*; 19 *tagwakwambut*; 20 *betikit*; 21 *mindsha kumbum*, also called *yeshagu*; 22 *nimbi*, inside: *kwandshengga*; 23 *tsaam*; 24 *nggwalnduna auw*; 25 *benggo grau*; 26 *tambu mangge*; 27 *tikit*; 28 *mbai*; 29 *kimbi*.

approach the *amei* during this phase.

Sometimes, but not on all ceremonial houses, the distal end of the ridge beam is propped up by a post (*gini sitik*) at the back of the house. In the next step, the long wooden rafters (*benggomangge*) for the front part of the building are put in place (**pl. 28**). Unlike the crucks (*watnamba*), these poles intersect above the ridge piece.

Following this, slats[23] made of 'limbum' palm are affixed to the inside of the roof sides in a fan-like formation. The topmost of these up to ten *yakua* slats[24] has approximately the same inclination as the ridge beam, the second one from the bottom that of the wall plates, while the lowest one lies almost horizontal. In nearly all ceremonial houses in Kalabu, only the two 'limbum' boards positioned at the level of the *kwambut* beams protrude from the front of the façade; they are carved and painted. All the other *yakua* end approximately at the foremost *watnamba* pair. Only in the case of Kaumbul is this different. Here one has several protruding boards on each side. The painted and carved 'limbum' boards also go by the name of *daungge*.

In a next step, bamboo rafters (*wenggokama*) are placed in position on the outside of the frame of the house, their top ends projecting beyond the ridge beam. They are lashed to the *yapa* with vine ropes. Next, the men, working from bottom to top, attach long, thin horizontal bamboo poles (*yawakama*) to the *wenggokama* rafters at intervals of between 20 and 40 cm, creating a kind of grid. Later on, the thatched panels are attached to these slats.

While one group of workmen is busy with the substructure of the roofing, a second group is occupied with fitting in the *nyan* ('child'), the secondary ridge beam that is mounted with the aid of a crossbeam (*nyelle* – ornamental nose plug) roughly two metres below the ridge beam, between the second and third *watnamba* pair from the front; its function is to underpin the main ridge piece. Usually the *yapa* (i.e. the main ridge beam) does not exceed far beyond the foremost pair of crucks (*watnamba*). Attached to the *nyan*, cross-section upon cross-section, is a ridge extension piece (*yapitak*) which is visible on the outside. When the house is finished, the *yapitak* forms the peak of the ridge. The *nyan* itself ends at the highest point (**fig. 21**) of the projecting roof (*nimbi* – tooth); it also forms the end point of the two bamboo poles (*biterapu*) which flank the façade, indicating the forward inclined angle of the impressive façade painting.

The intersection point at the top is also the spot where the chain consisting of plaited links (*nggal*) comes to hang. In Kalabu, the chain is decorated with three puppet-like figures collectively called *mande* (testicles)[25] and said to represent slain enemies. This nodal point to which sometimes also coconut husks are added is ultimately wrapped in wild taro leaves (*myamba*) and decorated with red hibiscus flowers (*mauwe*). The spot is called *tsaam*. Occasionally, the basket of *nggwalndu,* which previously adorned the *wagnenyaui* post, is attached here, after the *yapitak* has been erected.

When the men enwrap this spot with vines, small whistle-like instruments are sounded (made from oval and round fruits) in order to chase away the women and children who are not permitted to see this, since it is considered secret (*maira*), similar to the intersection point of the *watnamba*.

Also attached to this node are the vertical bars (*tama* – nose) made from a special kind of 'limbum' palm, forming the cone that constitutes the framework of the projecting roof, or canopy (**figs 21; 21 a, b**). Size and shape of the canopy's bottom opening are determined by the length of the thick vines to which the 'limbum' bars are clamped from the inside. Immediately behind the leading edges of the roof sides, but in front of the *benggomangge*, vines (*narkassa*) are mounted; they reach as far as the *nimbi* above and are fixed in the ground by a 'limbum' slat. Usually there are four to each side; the foremost one is called *nggugyeseri* (rainwater drain), which also explains its actual function.

Above the cross-sections of the rafters that provide the substructure of the roofing, either a thick vine or a bamboo pole is placed serving as a crest pole to which the rafters are lashed in pairs (**pl. 30**). The protruding ends of the

[23] Broad strips, approximately 2 cm thick, cut from the outer, easily cleavable casing of the 'limbum' palm.

[24] Also called *lelai.*

[25] Among the eastern Abelam this part to which, in earlier days, the skulls of slain enemies were attached is described as the testicles of the male ridge beam. It is told that, during times of war, men used to hang up the testicles of slain enemy warriors on the ceremonial ground (Forge 1966: 27).

rafters are then trimmed. When all the vine bindings (*miaat*), especially those in the front part of the building joining the *watnamba* and the *benggomangge*, are in place (**pl. 29**), the men insert roughly four-metre long sticks (*vi warya*: *vi* – spear, *warya* – to fight) between the *narkassa* and the *wenggokama* rafters and tie them in. They stand at almost right angle to the *benggomannge*. *Vi warya* are occasionally made of real spears (*vi*), or at least pointed sticks. But in most cases the thin stems of the *mindshikni* tree including the roots are used. The people say that this is the only suitable wood for a *vi warya* (**fig. 20, 21**). Often the rootstock is carved and painted. The bizarre bird-head-like roots are positioned at the front.

When building has progressed to the roofing stage, the men once more go to the bush in search of a strong and suitable tree stem to serve as ridge post. After felling, a vine rope is passed through a hole that has been cut into the lower end of the stem – the same way it is done for the ridge beam. Following this, the men haul the stem back to the village. Inside the house, on the central axis, at approximately the level of the front *kwambut* supports, the men dig a hole into which the stem is sunk. For this purpose often a part of the scaffold has to be removed (**pl. 31**). The upper end of the post is equipped with a notch into which the ridge beam (*yapa*) will fit. While the younger men climb the scaffold and heave up the post, the others try to fit the lower end into the hole, which is roughly 60 centimetres deep and buttressed with stones. The central ridge post (*yanetikwa*) is the only roundwood element in the ceremonial house that is inclined to the back, and not vertical or forward inclined as all the others timbers. My Kalabu associates explained that the *yanetikwa* carries the upper section of the ceremonial house, the two *kwambut* support the lower part.

The next major phase in construction is the manufacture of the thatched panels[26] for the roof (**pl. 32**). It begins with the search and preparation of the vines required for attaching the panels (especially halving and quartering them and removing the inelastic woody parts); no other but the kind called *kibe* is considered suitable. Only ceremonial houses are roofed with specially prepared thatched panels made from the leaves of the sago palm. First, the people remove single leaves from the frond and extract the stiff stalks. Depending on the kind of thatch required they fold the leaf over the midrib of a sago palm frond; for the *nimbi* and the roof bonnet (*tibure*) vines are used, as the thatched sheets have to be semi-round in shape. Usually three leaves are laid over each other (folded across in the middle); the panels are fully waterproof and usually hold for many years. For each panel approximately 60 leaves are required. They are perforated just beneath the panel rod with the aid of a cassowary bone dagger; through the openings, a thin sago palm midrib is inserted lengthwise; this holds the leaves in place. For a whole ceremonial house, roughly a thousand thatched panels are required.

Thatch-making is again men's work. It is usually done by older men who are physically no longer able to participate in the actual construction work. Thatching (**pl. 33**) only commences when the people think that the supply of panels is sufficient to see them through. In order to estimate how many panels are needed, each roof side is divided into strips measuring the width of a panel, and marked with small sticks (in Waignakim) or vines (in Kalabu). These strips are called *timbu*; the same term is used for the single plots in a garden. In a similar way, the vertical gauge of the thatched sheets is also determined with the help of little sticks or vine knots. The actual thatching is carried out by all men who, in some way or another, feel associated with the hamlet where the new house is being built. The work is done in concerted action, in one go. Shortly after sunrise on the appointed day, the sounding of the slit gong summons the men to work. Thatching continues all day, ending usually shortly before nightfall.

Each *ara* is responsible for one side of the roof; again, the work process has a competitive touch to it. The *timbu* strips are labelled with special leaves (*dshambunyingga*) designating single clans, meaning that each clan (or lineage) is responsible for the work in its assigned section (including the manufacture of the panels).

To commence roofing, men from the hamlet of the new *korambo* first apply two or three rows of panels on each side of the ridge beam, tying them to a vine rope (*mbogomi mbau*) that has been spanned parallel to the ridge piece. Then the roof is bonneted, from front to back, using *tibure* panels that are placed transversely.

[26] Thatched panels of this kind are widespread in Melanesia; see also Pieper (1939: 60).

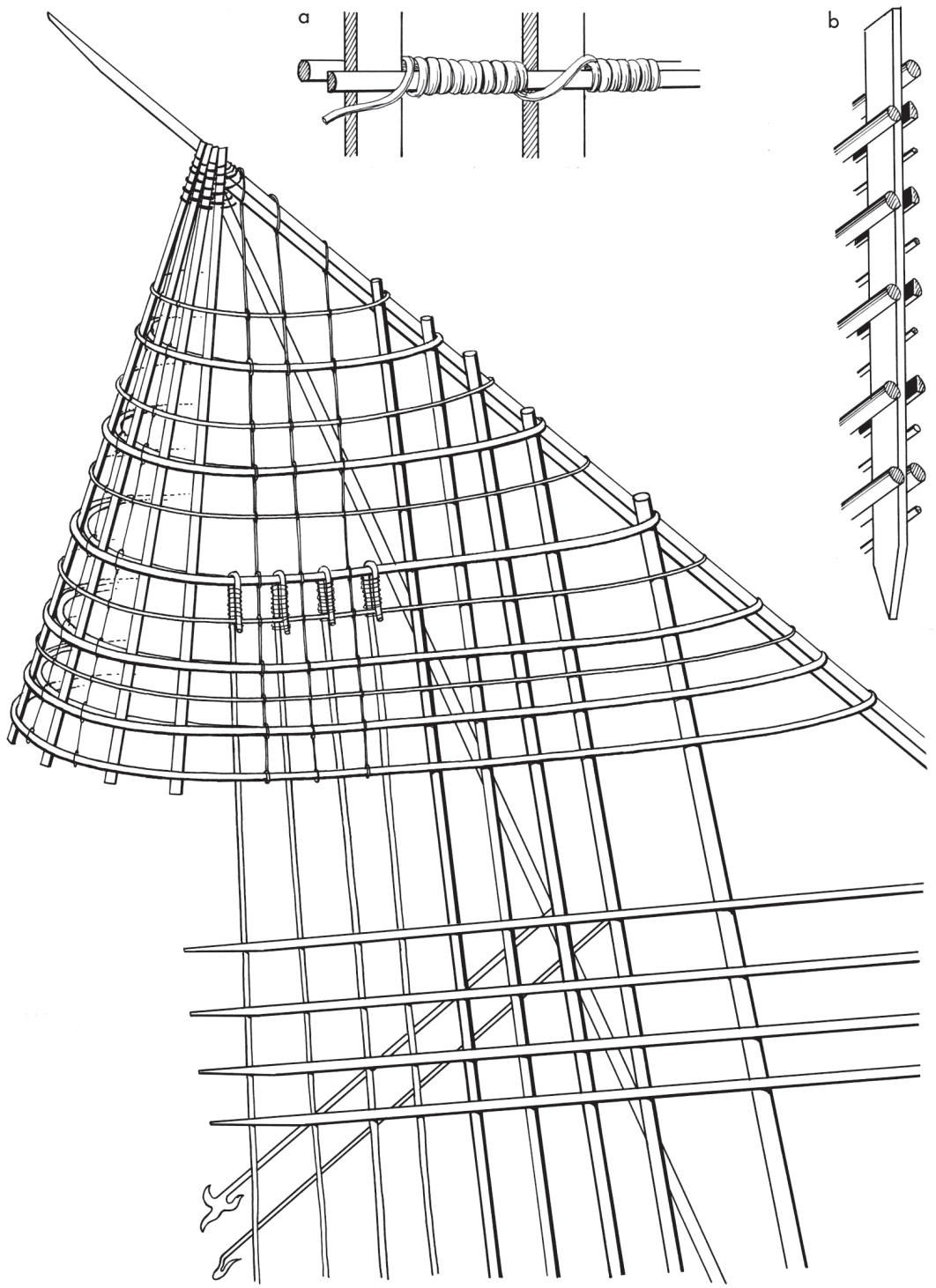


Fig. 21 Basic construction mode of the canopy on a ceremonial house (*nimbi*; side view);
a) Mode of lashing the vine slats to the vertical bars;
b) Detail showing a single 'limbum' bar clamped between horizontal slats.

The same group of men is responsible for the thatching of the leading edges on the roof sides; The panels – called *yiren* here – are again placed at right angles, that is, with the leaf tips pointing to the front. Next, the *nimbi* (canopy) is roofed. While the *nimbi* is being covered with a plaited mat decorated with white leaves and red hibiscus flowers, the other men start on the thatching of the main roof area, on both sides. Here the thatched panels are called *yapa*. For the bottom row, immediately above ground level, panels are used that have been folded lengthwise – that is, they are twice as thick as the others – with the folded edge facing upwards. Thatching proceeds from front to back, commencing immediately behind the *yiren* panels at the front. The men who fix the panels to the battens are standing on the scaffold within the structure. The sheets are passed to them by helpers, for the upper sections with the aid of bamboo poles.

Although the mat that covers the canopy appears to be made of one piece, it actually consists of two parts: the middle, or front, part is a *kimbi* (*kalusola kimbi*) consisting of squares, or diamond shaped ornaments standing on end (**pl. 34**); it is called *bapmu* (moon). A second *kimbi* (*noakimbi* – mother mat) flanks the front mat on both sides; the *noakimbi* runs across the ridge, breadthways. It shows a zigzag pattern (*gwatik tamba* – elbow) and a triangular pattern (*yamangga* – leaf of a type of 'limbum' palm). The spot where the ridge extension protrudes from the peak of the canopy is covered by upturned cooking pots of different sizes (the largest at the bottom, the smallest at the top), occasionally by an hourglass drum.

Furthermore, the *nimbi* is adorned with spears (**pl. 74**), two of which pass through the canopy from one side to the other. Attached to these on each side are two additional spears pointing forward, that is, in the same direction as the ridge extension.

To celebrate the end of construction, the men stick twigs and white fronds of the *bendshin* palm into the *nimbi* and the front section of the roof. Inside the house, just under the ridge, they hang up a fibre rope, a bit in the shape of a 'grass skirt', on a pair of *watnamba* (**pl. 44**). It is termed *mindsha kumbu* or *yeshagu* and marks the boundary that divides the house into a front part, which the women are allowed to enter during the inauguration feast, and a back part, which is reserved for the men. Suspended from the *mindsha kumbu* are vines to which hourglass drums are attached during festivities. Hanging up the *mindsha kumbu* and the vines is regarded not only as a dangerous task, but also as a significant ritual action. It can only be performed by an older man who has strictly observed a number of taboos for an extensive period. In Kalabu we were introduced to an older, physically and mentally slightly disabled man who, the people told us, was destined for this task since he had never married, had nothing to do with women and was said to generally lead a life of 'innocence'. A false step when hanging up the *mindsha kumbu*, possibly induced unwittingly by the infringement of a taboo, could lead to death or bring on sickness to the man's family. Finally, crossbars are fitted into the gable front, forming a grid (*benggo grau*) to which later the façade painting is affixed.

Roofing Ceremony

After work is completed, the scaffold is removed. The *amei* is cleared of all refuse and leftovers such as excess sago palm fronds, vine fibres, pieces of bamboo, etc. and of the continuously sprouting grass, in preparation for the first of a series of closing ceremonies. Next to the moon stone, a tally stick (*gare*) made of the midrib of a sago palm frond is stuck in the ground. It stands at the centre of a small circular bed of grass that has been left standing, measuring approximately a metre in diameter and lined by a circle of small *ban* fruits. It looks like a small green grass island on the otherwise bleak ceremonial ground (**pl. 35**). The sago leaves themselves have been removed, leaving behind stalk stubs roughly five centimetres long, on to which *ban* fruits are pinned. The stubs on the one side stand for one of the *ara*, those on the other side for its counterpart. Each *ban* fruit represents a pig that has been exchanged between the two moieties in the course of preparation and construction of the ceremonial house. In the case of Waignakim, this amounted to something between 30 and 40 pigs which were brought into connection with the ceremonial house – possibly only in retrospect – and a cassowary that was represented by a feather attached to the tally stick. Fastened to the *gare* was also *nggwalndu*'s basket that had previously been attached to the *wagnenyaui* post inside the house. The *ban* fruits it had contained had been removed and replaced by coconut husks, probably as a reference to the

forthcoming initiations,[27] which the two *ara* had agreed upon before construction began. During the roofing ceremony, to which all the surrounding villages are invited, long discussions and a copious feast for which several pigs are killed take centre stage.

In Waignakim we had the opportunity to attend such an event and to follow the extensive discussion that went with it. Below I reproduce passages from some of the main contributions.[28]

Nggilendu, Councillor of Waignakim:

All you men who have come from many different villages to take part in this feast, let me say this: we, the men of Waignakim I, have built this ceremonial house; we took great care that all the people kept to the (ritual) rules. I didn't want to see anyone fall sick, or even die.[29] We have put up a fence in order to keep evil away and to prevent people from falling sick and dying. All our thoughts were centred on what we wished to achieve. If you men of Waignakim II or III think you are on the trace of something (sorcery), don't come to us with it. We have nothing to do with these things; all we wanted was to build a new ceremonial house. Now you have come to see it. I like this kind of meetings. But if someone falls sick or dies, do not come here with your problems. And if someone is planning to do sorcery (*kus*) against another person, he cannot come here! So, if someone dies in one of your villages, don't come here and blame us. We have nothing to do with it. But you, men of Waignakim II and III, don't say of me: this man is talking about sorcery and sickness! No, that would be wrong; we are planning an initiation and therefore we have nothing to do with sorcery!

A short while ago, an old man died in Kumunware. He died precisely on the day[30] that the men of Waignakim III were planning to stage a ceremonial dance (*wagnen*). On that day, the man died. The people of Kalabu were on their way to us, they wanted to take part in the feast. When they reached Kumunware, they heard that the old man had died. But we had locked the dead body in a house, and so we went to the dance with the people of Kalabu. Together we stepped on to the *amei* and watched the men of Waignakim III, looked how they had decorated their bodies and how they wore their headdresses. I had thrown this old man out; I didn't want the people to start looking for reasons why this old man had died.

I prevented this because I had already started with the preparations for the new ceremonial house. If I hadn't, you people of Waignakim II and III would have come to me when someone in one of your hamlets died and blamed me that your death had something to do with the death of the old man (in Kumunware). That's why I paid no further attention to this old man, and started with the ritual preparations.

Wulmbi:

I am a man from the hills, I have nothing to do with sorcery. I'm busy preparing an initiation, which is why I do not wish to hear anything about death. Later, we will sing and dance. I don't grieve for this old man; I removed him because I wanted to hold an initiation. I don't want you to think: aah, he's grieving for this old man, and now he wants to take revenge. I'm telling you: that is not so!

Nggilendu (singing):

The bush is growing in my hamlet, in my hamlet Kumunware and Kandanggileko. My hamlet is becoming bush; this is why I wish to clear the hamlets Kumunware and Kandanggileko again; I want my hamlets to be real settlements again.[31]

He continues, now speaking:

I don't want anything to happen to me, I don't want to become sick and die; I am keeping to my taboos because I am preparing an initiation. Last year you staged a large feast; this year it's my turn. You have come from many villages, and now you can see that I'm on the right path. I don't want to see grief and jealousy arise. So, no village can forbid us to carry out the feast. I have now openly spoken my thoughts, so that you men from Waignakim II, III and IV may hear my words.

I will hold this ceremony. We built this ceremonial

[27] During initiation, the novices are fed – fattened would be more precise – for weeks on end on roasted yam and yam soup richly garnished with coconut rasps. The empty coconut shells are piled up at the edge of the *amei* as a sign that an initiation is in process or has recently been concluded.

[28] All the discussions and disputes reproduced in this study were recorded on tape and then translated into Tok Pisin, sentence for sentence, with the help of my research associate Waina. In addition, the translations of the rich metaphoric speech commonly used in these events, and called *andshe-kundi* in Ambulas, needed unravelling. For this I relied on the support of various bigmen.

[29] If a person dies during the construction of a ceremonial house or during an initiation, work stops immediately and is not resumed later.

[30] 23 December 1978. When the news of the death spread shortly before the feast began, some of the guests from other villages decided to return to their villages immediately, for fear that the deceased's relatives, driven by anger and anguish, might attack the visitors from enemy villages.

[31] The space in front of the ceremonial house is always kept clear of grass, until the building falls into disrepair. The speaker is alluding to the fact that only a hamlet with a *korambo* is considered as a real settlement because only then do the people keep the area clear of grass and weeds.

house at a bad time, in a period when we had not yet brought in the harvest. Just look at the tally stick (*gare*)! I took a sago palm frond, cut it in half, and fixed a red fruit to it for each pig I sacrificed this last year. Don't think that these were pigs that I procured in exchange many months or even years ago. No, these were pigs that we obtained over the last few months and sacrificed to honour the *nggwalndu* itself (literally: they fell on to *nggwalndu*). When it is time for the novices to enter the *korambo* to see the spirits, one *ara* will offer two pigs, and the other *ara* will do the same. This will occur on the day that the novices crawl into the ceremonial house.

At present, all our thoughts are focused on the feast. But many of you are now mourning a person that has died. And these men now intend to bring harm to another man, to kill him. But I, Nggilendu, tell you: this old man who has died – let us not grieve for him and let us not think about taking revenge for his death by using sorcery! The death of the old man doesn't bother us, it doesn't touch us. I am leading the men; we will go ahead with this initiation, that is our aim. All of you who belong to other families and other (totemic) birds, don't try to fight us (with sorcery) because you fear vengeance for the death of this old man! I have told you clearly: we don't bother about this old man, because now we are staging this feast. The old man was my (classificatory) father; in earlier days he himself staged many feasts; now he is dead and he has taken his knowledge with him. I am merely a child trying to stage a feast as I think it should be done. This is why I no longer worry about the death of this father.

When my father died, we sent two men with shell rings to Kalabu[32] so that they would take part in the (ceremonial) dance in Waignakim III. The people of Kalabu were on their way to us when my father died. I put his body in a house because I was not cross with anyone and did not want to hold anybody accountable for his death. When the people of Kalabu arrived at my home, I took them to Waignakim III, and together we watched the dancers make their appearance. Now it is our turn: all my children will wear a *wagnen* headdress after they have seen the *nggwal*.

When we thought about holding an initiation in Kumunware, we had no ceremonial house yet. That is why we, the men of Waignakim I, have built a large house, a *korambo*. The *nggwal* will come to settle in this house, and there our children will set eyes on him.

Preparations for this initiation commenced already a year ago. That is when I thought to myself: we can't allow the *nggwal* to appear in a small house. Many people from all villages in the area will come to this feast, and they would laugh at me if we had no ceremonial house. That is why I postponed the initiation until our large house was finished. Now you have come to see the large house, and now the *nggwal* will come to settle there.

Tapukuin (singing):

Bira is the name of a man's *nggwalndu*. This man is like a *bendshin* palm. Whoever tries to root up this palm will himself die. It is forbidden to root up this palm! Don't try to kill him with sorcery; he must stay alive.[33]

Tapukuin continues (now speaking):

This man Kraimtobi, he must not die; he must stay alive and grow old. When he is old and shaky and sits in the ashes of the fire (to keep warm), then he may die. But not yet.

Nggilendu:

Kraimtobi and I, we are men of the law.[34] It is we who first receive instructions from the governm ent; then we pass them on to you. This is why you cannot harm Kraimtobi; I cannot perform this task on my own. We have to do it together. Kraimtobi must recover. You men who are responsible for sorcery, you must talk about Kraimtobi and listen around to hear what has happened. If I hear the name of a village mentioned in connection with Kraimtobi, I will tell you, and you must then try to find out along which path this sorcery travelled. Often the village, or even the hamlet, where the sick man lives is responsible for the evil deed. But if another village is responsible for the sorcery, then you must go there. You must try to make the man well again. We must do something otherwise he will die. Kurulukwe must take the lead, he must find the path. He must find out at which place Kraimtobi was struck with this harm (illness).

Tapukuin:

You men who are versed in sorcery: you must first go to Bainyik, to the house where the sorcery bundles[35] are kept, and check whether Kraimtobi's bundle is still intact. Then you must bring back a part of it, so that Kraimtobi can regain strength. Apart from Bainyik, you must also go to Wora and Numagim.[36] Wherever you come across a sorcery bundle, you must take a little part of it and bring it back here.

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32 Since Kalabu and Waignakim used to be bitter enemies in former days, the Waignakim sent two men to Kalabu as hostages so that the people of Kalabu could visit the feast in Waignakim without fear. The hostages remained in Kalabu until all the people had safely returned to their village.

33 The use of the *bendshin* palm metaphor (in Tok Pisin: 'wail limbum') for a living person is unusual since, in other story contexts, the *bendshin* palm is associated with the dead. A *bendshin* palm also bars the entrance to the realm of the dead; should it be removed, the deceased would take possession of the earth.

34 Nggilendu and Kraimtobi are village councillors.

35 See pages 95-102.

36 For the people of Kalabu, the villages Waignakim, Bainyik, Wora and Numagim are sorcery villages par excellence.

Nobody's safe from sorcery, not even we men of the law. Nobody's immortal, all humans fall sick and die some day.

You might remember: some time ago, Gura was ill. You didn't want to go and check up on the sorcery bundles; instead, you kept postponing it until it was too late, and he died. Tomorrow you must set out, so that Kraimtobi may soon recover.

Yalka (singing):

I am a man who can carve secret things. Once I used to live in Umbite Targwa. Many men have seen the secret things I carve. I make them, and then they take them and claim 'I myself carved this secret image!' But that's not true; I am the one who knows how to carve and to paint.

Yalka continues (now speaking):

You must think of this man here; now you are trying to harm him with sorcery. Again and again this man fell sick because you were smoking him like a fish or a piece of meat. But this man must regain strength and remain healthy because he is the one who knows how to carve and paint secret things. This is why you may not harm him.

I am speaking about Waulemoi of Kalabu. He is the man who knows how to carve and to build elaborate cult scenes. He comes to Waignakim to make these things for us. I am telling you: this man is not allowed to die. Waulemoi must be left to grow old; when he is old and warms his skin in the fire's ashes, when he can hardly get up from the floor, when his eyes are nearly blind, then he can die, that is the good way.

This man is famous for his work in many villages. Many people enjoy pork in his name. I'm speaking of Waulemoi because his sorcery bundle is lodged in Waignkakim. Look to him, you men from all parts of Waignakim, look to him and see that he remains alive.

The clan or hamlet that is in possession of his sorcery bundle must look after it and see to it that Waulemoi is left to grow old.

Nggilendu:

Death and sorcery is something you find in every village. I am a man who knows a lot about sorcery and knows how to deal with sorcery bundles. But on my own I cannot do anything because in every village where men live whose sorcery bundle I keep, there is a speaker whose words I follow. When I am told that a certain person has caused ill, I am also told his name so that I can destroy his sorcery bundle; that is what I then do. It's up to you in your own village whether someone falls ill or dies; because the wrong is being done in your village. On the other hand, if a man dies, we try to find out why he died, which wrong caused his death and who committed that wrong.[37] However, Waulemoi must stay alive and be allowed to grow old. Sorcery is like the law: if a person lives by the law, then nothing will happen to him; but if he breaks the law, and someone sees him doing it and accuses him, then the man goes to jail. It is the same with sorcery. If a man does something bad, and other people get to know, then – unless he makes up for the wrong – the men take this wrong to the house where the sorcery bundles are kept, and the wrongdoer will fall ill. It's the same in all villages. Nobody falls ill or dies without reason. But the cause of it is always to be found in the village itself; from there the news travels to the village where the sorcery bundles are kept.

Nggelut of Yenigo:

I am from Kugim;[38] I have nothing to add to your speech. I came to see the house that you have built; you gave me food, I ate it and now I am going back to my village. I would never think of putting the blame on you for a death that occurred in our village.

Darigwa of Kalabu (singing):

You man from Waignakim, you spoke to me with a sweet tongue[39] because I am supposed to prepare this cult scene for you and carve secret things. Nggilendu and Yalka, the two of you spoke to me, now I will give you an answer.

He continues, now speaking:

You gave me sweet talk because you want me to carve and paint these secret images for you, as you yourself don't know how to do it. But in two or three months' time, after all is over, you will try to make me sick again. Because, in truth, you don't want me to grow old. All our sorcery bundles are being kept in your village, in Waignakim; that is why Waulemoi falls ill every month, sometimes even every week. Before the year is out he will fall ill again, I'm telling you. You were lying when you spoke about Waulemoi. Only because you are busy now preparing this initiation you gave him all this sweet talk; in truth you put him down with sorcery (Tok Pisin: 'slipim em long poisen'), you hang up his sorcery bundle and smoke him like a fish.

Taundshe of Kalabu:

You men of Waignakim I and II! You want Waulemoi to make these secret things for your initiation. You eat pork in his name, but in truth he falls ill, again and again, and we know why.

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37 Often, a man is not thought to die from a wrong he committed himself; instead he becomes the victim of a wrong that some other person, usually a clan relative, committed.

38 Overall term covering the villages of Magutogim, Yenigo and Naram, see also p. 2.

39 Darigwa is speaking in place of Waulemoi.

Papunap of Waignakim:

It is true, Kalabu is our enemy. In earlier days we used to fight with spears; but I, a small man,[40] I grabbed hold of these two villages with my own hands and brought war to an end.[41] Since then the people of Kalabu come to Waignakim, and the other way round. Now we sit together and talk about matters. It is I who stopped the war. Waulemoi has the knowledge to make these secret things, but time and again he falls ill. So, you men of Waignakim, you must think good of him, so that he stays alive!

Nggilendu:

Kalabu used to be one of our main enemies, but those days are over. If someone dies in your village, don't come to me and blame me! It is always the village itself that is to blame for the death of one of its people. If you come to me and tell me about your worries then I can – if that is your wish – make the wrongdoer fall ill. But the cause of the trouble always lies in your own village. I cannot act on my own but only according to your instructions, otherwise I myself would have to die.

Commentary

Rendered out of its roofing ceremony context, the reader might easily get the impression that these were speeches made during a mortuary ceremony (see p. 95ff) where accusations of sorcery and testimonies of innocence do in fact stand at centre. In the present case, however, the tenor is a different one. Seen from the perspective of the surrounding settlements, Waignakim is not only the village that holds responsibility for the people's spirit bundles (objects that have been in intimate contact with a human being are believed to contain a part of his, or her, spirit; the objects are often used for magical purposes), but is also accountable for their destruction (which leads to the death of the person in question). This is why the opening speakers try to channel the discussion by making reference to the fact that every ritual activity, regardless of whether it is performed in the context of the building or usage of a *korambo* or in connection with the growth of crops, forecloses the use of sorcery. In order to underpin the thrust of his account, Nggilendu tells of the time when a man died on the day that a ceremonial dance was to be staged; under normal circumstances, such an event leads to the end of festivities. However, in this case, the dance was performed all the same, mainly because the Waignakim men organizing the event refrained from raising accusations of sorcery against people from neighbouring villages, all of whom were invited and present on the occasion; in other words, the Waignakim did not hold them responsible for the death of one of their co-villagers.

However, when the names of men are raised who had suddenly, and for no apparent reason, fallen ill, the discussion turns to sorcery. Here special significance is given to the illness of Waulemoi, who, in his capacity as an acclaimed artist, was recently commissioned to create the façade painting for the new *korambo*. After this issue has been touched upon, and in the remaining course of the dispute, the speakers no longer address the original topic of the meeting. However, to return to the opening speeches and the original motive of the event, the roofing ceremony, I believe it is important to refer to the reasons stated in the contributions why the people of Waignakim had built a new ceremonial house in the first place. Nggilendu mentions an initiation staged a year previously in another part of Waignakim (and by a different *ara*). Now, he says, it is Kumunware's turn to organize such a feast, thus clearly implicating the notion of competition. His words also reveal his fear of becoming the laughing stock of the audience should the initiation be held in a small hut instead of a grand new *korambo*. He goes on to say that the only right place for a *nggwal* to settle is a ceremonial house.

During the debate, which went on for hours, the women of Waignakim were busy preparing large amounts of food. Before the food was brought to the edge of the *amei* towards late afternoon, the men of Kumunware sang a song of challenge in front of the new ceremonial house; it was addressed to the neighbouring, former enemy villages:

Bilendu waunendu bai mine ndu,
enemy,[42] you taunt me

nggilekumbui wuille meriyetnye ariyetnye,
wild taro with black leaves he cuts off and throws them down[43]

[40] When he was young, Papunap was reckoned a very handsome man; to emphasize this point, he turns the view on its head and describes himself as the direct opposite.

[41] During the ceremony to end war between the two villages, an exchange of men was organized. Papunap was the representative of Waignakim, Kapmasui the one of Kalabu.

[42] *Bilendu waunendu* denotes both an enemy in war and a ritual exchange partner from another village.

[43] A metaphor signifying a challenge, both in war and ritual exchange.

saune ngguai mitagna watagna
wild taro border[44] falls (?)

bilendu waunendu wunat mikele myangge
enemy who is pursuing me, I flee,

wanekwa ndu
says he

Mikulik Myambangge tipma nde mot kurro
metaphor for Waignakim, coconut palms the wind seizes

masha nde nggare wau.
Betel nut palms rustle in the wind.

The gist of the text goes roughly as follows:
Enemy of mine who hurls taunts at me
He cuts down a wild taro and throws it at my feet, a wild taro. The body of the slain enemy marks the new border.
You are the enemy who pursues me and from whom I flee, at least that is what you claim.
But in Waignakim the wind merely seizes the crowns of the coconut and betel nut palms, making their leaves rustle in the wind.[45]

Following this provocative song[46] which equates acts of war with competitive ritual events between villages, the women carry the food, either in large pots or wrapped in leaves, to the edge of the ceremonial ground. From here the men take over and lay out the food, supplemented with betel nuts and tobacco leaves, in two rows according *ara* on the open space of the *amei*, carefully seeing to it that each moiety receives an equal share.[47] Then the two moieties exchange the food, distributing parts of it among the many guests who soon start back for home after having received their share.

The Façade and its Painting

The last step in ceremonial house construction involves mainly the men from the hosting hamlet, supported by one or several acclaimed artists. The façade measurements are taken directly from the gable front with the aid of vine yardsticks. They provide the dimensions of the underlying support, which is made of bamboo rods and strips of bamboo (**fig. 23a, b**). In Waignakim, the beam (*betikit*) on which the painting rests and the *tagwakwambut* were installed at the same level, closely next to each other. Usually, the painting's substrate is manufactured at the same time as the framework for the lower section of the façade (*tambukorambo*). The latter is made of thin tree stems and bamboo poles, to which the same type of leaf panel is attached as for the roof of the house (**pl. 36**). The lower section is not vertical but is, depending on house type, reclining, with its lower edge standing forward. Built in to the *tambukorambo* is the tunnel-like entrance called *korekore* (**pl. 41**). Its shape – the same as the terminology of its constituent parts – resembles a miniature, about-faced version of a ceremonial house.[48] It is made mainly of thick vines; its ridge piece is also called *nyit*, the same as the house's main ridge beam. Before the tunnel entrance is finally topped with a plaited mat, it is covered with thatched panels.

In Waignakim, the painting's base frame was mounted provisionally to the *benggo grau*, with the men standing on the grid-like construction which was leant against the *tambukorambo*.

In Kalabu,[49] the finished façade is mounted in a trial run when the painting is completed, but with the decorated side facing inwards (**pl. 74**).

The painting's medium consists of flattened spathes obtained from the lower midribs of sago palm fronds. In their natural state the midribs are vaulted in shape. In a first step requiring much skill, the woody outer cover is removed, leaving behind a flexible and workable material. The pieces are trimmed and then left to soak in a stream overnight. The next morning, the soft and pliable pieces are flattened, either by clamping them between the stakes of a garden fence or with the help of a special frame made of wild sugarcane. They are left until they have

44 In former days of war, the location where a warrior had been killed became the new border mark between the two enemy villages.

45 Metaphor implying that neither war nor ritual exchange can destroy the village; they merely glance off its edges.

46 Similar provocative songs are performed during yam feasts.

47 On two occasions, once in Waignakim and once in Kalabu, we observed that surplus food presented by one of the groups was removed again without comment, probably because the event was not classified as a competitive food exchange (yam feast) but merely as a roofing ceremony.

48 We were told that, among the Boiken, the entrance to the ceremonial house was furnished with miniature decorative elements, for example, a carved crossbeam as found on the ceremonial house itself.

49 According to my local assistants and the information gathered from Werner Stöcklin's photo documentation.

dried completely, suitable to be used as supports for the painting. In everyday life, these materials also serve as sitting and sleeping mats.

A façade painting requires dozens of such single spathe sheets that go by the term *mbai*, the same as the façade painting as a whole. Sewing the pieces together and joining the support to the underlying frame is done behind a leaf fence, out of sight of women and children. For this purpose, the frame, *grau*, measuring up 15 metres in length, is placed on a set of posts so that the men can work on it from both sides, and from above and underneath. Attaching the spathe sheets to the underlying frame is considered a secret associated with the correspondent initiation (*poko*). Normally, sturdy *tipangga* vines are used for the purpose. The work is always performed by a group of men, working in pairs: one of the men pierces the sago spathe from the top with a pointed bamboo tube serving as an awl. The man on the other side inserts the vine into the tube upon which the man above retrieves the awl containing the vine. Then the work step is repeated, this time from the opposite direction, and so on. The men always start from the top of the façade, gradually working their way down; the lower spathe sheets overlap the edges of the ones above them to the effect that no blunt edges are visible from below. In other words, when viewing the façade in position the painting appears to consist of one, unbroken smooth surface.

The men who initiate the construction of the new ceremonial house also choose the artist (*maira yagwandu*, *yigendu*) responsible for the painting. In the case of Waignakim, the men selected Waulemoi of Numbunggen hamlet in Kalabu whom we already came across in the context of the speeches during the roofing ceremony. At the time of fieldwork, he was considered the most famous artist in the area. Previously, this position had been held by a man called Waiwu Urula[50] but in the course of the years, and with age, he had gradually lost his eyesight and his strength, until finally Waule took over his position. The two artists differed clearly in style[51] – even to Abelam viewers. To us, the distinct styles became apparent – notably, only in the course of several months – as follows: Waulemoi's line drawing was clear and flawless, with no wobbly lines or inaccuracies, and with every detail worked to perfection. His works were generous and brilliantly arranged, with the precision of a graphic designer. The strength of Waiwu's work, on the other hand, lay not in the clarity and precision of his line drawing, but in its expression, in the visual impact of the images he created. Going by our own, Western standards, Waiwu was more the 'artist' of the two, and his works had more depth. The man to come closest to Waiwu's style was Kwandshendu, who had been Waiwu's assistant for many years, maybe even for decades. Waulemoi's helpers were two men called Longgen and Lake. They both followed him in terms of style. Waulemoi's and Kwandshendu's fathers had, in their time, themselves been talented artists[52] who had passed on their knowledge and skills to their sons, after these had shown an interest in carving and painting already in early years. Kwandshendu told us that his father used to draw patterns on the ground with a stick to explain to him the process of painting, that is, where to start on a pattern and how to carry on, and so forth. One day, when his father was away, Kwandshendu made a painting on a *mbai* and showed it to his father when he returned later that day; his father was full of praise and encouraged him to carry on painting and also to try his hand at carving. He taught him how to work a piece of wood using a (stone) adze, that is, in which direction to carve and at which angle to apply the blade, indicating the outline of the figure to be carved with black earth pigments; boys usually undertake their first carving attempts out in the bush, using hard, but not brittle clay as a test object before turning to work on a suitable piece of wood.

Both Waulemoi and Waiwu were disappointed that none of their sons showed interest in learning how to carve or paint. Lake described how he, as a young man, had often watched Waulemoi from the entrance of the leaf enclosure behind which the latter was

[50] See Koch (1968: pl. 5a: Waiwu Urula; pl. 5b 'Kopira', later called Waulemoi).

[51] On regional style differences and the meaning of specific motifs, see Forge (1973, 1979).

[52] Unfortunately I have little detailed information on Waiwu. Interestingly, Waiwu's sister Dshowe (Waulemoi's wife) used to incise the decorative cuts on girls' arms, legs and abdomens on the occasion of first menstruation feasts. In the eyes of the people, Dshowe's knowledge, which she had received from her mother, equalled Waiwu's skill as an artist: "Waiwu knows how to carve secret things, Dshowe knows how to cut the young girls' skin," they used to say.

working. One day, when Waulemoi was leaving the enclosure to urinate in the bush, Lake asked him whether he could continue on the face that Waulemoi had just started to paint. He agreed, and when he came back and saw what Lake had produced in his absence, he invited him to become his assistant. Lake is generally considered to follow in Waulemoi's footsteps, but he confided to us that he was not much good at carving and that he would stick to painting only.

As mentioned above, the façade painting is produced behind the walls of a leaf enclosure. Painting is regarded as a secret process that needs to be carried out not only away from women and children, but also out of sight of such men who are not keeping with the strict avoidance rules that go with painting. In the first place, this pertains to sexual abstinence but it also involves abstaining from foods other than those that have been prepared by one's own wife who, of course, herself has to remain sexually abstinent. This not only goes for the main artist but also for his assistants. Furthermore, all the men involved in the process have to refrain from washing for the entire painting period[53] lest the paint flake off or the colours and their brilliance fade quickly. In Waignakim, the men were afraid of the paint falling off – except for Waulemoi who was convinced that his work would turn out a success.

To us it was always somewhat a marvel that the earth pigments stuck to the, in fact, very smooth surface in the first place; at the same time, we were surprised to discover that, on the work of some artists, the painted surface immediately began to develop cracks and flaws. When you passed your finger over the surface the paint began to flake immediately, even though all the painters were using the same pigment. Possibly this had to do with differing degrees of dilution although we never noticed any evident divergence in the mixture applied. When we told the men what we had observed, their verdict was unambiguous: the painter in question must have slept with a woman, or secretly gone for a wash in a stream.

In most cases the chief artist procures the pigments himself; if not, he gives precise instructions where and from whom the substances are to be obtained because not all pigments offer the same quality, especially as far as the colour red is concerned. For this reason the chief painter usually relies on his own selection, and provides the paint brushes at the same time. Traditionally, the naturally brown painting support is first covered with a grounding of grey clay called *dshanggele*; it is obtained from the beds of streams or riverbanks and is common throughout the Abelam area. All the other pigments, that is, white, red, yellow and black, come from specific places, or villages. The people of Kalabu, for example, fetch their white, *sabyo*,[54] from the Arapesh village of Yamel; yellow, *paalkipma*, comes Mendeamun, an Arapesh village located halfway between Kalabu and the coast; black, *wuinkipma*, is traded in from the Benggrakim/Seigessi/Witupe area; while red pigment, *waimba*, is from Waignakim. *Waimba* is the only pigment that requires a special production process, all the other colours are obtained in their natural but dried state, in the shape of clumps, although normally the white pigment has to be cleaned before use in order to remove small stones and grains of sand. This is done in basically the same way as sago is rinsed, that is, the pigment is mixed with water and squeezed through a mesh of coconut fibres which retains the unwanted ingredients. Red pigment always comes in powder form in either a bamboo tube or a coconut shell. It ranks as a speciality of Waignakim. Unfortunately we never had the opportunity to watch it being produced. According to the artist Kwandshendu, the basis of the pigment is certain type of black 'stone' that is found on the bed of the Waimba stream. Any person, man or woman,[55] wishing to produce red pigment breaks off a piece of the

[53] Since, in 1980, we had commissioned the people to produce a façade painting for the Museum der Kulturen Basel (**pl. 88**), we were able to witness how the people observed these rules of conduct. On the first day of work I was asked to cook a midday meal for the artists and their assistants. Waulemoi accepted the bowl of food I brought to him, but did not eat from it. Later, he had someone pass on the message to me that his wife was doing his cooking. Certainly the assistants' longing for a refreshing bath grew from day to day.

[54] *Sabyo* is the name of this special white pigment; the generic colour terms are different: *wama* – white; *ramu* – yellow; *nggile* – black; *nggwauw* – red.

[55] A second, usually less reliable informant explained that somewhere down the Waimba creek, there was a special tree. Only menstruating women were allowed to visit the place. There they were said to break off a piece of the tree that grew underwater. Back at home they would boil the piece of wood in a cooking pot together with red flowers and leaves.

stone and takes it home to first dry in the sun. Following this it is fired together with various red flowers and the red bark of the *ndigu* tree. The result is the red *waimba* pigment.

Before applying the grounding, the support surface is rubbed down with the juicy buds (similar to those of water lilies) of the *wambe* plant.[56] This is said to purify the *mbai* from any evil influence and later make the pigments stick better to the surface. After coating the first section of the *mbai* with the *wambe* bud – starting at the apex of the triangular painting – Waulemoi began administering the grounding. Waulemoi ranks as an innovator among the artists of the region,[57] not least because he no longer uses grey mud as a grounding, but a black, tarry earth substance instead, which adheres to the smooth surface much better than the traditional stuff. He introduced this method several years ago, with evident success. It also makes the painting process easier, insofar as all the areas which, going by the traditional method, would have to be painted black separately, now can be left as they are in their 'grounded' condition.

Before the actual paintwork commenced, the men heated a few stones in a fire, which they then transferred to coconut shells filled with water. The men bent over the shells, briefly holding their hands and arms into the rising steam. The steam bath is the last act of purification to get rid of any remaining negative influences before the actual paintwork begins. In earlier days, the men used to add a little red colour, *urakus*, to the water with the objective of driving off the 'snakes of the ground' (worms) on the one hand, and 'charging' the *mbai* with heat on the other. Previously, *urakus* was also used for love magic: men believed that by means of the red colour they could attract a woman's attention.[58]

Waulemoi had enlisted his two assistants, Lake and Longgen, for the task of painting; Kwandshendu and his assistant Kapas were also part of the team. Even though Kwandshendu had worked as chief artist on several other assignments, he accepted Waulemoi's leading role in the present job and followed his instructions without argument. The team was supplement by two helpers who were not acclaimed painters, called Dondombale and Mbalesibe. All the men partook in the short 'steam bath'. Following this, Waulemoi started to paint the lines of the first pattern, *matmboi*, at the apex of the *mbai* with white paint, notably without first drawing up a general outline of the painting or making any preparatory sketches of the single motifs. He began by applying two short lines down the central axis of the uppermost pattern. Then he drew with his feather brush (*dshinggil*) white lines (**pl. 38**), *maindshe*,[59] delineating one side of the contour of the *matmboi*'s body represented by two oval shapes standing end on end (**fig. 22a**). As soon as he had finished, Lake began on the opposite side with mirror-inverted white contours, while Kwandshendu busied himself with the spiral-like arms and legs and the head of the *matmboi*, which is said to represent a gliding possum. Following Waule's instructions, Dondombale and Lake began tracing the white lines with red colour. When this was done, Lake began filling in the designated areas with yellow paint with the aid of a thicker (scrubber-like) brush.

All the time Waulemoi kept an eye on his assistants; from time to time he would tell Lake or Kwandshendu to erase a line and then indicate how he wanted the line to run by tracing his finger over the surface. The men never talked about the painting and its meaning (see also Forge 1973). When questioned the men would say that the motifs were merely patterns that carried specific names. Mbalesibe and Roro, a further associate, were confined to adding white dots to the black-grounded surface with the aid of a dabber made from the stalk of a certain plant, and procuring the thick white sap of the *yauw* tree which they applied with a feather brush to the surfaces designed to remain black. When the sap dries it becomes transparent and acquires a varnish-like glaze.

Immediately below the *matmboi* followed a motif (**fig. 22b**) called *dshuimbiat* (*biat* – foam, also the ripples on water caused by a water spider moving over its surface). The coiling white lines were painted by Waulemoi, assisted by Kwandshendu. While the team of helpers,

[56] Women apply the sap of the *wambe* plant to a girl's entire body after first menstruation; therefore the term *wambusuge*.

[57] The southern and eastern Abelam always use black mud for the grounding, see Forge (1967: 76).

[58] I think it is typical that only Abelam men revert to the use of love magic; the Abelam women never apply such magical means, nor do Iatmul women, see also Hauser-Schäublin (1977: 75).

[59] The term *maindshe* not only denotes a painted white line, but also the thread with which women make string bags.

reinforced by Longgen who, until then, had merely been watching, was busy filling in the main lines, Waule began laying out thin sticks marking the triangular *wagnen* headdresses of the *kwandshe* ('bat'), the next figure on the image (**fig. 22f, pl. 37**), indicating the number of figures (four) in a row at the same time. He was assisted by Lake who, together with Kwandshendu, began painting the outlines of the heads between the markers. Waulemoi stood next to them giving instructions as to the size and curvature of the tops of the heads (**pl. 71**). Then the two men traced the marking sticks with their brushes, thus defining the headdresses' silhouettes, and removed the markers as soon as they had finished. Waulemoi himself added the nose, eyes, mouth and the typical mark on the forehead. The torsos of the female figures were painted jointly by Waulemoi, Kwandshendu and Lake, with Waulemoi, as always, working on the right hand side of the *mbai* (looking from the foot of the painting), and his two assistants on the opposite side. Below the breasts, somewhat to the side, the artists added a number of smaller bats (*kumbui*) said to represent the *kwandshe*'s children. After the main painters had applied new white lines to a motif, it was the assistants' task to supplement them with the colours red and yellow, to add all the necessary dots and cover the leftover black surfaces with *yauw*. Only once did Dondombale venture to apply the white paint himself: as he had seen Waulemoi doing it, he began drawing a white line but it turned out so wobbly and out of proportion that the other men told him to wipe it out again; he conceded wordlessly and made room for the others. – The bats were followed by a horizontal band of round-bodied spiral forms (*maingge* – black cockatoo, also called *baintship*), usually forming pairs (**fig. 22d, pl. 72**). Again it was Waulemoi who charted the first white lines on his side of the *mbai*, followed by Kwandshendu and Lake on their side.

The next pattern is called *biasibe* (*bia* – belly; *sibe* – skin); it consists of headless, anthropomorphic figures with flexed legs and arms, set next to each other (**fig. 22e**). The limbs of the four figures formed a zigzag band across the painting. Below the *biasibe* the men painted horizontal, oblong oval shapes reaching from one body to the next. This motif, called *woutampaal*, is always inserted as a concluding pattern, either in the shape of a continuous band or as single designs. Immediately below the *woutampaal*, Waulemoi painted small fruits (*ashal*) belonging to a certain vine, the lower section in red, the upper part black.[60] Between the fruits he added a motif called *kwashin* (actually a special type of glider that climbs coconut palms and slides down again with the aid of its gliding membranes). As he had done in the case of the *kwandshe* and *kumbui* motifs, Waulemoi added a band of *maingge* underneath. This was the first time that Kapas, Kwandshendu's assistant, was allowed to work on the white lines.

The men worked on the painting without any long interruptions except for two short meal breaks per day and brief pauses to enjoy a few betel nuts or roll a smoke. It took the men five days to finish the 12-metre long façade painting. Waulemoi was always the first to appear in the morning, usually arriving at our house before seven o'clock, demanding the paints, which we kept in our house over night, and telling us to remove the plastic cover which we used to place over the already painted parts of the *mbai* as a protection against the often heavy downpours at night. In the evening the men usually carried on working until almost dark, with us standing on the sideline desperately waiting for them to put aside their brushes so that we could go for a wash at our pool in the bush before night fell.

Waulemoi, one of the few men in Kalabu who hardly spoke any Tok Pisin, was not only impatient towards us, but also towards his co-workers. Often he could hardly wait for them to fill in the main white lines that he had just completed, eager to start with the next section, but he could only carry on when his assistants had finished with the previous pattern.

While the men were still busy filling in the *maingge*, Waulemoi started laying out the marker sticks for the *wagnen* headdresses of the large anthropomorphic figures (*ndudama* – human face, **fig. 22g**). As in all previous sections of the *mbai* he first rubbed down the support surface with a *wambe* bud and applied the black grounding. This time Kapas helped to divide the width of the façade into separate sections with marking sticks, accommodating five figures. For two of the figures Waulemoi himself painted the heads' silhouettes, work on the other three was taken over by Lake and Kwandshendu, and even Longgen and Kapas joined in. Before the

[60] This is actually the fruit's natural colour pattern.

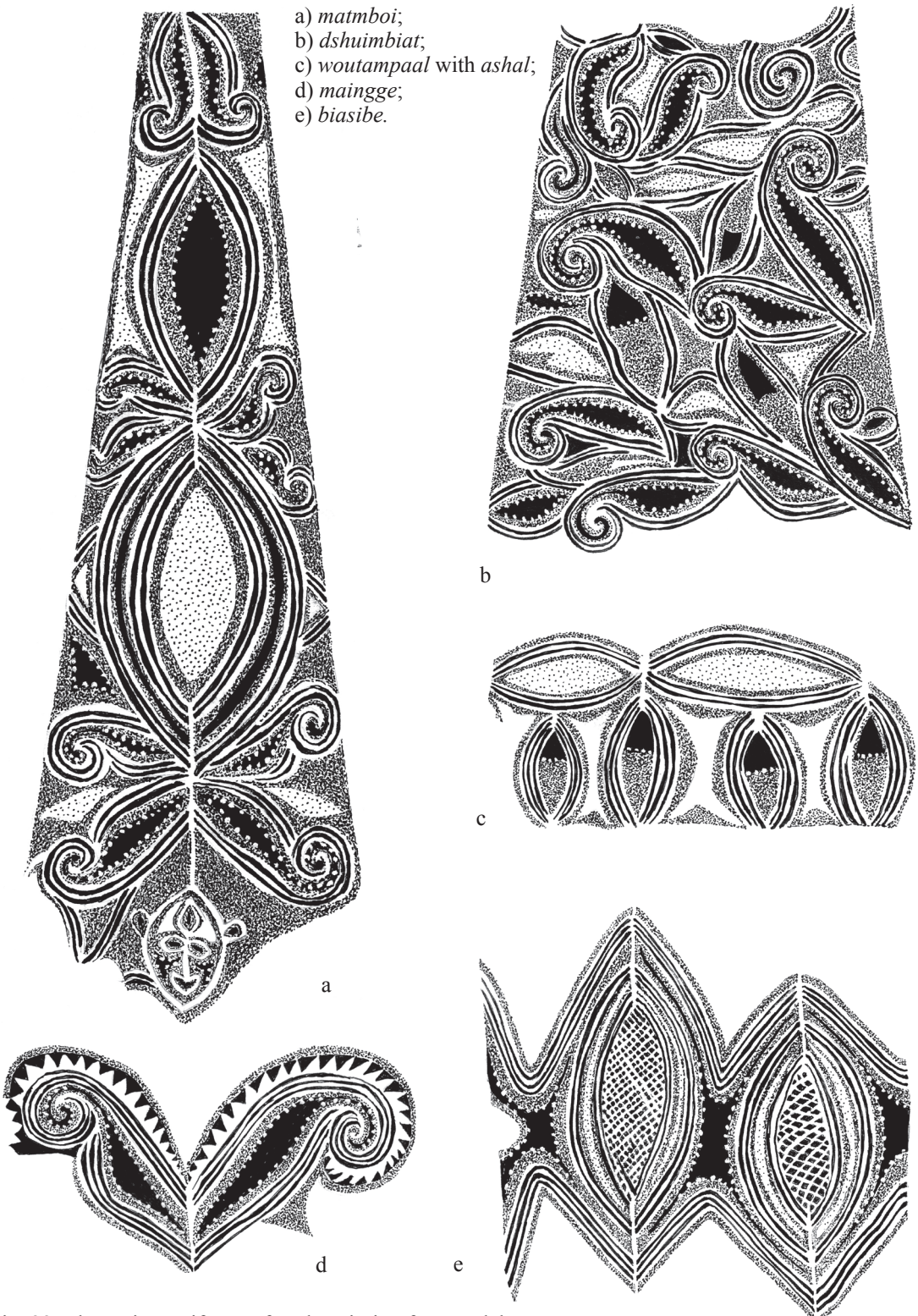


Fig. 22 The main motifs on a façade painting from Kalabu

f) *kwandshetagwa* with *kumbui*;
g) *ndudama*;
h) *nggwalnggwal*.

eyes, nose and mouth were applied, the men painted the round *noute* headdress, only then did they turn to the *wagnen* headpiece, tracing the marker sticks that indicated the *wagnen*'s outlines with white paint. After Waulemoi had painted a white jagged beard, he added the eyes and mouth to two of the figures before turning to paint the contour of the trunk of one of the figures. Noteworthy was the way the other artists observed Waulemoi's style of painting; they would look at the work that Waulemoi had just finished – he was always one or two steps ahead of the others – then copy the way he had drawn his lines in their own section. Kwandshendu was probably the most independent of them all, but if Waulemoi criticized him he too followed the chief painter's instructions and made corrections to his work, without arguing. Four of the *ndudama* figures' faces were almost identical; they were said to represent decorated men, ceremonial dancers (*narendu*) to be precise, while the face of the fifth figure was painted black, since Kwandshendu wished to depict a warrior (*kaundu*). He did not use the black grounding paint for this task, instead he prepared a special pigment in the traditional manner, made from the soot of cooking pots and leaves of the *yiwit* tree (*gnetum gnemon*). The concoction was chewed until it had attained the right consistency, after which it was spat out and used as paint.

The further the work progressed, the more often the artists were forced to step on already painted sections of the *mbai*, as they were unable to reach the central areas from the side. For this purpose they used either a large wild taro leaf or an unused sheet of sago spathe. Since the support was never shifted around and because the pigments were not sticky (except for the *yauw* sap), no part of the painting was ever damaged. And, gratefully, only in a few cases did the paint not stick to the grounding and began to flake. The most delicate pigment was the *waimba* as it always retained a bit of its powderiness, and refused to blend completely.

The *ndudama* were furnished with legs and arms, similar to the *biasibe* above. A *woutampaal* band supplemented by a few *ashal* fruits constituted the lower margin of this motif, followed underneath by *maingge* spirals (**fig. 22d**). Then, once more, Waulemoi began laying out thin sticks marking the edges of the *wagnen* headdresses of the *nggwalnggwal* (**fig. 22h**), the largest figures on the façade painting, in the shape of equal-sided triangles, with a horizontal stick forming the lower margin (**pl. 39**). Following this he divided each triangle into two by placing an additional stick down the central longitudinal axis. The crossbar served as orientation for the positioning of the eyes on which he started by first painting the innermost ring of a series of concentric circles (representing the eye) 'around' the crossbar. The stick down the central axis was a guide to get the face's symmetry right. After completing the first pair of eyes, he continued with the same motif on the second figure. In the meantime Lake had started work on the third face, carefully following Waulemoi's example. After the eyes, Waulemoi painted the ears, then the outline of the forehead to which he added the floral band, the dog-tooth headband and the wreath of feathers. Whilst Waulemoi was busy on the central oval forehead ornament (*magnakara*), Kwandshendu traced the sticks forming the boundary of the *wagnen* headdress. In a next step, Waulemoi marked the outlines of the lachrymal sacs (*minianggu*), then he painted the flexed arms,[61] which set out from a joint spot immediately above the mouth. He continued with the long-shaped, nose starting with the nose-plug (*tsilimbush*) that hung down past both corners of the mouth and ended in a cowrie-shell tip (*tsimasik*). According to some other men this motif actually represented a *bande* necklace (consisting of small shell rings and a *bande* snail-shell pendant). Waulemoi painted the figures in the middle and on the right almost single-handedly, receiving help only in a few instances. Starting from the elbows, *tamba kwale*, he painted white lines which joined in a spot above the navel (*gwandshing*). Next he painted lines starting at abdomen level (*kitnya*, literally 'vulva') and ending below the wrist ornaments, *sualagu* and *tambakwalya* (in the shape of a shell ring), on both sides of the face where they met the equivalent lines of the adjoining figure. Although they look very much like the legs on the *ndudama* and *biasibe*, they are not described as the legs of these figures, not least because they butt against white jagged bands and crests of chicken feathers (*batnbat*). Rather, they are regarded as the figures' ornamental bordures; these are enclosed by string bag patterns (*marangge* and

[61] See also Forge (1970a: 281-282).

kuyen patterns). In the painting's lower margin, Kwandshendu, Longgen and Lake added two roosters (*sera*) and two hornbills (*paal*) to mark the end of work. Shortly after the last white lines had been drawn, the assistants were also finished with the infills (**pl. 72**).

Waulemoi's talent as an artist is also borne out by the fact that he produced the painting without the help of a prior overall blueprint, for example, by marking off sections for the various motifs. Although he lay down the outlines of the headdresses for the *kwandshetagwa*, *ndudama* and *nggwalnggwal* with sticks, the props were not relevant for the paintings' proportions as such, merely for the single motifs. He concluded the work at the lower margin accurately to the centimetre and without having to make compromises on the large *nggwalnggwal* figures in the sense of having to stretch or 'squash' them in. Given that each façade painting is different in size – in terms of width as well as length – one cannot appreciate enough the skill of the painters who create and design the basic patterns by means of white lines.

However, the work on a *mbai* does not always run as smoothly as in the case of Waignakim where a well-attuned team from a single village, working under a highly proficient chief artist, was usually in agreement as far as motifs and colours were concerned. A close associate told us that, a while ago, Waulemoi had been invited to work on the façade painting of a new ceremonial house in a neighbouring village, together with an artist from a third village. Since Waulemoi and the other man, who knew each other quite well, came from different villages, each with its own specific tradition of carving and painting, the two artists could not reach an agreement as to the style of painting desired. Frustrated by the situation, Waulemoi packed his tool kit and left the village again together with his assistants.[62]

As far as old ceremonial houses were concerned it was often difficult to identify which artist, or artists, had actually produced the façade painting. When I asked some of the painters separately, each one would reply with absolute self-assurance that he alone had done the job, even if his part had only been that of an assistant.[63] It was only when I got a group of artists together that I was able to ascertain who exactly had been party to the work and in which function.

The day before the façade painting is mounted (**pl. 75**), the *mbai* is decorated with orange-coloured *ban* fruits impaled on thin, needle-like sticks affixed to bark strips running down both sides of the façade. Red hibiscus flowers are placed on the painting's surface, some of them are provisionally affixed to the *wagnen* headdresses of the large *nggwalnggwal* figures.

When, in former days, a painting was finished the men used to heat stones in a fire and place them in a palm leaf container together with fragrant leaves and red paint (*urakus*). This step was called *kipma ndei pukao*. The rising steam was said to charge the painting with heat and pervade the inside of the ceremonial house, to the effect that the women who came to the *korambo*'s inauguration would be entranced (but without understanding how and why), not only by the house itself but also by the men who had built it.

The men like to talk about the origin of this paint and how it works on onlookers, in the course of which they often tell the following story.[64]

This story tells of a man who could take off and change his skin. When he wished to shave he would look into the water of a pond as we look into a mirror nowadays. He would do the same when he dressed for a ceremony or a feast. When he wished to shave he would take his bamboo razor – we call them *danggu* and *kaut* – look into the water and shave. Rainwater had collected in an old slit gong that stood outside, uncovered; this is where he looked into the water to shave. When there was a feast he would usually stay at home because he was an old and rather ugly-looking man. But his two wives were young, and they went to all the feasts and dances. He would say to them: 'Go on, I'm too old; I'll stay at home.' But as

62 Forge (1967: 81-82) tells of a case the other way round: in 1959, the men of Winggei tried to paint the façade of their new ceremonial house in the Kalabu style, hoping that it would make their yam tubers grow to the same length as those of Kalabu.

63 Before actual painting began on 'our' façade we were briefly shocked when Dondombale said he would do the painting. Since Abelam etiquette forbids a direct rejection in such a situation, we expressed our inner reluctance by showing only lacklustre enthusiasm and saying: well, if that's your wish. As it turned out later, he took over the role of an assistant and appeared to be satisfied with his assignment.

64 Told by Ndukabre of Buknisuagim.

soon as the two had left the hamlet he would change his skin and become a young and handsome man. He would go to the slit gong, look into the water and adorn himself. When looking into the water he would see his mirror image (*kaigni*).

The two women had already left for the feast when the man decided to follow them. When the two women saw him they asked themselves, 'who is this man?' It didn't occur to them it could have been their husband, 'where could he be from,' they mused. This was the same at all feasts, so, one day, one woman said to her child, 'stay at home with your father and watch what happens!' The boy stayed at home.

Each time, the two women had given this handsome young man betel nut, betel pepper and tobacco, without knowing who he was. When they went to a feast, they used to wait for the man to appear and give him betel nut, betel pepper and tobacco, to nobody else but him. This went on like this until they told the boy to stay at home and report what happened. In the course of time they had become suspicious because if it had been a normal man they would have found out by now who he was and where he was from. That is why they had told the boy to stay at home. They had given this man all good things, now they suddenly suspected it could be their own husband and that he belonged to both sides, that is, that he was a living man as well as a spirit of the dead.

As soon as the women had left the village to go to the next feast, the boy went to hide. He hid away and watched his father change his skin – like we take off a shirt and put on a new one – and become a young and handsome man once more. The boy left his hiding and approached his father whose name was Sagiura. The father spoke, 'You've discovered my secret; if I die, this knowledge (meaning this ability) will be lost unless I pass it on to you. Then you can do what I am doing now.' He talked about this with his son for a long time. In the meantime the two women had arrived at the feast where they danced and sang all night long. At daybreak they returned to their village. The husband told his two wives, 'cook a soup so that we can eat and then go to sleep.' As soon as his wives were asleep he sent his two daughters to the bush. One became the wild fowl we call *waren*; the other girl he sent up a tree where she became the wild fowl that we call *serkwak*. They remained there, never to return to the village again. Sagiura himself also climbed a tree where he turned into a red parakeet, the one we call *ura, sagiura*. He left his two wives back in the village. Up on the tree he settled in a knothole which became his home. On the *wani* tree he had found a second knothole where he stayed occasionally. This tree stood next to the pond where the women used to fetch water from. The tree was hollow so that he could climb down inside the trunk. As soon as he reached the ground he would turn into a man. He wooed a woman who had come to fetch water and succeeded in having intercourse with her. This he did with all the women who came to fetch water from the pond. After intercourse he would climb back up the hollow trunk of the *wani* tree and become a bird again. He had intercourse with many, no, with all the women; they all became pregnant. The men were baffled why their women had all become pregnant at the same time. Then one woman suggested, 'a man should go and hide next to the pond and see what happens; then he will see this man who made us all pregnant.'

The woman went down to the water hole, placing the bamboo tubes which she wanted to fill with water on the ground. At that moment, Saguira popped up on a branch and called, '*kileng'*, after which he climbed down inside the trunk of the tree. When he alighted on the ground he turned into a man. The women simply adored this man, for his skin was shiny red.[65] The man hiding in the bush saw everything upon which he rushed back to the village and told the others what he had seen. The men picked up their stone axes and dashed down to the pool to kill Saguira. They tried to fell the tree, but failed. They kept on hacking at the tree with their axes until night fell. They continued the next day, and the day after that. When the tree was about to fall, the men formed a circle lest Saguira escape. This he tried to do but the men killed him. They killed him and carried his body back to the village. When his son saw what had happened he went to hide in a flower that lives near the water. We call this flower *kukumairameine*. He hid under the blossom where he became as red as the flower itself. The men killed him too, and through his blood everything turned red. The red decorative flowers that we use as ornaments emerged, so did red plant stalks. Everything that grew from his blood was red. The men lit a large fire and threw the two bodies into a cooking pot. There they cooked the bodies, producing a red-coloured liquid that was like paint. The body of the dead boy was all red inside, so one of the red pigments we call *nyanura*; the other red paint, which stems from the father's skin and feathers, we call *sagiura*.

That is why the women desire us men when we put on this paint.

[65] Red skin actually means a light skin. Light-skinned men and women are regarded as handsome and beautiful respectively (in contrast to those with dark skin).

In the evening before the façade painting is finally mounted, the slit gongs are beaten, sounding the signal *mi wapui* which announces that the façade is going to be fitted definitely the next day. This is followed on the next morning by the signal *maira kure to*. Next, the men attach a strong vine to the support (*grau*) at the back of façade's top end; a second vine rope is lashed to the support about half way up the *mbai*. Holding the loose ends, the men climb up the grid at the front (*benggo grau*) to which the façade painting will be fastened. Then the actual hoisting of the façade commences (**pl. 74, 75**). While the men inside the house start to pull on the vine ropes, gradually lifting up the tip of the façade, the men outside slowly carry the painting towards the *korambo*. In order to prevent the *mbai* from sagging in the middle, a group of men underpins it with bamboo poles and sticks. As soon as the painting is in a vertical position, the men lift it up until the tip of the façade is immediately beneath the peak of the house. For this purpose, men climb the ladders leaning against the lower part of the house front which is covered with thatched panels. The men standing inside the house gradually draw the *mbai* closer and closer – not to forget, the whole façade is overhanging – until it reaches its final position (**pl. 40**). Then it is lashed to the underlying grid, with the foot of the painting just above the leaf-covered section below. As soon as the *mbai* is safely attached, large woven mats are placed over the leaf tiles of the *tambukorambo* construction, with one large mat, called *kalusola*, reaching from one side of the front to where the tunnel-like entrance (*korekore*) is let in on the opposite side. The entrance is covered with a separate mat (*noakimbi*). The mats made of sago leaves and strips of sago midribs show the same patterns as the mats (*nimbi*) covering the projecting roof tip (**pl. 34**).

For the inauguration, the lower, mat-covered section (*kimbi*) of the house front is adorned with a garland made of vines or strings and decorated with white leaves and *ban* fruits (*mindshakuso*). The last element to be put in place is the carved crossbeam (*tikit*) covering the lower rim of the *mbai* and the upper edge of the *kimbi.* If the men are in possession of an old frieze from a former ceremonial house in the hamlet, and providing the size is right, they use this and merely repaint it. If it is a little too short, a carved mask is placed next to it to cover the gap. I was told that the friezes of the eastern Abelam usually displayed carved heads, while the central northern Abelam preferred male and female figures with angled legs and arms (*ndunyan tagwanyan* – boys and girls). Occasionally, copulating couples were shown. Today, all the new *tikit* in Kalabu have carved heads.

Above the entrance (*korekore*) the men place the carved figure of a large python (**pl. 41)**, *ndua* (usually made from a root stock); a second one is often added to the *kimbi*. They usually carry the names of the *wale* of the clans represented in the respective *amei*. On each side of the *kimbi*, a little below the crossbeam, the men add the carved figure of a bird, usually a hornbill (*paal*), fixed to a short protruding spear (or at least the shaft of a spear).

When everything is done and finished and the whole front of the house has been decorated, the men sound the *wagnen ula* signal on the slit gong, announcing the forthcoming inauguration ceremony.

Inauguration of the Ceremonial House

The last task for the artist in charge of the work on the ceremonial house involves creating a 'sun disk'. For this purpose he takes a single sheet of sago spathe, trims it to a round shape and applies to it a black or grey grounding. Then he paints several concentric white circles, the outermost in the shape of a jagged band. The spaces in between the circles are filled in with red and black; both sides of the disk are decorated in the same fashion. The object is described as a sun (*nyamban* – sun man). Next, a corona made of white chicken feathers is attached to the rim. It is hung up over the moon stone at the centre of the ceremonial ground with the aid of four vines, three of which are fastened to nearby coconut trees. The fourth leads to the *korambo* where it passes through a gap at the front into the inside where it is lashed to the vines and fibres of the *mindsha kumbu* (**pl. 45**). With the aid of this device the sun can be made to 'dance' as soon as the men sound their hourglass drums inside the *korambo*. At an inauguration in Kuminimbis we once saw a white-and-black feathered bird fastened to the 'sun', to the effect that as soon as the bird started to flap its wings, the object began to move.

In the days and weeks leading up to the

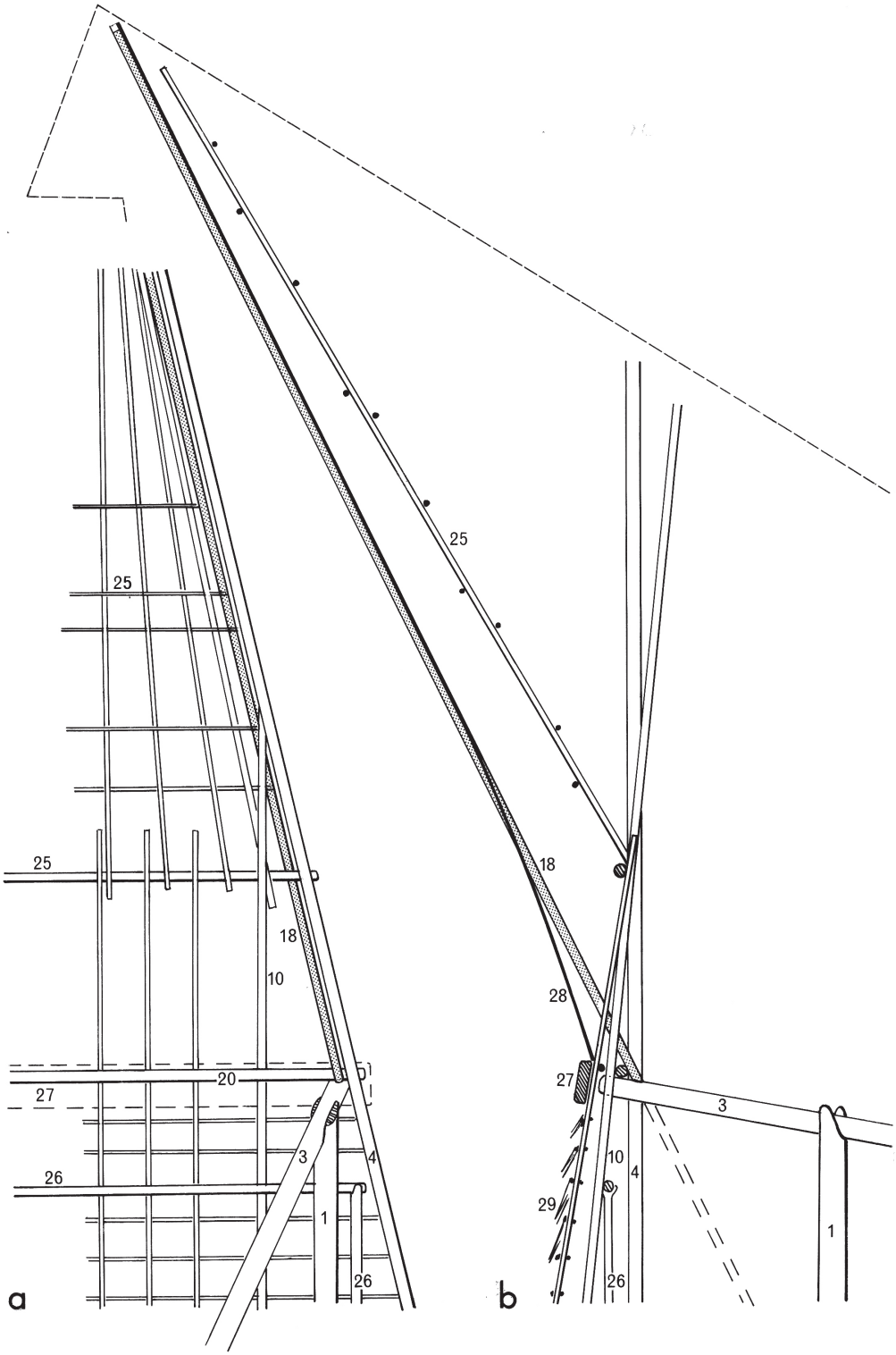


Fig. 23 Construction of the gable front with reference to the fixing of the *mbai*; a) front view; b) side view (numbers refer to the legend on p. 58).

inauguration ceremony, the women of the hamlet are busy 'washing' endless amounts of sago in preparation for the feast meal. This is in fact rather astonishing since, by this time, usually the bulk of garden crops has been harvested and one would expect that for such a special occasion the feast visitors would be served the more highly valued tubers, especially yams. But, what makes this sago so special is the way that it is prepared. Normally sago comes in the form of soup or flat cakes, or a piece is broken off and roasted in the fire and then filled with grated coconut, but for this occasion the sago is mixed with coconut flakes and slow-cooked in an earth oven. Prepared in this way, sago ranks as a delicacy. Next to preparing the food, the women also find time to produce string bags which are used to decorate the front of the *korambo* during the feast.

Preparing the feast is a task that involves the whole village, not just the organizing hamlet. One of the main tasks is the procurement of the necessary number of pigs; these are traded in from neighbouring hamlets and villages. For this purpose the men above all need money and as many shell rings as they can dispose of. Next to that, the men have to prepare the feather and shell ornaments they wish to wear for the event. This involves, among other things, replacing damaged feathers with new ones, or making new combs (*mindsha*) from thin vines and little 'limbum' sticks to which feathers are attached which bob up and down upon each dance step. The men also check their spears; loose fitting tips are re-bound and the engraved patterns on the shaft refurbished with lime.

The lower section of the *korambo* façade is decorated with large shell rings (**pl. 43**); most of these have been passed down from father to son over generations. Traditionally these rings were produced in a number of Arapesh villages in exceedingly arduous work. They rank as extremely precious and, accordingly, they are stored with great care. Once I had the opportunity to witness this in the house of the father of one of my assistants. At the back of the house, a large earthenware pot had been sunk in the ground up to the rim; it was covered with leaves which had in the course of time turned brown. At first sight the pot was not visible. When Wambusuge, so the name of my assistant's father, removed the leaves I realized that the pot was full to the brim with carefully wrapped shell rings. Cautiously he lifted one ring after the next from the pot and took them from their wrappings, in this case plastic rice bags, gently passing his fingers over the smooth and cool-looking surface with an almost loving look in his eyes. The Abelam make a distinction between inalienable rings that are part of the family heirlooms and those that are used in exchange transactions. Some of the rings he showed us were linked to specific historical events and were looked upon as representations, as physical proof, so to speak, of the veracity of the event. These rings carried personal names. Next to that, Wambusuge had set aside six rings of different sizes as bride wealth for his youngest, yet unmarried son. Whilst laying out the rings he remarked to his elder son – our assistant – that, at the time, he had likewise set aside six rings for his marriage to his first wife, but added that he was not prepared to contribute to his second marriage which the latter had entered into against the will of his family; for this, Wambusuge said, he would have to procure rings of his own.

On the occasion of the inauguration ceremony, the men lay out their shell rings – usually heirloom pieces – on banana leaves on the ceremonial ground. Many of them are exceedingly large and heavy. The grooves marking ownership are usually worn down, a sign of the rings' great age. The smaller pieces are either embellished with a kind of beak (said to represent the beak of a hornbill) or stand out on the basis of their rather exceptional form (not flat and disk-shaped, but with an undulating, somewhat 'bent' shape instead); of the latter the people say that they were not made by the Arapesh,[66] but by primeval spirit beings (*wale*).

It is impressive to see with how much care the men lay out the shell rings on the banana leaves, shifting them around cautiously, here and there substituting one for the other until they are satisfied with the arrangement. At an inauguration in Kimbanggwa, the largest and most splendid rings were placed at the top, the others – still larger than the ones used as bride wealth – below. In a next step the shell rings are sewn on to the banana leaf separately.

The leaves are usually decorated with six to eight rings each and adorned with red hibiscus flowers; when finished they are hung up on a bamboo scaffold placed in front of the

[66] According to Arapesh sources, the rings possibly came from the islands of Tarawai and Walis off the coast.

kimbi. Decorating the ceremonial house for the inauguration feast (*kule korambo yua nde sikal*) is primarily the task of the men of the host village. They also provide the large majority of shell rings, thus displaying their village's enduring wealth and strength. However, if they are short in stock they have to rely on their allies from other villages for support. On one occasion in Gweligim, the men did not have enough rings to the cover the entire length of the *kimbi*, upon which they began chiding their friends from the neighbouring villages for not having helped them sufficiently. In Kuminimbis, the topmost shell ring on each banana leaf was a piece with a 'beak'. The men told us that these highly treasured rings belonged to the local men of Kuminimbis; below each such prized piece the shell rings from one specific village were exhibited (on the next leaf those of a next village, and so forth). Our question whether it never came to disputes as to who owned which ring when they were recovered after the feast caused astonishment. No, the men said, they had never heard of such a case. Each man knows which rings are his on the basis of specific details; usually the rings carry special markers identifying the owner, or, to be more precise, the original manufacturer. Apart from that, the most famous rings are known to many men.

The process of hanging up and displaying the shell rings, which is done with the help of men from allied villages, is underpinned by a strict ban on quarrels and disputes on the *amei,*[67] in view of the immense and irreplaceable value of the rings, not only for the individual owners but also for the represented villages as such. The rings' worth cannot be measured in terms of 'exchange' value alone; they have to be considered with regard to their 'historical' value as treasured and safely guarded heirlooms transferred from one generation to the next through the ages. Beyond this, the Abelam also refer to shell rings as 'our bones', that is, they represent links to the primeval times of creation when the *wale* still inhabited the land.

A further aspect of this ban on quarrelling and fighting in front of a new *korambo* is also worth mentioning; this refers to sorcery. While the men were discussing the arrangement and display of the shell rings at the opening in Kimbanggwa, an old big man suddenly launched into an aggressive speech, upon which he was seriously reprimanded by his clansmen. It was followed by a common vow taken by all the men present to refrain from performing sorcery against each other during this period.[68] Clearly, in the people's understanding, a freshly decorated ceremonial house is incompatible with conflict and sorcery; in the given context, especially the latter is regarded as a sacrilege.

Above the shell rings, immediately below the carved crossbeam, the men hang up the string bags (*wut*) that the women have produced for the occasion (**pl. 76**). If the *kimbi* is too low to display both shell rings and string bags, the latter are fixed to the inside roof sides to the left and right of the *mbai*.

Decorating the *korambo* usually lasts from daybreak to midday. The guests from the neighbouring villages begin to arrive in large numbers as soon as the heat subsides in the afternoon. The visitors gather outside the village in order to put on last touches to their adornments and stick flowers into their hair. When the slit gongs sound the opening signal the men storm on to the *amei*, one village after the next, brandishing their spears and threateningly stamping their feet on the ground, with their eyes rolling and their mouths spewing saliva; many of them hold pig tusk ornaments between their teeth in the fashion of warriors during battle. On the *amei* they are received by the men of the hosting hamlet, they too armed with spears. The guests circle the ritual ground several times, always kept in check by the hosts, who start to gradually pen them in. The tumultuous ruckus ends abruptly and the situation relaxes immediately, but only briefly until the next group storms on to the ritual ground.

When all the guests have arrived, the sun suspended over the *amei* suddenly starts to bob up and down (**pl. 76**) simultaneously the men inside the ceremonial house sound the hourglass drums and launch into their first song (**pl. 45**). On the ritual ground outside the

[67] At all inauguration ceremonies that we witnessed, the village men had hung up a note stating that the consumption of alcohol during the event was strictly forbidden. Normal village binges are usually followed by brawls; the ban on alcohol was proclaimed to safeguard the valuable shell rings, lest these be damaged during a fight.

[68] When, in 1978, the ceremonial house in Kimbanggwa was being decorated, Waulemoi was seriously ill. His sickness was an issue during a debate on the *amei*. See also the discussion on Waulemoi's susceptibility to illness in Waignakim, p. 65.

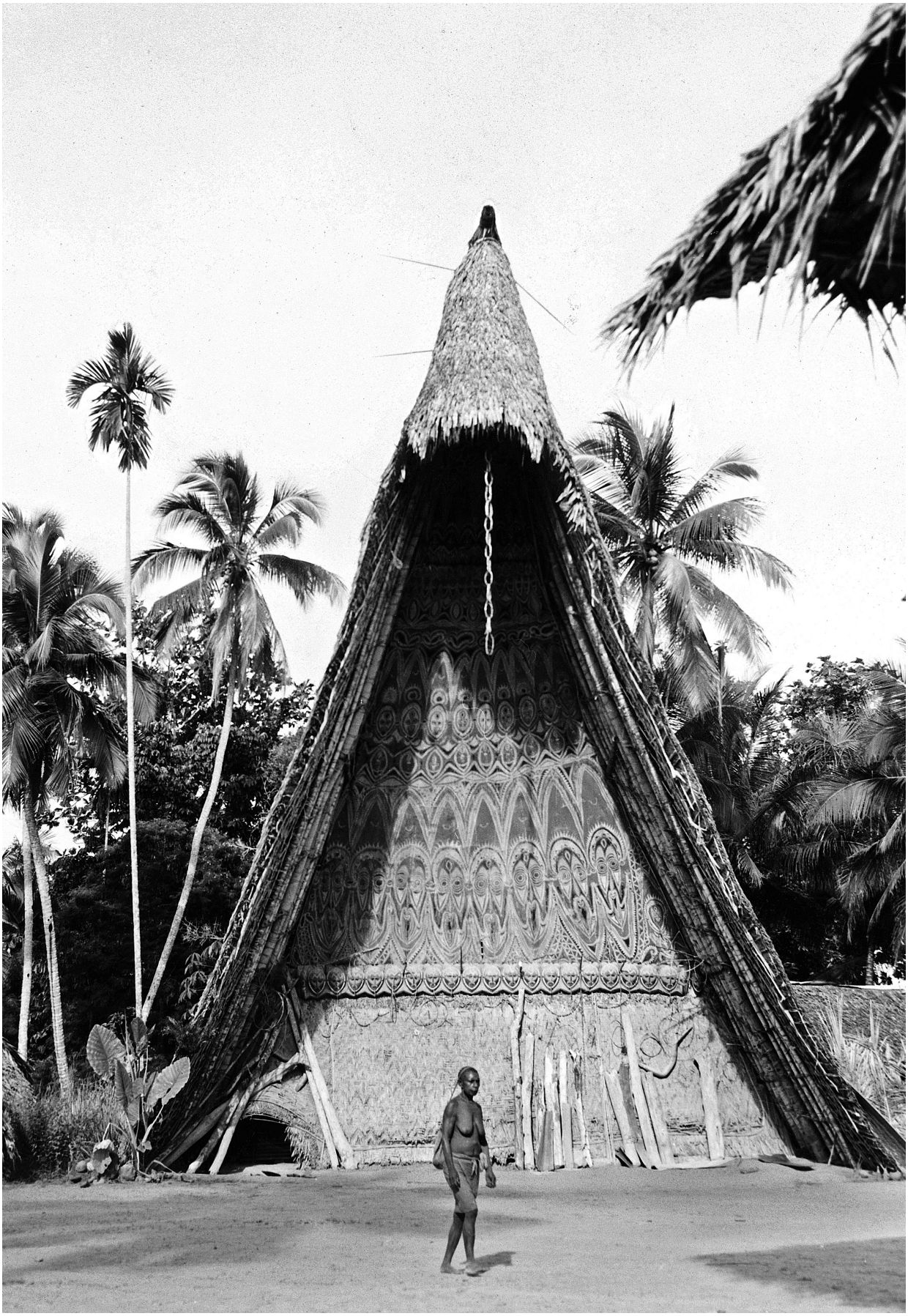
men and women commence dancing, wearing adornments of mollusc shell necklaces and rings, bird of paradise feathers, flowers and leaves. The dancers form two rows headed by the men and boys and followed by the women and girls who – the same as in ritual initiation dances – keep their heads bowed low. During this inauguration dance called *mindsha* it is the guests who surround the hosts, watching from the edge of the ritual ground and admiring the dancers. In the meantime, the tone of threat and aggression has subsided completely; the men betoken this by placing their spears upright on the ground and holding them with one hand high up near the tip. During this first performance the women do not enter the ceremonial house. The women who sing the chorus position themselves next to the *korambo* at the level of the men inside the house so that they can follow the song text and start with the chorus on cue.

When darkness falls, most of the visitors leave for home, but many of them return in the course of the night to listen to the *mindsha* songs which are now performed by both men and women, inside the new ceremonial house.

20. Ceremonial house of the *miaat-korambo* type in Buknitibe, Dshame.

21. Moderately inclined *korambo*, Nyambak, Kalabu. The plaited mat covering the lower section was destroyed when, immediately after construction was finished, the 'owner' of the house died.

22. Ceremonial house of the type *naure kumun-korambo,* Yambusaki, Kalabu.



23. *Naure kumun-korambo* in Wapinda, Kalabu.

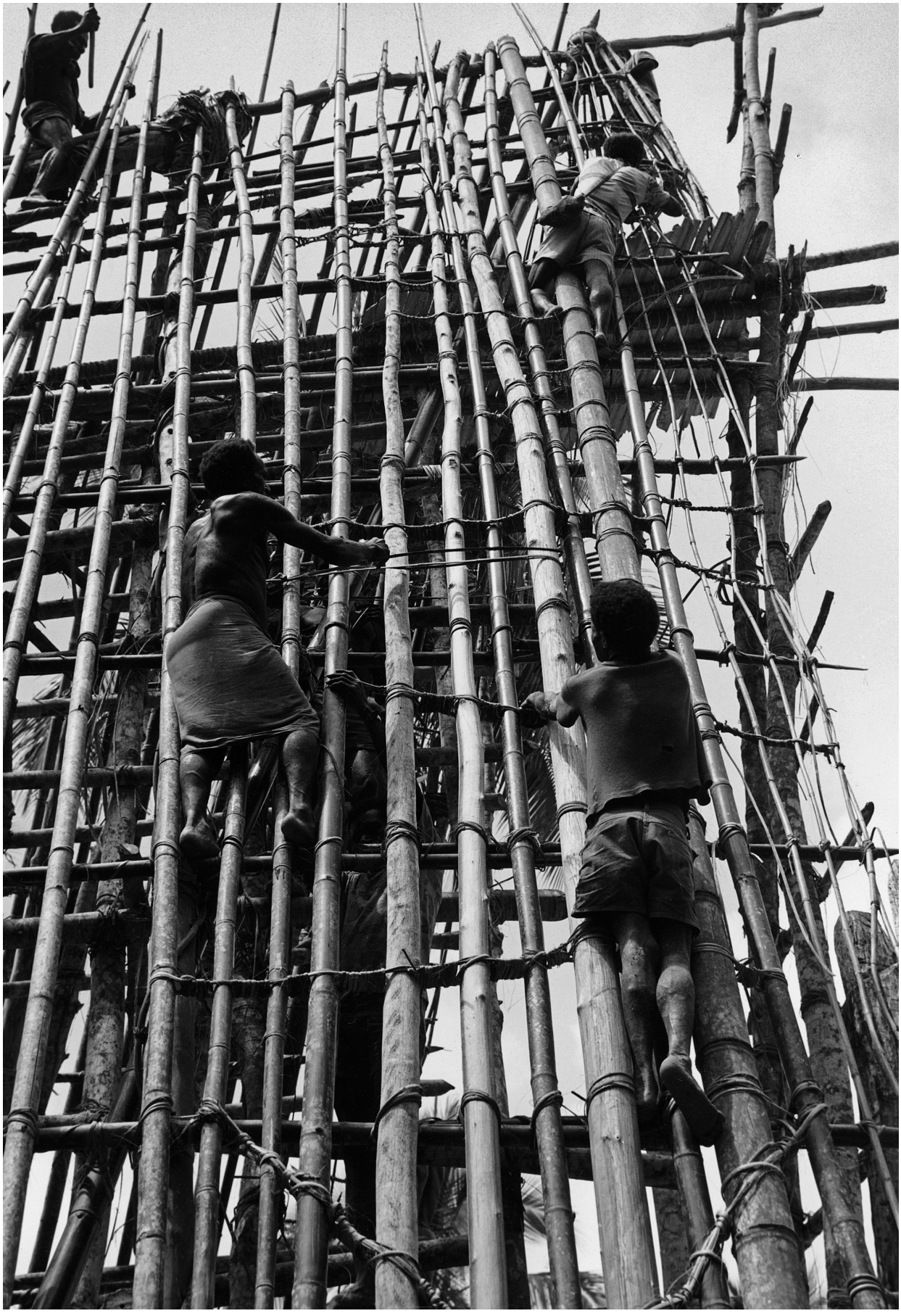
24. The *naure kumun-korambo* in Kaumbul, Kalabu, built in 1978.

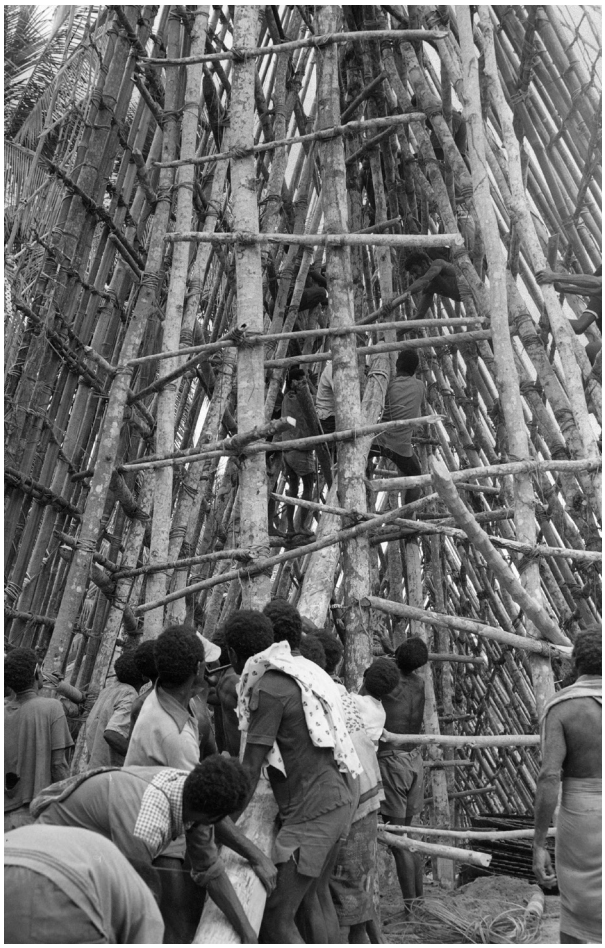
25. Ceremonial house type of the north-western Abelam;
korambo in Kuminimbis.

26. Storage house with plaited mat decorating the upper gable section. The lower part is covered by palm leaves sewn together with ornamental stitches.

27. Pig trap (*wami*) with trap door. It has approximately the same shape as a house.

28. The construction of a ceremonial house in Waignakim.
The crucks and rafters are leaning against the scaffold inside
and the ridge beam above.





29. The crucks and rafters are lashed together with *miaat* bindings. At the top on the left, the end point of the ridge beam is to be seen; it is wrapped in vines and leaves. Later, the ridge extension will be fixed to this spot.

30. A crest pole is clamped between and tied to the rafters where they intersect above the ridge beam.

31. Later, the central ridge post, *yanetikwa*, is erected; for this purpose part of the scaffolding has to be removed.

32

33

32. The leaf panels are made by old men who no longer have a hand in the actual building of the ceremonial house.

33. With the aid of long bamboo poles the thatched panels are passed to the men waiting above who lash them to the battens.

34. Manufacturing the mat (*kimbi*) made of sago leaves and bamboo strips.

35. During the roofing ceremony at Waignakim, large quantities of food are exchanged. In the foreground, at the centre of the ceremonial ground, is a circular bed of grass with a tally stick marking the number of pigs that have been sacrificed for the new *korambo*.

34

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36. Before commencing on the façade painting, the lower part of the house front is covered with thatch sheets. Leaning against it is a grid-like construction; this was used for the first fitting of the painting's support.

37. The painting of the façade is directed by an experienced artist. Here Waulemoi (at centre) is explaining to Kwandshendu (at front) the layout of the basic white lines.

38. Still today, the artists use bird feathers for painting on the uneven support made of flattened sago-palm spathes.

39. Waulemoi laying out sticks marking the outline of the three *nggwalnggwal* faces.

40. The painting is inserted in one piece and fits like a glove into its position.

41. The inside edge of the roof showing the narrow carved and painted 'limbum' board, the diamond-shaped 'netted' patterns, *narkassa* (vertical decorative vines), and *miaat* bindings. A carved python is mounted on the tunnel-like entrance, *korekore*.

42. Inside view of the front of a *korambo* (entrance on the left).

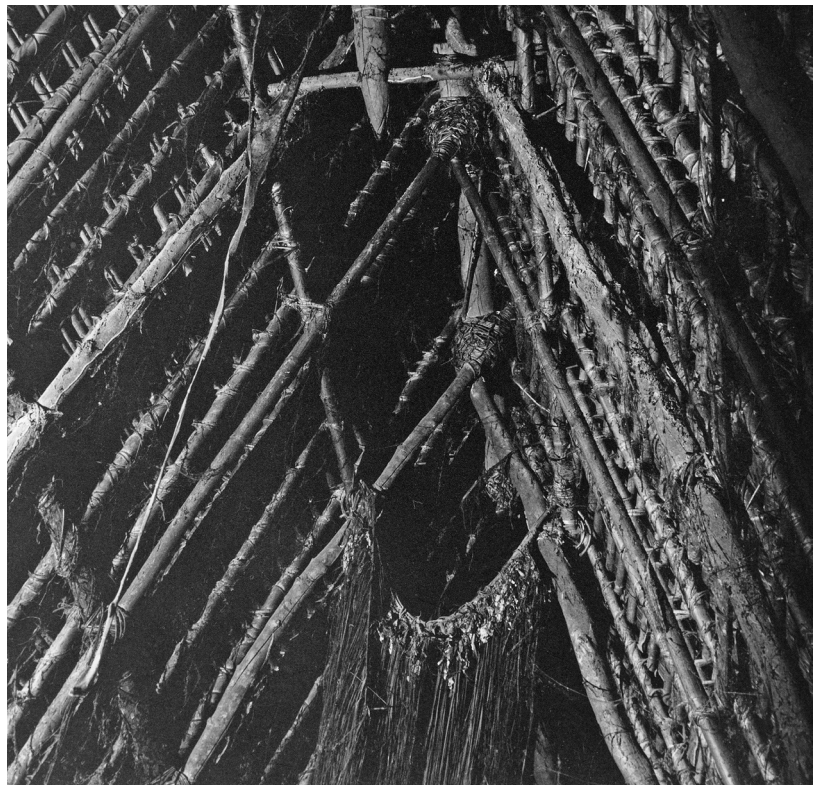
43.The upper ridge beam area showing the *nyan* that is clamped under a crossbar, and the grass-skirt-like drape that divides the interior into a front and a back sector.

44. When the house is finished, the lower part of the façade is decorated with shell rings and string bags for the inauguration feast.

45. *Nggwal mindsha* inside the ceremonial house during the inauguration feast.

(overleaf)
46. The remains of an old *korambo*. Long before a disused house is pulled down, the hamlet inhabitants let the grass grow back again on the *amei*, indicating that the place is no longer ritually used.

42



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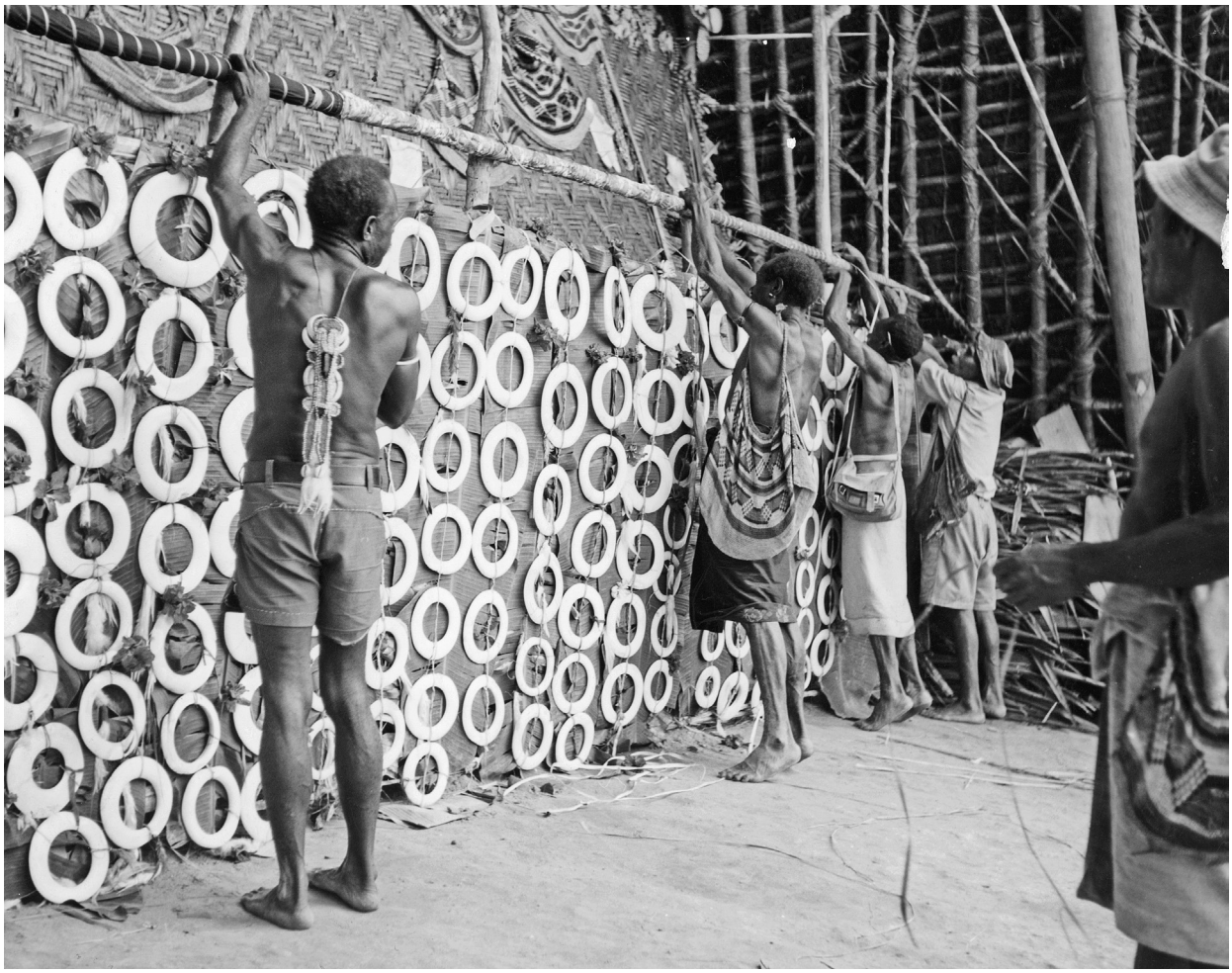

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3. The Ceremonial Ground as a Stage of Social Life

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the ceremonial house and ground, or plaza, in front of it constitutes the hub of the social and religious life of lineages, clans, clan clusters, ritual moieties, and the village as a whole. Any incident that involves more than a few single people is usually dealt with on the *amei*. In sociological terms, discussions and actions staged on the ceremonial ground involve either 1. single persons, 2. pairs (usually lovers), 3. a group, often acting in representation of a clan or several clans (disputes over land or forest ownership, rights of way, water usage rights, or sorcery), 4. ritual moieties (in the context of the yam cult, ritual competitions, initiations, etc.), or 5. local units (hamlets, village halves or other villages). The ceremonial ground also serves as a meeting place for representatives from different villages (e.g. in dealings concerning yam growth rituals which involve whole networks of villages).

First Menstruation Ceremony

Boys usually have their first experience with ceremonial houses and ritual grounds in the context of initiations. Occasionally boys commence their ritual career at the early age of three or four by entering the first initiation grade.

For a girl, the first life-cycle ritual held on the *amei* is the *wambusuge* staged on the third day after menarche has set it in (**pl. 47**). At the time, the young girl is still confined to the menstruation hut, *kalbangga*, and is barred from participating in person. The ceremony is performed on the *amei* of the hamlet where the family lives, and not on the main ceremonial ground where initiations and yam feasts are normally held. The *wambusuge* is the only occasion upon which the women temporally take over control of the ceremonial ground.[1] In principle, all the women of the village and relatives from surrounding settlements are invited. Organisation and execution lie in the hands of the girl's mother. After bleeding has set in, the mother immediately informs her brother and asks him for support in procuring firewood, food, betel nuts and tobacco. During a *wambusuge* large amounts of long and short yams as well as coconuts are displayed in front of the ceremonial house; later they are distributed to the attending women, together with betel nuts and tobacco. Although the Abelam otherwise clearly attribute long ceremonial yams (*wapi*) to the male sphere, they form a vital element in female *wambusuge* ceremonies. The large tubers are cut into small pieces and distributed among the women visitors. Apart from foodstuffs that are distributed in their raw state, the girl's close female relatives also cook large amounts of unpeeled tubers, mainly short yams (*ka*) and taro (*mai*); these are distributed among the female guests in the course of the early afternoon. A few hours later, when the local women have finally gathered on the *amei* in large numbers, they exchange yam soup garnished with coconut flakes and served in coconut shells. Each woman gives her portion of soup to a woman of her choice, and receives the same in kind. The exchange is not determined by clan or moiety membership, instead it follows more personal preferences, affection and friendship being important criteria. Immediately after the exchange the feast is over.

The young girl herself does not participate in these activities. Normally she is ritually washed the next day, endowed with a new string bag and adorned with shell ornaments which she wears until the time of her next menstruation.

After the *wambusuge*, the young woman, now classified as *naramtagwa*, is subject to a series of strict rules and taboos for many months to come.[2]

Men are involved only marginally in

[1] For the eastern Abelam Forge (1970a: 274) noted female transvestite behaviour similar to that performed by Iatmul women on the occasion of marriage. Among the central northern Abelam this kind of behaviour seems to have been absent altogether.

[2] On rules of conduct during menstruation, pregnancy and after giving birth, see McLennan (1965).

wambusuge feasts. The girl's father, mother's brother and brothers take over the task of cleaving open the coconuts and cutting up the long yams, but they do not interfere in the women's dealings and decisions. The women are usually accompanied by scores of children, and when matters get too loud and boisterous, the men merely look on, but with growing unease.

In former times, the young girls' upper arms, breasts and belly were also adorned with scarification marks, *ramoni*.[3] Prior to the operation, the girl's parents would give her mother's brother a gift of shell rings, in compensation for the blood lost during the procedure.[4] Since approximately the mid-1960s scarification is no longer practiced in Kalabu. Many women over forty still carry these scar marks, of the thirty-year-olds only very few do. Among the older women, memory of the procedure is still very vivid. Numbu, a woman of about 45, has no scar marks to show because her mother had prevented her from being scarified after she had witnessed the ordeal on Unde, Numbu's elder sister. In the course of the operation during which the skin was incised by aid of sharp-edged white stones (*ulma*), Unde fell unconscious upon which her mother had decided that her younger daughter was to be spared the suffering.

Dshowe, a woman of about 60 at the time of fieldwork, was one of the two women in Kalabu who had been responsible for carrying out the operation. She reported as follows:

When a young girl has her bleeding for the first time, she is taken to the house of blood (*kalbangga*). When she has to leave the hut (to empty her bowels) she is forbidden to touch the naked ground with her feet, which is why she has to lay out sago leaf spathes and step on these. One day during her stay in the menstruation hut the girl is ordered to stand on a wild taro leaf. Then a woman comes and cuts patterns into her skin, on her upper arms, her breasts and her belly. The blood that flows from the cuts is not allowed to touch ground; therefore the girl stands on a wild taro leaf. When the girl's skin has been cut, her parents hold a big feast, cook large amounts of food, and the women exchange bowls of soup. Before the girl leaves the *kalbangga*, women come to cleanse her body, not with water but with the sap of the *wambe* plant instead, which grows near streams.[5] To get the sap you have to scrape the plant's woody stalk, then you wash the girl's skin with it. Then the girl is decorated with shell rings[6] which she wears for a long time afterwards.

Kaso, my mother, taught me how to cut the young girls' skin. My brother Waiwu knows how to make carvings. I have made many of these scar marks (*ramoni*) on girls' skins, just as my brother has made many carvings.

When the young girl came out from the menstruation hut she was not only decorated with shells. The women also used the young, still white, sago palm leaves to make a little skirt which the girl then had to wear. Today she is given a piece of cloth to wear, or a skirt from the store. In earlier days, before the girl was adorned with shells, she was given a leaf skirt to wear. Many sea shells (*bande*) were put in a string bag which was then hung on her body. She had to carry this string bag for many months.

When a young girl has her first bleeding, she may not walk to the menstruation hut because she is not allowed to touch the ground;[7] instead she is carried to the hut. If she has to the leave the hut at some point, she has to place sago palm spathes under her feet. The *wambe* plant, the sap of which is used to cleanse the girl, we also use to make wounds heal faster. If you rub its sap on a wound, it heals faster.

For the women's feast (*wambusuge*) many crops are collected and piled in heaps, mainly *ka* and *wapi* yams as well as coconuts. These things are given to women from other hamlets and villages. For this the man who will one day marry the young woman has to pay six shell rings.

After a young girl has bled for the first time she may not go to the garden to work, and she is not allowed to eat all kinds of food. She may only eat

3 Apart from these scarification marks, most women and girls, some men as well, also feature burn marks (*sarip*) which are made by inserting thin wooden splints into the skin and then setting them alight. Unlike among the Sawos (see Schindlbeck 1981), this kind of branding was not associated with initiations in any way.

4 If a dispute between two men turns violent and one of the men is inflicted with a bleeding wound, the perpetrator has to compensate the victim's mother's brother (*wau*) with a shell ring.

5 This ritual cleansing with the sap of the *wambe* plant actually gives the first menstruation ceremony its generic term. Kaberry (1941a: 361) suggests that the plant is called *naramtagwa*.

6 Necklaces (*beleben*), wristlets (*tambakwalya*) and *bande* mollusc shells, which she keeps in her string bag.

7 The Abelam say that the ground would cool off if a girl experiencing her menarche should step on the ground; this in turn would negatively affect the growth of crops and plants.

tubers that have been roasted in a fire, but the young woman (*naramtagwa*) is not allowed to touch them herself. We wrap the roasted tuber in a leaf of nettles. When she eats she must hold the food in this leaf. It is only later that she is allowed to drink soup again. Again much later, when I believe the time is ripe, I go to the bush and collect various plants, which the girl has to chew together with a betel nut. After that she is allowed to chew betel nut again. For a long time she is forbidden to eat greens, as well as meat. Only after she has got married and given birth to two or three children is she allowed to eat these foods again.

It is the girls who had their menarche just some months ago, at most a few years back, but who are not yet married that accompany the newly initiated and decorated young men in the dances on the *amei* when these appear for the first time publicly after weeks or months in seclusion. For this occasion the girls wear the same type of ornaments as after first menstruation, especially string bags filled with mollusc shells.

Bride Wealth Prestation

The next major public step in the lifecycle of a person – apart from the various stages in the graded initiation system as far as boys are concerned – normally involves the transfer of bride wealth which is again staged on the *amei*. Up to now, not even in the chapter on the structure of social groups, I have said nothing on the issue of marriage rules. The reason is that I was unable to gather sufficient reliable data that would allow me to make valid statements on the extent and frequency of clan alliances by marriage. Mainly, this has to do with the fact that individuals are able to claim membership to alternative and differing *kim*, according to social frame of reference and context. In the census I compiled in the course of many months, the only conclusive pattern I was able to discern was that, in the large majority of cases, marriages were contracted beyond clan boundaries (without fail over lineage boundaries), often across village halves, but practically always within the same ritual moiety (*ara*).

On the day of the bride wealth transfer, shell rings (*yua*)[8] are placed over the shoot of a sprouting coconut without the husk and carried onto the ceremonial ground by a close kinsman of the groom, or by the groom himself. In Kalabu, the bride wealth usually includes six such shell units of different sizes. They are placed on banana leaves and laid out on the ground (**pl. 48**), according to size, and then handed over to the bride's father. In the late 1970s, the bride wealth was usually supplemented by money. As far as I could tell, the bride wealth is higher if the marriage is across moiety boundaries, if the bride is an only daughter, or if the bride's clan has the impression that it is always in the role of 'wife givers' towards the groom's clan, in other words, if in the past only very few women from the present bridegroom's clan have married into the bride's clan.

During the usually lengthy discussion that unfolds on the *amei* over the size and quality of the prestation, the bride is never present. Like all other women she is barred from entering onto the ceremonial ground when the men are debating and negotiating, lest it be to deliver bowls of food. Normally the groom too is not present on this occasion.

Like all Abelam debates and disputes, the discussion on the volume and appropriateness of the bride wealth is usually very lively, at times even hot-tempered; often it goes on all day. The bride's father habitually rejects one or some of shell rings on the basis of inferior quality and demands from the groom's father replacement, making it clear that otherwise he would not approve of the marriage. Occasionally the negotiations are adjourned to a later date, especially if the groom's father is not able to bring round the bride's father or is not willing to meet his demands. However, at the end of the day, usually shortly before night falls, dissension often miraculously dissolves into thin air, without the parties essentially having budged an inch from their original positions.

Occasionally a marriage is contracted on a sister exchange basis, that is, a man marries a woman while his own sister weds the woman's brother. This form of marriage too is sealed with an exchange of bride wealth, with the simultaneous prestations being equal in both size and quality. Often the bride's father not only receives shell rings in exchange for his daughter, he also gives the groom's father a shell ring in return, thus securing the right for his daughter to occasionally visit her parents and lend them a hand in work.

[8] As mentioned above, they are traded in from the Arapesh who make them (see Bühler 1963).

Shift of residence, that is, the move of the woman from her father's and brothers' hamlet to that of her husband's family, is not ritually highlighted in any way. The young woman simply comes to stay with her future mother-in-law as soon as the young couple have decided to seal their 'romantic' relationship by marriage. This may occur many months before the transfer of bride wealth; actually the young man and his father usually only start to procure the necessary shell rings when the girl has come to reside in their hamlet. Until then the young couple try to keep their relationship secret, restricting their liaison to furtive meetings in the bush. The decision to change residence, which is taken by the woman, is an act with social repercussions in the sense that, sooner or later, their private relationship needs redefining as an alliance between two *kim*; this is sealed with the transfer of bride wealth. After the move the young girl is not allowed to live under the same roof as her future husband; she sleeps in her mother-in-law's house and helps her in her daily work, at home and in the garden. Fetching water from the stream and collecting firewood for her mother-in-law are especially appreciated services. Most mothers-in-law – usually with the explicit support of the girl's own mother – try to prevent the young couple from secretly meeting in the bush, since premature pregnancy, i.e. before bride wealth has been paid, is looked upon as wrong, and disdained. Ultimately, this is the main reason why a mother-in-law keeps a keen eye on the young girl, and the father sees to it that his son sticks close to him most of the time.

According to tradition the young couple only move into a new house, which is built by the husband, after bride wealth has been paid. A few days after this event and thus – in the eyes of the Abelam – after the marriage has officially been consummated, the young husband is subjected to a special act of 'purification'. After sleeping with his wife a few times, a group of old men come to pick up the husband at daybreak one day, taking him down to a stream, namely to the place of his clan-specific *wale*. There an experienced old man performs an operation on the husband's penis during which a deep cut is made on the glans with the aid of a sharp white stone, *ulma*, (today a broken piece of glass). The blood that is discharged[9] is carried away by the stream. The men say that the operation is necessary as a means to purify the young husband from the dangerous forces that he might have contracted while being intimate with his wife.

The notion behind this act has to do with concepts concerning the nature of male- and femaleness. While men are regarded as 'hot' (*ya*), women are considered to be 'cold' (*yipma*). Through sexual intercourse – especially in the immediate period after first marriage – the husband runs the risk of 'cooling down'.[10] This in turn could jeopardize his ritual potential to grow yam and establish relationships with the spirits of the beyond, a prerequisite of successful yam cultivation. Water and greens have a similar cooling effect; both are classified as female. By 'bleeding' the penis, the body is believed to discharge the cold contracted during and through sexual intercourse. After the old man performing the operation[11] – it should never be the husband's own father lest the latter go blind at the sight of the blood[12] – has administered the cut, the young man breaks out in a sweat which is taken as a sign that his innate 'male' heat is returning. To support and conserve the returning male heat, the man is made to eat stinging nettles. In earlier days, young married men were recognizable by their special hairdo. Unlike their unmarried peers, who wore comparatively long, flattened hair, the young husbands wore a kind of rasta hairdo called *wamage* consisting of twisted tufts fixed with *gwat* oil and likened to sticks of tobacco (*linimbe*); the forehead part was kept clean-shaven.

The operation is followed by a period that lasts several months during which the young man is subject to a range of strictly observed rules. The most testing restriction – at least as far as we could tell from observation – was the prohibition on drinking water. The young wife is also bound to a series of rules but they are not as longlasting and strict as the in the case of her husband.

Not every marriage is validated by the payment of bride wealth. In such a case, the young couple have probably long commenced

[9] For this form of bleeding the mother's brother is compensated with a shell ring.

[10] Inversely, women do not have to fear 'warming'. Interestingly enough, there is a myth-like tale which tells that fire was originally created by a woman.

[11] My main associate in these matters compared the act to a young girl's menarche.

[12] The same holds true for giving birth; neither mother nor father are present during the process lest they go blind.

marital relations by the time the representatives of the two *kim* start negotiating the terms of marriage. To compensate for the lack of bride wealth, the parties often agree that, later, one of the couple's children be returned to the clan of the bride's father, or that, alternatively, the young husband switches residence to the land of his father-in-law where he will work in the latter's gardens for a while, together with his wife's brothers.

From a socioeconomic perspective, bride wealth may well be regarded as compensation for the loss of labour in the gardens of the bride's father's clan, but what is probably more relevant – as the above-mentioned return of the daughter's child implies – is the aspect of recompense for the children she gives birth to and which grow up in and belong to her husband's clan. This notion finds expression in the practice that, when a member of the husband's *kim* carries the bride-wealth shell rings onto the ceremonial ground, they are placed over a sprouting coconut, which is considered as a symbol of the bride's fertility; later, the coconut is planted and will bear fruit.

As Dshowe remarked in her description of the first menstruation ritual above, the bride wealth is also looked upon as payment for the large amounts of food that her parents and close kinfolk distribute to the guests who have come from near and afar. This is certainly one aspect, but there is more to it, as a few people pointed out to me spontaneously: since practically every hamlet yields a girl that reaches puberty sooner or later, it means that every lineage and every clan stages, at least once in a while, one such feast, to the effect that, in the long run, this kind of food distribution is looked upon as a form of delayed reciprocal exchange.

Death Watch

Every Abelam man and woman stands a chance in life of being the focus of attention on the *amei*, namely when he or she is the subject of a dispute that is acted out and settled publicly, without her or his reputation being blemished thereby. Next to such events which arise from interactions between an individual and members of other social groups, each and every individual definitely becomes the focus of attention on the *amei*, namely on the occasion of death, in the context of the death watch held for her or him.

When a person dies, the corpse (*gamba-singgui*) is carried to the ceremonial house in the deceased's hamlet and laid out in the shelter of the building's jutting roof sides.[13] A death is sounded on the slit gong by a special signal. If it concerns an old big man, the sign marking a cultivator who has grown an especially large yam is beaten first. If the hamlet has no ceremonial house of its own, the body is laid out in front of the deceased's own house. The women gather round the body (male or female), caress it, address it by kin terms,[14] wailing loudly. The men, on the other hand, avoid any direct contact with the body. At least part of the man's wealth in the form of shell rings is displayed next to him; recently, modern bank notes have replaced the traditional form of wealth. In former days the body used to be decorated; the men were dressed in their festive array, the women in the attire worn at the first menstruation feast (*wambusuge)*. The women hold wake throughout the night, while the men usually sit together at a distance in small groups. If the deceased – man or woman – was old,[15] dirges are sung all night, but without instrumental accompaniment. These songs called *gambakware* are owned individually and are usually passed down within the lineage, from father to son. They are intoned by a group of men standing together and tell of secret amorous adventures or earlier feats in battle. Women who are acquainted with the song then join in and sing the chorus. Singing usually goes on all night, interrupted only by short intervals but often drowned out by the women's laid wailing and weeping.

When Samtagwa, a respected old big man living in Kaumbul, died, his kin came to fetch his body and carry it back to Malmba where he was originally from. Below I include an extensive extract of some of the *gambakware* songs

[13] When Kulieng, the councillor of Kalabu, died construction on the ceremonial house in his hamlet Nyambak had just finished and the *mindsha* had begun. Out of grief, the plaited mat covering the front of the house was cut off and Kulieng's body laid out inside the ceremonial house. Through this act the *korambo* was deprived of its original function and was never used again. 'We destroyed the house out of grief,' the villagers explained Stöcklin (1973: 52).

[14] Kin terms are hardly ever used in everyday communication. By using kin terms during the death watch the people are expressing their close relationship to the deceased person.

[15] In the case of children and people up to the age of approximately 50 no dirges are sung because, as the people say, 'their premature death has shut our mouths.'

performed during the wake in his native hamlet Ndusaki.[16] In order to give an impression of the call-and-response style of singing – technically called an antiphony – I have tagged the voices as male (m) and female (f).

Women's song:

I'm staying at a place but you're beating the slit gong and calling me. The man has died. His (totemic) bird, *kwaru*, is now bathing at the water hole where his *wale* is. He spent a long time in Ndusaki Kounoure, now he's gone to where the spirits of the dead (*gamba*) stay.
He's on his way, he's bringing it with him, it is *kwaru* that is bringing him to Ndusaki Kounoure.
Kwaru, where have you gone to? I was looking for you and this brought me to Ndusaki Kounoure.

Song by Kapremu of Kalabu; name of song: Wuindu:

M. He's cutting[17] a vine, *paal*.[18] He also cuts down *wuinggile* and *kwami*. He cuts down this rattan which is now lying in the Namipil and Kwaro streams. *Paal* is now lying in these streams.
M. When I was young I lived in my hamlet Kaumbul Wapinda.
F. When I was young I lived in my hamlet Kaumbul Wapinda.
M. When I grew old and death approached me I went to Unaip Yenggore.[19]
F. ditto.
M. The sun has dried the leaf of the breadfruit tree. If someone steps on it there is a rustling and you turn round to see who is coming.
F. ditto.
M. If you step on this leaf the people try to find out who is approaching.
F. ditto.
M. She fills water into a bamboo. She puts it down and turns round.
F. ditto.
M. You're scooping up water, but I'm your husband and I've come to see you. But you cannot see me.[20]
M. A baby is crying. I want to sleep next to it, but you turn me out of the house. You say 'go!'[21]
F. ditto.
M. You ask me to leave, and I leave, grudgingly.
F. ditto.
M. I'm on my way to a village where the men are putting on *wagnen* (ceremonial dance headdress). I'm on my way there when I suddenly realize that I am menstruating. I pick a few young *yiren* and *mbongga* leaves and wipe off the blood.[22]
F. ditto.

Song by Lake of Kalabu; name of the song: Serapan:

M. Serapan is picking wild *titnbun* lime.[23] He puts them in a fire, and this *titnbun* leaf drops off.
At the place where this happens a roar of thunder rises from the ground. You men and women, I'm telling you, when you hear this, you will be scared; such is the noise when they throw this *titnbun* leaf into the fire.
When the men do this, the boar Serapan[24] tries to rise and stand still.
F. Serapan, you rise from this place like a man. But can you remain firm?
M. Down in the valley Serapan makes the earth shake so that the men are scared and run away. Or will they stand and face him? That's the way of Serapan, and my vulva has been longing for him for ages.[25]
F. My vulva has been longing for him for a long time. My vulva is hanging up high in the *yiru* and *bauw* tree.[26] It has been up there for a long time; Serapan too thinks of it often.

Second song by Lake; name of the song: Tul and Waimba.

M. There is a flowing water that we call Tul and Waimba.[27] Katu and Imagwate[28] are everywhere.
F. ditto.
M. Men are coming, and you people must stay in the

16 On 10 February 1979.
17 Metaphor for Samtagwa, the deceased man.
18 Meaning that death has overtaken Samtagwa.
19 Malmba.
20 Probably meaning the deceased man.
21 Sexual intercourse during lactation is frowned upon since it is said to harm the child.
22 My associates did not agree with each other on this passage. The *wagnen* probably refers to the spirits of the dead. The singers are trying to express that they were on their way to the realm of the dead, but then suddenly turned round because they were still among the living.
23 *Titnbun* is applied as a ritually cleansing substance before going to battle and before planting ceremonial yam.
24 More on Serapan see p. 117.
25 Prior to a war raid and during the yam cycle, sexual intercourse is forbidden.
26 Beyond reach.
27 Streams near Waignakim.
28 *Nggwal* of Numbunggen and Kaumbul, Kalabu.

village. Katu and Imagwate are two handsome men. They are coming, and the people stay in the village.

F. The voices of Katu and Imagwate follow the course of the stream.[29]

M. ditto.

F. Your two voices follow the course of the stream.

M. In the hamlet Kandanyinggi (in Waignakim) a woman is taking a pee but she stops in the middle of it.[30]

F. ditto.

M. In Kandanyinggi a pretty woman is taking a pee but she stops in the middle of it.

F. ditto.

M. Your skin is all cold.

F. ditto.

M. Your skin is all cold. When she passes (her hand) over my body, her skin shivers.

F. ditto.

M. You pass over my body and I become uneasy. I lie down; your hand is so cold.

F. ditto.

M. You pass (your hand) over my body, and I turn towards you. You are good to me.

F. Your vulva smells like a *wandsho* plant.

M. Whom will you sleep with, I wonder? I think with your husband.

F. You brag that you have a lover in another village.

M. Your vulva smells like the roots of the *wandsho* plant.

F. You joke with another man and you're proud of that.

M. Your vulva smells like the *wandsho* plant and your face is like that of a *waiwu*.[31]

F. You flee upwards into the air.

M. This vein in my leg hurts. I come to you but my leg hurts, and I call for you.

F. This vein in my arm hurts. In my thoughts I am with you, and I call for you.

M. You're a woman, you're holding a small child, that is why I can't come to you.

F. This child still needs me.

M. A tree called *sure*.

F. A tree, *wandsho*; it is a pleasing sight because it looks like a man.

M. So that is how you are, and you desire me.

F. This *wandsho* tree is like a man.

M. He walks like a man, and I am startled when I see this man *wandsho*.

M. You tell me to tie it up, and I fasten it.

F. You tell me to carry it, and I carry it.

M. These (two) men Katu and Imagwate tie up a pig and carry it off.

F. These (two) men Katu and Imagwate catch a cassowary and tie it up.

M. I have a lucky hand.

F. Katu and Imagwate often catch pigs and cassowaries. They have a lucky hand.[32]

M. This is the man Serapan. A woman calls.

F. ditto.

M. Down by the water Saigeti and Wasami[33] stands a woman and calls.

F. ditto.

M. ditto.

F. Down by Saigeti and Wasami stands a woman; she is joking and laughing.

M. Serapan is a man. Woman, you're pubic hair and your vulva are large, you almost look like a man and you're laughing.

F. ditto.

M. Your vulva and your pubic hair outmatch everything; it almost looks as though you are a man. You lie down in this water Saigeti.

F. You, this woman here, your pubic hair is so lush, and you bathe and lie down in this water Saigeti and Wasami.

Song by Tomas[34] of Malmba:

M. I am a man who does not know where the *wale* dwell or how one wears a *wagnen* (dancer's ceremonial headdress).[35] I know nothing of this. The place where the *wale* dwell and the place where one wears *wagnen* I have passed on to Magutokim and Waignakim.[36]

M. With whom shall I hold a feast in Ndusaki Kounoure?[37] That is why I now sing in two hamlets.

F. With whom shall I hold a feast in Ndusaki Kounoure? Now I shall sing here.

M. ditto.

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29 Katu and Imagwate go to Waignakim to fight the enemy.

30 This metaphor actually refers to men of Waignakim, who are afraid of fighting and flee the village.

31 On paintings and carvings this type of elongated face is called *waiwu*; here it means a pretty face.

32 Katu and Imagwate is a reference to the men of the hamlets Kaumbul and Numbunggen in Kalabu. Here they are making a promise to sacrifice a pig in the name of Samtagwa.

33 Springs located near the hamlets Kamogwa and Baigu in Kalabu.

34 A classificatory son of Samtagwa.

35 Metaphor for the realm of the dead.

36 Meaning Waignakim is responsible for the death of Samtagwa.

37 The sentence is not complete; in terms of meaning one should add: 'now that you are dead.'

F. ditto.
M. You were a man who put out nets[38] and snares.[39]
F. ditto.
M. You are the one, the companion of *kwaru*.[40] You are the one who puts out nets and snares.
F. You are *kwaru*'s plumage, you put out nets and snares so that you can get to *kwaru*.
M. Now he comes, this man *kwaru*.
F. ditto.
M. The bird *kwaru* has laid itself down, and I try to approach it.[41]
F. ditto.
M. *Kwaru* starts calling. A man standing there asks: 'what have I done to make you call me?'
F. What I have I done? You call for me, why? I don't like you calling me![42]
M. What I have I done? I don't want to go to Siretu. I will stay in the bush or in my hamlet. You can beat the slit gong, I will hear it.
F. ditto.
M. When you beat the slit gong I shall come to this village Bukniware and Yamanimbu."[43]

Song by Yosbli[44] of Yenigo; name of song: Wulnimbya.

M. I do not feel like a human being, but like a bad dog instead, now that you're dead. For the village of Kwatmogo Palna I had an ally.
F. For the village of Kwatmogo Palna[45] I had an ally, you could call me when the enemy came.
M. When the enemy came you could count on me.
F. ditto.
M. Down at the *wale* Wuiko Tapuko we gave our promises; you could count on me. In battle we always helped each other and beat the enemy. But now you are dead and I no longer have an ally (followed by an acoustically flawed passage).
M. The place where our *wale* dwells, some men wanted to find it, but they failed and went back.[46] A river, Pasi, appears like a man and speaks. A river, Kulaure, is very cold. This man washes in the Kulaure, then he comes.
F. The water of the Kulaure[47] is very cold; he washes there and then he comes.
M. It's this man Wulnimbya;[48] he's looking for traces but can't find them. He only finds the traces of pigs and cassowaries. If he should find the trace of a man, then he would certainly feel the spear because Wulnimbya would fight against him.
F. If I should find the trace of a man, he will feel the spear, no use if he tries to defend himself.
M. I shall cut off his path, and you can only turn back.
F. ditto.
M. Only if I were an old man you could escape (followed by an acoustically flawed passage).
M. A snake, *kuindshe*, crawls away, and a second snake, *nati*, crawls back on the same path that *kuindshe* took.
F. ditto.
M. These two snakes[49] take turns in coming and going. And you man here who lives in this hamlet, you may feel sorry for yourself for having something to do with these snakes that keep moving up and down this path, for there is nothing you can do against their way.
F. ditto.
M. In this village Tuta (?) it is the snake, *kuindshe*, and the chicken, *sera*, who walk on this path, back and forth.
F. ditto.
M. Which village are you mad with and fighting against?
F. ditto.
M. Which village are you mad with and fighting against? At that time you stepped over the boundary and entered the enemy village. But now you are dead.
F. ditto.
M. If I begin a (secret magic) song in my village, then you men, you can stay in your village."

Women's song:

F. Sirendshui[50] is a star in the sky. A woman is sitting down and looking up to the star. It is Sirendshui that has risen and is now shining on me. That is why I am here and singing about the star up there.

38 For catching pigs.
39 For trapping cassowaries.
40 Samtagwa's *dshambu*.
41 Meaning he will try to find out why Samtagwa had to die.
42 Suspicion of sorcery.
43 Yenigo.
44 Yosbli is Samtagwa's *rawa* (sister's son).
45 Waignakim is the traditional enemy of Kalabu and Yenigo.
46 The enemy tried to ambush Samtagwa and Yosbli, but failed.
47 Kulaure is a metaphor for Aunyelum; this is the village against which Samtagwa and Yosbli fought.
48 Wulnimbya is the name of a *nggwal*.
49 Metaphor for Samtagwa and Yosbli.
50 Sirendshui is the Morning Star, in this case a reference to the deceased man Samtagwa.

Song of Dshambosa of Malmba:

M. In one place there is a lot of rubbish.[51] You told me to pick it up, and that is what I'm doing. There is sorrow. Down at the water there is a fight, and an enemy who belongs to *kwandshetagwa*[52] is killed.
F. Down at the Kumau there is a fight, and an enemy is killed.
M. The *maingge* bird[53] may sleep with him, joke with him. Then he returns to his village, and so does the other.
F. I will sleep with you, but then you have to return to your village wherever that is; you must return to there. This woman's (totemic) bird is *maingge*.
M. On top of the hill sits a woman.[54] She looks down and makes jokes while sitting up there on the hill.
F. ditto.
M. A woman is up there on the hill and I shall sleep with her.
M. Down there in the valley we will hold hands and cross the rising river together.
F. ditto.
M. There at the rapids we will hold hands and cross the river together; you may not do it alone.[55]
F. ditto.
M. A bird, *saren*, flies away and calls.
F. ditto.
M. It flies away, or it stays and laughs. If it goes there, it looks at the man and flies away.
F. ditto.
M. Woman, why do you first stand still and then run away?
F. ditto.
M. Why do you ask me? I have this longing for a man; that is why I stand still and look.
F. ditto.
M. He grabs the plumage of the *umbun* and *ura* bird. He lays out the skin and feathers to dry in the sun.[56]
F. ditto.
M. In Winggei and Katoumu he grabs the feathers of *umbun* and *ura* and lays them out to dry, in Winggei and Katoumu.[57]
F. ditto.
M. In the village Winggei and Katoumu the cassowary's plumage[58] is especially lavish.
F. ditto.
M. In the village Winggei Katomou, a man is holding tight the plumage of a cassowary. The cassowary can struggle as long as it likes, to no avail.
F. ditto.
M. You are a woman and your hair looks like the plumage of a *kwaru* bird.
F. ditto.
M. In the village Kwalmik[59] this *kwaru* bird is strutting.
F. ditto.
M. You are standing on a hill and your limbs are trembling; you are restless.
F. ditto.
M. In the river Amagu there is a woman.[60] The hairs on her body are standing on end; she steps out of the river Amagu.
F. ditto.
M. I often think of this place. But I don't dare to go back there.
F. ditto.
M. He lives in the village Sakengge and Suago.[61] He holds things of our ancestors that we call *wuti* and *yina*. I cannot go to Sakengge and Suago.[62]
F. ditto.
M. I do not wish to go to the pools Atoleri and Mando.[63]
F. ditto.
M. When I bathe in Atoleri and Mando my skin is chilly and I shiver because I don't wish to bathe there.[64]

Second song of Kapremu of Kalabu:

M. Once a woman of the Nyinggigim was on her way to cut wild sugarcane up on the hill Buku,

51 By this it is probably meant that Samtagwa's death has created disorder; hopefully, the death watch including the songs and the mortuary feasts that are to follow will restore order.

52 *Kwandshetagwa* (flying fox) is the *dshambu* of the men of Ulupu and Kalabu (Ndunyinggi hamlet) who used to be allies. When they were once travelling together, they were ambushed and killed by Malmba men.

53 *Maingge* is the *dshambu* of Mamblep. Possibly this is a reference to the fight between Kalabu, supported by two men of Kuminimbis, against Malmba.

54 Metaphor for an enemy he wishes to kill.

55 Meaning entering enemy territory (rapids) together with an ally to carry out a raid.

56 Laying out the skin and feathers to dry in the sun is a metaphor for slain enemies.

57 Hamlet of Malmba I.

58 The cassowary is the *dshambu* of Waignakim, Malmba's enemy.

59 Ulupu.

60 Metaphor for a man from Kimbanggwa whom the men of Kalabu and Maprik (allies) had killed jointly.

61 Waignakim.

62 *Wuti* and *yina* is a reference to sorcery or a planned raid of which he is afraid.

63 Dwellings of *wale* of Ndunyinggi, Kalabu, located on the boundary to Malmba. The man is afraid of an ambush.

64 To die.

but illness befell her. After leaving the hill she went down to the pool Mando and followed the bank of the river when a *wale* pulled her down (into the water).

Bendshanggram song of the men of Malmba:

M. He goes to Kuindshambi[65] and sits down on the *titnbun* and the *yewi* lime.[66] He is in Kuindshambi. Who is holding him back, who is fighting?
In Kuindshambi and Waragwa a man is fought against and killed. (Followed by a short, acoustically flawed passage).
M. He left the village following Kato and Apupik.[67]
On Kato and Apupik there was once a village; the people left, but still often think of it.
M. Why did you fight against me, what were you planning, why did you follow me?
F. ditto.
M. I left the village on Kato and Apupik where our ancestors once lived. But you rose up against me as my enemy and drove me away.
F. ditto.
M. In Kato Apupik he called. You were in that village and shouted.[68]
F. ditto.
M. Today you think back to that village, filled with yearning. That is why I left it and went to Bombomu and Menapaim.[69]
F. ditto.
M. Stay where you are and bear your anguish. But I shine like Sirendshui and Gerambu.[70] That is how I appear, and sorrow befalls you.
F. ditto.
M. In the village Ipasimbil and Angguimbil[71] people turn to water.
F. ditto.
M. As a man on my own I cannot return to Kato and Apupik. I have lost that place forever.
F. ditto.

Third song of Kapremu of Kalabu; name of song: Tshat and Yonggwa:

M. A flying fox, *kumbui* and *kwandshe*, flies to a tree[72] that grows near the pool Markulugo and Anggimba.[73]
F. On these trees, *kui* and *wani*, a flying fox has landed to eat their fruit.
M. Who calls from down there?
F. ditto.
M. It is a bird, *nyimbya*,[74] that lives in the enemy village of Malmba. He's calling me and my kin.
F. ditto.
M. It bathes in the stream Watik and Myambako,[75] then climbs up the bank. This bird's name is *sanggan*; it stands on the bank and lets the water dry off.
F. ditto.
M. I'm an old man, but I am pleased at the sight of the bird drying its feathers.[76]
F. ditto.
M. You're a handsome woman; that is why I want to come to you, come rain or storm.
F. ditto.
M. So I follow you to the place Myambako, where *sanggan* lives with the *kugele* bird.[77]
F. ditto.
M. The hill Tshat and the valley Yonggwa.[78] He comes like the sun that rises and then shines.
F. The hill Tshat and the valley Yonggwa. A fire burns off the grass on the hill and in the valley, and then he comes.
M. Like a fire he appears on the hill and in the valley; he comes like a fire.
F. ditto.
M. On Tshat and in Yonggwa he appears like if the sun and moon were to meet.
F. ditto.
M. You kill a man, Pelek,[79] and are proud of it.
F. ditto.
M. Who will carry on this fight?
F. ditto.
M. It is a bird, *kwaru*,[80] that will carry on the fight.

65 *Amei* of Kwimbu.
66 *Titnbun* and *yewi* are references to death, either by sorcery or in battle.
67 See the story of Kato Apupik, p. 12ff.
68 Probably meaning battle cry, for the altercation was a village-internal conflict.
69 Yamel.
70 Sirendshui is the Morning Star, Gerambu the Evening Star; the latter is probably referring to the spirit of the deceased man.
71 Magutogim (Malmba II).
72 A woman marries to Malmba.
73 Battle ground between Malmba and Kalabu. This is where foes exchanged men to mark the end of hostilities; to commemorate the event, the men planted a yellow-leaved shrub there.
74 *Dshambu* of a man of Kalabu. Kapremu's mother is from Malmba.
75 Spot where the Ulagem flows into the Pasi; fighting ground for battles with Waignakim.
76 He's pleased at the sight of a dead enemy.
77 Possibly the whole verse is a description of an ambush on a man of Waignakim.
78 Boundary between Kalabu and Waignakim.
79 A Kalabu man, who distinguished himself in battle against Waignakim.
80 *Dshambu* of Samtagwa, who was associated with the hamlets Kaumbul and Numbunggen in Kalabu.

F. ditto.
M. I will not let you go back; you must stay in Numbunggen.
F. ditto.
M. This bird *kwaru* cannot go back, instead it will stay in Numbunggen.
F. ditto.
M. I have settled down in the grassland.
F. ditto.
M. I have settled down in the grassland, and a dog[81] has followed me because it wants to kill me.
F. ditto.
M. Up there in the village, the betel and coconut palms are swaying.[82]
F. ditto.
M. In the village Yoindshang[83] the betel and coconut palms are swaying.
F. ditto.

Women's song:

In the village Ndusaki and Kounoure I sing a song. Earlier on, you moved to Kalabu; there you grew old and died. Now you have returned to Ndusaki and Kounoure. Here on this *amei* we used to hold ceremonies and feasts, here on this *amei* where we have laid out your body. Earlier on you used to call like a bird at dusk, like a rooster at dawn. We were used to hearing your voice. Now you are dead and we will never hear your voice again. That is why we mourn for you.

Now you are dead. With whom shall I now stage feasts? My *nggwal* rests in the ceremonial house; now he has closed his eyes. You closed your eyes in Ndusaki and Kounoure, and I shall never be able to hold a feast again.

At night I will ready my bed, but I will not be able to sleep, instead I will wait until day breaks. Hornbill bird (*paal*), where have you gone? But I have remained behind, I sit on my bed and in my thoughts I yearn for you.

Second song of Yosibli of Yenigo:

M. A woman from Kwambigim[84] yearns[85] for the hill of Nyimbyang and Aineng.[86]
You woman from Kwambigim, you yearn for Nyimbyang. Nyimbyang is my village, and it is black like the feathers of a cassowary.
F. Nyimbyang is my village, and it is black like the feathers of a cassowary.[87]
M. Day breaks on Nyimbyang and Aineng, and the *kwas* bird calls from the hill.
F. The *kwas* bird calls in Nyimbyang, and one says it is the *nggwal* Nyimbya that calls from the valley.
M. You are a handsome woman of Nyimbyang and Aineng from where my *nggwalndu* Nyimbya calls. You pick the fruit of the *kwambut* tree[88] and it pleases you.
F. You pick a large fruit and it pleases you.
M. On the hill Nyimbyang I pick a twig of *ban* fruits[89] and give it to the men of Kwambigim. This will sadden you and you will stay in your village.
F. ditto.
M. Now I am on the way to pursue you.
I'm only a boy but I will kill you on this hill Nyimbyang.
F. I'm only a boy but I will kill you in Nyimbyang and Aineng.
M. You will gather up at night the people I have killed; you can gather them up in the morning as well as in the evening. Then you will only eat cold food, and you will feel sorry for all these people.
F. ditto.
M. On this hill, in Nyimbyang and Aineng, you will only eat cold food, and your anger towards me will be in vain, for I am a man of Yenigo. (Followed by a short, acoustically flawed passage).
M. You can wrap up the body of this man and stay with your wife and children.
F. ditto.
M. Go and search in the forest and you will come across the tree that I have felled.[90] You will feel anguish and return to your village.
F. ditto.
M. In your village stream there will be nothing left but pure water."[91]

Commentary

For an outsider, the contents of the songs remain

[81] Metaphor for a man.
[82] Metaphor for a fight that sweeps through the village like the wind.
[83] Yondshangge is an enemy village of Kalabu. Possibly the whole verse is a reference to a joint raid by Kalabu and Waignakim on Suambugim/Yaremaipmu during which they drove off the people into the grassland plain, as far as the present village Yondshangge.
[84] Kwambigim is an enemy village of Yenigo. The metaphor woman stands for an enemy.
[85] That is, he's looking for a fight.
[86] Fighting ground between Kwambigim and Yenigo.
[87] A village with many inhabitants.
[88] *Kwambut* is pandanus; the Kwambigim first killed a man of Yenigo.
[89] In retaliation, the men of Yenigo killed many people of Kwambigim.
[90] A slain warrior.
[91] There are no more fish in the water, meaning the village is completely empty of people.

more or less cryptic because the incidents they describe are wrapped in metaphors. Next to that, the same metaphors may carry different meanings depending on the context they appear in; moreover, on the whole. The narrated events are often only hinted at. Normally a verse is structured so that it begins with a statement to which facets are then added, one by one, until the subject matter gradually takes on shape, rather like in a mosaic. A verse from the song of Tul and Waimba (sung by Lake of Kalabu) provides a good example of the structuring principle:

> You tell me to tie it up, and I fasten it. You tell me to carry it, and I carry it. These (two) men Katu and Imagwate tie up a pig and carry it off … Katu and Imagwate often catch pigs and cassowaries. They have a lucky hand.

In all songs, the names of individuals are never mentioned, so that sometimes not even the villagers are able to recognize who and what is being referred to. I spoke with various people about the contents of the songs and it showed that only very few men understood the precise meaning of the metaphors in their context. To a certain extent, this is possibly also a result of cultural change, but at the same time it appears, from what I gather, that even in earlier days the contents of the songs were never openly discussed, nor did the elders explain the metaphors to the younger men. It appears that recounting the incidents in song is not meant as a narrative of previous events in balladic form, nor is it the task to inform the listeners about what had actually happened on some occasion in the past. Moreover, the people, singers and audience alike, evidently love playing with, and listening to, these metaphors which are always rich in imagery and figures of speech. The songs also provide an ideal opportunity to cryptically hint at incidents otherwise not spoken of, for example, illicit love affairs. Since often people from former enemy villages attend these death watches, they also provide a good occasion to enigmatically vent potentially aggressive feelings so that the addressees well understand what is being hinted at (e.g. an account of a defeat in battle), but without giving them room or justification to pick a quarrel leading to open dispute or even of physical violence. Especially at Samtagwa's death watch – a man originally from Malmba who had married to Kaumbul – many visitors from neighbouring villages were present, which lent the event a special note. As a young man Samtagwa had frequently taken parts in raids and battles, namely against some of the villages now represented at his wake, and had been widely feared as a mighty warrior. This is probably also the reason why the songs contain so many references to battle events and war.

When reviewing the songs played during Samtagwa's death watch, one notices that, apart from the male and female antiphons, there are also songs that women perform on their own – alternatively, there are no exclusively male songs. These short female pieces convey sorrow for the deceased. In the first song, Samtagwa, whose name is never mentioned directly, is addressed by his *dshambu*,[92] his totemic icon, the *kwaru* bird who goes for a bath in the clan-owned pool in the bush. This spot is considered to be a clan-specific entrance to the beyond,[93] as the song clearly indicates. In the second piece, the deceased man is described as a shining star, whereas in the third song Samtagwa is likened to a carved *nggwalndu* with its eyes shut, resting in the ceremonial house. In this case his *dshambu* is no longer the *kwaru* bird (a kind of parakeet) but a *paal* (hornbill) instead, the totem bird of Malmba, in other words, the man's place of origin.

In the men's songs, or, to be more precise, in the songs that the men intone, sorrow over Samtagwa's death is given but little room, and when they do the metaphors used are less sorrow oriented than in the women's solo pieces. It is the loss of Samtagwa's prowess as a warrior that the men deplore. In the song performed by Tomas (Malmba), grief about Samtagwa's death receives an additional dimension when the singer addresses the issue of blame for Samtagwa's death by commencing a search for potential culprits in other villages (Waignakim, Yenigo). Yosbli of Yenigo, a sister's son of the deceased man, counters the accusations on the strength of his close association with Samtagwa. In the instance of death, accusations are usually

[92] Forge (1966: 23) describes an alternative way for a man to indicate his *dshambu*: "…in the course of an Abelam debate, a man jumps to his feet and, holding his arms out from his sides, turns slowly round to face all the participants in turn, glaring ferociously at them, and then sits down. There is no difficulty about this gesture, he is being his totemic bird."

[93] See Hauser-Schäublin (1984: 359).

directed towards members of former enemy villages. In the present case, Yosbli, in his first song, talks about the battles he had fought together with his mother's brother against Waignakim and Aunyelum. In his second piece he recounts how Yenigo had once just about wiped out Kwambigim; it shows what a prominent role accounts of warfare and bravery play in these death watches. In a similar manner, Lake makes reference in his song to Serapan, the mythical boar that emblematically stands for war and fighting spirit, while Dshambosa lists a whole series of armed conflicts, including one defeat. The latter event probably refers to the above-mentioned battle with the men of Kalabu (see pp. 19-20) who in the course of fighting received support from two men of Kuminimbis (Mamblep), leading in the end to the death of two men from Malmba.

Also of interest is the mention of village-internal conflicts on the ridge of Kato Apupik – discussed in the first chapter on migration and settlement (see p. 12) – in the Bendshanggram song by the men of Malmba. In the course of the death watch, which continued through the night, the accounts of warfare and killings, expressing either grief or triumph, increasingly supplant direct expressions of sorrow over Samtagwa's death. In his third song, Kapremu sings about a war between Kalabu and a group of people who had previously settled on land that now belongs to Waignakim. Possibly this refers to the same group as recounted in the story of Suambugim (see p. 10).

With regard to the song texts, death watches are not necessarily amicable events. However, since issues of liability for a death or deeds of war are uttered in song and not in spoken words, heated disputes or even fights are avoided. The only way for a man to counter felt accusations and insults is for himself to reply in song and downplay, again in metaphor, the deeds praised in the song of his antecedent, thus keeping antagonism on an indirect, or 'poetic' level. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the death watch for Samtagwa was rather exceptional due to the fact that he had not only married into, and resided in, an enemy village, i.e. Kalabu, but also entertained close kin relations to many rivalling villages, all of which had sent representatives to the death watch. When a wake is held for a man or woman of one's own village, deeds of war and prowess feature significantly less prominently in the songs; instead, the people often address amorous adventures and love affairs about which nobody speaks of in everyday life.

Towards dawn some of the women normally start to prepare food for the visitors from other hamlets and villages, while the men start digging a grave at the edge of the hamlet. In earlier days the dead were buried inside their own house, after which both the body and the dwelling were left to gradually decay. The body is lowered into the ground and placed in a chamber dug out at one side of the grave. If the deceased person is still quite young, the body is rubbed down with lime (nowadays just a normal body powder) and then left for a few hours. Later his kinsmen inspect the deceased's lime-covered skin in the hope of discovering hints as to the source of death,[94] that is, clues to the person who could be held responsible for the death. After the body has been transferred to the grave it is covered with wooden slats on to which earth is shovelled. A small fence is drawn round the burial site in order to keep the pigs away. Next to the fence the deceased's close relatives hang up some his clothes and a few personal belongings such as string bags or cups and plates; in former days these memorials included more personal things such as items of adornment.

Men (but not women) who have touched the corpse are subject to a number of prohibitions for a certain period. Thus, for example, they are not allowed to wash or shave (to cut hair in general[95]) until the first mortuary feast is over, which is held about a week later, nor may they eat greens. The tubers they consume (taro, yam) must be roasted in the fire, and not boiled. When eating, the men are forbidden to hold the tuber with their bare hands; instead it is wrapped in a nettle leaf in order to avoid direct body contact. During my stay in Kalabu, I witnessed on several occasions that, approximately a week after the burial, the men who had transferred the corpse to its grave as well as the deceased's next of kin – spouses, brothers and sisters, grandchildren – were subjected to a beating with nettles. The explanation given for this practice was that the spirit of the deceased was trying to cling on to

[94] Forge (1970b: 265-267) describes various types of divination.

[95] This rule also applies to initiates and newly married men.

the next of kin and the men who had carried the body to the grave and that the nettles would drive off the spirit. Some villagers maintained that this practice had its origin among the Arapesh people and that the Kalabus had taken it over at some point in the past. The soup the men are given to eat at the end of the prohibition period is, however, an old Abelam tradition. It contains a variety of plant ingredients which are believed to cleanse the body. Actually, it consists of almost the same items as the soup that women who have given birth receive when they leave the birthing hut.

Disputes on Sorcery and Death

No speeches are held during the death watch. Discussions concerning death, which is always experienced as an enigmatic occurrence, arise slowly in the course of the days to follow, usually in connection with the mortuary ceremonies, which are held at regular intervals in the weeks to come. On the occasion, the men meet on the *amei* to fathom the cause of death, which is very often seen in connection with sorcery. In the first weeks after the death the deceased's relatives gather in his hamlet in the evening after having spent the day in the gardens at work and stay there for the night. His closest kin remain there until a first mortuary ceremony concludes this initial phase. Up to this event, the women who felt closely related to the deceased meet once a week in his hamlet to exchange food (yam, taro) which each woman cooks at home in the peel. The exchange is not dictated by kinship reckoning, but by 'sympathy' between individual women instead. Unlike the men's exchange feasts where each prestation is reciprocated immediately and equally, the women distribute and receive cooked food without keeping an exact tally. These spontaneous exchanges are held on the weekday on which the deceased was buried, usually about four or five times, towards midday; afterwards the women return to their normal chores.

This transaction of cooked food is comparable to the exchange events that are staged in the context of a first menstruation feast for a young girl, with a very similar function. The spontaneous giving and taking of food is an expression of community between women, more or less irrespective of clan, hamlet, village or moiety membership. The events which can never be presaged due to the happenstance of the triggering incident (menarche, death) regularly strengthen female solidarity across structural divisions. Men never take part in these exchanges; instead they often meet on the *amei* to discuss the possible causes of death and elicit who is to blame for the loss.

On the occasion of the death of Wureso, an important old bigman of Kumunggwande hamlet, a large meeting was held in the hope of shedding some light on his passing.[96] Below I reproduce a lengthy, continuous excerpt from this dispute.

Waimbanggele:

We needn't brood over the cause of this old man's death. I shall take his place, or else one of my brothers can replace him. Wureso was a very old man when he died which is why I don't worry too much about his death; I don't want me, my brothers or one of our children to have to die because of him. Before he died he had been sitting in the ashes of his fire for many years;[97] once he used to be young and strong, then he grew old, and towards the end, he became very frail, that's how old he was, and that is why we shouldn't waste too many thoughts on him.

Ninggipate (from Bainyik):

Two men have died, one in Dshame, one in Kalabu. But we men of Bainyik have nothing to do with their deaths. Their spirit bundles have not been touched, nothing has been done to them.[98] You will have to search in your own village why these two men had to die; we have nothing to do with it, for we are the men who watch over the spirit bundles. You'll have to look around in your own village, it has something to do with revenge and pay-back.

Kamanbanggu:

In our hamlet a young man is sick, ill of sorcery. Who has caused him harm? This is what we have to find out so he can recover again. In our village there is

96 On 24 January 1979

97 Meaning he was old and frail.

98 He is referring to the so-called *tale kra kus*, 'the first-taken magic', which involves any kind of substance taken from a newborn child (saliva, excrement, etc.). It is sent to a 'spirit power house' where an experienced man watches that the child's spirit carrier enclosed herein comes to no harm; he continues to do so when the child grows up. The term 'spirit bundle' is taken from the German 'Seelenbündel' as defined by Stöcklin (1977: 27-32; 2004:150-168).

no such thing as revenge and pay-back: this harm is being brought to us by another village. …

Dondombale:

All of us men must try to help this young man regain his health. Back then, when his mother gave birth to him, somebody was responsible for his spirit bundle. We have to find out where it was sent to, to Bainyik, to Numagim, or to Wora. Then we must check whether it is still untouched. But we must proceed with care; if we speak about it openly we'll find nothing His spirit bundle must be in Bainyik, or possibly in Waignakim. When we find out we'll know which kind of sorcery he's suffering from. If it is not sorcery done on his first, original spirit bundle, then we have to go to Yamel, Malmba, Magutogim and Yenigo because these villages are responsible for the sorcery performed on the second spirit bundle taken later. That is how we did it in the case of Akai of Dshame; he too died through his second spirit bundle. But we can't let the same thing happen to this young man. We have to try to reverse the sorcery that was performed on his second spirit bundle;[99] then he'll regain strength. But if you're carrying thoughts about discord, jealousy and revenge in you, then this young man will have to die. Because someone has taken his second spirit bundle, and this is a disgrace. This man has sent the spirit bundle to the Bukni or Boiken;[100] these people always do sorcery or draw money or shell rings – the bones of our village – from us; that is bad. That is why none of you should try to do, or even think about, sorcery. Because if you do, you're doing wrong. Don't forget, even if someone is doing it hidden, there are always men watching you if you go to Malmba, Yamel or Yenigo, and they're sure to remember your name! Beware, if I hear a name spoken, I'll fetch my knife and cut off this man's hand, because this man's harming all of us! I'll cut both hands off him; then he'll no longer be able to work in his garden but will have to stay back in the village, looking around like the cats do when hunting mice in the house. He'll no longer be able to eat like us others but will have to let himself be fed. That's why all of us have to watch out that no wrong is committed through sorcery. If someone falls ill through his first spirit bundle then it is not so serious; someone will take care of the spirit bundle. But we can't do much about the second spirit bundle; we can only try to settle the matter by paying money, shell rings and pigs. If someone is jealous of another man, or envies him, then he will perform sorcery and be prepared to invest rings, money and pigs. The first spirit bundle is not a real danger because many men know about it. If someone falls ill, they'll say 'you must take this or that track.' Then we'll find the spirit bundle and the man will recover. But when we're talking about the second spirit bundle, we're usually talking about discord; quarrels are the reason why spirit bundles are stolen, by both men and women. I'm telling you women: think well about what you do! If you're envious or mad about something and send a man's spirit bundle[101] to a sorcerer's house, that is abject! Your task is to cook, to take care of many things, to look after the crops; that's your job. When an enemy challenges us to a fight, then it is not you women who defend us, that's the men's job. We stand up to a fight, but you women have nothing to do with it. That is why you shouldn't even think about harming men by sorcery. If I ever hear of a woman performing sorcery, I'll kill that woman, for she's worth nothing, and no match for me! I'm speaking to you in this manner because I worry about sorcery.

When we find out who has done sorcery we'll get rid of the man. We've gathered here today, and I think you are all men capable of performing sorcery. Then you send men to the Boiken, for it is they who try to harm us. Later they ask for fifty Kina or a hundred Kina and six to twelve shell rings from us, all of the same size. Jealousy and envy are at home here; that is why secondary spirit bundles are stolen and taken to sorcery men so that they kill a man. But remember: I will kill that man with a knife or with my spear if I catch him or hear his name! The same goes for women: if you sleep with a man and then think of making sorcery, then be prepared! Every woman should remember that her husband will not be able to help her because he can't stand up to me.

When the man whom the woman has performed sorcery on is dead, and she steps up to his body to see him one last time, then she should think of what they talked about and did together. She will be sorry for having killed him. If the traces don't point the way to her, she will remain near the corpse and weep;

[99] *Gipakus* is the name of a type of sorcery which is performed on an object that has been in intimate contact with the victim (such as a piece of betel pepper that he has bitten off, or food remains); it is sent to a 'power house' where it is destroyed, causing the victim to sicken and die.

[100] In the eyes of the Abelam, the Bukni (Arapesh) and Boiken are the prime sorcerers.

[101] He is referring to a man's sperm that a woman may collect after intercourse and put to sorcery use.

but if her deed becomes known, she will be made to disappear…

Once I was on my way to Kimbanggwa. Wulnimbya wanted to speak to me about the yam stone. I went to Kimbanggwa and stayed there for a while. When returning home I met Dshagumun of Dshame on the way; he was holding wild taro leaves in his hand as a sign that he wished to challenge me to a fight. Many men, among them my brothers, came to support me. I said to Dshagumun: 'Your challenge merely makes me laugh because you are not up to me! I'm not like any other man, I'm like a bush spirit that you cannot catch. Even if he pays his mother's brother money and shell rings that he come and support him in battle, I shall do him in because he will never succeed in killing me.

Once when we were building the ceremonial house in Nyambak, Dshagumun's daughter[102] hanged herself, after which he accused Butue,[103] her husband, of being responsible for her death. The young woman had gone to hang herself just outside Nyambak. From us he (Dshagumun) demanded many large shell rings, claiming that we were responsible for the death of his child. We gave him the shell rings. But he was not satisfied yet, so he sought revenge when I went to Kimbanggwa.

I saw Dshagumun on my way to Kimbanggwa. He was sitting in Numbunggen, this worthless man. I saw him and continued on my way. I went down to the Ulagem stream, crossed it and climbed the hill on the opposite side. Then I heard the sounding of the slit gong. I turned round; I saw people coming towards me but I wasn't afraid because this man is worthless and only thinks about harming others. He alone is to blame for his daughter's death.

Saule (Dondombale's full brother):

I have this to say to the death of this woman: at that time, when Butue's wife went to her hang herself, the police came to fetch us. The people of Dshame were also cross with us. Dshagumun's daughter died through her father's problems. She was made to grab hold of this rope[104] and hang herself. If the Dshame men wish to fight with us for that, they are wrong.

Dondombale:

They are like little boys; they will never be capable of putting up a fight! That young woman hanged herself, but that's not sufficient reason for a fight. I will lead my people; they will first have to kill me but they will never succeed, these people of Dshame, because they are simply no good. Listen to what I'm saying about you, then you can go home. You don't know how to evade spears, and you don't know how to exchange men.[105] But I do; because I used to go on raids with my fathers and grandfathers. If I wished to spear you at this moment, I could. You see this bundle of spears in my hand. Each spear would kill one of you but I have no wish to do so because I feel pity for you. This child died for the faults of her father. He demanded 24 shell rings from us, and we gave them to him. They were passed on to Dshame and Kalabu II, even though this woman died of her father's wrongs which he committed underhand. Actually, we were not obliged to hand over these shell rings, and now we are sorry we did it.

Dshapal:

Kigumun's (Butue) wife hanged herself for the following reason: Dshagumun first put a rope round the woman's neck in Bainyik,[106] then she hanged herself. That's how it was, but the people of Dshame wanted to fight against us although they received 24 shell rings for the woman's death. The death price was 24 shell rings. And now you are asking for even more, that's not fair. At the time when I brought the body back to the village from the hospital in Maprik[107] you men of Dshame wanted to fight against us, but I turned you away.

Kwandshendu:

You talk too much! Let the issue rest! First we talked about my brother-in-law being sick and that we should try to help him recover. We must find out who is responsible for his sickness, who took his secondary spirit bundle and took it to a man with sorcery knowledge. That's what we must first talk about. Leave everything else to later.

Nambisenta:

My son is sick.[108] But you have a grave, and now this

[102] A classificatory daughter of Dshagumun.
[103] Butue is a classificatory sister's son of Dondombale, but also his son-in-law.
[104] Through sorcery.
[105] On the occasion of peace ceremonies in earlier days, enemy villages used to ritually exchange one man from each side.
[106] In a 'spirit power house'.
[107] The woman had been taken to the hospital in Maprik where the doctors could do no more than verify her death.
[108] A classificatory son.

man fell sick. But if we all think the same way and try hard, then he will recover. Don't go spreading false stories, stick to the truth, then I'll feel alright! You are discontent; this discontentment is located in your grave.[109] You called, and this man fell sick; that is why you have to help him recover. If he dies, I will pay back his death with the lives of two men.
Try to undo this wrong because sickness and death lead back to you and your family! The grave asks the people,[110] for there is no sickness without cause. But you have a grave and it is pointing at you, at each one of you. Try to make this man recover again! Try to find out where his spirit bundle is! Death comes from your side, you are responsible for it. I belong to a different family (*kim*) and have nothing to do with this death; it is your grave that is calling!

Kapmakyole:

This is how it is with a first (primary) spirit bundle that is taken away: if, for example, my father has taken it and sent it to a 'spirit power house' where it is taken care for, then I must go and search for the path it has taken (when I am sick). But you don't know where it is. But you have a grave, which is why you must be of one mind and talk about it. Because if you don't talk about it, then everything will be put on the grave and you will carry a heavy burden; later, all of you will die from this. That is why you have to settle this matter. In case people were to bring the name of my father into play, and also mention me, I would go to the 'power house' and see whether my bundle is still okay or whether it is rotting away, and check whether it is mine in the first place or whether it belongs to another man. Sorcery is something that not only affects one man alone, but his whole hamlet.

You men of Yambusaki, go and think about this case of illness because it concerns you directly. I myself, however, am from Ndunyinggi where we have two clans, Luimogim and Smoigim. I'm responsible for the spirit bundles of these two clans. If a person belonging to one of these clans falls sick or dies, I don't come to you, men of Yambusaki, because it is matter that only concerns me and my hamlet. This means that in the case of this death that affects you now, you cannot point your finger at me, a man from Ndunyinggi. This is how things are: sometimes it is not clear which hamlet is responsible for a death. If, for example, you take money and shell rings into your hands and carry them to a 'power house' in order to kill my spirit bundle, then I will think about the matter and take revenge on you. But if you haven't given money and shell rings to anyone for this purpose, then my sickness is something that concerns me alone. The matter about dying is as follows: if someone shoots an old man, then his son will shoot another young man. That's the way it is, or not? However, I don't know why this man (of Yambusaki) wishes to pull me and my brother into this affair, and why he demands that we sacrifice pigs. This is a bad way of thinking. That is why any man who knows something or has heard something must speak up so that we can settle this matter, either with pigs, shell rings or money. If we know the whereabouts of his spirit bundle we can send a message to that place and have the matter checked out. But it's wrong of you to call my name and that of my brother and demand that we offer pigs.

Kwandshendu:

I know about the death of this man: he died of a wrong in his own hamlet. I went to Nyambak and met Karendshamba. He told me: 'If you're looking for the person responsible for the death of this man, that is your problem, it doesn't affect me.'

I'm not thinking about myself, but of you. I'm thinking of the hamlet where my mother who gave birth to me came from (Yambusaki). It is in my thoughts, that's why I'm trying to help you. But if your thoughts are on this man, then I will perform sorcery on you. I feel sorry for this man who is sick. Once, a long time ago, I committed a wrong and fell ill for that reason. But I righted my wrong again; you know that this was done. Now I'm thinking of you because you have a grave, and all these other men are telling you to settle this matter. But you're not even considering straightening this grave. This is probably why this discontentment was able to enter the spirit house in Bainyik or Waignakim. This is the reason why this young man has fallen sick; but you're not giving us any real answers. You're not saying that you are prepared to hold a feast for the deceased man; you're beating around the bush, and that is wrong. The thing about dying is always the same: if you're not planning to hold a mortuary feast, then someone else will see to it that one of you dies. You can bet on it that someone will take money and shell rings to a 'power house' to have one of you killed. You're doing wrong if you try to pass on the blame to other men.

[109] Nambisenta is implying that the deceased man's relatives are trying to revenge his death through sorcery.

[110] The spirits of the deceased request the living to seek for the cause of death.

Kapmakyole:

We know the cause of this young man's sickness. Once we had this contest with the people of Kalabu II. We tried to find where our primary spirit bundles were and whether they were still all in one piece. We were in possession of small sticks (*mbang*) for the 'power house'. We gave them to you, you men of Yambusaki, because you wanted to find the right way. Now a man is sick. If anyone has heard of the whereabouts of his spirit bundle, then he must tell me. Because I think that when we gave you those sticks you simply threw them away. The Australians write down the names of people in a book. We don't do it like that; we break a small stick in two for every person whose spirit bundle is kept in a spirit house. That's how we know how many spirit bundles are kept in which 'power house'. Afterwards we can just present a little stick and say: this stands for your spirit bundle! Then we try to follow its path until we have found where it is being kept. But it was a mistake to throw away these little sticks. Now you're trying to find out where this man's spirit bundle is, but you can't. That's why you have to go to the places where the 'power houses' are. Listen to what they have to tell you there! Then you will possibly be able to make the sick man recover. It's not good for us to just sit here and discuss, to pass blame onto each other, and become angry. If someone is dying you must carefully inquire where to turn to for help. Then things will turn for the better. I admit: I too don't know what to do about this young man's sickness. But if someone has turned on him, then Kwandshendu should know, because Kwandshendu and I have good relations to a certain hamlet in Bainyik. You needn't be afraid of me. Go to Bainyik and listen around! If you don't want to go to Bainyik, then send Kwandshendu to look for the traces. Then we might be able to find out which grave in which hamlet is responsible for the young man's sickness. If you're blaming me, then Kwandshendu would know whether you're right or not, and he would talk about it openly at this meeting, for he would know whether I had undertaken anything against this man in secret. Because Kwandshendu and I belong to the same hamlet, and sorcery is a matter that is tied to the hamlet. So, follow my advice: go to Bainyik and try to find how what state his spirit bundle is in.

Commentary

The passages from this dispute illustrate how villagers try to explore the causes of a number of cases of death, some of which go back in time considerably. The death of the old man they have come to commemorate is hardly addressed since, according to Abelam conception, he has lived a full life and his death is therefore considered natural. The incident is the starting point for a discussion about the circumstances of a young man's mysterious sickness which then becomes the central issue of the whole dispute. It becomes clear from the contributions that the people recognize two basic kinds of sorcery, *kus*. At the core of Abelam aetiology stands the idea that some person (who exactly, nobody knows for sure) takes from a young child an item, or substance, that has been in intimate contact with its body (e.g. saliva, excrement) and sends it on secret paths to a 'power house' (*kusngga*) for 'treatment'. This magical practice is called *tale kra kus*, 'the life substance that was taken first'. The Abelam say that the respective 'power house' is always located outside one's own village. There the item, and carrier of a bodily substance called *myoula*, is handed over to a man versed in these matters, together with a shell ring, and treated with powdery red and black paint; this serves to lure and bond the child's soul (*komunyan*) which is attracted by the *myoula*. Following this, the mixture is wrapped and tied with leaves from a certain type of vine and suspended from the roof inside the house. This bundle is called *kuitnbui*. Later on, when the child is about ten years old, the bundle is opened again and the contents placed in a bamboo tube which is tucked into the leaf roof. This bundle is looked upon as the external seat of a human being's *komunyan* soul.[111] Inside the *kusngga*, the bundles belonging to people from the same village are safeguarded in a common location. The keeper of the house inspects the bundles at regular intervals to see whether they are in good condition. As long as a person is well and healthy, his spirit bundle will shine like a star (*kun*). Should she fall sick, the bundle merely issues a dim glow. Only very rarely does a person know in which 'power house' his *komunyan* is being held, where it is registered under his first-given names.[112] Consequently, when investigating a

[111] According to Abelam ontology a human being is endued with different spirit essences located in different parts of the body. After death, they go different ways, see Hauser-Schäublin (1984: 362-363).

[112] All later bestowed names are not suitable for sorcery practices.

death in a public dispute, the men often have to first ascertain in which *kusngga* the sick man's bundle is being kept. For each spirit bundle that is sent to a specific 'power house', a local man versed in sorcery matters, *kumbundu*, holds a little stick (*mbang*) which serves as a kind of voucher and mnemonic device. These 'receipts' are also referred to in the passages above; one of the speakers even accuses the men of Yambusaki for having thrown away the sticks. As soon as the whereabouts of a sick person's bundle has been ascertained, a representative is sent to the *kusngga* in question to inspect the victim's *komunyan*. If the bundle is still issuing a dim glow it is taken as a sign that the person has the chance of recovery. The keeper of the house takes from the bundle a small portion of the substance (also referred to as *myoula*) and gives it to the representative to take back. At home, the substance is rubbed onto the patient's chest, regarded as the seat of *komunyan*, the bodily spirit.[113] Restoring spirit substance to the body is believed to strengthen the patient. *Tale kra kus* serves, above all, the task of caring for and sustaining an individual's soul. A person only encounters harm if s/he (or a close kin) commits an offence in his village. Then the men holding responsibility will order the destruction of his or her spirit bundle, which leads to death. That is why various speakers in the dispute advised the men to seek for the reason of sickness and death in their own hamlet. During the discussion at the roofing ceremony in Waignakim, Nggilendu of Waignakim likened the keepers of *komunyan* to law enforcement officers (see p. 65): they only punish those who have committed an offence, but make no efforts to settle the matter and make good the damage. People who respect the rules and norms have no reason to be afraid of the *komunyan* keeper, on the contrary, various villagers said that a keeper was "like a woman who cares for us as she cares for her own pigs."

It quite often occurs that, after a visit to the *kusngga* in connection with an illness case, the men versed in these matters report that the *komunyan* is unblemished and that there are no signs of wilful destruction. In this case, one is probably up against a magical practice called *gipakus* which, unlike *tale kra kus*, aims invariably at the death of a person. This form of sorcery is again not performed in one's own village, but in a foreign location, usually thought to be in the Kugim area, that is, among the north-eastern Arapesh and Boiken. There are different ways of performing *gipakus*. In a first step, the perpetrator procures some item with which the targeted victim has been in intimate contact – for example, he cadges a piece of betel pepper which the other man has already bitten off, or he stashes away inconspicuously some food remains or the peel of betel nut which the victim has been in close contact with.[114] He then carries these off to a *kusngga* and commissions the sorcerer to destroy the *gipakus* against a payment of shell rings and/or money, causing the victim to sicken and die. A very common method in this pars-pro-toto, or contagious, sorcery is for the sorcerer to place the bundle containing the victim's life substance into a 'fire' (i.e. into red paint). Of the Arapesh it is told that they capture the victim's *komunyan* with the help of a taro leaf, which they leave on a path. After the victim has unknowingly stepped over it, the leaf is placed in a pot filled with a special red paint called *nyambel*. The sorcerer calls the victim's name upon which the man's (or woman's) *komunyan* answers with the words: "Here I am, X". The powerful red paint kills the person's spirit upon which s/he dies. Alternatively, the victim's spirit bundle may be treated in a way that does not kill him from within, so to speak, but so that death occurs as a consequence of external circumstances and factors instead. This method is called *komunyan awegre ndei yao*. Following the logic of the practice, the sorcerer performs a variety of symbolic acts on the spirit bundle, generating an analogous effect on the victim itself. In one method, for example, the sorcerer encircles the *gipakus* bundle with a pointed boar's tusk or a miniature spear, to the effect

[113] *Nyan* is not the generic term for 'soul/spirit' (Stöcklin 1973: 47). In this context *nyan,* which basically means child, stands for the 'small one' compared to the 'big one' denoting the human being as a whole. In the body context, the Abelam describe the beating heart as *uranyan*, but do not mean the organ as such; this is called *nggumisik*. The force that makes the heart beat and causes heart throbbing is identified as being part of *komunyan*. When a human being dies, the *uranyan* dies with him/her.

[114] When chewing betel nut the Abelam usually spit out most of the blood-red juice. This juice, consisting mostly of saliva, is not suitable for sorcery as the lime consumed with the betel nut is said to 'neutralize' the saliva.

that the victim will be killed by a wild boar or at the hand of an enemy spear in the near future. In the dispute above, Dshapal claims that before the young wife committed suicide by strangulation, a rope had been placed around her spirit bundle. However, as the case of the young woman's death – which led to a number of ensuing conflicts that were finally settled by the payment of 24 shell rings and money – illustrates, the reasons and circumstances of death are never fully agreed upon by all the participant parties; instead, interpretations vary considerably depending on proximity and kinship relationship to the victim. In this specific case, contradictions remained between the father and the woman's husband and his relatives In other words, a definite and unitary version of the suicide could not, and never really can be, established.

Sorcery disputes often also provide insight into the constitution and self-conception of a community. As explained above, the houses where the life substance bundles are kept are stationed outside one's own village. In Kalabu's case they are located in Waignakim and Bainyik – villages that are actually regarded as enemies. Still, it is their task to care for the Kalabu bundles and, ultimately, they are also held to responsibility. As far as *gipakus* is concerned, that is, lethal sorcery, the Kalabus locate the source in the enemy Kugim villages to the east and among the Arapesh and Yanggore (Boiken), both of them peoples the Abelam never considered a match in terms of warfare. Thus, one notices a tendency to externalize everything that has to do with sorcery beyond the confines of one's own village. No doubt this strengthens internal village solidarity and unity vis-à-vis the surrounding foreign villages, but not unequivocally. According to local aetiology, a case of serious illness leading to the death of a hamlet co-member always implies a link between one's own village and a settlement that is notorious for its magical practices and sorcery respectively. The link can only be created and sustained by intermediaries with connections to both localities, with the consequence that a latent mistrust towards co-villagers always remains. The passages above clearly reveal this aspect of distrust and uncertainty, and the way in which the people react to it: with assertions of innocence on the one hand, and with threats, on the other.

Although nowadays sorcery is always projected outwards onto other villages, many of them former enemies, there appears to have existed in earlier days a form of institutionalized village-internal sorcery. In a hamlet in Kalabu there used to be a house where a special kind of red paint was kept which was used to kill children, and occasionally also adults. This type of sorcery was called *nyankyakus* (*nyan* – child, *kyak* – to die, *kus* – magic), which a particular clan was in charge of. The modus operandi was to point a short stick in the shape of a spear in the direction of the victim, to call his name and then place the miniature spear next to the red paint.

Looking back on the earlier days – the practice ended approximately in the early 1960s – the people often compare this form of sorcery to the role of the police today. Similar to *tale kra kus*, only people (or, in lieu, their children) who had committed an offence or wronged the community in some way or another were liable to be subjected to this form of (lethal) sorcery. This means it dealt with aberrant and conformist behaviour respectively, an instrument of social control that regulated community life and the relationship between the individual and the collective.

Still, this does not change the fact that, for the Abelam, there is no such thing as a death without cause, especially as far as young people are concerned, and that each incident has to be compensated with a payment of yams, pigs and shell rings, lest it lead to further deaths in retaliation. This is actually what some of the speakers are referring to when they demand that the 'grave should be straightened', in other words, it is time to hold a mortuary feast in order to prevent further deaths.

To end this section I turn to the term *kus,*[115] which has appeared repeatedly over the last few pages and which I have, for sake of brevity and comprehensibility, translated as 'magic' or sorcery. *Kus* is used in very different contexts (at least seen from an outside point of view) and can mean quite different things, but the common attribute is nevertheless recognizable:

[115] Forge (1970b: 259) spells it *kwis* and says it literally means 'colour'. The relationship between the two terms is actually more complicated, as I will go on to explain later.

kus	salt
dshuikus	Dry wooden logs which are soaked in sea water to extract salt.
nyingkus	Tobacco, actually *nyingga* = leaf; *kus* = salty, salt or hot.
numan kusnde viyu	Taleo wind, literally: 'the great salt (= sea) fights', that is, 'the surging of the sea').
tagwa kus	(tagwa = woman), substance applied by men in love magic, basically consisting of red paint.
wapi kus	Magic substance, mainly crushed leaves and bark, and paint or earth, used to enhance the growth of yam.[116]

Kus and *nyingkus* are certainly associated, insofar as both salt and tobacco are classified as hot and stimulating substances which, taken in small portions, are considered as pleasant and 'peppery'. Both are looked upon as essences or ingredients with the ability to liven up the routine diet through their savoury taste. *Tagwakus* too has an impact that one could circumscribe as 'stimulus' in the sense of initial attraction, which later passes over into absorption and affection. Likewise, *wapi kus* exerts a form of stimulus, a prickling, which induces a yam tuber to grow and stretch in length.[117]

Seen from this perspective, *kus* meaning 'magic' fits into the pattern, since its impact also has an irritating, biting and captivating aspect. But unlike tobacco or salt, magic is not perceived as pleasant or stimulating in a positive sense, on the contrary, it has a stunting, tormenting and persistent effect that engrosses the affected person, leading to sickness and, ultimately, to death. Moreover, *kus* in the sense of magic/sorcery has properties that go beyond those belonging to salt and tobacco, but are hinted at in the term *tagwakus*. Among others, it includes the fact that an actor performs his act on a surrogate representing the spirit of his victim, and not directly on the victim himself, with the intention of banishing, captivating and finally killing him. The main motives for such a deed are revenge, jealousy and envy.

Further Mortuary Ceremonies

The actual funeral is followed by a series of mortuary ceremonies; the first of these is staged a week after the funeral and is called *tshipmowi* (*tshipmea* = stinging nettle), which appears to be a reference to the practice of beating the deceased's close kin with nettles on the occasion. The second mortuary feast follows again a week later; it is called *kauwya*, 'maggots'; the feast after that, again a week later, *tsaat*, 'flies'. They refer to the gradual decomposition of the corpse, which is lying in an only provisionally covered grave. The direction the maggots and flies take when exiting the grave is taken as a hint as to which area the person or people responsible for the death come from. Both mortuary feasts comprise food exchanges between women, while the men are busy disputing the circumstances of death. Usually in the fourth week after the funeral, a feast called *gambalelego* is held. It marks the end of the period during which the close kin have spent the nights in the deceased's hamlet, and is highlighted by the burning of the mourners' sleeping mats and the removal of the ashes from the nightly fires. On the same occasion, the deceased's sister's sons, *rawa*, receive a gift of shell rings, nowadays also money. The exchange goes back to the practice that when a boy is born, his mother's brother, *wau*, receives a shell ring; it expresses a life-long bond between *rawa* and *wau* which ends upon the death of the mother's brother. The transfer marks the passing of this relationship. However, this ruling is only effective if the *rawa* has not been living in the same hamlet as his mother's brother, which would imply that the young man had become a member of his mother's lineage.

It happened quite often that, after this

[116] In the house of Wambusuge, a man of roughly 70, I had the opportunity to inspect a bamboo tube containing *wapi kus*. Rather to my disappointment, the tube only contained grey-coloured earth; probably red colour only played a minor role in yam magic in Kalabu.

[117] Stöcklin (1973 and later publications) argues against this interpretation, noted already by Forge, and dismisses it as the 'itching powder' (German: Juckpulver) theory (Stöcklin 1973: 44) on the basis that it does not take sufficiently into account the power and agency of spirit beings. In actual fact *wapikus* constitutes only one link in a whole chain of measures that the men apply to promote the growth of tubers. The stimulation of the yam and the application of heat by means of *wapikus* must, however, be viewed in a more comprehensive context and compared, for instance, with the practice of beating novices with stinging nettles during initiation; after all, this has a very similar effect on humans to the application of *wapikus* has on yam tubers.

mortuary feast, the deceased's closer kin left the settlement and went to stay with relatives in another hamlet. It is probably safe to say that, generally, the great majority of residential moves occur after incidents of death or illness. My data suggests that it is more often the widows who leave their home and go to stay with relatives, than the widowers. When a widow moves away it usually meets with disapproval on the part the deceased's male relatives. In the discussions that ensue they invariably argue that, through her marriage and on the strength of the payment of bride wealth, a woman is insolubly tied to the clan of her husband. She is said to be bound to it by her duties, which is why she is obliged to return to reside on the land of her husband's clan. After a while, widows are usually remarried to a real or classificatory brother of the husband, usually on the basis of the argument that someone has to fend for the woman: she needs a husband, the people say, to do the heavy work in the gardens (clearing the bush, planting, etc.), to build a house and to protect her from advances by other men (in other words: to prevent her from having a secret affair with an outsider).

Unexpected deaths frequently evoke great distress and unprecedented grief among the relatives. In reaction to such an incident, they often collect all the tubers from the dead man's storage house and pile them up within a small enclosure called *dshinde*, or place his yams, taro, tobacco leaves and coconuts on a platform where they are left to rot away. In 1983 we encountered such a *dshinde* platform in the hamlet of Uranggemel, which a father had erected in commemoration of his twelve-year-old son who had died the year before. Soon afterwards, the man left the village with his two wives and his children and went to stay with relatives near Wewak. Subsequently, the other residents deserted the hamlet as well, and the houses were left to fall into disrepair.

The final, full mortuary feast is often staged only several months after the funeral, at the earliest after harvesting the last crops that the deceased had planted himself. The feast is called *bau tapi ke nane* and marks the end of the official mourning period. The grave that has been left open until then, often enclosed by a low fence and covered with small roof, is filled up and levelled. The feast's main event, however, focuses on the presentation of large amounts of food crops amassed by the deceased man's sons on the *amei,* which are then given to his *rawa*, i.e. his sister's sons. The prestation also includes a number of pigs which are slaughtered and cooked on the spot; the prime pieces of pork also go to the sister's sons. Next to the shell rings and money handed over on the occasion of the *gambalelego* feast earlier on, the transfer of yam, pig meant, tobacco and betel nuts at this event marks the final transaction between the two clans that share consanguineal bonds.

The feast attracts not only people from the local village, but also many relatives from surrounding settlements, all of which have to be fed and provided for. As well as preparing large amounts of food with the help of other female relatives, the women, specifically the daughters of the deceased person, also procure large amounts of taro tubers which are piled up in a large heap on the *amei* and then given to the *rawa*, the sister's sons.

After the final mortuary feast no more discussions are held on the issue of who are what was responsible for the death. The name of the deceased person is no longer mentioned since his, or her, *gamba*, i.e. spirit in death, imagined to be a transformation of the living person's *komunyan*, has now left the village and settled down in the realm of the dead. What remains in the village and among the humans is *wuyagunggi*, a spiritual substance associated with the concept of blood (*wuin*) linking the generations within a descent group, and thus an almost supra-personal essence. *Wuyagunggi* is able to move to and fro between the here and the beyond, which it leaves and enters through a clan-specific pool in the bush.

In earlier days, the people used to excavate the bones and keep the humerus (*ngguai*) of the most important clan ancestors, occasionally also the skull. The bones served the purpose of attracting the netherworldly powers, above all the ancestors, in the context of the yam cult. Before going on a raid, the old men used to show the young warriors the *ngguai*; these were often engraved and called *yina* in this function. Viewing the *yina* was said to lend the young fighters courage and fighting spirit and to make them practically invulnerable.

Dealing with Conflicts

If during a public dispute on the *amei,* where normally complaints and allegations are dealt

with, we find attention focussed on a couple, then we are usually dealing with a love affair where a married man has taken a second wife of his own fancy and without permission by his male agnatic kin. This is frequently the case after village feasts, which tend to foster pre- and extra-marital affairs. However, normally a simple love affair, which usually only involves irregular casual meetings in the bush, is not sufficient reason to call a public meeting. In the disputes we witnessed the woman was either pregnant, or at least claimed to be pregnant, and had the intention of forcing her lover to marry her. In one case we documented, the woman gave birth to a child ten months after claiming to be pregnant in a public meeting. In another case, the woman named a man as the father, who, according to her own testimony, could not possibly have sired the child. Since he under no circumstance wished to marry the woman, he fled the village and went to work on an oil palm plantation in New Britain. Shortly after his departure, it became known that she had been impregnated by her own (widowed) father, who had been abusing her for years, and had forced her to make false allegations.[118]

These days each village has a village court presided by a local magistrate who has received elementary training in legal matters and adjudication. He passes decision on his own, but usually only after lengthy discussions; in the cases we observed, the judge's verdicts were usually in keeping with the Abelam sense of justice. Traditional conflict resolution was largely based on the principle of consensus. Older men played (and still do today) the role of peacemakers and mediators. They were able to mitigate the often hot-tempered disputes and call the conflict parties to moderation, on the basis of seniority and experience.[119] If no consensus was reached – for example, if, after a killing, a party was incapable or unwilling to pay compensation – the wrongdoers often moved away and founded a new settlement in a remote part of the village territory, or even further away.

In the village court system justice is served in front of a special village courthouse, on prefixed days. Nevertheless, many quarrels are still disputed and dealt with on the *amei* in the traditional manner, even petty cases such as rows between first and second wives, and similar trivial matters.

However, village conflicts[120] normally involve larger groups of people and therefore their effect is at an increased level. The incidents are followed by heated disputes on the *amei* during which the emotional pitch often threatens to erupt into physical confrontation, before the issue is finally resolved, or else adjourned. A frequent cause of conflict is the ownership and usage of sago palms; other frequent issues concern land claims made by a person on behalf of his lineage or clan and to the detriment of some other group. There is no such thing as unclaimed land, at least not since Australian colonial administration laid down definite boundaries between village territories. Even on remote hills, far away from the village and close to old enemy villages, lineages hold land claims which are designated by perennial shrubs (*paindshak*, *kauwa*), often since many generations. Nevertheless, it happens time and again that a man, knowingly or unwittingly, clears a tract of bush which he believes is the property of his lineage, but which others also claim for their clan. Land disputes occur frequently and are serious affairs. One of the stumbling blocks is that continued use of such land may lead to a tacitly accepted customary right in the long run. Due to the now fixed boundaries between village territories, groups suffering from land shortage and/or soil exhaustion are no longer able to move on and settle in unpopulated or

[118] As the father and his agnates were not prepared to settle this misdeed in the traditional way, that is, through payment of shell rings to the girl's mother's brother, the man was sentenced to a prison term by a court in the provincial capital of Wewak. The child from the illicit union died shortly after birth. The young woman went to marry a man in a neighbouring village. When the father was released from jail a few years later he returned to the village and continued to live there, apparently quite well integrated. This would probably not have been the case if the child had survived and the daughter had stayed in the village.

[119] Absence of the authority of traditional elders and leaders is the one of the explanations I have for the criminal, and often violent, actions of young men living and working in urban environments. Once a young man described to me how he and some other young men, all from the Maprik District, had killed two people in a coastal town, on two separate occasions. In both cases the crimes were not committed under the effect of emotion, but out of pure wantonness. This type of behaviour would be impossible in the village due to the presence, authority and assuaging role of responsible elders; these, however, are missing in the towns.

[120] For this see Scaglion (1976) who has done extensive research on the subject.

sparsely settled areas. This has had the effect that intra-group conflict has become more frequent over the last few decades, whereas earlier incidents probably involved more inter-group conflict. Land is not owned individually, but by lineages; these have to think and act with the future generations in mind. As a result, land disputes on the *amei* always involve many participants and tend to become, due to the importance of land, extremely emotional and heated. Often the parties are unable to reach an agreement and it is only when they move the dispute venue to the tract of land in question, and an old, experienced man with the necessary authority is able to reveal the shrub marking the land boundary, often hidden under elephant grass, bushes and trees, and untraceable for the untrained eye, that the conflict is resolved.

In the case of sago palms, which, unlike land, are owned individually, conflicts are sometimes resolved by Solomonic judgement, as in one case we witnessed where two men both alleged to have planted the tree that was now ready to be used – i.e. approximately 15 years after planting. In view of the contradicting claims and the fact both men were unable to name witnesses to come and testify, the village magistrate decided that the two men should share the sago palm. Since the two men were fellow clan members (which, however, did not hinder them from quarrelling) and both wanted to harvest the palm immediately – sago palms should be felled shortly before flowering (which they do only once) because then the rate of starch is at its peak – the magistrate ordered them to share the work and produce equally.

The Yam Cycle

For the Abelam, owning a ceremonial house without practicing the yam cult is beyond conceivability; vice-versa, that is, growing ceremonial yam in absence of a *korambo* is imaginable. By the late 1970s, there were no more ceremonial houses left standing in the Wosera area (with one exception), but the yam cult was still going strong. The people actually consider the cultivation of long yam (*wapi*[121]) indispensible if a village is in possession of a new ceremonial house. "The clan spirits (*nggwalndu*) become restive if we don't grow long yam," they say. They underpin the validity of such statements with references to demands made by the clan spirits in dreams, insinuating that cultivating ceremonial yam, an absolute male privilege, was a means of keeping the *nggwalndu* satisfied, possibly because the spirits saw in the long yam an opportunity of reincarnation, or at least a chance of demonstrating their power. The longest ceremonial yams are given the names of *nggwalndu* and decorated with adornments that represent them. Viewed from a sociological perspective, the lore of the ancestors, tantamount to the lore of the clan spirits, finds expression, rectitude and therefore ongoing validity in the practice of ceremonial yam cultivation.

In villages where no ceremonial houses are left, the yam storage houses takes over the role of the *korambo*, entailing a shift from collective action to individual agenda. In this case the owner performs all the necessary growth-enhancing rituals alone and for himself; if his hamlet still boasts a ceremonial house, his private ritual procedures are regarded as complementary to those performed collectively in front of the *korambo*.

Traditionally, the life of Abelam men is inextricably linked to the yam complex. Ritual life with its focus on initiations in which the cultivation, presentation and exchange of yam with the opposite moiety form indispensible components would be unthinkable and infeasible without it. Everyday life too, geared mainly to the provision and sustaining of basic food resources, is intricately tied in with the ceremonial yam. *Wapi* yam plays a major role in the cultivation of *ka*, the short yam grown for everyday consumption, in a twofold sense. On the one hand, ceremonial yam, which is cultivated in separate gardens imbued with sacred attributes, is, according to Abelam belief, indispensible for the successful and bountiful growth of *ka*, the staple food; on the other hand, an abundant *ka* harvest is a prerequisite for the successful cultivation of ceremonial yam in view of the yam feasts, the epitome of the yam cycle, where abundant quantities of short yam are required to entertain and feed the scores of guests from near and afar.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, most Abelam myths and stories tell of the origin and cultivation of crops and describe how the people became horticulturalists after abandoning their old life as hunters and gatherers. With reference to *wapi* yam, the myths tell the story of a culture

[121] The type called *wapi* corresponds basically with the botanical classification *Dioscorea alata*.

hero, a boy named Wapinyan (yam child),[122] who taught the people how to grow yam, later, himself transforming into a yam tuber. There exist two accounts of how Wapinyan came into existence: according to the first version, he emerged from a hole in the ground into which a man had repeatedly urinated. In the second story Wapinyan is said to have emerged from a small (wild-growing?) yam that was being stored in front of a menstruation hut. Wapinyan had a brother who had escaped from the humans (unlike himself who had been caught) after stealing bananas, and disappeared into the bush where he turned into a wild-growing yam species. Wapinyan's adoptive parents (a childless couple) took care of the young boy who had a yam shoot growing from the back of his head. In those days the people still lived as hunters and gatherers, and instead of staging yam feasts they organized competitions during which they displayed and exchanged wild taro roots. The young boy taught his adoptive father how to make a garden (slash-and-burn method) and how to plant and cultivate yam. This was all achieved with a minimum amount of work input, in fact, the work took care of itself, as driven by spirit hand. Wapinyan told his parents that the success of his work was dependent on their abstaining from sexual intercourse; they heeded his advice and, after a short while, Wapinyan dug from the ground a huge yam tuber. He then went on to stage the first large yam feast to which many men came to admire the fine specimens.

After a while the father became tired of sticking to his son's strict rules. One day, when Wapinyan had gone to the bush to collect water for his new crop of yams, the man persuaded his wife to have intercourse with him. When Wapinyan returned he 'smelt' what had happened in his absence as soon as he reached the village outskirts. He turned round immediately and ran off into the bush. His father tried to follow him, but was unable to catch him. Finally, the boy jumped headlong into a pool; only a leg was left sticking out of the water. The men who had gathered in the meantime tried to pull the boy from the water, but only succeeded in retrieving the leg. The limb took on the shape of an oblong stone and was used thereafter by the men in their yam growing rituals. In a further version the story has a different ending: after the boy had jumped into the water, the father thrust a bamboo pole into the bed of the pool. In the course of time, a yam vine began climbing up the pole and soon developed a rich foliage. When the leaves had finally dried, the men dug up an enormous tuber of the species called *mambutap*. Carrying it on their shoulders, they travelled across the entire area, showing their trophy to all the people.

In one version of the Wapinyan myth, the yam child is described as being a (unintended) creation of men,[123] similar to the ceremonial yam which grows as a result of male labour and ritual expertise. In the other version, it is a woman sitting in her menstruation hut who discovers the transformation from yam to child. Both myth versions go on to show how important the rules pertaining to gender separation are, and what happens if people disobey them and engage in illicit sexual intercourse: immediately the 'paradisiacal' conditions of existence come to an end, forcing the people to work hard (clearing the bush, fencing in gardens, planting yams, etc.) to secure their livelihood.

Notably, the strict rules and taboos that the men have to observe not only pertain to the act of sexual intercourse, but also to the consumption of meat as well as to other foods and stimulants that come from people other than one's own wife. The wives themselves are subject to the same strict rules and taboos as their yam-growing husbands. Next to that, a woman has to shave her head as soon as her husband commences work on a new *wapi* garden.

The three most important species of ceremonial yam are called *mambutap*, *kitpi* and *undinggil*. The yam complex is entirely men's business; the women are excluded from this domain completely. Even the building of fences around the gardens and the endless job of weeding – otherwise a typical women's chore – are carried out by the men.

In order to better understand the ceremonies performed on the *amei* in the context of the yam cult, I need to expound a little and say something on the planting and cultivation practices.[124]

[122] The full text of the myth-like story is to be found in Hauser-Schäublin (1983: 182-184).

[123] Tuzin (1972) has dealt extensively with yam symbolism, strongly emphasizing the phallic aspect. In my opinion he carries the equation yam = penis a little too far, possibly due to his status as a male ethnographer. On this point see Hauser-Schäublin (1987).

[124] For a more detailed description and analysis of horticulture and yam cultivation among the Abelam see Lea (1964).

In Kalabu the men start clearing a tract of land for a new yam garden approximately in August. Traditionally the people always select the same hill areas for cultivating *wapi* yam. In Kalabu, these are called Rumbun and Ribagui. It is said that the *nggwalndu* and ancestor spirits, who play an important role in the growth of crops, favour these two areas, which is why yam gardens often carry bynames like 'Tipmanggero's pouch' or 'Sagulas' pouch'. As soon as the garden has been fenced in and the plot cleared of only half-burned logs, branches and the grass that has re-grown in the meantime, planting can commence. Usually the owner first plants a few cuttings on his own before inviting men from his own clan and other closely related kin groups (e.g. his residence group, *ndugendu*) to come and assist on an appointed day. The adult men are joined by young boys who have not yet reached puberty.[125] Using their bare hands the younger men dig holes up to 1.6 metres deep and measuring roughly 40 centimetres in diameter. The old men crumble the excavated, usually heavy earth with their hands, removing small stones, roots and other impurities. A 'pitpit' cane is thrust into the hole and then the cavity is filled up with the loosened earth, with the intention that, in time, the yam tuber will grow 'down' the prepared hole. The filled-in hole is topped with a roughly 60-centimetre-high pile of earth. While the young men and boys are busy finishing the job, the elder men start to prepare the budding yam tubers that have been selected as seedlings with the help of a cassowary bone dagger (*wapinggwale yina*). Since normally only the top end of the tuber (the sprouting end) is used for ceremonial yams, a 'head' piece measuring something between 20 and 30 centimetres is removed from the rest. This piece is called *tagui* (which also means placenta).[126] Again with the aid of a bone dagger, the 'head' is hollowed out about ten centimetres from the bottom, i.e. the cut surface. The owner of the garden, usually an older man and experienced in dealing with yams and spirit beings, rubs down the *tagui* with a bundle of leaves (*uara*) before planting it; the leaves are said to contain cleansing substances. The cane stick is removed from the hole and the germinating cutting is placed on top of the earth mound, with the hollowed-out part facing downward. After sprinkling a concoction of powder made from various tree barks over the cutting, it is loosely covered with earth. Around the edge of the mound the men plant further, non-germinating cuttings (*nyagwapi*). These tubers will be used as *wapi* seedlings in the season to follow.[127] Finally, the men cover the mound with white-coloured earth called *munya,* which is the term for breast milk as well as breast. The pale reddish-white shoot is tied to a stick in the ground. The spot where the stick enters the ground is covered with a red hibiscus flower (*mauwe*) and *titnbun* leaves (a type of wild lime). The layout in a *wapi* garden is clearly specified, with *mambutap*, the most important and favoured type of *wapi*, normally heading the plot in the uppermost row. Other types such as *undinggil*, *kitpi*, *balepane*, *yeimbu* and, less frequently, *laindshe*, *bagulandshe*, *windshembu*, *nale*, *kupmui*, *wosera* and others, follow miscellaneously in the rows below. Occasionally, bizarrely shaped stones accredited with special powers are also placed on the mounds, next to the tubers.

After the work is finished, the helpers, both men and boys, retire to a shaded spot outside the garden to eat some food and recuperate, while the owner of the garden returns to the freshly planted plot. Holding a ripe coconut in his hands he calls the names of his *nggwalndu*, his *baba*, the sun, Sirendshui (Morning Star), Gerambu (Evening Star) and also invokes his deceased father and his father's brothers as well as a number of dead men of his grandfather's generation. Recently deceased clan members are especially important because they create the link between the living and the ancestors, promising close cooperation between the humans of this world and the spirits in the beyond. According to the Abelam, close collaboration between the two 'sides' ensures that the yam will grow to its full length. The coconut used to invoke the otherworldly powers the garden owner places next to the *mambutap* mound. It is left there to grow roots until after the yam feast, after which it is removed and replanted in the village. After the *wapi* has been planted no one but the owner of the garden is allowed to enter the plot. During

125 See also Forge (1970a).

126 In the case of twins, the second-born child is also referred to as *tagui*.

127 The largest tubers, the ones that are displayed during yam feasts, do not develop shoots. The Abelam say they are 'worn out' and call them *golepa wapi*, aged yam.

this time the men also build a bamboo fence around the ceremonial ground[128] of the owner's hamlet, providing that the settlement features a *korambo*; occasionally only the moon stone at the centre of the *amei* is enclosed. The fence is a sign for all women and children, and men who are not involved in yam growing, to keep away from the moonstone. Only men who strictly follow *yagit*, the rules of yam growing which include sexual abstinence, avoidance of eating meat, taking food only from one's own wife, not accepting tobacco or betel nut from others, no talking about sorcery and banning evil thoughts about other people – only men who adhere to these rules are allowed to enter the enclosure, where spirit beings called *nyambapmu* are believed to come to reside. They are associated with the sun (*nya*) and the moon (*bapmu*) and looked upon as their children. They are of human shape but of minute size and with red or white skin. Their presence in the enclosure is believed to promote the growth of the yams, but if they are approached by humans who do not abide by the rules of yam growing, they disappear again, never to return, putting the *wapi* harvest of the village as a whole at serious risk.

In Kalabu, Kaumbul, where a new ceremonial house was built in 1978, is considered the most important hamlet as far as the *wapi* cult is concerned. It also harbours a particular house where a special stone (*wai*, *wapiwai*) is kept,[129] said to be pivotal for the cultivation of *mambutap* yam. Stones play an important role in Abelam thought. As already mentioned above, long-shaped stones called *kumbumaak* are placed upright next to the ceremonial house, while a round stone, called *ulma* and *bapmu* respectively, features at the centre of the ceremonial ground. Kalabu's most important yam stone is never displayed publicly, but kept locked away in a house. Only very few men have ever set eyes on it. Its name is Windu. Actually, the stone was meant to be called Sagulas, an old planter once recalled, but then this name went to the carved *nggwalndu* figure. According to one of my most informed associates, Kwandshendu, a man who plays an important role in the ceremonial yam complex and, above all, in connection with the yam stones, the stone features marks, or engravings, that look like the 'ritual tattoo marks (…) on the skin of Sepik men'. Indeed, Windu is said to have been brought to the present settlement area from Umbite Targwa by the first immigrants.[130] Next to this principal specimen, other stones are kept in the same house to which only one old man selected by the community has access. Their names are Nyitndshimbui (a star) and Kulamele. Nyitndshimbui is originally from Dshame where it was kept up to the Second World War. When the Japanese occupied the village they fetched the stone from its hut and used it as a base for a fireplace. Due to this sacrilege the stone was no longer of use to the people of Dshame, who gave it to Kalabu where it was 'restored' to its old function. Kulamele (knife?) originally belonged to the men of Waignakim. On the occasion of one of the many peace agreements between the two villages, Waignakim gave the stone to the men of Kalabu in exchange for one of theirs called Sabamale.[131] However, Windu is clearly the most important of the three; in Tok Pisin the people often refer to it as the 'boss' of the other two. Windu on its part is regarded as the child of the yam stones of Kimbanggwa (and partly also of Bainyik). As antipodes, so to speak, of the stones in Kaumbul there also exist yam stones and one taro stone (round like a taro tuber) in Baigu, one of Kaumbul's satellite settlements.

As briefly mentioned above, only one man, who is selected by his peers, has access to the stones in his function as 'keeper' (*nimbindu*). Occasionally he is metaphorically referred to as *wasa* (dog), due to his reliability and ongoing presence in the village. His office is not hereditary, still, most of the *nimbindu* are recruited from either the Yabitigim or the Kundigim clans who jointly own the land that Kaumbul stands on. When a new keeper is selected he has to undergo a probation period and is only definitely appointed after it has

[128] Bühler (1960b: 208-209) writes: "In front of the ceremonial house a section is always closed off by bamboo sticks lying on the ground; they delineate the boundary of the sacred area on which the house 'tambaran' stands." The enclosure Bühler speaks of is only erected after the ceremonial yam has been planted; it remains there until after harvest.

[129] I was never allowed to enter the stone house. The information that follows is based on descriptions I received from my research associates.

[130] There is, however, no mention of it in any of the migration accounts; possibly the reason for this is that the stone represents one of the best-guarded secrets in Kalabu.

[131] The exchange involved objects of equal value.

shown that the yam stone 'approves' of his blood. If in the year that the man was chosen, and approached the stone for the first time, the yam tubers grow to their full length, it is taken as a sign of approval. Crop failures are put down to the incompatibility of yam stone and *nimbindu*. The blood of younger men – that is, men approximately up to the age of 45 – is said to be harmful to yam. People say that when a (ceremonial) yam smells the blood of a young man it will take flight. This also has to do with the fact that the blood of young men is believed to be bright red, whereas that of elder men who have already gone through a few extended periods of asceticism – avoidance of certain foods and water, sexual abstinence – is said to be almost black in colour. The yam's dislike of 'young blood' is the main reason why young men are neither allowed nor able to grow ceremonial yam.

The relationship between ceremonial yam and yam stones is complex and varied. Occasionally, the stones are described as *wapinyale*, the core of a yam; in a way they are looked upon as the tubers' bones. One old man once explained the stone's functions with the following comparison: "You whites," he said, "only eat at the table. If you have no table, you don't eat. The *wapiwai* is like your table: if we have no *wapiwai* we have nothing to eat."

Yam stones are believed to have a spirit, comparable to the human soul. According to Kwandshendu, the stone's spirit is called *nyambapmu*. Other men maintained that they used the same term as for the human spirit or soul: *komunyan*. The stone's spirit appears to the keeper at night in his dreams, during the day it may reveal itself in the shape of a firefly (*kun*), a pig or a python. The Abelam always speak of 'stones' when referring to the *wapiwai* although these objects actually are often large mollusc shells or pieces of coral.

Shortly before the planting season starts, the keeper rubs down the stones with the sap of various leaves and plants and then decorates them in the same fashion as the men adorn the long yams for display on the ceremonial ground. The upright-standing stone[132] serves as the 'body' with two sticks decorated with chicken feathers and *ban* fruits flanking the body on both sides. The face consists of a mask topped by a woven, disc-shaped headdress (*noute*), while the 'neck' is decorated with a band to which a large shell pendant is attached that covers the 'chest'. Additional adornments complement the arrangement; the selection is made by the keeper in charge.

A man planning to grow ceremonial yam must establish contact between the *wapiwai* and his yam garden. Principal prerequisite is that the man gives a shell ring to the stone's keeper. The latter carries the shell ring into the house, presents it to the stone, uttering the name of the donor, and places it on a palm leaf spathe. In return the donor receives a bundle of fragrant leaves that have been hanging in the stone house for a while. Later the grower takes the leaves to his garden and deposits them next to the yam mounds. During the *wapi* planting and growing season, the stone house usually holds several shell rings. Similar to the exchange of bride wealth on the *amei*, the shell rings are ordered by size and in a row, with the largest ring closest to the stone. Hanging over each shell ring is a band with cowrie shells attached to it; the upper end is fixed to a *yinggua* spear sticking in the roof, with the band (*kamandip*) hanging dead-centre over the middle of the shell. The band remains there untouched until the *wapi* yam has filled the hole in the ground that has been excavated for it, to full extent. Then it is removed and placed carefully within the ring; this indicates the time for the hole in the ground to be extended so that the yam may continue to grow.

The shell ring and the cowrie band, which are later returned to the owner of the crop, establish a lifeline between the yam stone and the garden plot. Some of my research associates likened this connection to a power station which pumps electricity through cables to people's homes. They said that the yam stone's spirit would follow the 'path' of the shell ring and so reach the gardens of those men who had deposited a shell ring in the stone house. The spirit is thought to make the tubers grow large and strong. As well as individual invocation, the men also engage in collective ritual action on the ceremonial ground.

In December 1978, and again in November 1980, a ceremony called *dshipmu ndei viyu* ("throwing / spearing *dshipmu* leaves") was held in Kalabu, the aim of which was to promote the growth of *wapi* yams. For this purpose a palm

[132] In Kwambigim the long ceremonial yams are displayed on the ceremonial ground in an upright position.

leaf container filled with water and *dshipmu* leaves was placed next to the moon stone. The water came from various clan-related *wale* pools in the forest. Next to the container lay a ripe coconut. Approaching from the secluded area at the back of the ceremonial house – called *toiembo* – a man carried a sprouting coconut decorated with red *mauwe* flowers onto the *amei*. In the morning of the appointed day many elders from the surrounding hamlets and villages gathered on the ceremonial ground; some of them were wearing ritual attire. The speeches that were given always began with an invocation of the *nggwalndu*; when delivering their speeches, the speakers held the sprouting coconut in their hands (**pl. 49**), striding up and down the *amei*, always in an east to west direction, and back. On one occasion a man arrived on the ceremonial ground carrying a branch of betel nuts and chanting the names of clan spirits. When finished, he tacked the betel nut branch to the plaited mat on the front of the *korambo* and carried some coconuts inside. Before the sun reached its midday peak, the men gathered around the palm leaf container and together blew over the water and *dshipmu* leaves with the intention of making their breath mingle with the water and leaves.

Before the men parted in the evening, the now 'charged' concoction was siphoned into bamboo tubes and one or two beer bottles, and distributed among the yam growers. The next day, before sunrise, the men went to their gardens and sprinkled the water over the *mambutap* mounds with the aid of the *dshipmu* leaves. Together with the concoction's potency, the breath of the men and that of the invoked spirit are said to pass over into the tubers in the ground, making them grow thick and long.

The period between the collective empowering of the ritual concoction in the container and its distribution into bamboo containers is taken up with speeches and discussions. Not every man gets up to speak and not every speaker is daubed with lime as a sign of distinction and praise. In Kalabu, the man ranked the most knowledgeable and influential person with regard to yam was called Wulnimbya from Kimbanggwa, the keeper of the most important *mamputap* stone in the central northern Abelam area. Men from many villages regularly consigned shell rings to him, which he then placed in front of the yam stone, speaking the name of the donor and the village the latter came from, for the purpose of channelling the stone's power to the donor and his village, or, to be more precise, to the yam in his garden. A survey among my Kalabu associates showed, however, that the Kimbanggwa *wapiwai* is only rarely invoked by them, usually only when the Kalabu stone has proved ineffective over an extended period of time, in other words, when over the last few years the ceremonial tubers have failed to reach their desired size.

In his home village, the keeper of the stone usually does not take centre stage in the discussions, leaving this role to his speaker (*kumbundu*) instead, while he himself remains in the background. The speaker is the man who mediates between the deceased, the ancestors, the clan spirits, the stars, the yams and the growers, imparting to the humans the wishes of these otherworldly beings and reminding them of the lore of the ancestors. According to the Abelam ideal there is only one speaker for each stone house but, as discussions show, usually several men try to take over this role. Mambutap yam is assigned to the Buknisuagim clan;[133] the most influential man of the main lineage of this clan is said to know the most effective yam spells as well as the traditional songs, which he alone is allowed to recite. When yam growers consign shell rings to a stone house they give them to the speaker who then passes them on to the real keeper.

As just mentioned, the speakers and keepers are not the only people with knowledge about yam. Usually a few elder men who are versed in the lore of yam – either because they were taught by their fathers, or because they are accustomed to dealing with supernatural beings, or, simply, because they have proved themselves as successful yam growers in the past – feel entitled to stand up and speak their piece in the discussions on the *amei*. Unlike other keepers, Wulnimbya of Kimbanggwa was not a man to hold back his thoughts; for one thing, this was due to his personality, for another thing, to the fact that his opinion and counsel was expected and appreciated in public meetings.

In order to give the reader an impression of

[133] As mentioned above when I discussed the structure of clans, all types of crops such as short yam (*ka*), taro, bananas or litchi (lychee), are assigned to different clans. These have to be consulted if, after a crop failure in one year, one hopes for a better harvest the next season.

the discussions and of the ritual procedure in connection with the 'spearing *dshipmu* leaves' ritual, I reproduce extracts of such an event in context[134] as it took place on 26 December 1978 in Kaumbul.

Nambisenta (a speaker, *kumbundu*):

Our ritual exchange partners (*sambera*) used to give us yams. Don't forget that (meaning, we are still in their debt). We have gathered today to make the yams come up big. And you dead men, Borem and Yambanggu, you must watch over us so that we can harvest long yams. I built this new ceremonial house[135] so that the yams will grow. We must respect the deceased, then our crop will thrive. And you dead men Saigetibe, Boreng, Bapgnapi, Marambo, all of you too must blow your breath (over the water and leaves). If we, the living, blow together with you, the deceased, then the yam vines will climb to the top and we will harvest large yams. If the crop is larger than expected, then we will hold a feast, not least to honour the *korambo*. We will display our yams in Kaumbul. You (the deceased) can't let us down. Alone we're not strong enough.

You spirit beings in the waterholes (wale), you must help us, and you too Sagulas, Manggyale, Wanke, Katu, Imagwate and Sugurumbun (*nggwalndu*), come here and give us your breath. And all of you stars, Nyamban (sun), Sirendshui (Morning Star), Gerambu (Evening Star) and you Kumun, Kandi, Wora and Gelaua (*dshambu*), come here and help us make the yam vines climb to the top and form a small lake.[136]

We have placed the leaves in the water; now we shall blow over them. All of you must help us.

Following Nambisenta's invocation, the meeting decides to wait for the arrival of a few important old men. As soon as they arrive, Gueguin, an experienced yam grower, summons the men to come and perform the blowing ritual. The men stand up and, forming a circle around the palm leaf container, begin to blow.

Waiwu (an experienced painter and carver) asks another man to pass on the following message: "Maybe I just didn't hear it, but didn't you sound the slit gong to announce what is happening today?"

Nambisenta:

Waiwu's wrong. If he wants to beat the slit gong on the *amei* of Yambusaki (Waiwu's *amei*), then the slit gong of Kaumbul has to be sounded too. But for that we need to have a pig ready. Because if men hear the signal in other villages they will come here and we will have to provide them with meat.

Nambisenta fetches two coconuts:

One coconut stays in Kaumbul; it is for Katu and Imagwate (*nggwalndu*); the other one goes to Yambusaki,[137] to Tipmangero Manggyale (*nggwalndu* of Yambusaki). This year only a few men have planted yam. There used to be many,[138] but then there was a quarrel and now only a few are left. Nobody should think of sorcery, otherwise we'll not be able to harvest yam.

Kwandshendu:

Now is the last time that we try to grow long yam. If again people have to die after this, we shall do something about it. While the visitors arrive for the yam feast and the men bring out the long yams tied to poles I shall enter the stone house and bring out the yam stone. And when the yams are being carried on to the *amei*, I will hit the stone with a yam so that the tuber breaks into many pieces. After that nobody in this village will ever be able to grow long yam again.

134 Since the main focus here is on the function of the ceremonial ground in the context of ceremonies performed in connection with the yam cult, I have omitted passages in the discussion that relate to earlier yam exchanges between the ritual moieties. I shall be returning to this topic later on.

135 Nambisenta does not belong to Kaumbul and had no part in the planning and building of the new ceremonial house. Among the Abelam, however, no one would ever dare to dispute such an allegation. It is considered a breach of basic etiquette to question the deeds that a man prides himself with, lest he be shamed thereby. Losing face in public is a serious matter that no man would inflict on another person since this could provoke retaliation by sorcery.

136 The aim is for the vine to climb up the specially constructed scaffolding in many and extensive loops.

137 Kaumbul (Kalabu II) and Yambusaki (Kalabu I) are responsible for the *wapi* yam, Ndunyinggi (Kalabu I) and Wapinda (Kalabu II) for *ka*. The public display of yams on the *amei* reflects this pattern. This is why Nambisenta has prepared two coconuts; he is from Yambusaki *amei*.

138 After a rich yam harvest and, accordingly, a lavish yam feast in 1974 many people died in the months to follow. The deaths were explained by sorcery which a number of men are said to have performed because they were jealous of other men's yams.

Samtagwa, keeper of the stone, breaks open a coconut, takes a sip of the juice and spews it on the ground of the *amei*. He calls:

Kumun, Kandi, Wora, Gelaue (*dshambu*), *kiaubaba* (male *baba*), all of you, come! I have spewed my saliva, now it is time for you to do the same, to blow your breath (over the water) together with us. Then we'll harvest the long yams. We've built a new ceremonial house and we'd be ashamed (if we can't stage a yam feast in front of it), for Kaumbul is the heart of *mambutap*.

Agilanggui (one of the most influential men in the village; he is consulted when people suspect sorcery to be the cause of illness and death):

We've built a new ceremonial house; we've commenced the cycle of *mindsha* songs without finishing it yet; after we've harvested the yams, we will close it with *bire* songs.

Longgen:

Hear what I dreamt of: I went to a place called Wanketagwa.[139] There I saw a lake as big and round as the moon. A huge lake! When I climbed down the bank to the shore I saw a man. He waved to me: 'Come here to me!' As I climbed down further, the water began to bubble and make waves like the sea. They rolled over me and threw me back to the shore. – What do you make of this dream?

Nambisenta:

This is not a dream about rain, but about yams. It means that we will harvest long yams.

Milen:

There's nothing left to say about the yam. We've laid out a net (trap) like when hunting pigs. There's no way to escape, it will go into the net. We'll harvest large long yams. We've put out the net for the yam like we do for the pigs we try to catch.

Tambandshoe (he, too, is regarded as one of the speakers of the keeper of stones):

You fathers used to surround the trunk of the sago palm.[140] We young men (T. is about 50 years old) will try to grow long yam. We'll do it like you fathers did when you killed an enemy with your spear. For each slain enemy you used to add a feather to your boar tusk decoration (*kara-ut*) and wear it on your back for everyone to see. We'll do the same for the long yams we harvest.

Another man:

The yam grows long if you give it water from the Pasi river and Ulagem stream (he is referring to certain pools where spirit beings are believed to reside). You men, you must forbid your wives to wash themselves there (the 'smell' of women drives away the yam). You must forbid it. They must go to other pools.

Ninggibaintship:

For these flowing waters we need no further restrictions. It is true, in earlier days, when our forefathers were still alive, they took water from the Pasi and Amagu to give to the yam. But a long time ago already the Whites began settling there (the District Centre Maprik is situated on the bank of the Amagu river) and today many people wash there. They've cut off the road for us (meaning, they have broken the law of the ancestors). But there are many pools left in the bush; their water is clear and good. You must save some of them for the yam. Use their water for the yam.

Dshanyamyo (like Samtagwa, D. is regarded as a keeper of the stone):

I once went to my yam garden. There I saw some women climbing up a *yiwit* tree[141] to collect leaves. They called to me saying, 'we don't believe in all this yam business.' I answered: 'You should not use such words!' I was in my yam garden and the women shamed me and the yam.

Samtagwa:

When a girl bleeds for the first time we don't refuse the long yams to the women. On the contrary: we

[139] Wanketagwa is the name of the female Kundigim *baba*; probably he is referring to a *wale* pool of the same name.

[140] This refers to a special method of hunting pigs where the men lay out a bait of sago which pigs have a preference for. While the animal is busy with the sago the men can easily approach it and spear it. Tambandshoe applies the metaphor to the yam stone which the men now have under control.

[141] *Gnetum gnemon*; the leaves are used as a type of green vegetable.

tie the tubers to poles and give them to the women; we do this on the occasion of this feast called *wambusuge*. That's why the women shouldn't speak so disdainfully. You have to believe in the long yam; not everyone is successful at growing long yam; only some have the ability. For this reason the women shouldn't speak in this manner! You women would never succeed (to grow yam). – We will no longer give you yam for your feast, because you don't respect the yam. All you think about is seducing men. All you can do is cause harm to the yam. When the yam sees you, it runs away!

Kwandshendu comments (after reciting a song that refers to Umbite Targwa, the joint mythical place of origin of humans, yam stones and yams[142]):

Without Bira (*nggwalndu*) there would be no yam. If we speak to him we harvest long yam. If Bira and I fail, then I'll take my *yinggua* spear (metaphor for yam) and hurl it into the bush.

Turning to Wulnimbya of Kimbanggwa he says:

It is good that you have come. When you return to your village then you must carry these thoughts that we have uttered here back with you. The two of us will tether a line that stretches to all villages.[143] A tree kangaroo (metaphor for a man) is climbing along this line when a man harbouring bad thoughts takes a gun and shoots at the kangaroo; it falls off the line, hurt.[144] That is what I'm afraid of, that this could happen. The two of us, Wulnimbya and I, we can do nothing else but think of the law of the yam! If we both think the same way, then we'll harvest large yams. The two of us have built ceremonial houses, one in Kaumbul, the other in Toulesagu (a hamlet of Kimbanggwa). If our thoughts are one, then we'll harvest long yams, display them in front of the ceremonial houses and thus contribute to the honour of these buildings.

Wulnimbya:

Your words are true. The spirit of the yam stone[145] may reside in any of these villages, but when I sound the slit gong and call, it will come back to the two of us. Then we'll see to it that the yam grows well. When we've done everything we can for it (performed all the necessary rituals) we'll send a message to all the villages, telling the men to clear the bush for new yam gardens. If we do nothing for the yam for a period of one or two years,[146] then the people will start to die because of it. That's why I told you to grow long yams. When it has grown large and splendid and is presented on the *amei* for the people to see and rejoice in, then the people will also be pleased about what we did for them; and everything will be well. But if the men try to grow yam and fail, then they'll not be satisfied with us, and we'll have to die. That is why I have called all the men together today to help us with their breath. Now that this is done, we'll harvest a great crop.

Commentary

The contributions show, above all, how many different otherworldly forces and agents are involved in supporting men to grow ceremonial yam successfully. The help the people ask for is by no means meant in an abstract sense; instead, the spirit beings are asked to lend the growing yam tubers their breath, to exhale over the leaves and the water in the container, the same as the men do. Nambisenta lists the names of recently deceased men whom he had known personally. As mentioned before the recently dead serve as mediators between the here and the beyond; since they died not long ago they are still well remembered, still present in a sense, while, on the other hand, they now also belong to the beyond through their status as spirits.

An outside observer might expect that, in the context of ritual acts involving yam stones on the one hand, and much-cherished crops, on the other, the Abelam would only speak of the *wapiwai* with awe and respect, in a low voice, maybe even in a whisper. The passages from the speeches show that this is by no means the case: at one point the old bigman Kwandshendu even threatens to drag the secret stone from its house and smash a miscarried yam over it, in effect an absolute sacrilege and unthinkable in reality. From many discussions I had on this and similar issues it became evident that uttering a threat verbally did not necessarily constitute a first step of translation into action. Thus Kwandshendu's statements are not to be seen as a threat against

142 On Umbite Targwa see below p. 118.

143 He means the connection between the main yam stone and the different villages.

144 Kwandshendu is hinting at sorcery that one man performs on another in order to destroy his crop of yam.

145 Wulnimbya uses the term *wai* for yam stone. He is not referring to the stone as such, but to the stone's 'soul' or 'spirit'.

146 Meaning, if we do not plant yam.

the *wapiwai* itself, but as an admonishment to men who practice sorcery (*kus*) and thereby seriously jeopardize the growth of ceremonial yam. Sorcery and *wapi* yam stand in absolute antagonism and it is not uncommon that in public debates dealing with the yam complex reference to sorcery is strictly forbidden; the same applies to discussions appertaining to a new ceremonial house, as we saw above (pp. 63-66). The idea behind it is that people who have died through sorcery air their grievances about their fate to the recently deceased, the ancestor spirits and also the living. Kambairogwa, a keen yam grower, once explained to me: "I would never even think of having anything to do with sorcery because I do not want to have the dead coming to me and telling me with tears in their eyes that I was an accessory to their death. Because then the dead and the ancestor spirits would no longer be prepared to help me in the gardens, and all my crops would fail." It is in this sense that Kwandshendu's utterance has to be seen; his threat to destroy the *wapiwai* is directed against those men who keep on dabbling in sorcery; this would mean the end of growing ceremonial yam. Later on in the discussion he repeats his misgivings about *kus* in a slightly modified fashion. Contrariwise, the Abelam believe they would die at the hand of the ancestor spirits and the *wapiwai* if they were no longer to plant and grow yams. Thus, the men are caught in a double bind: on the one hand, the powers of the beyond compel them to grow yam, on the other, they absolutely depend on their cooperation.

Looking back to the description of the first menstruation feast (pp. 82-84), Samtagwa's and Dshanyamo's statements shed some light on the significance of yam distribution during the *wambusuge* ceremony which is performed by women only. But indirectly the passages also indicate the scepticism that some women have towards the male-dominated yam cult, and, equally, the men's reactions to these female doubts as to the purpose of the whole complex.

Two years after the debate in Kaumbul, where the quoted passages are from, I had the opportunity to witness a very similar event, again in Kalabu but in a different hamlet. In the meantime, Samtagwa, the keeper of the yam stone, had died.[147] The speeches were more or less the same as two years before but it soon became evident that the death of the knowledgable Samtagwa had torn a hole, and that his experience was bitterly missed. Even though his death lay 18 months back, the men had not yet appointed a replacement. This regrettable condition found expression in a series of chanted lyrics:

tagwa ninggus kie kutanggu kute kelau taga mange nggile

Woman[148] locks the entrance to the house
closes her house. Mountain, branch of the *mangge* tree above

Meaning that:

Samtagwa has closed the door to the *wapiwai* house for good. He has left and gone upwards, disappeared over the branch of the tall *mangge* tree.

The following dirge was sung by Wuyapi of Dshame:

tagwa yengge nyine yu?
Woman where are you going?

banggup kambil
(to the) Banggup brook, (to the) Kambil stream

ramu ve nyine ramu ve
The yellow[149] you feel, the yellow you sense

wune numbumba ro, wune nyitmba kwokumbale.
I am on top of the mountain, up in the sky like the Kwokumbale bird

nggu gune wau, ka gune wau
From the water he calls you, from the *ka* yam he calls you

kipmamba yale, yalelui
Forth from the ground he leads (you)

yesesan wuremba wurena, maulemba rapna
He watches carefully and is pleased in thoughts (he) climbs up.

[147] See the dirges, or mortuary songs (*gambakware*), for Samtagwa on pp 87-92..

[148] Metaphor for Samtagwa.

[149] 'Yellow' refers to menstrual blood; my associates explained that it was meant as a circumscription for the decorated yam stone (*wapiwai*).

The song has roughly the following meaning:

"Samtagwa where have you gone?
To the Banggup and Kambil streams (*wale* pools).
You are like a decorated yam stone (?).
I am on the mountain, up in the sky
Like Kwokumbale, who calls in the middle of the night.
He calls to you from the water, from the *ka* yam and from the ground,
he calls you and leads you.
He watches you and is pleased, in his thoughts he is here."

The chants describe how Samtagwa rose toward the sky and vanished when he died. Wuyapi likens him to a Kwokumbale bird which, in other contexts, is often identified with the sun. The bird metaphor reminds one of the *dshambu* birds although in this song the bird sounds not only come from the sky but also rise from the ground, from the water and even from the *ka* yam. In the second song Samtagwa, the keeper of the yam stone, is himself described as a decorated yam, which might explain why it is said that he is calling from a *ka* yam. He himself has become a yam stone and is now watching over the yam growers, noting their success with contentment; in other words, he is with them in thought.

The third chant was sung by Ninggibaintship:

nggwal Bira ndu yiu nggile nggaimba,
Nggwal Bira. The man has vanished to his village.

min dauli wanemba myala.
You climbed down, someone passes on a message (from you)

wamineka ndu, wunamba nyakare Kaumbul nggai
You have this message sent (to us) and I am ashamed in Kaumbul

wapi wunemba simbara
I am a yam that is like a small child.

Freely interpreted, the song's meaning could be summarized as follows: "*Nggwal* Bira! The man (leader of the yam cult) has left us. You Samtagwa have descended (to the beyond) and pass on to us what you have to say. I listen here in Kaumbul like a small child that knows nothing and therefore has nothing to say."

Messages from the deceased, specifically from earlier influential bigmen and yam cult leaders, are transmitted through dreams at night, but the contents of the message need unravelling first. In the debate above, a man called Longgen described a dream, which was subsequently interpreted by Nambisenta. In summary, the three chants not only express the people's grief about being left without an experienced yam cult leader, but also show how they try to contact the deceased person and are ready to follow his instructions.

In September 1980 we had the opportunity to attend a ceremony in Waignakim, which was of more than merely local significance. Basically it was similar to the ceremonies in Kalabu during which men exhaled breath over a palm leaf vessel containing leaves and water gathered from special *wale* pools. Here too, the charged leaves and water were distributed among the yam growers in the evening. But unlike the event in Kalabu, the men of Waignakim sacrificed a number of pigs on the occasion and had therefore sounded the slit gong two days before to announce the ceremony to the surrounding villages.[150] Actually, the event consisted of two ceremonies performed simultaneously in two separate hamlets of the large and sprawling village. Participants came from Malmba, Magutogim, Yenigo, Naram, Nyamikim, Bainyik, Kimbanggwa, Dshame, Kalabu and Lonem. The ceremony called *yapu*, meaning breath, was primarily intended to promote the growth of *mambutap* yam, but also covered other types such as *uindinggil*, *kitpi* and others, as well as short yam (*ka*) and taro (*mai*).

At the centre of the *amei*, next to the moon stone, lay two coconuts enclosed in a circular fence (*biben*).[151] It consisted of sticks stuck in the ground and fastened together with thick vines. Attached to them was sago fibre material. On top of the fence, with their sharp ends pointing upwards, there were a number of spears, their

[150] See also Waiwu's statement during the yam ceremony in Kalabu who complained that the slit gong had not been sounded.

[151] Means, literally, a sago leaf strip.

tips decorated with orange-coloured *ban* fruits. On top of the spears the men had placed two male *baba* masks adorned with red hibiscus flowers. In front of the fence was the palm leaf container filled with water collected from different pools and the *sipmu*[152] and *koramben* leaves.

We arrived in Waignakim with a group of Kalabu men. Before leaving the village there had been some commotion as the men whom I wanted to have with me on the trip to Waignakim refused to accompany me. Their refusal had to do with the practice of distributing the mix of water and leaves to the men to take home in the evening where they would then administer it to their yams. But since the recipients were expected to bring along at least one shell ring in exchange, the Kalabu men were afraid of appearing in Waignakim empty handed, or, to be more precise, with an empty net bag, lest the hosts reacted to such insult with sorcery (*kus*). Similar to Kalabu, the rings were to be placed in the stone house of Waignakim. When we finally arrived in the hamlet of Kumunware in Waignakim, with only a few men from Kalabu accompanying us, the visiting groups from other villages were gathered around the small enclosure at the centre of the *amei*, busily blowing over the container. I noticed that the two *baba* masks and the spears were unmistakably oriented towards a common reference point. This was confirmed by the men who explained that the masks and the spears were pointing towards the east, more precisely, to the spot where the sun rises in the morning. I also noticed that the speakers were strictly pacing on an east to west axis when delivering their speeches.[153] What astonished[154] me, though, was that the men spontaneously all gave the same explanation for this pattern: *baba* and spears, they said, were pointing to the east because that is where the sun rises. The sun, they continued, travels from east to west which is also the 'path' of the *nyambapmu*, the tiny male spirit beings that are invoked in all yam ceremonies and asked to come and settle in the small enclosure and help to promote the growth of crops. The spears on which the *baba* masks were resting belonged to the categories *yinggua* and *manggam*, *yinggua* being the spear of the *mambutap* yam, *manggam* that of the *kitpi* and *undinggil* species. The message behind this was that the yams were hoped to grow to the same length as the corresponding spears; the gradient of the spears reflected the position of the ceremonial yams when fixed to poles during public displays.

In the context of this ceremony I also came across the names of female spirit beings, Tinggyen and Songgyen. Like their male counterparts, the *nyambapmu* (which, however, have no personal names), they are associated with the sky and celestial bodies[155] and are expected to have a growth-enhancing effect on taro (classified as female) and also on *ka* yam. They are said to descend on to the *amei* by aid of a vine hanging from the ceremonial house (whether this refers to the plaited chain, *nggalut*, suspended from the tip of the ridge beam I was unable ascertain with certainty).

Discussions on the *amei* continued until dark. Shortly before the visitors left to go back to their home villages, the pig meat that had been cooked in an earth-oven was distributed – on top of all the food that had been served in the course of the day – with the most influential men receiving the largest and most savoury pieces,[156] among them Wulnimbya of Kimbanggwa.

Next to the speeches which were, in style, very much like those held in Kalabu, a number of chanted songs were performed. Here I

[152] The initial sound 's' is occasionally pronounced as dsh.

[153] It was only after seeing this in Waignakim that I noticed that in Kalabu too the men kept to an east-west axis when delivering a speech on the *amei*.

[154] Questions aiming at the meaning of a certain action, of motifs in painting or the pattern on a sting bag, or even of the essence of spiritual beings often met with astonishment on the part of my associates, occasionally even with disapproval, not because I had intruded upon some hallowed sphere of secrecy, but simply because the topic I had broached did not lend itself to verbal exegesis.

[155] One man explained that these beings inhabit high mountains.

[156] Although the Abelam are always very polite in public, they always find reason to criticize the hosts of a feast staged in a neighbouring village, but only when they are out of earshot on their way home in the evening. I especially remember the remarks of one man after the pork had been distributed together with huge bowls of rice. Although an Abelam man usually only gets to eat highly-valued pork on very few occasions in the year, this particular man laconically remarked after receiving a huge portion of meat: '*bagna kwami, tinpis kaprek*!' which means as much as 'what, only pork, no tin meat?' Half amused, half shocked, we began to laugh upon which some elders chastised us immediately, lest the hosts be offended by our laughter.

reproduce two of them, both directly relating to the mythical and religious background of the yam cult; at the same time they are constituent of it. The short formulas – what these chants basically are – throw a light on the yam cult mindset. Wulnimbya of Kimbanggwa opened the discussion with a chant focusing on *undinggil* yam. The first song deals with Separan:

mbale Serapan rapmei inde, tsumbuitshik, myambatshik
Boar Serapan, rise. Little fruits of the *tsumbui* tree and the *myamba* bush

nggile kinde sikalu mbale Serapan
pack up and carry the boar Serapan here

tshipmuishik, myambatshik, Balure Wuimba ndetu
the little fruits of the *tshipmui* and the *myamba* bush, he is on the mountain Balure and in the Wuimba grass plains.

Saigware Mbai, Serapan mbale mbula rapndiek
on Saigware and Mbai, you, boar Serapan, rise!

Mbula kware Serapan rapneinde tu, Serapan mbale
now Serapan rises and stands up, the boar Serapan,

mbula rapindio, Kainumbu Ulmapma, Serapan wani
now he rises, in Kainumbu Ulmapma, this Serapan,

ngaimba nde rapmu.
from this village he rises.

In normal speech Wulnimbya then added:

The boar that you men of Waignakim hold ready for this feast is a boar like Serapan used to be. It's not a small pig, but one of the size of Serapan. You have killed it and now bring the meat on to the *amei* where we have gathered to help make the yam grow. Yesterday you killed this pig, and I was told the name of this mighty boar. I thought of you and the yam, all night long, until daybreak. Then I rose and set out to come to you and help you.

The Boar Serapan

Literally Serapan means 'rooster-man', *sera* (rooster) being a metaphor for a handsome man (*ban* or *pan* = man, chap). The ambiguity that finds expression in the name of this mythical boar (human/pig)[157] is touched upon in a story which the chant is based on.

Serapan came from a pool that carries the same name. When the pool was still his home (in the shape of a waterfall where a small stream flows into the Pasi river) he used to often break into gardens and steal the crops. If the men had planted their gardens on the hill-slopes of Boim and Gumbialem (north-east of Kalabu) it was not uncommon for the mighty boar to eat all the seedlings. The men asked each other: 'what type of being lives in that pool?' The men had followed the boar's tracks as far as the pool; now they considered how they could get rid of him. They were lying in waiting when he climbed from his pool. It was a huge boar, nearly the size of a man. He fled along the slopes of the hill Boim with the men in pursuit. They put out a pig net (trap), but Serapan was able to free himself. He fled down the hill Yauipur where the men again had put out a net; they drove the boar into the net, but again he was able to free himself and escape. He reached the Ulagem, then he came to Dshame, entering the Wanggimbalak *amei*. He moved on and came to the hamlet of Numbunggen. The Dshame men pursued Serapan who had by then reached the Wutpam (stream marking the Dshame/Nyamikim border). There the men again had put out a net, but once more Serapan was able to free himself and escape. He fled to the bush of Nyamikim with the men of Nyamikim in pursuit of the huge boar who by then had reached the Mitpim river (border between Nyamikim and Nyelikim, now called Klinwara). There the men had put out another trap. Serapan went into it but he was able to tear up the net and escape towards Nyelikim. The Nyelikim men too put out a net. One man especially had been pursuing Serapan for quite a while; he was a friend of Serapan (in a different version of the story Serapan used to be a man who one day put on a *baba* mask and thus turned into a pig; his brother followed the boar and persuaded him to be caught in a trap). This man found out where Serapan was hiding and went to him. Serapan spoke: 'I'm not a pig, I'm a human being. Lay out your net in a certain spot and wait for me there, but keep on talking all the time (so that I can recognize you by your voice)'. The man followed Serapan's instructions. When he returned

[157] On this see Hauser-Schäublin (1984).

to the other men, they asked him: 'what's the matter with that pig?' He answered: 'I don't know'. He placed himself next to his net, talking without cease. The boar followed the trail of his voice and went into the net. The man held him down; all the strength had gone from the boar. He called to the other men. They tied Serapan up, built a stretcher of wood and placed him on it. Then they carried him back to Nyamikim where the people rejoiced in song. The boar began frothing, and the froth dropped to the ground. The froth was pure white, as white as powder. The men collected the froth and stored it away (white earth is used in pig magic). Then white froth began gushing from all parts of his skin. The Nyamikim collected it and stored it away. They carried the man in the body of a boar to the Kainumbu *amei*. Messages were sent to all the villages, telling the people that Serapan had been caught. People began arriving from all the villages. The men singed the boar over the fire and then they cut up his body. Men from many villages carried back Serapan's bones and stored them at home." The narrator then added: "When Serapan still lived in his pool, he sometimes appeared as a *undinggil* yam. That is why Serapan's bones are so important when we plant *undinggil* yam. Before planting this type of yam, we sacrifice a boar and send pieces of meat to all those villages where Serapan's bones and froth are kept. The men who watch over these things eat the meat. Occasionally we also send them shell rings. This makes the *undinggil* grow well and the crop rich."

Tshumbuitshik and Myambatshik are the names of two men (actually little fruits, *thsik* or *sik*, of a certain ironwood species). Notably 'tree' often serves as a metaphor for 'man' ('big and strong like an ironwood'). The names refer to the two men who caught Serapan (although the above reproduced myth version mentions only one man). In other contexts, Tshumbuitshik and Myambatshik are used as metaphors for especially large specimens of ceremonial yam. In Wulnimbya's chant, Serapan is invoked to rise (in effect to 'resurrect'). His 'resurrection' is to become manifest in huge yam tubers. The re-enactment of the mythical killing and the distribution of meat to various villages, in analogy to the distribution of Serapan's bones described in the myth – one of the pivots of the *undinggil* cult – are core ideas in Wulnimbya's speech. They close the distance between the time of creation and the present: in the acts performed on the *amei,* the past merges with the present and the present with the past.

A typical feature of the chants is the accumulation of names whose meanings remain unclear, without being given additional clues, at least to outsiders. Many of them do not even offer self-contained explanations, as the Serapan myth goes to show.

In Waignakim, Tigaseige of Bainyik/Kimbanggwa performed the following chant:

Umbite Targwa nggumbu gwande yambu yanu
Umbite Targwa where there is water and fire burns

Bira sera yalmba nde ure, yalmba nde wau,
Bira rooster, where he (*nggwalndu*) crows, where he calls

ure kwa Umbite ngai, wagwa Targwa amei
He crows in the village of Umbite, he calls out on Targwa *amei*.

Umbite Targwa

What Umbite Targwa actually 'is' or where it is located remains rather a mystery. As in many other instances, we are offered no exegesis. The oral migration histories (see p. 7) speak of Umbite Targwa as a place of origin. The above-quoted chant, however, offers a number of new aspects. In contrast to many other places mentioned in the migration stories which are of major significance to the Abelam, Umbite Targwa tends to be mystified. Thus, for example, we are told the following: "All Abelam originally lived in a hole. The people of Kalabu had settled in the middle of the hole; around them were the people of other villages. Then one man stood up and said: 'how many people have already left, and why are we Kalabu people still here?' Then the people left this hole at Umbite Targwa …" Some people I asked said that Umbite Targwa was spirit place inhabited by *wale* near Kimbanggwa and associated with the main yam stone. In 1983 we visited a yam feast in Kimbanggwa, held in the hamlet of Kwandshengga; there we heard that the settlement once used to be called Targwa.

On the occasion of a feast in Naram where *ka* yam was being displayed, Umbite Targwa was mentioned in a song with the following content: "I am in Naram. I am a short, small man,[158] in the pool of a spirit being (*wale*). In

[158] Here reference is being made to the comparatively short tuber of the *ka* yam.

Umbite and Targwa I am together with Bira. Singing a song of joy, he ('the short man') will step onto the *amei* where you men and women have gathered to see the feast. He will be one with Bira. Soon this short man will appear, and you will see him."

From the short text it becomes evident that Umbite Targwa is the abode, or realm, of spirit beings; in the present case, the *ka* yam is a representative as well as an embodiment of the *nggwalndu* called Bira.

Kwandshendu once sang three Umbite Targwa songs for me which I had heard on different occasions but never recorded. They go as follows:

1) *Nggai nggumbu gwande yambu yanu nggai*
The village that is in the water and where fire blazes

nggai wune Umbite nggai Targwa amei
my home is Umbite, my *amei* Targwa,
yambu yanu.
where fire burns.

2) *Ndugeru Myambagut rage wigma*
Nudgeru Myambagut (two men), yearning seizes you

kwate nggera Umbite nggai Targwa amei,
lying flat you cry (in yearning) for Umbite village and Targwa *amei*,

kwandekwa nggu yaan kwa ya.
which lies in the water and where fire burns.

3) *Wuti lere, yina puka pukaure, nggai Umbite nggai Targwa amei;*
wuti bone dagger he carves,
yina bone dagger he engraves
in the village Umbite, Targwa *amei*;

ndu ndu kutna yina wune wuti las, yina las
many men admire the *yina* (and say):
I want to be like a *wuti*, like a *yina*

mine wuillewaap ndu, tawaap wapi Umbite Targwa,
You are a short man, a long yam (man) in Umbite Targwa,

Bira Lelawi lauinde ya, dshui pelna bapmu kwana.
(where) Bira (and) Lelawi is staying
like a star he shines, radiant like the moon he appears.

The last chant needs explaining briefly: producing *wuti* and *yina* is a metaphor for creating secret and arcane objects which are used for initiation scenes; it can also be used to describe the decoration of yam stones. In the present case, this second interpretation appears more fitting since, in a next metaphor, the mention is of a 'short man' (*ka*) and 'long *wapi*'.

Practically all the songs mention that Umbite Targwa is associated with water and fire. The attribution of a phenomenon to opposed, but linked pairs, is typical of Abelam ontology. We came across it already in the chants performed in Kaumbul in the context of the rituals to enhance the growth of yam, where the singers expressed their grief at the death of the keeper of the yam stone. There it was told that Samtagwa had vanished into the earth *and* the sky. The contrapositions sky/earth and fire/water are based on the same principle as the male/female dichotomy. Sky and fire are considered male, while earth and water are classified as female,[159] but at the same time – albeit on a different level of abstraction – each of these elements contains both male and female aspects. The fact that Umbite Targwa is located in a place where 'fire burns' and 'water stands' suggests utmost creative power. In the same line of thought we have the notion that human procreation is dependent on the circumstance that the 'hot' male component merges with the 'cold' female element.

The statement 'my home is in the water' implies that the respective verse is referring to one of the pools in the bush where the *wale* are believed to reside. Also remember that Serapan emerged from a pool, and that the *nggwalndu* Bira is actually located in Umbite Targwa from where he communicates with the human beings by uttering calls. My associates equated these calls to the voice of a musical instrument called *kundi ure* made of hollow, cylindrical bamboo tubes into which the men sing. When being played, the *kundi ure* are placed in dug-out holes in the ground.[160] Next

[159] See also Losche (1982: 147-152).

[160] In a previous paper (Hauser-Schäublin 1983: 181) I suggested an analogy with the water drums found in Middle Sepik cultures. The fact that the *nggwalndu*

to Bira there is also mention of 'the short man' and 'the long *wapi*'; both are metaphors for the main yam stone. I believe that all these figures represent facets of one and the same spiritual being, or, put differently, that this being residing in Umbite Targwa, the home of all yam stones, becomes manifest in different guises and communicates with the humans with the help of alternative voices. At the heart of the matter, the *nggwalndu* Bira stands for the spiritual essence, not only of the yam stone but also of the *ka* and *wapi* yam. Human beings (more specifically men) not only crave to catch a glimpse of the 'yam spirit' cast in stone, but actually to become one with it. Also of interest is the reference to the (night) sky in the last song, where Bira is described as a bright star and a shining moon. It conveys the idea that when Bira reveals himself to the humans he appears in the shape of a large, magnificently decorated *wapi* or *ka* yam during a display on the *amei*, but in contrast to the perishable tubers, Bira himself is omnipresent and everlasting, like the celestial bodies.

With reference to the chant performed by Tigaseige of Waignakim, we may summarize as follows: the men invoke the yam's principal place of origin and creation in order for it to disseminate its potency to the men growing yam. The calls that come from Umbite Targwa are heard by the men and interpreted as a sign that contact between the mythical place of origin and the humans has been successfully established, with the prospect of a rich crop. By means of the song, Umbite Targwa, the mythical source of creation is recharged and transformed in this context, standing as a metaphor for the yam stone house in Waignakim.

Following the distribution of the ritually charged water and leaves from the container which the men blew over, the two *baba* masks and the spears are transferred to the ceremonial house, where they are placed next to the carved *nggwalndu* figures. The *biben* fence enclosing the moon stone on the *amei* is left standing until harvest time. In its shape it is reminiscent of a pool in the bush, where *wale* spirits reside; the same applies to the leaf container filled with water from the different spirit pools. This reading is corroborated by the *baba* masks on the fence which represent clan-associated spirit beings in the shape of pigs – Serapan being their most prominent representative. They too are associated with mythical water holes in the bush and act as intermediaries between the realm of the dead and the world of the living.[161] Adding the presence of the *nyambapmu* spirits in the enclosure, we may safely conclude that this collective ritual, so eminently important for the growth of yam, incorporates and reflects basic Abelam religious tenets in a highly condensed form.

After this collective, in fact village-unifying, ceremonial act, the individual yam growers retreat to their gardens and perform a number of private rituals at their own discretion, and on the basis their personal stock of secret knowledge. Usually each planter knows a number of magical formulas which he speaks to promote the growth the vines, the leaves and, ultimately, the tuber itself.

When the time comes that the yams are thought to have grown to the size of the hole previously excavated, the men assay this by a variety of methods, for example, with the aid of the ulna of an ancestor (one who was known to have been a mighty warrior or a successful yam grower). The bone is placed upright on a *mbande* shell, positioned on top of a yam mound; if the bone remains standing without tipping it means that the yam has reached the desired length. Another man said he uses the finger bones of an ancestor inside a coconut shell which he places on the mound. If the yam has attained the right length, the bones start 'knocking' on the coconut shell (from the inside); at the same time one is able to hear the ancestor's murmuring voice. After fetching his *baba* mask and his *yinggua* spear – both of which he has decorated with red *mauwe* flowers – the man returns to his garden and invokes in a magic formula, next to various celestial bodies, the *dshambu* birds and his *nggwalndu*, the mythical ('totemic') pig that is associated with his *amei* represented by the *baba* mask.[162] Then he starts to dig a tunnel to the distal end of the yam tuber deep down in the ground, with the help of a special pig bone (*kuau*). If the yam has grown to the expected length, he extends the yam hole so that the tuber may grow even deeper. If the yam has grown as

Bira is associated with water and pools makes this interpretation appear in a new light.

[161] On this see also Hauser-Schäublin (1984: 353-357).

[162] Since the yam cult is still of relevance for the Abelam today I will not reproduce the wording of this or other spells verbatim; I was able to record them under the provision of strictest confidence. They proved invaluable for my understanding of Abelam religion.

far as the test tunnel – the spot is referred to as *talangge* (the term for 'main settlement') – it is taken as a sign that the planter has followed all the prescribed rules and displayed impeccable moral conduct. But the yam will only continue to grow down the extended hole (*wingge* = subsidiary settlement) if the planter's wife also obeys the imposed rules.

The men go about things in a similar way when cultivating *ka* yam in preparation for a ritual exchange. Since the planted shoot of a *ka* yam usually proliferates into several tubers, the planter removes all of them except for the largest one several weeks after planting, allowing the remaining one to grow distinctly longer and thicker than if left unattended to.

However, the cultivation of *ka* and *wapi* yams implies more than simply producing the largest yam specimens. The relationship between a grower and his yam is comparable to that of a father to his child, with the difference that in this case the 'father' is dependent not directly on his wife, but on a variety of other beings who support him in making a young shoot grow into an animated and inspirited yam. The yam is enlivened by the breath of the living, the deceased and the supernatural beings in the ritual described above. But the actual life-giving stimulus comes from the planter himself, whose blood is said to pass into the yam, which is why the yam is regarded as his child. Experienced old men often describe how they dream of their *wapi* during the growth phase, and how they occasionally encounter the yam in their dreams which appears to them in the shape of a python or a large tree trunk. They also tell of unusual experiences, of fireflies following them from the edge of the garden back to their homes in the evening, or of encounters with huge boars in the immediate vicinity of the village. These and similar instances are seen as clear signs that a yam's spirit is capable of leaving the actual tuber and of wandering around and communicating with 'its' grower, telling him what still needs to be done or pointing out what he has done wrong.

When, in the summer of 1979, the men of Lonem had harvested their ceremonial yams and were inspecting the tubers, they noticed on one of the specimens a deep circular depression; the skin was unblemished and the flesh still firm, which showed that underneath the skin there was no rotting. After a short but heated discussion the men came to the conclusion that the indentation showed that the yam's *komunyan* must have once left the tuber and wandered through the bush where it was hit und hurt, but not killed, by a hunter's spear; had it been killed, the tuber would have rotted in the ground. And, in actual fact, the men recollected that a few weeks before a man had indeed returned from a hunt and reported that he had encountered a large boar in the bush. He told that he had been able to spear the animal but that, in the end, it had escaped. In another case, the men found that a yam tuber had bifurcated at the lower end. The explanation given was that when the wife had one day brought food to her husband in the garden she must have glanced at the yam mound, startling the tuber and causing it to take on a form that classified it as female.

These and similar phenomena are the subject of many discussions when the tubers are publicly displayed on the *amei* after harvesting; the most ardent critics are the men from other villages, who closely inspect the yams and often develop their own theories as to the often bizarre shapes of the tubers' side shoots (**pl. 50**). In these discourses, ancestral lore and the rules laid down by various spirit beings find concrete expression through the tubers' appearance while, at the same time, the mighty yams confirm the efficacy of the power of these spirit beings.

Wapi Yam Feasts

In the Maprik area the harvest time for *wapi* yam varies from district to district, depending on the differing planting schedule. Prolific yam displays are staged between April and September, at the latest October, with the feasts first commencing in the western parts of the area, the last ones finishing in the east, so that one has an actual wave of feasts rolling over the entire area from west to east. The Abelam are well aware of this pattern, or rhythm, and often refer to it when asked by outsiders why such and such a village had not yet organized a feast. There might be exceptions to this pattern, but I at least never came across such a case. How this west-to-east time lag originally developed, I was unable to ascertain.

In principle there are separate ceremonies for the various kinds of ceremonial yam. The first feast focuses on the kind called *mambutap*, which takes six months to mature. Roughly two months later, the next feast is organized, this

time celebrating the species *undinggil* and *kitpi* (and others), which need eight months to grow. Both ceremonies basically go on for two days. On the first day, the tubers are carried onto the *amei* and publicly displayed; on the second day, the actual exchange with the *sambera* takes place. In one and the same village the different types of yam tubers are always displayed in the same fashion, but the mode varies from district to district: the north-western Abelam of the Mamblep area lay out their decorated yams on banana leaves on the ground, while the central northern Abelam attach them to long poles and display them in a slanting position. This is said to be a new mode of presentation – traditionally they were always laid out on banana leaves – taken over from their Arapesh neighbours. In turn, the eastern Abelam display their yams in an upright position, leaning them against a specially constructed frame.

The basic difference between the *mambutap* and the *undinggil* / *kitpi* ceremonies respectively lies in the presentation of distinct songs; the north-western Abelam also decorate the various yam types differently. In the central northern Abelam area, which I am more familiar with, the men do not apply different types of adornment to different types of yam, but select the decorations according to length and girth of the tubers.

At *mambutap* yam presentations, the display of the tubers is followed by *bire* songs and dances in the evening, performed by men, women and children together. In case of an exceptionally rich crop, or if many of the tubers have attained an extraordinary length, the men perform *kanggu* songs and dances, from which women and children are excluded. As far as *undinggil* and *kitpi* are concerned, festivities commence days before the actual public display with a series of dances and songs called *wanyen* in which women and children are allowed to participate. In *wanyen* performances, the chorus consists of three men, each equipped with a short piece of bamboo into which he blows like on a trumpet. In addition, one of the men holds an hourglass drum. After an introductory piece which is sung, the three men, blowing on their bamboos, commence a wild dance across the *amei* that lies in the dark, storming towards the women and children, who are dancing in pairs, causing them to disperse in panic lest they be overrun by the men. The last *wanyen* dance is staged in the night before the yam display the next day. *Kanggu* and *wanyen* feasts end with a *bire* a few days later, the same as after an inauguration feast for a new ceremonial house (for more on the music, see Hauser-Schäublin and Haase 1986).

The round stone at the centre of the *amei* is usually removed for the yam display, just as it is for the brisk *wanyen* dances that take up the entire space of the ground. When *bire* songs and dances are scheduled, the *bapmutagwa* stone is left in position and a slim little tree called *sipmu* is planted in the ground next to it. This is the spot where the men commence with a *bire* song before circling the stone and tree in quick steps, interspersed with several changes of direction. The women dance in an outer circle, always moving counterclockwise. As regards the meaning of the little tree, I was unable to gather any reliable information. I once saw a similar tree on a ceremonial ground during an initiation in Waignakim, but it did not serve as a focal point for dancing. All the people could tell me was that it acted as a kind of peace symbol admonishing the people on the *amei* to behave and keep the peace, similar to the yellow *yol* leaves which elders hold up between quarrelling parties when disputes threaten to erupt into violence.[163] Long before the display is scheduled, often weeks before, after the men have assessed the yams in their gardens and seen that they will soon have attained an appropriate size, the slit gongs are sounded, inviting the neighbouring villages to the upcoming feast. One of the main tasks in preparation for a feast is to procure sufficient pigs. For this the men have to search the area, or rather, the neighbouring villages for suitable pigs, which is not only time consuming, but also costly. They do not set out on their quest before they are convinced that their yam tubers will hold up to the scrutiny of the many guests during the feast. Purchasing the pigs is a task that is carried out by the *ara*,

[163] During the last yam feast I witnessed in Kalabu in 1983, some drunk men returning from a party at the nearby village 'club' (a village shop that sells beer) after midnight interfered with the men singing and dancing *bire* on the ceremonial ground which soon lead to a brawl. Before becoming really serious, a number of vigorous elders intervened, which stopped the fighting. The court case that followed a few days later ruled that the intoxicated intruders were to give a pig to the men and women who had been performing *bire* for defying the ceremonial peace symbolized by the little tree planted next to the moon stone.

the ritual moieties. Later the two sides will exchange the pigs, together with the yam. In case of a modest, or at least mediocre, harvest, the exchange of pigs and yams is restricted to the two village moieties, but if the men expect an abundant crop the exchange may well involve a full-scale contest between two entire villages, during which the two settlements try to surpass each other in terms of size and number of pigs and ceremonial yams. "We used to fight with spears, today we fight with pigs and yams," was the way one man put it. However, ritual exchange partnerships have by no means only developed as a substitute since the cessation of warfare.[164] Ritual moieties are an age-old institution and do not fit the traditional relations of amity and enmity. This does not mean that *ara* relationships are free of aggression. On the contrary, exchange feasts are always charged with an air of aggressiveness and an emotional set-up that is associated with fighting, not least because of the aim of the event, namely the exchange partners to outdo each other with more and larger gifts, thereby gaining prestige and piling shame on the other (**pl. 79**).

The purchase of pigs, in most cases outside one's own village,[165] triggers off an extensive circulation of shell valuables in the area. Men are often left 'penniless' after such a feast, especially nowadays when pigs have to be paid for by cash (and not 'only' with shell rings as in earlier days). In their search for suitable pigs the men often travel the area for weeks on end until they are able to strike a deal in some village. Each purchase is rung off on the slit gong; the gong signal is that of the *nggwal* in whose name the pig was bought. This is attentively followed in all the neighbouring villages, since the number of pigs purchased says something about the size of the upcoming feast. The women's task in this phase is to procure sufficiently large amounts of firewood, greens, coconuts, drinking water as well as pots and dishes, and organize enough female helpers for the event. Men and women collect large stocks of tobacco, betel nuts and secondary crops such as taro and yam to provide for the many guests expected. A yam feast without the free distribution of betel nut, tobacco and cooked food is beyond imagination, and even if the treasured betel nuts happen to be scarce in the area at the time, the people always find means and ways of obtaining a sufficient stock to keep their guests satisfied and save their reputation as hosts.

The day of a ceremony is usually scheduled according to the phase of the moon. Most of the feasts we attended were held during full moon. Next to the fact that the full moon features prominently in many magical spells and is invoked in connection with the growth of yam, the choice of schedule also has quite practical reasons. Since many of the songs and dances are performed at night, attracting many visitors from neighbouring villages, full moon nights are ideal because it means that the *amei* does not have to be artificially lit up with the help of torches or Coleman lamps.

In the days leading up to the actual feast, the yam tubers are decorated. This is usually done individually by the lineages. For this task the men prepare the necessary number of feathers, leaves, flowers and shells and sit down to freshen up the plaited or wooden yam masks with a new lair of paint (**pl. 80**). The work of decorating the yams is normally performed in a secluded area, since the men do not want others, especially their exchange partners, to learn anything about the tubers' size, quality or special attributes before the moment of public display on the *amei*. Of course, fantastic rumours about the length and girth of the various yams begin to circulate as soon as they are dug up in the garden, but nobody knows anything for sure. Shortly before the feast, 'pitpit' stalks are deposited on the ceremonial ground. At the top end they are decorated with a vine ornament in a cross-hair pattern, similar to the designs found on ceremonial houses. They indicate the length of the yams to be displayed shortly.[166] A man usually keeps record of the length and girth of the largest yam specimens, even after giving them away to his *sambera*, so that he is able to compare them with the yams he receives in return at the next yam exchange. Occasionally length and circumference of yams are recorded with the aid of small white stones, *ulma*, which are pressed into the ground of the *amei*, following the tuber's contours. The element of surprise is

[164] For this also see Tuzin (1972: 232-233).

[165] It is forbidden to eat the meat of a pig that has been raised by oneself or a close relative. Since meat is distributed in many small pieces during yam ceremonies it is often difficult to ascertain its origin. In order to avoid this, pigs are purchased in other villages.

[166] I sometimes had the impression that these markers exceeded the length of the tubers, but I never actually measured them.

retained until the men carry the decorated yams onto ceremonial ground on the appointed day behind a vanguard of men beating on hourglass drums.

The affection and diligence with which the men dig out their yams, attach them to poles and finally decorate them was always something that greatly impressed me. Among the central northern Abelam, the largest yam is distinguished by a triangular *wagnen* headdress, tubers of intermediate size by a round *noute* disc. Each tuber selected for display is given a name; failed specimens, on the other hand – usually because they are too short – the planter digs out when he is alone, hiding them from the inquisitive eyes of strangers. A *wagnen*-adorned yam normally receives the name of a *nggwalndu*, specimens decorated with a *noute*, the name of a lesser spirit being (for example, a *wapinyan*) or that of a recent ancestor (that is, one who still figures in the genealogy). Often a man dreams of his yam, which appears to him in the shape of an animal and tells him its name which he then bestows on the tuber as soon as it is dug from the ground. Often these are names of *wale* or celestial bodies such as Bapmu (moon) or Sirendshui (Morning Star). Name bestowal constitutes the last step in the yam's inspiritment, which started with various collective and individual ritual acts shortly after planting. The notion of growth and maturing also finds expression in the tuber's decoration which corresponds to that of the ritual dancers during initiation ceremonies.

Yam displays including ritual exchanges between moieties, or, on an even grander scale, between entire villages, are always associated with pride, aggressiveness and the aspect of challenge. But despite heated discussions on the *amei* triggered by the exchanges, armed confrontations with spears are a no-go. In the past, yam feasts occasionally gave rise to armed conflict, but never during the occasion itself, only afterwards. Feasts and ceremonies are considered as periods of truce, warranted by the exchange of temporary representatives (*kurkya*) between villages involved in a ritual yam and pig exchange (*mbalwapi*). Following a ritual exchange between the two Kalabu hamlets Yambusaki and Ndunyinggi, a woman was raped, which led to a pay-back killing after which the village threatened to break apart. In ritual exchanges involving separate villages, the antagonistic element is even more pronounced. This becomes manifest already at the outset of the event, when the hosts, brandishing spears, ritually greet the visitors, who, in turn, are likely to be carrying wild taro stems, which they beat on the ground, and backing their determination with threatening gestures. Ritual contests between villages always involve the exchange of live pigs, whereas village-internal events only include gifts of pieces of meat which are offered to the *sambera*; in the latter case the individual relationship between two ritual partners is emphasized, while village exchanges underline the aspect of collective action. This is also reflected in the number and size of the yams and pigs presented as well as in the amount of cooked food that is prepared by the women.

Lonem is a neighbouring Arapesh village on amicable relations with practically all the hamlets of Kalabu. It regularly invites the people of Kalabu to its yam own feasts (I visited three of these between 1979 and 1983) and gives them yam and pieces of pork. In fact, this prestation follows more the village-internal pattern of exchange. In 1983 the Arapesh hosts had prepared so much food that the men of Kalabu refused to accept the invitation to the feast. Since Kalabu and Lonem did not stand in a *mbalwapi* exchange relationship with each other, and because the food that the people of Lonem had prepared was classified as a true gift, that is, without the duty of reciprocation, the Kalabu men were ashamed to attend. "We always only take from the Lonem," they said, "without ever thinking about returning [the gift], and that is bad." When, in spite of their absence, the Lonem put aside for them a number of ceremonial yams, the Kalabu men sent a message to tell them that they would not accept the gift. However, this kind of relationship between villages is probably quite unique in the area, and can only be explained through longstanding historical relationships and the fact that we are dealing with a cross-language relationship; during yam feasts in Arapesh-speaking Lonem the lingua franca is Abelam. Otherwise the exchange pattern between villages is quite different and marked by challenge and contest, as the following case goes to show.

The Kuimbe hamlet of Kuminimbis stands in a *mbalwapi* relationship with Nyelikim.

When, during a yam feast in Kuimbe, the local men carried their ceremonial yams attached to poles onto the *amei*, they were greeted by their *sambera* (i.e. their ritual exchange partners from their own village) and their *waune* (i.e. the exchange partners from Nyelikim) with spears, with the men clutching boar tusk pendants between their teeth, in other words, in the ritually aggressive manner typical for village exchange contests. As soon as the Kuimbe men had deposited their yams in a straight row they struck up a song called *wapi ndei yagren*, with the intention of provoking their exchange partners from Nyelikim. The song went as follows:

In the hamlet of Kulungge Yanggusaku I have erected a stockade; all we can do is to pity you. All you enemies, now you have come, so now we'll show you our yams! Are you afraid, or not? You'll never be able to tear down this stockade, to break through the line of our men. You'll see the yams, and if you're really brave you'll carry the tubers back to your village and accept our challenge.

The *nggwal* Kambanggile has held this yam in his hands, now the yam has itself become Kambanggile. There are not many men who are able to grow yam of the kind like Kambanggile. But I, a man of Kuimbe, I found Kambanggile although Kambanggile was hiding away.[167]

Many men can try to do the same thing, but most of them will fail. This man Kambanggile, he is now in Kuimbe; he appeared among us; many people can now spread lime on his skin (as a mark of distinction); so be it!

In Kuimbe, Kambanggile created an image of himself, now he is on the *amei*. You men and women, you are looking at the image of Kambanggile. He is taller than coconut and betel palms, and he's very fat, this Kambanggile. Which enemy will try to outdo him in size?

Many men have come to see the feast. I am a man[168] who eats a lot of meat; now I am in Kuimbe; I'm eating a lot of meat (reference to the many pigs that the men of Kuimbe have sacrificed in the name of Kambanggile on the present occasion.)

Now I have appeared in Kuimbe! The men from other villages now have to spread lime on my skin.

You men of Maindshe (reference to the central Maprik region), you must do without the taste of pork and coconuts, but not I! I am a Wosera man.[169]

You Maindshe men, you can only envy me, the way I have appeared in Kuimbe.

You from Maindshe, all you can do is to get excited about chicken feathers (adornment used to decorate lesser valued, smaller yams), but I, I'll cause envy in you when I wear these bird of paradise feathers on my head (adornment for large yam).

The song continues with an imputed answer by the men of Nyelikim:

You are a man of *undinggil* and *mambutap*, so be it; when I try to hold (grow) him (the yam) I fail. That's why I stand aside and only watch. Yam does not grow in the hands of a bad man. That's why the yam does not like me. But you, men of Kuimbe, you he likes.

Your hands (meaning the hands of the Kuimbe men) have the ability to grow yam. My hand is too cold[170] which is why I'll never harvest yam. Your hands are the right ones. I am only a beginner, not up to it (growing yam). That's why I have come to admire the yam of the Kuimbe men.

We cannot find the yam when we dig for it; we don't know where it is hiding. Only the man who follows the rules is able to find it. Where is the yam hiding? I want to see (find) it! I followed its trail. This yam has gone to hide in Kuimbe. That's why I have come.

This yam is like fragrant leaves. Many men followed its scent.[171] I look at the yam and return to my village. You can keep the yam in Kuimbe. Many other men too (like me) have just come to see the yam.

The Kuimbe men answer, now again for themselves:

Why don't you want to accept these things (the yam and the pork, actually meaning: why do you decline the challenge). I give them to you, and you must eat them. If you decline, you are showing bad manners. It is because you would like to eat of these foods that I give them to you. You should eat and be happy.

The voice of Kambanggile:

You must bring along the leg of a pig (as sacrifice) if you wish to see the secret.[172] If you do not bring

167 In other words, he was only 'found' because the yam growers had observed the imposed rules.

168 The singers are impersonating Kambanggile, which is why they are using the 'I' form.

169 The Wosera have the reputation of being avid 'pork eaters'; Kambanggile is comparing himself to them.

170 Meaning, they lack the 'heat' needed to perform rituals.

171 The scent of fragrant leaves is a metaphor describing the shortly expected 'arrival' of ceremonial yam, but also the apparition of a *nggwal*.

172 Meaning the yam stone.

a leg of pig I will hide my shame (literally, vulva meant as metaphor for the yam stone) and you'll not be allowed to see it. Then it will remain locked in my house. But if you bring the leg of a pig, then you can look at it and take me. I am in this house.

The voice of the Nyelikim men:

I'm a man from Maindshe; I'm not capable of finding such a yam. Only the men of Kuimbe can harvest long yam. But I, a man from Maindshe, I can't. I tried this year, in vain. We've come to see the yam of Kuimbe.

The Kuimbe men end the song with some metaphors suggesting the Maindshe men's futile attempt to grow long yam:

This bird, *wama* (white cockatoo; possibly a *dshambu* bird of Nyelikim; there is no reference to it in Scaglion [1976]) is looking for the (edible) seeds of the breadfruit tree, but can't find any. It only finds the husks, but it is looking for the seeds. Where can they be?

It has lit a small fire with very little firewood. What do you plan to cook on this fire? It's not enough, it'll soon go out. You must try to make a big fire, then you can cook on it whatever you like. But it doesn't work on a small fire."[173]

Following the provocative song, which played on the embarrassing notion that the receivers, in other words, the Nyelikim men, would not be capable of reciprocating the gift of pigs and yam in equal amount and quality, the yam was exchanged on the next day.[174] The Kuimbe men carried the tubers as far as the boundary between Kuminimbis and Nyelikim. To complement the rather ambivalent gift of yam, the Kuimbe men had added a number of live pigs, which were tied to long poles. In order to be able to memorize the extent of a gift, the parties, donors as well as receivers, keep record of the size of the pigs and yams with the aid of special gauges called *yigel* (for yam) and *seneral* (for pigs) respectively. The length of a tuber is measured with a 'pitpit' stalk to which three vine rings are attached indicating the girth at the tuber's 'chest', 'belly' and 'legs'.[175] Similar rings are used to gauge the neck and belly of pigs.

What really roused emotion on the part of the receivers was the fact that, in the opening song, the Kuimbe men had put their words into the mouths of their Nyelikim rivals, making them say that they were not up to growing ceremonial yam. Apart from the aspect of social rivalry, only of marginal interest to the present discussion, the song, especially the verses 'sung by' Kuimbe's *nggwal* Kambanggile, contains an important reference, namely that there would be no yam without *nggwal* or, even more to the point, that the *nggwal* is actually embodied in the yam tuber ("Kambanggile … is now in Kuimbe; he appeared among us"). Kambanggile goes on to praise the men of Kuimbe, who sacrificed many pigs in his name in their attempt to contact him and receive his help. In one of the next verses we are given information on the relationship between the yam stone and *nggwal*: Kambanggile refers to the stone as his vulva,[176] accessible only to those who offer a whole leg of a pig (not merely little pieces of pork). The metaphor discloses that the yam stone is the most secret and best-guarded 'part' of the *nggwal*.

Songs like the one in Kuminimbis are performed exclusively by men; there is no such thing as a women's chorus. They are considered as typical male songs of challenge, similar to the ones called *maku*, which are performed during a roofing ceremony for a new *korambo* (see p. 62).

Yam ceremonies differ in detail from region to region as far as procedure is concerned, in some cases even from village to village. On the opening day of a yam feast in Lonem[177] the hosts first 'greeted' their visitors in a way that was similar to the event in Kuminimbis – maybe with

[173] In other words, they are not capable of generating sufficient ritual heat, a prerequisite for attracting a *nggwal* and growing ceremonial yam.

[174] Since Nyelikim lies to the east of Kuminimbis, their yam feast was still pending. The Kuimbe gave the yam and a pig to the men of Nyelikim on 7 April 1979; the latter reciprocated the gift on 27 April 1979, presenting the Kuimbe men with long yam and two pigs.

[175] The same was done with men who were exchanged between two warring villages after a peace agreement; their measurements had to be equivalent.

[176] Although yam stones are phallic in shape, the men revert to a vulva metaphor. In the love affairs so often described in Abelam songs – brief affairs often develop during mortuary feasts, the nightly singsings after a yam display or even at initiations – viewing a woman's genitals is a special act, equally significant (or even more important) than the act of intercourse itself; this even though the Abelam went naked in pre-colonial times. It underlines the importance of the element of visual experience.

[177] I visited yam feasts in Lonem in 1979 and 1980.

a little less aggression. Later in the afternoon the men carried their yam tubers tied to poles from their hamlets to the edge of the *amei*, which was enclosed by a fence; here they gathered in a group. On the *amei* they were being awaited by their wives, sisters and daughters. The women were dressed in tiny fibre skirts with a piece of white tapa cloth at the back. Around the neck they wore layers of necklaces made of mollusc shell discs, on their breasts a large white shell ring. Their strings bags were filled with *bande* shells. Their faces were painted and each cheek was marked with a black triangle encircled by small white dots. The triangle is referred to as *kitnya* which means vulva. On their heads they carried white tapa cloths, others wore strips of white, rasped tree bark which looked like fluffy foam caps; in their hands they each held a woman's spear, *sowam*. In everyday life these spears are used by old women as walking sticks on slippery terrain.

As soon as some elders standing outside the fence struck up a song as a sign for the men to carry the yams onto the ceremonial ground, the women started dancing in pairs. Quite a few elder women whose husbands had contributed a pig to the event were carrying either a banana or wild taro leaf in their hands. The banana leaf signified that the husband had purchased a village-owned pig, the taro leaf that it came from a foreign village. These visuals not only serve the purpose of identifying the donors, but also of communicating to visitors and exchange partners, which pigs they might have to avoid when accepting pieces of meat due to the food taboos (especially consuming meat of a pig from one's own village).

Then the old men who also ranked as experienced yam-growers stormed onto the *amei* singing, and beating their hourglass drums. The song is usually of the *nggwal-bire* type to which the women's chorus sings in response. The women, who were dressed like young girls after first menstruation, danced until the young men following the yam growers had carried all the tubers onto the ceremonial ground. There they were placed on a scaffold that is usually protected by a little roof. The entry of the marvellously decorated yams is always attentively watched by the visitors from other villages and by the women and children. As soon as the tubers are put in place, the hosts serve up copious quantities of food, betel nut and tobacco. All the leftovers are collected and placed next to the *kumbumaak* stone beside the ceremonial house, or next to the small, bizarrely shaped stones in front of the yam storage houses. The men always spit their red betel juice in the direction of the stones, provided these are in spitting distance. The refuse, especially the betel branches and peels and the coconut husks, are described as '*nggwal*'s rubbish'. At large yam feasts the stones are decorated with red flowers and short spears tipped with orange-coloured *ban* fruits. These adornments are also attributes of the yam growers who organize the feast.

In 1983, Lonem staged a yam feast that boasted exceptionally long yams (**pl. 81**) and for which *kanggu* songs were performed in the evening. When the tubers were carried onto the ceremonial ground, the women were dancing in full ceremonial regalia. The first piece that was struck up was a *kanggu* song, which has no female chorus;[178] all one heard at each step was the rattling of the shells in the women's string bags.

When the tubers have been placed in position – this goes for all types of yam feasts – the visitors inspect the single tubers in their mask, feather, shell and flower decorations (**pl. 50, 51, 80**); the men do this in groups. The most impressive or beautiful specimens are tagged with lime as a mark of distinction, upon which the hosts sound a roll on the slit gong to which the jurors respond with a loud 'uh-eh' as a sign of joy and appreciation. The assessment is often followed by a series of speeches during which the visitors are provided with food, betel nuts and tobacco.

When night falls the tubers are removed from the *amei* and stored in nearby houses, lest they be damaged during the nightly dancing. At the above-mentioned *mambutap* feast in Lonem in 1983, the women retired from the ceremonial ground as soon as the tubers had been put on display, and did not return. When the *kanggu* songs were struck up in the evening, the *amei* was entirely in the hands of men, but there was no secret action of any kind. In fact, the night songs differed only slightly as far as content is concerned from the songs in which the women join in. Most of them were about

[178] Later, some of the elders criticized this, stating that the first song should always be a *bire* so that the women could participate too.

love affairs or deeds of war. In *kanggu* dances the men face each other in two rows, moving back and forth in 'waves' while singing and beating on their hourglass drums. During this specific event the women were busy preparing food nearby and although they were not party to the dancing and singing, they were listening intently.

After this brief reference to the *kanggu* night songs, I return to the *nggwal kanggu*, which the men sang while the yam was being carried onto the ceremonial ground, for it contains references that point to the core of the yam complex. The song was sung by the bigmen Wurenowi of Lonem and Kwandshendu of Kalabu and went as follows:

This woman has adorned herself and is rejoicing,
she is in Suibo and Babangge.
This woman who belongs to me rejoices at her work,
she is extremely pleased.
This young woman has passed her menarche.
This woman in Wutambal is grown up.

The song which, at first sight, deals with secular matters carries in fact a deeper meaning; the key words are the two names Suibo and Bagangge. They refer to hamlets in Bainyik, where the yam stones are kept which have far more than only local significance and to which Wurenowi and Kwandshendu have close contact. The woman who has adorned herself and is pleased with her creation is a metaphor for the decorated yam stone that comes to inspect the ceremonial yam (= its creation) with pride.

The saying 'she has passed her menarche' is a figure of speech Abelam men use to describe a beautiful and desirable young woman. In this case the trope refers both to the yam stone in Bainyik and the ceremonial yam in Lonem (displayed on the *amei* of Wutambal). The first *kanggu* song with which the nocturnal feasting was opened in the late afternoon also dealt with yam (not in direct reference to the yam feast in Lonem, but in a more generic sense) and its otherworldly origin.

The *nggwal* and hamlets featuring in the song below disclose that the lead singer, a man called Kandapa (Nyinde-Kundigim clan) is from Kalabu. The song (*nggwal kanggu*) is dedicated to the *nggwal* Imagwate of Kaumbul. It goes as follows:

You beat the slit gong and summon me.
This bird *wama* in Malpenamu,[179] it calls for him with the slit gong.
I slept next to you until morning broke and the *buka* bird began to sing.
Now it is light which is why I must go home
Katoumu (Malmba) looks like the feather coat of a cassowary. He caught the cassowary by its feathers and turned it on its back; he plucks its feathers.
You think nothing of this village and wish to fight me.

He went to the top of Borenggi mountain (Barengga).[180]
He pulled out the bird of paradise decoration belonging to a woman and distributed it among the men.
The enemy (*waune*, here female) thinks of him, cuts wild taro leaves and blocks the path with them.
She sits down and waits to see what happens.

I create *wuti* and *yina* and climb down to the Ulagem stream.
You *kwandshe* flying fox, you were with this man who went to Gambagiti (Malmba).
The man went away, only the woman stayed behind in Gambagiti. This woman is mine. It is with her that I sing *wanyen* and *sakimba*.[181]

This woman has passed her menarche. This young woman (*naramtagwa*) of Kaumbul receives much lime on her skin, which pleases her.
Imagwate now wishes to make string bags (*wut*).
The bird *wama* takes from Imagwate the fragrant leaves and adorns itself with them. Shining, it appears in Kaumbul.

The *kumbui* and *kwandshe* flying foxes fly away and go to pick the fruit of the *wani* tree.
In Saigetibli and Bananggwa [locations on the Pasi River] stands this tree where the flying foxes have settled.
He comes and goes, and everyone is pleased in Saigetibli and Bananggwa where this tree stands and the flying foxes eat the fruit. And he come and goes.

I prepare a secret work (*maira*); you may come and try to see it. If you come too close I will not be able to create *wuti* and *yina*.
You must remain at a distance, and then *wuti* and *yina* will please you.

[179] Hamlet near Wapinda.
[180] Allies of Kalabu.
[181] Both are songs for *wapi* and *ka*.

I carve *wuti* and *yina*. But you, *kwandshe* flying fox, you should not try to catch a glimpse of them. Because if you see them, they will fail.
If you go back and tell many men about this
I will be unable to create them.
This place Saigetibli and Bananggwa belongs to me.
There I create *wuti* and *yina*. Only there is my home.
Imagwate, where are you going, where do you come from?
It is I, Imagwate, who is at home in Ulagem and who creates many *wuti* and *yina*.
I enter Kaumbul.
You are my good child, but you are not decorated.
Stand up, so that we can go to Kaumbul and Wapinda together!

Commentary
This *nggwal-kanggu* song traces the relationship between *nggwal*, *dshambu* ('totemic' clan bird), *wale* (here in the shape of pools), *wai* and yam. As matters are rather complicated I shall go through the song, verse by verse.

The first section describes how the yam grower in the shape of the *wama* bird, the totemic emblem of Kalabu II in general, and of the Magnapate clan specifically, contacts Imagwate, his *nggwal*, namely by beating the slit gong. At night (that is, in a dream) the two meet. With regard to the second verse, my translator interpreted the cassowary's feathers that Imagwate plucks as a metaphor for the ceremonial yam he harvests. In my view the trope more likely refers to an act of war, specifically to a fight between Kalabu and Malmba, actually the same event that the bigman Dshambosa of Malmba refers to in his speech during the death watch for Samtagwa (see p. 90). Not only are the *amei* identical (Katoumu), the metaphor is also the same (a cassowary that is caught and has its feathers plucked). The defeat of Malmba, depicted as the conquest of a man over a woman who, after defeat, and despite deep-rooted contempt (symbolized by the cutting of wild taro leaves), is unable to offer resistance. The (female) *kwandshe* flying fox stands for a man from Malmba who is sent to Kalabu in connection with the peace agreement between the two villages, often pledged by an exchange of men; each of them then settles down in the former enemy village, marries and has children there. But in Kalabu, Imagwate is preparing for a next raid (symbolized by *wuti* and *yina*). There follows a metaphor which my translator Waina again associated with yam (and for which I too have no other explanation): word is of the young woman who has passed her menarche. This is a reference to the yam stone that becomes embodied in the ceremonial yam, revealing itself to the men during display on the *amei* where it is admired and honoured by being daubed with lime. Here again, Imagwate appears to be identical with the 'young woman'. Imagwate also prepares a secret for the benefit of the men growing yam; this is signified by the metaphor *wut* which, otherwise, is often used in reference to initiations. It indicates that the two complexes, initiations and yam cult, are intricately connected with each other.

The *wama* bird, the totem of the *amei* of Kaumbul and Wapinda (that is, of Kalabu II), alludes to the men who are responsible for the yam stone and who now are excited about their success, meaning, their crop of ceremonial yam. In my assistant's opinion, the whole of the second part of the song is to be seen in connection with the yam cult: the *kumbui* and *kwandshe* flying foxes are the yam growers who gather around the stone house like flying foxes hovering around a *wani* tree. Only one of the men, who identifies with Imagwate, is allowed to enter the house to decorate the yam stone. This he can only do 'correctly' ('correctly' in terms of success at growing paraphrased here by the terms *wuti* and *yina*, which convey the notion of power) if the other men stay away and do not disturb him. Saigetibli and Bananggwa are *wale* locations on the Ulagem stream, at the same time the abode of Imagwate, the creator of ceremonial yam. From here Imagwate summons 'his good child', meaning the yam grower, to stage a yam feast together with him.

From an overall perspective, the song indicates, for one, how the Abelam interpret their relationship to the *nggwal*, their spirit abodes, the yam stone and yam. With its allusion to a crushing defeat of the enemy, this song differs from the one in Kuminimbis, where the enemy was merely branded as not being capable of raising ceremonial yam.

The actual yam exchange is staged the day after the *kanggu* and *bire* performances. In detail, the procedure of exchange varies from village to village, as does the grand entry of the decorated tubers on the *amei*. Lonem, for example, was the only village where dancing women dressed as *naramtagwa* approached the

men carrying the yams. In Kalabu, the tubers were displayed on the day after the dances and songs had been performed. Moreover, the tubers were brought to the ceremonial ground and prepared for presentation in the absence of onlookers. It was only after they had been carefully placed on the frame, and after many changes to the order of presentation, that the villagers and the numerous visitors from neighbouring settlements were summoned by a roll on the slit gong. It was only in 1983, on the occasion of two yam feasts, one in Kimbanggwa, the other in Kalabu (and after witnessing at least twenty such events) that I began to grasp the exact mode of procedure in ritual exchange. In both cases the transaction was executed on the second day of the feast, after long hours of intensive discussion. In Kimbanggwa, the issue of the talks concerned the realignment of the ritual moieties, made necessary by the circumstance that the two *ara* had grown out of balance with respect both to numbers and prominent members. After the matter had been settled, the members of the one moiety lifted one tuber after the next from the frame, showing them to the assembled audience. Then the name of a man from the opposite moiety was called. The addressed man confirmed his presence, rose and went to stand beside 'his' yam. This procedure was repeated until all the yams belonging to one moiety had been allocated to the chosen recipients of the other *ara*. Then the tubers were returned to the frame. Approximately half an hour later, the procedure was repeated with reversed roles, that is, this time the *ara* that had previously received yams gave its own decorated tubers to the members of the opposite moiety, again one after the next, and returning the tubers to the frame after the transfer. Incidentally, the decorated tubers on the frame were not arranged by moiety, but according to size. It was only after dark, when the feast was over, that the men were allowed to collect their 'gift' and take it home.

As mentioned in a different context earlier on (see p. 105), the Abelam deem it not only appropriate, but actually necessary to organize a yam feast to celebrate a new ceremonial house. Thus, for example, yam displays were staged in 1979 and again in 1980 for the Kaumbul *korambo* in Kalabu which was built in 1978, but without topping them with an actual exchange contest. This certainly had to do with the fact that in both years the yam crops were not more than mediocre. On top of that, comparatively few men had planted long yam, which is why a single yam feast covering all types of *wapi* yams was organized, and not a separate feast for *mambutap* and one for all the other types, as is usually the case. The display was not only meant as a tribute to the new ceremonial house as such, the men also felt compelled to stage the event in order not to lose face, since they had pledged to do so in many public discussions earlier on.

In 1983, the situation was quite a different one. The year before a man called Kamboiragwa had harvested a giant *mambutap* yam, measuring nearly three metres in length. With the intention of giving it to his exchange partner he purchased an equally large pig in one of the neighbouring villages and then presented his partner with the two gifts on the *amei* of Wapinda. Since nobody had harvested such a large tuber for many years, the transaction caused unrest among the members of the receiving *ara*. The following year (1983), the *numanara* (elder) moiety tried to overtrump the *waignara* (younger) moiety (to which Kamboiragwa belonged) by reciprocating with a prestation consisting of a multitude of semi-long *wapi* of different kinds and a so-called *ka kwei*, a cone-shaped mound of *ka* tubers. The event which was hosted by the *numunara* was again held on the *amei* of Wapinda. It was not an exchange in the direct sense of the term, as the *waignara* moiety had only come as a 'receiving' party, with no yams to give back. Before the tubers changed hands, the men discussed the issue of earlier exchanges between the two moieties. The actual transaction proceeded much in the same way as it had done before in Kimbanggwa: first, the largest specimen was taken down from the frame by the man who had grown it with one of his assistants and given to his *sambera* in the opposite moiety, followed by all the other tubers arranged according to size. After the last specimen had been handed over, all the tubers were placed back on the frame. This specific feast is a good example to show that it is possible for a moiety, given clever reasoning, to reject a presented gift: in this case the *waignara* refused to accept the round pile of short *wapi*, *ka* and *mai* tubers that their ritual partners had prepared if the latter were not ready to complement the gift

with a pig sacrifice. In fact, the *numunara* had selected a pig for the *wapi* feast, but since the sacrifice was also meant to serve the purpose of settling a moiety-internal conflict – during a quarrel with her husband, a member of the *numunara* moiety, the woman owner of the pig had served her husband her own excrement for a meal – the *waignara* refused to accept the gift, since it was tainted. The men went even a step further and demanded from the *numunara* that they sacrifice an additional pig for the long yams displayed on the frame, maintaining that, otherwise, they would feel compelled to return the long tubers to their owners in the days and weeks to come. Towards late afternoon, the meat of the contested pig and the tubers from the *ka kwei* were distributed among the feast visitors, without further mention of any obligation to reciprocate. By this means, the *numunara* showed that they accepted the criticism and agreed that the pig sacrifice only qualified to settle the conflict within their own ranks.[182]

Ka Yam Feasts

Among the central northern and eastern Abelam normally separate ceremonies are held for *wapi* and *ka* respectively.[183] The main reason for this is that *wapi* is planted several months before *ka*, which means that the latter is harvested some months later (in addition, *ka* takes longer to mature). Nevertheless, occasionally *ka* and *wapi* feasts are held jointly, as we witnessed in Ulupu and Yenigo, while Malmba and Naram put on lavish feasts that focussed exclusively on *ka* tubers. Short yams are not displayed on poles as the *wapi* tubers are, but mostly in cone-shaped heaps arranged on the ceremonial ground instead (**pl. 51**). The core of the mound is formed by short *wapi* of the types *laindshe*, *uramashe*, *sibeputi*, *ulelaindshe* or *gumbuli* (and many other types that are classified as *wapi* but tend to be short in size and often develop hand-shaped shoots).[184] They are attached to a vertical pole positioned at the centre of the mound and are completely covered by *ka* tubers built up around them. The *wapi* yam at the core is described as the *ka*'s 'bone' or 'spine'. Then the men place a circle of ripe coconuts around the mound and decorate the pole at the centre with betel branches, bundles of tobacco leaves and, sometimes, an additional *wapi* yam (nowadays occasionally even a six-pack of beer). The *ka* heap is further adorned with red *mauwe* flowers, feathers and the odd yam mask. The largest *ka* specimens are presented in a separate display, leaning next to the each other against a small fence that is specially constructed for the purpose at the edge of the *amei*. They are decorated in a similar fashion as the *wapi* yam, but less elaborately.

During a *ka* feast it is not unusual to see up to twenty such mounds on the ceremonial ground, each one 'owned' by a specific individual. Usually the owner has not grown all the tubers himself, instead he relies on a number of helpers, mostly men of his own clan, sometimes an affine from a different clan, but certainly from the same ritual moiety.

Actually, a man can only feed surplus crops into the ritual display and exchange system, that is, only the tubers – this goes for both *ka* and *wapi* yams – which he does not rely on for household consumption. Although this ritual exchange is based on the principle of reciprocity, it is a system of delayed exchange which means that the gift receiver does not reciprocate immediately, but at some later stage, sometimes even only years after the initial gift was made.

At the *ka* feast in Malmba, one of the participants was a woman, which is unusual. Her mound on the ceremonial ground consisted of a cylindrical pile of taro interspersed with *ka* yam. It was meant for the wife of the husband's exchange partner and was also subject to the obligation of reciprocity. However, I never saw a woman on the *amei* during the entire feast and I got the impression that in actual fact it was the husband himself who was orchestrating it all.

The allotment of the *ka* heaps was carried out by a group of men who strode from mound to mound, beating their hourglass drums and calling out the name of the man to receive the pile. Later, the men distributed the tubers to men of their own village (previous and potential future helpers) and supporters from

[182] In the days that followed, the *numanara* failed to procure a second pig to give to their *sambera*, which led to a series of discussions among the *waignara*. They repeatedly decided to return the ceremonial yam but this never happened, at least not until we left the village two weeks later.

[183] Among the western Abelam there seem to be no *ka* feasts. Although Kalabu people frequently participated in *ka* displays I am not sure whether they traditionally ever staged these themselves, and on equal terms with *wapi* feasts.

[184] These are classified as female.

neighbouring villages. To each portion of yam, the men added small pieces of pork from the pigs that had been sacrificed for the exchange.

On 16 March 1979, the village of Naram staged a large *ka* feast on the ceremonial ground of Giting. The yam mounds had been prepared already days before, but without the largest tubers. These were kept out of sight in a special enclosure (similar to the one used by the decorated dancers during initiations). Early in the morning of the day of the feast, after all the visitors had arrived, the Naram men tore down the fence and carried the large and richly decorated tubers onto the ceremonial ground, one by one, in a procession led by six men in a double column. They sang so-called *sakimba* songs[185] to the accompaniment of hourglass drums; the songs addressed the visitors, specifically the exchange partners from neighbouring villages:

Sagulas (*nggwal*) you're in a hut. When morning broke the men cooked yam soup[186] for you. You ate it. You're in a small hut; we only heard your voice.[187] We followed it but were unable to find you because you're hiding in the house. You people from other villages, you heard the news and must have thought: those are the men from Giting and Suaguo. A man as old as stone is in a hut in Giting. The house in which the old man lived was falling to pieces. But now he shines like the moon and the sun; many people have gathered here to see this man. Now he appears on the *amei* of Giting, and you people can see him.

You men and women, look at him before you go home. We in Naram we have neither *wapi* nor *ka*; all we eat is bananas and pumpkin leaves.[188] What you see here on the *amei* are bananas and pumpkin leaves. Tell that to the people in your villages. You people from faraway places, look well! When you return home you will always remember what we achieved here in Giting. You will no longer be able to sleep because you'll always be thinking of it.

Now I have appeared in Giting. I am a man who hides in the bush or in a garden. But now I have come to Giting and Suaguo. You people, you came to see me, so now look at me!

Addressing the people of Yamel:

You people who have climbed down from the mountains, look here, and then go back to your village. What you see here is for people from the plains, it's a secret from the swamps.[189] Look at it and then return home. *Ka* grows in swampy ground. You see the fish (the *ka* was carried onto the *amei* together with an image of a large fish), its home is the water. It is only there that it can thrive. Look well at the fish (metaphor for *ka*)! You people, you came from far away to see the feast.

The *ura* bird (metaphor for decorated yam) lives in the hamlet of Giting. This bird began to call and you all came to admire its feathers. The bird has settled on the branch of a breadfruit tree. You can see how red its plumage is. Look at it and then go back to your village.

I'm a man from the village of Naram. I'm not a long man. Long men come from the area where the sun rises. There we have long men.[190] But you came to Giting to see the short man (*ka*). He's about to appear and then you'll see him. I am in Naram. I'm a short, small man. In a pool belonging to a spirit (*wale*) I am together with Bira.[191] He ('the short man') will enter the *amei* with a song of joy, there where you men and women have gathered to see the feast. He will be one with Bira. Soon this short man will appear, and you will see him.

You people from the area where the sun rises, you can only call my name, for I am a man from the swamps. I will shine like the moon and the sun; you can look at me, you can see me, I will not forbid it.

In Umbite Targwa this short man came into being, and then he came to Giting. You people who live in the mountains, you will not be able to win him over for yourself. He belongs to me, for I am in Umbite Targwa. You came here to see him. Later you will return home and think of him. You can try to create him. But you will fail because he is with us Naram men in Umbite Targwa.

The men come forth from the enclosure carrying the large *ka* yams.

You people who have gathered in Giting, do not

185 In Kalabu these songs are called *banggra ndei tao*. See Hauser-Schäublin (1987).

186 The same kind of ceremonial soup is served to initiates.

187 Possibly referring to the sound of an instrument or the slit gong signal 'Sagulas'.

188 This section is alluding to a song performed previously by the Yenigo men at their own yam feast where they ridiculed the Naram men of only being capable to grow bananas and pumpkins.

189 The Abelam say that *ka* yam originated in the grass plains to the south.

190 Long *wapi* yam, said to be from the mountain area to the northeast (Arapesh).

191 Meaning Umbite Targwa (see p. 118).

think we have created something on top of the name of the grandfathers; they all vanished in the Pasi River.[192] Only their children are left – that's us! So I try to grow *ka* yam. You will see it because it's home is Kwimbu[193] and Naram.

Wirimo (*nggwalndu*) is plaiting an armlet (*auw*), and he puts it on.[194] He sleeps in a house in Giting, where many people have gathered to see him. I'm proud to see that so many men and women have come to see Wirimo appearing on his *amei*. All you people who have come from many villages to see the yams: Wirimo has felled a tree[195] that now lies in Kwimbu and Naram. You came to see this tree. Wirimo calls for pigs which should be brought to Naram and Kwimbu. Wirimo has felled this tree that is very long. You have heard Wirimo's message. You came to see the tree trunk.

When morning broke and the birds started to sing you heard him calling. Wirimo is in the bush. When morning breaks he tries to rise and to come to Giting. See this man coming. It's Wirimo who's coming to Kwimbu and Naram.

You men who belong to our enemies (*waune*). Your thoughts are uneasy. Now you're eating new (freshly harvested) *ka* and *wapi*. Anger and jealousy are rising in you. You try to get hold of this long man (grow long *ka*). You desperately try to get hold of me. But, you men from enemy villages, Wirimo is in Giting and Suaguo, and you envy me for him! Wirimo has called the *ka* yam. Now it is being carried onto the *amei*. Look at it, you people, you have our permission. Long *ka* belongs to us, the villages Naram and Kwimbu.

Wirimo called the people who live in the streams Tul and Gamban.[196] They left the water to come to Giting. Look here, you people, what Wirimo's calling has caused.

The people of Kwimbu sing:

You men of Naram, what a paltry village Naram is! You have no one who is able to grow *ka*. The black colour (on the face) and the red *mauwe* flowers (in the hair)[197] are at home in Kwimbu; only Kwimbu is able to grow long *ka*. You enemies, you see the black colour and the red flower; it has no meaning because the real *ka* people are at home in Kwimbu. Naram has nothing, it is a paltry village!

The *kugele* bird (*dshambu*) lives in Kwimbu on a branch or on a rattan vine. You here in Naram, you are proud (of your feast), but *kugele* created nothing here amongst you. That is why you come to Kwimbu because there lives a man who is as tall as a tree. You come to Kwimbu to spend the night near him.[198]

Commentary

Many of the topics addressed in song during *ka* presentations sound familiar to us from performances at *wapi* ceremonies. Challenges, amplifying one's own actions while simultaneously reviling the achievements of one's opposites from other villages, are characteristic features of public events in different contexts, including roofing ceremonies, sorcery disputes (asserting one's own innocence, accusing others) as well as various yam feasts, on an individual (e.g. sorcery) as well as collective level. The present song shows especially well that a yam feast is always seen as being a 'response' to a previous event of the same kind staged by the opposite party. Earlier songs that contained taunts like 'you are only capable of growing bananas and rattan vines' are taken up and reversed by providing evidence of the opposite, in this case the ability to grow long *ka*.

Up to now, the disputes and songs encountered have revealed various facets of the relationship between yam (both *ka* and *wapi*), *wai* (yam stone), *nggwalndu* and *wale*, but left some aspects unclear. The song above adds a number of additional features to the kaleidoscopic conception of this relationship. For one, none of the previous songs proclaimed in such explicit manner the (temporary) identity of *nggwalndu* and yam stone: the 'old man' sitting in his hut is referred to simultaneously as *wapiwai* and *nggwalndu* who comes to reveal himself to the people on the ceremonial ground in the shape of long *ka* yam. The song also mentions *nggwalndu*, pools in the bush and logs of wood; in Kalabu my research associates told me that in every clan-owned *wale* pool there was a (usually invisible) wooden log that represented the *nggwalndu* in bodily form. In the present song, the tree that Wirimo fells is equalled to the long *ka* representing *nggwalndu*'s crop.

192 *Wale* pools said to be the entrance to the realm of the dead.

193 Kwimbu is regarded as the 'mother' of Naram; the two villages are often mentioned in the same breath.

194 Meaning a plaited band with which initiates as well as yam tubers are decorated.

195 Meaning Wirimo has grown long *ka* yam.

196 A reference to the deceased who now appear on the *amei* as yams.

197 Yam growers are recognizable by their black face paint and the red hibiscus flower they wear in their hair.

198 Meaning near the *ka* stone.

Moreover, it is the first time that yam is alluded to as an embodiment of the deceased, adding a new dimension to the anyhow intricate meaning system. While this was hinted at earlier on – for example, when the names of deceased men were invoked during the growth-enhancing ceremonies – here the relationship becomes manifest. The song tells of how the *nggwalndu* induce the spirits of the dead to leave their realm through the clan-specific entrances – the *wale* pools – and to present themselves on the *amei* in the shape of *ka* yams.

Amei: The Platform of Social Interaction and Ritual Practice

Up to here the focus has been on the function of the *amei* and its significance in social and ritual terms. Viewed from a sociological perspective it shows that the ceremonial ground becomes a public space where social relationships are enacted, which transcend the sphere that is deemed private among the Abelam. These events include secret love affairs (e.g. of married persons) that become known through an indiscretion, or quarrels between co-wives which a husband is no longer able to contain, or when one of the wives feels she needs the support, or at least the opinion, of a wider audience. Conflicts over property (e.g. sago palms or fruit-bearing trees) are publicly mediated on the *amei* if, and when, the antagonists are not able to reach a bipartite agreement. The large majority of cases, however, concern incidents that involve collective property belonging to a residential unit or a clan. The ceremonial ground is also the place where alliances between clans are formed through marriage and validated by the public transfer of bride wealth. The preference for the *amei* as a public venue, enabling the presence of members from diverse social groupings, over settling problems in a more secluded residence area, points to the significance that the public and public space play in conflict resolution in specific, and social interaction at village level in general. The *amei* does not belong to a single group, but always to several clans. Public disputes tend to attract audiences recruited from several, uninvolved social units, which reduces the danger of bi-polar confrontation on the *amei*, unlike disputes and quarrels that are acted out in the hamlet of one of the contenders. These are often skewed in favour of the hosting group due to notions of the 'sanctity' of the home and unequal starting positions, which severely impedes peaceful resolution and often leads to a physical confrontation. On the basis of its public quality, the *amei* (almost) becomes a neutral social space. Moreover, due to its location in front of the spiritually charged ceremonial house and its ritual significance, even extremely heated disputes rarely get out of control and end in physical violence. It is also a corollary of the power of the elders in their role as conciliators and pacifiers. This becomes especially effective on the ceremonial ground, where the people not only accept their status but actually expect them to exert their influence.

My Kalabu associates could not remember one single case of a killing on a ceremonial ground following a village dispute. When acts of killing did happen, they always occurred beyond the *amei* in one of hamlets or even outside the village. The ceremonial ground is not only a place of conflict resolution in a direct sense. It also represents an integrative space in a more general sense, in earlier days probably even more pronouncedly when conflicts between village segments had more disintegrative potential and were liable to seriously threaten village cohesion. The *amei* constitutes a platform on which social relations and relationships between groups are expressed and, if need be, newly arranged and ordered. Beyond that, it constitutes a space where the community establishes rapport to individuals who are temporally in special, liminal condition, and reintegrates them through ritual. One such case is the first menstruation feast, which is staged in the *amei* and where women's solidarity, irrespective of age, clan or moiety membership, comes to bear. The admission of a young girl into the community of women occurs indirectly while she is still in the menstruation hut. The first menstruation ceremony constitutes the occasion where adult women celebrate the incorporation of a new member in their midst.

We actually know very little about the celebrations on the *amei* that were staged for a triumphant warrior upon his return home after having killed an enemy, but it seems that he was given a rousing reception. On return from a successful raid, the men carried a large stone on a litter onto the ceremonial ground to the sound of songs of triumph. The stone which was taken from a stream was placed beside the ceremonial house (as a *kumbumaak*) and given the name of

the slain enemy. Occasionally they made do with a few stems of wild taro that signified the enemy victims. The rituals performed in the context of these celebrations had, among other things, the purpose of bringing back the warrior from a 'hot' to a 'normal' bodily state, lest he succumb to the urge of keeping on killing people, even in his own village. His dangerous condition was ritually contained by placing the man under a kind of seclusion which involved food taboos and restrictions with regard to contact with his co-villagers. One of the main measures that brought him back to normalcy was the ingestion of stinging nettles. The end of the taboo period was marked by a ritual wash, similar to the one performed in initiation.

In the same vein as warfare, death too is an event that is liable to disrupt the community and threaten its continuity. The body of a deceased person is laid out on the ceremonial ground so that the community is able to redefine its relationship to the dead person and adapt to the situation, and to validate the kinsman's passage from one state of existence to the next. This lends the *amei* an integrative power that almost no other Abelam institution has, namely to realign the relationship pattern between the living and modulate the rapport between the living and the dead.

The ritual acts that are performed in connection with yam, climaxing in the spectacular yam displays, lends the ceremonial ground an added, amplified dimension: the *amei* constitutes the interface between the 'here' and the 'beyond', a nexus on, and through, which spiritual beings become manifest for which the Abelam otherwise have no words. In its quality as the place where *nggwalndu*, yam stones and the spirits of the dead embodied in *ka* and *wapi* yams reveal themselves to the people, the *amei* becomes the spatial link between the 'here and now' and the 'beyond'. For one, this applies to the concept of 'here' (village) and the 'out there' (untamed forest) – lateral space on the same level, so to speak – for the other, to vertical connections linking the 'above' and the 'below'. On the *amei*, celestial bodies like the sun, the moon, the stars and spirit beings associated with them such the *nyambapmu*, as well as pools in the forest through which the *nggwalndu* as well as the spirits of the dead pass from one world to the next, are no longer only conceptualized entities, they become manifest reality. This includes the (female) moonstone positioned at the centre of the ceremonial ground and the painted sun disc pending over the moonstone. In the enclosure that is erected around the moonstone during the growth of the yam, the *nyambapmu* come to settle, small spirit beings in human shape which, arriving from the east where the sun rises, climb down the vine chain hanging from the tip of the ceremonial house.

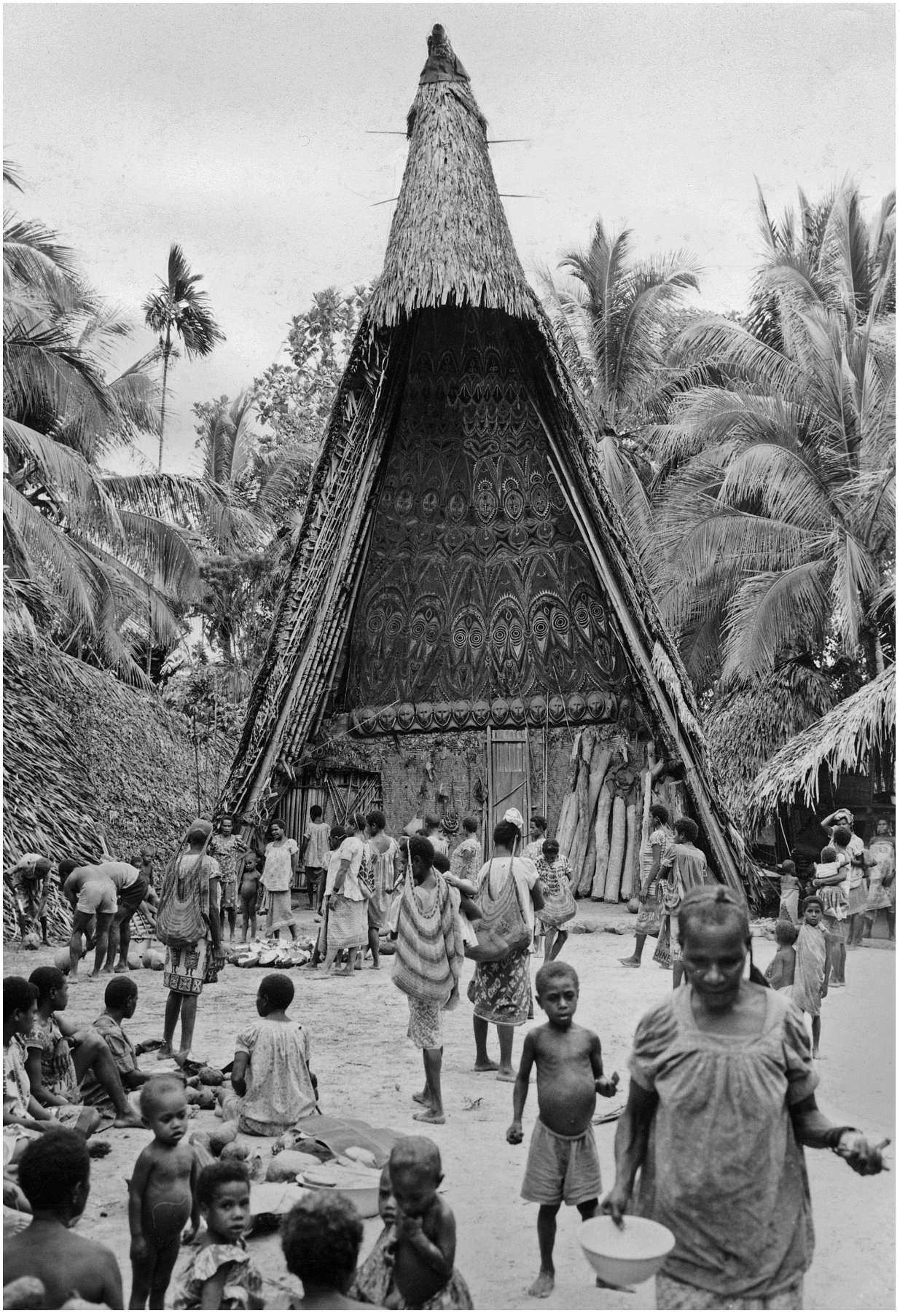
From pools deep down in the forest or along the beds of streams, not only the *nggwalndu* appear, but also the clan-associated pigs, the *mbale*, represented by plaited vine masks; their most important representative is the wild boar Serapan. The origin of the *baba* masks from the depth of a pool in the bush is signified by the *biben* enclosure which is adorned with masks that are attached to spears, and which is erected for the rituals to enhance the growth of the yam. A further reference in this direction is the vessel used for the rituals which contains water from the various clan-associated pools and springs. The spot where this ritual scene on the ceremonial ground is built up is no coincidence: it is the seat of the moon stone, in other words, where, following the growth-enhancing rituals, the spirit beings from the upper world come to settle in the *biben* enclosure. This means that this spot constitutes the junction between the upper, essentially male-classified world – signified by the painted sun disc and the vine chain hanging from the tip of the ceremonial house like a 'stairway to heaven' – and the lower, female world symbolized by the moon stone on the ground and the temporary enclosure around it.

Thus the centre of the *amei* is a pivot comparable to a world axis that connects different spheres of the universe. For dances during yam feasts and initiations the men plant a tree in the spot, emphasizing the link between the 'above' and 'below', between 'earth' and 'sky'. Men and women dance around it, lending it the quality of a stable pole around which the humans move.

At the same time it is also a temporal junction, a spot where the 'present' and the 'past' come together: in the rituals, Serapan is no longer a mythic being from the time of creation, he is here, present on the *amei*. The same applies to Umbite Targwa, the mythical place of origin of both human beings and yam; during the ritual performances, the *amei* becomes Umbite Targwa and the old bigmen

who stand up to speak and discuss assume the identity of *nggwalndu*.

It shows that the *amei* constitutes a platform on which all these notions may be enacted, a stage where the tangible results (e.g. prize yams, initiates) that grow from the relationship with enduring yet secretive powers are presented and charged with symbols. It is the space where the beyond in all its temporal dimensions (creation time, present, and future) encounters lived reality. The *amei* thus not only forms the hub of village life, it enables the Abelam to ritually enact, in compacted form, the universe as they envisage and experience it.



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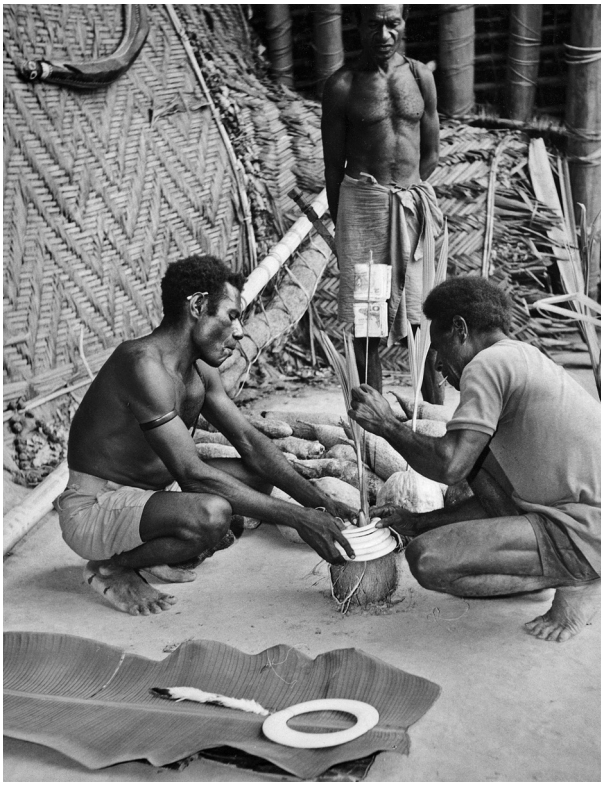

(previous page)
47. During the first menstruation ceremony (*wambusuge*), the ceremonial ground becomes the domain of the women. They exchange slices of ceremonial yam (*wapi*), yam soup, betel nut and tobacco.

48. Fitted over a sprouting coconut, shell rings constituting the bride wealth are brought to the ceremonial ground where they are laid out on banana leaves, arranged according to size.

49. Yam enhancing ceremony on the Kaumbul ceremonial ground. Instead of spears, Kwandshendu holds a sprouting coconut in his hands during a speech. At the centre of the *amei,* next to the moon stone, there is a container filled with special leaves and water.

50. Visitors closely inspect the exhibited tubers. during the *wapi* yam feast in Balokwil.

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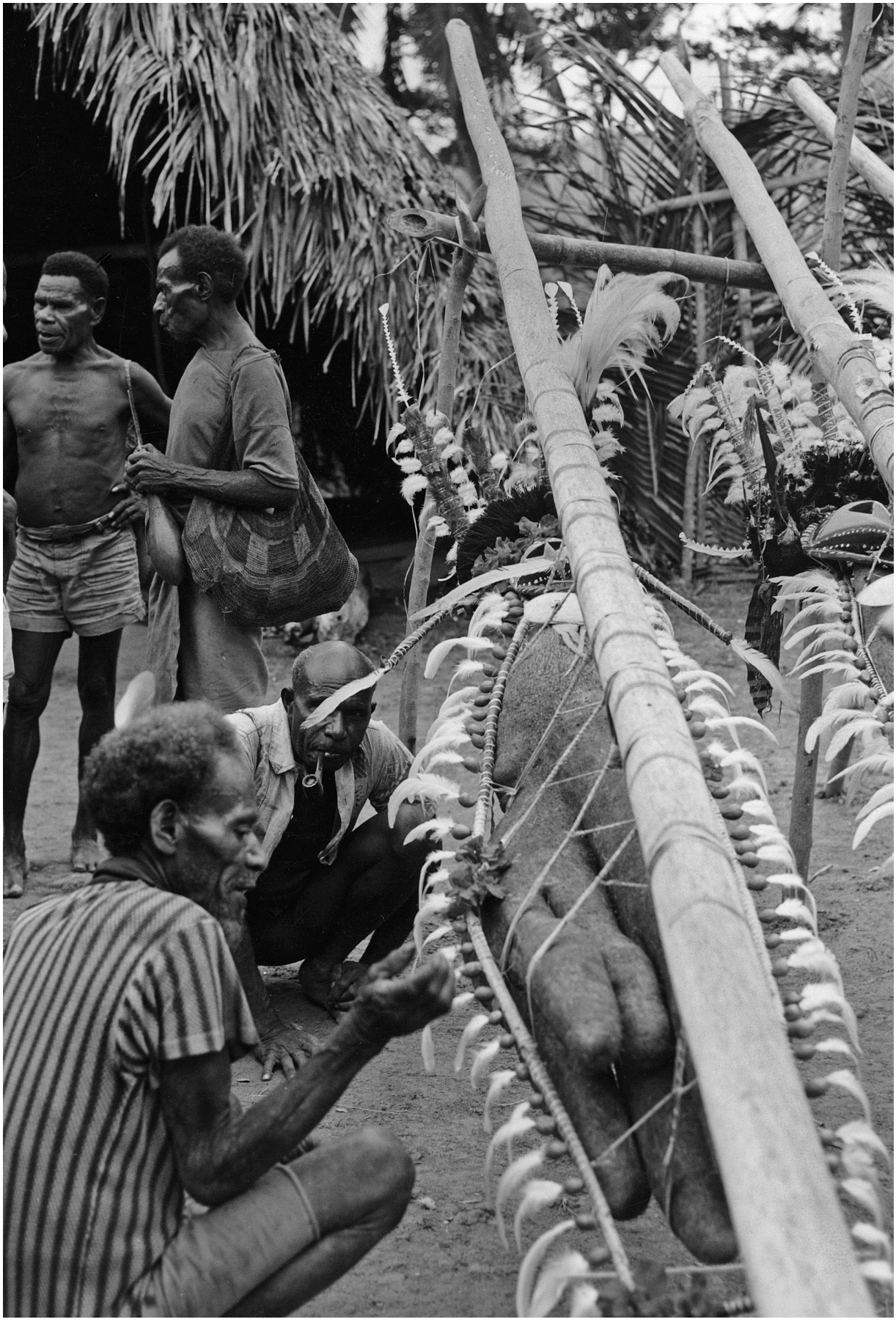

51. *Ka* yam feast in Naram. While the shorter tubers are heaped in mounds on the ground, the yam growers carry the largest specimens separately onto the ceremonial ground.

52. Carrying a *nggwalndu* figure to the new ceremonial.

53. The ritual objects are deposited in the new *korambo*. From the roof hangs the vine rope to which the men attach their hourglass drums during dance and song.

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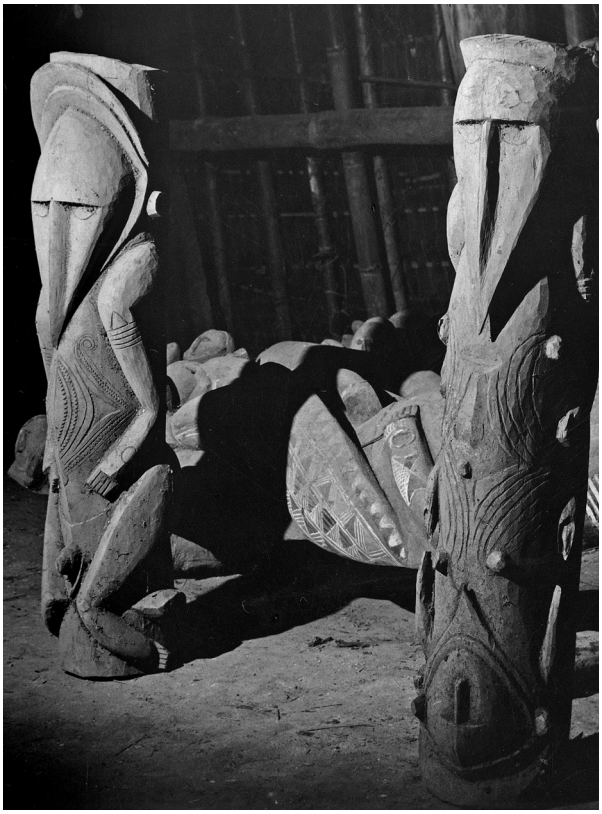

54. Two *kundi ure*. These carved wooden cylinders serve as resonating bodies for the bamboo instruments into which the men sing during initiations.

55. *Nggumaira*. Using multicoloured leaves cut to size, the artist Kwandshendu creates a pattern on a carpet of foam.

56. The entire vegetable foam carpet is decorated with patterns; some of them are the same as the ones found on the façade paintings of ceremonial houses.

57. The competitive exchange of pigs between the two moieties and their display on the ceremonial ground are a prerequisite of every ritual. The pigs' decoration is reminiscent to that of *baba* masks (see **pl. 85**). The animals are then killed in the name of *nggwalndu* and other spirits; the pork is finally distributed amongst the members of the moiety. Malmba village 1978.

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58. The female classified *nau* are made of bamboo roots. They are the focus of the initiation grade of the same name.

59. *Ulke-nau* belongs to a fight against the *baba* mask figure which the initiates have to overcome.

60. Ceremonial dance with *noute*; the initiates are accompanied by their sisters.

61. The initiation ends with the initiates having to catch fish with their bare hands.

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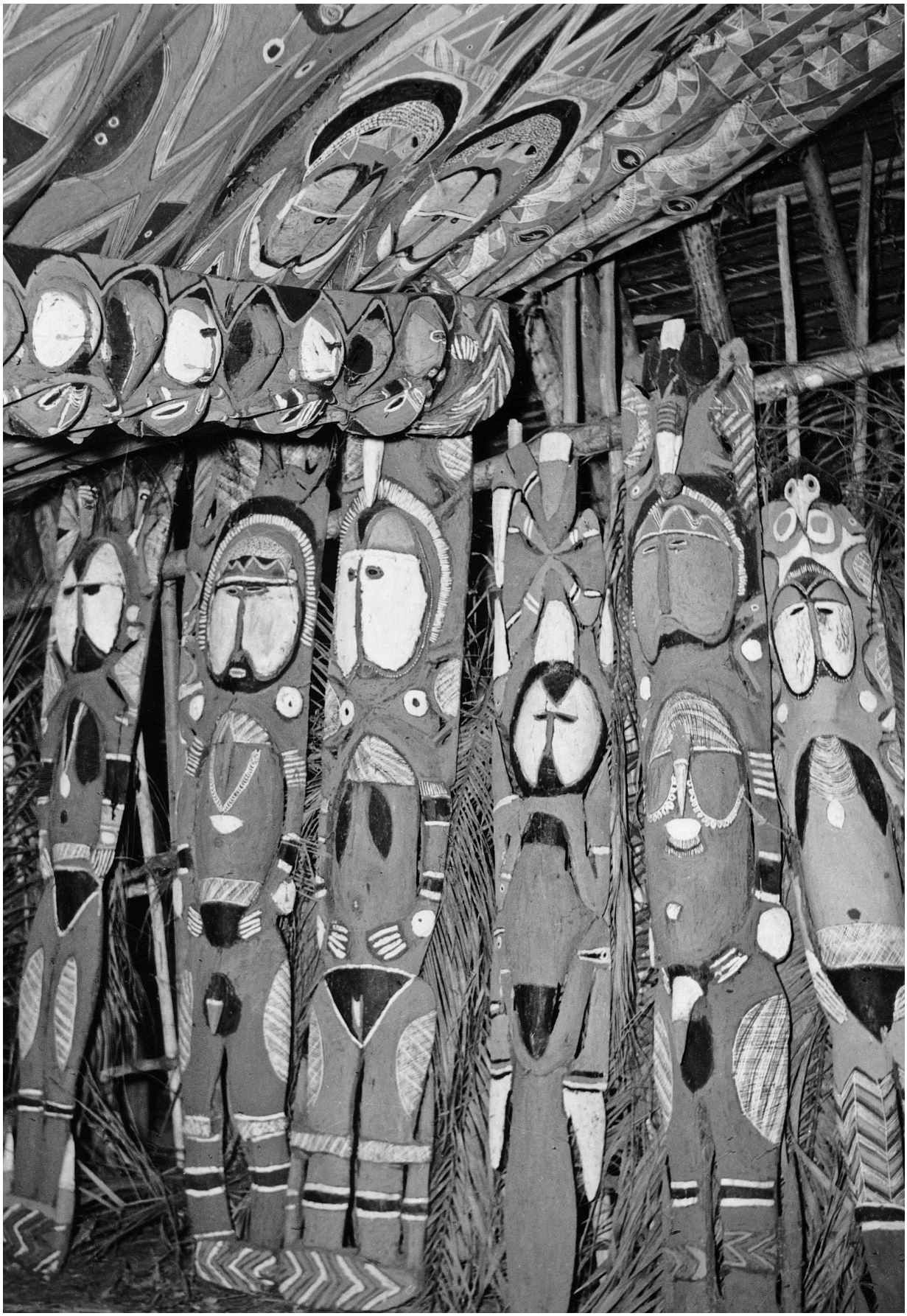

62. Initiation chamber with a drawn-in palm spathe cover, a carved frieze and standing figures. This type of chamber is typical of the *naranggwal* initiation grade; Numbunggai

63. Ritual mock combat upon the arrival of a visiting group during a initiation

64. Wagnen dancers (initiates) resting after a performance.

4. The Ceremonial House and the World Beyond

Inauguration Cycle

In the context of describing the construction of a ceremonial house I briefly mentioned the inauguration songs, without going into detail. As they are important for the understanding of the *korambo* and the spirit beings related to it, I shall now describe them at more length.

After the hosts have welcomed the visitors from neighbouring villages on the *amei*, a small group of elder men from the side of the *korambo* owners and builders retires to the ceremonial house. While the guests dance outside on the *amei*, the men strike up a *nggwal mindsha* song inside the house (**pl. 45**), with a group of women who know the song contributing the chorus; they are positioned at the side of the *korambo*, close to the roof line. As an example of a *nggwal mindsha* I reproduce below the contents of the Sagulas song (sung by Ndukarbe of Kalabu):

Man (M):
I am under the water on the ground. You may beat the slit gong to summon me. Then I'll set out to come and see you.

Women (F):
You must beat the slit gong and then I'll appear in the village.

M: Sagulas is making a string bag.
F: I know. Sagulas is working on a string bag for catching *kavi* and *mara* fish.
M: When he makes this string bag, many men come to watch him work. When he has finished the string bag, everyone is invited to come and see it and rejoice.

M: The *ngwawi* bird calls from the top of a tree: 'somebody's coming!'
F: Yes, that's true, the *ngwawi* bird calls: 'somebody's coming!'
M: Yes, it's true, when somebody comes, it is announced by this bird.
F: ditto.
M: This bird *ngwawi* is looking to see whether anyone is coming.
It is Sagulas who calls. He cooks this soup.
F: Yes, it is Sagulas who calls. He cooks this soup.
M: Sagulas has cooked a soup and it is getting cold.
F: Because someone said the wrong thing, this soup is getting cold, for the men came, and left again.

M: Woman, you have prepared a bed that is bad, because the support is broken.
F: Yes, the support has broken, fallen to pieces.
M: If you like me, you must ready a good bed. Then we shall lie down together, you and Sagulas.
F: That's how it is. If I really wish to sleep with you, I must ready a good bed.
M: I am Sagulas. You must follow my orders, for you are my daughter-in-law. If I tell you to fetch water for me, you must do so.
F: Yes, I am your daughter-in-law. I wait for you to tell me to fetch water.
M: I spent many shell rings on you, that's why you must obey me and fetch water.
F: If you tell me to, I'll fetch water because you spent many shell rings on me.

M: Down at the stream is a path. That's where I stay, scraping resin from the bark of a tree (for the twines of a string bag).
F: That's where I am, removing resin, when I see this man Sagulas, decorated and moving in a circle.
M: Do not think that is someone else. It is Sagulas who slept with you. He is coming.
F: Don't think it's just a man from the village. It's a man who has come from far away and wants to sleep with you.
M: Sagulas is at the spring called Ulpinamu. People from both parts of Kalabu go there.
The men go there and cut the woman's vulva into many small parts. Many men enjoy this woman.
F: You men of Kalabu I, you may take apart the vulva into many small pieces and be pleased that you own this woman.

M. I am about to leave my hamlet Kaumbul. Two birds live there, *kuyen* and *kabele*. I stay in the background behind them.
F: He leaves Kaumbul and approaches the birds (called) *kuyen* and *kabele*. He yearns for Kaumbul.
M: Sagulas has left the hamlet and pines for it. That's

why Kaumbul is almost empty today; there are not many people left there.
F: So it is, there are not many people left in Kaumbul.
M: In Kaumbul you picked a white *laulau*[1] fruit. That's why there is mourning, and we fled to the grass plains.
F: So it is. He picked this white *laulau* fruit. That's why we fled to the grass plains.

M: Sagulas' house has collapsed, that's why you tear it down
F: Yes, you tear down Sagulas' house. That's why Sagulas is sad.
M: You destroyed my house, now I am sad.
Therefore I cannot stay with you.
He's sitting in Walmeingga. He watches a woman scooping water, and sees her vulva.
F: Yes, she's scooping water and you see her vulva.

M: Sagulas leaves.
Sagulas goes and takes a branch of red fruit with him.
F: He takes a branch of red fruit and carries it away.
M: This is the path on which Sagulas comes and goes. On this path Imagwate and Wanke walk, and it smells of *sipmu* and *auwi* leaves.
F: The path on which Imagwate and Wanke walk smells of *sipmu* and *wandsho* leaves. It smells sweet.

M: Where are you going to?
I go to any village.
F: Where are you going to?
M: I go to just any village.
You feel at home in Wapinda and Malpenamu. But where are you going to?
F: I feel at home in Wapinda and Malpenamu, there where smoke and steam rise.

M: My friend (*kitnya*, literally: vulva); I will own you at night, but not during the day.
F: At night is good, but you cannot have me during the day.
M: I do not want you to possess me during the day and see my vulva.
F: So it is. Not during the day, for you may not see my vulva and (pubic) hair. At night it is good.

Commentary

This song, dedicated to Kalabu's most important *nggwalndu*, addresses a variety of themes which, at first sight, seem rather quotidian, not to say trivial: Sagulas is making a string bag, a bird calls, there is mention of a soup that is getting cold, of a woman who owns a rickety bedstead, and of a second woman who is raped by a bunch of men.

But of course the song carries deeper meaning, which comes to the fore as soon as one takes a closer look at what the single verses are alluding to. For several passages my translator and research associate, Waina, was only able to give a literal translation of the metaphors used, but no real interpretation of what they actually meant. It was only after comparing the song text with similar lyrics and oral traditions from other contexts that I began to understand a few things that had, until then, remained concealed.

The introduction is a standard opening: it tells of how Sagulas is residing in a pool, or swamp, deep down in the forest and how he is called to the village by the sound of the slit gong. The song goes on to tell us that Sagulas is 'working on a string bag', a metaphor that frequently appears in other contexts too. It is a reference to the preparation of an initiation, here in specific to the manufacture of the painted headdresses that the initiates wear when they emerge from the initiation enclosure to dance on the *amei* in front of a large audience. The reference to catching *kavi* and *mara* fish is also a trope, alluding to the end of a particular initiation, to which visitors from near and far are summoned by the sound of the slit gong ('the bird calls'). In the meantime, the women are preparing yam soup for the guests, but nobody comes to eat the soup ('soup gets cold'). In the last verse of this section we get to hear that an incidence – probably a quarrel or a fight ('someone said the wrong thing') – brought the feast to a sudden end, after which the visitors left without tasting the soup. Which specific ritual event the verse is alluding to I was unable to elicit.

For the next verse, Waina, my translator, had no real explanation. Going by the wording, the passage describes a love affair between Sagulas and a woman, followed by his relationship with his daughter-in-law. The two themes blend. Cross-comparisons with similar texts from other contexts suggest that this liaison between a man and a woman / daughter-in-law is a reference to the relationship between the two *ara*, the ritual moieties. The 'man' stands for the hosting *ara*, that is, the moiety that

[1] Tok Pisin term for Malay Apple (*Syzygium malaccense*).

organizes and carries out the initiation, while the 'woman' denotes the opposite moiety that has to prepare immense amounts of yam and pork – signified by the 'bedstead' on which one rests – in order to be shown the creations, meaning the initiation scenes that the hosting *ara* has prepared. In initiations, the relationship between the two moieties is in fact an unequal one, in the sense that the hosting moiety – the one that creates the cult scenes and musters the adorned ritual dancers – asks for gifts in return from the receiving moiety. The male-female trope also circumscribes the relationship between initiators and initiates, or, in a different guise, that between old and young men, and thus addresses a key issue in society: the authority of the elder over the younger generation. The song text contains a reference that supports this interpretation, namely the passage that describes how the woman (meaning the novice) is busy removing resin from the bark of a tree in order to manufacture twine (a typically female chore, but it also contains an inference to 'making string bags') when, suddenly, she notices Sagulas' moving in a circle' like dancers from the initiating moiety on the *amei*). The initiating men tell the novices that the man who appears is a stranger. Scraping resin from tree bark is a further hidden reference to an act during initiation, namely to the initiates in the initiation enclosure (i.e. during seclusion) rubbing ash onto their skin. The ash is procured from the marrow of the *yitnbin* tree, whose bark provides the twine for making string bags.

In the last part of this verse, the vulva is a reference to one or several pigs, which the 'female' classified *ara* has to give to its 'male' ritual partners in compensation for the services performed during initiation.

The next section broaches a topic that is also part of oral history. We hear that Sagulas left Kaumbul because someone had picked a white fruit and that, after the incident, only few people continued to live there; most of the others fled to the grass plains. This verse is a reference to the story that tells of how a widow's lover was killed (see pp. 11-16), forcing a large group of people to flee to Balekasik in the Winggei area. Sagulas is quoted saying 'you destroyed my house … therefore I cannot stay with you' which is explainable because Sagulas is closely associated with the founding Kundigim clan that left Kalabu, symbolized in the song by the 'branch of red fruit' that he carried with him. A point of interest here is that the song addresses an important logical consequence of the emigration to Balekasik which is not mentioned in the oral account, namely the fate of the respective *nggwalndu*. After leaving Kaumbul, Sagulas met on the way Wanke and Imagwate, the latter being the *nggwalndu* of the clans belonging to the *amei* Kaumbul; Wanke is the *nggwalndu* of the Mainggegim clan that owns parts of Wapinda and Malpenamu. For the replacement of Sagulas (as Kaumbul's spirit representative) and the creation of new *nggwalndu*, and for the takeover of the ceremonial ground, the men sacrifice pigs, expressed in the song by the passage 'it smells of *sipmu* and *auwi* (or *wandsho*) leaves'. The call-and-response passage 'where are you going to?' deals with the disappearance of Sagulas who, from then on, makes his appearance in Wapinda when feasts are staged that include pig sacrifices ('where smoke and steam rise'). The meaning of the last verse is not clear; my translator believed that it was probably a reference to the killing of an enemy; however, possibly it is merely adverting to Sagulas' habit of only showing himself to the humans at night.

Set-up of Ritual Artworks in the *Korambo*

As mentioned earlier on, the *mindsha* inauguration cycle[2] may last for several weeks. It usually ends as soon as the yam specialists decide to plant *wapi* yam, specifically *mambutap*, and the men are needed to clear the bush for the new gardens.[3] This coincides with the moment that the ceremonial house, where the ritual carvings are to be stored, needs purifying from all female essence and influence. I am not sure whether all the necessary ritual purification acts were performed for the new *korambo* in Kaumbul where we were able to witness the inauguration cycle. Insiders told me that for this ritual stones were heated in a fire until they were glowing red, after which a concoction of water from *wale* pools, certain plants and red paint was poured over them, causing it to vaporize with a loud hissing sound and making steam

[2] *Mindsha* is also the term used for the decorative combs the men wear in their hair on festive occasions. It consists of an actual 'limbum' comb to which a partially trimmed bird feather is attached; when dancing, the feather bobs up and down.

[3] See also Agilanggui's contribution to the speeches at the yam feast in Kaumbul (see p. 112) where he criticized that the inauguration cycle had not been finished by the time the new yam was planted.

rise up the inside roof of the house, as far as the ridge beam. This is said to purge the entire building of the women's 'smell' still lingering in the house after the many dances and songs performed inside the *korambo*. At the same time the procedure is said to elicit a pleasant aura that attracts the *nggwalndu*, *baba*, *wapinyan* and other spirit beings to come and dwell in the house. After these final preparations it is time to transfer the ritual carvings to their new abode. Before an old *korambo* is finally torn down, the men remove the ritual objects and store them either in the ceremonial house of another hamlet or in a newly built storage hut where they are safe from the elements and the inquisitive eyes of women and children.[4] When the new house is ready, they are transferred to their new dwelling on a pre-scheduled day.

In Kalabu, the day for the transfer was determined at short notice after some men from the *numanara* ritual moiety had shot a wild pig and decided to organize a *sambera* feast. On the night before the feast, men from the opposite moiety (*waignara*) succeeded in hunting down a wild pig too. The *numunara* pig had been eviscerated, the bristles singed in the fire and the meat was being smoke-dried over a fire when the *waignara* staged a triumphant entry onto the Kaumbul ceremonial ground, presenting their pig. It was tied to a thin tree-stem and decorated with bands of leaf fringes to which red flowers were attached. When entering, the *waignara* struck up a song of challenge addressed to the men of the opposite moiety. The leaf decoration was removed and attached to the mat (*kimbi*) covering the lower front of the ceremonial house; the girth of the pig was measured with a piece of cane that was attached to the *kimbi* next to the leaf band.

Relocating the secret ritual carvings always demands the sacrifice of several pigs, as was the case in Kalabu. One of my associates explained this practice as follows: 'The pig is the *nggwalndu*'s headrest;[5] you cannot let important old men sleep on the ground, so we prepare a bedstead for them, just as we sacrifice pigs for the *nggwalndu*.'

Next to the meat, which was to be distributed among the men of the opposite moiety, both *ara* had readied *ka* and *wapi* tubers. The women of the two moieties had prepared large bowls of *ka* soup which were plac4ed next to the *wapi* tubers. They did not include the largest specimens from the last harvest – these had been distributed at the yam feast – but they were nevertheless quite sizeable, adorned down both sides and with the shoots at the upper end tied together and wrapped in bast fibres (*pate nde mai*). In the meantime a delegation of men had gone to Wapinda, where the ritual carvings from Kaumbul were being temporarily stored. Shortly later came the sound of a slit gong, followed by the 'voices' of numerous musical instruments, most of them globular flutes made from gourds or fruit husks. As soon as the first sounds were perceived the women and children disappeared, some of them dashing into the bush, others retreating to the safety of their houses. Then a procession of men appeared, led by individuals blowing on round (*nggwalgwate*) or oval (*mairami*) globular flutes (*butuo*).[6] The sounds of these flutes are regarded as the voices of birds. They were accompanied by other instruments, such as bamboo tubes stuffed with sago leaves which the men shouted into, but, on account of the leaves, with a distorted effect. The sounds were said to be the yapping of dogs[7] or – depending on the pitch – the call of wild fowl (for musical examples see Hauser-Schäublin 1986).

Behind the consort came the men carrying the large *nggwalndu* figures, first Sagulas and followed by Wanke and Imagwate (**pl. 52**). Without putting them down the men carried the figures through the low entrance into the house. Last came two hourglass-shaped *kundi ure*;[8] being among the most secret carvings they were covered with banana leaves (**pl. 54**). One of the instruments, all of which resemble hourglass drums (*kang*) in shape, was called Sagulas, the other Imagwate; the one associated with Wanke no longer existed. The flutes only

4 During the Second World War, and during heavy fighting between Allied and Japanese troops in the Maprik area, the Kalabu villagers hid several ritual carvings in a pool in the bush to safeguard them from damage.

5 He used the Tok Pisin term 'pilo' but, of course, meant a traditional headrest.

6 The transfer of the carvings took place on 21 February 1979.

7 Occasionally we were told that they were the *nggwalndu*'s dogs.

8 Apparently the *kundi ure* had not been stored in the Wapinda ceremonial house, but in the yam stone house of Baigu instead. The association yam stone – *kundi ure* appears to be especially marked, as the Umbite Targwa songs have already shown.

stopped playing when all the ritual objects had vanished into the *korambo* (**pl. 53**). Inside, they were placed in their designated positions. After leaving the *korambo* the men went to sit at the edge of the *amei* to eat the soup which the women brought to them. Later the meat was cooked in earth ovens and given to the ritual partners, together with the yam tubers. In the speeches that followed the elders called for a cycle of initiations after the next yam harvest, in which the *waignara* were to initiate the *numanara* into *ulke*, and the latter the former into *nggwalndu*.

The transfer of the ritual carvings to the new *korambo* in Kaumbul brought to light that each object is assigned to a pre-appointed position inside the building and that it is of relevance whether a figure is placed upright, or lying on the ground (**fig. 24**). The ritual carvings were positioned as follows:[9]

slit gongs (*mi*): each ceremonial house, or, to be more precise, each *amei* owns three slit gongs. The largest one is usually named after the *dshambu* (totemic bird) of the most important resident clan. In Kaumbul it is called *kurpag* after the *dshambu* of the Yabitigim, in Wapinda *kwandshing* (*dshambu* of the Mainggegim), in Ndunyinggi *kandi* (Smoigim) and in Mapme *nyameo* (Nyambisuagim). In Yambusaki the largest slit gong is called *kokumbale*, without their being a corresponding *dshambu*. In most of the *korambo* that we saw, the slit gongs were kept in the *bunbun* section of the house (also called *kabasagu*), that is, at the back; in a few instances they were located at the front.

***nggwalndu* and *baba*:** the *nggwalndu* figures are positioned at the centre of the *korambo*, lying on the ground on logs to protect them from moisture. The thickest round timber is placed under the figure's head and is referred to as the *nggwalndu*'s headrest. Placed on the large carvings are *baba* masks, provided they are not being kept in the yam storage houses.

***wapinyan*:** these small anthropomorphic figures (also called *kalamandshe*) rank as the *nggwalndu*'s children, although the genealogical parent-child relationship appears not to be of primary importance. Rather, the idiom expresses that the *wapinyan* are not only smaller in size, but also secondary in significance. They serve as the *nggwalndu*'s helpers, ready to take orders and carry them out at any time. The *wapinyan* are never placed in a lying position but always upright, either leaning against the roof or, very often, against a partition wall in the rear section of the building. Next to the *wapinyan* large, carved wooden heads, called *kumbu*, or *ndumagna*, are often also stored in a *korambo*. They serve as the heads of specific *nggwalndu* figures, the bodies of which, made from plant material, are specially produced for certain initiations. Unlike the large recumbent *nggwalndu* figures, these heads may leave the village, for example, to serve in an initiation in a neighbouring village. They do not have the same status and significance as the large anthropomorphic *nggwalndu* figures; this is also reflected in their position inside the *korambo*.

***kundi ure*:** these objects are carved but never painted, in difference to all the other ritual carvings kept in the ceremonial house. The *kundi ure* are always located in the same, clearly defined area of the *korambo* referred to as *nggwalna nggai* ('house of *nggwal*'). This place is in the front section of the house, on the right hand side, seen from the rear, between *kimbi* and roof (**fig. 24: 1**). The entrance, *korekore*, is on the opposite, left side (**pl. 42**). What the arrangement is like in a ceremonial house that has the entrance on the other side, which is very rare, I do not know. All my associates said that to have the *kundi ure* in a different spot would be inconceivable. The *kundi ure* serve as resonating bodies, as amplifiers, so to speak, for long bamboo instruments called *gwanggi* into which the men sing. The lower end of the bamboo is placed into the resonating body which is very similar in shape to an hourglass drum, but bigger and heavier. When played, the *kundi ure* are sunk in the ground at an angle, in a hole that is padded with grass. Its sound is said to represent the voice of the *nggwalndu*. The instruments are usually played as a group of three, similar to the slit gongs and the *wanyen* bamboo trumpets. In earlier days each village section used to own three such *kundi ure*, assigned to the *amei* Ndunyinggi/Yambusaki and Kaumbul/Wapinda respectively.

***kang*:** hand, or hourglass, drums are never stored in the ceremonial house. Being privately owned, the men keep their instruments either at home or in their yam storage hut. When they are played in the *korambo* they are fastened to long vines suspended from the roof at the centre of the building (**pl. 45**). Above in the roof,

[9] Taking the example of Kaumbul.

the vines are attached to the *mindsha kumbu* which has the shape of a fibre skirt running transversely. This short-fringed curtain is also an important marker for the spatial division of the house's interior (**pl. 44**). It not only divides the house into a front and a rear section, but also into a left and a right half. As mentioned above in connection with the *kundi ure*, right and left are defined from a standpoint at the back of the building looking toward the front, with the *kundi ure* area on the right and the entrance on the left. The entire right-hand side at the front and the whole back section are defined as a sacred area, while the front left-hand side (the space inside the entrance) is of a more profane nature. I shall be returning to this point in the context of initiation. The rear exit is – in difference to the front entrance – a ritual passage, only to be used by initiated men and boys after initiation, for it leads from the sacred area inside the house onto the *toiembo*, the secluded ritual ground at the back of the *korambo* (**pl. 70**).

The vertical division of space in an 'above' and a 'below' is basically similar to the 'back' and 'front' distinction, with the difference that the 'above' is neither tangible nor accessible. The uppermost part of the building, where *nyan* and *nyit* intersect, is veiled almost completely in darkness; moreover, *nyan* and *nyit* are wrapped in vine bindings, hindering a clear view, not least because this is believed to be one of the most secretive areas in the *korambo*.

Prelude to an Initiation: the *Sambera* Feast

For the Abelam, initiations and ritual moieties constitute an inseparable whole, with each *ara* conducting initiation ceremonies for its counterpart. As soon as a ceremony is over,

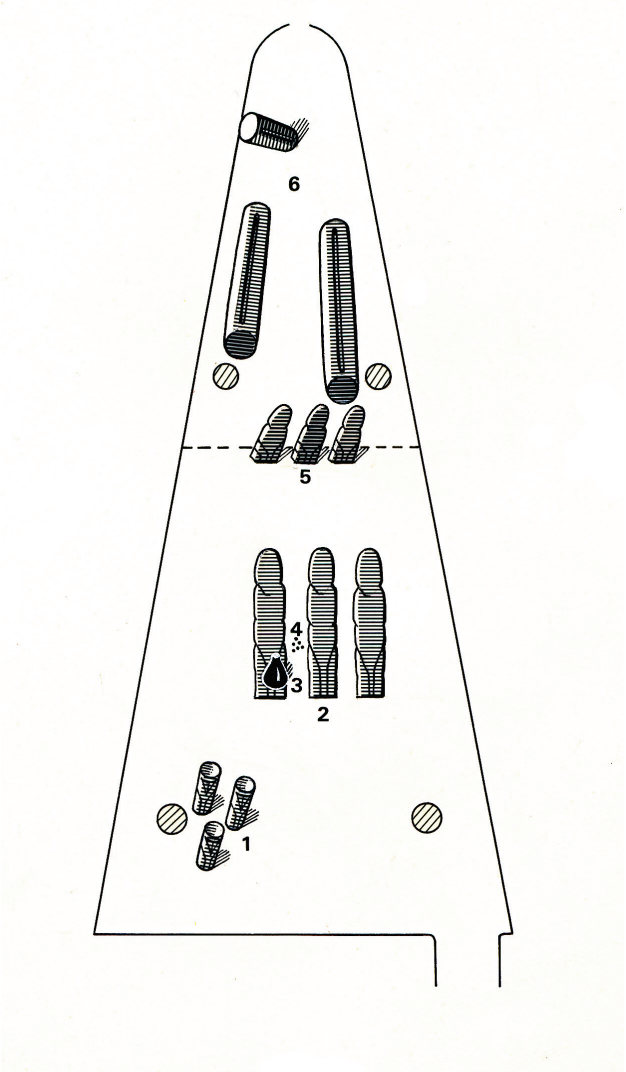

Fig. 24:
Arrangement of carvings inside *korambo*
1 *kundi ure*
2 *nggwalndu*
3 *baba*
4 *mindsha kumbu* for *kang*
5 *wapinyan*
6 *mi*

Front section of building: *yele-korambo*
Rear section of building: *kabasagu*

the hosting group starts putting pressure on the other moiety to reciprocate with the next initiation. There is no end to this 'give-and-take' relationship, since the initiation system is based on a cyclical principle, which means that, after attaining the ultimate grade, the process starts anew with the rendering of the lowest grade. And since the two moieties never carry out initiations for each other simultaneously, but on a delayed basis, the pressure to host an initiation is constantly upheld, albeit with shifting responsibility.

Initiations are always preceded by lengthy negotiations and discussions. Preparations for initiations – which always require numerous pig sacrifices, good harvests and, in consequence, ensuing yam feasts – customarily take years. It takes, or, more correctly, took a man several decades[10] to complete an entire initiation cycle, from the first to the last ceremony, because he is not only a 'grade taker' but also a 'grade giver', which means, to put it crudely, that half of the time the men are busy organizing and staging initiations for the other moiety.[11] Yam feasts and initiations are closely linked with each other, in earlier days probably more so than today. Between 1978 and 1985 more and more yam feasts were organized which were not followed by an initiation, leading to a growing self-momentum of these competitive exchange feasts. Inversely, however, initiations need to be preceded by a yam feast, without exception.

The decision to stage an initiation is followed by a competitive food exchange between the two moieties. Typically, the moment chosen for such an event is when the *wapi* and *ka* are still growing in the ground, this means during a time when the storage huts are just about empty, and the people are subsisting on a diet of sago and bananas. The timing, however, is not by coincidence; moreover, the hosting *ara* wittingly chooses a moment when, under normal circumstances, it is almost impossible to accumulate a sufficient amount of yams, display the tubers on the ceremonial ground, and hand them over to their exchange partners from the opposite moiety. The event is part of a highly complex, strategic game which only comes off because the Abelam are masters in deploying their food resources. Apart from banking a sufficient amount of seed tubers for the next crop, the men always put aside substantial quantities of yam as a reserve for unforeseen events such as bride wealth payments, mortuary ceremonies or first menstruation feasts, and, of course, unexpected competitive exchanges between the ritual moieties, as one never can be sure when the *sambera* might initiate a yam feast by presenting their ritual partners with a pig.

In Kalabu, early in 1979, word had been going round for quite a while that a pig exchange between the two *ara* was impending, but as yet nothing had happened. Then one night in April, to everyone's surprise, the *waignara* men sounded the slit gongs, spreading the news that they had just caught (and paid for) a village pig which they were about to bring from Kamogwa to Wapinda. When I arrived in Kamogwa (Kalabu I) the squeaking and wildly kicking pig had just been tied to a pole. Clearly, the men were in a happy and expectant mood. While some of the young men shouldered the pig, the important *waignara* members – all of them elder men – gathered to set out jointly to Wapinda, where the *numanara* men were already waiting for them. When they reached the end of the Ndunyinggi hamlet, the boundary between Kalabu I and II, the old men struck up the following song of challenge addressed to their *sambera* in Wapinda:

Go on and challenge (to an exchange) other men if you like, but if you wish to try me then you will find yourself facing this (pig).
I shall call your name, give it (pig) to you and you must cut it apart. You're my enemy with whom I fight with yam, pigs and shell rings.
Don't think that the breadfruit[12] contains stones. When you peel it you'll see that there are no stones inside, only flesh.
You can check every breadfruit: you'll find no stones, only flesh.[13]

Following the singing, which carried far in the nightly silence, the men arrived with the pig in Wapinda and left it in a meeting house

[10] By the late 1970s the initiation system was already impaired by a number of factors resulting from colonial impact and culture change. I was then told that the final, and highest, initiation grade had been staged for the last time some years after the end of the Second World War.

[11] See also Forge (1970a: 270) on this aspect.

[12] Breadfruit contain chestnut-like seeds.

[13] Meaning: the singer is not merely uttering empty phrases; he claims to be able to implement everything he says.

that belonged to one of the *waignara* men. The *numanara* men, who had themselves procured a pig in the course of the day, watched on in silence, but attentively, from the fires in front of their houses. Some of them got up to inspect the pig the *waignara* had brought and to see whether it was bigger than their own. There were no discussions that night, and the *waignara* men soon retired to their houses.

The next morning, large amounts of *ka* and ripe coconuts were heaped on the Wapinda *amei*. Men were seen carrying single large tubers on their shoulders, which they handed over to the leader of their respective moiety; in terms of *sambera* relationship, many of them did not belong to the Wapinda ceremonial ground, but came in support of their moiety peers. Unlike on other festive occasions where the yam is cooked in the normal manner, food for this *sambera* feast was prepared in a special way: the *ka* tubers were cut in two, lengthwise, and filled with grated coconut flakes, like a sandwich (*tipma ka ndei sigete*), after which the two halves were tied together with vines and cooked in large earthenware pots. In addition to this delicacy, the women cooked *ka* soup which, however, was not served in coconut shells or ceremonial pots (*amukat*), but ladled onto banana leaves lying on the ground. The thick soup (*sanggu*) that had been cooked by the wives of the *sambera* was eaten in groups, mainly by the young men and boys. Then the two pigs were singed and exchanged. Each group carried away its pig and went to cut it up.[14]

Two rows were laid out on the *amei*, one for each moiety, made up of raw *ka* tubers and supplemented with the cooked yams filled with coconut flakes and packed in palm leaf packets, as well as tobacco leaves and betel nut. Representatives from each moiety began distributing the food they had received among the members of their own *ara,* when suddenly a fresh container filled with cooked coconut-yam 'sandwiches' appeared out of the blue. It was immediately rejected because the sponsor (a man from the *numanara* moiety) had failed to contribute money to the purchase of his *ara*'s pig; this prevented him from being party to the exchange. The meat, after cooking in the earth oven for several hours, was not publicly displayed but distributed among the various receivers, outside the *amei*.

The exchange of uncooked and cooked food, including pork, constitutes an important part but not the only aspect of a feast. Just as important are the speeches that deal with the aim and significance of the occasion. In the present case, this involved the preparation of an initiation, as the following excerpts from the debate[15] go to explain:

Kapmale[16] (*waignara*):

I gave you (the opposite *ara*) pigs for *ulke* and *nau*, and now you ask for some for *nggwal*. I carried *yesak* (decoration worn for the *nggumaira* initiation) in Wapinda; you gave me no pig for that. But I gave you pigs for *ulke* and *nau* (to enable his youngest, adopted son to see the initiation scene) and now you asking us to stage *nggwal* and to provide even more pigs if we too want to see something.

Darigwa (*numanara*):

My father gave you many pigs for the 'tambaran'.[17] You have balanced this debt, but not more! When you, Kap, once came to Wapinda, you entered the *korambo* and I got to eat pork for that. This debt you have amended, but not more! If matters go on like this, I shall see that my two sons leave Wapinda and go to Kaumbul to see the tamberan there.[18]

Kapmale:

I gave many pigs for *nggwal*. You can't twist my words. I had my son before you; your sons are younger. Your father died on our side, on the side of the *waignara*. That's why the *numanara* came to an end with his body,[19] but I am here and speaking. You

[14] Cutting up a pig is a task performed by the old men, as younger men are afraid of coming into direct contact with the animal's blood. If a man under the age of approximately 60 has to do the job all the same, he binds off his wrists and lower arms in order to prevent the pig's blood from 'invading' his own bloodstream, lest he grow prematurely old.

[15] This discussion took place on 7 April 1979; in terms of content it connects up with the debate carried out on the occasion of the transfer of the carvings to Kaumbul.

[16] In other contexts Kapmale is occasionally also called Kamboiragwa.

[17] Tok Pisin term that corresponds to the Abelam term *maira*; this covers everything that is associated with initiations and rituals. Men often use 'tamberan' in speeches even if they are otherwise speaking in Abelam.

[18] He is threatening to sever existing *sambera* relationships and enter new ones with Kaumbul men.

[19] Meaning: you cannot live off your fathers' and

must first try to pay your debts and stage *nggwal* for my son. Only then you yourself will see *nggwal*.

Darigwa:

I told you before: if you try to challenge me in this way, I'll fetch my sons and take them to Kaumbul to see the 'tamberan' there.

Kapmale:

You're trying to cheat me! Your father told you to obtain pigs; I was told to do the same. But unlike you I did it. Now it is up to you to repay us. I'll eat (pork), only then our issue is settled. But if you try to challenge me, or if you attempt to cheat on me, then it is at your account. It was I who tried to clear up this matter with the 'tamberan'; I did my duty, so this matter is settled. But you Darigwa, you are trying to skip (grades) and see *nggwal*. I don't agree with that, and there is much talking left to do, for I gave you, all in all, six pigs. You ate them but you're not even considering paying back the debt. You're trying to get around it and wish to see *nggwal* straightaway. Your ideas about your father's pigs are wrong, for now you are standing here. As far as the 'tamberan' goes, you (the *numanara*) go ahead, I (*waignara*) follow you. I gave you six pigs, don't forget that. Because you belong to the first *ara*, it's up to you now. I, however, belong to the second *ara*. So, undo your wrong, in the name of my son. Then I shall stand in your debt, in the name of your children. That's why you must give me six pigs, so that I can eat. Only then will you see *nggwal*.

Bukua (*waignara*, younger classificatory brother of Kap):

Because you belong to those who have to start with these feasts, it's up to you to try to pay back your debts. You alone cannot do this. The other men have nothing to say on this matter (although it concerns them too) because you are their speaker; this is why you're talking to us now.

Kap:

I wanted to have a competition with you, but you of the first *ara*, all you think about is how to harm other people (through sorcery). For you are the ones who know about sorcery (*kus*).

forefathers' merits (since Darigwa apparently changed *ara* membership). You have to produce your own performances and results.

Barembia (*waignara*):

What's all this talk about pigs? After we'd provided pigs in preparation of the 'tamberan' feast, many people died. That's what we've got to talk about! For every man that died you must provide a pig and we must eat them (in the name of the victims). You just want to give and take pigs for the 'tamberan'. But first we must find out why all these people died, and then we have to settle this matter!

Kap (speaking to Darigwa):

You're trying to trick me out of my six pigs by mentioning the name of your father. But, together, you and I started something new. I will now prepare *boko* and *kara* (initiation grades). You all now that I harvested a large yam for this 'tamberan'. I presented it in public on Wapinda. You all know that! Don't dare to mention the names of your fathers in this matter! I purchased pigs for the yam feast; you all saw them. So don't later mention the names of your fathers in this matter!

Barembia (speaking to Darigwa):

You men of *numanara*! Remember: the next time decorations are brought to the stone house, you must clear some land and plant yam. I and my followers, we all have the same wish: together we'll harvest yam and give it to you, making you feel envy. That's why you try to take vengeance on us through sorcery.

Tambandshoe (speaking to Darigwa):

As we, the *waignara*, know about your wish to see *nggwal* we will outmatch you with yams and pigs. But some day you will not get around repaying this debt. Then you will have to hold a feast in Kaumbul and Wapinda.

Gueguin (*waignara*):

Don't talk so much! My *nggwal* is Sagulas; his home is Wapinda. This is what Sagulas sees: this year you will harvest so much *ka* that you will have to ram poles in the ground along the paths leading from the gardens to the village so that the men can put down their heavy loads and rest. Sagulas is in Wapinda. This is how he sees it: the time is ripe to purchase pigs and cook yam. Many men will have to be able to eat from it so that Sagulas gets something to eat as well. But leave out the sorcery! A competition with yam and pigs is good and the right thing to do.

Tambandshoe (to Darigwa):

Kap gave you many pigs in the name of *nggwal*. We of Kaumbul, we have a name for (growing) yam. But people of Wapinda, Darigwa and Kap, you have a name for initiations. And when a feast is over, Kap always provides pigs to clear the *amei* of crumbs.[20] We all know that. So, Darigwa, it's up to you to sacrifice pigs if you want Kap to stage a feast.

Kap:

You all saw the feast back then. After the feast I cleared the crumbs from Wapinda with pigs. If you want to have a feast, you must provide pigs; you must do as I did.
When I created my last 'tamberan' I was the leader of my *ara*. At the time, my (eldest) son was too young to carry a headdress, so I took his place. When I was getting ready and stepped onto the *amei* of Wapinda, you *numara* men forbid your wives to see me and be pleased at the sight. They all had to stay in their houses. When the feast was over I sacrificed many pigs to clear away the crumbs. Now you've decided to dance with headdresses. That's alright with me, but don't forget my pigs! Promise me first that you too will provide pigs!
Now we must form pairs of women (from the first and second *ara*) who will then exchange soup and meat at the same time. If a woman receives food from another woman without being able to give something back, she'll not be content. That's why we now have to decide which women will exchange things (with each other).
We'll hold a big feast in Wapinda: when we've harvested yam, we'll hold a yam feast where each man for himself piles up *ka* on a heap. We don't want men working together; each one should have his own pile. That is what makes a good competition.

Darigwa:

I don't like your idea about a competition. Back then I cooked soup and gave it to you. You ate it, put on the headdress and danced.

Kap:

You must only give back to me what you owe me. Back then, when I cooked soup which I then gave to you and you ate it, I had no father to help me. You know that. It was me alone who planted *wapi* and *ka*. I cooked soup, gave it to you, and you ate it. Then you put on your headdress and danced on the *amei*. But now I'm talking about a new competition where each man stands alone and competes with the other.

Kitneikyak (*waignara*, to Darigwa):

You have no reason to be dissatisfied about the soup. In Wapinda, I and Kap cooked soup for you, and you ate it. You can't be dissatisfied about that now, instead you must think about repaying your debts. Make a decision so that we can arrange women in pairs; they will then exchange food and meat. Your many objections are wrong. You want the women (of each *ara*) to work together. Don't forget that I, Kitneikyak, own large numbers of women (members of *waignara*). If I summon them all, you'll not be able to stand up against them, and you'll be angry and will try to harm us. That's what I don't like.

Tambandshoe (addressing Kumbiskapa, also *waignara*):

This yam of the sort called *laindshe* and this *ka* that you got in Gweligim, for this yam I now want to hold a 'tamberan'! Don't forget this *wapi* and *ka*! You must give me some of it in Kaumbul. Of the tubers that the *numanara* piled up in Kaumbul, you received several. If we now prepare a 'tamberan', you must be the first to build a pile of tubers on Kaumbul.[21] You cannot remain in Ndunyinggi then. The other men of Kalabu I come behind you; you must be the first.

At this point the men start sticking little sticks into the ground, in pairs.

Kap comments on this:

These here are Boinda (*numunara*) and Bukua (*waignara*). Together they must obtain pigs and pile up *ka*.[22]

Tambandshoe:

This year we will harvest yam. After that we'll clear

[20] Every feast ends with the sacrifice of a pig, which is believed to make the clan spirits leave the village and go back to their abodes.

[21] Kumbiskapa's *amei* is Ndunyinggi. Tambandshoe, from Kaumbul amei, reproaches him for having unduly received yam from the *numanara* in Kaumbul while he himself had received very little. He demands that at the next yam feast that Tambandshoe is planning, Kumbis has to help him with a substantial contribution.

[22] This stipulates a direct *sambera* relationship.

fresh land again and plant. Every man must try to grow yam on his own. Then we'll hold a competition. Every man must take part, and whoever is left standing at the end with empty hands will be jealous and will try to take revenge on another person.

Following the speeches, the two moieties exchanged the food.

Commentary
The extracts from the speeches are a good example to show how members of opposite moieties argue with each other on competitive issues. The present case focuses on the demand of the *numanara* that the *waignara* first hold an initiation for the *numunara* sons, in repayment of an old debt from the previous generation, which the *waignara* allegedly had never repaid. This is also why the debate hinges indirectly on the question whether only the performances of the present generation should be taken into account, or not. Darigwa chooses not to press claims later on in the dispute – probably due to the many voices raised against him. Thus he seems to accept the claim by the opposite side that it is up to the *numara* to first stage an initiation for the members of the *waignara*. In this case it means that the *numanara* have to initiate the 'junior' members of the *waignara* moiety into the *nggwal* grade. The atmosphere is highly competitive and the tone of the dispute openly challenging, which confirms how closely ritual exchange feasts are connected with the initiation complex. The relationship to spirit beings that figure prominently in the initiation scenes only plays a subsidiary role here. Gueguin is the only speaker to mention his *nggwal*, firstly, to refer to himself ('Sagulas wants to eat yam and pork'), secondly, in reference to the initiation grade that the *numanara* are being asked to hold.

Initiation Grades
Typically a man goes through several consecutive initiation grades in the course of his life, starting as a small boy, often still in the arms of his father, and passing through the last grade as a fully-grown man. Culture contact, modernization and the impact of the missions had brought noticeable changes to the initiation system by the late 1970s – at least in Kalabu – in the sense that, for one, the intervals between initiations had become longer, for the other, that the contents of distinct grades had been compounded. Although the men still often discuss forthcoming initiations at length, they seldom carry them out. The main reason for this, they say, is that today many more deaths occur than in earlier days. Since natural death is hardly ever given as the cause of mortality, sorcery practised by malicious or jealous adversaries is practically always in play. As in the cultivation of ceremonial yam, sorcery and rituals geared to the growth and maturation of young men and boys – the rationale behind initiations in both a direct and a figurative sense – form two complexes that radically exclude each other. This is one of the reasons why men in village discussions often demand that, before commencing a new initiation, the recent deaths of co-villagers need investigating and clearing up (see above). Between 1978 and 1983, Kalabu villagers organized and staged numerous feasts and ceremonies in preparation for a new round of initiations, but without ever implementing one in the end. Likewise, the ceremonial house in Kaumbul was built for the purpose of staging initiations; it actually served as the focus of quite a few yam feasts, usually considered as the precursor of an initiation, but, in the end, no initiation was ever staged.

Traditionally the initiation cycle consisted of the following grades:[23]

nggumaira
ulke
nau
nggwalndu: nggilut
narut
boko, kara
puti

The consecutive grades, collectively subsumed under the term *maira*, feature the enactment of changing ritual images and installations in the *korambo* as well as a variety of dances and songs on the ceremonial ground. Passing a specific stage entitles the initiates to wear special types of adornment that distinguish them as graduates of the particular grade. These include grade-specific patterns on string bags,[24] special body ornaments and

[23] See also Kaberry (1941: 357), and Scaglion (1976: 84-85) for Nyelikim.

[24] The grade-specific string bag patterns carry the following names: *nggumaira, nyamnyam; ulke-nau: gelaue; nggwalndu: kuyen* and *apui marangge* (also called *sainyik*); *puti: wama-ut,* also called *bikna-ut*; a small *kibe*-plaited bag is also regarded as an emblem of the *puti* grade.

other insignia as well as certain privileges. Next to distinctive elements, the various grades also share common features; among others this refers to the actual sequence of ritual acts that the novices go through in the course of an initiation. These include: beatings; entering the *korambo*; beholding the initiation scene; change of name; seclusion and instruction; appearance as ritual dancer on the *amei*. As on the occasion of other significant personal events (marriages, mortuary ceremonies, growing yam, killing an enemy, etc.) the initiates are subject to a number of taboos and restrictive rules with regard to food and contact with women. Initiations are always staged at the same time in the annual season, that is, after the yam harvest but before laying out new gardens. The initiators never explain to the novices the contents or meaning of what they are shown. The emphasis is explicitly on visual experience, on seeing with one's own eyes the sacred and secret objects revealed in each grade. Even my best and most knowledgeable research associates were never able to provide an exegesis of the deeper meaning of an initiation grade,[25] merely descriptions of what it contains.[26]

Nggumaira

Nggu is the common Abelam term for water in streams and pools, whereas *kulak* is used for drinking water straight from the spring. *Nggumaira* is best translated as 'marvel from the water'. Prior to colonization and pacification this initiation grade was staged inside the *korambo*, more specifically, directly under the vine rope from which the *kang* drums are suspended. Nowadays the men prefer a spot close to a stream, which makes the work for the men creating the scene a little easier. The men of the initiating *ara* – the receivers are the junior generation of the opposite moiety – commission an artist from their own ranks to create the ritual work of art.

To create *nggumaira* the men first dig a round hole in the ground, larger nowadays than when the grade used to be performed in the ceremonial house,[27] where the work was hampered by edificial constraints and extra effort. Then the hole is filled with water, after which it is referred to as *wanggunggu* (waterhole). Next the men fetch from the forest a special type of vine (*biatbanggui*) that grows on certain trees. It is cut into small pieces, which the men then rub between their hands, dipping them in the water like when doing washing. The procedure creates a snow-white, fine and dense foam that spreads across the water's surface. Moreover, the foam is very durable and does not dissolve quickly like soapsuds do. The work continues until the whole pool is covered with a thick layer of foam. When the 'canvas' has been prepared, the commissioned artist cuts the many flowers and leaves that the men have collected to size and shape. He starts on the image at the centre of the foam carpet with a yellow flower (*ramu mimoe* – yellow flower), the lower chalice of which is brown inside. Around it he groups black strips of sago palm leaves (*tsigu*);[28] from there he continues to lay out in concentric circles flower and leaf ornaments (**pl. 55, fig. 25**) until the entire foam carpet is covered with rich patterns (**pl. 56**). The edge of the pool is hidden under ever-widening rings of leaf bands, with the outer edge marked by a ring of orange *ban* fruits (**pl. 82**).

The red, yellow, white and black lines that make up the floral pattern are referred to as *maindshe*, the same term that is used for lines and dashes on paintings as well for the twines from which the women manufacture string bags**.**

Before the novices are led to see the secret image they are subjected to a beating with

[25] A fact that Forge, too, emphasizes in various publications (1966; 1970a; 1979).

[26] Personally I was able to follow sequences of different initiation grades in various villages, but never a full grade through all its phases, which can go on for weeks or even months. I witnessed the following grades in parts: *ulke* in Samgik, *ulke-nau* in Malmba, *nggwalndu* in Wora, Kwanimbandu and Waignakim. The ritual scene *nggumaira* was created for us especially by the men of Kalabu, under the direction of the artist Kwandshendu. Of the final grade, *puti,* I have not seen any parts for the simple reason that it was last performed in Kalabu sometime around 1950. The following descriptions are based, on the one hand, on own observations, on the other, on the accounts of research associates collected between 1978 and 1980, which I then tried to assemble kaleidoscopically to render a full picture. My description is therefore far from being exhaustive; for this the rituals and the contents are far too complex and varied. Furthermore, I place emphasis more on the contents of the various ritual scenes and images, and less on the actual single steps through the initiations.

[27] Forge (1967: 69) mentions for the eastern Abelam a similar initiation grade during which patterns were made on the floor of the ceremonial house. According to the descriptions given by Forge's informants it did not involve a waterhole.

[28] These basically green leaves turn black when soaked in water for some time.

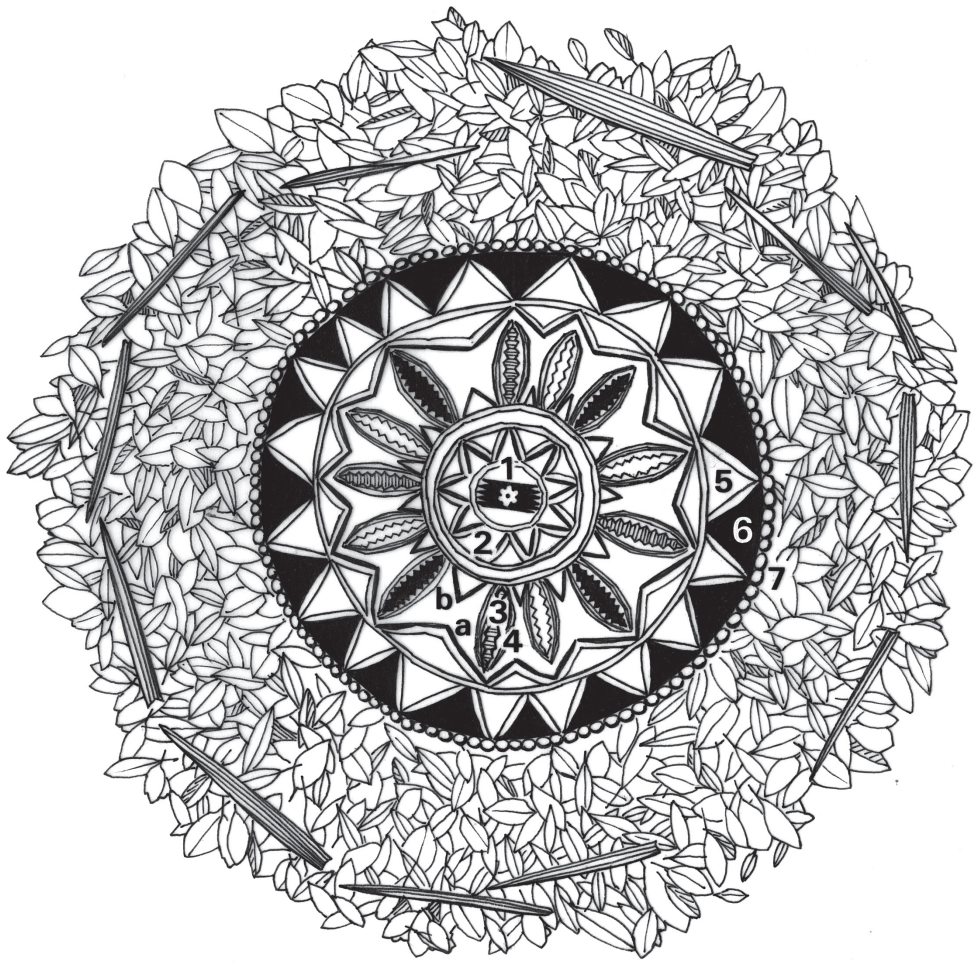

Fig. 25
The pattern layout in *nggumaira*
1 Sirendshui (Serapan); 2 *yaul*; 3 *seraul* a) legs b) arms; 4 *kwagu*; 5 *kitnya*; 6 *kwandshe*; 7 *arpmu*.

stinging nettles.[29] The senior men of the *ara* that create the ritual image form an alley through which the initiates (*dshalendu*) are driven – the youngest ones carried by their fathers; hereby the old men see to it that the ordeal does not turn out too harsh. In single file the boys are led to see *nggumaira*. They are allowed to walk round it once and are then, still in single file, made to stand a few metres away, with their backs turned on the image. Members of the initiating *ara* quickly and silently cover the 'pool' with sand and stones until nothing is left to be seen of the marvel. Then the novices are told to turn around and behold *nggumaira* once more, but there is nothing left to be seen. The boys are told that the marvel had only popped up quickly to reveal itself to them, before vanishing back underground.

In this scene, emphasis is placed on the suddenness with which the marvel appears to reveal itself, and vanishes again. In conjunction with the ephemeral materials it is made of, the image accentuates the aspect of transiency.

Whether or not this initial grade is, or to

[29] Occasionally the sisters of the novices are beaten simultaneously with stinging nettles back in the village. As the skin becomes hot through beating or rubbing with nettles, the Abelam regard this procedure as strengthening and growth enhancing; at the same time it is seen as a prerequisite for communication with otherworldly beings. The same goes for red colour, which is classified as being 'hot' and which is applied to the yam tubers to aid growth.

be more precise, was followed by a period in seclusion is not clear. My associates disagreed on this point, often saying that the boys were too young to be separated from their mothers for any length of time. Immediately after experiencing the *nggumaira* revelation the boys are led out onto the *toiembo*, the sacred enclosure at the back of the ceremonial house where they are taught to play on short bamboo flutes. The sounds are said to represent bird voices. The initiation comes to a close with a ritual dance, first performed by the initiating men, then by the novices – if they are too young, the fathers act as substitutes. The dancers' ornaments consist of frilled, wild 'limbum' palm leaves (*bendshin*) which are tied into wreaths (called *bendshinare* or *yesak*) and worn around the head, the arms or the knees. The *dshalendu* are given a new name by their fathers' ritual partners. As an emblem of having seen *nggumaira* and passed the first initiation grade, the boys are now allowed to wear a wristlet, *kwalya*,[30] made of flat shell discs.

Interpreting *Nggumaira*

This artwork of leaves and flowers set out on a pure white, almost canvas-like carpet of foam belongs to the most impressive and fascinating images I ever saw during my research among the Abelam (**pl. 82).**

A comparison with the façade paintings (**fig. 22, 25**) on the ceremonial house reveals several common features. For one, my associates drew parallels between the concentric layout of *nggumaira* and the eyes of the large *nggwalnggwal* faces in the lower section of the *korambo* painting. The *yaul* band is not only similar to the string bag ornaments on the *mbai*, but also to the patterns that women create on string bags by combining differently coloured threads. The *nggumaira* hand and leg motif corresponds with the *bia* pattern of the façade painting. The outer ring consisting of *kitnya* and *kwandshe* triangles signifies the notion of identity between women and flying foxes as expressed in many other contexts too, not only on the *mbai* – where women are represented as *kwandshe* (flying foxes) – but also in songs and speeches. On the other hand, there is no direct correspondent for *seraul* (crickets) and *wiwu* (lizards); these motifs occasionally appear on façade paintings, but they are not part of the standard repertoire.

The *nggumaira* differs from painted and carved works of art on one significant point: it does not feature anthropomorphic figures. The ephemeral image contains human elements (arms, legs, vulva), but they are rendered in such abstract form that they stand for themselves as autonomous artistic designs, without immediate reference to the human body.

At the centre of the ritual image itself, but also the ideational conception behind it, stands Serapan, the mythical boar who appears here in his celestial guise as Sirendshui, the Morning Star. All the descriptions of *nggumaira* I received, before Kwandshendu unexpectedly offered to create the ritual scene for us, were focussed on Serapan, the motif at the centre from which jagged lines radiate out towards the edge of the pool.

The association of Serapan with Sirendshui in the present context comes somewhat as a surprise, but is not extraordinary. I had come across the equation before, namely when enquiring about the indigenous names of celestial bodies. In this context the people frequently referred to the aggressive potential of both concepts, on the one hand, the mythical boar Serapan and his habit of breaking into and wrecking yam gardens, and, on the other, the bright-shining Morning Star that tends to swallow smaller stars with its brilliant light. However, in the *nggumaira* context, this common feature is of only secondary significance; in the foreground stands the idea of representing Serapan's eternal nature in the infinite quality of the Morning Star Sirendshui.

According to Abelam cosmology, the 'bone spirits' of the deceased continue to exist as stars; this is especially true of the primeval beings that inhabited the earth during the time of creation, and now light the sky at night.[31] This helps to explain the identity of the mythical boar Serapan with Sirendshui, the Morning Star. A further link comes to light when one considers that the famous yam stones, which play such a significant role in the yam complex, are also described as Serapan's bones.

The fact that Serapan, represented in the *nggumaira* by a yellow flower, is located at the centre of the image on the foam carpet brings to

[30] The same adornment is worn by girls after first menstruation.

[31] See Hauser-Schäublin (1983: 197).

mind that, in the myth,[32] Serapan emerged from a pool in the bush. As mentioned already in other contexts, pools and swamps are regarded as the interface between the here and the netherworld, through which spirit beings travel between the world of the humans and the beyond. When discussing Abelam clan structure, I mentioned that these clan-specific pools are associated with the *baba,* which often carry identical names. In Kalabu, Serapan is not aligned to a specific clan, instead he is regarded as the primeval boar, transformed into animal shape after shedding his human form. For this reason, clan-specific names never feature in the context of *nggu-maira*; the 'marvel from the water' is clearly of superordinate significance.

Ulke-Nau

For quite a while already, *ulke* and *nau* are no longer carried out in separate initiations; they have been merged and form one single *maira*. But elder men still know which parts of the initiation belong to *nau*, and which parts stem from the original *ulke* grade.

Ulke-nau commences with the appearance of *baba* mask figures which place selected coconut palms under a taboo by tying leaves around their stems. This means that the coconuts from these palms are reserved for use in the initiation and that the rightful owners forfeit all rights to their trees. The grated coconuts are used for garnishing the yam soup that the novices are given to eat during initiation. In the hamlet of Suapel in Kalabu, where we witnessed the placing of the taboos, the *baba* figures also 'terrorized' the inhabitants into giving them betel nuts, tobacco and other items, which the people willingly did. Most of the women and children went to hide in their houses in order to evade the aggressive mask figures on their rampage.

In earlier days, the stem of a *mangge* tree was erected on the *amei* during the *ulke* initiation,[33] which is described as the *baba*'s *maira*. The stem was enclosed by a fence which was adorned with wild taro leaves. Inside the enclosure the men placed a *baba* mask. Spears were thrown at the *mangge* stem (by the novices?); these had to hit and stick in the tree. This grade's main musical instrument, which the novices get to see and play during seclusion, is the bullroarer, *ulke*.

In the village of Samgik we were once shown ritual installations used in initiations called *nautagwa – kutagwa*. We were taken to a small ceremonial house that had no façade painting. Inside, we encountered a cult scene that was topped by a *baba* mask which was referred to as *kutagwa* (a female figure).[34] The mask formed the apex of a triangular installation left unpainted (in contrast to earlier days when it was decorated in a very similar way to a façade painting, albeit much smaller); instead it was draped with coloured cloths. Underneath the *baba* mask there hung a comparatively short *wapi* tuber and beneath that an ovula (mollusc) shell; both were referred to as the *kutagwa*'s children. Immediately in front of the triangular construction, birdlike carvings were sticking in the inner side of the roof. Next to them short *wapi* tubers, some of them painted, were set up. Leading from the entrance of the ceremonial house to the *kutagwa* was a broad pathway flanked on both sides by large, painted fruits that looked like coconuts at first glance; the men, however, told us they were the fruits of wild-growing trees. They, too, were regarded as the *kutagwa*'s children. Behind one such row of fruits, otherwise lined by carved figures and painted *wapi* yams, there lay a wooden turtle. On both sides of the *kutagwa* and its triangular support there hung carved bird figures and, in one spot, thin bamboo flutes which were said to represent the *kutagwa*'s voice. Behind the painted fruits on the right, a short painted *wapi* tuber was positioned, next to it, on the right, there were two small carved figures; these were called *nautagwa*. Behind the row of fruits on the left there was a similar statue. Some of these *nautagwa* figures were said to be male, others female. I was told that, in earlier times, *kutagwa* and *nautagwa* used to form two separate initiation grades, but that they now are performed as a single, combined initiation.

In Kalabu the men described to me the *ulke* initiation scene on several occasions. The focus in this grade is on board-shaped, occasionally double-sided carvings: these are called *ulke*. The carvings show anthropomorphic as well as animal figures. Occasionally figures, rarely

[32] See p. 117.

[33] See also the photographs of a similar initiation in Forge 1966, plate 3.

[34] Among the eastern Abelam witches are referred to as *kutagwa* (Forge 1970b: 267-268). In Kalabu the same concept exists in slightly altered form as *mikutagwa* (Hauser-Schäublin 1984: 362).

heads, are grouped together to form a frieze. The *ulke* carvings are usually flanked by *wapinyan* anthropomorphic statues, some of them male, others female. *Wapinyan* figures are never placed lying down, but always upright. The men commented on this with the words "*gik ndei yau*," which translates as 'they have laid eggs'.

Photos taken by Phyllis Kaberry, which later came into the possession of Anthony Forge,[35] show, among other things, details from *ulke* initiations in Kalabu. They depict narrow, vertical ('limbum'?) boards; they are coloured white and look, in form and design, very much like the horizontal 'limbum' boards that jut out from the front of a ceremonial house on both sides, at the level of the carved crossbeam.

One of the foci in *nau* initiations are roots of bamboo that are stuck in the ground upside-down, that is, with the gnarled roots at the top and the bamboo shaft sticking in the ground. Often the tips of the roots are carved and painted so that they look like birds' heads and necks (**pl. 58**). The bird image is amplified by fitting out the *nau* figures with bird skins. They are additionally decorated with *beleben*, *mai* and *mbande* mollusc shell necklaces – typically female adornments. Occasionally the bamboo shaft sticking in the ground is wrapped in colourful leaves. Often the *nau* figures are surrounded by carved wooden bird figures inserted into the inside of the roof. The musical instrument that goes with these figures is a short bamboo flute (of the same type of bamboo as the figures); it is referred to as *nautagwa* and played transversely.

An old man in Kalabu told me that when he was initiated into the *nau* grade many years ago, the rituals had commenced with an act that is no longer performed today and that is now almost forgotten. Before the novices were shown the main cult scene they were taken to the bush, to a spot near a pool. There the initiating men had dug a trench which was filled with stinging nettles. The entrance and the exit at the other end of the (roofed?) trench was similar to that of a ceremonial house. The novices were flogged with stinging nettles into the trench which they had to cross from one end to the other.

Whereas the *nau* are explicitly referred to as female and decorated with typically female ornaments, *ulke* carvings are only indirectly assigned female status. In both grades, now combined to one, shell rings are not featured in any way, a fact that my research associates emphasized repeatedly with reference to other *maira* where shell rings actually are important.

In the village of Malmba we had the opportunity to see an *ulke-nau* initiation.[36] The event was preceded a few weeks before by a *ka* yam feast, said to be the initiation's prelude. In the course of the initiation it also became apparent to what degree other villages are involved in these events and how much depends on ongoing ritual interaction between the various villages for ensuring a smooth run of the ceremonies. As in the case of yam feasts, not only allied settlements are invited to the initiation ceremonies, but also enemy villages. Due to their village-spanning and -linking quality, yam feasts and initiation ceremonies should be viewed as a network of relationships that is regularly asserted and renewed through these joint ventures. The event in Malmba was visited mainly by representatives of those Kalabu clans who had longstanding kin ties to the village and who had already provided and sent batches of crops in support of the upcoming feast.

A few days before the actual initiation, a delegation of Malmba men had visited the hamlet of Suapel in Kalabu to fetch the carved head (*kumbu*) of the *nggwalndu* Yeyuwi[37] (**pl. 83**) and a number of *nau* figures because they were short of these objects in their own village. The objects were decorated with flowers and accompanied by a large group of men who provided the musical consort on the journey through the bush. The instruments they used included small *butuo* flutes (made from the husk of a round fruit) as well as *tsitsilolo* (a folded leaf through which one blows to create a sound almost like that of a siren) and *gwaminggel* (a bamboo shaft filled with leaves into which the player sings or bays, to be more precise). The *gwaminggel* is called Yeyuwi's dog; it is said that he barks because he is asking for the meat of pigs, the usual payment for this

[35] For being generously allowed to see both Kaberry's and his own photographs I am very grateful to the late Anthony Forge.

[36] On 14 and 15 November 1978.

[37] Yeyuwi is really the name of the Magnapate's *wapinyan.* Since the *nggwalndu* of their core hamlet Wapinda is Sagulas, Yeyuwi as occasionally declared to be the *nggwalndu* of Magnapate's affiliated hamlet Suapel.

kind of service. The various spirit voices were a warning to women and children not to approach the potentially dangerous procession. In this specific case the men were especially cautious because the path to Malmba led past many gardens where, during the day, the women and their children usually stay. Many of the senior men had adorned themselves with the same types of flowers that the ritual objects were decorated with and were carrying with them their boar tusk ornaments and spears. In Malmba the people were awaiting their arrival. Outside the *amei*, the Kalabu men gathered in a group and then stormed onto the ceremonial ground, brandishing their spears and uttering war cries, where they were greeted by the Malmba men who were also armed. Amidst the commotion, a *baba* mask figure, also armed with spears, suddenly stepped out to face the visitors who now turned their full attention to this new foe (**pl. 59, 85**). There followed a mock fight in the course of which the Kalabu men finally succeeded in driving back the *baba* figure. After things had quietened down, the ritual objects were carried onto the ceremonial ground, where the Malmba men briefly inspected them before storing them away in a house nearby. Before the Kalabu men set off for home again they were given a meal by their Malmba hosts.

About a week later, after the afforded amount of pigs had been procured, the Malmba men sounded the slit gong, announcing to the surrounding villages that the initiation was now to begin. Before long, groups of men from Magutogim, Ulupu, Yamel, Yenigo, Naram and Kalabu began arriving. One group after the next was greeted by the Malmba men, who were armed with spears and headed by two *baba* figures. Before being accepted, the visitors had to drive back the two *baba* figures[38] and break through the ring of armed warriors surrounding them. The men of Ulupu had brought with them a figure made from a wild taro shoot called *myamba*, the roots representing the head and the trunk, the leaves making up the legs. They deposited the figure at the entrance of the palm leaf enclosure that surrounded the *amei* and left it there for the entire duration of the ceremony. The presence of the figure was an intended provocation – quite common for these occasions – because it represented a man from Malmba who had once been killed on a raid by Ulupu warriors. But it also stood for an old village alliance, since the Malmba warrior had been slain by the Ulupu men to revenge the death of a man from Kalabu who had been killed by Malmba during a raid.

After entry, each visiting group went to sit down in separate, specially designated areas on the ceremonial ground, where the men were immediately served yam soup in beautifully adorned ceremonial clay pots (*amukat*). This, the people said, was done on purpose in order to prevent the aggression of the mock fights from growing into a serious confrontation; the sight of the full pots of soup was sure to turn the men's mind away from fighting to enjoying their food. As not all the surrounding villages arrived at the same time, the meals were served staggered, with one group already eating while a next group stormed onto the *amei*. Several men of the visiting groups carried with them taro leaves, smacking them on the ground when they entered the *amei*. The men from Yenigo came with a whole taro shoot which they threw at the feet of the Kalabu men who, in turn, picked it up and threw it back towards the representatives of Yenigo. The gesture signified the traditional enemy relationship between the two villages, rather like the medieval custom of throwing down the gauntlet.

Finally, a crowd numbering a few hundred people were gathered on the *amei* when, suddenly, the *baba* mask figures appeared again among them, only to slip away again quickly. This was the sign for a mock fight to commence between a group of young men, conspicuously dressed only in shorts but without a shirt or T-shirt – compared to the majority of men who usually dress in their best clothes for this type of event – and the *baba* mask figures.[39] The young men were the novices about to undergo initiation. Brandishing their spears they stepped forward to face the *baba* figures, who were also armed with spears. The fight consisted mainly of the two groups threateningly moving towards each other and then back again and stamping their feet on the floor, until the *baba* figures finally fell to the ground signalling their defeat. Immediately afterwards, they retreated to the *toiembo* at the back of the small, undecorated ceremonial house, accompanied by the initiates

[38] The *baba* masks were from Yamel; like the carved *nggwal* head they had been merely borrowed.

[39] Nowadays, if at all, only senior men adorn themselves with shell rings and flowers for such a ceremony.

(*dshale*) where these were probably shown the secret of the masks.

Late in the afternoon, *noute* dancers appeared on the ceremonial ground. Their bodies were covered in black paint (*nggile*) which is obtained from the ashes of the marrow of the *yitnbin* tree. The decorated dancers (*nare*)[40] wore a frilled fibre skirt and knee bands of the same material, a special ritual attire which was not worn for modesty reasons (traditionally, the Abelam went naked). The dancers' faces were elaborately painted, with special emphasis on the nose and eyes. These were completely coated with paint; the dancers must try to keep their eyes closed as long as possible. On their heads they carried a *noute* headdress, typical for *ulke* and *nau*, consisting of a round, plaited and painted disc with chicken feathers attached to the rim. The headdresses were affixed to the dancer's hair. The forehead was covered by bands with sewn-on red *kwarligus* seed pods (see **pl. 67**). The *noute* dancers belonged to the *waignara* moiety that was hosting the initiation and presenting it to their *numanara* partners. While the elaborately adorned men were performing a round dance in pairs (always anticlockwise), other men struck up a song. The songs were performed by alternating groups from different villages; they included a women's chorus and were accompanied by hourglass drums. This type of song is called *limbi* and is only performed in the context of *ulke* and *nau* initiations. Unlike *bire* and *wanyan* songs, which are also staged on the ceremonial ground, here the male and female singers move in a large circle on the *amei*.

Among the *nare* dancers there were also men from Kalabu and other villages, but they belonged to the same moiety (*ara*) as the dancers from Malmba. In a foreign village, only those men are allowed to dance who have already performed as *noute* dancers for their *sambera* in their own village. The *dshale* – together with all the other *numanara* men – watched from the audience. Senior men distinguished the best and most beautifully decorated dancers by daubing their chests with splashes of white lime. These dancers are referred to as *kyakndu*, which means 'deceased person', or as *nare kyandyak*, 'the adornment/ the adorned is dying'. The *noute* dancers were joined by a few women, some of them sisters, others wives. They were decorated in the same fashion as for a yam feast or the inauguration of a new ceremonial house. Some of them were holding a taro leaf in their hands, indicating that their men had purchased pigs outside their own village; others carried vine pig gauges attached to 'pitpit' stalks. The decorated *noute* dancers were considered as *maira* that was being shown to the novices. The dance went on all night. Only very few men succeeded in keeping their eyes shut for the entire period (**pl. 60, 84**). For many of them it was too much, and they had to open their eyes already after a few hours. The dancers often make provisions during the preparations leading up to the event, against the urge to open their eyes. The most effective method, they say, is to weave into their own hair some female pubes, namely in the spot where the *noute* headdress is affixed. This is said to transfer to the dancer a specifically female characteristic, and that is cooling. This is believed to have impact on the *noute* dancer, allowing him to keep his eyes shut for the entire length of the performance.

The *noute* dances went on all night, watched by men and women. Shortly before daybreak, at around 5 o'clock in the morning, a group of men stormed onto the *amei,* beating the ground with sticks and the lower ends of coconut fronds. This was the moment when the women retired from the scene. In the same instant, the *noute* dancers changed their direction of dancing volte-face, now moving clockwise. By this time – it was a full moon period – the moon had set, most of the fires had gone out and a morning mist had risen, shrouding the *amei* in obscurity. The atmosphere was made even more ominous by the shouts of the men that accompanied the sound of their sticks hitting the ground. The *dshalendu* were ordered to remain near the *amei* and prevented from running away as many other young people did. Then the *waignara* men formed two lines facing each other. They were armed with canes. Some of them even carried club-like sticks with thorns, but after a short discussion they were told to substitute them for canes. When all were ready, the novices stormed out from the *toiembo* and were forced to run the gauntlet, with the *waignara* men letting their canes rain down on them. Young boys were carried on the backs of their fathers to make the ordeal as short as possible. Behind each row of

[40] *Nare* is the plural form, *narendu* the singular. *Nare* stands for 'adornment', the 'adorned'. The female equivalent is *naremtagwa* or *naramtagwa*; the term is used for a decorated girl after first menstruation.

waignara men stood a *baba* mask figure who saw to it that the novices were not hit on the head. When it did occur – it only happened once or twice – the *baba* figure hit the culprit with the stick it was holding. Among those who ran the gauntlet were a number of men from other villages. They took this on themselves, they said, in lieu of relatives from Malmba whose children were too young to take the beating; it was also a way to mark kin solidarity across village boundaries. The atmosphere was quite suspenseful and emotions ran high as dawn broke amidst the shouts of the men, the sound of the canes hitting the novices' backs, the gasping of the initiates as they stamped the ground with their feet. After having run the gauntlet, each *dshalendu* was taken to a hut called *mairapute* where the initiation scene *ulke-nau* had been erected. The *mairapute* was a substitute for the ceremonial house which the men of Kalabu had once burnt down.[41] The novices remained in the house only for a short time. When they emerged, their backs were covered with blotches of yellow and red paint. These were referred to as the spirits' excrements (*maira nde witnya witneiyak*), representing blood and urine. They were applied by the initiators when the novices were leaving the *mairapute*.[42] At the same time, the initiates were given new names.

In the meantime, the *noute* dancers had formed a single row. Each dancer placed his hands on the hips of the man in front of him. The row of dancers began to move on the *amei* in a spiral shape, with the novices falling into line at the back, moving in an almost crouching posture. When the leading *noute* dancers had reached the middle of the *amei* and the row of dancers had finally formed into a spiral, a debarked tree stem was carried onto the ceremonial ground and placed at its edge, upon which the dancers, who had been moving to the sound of a *bire* song, dissolved their formation.

The novices, with their backs covered with paint blotches and weals, went to sit down on the log. In front of them some of the senior, and important, *waignara* men began moving up and down the row. To start with, the initiates were given leaves of the *yewi* lime tree to chew on and spit out again. This had a cleansing function and served as a preparatory step for the ritual food that they were given next. Each novice received from his *sambera* a small yam that had been roasted on the fire. On command, they all took a bite from their tuber and began chewing on it. However, before they could swallow it down, the initiating men ordered them to spit it out again immediately. Those who missed the command instantly started vomiting. This was explained by the fact that the yams had been administered many potent substances in order to attract the spirit beings from the beyond and make the yams grow well. The substances, however, were said to be so potent that they would immediately kill anyone who let the yam enter the stomach (*nggwalndu*). After having received this ritual food the novices rose from the log. At the same time, the people who had been watching from the edge of the *amei* began to move back onto the plaza. The *noute* dancers began taking off their headdresses and laying aside their adornment. At this moment a naked man painted white from head to toe emerged onto the ceremonial ground, performing bizarre leaps and holding an adze in his hands. In Tok Pisin he was referred to as 'fani man', in other words, 'funny/weird man'. Most of the onlookers smiled when he appeared. His status was rather ambiguous: only the Malmba men and their allies thought him amusing. For the Kalabu men he was reminiscent of a grievous occurrence, namely of the time when, during one of the last raids, a Malmba man had killed a Kalabu with an adze. This performance was referred to as *piabio ndei dioro*; *piabio* is the term for the feather-bush that a man is entitled to attach to his boar tusk pendant when he has killed a man in battle. The reference is best translated as 'they are making fun of their *piabio*', the *piabio* here meaning the slain (Kalabu) warrior.

While the novices were being given their ritual food, the squeals of pigs could already be heard from a distance. In the meantime, day had broken and the women were busy hauling large amounts of cooked food to the edge of the ceremonial ground. From here the men took over, distributing the food to all the visitors who had spent the night there. This was followed by men carrying pigs tied to poles onto the *amei* where they were placed on display in a row. The largest animal was adorned with a band of

41 This information comes from Kalabu.

42 In the process the initiates often have to crawl under a carved female figure. This stresses the aspect of ritual rebirth even more than in the case of the Malmba initiation where this female figure was missing.

large orange-coloured fruits around the neck; its face was coloured with paint (**pl. 57**).[43] Next to the pigs the people placed wild taro leaves; these indicated the number of pigs that had been killed during the preparations for the initiation. The pigs had been purchased by members of the *numanara* moiety who now gave them to their *waignara* counterparts, in compensation for the initiation they had been given, specifically for the cult scene that the *waignara* had installed and the performance by the *noute* dancers. The actual pig exchange was conducted between the most important members of the two moieties while the wives of the men who had purchased the animals danced round the pigs. The women wore decorations and carried with them pig gauges as well as banana and taro leaves respectively. After the exchange, the pigs were carried off to be singed, dismembered and cooked in earth ovens. Later the pieces were distributed to the members of the *waignara* moiety together with the yams, which was referred to as *nggilya nde kwek*, literally 'one piles on black'. The term *nggilya* is a metaphor for yam, but it also stands for black colour (*nggile*) which the *noute* dancers paint their bodies with.

Traditionally, the novices spent the time after this ritual in seclusion on the *toiembo* where they were fed by the initiating moiety with yam soup over an extended period of time.

Initiation Scene[44]

Inside, the *mairapute* was divided into a front and a back chamber, both in plain sight from the entrance. The back chamber contained the carved head of the *nggwalndu* Yeyuwi that was not wearing a *wagnen* headdress because the hut was too low. Before the head, spread out on silvery leaves, were shell rings. The boundary to the front chamber was in front of the shell rings and was marked by board-shaped *ulke* carvings and *wapinyan*-type figures. Most of these anthropomorphic figures were female. They were positioned next to an alley in the middle – three on each side. Next to the ones closest to the middle, bone daggers were sticking in the ground. They were referred to as *yina* and were said to belong to the *nggwal*. On both sides, running parallel to the house's longitudinal axis, there were rows of shell rings similar to the ones encountered in bride wealth transactions. They too were placed on silvery leaf underlays, like Yeyuwi's rings. In front of the *ulke* and laterally to the shell rings two *nau* were sticking in the ground, one on each side; they were both decorated with bands adorned with the shells of small sea snails. A special feature of the house interior was a plaited mat that served as a kind of ceiling; it was made of almost black sago leaves and white bamboo strips.[45] It is called *nggilut* (*nggile* – black, *ut* – bag.)

Concluding the Initiation

A week after the novices had been shown the secret ritual images, the initiation ended.

During their stay at the *toiembo* – in earlier days their sojourn is said to have lasted much longer – the initiates had to adhere to a series of taboos and rules, on the one hand, with regard to mobility – they were restricted to the ceremonial ground and the adjacent forest – on the other, as far as social contact to non-initiates and avoidance of certain foods, especially greens, were concerned. Also, they had to stay clear of water, that is, they were neither allowed to drink nor wash. Whether or not the initiates were instructed in various skills during this period, for example, in using the bullroarer or playing on the small bamboo flutes, I do not know. In a similar vein, I do not know whether or not they were given to eat the ritual food called *yangkipma* consisting of a mixture of pulverized vegetable material and salty ash cooked in an earth-oven. What they were certainly fed with, in abundance, was yam soup garnished with grated coconut; after use the empty coconut shells were stacked on the *amei* on a cylindrical rack for everyone to see. This 'fattening up' of the novices with yam – which it in effect boils down to – is metaphorically referred to as *lapu ndei tshikindu* – 'they cook bananas'.

The week spent at the *toiembo* was used to learn how to make a *noute* headdress. On the last night of seclusion the novices danced wearing their new disc-shaped headdresses as their *sambera* had done at the inception of the initiation. This event is a village internal

[43] See also the figures 27 and 28 in Hauser-Schäublin (1984).

[44] The initiation was held only weeks after our arrival in the field. We only stayed for a very short spell in the *mairapute*; taking photographs was forbidden. Due to myriad new impressions raining in on us at the time, the description here is possibly incomplete.

[45] The white stripes are from the inner surface of the bamboo cane.

ceremony, that is, there are no visitors from neighbouring villages present. The next morning the novices followed their *sambera* to the forest, to an area that belonged to a clan of the *waignara*. There, near the headwaters of the Anggimba stream, was a place called Abaite (like one of the *baba* masks that had participated in the mock fight earlier on). This spot is looked upon as the abode of the *wale* of that name. The water had been dammed up, creating a small lake. Women and non-initiates were forbidden to approach this area. The novices, dressed in short trunks, were ordered by their *sambera* to scoop the water from the pool with the aid of ladles made of the lower, wide ends of palm fronds, and then 'catch' the fish and turtles in the pool with their bare hands and throw them onto the bank (**pl. 61**).[46] Each catch was met with a shout of approval. But even as the size of the pool dwindled, the size of the catch did not grow noticeably, but this, it appeared, was not the prime aim of the task in the first place. What seemed to be more important was the act itself and the fact that at least a few fish were caught. The 'haul' belonged to the novices' *sambera* and was later consumed by these. After the pool had been emptied of water, the men returned to the village. Most of the food taboos (except the ban on drinking water) had to be upheld by the young initiates, who had now passed the *ulke-nau* grade, until after the next yam harvest.

The men made no comments as to the meaning of the various acts, but they mentioned that the young initiates had let blood from their penises prior to the ceremony of catching fish. Given that the place was designated as a hallowed *wale* abode, the act attains the nature of a kind of communion and gives rise to the idea that the fish might have emerged from the blood of the initiates. Traditionally, Abelam male and female adults never ate fish; only children, pigs and dogs ate fish. Unlike grown-ups, the consumption of fish did not harm them. Even today, many Abelam man and women, especially elderly people, categorically reject eating fish. I do not know how common, or widespread, this form of concluding ritual is. In Kuminimbis the people told me that the initiates were not ordered to catch fish, but flying foxes instead, which were again consumed by the novices' *sambera*.

Men who have passed *ulke-nau* are entitled to wear red flowers in their hair and carry a spear during feasts. *Ulke-nau* is regarded as the 'secret of the *baba*' and, thus, also of fighting. Only men who have passed this grade are allowed to be daubed with lime for delivering a good public speech and, vice versa, they themselves are now entitled to distinguish other speakers with the same mark of distinction.[47]

Interpreting *Ulke* and *Nau*

As the example of Malmba shows, statements concerning the contents of an initiation chamber do not always fully correspond to what it actually contains. Thus, for instance, the carved head of the *nggwalndu* Yeyuwi, his bone daggers and the plaited 'ceiling' do not really belong to the two initiation grades being discussed here. However, at least nowadays, the people show great enthusiasm for combining, on the spur of the moment, ritual elements that, conceptually, should be kept separate, but which tend to be merged when actually creating the scene in the ritual chamber. One reason why the leeway for combining basically disparate elements is so large is the fact that the initiates are not given any explanation as to the meaning of the cult scene; instead, the emphasis is clearly on the act of visual experience.

What the *ulke* and *nau* cult scenes actually represent and mean is never articulated in words. All the Abelam concede is that both *ulke* and *nau* basically represent female beings and reference spaces in the natural environment: *ulke* are connected to specific pools said to be the abodes of *wale* spirits, *nau* are associated with the forest in general and the female spirits residing there. They both only carry generic but not personal names, although we do come across a hint that *ulke*, *baba* and *wale* might a share common identity insofar as, in Malmba, the most important *baba* figure carries the same name, Abaite, as the pool in the bush where the novices were told to catch fish, and the *wale* spirit which is believed to reside there. In Samgik the *ulke* in the cult scene – here called *kutagwa* – was actually represented by a *baba* mask. This never seems to be the case in Kalabu

[46] Personally I was not allowed to witness this scene but had to remain behind the last bend of the stream. But my husband was allowed to watch and even take photographs. He also provided the description of the event.

[47] During a public discussion on the *amei* I actually did once see how a man distinguished a non-initiated speaker but instead of daubing his skin with lime he only circled his lime container around the man's head.

(and neither in Malmba); there the board-shaped relief carvings are always referred to as *ulke*.

The initiation chamber in Samgik contained a clue as to the relationship between *ulke* and *wapinyan*: next to anthropomorphic figures, the scene also included painted *wapi* yams. The two entities appear to be exchangeable, or at least equipollent. In Samgik, the tubers – I do not know whether they were all of the same type – were regarded as the children of the *kutagwa*. In Kalabu, the *wapinyan* positioned next to the *ulke* figures are referred to by the metaphor *gik*, egg. Possibly this expresses the same kind of relationship (mother – child) as it does in Samgik. This opens a link to the yam cult which, in Malmba, finds expression in the practice of giving the novices roasted yam to eat which they are ordered to spit out again. How specific this reference is I cannot say for sure. I certainly never came across the explanation that the initiates were, unknowingly, about to consume the *ulke*'s children, from which they were, at the last moment, held back by the initiators.

The *noute* headdresses – and, therefore, also the dancers who wear them – stand in a special relationship to the *wale* pool where the final ritual act takes place. I was told that the round-shaped disc[48] is modelled on the leaf of a certain plant that grows in standing water. The leaf is referred to as the '*wale'*s leaf' (*walengga*). It is, by the way, the same leaf that men use for rubbing down their digging sticks before breaking the ground and harvesting the yams in their gardens. The standing waters where the plant preferably grows are the abodes of the spirits represented by the *baba* masks. As we recall from the Serapan myth, the *baba* bear clear reference the realm of the beyond. Through blood-letting (on the penis) into the *wale* pool the novices enter into communion with the *wale* spirits, while, in turn, the initiators ritually consume the fish that emerge from this communion. Thus, the circle closes insofar as it is the initiating men who first wear the *noute* headdress, then order the novices to bleed their penises and finally consume the product metamorphosed by the communion.

The dancers wearing *noute* headdresses stand in close relationship with the beyond, the entry to which lies in the specific pool. They bear the *wale*'s emblem and keep their eyes shut – like the dead. The Abelam refer to *noute* dancers as the 'dead' because they are said be from the beyond. A further reason for this designation is the fact that the Abelam regard the realm of the dead as a place where the inhabitants have ample time for feasting and for creating beautiful adornments, certainly more and better than the living. Thus, referring to the *noute* dancers as the 'dead' is actually the highest form of praise.

Next, a word to the *nau*. As mentioned above, *nau* consist of bamboo shafts that are stuck upside down in the ground, with their often bizarrely shaped roots projecting upwards. Through additional trimming and painting these objects take on similarity with birds. As far as I could ascertain, they bear no reference to the clans' *dshambu* (totemic birds), but I believe they stand in relationship to a myth of which I could only record fragments. The myth tells of how men who originally emerged from a bamboo shaft were 'taken in marriage' by the women.[49] Notably, the Abelam never address this link between myth and cult scene. Notwithstanding, the instruments of the *nau* are short bamboo flutes said to represent their voices.

From an analytical point of view, the reversal of the quotidian order of things, that is, for example, the inversion of 'up' and 'down' – the bamboo roots that point upwards in the ritual context – is certainly of significance. Not least, the *ulke* figures are also carved from the root of a tree (*umbut*). The female figures represented in *ulke-nau* initiation scenes consist of root parts; in distinction from this, the male figures featuring in later initiation scenes are all made of the wood of tree stems or from vines that grow upwards on trees.

With regard to *nau*, the Abelam emphasize, next to their status as female, that they are beings of the forest. They are classified as belonging to the category of female spirits, *mikutagwa*, who live in treetops and rule over forest animals, leading them to men on the hunt, but also helping them to escape. With strange calls and by imitating the sound of flapping wings they often lead men astray in the bush, making it even for experienced hunters difficult

[48] In Malmba we once saw a tapering *noute* headdress which gave rise to contention. Some of the men demanded that the performers wearing a pointed *noute* should stop dancing, since the pointed shape was a prerogative of the *wagnen* headdresses (at *nggwalndu* initiations).

[49] This myth is widespread in the Sepik area.

to find their back to their village.[50] The Abelam esteem the two cult scenes second to the *nare*, the *noute* dancers. They explain this valuation as follows: 'the initiation images are made up of things of the forest; we humans, however, are the greatest *maira*'. What we may read from this statement is that the contents of the initiation ritual appear to structure the relationship between human beings and certain aspects of their natural environment. Furthermore, *ulke-nau* expresses the interrelation between village men and women, who are closely associated with the realm of the beyond. As we will see later, higher initiation grades deal primarily with male beings whose names are invoked in yam rituals and songs.

Kavyatagwa

Kavyatagwa is also ranked as a *maira*. The term refers to a musical instrument made from a pared tree trunk. In earlier days a *kavyatagwa* consisted of a number of bound-together bamboos which the men played in unison with the aid of wooden beaters. Roughly 80 years ago, the Kalabus took over the practice of using a tree trunk from the neighbouring Arapesh. In Kalabu it is used when a *wapi* harvest does not produce a satisfactory yield. In such a case the men sacrifice several pigs and play on the *kavyatagwa* to express their determination to give it a second try. In the Arapesh village of Nimbenanggu we once witnessed the men playing on the instrument during a yam feast, in an enclosure next to the ceremonial ground to which only initiated men had access. The initiation grade *kavyatagwa* boasts no initiation scene and is not followed by a period of seclusion. When one moiety performs *kavyatagwa* for its counterpart, the men of the receiving *ara* (that is, the one that gets to see and play the instrument) are requested to supply a number of pigs and give them to their ritual exchange partners. The men who have experienced this *maira* are entitled to wear a large shell pendant called *kavya* on their chest.

Nggwalndu

In Kalabu, the initiation that involves beholding the clan spirits, *nggwalndu*, is divided into two stages: into *nggilenggwal* ('black *nggwal*') and into *naranggwal* ('decorated *nggwal*'). They are manifestations of the same spiritual beings that are shown to the novices. These figures all bear different (male) *nggwalndu* names of the clans represented in the village; however, individuality is of subordinate significance.

Unlike in the case of *ulke* and *nau*, a prerequisite of this initiation grade is the staging of a *wapi* yam feast, preferably of the *mambutap* type. While *ulke* and *nau* are associated with *ka* yam, *nggwalndu* stands in close relationship with ceremonial yam, as the yam rituals and the corresponding songs go to show. When the decorated, long yams are carried onto the ceremonial ground they are given *nggwalndu* names, underpinning the idea that the tubers actually are manifestations of clan spirits. The *nggwalndu* are invoked in song and by the slit gongs at every ceremony and are looked upon as being omnipresent. Embodied in their faces on the façade of the *korambo* they watch over everything that happens on the ceremonial ground. Every feast commences with the sacrifice of pigs, which is believed to attract the spirits. Especially the scent of the pigs being singed and the screams of the dying animals are said to reach the *nggwalndu* residing in their watery abodes (swamps, pools) in the forest and attract them to the village, specifically to the ceremonial house where they settle down to inspirit the carved figures – only one of their multiple forms of bodily manifestation.

In the intervening years between *nggwalndu* initiations the figures are kept in the ceremonial house, but are not attended to,[51] allowing them to become coated in thick layers of dirt, dust and cobwebs. Only when a new *nggwalndu* initiation was been agreed upon, the carvings are cleaned and re-painted by a few artists (**pl. 52**), in the belief that the new and bright colours and patterns will attract the clan spirits to come and reside in the *korambo* during the ceremonial period.

The aspect of physical presence, or contemporaneity, is definitely more pronounced in *nggwalndu* than in *ulke* and *nau* initiations, not least because the conception of the spirit beings involved here is definitely less diffuse than in the two latter initiations. Furthermore, the novices are shown *nggumaira*, *ulke* and *nau* in the early light of day, while they only get to see *nggwalndu* (and also *puti*) late at night.

Nggilenggwal and *naranggwal* are staged at a one-year interval. Senior men whom

[50] See also Hauser-Schäublin (1984: 362).

[51] See Forge (1966: 29) for a detailed description.

I interviewed after their own *nggwalndu* initiations specified that they had been shown *nggilenggwal* in the *korambo* of one settlement, and *naranggwal* in the ceremonial house of another hamlet, but within the same village section.

Nggilenggwal

Each clan represented in the initiating moiety constructs its own *nggwalndu* in the ceremonial house. The figures come to stand along the sidewall opposite the low entrance called *korekore*. A *nggilenggwal* figure consists of a latticed body in the shape of a ceremonial house and pig trap respectively, and a carved wooden face (called *kumbu* or *ndumagna*, see **pl. 83**) topped by a tapering *wagnen* headdress. *Nggilenggwal* initiations in Kalabu II, by way of example, feature four such figures placed closely next to each other in a row. They stand at a right angle to the house's roof, facing the opposite side .

When constructing the scene, the men first erect short posts in pairs. Each pair forms the front of a figure; where the posts intersect at the top, the head comes to rest. The body consists of a framework made of many sticks. One of the men commented as follows: 'We first build a pig trap (*wami*); its back end is positioned under the *kwambut* beam. After tying all the sticks together with different vine ropes[52] we cover the framework with leaves of the 'limbum' palm followed by silver-coloured *tul* leaves. Only then do we add the real *maira*: the plaited mat that covers the *wami*. This mat, called *kimbi*, consists of white strips taken from the inside of wild bamboos (called *yeleko*). The white mat is then drawn over the *wami* that is covered with leaves. These leaves tied down with bark strips, forming a pattern like a net.'

This wickerwork is painted red, white and black, but without yellow. The figure consisting of a non-human body, but with an anthropomorphic head, has neither arms nor legs. A thick vine is attached to the figure's 'neck'; the other end is tied around the *kwambut* beam behind it. The vine is not pulled tight but left slightly sagging; it is described as the *nggilenggwal*'s spine (*burtunggulapa*). All the figures standing in a row are attached to the side beams in this manner. Around the neck they are adorned with various types of shell decorations, including *mai* and *beleben* necklaces, also used for *nau*, and large *kavya* pendants that cover the chest.

Over the *nggilenggwal* figures, immediately above the *wagnen* headdresses, the men spread a plaited mat made of white bamboo strips and sago leaves that have been coloured black by soaking in water. This mat is referred to as *nggilut* ('black string bag'). Apart from the mighty *nggilenggwal* figures themselves, shell rings and cassowary bone daggers (*yina*) constitute important components of the initiation scene. Beside or in front of the figures bone daggers decorated with feather tufts are stuck in the ground (*narina*). They are enclosed by a fence of short sticks with small *ban* fruits pinned to their pointed ends. The area within the enclosure, with the *narina* at the centre, is covered with white *mindshakuso* leaves. For the bone daggers displayed in this fashion the metaphor *kwanya* ('mushrooms') is used.[53] Additionally, the space in front of a *nggilenggwal* figure is decorated with shell rings, arranged in two different ways. On an underlay of *mindshakuso* leaves the men place a cone-shaped pile of up to eight shell rings, with the largest at the bottom followed by ever smaller ones, topped with a *narina* protruding from the hole of the last shell. This arrangement is referred to by the metaphor *kalngga* ('leaf of the *kal* tree').[54] Next, further shells are placed around the largest shell at the base, again on a carpet of *mindshakuso* leaves; this pattern is called *toulunggu* ('water hole in the mud'). Each *nggilenggwal* is equipped with its own *toulunggu*, *kwanya* and *kalngga* but they are all covered by the same large, plaited *ut*. Opposite the *nggilenggwal* figures, along the other roof side, numerous spears – in this function they are called *nggilina* – are tied to the *kwambut* beam, with their tips pointing downward at a slant. This is also the area where the 'aisle' is located along which the novices have to crawl after entering the ceremonial house through the *korekore*. Sometimes the aisle is covered by a *nggilut* mat, forming a serpentine-like corridor.

[52] From his description it appeared that each clan used a different kind of vine for its *nggwal.*

[53] The *kwanya* mushroom is a much-valued delicacy. It grows on the residual woody fibres of sago pulp after processing.

[54] The bark of this tree is used to enhance the growth of yams on the basis of the tree's thick and straight stem void of branches. The stem simulates the size and thickness that a *wapi* tuber should attain.

After the novices have crawled through the low entrance, the initiating men bar the way by placing their legs crosswise in front of them, through which the novices have to wriggle. During the process they are beaten, or at least touched, with an oblong stone wrapped in stinging nettles. This stone is called *nggwal matu* (‘*matu*’ = stone). Only after having suffered this ordeal are they allowed to crawl through the *nggilut*. They are prevented from standing up by the spears pointing at them. Whilst moving forward on all fours, they perceive the *nggilenggwal* figures on the opposite side together with the shell rings and cassowary bone daggers. What they cannot see, however, are the *kundi ure* instruments (*kundi* – mouth, voice, talk; *ure* – to call), which are hidden in a tightly sealed enclosure. There, immediately in front of the foremost *nggilenggwal*, three men sing into the bamboos tubes which end below in hourglass-shaped resonating bodies, thus creating a loud and quite intimidating sound; the *kundi ure* represent the voices of the *nggwal*. The novices are not shown these instruments. Subsequently, the initiates are escorted through the rear exit onto the sacred and enclosed ground (*toiembo*) at the back of the house. Here they remain in seclusion for an extended period.

After all the *dshale* (novices) have seen the ritual installation and been given a new name, they are amply fed with yam soup by the initiators. Early next morning a few novices are selected and taken back inside the ceremonial house. These are usually young men who either hold potentially important positions in the clan – for example, the eldest son of an important man from the senior lineage – or in the moiety – for instance, the son of the moiety’s leading speaker. These men, referred to as *gussikndu* in this context, have to provide their *sambera*, addressed as *nggwal* in this function, with a large piece of pork, preferably a hind leg, in order to be allowed to re-enter the *korambo*. Inside the ceremonial house they are led to the enclosure containing the *kundi ure*; inside, they are permitted to see and even ‘sing into’ the instruments. Afterwards they return to the *toiembo*.

To mark the end of the seclusion period, the novices are sent out to catch a wild pig; the chase is followed by a ritual dance during which the novices wear *noute* headdresses, similar to the *ulke-nau* initiation. The men emphasized that the final dance, which marks the end of the *nggwalndu* grade as such, is not staged until after the *naranggwal* stage.

Naranggwal

As mentioned briefly above, *naranggwal* is performed approximately a year after *nggilenggwal*, at a different *amei* of the same village section. This grade, which immediately and inextricably hooks up with *nggilenggwal,* must be preceded by a *wapi* feast. The hamlet responsible for staging the rituals also prepares the corresponding cult scene. The men of the initiating moiety see to it that the *nggwalndu* figures being stored in the ceremonial house are cleaned and repainted by the right artists. If the existing carvings have suffered under the influence of the weather and insects beyond repair, new figures are carved and painted. This work is again carried out to the exclusion of the non-initiated.[55] Since the focus of the *naranggwal* initiation is predominantly on these large, carved anthropomorphic figures, preparations for this stage are distinctly more elaborate than for *nggilenggwal*. Because the carvings are kept permanently in the ceremonial house – unlike the lattice body of *nggilenggwal* which is discarded, often burned, immediately after the ritual (only the carved head is retained in the *korambo*) – where they serve as temporal abodes of the clan spirits, all work steps demand more diligence and effort.

The refurbished *nggwalndu* are positioned in the middle of the ceremonial house, along the central axis, and mounted on a base frame, with their heads towards the rear end of the house, their feet towards the front end. Immediately behind the supine figures, tree stems are embedded in the ground; in height they reach approximately to the level of the *kwambut* beams. Leaning against these posts, *wapinyan* figures are placed; at the same time, strong vines are tied to the *kwambut*. Following this, men go to collect

[55] Kwandshendu, at the time of fieldwork one of the most renowned artists, told us how his father, also a famous artist and carver, had once taken him to the ceremonial house in Numbunggen where the men were preparing a *puti* initiation scene. Kwandshendu was merely a teenager then and had only passed the first initiation grade. The sambera were indignant that such a young man was allowed to see the scene, let alone witness its installation. Kwandshendu’s father answered them with the words: ‘When I’m dead – who will know how to model *puti,* if not my son?’ This immediately put an end to all objections.

sago spathes (*mbai*); others go to look for thin tree stems, which are then barked. The poles are tied together to form a massive framework onto which the *mbai* are fastened. Basically it is the same type of construction as used for the façade painting, but in this case the basic frame consists of stronger material. The sago spathes are then sewn together and painted by the artists and their assistants with large *nggwalnggwal* motifs, that is, the large *nggwalndu* faces that also dominate the façade. The painting is suspended in an almost horizontal position with the vines that are tied to the *kwambut* beams, forming a kind of ceiling. This type of mounting is referred to as *samban*.[56] The painting's solid framework is placed on the posts against which the *wapinyan* are leaning and a few additional supports at the front end. Thus, the ceiling – with the painting facing downwards – comes to lie at the level of the *korambo*'s side beams, at the same angle of inclination, in other words, higher at the front and lower at the back. Then a wall made of painted sago spathe sheets is erected around the anthropomorphic *nggwalndu* figures, forming a kind of closed chamber. This construction is referred to as *narut* ('decorated string bag'); the chamber's ceiling is called *nyit tshui* ('shooting star in the sky', **pl. 62**).

From the entrance at the front of the ceremonial house a low winding corridor covered with painted palm spathes leads to the chamber containing the *nggwalndu*. As in *nggilenggwal*, the novices have to crawl along the corridor on all fours. The entrance to the chamber is blocked by a small door called *atapine* which the initiates have to break open and wriggle through. As mentioned above, the *nggwalndu* figures are resting on a gently sloping base frame, with their heads higher than their feet. This bed-like construction is called *kwangge*.[57] At the foot of each *nggwalndu*, shell rings are laid out on leaves in a formation called *toulunggu*. These shell rings are provided chiefly by the men of the initiating moiety, but certainly by men of the hosting village. Only very large, often conspicuously shaped rings are used for this purpose. They carry individual names that usually refer to a clan's *dshambu*; in Tok Pisin they are called 'storiring' (that is, a shell ring associated with a specific historical event). As in the *nggilenggwal* stage, the *kundi ure* instruments are located in a spot at the front of the house, opposite the entrance.

As a counterpart to the shell ring decoration inside the chamber, shell rings are also displayed on the ceremonial ground, which is fenced in by an enclosure to which only initiated men have access. These rings, often in large numbers, are provided chiefly by visitors from neighbouring hamlets and villages.

Initiation Sequence

The night before the initiates are taken to the ritual chamber containing the *nggwalndu*, the ritual partners stage a dance wearing *noute* headdresses, similar to other initiation grades. At daybreak, the novices are explained the components, *ndumaira*, which make up the dancers' ritual attire. Following this the initiators lay out shell rings on the ceremonial ground and the novices are led through the enclosure onto the *amei* where they find the ceremonial ground covered with shell rings. After this they are beaten by their *sambera* with stinging nettles. The novices are expected to suffer this painful ordeal standing, holding on to a 'limbum'post that has been let in the ground as a support. Only when the whole body feels like on fire are the novices allowed to enter the ceremonial house in single file through the low *korekore*, to the sound of the *kundi ure*. When the initiates at the front succeed in breaking open the door to the ritual chamber, the initiating men strike up a *kanggu* song accompanied by hourglass drums. While the novices are entering the ceremonial house from the front, the initiating men pass into the *korambo* from the *toiembo* at the back and position themselves on the ritual chamber's ceiling (*nyit tshui*), which is build solidly enough the bear the weight of many men, and await the arrival of the novices in the chamber underneath. Upon entry of the initiates, whose bodies are still burning from the nettle ordeal and who are in a state of high emotional turmoil, the hidden initiators launch into their *kanggu* song. From what I gathered from men who had gone through this experience, the visual and acoustic effect must be overwhelming. "The *nggwalndu* look as if they're sleeping men who raise their heads as soon as the novices enter," the men commented. In addition, the faces of

[56] The Iatmul use the same term for their suspension hooks – a device that the Abelam do not have.

[57] Traditionally the Abelam did not use beds in the common sense of the term. Still today, many of them sleep on smoothed sago palm spathes or on a plaited mat (*ara*) on the ground.

the *nggwalndu* painted on the ceiling vibrate violently under the stomping steps of the dancing men on top, markedly enhancing the effect of spiritual vivification, a pivotal aspect of the whole procedure.

Following this, the initiates proceed to the rear exit, past the *wapinyan* figures that form the back wall of the ritual chamber. It is here that the initiators reveal themselves to the novices as the producers of the spirit voices; at the same time, the initiates are shown the secret of the 'artificial' ceiling and the hidden *kundi ure* instruments (unlike during the *nggilenggwal* stage, all the novices now get to see the *kundi ure*). Following this dramatic revelation, the novices retire to the *toiembo* where they spend a period of seclusion during which they are again amply fed with yam soup. They learn to plait special knee- and armlets (*auw*) and a belt called *sino*, which they are allowed to wear from now on as tokens that they have passed through *naranggwal*. During seclusion they also learn to play the instruments associated with *nggwal*, specifically the globular flutes called *butuo* made from round or oval-shaped fruit shells into which two holes are drilled. On their part, the *sambera* manufacture for the novices huge triangular *wagnen* headdresses consisting of painted palm spathes and feathers (**pl. 86**).

In return, the novices owe their *sambera* a number of duties, for example, collecting firewood and fetching water. For this purpose, they take paths that lead straight from the *toiembo* out to the forest, strictly avoiding encounters with women and children. Rasping coconuts (for making yam soup) is also one of the initiates' chores. Commencing with seclusion, the *sambera* paint their skin black; the colour stays on until the concluding rituals of the initiation are staged, refraining from washing during the entire period. When they have finished making the *wagnen* headdresses, the day of the *dshale*'s crowning dance is announced. For this event the initiates are also daubed with black paint and have their faces artistically painted with fine designs. Then the *wagnen* are mounted; the huge headdress is affixed by means of a crossbar that is positioned on the wearer's neck, and by weaving his hair into the base construction. The initiate with the largest headdress is termed *pesapa* and regarded as the group's leader. The novices' fathers wear *noute* headdresses; they join the *dshale* on the ceremonial ground where they are greeted by a large audience. The *wagnen* headdresses reach heights of up to two metres and are very heavy. When a dancer weakens he briefly retires and rests for a while. For this purpose special support frames are erected on which the initiate can rest his headdress in order to relieve his neck muscles. When the dance, which is accompanied by *kanggu* songs, is over the novices return to the *toiembo*. Following the performance the initiates are instructed to go to the bush, track down a wild pig and catch it with a net. Before departing the men gather on the *amei* to invoke the *nyambapmu*, the *baba* and the ancestors to come and aid in the hunt. After the invocation the men gather around the *bapmutagwa* stone, forming a circle, while one man smashes a ripe coconut on the stone. If the first attempt fails, the procedure is repeated. The bystanders' task is to prevent coconut chips from flying beyond the circle. The pieces they catch are again smashed on the stone. As soon as they have finished, the newly initiated men leave for the hunt. The meat of the coconut is left to the dogs.

The chase often goes on for days, with the men returning to the *toiembo* in the evening. When they have finally tracked down a pig and caught it they carry it back to the ceremonial ground and deposit it beside the round stone; the initiates are then told to leap over the pig, one after the next. The purpose of this ritual is to get rid of an immaterial substance which the novices carry in them and which could prove harmful. This essence is called *dshoai* and comes from being fed *yangkipma*, a special ritual food served during seclusion on the *toiembo*. At the same time, the coat of black paint which they have been wearing on their skin for days, or even weeks, is believed to 'pass over' into the pig on the ground. Later, the pig is killed and cooked in an earth oven. The novices are not allowed to eat any of the meat; it goes to the initiating group. One man explained that if the novices failed to catch a wild pig even after several attempts, they were alternatively taken to a pool in the bush and told to scoop out the water and catch the fish with their bare hands.[58]

Following the 'pig leaping ritual', the initiates and their *sambera* jointly go to the bush for a wash, the first wash since the seclusion

[58] See also the description of *ulke-nau* in Malmba (pp. 156-157) where the initiates also had to catch fish.

period began. After this, the men return to their normal daily rhythm. However, the initiates who were given *yangkipma* to ingest during seclusion remain subject to whole set of taboos: they are not allowed to drink water, are forbidden to eat leafy greens and chew betel nut. It is up to the young man's father to gradually ease these restrictions in the course of the weeks and months to come. The last restraints are lifted at the next yam harvest.

Supplementary Observations

In 1979, a new ceremonial house was built in Waignakim. Before the start it was agreed upon that a *nggwalndu* initiation was to be staged in the same year. The year before, the same initiation had been performed in another part of the village, probably organized by the opposite *ara*; this had been one of the reasons for the construction of the new *korambo*. The *nggwalndu* figures and the *kundi ure* were kept in a small hut next to the ceremonial house until the new building was finished. As soon as this was accomplished, the slit gongs were sounded on several nights running. It was a sign telling the people that the men were in the process of throwing spears into the front of the new ceremonial house, into a spot just below the carved cross beam; this marked the beginning of the initiation. At each throw, the men called the name of a once slain enemy warrior. The initiation itself was staged as a village internal event, but for the concluding *wagnen* dance the Waignakim men also invited the people from (former) enemy villages. For this purpose they sent two envoys to Kalabu, carrying with them two large shell rings. For the duration of the feast the two Waignakim men stayed in Kalabu as 'hostages', so to speak, warranting the safe return of the Kalabu visitors. The two men stayed in Kumungwande, the subsidiary settlement of Ndunyinggi and Yambusaki (Kalabu I), as Waignakim had never been at war with Kaumbul (Kalabu II), only with Kalabu I.

The visiting groups were received on the *amei* where the *wagnen* dance was to be held with the staging of the mock fight ritual (**pl. 63**). At the centre of the ceremonial ground stood a small *kaanda* tree to remind the people that the feast was designed as a friendly event and that there was to be no fighting. The stones beside the ceremonial house were decorated with red flowers and topped with cane stalks which looked liked spears. The spears sticking in the lower façade of the *korambo* were adorned with wild taro leaves. When the dancers emerged from the *toiembo* they were not only headed by a group of men singing and beating on their hourglass drums – very like the yam feasts when the decorated *wapi* tubers are presented on the *amei* – but also by a man painted black from head to toe, holding a small plaited bag, *kimbi*, above his head. In his other hand he was holding a bunch of dry plants. Notably, the plaited bag (made of strips of coconut leaves) goes by the same name as the hind part of the *nggilenggwal* figures and the plaited mat covering the lower part of the façade of a ceremonial house. The *kimbi* bag is also the token of this initiation grade; men who have passed this grade are entitled to carry such a bag. Among the first dancers to appear were the novices (*dshale*) wearing large *wagnen* headdresses; however, many of these headpieces were no longer decorated with feathers, but with strips of coloured paper and cloth instead. The *wagnen* dancers, with their eyes shut and their faces painted, performed in pairs, circling the ceremonial ground anticlockwise. The most outstanding actors were daubed with lime as a mark of esteem. Again the saying is used '*nggwal nde kyak*' ('the *nggwal* dies') to emphasize excellence. Following the *wagnen* dancers came women decorated with the typical female face paint called *kupminggile*. The more senior women were painted red and white, a design called *glabmak weimbabmag*. Their hair was covered with white flakes made from wood shavings and bamboo pulp. Each one carried a spear-like walking stick and wore round the neck a string bag as well as a necklace and a shell ring. They wore small pubic aprons, but over a pair of underpants. Next came the group of their (real and classificatory) brothers and fathers, referred to as *magnandu*. They too were wearing *wagnen* headdresses. As a special attribute, shell rings were attached to the headdress, one on each side. The initiators who also emerged onto the ceremonial ground, and were referred to as *kutagwa*, stood out through their black-painted skin and the sago leaves which they wore round the neck; the *kutagwa*'s decoration was called *koyui*. Groups of elder women danced diagonally across the ceremonial ground, to and fro. Like the men, they were wearing bird feathers on their heads, some of them were adorned with cassowary feather

wreaths or swaying *mindsha* feather-crests. The women were from the novices' mothers' generation. Prior to the dance on the *amei* they had put on *noute* headdresses and tried to storm the *toiembo* enclosure where their sons were in seclusion, shouting 'Come out! Let's go to our *wale* together!' Referred to as *pemak* and *kausuk* in this role, they were trying to shorten their sons' time in seclusion. The younger women including the novices' sisters and wives behaved quite differently during the event; they kept their eyes lowered and generally retained a low profile, unlike their senior counterparts, who moved aggressively, often disturbing the men's closed dance formation in the process.

The large *wagnen* headdresses were equipped with cords to make balancing easier; nevertheless, many of the younger novices, young boys mostly, tired very quickly and were forced to take a rest on the support frame erected for this purpose. Most of the visitors returned to their villages at the end of the day. The last Kalabu people arrived back in the village on the following evening, after which the Waignakim 'hostages' were set free and sent back home.

Interpreting *Nggwalndu*

As pointed out, the *nggwalndu* are spirit beings of which the Abelam people have, at least to some extent, notions as to what they are and what the look like. Their large faces feature prominently on the façade paintings of ceremonial houses. The mighty anthropomorphic carvings inside the *korambo* are named after them. Their true home, however, is to be found outside the village, in clan-specific locations in rivers and streams. The standard wording with which they are invoked on different occasions is '*ngu nggai kart nggaimba toru miwunat kundiwunat*', meaning 'the spot in the water, the spot in the swamp which I will reach with gong signals, invoke with my voice'. The *nggwalndu* are attracted to the village by the pungent smell of pigs being singed and the screams of the animals in agony. During yam feasts the Abelam are never quite sure whether these transcendent beings have actually come to inspirit the carvings in the ceremonial house, or even the yam tubers themselves. But in the case of a *nggwalndu* initiation there is never any doubt. *Nggwalndu* is also the term used for 'grandfather', 'grandchild' and 'stomach', but even my most informed associates were not able to explain how these three entities were related to each other. I believe the link between the three notions (at least from a male perspective) lies in the field of food, more specifically in the call, or craving, for food.[59] At the individual, or physical, level the stomach is the organ that demands food, or, as the Abelam say, 'the stomach is hungry, it is calling.' In the social context, it is the grandfathers who call for food and support from their descendants as they no longer command sufficient strength to grow food in their own gardens; instead, they merely sit in 'the ashes of their fire'. Inversely, grandfathers tend to dote on their grandchildren, especially their grandsons, regularly passing them the best pieces from their own dish. At the socio-religious, supra-personal level we have the ancestor spirits who demand to be fed continuously, or at least regularly, by the human beings, notably exclusively on savoury pork.

There also exists a direct link between the spirit beings located in waterholes and the ritual carvings. One of the senior men explained the relationship as follows: under the surface of each pool (in streams and rivers) there lies hidden the trunk of an ironwood-tree. It is this tree, in human shape, that the men and women encounter in the ceremonial house. If, for example, someone has committed an offence during the performance of *mindsha* songs (in the context of the inauguration of a ceremonial house) the person may fall sick or even die. In Bonggiora a man called Nyiurek told me the following story about the relationship between carvings and waterholes and the origin of the *nggwalndu*:

Once upon a time, a large flood (*nilonggu*, also called *mbilonggu*) came, killing nearly all human beings; only one man survived. He saved himself by climbing up a coconut palm where the water could not reach him. After the water had receded, he climbed down from the tree. Then he thought to himself: what must I do in order not to be all on my own? He picked up earth from the ground and formed out of it *wapinyan*. But after a while they developed cracks and fell apart. Then he started working on wood. He first carved an *urunggwal* and the long pipes that go with it. He tested them, but they remained mute. So he carved some more, this time placing them in a pool so that the *wale* would animate them. He also

[59] The women would certainly differ on this point; they would almost certainly name babies (but also piglets) that demand food from her.

slipped a shell ring into the water. Suddenly the *urunggwal* began to move.[60] It surfaced and then swam away. At the time, the man's wife was in her menstrual hut. She left the hut and went for a wash down at the pool. There she saw a man, and her child asked: 'Ai, is that a human being or a spirit?' The woman liked the look of the man so she went up to him and held his arm and asked him: 'What are you doing here?' But the man didn't answer. Then she took a piece of string, the one you use for making string bags, threaded it through the hole in his earlobe and bound him fast, after which she returned to the menstruation hut. She told her husband nothing about what had happened. The latter went back to carving his figures. He also started building a house (*korambo*). His wife asked him: 'Who's going to help you build this large house?' However, during the night the figures he had carved came to help him on the building. When the ceremonial house was finished, he struck up a *mindsha* song upon which all the male and female figures he had carved and placed in the water appeared. They sang and danced until daybreak. After that there was no going back for them anymore. But the man had built other houses, dwelling houses, as well, so he was able to distribute the houses among the incarnated beings. Only one of the beings, the one he had carved first and placed in the pool, remained a wooden figure, for his menstruating wife had touched it when it had appeared in human shape. This made it turn into a wooden *nggwalndu* figure. The humans went down to the pool, picked up the figure and carried it back to the ceremonial house. It had become a *nggwalndu* figure.

In the two *nggwalndu* initiation scenes, the novices encounter two manifestations of these beings. The flower and feather decoration, and especially the arrangement of shell rings at the foot of the carvings,[61] transform the figures into animated beings,[62] merging representation and substance. The novices are not only confronted with the varietal scope of *nggwalndu* manifestations, they also learn about the identity of the painted *nggwalnggwal* faces (*narut*), the carved head with a wickerwork torso (*nggilenggwal*) and the recumbent *nggwalndu* figures. The *wapinyan*, which feature in the *naranggwal* initiation, are looked upon as the *nggwalndu*'s children and helpers ready to carry out their orders upon command.[63]

The relationship between *nggwalndu* and waterholes was referred to above and complemented by the myth told by Nyiurek. The special nexus also finds expression in the context of the initiation scenes in the ceremonial house: the shell rings are arranged into a pattern called *toulunggu* ('waterhole in the mud'), thus, in a way, intonating the primeval scene of the *nggwalndu*'s coming into being. Next to that, additional linkages are created through imagery. For one, this refers to the special surrounding that the *nggwalndu* are embedded in, namely *nggilut* and *narut*. Both terms relate to specific types of string bags. In songs, the metaphor 'I am making a string bag' features quite often, referring to *nggilut* and *narut*, the initiation chambers where the spirit beings come to reside. In *nggilenggwal*, use is made of bamboo strips and sago leaves (soaked in water!) – both of them are items that have their origin in the 'wild' beyond the confines of the village. One of the main attributes of *naranggwal* is the low-drawn ceiling showing *nggwalnggwal* images. It is referred to as a 'shooting star that has dropped from the sky' (*nyit ndei tshui yu*), thus transforming the *naranggwal* chamber into the firmament. From a different context[64] we are aware of the relationship between shooting stars and *wale* pools: if a shooting star falls into a pool it means that a human being has to die. The *naranggwal* initiation scene merges the two entities, the bright 'above' and the dark 'below', shooting star and pool in the forest, creating the realm of the *nggwalndu*. The same applies to Umbite Targwa (see p. 118), the enigmatic mythical place which the people circumscribe as 'Umbite Targwa, which lies in the water and where fire burns.' It is the place from where the *nggwalndu* call (by means of the *kundi ure*) and where they once created *wuti* and *yina*. The songs performed in the context of the yam cult spell out the identity of *nggwalndu* and yam stone (*wapiwai*), but ultimately also of the ceremonial yams themselves (*wapi* and *ka*) which present themselves to the humans

60 In the Kalabu dialect; *kundi ure.*

61 This reminds of the myth told by Nyiurek (above). The carvings had been placed in the spirit's waterhole to animate them. But it was only when the man put a shell ring into the pool that the carvings became alive.

62 The women are, of course, also excluded. As the myth clearly shows, the *nggwalndu* became a 'lifeless' carving after being touched by a menstruating woman.

63 Forge (1966: 28) writes on the *wapinyan* "they seem to be manifestations of the *nggwalndu* rather than supernatural beings of their own right".

64 See Hauser-Schäublin (1983: 129-190).

as *nggwalndu*-cum-*wapiwai* in inspirited and embodied form. Initiation does not touch upon this trinity. Moreover, before entering the initiation chamber the novices are 'beaten' with a stone (*nggwal matu*), in other words, they are touched by the *nggwal* and become one with him. When the initiates appear on the *amei* in their ceremonial *wagnen* attire (in effigy of the spirit beings depicted on the façade painting) and dance, they actually themselves become *nggwalndu*, which is why they are referred to as '*nggwal nde kyak*' (the *nggwal* dies). They make their appearance before their audience with their eyes shut, like the dead, and splendidly adorned as *nggwalndu* (**pl. 86**). Just as the decorated yam tubers represent manifestations of *nggwalndu* and *wapiwai* during yam feasts, the *nare*, dressed in the same attire as *wapi* yams, become materializations of the same mysterious powers in initiation. Accordingly, a man who wishes to grow ceremonial yam must be initiated into *nggwalndu*, for only a man who has experienced the consubstantiality of *nggwalndu*, *wapiwai* and *narendu* with, and on, his own body is in a position to grow ceremonial yam, or put differently, only in his status as a manifestation of *nggwalndu* and *wai* is he capable of rearing 'a child of his own.'

Boko and *Kara*

The *nggwalndu* initiation is followed by two grades called *boko* and *kara* that do without special initiation scenes in the ceremonial house, but for which the fathers' of the initiates recompense their ritual partners with pigs all the same.

Boko deals with learning how to sew together the sheets of flattened sago palm spathes to form a single flat surface on a frame. *Boko* is the term of a special, awl-shaped instrument consisting of a pointed bamboo tube used for penetrating the hard surface of the flattened sago spathes. A thin vine inserted into the bamboo awl serves as a 'thread' with which the sheets are sewn together. The technique is regarded as *maira*, which is why non-initiated people are excluded from witnessing the assemblage of a façade painting.[65] A man who has acquired *boko* and sacrificed the necessary pigs is entitled to decorate his yam storage hut with sheets of sago palm spathes sewn together in this technique (**pl. 26**).

Kara is the word for wild boar; it is also used for a pig feast during which many animals are killed. In all other initiations – including *boko* – it is common practice that the initiates are fed with large amounts of yam soup (garnished with coconut flakes) and tubers baked in a fire. In *kara*, the tubers are steam-cooked in an earth oven, which, otherwise, is the way that pigs are cooked. In a second earth-oven sago is prepared. The novices are given both foods to eat. Pork, however, is only consumed by the group of initiating men. Men who have passed the *kara* initiation are allowed to wear the *kara-ut* boar tusk decoration. This adornment fabricated in the looping technique and beset with nassa shells is worn around the neck during disputes on the ceremonial ground; special about this type is that it is worn on the back. Its appearance is anthropomorphic, showing a human-like figure with head, arms and legs and equipped with upturned boar tusks at both sides of the head, making them rather look like horns. During ritual mock fights (in former times also in battle, with the men calling the name of their clan's totemic pig) and when men enter a former hostile village in groups for a feast, they hold the *kara-ut* between their teeth. Young men who have not yet passed the *kara* grade substitute the boar tusk decoration with a flat bone dagger (*ako*) which they, too, clutch between their teeth.

Similar to *kavyatagwa*, *boko* and *kara* are not followed by a concluding dance; but the men receive a new name all the same.

Puti

In Kalabu, the final initiation grade, *puti*, was staged for the last time in the 1950s. It was held in Numbunggen. At the time of fieldwork, the majority of middle-aged men had never seen this specific cult scene; only senior men had passed through the *puti* grade. However, as some of my research associates told me, it was quite normal that not all men reached the ultimate and most important grade. To a certain extent this also applies to the earlier grades because for a man with several sons it was almost impossible to procure the necessary number of pigs to put all sons through all initiation grades. In lieu of a real initiation, many men were therefore 'only told the name of the *maira'* and were given a new name, which meant that they received all the rights and privileges associated with a specific grade, but without ever having seen the actual cult scene.

[65] See p. 68.

Often fathers select their first-born sons to go through initiation and thereby acquire the knowledge and ability to later act as initiator, design cult scenes and decide on the correct procedure of the initiation rituals. However, selection does not follow primogeniture. I know of a number of cases where the father chose one of his younger sons to be initiated because he thought him to be better suited than his eldest son. The chosen man is then likely to become the most important man of his clan, carrying the title *gussikndu* as though he is the religious leader of his clan.

Rorotabu, one of my most trusted associates, once commented on the sequence of initiations with the following words: '*nggumaira* opens the door to *maira*, *puti* closes it.' A man who has seen *puti*[66] belongs to the select few who know all the secrets of *maira* and have the ability to communicate with otherworldly beings. One day, one of the largest and fattest pigs in the village was found lying paralysed and screaming in the bush, causing unrest and confusion among many of the younger people because they could not imagine who, or what, had caused the injury. When a senior, initiated man came up to the scene he threw a glance at the prostrate animal and the shocked owners and commented, almost jovially: 'That's the doing of the old ones (*golepa*)' upon which matters calmed down immediately. Only initiated men are in a position to explain the cause of an accident or a death (or, rather, their judgement is given credibility) since only they are aware of all the beings who could have caused the calamity. A man who has not yet passed through all the grades cannot know who, or what, there is to expect in the universe.

Next to the term *puti*, the ultimate initiation grade, and the being that is shown therein, also goes by another name: *bikna*, which is the name of a special bird. It does not reside in trees but lives and nests on the ground. The same term also refers to a simple type of musical instrument consisting of a folded leaf (or otherwise a vine loop) through which the player blows to create a siren-like sound. The instrument is also known as *kibenggwal* (*kibe* is a type of vine) and is regarded as the voice of *puti*.

Puti does not belong to the category of *nggwalndu*; it is classified as a being of its own. Literally *puti* means 'the empty one', one who has given everything away. It is not a secret term in any way, but appears in everyday language in a variety of contexts: *sibe puti*, for example, is the name of a special yam species, the peel, or skin (*sibe*), of which tends to come off easily when handled inaptly. *Puti* is also used for white people whose skin tends to peel after catching a sunburn and also for a bald person (*magna puti*), literally a 'head empty (of hair).'

The *puti* figure has no name of its own and is not associated with any particular clan: 'there is only one *puti*, but many *nggwalndu*,' the men used to say. *Puti* is the void and nameless one.

Initiation Scene

The initiation scene encompasses a single[67] *puti* figure featuring on the longitudinal axis of the ceremonial house, with its face looking towards the front end. It is positioned in the place where the ropes to which the hourglass drums are attached are suspended and where, previously, the hole was dug for the *nggumaira* initiation scene. *Puti* has a carved face similar to *nggilenggwal* and the torso consists of wickerwork which in shape, but not in size – the *puti* figure is distinctly larger –, again resembles the *nggilenggwal* figure, looking like a small ceremonial house (**pl. 87**). With reference to the body's framework the men speak of *wami* (pig trap), which is constructed on the same principle (**pl. 27)**. The framework is first lined with 'limbum' palm leaves and then covered with white-silvery *tul* leaves. Following this, the men plait a mat (*kimbi*) with *kibe* vines; this forms the figure's visible body. It is painted with the same colours as used on the façade painting. Subsequently it is decorated with shell rings of different sizes, some of which have beak-like angular projections (*paal*, after the beak of the hornbill bird). The shell rings run down the figure's spine (*burtunggulapa*) and cover both flanks so that, in the end, the entire body is overlaid with shell rings;[68] this is described by

[66] Stöcklin (1977: 26) refers to *puti* as the "chief of all yam spirits."

[67] At the time of fieldwork, and in the process of merging initiation scenes, it happened occasionally that several puti figures were installed, although the men are well aware that it should actually only be one figure.

[68] Neve (1960: 124) and Stöcklin (1977: 26) maintain that *puti*'s body contains red paint which is administered to the novices. In Kalabu, where apparently red paint is of less significance than in other villages, this was never done, my informants said.

the metaphor *kwanya ndu apui sipmba* ('to cover the skin with mushrooms'). The *kimbi* section covering the spine is additionally adorned with long chicken feathers (*nyagnya*). At the front, the men attach a pair of flexed arms and legs (in contrast to the *nggilenggwal* figure). They are made of bent banana stems and wrapped with leaves, moss and fern branches. The feet and toes respectively are made of the powerful, almost hoof-like claws of the cassowary. In each hand the figure holds a spear, with a small shell ring attached to each wrist. The head is topped by a *wagnen* headdress. In front of the figure the men lay out shell rings on a mat of leaves; the rings must all come from men of the village. The arrangement is enclosed by a low fence in the shape of a circle. Like in *naranggwal*, the ceremonial ground outside is again covered with shell rings offered by the visitors to the initiation.[69]

Inside the ceremonial house, on the path leading to the initiation scene, the men dig a hole into which they place earth colours, herbs, leaves, roots and bark pieces from specific trees, as well as nettles. After heating some stones and throwing them into the pit, they pour the sap of a few special plants into the hole, creating a hissing, spicy vapour that quickly spreads through the entire house. They call this procedure *kipma ndei pukao* ('they work with soil'); in a figurative sense the act is believed to heat the ground but also to inspirit the *puti* figure, making it shine from within.[70] The novices (*dshale*), all of them senior men, are subject to strict rules of behaviour before they enter the heated-up *korambo* and behold the cult scene. Unlike in other, lower initiation grades, revelation is not preceded by a ritual beating. Probably the necessary ritual heat is provided by the vaporized special plants and leaves which include stinging nettles.

Apart from the *puti* figure and the shell rings, the only other ritual equipment in the ceremonial house are the *kundi ure*. There are no *wapinyan* or *nggwalndu* figures, and there is no artificial ceiling. *Puti*'s chamber (*ut*) is delineated by the roof of the ceremonial house. As in the *nggwalndu* initiation, *puti* is accompanied by *kanggu* songs. Also, the order of events is similar to that of the preceding grades. A man who has gone through *puti* is entitled to carry a special type of small bag made from *kibe* vines called *kimbi*.

Interpreting *Puti*

As mentioned at the outset of this section, *puti* is described as an old man[71] who does nothing else but sit by his fire to warm his skin. 'He is empty because he has given everything away,' is the way one man put it. The 'giving away' refers to all the *maira* that the novices get to see in the course of their initiation career. *Puti*, a being that has reached the end of a full life, stands for the accomplishment of all religious miracles which go through a process of gradual enhancement in the course of the successive initiation grades. For, at the revelation of each new *maira*, the novices were always told that the preceding grade had only been of minor significance, and that the present *maira* disclosed the 'real secret'.[72] *Puti* stands for the ultimate ending in this gradual process of unravelling – but only few men ever get to experience it. *Puti*, ranked above and beyond the principle of clan structure, once used to own all the *maira*, but he passed them on to the men, successively. Now, old and empty, he reveals his true face to a select few. The revelation discloses dimensions that other grades, maybe with the exception of *naranggwal* to a certain extent, do not possess. In physical terms, the *puti* figure is located at the heart of the *korambo*, at the centre of the house. It is where, during *nggumaira*, the opening grade of the initiation cycle, the novices were shown the miracle of the foamy waterhole; now, at the end of the cycle, *puti* himself emerges from the waterhole, symbolized by the low enclosure containing the shell rings. The *puti* figure not only occupies the central position in the house in physical terms, equidistant to the house's four perimeters. He also occupies the midpoint between the waterhole and the heavens. His mighty *wagnen* headdress featuring myriad feathers is 'like the sun'; his spine is referred to as *nyit* (heavens/sky), the same term as used for

69 In Neve (1960: 120), two *puti* figures are to be seen on the ceremonial ground, surrounded by dozens of shell rings. According to my associates, in Kalabu only shell rings are laid out, but never additional *puti* figures.

70 Heating stones which are then placed in a hole filled with vegetable material and paint is carried out in the context of various initiation grades, and also for a new ceremonial house in order to prepare it for the admission of secret carvings.

71 Often the figure displays bisexual features.

72 See also Forge (1970a: 272-273).

the ridge beam on the ceremonial house. The shell rings that adorn his whole body – 'like a *korambo* that is decorated with shell rings on the day it is inaugurated' – are stars in the sky. In other words, *puti* is the personified cosmos that contains everything that humans need. At the same time he is void because he has passed on all *maira*, actually the secrets of life as such, to the men in initiation, granting them the knowledge to grow yam and perform the rituals they need to manage daily life. The *puti* figure, equipped with the claws of the cassowary, also stands for the mythical cassowary woman, one of the major culture heroes among the Abelam people and neighbouring groups. It was the cassowary woman who built the first ceremonial house. According to the myth,[73] she was killed by one of her twin sons; from her decomposing body, which she ordered her sons to fence in like a garden, emerged the first crops.

Puti clearly reflects the nature of this mythical cassowary woman whose human sons became stars in the sky, not only on the strength of the claws that are attached to the figure's feet, but also due to the shape of its body as a whole, which has more that of a flightless bird than of a humanoid being. The cassowary representation also finds expression in the cassowary bone daggers that feature in the *nggwalndu* initiation scenes, showing that *puti* stands at the interface of diverse beliefs, all of which are significant to Abelam worldview.

[73] See Hauser-Schäublin (1983: 192-193).

66

(previous page)
65. Aerial view of Kimbanggwa village located on a mountain ridge and surrounded by dense vegetation.

66. Kalabu, Wapinda hamlet with ceremonial house.

67. Ceremonial house of Dshame.

68. Kalabu *korambo* of Yambusaki., cf. frontispiece.

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69. The thatching of the roof of a ceremonial house. Kumunware hamlet, Waignakim.

70. A ceremonial house seen from the rear. The exit leads to a small sacred ceremonial ground accessible only to men. Kaumbul hamlet, Kalabu.

71. The master painter (Waulemoi) advises his assistants how to carry out the designs. Note the black prime coating of the sago spathes which are stitched together to form a continuous surface. Kalabu.

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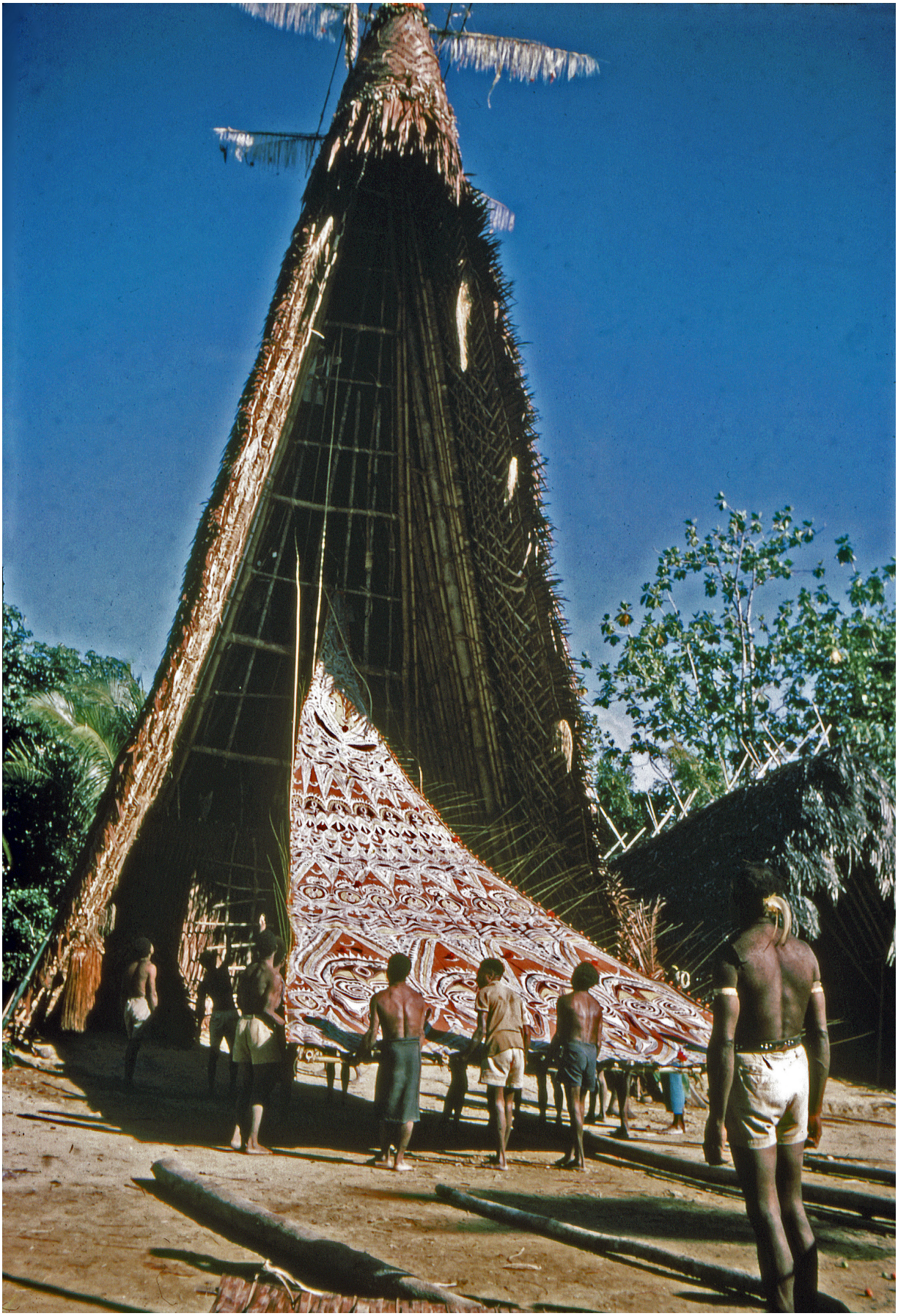
72. Painting the facade of a ceremonial house is always team work. The master painter (left) is supervising his assistants.

73. The master painter, Waulemoi of Kalabu, and his assistants are painting *nggwalnggwal* faces on a façade destined for a ceremonial house.

(overleaf)
74. The facade (with the painting turned inside) is first hoisted to test its fitting to the gable. Kalabu. Photo: Werner Stöcklin 1969.

75. The final hoisting of the façade to the gable; Kalabu 1. Photo: Werner Stöcklin 1969.



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76. Inauguration of the new ceremonial house decorated with shell rings and netbags in Kimbanggwa.

77 Some carvings are stored in the ceremonial house to be reused for the next ritual. Yambusaki hamlet, Kalabu.

78. Among the southern Abelam, shell rings for a bride wealth are attached to a bamboo pole. Waignakim.

79. Yam feasts are the occasion for ritual contests between two moieties during which they try to outdo each other with gifts of yams and pigs. The exchanges are accompanied by long, and often heated discussions on the ceremonial ground.

80. The decorated tubers are critically inspected by the men.

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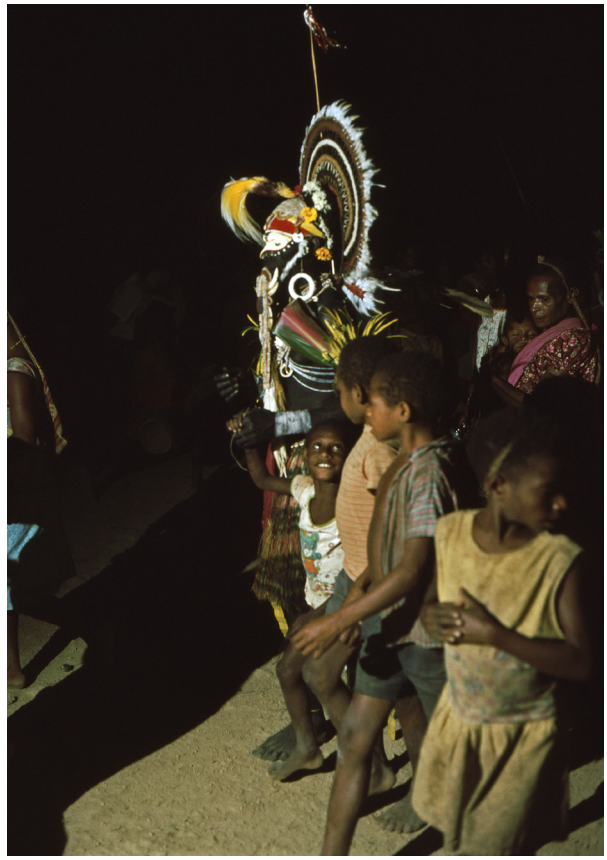

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81. Experienced yam growers (big men) cautiously excavate a long ceremonial yam. Lonem.

82. The ritual dance of men with painted faces and wearing a *noute* headdress lasts until dawn; the dancers are not allowed to open their eyes.

83. *Nggumaira,* 'the marvel from the water', is part of the first initiation grade.

84. Transferring ritual objects, here a carved *nggwalndu* head and a *nau*, from Kalabu to Malmba.

85. *Baba* masks haunt the village and violently beg for donations before a ritual starts. Kalabu.

(following pages)
86. The headdresses worn by *wagnen* dancers consist of flattened painted palm spathes adorned with thousands of colourful feathers. It takes tremendous effort and skill on the part of the dancers to retain their balance and go on dancing for a prolonged period.

87. Puti (Putilago) initiation scene from Bongiora village set up in the interior of the ceremonial house in the Museum of Cultures in Basel.

88. Reconstructed ceremonial house with original building material and painted façade made in Kalabu village (1980) in the Museum of Cultures in Basel.

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5. Ceremonial House and Ceremonial Ground: An Interpretation

The ceremonial ground is the locus where the relationships between individuals and groups and between different social entities are negotiated and structured. At the same time it is the place where the men gather to perform rituals in order to promote the growth of crops and human wellbeing with the help of beings from the beyond. Nothing comparable is effected within the ceremonial house, even though the installation of an initiation scene requires at least consensus of the men in charge. But, otherwise, the ceremonial house is not the place of collective action; it serves as the abode of specific spirits who reside there for a certain period of time, before returning to their habitual residence outside the village, that is, outside the human domain. Since these beings dislike being disturbed and try to elude human supervision, the building is not actively used in everyday life, It serves merely as the repository of the secret carvings, which, however, do not represent the figures as such, but only serve as temporary abodes.

These mighty buildings, towering above the forest canopy and visible from afar, serve as landscape markers and provide villagers who are temporarily located outside their settlement important points of orientation and identification. For the resident villagers the *korambo* stands as an expression of their potential and prestige, but also as a symbol of the continuous presence of the world beyond, which is allocated a clearly defined and demarcated space in everyday life.

Exoteric versus Esoteric

There exists a direct bearing between the external, visible aspects of the *korambo* with its richly painted façade, and the internal contents of the ceremonial house represented in the initiation scenes. Over the course of this study I have pointed out on several occasions how important the division into an exoteric and an esoteric realm is in Abelam culture. This becomes especially evident in the context of songs, which come over as a string of metaphors and which, understood as such, by all means convey sense and meaning. Many people, however, understand them in their literal sense only. But as I have tried to show, they usually also contain an esoteric message that alludes to either a highly volatile social event (act of war) or to secret knowledge (*maira*), preventing direct mention in words in view of possibly irreversible repercussions. In the former case, this could result in a retaliatory act of war, while, in the latter, a breach of the well-guarded ritual secrecy would amount to an act of profanation. Only very few people are actually aware of the link between the exoteric and the esoteric levels of songs and words, between 'what the picture shows' (exoteric) and 'what lies hidden behind the image' (esoteric). The same applies to the exoteric-esoteric relationship in the set-up of ceremonial houses, which is why, when describing the construction process, the production and mounting of the façade painting and the building's additional adornments, I kept more or less strictly to the description I myself received from my Abelam associates.

I became aware of this exoteric-esoteric duality when working with photographs of Abelam objects held in the Ethnographic Musem in Basel (now Museum der Kulturen Basel), which I took to the field with me. These included, among others, pictures of carved crossbeams (*tikit*) that separate the façade painting above from the plaited *kimbi* mat below, and a number of other objects that either feature on or in the ceremonial house. When gathering the indigenous terms for these pieces I met with a number of discrepancies in the sense that I often received different terms for the same object. It was only a few months later that Kwandshendu offered me an explanation for this puzzle: when, for example, a carving features on the outside of a ceremonial house it is referred to by a distinct term, but when it is displayed as part of an initiation scene inside the *korambo* it is called differently. Non-initiated people, especially women, are not aware of

the fact that certain objects displayed publicly on the outside of a ceremonial house actually reflect men's well-guarded secrets inside the house. Only certain senior men were aware of this dual principle, and only very few of them were able to point out the specific links between the exoteric and esoteric levels. In summary, the relationship breaks down into the following pairings, in order of initiation grades:

Exoteric:	Esoteric:
tikit (carved crossbeam featuring heads or figures)	*ulke* (relief carvings, occasionally a full frieze ; in earlier day: also carved and painted 'limbum' boards).
vi warya (root stocks with bird-head-like endings inserted into front end of the roof)	*nau* (bamboo roots stuck upside-down in the ground)
korekore (tunnel-shaped entrance)	Entrance and 'door' (*atapine*) to the initiation chamber, also entrance to the *wale*'s abode.
ndua (python)	*wale*
kimbi (plaited mat on the lower section of the façade)	*nggilut* (plaited 'chamber' of the *nggilenggwal*)
vi (spears sticking in the projecting roof)	*nggilina* (spears hanging over the winding corridor leading to *nggilenggwal*)
narkassa (vines hanging from the projecting roof (*nimbi*) down to the ground)	*samban* (suspension holding the ceiling of the chamber in *naranggwal*)
mbai (façade painting)	*narut* (painted ceiling and walls of the *naranggwal* initiation chamber)

Most of the equations should be obvious from descriptions in earlier chapters as they concern nearly identical objects, irrespective of whether they are shown on the outside or guarded inside the ceremonial house. The python, *ndua*, however, needs some commenting. As already described in other contexts, the *wale*, who usually reside in pools in the forest, become manifest in various guises. The python is one of the most typical forms of materialization. The snake that is mounted on the tunnel-like entrance (*korekore*) to the ceremonial house (**pl. 41**) contains a reference to the *wale* in two respects: first, as a form of spirit embodiment, secondly, the *korekore* leads to 'secret' *wale* pool inside the ceremonial house.

I cannot say whether, or to what extent, the permanently visible decorations on the ceremonial house serve the senior men as mnenomic devices as far as the different initiation grades and their contents are concerned. Although they were never explained to me in this way, this might well be one of their functions. The young men are never informed about the double identity of these symbols; it is left up to each individual to discover this innate relationship for himself. Significantly, the men who told me about this surprising but, at the

same time, dazzling correlation were either carvers or artists who, of course, were intimately familiar with the features of the works they created. Looking back at the descriptions of the different initiation scenes, it shows that, at last to some extent, a differentiation between outside and inside is made already here, for example, in terms of the shell rings which are spread out on the ceremonial ground, but actually, and unknowingly to many, act as a reference to the shell rings displayed in the initiation scene inside the *korambo*. Likewise, the *kumbumaak* stones, which are positioned beside the ceremonial house, publicly visible, have their counterpart in the yam stones, which are enshrouded in secrecy.

All the same, it is notable that – as Kwandshendu and Rorotabu explained to me independently of each other when describing the formal correspondence of outside and inside elements – two initiation grades are not visibly represented on the outside of the ceremonial house, namely the first (*nggumaira*) and the final (*puti*) grade. As described above (see p. 148), *nggumaira* is composed exclusively of ephemeral materials, flowers and leaves; this practically excludes the possibility of mounting a durable symbol on the outside of the ceremonial house to reflect the first grade. The only hint that is included is the band of *ban* fruits and leaves, *mindshakuso*, that is attached below the *tikit* crossbeam and left there even when the leaves and fruits have become parched. The band is a reference to the cord of *ban* fruits that encircle the *nggumaira* image in the initiation scene. Similarly, my research associates never made direct reference to the highest and last initiation grade, *puti*. However, I believe it is possible to deduce from other contexts that the ceremonial house as such, as seen from the outside, stands for the *puti* figure within. When I asked what the *korambo* 'represented' as such I used to receive differing explanations to which I will be returning shortly. One of the answers I received was that the house showed a *kumbundu*, a senior big man in ritual attire. In descriptions of the corresponding initiation scene I was often told that *puti* was an old, nameless, humanlike being that once used to own everything that the humans now possess, but which he later handed over to the people. The act of giving is reminiscent of the doings of a culture hero; but here the emphasis is neither on the act of giving nor on the goods themselves (unlike the stories about the mythical cassowary woman who gave the humans their crops), but on the fact that *puti* is the origin of everything. Once, *puti* encompassed everything in the world just as today the *korambo* embraces all the *maira*.

In outer form, the figure's body and the building's shape, *puti* and *korambo,* actually do bear resemblance. On a ceremonial house, the projecting canopy stands for the head – notably, among the north-western Abelam, the ridge beam underneath is decorated with a carved face. From the tip of the nose a plaited vine chain hangs down to the ground. The house's façade depicts the *puti* figure's foreside, that is, its chest and belly. One man even went as far to explain that the carved and painted 'limbum' boards (*daungge*, also called *yakua*) that protrude from the front on each side of the *korambo*, showed two arms. However, a one-to-one transfer based on the formal likeness of the constituent elements is off the mark, and I believe that in this case the man was merely trying to satisfy my expectations as to a conceivable link. As I have pointed out on several previous occasions, imagery is never explained in the form of verbal exegesis; the Abelam do not require a consistent explanation for beings that are represented by means of visual media, either as three-dimensional sculptures or two-dimensional paintings. Instead, the system of cross-referencing signs is an open one, providing leeway for multiple and diverse interpretations. For my senior associates it was enough to know that, when a new ceremonial house was inaugurated, the *kimbi* mat was decorated with shell rings in the same manner as the plaited body of *puti* in the initiation scene. But they never explicitly said that the ceremonial house was the exoteric version of *puti*. This, in turn, is what I propose to do by way of indirect reasoning.

For the system of interconnections between the exoteric and the esoteric, the relation between part and whole plays an pivotal role. Just as the lower initiation grades are just facets of an encompassing whole, *puti*, the exoteric elements such as *tikit*, *vi warya*, *korekore*, *kimbi*, *narkassa* or *mbai* merely form constituents of the ceremonial house as such. Conversely, the concurrence of visible elements on the *korambo* that carry exoteric meaning makes indirectly

clear that the different figures that the novices are shown in initiations are by no means beings that belong to some kind of spiritual 'proto-clan', but constitute beings that are not bound by any form of genealogical fabric. This is, in fact, not surprising since genealogical-lineal thought modes play practically no role in everyday social reality. Just as the architectural elements differ from each other in terms of shape and function, so do the *maira*; but common to both categories is that they constitute facets of a whole of which they are part. The same relation holds true for the façade painting, which, taken as a whole, stands as a reference to the secret initiation chamber, *narut*. Throughout, the artists asserted the intrinsic value of each pattern and motif, separated from each other by white lines. But apart from the *nggwalnggwal* motif (**fig. 22h**), the large faces in the lower section of the *mbai*, which are loosely associated but never personified with the *nggwalndu*, they never offered a comprehensive explanation as to the meaning of what the picture shows. Nevertheless, the façade painting does provide the people with pieces of information, but these are not articulated in words, instead they serve as indices to similar things that are wrapped in different shapes and forms. This becomes most evident in the case of the *nggwalndu*. The large *nggwalnggwal* faces with eyes consisting of concentric rings which hypnotically stare down upon the people below, are a reference to the large anthropomorphic *nggwalndu* figures lying inside the ceremonial house. On the painting, the figures, which have minute bodies, are depicted wearing a pubic triangle, while the *nggwalndu* carvings in the *korambo* are unmistakably equipped with a penis. Asked about this discrepancy, the artists claimed that it was impossible to paint a penis and that, inadvertently, the organ in question turned out as a pubic triangle on the image, unlike in the carving. Any suggestion that the façade painting showed female *nggwalndu* was adamantly rejected, throughout. Yet, given the female representation in painting and the male rendition in carving, a comparison with the level of language lends itself well; in song, the term 'woman' is often used as a metaphor for 'man' or '*nggwalndu'*. In a similar vein we may ask whether the trope 'vulva', which is often used to describe the stone house and the yam stone, should not actually read as the equation penis/stone.[1] The *nggwalndu* carvings in the ceremonial house, which are never regarded as mimetic images, are references to the spiritual beings residing in certain pools in the forest of which the people have no clear notion with regard to bodily shape and features. The same could be inferred with regard to the *nggilenggwal* and *kundi ure* and also to the large, decorated *wapi* tubers when they are presented publicly on the ceremonial ground (**pl. 50**).

The *nggwalnggwal* motif on the façade painting acts in a way like a cipher for the entire spectrum featuring *nggwalndu* **(pl. 86);** in a similar way, the painting also alludes to all the other initiation grades. While the various objects on the ceremonial house that reflect exoteric aspects of the esoteric realm differ from each other in terms of material and shape, painting relies on a single medium and on two-dimensionality. Moreover, next to materiality and mode of representation, the façade painting applies a different mode than the architectural elements to allude to the initiations. While, for example, the carved crossbeam or the strangely wrought root objects, *vi warya*, always have a similarly designed counterpart in the secret initiation scene, the façade painting never reproduces the objects as such, but the beings they represent. Basically the images signify creatures encountered in everyday life; these, in turn, function as metaphors for the *maira* they designate. As mentioned above (p. 70), an Abelam 'reads' a façade painting from top to bottom, in the same direction as the painting is produced. Considering the main motives on the upper third of the picture and the names that go with them, one notices that they do not portray humans or forest creatures in the direct sense of the term, but represent beings that feature in the lesser initiation grades. The pattern called *dshuimbiat*, (**fig. 22b**) meaning as 'foam' or 'ripples on the water', very realistically displayed in the painting, alludes to *nggumaira*, the opening initiation grade (**pl. 82, fig. 25**). *Matmboi*, gliding possums are classified as female creatures that live in tree tops (**fig. 22a**) and have the habit of leading hunters astray; in

[1] In previous chapters I always objected to interpreting the yam ceremonies as a phallic cult; I believe this view has been over-emphasized in the literature. However, this does not imply that I deny that a penis/stone relationship exists, but it is not of primary significance.

turn, the upturned bamboo shoots, *nau*, are also classified as female. It follows that the illustrated *matmboitagwa* constitute a reference to the *nau* initiation grade (**pl. 58**), in the same way as the female flying foxes, *kwandshetagwa* (**fig. 22f)**, stand for *ulke*. Going by the description of an initiation scene in Samgik, the mother-child relationship plays an important role. In the scene in question this relationship was depicted by the image of a *baba* mask/decorated yam. The same holds true for the pictured *kwandshetagwa*, the quintessential female symbol, and epitomized by her children, *kumbui* bats, shown beneath her breasts. Other motifs based on plants and birds provide further references to the forest, the realm of the gliders and flying foxes; these include patterns such as *baintship*, *woutampal*, *ashal*, *seraul* and *maingge* (**fig. 22c, d**).

The *ndudama*, the human figures on the façade painting (**fig. 22g**), address a *maira* which for the Abelam is of primary significance: that of decorated men. The figures actually depict *nare*, ritual dancers common to all initiation ceremonies (**pl. 84, 86**). In reality, and depending on context, *nare* wear either plaited, round *noute* headdresses or triangular, painted *wagnen* head pieces, which is why they are shown on the painting wearing both adornments. Like the *nggwalnggwal*, the *ndudama* are also endowed with female pubic triangles – for certain dances women wear this motif also as a facial pattern. The equal rendering in imagery of secret figures and ritual dancers which have, through seclusion and adornment, themselves become otherworldly entities, indicates that, in initiations, the Abelam do not distinguish between the two spheres, that is, human representatives and beings from the world beyond. Unlike in the case of the *nare,* where the body proportions are more or less realistic, the *nggwalnggwal* are shown with disproportionately large faces (**fig. 22h**) that dwarf the other body parts. They are still recognizably humanlike beings, but at the same time the figuration expresses their transcendent nature. The motives are surrounded by string bag patterns that are typical for this initiation grade and which also distinguish the string bags that men who have passed this grade are entitled to wear. Among the patterns beneath the *nggwalnggwal* figures a rooster, *sera*, is shown. For one, it is regarded as the bearer of light on the strength of its long white tail feathers, but with regard to the human sphere it also symbolizes a handsome, imposing man. Likewise, *paal*, the hornbill bird, that features beside the large faces next to *sera* does not stand for the wild, untamed forest, but for the human realm. This proximity to the village and its people also finds expression in the fact that, on many ceremonial houses, the plaited mat is decorated with carved hornbills. On the strength of its strong and light-coloured beak, which the people equate with the (durable) white human bones and the stars, the bird is closely associated with human existence.

Looking at the façade painting from this perspective shows that the upper part of the picture features creatures and plants associated with the forest. Following an intermediate layer displaying headless, anthropomorphic figures (**fig. 22e**), *biasibe*, the focus is narrowed down to, and shifted towards, the human domain, step by step. Here the motives include ritual dancers and the *nggwalndu* for whom the villagers construct a temporary abode in the middle of the village, that is, in the ceremonial house. Putting it simply one could say that the façade painting, read top down, mirrors the sequence of initiations, with the exception of the ultimate grade *puti*. Unlike on the façade painting, it is not possible to discern the sequential order of initiation grades by means of the architectural elements displayed on the front side of the *korambo* as there are no fixed rules as how to 'read' a ceremonial house consecutively.

Nevertheless, it is important to note in this context that the positioning of ritual objects in the ceremonial house is by no means random, just as the objects displayed on the outside of the house are not placed incidentally. Having explained the various locations in the context of the description of the different initiation grades I will not list them here again. Next to certain pivotal spots such as the centre of the house where the scenes for *nggumaira* and *puti* are staged, there are certain areas which are not actively used, for example, the backmost part of the building (occasionally slit gongs are positioned here) and, at least partly, the left-hand side of the house (looking from the rear entrance). Also the space at the side immediately behind the plaited mat is not used for any initiation scenes. The *nggwalna nggai* where the *kundi ure* are kept could be described as a secret precinct, while the middle part of the

house where the most important ritual objects are placed certainly constitutes the *korambo*'s focal point, or epicentre. Looking at it from this angle, the *nggilenggwal* positioned transversely on the right-hand side, definitely step back behind the *naranggwal*.

As far as the outside of the ceremonial house is concerned, the people do not distinguish between an important and a less important side. The *vi warya*, which designate one of the lower grades, feature on both sides of the roof, the lateral position indicating their rather peripheral significance. The carved crossbeam *tikik* forms the horizontal centre line separating the *kimbi* below (comprising the python *ndua* and the entrance) from the façade painting above. The division makes sense insofar as the lower part and its attributes make reference to the *wale* and waterholes in the ground, while the *mbai* signifies a 'shooting star', which clearly belongs to the upper realm.

Figure and Form

When mounting the objects to the ceremonial house's façade and when designing the initiation scenes inside the house, variations and new combinations are quite common, but the arrangement is hardly ever fortuitous. This is also especially true of the various shapes and forms the people rely on. The ritual objects and their features, orientated towards the beings they are meant to represent, display a set of forms and characteristics that are typically Abelam and which emerge in a variety of contexts.[2]

The Circle as Base

The circle is one of the very basic shapes encountered in very different contexts and places. During *ka* yam displays, the average tubers are heaped in a conical mound on a circular surface (**pl. 51**). A stick and, above all, *wapi* yams form the mound's 'spine'. In yam growing, the mound consisting of very fine soil which is piled up over the spot where the seedling is planted is also circular in shape, very much like the *ka-kwei*. At the centre of the mound is the hole that has been excavated and filled with finely crumbled soil into which the planter inserts a 'pitpit' stalk on top of which he then places the yam cutting. Very similar to a conical *ka* mound is also the shell ring pattern called *kalngga* consisting of a set of ever-smaller shell rings placed on top of each other; here a cassowary bone dagger serves as the 'spine'. The *biben* enclosure around the moon stone *bapmu* is also circular in shape. It is decorated with *baba* masks which are placed on spears standing out at an angle. Underneath the spears stand palm leaf containers with water over which the men have to exhale in order to promote the growth of the yam in their gardens. The fenced-in area at the centre of the *amei*, which plays an important role during the roofing ceremony, is also circular in shape. The moon stone, situated next to this circular fenced-in area and the *biben* enclosure, is also round, in fact, 'round on all sides', that is, it is spherical. By virtue of its shape the moon stone is a cryptic reference to the secret taro stone that takes centre stage in the growth rituals for this round (female) root crop. Very often the ceremonial ground, the centre of all public social and ritual life, is also circular in shape, and the same holds true for the waterhole on the surface of which the men create the *nggumaira* initiation scene. Last but not least, the *noute* headdresses worn by ritual dancers, and with which semi-long yam tubers are decorated, are also round shaped.

The Ring

For the Abelam, the shell ring is the quintessential ring form. White painted, concentric rings also feature as eyes, for example, on the large *nggwalnggwal* faces, which the people frequently compare to shell rings, and also as a representation of the sun painted on a piece of round sago palm spathe and suspended over the moon stone on the occasion of the inauguration of a new ceremonial house. Some clues also suggest that the Abelam conceive of the stars as white rings; for them, shell rings are nothing else but 'fallen' stars (**pl. 78**).[3]

The Triangle

This unusual shape, which, compared with the circle, the square or the rectangle, allows for only a single symmetry (central axis), is typical of Abelam architecture. The ground plan of buildings nearly always has the shape of an isosceles triangle (in the case of the ceremonial

[2] To the best of my knowledge, there are no abstract geometrical terms for circle, ring and triangle in the Abelam language; I therefore rely on Western geometrical concepts here.

[3] See Hauser-Schäublin (1983: 189).

house more that of a trapezoid). On ceremonial houses, the gable front as a whole, but above all the facade painting, are triangular in shape, and both the *nggilenggwal* and *puti* figures are constructed on the principle of the triangle. The same holds true for the painted *wagnen* headdresses that adorn the prize yam tubers at yam feasts, ritual dancers on the occasion of certain initiations and, again, the two figures *puti* and *nggilenggwal* in the respective initiation scenes. A further example is the (female) pubic triangle. As noted in previous chapters, ritual musical ensembles such as slit gongs, *kundi ure* or *wanyen* bamboo trumpets always consist of three instruments, never two or four. The only explanation I have for the emphasis on trinity is the fact that it does not allow for the formation of equal binary opposites; hence it represents an (almost structuralist) axiom in Abelam culture, holding together and mediating between many other aspects that are dominated by contrast and opposition. The fact that this type of triality is expressed on the artistic and acoustic levels, but absent from the social and local dimensions, grants it special significance.

Verticality

Verticality plays an important part in the arrangement of the *kumbumaak* stones on the ceremonial ground and the safekeeping of the secret yam stones. Likewise, the 'spine' of a *ka kwei* (mound of *ka* yams) stands upright, as do the *wapinyan* inside the ceremonial house and the cassowary bones that are stuck in the ground during certain initiation ceremonies.

Inclined Position

The most conspicuous form of obliqueness is to be found in the sloping ridge of the ceremonial house that drops away from front to back. On a reduced scale this goes for all the other house types as well. The 'backbone' on the *nggilenggwal* and *puti* figures also drops off to the back. The same is the case for the pig traps, *wami*. Decorated ceremonial yams are tied to poles and exhibited in public in a slanting position (**pl. 50, 80**). After exchange and removing the adornment, the ritual partner who receives the yam, stores the tuber in the same position, either in the ceremonial house or in his own yam storage house. Nobody would ever think of storing ceremonial yams, which, after all, carry personal names, in any other way, for instance, flat on the ground. When shell rings are exchanged in compensation payments (after a committed wrong, a fight or even a homicide) they are tied to a bamboo pole that is also placed in a slanting position (**pl. 78**) and displayed in public, in difference to shell rings in bride wealth exchanges which are laid out on leaves on the ground (**pl. 48**). Inside the ceremonial house, the *nggwalndu* figures are placed in a sloping position on tree stems of unequal thickness so that they face the front of the house. Last but not least, the painted ceiling of the *narut* initiation chamber is also drawn in at an angle (**pl. 62**).

Commentary

With a view to the commonalities in figures and shapes, the following findings are suggestive: the circle is closely associated with the elements 'ground' and 'water', not rainwater, but dark and stagnant waters such as pools and swamps. The two elements, ground and water, are classified as female, dark, humid and fertile; it appears that *ka* yam is seen more as female type of tuber which is why it is displayed in circular heaps. This applies even more to the round taro tuber (*mai*). For its growth and increase the people rely on a round magic stone. Unlike *ka*, which is piled up in conically-shaped heaps, taro is displayed on the ceremonial ground in large cylindrical receptacles.

A circle features at the centre of the *amei* during yam rituals and roofing ceremonies as well as for the kick-off of pig hunts in the context of initiations (possibly other events too). At the same time, the circle also constitutes the centre point inside the ceremonial house, for example, for *nggumaira* and *puti* initiations. In contrast, the ring, which for European concepts and viewing habits is very much like a circle, has nothing in common with ground or water, but stands for 'white' and 'light' instead. The wreath of feathers displayed on painted images of the sun, *noute* headdresses and a number of other items belongs to the ring category, and not the circle. A white wreath of feathers is the primary symbol of light, best exemplified by the white rooster with its impressive tail plumage. The *mindsha* feather crests that the men adorn themselves with are modelled on this image. Thus, basically the ring is regarded as a different figure from the circle. It is only in initiation scenes, where shell rings are placed in

round enclosures symbolizing waterholes, that the two shapes coincide and complement each other. As mentioned earlier on, the Abelam say that shooting stars that flash through the night sky always drop into waterholes, causing the ground to faintly tremble. If it hits a *wale* pool it means that someone is about to die. Thus, the ritual enclosures which stand for waterholes and which contain shell rings must have something to do with the secrets of life, death and eternity, as embodied in the concept of the 'bone spirit' or 'bone soul'.

For the Abelam the black painted pubic triangle, viewed as a realistic representation, is conceived of as a true triangle, in difference to the ground plan of a ceremonial house, the shape of the façade and the *wagnen* headdress, which also have three sides and three angles. Although I never received an answer to my questions aiming in this direction I believe from observation that the people make a basic distinction between different types of triangular forms, depending on whether the base of the triangle is at the bottom (e.g., façade or *wagnen* headdress) or at the top (pubic triangle). On top of that, three-dimensional space is something quite different from a surface with three corners, even if, in our view, they both are in some way 'triangular' in shape. Triangularity as such – represented in pubic triangles as well as in façades – is not the defining model to go by; one has to keep the alignment, or positioning, apart. For the Abelam, the painted façade and the *wagnen* headdress go together, not only on the basis of formal principles. We also have terminological clues: thus, when the painted façade *mbai* has been hoisted and fitted to the gable front, the neighbouring villages are informed of the event by the sounding of the signal *wagnen ula* on the slit gong (**pl. 75**). Apart from that, the façade is often referred to as *wagnen* in esoteric contexts during initiations. This suggests that the Abelam regard *mbai*, *wagnen* and *nyit tshui* (ceiling of the initiation chamber) as being identical things (**pl. 62**) even though they differ in size and are used for different purposes. In terms of semantic field we notice a continual progression starting with *mbai*, literally 'flattened palm spathe', to the shooting star in the night sky, and finally to the dancer who 'carries the firmament' on his head – a bit like the Titan Atlas – in the shape of the *wagnen* headdress (**pl. 86**). All three triangle-shaped paintings are presented in a more or less forward inclined position; this has to do with notions concerning verticality and obliqueness.

The category of vertically positioned objects includes, in the main, durable materials such as stones and bones,[4] which, for the Abelam, stand for eternity, but also for strength. Just as the spine supports the human body, enabling a man to walk upright, so does the yam stone (*wai*) form a tuber's backbone without which it would not grow. As indicated above in the descriptions of the various initiations and the significance of the ceremonial house, these stones are never exhibited in the ceremonial house. They are not even stored there, and the initiates do not get to see them on any occasion. In the *nggwalndu* initiation the novices are touched with a special stone (*nggwal matu*), but this is not a *wai*, a yam stone. Initiations and yam stones, secret as they both are, appear to form related yet separate complexes, otherwise one might expect that at some stage a decorated yam stone would form the focal point of an initiation scene, which is not the case. Below, I shall be returning to the question why yam stones are never kept or displayed in a ceremonial house.

None of my informants ever referred to the *wapinyan* figures in connection with the mythical yam child. Not least due to the form of presentation, which, I believe, one has to credit with the same degree of explanatory value as any other form of ethnographic fact, *wapinyan* appear to point, in carved, exoteric form, to the secret *wapiwai*. This is the only credible link I see between this figure and the yam cult. It grants the *wapinyan* an accountable position in the continuum comprising *kumbumaak* (stones placed next to the ceremonial house), the *wapiwai*, the 'spine' in the mound of *ka* yams and, last but not least, the cassowary bone daggers sticking in the ground in initiation scenes. The vertical stance appears to be the position offering the strongest support, literally and figuratively speaking, comparable to the posts that carry the *kwambut* beams, and the *yanetigwa*, the main ridge supporting post, which bears the weight of the ceremonial house as a whole.

[4] In some eastern Abelam villages the long *wapi* tubers are exhibited on the ceremonial ground in an erect position. According to the present interpretation, the relationship between stones and yams is more salient there than among the central northern Abelam.

Only seen from this perspective does the comparison Kwandshendu offered me with regard to the yam stones' function make sense: the stone, he said, is the table upon which the food lies; if there's no table, there's nothing to eat.

The rather unusual oblique, or slanting, position[5] in which yams and shell rings (in the form of compensation payment), arranged according to size and tied to poles, are displayed on the ceremonial ground (**pl. 78**) finds its equivalence in the ridge beam of a ceremonial house that drops away from front to back (e.g. **pl. 25**). What these elements have in common as far as presentational form goes is that each one discloses an aspect of *nggwal*: the yam as a tangible expression of the *nggwal*'s power; shell rings representing the innermost essence, the 'bones', an emblem of truth which a man presents to his adversary in the name of his *nggwalndu* when settling a conflict. The sloping ridge beam of the *korambo* is also a facet of the kaleidoscopic *nggwalndu* image. Unlike the circle, which is classified as a female form, the oblique position is looked upon as a male quality. The sloping surfaces of the *mbai* and *nyit tshui* are inconceivable without the slanting ridge beam; they belong together. Similar to the ridge beam's inclination, the paintings' position is slanting as well. As *nyit nde tshui yu*, 'shooting star from the sky', the painted ceiling of the *narut* arches over the carved figures inside like the firmament (**pl. 62**). *Nyit*, sky, is also the term used for the ridge beam, as is *yapa*, the term for father. *Yapa* is also used to designate the (male classified) sun. *Nyit tshui* is a size-reduced representation of the firmament, a microcosm that the Abelam do not consider as being a vault, but as made up of a set of inclined, sloping surfaces. Thus, the dancer wearing a *wagnen* headdress is like a pillar with its capital (head) supporting the skies. The act of carrying a section of the sky on his head, with his body upright, shifts the man into the centre of cosmic happening. But, with his body coloured black and his eyes closed with paint he is not just an 'ordinary' man, but one of the 'dead' (**pl. 64**), one who is more familiar with the conditions of the beyond than his 'living' counterparts. The short apron the dancer wears underlines his special ritual status. As the Abelam normally went naked in former days, the apron has little to do with prudency. I believe it has to be seen in connection with the 'fibre skirt' hanging in the ceremonial house that separates the building into a secular and a sacred section (**pl. 44**). The same applies to the *narendu*'s apron; it marks a boundary. From the waistline upwards the dancer is imbued with increasing sacredness climaxing in the *wagnen* headdress he carries on his head. The analogy between *wagnen* and *mbai*, that is, between headdress and façade painting, is even more striking when one considers that the earliest *tikit*, the carved crossbeam separating the plaited mat below from the façade painting above, used to be decorated with skulls or carved wooden heads, granting the *mbai* the status of a large *wagnen* headdress for the heads underneath. In the same sense, the painted ceiling of the *narut* represents the *wagnen* headdress of the carved *nggwalndu* figures lying inside the initiation chamber.

Semantics of Ceremonial House Components

As yet I have only treated the terms for ridge beam (*nyit* and *yapa*) in the context of their relationship to 'sun' and 'sky'. Here a further level of meaning needs adding. The secondary ridge beam lashed to a crossbar fixed to a pair of round crucks and underpinning the ridge beam (**pl. 44**) is called *nyan* (male) child, or *moim*. The men had no explanation for the latter term; in the end it probably refers to a personal name. The father/child relationship expressed in *yapa* and *nyan* is reflected, firstly, in the proportions of the two elements (with comparable function) but, secondly, also by the fact that the 'young boy' props the 'old man'. At the same time, *yapa*, the 'father', is associated with *nggwalndu* in the sense that the vine that braces the ridge beam on both sides is also called *nggwalndu*, and the spot where the *yapa* is attached to the first pair of *watnamba* by a vine binding (**fig. 20**) is referred to as *nggwal*'s woven ornamental band (*nggwalndu auw*, **pl. 30**), not to forget *nggwalndu*'s basket that is placed at the tip of the ridge extension during construction.

Just as a new yam grows from an older tuber, the Abelam see it as paramount that a man has a son who will once take over his position. The idea of a new generation growing from the previous one is of prime significance in Abelam culture, which is strongly informed by the cyclical growth of crops. This also helps to explain the men's periodic change of name that goes with each initiation grade and through which a man acquires a 'new existence' after each initiation. Like the yam which grows from a foregoing tuber, a man's life is divided into

[5] Horizontality is practically of no significance in Abelam culture.

cycles, and, judging from some of the clues I gathered, I think one could say that an Abelam man sees himself living through several lives, and not simply one continuous lifespan. And, just as a yam tuber that has grown to its full length no longer produces a new shoot and is therefore called *golepa*, 'old man', every man reaches an age when, after having passed through all grades, nothing new grows.

This is certainly also what the old men who see the *puti* image experience. Not only has the represented being itself come to its end, the initiates too have grown empty; nothing new will grow from them. The concepts of reproduction and alternation of generations are reflected and inscribed in the construction terms used to designate the main ridge beam and the secondary ridge beam, *yapa* and *nyan*, respectively.

The protruding roof, or canopy **(fig. 21)**, is called *nimbi* which means 'tooth' or 'beak'. The underside of the canopy is referred to as *kwandshengga*, 'nest of the flying foxes', probably because flying foxes actually do use the spot as a dwelling. I do not see the term *nimbi* as referring to either a human or an animal tooth. Rather, the device appears to be associated with the beak of the cassowary. This interpretation is suggested by the fact that when, after roofing is concluded, the spears are affixed to the canopy, the signal *saigewata* (*saige* – cassowary) is sounded on the slit gong. The same signal was used in earlier days when a man had succeeded in killing an enemy warrior. In Kuminimbis, incidentally, the entrance to the ceremonial house is referred to as *saigetambu* – the path of the cassowary. As shown above, the *puti* initiation already contains a number of references to this typical ratite, and the fact that parts of the ceremonial house as well as *puti* make reference to the cassowary is, of course, no coincidence. According to the pertinent story,[6] the mythical cassowary woman, acting in the guise of a culture hero, was the first to construct a ceremonial house (however, the myth does not recount how she accomplished this). One of my associates, Darigwa, once compared the ceremonial house with a female cassowary that builds its nest on the ground where it lays its eggs to hatch out. The boundary of the ceremonial ground, he explained, equalled the edge of the nest which the bird built of its droppings, while the bird itself was the *korambo*. Continuing this analogy, it is seen that the eggs are represented by the ritual objects kept inside the ceremonial house. The term *gik*, 'egg', actually is used as a metaphor for the *wapinyan* in connection with the *ulke-nau* initiation. Elsewhere,[7] I have tried to substantiate at the linguistic level the indigenous term for cassowary which the Abelam have in common with their Arapesh neighbours (*saige*, *saike*, *saiche*) and, at the same time, indicate how the term used by linguistically related groups such as the Boiken (*amia*) and the Iatmul (*amuya*) connects to the Abelam term for ceremonial ground, *amei*. On the strength of this, the *amei* stands for the first yam garden men built, for, as the myth of the cassowary woman tells, her sons had to fence in the spot where their mother died. From her decomposing body, the first *wapi* and *ka* yams grew, and from then on all the shoots had to be cut with the aid of a knife made from one of her bones in order to make the yams grow.

With regard to the beliefs concerning this female culture hero, the ceremonial ground, with its mounds of *ka* yams and the *wapi* tied to poles, represents on the occasion of yam feasts the cassowary's burial site which, at the same time, became the first yam garden. In this way the cassowary is conceptually significantly linked to both ceremonial house and ritual ground although, on the surface, this only becomes evident through single terms and names. What for me is an important aspect is that the ceremonial house is not only associated with maleness and aggressiveness, but also granted a female dimension. In order to experience its secrets, the initiates have to crawl through the *saigetambu* (in Kuminimbis) and enter the bird's body. The idea of rebirth is expressed by the act of having to crawl between the legs of a female carved figure in order to see the initiation scene. Entering the cassowary's body beforehand underpins the notion of rebirth.

Undoubtedly the ceremonial house retains its male and aggressive moment; it is certainly more present and evident than its female aspects. Thus, for example, some of the main posts supporting the construction are named

[6] The myth, in varying versions, is common to all parts of the Sepik area. I have the impression that the myth is of special relevance among the Arapesh where the story is connected with various places on their migration routes, all of them located within Arapesh territory.

[7] See Hauser-Schäublin (1983: 195).

after slain enemies. The spears sticking out from the canopy and the roof sides (here, under the term *vi warya*, they also refer to the *nau* initiation) symbolize the village community's courage and strength in battle. Especially the canopy, visible from miles around, presents an effective deterrent to all enemy villages. The three figures hanging from the chain from the peak of the ridge represent slain enemies; they are referred to by the metaphor *mande* (testicles), which indicates in what way killed warriors were mutilated. Featuring as permanent elements on a ceremonial house these figures embody the ultimate provocation for any enemy. This is also a reason why, during a raid on a neighbouring village, the ceremonial house was the first building to be set on fire, indicating the attackers' intention of total destruction of the village.

Next to a large number of terms that refer to types of wood used (*mangge* – *Casearia sp.*; *kama* – bamboo) or the function of certain construction elements (such as *biterapu* – the 'two climbing ones'; *narkassa* – decorative vine; *gini sitik* – the final support), the name *korekore* used for the tunnel-like entrance is of special interest. *Korekore* is the name of a bird, which, like the wild fowl, lives on the ground in the bush for the most part of the time where it also builds its nest. According to my informants, the nest is made of thin sticks and stalks in approximately the shape of a ceremonial house. The bird, roughly the size of a Lory with a partly red, partly speckled plumage, is said to adorn its nest with leaves and fruits in the same way as the men decorate a *korambo*. Judging from the descriptions I received we must be dealing with a male bowerbird which not only has the habit of constructing a special bower to attract a mate, but which also, in its courtship ritual, is said to clutch a twig with fruits in its beak and move up and down the long narrow entrance to its bower. When I showed the men a photograph of a fawn-breasted bowerbird (from Peckover and Filewood, 1976) they claimed that the *korekore* was very similar to the species in the picture. Only very few men had ever seen the bird in life but everyone had heard descriptions of it and its behaviour, and all the men confirmed that the bower was similar in shape to the ceremonial house or, inversely, that the *korambo* was modelled on the bird's bower.

The scene of an orator decorated with a feather crest and red flowers in his hair, with a boar's tusk ornament on his back and with spears in his hand, parading up and down the *amei* in front of the ceremonial house, half chanting, half speaking, is an impressive sight. As we know, the Abelam frequently apply bird metaphors for describing men, usually reverting to species that are famous for their colourful and striking plumage or their special and loud calls. Hence the comparison between the *korekore* bird's spectacular bower with its forecourt and the ceremonial house and *amei* belonging to it is merely an extension of this analogy, albeit at a different level. Undoubtedly, ceremonial house and ceremonial ground play a much more prominent role with regard to the relationship between men and women than I have been able to convey in this study. The interplay between actors and audience as described for yam feasts and initiations is of great significance for the shaping of gender relations, and just as the bowerbird tries to attract a female to its nest, so do Abelam men try to impress the women and gain their favour by constructing an imposing ceremonial house, by performing spectacular dances and by exhibiting especially beautiful species of ceremonial yam.

Up to now I have left the aside the question of what the term *korambo* for ceremonial house actually means, not least because I do not have a conclusive explanation. *Mbo* is used to describe the initiation enclosure, the area of seclusion at the back of the ceremonial house. The men always strictly rejected the possible interpretation that *korambo* was a composite term consisting of the words *ko* – to eat, *ra* – to stay and *mbo* – place, spot, even though this version would suggest itself as a metaphorical explanation, considering the actions that centre on the ceremonial house during initiations. My informants used to refer to similar expressions such as *korekore* which, with regard to the bowerbird, is possibly an onomatopoeic term. The term for the plant called *korambin* which is used for different purposes does not tally with either of the two interpretations. The same expression is used for the shell ring that a man gives to a child's mother's brother on the occasion of the baby's birth. It is regarded as a kind of guarantee that, should the child fall sick, the mother's brothers would come to its aid immediately and help it recover (e.g., by breathing on food intended for the child), thus also proving their innocence with regard to the child's

affliction. I got the impression that for Abelam men the word *korambo* was an indivisible term referring to a plethora of textures and meanings.

Conclusion: Microcosm and Macrocosm

Up to here I have tried to outline the significance of the ceremonial house and the fields it refers to by drawing on exoteric elements in construction, the façade painting, the shape of the house and the terminology of its single parts. In a last step I wish to explore the *korambo* in its overall setting and significance.

As mentioned in previous chapters, the site where a ceremonial house is built in a village is predefined by tradition. At least in Kalabu, the criteria determining the location are not specified, or no longer known. What does seem to be important is an elevated position. When questioned about the cardinal directions, the people always said that they were of no significance. It was only when my husband and I used a compass to assess the directional alignment we found that, predominantly, the painted façade pointed eastwards. In Kalabu this was the case almost without exception, in the other villages this applied in the majority of cases, with some notable exceptions; some of the *korambo* faced westwards, a few to the south, but no ceremonial house looked to the north, that is, toward the gradually rising mountain range. Whereas in geography east is a clearly defined point on the compass, the Abelam see it more as range of bearings in the same general direction. Most of the ceremonial houses conform to this orientation.

When the yam growing ceremony was being held in Waignakim and the same people who, before, had denied that ceremonial houses were oriented towards any specific direction, now explained that the *baba* masks used in the ritual stringently had to face east, they suddenly realized the common ground between the two issues, probably due to the overall context they were acting in. Above all, the masks balancing on the tips of spears, but also the façade of a ceremonial house, should face east because, according to Abelam belief, this is where new, generating powers originate.

When a new ceremonial house is built, the men hang up horizontally over the centre of the *amei* the image of the sun, painted on a sheet of palm spathe. It represents the midday sun at its zenith shining on the ceremonial ground, a trope for village life. It was only in the course of several months that I realized why the slanting ridge beam is called 'sky/heaven' (*nyit*). The Abelam do not conceive of the lived world, that is, the human environment and the space above them, as a hemisphere. For them the sun (*nya*), after passing the zenith (*naure*), follows a precipitous path towards the west; when setting (*nya dumbu kyao*) it takes on a deep red hue before vanishing beyond the horizon. When it passes from the world of the living, it rises in the realm of the dead, providing them with light during the night. The spot where the sun sets is the most distant spot on the horizon, the place where the boundaries of the 'worlds' converge, in a similar way as the sides of a triangle meet at its apex. The space between the place where the people live under the midday sun and the spot where the sun sets has the shape of a 'pyramid' on a three-cornered ground plan. This concept of space is, of course, represented in the shape of the ceremonial house: the sloping ridge beam describes the sun's precipitous descent towards the west; the two sides of the building's roof depict the 'walls' of the firmament that converge in the west. The spot where the sun sets in the west is the place where a human being's 'bone spirit', or 'soul located in the bones', enters the world beyond and becomes a star in the sky. The *korambo*, undoubtedly representing the cosmos or depicting it as a microcosm, is also equipped with a 'spirit', or 'soul, passage' in the shape of the rear exit leading onto the *toiembo*, the men's sacred area at the back of the house. It is where the novices reside in seclusion, just as the spirits of the deceased sojourn in the realm of the dead located in the west. It is from here that, after seclusion, the initiates emerge onto the *amei* in the guise of the deceased, as adorned ritual dancers. After receiving a new name and having progressed to the next stage of ritual aptitude, they enter a new phase of lived existence.

The space between the spot where the sun sets and the domain of the living is the zone that offers the chance of encounter between the two spheres: inside the ceremonial house representing this domain, the otherworldly beings temporally reveal themselves during initiation. The novices enter the zone on all fours like pigs, the intermediaries par excellence between this world and the beyond,[8] thereby transcending spatial and temporal boundaries,

[8] See also Hauser-Schäublin (1984: 353-357).

which are factual in everyday life but superseded in initiation.

This means that, during initiation, the *korambo* represents that half of the cosmos that joins the living with the dead. It is not only the ridge beam, referred to as *nyit* (sky) that points to the idea of the firmament, but also *bapmu*, the moon, that features as the main pattern on the mat of the canopy. Fireflies that zigzag through the dark with flashing lights are said to preferably settle in the roof of the ceremonial house where they shine like stars in the sky. The same image pertains to the *puti* figure whose back is covered with shell rings that represent stars in the night sky. *Puti* is the personified microcosm, an old man who once possessed everything but who gave everything to the humans, leaving him empty and exhausted (**pl. 90**). Hence *puti,* who is also identified with the primeval cassowary figure that stands at the beginning of being, reveals insight into the ultimate relations of existence. It also explains why *puti* is conceived of as a single figure and that the respective initiation scene does not comprise other effigies as is the case in *nggwalndu* and similar scenes. It also makes understandable how *nggilenggwal*, *naranggwal* and *puti* are linked with each other. With regard to the symbolization of the cosmos, these *maira* proceed from one enhanced stage to the next: the undecorated body of *nggilenggwal* without arms and legs, the shape of which refers to the universe as a container; *nyit tshui*, the shooting star as the ceiling of *naranggwal* and, ultimately, the star-covered body of the humanoid being *puti* which presents itself – with the same directional focus as the ceremonial house itself – in the position of the macrocosm.

With regard to the ceremonial house in its, ultimately, most important signification context, the façade painting too acquires new meaning apart from the aspects of decoration, reference to esoteric properties and mnemonic device: all the beings represented there, above all the overwhelming *nggwalnggwal* faces, are looking from the west, from the realm of the dead, towards ceremonial ground, the stage of life. Just as the *korambo* represents the otherworldly cosmos, the circular *amei* stands for the space of lived life. The human beings live under the sun at its zenith. The (*miaat*) *korambo* among the central northern Abelam was inclined so far forward that the vine chain suspended from the canopy – where among the Abelam situated closer to the Boiken people a small painted sun was affixed – almost hung down to the moon stone situated at the centre of the ceremonial ground. Like a Jacob's ladder the chain connects the ground with the sky, the waterhole, that is, the nadir, with the zenith above. It stands, or to be more precise, hangs 'like a pillar' at the centre of the ceremonial ground, the hub of life. Especially the *miaat korambo* (**pl. 20**) exemplifies almost paradigmatically how the link to the beyond 'leans' into the realm of the living, so to speak: the tip of the house towers above the centre of the ceremonial ground, while the roof of the *korambo* slopes away towards the back where it meets the ground at the edge of the *amei*.

According to Abelam conception the sun travels through different phases between sunrise in the east and sunset in the west. In its early course, until it reaches its zenith at midday, the sun is associated with the powers of growth. In principle, the course of the sun during the first half of the day is a mirror image of the course it takes between midday and sunset, with the only difference that in the one instance it 'rises' and in the other it 'falls'. Hence the morning course is associated with everything that emerges, grows and becomes durably strong. The afternoon and evening are identified with all things and beings that have reached, and passed, maturity. This division also becomes evident when one looks at the time of day that ritual acts are carried out. In the case of initiations this becomes apparent as follows: *nggumaira* and *ulke-nau*, the lower grades, are shown to the novices in the early hours of day, before sunrise; in *nggilenggwal*, *naranggwal* and *puti*, the higher grades, the beings associated with these stages reveal themselves to the initiates during the last hours of the day, that is, at night. In other words, the crucial hours are those in which the sun is still traversing the realm of the dead. The ritual dancers start performing shortly before the sun sets and carry on through the night until dawn breaks, heralding a new day.

In distinction to the initiation ceremonies, all the rituals serving the growth of yam are held between sunrise and midday. This pertains especially to collective acts such as planting yam, breathing over the water from different springs and invoking the beings responsible for the growth of the crops. But it also applies to actions performed by the individual such as

sprinkling the 'aspirated' water on the planting mounds in the garden, attaching the leaves from the stone house, probing the length of the yam tuber in the ground, etc. Scarification performed on young girls at first menstruation in earlier days and bleeding the penis of a freshly married man were also carried out when the sun rose in the morning. The soup a woman cooked to mark the end of the post-partum period and a man ate after observing a set of taboos in the context of a death or a killing respectively, was consumed during the morning hours. All these undertakings have to do with enhancing and sustaining the strength of both human beings and crops.

The yam feasts, on the other hand, are staged in the afternoon, approximately at the same time as the ritual dancers commence their performance at initiation ceremonies. As mentioned earlier on, the tubers that have reached a length where they are worthy of display, are referred to as *golepa*, that is, as mature and old, no longer capable of providing new shoots. They have reached full maturity, not least having grown to what they are with the aid of the *nggwalndu*. This is probably also the reason why yam feasts are staged in the afternoon and not before midday; it is a means to express that growth has reached its climax, even passed beyond turning point, and is now on the wane, at the threshold of old age.

Next to the morning sun other beings are also associated with the powers of growth. These include the *nyambapmu*, the small anthropomorphic male figures with fair skin and white hair that follow the course of the sun from daybreak in the east to midday. When the human beings gather on the *amei* to carry out the growth rituals for their crops, the *nyambapmu* climb down the plaited chain suspended from the *korambo*'s canopy and enter the moon stone enclosure in order to support the growth process. Occasionally the *nyambapmu*, the children of the sun and the moon, are also referred to as *mindu* or *kipmandu*, that is, as 'tree' and 'ground' people.[9] They are looked upon as swift and helpful spirit beings, aiding the humans like the 'good folk' in Western fairy tales, but if offended they withdraw their support immediately. *Tinggyen* and *songgyen*, female beings, are very similar in shape and body as the male *nyambapmu*. They, too, are 'eastern' beings associated with the powers of growth. Some of hints offered by my associates suggested that human beings, before being born to this world, reside in the east, that is, in the area where the sun rises. Analogous to the realm of the dead located in the area where the sun sets, there appears to be a domain of the 'unborn' situated at the other side of the sun's trajectory, from where they step into the world through procreation, pregnancy and, finally, birth. My informants told me that the unborn look very much like white people, just a lot smaller; hence they appear to be very similar, if not identical, with the *nyambapmu.* In Tok Pisin these unborn beings, which are classified differently to an embryo in a woman's womb, are called 'nupela man', in the local language *lu*. This concept definitely belongs with the notion of the 'powers of growth' referred to above. As already mentioned, the growth of yams is essentially dependent on the 'powers of the east', but the tubers could not grow to their full extent without succour from the beings of the western half of the cosmos because, besides reaching the right length, they need to attain complete maturity. The reliance on aid from both directions of the sun finds expression in the fact that yam growers invoke the spiritual beings associated with both the east and the west. This is why the exhibited *wapi* and *ka* tubers are also addressed as representatives of the *nggwalndu* and the secret yam stone. Due to its immaturity, but also its potential for development, the entire 'eastern complex' is less clearly articulated than the 'western domain', which features grown and mature spirit beings. This is also one of the reasons why *korambo* are usually not located in the eastern half of ceremonial grounds, but on the western side instead.

Initiations inside the *korambo* emphasize spirit beings that have their origins in the realm of the western beyond. The powers of the east, such as the *nyambapmu,* are not represented in the cult scenes, unless, of course, one includes the morning star, Sirendshui, which in the context of *nggumaira* is also referred to as Serapan. But in this initial initiation scene the theme is not growth and renewal, but eternalness.

Seen from the perspective of overall culture, the stone cult has the same significance as initiation. Yet there is a fundamental difference

[9] Next to the *nyambapmu* there is a category of 'ground people' called *smutek* and *bunyata*; they are said to live in termite mounds. If they exit the ground they can make things grow either tremendously large or small. The grey-coloured (!) yam medicine that I was shown by my associate Waina in his father's house (see p. 102) was said to be made from the blood of a slain *smutek.*

between the two: while the whole initiation complex is linked to the west, the stone cult is associated with the east. It is against this backdrop that Kwandshendu's statement claiming that the yam stone's spirit is called *nyambapmu* acquires its full meaning. According to this view the *nyambapmu* are the representatives of the secret stones, which the men often compared with a 'power station'. This means that, in certain actions, the stones' spirits approach the human beings spatially because they contribute to the creation of the new and the furthering of the existing. At death, however, the human spirits depart from the living and only return to the lived world in the shape of pigs. This explains why the *baba* masks are the only representations of otherworldly beings that appear on the *amei* during certain ceremonies. Here the question arises whether the houses where the spirit bundles of young children are taken to and fostered by a specialist, should not also be reckoned to the east, the realm of the powers of growth. After all they stand in a similar relationship to the human beings as the stone house does to yams. In contrast, sorcery, which aims at killing people and not fostering them, is not associated with the rising and energizing sun, but rather with the descending and abating sun. It appears that this lethal kind of magic is based on a reversal of the cardinal poles, that is, a switch from east to west. However, whether this is effected by choosing a moment in the latter half of the day to perform sorcery, I cannot say.

If my interpretation of the spatial division is correct, then the stone houses should, in principle, be located east of the *amei*. Presumably, the east is not represented by a possibly imaginary ceremonial house, as the *korambo* as such is definitely rooted in the west. Moreover, considering their mission and potency, stone houses should be situated in the east. In Kalabu the stone house of Kaumbul stood northeast of the *amei*, in Baigu due east. In order to make a more generalized proposition one would need further data from other villages, which, unfortunately, I do not have. For the Abelam, east and west do not constitute cardinal points, but three-dimensional spaces instead, meeting in the sun's zenith called *naure*. The same term is used to refer to couples of men and women when they perform together in dance and song, but it is also applied as a metaphor for the *nggwal* which are invoked to come and reside in the *nggwalndu* carvings in the ceremonial house. Thus, *naure* is best translated as 'partner', 'part of a couple', 'equivalent' and 'mirror image'.[10] I presume that the sun in its zenith is termed *naure*[11] in relation to the ground vertically below it; possibly it also references the painted sun suspended directly over the round, female moon stone symbolizing the full moon located at the centre of the ceremonial ground. One also has to take into consideration that this partner relationship might not only refer to 'above' and 'below', but also apply to a horizontal axis, linking the domain in the east with the realm of the west.

However the term *naure* is interpreted, the fact remains that, under the midday sun, the humans stand between growing and receding. Everything that has to do with the fundamental issues of becoming, being and dying is reflected in the design and signification of the ceremonial house and ground: the *amei* as the platform of life with a centre that is considered the hub of the world where, axis-mundi-like, between waterhole and midday sun, concepts of becoming, receding and continuing merge. They meet there where the tips of the imaginary stone house in the east and the *korambo* in the west, embodying the knowledge on degeneration and regeneration, adjoin. The link between the two realms of the cosmos is represented by the rainbow (*kwarwale*), an arc of light spanning from east to west. For a brief moment it connects the domain of the 'unborn' with the realm of the dead. Itself a product of the contrasting elements 'water' and 'sunlight' it represents the epitome of creative power. The interior of the ceremonial house offers the opportunity to experience reality beyond everyday life. The initiations that open up to men the western realm of the cosmos confirm the veracity of this truth, from one generation to the next.

[10] For 'reflection', for example, a face in the water, which is, of course, also a kind of mirror image, the Abelam have a special term, *kaigni,* which is, at the same time, the term used for the doppelganger spirit.

[11] As we recall, the upright-standing ceremonial house is also referred to by the attribute *naure*.

Glossary

A. = Ambulas, language of the Abelam, as spoken in Kalabu. Regional variants indicated when appropriate.
TP = Tok Pisin

Abaite – A.: name of a *baba* and a waterhole of Malmba, cf. Anggimba
Abelam – also Aplas, Aplam, Aplasim, Abelap; Arapesh term for Ambulas-speaking population, part of Ndu language family
Abelam, northern – population inhabiting settlements along Prince Alexander Range: northwestern – population inhabiting settlements between Torricelli Mountains and Ilahita-Arapesh; eastern – population inhabiting settlements from Ulupu on eastwards to Boiken boundary; southern – population inhabiting settlements south of the line Gweligim, Waignakim, Naram; also called Tuma; western – population inhabiting settlements along Torricelli Range and along the western language boundary of the area
Abusit – earlier settlement near the present Yambusaki hamlet of Kalabu I
Abusit Worunggwande – settlement in the vicinity of Waignakim
Agguambal – A.: name of a *wasa*
Aigagam – cf. Waignakim
Ainggulim – mythical place of origin of founding group of Arapesh village of Lonem
Ainyerik – boundary near Malpimbil between Abelam and Arapesh
ako – A.: flat cassowary bone dagger worn by men as decoration on upper arm
Amakandi – A.: *amei*-specific dog name
Ambing – mythical settlement of the inhabitants of Kalabu
amei – A.: large public ceremonial ground in front of *korambo*
amia – Boiken: cassowary
amukat – A.: ceremonial pot
amuya – Iatmul: cassowary
andsha kundi – A.: metaphoric speech, metaphor
Anggimba – traditional battleground, boundary spot between Kalabu and Malmba, waterhole, stream
Angguimbil – hamlet of Magutogim
Apanggai – village of the northwestern Abelam
Apebaom Wasarnba – mythical settlement of the Abelam
Apinggwande – hamlet of Kalabu I
apuigwat – northwestern A.: bird's nest
apui marangge – A.: grade-specific string bag pattern of *nggwalndu*
ara – A.: ceremonial moiety; sitting mat made of plaited coconut palm fronds
Arapesh – non-Austronesian cultural group, linguistically part of Torricelli phylum
arpmu – A.: part of *nggumaira* image
Asambil – stream in Abelam area
ashal – A.: fruits of a creeper; motif in painting
atapine – A.: door to *narut*
Atogim – A.: a clan in Kalabu I
Atoleri – A.: name of a *wale* – pool in Pasi river
aupa – A.: a leafy vegetable, also *dshambu nyingga* of Kalabu II
auw – A.: plaited armlet; binding on ridge beam; decoration for initiates and yams
auwi – A.: type of leaf

baba – A.: plaited helmet mask, related to pig-shaped, clan-specific spirit beings; mediators between the living and the realm of the dead
Baba-Kalabu – also Kalabu II, part of Kalabu village
baba tibit – A.: the 'lower part' of the hamlet, of the *amei*
Babangge – hamlet of Bainyik
Babawora – A.: name of a *baba*
Babeinde – A.: name of a *baba* and a *wale*

bagulandshe – A.: type of *wapi*
Baigu – hamlet of Kalabu I, offshoot settlement of Kaumbul
baintship – A.: pattern in painting, also *maingge*
Bainyik – village of the Abelam
Balekasik – hamlet of Winggei
balepane – A.: type of *wapi*
Balokwil – boundary village between Abelam and Arapesh
Balure – mountain in Abelam area
ban – A.: orange-coloured, inedibale fruits
ban, also pan – A.: man, fellow
Bananggwa – pool in Pasi river, a *wale* spirit place
bande – A.: mollusc shell necklace; shell pendant; northwest A.: construction element of *korambo*; mollusc shells
Bandjana – village of the Abelam
banggra ndei tao cf. *sakimba*
banggu – A.: feast in context of initiations
Banggup – small stream in Abelam area
Bani – name of a large anthropomorphic sculpture
bap – A.: fruits
bapmu, also bapmutagwa – A.: moon; round stone on *amei*
bare – A.: leafy vegetable
Barengga – Abelam term for an Arapesh village
batnbat – A.: wreath of chicken feathers
bau tapi ke nane – A.: fifth and last mortuary feast after burial
bauw – A.: tree species
beleben – A.: shell necklace worn by young women
bendshin – A.: wild palm species, mythical palm of the dead, locks entrance to the realm of the dead
bendshinare – A.: wreaths made of palm leaf fronds of the *bendshin*, worn as decoration for dances
benggo – northwest A.: bamboo pole flanking the façade painting
benggo grau – A.: framework at the back of the façade painting on the *korambo*
benggomangge – A.: roundwood timbers at the front end of the *korambo*
Benggrab – A.: name of a *nggwalndu*, a *wapinyan* and a *baba*
Benggrakim – also Bengragum, village of the Abelam
betikit – A.: crossbeam on the inside of the *tikit*
bia – A.: belly; pattern on façade of the *korambo*;
biasibe – A.: Anthropomorphic motif in painting, cf. *bia, sibe*
biat – A.: foam; concentric circles produced by a water spider on the water's surface, cf. *dshuimbiat; biatbanggui* : type of vine used for making *biat* during *nggumaira* initiation
biben – A.: strips of sago fronds; enclosure for *bapmu* at certain yam ceremonies; symbol for a *wale* pool
bikna – A.: bird species; for *puti*; musical instrument made of folded leaf or cane material, also *kibenggwal;*
bikna-ut – A.: cf. *wama-ut*
bilendu waunendu – A.: enemy in battle as well as exchange partner
Bindshinar – hamlet of Kalabu II
Binem – stream in Abelam area
Bira – A.: name of an *amei*-specific *nggwalndu* of Wapinda, also name of a *wapinyan*
bire – A.: ritual songs and dances, especially at harvest of *mambutap*
biterapu – A.: wooden poles that intersect above the ridge beam of a *korambo* and flank the sides of the façade painting, forming its edges
Bobmagim – also Bobmagum, village of the Abelam
Boiken – cultural group east of the Abelam and north of the Sawos; non-Austronesian language of the Ndu language family; Boiken, also Beukin, village of the Boiken
Boim – hill range north-east of Kalabu
boko – A.: fifth initiation grade; awl-like instrument
Bombomu – hamlet of Yamel
Bombuamo – village of the Arapesh
Bonebel – A.: name of a *kiau-baba* and a *wale*
Bonggiora – village of the northwestern Abelam
Bukni – Abelam term for the Arapesh
Buknisuagim – A.: a clan in Kalabu I
Buknitibe – hamlet of Dshame II
Bukniware – hamlet of Yenigo
Buku – hill in Abelam area
bukua – A.: bird species
bunbun – also called *kabasagu*
bunbungwat – northwest A.: rear support of roof side beam
Bunen – mythical settlement of the Abelam

bunyata – cf. *smutek*
burtunggulapa – A.: 'spine' of the *nggilenggwal*, a vine rope connecting the neck of the figure with the *kwambut* beam
Butukwe – A.: name of a *wapinyan*
butuo – A.: globular flute

Cherigum – cf. Aunyelum
Chikinambu – village of the Abelam
Cinambo – see Kinyambu

dama – A.: face, cf. *ndudama*
danggu – A.: bamboo razor
Dangguko – A.: name of a *wale*
Daumo – A.: name of a *mbale*
daungge – A.: carved and painted 'limbum' boards
Digut – stream in Abelam area
Digute – hamlet of Kalabu I
Dingge – hamlet of Kalabu I
dshale, dshalendu – A.: initiates
dsham – A.: type of wasp, a *dshambu* of Kimbanggwa
Dshama – village in Wosera
Dshamapate – A.: a clan in Kalabu II
dshambu – A.: bird-shaped 'totemic' clan emblem
dshambukut – A.: formula for clan-internal avoidance taboo
dshambu-nyingga – A.: leaf totem, taboo sign; leaves that rank as emblems of certain clans
Dshame – village of the Abelam
dshanggele – A.: grey mud used for grounding in painting and to preserve the ends wooden posts against rot
Dshanggungge – hamlet of Kalabu I
Dshikinyanggu – village of the Abelam
dshikni – A.: rod
Dshiknikim – A.: a clan in Kalabu I
Dshiknyi – stream in Abelam area
Dshilimbis – settlement of the Abelam
dshinde – A.: small enclosure, also platform for displaying crops of a deceased person
dshinggil – A.: feather paint brush
dshipmu – A.: a type of leaf;
dshipmu ndei viyu – A.: ceremony for enhancing growth of *wapi*
dshoai – A.: enhanced ritual potency in initiate
dshuikus – A.: tree stems placed in saltwater to extract salt
dshuimbat – A.: a pattern in painting, cf. *biat*
Dumbit – village of the Abelam

fani man – TP.: funny, crazy-acting man

Gaikorobi – village of the Sawos
Gaimale – not closer-specified settlement of the Abelam
Galigat – A.: name of a *baba*
gamba – A.: spirit of the dead, 'soul' of the dead
Gambagiti – hamlet of Malmba
gambakware – A.: songs sung during death watch
gambalelego – A.: fourth mortuary feast after burial
Gamban – stream in Abelam area
Gambangge Samba – place in vicinity of Kalabu
Gambaninggwa – A.: name of a *mbale*
gambasinggui – A.: corpse
gambatimain – A.: a *dshambu-nyingga*
Ganyamo – A.: name of a *mbale*
Garanggewi – A.: name of a *wale*
gare – A.: tally stick made of the midrib of a sago palm frond
gelaue – A.: grade-specific pattern on string bag for *ulke-nau*
Gelaue – A.: name of a *kiau-baba*; a *dshambu*
Gelein – A.: name of a *wasa*
Gerambu – A.: evening star
gik – A.: egg; metaphor for *wapinyan*
gini sitik – A.: post supporting the rear end of the *nyit*
gipakus – A.: special type of lethal sorcery; bundle containing spirit/soul of victim
Giting – hamlet and *amei* of Naram
glabmak weimbabmag – A.: red and white face paint used by elder women
Gloskim – mythical settlement of the Abelam
Glossa – hamlet of Kalabu I
golepa – A.: the 'old one', very old man; *golepa wapi* 'aged yam', i.e. *wapi*, the largest ceremonial yam that no longer develops shoots
grau – A.: framework to which the *mbai* is attached, cf. *benggo grau*
guagnendshambe – A.: platform joining the *nggoinyangge* to the *nyangga*

Guiamel – A.: name of a *wale*
Gumbialem – hill range north-east of Kalabu
gumbuli – A.: type of *wapi*
Guindshambu – mythical settlement of the Abelam
gussikndu – A.: initiates of special social status; leaders of the *kim* in religious matters
gwaminggel – A.: leaf-filled bamboo tube used for 'barking' into, looked upon as 'dog' of the Yeyuwi
gwandshin – A.: navel
gwanggi – A.: long bamboo tubes for singing into, serve as resonance bodies of *kundi ure*
gwat – A.: tree oil
gwatik tamba – A.: 'elbow', zigzag pattern on plaited mats
Gweligim – village of the Abelam

haus tambaran – TP.: ceremonial house, cf. *tambaran*, *tamberan*
Hayfield – airstrip and mission station near Maprik

Iatmul – non-Austronesian population group on Middle Sepik, linguistically part of Ndu language family
Ilahita – village of the Arapesh
Ilibeim – also Ilibaim, Ilapweim, village of the Arapesh
Imagwate – A.: name of a *amei*-specific *nggwalndu* of Kaumbul
Inela – A.: name of a *baba*
Ipasimbil – hamlet of Magutogim

Jambuani – village of the Abelam, no longer locatable, possibly a hamlet of Dshame

ka – A.: yam species, short yam
kaanda-tree – A.: peace symbol placed on the *amei*
kabasagu – A.: rear section of the *korambo* cf. *bunbun*
kabele – A.: bird species
Kaboibis – village of the Arapesh
Kagatik – A.: name of a *baba*
Kagwaragwa – A.: name of a *wapinyan*
kaigni – A.: mirror image, look-alike spirit/soul
Kainumbu Ulmapma – *amei* of Nyamikim
ka kwei – A.: cone-shaped heap of *ka* for ceremonial presentation
kal – A.: tree species, gauge for size of *wapi*
Kalabu – village of the Abelam; Kalabu I, also Kwale-Kalabu, upper village section; Kalabu II also Baba-Kalabu, formerly also called Kuyendshe, Kuindshe, Kwiendji or Kuyen: lower village section
Kalabu dialect – also *mamu-kundi*
kalamandshe – cf. *wapinyan*
Kalanggua – hamlet of Kalabu I
kalbangga – A.: seclusion hut for menstruating women, 'blood house'
kalngga – A.: 'leaf of the *kal* tree'; metaphor for form of presentation of *yina* in *nggilenggwal*
kalusola, also kalusola *kimbi* – A.: middle or front section of *kimbi* of projecting roof [*nimbi*] with *bapmu* pattern
kama – A.: bamboo
Kamabil – hamlet of Kalabu I
kamandip – A.: band with attached cowrie shells which is suspended next to a *wapiwai*
kamanggwato – A.: a *dshambu-nyingga*
Kambanggile – A.: name of a *nggwal* of Kuminimbis
Kambil – stream in Abelam area
Kamogwa – hamlet of Kalabu I
kamu – southern A.: how?; *kamu-kundi*: dialect of the Abelam
Kandanggileko – hamlet of Waignakim
Kandanggwa – earlier settlement site of inhabitants of Kalabu
Kandanyinggi – hamlet of Waignakim
kandi – A.: a *dshambu*; name of a *mi* and a *baba*
kandingga – A. storage huts for crops
kang – A.: hourglass drum
kanggu – A.: ritual songs and dances performed after an especially successful harvest of *mambutap*
kapuk – cf. *yembe*
Kara – village of the Abelam, no longer locatable, possibly Kori
kara, also karambale – A.: boar; sixth initiation grade
kara-ut – A.: anthropomorphic ornament manufactured in looping technique with inset boar tusks

Katndshanggu – hamlet of Kalabu I
Kato Apupik – hill range in Abelam area
Katotagwa – A.: name of a *baba*
Katoumu – hamlet of Malmba
Katu – A.: name of a *amei*-specific *nggwalndu* of Kaumbul and Numbunggen
Kaumbul – hamlet of Kalabu II
Kaumoule – A.: name of a *wasa*
kaundu – A.: warrior
kausuk – A.: mother of a novice of the *nggwalndu* grade
kaut – A.: bamboo razor
kauwa – A.: perennial shrubs that serve as boundary markers
kauwya – A.: second mortuary feast after burial; 'maggots'
ka vi – A.: type of fish
kavya – A.: large shell pendant worn on chest
kavyatagwa – A.: musical instrument made from the pared stem of a tree; an initiation grade
kayak cf. kiau-baba – A.: male *baba*, in some cases same names as *wale*
kibe – A.: type of cane cf. *kibenggwal*
kibenggwal – cf. *bikna*
kim – A.: small or large social unit, clan, lineage
Kimbanggwa – village of the Abelam
kimbi – A.: plaited mat that covers the lower part of the façade of *korambo*, cf. *wama-ut*, used for the gable front of *kandingga*; plaited bag reserved for men who have passed the *puti* grade; cf. *kalusola kimbi* and *noakimbi*; plaited back part of nggilenggwal figure and of *puti* figure
Kinyambu – village of the Boiken
Kipakwandshing – A.: name of a *wasa*
kipma ndei pukao – A.: 'they work with earth', part of the *puti* ritual
kipmandu – A.: 'earth people' or 'brownies' *mindu nyambapmu*
kitnya – A.: vulva, triangular pattern in painting *nggumaira*
kitpi – A.: type of *wapi*
kiwi – A.: vine species
Klinwara – modern Tok Pisin name for Mitpim
ko – A.: to eat
kokumbale, also kwokumbale – A.: bird species, occasionally metaphor for sun, name of a *mi*
Kolambigim – A.: clan in Lonem
Kolekuk – A.: name of a *mbale*
komunyan – A.: a type of spirit/soul
komunyan awegre ndei yao – A.: a form of sorcery
Komunyinggi – former hamlet of Kalabu
koramben, also *korambin* – A.: leaf type, a plant; shell ring that a father gives to mother's brother at birth of a child
korambo – A.: ceremonial house, cf. *ko ra mbo*
Koranggim – A.: a clan in Kalabu I
korekore – A.: tunnel-shaped entrance to *korambo*; bower bird
Kori – hamlet of Dshame
Korkum – cf. Kugim
koyui – A.: decoration of the *kutagwa*
Kualeng – hamlet of Kalabu II
kuau – A.: pig bone
kugele – A.: bird species
Kugim – part of Abelam area, also Korkum; comprises the villages Mugutogim, Yenigo and Naram
Kuguran – stream in Abelam area
kui – A.: tree species
Kuimbe – hamlet of Kuminimbis
Kuindshagu – stream in Abelam area
Kuindshambi – *amei* of Kwimbu
kuindshe – A.: snake species
kuitnbui – A.: 'spirit bundle' containing the soul of a young child, external seat of *komunyan*
kukumairameino – A.: a red-flowering decorative plant
Kukwal – village of the Abelam
Kulagel – settlement in the area of Waignakim
kulak – A.: drinking water from a spring, different to *nggu*
Kulamele – A.: 'knife'?, name of a *wai*
Kulaure – river in Abelam area
Kulungge Yanggusaku – hamlet of Kuminimbis
Kumau – forest pool in Abelam area
kumbu – A.: large carved wooden heads, heads of the *nggwalndu*
kumbui – A.: small bat, 'child' of the *kwandshe*, motif in painting
kumbumaak – A.: oblong or bizarre-shaped stones on the *amei*, usually carry male names and are aggressive in nature, opposite of *bapmu*
kumbundu – A.: leader, man with knowledge in magical affairs
Kuminimbis – village of the northwestern Abelam

Kumun – village of the Boiken
kumun – A.: bird species, a *dshambu;* a *baba*
kumundji – northwest A.: term for a village half; in Kalabu *kumundshe*
Kumundshe, also Kumdundji – A.: term for a village section; old term for upper section of Kalabu
Kumunggwande – hamlet of Kalabu I, offshoot settlement of Ndunyinggi
kumunsaige – A.: type of leaf, a *dshambu-nyingga*
Kumunware – mythical place of the Abelam, hamlet of Waignakim
kun – A.: star, firefly; manifestation of spirit/soul
kundi – A.: language, talk, mouth
Kundigim – A.: a clan in Kalabu II
kundi ure – A.: cylindrical resonance body, sacred carving in the shape of *kang*; resonance body for *gwanggi*, voice of *nggwalndu*, cf. *kundi, ure*
Kundshinggini – also Kunjingini, village of the Abelam
kupminggile – A.: women's face paint
kupmui – A.: type of *wapi*
kurkya – A.: hostage
kurpag – A.: bird species, name of a *mi* and a *dshambu*
kus – A.: sorcery; 'salt', 'spicy', 'salty', 'irritant', 'stinging'
kusngga – A.: 'spirit power house', storage place for 'spirit bundles' *tale kra kus*
kutagwa – A.: figurative carving for *ulke-nau*, originally an initiation grade of its own; eastern A.: witches
kuyen – A.: bird species; grade-specific pattern on string bag for the *nggwalndu* initiation grade
kuyendshe – A.: Kalabu
kuyen tshalenggi – A.: tree kangaroo, *dshambu* of Lonem
kwa – A.: to sleep, to rest, to stay
kwaaro – A.: short fibre skirt
kwagu – A.: a pattern of the *nggumaira* image
Kwale-Kalabu – A.: Kalabu I
Kwalinggu Tipmabel – mythical place on migration route of the Abelam, hamlet of Kalabu
kwalmbongga – A.: a *dshambu-nyingga*
Kwalmik – hamlet of Ulupu
kwalya – A.: a wristlet made of shell discs for men/boys who have passed *nggumaira* and for girls after first menstruation
kwambi – A.: a leafy vegetable; *dshambu* of Kalabu I
Kwambigim – village of the Abelam
kwambut – A.: roof side beam of *korambo*; pandanus
kwami – A.: meat; a species of climbing palms
kwandshe, kwandshetagwa – A.: flying fox, motif in painting and of the *nggumaira* image; a *dshambu*
kwandshengga – northwest A.: inner side of *nimbi,* lit.: nest of a flying fox
Kwandshengga – hamlet of Kimbanggwa
Kwandshesagi – hamlet of Kalabu I
Kwandshing – A.: name of a *mi* and a *dshambu*
kwandshing-tibu – A.: a *dshambu-nyingga*
kwangga – A.: man's sleeping house
kwangge – A.: bed-like structure for supine *nggwalndu* figures
Kwanimbandu – village of the Abelam
kwanya – A.: a type of mushroom; metaphor for form of presentation of *yina* in *nggilenggwal*
kwaretagwa – A.: a *dshambu*
kwarligus – A.: red seeds used as adornment
kwaru – A.: bird species, a *dshambu*
kwarwale – A.: rainbow
kwas – A.: bird species
Kwasengen – formerly considered as dialect of the Wosera; language of the Ndu family
Kwasepaing – A.: wife of Tipmanggero
kwashin – A.: a glider possum, motif in painting
Kwatmogim – A.: a clan in Kalabu I
Kwatmogim – village of the Abelam
Kwatmogo Palnamba – also Palna, place along migration route of Kalabu in the area of present-day Waignakim
kwatmu – A.: 'ironwood' used for supporting posts
Kwatnggile – name of a *kiau-baba* and a *wale*
Kweimbe – A.: name of a *wale*
kwiendji – northwest A.: term for village half; in Kalabu *kuyendshe*
Kwimbu – village of the Abelam
kwis – cf. kus
kwomitu – northwest A.: round-wood cruck on *korambo*
Kyagolagin – A.: name of a *wapinyan*
kyak – A.: to die, death
kyakndu – A.: 'a dead man', term for best-decorated dancer, cf. *nare kyandyak*

Labungge – hamlet of Kalabu II
laindshe – A.: type of *wapi*
Lakuite – part of Tipmabel Wamangge
lale kama – northwest A.: horizontal bamboo pole used in roof covering of a *korambo*
lapu ndei tshikindu – A.: 'they cook bananas', metaphor for fattening novices with yam in seclusion for *ulke-nau*
Laui – A.: wife of Sagulas
laulau TP.: Malay apple, *Syzygium malaccense*
lelai – A.: 'limbum' board, part of roof construction of *korambo*
Lelawi – A.: name of a *amei*-specific *nggwalndu* of Wapinda
Lelrit Teinggele – former boundary site between Lonem and Kalabu
limbi – A.: antiphony between men and women during *ulke-nau*
limbum – TP.: various palm species; the wood is used to make sticks, boards, slats etc.
linimbe – A.: hairstyle of married men
lipma – A.: oldest type of yam crop, *Dioscorea bulbifera* L.
Lonem – village of the Arapesh
lu – A.: unborn, 'new humans' especially in ritual terms
Luagas – A.: name of a *baba*
Luimo – ancestral founder of Luimogim clan
Luimogim – A.: clan in Kalabu I
Lutma – A.: name of a *wale*

magnagwat – A.: front post supporting roof side beam, often named after slain enemies
magnakara – A.: oval-shaped forehead decoration on paintings
magnandu – A.: elder classificatory and real brothers and fathers in special contexts
magnanyan – A.: firstborn child
Magnapate – A.: clan in Kalabu II
Magutogim – today also Malmba II, village of the Abelam
mai – A.: taro; women's mollusc-shell decoration
maindshe – A.: white line in painting; twine for making string bags; lines made of multi-coloured leaf strips in *nggumaira* image
Maindshe – today also Maprik II, general term for central Maprik area
maingge – A.: parrot species, *dshambu* of Mamblep; as pattern in painting 'black cockatoo' also baintship
Mainggegim – A.: clan in Kalabu II
mainggetibu – A.: a *dshambu-nyingga*
maira – A.: a sacred secret, everything in connection with cults, initiations, etc.
maira kure to – A.: signal on slit gong
Mairagwa – hamlet of Kalabu I, offshoot settlement of Yambusaki
Mairambun – A.: name of a *nggwal,* son of Sugurumbun
maira nde witnya witneiyak – A.: 'faeces of spirits', body painting
mairapute – A.: hut-like substitute building for a *korambo*
maira yagwandu – A.: artist, especially painter
mairami – A.: oval-shaped globular flute, sound said to be voice of bird
maku – A.: song of challenge during roofing ceremony for *korambo*
Malingeine – also Aunyelum, village of the Abelam
Malkapi – A.: name of a *mbale*
Malmba – I, II; village of the Abelam
Malpenamu – part of Wapinda, hamlet of Kalabu II
Malpimbil – also Malpi, hamlet, mixed settlement of Kalabu I and Lonem
Mamblep – also Mambleb, part of Abelam area, census division
mambutap – A.: most important type of *wapi*
mamu – central north. A.: how?; *mamu-kundi*: dialect of the Abelam
mande – A.: 'testicles', figures and other objects suspended from *nggal*; among eastern A.: 'testicles of the "male" ridge beam'
Mando – A.: name of a *kiau-baba* and a *wale*
mangendu – A.: initiation grade among the eastern Abelam
manggam – A.: a type of spear, in rituals associated with *kitpi*- and *undinggil* yams
mangge – A.: Casearia sp., its stem is erected on the *amei* for *ulke-nau*
Manggyale – A.: name of a *amei*-specific *nggwalndu* of Yambusaki
Mangi – village of the Abelam
Maninggral – A.: name of a *wapinyan*
Manul – former hamlet of Kalabu
Mapme – hamlet of Kalabu I, offshoot

settlement of Kaumbul and Yambusaki, *amei*

Maprik – village of the northwestern Abelam, administrative centre since 1937, dialect group of the Abelam Maprik II – cf. Nggumaindshe

Maprik (-area, -style) – synonym for Abelam area and style

mara – A.: fish species

Marambu – A.: an *amei*-specific dog's name, name of a *mbale* and a *wale*

marangge – A.: pattern on string bag

Marap – hamlet of Kuminimbis

Maregumbun – A.: name of a *wale*

Markulugo – A.: name of a *wale* and the place associated with it in the Pasi; name of a traditional battleground Malmba and Kalabu, boundary spot

masha – A.: a *dshambu-nyingga*

matmboi (-tagwa) – A.: a glider possum, pattern in painting consisting of two ovals

matu – A.: stone

Matungge – hamlet of Kalabu II

mauwe – A.: red hibiscus flowers

mbai – A.: sago palm spathe, large composite painting on façade of *korambo*

mbale – A.: pig and 'totemic' pig with clan-specific name, occasionally also name of a *wale*

mbalwapi – A.: competitive 'pig–yam' relationship between Abelam villages

mbande – A.: type of shell

mbang – A.: sticks serving as mnemonic device for 'spirit bundles' *tale kra kus*

mbo – A.: enclosure and place of seclusion in initiations

mbogomi mbau – A.: vine fastened on both sides of *nyit*, for attaching thatched panels on *korambo*

mbongga – A.: a type of leaf

Menapaim – hamlet of Yamel

mi – A.: tree, slit gong

miaat (-korambo) – A.: *korambo*-type with strongly-inclined gable front; a special vine binding after which this house type is named

miaatbande – A.: bamboo rafters on the façade side of *korambo*

Mikau – village of the Abelam

mikutagwa – A.: female spirit beings that live in tree tops and have influence over hunting animals, cf. *kutagwa*

mimoe – A.: type of flower

mindsha – A.: hair combs, songs and dances performed for inauguration of, and in *korambo*; term used by northwest Abelam for *mindsha kumbu*

mindsha kumbu – A.: fibre rope attached to *watnamba* crucks, looks like fibre skirt, boundary marker within *korambo*, cf. *yele korambo* and *kabasagu*

mindshakuso – A.: garland-like decoration made of strung *ban* fruits and silvery leaves

mindshaligi – northwest A.: rafter of *korambo*, to which *mindsha* is attached

mindshikni – A.: small tree species, the roots of which are used for *vi warya*

mindu – A.: 'tree people', *kipmandu*

Mingin – former settlement place of people of Kalabu

minianggu – A.: lachrymal sacks

Mitpim – border river between Nyamikim and Nyelikim

mi wapui – A.: signal on slit gong

Moenggwa – hamlet of Kalabu II

moim – cf. *nyan*

Monlepuka – A.: name of a *baba*

Mun – also Mul, settlement in Abelam area

Mundagein – A.: name of a *wapinyan*

Mungru – village of the Abelam, no longer locatable, possibly Mangi

munya – A.: breast, breast milk, whitish earth substance used for magical enhancement of yam

Mutagwakim – A.: clan in Kalabu I

myamba – A.: wild taro

myambatshik – A.: small fruit from an ironwood tree species

myoula – A.: bodily substance, serves to attract the spirit/soul *komunyan* in sorcery practices

Nagripeim – village of the Abelam

nale (nale wapi) – A.: type of *wapi*

Naram – village of the Abelam

narambaba – A.: female *baba*, occasionally same name as *wale*

naramtagwa, also *naremtagwa* – A.: term for social status of girls after the *wambusuge*; adorned girls

naranggwal – A.: 'decorated *nggwal*', second stage of *nggwalndu* initiation

nare kyandyak – A.: the 'decoration dies' or the 'decorated one dies'; term designating the best decorated dancer, cf. *kyakndu*
narendu, pl. nare – A.: ceremonial dancer, really means 'decoration', the 'decorated one'
narina – cf. *yina*
narkassa – A.: vine reaching from the ground to the *nimbi*
narut – A.: 'decorated string bag', metaphor for the chamber made of *mbai* for *naranggwal* initiation
nati – A.: a type of snake
nau – A.: third initiation grade, *ulke-nau*; bamboo roots sticking in the ground upside-down
naui, also nauindu – cf. *ndugendu*
naure – A.: zenith; men and women performing in pairs during songs and dances; metaphor for *nggwa*l; general term for dual relations
naure-kumun (-korambo) – A.: type of *korambo* with steeply-rising, almost vertical gable
nautagwa – A.: figure carving for *ulke-nau*; musical instrument similar to transverse flute
ndigu – A.: tree with red bark
Ndsherednye – hamlet of Kalabu II
Ndu family – non-Austronesian language family of the Middle Sepik Stock
ndua – A.: python, manifestation of *wale, dshambu* of Bainyik
ndudama – A.: human face, motif in painting
ndugendu – A.: 'man-village-man', friendship between two men of same *ara*
ndumagna – A.: 'human head', *kumbu*
ndumaira – A.: adornment of ceremonial dancers
Ndumeni – mythical place of origin of the Abelam
Ndumeni Kausagu – mythical place on migration route of the Abelam
Ndunguru Maindsha – mythical place on migration route of the Abelam
Ndunyambui – A.: name of a ceremonial pot, cf. *amukat*
ndunyan – A.: boy, carved figure
Ndunyinggi – hamlet of Kalabu I, *amei* of Luimogim clan
Ndusaki Kounoure – *amei* of Malmba
nggai – A.: village, hamlet, house
nggal – A.: plaited chain suspended from the spot called *tsaam* on the projecting roof of the *korambo*
nggalut – northwest A.: for *nggal*
nggile – A.: black
Nggilegware – A.: name of a *wasa*
Nggilendu – A.: name of a *wapinyan*
nggilenggwal – A.: 'black *nggwal*', first stage of *nggwalndu* initiation grade; cult figure in respective initiation scene
nggilina – A.: 'black spears' hanging over the winding passageway leading to the *nggilenggwal* figure
nggilut – A.: literally 'black – *nggile* bag' *ut*; metaphor for wattled chamber of the *nggilenggwal*
nggilya – A.: metaphor for yam
nggilya nde kwek – A.: 'one piles on black'; metaphor for the exchange of yams and pigs between *ara*
nggoinyangge – A.: ladder-like parts of the *nyangga*
nggu – A.: water from streams, rivers and pools; different to *kulak*
ngguai – A.: excavated humerus of a deceased person, used in divination
nggugyeseri – A.: foremost *narkassa*, 'drain' for rainwater
Nggumaindshe – also Maprik II, village of the Abelam
nggumaira – A.: first initiation grade, 'marvel from the water', image displayed on the *wanggunggu*
nggumisik – A.: heart
nggwal, also nggwalndu – A.: 'grandfather', *paal* vine in the ridge beam area of the *korambo*
nggwale-Smoigim – A.: lineage of the Smoigim clan in Kalabu I
nggwalgwate – A.: globular flute, its sound is regarded as the voice of a bird
nggwal matu – A.: to be 'hit with a stone by the *nggwal*'
nggwal mindsha – A.: first *mindsha* at inauguration of ceremonial house
nggwalna nggai – A.: 'house of *nggwal*', enclosed location for *kundi ure* in the *korambo*
nggwal nde kyak – A.: 'the *nggwal* dies'; term for the most splendid *wagnen* dancers
nggwalndu – A.: grandfather, grandson, stomach, ancestor- and clan spirits; fourth initiation grade; anthropomorphic figures

nggwalndu auw – A.: 'plaited dress of *nggwalndu*', intersection of *nyit* and *watnamba*
Nggwalnggamerap – mythical place in Arapesh area
nggwalnggwal – A.: anthropomorphic motif in façade painting
nggwauw – A.: abstract colour term for 'red'
ngwawi – A.: bird species
nilonggu, also *mbilonggu* – A.: mythical deluge
nimbi – A.: tooth, beak, term for the projecting roof of *korambo*
nimbindu – A.: 'spear man', guardian of the *wai*
noa – A.: mother
noakimbi – A.: 'mother mat', left and right half of *kimbi* with *gwatik tamba* and *yamangga* patterns
noute – A.: round disc-shaped headdress for *ulke-nau* grade, decoration for yam tubers of mediocre quality
Noutim Bertngge – former *amei* of Suambugim
Ntsatgo – A.: name of a *wale*
Numagim – village of the Abelam
numanara – A.: elder 'brother', first ceremonial moiety, cf. *waignara*
numandu – A.: elder sibling; northwest A.: ridge beam of *korambo*
numan kusnde viyu – A.: cf. *taleo*
Numbunggai – village of the Abelam
Numbunggen – hamlet of Kalabu II
Numuaka see Numbunggai
Nunggigim, also Nyinggigim – A.: clan in Kalabu II
nupela man – TP.: new human being, unborn *lu*
nya – A.: sun
nya dumbu kyao – A.: sunset
nyagnya – A.: long chicken feathers
nyagwapi – A.: yam tubers, only to be used as seedlings for ceremonial yams in the year to come
Nyalmakim – A.: clan in Kalabu II
Nyambak (-hill, -mountain) – hamlet of Kalabu I
nyamban – A.: 'sun man', round painted disc suspended over *bapmu*
nyambapmu – A.: anthropomorphic spirit beings, children of *nya* and *bapmu*; spirit of the *wapiwai,* has no personal name
nyambel – A.: red pigment used for *kus*
Nyambi – hill in today's area of Kalabu
Nyambisuagim – A.: clan in Kalabu I
nyameo – A.: bird species, name of a *mi* and a *dshambu*
Nyamikim – village of the Abelam
nyamnyam – A.: grade-specific string bag pattern belonging to *nggumaira*
nyan – A.: child; secondary ridge beam, lashed to a crossbar, underpinning the main ridge beam of the *korambo*
nyangga – A.: literally 'child house'; scaffold for *korambo*
nyankyakus – A.: type of sorcery producing death in children
nyanura – A.: red pigment originating from the body of a mythical figure
Nyeligim – also Nyelikim, village of the Abelam
nyello – A.: crossbar for clamping *nyan*, literally 'nasal septum stick'
Nyimalik – A.: name of a *wasa* and a *wale*
nyimba, also nyimbya – A.: bird species, *dshambu*
Nyimbya – A.: name of a *nggwalndu*
Nyimbyang Aineng – hill in the Abelam area, traditional battleground between Kwambigim and Yenigo
nyimbyangga – A.: a *dshambu-nyingga*
nyinde – A.: later
nyingga – A.: leaf
Nyinggui – A.: founding ancestor of Nyinggigim or Nunggigim clan as well as of Kundigim and Magnapate clans
Nyinggum – Abelam term for the Boiken area
nyingkus – A.: tobacco, from *nyingga* and *kus*
nyit – A.: heavens, ridge beam of *korambo*, see *yapa*; ridge beam of *korekore*; spine of *puti*
nyitmangge – A.: ridge beam, *nyit*, *numandu, yapa*
Nyitndshimbui – A.: heavenly body, name of a *wai*
nyit tshui – A.: 'shooting star in the sky', the *mbai* ceiling of the *narut*

paal – A.: hornbill, *dshambu* of Kalabu I and Malmba; a *dshambu-nyingga;* an *amei*-specific dog name
paal – A.: leaves of a climbing palm species, vine
paal entsak – A.: a *dshambu-nyingga*
paalkipma – A.: yellow earth pigment used in

painting, cf. *ramu*
Palkem – stream in Abelam area
Palnamba – pool on Nyambak mountain
pändshak – A.: perennial shrubs used as boundary markers
pan – cf. *ban*
Parchee – river, cf. Pasi
Pasi – river in Abelam area, today usually Engl. spelling Parchee
Paskwa – location near Kalabu
Patiko – hamlet name
Pelenggil Yamboin – also Yambei, hill range, mythical place on migration route of Abelam, settlement in the area of Waignakim
Pelkeire – hamlet von Kalabu II
pemak – A.: mother of a novice of the *nggwalndu* grade
pesapa – A.: leader of the *wagnen* dancers, wears the largest headdress
piabio – A.: feather bush on boar tusk decoration *kara-ut*, sign that bearer has killed an enemy
Pilmak – hill in the vicinity of Kalabu
pitpit – TP.: stem of a specific type of reed
poko – A.: stitching together the *mbai*; an initiation grade
Prince Alexander Range – eastern part of the coastal range, cf. Torricelli Mountains
pu kama – northwest A.: vertical bamboo pole in the roof construction of the *korambo*
puti – A.: seventh and final initiation grade; the 'empty one' who has given everything; the central wickerwork figure in the initiation scene, see also *kumbu*

ra – A.: to stay, to reside
Ragapa – A.: name of a *wapinyan*
Ramba, rambangga – A.: a *dshambu-nyingga*
ramoni – A.: scarification marks applied in context of first menstruation
ramu – A.: abstract colour term for 'yellow'
Ramuko – A.: name of a *wale*
Ramurabu – A.: name of a *wale*
rangga – A.: woman's dwelling house
Raurigim – village of the Abelam, no longer locatable
rawa – A.: sister's son
Ribagui – hill range in the area of Kalabu
Rigimbil – A.: name of a *wapinyan*
Rimui – A.: name of a *mbale* und *wale*
Rombel – A.: name of a *wasa*
Rumbun – hill range in the area of Kalabu

Sabamale – A.: name of a yam stone; name of a hamlet of Waignakim
sabyo – A.: a white earth pigment, cf. *wama*
sagiura – A.: a type of red parrot, also *ura*, a red pigment
Sagnakim – A.: extinct clan in Kalabu I
Sagulas – A.: name of the most important *nggwalndu* of Kalabu, name of a carved figure and a *kundi ure*
saige – A.: cassowary; *saigetagwa*: cassowary *dshambu* of Waignakim; *saigetambu:* term for *korekore; saige yui*: cassowary feather wreath
Saigeti – A.: spring near Kalabu
Saigetibli – pool on the Pasi, a *wale* spirit place
Saigware – location in Abelam area
saike, saiche – Arapesh: cassowary
sainyik – cf. *apui marangge*
Sakengge – hamlet of Waignakim
sakimba – A.: ceremonial song at *ka* feast
Salauyen – A.: name of a *wapinyan*
samban – A.: horizontal mounting of a *mbai*, to mount ceiling of the initiation chamber *naranggwal*; Iatmul: suspension hook
sambera – A.: exchange partner in one's own village
Samgik – village of the Abelam
sanggan – A.: bird species
sanggu – A.: thick soup made from *ka*
saren – A.: bird species
Sarendu – village of the Abelam
sarip – A.: decorative burn marks on women and men
Seigessi – village of the Abelam
seneral – A.: vine gauge for measuring girth of pig
sera – A.: cockerel, rooster; metaphor for handsome man
Serakim – village of the Abelam
Seranyankra – grass plain in Abelam area
Serapan – A.: mythical boar; symbol of fighting; literally 'rooster-man', originally a man; associated with *wapi* yam of the *undinggil* type; metaphorically equalled with Sirendshui
seraul – A.: 'cricket', a pattern of *nggumaira*

image
serkambi – A.: cavity in ground with trench-like extension, auxiliary device when digging deep holes for house posts or when excavating the longest specimens of *wapi*
serwak – A.: wild fowl species
shamu – northwest A.: how?; *shamu-kundi*: dialect group of the Abelam
shinggityein – northwest A.: split bamboo for enwrapping ridge beam of *korambo*
sibe – A.: skin
sibeputi – A.: type of *wapi*
Sigora – village on the boundary between Abelam and Boiken area
sik – A.: small fruit, offshoot
sino – A.: plaited belt
sipmu – A.: little tree placed next to *bapmu* during yam feasts
Sirendshui – A.: morning star
Sireto – place in Abelam area
Smoigim – A.: clan in Kalabu I
smutek – A.: 'earth people' who live in termite hills, different to *mindu/kipmandu*
Soali – A.: name of a *wale*
Songganggu – hamlet of Kalabu II
Songgyen, see Tinggyen
sowam – A.: woman's spear, walking stick in everyday usage
storiring – TP.: shell ring linked to historical event
Suaguo – hamlet of Waignakim
sualagu – A.: mollusc shell wristlet
Suambugim – also Suambigim, present-day village in Abelam area
Suambugimtagwa – A.: personal name of a slit gong
Suanggele – A.: name of a *mbale*
Suapel – hamlet of Kalabu I, offshoot settlement of Wapinda
Sugurumbun – A.: name of a *amei*-specific *nggwalndu* of Ndunyinggi and Mairagwa
sure – A.: tree species

tabu – A.: flattened palm leaf spathe used as sleeping mat
tagui – A.: yam seedling; placenta; second-born twin
tagu-Smoigim – A.: lineage of Smoigim clan in Kalabu I
tagwa – A.: woman
tagwakus – A.: red-coloured magical substance used to attract a woman's attention
tagwakwambut – A.: crossbar on the inside of *tikit* and *betikit* in the *korambo*
tagwanggalle – northwest A.: term for *kwambut* beam
tagwanyan – A.: girl
taksapa – A.: vertical lateral roof supports
talangge – A.: 'main place', hole to probe the growth of yam tuber in ground; different to *wingge*
tale kra kus – A.: 'the life substance that was taken first', excretions *myoula* of a newborn child collected in a 'first spirit bundle', serves wellbeing and growth of spirit/soul in difference to *gipakus*
taleo – TP: northwest trade wind
tama – A.: 'nose'; longitudinal bars that form the cone-shaped *nimbi* canopy of a *korambo*, cf. also *dama*
Tamangge – hamlet of Kalabu II
tambakwalya – A.: mollusc shell wristlet
tamba kwale – A.: elbow
tambaran, also tamberan – TP.: for A. *maira*
tambugwat – northwest A.: term for *tikit*
tambukorambo – A.: lower part of front side of *korambo*
tambu mangge – A.: crossbeam at front side of ceremonial house interior, supported by posts that go by the same name
Targwa – *amei* of Umbite Targwa; old name for Kwandshengga
Taurip – A.: name of a *mbale*
tibure – A.: roof bonnet of *korambo*, thatched panels for bonnet
tikit – A.: carved crossbeam on outside of front side of *korambo*
timbu – A.: garden plot; preset tracks on roof for thatched panels
Tinggyen – A.: name of female spirit being, cf. Songgyen; counterpart to *nyambapmu*, enhances growth of female classified crops such as taro *ka*
tipangga – A.: weather-resistant type of vine used in certain areas of *korambo*
tipma – A.: coconut
tipma ka ndei sigete – A.: *ka*-dish on the occasion of exchange events between the *ara*
Tipmabel – hamlet of Kalabu II; Tipmabel Wamangge: first hamlet founded by immigrants to territory of present-day Kalabu

Tipmanggero – A.: name of *amei*-specific *nggwalndu* of Yambusaki
titnbun – A.: lime fruit used in ritual purification; metaphor for fighting and killing a human
Tjamangai – village of the Abelam, probably Dshama
toiembo – A.: ritual area reserved for men at the back of *korambo*, secret enclosure, unlike *amei*
tok piksa – TP.: metaphoric speech, metaphor *andsha kundi*
Toletagu – hamlet of Kalabu II
Torricelli – Mountains, western extension of Prince Alexander Range; non-Austronesian language phylum
Toulesagu – hamlet of Kimbangwa
toulunggu – A.: 'waterhole in the mud'; metaphor for form of presentation of shell rings in *nggilenggwal*
tsaam – A.: intersection of *yapitak* and *biterapu*, highest spot of *korambo*
tsaat – A.: flies; third mortuary feast after burial
Tshat – hill in Abelam area, boundary between Kalabu and Waignakim
Tshatu – *amei* of Winggei
Tshawinggup – stream in Abelam area
tshelagwip – A.: a night bird, *dshambu* of Nyamikim
tshik – cf. *sik*
tshipmea – A.: stinging nettles
tshipmowi – A.: first mortuary feast after burial
tshipmui – A.: shrub species
tsigu – A.: strips of sago leaves blackened by soaking in water
tsilimbush – A.: adornment worn through nasal septum
tsimasik – A.: shell, part of *tsilimbush*
Tsimbukwaru – A.: name of a *wasa*
Tsirige – A.: name of a *wasa*
tsitsilolo – A.: folded leaf through which one blows
tsumbui – A.: tree species
tsumbuitshik – A.: small fruit of ironwood tree
Tuindshere – hamlet of Kalabu II
Tul – stream near Waignakim
tul – A.: silvery leaves from a specific tree
Tuma – Abelam term for the southernmost Abelam and the Sawos
tumbuna – TP.: ancestors
Tuta – settlement of the Abelam
Tyendekim – village of the Abelam
Uaigagim – cf. Waignakim
Uangguatagwa – A.: name of a *baba*
uara – A.: bundle of leaves that has a magical-purifying effect
Uasamigo – A.: name of a *wale*
Uitagu – hamlet of Kalabu II
Uitikim – A.: clan in Kalabu II
Ulagem – stream in Abelam area
ulelaindshe – A.: type of *wapi*
ulke – A.: second initiation grade, cf. *ulke-nau*; bullroarer; board-shaped carvings
ulke-nau – A.: initiation grade, formerly separate grade now performed as joint second and third initiation grade
ulma – A.: white stone; tool with sharp edges used for scarification *ramoni*, operation on penis, etc.; also name for *bapmu*; used for marking size of yam tuber; name of a *baba* and a *wale*
Ulpe – hamlet of Kalabu II
Ulpi – A.: name of a *baba* and a *wale*
Ulpinamu – spring near Kalabu
Ulupu – village of the Abelam
Umbite Targwa – mythical place of origin of the Abelam in the Wosera area
umbun – A.: bird species
Umbunwa – A.: name of a *wale*
umbut – A.: root section of a tree
Unaip Yenggore – *amei* of Malmba
undinggil – A.: type of *wapi*
Upunggilmo – A.: name of a *wale*
ura – A.: also *sagiura*, type of red parrot
urakus – A.: red pigment, also used in love magic, cf. *nggwauw*
uramashe – A.: type of *wapi*
Uranggemel – hamlet of Kalabu II
uranyan – A.: heartbeat, life force, part of *komunyan*, cf. *nggumisik*
Uraskil – hamlet of Kalabu I
ure – A.: to call
Uremaingge – A.: name of a *baba*
urunggwal – northwest A.: for *kundi ure*
ut – A.: bag; metaphor for chamber containing ritual sculptures

vi – A.: spear
vi warya – A.: *vi* = spear, *warya* = to fight; root sticks with bird-head-like ends or real spears – *vi* placed slanting downwards between *narkassa* and *wenggokama* on *korambo*

vi wokenkama – northwest A.: oblique-running bamboo poles located in roof part in front of façade

wagnen – A.: triangular headdress for *nggwalndu* grade, large, disc-shaped headdress made of painted palm spathes and feathers; ceremonial dance; adornment for top-quality yam tubers; metaphor for façade of *korambo*
wagnen ula – A.: signal on slit gong marking the mounting of the façade of a ceremonial house
wagnenyaui – A.: foremost, ladder-like support at head of *nyangya*; cf. *wagnen, yaui*
wai – A.: ceremonial stone for *wapi*, see *wapiwai*, *wapinyale*
waigna – A.: younger sibling
Waignakim – village of the Abelam
Waignapate – A.: clan in Kalabu I
waignara – A.: younger 'brother'; second ceremonial moiety, cf. *numanara*
wail limbum – TP.: bendshin palm
Waimba – stream near Waignakim; red pigment found near this stream, cf. *nggwauw*
waiwu – A.: type of elongated face in painting and sculpture, generally a handsome face
wale – A.: spirit beings that live in waters, usually clan-related waterholes are regarded as clan-specific entrances to the realm of the dead
Walembil – hamlet of Kalabu I
walengga – A.: 'leaf of the *wale*', leaf of a water plant
Wallapia – hamlet of Kalabu I
Walmeingga – location in Abelam area
wama – A.: white cockatoo *dshambu* of Kalabu II, abstract colour term for 'white'
wamage – A.: hairstyle of newly married men
wama-ut – northwest A.: plaited mat that covers lower part of gable front of *korambo*, cf. *kimbi*; A.: grade-specific string bag pattern for *puti*
Wambak – village of the Abelam
wambe – A.: plant, the sap of its buds is used to ritually cleanse body of girl at *wambusuge*; also used as grounding in painting
Wambina – A.: brother of Luimo
wambusuge – A:. women's feast, i.e. ceremony at first menstruation, sap of *wambe* used to ritually wash body of girl after first menstruation
Wamdangge – hamlet of Kalabu I
wami – A.: pig trap
Wamolanggo – hamlet of Kalabu II
wandsho – A.: tree species
Wanggimbalak – *amei* of Dshame
wanggunggu – A.: hole filled with water for *nggumaira*
wani – A.: tree species
Wanke – A.: name of a *amei*-specific *nggwalndu* of Wapinda
Wanketagwa – A.: name of a *narambaba*; abode of a *wale*
wanyen – A.: ceremonial songs and dances at harvest of *undinggil* and *kitpi;* special bamboo trumpets
wapi – A.: *Dioscorea alata*, yam species, long ceremonial yam
wapikus – A.: magic substance to enhance growth of yam
wapi ndei yagren – A.: song of challenge addressed to the *waune*
Wapinda – hamlet of Kalabu,
wapinggwale yina – A.: cassowary bone dagger
wapinyale – A.: 'core of the yam', cf. *wai*, *wapiwai*
wapinyan – A.: 'yam child', children of the *nggwalndu*, anthropomorphic figures, name of a culture hero
wapiwai – A.: ceremonial yam stone kept in a special hut, cf. also *wai*, *wapinyale*
Warabung – boundary settlement between Abelam and Boiken area
Waragwa – *amei* of Kwimbu
waren – A.: wild fowl species
wasa – A.: dog; metaphor for *nimbindu*
wasak – A.: term for clan-specific emblem of dog and pig
Wasakumun – A.: name of a *wasa*
Wasami – spring in Kalabu
watnamba – A.: foremost pair of full crucks with support function on *korambo*
wau – A.: mother's brother
waune – A.: exchange partner in another village, rival, enemy
weingga – A.: house to safeguard secret stones *wai* for the yam cult, secret counterpart to *kumbumaak*
Wendanggi – hamlet of Kalabu I

wenggokama – A.: bamboo rafters on *korambo*
West-Wosera – dialect group, today called Kwasengen, cf. also Wosera
Wewak – provincial capital East Sepik Province, former Dallmannhafen
windshembu – A.: type of *wapi*
Windu – A.: name of a *nggwalndu* and *wapinyan* and a *wai*
wingge – A.: 'offshoot village'; hole to probe the length of a growing yam, counterpart to *talangge*
Winggei – village of the Abelam
Wirimo – A.: a *nggwalndu*
Witupe I and II – villages of the Abelam
wiwu – A.: 'lizard'; motif in painting and of *nggumaira* image
wokenmangge – northwest A.: pairs of wooden poles running at same angle as cantilevering gable of *korambo*
Wombisa – village in Wosera area
Wora – A.: name of a *dshambu*; village of the Abelam
Worunggral – A.: name of a *wapinyan*
wosera – A.: type of *wapi*
Wosera – southern Abelam area; dialect group; village of the Abelam
Woswose – A.: founding ancestor of Koranggim clan
woutampaal – A.: pattern in painting
Wuembatik – hamlet of Kalabu II
Wuigno – A.: name of a *wale*
Wuiko Tapuko – A.: name of a *wale*, cf. also Wuigno
Wuimba – grass plain in Abelam area
Wuimo – A.: name of a *wale*
wuin – A.: blood
Wuinbabel – place on early migration route of Kalabu
Wuinbamu – A.: name of a *mbale*
wuinggele – A.: type of climbing palm
wuinkipma – A.: black earth pigment, cf. *nggile*
Wulnimbya – A.: name of a *nggwal*
wuna ndu – A.: 'my man', term used by woman for her husband or lover; term for *ndugendu* of husband
wut – A.: string bag; metaphor for contents of initiation, i.e. initiation scenes and images *maira*
Wutambal – *amei* of Lonem
Wutemein – A.: name of a *baba*
wuti – A.: type of bone dagger; metaphor for secret objects used in times of danger and war, for sorcery
Wutpam – border river between Dshame und Nyamikim
wuyagunggi – A.: soul substance of deceased that moves to and fro between the here and the beyond; link between generations

ya – A.: 'hot', male quality as against female *yipma*
Yabumi – A.: name of a wale
yagit – A.: taboos that have to be observed when cultivating *wapi*
yakua – A.: cf. *lelai, dangge*
Yamami – hamlet, mixed settlement of Kalabu I and Lonem
yaman – A.: type of palm wood *limbum*, used for making spears
Yamangan – hamlet of Nyamikim
yamangga – A.: leaf of a *limbum* palm, term for triangular pattern on plaited objects
Yamanimbu – hamlet of Yenigo
Yambat – hamlet of Apanggai
Yambusaki – hamlet of Kalabu I
yanetikwa – A.: central post supporting ridge beam of *korambo*
Yanggore – also Yenguru, Yangoru, administrative centre in Boiken area, Abelam term for the Boiken
Yanggula – hamlet of Kalabu I and of Balokwil
yangkipma – A.: ritual food given to initiates
yapa – A.: ridge beam of *korambo,* literally 'father', cf. *nyit*; thatched panels for the large roof sections
yapandu – northwest A.: term for foremost pair of rafters
yapingga – A.: a *dshambu-nyingga*
yapitak – A.: pole, ridge extension piece protruding from canopy of *korambo*
Yapite – A.: name of a *mbale*
Yapitikim – A.: clan in Kalabu II
yapu – A.: breath; ritual to enhance the growth of crops
Yarakakigwa – A.: name of a *wapinyan*
Yaremaipmu – cf. Yondshangge, village of the Abelam
yaui – A.: garden
Yauipur – hill near Kalabu
yaul – A.: pattern of *nggumaira* image
yauw – A.: tree, sap of which is used as varnish-like coating for painting
yawakama – A.: long, thin bamboo battens

yeimbu – A.: type of *wapi*
yeleko – A.: white strips taken from inside of wild bamboo and used for plaited *kimbi* mat
yele-korambo – A.: front section of *korambo*
yembe – 'no'; dialect group of the Abelam
Yembigo – hamlet of Kalabu II
yembumbile – northwest A.: special type of vine binding used for construction of gable, cf. *miaat*
Yembure – see Balekasik
Yengoru – dialect of Boiken language
Yenigo – village of the Abelam
Yerukwa, also Kikwa – A.: name of a *wapinyan*
yeshagu – cf. *mindsha kumbu*
yesak – A.: wreaths made of leaves of bendshin palm, used as dance decoration at *nggumaira*
yewi – A.: lime species; metaphor for fighting and killing a human being, cf. *titnbun*
Yeyuwi – A.: name of a *amei*-specific *nggwalndu* of Suapel, also a *wapinyan* name
yigel – A.: gauges kept for pigs and yams
yigendu – A.: artist, especially a painter
yina – A.: type of bone dagger; decorated with incised patterns, *ngguai*, serves to attract additional forces enhancing the growth of yam and for preparing warriors before going on a raid
yinggua – A.: a type of spear associated with *mambutap* yam; metaphor for yam
yipma – A.: 'cold', female quality, in contrast to *ya*
yiren – A.: thatched panels placed at right angle; a type of leaf
yiru – A.: tree species
yit – A.: portcullis in fortified settlement
yitnbin – A.: tree species, the fibre of which is used for making twines for string bags
yiwit – A.: leafy vegetable, *Gnetum gnemon*, the sap of which is mixed with pigments for paintings
yol – A.: yellow decorative leaves, symbol of peace
Yondshangge, also Yoindshang – village of the Abelam
Yonggwa – valley in Abelam area, boundary between Kalabu and Waignakim
yua – A.: shell ring.

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The ceremonial houses of the Abelam people (East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea) rank as architectural masterpieces. The impressive buildings, built on a triangular ground plan, often reached heights of up to 30 metres, towering above even the tallest coconut palms. One of their characteristic features were the richly painted façades. They were constructed completely without nails or pegs, all elements being held together with the aid of vines and liana ropes; they were built by communal labour and reflected the strength of the respective community. Outside the ceremonial cycle they served as repositories for sacred carvings but during initiations they became places of stupendous ritual installations. The novices entered the house through a low, tunnel-like entrance before they were confronted with dramatically staged cult images inside. Following this revelation they were led out through a narrow exit at the back on to a small, hidden ceremonial ground where they remained in seclusion for several weeks.

The large circular foreground in front of the ceremonial houses formed the focal point of the village. Here all stages of life – of both men and women – were publicly enacted and mediated (e.g. puberty rites, marriages, funerals). Next to this the ceremonial ground served as an arena of public affairs such as disputes on sorcery and death, conflict mediations, debates about communal ventures (staging of feasts and ceremonies, construction of a new ceremonial house, start of a planting cycle, ritual acts relating to the cultivation and the competitive display of ceremonial yam, warfare, etc.). All ritually important communal undertakings were preceded by pig sacrifices to the mythical clan founders and ancestors.

This book offers a unique documentation of the architecture of the different styles of ceremonial houses according to region, their mode of construction and the impressive façade paintings. It goes on to explain the social networks responsible for the construction and maintenance of such ceremonial houses: crucial agents of social formation. The integrative and consolidating force that emanated from a ceremonial house and the ritual arena associated with it, not only shaped social life in the village but also defined the communion between humans, clan ancestors and mythical creative forces.

Up to the late 1980s, knowledge concerning the construction and meaning of ceremonial houses was passed on to the next generation by means of practice (learning by doing). However, since then the Abelam have increasingly converted to Christianity and turned their backs on traditional belief and knowledge: they no longer build ceremonial houses, initiations are a matter of the past, and pigs, domesticated as well as semi-wild, which used to be focal to religious life in earlier days have been discarded. All this has changed the face of Abelam culture radically and the knowledge concerning the construction of ceremonial houses is now almost lost.

The author presents an extensive description and analysis of Abelam society at a time when the people were still building ceremonial houses, staging initiations and sacrificing pigs. The magnificent edifices constituted the spatial, social and religious pivots of Abelam culture.

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