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THE "LORD OF THE EARTH" CULT AMONG THE ASMAT:
PRESTIGE, POWER, AND POLITICS IN A TRANSITIONAL SOCIETY

Peter W. Van Arsdale and David E. Gallus

IKHTISAR :

Sejak 1966 kampung Asmat Ewer, telah mengalami suatu rangkaian pernyataan kepercayaan akan Tuhan Tanah, sampai empat kali. Selama delapan tahun kepercayaan itu ada, terjadilah perubahan² secara lambat laun dalam maksud-tujuan kepercayaan tsb., tapi segala perubahan dapat dimengerti sebagai bagian dalam rangka "gerakan seribu tahun" (millenarisme) suatu rangkaian perbuatan² yang direncanakan untuk menyebabkan beberapa perubahan pokok dalam cara hidup; setelah itu, peserta² "terpilih" akan menikmati amgerah² istimewa, seperti: menerima pengaruh (gengsi) kuasa, kekayaan dan kebahagiaan.

Tahap pertama, dibawah pimpinan Marsellus Bewormbij, ditandakan oleh ilham², bahwa roh yang larim "ndembero" (Tuhan Tanah) akan menganugerahkan harta benda, kemerdekaan¹ dan kulit putih kepada mereka yang meninggalkan cara hidup yang biasa kepercayaan tebal akan kekuatan doa dan akan Gereja Katolik perlu juga. Mula² ilham² dilengkapi dengan barang yang secara diam² dicuri dari misi. Kepercayaan ini berhasil disebar luaskan, dan orang menghentikan pekerjaannya, tapi peletusan ini dicegah terutama oleh usaha seorang penduduk kampung, Gabriel Eweripitsj.

Tahap kedua, ketiga, ke-empat terjadi dibawah pimpinan Sotor Baptes. Ia mempertahankan dan memperluas tata cara kepercayaan semula, tapi fungsi²nya yang sesungguhnya berubah. Sedangkan Eweripitsj telah menjadi wakil dari pemerintah Indonesia, dengan diangkat menjadi pejabat tertinggi di Ewer; berlaku sebagai sahabat misi dengan pekerjaan dan usahanya bagi mereka; dan seorang yang membaharui kampung dengan proyek² pembangunan, dan karena itu sangat dihormati dan disegani (seseorang yang berwibawa, "man of power"), Baptes menjadi seorang pengatur, seorang dukun yang penting dengan kekuatan yang dianugerahkan oleh Tuhan Tanah, seorang yang pandai berbicara (seseorang yang berpengaruh, seorang Orang Besar secara adat Melanesia). Masing² orang termasuk "fam" atau kelompok suku tertentu, yang berjuang untuk merebut kewibawaan atas kuasa dikampung. Kepercayaan Tuhan Tanah menjadi jalan yang membawa wibawa kepada kelompok suku Bewormbij dan Baptes, dan menyebabkan Baptes menjadi Orang Besar dengan pengaruh terkuat di Ewer. Dari sudut pandangan orang Asmat, wajarlah secara intelektual dan rasional, percaya kepada Baptes dan kepercayaan yang diwakilinya lebih daripada percaya kepada Eweripitsj, wakil dari susunan kekuasaan yang dipaksakan dari atas.

Banyak pemuda² sekarang sudah kurang percaya bahwa Tuhan Tanah akan menganugerahkan barang, kemerdekaan, dan kulit putih. Namun pengaruh Baptes

¹Merdeka = kemerdekaan diantara orang² Asmat yang berbicara bahasa Indonesia.

berlangsung terus, terutama berdasarkan kemampuannya sebagai seorang dukun yang penting dengan kekuatan ajaib. Tata cara kepercayaan ini telah berkembang menjadi susunan tetap, dengan Baptes sebagai tokoh dan wakilnya. Para pemuda lebih2 mencari jalan lain untuk menjadi orang berpengaruh, Orang Besar, daripada mencari kuasa yang diwakili oleh Eweripitsj. Beberapa telah memilih pekerjaan dengan upah disebuah perusahaan yang mencari minyak dipedalaman daerah Asmat. Sekembalinya dari pekerjaan mereka diakui oleh penduduk kampung sebagai orang yang berpengaruh. Kesempatan2 ekonomis yang demikian dapat memberi jalan yang bisa diterima oleh penduduk kampung tokoh2 perubahan.

Since 1966 the Asmat village of Ewer has undergone a series of manifestations of cargo cult behavior¹. The latest was during the latter part of 1973, with lingering effects still being felt in early 1974. This paper details the developments surrounding the four major Ewer cult manifestations, and then analyses this behavior in terms of (1) progressive functional transformations of a relatively stable cult structure, with a decreasing interest in cargo and concomitant increasing intra-village struggle for power; (2) Big Man activity as broadly manifested throughout Melanesia; (3) economic and development problems in the Asmat region. Following LaBarre (1971: 26-7) we recognize that it is doubtful if any single explanation for cult behavior will suffice. Rather, a cargo cult can best be interpreted as a complex of cultural responses to multicausal factors.

Analytical Background

In categorizing the activities in Ewer, we follow Meggitt (1973: 1): A millenarian movement involves a series of actions designed to bring about certain existential changes, after which "the elect" participants will enjoy special benefits such as the acquisition of power, wealth, and happiness. A millenarian (or cargo) cult is that kind of millenarian movement which emphasizes and employs religious - magical doctrines and rituals to explain and achieve its purposes.

Hence it is crucial to recognize that a millenarian movement in its broadest interpretation can follow either Western-recognized processes of political and economic development, or non-Western yet locally recognized processes for achieving the same development status. Lawrence (1967: 274-5)

states that an improvement in economic opportunities may lead to the acceptance of development as a satisfactory alternative to cargo cults. Similarly, Finney (1969: 59-60) has found that cargo cult actions and market-oriented activities can be conceptualized as competing ways open to New Guineans to obtain wealth, and that where favorable preconditions exist commercial activities with their demonstrable returns may well be preferred to cargo cult activities. Vriens (1972: personal communication to Trankenschuh) has made similar findings among peoples of southwest Irian Jaya, including the Marind and Mappi. As will be shown, for many of Ewer's adult males such commercial and economic opportunities have not been readily accessible. In its earlier stages the cult members chose what to them seemed a more viable alternative: ritualistic methods to attain economic and even ethnic parity with whites. These ritual insights were offered by a few men striving to increase their own power and prestige.

Such a choice was intellectually viable as well. It followed traditionally accepted Asmat practice. Lawrence (1970: 238) follows his earlier work in reiterating the importance of analysing cargo cult behavior along rational - intellectual lines found in the society itself, rather than applying purely sociological analysis. This can be contrasted to the opinion of Burridge (1960: xviii) that cargo cult participants act via their emotions rather than their intellect. In his comparative study of two New Britain societies Counts (1971) provides further data supportive of Lawrence's "ethno-intellectualist" thesis. Kandokans believe, consistent with a philosophy toward the value of certain long-term activities, that cash cropping and council activities will bring eventual development. These are "something true", whereas Kandokans assume cargo beliefs to be intellectually false because of the troubles which result. Bibling Range villagers, on the other hand, following established religious - intellectual lines of reason found in their society, wanted immediate material satisfaction and saw cargo cult activities as the most viable alternative. Asmat behavior regarding traditional economic opportunities and exploitation of resources is intellectually directed along these same short-term guidelines, and their initial cargo activities were

a logical consequence. After repeated failures to achieve their goals and the desired cargo, the cult leaders gradually modified the functions of the cult toward more political and ndambero (traditional curer) ends.

Other Millenarian Cults in Irian Jaya and Asmat

By far the large majority of millenarian cults in Melanesia have been reported in those areas east of Irian Jaya. Yet this seeming disparity in numbers may well be an artifact of research opportunities and reports available. Millenarian activity is probably as wide-spread in Irian Jaya as elsewhere in Melanesia, as evidenced by a relative increase in recent reports. The Biak area is most heavily represented in this literature (Kamma 1972;² Pouwer 1970; Worsley 1968: 2, $\sqrt{\text{ma}^2}$; Marjen 1967), but other regions are also covered (e.g. Pouwer 1970; van Baal 1969).

Some of Irian Jaya's earliest millenarian cults appeared in the Lake Sentani region in the 1920's (Worsley 1968: 98-9). These were in response to the combined effects of mission and government penetration. For southern Irian Jaya, to date but few published reports have appeared. Van der Kroef (1959) mentions Messianic movements among the Muyu, and Gerbrands (1967: 8) briefly notes a cargo cult among the Asmat of the village of Amanamkai apparently dating back to about 1960. Gerbrands himself was taken to be the reincarnation of an important chief, who had predicted his own return after death with an unlimited supply of white man's goods.

Trenkenschuh (1974: personal communication) has provided the authors with unpublished information and letters relating to millenarian cults in several areas of Irian Jaya³. These include cults among the peoples of Kiman, Muyu, and Mimika. In the case of Muyu manifestations in the area near Mindiptana, these began as early as 1949 with a festival whose singing was aimed at changing fruit into shell money. The shell money was then to be used for Western goods. There have been several other somewhat unrelated cult activities in Muyu since then.

Millenarian cults have appeared in several villages of Asmat, although in most cases detailed information is lacking. In addition to that in

Amanamkai, prior to the 1966 outbreak in Ewer, cults were reported in Sjurru, Jepem, Amborep, Manep, and Jamatsj. Based on reports from neighboring villages the influence of Ewer's cult has been more powerful than that of any other village. Yet Ewer people first became acquainted with cult activities from people in the other villages mentioned. Subsequent to 1966 cults have been reported in Atsj and Ayam. The latter, the cult of the Crocodile Woman, has been described by Trenkenschuh (1970), as have the first three Ewer manifestations.

Kepercayaan Tuhan Tanah: The "Lord of the Earth" Cult in Ewer

PHASE I: During October of 1966 a 27-year old man named Marsellus Bewormbij broke into the Catholic pastor's storeroom in Ewer. As the pastor was frequently in Agats, the administrative center of Asmat some 10 kilometers away, he did not initially miss the tobacco, money, and clothing which were stolen night after night.

Bewormbij began dividing these goods (barang) with others in Ewer, telling them he had received the supplies from Tuhan Tanah, the "Lord of the Earth". Tuhan Tanah had appeared to him and presented a secret key, with which he was able to unlock a hole in the ground from which the barang appeared. It seems the people began to believe his story, and gladly accepted his gifts.

Our informants say that initially no one knew Bewormbij was stealing the barang. He thus was able to gather a group of followers about him, all relatives, most of whom belonged to jeu (Asmat fam, divided into two moieties) Jower. Central figures at that time included Marcus Jujip, who was Bewormbij's younger brother, Sotor Baptes, Donatus Doperas, Daniel Faitesi, and Jacobus Jemis. All were young men, and most in the probable position of desiring to enhance their own power and prestige, as member's of Ewer's most powerful jeu at that time.

Bewormbij did in fact become a Big Man, a man of influence, in Ewer. His story was expanded to say that Christ, Mary, and the angels were giving him advice. They had also informed him that on a certain date there would

be a great happening. All believers in Tuhan Tanah would become white, each becoming a tuan⁴. They would receive merdeka (freedom), and the hole would supply even more barang than before.

All these things would happen if Ewer's people believed in Tuhan Tanah, and rejected all that is traditionally Asmat. Bows, arrows, spears, etc., must be burned, proclaimed Bewormbij. No longer were they to use body paint or the traditional woman's garb (fiber awér). When each became a tuan with white skin such things would be unnecessary. Any such items hidden and not burned would rot; and since their food would come from cans, hunting and gathering would be unnecessary also. There was even a plan to cut down many of the sago palms as they would not be needed⁵.

These events all hinged, said Bewormbij, with the sincerity of the people's beliefs. As a majority of villagers were already baptized Catholics, they were to obtain rosaries and pray fervently each Sunday. In response church attendance shot up, many items were burned, work and sago chopping ground to a halt, and drumming and dancing began. About this time Bewormbij began to wear a starshaped pin he had stolen. The people began calling him "President".

Also at about this time, Gabriel Eweripitsj returned to the village from the southern coast where he had been working for the Catholic mission. This man is presently Kepala Desa of Ewer, the village's highest government-appointed position. Even then he was conversant in government activities and widely respected by outsiders as a potential innovator for mission and government programs. It is also extremely important to note that he is a member of jeu Jowijof, Jower's chief rival for power in the village during the past decade. Eweripitsj heard of these activities and decided to investigate, as did the pastor who finally had discovered the missing supplies.

While the pastor was unable to pin down the thief due to lack of evidence, Eweripitsj had more success. He hid under the store room and caught Bewormbij stealing more supplies to supplement his revelation that the Virgin Mary would walk through Ewer later that night. Bewormbij begged Eweripitsj to allow him to perform fellatio, the traditional Asmat custom binding one to

secrecy. Instead, Eweripitsj reported the incident to the pastor, the head teacher, and government officials in Agats. Bewormbij was arrested for theft and jailed in Agats. The pastor demanded that the people who had received the barang return it; slowly it was brought back.

Making one last attempt at retaining his prestige and power as "President", Bewormbij escaped from jail. He told the people that he had simply "reappeared" in Ewer. Some of the villagers believed him, and festivities quickly began again. However, several people found his canoe in a small river not far from Ewer, and traced his footprints back through the mud. Bewormbij was re-arrested, belief in the cult diminished, and he has since never regained any power or prestige whatsoever. He presently leads a non-descript life, occasionally bringing pig meat to sell to the pastor (not the same man present in 1966). When questioned during November, 1973, one informant stated that people thought it was foolish that Bewormbij had stolen the mission barang. However, this professed attitude has probably developed only recently.

PHASE II: During July of 1968 the teachers and new pastor of Ewer began to notice the villagers remaining home more than usual. Drumming was on the increase, and work was again slowing down. Being unwilling to leave the village, Ewer men refused to paddle the teachers to Agats or bring them food.

It was learned soon after that a middle-aged man named Leo Baitjitji had been speaking to the villagers from a comatose state-macam gila (as if crazy). He was probably an epileptic, a condition further compounded by a case of Malaria Tropica. Among other things Baitjitji had told the people to listen to his cousin Sotor Baptes, one of the ranking members of the faction Bewormbij had built up. Baptes, a cripple since his youth, was able to attract a following owing to his previous association with cult, his close family relationship with jeu Jower (discussed more fully later), and his position as a ndembero (traditional curer) with special contacts to the spirit world.

Through a series of dreams Baptes reported an old bearded man had appeared to him, and offered a key leading to numerous kinds of barang.

The old man also revealed that merdeka was imminent. Other dreams were of dead people, which he not only reported to the villagers but to the pastor. Although the pastor told him dreams were not to be feared, like other primitive peoples Asmaters believe dreams of spirits and the dead to be extensions of reality.

For fear of missing the promised freedom and barang no one dared leave Ewer. However, Gabriel Eweripitsj had by this time become Kepala Desa. He heard rumors of the cult's re-emergence and again quickly reported it to the government in Agats. Before the situation could develop further Baitjitji and Baptes were called to Agats and warned of the consequences of such talk. The village seemingly returned to normal, although secretive talk continued until the next outbreak occurred.

PHASE III: Actually a delayed continuation of the events of 1968, this phase of the cult surfaced in July, 1969. At this time Eweripitsj left for Surabaya, Java. Apparently his presence had kept talk underground because shortly after he left both Baitjitji and Baptes began talking of Tuhan Tanah more openly again. Baitjitji instructed the people: "What I got from Tuhan, Mary, and Jesus is in the hands of Baptes. Later Baptes will open everything and you will have much barang, white skins, and Ewer will become a big city". At this point Baptes began revealing his dreams again.

During early August, participation in the fish cooperative ceased, and pig hunters no longer brought in pigs. Further belief in the cargo cult was probably enhanced when Baitjitji died on August 16 due to complications surrounding his chronic Malaria Tropica. Baptes quickly emerged as the sole cult leader, strengthening his position by proclaiming that Baitjitji had not died at all but would return when Tuhan Tanah opened the hole in the ground for the emerging barang. Traditional Asmat mourning calls for prolonged wailing and rolling in the mud by close relatives, women in particular. Hence it was a marked contrast when, due to Baitjitji's supposed return, no such mourning occurred at his burial. When questioned by the pastor, several people responded that they had learned from the Catholic religion not to cry at a funeral, but to pray.

Shortly after the burial, Baptes changed his tact and declared that he was more powerful than Baitjitji had claimed. Through a dream he revealed that he had been taken on a world tour. In Surabaya he had learned Eweripitsj had been shot and killed. Baptes then said: "See what happens to people who don't believe me. Whoever does not believe will get the same". This convinced many people even more strongly that Baptes' power was real. Each Thursday they began to meet at his house to hear further revelations.

Informants reported the following Baptes monologue from one of these meetings: "We must stand by ourselves. Tuhan says that if we stand by ourselves, our lives will be changed and much better than now. We will undergo a great change. Our skins will become white and we will have all types of barang. This will happen only if you believe. Whoever does not believe will become pigs, or dogs, or fish, or snakes. Also, we must keep this secret. Whoever reports this to the pastor or to the government will become water". During other meetings he added that the Asmat must be free of Indonesian influence, and that all the people of Irian Jaya must be prepared to fight for their freedom⁶.

It would therefore be necessary for Asmat to have its own government, and so the following offices were established: President of "Free Asmat", Sotor Baptes; Vice-President, Donatus Doperas (one of Bewormbij's original faction, a close relative of Baptes, and reputed to have special powers from the spirit world); Governor, Amandus Aman (former Ewer leader, presently a jeu leader); Bupati, Mattias Sateu (acting village leader during Eweripitsj's absence). Other offices, all following the established Indonesian government hierarchy included K.P.S. (Kepala Pemerintahan Setempat), Kepala Distrik, secretaries, and translators. Since Baptes spoke to the people in Indonesian, which not all villagers could understand, the latter were deemed necessary.

During October and November, 1969, belief in Ewer's millenarian cult reached an all-time high. This amount of fervor has not apparently been attained since. There was drumming every week, the pig and fish cooperatives were dead, people refused to leave the village except when absolutely necessary to get food, children showed no enthusiasm for school, teachers were

brought no food, and according to Baptes' orders the church was filled each Sunday.

There was a great deal of other activity in the Agats - Ewer area during this period, as Catholic and government officials were making plans for the ordination of Father Alphonse Sowada, O.S.C., as first Bishop of Asmat. It was general knowledge that many dignitaries would be arriving in Asmat for the ordination, and numerous supplies were arriving by air. The central coastal region of Asmat has only one airstrip, that being the one in Ewer opened May 15, 1967. The bi-monthly flights over the past two years probably had increased the people's interest in barang, although ironically no statements to this effect were made by our informants. It does seem that this mission activity contributed to the high pitch of cult enthusiasm.

Baptes proclaimed that after the November 23rd feast of ordination a "great happening" would take place. He would approach the Archbishop of Merauke when he stepped out of the plane at Ewer, and at that moment Asmat's flag would arise from the ground. Its colors would be red, white, and blue with a cross. Immediately the ground would open and factories, machines, automobiles, airplanes, clothing, electric generators, boats, medicines, food, and kitchen utensils made from gold⁷ would appear. Each person would become a tuan at that moment, and from then on would never work again. The barang would then be sent to the village of Ayam, which would become capital of Asmat.

Word of this revelation spread to other villages, the coastal village of Owus apparently becoming especially convinced of the truth of the reports⁸. Ayam was notified of the role it would play, although why it was chosen is not clear. It may have been an orchestrated attempt to improve upon the animosities between Ewer and Ayam which stretch back to pre-contact headhunting times.

A few days prior to November 23, Eweripitsj (reported by Baptes to have been killed in Surabaya) returned to Ewer. Baptes, Aman and Sateu quickly went to Agats and asked the government to remove him as Kepala Desa. When their request was refused rumors began spreading of a duel which would

result in Eweripitsj's death. The more that Eweripitsj investigated the cult activities, the more vigorously the cult's leaders lobbied against him.

A great deal of excitement accompanied the November 23rd feast of ordination, but when Baptes' revelations were not realized he twice rescheduled the "great happening". However, during December the government demanded a full report on the cult. This was provided by Eweripitsj and two other villagers. The members of the cult's Asmat "government" were called to Agats and warned of the consequences which continued cult activity would bring about. Baptes merely declared he had been aiding the Catholic mission by promoting better attendance at church. Yet this pressure by the government was enough to diminish enthusiasm in Kepercayaan Tuhan Tanah once again.

PHASE IV: Due to the fear of government reprisals and the continued presence of Eweripitsj in the village as Kepala Desa, little information surfaced about the relative strength of the cult from 1970 through 1972. However, enough information was obtained to indicate that cult beliefs persisted. Baptes was regularly consulted as one having special contacts with spirits, and was called on in his role as a ndembero to divine and cure illness. While the structure and organization of the Ewer cult has remained essentially the same since 1966, it is in the increasing power and prestige gained by cult leaders in their developing roles as ndembero that functional transformations are evidenced.

Near the end of May, 1970, the wife of one of the villagers who had helped Eweripitsj prepare his report for the government died. Some recalled Baptes' earlier statement that anyone revealing cult secrets to the government would die. Others reported that an increase in illness in Ewer at that time was due to Eweripitsj's continued reporting of the people's secrets to the government.

During late 1970 and 1971 an informal program of maternity aid was attempted in Ewer. The wife of the pastor's assistant, a Kei Islander, volunteered to assist Ewer women with childbirth. As part of the program she trained teenage Asmat girls to assist in preparation, delivery, and disposal of the afterbirth.⁹ Eweripitsj also assisted. Shortly after one afterbirth

had been buried, a teenage assistant became ill. Baptes quickly spread the word that this had resulted from her work with the afterbirth. He added that Eweripitsj never became ill because of his special relationship to the Catholic mission and the various pastors he had helped. The girl soon thereafter quit as assistant, and despite Baptes' proclamation that this resulted from her fear of the illness, it is likely that being a member of jeu Jower she was pressured into quitting by Baptes' supporters. Because of these incidents and a general lack of enthusiasm for the program, it was discontinued.

Even less information was available about cult undercurrents during 1972. Yet in some neighboring Asmat villages the phrase "kepercayaan Tuhan Tanah" had been heard by 1973, and has recently been heard in connection with cult activities in the Mayu and Kimam areas. The emphasis in Ewer, although still paying lip-service to barang, has narrowed down to a power struggle between certain members of the three jeu Jower, Jowijof, and Darkau; the emergence of a new generation of Big Men; and a general dislike for outside intervention by the government, missions, and non-Asmat teachers.

As a member of Jowijof, it was apparent by February, 1972, that Eweripitsj's position as Kepala Desa was still under bombardment by Jower. But only through hindsight can the connection be made with cult rumblings since the spokesman for Jower was Jacobus Sakarpitsj. Serving as Kepala Kampung he had never been linked to the cult although he had been openly resentful of Eweripitsj's authority. He had been a powerful headhunter, in contrast to the younger Eweripitsj, and had retained prestige as a tesmajipic (traditional man of importance) because of his war feats. During an open meeting Sakarpitsj said that Emanuel Jiminpitsj, a Jower man who had recently died unexpectedly, had been working too hard as a result of Eweripitsj's harsh orders. "All the people" wanted a younger, more flexible Kepala Desa who would truly listen to everyone and consult them prior to giving orders, he said¹⁰.

Such complaints continued, but further information about the cult per se did not surface again for fifteen months. Then on May 10, 1973, much

to the teacher's surprise, three students openly revealed to the class the new members of "government" in the cult. Sotor Baptes remained as President, with a new man named Didimus Dokom as Bupati. Donatus Doperas had now assumed the title Kepala Desa, with another new name being that of Julius Jirman as Wakil Desa. A list of members had been drawn up which included the names of teenage boys, and children. It was stated that after years of unfulfilled revelations the group wanted results. Hence an asphalt airstrip would be needed, with young Ewer men becoming pilots¹¹. How this would be accomplished went unstated. It was also said the school must be made of cement, with a zinc roof.

The latest manifestation finally came more clearly to the surface during August, 1973. A man named Pojuru from the neighboring village of Per died suddenly after a jungle trip. Before he died he told of a snake he had met in the jungle. The creature had a book and a key (both symbols used by cult leaders in Ewer during the three previous phases). The snake threatened Pojuru with death if he did not take the book and key, but as he was afraid he refused. Because of his death as the snake had predicted the story quickly reached Ewer. (One Asmat man who helped spread the story is a Catholic catechist and teacher in Per, who originates from Ewer.)

During August and September, 1973, the non-Asmat teachers again reported that villagers were not bringing them food. The pastor's Kei assistant was also not receiving the food which he normally purchased from the villagers. By October it was noted there was a general lack of enthusiasm for village projects and work. Some people believed the pastor should pay them for cleaning up the village, and others mentioned their desire for non-Asmat teachers to leave. Men complained that zinc roofing should not go on the new teacher's house, but on the Desa office instead (for a variety of reasons this request was met by the government and implemented in January, 1974). One evening after a small fight between the Kei assistant's son and an Asmat boy, the latter's father threatened the Kei boy and told him: "outsiders are not wanted in Ewer".

Clamouring for a new Kepala Desa peaked again in October, and once again in November. One of the men mentioned to fill Eweripitsj's office was Paulus Potes of jeu Jower. It seems his name had been picked somewhat at random, as he himself had not been in Ewer for some time. He had deserted his wife (as Asmat teacher) to hunt crocodiles, and although he later returned it was general belief even among the villagers that he was hard to get along with. Those pushing for Eweripitsj's removal stated Potes would be able to argue for higher prices for native products sold in Agats. Eweripitsj was always pushing for government projects and hard work, but was not able to arrange things to suit the people. He also does not know how to read or write, they pointed out, and does not sit in his office enough. Yet in November, when there was the opportunity for a village-wide vote to replace Eweripitsj, the overt Jower/covert cargo cult faction could not muster enough support for any of the men it had variously proposed.

On September 28, 1973, fifty Ewer men had gone to Agats to sign up for wage labor with an oil exploration company that had recently opened operations in the interior Asmat region. Although these men repeatedly prepared to leave to begin their contract, they were time and again forced to wait owing to various company delays. Yet enthusiasm for the wage labor continued at a very high pitch. However, none of the cult's leaders signed up, nor expressed much interest in the possibilities of such work. When in early October a group of Ewer men returned from an unsuccessful crocodile hunt to the Mimika region, they were further frustrated to learn that they had missed their chance to sign up for wage labor. Baptes told them not to worry, as they would soon receive barang from Tuhan Tanah.

It was also during October, 1973, that Baptes spoke with Paulus Potes' wife. He told her that, although he appeared to be a cripple, the pastor had recently seen him with two perfectly good legs, walking normally. Thus the theme of the power of the church and the pastor, which was prevalent in the earlier cult manifestations, is still present.

Analysis and Conclusions

PROGRESSIVE FUNCTIONAL CULT TRANSFORMATIONS: Over a period of eight years Ewer's millenarian cult has remained viable. Its four major manifestations indicate that belief in the cult has remained generally widespread, extending at times beyond the village. As of 1974 Sotor Baptes has become ever increasingly a strong Big Man, a man of influence. Several informants, both in Ewer and its sister village Sjurru, state flatly that Baptes is now the most influential man in Ewer. All this has taken place despite the fulfillment of not a single revelation, and despite the continued presence of Eweripitsj as Kepala Desa. We propose that this can be explained in part by the progressive functional transformation of the cult while its structure and organization have remained essentially the same.

The first cult outbreak occurred in 1966. Jeju Jower and jeu Jowijof were the two most powerful of the village's six fam at that time, but Jower had the edge. His man held the highest government-appointed position, and both Sukai and his son Jacobus Sakarpitsj were considered extremely influential based upon their war feats prior to 1953. Jowijof definitely wanted to increase its own power, but was unable to do so until Eweripitsj became Kepala Desa in 1968. It is our contention that the inter-jeu power struggle which has become increasingly pronounced since 1968 is one facet of the cargo cult's functional transformation.

But in 1966 this was not the motivation behind the cult. Bewormbij is a member of Jower. Hence by first gathering a close-knit group of supporters from Jower and his own extended family he was in the ideal position to capitalize upon his membership in this fam. He has no particular Asmat-recognized charisma nor special attributes, so it is probable that were he a member of another fam the cult's success would have been uncertain. That the people were extremely hopeful of receiving the promised barang was, of course, another factor in his favor.

Baitjitji and Baptes took over control of the cult at the most crucial period in its eight years existence. Belief in Tuhan Tanah as the provider of barang was still present, but after his failure of 1966 Bewormbij

had no other personal attribute or influence with which to continue mustering support in his drive to become a truly Big Man. It is probably no coincidence that shortly after Eweripitsj became Kepala Desa, shifting the balance of power toward Jowijof, that Baitjitji and Baptes revived interest in the cult. From the viewpoint of cult leadership the functional transformation was in full swing, because not only did Baptes want to become a Big Man, Jower was now in a secondary power position. From the viewpoint of the villagers the cult's structure (and apparent function) was the same as before.

Evidence is circumstantial but it appears that Sakarpitsj may have been behind some of Baptes' maneuvers. Both are members of the same extended family and Baptes' wife is a member of Jower. Throughout Melanesia it is rather unusual for a man as young as Baptes (c. 25 years) to command such widespread influence; the older men often pay little attention to "young upstarts". This would seem to be particularly so among the Asmat since feats of war and headhunting are no longer alternatives by which a young man can gain prestige. With Sakarpitsj' support Baptes would have been assured of solid village backing, and not merely among younger people or Jower members. (Some members of Jowijof could also be included here since Sakarpitsj' influence reaches across jeu lines into that fam as well.) Furthermore, as became obvious during Phase IV Sakarpitsj would very much like to see Eweripitsj removed as Kepala Desa.

Jeu Darkau, although not as powerful as Jower or Jowijof, commands a unique position in the village. It has a large membership, among those Baptes himself and Donatus Doperas. Its importance in the inter-jeu power struggle can best be understood by digressing long enough to explain the basic kinship organization pattern in Asmat. It can be termed Hawaiian in that it is broadly classificatory and generational, hence can be conceptualized horizontally rather than vertically. Lineages and clans are not recognized. A dualistic worldview is found in many aspects of Asmat life, including the division of each fam into moieties and the idea that each fam is represented by a spirit world fam of the same name whose membership must be kept in balance with the real-world fam via the proper number of births

and deaths. Another aspect of dualism and balance was the primary element of revenge in traditional warfare and headhunting raids.

Complementing both the classificatory kin system and the dualistic fam system is a spatial orientation regarding fam membership. In part this means that, although one generally retains the ascribed membership in the fam and moiety of one's father, this can be altered if the total village fam system is perceived to be out of balance. The houses of any one fam tend to be grouped in the same part of the village. However, a man of a different fam can usually build his hut in a different fam's section if he has family ties there, strong friendships, or intentions of improving his own position in the village. Over time such a spatial orientation can be translated into a change in fam membership. By requesting permission from the respective fam leaders (who consult each other as well as spirit world fam leaders) a switch can be made. Informants tell us that Baptes has come close to switching from Darkau to Jower on several occasions, and his hut is located in Jower's section. Yet by maintaining Darkau membership he is in a better position by which to solicit extensive support from both Darkau and Jower.

It is among the younger men of Ewer that the balance of power is being actively fought over, much of it by means of Kepercayaan Tuhan Tanah. What is reflected as power at the fam level is the result of striving for influence at the individual level. Those belonging to Jowijof are less active than those of Jower and Darkau. Yet influential older men such as Sakarpitsj, Eweripitsj, and some of the fam leaders play a strong role in what power shifts actually do occur.

Politico-economic explanations for cargo cults have in recent years been overshadowed by the status- and relative-deprivation theories advanced by Burridge, Cochrane, and Aberle (the latter regarding peyote usage among certain American Indians). The intellectual versus emotional aspect is yet another approach as has already been mentioned, and will be detailed regarding the Asmat in the next section. Yet as Strathern (1971: 255) points out, in many parts of Melanesia status actually depends on success in political and economic ventures. Worsley (1968; 1957) is the principal advocate of politico-

economic explanations. He makes several points which are applicable to the present analysis. Cults usually occur among peoples divided into small, separate, narrow, and isolated social units (1968: 227), for the Asmat this being the village and its fams. Since such a highly segmented society is incapable of offering large-scale resistance to outside influence or takeover, a millenarian cult is one way by which this segmentation can be overcome and a common front presented. Worsley believes such millenarian movements usually take religious forms because jealousies and inter-segment rivalries can be more easily overcome if the leader projects his message onto a supernatural plane which transcends the effects of segmentation (1968: 237). Sotor Baptes has skillfully maneuvered his own fam membership such that inter-fam politics are working in his favor and against Everipitsj. This political leverage has enhanced his own status not only as cult leader but as an "organizer". In the latter role aspiring Big Men among the Asmat need not necessarily have their organized plan or activity implemented each time. It is often enough that other men listen to them and respect them. Specific economic factors relating to these political considerations are discussed in the final portion of this section.

Political protest per se was clearly manifest during Phase III; as an alternative to Indonesian government cult leaders offered their own "Asmat government" and a plan to attain merdeka. Dalton (1973: 471-3) and Smelser (1963: 32, 43-5) clearly illustrate that under the pressure of imposed development and modernization processes degenerative or dysfunctional changes in socio-political organization will occur unless acceptable alternative forms are provided by the change agents or the society itself. An acceptable alternative was Kepercayaan Tuhan Tanah and the leadership offered by Baptes and his "government". While certainly not succeeding with their plan these organizers were able to unite most of Ewer in a common front. This in itself provided a measure of success, and is one element in the cult's successful functional transformation.

A classic example of the progressive functional transformation of a social movement, while the structure and organization remained essentially the same, is provided by Messinger (1955). In the United States in the 1930's the Townsend Movement was begun to provide national pensions for the aged as a mechanism for alleviating economic dislocation. But within a few years social issues shifted such that the movement was deprived of the conditions necessary to continue operations. In order to maintain membership and perpetuate the organization itself (not the Townsend Movement per se) new functions were introduced. Ewer's cult leaders have done the same. During Phase III barang and merdeka obtained through Tuhan Tanah were stated functions of the cult, as were they during Phase IV but to a lesser extent. A progressive functional transformation has actually occurred, however, since Baptes first assumed control. Intra-village politics, traditional curing by ndembergo, and the concomitant rise of Baptes and Julius Jirimman as Big Men have emerged as primary functions. The following structural characteristics have remained essentially the same: The offices and titles held by the cult's leaders; the use of certain symbols, such as the book and the key¹²; the special role of the Catholic pastor, prayer, and the church; dislike for outsiders and outside intervention; the belief in Tuhan Tanah as cult inspiration and provider. The continually stated functions of obtaining barang and merdeka have become fixed structural rather than functional characteristics; the cult thrives despite a general belief today among younger people that Tuhan Tanah will not provide barang nor white skin, and that Bewormbij was a fraud.

THE ROLE OF THE BIG MAN IN ASMAT: We have used the term Big Man in a broad sense, as it has been applied to many Melanesian societies by various fieldworkers. Viewed broadly within the framework of transitional Asmat Society a Big Man is a man of influence, an organizer. Sahlins (1968: 164) summarizes the characteristics of a Big Man, stating that in order to obtain the obedience of his followers he must "demonstrate that he possesses the kinds of skills that command respect--magical powers, gardening prowess,

mastery of oratorical style, perhaps bravery in war and feud. Typically decisive is the deployment of one's skills and efforts in a certain direction: towards amassing goods ... and distributing them in ways which build a name for cavalier generosity". In Ewer various of these traits apply to Bewormbij, Baptes, Jiriman, and Sakarpitsj.

Gabriel Eweripitsj does not display any of these skills. He commands respect not because of traditionally recognized attributes or acts but due to the office he holds. It is the missionaries and government officials, moreso than his fellow Asmaters, who respect him for his Christian lifestyle, dedication to job, persistence in carrying out government instructions, and hard work. He is a man of power in that he is representative of power. This in itself serves to clarify the interface between traditional and imposed leadership patterns that he represents. It also points out that despite the strong leadership he has offered it is only external to traditional Asmat values. Power, as Wirsing (1973) states, is an aspect of institutionalized political hierarchies and functions best where information and authority pass through a chain of internal command. Such does not exist in Asmat other than that imposed by change agents; the chain of "internal" command is in fact only internalized in the administrative center of Agats. Hayano's (1973: 306) generalization about the changes occurring among highland New Guinea's Tauna villagers is applicable to the transitional Asmat as exemplified by Eweripitsj: "Perhaps the term 'Big Man' is no longer appropriate for men whose political power and economic wealth extend far beyond traditional boundaries".

It is useful to briefly compare some of the types of Big Men studied in other Melanesian societies. For the Tolai Epstein (1972: 42-3) has summarized the main characteristics of the traditional Big Man system: (1) absence of established political offices; (2) achieved socio-political status, deriving in large part from the Big Man's accumulation of shell money; (3) well-rounded political expertise, the Big Man often having to be a successful organizer, manager, arbitrator, innovator, financier, and war

leader all rolled into one; (4) egalitarianism, so that while a leader the Big Man can still convince others he is one of them; (5) thriftiness versus generosity, such that resources are managed well yet generosity shown when necessary; (6) parochial powers, the Big Man's rise dependent upon the support of a loyal faction. Later expansion of influence was dependent upon effective utilization of established social and economic relations with individuals and groups outside his own faction; (7) nature of personal powers, such that regularized political groups and hereditary succession to political power did not develop. Elements of all seven categories have appeared in the development of Ewer's cult and leadership system, this particularly worth emphasizing since Epstein's article focuses on the Big Man system, not millenarian cults. Hence the real value in this comparison is the illustration of the Ewer cult as a vehicle for the rise of transitional Big Men.

A theory presented by Cochrane (1970: 11-14, 152-4) further clarifies the relationship of the Big Man to society. Traditionally he was a microcosm of his society and as such his status was a matter of concern for everyone. His status was their status. But with European contact such status was destroyed. Cargo cults, writes Cochrane, are attempts to remedy this situation by making Europeans and other change agents recognize these traditional status concepts. Furthermore, Europeans were to recognize that Big Men were their equals, this being far more important than actually acquiring European goods. To this we would agree regarding the Ewer situation but must add two needed clarifications. First, the perceptions of the cult's leaders and the cult's followers are very different, as are their motives for participation. Status recognition among the cult's leaders is far more important to them than it is to their followers, and conversely the accumulation of barang is more important to the followers than it is to leaders. The former is a traditional felt need while the latter is an induced need; accumulation of wealth among the Asmat was not generally present nor a means by which one could gain prestige. Second, the Ewer cult is not only

aimed at obtaining the proper recognition of change agents, it is more importantly a viable vehicle by which some men can attain Big Man status in a transitional society. Other villagers have chosen wage labor by which hopefully to attain such status, as is detailed in the final portion of this section.

As Ewer's most influential Big Man Sotor Baptes does not accumulate and distribute wealth. His "cavalier generosity" is manifested in a very different and, for the Asmat, more important manner. Baptes is a ndembero, the village's most influential curer, and in this role actively distributes advice and cures. To understand the ndembero is to understand a portion of the Asmat system of spiritual beliefs. The traditional Asmat universe, not surprisingly, is filled with a variety of spirits (ndat). Those of the spirit world jeu have been described and there are numerous others associated with sago grounds, fishing areas, etc. But in the coastal region near Agsts the most important spirit is the ndembero which is associated with the village as a whole. This spirit dwells in the earth. When rendered into Indonesian by Asmaters themselves it is called Tuhan Tanah--the Lord of the Earth¹³.

In precontact times as today the ndembero was the provider of valuable advice (among other things), especially regarding ways to secure medicinal substances from the jungle and administer them. Such advice is transmitted to selected people at night when the spiritual ndembero chooses to enter the home. The first visitation is particularly important since prior to that night the person supposedly has no knowledge that he or she will be selected. While under a trance or in a dream the person is told of his role and receives some of the necessary information. At that point he becomes a ndembero himself although the spiritual ndembero does not enter his body. He will retain this role for the rest of his life in most cases. Sometimes subsequent visitations are frequent and sometimes years may pass before the spiritual ndembero returns to give further advice. In the interim the person is free to practice traditional cures (and apply curses as well, but this is not restricted to ndembero).

At any one time in a village there are several ndembero. Ewer presently has about six to eight, its sister village Sjuru fifteen. Each has varying degrees of knowledge, ability, and experience and each has a concomitant degree of prestige which is recognized generally throughout the village. Baptes and Jiriman are recognized as the most prestigious of Ewer's ndembero at present, this going hand-in-hand with their roles as cargo cult leaders. Each role has served to solidify the other, and it seems certain that if either man were not prestigious in both roles he would not have become an influential Big Man. Were he to have relied solely on prestige derived from the cult Baptes may have met the same fate as Bewormbij after repeated unfulfilled revelations. Were he to have relied solely on prestige derived from his role as ndembero he would not have been able to attain the type of Big Man status previously afforded tesmajipic (war leaders), e.g. women can also gain prestige as ndembero.

The belief in Tuhan Tanah as provider of barang and merdeka is therefore a belief in the spiritual ndembero's ability to extend his powers such that not only advice but goods and freedom are provided from a hole in the earth. Following Lawrence (1970: 238) this is indeed rational - intellectual from the Asmat point of view. Further, the belief in a spiritual ndembero is complemented by a belief in the curing powers of the village ndembero. Baptes followed Bewormbij's lead by strongly advocating prayer and church attendance, therefore blending traditional and Christian spiritual beliefs into the cult's structure. He has also stressed the special powers held by the pastor. The Catholic church is recognized as a potential threat to the cult's existence as well as a source of belief (or power) with which to unite the village's segmented social order. While minimizing the threat by more fully incorporating elements of the church, Bewormbij and Baptes were able to gain also access to elements by which to better maneuver in their drives to become more influential. The entire cargo cult belief complex is a rational, intellectualized, and orderly system. Traditional and non-traditional elements neatly complement one another.

The road for Baptes has not been lined entirely with wine and roses. He perceived the maternity aid program as a real threat and was instrumental in its loss of popularity. Eweripitsj and the Indonesian government have threatened the cult numerous times. As a cripple he has made extravagant claims of health ("the Pastor saw me walking normally with two good legs") countered at other times by explanations for his crippled condition. One informant from Baptes' fam, Darkau, related that his initial desire for cult leadership was a result of wishing to avenge his crippling. A man named Daumbui from jeu Toso, along with his daughter Kakawer, secretly entered the house one night when Baptes (a young boy at the time) was sleeping. Both were powerful ndembero and without disturbing him rubbed his legs with a jungle medicine. The next morning when he awoke his legs ached. Supposedly it was not long before they withered to their present shape. Whether Baptes later enacted a curse or applied malevolent medicine to anyone of fam Toso is not known, but the element of revenge in order to restore balance is common among ndembero. Baptes likely invented this description of his crippling at a much later date and used it, in part, to justify his expanding ndembero and Big Man influence.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PATHS AND PROBLEMS: Baptes and Jirman have strengthened the role of the Big Man in Ewer. Prestigious attributes of a traditional nature are showing a resurgence. Village unity has been strengthened. But the functional transformation of the cult in this direction has left increasingly little room for accommodation to development programs and integration with mission and government policies. Furthermore, while it is now apparent that many young men in Ewer would prefer to become men of influence rather than men of power, very few can take the path chosen by Baptes. There is "little room at the top". The cult has become oriented toward maintaining its own leaders in positions of influence.

With the arrival in Asmat during August, 1973, of the I.S.S.A. (Indonesia Surveys S.A.) oil exploration company a viable alternative for attaining potential Big Man status was presented. Through a labor

subcontractor I.S.S.A. on September 28 began registering men from Ewer and most other central coastal villages for proposed three-month labor contracts in the interior. Many more wanted to be placed on the labor rolls but only 50 from each village were initially permitted to register. Once listed the men were told to return to their villages and wait to be called.

We surveyed the situation in four villages including Ewer, and sampled attitudes toward the proposed labor activities. Nowhere did the enthusiasm for the labor reach the feverish pitch attained in Ewer. Despite unforeseen delays that forced most of the various villages to wait over two months before many of their men could leave, Ewer's enthusiasm remained extremely high. Most of the Ewer men, in contrast to other villages, moved into small bivouacs in Agats to be as close to the source of labor information as possible. With this feverish enthusiasm came numerous rumors, particularly regarding the amount of money to be earned and the reasons for the delays. Of 16 Ewer men sampled at random from the list of 50, four expected to earn 500 to 1100 rupiah (U.S. \$1.22 to \$2.68) per day. Actual starting pay was 125 rp. per day. All expected to be able to buy far more than even their wage expectations would permit. Blame for the delays was most frequently placed upon Eweripitsj for "not being able to arrange things with the company". In reality Eweripitsj had been granted no hand in such matters.

Labor positions were available for only nine Ewer men during October. Each of the men who went has been identified as a younger man (less than 35 years) who had been previously striving to attain a position of influence and who had already succeeded to some extent. The 50 men decided among themselves who would fill these positions, hence these nine used their prior influence to override the others. Due to problems with equipment and supplies a cutback was made by I.S.S.A. in December, and the nine returned after completing only two months work. The men were paid only upon completion of the labor, each receiving about 8000 rp. (U.S. \$19.50) cash. They also brought back mosquito nets, tennis shoes, towels, and blankets which had previously been deducted automatically from their wages.

Despite the discrepancy (recognized by many of the men) between their expected and actual earnings, all professed pleasure with the amount received. However, it was in the reactions of the villagers to the tennis shoe "badges", and the brash and boisterous manner by which the nine walked about the village, that their increased prestige could be observed. All had participated in a unique economic activity in a distant location, in itself a prestigious event (Hayano 1973: 305-6). We believe that at least one, and perhaps two, of the nine men has subsequently become widely recognized as a Big Man in Ewer.

Baptis, Jiriman, and the other "officials" of the cult did not participate in the wage labor nor show interest in it. They have chosen a successful though alternate path toward becoming Big Men; many of those who engaged in labor are hopeful of achieving similar results. In the analytical background to this study we presented findings from other research (Lawrence 1967: 274-5; Finney 1969: 59-60; Vriens 1972; Counts 1971) which indicate that viable economic alternatives frequently are chosen over potential cargo cult activity. The problem for change agents concerned with integrating these people into the mainstream of development, a path irrevocably chosen by the Indonesian government for the Asmat, is in recognizing the pivotal position occupied by the Big Man in traditional as well as transitional society. Granted that cargo cult activity is not an acceptable alternative from a change agent's viewpoint, whereas wage labor is. Both alternatives share common ramifications which must be understood. The requirements for becoming a Big Man have not changed, nor should they necessarily, and we hope that our study has clarified the alternative paths available to the Asmat people at whom development is aimed.

NOTES

¹Both authors have had first-hand contact with the cult and its members, one (D.E.G.) through mission activities and the other (P.W.V.) through anthropological fieldwork.

²Kamma's book is based on his original pioneering study of 1954, De Messiaanse Koreri Bewegingen in het Biaks - Noemfoorse Cultuur-Gebied (The Hague: Voorhoeve). As quoted by LaBarre (1971: 32) Oosterwall states that Kamma provides ".... a model anthropological study on cargo cults especially the element of time and the important 'mythological' explanation" (emphasis Oosterwal's).

³We are indebted to Father Frank Trenkenschuh, O.S.C., for his valuable insights and encouragement in the preparation of this article.

⁴As simple Indonesian was widely understood in Ewer even at that time, it is very doubtful if confusion occurred between the two similar sounding words Tuhan and tuan. In local usage tuan is a term of respect applied to whites with the same connotations as the "masta" (master) used by Pidgin-speaking peoples of Papua New Guinea (q.v. Finney 1969: 65). But tuan is also used to refer to any Asmat man who is in charge of a household, fishing area, or sago ground--all areas of economic strength in Asmat society.

⁵Fortunately this was not done, as no scheme of reforestation is employed by the Asmat, and the sago area under control of Ewer (a relatively large village with a population of 774 at that time) are less plentiful than those of neighboring coastal villages. Such an action would have caused a severe and prolonged food shortage since new sago palms do not mature for about six years.

⁶These declarations were delivered just prior to Pepera, Irian Jaya's "Act of Free Choice", in August, 1969. Pan-Papuan, anti-Indonesian sentiments were strong in some areas of Irian Jaya at that time.

⁷During early November a gold-plated paten was stolen from the Ewer church, along with a small gospel book and confessional stole. All were returned two weeks later. Some people later reported Baptis had wanted to practice with these items, which he claimed to have received from Tuhan Tanah, since after the "great happening" Asmat people would be needed as pastors.

⁸When questioned in November, 1973, one informant in Omus said only that he "had heard" (sudah dengar) of those activities of 1969.

We invariably found that informants initially responding this way knew a great deal of specific information, which they were willing to reveal after rapport had been established.

⁹ This program was deemed vital because stringent Asmat taboos prevent childbirth in the home. Except for those who give birth in Agats' hospital, women give birth in the nearby jungle, frequently unassisted. The afterbirth is believed to be very dangerous. Among those Asmaters who speak Indonesian it is referred to only indirectly, as kakak (older sibling).

¹⁰ It is more likely that Sakarpitsj was maneuvering for his own advantage, recognizing that younger men do not have his advantage of being a tesmajipic. The full extent of his deception was not uncovered until November, 1973, when we learned that Emmanuel Jiminpitsj's death was commonly attributed to a curse cast by a powerful woman ndembero from jeu Jowijof, not to "overwork".

¹¹ At about this same time a teenage boy who had graduated from elementary school in a neighboring village came to the pastor in Ewer. He presented his diploma and asked that he be enrolled in Ewer's new Asmat pilot school.

¹² The snake which spoke to Pojuru is a new symbol in the cult complex. One informant told us he believed it to be Tuhan Tanah or perhaps another spirit. Meggitt (1973: 23, 28-9) cites examples where snakes have served as aids in achieving millenarian goals. Worsley (1968: 55-6) states that snakes have widespread importance in Melanesian cult doctrines, being commonly believed to be reincarnations of spirits of dead persons.

¹³ Informants clearly have repeated that Tuhan Tanah and the Christians' Tuhan Allah are not related. They are separate spirit entities.

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THE ASMAT BIS POLE: ITS BACKGROUND AND MEANING

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IKHTISAR :

Tulisan ini adalah ringkasan dari paper yang berjudul Arti dan Latar Belakang Falsafah Patung Mbis Suku Asmat, yang disusun oleh Abraham Kuruwaip untuk memenuhi Kurikulum S.T.T.K. untuk dapat dinyatakan lulus ujian akhir Sekolah Tinggi Theologi Katolik di Jayapura.

Kata mbis berasal dari mbiu atau ndat, yang berarti arwah orang yang telah meninggal dunia. Mbis adalah perwujudan kenyataan daripada mbiu yang tak kelihatan.

Menurut kepercayaan orang Asmat, arwah orang mati, terutama arwah Kepala perang dapat ditemukan kembali melalui pengukiran dan upacara patung mbis. Patung mbis diukir dari kayu fisak dan semkan. Patung itu diresmikan dan disucikan dalam suatu upacara dengan darah seorang musuh yang telah dipenggal kepalanya. Kemudian patung tersebut dicat dengan warna putih yang dibakar dari siput, warna merah dari batu kapur, warna hitam dari arang.

Dasar, arti dan makna patung mbis dan ukiran lain dalam dunia Asmat, berpangkal pada keyakinan dan pandangan yang telah berakar dalam dirinya.

Sesuatu yang diyakininya itu merupakan jawaban atas pertanyaan manusia yang existensial tentang dirinya sendiri. Pertanyaan itu timbul dari pengalaman peristiwa hidup sehari-hari, yaitu "Dari manakah dan kemanakah manusia itu, dari manakah keselamatan, sengsara dan maut".

Semua pertanyaan itu dirumuskan sebagai jawaban dan diyakininya sebagai sesuatu kekuatan Ilahi yang berada diluar batas kemampuan manusia. Kekuatan Ilahi itu disebutnya Samu atau Namu.

Samu itu mempunyai hubungan yang sangat erat hubungannya dengan mbiu atau arwah orang yang telah meninggal dunia. Mbiu, dengan bantuan samu mempengaruhi seluruh kegiatan hidup manusia. Karena itu, bila manusia mau hidup bahagia, ia harus mengukir sebuah patung manusia (mbis), agar arwah orang yang telah meninggal dunia itu datang dan membahagiakan manusia.

Patung mbis itu sesudah diukir diberi nama, sesuai dengan nama orang yang telah meninggal dunia. Dengan demikian patung mbis mempunyai arti dan

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In translating I have always rendered the Asmat word Mbis as Bis. The "M" is a linguistic expression used in writing Asmat and only confuses those not acquainted with the Asmat language. Also I have not included footnotes in the text as most of these are from the Indonesian literature listed in the bibliography at the end of the paper. - Translator.

pengaruh yang besar dalam masyarakat Asmat :

1. Mbis sebagai lambang kehadiran nenek moyang. Arwah nenek moyang ditemukan kembali melalui mbis dan mendapat pengaruh yang nyata dalam masyarakat.
2. Tanggung jawab dan balasan. Orang yang masih hidup harus mengukir mbis dan membunuh seorang musuh sebagai ganti saudaranya yang telah meninggal.
3. Lambang kekuatan hidup. Dengan mengukir mbis, orang memperoleh kekuatan hidup rohani dan jasmani.
4. Tanda kesuburan. Patung itu memberi kesuburan, justeru karena nenek moyang berada dibelakangnya dan memiliki benih2 kehidupan. Karena itu sesudah upacara mbis, orang membawa patung kedusun sagu sebagai pupuk.
5. Keindahan dan kenangan. Untuk mengungkapkan perasaan keindahan dan mengenangkan kembali serta meniru jejak hidup daripada kepala perang dan leluhur yang telah meninggal dunia.

Kesemuanya ini hanya mempunyai satu tujuan, yaitu memperoleh hidup yang lebih bahagia.

Part I. The general basis, meaning and function of Asmat carvings and art

Although it is true that Asmat carvings have their own unique basis, meaning and function within Asmat society, it is just as true that their art shares the basic principles of art found anywhere in the world (e.g. they also follow the "canons" of beauty, the art also serves to evoke images from the mind and memory of the observer, etc.)

Various factors are at work in the urge for artistic expression and creativity. The most obvious element is simply a desire for self-expression and self-satisfaction of the artist himself. This can be said to be a basic human drive since without it man's life has no purpose as human, as unique from lower animal forms of life. The need for self-expression is uniquely human and therefore common to all mankind.

A part of this need for self-expression (and therefore an urge for self-fulfillment or, in other words, a desire for happiness) goes deeper than merely material forms. The creative drive finds its expression in the creation of myths. A myth, here, may simply be defined as an attempt of man to answer

for himself and his fellows pressing questions which arise from the stark reality of life and death. The myth externalizes in artistic form the internal cohesion man evolves relative to his own existence. It is with "myth making" that men express their own understanding and grasp of their existence as finite and extremely limited.

In Asmat we find that there are two myths which encapsulate both the artistic urge and the painfully evolved awareness of their jungle existence. These are the myths concerning the origin of the Bis (as carving and as feast) and the Fumeripits Myth or the story of human creation. These are intimately related to Asmat's conception of life and death and their own cultural norms for present and ultimate happiness. It is possible to find in these stories the foundation for their culture and an expression of personal and communal awareness of the Asmat People.

Briefly this awareness is an expression of their conclusion that there must be something which transcends their own human limitations and adds power to ordinary existence (especially at the "crisis points" of existence such as birth and death). This transcendent power is attributed to their long-dead ancestors. It is believed that the souls of the ancestors remain present and active in daily life and so deserve and expect respect and attention from those still living in Asmat.

There is in the Asmat belief system an awareness that their ancestors (as described in their myths) are involved in every aspect of human existence: economic, social, political and religious. They express their reverence for the mythical (and, to them, real) ancestors by means of their carvings, their art. By their art they make a concrete act of faith in the abiding presence of the ancestors.

With this background it is obvious that they turn their artistic attention to material things basic to the daily existence of the Asmat people — the drum, the spear, the war shield, the large canoe and its paddles. If the ancestral world is involved in every aspect of mundane existence then their art testifies to this presence. For purposes of this general introduction I would like to briefly add six general comments :

- 1) Asmat carvings are symbols of the real presence of the ancestors in daily existence.
- 2) Carvings are signs to the ancestors and to the living that responsibility for un-avenged deaths has not been forgotten. They signify to the ancestors that they have not been forgotten and so avoid punishment by un-avenged ancestors. From this it is clear that their art is also part of their general "military strategy" of planning for warfare and revenge.
- 3) Asmat carvings are memorials to dead heroes which pay respect to these cultural heroes (especially the great war leaders) of the past.
- 4) Carvings promote both spiritual salvation and physical security of the Asmat people — since it is by means of these physical carvings that the ancestors are spiritually present and exercise their power to the advantage of the living.
- 5) Asmat carvings are expressions of beauty — intended by the artist to please the eye of the ancestral observers and so solicit their protective presence.
- 6) Carvings express the inner emotions and feelings of the Asmat people as well as their intellectual awareness of ancestral presence. This is especially clear in times of suffering, fear and joy when the emotions find concrete expression in artistic form.

Asmat Carvings as Symbols

Above I use the expressions "symbol" and "sign" which should be clarified for this discussion. If much of our conclusions hinge on the symbolic value of Asmat carvings and art it is essential to distinguish these symbolic concepts from the more common-place signs.

Briefly, and simply, a sign is always obvious in its meaning which is often not directly related to the sign itself. Red is a sign of danger. A red flashing light is a sign of danger on the highway. These, however, are arbitrary signs since red, in its essence, need not signify danger and does so only by convention. Natural signs are more obvious and essentially linked to their meanings ... smoke is naturally a sign of fire, the sun is naturally a sign of light.

Symbols are quite different. A concrete symbol is indeed visible and open to the five senses but what is symbolized is not obvious in itself and often difficult to discern. Usually a symbol's meaning is drawn from personal awareness and so has deep resonances. Briefly: A symbol is an expression of meaning without obvious relationship to its often hidden meaning.

Asmat art or carvings are in many ways signs but they are also symbolic expressions or symbols. What is produced has immediate sign value. The carving of a hornbill signifies that bird. What the carver symbolizes, however, is the fact that the year-bird (i.e. hornbill) eats fruit the way the Asmatter eats human flesh. The hornbill is therefore a symbol first of all Asmat (i.e. humans) and secondarily by application, a symbol of the war leaders. To grasp the signified meaning is easy. To grasp the symbolic concept the observer must be immersed in the daily existence and cultural dictates of the Asmatters who alone possess and define this symbolic value. Understanding of the symbol requires no less than grasping the culture, the personality and the basis of living shared by those who "own" the symbol.

A non-Asmat example may help to illustrate this meaning. To the Christian the cross is a symbol because Jesus Christ died on the Cross. In itself the cross, to those knowing crucifixion as a way of punishment or death, is a sign of death but to the believer in Christ, the cross symbolizes the Christian conception of life and death. Another example from the Christian tradition is the sharing of a meal — which in itself is a easily recognizable sign of fraternity. Only the Christian understands the symbolic value in the "breaking of the bread".

The same application within Asmat culture may be made of Asmat art and carvings. Like the Christian Cross, what is symbolized has sacred implications and is power-filled ... not so much in itself as in its relationship to or with the sources of power. This is true whether we speak of the Christian God or (in Asmat) the presence of the Ancestors.

Part II. The Bis Pole or Bis Ancestral Carving

The meaning of "BIS"

The Asmat word "bis" is derived from the word mbiu or ndat which is generally translated as the spirit or soul of the dead (this will be amplified later in the discussion of the Asmat concept of "spirit"). Bis itself defines a carving made of a person who has fallen in battle or even someone who has died under more normal circumstances.

In the Asmat belief system, the bis is the focal point for renewed contact with a dead person. In this sense the bis can be called a substitute for the dead person, thus associating the two words bis and ndat ... or mbiu. Extending this sense, the word bis also comes to mean the identification of such a memorial with the dead person himself.

The Asmat language lends itself to such multiple interpretations of a single word because the verb forms are often identical to noun forms. Thus, to illustrate, atakam is the verb "to speak". It also defines language (Asmat Atakam = Asmat language). It is also the noun form for "word". In a similar way the word ban means both "hand" and "to hold".

Within the cultural framework of Asmat, the Bis is defined as a memorial carving and a symbol of the abiding presence of the spirit(s) of the dead which effects a relationship between still-living and already-dead. Physically the Bis consists of several figures of humans, animals and objects carved one atop another with a large protruding wing carved from the "flying" root of the tree used for the carving itself. The lower portion of the bis is tapered in order to facilitate planting it in the ground upon completion. The bis can reach an impressive height of six to eight meters although smaller ones are made (especially now for commercial rather than religious purposes).

If the Bis is classified by its external appearance or size there are two types:

1. The large/temporary bis

The very large bis (as above mentioned, it can be up to six or eight meters in height) is considered to be temporary due to its brief use within the village or men's house. Shortly after the feast is finished the bis is removed from the village site to be placed to rot in the sago areas of the people and so to impregnate the sago with health through the power of the represented ancestral spirits. Occasionally such a pole is retained in the men's house (yew) which is the focal point of all village activities.¹

2. The small/permanent bis

Usually smaller versions of the bis are carved to be used in the village itself, especially in the men's house (yew). This is called "permanent" because it is retained inside the building rather than placed outside where the soft wood quickly rots. In this capacity it is called upon to obtain the assistance of an abiding spirit, especially in times of need such as before a battle, before the hunt, etc.

Each of these two types share the basic meanings within the Asmat culture. It is possible now to stress five points of meaning associated with the bis.

1. Symbols of Ancestral Presence

As will be more clearly developed throughout this presentation, the awareness of the continued and active presence of ancestors among the Asmat people gives rise to the bis feast and the bis carving or bis pole. The actual physical carving (in human form or animal representations such as year bird, kuskus, crow, etc.) symbolizes this belief. Such symbols are also found in the carvings on more ordinary objects of daily usage such as the canoe and its paddles, etc.

¹ YEW is the Asmat term for the Men's House or Bachelor House which also serves as ritual center. These buildings have been forbidden by the government since 1963. (Translator).

2. Reminder of Revenge-Obligation

Asmat society places great importance upon the obligation to revenge any death but especially the death of one killed in battle. The people feel a deep obligation to avenge a death by killing an enemy and so restoring the balance of their society. Failure in this obligation (especially in the cannibalistic feast following the killing) involves rendering the spirit impotent in his obligation to the on-going renewal of life among the Asmaters. Death becomes the seed of renewed life. This belief and sentiment is present especially in the carving and feast of the bis.

3. Physical and Spiritual Health

As mentioned above, the spiritual and material welfare of the Asmat people is associated with the presence of the spirits of the dead, especially the presence of mythical heroes among whom Fururipiti is the most important since he is the human creator of the visible world. The carving of the bis, associated with revenge killings and the cannibalistic feast, opens the relationship with the spirit world (the ancestral world) and so assures physical and spiritual security. The various decorations on the carving testify to this relationship. The praying mantis, year bird and crocodile figures represent fruit and meat eating animals which come to symbolize cannibalism and its involvement with life-renewing forces.

4. Fertility

Fertility is not merely central and important to human continuity (i.e. to the Asmat or "humans".) but is also essential to the animal world, to the sago areas and the abundant supply of sago within the trees. This association with fertility can be seen from the following:

- a) In the bis-cemen and the bis cen with literally means the penis and vagina of the bis.
- b) At the closing of the bis feast a general "celebration" of sexual intercourse is held by everyone participating in the feast.

- c) The bis is transported to the sago areas after the feast and implanted there to assure fertility of the sago trees.
- d) The turtle is frequently represented in the carvings since to the Asmatter the abundant turtle eggs symbolize ultimate fertility.

5. Beauty

As mentioned earlier the beauty-aspect of the carving appeals to the human need for beauty. In the bis, however, the elaborate painting and decorating of the finished carving (often imitating decorations common to the ancestor being recalled by the carving) also attracts the attention and full compliment of spiritual powers so assuring the desired security and warding off non-desired evil forces.

The Distribution of the Bis

According to researchers in the Asmat area, the Asmat people form at least three large groupings: the Bisman, the Simai and the Serao. The bis takes its origin from the Bisman group which lives between the Unir and Ertar rivers including the villages of Ewer, Sjurur, Yepem, Per, Wus, Biwar-Laut, Atsy, Amanankai, Yow, Ambisu, Damen, Atambutsy, Qmanescep and Ocenep. The word bis, as above mentioned, translates into both the carving and the spirits represented by the carvings. The word man means "to make" or "to work at". Bisman = Carvers of the Bis.

Although linguistically obvious, as well as clear from other factors, that the bis originates with the above mentioned villages, the bis and its feast also been adopted by the Simai groupings as well as the Serao peoples of the deeper interior. Due to differences in these territories there are also some variations in both the carving itself and the concomitant feast. In the latter two groups a different type tree is used and the feast (and the carving itself) is explained by different mythical tales.

The diffusion of the bis probably arises from the expansion of the Bisman people into the territories of the two other groupings through warfare.

On the other hand it seems clear that the people of the interior, usually of smaller villages, often came into contact with the coastal Bisman when they came to the sea to reap the more fertile area's bounty.

Although it is clear that the bis has now extended to the villages of Yaosakor, Kaimo, Os, Awok, Beco, Fos and Warkai, this diffusion process still requires further research. Such investigation would be of great value since we have been trying to demonstrate how clearly the bis is an indicator of Asmat cultural patterns, beliefs and customs.

Two Myths on the Origin of the Bis

Although there are many variations in the Myth of the Bis, I intend to use two main variants in this study. The first is that most closely associated with the villages of Atsj and Amanankai and the second originates from the villages of Ewer and Sjurur. The first story is told by Bai (of Atsj) and basically repeated by Powos, Yopoka and Namsempak (of Amanankai) as well as Qmanmak (or Qmanesep).

BIS ATAKAM: The Story of the Bis. (from Atsj area)

On the Siretsy river there was long ago a place called Sitan where a man named Beworpits and his wife Taweraut and their two children lived. Far away from Sitan, at the mouth of the Siretsy river, there lived two brothers whose names were Tawer and Seitakap. They lived in a difficult place where there was hunger and sicknesses as well as constant warfare.¹

Seitakap was a very outgoing and cheerful person who enjoyed causing excitement. Since their village was always in a real state of danger from attack, his brother Tawer constantly advised him to be more quiet. One day Tawer had hardly finished admonishing his brother to be quiet when both of

¹The Siretsy River derives its name from the word Surku which is a place of paradise without hunger or want. Beworpits is living in paradise while Seitakap does not.

them were confronted by the sudden appearance of a stranger. Beworpits had left Sitan to go hunting for some human flesh. As Beworpits quietly approached the two brothers he carefully observed his surroundings and knew that the village was empty except for the two brothers. At once he threw his spear and killed Seitakap. Tewel quickly escaped. Without delay Beworpits cut off Seitakap's head and sliced up his body. He loaded the head and the meat into his canoe and returned home toward Sitan. As he approached Sitan his wife saw him and welcomed him with great joy ... throwing white lime into the air to demonstrate her excitement.

From all ends of the village the people came running. Everyone accompanied the head of Seitakap to their men's house and began the feast of human flesh. They carefully divided the meat and threw Seitakap's bones into the fire to burn. They then began beating their drums and dancing.

Suddenly they heard a strange voice coming from the bones of Seitakap which were burning in the fire. The voice asked Beworpits about the songs that they were singing as they celebrated. Beworpits replied that they were singing the Daiso Song which celebrates the successful hunt. Seitakap then told Beworpits that from now on they must sing as he would teach them. Beworpits said that he was ready to learn the new song.

Seitakap began explaining that he was really not dead but that he had already made the canoe trip to the village of his ancestors to live with them. The place was to the west beyond the sea. He told them that he had taken the trip by way of the river Ayi² and so arrived in the place of his ancestors where everyone lived in peace and happiness.

The Ancestors had instructed him, he explained, to return and give to the people a new custom, a way of life which would keep them in relation with their ancestors. He explained that he was bringing a way of life which

²The River Ayi mythically connects the present world with the place of the Ancestors.

must be followed to assure happiness. He also brought a new song which should be used at the feast of human flesh:

SEITO - SEITO MBARA-MBARE
AYIA MBARA, MBOSEA MANO-MANO
SIREPA MBOSEA MANO-MANO

Seitakap-Seitakap, you have been lost
You went by way of the Ayi River
You have returned, you have returned
For me you have returned

Seitakap explained that the song was strictly taboo and could only be used by male adults and then with great reverence. He promised that the ancestors would always aid, protect and strengthen those who remained on earth so long as they would prepare a place or means of meeting with these ancestors. To do this they must make a carving of those who had died and give it the same name as that of the dead. If the dead man's wife and children are also dead, they too must be included in this carving. This would be the Bis.

Following the directions of Seitakap, Beworpits immediately cut down a tree and began making the first Bis carving. As the carving progressed all of the women went into the main house and began drumming and dancing. When the men had returned from the jungle with the tree all of the women resisted their entry into the village just as they would ward off an attacking enemy. In this way did the large log enter the village and the men's house. All of the men were then instructed to sing another new song before beginning their work on the bis.

MBIS NDIA IPA MBISA WAYA FAIMATSYI
YAKA NDIA IPA MBIS MBA, NDIA IPI WASAI NDIPIA
FININDIA IPA FEONA FARSYA NDIA IPI YEJU BANE-O

Bis ! Dance and hide with a peaceful heart
 Bis ! You have preceeded me and are now hidden
 You dance the dance that comes from your heart
 The hair on your head moves and there is a union between seen and
 unseen.

When they had sung this song they began to rough out the carving using only a stone axe. They first carved Beworpits' father who was already dead. Now on the command of the ancestors, Seitakap ordered them to santify the carving with human blood which they had drawn from the head and the body they had eaten. Seitakap told them that it was only with blood that the bis would become powerful and to their advantage.

From that day to this day the Asmat People have always made carvings of the dead and named them bis. They also make other carvings of men but these are not called bis but Kave or Kawenak.

From the village of Ewer an alternate myth explaining the origin of the bis was told by Gabriel Ewerpits and Saharpits. This account basically agrees with versions of the same story told by several carvers (i.e. wow ipits) of the village of Sjuru (David Simni, Wof, Safanpo, Yakai and Seicem).

BIS ATAKAM II: The Story of the Bis (Ewer-Sjuru area)

On the upper reaches of the Siretsy River there is a place called Kaimo. Long ago in Kaimo there lived a man named Darew and his wife, Mbis. They lived a contented and happy life. Mbis was an exceptionally beautiful woman who was very friendly and very kind. On the other hand, Darew had a terrible personality. Darew was very jealous and spiteful man who had a quick temper and was always angry. Darew married Mbis and from the first day of their marriage he, out of jealousy, absolutely forbade Mbis to leave their house. He covered his wife with a large sleeping mat and whenever he left the house he blocked shut the door.

Mbis' parents were named Beworpits and Toweraut. Darew had forbidden Mbis' parents and relatives even to visit the house. Mbis' family and even

everyone in the village resented this prohibition.

Mbis never was allowed outside the house. Darew himself went hunting and went out searching for food. He even prepared the food and gave it to Mbis. But in a short time Mbis grew more and more thin. Her health got worse and worse. The village people kept their distance from Darew and Mbis — partially because of this strange behavior and partially because Mbis' body was now terribly dirty and had a very foul odor because she could not go out to wash herself. The villagers advised Darew to change his ways but Darew merely gave them a cold shoulder and refused to pay any attention to them.

One day Darew went out fishing with some of the other people of the village. As usual Mbis had been left alone behind the closed door. Jumping at this occasion Mbis' relatives quickly opened the door and set her free. When they saw how very thin and weak she had become they all began to cry for her. Then they took her down to the river and gave her a good bath. Then they took her to their own house and gave her some new clothing.

After Mbis had eaten some good food they took her to the upper regions of the Siretsy river. For the trip they took along their fishing supplies and covered Mbis with a large sleeping mat on the floor of the canoe so that nobody could see her. An observer would suppose that they were going fishing. Mbis' family paddled the canoe as swiftly as possible in the hope that they would not meet any others who were out fishing.

They continued rowing until they reached the mouth of a small river called Sitan. Mbis got out of the canoe and began walking along the shore of the Sitan river. Without any delay her family set out to return to their village.

When her family had gone Mbis continued to walk until she was suddenly confronted by a large cassowary bird. She asked the bird, "Will you be my friend?" The Cassowary replied, "Yes, I will lead you and I will become your foster-mother I will lead the way and you will follow me". So Mbis and the Cassowary began their journey together.

By now Mbis' relatives had returned to Kaimo and saw that Darew had preceeded them to the village. From his canoe Darew saw that many trees had

just been cut down. He jumped out of his canoe and saw that the door to his house had been forced open. He was very excited and most unhappy. Slowly he entered his house and was surprised that Mbis was gone. He began to scream and to cry very loudly. Everyone heard his mourning and gathered around his house. They asked him what was the matter. He cried that his wife had gone and he didn't know where she was. The people began to mock him saying: "It's your own fault! Why did you lock her up in your own house?"

Mbis' family had come ashore and now told Darew that they themselves had set Mbis free. They told him that they had taken her upstream and released her at the Sitan river. After that, they told him, they had no idea where she had gone. Darew made no attempt to reply and merely continued his weeping day and night. Finally he became very sick and his voice left him (because of his crying). He died in his house and the people left his body there to rot.

All this time Mbis and the Cassowary were walking day and night. Mbis began to feel very hungry and finally asked the bird for some Sago. The Cassowary offered some Sago to Mbis but refused to eat anything for itself. They then began to walk again until they heard some sort of a weak noise such as that made by a large boat. The sound was not clear but Mbis and the bird began walking toward its source. (They later found that the noise came from a man called Pupurpits who was blowing a bamboo horn).

Mbis and the Cassowary rested for the night but at dawn they began to search for the source of the sound. They went for three days and for three nights and finally they knew that they were near to the source of the sound. They saw that it was coming from the top of a very tall Yimenbot tree.

Near the tree they saw a man and his wife who were the parents of Pupurpits. They were gathering firewood. As Mbis and the Cassowary saw this, Mbis hid behind a tree as the Cassowary approached Pupurpits' parents. Tewelaut saw the Cassowary and yelled to her husband who at once tried to spear the bird. The Cassowary fled into the jungle but then again returned and showed itself to Beworpits, Pupurpits' father and his mother, Tewelaut. Beworpits again tried to spear the bird who again ran into the jungle for a second time. Beworpits tried to circle behind the cassowary.

As soon as Beworpits had gone in search of the bird, Mbis showed herself to Tewelaut and told her that her name was Mbis. The woman replied, "My name is Tewelaut and my husband's name is Beworpits. He isn't here now. He is hunting a cassowary". A second time Mbis said, "My name is Mbis. My mother's name is also Tewelaut but she is from Kaimo. The bird your husband is trying to kill is my foster mother".

At this Tewelaut called to her husband and when he came she explained everything to him. They all sat down together and cried. Then they returned to their house. When they arrived in the village Tewelaut and Mbis remained in the canoe while Beworpits went toward the house. Everyone asked him, "Beworpits ... where is your wife?" He replied, "She is sick and stayed in the canoe". Then the people left him alone and Beworpits called to Tewelaut and Mbis telling them to come ashore. They left the canoe and went straight into the house where they concealed Mbis beneath a sleeping mat.

Then they went and called Pupurpits for the evening meal. When Pupurpits came down from the tree Beworpits replaced him and continued to blow the bamboo horn. As Pupurpits sat down to eat, his mother suddenly threw back the sleeping mat and exposed Mbis to his view. Thus Pupurpits and Mbis were married.

That night the village people continued to hear the sound of the bamboo horn. They knew that whoever was blowing the horn it couldn't be Pupurpits but had to be someone else. The next morning everyone gathered by Beworpits' house and started to ask who was blowing the horn last night. Pupurpits replied that Beworpits had been blowing the horn. At the same time he announced that his parents had given him a bride. She was a young beauty from the village of Kaimo whose name was Mbis. At once several women from the village who had hoped that they would marry Pupurpits came out and tried to drive Mbis from the village. Pupurpits drove them away from his house.

Some time later Mbis decided to go fishing. Pupurpits remained home and dreamt about the face of his beautiful wife. He tried to think of a way that this beautiful woman could always remain near him. To fulfill his wish, he found a piece of wood and carved a statue which looked just like Mbis.

He named the carving Mbis.

Everyone who saw what Fupurpits had done at once began to imitate his actions. They all carved statues of those who were not present at that time. They called these carvings Mbis although each carver also gave a particular name to his own carving, recalling the name of the person remembered by the Mbis.

From that day to this very day the Asmat people carve the Mbis.

If we try to evaluate these two myths and view their respective differences, it seems clear that the first story is a more direct answer to the existential questions of the Asmat people. It seems to apply more concretely to the reality of the situation which confronts the Asmat people: it answers their fears, explains enemy situations, provides concrete regulations, provides for social cohesion and offers hope for the future of the people.

Obviously Seitakap is attempting to initiate and provide a tradition. He sets down regulations for a feast which is, at base, to provide a linkage between contemporary Asmat man and the ancestral world. In other words the bis and its feast intends to provide a transcendental relationship with the non-visible world.

If this is true than the first myth (Atsj-Amanamkai) is for the Bisman group a central myth which provides a succinct formulation of man, his place and his life in this world. The second myth (Sjuru-Dwer) is interesting but seems to be superimposed on an already existing pattern and so is not concerned with the definition of that pattern — which is the case of the first myth.

The Bis as a Human Figure

Within the complex of Asmat art we find many motifs such as recurrent animal themes, physical objects, etc. It is, however, in the human figure itself that we find Asmat art's central motif. It is in the bis itself that both the external and internal expressions of "Asmat Anthropology"

become evident. The actual human carving and its decorations is merely a testimonial to superficial evidence. There is, however, an implied meaning associated with the carving which is not externally or obviously present. This is, as said above, the symbolic meaning, the integrated reply to the existential questions arising within Asmat society. This is, of course, more obvious in the actual execution of the carving and the essential celebration of the concomitant feast. The feast interprets the meaning of the concrete manifestation of the feast ... the bis itself.

Within the complex of the feast the Asmatter affirms that man does indeed rule the world - both physical and spiritual. It affirms the relationship of these (i.e. spiritual and material) and the relationship or continuity of the present with the past. The feast is an exposition of these tenets of Asmat culture.

Identification of the Bis and its Various Parts

The bis pole or carving consists of three distinct parts: the bis-anakat or main body of the carving; the bis cemen or penis of the bis (the wing-like projection) and the ci and bino or canoe and base portion used to "plant" the bis in the ground. Each of these three main parts have many minor parts:

- I. Bis Anakat or body of the bis which is the central figure or theme of the carving. Its most distinctive parts are :
 - a) Fin or body hair including pubic regions as well as head-hair. This is always painted black (charcoal) associated with the color of many birds as well as the color of the Asmatter's skin.
 - b) Wakanbai — the mark or ridge delineating the hair from the forehead. This is usually red in color.
 - c) Umubiyof — the decoration of the nasal area.
 - d) Ripaneu — wood or shell as nasal decoration.
 - e) Uwi — ear decorations, usually made of the leaves of the sago palm.

- f) Sep — this designates the arm itself but the word itself actually means the upper bone of the arm.
- g) Kanter — the feet of the bis carving.
- h) Kiki — lines carved and colored to represent the location of the bones in the human body.
- i) Yirfopin — semi-circular cuts which represent the breast/chest area.
- j) Cemen — penis.
- k) Cen — vagina.
- l) Yipa — carving of a child placed above the main figures on the bis.

Each of these, unless otherwise described, is usually painted red color (water mixed with red clay). The remainder, i.e. largest body portions, is made white by application of wet lime.

II. Bis Cemen or Penis of the Bis

This entire section, which appears as an ornate "wing" protruding forward from the top of the figure is called the Bis Cemen (literally the carving's penis). It is basically a phallic/fertility symbol as the source of life-enriching forces. This is heavily decorated with human figures, birds, human heads, etc. Its various parts are :

- a) Yir-Mbikokom — the head/beak of the Yearbird (Hornbill).
- b) Okon — the lowest section of the "wing" which is usually triangular in shape.
- c) Bua — the mouth which appears either as a circle or as a square (in which case it is called Bianam).
- d) Doukus — human head; often many heads are included in the carving, probably representing the enemies who were killed by the represented war leader.
- e) Asukfofsi — the tail of the Kuskus (marsupial opossum like animal), the spine of the crocodile or fish. These represent the bravery of the war leader.

- f) Yanmak — ears which are represented by carved circular figures.
- g) Yanpo — the lower portion of a bird's neck — usually carved in triangular form with the point upward.
- h) Tanampo — the opposite side of the yanpo (cf. above).
- i) Yamsenkam — the point of contact between the main body of the carving (i.e. bis-anakat) and this penis section (bis-cemen).

III. Ci and Bino — The lower portion and canoe figure.

The word ci means "canoe" while bino merely designates the sharpened lowest portion of the bis which is stuck into the ground to hold the bis upright. Often within the small canoe (ci) a sago bowl is carved (suunkus) as an offering of food to the ancestral world by the family of the newly deceased.

The Bis-pokmbui or the Feast of the Bis

The Bis-pokmbui or Bis Feast is celebrated at the request of a war leader and the concurrence of the family of the recently deceased in whose honour the feast is to be held. The feast develops in stages and usually lasts six or seven months from beginning to end. The stages of the feast are associated with the various phases of progress in the actual carving process of the bis. Using these phases the feast can be divided into six more or less distinct units:

1. The Opening of the Feast

The feast actually begins at the time when there is agreement that a bis should be carved. At that time the war leader blows the bamboo horn and gathers all the males together in front of the yew (men's house). He commands all the men to decorate their bodies and to re-paint their canoes. After this has been completed all of the men go into the jungle to search for the proper tree to be used for the carving. They depart from the village amid much shouting and excitement just as if they were going into battle. The women remain in the village and, contrary to normal times, enter the men's house to drum, dance and sing. The dance at this stage is called Ndi.

When the men have found and agreed upon the desired tree, they are divided into three groups. One group is sent to the sago area to gather young sago leaves. The second group goes ashore near the tree and begins to clear out the undergrowth in the area around the tree. The third group remains in their canoes to act as guards.

When the first group has returned with the bunches of young sago leaves, they begin to tie these leaves to the trunk of the tree. Once the tree is properly decked out in these leaves the men return to the village site where the war-leader orders everyone to go into the jungle to cut down sago trees which will then fill with sago grubs (i.e. the larvae of the capicorn beetle ... from the time the tree is cut until the larvae are properly developed takes from 30-40 days. Translator). This terminates the first phase of the feast.

2. The Transport of the Bis Tree

The second phase of the feast begins when the villagers have returned to the village from the sago areas. Again amid the din typical before a battle and with full body decorations the men leave for the spot where the tree has been prepared. The women return to the men's house as soon as all the men leave the village and again begin drumming and dancing as before.

When the men have arrived in the place where the bis-tree has been singled out and decorated, some are again sent out to fish, others to gather more sago leaves and still others to hunt the bird Bakapeor (which is a type of yellow sparrow). The rest of the men who remain are further divided into two groupings coinciding with the two sections of the men's house. One group goes ashore to prepare to load the log and the others remain in their canoes in preparation for mock battle with those who will later load the log into the canoes.

These who have gone ashore approach the tree as if they were approaching an enemy. The war leader, who is carried on the shoulders of his relatives, on a sign from his in-laws and relatives, climbs onto the tree.

He then lists the name of six enemies that he has personally killed. He then makes a few chops at the tree and comes down. He is immediately replaced by another war leader who recounts the name of five enemy that he has killed. He also chops at the tree with his axe. This process is repeated until the tree finally tumbles down.

Once the tree has fallen, those ashore simulate battle with those who have remained in their canoes. This "battle" continues until those who have gone fishing and hunting return to the site. At that time they place human and cassowary bones on the log and some spears. They then decorate the log with the sago leaves and tie the fish and birds to the log. When this decoration is completed the main war leader measures out the log for the bis carving and so determines at this point the carving's ultimate length. Another war leader then begins cutting at the designated spot but then stops and enumerates several more enemies who he has slain. The cutting is then turned over to another war leader who finishes the cut. Before they take a rest they cut off a portion of the very top of the tree to use in carving a small canoe and a sago dish (ambasos).

3. The Return to the Village

After a brief rest period they drag the log to their canoes to carry it back to the village. If the bis will be a small carving it is placed inside the canoe itself for the trip. If it is to be a very large pole it must be tied to the canoe and towed to the village site. When they near the village they approach very quietly and slowly.

4. The Reception of the Bis in the Village

All during this period the women have remained drumming and dancing in the Yew. When they hear the approach of the men some of the women run from the men's house and hide themselves behind the reeds along the river bank. Once they see the men approaching they run from their hiding places and return to the yew to report to those who had remained drumming. Everyone grabs for weapons (spears, knives, sticks, etc.) As the men approach the shore in front of the men's house the women initially pretend that they are unaware of

their arrival but finally they begin to throw ashes and lime into the air.

The war leader sees this display and shouts at the women, "Who is in our place?" The women refuse to answer and so the war leader repeats the question a second time. One of the main women comes from the yew and asks, "Who are you? This is the place of our ancestors!" When the men hear this reply they begin to beat the sides of their canoes with their paddles to frighten the women with the resulting din. The men withdraw a bit and allow the women to leave the men's house and then they come ashore. As they leave their canoes they are met by a fierce attack of the women using their sticks, spears, etc. During the "battle" some of the men frequently receive serious wounds.

When the attack has ended the women return to their own houses and the men drag the pole into the men's house and place it on the bark of a tree called yimenbot.

5. The Carving Process within the Men's House

After properly positioning the log on the bark mat, the war leader himself begins to chip at the pole to form the rough outline of a human figure(s). He then enumerates ten enemy he has personally slain.

Once the rough outline of the figure(s) is finished the actual carving is turned over to an expert carver or carvers. The process of finishing out a rough outline of the finished project is then completed by these artists. When this phase is completed the log is carried into a specially prepared room partitioned off within the yew (men's house) which is called the ecawor. It is in the relative privacy of this room that the finishing touches are made section by section. Each section has its own ceremonial observances associated with the progress of the carving.

6. Rituals Observed During the Carving Process

Since the bis is divided into three main sections, so there are separate rituals associated with the carving of each of these sections:

A. Ritual for the Bis-Cemen

The first area to be finished out is the bis-cemen (i.e. phallic section). At this point all of the men gather to give a proper name to the bis itself. The name coincides with the name of the victim or dead person who is commemorated by the carving and the feast. When the formal name has been given all of the carvers and the guards are fed by the family of the person in whose honor the carving is being made.

When the naming process is completed the artists then finish the cemen-section in its final form. During this time the family of the remembered person hunts for a pig and brings it into the men's house. The women are invited to share the meat. This again becomes an occasion for a mock battle which lasts far into the night.

To close this portion of the feast the villagers go out to gather fish, sago, sago grubs, etc. The food is divided throughout the village and the cemen-phase of the feast is terminated.

B. Ritual for the Bis-Anakat

The trunk of the carving (i.e. bis anakat) is the next section to be completed. This usually consists of several carved human figures, both male and female. As the trunk nears completion the war leader summons the men to announce that the village should prepare for war. The men then leave in search of an enemy and the carvers continue to proceed with the final section of the carving (ci and bino).

When the warriors return to the village with human flesh and the human heads taken in battle, they draw off all the blood from their victims and "sanctify" the entire carving by rubbing it with human blood. Special attention and care is given to the vital organs of the carved figures: eyes, mouth, sexual organs, etc.

When this feast is completed the war leader again orders everyone to the jungle to cut down more sago trees to prepare for sago grubs. From this time to the termination of the feast there is drumming and dancing everynight. As before, from the time the tree is cut until the grubs are "ripe" takes 30-40 days. This determines the duration of this phase of the feast.

C. Ritual for the Ci and Bino

This is the closing phase of the entire feast. The war leader sends the people into the jungle to spend four days preparing sago. They return to the village and gather all the food inside the men's house. The next day the women return to the sago area to "harvest" the sago grubs from the trees which had been cut a month earlier. These grubs are taken first to the individual homes and wrapped in the towusbirim leaves and then carried into the men's house.

On this same day as the grubs are being gathered the men finish the bis and paint it with the red, white and black paint, as described above.

Toward evening of that day everyone gathers in front of the yew and all the food is divided and carried back to the private homes. All again return to the men's house.

At this point the bis, newly completed and brilliant in fresh colors, is carried from its special room (ecawor) into the main section of the yew and placed on the floor. Several men rip off a section of the roofing of the house and partially elevate the pole to display it to those gathered in front of the yew. This results in a general mourning for the dead who are commemorated by the carving.

When the crying has stopped everyone returns to their houses to get their drums. They begin dancing and singing and drumming until daylight. At this time everyone has sexual intercourse.

After daybreak and the end of the drumming and intercourse session the bis is taken from the men's house and moved to its predetermined spot in the sago area. Before the men return to the village after erecting the bis in the sago grove, they break off the hand of the carving so that the bis will be unable to obstruct anyone passing near the spot in his travels.

When this group returns to the village the feast of the bis is considered finished without further ado.

Part III. Interpretation of the Bis and its Background

Interpreting the Myths of Origin

When we generalize and say that the bis is a portrait of the over-all plan of the life and death of an ancestor, we also generalize and say that the bis myth is a portrait of the origins, life and destiny of man himself. As we have seen above, this is true because especially in traditional societies the myth is firmly implanted in the consciousness of the society and provides basic answers to the questions of man's limited existence.

In comparing the two bis myths (i.e. from Atsj area and from Ewer area) we concluded that especially the first (i.e. Atsj area's) myth most clearly attempts to confront existential questions. Although we cannot point to or posit a scientific approach within the myth (i.e. the myth does not provide a systematic, sequential and logically patterned answer) we can conclude that the myths do embody an Asmat philosophy or anthropology. In "interpretation" of the myths we are really looking for the Asmat's life views: his cosmological, ontological and anthropological insights.

Initially it can be said that Seitakap and Tewel, in the first myth, symbolize or represent all mankind. The earth itself is man's abode which, according to the Asmat conception, has existed for men from eternity. Man arrives in an already existing universe. Man simply appears from Safan through the cooperation of three forces: parents, ancestors and generalized life-giving powers (which could also be called "creative energy" or absolute power which will be discussed below).

Safan is the world of those who formerly inhabited the earth (i.e. lived in Asmat). It is also the "kingdom" of the ancestors which is situated simply across the sea, to the west. The cyclic existence is clear: man is born in Asmat, he grows and dies to enter the stage of ancestral existence from which he returns in guise of "life giving power" for those still in Asmat.

This is a continuous and cyclic process: man is born, lives and dies. At death he enters a second level of earthly existence previous to settlement in the place of the ancestors. Movement from this plane of existence

(intended to be temporary) depends upon the activity of those relatives who still live. They must celebrate a special sharing of food, etc. so that the departed soul can continue its journey through to the ancestral abode.

Once the soul has arrived in Safan he is "made complete" by the action of the ancestors and so is enabled to return to the first level of existence at the time of the bis celebration. This return from the third level of existence to the first or earthly level of existence enables him to enrich and assist those still living. If no remembrance is made, no bis celebration is held, new life and happiness cannot flow into human existence from the ancestral world.

Interpretation of the background of the bis and its mythological setting leads us to conclude that for the Bisman there are three levels (or phases or places) of existence:

1. The Contemporary World or Place of the Living

The world is typified in the myth by the place of Seitakap and Tewateraut (Tewer = Tewateraut) which is located near the mouth of the Siretsy river. This is typified as a place of fearful existence, war, suffering, and finally death as the ultimate threat. These difficulties arise from the second level of existence which can be overcome by aid of those in the first and third levels of existence. However difficult a place this world may be, it is also a place with a potential for happiness due to the assistance of the ancestral beings.

2. The World of the Dead

The world of the dead is intended to be a very temporary place depending on the concern of a few people who continue as relatives at the first level of existence. Within the myths this is Sitan, the home of Beworpits, which is considered an evil place. All spirits who are forced by neglect of the living to remain permanently in Sitan are considered dangerous — the cause of all the suffering and difficulties on level I (i.e. the contemporary world). These permanent dwellers also try to prevent new spirits from leaving, from progressing to the final level or the ancestral abode.

This shows the importance of the common meal which must be celebrated by the relatives in order to allow the dead to make the transition as swiftly as possible.

Death is personified by Beworpits. Death is always present in the world. This is represented by the arrival of Beworpits at the place of Seitakap and Tewer. Death can be avoided or resisted only through the assistance of the ancestors. Man with his own means and efforts is helpless in the face of death. As Beworpits follows Seitakap's directions to celebrate the bis feast, the myth tells of the subjection of death to the higher powers of the ancestors who communicate the essential life forces for continued existence.

In the bis celebration, as in any communal feast, individual man must put aside his personal concerns and join with his fellow men — here to obey the commands of the ancestors. Although not directly found in these myths of the bis, it is clear that this communal effort does release life-forces in the myth of creation, the Fumeripits Myth (cf. below). Fumeripits cannot be seen or sensed by man's five senses, but is represented as the sound of wind or the air around us (as described by his name ... fum = wind or sound; ipits = man). Fumeripits is the personification of the soul of man.

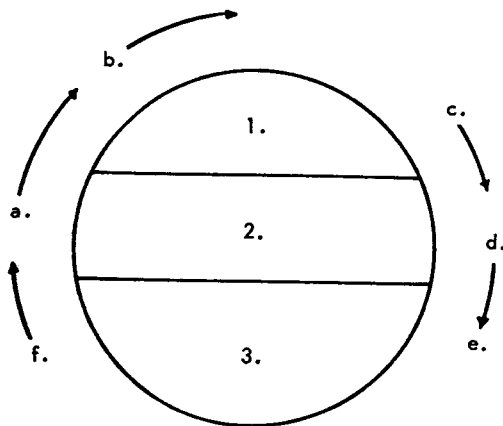
3. Ancestral World: Surku

The ancestral world is to the west across the sea. It is a place without any deprivation, without suffering or death. It is a place of permanent peace and happiness. All men are intended to enter this place but in order to reach the goal they require assistance of the life-forces accessible only through contact with those living in the ancestral world. This contact is made through the recent dead who act as mediators of this life-force. This is most clearly achieved through the bis feast.

The two myths recounted above contain, in addition to the pattern for the feast, the basics of an "Asmat Ethics". Simply stated, all Asmaters (i.e. humans) must resist evil and seek what is good. For that reason whatever occurs during the bis feasting cannot be considered evil, although from outside standards there may be elements which are considered evil.

This ethical view will be further developed later, but for the present it is important to observe that the bis is part of the search for goodness, part of the means to the ultimate end.

To summarize the Asmat view of the world this drawing may be of some assistance in understanding graphically their conception:



- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. The world of the living | d. Life, usually temporary, in the world of the dead (may be permanent) |
| 2. The world of the dead | e. Entry into the world of the Ancestors |
| 3. The world of the Ancestors | f. Relationship with the living by means of the recent dead. |
| a. Man is born into this world | |
| b. The Progression of life in this world | |
| c. Death - terminating human existence | |
- 2 + 3 "The other side of the sea" or safan.

Although most of the above conclusions are drawn from the first myth, it is also possible to see basically similar beliefs typified in the alternative account of the origin of the bis (i.e. concerning Mbis and Darew). These two personify again good and evil. The initial view of their situation

is a happy one until their marriage where Darew comes to personify evil and Mbis to personify goodness. Darew has a proud and possessive attitude which excludes and is mindless of others and their rights. He also desires goodness but, in fact, he resists its achievement by his own actions ... demonstrating that good and evil are mutually exclusive.

Bis is the personification of goodness. As the story opens it appears that evil could be a way to happiness (i.e. for Darew in keeping Bis to himself). But it quickly becomes apparent that Darew's grasp on Bis is impossible to maintain. Goodness, which was suppressed in Bis's imprisonment, comes to the fore and triumphs over evil (Darew). It is Darew and not Bis who dies of unhappiness. The moral is obvious: do not live as Darew did, but follow the example of Bis.

The story also demonstrates that goodness can be achieved only after initial suffering. The place of happiness is distant but with communal effort and assistance (i.e. the Cassowary Bird) it is possible to arrive there. Pupurpits and his distant horn are symbolic of the call of all that is good ... which Bis achieves in her marriage with Pupurpits.

To perpetuate this lesson the second myth enjoins the making of the bis. When someone wishes to seek happiness, the story says, let them carve a bis which will be an effective symbol of happiness. It is an effective symbol because it will attract the interest of the ancestral world which will make the goal possible.

The Bis Carving

As repeated above, all mankind questions human existence. No single or complete answer can ever be formulated (not even from our sciences) that will be universally and entirely satisfactory. The questions are asked by all men everywhere and, accordingly, the answers vary from one group to another. Gradually answers emerge within any given area or grouping which are generally accepted and so enter into the cultural framework. The bis carving and its feast is part of Asmat's answer in their quest for an intelligible universe.

The celebration of the bis feast is religious in character. It provides an opportunity and occasion for the Asmatter to see himself as clearly as possible. During the feast the Asmatter's human identity, physical and spiritual, is again promulgated and clarified.

To help clarify the Asmat outlook it would be helpful to consider briefly the role of the Fumeripits myth within the general framework of which the bis is integrated. The Asmatter believes that Fumeripits, their "creator" is the primary source of life-giving power. It is Fumeripits who shares some small portion of his personal powers with the "lower" ancestors at the time of bis celebrations. A brief summary of the basic Asmat creation myth is as follows.

The first men were created from wood by the creator whose name is Fumeripits. At that time there was nobody on the face of the earth. Fumeripits saw this and then gathered together his tools to carve wooden figures of human form ... both male and female. He then placed these carvings in a yew which he had personally built. He then sat down again and carved an em (drum) which he began to beat as he danced to and fro in the men's house. At the beat of the drum all his wooden carvings began to move and finally to follow the dance to the beat of Fumeripits' drum. As these carvings danced they began to become flesh and blood, to become Asmat or Human Beings. These first humans became the original ancestors of the Asmat people. They moved to the sea and still live there in a place of happiness and continue to assist in the process of creation of new human life.

To understand this continual process of creation -- in the context of the bis and Fumeripits myths -- it is important to understand Asmat's "psychology" or analysis of the soul-life principle.

In Asmat analysis man consists of the visible, solid, matter. He also has a soul (ndat) and a human "essence" which is samu or ndamu/namu. The body is formed by intercourse of male and female partners. The body becomes the focal point of unity between ndat and ndamu (soul and essence). The body also serves as the visible point of contact with the ancestors. The human body is considered no more than matter and so can be identified with a tree. This is clearly related to the Fumeripits account which attributes the

origin of the human race to wooden figures.

At death of this material body, life, for the Asmatter, continues in the form of a shadow or spirit called ndat. The ndat depends upon a deeper principle of life which is designated ndamu or samu. There is a more commonly used word juwus which roughly translates as life principle-life essence just as ndamu or samu. To simplify the discussion I will use the more common term, Juwus, for this life-essence

Only human beings have Juwus as well as ndat. The uniqueness of the human being lies not in the ndat but in the co-existence (with ndat) of juwus in a living human being. Material things and other creators do not possess juwus. Although man is identified with a tree, especially the sago palm tree, the tree is never considered to have juwus.

All living and growing objects (such as a tree) have their own spirit (ndat). They do not have, or are exclusive of the presence of juwus which differentiates the human from non-human forms. The increase and decrease of ndat in non-human forms follows its own rules so that the death of such an object (animal or plant) occurs as ndat decreases and finally is "used up".

Following another set of rules, the same increase-decrease principle is at work in human beings. A man is said to be healthy when there is a strong bond or relationship uniting the juwus and the ndat. When the relationship weakens or is totally broken for brief periods of time a person is said to be sick. When juwus completely leaves the body for a long period, and so confuses the ndat, a person is said to be unconscious. Finally, if Juwus leaves completely and manages to extract with it the ndat, then a person dies. Juwus rejoines a generalized "life force" from which it originated and ndat becomes the shade or spirit. It is this spirit (ndat) which is contacted by means of the bis feast. Juwus cannot be represented in carvings by man or reached by means of these carvings.

Juwus seems to be but one small part of the "generalized life force" which is transcendent, which cannot be approached by humans (not even by the powerful ancestors). This provides another reason why the bis cannot assist in contacting the juwus. The inaccessibility of Juwus explains why it is

technically impossible for the ancestors to raise from the dead someone who has already died.

Juwus and ndat are united only in the process of conception. When a woman has already conceived -- i.e. is obviously pregnant -- the ndat and juwus join together and enter the woman's body by way of the vagina under the guise of a spirit. They take up residence in the body already prepared in the womb of the woman. The Asmaters believe that this spirit (i.e. ndat-juwus combination) come from the spirit world -- for example, from the jungle where many spirits are in daily evidence.

Although not immediately evident from the above, it seems that the principle that from death there emerges life is also active in this understanding of the "soul". This becomes clear in daily Asmat life as they interpret it. When a breadfruit fruit rots or a bean dries it becomes seed. The planted seed which has "died" become the occasion for new life. It is with this line of reasoning that the Asmatter concludes the bis feast with human killings -- through death to gain strength and receive life. This concept shoots through all of Asmat cultural understanding.

What is evident to the Asmat people is that life does seem to grow and then to diminish, to weaken and finally to disappear. The principle of life can be strengthened -- as in the bis feast and in the killing and cannibalistic feasting - increased and intensified.

Although the above is not unique to Asmat and some such belief is shared by many traditional societies, they do see the heirarchy of life. Life is multileveled. Man holds the highest form of the life forces. Other living and also inanimate objects hold lesser grasp on these life forces.

Bis Pokmbui: An Analysis of the Bis Feast

To understand the bis-feast there are two areas of analysis possible -- first the rituals or celebrations themselves and secondly the bis as a portrait of man's ongoing struggle.

1. The Celebration-Rituals of the Bis Feast

The Ancestors have two main obligations in their relationship with the living. They must maintain the spiritual bond existing between the living and the dead and they must protect the continuity of the people and their way of life. It is because of this relational obligation on the side of the ancestors that the people approach the feasting with serious and reverent attitudes. To disregard the cultural regulations would place in jeopardy the existence of the world by threatening the relationship with those whose obligation it is to maintain existence.

Since the word religion comes from religio -- basically relationship -- this is a religious attitude. In some instances the request for aid from an ancestor takes on an almost prayer-like character. Their songs and dances also have many prayer-like characteristics. These formulations are directed to the ancestors. The accompanying actions (feasting) makes possible the real contact and so become religious ritual.

Ritual is defined as sacred actions which bring man into a relationship with a power which he believes in, in order to obtain favors or grace in his search for happiness. Dr. J. Verhaar defines ritual as "A sacred action of religious man with which he receives invisible grace hidden in visible signs". The Asmat feasting, especially the bis feast, is such a religious ritual of religious man.

The bis feast is extremely long and actually consists of a series of rituals or celebrations. Within these related (temporally and thematically) rituals the Asmat express their belief in the ancestors as the source of health and happiness -- and actuate the relationship which makes this possible. The central ritual or its meaning is (in a liturgical fashion) one of praise and honor for the ancestors which will elicit their favour.

2. The Bis as a Portrait of Human Struggle

By interpretation of the various phases of the feast and the groupings involved (and their interactions) we are afforded an insight into the Asmat view of the human struggle.

The first primal grouping is that of male and female. When the men go to the jungle to find the log for their carving, the women move into the men's house (yew). They both come to represent the two principles found in every society and every individual: good and evil. The men represent the good elements while the women represent the evil. Good always strives to resist evil but it is an ongoing struggle. This identification of woman with evil is not unique to Asmat since, again, many of our traditional societies make this equation. Woman is dangerous, insignificant and lacking in all real ability.

Several times throughout the feast the women simulate battle with the men. They act out this struggle between good and evil. The men who represent the good in man and the world approach the women, retreat again, fall back, attack again. Ultimately it is the men who win and who force the women to retreat. One loss is celebrated for evil and one win is celebrated for goodness.

When the women have been defeated, progress on the carving begins. This is progress on the "road to salvation". It is because of the men's victory that the feast can continue. As if to demonstrate that one victory is not the final victory over evil, other mock battles do the celebration as reminders that the struggle must be constant. Through men's life and the history of the world the struggle continues. The ultimate completion of the bis forshadow the ultimate victory.

In contrapoint to this motif is the theme that from death life emerges. This is clearly the case in the final intercourse. Victorious man (good) unites with killed/defeated women (evil) to bring forth a new generation of mankind. This is also associated with the Asmat belief that the continuity of the society depends upon the death of the enemy. It is in the defeat of evil (death) that life is possible.

Part IV. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

From all the above it is sufficiently clear that in this one feast and its mythical basis the Asmat people encapsulate their outlook on life and their own limited existence. The explanations that the Asmat people offer

through the bis feast are actually the result of deep reflection and are clearly rooted in the concrete reality of the Asmat's daily existence. By confronting the real world the Asmat people gradually evolved conclusions which became formulations of belief. These formulations, in myth and ritual, entered into the cultural dynamics to form the nucleus of their way of life.

In the above study I have attempted to demonstrate that the bis (ceremony or feast as well as resulting carving) is a concrete answer to existential questions concerning man's nature, his life, his sufferings and death. The answers emerged only gradually, it is presumed, but did eventually emerge in their own history to form a fundamental outlook and system of belief.

This system of belief includes the central concept of a universal life force which is the origin of all which lives, all that is good, and of all strength and health of the living. This is the Juwus. This life force, associated with the continual support from the ancestral world, is worked into the framework of daily Asmat life by way of laws and customs. So is Asmat continuity and survival assured.

Thus was Asmat when outsiders arrived 20 years ago. It is important that we outsiders be aware of this background. The Asmaters are not a blank page on which we are "invited" to write. They have a complex cultural pattern which has worked for them and which has guaranteed their continuity. If we seriously hope to offer the Asmat people a new system of education, a new type of economic system, a new religion and basis for daily existence and a new world-view, then we must try to do so on the basis of what they have personally and painfully evolved and believed.

Our methods of communication should be in harmony with their view of a universal and supreme life force. This must be so because it is by means of their belief in this power-force that they are judging us and our teachings. If we choose to ignore their fundamental beliefs in our attempts at innovations, then the Asmat people will, in their own wisdom and insight, and most secretly, define their own way. The result will be that we enlarge the chasm already exists between ourselves as non-Asmat and the Asmat people.

If, on the other hand, we try to act on the level of the existing cultural substratum (as the basis of our relationship, then the Asmat people will deepen their awareness and belief that whatever we offer from "outside" is basically on the side of goodness and is part of their own struggle as well as ours. If what we offer is recognized as already existing in weak images in their own beliefs, the possibility of rejection is obviated. If they see no relationship between their beliefs and our contentions and introductions, they must resist us for they would be, in their view, accepting evil and endangering continuity of their existence if they accepted us and our beliefs.

When this is a matter of Christian evangelization we know that God himself is the core of truth, goodness, strength and power. He has sent his Son to bear witness to this truth and to the greatness and power of his Father. To the Asmat the core of truth, goodness, strength and power is a supreme life power. It is inconceivable to a Christian that anything which is good and true could arise from some evil source or from a source isolated from God's presence. Thus we can accept the good in the Asmat beliefs.

With this background it is possible to teach that the Asmat belief in a supreme source of life -- which seems to have many of the attributes of the Christian God -- is in fact a revelation of God himself. This provides a focal point which makes possible a dialogue between the Christian and the Asmat.

Again it is a Christian belief that Christ came to earth to forgive sin and to set all men free. This does not mean that he came to forgive sin and relieve man only in a spiritual sense. In fact his task was to set free all of creation. He came to bring a wholeness to the universe and to man himself, spiritually and materially.

Their own beliefs sought this goal. If we are to bring the "good news" to them we should help them to understand that the intention of God for them is just as they understood in their own culture ... but with new emphasis and new dignity and new understandings. Thus we help them search for the health and salvation of body and soul. We help them stand on their own feet, emerging into our contemporary world with Asmat contributions and Asmat

dignity. This will obviously be a great contribution not only to Asmat but to our Indonesian nation.

There are many concrete suggestions which I could make as one personally interested in the development and Christianization of Irian Jaya and, in particular, in the Asmat area's successful integration into the Christian and Indonesian world. I am of Irian Jaya myself and so I know this is important and that it is my task and vocation -- as well as that of all who are interested in Irian Jaya and Asmat.

To the missionaries I suggest that we delve more and more into the fundamental beliefs of the Asmat people. In this we will find the deep basis of their beliefs so that we can teach them how to relate to the human and Christian norms ... many of which are existing in germ-form in their own culture. This means that we must intensify our efforts to pay real attention to the daily life of Asmat and the background/explanations from their society for their lives.

This means that we must go to the people with real respect. Often we must accept their whims and activities and then search for their own explanation for their behavior. Through this we can isolate focal points of truth central both to Asmat beliefs and the Christian Gospel and tradition. From this basis of agreement we could begin again in evangelization, could publish our own catechism, etc.

The Catholic Mission is responsible for seventeen grade schools and the junior high school in Asmat. This is an obligation given to the mission by the government of Indonesia and it is a deep obligation. We must see to it that we provide a system of education which is practical and which will actually prepare the students for village life. We should try not to isolate their education from the realities of their social life, from the hard economic facts and from Asmat culture itself. It is true, however, that those in the high school who are candidates for higher education must be related to differently ... better preparing them to see beyond Asmat limitations and so on.

To assure that this is realistically possible it is suggested that in such areas as mathematics (which is one of the most difficult subjects for the Asmat) the teachers accompany their students to the village cooperatives to work with these men in concrete problems (e.g. calculating cubic meters, salary payment, etc). We should strive to draw the local and regional cooperative leaders into this educational process.

The schools should also try to inculcate respect for traditional art forms. Parents and artists should be invited into the schools to explain traditional forms, the meaning of motifs, etc. This not only relates to village life, but also helps the parents really become co-responsible for the education of their children.

Although beyond the scope of the Mission's responsibility or ability to intervene, business and trade development in Asmat should not be an obstacle to human development and dignity but should promote this no less than education does. Those involved in work here in Asmat as businessmen should not tolerate a situation where their efforts degrade the Asmat people and result in a degeneration rather than growth.

In the logging/lumber industry now being promoted (e.g. Atsj, Yow, Komor, etc.) there has often been a total disregard of the rights of the Asmat people. Wives and children remain for long periods without their fathers or husbands. Education suffers. The sick are left without assistance. This only destroys future hopes for the Asmat people and the Asmat area. There are real questions as to just payment for logging and for work. These are problems which must be confronted by those in responsible government positions.

For our part, again, we must always have a completely open and honest approach to every developmental project and effort (co-operatives, schools, etc.) realizing that these are matters of supreme importance for the people and that, accordingly, they have every right to know what is being done and why.

Those trusted with dissemination of information as well as the Health Officials and teachers should make every effort to promote

understanding of the advantages of hygiene, cleanliness, the purpose of hospitals or clinics. The health of the body is an essential ingredient to the health of soul and the total development of the people.

While we eventually continue the search for diversification of developmental projects (e.g. gardens, fishing co-operatives, etc.) we should also see that mentality building is co-existent with these efforts. Our preaching in church, for example, should be related to actual projects which are underway in the area.

If these efforts are made then, and with this paper's minor contribution, it can be hoped that the development of the Asmat people will be along balanced and healthy lines which will benefit all of Irian Jaya and all of the Indonesian nation.

GLOSSARY OF MAIN ASMAT OR INDOONESIAN WORDS RECURRING IN TEXT

ANAKAT	Body of carving (i.e. bis anakat). Also used for stalk of bananas, etc.
ASMAT	(Aslo spelled Asamat) Human Being. The name of the people and area in central south coast of Irian Jaya between Mimika and Mappi areas.
ATAKAM	Word; to speak; language. Bis atakam = The Story of the Bis.
BAN	Hand.
BIS	(1) Tall elaborately carved pole representing those relatives who recently have been killed in battle or died normally. (2) The Mythical Heroine of the Bis Myth. (3) The Spirit represented by the bis carvings. (4) The Feast surrounding the execution of the bis carving.
BIS:MAN	Largest grouping of the Asmat people -- mainly coastal or along rivers near the coast. From BIS and MAN (to make), therefore termed the Bis Makers.
CEMEN	Penis; Bis Cemen (lit: The Penis of the Bis Pole), the complex carved wing-like protrusion upward from the uppermost figure on the bis-pole.
ECAWOR	Special room prepared in the Yew for the carving of the bis pole during the bis feast.
FUM	Wind. (Cf. text on FUMeripits ... the Creator in Creation Myth).
IPITS	Man; male; FumerIPITS - the Creator in Asmat Mythology.
JUNUS	Human Life principle flowing from common source. Coexists in man with ndat till death when it returns to common source and ndat survives as human shade.
KAVE	Ancestor; human being; ancestral carving.
KUSKUS	(Indonesian Language). Small marsupial (in Asmat, <u>Fac</u>) opossum-type, used for decorations (the fur) especially for hat-like apparel.
KAFENAK	Alternative for "Asmat" or human being.
MBIS	Alternate spelling for <u>BIS</u> .
MBUI	(alternate = <u>Bui</u>) Water. Interpreted by author as spirit in sense of <u>Ndat</u> as well as root word for <u>BIS</u> .

NDAMU	(cf. <u>Jurus</u>) Life principle for human beings.
NDAT	(Nat) Spirit of all living things. The element of human beings which survives after death (departure of <u>Jurus</u>) but disintegrates at death of non-human forms.
FOKMBUI	Feast or celebration. <u>Bis Pokmbui</u> = Bis Feast.
SAFAN	World of those who formerly lived on earth (ancestors). Found to the west, across the sea.
SAGU	(Indonesian Language). A Type of palm tree (sago palm). The food (a starch residue) prepared by washing the pith of the sago palm. The basic staple of the Asmat Diet. In Asmat (<u>amos</u>) also a generic term for all food.
SITAN	Mythical site in <u>Bis</u> story where Deworpits lived; an evil place.
SURKU	(Probably borrowed from Indonesian SURGA = heaven). The Asmat word for paradise ... probably only since contact with missions.
WOWIPITS	Artist; Asmat wood carver.
YEW	Men's or Bachelors' House which serves as the focal point of the social structure and is used as the center for all planning, as well as a feast house. Usually women are excluded from the <u>Yew</u> except on especially determined occasions. The building of the <u>Yew</u> has been prohibited by the Government since 1963.

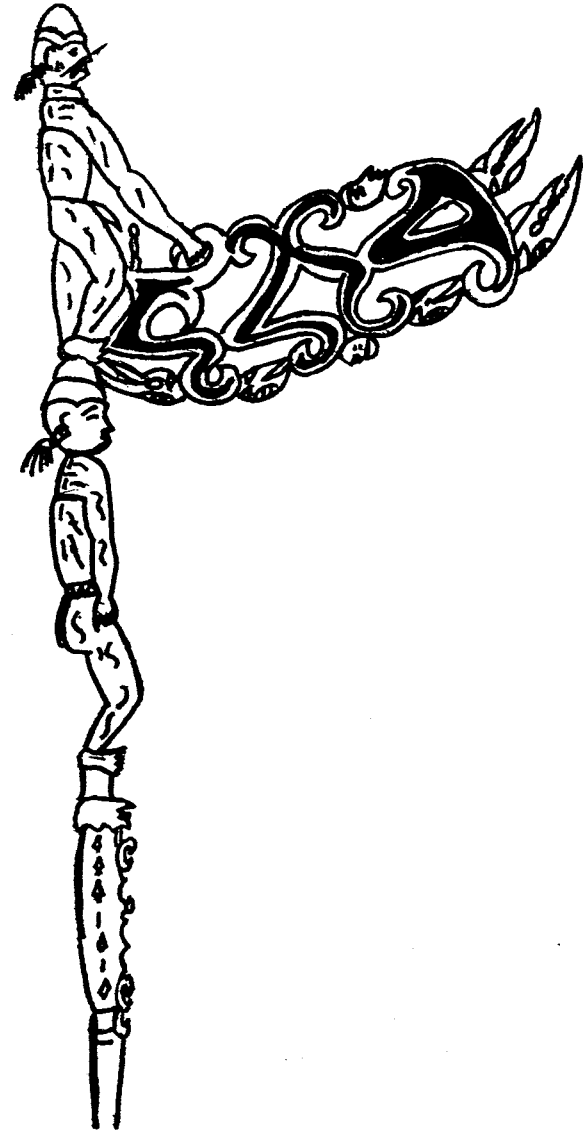
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THE PARTS OF THE BISPOLE

The whole bispole is divided into three parts :

1. Bisanakat or the body of the bis

Anakat means the flesh of a fruit or core of ironwood. But anakat also means the stem from ground to top. So, bisanakat means the whole manfigure from feet to head. On anakat and other parts of the bispole, we could find lines, scratches or incisions made by biscalvers.

a. Fin or hair

Fin means the hair of the head and the body. Fin is paint with black colour. Black is the symbol of headhunter. That's why, every black, fruit eating bird is a symbol of headhunter. Black must be the bird predominant colour, because the Asmat himself is dark skinned.

b. Wakanbai

Wakanbai means clean shaven circle around the head. This round circle is usually paint with red colour.

c. Umbiyof or nosepin

This nosepin is made of wood.

d. Bipanew

Bipanew is made from pieces of the shell, worn in the nose. We can call this noseornament.

e. Uwi or earornament, made from green sago leaf.f. Sep or arm

Sep is the arm of the bis. Sep really means the both bones in forearm.

g. Kanter

Kanter is the leg of the manfigure of the bispole in its entirely including the foot.

h. Kiki. These are straight incisions or scarifications on the bispole. Also means figure produced on the skin by incisions or scarifications.

i. Yirfopin. These are incisions in the form of comma or half circle. With these signs the cheek, breast are shown.

j. Cemen or penis

k. Cen or vagina. Cemen and cen are symbols of fertility.

l. Yipa. This means the figure of a child on the shoulder of a manfigure. This the meaning of bravery of a warleader, who ever had carried a living enemy at his lifetime, specially during the war. Yipa is also a figure of a child alone, not including a part of bispole.

The whole bispole is always paint with red, white and black colour. White colour is made from ash of burned shell. Red colour is made from a kind of red coloured stone and black colour is made of charcoal.

2. Biscemen or penis of the bis

The whole biscemen is a symbol of fertility. Biscemen consists of some figures of animals as symbols of headhunter, warleader, strength etc. Biscemen itself into :

a. Yirimbikokom or the head of hornbill.

b. Okon

Lower cheek bone of hornbill. Okon is shown by making a triangle with the top to left or to right.

c. Bua

Bua is a figure of mouth of human or animal. Bua is shown by round circle or square. The people from southern Asmat called this round circle bianam or buanam.

d. Doukus or the skull

How much skull must be carved, hang up the numbers of animies were been kilt by the man, whose figure is carved.

e. Asukfoksi

This is the tail of a snake or another animal, but also means the backbone of crocodile or fish. Asukfoksi is a symbol of the strength and bravery of a warleader.

f. Yanmak or the ear.

It is shwon by dubble round circle.

g. Yanpo is the lower part of neck.h. Tanampo is the uper part of the neck.i. Yamsenkam

This is the meeting point between bisanakat and biscemen.

3. Ci and Bino

- a. Ci means the cano. Ci is carved as symbol of relationship between this world and the world here after (ancestor world). In this cano usually made suunkus or an. Suunkus or an is the same thing as trough.
- b. Bino is the lower end of the bispole. With this part the bispole is put into the ground.
- c. Suunkus or an is the same thing as trough, within food, specially sago been put.

Eram Kuruwaip B.A.
Museum Curator of Asmat

Shield (Yemes)[Asmat].

Wood, paint. Sago leaves and rattan leaves.
Height: 107 cm. Width: 43.5 cm.
Donated by John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund.
Collected by Herman Renwarin



This shield was probably used in the shield feast to remember the ancestors killed by enemies or died naturally. The figure on the top of the shield represents the ancestor of the owner of the shield. The three double "S's" form represents other close relatives. The colors of this shield are white, red and black.

Shield (Yemes) [Asmat].

Wood, paint.

Height: 195.5 cm. Width: 46.5 cm.

Donated by Kabin Permuseuman Perwakilan
Departemen P. D. & K. Propinsi
Irian Jaya.

This type of shield is used in fighting. The five double "E" form figures are symbols of the flying fox and represents the ancestors and relatives of the owner of this shield. The colors are white, red and black.

Shield (Yemes) [Asmat].

Wood, paint. Sago leaves.

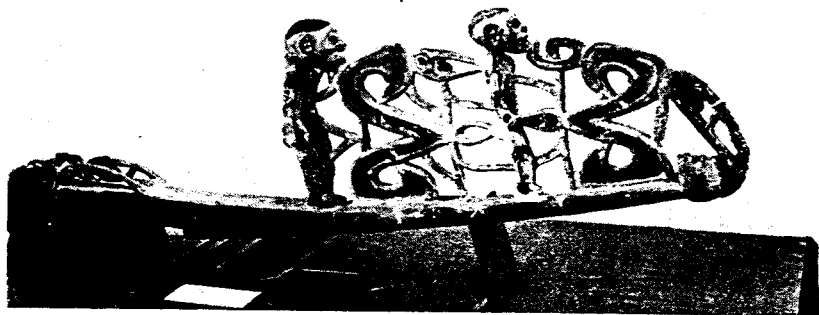
Height: 181 cm. Width: 36 cm.

Donated by Kabin Permuseuman Perwakilan
Departemen P. D. & K. Propinsi
Irian Jaya.

Collector unknown.



This shield was probably used for shield ceremonies. The figure on the top represents the ancestor of the owner of the shield and the upper figure represents the penis of ancestor. The three double "C's" are a symbol of nose ornament (*bi pane*) and represents people and the two dots represent human heads. Usually in the Asmat culture these figures represent the relatives and ancestors of the owner of the shield. The colors are white, red and black.



Canoe Perahu (Cicemen) [Asmat].

Wood, paint. Cassowary feather, grass sheet and fibre.

Length: 126.5 cm. Height: 35 cm.

Donated by Kabin Permuseuman Perwakilan Departemen P. D. & K. Propinsi Irian Jaya.

This canoe perahu is used as decoration of the front part of a canoe.

The two human figures usually represent the ancestor of the owner of the canoe. The two "E" forms are symbols of the flying fox. The other figures are a cockatoo's head and a horn bird's head.

The colors are white, red and black.



Canoe Perahu (Cicemen) [Asmat].

Wood, paint.

Length: 104 cm. Width: 36cm.

Donated by John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund.

Collector unknown.

The figures of this canoe perahu represent birds, men and the other "S" forms symbolise men.

The colors are white and red.

Woman skirt (Awer Ansenem) [Asmat].
Sago leaves, pandanus and rattan leaves.
Height: 90 cm. Length: 112 cm.
Donated by John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund.



Belt (Awer) [Asmat].
Sago leaves, pandanus, rattan leaves
and grass sheet.
Donated by John D. Rockefeller 3rd
Fund.
This belt is especially used by women
during dancing.

Male and female figures (Kawenak) [Asmat].
Wood, paint.
Height: 110 cm. Width: 15.5 cm.
Donated by Kabin Permuseuman Perwakilan
Departemen P.D. & K. Propinsi
Irian Jaya.
Collector unknown.



The bottom figure represents man and the top
woman. The figure between the legs and the
hands of the two human figures represents a
horn bird.
The color is white.

Human figure (Kawenak) [Asmat].
 Wood, paint.
 Height: 102 cm. Width: 15 cm.
 Donated by John D. Rockefeller 3rd Fund.
 Collector unknown.
 This human figure is female.
 The color is white.



Male and female figures (Kawenak) [Asmat].
 Wood, paint.
 Length: 69.5 cm. Width: 12.5 cm.
 Collected by Lembaga Anthropologi
 Universitas Cenderawasih.
 Collector unknown.
 The bottom figure is female and the top is
 male.
 The colors are white and red.

Human figure (Mbis) [Asmat].
 Wood, paint.
 Height: 122 cm. Width: 10.5 cm.
 Donated by Kabin Permuseuman Perwakilan
 Departemen P.D. & K. Propinsi
 Irian Jaya.
 Collector unknown.



The top figure is male and the body of the
 bottom one is symbol of the root of the
Banian tree but has been carved to two
 snakes. The head of the snakes represent the
 hands and the tails represent the feet of the
 bottom figure.
 The colors are white and red.

Research in progress:Recent Development in Asmat Art

As part of the University of Cenderawasih research project in the Asmat a short study on the above topic is being carried out in the Asmat by Arie Yan Korwa. Funds for this study have been made available from a previous grant to the Institute for Anthropology by the Asia Foundation, Jakarta.

Arie Yan Korwa
Curator,
University Museum
University of Cenderawasih

Potential Modernization Among the Asmat

This research was conducted in Indonesia, primarily among the coastal Asmat tribesmen of Irian Jaya (Western New Guinea) from August, 1973, to April, 1974. The primary data base was derived from open-ended behavior oriented questionnaires administered to a random sample of 30 married men and members of their households in the villages of Ewer, Owus, Sjuru, and Jepem. Existence research was also conducted in Asmat's administrative - economic center, Agats. Supplementary data was obtained in a number of other villages.

1. Oral history of coastal area prior to first permanent contact in 1953
 - a. village formation, movements, warfare (dating to late 1800's)
 - b. effects of Japanese occupation during World War II
2. Changes in social organization since 1953
 - a. fam and moiety growth, conflicts, divisions, stability
 - b. interaction of dualistic worldview, traditional coceptions of

- spirit realm, and social organization
- c. development of semi-permanent villages
 - d. leadership patterns and attitudes
 - e. maps of four main villages, indicating fam affiliation by household and homes of random sample subjects
3. Changes in resource utilization patterns
 - a. survey of Asmat edible and material resources: scientific name, English name, Indonesian name, Asmat name, various uses and relative abundance
 - b. economic interaction of villagers with stores, traders, government, tourists, and missions in Agats
 - (1) Goods and materials purchased, sold, traded
 - (2) Sources of income
 - c. resource utilization index: selected food, household, and craft items scored according to how and where obtained, how used (both traditional and modern items)
 - d. utilization patterns by fam of sago and fishing areas (Ewer only)
 - e. introduction of horticulture and gardens
 - f. development prospects in Asmat
 - g. yearly climatic patterns (rainfall, temperature, cloud formations, tides)
 4. Changes in communication patterns
 - a. traditional communication channels
 - b. travel between villages and Agats, purposes
 - c. Asmat - government - missions interaction
 - (1) Government reorganization program
 - d. government, Catholic, Protestant education programs and school curriculums

- e. participation by Asmatters in groups and formal organizations; local political developments
 - f. mission air operations
5. Demographic characteristics
- a. entire village - 1973
 - (1) Census by age and sex
 - (2) Birth and death statistics
 - b. random samples (30 households each village)
 - (1) Pregnancy and fertility data
 - (2) Household composition
 - (3) Marriage and internal migration patterns
 - (4) Geneologies for married males to three generations
 - c. census by family, tribal or area affiliation, and religion for all residents of Agats.
6. Time-budget analysis of all daily activities (Ewer only)
- a. over continuous three week period Sept. - Oct., 1973
 - b. analyzed and scored by behavior category for two small, two medium, and two large nuclear families and their households
7. Asmatters wage labor with oil exploration crews
- a. wage labor decision survey
 - (1) administered to 16 men in each of Ewer, Owus, Sjuru prior to beginning labor contract work
 - b. open-ended interviews with 30 men (Jepem's random sample) after completion of contract
 - c. operational framework used by oil exploration company and its two labor sub-contractors
 - (1) Map of completed seismic exploration lines
 - d. oil and development prospects for Irian Jaya
 - e. overview of Indonesian economic development policies

8. Health and medical care
- a. traditional medical and curing practices
 - (1) Role of traditional curer; sorcery
 - (2) Mental health as exemplified by "madman syndrome"
 - (3) Child care
 - b. hospital operations in Agats
 - c. records of all illnesses and injuries treated in Ewer and Owus by P.V. (Sept. - Nov., 1973)
 - (1) Results of Asmat-run clinic begun in Owus Nov., 1973
 - d. epidemics and major diseases in Asmat since 1962, with some casualty figures
9. "The 'Lord of the Earth' Cult Among the Asmat: Prestige, Power, and Politics in a Transitional Society" (article co-authored with David Gallus to appear in IRIAN: Bulletin of Irian Jaya Development, vol. III, no. 2, June, 1974)
- a. based upon research by the authors into the Ewer cargo cult since its inception in 1966
 - b. analyzed according to:
 - (1) Progressive functional transformations of a relatively stable cult structure
 - (2) Big Man activity as broadly manifested in Melanesia
 - (3) Economic and development problems in Asmat
10. Expedition to previously unexplored stretches of Catalina and Friendship Rivers of the interior Asmat region
- a. comparison of data with earlier expeditions to Brazza River

Peter W. van Arsdale
 Department of Anthropology
 University of Colorado
 Boulder, Colorado

NOTE: Supplementing this research is a 500 photograph collection of 35 mm color slides, four 30 minute tapes of Asmat and Indonesian music, and a collection of ornamental and carved artifacts.

Peter W. van Arsdale :

Peter W. van Arsdale is a Ph. D. candidate in cultural anthropology at the University of Colorado. The data upon which the present article is based was gathered in Indonesia and the Asmat region from August, 1973, to April, 1974, as part of dissertation research on the potential for modernization among the Asmat. van Arsdale received a B.A. cum laude in psychology from the University of Colorado and an M.A. in general anthropology from the University of Maryland. As a member of the Research Training Program in Culture Change in the University of Colorado's Institute of Behavioral Sciences, he holds a fellowship from the National Institute of Mental Health.

David E. Gallus, O.S.C. :

David E. Gallus, o.s.c., is a Crosier priest ordained in the United States in 1966. Following ordination he completed a year of graduate study in anthropology at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., in preparation for his work among the Asmat. Upon his arrival in the Asmat region in June, 1967, Fr. Gallus began work as a missionary pastor and continues at present. Since 1970 he has been coordinator of Catholic mission aviation for the Asmat region, and is auditor of the central cooperative office.

Abraham Kuruwaip :

Abraham Kuruwaip was born in Upyetetku, Muyu, Irian Jaya. After completing primary school in 1962 he attended seminary for seven years and then commenced four years of theological and philosophical study at the higher theological seminary in Jayapura, where he gained his B.A. Towards the end of 1973 he took up duties in the Asmat where he worked first as a deacon in the Catholic church and then as assistant parish pastor at Sjurru. Abraham Kuruwaip is also the curator of the Museum of Asmat Culture and Development, at Agats and he also teaches courses in the Junior High School and Teacher Training School in Agats.

G. Zegwaard, M.S.C. :

Fr. G. Zegwaard, a Dutchman, was ordained a priest in 1944. He came to Irian Jaya as a missionary in 1946 and first worked among the Mimika people. In 1952 he opened the first Asmat mission station in Agats. Subsequently Fr. Zegwaard moved to Merauke and then to Jayapura. At the present time he is the Director of the Catholic Mission Institute for the Advance of Social Research.

Manuscripts:

The editors of the IRIAN welcome manuscripts of a theoretical or practical nature that directly or indirectly bear on Irian Jaya. Manuscripts should be typed, double space and may be submitted in either Indonesian or English. If articles are submitted in Dutch the editors will endeavour to have the material translated into one of the above languages. Two copies of articles are required. Each article must be accompanied by an abstract of 200-400 words which, if possible, should be in the language other than that in which the manuscript is written. Articles should be accompanied by a brief biographical note on the author.

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