

## New Guinea Annexations

### *The Early Period, until 1824*

The late Muhammad Yamin might not have been surprised if future demarcators of New Guinea's central boundary stumbled upon remnants of border markers placed there more than 2000 years before by intrepid Indonesian empire builders.<sup>1</sup> Historical evidence for such early Indonesian influence, however, remains scanty. The list of tributaries to Java's Modjopahit empire in the Nāgara-Kērtāgama, recorded by the poet Prapañca about 1365 A.D. during the zenith of its rule, does include the names of Wwanin and Seran.<sup>2</sup> These have been identified with the Onin and Kowiai regions of south-western New Guinea and point to some contemporary familiarity of the Javanese with that part of the island.<sup>3</sup> More significant and lasting were the relations of the inhabitants of Ceram and some of the other islands of eastern Indonesia with parts of westernmost New Guinea and its off-shore islands. But limited expansion also took place from the New Guinea side. The Biak hero Goera-bèsi, for example, is supposed to have married the daughter of the Sultan of Tidore and to be the legendary progenitor of the four rulers of the islands off the western tip of New Guinea, known as the Radja Ampat (Four Princes) Archipelago.<sup>4</sup>

The arrival of the first Europeans in east Indonesian waters in the early part of the sixteenth century had little immediate impact on New Guinea's territorial status. Ynigo Ortiz de Retes is credited with taking possession of the island for the Spanish Crown when he landed near the Mamberamo River in 1545.<sup>5</sup> This annexation (and the one by Torres in 1606) merely had symbolic significance and whatever claim Spain may have had on *Nueva Guinea* by virtue of European discovery was eliminated by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1714.<sup>6</sup>

Dutch explorations along the southern shores of New Guinea in the early seventeenth century went beyond Cape Valsch, but when Dutch explorers reached the shallow and dangerous waters between New Guinea and the Cape York Peninsula—assumed to represent a cul-de-sac rather than a possible passage—they swerved southward into the Gulf of Carpentaria.<sup>7</sup> A more systematic attempt to establish trade relations was made in the 1670s. But the abortive 'Treaty of Peace and the Rules concerning the Future Trade in Slaves and Massoi' between

Johannes Keyts and the *orang kaya* (leaders) of Keffing (Ceramlaut) and Ony (Onin) merely confirmed the East India Company's belief that only trouble could be gathered from these dismal regions.<sup>8</sup>

The attempt by the Company to safeguard its monopoly of the valuable spice trade in the Moluccas, however, had indirect effects. The Company's grand design was the extirpation of clove and nutmeg trees anywhere outside selected locations, the prevention of other nations—European or Asian—settling or trading in the eastern region, and the control of smuggling and piracy. For this reason it concluded treaties with the potentates of eastern Indonesia and sent punitive and exploratory expeditions to the New Guinea rimland whenever rumours about Spanish or British 'intruders' or reports of excessive smuggling and piracy reached the headquarters in Ambon or Batavia.<sup>9</sup> The 'Eternal Alliance' of 1660, for example, burdened the Sultans of Batjan, Ternate, and Tidore with the faithful implementation of the Company's design for which they received an annual stipend.<sup>10</sup> These treaties naturally required some definition of the territorial limits of the Sultanates. A cryptic reference to New Guinea is made only under the listing of Tidore's territories where one finds included the 'Papuan islands or all other islands belonging to those'.<sup>11</sup> In a letter written in 1671, the ruler of Tidore indicated that 'the Papuan [region]' began 'from the tip of Onin westward along the coast, but that the principal islands consisted of Waigammo, Salawati, Batanta, Mesowal or Misool, Waigioe or Poeloe Wardjoe'.<sup>12</sup> It would appear, however, that the traders and corsairs from Ceram and the neighbouring Ceramlaut islands could make a stronger claim on the Onin peninsula than Tidore; moreover, in most of the Radja Ampat Archipelago Tidore's rule vanished the moment its armed *cora-coras* (prahus) disappeared from the horizon. It is evident from the despatches that the East India Company realized that Tidore's legal claim was 'somewhat chimerical',<sup>13</sup> but it was satisfied as long as its main purpose—the creation of a spiceless no-man's-land and a natural buffer against foreign intrusions—was accomplished. As a panacea for actual possession of isolated places in the eastern part of the archipelago, the Company also placed signs to indicate that these localities were the Company's property. Here again it was very much aware that '*living possessors are better and stronger witnesses for a continued and immediate possession than dead stones and monuments*'.<sup>14</sup>

The gradual disintegration of the Company and the decline of Dutch seapower in the eighteenth century promoted smuggling and piracy, loosened the hold over the east Indonesian protectorates, and brought foreign interests into east Indonesian waters. As Captain Thomas Forrest, who sneaked into New Guinea waters with the *Tartar Galley* in 1774–5, commented:

The Dutch seem to claim a right to all the Molucca islands, more from the forbearance of other European nations, than from any just title. I am not certain whether the islands of Waygiou, Mysol, Batanta and Salwattay, may not also be claimed by them; but I resolved, from Tuan Hadjee's report, and what I had learned of others, to go beyond those islands, as far as the coast of New Guinea, where surely the Dutch can have no pretensions.<sup>15</sup>

Forrest was the first European explorer (and employee of the British East India Company) to visit the 'land of Dory' (present-day Manokwari) where he found nutmeg trees on neighbouring Manaswary Island and picked 'above one hundred plants' which he intended to carry back to Balambangan, the British East India Company outpost off the tip of north-eastern Borneo.<sup>16</sup>

Another British East India Company sponsored trip to New Guinea waters was made in 1791–2 by Captain John McCluer, who, on one of his subsequent trips, hoisted the British flag on tiny Gebe Island (October 1794). Implementation of this annexation was discussed in British India at length but finally abandoned.<sup>17</sup> Yet another quickly forgotten act of annexation occurred during the same period. In the Torres Strait, a brief and unhappy stay by Captains Bampton and Alt on Darnley Island led to a proclamation (July 1793) taking possession of 'this island and the neighbouring ones, and the coast of New Guinea'.<sup>18</sup> McCluer's account of his experiences to a colleague in the Bombay Marine, Lieutenant John Hayes, led to the first European attempt toward effective occupation in New Guinea. So impressed was Hayes with the country and the spices he found when he anchored at Doreh Bay in September 1793 that he had a fort built and proclaimed himself Governor of 'New Albion'. He took possession of the whole northern coast of New Guinea from Waigeo in the west to Rossell Island in the east 'on behalf of the King and Nation of Great Britain'.<sup>19</sup> But Hayes's petition for protection of the colony was rejected by the British East India Company, whose Council concluded that the establishment of a New Guinea settlement 'on the Company's account' would not be justified.<sup>20</sup>

One further reference to Tidore's territorial holdings in New Guinea appears in the treaty of 1814, signed by Ternate and Tidore. Tidore's rule was said to extend over 'the whole of the Papoa Islands, and the four districts of Mansarij, Karendefur, Ambarpura and Umbarpun'.<sup>21</sup> One scholar became so impressed with this listing (comparing it with 'the vague ambiguities' of the Treaty of 1660) that he saw an 'almost routine acceptance' of Tidore's sovereignty rights 'over the Papuan islands and large sections of mainland New Guinea'.<sup>22</sup> It is hard to share this enthusiasm as the location of the four 'districts' has remained unclear. They may refer merely to some of the old Biak-Numfurese settlements in the Geelvink Bay and the Radja Ampat's Salawati Island.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Western Part, 1824–1875*

The Treaty of London signed by Britain and the Netherlands in March 1824 contains no direct reference to New Guinea. A future claim to the island by either of the signatories appears to be left open by implication, subject only to the requirement that any settlement formed should have previous authority from the respective government.<sup>24</sup> The Dutch claim on New Guinea, in the meantime, continued its traditional vagueness. The Government Gazette of the Netherlands Indies, for example, described the territory of the Residency of Ternate as including 'the Papuan Islands *Waijges*, *Sallawatti* and *Mijsole* and that part of *Nieuw Guinea* which is under the sovereignty of *Tijdore*'.<sup>25</sup> Rumours in early 1826 that the British had established a post on the south coast of New Guinea, east of the Aru Islands, finally brought a clarification.<sup>26</sup> Although an on-the-spot investigation quickly disproved British activity in this area, the Governor of the Moluccas (Pieter Merkus) grasped the opportunity to suggest an end to the threat of a British annexation. In his report to Batavia he indicated that as a first safeguard he had demanded and received a statement from the Sultan of Tidore in which this ruler had marked out 'that whole island [of New Guinea] as a *Tidorese possession*'.<sup>27</sup> Merkus proposed to take possession of New Guinea either by cession from Tidore or, if the right of that ruler to the above-mentioned island were somewhat in doubt, by effective occupation of a point along the coast. Correspondence on the matter reached the Minister of Navy and Colonies in the Netherlands who announced that, after weighing the various factors involved, the King had given approval:

To take possession of the west coast of New Guinea, from the Cape of Good Hope (north coast) to Cape Valsch or further southward; while leaving it to the discretion of the Governor-General to place a small establishment on the coast of New Guinea, if His Excellency considered this absolutely necessary, especially in the interest of the Pacific fisheries.<sup>28</sup>

Governor Merkus, responsible for the actual launching of the expedition, appointed A. J. van Delden as Government Commissioner and instructed him to proceed to New Guinea on the corvette *Triton* which, together with the schooner *Iris*, had been assigned to duty in New Guinea waters. His main task was to locate a suitable spot for a military post, hoist the Dutch tricolor, and take possession in H.M.'s name of 'N. Guinea and its interior' from the 141st meridian on the south coast to the Cape of Good Hope on the north coast, except that rights of the Sultan of Tidore to a number of districts within this region were not to be usurped. Merkus also suggested that the most suitable location for the establishment of the post appeared to be 'the banks of the [Dourga] river' which had been explored by Lieutenant-Commander D. H. Kolff a couple of years before, but he left the final decision to the Commis-

sioner in case 'a better spot was located'.<sup>29</sup> Because the garrison was small, Merkus recommended that preferably the post should not be located in a region frequented by the traders from Ceram and Goram who might fear the loss of their exclusive trade and 'incite the population against the Government's garrison'. Finally, Van Delden was instructed to select a healthy spot.

The expedition left Ambon on 21 April 1828. It included a military garrison consisting of a lieutenant, a doctor, 11 European and 20 Indonesian soldiers with their families (23 women and 21 children) and 10 Javanese convict labourers. Stores for the garrison (including cattle) crowded the decks.<sup>30</sup> Sailing via Banda and south of the Aru Islands, the 'Dourga River' was reached after a month. The inland exploration of this waterway proved disappointing as the water failed to lose its salinity and the surrounding country—appropriately described by a later authority as 'one large bowl of pea soup'<sup>31</sup>—was swamp. Abandoning hope of a settlement in this area, the expedition set course in a north-westerly direction. The fruitless search along inhospitable shores does not have to be spelled out. Finally, when they had almost reached the Onin peninsula, a well-sheltered bay was discovered and the small strip of jungle at the foot of a steep mountain which looked to the tired expedition like the promised land was proclaimed fit for settlement.<sup>32</sup> Locally known as Lobo, the region was renamed Merkusoord and the Bay of Oeroe Langoeroe became Tritons-baai (Triton Bay). Clearing the jungle and erecting buildings and palisades began on 6 July, and after seven weeks of hard work the great moment arrived (see Plate 1). The Dutch flag was hoisted over 'Fort Du Bus' on 24 August 1828 after solemn possession had been taken, in the name of the King, of

That part of New Guinea and its interior, beginning at the 141st meridian east of Greenwich on the south coast, and from there west, north-west and northward to the Cape of Good Hope, situated on the north coast, except for the rights which the Sultan of Tidore might have on the districts of Mansary, Karongdefer, Ambarssura and Amberpon.<sup>33</sup>

The Proclamation of 1828 represents the first official, direct claim of the Netherlands on western New Guinea. It is not clear, however, what it includes. Reference is made to Tidore's rule and its rights over four districts, but (as was noted before) the locale of these is not really known. Even more baffling is the use of the term 'interior' (*en de landen daar binnen liggende*). Presumably, this refers to the coastal strip between the 141st meridian and the Cape of Good Hope. Another interpretation would be a straight line between these two points, but this would imply a boundary running through the Arafura Sea, the Central Highlands, the Geelvink Bay, and New Guinea's 'Bird's Head'. The selection of the 141st meridian may seem somewhat arbitrary (the King's instructions had referred to 'Cape Valsch or further southward');

on the other hand, this was the approximate extent of maritime exploration.<sup>34</sup>

Van Delden and the other members of the expedition can probably be pardoned for choosing to underplay, in the excitement of the moment, two of Governor Merkus' specific instructions. First, Merkusoord was clearly within the sphere of Ceramese trading activity. The personal account of Lieutenant J. Modera contains references to the seasonal stay of Ceramese traders, the fact that the local population was somewhat familiar with their language, and that some were Muslim. Second, with regard to the salubrity of Merkusoord, Modera recounts that from 11 July to 7 August the weather was consistently damp and chilly with rain falling during the night. Cold winds swooped down from the south-west and 'in the course of eight days there were fifty odd sick aboard and another twenty among the garrison'. Their sickness was referred to as 'hot, long-lasting, swamp fevers'.<sup>35</sup> A member of the natural science commission, Salomon Müller, mentions 'Cold and hot fevers, dysentery, and tenacious attacks of rheumatism' from which all suffered from the beginning. These ills were blamed on the 'noxious vapours' rising out of the newly cleared ground, the lack of fresh food, and the uninterrupted hard work rather than on the climate of Merkusoord.<sup>36</sup> As the months and years dragged on, the garrison continued to be plagued by the strange illness and attacks by the local population, incited and supported by Ceramese and Goramese traders. The first Dutch attempt at effective occupation of New Guinea was a miserable failure. Evacuation was at last decided upon in late 1835 and carried out in early 1836 with the promise that another post would be established as soon as a healthier location was found.<sup>37</sup>

New Guinea might have been conveniently forgotten had not an embarrassing British request for a 'statement of the nations, tribes, and chiefs' under Dutch authority focused attention on the unsatisfactory conditions in the Borneo and East Indonesia regions.<sup>38</sup> In 1846, A. L. Weddik, who as Governor of Borneo had carried out a survey in that area, was charged with a similar task for the Moluccas and New Guinea.

Weddik's report was submitted in January 1848 and although few of his recommendations proved acceptable at the time, his main conclusion had an important effect on the territorial status of New Guinea.<sup>39</sup> This conclusion—reached on the basis of a number of dubious findings and assumptions which possibly had been influenced by news in mid-1846 that Lieutenant Yule had issued an annexation proclamation at the southern shore of Papua—was that Tidore's rule extended over a far wider area than had been assumed before. Not only did it, according to Weddik, cover the entire western rim of New Guinea but the south coast (as far as the 141st meridian), the north coast (as far as Cape Bonpland, east of Humboldt Bay) and the interior, as well.<sup>40</sup> With regard to the interior boundary from Cape Bonpland in

the north to the 141st meridian in the south a boundary line could be drawn provisionally pending 'a detailed investigation' which would take into consideration 'the geographical features and political institutions of the populations' of the area. If such a survey could not be carried out immediately, an announcement indicating the government's intentions should be made and, in the interim, border posts placed in some parts of the territory, specifically at the northern and southern extremities. Simultaneously, a proclamation should be issued which would give proper expression to Tidore's territorial limits.

Weddik's report produced a mixed reaction. The Dutch government did not favour publicizing its activities nor did it want to issue a proclamation because such action was unnecessary since 'our sovereign rights are not subject to any legitimate doubt[?]'. This statement was followed by the somewhat unusual and contradictory comment that it would be better anyhow if some uncertainty about these rights continued to exist. The suggestion of a border survey in the interior was considered 'admittedly very necessary' but highly impractical. Moreover, little benefit was expected from placing occasional border posts, but the government was willing to put this matter under consideration 'if it could be carried out without great costs'.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of the government's unwillingness to go along with most of Weddik's more specific recommendations, it did make his overall finding the basis of a secret decree (30 July 1848) which was to serve as 'a lead in the activities of the authorities concerned'. In that decree it was explained that 'an inaccuracy' had occurred in the previous description of Tidore's territories and stated that Tidore's rule in fact extended 'to meridian 140° 47' east of Greenwich on the north coast'. Tidore's limits, then, ranged:

From Cape Saptop Maneh (Cape Bonpland) 140° 47' meridian east of Greenwich on the north coast, along that coast, the Bay of Wandammen (Geelvink Bay) to Cape Kain Kain Beba (Cape of Good Hope) and further west, south and south-east to the by Proclamation of 24 August 1828 provisionally adopted boundary at 141° E.L. on the south coast; including the interior, for so far as this, as a result of subsequent investigations concerning the geographical features of the country and the political institutions of the inhabitants, will appear to belong to Netherlands territory . . . .<sup>42</sup>

This new development created an anomalous situation. There now existed two definitions of the Dutch territorial limits in New Guinea: the official Proclamation of 1828 directly annexing part of New Guinea to the Dutch Crown, and the secret, territorially more extensive, decree of 1848 which used the intermediary of the protectorate of Tidore.

The only immediate practical effect of the decree of 1848 was the expedition of D. J. van den Dungen Gronovius. It was charged with placing markers, which carried the royal coat of arms with the under-script *Nederlandsch-Indië*, in appropriate spots along the New Guinea

coast.<sup>43</sup> For the next fifty years this ritual, combined with handing out Dutch flags and appointment of chiefs, became one of the tasks of each subsequent New Guinea expedition.

The promise made at the time of the abandonment of Fort du Bus to find a suitable location for a new settlement continued to be held in abeyance. The inconclusive report of the expedition of 1858 squashed any immediate plans the government may have had.<sup>44</sup> It decided to leave matters in the hands of its useful 'ally', the Sultan of Tidore, and to regulate his authority along more modern and humane principles.<sup>45</sup> With the decree of 1848 in secret operation, the definition of Tidore's territorial limits became one of the vaguest in its history:

The territory of the Realm of Tidore and dependencies is considered to be composed of the territories which are in possession of His Highness at present and are considered to belong to his Realm in accordance with the existing and later to be completed description.<sup>46</sup>

The veil of secrecy which hung over Dutch claims to New Guinea was finally lifted in 1865: the *Regerings-Almanak voor Nederlandsch-Indië* described Tidore's territorial limits as extending from Cape Bonpland on the north coast along that coast to the 141st meridian in the south.<sup>47</sup> Ten years later, an alteration (announced in the *Koloniale Verslag* for 1875 as an 'improved territorial description') crept in surreptitiously.<sup>48</sup> The still undefined interior boundary now became a straight line connecting Cape Bonpland with the 141st meridian in the south.<sup>49</sup> The territory of Tidore then was said to include:

The north-western part of New Guinea bounded in the east by a straight line running from Cape Bonpland (on the east side of Humboldt Bay), 140° 47' East Longitude on the north coast to 140° [sic] East Longitude on the south coast, with the adjacent islands . . . .<sup>50</sup>

The increased interest in New Guinea expressed abroad at the end of the 1860s resulted in a series of Dutch expeditions in the 1871-81 period. The first of these appeared to have expansionist overtones as it was charged with the exploration not only of 'that part of New Guinea which belongs to the territory of Tidore' but of 'the whole island'.<sup>51</sup> It, in fact, proceeded from Humboldt Bay as far as the 143° 32' meridian but was then forced to return. Robidé van der Aa, compiler of the reports of the various expeditions, in 1879 urged:

Far-seeing statesmanship suggests that the Government of the Netherlands Indies, with an eye on a not unlikely establishment of the Germans in the eastern part of New Guinea . . . quickly consider whether our present eastern boundary . . . delimits in geographical and ethnographical terms a rounded-off entity or whether it may not be desirable to shift the border to the 145th meridian.<sup>52</sup>

But Robidé van der Aa's was a lonely voice and the Dutch colonial government appeared satisfied to consider Cape Bonpland its most eastern outpost along the northern shore of New Guinea.

*The Eastern Part, 1860–1886*

Similarly inhospitable to explorers and further removed from the trade routes of the East, the eastern part of New Guinea continued in even more isolation than its western counterpart. Proclamations by British subjects at Darnley Island and Doreh Bay (both in 1793) which could have affected its territorial status were short-lived and soon forgotten. The Union Jack was raised at Cape Possession (north-west of Yule Island) in 1846 by Lieutenant C. B. Yule of Her Majesty's *Bramble*, who was engaged in an Admiralty survey of the Torres Strait and neighbouring areas.<sup>53</sup> But the fate of Yule's proclamation taking possession of this newly discovered part of the country in Her Majesty's name was identical with that of its predecessors.

Interest in this part of New Guinea increased, however, after the 1860s due to Australian participation in the Torres Strait pearling and bêche-de-mer industry, the unsatisfactory conditions of indentured labourers, the increased strategic and commercial significance of the Torres Strait route for steamship navigation, and the growing French and German activities in the south-west Pacific.<sup>54</sup> Australian interests led to the formation of the New Guinea Company in 1867 and pressure by various persons on the British government for annexation of New Guinea. These were not all Australians. In 1875, for example, the influential Royal Colonial Institute addressed a memorandum to the Earl of Carnarvon suggesting that British authority 'should without delay be extended to the portion of New Guinea lying east of 141 degrees of east longitude up to which the Dutch Government claims possession of the Island'.<sup>55</sup>

The Earl of Carnarvon responded by asking the Admiralty to present him with:

Any information which they may possess as to the title or alleged title of the Dutch to the western portion of New Guinea; the precise boundaries of the territory held to be Dutch; and with any other information bearing upon the suggestion that England should assert the ownership and take possession of the eastern portion of the island.<sup>56</sup>

The Admiralty hydrographer, Captain F. J. Evans, in his memorandum dealing with 'The Discovery and Exploration of the Coasts of New Guinea' apologized for his imperfect sketch of the Dutch claim caused by 'the secrecy and jealousy of the Dutch in relation to their East India Possessions, even to a late period'.<sup>57</sup> He probably should have apologized for inability to read Dutch as well because he was of the opinion that the Dutch claim was based exclusively on the right of discovery and exploration and failed to mention the Proclamation of 1828 which took possession of the southern and western parts of the island.

In spite of the pressure from various sources, the British government remained lukewarm about annexing New Guinea as an imperial respon-

sibility. It had ignored Captain John Moresby's earlier proclamation (issued on Hayter Island on 24 April 1873) when he, flushed by his discoveries of new islands and ocean passages and convinced that occupation of this area 'by any foreign maritime power . . . would be a standing menace to Queensland', had solemnly taken possession of 'three considerable islands' off the eastern tip of New Guinea (together with various groups of detached islets).<sup>58</sup> Britain did, however, appoint a High Commissioner for the Western Pacific in 1877 and gradually extended the Queensland boundary across the Torres Strait until it included by 1879 practically all the neighbouring off-shore islands of New Guinea.<sup>59</sup> These palliatives, however, failed to satisfy. Australian anxiety over the threat of German expansion reached a climax in 1882–3 and precipitated action by Queensland. On 20 March 1883, Henry M. Chester (Resident Magistrate at Thursday Island) was instructed to proceed to Port Moresby. On 4 April he took possession 'of all that portion of New Guinea and the adjacent islands not already in occupation by the Dutch' and read the following proclamation in the presence of about two hundred natives and thirteen Europeans:

I, Henry Majoribanks Chester, resident magistrate at Thursday Island, in the colony of Queensland, acting under instructions from the Government of the said colony, do hereby take possession of all that portion of New Guinea and the islands and islets adjacent thereto, lying between the 141st and 155th meridians of east longitude, in the name and on behalf of Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, her heirs, and successors. In token whereof I have hoisted and saluted the British flag at Port Moresby in New Guinea this fourth day of April, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and eighty-three.

God Save the Queen!<sup>60</sup>

Queensland's action was neither accepted nor appreciated by Britain as is evident in the communication from the Earl of Derby to the Queensland Administrator, Sir Arthur Palmer:

Her Majesty's Government have given their careful consideration to the request of the Government of Queensland . . .

2. They are unable to approve the proceedings of your Government in this matter. It is well understood that the officers of a Colonial Government have no power or authority to act beyond the limits of their Colony, and if this constitutional principle is not carefully observed serious difficulties and complications must arise . . . It is therefore much to be regretted that your advisers should, without apparent necessity, have taken on themselves the exercise of powers which they do not possess.

3. The apprehension entertained in Australia that some foreign Power was about to establish itself on the shores of New Guinea appears to have been altogether indefinite and unfounded, and the inquiries which have been made by Her Majesty's Government have given them the strongest reason for believing that no such step has been contemplated. . . .

4. Her Majesty's Government are, moreover, clearly of opinion that even if the time had arrived for asserting and exercising the Queen's authority and jurisdiction on the shores of the island, or on some portions of them, there would be no necessity or justification for including in these measures the whole of the vast territory to which the proclamation of the Queensland Government purports to apply. . . .<sup>61</sup>

By this time, however, Australian opinion was almost solidly in favour of annexation. The Intercolonial Convention, held in Sydney in November and December 1883, expressed strong feelings about New Guinea and the New Hebrides. It was 'emphatically' of the opinion that 'such steps should be immediately taken as will most conveniently and effectively secure the incorporation with the British Empire of so much of New Guinea and the small islands adjacent thereto as is not claimed by the Government of the Netherlands'.<sup>62</sup> The governments of the various colonies represented at the Convention also undertook:

To submit and recommend to their respective Legislatures, measures of permanent appropriation for defraying, in proportion to population, such share of the cost incurred in giving effect to the foregoing resolutions as Her Majesty's Government, having regard to the relative importance of Imperial and Australasian interests, may deem fair and reasonable.<sup>63</sup>

Britain was now slowly edging towards establishing some form of protectorate. But, as Zimmermann has recounted, German action was imminent:

Since 1880 German circles have turned their attention to the eastern part of the north coast of New Guinea and its adjacent islands. Decisive action might not have come so soon if the British-Australian colony of Queensland had not simply declared New Guinea and neighbouring islands annexed. Germany woke up to the fact that the whole of German interests in the South Seas could go up in smoke and under the direction of the Secret Commercial Adviser von Hanseemann a consortium was formed charged with the acquisition of a South Seas colony.<sup>64</sup>

The Neu-Guinea Compagnie was formed in May 1884 and a scientific expedition under Dr Otto Finsch departed from Sydney for New Guinea on the *Samoa* on 11 September. Finsch's secret instructions were:

Exploration of the unknown or little known coasts of New Britain as well as the north coast of New Guinea to the 141st meridian in order to discover harbours, to establish friendly relations with the natives, and to acquire as much territory as possible.<sup>65</sup>

Meanwhile, the British government had been informed that Germany 'intended to place under the direct protection of the Empire . . . those districts in which German commerce has become predominant, or to which expeditions, whose justification can be denied by no one, were about to be undertaken'.<sup>66</sup> The British Cabinet met on 9 August and Lord Granville was able to inform the German Ambassador that same day that

The extension of some form of British authority in New Guinea, which will be shortly announced, will only embrace that part of the island which specially interests the Australian Colonies, without prejudice to any territorial questions beyond those limits.<sup>67</sup>

This statement could create the impression that Britain gave Germany *carte blanche* for the acquisition of other parts of New Guinea and, indeed, it was interpreted in this way by the German government.<sup>68</sup> The British position became firmer, however, during the following weeks. As a result of communications between the Colonial Office and the Foreign Office, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin was instructed to inform the German government that it was now proposed

To proclaim and establish the Queen's prerogative over all the coasts of New Guinea not occupied by the Netherlands Government, except that portion of the north coast comprised between the 145th degree of east longitude and the Eastern Dutch Boundary.

The British Protectorate will also include the small islands immediately adjacent to those portions of the coast over which it is established.

The 145th degree of east longitude has been fixed as the Western British limit on the northern coast, in order that it should embrace the territory owned by the natives on the Maclay Coast, whose claim for British protection has long been under the consideration of Her Majesty's Government, and was one of the principal reasons which determined the Cabinet to advise the Queen to assume the responsibility of establishing a protectorate in New Guinea.

The Maclay Coast extends to the southward as far as Cape King William, where commences that part of the coast extending to the Dutch Southern Boundary which for obvious reasons it is indispensable to bring under British control.<sup>69</sup>

The German government curtly informed Britain that the announcement had come unexpectedly after the previous declarations and that it wished to reserve its position on the subject. In its view 'the delimitation of the areas which interest both sides on that stretch of the [north] coast should be the subject of a friendly understanding by means of a commission'.<sup>70</sup> This sign of a possible *rapprochement* wilted British determination and the government declared that the proposed British protectorate would be limited to the south coast 'without prejudice to any territorial question beyond these limits'.<sup>71</sup> Britain did move quickly, however, to proclaim a protectorate over this part of New Guinea.

There seems no reason to replay in any detail the comic opera in which H. H. Romilly, British High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, and Commodore J. E. Erskine were the leading stars. Both men received identical instructions.<sup>72</sup> Romilly (arriving from Cooktown) solemnly proclaimed the Protectorate on 23 October 1884, only to see his proclamation nullified by an indignant Erskine, who (arriving from Hobart via Sydney) was intent on carrying out *his* instructions and who re-

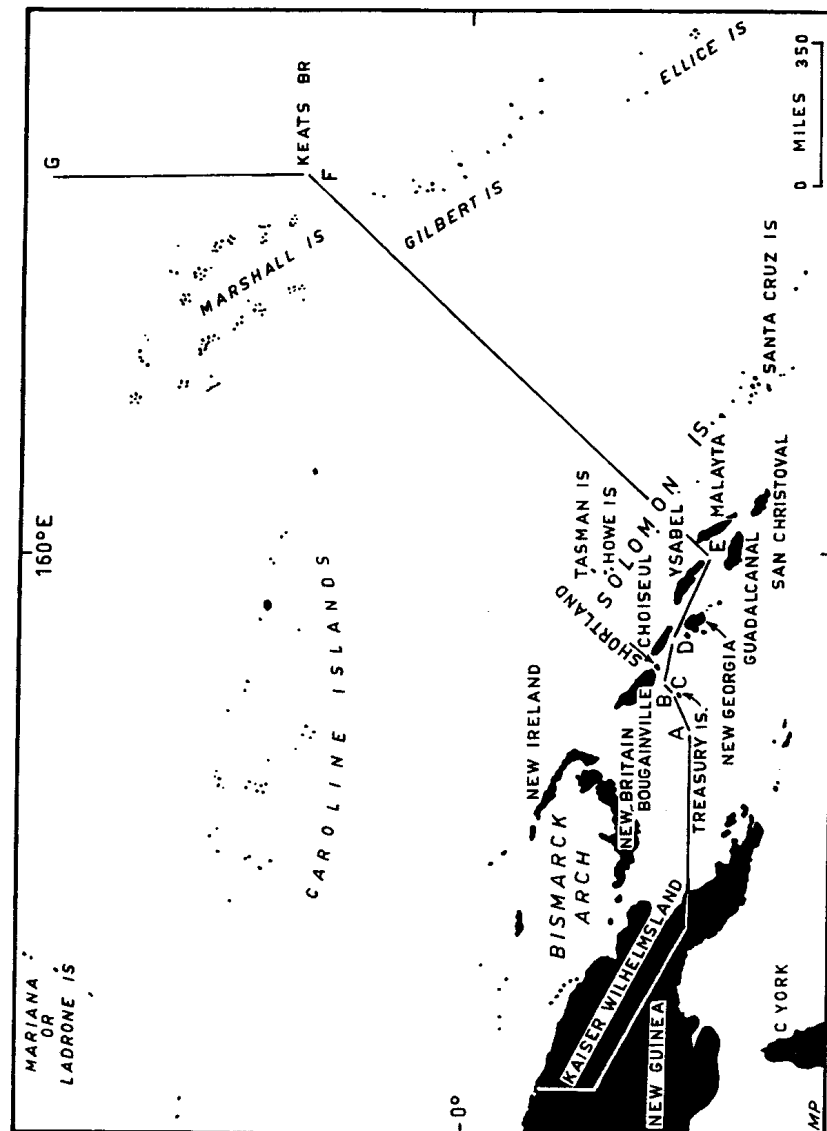
proclaimed the Protectorate 'in as formal and thorough manner as possible' on 6 November.<sup>73</sup>

It is of interest that the two proclamations could lead to different interpretations regarding the extent of territory claimed. Romilly's nullified proclamation placed 'that part of the island of New Guinea from the Dutch boundary . . . to the East Cape, and also the islands adjacent to it eastward to Kosman Island' under British protection.<sup>74</sup> The Erskine proclamation was almost absurdly restrictive in claiming 'All that portion of the southern shores of New Guinea' from the Dutch boundary to East Cape 'with all islands adjacent thereto south of East Cape to Kosman Island, inclusive, together with the islands in the Goschen Straits'.<sup>75</sup>

Act two of the opera began on 6 December with a slightly different cast. At that time, Erskine, who had returned to Sydney, received instructions to annex the D'Entrecasteaux Archipelago as well. The sentence 'D'Entrecasteaux Group and small islands adjacent' was added to the proclamation of 6 November 1884, giving it the appearance of a forged document.<sup>76</sup>

Following the British decision of 9 August, the German government had wired its Consul-General in Sydney that it had decided 'in Neu-Britannien und an der Nordostküste Neu-Guineas . . . die deutsche Flagge zu hissen'.<sup>77</sup> Assisted by Dr Finsch, German flag-raising ceremonies took place during October-December on the north coast of New Guinea and the New Guinea islands. The British government was informed officially on 19 December that the German flag had been hoisted 'at three places on the north coast of New Guinea, and at ten places in New Britain, Ireland and Sable Land'.<sup>78</sup> Britain now acted swiftly. A harried Erskine was instructed to proceed 'with all despatch' to Port Moresby and extend the protectorate over the territory between East Cape and Huon Gulf (up to the point of German annexation), the Louisiade and Woodlark groups, and Long and Rook Islands in the Vitiaz Strait.<sup>79</sup> Fresh British proclamations and flag-raising ceremonies took place in early 1885, including a ceremony close to Fortification Point (147° 43' East Longitude), near present-day Saidor on the Maclay (Rai) Coast.<sup>80</sup> Germany officially protested against the British action 'as contrary to the promise of the English Government given to the Imperial Government in official despatches'.<sup>81</sup>

As far as mainland New Guinea was concerned, a *modus vivendi* was reached in April 1885. Hereby 'a fair and equal division of the territories'—Germany 'about 67,000 square miles', England 'about 63,000 square miles'—was arrived at 'by means of a conventional line or lines' drawn 'from the coast near Mitre Rock on the 8th parallel of south latitude' to the 147th meridian East Longitude and from there 'in a straight line' north-westerly to the point of intersection of the 6th parallel with the 144th meridian and then again in 'a west-north-westerly



2 The Anglo-German Declaration of 1886

direction' to the intersection of the 5th parallel of South Latitude with the 141st meridian of East Longitude.<sup>82</sup>

A subsequent agreement, concluded in April 1886, defined British and German spheres of influence in the western Pacific.<sup>83</sup> Not only was German authority confirmed over New Britain and New Ireland (the Bismarck Archipelago), but the 'conventional line of demarcation' which was drawn from the New Guinea coast along the 8th parallel of South Latitude swerved south of Shortland Island and south-west of Choiseul and Ysabel before turning north-easterly towards the central Pacific. In spite of the intermittent contact of British and Australian seafarers, traders, whalers, and missionaries with the Solomons, the northern half of this archipelago was placed under German authority (see Fig. 2).

By 1886, then, New Guinea was divided among three European powers by geometrical lines which paid scant attention to geographical features or the particular needs of the inhabitants. The following chapters discuss the boundary between Queensland and the Territory of Papua, the former Anglo-German boundary between Papua and the Trust Territory of New Guinea, and the central dividing line between east and west New Guinea, the Irian boundary.

## 3

## Papua Irredenta

*The Origin of Queensland's Northern Boundary*

The New South Wales squatting district of Moreton Bay became the colony of Queensland in 1859. Large in size but small in number of inhabitants (approximately 25,000 people), the colony was preoccupied with safeguarding its boundaries. This concern soon led to insistent demands on the mother country to carry out her 'imperial task' in the south-west Pacific and to engage in territorial expansion.

Letters Patent of 6 June 1859 defined the initial boundaries of the colony. The land boundary was set out in detail; but the description of the maritime one was perfunctory. It stated nebulously that Queensland acquired 'all and every the adjacent Islands, their members and appurtenances, in the Pacific Ocean'.<sup>1</sup> A similarly vague phrase was employed for the Gulf of Carpentaria maritime boundary in 1862 when the Queensland territory was expanded from the 141st to the 138th meridian of East Longitude.<sup>2</sup> Given the narrow interpretation which was given to these maritime limits it could be argued that New South Wales had never abandoned title to the islands off her former coastline.<sup>3</sup> And, indeed, in 1865 the Governor of New South Wales made use of his commission 'to lease certain islands for the purpose of working guano deposits' by issuing a seven-year lease of Raine Island—lying some sixty miles off Queensland's Cape York Peninsula—to a private individual.<sup>4</sup> This development led the Queensland Governor in December 1871 to request that the Colonial Secretary extend his jurisdiction over all islands within sixty miles of the Queensland coast.<sup>5</sup> This was granted in the Letters Patent of 30 May 1872 and, following the request of the Queensland Legislature, a proclamation and deed of transfer annexed the islands in August of that same year.<sup>6</sup>

In the north, the new maritime boundary brought all of the major Torres Strait channels and all the islands from Endeavour Strait to the unexamined reefs north of Jarvis Island under Queensland jurisdiction. Government buildings were constructed at the new post of Port Kennedy on Thursday Island in 1876 (see Fig. 3). The sixty-mile range, however, did not reach the Warrior Reefs nor such islands as Dalrymple, Darnley, and the Murray group but this hardly affected the strategic command of the Strait. As Captain J. Moresby, who surveyed this area in the early 1870s, put it: