PART 2

First Impressions and Attitudes

A fascinating aspect of ethnohistory is the analysis of descriptions of first culture contacts. Such descriptions can be highly entertaining: the human mind, confronted by entirely unfamiliar objects or ideas, reacts in strange and unexpected ways. Nothing about the Motuan of the Port Moresby district so infuriated an English traveller as their failure to invent a Melanesian equivalent for the expression, ‘thank you.’ (B124) Nothing so offended the Victorian sensibilities of a missionary and a royal navy man as the natives’ custom of holding the nose between the forefinger and thumb of one hand while the forefinger of the other hand probed the navel. (B18) Such an ‘uncouth’ greeting was one more piece of evidence to confirm the opinions expressed by European fore-runners, that the people of New Guinea were barbarous.

We have, in the documents that follow, numerous recitals by Europeans of the New Guinea peoples’ offensiveness in appearance, customs and behaviour. It is not so easy to discover what the latter found offensive in the Europeans.

Observers tend to project their tensions. Thus, observations are coloured by what one has been told to expect, by what one desires to see and by what one hopes to perform; and the impressions that are formed often depend on the degree to which these expectations are met. If the observer is not gifted with unusual powers of insight, or if new evidence of a different sort does not arise, the impressions harden into attitudes that might in time become eroded, but seldom break down completely.

When the European writes of his disappointments, frustrations or amazements with the land and the people, we can relate his impressions to what we know of his cultural background, his wishes and his expectations. We can see why he has developed a certain attitude and his behaviour becomes understandable in terms of it. On the other hand, we know relatively little about the native person’s cultural background and we can only guess at his impressions and attitudes. We do not know, for instance, what he thought of and expected from the Europeans.

There is no bridge between cultures. Values that are basic to the one culture have no relevance for the other. When a European praises or rejects what he sees in the New Guinean’s culture he is merely imposing his society’s prejudices on another: ‘As for morals,’ writes the naturalist, Raffray, of the Dorei people, ‘they are inconstant, disloyal, cruel on occasion, always traitors and cowards, noisy, rowdy, demonstrative and lazy. I could give numerous examples of the above traits, but that would take too long.’ (B54) It is unfortunate that the New Guineans could not give us just as clearly their impressions of Raffray and his companions. There would be no more truth — in the sense that the findings could be universally accepted — in such a picture of the European than there is in Raffray’s picture of the New Guinean. Each manufactures an image of the other, equally absurd. Is there then anything to be gained from the study of such European-centred documents? Some of the documents suggest a New Guinea viewpoint and give us an occasional glimpse at the other side of the coin. A study of attitudes revealed by Europeans and by New Guineans can help us to understand the values and assumptions that coloured their experiences and directed their behaviour. This understanding is particularly important when one comes to study the interaction and change that resulted from sustained culture contacts.

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1 The Gallop Papers, Journal Entry for Sept., 1886 by R. Gallop, Mitchell Library, MS. uncat., set 488; item 1F
2 Moresby notes the custom at Killerton Is., (J. Moresby, Discoveries in New Guinea, London, 1870, p. 219); Bridge describes it as a custom of the Woodlark Islanders and the Moresby Islanders, C. Bridge, ‘Cruises in Melanesia, etc.’ Journ. R. G. S. (1886, pp. 562-30); Macfarlane describes the custom at Tente Island, (Journal of S. Macfarlane, typescript, Mitchell Library, no. A3806, p. 4
THE IMAGE: DOCUMENTS B81 to B93

New Guinea meant different things to different men. And yet it is remarkable how men's earliest illusions concerning the land and the people persisted, so that nearly three hundred years after Europeans first made contact, the image was basically the same. The image was built on one or more of the following convictions: that the natives were so wild as to be demoniac; that great untapped riches and strange sights awaited those visitors brave enough to venture; and that, in keeping with all wild and demoniac places, the land retained its secrets by providing severe obstacles to intrusion.

Grijalva (1537), said of the Papuans, 'most of them eat men's flesh, and are witches, so given to devilishness, that the devils walk among them as companions.' (B3) His opinion is echoed and re-echoed by European visitors down through the centuries. Early contacts were marked by tentative offers of friendship, by mutual suspicion and then sporadic hostilities until the European decided that nothing was to be gained from persistence and withdrew. The word used most frequently to describe the New Guineans, in accounts of contact right through from Torres in 1606 to Jukes in 1845, is 'treacherous'. The natives' main weapon against the superior arms of the foreigner was weight of numbers; their strategy — dissemblance and a sudden attack. Contacts were too brief to achieve anything but the strengthening of the earliest impressions formed, that the native people were not to be trusted and had nothing to offer that would justify the dangers of a prolonged meeting.

The Portuguese and Spaniards were men in a hurry. From the new lands of the Pacific there had to come the reinforcements necessary for the Catholic army in its life and death struggle with the Lutherans and Calvinists, and the riches that would guarantee power in Europe. Prado's account of contact with the people of Mailu on the south-east coast shows the peculiar combination of benvolement and ruthlessness in the Iberian make-up. (B7)

Employees of the Dutch East India Company were anxious to discover trade commodities that would justify New Guinea's inclusion in their commercial empire, because unreumerative voyages were not tolerated by the Company directors. The tensions governing their actions are seen in the exasperation of Keys who spent several days explaining the clauses of a treaty in slaves and marsoi bark to the people of Onin, fed them in good Spanish wine, and ended by accomplishing nothing more than 'a handful of flies'. (B16; B17) The Dutch found nothing attractive in New Guinea — in the land, the prospects, or the manners of the people. Jansz, Carstensz, Pool and Kolff all lost part of their crew in hostilities with the natives. Successive explorers were warned of the perfidy of the people. Accounts of atrocities were few but gruesome enough to affect the most hardened souls. Two incidents of the nineteenth century that were given wide publicity were the fate of twenty seamen wrecked on Malaita in 1829, and of 340 Chinese and Europeans of the St. Paul, who were wrecked on Rossel Island in 1858. Leonard Shaw, a survivor from the St. Paul, spent three and a half months in captivity on Kilinailau Island in the Solomons while another survivor, Black, was rescued from New Ireland in 1851. (B85) In 1873 Captain Redlick on a trading mission along the New Guinea coast in the Franz, described the horrible fate of some of his men who were captured by the natives, and the terrible revenge he and the Rajah of Salwatti took on some natives who were thought to be guilty of the crime. Europeans expected to find the New Guinea peoples backward and treacherous and expressed pleasant surprise when they found exceptions.

Saavedra's fanciful name of 'Island of Gold' for Biak, gave weight to eager speculation that riches were to be found in New Guinea. (B2) Similarly, the name 'Islands of Solomen' hopefully given to the archipelago off the north-east coast, lent credibility to the same dream of wealth. The search for the source of Solomon's wealth had occupied Europeans since their entry into the Pacific. As each region was explored and proved negative, the dream was not lost sight of: the search continued further to the south and to the east. Men were eager to see associations

2 P. A. Leupe, De Reizen der Nederlanders naar Nieuw-Guinea en de Papoeasche Eilanden in de 17 de en 18 de eeuw, Nijhoff, ed., s'Gravenhage, 1875, p. 155 et seq.
5 See pp. 576-7; 588-9; 695
between the relatively unexplored areas of the southwest Pacific and the ancient world of Egypt and the Middle East. Curious myths illustrating this relationship were widely circulated. Marco Polo’s land ‘Lochac’ or ‘Beach’ was thought to be in this area; also Ophir, the land of Sheba, was thought to be here. It was said that the three Magi who attended Christ’s birth at Bethlehem came from the Moluccas, that the people of these islands were skilled in astronomy, the principles of which they had got from the Egyptians and preserved in ancient books. As late as the nineteenth century, D’Urville described ‘Egyptian’ art forms he saw at Dorei. (B45) Remarks on the Jewish features of some of the New Guineans and Papuans and Solomon Islanders were common: Shortland, Moseley, Moresby and Macleay all commented on this and the question of whether these people could be part of the Lost Tribe of Israel naturally arose. That this was not a new question for debate is shown by Dr John Campbell’s inscription on his map of Dampier’s discoveries in New Guinea: ‘It is the least known to Europe of any of the Eastern Countries. The inhabitants are generally speaking Blacks, but there is a Nation of Whites seated in one part of it whom some have suspected to be a Remnant of the Ten Tribes of Israel, who were carried into captivity ...’ (For the probable source of the story of ‘a Nation of Whites’, see Roggewein’s description, B31.)

The dream of New Guinea riches persisted, despite continued disappointments. Myths of gold nuggets lying ready to be picked up like potatoes from the soil were current as late as the eighteen-sixties and -seventies. (B84)

Negotiation of the New Guinea coastline in inadequate vessels produced tremendous tensions in the early explorers; they saw much to hold in awe, but little to admire. The mountains drew forth the first comments on the terrain. Jan Carstensz in 1623 described ‘a very high mountain range in many places white with snow, which we thought a very singular sight, being so near the line equinoctial.’ Witsen in 1705 described mountains ‘which are seen by sailors at a great distance at sea as if towering above the clouds.’ The atmosphere was ‘very damp and foggy, so much so that most frequently in the afternoons the land is entirely hidden, which has caused the Dutch East India Company the loss of many ships.’ (B19) For Dampier, the eruption of a volcano in New Britain was ‘the most terrifying experience I ever beheld.’ To Labillardière, who sailed with D’Entrecasteaux, a similar sight appeared not nearly as terrifying as the hazard of negotiating the Dampier Strait. The approaches to much of the coastline were rendered difficult by shallows, reefs, currents and strong winds. Navigation in New Guinea’s eastern waters was considered particularly dangerous: ships preferred to take a course north of the main island and escape the perils of the Louisiades.

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, New Guinea was still shrouded in mystery. Ignorance of what lay beyond the fringe gave rise to fanciful speculation of a quite incredible kind. Several publications over this period whetted the appetite of the Victorian reading public for things new and bizarre. It is difficult to determine whether in Andrew Deverel, The History of an Adventurer in New Guinea (published 1863) the hero had any real existence. (B83) Andrew Deverel is a far more romantic character than Captain Lawson, who describes his adventures in Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea (B87) (published 1875), and yet Deverel’s adventures are more credible than Lawson’s. Neither of these stories can surpass for startling ideas the adventures of Louis Trégancé, a French sailor. In Adventures in New Guinea (published 1888), Trégancé claims to have spent nine months as a prisoner of an inland sophisticated tribe, the Orangwoks. Their sophistication is described in their buildings six storeys high, in their organization of 10,000 labourers for the gold mines, and in the splendid court of the king, Hotar Wokoo. (B93)

These tales, even after they were exposed as gigantic hoaxes, served to centre interest on New Guinea. Its mysteries attracted eccentric scholars like ‘Professor’ Denton, and colourful adventurers like Lawrence Hargrave and George (Chinese) Morrison, as well as idealists, scientists and explorers. Jukes, naturalist on the Fly expedition (1845), imagined the interior of New Guinea would be as enchanting as the Arabian Nights! (B81) Luigi d’Albertis, Italian naturalist, navigated the Fly River, and, pushing inland for a sight of the mountains, claimed he felt something of the excitement of Moses, who had been promised a view of the Promised Land. (B70) Sherman Denton at Yule Island in 1884, on his way to the New Guinea mainland, compared the Yule Islanders to the Red Indians ‘of poetry and fiction’, and compared his own longing for the sight of New Guinea to the longing the first discoverers of America felt for that new land. (B90)

As it happened, the realities to be observed in New Guinea were often more interesting and strange...
than the features dreamed up by the most vivid imaginations. The more sophisticated Europeans of the late nineteenth century no doubt smiled at the dreams and misconceptions of their forebears and grew impatient with their contemporaries who reported stories of giant birds and 'tailed' tribes in New Guinea. (B88) Yet their own more scientific accounts of contact with the land and its people often reveal gross errors. These are particularly evident in interpretations of the native people's reactions and responses to contact with the white man; for the

European measured and assessed everything against the yardstick of his own culture. His Western European background supplied him with set assumptions, prejudices and values, all of which coloured his observations. His image of New Guinea was closer to reality than that of his precursors; but all except the most perceptive and sensitive of men had a considerable way to go before arriving at an understanding of the New Guinea people and a recognition of truth. See also Gavin Souter, New Guinea: The Last Unknown, Sydney, 1963.

B81 Speculation about the Interior of New Guinea, 1845

J. Beete Jukes was a naturalist who accompanied the H. M. S. Fly expedition under the command of Captain Blackwood to chart the western side of the Gulf of Papua. On 2 June 1845 the party had examined about 140 miles of the coast of New Guinea when it came upon a large area of mud banks intersected with fresh water channels. Jukes reflected that these could form the delta of a large river. The possibility of the existence of such a river whereby one might penetrate the interior of New Guinea motivated further explorations on this coast.

I know of no part of the world, the exploration of which is so flattering to the imagination, so likely to be fruitful in interesting results, whether to the naturalist, the ethnologist, or the geographer, and altogether so well calculated to gratify the enlightened curiosity of an adventurous explorer, as the interior of New Guinea. New Guinea! The very mention of being taken into the interior of New Guinea sounds like being allowed to visit some of the enchanted regions of the 'Arabian Nights', so dim an atmosphere of obscurity rests at present on the wonders it probably conceals.


B82 Captain Owen Stanley Reports on the Papuans, 1849

After the completion of the fourth surveying cruise of H. M. S. Rattlesnake and H. M. S. Bramble, the Commander, Captain Owen Stanley, wrote of the curiosities of the voyage to Lord Stanley. See B66 for background detail, also B109, B110 and B111.

The natives (of the Louisiade Archipelago) seem to form a race between the Malays and the South Sea Islanders in colour; many of them quite resembled the former. We noticed a great variety of expression of countenance, a great many of the men had perfectly Jewish features. Can part of the lost tribes have found their way to these regions? All that we saw about the people was curious, but what puzzled us most was seeing jets of smoke suddenly start out from the sides of the hills as we passed them; it was not smoke from a common fire, it looked much more like the rush of waste steam from a steamer's funnel. Cook had noticed the same thing amongst the South Sea Islands and came to the conclusion that the natives must have fire-arms.

The New Guinea people not only do not possess fire-arms but they did not seem to be aware of the nature of ours, so that I am quite at a loss to account for these jets which were seen all along the coast from Rossel Island, the East End of the Louisiade, to Cape Possession on the coast of New Guinea.

B85  A Cruise among the Cannibals, 1873

Captain Edwin Redlick of the schooner Franz, was on a trading mission from Sydney, N. S. W., among the islands of the Western Pacific and along the coasts of New Guinea. On 12 November two boats were detached with 18 men and fitted out for a three weeks' cruise. When the boats had not returned to Galewo Strait by 6 December, Captain Redlick asked assistance of the Rajah of Salwatti in ascertaining the fate of the men. The Rajah took a search party and returned a few days later with some of the possessions of the men whom he thought had been killed and eaten. Redlick tried to persuade the Rajah to accompany his party to the scene of the murder and although the Rajah strongly resisted, he finally acceded to Redlick's wishes.

The following day, 2nd of January, we could not have been less than two degrees to the east of Salwatti, and we now steered into a large and beautiful river called Crabara [probably McCluer Inlet, near Assassination Creek, ed.]. We pulled very fast until 11 o'clock at night, when we anchored; we were then at least 30 miles up the river, which runs a long way inland. The river is here half a mile wide, the banks covered with the most luxuriant vegetation. The party now divided; some remained at anchor, and some proceeded further up the river.

The next morning two of the prows returned, bringing three bush natives whom they had caught. One of them, by his own confession, had been actually engaged in the murder of the men, and boasted of having killed the 'white man'. He said that the two boats had been seen lying at anchor at Esimal Island. Three canoes, each having fifteen men, from the mainland, had put off with bananas, pine-apples, which were given to the men in the boats, the canoes quietly paddling off to the coast. This friendly behaviour effectually put the mate and his companions off their guard, while the New Guinea men had counted the number of men in the boats, and saw how they were armed. The next night, the savages returned and with the exception of the two boys who had been left as boat-keepers, ramped on shore by their fires; they had divided into two parties and were a little apart.

The New Guinea men crawled upon them and killed them so suddenly, and so quickly, that not a cry escaped the victims, so that the two boys were not aware of what had happened so near them, and they both easily fell to the assassins' blows. The savages then brought the boats to a place which is nearly dry at low water, and there burnt them, and paddled off with the bodies up the river Crabara. They there cut off their heads, kept them for trophies, and sold the bodies to a neighbouring tribe, who had cooked and eaten them.

The three prisoners were horrible looking fellows, especially the one who had helped to murder the men. They are a different race to that inhabiting the more civilised parts of New Guinea, and are easily distinguished. After the prisoners were well secured, the prows went further up the river, and we hoped they would proceed as far as the village 'Crabara', which is about twelve miles distant. After pulling about 6 miles, we heard the shells sounding, and drums beating in the bushes right and left; the Rajah then advised a retreat, for he said they might come down on us by the thousand, so we made the best of our way down the river.

The next morning we anchored at Esimal; the cannibal was brought on shore to the exact spot where he had killed the mate, and in front of where the boats had been lying at anchor. He was lashed to the very tree under which he had committed the murder, and was shot there and then, each of us firing at him until he dropped dead. As soon as he was dead, the natives cut his head off, and strapped the body to a branch of the tree, as a warning example to other cannibals who will certainly visit the spot now and then. All the men witnessed the execution, for which the Rajah had previously given his sanction.

The two other savages remained in the Rajah's hands, and both died a most horrible death. We witnessed the execution of one of them. He was literally cut to pieces by women and children, the widows and orphans of those who were killed in the first expedition when the Rajah went out and recovered the guns, &c.


B86  Dr Meyer's Travels in New Guinea, 1873

Dr Adolf Meyer, a German naturalist, claimed to be the first to cross New Guinea. According to his account of his travels, he landed from the Moluccas at Dorei Bay with 35 Indonesians and, skirting around the shores of Geelvink Bay, attempted to cross New Guinea to the shores of the Arafura Sea. This attempt failed, and he then claimed to have succeeded in crossing the island from a point about one hundred miles further on in a north-westerly direction to McCluer's Gulf. His description of the country and its products in no way accords with reality and it is evident that much of Meyer's explorations were invention. However, he ran no risk of exposure for some time as no other European had a knowledge of the region. See also, A. Wichmann, Entdeckungsgeschichte von Neu Guinea, 1910, for doubts expressed on the

I then proceeded along the coast of Geelvink's Bay to the north-west, with the purpose of finding a spot from whence I might have a chance of crossing the island from Geelvink's Bay to M'Clure Gulf. It is known that a water communication has been supposed to exist between these two seas, but I ascertained that it is not the case. After many difficulties of all sorts, I at last succeeded, and crossed the country to the shores of M'Clure Gulf in four days. I shall soon describe this interesting tour more particularly, accompanied by a chart, in 'Petermann's Mittheilungen'. The mountain chains which I passed were not higher than 2000 feet, the country partly well populated; I was very fortunate with the Papuas, being entirely in their hands, and only accompanied by six of my men.

My schooner waited for me in Geelvink's Bay, and on my return I caught a severe fever, which has not yet left me.

But my chief task was still to be accomplished—the ascent of the Arfak Mountains, which have been for a century the object of the most fabulous reports. It was no easy thing, but after very careful preparation I succeeded perfectly.


B87 A Stimulus for Jaded Imaginations, 1875

'Wanderings in the Interior of New Guinea', by a 'Captain Lawson', was published in 1875. Lawson's adventures in New Guinea were supposed to have commenced in 1872 from a point on the south coast of the mainland. Captain John Moresby had completed a survey of hundreds of miles of the New Guinea coast in 1873 and he was able to point out many of the absurdities in Lawson's claims. There is some evidence to suggest that Lawson was Lieutenant Robert H. Armit, R. N., leader of a British group which in 1875 was known as the New Guinea Colonizing Association. See J. Moresby, Discoveries in New Guinea, London, 1873, appendix.

THE ASCENT OF MT HERCULES

The cold now shortly became excessive, and our desire to sleep increased with it. The thermometer fell twelve degrees below freezing-point, my hands were so numb that I could not feel whether I had fingers or not, and the water in our bottle was a mass of ice. Unfortunately we had very little extra clothing, with the exception of our blankets, and consequently we felt the coldness of the atmosphere most acutely...

At length blood began to flow from our noses and ears, and my head ached in a distracting manner. Aboo, also, complained of a headache, and entreated me to let him sit down and rest. With much trouble I restrained him from so doing, for I knew that if we halted sleep could not be resisted. As it was, I saw that our only chance of preserving life was to retreat without delay; for we were in a pitiful plight.

Our lips and gums, and the skin of our hands and faces, were cracked and bleeding, and our eyes were bloodshot and swollen to an alarming extent. The thermometer had sunk to twenty-two degrees below the freezing-point, and the air was so rarified that we were gasping rather than breathing. Our staves fell from our grasp, and we could not pick them up again, so benneced were our arms and hands. It was now one o'clock, and the greatest elevation we had attained was twenty-five thousand three hundred and fourteen feet. It took us three hours to descend to the limit of the snow; but after that point was reached we pushed forward more rapidly. As soon as I had recovered the use of my hands sufficiently to hold the flask, I served out a little branly, which put new life into us. Just before we left the boundary of the snow, three large white eagles were seen; and many black ones as high up as the limit of trees. We arrived at our camp about half-past seven in the evening thoroughly beat.

PAPUAN SPORTSMEN

All Papuans are inveterate cock-fighters, and what the brutal little bull-dog is to the Brummen rough, the long-legged game cock is to the Papuan sportsman. And they bet with the blindest infatuation, often reducing themselves to abject poverty, and even staking the clothes from off their backs. Occasionally, driven to despair by their losses, they will destroy themselves, and I heard of one man who having sat down to play dice with a Dutch captain lost all he had, and then staked the liberty of his wife and five children. He lost; but rather than suffer them to go into slavery, he murdered the whole family and then cut his own throat.


B88 Stories of Men with Tails, 1877

Reports of the existence in New Guinea of men with tails have persisted over many years. The stories originated with the native peoples. For Europeans, New Guinea offered such strange phenomena that
the possibility of the existence of a tribe of tailed men could not be discarded lightly. In the newspaper report (A), the L. M. S. missionary W. G. Lawes is castigated for repeating the stories; in (B) the trader Wilfred Powell treats the stories with respect. As late as 1937 Mr M. J. Healy, Assistant Resident Magistrate of the Gulf Division, reported similar stories when he patrolled the little-known country between the Tiveri and the upper Tauri, a district inhabited by the Kukukuku people. See the Report of the Lieutenant-Governor, J. H. P. Murray, Territory of Papua. Annual Report for the Year 1936-1937, October 1937, p. 24; also, K. Bushell, Papuan Epic. With an Account of Tailed Men near the Coast, London, 1936.

A On the 7th instant we published a letter written by the Rev. W. Lawes, who has just returned from a visit to New Guinea, and in which he repeats the story of the tailed native tribe. He says: 'I have heard the story from one and another of the natives along the coast, but have never conversed with one who has seen the said appendage. I have tried to sift the story and get at the truth, if there is any in it. I find that the farther you go from the locality the longer the tails become, and the more minute the description of their owners.' This is remarkably like the story of 'the three black crows'. At the outer edge of the historic circle there was a doubt that the sick man had vomited three black crows, but as the interior was penetrated the crows decreased in number, and at the very centre it was found that 'the three black crows' had dwindled down to 'something as black as a crow!' It is to be regretted that missionaries should lend themselves to retail the cock-and-bull stories of a lot of mendacious savages. The account of the tailed blackfellows, however, is excelled by the startling narrative of the auricular natives, who have ears so large 'that they roll them up when they walk and untie them when they lie down, using one for a mat and another for a coverlet!' It is added: 'This may not seem to throw much credit on the tail story, but who shall say that there is not a germ of truth in both?' We should say that the narration of the stories is indicative rather of the 'simple faith' of the retailers than of the veracity of the natives. The next yarn will probably be one of the discovery of a native race with one eye before and one behind—with mouths on the top of their heads, and noses like the trunk of an elephant. We may hear from natives of men with wings like birds, or with fins like fishes, and with 'swallows' equal to that of unsophisticated travellers; but although these things may be stated on the authority of nude savages and repeated by missionaries, we are not bound to receive the statements as gospel . . . .

B The legends of these natives are very absurd and impossible as a rule, and one can generally detect a true story from a false one by the absence of exaggeration in the former. If a native wishes to invent a story he dresses it up with the most improbable adjuncts that he can possibly command.

Very different . . . however, are their stories of a race of men with tails; also a race of little men represented as being about three feet high—of these their accounts do not vary, and are consistent with what one might suppose to be the facts. For instance, these people are not attributed with any supernatural propensities or gifts, but are described as men like other natives, building houses and carrying spears, &c.; the only thing perhaps at all exaggerated about the story is that they make a hole in the ground with a stick, when they sit down, for the tail to go into, because the tails are unendurable, but even this seems to bear the stamp of truth about it; for had a native invented the story, he would in all probability have made it a flexible one, as the only other tails that they have any knowledge of are those of the dog, cuscus, wallaby, &c., which of course are flexible; therefore had this been a mere creation of imagination it would probably have taken some such form as this: 'that they had tails wh.ch trailed on the ground behind them, and which they swung round them when fighting, like a club.' The fact of their tails being stiff inclines me to believe that there has been a family with such an appendage at one time amongst them; indeed it is a well-known thing that there was such a family in Austria. However, although on the coast the natives are quite confident as to where these people are situated, on going to search for them they are always reported to have moved somewhere else.

This story is told word for word the same in New Guinea, which is curious, so say the least of it, though not by the natives of the districts between Spacious and Open Bays, as far as Cape Gloucester. It is confined to the Gazelle peninsula in New Britain, but is heard of again in New Guinea, some two hundred miles distant. There is no such story in New Ireland.

SOURCE A 'Notes of the Day', Echo, 9 March 1877, Newspaper Cuttings, Mitchell Library; B Wilfred Powell, Wanderings in A Wild Country or Three Years amongst the Cannibals of New Britain, London, 1884, appendix, pp.275-6

B89 Hargrave Describes the Exhilaration of the Explorer, c. 1878

Lawrence Hargrave, engineer on four separate expeditions to New Guinea, was one of the founders of the Geographical Society of Australasia. For further background detail on Hargrave see B71; B76.

... our new found society cannot do a better thing to inaugurate its birth than by despatching a party to thoroughly investigate that large island that must eventually prove of immense value to the British Empire. As an old volunteer I well know the thrill of delight that starting on an exploring expedition used to send through my veins; first there is the cool calculation of cost and requirements and selecting outfits; then the vexations, delays; then those great events, the start, the last white man seen, the last sign of civilization,
and all is new before us. Now rise before me the careful journal keeper, the accurate observer, the geologist, the naturalist with spirit can and arsenical soap, the cook, the black tracker, and the inevitable grumbler, and things overlooked in the outfit; the hairsbreadth escape from the shipwreck or bush fire, surrounded by yelling savages, the night attack and repulse; the surprised rout at dawn of the enemy and loot of this camp; all these have their charms and feeling of exhilaration [sic] that they have been passed through: Then the fevers and the aegus, the loathsome sores, the sleepless nights spent in scratching our 'ten' infested skins (ten is a minute red insect that is on all New Guinea fauna, the cassowary and wallaby in particular) the enforced fast, the empty water bags, and finally the return to civilization, the wretched grasping of some of the party for notoriety and the credit of having done all the work, the blatant misrepresentations repeated from mouth to mouth....

SOURCE MS. Papers of Laurence Hargrave, undated, microfilm, Mitchell Library, FM4/1060

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**B90 The Denton Family Approaches New Guinea, 1884**

The Denton family was accustomed to travel. During his tour of some of the Australian towns, 'Professor' Denton was able to address audiences on a variety of subjects. He was interested in spiritualism and found an exciting medium in his son, Sherman. As a child Sherman was trained to conjure visions of strange, far-distant places he had never visited, such as New Guinea. Professor Denton and his two sons, Sherman and Shelley, joined the *Argus* expedition to New Guinea under the lead of W. E. Armit. See also B91.

By the 3rd of July, the schooner 'C. Walker' was ready for its passengers, and at two o'clock we sailed for Port Moresby, New Guinea.

Mr Armit, the correspondent for the Melbourne *Argus*, was a thin, wiry man, sanguine as to hair and mustache. He was a smart man, but altogether too fond of intoxicating liquor; and, when half drunk, would do and say many things unbecoming a gentleman.

Irving, his friend and assistant, was a slim English dude, possessing to perfection the art of bragging: this might be said to be his only accomplishment.

Hunter, the third on our list of passengers, was a pretty good fellow when sober.

Then there was Belford, a big, brawny half-caste; and a Dutch missionary, whose name I have forgotten; besides the captain, who was a fine fellow, and the crew.

The trade winds, which were very strong, blew almost directly opposite to the direction we wished to take; and our journey, on that account, was a long and rough one, considering the distance we had to travel.

We passed many small coral islands, a few of which were inhabited. A part of New Guinea, or Papua, a high rocky promontory, was sighted about noon of the 6th, and we ran within a mile of the shore. The first discoverers of America never looked with more longing toward the new land than we did toward this as yet little-known part of the world. We were to explore parts of this country where white man had never before placed his foot, and perhaps we should find animals and plants before unknown. And then the strange inhabitants of that new land — what an opportunity for the student of ethnology!...

We ran out to sea, and back again, and on the 8th reached Ule Island. This was a beautiful place; the surface was hilly, and covered with grass and forest, with here and there a native plantation of bananas; the shore was lined with a belt of cocoa-nut trees, and nestling under them was a village of considerable extent, composed of brown huts. Crowds of natives were running about on the sandy beach. On the hillsides, fires were lighted, as a signal that the inhabitants wished to trade.

As we put about to make another tack, a boat with a mat sail left the shore, and the captain hove to, and waited for its arrival. It contained several natives. The moment they came on board, we were struck with their remarkable resemblance to American Indians. They were by far the finest-looking savages I had ever seen. Tall, straight, and proud, they seemed more like the Indians of poetry and fiction — the Indians of early American history — than the feeble and degraded representatives of that race today. They were entirely naked, and their rich reddish-brown skin, fine muscular development, and frizzy hair (unlike the Indian), which stood up on their heads six or eight inches, gave them an imposing appearance. For ornaments, they wore tortoise-shell ear-rings, white shell rings on their arms and ankles, dogs'-tooth necklaces, and round pieces of board's tusk through the septum of their noses.

They brought cocoa-nuts, bananas, sugar-cane, and paradise-bird skins; all of which they threw upon the deck, without asking what would be given in return. Armit gave them flour, sugar, and tobacco; the latter pleasing them immensely...

The next day we passed Red-Scar Head, a promontory jutting into the sea; and the following day, by beating up inside the reef, we arrived toward evening at Port Moresby. The harbour was almost enclosed by high hills, covered with long, dry grass, with here and there a garden. In the ravines between the hills grew patches of forest, and a belt of cocoa-nut trees encircled the shore. On two small hills near the beach were the houses of the missionary, the church, and a few other small buildings. To the right, stretching for a quarter of a mile, the native town of Bura-Bura was supported on piles, in some places extending into the water; another part of the same town extended along the left shore to a small rocky island.

The morning after our arrival, a boat-load went ashore, but I remained behind on account of my lame foot. They came back with such glowing accounts of the land and the natives, that I could no longer resist the temptation to go ashore.

B91 The Armit Expedition Ends in Sickness and Death, 1884

W. E. Armit’s telegram, reported in the Argus, 24 October 1884. See B90 for background detail.

Arrived here (Port Moresby) on the 3rd September, after a most disastrous trip in point of illness. Reached Pauman, a village of the Seramina, 120 miles E.S.E. on 17th August. The natives were everywhere very friendly. Made the acquaintance of two entirely new tribes, who knew nothing of whites, and possessed not one scrap of iron. They were much frightened at us, but soon became reassured and very friendly. Their territory lies on the Iala river, one of the Kemp Welch sources. The country was fearfully mountainous, not an inch of flat anywhere. On the 18th August Professor Denton complained of indisposition, but not seriously. He had been suffering from a nasty ulcer on the instep. As we could not pierce into the range of mountains before us, owing to war between the tribes, I determined to return and made an attempt from a new point. We rested three days at Dedourie, having to climb over Mount Belford, 3600 feet high. Professor Denton was completely exhausted, having refused all nourishment and medicine since becoming ill. I remained with him and cheered him along and over the summit. Going down heavy rain soaked us through, and it was very cold. Belford returned from the village with fresh men and a hammock. We carried Professor Denton into Lochivago. On the 24th Bellford was prostrated with fever, Professor Denton getting weaker, yet obstinate even regarding food as well as physic. On the 26th we started for Moroka, Professor Denton and Belford on stretchers. The fever attacked me before breakfast, and I had a terrible day. We reached Berigabadi at 2 p.m. The village was deserted. The natives propped up the crumbling roof of a hut, but the floor had sunk in the centre. Mr Hunter who was the only sound man of the party, made our beds. At half-past 8 p.m. Professor Denton had very slight convulsive fits; five minutes afterwards he was dead. It was pouring with rain, and the weather was close and sultry. That night we were forced to camp with the dead body between us. Mr Hunter dug a grave, and we buried our unfortunate friend at 7 on Monday morning. We then proceeded to Monoka, thence to Sugaiere, and on to Port Moresby by Narianouna. I have been suffering from fever ever since.


B92 Morrison’s Expedition to the Interior, 1884

George Morrison left the Denton family at Cooktown, and recruited some companions for an expedition of his own to New Guinea—Ned Snow and John Lyons. The expedition was financed by the Melbourne Age. Lawrence Hargrave had claimed that the only good thing that came out of the gold speculators’ term in New Guinea (1877) was that their horses were left there to multiply and be of use to future explorers. Morrison was able to round up fifteen horses when he reached Port Moresby. On 21 July the small party set out towards the Goldie River. On 1 October the party was attacked by natives of Epai and Morrison was severely wounded by two spear thrusts. The attack came after Morrison had shot a native whom he had seen thieving from his supplies.

An exploring party, equipped by the Melbourne Age, under the command of Mr George Ernest Morrison, started from Port Moresby soon after the return of the Melbourne Argus expedition last autumn. Its objects appear to have been similar, namely to cross the island to the North eastern coast, and it seems to have followed the same or nearly the same route as far as the foot of the Central Range, and to have been compelled, like its predecessor, to bend thence to the eastward in search of a place low enough to cross. Horses were taken, and plenty of pasture found up to the main watershed. At the foot of the range, however, when on the point of success, Morrison was attacked and severely wounded by the natives who for many days had become increasingly menacing, and the part had to make a hurried return to Port Moresby.

In his telegram to the Age from Cooktown, Queensland, sent immediately on his arrival, November 20th, Morrison says he had reached a point more than 100 miles distant from Port Moresby. His party was a small one—2 white men besides himself.


B93 A French Sailor in a Charmed World, 1888

Adventures in New Guinea, is the fanciful tale of the adventures of a French sailor, Louis Trégance. The story tells of Trégance’s capture by an inland tribe, the Orangwoks, who escort him to their city.
No sooner had the priest and myself descended, carrying our luggage with us, than as from the ground, a score of Orangwoks enclosed us. They were mounted on little ponies, striped with yellow and white, which moved with great speed. Their riders were clothed in a long, loose-fitting robe, reaching below the knee; this was the common dress of the country. They were armed with swords, spears, and bows and arrows. Some of them carried shields of pure gold, and others had a breastplate of gold bars. They had a warlike look, although they were of small stature. We were seized before we had time to offer resistance, even had we thought of doing so, and bound with a well-made rope of bark and gold thread.

The head of the troop demanded our names and business in a tone of authority. He spoke the same language as the coast tribe, but spoke it differently. The coast tribe spoke from the throat; the Orangwoks spoke from their lips and upper part of the mouth; their voice too was more resonant, their pronunciation of the words was also different, and many of the words used were unknown to me. Lakangeoo replied to the speaker, and explained in an undertone our business. The officer listened within an indifferent air until the priest mentioned the goldmines. The chief’s attention was at once aroused, and he now displayed the keenest interest. When the priest finished speaking, at a word from the leader, every Orangwok sheathed his sword, or lowered his spear, from which I inferred that we were safe, and prepared to ride onward... Their little ponies went like the wind, and their white and yellow stripes flashed in the passing light in a striking manner; so too did the arms and shields, which were brightly burnished. I could now understand how the imagination of the coast natives had been wrought upon by the vision of some hundreds of the Orangwoks riding rapidly in their bright armour... K'ootar consisted of about two thousand or three thousand houses, and had a population of nearly ten thousand people. It was by far the finest city of the kingdom, though by no means the largest. None but chiefs and warriors were permitted to live in K'ootar, although any person, on receiving permission, was allowed to stay in it for a limited time. The houses were of several storeys, varying from three (including the ground floor) to seven. The palace of the king consisted of seven storeys. A few of the more distinguished chiefs had houses of six storeys, others less distinguished had five, four or three. No house of less than three was allowed to be built in K’ootar. This procured a uniformity which was very agreeable to the eye...

‘What do people in your country do?’
‘Dig gold out of the earth.’
‘How is the gold obtained?’
To this I replied shortly by explaining.
‘Will you go to the gold-mines of the Great King?’ (And here I could feel there was a general movement of reverence.) ‘And teach his servants to get gold?’
To this I replied that I would.

These questions were not put to me by the king himself. He addressed the wise man on his right hand, who again communicated with one on the next step, and he to one on the dais. My answer was conveyed to the king after a similar manner, but going the reverse way, being delivered to him by the wise man on his left hand.

I was now gently touched with the spear, and moved on, pleased that the wearsome and painful exhibition was over. On going up into the galleries already mentioned, I was struck with the magnificence of the ceremonial... The bright sun, which fell upon the gorgeous spectacle, illuminated the vast court with dazzling light; for every guard was clothed in bright uniform overlaid with gold. Everywhere there was a profusion of this metal.

The king was very small, not more than four feet high, and made in proportion. His wife was still smaller. They were richly dressed, and their jewels (they were the only persons permitted to wear jewels) shone with a dazzling lustre. In addition to the tigers I have mentioned there were on the outer rim of the dais four wild-looking animals (bisons, I believe they were); while in the trees which shaded the throne, and which were carefully cultivated, there sat several magnificent wawkoos.


THE REALITY: DOCUMENTS B94 TO B125

With our knowledge of the cultural backgrounds of the Europeans involved in first contacts with the peoples of New Guinea, it is easy to understand why they saw and thought as they did. But now comes the real work of the ethnohistorian: what did they really see? What was the cultural background of the New Guinean, and in what ways were his attitudes changed by the new experiences? What did the New Guinean think of the white man? Did he think of him as a man like himself, or as something more than or less than a man? Was the New Guinean's approach essentially friendly because he thought the Europeans were more than men and had come to bring him material advantages? Or was it essentially hostile because he thought the Europeans were less than men and brought evil? Did the New Guinean have any answers as to where the white man came from or why he came? There is always the evidence preserved in oral tradition, but the truth is not easily arrived at. In the collecting of ethnohistorical evidence we have a