

# CHILDREN OF THE FIRE

*The Life, Legends and Customs  
of the Mali Baining of Papua New Guinea*

*John Aranda Cabrido, SDB*



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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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The author expresses his gratitude to the Mali Baining families in Illi, Merai, Gar, Karong and Marunga and the Filipino community of Kokopo who cooperated in the research and funding of this project. He also thanks Ms. Nancy Amistad, Fr. Jose Reinoso, SDB and Fr. Francis Alencherry, SDB for their help in publishing and printing this work.

## PREFACE

This work is a labor of love. It is the fruit of pastoral ministry among the Mali Baining over a three-year period (2001-2004), the longest of which was December 2003-January 2004.

The Catholic missions to the Baining peoples were among the earliest started and dates to the beginnings of the evangelization of Papua New Guinea in the mid-19th century. This was spearheaded by the Fathers and Brothers of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) who were also among the earliest recorders of Baining culture, anthropology and ethnography. Although these missions spread throughout all the tribes of the Baining peoples, most of the literature produced referred to the more accessible Kachet, Uramat and Kairak tribes. The most noteworthy of these is *Baining Life and Lore* (Port Moresby: Institute of Papua New Guinea Studies 1982) written by Archbishop Karl Hesse, MSC and Fr. Theo Aerts, MSC.

In contrast, very little has been written about the Mali Baining. The works, mostly in German, remain unpublished. Virtually nothing is found in English. This work aims to fill in the lacuna.

The modernization of Papua New Guinea is forging ahead in rapid pace. Contact with Western ways has seen the disappearance of traditional cultures and values. The small Mali Baining population is not shielded from this phenomenon.

This work does not pretend to be definitive nor even strictly scientific. The author has no degree in anthropology or linguistics. At best he has employed Malinowski's "observational method." As a dedicated missionary who has won the trust of the people, he has recorded his observations and helped the people tell their stories. Ultimately, this is an evangelical endeavor, for planted in every culture are seeds of the Gospel.

It is hoped that this short book may inspire others for mission work in Papua New Guinea, particularly among its more marginalized tribal communities. May it also encourage some to produce a more detailed documentation of the tribal history and stories of the Mali Baining and other tribal peoples for anthropological reference by missionaries and social workers. Finally, may it serve as a depository of knowledge and culture for young Mali Bainings who may lose touch with their traditions given the pervasive Western influence and spur them to promote their cultural identity in the light of the Gospel values.

29 June 2005

*Solemnity of St. Peter and St. Paul*

*To the Salesians of Don Bosco  
on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee (1980-2005)  
of their mission work in Papua New Guinea*

## FOREWORD

It is a pleasure and an honour to be asked to write a few lines as foreword to the book *Children of the Fire*, written by Father John Cabrido sdb. To appreciate the Baining people is already laudable, to work with them is wonderful and to study their daily life as well as their culture I consider extraordinary.

From my 14 years living and working with the Chachet Baining I do know how little attention in the past the Governments have paid to even acknowledge the tribes of the Baining people. Infrastructure development, health and other social services were minimal or not existing.

I congratulate Fr. John on his research among the Mali tribe of the Baining people and I thank him for the love he has shown to them - in the context of his research and his pastoral work among the otherwise much forgotten people. I have experienced myself how difficult it is to gain the trust and the confidence of the Baining people who still treat their legends and customs as secret and sacred.

The more I am delighted that Fr. John had been successful to enter into the "world" of the Mali Baining during his pastoral work over the three year period. The material gathered in the document is of great value, considering - due to the outside influence - the rapid changes taking place in the life of the Baining people.

With Father John I hope that the Mali Baining reflect deeper on their wonderful cultural heritage and - in this context - on their traditional good values. May this book be a source for the young Mali people to strengthen their identity and so to become a stronger force in Church and Society!

Vosswinkel, 30 June 2005

✠ **Karl Hesse msc**  
*Archbishop of Rabaul*

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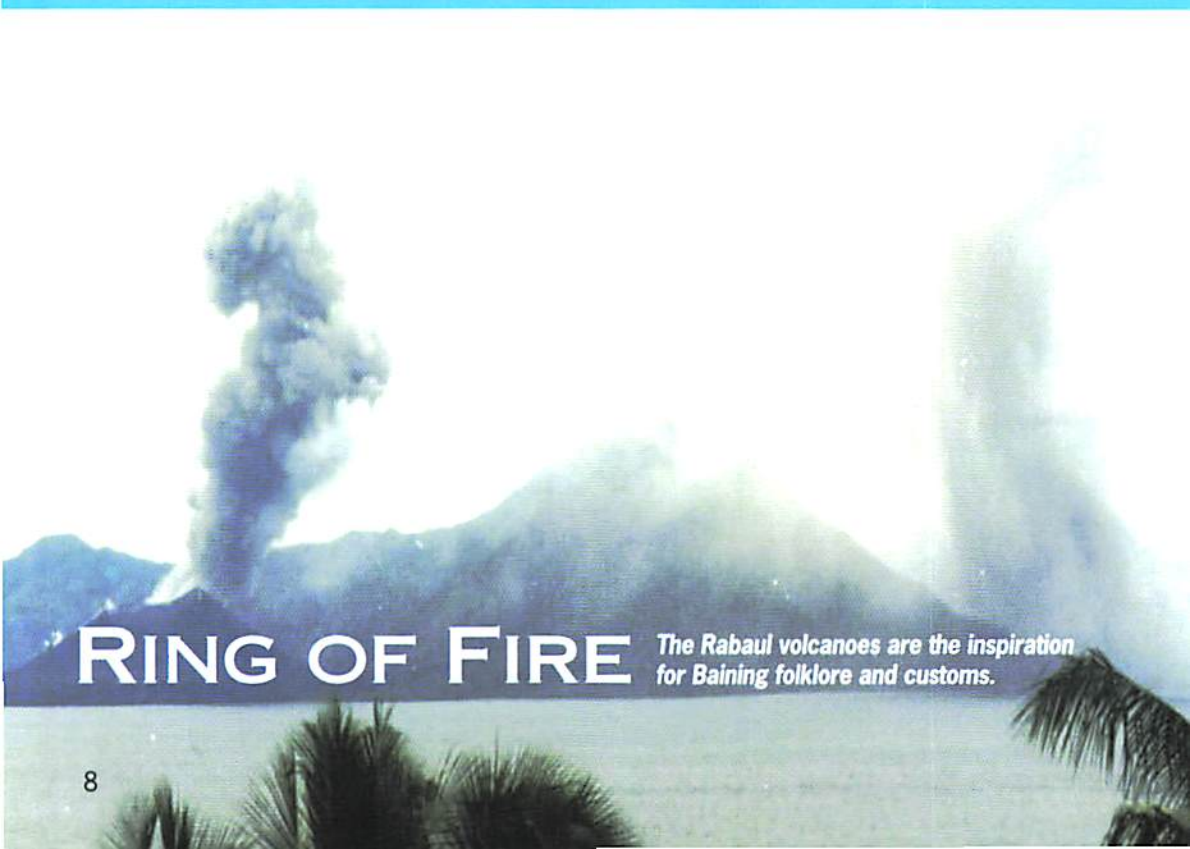
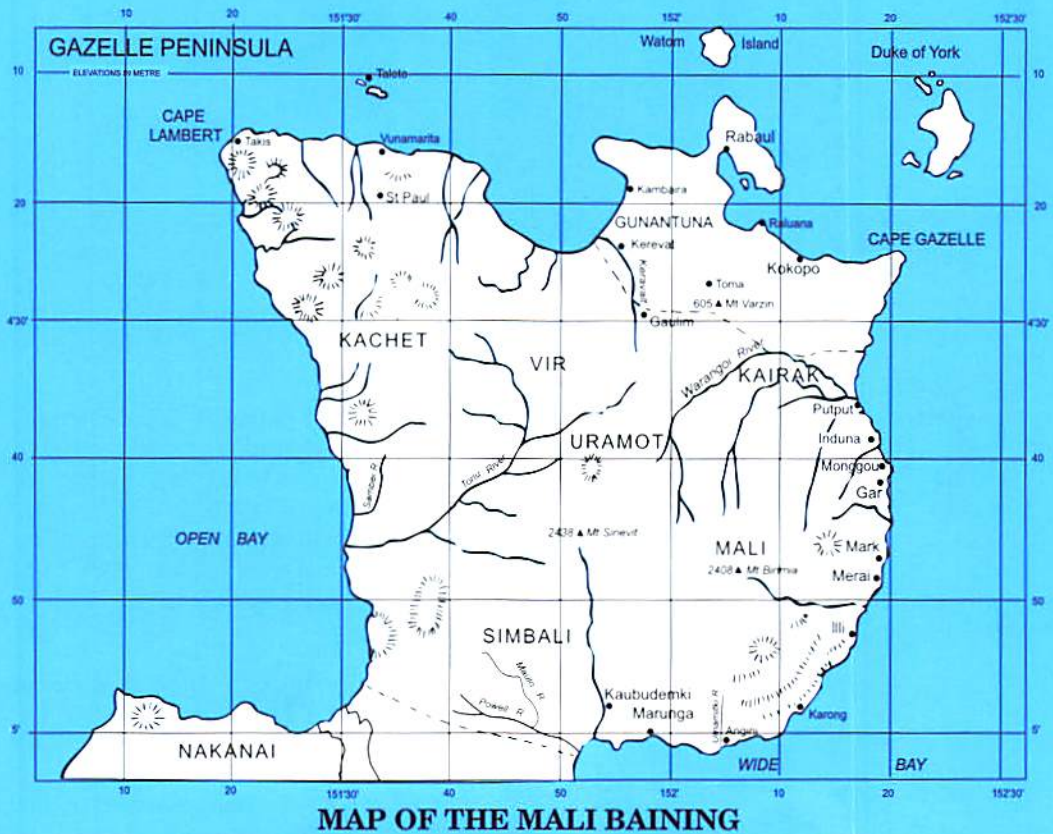
# 1 THE MALI BAINING OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

**T**he Baining people are located in the hinterland and the eastern shores of the Gazelle Peninsula of the island of New Britain. The earliest Baining folklore puts their origins on the northern shores of the Gazelle near the Rabaul volcanoes. The migration of the Tolais from the nearby Duke of York Islands and New

Ireland displaced the native Bainings driving them further inland and into the mountains where they are now found. This is supported by the ethnology of their languages. Whereas the Tolai language, Kwanua, like those of New Ireland are Austronesian, the Baining languages are non-Austronesian and indicate a totally different origin.



The Baining people today are divided into five tribes. The Kachet lives in the northwest while the Uramot and Kairak inhabit the central mountains. The Mali and the Simbali are found along the eastern shores. But this was not always so. Prior to World War II, the Mali Baining lived further inland in the eastern mountain areas of the Gazelle Peninsula. However, the Japanese forces uprooted them, destroyed their mountain villages and relocated them along the coast. Today the Mali Baining are found mainly in the villages of Marambu, Sanban, Kiligia, Raigel, Maranachi, Dadul, Gar, Merai, Illi, Karong and Marunga.



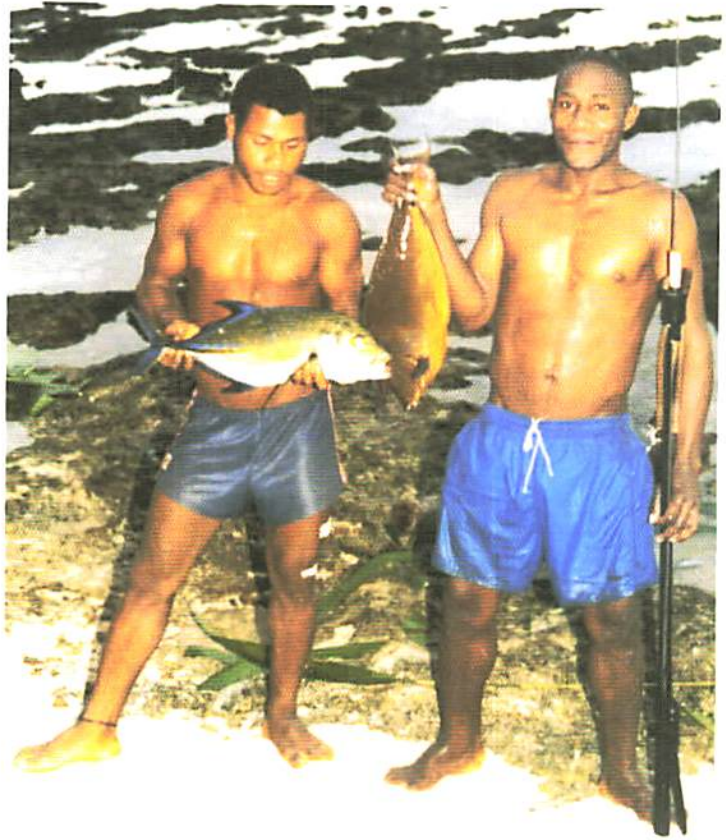
**RING OF FIRE** *The Rabaul volcanoes are the inspiration for Baining folklore and customs.*

## ETHNOLOGICAL REPORT ON THE MALI BAINING

In 1988 the Summer Institute of Linguistics made an ethnological report on the Baining Tribes. The result of their survey can be found in < [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_family.asp?subid=228](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=228) > and can be summarized as follows:

	KACHET	KAIRAK	URAMOT	SIMBALI	MALI
<i>Name of Language</i>	Qaqet	Kairak	Ura	Simbali	Mali
<i>SIL Code</i>	BYX	CRK	URO	SMG	GCC
<i>ISO 639-2</i>	paa	paa	paa	paa	paa
<i>Population</i>	6,350 (1988 SIL)	750 (1988 SIL)	1,900 (1991 SIL)	350 (1988 SIL)	2,200 (1988 SIL)
<i>Region</i>	East New Britain Province, Rabaul District, Gazelle Peninsula	East New Britain Province, Rabaul District, Gazelle Peninsula	East New Britain Province Rabaul District, Gazelle Peninsula	East New Britain Province, eastern Gazelle Peninsula	East New Britain Province, eastern Gazelle Peninsula
<i>Alternate Names</i>	MAQAQET, KAKAT, MAKAKAT, BAINING		URAMÄT, URAMIT, URAMET, URAMOT, AURAMOT		
<i>Classification</i>	East Papuan, Yele-Solomons-New Britain, New Britain, Baining-Taulil.	East Papuan, Yele-Solomons-New Britain, New Britain, Baining-Taulil	East Papuan, Yele-Solomons-New Britain, New Britain, Baining-Taulil	East Papuan, Yele-Solomons-New Britain, New Britain, Baining-Taulil	East Papuan, Yele-Solomons-New Britain, New Britain, Baining-Taulil.
<i>Comments</i>	2 dialects. Several primary schools. Mountains sloping to coastline. NT 1996	Many people are passively bilingual in Uramat. There is a primary school. Mountains and foothills.	'Ura' is the language name, 'Uramät' refers to the people. There are several primary schools. Literacy rate in first language: 15% to 25%. Literacy rate in second language: 15% to 25%. Mountains, foothills.	Many people are passively bilingual in Uramat. There is a primary school. Mountains and foothills.	A distinct language within the Baining ethnic group. Two dialects. Several primary schools. Mountains

Some sources also list the Makolkol and Taulil among the Baining tribes. But this is not considered such by the Bainings themselves. The Bainings hold that these two tribes originated from the mixed marriage between the Bainings and the Tolais. The Makolkol and Taulil tribes settled inland between the Tolais and the Bainings. Not belonging to either, the Makolkol and the Taulil were always on the disadvantage during tribal conflicts between the rival Bainings and Tolais. Attacked by both, the Makolkol and Taulil numbers have steadily declined. In a 1988 survey the Makolkol were listed only as 7 members and may well be already extinct.



**ESTIMATED FIGURES OF THE MALI BAINING VILLAGES**

It is difficult to give exact figures on the Mali Baining population. Even the most recent census of 2000 estimates the actual population since several of the Mali Baining villages are too difficult to reach and a number of its people are students or workers who have dual residency, both in the village and in the town or school.

The following estimate figures have been supplied by the Mali Bainings themselves and may reflect a more accurate count. My own stay in five of these villages leads me to conclude that these figures are reliable.

Village	Est. Population	Village	Est. Population
Dadul	60	Maranachi	400
Gar	300	Marunga	800
Illi	300	Merai	500
Karong	500	Raigel	450
Kiligia	100	Sanban	500
Marambu	500		

**LIFE IN THE VILLAGE**

Traditional Baining life is loosely organized. Communities have no chief or stratified leadership. To this day, the leaders in Mali villages are the elders. These are males who by their age, experience or achievement have acquired a certain status of prominence and are recognized as such. They are deferred to and they decide village activities, particularly its festivities. Those who obtain leadership through political positions are in danger of losing it also after their terms. Instead the true elders are those who are recognized heads of extended families or clans. The number of elders varies per village.

Village life is relatively peaceful and simple. Mali Baining life revolves around two complementary activities: gardening and hunting/fishing. The roles of the genders are complementary and no sphere is associated with only one. The males prepare the garden by felling down trees and clearing the ground.

They also plant the various crops, mainly root crops like taro, yams, *singapo*, cassava (*tapiok*), sweet potato; vegetables like tomatoes, cucumber, eggplant and *ibica*; and fruits like pineapple and banana (though these serve also as staple food). The women generally maintain the garden. They see to its weeding and harvesting the crops. At times, these gardens can be found several kilometers away from the village itself.



Today the Mali Baining are also engaged in plantations, like the coconut of yore and today's cocoa and vanilla. Ordinarily, the men and young boys maintain these plantations. The size and number of gardens and plantations reflect on the Mali Baining male's standing in the village.

Hunting is the man's domain. Skill in hunting wild boar, cassowary, wild fowl and tree kangaroos reflects on one's reputation and honor. Traps are set in the forest. This is done by selecting some young yet strong tree along a wild boar's forest path. The tree trunk is

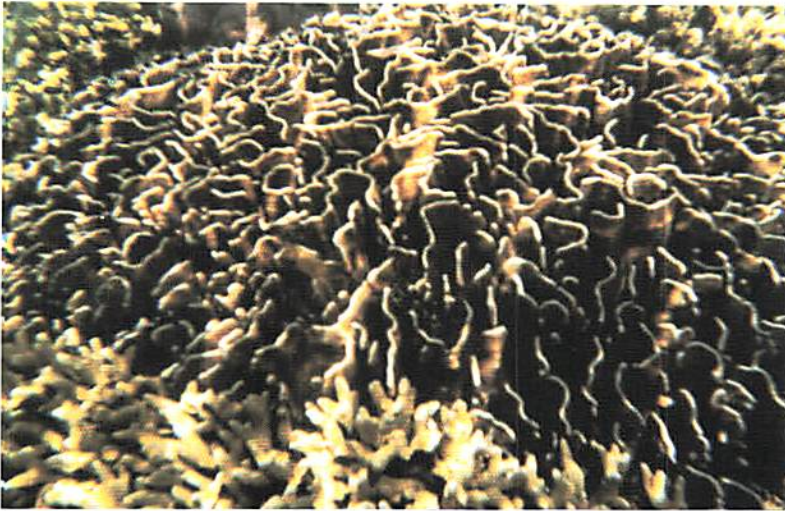
nimbly arched and vine rope is tied to it with its other end serving as an entrapment lasso. This lasso is covered over with bush leaves. The unfortunate boar's leg is caught by the lasso. This keeps the animal captive until it is killed the hunter who checks his traps twice a week.

It is part of hunting etiquette not to kill a wild pig caught in another's trap. Instead the finder informs the trap's owner. Together they kill the pig and share it.

Another hunting style is to run through the forest with dogs. Three to five dogs would encircle a wild boar or cassowary to enable the hunter to pin it down. Hunting can be done alone, in pairs or even in small groups. Hunting for tree kangaroos and wild fowl is done only in the night.



Being a coastal people, Mali Bainings also engage in fishing both in the river and in the seas. Fishing in canoes out in the sea is done more frequently during daytime. Nighttime fishing is by spear and is limited to the nearby reefs. Fish are still plentiful in the Mali Baining waters.



Unfortunately, the destructive method of spear fishing has virtually killed all corals and reef life, though crayfish still abound. The more common instrument used today are spear guns crafted from wood, rubber and scrap iron.

There are several ways of traditional fishing. One is the use of the traditional fish net or *sangacha*, also called *umben* in Tok Pisin. This is 1.5 to 2 meters high made of stick and net, manufactured from bush vine. This is wedged in between cleavages

in the reef rocks during the incoming tide entrapping fish when the tide would wane. Another is the use of a spear traditionally made of pointed stick. Finally, there is the *poisoned root*. The root of a forest vine with toxic qualities is pounded and inserted underneath reef rocks. The acids blind the fish which swim aimlessly and are for the picking by the divers. Unfortunately this method destroys fish eggs and other marine life particularly corals. This method also kills small fish as well.

A marine animal which is prized is the sea turtle. Sea turtles abound in the still sparsely populated Baining shores. Turtles are hunted both in the water and on land. Skilled divers sneak towards sleeping turtles



*The young man on the left holds some poisoned roots while the other has the traditional fishnet or sangacha.*





at night and turn them over. An overturned turtle is virtually immobile and cannot swim. Care however must be taken since enormous sea turtles are known to overpower their captors and can bring them into the depths. More often the turtles are captured on shore when they come up to lay eggs. Turtle tracks are avidly hunted for they indicate a possible nocturnal return. Young men take turns keeping vigil awaiting the turtle's resurgence from the sea. Once spotted, the turtle is turned over to render it immobile. Catching a turtle is a source of pride, there is a distinct phrase for this, "*tanim torosel*," meaning "to turn over a turtle" or to catch it. Sometimes, instead of turtles, what are found are their eggs. These, too, are a prized delicacy. Unfortunately, unchecked hunting habits are fast depleting their population. Older folk talk of times past when turtles literally littered the beaches. Today, turtle sightings are becoming rare.

Though not regular hunting fares, Mali Bainings are also known to catch crocodiles, more popularly called *pukpuk*. These are found at the mouth of rivers living by the mangroves. Several rivers like those of Marunga and the stretch between Karong and Marunga are known to be infested with crocodiles. Mali folklore does not encourage the killing of crocodiles. The belief is that the hunter of a crocodile will himself be killed by one.

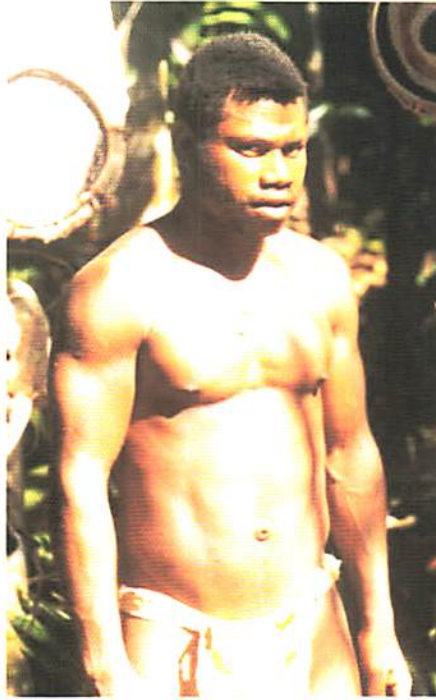
## GENDER ROLES AMONG THE MALI BAINING

### *Role of Men*

The man is considered the head of the family. He is the one involved in decision making. He is expected to prepare the gardens, go hunting and fishing and construct the family dwelling.

Today, he is also the one in-charge of cleaning the "blocks." These are agricultural plots of land, about a hectare in size, which are planted with marketable products, often the only source of monetary income. The usual crops are cocoa, coconut/copra, vanilla and the betel nut or buai.

Often the men of an extended family organize themselves in "group work." A day is set aside every week when all the males in the "group" engage in a common



men to learn as much as possible from their fathers and elders. The father will give the secrets of his trade to the son he loves the most or behaves best.

### *Role of Women*

The mothers assist their spouses in disciplining the children. Their day is spent mainly taking care of the gardens by clearing them of weeds. They also prepare the plants and food crops for the men to plant.

The women take charge of harvesting from the gardens.

activity. This can be the clearing of an area to serve as a new garden for one of its members or the construction of new classrooms made of "bush material." This manifests the strong sense of community among the Mali Baining.



### *Role of Young Men*

The expectations on the young men are similar to those of their fathers, although they fulfill a largely supportive or assistant role. They serve as apprentices to their elders in their work and thereby learn from them. It is the duty of the young





All the household chores are done by the women with the help of their daughters.

### *Role of Young Women*

The duties of the young women are similar to those of their mothers. They serve as assistants to their mothers. They take over their mothers' roles when the latter are already elderly. As in the



case of the young men, the young women have the duty to learn the secrets of their mothers. The mother usually bequeaths these to the best behaved daughter.



### *Role of Children*

The children, i.e. the girls and uninitiated boys, are there to help their mothers in the household chores, like fetching water and scraping the coconut meat. They are the ones the mother relies on to go on errands. At times, they help baby-sit the younger children. They are mostly found together with their mothers who also tag them around for security purposes.

## MALI BAINING HOUSES



*Traditional Houses in Illi*

**M**ali Baining houses are one-room structures made from bush material. Most houses are located within the village perimeter, though some today prefer to live further away in little hamlets. Once the location of a house has been determined, the women go to the bush to gather the palm leaves which will serve as roofing. In one instance, four women from Illi village went as far as the Moreh River, some three kilometers away, to gather these leaves which are often found in the deep forest. After nearly a week of labor, during which they live in makeshift shelters, they bundle the palm

branches and leave them to dry. In the meantime, the men of the family lay the foundations of the house. Basically, this would mean putting the four tree trunks which would serve as the pillars. Beams would then be put in place to serve as support for the roof skeleton. After about four weeks from the gathering of the leaves, the men would pick these up with canoes and lay them as

roofing. House walls are made of matted spliced bamboo.

Mali Baining homes are bare and have only beds attached to the walls as furniture. A hearth is usually located at the center of the house and serves both for

cooking and heating to drive away insects, mosquitoes and sand flies. Clothing and personal possessions are minimal and are usually stored in net bags or *bilums* which are hung on the beams. Planks of wood suspended on the roof beams also serve as storage spaces for pots and pans.

*The Village of Merai*







### THE TRADITIONAL ATTIRE OF THE MALI BAINING

Like the other Baining tribes, the Mali Bainings do not exhibit any skill in weaving cloths. Instead, their traditional attire is made of forest material which is relatively perishable.

#### Men's Attire

The men are dressed in the *simalacha* (pl. *simal*), the traditional G-string, which is made from the processed inner bark of the *korn* tree, referred to as the *tapa cloth*. Also called the *malu* in Tok Pisin, the *simalacha* consists of two pieces. There is the *simalacha* proper which is about half-meter long and about 15-20 centimeters wide. This is used to cover the front and back of the man. The *aiski* is a thin strip of *tapa cloth*, often a residue,

which is tied around the waist and used to secure the *simalacha* in place.

To wear this, one first wraps the *simalacha* covering his genitals while gripping one end of the *simalacha* with his chin wedged to his chest. He then ties the *aiski* around his waist making sure that the *simalacha* is held in place. He adjusts this accordingly.

In traditional times, the *simalacha* was the ordinary daily wear of the Baining male. During times of work or other

physical activity, the *simalacha* can also be stretched and tucked, giving the effect of a pampor or underwear. This facilitated movement and lessened obstruction.

Today, the *simalacha* is worn only during village celebrations and mainly by the dancers.

Uninitiated young boys may be found running around naked. Today, however, most are dressed with Western-style short trousers.





#### Women's Attire

The traditional women's attire is the grass skirt. Leaves from the *pit-pit* stalk and the *tanget* plant are strung together using bush rope and made into a skirt. The women are normally bare-breasted. Often however, their chests are covered by the *bilum*, or the net bags, which serves as an all-purpose utility bag.

Young girls cover their private parts with processed green pandanus leaves. They are worn similar to the *similacha* but their green coloring makes them distinctive of the girls. Like the older women, they remain bare-breasted.





## THE MAKING OF THE TAPA CLOTH

### What is tapa cloth?

The *tapa cloth* is a processed tree bark used for clothing or decoration by many Melanesian and Pacific Islander cultures.

### Choosing the Tree

The *korn tree* or *komga* in Mali is found in the bush (= forest) and grows to about 15 meters high when full grown. Often mid-size trees are chosen since adult trees, while capable of giving a larger piece of cloth, would also have many scars and outgrowth which would result in holes in the finished cloth. An ideal tree would be  $\frac{1}{3}$  to  $\frac{1}{5}$  of a meter in circumference. Another tree of preference is the *amanga tree*.

The tree is chosen from those out of the usual bush paths. This is so to keep the making of the tapa cloth, and consequently the holding of a feast, a secret by not leaving any traces.

### Peeling the Bark

Although one can make the tapa cloth alone, often the work is done at least in pairs. This facilitates the procedure especially when one has to peel the bark from the tree.

First one prepares the wooden chisels which would be used to peel the bark. The wooden chisel is about a third of a meter long and 3-4 cms. wide. Once the tree has been chosen, one either cuts the trunk first or marks out the length of the bark to be cut on the still standing tree. Ordinarily, the bark cut is about two meters long. The bark is then chiseled out carefully. Care is taken to avoid holes and slits in the bark. This takes about 10-15 minutes.

Then the inner bark, often whitish to light brown in color, is separated from the outer bark. It is actually the inner bark which is used for the tapa cloth. This is meticulous work since care is taken that no holes would be made. Often the inner bark is chiseled off the whole length of the piece and then it is peeled off

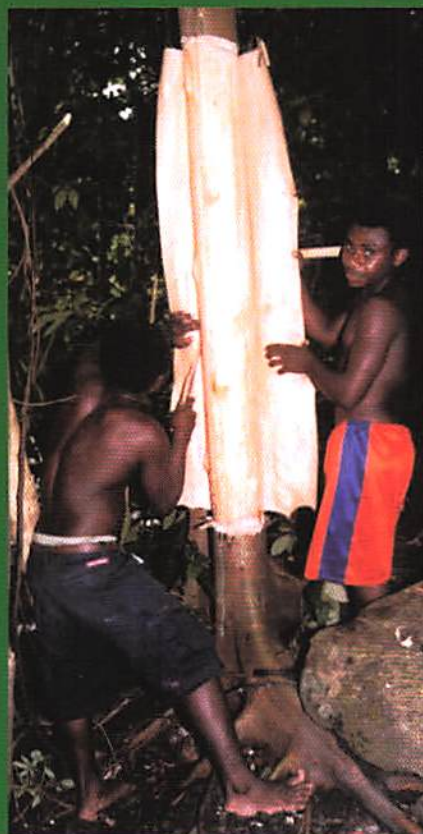




little by little from the outer bark. Peeling the inner bark is the first major step in the making of the tapa cloth. Once peeled, the inner bark is rolled up and tied with some bush rope made from the root of forest vines. This would take some 20-25 minutes.

The number of trees to be cut would depend on the purpose of the tapa cloth. The making of the *simalacha* would require only one large piece, or at the most a second smaller tree. The making of a fire-dance mask would most probably need three to four trees to be cut. All the excess wood, branches and bark are carefully disposed of. The making of the tapa cloth is a secret process and it is taboo for women to see it or even know it is being made.

Considering the total number of trees which are cut, in some ways the holding of these Baining celebrations can be an ecological hazard.





### *Processing the Tapa Cloth*

Since the cutting of the tree and peeling of the bark is tedious work, the processing of the tapa cloth is usually done the next day. For this, one needs to go to a secluded area where there is flowing water, usually by a mountain

river or a secluded stream. The mallet which is used is made from the Galip palm and is called the *awirki*. This is about 1/3 meter long and some 4 cm wide. The pounding pallet is called the *wir* and this is made of hard wood.







The inner bark is first submerged in the cool river water to take out its resins and natural acids. It is then pounded with the mallet causing it to stretch and expand. Care is taken to keep it continuously wet during the process. This cycle of wetting, pounding and stretching is done several times. Often one morning session would not suffice. One would have to return for a second or a third day until the desired effect of a soft and pliable tapa cloth has been achieved.



The tapa cloth is then wind-dried, often in some shady area or even possibly in doors. This is to shield it from the eyes of women and strangers. When the desired softness has been achieved, the edges of the tapa cloth are then trimmed. It is now ready for further processing as a *simalacha* or for masks used in the fire dance.

## 2 MALI BAINING LEGENDS



### INTRODUCTION TO MALI BAINING LEGENDS

*As told by: Mr. Robert Ngorana, Sebastian Suilka and George Sameng*

**S**tori tumbuna, literally, stories of the forefathers, is not simply just another storytelling time. It is the passing on of oral tradition in a way which is both respectful of the heritage (from the elders) and lively in the exchange of recollections. This form of story telling is restricted to the initiated males who are bound to keep these secret. They would often gather in circular fashion at some

secluded spot, far from the presence of women and little children. The young men would listen to the village elders tell their traditions. Others both listen and help out to supply details. The stories are mainly etiological stories which both help to explain the terrain and the character of the Bainings. These can also be explanatory stories of their heritage and culture.

Revealing of the character of the Mali Bainings, most of their stories contain two



conventional characters. They are often understood as the two kinds of persons: *Chlemen* and *Secha*. *Secha* is the wise and industrious person who works quietly in his garden. He is humble and yet he is a capable and skilled hunter. Moreover, he is both courageous and brave and because of this, he earns the respect of most in the village. Usually he is compared to and symbolized by

the *brasacha* or the forest eagle (*maningulay* in Tok Pisin).

On the other hand, *Chlemen*, also called *Waulu* by the Simbali, is deceitful and boastful as he is incompetent. He talks too much [tok tok nabaut], a quality despised by the Mali Bainings. He is the *giaman* man or liar *par excellence*. He is a lazy fellow who is neither skilled as a hunter or as a farmer. Despite this, he often owns the accomplishments of others and trumpets them as his own. Appropriately, he is symbolized by the *lalum*, or vulture which preys on what others have left behind.

These two stereotypes reveal the value system of the Mali Bainings. While the exploits of *Secha* are viewed with awe, the foibles of *Chlemen* become the object of ridicule and uncontrolled laughter. Ultimately, their stories are both prime time village entertainment and an age tested educational program.

## ORIGINS OF THE BAININGS

As told by Mr. Steven Nguarunas

**T**he place of origins of the Bainings is in the Gazelle Peninsula, near and around present-day Rabaul. That this is their "as ples" (place of origin) is proven by the fact that they have names for the mountains and volcanoes of this area.

The Baining names for these volcanoes are: *Salamar*, meaning 'they have gotten' – it is now dormant but it may erupt again; *Saulung* or 'empty' is now extinct – this may not erupt ever; finally, there is *Sauris* which is still active.

There are even names for the major roads: *Churunga*, now known as the Berma Road. The latter is an adaption by the Tolai who called it *Vurunga*. What is today known as the Nonga Base was called by the Bainings as *Anoncha* or *Anonga*, calling it after a tree.

The name *Rabaul* has an interesting story to it. The traditional attire of the Bainings of old was *baulki* or the *baul*. This was made from tree bark and worn as a G-string. When the Tolais, a migrant people from what is now called New Ireland, arrived, a Baining warrior was taken by surprise and ran to warn his village.

In his panic he lost his only clothing but could no longer go back to recover it. Lamenting he shouted, "Ara! Gu Baul" ("Oh my! There goes my *laplap*!") The Tolais, upon hearing this thought this was the name of the place and so called it Rabaul.

The Tolais were originally from New Ireland. They came to Rabaul and made friends with the original Baining people. At first they co-existed very well and mixed together. Later however problems arose between the two tribes because of two reasons. Primarily, it was a question of ownership. Both claimed possession of the land and what it held. Secondly, was the issue of a "secret power," The mountains had their own powers which the Baining kept secret. The Tolais wanted it and a tribal war erupted causing the original

Bainings to disperse inland and towards the south.

This caused the Bainings to be divided into five huge tribes. Those of the north are the Chachet, while the Kairak and the Uramat are found deep inland. The southern Bainings are the Mali and Simbali tribes. Today the Mali Bainings inhabit the villages of Sanbam, Mavambu, Kiligia, Dadul, Marangachi, Raigel, Gar, Merai, Illi, Karong and Marunga.

Each Baining group has got this power, which they believe to have originated from the volcanoes. The Mali Bainings have only one such which they took with them and which they believe would look after them. They still hold to be the guardians of this power up to this day.

## TWO SECHA FROM NONGIA AND KILAK RIVER

As told by Mr. Steven Nguarunas

Once there were two *Sechas* who lived by the River Kilak. This took place in ages past when betel nut trees, today popularly known as *buai*, were not yet being cultivated. Instead, people would go inside the bush to look for the wild *buai*, also called the *churem*. It was the time of the heavy rains when these two were caught by a huge downpour deep in the forest as they searched for *churem* to bring home. The strong rain forced them to seek refuge under a gigantic *Harima* tree. Unknown to them, this was the house of a forest *Secha*, named *Chevengem*, who invited both to enter and find shelter. Both travelers were greatly surprised and after some initial hesitation, entered and were warmly welcomed. The traditional *churem* was offered together with mustard leaf as signs of welcome. They were amazed at the huge quantities of wild pigs their host had hunted which was neatly hanging by the wall. Quickly, a pig was roasted and served for them and they ate with gusto.

They told some stories and enjoyed each others' company. After a while the two visitors got a well deserved rest.

Before sunrise, while they were still asleep, their host already rose up to look for some fresh *churem*. *Chevengem* surprised his guests with these new mustard sticks. After a quick breakfast, all three changed into *tarangau*, or salt-water eagles. They flew towards the mouth of the river but not before their host was able to give them some *churem* to bring home. Reaching the mountain *Chailini* their host bade them good-bye and returned home singing,

*Sai mungomat a chi (3x)*

*Diva I du lenge nango*

(Now the two of you

Will put me into the hands of all men / = Will tell everybody about me)

The two did not depart immediately but listened intently to the singing. Finally they continued their flight. By the time they reached home, they had already changed into human form and they told everyone of their happy experience.

## THE ORIGIN OF THE LITTLE HAMLET OF ARSET

As told by George Sameng and Kilian Vitus

One day a *Secha* made his rounds of the forest (bush) in order to check his traps. Lo and behold, in one of his traps he had caught a wild pig. Carefully he got a strong tree trunk and tied the pig, suspending it on all its fours. But since he was alone he could not carry the entire pig. So he left it, still alive and tied up by the river bank of *Wara Illi*, the River Illi.

The *Secha* then went down to the beach at lleish in order to fish. After some time he caught two fish (*achila*). Then he noticed two *Chlemen* approaching toward his direction. Before the two could see him, the *Secha* performed some magic which enabled him to disappear.

The two *Chlemen* were also carrying spears as they intended to fish. The yet invisible *Secha* got his two *achila* and laid these out on the very path of the *Chlemen*. The first *Chlemen* saw the dead fish and speared it, pretending that it was he who had caught it! The second *Chlemen* also caught sight of the other fish and pretended in similar fashion.

At this moment, the *Secha* made himself visible to the pair who were greatly surprised and just as embarrassed at their pretense. It was then that he told the two of the pig he had just caught and left by the bank of *Wara Illi*. He persuaded them to go and carry the pig to the place of the *mumu*.

The two *Chlemen* were so happy at this. They left beating their chests for joy imagining that they had caught the pig themselves. The pig however was not tied too well. When the *Chlemen* tried to carry it, the pig became very angry and wild and the two men were thrown down. In their fear, they left the pig and hastily made a clearing in the bush. That is why the place is called *Arset*, because of the big road-like clearing they had made.

Unknown to the two, the *Secha* had just hidden himself, observing them and dying with laughter at their misfortune.

Now the *Secha* came out from his hiding. He was both amused and angry at the two for having left the pig. He ran after them and he saw them scampering about haphazardly. Finally, he went back together with the pair and helped them to tighten the rope to the wood in order to better carry the pig. While carrying the pig to the *mumu* place, he ordered them to tell no one about the catch.

Anyway, they finally arrived at the village which by now was preparing for the *mumu*. The *Secha* quickly busied himself preparing the *mumu*. The two *Chlemen* wasted no time telling the village people how they had killed the pig.

Of course, this was not true. The two *Chlemen* never caught nor killed the pig. It was the *Secha* who killed the pig which the two claimed to have done. These two made such false claim because they desired to have a *biknem* or honor for themselves in the village.

Anyway, once the *mumu* was done, the entire village had a whole night of festivity. All made a huge *singsing* or celebration and all the people danced.

## CHEVENGEM GOES FISHING

As told by Mr. Steven Nguarunas, Mr. Sebastian Sulka and Mr. Robert Ngorona

One day Chevengem left his home in the forest to look for fish. He traveled far until he reached Gulum, today also known as Illi. Here at Gulum he fished the whole night using the traditional *umben*, or fishing net. He would position himself on the reef where there was a streamlet. When the tide came in, he would wedge his net between two reef rocks hoping to trap the fish brought in by the tide. Ever industrious, he worked the whole night until the break of dawn.

Early that morning *Inanuria*, the wife of *Talias* - a giant, went down to the beach for her morning necessities. She spotted Chevengem who was busily concentrated on his work. Quietly, she approached nearer as she wanted to spear the *Secha*. The sun was now beginning to rise and the woman's shadow

extended until the water. Chevengem noticed the shadow and the spear now raised to kill him. At the moment the woman threw the spear, he was able to move to his side and the spear missed him. Running quickly, Chevengem got the spear and killed her.

Chevengem got all his fish and changed into a *brasacha* or the forest eagle and flew away. However, he did not go straight to his house lest the giants track him out. Instead he went towards the direction of the River Mandaure and followed the river upstream. From there he went to his house in the bush.

The *tok-tok* or news spread rapidly and soon Talias got to know of the murder of his

wife. He asked many people but no one knew who had done this. Talias and his giant friends came together and they went toward the direction of the house of Chireis. They did this because they heard that the murderer had gone in that direction, for truly Chevengem had flown that way. The giants all went and killed Chireis.

On their way back, they met Chevengem and his friends. Chevengem had gathered all his brothers and they decided to come to help Chireis. Unfortunately, they had arrived too late. So instead, they decided to kill the giants of Merai. But the others shouted that Merai was their *bikman*, or leader, and tried to stop them. Because of this Chevengem and his group did not carry out their plan.

## THE STORY OF TWO FRIENDS: RIVER KILAK AND RIVER MERAI

*As told by Mr. Steven Nguarunas, Mr. George Sameng and Mr. Sebastian Suilka*

**T**he Spirits of *Wara Merai*, or the River Merai, and *Wara Che-lak*, or River Kilak, were *poroman* or good friends. This is their story.

The Spirit of Merai was a man who knew how to handle *Basioghi*, a *pukpuk* or crocodile. He would use *Basioghi* in his hunting trips. *Basioghi* however used to steal from the houses in the *bikples* or village. When the people would go to work in their gardens, *Basioghi* would go inside their huts and steal from them. Then he would hide in a little stream called *Romosan* which flowed into the River Merai.

For a long time the people of the village tried to find out who did all the stealing but were unsuccessful. One day all agreed on a particular strategy. All pretended to go to their gardens but only after a short while came back. They hid themselves and watched closely. After a little while they saw *Basioghi*. Now they knew! They all ran quickly and together repeatedly struck the crocodile. They did not spear it but tightened ropes around it. They killed the crocodile and cut it up into pieces and quickly distributed its parts to all in the village. They declared a feast, put on their best finery or *amuthemes* and cooked or *mumu-ed* the crocodile meat.

They gave the head of *Basioghi* to a *lapun meri*, or an old woman, who had a little grandchild. The two however did not *mumu* or cook the head of the crocodile immediately. Instead they hanged it on the roof of their house. Unknown to them, blood dripped from the head of the crocodile and this formed a little streamlet to the place of the *mumu*.

When the old woman and her grandchild were ready to cook the head of the crocodile, *Basioghi* started to speak to them. *Basioghi* warned them to flee immediately since some tragedy would befall the village that very night. So the old woman and her grandchild immediately left the village and fled up to the mountain *Gale-vern*. There during the night the little *mangi* or boy woke up and sang the following song:

*Thiguamgi, Thiguamgi eao  
Sailamon amamor  
Sailamon amalel*

*Thi (=name of the old woman), Thi look  
Big wave is coming  
Mall wave is coming*

Soon after in the middle of the night *tupela bikpela si* or two huge waves hit the village. The first wave was *cha-lak* or weak and not yet very strong. It brought with it a lot of leaves and mud. The mud and leaves covered the entire place. The second tsunami hit the village directly and destroyed it, covering it with enormous stones. It spared Merai, however, since Merai was a *stretpela* or just man who did not eat the crocodile.

Even today the River Kilak has plenty of leaves and mud but no big stones. On the other hand, the River Merai is filled with huge boulders.



*This young boy, Max, was chased by the crocodile in the River Kilak. Several days later the crocodile was hooked with a bait of wild fowl.*

## THE STORY OF KUNENG

As told by Mr. Steven Nguarunas, Mr. Sebastian Suilka and Mr. Robert Ngorana

Once there were two *Sechas*. The older brother, Mangisem, spent his day in the forest for he was a hunter. The younger one was Mengam. He was always by the *solwara* or the sea for he was a fisherman. They would work every day, every week during the entire year. They used different weapons for looking for *abus* or prey.

One day Mengam went fishing by the River Moreh. He brought his *umben* or traditional fishnet and he was able to catch a few fish. He decided to go back home and rested by the little stream of Nong. While there he started to cook his catch. One fish he *mumu-ed*, the other he grilled.

The wife of Kuneng was also on her way to Nong. She saw the smoke from the fire and she readied her spear. She aimed at Mengam but Mengam had changed into an eagle which flew up a *Mulut* tree; but not before he was able to snatch two fish he had already cooked.

In the meanwhile two *Chlemen* also came to the place. They saw the fish which remained and they sneaked slowly. Two fish were still alive and flip-flopping and the *Chlemen* took these and hid themselves. They talked themselves into thinking they were the ones who caught the fish. When they were cooking the fish, the wife of Kuneng saw them. She got her spear and aimed at the two *Chlemen*.

Just at that moment Mengam threw his spear and hit the wife of Kuneng. She died immediately falling in between the two *Chlemen*. The two were taken by surprise and were so proud thinking that it was they who had killed the woman. The two put their feet on top of the fallen woman and shouted exultantly.

Mengam then went back home and exchanged his catch with his brother. Mangisem gave Mengam some of his *abus* from hunting, and Mengam shared with him a fish.

The two *Chlemen* also left. They told the people that they had killed the wife of Kuneng.

Of course, this was a lie. Still they had a huge *singsing* or feast and celebrated. All the *Secha*, however, did not believe them.

Kuneng in the meantime learned of his wife's death. He tried to find out who killed his wife and learned the story about the two *Chlemen*.

One day Mengam decided to fish again and returned to the same place where he *mumu-ed* his fish and killed the wife of Kuneng. While there, two people met him: Luvachemes and his child. Mengam thought that they were going to take revenge and he asked them to make sure of their decision. The two answered that they did not come to kill nor eat anyone. So Mengam gave them a fish each and all three of them left. They also decided to meet again at the same place one day.

When they left, Mengam forgot his spear. The other two noticed this but the child did not think anything of it. Luvachemes, however, seeing the spear, now knew who had killed the wife of Kuneng.

The day came for them to meet again and Luvachemes returned with his son and daughter. While there, the girl smelled the cooking of some other kind of fish. They thought that someone had been killed and cooked and decided it was time to break up.

When they separated, however, the girl realized she had fallen in love with Mengam and did not want to leave. Actually Mengam had already planned all this. He took the daughter back to her father and he asked for pardon. The father agreed to his daughter's wishes saying that she was not so hardworking anyway. So Mengam took her and made her his wife.

When Mengam arrived home, his big brother Mangisem became very angry. "Where did you get this woman?" he asked. He was afraid that her relatives might find some reason to fight them. But Mengam defended himself and told his brother that her father had agreed to give him his daughter.

In the meanwhile Kuneng learned the truth about what happened to his wife and challenged Mengam and his brother to a fight. Kuneng called on all his *wantoks* or relatives,



the giants. Mengam, too, called on all his relatives and a fight was set.

In ancient times, fighting was done in a field which was cleared. On one side were all the giants. On the other were the humans. Kuneng then planted a *Tanget* stick on the middle of the field and challenged anyone to cross it. Mengam then came and pulled out the *Tanget*. Soon spears and rocks were all

flying through the air. Some even used magic to avoid all these. The fighting was fierce.

Luvachemes [aip Mashiek] got a wooden bat and hit Kuneng right on the nose. This broke his nose and shaped it like that of a pig's. Now if you go to the Point called Kuneng, you will see the nose of Kuneng. The point is shaped like the nose of a pig because Luvachemes, in-law of Mengam, had done this.

## THE STORY OF MUNDUA

*As told by Mr. Henrick Steven, Mr. George Sameng and Mr. Kilian Vitus*

**A** cave rises from the sea near the mouth of the River Mandaureh. One day a group of men and young boys went into the cave to look for bats which were plentiful in it. They killed many bats and decided to leave the cave.

A few of them however continued to go deeper into the cave. They reached a yellow stone, called Mundua, found in the middle of the cave. People never went beyond this stone. But now the men climbed over the stone. Suddenly the stone moved and blocked the passage back. The men continued walking until they reached the opposite end.

There they found a place very much like the place we have today. There were gardens with all kinds of plants. They also found different kinds of colorful plants with beautiful flowers.

But things were also different. The different limbs and parts of each man could talk. The ears could talk, the arms could talk, the nose could talk and so forth. And they were talking in the same *tok ples!*

They got some flowers and plants from the surroundings and looked for a way back. They entered another cave and walked and walked and walked. By now they no longer had anything else to eat except for some sugar canes. Some of the men died still in the cave, a few others were able to make it through.

They came out a small cleft in the reef. It was really very narrow and the hole was very small. Once outside, they planted the plants and flowers which they had brought. Soon after telling their story, they all died.

Today this place is called Mundua, just close to the mouth of the River Moreh. One can still see the plants and flowers which the men had planted.

# 3 MALI BAINING CUSTOMS

## BIRTH RITUALS

### *Before the Birth of the Child*

A pregnant mother is not allowed to eat just any kind of food during her pregnancy since this may have adverse effects on her yet unborn child and could even cause its death. For example, she may not eat a banana coming from a banana plant which had a difficult time bearing fruit. A beetle may have drilled a hole into the plant causing it to bear fruit irregularly, i.e. the fruit may have come forth from this hole instead of the top of the plant. It is believed that such a fruit may cause abnormalities in the baby.

Similarly, pregnant women should not eat the *kuskus* or tree kangaroo as this may cause the eyes of the child to be as wide open as that of the *kuskus*. Flying foxes are also forbidden lest the child cry excessively like the flying fox.

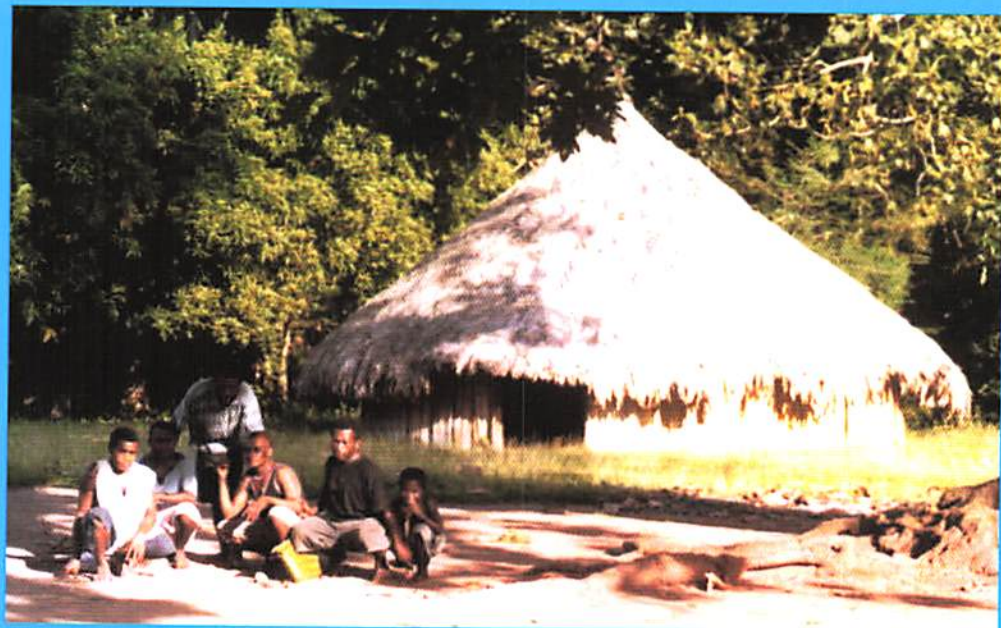
During community celebrations, the pregnant woman should avoid at all cost the *tumbuan*. A *tumbuan* who passes close to a pregnant woman may cause her child to be deformed and look like a *tumbuan*.

### *After the Birth of the Child*

Soon after giving birth, the mother is not allowed to go out into the gardens or some far away place. It is the belief that evil spirits, associated with these places, can have an adverse effect on her child.

Should the mother go to the garden, she should not leave the child unattended. Evil spirits or *masalais* may come and carry away the baby or exchange it for another.

*The avalcha or the traditional house for the initiated males in Merai.*



## THE INITIATION RITUAL OF THE MALI BANING

**T**his rite recognizes the passage of one into a fuller state of membership in the Mali tribe.

### THE INITIATION RITES OF THE MALI BAINING MALE

*As told by Mr. Julius Kurunas  
and Mr. Manuel Seril*

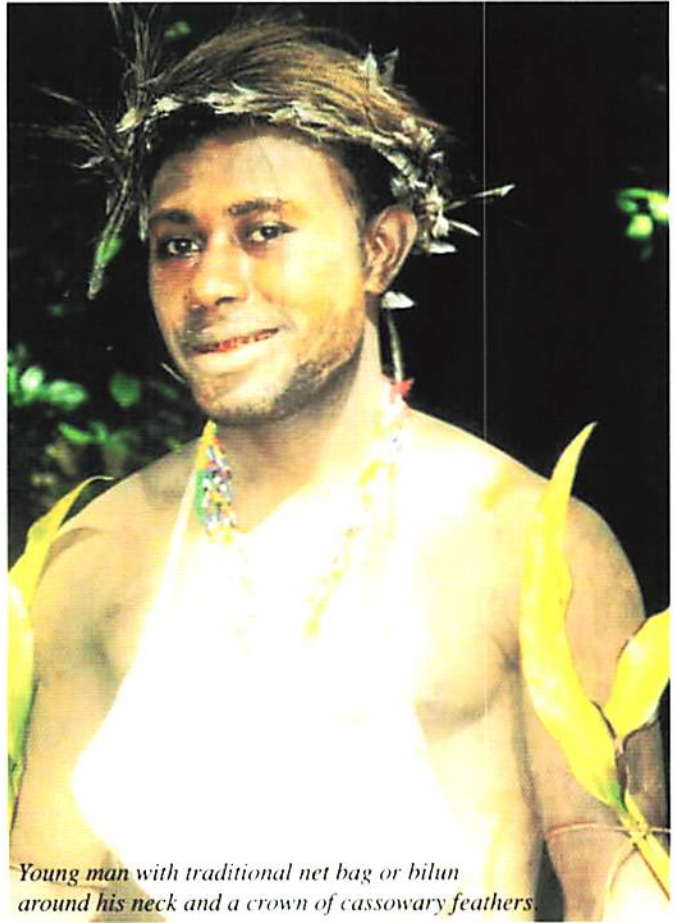
#### *The Date of the Initiation Rite*

**T**here is no specific time of the year for the initiation ceremony. It is done whenever there are a sufficient number of young boys of a particular generation to form a group. The group would usually be anywhere from 20 to 30 boys. The boys' ages would range from 8 and above, depending on the last initiation ceremony. It is the village elders who determine the time and the place of the initiation rites. As customary, the women do not participate in the decision making process.

#### *The Preparations for the Initiation Rite*

When the village elders have agreed on a certain date, the young men of the village are informed of this. They organize themselves into hunting groups, camp out in the bush and hunt for wild pigs. Some prepare traps; others prefer chasing wild pigs and cassowaries with their hunting dogs.

The men prepare a *haus-boi* like structure called the *avalka* which would serve as the "haus tumbuan" or the house of the ancestors.



*Young man with traditional net bag or bilun  
around his neck and a crown of cassowary feathers.*

The construction of the *avalka* and hunting of wild fare would usually last for some months (generally three months). During this time, those engaged in these activities must conduct themselves righteously and behave properly (= *strepela pasin*). They should not steal nor engage in marital acts with their wives. To do so may have an adverse effect on the man and through him affect the otherwise healthy growth of the boys to be initiated. It may also spoil the food which is being prepared and cause it to be *bagarap*.

The constant absence of their husbands and sons from the ordinary run of the day often alert the older women to the coming festivity. However, they are bound by custom not to talk about this among themselves and to keep it secret. Usually, the younger women and children are not aware of this early stage of preparation.

When the date for the ceremony is near, the event becomes common knowledge. Everyone looks forward to the event and prepares for it. The young women help their mothers to prepare the *mumu*. They harvest the root crops and gather the firewood and the *mumu* stones.

Each initiate is assigned an *alumucha* appointed by his parents. The *alumucha* is a trustworthy and responsible initiated male, often a relative. He is expected to act like a *second parent*, in a role akin to but more than that of a godparent. The *alumucha* too makes the necessary preparations. He prepares the *simalacha* or the tapa cloth G-string traditional attire which will be worn by the initiate during the ceremony. He must also look for two special sea shells often obtained only in the deeper reefs. One is known as the *chulumka* and the other is the *athinga*. These belong to the enormous cowry family of shells and are usually full white in color. The wife of the *alumucha*, on her part, makes two bilums or net bags from bush material, often the roots of the forest vine. She makes both a small and a large bilum.

#### *The Night Before the Initiation*

On the night before the initiation, also called *athachem*, the young boys for initiation are gathered in one house. Ordinarily this is not the *avalcha* or the haus-boi but just the house of an unmarried male or a widower. What is important is that the house is not the ordinary residence of any woman. It is here that all the initiates spend the night.

#### *The First Day of the Initiation*

Very early on the next day, even before sunrise (about 5:30 AM), the initiates or *airaingda* (sing. *airinga*) are led to a secluded place where no village person, especially the women, will see them. An elder is assigned to look after them and food is provided. The boys are made to plant *tangets* or red violet-colored tea plants. They are dressed only in traditional attire. The old *simalacha* or G-string are broken and new ones are worn prepared by their *alumucha* (pl. *alumutha*).

In the meantime, the *alumutha* make their last preparation, especially of the attire. The other initiated males prepare the *snarki* or the initiation place, clearing the field and preparing it for the ritual. Usually, this would last until almost midday.



When all are prepared, the *airaingda* are led to the initiation ground where all the men of the village will already be waiting to witness the ritual. The initiates walk in procession with their heads bowed down. They are strictly ordered to keep their heads down until told



otherwise. While on the way, the *kalidanga*, a noise maker made from a piece of wood attached to a tree branch with a rope vine, is twirled to create the sharp screeching sound associated with the *tumbuan*.

The *airaingda* are met at the initiation ground by their *alumutha*. The *alumucha*, dressed like a *tumbuan* with his face covered by a *g o a l k a*, approaches his *airinga*. It is only then that the young initiate is told to look up. This moment evokes intense fear in the initiate who has grown up regarding the *tumbuan* as an ancestral spirit and from whom he has always run away from. The *alumucha* assists the *airinga* to strip off all his clothing and then dresses him traditionally with the *simalacha* and the small *bilum*. This

contains the two sea shells and is worn around the neck. It is only then that the *alumucha* removes his face mask for the *airinga* to recognize him. This moment of revelation literally opens the eyes of the initiate to the world and the mentality of the initiated male. It is now that the *alumucha* reveals all the secrets of the Mali Baining. The *airinga* is now considered a man and must know the secrets of the men. He must also learn to keep his lips sealed and not to reveal the secrets of the Mali Baining.

This transference of secrets takes about an hour. After that, the *airaingda* are led to the newly build *avalcha*. Once inside, the feasting begins. The main *kaikai* or feast is shared in front of the *avalcha*. The new initiates watch all these activities from inside the *avalcha*.

Once the feasting is over, the *tumbuans*, who represent the spirit of the ancestors, arrive. They collect all the leaves, which served as food wrappings, leftovers and rubbish from the *kaikai* and burn these. As they burn the rubbish, they make their first dance, also called the *vestelino*.

During the night, the *tumbuans* return and dance. This is the dance of the main spirit of the *avalcha* and lasts until daybreak.

### *The Second Day of the Initiation*

On the second morning, a *tumbuan* enters the village and drives all women and young boys into their houses. The *airaingda* are then led out of the *avalcha* and brought to the designated sacred place or the *singal-anget luchap*. This is a secluded area, away from any bush track, where the preparations for the sacred dances (like the *fire dance*) are done and where the dance masks are later properly disposed of. This place is strictly off limits to women and young boys.

The day is spent preparing a cone-shaped bark of a tree which the *airinga* will use as his dancing attire. The *alumucha* helps his *airinga* in preparing this. The day is also used for giving more advice and warning the initiates not to reveal the secrets he has been entrusted to women.

This dance of the new initiates takes place at about mid-afternoon. This is done in the village and is watched by all. After the dance, the *airaingda* go back to the *avalcha*.

During the night, the newly initiated women enter the *avalcha*. This is the only time women are allowed to enter the *avalcha* and most take it as a once in a lifetime opportunity. The young women are dressed traditionally, wearing only a grass skirt. The songs, however, are different from those used during the dances of the *tumbuans*. They dance the whole night until daybreak.

#### *The Final day of the Initiation*

A few hours after the women have left the *avalcha*, two or three *tumbuans* enter the village to drive all women and young boys into their houses. The *airaingda* are then let out of the *avalcha* and return to their homes.

The mothers welcome back their sons with great respect. These young men now belong to the clan as full-fledged members and must no longer be treated as children. As a sign of respect, when they are seated, women are not

allowed to pass by just a few inches in front of them. And if they are seated underneath a house, women are not allowed to go on the upper floor.

Although the climax of the initiation process happens on these two nights and two days, the entire process itself lasts for months. There are the months of preparation needed to build new gardens, to hunt pigs and other wild fare, and to construct the *avalcha*, the *snarki*, the *singal-anget-luchap* and all *amuthemes* needed for the occasion. After the two climactic days are over, the process of initiation continues. During this time the stories of the ancestors are told to the initiated males. Often these stories are lengthy and boys would sometimes sleep during their telling. Also during this time, the *tumbuans* will continue to visit the village every morning and afternoon, chasing young boys and the women into their homes. This will last about two weeks. Finally there is the building of new beds in the *avalcha* for the newly initiated males. Once these have been built, the *tumbuans* will come for a final dance and this closes the feast.

## THE INITIATION RITE OF THE MALI BAINING WOMAN

*As told by Anna, wife of Paul*

The initiation rite of the women does not need too much preparation. It is done only in one day, i.e. on the second day of the male initiation when the *airaingda* gather at the open space called the *singal-anget-luchap* to prepare their cone-shaped bark attire. The women's ceremony coincides with the boys' *avalcha* ceremony.

While the young *airanga* are at the *singal-anget-luchap*, some elderly women instruct and give advice to the young girls. They are taught how to dance according to the rhythm of the traditional instruments during a *sing-sing*. They are also taught how to sew together the special leaves which make the attire of the women's *tumbuan* called the *sivethi*. They do all these preparations quite hurriedly since they must be ready to dance once the *airaingda* and the village elders return to the *avalcha*.

The dance of the women usually begins outside, in front of the *avalcha*. Slowly the initiated young women enter the *avalcha* for their dance. This is the only occasion when women are permitted to enter the *avalcha* and most women take this rare opportunity to see what's inside.

The entire process of initiation of the women, especially the dance in the *avalcha*, is called the *sivethichi*. The *sivethichi* is intended to protect the hunters and to win luck for them to have a good catch.

## COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

The traditional Mali Baining marriage is prearranged. The parents, among themselves, arrange their children's partners. There is no bride-price among the Mali Bainings; but they do have some sort of "pay back" afterwards. For example, if a "sister" is given in marriage to a certain family, that family, in turn, must give a "sister" to marry a "brother" belonging to the first family. One must understand the extended nature of Mali Baining families. "Brother" and "sister" extend to beyond the nuclear family and include other close kin.

One can know the prearranged partner but is not allowed to meet him/her until they are officially engaged. On the day of the engagement, the man is taken by the relatives of the woman to the woman's house where he meets his partner.

The marriage ceremony is simple. To show that they are married, a cooked taro is cut in half, a piece each for the bride and the groom. They both eat their share. A small *bilum* is then given to the man as a sign of the woman's love for him.

The man then takes his wife to his place. If the man does not yet own his own land and dwelling, he brings her to his relatives. Ordinarily, the woman leaves her home and joins her new husband in his own place. In some instances, however, it is known that some men remain with their in-laws until such a time when they have built their own house.

The children are usually brought up by the relatives of the mother. However, this does not forbid them from staying with their father's relatives either.

Preferably, the rights over the children are exercised by the parents. However, at times, other maternal relatives, like uncles, may have control over the children, like choosing their future partners.

Nowadays these customs are seldom practiced. This is because traditional marriages many times did not work out. Today the young people usually tell their parents the partner whom they prefer and the elders arrange accordingly.

## DEATH AND BURIAL RITUALS

In older times, the dead were simply laid out far deeper into the bush, usually under big trees or on rocky places. However, this practice is no longer followed. Today the dead are buried.

When one dies, the body is kept in the house for mourning, or the *haus kraï*. Relatives go to the deceased person's garden and harvests or collects whatever food crops are there. These are brought to the place of mourning and, as a sign of respect and sorrow, they are cut into small pieces and destroyed.

On the day the person is buried (or left in the bush) the others in the village are not allowed to visit or work in their gardens. The spirit of the dead person may send wild pigs and parrots to destroy their gardens. Even after the burial, the whole day is spent resting. This is strictly observed even today.

After the burial, the mourners still remain in the dead person's house for two weeks. After two weeks, a small *kaikai* or communal meal is held to mark the end of the mourning period.

However, the entire burial ritual ends only when the house of the dead person finally rots away and is disposed of.

## OTHER CUSTOMS

### *On Sleeping*

**L**ike many Papua New Guinean cultures which have a lively view of the spirit world, Mali Bainings believe that the spirit of a person can leave his body during sleep. Dreams move beyond the simply subconscious and can actually be extra corporeal experiences. For this reason it is improper to jolt someone from sleep. Instead a person should simply be coaxed out of sleep or awakened gently to allow the spirit to return to a dormant person.

### *On Sharing Food*

During traditional feasts, food is served only in communal portions. This means that the food, usually root crops and veal (pork or

fish) cooked in stone ovens (mumu-style), is put on large banana or taro leaves. Those partaking gather around the meal and eat with their bare hands.

In cases when individuals are given their own portions, one who wants to share some of his food must first do so with one nearest to him, whether on his left or right, and not to some other across him. To do so would be improper. It is up to his immediate neighbor if this wants to pass on the portion further.

### *On Eating After a Hunt*

A hunter usually does not eat whatever he has hunted or, if ever, does so only after all have already partaken of it. He usually gets the last share. The achievement of hunting affords him enough honors. Instead he eats whatever has been hunted by someone else.



# 4 THE ALELEM OR FIRE DANCE OF THE MALI BAINING

As told by Mr. Robert Ngorana, Mr. Sebastian Suilka and Mr. George Sameng

## THE FIRE DANCE

Together with the Day Dance, the night time *Firedance* is the most representative and best known feature of Baining culture. It traces its origin to the time when the Bainings still lived around the areas of the Rabaul volcanoes. It celebrates the power of nature interweaving it with the people's experience of creation. Most of the masks, for example, are patterned after animals and creatures found in the wild, like the *muruk* or cassowary, the *pik* or wild boar and even the spider!

But more than this, the *firedance* is a religious ritual. It is meant to connect the present generation with the traditions of their elders and ultimately with the spirits of their ancestors. Many actually believe that the spirits of their deceased relatives come back during the *firedance* and some would even point to the increased number of dancers as a proof of this! This belief is partly supported by the instances of supposed "spirit possession" immediately after such dances. This is not uncommon as would be explained below.

Finally the *firedance* is more than a dance. It is a village festivity or better still a celebration by a village to which other villages are invited to join. This may be occasioned by some major event or the visit of some dignitary. It may also

be held to commemorate an occasion in the village's history.

The holding of a *firedance* is decided after much consultation among the village elders and *bikmen*, or important men of the village. On them also falls the decision regarding the date of the celebration. The event of the *firedance* is kept as a tightly held secret among the men and the initiated males of the village. It is only much later that the women will get to know of its impending celebration.

Though the *firedance* is a festivity common to all Baining tribes, nevertheless each has its own variations. The *firedance* of the northern Baining tribes of the Uramot and Kachet are more similar. The same can be said of the *firedance* of the southern Baining tribes of the Mali and Simbali.

## LONG-TERM PREPARATION

The preparation for the *firedance* forms part of the secrets of the initiated male. Participation in the dance itself serves as part of the initiation ceremony for young boys.

### *New Gardens*

Months before the *firedance* takes place, the men in the village prepare even bigger gardens. These are needed to provide the *kaikai* or food for the feast. Yams, taros and cassava or *tapiok* are the most important staple foods.



Young men preparing their masks in the *singal-angat-luchap*

## THE SINGAL-ANGAT-LUCHAP

A clearing is made in a secluded place in the forest. This is designated as the place of the *singal-angat-luchap*. This is a shed made of bush material which serves to accommodate the masks and other *amuthemes* or decorative attires – also known as *bilas* in Tok Pisin – as these are being made.

The location of the *singal-angat-luchap* is considered a sacred place. After the fire dance, the very shed itself and all the masks are destroyed to preserve their sanctity.

Care is taken to keep the location of the *singal-angat-luchap* a secret from women and uninitiated boys. The belief is that a woman who strays into its vicinity will be punished by the ancestral spirits with temporary mental derangement or some other physical malady. This is because in traditional times, the men painted the mask red from the blood extracted from their tongue in self-sacrifice.

All the preparations connected with the fire dance is kept secret from the women of the village. It is only when the men make their traditional cry during the painting of the masks that the women would start to have an inkling





of a celebration that is about to take place. This cry is one of lament and remembrance. They remember their deceased elders, especially those who used to lead and organize such occasions and in particular the outstanding characters of their past.

#### *The Role of the "Alumucha"*

From the time the man begins to prepare the *tapa cloth* or traditional bark cloth used to make the *simalacha*, the traditional G-string attire, and the mask, he is compelled to abstain from sexual contact. He must no longer sleep with his wife, though he is allowed to receive food from her. From now on he would spend most of his time in the bush, i.e. the forest, hunting for wild pigs.

When the firedance draws near, the man who acts as sponsor of the boy and is in-charge of his initiation is also held responsible to prepare all the needed *amuthemes* or traditional attire and finery needed for the celebration. He makes ready the *simalacha*

or G-string attire. He works on the mask, seeing to its construction and painting. He goes to search for the colored soil or ground which will be used for the body-painting. He does all this preparation in secret.

The man, usually a close relative, prepares everything for the boy. In a sense, he becomes like a godfather to the boy who calls him *alumucha* or bigman. The young man is expected to show respect to him and his wife at all times. After the ceremony, the young man is expected to show some signs of gratitude or "pay back." He can kill one pig. This however must not be killed with a spear but with special arrows with two or three heads. Or the young man can prepare a basket of galip nuts or a bilum (= net basket) of taros or other garden crops as a gift for his sponsor. He is not allowed to buy these things from a store but must cultivate them himself.



*Young Baining surrounded by the intricate masks of the Kachet Baining found in the Kokopo Museum (above). Frames of masks in the singal-angat-luchap (left).*



The masks may be of different shapes. Often they take the shape of things found in the forest like the *balus* or pigeon, *pisin* or the bird, *pik* or the wild pig.

The masks are prepared in a special place. It is called the *singal-angat-luchap*. This is a secret place where women and uninitiated children are forbidden

access. Should they break the rules they may be punished with sickness or some mental disorder.

The frame of the mask is made from the *komka* tree, the same tree whose bark is used for the making of the *tapa cloth*.

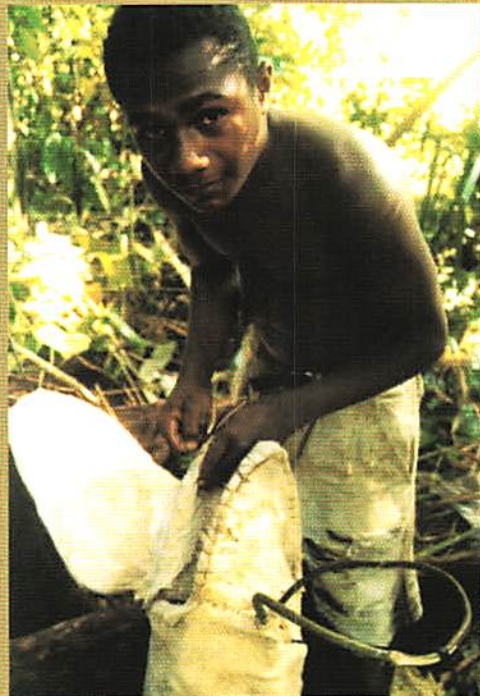
Usually a branch or the slender trunk of a sapling is chosen and spliced to obtain the pliable 2-4 cm. wide strips for the frame. The frame is shaped and held in place by ropes made from the forest vine.

The more traditional designs are those of the *muruk* with its two huge eyes and an elongated beak whose

opening serves as the view-finder of the mask wearer. The pukpuk or crocodile and the serpent are also popular shapes. Modern Mali Baining young men are known to have even created designs of their own, like those of the deck of cards – as clubs, spades etc. – which may seem shocking to purists. This witnesses to the swift adaptation of traditional culture to modern influences.



“The masks  
the shape of  
found in the  
like the bird  
wild pig.”



Young Baining males may also be seen using homemade needles from clothesline wires. Unfortunately, some avoid the labor required in making several strips of tapa cloth and content themselves with white cloth bought from the town merchandise store. Still, most of the masks today are still made from tapa cloth.

take  
things  
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Finally the mask is painted with the traditional colors of red and black. The black color is obtained from the ash of a burnt coconut shell or the burnt breadfruit leaves. These are then dissolved in vegetable or coconut oil and painted using the tip of the *gorgor* stalk. The red color, in ancient times, was derived from the blood from the slit tongue of the mask's maker. This gave the mask a sacral character and reinforced the belief of its association with the ancestral spirit.

Today, however, the colors

Once the frame is done, *tapa cloth* is wrapped all around it. The rope, also called the *abarka*, is made from the roots of the forest vine and is sewn using a chiseled cassowary bone. Today, At about this time the maker of the mask will also put some kind of talisman, often a knotted piece of rope or some small carving. This is to protect him from the spirit of the ancestor who would eventually "possess" the wearer of the mask. This can also be used for exorcism in case the ancestral spirit casts a malevolent spell on a villager during the dance.

more conveniently comes from acrylic paints purchased in town.

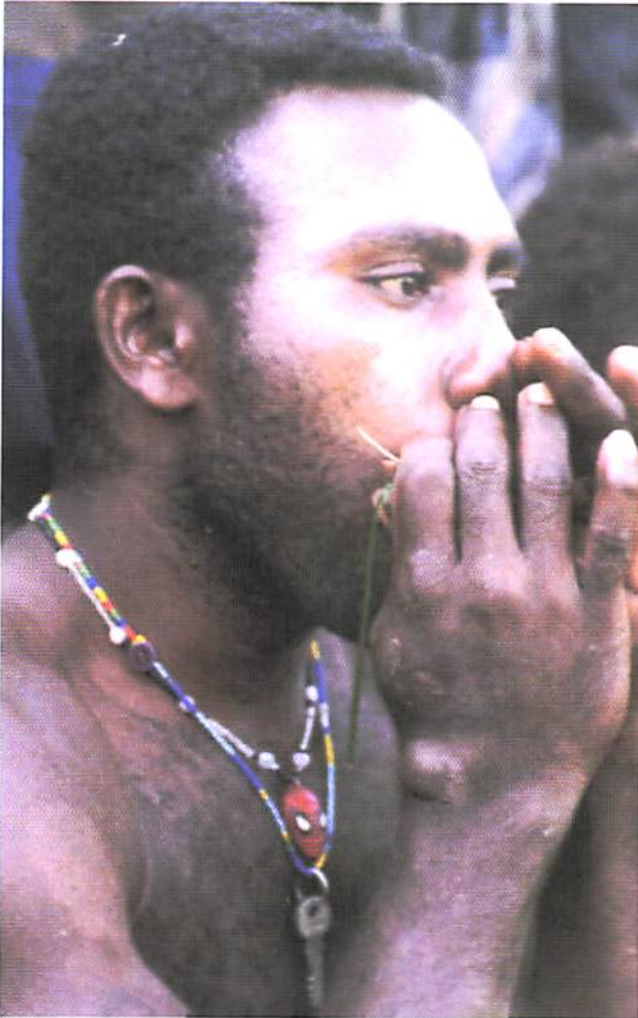
The designs on the mask can either be painted or stamped. To stamp the design, a master print is made from the cut stalk of the *gorgor* plant. Once the design has been made, the print is stamped much like one would stamp using ink. The etched stamp is called the *cusak*. This term is also applicable to the traditional paint brush. The designs may be of traditional geometric shapes. Usually, it is the village elders who would guide the younger men in





*“ The mask is painted with the traditional colors of red and black. In ancient times the red color was derived from the blood of the slit tongue. This gave the mask its sacral character.”*





number of guest will be many, the time for hunting can be longer.

Usually the hunts are done in groups and they would know the hunting grounds of each. It is part of Baining courtesy not to transgress in the known hunting area of another group. Should the hunters approximate crossing paths in the forest, the latter group should find some other way as it is not proper for them to meet in the forest.

When the hunters return from the forest they make their traditional cry. Usually this is done by one of the *tambuans* who also blows his *chaicho* or bush rope flute. This is to inform everyone that the hunters are about to arrive. This serves as a warning for the women to hide in their huts since it is forbidden for them to encounter these hunters. It also warns others on the road or path to give way. The crying continues until the group of hunters reaches the place of the "mumu" or where

this. Compared to the masks of the Northern Bainings, those of the Malis are much simpler and cruder in their execution.

The finished mask is housed in the *singal-angat-luchap* until the night of the dance. It is strictly forbidden that these be seen by women and uninitiated boys.

#### *Hunting and Cooking the Food*

About a month before the firedance, the men of the village begin their hunting trips in the forest. They hunt for wild pigs, *muruks* or cassowaries and an occasional tree kangaroo. This will serve to feed the entire village and all the guests during the firedance. If the expected

*The screeching sounds of the chaicho (right) serves as a signal for women and children who hide in their huts.*







are red hot, the firewood is removed and some of the stones set to the side. The mumu packs are then put inside the hole with hot stones set under and above them and also to their sides. More banana and taro leaves are lumped on top of the heap to serve to entrap the heat. Logs and large pieces of wood keep the entire mound in place. Cooking time for these stone ovens would usually be anywhere from 6-8 hours. Usually the cooking is done in the evening and the cooked meat is ready by the morning.

Since there are neither electricity nor refrigerators in the Baining's, constantly "mumu-ing" the meats is the only way to preserve them. In some sense, it is like "mummifying" the meats which is the effect obtained after several rounds of cooking. Since hunting can begin over a month before the firedance, the earlier catches can be cooked even some 15-20 times! The meats are usually cooked every other day, and the older meats usually end up pretty dry.

the wild fare is cooked in traditional earth and stone ovens.

The hunted fare is cooked in the traditional manner. A hole, usually a meter deep, is dug in the earth. Flat river rocks approximately 10-15 cm long are gathered. The hole is filled with firewood and the rocks are put on top of these. Once the fire is started, the rocks little by little absorb the heat of the fire. The veal or the meats from the hunt are wrapped in banana or taro leaves until a tight pack is made. Usually a pack would contain an entire mid-size pig or at least half a large boar. Once the stones



## IMMEDIATE PREPARATION

### *The Area of the Firedance*

The firedance is usually held inside the village or its vicinity where a large clearing can be made. Ordinarily, the area for the firedance is already marked out by tradition and is the same place of all previous firedances. Once the firedance has been publicly announced, the clearing is prepared and cleaned.

### *The Gathering of Wood*

Key to the success of a firedance is a huge bonfire. To achieve this, the men of the village start gathering firewood well in advance. There is no particular preference for the kind of wood or tree used. Usually branches will be bundled up for easy transport.

The firewood is often kept in individual houses until just several days before the firedance. Once the *tumbuans* have made their traditional bird-like cries announcing the event of the firedance, the wood is then transported to a common area near the clearing where the firedance is to be held.

Larger log pieces form the foundation of the bonfire. Not all the firewood is piled up at once. A large pile is kept as reserve. During the firedance itself, a man would be in charge of keeping the flame alive. He would be seen going in and out of the dance area putting more wood in the dying fire. It is important to keep the flame large and alive during the entire length of the dance which would ordinarily be a little over an hour.




### *The Tapiok Cakes*

Ordinarily the women of the village are kept in the dark about the preparations for a firedance until the *tumbuans* make their traditional cries preparing the way for the returning hunters. Usually this would be some 3-4 days before the event itself. Still many women are already able to guess the coming of the event either through gossip, the frequent absence of the men from the home and the lengthy sexual abstinence!

Still some form of "formal communication" takes place. The older and more trustworthy women of the village become the channels for communication. The elders of the village communicate to them the specifics. These older women, in turn, take charge of controlling all the tasks assigned to the women of the village.





Once the firedance becomes public knowledge, the women start preparing the food for the village shared meal. The men are in charge of hunting, cooking and preparing the veal (wild pig, fowls, cassowary etc.).

In earlier traditional times, taro was the main staple food during the feast. However, due to the lack of taro, today the women prepare the traditional *tapiok* or cassava cakes. The cassava is harvested and dried. This is then peeled and grated. The cassava is then boiled and the cassava meat is squeezed. The cassava milk once it solidifies forms a starchy flat shaped cake about 2-3 cm. thick. This has the advantage of being preserved for several days and at least long enough for the firedance. Instead, the taro can be served boiled or roasted.

### Practices

The firedance is also an occasion for the young men of the village to display their physique before the village girls even if incognito. All are determined therefore to perform to the best of their abilities. To ensure this, at least two rounds of practices are done before the firedance itself. Usually this is done some four nights before the event and is held way late into the night, often near midnight, to ensure its secrecy. The village elders often supervise these practices which last till early morning.

No practice is held on the night immediately prior to the firedance as this is often used for the last minute preparations for attires and finery.

### Preparing the Amuthemes

Personal decoration is highly esteemed by most cultures in Papua New Guinea. The same is true for the Mali Bainings. Other than the *simalacha* and the mask, the dancer of the firedance has many other personal decorations or *amuthemes* to prepare.

There is the *klem* or the dance rattles made from the hallowed seeds of the *galip* nut with a little conch shell inserted inside. These nut shells are strung together by the spliced roots of the forest vine and are fastened to the dancers' shins.



*The dancer's arms, legs and back were covered with sweet-scented colorful leaves (left).*



There are the colors for the body painting which have to be obtained, usually from choice soil from the nearby mountains.

There is also the assortment of *tanget* leaves and other traditional fragrant bush leaves which are used for the adornment of the dancer's arm and back.

There are also the leaves of the ground orchids usually found along the mountain slopes by the river banks which are used for the covering of the dancer's legs. These ground orchids are locally called: *garaung*, *thalek*, *nungur* and *malos*. Their flowers are usually violet and white.

## THE DAY OF THE DANCE

The day of the dance begins early for everyone in the village. Not only are all excited, but many last minute preparations are still to be done. Usually the morning will be spent to complete the *amuthemes* of the various dancers. The *tumbuans* also will be actively running about through the village both to scare the women and children and to build up the expectation for the ritual dance for that night. The women will be busy preparing the last of the tapiok cakes while the men would usually haul in the "mumu" packages in coconut leaf stretchers and bring these to a common place in the village.

By mid-day some men would already prepare the wood for the bonfire setting this in a pyramid shape. People from outlying villages would have come in since the night before and especially during the daytime prior to the dance. These add festivity to the celebration as well as extra help for the preparations.

## The Distribution of Food

By late afternoon, the food prepared by the various village groups is shared and divided proportionately. This is the *tilim kaikai* or the distribution of food. The food is ceremoniously brought into the distribution place by a group of men led by a *tumbuan* who cries out so that a way may be prepared for them. The cry also serves to express the joy felt at the impending feast. At times the *tumbuan* may also carry a stick to strike those who remain obstinate and do not give way.

Food piles are divided according to clans in the village and among the guests from other villages. Each is given a proportionate share of *mumu*-ed veal and tapiok cakes. This is an especially pleasant time for the kids of the village who stare wide-eyed at all the food in front of them.

The clans then get their food and go to some designated houses where all the clan members share their *mumu*. This is eaten with *gusto* and is usually consumed before the start of the fire dance.



*The "tilim kai" or the distribution of food during the late afternoon signalled that the aletem or fire dance was soon to begin.*

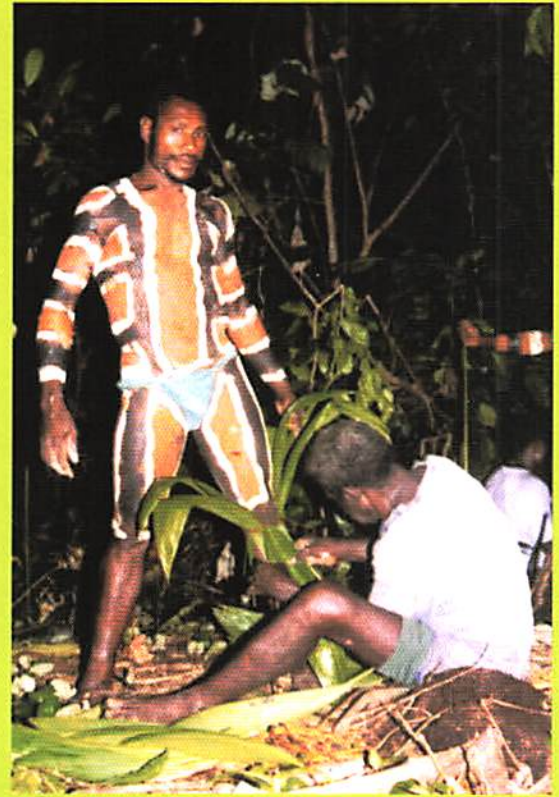


## The Dressing Up of the Dancers

Just before sunset all the dancers gather at the *singal-angat-luchap* for putting on their *amuthemes* and dressing up for the dance. The first thing done is body-painting. Each dancer is usually assisted by 2-3 men many of these village elders who know better the traditional designs for the body painting. The body painters are traditionally known as *avelmes* or *kutpranas*.

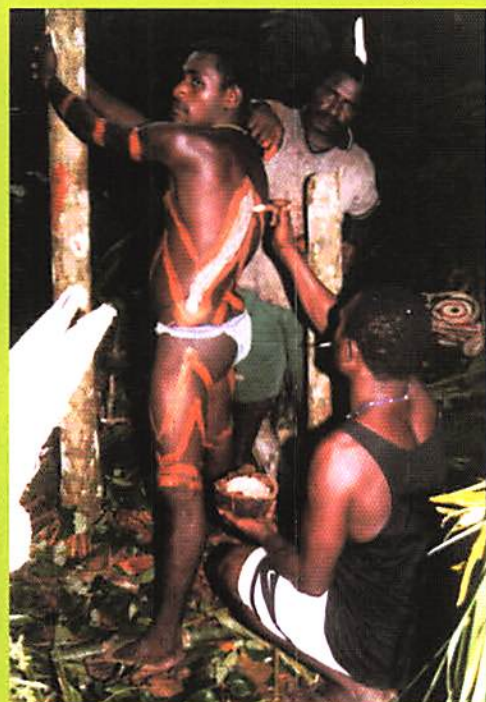
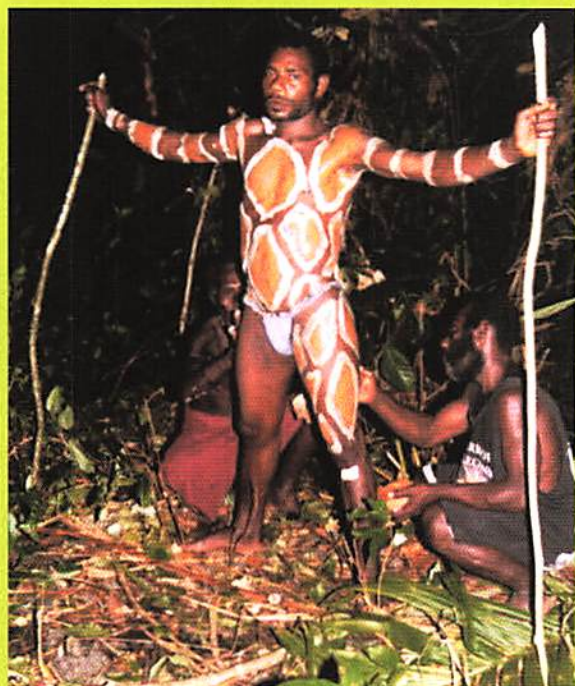
There are three colors used for the body-painting. There is *meilki* or white ground. These are found in certain areas deep in the forest, e.g. upstream by the river Moreh. Sometimes white ashes are used as a substitute. Next there is *ailinchi* or black color. This is obtained either from dried breadfruit leaves, or dried sugar cane leaves or dried *pitpit* leaves. These are then burnt in the fire and the black ashes produce the necessary color. Finally, there is the *lassurki* or the red color. This is the most precious of all. In olden times this was obtained by slitting the tongue and drawing out some blood. This is also obtained from the deep red soil found in certain areas of the forest. Today at times modern colored paints are used.

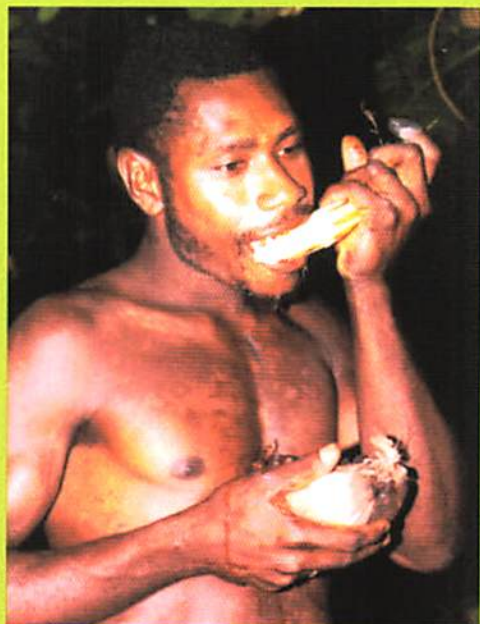
The traditional designs for the body painting are geometric designs often broken intersecting lines. However today the younger



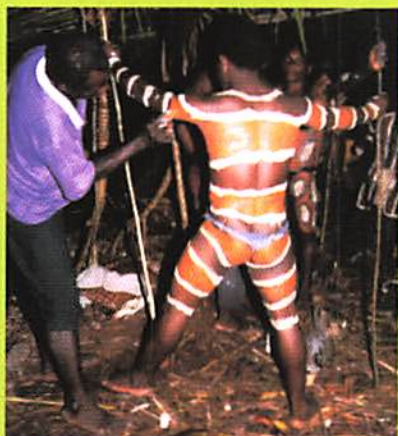
generations prefer designs they see in modern advertisement. Strangely, a popular design is the colonial Union Jack!





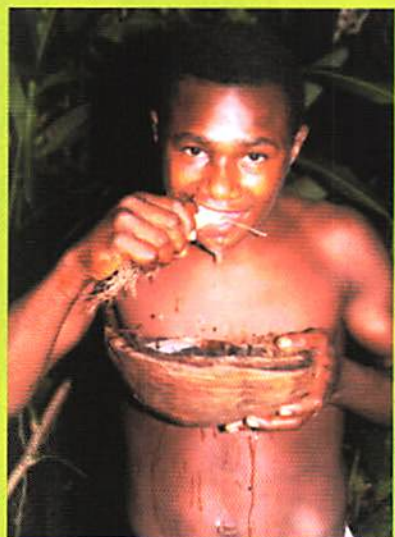


Once the body has been decorated with the colored soil, sugar cane juice is sprayed on the dancer. One chews the sugar cane to excrete its juice. This is then sprayed from the mouth of the person straight to the body of the performer. The juice makes the dancer's body more shiny and glossy. It also helps to attach the soil more to the skin. This will prove necessary once the dancer performs and sweats resulting in the peeling off of the colors.



The red, black and white body paints of the Mali Bainings set them apart from the dreary and monotonous black of the Kachet and Uramot Bainings. In this sense the Mali fire dances are more colorful.

After the body has been painted, the dancer puts on his *simalacha*. Once this is worn, the decorative leaves are then attached. There are the *tanget* and fragrant-colored leaves for the arms, neck and back torso. The leaves of the wild orchid are also decoratively set in place to cover both shins and bottom part of the legs. This is an important defense for the dancer who would soon have to step into the fire! After this the *klem* or seed rattles are attached just below the knees and the mask is worn.









DECORATING VICTOR



A final piece is not to be forgotten. This is the symbolic gift the dancer brings as he enters for the fire dance. Often this would be a fruit, like the *pinap* or pineapple or a *pawpaw* or a papaya. Many also bring a cluster of *buai* or the betel nut which is much prized by the people.

The dancers then exit the area of the *singal-angat-luchap* and wait in line moving slowly towards the dancing ground waiting for the signal for the fire dance to begin.

### Musical Instruments

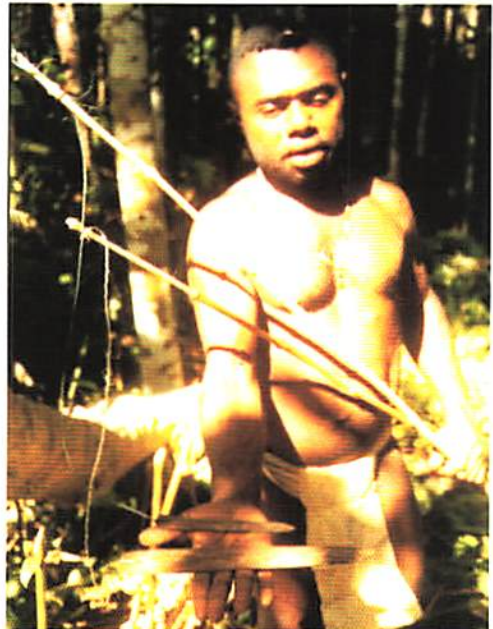
There are various musical instruments used for the fire dance. There are bamboo flutes called the *aicha*. There are different flutes used when the dancers make their procession inside and when they have to exit after the dance. There is the *aviringi*. This consists of a bamboo piece which is pounded on a flat stone or on wood. It is used to give rhythm to the dance. The *garamut* is also a popular instrument. This is made from a huge tree trunk whose center has been hollowed out. A *diwai* or wooden stick is used to pound it like a drum. Another traditional instrument is the *awirki*. This consists of a piece of carved wood tied to a rope vine and attached to a wooden or bamboo pole.

The pole itself is shaken like a mast and the swirling wooden piece makes an eerie loud noise.



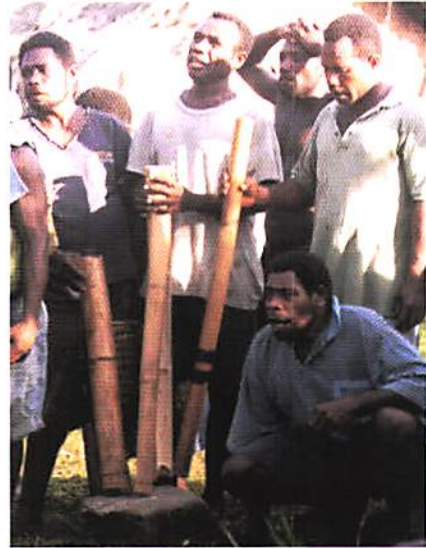
### The Singers

The singers are composed only of men and the initiated youth. The songs of the fire dance are usually traditional tunes drawn from the folklore of the Mali Bainings. Musicians and singers form one group and are positioned at a central place in the clearing. Most of the





dancing will be done directly in front of them. The songs are repetitive and are at a certain point monotonous but these are always sung with gusto. The total number of musicians and singers would be from 30-35. Many young boys also crowd in.



*The Villagers*

It is now early evening about half an hour after sunset (ca. 1900 Hr.). It is all dark save for the bonfire which has just been lit. The flame jumps into the air. The people of the village and the guests from the neighboring villages encircle the dancing ground careful to leave a clearing of 50 meter-diameter. On one end of the circle is a clearing which the dancers would use for their entrance and exit. Opposite this is the place of the musicians and singers. The people are spread all over between these two ends. Women, children and men intermix. The atmosphere is joyful and expectant as all are anxiously waiting for the fire-dance to begin.



## THE FIREDANCE

The firedance begins with a loud shout from the dancers who until now are still in the dark and not within view of the spectators. The dancers enter the open ground one by one. Unlike in Northern Baining practice, the first dancer of the Mali Baining firedance does not wear any special mask. He is agreed upon by the majority of the dancers. Usually, the first dancer is the fittest among them. He makes a round dancing around the huge bonfire and performs for sometime in front of the musicians. He then hands his traditional gift to one in the crowd and continues to make a complete circle. Then he goes to one side of the field where he waits for the other dancers while standing in place.

In the Kachet and Uramot tribes this first dancer is called the *lingenka*. Usually the firedance is started by one who has never participated in such an event before. However, the *lingenka* is not customary of the Mali Banings although at times they also use him. Instead the Mali Baining firedance is started by the leader of the firedance group.





A single dancer is called the *kavat*. The entire group of dancers is called the *kavachap*. The whole dance itself is called the *Aletem*.

After the entrance of first dancer, the second follows for his individual dance. And so the turns go on and the line of waiting dancers becomes longer. Usually the final dancer to enter is the one with the most elaborate mask, often this is the serpent mask. The more solemn the occasion, the more dancers there will be for the fire dance. A group of 15-25 dancers is considered average.





Once the last dancer has performed his individual piece and goes into line, the entire *kavachap* or group of dancers go and dance encircling the fire together. The dance itself has no specific step pattern. Instead they jump and run to the rhythm of the singers and musicians. The dancers go round and round without entering yet into the fire. This whole first segment of the fire dance from the individual dances to the group dance would usually last for about half an hour. After this there is an intermission during which the dancers exit the dancing ground.

This short intermission of about 5-10 minutes is done to give the dancers, singers and musicians a short respite. By now the dancers would be perspiring so much that much of their body paints would already have melted away. The intermission allows them also



an occasion to fix their *amuthemes* as needed. Furthermore it allows the spectators to compare notes and observations. During this time too the bonfire is replenished with more wood, even if the fire is constantly tended to even during the dance.







The dancers reenter the dancing ground with a loud shout. Unlike previously, there are no more individual performances. Instead the dancers enter the grounds in line and begin their dancing as an ensemble. Soon the more courageous ones dance bordering on the fringes of the bonfire itself. The singers and musicians sing with more gusto encouraging the dancers to go full way. By now the masked dancers jump across the bonfire, some inadvertently stepping on the burning charcoal. This is when the fire dance goes into full frenzy with dancers crossing paths and many leaping through the flames. This continues on for sometime lasting about 20-30 minutes. The fire dance comes to a close with a last song which is sung with a very fast tempo. This is a signal to the dancers that they are about to end. Then just as swiftly, the dancers exit as a group and suddenly the fire dance has ended!

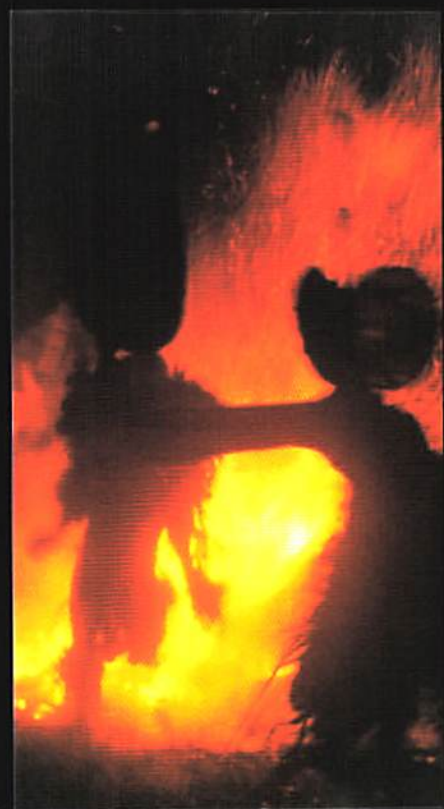


The fire dance of the Northern Baining goes into several rounds during the night and ends only with the approach of daybreak. In contrast, the Mali Baining fire dance is much simpler and definitely shorter. Often beginning just after sunset, it is over after only an hour.

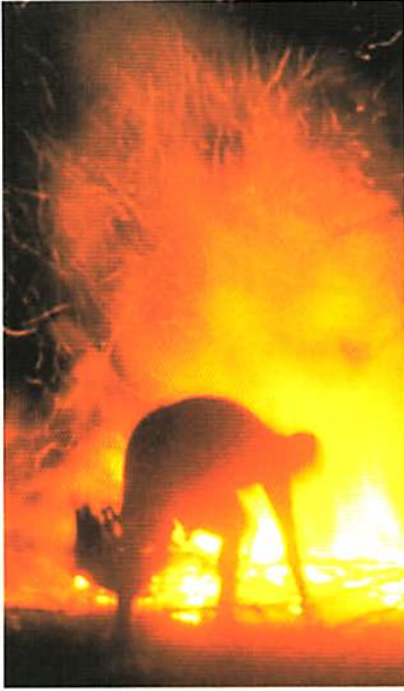












#### EVENTS AFTER THE FIRE DANCE

Once the dancers exit they proceed immediately to the *singal-angat-luchap* to change into ordinary attire. Many rush to a nearby stream or river for a quick and necessary bath. The masks, *amuthemes* and *simalacha* are left in the *singal-angat-luchap* and are destroyed in the succeeding days. The dancers themselves slowly and very discreetly reenter the village and join in its activities. Care is taken not to be identified, although many already know who they are.

Officially the fire dance is over but the celebrations continue on. Many of the singers and musicians continue to play and they are joined in by other young men and women. This night is a happy moment and many young people take the occasion to revel in the celebration.



#### Endnote: Spirit Possessions

It is not uncommon after a fire dance to have instances of spirit possessions. Whether these are actual possessions or self-induced hallucinations is not clear. Definitely, the tension on preparations, probably sleepless nights and often extended hunger if not total fasting all contribute to an imbalanced state of mind. Still many in the village consider these as an affliction by angry ancestral spirits who have come to punish those who may have infringed on traditions. This can be the trespassing of women across sacred places, or the failure to keep to traditional procedures in the manufacturing of the *amuthemes* or some other reason still kept secret. Spirit possession may also take place if one does not exert all his energies in the practices preparatory for the dance.

Most of these "possessions" are temporary, though some can last 3-4 days or even a week. Those possessed are exorcised by village elders who chant incantations and use local herbs. Others in the village take extra precaution and mark themselves with certain signs to ward off evil spirits. Among the special marks used is the *kabang*. These are marks made of lime used by village sorcerers to fend off evil spirits. Special soft soil may also be used. In fact today, some even mark themselves with baby powder!

## 5 THE DANCE OF THE TUMBUANS

As told by: Mr. Winter Robert, Mr. Henrick Steven, Mr. Kilian Vitus and Mr. Sameng Robert

### WHAT IS THE TUMBUAN?

**T**he *tumbuan* is believed to be the incarnation of the spirit of the ancestors. As such it is a frightening figure often employed to scare little children and drive away the women into their huts by the *tumbuan's* shrieking and bird-like sounds.

During village festivities, the *tumbuan* also has a heraldic function. He clears the path for the hunters coming from the forest, or the men carrying the food for distribution, or dancers for the fire dance. As the embodiment of ancestral spirits, there is a certain mystique associated with the *tumbuans*. Their preparation and attires are kept properly only in the designated *haus tambaran* or in a *avalcha* or *haus boi* (in Tok Pisin).





enough to cover the face. The small slits in the weaving allows the wearer to see clearly while disguising his identity. Many today prefer their *goalka* made of synthetic nylon rope which is both more durable and colorful.

### *Making the Tumbuan Attire*

The attire of the *tumbuan* consists of three things: the covering of coconut leaves, the face mask or the *goalka* and the *achusochi*.

The leaf of the coconut palm is split into two at its backbone. This is chiseled as thinly as possible without breaking it. The stiff middle stick of each individual leaf, which broom sticks are made of, is then stripped off. Each individual strand of leaf is thus broken into two. The main backbone is then formed into a circular shape the width of which would depend on the size of the individual. Three such circular rings are made to be suspended on the waist, the mid-torso and the neck. Split vine ropes are used to serve as straps. A fourth, much smaller ring, is also used to cover the shoulder blades, though this is more for cosmetic purposes and is not so necessary.

The *goalka* is traditionally made from the roots of the forest vine. It is woven in a circular fashion and is about 10-15 cm. in diameter, just big

*The tumbuan  
is a  
frightening  
figure  
believed to be  
the spirit of  
their  
ancestors.*







The *achusochi* is a conical-shaped head gear used to shield the identity of the *tumbuan* and to add color to his attire. It is made from the root of the *pandanus* tree which is then beaten with an *awirki* or wooden mallet. The strands which result are then gathered and dried. Usually this will be white in color. The final yellow color of the *achusochi* is obtained from the roots of a certain garlic plant, also known as the *brumen* (left). One chews the roots and sprays the color with his mouth. Sometimes one may wear the black *achusochi*. This is usually the color of the *tumbuans* for wartime. During dances, it is worn by one who intends to inflict harm on one of the villagers.

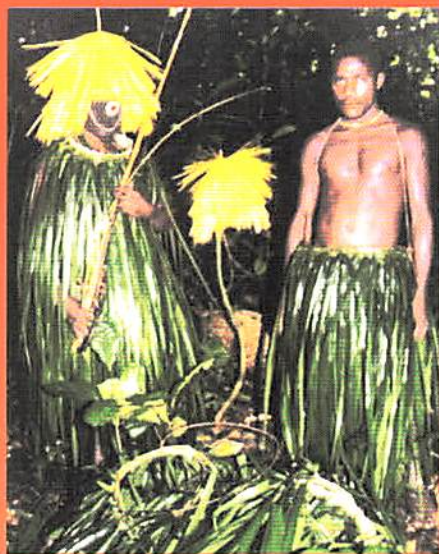


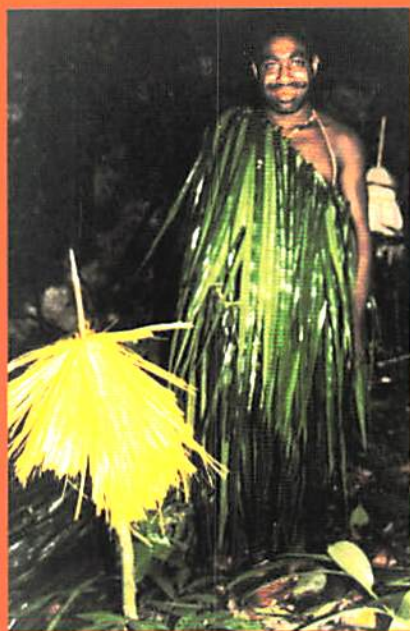
## DRESSING UP THE TUMBUAN

The young men who make the tumbuan dress up in a common secluded area. Properly this should be the *haus tambaran* or the village *avalcha*. Often they help each other in pairs. They first wear the coconut leaf skirt which they suspend from their waist. The second ring of coconut leaves can either be worn diagonally from one shoulder or suspended from mid-torso. The third ring of coconut leaves is worn around the neck. The entire body is thus covered by layers of coconut leaves. Often a fourth and final ring, usually made of shorter stumps of leaves, is worn around the neck to cover the shoulder blades.

They then cover their faces with their face *goalka*, securing this with some piece of rope. Finally, they put on the *achusochi/achogi* as their head gear. This too is secured with some rope fastened underneath the chin.

If it is the first time for one to dance as a *tumbuan* and to wear the *achusochi*, he is first struck three times with the bamboo whip (right). This initiation ritual serves to remind one of the important role he is about to play.





*The various layers of palm leaves were worn beginning with those from the hip (far left) going up the torso (top and bottom).*



## THE DAY DANCE OF THE TUMBUANS

The procession of the *tumbuans*, or dancers representing the spirits of the ancestors, is preceded by the *kalidanga*. He is a dancer who holds the *awirki* and serves to warn the people of the approach of the *tumbuans*. The *tumbuans* themselves hold their fighting sticks in one hand, ready to strike those who would not clear the path. Other *tumbuans* would have the *chaicho* or bush rope flute in their hand blowing this to serve as warning of their approach.

As they near the village, the *tumbuans* – numbering some twenty five to thirty – would speed their steps and increase the volume of their cries and blowing of the *chaicho*. By the time they enter the village, all the women and

uninitiated children would have already been hidden in their respective



huts. A group of musicians and singers would be formed as a mass, often as an elongated line, and the *tumbuans* would dance in circular fashion, often jumping according to rhythm but with no designated steps. The dance itself is more frenzied than anything and lasts for about 10-15 minutes, or until such a time when the dancers are exhausted. The only variation in the dance would be the change of direction the dancers would make after certain intervals.

This ends with a loud shriek after which the *tumbuans* disperse throughout the village to sow fear with their cries and pounding of





houses. They then exit the village going back to the *avalcha* or their designated secluded place. This first dance ordinarily occurs sometime early in the morning just after sunrise.

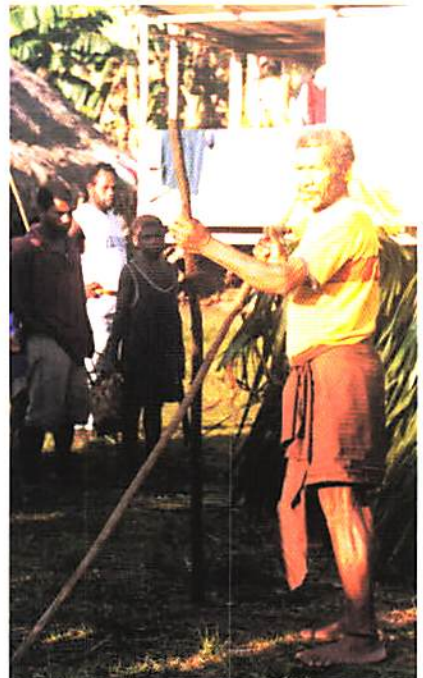
During the event of a fire dance, the *tumbuans* come out a second time just before the distribution of the food in mid-afternoon. Again



their entrance is preceded with shrieks and the blowing of the *chaicho*. Often this afternoon dance is more physically violent. Certain elders of the village even strike the *tumbuans* to test their physical endurance. The dancers also strike back. At times this also becomes a time for meting out justice and punishment to errant youths. These are singled out and whipped by two or more *tumbuans*. Unfortunately, this could even lead into brawls.

To prevent violence, a village elder can position himself where the *tumbuans* can see him and hold aloft two wooden poles in a crossed "X" fashion. This is a signal that the dance should be peaceful and no violence or vendetta should take place.

Like in the morning, the dance ends with the dispersal of the *tumbuans* first into the village and ultimately back to their *avalcha*.





## THE NIGHT DANCE OF THE TUMBUANS

The night dance of the *tumbuan* is considered a sacred dance. No woman or uninitiated child may see this. The *tumbuan* are dressed as they would in the morning except for the *achusochi*. Instead of this head gear, they are now wearing masks. These masks are of various shapes and are made of dried *pandanus* leaves. The bark of the tree may also be used. These are shaped inside out and are painted mostly in red.

The dance is held in an open clearing where a bonfire has been prepared. Like in the day dances, there is a group serving as musicians and chorus. The *tumbuan* dance around the bonfire in circular fashion in no designated step pattern. Most simply jump up and down in a frenzied movement to the rhythm of the music. They do not jump into the fire or cross it. After some 15 minutes of this frenzied dancing, they slowly move out and disappear in the darkness.



Immediately after the *tumbuans* have left, the men of the village together with all initiated youth will dance for a few minutes. This is to remove the power of the *tumbuans* in order to make the area safe for the women and children. It is believed that the power their ancestors' spirits may have adverse effects on the latter.



#### *After the Dance*

Once the dance is over the women and children get out of their houses. Usually the musicians continue with their singing and now the women join in. The festivity of singing and playing of musical instruments continue way into the early morning until all pass out.







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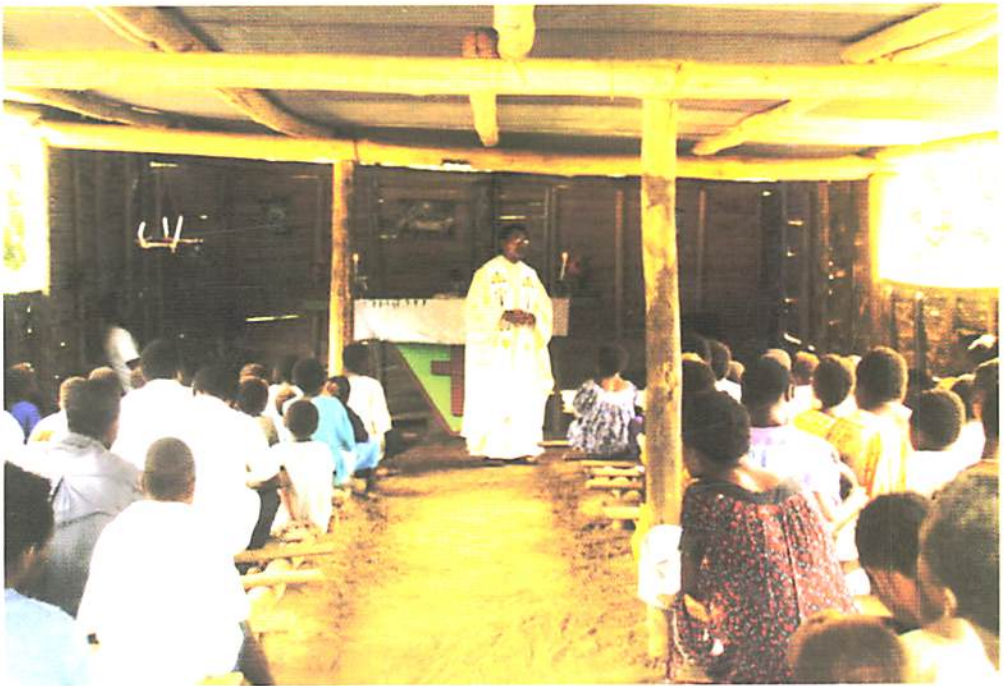
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