

ARGONAUTS OF THE WESTERN PACIFIC

*An Account of Native Enterprise and
Adventure in the Archipelagoes of
Melanesian New Guinea*

BY

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WITH A PREFACE

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WITH 5 MAPS, 65 ILLUSTRATIONS, AND 2 FIGURES.



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INTRODUCTION THE SUBJECT, METHOD AND SCOPE OF THIS INQUIRY

I

THE coastal populations of the South Sea Islands, with very few exceptions, are, or were before their extinction, expert navigators and traders. Several of them had evolved excellent types of large sea-going canoes, and used to embark in them on distant trade expeditions or raids of war and conquest. The Papuo-Melanesians, who inhabit the coast and the outlying islands of New Guinea, are no exception to this rule. In general they are daring sailors, industrious manufacturers, and keen traders. The manufacturing centres of important articles, such as pottery, stone implements, canoes, fine baskets, valued ornaments, are localised in several places, according to the skill of the inhabitants, their inherited tribal tradition, and special facilities offered by the district; thence they are traded over wide areas, sometimes travelling more than hundreds of miles.

Definite forms of exchange along definite trade routes are to be found established between the various tribes. A most remarkable form of intertribal trade is that obtaining between the Motu of Port Moresby and the tribes of the Papuan Gulf. The Motu sail for hundreds of miles in heavy, unwieldy canoes, called *lakatoi*, which are provided with the characteristic crab-claw sails. They bring pottery and shell ornaments, in olden days, stone blades, to Gulf Papuans, from whom they obtain in exchange sago and the heavy dug-outs, which are used afterwards by the Motu for the construction of their *lakatoi* canoes.*

Further East, on the South coast, there lives the industrious, sea-faring population of the Mailu, who link the East End of New Guinea with the central coast tribes by means of annual trading expeditions.* Finally, the natives of the islands and archipelagoes, scattered around the East End, are in constant trading relations with one another. We possess in Professor Seligman's book an

* The *hiri*, as these expeditions are called in Motuan, have been described with a great wealth of detail and clearness of outline by Captain F.Barton, in C.G.Seligman's "The Melanesians of British New Guinea," Cambridge, 1910, [Chapter viii](#).

excellent description of the subject, especially of the nearer trades routes between the various islands inhabited by the Southern Massim.[†] There exists, however, another, a very extensive and highly complex trading system, embracing with its ramifications, not only the islands near the East End, but also the Louisiades, Woodlark Island, the Trobriand Archipelago, and the d'Entrecasteaux group; it penetrates into the mainland of New Guinea, and exerts an indirect influence over several outlying districts, such as Rossel Island, and some parts of the Northern and Southern coast of New Guinea. This trading system, the Kula, is the subject I am setting out to describe in this volume, and it will be seen that it is an economic phenomenon of considerable theoretical importance. It looms paramount in the tribal life of those natives who live within its circuit, and its importance is fully realised by the tribesmen themselves, whose ideas, ambitions, desires and vanities are very much bound up with the Kula

II

Before proceeding to the account of the Kula, it will be well to give a description of the methods used in the collecting of the ethnographic material. The results of scientific research in any branch of learning ought to be presented in a manner absolutely candid and above board. No one would dream of making an experimental contribution to physical or chemical science, without giving a detailed account of all the arrangements of the experiments; an exact description of the apparatus used; of the manner in which the observations were conducted; of their number; of the length of time devoted to them, and of the degree of approximation with which each measurement was made. In less exact sciences, as in biology or geology, this cannot be done as rigorously, but every student will do his best to bring home to the reader all the conditions in which the experiment or the observations were made. In Ethnography, where a candid account of such data is perhaps even more necessary, it has unfortunately in the past not always been supplied with sufficient generosity, and many writers do not ply the full searchlight of methodic sincerity, as they move among their facts but produce them before us out of complete obscurity.

It would be easy to quote works of high repute, and with a scientific hall-mark on them, in which wholesale generalisations are laid down before us, and we are not informed at all by what actual experiences the writers have reached their conclusion. No special chapter or paragraph is devoted to describing to us the conditions under which observations were made and information collected. I consider that only such ethnographic sources are of unquestionable scientific

* Cf. "The Mailu," by B. Malinowski, in Transactions of the R. Society of S. Australia, 1915; [Chapter iv.](#) 4, pp. 612 to 629.

† Op. cit. Chapter xl.

value, in which we can clearly draw the line between, on the one hand, the results of direct observation and of native statements and interpretations, and on the other, the inferences of the author, based on his common sense and psychological insight.* Indeed, some such survey, as that contained in the table, given below ([Div. VI](#) of this chapter) ought to be forthcoming, so that at a glance the reader could estimate with precision the degree of the writer's personal acquaintance with the facts which he describes, and form an idea under what conditions information had been obtained from the natives.

Again, in historical science, no one could expect to be seriously treated if he made any mystery of his sources and spoke of the past as if he knew it by divination. In Ethnography, the writer is his own chronicler and the historian at the same time, while his sources are no doubt easily accessible, but also supremely elusive and complex; they are not embodied in fixed, material documents, but in the behaviour and in the memory of living men. In Ethnography, the distance is often enormous between the brute material of information—as it is presented to the student in his own observations, in native statement, in the kaleidoscope of tribal life—and the final authoritative presentation of the results. The Ethnographer has to traverse this distance in the laborious years between the moment when he sets foot upon a native beach, and makes his first attempts to get into touch with the natives, and the time when he writes down the final version of his results. A brief outline of an Ethnographer's tribulations, as lived through by myself, may throw more light on the question, than any long abstract discussion could do.

III

Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight. Since you take up your abode in the compound of some neighbouring white man, trader or missionary, you have nothing to do, but to start at once on your ethnographic work. Imagine further that you are a beginner, without previous experience, with nothing to guide you and no one to help you. For the white man is temporarily absent, or else unable or unwilling to waste any of his time on you. This exactly describes my first initiation into field work on the south coast of New Guinea. I well remember the long visits I paid to the villages during the first weeks; the feeling of hopelessness and despair after many obstinate but futile attempts had entirely failed to bring me into real touch with the natives, or supply me with any material.

* On this point of method again, we are indebted to the Cambridge School of Anthropology for having introduced the really scientific way of dealing with the question. More especially in the writings of Haddon, Rivers and Seligman, the distinction between inference and observation is always clearly drawn, and we can visualise with perfect precision the conditions under which the work was done.

I had periods of despondency, when I buried myself in the reading of novels, as a man might take to drink in a fit of tropical depression and boredom.

Imagine yourself then, making your first entry into the village, alone or in company with your white cicerone. Some natives flock round you, especially if they smell tobacco. Others, the more dignified and elderly, remain seated where they are. Your white companion has his routine way of treating the natives, and he neither understands, nor is very much concerned with the manner in which you, as an ethnographer, will have to approach them. The first visit leaves you with a hopeful feeling that when you return alone, things will be easier. Such was my hope at least.

I came back duly, and soon gathered an audience around me. A few compliments in pidgin-English on both sides, some tobacco changing hands, induced an atmosphere of mutual amiability. I tried then to proceed to business. First, to begin with subjects which might arouse no suspicion, I started to "do" technology. A few natives were engaged in manufacturing some object or other. It was easy to look at it and obtain the names of the tools, and even some technical expressions about the proceedings, but there the matter ended. It must be borne in mind that pidgin-English is a very imperfect instrument for expressing one's ideas, and that before one gets a good training in framing questions and understanding answers one has the uncomfortable feeling that free communication in it with the natives will never be attained; and I was quite unable to enter into any more detailed or explicit conversation with them at first. I knew well that the best remedy for this was to collect concrete data, and accordingly I took a village census, wrote down genealogies, drew up plans and collected the terms of kinship. But all this remained dead material, which led no further into the understanding of real native mentality or behaviour, since I could neither procure a good native interpretation of any of these items, nor get what could be called the hang of tribal life. As to obtaining their ideas about religion, and magic, their beliefs in sorcery and spirits, nothing was forthcoming except a few superficial items of folk-lore, mangled by being forced into pidgin English.

Information which I received from some white residents in the district, valuable as it was in itself, was more discouraging than anything else with regard to my own work. Here were men who had lived for years in the place with constant opportunities of observing the natives and communicating with them, and who yet hardly knew one thing about them really well. How could I therefore in a few months or a year, hope to overtake and go beyond them? Moreover, the manner in which my white informants spoke about the natives and put their views was, naturally, that of untrained minds, unaccustomed to formulate their thoughts with any degree of consistency and precision. And they were for the most part, naturally enough, full of the biased and pre-judged opinions inevitable in the average practical man, whether administrator, missionary, or trader, yet so strongly repulsive to a mind striving after the objective, scientific view of things. The habit of treating with a self-satisfied frivolity what is really serious to the ethnographer; the cheap rating of what to

him is a scientific treasure, that is to say, the native's cultural and mental peculiarities and independence—these features, so well known in the inferior amateur's writing, I found in the tone of the majority of white residents.*

Indeed, in my first piece of Ethnographic research on the South coast, it was not until I was alone in the district that I began to make some headway; and, at any rate, I found out where lay the secret of effective field-work. What is then this ethnographer's magic, by which he is able to evoke the real spirit of the natives, the true picture of tribal life? As usual, success can only be obtained by a patient and systematic application of a number of rules of common sense and well-known scientific principles, and not by the discovery of any marvellous short-cut leading to the desired results without effort or trouble. The principles of method can be grouped under three main headings; first of all, naturally, the student must possess real scientific aims, and know the values and criteria of modern ethnography. Secondly, he ought to put himself in good conditions of work, that is, in the main, to live without other white men, right among the natives. Finally, he has to apply a number of special methods of collecting, manipulating and fixing his evidence. A few words must be said about these three foundation stones of field work, beginning with the second as the most elementary.

IV

Proper conditions for ethnographic work. These, as said, consist mainly in cutting oneself off from the company of other white men, and remaining in as close contact with the natives as possible, which really can only be achieved by camping right in their villages (see Plates I and II). It is very nice to have a base in a white man's compound for the stores, and to know there is a refuge there in times of sickness and surfeit of native. But it must be far enough away not to become a permanent milieu in which you live and from which you emerge at fixed hours only to "do the village." It should not even be near enough to fly to at any moment for recreation. For the native is not the natural companion for a white man, and after you have been working with him for several hours, seeing how he does his gardens, or letting him tell you items of folk-lore, or discussing his customs, you will naturally hanker after the company of your own kind. But if you are alone in a village beyond reach of this, you go for a solitary walk for an hour or so, return again and then quite naturally seek out the natives' society, this time as a relief from loneliness, just as you would any other companionship. And by means of this natural intercourse, you learn to know him, and you become

* I may note at once that there were a few delightful exceptions to that, to mention only my friends Billy Hancock in the Trobriands; M.Raffael Brudo, another pearl trader; and the missionary, Mr. M.K.Gilmour.

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familiar with his customs and beliefs far better than when he is a paid, and often bored, informant.

There is all the difference between a sporadic plunging into the company of natives, and being really in contact with them. What does this latter mean? On the Ethnographer's side, it means that his life in the village, which at first is a strange, sometimes unpleasant, sometimes intensely interesting adventure, soon adopts quite a natural course very much in harmony with his surroundings.

Soon after I had established myself in Omarakana (Trobriand Islands), I began to take part, in a way, in the village life, to look forward to the important or festive events, to take personal interest in the gossip and the developments of the small village occurrences; to wake up every morning to a day, presenting itself to me more or less as it does to the native. I would get out from under my mosquito net, to find around me the village life beginning to stir, or the people well advanced in their working day according to the hour and also to the season, for they get up and begin their labours early or late, as work presses. As I went on my morning walk through the village, I could see intimate details of family life, of toilet, cooking, taking of meals; I could see the arrangements for the day's work, people starting on their errands, or groups of men and women busy at some manufacturing tasks (see [Plate III](#)). Quarrels, jokes, family scenes, events usually trivial, sometimes dramatic but always significant, formed the atmosphere of my daily life, as well as of theirs. It must be remembered that as the natives saw me constantly every day, they ceased to be interested or alarmed, or made self-conscious by my presence, and I ceased to be a disturbing element in the tribal life which I was to study, altering it by my very approach, as always happens with a new-comer to every savage community. In fact, as they knew that I would thrust my nose into everything, even where a well-mannered native would not dream of intruding, they finished by regarding me as part and parcel of their life, a necessary evil or nuisance, mitigated by donations of tobacco.

Later on in the day, whatever happened was within easy reach, and there was no possibility of its escaping my notice. Alarms about the sorcerer's approach in the evening, one or two big, really important quarrels and rifts within the community, cases of illness, attempted cures and deaths, magical rites which had to be performed, all these I had not to pursue, fearful of missing them, but they took place under my very eyes, at my own doorstep, so to speak (see [Plate IV](#)). And it must be emphasised whenever anything dramatic or important occurs it is essential to investigate it at the very moment of happening, because the natives cannot but talk about it, are too excited to be reticent, and too interested to be mentally lazy in supplying details. Also, over and over again, I committed breaches of etiquette, which the natives, familiar enough with me, were not slow in pointing out. I had to learn how to behave, and to a certain extent, I acquired "the feeling" for native good and bad manners. With this, and with the capacity of enjoying their company and sharing some of their games and amusements, I began to feel that I was indeed in touch with the natives, and this is certainly the preliminary condition of being able to carry on successful field work.

V

But the Ethnographer has not only to spread his nets in the right place, and wait for what will fall into them. He must be an active huntsman, and drive his quarry into them and follow it up to its most inaccessible lairs. And that leads us to the more active methods of pursuing ethnographic evidence. It has been mentioned at the end of **Division III** that the Ethnographer has to be inspired by the knowledge of the most modern results of scientific study, by its principles and aims. I shall not enlarge upon this subject, except by way of one remark, to avoid the possibility of misunderstanding. Good training in theory, and acquaintance with its latest results, is not identical with being burdened with "preconceived ideas." If a man sets out on an expedition, determined to prove certain hypotheses, if he is incapable of changing his views constantly and casting them off ungrudgingly under the pressure of evidence, needless to say his work will be worthless. But the more problems he brings with him into the field, the more he is in the habit of moulding his theories according to facts, and of seeing facts in their bearing upon theory, the better he is equipped for the work. Preconceived ideas are pernicious in any scientific work, but foreshadowed problems are the main endowment of a scientific thinker, and these problems are first revealed to the observer by his theoretical studies.

In Ethnology the early efforts of Bastian, Tylor, Morgan, the German Völkerpsychologen have remoulded the older crude information of travellers, missionaries, etc., and have shown us the importance of applying deeper conceptions and discarding crude and misleading ones.*

The concept of animism superseded that of "fetichism" or "devil-worship," both meaningless terms. The understanding of the classificatory systems of relationship paved the way for the brilliant, modern researches on native sociology in the field-work of the Cambridge school. The psychological analysis of the German thinkers has brought forth an abundant crop of most valuable information in the results obtained by the recent German expeditions to Africa, South America and the Pacific, while the theoretical works of Frazer, Durkheim and others have already, and will no doubt still for a long time inspire field workers and lead them to new results. The field worker relies entirely upon inspiration from theory. Of course he may be also a theoretical thinker and worker, and there he can draw on himself for stimulus. But the two functions are separate, and in actual research they have to be separated both in time and conditions of work.

As always happens when scientific interest turns towards and begins to labour on a field so far only prospected by the curiosity of amateurs, Ethnology has introduced law and order into what seemed chaotic and freakish. It has transformed for us the sensational, wild and unaccountable world of "savages" into a number of well ordered communities, governed by law, behaving and thinking according to consistent principles. The word "savage," whatever association it might have had originally, connotes ideas of boundless liberty, of irregularity, of something

extremely and extraordinarily quaint. In popular thinking, we imagine that the natives live on the bosom of Nature, more or less as they can and like, the prey of irregular, phantasmagoric beliefs and apprehensions. Modern science, on the contrary, shows that their social institutions have a very definite organisation, that they are governed by authority, law and order in their public and personal relations, while the latter are, besides, under the control of extremely complex ties of kinship and clanship. Indeed, we see them entangled in a mesh of duties, functions and privileges which correspond to an elaborate tribal, communal and kinship organisation (see [Plate IV](#)). Their beliefs and practices do not by any means lack consistency of a certain type, and their knowledge of the outer world is sufficient to guide them in many of their strenuous enterprises and activities. Their artistic productions again lack neither meaning nor beauty.

It is a very far cry from the famous answer given long ago by a representative authority who, asked, what are the manners and customs of the natives, answered, "Customs none, manners beastly," to the position of the modern Ethnographer! This latter, with his tables of kinship terms, genealogies, maps, plans and diagrams, proves the existence of an extensive and big organisation, shows the constitution of the tribe, of the clan, of the family; and he gives us a picture of the natives subjected to a strict code of behaviour and good manners, to which in comparison the life at the Court of Versailles or Escorial was free and easy.*

Thus the first and basic ideal of ethnographic field-work is to give a clear and firm outline of the social constitution, and disentangle the laws and regularities of all cultural phenomena from the irrelevances. The firm skeleton of the tribal life has to be first ascertained. This ideal imposes in the first place the fundamental obligation of giving a complete survey of the phenomena, and not of picking out the sensational, the singular, still less the funny and quaint. The time when we could tolerate accounts presenting us the native as a distorted, childish caricature of a human being are gone. This picture is false, and like many other falsehoods, it has been killed by Science. The field Ethnographer has seriously and soberly to cover the full extent of the phenomena in each aspect of tribal culture studied, making no difference between what is commonplace, or

* According to a useful habit of the terminology of science, I use the word Ethnography for the empirical and descriptive results of the science of Man, and the word Ethnology for speculative and comparative theories.

* The legendary "early authority" who found the natives only beastly and without customs is left behind by a modern writer, who, speaking about the Southern Massim with whom he lived and worked "in close contact" for many years, says:— "...We teach lawless men to become obedient, inhuman men to love, and savage men to change." And again:— "Guided in his conduct by nothing but his instincts and propensities, and governed by his unchecked passions..." "Lawless, inhuman and savage!" A grosser misstatement of the real state of things could not be invented by anyone wishing to parody the Missionary point of view. Quoted from the Rev. C.W. Abel, of the London Missionary Society, "Savage Life in New Guinea," no date.

drab, or ordinary, and what strikes him as astonishing and out-of-the-way. At the same time, the whole area of tribal culture *in all its aspects* has to be gone over in research. The consistency, the law and order which obtain within each aspect make also for joining them into one coherent whole.

An Ethnographer who sets out to study only religion, or only technology, or only social organisation cuts out an artificial field for inquiry, and he will be seriously handicapped in his work.

VI

Having settled this very general rule, let us descend to more detailed consideration of method. The Ethnographer has in the field, according to what has just been said, the duty before him of drawing up all the rules and regularities of tribal life; all that is permanent and fixed; of giving an anatomy of their culture, of depicting the constitution of their society. But these things, though crystallised and set, are nowhere *formulated*. There is no written or explicitly expressed code of laws, and their whole tribal tradition, the whole structure of their society, are embodied in the most elusive of all materials; the human being. But not even in human mind or memory are these laws to be found definitely formulated. The natives obey the forces and commands of the tribal code, but they do not comprehend them; exactly as they obey their instincts and their impulses, but could not lay down a single law of psychology. The regularities in native institutions are an automatic result of the interaction of the mental forces of tradition, and of the material conditions of environment. Exactly as a humble member of any modern institution, whether it be the state, or the church, or the army, is *of it* and *in it*, but has no vision of the resulting integral action of the whole, still less could furnish any account of its organisation, so it would be futile to attempt questioning a native in abstract, sociological terms. The difference is that, in our society, every institution has its intelligent members, its historians, and its archives and documents, whereas in a native society there are none of these. After this is realised an expedient has to be found to overcome this difficulty. This expedient for an Ethnographer consists in collecting concrete data of evidence, and drawing the general inferences for himself. This seems obvious on the face of it, but was not found out or at least practised in Ethnography till field work was taken up by men of science. Moreover, in giving it practical effect, it is neither easy to devise the concrete applications of this method, nor to carry them out systematically and consistently.

Though we cannot ask a native about abstract, general rules, we can always enquire how a given case would be treated. Thus for instance, in asking how they would treat crime, or punish it, it would be vain to put to a native a sweeping question such as, "How do you treat and punish a criminal?" for even words could not be found to express it in native, or in pidgin. But an imaginary case, or still better, a real occurrence, will stimulate a native to express his opinion and to supply plentiful information. A real case indeed will start the natives on a wave

of discussion, evoke expressions of indignation, show them taking sides—all of which talk will probably contain a wealth of definite views, of moral censures, as well as reveal the social mechanism set in motion by the crime committed. From there, it will be easy to lead them on to speak of other similar cases, to remember other actual occurrences or to discuss them in all their implications and aspects. From this material, which ought to cover the widest possible range of facts, the inference is obtained by simple induction. The *scientific* treatment differs from that of good common sense, first in that a student will extend the completeness and minuteness of survey much further and in a pedantically systematic and methodical manner; and secondly, in that the scientifically trained mind, will push the inquiry along really relevant lines, and towards aims possessing real importance. Indeed, the object of scientific training is to provide the empirical investigator with a *mental chart*, in accordance with which he can take his bearings and lay his course.

To return to our example, a number of definite cases discussed will reveal to the Ethnographer the social machinery for punishment. This is one part, one aspect of tribal authority. Imagine further that by a similar method of inference from definite data, he arrives at understanding leadership in war, in economic enterprise, in tribal festivities—there he has at once all the data necessary to answer the questions about tribal government and social authority. In actual field work, the comparison of such data, the attempt, to piece them together, will often reveal rifts and gaps in the information which lead on to further investigations.

From my own experience, I can say that, very often, a problem seemed settled, everything fixed and clear, till I began to write down a short preliminary sketch of my results. And only then, did I see the enormous deficiencies, which would show me where lay new problems, and lead me on to new work. In fact, I spent a few months between my first and second expeditions, and over a year between that and the subsequent one, in going over all my material, and making parts of it almost ready for publication each time, though each time I knew I would have to re-write it. Such cross-fertilisation of constructive work and observation, I found most valuable, and I do not think I could have made real headway without it. I give this bit of my own history merely to show that what has been said so far is not only an empty programme, but the result of personal experience. In this volume, the description is given of a big institution connected with ever so many associated activities, and presenting many aspects. To anyone who reflects on the subject, it will be clear that the information about a phenomenon of such high complexity and of so many ramifications, could not be obtained with any degree of exactitude and completeness, without a constant interplay of constructive attempts and empirical checking. In fact, I have written up an outline of the Kula institution at least half a dozen times while in the field and in the intervals between my expeditions. Each time, new problems and difficulties presented themselves.

The collecting of concrete data over a wide range of facts is thus one of the main points of field method. The obligation is not to enumerate a few examples

only, but to exhaust as far as possible all the cases within reach; and, on this search for cases, the investigator will score most whose mental chart is clearest. But, whenever the material of the search allows it, this mental chart ought to be transformed into a real one; it ought to materialise into a diagram, a plan, an exhaustive, synoptic table of cases. Long since, in all tolerably good modern books on natives, we expect to find a full list or table of kinship terms, which includes all the data relative to it, and does not just pick out a few strange and anomalous relationships or expressions. In the investigation of kinship, the following up of one relation after another in concrete cases leads naturally to the construction of genealogical tables. Practised already by the best early writers, such as Munzinger, and, if I remember rightly, Kubary, this method has been developed to its fullest extent in the works of Dr. Rivers. Again, studying the concrete data of economic transactions, in order to trace the history of a valuable object, and to gauge the nature of its circulation, the principle of completeness and thoroughness would lead to construct tables of transactions, such as we find in the work of Professor Seligman.* It is in following Professor Seligman's example in this matter that I was able to settle certain of the more difficult and detailed rules of the Kula. The method of reducing information, if possible, into charts or synoptic tables ought to be extended to the study of practically all aspects of native life. All types of economic transactions may be studied by following up connected, actual cases, and putting them into a synoptic chart; again, a table ought to be drawn up of all the gifts and presents customary in a given society, a table including the sociological, ceremonial, and economic definition of every item. Also, systems of magic, connected series of ceremonies, types of legal acts, all could be charted, allowing each entry to be synoptically defined under a number of headings. Besides this, of course, the genealogical census of every community, studied more in detail, extensive maps, plans and diagrams, illustrating ownership in garden land, hunting and fishing privileges, etc., serve as the more fundamental documents of ethnographic research.

A genealogy is nothing else but a synoptic chart of a number of connected relations of kinship. Its value as an instrument of research consists in that it allows the investigator to put questions which he formulates to himself *in abstracto*, but can put concretely to the native informant. As a document, its value consists in that it gives a number of authenticated data, presented in their natural grouping. A synoptic chart of magic fulfils the same function. As an instrument of research, I have used it in order to ascertain, for instance, the ideas about the nature of magical power. With a chart before me, I could easily and conveniently go over one item after the other, and note down the relevant practices and beliefs contained in each of them. The answer to my abstract problem could then be obtained by drawing a general inference from all the cases, and the procedure is illustrated in Chapters XVII and XVIII.* I cannot

* For instance, the tables of circulation of the valuable axe blades, op. cit., pp. 531, 532.

enter further into the discussion of this question, which would need further distinctions, such as between a chart of concrete, actual data, such as is a genealogy, and a chart summarising the outlines of a custom or belief, as a chart of a magical system would be.

Returning once more to the question of methodological candour, discussed previously in [Division II](#). I wish to point out here, that the procedure of concrete and tabularised presentation of data ought to be applied first to the Ethnographer's own credentials. That is, an Ethnographer, who wishes to be trusted, must show clearly and concisely, in a tabularised form, which are his own direct observations, and which the indirect information that form the bases of his account. The Table on the next page will serve as an example of this procedure and help the reader of this book to form an idea of the trustworthiness of any statement he is specially anxious to check. With the help of this Table and the many references scattered throughout the text, as to how, under what circumstances, and with what degree of accuracy I arrived at a given item of knowledge, there will, I hope remain no obscurity whatever as to the sources of the book.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF KULA EVENTS WITNESSED BY THE WRITER

FIRST EXPEDITION, August, 1914—March, 1915.

March, 1915. In the village of Dikoyas (Woodlark Island) a few ceremonial offerings seen. Preliminary information obtained.

SECOND EXPEDITION, May, 1915—May, 1916.

June, 1915. A Kabigidoya visit arrives from Vakuta to Kiriwina. Its anchoring at Kavataria witnessed and the men seen at Omarakana, where information collected.

July, 1915. Several parties from Kitava land on the beach of Kaulukuba. The men examined in Omarakana. Much information collected in that period.

September, 1915. Unsuccessful attempt to sail to Kitava with To'uluwa, the chief of Omarakana.

October-November, 1915. Departure noticed of three expeditions from Kiriwina to Kitava. Each time To'uluwa brings home a haul of *mwali* (armshells).

November, 1915—*March*, 1916. Preparations for a big overseas expedition from Kiriwina to the Marshall Bennett Islands. Construction of a canoe; renovating of another; sail making in Omarakana; launching; *tasasoria* on the beach of Kaulukuba. At the same time, information is being obtained about these and the associated subjects. Some magical texts of canoe building and Kula magic obtained.

THIRD EXPEDITION, October, 1917—October, 1918.

* In this book, besides the adjoining Table, which does not strictly belong to the class of document of which I speak here, the reader will find only a few samples of synoptic tables, such as the list of Kula partners mentioned and analysed in [Chapter XIII](#), [Division II](#), the list of gifts and presents in [Chapter VI](#), [Division VI](#), not tabularised, only described; the synoptic data of a Kula expedition in [Chapter XVI](#), and the table of Kula magic given in [Chapter XVII](#). Here, I have not wanted to overload the account with charts, etc., preferring to reserve them till the full publication of my material.

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF KULA EVENTS WITNESSED BY THE WRITER

November, 1917—December, 1917. Inland Kula; some data obtained in Tukwaukwa.

December—February, 1918. Parties from Kitava arrive in Wawela. Collection of information about the *yoyova*. Magic and spells of Kaygau obtained.

March, 1918. Preparations in Sanaroa; preparations in the Amphletts; the Dobuan fleet arrives in the Amphletts. The *avalaku* expedition from Dobu followed to Boyowa.

April, 1918. Their arrival; their reception in Sinaketa; the Kula transactions; the big intertribal gathering. Some magical formulae obtained.

May, 1918. Party from Kitava seen in Vakuta.

June, July, 1918. Information about Kula magic and customs checked and amplified in Omarakana, especially with regard to its Eastern branches.

August, September, 1918. Magical texts obtained in Sinaketa.

October, 1918. Information obtained from a number of natives in Dobu and Southern Massim district (examined in Samarai).

To summarise the first, cardinal point of method, I may say each phenomenon ought to be studied through the broadest range possible of its concrete manifestations; each studied by an exhaustive survey of detailed examples. If possible, the results ought to be tabulated into some sort of synoptic chart, both to be used as an instrument of study, and to be presented as an ethnological document. With the help of such documents and such study of actualities the clear outline of the framework of the natives' culture in the widest sense of the word, and the constitution of their society, can be presented. This method could be called *the method of statistic documentation by concrete evidence*.

VII

Needless to add, in this respect, the scientific field-work is far above even the best amateur productions. There is, however, one point in which the latter often excel. This is, in the presentation of intimate touches of native life, in bringing home to us these aspects of it with which one is made familiar only through being in close contact with the natives, one way or the other, for a long period of time. In certain results of scientific work—especially that which has been called "survey work"—we are given an excellent skeleton, so to speak, of the tribal constitution, but it lacks flesh and blood. We learn much about the framework of their society, but within it, we cannot perceive or imagine the realities of human life, the even flow of everyday events, the occasional ripples of excitement over a feast, or ceremony, or some singular occurrence. In working out the rules and regularities of native custom, and in obtaining a precise formula for them from the collection of data and native statements, we find that this very precision is foreign to real life, which never adheres rigidly to any rules. It must be supplemented by the observation of the manner in which a given custom is carried out, of the behaviour of the natives in obeying the rules so exactly

formulated by the ethnographer, of the very exceptions which in sociological phenomena almost always occur.

If all the conclusions are solely based on the statements of informants, or deduced from objective documents, it is of course impossible to supplement them in actually observed data of real behaviour. And that is the reason why certain works of amateur residents of long standing, such as educated traders and planters, medical men and officials, and last, but not least, the few intelligent and unbiassed missionaries to whom Ethnography owes so much, surpass in plasticity and in vividness most of the purely scientific accounts. But if the specialised field-worker can adopt the conditions of living described above, he is in a far better position to be really in touch with the natives than any other white resident. For none of them lives right in a native village, except for very short periods, and everyone has his own business, which takes up a considerable part of his time. Moreover, if, like a trader or a missionary or an official he enters into active relations with the native, if he has to transform or influence or make use of him, this makes a real, unbiassed, impartial observation impossible, and precludes all-round sincerity, at least in the case of the missionaries and officials.

Living in the village with no other business but to follow native life, one sees the customs, ceremonies and transactions over and over again, one has examples of their beliefs as they are actually lived through, and the full body and blood of actual native life fills out soon the skeleton of abstract constructions. That is the reason why, working under such conditions as previously described, the Ethnographer is enabled to add something essential to the bare outline of tribal constitution, and to supplement it by all the details of behaviour, setting and small incident. He is able in each case to state whether an act is public or private; how a public assembly behaves, and what it looks like; he can judge whether an event is ordinary or an exciting and singular one; whether natives bring to it a great deal of sincere and earnest spirit, or perform it in fun; whether they do it in a perfunctory manner, or with zeal and deliberation.

In other words, there is a series of phenomena of great importance which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality. Let us call them *the inponderabilia of actual life*. Here belong such things as the routine of a man's working day, the details of his care of the body, of the manner of taking food and preparing it; the tone of conversational and social life around the village fires, the existence of strong friendships or hostilities, and of passing sympathies and dislikes between people; the subtle yet unmistakable manner in which personal vanities and ambitions are reflected in the behaviour of the individual and in the emotional reactions of those who surround him. All these facts can and ought to be scientifically formulated and recorded, but it is necessary that this be done, not by a superficial registration of details, as is usually done by untrained observers, but with an effort at penetrating the mental attitude expressed in them. And that is the reason why the work of scientifically trained observers, once seriously applied to the

study of this aspect, will, I believe, yield results of surpassing value. So far, it has been done only by amateurs, and therefore done, on the whole, indifferently.

Indeed, if we remember that these imponderable yet all important facts of actual life are part of the real substance of the social fabric, that in them are spun the innumerable threads which keep together the family, the clan, the village community, the tribe—their significance becomes clear. The more crystallised bonds of social grouping, such as the definite ritual, the economic and legal duties, the obligations, the ceremonial gifts and formal marks of regard, though equally important for the student, are certainly felt less strongly by the individual who has to fulfil them. Applying this to ourselves, we all know that “family life” means for us, first and foremost, the atmosphere of home, all the innumerable small acts and attentions in which are expressed the affection, the mutual interest, the little preferences, and the little antipathies which constitute intimacy. That we may inherit from this person, that we shall have to walk after the hearse of the other, though sociologically these facts belong to the definition of “family” and “family life,” in personal perspective of what family truly is to us, they normally stand very much in the background.

Exactly the same applies to a native community, and if the Ethnographer wants to bring their real life home to his readers, he must on no account neglect this. Neither aspect, the intimate, as little as the legal, ought to be glossed over. Yet as a rule in ethnographic accounts we have not both but either the one or the other—and, so far, the intimate one has hardly ever been properly treated. In all social relations besides the family ties, even those between mere tribesmen and, beyond that, between hostile or friendly members of different tribes, meeting on any sort of social business, there is this intimate side, expressed by the typical details of intercourse, the tone of their behaviour in the presence of one another. This side is different from the definite, crystalised legal frame of the relationship, and it has to be studied and stated in its own right.

In the same way, in studying the conspicuous acts of tribal life, such as ceremonies, rites, festivities, etc., the details and tone of behaviour ought to be given, besides the bare outline of events. The importance of this may be exemplified by one instance. Much has been said and written about survival. Yet the survival character of an act is expressed in nothing so well as in the concomitant behaviour, in the way in which it is carried out. Take any example from our own culture, whether it be the pomp and pageantry of a state ceremony, or a picturesque custom kept up by street urchins, its “outline” will not tell you whether the rite flourishes still with full vigour in the hearts of those who perform it or assist at the performance or whether they regard it as almost a dead thing, kept alive for tradition’s sake. But observe and fix the data of their behaviour, and at once the degree of vitality of the act will become clear. There is no doubt, from all points of sociological, or psychological analysis, and in any question of theory, the manner and type of behaviour observed in the performance of an act is of the highest importance. Indeed behaviour is a fact, a relevant fact, and one that can be recorded. And foolish indeed and short-sighted would be the man of

science who would pass by a whole class of phenomena, ready to be garnered, and leave them to waste, even though he did not see at the moment to what theoretical use they might be put!

As to the actual method of observing and recording in field-work these *imponderabilia of actual life and of typical behaviour*, there is no doubt that the personal equation of the observer comes in here more prominently, than in the collection of crystallised, ethnographic data. But here also the main endeavour must be to let facts speak for themselves. If in making a daily round of the village, certain small incidents, characteristic forms of taking food, of conversing, of doing work (see for instance [Plate III](#)) are found occurring over and over again, they should be noted down at once. It is also important that this work of collecting and fixing impressions should begin early in the course of working out a district. Because certain subtle peculiarities, which make an impression as long as they are novel, cease to be noticed as soon as they become familiar. Others again can only be perceived with a better knowledge of the local conditions. An ethnographic diary, carried on systematically throughout the course of one's work in a district would be the ideal instrument for this sort of study. And if, side by side with the normal and typical, the ethnographer carefully notes the slight, or the more pronounced deviations from it, he will be able to indicate the two extremes within which the normal moves.

In observing ceremonies or other tribal events, such, for instance as the scene depicted in [Plate IV](#), it is necessary, not only to note down those occurrences and details which are prescribed by tradition and custom to be the essential course of the act, but also the Ethnographer ought to record carefully and precisely, one after the other, the actions of the actors and of the spectators. Forgetting for a moment that he knows and understands the structure of this ceremony, the main dogmatic ideas underlying it, he might try to find himself only in the midst of an assembly of human-beings, who behave seriously or jocularly, with earnest concentration or with bored frivolity, who are either in the same mood as he finds them every day, or else are screwed up to a high pitch of excitement, and so on and so on. With his attention constantly directed to this aspect of tribal life, with the constant endeavour to fix it, to express it in terms of actual fact, a good deal of reliable and expressive material finds its way into his notes. He will be able to "set" the act into its proper place in tribal life, that is to show whether it is exceptional or commonplace, one in which the natives behave ordinarily, or one in which their whole behaviour is transformed. And he will also be able to bring all this home to his readers in a clear, convincing manner.

Again, in this type of work, it is good for the Ethnographer sometimes to put aside camera, note book and pencil, and to join in himself in what is going on. He can take part in the natives' games, he can follow them on their visits and walks, sit down and listen and share in their conversations. I am not certain if this is equally easy for everyone—perhaps the Slavonic nature is more plastic and more naturally savage than that of Western Europeans—but though the degree of success varies, the attempt is possible for everyone. Out of

such plunges into the life of the natives—and I made them frequently not only for study's sake but because everyone needs human company—I have carried away a distinct feeling that their behaviour, their manner of being, in all sorts of tribal transactions, became more transparent and easily understandable than it had been before. All these methodological remarks, the reader will find again illustrated in the following chapters.

VIII

Finally, let us pass to the third and last aim of scientific field-work, to the last type of phenomenon which ought to be recorded in order to give a full and adequate picture of native culture. Besides the firm outline of tribal constitution and crystallised cultural items which form the skeleton, besides the data of daily life and ordinary behaviour, which are, so to speak, its flesh and blood, there is still to be recorded the spirit—the natives' views and opinions and utterances. For, in every act of tribal life, there is, first, the routine prescribed by custom and tradition, then there is the manner in which it is carried out, and lastly there is the commentary to it, contained in the natives' mind. A man who submits to various customary obligations, who follows a traditional course of action, does it impelled by certain motives, to the accompaniment of certain feelings, guided by certain ideas. These ideas, feelings, and impulses are moulded and conditioned by the culture in which we find them, and are therefore an ethnic peculiarity of the given society. An attempt must be made therefore, to study and record them.

But is this possible? Are these subjective states not too elusive and shapeless? And, even granted that people usually do feel or think or experience certain psychological states in association with the performance of customary acts, the majority of them surely are not able to formulate these states, to put them into words. This latter point must certainly be granted, and it is perhaps the real Gordian knot in the study of the facts of social psychology. Without trying to cut or untie this knot, that is to solve the problem theoretically, or to enter further into the field of general methodology, I shall make directly for the question of practical means to overcome some of the difficulties involved.

First of all, it has to be laid down that we have to study here stereotyped manners of thinking and feeling. As sociologists, we are not interested in what A or B may feel *qua* individuals, in the accidental course of their own personal experiences—we are interested only in what they feel and think *qua* members of a given community. Now in this capacity, their mental states receive a certain stamp, become stereotyped by the institutions in which they live, by the influence of tradition and folk-lore, by the very vehicle of thought, that is by language. The social and cultural environment in which they move forces them to think and feel in a definite manner. Thus, a man who lives in a polyandrous community cannot experience the same feelings of jealousy, as a strict monogynist, though he might have the elements of them. A man who lives within the sphere of the Kula cannot become permanently and sentimentally attached to

certain of his possessions, in spite of the fact that he values them most of all. These examples are crude, but better ones will be found in the text of this book.

So, the third commandment of field-work runs: Find out the typical ways of thinking and feeling, corresponding to the institutions and culture of a given community, and formulate the results in the most convincing manner. What will be the method of procedure? The best ethnographical writers—here again the Cambridge school with Haddon, Rivers, and Seligman rank first among English Ethnographers—have always tried to quote *verbatim* statements of crucial importance. They also adduce terms of native classification; sociological, psychological and industrial *termini technici*, and have rendered the verbal contour of native thought as precisely as possible. One step further in this line can be made by the Ethnographer, who acquires a knowledge of the native language and can use it as an instrument of inquiry. In working in the Kiriwinian language, I found still some difficulty in writing down the statement directly in translation which at first I used to do in the act of taking notes. The translation often robbed the text of all its significant characteristics—rubbed off all its points—so that gradually I was led to note down certain important phrases just as they were spoken, in the native tongue. As my knowledge of the language progressed, I put down more and more in Kiriwinian, till at last I found myself writing exclusively in that language, rapidly taking notes, word for word, of each statement. No sooner had I arrived at this point, than I recognised that I was thus acquiring at the same time an abundant linguistic material, and a series of ethnographic documents which ought to be reproduced as I had fixed them, besides being utilised in the writing up of my account.* This *corpus inscriptionum Kiriwiensium* can be utilised, not only by myself, but by all those who, through their better penetration and ability of interpreting them, may find points which escape my attention, very much as the other *corpora* form the basis for the various interpretations of ancient and prehistoric cultures; only, these ethnographic inscriptions are all decipherable and clear, have been almost all translated fully and unambiguously, and have been provided with native cross-commentaries or *scholia* obtained from living sources.

No more need be said on this subject here, as later on a whole chapter ([Chapter XVIII](#)) is devoted to it, and to its exemplification by several native texts. The *Corpus* will of course be published separately at a later date.

IX

Our considerations thus indicate that the goal of ethnographic field-work must be approached through three avenues:

1. *The organisation of the tribe, and the anatomy of its culture* must be recorded in firm, clear outline. The method of *concrete, statistical documentation* is the means through which such an outline has to be given.
2. Within this frame, the *imponderabilia of actual life*, and the *type of behaviour* have to be filled in. They have to be collected through minute, detailed

observations, in the form of some sort of ethnographic diary, made possible by close contact with native life.

3. A collection of ethnographic statements, characteristic narratives, typical utterances, items of folk-lore and magical formulae has to be given as a *corpus inscriptionum*, as documents of native mentality.

These three lines of approach lead to the final goal, of which an Ethnographer should never lose sight. This goal is, briefly, to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world. We have to study man, and we must study what concerns him most intimately, that is, the hold which life has on him. In each culture, the values are slightly different; people aspire after different aims, follow different impulses, yearn after a different form of happiness. In each culture, we find different institutions in which man pursues his life-interest, different customs by which he satisfies his aspirations, different codes of law and morality which reward his virtues or punish his defections. To study the institutions, customs, and codes or to study the behaviour and mentality without the subjective desire of feeling by what these people live, of realising the substance of their happiness—is, in my opinion, to miss the greatest reward which we can hope to obtain from the study of man.

These generalities the reader will find illustrated in the following chapters. We shall see there the savage striving to satisfy certain aspirations, to attain his type of value, to follow his line of social ambition. We shall see him led on to perilous and difficult enterprises by a tradition of magical and heroical exploits, shall see him following the lure of his own romance. Perhaps as we read the account of these remote customs there may emerge a feeling of solidarity with the endeavours and ambitions of these natives. Perhaps man's mentality will be revealed to us, and brought near, along some lines which we never have followed before. Perhaps through realising human nature in a shape very distant and foreign to us, we shall have some light shed on our own. In this, and in this case only, we shall be justified in feeling that it has been worth our while to understand these natives, their institutions and customs, and that we have gathered some profit from the Kula.

* It was soon after I had adopted this course that I received a letter from Dr. A.H.Gardiner, the well-known Egyptologist, urging me to do this very thing. From his point of view as archaeologist, he naturally saw the enormous possibilities for an Ethnographer of obtaining a similar body of written sources as have been preserved to us from ancient cultures, plus the possibility of illuminating them by personal knowledge of the full life of that culture.

CHAPTER III

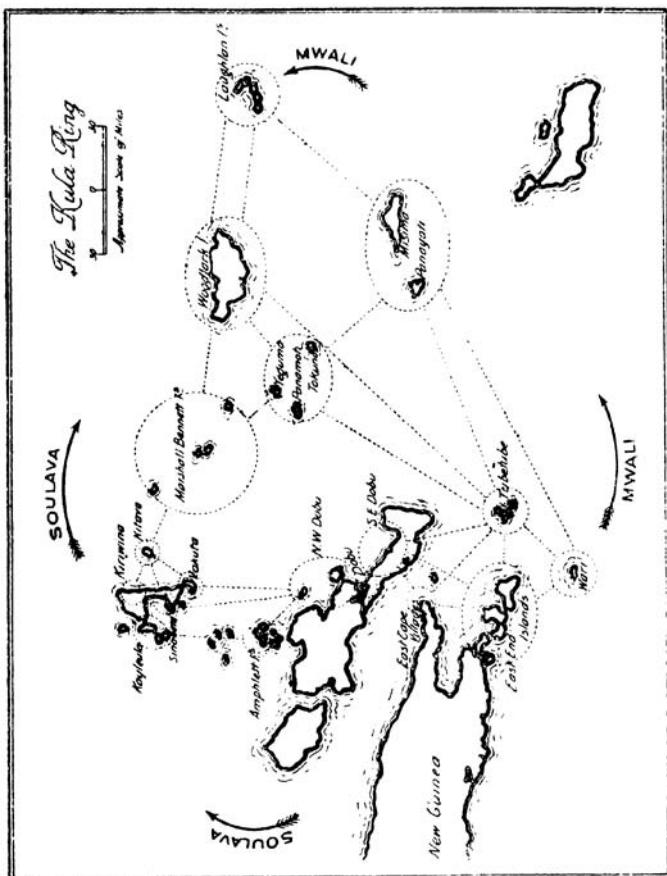
THE ESSENTIALS OF THE KULA

I

HAVING thus described the scene, and the actors, let us now proceed to the performance. The Kula is a form of exchange, of extensive, inter-tribal character; it is carried on by communities inhabiting a wide ring of islands, which form a closed circuit. This circuit can be seen on Map V, where it is represented by the lines joining a number of islands to the North and East of the East end of New Guinea. Along this route, articles of two kinds, and these two kinds only, are constantly travelling in opposite directions. In the direction of the hands of a clock, moves constantly one of these kinds—long necklaces of red shell, called *soulava* (Plates XVIII and XIX). In the opposite direction moves the other kind—bracelets of white shell called *mwali* (Plates XVI and XVII). Each of these articles, as it travels in its own direction on the closed circuit, meets on its way articles of the other class, and is constantly being exchanged for them. Every movement of the Kula articles, every detail of the transactions is fixed and regulated by a set of traditional rules and conventions, and some acts of the Kula are accompanied by an elaborate magical ritual and public ceremonies.

On every island and in every village, a more or less limited number of men take part in the Kula—that is to say, receive the goods, hold them for a short time, and then pass them on. Therefore every man who is in the Kula, periodically though not regularly, receives one or several *mwali* (arm-shells), or a *soulava* (necklace of red shell discs), and then has to hand it on to one of his partners, from whom he receives the opposite commodity in exchange. Thus no man ever keeps any of the articles for any length of time in his possession. One transaction does not finish the Kula relationship, the rule being “once in the Kula, always in the Kula,” and a partnership between two men is a permanent and lifelong affair. Again, any given *mwali* or *soulava* may always be found travelling and changing hands, and there is no question of its ever settling down, so that the principle “once in the Kula, always in the Kula” applies also to the valuables themselves.

The ceremonial exchange of the two articles is the main, the fundamental aspect of the Kula. But associated with it, and done under its cover, we find a



MAP V—The Kula Ring.

great number of secondary activities and features. Thus, side by side with the ritual exchange of arm-shells and necklaces, the natives carry on ordinary trade, bartering from one island to another a great number of utilities, often un procurable in the district to which they are imported, and indispensable there. Further, there are other activities, preliminary to the Kula, or associated with it, such as the building of sea-going canoes for the expeditions, certain big forms of mortuary ceremonies, and preparatory taboos.

The Kula is thus an extremely big and complex institution, both in its geographical extent, and in the manifoldness of its component pursuits. It welds together a considerable number of tribes, and it embraces a vast complex of activities, inter-connected, and playing into one another, so as to form one organic whole.

Yet it must be remembered that what appears to us an extensive, complicated, and yet well ordered institution is the outcome of ever so many doings and pursuits, carried on by savages, who have no laws or aims or charters definitely laid down. They have no knowledge of the *total outline* of any of their social structure. They know their own motives, know the purpose of individual actions and the rules which apply to them, but how, out of these, the whole collective institution shapes, this is beyond their mental range. Not even the most intelligent native has any clear idea of the Kula as a big, organised social construction, still less of its sociological function and implications. If you were to ask him what the Kula is, he would answer by giving a few details, most likely by giving his personal experiences and subjective views on the Kula, but nothing approaching the definition just given here. Not even a partial coherent account could be obtained. For the integral picture does not exist in his mind; he is in it, and cannot see the whole from the outside.

The integration of all the details observed, the achievement of a sociological synthesis of all the various, relevant symptoms, is the task of the Ethnographer. First of all, he has to find out that certain activities, which at first sight might appear incoherent and not correlated, have a meaning. He then has to find out what is constant and relevant in these activities, and what accidental and inessential, that is, to find out the laws and rules of all the transactions. Again, the Ethnographer has to *construct* the picture of the big institution, very much as the physicist constructs his theory from the experimental data, which always have been within reach of everybody, but which needed a consistent interpretation. I have touched on this point of method in the Introduction (Divisions V and VI), but I have repeated it here, as it is necessary to grasp it clearly in order not to lose the right perspective of conditions as they really exist among the natives.

II

In giving the above abstract and concise definition, I had to reverse the order of research, as this is done in ethnographic field-work, where the most generalised inferences are obtained as the result of long inquiries and laborious inductions. The general definition of the Kula will serve as a sort of plan or diagram in our further concrete and detailed descriptions. And this is the more necessary as the Kula is concerned with the exchange of wealth and utilities, and therefore it is an economic institution, and there is no other aspect of primitive life where our knowledge is more scanty and our understanding more superficial than in Economics. Hence misconception is rampant, and it is necessary to clear the ground when approaching any economic subject.

Thus in the Introduction we called the Kula a "form of trade," and we ranged it alongside other systems of barter. This is quite correct, if we give the word "*trade*" a sufficiently wide interpretation, and mean by it any exchange of goods. But the word "*trade*" is used in current Ethnography and economic literature with

so many different implications that a whole lot of misleading, preconceived ideas have to be brushed aside in order to grasp the facts correctly. Thus the *a priori* current notion of primitive trade would be that of an exchange of indispensable or useful articles, done without much ceremony or regulation, under stress of dearth or need, in spasmodic, irregular intervals—and this done either by direct barter, everyone looking out sharply not to be done out of his due, or, if the savages were too timid and distrustful to face one another, by some customary arrangement, securing by means of heavy penalties compliance in the obligations incurred or imposed * Waiving for the present the question how far this conception is valid or not in general—in my opinion it is quite misleading—we have to realise clearly that the Kula contradicts in almost every point the above definition of “savage trade.” It shows us primitive exchange in an entirely different light.

The Kula is not a surreptitious and precarious form of exchange. It is, quite on the contrary, rooted in myth, backed by traditional law, and surrounded with magical rites. All its main transactions are public and ceremonial, and carried out according to definite rules. It is not done on the spur of the moment, but happens periodically, at dates settled in advance, and it is carried on along definite trade routes, which must lead to fixed trysting places. Sociologically, though transacted between tribes differing in language, culture, and probably even in race, it is based on a fixed and permanent status, on a partnership which binds into couples some thousands of individuals. This partnership is a lifelong relationship, it implies various mutual duties and privileges, and constitutes a type of inter-tribal relationship on an enormous scale. As to the economic mechanism of the transactions, this is based on a specific form of credit, which implies a high degree of mutual trust and commercial honour—and this refers also to the subsidiary, minor trade, which accompanies the Kula proper. Finally, the Kula is

* By “current view,” I mean such as is to be found in text-books and in passing remarks, scattered through economic and ethnological literature. As a matter of fact, Economics is a subject very seldom touched upon either in theoretical works on Ethnology, or in accounts of field-work. I have enlarged on this deficiency in the article on “Primitive Economics,” published in the *Economic Journal*, March, 1921.

The best analysis of the problem of savage economy is to be found, in spite of its many shortcomings, in K. Bücher’s “Industrial Evolution,” English Translation, 1901. On primitive trade, however, his views are inadequate. In accordance with his general view that savages have no national economy, he maintains that any spread of goods among natives is achieved by non-economic means, such as robbery, tributes and gifts. The information contained in the present volume is incompatible with Bücher’s views, nor could he have maintained them had he been acquainted with Barton’s description of the Hiri (contained in Seligman’s “Melanesians.”)

A summary of the research done on Primitive Economics, showing incidentally, how little real, sound work has been accomplished, will be found in Pater W. Kopper’s “Die Ethnologische Wirtschaftsforschung” in *Anthropos*, X—XI, 1915–16, pp. 611–651, and 971–1079. The article is very useful, where the author summarises the views of others.

not done under stress of any need, since its main aim is to exchange articles which are of no practical use.

From the concise definition of Kula given at the beginning of this chapter, we see that in its final essence, divested of all trappings and accessories, it is a very simple affair, which at first sight might even appear tame and unromantic. After all, it only consists of an exchange, interminably repeated, of two articles intended for ornamentation, but not even used for that to any extent. Yet this simple action—this passing from hand to hand of two meaningless and quite useless objects—has somehow succeeded in becoming the foundation of a big inter-tribal institution, in being associated with ever so many other activities, Myth, magic and tradition have built up around it definite ritual and ceremonial forms, have given it a halo of romance and value in the minds of the natives, have indeed created a passion in their hearts for this simple exchange.

The definition of the Kula must now be amplified, and we must describe one after the other its fundamental characteristics and main rules, so that it may be clearly grasped by what mechanism the mere exchange of two articles results in an institution so vast, complex, and deeply rooted.

III

First of all, a few words must be said about the two principal objects of exchange, the arm-shells (*mwali*) and the necklaces (*soulava*). The arm-shells are obtained by breaking off the top and the narrow end of a big, cone-shaped shell (*Conus millepunctatus*), and then polishing up the remaining ring. These bracelets are highly coveted by all the Papuo-Melanesians of New Guinea, and they spread even into the pure Papuan district of the Gulf.* The manner of wearing the arm-shells is illustrated by [Plate XVII](#), where the men have put them on on purpose to be photographed.

The use of the small discs of red spondylus shell, out of which the *soulava* are made, is also of a very wide diffusion. There is a manufacturing centre of them in one of the villages in Port Moresby, and also in several places in Eastern New Guinea, notably in Rossell Island, and in the Trobriands. I have said “use” on purpose here, because these small beads, each of them a flat, round disc with a hole in the centre, coloured anything from muddy brown to carmine red, are employed in various ways for ornamentation. They are most generally used as part of earrings, made of rings of turtle shell, which are attached to the ear lobe, and from which hang a cluster of the shell discs. These earrings are very much worn, and, especially among the Massim, you see them on the ears of every

* Professor C.G.Seligman, op. cit., p. 93, states that arm-shells, *toea*, as they are called by the Motu, are traded from the Port Moresby district westward to the Gulf of Papua. Among the Motu and Koita, near Port Moresby, they are highly valued, and nowadays attain very high prices, up to £30, much more than is paid for the same article among the Massim.

PLATE I



THE ETHNOGRAPHER'S TENT ON THE BEACH OF NU'AGASI

This illustrates the manner of life among the natives, described on p. 6. Note (with reference to Chs. IV and V) the dug-out log of a large canoe beside the tent, and the *masawa* canoe, beached under palm leaves to the left.

PLATE II



THE CHIEF'S LISIGA (PERSONAL HUT) IN OMARAKANA

To'uluwa, the present chief, is standing in front (cf. Ch. II, Div. V); to the left, among the palms, is the Ethnographer's tent (see p. 6), with a group of natives squatting in front of it.

PLATE III



STREET OF KASANA'I (INKIRIWINA, TROBRIAND ISLANDS)

An everyday scene, showing groups of people at their ordinary occupations. (See p. 7.)

PLATE IV



SCENE IN YOURAWOTU (TROBRIANDS)

A complex, but well-defined, act of a *sagali* (ceremonial distribution) is going on. There is a definite system of sociological, economic and ceremonial principles at the bottom of the apparently confused proceedings. (See p. 8.)

PLATE V



SCENES ON THE BEACH OF SIOSILO (SOUTHERN MASSIM DISTRICT)

These represent phases of a big annual feast, the *so'i*. (See p. 37 and compare also Ch. XXI.) Note the prominent part taken by women in the proceedings; the use of the "ceremonial" axe handles; the manner of carrying pigs, and the canoes beached on the shore.

PLATE VI



VILLAGE SCENES DURING A SO'I FEAST

These show types of Southern Massim and their decorations; again note the prominent part taken by women in the ceremonial actions. (See p. 37.)

PLATE VII



IN THE AMPHLETTTS

The sea-front of the main village (or Gumawana). (See p. 46.)

PLATE VIII



GROUP OF NATIVES IN THE VILLAGE OF TUKWA'UKWA

This shows the type of coastal village, with the natives squatting round. (See p. 5.)

PLATE IX



MEN OF RANK FROM KIRIWINA

Tokulubakiki, a chief's son, Towese'i and Yobukwa'u, of the highest and somewhat inferior rank respectively. All three show fine features and intelligent expressions; they were among my best informants. (See p. 52.)

PLATE X



FISHERMEN FROM TEYAVA

Types of commoners from a Lagoon village. (See p. 52.)

PLATE XI



A TYPICAL NAKUBUKWABUYA (UNMARRIED WOMAN)

This shows the coarse, though fine-looking, type of a commoner woman. (See p. 52.)

PLATE XII



BOYOWAN GIRLS

Such facial painting and decorations are used when they go on a *katuyausi* expedition.
(See p. 52.)

PLATE XIII



KAYDEBU DANCE

The circular dance with the carved shield on the *baku* of Omarakana. (See p. 57.) Note the plain, though picturesque, headdress of cockatoo feathers.

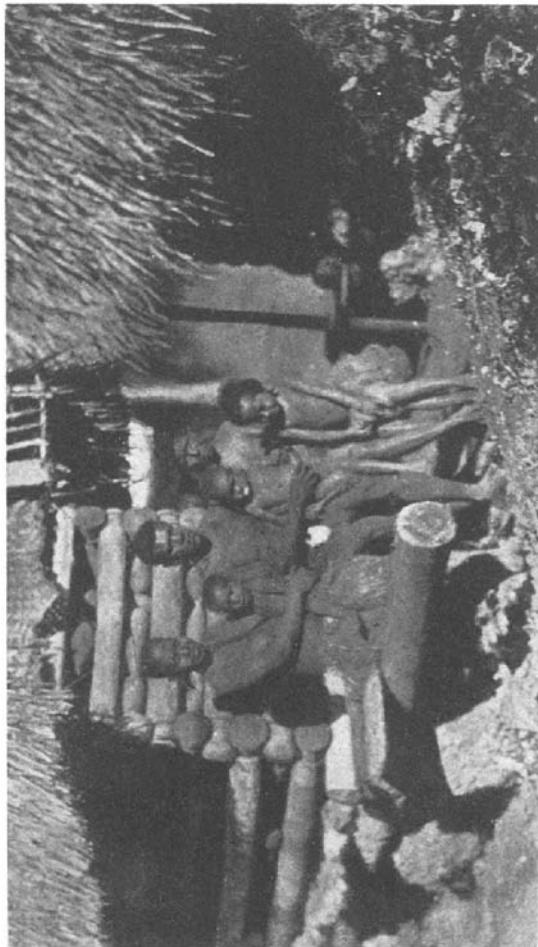
PLATE XIV



DANCERS IN FULL DECORATION

A Segment of the dancing circle, in a *kaydebu* dance, village of Yalaka. (See p. 57.)

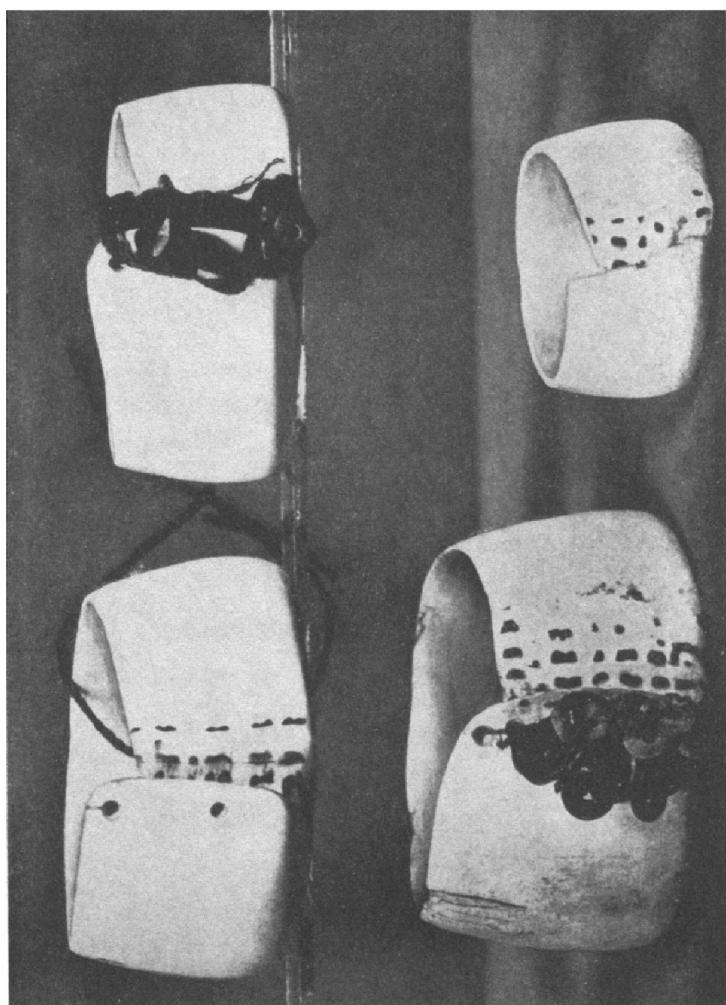
PLATE XV



A FAMILY GROUP

Tokulubakiki of Omarakana, with his mother, wife and children. (See p. 57.) Note the storehouse, with yams showing through the interstices.

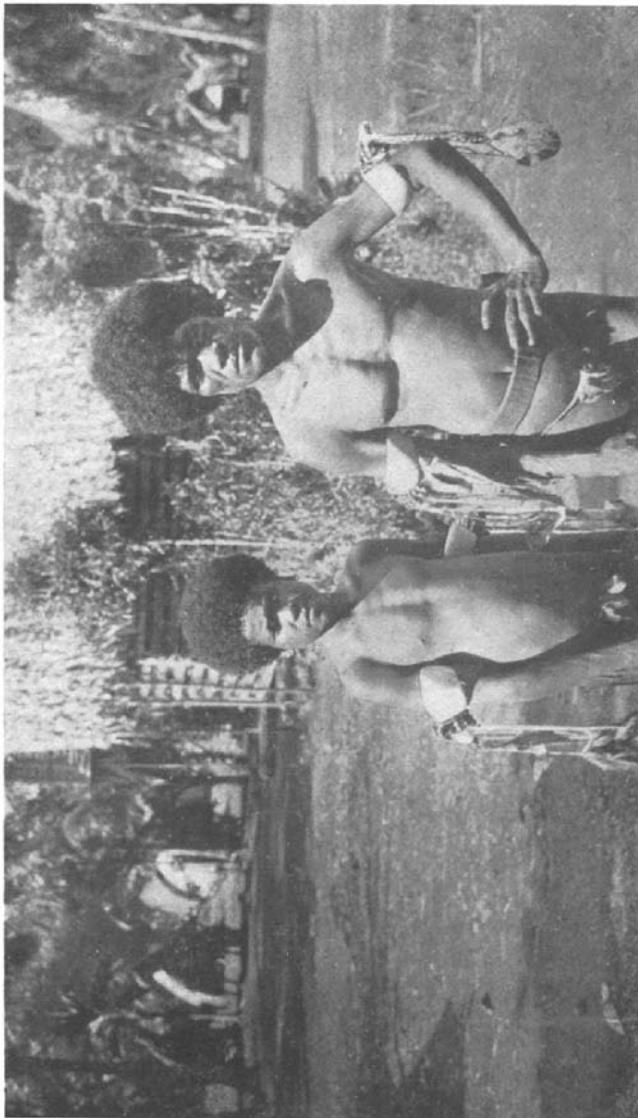
PLATE XVI



ARMSHELLS

This shows the several varieties, differing in size and finish. (See p. 81.)

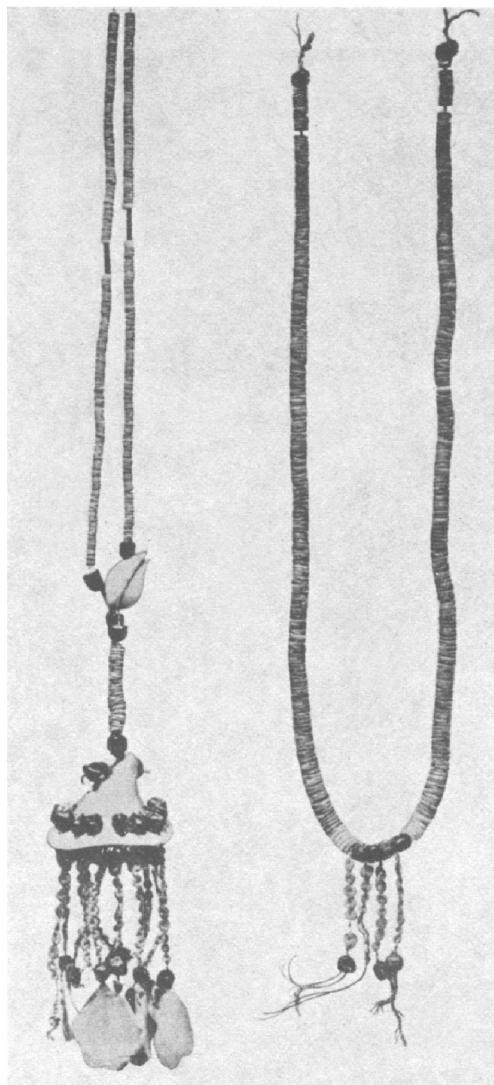
PLATE XVII



TWO MEN WEARING ARMSHELLS

This illustrates the manner in which the armshells are usually adorned with beads, pendants and ribbons of dried pandanus. I do not remember having seen more than once or twice men wearing armshells, and then they were in full dancing array. (See p. 81.)

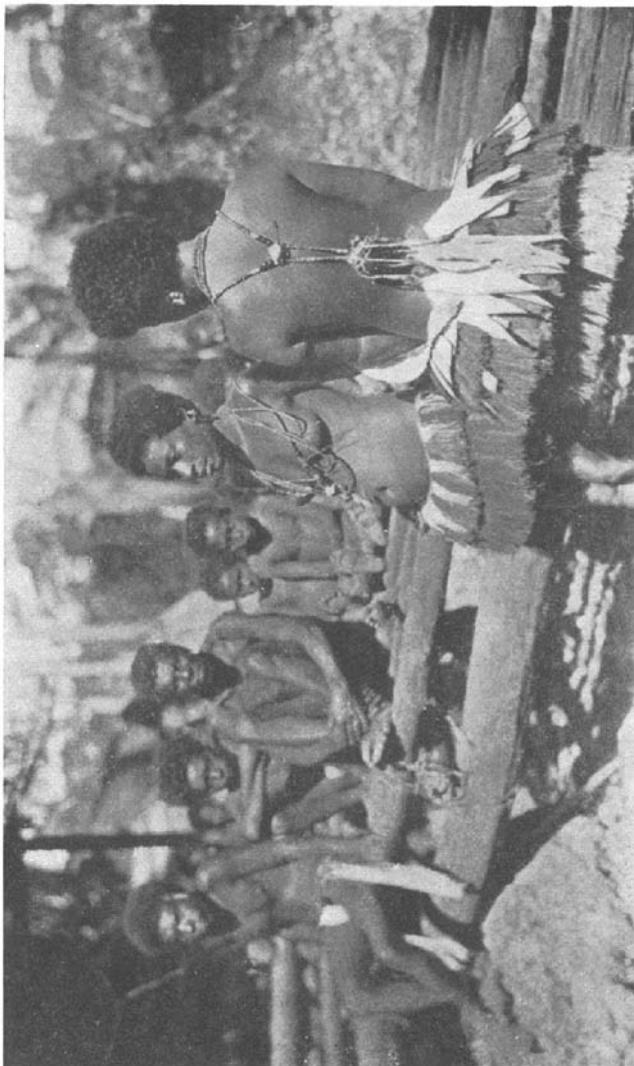
PLATE XVIII



TWO NECKLACES, MADE OF RED SPONDYLUS DISCS

On the left, the *soulava*, or *bagi*, the real Kula article. On the right, the *katudababile* (or *samakupa*, as it is called among the Southern Massim), made of bigger discs, manufactured in the villages of Sinaketa and Vakuta (Trobriand Islands). This latter article does not play any important part in the Kula. (See p. 81. Ch. XIV, Div. II; Ch. XV, Divs. II and III.)

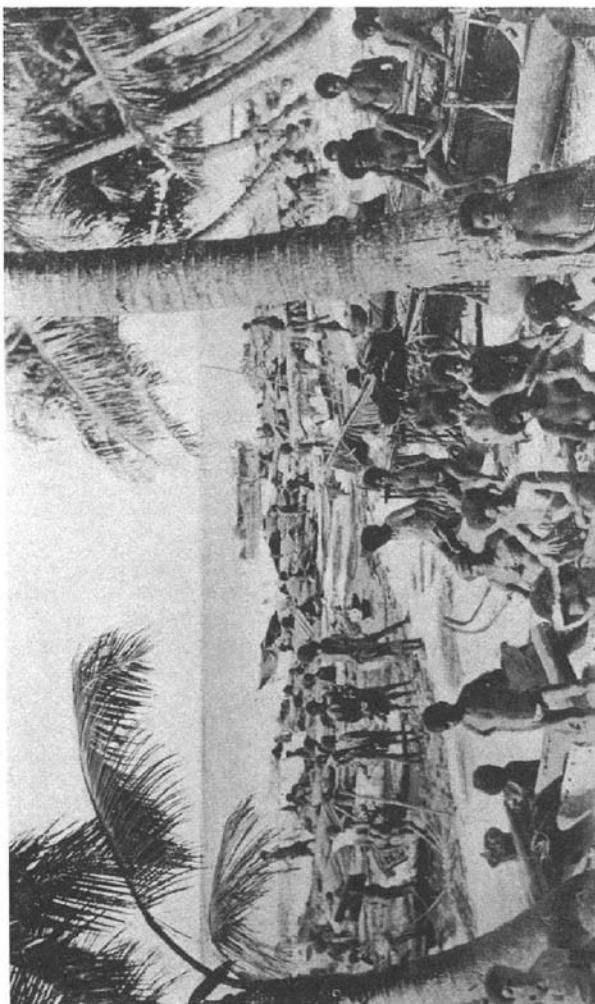
PLATE XIX



TWO WOMEN ADORNED WITH NECKLACES

This shows the manner in which a *soulava* is worn, when used as a decoration. (See p. 82.)

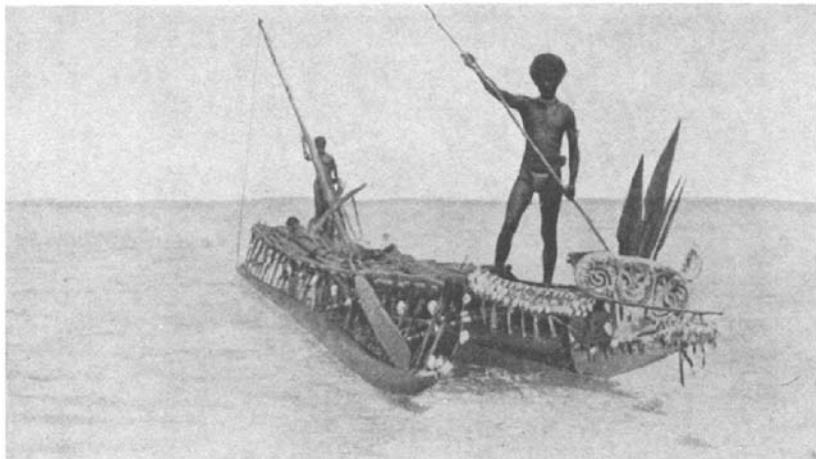
PLATE XX



A KULA GATHERING ON THE BEACH OF SINAKETA

Along about half a mile's length of shore, over eighty canoes are beached or moored, and in the village, on the beach and in the surrounding country there are assembled some two thousand natives from several districts, ranging from Kitava to Dobu. This illustrates the manner in which the Kula brings together large numbers of people belonging to different cultures; in this case, that of Kitava, Boyowa, the Amphletts and Dobu. (See p. 92, and Ch. XVI, Div. II.)

PLATE XXI



A MASAWA CANOE

Nigada Bu'a, the sea-going canoe of Omarakana, showing general form, ornamentation of prow-boards, the leaf-shaped paddles and the form of the outrigger log. (See also p. 106, next Chapter.)

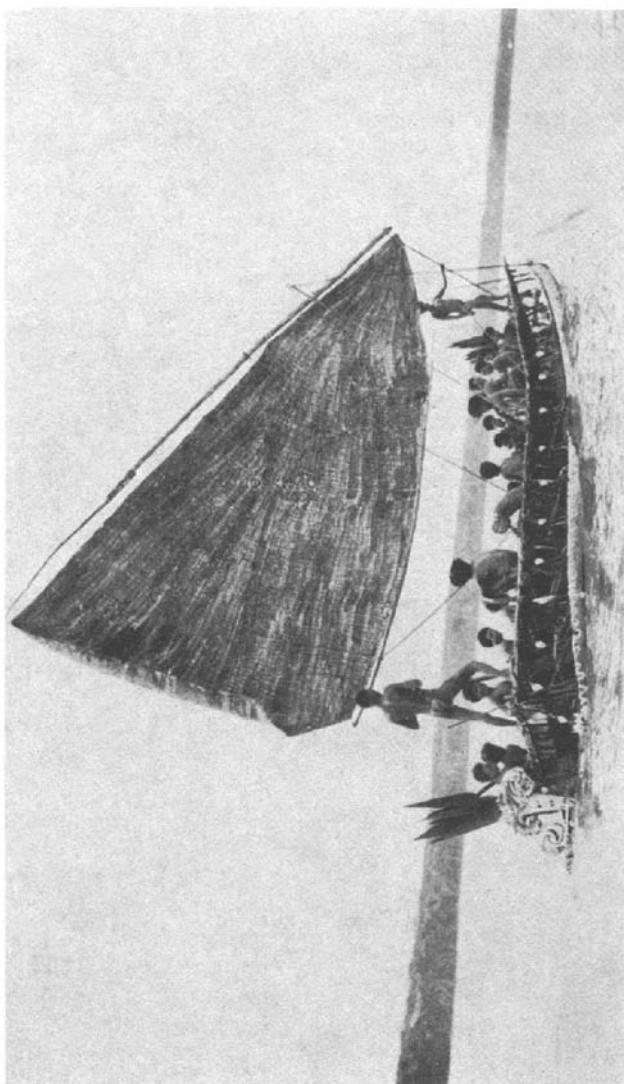
PLATE XXII



PUTTING A CANOE INTO ITS HANGAR

The canoes on the East shores of Boyowa are seldom used, and when idle are housed in shelters, built very much like ordinary huts, only much larger. (See p. 106,)

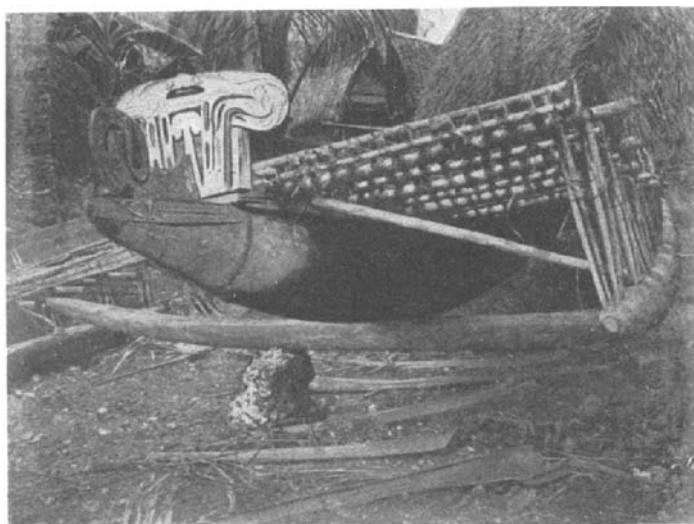
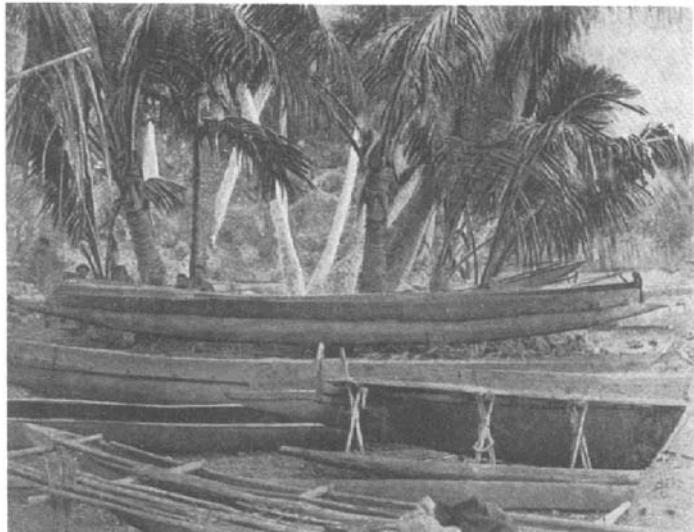
PLATE XXIII



CANOE UNDER SAIL

This illustrates the rigging, the tilt of the canoe—the raised outrigger—and the carrying capacity of a canoe. This one is well in the water, with a crew of eighteen men. (See p. 106, and Ch. IX.)

PLATE XXIV



FISHING CANOE (KALIPOULO)

Above, the profile of a canoe, shows the outline of the dug-out, the relative width of the gunwale planks and the hull, and the general shape of the canoe. The bottom picture shows the attachment of the outrigger to the hull, the prow, the prow-boards and the platform. (See p. 106.)

PLATE XXV



THE DUG-OUT IN THE VILLAGE

A canoe hull in the process of being hollowed out, in the *baku* of one of the villages of Sinaketa. The parts not being worked are covered with cocoanut leaves. (See p. 112.)

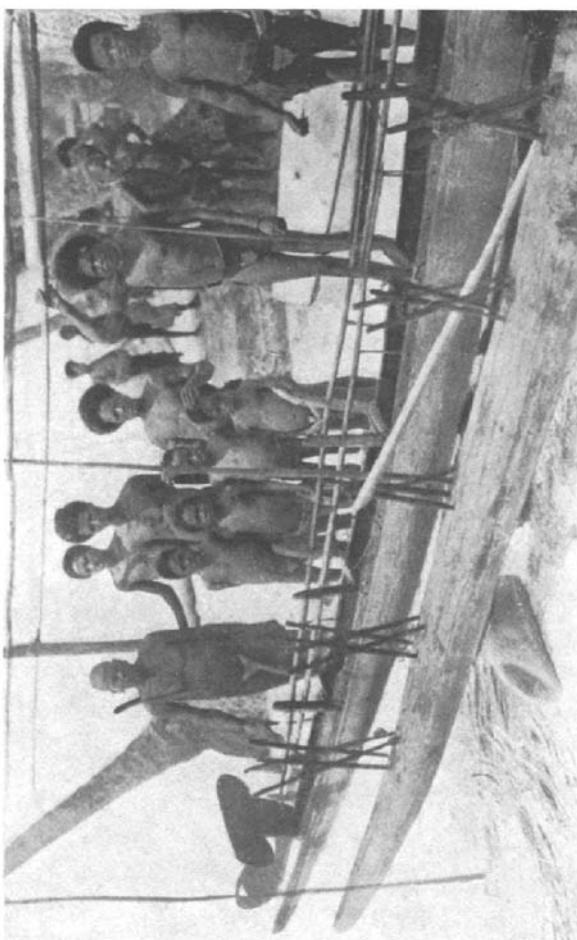
PLATE XXVI



CARVING A TABUYO

Molilakwa, a *tokabitam* (master carver), giving the final touches to an oval prow-board (*tabuyo*), made for a new canoe in Olivilevi. The carving is done with a long iron nail (formerly a wallaby bone was used), which is driven by means of a wooden hammer. (See p. 112.)

PLATE XXVII



CONSTRUCTION OF A WAGA

This canoe has been partly dismembered, in the process of being relashed. It shows the construction of the ribs and the fixtures on the outrigger log. The men were just in the act of fitting in a new gunwale plank (to be seen in the background) which has to fit into the carved prow-boards and into the groove at the top of the hull. (See p. 123.) The owner and magician can be seen to the left of the picture.

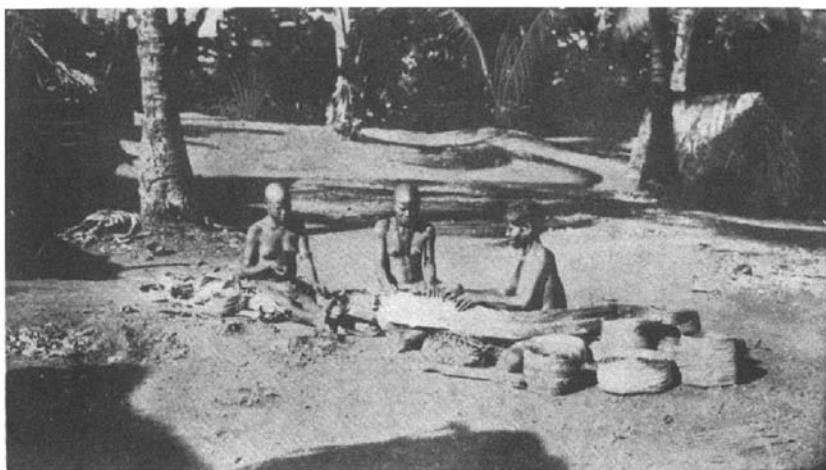
PLATE XXVIII



SAIL MAKING

Within a couple of hours a number of men perform this enormous task of sewing together small bands of pandanus leaf (see p. 140 and Chapter VI, Div. II) till they form a sail. Among the workers there is an albino.

PLATE XXIX



ROLLS OF DRIED PANDANUS LEAF

This is the material of which the sail is made. The *bisila* (pandanus streamer) is made of a softer variety of pandanus leaf, bleached at a fire. (See p. 146.)

PLATE XXX



LAUNCHING OF A CANOE

Nigada Bu'a after its renovation, being pushed into the water. (See p. 147.)

PLATE XXXI



THE TASASORIA ON THE BEACH OF KAULUKUBA

Stepping the masts and getting the sails ready for the run. In the foreground, To'uluwa, the chief of Kiriwina, standing at the mast, supervises the rigging of Nigada Bu'a. (See p. 154.)

PLATE XXXII



A CHIEF'S YAM-HOUSE IN KASANA'I

This illustrates the display of yams in the interstices between the logs of the wall, and the decorations of cocoanuts, running round the gable, along the supports and the walls. This yam-house was quite recently put up and its barge boards had not yet been erected. (See p. 168.)

PLATE XXXIII



FILLING A YAM-HOUSE IN YALUMUGWA

The yams are taken from the conical heaps and put into the *bwayma* (storehouses) by the brother-in-law (wife's brother) of the owner. Note the decorations on the gable—the owner being a *gumguya'u* (chief of lower rank). (See p. 170.)

PLATE XXXIV



DISPLAY OF PIGS AND YAMS AT A DISTRIBUTION (SAGALI)

All food to be given away is several times displayed before, during, and after the ceremony. Exhibiting the food in large, prismatic receptacles (*pwata'i*) is one of the typical features of Trobriand custom. (See p. 170.)

PLATE XXXV



COMMUNAL COOKING OF MONA (TARO DUMPLINGS)

Large clay pots, imported from the Amphletts, are used for the purpose; in these, cocoanut oil is brought to a boil, pieces of pounded taro being thrown in afterwards, while a man stirs the contents with a long, decorated, wooden ladle. (See p. 171.)

PLATE XXXVI



SCENE IN THE WASI (CEREMONIAL EXCHANGE OF VEGETABLES FOR FISH)
The inland party have brought their yams by boat to the village of Oburaku, which is practically inaccessible by land. They are putting up the vegetables into square, wooden crates in order to carry them ceremonially and to place each before the partner's house. (See p. 187.)

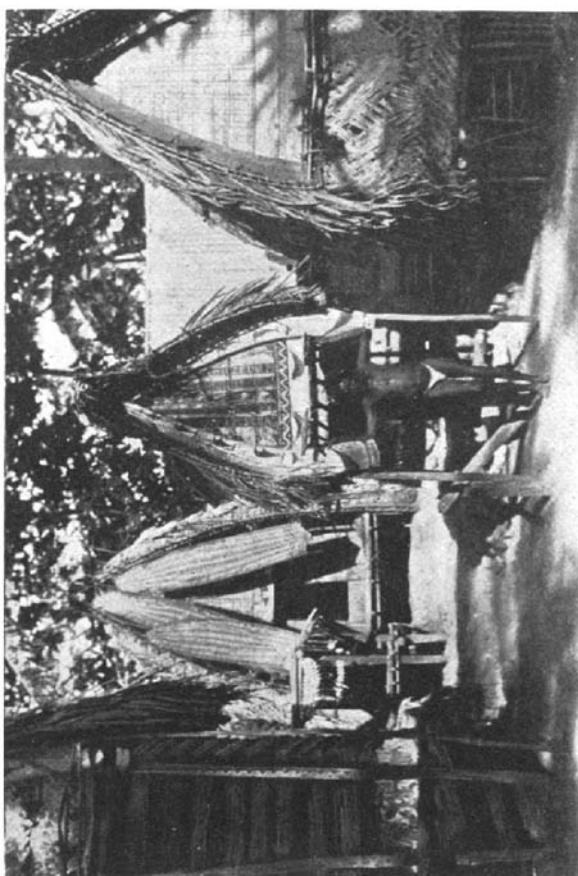
PLATE XXXVII



VAVA, DIRECT BARTER OF VEGETABLES FOR FISH

In the picture, the inland natives exchange bundles of taro directly for fish, without observing the rites and ceremonies obligatory in a *wasi*. (See p. 190.)

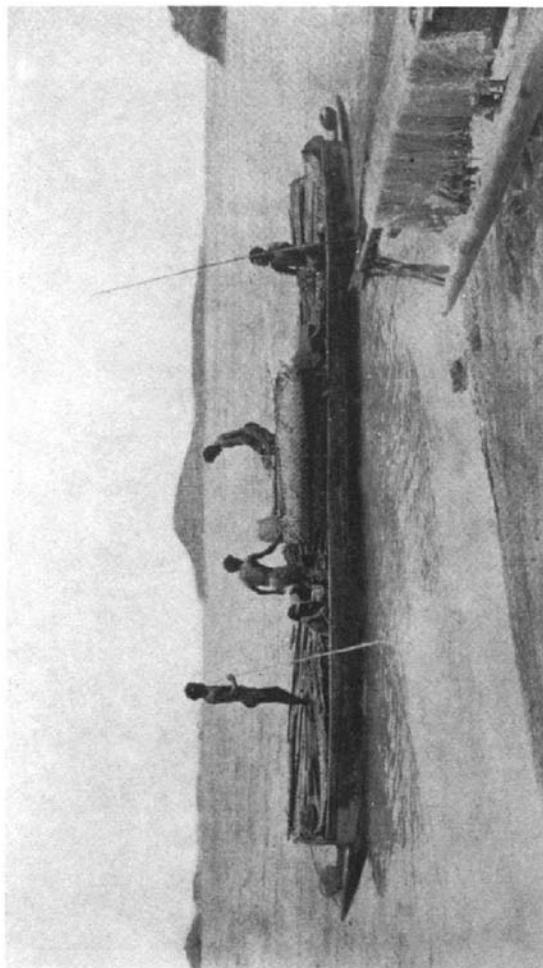
PLATE XXXVIII



KOUTA'UYA, ONE OF THE CHIEFS OF SINAKETA

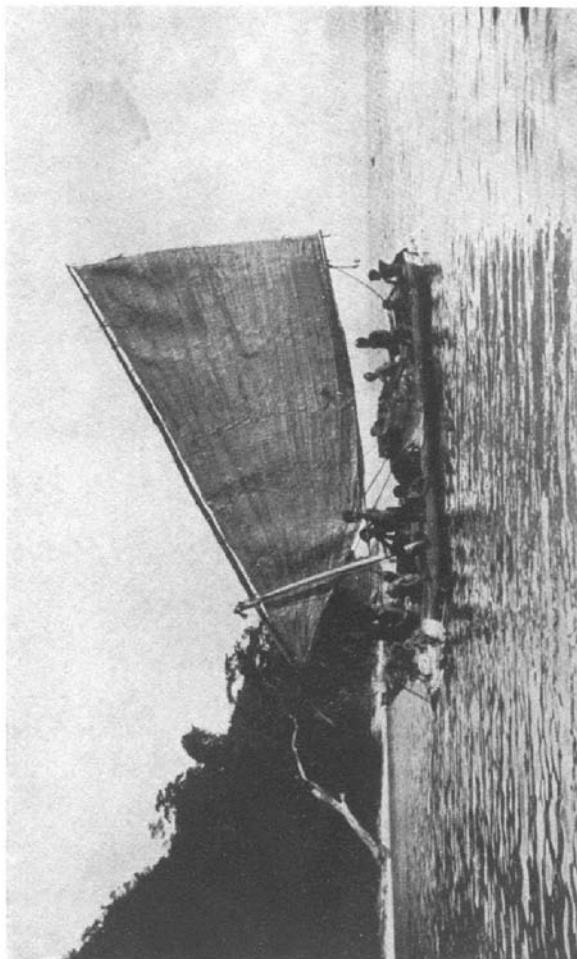
He is seen standing in front of one of his decorated yam-houses, his *lisiga* (own dwelling) in the background. (See p. 200.)

PLATE XXXIX



A *masawa* canoe on the beach of Nu'agasi (in the Amphlettts), showing the main load at the *gebobo* (middle partition). (See p. 204.)

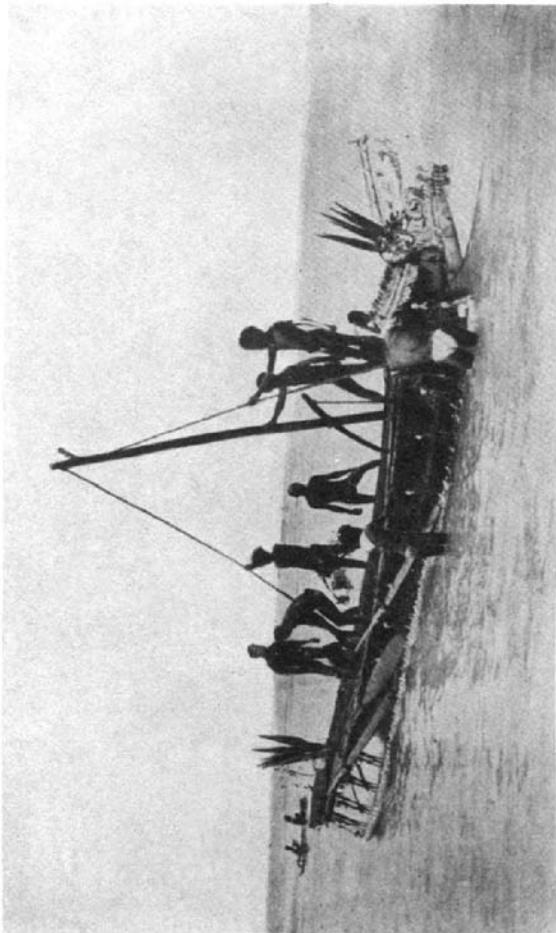
PLATE XL



A WAGA SAILING ON A KULA EXPEDITION

A canoe fully loaded with a crew of twelve men, just about to furl sail, arriving in the Amphlettts. Note the cargo at the *gebobo* and each man's personal bundle of folded mat on top of it. (See p. 228.)

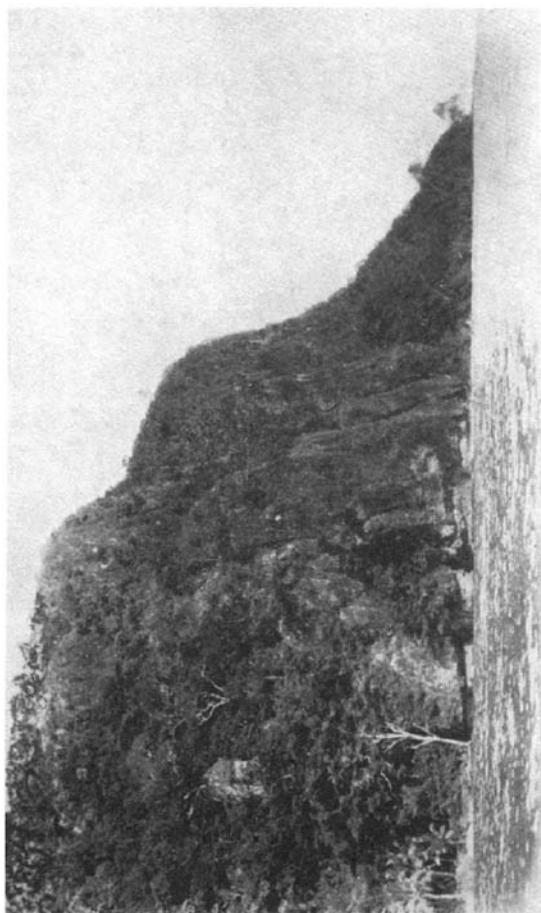
PLATE XLI



THE RIGGING OF A CANOE

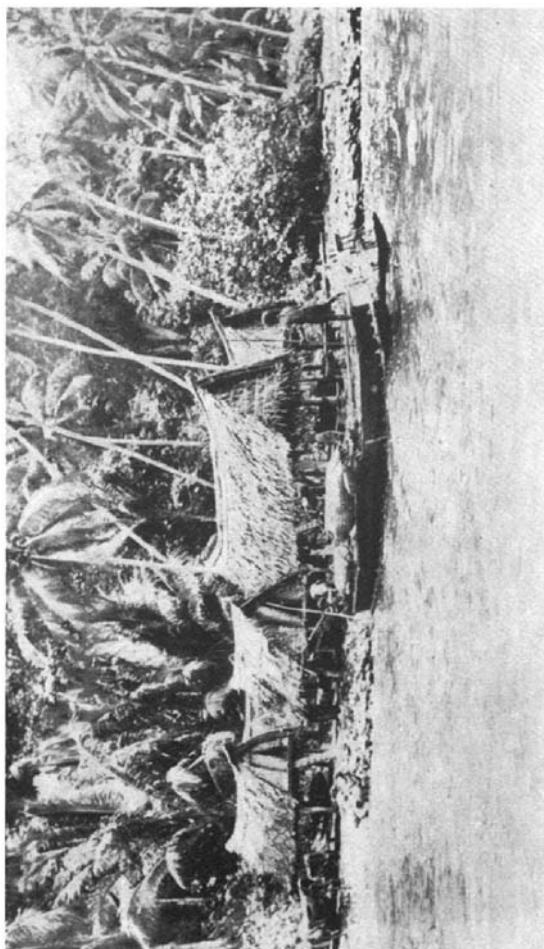
Each time before a canoe starts, its mast has to be put up and fixed by means of stays and a special arrangement of crescent-shaped cross-pieces and a rope, to be seen in the picture. (See p. 226.) Note the small *kemo'u* canoe to the left.

PLATE XLII



SCENERY IN THE AMPHLETTTS. (See p. 268.)

PLATE XLIII



LANDING IN THE MAIN VILLAGE OF GUMSILA. (See p. 272.)

PLATE XLIV



TECHNOLOGY OF POT MAKING (I)

Top picture: the clumps of clay have been put in a circle and joined up, forming a thick, circular roll. Bottom picture: the roll is being worked upwards, caving in all round. (See p. 284.)

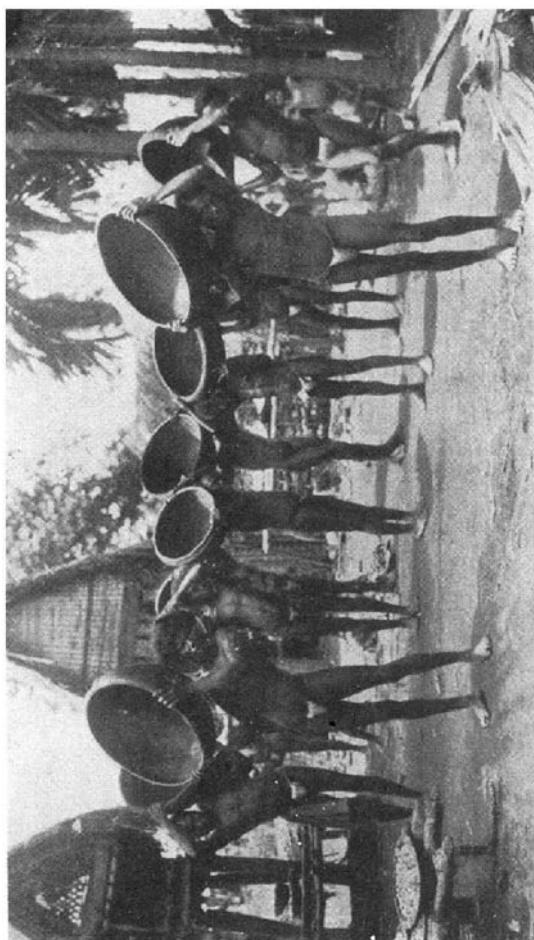
PLATE XLV



TECHNOLOGY OF POT MAKING (II)

Top picture: the dome-shaped mass of clay is worked near the hole in the top; presently the latter will be closed, and, as this is a small pot, only after that is the pot beaten, as shown in the picture below. (See p. 285.)

PLATE XLVI



FINE SPECIMENS OF AMPHLETT POTS

The largest type of cooking pots, used only for the preparation of taro pudding, are an article of high value and often handled and displayed in connection with ceremonial distributions (*sagali*) and communal cooking. (See p. 283.)

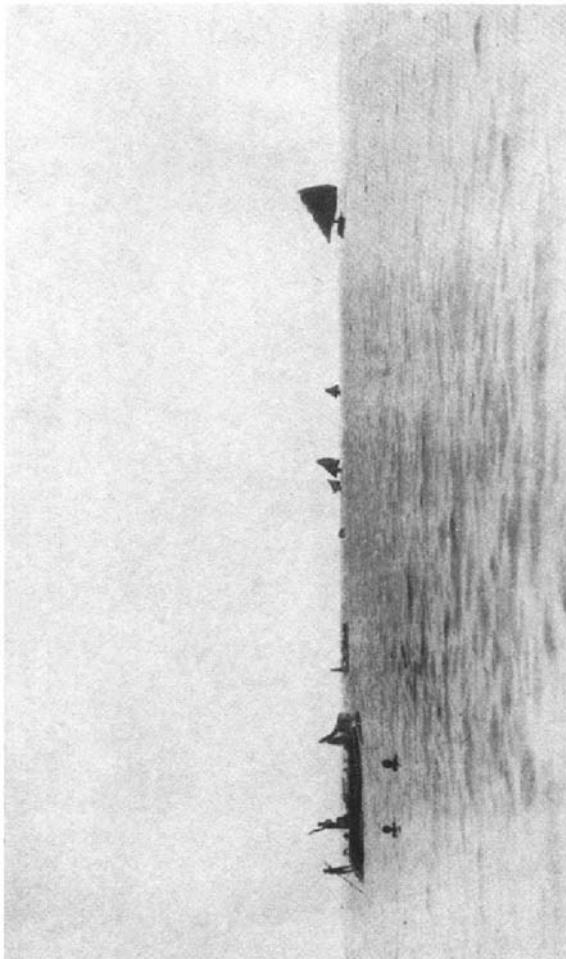
PLATE XLVII



A CANOE IN GUMASILA LOADING POTS

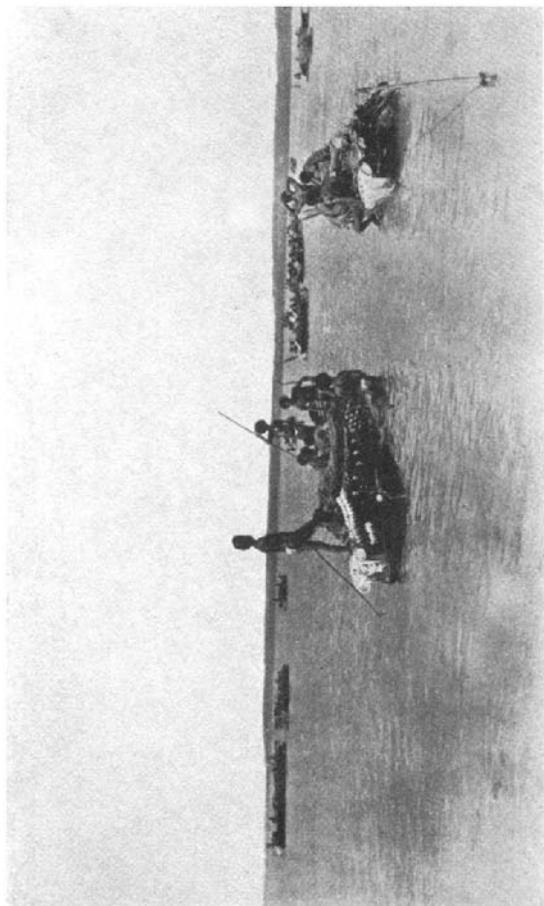
The main article of export from the Amphletts has to be stowed away very carefully. (See p. 290.)

PLATE XLVIII



A KULA FLEET HALTING TO PERFORM THE FINAL RITES OF MWASILA
This photograph was taken in the Trobriands, and it shows the Dobuan fleet just arriving and its final halt (cf. Chapter XVI, Division II). The scene on the beach of Sarubwoyna would present an identical picture. Note the two men in the forefront, wading ashore to procure the leaves for the Kayakaya. (See p. 335.)

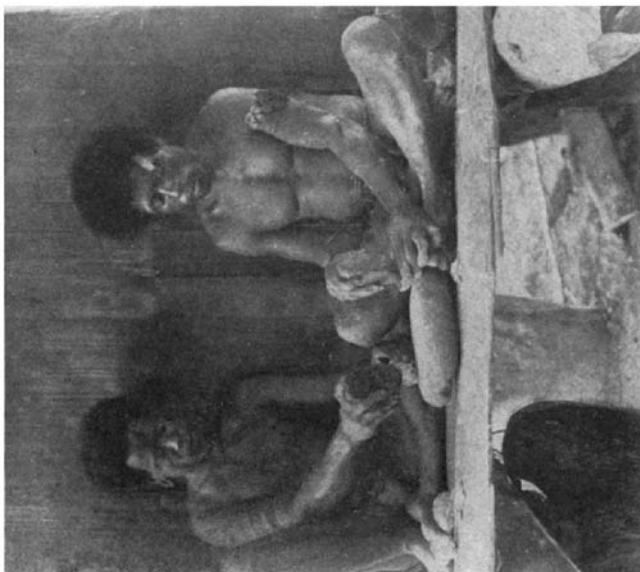
PLATE XLIX



THE BEAUTY MAGIC OF THE MWASILA

The whole fleet are preparing for the final approach; in each canoe magic is spoken over cosmetics and every man combs his hair, anoints his body, and paints his face. (See p. 335.)

PLATE L (A)



WORKING THE KALOMA SHELL (I)

The spondylus shell broken and made into roughly circular pieces by knocking all round; this is done by men.

PLATE L (B)



WORKING THE KALOMA SHELL (II)

Women grinding pieces of shell into flat discs. Each piece is inserted into a hole at the end of a wooden cylinder and ground on a flat sandstone. (See p. 371.)

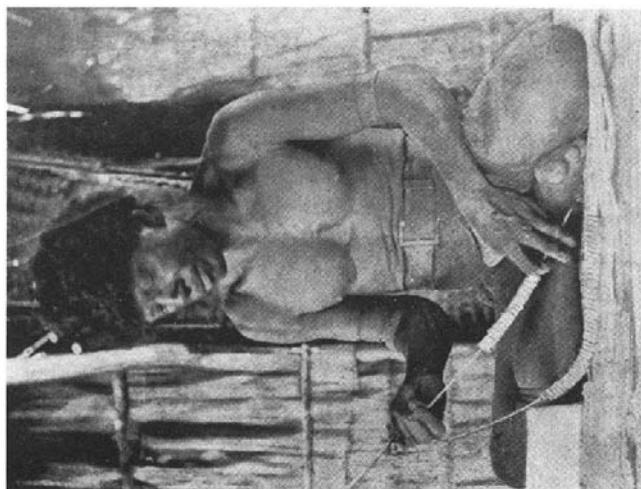
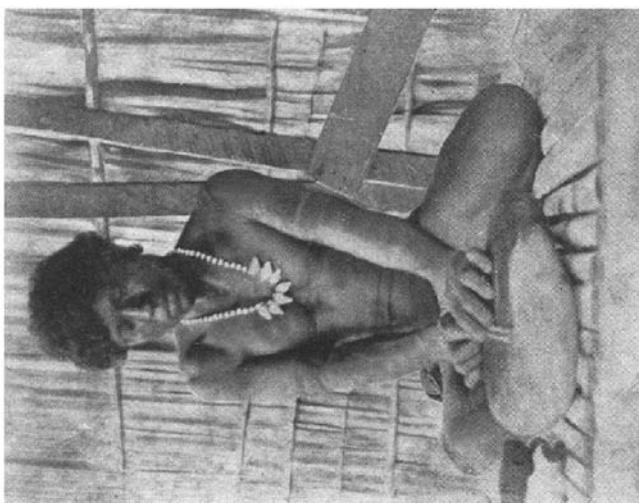
PLATE LI



WORKING THE KALOMA SHELL (III)

By means of a pump drill, a hole is bored in each disc. (See p. 372.)

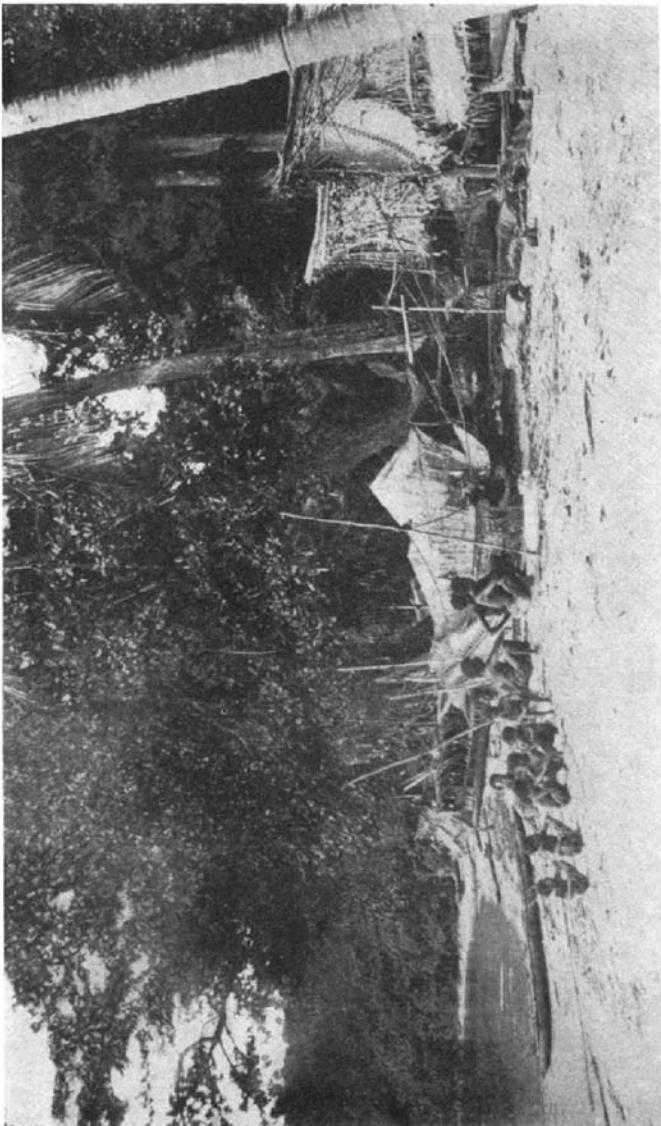
PLATE LII



WORKING THE KALOMA SHELL (IV)

The shell discs, flat and perforated, but of irregular contour still, are now threaded on to a thin, tough stick, and in this form they are ground on a flat sandstone till the roll is cylindrical, that is, each disc is a perfect circle. (See p. 372.)

PLATE LIII



ON THE BEACH OF NABWAGETA

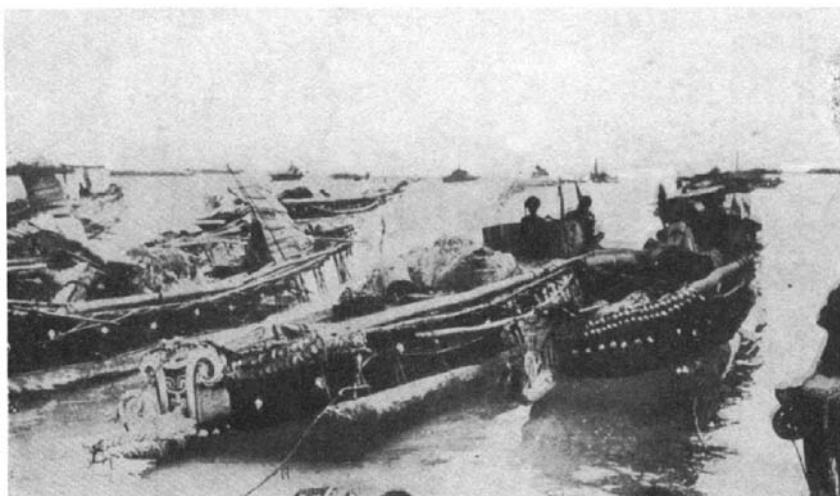
In the middle of the picture a sail is seen, hung on a scaffolding of sticks; natives are pausing in their work of overhauling it and patching it up. (See p. 383.)

PLATE LIV



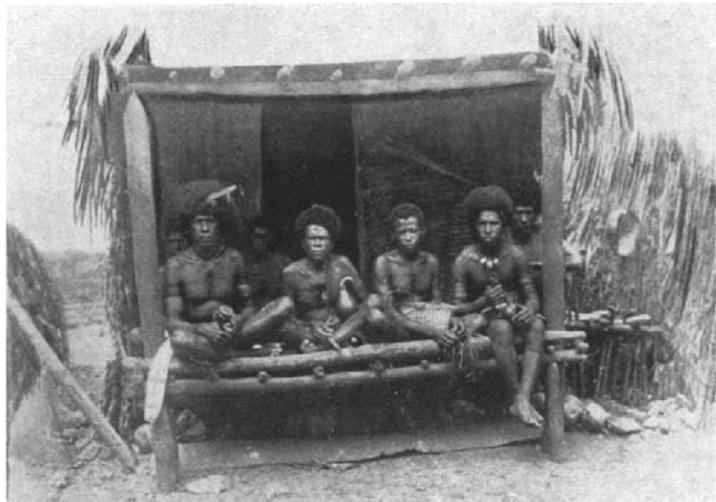
THE DOBUAN CANOES PULLED UP ON SINAKETA BEACH. (See p. 390.)

PLATE LV



SOME CANOES MOORED ON THE SHALLOW LAGOON NEAR THE SHORE. (See p. 390.)

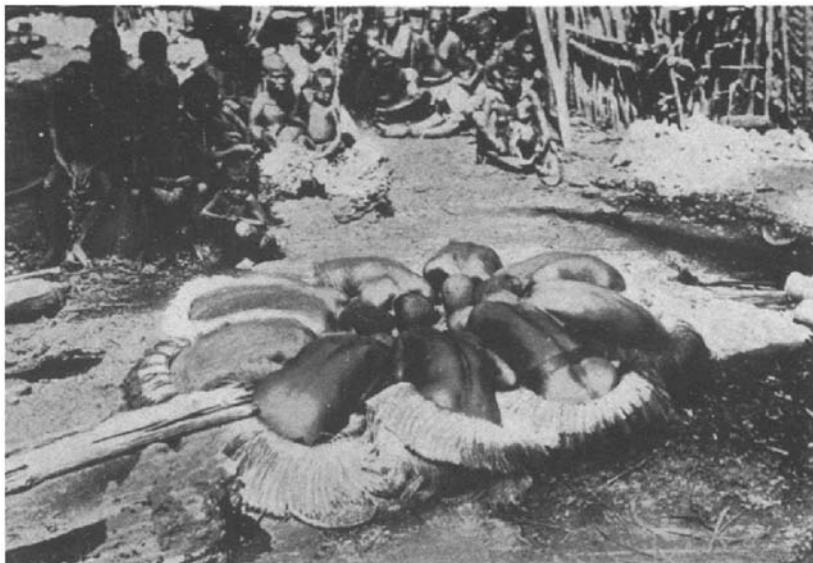
PLATE LVI



DOBUAN VISITORS IN SINAKETA

Top picture: the Kula visitors and hosts sitting side by side on a house platform in Sinaketa. Bottom picture: to the right Tovasana, wearing a wig of pandanus fibre, holding his lime pot and spatula and ornamented with *buna* shell on his leg, sits with Kauyaporu (on the left), the chief of the Dobuans, on the platform of one of the Sinaketan chiefs. Note the aromatic herbs in Kauyaporu's armlets. (See p. 389.)

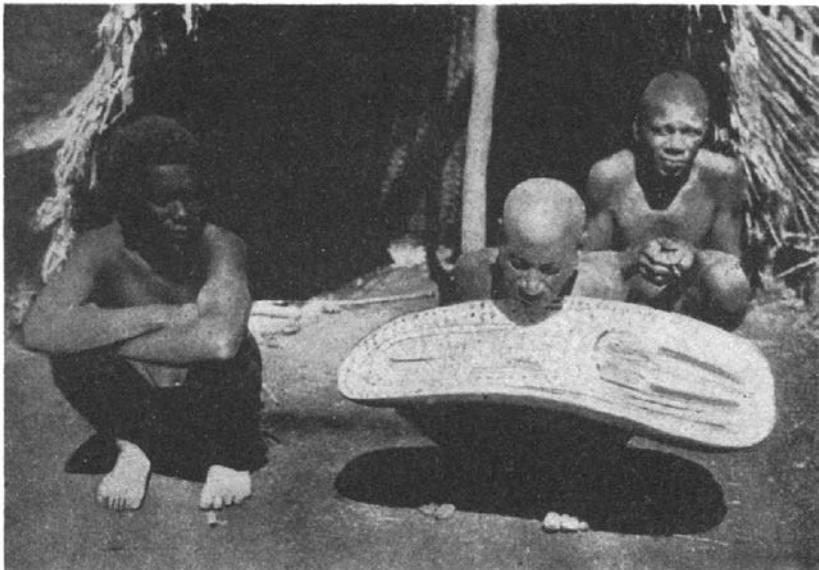
PLATE LVII



A MAGICAL SPELL ASSOCIATED WITH PREGNANCY

The women are bent over a special garment to be worn by the pregnant woman. They almost touch it with their mouths so that it may be well pervaded with their breath which conveys the virtues of the spell. (See p. 405.)

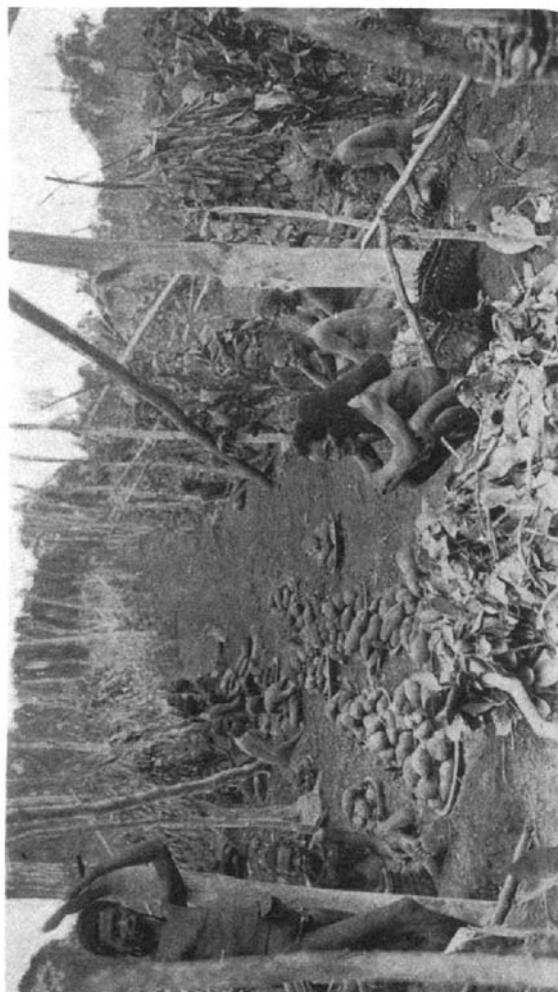
PLATE LVIII



A RITE OF WAR MAGIC

Kanukubusi, the last war wizard of Kiriwina, showing, in reconstruction, the manner in which he used to charm the shields in olden days. (See p. 406.)

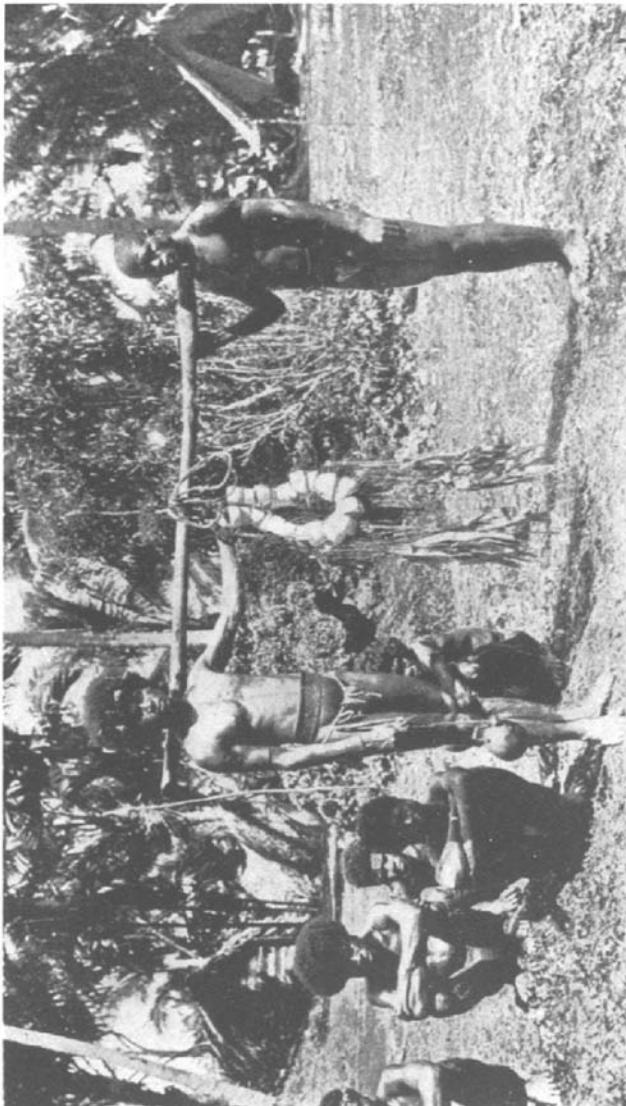
PLATE LIX



A RITE OF GARDEN MAGIC

An offering of cooked food is exposed to the spirits for some time in the garden. The magician, with the ceremonial axe on his arm, is seen squatting to the right. In the forefront, a big bundle of leaves which he will presently charm over. (See p. 407.)

PLATE LX



ARMSHELLS BROUGHT FROM KITAVA

The personal share of To'uluwa from the haul of armshells brought to Omarakana in October, 1915. (See p. 471.)

PLATE LXI



BRINGING IN A SOULAVA

The party, the second man blowing the conch shell and the leader carrying the necklace on a stick, approach the chief's house. (See p. 472.)

PLATE LXII



OFFERING THE SOULAVA

The necklace is thrust on its stick into the chief's house. Both this plate and the foregoing one represent an act of purely domestic Kula, one of the sons of To'uluwa offering his father a necklace. Hence the scanty attendance of the general public. (See p. 472.)

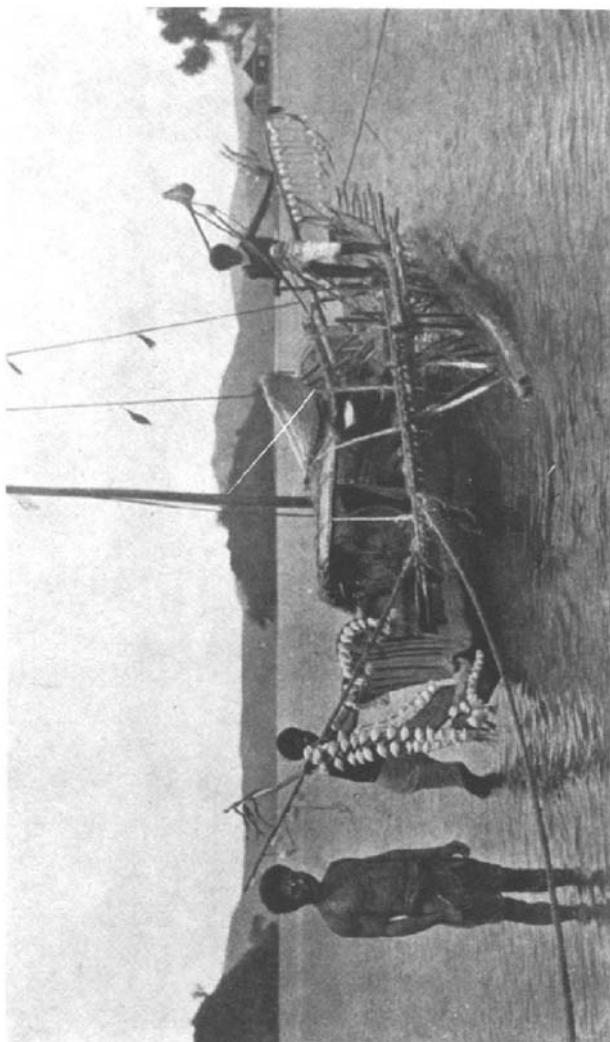
PLATE LXIII



CEREMONIAL DESTRUCTION DURING A SO'I FEAST

This picture was taken on the South coast of New Guinea, (cf. p. 486 and Div. III of Ch. II.)

PLATE LXIV



NAGEGA CANOE

This type of canoe is manufactured by the North Eastern Massim and it is used in the South Eastern branch of the Kula. (See p. 496, and Ch. V, Div. IV.)

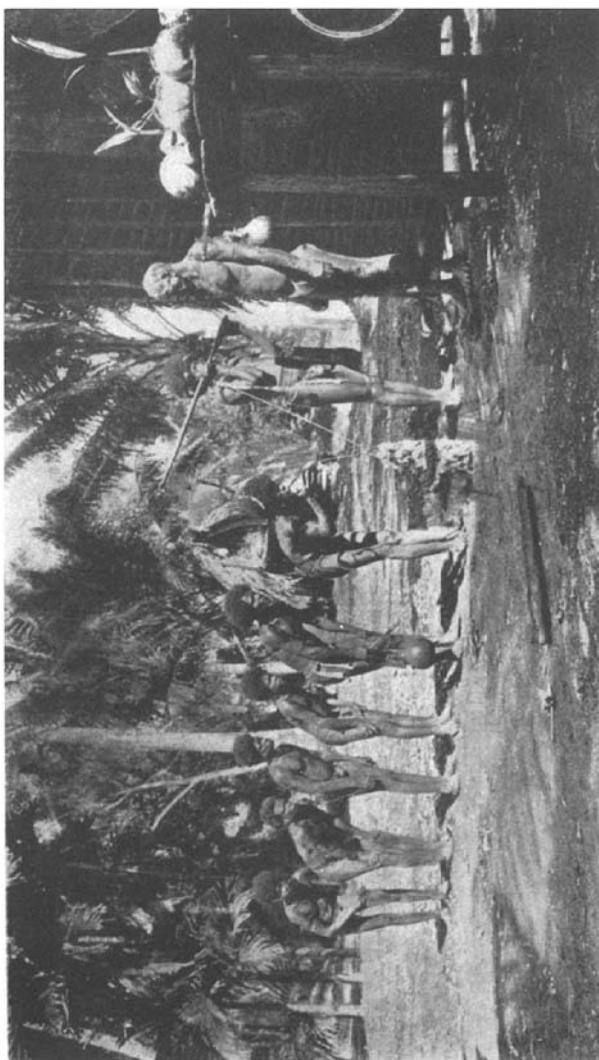
PLATE LXV



A CORPSE COVERED WITH VALUABLES

A great number of valuables, including large axe blades, with which this man was covered at dying, have been already withdrawn. Only personal possessions are left on the corpse, and they will be removed immediately before the interment. (See p. 512.)

PLATE LXVI



A CEREMONIAL ACT OF THE KULA (See p. 472.)