TRIBES AND INTERTRIBAL RELATIONS IN THE FLY HEADWATERS

By FREDRIK BARTH[1]

IT has been noted frequently (cf., e.g., Vayda, 1966) how the ethnography of New Guinea exhibits both variety and uniformity: on the one hand, great local and regional variation in the forms of culture and society; on the other hand, a recognizable common character, and frequent repetition of details of idiom, throughout the island. In the present paper I shall describe major features of the variation in social and political forms in a region of the central cordillera of New Guinea. In the course of this description I shall develop some hypotheses as to how these local variants are related, both historically and structurally. With this as a basis, it becomes possible to explore some of the factors and processes responsible for this distributional picture and give a more analytical answer to the problems posed by variability and uniformity.

Field work among the Faiwolmin first reported here,[2] and first reports of field material from adjoining areas (Craig, 1967; Cranstone, 1967, 1968; Pouwer, 1964; Quinlivan, 1954) indicate the presence in the region of the Fly-Sepik divide of a number of societies prominently organized around secret ritual in male cult houses. I shall argue that this focus on secret ritual poses technical problems of cultural transmission and thus affects both the organization of the cultural tradition and its content.

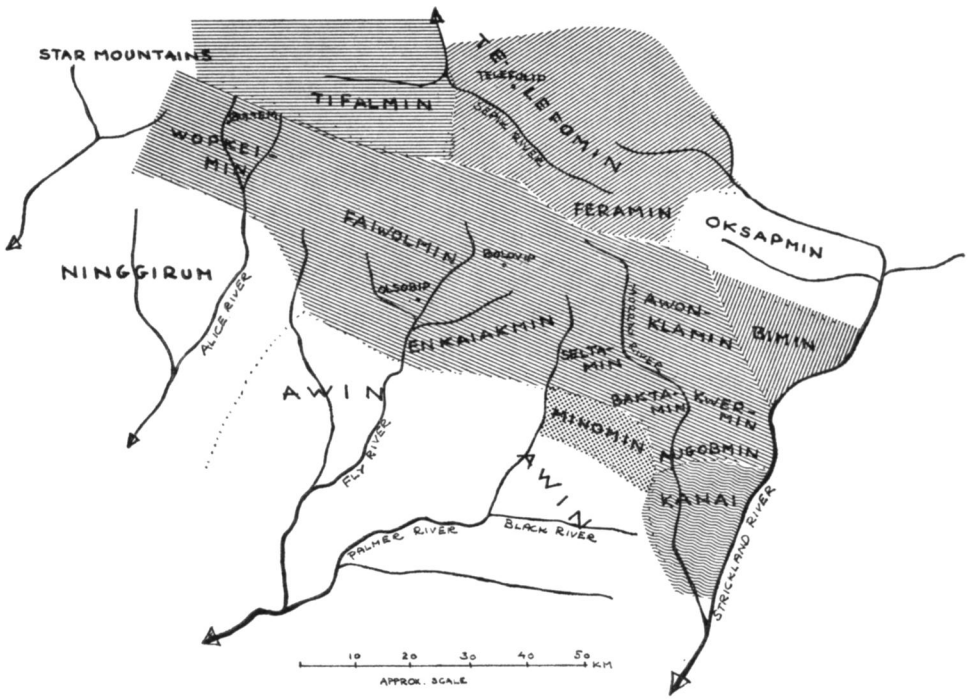
To show this, I shall give an account of the main ecological, cultural, and organizational features of the aboriginal population, mainly Faiwolmin, of a region of about 80 by 30 miles along the southern slope of the Hindenburg Range, and certain comparisons with the adjoining area of Telefomin to the north. It is necessary to describe and document this variation in considerable detail to show its range, the distinctive character of the systems in question, and the culture historical evidence that can be inferred. A major part of the exercise thus depends on a cumulative presentation of ethnography, and the reader may find it helpful to refer repeatedly to the basic map and the tabular summary of forms and distributions during reading.

The area of the Fly headwaters was first visited by Austen in 1923 and subsequently traversed by Karius and Champion on their original crossing of the island, and it may later have been skirted by A.P.C. (oil geologists) and exploration patrols;

[1] University of Bergen.

[2] The data were collected in January-November, 1968, mainly centring on the *Baktamin* group in the Murray Valley. Through the kind invitation of Patrol Officer John McGregor, then at Olsobip, I was also able to accompany a regional patrol through the eastern half of Olsobip district and a contact patrol into the upper Palmer and middle and lower Murray areas, thus obtaining extensive materials throughout most of the region discussed. The research was supported by grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Norwegian Research Council, and this I gratefully acknowledge. I am also indebted to Barry and Ruth Craig for valuable comments and information about Telefomin.

but first institutionalized contact did not start until the establishment of Olsobip Patrol Post in 1964 and has only slowly been extended, leaving the populations of the extreme south-east corner still uncontacted. Warfare and cannibalism were discontinued with the spread of administration contact, but no modifications of the agricultural systems have taken place, no labour migration has started, missions have only established themselves since 1967, close to Olsobip, and only in that area have some of the children started attending school. The main distributional and organizational features of the area thus reflected pre-contact conditions at the time of field work.



Map 1

Ecology

The central mountain range of New Guinea in this area forms a relatively narrow spine, with the divide running at about 8,000–11,000 feet. To the south the land drops swiftly through a series of east-west ridges down to the alluvial plain at only a few hundred feet altitude. The landscape is highly dissected by streams of the Fly River drainage and tributaries of the Strickland, partly with extensive sink-hole and karst formations. The dominant feature is the Hindenburg wall, passable only in a few places and dividing the area off from the northern Sepik region, while large swampy flats separate it from river communication with the south.

Altitude and physical features combine to produce a series of markedly distinct ecological zones. Below the unutilized high mountain zone lie the moss forests of the cloud belt, reaching as low as 5,000 feet in places. Then follows a middle zone of fairly luxuriant forest, including various species of wild pandanus, covering the ridges and high valleys. In the main valleys, from about 3,000 feet and lower one finds areas of gallery forest, including species such as breadfruit. Finally, the lowest valleys, and particularly the alluvium, are covered by poor stunted jungle and occasional sago swamps. The whole area is characterized by heavy, though locally highly variable, precipitation and a virtual absence of seasons to the extent that most groups seem to have no calendrical system based on the year. The ecology of the area is thus distinctive, but in many ways comparable to the slopes of the Bismarck or Owen Stanley Ranges.

Government censuses indicate a population of about 4,000 for the area as a whole. Most of the settlements are found in the middle zone, especially in the cold wet areas close under the mountain wall. The lower ridges and valleys have fewer and more scattered settlements, while the alluvial plain is very sparsely populated and in part uninhabited.

This distribution appears to be mainly conditioned by the relative productivity of taro cultivation. Taro is the most valued food throughout and the dominant staple in all but the lowest zone. It is cultivated by shifting swidden agriculture, with only a single crop in any one garden and a forest-fallow cycle of at least 15 years. In the higher altitudes this is supplemented by sweet potato and bananas; in the low altitudes bananas become increasingly important. A second staple in the lower areas is sago. Below about 3,000 feet breadfruit is planted in abandoned gardens and provides an important supplement, while the red pandanus and, in higher areas, pandanus nuts are also harvested. Finally, there is extensive collecting of wild yams and a variety of leaves, pith, shoots, etc.

Domestic animals are dogs and pigs, the latter dependent on wild boars for impregnation. Pig husbandry is unsuccessful by New Guinea standards; the domestic pig population fluctuates, but is less than the adult human population and is partly maintained by capture of wild piglets. Hunting of birds, snakes, lizards, cassowary and marsupials is a major activity of the men, while both sexes collect insects, grubs, and crayfish. Fish are occasionally caught with poison.

Most communities have access to several ecological zones; marsupials are best hunted in the moss forests, taro best cultivated in the middle zone, banana and breadfruit in the valleys, and sago in the lowest zone. Only the highest communities are entirely without access to sago areas, while the plains and lowest ridge communities are without access to moss forest and the cool middle zone.

Groups

Most of the population speak languages of the Ok family (Healey, 1964), predominantly the language generally referred to as Faiwol. Strictly speaking, we seem to be dealing with a dialect chain in which Faiwol is the name of the dialect spoken by the

group close to the Fly River. The main groups of the Faiwolmin are indicated on the map; each dialect is readily intelligible by speakers of the neighbouring dialect, but comprehension fails between speakers of dialects on two or three removes from each other. The speech in the westernmost part, that of the Wopkeimin at the edge of the Star mountains, may be distinct. East of the Faiwolmin the language of the Bimin is clearly a distinct member of the Ok family.

Faiwolmin settlement reaches southward to the last range of hills but stops abruptly at the alluvium. On the plains, beyond an empty no-man's-land, the area is occupied by the Awin, living in widely separated small communities on the larger rivers and speaking an entirely distinct language. To the east are two small distinct groups first contacted by McGregor and myself: the Minomin (population 62) around an isolated range of hills in the lowlands between the Palmer and the Murray, and the Kanai (population about 300) along the banks of the lower Murray and between the Murray and the Strickland. This latter group is referred to as Mirapmin by their Faiwolmin neighbours. Both Minomin and Kanai are, as revealed by a brief word list, distinct from Faiwol, Awin, and each other.

Community Organization

Communities among the Faiwolmin are typically organized around a central village. The houses, built on posts one to seven feet above ground, are scattered around an open plaza and include small women's houses, one or several larger men's houses, men's cult houses generally of several kinds, and, separated from the rest, a menstrual hut. Much of the time many of these houses are boarded up while the people live temporarily elsewhere in small garden hamlets or single garden houses, or in temporary shelters in the jungle during hunting or sago-producing expeditions. Part of the population may also lack a house in the central village and live permanently in one of the smaller hamlets, in which case they visit the centre mainly for ritual and ceremonial occasions.

Garden houses and hamlets are constructed and abandoned according to the needs of the individual users. The central village sites are more permanent but are moved in response to repeated attacks or a bad history of deaths from sickness. They tend to be located on easily defended spurs or hills, surrounded by a cleared area.

Awin settlements on the flats to the south contrast strikingly. Built on bluffs beside the larger rivers, they consist of a few or even only one large square house raised on posts. Each house is partitioned parallel to the roof-beam into a smaller women's section and a larger men's section; these have separate entrances and no internal passageways. In addition, the villagers may have small garden houses or shelters.

Along the southern fringe of Faiwolwin settlement a similar house type is occasionally found. The users claim that it is more comfortable at night: whereas the normal Faiwolmin house has one or two central fireplaces around which the sleepers group themselves, without cover, on the bark floor, the Awin house has multiple fireplaces on floor level and a system of raised lattice-work benches on which

one sleeps, warmed from the fires below and protected from mosquitoes by the smoke. On the other hand, this house type offers the ritual disadvantage that secret male cult cannot be discussed or pursued because the uninitiated would overhear the proceedings. Informants claim that this house type is a recent adoption copied from the south. This is corroborated by the remains of small Faiwolmin-type houses on the abandoned village sites of several Faiwolmin villages which now build Awin-style houses.

In the eastern part of Faiwolmin area, among the Kwermin, a similar house type is found, connected with a different settlement pattern. Until 1967 central villages were absent and people lived in scattered garden hamlets and houses, but with a common men's cult house as a central focus for the community. The small hamlet houses are divided in the same way as the Awin houses into male and female sections. In this area there is no suggestion that the house type is an innovation. The Augobmin, similarly, live in small garden hamlets composed of relatively small partitioned houses. Finally, the Minomin and Kanai occupy similar houses but in a highly dispersed settlement pattern where each household is constantly building and shifting: based mainly in a house located in a mature garden, the men tend to be engaged elsewhere in clearing, planting, and house-building in a new garden area, while an abandoned old garden and its associated deteriorating house are periodically occupied during the harvest of late-bearing crops like banana, etc. These groups lack cult houses.

Through most of the area the population is organized in clearly bounded territorially discrete political units. Within such units violence is severely restricted and killing denied to be conceivable. Between such units warfare was endemic. Where there are central villages one, or sometimes a pair, of these with associated smaller hamlets constitutes a political community; among the Kwermin/Augobmin, as also among the Bimin, the corresponding territorial units function as political entities. The total population of such communities ranges from 100 to 250. Among the Minomin and Kanai political units appear to be smaller and interrelations between them perhaps somewhat closer; but the categorical ban on killing within the community, contrasted with ready violence outside it, seems to hold true.

Warfare was usually triggered by suspicion of sorcery or other causes of anger or insult demanding revenge. It is generally described as a feuding see-saw of action and counter-action. Such feuds often involved an escalation, not so much of numbers killed as of the severity of insult; from killing and abandonment of the corpse, through killing and throwing the corpse into the river, to cannibalism, and occasionally the desecration of the enemy's cult houses and sacred objects. Though it is advantageous to consecrate warriors and weapons through rituals before battle, these preparations are not considered necessary for killing (though they are for cannibalism) and are independent of any other ritual cycle. Thus, though war was not continuous, the fear and threat of attack was, and no mechanisms for institutionalizing periods of truce or peace are known. Detailed census material indicates warfare as the cause of death of 35% of the population.

Though conquest of land does not seem to be a major goal in warfare, conflicting claims to hunting and collecting territories could cause fighting; and continual harassment could lead to abandonment of marginal territories, movement of settlements, and even wholesale migration by the weaker community.

Community Interrelations

The area thus provides an example of a highly dispersed and politically segmented population. Each community of 100 to 250 persons monopolizes access to resources in a territory of at least 100 square miles, spanning several ecologic zones, and is internally constituted as an independent society. Villages are anywhere from four to five hours to a full day's trek apart; in the few cases where they are closer they are separated by large swift rivers which can be crossed only on fragile suspension bridges. But despite the basic anarchy that prevails outside the community, there are certain forms of contact between persons of different communities. These spring from four main sources: (i) intermarriage and migration, (ii) common membership in territorially dispersed clans, (iii) trading partnerships, and (iv) participation in ceremonies. Each of these shows variations in form and extent.

Intermarriage and Migration

Political communities among the Faiwolmin are ideologically and statistically endogamous. Each community contains members of several exogamous patrilineal clans which intermarry and form an irregular and highly connected kinship web. Nevertheless, in pursuing individual life histories one discovers that almost 15% of the adult population derives from other communities or has dual membership. Such extra-community ties lead periodically to a certain amount of visiting, and imply certain rights and liabilities.

Most interconnections arise initially on the initiative of a woman. Dissatisfied wives and widows, and daughters who are badly treated, may choose to flee and seek their fortune elsewhere. In retrospect, a commonly cited cause is hunger—that the taro in an area was inadequate during famine (prominently caused, as far as I can ascertain, by poor garden management), or the woman was exceptionally poorly provided for by her husband or kinsmen. Until pacification, such flight was a dangerous undertaking, as the woman might as soon be killed as taken in marriage when she arrived. Occasionally also women captured in war were married rather than eaten.

Intermarriages can also take place with the acquiescence or arrangement of the communities concerned. The Baktamin tell of a case roughly 15 years ago, when young men from neighbouring Seltamin came to a ceremony and with love-songs and magic persuaded two Baktamin girls to elope. The girls' relatives pursued and caught them, but after ramming burning sticks up their vaginas to express resentment they reluctantly accepted the match.

Once such an inter-village marriage has taken place, it may lead to the subsequent migration of a younger brother, child by a previous marriage, etc., to the woman's

new home. Such affinal ties also sometimes lead to co-operation in gardening on sites close to the common boundaries of the two communities. This takes place equally readily between villages of different culture, e.g. between the Awonklamin and the Bimin, as between closely similar communities.

The areas of dispersed settlement, like Minomin and Kanai, and to some extent Augobmin, show a more highly dispersed marriage network. Not only do political communities seem to depend more heavily on consanguinity and intermarriage for integrating their constituent scattered settlements, but wives are also taken and given freely across political and ethnic boundaries and over considerable distances. Thus the census of a Minomin hamlet area includes wives from the Awin, Kanai, and Augobmin. In these sparsely populated areas, furthermore, affinal ties show great variations in how frequently they are activated, and affines who are separated by long distances may lose contact with one another.

Between the Awin settlements along the upper rivers a fair amount of village intermarriage seems to be characteristic, creating a wider regional network of kinship and opportunities for inter-visiting.

An affinal relationship implies a taboo on killing, though it does not prevent participation in a raid so long as the man does not himself kill his affine.

Common Membership

Territorially dispersed exogamous clans likewise create a link between different communities. There is a strict taboo on killing a clan member or seeing his blood shed—in a raid a person must turn his head away when this happens. Within a political community, clan members support each other, perform cult to clan sacred objects, and hold joint rights to certain hunting and collecting areas. Consequently, the solitary representative of a clan in a community is in a difficult and isolated situation, and I have several case histories where a sole surviving clan member in one community chose to migrate to a neighbouring community, there to join a genealogically unrelated segment of his clan. In normal peacetime clan members in other communities further provide precarious asylum and protection for a wanderer. Where clans are found in the eastern Faiwolmin area they are generally dispersed over from two to five communities, and thus a network of relationships is established.

The nature of clan identity in this area needs to be made clear. Basing my understanding of the system on Baktamin material, I would argue that the presence of a clan organization in some parts of Faiwolmin primarily reflects a particular organization of the ancestor cult and is thus intimately associated with highly secret and mystical notions of garden fertility rather than distinctive ideas about descent and kinship. The significance and even existence of clan shrines containing ancestral bones is a secret revealed only in advanced initiations (see below). Clan exogamy is also justified by these ideas; and the common participation in cult seems to lie at the bottom of the intimacy of clan bonds. There are also regional variations in clan organization which reflect differences in cult form. The eastern Faiwolmin (Enkaiakmin to Baktamin) show the pattern most clearly. In the western part,

towards the Star Mountains, exogamous clans are apparently not found, though localized lines are referred to by the central Faiwol term for clan (*nigál*). The easternmost Faiwolmin (Kwermin) shroud their clans (*nangár*) in the greatest secrecy but seem to observe the exogamy rules, whereas among the south-easternmost Augobmin I was unable to establish the existence of clans. Exogamous clans are found among the Awin, whereas among the Minomin they do not exist, and probably not among the Kanai.

Trade Partnerships

Separate communities are also connected in a network of trade. The system carries a diversity of objects of value in large quantity and operates continuously except during periods of war. The main goods are stone adzes, tobacco, cowrie shells, salt, pigs, bows and arrows, and over the last 10 to 15 years steel axes and knives. Other wealth objects such as larger shells, rattles, pigs' teeth, dogs' teeth, bird of paradise skins, magical seeds, etc., are also exchanged.

Each type of goods tends to flow in a traditional direction, but this depends primarily on the location of the source of production and is not strictly controlled; if exchange opportunities are favourable, the usual direction can be reversed. Large stone adzes generally move towards the east and originate, according to Enkaiakmin informants, in Migalsimbip among the Wopkeimin, though they may come from further west. Small stone adzes and salt come from Oksapmin in the north-east. Cowries and other marine shells come across the mountains from Telefomin; bush tobacco is produced in excess in higher and middle areas, bows and arrows in middle and lower, and pigs in lower altitude areas. Steel axes come from Kiunga via the western areas, while industrial salt has come in recently from Olsobip.

Trade takes place by direct exchange within communities. Between communities, it mainly passes between special trading friends. Such partners stand in a lifelong relationship to each other; a man may have anything from none to five or six. Sons usually succeed their fathers in the relationship. Trading friends may kill each other in war between their respective communities but are sorry about it afterwards, and they do not eat each other.

Trade between friends takes the form of delayed exchange; a man also acts as his friend's agent. If the latter desires something in exchange which the former does not have, he offers his friend's wealth object for barter within his community, haggling over the exchange as if it were his own, and saving the fruits of the exchange for his friend to receive on his next visit. Naturally, friends serve reciprocally as hosts. They are generally found in adjoining communities and so have free access to each other except in times of war.

Ceremonies

Communities are also tied together by occasional joint participation in secular or religious ceremonies. The rare secular occasions are pig feasts, when members of a community make a slaughter of a considerable number of pigs and invite the

representatives of one or several neighbouring communities to participate. Such pig feasts have to be reciprocated.

More commonly major religious ceremonies, and especially initiations, are thrown open for participation by members of one or two other, at the moment, friendly communities. In the peripheral Faiwolmin areas small clusters of communities may be entirely dependent on one centre for the performance of more advanced initiations; elsewhere such invitations are reciprocal over time. The presence of strangers in such ceremonies is, however, always difficult. There is fear beforehand that the invitation may be a ruse for an ambush, as indeed it sometimes has been, and disputes may arise during the ceremony that lead to subsequent revenge and warfare.

These various kinds of inter-community relations seem to connect adjoining villages equally readily whether they belong to the same or to different ethnic groups. In contacts between communities of different language it is characteristic that the Faiwol are monolingual, while their Awin, Minomin, or Bimin partners are bilingual. Indeed, the Minomin seem frequently to be trilingual. In their contact with the north, however, the Faiwolmin are expected to make the effort and use what they command of Telefol language.

I have discussed these inter-community contacts in some detail because they are crucial to an understanding of the organization of the region and the processes of cultural transmission. But it is important to realize their minor place in everyday life and the very high degree of isolation of each community. The Murray Valley particularly is characterized by the limited radius of movement of its populations—very few persons have ever moved beyond a radius of 20 miles from their village—and the tiny scale of the known world from each group's point of view. Groups of fully grown armed men are uneasy when they visit friendly neighbouring communities, and they are afraid even now, after pacification, to visit neighbours who have recently been enemies. From their sitting platforms they can look out over parts of a landscape that have never been visited by any member of their community and about which they have essentially no information. Add the fact that no fundamental differences in perspective distinguish peoples within a wide radius, and major features of this cultural milieu can be appreciated. Yet, the diversity and uniformity characteristic of New Guinea as a whole also characterizes this region: in its variety of ethnic groups, languages, community organizations. To complete this picture of regional diversity, and seek for clues to its sources, we should finally turn to the organization of ritual.

Ritual Forms

Religious cult throughout the area takes the form of secret male rituals directed at growth and garden fertility, and is associated with ancestral sacrae. Crucial formal variations in this cult are found in the organization of male initiations and the constitution of different cult houses and their associated rituals.

My only reliable materials come from detailed investigation among the Baktamin. Initiation among them is organized in seven grades through which males pass as age sets. Though the sequence of the grades, and their associated taboos and privileges, vary between neighbouring communities, this basic pattern seems to be shared also by the Seltamin, Awonklamin, and Enkaiakmin, i.e. most of the eastern Faiwol-speaking groups. Among the Awin there is only a single initiation of youths, whereas the Bimin in the north-east have a complex system, with names differing from those of the Faiwol and an unknown number of grades. On the southern and eastern fringes of the area there seems to be significantly less interest in the higher initiation grades. Thus the southernmost villages of the Enkaiakmin are partly dependent on initiations that take place outside their own community. The Kwermin to the south-east are similarly dependent on western neighbours for higher initiations, while Augobmin are dependent on the Kwermin even for lower grade initiation. The Minomin seem to have no male initiation at all. Evidence is lacking for the Kanai.

Further west in the Faiwolmin area there is evidence of a system of fewer initiation grades comprising only three (according to my informants, interviewed in Olsobip) or more probably four (Craig, MS., p. 71) in Wopkeimin.

The rituals of initiation, and those to which initiation gives access, mainly take place in special cult houses. Among the eastern Faiwolmin, including the Baktamin, there are three distinct types of cult houses as well as normal men's houses containing minor sacrae. Among the Seltamin even women's houses contain sacrae for the benefit of the pigs, making a total of no less than five different kinds of permanent houses containing shrines. The men's houses are accessible to boys upon completion of the lowest grade of initiation, but young men generally prefer to live in houses without sacrae and seniors till they reach maturity. Of the cult houses proper, the Katiam is the taro and clan ancestor house of which the second grade initiation gives a first glance and fourth grade leads to fuller participation. The Katiam is also used as a residence for fully initiated men and a storage place for ritual paraphernalia. The Yolam is associated with taro fertility and warfare in an ancestral cult that does not emphasize clan identities. Novices are first introduced to it in the third degree initiation but do not participate fully in its cult till after the sixth degree, when initiation is associated with re-thatching the cult house. The Amowkam cult house is the centre for other taro rituals independent of clan identity. It is decorated with carved and painted boards representing ancestors. The Baktamin allow entry into the Amowkam only after seventh and last initiation, while the Enkaiakmin place it earlier in the sequence.

The east-west distribution of these cult houses, like the initiations, shows a clear pattern. The Amowkam is not found east of the Baktamin; it is entirely lacking among the Awonklamin and the south-eastern groups of Faiwolmin. The Yolam is also poorly developed among the Awonklamin—some places only a tiny structure, some places absent. Among the Kwermin only the Katiam is found—indeed, it constitutes the only permanent building in the ritual centre of their dispersed

hamlets. Both the Bimin and the Awin do their initiations in temporary buildings, which are abandoned on completion of the ritual—a practice clearly related to the association, among other groups, of initiation with thatching or rebuilding the permanent cult house. Augobmin, Minomin, and Kanai similarly lack permanent cult houses.

In the Murray and Palmer Valleys each community is independent in its cult activities. Initiations and other big rituals draw participants from adjoining communities that are at peace at the moment, but there is no precedence of one cult centre over another. A group lacking a certain kind of cult house is dependent on neighbours for initiation. In describing the cult houses of the central and western Faiwolmin, however, the different structures need not only to be related to initiation grades and degree of access but also to their place in a territorial system. Thus the decorated cult house corresponding to the eastern Amowkam serves, at least in Bultem, the central village of the Wopkeimin, as a centre for higher initiation than the local cult houses. The western equivalents of the Yolam, Katiam, and men's houses on the local level are also difficult to establish. The secrecy of the cults and initiations, and the absence of a clan system by which to differentiate the shrines of the two cult house types, make direct identification difficult. According to Craig (*op. cit.*, p. 54) both types of cult house (plus the normal men's house, Kawelam) exist, though most settlements contain only one. From informants interviewed at Olsobip I was able to establish the existence of only one, corresponding to the Yolam.

Ethnohistory

The picture I have sketched represents an essentially unmodified aboriginal situation ; and this gives us an opportunity to investigate some of the processes that have produced and maintained population distributions and cultural boundaries. The synchronic picture is clear : we find a belt of population clustering in low density in the 3,000–5,000 feet belt of the mountain slope and falling to almost no population at all on the adjoining alluvium. Several distinct ethnic groups are represented among them. There is the considerable variation in local organization that I have indicated ; warfare between such local communities has been endemic, but one also sees several forms of inter-community contact and incipient regional organization.

As a first step of analysis, we may seek to transform this synchronic picture into an ethnodynamic picture of process and historical sequence.

The genetic interrelations of languages provide some clues. The Faiwol dialect chain belongs as one (or perhaps two) of the members of the Ok language family (Healey, Wurm). Together with Telefol, Tifal, Bimin and some other languages further north, it forms the mountain sub-family of the Ok, whereas the languages of Ninggirum and other peoples to the south-west constitute the lowlands sub-family. Awin, on the other hand, has been grouped with Pare in one of the four divisions of the new Pare-Samo-Beami-Bosavi family (Voorhoeve *et al.*, 1968). My brief word lists indicate that Minomin will probably fall into the Awin-Pare division, while Kanai may belong to the Samo division (Voorhoeve, personal communication).

Material indicators also suggest that we are straddling a major ethnographic division. Male Faiwolmin wear the penis gourd like the peoples westward. The Awin cover the penis with a flat nut only, while the Minomin and Kanai wear aprons like the peoples eastward in the highlands and cover their buttocks with a grass skirt. These contrasts are independent of the environmental circumstances which explain many of the material differences between Faiwolmin as mountain people and Awin as river people; they more probably reflect major historical tradition rather than ecology.

The Strickland River has been regarded as a major geographical barrier separating these two major traditions, but Kanai and Minomin are found on the western side of this supposed barrier. One might imagine either that these groups moved across the Strickland, or that they are an aboriginal or remnant population in the area. A number of facts favour the latter view.

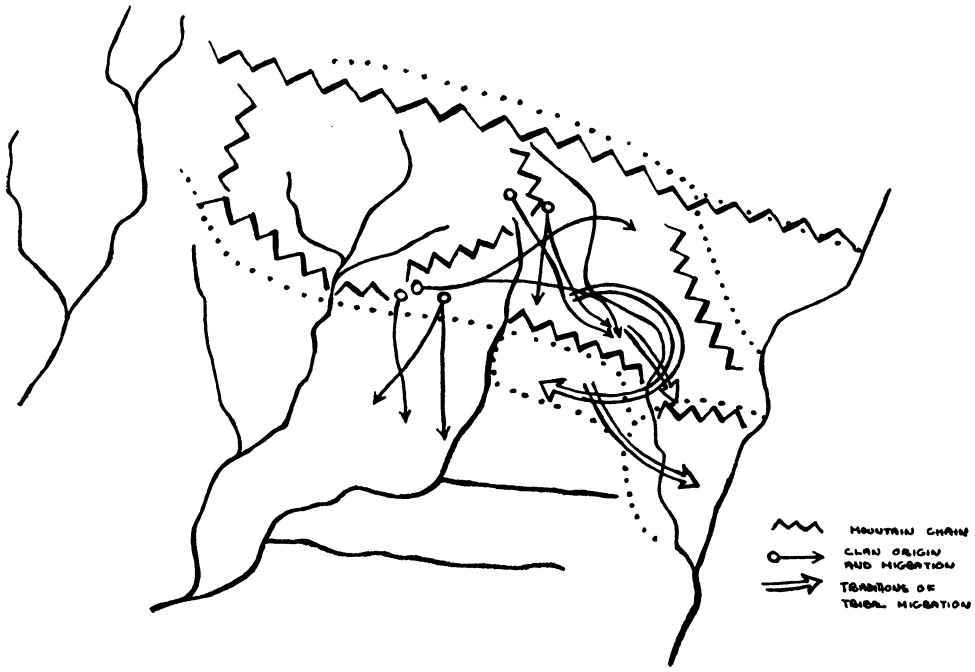
Firstly, we may look for purely demographic indicators. Though detailed censuses of Baktamin clearly show a negative balance today, with epidemics of various kinds following first contact, the Faiwolmin seem previously to have produced a greater population pressure than the Awin to the south. In the marginal Awin communities I collected family histories of migration from Faiwolmin villages; and most of the Awin clan names in this sparsely populated Palmer-Black River area are of Faiwol origin. Awin myths place the origin of all their clans in the headwaters of the rivers, but this might be expected from such river-centred groups. What does seem to be indicated is a population excess in the north and a southward movement filtering through the ethnic boundary and becoming assimilated to the Awin. Such a movement would have no effect on the localization of the boundary between Faiwol mountain people and Awin canoe people, which follows the clear division between mountain and alluvium.

Clan origin myths give some further indications of movement within the Faiwolmin area. These trace each clan to a karst hole in the mountains from which the original clan ancestors emerged. These places among the eastern Faiwolmin are variously located 20 to 40 miles west and north in neighbouring or more distant tribal areas and would indicate a general eastward migration.

Traditions of tribal origin and conquest are consistent with this. The Baktamin claim to have conquered most of their territory from the Augobmin. The Augobmin acknowledge this tradition. The Minomin claim origin in the Upper Murray River, whence they were driven by the Seltamin and Baktamin to the present Kwermin and Augobmin area, later to be defeated by them and driven south and west into their present area. The Kanai claim in part to be living in their ancestral area, in part to have been driven out from adjoining western areas by the Minomin. These different traditions have been summarized on the second map and give a consistent picture of eastward and southward movement.

A similar direction is indicated for the spread of some crucial ritual features. This is most clearly seen if we extend our comparison to include also the two tribes Tifalmin and Telefomin north of the divide, with which particularly western Faiwolmin

groups are in contact. Among the Tifalmin youths are initiated through a series of rites (Cranstone, 1967, p. 289) involving four grades (Craig, *op. cit.*, pp. 71, 72) and associated with a highly decorated cult house. The Telefomin, who are the dominant and admired neighbours to the north, recently practised six grades of initiation and have traditions of a seventh (or first) grade discontinued some 80 years ago (Craig, *op. cit.*, pp. 63–67). The names of only two of these grades are cognate to those of the Baktamin, and their sequence and contents differ considerably; but many of the individual idioms and ideas are reminiscent or even identical. Telefomin houses are decorated with painted houseboards, and several types of cult houses are found. Uniquely, in the village of Telefolip a temple of special construction is located, mythologically founded by a culture heroine who later travelled on to found the main cult house of the Wopkeimin in Bultem. Finally, the temple in Telefolip is the centre for a cult that draws participants from a wide area, including some Faiwolmin groups.



Map 2.

We can now see that the decorated Baktamin Amowkam is the easternmost representative of a type of cult house more prominently found to the west and north. Evidence of recent introduction from the west is also suggested in the fact of association with seventh and highest initiation among the Baktamin, lower grade in the west, and in the etymology of the name.[3] Another ritual feature pointing in the same direction is the absence of any regional hierarchy of cult houses among Baktamin

and other Murray Valley Faiwolmin, the presence of regional cult centres among western Faiwolmin, and the more spectacular presence of the Telefolip centre among the Telefomin.

A general distributional and temporal picture thus emerges for the region as a whole. All the evidence indicates a movement both of people and cultural/ritual forms eastward and southward. Towards the south, the population movement does not result in the spread of the culture of the mountaineers into the swamps of the lowlands—the migrants are assimilated and a cultural boundary between Faiwolmin and Awin maintained. Eastward, on the other hand, both peoples and cultures seem to move within the continuous ecological belt of the southern slope of the cordillera in a general west-to-east direction. In this movement whole ethnic groups seem to be in a process of displacing each other, and social and cultural forms seem to be spreading within the Faiwolmin ethnic groups.

To understand the present distributions and the cultural dynamics that underlie them, we need to identify the processes whereby this eastward displacement is effected and the pressures that activate the processes. Anthropology provides several standard alternative hypotheses for this purpose. We may be observing the results of cultural adaptation whereby the distributions reflect ecological circumstances and differences. We may be seeing a phase in a history of migration and conquest whereby populations from a more prolific centre progressively displace peripheral groups and cultures. Or we may be faced with a pattern of diffusion and assimilation whereby cultural elements are borrowed and ethnic identities changed in response to the greater efficiency, higher prestige, or other advantage associated with the cultural traits from a central area. Indeed, each of these or combinations of them may be at work, and they can also be refined and made more directly relevant to the locally observable facts of cultural transmission, migration, and competition. In doing so, I wish to emphasize the importance of local and regional forms of organization, and the crucial role which cult activities and cult houses play in the societies in creating and maintaining such organizations. To prepare for this argument, it is convenient to summarize the forms of organization found in the whole area and the cult forms with which they are associated.

Forms of Regional Organization

In the most peripheral south-western areas of this part of the mountain slope, among the Kanai, Minomin, and Augobmin, there are no permanent cult houses and no or only one initiation. The ritual segregation of the sexes is unimportant, and joint families live together in a single house structure. No communal ritual holds the group together, and the population is highly dispersed, pursuing shifting agriculture and constantly moving the location of households. Tiny clusters of two or three related households may form hamlets for defensive purposes. Descent

[3] Am-owk = lit. " house of his mother ". Few even of the fully initiated Baktamin men seem aware of this etymology, and it is garbled by the suffixing of *-am*, " house ", in the Baktamin dialect version, by analogy to the other cult house designations Kati-am and Yol-am. The name also seems to contain reference to the myth of a female founding ancestress—not associated with the Amowkam tradition of the Baktamin.

is not systematized in exogamous clans, and group names have a mixed territorial and kinship referent.

The south-easternmost Faiwolmin exemplified by the Kwermin are similarly dispersed in households but are tied together by a senior male cult to a ritual centre. The cult house is dedicated to mysteries connecting taro fertility and clan ancestors, and exogamous units are defined by this cult. Great emphasis is placed on the secrecy of the clan cult, and initiations are elaborated into several grades. But the cult takes place in the ritual centre away from the settlements, and both sexes continue to reside in joint family houses.

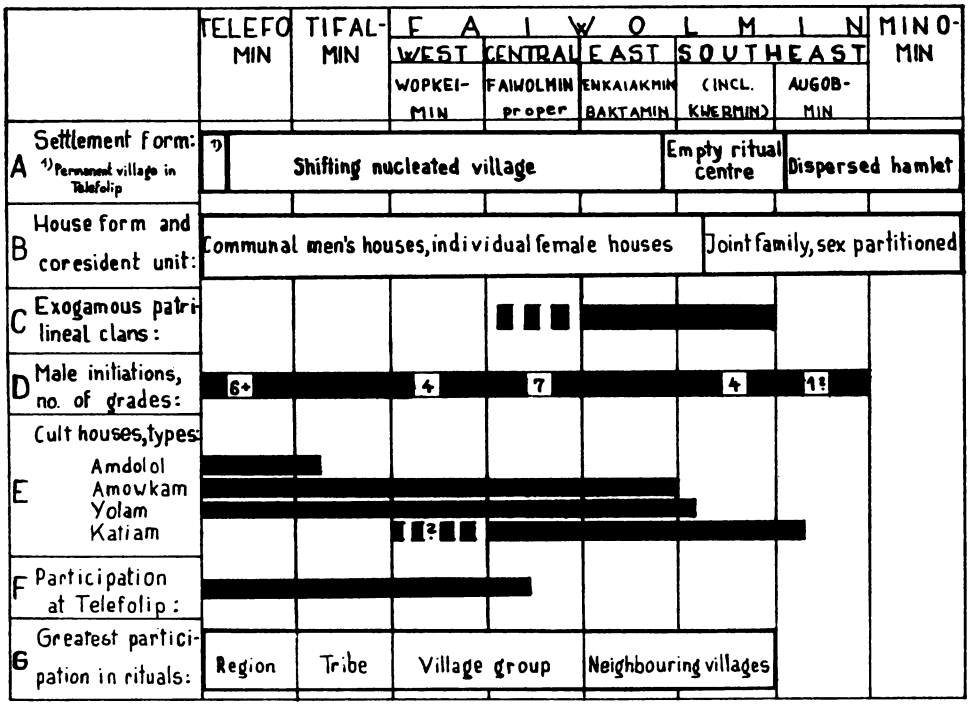


Figure 1.—Summary of regional variations.

A. The only truly permanent village site seems to be Telefolip. The non-residential centres of the Kwermin group are composed of a cult house each, while the population live in dispersed hamlets.

B. In Telefomin and western and central Faiwolmin a man also often sleeps in the female house of his wife, as do men among other groups when in temporary garden houses.

C. Exogamous clans are present where indicated. Central Faiwolmin exogamy and lineality are doubtful.

D. The number of grades in the system varies from six in recent times in Telefomin, a maximum of four in Wopkeimin, seven in central and eastern Faiwolmin, etc.

E. Cult houses of the different types are present as indicated. The Baktamin terms for the cult house types are used, except for the *Amdolol*, found only in Telefomin.

F. Individual participants to the great ceremonies in Telefolip are drawn as indicated.

G. The maximal size of congregations that meet for local ritual events in each sub-area is indicated.

The next Faiwol-speaking groups to the west—Baktamin, Seltamin, and Enkaiakmin—show greater complexity. They form compact villages around several types of permanent cult houses—though the villages shift their locations as a result of soil exhaustion and sorcery fears. Thus over time the same regime of circulation on the land is achieved as in the areas of dispersed settlement. Elaborate sequences of seven grades of initiation are practised ; male and female residences are separated to facilitate the practice of secret male cult, but in garden houses away from this activity the two sexes may reside together. Several exogamous clans together form a community which tends towards endogamy and a high degree of isolation.

There is some evidence among the Baktamin of a previous local organization, and presumably ritual organization, similar to that of the Kwermin/Augobmin. Thus two of the main constituent clans of the Baktamin have exclusive hunting and collecting territories, one in the northern part of Baktamin land and one in the south-east. These rights are explained—without any reference to the organization of neighbouring communities—in terms of previous residence in these territories by the respective clan ancestors before they moved together in the Baktamin village.

The centralization of villages thus seems to have taken place as a historical process in formerly dispersed communities ; but the greater centralization clearly also offers military advantages and has resulted in conquest and territorial expansion of the more highly centralized groups in a general south-eastward direction.

Compared with the dispersed areas to the south-east, one may thus say that the centralization of these villages results in an involution of relations which otherwise form an open network. The cult house is the focus which defines the village community, and with reference to which political and religious membership is codified. The clan organization which regulates marriage within the group is also codified in these cult forms. Such a ritually based nucleation of villages, at the expense of wider regional integration, is characteristic of most of the Faiwolmin. A certain establishment of new network forms is effected through reciprocal participation in the initiations of neighbouring communities, particularly in the higher grades, but this does not fundamentally change the general milieu of local isolation and inter-village anarchy.

The western Faiwolmin, and especially the Wopkeimin, seem to lack some of the complexity of initiation grades and the exogamous clan system of their eastern neighbours. They also participate most actively in regional trade, both in a north-south and east-west direction. This higher intensity of inter-village activity may be correlated with an extended territorial base for their Amowk type cult house, in the village of Bultem, which seems to serve as centre for a group of villages. This pattern is further exemplified in the neighbouring Tifalmin tribe and has its full-fledged form in the regionally organized cult activities centring on the temple in Telefolip. The cult activities there climax in periodic rebuilding, a ritual event that has never been observed but which draws participants not only from all the Telefomin but also from the adjoining tribes. Thus the Tifalmin form a part of this regional system, the Wopkeimin also seem to have been regular participants, while other Faiwolmin west

of the Fly River have experienced a marginal participation. In the westernmost Enkaiak village of Bolivip, just east of the Fly River, one senior man claims once to have participated as the first of his group. I also have evidence from one informant in Telefolip, which I have been unable to confirm, that the ritual incorporates direct reference to its regional character by allocating parts of the temple to participants from the different regions in terms of the directions from which they come.

We thus see a progressively greater involvement, as one moves west and north in cult forms that organize larger regional congregations, from clan cult, village cult, joint cult by groups of villages, and finally regional cult. With the development of the third level of participation separate cult maintenance of the lowest clan level disappears.

The Telefomin area, which seems to have served as a centre of ritual innovation and diffusion, has a much larger population, though sustained on the same basic level of horticulture and technology. Telefomin lacks the clan cult but clearly shows other kinds of ritual and ceremonial complexity not yet documented in the available literature. Uniquely in the same area, Telefolip village is also a permanent village site, a claim that is substantiated by the evidence of local erosion in the village clearing. The Telefomin have no clan organization and impose forbidden degrees on marriage in a bilateral framework—which may also contribute to a greater regional integration than the Faiwolmin pattern.

This pattern of distribution suggests a clear age-area stratification from a Telefomin centre to an arcadian periphery. Though I wish to argue in favour of a general historical process of this kind, it is important to realize that the distribution of contemporary forms reflects a creative process of transmission of tradition rather than the deposition of archaic unchanging forms in the periphery. This is strikingly so in the present case, where the different forms of organization are so prominently based on religious ideas realized through repetitive cult. Faiwolmin codifications of cult and the sacred depend heavily on secrecy as a scale and measure of value and importance. True and effective information is secret information, while that which everyone knows is useless and powerless knowledge. I shall return elsewhere to the implicit epistemology of such a view, what it implies about the nature of knowledge, and the structure of Faiwol culture. Here I need only refer to the implications of secrecy for the transmission of tradition, which is affected both on the level of organization and in attitudes towards communication. The transmission of such religious ideas can most vividly be organized in a proliferating system of initiation, where progressively deeper religious secrets are rationed out in steps and the vast majority of the congregation participates to various degrees in a cult, the total structure of which is fully known only to a small inner core. This core, like the lower grades, is maintained through cumulative initiation ; but its knowledge is in constant danger of being lost through accident and too long delay in transmission. The other aspect of secrecy is its effect on the quality of transmission. Sacred communications become rare, surrounded by taboos, and pedagogically imperfect : there is reluctance and withholding of information by the initiator and fear, anxiety, and suspicion of

deception by the novice. Characteristically, the novices even to the senior grades have confused recollections of ritual climaxes and try to forget, rather than work analytically with, the dangerous information they have received.

It is my thesis that this native theory of knowledge, and this organization of its transmission, produces failures and distortions of communication and thus great variations between local traditions. I have several cases that show the reluctance in borrowing that results from this organization and attitude, though both proselytizing and deception also take place. My clearest case of outright failure of transmission is the Augobmin, who simply lost their, apparently Kwermin type, cult organization through accidents of death and warfare exterminating their handful of fully initiated men some 15 to 20 years ago.

This organization, then, is one that tends to produce local variation through discontinuity and local improvisation, of a type which in the structurally comparable area of Himalayan India has been called drift (Berreman, 1960). Nevertheless, the variation one observes in a region like the present does not give a random picture. What happens in one local tradition is only partly insulated from what happens in adjoining communities ; and so both local codification and peripheral lag are apparent.

The distribution of forms is thus generated by a number of simultaneous partly independent processes. A process of diffusion from an innovation centre in Telefolip seems to be taking place. Simultaneously, the organization of local cultural transmission is such that both loss and improvisation occur and new local variants emerge. Different ritual forms imply different community types ; these again confront each other in warfare and compete and replace each other on the basis of their unequal defensive and offensive capacities. Finally, the communities are under ecologic constraints derived from the necessity of dispersed shifting cultivation. For an understanding of the distributions which have been outlined, all these factors need to be combined.

We may first consider the factor of ecologic variation as an explanatory context for cultural variation. The Faiwolmin, Bimin, Minomin and Kanai are all subject to the same gross ecologic constraints, requiring shifting agriculture. Nowhere does one see evidence of critical population pressures. I have no detailed material, but it seems clear that only a small fraction of the land has ever been cultivated in the territory of any political community, and in the favoured places cultivation is followed by at least the minimum of 15 years before re-use. A higher density of population is found, and can doubtless be sustained, in the middle altitude range, but this is not correlated with the difference between dispersed and nucleated settlement ; and both these forms allow the ecologically required shifting of agriculture—in the latter case by the irregular shifting of whole village sites. To the extent that such differently organized groups compete, it would seem to be their unequal defensive and offensive capacities, and not unequal productivity, that decide the issue. The gross east-west differences in social and cultural forms thus find no easy explanation in ecological determinants. The contrast between northern Faiwolmin and southern Awin, on the other hand, clearly corresponds with a major adaptive difference between mountain and river/lowland peoples, as noted above.

The dispersed pattern without cult houses, as found in the peripheral south-eastern areas, clearly organizes a smaller population for defence; and their history of displacement would seem to demonstrate this disadvantage. The absence of a cult tradition on which centralization would be based might reflect the area's peripheral location and the recent centralization of their neighbours—i.e., present lag or survival. Alternatively, one could envisage a recent loss of communal cult institutions, perhaps caused by the low population density of these low-lying areas. I do not have materials from the Bimin with which to test these alternative hypotheses, but a certain atrophy of cult traditions has clearly taken place among the Augobmin. Comparative data from across the Strickland River would be instructive.

The south-eastern Faiwolmin (Kwermin) pattern of dispersed settlement around a central cult house probably gives some military advantage through the collective identity produced by initiations and cult house rites. However, as exemplified by the Kwermin, this cult form seems to suffer from the twin limitations that communal cult is restricted to initiations and that clan cult is so secretive that it is rarely practised, so the central cult house occasions a relatively low level of activity and has long latency periods.

This is not true of the cult forms of the other Faiwolmin groups. Their cult houses are associated with a far more active ritual life and generate nucleated communities that seem to offer significant military advantages. Though a part of the village population is normally dispersed in garden houses, and thus exposed to surprise attacks, the village provides security for many and a refuge for all and is also a focus for stronger loyalties and the mobilization of collective vengeance. These advantages are reflected in the recent history of expansion.

The greater frequency of cult activities is related to the greater number of cult houses and also exhibits a greater emphasis on communal cult, requiring community-wide ritual abstentions in preparation and thus the need for community-wide co-ordination. The ritual is also connected with joint planting of gardens, and the first fruit harvest is under ritual collective constraints. Nevertheless, the maintenance of tradition is also here made problematical by secrecy and accidents of transmission, and the content of the transmission is affected by such factors. The Baktamin at present are unable to initiate novices to the highest grade because their Amowkam with its sacrae was recently destroyed in war; though the leader of the Amowk cult is still alive, he is prevented from transmitting his esoteric knowledge out of ritual context. In the neighbouring Seltamin communities the eclipse of both major cult houses in one village and of the Amowkam in the other as a result of the death and inactivity respectively of the cult leaders can be observed. During 1968 the Yolam of the western Seltamin community was revitalized by the return of a senior initiate after a long residence among the Baktamin; this led to the re-integration of the village and the re-occupation of the houses by a population which had been scattered. Clearly, this revitalization implied some discontinuity with cult practice as it had been previously; since it required reconstruction of rituals, it would give room both for improvisation over faulty memory, positive innovation, and eclectic

borrowing. Simultaneously, during my stay among the Baktamin I witnessed a discussion among the inner core of initiates that led to a theologically significant change of the status of sixth degree novices with respect to the senior sacrament, inspired from western neighbours. In other words, small-scale and restricted communication generate changes of the content of tradition. At the same time dogmatic and pragmatic attitudes also maintain traditional differences despite knowledge of alternatives, usually justified by the will or the whim of particular ancestral figures.

Compared to this decentralized regional pattern of changing, drifting, and borrowing local village traditions, the organization of tradition that comes about with the establishment of a territorial hierarchy of cult houses, as in the west, and particularly among the Telefomin, has a new character. The continuity must be strengthened by the existence of central and parish cult houses; and the possibility for developing true ritual specialists and a cumulative religious tradition would seem to have been introduced. Certainly, the local cult leader who has participated in a ritual at the central temple of the region must return to his parish with strengthened authority and with an enduring norm for his cult activity, while the cult leaders in the centre must see themselves as entrusted with knowledge for which there is a periodic expert audience—a communicative situation different from that in the isolated local cult house.

As it looks from a Baktamin periphery, such an organization is capable of emerging without any conception by its innovators of these inherent potentialities. Either the introduction of a culture hero myth to serve as charter for cult, or the coupling of an existing ancestral shrine with subsidiary shrines for descended ancestors, creates the required hierarchy of cult houses; and thereby the communicative situation arises which embodies this cumulative potential. Thus the differentiation of local and regional shrines seems to represent a threshold or take-off point for religious creativity. We should not be deceived by the conservative and traditional emphasis of such a cult system; its creativity depends on the heightened ritual specialization and cumulative retention of the cognitive work of generations of such specialists. A reflection of this creativity is seen in Telefolip's character as a centre for innovation and diffusion far beyond its area of cult participation.

It is intriguing that a hint of the socio-political potential of this organization should also have had occasion to assert itself before the eclipse of further development. After a brief and unhappy exposure to external contact, the Telefomin people in 1953 made a unique and concerted uprising. If the published account is adequate at this point (Quinlivan, 1954), the co-ordination and effectuation of this action depended precisely on this one characteristically regional organization in existence: the myth and temple of Telefolip. Further realization of the potential in this hierarchical cult house structure have not to my knowledge been reported.

Seen in a wider New Guinea perspective, it seems plausible that similar ideas of secrecy and patterns of withholding basic esoteric knowledge produce similar discontinuities and variability in many cultural traditions. The patchwork picture

of variation and contrast which the ethnographic map exhibits may be affected by this. Yet it is clear that the codifications of religious thought about ancestors, descent, fertility, and the sacred found in the Faiwolmin-Telefomin area generate local and regional organizations that are very different from other, and better known, New Guinea systems. The highlands, with their lineage systems combined with exchange networks activated in great ceremonial exchange cycles like the *moka* (Bulmer, 1960) certainly organize larger populations, though in a system of different character from that described here. Nor can the Faiwolmin be fitted to the pattern of ritual-ecologic programming analysed for the Maring (Rappaport, 1967) and possibly characteristic of many other New Guinea peoples. For structural comparisons it might be more illuminating to look rather for West African or Maya parallels. In the analysis of traditional social systems of New Guinea, it is important to be mesmerized neither by the unity nor the diversity of the area. To put in perspective the striking idiomatic and sectorial similarities in the cultures and societies of different parts of New Guinea, we need to define and contrast total syndromes constituted by ritual, kinship, economic, and ecological elements, and to explore the basic differences and similarities in the systems so constituted. For this purpose the cult house-centred village system of the Fly headwaters may usefully be distinguished from other forms.

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FREDRIK BARTH.