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# OCEANIA

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## REPORT ON RESEARCH WORK IN NAURU ISLAND, CENTRAL PACIFIC

By CAMILLA H. WEDGWOOD

(Continued from Vol. VI, No. 4)

### *Rank.*

IT has already been said that Nauruans lay great emphasis upon primogeniture and distinguish those who are *temonibe* (the senior members of the senior branch of a clan) from those who are *ameneyame*. Actually there seem to have been three social classes in Nauru: the *temonibe*, the *ameneyame*, and the *itsio*. The distinction between the two first is determined by the accident of birth; the *itsio* or serf class, however, was composed of men and women who had been taken prisoner in war or who, having escaped from the enemy, had put themselves under the protection of a *temonibe* or of some powerful man living in a district other than their own. Such people were often landless and, unless they married someone of higher status, their offspring seem usually to have held the same lowly and dependent position. They might acquire land and trees, for these were often given in return for services, but the stigma of being *itsio* was still theirs. According to one informant a *temonibe* or a war-leader had the right of life and death over his *itsio*, and would resent it if they were injured by another. It is said too that *itsio* could be given away or inherited like other goods, but I do not know of any instances of this, and I am inclined to believe

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that their position was not in fact as unenviable as it may have been in theory. To-day, under the administration of the white man, the serf-like condition of *itsio* is no longer known, but the descendants of these people are still very generally looked down upon.

Quite distinct from the position of such prisoners or refugees of war, and of impoverished folk who had put themselves under the charge of a *temonibe*, was that of the castaways, who from time to time reached Nauru from the Gilbert Islands. Sometimes such people were killed before they came ashore, but if they reached land safely they were usually taken under the protection of the *temonibe* or other important man of that part of the island in which they found themselves. From their protector they often received land and were indeed frequently adopted into his family. They were sometimes spoken of as *rawen*<sup>24</sup> or pets and were treated as such, but never as lowly dependants such as *itsio*. A man of importance liked to have such people attached to him. The Gilbertese were good warriors, and, more important, the cult of the war god Taburig was theirs, and it was by the correct worship of Taburig that victory in battle could be assured. Furthermore it was the Gilbertese who had knowledge of sorcery—a subject of which the Nauruans were ignorant—and through their help in performing death or sickness magic therefore, a man could gain power and influence over his fellows. So highly were their knowledge and help valued, that not infrequently a Gilbertese castaway was given a woman of noble birth to wife, and it was common for a *temonibe* to take a castaway girl into his home and rear her as a bride for his son.

Among the middle class, the *ameneŋame*, some Nauruans distinguish between those who are nearly related to the *temonibe*, or who are senior members of important branches of a clan, and those who are but juniors and belong only to unimportant branches. The former they term *ameneŋame*; the latter only *eŋame*. The *ameneŋame* are generally owners of a considerable amount of land, and have much influence, and I was told that in olden days they had the right to join any gathering of *temonibe* and take part in their

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<sup>24</sup> *Rawen* is the word used for tame snipe, tame noddies, and other pet birds and animals.

discussions. The *eyame* on the other hand usually own only a small amount of land and are considered to be entirely unimportant.

P. Kayser in his critique of Hambruch's work<sup>25</sup> denies that there is any distinction between *eyame* and *ameneeyame*, maintaining that the latter word means only "the *eyame* people," and I was therefore very doubtful at first as to whether I had understood my informants aright, but since the distinction was made spontaneously by several different men and women I have come to the conclusion that it must be genuine. Hambruch<sup>26</sup> also records the existence of two other classes: *mo*, which he places as second in importance to the *temonibe*, and *itsiora*, which he places lowest in the scale, beneath *itsio*. As P. Kayser<sup>27</sup> points out the word *mo* (or more correctly *eomo*) means "good," and is in this context synonymous with *temonibe*, as indicating the best or most senior member of the clan or lineage. As regards the *itsiora*, P. Kayser states that this is no more than a word of abuse, used alike for men and dogs who cadge food from others. I myself only heard it used once in a sense that might suggest that it had a class significance. My informant was telling me of a man of low rank who had married a *temonibe* woman, and said of him that he was ugly, lazy and *itsiora*. Hoping to find out in what sense this word was being used I asked whether he was *itsio*, and was told "no, *itsiora*." I am not satisfied, however, that this was used to denote a social rank lower than *itsio*; it seemed rather an expression of the deepest contempt for which *itsio* was not strong enough, for to-day I believe that this latter word is often employed in a general derogatory sense and not only as a definition of social status.<sup>28</sup> The woman whose husband was under discussion had previously broken off her engagement to a near kinsman of my informant, and had very much degraded herself in the eyes of the community by marrying a man so far beneath her socially; it was therefore to

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<sup>25</sup> P. Kayser, "Die Eingeborenen von Nauru," *Anthropos*, Band xii-xiii, 1917-1918, pp. 327-8.

<sup>26</sup> Hambruch, *Nauru*, Halbband I, p. 184.

<sup>27</sup> P. Kayser, *loc. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> One man, speaking to me of rank in Nauru named the *temonibe*, *ameneeyame* and *itsio*, but then substituted for the last the word *eyame*, indicating that *itsio* was a somewhat too opprobrious term to use for the lowest rank at the present day.

be expected that my informant would use the most degrading term he could by which to describe this man.

As regards marriage between members of the different social classes and the status of their children my evidence is by no means clear. It seems that although it was correct for a *temonibe* girl, especially an eldest daughter, to marry a *temonibe* man (in which event their offspring would inevitably be *temonibe*), sometimes she did marry beneath her. Indeed the union of a *temonibe* woman and an *ameneyame* man of wealth and importance was not uncommon and their children were I believe usually regarded as *temonibe*. Rarely did a woman of the upper rank wed a poor and unimportant man, and still more rarely a man of the *itsio* class, though such marriages are not unknown. I gathered that the status of the children was then often disputed. In the instance which I have mentioned above the *temonibe* woman claims *temonibe* rank for her children, but most of the people with whom I spoke on the matter were unwilling to accord this, so contemptible did they consider the father. One man said, however, that their position in society when they were grown up would depend to some extent upon their own personalities.

It was probably always more common for a man to marry beneath him than for a woman to do so, but even in such unions the position of the children is not clearly defined and depends to a great extent upon the characters of their parents and of themselves. It seems that in Nauru there were no special insignia of rank, no special privileges or obligations by which members of the different social classes were distinguished from each other, and that apart from the importance of primogeniture and seniority, wealth and personality did more to determine social status than parentage.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Hambruch (*op. cit.* pp. 185, 191-3) gives a clear account of rules regulating the social status of children, but I myself could not find that any such rules existed. I believe that in his desire to have everything clear cut, Hambruch elaborated them from the (insufficient) data in his possession and did not realize how flexible the whole system of rank is in Nauru. Certainly he is wrong in his general statement that, apart from marriage with a *temonibe* woman, among "freemen" (that is among *ameneyame* and *eyame*) a child always belongs to the rank of its father. According to P. Kayser the children of "mixed" marriages refer to their parents in order to define their own position. Thus if a *temonibe* man married an *ameneyame* woman, the children are *temonibe ex parte patris*, and *ameneyame ex parte matris*. (P. Kayser, *op. cit.* p. 328.)

It is true that I was sometimes told that *temonibe* did have special privileges, as for instance that only they could own frigate-bird stands and that only they could impose a taboo upon the coconuts of a district, but closer investigation showed that such things were not regarded as the inalienable rights of all who were *temonibe*: it was either in virtue of his being the senior member of a clan that a true *temonibe* had special powers, or that, through force of arms and wealth some *temonibe* (or some men who through prowess had been accorded *temonibe* status) had acquired or appropriated to themselves such rights.

It is difficult to tell now what influence a *temonibe* had in settling disputes within the clan or within the district in which he or she lived. It seems to have depended largely upon the personality of the individual and the strength of the clan. Thus, Queen, *temonibe* of Eamwit, was influential throughout the island, and it is told of Eigamuija, her daughter, that she had the power to stop people fighting, because she had so many relatives in every district. I could not, however, find any clear evidence that a clan *temonibe* had any recognized judicial function, nor can it be said that the *temonibe*, even when men, were necessarily leaders in war or in big economic undertakings. To-day they are still respected, and usually own more land than most commoners, but in selecting a district Chief the people do not consider the man of highest rank as necessarily the most desirable candidate. The district Chief is an innovation of the white man's government, and is chosen for his abilities and suitability for carrying out the administrative work of his office. The Nauruans never translate the word "Chief" by the word "*temonibe*"; the two positions are entirely distinct in their minds and indeed have no relation to each other.<sup>30</sup>

What the forces were which preserved law and order in Nauru, I could not clearly make out, and my failure to do so was, I suspect, because they were not organized. As already mentioned, the fear of

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<sup>30</sup> When the system of district Chiefs was first introduced some of the people chosen for this office were true *temonibe*, as for instance Eidagabo of Buada who was the senior woman of Eamwit and Eirak of Baitsi; others, such as Auweida of Boe and Nobob of Meneñ had acquired *temonibe* status through the prowess of their forebears. To-day only a small minority of the Chiefs can claim to be true *temonibe*.

public ridicule was considerable and doubtless did much to ensure that people conformed, at least outwardly, to the approved standards of behaviour.<sup>31</sup> Quarrels between members of a kinship or homestead group over the ownership of land, fishing rights, etc., were usually settled by the senior member of the group, and if a person were considered to have offended against another, the jeers of his fellows were held to be ample punishment. Theft was always considered to be a very serious offence and seems to have been rare. Certain men in the community were known to be thieves and to go about at night on stilts so that they could thrust their hands through the roof-thatch and take the goods stored in the rafters. But there seems to have been no organized method of punishing such men, though I was told that they were kept in check by the fear of sorcery on the part of the injured householder, and by the strong public condemnation of stealing. Sometimes wrestling and other competitive sports were employed as a kind of judicial mechanism, though this did not always make for justice. Thus, if a man lured away the wife of another, the injured husband would, if he felt himself to be strong enough, challenge him to a wrestling match, and if he defeated him he would recover his wife. Should the husband not feel strong enough to overcome his adversary, he could ask one of his kinsfolk to engage in the contest for him. If the injured husband or his champion were defeated he had no redress. Not so very long ago, a man of considerable physical prowess carried off the wife of his maternal uncle. She did not wish to leave her husband for she was much attached to him, but she was afraid of the younger man and did not dare to oppose him. The unfortunate husband was not himself strong enough to challenge his nephew, nor was there anyone whom he could ask to do so for him, and he was therefore unable to do anything to get his wife back. He had to content himself by sending lads about the island to sing mourning songs in which he bewailed his loss.

Although it has been said that thieves were afraid of sickness and misfortune befalling them as the result of evil spells being laid upon them by the person whom they robbed, the fear of death and sickness

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<sup>31</sup> I was told that the word *idüra* signified to do something which was against the custom, and that to-day it is used, wrongly, to translate the word "sin."

magic does not seem to have played any important part in preserving law and order, as it has in some parts of the Pacific, probably because all such magic was introduced from the Gilbert Islands and is not native to Nauru.

### *Economic Life.*

Before the coming of the Europeans, Nauruans subsisted principally upon the products of the coconut and the pandanus and upon fish. A little meat was obtained by catching black noddies, but this was regarded rather as a sport than as a serious way of obtaining food.

The soil of Nauru is so infertile that it is scarcely surprising that the people never took to gardening, and indeed so isolated were they that it is hard to see how they would have obtained the wherewithal to begin it. Even to-day, when bananas, pumpkins, beans and many fruit-bearing trees have been introduced, only relatively few Nauruans show sufficient interest, patience and care to become effective gardeners. The only cultivation which they practiced formerly was the planting of coconuts, mostly in the coastal belt, and of pandanus trees in the interior. It would be tedious to enumerate here all the different ways in which the pandanus fruit and coconut were treated for food<sup>32</sup>; suffice it to say that from these two plants they procured a greater variety of diet than might be expected among a people whose only methods of cooking were the earth oven, heated stones dropped into wooden bowls of water, and roasting in the embers. After the coconut toddy (*ekarawe*) which the men collect morning and evening, and without which the people could hardly survive, the two most important vegetable foods were a kind of pandanus preserve called *edoyo*, and dried coconut flesh called *emette*, both of which could be stored for a long time. *Edoyo* is made in strips about one-sixth of an inch thick, some two and a half feet wide and sometimes as much as nine or twelve feet long; each strip is rolled up and carefully encased in pandanus leaves and used to be kept in the house-loft against the time when it was wanted.

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<sup>32</sup> A valuable study of the many ways in which the Nauruans use the pandanus is to be found in P. Kayser's article "Der Pandanus auf Nauru," in *Anthropos*, Bd. xxiv, 1934, pp. 775-791.

It has the appearance of a strip of tough leather, and when eaten raw tastes like dried figs. *Emette* is the flesh of dry coconuts after they have been stored for upwards of three years by which time it has become soft and yellow. Men going out fishing and small boys going off to play on the beach, used to take *emette* with them to eat as a mid-day snack.

The cultivation and care of the pandanus trees was primarily the work of the women, though the men helped in the initial clearing of the land and in the planting. This was done during the time of the westerly winds when the rainfall is most plentiful. There are a considerable number of different varieties of pandanus (of which each has its own name) some with sweet fruit, some with sour, which lend themselves to different treatment, and some which are more valuable for their leaves (from which thatch, mats, petticoats and other objects are made) than for their fruit. The pandanus flowers usually during January and February and the fruit is ready for gathering about August or September. Formerly, when the time for the pandanus harvest (*ineded*) had come, the people used to leave their homes on the coast and go to dwell in more or less temporary bush huts on the pandanus lands in the interior. Sometimes all the members of a homestead helped in the gathering of the fruit, but the men generally spent most of their days in fishing, and only returned inland for the night. Commonly two or three sisters with their children worked together, for picking the pandanus fruit and turning it into *edoyo* entails heavy labour and requires the co-operation of a number of people throughout the two or three months of the harvest. Young girls unite to carry water from the homewells to the temporary settlements, for there is no water to be had in the bush-lands; groups of two or three youths or young men work together picking the fruit, and if there is no old oven which can be used for the cooking some men will dig a new one and collect from nearby coral pinnacles the necessary cooking stones; the women do all the work connected with the actual cooking of the fruit and the small children are kept busy collecting fuel. The process whereby the juice is extracted from the fruit after the first cooking is primarily the work of young men, and if anyone is known to be engaged in a big pandanus gathering, they will come from other homesteads and

even from other districts to where the work is being done and hold a pandanus-squeezing competition, either working individually or in groups. This was the only stage in the harvest and making of *edoyo* which was at all festal. My informants impressed upon me that the people had to labour much too hard during the harvest season to have any leisure for dancing or singing or any other such relaxations. When all the pandanus fruit had been gathered and turned into preserve, however, there was, in olden times, a great harvest festival at which the people danced and sang songs about the pandanus. Where this festival was held my informant did not know since none had taken place during his lifetime, but it seems probable that the dancers and singers went round the island performing at each place they came to, for such touring parties seem to have been characteristic of old Nauruan life.

Fishing was predominantly the work of men ; indeed women were definitely debarred from taking any part in it. They might catch shellfish on the reef, but they were forbidden to have anything to do with sea fishing. Even to-day, although public opinion on this matter has so far changed that groups of women or of men and women together are often seen fishing with rod and line from the edge of the reef at low tide, there is still a strong prejudice against their going out to fish from canoes, and indeed I never saw a woman in a canoe.

The ways in which fish were (and still are) caught are too numerous to be detailed here, but some of the more important may be mentioned. Sometimes two men go out together in a canoe and work with hook and line, or if they wish to catch shark and barracoota, with a noose and floating bait. On their return it is customary for them to exchange their catch (irrespective of whether one of them has caught more than the other) and if the canoe has been borrowed, to give some fish to its owner in recognition of his kindness in making the loan. There is no tabu against a man eating fish which he has himself caught, but the exchange is an approved way whereby the two men express their mutual friendship. Often a man goes fishing by himself, with rod and line from the edge of the reef or from a canoe, or taking his fish-spear dives for his catch in the deep water just beyond the reef. In olden days magic was performed over a

boy to make him skilled in the last method of fishing, and to protect him while he was in the water against the attacks of sharks and other dangerous marine creatures. Once a man had been thus charmed the fish which he obtained with his spear were tabu to all women save his wife and daughter ; even his mother or sister might not eat of them lest he should die.

To-day there is not much co-operative fishing carried on, but formerly one important method of getting fish, now obsolete, was by means of a large seine net (*iw*). This net was loaded onto two canoes and so carried for some little distance out to sea. The canoes then separated, moving parallel to the shore, and the net was payed out between them for the whole of its length. Thereupon most of the men jumped into the sea and, taking hold of the net, worked their way towards the beach, the canoes moving in the same direction at the same pace, until by this means all the fish within the enclosed area had been trapped. Unfortunately I could learn nothing of the principles upon which the catch from such a communal enterprise was divided, nor of the structure of the co-operating group. The catching of flying-fish at night, by means of torches and hand-nets, was also often a co-operative affair, in that usually a fleet of from twelve to fourteen canoes would go out together, but in this case each canoe worked as a separate unit and the catch of each was divided among the men who were in it. (There were usually three of these : one at the prow and one at the stern with hand-nets, and one amidships who held the torches.)

In olden days too, very large fish-traps were built and set in the passages (*ega*) in the reef. There was a distinct fish-trap season for each part of the island, which was determined primarily by the prevailing wind conditions ; thus the people of the southern coast set their traps from, approximately, February to April ; those of the west coast from about May to July ; those of the north coast from August to October, and those of the east from November to January. The *ega* were privately owned ; so also were the fish-traps, and it was not everyone who had the right to possess and use one. Trap-fishing was hedged about with a number of tabus. On the night before the first setting of the traps, the owner had to abstain from sexual intercourse, and whenever he used his trap he could not

wash in fresh water. All fish caught in these traps had to be eaten on the beach and no portion of them might be taken home; this meant that no women ever tasted the catch, for the presence of women on the beach where the fishing was going on was rigorously tabued. The catch from these traps was usually very large, and it was customary for every man who was setting one to send invitations to his male relatives and friends throughout the island asking them to come and eat his fish and to bring with them any friends they pleased. In this way, so long as the traps were being used in a certain place, probably for several days, practically all the male population of the island gathered there and ate daily. It must be noted, however, that the invitations were not from one district to the men of the other districts, but were from individuals to individuals. This trap-fishing was intimately associated with the cult of Bagewa, god of marine creatures, and had too a certain ethical aspect.<sup>33</sup> I was told that in Waboe, the leading man of the district used to announce the day on which the fish-traps would first be set down, and that all those who had the right to do so brought their traps down to the beach on that day, and brought also offerings of food which were presented to Bagewa through the mediation of his priest. The latter warned them that they must "work with open hearts" ("*renim eo ewewin buriorura*") for malice and sin would be revealed through the creatures which Bagewa would put into their traps. Later, when the traps were pulled up, if one contained queer sea-creatures instead of fish these in their different ways symbolized secret sins of omission or commission on the part of the owner—often niggardliness in his offerings to Bagewa. He was mocked by the people and deeply shamed, and his trap was henceforth useless.

The fish which play the most important part in Nauruan life are those called *ibija* (*Chanos chanos*) which the people rear in the brackish lagoons inland. It is not only that in good seasons a large supply of these fish can be procured with relatively little labour, but that the people have an emotional attitude towards them which

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<sup>33</sup> Since Bagewa himself was introduced to Nauru from the Gilbert Islands, it is very possible that this method of fishing also came thence.

distinguishes them from the ordinary sea and reef fish. This is still noticeable to-day ; although a Nauruan fisherman usually sells the major portion of his sea-catch to the Chinese labourers and Europeans, it is, I believe unknown, for a man or woman to sell *ibija*, though, as I have reason to know, they are most generous in giving them away to their European friends.

The large inland lagoon of Buada and the two less extensive ones in Ijuw have already been mentioned. Those in Ijuw are subdivided into two or three smaller ponds by means of boundaries built of coral boulders ; in Buada, where rock is not so easily obtained, ridges of piled coconut leaves have been constructed to form boundary fences.<sup>34</sup> (Plate IVA.) Each of these ponds is owned by one or several people (usually members of the same family or of the same *amenubwien*) and in addition there may be a caretaker (*amen rana*) whose duty it is to look after the boundaries, and generally to see to the stocking and preserving of the pond, and who in return, has certain important rights over the fish.<sup>35</sup> During the month of March and early April anyone who owns or has an interest in an *ibija* pond gathers together a few friends or goes alone to the reef when the tide is out, and, walking about quietly in the shallow pools near the shore, seeks for the tiny *ibija* larvæ. These are about a quarter of an inch in length, and look transparent save for what appear to be two large eyes. It is by no means easy to see them in the water and for this reason the fisherman carries in his hand a light wand with which he gently disturbs the surface of the water so that the larvæ may be made to show themselves in moving. He also carries a small vessel containing coconut oil which he sprinkles over the water when it becomes too much ruffled. As soon as he perceives some of the larvæ he stoops swiftly and scoops them up in a flat oval tray (made from the fibrous part of a coconut leaf spathe) and thence transfers them with a coconut shell spoon to a coconut shell containing water, which for convenience he carries hanging

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<sup>34</sup> These are much less satisfactory than the rock boundaries, for they are liable to be washed away when the rains are heavy and the lagoon rises ; and moreover, in rotting, they form a deposit which is making the lagoon ever more and more shallow.

<sup>35</sup> The complex rules concerning the ownership and use of *ibija* ponds is discussed below, pp. 18, 21.

from his mouth. When he has got sufficient larvæ for the time being, or when the rising tide forces him to stop, he goes home and transfers his catch to a conch shell which is usually kept hanging up in the shade outside the house. The water put into such a shell is, I understand, sea-water, but as it evaporates it is replenished with fresh-water, with the result that it becomes daily less saline. The small fish grow rapidly and after about a fortnight or three weeks, when they are perhaps half an inch long, they are transferred to one of the small "nursery" ponds. These "nurseries" are pools or small ponds of brackish water which are found in many places in the coconut belt and it seems that one or more of them "belong" to every big pond or section of the Buada lagoon. The small *ibija* are now more or less ignored for some two or three months, except that they may be fed on a little grated coconut. At the end of this time they are moved into the large ponds and here they remain for a year or eighteen months, when they are deemed ready for catching.<sup>36</sup> If, as is usual, other people help the owner of the pond to catch larvæ, the number which each one contributes is noted, and when the time comes to net the adult fish, these people are invited to share in the labour of catching and in its proceeds. Other people also, who do not own or have no share in an *ibija* pond, may catch the larvæ and ask the owner of a pond to put them into it for them, and if this is done they too will have a right to enjoy some of the fish from the first catch. The day for this is determined by the owner or caretaker of the pond, and he invites to it all those who helped him to collect the larvæ. The fishing is done by means of a drag net, and the fish are divided equally among all those who have been invited (not, as might be supposed, in proportion to the number of larvæ that each contributed). Strangers and other uninvited persons could also, on this occasion, join in the fishing, but they would take only a few fish for themselves. Before the people go home, the owner cooks and eats one of the newly caught fish, and after this anyone may partake of them. But if anyone other than the owner of the pond were to eat this first fish then this presumptuous person

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<sup>36</sup> The *ibija* which I saw were about fifteen inches long, but I was told that often they were left to grow almost twice this size, and that in olden days they might be left in the ponds for as long as five years.

would—according to different informants—go mad, or suffer from a serious sickness through a fish-bone sticking in his throat, or at least suffer from the laughter of the other people at his expense. (*Ibija* contain a large number of very fine bones and are in this respect even more difficult to eat than herring.) After this first dragging of the pond the owner has fulfilled his obligations to those who helped him to stock it and may now fish in it as he pleases.

Generosity with food is a characteristic of the Nauruans as it is of most Pacific Island peoples. Formerly, if a man were walking along a path, carrying coconuts or fish or other kinds of food, he would feel himself obliged to give away perhaps the major part of it should he be asked for some. To be reproved in public for meanness was taken very seriously to heart and from an early age children were taught to give. It was recognized, moreover, that if anyone were walking along a path and desired a drink or other refreshment he was at liberty to help himself without asking leave to a coconut or pandanus fruit and on visiting a house where fish were being cooked he could take some and eat it there without invitation. On certain occasions, too, the appropriation of food by strangers might be done on a large scale. When a fisherman lands from his canoe on the beach, anyone has the right to take some of the catch. Actually this privilege does not seem to be exercised when the catch is small, but if the catch has been large, as it usually is when the men have been out after flying-fish, bonito or yellow-tail, then some of it, occasionally even all of it, was commonly appropriated by others. To do this is termed in Nauruan *pwiwbi*. The most suitable person to *pwiwbi* is a "stranger"—that is one who is unrelated to the fisherman, and from whom therefore he cannot look for any return, but it is recognized that no one should *pwiwbi* the same man twice within one week. If the men have the whole of their catch taken in this manner and are therefore unable to give a share of it to those who had a claim thereto—as for instance the owner of the canoe which they borrowed, and (if they have been after flying-fish) the woman who made the torches for them—these latter will show no resentment, but will forego their share and treat the matter as a joke.

It is not only in food that the Nauruans are generous ; they will not refuse anyone who asks for a gift. In particular if the request is made through the child of the owner of the coveted object it cannot be withheld, for, so it was explained to me, parents will not deny what their children ask of them, whether it is for the children themselves or for another.

Formal gift-exchange does not seem ever to have been as important in Nauru as it is in some other parts of the Pacific, but there are two customs—*itubo* and *epaba*—by which people can take some one else's goods. On the birth of a child, particularly of a first child or of a first daughter, if the parents are people of any importance, men and women, their friends and relatives as well as "strangers," come to the father's house and loot any property which they desire. Even trees and land can be taken on such an occasion—the latter by calling out its name—and it is said that in olden days, if the father were a *temonibe*, his *itsio* could also be carried off. The greater the number of people who come to *epaba* in this way, the greater the compliment to the parents of the new-born child ; but at the same time, though pleased with these attentions, they take care beforehand to hide their most valuable possessions (such as the precious shell-money) so that the visitors cannot *epaba* them.<sup>37</sup> The loss of property which a man suffered through this custom was not, I was told, very serious since he could at a later date *epaba* those who had honoured him thus ; even then, however, it would be a disgrace were he to take back anything which had previously been taken from him. It was explained to me that *epaba* signified really to break a tabu and that the custom marked the close of the observance of tabus on all important occasions, such as birth, first menstruation, the seclusion of boys and the frigate-bird contests. As performed after birth the *epaba* was really a declaration of the fact that, since the child was safely born, the tabus associated with pregnancy and delivery were no longer necessary ; my informant summed it up by saying that it is a public demonstration of the return to normal life.

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<sup>37</sup> I understand that the Administration has now made the custom of *epaba* illegal.

The distinction between *itubo* and *epaba* is not very clear, and I believe that to-day the two words are sometimes used synonymously. The difference lies, I think, in this: that *itubo* implies that someone makes a formal request to the father of the child whose birth is being celebrated, and that later the father makes a formal request for a return gift. The request is not made directly but through a third party. Formerly a number of people would come to the father's house singing: "X— is behind us and he asks you to give him such-and-such." (Actually the person on whose behalf the gift was being asked was never present.) The gift would then be made and the visitors would go home. Within a few days the father would send a group of his friends to the house of the man from whom the erstwhile visitors had come, and they would say: "X— *ijor ataron*." ("X— has stepped into the noose.") The metaphor is from the method used for catching barracoota. The *ataron* is a noose of fine cord; from the stern of the canoe floats a lure which attracts the fish; in front of this hangs the noose and in front of this again floats the bait. As the fish snaps at the bait the noose is manipulated so that it slips over the victim's head and is drawn taut. The man for whom the people came to *itubo* the father is the barracoota; the gift for which he asked is the bait; and the father has thereby caught him in that he has now the right to demand a return gift. This return gift cannot be refused. There is no necessary equivalence between the value of the property thus exchanged; it is the exchange of the gifts which is important, and however much he treasured them the father would never ask for his own goods to be returned to him. For him to fail to ask for any return gift would be taken ill by the person who asked for the initial one, for it would imply that the father was displeased with him. I was told that the *itubo* custom is a sign of rejoicing, particularly on the part of the father in honour of whose child it is being done; it is an expression of his willingness to part with anything in his joy that the infant is safely delivered and that all is well with it and with its mother.<sup>38</sup> I was further assured that people did not use the *itubo* custom for the purpose of acquiring some valuable property

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<sup>38</sup> Should the mother suffer a miscarriage or she or the infant die, there would be no *itubo* or *epaba*.

which they coveted and that anyone who did so would be greatly shamed.

*Ownership of Land and Goods.*

Early training in the practice of giving generously, and such customs as *itubo* and *epaba* have as their complement the recognition of strongly individual ownership of property. Indeed it may be said that it is this very individual ownership which gives significance to the customs which have just been described.

It has already been mentioned that among the Nauruans the clan is not a land-owning unit, neither is the hamlet, nor the lineage, but the individual. There are three main types of landed property : homestead sites (*etan in mek*), coconut land (*eben in ini*), and pandanus land (*eben in epoa*), but every tract of country, even the waste land (*mara*) in the interior, has its owner and its individual name. Formerly, so I was told, low boundary walls of stones separated one block of land from the next; in the coconut belt these have all gone, but inland they are still visible in many places, though they are usually in disrepair. Although people own blocks of land in many different parts of the island, every man and woman knows the boundaries of his or her properties and of those of the neighbouring land-owners. Almost as important as the coconut and pandanus lands (and to-day as fruitful a source of litigation) are the *ibija* ponds, which are also owned by individuals though very often by two or three who are related.

I have emphasized that in Nauru there is individual ownership of land and not only individual rights of tenure or usufruct ; that the owner can dispose of it by gift, sale or bequest to whomsoever he chooses. Nevertheless his rights may be to some extent restricted by the rights of the " caretaker " of the land. Often, but by no means always, one person will claim to be the owner of a block of land and another will claim to be the " caretaker." The position of the latter is not clear, but it seems that he or she has the responsibility of looking after the land—cleaning it, keeping the boundary walls in repair, and tending the trees—and in return has the right to collect and use the fruits from it. The office of " caretaker " appears to be, at least to some extent, hereditary, and it is

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possible that it derives from olden days when a wealthy man settled a poor dependant upon a block of land and gave him the usufruct thereof. Similarly the owner of an *ibija* pond often has a caretaker for it, but, as we have seen, although the latter seems to have more to do with the pond and its produce than the owner (according to one informant the owner should not even collect fish from it without first informing the caretaker) the position of the latter is acknowledged in that it is always he and not the caretaker who eats the first fish of the season's catch. Furthermore the owner of a pond may also have to share its produce with someone to whom the previous owner has granted a life-interest in it.

In the same way the owner of coconut or pandanus lands may not be the master of the trees which grow upon them. It is a common feature of land tenure in the Pacific that men may own trees on land belonging to another. In Nauru this comes in two ways: the present or past owner may have given certain trees away—as a return for some gift or favour or as a spontaneous gift to a friend—or the trees may be those which he has given another person leave to plant on his land, and which the planter has given or bequeathed to others. It seems, however, that a landowner will not give any person who asks him leave to plant, and that to-day it is rather that certain people have, through inheritance, the right to plant a limited number of trees on certain blocks of land. Before death a man or woman can leave land with the proviso that certain persons (usually *amenubwien* of the heir) shall have the right to plant a specified number of trees on it. These people and their heirs then own these trees absolutely, and should any of the trees die they have the right to plant others to replace them<sup>39</sup>; but, except by special arrangement with the landowner, they may not plant any more. If the planter or inheritor of the trees does not specify to whom they are to pass on his or her death, they then become the property of the owner of the land. There are certain marks, such as crosses, chevrons,

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<sup>39</sup> The trees in the coconut belt are very numerous, and in order to improve their quality it has been deemed necessary by the Administration to thin them out. If any trees which have been cut down by order of the Administration are the property of people who have inherited them in the manner described above, their owners have not got the right to replace them by planting others, nor does the owner of the land on which they were growing make any compensation for them.

etc., which can be cut upon coconut trees to denote who owns them, but it seems that not every individual has a distinctive mark. I was told that the marks had been handed down from the ancestors and were "shared equally" by their descendants.

Although the possession of coconut and pandanus trees is jealously guarded, and bitter disputes often arise concerning them, the owner of such trees would always give his permission if someone asked leave to take the fruit from them, unless indeed there were special reasons for his not doing so. Nauruan custom also permits anyone to procure leaves from the coconut or pandanus trees of another, provided that he tell the owner afterwards that he has done so. (These leaves may only be taken direct from the trees; to take those which have fallen or been cut and gathered into heaps ready for use would be regarded as theft.) Trees, other than coconuts, pandanus and introduced fruit trees, are not regarded as belonging to anyone, wherever they may be growing. Even "tomano" trees, whose timber is so valuable for house and canoe-building, may be cut on land belonging to another person without permission and without any compensation being made for them.

In addition to the *ibija* ponds and the three forms of landed property mentioned above, different parts of the reef and foreshore were owned individually, as were also the passages through the reef which were economically important for purposes of trap-fishing, and certain pools in groups of coral pinnacles (*ieye*) which are found on some parts of the reef and are valuable as fishing places.

In pre-European days the most important goods and chattels which Nauruans possessed were their tools and "shell-money." At that time every family had its *ebwerenbitoebe*, or basket of valuables in which were kept the precious pink shell discs (*eya*), the long, ridged, orange coloured shells (*ikibur*) for which men dived outside the reef, the teeth of sharks of many kinds (*imwin bawo*, *imwin eimer*, *imwin mwijeb*) and the (?) whales' teeth (*idagua*), all of which served both for ornament and as symbols of wealth. A man had also his canoe, fishing gear and weapons of war. There were, too certain "incorporeal" possessions, such as songs, legends and dances, which were individually owned and which the people valued highly. The most important of these possessions were perhaps

those which are known as *kirire*. There is no single word in English by which this one can be translated but in general it signifies special ornaments—necklaces, anklets, armbands, etc., of which the more important component parts are valuable shells, sharks' teeth and frigate-bird feathers—special costumes or types of body decoration, and special ornamental designs which are worked in the mats and other objects made from plaited pandanus which the people use both in their daily and ritual life, all of which have been handed down from generation to generation. Some of the ornamental *kirire* are associated with distinctive rituals, and these too are classed as *kirire*. I was never able fully to understand the system of *kirire* but it seems clear that their possession was closely bound up with a person's prestige, and that to own a large number of them was indicative of high social status. Furthermore, some of them appear to have been commemorative of great achievements of the owner's forebears. The more elaborate ornaments were not worn except on festal occasions and to-day they are very seldom seen. Even the *kirire* designs on mats are rare now, and many of the women have forgotten how to work them. Like other possessions, *kirire* were given away, particularly on certain ritual occasions, such as birth, first menstruation, etc., and I was told that formerly disputes as to the ownership of a design or ornament were frequent and bitter.

#### *Inheritance of Property.*

To understand the principles which regulate the inheritance of property, two things must be borne in mind: daughters are very highly honoured by their parents, and sisters by their brothers, because it is they who will "take the place" of their parents when the latter are dead and will continue the clan; on the other hand women may have nothing to do with the sea or with fishing.

If a widower dies all his goods and chattels, save those which have to do with specifically male occupations, go to his daughters, the eldest receiving the lion's share.<sup>40</sup> Canoes, fishing tackle and weapons go to the sons of whom again the eldest gets the largest

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<sup>40</sup> If the dead man had been a polygynist and left behind him daughters by both his wives then the eldest daughter of each family would get the major portion of the estate; in this respect the children of each wife are treated as distinct families.

portion, while his frigate-birds and all things associated with them are held jointly by the sons, the eldest having authority over them. As regards his land, it is usual for the homestead land to pass to the daughters (though a man may get his sister's permission to live on it), and coconut and pandanus lands, as well as the trees thereon, and *ibija* ponds generally go to all the children and are held by them jointly, unless the man is poor in which case they will pass to his eldest daughter who is then under an obligation to give some of them to her brothers and sisters. Property on the beach and reef also normally went to the eldest daughter but her control of it was confined to the right to impose a tabu if she did not wish people to fish from it ; otherwise her brothers were free to use it when they would. If a widower should be survived only by sons then the property will all go to them, the eldest son enjoying the priority which is normally accorded to an eldest daughter.

It sometimes happened that a man deserted his wife, leaving his children with her, and married a second woman by whom he had offspring. Then he usually left all his land to the members of his second family, but he might make up the quarrel with his first wife, and thus have two wives living in different places, in which case the land would probably be divided equally between the two families.

Should a man leave behind him a widow as well as children, the distribution of the property is the same, but during his widow's life-time or until she remarries she has authority over it. If she dies or takes another husband before her children by the dead man are grown-up, his brothers safeguard the children's interests in their father's property, prevent the widow from appropriating it, and act as their trustees and guardians. The property of a man who is survived only by his widow goes to her absolutely, and unless he has given instructions that she shall have only a life interest in it, she can give or bequeathe it to whomsoever she wishes. Thus, if she marries again she can even leave it to the children or relatives of her second husband. In the event of a man being survived by neither widow nor children, such of his property as would have been inherited by his daughters goes to his sisters or their daughters ; what would have been inherited by his sons goes to his brothers or his brothers' sons. His sister's sons get none of his property unless

he has no sister's daughters or no brother's sons, in which case they have a claim to what these relatives would have received. But if a man dies and he has no near relatives to inherit from him, his property passes to someone "related to his sister," and this might be his sister's husband or some kinsman of his. It sometimes happens that a man survives one or more of his children, who have died leaving issue. Then when he dies the grandchildren will inherit the share which would have gone to their parents. Thus, if the eldest daughter be dead her children will between them share the bulk of the estate (which would normally have been hers) and the largest proportion of it will go to her eldest daughter. If the eldest daughter leaves only sons, these will still receive what would have been their mother's estate, and will not be passed over on account of their sex in favour of their mother's younger sister.

When a woman marries she retains all her rights to the property—lands, ponds, trees, goods and chattels—which she has been given or has inherited, and to this and any other property which she may acquire, her husband has no claims, unless, as is not uncommon, she gives him some of it. A woman may therefore be quite independent economically of her husband, and if he dies, or if there is a divorce, she still has complete control of her own wealth. On her death it is inherited primarily by her daughters, the bulk of it by her eldest daughter, though some of it may be held jointly by all of them. Even then, however, it is the eldest daughter who has most authority. The only exception to this rule seems to be if a woman has an illegitimate child as well as children born in wedlock. It is generally assumed in Nauru that a woman loves the former better than the latter, and that, whether boy or girl, it will get all her property at her death to the exclusion of her legitimate offspring. This is usually a satisfactory arrangement, for the legitimate children will in the course of time inherit from their father, whereas a bastard can only look to its mother. I was told, however, that if the husband were a "good man" he would probably give his wife's illegitimate child some property, either during his lifetime or by bequest. If a woman is survived only by her husband, all her property goes to him absolutely, subject to any conditions which she may have laid down.

Parents have the right to disinherit their children if the latter flout their authority or are unfilial in their conduct. Public opinion forbade that an eldest daughter should be wholly deprived of her inheritance, but a man could disinherit his sons absolutely and leave the property which would have been theirs to his sister's children and some of it he might even bequeathe to people who were not kin to him.

Adoption was probably never common in Nauru, but sometimes a person who desired and had no children did adopt one, and sometimes even a married couple who had a family would adopt. Adopted children did not lose touch with their true parents; nevertheless they became fully recognized members of the families which had taken them, and they seem even to have held a privileged position therein. I was told that it was against Nauruan custom for real and adoptive siblings to show any jealousy of, or antagonism towards each other, and that on the death of the parents the adopted children inherited on the same footing as the true children. Furthermore, if a man or woman adopted the child of very poor or landless people it was usual for the adopting parent to give it some land which it would then give to its real parents.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand if an adopted child had inherited, or was likely to inherit, little from its adopting parents, its true parents would, if they were able, bequeathe land to it.

If a parent has left land or a pond jointly to his or her children this is also held jointly by their children, even if some of them are living in other parts of the island. It may, however, be divided up among the descendants of the third generation. Generally the eldest sister has the greatest authority over land held thus in common between siblings, but I was told that if a person had a joint right to some coconut or pandanus land he or she might cut down trees and establish a homestead there without having first to obtain the consent of the other joint owners.

Children do not have to await the death of one of their parents before receiving land and other goods from them. They may be given some trees while they are still quite young, and often they

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<sup>41</sup> There is no reason to suppose that this gift was in any sense compensation given to the parents in return for their child; it was a free optional gift.

receive some land when they marry. This is particularly common if a daughter marries a man who has little land of his own. Such gifts made during the parent's lifetime do not affect the rights of inheritance: if an eldest daughter has been given land by her father when he was alive, she still gets the bulk of the estate after his death; and unmarried sons and daughters who have received no portion during their parents' lifetime do not on this account get any greater share of the inheritance than they would otherwise have done.

It must not be supposed that the rules concerning the inheritance of property which have been outlined above were rigid. In olden days, as at the present time, a Nauruan had the right to declare before witnesses (usually members of his *amenubwien*) how he wished his property to be distributed after his death. But it would be unusual for anyone so far to defy public opinion as to depart very greatly in his testamentary dispositions from the customary rules of inheritance, and if he or she did do so, it would almost certainly lead to disputes between those who had been named as heirs and those who considered that they had a rightful claim to the property.

Generally among those Oceanic peoples who have a matrilineal clan organization, the inheritance of property, particularly of landed property and of heirlooms (such as the Nauruan *kirive*), is also matrilineal, passing from a man to his sister's son. The inheritance rules of Nauru are therefore especially interesting for the compromise which they show between the matrilineal and patrilineal principles. Whether at some former time the matrilineal principle was dominant, and property was held by the matrilineal clan or lineage, and then became gradually modified by a growing emphasis on the paternal side of the family, which resulted in the breakdown of the clan as an ownership group and the rise of individual ownership, we cannot now tell. I believe it to be certain, however, that the compromise which now exists between the two principles is not a recent development—is not the result of contact with patrilineal Europeans—but was a feature of the old Nauruan social organization.

*Ritual and Æsthetic Life.*

It is more difficult to get reliable and adequate information to-day about the ritual life of old Nauru, than about almost any other aspect of the native culture. This is partly because the old ceremonies have not been performed for many years; partly because an informant when giving an account of them tends to describe the ceremonies as he or she remembers them on certain specific occasions and cannot give a general account of the normal procedure; and partly because many of the rites—particularly those connected with the social and physical growth of the individual—varied greatly on account of the different *kirire* which were owned by the central figure and his or her relatives, and I found it almost impossible to disentangle from a purely verbal account what rites were essential parts of the ceremony and what were merely *kirire*. In this report therefore I shall not attempt to describe them. For similar reasons I was unable to gain anything but a very superficial knowledge of the religion, myths and general esoteric lore. One or two of the altar-stones to the war god Taburig can still be found—and even he was not a true Nauruan god but had come from the Gilbert Islands; some of the hero-legends have been preserved and written down, but the more sacred myths (as well as some of the stories) and other things of esoteric importance, have either been forgotten, or are the jealously-guarded property of certain individuals. Some of the old and elderly people do still know the old songs and prayer formulæ, but the contemptuous attitude of the young towards these things of the past, has made those who know unwilling to display their knowledge before any but people of whose sympathetic understanding they are assured. Finally, to gain any insight into the spiritual life of a people it is essential to have a knowledge of their language.

*Transition Rites.*

To-day the Nauruan transition rites associated with birth, puberty, marriage and death have been almost wholly abandoned, though certain features which are considered to be not inconsistent with Christianity are sometimes retained.

When, for the first time a woman knew that she was pregnant she told her mother and from the third month onwards she wore a special mat, abstained from all heavy work and observed certain food tabus in order to safeguard the unborn child and to ensure that it should be beautiful. Her husband also observed similar restrictions in his work and diet and abstained from cutting his hair ; and from this time until the infant could walk, all sexual intercourse between him and his wife was suspended. Throughout her pregnancy the expectant mother was cared for by her own mother and female kinsfolk and she received frequent visits from her husband's mother and relatives who brought with them gifts of food and mats. During these months she might live at her husband's homestead or at her own, but if possible she was always with her own parents for the delivery. This took place outside the dwelling-house, in the open, a new mat having been placed on the ground for the occasion. Usually the near relatives of the wife and husband were present—men, women and children—only the husband himself kept away, and he too might come if his wife called out for him. If labour was difficult a professional midwife, either a man or a woman, was summoned, and boxes and other closed objects inside the houses were opened in harmony with the desire that the woman's womb should open.<sup>42</sup> Once the child had safely arrived, the umbilical cord was cut with a shell or shark's-tooth knife and the after-birth, which the people feared as possibly maleficent to the mother, was burnt. The mother was given some sea-water to drink, "to clean her inside," and a little was also given to the infant. Then she washed herself in the sea, entered the maternity hut<sup>43</sup> and was anointed. Here she stayed for some days. Presents of fine mats and petticoats, and of a special coconut-shell spoon for the infant

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<sup>42</sup> In the Gilbert Islands if delivery is slow, the people not only unfasten all bags, boxes, etc., but also undo the girdle of their leaf petticoats ; the Nauruans, however, do not go to such lengths.

<sup>43</sup> The informants who told me about the birth-rites gave conflicting evidence ; according to one the infant was actually born in a special hut ; according to another the birth was in the open but mother and child remained in a special hut for a few days afterwards ; from a third I gathered that no special hut was erected, and that after the birth the mother and infant stayed in the ordinary dwelling hut. Very possibly all three statements were correct ; the custom varying according to the rank and wealth of the parents.

were made by the *amenubwien* of both the parents, and for the first three or four days after the birth many women, not necessarily those who were kin, came to feed the baby with very weak *edono* and coconut milk. For this they received gifts, sometimes valuable gifts of trees and lands. If the mother had no milk another woman took the child and might even adopt it permanently. For three or four months the mother was still allowed to do no heavy work and for upwards of three years she was prohibited from eating deep-sea fish caught from a canoe. Her husband resumed his normal life after the birth, save that he could not have sexual intercourse with his wife.

The most spectacular customs connected with birth were the boxing contests between the male friends and *amenubwien* of the young father and mother; and the *epaba* of the parents' goods by friends, relatives and even strangers. The custom of *epaba* has already been described and nothing further need be said about it here. The boxing contests take place only if the parents are of *temonibe* or of *amenejame* rank. They are not, as might be supposed, a match between the mother's kin and the father's kin, but wholly individual contests, each man fighting whomsoever he chooses or happens upon. I was told that the idea at the back of the fight was that the men should make each other suffer out of sympathy with what the woman had suffered. This formal recognition of the pain which women have to endure in labour is found also in the proverb *ogoda wan an aru* (meaning "the place where she has to cast her fish line is very far out") which signifies that a woman's life is one of greater hardship and danger than is that of a man. This is also associated with the myth that in olden days babies were never born naturally but had to be cut from the mother's womb, until the culture hero Deragae came to Nauru and taught the people, among other things, how babies could and should be delivered. Because of the tradition that once the cost of a new life was always the death of its mother, and because even now a woman endangers her life when she gives birth, she is released from all tabus (save that on sexual union) and is allowed to do what she wishes for two or three weeks before her confinement.

There is no special naming ceremony, but during the first three or four days after the birth men and women who are *amenubwien* of the parents come, if they wish to do so, and give a name to the infant, usually one belonging to an ancestor.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes people who are not kin to the infant also give it a name, and for them to do so is regarded as an honour to the parents.

The first cutting of the hair, the cutting and loss of the first teeth, and other such stages in the baby's growth are not marked by any ritual except for those who are of *temonibe* status. The next important transition rites after those of birth are the ones which take place on the occasion of a girl's first menstruation; and, for a boy when at about the beginning of adolescence he goes into seclusion for special training.

Formerly, when a girl's breasts first began to develop, her female *amenubwien* started to make mats and to prepare coconut oil in expectation of her first menstruation ceremony. Later a hut was built for her, a little removed from the dwelling houses, and in this the mats were arranged. Here the girl stayed for from ten to fourteen days, accompanied by her young female relatives. These might leave the hut during the day-time to visit their homes, but they always spent the night with the girl. They did not cook for her—indeed they were not permitted to touch her food or anything belonging to her—but every day they made garlands for her to wear. While she was in the hut the girl observed a number of food tabus; older women prepared all her meals, did the work necessary about the hut, and in general supervised her conduct. Every day she was washed, oiled and censed, and she received visits from her kinswomen who brought her new mats and also food. This latter was not given to the girl but was redistributed among her visitors: that brought by the *amenubwien* on her father's side being given to the *amenubwien* on her mother's side and vice versa.

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<sup>44</sup> The names of near *amenubwien* who have died should never be spoken by or in the presence of their relatives, and could therefore not be given to an infant. This tabu is observed in theory at least for three generations. Furthermore no two people should have the same name, since no one likes to speak his or her own name in addressing another person or in referring to himself. To-day the name which is recorded in the birth certificate and in the census is usually that given by the paternal grandfather or his substitute.

During her seclusion the girl did not receive any special instruction, but the old women who knew about such things recited tales to her and taught her songs. On the day when she was to leave the hut, she was washed and oiled as usual, adorned with necklaces, bracelets and armlets and a special breast ornament and dressed in the petticoats of an adult woman. Thus attired she went forth with her maids-in-waiting and walked about the village. There was no special feast to mark the end of her seclusion, but for a week, whenever she left her parents' homestead, she wore all her ornaments. This is a brief summary of the rites as they were performed for a girl of commoner rank. For a *temonibe* the ceremonies were very much more elaborate and were made very much more public: on every day of her seclusion the girl was seated in a specially constructed chair, and followed by a crowd of people singing, she was carried to the homesteads of her relatives from whom she received valuable gifts. One interesting feature of the first menstruation rites of a *temonibe* was the special dance between two parties of women (the grouping had apparently no relation to any kinship or social filiations) and in which men also used sometimes to join. Judged by present-day Nauruan standards the dance was indecent, but its significance lay in this, that it was in a sense a war-dance, reminiscent, so I was told, of the fight between the mythological heroes Araimin and Abonoque, the flow of menstrual blood being, symbolically, the female equivalent for the shedding of blood by men in battle.<sup>45</sup>

I was assured that there were no puberty ceremonies for boys, and this agrees with Hambruch's evidence.<sup>46</sup> It seems, however, that when a man of some importance or wealth had a son of about fourteen years old he might arrange for this lad to go into seclusion with others of approximately the same age and there receive from specialists instruction and training in sports. The specialists were always related to one or more of the boys and were of the same

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<sup>45</sup> There is not space here to describe the first menstruation rites in any greater detail. Hambruch (*op. cit.* pp. 220-237) gives a very long account of those of a *temonibe*. Unfortunately he does not make it quite clear what are the essential features of the rites and what are privately owned *kirire* rites.

<sup>46</sup> Hambruch, *op. cit.* p. 239.

district as the man at whose instigation the seclusion was being organized. A house was built, not necessarily removed from the dwelling-houses, and inside this a smaller mat-walled enclosure was set up within which the boys remained for a period of three or four weeks at a time. They were not subjected to any special hardships, save such as were inevitable in such a confinement, and in the observance of a number of food tabus. The specialists visited the hut daily, and sitting outside the enclosure gave the lads verbal instruction in the science of wrestling, boxing and other sports, as well as in fighting. One or two old men were in charge of the seclusion hut and its inmates, and, as one of their duties, they censored all the food which was brought for the boys and divided it out among them. Within the enclosure differences of rank and wealth were ignored and the lads shared alike in all things. This training was usually continued for several years, but the seclusion was intermittent, each period lasting for about a month. In the intervals, of about two or three months, the boys practised, under the care of their tutors, what they had been taught in theory. There was apparently no specified time when the seclusion and training came to an end; the specialists signified when they considered that their charges were ready. A big feast was then given by the parents of the boys and to it were invited people from all over the island; the lads were displayed and valuable gifts of land and "shell-money" were made to the instructors and to the old men who had acted as supervisors. A competition was also arranged for wrestling, boxing and other matches between the newly-trained youths and those from other districts. Not every youth was expected to excel in these sports but the two or three who showed greatest promise usually continued their training (though they did not return to the seclusion hut) and often developed into champion fighters.<sup>47</sup> Other youths might specialize along other lines—as for instance deep-sea fishing, the catching of frigate-birds, or even magic—but it was the notable

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<sup>47</sup> There is not space here to give an account of the old method of warfare, which was originally introduced from the Gilbert Islands. It consisted primarily of Homeric combats between pairs of champions, each attired in cumbersome armour, and assisted by two "squires."

athletes and warriors who were most admired and in whose honour songs were composed.

Formerly, although a man was permitted to marry when he was about eighteen years old, it seems that he was not expected to settle down and work as the older men did. Instead the young men from the different districts used to go in bands about the island, led by some champion athlete, challenging others to compete against them. Talking with some of the older men and women I gained the impression, indeed, that in days gone by something interesting and exciting was always going on : athletic contests between young men ; dancing and singing displays by bands of young men or young women ; snipe-fighting contests ; kite flying ; the racing of toy canoes on the reef at high tide ; string-figure displays, accompanied by songs and dances, which lasted for two or three days ; story-telling competitions ; and, from about July to September, the semi-ritual contests in catching frigate-birds. Serious daily work was left for the most part to the middle-aged ; the young passed the bulk of their time in sport, love-making and fighting.<sup>48</sup>

The way in which marriage was celebrated in Nauru has already been described ; we pass now, therefore, to the last of the transition rites, those concerned with death. Unfortunately I could learn almost nothing about the old Nauruan funerary rites and only little of the beliefs about the spirits of the dead (*ani*). Various methods of disposal were practised. The corpses of very much beloved and highly honoured dead were kept in the attic of the house and preserved by being treated with coconut oil ; others were buried close beside the house and some, usually those of little account or those who had been killed in battle, were thrown over the edge of the reef into the sea. One man told me that those who had been killed in battle were treated thus because their spirits were believed to be specially dangerous ; I was also told of a noted warrior, mortally wounded in battle, who asked that his body should be given sea-burial lest his enemies should get hold of it and mutilate it. Cave-burial was usually considered ignominious and was given to *itsio* and other

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<sup>48</sup> There is not space here to describe these activities. Hambruch gives an account of the frigate-bird competitions (*op. cit.* pp. 281-291) and of the dancing, songs and sports (*op. cit.* pp. 313-343).

negligible people, but it is said that there was in Anibari a secret and very sacred cave wherein the honoured dead of this district were laid to rest. The spirits of the dead were believed to go to a land of the dead called Buitani, which resembles Nauru except that it is larger, and where the life is as it is on earth. Only those who had been guilty of marrying within the clan or with a prohibited relative were unable to get there. Such people were crushed between two rocks through which the pathway to Buitani led, and were then suspended by the heel, upside down (the position of "greatest shame"), from an hibiscus tree; later they entered into dragon flies. On the beach at the south end of Anibari Bay is a place where the coral cliff is pierced by a narrow passage; this is said to be the "representation" of the place on the road to Buitani where incestuous spirits were crushed.<sup>49</sup>

There does not seem to have been any general cult of the dead, but in so far as the frigate-bird was associated with Buitani, the frigate-bird cult may have had some connection with the *ani*. In moments of emergency the help and advice of the dead could be invoked through the aid of a medium. There is not space here to give an account of the magical and mediumistic practices of old Nauru, but it may be mentioned that the mediums seem to have worked primarily with the help of spirits (*ani*). Some of them kept in their houses one or two skulls of friends or relatives which acted as vehicles for the *ani* to whose bodies they had belonged in life, and it was believed that in their dreams the mediums could visit Buitani.

### *Conclusion.*

It has been necessary to write most of this report in the past tense because so much of the life of old Nauru has changed. Christianity has supplanted the old religious beliefs and practices and has so modified the ritual life that little is left of it. From a humanitarian point of view it cannot be doubted that the loss of

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<sup>49</sup> I was at first under the impression that this was supposed to be the very place itself, but later I was assured that this was not so, that it was only the earthly representation of it. This is perhaps borne out by the fact that none of the Nauruans show any respect or fear of the place, and that some years ago a hut was built on top of the rock as an observation post for fishermen.

REPORT ON RESEARCH WORK IN NAURU ISLAND, CENTRAL PACIFIC.  
PLATE IV.



*A. Part of Buada lagoon during a drought ; in the foreground is the dried-up bed of one of the smaller " ponds " (the mud encrusted with salt) and the " fence " of piled coconut leaves which separates it from the large central " pond."*

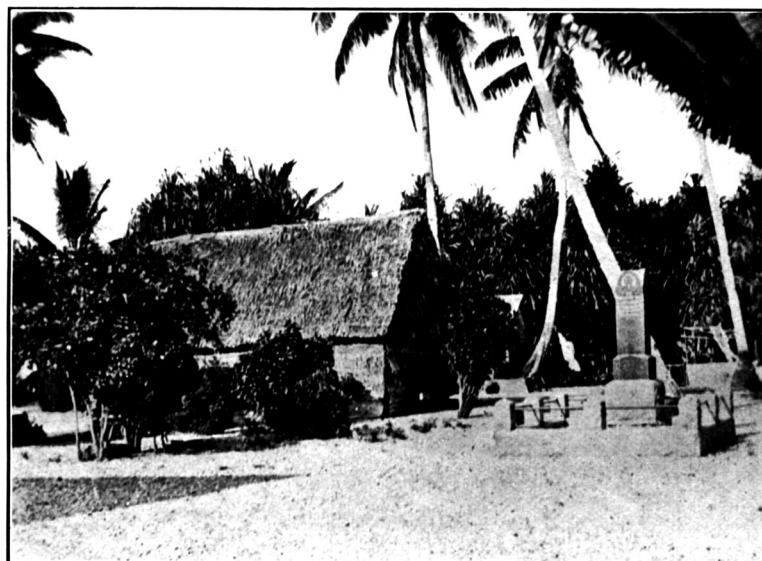


*B. A group of men catching ibija with a drag-net in the big lagoon in Anabar.*

REPORT ON RESEARCH WORK IN NAURU ISLAND, CENTRAL PACIFIC.  
PLATE V.



*A. A fisherman about to carry his canoe (built in the modern style of planks) over the reef to launch it in the sea. In one hand he holds a stick around which his deep-sea fishing lines are coiled ; in the bucket in the background are lumps of coraline rock to be used as sinkers. Fishermen often wear shirts as this one is doing to protect them from the sun.*



*B. An example of the rapid change from the old religion to Christianity ; beneath the bush to the left of the picture are two stones—fifty years ago altar stones to the god Taburig ; on the right is the Christian grave of Chief Auweida, who as a young man was instructed in the priestly rites of Taburig, and ended his life as a deacon in the Protestant church, by which time there were scarcely any non-Christians on the island.*

some of the old customs is an almost unmixed good, but it is greatly to be regretted that the changes have made life less full and interesting for the majority of the people. The gatherings each evening on the beach, when the youths and maidens sang and played games while their elders talked, are no more, and nothing has arisen to take their place satisfactorily; the big festivals for which men and women worked co-operatively and sociably are no longer held, and among many of the people in early and middle life I missed the sense of social responsibility, the vitality and the interest in all that is happening which were so noticeable among the uncivilized people of Manam, and which are I believe characteristic of peoples whose own culture is still vigorous. Nauru presents an interesting problem in applied anthropology: how to link the imported European culture with that which was native to Nauru, and to give to the resultant hybrid the vitality which belongs to each in its own environment.

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