

PAPUAN CHARMS.

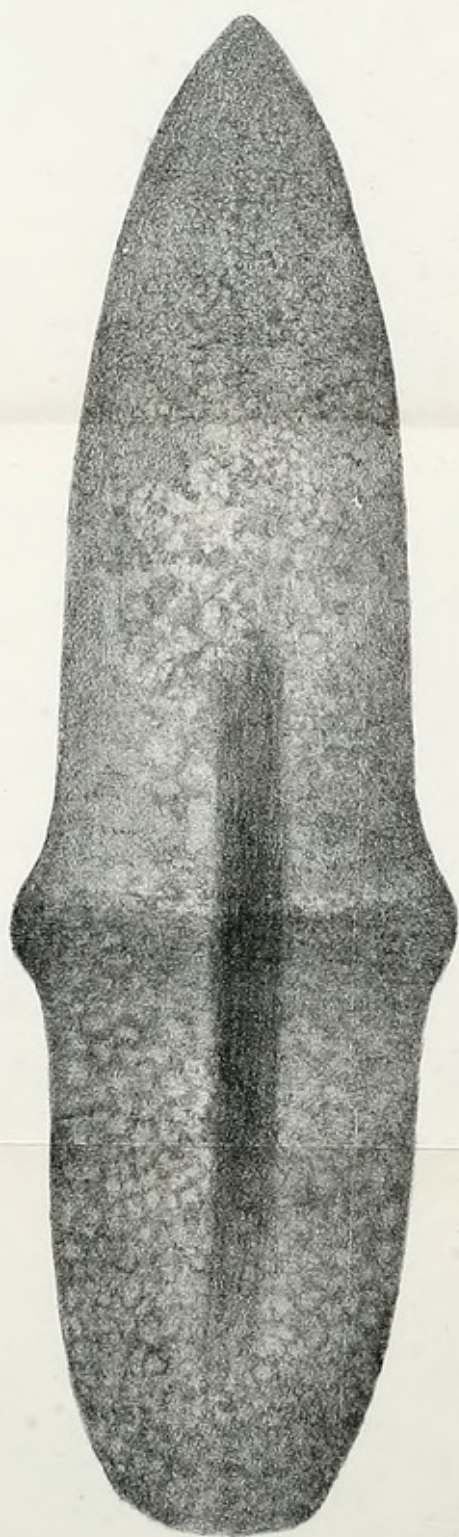
A recent gift of this kind, received from Captain F. R. Barton, has led to a renewal of the interest felt in the charms previously collected in the Island, and brought from it hither. One, at least, of these, a shaped stone (Plate XIV), appears to merit some consideration on account of its unusual and possibly exotic form. The only information supplied with it is given by the attached label, which reads, "Sorcery charm, Mekeo," Mekeo being a village inland from Hall Sound, a little to the north of Port Moresby. The charm is biconical in shape, circular in section, 210 mm. in length, and 58 in maximum thickness; its material a coarse but very hard sandstone, shewing a few small enclosures of black shale. One of its conical portions is the longer, 125 mm., and tapers rapidly with an outline of increasing curvature to a rather sharp point. The shorter one contracts similarly, but to a much broader extremity. Over the line of junction of the two rises a strong annular ridge or flange, and the shorter one is on one of its sides channelled throughout its length by a broad shallow groove, which cuts through the flange and passes a little beyond it. It is highly improbable that a stone so carefully wrought should have been made expressly for magical purposes. Savage mummary does not call for the aid of art, but of artfulness. Still less likely is it that a stone prepared for sorcery usage should have accidentally received a form which eminently fitted it for a practical use. We have only to fit the butt end as far up as the flange will allow into a suitable perforation in a straight haft, insert a wooden wedge into the further end of the groove, drive it home, and we may go forth with a very effectively mounted club for hostile or pick for peaceful purposes—as, for example, sago extraction. Still another use appears to have been found, if not intended, for the implement. The surface of the extremity of its broad butt end has evidently been subjected to so much attrition that it has been worn down on one side to a smooth convex facette, with edges very obvious to the touch. It is plain that if this acquired surface be not an effect of natural causes, the stone has at one time been employed as a grinding instrument, in fact, as a pestle. Considered from this point of view, it has a remarkable resemblance to a pestle figured by Mr. S. Powers, in the United States Geographical and Geological Survey of the Rocky Mountains, Vol. 3, opposite p. 432, where, speaking of the Californian tribe of the Yokuts, on the slopes of the Sierra Nevada, in the vicinity of King's River and Lake Tulare, he has the following: "The few and simple

stone implements used by the Californian Indians resemble, in their main purpose and design, those of the extinct races exhumed in the shell mounds, only they are conspicuously ruder and simpler. Take the stone mortar, for instance. The prehistorical mortar is carefully dressed on the outside, and has three general shapes," which he goes on to specify. "But the Indian now takes a small boulder of trap or greenstone, and beats out a hollow in it, leaving the outside rough. Whenever one is seen in possession of a mortar dressed on the outside, he will acknowledge that he did not make it, but found it—in other words, it is prehistoric. The prehistorics used handsomely dressed pestles sometimes embellished with rings, but the squaw nowadays simply picks up a long slender cobble from the brook." Mr. Powers' figure of the ringed pestle (if pestle it was originally) is to be seen enlarged in de Quartrefages' "*Races Humaine*," p. 103, and may be compared with Plate XIV., a representation of the Papuan implement. Had this latter been nothing more than a pestle, it would have been reasonable, almost necessary, to suppose that, wherever it was made, stone mortars similar to those utilized by the irreverent Yokuts, were also in use. Such mortars are believed to be unknown in the New Guinea of the present day where the grinding apparatus, apart from the small betel-nut mortars, consists, like of those of Yokut make, of a rough block of stone superficially hollowed and of a rounded pebble for an upper mill stone; the whole but little superior to the grinding slabs of Australia. But notwithstanding that the longitudinal groove may have been added subsequently to the formation of a pestle to adapt it to other purposes, a groove, the result of sharpening weapons on it, would not pass through the flange. It is perhaps safer to regard the implement as originally a tool or weapon which has incidentally been put to use in some ordinary grinding cavity. Even so, the difficulty of accounting for its occurrence and mystical value in New Guinea is by no means removed, scarcely lessened. It seems not only different from, but in its way superior to anything made there now. The reversible mount of the ordinary Papuan axe is indeed a well devised improvement on the fashion of fixing a blade in one position in a straight haft, and were it certainly an indigenous device, would be creditable to Papuan ingenuity; but the clubstones and picks, whether perforated to receive the haft or designed to fit into a perforation in the haft, are unprovided with any means by which they can be immoveably fixed in place, and are so far inferior in design. As for the heads of the straight-shafted Tugeri clubs, they are the merest crudities beside this sorcery charm. A stone or other object made by human hands to some useful end is not likely to pass into the domain of magic or worship as long as it remains in familiar use, unless in reverence of that use, or being unused, as long as the knowledge of its origin is recent, unless it has been derived from some awe-inspiring

source. The Papuans do not worship utensils on account of their use to them in their labours. The stone in question is an object of awe to the people of Mekeo. As an implement, it is therefore unfamiliar to them, and any actual knowledge they have of its local manufacture or of its derivation must be more or less traditional. The probability of its having been recently brought amongst them is small. Without assuming that the stone implements of every tribe in British New Guinea are known, it may at least be said to be hardly probable that there will yet be discovered one of a type so distinct from those generally in use as the one before us. It is, of course, possible that it may have been introduced into the south-east of the island from a foreign source, and has been made a fetish or sorcery medium in forgetfulness or even in remembrance of that source. The writer's knowledge of the stone weapons of Dutch and German New Guinea is not sufficient to assure him that it could not have come from one or the other, but so far as literary resources are open to him, he has failed to meet with a record of a similar one from New Guinea, Oceania, or elsewhere. Ringed stones and longitudinally grooved stones are to be found, but a combination of the two has been sought for without success. In Evan's "Ancient Stone Implements," we read of numerous ways of mounting stones for use, but find no mention of an implement grooved for the reception of a wedge on the one hand, and flanged for abutment against the haft on the other. Certainly such provisions for mounting may have been noticed elsewhere since 1892, but till advised of this one cannot but suspect that however it is to be accounted for, the Mekeo stone points to a past state of Papuan art, and one more advanced along its particular path of development than is to be found at the present time in New Guinea.

To revert to the occasion of the foregoing note. In the course of an expedition from the east coast into the interior, Captain Barton made acquaintance with mountain tribes on the head waters of the Musa, a river flowing into Dyke Acland Bay. One of the tribes is called by the coast people, who suffer from its raids, *Domari*, i.e., mountaineers. Observing a potsherd suspended from the neck of a man in each of two distinct tribes, he made inquiry, and found that they were worn as charms, and noticing moreover a peculiarity about the potsherds themselves, he, on ethnology intent, effected a friendly transfer of them to his own possession, and subsequently with great kindness presented them to the Museum. The circumstance which chiefly attracted Captain Barton's attention to the shards was that they were suspended by handles. They are similar parts of the edge of two pots (Plate XII.). These, when entire, had thick flat lips slightly overhanging the inner surfaces, about 12 mm. broad, and expanded at opposite points, presumably into triangular projections, which at their apices, were continued outwards and downwards till they united with the body of the pot a little below the neck, the whole forming strong and well-shaped handles. In the

larger, better-made, and better-preserved of the two, the surface of the flat lip was ornamented throughout with scalloped bars, separated by intermediate furrows set obliquely in opposite directions on each side of the expansion, and on it developed into a rhomboidal pattern of similar bars concentrically arranged; the edges of the expansion are embellished with oblique notches, and the side of the neck below it with impressed undulatory lines. Though the inner surface shews horizontal grooves, such as might have resulted from the revolution of the clay under the finger of the potter, it leaves the use of the wheel questionable. In the lesser shard, the material is a sandy yellowish clay. It was imperfectly baked in an open fire, which acted less on the inner than on the outer surface. In a series of over one hundred pots collected at various points on both coasts of British New Guinea, there is not one whose edge is strengthened by a thick flat lip, nor is there one whose neck is relieved of tension when the vessel is in use by an arch connecting the edge with the body, and so forming a handle. There is but one—apart from the imitation of a cocoa nut or gourd dipper figured beside it in Edge Partington and Heapes Album, ser. 3, p. 76, ff. 8, 9—which has a handle of any kind, and this rising loop-like upwards from the brim has an appearance of fragility and, beyond its immediate office of suspension, of uselessness in strong contrast with the idea of purposeful massiveness conveyed by the shard. This charm also may very possibly be to the Papuan a proof that something to which he is unaccustomed has been wrought in the past, and consequently has acquired a potent influence over the present. So it has been with the flint arrowheads and stone celts of Europe. But again we have to remember eventualities. To conclude from the apparent absence of a higher type of pottery from British New Guinea that it is also foreign to the rest of the Island would be unwise. All that can be said with confidence is that provided that the south-eastern pots are not inferior to any made elsewhere in the Island, these shards tell us of a stage of industrial culture distinctly higher than at present obtains. Time may indeed shew that they are not indigenous products, but due to contact with some exotic culture.



F. E. H. H. L. L. L.

New Guinea Charm.



De Vis, Charles Walter. 1905. "Papuan charms." *Annals of the Queensland Museum* 6, 32–35.

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