

SOME EVIDENCES OF PAPUAN CULTURE ON CAPE YORK PENINSULA.

AS ILLUSTRATED BY SPECIMENS IN THE QUEENSLAND
MUSEUM COLLECTIONS.

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(Plate VI.)

MORE writers than one have referred to presumed Papuan culture on Cape York Peninsula, and the list of objects illustrating it is now a formidable one. The Queensland aboriginal was never an inventive genius, and his implements and weapons are remarkably constant, but that he is a born mimic and imitator is very apparent. Hence it is not to be wondered at that he at times, under the influences of foreign infiltration, discarded some of his native implements for those of other peoples, instances of which may be found in the substitution of the primitive few coverings for the luxury of the bark blanket¹ and tappa cloth or the safer outrigger² for the original native bark canoes. The point has been raised as to whether there was an infusion of Papuan blood over this area,³ but this idea does not meet with favour, especially amongst those acquainted with local conditions in the early days. Even as far back as 1802, when Captain Flinders landed in the Peninsula he found the natives anything but the fierce cannibals that the Dutch had led him to believe they were; "of bow and arrow not the least indication was observed at the Coen River" [or elsewhere].⁴

In spite of the fact that it is said that the bow has been found in the extreme north, it is only to be regarded as an immigrant from New Guinea, no attempt having ever been made by the natives to manufacture such an article. It is, however, interesting to note that Meston in a letter to me says that he found some small boys on the Pascoe River and at two or three other points of the sea-coast using small bows and arrows merely for amusement,⁵ the grown men never taking to this weapon. He further says: "The tribes at Cape York,

¹ Walter E. Roth, *North Queensland Ethnography*, Bulletin 15, paragraph 56, Records of the Australian Museum, 1910.

² *Ibid.*, Bulletin 14, Transport and Trade.

³ N. W. Thomas, *Natives of Australia*, 1906, page 16.

⁴ Flinders, *Voyage of Terra Australis in H.M.S. "The Investigator,"* London, 1814, vol. 2, page 146.

⁵ It is extremely interesting to note how soon the boys learn to use their weapons. Quite small youngsters will become adepts at throwing the spear, and their elders give them every encouragement.

the nearest of all to the Papuans, have never, since history has given a record of them, copied the bow and arrow from the Papuans, although used on all the Torres Straits islands. The islanders used both the bow and arrow of Papua and the woomera and woomera spear of the mainland aboriginal, but the mainland men copied nothing from the islanders, their sole weapon being the woomera spear, the nulla and the boomerang being unknown. Nor did they use any shield, all parrying being done with the woomera." I think it is fairly evident, from a study of the objects of presumed exotic culture, that the Papuan infiltration had taken place within comparatively recent times, and may be traced to the time when the Papuans were first employed on the Barrier Reef in the *bêche-de-mer* and pearl-shell fisheries.⁶

That these Papuans should fraternise with the mainland natives on various parts of the coast was only to be expected, and we may be sure that intercourse must have taken place very frequently; hence we find the introduction of the hour-glass pattern in weaving, vegetable pigments used in addition to mineral pigments, plait-work with pandanus, vegetable ornamental strands made with *dendrobium*.⁷ Ear-boring was indulged in, widow basket caps, bamboo tobacco pipes⁸ were introduced, and alterations in hut construction⁹ became apparent.

Drills and reversible adzes were found more convenient. The wearing of the *Conus* shell for personal adornment and the hole in the bailer shell¹⁰ for carrying purposes all testify to outside influence. The same may be said of the use of feather-work and initiation masks, and the utility of the sucker-fish in hunting other fish did not fail to attract their attention. Evidence, however, is not quite so strong in support of the pineapple club, or the comb used at Princess

⁶ Cf. W. E. Roth, North Queensland Ethnography, Bull. 14, paragraph 11.

⁷ Cf. W. E. Roth, North Queensland Ethnography, Bull. 15.

⁸ The tobacco pipe in Northern Queensland deserves here a short notice. There are several of these in the collections of the Queensland Museum, and, except in those cases where they are undoubtedly immigrants from New Guinea, they represent a very rough type of poor workmanship. Though sometimes made of bamboo they are frequently manufactured from the stem of a hollow or hollowed-out branch, one end of which is closed with gum and bored with two holes as in the New Guinea pipes, and used in the same way. Several kinds of weeds as well as bamboo segments are smoked. Pipes of this type come from the Cape York Peninsula. We have in our collection, however, one specimen, closed at both ends, which is said to have come from the locality of Moreton: donor, Mr. A. Haly. This specimen (QE 14/572), which is 540 mm. in length, may have been transported there. Another interesting specimen is a bamboo tobacco pipe made by the Russell River blacks, and was collected some years ago by Mr. Henry Tryon at Green Hills, Cairns district. Its length is 678 mm. (Q. M. Specimen No. QE 14/570.) An elaborately carved specimen, ornamented with a typical New Guinea design and marked as coming from Cape York, is really an introduced type which has been somewhat knocked about and mended again by means of some sort of cloth and gum cement. This specimen, No. QE 14/569, is 554 mm. in length.

⁹ Cf. W. E. Roth, N.Q.E., Bull. 16.

¹⁰ *Cymbium flammeum*, Bolt.

Charlotte Bay, the harpoon and the fixation of iron adzes by dovetailing. Wrestling,¹¹ which is also indulged in the Peninsula, may possibly be due to influences other than Papuan. The Queensland native probably had no idea of boiling water; hence it is difficult to explain the origin of the use of it in the North. The idea may have come to them from another source or it may have dawned upon them by chance;¹² on the other hand, it may be due to Papuan culture. These few remarks bring me then to the object of this paper, viz., to place on record a few interesting ornaments, several of which emanate from the Lankelly tribe.

There seems to be some doubt as to the exact locality traversed by the now extinct Lankelly tribe of the Cape York Peninsula, but Senior Sergeant James Whiteford, who about thirty years ago occupied the position of Protector of Aborigines in the Coen district, kindly tells me that the so-called Lankelly tribe occupied the territory along the banks of the Lankelly River, a tributary of the Coen (Pennefather) River, from the coast 60 miles inland, and was a portion of one of the larger tribes which of late had split into various smaller groups. This tribe seems to have come into contact with Papuan influences rather more than the rest of their western neighbours, though not to the same extent as on the east coast, where Papuan interest was naturally far greater.¹³

Dr. Haddon has kindly drawn my attention to the fact that many of the objects of presumed Papuan culture are nothing more or less than immigrants from Papua. This can hardly, however, be said of the various specimens shown in Plate VI. Figure 5 represents a pendant consisting of a native gum cylinder with the seeds of *Abrus precatorius*, Linné., embedded therein, which is suspended by a thin cord. The upper portion, however, is drawn to a point and so shaped to accommodate a small cap of native plait-work, the lower portion of which is made of pandanus and the upper portion of narrow strips of lawyer cane, total length 201 mm. (Q. M. Specimen No. QE 14/574.) A rather "natty" little necklace, consisting of gum cylinders with red seeds inserted and attached to twine, and made by a member of the Lankelly tribe (registered as QE 14/585), must have looked very pretty when intact (our specimen is very much damaged). This specimen is also of presumed Papuan culture.

Figures 3 and 4 represent a peculiar type of breast ornament bearing the native name of "Mona"; a longitudinally curved shape of stringybark ornamented with a wall of gum (the shape of which is best learnt by a study of the illustration) set with the seeds of *Abrus precatorius*, Linné.; the upper end of

¹¹ W. E. Roth, N.Q.E., Bull. 12.

¹² Cf. R. H. Mathews, Rock-holes used by the Aborigines for Warming Water, Journal and Proc. Roy. Soc. N.S.W., vol. 35, 1901, page 213.

¹³ A number of specimens of various kinds (also in our collection), from the people of the Lankelly, go to show that they were subjected to considerable outside influence, not necessarily always Papuan.



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