The Cultural Situation of the West Caroline Islands
Songosor, Pur, Merir, Tobi and Ngulu (pp. 245-249)

by
Dr. Anneliese Eilers

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Dr. G. Thilanius
Professor der Volkerkunde
Director of the Museum fur Volkerkunde
Hamburg


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Translated from the German by

K.J. Dennison
Department of Anatomy
University of Otago Medical School
New Zealand

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Similarity of individual cultural elements between Ngulu and the four isolated, small, west Caroline islands does not depend on direct contact after the time of their settlement. There are, also, no signs of this. The similarity comes much more from the old connections, established by all five islands, with Yap, the great meeting point in the west, associations that extend up to the most recent times. For Ngulu they are particularly vital and important; for Tobi they were probably broken a long time ago, but have been renewed in more recent times (through European influence) while on the other islands they have apparently never completely ceased. The common feature of the culture of these islands is the outcome of the influence of Yap culture. From the traditions of these island inhabitants it is clearly brought out that at one time their ancestors set out from the over-populated Hogomog to Yap, and from there, after a
fairly long stay, they settled the isolated islands. Now it is not the intention of this presentation to investigate the dependence situation of the Yap-Hogemog culture and determine to what extent the culture on Yap, dominant over the common Carolino characteristics, shows close ties to this island group. Also an obstacle stands in the way of an exhaustive investigation of the cultural ties of west Caroline cultural values, in that by the time of conclusion of this volume not all of the material on the more easterly islands, particularly Hogemog, Oleai, Sorol and Mog was published. Thus in the meantime it remains an open question whether peculiarities of the cultural heritage as also occurred on Tobi, Songosor, etc...were once brought from Hogemog, the old homeland, or whether it is a matter of enrichment from the Yap culture. In other words whether the cultural heritage that is in part so similar on Yap and the small west Caroline islands can be traced back to Hogemog, the source common to them all, or whether the culture of the isolated islands bears less of the features of the Hogemog culture than that of Yap.

Since a direct connection between Ngulu and the four other islands does not exist, a further comparison is unnecessary, especially since as has been proved the similarities have the same source. As to connections between Ngulu and Yap, it might be reiterated at this point that Müller, Yap I, regards the island of Ngulu as a Yap colony. Thus there remains only an investigation of the cultural situation of the islands Songosor, Pur, Nerir and Tobi.

"Müller (Yap I, p.52) says in connection with the investigation on tattooing, principally the "γώτ", ...... and also from the magical incantations, a Hogemog origin of the "γώτ" cannot be concluded. Otherwise the entire spiritual and material culture of the Yap people might considerably derive from there... Furthermore the Pur traditions (cf Tobi I, p.204) reveal two Yap immigrations from Hogemog and assert an extensive new settlement of Hogemog people a long time before the voyage of the Songosor, Tobi and Pur discoverers.
The Pur tradition maintains that Merir in later times had been resettled from Pur, after the Papuans had slain all the Merir people. With this then consideration could be confined only to the islands of Songosor, Pur and Tobi.

On all four islands tradition holds firmly to an origin from Hagamog. Individual Pur people admit to Thoror (Sorol), and Merir people to Hug as a near or original homeland of their ancestors. However they all believe in a prolonged stay on Yap. From the stories, that are contradictory in details, somewhat of the following picture evolves: Hagamog people at one time left the overpopulated homeland to go to Yap which offered them a better quality of life. They prospered there, after a long time of difficulties, to the point where they found it advisable to extend further. They did this by a couple of voyages together, and in five canoes sought a new homeland. Further and further they settled the islands of the southwest that had been previously uninhabited. The most astute people took the island of Pur that was discovered first, the others had to travel on, for better or worse. They must have even visited the already inhabited St. David's (Freewill) Islands, with the native name, Warat. Right into recent times they remain conscious of their original association and never entirely lose the sentiment for one another. In times of need they seek out their ancestral relatives. The first settlers were:

♂ Taleueg
1: ♂ Taelau
2. ♂ Sāgēpit
3. ♀ Rimalēp āru
[group: "♂ Manuat or Ean"

♀ Saual
1. ♀ Sael
2. ♀ Kārētal a āī
3. ♀ Sautēri
4. ♀ Hōda
5. ♀ Nesiatal
[group: "♂ Tana"

♂ Yād
♂ Sau
Talau obtains Songosor: Sāngēp Merir; Rimaal āru goes later to Tobi; Waretāl ș āl takes Pur by cunning and forces Nesiamal to go to Warat with her people, where she is slain. The most doubtful is the settlement of Songosor: according to some it would have been the first to be found and Talau, being the eldest son, would have remained there; others say that Ūat and Naa took it, and later the survivors from Warat also.

According to the Pur people, originating from Ihorer-Sorol, according to the Merir people originating from Hog, went there. On Songosor itself nobody knows anything about Talau as an ancestor; he is regarded only as the spirit of Passarum, the son of Ūat.

Of the five settlement stations of the Yap-Kogenog culture, Tobi lies the most isolated and has every appearance that after the time of the ancestors' Yap sojourn there have been no new influences from there. That is until quite recently, about 1900. The population's turning aside from the new and the foreign, the tenacious clinging to the old customs, had a side effect, the creation of a unique character. Thus as a fact in this small island there is found the greatest variety of form within the culture developed. Nowhere does one come across such an abundance of innovations in the production of wooden goods, whose prototypes are also found on Yap and Songosor. And on no neighbouring island are the weaving patterns, that reflect the Kogenog patterns, so full of variety as here. If it were a matter of less simple objects and more difficult techniques, one would have to say that the culture handed down has deepened and been refined on this small island. It is also noteworthy that Tobi has preserved the large fish weir basket whose internal structure however is not a long tube running from front to back as on Yap, but instead consists of two tubes open front and back and extending to the middle. Also on Tobi there are several varieties of hook fishing that
Songosor and Pur do not have. In the following only a few peculiarities are referred to, out of an abundance of material; in spite of the extraordinary seaworthiness of the boats the Tobi people of old have declined to undertake voyages to neighbouring islands. The grounds for this may indeed lie above all in their character. Self-sufficient, and being enclosed against foreigners, nothing has ever driven them far. Certainly they would have had a great distance to travel even to their nearest neighbours, as with the ancestral voyages. Yet the Caroline sailors do not tend to be scared off.---The house bears no resemblance to the Yap house. Not only is the stone foundation missing but the entire timber structure is totally different, noticeably more simple and, too, the position of the posts differs completely. The verandah is likewise missing. It is noteworthy that the old Tobi house had such a spacious loft that a man could easily be hidden in it. People swung themselves up through a hatch by means of a rope. The prototype of the house on Tobi, Songosor and Pur is found further in the east, somewhat on Elato. Mogenog, Palalap and Panaulip have similar buildings as on Yap, that may also lack the stone foundation, as in the first two.

Furthermore the women's clothing is also remarkable. On Songosor and Tobi the women wear plaited clothing mats, Likewise on Kerir and Pur originally, but since their stay on Palau a fibre skirt is worn over it. Yap and Ngulu know only the fibre skirt as women's costume, and Palau the same. On Mogenog, Panaulip, Nama, Olo, Paia and Truk, Hok and Ola they wear........ woven clothing mats. They are worn in the same way as the plaited ones on the four western islands, and since weaving is also carried out here, plaiting of the same garment is extraordinary.

The men's tattooing is on all islands the "poi"-tattooing of Yap, that Müller regards as the heritage of the Chamorro population, but is seen by others as a Mogenog
possession that has immigrated to Sorol and Yap. With regard
to the detailed characteristics, there are found on Yap and
the western islands more deviations that similarities. The
tattooing of the women is without doubt most closely related
to the Mogenog tattooing; the usual tattooing on Yap shows
quite a deviating form.

In the area of spiritual and social life there offer
only few conspicuous features that allow a comparison. Most
are raised only little above the general Caroline situation
or are too superficially known to permit an investigation
of dependent states to be carried out. What is important is
the method of burial and belief in an afterlife. On the small
islands of the west burial at sea is practised. Burial in
the ground is to a great extent prevented by the rocky
terrain. Where it is possible, this method is quickly adopted;
so with the merir on Palau. Yet the value placed on the method
of burial is noteworthy where both methods are possible. On
Yap the dead person is committed to the sea only on the
occasion of an important death. Otherwise the corpse is buried
in the ground. The reasons, fear and time expediency, are
obvious. Sorol and Hok have both methods of burial but the
chief is always accorded the honour of a grave on land in a
coffin. Mogenog has only burial in the ground. There is a
regular cemetery, the "ulūpe". On Merir burial in the ground
is regarded as insulting. It is reserved for thieves and
murderers, and on all the islands suckling infants who have
died before cutting their teeth are buried in this way. Tobi
has a children's cemetery. Generally, interment of the dead
in canoes that are committed to the sea is found only in
Polynesia and particular areas of Melanesia. In the Carolines
it is unusual. Only on the remote islands of the west, including
Ngulu, it is taken for granted and is firmly linked with the
notion of the abode of souls. On Mogenog and Yap, Sorol and
Hok they believe that the dead enter a spirit world, a
house in heaven. The Tobi, Fur and Sungsor people
imagine their kingdom of the dead in great canoes, that the souls of the corpses carried forth in the boats reach in one way or another.---Whoever can have one, is laid in a wooden coffin that is so small that the corpse has to be firmly tied together. On Ngula the custom of trussing the dead is practised and it is explained in that as soon as decomposition sets in the dead begin to sprawl out.---On Yap it is believed that death arises through the god of death catching the soul in his net;.... the Songosor and Pur people explain it thus, that the god Rugiirex, who holds all the threads of life in his hand, breaks that of the man who must die. Unique to, and only authenticated for Tobi, is the veneration of spirit boats that corresponds well with the notions of the world of the dead on boats. Already by Kubary's time nothing could be discovered of this on Songosor. This notion is no longer found on Yap nor on Kogemog.---The following small, common features are also referred to: On Tobi the god Yari forbids the alteration of fish hooks, and punishes a violation of the commandment with a typhoon. On Kogemog the spirit "XaITk" teaches a sleeping man the manufacture of fish hooks and threatens a typhoon should he not imitate his method.

A small vocabulary containing a selection of words from the islands referred to in this discussion could form a conclusion to this small comparison. Recapitulating, all things indicate that the native tradition, that the western islands were settled on the way from Kogemog to Yap, stands in full agreement with their entire cultural heritage.