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Prince Peter of Greece
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We met last year when you were here in Washington at a reception held at Ft. Myer. I've been meaning to write to you ever since. It's time I got around to it.

Polyandrous marriages were one of several approved marriage practices on pre-Christian Tobi. Informants provided the following information:

A man coming in from fishing in the morning after being out all night would learn that his wife had been unfaithful. One way he was said to have discovered this was by inspecting the knot in the string with which he had tied together the artificially elongated outer lips of her genitals. The labia of Tobian girls were stretched beginning at puberty by toothless old men who sucked them. I always had suspected that this was not true (although everyone told me about it) until I came across reference to a similar practice on Ponape contained in Schidloff's Venus Oceanica. He refers to Finch as his source (pp. 137).

Each Tobian man had his own secret knot with which he tied his wife together. Returning from fishing a suspicious husband would check his wife to determine whether or not the string had been untied and re-tied in his absence. However he learned of it, his wife's infidelity led him to set a trap for her lover. The next night or so he would pretend to go fishing but would hide himself near his house. When he knew his wife and her lover were together, he entered the house and confronted them. This is one of the few occasions in which a man was given the right to use a stick to beat someone and frequently the husband would beat the lover. The lover would flee and the next day would appear bearing gifts appropriate for a formal apology.

Usually this would be the end of the matter. Sometimes, though, the lover would try to continue the illicit relationship. If the husband discovered him a second time he would (it is said) recognize the inevitability of his wife's wrong-doing and, presenting gifts to the lover, invite him to join the marriage. Informants presented this as a way of settling for half a loaf. One husband would fish during the day and the other at night, and the wife would never be left alone. On nights when nobody went fishing they all slept together in the same house on the same mat.

I am still in the process of feeding my very complex genealogical data into the computer, so I have no quantitative statements to make. The practice of polyandry on Tobi, was, I think, one of many practices (along with polygyny, frequent divorce and cross-cousin marriage) responding to imbalances in the sex ratio due to demographic fluctuations. As to how often and how faithfully the scenario related time and again by my informants happened, I cannot at this point say, but polyandrous marriages do occur in many of the genealogies I collected.

I hope this is of some use to you. I am enclosing two papers, both for general background on Tobi and for what they have to say about sex, marriage and gender relations on the island.

Sincerely,

Peter W. Black
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