

***Kain***  
***Friend of Maclay***

by

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**Note:** As the original illustrator was unavailable to provide a release for his drawings in the original edition, these have been deleted and new ones substituted. The text has been revised and several additions made.



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## Dedication

To the memory of the headmen of Bilbil Village: Maia Awak, Derr Mul, Pall Tagari, Gab Kumei and Damun Maklai who taught me so much about the traditions and history of their people in the 1970s. Also dedicated to Sungai Damun, Kubei Balifun and Nupen Tegil, members of the next generation of Bilbil Village, who used the skills passed on by these old people to build a balangut in 2013.

## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Sir Peter Barter of the Madang Resort for his support and interest in my work and the support of Melanesian Tourist Services who financed the first edition.

## Photographs and sketches

Photographs used are by the author, or were historical photographs or sketches sourced from many publications in which the same items were repeated.



*The members of the next generation in front of the balangut they built in 2013.  
From left: Sungai Damun, Kubei Balifun, and Nupen Tegil.*

# Chapter 1

## Bilbil Village, 1971

Old man Maia sat with his wife, Kobor, in the village of Bilbil. He had old gnarled hands and his neck was creased with ropes of flesh, but it was his eyes that captured the viewer. Darting this way and that, they were the eyes of a sorcerer making magic over bones or hair, or the eyes of a warrior of long ago, staring forward, shield and spear at the ready. They were the eyes of a trader from past canoe voyages up and down the coast of Madang, in the time when the pot trade was flourishing. With the wind whistling through his hair, he would have stood on the prow blowing the conch shell as the waves crashed over his feet. He knew stories that had been handed down from father to son through time. Now he was doing his part handing them on to the next generation.

Tonight there would be a yam feast to mark the beginning of the harvest. The time was fore-ordained by the rising of the *Biris*, the Pleiades, in the pre-dawn sky. The ancestors had used these stars as a sign that the new harvest should be dug up and stored in the yam houses. But first came the feast.

Carrying heavy *bilums* of yams, the women returned from their gardens and began to prepare for the feast. Chatting and laughing they skinned the thick peel off the yams. Before them a line of large cooking pots was set in the ground. Round and bright red, each pot had been skilfully fashioned from clay. Splitting the yams with their bush knives, some of the women placed them in the pots, then others arrived bringing water pots to pour



*Maia Awak in 1971.*

water over the yams and *kaukau* and meat. The top of each pot was secured with leaves and a stopper.

Meanwhile, the men were chopping up dried branches and setting them around the pots. Soon the branches were set alight until the whole line of pots was merrily blazing. The smoke rose thick and black and the spicy aroma of burning leaves filled the air with a homely smell. Now was the time to sit and talk while waiting for the meal to cook.

As usual, they gathered in their family groups with mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles and grandparents, all together with their children. That was the village way of life. No one need ever be lonely here. If someone had no food, then he was fed by others more fortunate. There was usually plenty of *kaukau* and yams to go around. As they waited for the food to cook, they chased away the pigs and dogs that were looking hungrily at the boiling pots.



*Maia's daughter-in-law, Sibol, preparing for a village feast.*

“I still think it is the right way to cook food,” sighed Maia staring fondly at the glowing clay pots.

Kobor nodded, “Mmmm, the food is sweeter cooked this way. But many of our friends use trade store pots.”

“Everything burns in them too easily,” Maia complained and he spat his betel nut out in a red stream onto the ground. “Anyway who wants to sit and watch a trade store pot on the fire? These clay pots were made by my ancestors for hundreds of years.”

Just then Maia’s grandson, Balifun, ran up from his game on the beach and sank panting on the mat.

“You there,” complained Kobor, “Don’t you know your manners? Don’t sit there with your back to me. Are you a pig that you sit like that?”

“Sorry, *tabuna*,” Balifun said, turning around. “I have something to tell Maia.” He turned to his grandfather. “*Bageg*,” he said, - for that was the polite way to address his grandfather - “*Bageg*, do you know something really exciting?”

“Tell me, Balifun”

“We learned it in school, today. It is 100 years since Maklai, the Russian man, came here to our area. You have often spoken about him.”

“Of course you’ve heard me speak of him, but he lived a long time ago.”

“Were you alive then?” asked Balifun, for his grandfather certainly looked old; his face was shrunken in deep furrows.

Maia laughed. “I might look old, Balifun, but I’m not that old. My father, Awak, was not even born when Maklai came.”

“*Bageg*, you have told me so many stories about our ancestors. One day you must take me over to the island where they used to live.”

“True,” agreed Maia, “I’m getting old. Soon it will be time for me to die and be buried under the ground. Why don’t we go tomorrow?”

“*Aia*! You can point out all those places you’ve been describing to me.”

Maia was a great talker. Many was the time Balifun had sat wide eyed as Maia talked about his *tumbuna*. He whispered when he spoke of sorcerers; thumped his fist when he described the warriors setting out for battle; and had a dreamy look when he talked of his sailing days in the trading canoes with cargoes of pots.

Next morning, Maia and Balifun were stirring early while the cocks crowed and the pigs snuffled in their holes under the thatched houses. The rest of the village was still asleep as they walked down the track to the beach where their canoe was. It was a beautiful dawn with pinks and golds fingering across the sky. Then the sun peered from over the horizon and bathed the sea and the islands in its yellow light. Maia puffed as he rowed and then stopped for a while, letting Balifun do all the work. He shaded his eyes and saw the island looming larger. It was not very wide in the middle and he could see the light shining through the coconuts from the other side.

A hundred years ago, there had been quite a big village on this rocky island. Because the soil was poor, the people made pots and traded them up and down the coast for food. When the people were forced to move to the mainland by German officials, the island was left deserted.

As Maia and his grandson neared the white sandy beach they heard only the noises of the bush. "There's no one here," called Balifun as he jumped out of the canoe. "No one here!" echoed the trees and bushes. Birds twittered in the branches and the bush fowl squawked at the intruders before disappearing into the undergrowth. A breeze stirred the trees and the leaves whispered eerily of past voices: the busy voices of the crews preparing for a sailing trip; the muttering voices of the sorcerers as they planned more mischief; the demanding voices of children; the urgent calls of the women as they patted the clay pots into shape. Where once there had been a busy village only, there was now only a fisherman's hut. Where once many large sailing canoes had been drawn up on the sandy beach, now the only one was the little canoe they had come in. Not even a fisherman stalked along the water's edge.

Maia was in a dream world - the land of his ancestors. He knew every nook and cranny of this island from when he was a little boy. He began



to point out where the men had built their trading canoes and which part of the beach belonged to which clan. They stood under the shade of a large tree that had grown in the middle of the beach, for the jungle was encroaching on the sand. Balifun stooped and picked up a piece of pottery. "Look, *Bageg*, this belongs to the olden times."

Maia laughed, "Not so long ago, Balifun! My father lived here you know, and so did I, for a while. Then we all shifted to the mainland."

Maia pointed towards some trees. "Come, I'll show you where we got our water from." They pulled back the branches and peered down a deep well.

"There's still some water there!" exclaimed Balifun.

"Yes. It's the only fresh water on the island," Maia explained. "The women would come here carrying their water pots on their shoulders and fill them at this well."

Maia and Balifun wandered up a track leading from the beach to the coconut grove in the middle of the island. It was overgrown and neglected. Picking their way through the ferns and undergrowth, they soon came to the rocky headland on the far side of the island. Here a pleasant breeze blew from the sea.

"Hmmm," sighed Maia, "This is where the people gathered to enjoy the cool breeze when they had finished their work."

Balifun climbed carefully over the jagged rocks, but even so he nearly fell into a shallow pool of water. Maia stopped short behind him. "*Ehe!*" he exclaimed as he pointed dramatically at the rock pool. "This was once our mirror." Maia gazed into the water and preened his hair. He was thinking of his ancestors who had once painted their faces and straightened their feathers in this very pool.

"It's not very big," commented Balifun.

Maia blinked his way back to the present. "What was that you said?"

"The pool. It's not big enough for lots of men to use at once."

“*Nene!* no, of course not,” Maia shook his head. “There are more of them over there, the men would line up one behind the other and take turns at fixing their feathers and painting their faces.”

After this, they climbed over the rocks and stood above the deep swirling sea and looked out towards the distant cloud topped mountains of the Rai Coast. “There’s Bongu where Maklai used to live,” Maia pointed across the water. “He used to visit our island and the people built him a small hut right where we are standing. It was a good look-out for him when he was waiting for his ship.”

“What ship?” asked the puzzled Balifun.

“Why, the Russian ship to take him home. It didn’t come for many seasons. He was tired of watching for it but Kain often came here to watch for him.”

Maia peered over the edge of the six metre cliff. “Balifun, do you think you could jump into the water from here?”

“*Nene!* not me!”

“The young men used to, one after the other.”

“Why? *Bageg?*”

“I suppose they wanted to show how brave they were. They would climb up a bush vine which dangled over the edge and jump in again. If they didn’t jump out far enough, they would break their legs on the rocks below.” Balifun drew back from the edge and eyed the pounding waves below. His *tumbuna* must have been brave, indeed.

The two of them wandered further around the cliff track and came to a place where the waves thrashed against a cave under the cliff.

“Can you hear the moans?” whispered Maia.

“It sounds like a woman moaning,” Balifun answered.

“Yes that’s right! There was once a woman spirit living under these rocks. She went off hunting and left her baby in a *bilum* hanging from a

rock. When she returned the baby was gone and now you can still hear her wailing.”

Maia and Balifun wandered along the north side of the island where deep ravines sliced into the rocky headland. The roar of the waves smashing against the rocks and echoing through the underwater chasms made Balifun’s skin creep.

“This is a *masalai* place,” whispered Maia. “If their children were sick, the people would throw food in the water. The *masalai* ate it and the children got better.”

They pushed their way through the undergrowth and, climbing down to a small beach, they walked beneath a low cliff wall eroded by heavy seas in the northwest season. Pieces of pottery, shells and pebbles had been exposed on the side of the cliff. Maia sat down to rest and Balifun picked up some stones and threw them into the water. Turning to pick up some more, his eyes were attracted to something in the cliff. He scrambled up to take a closer look.

“*Bageg, Bageg*,” he called excitedly.

“What is it, Balifun?”

“Bones, *Bageg*, bones.” Maia walked over to him.

“Your eyes are better than mine,” he sighed as he tried to get a closer look. There exposed on the cliff side was a long-dead skull with two rows of teeth grinning out at the world. Nearby Maia saw finger bones with pieces of pottery still between the joints, as if the skeleton still clutched parts of an old pot. Other bones had fallen on the the rocky beach.

“Whose bones could they be?” whispered Balifun in an awed voice.

“Let me think,” said Maia, scratching his head.

“This land belonged to the Nuguri clan. Before it extended right out to the reef, but the *karag* really pounds the shore here. It’s enough to make the dead come out of their graves.”

“Look up there,” pointed Balifun. “There are two old coconut trees. Does that help?”

“*Aia!*” exclaimed Maia, looking up at the trees. “I know who lived here. It was old Kain.”

“Kain. You mean that old warrior you often tell me about?” cried Balifun.

“*Ehe!*” answered Maia, “He was one of the big men on the island in his time. He was a great friend of Maklai, the Russian, and showed him all over the island.”

Balifun climbed up to have another look at the bones. “If only these bones could talk. They would tell us a few stories!”

“Well,” answered Maia. “If they are Kain’s bones, I know a few stories they might tell. He was a famous ancestor.”

“Tell me some more stories,” begged Balifun, as he settled on a rock. Now that he had seen the bones of the old warrior, he was really interested. So Maia began the story of Kain, the old headman of Bilbil Village, who had made friends with Maclay.

## Chapter 2

### Kain 1870

One day Kain was sitting under two young coconut trees outside his house on Bilibil Island. A strong man and leader of his people, Kain often braved the seas during trading voyages to distant places, facing the wind and the waves. Scars on his body were testimony to the many battles he had been in. Ever alert to danger, his round shield and his spear lay beside him. He felt safe enough on the island, protected as it was by wild waters that swirled around the cliff side. The beach side was open to attack, but the line of brightly coloured canoes could be instantly filled with warriors summoned on the *garamut*. Then again, who would be crazy enough to destroy them? The Bilibil people were famous for their pottery industry. The mainlanders depended on these pots for cooking, for bride price payments and for trading. This made them safe from attack.

Kain dreamed on. It was a beautiful morning and he could see Yabob Island clearly across the water. Several small canoes were in the water below him and the fishermen seemed to be catching lots of fish. He wondered lazily whether he should join them in his canoe. It was nearly the season to make the magic to bring the flocks of black and white pigeons to the island. This was his special work which no one else could do.

When the birds came, the men had great fun climbing the trees where the birds roosted at night. The birds liked to huddle up together and the men knew that if they plucked the end pigeon off the branch the others would sidle up to fill the gap. One after the other the pigeons would disappear



*!871 Portrait of Kain by Maclay.  
(Sentinella, 1975: 280).*

into the *bilums* that the men carried around their necks. The next day everyone in the village enjoyed pigeon soup cooked long and slowly in the large red cooking pots.

Kain was sitting, lazily dreaming about the birds when an earthquake struck. He leapt to his feet as the ground shook more and more violently. “Alas! *Medapep!*” he cried. “An evil has befallen us.”

People rushed out of their houses; pigs snorted and hens scurried for shelter; the houses and coconut trees swayed madly; things began to fall; branches broke off the trees; coconuts thudded to the ground; and some of the houses collapsed in a heap. “Someone must have worked some strong magic for this to happen,” thought Kain. It was the worst earthquake he could remember.

The ground continued to heave for some time before it quietened. Then everyone gathered around to see the damage. No one was badly hurt but the village was in chaos; pigs continued to squeal and children screamed for their mothers. Remembering his daughter, Yagad, and the other women were collecting clay on the mainland to make their pots, Kain hurried down to the beach.

“Wait for us!” called his friends Gad and Madamai. They pushed their small canoe into the water and began to paddle furiously towards the mainland. They were more than halfway across when Gad suddenly shouted, “Look out!” and pointed back to the island. There, coming straight for them, was an enormous tidal wave, a tsunami. It towered over them like a huge mountain. Closer and closer it came and the men stared at it open-mouthed in horror.

“Oh *Anut*, save us! O Papa, mama and all our ancestors help us,” cried the men as they clung desperately to the canoe. And then the wave was upon them gathering the canoe up in its powerful force.

Never before had the men travelled so fast in their canoe. The white foam of the wave tumbled over the canoe and the men feared they would be drawn down into the depths of the churning water. Instead, they were gathered by the force of the wave and flung forwards towards the beach. The canoe was lifted until it was level with the highest trees. There it

was caught in the topmost branches. The wave rushed on into the bush and swished out to sea again carrying logs and trees and everything in its path.

Madamai, Gad and Kain sat petrified in the canoe caught in the top of tree. Looking down they saw another wave approaching. It was not as big as the first and they began to feel braver.

“*Ea! Medapep*, alas!” sighed Kan. “Who has brought this evil upon us?”

“Probably those bushmen up there,” Madamai, pointed to the hills. They sat in silence for a while unable to comprehend the power of the magic that could make such an earthquake.

As the ground steadied and the tree was no longer hammered by swirling water, Kain grinned. “We must look funny sitting up here in this tree in a canoe.” At this they peered at the branches holding their canoe and began to laugh nervously.

“How are we going to get back to the island?” queried Madamai. “True!” added Gad, “Look, I’ve lost my paddle.”

“*Ehe!*” said Kain. “You sit in your canoe in a tree and you want to paddle? Are you going to paddle the air?”

Madamai pulled off a small branch. “Here use this!” he said, as he thrust it into Gad’s hand. They all burst out laughing again. Carefully they climbed out of the canoe and down the tree. Then Gad called out. “*Ehe!* Look at the fish!”

There, sure enough, were hundreds of flapping fish that the tsunami had dumped on the sand and in the grass beyond the shore. The men ran around gathering as many as they could. At that moment they heard shouts and through the bush came the men and women who had been collecting clay.

Kain was pleased to see his daughter, Yagad, “*Ehe!* You survived the great wave. We thought you would all be killed!” he exclaimed.

“*Nene!* We were collecting clay in the bush so we were all right.”

Kain turned to the men, "Tell me, where are your canoes?"

"They were washed inland by the waves, but we can drag them back. What happened to your canoe, Kain?" they queried.

"Come and have a look!" said Kain leading them to the bottom of the tree and pointing high up into the branches.

The men walked around and around the tree trying to see what Kain was pointing at through the thick branches. "The man must be mad," they whispered to one another. "Surely, he doesn't keep his canoe in a tree!"

When they saw the craft looking as if it had been beached on the branches they laughed, "*Oi-a-a!*"

When Madamai explained what had happened, they said, "You will have to come back with us."

After they had retrieved their canoes in the bush, they filled them with the stranded fish and set off home, anxious to see if their friends and family were safe on the island.

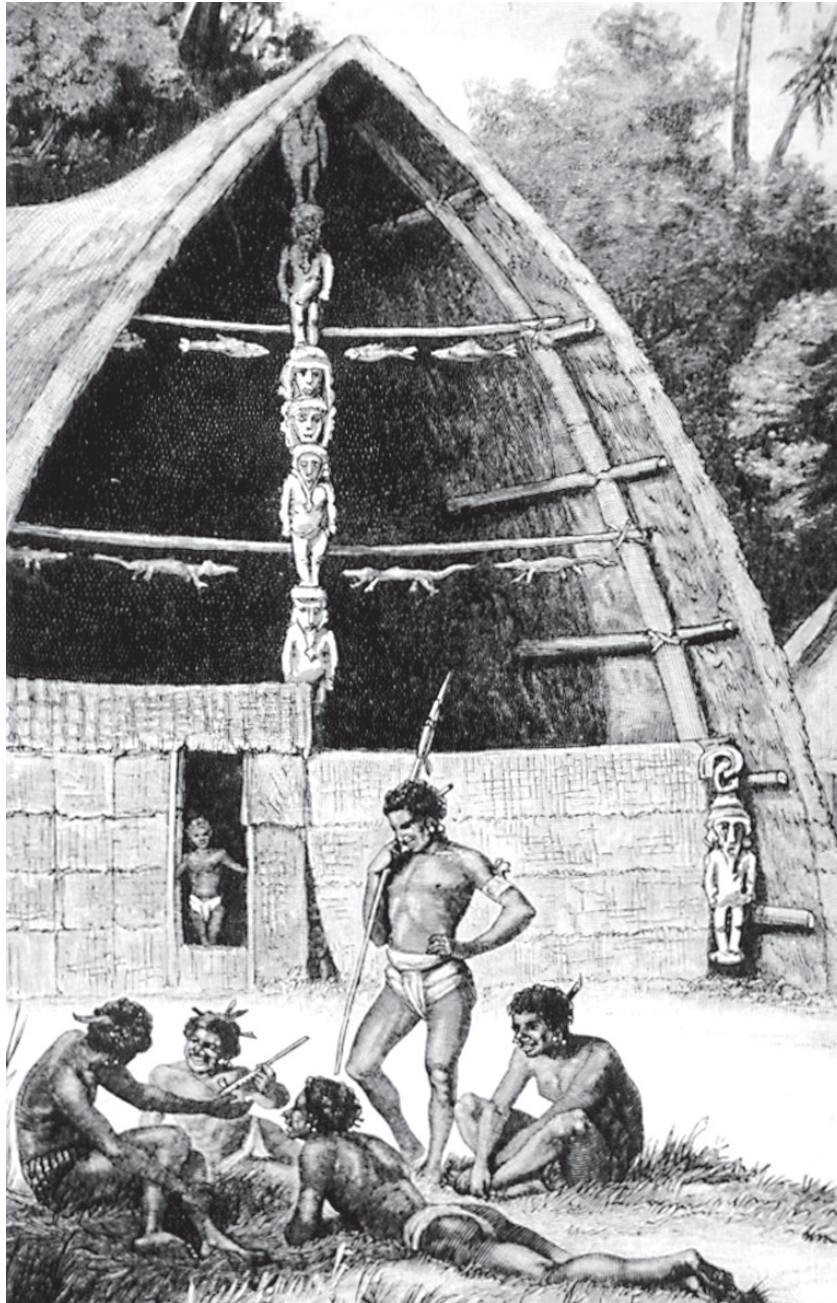
"They would have been protected by the cliff on the other side," Kain reassured them.

It was true, too. The tidal wave had not done as much damage as the earthquake. The quake had destroyed many of the houses and the people had fled to higher ground so that when the wave crashed on the island they were out of reach. The wave had swirled into the houses and out again, carrying logs and roofs out to sea but no one had died in their village. That evening the people mourned their lost houses as they cooked the fish that had been brought back in the canoes. The people thanked *Anut*, the all-powerful god, for having protected them.

When they heard how Gad and the others had sat in their canoe in the tree, they laughed and flicked their hands in astonishment. "*Oi-a-a!*" It was a story they would tell their children and grandchildren through the generations so that the time of the big tidal wave would always be remembered.

*Opposite page: Darem on Bilbil Island. (Finsch, 1888: 75).*





Yagad sat with the other women, but her eyes frequently wandered to the men on the other side of the fire. She had been pleased to see that Bais, son of Nelle, had survived when she returned to the island. All day long she had been worried about him. Tonight she was trying to catch his eye. Tossing her thick dark hair she adjusted her combs, and crossed her slim brown legs. Every now and then she glanced shyly across the fire, straightened her shell necklace which glowed white against her brown skin and fiddled with her grass skirt. Then she began to tell her story to the women. After she had described the fish flapping around the base of the tree and the canoe in the tree she threw back her head and laughed and the women laughed with her.

Sitting with the men across the fire, Bais noticed how Yagad tossed her head and how the firelight danced in her eyes. He knew that this was the girl he wanted for his wife. But he didn't think he had a chance. Her father, Kain, was a headman of the Gapan clan and would want a big bride price. Just then his thoughts were interrupted by movement among the women and children as they gathered the remains of the food and went off. They would have to sleep in the few houses not destroyed by the earthquake.

Bais, who had just been initiated, took his place with the other men when they were summoned to the *darem*. It was a sacred house and no woman dared go near it. One after the other the men crept through the low doorway into the gloomy interior, lit only by the light of a fire. This *darem* was shared by all the clans in time of crisis. There were many important things for the men to discuss that evening. Bais stared around. The *darem* was a tall tent-shaped building supported from the central ridge pole so that, on two sides, the roof also formed the walls of the building. The house post was carved with many figures called *Aimaka* which represented the ancestors. The front of the *darem* was blocked off with a matted wall.

Platforms on one side held the sacred flutes and statues for their secret rites; wooden headrests marked the sleeping area on the platform; round shields and wooden headrests lined one wall.

Kain nearly tripped over Bais's legs as he settled near the fire he looked around all the faces. It was hard to see, but in the shadows he made out the figures of Lalu, Gad and Madamai beside him. They were the men he relied on in times of trouble like this.

Kain stood up and waited for silence, then began to talk about the damage of the recent earthquake. Each clan arranged for workers to fix the broken walls and roofs. Their payment would be a big feast provided by the owners of the house. Another problem which was discussed at length was that the bushmen were stealing from the small gardens the Bilbils had on the mainland.

"Those bushmen," spat Madamai, "They must have caused the earthquake and tidal wave today."

"*Ehe!* Their magic is strong indeed," agreed Gad. The men eyed each other, troubled faces lit by the dancing flames.

"Terrible thieves," complained Madamai.

"They tried to steal one of our women the other day."

"If it's not women they are stealing, it's food from our gardens," added Madamai.

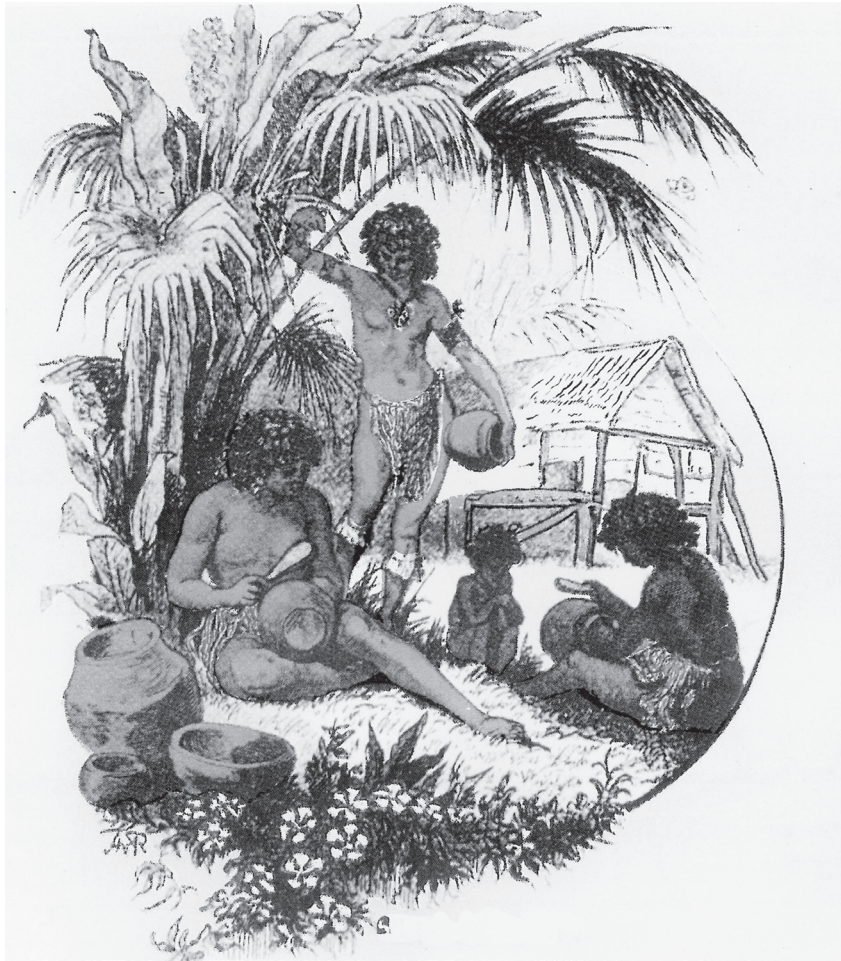
"And now this earthquake and big wave," said Kain. "What are we going to do?"

"We must fight them!" muttered Madamai.

"Let's ask the Kranket Islanders to help us," suggested Gad.

"*Ehe!* We need them," agreed Kain. "Those bushmen are good fighters."

The men talked far into the night, preparing to fight the bushmen.



*Women potters on Bilbil Island. (Finsch, 1888: 82).*



## Chapter 3

### Battle with the Bushmen

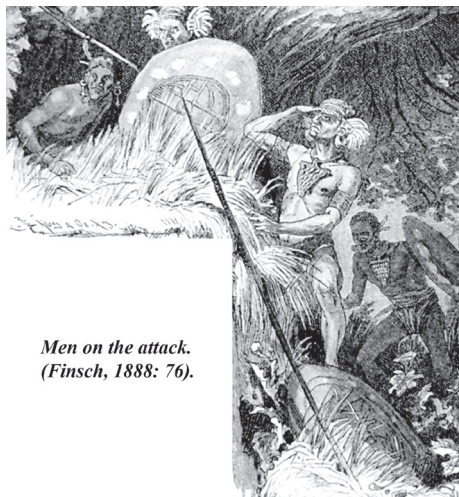
Over the next few days they prepared for battle. Kain sent word to his allies on Kranket and Yabob for help and anxiously scanned the water for the first sight of their canoes. When they arrived, the Bilbil men escorted them into the village. How fierce they looked with their wide staring eyes and grimacing faces. Kain found it hard to recognise his friend, Malbak, so changed had he become with his painted face and feathered headdress.

“We will attack at dawn,” Kain explained.

“Good! When everyone will be sleeping and not prepared to fight.”

One by one they peered into the rock pools. Carefully fluffing their hair out, the men stuck in feathered combs and adjusted their dogteeth necklaces and headbands. Because they were setting off in the dark, they put on their face-paint before sunset.

When it was his turn, Kain held a half coconut containing the black paint. He dabbed a finger into it and smeared it on his face as he peered into the water. Then he straightened two combs and poked them behind his ears to make his face large and fierce. He donned the dog teeth, straightened the bone through his nose and the shells through his ears. Satisfied, he pulled a face at himself and drew back in fright from his own image. He had some trade friends among the bushmen and did not want to be recognised. At last he drew back from Mother Nature’s mirror and let someone else take his place.



*Men on the attack.  
(Finsch, 1888: 76).*

In the middle of the night, the men paddled their canoes across a moonlit bay towards the coast. As soon as they landed, they dragged their canoes high up on the sand and disappeared into the bush. Silently, gripping their spears and carrying their shields, they glided through the bush. They toiled up a steep, muddy track, fighting the creepers and slipping on the roots. Overhead, owls hooted and flying foxes hovered and flapped above the trees. Every now and then fireflies flickered on and off.

It was eerie in the bush, where even the moon did not pierce the canopy of leaves and vines. Here was the home of fierce spirits, the *masalai*. The men whispered magic words so the spirits would not be offended by the intrusion. When one of the men fell over a root, those near him whispered, "*Medapep*," because to fall like this was bad luck.

At last, when they were approaching the enemy village, deep in the bush, Kain motioned the men to stop. He turned and saw many more shapes moving up the track. Silently, they took their positions around the village. They stood there, tensely waiting for the signal. High up beside the village was the lookout tower, the *kobor*, where the bushmen kept a guard. Kain looked up at the tower. Was there anyone stirring and peering over the edge?

"Quick! We must give the signal before the village was warned," he said.

The men held their spears at the ready and then Kain thrust his hand forward and let out a loud vibrant war cry, "*Tamol a! Wa-aa-aa!*" At once dozens of men around him also uttered the cry, "*Wa-aa-aa!*" and lunged toward the village.

Suddenly there was pandemonium. Women and children tumbled out of the houses half asleep and tried to escape into the bush. The men grabbed their spears or any weapons that came to hand and tried to defend their village, but they were unprepared and many were injured.

At last, when dawn was breaking, Kain called a halt to the fighting. Many of the bushmen had been captured. Madamai pointed his spear at them. "So, you stole from our gardens," he sneered.

"*Ehe!* What do you want us to do?" pleaded the bushman.

“We want to be left alone,” cried Kain. “You bushmen, you steal our women when they come to collect the clay or go to the gardens. And now you are making strong magic so that the ground shakes and big waves come.”

“But that wasn’t us,” insisted the stocky bushman. “The ground shook here, too. We thought it was those mountain people up there,” and he pointed an accusing finger at the distant mountains. “Our sorcery is not that strong.”

Kain was inclined to believe him. Perhaps, it was the mountain people. Their sorcery was strong indeed. So he turned to the bushman.

“*Aia!* I’ll believe you,” he said. “But what about the food you stole?”

One man spoke up, “We can give you some materials from our bush. I am the headman of this village. I promise this will be done.”

“What sort of things?”

“New posts for your houses. Planks for your canoes and vines and bamboo. Anything you need.”

Because he wanted to build a new canoe, Kain at once became interested. “All right,” he agreed. “When can you get these things ready?”

“In four days’ time,” said the headman, holding up four fingers. “We’ll send smoke signals from the beach.”

Kain looked pleased, but Madamai frowned. “And if they don’t show up? What then?”

“Why, we’ll attack their village again and next time we’ll set fire to their houses.”

“We’ll be there,” insisted the little bushman. “We know what strong fighters you Bilbil men are.”

“Let them go,” Kain ordered his men.

The bushmen jumped up and down on their stocky legs, happy to be free. Then they ran off through the bush and vanished amongst the shadows

and vines. Madamai turned to Kain. “Well, that’s fixed then. All I need now is a hull for my new canoe.”

Malbak, from Kranket heard him. “Kain, I have a hull at home that is nearly finished. Come and have a look at it.”

“Aia! Good. Tomorrow we’ll go and look at it.”

“Bring some pots in exchange and you can take it home with you.”

“Ehe!” said Kain, and he turned down the bush track well satisfied with the events of the day.



*Bilbil pots ready for sale.*

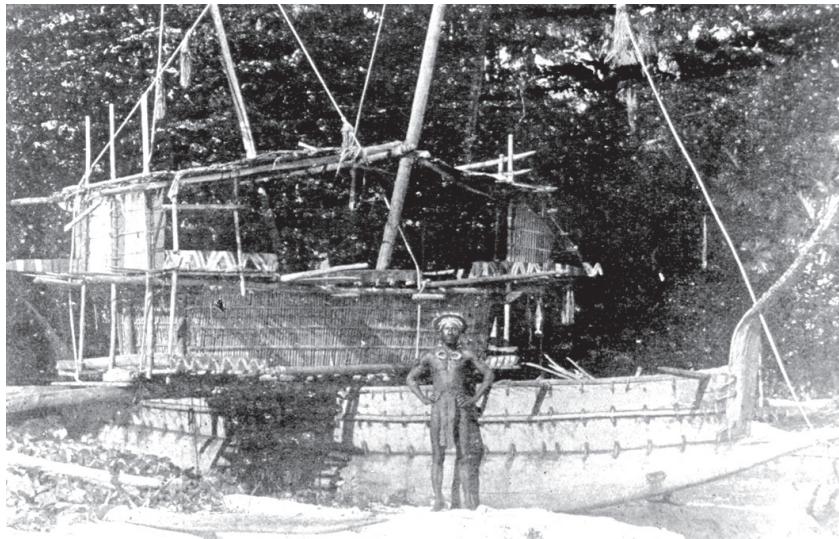


## Chapter 4

### The New Canoe

The following morning, Kain and his friends set off early for Kranket Island in Madamai's large, two-masted canoe, a *balangut*. It could carry much cargo and took many men to sail it. The sides of the canoe were built up with strakes colourfully painted with pots and fish. The pots were carried in a large pot cage and the men were shaded from the sun by a small shelter. Towering over it were two woven sails adorned with large red fish. On the top of each mast were the totems of Madamai's Dugus clan - the sign of the half-moon.

The men clambered over the deck, pulling on ropes and turning the sails or hoisting them up as the wind carried them northwest. The bunting on the ropes fluttered in the wind, showing the sailors which direction to turn the sails. Kain loved to sit in the shelter and watch the sails as they strained in the wind. The gentle rocking of the hull lulled him as the prow steered a steady course.



**Balangut at Yabob village, 1935. (Unknown origin).**

It was a peaceful day as they made their way along the coast. Big billowy clouds hung over the distant mountains. Nearby, they passed the small island of the Yabob people. The *yawan* carried them quickly towards Kranket Island. They were careful not to call the sails *lai* which was their usual name. Instead they called them ‘the wings of the bird, *banid*’ to deceive the evil water spirits. As they approached Kranket, they blew loud and long on their conch shells. ‘*Too, too, ti, ti, too*’.

“Kain! Kain!” called the men on Kranket, as they crowded onto the beach and put rollers on the sand for the canoe.

“Malbak, Malbak!” called Kain as he saw his good friend standing on the beach,

“Men of Bilbil, welcome,” called Malbak when he saw the half moon sign on the mast.

At last the canoe crunched on the sand and the Kranket men pulled it up high on the beach and joyfully greeted their trading friends. Malbak led them to where he was putting the finishing touches to the hull. “It has taken a long time to make this hull,” he said, as he picked up a smooth stone and polished the side of the hull. “I’ll attach a temporary outrigger so you can sail it back to Bilbil.”

Kain looked the hull up and down. “*Aia!* It is a fine hull. Will it make a one mast *lalong*, or a *balangut*?”

The men studied the hull and paced it out. “A *lalong* would only come to here,” they pointed, but this hull is longer. It could take two sails. It will make a good *balangut*.”

“How do you know it is long enough for a two-mast?” asked Bais who was only learning the art of canoe building.

“*Aia!* You do not know about these things yet,” explained Kain. “If you put two sails on a short hull, the front will dip into the water and the canoe will sink. But this hull is long enough for two sails. The power from the sails will not tip the canoe over.”

“*Ehe!*” agreed Malbak, “I made it long enough for a *balangut*.”

“We brought many pots to pay for this hull,” Kain said, pointing back to the canoe. They unpacked the pots from the canoe and laid them one beside the other for the length of the new hull. Malbak was very satisfied with the size of each pot and the quantity.

“That is good.” Malbak sounded pleased, “I will trade them next time I go to the Rai Coast.”

“Can I go with you?” asked Kain.

“*Ehe!* That is a good idea,” Malbak said as he chewed on his betel nut. “It is best to travel together in case of accidents,” and he spat the red juice on the ground.

“The wind will change soon and that will be our chance,” said Kain,

“You’ll have to hurry and get your new canoe finished so you can sail it. Won’t there be singing and dancing for the new canoe!”

“*Ehe!* Every place on the Rai Coast will kill a pig for the new canoe. They will be so happy to see it because it will carry many pots over the years.”

To mark the time, they cut a frond from a coconut tree and counted thirty leaves in three lots of ten. The rest of the leaves were stripped off the frond. “Here,” said Malbak handing the frond to Kain. “When this number of days has passed I will come to Bilbil and sound my conch shell. We will go to the Rai Coast together.”

“We must ask Madamai to make his magic over the waves and wind, so we will have good weather for our trip.”

“*Ehe!* I was forgetting,” said Malbak. “I must come ashore at Bilbil and discuss the payment for the magic with Madamai.”

That evening, they set off on the return trip, towing the new hull, using the *taleo* which rose in the evening from the northwest. Just as they approached Bilbil Island, the sun sank over the mainland brushing the sky with golden rays. Kain sat back on the platform of the canoe and watched the fluttering *tanget* leaves against the golden sky. The bright red fish design gleamed on the sail. He could hardly wait for his new

canoe to be built. He already had the splash boards and prows from his old canoe lying under his house. A new sail and shelter had to be made but with many men working it should not take long.

Next morning a spiral of smoke on the coast signalled that the bushmen had kept their word. The Bilbil men were busy all day making trips to collect the logs, bark, bush vines and leaves which had been piled on the beach. The Bushmen themselves had long since disappeared into the jungle as they feared the strength of the Bilbils.

Kain organised the men to prepare the materials for the canoe. The bush vine was put to soak in the sea; the bark of the *dim* tree was left to soak in an old hull; the logs were split open and smoothed down to make planks; tools were fashioned from pig bones, shells, wood and stone. All the materials were ready. Over the following days there was much activity. Bais and his friend, Han, hammered holes into planks with pointed bones and then lashed the planks to the hull with bush vine. Next, it was time to caulk all the holes around the lashings with a putty, *dim*, which the women had scraped from the bark which had been soaking in an old canoe hull. The stringy red sinew stained their fingers and grass skirts as they carried it to the canoe. Here the men used it to plug the holes using a tool fashioned from a pig's bone.

Then it was Madamai's turn to do his part to protect the canoe against leakage. Holding a coconut shell filled with many magic leaves and ginger roots, he chewed some of them and spat the mixture over the caulked holes, calling on *Dabag*, a good spirit. "*Dabag, Dabag*," he shouted, "come and look at this canoe. You must protect it. Keep it watertight. Do not let any holes open. You are the one who keeps the *dim* fast in these holes."

The days passed and the canoe began to take shape. The pot cage was built on top of the outrigger and over it was constructed the shelter for the crew. It was a great day when the two masts were hoisted into position, each had Kain's totem, the white bird, sitting in a nest of leaves on top.

At last it was time for the sails to be woven. The leaves were dried, the outline drawn on the ground and the four corners pegged for the weaving.

One afternoon, when there were no older men to supervise the weaving of the sails, Bais and Han decided they knew enough to begin the work. They sat contentedly weaving the *garabud* leaves through the strands of bush vine.

“Kain will be pleased to see us weaving his sails for him,” Gad said.

“*Ai!* True! This is easy work. We sit on the beach and enjoy the breeze,” added Bais. “It is better than working in the gardens.”

But Kain was not pleased at all. He took one look at their weaving and shouted: “Look at those leaves. You have put them too far apart. The wind will blow straight through and the canoe will not sail well. You must begin again.”

Han stared at Bais, “So it isn’t that easy after all,” he whispered. Bais hung his head as he began to undo the weaving. Next time they would do it properly.

Later that day, when Kain had forgotten his anger, most of the men, young and old, climbed up the rise to the clifftop, for their usual dive and swim. All except Bais. He had seen Kain’s daughter, Yagad, making pots under her father’s house. She was as pretty as ever, was a hard worker and a great pot maker. She would make a good wife. However, there was still the bride price. Then again, Kain would decide who was going to marry her. That was the custom.

Tap, Tap, Tap! Yagad shaped a ball of clay by patting it around with a small paddle. Bais liked to watch her agile fingers as she worked. He noticed the red hibiscus flower in her hair moved in time with the tapping and her long legs, which held the half-made pot, vibrated.

“*Ehe!* Bais, “she called softly, “You are not with the rest of the men having a swim?”

*Bilbil girl. (Finsch, 1888: 108)*



Bais settled on a log nearby. “And what about you, Yagad? Shouldn’t you be down on the women’s section of the beach.”

“I will go soon. When I’ve finished this pot.”

“Your father got cross with the way I wove the sail.”

“*Ehe!* So I heard! His voice could be heard all over the village!”

“He must think I’m stupid.”

“*Nene!*” Yagad reassured him. “You have a lot to learn.” She glanced up at him with laughing eyes.

“One day I will have trading partners like your father and travel to far away places.”

“Will you trade my pots?” Yagad asked, wistfully.

“I can only do that if you are my wife,” laughed Bais.

Yagad had no time to answer. The women were calling her down to the water.

Bais climbed up to where the men were. Not for them the easy swim off the beach. No, they must show their strength by jumping off the high cliff into the sea and climbing up the vine rope to the top again.

This place was called Airu and the deep, dark water swirled and surged against the rocks. Taking a running jump Kain leapt far out from the edge yelling, “*Ea,*” as he went. Then his body plunged deep under the cool waves. While others jumped after him, Kain made quick strong strokes towards the bush vine and clambered up. When his hair was wet his hooked nose seemed to stand out more than ever. He towered over the young boys as he encouraged them to leap off the edge.

“Come on,” he urged. “Show your strength. Be strong warriors.”

The boys hesitated, but Bais dared not. He was a man now and like all men of his tribe must be bold. He knew if he did not jump out far enough, he would be dashed on the rocks below the cliff. Many were the

stories of men this had happened to. He took a running jump and cleared the top of the cliff with a loud cry as he plummeted into the churning water beneath.

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The days passed and, at last, the canoe lay finished on the beach. Resplendent in its newly painted colours with a large red fish adorning the woven sail. Bunting of *tanget* leaves fluttered in the breeze and the planks along the sides were decorated with their designs of pots and fish. The sun glistened on the white wooden birds atop the two masts as they seemed to peer down on all the activity.

“Those birds will look out for the fish for us when we are at sea,” Kain said to Madamai.

Madamai agreed, “They will bring good luck. All along the Rai Coast people will know it is your canoe when they see them.”

“Many people will come rushing down to the beach to greet us,” Kain replied excitedly. “*Ea!* This canoe will bring happiness to many people.”

Others began to arrive on the beach, for Kain had invited a great many to the feast to ‘open the door’, the *opim dua*, of his canoe. The women put their newest grass skirts on top of their old ones, red strands of the skirts hanging gracefully below budding breasts.

The woman had prepared a large feast with the last of the yams which had been carefully put aside for times like these. Although it was the hungry time of the year, there was always food for feasts. The women scraped the *taro* and yams and cooked them in a line of pots by building up firewood around them. When the fire died down the pots sat blackened in the ashes. The food thus cooked was served steaming hot into wooden bowls.

Meanwhile, the men had been busy preparing themselves for the *singsing*. Again they took turns one behind the other at the rock pools. When it was Kain’s turn he peered at his face in the water and applied red paint to his hair, fluffed it out with a bamboo comb and added cassowary feathers. He straightened the *bulra*, pigs teeth ornament, and tied the



dog teeth headband around his forehead. Girded with his *mal* he was a colourful sight. He turned to Malbak who applied a long streak of paint on Kain forehead and streaks on each cheek. Then more red paint was smeared on his back and over his ornaments: red the colour of joy.

“*Aia!*” sighed Malbak. “You are well prepared for the *singsing*.” Together they walked down to the canoe. As they passed the *darem*, they, could hear the magic flutes sounding their eerie notes to welcome the new canoe.

Some of the men arrived bringing gifts for Madamai, the *likon*, so he would make the special magic to protect the canoe when it sailed on the high seas. Among the gifts were dog teeth, pig teeth and pots. Madamai looked over the gifts and was well satisfied with them. Walking down to the canoe, Madamai began the special ceremony over it. He flogged the canoe with ginger leaves to rid it of any evil spirits and then spat a secret magic potion over it to protect it from evil.

Then he began to chant a prayer to *Dabag*, the good spirit.

*Tao aegri ibol,*  
*Dim aegri ibol.*

“Fasten these holes on the sides and stop the water going inside” he pleaded over and over again. And then turning to address the canoe itself, he shouted, “And may you bring many cargoes of pots to our trading partners.”

Then, the mats were laid out and the women placed the steaming wooden bowls of food on them. Kain, as the host, organised the food so that every group got a fair amount. The women and children left with their share and the men carried their portion to the *darem*. Once they had crept inside, they blocked the doorway. It was all very secretive.

Before they ate, Kain stood over the food and prayed to their god, *Anut*. Then, taking a piece of burning wood, he blew ash over the food to banish the evil spirits. When all the men had been served, they began to eat hungrily. It was many a day since they had had such a big meal so they filled their bellies while they had the chance. After they had eaten, Kain rose to talk and the men hushed.

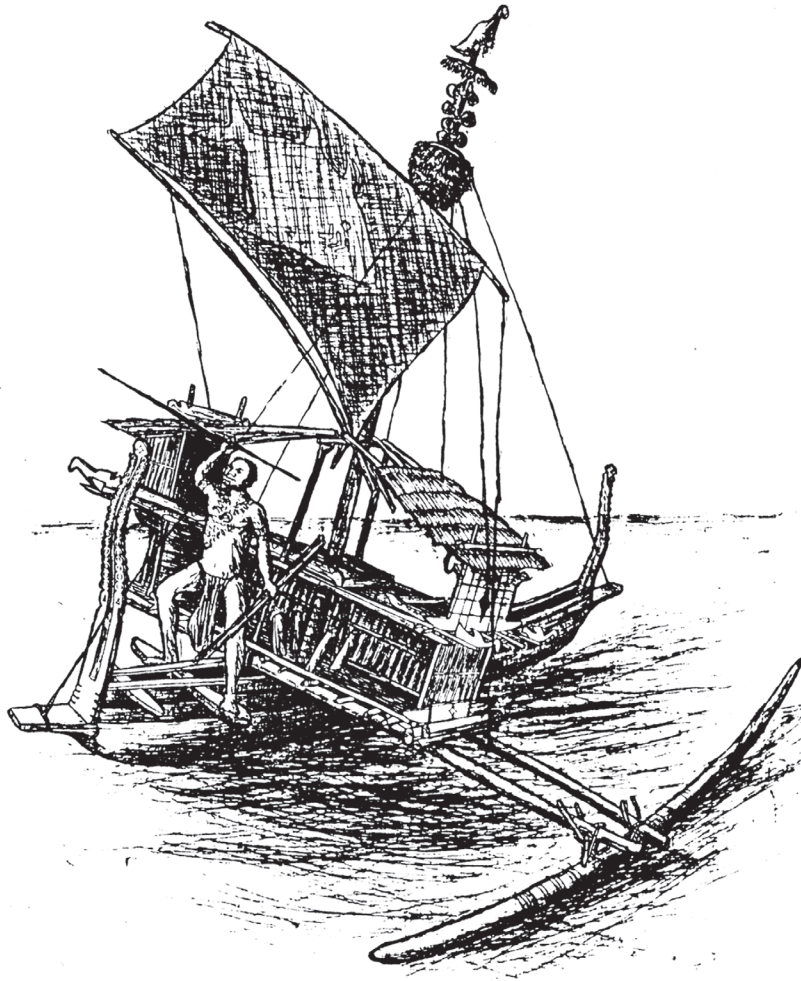


“This feast has been prepared for the canoe and for you men who helped me build it. It is a fine canoe and I’m sure it will bring much happiness to our trade friends. Now we must go out on the seas and venture to many places. We will take our pots and buy food with them. If the wind is right and the weather fine, we will return safely and then there will be more feasting and dancing.”

The men cheered him and drank their *koniak* made from roots. It was refreshing and made them very talkative. At last it was time for the *singsing* to begin. More wood was heaped on the fire and the men stomped around inside the *darem*. The white feathers in the headdresses glowed in the firelight and their ochre-painted bodies glistened red.

The women heard the drums and gathered in the square outside the *darem*. Two by two, they circled around holding each other by the waist, their colourful skirts swaying gracefully as they moved. On and on they danced until the sun set in golden splendour over the mountains and a cool sea-breeze fanned them. Then the women hurriedly called the children and went back to the village for fear of the *masalai* that roamed in the night.

On the beach the canoe threw a dark shadow across the sand. The *tanget* leaves fluttered and the white birds continued to peer woodenly down at the sand. All was in readiness for the trading to come.



*Illustration of a lalong. (Rosalie Christensen).*

## Chapter 5

### The Trading Trip

When Madamai rose early the next morning he noticed that it had been raining in the night and many clouds lay along the Finisterre mountain range. He quickly gathered *tanget* leaves and other colourful shrubs from the bush to make weather magic to keep more rain away. Clothed in his finest dogteeth and feathers, alone on the beach, he addressed the spirits:

*O Bipoi, O Sagui,  
I give you these gifts.  
Don't rain on these canoes,  
Walk along the heavens,  
And stay in your house at Bunu,  
On the Finisterre Range.*



*An Astrolabe coastal village in the 1890s. (Sentinella, 1975: 38)*

He began to make wind magic, calling on the winds to blow the canoes to the Rai Coast. He pointed, his hands reddened with ochre, and threw some ginger leaves in the direction the canoes were going.

Soon all the village was awake. Pigs snuffled in the dirt under the coconut trees. Children ran into the water for their first swim of the day, yelling and splashing each other and the women cooked *taro* and yams on their fires and scolded the children for their noise. At last, Kain strode down to the beach. Dressed in his finest *mal*, skin glistening with red ochre paint, he was armed with spears and a small round shield. People stared at him as he passed and mothers quietened their quarrelling children, for here was a warrior indeed, ready to lead his men onto the high seas and protect them against all dangers as they traded their pots. He strode over to where Madamai was standing and put his hand on his old friend's shoulder.

"Tell me, Madamai, is the weather going to be fine for us, today?"

"Of course," answered Madamai, "I have just made magic over the rain clouds and look at the wind. It is the *dadau*! It will take you to the Rai Coast."

"*Ehe*! You have done well, my friend. Many pots will come your way for this."

Kain then thumped a message on the large *garamut*, announcing that all the canoes were ready for the trading trip. At this, some women rushed to finish their pots and other women carried their pots down to the canoes. Yagad was there with her pots, but she could not give them to Bais to trade. Not yet. She walked past him, grass skirt swaying on her hips, pots held on her shoulders and handed the pots to her father. He would trade them for her. One by one, Kain loaded them on the canoe and packed them in with leaves.

Husbands then turned to their wives. "Mind you behave yourselves while we are away. Any humbugging and we will know, because no one on the Rai Coast will buy your pots."

The men then slid the canoes into the water. There were six canoes - two from Kranket, one from Yabob and the rest from Bilbil. Four were

*balangut* with their two masts and sails, but the most colourful one was Kain's new canoe. The designs along the side were in red ochre and the white cockatoos astride the masts gleamed in the sunlight. The new *tanget* leaves fluttered on the mast stays, showing the wind direction.

At last it was time to go and the captain of each canoe summoned his crew to jump on board. After the sides of the canoes were flogged with ginger leaves to rid them of evil spirits, they sailed towards the Rai Coast, with the wind catching the sails. The women stood on the beach watching the shapes of the canoes grow smaller until they could no longer hear the "*Too ti too*" sound of the conch shells. Then they turned back to the village, remembering the words of their husbands.

Kain and Gad were standing on the bow of their canoe, their *mal* flapping in the breeze. Kain fingered his *bulra* decoration on his chest. "That's a fine bulra you have there," Gad commented.

"True!" agreed Kain. "My trading friends on Karkar gave it to me in exchange for some pots, remember?"

"Yes, I remember," answered Gad. "*Ea!* Those Karkar men grow the finest pig teeth around here,"

"Maybe, but they don't make pots."

"*Ehe!* They exchange their pig teeth for our pots and then we are all happy."

They both laughed, but not loudly for who knew what evil spirit might be listening.

Suddenly, the front of the canoe dipped forward and Kain pointed to the sail and yelled at one of the crewmen.

"Quick, Widon, turn the wings of the birds."

But Widon was half asleep and moved slowly to his feet. Kain could see the canoe would sink if the ropes were not pulled quickly. He leaped forward to grab them. Just at this moment, Widon decided to move and got in Kain's way. With an angry swing of his arm Kain pushed him aside, grabbed the ropes and pulled, turning the sails. The canoe veered

suddenly and Widon lost his balance and fell into the sea. How the others laughed at him! “Lazy fellow, you deserve to fall into the water,” Kain cried.

The canoe sailed off leaving Widon splashing wildly in the sea. “Are you going to leave him there?” Gad asked, as he watched the figure growing smaller and smaller.

“*Nene!* we’ll just give him a fright. He’ll obey me sooner next time.”

Kain slackened sail and the men paddled back to where the sorry Widon floundered in the waves. They offered him an oar and he pulled himself on board.

“Next time you’ll obey me straight away,” Kain said with a severe look on his face.

“Yes, captain,” Widon said, hanging his head.

The other canoes had slackened sail, to wait for them. What a beautiful sight they were as they stretched across the bay. Each canoe had its own totem on the mast. There was a moon crest on one and bird totems on the others.

The four *balangut* were the fastest but they slackened their pace to keep with the others. For safety reasons, it was best to travel together. The wind strengthened and soon they could see Bogadjim Village which was their first port of call. As they blew on their conch shells, many figures came running down the sand to lay rollers for the visiting canoes.

Shouts of welcome greeted the pot traders as the canoes scraped the sand. “A new canoe! A new canoe!” came the cry as the villagers hurried across to Kain’s canoe.

“We must throw the crew overboard,” they cried. They climbed on board and pushed Kain, Gad, Widon and all the others overboard. Then they began throwing rotten fruit and eggs at them. “That’s for bringing the new canoe,” they shouted. Kain and his crew laughed good naturedly for to show anger would bring bad luck on them and their canoe. Then

the headman of Bogadjim, Kubai, arrived and tried to spear the wooden birds. Laughing happily he warned, "Look out, I'm trying to kill them!"

Kain laughed too, "This will bring us good luck."

At last the welcoming ceremony was over and Kubai led his friend, Kain, towards the village. "We have killed a pig for the new canoe," he said happily.

"You are ready for the *singsing*," said Kain eyeing Kubai's thick shell earrings and the new bamboo sliver through his nose.

"Maybe, but you my friend are not ready," said Kubai, pointing at the dried egg on Kain's chest. "Come you must wash first and prepare for the feast."

They walked along the beach to the village square. The houses looked cool under the coconut palms. Their heavy *morata* roofs curved down to the ground. Kubai offered Kain a *kulau*.

"*Ea!* Good," sighed Kain, as he drank the refreshing coconut juice. "These trading trips are thirsty work."

"Yes. It's a while since you've been here."

"We've brought you lots of pots. They should do you a while this time."

"That's good. I must buy some extra ones, too. My trade friends in the hills are coming down, tomorrow."

"That makes me wonder just how far our pots travel!" Kain said proudly.

"But how long will this continue?" asked Kubai with a worried look. "Those Mindiris around the coast have begun making many more pots than usual and trading them all along the coast. You'd better watch out or no one will want to buy your pots!"

Kain stood still, too stunned to talk. After a long angry silence he thrust his spear into the ground. "We'll have to fight those Mindiris."

Kubai wondered if he had said too much, "Old Kore is the headman there. Perhaps if you talk to him, you might come to some agreement."

But later, when they had washed and dressed for the *singsing*, the men from Bilbil were ready to declare war on the Mindiris.

“Those Mindiris,” spat Gad. “They share the same ancestors with us. They should be like our brothers!”

“What do you mean?” asked Kubai.

“Many generations ago our ancestors lived on Yomba Island, which was out near Bagabag Island,” Kain began to explain. “Then the island began to sink and some managed to escape. But then, a large tsunami submerged the island, killing many people.”

“But some people escaped to the coast,” Madamai added. “Some came to Mindiri and others to Yabob and Bilbil.”

“Yes that’s right,” Kain agreed. “That’s why we speak a similar language and make the same kind of pots. Our ancestors all lived on the island.”

“I see now,” said Kubai. “But what will happen if the Mindiris make more and more of these pots?”

“That’s the trouble,” Kain replied. “We depend on our pots for a living because we exchange them for food which we cannot grow on our island.”

“*Ehe!*” agreed Gad. “They are crucial for our survival. What are we going to do now?”

“We could invite them to a feast and discuss our problem with them,” said Madamai. “We must give them a chance. My relations are married to Mindiri people. We should call in there and see what they say.”

Even Kain agreed that this was the best policy, so they left the matter there and turned to talk of other things. Then it was time for the *singsing* for the new canoe. When Kain lay down to sleep that night on the platform of his canoe, lulled by the sound of the waves on the beach, he wondered how many pots they would sell in the villages they visited along the Rai Coast.

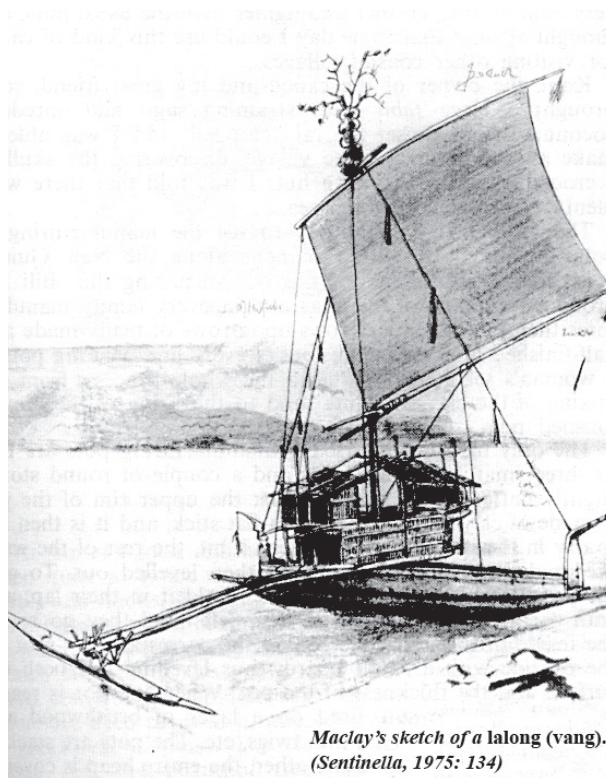


## Chapter 6

### *Karag, the 'angry man' wind*

The next morning at Bogadjim, Kain was up early unloading pots from the canoe for Kubai. Each one had been carefully wrapped in leaves to protect it in the pot cage. There was no room to store the gifts that Kubai had for him. These would be picked up on the return trip when the canoe would hopefully be empty.

Soon they were ready to depart and with much shouting and laughing the crews pulled the heavy canoes down to the water and raised the sails. Gorendu was the next port of call and here Kain met another trading partner, Tui. How pleased they were to see each other, but Tui also warned Kain about the Mindiris.



*Maclay's sketch of a lalong (vang).  
(Sentinella, 1975: 134)*

On and on they went to different places and at each port of call the people killed a pig to celebrate the new canoe. However, the nearer they got to Mindiri, the fewer the pots that were bought and the more annoyed Kain became. For years, the Mindiris and the Bilbils had been friends and had even exchanged pots. The Mindiri pots were black and thick and lasted a long time. The Bilbil pots, however, cooked food faster and gave it a sweeter flavour. Both had been in demand for these different reasons, but now the Mindiris were flooding the market with their pots. How were the Bilbils going to buy food for the hungry months?

At last, they came to Mindiri Village. Kain decided to call in. Surely his friend, Kore, did not want to fight over the pot trade? The canoes spread out in the sea in front of Mindiri. The crew slackened their sails and waited. Nothing happened. No-one shouted cries of welcome; no one hurried down with rollers to the beach. There was no-one in sight at all, just the swaying coconuts over the *morata* roofs of the village. All was silent.

Beg of Yabob brought his canoe alongside and spoke to Kain. "What are we going to do?"

"Perhaps we can just pretend to be friendly. They don't know we know what they are doing."

"I'll invite them to a feast at Yabob Island," said Beg. "Let's see how they answer us."

"*Ehe!*" Kain agreed, "that will give us time to decide what to do."

Cupping his hands about his mouth Beg called "Kore! Kore!"

Kain blew the deep hollow sound on his conch shell. "*Too, too, too, ti, too,*" bellowed the deep hollow sound.

At last a lone figure appeared on the beach and Kain could see it was old Kore, his trading friend at Mindiri. However, when he came close with the water lapping about his ankles, he did not look very friendly.

"What do you want?" he growled at the traders.

"Kore!" called Kain. "We have pots to trade. Do you need some?"

“*Nene!* Not anymore,” called Kore. “We have plenty of our own. Our women have been very busy.”

Beg exchanged looks with Kain. “Well, why don’t you visit us at Yabob?” he asked. “You need not buy our pots. Just come to a *singsing*.”

Kore was very surprised at Beg’s friendliness. “When is the *singsing*?” he asked.

“At the turn of the moon. We will have a big celebration. We will be expecting you.”

Kore looked thoughtfully from Kain to Beg. Were they tricking him? Was there really going to be a *singsing*? At last he decided he could not miss the celebration.

“All right!” he said. “You can expect us in one moon’s time,” and with that he turned and walked up the beach towards the village.

The fleet of canoes turned out to sea again and sailed on to Lamtub, Singor and Avrai. After resting there they went on to Teliata. At each place the people bought only a few pots. Kain grew more and more upset and decided to return home with the rest of the pots. So Madamai was called on to make his magic to change the wind. Following the custom, the young men ceremoniously washed off the *dadau* in a river. Even so, they had to wait many days before the wind changed to the south-east.

When it came it was a fair wind to begin with and the men set off, calling into the same villages as on the way down, only this time they collected the trade items: bows and arrows, wooden plates, clay paint, *bilums*, tobacco and betel nuts. By the time they got to Bibi the wind had become stronger. They stood on the beach and looked out to sea. The water was dark and sinister. Waves dashed onto the shore and the wind whistled through the coconuts.

“*Ehe! Medapep*, the *karag* is here now,” warned Madamai. “This ‘angry man wind’ will blow us all to Karkar. We should wait here at Bibi until it passes.”

But for once Kain would not heed the word of his weather man. He wanted to get home and prepare the attack on the Mindiris.

“Tomorrow we will call into Rimba to pick up the food and pigs they promised us and then we will head home,” he decided.

They left Bibi early the next morning and made their way slowly to Rimba, but the sea became more and more choppy. By the time they were outside the reef near Rimba, the *karag* was buffeting the sails of the canoes. Madamai, the *likon*, made his magic over some ginger roots. He mixed it with some leaves in a pot. Then he chewed the mixture and spat it out on the water. It had no effect and great mountains of waves towered over all the canoes.

“You *karag*, go away. Leave us!” begged Madamai, but still the wind blew. Madamai and his crew managed at last to make the shore, where willing hands pulled the canoe high up on the sand.

However, Malbak and his friend, Mapalsen, the two traders from Kranket, were not so lucky in their canoe. They pulled hard at the ropes and tried to turn the canoe, but the wind strengthened and the canoe drifted away from the others. Then the rain began and great flashes of lightning split the sky, while thunder rumbled around the coast. Malbak’s canoe drifted towards the open sea. How frightened they were as they clung to their craft.

“Pull the sails down,” yelled Malbak. The men tried hard, but the wind tore the booms away and the mast broke with a large crack.

“Throw the cargo overboard,” yelled Malbak and the men obeyed as best they could. Pots, plates and food were all thrown into the churning water.

“The *karag* is taking us to Karkar,” yelled Mapalsen over the wind. Malbak’s eyes widened with terror.

Driven before the gale force wind, they were buffeted all through the day and into the night. The darkness was full of terrors. Would they ever see land again? Through the long night they clung to the canoe as it was tossed this way and that. There were no stars to guide them or moon to show the outline of the shore - nothing but darkness, deep darkness, and the roar of the wild seas.

At last when dawn was breaking and they were nearly dead from fright and fatigue, the canoe hit a jagged rock. "Land at last," they cried. But more terrors lay ahead. Were they in friendly or hostile territory? Clambering out of the canoe they huddled together under some bushes.

"Look!" whispered Malbak as a figure approached. Was he friend or foe? Did he have a horde of warriors ready to leap from the bushes at them? Closer and closer came the figure.

"Why it's old Bison," yelled Malbak rushing forward with relief to greet him. "Remember me, Bison? I met you on Karkar Island."

Bison was amazed. "What are you doing here on Bagabag Island? Have you come on a trading trip?" he asked.

Malbak laughed at this. "A trading trip! Oh Bison, we have no pots left. We threw everything overboard. The *karag* blew us here last night. This is my friend Mapalsen."

"Come Malbak, bring Mapalsen and the crew to my village. You can rest here for a few days while you fix your canoe."

As they were walking up the track, Mapalsen suddenly stopped and looked very worried.

"What's wrong?" Malbak asked.

"What about Kain and the others? What happened to them in the storm? We did not see their canoes."

"*Ehe! Medapep!*" groaned Malbak. "We have been so worried about ourselves and our own survival we forgot about our friends. Let's hope they are still alive."

Bison laughed loudly and they all looked to see what he thought so funny. "I know what they'll say if they get ashore safely."

"What?" queried Mapalsen.

"They will say, 'Malbak and Mapalsen and their crew are all dead'" and Bison laughed again loudly. "If you hurry, you will be back in time for your own funeral."

At this they all laughed. "We must hurry and repair our canoe," Malbak said urgently. "They will be tearing out my fruit trees and betelnuts as a sign of grief."

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Meanwhile, back on the Rai Coast, Kain and his friends who had survived the storm, lamented the loss of Malbak and Mapalsen. "I must take this bad news to Kranket Island," Kain said sadly. "I will never see Malbak and Mapalsen again."

A few days later they set out for Bilbil Island. The women had been straining their eyes for the first sight of the sails and by the time the canoes arrived at the beach there was a crowd to pull the canoes ashore. What a welcome they received!

But when the women saw the dejected looks on the men's faces they knew something was wrong.

"Where's Malbak?" asked one of them.

"Yes, Malbak and his friends?" someone else asked.

"They are dead," cried Kain. "My good friends Malbak and Mapalsen are dead, the wind was too strong and they drowned."

There was much wailing and weeping. Word was sent to Kranket Island where the people sadly began to prepare for the funeral feast which would be held at the rising of the new moon. Kain, Gad, Madamai and young Bais all went along to the funeral feast. They sat in the *darem* on Kranket and remembered their lost friends. Wearing the *bilas* for the dead, they drank *koniak*.

Malbak's family showed their grief by cutting down everything that Malbak had owned. His banana plants and betel nut trees were all hacked down while the people wailed. "Oh Malbak, Malbak. You were a big man of our clan. *Aia!* Malbak! We will never see your face again."

Later, Kain and Madamai wandered down to the little beach. The water gently lapped the pebbles on the beach.

“Malbak would stand here and welcome us,” remembered Kain.

“Yes,” answered Madamai. “The sea spirits have taken him now.”

As he stood there looking out to sea his eyes suddenly rivetted on a small speck in the water. “*Ehe!*” he cried to Madamai, “What’s that out there?”

“Where, where?”

Kain pointed. “I think it is a canoe. Yes, it is. It’s coming here. It must be someone coming for the funeral feast.”

“From Karkar? No one knows about the funeral over there. Listen, I can hear the conch shell,” whispered Kain.

“*Too, too, too, ti, too,*” came the sound. Then the sail came in sight with Malbak’s totem on the mast.

“That’s Malbak’s canoe!” Madamai shouted.

“Malbak, Malbak,” called Kain with tears in his eyes. Could this possibly be true? Is he still alive?

The canoe neared the shore and there were Malbak, Mapalsen and the others standing waving and flicking their hands with delight. “Are you sure it is not their spirits from the dead?” whispered Madamai. But Kain was not listening. He rushed out into the water and jumped on board the canoe.

“Malbak. Mapalsen! It is you. Oh, Malbak, I never thought I’d see you again.” The two men held hands and hugged each other.

“Why are you wearing the *bilas* for the dead?” Malbak asked him. “Did someone die?”

*Kranket man. (Finsch, 1888: 87).*





“It was for you, Malbak. For you! We are having your funeral feast today.”

“Well, then, I am just in time for my funeral feast,” Malbak laughed heartily. “Bison was right.”

By this time word had spread and the villagers all crowded down to the beach. “Malbak, Mapalsen,” they shouted happily.

Malbak’s father came forward with tears of happiness in his eyes. “Oh Malbak. We thought you were dead. We have destroyed your banana plants and your betel nut trees.”

“Don’t worry, father,” Malbak replied. “We will plant some more. Let’s be happy now. I am so glad to be home.” Laughing and shouting, the men all walked up to the *darem*.

“You can take off your *bilas* for the dead now,” laughed Malbak.

“Of course, of course,” cried all the men, and they washed the black paint from their faces and re-painted them with red ochre.

“What about the feast?” Kain asked. “It is no longer a funeral feast “

“*Nene!* But let’s not waste it,” laughed Malbak.

So the funeral feast turned into a feast of joy and the Krankets and their friends danced loud and long.

## Chapter 7

### A Feast and a Fight

Now that Malbak had returned safely, the men of Yabob and Bilbil turned their thoughts to Mindiri. Preparations went ahead for the feast which would lead to a peaceful settlement or to war. Beg of Yabob and his friends went to Bilbil Island and sat with Kain and Madamai in the *darem* to discuss the feast and lay plans in case of trouble.

Beg began: “When the Mindiris arrive at Yabob, I will go and welcome them. What if they try to attack us?”

Kain pulled at his beard, “I will wait in the bushes with my men and attack them from behind.”

“Good idea!” agreed Beg. “We will feed them first. Then bring up the subject of the pots. Your men must stay hidden in the bushes.”

Madamai, however, had a different idea. “Kain and I should go to the feast, while our other men keep hidden.”



*Sketch of village houses on Bilbil Island, 1872. (Tumarkin, 1982: 253).*

“Perhaps you are right,” said Kain. “If there are no Bilbil men at the feast, the Mindiri might get suspicious.”

They continued to argue back and forth and, every now and then, one of the old leaders would stand up to talk. Everyone would hush while they spoke, for theirs were the words of wisdom passed down from father to son through the generations.

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On the day of the feast, the Bilbils left their island early and paddled their small canoes to Yabob Island. They dragged these canoes up the beach and hid them. Small distant specks on the water informed the Yabobs that seven canoes were coming from Mindiri.

Wanting to appear friendly, Beg dressed for a feast, not a fight. Donning his best *mal* and decorations, he covered his face and hair with red ochre.

Nearer and nearer came the Mindiri canoes. Kore was in the first canoe dressed for the feast but in his eyes there lurked suspicion. “Do these Yabobs mean to harm us?” he whispered to his friend Mul.

“Don’t go ashore until we are certain,” Mul whispered back. “That way we can escape in the canoes before any harm is done to us.”

“*Ehe!* You are right,” Kore agreed and he motioned to the other canoes to slacken their pace.

Beg ran down to the beach and shouted a welcome to them. “Kore,” he called, “Come ashore. We will help you with your canoes.”

Kore looked at Mul. “Do you think he’s friendly?” he whispered out of the corner of his mouth.

“Hard to tell,” answered Mul.

They stood hesitating, while other canoes drew up alongside them.

“Leave your spears and bows and arrows in the canoes and come in peace,” said Beg. “You have come for a feast not a fight.”

Still they waited and watched the island. They could not see Kain and his men hidden in the nearby bushes. Nor could they see the spears pointed in their direction.

“I think it is all right,” said Kore. “Come, let us go and meet Beg.”

Leaving his weapons in the canoe, he got out and started up the beach. Beg led him to the village square where the Yabob women were busy putting yams and *taro* into the cooking pots for the feast. When all the Mindiri were assembled in the village square, Kore looked around suspiciously. “Where are your friends from Bilbil? I cannot see any Bilbil men here.”

“They’re coming,” answered Beg. “You don’t think they would keep away from a feast do you?”

Kore laughed, “Not Kain and Madamai. They love a feast.”

He was not surprised to see both these men appear shortly afterwards. “So you have come, eh?” he said. “You great pot traders,” he scoffed at them.

“Beware, Kore!” sneered Kain. “You may think you can take the pot trade away from us but we are strong fighters.”

Beg could see that a fight might develop, so he touched Kain on the shoulder. “*Ehe!*, Kain,” he said, “did you smell the feast cooking?”

“*Aia!* My friend,” replied Kain. “I will even sit with this big-head Kore, if I have to. Your women cook so well.”

“Come,” encouraged Beg, “Let’s be friends with the Mindiri men. We must eat first and then we can talk.”

He divided the food into wooden plates and ordered the men’s food to be taken to the *darem*. It was cool and dark under the thick *morata* roof and the men licked their lips hungrily when they saw the steaming pork, taro and yams being carried in on wooden plates. Beg said a prayer to *Anut* as usual and all began to eat their portion. Madamai sucked up the juice from his shell spoon. “Hmmm. This is well cooked. It has just enough seawater in it to bring out the taste.”

“*Ehe!*” agreed Kain, “Yabob women cook well in their pots.”

They all munched on in silence, too busy eating to talk much, Then Beg spoke, “We have invited you all to come today to talk about the pot trade.”

“I thought we were just invited to a feast,” objected Kore.

“True, we did invite you to a feast but now that you have eaten, we will discuss the pots.”

“There is nothing to discuss,” Kore cried, “Our women make good pots and everyone wants them. That’s all.”

Kain jumped up angrily. “Our pots are good too. They cook faster than your black ones.”

“Maybe it is true,” admitted Kore, “but our pots last longer. Who wants pots that break easily?”

Kain was too angry to reply. He stamped out of the *darem* with Madamai close behind him. The other Mindiri men were worried about what was going to happen. Would the Bilbil men fight them? They turned to Beg; would he help them? One glance and they knew he would not.

His eyes were hooded with half closed eyelids and he was staring angrily at Kore. “You have gone too far, this time,” he hissed. “We brought you here to come to an agreement about the pots. Now that you refuse to discuss anything, you will be lucky to leave the island alive.”

“You lied to us!” shouted Kore. “You told us there would be a feast and no fighting. You told us to leave our bows and arrows in our canoes. Come on men. To the canoes. Get the weapons.”

The Mindiri rushed for the canoes. Too late! The Yabob and Bilbil men had got there before them. Treachery! They had put holes in most of the canoes and were breaking the strings on the bows and snapping the arrows. The Mindiri men picked up their broken weapons and threw them away in despair. One man, Dua, found a bow and arrow that was not broken. He picked it up and aimed at a Bilbil man. Ping! The arrow flew through the air but it only hit the base of a tree.

Dua turned to get another arrow but he was speared and fell into the water. Then the Bilbil and Yabob men came from all directions and attacked the Mindiris. It was an easy victory, achieved with cunning and feigned friendliness. More than ten Mindiri men were killed on the beach that day.

Kore and Mul managed to escape in one of the canoes and three other young men swam to safety. Their names were Kistamon, Kasan and Sisoï. They made their way to Kranket Island and from there went to Siar.

Back on Yabob Island, Kain, Madamai and Beg were clapping each other proudly on the back. "We won. We won!" they shouted.

"That bighead Kore. Now he will not boast about the Mindiri pots any more." Kain said.

But after their first joy had subsided, they became a little afraid. The Mindiris would not be happy until they had paid back the deaths of their brothers. "What will happen when we visit the Rai Coast now?" wondered Madamai.

"The Mindiris have many friends there," warned Beg. "We will have to be careful."

"And yet we must go there to sell our pots," Kain insisted. "We must have food or we will all starve."

By killing the Mindiri men, they had left themselves open to revenge attacks whenever they ventured to the Rai Coast. Then Madamai remembered something and cheered up. "I have been watching the stars. It will soon be time for the *Biris* to rise and then we can dig the yams from our gardens on the mainland. We need not go hungry for a while. When we need food from the Rai Coast, the dispute will be over. Come on, let's return to Bilbil Island. Tonight I will watch for the stars. Perhaps tonight is the night."



*Sketch of Bilbil house by Miklouho-Maclay, 1872.  
(Tumarkin, 1982: 183)*



## Chapter 8

### War and Peace

For the next few nights Madamai stood on the cliff side of the island and gazed at the sky. But there was no sign of the *Biris*, the constellation Pleiades. Then, suddenly one night there they were. Madamai was standing alone with the coconut leaves whispering in the breeze and the water lapping the rocks beneath. Other men had stood there with him, too tired to stay awake. He stood alone looking towards the east for he was the *likon*, the one appointed to watch for the appearance of the *Biris*.

“*Biris! Biris!*” he shouted excitedly, pointing at the new stars, as first the brightest one and then the others appeared over the horizon. Standing on the cliff edge he blew loud and long on his conch shell. The deep sound carried far across the ocean welcoming the New Year.

The old men beside him rolled over at the sound and rubbed their eyes. Standing beside Madamai, they too looked to the east as he pointed out the stars. “Quick,” called Madamai, “we must go and waken the village.”

He rushed down the path towards the *morata* roofed houses nestled around the beach. As soon as the conch was blown, the dogs howled and the cocks crowed. But many people still slept. Grabbing a stick, Madamai thumped on the nearest *garamut*. At this, people began tumbling out of the houses still half asleep. Babies cried, pigs grunted and people shouted. Over the noise Madamai shouted: “The *Biris* have come, the *Biris* have come.” At once everyone headed for the beach. Now that the *Biris* were here, it was time to wash the old year off and be ready for the new year, before the sun rose over the sea.

*Rai Coast men. (Brown, 1908: 504).*



“Come on, hurry up,” the mothers urged their children. “You’ll get a bad sickness if you don’t wash before sunrise.”

Madamai rounded up the slow ones with a stick and hit them across their backs. When they had finished washing, they splashed each other, laughing and singing for joy. Then they stood on the beach and watched the clouds inflame the sky with a red and yellow glow. It was a beautiful welcome to a new day and a new year. Now it was the time to feast and celebrate. The rising of the stars meant the yam harvest was ready.

All that day the canoes plied back and forth to the mainland where the people dug up the yams from their mainland gardens. How their mouths watered as they peeled the yams and prepared them for the cooking pots. The women lined up the pots and the men piled firewood around them. Soon the pots were filled to the brim with yams, chicken, flying foxes and *taro*. Later, when the firewood was lit, the line of pots turned bright red as the food cooked.

That evening the men presented the women with plates full of steaming food and the women did the same for the men. After it was all over, Kain, Madamai, Gad, Bais and the other men sat inside the *darem*. They did not talk about the feast or the stars. They had more important things to discuss.

The Mindiris had sent word that they wanted to fight the Bilbils. Now the Bilbils must prepare for war. Until this fight was over and peace restored, they would never be able to visit the Rai Coast again. It was all right now while they could eat the yams, but these yam gardens would soon run out. Then, if they could not trade their pots for food, they would starve. That very night they began to plan the attack on Mindiri village.

Within a few days they were ready, and six large canoes full of warriors set off for the Rai Coast in the pre-dawn light. They steered by the morning star as they wanted to remain hidden from people further around the Rai coast who might warn the Mindiris of their coming

“There’s *Boi*, the great star,” shouted Gad to Kain who was on the night watch.

“*Ea!* This wind is just right too. We should be at Bongu soon after dawn,” said Kain hopefully. “We will hide there during the day and maybe some of the Bongu men will join us against Mindiri.”

The *tanget* leaves fluttered above them and their *mal* flapped in the wind. The sea was not rough at this hour of the morning; it was really the best time to sail. Soon the mountain range was outlined against the morning sky on their right side, as they made their way along the coast. “There’s Bongu!” called Gad and they steered their canoes to the shore.

Early next morning they were off again and sailed as far as Bibi. They were within reach of Mindiri Village now and, on the following day, the men grew anxious as their canoes approached Mindiri where armed warriors could attack them. This was war; a war to protect their pot trade, a war for their very survival on an island without gardens. If they could no longer exchange their pots for food, they would all starve. The six canoes hove to, off the shore and the Bilbil men stared into the bushes beyond the beach. There were figures emerging through the coconuts.

“They have seen us!” said Kain.

“We cannot make a surprise attack now,” cried Madamai, as he pulled his canoe up alongside Kain’s.

Then they heard the sound of the *garamut* calling the Mindiri men to battle. They must hasten to catch them before they could organize their resistance. Shaking his spear in the air, Kain jumped onto the sand yelling, “*Wa-aya-ah.*” One after the other his men followed him.

“You stay and watch the canoes,” Madamai called to two of the young men as he dashed off after the others.

The warriors came to an old house and hid behind it. Just as Kain peered around, an arrow zipped past him and he drew back. Putting aside his spear, he put an arrow in his bow and fired it towards the next house. He could see more and more Mindiris gathering and his men would soon be outnumbered. What could they do? Then Madamai saw a fire still smouldering beside him. He blew on some of the fire sticks until the red hot glow burst into flames. He bravely dashed out of hiding towards the village and threw a burning stick on the roof of the nearest house.

More Bilbil grabbed firesticks and did the same thing. The Mindiris shot arrows at them and many men fell to the ground. By now the village was alight and the Mindiris had to rush to save their houses. In the confusion, Madamai, Kain, Gad and those who were not wounded fled back to the canoes. They were outnumbered, some of their men had been killed and they did not want to lose any more. Pulling the canoes into the water they climbed on board.

Just then they heard a shout from the Mindiris. It was Kore, coming down to the beach with his men - Kore, the man who did not like their pots - Kore who had come to Yabob and been deceived. What did he have to say?

“Men of Bilbil,” he called, “the fight is over. We lost some men at Yabob and now some of your men have died. The trouble is finished. Let us live in peace!”

Kain turned to Gad. “It might be a trick,” he whispered.

They all stopped what they were doing, but nobody said anything. Then Kore spoke again, “Kain, son of Serbung, let us be friends now. You want to trade your pots and we want to trade ours. We must reach an agreement.”

Madamai spoke to Kain, “Speak to him. I think he means well.”

Kain stood on the front of his canoe facing Kore. “Yes, you are right. We must live in peace. We cannot keep fighting like this.”

“We will prepare a feast of friendship for you,” Kore cried. “We will cook many pigs and much food.”

So these two groups of warriors decided on a date for their feast - a feast that was to end the dispute over the pots. Kore, the Mindiri man, was the one who made this peace possible. From that time on, the Mindiris mainly traded inland and to the east away from Bilbil. The Bilbils traded with the people as far as Mindiri for most of the year, but two or three times a year they still traded to all the villages past Mindiri.

## Chapter 9

### Arrival of Maclay, 1871

One afternoon Kain was sitting in the *darem* talking to Madamai, and Nelle and the other men. Bright sunshine showed through the cracks in the high roof which sloped steeply on either side. Suddenly, a dark figure blocked the small doorway.

Kain looked up and called “*Ehe!* Bais, son of Nelle, we were just talking about you.”

“Why me?” asked Bais anxiously, “What have I done?”

“Come Bais,” said Kain, stretching out a hand to him. “Don’t you want to marry my daughter, Yagad?”

“Why, yes. Is that what you are discussing?”

“We must arrange a bride price for you,” said Nelle.

Bais was happy that at last they were discussing this. “I’ve wanted to marry Yagad for a long time. She is a beautiful girl and she makes fine pots.”

“We could buy a large pig from Kranket,” Nelle suggested.

“Yes,” agreed Kain, “Malbak brought some back from Bagabag Island.”

“We could try,” said Nelle, “but they may have eaten them all by now.”

Just then there was a commotion in the village. The men rushed out of the *darem* in time to see a whole crowd of people disappearing in the direction of the cliff side of the island.



*Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay*

*“Anut wag, Anut wag!”* someone was shouting while they pointed out to sea.

Kain started off towards the cliff. “Madamai, why are they shouting ‘God’s canoe, god’s canoe?’” he cried.

Madamai did not hear him. He was running through the trees towards the cliff. A crowd had gathered there, staring out to sea at a ship that was entering the bay. Its sails were slackened and smoke billowed out of the funnel. Never had the people seen anything like this before. To them the world ended at the horizon. There was the moon, of course. Perhaps this large canoe came from the moon or some other world. Surely it must be an *Anut’s wag* or god’s canoe.

The people stared and stared at the ship, hardly able to believe their eyes. It had sails like their canoes, but they were large and white and billowed in the wind and a large flag with a blue cross on it fluttered like a totem. It must surely have come from the spirit world. As it loomed larger they became terrified: women and children fled back to the village; some men crouched behind the rocks for safety; Madamai decided to try some of his magic to drive this evil object away. Taking a dry coconut, he banged it hard and sang out, “Oh papa, mama all our ancestors protect us from this new thing that has come here.” He threw the coconut onto the sand. High up on the big ship he could see a small figure watching him.

It was Miklouho Maclay, a Russian scientist. As he watched the small figures on the beach, Maclay saw Madamai with the coconut. He saw him put it on the beach and gesture towards the ship and thought it must be a gift of welcome for him. He decided to go ashore at the next bay.

The men on Bilbil watched the ship as it continued to the Rai Coast. At last Kain spoke, “Look, it is going to Bongu.”

“I’m glad it’s not coming here,” said Madamai, breathing a sigh of relief. “My magic worked, we don’t want evil spirits here.”

Days passed. Kain, Madamai and Bais were too frightened to visit Bongu or Gorendu for fear of the ship. When it left twenty days later, they plucked up courage and decided to sail to Gorendu to see their friend, Tui, and ask him what had happened. They found Tui very excited.

“Kain, Madamai, Bais,” he called, “did you see the ship?”

“*Ehe!* That I did,” answered Kain. “Where did it come from?”

“We do not really know, but it’s from a place called Russ. It may be on the moon. Three men have stayed behind.”

“Three men! Do you know them?”

“I think that two of them are servants,” replied Tui. “I made friends with Maklai, the *tamo russ*. He came down the path and found me. I tried to run away but he took me by the hand and led me to the village. He did not have a spear so I was not afraid.”

“Could we meet him?” gasped Madamai.

“Of course, I will take you right now.”

They hastened down the path in the direction of Garagassi where Maclay had his house. There were colourful croton shrubs surrounding the village square and the dark morata roofs of the village houses hung high above and curved down to the ground so that no side walls were necessary. From there a short track led to the shiny white beach where swaying coconut palms leaned out over the blue water.

“Maklai does not live in the village,” explained Tui. “Follow me down the beach.”

They followed him quietly down the beach until they came to a small promontory. Turning off the beach, Tui followed a stream and soon came to Maclay’s house built under two enormous trees. The crew of his ship had built it in a few days. It was a quiet scene and the men approached the house, their bare feet pacing the jungle tracks soundlessly.

The men from Bilbil were frightened when they caught the first glimpse of the house. It looked like a large shaggy bird sitting on a nest leaning against the trunk of a tree. “Not the safest place,” thought Kain to himself. “Trees like this could fall in a big storm.”

“This is a dark place,” whispered Tui.





*Maclay's sketch of his house at Garagassi, (Sentinella, 1975: 22).*

“Surely it is the home of many bush spirits,” added Kain. “I would not like to be here at night. Tell me, is this Maklai really a man or a spirit?”

“That we don’t know yet. We tried to frighten him with spears but he just lay down on a mat and went to sleep. After that we became friends.” Tui explained.

When Kain saw a man coming down the steps he stepped back in fright. The man had white skin - white! Perhaps he was a dead ancestor returned. But Tui was not afraid. He was going forward to meet him.

At this Kain, Madamai and Bais stepped forward shyly. Kain looked at Maclay but when Maclay looked straight at him with his piercing blue eyes, Kain dropped his gaze. He could not look into those eyes, blue like the sea or the sky. What sort of a man was this? Blue eyes and white skin. “*Oi a!*”

Maclay went up to Kain, pointing to himself he said, “Me Maclay.”

Kain pointed to himself and said, “Kain.”

“Kain?” repeated Maclay.

“*Ehe!* Kain,” said the Bilbil man. He glanced up at the Russian man but lowered his eyes again. Then he saw Maclay’s feet. Feet? “How can he climb trees with feet such as these?” he whispered to Tui, as he stared in wonder.

Tui only laughed. “Those aren’t his feet, Kain. They are his boots.”

“Boots?”

“*Ehe!* Foot coverings. He wears them over his feet. I have seen him take them off.”

Maclay, in his turn was studying these men from Bilbil. They were dressed differently from Tui. Their black hair was coloured in front with red ochre which was also painted on their noses and foreheads. He noted that the *bulra* which they wore on their chests was made from pig tusks. Maclay stood by while Tui showed Kain over the hut. He saw the tins, mugs and tin pots, steel axes and nails. It was very difficult for Kain to imagine how these items were made. Every tool he ever used came from the bush or the sea: bones, wood, shells or stones.

Picking up the iron hammer, he asked Tui, what sort of a stone they would be made from. But Tui did not know and Maclay did not speak their language. Tui picked up a cooking pot and handed it to Kain, “Look,” he said, “Maklai won’t need Bilbil pots to cook with.”

Kain turned the pot over and tapped the bottom. He was amazed at the sharp sound it made. How the women would listen when he told them about this! He did not realize that one day these pots would threaten the

Bilbil pot trade far more than the Mindiri pots once had. Next, he picked up a china plate and saucer and examined each carefully. "Careful," called Maclay trying to tell him in sign language that they would break. At this Kain became so nervous he nearly dropped a cup. Now he felt uncomfortable and out of place. He wanted to escape to the bush where he felt at home but Maclay beckoned to him to stay and talk.

The three of them sat on the veranda. Maclay undid his laces and took his boots off. Kain watched closely. This was all so new to him. He picked up one of the boots and it seemed very heavy. How could people walk with these on? Then Kain saw something even more interesting. Maclay was taking his skin off like a snake. *Ehe!* Kain flicked his fingers in astonishment. How could this be?

"Socks!" said Maclay in his own language, holding up the two things that he had just taken off. "Socks," repeated Tui and Kain.

It was beginning to get dark so Maclay turned to get his lantern ready. It gave off a pale blue light and Maclay's face looked like that of a ghostly spirit. This was too much for Kain and Tui. They both took off in a hurry into the bush. When they peered back, Maclay was still standing there holding his lantern. Tui's friend, Bugai, joined them and stared fearfully at Maclay.

"He has stolen a piece of the moon and he is holding it in his hand," he whispered.

"*Ehe!*" agreed Kain. "He must be from the moon."

And that is how Miklouho Maclay became known not only as *tamo russ*, the Russian man, but also as *tamo kaaran*, the man from the moon.

Kain and Madamai talked far into the night about this new man who had come from another world. The next day, Kain and Madamai sailed their canoe near Garagassi point where Maclay had his hut. Now it was Maclay's turn to be astonished at the size of these canoes which were built entirely of bush materials.

Maclay gave gifts to the Bilbil men beads and nails and red cloth and they in turn brought him coconuts and bananas from their canoes and

pointing to their island in the distance, invited him to come and visit them. When they were leaving, they pressed his arm in a gesture of friendship, calling out, “O Maklai! O Maklai!” Then walking towards the canoe, they turned again and clenching a tight fist they gestured again to him.

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The months passed. Kain and Madamai were frequent visitors to Maclay’s place at Garagassi. They never ceased to be amazed at Maclay’s possessions: the *tambu* that made such a noise when it was fired; the steel axes that chopped through trees so quickly; and many other things.

One day when they were sitting there, Maclay poured some methylated spirits into a saucer and set it alight. “Maklai has set water on fire!” cried Tui as he leapt down the steps and into the bush followed by Kain and Madamai. They peered back at the house from a safe distance, but nothing worse happened. They came back very gingerly and entreated him not to set the sea on fire in the same way.

Whenever Kain or Tui found something interesting, they would take it to Maclay who collected birds, lizards and other animals. The men would sit and watch as he drew the animal and preserved it in chemicals. Maclay also studied the people, measured their heads and even asked for a snippet of hair. The men were aghast. Hair! How could he ask for that! Didn’t he know that a sorcerer could use hair to make magic against a person. The sorcerer would put it in a bamboo container and hold it over the smoke of a fire while whispering secret curses.

Maclay approached Bais with a pair of scissors, but Bais retreated. “*Nene!*” he gasped, “You’ll never take my hair!”

“Look, you can have some of my hair,” Maclay declared cutting a piece and offering it to Bais.

Bais took it gingerly looking from the hair to Maclay and back. “*Ehe!* You trust me with your hair?”

“Here you can cut mine,” Kain decided and bent his head forward. Maclay gave him a piece of his hair in exchange.

Then they solemnly lined up as Maclay took a snippet from each. By the time he had finished, Maclay had lost quite a bit of his own hair.

Kain and his friends then returned to Bilbil.

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One day, Bais, was walking down to the beach when he caught sight of Yagad who was now promised to him in marriage. She was tapping a pot into shape. He watched her and loved the curve of her arms and breasts as she patted the pot with her stick, but he noticed that her skin was mottled in colour.

Pointing to her arms he asked “What’s happened to your arms?”

“They are covered in sores,” She cried sadly. “The disease is spreading all over me.”

“It does not matter” soothed Bais, “You will still be my wife. As soon as my family have paid the bride price, we can be married.”

“Promise me that once we are married you will never leave me!”

“Yes I promise and even if I die first, my spirit will come to visit you.”

“And if I die first, I will visit you,” Yagad said sadly because she already felt sick.

Sometime after this the dreaded skin disease spread all over Yagad and she lay dying in the village with Bais at her side. “Remember what we promised,” he whispered. He washed the sores on her arms and legs, but it was no good and Yagad soon became unconscious. Kain was sad to lose his daughter, who was so soon to be married to Bais. The women sat around her, mourning. They sprinkled powder on her face, decorated her body with dog teeth necklaces and wrapped her in woven mats.

Bais helped to carry her to the grave, but he was overcome with grief. Running off into the nearby bush he began to howl his grief, “*Oo Oo Oo*” he yelled and beat the bushes with a heavy stick. So great was the noise that the villagers thought it must be the *tambarans* coming so they ran back to the village leaving Yagad lying in the grave.

Meanwhile poor Yagad woke up and found herself lying in the hole. “Help, help” she called. When Bais stopped his grieving sobs, he heard her cries and crept up to the grave. He trembled, “Your spirit has come to get me.”

“No, No not my spirit, but really me”, Yagad whispered, “I was not dead, only asleep.”

At this, Bais helped her out of the grave but they covered it over with earth as if she had been buried. “Come with me”, Bais urged and led her to a bush house hidden from the village. Every day after that, Bais fetched Yagad food from the village and bathed her sores in the seawater until they were healed and she was her beautiful self again.

“It is time for you to come back to the village,” he said one day. “I want to show you off to the other men. You are not a devil woman, but a real woman and very beautiful. I will put on a *singsing* in the village soon and invite people from near and far. I will dress you in the finest way and show you off to them all.”

It was again time for the yam feast after the rising of the *Biris*. When the night for the feast arrived, Bais gathered the finest decorations. In Yagad’s hair, he put white feathers and around her neck the strands of the dog teeth. Her body glistened with red oil and she wore a colourful grass skirt about her waist. Bais himself wore his finest *mal* and tusks of a large pig hung from his neck. His well-combed hair had a fine headdress of feathers and dogteeth. As they set off up the track to the village, Bais said to her, “You must hide from the villagers. Wait until I call out to you to bring me my *brus*.”

So while Bais went strutting off amongst the dancers, Yagad hid on the edge of the village and watched the men dancing and singing. After a while, she noticed they were getting tired and knew they would soon be sitting down and calling for their wives to bring the *brus*. When the men called out, the women brought the *brus* and then sat together on one side of the mats, as was the custom. Yagad waited for Bais to call her.

At last he bellowed out, “Yagad, Yagad, bring me my *brus*”.

There was a stunned silence amongst the men. They all looked at one another. "The man is mad," Madamai whispered. "He calls for Yagad, but she has been dead for one moon now."

Kain was stunned, "My daughter, Yagad. What is happening?"

But Bais was not listening to them. He was looking towards the place where Yagad was hiding. Yagad knew the time had come to show herself. Picking up the *brus*, she moved slowly towards the dancers. Immediately all heads turned towards her and all were amazed. Some shrieked and rushed to their houses. Others stood with their mouths open.

"This girl who died has now come back," they whispered to one another and they were afraid because they thought it was her spirit.

Then Bais said in a loud voice. "This is no *tambaran* woman who has died and has now come back. She did not die. I rescued her from her grave and looked after her in the bush house. Tonight, she wants to return to the village."

Yagad held out the *brus* for Bais and stood wondering what to do next. Dare she go over and join her mother and the other women on their side of the mats. She decided to stay with Bais while he explained to the men what had happened. The women edged closer listening to Bais and looking at Yagad. Then, at last, her mother said, "Yagad, have you no shame! Sitting with the men. You should have given Bais his *brus* and then joined me." So Yagad got up and followed her mother home to her house and once more she lived in the village of Bilbil. Her father, Kain was so pleased to have his daughter back

Over the following days more items were added to the bride price which was gathering in size since she had come back to life after her illness. Now there were wooden bowls from the Rai coast, galip nuts from Karkar, Gogol pots from inland, pig tusks from the bush people and even bird of paradise plumes traded from up in the mountains. Yes, Kain was happy that his daughter was back now and soon to be married to Bais, the strong handsome young man. Never mind that he needed to learn so much about building canoes and sailing. He, Kain would teach him so that he could pass the knowledge on to his descendants.



## Chapter 10

### Maclay visits Bilbil Island

One day Maclay gave Kain a small piece of iron. Kain took it home with him and wondered how he could use it. He looked at his own stone axe and decided to make another axe with the piece of steel in place of a stone. It took days to fashion the handle around the piece of steel, but at last Kain managed it. However, he could not sharpen the blade at all. He tried to chip it with a stone, but it did not work.

Next time he went to visit Maclay, Kain took the steel axe along to show him. Maclay was amazed, “Good, good!” he said, touching the new axe handle. Kain smiled happily for to be praised by the Russian was praise indeed. Maclay then got another piece of iron and began to sharpen the blade for Kain. Kain was pleased that Maclay was learning the Bongu dialect. At last they could talk to each other. Kain grew bold and asked Maclay to show him the gun which he had seen but never heard.

When Maclay brought the gun out, the men who had already heard it covered their ears in fright. “*Tambu, tambu,*” they cried, pointing at the weapon. It was a new object and this must be its name as Maclay had always told them that the gun was *tambu*. They clung together in fear and hardly dared to look at this terrible thing.



*Sketch of Gorendu village, 1872. (Sentinella, 1975: 38).*

Maclay raised the gun and fired into the trees. At the noise, Kain's legs shook like a jelly fish. His eyes widened in astonishment and his mouth opened in horror. He motioned to Maclay to put this *tambu* thing away out of sight. Only when he could no longer see it did he calm down enough to talk.

Later, Kain invited Maclay over to Bilbil Island. He pointed to Maclay's boat and then the island in the distance saying, "You must come and visit us." When it was time for Kain to return home, he grasped Maclay's arm. "Oh Maklai! Oh Maklai!" he called and then walked down the path a short distance. Turning, there he bent his arm at the elbow and clenched his fist. Then he extended his arm in a farewell gesture before going down to his canoe where his men were waiting.

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A few months later, Maclay sent word that he was going to visit Bilbil Island. Kain was very excited. He would be a big man in the sight of his people now that *tamo russ* was coming.

On the day that Maclay was due to arrive, Kain kept watch at the cliff side of the island. When the boat drew near, he signalled to Maclay to go around the island to the beach.

As soon as they caught sight of the sail, people cried out, "O Maklai" and gathered to watch. Some rushed to drag Maclay's boat up on the beach and Kain went forward to greet him. Maclay was fascinated to see the many canoes drawn up on the white sand, including Kain's new canoe. He had brought presents - tobacco for the men and red cloth for the women. Then Kain led him off to look around the village and the island.

Maclay stood on the cliff side and saw the wonderful view of the Rai Coast. "I think I'll come and live here," he said jokingly.

"*Ehe!* Maklai! Good, good," replied Kain, happy that his friend was so pleased. "Why don't you come down to the village and wait while my daughter, Yagad, is getting married."

"Your daughter? Shouldn't you be there?"

“*Nene*. The young people look after all the details. The bride price has been paid, so I am happy.”

After they returned to the beach, Maclay inspected Kain’s new canoe with interest. He noted the long hull and the strakes tied on top of it, the carved prow and the two large crossbars that attached the canoe to the outrigger. What fascinated him most was the shelter that was built on top of the platform of the canoe, big enough to sleep six people.

As the marriage preparations were now beginning in earnest, Kain directed Maclay to the village. Here, Yagad sat trembling with excitement. Today she was to become the wife of Bais, son of Nelle. Some of the young men smeared her with red paint - red the sign of joy. Red over her hair and armbands and down her back. Her girlfriends arrived and they too were smeared with red paint. But Yagad’s decorations outshone them all. White bands of paint were drawn across her forehead and down her nose - a special band was tied around her head and strings of beads placed around her neck. It was a day of joy for her because soon she would be led by the girls to Bais’s house. The bride price of pigs and wooden bowls and dogteeth necklaces lay on the ground beside her. Soon her family would come to take it away.

Maclay approached curiously. He had already seen a wedding in Bongu and wished to compare the ceremonies. He saw Madamai approach to make magic over Yagad and add special leaves to her armbands. Putting her hands on the shoulders of two of her friends she was led to the house Bais had built. Many followed behind to the village square where Bais was organising a feast.

Kain, like all fathers, did not take much part in the wedding preparations. He had done his part in approving Bais as a suitable husband for Yagad and in approving the bride price. As for Bais, he celebrated with his friends after the feast when they all went off to bathe in the sea, laughing and shouting together. Then that night he received Yagad into his house and into his life.

Meanwhile, Maclay realised he would be unable to return to Bongu because of the gathering storm. “You must sleep here for the night,” Kain offered.

Maclay agreed. "But where can I sleep?"

"Why, in my new canoe!" Kain suggested. "It is clean and airy, and you will be sheltered from the rain."

Maclay was pleased with the idea and set about making himself comfortable while Kain went off to get some food left over from the feast. He asked the women to put some food on a *tabu* plate. "Quick," he urged, "*tamo russ* is hungry."

Kain carried the wooden bowl of steaming sago and grated coconut down to Maclay. Together they sheltered from the rain in the canoe and hungrily ate the sago.

Early the next morning, Maclay was walking through the village with Kain when he heard a woman moaning and later heard the cry of a newborn baby.

"Is it a baby girl or boy?" he asked Kain.

Kain inquired at the house, "It is a boy," he replied.

"Then ask the mother to call it Maclay after me," Maclay said.

"The baby will remind us of your visit," Kain said happily.

Later that morning, Maclay set off for Bongu, but before he left he arranged to go trading with Kain to Siar and Kranket Islands further up the coast.

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It was many months later that a date was finally set. When Maclay returned to the island, he was met by a noisy, laughing crowd of people. He saw Yagad and Bais, the newly weds, waving happily at him. Kain led him to the village surrounded by a great crowd of people.

However that afternoon, the *karag* was blowing so strongly the voyage was delayed. Madamai advised against it and, as he was the weather man, Maclay did not mind. There was plenty to do.

One afternoon when the men were sitting with him, he pulled out his sketchbook and pencils and began to sketch his good friend, Kain. The men gathered around to watch.

“It’s like charcoal,” one said.

“*Nene!* Thinner than charcoal,” said another. Kain was amused at being the centre of attention. The men gazed from him to the marks Maclay was making on the paper.

At first, Maclay drew the rough outline and then Kain’s mop of hair with a bamboo comb jutting from it. Next he filled in the details of the earring made from turtle shell and the string of shell slivers which hung from it. He paused and studied Kain carefully, noting his gentle smiling expression and the strong nose which dominated his face. Kain’s face was clean shaven apart from a little chin stubble, the rest carefully shaved with a piece of glass Maclay had given him.

When Maclay had finished he showed it around. Kain gasped “*Aia!* You have my spirit on this paper.”

The men all looked concerned. “Kain, will you die now?” they wondered.

“No! No!” Maclay insisted. “It is not your spirit on this paper. You won’t die.” But the men were not so sure.

Maclay became exasperated, “Look I’ll draw myself,” he said making a hasty sketch. “If Kain dies, then I die too.”

The men felt reassured and Maclay began to draw many things: the women making pots; the men building canoes; the village houses; and the men chatting on the grass in front of the *darem* with its posts carved in the shape of men and its arching roof.

The wind was calmer now and the young men prepared themselves for a feast at Bogadjim on the Rai Coast. Donning chest ornaments made from dogteeth, they puffed their hair up and decorated it with cassowary feathers. Then they painted each other with red paint - the paint of rejoicing. A thick stripe was applied on each cheek and the length of the nose. More was rubbed on their bodies. When Maclay saw them, he was

amazed. He had to look closely to identify each of them. Dressed in their finest *mal*, they paraded on the beach. Thumping feet kept time to the *kundu* drums and feather headdresses bobbed in flowing movements, as the dancers gleefully danced around on the wet, sandy beach and then they sailed off for the short trip to the Rai Coast.

But, now that the weather had calmed, Maclay's eyes turned north in the other direction. It was time to sail to Kranket and Siar Islands.

Next morning, long before dawn, Maclay stirred the fire in the men's house. Kain was sound asleep when Maclay shook him by the shoulder. "Kain, Kain, the wind is not blowing so hard this morning."

Kain opened one sleepy eye and said, "It's too early," and went back to sleep.

Maclay persisted, "Kain. Come on. Where's Gad?"

Holding his lantern, Maclay wended his way down to the canoe on the beach and loaded his clothes and gifts on board. Sitting there on the sand he was struck by the beauty of the scene. The moon peeped out from the clouds and flickered across the coconuts, the village houses and the waiting canoe. At last, Kain and Gad arrived with the sails and paddles and sleepily began to prepare the canoe. Women came carrying pots which the men carefully packed in the pot cage.

They set off in the dark and watched the stars. "*Biris, Biris*," Kain pointed out the Pleiades and the morning star, *Boi*, to Maclay. They sailed past several islands before coming to Siar Island. The people all knew about Maclay and thronged down to the beach. Kain and Gad hardly got a welcome at all. Everyone was calling, "Maklai, Maklai, O Maklai."

They pulled the canoe high up on the beach and crowded around him, trying to touch him and shake his hand. Kain and Gad stayed close to Maclay. They wanted to protect him from harm. What would Tui say if his friend, Maklai, were speared by someone on Siar Island?

The Siar people were very friendly and curious. They gathered around Maclay and watched everything he did. He in turn looked at them, and

saw the different shaped noses and how clean the village was and how well fed the children. That afternoon they boarded Kain's canoe and began the return trip to Bilbil. As they were passing Kranket Island, a canoe came out to meet them with three men on board.

"Maklai, Maklai, come to Kranket," called a voice. It was Masbud inviting Maclay to visit his village.

"No, not this time. I must go home," called Maclay. "I'll come another time

Masbud called to Kain and Gad: "Bring Maklai with you next time. You must come to Kranket Island. You cannot just go to Siar."

"I think he's jealous," said Kain to Gad.

"Yes," laughed Gad, "he does not want us to be known as Maklai's friends. He wants to be his friend, too."

With a mischievous look on his face Kain pointed at Kranket Island and said to Maclay "You must not go there. They are not very friendly," and he winked at Gad.

"That will fix them," whispered Gad and he smiled to himself.

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Four months after this trip, Kain and Madamai were again standing at the cliff side of the island looking out towards Karkar when they saw smoke on the horizon.

"Is Karkar erupting again?" inquired Kain nervously.

"*Nene!*" said Gad who was standing next to him at the lookout. "Look, it's a ship on the water."

"The Russian ship has come for Maklai," shouted Madamai and people rushed to look.

Kain and Madamai sailed to Gorendu to see Maclay before he left on the ship.



Maclay was delighted to see the ship; his friends had not forgotten him. He gathered his scientific specimens together and put them on board. “Come on up!” he invited Kain and the others, but they refused. The ship towered over their canoes like a big monster from an unknown world.

Maclay called to Kain and Madamai: “I will come back.” They stood in their canoe with tears in their eyes. After Maclay had gone, his friends missed him sadly.

Often Tui would visit Kain on Bilbil Island and together they would stare over the distant water longing for the ship to return. “He said he would return,” Tui said, “and Maklai never lied to us.”

And they would wonder where he had gone. Was it to Russia? Or to the moon? Or perhaps Russia was on the moon. Who knew? Their world finished at Karkar on the horizon. What lay beyond, none of them had the slightest idea.



*Village scene by Maclay, 1872. (Sentinella, 1975: 134)*

## Chapter 11

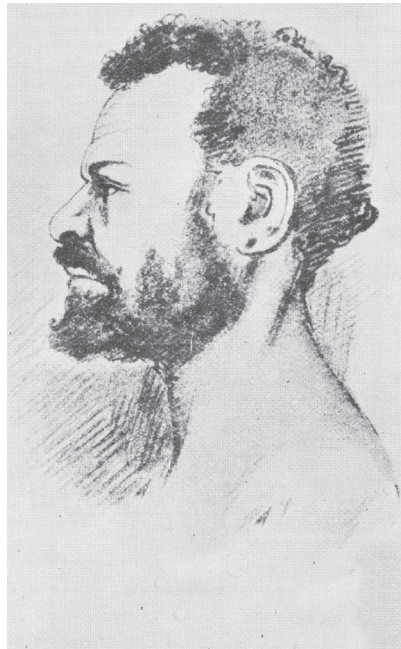
### Maclay Returns

Many years later, in 1877, Maclay returned to the Rai Coast. As he stood on the deck of the vessel, the distant blue mountains beckoned him. He was anxious to see his old friends again. They were now 'his people'. He identified with their lifestyle and wanted them to retain their traditional way of life.

At last the *morata* roofed houses, nestling under the coconuts came into sight. This time Maclay landed fearlessly, calling out names - "Tui, Kain, Madamai, Bugai, Gad." People came rushing down to the beach. Tui pressed his arm and tears rolled down his cheeks. "*Ahe!* Maklai, you said you would return."

Hearing the news on Bilbil Island, Madamai, Kain and Gad were anxious to see Maclay. "*Tamo Russ! Tamo kaaran!*" Beaching their canoe they rushed to greet him, the man with fair skin and blue eyes, the man from Russia who gave them gifts of cloth, tobacco and nails. They told him of changes since his last visit: the terrible earthquakes, landslides and tidal waves that had devastated the land and wiped out many villages.

Now that Maclay was back amongst them, all would be well again. He had said he would return and here he was. Good times would surely follow. He was their guardian, their god/man who could set fire to water, who could carry a piece of moon for light in the darkness and who could explode a firestick that



*Tui of Gorendu village, by Maclay.  
(Sentinella, 1975: 22).*



*Interior of Maclay's second house, 1877. (Gash, et al, 1975: 30).*

killed animals at a distance. Whoever had him living near their village was blessed indeed.

Kain got in first, "Maklai, you come with us. We will build you a house on Bilbil at Airu."

"No. No. He's going to live at Bongu near us," Tui said hastily.

Maclay tried to be diplomatic, "I will live near Bongu, but I would also like a small house on your island", he said looking at Kain with his piercing blue eyes.

Kain was delighted. "*Ahe!* We will start at once".

"Good, good," Maclay said, "I will come to Bilbil often."

Kain, Madamai and Gad set off home happily and began to organise the building of a small hut at Airu above the mangrove trees. It was a cool dark place with large trees on the hill, casting heavy shade. Below, the waves dashed against the cliff. Not long after the hut was finished, Maclay paid the island a visit and Kain and the others proudly showed it to him. Maclay flicked his hands, in the way of the people and Madamai laughed, "*Ehe!* You are a man of Bilbil now," he said, pressing Maclay's arm.

It was nearly the end of the *karag* season, the angry wind season, when enormous waves sometimes tipped the large canoes over. Maclay wanted to sail along the north coast past Siar Island but Kain said they had to wait for more suitable weather. Maclay did not mind waiting as he had plenty to occupy his mind. Each evening, he sat in the *darem* with Kain and Gad while the *karag* roared outside. As they talked about previous trade trips they had done, the men's faces took on an apprehensive look. Maclay was keen to travel far to the north past Rempi, but Kain had never been there and was hesitant.

"Those people might eat us," he warned. "They are man eaters."

"But don't you trade with them?" Maclay asked

"*Nene!* Never!" replied Kain. "We go to Sek Island but not Rempi."

“We could get a guide from Sek to show us the way.”

“All right,” Kain agreed nervously, “but be careful what you eat at Rempi. They might give you human meat.”

Maclay laughed at this, “Then I would be a cannibal too.”

Early one morning, they set off, sailing for Sek Island. They did not land on Kranket or Siar Islands this time, but continued north to Sek. In many places the water’s edge was hemmed in by mangroves. The quiet water meandered into lagoons where long legged birds stalked amongst the water lilies. As the canoes continued on their way, the mirror calm water reflected the canoes with the bright red fish on their sails.

They landed at Sek Island and found two guides to take them further north along the bay. They turned up a river which flowed from a small lake. Startled birds took off and a flock of cockatoos flew past, their plaintiff cries adding to the tension. Kain had never been this way before and his skin felt creepy. He fell over a large root on the track. *Medapep!* He must not let the bush spirits of this place harm him. “I’m Kain,” he whispered, introducing himself to them.

Fighting their way through thick jungle creepers, it took nearly an hour before they suddenly found themselves in Rempi Village. Frightened by Maclay’s appearance, one man began to beat the *garamut* with the battle cry. Men appeared from everywhere, grabbing weapons and urgently calling their friends.

Now it was Kain and Gad’s turn to be frightened, surrounded as they were by these fierce armed men. The headman, shield and spear at the ready, shouted at the guide, “What do they want?”

“This white man is Maklai from Bongu,” the guide told the headman. “He wants to meet the people in your village.”

The headman led them to the village square and ordered food to be cooked. Kain and Gad whispered to Maclay, “What if they cook meat? How are we to know what it is?”



Maclay did not know what to answer because he too was worried for the same reason. Soon the steaming food was brought out on wooden *tabirs* and set out before them. Kain and Gad looked suspiciously at the bowls of food, but suddenly they relaxed. "It's *taro*, beautiful *taro*," they said to the headman who smiled happily.

"I'm glad you like it, you men of Bilbil. This food is cooked in your pots."

"Where do you get them from?" Gad asked. "We never come here."

"From Sek Island," put in one of the guides.

"*Ere!*" said the other, "We get your pots and exchange them for *taro*."

"*Ahe!* True," said Kain. "I knew that, but this man Gad did not know." He tapped Gad on the shoulder.

The Rempi headman laughed, "Yes, your pots travel far inland. If we have too many, we trade with the mountain people up there for spears and bows and arrows."

Later that afternoon, it was time to return down the hills to the shore and sail home to Bilbil. Kain and Gad sat on the platform of the canoe with Maclay and talked and laughed over their experience. Grinning happily, Kain teased Maclay, "Well, at least you aren't a cannibal."

"No," laughed Maclay, "There was no meat cooked with the food."

"What would you have done if there had been, eh?" asked Gad.

Maclay looked at him and then threw his head back and laughed loudly and the others joined him.

"You have never been cannibals?" he asked.

"*Nene!*" answered Kain, "We are not man eaters, not the Bilbils, nor the Yabobs, nor the people of the Rai Coast".

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Kain returned to Bogadjim with Maclay where they met Kodi, one of the headmen and his son Ur. Kodi looked worried. As soon as he could he told Kain of the news from Gorima Village. “There are some wild men in Gorima who want to kill Maclay. Their leaders are Malu and Abui.”

When Maclay saw their worried looks, he said, “What’s that about Gorima?”

“You musn’t go there,” said Kodi, “It is a bad place.”

“Why is it bad?”

“Two men, Malu and Abui, are threatening to kill you. It is not safe there.”

“What do you know about these two men?” inquired Maclay.

Kain thought for a moment and then said, “I don’t know about Abui, but there is a story about Malu.”

“Tell me, Kain, I want to know.”

Kain took a deep breath. “It isn’t a long story,” he said. The men gathered around to listen.

“Malu was born in Yabob Village many years ago. From the first he was a very sick baby as his skin was covered in sores. His parents tried to heal him with all sorts of remedies. They tried herbs from the bush and the medicine man but nothing worked. So they gave up. They decided to let the sea decide what should happen to their baby. They built a little raft and putting baby Malu on it, they pushed it out to the sea. The *taleo* carried the little raft past Bilbil Island and the waves swept it ashore at Gorima. The baby was crying loudly because the seawater had hurt its sores.

“A man from Gorima was walking along the beach in the early morning and he heard the cries of the baby. He was astonished because there were no footprints on the beach – no one else had come that way in the morning. He followed the noise and came to the baby on the little raft which had been carried higher and higher on the sand by the waves. Picking up the baby he washed its skin all over.



Then he took it home to his wife and said, "Look, I found this baby on the beach. We have no children so let's look after him and if he gets better then he can be our first-born." They bathed his sores and fed him nourishing food and the baby improved. They named him Malu, which means 'duck', because he came from the water.

Kain looked around the group of listeners before he continued, "As he grew up, Malu has always been hot headed. If ever there is a fight between villages, Malu will be there in the middle of it. And now, he even wants to fight you, Maklai. Be careful, my friend. Malu is a fierce fighter."

Maclay stared at Kain. "I must go to Gorima Village and face this Malu tomorrow."

Kain was horrified. "No you must not go. You will be killed."

"I will go with you," offered Kore.

Maclay looked at them, "We will see, but first I must sleep."

Next day, before the others had woken, Maclay left and went to Gorima on his own, to face Malu. It was a long way and he was tired when he arrived at the village. Few in the village had seen this white man but they had heard of him. An agitated crowd gathered. Maclay could not speak their language but, with gestures, requested a place to sit down. When the people had gathered, he said through an interpreter. "Abui and Malu are they here?"

"They are in the bush," came the reply.

"Then I shall wait," and Maclay settled on a log.

Time passed and evening came. In the gathering dusk, Maclay built the fire up with sticks and logs until it was blazing. With fire on his face he shouted, "Call Malu! Call Abui!"

No one moved. At last Malu and Abui appeared, shamefaced and sat in front of Maclay. Maclay addressed them again through the interpreter. "I have come to this village of Gorima because I heard you two men, Malu

and Abui, wish to kill me. What have I done to you that you wish to kill me? Look at me!” But they hung their heads and could not look up.

Maclay continued, “I have walked all the way from Bogadjim to here. I am very tired so now I’m going to sleep. If you want to kill me now is the time.” He turned and went into the men’s house, wrapping himself in his blanket he went to sleep. Malu and Abui were amazed at his courage. How could they kill a sleeping man?

Maclay was unarmed and had come to challenge them. He must be more than a man, surely he must be a spirit. Maybe he was the spirit of one of their dead ancestors come to help them. They sat beside him as he slept and protected him. Next day, Malu and Abui accompanied Maclay back to his house. There was no more trouble at Gorima and news of Maclay’s courage spread through the villages.

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The months passed and once again Kain waited for the *Biris* to rise in the sky. It was a good time to go trading to the Rai Coast and Maclay wanted to go with them.

This time only two canoes would set out - one sailed by Kisem and his friend Sale and the other by Kain. They sat in Maclay’s place at Garagassi, discussing the trip. “We must begin sailing in the evenings,” explained Kain who was familiar with the winds and tides. “The *taleo* will take us further along the Rai Coast.”

“Fine,” agreed Maclay. “I’ll leave it to you. You’ve been there many times before on your trading trips. You know about the winds and the tides and your canoe sails well.” Kain was very pleased to hear this from Maclay, the man who had come from the sea in such a big powerful ship.

“*Ehe!* Maklai!” said Kain, “My canoe is not like the ship you came in.”

“No, but I did not make that ship. Look at this canoe you and your friends made with your own hands from bush materials. It is wonderful. Tell me, what tools did you use?”

“Wooden hammers, pig bones, shells and stone axes,” answered Kain counting them on his fingers.

“See what I mean?” said Maclay. “You made such a large canoe using tools like that. Our men have axes, nails and hammers made of steel.”

“Yes, we like your nails,” said Kain remembering the nails Maclay had given him.

That evening, when they set off, the *taleo* caught the sails with a gentle breeze. Maclay lay on the bamboo deck soothed by the wind on the tell-tale bunting. The red fish design on the masts glowed in the last rays of the sun. Then darkness fell rapidly and the stars appeared. One of Kain’s crew, Hassan, was an expert on steering by the stars. “There’s *Biris*.” He pointed out the Pleiades when they rose above the horizon. He knew that these stars must be on the left side as they steered down the coast. The canoe bobbed gently up and down on the sea and Maclay was lulled to sleep, quite happy to leave the sailing to Hassan and Kain.

They met the headmen at many villages and Kain translated the different languages for Maclay. One day as they sailed further on, Kain pointed out where Mindiri Village had once been.

“Why have they shifted?” inquired Maclay.

Kain dropped his eyes. He could not face those blue eyes of Maclay and tell him the truth about Mindiri.

“Well,” he said at last, “their village was burnt down, so they shifted.”

“Who burnt it down?” inquired Maclay, curiously.

“Their enemies,” answered Kain. He could not tell Maclay that Bilbil men had burned the village down. What would Maclay think? He would say the Bilbil men were jealous men. He would go home and tell the people in his country about the Bilbil men. Kain sat on the platform of the canoe, staring out into the darkness, and brooded.

The next day they landed near Singor Village. Kain was wary of the Singor people as they were friends of the Mindiris. Would they be

friendly or hostile? He was glad Maclay had his gun. That put him in a powerful position. When they sounded their conch shells no one was there to greet them. No one came to put the rollers down for the canoes. They beached the canoes themselves and slept on the deck.

Maclay woke early next morning. Looking around at all the sleeping bodies he decided to wake them in the quickest way possible: with a loud noise. He pulled out his double barrelled gun and fired it into the air. Bang! There was a deafening roar. Kain leapt up holding on to his ears and when he saw the firestick in Maclay's hands he was angry - not angry with Maclay for making the noise but angry with the people of Singor who had not come to welcome them: angry that Maclay had not been recognised for his status and needed to fire his gun to get attention.

When the people of Singor came running to the beach at the sound of the gun, Kain stood on the deck of his canoe and berated them. "How is this!" he yelled. "Maklai, the *tamo kaaran*, has come to the village of Singor and yet you did not greet him! Shame on you! Do you not know how important this man is? He is the *tamo russ* from Russia and he has come to see you and you do not give him even a suckling pig!" Kain was in a real rage. Protected as he was by Maclay and his gun, he would show these people who was boss

The Singors were amazed. The noise of the gun, the shouting Kain and the *tamo russ*, all before breakfast! *Medapep*! Disaster would befall them if they did not do something. They were too cowed to answer back. They fell over themselves rushing back to the village. Chickens, sucking pigs, bananas and bags of nuts were grabbed and quickly carried down to the angry Kain.

Sual, the headman of Singor arrived with gifts for Maclay and a beautiful shell ornament he wanted to trade. Kain jumped onto the beach. Now to take advantage of his new power over these Singor people! He had seen the look on Sual's face after the gun had been fired. He was keen to trade two large pots for Sual's beautiful shell ornament. Carefully, he laid one pot on the ground next to the ornament but it did not work. Sual knew the exchange was unfair. "We have to grind these shells for a long time to make these ornaments," he argued.

So Kain put a waterpot beside the cooking pot and again looked up at Sual. “*Ehe!* Yes, that is enough,” Sual said. Kain hung the ornament around his neck but he still showed his anger. Then Sual gave Kain a gift of betel nuts as a sign of friendship. At last Kain began to mellow.

Meanwhile, Maclay handed out gifts of glass beads and mirrors. The people crowded around him - for many it was their first glimpse of this Russian man. So impressed were they that they promised Maclay a large pig, but he did not want it. This time Kain was not impressed with Maclay. “They have offered you a pig! You must take it. What a feast we could have!”

Maclay placated him, “On the way back, you can collect it. I promise you. You can eat it at Singor or take it back to Bilbil.”

They continued with the voyage, travelling mostly at night. Maclay sat on the deck, writing by the light of his kerosene lamp, or watching the dark outline of the coast slip past, lit by the scurrying moon. He knew little of the people they were passing now. Only through Kain’s canoe was he able to travel this far; only through Kain’s eyes was he able to learn about them. He must do all he could to keep Kain’s friendship.

Kain sat beside Maclay, heating his tobacco on the smoking coals and rolling it in leaves, before exhaling billows of white smoke. Then he stood up and moved away so that the smoke did not get in Maclay’s eyes. He must do all he could to keep Maclay’s friendship. This man gave him power and prestige he had never known before - the Russian man and his Russian gun. He remembered the look on Sual’s face after the gun had been fired. Sual could not understand the magic of the firestick! It gave him, Kain, the chance to be angry with the Singor people without risking payback. *Ehe!* Already his name was travelling along the trade routes far up and down the coast and inland. Wherever Maclay’s name went, so also did the name of Kain, because he was a friend of Maclay. Holding on to the curving prow, he looked at the coast and felt exhilarated. He knew each bay, each headland which they passed and he knew the people who lived there - their language, their leaders and the laws they followed. This was the knowledge Maclay needed.

The two canoes called into Awrai Village and the people welcomed them. Kain listened to the greetings.

“They think we are from Siar Village.”

“Siar?” queried Maclay “That is a long way from here.”

Kain did not answer straight away. He did not want Maclay to know that the Siars had befriended these people in the fight between the Mindiri and the Bilbils. At last he spoke, “They are great friends and spend months visiting each other. There are many marriage links between them.” He knew then that he held some control over the knowledge that Maclay had of the people they visited.

On they went to Teliata Village. Maclay, interested in all he saw, studied the people and their food gardens. Maclay wanted to travel further around the coast. “*Nene!* No,” insisted Kain, “the people will kill us there. Teliata is as far as we have ever gone!”

“Here, I will give you two steel axes if you will take me,” begged Maclay.

But Kain refused. Further along the coast were unknown enemies who would kill and eat them. Never before had he been in the villages beyond Teliata and he was not about to go now. Not even if Maclay offered him guns and axes and cloth. Guns were all right against a few people, but there were hundreds of people with unknown laws and leaders.

Maclay did not give up easily. Through his binoculars he could see three villages further around, but the local people had no connection with them, no knowledge of their names. Wanting to travel further, he again confronted Kain, that evening, but in the end he had to accept the fact that they would sail no further to the east.

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A few months after this trip, Maclay left the Rai Coast for the second time, travelling to Australia and Russia. The years passed and life went on as usual. Then Tui of Bongu got very ill and wished his friend Maklai was there to help him. His sickness grew worse and his family suspected that the hill people had made sorcery over him while he was visiting

them. They wanted to declare war on the hill people. Where was Maclay to settle the argument? He would have known what to do.

Hearing how ill Tui was, Kain hastened to see him with Gad, Hassan and Madamai. Even as they beached their canoe they heard the beating of the drums and the wails of the women. "Tui, Tui is dead," they wailed.

Men rushed around cutting down Tui's betel nut palms and bananas. Some even hacked at Tui's house, but not enough to cause damage because his body lay inside bedecked with shell ornaments and pig teeth headbands. Because Tui was a bigman on the Rai Coast, a large feast was being held in his honour and many pigs killed.

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In 1883, Maclay made his third visit to the Rai Coast. He landed on the beach but this time Tui did not come to greet him. "Tui, Tui," he called, but there was no answer. Tui was dead. Many others had died also.

However, Kain, Hassan, Madamai and Gad all arrived from Bilbil to greet him and invite him to live on their island. Kain told him about all the changes that had taken place: part of the old village of Bongu was deserted; Gorendu Village only had a few houses left; some white men had come.

"White men?" queried Maclay.

"*Ehe!* One man said he was your brother!"

Maclay was angry. "How dare they use my name. He wasn't my brother. It must have been Romilly or those people or the goldminers on the *Dove*."

"They didn't stay," Kain reassured him. "Will you stay this time, Maklai?"

"No! But I want to see where my old house was. Let's go to Garagassi."

"Your house has fallen down," Kain warned him, "only the posts are left."



It was true too! Maclay nearly walked past the old place which had once had neat paths and shrubs. Now it was overgrown with large bushes under the tall trees. His vegetable garden where the corn once grew so high, was gone. A feeling of desolation overcame him. But there was work to be done. He had brought more plants and seeds and the people set about clearing the garden once more. Kain and Madamai helped make a garden fence and chopped out some of the bushes. It was good to be helping their friend Maclay again.

When the work was finished Maclay said "I have a surprise for you on board the ship."

"What is it?" they asked.

"Some animals - a bull, a cow and some goats: animals you have never seen before. You must make a fence for them before we bring them to the village," Maclay suggested.

"Make a fence, make a fence," repeated the people before they had seen the animals. The enclosure they made was only enough to keep pigs in. When the Russian sailors pulled the animals off the ship with ropes around their horns, the villagers scattered in terror but Maclay burst out laughing.

"They are just like large pigs," he tried to reassure them. But the people were not so sure. Some jumped into the sea: others hid behind trees or clambered up the branches out of the way of the careering bull.

The cow followed off the boat and then the goats. Somehow, they managed to manoeuvre them into the fenced enclosure, but not for long. The bull butted the fence in several places and each time the people roared. Then it found a weak spot and broke a hole in the wooden stakes. Snorting wildly, it dashed towards the forest with the cow behind it. "Stop the bull. Stop the bull!" shouted Maclay as the bull raced towards a crowd of people. Screaming and yelling the people panicked and fled out of its way. The bull and the cow both escaped and were never caught again.

Kain watched the commotion from a safe distance. "*Ehe!*" he said, "They are much bigger than our pigs."

Madamai laughed, "At least we cannot be jealous because Maclay brought them to the Bongu people. No one has them now!"

They turned their attention to the goats which had stayed in another enclosure. Maclay was milking them. Milking them! The white fluid was like a mother's milk. Maclay offered some to Kain but he recoiled. "*Nene!* Am I a child that I should drink milk!" he cried, but the sailors from the ship were happy to drink it. The goats themselves were stroked and petted over the fence. Yes, they were a good gifts that Maclay had brought. In return, they brought *taro* and yams for Maclay and the crew.

"Come to the island and live with us this time," said Kain. "We will build you a big house and find you a wife. You will never need to leave again."

But Maclay had made up his mind to leave with the ship. There were too many changes: Tui was dead; other Europeans had come and used his name to make friendly contact with the people; he must go and write letters and protect his people.

"Thank you for your offer, my good friend Kain, but I have already chosen a wife. I'm going to be married. I am leaving with the ship."

"Are you leaving now?" Kain could not believe it.

"*Ehe!* I'll go when the ship goes, but why don't you come some of the way with me?"

"On the ship? What about Madamai and Hassan too?"

"Yes. Come as far as Sek Island."

The three men were shaking at the knees when they waited for the dinghy to take them out to the ship. Larger and larger loomed the hull until they felt dwarfed beside it. They climbed on board and the crew tried to reassure them. When the ship began to move they were so terrified that Hassan leapt overboard and swam back to the island. Maclay held onto Kain who was ready to leap off too.

Gradually Kain and Madamai relaxed until they came near to Sek Island. Kain said to Madamai "I'm leaving. Sek is as far as I am going. If I stay

on board, they will take me to Russia and I'll never see my son's face again."

"I'm coming too," added Madamai. Together they jumped overboard and were picked up by some passing canoes. The following day, the ship stopped at Sek and Maclay saw Kain and asked if he could buy an island near Sek so he could live there if he ever returned. The landowners agreed and wanted him to return and live among them on Sek island. But Maclay never returned. As Kain watched the Russian ship sail off towards Karkar, he did not know he would never see his good friend, Maclay, again.

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The Bilbil men all returned to their island and traded pots, held feasts and carried on as usual. More ships came. Otto Finsch, a German, called into Bilbil saying he was Maclay's brother. Kain proudly showed him around the island. Finsch was impressed with the men's house, the canoes and the colourful decorations the people were wearing. However, Finsch did not stay long, but continued north. Later, the German flag was raised, claiming the land for Germany and the Neu Guinea Compagnie.

Then a man called Kubary came. He arrived very early one morning before breakfast. Kain and Madamai staggered out of the *darem*, wiping the signs of sleep from their faces and hurried to the beach to meet this new whiteman. Was he too a brother of Maclay? If he was, then Maclay truly had many brothers.

They had no common way of communication except through signs and pointing. This man pointed at himself, "Me Kubary!" He pointed at the axes and steel knives he had brought with him and then at the distant hills on the coast opposite Bilbil Island. Kain did not understand this Kubary, but he had plenty of steel axes and knives.

"Here mark this paper with an X," Kubary said to Kain. Again he pointed to the place. Kain looked at Kubary's fingers! Fingers were important for pointing and for marking places on paper. But why was Kubary using his fingers in this way? Kain wished Maclay had been there to advise him. Maclay would have been able to interpret Kubary's ideas. He would

have known what was going on. So often, he had helped Maclay talk to the elders in so many villages. Where was he now?

In the end, Kain and Madamai signed the paper with an X and were duly given the axes. As Kubary left, Kain shook his head, "This something is no good," he said to Madamai. He knew something was wrong, but he had no idea that Kubary was getting him to sell all the coastal land as far as the distant hills for the axes. Sell the land! It did not even belong to the Bilbil people! And it had all happened before breakfast!

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The years passed. Many foreigners came to live near their island and began to clear the coast which had been 'bought' by Kubary, but life went on as usual.

Kain, friend of Maclay, grew old and died one morning just as the rays of the sun rose over the water. The news was announced by the short staccato beats on the *garamut* and the wailing of the women. The people decorated his body for burial and put it in a sitting position inside his house. They clothed him in his best *mal*, carefully combed his hair and attached a fine feathered headdress. Around his neck was hung his *bulra* and through his ear, the turtle shell earring. The drumming of the *garamut* was relayed to other drums until all the villages on the coast and inland knew of Kain's death. Mourners arrived from Kranket Island, Yabob and the Rai Coast.

The wailing continued for was this not Kain, the Bilbil headman: friend of Maclay. His name was known far and wide along the trade routes. All night long the women wailed and the men kept him company. A matted covering was placed around his body and he was buried near the sea, beside the two young coconut trees where he had often sat. His daughter, Yagad, brought a water pot and carefully placed it in his hands. No good if he grew thirsty on his journey to the spirit world. His spirit would travel to the Rai Coast, to *Degasub*, where *Tinagai* guarded the cave entrance to the underworld - *Tinagai*, the fierce spirit, who would inspect all the newly dead to see if they deserved to enter the gates and join the souls of the dead. That evening the men sat on the cliff side to watch the sky for a shooting star, a sure sign that his spirit was at last on its way.



*Maia Awak in 1976 with his model of a balangut.*

## Chapter 12

### Back to 1971 in Bilbil Village

Maia sat chewing his betel nut thinking of Kain, the old warrior, friend of Maclay. He had lived in the time before there were many changes. Before the Bilbil people moved to the mainland.

Balifun stared at the bones and said, “Well, that was a good story, *Bageg*, you did make these bones talk for me. What are we going to do with them now?”

Maia blinked his way back to the present. “We’d better not leave them here. The sea will only wash them away.”

“Perhaps we should take them back to the village and bury them in the cemetery.”

“*Ehe!* Good idea,” agreed Maia.



*Present day village scene, exchanging pots for food.*

So the two of them gathered the bones from the cliff wall, carried them to the canoe and paddled home, leaving the silent island behind them. They were not worried about carrying the bones of their ancestors back with them. The bones of Kain or one of his friends. Who knew? That afternoon, Balifun dug a small grave in the village cemetery and when the other men returned from work, they held a special ceremony and buried the bones, safe at last from the pounding waves on the island.

In the evenings, Maia regaled his grandchildren with the stories of Kain, Madamai and Gad. Sometimes he would wag a finger at them, "You must listen to these stories. Then you can tell them to your own children so they will know about their ancestors. My father, Awak, died when I was only twelve years old. How I wish I had listened to him."

Each night the children turned eager eyes to Maia and listened to his tales. One night Balifun asked, "What happened after Kain died?"

"Well the companies came and began to clear the land and establish the German Colony. They had very strict laws and our people revolted against them. Some of the Siars and Kranket people were shot. The Bilbil people fled to the Rai Coast and that is when I was born."

"Did you live on the island after that, *Bageg*?"

"Only for a few years and then the Germans made us shift here to the mainland."

What about the large canoes like Kain made. Did you build them too?"

"Yes, of course. We made them for many years just here on the beach and we sailed to the Rai Coast. But, during the war, the Japanese bombers came and destroyed them all. We never made any more after that."

"Could you make another of those canoes now, *Bageg*?" asked Balifun.

"Why, yes, we could, but the logs are hard to get now, and the bush material is deep in the jungle. Maybe I could make a model of one."

During the next few weeks Maia was busy making a model *balangut* from a short piece of wood. He added little planks, a small house and a mat sail. Then he carefully painted designs along the side in traditional



colours. A crowd of people gathered around. *Ehe!* It is indeed like the canoes our *tumbuna* used to make,” said Damun Maklai, whose ancestor was named by Maclay on his visit to Bilbil Island in 1872.

“True,” said Pall, “my father, Tagari, made canoes like this.”

“Why don’t we make a big canoe again and we could sail it to Madang,” cried Maia excitedly.

So the idea grew and a ten metre log was hulled at Kranket Island and pulled to Bilbil. They collected material from the bush and began to build the superstructure just as Kain had done one hundred years earlier. But, before the canoe was finished, old Maia grew ill and became weaker and weaker.

“It will soon be time for me to die,” he said sadly to Balifun.

“O *Bageg*, not yet. The canoe is not finished. Don’t you want to see it when it is made?”

“The others will finish it for me, Balifun. *Nene!* It is time for me to die.”

Sadly, his wife, Kobor, and all the family gathered around him. Maia said goodbye to them all. Shaking hands with Kobor, he thanked her for all the work she had done for him. “You have been a good wife,” he said with tears in his eyes. Then he turned his face away and died. The wailing of the women brought the other villagers running. “Maia is dead, Maia is dead,” the cry went around the village. Short beats on the drum announced it to the surrounding villages. His friend, Pall Tagari had just arrived from town, but when he heard the news he turned around and walked the 10 kilometres back to town to order a timber coffin. Maia was a headman and deserved the best. The people decorated his body and put some of his possessions in the coffin. The next afternoon a long line of people wended its way down to the village cemetery behind the coffin. It was buried amongst the colourful yellow shrubs in sight of the sea.

All work on the canoe ceased for a week while the men mourned. They spoke of Maia and his deeds; his life and his passing. Later, when they were putting the mast on the canoe, they wondered which totem to put

on it. At last Derr said, “We must put the cockatoo, the totem of the Gapan clan.”

“Why the Gapan Clan?” asked the men.

“That is Maia’s clan,” answered Derr.

“He was the one who began the canoe and his spirit still bosses it.

The men all agreed that this would be a fine way to remember Maia, and Balifun helped carve the white cockatoo. Many months later someone painted Maia’s name on a board and the date of his death underneath, to mark his grave. Now his bones rest near the bones from Bilbil Island, perhaps those of Kain, the old warrior, who was a friend of Maclay.



*The author collecting stories of Miklouho-Maclay at Bongu village, 1994.*

## Historical Note

Many books have been written about Miklouho Maclay, the Russian explorer and scientist, who lived amongst the people of the Rai Coast on the north coast of Papua New Guinea during three visits between 1871 and 1883. Maclay kept diaries which provide an interesting picture of life in the days before European contact.

C.L.Sentinella translated Miklouho-Maclay's diaries from Russian into English and this book was published by Kristen Pres in 1975. Sentinella was quite an old man when he visited Madang in October 1977 and the author took him out to Bilbil Village to meet some of the headmen. He was very interested to meet Damun Maklai whose great-grandfather had been born on Bilbil Island when Miklouho-Maclay visited there in 1871. That day in 1977, Maia, Gab, Damun, Derr crowded around Sentinella when he began talking about Miklouho-Maclay. They looked at this old white foreigner and forgetting the time difference excitedly thought he must be a relative of Maclay.

Speaking *Tok Pisin*, they asked me, "Is he Maclay's brother?"

Not understanding *Tok Pisin*, Sentinella inquired, "What do they want to know?"

"They are asking if you are Maclay's brother."

Sentinella thought this quite amusing as Maclay had visited Bilbil Village over a hundred years previously and could hardly be his brother. But, overall, he really enjoyed his visit to Bilbil Village to meet the descendants of the men who had once befriended Miklouho Maclay, the Russian scientist in 1871.

One of Maclays's closest friends was Kain who was referred to in many of the entries in Maclay's diaries. Kain was a headman on Bilbil Island and is remembered in the traditions of the people. Maclay travelled on Kain's trading canoe along the coast, visiting many different villagers. Without Kain, Maclay would never have been able to travel so extensively or communicate with so many people. Kain's expertise in many languages was also very useful. Maclay depicts Kain as a man of courage, a great sailor and trader. A man he could trust. However Kain

had his limitations. He was reluctant to accompany Maclay past Teliata on the Rai Coast or to inland villages. Was this because he had no faith in Maclay himself or his powerful gun? More likely it was because he did not know the languages of the people; he had no trade friends there and no knowledge of their customs. Maclay never accepted this and always tried to extend Kain's horizons.

This story is written from the point of view of the village people. It commences at a point in time near the present, looking back to the past and then moving forward to the present again. It is a study of the way the people lived before Maclay came to their area. Traditionally, they made clay pots which were traded up and down the coast for food. Sometimes the canoes were lost in heavy seas or were blown off course to other islands. There was rivalry between the different villages over pottery and the story of the fight that occurred between Yabob and Mindiri has been passed down over the generations. The people of Bilbil Village still have traditional stories about tidal waves and point out where the canoe got caught in the tops of the trees.

Stories of Maclay still abound. The story of baby Malu being put on a raft and being rescued at Gorima was heard recently in one of the villages. Maclay is gaining fame through the years and many people have Maclay as their first name or surname.

Most of the characters in the story were real. Maia was the headman of the Gapan Clan and most of the stories about him are true, too. A great talker, Maia brought the Island of Bilbil alive again when the author visited Bilbil Island with him in 1976. During this visit, Maia pointed out many places which are significant in this book: where Maclay's house once stood; where Kain was buried; and the beach where the canoes were built. He was also instrumental in beginning the re-building of the large trading canoe in 1978 shortly before his death. When he died he was buried alongside the bones from Bilbil Island. Maia's wife, Kobor, survived him for many years.

## Glossary

<i>Aimaka</i>	name of carved pole in the <i>darem</i> .
<i>Anut Wag</i>	god's canoe. <i>Anut</i> was the local deity near Madang in former times.
<i>Balangut</i>	a two mast canoe sometimes spelt <i>Palangut</i> .
<i>Bageg</i>	grandfather or great grandfather.
<i>Bilas</i>	decorations worn by the people.
<i>Biris</i>	the Pleiades constellation.
<i>Bilum</i>	string bag made of rolled fibres.
<i>Boi</i>	morning star.
<i>Bulra</i>	decoration formed from two pigs' tusks.
<i>Dadau</i>	north-west wind.
<i>Dadeng</i>	Pot exchange on a trading voyage.
<i>Darem</i>	spirit house or men's house.
<i>Dim</i>	name of tree from which the bark was used to caulk the canoes. Also the name of the putty used.
<i>Garabud</i>	leaves of the tree with this name were used to make the sails.
<i>Garamut</i>	large canoe-shaped drum which was used to send signals. Through these drums, messages could be sent a long way.
<i>Karag</i>	the wind most feared by the traders. It means "angry man." It is a Southeast wind.
<i>Kaukau</i>	a root vegetable, sweet potato.
<i>Koniak</i>	from the English coniac, an intoxicating drink from roots.
<i>Kulau</i>	green coconut -the milk is thirst quenching.
<i>Kundu</i>	a small hand held drum.
<i>Lalong</i>	a one sail trading canoe.
<i>Likon</i>	a magic man particularly for weather.
<i>Mal</i>	covering worn by the men and made from bark.

<i>Masalai</i>	spirits which inhabit bush places or reefs.
<i>Morata</i>	roofs of the houses made from saksak leaves.
<i>Medapep!</i>	Alas! Used when something happens which may have been caused by spirits eg tripping over roots. By saying <i>Medapep</i> , people protect themselves from further mishap.
<i>Nene</i>	local term of negation or no.
<i>Opim dua</i>	The ceremony of launching a new canoe.
<i>Pain</i>	sail of the trading canoes.
<i>Singsing</i>	any festival with dances.
<i>Tambaran</i>	the spirits of the ancestors. Derived from the Tolai <i>Tabaran</i> .
<i>Tambu</i>	Maclay used this word when he wanted the people to keep away from his gun, but they thought it was the name of the gun.
<i>Taleo</i>	the northwest wind from November until April.
<i>Tamo</i>	man in the Bongu language.
<i>Tamo kaaran</i>	man from the moon
<i>Tamo russ</i>	man from Russia.
<i>Tanget</i>	a shrub whose colourful leaves are used in sorcery and in decorations.
<i>Tumbuna</i>	ancestors, grandparents. Derived from the Tolai <i>Tabuna</i> .
<i>Taro</i>	a root vegetable.
<i>Waing</i>	The trading trip on which the Dadeng takes place.
<i>Yawan</i>	a gentle wind.

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