

John Macgillivray

*Narrative of the Voyage
of H.M.S. Rattlesnake,
1846-50, Volume 2*

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Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4066338101549

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DISTRIBUTION OF TRIBES OF CAPE YORK AND TORRES STRAIT.

There are at least five distinct tribes of natives inhabiting the neighbourhood of Cape York. The Gudang people possess the immediate vicinity of the Cape: the Yagulles*

stretch along the coast to the southward and eastward beyond Escape River: the Katchialaigas and Induyamos (or Yarudolaigas as the latter are sometimes called) inhabit the country behind Cape York, but I am not acquainted with the precise localities: lastly, the Gomokudins are located on the South-West shores of Endeavour Strait, and extend a short distance down the Gulf of Carpentaria. These all belong to the Australian race as unquestionably as the aborigines of Western or South Australia, or the South-East coast of New South Wales; they exhibit precisely the same physical characteristics which have been elsewhere so often described as to render further repetition unnecessary.

(*Footnote. This is the tribe concerned in the murder of the unfortunate Kennedy. The circumstances were related by some of the Yagulles to an old woman at Cape York of the name of Baki, who, when questioned upon the subject through Giaom, partially corroborated the statement of Jackey-Jackey. She further stated that a few years ago a Yagulle woman and child had been shot by some white men in a small vessel near Albany Island, and that the tribe were anxious to revenge their death. Whether this was a story got up as a palliative for the murder, or not, I cannot say.)

On the other hand, the tribes inhabiting the islands of Torres Strait differ from those of the mainland in belonging (with the exception of the first) to the Papuan or frizzled-haired race. Besides, probably, a few others of which I cannot speak with certainty, these tribes are distributed in the following manner. The Kowraregas inhabit the Prince of Wales group: the Muralegas and Italegas divide between them Banks Island: the Badulegas possess Mulgrave Island,

and the Gumulegas the islands between the last and New Guinea: the Kulkalegas have Mount Ernest and the Three Sisters: The Massilegas* reside on the York Isles and others adjacent: and the Miriam** tribe hold the north-easternmost islands of Torres Strait, including Murray and Darnley Islands.

(*Footnote. I do not know what name is given to the tribe or tribes inhabiting the space between the Miriam and the Kulkalaig. Dzum (a Darnley islander) told me of a tribe called Gamle inhabiting Owrid, Uta, Zogarid, Sirreb, Mekek, and Wurber; at all events the natives of Massid belong to a distinct tribe, judging from their language, and are known as the Massilegas by the Kowraregas. They occasionally (as in 1848) come down to Cape York on a visit to the Australians there, often extending their voyage far to the southward, visiting the various sandy islets in search of turtle and remaining away for a month or more.)

(**Footnote. Is so named from a place in Murray Island. The possessions of this tribe are Mer, Dowar, Wayer, Errub, Ugar, Zapker, and Edugor, all, except the two last, permanently inhabited.)

The junction between the two races, or the Papuan from the north and the Australian from the south, is effected at Cape York by the Kowraregas, whom I believe to be a Papuanized colony of Australians, as will elsewhere be shown. In fact, one might hesitate whether to consider the Kowraregas* as Papuans or Australians, so complete is the fusion of the two races. Still the natives of the Prince of Wales Islands rank themselves with the islanders and exhibit a degree of conscious superiority over their

neighbours on the mainland and with some show of reason; although themselves inferior to all the other islanders, they have at least made with them the great advance in civilisation of having learned to cultivate the ground, a process which is practised by none of the Australian aborigines.

(*Footnote. Dr. Latham informs me that the Kowrarega language is undeniably Australian, and has clearly shown such to be the case: and although the Miriam language does not show any obvious affinity with the continental Australian dialects, yet the number of words common to it and the Kowrarega, I find by comparison of my vocabularies to be very considerable, and possibly, were we at all acquainted with the grammar of the former, other and stronger affinities would appear.)

THE KOWRAREGAS.

The Kowraregas speak of New Guinea under the name of Muggi (little) Dowdai, while to New Holland they apply the term of Kei (large) Dowdai. Their knowledge of the former island has been acquired indirectly through the medium of intervening tribes. The New Guinea people are said to live chiefly on pigs and sago; from them are obtained the cassowary feathers used in their dances, and stone-headed clubs. They trade with the Gumulegas, who exchange commodities with the Badulegas, from whom the Kowrarega people receive them. These last barter away to their northern neighbours spears, throwing-sticks, and mother-of-pearl shells for bows, arrows, bamboo pipes, and knives, and small shell ornaments called dibi-dibi. They have friendly relations with the other islanders of Torres Strait,

but are at enmity with all the mainland tribes except the Gudang.

MODE OF WARFARE ILLUSTRATED.

Occasionally hostilities, frequently caused by the most trivial circumstances, arise between two neighbouring tribes, when incursions are made into each other's territories, and reprisals follow. Although timely notice is usually given prior to an aggression being made by one tribe upon another, yet the most profound secrecy is afterwards practised by the invaders. As an illustration of their mode of warfare, in which treachery is considered meritorious in proportion to its success, and no prisoners are made, except occasionally, when a woman is carried off--consisting chiefly in a sudden and unexpected attack, a short encounter, the flight of one party and the triumphant rejoicings of the other on their return--I may state the following on the authority of Giaom.

About the end of 1848, an old Kowrarega man went by himself in a small canoe to the neighbourhood of Cape Cornwall, while the men of the tribe were absent turtling at the eastern end of Endeavour Strait. He was watched by a party of Gomokudin blacks or Yigeiles, who, guided by his fire, surprised and speared him. Immediately returning to the mainland, the perpetrators of this savage deed made a great fire by way of exultation. Meanwhile the turtling party returned, and when it became known that the old man had been missing for several days, they were induced by his two sons to search for him, and found the body horribly mutilated, with many spears stuck into it to show who had been the murderers. This explained the fire, so another was

lit in reply to the challenge, and at night a party of Kowraregas in six canoes, containing all the men and lads of the tribe, crossed over to the main. They came upon a small camp of Yigeiles who had not been at all concerned in the murder, and enticed one of them to come out of the thicket where he had concealed himself by the offer of a fillet of cassowary feathers for information regarding the real murderers. As soon as the man stepped out, he was shot down with an arrow, his head cut off, and pursuit made after the rest. Towards morning their second camping-place was discovered and surrounded, when three men, one woman, and a girl were butchered. The heads of the victims were cut off with the hupi, or bamboo knife, and secured by the sringi, or cane loop, both of which are carried slung on the back by the Torres Strait islanders and the New Guinea men of the adjacent shores, when on a marauding excursion;* these Papuans preserve the skulls of their enemies as trophies, while the Australian tribes merely mutilate the bodies of the slain, and leave them where they fall.

(*Footnote. See Jukes' Voyage of the Fly Volume 1 page 277.)

CANNIBALISM.

The Kowraregas returned to their island with much exultation, announcing their approach by great shouting and blowing on conchs. The heads were placed on an oven and partially cooked, when the eyes were scooped out and eaten with portions of flesh cut from the cheek;* only those, however, who had been present at the murder were allowed to partake of this; the morsel was supposed to make them

more brave. A dance was then commenced, during which the heads were kicked along the ground, and the savage excitement of the dancers almost amounted to frenzy. The skulls were ultimately hung up on two cross sticks near the camp, and allowed to remain there undisturbed.

(*Footnote. The eyes and cheeks of the survivors from the wreck of a Charles Eaton (in August 1834) were eaten by their murderers--a party consisting of different tribes from the eastern part of Torres Strait. See Nautical Magazine 1837 page 799.)

In the beginning of 1849 a party of Badulegas who had spent two months on a friendly visit to the natives of Muralug treacherously killed an old Italega woman, married to one of their hosts. Two of her brothers from Banks Island were staying with her at the time, and one was killed, but the other managed to escape. The heads were carried off to Badu as trophies. This treacherous violation of the laws of hospitality was in revenge for some petty injury which one of the Badu men received from an Ita black several years before.

SIGNALS BY SMOKE.

When a large fire is made by one tribe it is often intended as a signal of defiance to some neighbouring one--an invitation to fight--and may be continued daily for weeks before hostilities commence; it is answered by a similar one. Many other signals by smoke are in use: for example, the presence of an enemy upon the coast--a wish to communicate with another party at a distance--or the want of assistance--may be denoted by making a small fire, which, as soon as it has given out a little column of smoke,

is suddenly extinguished by heaping sand upon it. If not answered immediately it is repeated; if still unanswered, a large fire is got up and allowed to burn until an answer is returned.

POLYGAMY.

Polygamy is practised both on the mainland and throughout the islands of Torres Strait. Five is the greatest number of wives which I was credibly informed had been possessed by one man--but this was an extraordinary instance, one, two, or three, being the usual complement, leaving of course many men who are never provided with wives. The possession of several wives ensures to the husband a certain amount of influence in his tribe as the owner of so much valuable property, also from the nature and extent of his connections by marriage. In most cases females are betrothed in infancy, according to the will of the father, and without regard to disparity of age, thus the future husband may be and often is an old man with several wives. When the man thinks proper he takes his wife to live with him without any further ceremony, but before this she has probably had promiscuous intercourse with the young men, such, if conducted with a moderate degree of secrecy, not being considered as an offence, although if continued after marriage it would be visited by the husband (if powerful enough) upon both the offending parties with the severest punishment.

Occasionally there are instances of strong mutual attachment and courtship, when, if the damsel is not betrothed, a small present made to the father is sufficient to procure his consent; at the Prince of Wales Islands a knife or

glass bottle are considered as a sufficient price for the hand of a lady fair, and are the articles mostly used for that purpose.

According to Giaom puberty in girls takes place from the tenth to the twelfth year, but few become mothers at a very early age. When parturition is about to take place the woman retires to a little distance in the bush, and is attended by an experienced matron. Delivery is usually very easy, and the mother is almost always able on the following day to attend to her usual occupations. The infant is laid upon a small soft mat which the mother has taken care to prepare beforehand, and which is used for no other purpose.

CONDITION OF THE WOMEN.

The life of a married woman among the Kowrarega and Gudang blacks is a hard one. She has to procure nearly all the food for herself and husband, except during the turtling season, and on other occasions when the men are astir. If she fails to return with a sufficiency of food, she is probably severely beaten--indeed the most savage acts of cruelty are often inflicted upon the women for the most trivial offence.

THEIR TREATMENT BY THE MEN.

Considering the degraded position assigned by the Australian savages to their women, it is not surprising that the Prince of Wales Islanders should, by imitating their neighbours in this respect, afford a strong contrast to the inhabitants of Darnley and other islands of the North-East part of Torres Strait, who always appeared to me to treat their females with much consideration and kindness. Several instances of this kind of barbarity came under my own notice. Piaquai (before-mentioned) when spoken to

about his wife whom he had killed a fortnight before in a fit of passion, seemed much amused at the idea of having got rid of her unborn child at the same time. One morning at Cape York, Paida did not keep his appointment with me as usual; on making inquiry, I found that he had been squabbling with one of his wives a few minutes before, about some trifle, and had speared her through the hip and groin. On expressing my disapproval of what he had done, adding that white men never acted in that manner, he turned it off by jocularly observing that although I had only one wife, HE had two, and could easily spare one of them. As a further proof of the low condition of the women, I may state that it is upon them that the only restrictions in eating particular sorts of food are imposed. Many kinds of fish, including some of the best, are forbidden on the pretence of their causing disease in women, although not injurious to the men. The hawksbill turtle and its eggs are forbidden to women suckling, and no female, until beyond child bearing, is permitted to eat of the Torres Strait pigeon.

Among other pieces of etiquette to be practised after marriage among both the Kowraregas and Gudangs, a man must carefully avoid speaking to or even mentioning the name of his mother-in-law, and his wife acts similarly with regard to her father-in-law. Thus the mother of a person called Nuki--which means water--is obliged to call water by another name; in like manner as the names of the dead are never mentioned without great reluctance so, after the death of a man named Us, or quartz, that stone had its name changed into nattam ure, or the thing which is a

namesake, although the original will gradually return to common use.

The population of Muralug is kept always about the same numerical standard by the small number of births, and the occasional practice of infanticide. Few women rear more than three children, and besides, most of those born before marriage are doomed to be killed immediately after birth, unless the father--which is seldom the case--is desirous of saving the child--if not, he gives the order marama teio (throw it into the hole) and it is buried alive accordingly. Even of other infants some, especially females, are made away with in a similar manner when the mother is disinclined to support it.

NAMING OF CHILDREN.

An infant is named immediately after birth: and, on Muralug, these names for the last few years have been chosen by a very old man named Guigwi. Many of these names have a meaning attached to them: thus, two people are named respectively Wapada and Passei, signifying particular trees, one woman is called Kuki, or the rainy season, and her son Ras, or the driving cloud. Most people have several names, for instance, old Guigwi was also called Salgai, or the firesticks, and Mrs. Thomson was addressed as Kesagu, or Taomai, by her (adopted) relatives, but as Giaom by all others. Children are usually suckled for about two years, but are soon able, in a great measure, to procure their own food, especially shellfish, and when strong enough to use the stick employed in digging up roots, they are supposed to be able to shift for themselves.

COMPRESSION OF THE SKULL.

A peculiar form of head, which both the Kowrarega and Gudang blacks consider as the beau ideal of beauty, is produced by artificial compression during infancy. Pressure is made by the mother with her hands--as I have seen practised on more than one occasion at Cape York--one being applied to the forehead and the other to the occiput, both of which are thereby flattened, while the skull is rendered proportionally broader and longer than it would naturally have been.*

(*Footnote. Precisely the same form of skull as that alluded to in volume 1: hence it is not unreasonable to suppose that the latter might have been artificially produced.)

When the child is about a fortnight old the perforation in the septum of the nose is made by drilling it with a sharp-pointed piece of tortoise-shell, but the raised artificial scars, regarded as personal ornaments by the Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, are not made until long afterwards. According to Giaom, who states that among the Kowraregas this scarification is purely voluntary, the patient is laid upon the ground and held there, while the incisions are made with a piece of glass by some old man famous for his skill in performing the operation. The chewed leaf of a certain plant (which, however, I could not identify) is introduced into the wound to prevent the edges from uniting, and a daub of wet clay is then placed over all, and kept there until the necessary effect has been produced. The principal scarifications among women at Cape York and Muralug are in the form of long lines across the hips. Among the men, however, there is considerable variety.

The characteristic mode of dressing the hair among the Torres Strait Islanders is to have it twisted up into long pipe-like ringlets, and wigs in imitation of this are also worn. Sometimes the head is shaved, leaving a transverse crest--a practice seldom seen among the men but not uncommon among women and children, from Darnley Island down to Cape York. At the last place and Muralug the hair is almost always kept short--still caprice and fashion have their sway, for at Cape York I have at times for a week together seen all the men and lads with the hair twisted into little strands well daubed over with red ochre and turtle fat.

RAISED CICATRICES ON THE BODY.

The Torres Strait Islanders are distinguished by a large complicated oval scar, only slightly raised, and of neat construction. This, which I have been told has some connection with a turtle, occupies the right shoulder, and is occasionally repeated on the left. At Cape York, however, the cicatrices were so varied, that I could not connect any particular style with an individual tribe--at the same time something like uniformity was noticed among the Katchialaigas, nearly all of whom had, in addition to the horned breast-mark, two or three long transverse scars on the chest, which the other tribes did not possess. In the remaining people the variety of marking was such that it appeared fair to consider it as being regulated more by individual caprice than by any fixed custom. Many had a simple two-horned mark on each breast, and we sometimes saw among them a clumsy imitation of the elaborate shoulder mark of the islanders.

INITIATION TO RIGHTS OF MANHOOD.

The custom of undergoing a certain mysterious ceremony prior to being admitted to the privileges of manhood, supposed to be an institution peculiar to the Australians, is found among the Kowraregas, but whether it extends throughout Torres Strait is uncertain. This initiation is not at Cape York and Muralug accompanied by the performance either of circumcision or the knocking out of a tooth, as in many parts of Australia. The boys, usually three or four in number, are chased about in the bush during the day by some of the men decked out with feathers and other ornaments, and at night retire to the men's camp, for, during the whole time of their novitiate--or about a month--they must on no account be seen by a woman; in fact, as Giaom informed me, a woman coming upon these kernele--as they are called--no matter how accidentally, would be immediately put to death. When all is over the lads return to their parents, decorated with a profusion of ornaments which are worn until they drop off, and wearing in front a small triangular piece of shell as a distinguishing mark.

CANOES OF TORRES STRAIT.

The same kind of canoe which is found throughout Torres Strait has been seen to extend from Cape York along the eastern coast as far south as Fitzroy Island,* a distance of 500 miles. It essentially consists of a hollowed-out log, a central platform, and an outrigger on each side. The largest canoes which I have seen are those of the Murray and Darnley Islanders, occasionally as much as sixty feet long; those of the Australians are small, varying at Cape York between fifteen and thirty feet in length. Even the Kowraregas have much finer canoes than their neighbours

on the mainland; one which I measured alongside the ship was forty-five feet long and three and a half in greatest width, and could carry with ease twenty-five people.

(*Footnote. At the latter place we found a small canoe with two outriggers concealed on shore among some bushes. The bark canoes of Rockingham Bay have already been described. About Whitsunday Passage the canoes, also of bark, are larger and of neater construction: one which I examined at the Cumberland Isles was made of three pieces of bark neatly sewn together; it was six feet long and two and a half feet wide, sharp at each end, with a wooden thwart near the stem and stern, and a cord amidships to keep the sides from stretching. In the creeks and bays of the now settled districts of New South Wales another kind of canoe was once in general use. At Broken Bay, in August 1847, a singular couple of aborigines whom I met upon a fishing excursion had a small canoe formed of a single sheet of bark tied up at each end; on the floor of this they were squatted, with the gunwale not more than six inches above the water's edge. Yet this frail bark contained a fire, numbers of spears, fishing lines and other gear. The woman was a character well known in Sydney--Old Gooseberry--said to be old enough to have remembered Cook's first visit to these shores.)

MODE OF CONSTRUCTING AND MANAGING THEM.

The construction of a canoe in the neighbourhood of Cape York is still looked upon as a great undertaking, although the labour has been much lessened by the introduction of iron axes, which have completely superseded those of stone formerly in use. A tree of sufficient size free from limbs--usually a species of Bombax (silk-cotton tree) or

Erythrina--is selected in the scrub, cut down, hollowed out where it falls, and dragged to the beach by means of long climbers used as ropes. The remaining requisites are now added; two stout poles, fourteen to twenty feet in length, are laid across the gunwale, and secured there from six to ten feet apart, and the projecting ends are secured by lashing and wooden pegs to a long float of light wood on each side, pointed, and slightly turned up at the ends. A platform or stage of small sticks laid across occupies the centre of the canoe, extending on each side, several feet beyond the gunwale, and having on the outside a sort of double fence of upright sticks used for stowing away weapons and other gear. The paddles are five feet long, with a narrow rounded blade, and are very clumsily made. The cable is made of twisted climbers--often the *Flagellaria indica*--and a large stone serves for an anchor.

When desirous of making sail, the first process is to set up in the bow two poles as masts, and on the weather side a longer and stouter one is laid across the gunwale, and projects outwards and backwards as an outrigger. These are further supported by stays and guys, and, together with another long pole forked at the end, serve as a frame to support the pressure of the sails, which are usually two in number, made of matting of pandanus leaves, and average four and a half feet in width and twelve in height. The sails have a slender pole on each side to which the matting is secured by small pegs; when set, they are put up on end side by side, travelling along the backstay by means of a cane grommet. When blowing fresh it is usual to keep a man standing on the temporary outrigger to counteract by his

weight the inclination of the canoe to leeward. From the whole sail being placed in the bow these canoes make much leeway, but when going free may attain a maximum speed of seven or eight knots an hour. Except in smooth water they are very wet, and the bailer (a melon shell) is in constant requisition.

BOWS, ARROWS, SPEARS, THROWING-STICKS AND CLUBS.

The inhabitants of the mainland and Prince of Wales Islands use the spear and throwing-stick, but throughout the remainder of Torres Strait bows and arrows are the chief weapons. The bows, which are large and powerful, are made of split bamboo, and the arrows of a cane procured from New Guinea, afterwards headed with hard wood variously pointed and sometimes barbed. The Kowraregas obtain bows and arrows from their northern neighbours, and occasionally use them in warfare, but prefer the spears which are made by the blacks of the mainland. We saw three kinds of spear at Cape York; one is merely a sharpened stick used for striking fish, the two others, tipped and barbed with bone, are used in war. The principal spear (kalak or alka) measures about nine feet in length, two-thirds of which are made of she-oak or casuarina, hard and heavy, and the remaining third of a soft and very light wood; one end has a small hollow to receive the knob of the throwing-stick, and to the other the leg-bone of a kangaroo six inches long, sharpened at each end, is secured in such a manner as to furnish a sharp point to the spear and a long barb besides. Another spear, occasionally used in fighting,

has three or four heads of wood each of which is tipped and barbed with a smaller bone than is used for the kalak.

The throwing-stick in use at Cape York extends down the North-East coast at least as far as Lizard Island; it differs from those in use in other parts of Australia in having the projecting knob for fitting into the end of the spear parallel with the plane of the stick and not at rightangles. It is made of casuarina wood, and is generally three feet in length, an inch and a quarter broad, and half an inch thick. At the end a double slip of melon shell, three and a half inches long, crossing diagonally, serves as a handle, and when used, the end rests against the palm of the right hand, the three last fingers grasp the stick, and the forefinger and thumb loosely retain the spear. With the aid of the powerful leverage of the throwing-stick a spear can be thrown to a distance varying according to its weight from 30 to 80 yards, and with considerable precision; still, if observed coming, it may easily be avoided.

The only other weapon which I have seen in Torres Strait is a peculiar kind of club procured from New Guinea, consisting of a quoit-like disk of hard stone (quartz, basalt, or serpentine) with a sharp edge, and a hole in the centre to receive one end of a long wooden handle.

The huts which the Kowraregas and Cape York people put up when the rains commence are usually dome-shaped, four to six feet high, constructed of an arched framework of flexible sticks, one end of each of which is stuck firmly in the ground, and over this sheets of tea-tree (*Melaleuca*) bark--and sometimes an additional thatch of grass--are placed until it is rendered perfectly watertight.

PETTICOATS AND FISHING GEAR.

Not only at Cape York but throughout Torres Strait the males use no clothing or covering of any kind. At Cape York and the Prince of Wales Islands grown up females usually wear a covering in front, consisting of a tuft of long grass, or flag (*Philydrum lanuginosum*) or split pandanus leaves, either hanging loosely or passed between the legs and tied to another behind; over this a short petticoat of fine shreds of pandanus leaf, the ends worked into a waistband, is sometimes put on, especially by the young girls, and when about to engage in dancing. This petticoat, varying only in the materials from which it is made, is in general use among the females of all the Torres Strait tribes except the Kowrarega, and much labour is often expended upon its construction. The large mats used as sails, also for sleeping under in wet weather, are made by the women from the fallen leaves of the pandanus--the common basket from the rush-like leaves of *Xerotes banksii* ? --and the water basket from the sheath of the leaf of the *Seaforthia* palm.

The food of these blacks varies with the season of the year, and the supply is irregular and often precarious. Shellfish and fish are alone obtainable all the year round--collecting the former is exclusively a female occupation, but fishing is chiefly practised by the men. Fish are either killed with a plain pointed spear, often merely a stick sharpened at the end, or are taken in deep water with the hook and line. Their hooks are made of a strip of tortoise-shell so much curved as to form three-fourths of a circle, but from their shape and the absence of a barb they cannot be so effective as those of European make: indeed these last were

at Cape York preferred by the natives themselves. The line is neatly made from the tough fibres of the rattan, which are first scraped to the requisite degree of fineness with a sharp-edged Cyrena shell, then twisted and laid up in three strands.

Turtle forms an important article of food, and four different kinds are distinguished at Cape York and the Prince of Wales Islands. Three of these can be identified as the Green, the Hawksbill, and the Loggerhead species, and the fourth is a small one which I never saw. This last, I was informed by Giaom, is fished for in the following extraordinary manner.

MODE OF CATCHING TURTLE.

A live sucking-fish (*Echeneis remora*) having previously been secured by a line passed round the tail, is thrown into the water in certain places known to be suitable for the purpose; the fish while swimming about makes fast by its sucker to any turtle of this small kind which it may chance to encounter, and both are hauled in together!

The green turtle is of such consequence to the natives that they have distinguished by a special name taken from the animal itself (*sulangi* from *sulur*) the season of the year when it is most plentiful; this, at Cape York, usually extends from about the middle of October until the end of November, but the limits are not constant. During the season they are to be seen floating about on the surface of the water, often in pairs, male and female together. A few are caught at night on the sandy beaches, but the greater number are captured in the water. The canoes engaged in turtling, besides going about in the day, are often sent out

on calm moonlight nights. When a turtle is perceived, it is approached from behind as noiselessly as possible--when within reach, a man in the bow carrying the end of a small rope jumps out, and, getting upon the animal's back, with a hand on each shoulder, generally contrives to turn it before it has got far and secure it with the rope. This operation requires considerable strength and courage, in addition to the remarkable dexterity in diving and swimming possessed by all the blacks of the north-east coast and Torres Strait.

LOOKOUT STATIONS FOR TURTLE.

There are some favourite lookout stations for turtle where the tide runs strongly off a high rocky point. At many such places, distinguished by large cairns* of stones, bones of turtle, dugongs, etc., watch is kept during the season, and, when a turtle is perceived drifting past with the tide, the canoe is manned and sent in chase.

(*Footnote. One of these on Albany Rock is a pile of stones, five feet high and seven wide, mixed up with turtle and human bones, and, when I last saw it, it was covered with long trailing shoots of *Flagellaria indica* placed there by a turtling party to ensure success, as I was told, but how, was not explained. The human bones were the remains of a man killed there many years ago by a party of Kowraregas who took his head away with them. The mounds described and figured in Jukes' *Voyage of the Fly* (Volume 1 pages 137 and 138) and considered by us at the time to be graves, are merely the usual cairns at a lookout place for turtle.)

With their usual improvidence, the Australians, when they take a turtle, feast upon it until all has been consumed and the cravings of hunger induce them to look out for

another; but the Torres Strait Islanders are accustomed to dry the flesh to supply them with food during their voyages. The meat is cut into thin slices, boiled in a melon shell, stuck upon skewers, and dried in the sun. Prepared in this manner it will keep for several weeks, but requires a second cooking before being used, on account of its hardness and toughness. The fat which rises to the surface during the boiling is skimmed off and kept in joints of bamboo and turtle bladders, being much prized as food; I have even seen the natives drink it off in its hot fluid state with as much gusto as ever alderman enjoyed his elaborately prepared turtle soup.

HAWKSBILL TURTLE.

The hawksbill turtle (*Caretta imbricata*) that chiefly producing the tortoise-shell of commerce, resorts to the shores in the neighbourhood of Cape York later in the season than the green species, and is comparatively scarce. It is only taken at night when depositing its eggs in the sand, as the sharpness of the margin of its shell renders it dangerous to attempt to turn it in the water--indeed even the green turtle, with a comparatively rounded margin to the carapace, occasionally, in struggling to escape, inflicts deep cuts on the inner side of the leg of its captor, of which I myself have seen an instance. Of the tortoise-shell collected at Cape York and the Prince of Wales Islands a small portion is converted into fishhooks, the rest is bartered either to Europeans or to the Island blacks, who fashion it into various ornaments.

CAPTURE OF THE DUGONG.

Another favourite article of food is the dugong (*Halicore australis*) of which a few are killed every year. Although it extends along the east coast of Australia from Moreton Bay to Cape York, it appears to be nowhere very common. About Cape York and Endeavour Strait, the dugong is most frequently seen during the rainy season, at which time it is said by the natives to bring forth its young. When one is observed feeding close inshore* chase is made after it in a canoe. One of the men standing up in the bow is provided with a peculiar instrument used solely for the capture of the animal in question. It consists of a slender peg of bone, four inches long, barbed all round, and loosely slipped into the heavy, rounded, and flattened head of a pole, fifteen to sixteen feet in length; a long rope an inch in thickness, made of the twisted stems of some creeping plant, is made fast to the peg at one end, while the other is secured to the canoe. When within distance, the bowman leaps out, strikes the dugong, and returns to the canoe with the shaft in his hand. On being struck, the animal dives, carrying out the line, but generally rises to the surface and dies in a few minutes, not requiring a second wound, a circumstance surprising in the case of a cetaceous animal, six or eight feet in length, and of proportionate bulk. The carcass is towed on shore and rolled up the beach, when preparations are made for a grand feast. The flesh is cut through to the ribs in thin strips, each with its share of skin and blubber, then the tail is removed and sliced with a sharp shell as we would a round of beef. The blubber is esteemed the most delicate part; but even the skin is eaten, although it requires much cooking in the oven.

(*Footnote. A slender, branchless, cylindrical, articulated seaweed, of a very pale green colour, was pointed out to me by a native as being the favourite food of the dugong.)

COOKING IN THE OVEN.

This oven is of simple construction--a number of stones, the size of the fist, are laid on the ground, and a fire is continued above them until they are sufficiently hot, the meat is then laid upon the bottom layer with some of the heated stones above it, a rim of tea-tree bark banked up with sand or earth is put up all round, with a quantity of bark, leaves, or grass on top, to retain the steam, and the process of baking goes on. This is the favourite mode of cooking turtle and dugong throughout Torres Strait, and on the east coast of the mainland I have seen similar fireplaces as far south as Sandy Cape.

CULTURE OF THE YAM.

A great variety of yam-like tubers are cultivated in Torres Strait. Although on Murray and Darnley and other thickly peopled and fertile islands a considerable extent of land in small patches has been brought under cultivation, at the Prince of Wales Islands the cleared spots are few in number, and of small extent--nor does the latter group naturally produce either the coconut or bamboo, or is the culture of the banana attempted. On the mainland again I never saw the slightest attempt at gardening.

The principal yam, or that known by the names of kutai and ketai, is the most important article of vegetable food, as it lasts nearly throughout the dry season. Forming a yam garden is a very simple operation. No fencing is required--

the patch of ground is strewed with branches and wood, which when thoroughly dry are set on fire to clear the surface--the ground is loosely turned up with a sharpened stick, and the cut pieces of yam are planted at irregular intervals, each with a small pole for the plant to climb up. These operations are completed just before the commencement of the wet season, or in the month of October.

When the rains set in the biyu becomes the principal support of the Cape York and Muralug people. This is a grey slimy paste procured from a species of mangrove (*Candelia* ?) the sprouts of which, three or four inches long, are first made to undergo a process of baking and steaming--a large heap being laid upon heated stones, and covered over with bark, wet leaves, and sand--after which they are beaten between two stones, and the pulp is scraped out fit for use. It does not seem to be a favourite food, and is probably eaten from sheer necessity. Mixed up with the biyu to render it more palatable they sometimes add large quantities of a leguminous seed, the size of a chestnut, which has previously been soaked for a night in water, and the husk removed, or the tuber of a wild yam (*Dioscorea bulbifera*) cut into small pieces, and well steeped in water to remove its bitter taste.

Among the edible fruits of Cape York I may mention the leara, a species of *Anacardium* or cashew nut (the lurgala of Port Essington) which, after being well roasted to destroy its acidity has somewhat the taste of a filbert--the elari (a species of *Wallrothia*) the size of an apricot, soft and mealy, with a nearly insipid but slightly mawkish taste--wobar, the

small, red, mealy fruit of *Mimusops kaukii*--and the apiga (a species of *Eugenia*) a red, apple-like fruit, the pericarp of which has a pleasantly acid taste. The fruit of two species of pandanus yields a sweet mucilage when sucked, and imparts it to water in which it has been soaked, after which it is broken up between two stones, and the kernels are extracted and eaten.

NO RECOGNISED CHIEFTAINSHIP.

Throughout Australia and Torres Strait, the existence of chieftainship, either hereditary or acquired, has in no instance of which I am aware been clearly proved: yet in each community there are certain individuals who exercise an influence over the others which Europeans are apt to mistake for real authority. These so-called chiefs, are generally elderly men, who from prowess in war, force of character, or acknowledged sagacity, are allowed to take the lead in everything relating to the tribe. In Torres Strait such people are generally the owners of large canoes, and several wives; and in the northern islands, of groves of coconut-trees, yam grounds, and other wealth. Among the Kowraregas, there are, according to Giaom, three principal people, Manu, Piaquai, and Baki, all old men, but among the Gudangs, a young man of twenty-five of the name of Tumagugo appeared to have the greatest influence, and next to him Paida, not more than six or eight years older.

LAWS REGARDING PROPERTY IN LAND.

It seems curious to find at Cape York and the Prince of Wales Islands a recognised division and ownership of land, seeing that none of it by cultivation has been rendered fit for the permanent support of man. According to Giaom,

there are laws regulating the ownership of every inch of ground on Muralug and the neighbouring possessions of the Kowraregas, and I am led to believe such is likewise the case at Cape York. Among these laws are the following: A person has a claim upon the ground where both himself and his parents were born, although situated in different localities. On the death of parents their land is divided among the children, when both sexes share alike, with this exception, that the youngest of the family receives the largest share. Marriage does not affect the permanency of the right of a woman to any landed property which may have come into her possession. Lastly, an old man occasionally so disposes of his property that a favourite child may obtain a larger proportion than he could afterwards claim as his inheritance.

Neither at Cape York, nor in any of the Islands of Torres Strait, so far as I am aware, do the aborigines appear to have formed an idea of the existence of a Supreme Being; the absence of this belief may appear questionable, but my informant, Giaom, spoke quite decidedly on this point, having frequently made it the subject of conversation with the Kowrarega blacks.

TRANSMIGRATION OF SOULS.

The singular belief in the transmigration of souls, which is general among the whole of the Australian tribes, so far as known, also extends to the islands of Torres Strait. The people holding it imagine that, immediately after death, they are changed into white people or Europeans, and as such pass the second and final period of their existence; nor is it any part of this creed that future rewards and