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978-0-521-17986-7 - Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits, Volume I

A. C. Haddon

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REPORTS  
OF THE  
CAMBRIDGE ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPEDITION  
TO  
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CAMBRIDGE ANTHROPOLOGICAL EXPEDITION  
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VOLUME I  
GENERAL ETHNOGRAPHY

CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1888 I went to Torres Straits to study marine zoology and had no intention of paying attention to ethnography; indeed, before I left England, I consulted Sir William Flower about taking measurements of natives and he dissuaded me from doing so, and others seemed to think that there was little worth doing as regards the natives. All this fitted in very well with my inclinations, for I had not paid any serious attention to ethnology and was relieved to find that I might neglect it.

After a preliminary cruise in the Straits, I stayed at Mabuiag during the month of October in 1888 and spent five months at Mer in 1888–9. I also paid short visits to various islands. Throughout this time I was in close contact with the islanders, especially when dredging and collecting plankton. I found them a cheerful, friendly and intelligent folk, and soon became friends with many of them. Naturally, when opportunity offered, I spoke to them about their past and soon found that the young men knew extremely little about it and they always referred me to the old men. I had previously found that practically none of the Europeans in the islands knew or cared anything about the customs of the natives or their former beliefs, and I also discovered that all that was known about them was contained in the accounts given by Jukes, by Macgillivray, and in the sketches and often inaccurate notes by Wyatt Gill and a few others. I therefore considered it my duty to record as much as was possible in the circumstances, so I induced the old men to come in the evenings and talk about old times and tell me their folk-tales. In this way, without any previous experience or knowledge, I worked single-handed among the Western islanders and amassed a fair amount of information.

On arriving at Mer I was hospitably entertained by the Rev. A. E. Hunt and Mrs Hunt and by the Rev. E. B. Savage, who did all they could to make my stay with them pleasant and profitable. I made a rough survey of this volcanic island and located all the villages and groups of houses. I also made enquiries into their folk-tales, former ceremonies, and the like, but as I understood that Mr Hunt proposed to make a study of the people I purposely did not investigate the natives as thoroughly as I should have liked to have done in the intervals of my zoological work.

I left the Straits in the summer of 1889 with very considerable collections of marine animals. Two large metal drums of specimens were consigned to my friend Prof. G. B. Howes of the Royal College of Science, South Kensington. The excise officer demanded a duty on the alcohol although all of it had been shipped from London to Torres Straits. Howes refused to pay anything and poured all the alcohol down the sink; the excise officer did not mind, and Howes filled up the drums with fresh spirit which was provided by the Department of Science and Art. Thus the Government lost both the duty and the value of the fresh alcohol and the specimens gained therefrom.

I had arranged to have a couple of months or so in London before returning to my duties in Dublin and I spent that time in sorting my ethnographical collections in the British Museum, to which institution I gave the bulk of the specimens, and I also wrote up my ethnographical material on the Western islanders, which was published by the Anthropological Institute, and prepared my folk-tales for the Folk-Lore Society. It was during this time that I first became acquainted with ethnologists and folk-lorists, and other

anthropologists. Towards the end of my stay in London, Sir William Flower suggested that I should seriously take up the study of anthropology. This I was not very ready to do as I was devoted to zoology. However, on my return to Dublin I gradually turned my attention to various aspects of anthropology, and finding not much scope there for my new interests I went to live in Cambridge in 1893. A few years later I resigned the chair of zoology in the Royal College of Science, Dublin, and thenceforth devoted myself to anthropology.

Feeling that our knowledge of the Torres Straits islanders was extremely incomplete, I decided to make another expedition thither, and I was fortunate in being able to persuade six others to accompany me; we arrived at Thursday Island on April 22, 1898.

My first concern was to secure the services of Sidney H. Ray, who had made a study of the two languages of Torres Straits based upon missionary publications and other material which I supplied, all of which was too imperfect to be trustworthy. The personal investigations by Ray are published in vol. III of these Reports. He is now the recognised authority on the languages of Western Oceania.

I had long felt that psychological investigations must be undertaken before any real advance could be made in ethnology, so I invited Drs W. H. R. Rivers, C. S. Myers and W. McDougall to undertake this branch of our work. They concerned themselves with the study of mental characteristics by the methods of experimental psychology and their results are given in vol. II of these Reports. This was the first occasion on which trained psychologists provided with what apparatus they needed had worked among a primitive people in their natural surroundings.

In endeavouring to discover whether certain aptitudes or disabilities were common to members of the same family, Rivers began to collect genealogies. He soon saw that this method of enquiry afforded precise information concerning vital statistics and it also helped to explain a number of social conditions. He collected kinship terms and incidentally the duties and privileges of kinsmen, and in this way he originated the genealogical method which in his hands and in those whom he inspired has led to a new and invaluable ethnological technique. Previously Rivers had not taken any interest in ethnology, and the after-results of our expedition were his investigation of the Todas (*The Todas*, London, 1906), his subsequent researches in Melanesia (*The History of Melanesian Society*, Cambridge, 1914) and his numerous later ethnological publications. Apart from his purely psychological researches, he was particularly interested in the inter-relation of psychology and ethnology. The sudden death of Dr W. H. R. Rivers, F.R.S., in Cambridge on June 4, 1922, was an irreplaceable loss to his friends and to science; obituary notices and a bibliography are given in *Man*, 1922, No. 61.

Dr C. S. Myers, F.R.S., was an accomplished musician and, in addition to his psychological investigations, he interested himself in native music in the Straits and has since done so elsewhere. As in the case of Rivers, from being at first a pure psychologist he became interested in other branches of anthropology. He is now the Director of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology.

Dr W. McDougall, F.R.S., continued in the straight path of psychology, at first at Oxford and thenceforth in the United States of America.

Mr Anthony Wilkin already had some archaeological and anthropological experience in Egypt and Algeria, and as he was a good photographer I asked him to act as such for the expedition and to undertake certain branches of material culture. To our profound grief

## INTRODUCTION

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the promising career of this brilliant young man was cut short by death at Cairo on May 17, 1901. His name is perpetuated among us by the Anthony Wilkin Studentship for ethnological and archaeological field-work.

Dr C. S. Seligman, F.R.S., with his wide interests filled in many gaps, such as native medicine and the diseases of the natives, and he helped the psychologists in their work. He has recently retired from the Professorship of Ethnology at the London School of Economics, University of London.

Rivers, Myers and McDougall remained on Mer, one of the Murray Islands, during four months (May to September, 1898), but from May 23 to July 20, Ray, Wilkin, Seligman and myself paid a flying visit to the Central Division of British New Guinea (or Papua, as it is now officially termed). Various minor studies were published as the result of this trip, and it was owing to the knowledge Seligman then acquired that Major Cooke Daniels invited Seligman to accompany him on an expedition in 1904 to the south-east end of New Guinea, which resulted in the publication by him of *The Melanesians of British New Guinea*, Cambridge, 1910.

The expedition as such broke up in October, 1898, but Myers, McDougall, Seligman, Ray and myself accepted the cordial invitation of Charles Hose to make a supplementary expedition to Sarawak, which led to many interesting experiences and to various ethnographical studies. It was owing to this visit that Hose asked McDougall to cooperate with him in writing *The Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, London, 1912. We were in Sarawak during the first four months of 1899.

Further general information will be found in the Introduction to my paper of 1890, in the Prefaces and Introductions to vols. II, V and VI of these Reports, and in the Preface to *Head-hunters, black, white, and brown*, London, 1901.

It will be seen from the historical sketch in this volume that practically nothing was known about the Torres Straits islanders till the memorable voyages of the "Fly", "Bramble", and "Rattlesnake" in the years 1843 to 1849. Nothing further of any importance was written until after the advent of the missionaries of the London Missionary Society in July, 1871; the records of their labours will be found in the books by A. W. Murray (1876), W. Wyatt Gill (1876) and S. McFarlane (1888). The first account of the Western islanders, published by me in 1890, was based on observations made in 1888. Hunt's brief paper (1899) deals from 1887-90. These Reports cover the years 1898, 1899, with references to my own and other earlier publications.

Thus there is a gap in our knowledge of what was taking place in Torres Straits during the twenty-two years between 1849 and 1871, and there is only desultory information about what has occurred since. During the first blank period many vessels passed through the Straits, some of which doubtless touched at various islands, but what the foreigners did there is unrecorded.

It also comprises the period of the beginning of the pearl-shelling and bêche-de-mer industries, about which more or less lurid rumours were current when I first visited the locality. If anything can be retrieved about the contact of the white men and their South Sea crews with the natives it would make most interesting and doubtless unsavoury reading. There can be little doubt that the events of this troublous period affected the natives very adversely in every way and that the ill-effects persisted for a long time. Somewhere about 1880 the welfare of the natives became the concern of the Queensland Government, abuses were stopped and in time benevolent administration made the lives

and property of the islanders secure and they were helped to bear the strain consequent upon the rapid introduction of an alien and complex civilisation.

Since 1888 I have consistently tried to recover the past life of the islanders, not merely in order to give a picture of their former conditions of existence and their social and religious activities, but also to serve as a basis for an appreciation of the changes that have since taken place. It has generally been acknowledged by me that ethnologists should study the existing conditions of backward societies, but to interpret these it is first necessary to know from what they have originated and then to trace the successions of new contacts and their influences on the people. I must leave it to another to describe this metamorphosis.

I have fulfilled to the best of my ability and opportunity my self-imposed task and I can only hope that others will build upon this imperfect foundation.

I should like here to acknowledge the help I have received from various friends, amongst whom must be especially mentioned Mr W. N. Beaver, Mr A. O. C. Davies, Professor Gunnar Landtman, the Rev. W. H. MacFarlane, the late Rev. E. Baxter Riley, Dr D. F. Thomson and Dr W. E. Williams, the observations of all of whom I have so often quoted, and also my indebtedness to Miss E. S. Fegan and Miss A. Nicol Smith who have for long periods of time rendered me invaluable honorary secretarial assistance.

The following is the system of spelling which has been adopted:

<i>a</i> as in "father"	<i>ò</i> as <i>aw</i> in "saw"
<i>ǎ</i> as in "at"	<i>u</i> as <i>oo</i> in "soon"
<i>e</i> as <i>a</i> in "date"	<i>ǔ</i> as in "up"
<i>ě</i> as in "let"	<i>ai</i> as in "aisle"
<i>è</i> as <i>ai</i> in "air"	<i>au</i> as <i>ow</i> in "cow"
<i>i</i> as <i>ee</i> in "feet"	<i>ei</i> as <i>ay</i> in "may"
<i>ĩ</i> as in "it"	<i>oi</i> as <i>oy</i> in "boy"
<i>o</i> as in "own"	

The consonants are sounded as in English.

A. C. HADDON

