2

COLONIALISM ON A SHOESTRING

The Papua Act and the New Anthropologists (1904–14)

The 1898–1907 period was one of significant global political change. The British Empire itself was transforming. Canada had already become an independent dominion and the six former colonies in Australia became federated on 1 January 1901, creating the new Commonwealth of Australia. Political pressure mounted for the end of British rule in New Guinea so that Australia could take over its administration. It did so after the *Papua Act of 1905* came into force in 1906, when the Australian-administered ‘Territory of Papua’ came into existence, and when an Australian Royal Commission provided policy directions for Papua. The name ‘New Guinea’ for the former British colony was lost, and Australia had changed within only a few years from a group of colonies dependent on a colonial power to a colonial power itself. British traditions continued, however, including in relation to racial attitudes.

Great Britain regarded the vast southern continent of Australia as *terra nullius* or ‘nobody’s land’ after Captain Cook landed on its eastern shores in 1770. Thus began a history of tragic relationships with traditional Aboriginal groups whom Britain, and the new Australia, believed had no claims to land ownership. That view prevailed despite the richness of Aboriginal culture—its commitment to the spiritual aspect of ‘Country’, the geospatial aspect of much of its art and mapped songlines, together

with an oral history of the Dreaming. Versions of this Australian racism also came to Papua, remaining there for many more years, including during the colonial rule of Hubert Murray and despite accusations from parts of the white community that Murray was too 'pro-native'. Other critics said he was too benignly paternalistic towards his childlike subjects.

Hubert Murray, a trained lawyer, had first come to British New Guinea in 1904 as its chief judicial officer. He was appointed acting administrator of the new Territory of Papua in 1907 and became confirmed in the position in 1908, beginning a distinguished 32-year-long career as one of the British Empire's great colonial governors (West 1968). Murray's new administration would recognise and control native landownership through legislation; advocate and administer a liberal land system, including provision of leases for white settlers; encourage a system of native indenture especially on new plantations; and promote a policy of protecting life and property in general (e.g. Stanley 1923).

Very early in his administration, Murray shifted from the 'shoot-and-loom' type of resident magistrate that had been epitomised by Monckton, Armit and others, to a style that can be described more as the 'look-and-consider' type. One of Murray's early policies was to manage the 'peaceful penetration' of areas where the administration had not yet secured a presence, insisting that his officers patrolled regularly. This required of Murray's so-called 'outside men' 'bushmanship, endurance, and a calm confidence to advance peacefully' (Nelson 1986, 3). The policy certainly contrasted with that adopted during British New Guinea times, but it did give rise to a disrespectful catchphrase among some administration officers of the new regime: 'When you're dead you may shoot' (West 1968, 9). Murray also supported a decision to split the former Northern Division into two in 1908–09: the Kumusi Division in the south-east and the adjoining Mambare Division in the north-west (Figures 2.1 and 2.2). This presumably was as an attempt to bring about more effectively his policy of peaceful penetration among the Orokaiva, and despite the additional administration and administrative costs involved.

Figure 2.1. Detail from map of the two territories of New Guinea and Papua

This detail is from a population map that was drafted in 1921 in Melbourne and published in 1923 in the context of the two territories of New Guinea and Papua now being administered jointly by Australia following the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. White signifies inland areas in both territories where there is no population data. Three divisions are mapped for those parts of south-east Papua occupied by the Orokaiva north of the Owen Stanley Range—namely, Mambare, Kumusi and North-Eastern (see also Figure 2.2). Yellow signifies only estimated inland populations, whereas pink refers to an actual count or census in more coastal areas. Kumusi and Mambare together have a total counted population of 15,721, plus an estimated 1,075 for Mambare in the west. The entire map was reprinted and included as a separate insert in a limited commemorative issue of a book on the explorations of Ivan Champion (Sinclair 1988).

From the beginning Murray was also interested in following the results of the newly emerged science of anthropology and in engaging with anthropologists for advice. Anthropology grew out of British imperialism and the need to understand more fully the native peoples one was subjugating, and as part of Western intellectual ambition to discover the origins of, and evolutionary relationships between, different human cultures globally. Leading British anthropologists had been taking an interest in the New Guinea region ever since the Cambridge University expedition to Torres Strait and southern New Guinea in 1898 (Haddon 1901). They continued their interest in the years ahead, not so much in direct fieldwork but in communicating with administration officers and missionaries. Bishop Stone-Wigg was interested in anthropology, as

were other Anglicans, such as Reverend A.K. Chignell (1911, 1913) who was based for many years at Wanigela Mission. One general historical conclusion, however, is that ‘the Anglicans’ appreciation of the Papuans was more romantic than scientific’, especially in comparison to the other more pragmatic missions in Papua (Langmore 1989, 112). Administration officers also became much more involved in anthropological work.

Recruits who followed the new employment opportunities offered in the Territory of Papua service included Wilfred N. Beaver and E.W. Pearson Chinnery, each becoming resident magistrates in the adjacent Kumusi and Mambare districts, as well as L.A. Flint and C.T. Wurth, who collaborated with British anthropologists such as A.C. Haddon. They collectively produced reports that form the foundation of a documented Western understanding of the Orokaiva, including notes on Orokaiva magic and myths (ANU 1968; Beaver 1913–14, 1914–15, 1918–19; Chinnery and Beaver 1914–15a, 1914–15b).

Wilfred Beaver wrote the following:

The Sangara people living round the slopes of Mt Lamington say that the spirits of the dead go to a place called Haugata (one of the peaks on the mountain), where there are many ghosts who live in trees. (Beaver 1913–14, 69)

This is the first known record by a European that the summit area of Mount Lamington was regarded, by the living, as a special place for the dead and, therefore, was of greater significance than just being a mountain. Perhaps it was, by implication, also a place to be avoided. Beaver’s record is, in any case, just one example of the respect and reverence that communities worldwide show to lofty mountains close to where they live, and in some cases—such as the Sangara people—to the spirits of the ancestors who live there. The gods of the Ancient Greeks had Mount Olympus and the spirits of the Sangara had Mount Lamington.

The year 1914, when Beaver’s words were published, was one of optimism and excitement in Port Moresby (e.g. Davies 1987). Hubert Murray’s economic and social developmental work in Papua was being supported by the Australian Government and there was private enterprise investment in the establishment of European-managed plantations and use of native labour. Further, discovery of commercial quantities of oil was expected. A mining company was developing copper deposits in the Astrolabe Range near Port Moresby, and a loan had been received

from the Australian Government to establish a light railway from the mine to the port. A reticulated water system had been established in Port Moresby. This, however, was interrupted in 1914 by outbreak of World War I (WWI).

The war led to challenges for the ongoing development of the Territory while the Australian Government focused its efforts and resources on supporting the fighting in distant Europe. Many young Australians, who might otherwise have been recruited to positions and jobs in Papua, went to Europe to support the British Empire's war against the Kaiser and the Germans, and Australians who were working in the Territory of Papua also volunteered for war service. The Australian Government took full advantage of the outbreak of the war and promptly invaded German New Guinea, thus ridding itself of the perceived German threat and, in so doing, acquiring the war-prize asset of a well-run colony, including its extensive plantations (e.g. Lyng 1919; Hiery 1995; Hunt 2017).

A large Australian military force entered Blanche Bay, Rabaul, on 12 September 1914, capturing the radio station at Bitapaka after some resistance, and then claiming the German's well-laid-out and picturesque capital town of Rabaul (e.g. Mackenzie 1987; Stone 1995). However, Australian military personnel occupied Rabaul during what became for them a wartime backwater, militarily speaking. The military administered the whole colony until the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, after which an Australian civil administration took over under a mandate from the League of Nations.

The Australians soon discovered that the colony of German New Guinea and its economy had been run more successfully than had their own in Papua. The German colony had received a greater subsidy from the German Imperial Government, and its exports were greater too, particularly of copra. The Germans had encouraged tropical agriculture rather than mineral extraction; had opened the door to cheap, Asian, skilled labour; and had fixed native labourers' wages at a much lower rate. One Australian commentator summarised the treatment of native labourers in German New Guinea as 'pay them badly; tax them heavily; treat them severely' (Lyng 1919, 235). This, however, was despite the relatively enlightened and strong sense of justice shown by the German governor, Dr Albert Hahl.

Figure 2.2. Map of part of the Territory of Papua

This annotated detail is from an early map of the Territory of Papua that was included by C.A.W. Monckton (1934) in his third and final book published in Britain in 1934. Note the proliferation of names of important British people and historical events used for geographic features, including those of high peaks such as mounts Victoria, Monckton and Lamington. Mount Victoria is shown at 13,500 feet, the highest point on the Owen Stanley Range. The Mamberé and Kumusi divisions were known together as the Northern Division on earlier maps. The digital image forming the base of this figure was provided courtesy of the National Library of Australia, Canberra.

There were now two separate Australian administrations of side-by-side territories (Figure 2.1). One capital was Port Moresby, the other Rabaul. Amalgamation of both territories into one administration—and even, indeed, a tripartite amalgamation including the British Solomon Islands—seemed logical, but this was prevented by the conditions of the mandate. It was opposed anyway by other people for other reasons (see, for example, Mair 1948). There were inevitable comparisons to be made, and differences to be stressed, between the two territories, some of them petty, even mutually hostile. This resulted in competitive opinion and debate between the respective white communities and administrative

officers in both territories. Papua tended to emerge from these exchanges as the proverbial ‘poor relation’ in comparison to New Guinea, at least in the eyes of the new, white ‘New Guineans’, some of whom were not supportive of the more liberal attitude of the white ‘Papuan’ towards the indigenous local people. There were even different *lingua franca* in use: Pidgin English or Tok Pisin in New Guinea, and Police Motu in Papua.

Government Geologist in Lamington Country (1911–18)

From the outset Murray looked for ways of developing income and ensuring greater economic self-sufficiency for the new Territory. Development of an agricultural sector was clearly important, and so too were, if possible, discovery and extraction of natural resources such as gold, copper and oil. Engines on ocean-going ships were becoming oil-burners, replacing sail, wood and coal, and the navies of the world were oil-hungry too. The year 1911 was, therefore, a fortunate one for the Territory because hydrocarbon seepages were discovered in the Lower Vailala River area on the Gulf of Papua west of Port Moresby (e.g. Rickwood 1992). This oil discovery eventually triggered considerable interest from petroleum companies who employed investigative geologists to discover the true economic potential of the area.

The Territory of Papua also employed its own geologist, an Australian, 25-year-old Evan R. Stanley, who arrived in Port Moresby in January 1911 (Davies 1987). His principal task was to determine, as far as possible, the geology of Papua as a whole—a formidable task bearing in mind the difficulties of access to its inhospitable mountains and forest-covered basins. Stanley inevitably became involved with the work of the oil company geologists in the west, but he also mapped in the east, notably in 1916 when he undertook a major, and quite remarkable, geological expedition northwards from the coast at Rigo, across the Owen Stanley Range to the headwaters of the Kumusi and Musa rivers (Stanley 1918). They also had to return to Rigo on foot by the same route. The aim was not only to report on occurrences of gold in the headwaters of the rivers, but also on the reported presence of edible earth in the Mamama valley just south-west of Mount Lamington. A major challenge in undertaking such geological mapping was that the quality of the topographic maps was

so poor. This meant that Stanley's expedition party had to carry unwieldy topographic surveying equipment into the field so that Stanley could triangulate to peaks and create base maps for his geology.

Stanley reached the Mamama at the south-west foot of Mount Lamington and reported the following:

Mount Lamington and the Hydrographers are very prominent features on an east and west range above the ninth parallel reaching altitudes of 5,500 feet and 6,280 feet respectively. They are bold and rugged, having been subjected to severe denudation, causing sharp, steep gullies. (Stanley 1918, 76)

Stanley recognised that both Lamington and the Hydrographers together consisted of young volcanic rocks and he assigned a Pleistocene age to them (Figure 2.3). He did not report that Lamington was, in fact, a volcano—whether extinct or potentially active—in its own right and geologically separate from the older Hydrographers Range.

Geologists have since quibbled over why Stanley, who was clearly an outstanding pioneering geologist and insightful report writer, did not reach this conclusion. Perhaps his non-use of the word 'volcano' was simply a reporting oversight. There are, however, good reasons why he was prevented from making a clear identification. First, the southern flanks of the mountain are indeed steep and heavily incised. The south-west directed streams there cut deeply into the flanks of the eroded mountain, delivering sediment into the Mamama, a tributary of the Kumusi, and then northwards around the mountain towards the north coast of Papua. Further, Stanley had no access to aerial photographs, or any views from the air, as the first aircraft to fly in Papua would not do so for several more years. Stanley would almost certainly have used the term 'volcano' had he climbed the mountain from its northern side and identified a north-facing crater and other youthful volcanic features in the summit area, although, from the ground and at a distance from the north, the 'crater' would have appeared just as one of the heads of the stream system of the Ambogo River. However, it remains a cold fact of history that Stanley did not make the volcano identification in his reports, neither in his classic *The Geology of Papua* (1924) nor on its accompanying coloured geological map (Figure 2.3) where he acknowledged the input of oil company geologists A.G. Maitland, J.E. Carne, A. Wade and others. Subsequent Australian geologists working in Papua did not make any correction to that view either—at least up to 1951.

Figure 2.3. Detail from geological map of Papua by Evan R. Stanley

This is part of the geological map of Papua published by Stanley (1924). Young volcanic areas including Mount Lamington and the Hydrographers Range (see left-hand arrow) are shown in pink. Mount Dayman is not a volcano and is an error made earlier by A. Gibb Maitland after viewing the mountain from the north coast. Mount Victory (right-hand arrow) was identified at this time as the only active volcano in Papua. ND stands for the Northern Division, and NED for the North-Eastern Division. Government stations at Kokoda, Buna and Tufi are shown by the filled triangles.

Stagnant Economics (1918–29)

Postwar recovery was stagnant in both Papua and Australia, and there were changes in Territory administration staff as a result of the long and disruptive war in Europe. The Kumusi and Mambare divisions were combined back into a single Northern Division in 1918–19, evidently because of the additional resources and staff needed to run two separate ones in the post-WW1 era (Figure 2.2). There had been a loss of former administration staff in the war, including the experienced Wilfred Beaver (Figure 2.4). The similarly talented E.W.P. Chinnery also served in the war—in Britain as an observer lieutenant in the Flying Corps—and, unlike his former colleague Beaver, he survived it (Fortune 1998). Chinnery undertook anthropological training with Haddon and Rivers at Cambridge University and then filled new positions in the Territory of New Guinea, including that of government anthropologist in 1924—another loss to the Territory of Papua.

Figure 2.4. Photograph of Lieutenant Wilfred Beaver during WWI

Lieutenant Wilfred Beaver, 60th Australian Infantry Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, died of wounds in Belgium, 26 September 1917. Photograph supplied courtesy of the Australian War Memorial (reference number DAOF088).

Evan R. Stanley continued his work as government geologist throughout the war years and shortly afterwards, and in 1921–22 was a key member of the Commonwealth Scientific Expedition to the Territory of New Guinea, where he undertook pioneering observations in the active volcanic arc along the southern margin of the Bismarck Sea (Stanley 1923). Stanley died, however, in Adelaide, Australia, in 1924, aged only 39, from blood poisoning supervening on a facial pimple. His government geologist position was not filled, evidently because of lack of funding related to the postwar global financial downturn. Further, the Australian Government in 1929 (i.e. about the time of the Wall Street Crash and the triggering of the Great Depression of the 1930s) withdrew its interest in development of an oil-extraction industry in Papua (Rickwood 1992). Oil companies, however, continued their commitment to oil prospecting in the Territory, particularly in the west, but an economic pay-off was still many years away.

Agriculture, then, still appeared to be the most immediate economic opportunity in Papua in the years immediately after WWI. Attracting European settlers to Papua was difficult, however, because of postwar labour shortages, low produce prices and high shipping costs (e.g. Crocombe 1964). The emphasis, therefore, was shifted to indigenous cash cropping under the *Native Plantations Ordinance of 1918 and 1925–52*. ‘Native plantations’ were established by the administration in the Northern Division for the enforced production of coffee, some cocoa, and the ubiquitous coconut. Sixteen coffee plantations were eventually created on the northern and north-western flanks of Mount Lamington in a roughly triangular area between the summit of the mountain in the south, Waseta in the west and a place called Popondetta in the north (Crocombe 1964; Miles 1956). A European controller of native plantations was based at Higaturu and produce collected from the different widespread plantations was required to be carried to Higaturu, Popondetta and Buna for pulping and shipping. The plantation and transporting work was hard for the labourers, the profits minimal and the enforced scheme was not regarded as successful. There was some interest in the district in the leasing and development of larger European-managed plantations of rubber.

White planters joined the European community in Papua that grew after WWI, including the presence of more white women in Port Moresby. Tensions between the different aspirations of the white colonisers—whether government, missions, town business or rural plantation managers—remained, many of the differences of opinion relating in one way or another to the treatment of indigenous Papuans. Some Europeans

were still blatant and quite aggressive racists. Others of a more liberal persuasion were content to operate under the ‘benign paternalism’ banner that still carries the notion of colonial superiority and condescension and Papuans being treated like children—‘helping the natives’ to develop was all very well but not, say, at the expense of European investment and commercial profits. The Anglican mission had given early and strong support for the development of Papuan priests and pastors on the basis that a god of love and forgiveness does not discriminate on the basis of colour or race. There was, however, ‘a gulf fixed between the missionaries who gave a Papuan priest the name “Father”, and the planters and townspeople, who gave him the name “boy”’ (Wetherell 1977, 302). Some white people would not take confession with black priests.

Racism was both deeply embedded societally and legally institutionalised. Some laws were strongly discriminatory. Hundreds of pages of laws under the heading ‘Natives’ are listed in Volume 4 of the *Laws of the Territory of Papua 1888–1945* (Papua 1945a). Verbal abuse by a ‘native’ towards Europeans could result in a jail term, but only being ‘whipped with a strap’ if the offender was under 14 years of age. Native labourers on plantations could not be absent from their quarters or make noise after 9.00 pm (such as beating on drums and dancing). Papuan men were given a dress code: they must wear a loin cloth; clothes must be clean and dry; shirts could be worn—like white men—but only by Papuans such as mission teachers, medical orderlies and policemen. Thus, shirtless Papuan men were quite common (Papua 1945b).

The *White Women’s Protection Ordinance* was passed in January 1926 providing the death penalty for rape or attempted rape upon a European woman or girl. ‘It was a piece of legislation discriminatory in its provisions, harsh in its penalties and startlingly out of character with Murray’s “native policy”’ (Inglis 1974, v). Murray evidently had ‘bowed before the strong and concerted pressure of the most influential [European] men in the town [Port Moresby], those who had tried to engineer his dismissal a few years earlier’ (Inglis 1974, 147). European residents in Rabaul in the Territory of New Guinea considered adopting similar legislation in 1936, but the 1937 volcanic disaster at Rabaul delayed this and the attempt was abandoned soon after. The ordinance was abandoned altogether only in 1958.

Old racial prejudices remained unchanged in Papua but, at the other extreme, there had been remarkable progress globally in the fields of engineering and technology that would assist Papuan development. Much of this progress was a flow-on from the military competitiveness of WWI. Aircraft usage began in Papua following the first flight of a flimsy seaplane, a Curtis Seagull, over the harbour at Port Moresby in 1922 (e.g. Sinclair 1978). Building Territory-wide road and railway systems was not feasible because of the generally mountainous and isolated terrain, whereas aircraft services could provide much greater travel efficiencies once suitable landing strips in both territories had been constructed. Aircraft usage grew in tandem with the introduction of telegraph and wireless radios for communication that could be used during extended administration patrols. Geologists also could use aircraft overflights of prospective terrains as well as wireless radios during fieldwork, whether on land or during coastal surveys, such as the one undertaken by Stanley (1923) along the southern margin of the Bismarck Sea in 1921–22.

Competitive advantage for the Mandated Territory of New Guinea emerged strongly after abundant alluvial gold was discovered in 1922 in the Wau-Bulolo area in the new Australian administered territory. This discovery was near the southern border with Papua beyond which individual gold miners had struggled to make fortunes on the Yodda and Gira goldfields. Gold extraction in the 1930s on the Morobe Goldfield at Wau-Bulolo was undertaken quite differently to that done previously in Papua. Extraction there involved enhanced dredging technologies, aircraft for haulage and greater financial investment (e.g. Nelson 1976; Sinclair 1978; Waterhouse 2010). Economist Ross Garnaut wrote:

For a period in the 1930s, New Guinea Goldfields and Bulolo Gold Dredging were amongst the most highly capitalised companies on the Sydney Stock Exchange. The former's initial capital raising in 1929 had been the largest ever on the exchange. Gold increased in value during the Great Depression when the value of almost all other commodities fell ... between 1931 and 1938, the mass of airfreight in New Guinea was larger than in any country on earth. (Garnaut 2009, 4)

Papua could not compete with this. Nevertheless, aerodromes or landing strips were built in the Northern Division at the main civilian centres of Kokoda, Yodda, Buna and Ioma. More would follow as the next world war took hold.

Government Anthropologist in Lamington Country (1914–37)

Hubert Murray was fully occupied with the developmental challenges facing Papua during the postwar period, and also had to manage outbreaks of so-called ‘cargo cults’ in different parts of the Territory. Similar cults appeared elsewhere in Melanesia and, indeed, in many parts of the world where colonialism was changing the nature of traditional societies. A.C. Haddon wrote:

An awakening of religious activity is a frequent characteristic of periods of social unrest. The weakening or disruption of the older social order may stimulate new and often bizarre ideals, and these may give rise to religious movements that strive to sanction social or political aspirations. (Haddon in Chinnery and Haddon 1917, 455; see also Worsley 1970)

Cults originate mainly where a self-designated leader acquires inspirational messages and instructions from spirits or ancestors living in the supernatural world. His followers or disciples then undertake prescribed rites and rituals in the villages aimed at improving their future way of life in one way or another. These may include the acquisition of material benefits, like the ‘cargo’ owned by white people that appears magically from the ships and aeroplanes of the Europeans. Some cults contained latent anti-colonial sentiments, or elements of extortion and sorcery, so colonial governments had to keep watch on how they developed. The speed at which the cults first appeared and then spread, possibly through intermediaries, was noted by the Europeans. There is a tendency, however, in some cases, to overemphasise the role of external forces such as colonialism. Some cults may be indigenous and revivalist in that they tried to renew old social orders based on the traditional principles of life (Opeba 1987).

Anthropologists E.W.P. Chinnery and A.C. Haddon in 1917 reported internationally on five ‘new religious cults’ in Papua, three of which swept through Orokaiva country (Chinnery and Haddon 1917). One of these was the Baigona or Snake Cult that began at the summit of Victory volcano, probably around 1911, and was first reported in 1912 (see also Williams 1928; Worsley 1970; Opeba 1987). A large snake called Baigona took a local prophet called Maine to the summit, cut out his

heart and cooked it in a fire. The heartless Maine was initiated into the rights of Baigona and given medicines that would cure all diseases. He was instructed to appoint 'Baigona men' and to spread the knowledge widely. Maine's prophecies and beliefs seemed to have been concerned mainly with agricultural and curative knowledge and was more of a fertility cult than one aimed at acquisition of 'cargo' (Opeba 1987). The killing of snakes was prohibited because this was thought to result in heavy rain and subsequent flooding in rivers near villages. The cult was stopped by authorities in 1914.

The other two cults in Orokaiva country were Kava-Keva and Kekesi, which broke out on, and spread out from, the coastal area between the Gira River and Buna (Chinnery and Haddon 1917; Worsley 1970; Opeba 1987). These cults evolved from the same social situation and both were considered to have derived from the powerful spirit of the garden crop, taro. Both were characterised by special taboos on the killing and eating of particular foods. They were together called the 'Taro Cult' and its principal proponents were 'Taro men' (Figure 2.5). The cult or cults ran throughout much of Orokaiva country including the Mount Victory area where the Baigona Cult had begun a few years earlier, and at more or less the same time starting in about 1919 only a few years after the end of the Baigona Cult. Kava-Keva means 'giddy, mad' referring to the characteristic shaking fits and head-jerking paroxysms known as 'jipari' (Chinnery and Haddon 1917; Worsley 1970). Emergence of the cults may have been influenced to some extent by the new cash crop gardening requirements imposed by the administration through the *Native Plantations Ordinance*.

Whether the Baigona Cult originating at the summit of Mount Victory was, in some way, a response to the large explosive volcanic eruption in the late nineteenth century is unknown. Intriguingly, there were unconfirmed reports by Europeans that volcanic activity continued at Mount Victory into the twentieth century and even that beacon-like summit 'glows' had assisted navigators up to the 1930s (Smith 1981). Anthropologists who reported on the Baigona Cult, however, make no connection between any coeval relationship between the origins of the cult and the deadly explosive eruption at Victory volcano.

Figure 2.5. Photograph of three 'Taro men' at Sangara

F.E. Williams gave the following description of this photograph: 'Three Sangara men. Man in centre wears hornbill beaks (percuo) and gana on breasts. Note streamers of cuscus fur. They are three Taro men on a visit. Man in the centre was apparently not quite himself, acting as if drunk' (Williams 2001, 92). This image was kindly provided by Jan Hasselberg who copied it from a print in the collection of Williams' photographs held by the National Archives of Papua New Guinea, Port Moresby. The photograph is published here courtesy of the Archives.

Hubert Murray responded to the ongoing need for bridging the wide gap of misunderstanding between the European colonisers on the one hand and the Papuans on the other, by creating positions for government anthropologists in his administration. An Australian, Francis Edgar Williams, was appointed to the position of assistant government anthropologist in 1922. Williams' work was needed primarily to serve the interests of the administration rather than to undertake the kind of independent anthropological research accomplished in universities, but he became acknowledged as one of the most talented anthropologists of his generation (e.g. Schwimmer 1976; Young and Clark 2001; Farquharson 2002). Williams and Murray worked well together, as both men shared a humane concern for improving the quality of life of Papuans. Williams, however, believed that traditional clan leaders and chiefs should be used by the administration wherever possible and should be appointed as village councillors rather than converted Papuan Christians, such as

mission teachers and pastors, who were not sanctioned by the local people. Conversely, Murray preferred that the administration did not interfere with traditional life because of the risk of destroying it, even though the missionised Papuans might well have done so anyway. Murray was not a supporter of the 'Indirect Rule' policy used in other British colonies such as in Africa.

Francis Williams undertook 14 months of fieldwork in two periods in the Northern Division in 1923–25, which included an assessment of the Taro Cult. He had previously investigated the worrisome 'Vailala Madness' Cult in the Gulf region of western Papua (e.g. Williams 1976), but the Taro Cult in comparison seemed benign. Williams wrote two books on the Orokaiva, both published in London (Williams 1928, 1930), and his outstanding and numerous photographs were displayed after his death in 1943 in an exhibition in Australia and in an accompanying book published in 2001 (Williams 2001). Williams confirmed what earlier anthropologists had observed: that the Orokaiva were 'a more than usually quarrelsome and disunited group of people ... [engaging in] tribal feuds, dispersals, and migrations ... in a veritable whirlpool of strife, migration, and counter-migration' (Williams 1930, 2, 8). They were hostile and resistant towards Europeans.

In 1923–25, Williams attempted to identify and map the cultural diversity of the people who collectively had been called 'Orokaiva' by the British. He stressed the considerable difficulties and uncertainties in doing so, yet boldly and pragmatically produced his now well-known 'rough and ready' map of the different tribal groups (Figure 2.6). Some of these so-called 'tribes' on the map are separated from each other by straight lines—like the suburbs of a Western city—rather than being mapped as large clusters or concentrations of hamlets separated by poorly populated areas. The Sangara people, for example, are mapped in a trapezoidal area well to the north-east of the summit of Mount Lamington, whereas in fact they live more directly to the north and north-west of it. The so-called 'Wasida' people are not easy to define as a cultural unit and, therefore, mapping their distribution is even more difficult.

Figure 2.6. Map of Orokaiwa 'tribes' by F.E. Williams

This is Williams' map of 'tribes' in the Northern Division (Williams 1930, unpaginated fold-out at the end of the book). Note that Binandere-speakers (Orokaiwa) also live in the coastal area of the adjoining North-Eastern Division. Anthropologists much later suggested that the 'Wasida' people, unlike the Sangara, were not sufficiently well defined to justify being identified as a separate 'tribe'. Anthropologists also stressed even further the problems of identifying cultural groups in this area (e.g. Rimoldi 1966; Schwimmer 1969).

A correct feature of Williams' map is the southern boundary of Orokaiwa country, which runs through the summit of Mount Lamington, separating the Binandere-speaking Orokaiwa tribes to the north from the Koirian-speaking people to the south, who are labelled 'Managalas' on the map. This boundary was confirmed by later, more detailed mapping

of Papuan languages (e.g. Wurm, Voorhoev and McElhanon 1975; Pawley 2005). About 15 different languages are now believed to comprise a 'Binanderean' group whose speakers occupy the long strip of coast running north-westwards from Cape Nelson into the Morobe area of former German New Guinea (Pawley and Hammarström 2018).

'Mountain Orokaiva' is a name that has been applied collectively to the populations, or 'socio-political units', that live mainly on the northern and north-western flanks of Mount Lamington (e.g. Rimoldi 1966, 3–4). It derives from usage by the Orokaiva themselves who distinguished 'inland people' (*periho*) from both 'river people' (*umo-ke*) and 'salt-water' or 'coastal people' (*eva'embo*). The mountain or inland Orokaiva lived in numerous hamlet-sized communities based largely on clan affiliations, rather than in larger villages. They were swidden agriculturalists, using fire and digging sticks for the breaking of new forest land and in the long-term rotation of previously occupied land (e.g. Keesing 1952).

Williams was impressed with the northern area of mountainous Lamington, writing that:

This piedmont area, formed by the northern slopes of Lamington and the Hydrographers, is closely populated and, in comparison with others, closely cultivated; and here the innumerable garden clearings, relieving the close monotony of the bush, make it possible to take in the beauty of the surroundings. With its comparatively bracing climate and the charm and opulence of its scenery, this region may be counted among the most fortunate of Papua. (Williams 1930, 12)

There can be little surprise, therefore, that this beguiling place was later chosen by Europeans for both an Anglican mission station and as a centre for provincial administration of the Northern Division.

Roars from Lamington (1922–40)

Stations for the administration and the Anglican mission had been established along the central Orokaiva coast by the beginning of WWI in 1914 (Langmore 1989). The main administration station was at Buna from where government foot patrols departed for the interior, and the Anglican mission itself developed coastal stations at Ambasi, Gona and

Erero. One of the early Anglican missionaries and craftsmen to work in the Anglican diocese was the down-to-earth and pragmatic Englishman, S. Romney M. Gill. He served with the mission from 1908 to 1954, thus overlapping with the year of the Mount Lamington eruption of 1951 (Wetherell 1977; Garland 2000).

Gona became the most important of the places for coastal missionisation, as well as acting as the starting point for inland incursions to the populous and fertile areas in the Sangara district on the northern and western slopes of Mount Lamington. Mission work in the Sangara district was begun in 1922 by a layman, Henry Holland, and by a Papuan schoolteacher, Andrew Uware (Tomlin 1951; Tomkins and Hughes 1969; Wetherell 1977). This originally involved taking in supplies and equipment to Sangara by foot track using carriers, but Holland eventually built a trafficable road through the swamps south of Gona and then up the ridges to Sangara where mission buildings were constructed. All of this work, together with a strengthening of the Gona Mission Station, was supported from the beginning by Henry Newton, who, also in 1922, had been consecrated the third bishop of New Guinea (1922–36).

Holland next—and after the work at Sangara had been firmly established—began a mission station at Isivita on the north-western side of Mount Lamington. This new venture involved two-hour treks each way between Sangara and Isivita along a twisting track over forested ridges and gullies. The Isivita Mission was dedicated to St Michael and All Angels. Holland moved there in 1928 leaving nurse Margery Brenchley and teacher Miss Lilla Lashmar in charge of the work at Sangara (Figure 2.7). The work of these three missionaries continued in this difficult area until the outbreak of World War II (WWII). The resident magistrate in Buna at one stage was concerned about the safety of the two women at Sangara because there had been so much inter-clan fighting in the surrounding villages, and suggested that a policeman be stationed at Sangara for a time. Bishop Newton, however, responded that the two women were quite capable of looking after themselves. Further, Sister Brenchley was reported as saying that her ‘only concern was the number of broken heads that she had to mend’ (Tomlin 1951, 132).

Figure 2.7. Photographs of Sangara missionaries, L. Lashmar (left) and M. Brenchley (right)

These photographs are taken from the plate opposite page 7 in the book by Tomkins and Hughes (1969). They are reproduced here courtesy of the Anglican Board of Mission, Australia.

Brenchley, Holland and Lashmar were adventurous spirits. In 1935, they organised an ascent of Mount Lamington whose peaks rose up behind them in challenging and tempting fashion in the view south from Sangara. Lashmar wrote about the ascent in a letter dated 19 May 1935 that was published by the Australian Board of Mission in Australia (Lashmar 1935). The trip took about a week and they were accompanied by a group of local men who carried their camping equipment and provisions. Lashmar recorded hearing ‘roars’ at the summit of the mountain. The Reverend J.W.S. Tomlin wrote the following version of the ascent, and of the ‘roars’, including quotations from original writings by Sister Brenchley:

Mr [Henry] Holland, the Head of the Sangara staff, and the two ladies, Miss [Lilla] Lashmar and Miss [Margery] Brenchley, ‘had often gazed at the blue peaks rearing their heads above the clouds to the south of Sangara, and longed to climb them. Mt Lamington had not been climbed to our knowledge, and the natives warned us it was not safe to attempt as the ground was soft, the earth shook, and a roaring noise could be heard at the top. We asked if the natives ever went up there, and they said “Oh, no! It is the home of the departed spirits!” However, just after Easter, the weather being fine and the two stations quiet, we determined to make an attempt. Mt Lamington is nearly 9,000 feet [sic] high, and the expedition, including five boys as carriers, took nearly a week ... the view [during the climb] was magnificent ... the Ambogo River

rushed and tumbled its way over the boulders through the deep ravine.’ As they neared the top, the ground, as predicted, became very spongy and walking was difficult. There was also a great roar at the summit, the roar of a mighty waterfall in the chasm below, but the boys began to talk together in whispers. ‘Sister, listen,’ said one, ‘That big noise not river’. Yes, the fear of the spirits was still very real to him. (Tomlin 1951, 132–33)

These words are of interest for several reasons. First, there is no specific mention of the ‘roar’ being of volcanic origin, or of the mountain being a volcano. Tomlin’s book was ‘in press’ in 1950. He added a short footnote on page 133 at proof stage noting that: ‘This was written before the great eruption of Mount Lamington’. Tomlin also speculated that: ‘The natives ... may have inherited their fear from some remote eruption, but no-one dreamt that it would ever burst out again with such violence’ (Tomlin 1951, 218). What was the origin of the roar? Had there been any reporting of the roars at any time to administration officers who then passed the information to any trained geologists or seismologists for their opinion?

This last question is of particular relevance because, surprisingly, in 1939 a geologist in the Dutch Indies published a scientific paper in the international literature on the geological structure of New Guinea island, stating that both Lamington and Victory were ‘active volcanoes’ (van Bemmelen 1939, 23). The source of this information, however, is unknown and there are no credible reasons to infer that it must have derived from the missionaries’ climb of Mount Lamington. The year 1939 was, in any case, a diversionary and pivotal one internationally. Another world war broke out in Europe following the rise of Nazism in Germany, and the Japanese had already, in 1937, initiated the Pacific War when they invaded China and began progressively working their way southwards through South-East Asia towards New Guinea and Australia.

Philip Nigel Warrington Strong had been consecrated the fourth bishop of New Guinea in 1936. His bishopric in the years ahead covered two particularly tragic events that would have a destructive impact on the missions on and near Mount Lamington (Strong 1981). However, there were still celebratory times for the Anglican mission, as they had achieved much in the years since WWI, despite significant challenges including resource difficulties. New mission stations had been created, numerous Papuans had been baptised into the faith, Papuan teachers and pastors had been trained, and ordination of the first Papuan priest, Peter Rautamara,

had taken place in December 1917. In 1938, Bishop Strong ordained Holland as a priest to the mission after a special course of instruction because of his great contribution to the mission's work in the Sangara district. Then, in 1939, there were celebrations when a new Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul was consecrated at Dogura where the power of the Church and the imagery and doctrine of the Anglo-Catholic eucharist and other ceremonies could be demonstrated to the full. Meanwhile, more pressing non-religious concerns were being faced in Rabaul to the north in the Mandated Territory.

The Australian invasion of German New Guinea in 1914 had removed a military threat, but Australia inherited a volcanic problem in its place. Blanche Bay is a complex caldera system that contains active volcanoes, most notably Tavurvur and Vulcan, which had been in near-simultaneous eruption in 1878—that is, well before the Germans built and occupied the town of Rabaul at the northern end of Blanche Bay in 1910. Tavurvur and Vulcan were again in twin eruption in 1937, causing more than 500 deaths and covering much of the town and surrounding areas in volcanic ash (Fisher 1939a; Johnson and Threlfall 1985). Rabaul town was evacuated temporarily, and the eruption led to the creation of the Rabaul Volcanological Observatory. A judge and a geologist, respectively, played key roles in the evacuation and in the building of the observatory. Each of these men in different but important ways would later apply their firsthand volcanic experience at Rabaul in the Northern Division of Papua.

Judge F. Beaumont 'Monte' Phillips had to assume the role of acting administrator of the Territory of New Guinea in Rabaul on the evening of Saturday 29 May 1937, because the administrator, Brigadier-General W.R. McNicoll, was on a tour of inspection of the Morobe Goldfield and the appointed acting administrator was ill. Judge Phillips witnessed the twin eruptions and their effects and became responsible for informing the Prime Minister's Department in Canberra of the volcanic disaster. He also organised the evacuation of the town including the dispatch of a radio message to the captain of a passenger vessel, the *Montoro*, requesting a return to Rabaul for evacuation of hundreds of town residents. Phillips was appointed CBE for this work (e.g. Quinlivan 1988).

Norman Henry Fisher was a government geologist at Wau in the Morobe Goldfields at the time of the Rabaul eruption; later, in 1937, he became involved with post-eruption volcanological investigations in Rabaul led

by Dr C.E. Stehn, director of the Netherlands Indies Volcanological Survey. The recommendation to build a volcanological observatory for eruption early warning purposes was included in a report on the future of Rabaul (Stehn and Woolnough 1937). In 1939, Fisher travelled to Java and received further volcanological training from Dr Stehn. He then became the resident volcanologist at Rabaul and supervised the construction and instrumental equipping of the observatory, which began operations in 1940 (Fisher 1940). Fisher published on the active volcanoes of the Territory of New Guinea but not at this time on those of Papua (Fisher 1939a, 1939b).

These were also the last years of Hubert Murray's long rule as administrator of the Territory of Papua. His health deteriorated and he died of lymphatic leukaemia at Samarai on 27 February 1940 (*Papuan Courier* 1940; West 1968). Many tributes were paid to Murray on his death, Judge H.G. Nicholas, for example, stating admiringly that:

Murray made Papua a shining illustration of the British doctrine of trusteeship and set a standard in the treatment of native races which has been acknowledged to be the highest throughout the British Colonial Service and by Commissions of the League of Nations. (Nicholas 1940, 5)

Others commented on the effects of the long duration of Murray's administration during which he had had to cope with several phases of development and change, noting, perhaps, that he may have focused too much in later life on the policies he had established earlier in his career (West 1968, 275). Certainly, there had been difficult times for Murray given that he had had to manage the economic fallout of two world wars and an intervening global depression. Further, support from the Australian Government for Papuan development was not as great as it might have been in a more ideal world. There is, therefore, some justification for the historical conclusion that Australia's work in Papua up to the time of Murray's death—and indeed for some years after WWII—represented 'Colonialism on a Shoestring' (Bashkow 2006, 2).

This text is taken from *Roars from the Mountain: Colonial Management of the 1951 Volcanic Disaster at Mount Lamington*, by R. Wally Johnson, published 2020 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

doi.org/10.22459/RM.2020.02