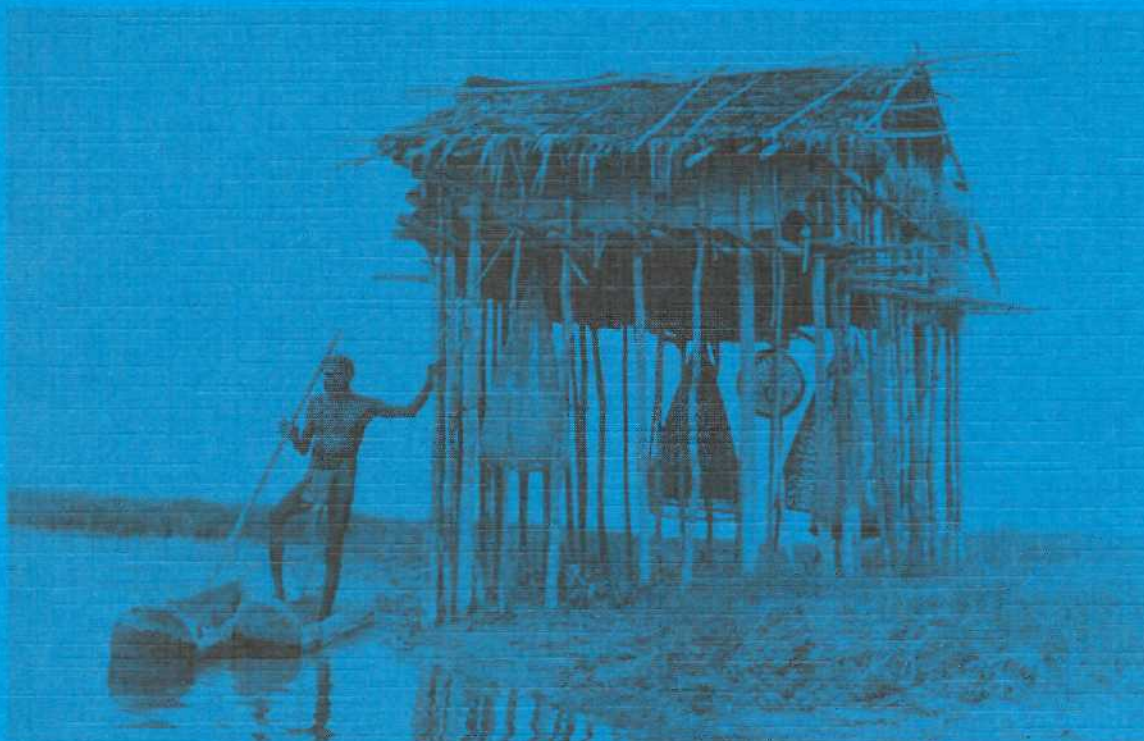


Jelle Miedema

# Pre-capitalism and Cosmology

Description and Analysis of the Meybrat  
Fishery and Kain Timur-Complex



## PRE-CAPITALISM AND COSMOLOGY

1. The first part of the paper discusses the relationship between cosmology and pre-capitalist societies. It argues that cosmology played a central role in the development of these societies, influencing their social structures, religious beliefs, and political systems. The text explores how cosmological ideas were used to justify social hierarchies and to provide a sense of order and meaning to the world.

2. The second part of the paper examines the impact of the rise of capitalism on cosmology. It argues that the emergence of capitalism led to a shift in cosmological thinking, as the emphasis moved from a holistic, interconnected view of the universe to a more fragmented and individualistic one. This shift is reflected in the development of scientific cosmology, which sought to understand the universe through rational, empirical methods.

3. The third part of the paper discusses the role of cosmology in the development of modern societies. It argues that cosmological ideas continue to influence our thinking and behavior, even in a world dominated by science and technology. The text explores how cosmological concepts are used in contemporary culture, politics, and religion, and how they shape our understanding of the world and our place in it.

*The printing of this study has been financed by  
the HENDRIK NANNES AND CATRIJN EPES-FUND  
- founded Bolsward 1511 -*

*For Gryt Risselada,  
in memory of  
Leenderi Miedema (†1972)*

VERHANDELINGEN  
VAN HET KONINKLIJK INSTITUUT  
VOOR TAAL-, LAND- EN VOLKENKUNDE

120

JELLE MIEDEMA

PRE-CAPITALISM AND COSMOLOGY

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE  
MEYBRAT FISHERY AND KAIN TIMUR-COMPLEX



1986

FORIS PUBLICATIONS  
Dordrecht-Holland/Riverton-U.S.A.

*Published by:*  
Foris Publications Holland  
P.O. Box 509  
3300 AM Dordrecht, The Netherlands

*Sole distributor for the U.S.A. and Canada:*  
Foris Publications U.S.A.  
P.O. Box C-50  
Riverton N.J. 08077  
U.S.A.

ISBN 90 6765 209 1

© 1986 Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde, Leiden.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission from the copyright owner.

Printed in the Netherlands.

## CONTENTS

Introduction	VII
<i>I Fishery</i>	
1. The Ayamaru Lake Area	1
2. Fish	5
3. Fishing Tackle and Fishing Techniques	7
4. Fishing Grounds and Fishing Rights	11
5. Economic and Social Aspects	13
6. Taboo, Ritual and Ceremony	18
<i>II Pre-Capitalism and Cosmology</i>	
1. 'Capitalism'	27
2. Mythology	36
Notes	41
References	43

## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The use of a cultural focus-approach in ethnographical studies involves the risk that cultures become one-sidedly associated with a dominant feature: as Same (Lapp) is almost synonymous with 'reindeer', so Meybrat is synonymous with 'kain timur' (ikat-cloths).<sup>2</sup> These examples have not been chosen at random. With regard to the former I have demonstrated that the study of (inland) fisheries is significant for a supplementary insight into the culture of the (Mountain- and Forest-) Samen in Sweden (Miedema 1973, 1975). In this study I intend to do the same with regard to the Meybrat, a tribal community living around the Ayamaru lakes in the interior of the western Bird's Head of Irian Jaya, West New Guinea.

Although with good reason the so-called "kain timur-complex"<sup>3</sup> is considered as a focal point of the Ayamaru culture (Elmberg 1955, 1966, 1968; Pouwer 1957; Kamma 1970), an overemphasis of this complex tends to diminish the importance of another – which probably dominates Meybrat daily life and culture most of all: the supply of food. Dealing with a lake area – and an important number of Ayamaru people involved in fishery – it will be obvious that a study on the topic will provide indispensable information about the Meybrat food supply system.

Besides the argument that a study of Meybrat fisheries is justifiable as it relativizes the importance of the kain timur-complex, another argument – partly related to the former – is that it reveals new evidence of Meybrat ancestor worship and cosmology. This evidence compels us to reconsider the rise of a so-called 'kain timur-capitalism', as well as prevailing ideas about culture areas in the Bird's Head.

All the available data on Meybrat fishery are presented in Chapter I. These data consist of my own field-notes, as well as references to notes published by other investigators. Because the latter had a very limited interest in fisheries and most of them paid a single and often very short visit to the area, the notes concerned are scarce and fragmentary. Nevertheless they are important a. to complete our picture of Meybrat fishery as far as possible, and b. as information on Meybrat fishery as the situation was some twenty-five years ago.

A possible restriction regarding my own field-notes is that they were made during six surveys, each of which lasted from one to three weeks. They were

obtained when I visited the Ayamaru area in 1975, 1976, 1978 and 1979 during a stay of almost six years in the Bird's Head, where I worked in charge of a local church. Direct observations on fishery in the Ayamaru area were made when I crossed the lakes with fishermen from the villages Mapura, Jitmau, Kambuaya and Ayamaru. Besides, apart from especially the Big Men of the villages of Jitmau, Kambuaya and Ayamaru, inhabitants from all the other villages in the vicinity of the lakes have been interviewed – about fishery as well as the kain timur-system. Most of these interviews took place when the people concerned cooperated in the building of an airstrip, in which I was involved as a supervisor (see Miedema 1984:232).

Chapter II deals with Pre-Capitalism and Cosmology. As these topics cannot be restricted to the context of fishery, or the border of the Ayamaru area, in comparison with Chapter I many more references had to be made to other investigations. However, given the present stage of our knowledge about cultures in the Bird's Head, and the circumstance that the character of my study on Meybrat fishery does not go much beyond the scope of a preliminary investigation, for the time being some analyses offered in Chapter II should be conceived as 'outlines' for future investigations.

The language of communication was Indonesian. Consequently the text here presented abounds with Indonesian terms. Apart from frequently used words like kain timur and pusaka, these terms are denoted by inverted commas; native terms are in italics.



## Chapter I

### FISHERY

#### *1. The Ayamaru Lake Area*

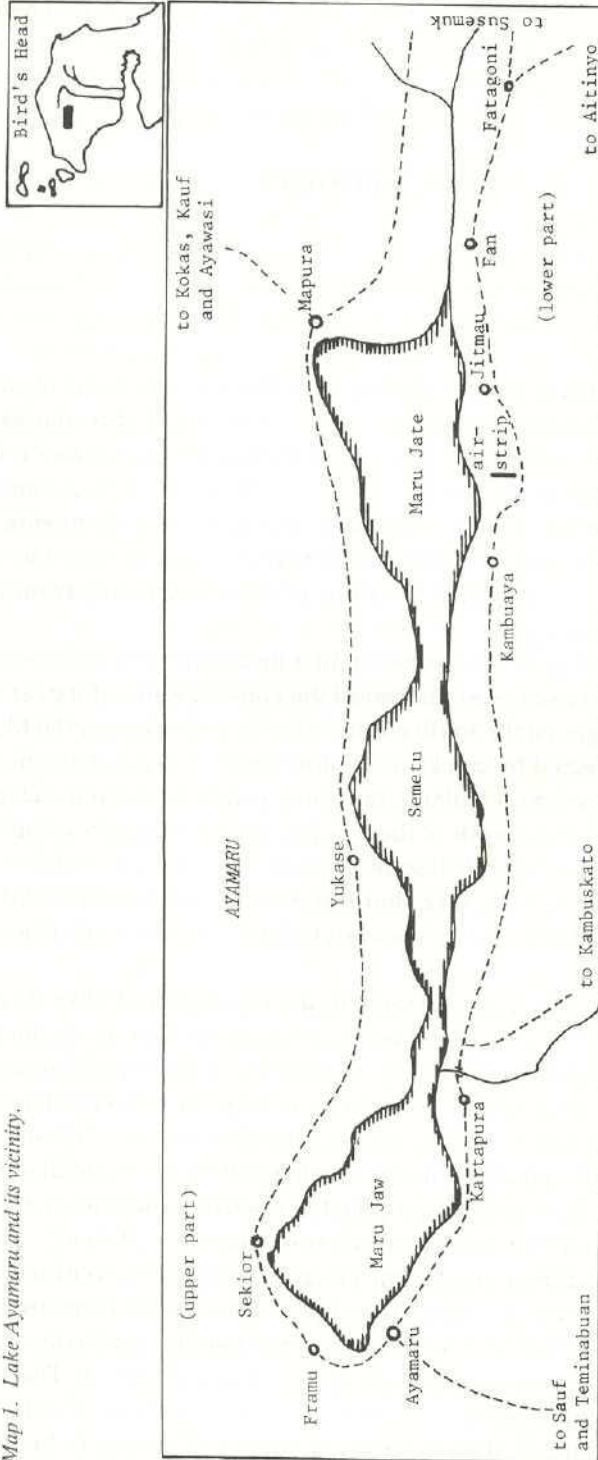
In the early (Dutch) sources on Ayamaru the lake area is usually described by the plural-term "Ayamaru-meren" (Ayamaru lakes). This plural denotation refers to the three interconnected lakes that jointly constitute "Lake Ayamaru": They are called – from west to east – Maru Jaw, Semetu and Maru Jate (Map 1). To speak of 'Lake Ayamaru' is consistent with the official Indonesian denotation 'Danau Ayamaru', but whatever description in foreign languages is used they are all pleonasms, because *maru* already means 'lake' in the Meybrat language.

The lake area forms a depression in a limestone area and is situated some 200 metres above sea level. Eastward the lakes flow into the river Kais, which in turn discharges on the south coast of the Bird's Head into the McCluer gulf. Mutually connected by creeks or shallow waters, the total length of the three lakes together is some 15 kilometres. Their width varies from one to three kilometres. The average depth of the western lake is two metres, fluctuating with seasonal rainfalls. A depth of some seven metres can be found along the southern shore of the western lake, but this is restricted to a basin not wider than twenty metres. The depth of the eastern lake varies in many places from 0.20 to 0.75 metres.

Depending on the seasonal rainfall, the water level of Lake Ayamaru often rises and falls with an interval of ca half a metre. During the monsoon from June till September and the "dry" season from October till January the water reaches its highest and lowest level respectively. According to Elmberg in 1954 an annual rainfall of 5,591 mm was registered at Ayamaru, of which 2,478 mm fell during June, July and August (Elmberg 1968:16). Rainfall is most regular in May. Then the water is least polluted and rises and falls at even intervals. This time of the year is considered as most suitable for fishing.

Due to the clearness of the water light can reach the bottom everywhere, which circumstance has resulted in a prolific flora of underwater plants. The shores of the central and eastern lake are muddy, gradually changing into marshy grasslands traversed by many channels and gullies. The slopes of the surrounding limestone hills are covered with a thin layer of red earth and are hardly suitable for swidden cultivation. Most gardens are to be found farther

Map 1. Lake Ayamaru and its vicinity.



inland where secondary forest gradually changes into a dense jungle. This limestone area is characterized by underground channels. Places where they discharge in the (western) lake are marked by wells. Water is said to well up from the earth in low regions in the vicinity of the lakes when roots of big plants are torn away (see also Reynders 1961:19).

At the foot of the hills along the northern side of the lake, from west to east the following villages are to be found: Sekior, Jukase (a new settlement consisting of the former villages of Jupiak, Karet and Seta) and Mapura (the former Utwit and Suwiam). Along the southern shores of Lake Ayamaru we find the villages of Framu, Ayamaru (former Mefkotiam and Sefachoch), Kartapura (former Semetu and Jokwer), Semu, Kambuaya, Jitmau and farther eastward the village of Fatagomi (former Fan, Techach and Gosames; compare Elmberg 1955:2; Pouwer 1957:299). The new villages reflect the on-going process of resettlement and village formation stimulated by the Indonesian government.

As far as the whole vicinity of Lake Ayamaru is concerned, the Meybrat make a distinction between the 'bagian atas' (the upper region), by which is meant the area on the north-west side of the lakes, and the 'bagian bawah' (lower region) situated on the south-east side (Map 1).

The following story, recorded in the village of Ayamaru (Mefkotiam), gives an account of how Lake Ayamaru came into being. It also shows the place of 'fisheries' in verbal tradition. We are not only told how 'the first inhabitant' of the area managed to catch fish and learned to eat it, but also how the joint property of private fishing grounds is legitimized in myths (a matter further dealt with in section 4).

"A man called Chrumblès (by some informants called Sinon, JM), at Sekior became thirsty when he was making a garden. He cut lianes, but failed to get water from them. Then he left the 'bagian atas' (upper region) and went to the 'bagian bawah' (lower region), till he reached the hill Tébon near Kambuaya. Here he stayed at the foot of the hill. One day his dog saw a black *safè* ('tikus': rat). The dog started to bark whereupon the rat disappeared beneath the roots of an 'anggur'-tree. Trying to dig out the rat, the dog came across a stone. Then Chrumblès took a branch of a tree with white leaves and removed the stone. But underneath the stone appeared to be a well. Water started to squirt out of it. The place is still called Surus Safè. It was one of the dwelling-places of the water demon MOS. MOS was angry at Chrumblès and his dog, because they had tried to catch the black rat. And when MOS is angry he punishes mankind with a deluge. The water which streamed out of the well inundated the whole area and forced Chrumblès and his dog to take refuge high upon the hill Tébon. After four days the water fell again and that is how Lake Ayamaru came into being.

When after some time Chrumblès walked to the lake and crossed a fallen

Table 1. Names of the kinds of fish to be found in Lake Ayamaru.

Sources/date:	Meybrat informants, 1979	Reeskamp (R) and Boeseman (B), 1959	Munro, 1967			
Language:	Meybrat	(local) Indonesian	Indonesian	Dutch	Latin	English
indigenous	syoach fiam fiam segiach besik hobo karit farir pomara ata karaka	ikan kabus ikan sembilang panjang (long) ikan kaskado idem (yellow) idem (black)	ikan gaboos (R) ikan sembilang (R) ikan cascado (R)	grondel (B) meerval (B) paling (R/B) regenboogvis " "	Gobiidae (R/B): div. spec. Chaenogobius isaza (R) Plotosus (S&R) <sup>1</sup> Anguillidae (R/B) Glossolepis incisus? (R) Chilatherina: div. spec. (S&R) Melanotaeni: div. spec. (S&R)	goby catfish-eel eels rainbow-fish " " "
imported	ikan mas ikan cepat  ikan tit ikan Puri	ikan mas (S&R) ikan sepat (R) sepat Siam (B)  ikan ted (R) Tambakan (S&R) Mudjair (S&R) Gurami (S&R)	karper (R) labirinthissen (B)  labirinthis vis  mulbroeder tandkarper goerami regenboogvis (B) -	Cyprinus carpio (R) Anabantidae (B) Triggaster pectoralis (R/B) " trichopterus (S&R) " leeri (S&R) " Helostoma temminckii (R)  Tilapia mossambica (R) Gabusia affinis (R) Osphronemus goramy (R)	carp labyrinth fish " " " " labyrinth fish  cichlids killfish labyrinth fish	
rest			Melanotaeniidae (B) Apogonidae?: Apogon malanopus? (R)			rainbow fish cardinal fish

<sup>1</sup> (S&R): Schuster and Rustami Djajadiredja 1952.

tree, he saw a fish in a pit after having eaten the fish more fishes which he ate.

Thereupon Chrumblants of the lake area towards until today have are regarded as the 'tu' grounds).

Downstream of Arpaed that a swamp over the a human being. When on the stream to Arpanoe will be broken. Buying person by picking concerned. He then awpan?'.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Fish

If I had known the names of informants only in their ethnologically it would have been found in Lake Ayamaru fisheries – regarding, a seman 1959).<sup>2</sup> Due to a Latin names mentioned of the names of what even in Lake Ayamaru can be

As far as the imported 1937-1938 the species Cyprinus carpio, and Osphronemus soldiers, who had been reports that in 1958 Cyprinus time transported from fish ponds, because imported by the Japanese and they have failed to survive kinds of fish, Boeseman reported from the interior other opinions about them the 'ikan cepat' imported by the Dutch from suggested that the 'ikan t

tree, he saw a fish in a pit. Chromblès caught the fish and gave it to his dog. After having eaten the fish the dog did not die, whereupon Chromblès caught more fishes which he ate himself.

Thereupon Chromblès divided the fishing grounds among the first inhabitants of the lake area. That's why other people who came to live here afterwards until today have to pay fish and 'kain timur' to the 'fam' (clans), which are regarded as the 'tuan tanah' (the owners of the ground, including fishing grounds).

Downstream of Arpan to the east people do not try to catch fish. It is believed that a swamp over there is the dwelling place of a huge ghost, who looks like a human being. When a person has fallen asleep in his canoe, having floated on the stream to Arpan, he is supposed to be killed by that ghost, whilst his canoe will be broken. But before this happens the bird Féchach warns the sleeping person by picking up water with its wings and dropping it on the person concerned. He then awakes with a start: 'Hey, where am I, maybe close to Arpan?'.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Fish

If I had known the names for the different kinds of fish mentioned by Meybrat informants only in their own language as well as the (local) Indonesian, terminologically it would have been difficult to identify the various kinds of fish to be found in Lake Ayamaru. Fortunately, I came across two survey-reports on fisheries – regarding, amongst others, Lake Ayamaru (Reeskamp 1959; Boeseman 1959).<sup>2</sup> Due to a direct or indirect overlapping of Indonesian, Dutch or Latin names mentioned by Reeskamp or Boeseman, a fairly complete picture of the names of what evidently are the more important kinds of fish to be found in Lake Ayamaru can be given (Table 1).

As far as the imported kinds of fish are concerned Reeskamp reports that in 1937-1938 the species *Trichogaster pectoralis*, *Helostana temmincki*, *Cyprinus carpio*, and *Osphromenus goramy* were imported from Ambon by Dutch soldiers, who had been stationed in the middle thirties at Ayamaru. He further reports that in 1958 *Cyprinus carpio* was brought once again to Ayamaru – this time transported from Hollandia (Jayapura) –, where it was introduced into fish ponds, because in World War II it would have been caught and wiped out by the Japanese and the local population. *Osphromenus goramy* would simply have failed to survive (Reeskamp 1959:14-5). Still regarding the imported kinds of fish, Boeseman reports only that *Trichogaster pectoralis* had been imported from the interior of India, whereas the Meybrat themselves have again other opinions about the origin of the imported kinds of fish. According to them the 'ikan cepat' (sepat Siam) and the 'ikan tit' (ikan ted) were imported by the Dutch from Ambarawa (Central Java), whilst some informants suggested that the 'ikan tit' had (also) been imported by the Japanese in World

War II. Another kind of fish, called 'ikan puri', was said to have been introduced into Lake Ayamaru by a 'mantri' (male nurse – working in the former hospital of Ayamaru), whose name was Puri.<sup>3</sup> Originating from Serui (north coast of Irian Jaya), he is supposed to have brought the fish concerned with him in a cane.

Concerning the importance of the fish population in 1959 both Reeskamp and Boeseman report that the fish stock of Lake Ayamaru has to be defined as "poor". Boeseman relates this to the obvious occurrence of many crayfish (Boeseman 1959:12). The Gobiidae, *Glossolepsis incisus*, Apogonidae, and *Gambusia affinis* are merely described as very small fishes, the last mentioned species having been planted in the carp ponds to keep down mosquito-larvae (Reeskamp 1959:14-5). The bigger and more important fishes are *Trichogaster* and *Cyprinus carpio*. The former is considered by Boeseman as the most important fish for consumption, but according to the Meybrat this was in former days the 'ikan sembilan' (*Nematognathi*), and since the 1960's the 'ikan mas' (*Cyprinus carpio*). Only from a cosmological point of view the 'ikan sembilan' is still regarded as the most important kind of fish, being considered as the 'ikan raja' (king of the fishes) or the 'ikan kepala' (leader of the fishes; see section 6 below). The 'ikan mas' is said to have escaped to the lakes in the 1960's, when after the departure of the Dutch the fish ponds were neglected and broke down due to heavy rainfall. Obviously flourishing well in the lakes, the 'ikan mas' became not only a very important fish for consumption, but also an article of trade. The latter, however, is not to be considered as a new development. Because the socio-economic importance of fisheries in Ayamaru is dealt with in another section, here it suffices to say that already in 1957 – thus before the introduction of the 'ikan mas' – the fishing grounds are reported to be in the hands of a few men only, who at that time made a good profit out of it (Pouwer 1957:300).

Considering the indigenous kinds of fish, Meybrat ideas about their origin are provided in a myth about the creation of the river Ibiach. This myth was recorded in the village of Susemuk at the eastern border of the Ayamaru area.

"At Ibiach, between the village of Susemuk and the river Kais, two small children had caught a 'cicak' (lizard). They were teasing the animal, when suddenly an old man came, called MOS. He asked the children 'where are your parents?'. The answer was 'our parents are working in the garden'. Then MOS ordered the children 'tell your parents that they have to keep apart some taro for me, when they come back'. MOS wanted to 'kumpul masyarakat' (gather all the people). He hid himself in a moor nearby, till it got dark. When the parents returned home they were told by their children what had happened. Very soon afterwards it got dark and then MOS came back. He was very angry and wanted to see the parents, because their children had caught a lizard and teased it with a 'buah merah' (red pandanus fruit). MOS was dressed in a

black 'kain' (woven cloth), decorated with teeth of a pig and adorned with decorations in his nose, ears and hair. He had also brought with him a calabash. In his rage he broke this calabash and water streamed out of it, containing the 'ikan sembilan' and the 'ikan bulana' (described as a sort of 'ikan mas'). The calabash did not get empty and the whole area was inundated. The water rose up to the top of the trees, the leaves of which changed into 'ikan kaskado'. All the people were drowned, including a bird which just failed to escape. That's how the river Ibiach originated and we got fish."

### 3. Fishing Tackle and Fishing Techniques

The most simple fishing method is catching fish with the hands. This is mainly done by children and women. One can often watch them wading through the water and groping with their feet and hands for (cray-)fish in muddy bottoms, underwater vegetation or sea weed. This fishing "technique" is sometimes applied in combination with the use of poison. The Meybrat make a distinction between two sorts of poison: *nyefo* and *sra*. The first is made from the roots of the derris plant; the second from leaves of a special kind of tree, which is cultivated in the gardens. Fish poison is mainly used during periods of drought, when the water has reached its lowest levels. Then the poison is put into a pool or upstream in a river. Within that pool or downstream in the river the paralyzed fishes are caught by hand, but an *ati* (fish spear) or *wata* (basket, used as a fish scoop) – both described below – can be used too.

Another fishing technique is thrusting a fish spear almost mechanically into the water, whilst sitting or standing in a canoe – see below. This job is mostly done by children or women, but occasionally also by men.

A third technique is fishing by means of a line. In former times these lines were made of 'tali genemon' (a fine rope made of the bark of the genemon tree). To this line a hook made of a special kind of bamboo, called *cematan*, was attached. Nowadays this fishing gear has been replaced by nylon lines and iron fish hooks, bought in Teminabuan at the south coast or a 'kios' (small store) in Ayamaru – run by immigrants from Sulawesi. In spite of these renovations fishing with lines is considered as not very successful compared to other fishing techniques.

Here should also be mentioned that in 1959 Reeskamp reported the use of a trap made of a bamboo pipe, which was used to catch crayfish. However, in 1979 there were no signs of this fishing tackle, nor was it mentioned by the Meybrat.

The fish spear is above all used to catch 'ikan mas'. This is especially done during the spawning season of the 'ikan mas', from June till August, when – as we have seen before – the grasslands in the immediate surroundings of the lakes are inundated due to heavy rainfall and thus form ideal spawning grounds for this kind of fish. Fishing at night used to be done by means of a *sa-*

*wèh* (torch), which nowadays has been replaced by the 'Petromax'-lamp: a vaporized oil burner. Oil is bought at the forementioned 'kios' or the mission-station at Ayawasi.

The *ati* (fish spear) was traditionally made of *cematan*-bamboo. It was described by the Meybrat as a single-pronged spear, provided with barbs formed by nicks in the bamboo. The *ati* which is used today is a multiple-pronged spear, having four to five barbed prongs (see photo 1). The prongs are made of spikes, provided with barbs which have been formed by hammering and moulding the spikes. The prongs are fastened to a long stick or bamboo cane by means of copper-wire. Both spikes and copper-wire are bought either at the south coast, the local 'kios' or at the forementioned mission-station.

An important kind of fishing tackle is the *wata*, this being a conical fish trap made of rattan. Its length varies from 0.70 to 2 metres, with a maximal cross-section from 0.50 to 0.80 metre. One end of this basket is tied together, while the other end is "closed" by a smaller cone with its open end inserted inside (see cover). Both the basket and the smaller cone are made of rattan. The latter can easily be removed, making the basket suitable for use as a fish scoop in order to catch small kinds of fish. In local Indonesian the smaller cone is called the 'anak bubu' (child of the fish trap). Placed upright in the muddy bottom, the fish trap also serves as a fish-well. The fish trap is said to have been the most important fishing tackle until the nylon net was introduced – see below. Besides the above-mentioned applications, the fish trap is mostly used in combination with a *bach* (fish dam) or *fra-thouk* (artificial pit – see below).

The *bach* is V- or U-shaped weir constructed of a framework of uprights driven into the bottom of a lake, river or creek with intervals of 20 to 30 cm. Filled up with hurdles, grass or sea weed they are meant to be permanent (see photos 4 and 5). During periods of moderate rainfall the *bach* stands out some 10 to 20 cm above the water level. They are useless in periods of heavy rainfall, when the water rises too high. V-type weirs are found in the rivers or creeks around the actual lakes; rectangular constructions are usually situated along the shores of the lakes. In V-type weirs an opening is made in the apex, and closed with the fish trap. Whilst these weirs are placed right across narrow creeks, in rather wide water courses they are found on the right or left side, depending on the local depth. Constructed along the shores of a creek, the apex can point to the lake as well as the opposite direction. These weirs are used alternately, depending on the rise and fall of the water, which may happen in periods of moderate rainfall at regular intervals. Sometimes both arms of a weir extend as far as the shore of a creek. In that case they permanently enclose a locally discharging gully. Especially along the muddy and shallow shores of the eastern lakes rectilinear weirs are found constructed transversely to the shore, crossing a groove, which in the midst of the lake is bordered by a ridge of sand or another weir, running parallel to the shore. The bottom of the lake area is not flat, but marked by many creeks and grooves.<sup>4</sup> Without preventing adja-



cent weir-constructions from catching fish, several fish weirs are to be found in a fishing water belonging to a village (see section 4). Wide pools in the bottom of the lake area are sometimes loosely 'enclosed' within a framework of uprights, which are interwoven with grass or sea-weed – thus forming a closed fence – as soon as the water falls, in which way the fish is simply prevented from escaping from the pool. The same technique is applied with regard to the *fra-thouk*.

The *fra-thouk* is a small pit, artificially made in the bottom of a creek or river by means of stones (*fra*: stone). It measures about one metre in width and is fenced with a circular construction of uprights (see photos 3 and 4). Unlike the construction of fish weirs, the uprights of a *fra-thouk* are loosely connected by means of hurdles and leaves. These leaves are considered as important, because they are supposed to attract fish that may be looking for a hiding place when the water falls. A *fra-thouk* can also be used in combination with a fish trap. In that case just half of the fence is used, and the fish trap is placed behind an opening in the middle of it. Which half of the fence is used depends on the direction of the current, which in turn depends on the rise or fall of the water. The trap can also be used as a fish-well, or, when placed upright in the mud of a creek, be used to store removed or new amounts of grass and sea-weed at times when the water level is too high to make use of the *fra-thouk*. This is especially the case from June till September, whilst May with its moderate rainfall is regarded as the best month to fish by means of a *bach* and *fra-thouk*.

In former times the Meybrat also used to catch fish by means of the *kor*, a small standing net made of genemon-rope. According to my informants it was made in the same way as today the Aifat people, and tribes in the eastern Bird's Head, are still making their *noken* (bag). Nowadays this traditional fishing gear has been replaced by nylon nets.

Nylon nets have been introduced since the 1960's. These are standing nets, measuring some 2 metres in height and from 5 to 20 metres in length. They are bought from "Bugis"-immigrants at the south coast. In 1979 their prices varied from Rp. 3000 to Rp. 6000 (some three to six American dollars). The nylon net is mainly used to catch the 'ikan mas', a job often performed at night till early in the morning. One can often see a group of five to seven people – men as well as women – fishing together along the shores of the lake area (see photos 1 and 8). Sometimes several nets are bound together and set out in a U-shaped configuration. Whilst held in that position by a number of men who are navigating their canoes, other men – sometimes joined by women and children – wade through the water, screaming and beating the water surface with their hands or a paddle, in order to drive the fish into the nets.

The canoe is a simple dug-out without outriggers (see photos 2 and 6 and cover). Its length is some 4 to 5 metres; its width about 50 cm. Characteristic of these canoes are the identical stem and sternpost which, standing out at an angle of 30 to 40°, follow in shape the slanting cross-section of the trunk of the

tree concerned (see photo 6 and cover). The canoe is navigated by means of a 'stick', which is about two metres long and on one side shaped into an oblong oval blade. Thanks to this construction it can be used as a punting-pole as well as a paddle. This double function is necessary, because during periods of drought the canoe often has to be steered through shallow and narrow water courses, at times scraping over a sandy bottom. Passing a fish weir one just removes as many hurdles and as much sea-weed as is necessary, which are replaced as soon as one has passed by. The Ayamaru-canoe is not provided with outriggers, because they would restrict the manoeuvrability of the canoe when passing through the many narrow water courses or the fish weirs. A new development, according to the Meybrat (see also the last story recorded in this section), is the construction of a canoe with a pointed stem and sternpost (see photo 7 or 8).

I wish to conclude this section on 'fishing tackle and fishing techniques' with three accounts of the place of fisheries in Meybrat verbal tradition. The first one concerns a 'new' trickster-story about the local culture heroes SIWA and MAFIF, about whom Elmberg has recorded other tales (Elmberg 1968). The other two stories concern the 'introduction' of the fish trap in the lake area and the 'invention' of the canoe, about which earlier versions also were noted by Elmberg (Elmberg 1968:256 Myth 6 and 278 Myth 49).

a. "One day Mafif wanted to catch fish. He left the house where he lived together with his elder brother Siwa. When Siwa noted Mafif's intention he went also to the lake, taking a shorter route than Mafif did. When Siwa arrived at the lake he changed himself into a fish and waited. Then Mafif appeared and cast his fish line, supplied with a bamboo-hook, into the water. Siwa did not hesitate long. He cut the line and hid the hook beneath a stone at the bottom of the water. Thereupon he swam back to the shore, changed himself into his normal appearance and hurried home. When Mafif returned home afterward he told Siwa that he had lost his fish hook. Teasing Mafif Siwa said 'aduh, maybe your fish line was not strong enough?'. Together they went to the spot where Mafif had lost his hook. Mafif started to look for it first. He dived again and again, but without any success. Then Siwa tried and at the first attempt he found the hook. He gave it to Mafif who was very pleased."

b. "Once a person of the 'fam' (kinship group) Solossa, living at Framu, decided to visit Meraid Sisir in the village of Sauf (located between Ayamaru and Teminabuan on the south coast, JM). Sisir had married Solossa's sister and still had to pay 'harta' (bride-wealth). Living near a river the people at Sauf used to catch fish, 'ikan kabus', but the Ayamaru-people did not know how this was done. To exchange goods Sisir and Solossa decided to make a 'rumah harta' (a house built especially to exchange goods, JM). The house was built in the neighbourhood of the river. During the building of it they had to eat and Si-

sisir often went to the river, always coming back with freshly-caught fish. One day Solossa decided to follow his brother-in-law. He wanted to find out how Sisir managed to catch fish and hid himself in a huge tree near the river. From there he noticed how Sisir caught fish with an object unknown to Solossa. When the 'rumah harta' was ready, Sisir offered all kinds of 'barang' (goods) to Solossa but the latter refused all of them. Sisir was perplexed 'but it was you who wanted the goods'. Then Solossa said 'I only want to get that thing', and he pointed to the fish trap, which had been used by Sisir to catch fish. 'That's nothing, my friend', Sisir said and he gave the trap to Solossa. But when the latter tried to catch fish the trap remained empty. Then Sisir explained that a fish trap needs 'anak bubu' (see above). He gave it to Solossa who returned home. So the Meybrat people learned how to catch fish."

c. "Faced with the problem of how to get on the lake, one day Chrumblès (called Sinon in other versions) cut a big tree and started to dig it out. But it had neither stem nor stern and when the tree-canoe was launched water just came in. 'What should I do now?', Chrumblès (Sinon) thought. Thereupon he observed for some time the ducks on the lake. He caught one of them and studied its beak. Then he cut another tree and dug it out, but this time he supplied it with stem and stern in the form of the beak of a duck. That's why our traditional canoes have beak-like stems and sterns."

#### 4. Fishing Grounds and Fishing Rights

To each village in the immediate surroundings of Lake Ayamaru belongs a well-marked fishing area. The border between fishing waters of villages on opposite shores is situated in the middle of the lake and runs more or less parallel to the shores. This border is very carefully watched. If illegally crossed during fishing, fierce disputes may arise. The border of fishing waters belonging to adjacent villages is a continuation of the border of the 'ladang' areas (arable land belonging to the villages, which border is sometimes marked by a river(-mouth). This border hardly gives any problems, because the distance between the villages is considered far enough and nobody is said to feel the need to fish far away from his or her own village. Because everybody is entitled to catch fish from the waters belonging to his or her own village, these waters can be seen as collective fishing grounds. However, within these commonly used fishing areas particular fishing grounds are to be found which are strictly private property.<sup>5</sup> These private fishing grounds are marked by a *bach* or *fra-thouk*, which are privately owned too.

Parallel with these collective and private fishing grounds a distinction has to be made between collective and individual fishing rights. The collective right implies that every inhabitant of a village in the vicinity of the lakes is allowed to fish in a water belonging to that village. However, one is not entitled to fish in

the immediate neighbourhood of a *bach* or *fra-thouk*, which mark the (most suitable) fishing grounds which are privately owned. Fishing in those places, and consequently fishing by means of the *bach* or *fra-thouk*, is a private right, which, moreover, is excluded from women and foreigners (see below, and section 6). This means that the application of the collective fishing right is restricted with regard to places, tackle and technique. It can only be applied by means of a net, fish spear, line or basket – when used as a scoop –, and only away from the areas marked by a *bach* or *fra-thouk*. This implies considerable limitations concerning the opportunities to fish also, because in periods of relative drought the *bach* and *fra-thouk* come into operation and they – together with the fishing grounds involved – are the private or 'joint' property of a limited number of people. Joint property is accepted by the Meybrat with explicit reference to their myths. Ownership of land as well as of fishing grounds is said to be inherited in the male as well as female line. In this context the term 'tanah pusaka' (inherited land) was sometimes used by the informants. The rightful claimants are regarded as the 'tuan tanah' (lords of the land – including fishing grounds). They are found among the members of the first clans who, according to the local tradition, occupied the lake area. Here the clans Chrumblès (Lumless), Bles (Bleskadith), Nau, Sinon, Isir and Karet have to be mentioned. (Some of these names have already been recorded in the myths noted in the previous section. Chrumblès – Charumprès – is also mentioned in a myth noted by Elmberg as the eldest son of a child and his opossum mother. Both survived a deluge sent by MOS and begot the first ancestors of the new lakes population; see Elmberg 1968:254 Myth 2.) People not belonging to the above-mentioned clans can rent a particular fishing water. Tenants have to pay for renting a *bach* or *fra-thouk* to a *bobot* (Big Man) of one of the clans concerned. Whereas traditionally, according to the Meybrat, the 'payments' are mainly seen as gifts in honour of ancestors of the 'tuan tanah', nowadays they are also seen as an economic transaction ('pembayaran betul': real payments): the 'tuan tanah' no longer merely represents the local ancestors, but being a *bobot* he also claims private property of the particular fishing grounds. At this point it is important to note that the *bobot*-ship is not restricted to Big Men who are Meybrat by origin. Among the present Meybrat *bobot* we also find men who are descendents of (Papua) clans who migrated from the south coast to the Ayamaru area some generations ago. These so-called "immigrant-bobots" (Elmberg 1968:201-6) are found among the Solossa, Kambuaya and Jitmau families. The relevance of the distinction between the above-mentioned two types of *bobot* with regard to private (fishing) rights will be further dealt with in Chapter II, section 1, after more information has been given first.

It has been stated before that the ownership of a *bach* or *fra-thouk* is obtained by inheritance, usually in the male line. When a man has no sons, then a daughter can claim rights of succession, even if she lives elsewhere. However, ownership of a *bach* or *fra-thouk* can only be claimed when perpetually used

and kept in order. If they are not, then they become the property of a nearest patrilineal male relative living in the village to which the wider fishing ground, in which the particular fishing ground is situated, is reckoned to belong. Regarding a dominant rule of inheritance in the male line, another aspect has to be taken into consideration. In accordance with the individual character ('hak pribadi' = private right) of ownership of a *bach* or *fra-thouk*, the *bobot* concerned often claimed that they could sell a fish weir or fish pit to whomsoever they liked. This matter often caused conflicts between a father and his sons who are the potential heirs; daughters were said to give fewer problems. If living elsewhere, daughters would prefer compensation in kain timur, instead of becoming the heir of a troublesome *bach* or *fra-thouk*: as only men are allowed to fish by means of a fish weir or fish pit (see again section 6), for the use of them a woman would become dependent on her husband, male relatives or friends. As to my question whether a woman could sell a *bach* or *fra-thouk* obtained by inheritance, the answer was negative. Whether a man is obliged to get the agreement of his sons or not, when he wants to sell 'his' fish weir, fish pit or fishing grounds then a continual conflict between the two generations is involved. The older informants flatly denied the necessity of such an agreement, whereas younger informants did not cease repeating that such a transaction was only allowed, or rather, accepted by force, in the event of their father's life being threatened, for instance, if he could not pay his kain timur-debts any longer, or when he was held responsible for a murder. These were said to be precisely the reasons why some *bobot* of immigrant origin came into the possession of a fish weir or fish pit, and not seldom more than one.

So a particular fishing ground – or even more than one – can be owned by a local Big Man (*bobot*; Meybrat by origin and in that position also a 'tuan tanah', or of 'foreign' origin: the immigrant-*bobot*), or a group of men who are close relatives and to be considered as 'tuan tanah'. In the latter case everybody not only owns his own fishing gear or canoe, but within a particular fishing area also his own *bach* or *fra-thouk*.

Owning adjacent particular fishing grounds, a group of relatives may have built a so-called 'rumah danau' (lake house) in the middle of their fishing grounds (see the cover). These houses are used not only for storage of fishing gear and as shelters, they also function as a watch-house. Being taboo for women, they are often occupied by at least one (male) member of the group of relatives concerned. They frequently stay there for days and nights on end, especially when the seasonal circumstances are good for fishing with the *bach* or *fra-thouk*, guarding the latter against theft of fish.

##### 5. Economic and Social Aspects

In 1955 Elmberg remarked that fishing had recently become a popular occupation among the Meybrat (Elmberg 1955:59). Two years later Pouwer reported

that a small group of men did hardly anything but fishing, making a good profit out of it (Pouwer 1957:300). Because fishery is given little attention by either author, the impression could be obtained that it is of little or moderate importance from a socio-economic point of view. In that regard the fishery-complex can indeed be considered of little importance, when compared to the kain timur-complex. Nevertheless, also the economics of fisheries in Ayamaru deserve fuller attention. In addition to what has been said about the fishing rights in the previous section, it not only reveals other – social as well as economic – aspects of the Meybrat way of life, but also the relative importance of the fishing grounds and fishing rights.

Since the introduction of the 'ikan mas' and the nylon net in the 1960's, fishing in Ayamaru has been intensified – both as regards the quantities of fish caught due to the increased use of the nets as well as the number of people involved in fishery. It was difficult to get detailed information about either of these aspects. The Meybrat appeared to be very reluctant to give information about, for instance, how often they went out fishing; the number of fish they usually caught by means of a net, fish weir or fish pit; or the number of nets they owned – which as such might be an indication that fishery is important for them.

Nevertheless, informants who showed themselves reliable on other matters told me that in the village of Ayamaru-kota (former Mefchajam) alone there would be some 200 to 250 nylon nets. Each family-head was said to own five to seven nets, whilst a catch of 200 to 300 fish a night would be no exception. I am inclined to think that these quantities are overestimated. Whatever the truth, from my own observation – only during the day-time – several times I noticed catches of 50 fish, caught with one to three nets only. Furthermore, in whatever season I visited Ayamaru, when I was crossing the lakes always groups of some four to seven people were to be seen in the western as well as in the eastern lake area, fishing with several nets, fish traps or spears. Moreover, in most villages fish racks were visible with rows of fish hanging to dry in the sun. And last but not least, fish is a frequent item on the daily menu. It may be apparent from only these observations that fishing in Ayamaru not only became a 'popular' activity, but indeed an 'occupation' and a relatively large scale 'business'. On the other hand the fishermen complain that since the introduction of the nylon nets the fish stock has decreased. According to them since the introduction of these nets the size of its meshes has decreased from "five fingers" from knot to knot to "three fingers". This points to overfishing and also to a decrease in size of at least the 'ikan mas', because this fish – especially the adult specimens – are not protected during their spawning season. It is also possible that, having flourished well initially, the 'ikan mas' became subjected to intraspecific competition as a result of an increased shortage of food. In this context it may be of interest to note – with reference to the correlation between the occurrence of many crayfish and a poor stock of common fishes (suggested by

Boeseman, section 3) – that bamboo-traps – which in the 1950's were still used to catch crayfish –, have never been seen in the 1970's, and were not mentioned by my Meybrat informants in all the discussions we had about fishery. But given the limitations of my investigations this is a matter which deserves more research.

In spite of the fact that the nylon net has become a very important and commonly obtainable kind of fishing tackle, given the continual changing conditions in the seasonal rhythm, the traditional fishing gear and techniques did not lose their significance. This is not only reflected in the significance attributed to fishing grounds and (private) fishing rights, but also in the actual fishing 'business'. At this juncture more has to be said about the sex-division of labour in fisheries, and the 'economic' value of fish and fishing gear in the network of trade-relations.

It has already been mentioned that fishing with a net, fish weir, fish pit or a fish trap is a man's job, whereas women and children only fish by using their hands, a fish spear, or a fish basket used as a fish scoop. But this is not the only sex-division of labour (apart from sex-bound taboos which are discussed in the next section). Other forms of gender-defined specialization are that it is the men who make a fish weir, fish pit, fish spear, canoe, paddle or a 'rumah daun', whereas it is the women who make the fish traps, and operate on the trade-market.

The making of a canoe is the work of specialists. A man who needs a canoe has to look himself for a suitable tree. The best trees to make a canoe are found in the jungle on the north side of the lake area. Friends and relatives are invited to cut down the tree, after which the prospective owner himself removes the branches and the bark. After the rough cutting work has been done, usually with the help of others, the rugged canoe-shaped trunk is entrusted to a specialist skilled in the finer work. During all these activities the helpers have to be provided with fish and palm-wine, whilst in addition to that the specialist gets 'kain toko' (fabrics bought in a shop). The rough trunk-canoe is dug out by means of a chisel-like adze: a piece of iron which is fixed transversely by means of rattan at an angle of about 70°, to the curved end of a stick.<sup>6</sup> I was told that in former days the finishing of a canoe was followed by a 'pesta prahu' (feast of the canoe), which lasted for three to fourteen days. After some palm-wine has been 'offered' – spilled on the ground – to the spirits of the local 'tuan tanah', the canoe is brought by all the men to the lake to be launched.

Basketry is a woman's job. Fish baskets can be obtained by trade, but they are also made in the lake area. To make them one is dependent on a supply of rattan from elsewhere, for example the Ayfat area, because rattan is scarce in the lake district. The fish traps are made at strategic places close to the fishing grounds. Such a place was observed at the crossing of water-routes between the villages of Mapura, Kambuaya and Jitmau. The spot was marked by a simple shelter, a fire-place, strings of rattan, half-finished traps, or used traps

roofed by their 'anak' (the smaller cone) waiting to be repaired (see photo 9).

For women, but also men, it is risky to fish alone. A person who should happen to catch a lot of fish while others at the same time are less fortunate, runs the risk of being suspected of having used 'suangi' (black magic). In Ayamaru this magic is called *kabes wanè*, and is believed to be practised by women – contrary to the 'suangi' *rasé* of the Ayfat people, which is said to be practised by men. One does not often see a man fishing on his own, unless he is inspecting his fish traps.

When fishing is done collectively, the catch is shared equally among the owner of the fishing gear and his assistants. If a big catch is obtained, the owner of a net or traps – occasionally laid out in an open, half-circular formation – gets a bigger deal of the catch. This can also be obtained by assistants who are preparing a feast. Then the extra-share is regarded as a gift, which is expected to be reciprocated in due time. The counter-gift does not necessarily have to consist of fish. Also the timing of the counter-gift is important. Reciprocity is brought into a 'negative' sphere, even among close relatives, when a counter-gift is 'paid' too quickly or too late (see Sahlins 1965:148; Miedema 1984).

After everyone has got his (or her) share of a catch, each portion is brought home. Or rather, men usually bring their share – together with the fishing tackle – to the 'rumah danau', where they wait for their women. Having come back from, or being on their way to the gardens, the women supply the men with palm-wine and food, and take the fish. Once back in the village the fish is wrapped in a special kind of bark and roasted on a fire or dried on racks in the sun.

In addition to fish being used for home consumption, bundles of fish are given away as a gift – or counter-gift – to exchange-friends or a *bobot*. Also when one pays a visit to the south coast, a host or a local shopkeeper is "paid" with a bundle of fresh-water fish. This is much appreciated on the south coast, where the people are used to eating salt-water fish.

Another part of a catch may be reserved to be bartered on the local market. This is also mostly a female job. The term 'market' has been used with good reason. This term does not particularly refer to the roofed-in market places, which have been built under the auspices of the (local) government in the bigger villages to stimulate 'regular' market activities. The term refers to the 'pasar-pasar alam', meeting places between the 'kampong danau' (lake villages) and the 'kampong darat' (inland villages). At these places the Meybrat are traditionally accustomed to 'exchange' products from the lake area – especially fish – for other products (see below). These exchanges have a character of barter. They have to be considered as commercial transactions in which the products are bartered against more or less fixed 'prices' – fluctuating in times when certain goods are scarce – against other products. Meeting places can be found between the villages of Sekior and Soroan; Framu and Sauf; Kambuaya and Kambufatem; Jitmau and Fatagomi, and between Mapura and



Kokas. They are called, respectively, Harit, Faitsrecht, Siach, Mrurur, and 'tempat senk'. The latter name refers to the sheets of zinc, obtained from the mission-post Ayawasi in the northeast, which are in favour at Ayamaru for the roofing of a church-building, a school or the house of a *bobot*. Such houses are called 'rumah permanen', i.e. meant to be permanent as they are provided with floors and walls made of cement.

Besides fish the market products include things like rattan, wood, 'atap' (pandanus leaves which are traditionally used for the roofing of houses), sago, taro (when scarce in the lake area), palm-wine, sweet potatoes, ready-made fish traps, sarongs or other pieces of cloth (obtained also at Ayawasi or at the south coast) and tuberous plants. During surveys in 1978 and 1979 I noted the following 'prices' (Table 2).

Table 2. Fish-prices in Ayamaru (1978-1979).

<i>Fish</i>	<i>Other products/articles</i>
3- 5 'ekor' or 2- 3 'bungkus'	= 1 bag full of taro
5- 6 'ekor' or 3- 4 'bungkus'	= 1 bamboo section of palm wine
5- 10 'ekor' or 10- 15 'bungkus'	= 1 piece of fabric bought in a shop
2- 3 'ekor' or 2- 3 'bungkus'	= 1 'tumpuk' ubi
1- 2 'ekor' or 1- 2 'bungkus'	= 1 'tumpuk' kasbi
1- 2 'ekor' or 1- 6 'bungkus'	= 1 sweet potato
1- 2 'ekor' or 1- 2 'bungkus'	= 1 piece of sago (unprepared)
1 'ekor' or 1 'bungkus'	= 1 piece of sago (prepared)
1 'ekor' or 1 'bungkus'	= 1 row of pandanus leaves for roofing
5- 10 'ekor' or 5- 12 'bungkus'	= 1 rattan fish trap

Note: 1 'ekor' ('tail' = piece) = 1 big 'ikan mas'; 1 'bungkus' (bundle) = 2 - 3 smaller 'ikan mas' or other fishes.

For the supply of rattan, wood, bark of trees, taro and other products the Meybrat are becoming increasingly dependent on inland villages, as the Ayamaru population is concentrated by the government in villages. The limited fertility of the soil, together with a repeatedly occurring disease of the taro plant, confronts the Meybrat more and more with a scarcity of food and wood. Scarcity of wood, bark, rattan and pandanus leaves etc. is said to be the reason why the houses in the Ayamaru area are small as compared to other areas in the Bird's Head. There is increasing concern about these matters due to rumours that the 'old' road from Teminabuan via Aitinyo to Ayamaru, built in the late fifties but out of use since the bridges have broken down, will be improved to open the area for transmigrants from outside Irian.

### 6. *Taboo, Ritual and Ceremony*

The ownership of a suitable fishing ground or proper fishing gear does not in itself guarantee success in fishing. It is important in Meybrat fisheries that the relationship to the first ancestors as well as to the water demon MOS is continually maintained. Neglecting the ancestors and the water demon is supposed to cause – in Meybrat terms – an “anti-effek” (anti effect): disturbances in the seasonal rhythm like a drought or, at the other extreme, too much rainfall. Some aspects of the role ascribed to the ancestors and MOS have already been demonstrated in the myths regarding the way in which Lake Ayamaru and the river Ibiach originated. In the following attention is focused on the way in which the relationship to the ancestors and the water-spirits is maintained in taboo and ritual.

As stated above women are not allowed to fish at a *bach* or *fra-thouk*. The same rule is in force with regard to ‘orang darat’ (people from villages in the interior) and ‘orang pantai’ (people from the – south – coast). These categories of people are not supposed to know the sacral words, which have to be used in Meybrat fisheries. These words are secret and said to be taught in the so-called ‘rumah Wuon’ (houses in which boys are – or used to be – initiated; see Elmberg 1968; Schoorl 1979).

Specific words have to be spoken when a new canoe is launched. Also when a fish trap is used for the first time, special precautions are taken. In order for a new fish trap to acquire the right smell it is rubbed with ashes and grass from the water-side, during which a spell is said over the trap: the waters and fishes are addressed with words like *feh nabo warach* (water in which the fishes stay), or *feh nabo feree* (fishes in the water). Then the trap is put into the water, but not before it has been supplied with a red stone called *chafra mawf* (*fra* = stone). Such stones are said to attract the fishes to the trap. If after the first trial no fish have been caught, some tobacco and palm-wine are offered at the spot. The local water spirits are addressed with the words *kabes-kabes bo anu tabak mevo, vo no siok magin nee ka'mu* (water spirits, take this tobacco-gift and give us fishes). Next taro is prepared. After part of it has been consumed, the rest is offered to the *tagu* (water spirit), who is believed to keep the fish away from the trap on account of its being hungry.

Fishes have to be made willing to be caught through the ancestors. The ancestors would be disturbed if women were to eat fish of the first catch of a new fish trap, or a first catch after a period of inactivity in fisheries. When a young mother has just given birth to a child it is taboo for her to eat the ‘ikan sembilan’ (the *tagu*-fish: patron of the fishes), because if she did the new-born child would not learn to speak. At least, this is the reason given to children. In this context it is important to note that a similar taboo concerns the ears of a cus-cus. They are also taboo for a young mother to eat, and in this case children are told that the baby might get ears like a cus-cus. However, some informants

confided to me that the actual reason is that the neglect of such a taboo would cause an "anti-effek": the ancestors would be disturbed and cause disbalances in nature. For the same reason members of the opposite sex have to observe a taboo on eating fish. Boys are not allowed to eat the 'ikan kabus', nor its spawn, during initiation. The 'ikan kabus' is perceived as a female fish.

MOS seems to come into the picture again when people are confronted with an extreme disturbance of the normal seasonal rhythm: a severe drought, extremely heavy rainfall, or when in due season hardly any fish have been caught for some time. The latter is considered as a sign that MOS is angry and has called away the fishes from the weirs and traps. The 'old people' are said to believe that the fish can withdraw themselves from the lake area through underground channels to the southern MacCluer gulf. Under such circumstances the old men declare that fishing is forbidden for a period of four days. During this time a special ritual has to be performed, which is also secret and cannot be revealed to women. I was only told that during those rituals MOS is asked to send back the *tagu*-fish, the 'ikan sembilan'.

Other evidence of ritual or ceremony associated with 'fishery' and 'water' is – incidentally – reported by Elmberg. However fragmentary these accounts are, in addition to the data mentioned thus far they give supplementary insight in the way in which bad luck in fishery is experienced as intentional. Mention should be made of the following observations of Elmberg, even though it is not always perfectly clear where his observations end and his interpretations start.

A Meybrat believes that his *nawian* (shadow) wanders around during a dream. It is forbidden to wake up a Meybrat abruptly, because his *nawian* might not return quickly enough and become a *kabes* (ghost), who is supposed to dive down and live on the bottom of wells, rivers or lakes. Those *kabes* are trouble-makers, which have to be dealt with by means of the help of medicine-men (Elmberg 1955:39).

*Tagu* are perceived to be the spirits of the "...first dead ancestors... endowing the humans with power in one form or another", regarded as the "owner" or "patron" of a locality and in the western part as "water-beings"; their power seems to be that they can advise men how to become a *bobot* (Elmberg 1955:47). In the shape of a big fish they are also supposed to guide the common fishes into the traps, after a special stone in a secret place has been put under a spell (Elmberg 1955:60).

Further, describing a series of successive ceremonies related to "[*bobot*-] exchange feasts of the Meybrat life cycle", Elmberg reports how he was informed that "spirit-stones" – after having been left in "spirit-waters" – were fetched home. At the spirit-water spells were cast on the stones with the words "Come up to the pile-house (the house where cloths were to be exchanged, JM) and you will get palm-wine! Come quickly and collect my cloths". Then ant-eggs would have been thrown into the water, during which action spirit-names were pronounced. Next, after palm-wine has been poured into the

water, a very big fish, "called MOS", would come to the surface to drink. He was followed by common fishes, which was regarded as a token that much kain timur would be brought to the exchange feast (see Elmberg 1966:8, 22). At the actual exchange of cloths 88 names of water courses, rapids and sources were mentioned by the *bobot*, whilst he declared that he would give clothes "for the water and the cave", in spite of the fact that he had "not got fish from Inom Semetu, no fish from Wejuk or Kräwok, no fish from Jachaf to Susim's ground" (Elmberg 1966:33). Whatever the meaning of these words, in the context of what has been described until now about Meybrat fisheries it seems evident that a hierarchy of MOS and the ancestors is reflected in the *tagu*-fish and common fishes from the different localities, and that MOS and the ancestors were invited to "attend" the meeting to bless the exchange of cloths.

In his dissertation - "Balance and circulation" - Elmberg explicitly notes that the spirits have to be satisfied if the fisherman wants to make a big catch, whereas the fish will hide from the traps when traditional kain timur-exchanges have not been made (Elmberg 1968:172, 173). The main theme of his study is that "balances" in the sacral en ceremonial sphere provide "circulations" (of cloths) in the profane sphere, and vice versa. The exchange of a combination of fish (-) - categorized as "cold" and taro (+) - categorized as "hot", for bark-cloth (+) and palm-wine (-) is considered - by Elmberg - as an ideally balanced exchange (although not all kinds of fish are classified as "cold": the catfish-eel is classified as "hot" and is fished predominantly by women; Elmberg 1968:195). Other "balances" are suggested between the "red stones" (+), which are supposed to attract fish (-), and water (-) beaten by means of rattan (+) at a Fu cave (spirit water), to procure rain in times of drought (Elmberg 1968:210). Also in times of continuous rainfall "hot" food and tobacco are offered to MOS to make him stop the rain. It is reported that "members of the Uon society (a secret men's society, JM) boasted that they know the secret how to stop MOS" (Elmberg 1968:224). As "red" is synonymous with "hot" and "powerful" (Elmberg 1968:213), it is interesting to read at the end of Elmberg's book that "red paint was applied to those who went near the spirit homes to feed palm-wine to the fish-shaped MOS" (Elmberg 1968:252).

In the foregoing sections all the available data about Meybrat fishery have been presented. I think that this simple description of various aspects of Meybrat fishery has convincingly demonstrated that a study on the fishery-complex provides indispensable information about the food supply system of the Ayamaru people, but also on other aspects of their culture.

In the following Chapter, I shall deal with the feedback of the results presented thus far on two specific aspects of the Meybrat culture: the genesis of capitalistic tendencies, and cosmology.



1. Fishing with nylon nets and fish spears on Lake Ayamaru.



2. A Meybrat fisherman.

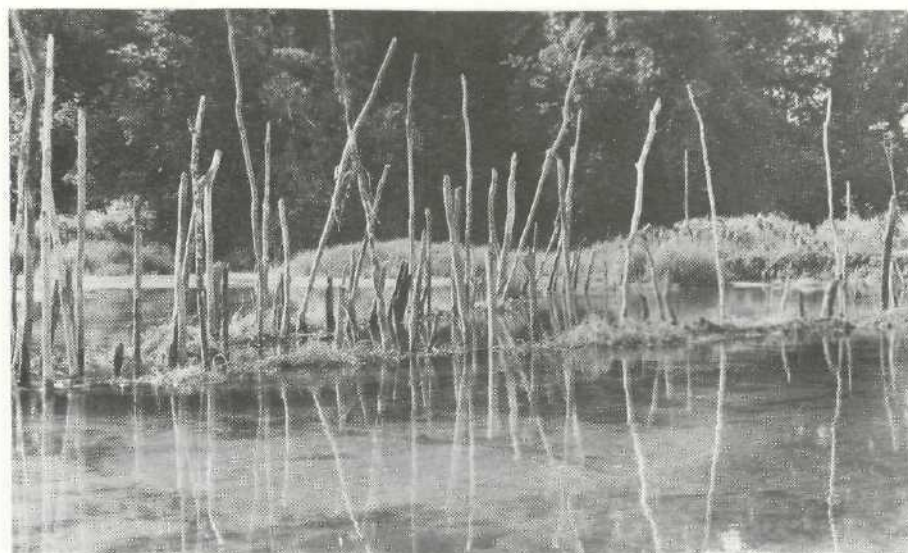




3. Uprights marking a fra-thouk (fish pit) with a fish trap, used as a fish well and store of grass and sea-weed.



4. A linearectal bach (fish weir) with uprights of a fra-thouk (fish pit) in the foreground.



5. A spear-shaped bach (fish dam).

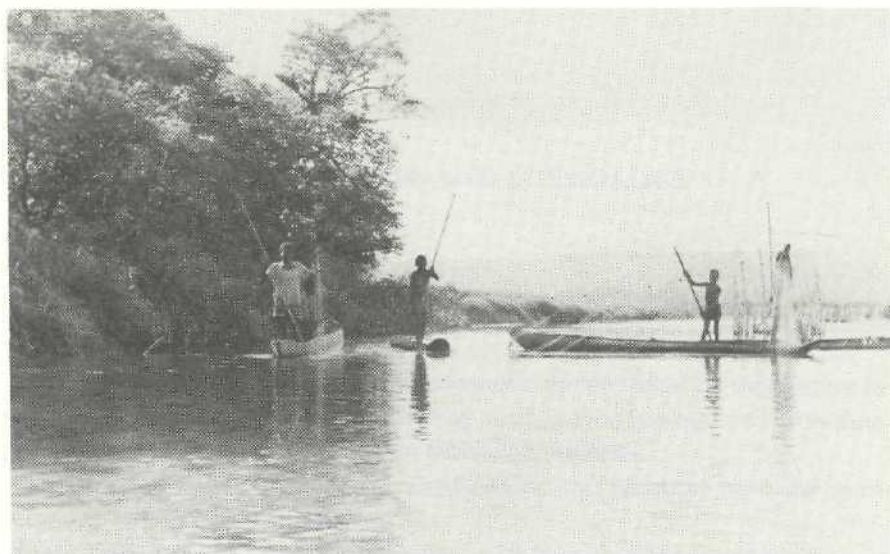


6. *The traditional dug-out canoe with paddle.*



7. *The modern double-pointed canoe.*





8. Fishing with nylon nets.



9. Women making fish traps.

## Chapter II

### PRE-CAPITALISM AND COSMOLOGY

#### 1. 'Capitalism'

The view that the Ayamaru kain timur-complex is the focus of this system in the whole Bird's Head area is sustained by authors who have gained long-time experience in the area.<sup>1</sup> It is based on the following facts:

- Compared to other tribes in the Bird's Head the Meybrat have the most elaborate classification of ikat-cloths.<sup>2</sup>
- In the Ayamaru area we are confronted with a so-called 'kain timur-capitalism', which is less outspoken in other areas.
- The kain timur were spread over the (western and central) Bird's Head from the south - and west (?) - coast<sup>3</sup>, from where trade-agents had exchange relations with *bobot* (local Big Men) in the Ayamaru region.
- Some of the above-mentioned trade-agents migrated to the Ayamaru area, where their descendents in the male line still use the title of 'raja' ('king': a title given by tradesmen from Onin - the Fakfak area - and the eastern Moluccas to their trade-agents along the south coast of the Bird's Head).
- The immigrants or immigrant-*bobot* are held responsible for the introduction of the 'rumah Wuon' (secret men's house) together with particular forms of death cult and initiation ritual, because kain timur as well as canoes - by means of which the kain timur reached the Bird's Head - play a dominant role in cults all over the western Bird's Head.<sup>4</sup>
- Some immigrant-*bobot* in Ayamaru trace their origin from the island of Salawati (which is also known for secret men's societies and cults in which canoes are important).<sup>5</sup>
- A special category of kain timur, the 'kain pusaka' (inherited, sacred cloth) are only to be found in the western and (part of) the central Bird's Head, whereas they are also known in the eastern Indonesian archipelago. These kain pusaka in turn have become an integral part of Meybrat ancestor worship and the local kain timur-system.

Given this information, in the present section I shall mainly be concerned with the genesis of capitalistic tendencies among the Meybrat, which tendency has thus far only been associated with the kain timur-complex. For that reason I will first give a short description of capitalistic aspects of the Meybrat kain ti-

mur-system, as it has been characterized by civil servants as well as ethnologists in the late 1950's.<sup>6</sup>

Restricted to the western Bird's Head and particularly the Ayamaru area the notation 'kain timur-capitalism' refers to the rise of class of rich men called *bobot* (local Big Men) as 'bankers' or 'financiers' in ikat-fabrics. The kain timur-capitalism concerned is mainly based on the use of two categories of ikat-cloths: the 'kain jalan' (wandering cloths), used as an intermediary in especially the exchange of women between kinship groups, and the 'kain pusaka' (inherited, sacred cloths), used as a medium to make contact with the ancestors. As the name 'kain jalan' already indicates, these fabrics are not hoarded but – like money – continually exchanged on the condition that they have to be paid back with interest: gifts of food, labour, or other ikat-cloths – not instantly including the original ones. The power and consequently the (relative) wealth of the *bobot* is directly based on their control of these kain jalan. In short, whilst the *bobot* in their position as Big Men can arrange conflicts and marriages, as 'bankers' and 'financiers' they can provide the cloths which are needed as a bride-price or be invited to settle a conflict, whereas as medicine-men or cult-leaders the *bobot* can increase their control over the kain jalan by delaying, or even buying off, their own obligations as debtors through ritual services. This breakdown of reciprocity (even among very close relatives) in the material sphere can be realized by the *bobot* through – amongst other means – the 'property' of the kain pusaka. Through their control of these cloths the *bobot* have in fact a monopoly in making contact with the most important ancestors. This is a very important means of asserting power, because in Meybrat life the ancestors (and the water demon MOS) have to be continually satisfied to avoid misfortune in life (like sickness, sudden death, drought or excessive rainfall).<sup>7</sup>

The point to be stressed here in this section about 'Capitalism' and Cosmology is that, whereas forms of kain timur-capitalism are found all over the Bird's Head – due to a former "warrior-capitalism" (Barnett 1959:1016) and the manipulation of common people, through charge of witchcraft and sorcery set in train by especially the local Big Men (see also Miedema 1981b:11) –, the outspoken form of kain timur-capitalism in the western Bird's Head can only be fully understood with reference to the use of kain jalan as well as kain pusaka. This means that two questions have to precede the one about the genesis of the kain timur-capitalism, as far as the western Bird's Head is concerned. Besides the general question – valid for the whole Bird's Head – why imported cloths have been accepted as an intermediate in the exchange of women between kinship groups, regarding especially the western Bird's Head another question has to be answered: why have foreign (imported) cloths been incorporated into the prevailing system of ancestor worship and why have they been accepted as a medium to contact the local ancestors?

The first question has already been dealt with in the existing literature as far

as the Ayamaru area is concerned. Because I recently wrote about the same problem with regard to the Kebar area in the eastern Bird's Head, in this study I will be mainly concerned with the second question stated above and confine myself to a short summarizing answer regarding the first one.

Due to my Kebar study there is more evidence now that in former times in the western as well as the eastern Bird's Head intra- and intertribal marriages were arranged through the exchange of (classificatory) sisters of the men involved. Because before the pacification (started in the first decennia of this century) these kinship groups used to be small, localized groups, the system to obtain a wife through sister-exchange was experienced as very rigid: a man who did not have a sister could not marry (Ayamaru: Galis 1956:26; Elmberg 1968:84; Kamma 1970:135; Kebar: Miedema 1984:139-40). Evidently even pigs or slaves were not enough to raise a bride-price system, though occasionally they may have been accepted in exchange for a sister who was married-off (Kamma 1970:136). Actually in the Kebar area female slaves often became wives due to lack of marriageable women, but this implied a severe restriction. Through marriages new exchange relations are established between the members of the kinship groups involved, but slaves are not supposed to have relatives (see Miedema 1984). As for pigs, in times of intra- and intertribal wars these were not easily transportable over long distances. But this was not the case with coastal articles of exchange like armlets made of shells or silver, guns, beads, axes, china-ware and... ikat fabrics. Among this coastal merchandise it is probable that originally the kain timur were scarce, as they were primarily imported by way of the south coast where the rajas of Onin, Arguni and Kokas, the great slave-traders of western Irian, bartered kain timur for slaves (Miedema 1984:254). Due to this scarcity they became highly esteemed in the interior of the Bird's Head as a means to increase social status. Through a continuous import during centuries up until World War II their amount increased. Together with other coastal articles they contributed to the emergence or institutionalization of a bride-price system, which became accepted all over the interior of the Bird's Head as a substitute for the rigid system of sister-exchange. In fact the kain timur became the most important 'harta maskawin' (bride-price goods). This can be illustrated by a remark of one of my Kebar informants: "In former times he who did not have a sister could not marry, nowadays he who does not have kain timur cannot marry".

Given this information, concerning the emergence of what has been called a 'kain timur-capitalism' the following development is important: whereas kain timur were first used to get a wife, subsequently women were used to get kain timur (Miedema 1981b:13-4; 1984:102). Women were often married-off only to men (or rather: kinship groups) who could provide many kain timur as a bride-price. Evidently this sometimes happened against the will of the women concerned, as a high rate of suicide among women in former generations was often ascribed by men as well as women to forced marriages arranged

by the Big Men. In fact, kain timur were no longer only accepted as bride-price goods, but also as payments for 'obat suangi' (medicines for black magic), pigs, people kidnapped by neighbouring tribes, or as a payment to arrange adultery or a murder – which in former times were answered by a (counter-) murder – or a 'ganti manusia' (a human being exchanged for a murdered person to settle an intra- or intertribal war). In other words, the kain timur acquired an economic value and it is especially this value – together with the increasing control of Big Men over the exchange-cloths – which gave rise to capitalistic tendencies in the whole Bird's Head.

However, as stated before, the kain timur-capitalism in the (western) Bird's Head cannot be fully understood without insight into the role of the kain pusaka. Therefore, in this study about the Meybrat I am especially concerned with the question: *why* have foreign, imported cloths been incorporated into the Meybrat ancestor worship? This question is especially relevant concerning the Ayamaru culture because a. prolific forms of ancestor worship together with the kain pusaka are only found in the *western* Bird's Head, and b. specific forms of ancestor worship as well as the kain pusaka are supposed to have been spread from the south coast all over the interior of the western Bird's Head via the Ayamaru-Meybrat area.

As far as I know the afore-mentioned question has not been dealt with before, at least not systematically. True, Elmberg states that certain forms of ancestor worship and probably also the kain pusaka may have been introduced by immigrant-*bobot* from the south coast. But this only explains the way in which both have reached the Ayamaru area, not *why* they have been accepted by the Meybrat (the role of the immigrant-*bobot* in Meybrat ancestor worship will be dealt with later on). Further Elmberg correctly states that profane cloths were sacralized after having circulated for some generations, but this does not explain why kain pusaka are not found in the *eastern* Bird's Head.<sup>8</sup> In my opinion the forementioned question(s) can only be answered, not by considering the 'origin' or 'life histories' of the cloths, but by considering the *setting* in which they ended up: the (Meybrat) system of ancestor worship.

However, a hard methodological problem thus far was that the kain pusaka had already become an integral part of the Meybrat ancestor worship by the time this was studied for the first time. Because of this problem the data of Meybrat fishery are significant. They confront us with evidently original forms of ancestor worship which show us that traditionally the relation between the living and the dead is realized through the only thing left by the ancestors which does not disappear: land, for Ayamaru including fishing grounds. The point to be stressed here, however, is that land and fishing waters are only left to the descendents of the first inhabitants of the area – the latter being regarded as the most important ancestors. This means that as they are obtained through *inheritance* land and fishing waters are regarded as *pusaka*. In other words, pusaka did already play a crucial role in ancestor worship in the western

Bird's Head before the arrival or emergence of the *kain* pusaka. Therefore the latter have to be seen as simply a new variant of an already existing complex.

It is through the pusaka that the ancestors still expose their power and will upon the living, and because of this the pusaka are regarded as having a sacred power. A power which on the one hand has to be dealt with very cautiously to avoid misfortune in life, but which on the other hand can be used by the local land-owners to restore imbalance in the profane sphere. We have seen that discontinuity in climatological conditions, and consequently in fishery, are ascribed to 'dissatisfaction' on the part of the ancestor spirits – or the water demon MOS. In the Ayamaru lakes area these ancestor spirits are supposed to live as common fishes in the 'spirit-waters' (the places which they owned as the first inhabitants of the area), where they are guided by the water demon MOS represented in the big *tagu*-fish. Bad luck in fishery is attributed to the ancestor spirits, whilst MOS is held responsible for extreme ecological circumstances: excessive rainfall or drought. However, the spirits or MOS are not only addressed in times of misfortune. To provide a moderate rainfall, at regular intervals, spirits have to be continually satisfied: secret words are used in fishery, offerings of palm-wine are made to make the fish willing to be caught, taboos are observed, on new fish-traps and canoes spells are cast, and so on. In other words, a continuous cooperation with the ancestors and MOS, or, as the case may be, a dynamic balance in the cosmic, sacred sphere is a necessary condition for providing continuous balance in the profane sphere, and vice versa: a stagnation in the profane sphere can arouse the anger of the ancestor spirits and MOS. The same pattern in Meybrat cosmology is reported by Elmberg in his thesis "Balance and Circulation" (Elmberg 1968), in which he, however, is mainly concerned with the *kain timur*-complex. Here we also find the idea that a stagnation in the exchange of – profane – cloths has to be avoided. The *kain jalan* have "to fly like birds" (Schoorl 1979:208), whilst the *kain pusaka* also have to be treated in a special way. Exposing these cloths in daylight or pronouncing their names without an 'upacara adat' (traditional ceremony) brings the dynamic balance in the profane sphere (the regular exchange of *kain jalan*) in danger. When this happens one has to address the ancestor spirits and MOS in a ritual in which characteristically the *kain timur*-complex and the fishery-complex coincide. At the spirit-waters the big *tagu*-fish MOS followed by the common fishes, the ancestors, are invited to come to the pile-house: "come quickly and collect my cloths" (see Chapter I, section 7; my italics). Due to their sacred power *kain pusaka* are supposed to attract profane cloths (Pouwer 1957:306), whereas Kamma reports on the use of heirlooms: "...one lays them besides a sick person, one waves them to and fro during a raid in order to terrify the enemy, one uses them to exorcise madmen, and one covers the dead with them during a mourning period" (Kamma 1970:137; see also note 7).

Thus, placed within the total complex of ancestor worship and cosmology,

the *pusaka* – originally only inherited land or fishing grounds – form the intermediate between the sacred and the profane. It is in this context that imported cloths as heirlooms could emerge as a new intermediate between the living and the dead.

Given the forementioned conclusion now the following question becomes important: why did a need emerge for a new intermediate to cope with the ancestors in addition to the already existing one – the sacred, inherited lands and fishing grounds? Looking again at the data on Meybrat fishery we have to realize that in the Ayamaru area traditionally two categories of the present-day population are excluded from the ownership of the lands and fishing grounds: the 'orang darat' (people from the interior around lake Ayamaru who in the course of time moved to the lakes area), and the 'orang pantai' (people from the coast: the afore-said immigrant-*bobot* or their descendents). With regard to the former category, the 'orang darat', it is quite possible that – assuming the validity of the identification of the sacred *pusaka* with inheritance – moving away from their own lands they felt the need for a more flexible *pusaka* than land in order to keep in contact with their ancestors. In this situation cloths, after having been exchanged among their people for some generations, may have been withdrawn from the exchange circuits. Because they had been in the hands of their ancestors they had acquired a sacred value to keep in contact with those ancestors and a sacred power to cope with new circumstances of life. This would mean that whilst the profane cloths had become a more flexible means to establish (marriage-)relations with the kinship groups, the *kain pusaka* became a more flexible means to establish relations with the ancestors. This explanation would imply that the emergence of the phenomenon 'kain *pusaka*' should be regarded as an indigenous development in the western Bird's Head.

However, another – or additional (?) – explanation may be that the *kain pusaka* were simply introduced by people who were already familiar with this phenomenon: the immigrant-*bobot* from the south coast. Having migrated to the Ayamaru area some five generations ago, according to Elmberg (1968:201-6), and tracing their origin from the East Indonesian archipelago – Salawati, where *kain pusaka* are also known –, Kamma reports that these immigrant-*bobot* told him that their forefathers had already practised "the Kain Timur ritual" for eighteen generations (Kamma 1970:136). It seems that these immigrant-*bobot* had to give heirlooms to the Ayamaru land-owners to get the right to stay in the area and to use the local land for gardening (Elmberg 1966:145). This would mean that the *kain pusaka* may indeed have been introduced in the interior of the western Bird's Head by the former trade-agents or *raja* from the south – and west (?) – coast.

Whether or not the phenomenon of the *kain pusaka* in the western Bird's Head has to be seen as the result of an indigenous development, evidently they became a welcome means of power in the hands of the immigrant-*bobot* who

started to compete with the local Big Men for the control of the exchange cloths, the *kain jalan*. This development is very important as it was especially the competition between the local Big Men and the immigrant-*bobot* that gave rise to the prolific form of *kain timur*-capitalism in the Ayamaru region. According to Elmberg these immigrant-*bobot*, once they were settled in the Ayamaru area, did not follow the local forms of reciprocity and leadership – which used to be marked by “balanced interactions of the pace-maker and his equals”, or “alternating roles of host and guest” (Elmberg 1968:197, 206). Within the context of fishery we have seen that a continual, dynamic balance in the sacred sphere is a necessary condition for a continual balance in the profane sphere. However, the realization of the former used to be the monopoly of the ‘owners’ of the traditional *pusaka*: the local land-owners. As descendents of the first inhabitants of the area they used to control the traditional intermediate between the living and the dead. Now, given the present-day information about ancestor worship among the Meybrat population it is clear that the immigrant-*bobot* managed to break this monopoly. Evidently the immigrant-*bobot* could obtain a powerful position in Meybrat culture through the introduction of new initiation and death cults, as they are regarded as “belonging to one of the *non-traditional* initiating societies Uon and Toch-mi, both of which had maintained a connection with medicine men and axe-men<sup>9</sup> of coastal villages” (Elmberg 1968:204; my italics). Referring to Held (1951) Elmberg ascribes these innovations to the “willingness [of Papuans] to incorporate new phenomena in traditional categories” (Elmberg 1968:204). I think this was not only a matter of ‘willingness’. Inland people were dependent on coastal trade-agents – who characteristically saw themselves as “fathers” – to get the highly esteemed coastal articles of exchange like axes or *kain timur*. As member of the initiation societies Toch-mi and Uon these coastal “fathers” became the experts “called upon when conditions (and relationships, JM) were seriously upset” (Elmberg 1968:214). The power of these experts can be illustrated by the observation that “members of the Uon society boasted that they know the secret of how to stop MOS” (Elmberg 1968:224). How they actually use their power is still a matter of speculation, because by definition we do not know much about the secret men’s societies in the Bird’s Head. But evidently the *kain pusaka* play an important role, as the “possession” of these cloths is seen as a necessary condition to become a *bobot* – both as a “banker” in profane cloths and as an “expert” to handle upset relations and conditions as we have seen before (Kamma 1970:137; Chapter II, note 7). The obviously dominant position of the *bobot* of the immigrant stock among the Meybrat as indicated above can also be illustrated with Elmberg’s observation that in the village of Ayamaru (former Mefchatiam) six of the seven men who were called *bobot* had a myth which related them to immigrants, whilst only one original land-owner was called “*bobot-telaga*” (Elmberg 1968:202; ‘telaga’ = lake).

Both the immigrant-*bobot* and the *bobot-telaga* tried to increase their con-



trol over the kain jalan in times when the imported kain timur became increasingly important as an intermediate in the exchange of women between kinship groups. However, the immigrant-*bobot* did not follow the local tradition in reciprocity. It is especially this category of big men which became known as "cloth-grabbers" or "*bobot-pencuri*" ('pencuri' = thief; Pouwer 1957:306; Elmberg 1966:33; Kamma 1970:134). This nickname points to a breakdown of traditional local principles of reciprocity in exchange relations. But this new attitude was not only restricted to the role of the *bobot* as 'bankers' or 'financiers', it was in particular extended to their role as cult-leaders. Introducing new cults the immigrant-*bobot* did not use the pusaka as a means to provide a continual parallel balance between the sacred and the profane for the welfare of the whole community: they started to counterbalance discontinuity in the profane sphere – often created by themselves – with ritual services in the first place to serve their own interests. Traditional initiation and death ceremonies were (partly) reformed into so-called "bobot-feasts", in which the exchange of profane cloths became a dominant element (Elmberg 1966). Competing over the control of the exchange-cloths in pre-pacification times the Big Men had visible as well as invisible weapons at their disposal. Obviously before the pacification that began at the beginning of this century (as far as the south coast is concerned) the use of visible weapons dominated the use of the invisible ones, as initially the *bobot* were also called 'kepala perang' (war-leaders).<sup>10</sup> Barnett even speaks of a 'warrior-capitalism' (Barnett 1959:1016). It is also Barnett who first pointed to the development that after the pacification the competition between the Big Men was continued with the invisible weapons: warrior-capitalism became kain timur-capitalism. Next to the traditional invisible weapon (manipulation of people through charges of witchcraft and sorcery) the possession of kain pusaka became more important as a necessary condition to maintain a position of power. Consequently the post-pacification period can be characterized as a period of 'war' over the control of kain pusaka. It is also a period in which common people became increasingly dependent on the *bobot* to acquire kain jalan, as the latter became scarce. In this development the *bobot* themselves partly had a hand. Many old kain jalan were 'transformed' into kain pusaka when the colonial government initiated burnings of the exchange-cloths, whereas heirlooms were only marked and given back to their owners (Barnett 1959:1017).<sup>11</sup> This is a clear indication of how important the heirlooms were for the Meybrat. Besides, after World War II the import of kain timur to the Bird's Head had come to an end. A result of these developments was that the competition among the *bobot* was increasingly focused on the control of kain jalan as well as the kain pusaka. An interesting feature in this process is that the *bobot*'s own interests in the kain timur-business came to dominate the interests of people dependent on the *bobot*, including their own relatives. Concerning especially the non-relatives we have seen that in the course of time women were married-out against their will by the *bobot* to ac-

quire the control over more profane cloths, whereas men were charged with murder in order to get kain pusaka (characteristically enough the new payment to settle a murder instead of via the traditional institute of the 'ganti manusia', mentioned before). However, after the pacification we are also confronted with the new element in the competition between the *bobot*, that they started to make claims at the expense of even close relatives: the privatization of pusaka. Whilst the data on fishery show that in former times pusaka were regarded as the joint property of the kinship groups involved, nowadays they are claimed by the *bobot* as their own private property.

The afore-mentioned analyses have been based on data on Meybrat fishery, gathered in the late 1970's by myself, and data on the kain timur-complex, gathered in the 1950's by Elmberg and others. So I brought two time horizons together. This operation may seem to be incorrect, as in the 1950's Elmberg, Pouwer and Kamma have stated that the kain timur-complex was on the decline. Or at least the power of the *bobot* was supposed to have been broken, due to processes of pacification (Elmberg 1966; Pouwer 1957:316-7; Kamma 1970:141). However, in view of evidence of recent studies about neighbouring tribes it can be stated that the kain timur-complex is still very much alive in the whole Bird's Head (Schoorl 1979; Miedema 1984). Nevertheless, as far as the Ayamaru kain timur-system is concerned, my impression was that this system in its present stage marks the 'end' of a development. A development which may be described as a process of involution. The competition between the *bobot* resulted in increasing privatization of the pusaka at the expense of the community as a whole. This seems to lead to repercussions, which tend to undermine the position of the *bobot*. I often attended quarrels between the *bobot* themselves as well as between this group of powerful elders and representatives of younger generations about the ownership of the 'private' (fishing) grounds and kain pusaka. Young people still regard both as the joint property of the kinship groups involved. In this context it has also to be mentioned that many young Meybrat men have migrated to coastal areas since the 1950's. Having found a job they often want to pay money as a bride-price, in order to become less dependent on the *bobot*. A tendency in the whole Bird's Head is that, when available, money may be asked for and presented as part of a bride-price. Besides, some young men follow courses at secondary schools on the coast, or even at the University and the Theological High School at Jayapura (former Hollandia), after which they stay in the coastal areas permanently, having found a job or a coastal wife. A matter of great concern to the *bobot* of Kambuaya, raja Abraham Kambuaya (the same person who was interviewed by Elmberg and Pouwer in the 1950's) was that his eldest son – a graduate from the University of Jayapura – is no longer interested in his father's kain timur-business. When I visited the area in the late 1970's elders often complained about a scarcity of marriageable men for their daughters.

Another matter is the Christianization of the Ayamaru people, including the *bobot*. At present they are no longer reluctant to have their kain pusaka photographed in full sunlight or with flash-light, or to mention the names of the sacred cloths without an 'upacara-adat' (traditional ceremony, see note 2). According to themselves this was unthinkable some twenty-five years ago. This change in attitude with regard to the kain pusaka points to an "Entzauberung" or de-mythologization of traditional objects of belief, as has been observed among the Kebar in the eastern Bird's Head (Miedema 1984:227).

But whatever the consequences of recent developments in Meybrat culture, the power of the *bobot* will not decrease much as long as they can still manipulate people with other invisible weapons through a common belief in 'suangi' (witchcraft and sorcery), and as long as young people remain dependent on the *bobot* for acquiring enough kain jalan to pay a bride-price or to settle conflicts, the strategy of which is often in the hands of the *bobot*.

Whereas the privately owned kain pusaka seem to become less important, this is not the case with the privately owned land and fishing grounds. Claims on both tend to become stronger not only due to competition between the *bobot* as still the most powerful representatives of their kinship groups, but also due to rumours about transmigration projects initiated by the Indonesian government. After the inheritary fishing grounds (and lands) proved their sacred value, now their economic value seems to become more important.

It will be evident that more research, in the field as well as concerning historical sources, will have to be done to give support to the presented analyses with more adequate empirical evidence. In future research the position of women – often accused of witchcraft, possible as potential heirs of lands and fishing grounds – will have to be given more attention. But probably the main key to many still obscure problems can only be found in the secret men's societies. However, because these societies are hardly accessible, an alternative approach is to continue investigations on Meybrat fishery, because it is in this field that the sacred and the profane come together in a still insufficiently explored way.

## 2. Mythology

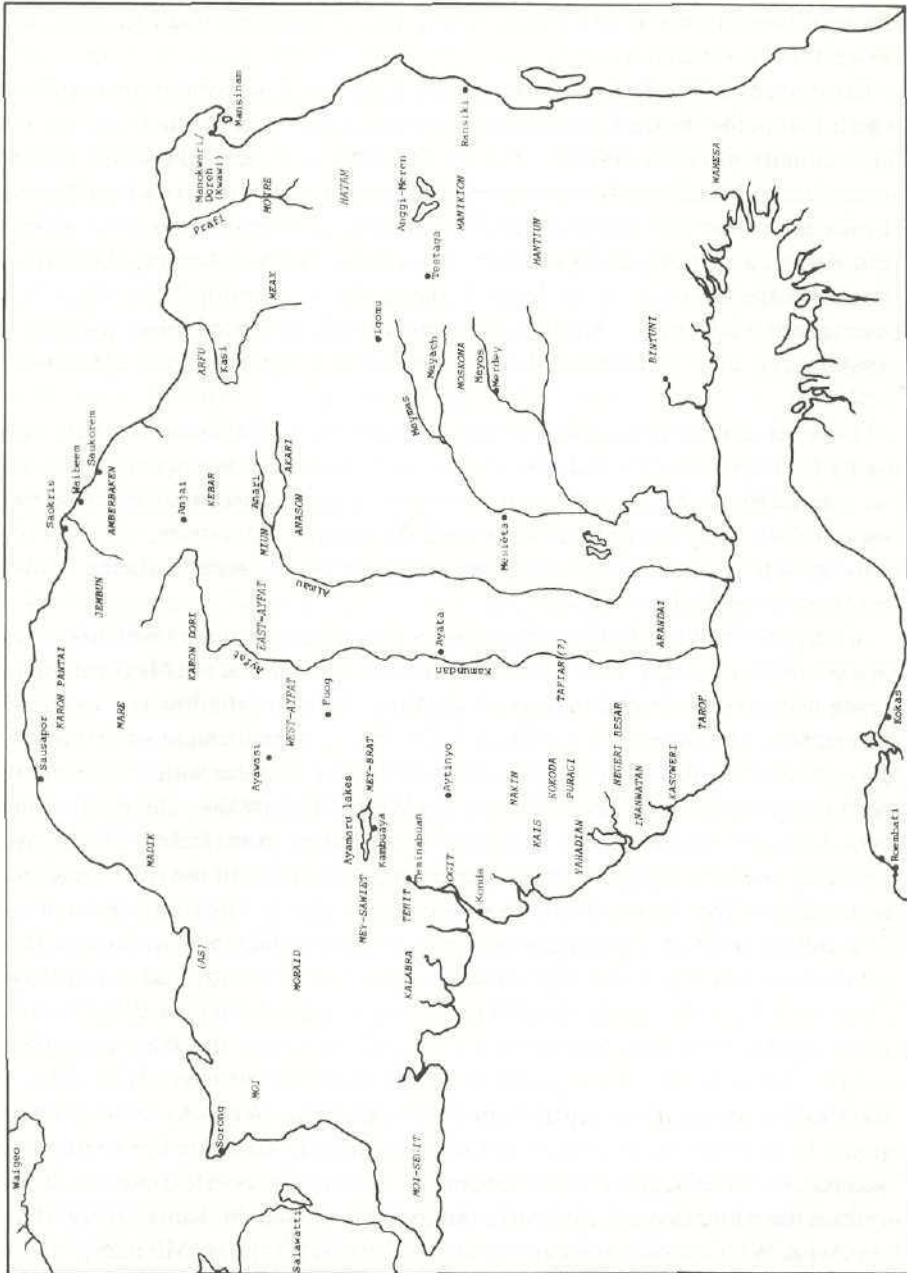
The relevance of further research on Meybrat fishery can also be stressed by pointing to another field of research. The study of fisheries not only provides new data on the Meybrat ancestor worship and cosmology, but also (new) evidence of structural similarities between myths from the western and eastern Bird's Head. In the present study I cannot deal with this topic in its full extent. First an overview and analysis has to be made of all the prevailing myths from the Bird's Head, published by ethnologists, civil servants, missionaries and probably also by students from the University of Jayapura. Besides, during my five-year stay in the Bird's Head I gathered several myths in different areas,

which material has not been published yet. The same applies to myths noted by J.M. Schoorl in the western Ayfat area. Given this stage of research about the mythology of the Bird's Head, here I have to restrict myself to just a few observations and analyses.

In my study of the Kebar, who live at the northeast side of the river Ayfat – which forms the 'border' between the western and eastern Bird's Head –, I have already referred to similarities between the so-called Jubewi and Junon stories and the western Ayfat Siwa and Mafif stories. These Jubewi and Junon stories are called the 'ceritera Anari' (Anari stories – called after the Kebar clan Anari, which originates from the vicinity of the river Aimau, which runs parallel to the river Ayfat; see Map 2). In that study genealogical evidence has been given that these 'Anari'-people previously migrated from (Anason) areas in the central eastern Bird's Head to the Kebar region (Miedema 1984:124).

However, the present study provides new evidence that similarities between myths from the western and eastern Ayfat-Aimau areas are not restricted to the *central* Bird's Head, nor to the trickster stories concerned. Because the comparative study of myths goes beyond the scope of this study, I wish to restrict myself to some preliminary observations on a common theme in the myths concerned: the water demon.

A study on fisheries implies the study of man in direct contact with his natural environment – here water. Evidence has been given that the Meybrat experience disturbances in the dynamic balance of seasonal rhythm as – to quote Van Baal – "intentional" (Van Baal 1981:156). Severe drought or extremely heavy rainfall is attributed to the ancestors or MOS. It is this water demon that leads me to similarities between East- en West-Ayfat myths. The myths concerned are a. (versions of) the Ajoï-Arix myths from Kebar (Miedema 1984:165, 166); b. the myths about the coming into being of the river Ibiach at the border of West-Ayfat/East-Ayamaru (presented in this study and henceforth called the West-Ayfat/East-Ayamaru version); and c. the myth about the coming into being of Lake Ayamaru (presented in this study and in Elmberg 1968) as well as other myths from West-Ayamaru (Elmberg 1968:253, 256, respectively M2 and M6), which henceforth will be called the West-Ayamaru versions. Here we are dealing with myths from the *northeastern* Bird's Head (East-Kebar) as far as the *central western* Bird's Head (West-Ayamaru). They appear to be versions of a common theme regarding – to quote Lévi-Strauss – "sequences and schemata" (Lévi-Strauss 1967:17). The central figure in these myths is the water demon (Ayamaru: MOS; Karon: AMOS; Kebar-Amberbaken-Arfu: WUOB; Meax-Akari-Anason-Miun: MERÈN or MERIN). In all the versions of the myths concerned it is a water demon who punishes mankind with a deluge. This happens after MOS-WUOB has been angered. In many cases this occurs after 'children' – who do not yet know the adat rules – have broken a taboo. As far as the Kebar region is concerned this taboo concerns a



Map 2. Language groups (in italics) in the Bird's Head of West New Guinea.

'tikus' (rat); snake; or a pig; in the West-Ayfat/East-Ayamuru version we met a lizard; and in the West-Ayamuru versions a (black) rat; a small ground kangaroo (wallaby) and probably also a 'kuskus pohon' (tree cuscus) or a certain kind of fish (the beginning of the myth concerned is not clear about which taboo has been broken – see Elmberg 1968:253). All these animals have something in common in that they belong to a category of animals, described in anthropological studies as "anomalous" (Douglas 1975). In three versions these animals are first caught by children, after which the former are slaughtered or teased with categories of 'food' or vegetables, which in turn have something in common in that they are *red*: 'rica' (red pepper); the red stalk of a sugar cane; a 'buah merah' (the red pandanus fruit).

Further it is of interest that in the West-Ayamuru versions the 'rat' is described as 'black'. This animal is regarded in Kebar as the 'child' of the evil and female counterpart of WUOB – called WABITON, whilst both WUOB and WABITON belong to the category *wandiek* (dirty, black, full of 'sin') as opposed to the category *mafun* (white, clean, without 'sin' – in local tradition). In Kebar cosmology both categories make part of a coherent system of complementary oppositions. Against that background it is hardly accidental that, whilst in the Kebar myths the water demon is confronted with 'yellow' leaves (in Kebar synonymous with 'white'), in the Ayamaru versions MOS, the 'black rat', is dug out with a branch of a tree with 'white' leaves.

Oppositions in sequences of events seem to be precluded by the confrontation of anomalous animals, or MOS-WUOB, with 'food' of the category 'red'. In addition to the evidence summarized above, we see that in the Kebar versions the water demon (the deluge) is stopped by a 'snake'-woman delivering a child (WUOB is said to be afraid of blood), whilst in a West-Ayamuru version the water falls after an 'opossum'-woman has recently given birth to a child (whereupon "dirt from the drying wood" – probably 'blood' – fell into the water, followed by the disappearance of MOS).

Other similarities in sequences of events are equally noteworthy. Due to the deluge the 'first people' are drawn or immobilized (Lot's wife has a counterpart in the Kebar mythology – see Leach and Aycock 1983:113). Only a few people who are very close relatives survive. Their incestuous relation results in the birth of sons and daughters, who are regarded as the first ancestors.

Within the scope of this study I have only been able to hint at some of the similarities between myths from west and east of the Ayfat river. Further investigations on the Meybrat fishery-complex will be rewarding. They can provide more information on the water demon, who is a recurrent character in myths from the interior of the central Bird's Head. Research of this kind is also vital in order to find out which versions of a common theme are strongest and how the various themes (water demons, culture heroes, trickster beings) are related to each other. Of course such a wide topic can only be fully dealt with when studied in its broadest cultural context, with historical dimensions in-

volved. At the present time our picture of the mythology and cosmology of the Bird's Head is too fragmentary. This cannot only be blamed on the limited amount of investigations which have been made thus far. It also has everything to do with the turbulent history of slave-trade and migrations of the "tribes" of the Bird's Head. This side of the cultural context of myth and cosmology becomes relevant when the interest is focused on the relation between the mythological/cosmological order and the social order. My Kebar studies suggest that the latter is more easily influenced by "external" influences than the former. As far as the Bird's Head is concerned, within one cultural area – seen from a mythological point of view – we are often confronted with an amazing variety of social systems which cannot be reduced to one order. Probably this variety reflects structural changes in that order. This implies that, when compared, the cosmic order of a culture – as supposed to be reflected in myth – cannot simply be regarded as a reflection of "the" social order of that culture, and vice versa. Nevertheless the study of structural similarities (and differences) between myths is important, as with regard to the Kebar in the eastern Bird's Head it has been shown that culture change is a process of selective adaptation to new elements, in which traditional thinking patterns still operate as an important "filter-mechanism".

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

- <sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Professor Dr. J. van Baal and Dr. J.M. Schoorl for critical comments on earlier versions of this study; to Mrs. S. van Gelder-Ottway M.Sc. for her corrections of the final text; and to Professor Dr. A.H.J. Prins for drawing my attention to the importance of fishery in pre-literate societies.
- <sup>2</sup> 'Kain timur' ('kain' = cloth; 'timur' = east): ikat-fabrics which as merchandise were intended for the east Indonesian Archipelago, from where they were imported into the Bird's Head for centuries up until World War II. In the interior of the Bird's Head these cloths became highly esteemed as an intermediate in the exchange of women between kinship groups.
- <sup>3</sup> The term 'complex' refers to the very elaborate form of ceremonial exchange (of kain timur) particularly in the Meybrat-Ayamaru area (see also Chapter II, section 1).

### CHAPTER I

- <sup>1</sup> Another version of this myth has been recorded by Elmberg 1968:257, M6.
- <sup>2</sup> Reeskamp's 'survey' lasted one day, whereas Boeseman's information is also based on a very short visit to the Ayamaru area.
- <sup>3</sup> In Bahasa Indonesia 'ikan puri' is the name of a small white fish, which is often used as bait to catch tunny-fish.
- <sup>4</sup> Describing a ceremony in the "bobot feast cycle" Elmberg reports that on one occasion 88 names of water courses, rapids and sources were mentioned (Elmberg 1966:29).
- <sup>5</sup> In 1957 Pouwer reports: "Op de tuin- en visgronden rusten sterk individuele rechten die angstvallig worden bewaakt" (There are strictly individual rights to the garden-areas and fishing-grounds, and these rights are guarded scrupulously).
- <sup>6</sup> A specimen of this adze is pictured in Elmberg 1955:15.

### CHAPTER II

- <sup>1</sup> I had discussions about this matter with F.C. Kamma and J.M. Schoorl, who both spent several years in the Bird's Head. Schoorl did research among the northeastern neighbours of the Meybrat: the - western - Ayfat people (Schoorl 1979), whereas Kamma spent a great deal of his life in 'Netherlands New Guinea' during which he did research i.a. among the Moi people, north-west of Ayamaru. However, most of his fieldnotes were lost during Japanese imprisonment in World War II. Regarding the issue concerned see also Van Rhijn 1960:2.
- <sup>2</sup> Kamma 1970:137. However, as far as I know Kamma never published the names of the 12 classes and 550(!) species he noted in a meeting with seven elders. Because the names were recorded in the 1950's it is quite possible that Kamma has been misled like Elmberg was. When in 1978 I showed the raja of Kambuaya (the same person who was interviewed by Elmberg, Pouwer - and Kamma?) Elmberg's dissertation with pictures of kain timur, and mentioned the names noted by Elmberg, the raja told me that many names of kain pusaka were false. "In that time we did not dare to show the kain pusaka in daylight, nor to expose them to flashlight to



have them photographed. We often showed ordinary cloths and because he (Elmberg) did not stop asking about the names of the kain pusaka we became embarrassed and annoyed and gave false names to get rid of him. It was not allowed those days to pronounce the names of the sacred cloths, nor to expose them to daylight without an 'upacara adat' (adat feast).<sup>3</sup> So it is not very likely that in ordinary interviews investigators in the 1950's got correct information about (names of) at least the kain pusaka and, thereby, about a considerable amount of cloths in the area.

<sup>3</sup> Contrary to Elmberg I came to the conclusion that the kain timur reached the Bird's Head mainly via the south coast and not also via the north coast (Miedema 1984:78).

<sup>4</sup> Information obtained from Kamma as well as personal informants in the Meybrat area; see also Elmberg 1966:45, 49; 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Personal information from Kamma and 'raja' Solossa from Ayamaru. See also Kamma 1970:134-5; Elmberg 1955:43; 1968:132, 204.

<sup>6</sup> The description of the Meybrat kain timur-complex is based on reports and publications of Elmberg (1955, 1959, 1966 and 1968), Barnett (1954 – published in 1959), Galis (1956), Pouwer (1957) and Kamma (1970). A few months before I finished this study there appeared another one about the kain timur-complex, in which a clear analysis is presented about one of the topics dealt with in this study: the relation between the sacred and the profane (Haenen 1984). Yet I did not refer to this study because some of its main interpretations have to be reconsidered first in the light of new data from the Bird's Head – a matter which goes beyond the scope of this ethnographic essay.

<sup>7</sup> Kamma reports about the *bobor*: "...they are able to accumulate prestige and wealth through their exchange partners and by means of the rituals of the secret men's societies" (Kamma 1970:140; see also Elmberg 1968:117). Barnett has described the kain pusaka as "...ancient and sacred pieces transmitted from a man to his heirs, usually his sons. They were identified with the ancestral spirits of the family and were conceived to have supernatural power. They were kept away from the direct light of day, wrapped in moldy parcels the opening of which was an awesome ritual that gave health and success to their guardians. Their protective power, through associations with the dead, safeguarded the spiritual well-being of the family and clan." (Barnett 1959:1014). About both the *bobor* and the kain pusaka among the neighbouring Ayfat people see also Schoorl 1979.

<sup>8</sup> The Karon in West-Kebar told me about their heirlooms that only very old cloths can become a Wan (sacred heirloom), provided that they had many 'Kisar'-like weaving-patterns (see Miedema 1984:87, 92 and 280).

<sup>9</sup> "The term for one of the Uon leaders classed him as an 'axe-man', which term in some Mejprat myths was used for a *coastal agent* supplying axes to the inlanders, and expecting a sort of *dependency* from his customers. Allegedly (some?) Toch-mi leaders were trained down at the coast." (Elmberg 1966:139, my italics.)

<sup>10</sup> Also from other parts of the Bird's Head I got evidence that many Big Man – even a son of a 'slave' – started his career as a war leader (Miedema 1984:106-7, 194-6).

<sup>11</sup> This sufficiently explains why in the 1950's it was observed that the Ayamaru people differentiated many more categories of sacred cloths than profane ones (Pouwer 1957:305). Pouwer sees this as an indication that the use of kain timur as profane cloth is a secondary development, obviously considering the ethnographic present in the 1950's as the reflection of a situation in the past. However, given the wide distribution of kain timur all over the Bird's Head it is more likely that these cloths (which for centuries were obtained by the Big Men in the interior from coastal agents in exchange for slaves and – later – birds of paradise), were primarily used as kain jalan in the inter- and intratribal exchange relations. So, if not obtained as pusaka together with profane cloths, evidently the emergence of *kain pusaka* has to be considered as a secondary development.

## REFERENCES

- Baal, J. van  
1981 *Man's quest for partnership*. Assen: Van Gorcum.
- Barnett, H.G.  
1959 'Peace and progress in New Guinea', *American Anthropologist* 61: 1013-9.
- Boeseman, M.  
1959 'De vissen uit het zoete water van Nederlands-Nieuw-Guinea', *Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea* 7-5: 10-5.
- Douglas, M.  
1975 *Implicit meanings; Essays in anthropology*. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Elmberg, J.-E.  
1955 'Field notes on the Mejbrat people in the Ajamaroe district of the Bird's Head (Vogelkop), Western New Guinea', *Ethnos* 20-1: 2-102.  
1959 'Further notes on the Northern Mejbrats (Vogelkop), Western New Guinea', *Ethnos* 25: 70-80.  
1966 The popot feast cycle. *Ethnos* Vol. 30, Supplement.  
1968 Balance and circulation; Aspects of tradition and change among the Mejbrat of Irian Barat. Stockholm: The Ethnographical Museum. [Monograph Series, Publication No. 12.]
- Galis, K.W.  
1956 Nota nopens het Ajamaroe-gebied. Hollandia: Gouvernement van Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea. [Kantoor voor bevolkingszaken, no. 66.] [Mimeographed.]
- Haenen, P.  
1984 'Eis veel en snel, maar geef weinig en traag: Ceremoniële doekenruil in de Vogelkop van Irian Jaya', in: T. Lemaire (ed.), *Antropologie en ideologie*, pp. 203-33. Groningen: Konstapel.
- Held, G.I.  
1951 *De Papoea: cultuurimprovisator*. 's-Gravenhage/Bandoeng: Van Hoeve.
- Kamma, F.C.  
1970 'A spontaneous "capitalistic" revolution in the Western Vogelkop area of West Irian', in: *Anniversary Contributions to Anthropology* (40th WBO), pp. 132-42. Leiden: Brill.
- Leach, E. and D.A. Aycock  
1983 *Structuralist interpretations of biblical myth*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Lévi-Strauss, Cl.  
1958 'La geste d'Asdiwal', in: *Annuaire, Ecole pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses*, pp. 3-43. Paris [English version:  
1967 'The story of Asdiwal', in: E. Leach (ed.), *The structural study of myth and totemism*, pp. 1-47. London: Tavistock Publications.]
- Miedema, J.  
1973 *Vissen de Lappen achter het net? Een onderzoek naar het visrecht van de Lappen in Zweden*. Groningen: Instituut voor Culturele Antropologie. [Monograph; summary in Swedish.]

- 1975 'A trend of equalizing differences between Lapps and Swedes, illustrated by their fishing-rights and fishing-tackle', in: Netherlands-Swedish Symposium on Developments in Scandinavian Arctic Culture, pp. 46-58. Groningen: Arctic Centre.
- 1981a Huwelijk, verwantschap en verwantschapsterminologie bij de Kebar in sociaal-historisch perspectief. Lecture Netherlands Society for Oceanic Studies, Amsterdam, mei 1981. [Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.]
- 1981b Staatsvorming en habitus in een tribale samenleving: De Kebar op 'Nieuw-Guinea'. Paper congres NSAV 'Civilisatieprocessen en theorieën, Amsterdam, december 1981. [Rijksuniversiteit Groningen.]
- 1984 De Kebar 1855-1980; Sociale structuur en religie in de Vogelkop van West-Nieuw-Guinea. Dordrecht: Foris. [KITLV Verhandelingen 105.]
- Munro, I.S.R.  
1967 The fishes of New Guinea. Port Moresby: NN.
- Pouwer, J.  
1957 'Het vraagstuk van de kain timoer in het Mejbratgebied (Ajamaroe-meren)', Nieuw Guinea Studiën 1-4:295-319.
- Reeskamp, G.A.  
1959 'Verslag van het tournee naar Ajamaroe, Negeri Besar en Sorong', Mededelingen van de Dienst van Gezondheidszorg in Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea 6-4:13-9.
- Reynders, J.J.  
1961 'Volksverhalen uit het Ajamaroese', Nederlands Nieuw-Guinea 6:18-20.
- Rhijn, M. van  
1960 Initiatierituelen in de Vogelkop. Hollandia. [Stenciled.]
- Sahlins, M.D.  
1965 'On the sociology of primitive exchange', in: M. Banton (ed.), The relevance of models for social anthropology, pp. 139-236. London: Tavistock.
- Schoorl, J.M.  
1979 Mensen van de Ayfat: Ceremoniële ruil en sociale orde in Irian Jaya. Nijmegen: Katholieke Universiteit. [Dissertation; summary in English and Bahasa Indonesia].
- Schuster and Rustani Djajadiredja  
1952 Local common names of Indonesian fishes. Bandung, 's-Gravenhage: Van Hoeve.

In this first systematic study of a fishery complex in the Bird's Head of New Guinea the author reconsiders prevailing ideas concerning 'capitalism' and cultural areas by reference to the western and central Bird's Head respectively. Relevant aspects – such as the significance of *pusaka* (sacred hereditary goods) in fishery; the role of ancestor worship and cosmology; the rise of a class of immigrant, though likewise native, big men as 'bankers' in *ikat* textiles (*kain timur*); the role of (imported) *kain pusaka* as part of the so-called *kain timur*-complex; newly discovered aspects of myths from the culturally often opposed western and eastern Bird's Head; and so on – are dealt with in a historical and structural comparative perspective.

Jelle Miedema (1946), a lecturer in cultural anthropology at the University of Groningen until September 1986, studied sociology and anthropology and from 1975 to 1981 worked in the Bird's Head, where he collected the material for, amongst others, this short study. He has previously published books on inland fishery among the Samen in Sweden and on the social structure and religion of the Kebar of the eastern Bird's Head of New Guinea (*De Kebar 1855-1980*, 1984, VKI 105).



FORIS PUBLICATIONS

Dordrecht - Holland/Riverton - U.S.A.

ISBN 90 6765 209 1