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► **To cite this version:**

A.C Haddon. THE MELANESIANS.: AN ETHNOLOGICAL STUDY OF WESTERN OCEANIA..  
The London County Council. Southwood, Smith AND CO., pp.17, 1907. halshs-00751432

**HAL Id: halshs-00751432**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00751432>**

Submitted on 13 Nov 2012

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LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL.  
HORNIMAN MUSEUM, FOREST HILL, S.E.



WINTER TERM, 1907.

THE MELANESIANS:  
AN ETHNOLOGICAL STUDY  
OF WESTERN OCEANIA.

SYLLABUS

OF A

COURSE OF TEN LECTURES

BY

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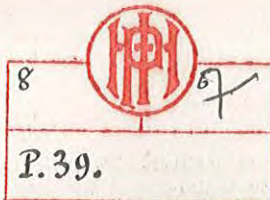
PRINTED FOR THE LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL  
BY SOUTHWOOD, SMITH AND CO., LTD.,  
And may be purchased, either directly or through any Bookseller from  
P. S. KING AND SON,  
2 AND 4, GREAT SMITH-STREET, VICTORIA-STREET, WESTMINSTER, S.W.,  
*Agents for the sale of the publications of the London County Council.*

1907.

No. 1020. Price 1d., post free 1½d.  
12033—500—17.1.07

S.S./15694





# THE MELANESIANS.

## AN ETHNOLOGICAL STUDY OF WESTERN OCEANIA.

**Geography.**—New Guinea, the larger islands of the Bismarck Archipelago and the Solomon Group, and New Caledonia are old land masses; but nearly all the other islands of Melanesia are of ancient origin. Of these many are volcanic, such as the Northern New Hebrides and the Fiji Group, while the remainder are coral islands, like Santa Cruz, or composed of raised coral beaches, as Vate and Erromanga and the Loyalty Islands, sometimes with deep sea deposits, which prove elevation from considerable depths. Hence the natives of purely coral islands are dependent upon shells with which to make their implements.

**Climate.**—Speaking generally the S.E. trade-wind blows from April to November, when it is replaced by the N.W. monsoon with variable wind and calms. The southern cyclones do not reach the Solomons. In the Solomons no one season is much wetter or hotter than another, the annual range of temperature is from 75deg.-95deg., and average daily range from 79deg.-88deg. New Caledonia has a drier and cooler climate. Fiji is healthy, humid on the rainy side, but with no difference in temperature, the daily mean being 79deg.

**Vegetation.**—Northern and Western Melanesia with generally luxuriant vegetation, usually with dense forests, which also occur on the mountains of New Caledonia and on the south-east of Fiji. The Southern New Hebrides and Loyalty Islands are comparatively sterile. An almost absolute lack of useful plants in New Caledonia.

**Animals.**—With exception of bats, rats, only indigenous mammal is the cuscus (Phalanger), which is common on Solomons and to the west, but does not occur further south. Dog, pig and fowls, probably introduced by natives before visits by Europeans. Cassowaries in New Guinea, New Britain, and Duke of York Island only. Solomons on border line of two great zoological districts: (1) Indo-Malayan or Papuanian; species not extending further east or south-east; (2) Polynesian; species not extending further north or west than New Ireland.

### DATES OF LECTURES.

- January 19 ... The Melanesian Islands and their Inhabitants.
- January 26 ... Decoration, Clothing, Food.
- February 2 ... Houses, Canoes, Industries.
- February 9 ... Birth, Adolescence, Marriage, Death.
- February 16 ... Magic, Religion.
- February 23 ... Social Organisation.
- March 2 ... Property, Inheritance.
- March 9 ... Government, Secret Societies.
- March 16 ... Decorative Art.
- March 23 ... Human Migrations and Distribution of Culture in the West Pacific.



Don de M<sup>r</sup> H. BREUIL





**Physical Characters of Natives.**—The Melanesians, or Oceanic Negroes, inhabit New Guinea and the adjacent islands and the range of archipelagoes from the Admiralty Islands to the Fiji Group and New Caledonia, and also Tasmania. They are characterised, as a whole, by being woolly-haired (*Ulotrichi*), dark-skinned, somewhat short, narrow-headed (*dolichocephalic*) people. The hair is uniformly black and long, everywhere it grows in small spirals, but in many places curly, wavy, and even straight, hair may be found; hair may be abundant or scarce on face. The skin is very rarely black, generally of a chocolate colour, copper-coloured individuals in places. Stature of men ranges from 1.50—1.78m. (4ft. 11in. to 5ft. 10in.), the predominating heights are from 1.56m. (5ft. 1½in.) to 1.6m. (5ft. 3in.); there is no satisfactory evidence of an existing or previous pigmy race. Cephalic index (in living) ranges from 67 to 85, everywhere *dolichocephaly* prevails, but broad-headed (*brachycephalic*) people occur in many places, and may locally predominate. Form of nose variable, sometimes *aquiline*, sometimes flattened; broad at nostrils. Lips, variable, often somewhat thick, but not everted. The skull is usually *dolichocephalic*, *hypistenocephalic*, *prognathic*, *chamæprosopic*, *platyrrhine*, *megadont*; with prominent *glabella* and *superciliary arches*, and flat forehead.

**Psychology.**—Taken as a whole the Melanesians are a noisy, excitable, demonstrative, affectionate, cheery, passionate people. The natives of New Britain are not lazy, their innate industry shines forth when life and property become in any degree safe; nowhere else has money (*diwara*, shell-money) so powerful an influence on savage life and custom; this makes them hard-hearted and intensely selfish (*Danks*). The Solomon Islanders had an early reputation for ferocity and treachery, but towards later travellers they exhibit a sense of honour and affection (*Guppy*); their character for ferocity and treachery, etc., is unjustified, the fault being generally with the aggressive white man, though, as everywhere else ill-disposed individuals covetous of the goods of the white man will make attacks on him (*Parkinson*). Not courageous (except natives of *Buka* and *Bougainville*) but will at times fight well under cover. As workers and servants mainly true and trustworthy, not very intelligent, and need at first much instruction. Often very honest. A native rarely refuses anything that is asked. The women are generally well treated. Indifference often shown to sick persons and invalids and the dying may be left to die (*Guppy*). In *Aneiteum* (New Hebrides) the sin most severely punished in next world was stinginess in giving away food, the greatest virtue is generous hospitality (*Inglis* and *Murray*).

**Deformation.**—The darker coloured natives decorate their skin by *cicatrices* and *cheloids*, the skin is abraded or cut and an irritant is frequently introduced, but no pigment is used. True tattooing is employed sporadically and is common among some of the lighter-coloured populations. The nasal septum is frequently perforated and a nose stick, or other ornament, inserted; rarely

the wings of the nose are perforated. The ear lobes are often bored, and the lobes may be enormously dilated; the margin of the ear may have many perforations. Teeth are blackened where betel is chewed, and a deposit may make the incisors appear enormous; upper incisors of women knocked out in places in New Hebrides and New Caledonia; but amputation of a phalange no longer practised in latter island. Circumcision occurs in various places. The head is but rarely artificially deformed; in West Torres Straits the infants' skull often shortened by manual pressure; the head in South Malekula is greatly elongated by very tight bandages when child a few days old, these are retained for years. Deformation of infants' heads also occurs in Mae (near to Malekula) and in interior of Fiji.

**Personal Decoration.**—Every portion of the body is decorated in various ways with shells, teeth, feathers, leaves, flowers, and other objects, and bands are plaited to ornament the neck, trunk, and limbs. Especially characteristic of Melanesia are shell necklaces, which constitute a kind of currency, and artificially deformed boars' tusks. Face and body painting is common for dance occasions. Scented leaves are constantly worn.

**Clothing.**—The men go nude in parts of Western British New Guinea, most of the Bismarck Archipelago and Banks Islands. A wrapper is worn in the New Hebrides and in Northern New Caledonia. Throughout the greater part of New Guinea and the Solomons the men wear a perineal band, which is sometimes very narrow. In Santa Cruz, Aoba, and Aragh the men are amply clad. Almost everywhere the women wear a longer or shorter petticoat made of finely-shredded leaves, but in S.E. Solomons and Banks Islands only a band with tufts and fringes. Plaited sunshades are worn by men in parts of New Guinea and the Solomons; women wear conical caps in Nowan (N. New Ireland), *pandanus-leaf* head-shades in S. New Ireland and Nissan, and head-mats in Santa Cruz.

**Collection and Preparation of Food.**—Natives could not be hunters everywhere as in most islands there is no game, nor could they be pastors anywhere as there are no cattle, the only resources are fishing and agriculture. A few peoples are simple collectors of food with the minimum of cultivation, equally few are hunters. Almost all depend for their sustenance on agriculture. In some parts of New Guinea and W. Solomons the sago palm is of great importance. Coconut palms grow mainly on the shore in most islands. *Canarium* nuts are important. The main crops are various kinds of bananas, numerous kinds of yams, bread-fruit, taro (*Caladium*) and sweet potatoes. Irrigation is conducted in Banks Islands, Maiwo (*Aurora*), New Caledonia, and Fiji. The yam takes highest place as staple food, though in some places taro is more grown. Bread-fruit is scarce in the Solomons. Sugar-cane is often grown.

Numerous devices employed for fishing, diverse fish hooks are generally distributed, but are not used everywhere, the fish spear



is universal, and in many places fish are shot with bows and arrows. Fishing by means of a kite occurs in the Trobriands (British New Guinea), the Solomons and Santa Cruz. Hand-nets and long seines are employed sporadically, as are also small or large fish traps or weir baskets, those of New Britain being especially large. In places fish are stupefied with bruised plants.

Food is cooked in the earth-oven everywhere; stone-boiling is very widely known, boiling in clay pots is local, sometimes large shells are employed for boiling. Wooden vessels for preparing and cooking food commonly distributed, and are of large size in the Admiralties and especially in the Solomons. A wooden pestle and mortar is found in some of the Solomon Islands.

**Narcotics and Stimulants.**—Tobacco was introduced into Java in 1601 A.D., and thence penetrated into W. Pacific, probably independently of the influence of white traders, its use has recently spread to the south-east of New Guinea, it extends over the Solomons, but only recently introduced in some islands and in the Banks Islands and New Hebrides and New Caledonia. Betel chewing, with the areca nut, leaf or flowerspikes of the pepper tree (*Piper betel*) and lime, extends from the Admiralties to Santa Cruz and in many parts of New Guinea. Kava, chewing of the root of *Piper methysticum*, is established in Fiji and the New Hebrides, but is a novelty in some of the Banks Islands; it occurs in one or two places in New Guinea. No intoxicating liquor is made.

**Houses.**—The typical Melanesian house has a roof of bamboo bent over a ridge pole which is supported by two main posts, very low side walls, and the ends filled in with bamboo screens. The *gamal*, or club-house, has the same construction, but is larger and higher, with an opening in the sides as well as at the ends. Pile-houses are found in New Britain, some of the Solomons and in New Guinea, where they are sometimes in the sea. Tree-houses and forts in S.E. New Guinea, Karkar, S. New Ireland, and Ysabel. Circular houses in E. Torres Straits, Nitendi (Santa Cruz), some New Hebrides, New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands, and for village drums in San Cristoval. Oval or semi-circular houses in Admiralties, Bismarck Archipelago and Vanikoro. Stone-houses in Gaua (Banks Islands).

**Canoes.**—Hollow tree trunk with plank gunwale general. In Siara district (New Ireland), built up of three or four cornered pieces of wood sewn together and caulked, and no outrigger. Plank-built in Solomons. Absence of outrigger characteristic of Solomons. Single outrigger float with two thwart poles in parts of the Bismarck Archipelago. Single outrigger float with several thwart poles, Bismarck Archipelago (generally), Santa Cruz, New Hebrides, New Caledonia, Fiji. Double outrigger floats Torres Straits, parts of N. New Guinea, Nissan and occasionally Bougainville Straits. Double canoe parts of British New Guinea, New Caledonia, Loyalty Islands, Fiji.

**Plaitwork.**—All Melanesians are mat and basket makers, but mats made of strips of leaves fastened together in some places, mats sometimes decorated with red dye in New Hebrides; mats used for clothing in Nitendi and Aoba. At Nissan, arm-bands made by a kind of bow, a process intermediate between that of plaiting and weaving. In Santa Cruz alone is found a loom with which beautiful mats are woven; but old dancing costume in Banks Islands, the art of which is now lost, resembles that of Santa Cruz mats. Weaving probably occurs in San Matthias (Parkinson). A loom is used in Leueneuwa, but these people are Polynesians with a strong Micronesian admixture.

**Pottery** is made in a few places in New Guinea; Admiralties; Buka, Bougainville, Shortland Islands, Mono; N. Espiritu Santo, and formerly in Aoba, N. Malekula, Shepherd Group, and Vate; New Caledonia, and Fiji. The coiled method occurs in Teste Island (New Guinea) and in New Caledonia.

**Weapons.**—Bows and arrows occur in New Guinea (except S.E. end), Solomons (especially N.W., less to S.E.), Santa Cruz, Torres Islands, Banks Islands, New Hebrides, known but not used in New Caledonia. Spears in parts of New Guinea, Admiralties (lances with obsidian points), Bismarck Archipelago, Solomons, practically unknown for war in Banks Islands, New Hebrides, New Caledonia. Javelins or spears are thrown by means of a throw-stick in W. Torres Straits (introduced from N. Queensland) and part of German New Guinea, and by a thong or becket in Vate, Tanna, Aneiteum, New Caledonia, and as a toy in Delena (British New Guinea). Wooden clubs (and spears) absent only in Santa Cruz. Stone-headed clubs in New Guinea and New Hebrides. Slings in parts of New Guinea, New Britain, New Ireland, and general (but not common) in Solomons, Banks Islands, and New Caledonia. Shields in many parts of New Guinea, New Britain, Solomons (S.E. especially).

**Birth.**—Ceremonies at birth rare; in Malaita and Malekula, a feast when a child a few days old, in Aoba father scatters toy bows or mats on beach after ten days, and in Aragh he gives presents to wife's relations. One of twins is killed in New Guinea, New Britain, Nissan, and Malekula. Twins appreciated at Florida, Malaita, Valua and Aoba. Traces of *couvade* at Saa (Malaita), San Cristoval, New Hebrides and Fiji. Abortion and infanticide very general, thus in Ugi two-thirds of the men have been brought from San Cristoval.

**Adolescence.**—Important secret initiation ceremonies for lads in the bush or in a special house in various parts of New Guinea, New Britain, Bougainville, Malaita, Ulawa, Malekula; circumcision at this period or earlier, locally in New Guinea, New Britain, universal in New Hebrides and New Caledonia, absent in Nissan and Loyalty Islands. Girls of the better class in



New Ireland are confined for several years in cages in special houses in the dark and not allowed to touch the ground, a modified form on west side of island; seclusion in the dark among Kabadi and Nara (British New Guinea) and W. Torres Straits. Period of license for girls in Rubiana, Vella la vella to San Cristoval. Boys and girls scarified or tattooed at puberty in New Guinea, Solomons. Upper incisors of girls knocked out when marriageable in N. Espiritu Santo and in south and centre of Malekula.

**Marriage.**—Considerable laxity before marriage in New Guinea and parts of Solomons and New Caledonia, but girls carefully looked after in parts of Solomons, Banks Islands and New Hebrides. Infant betrothal frequently occurs. Girls select their husbands in W. Torres Straits and Sulka (New Britain). Marriage by capture occurs in Buka and N. Bougainville. Marriage by purchase practically universal. Reluctance is shown by the bride in Bismarck Archipelago and New Hebrides. Fighting between the parties of relations in Torres Straits, Bismarck Archipelago and Aragh. Polygamy occurs if man can afford it. Adultery always severely punished. Divorce is easy, except in Nissan. Levirate obtains in Solomons (except Buka and N. Bougainville) Banks, New Hebrides (except Malekula), New Caledonia. Intermarriage with relations is forbidden, but in Tanna children of brother and sister may marry.

**Death and Burial.**—The methods of disposal of the dead vary from group to group and from island to island; in most, distinct forms are used for chiefs and commoners, and often vary for sex and age. Inhumation occurs everywhere, but in N. Guadalcanar and Aneiteum it is reserved for chiefs only. Burial at sea is very common among a coast population of various islands in Bismarck Archipelago, Solomons, and New Hebrides. Exposure on rocks, in caves, trees or platforms very generally distributed. Burial in canoes in Bismarck Archipelago, New Hebrides and New Caledonia. In Bougainville Straits distinguished men are burned, or buried in a cairn of stones, while commoners are thrown in the sea; at Saa (Malaita) and Santa Anna chiefs placed in effigies of fish. Burial in or under house in some parts of New Guinea, New Britain, Tanna. Mummification E. Torres Straits and New Caledonia, and traces in Ambrym and Malekula. Burial alive of the aged and incompetent is more prevalent in the New Hebrides than in the other groups. Ceremonies connected with death are more common in New Guinea, Bismarck Archipelago and Solomons than further south. Property is frequently destroyed at death.

**Magic.**—Magical practices occur everywhere for the gaining of benefits, plenteous crops, good fishing, fine weather, rain, success in love, and the procuring of children. Harmful magic for producing sickness and death is universal. Contagious and homeopathic methods are employed as well as solitary and social magic.

**Religion.**—From the Solomons to the New Hebrides (and perhaps elsewhere) the native mind is entirely possessed by belief in a supernatural power or influence, called almost universally *mana*; this is what works to effect everything which is beyond the ordinary power of man or outside the common processes of nature; but this power, though in itself impersonal, is always connected with some person who directs it; all spirits have it, ghosts generally, some men (Codrington). Animism does not exist, the sea or forest does not possess its own soul, but is haunted by spirit or ghost, but Animatism, or intrinsic life in inanimate objects, does occur in some places.

Totemism occurs in W. Torres Straits, S. New Guinea from Merauke to Fly River district, S.E. Archipelago of New Guinea, Bougainville and neighbouring islands, to Mono and N. Choiseul. A more or less developed ancestor cult is universally distributed. Human beings may become beneficent or maleficent ghosts, but not every ghost becomes an object of regard. The ghost who is to be worshipped is the spirit of a man who in his lifetime had *mana*. Hero cults occur in Torres Straits. Good or evil spirits apparently independent of ancestors are found practically everywhere.

In the Solomons more attention is paid to ghosts with a greater development of sacrifice, offerings of food, burnt as well as eaten (associated with these is an advance in the arts of life). In the southern groups more attention is paid to spirits, food and more especially money is offered to them, but not burnt or eaten, and generally offered at stones sacred to spirits. Various fish, reptiles and birds are regarded in most places. Regard paid to the moon in Erromanga, Tanna, Aneiteum.

There are no priests, but a man who knows how to perform magic or approach object of worship sometimes sacrifices for all. There are no idols. Everywhere is life after death believed in.

**Sociology.**—A division of the community into two exogamous groups is very widely spread, no intermarriage being permitted within the group. Mother-right is very prevalent, descent and inheritance being counted on the mother's side, or a man's property descends to his sister's children; but the mother is in no way the head of the family, the house is the father's, the garden may be his, the rule and government are his, though the maternal uncle sometimes has more authority than the father. The transition to father-right has definitely occurred in various places and is taking place elsewhere, thus in some of the New Hebrides the father has to buy off the rights of his wife's relations or his sister's children. The classificatory system of relationship terms probably very generally prevails. Totemism has marked socialising effects, as totemic solidarity takes precedence of all other considerations. Almost everywhere in a village is there one (often two, sometimes more) building of a public character where men eat and spend their time, young men sleep there, and strangers are entertained, in the Solomons these are also canoe-houses; frequently they contain images, and women are excluded. In the Banks Islands and New Hebrides there are club houses,



the members of which are of many strictly marked grades, promotion being by payment, each rank has its insignia, sometimes human effigies, which are usually, but wrongly, spoken of as "idols." Other socialising factors are feasts, dances, markets and money. A code of conduct of high ethical value is taught to youths by their maternal uncles in Torres Straits, probably something similar occurs elsewhere.

**Property.**—Land belongs to the community, but varying degrees of ownership accrue to those who cultivate certain portions. The rights of a chief rarely differ from those of other men. Property in trees is independent of ownership of land.

There appears upon the whole a remarkable tendency throughout these islands towards the substitution of a man's own children for his sister's children and others of his kin, in succession to his property; and this appears to begin where the property is the produce of the man's own industry, with the assistance in most cases of his sons, as in gardens newly cleared from the forest, in his money, his pigs, and his canoe.

**Currency.**—All personal ornaments most in vogue have a certain relative value. There are also products of industry made for the single purpose of exchange, *e.g.*, mat, feather, and shell money. Shell currency occurs in New Guinea, Admiralties, Bismarck Archipelago, Solomons, Banks, S. New Hebrides and New Caledonia. Mat money in N. New Hebrides and formerly in Torres Islands. Feather money in Santa Cruz and Gaua and Merlav (Banks Islands). Fur money in New Caledonia and Loyalty Islands. Teeth currency in Solomons, especially N.W. Arrows and boars' tusks were currency in Torres Islands, and pigs in Ambrym.

**Government.**—Probably everywhere public affairs are regulated by discussion among the old or important men, the more primitive the society the more important this is. Chiefs exist everywhere though with variable powers, which mainly depend upon their own character, but in many places their influence is attributed to their *mana*. Hereditary chieftainship in direct line rarely occurs, though it is often retained in the family. Every village has its own chief who alone rules, but weaker chiefs join in offensive and defensive alliance, and powerful chiefs sometimes force weaker ones into vassalship. Power of secret societies tends to obscure that of chiefs. Practically no organisation for redressing wrong or punishing the guilty, hence private quarrels are personal affairs and public opinion stops them only when they become acute.

**Secret Societies.**—The growth of the power of secret societies forms a means for the coercion and chastisement of objectionable persons, but they are often terrorising and black-mailing institutions. Secret societies occur in New Guinea (except S.E. peninsula) and New Britain, and from Torres Islands to New Caledonia,

and with them are frequently associated awesome ceremonies with masked performers and implements that produce weird sounds.

**Human Migrations and Distribution of Culture in Melanesia.**—The Melanesians constitute a well characterised group readily distinguished from Australians, Polynesians, Micronisians, and the inhabitants of the East Indian Archipelago. The effect of the Australians on Melanesia may be ignored, having affected only the W. Torres Straits islanders. The Melanesians are coast voyagers, and not wanderers over the high seas like their neighbours to the north and east. An examination of accidental driftings in the area shows that 86 per cent. were E.W. or W.E., while 14 per cent. were N.S. or S.N., most of the latter being within island groups. Practically all the ocean currents set from E. to W., therefore all N. and S. driftings must be due to storms. The S.E. trades prevail from April to November; and the N.W. monsoons from December to March. Thus is explained the preponderance of Polynesian influence in Melanesia affecting alike the physical character of the people and their culture, but allowance must be made for the possible effects of the migration of the Polynesians from the E. Indian Archipelago through Melanesia to the S. Pacific about the fourth century A.D. The Papuans represent the oldest stratum of Melanesian population, the Melanesians are modified from without.



Some of the Books and Papers in the Horniman Library Which relate to the Melanesians.

ABBREVIATIONS.

- G.J.—The Geographical Journal. London (Royal Geographical Society), 1893, etc.  
*Int. Arch. f. Ethn.*—Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie. Leiden, 1888, etc.  
*J.A.I.*—The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. London, 1872, etc.  
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