WILEY

99. The Agiba Cult of the Kerewa Culture

Author(s): A. C. Haddon

Source: *Man*, Vol. 18 (Dec., 1918), pp. 177-183

Published by: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2788511>

Accessed: 26-06-2016 05:21 UTC

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Wiley, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Man*

ORIGINAL ARTICLES.

With Plate M.

Gulf of Papua: Ethnography.

Haddon.

The Agiba Cult of the Kerewa Culture. By A. C. Haddon.

99

In the Gulf of Papua there may be distinguished four cultures, which, from east to west, may be termed the Elema, the Namau, the Urama, and the Kerewa; of these the three first are distinctly inter-related, but the last is more distinct. Without doubt these cultures have reached the coast from the interior of the island, though we are as yet ignorant of the routes they have traversed.

The term Kerewa is adopted from the village of that name at the northerly point of Goaribari Island, from which the other villages on this island, and certain others (Goro, Ubu, Ai-idia, Mombagoa, etc.) on the mainland and neighbouring islands, are stated to have been founded. The villages of Keme, Pai-ia-a, and Aimaha, on the opposite mainland, appear to rank with Kerewa as original sites; as they have the same culture it is necessary to unite them under one designation, and provisionally I adopt the term "Kerewa" (cf. H. J. Ryan,* *Annual Report, Papua*, 1912-13, p. 76). The *agiba* may be taken as a criterion of this culture; the custom of employing these skull shrines extends also to the Kiko-Kairi tribes on Ututi creek (about seven miles above Kikori Station), to the region of the mouths of the Omati and Turāma rivers, and probably further inland. The language spoken on Goaribari and in the vicinity is known as *Kerewa wadi*, and is allied to that spoken by the Kiwai folk.

FIG. 1.—*Dubu daima*, Pai-ia-a, Omati River; photograph by A. C. Haddon.

The Kerewa peoples live almost entirely on sago (*do*) and crabs (*ka-uri*), and the grubs that infest old sago palms. Owing to the swampy nature of the country they have but poor gardens, in which they grow bananas (*dubai*), sweet potatoes?, sugar-cane (*uri*), coconuts (*gota*), and a poor kind of native pumpkin, but no yams.

A village usually consists of a *dubu daima*, where the married men live; *ohiabai daima*, or young men's house; and the women's houses, *upi daima*. The *dubu daima* (Fig. 1) is a very long pile-dwelling varying from about 100 to over

* Since this was written I have heard, to my great regret, that my friend, Lieut. J. H. Ryan, was killed on July 17th, when leading his men in an attack in France.

AGIBA SHRINE FROM A DUBU DAIMA, AT DOPIMA,
GOARIBARI ISLAND.

200 yards in length.* The ridge is horizontal, or rises slightly at the front end and is supported by a central row of poles. There is a platform and entrance usually at each end, and several (usually five or six) side entrances. A gangway extends along the whole length of the interior, on each side of which are a number of cubicles, which are the sleeping places of the married men. I understand that the house is visited by women and girls only on the occasions of the *buguru* ceremony, which lasts for four days, and at which great sexual licence is permitted. This appears to be the ceremony described by H. J. Ryan, which, according to his account, is a simple kind of initiation rite culminating in marriage (*l.c.* pp. 76, 77).

In the *dubu daima* are a variable number of skull shrines (*agiba*).† An *agiba* consists of a flat oval board, the upper part of which is carved to represent a human face, and the lower part is perforated so as to leave two vertical hooks. The lower central portion of the board evidently represents a body, the lateral parts being the arms, and the upright hooks may represent the legs. It is painted black, red, and

FIG. 2.—*Agiba* in the *dubu daima* at Dopima; photograph by A. C. Haddon.

FIG. 3.—*Agiba*, "Aird River delta," from Seligman.

white. In front is a shelf (*pepe*), on which rest human skulls (*oro* or *opuoro*), probably of enemies or victims, these being attached by long loops to the hooks. The whole is lashed to poles which reach from the floor to the roof. I was informed at Aimaha that an *agiba* is carved by a man when he takes a head, but other men add skulls from time to time; the skulls are those of enemies only. One of the *agiba* in this *dubu daima* was brought from another village. Probably the *agiba* is a family shrine, and I suspect that the figure is the representation of an ancestor. I obtained a second *agiba* at Dopima (height 735 mm., breadth 365 mm.) which is very similar to that shown on Plate M. The one photographed *in situ* at Dopima (Fig. 2) had between fifty and sixty skulls attached to it. One at Pai-ia-a was

* I found that the one at Dopima was nearly 201·3 m. (660 feet) long, 10 m. (33 ft.) wide, and the floor was 1·98 m. (78 in.) above the ground. G. le Hunte estimated the length of a *dubu daima* on the right bank of the mouth of the Omati at 274·5 m. (900 ft.) (*Annual Report B.N.G.*, 1900-1, p. 28). The one described and figured by Jukes (p. 271) was over 300 yards in length (*see next page*).

† In the official reports this spelled *agibi*; in several cases I have ventured to differ from the official spelling of words.

1.07 m. (42 in.) high. I reproduce (Fig. 3) the *agiba* figured by C. G. Seligman (*Journ. Roy. Anthr. Inst.*, XXXIX., 1909, p. 259). I do not recall any other illustration of these objects, but they have several times been mentioned by missionaries and Government officials.

The skulls attached to an *agiba* may be plain or decorated in various ways (Plate M). C. G. Murray says: "As regards the skulls in the houses, those having artificial noses attached to them are of people who have died natural deaths; those that have no noses attached have been killed." (*Annual Report B.N.G.*, 1900-1, p. 33.) This requires verification. J. H. P. Murray states that their own dead are exposed on platforms until they are reduced to skeletons; the skulls are taken into the dwelling-houses, and the other bones are buried in a large mound (*Annual Report B.N.G.*, 1908, p. 12). I was informed that at Aimaha a widow puts the skull of her husband in her house. After a time a dance is held, and the skull is buried, but that the skulls of enemies are placed on the *agiba*.

One kind of decoration consists of having an artificial face made of clay and painted red; the nose is long and narrow and perforated at the tip, in the orifice of which a nose ornament may be inserted. The orbits are generally filled up with white clay, and shells or seeds may represent the eyes. The three specimens I obtained are shown in Plate M. Five Goaribari skulls in the museum of the University of Aberdeen are similarly decorated (R. H. Spittal, *Proc. Anat. Anthr. Soc. Univ. Aberdeen*, 1904-6 (1906), p. 88). I believe this special type is characteristic of the Kerewa culture, but skulls with artificial faces occur in Torres Straits, the Fly and Šepik rivers.

Skulls are also found with a cylindrical projection from each orbit, often with a red *Mucuna* bean at the tip, and covered over (as is the face) with grey coix seeds. The earliest account of this decoration is by J. B. Jukes (*Voyage of H.M.S. Fly*, I, 1847, p. 274, and figure). He named the village where the skulls were looted "Pigville." It was almost certainly a Kerewa village. The skulls are in the museum of the Royal College of Surgeons (*cf.* J. Edge-Partington, *Ethnographical Album of the Pacific Islands*, II, 1895, Plate 196, Figs. 1, 2). Other ethnographical specimens collected on this occasion are in the British Museum. R. H. Spittal (*loc.*) describes three similar skulls from the Bamu River, and figures (Plates VI, VII) one fine specimen in the Aberdeen University Museum with very prominent eye-stalks and a perforated decorated oval board in the nasal aperture.

In the museum at Port Moresby there is a similar skull (*epita*) from the estuary of the Bamu. The eye-stalks are 82 mm. high; the nose-board is rather elaborate. Two essentially similar skulls with eye-stalks and nose-boards were figured (Plate facing p. 8) in the *Annual Report B.N.G.*, 1896-97, Brisbane, 1898, as coming from Neneba, on the eastern slopes of Mt. Scratchley. A. Giulianetti says (p. 68) that the people of this village (which is now derelict) place their dead in a box covered by a net, about 8 feet from the ground, and enclosed by a fence of about the same height, outside of which is a ring of large flat stones. When the skeleton is clean, the skull is removed and placed in a small house built specially for the purpose of storing the skulls of the tribe; but he does not say anything about skulls being decorated.

F. von Luschan describes and figures in M. Krieger's *Neu-Guinea* (Berlin, 1899, p. 507, Fig. 48), a skull of this type, but with spikes in the orbits, which are probably supports for a pith eye-stalk; presumably on account of the foregoing reference, he describes it as coming from Neneba, but evidently this is the same skull (No. 36) that is figured in W. D. Webster's *Illustrated Catalogue*, Vol. III, where it is stated to come from the Fly River. Doubting the allocation of these skulls to Neneba, I asked Governor J. H. P. Murray to institute special enquiries on this

point, which he kindly did. T. Millar (acting R.M.) replied to him: "The last lot of skulls I saw were at Semola in 1912, and they were not decorated. When at Neneba at the same time I did not see any skulls" (May 31, 1917). A blunder or wilful misrepresentation has evidently occurred, but by whom it is not now possible to discover. We are thus justified in stating that this method of decorating skulls extends from the Bamu to the Kerewa district. The same also applies to the nose-boards, which are called *kanega* at the mouth of the Fly, on the authority of J. Chalmers, who says: "When a head is carried home and cleaned, and all the smell quite gone, the *kanega* is stuck in the skull, which is hung up on a post (*bio*) of the house" (MS.). Two of these specimens collected by him are figured by Edge-Partington (*Album*, II, Plate 197, Figs. 5, 6).

When a new *dubu daima* is built by any of the Kerewa peoples a man from another place is killed and brought to the new building and eaten in it. At Dopima, they said they did not sprinkle the blood on the posts of the house. It will be remembered that it was on an occasion of this kind that the famous missionary James Chalmers (Tamate) and his colleague O. F. Tomkins were killed and eaten at Dopima on the 7th of April 1901. (*Annual Report B.N.G.*, 1900-1901 (1902)). The *dubu daima* of the villages implicated in these murders were burnt and the war canoes destroyed. In a report on the massacre, the Rev. H. M. Dauncey says, "In one of the dubus were over seven hundred skulls, and at another four hundred. Some of the other dubus were cleared before the party reached them, but I am within the mark in saying that there must have been ten thousand skulls in the twenty dubus burned." (Quoted from *The New Guinea Mission*, by G. Currie Martin, 1908, p. 78.)

I was informed at Dopima that when a new war canoe (*obi*) is made the warriors go in it to a strange village on the mainland and kill a man. They said the canoe is not sprinkled with his blood (but I doubt this), the body is eaten and the skull attached to an *agiba*. In Ubua, an off-shoot from Kerewa in the Kikori estuary, the beheaded corpse is held over the bow of the new canoe, so that the latter is covered with blood. At Dubu-muba, an off-shoot from Ubua on a neighbouring island, a new canoe is blooded. The eyes, nose, ears, intestines, and genitals are not eaten, the body, after having been scorched "all same pig," is cut into small pieces which are mixed with "New Guinea cabbage" (the *ombi* of the Northern Division) and a little sago, which is boiled in a bamboo over a fire, or, according to another informant, mixed with sago and wrapped in nipa palm leaves and roasted over a fire, there being no earth oven in this district. In all cases the body of the victim was eaten and the skull kept in the *dubu daima*. The Kerewa folk were in the habit of raiding the bush tribes of the Omati and those of neighbouring rivers, but most raids appear to have been made right up to the hills on the Sirebi River, which flows from the east into the Kikori some thirty miles from its mouth. H. J. Ryan gives an instance of the murder of a local native by nine Ubua men who went up this river to make a new war canoe; after painting it with his blood they placed the body in the canoe and returned to their village (*l.c.*, p. 80).

I noticed in the *dubu daima* at Dopima and other Kerewa villages miniature *agiba*, called *marabu*, to which birds' heads were attached; they were without a shelf. E. W. P. Chinnery informs me that he has seen outside a door in an Ututi village a similar object, to which were attached birds' skulls, bones of cassowaries, and lizards' skeletons. They were more or less similar to three specimens (Fig. 4) which I collected at Wododo, a village on the north of Dibiri island, in the estuary of the Bamu, where they are called *gope*. I do not know their significance, but it is suggestive that, though the human-skull shrines have not been definitely recorded beyond the area noted above, the bird-skull shrines extend to the estuary

of the Fly, or at all events to that of the Bamu. There is another *gope* from "Deberi," of the same type as the foregoing, in the Cambridge Museum; length 415 mm., breadth 130 mm. Given to the same museum by G. Landtman is a specimen he collected at Kiwai island in 1910. It consists of an oval board, concavo-convex from side to side, 685 mm. long and 223 mm. broad; there is a carved face above, and in the centre are two oval apertures, with a vertical hook in each; the board is uncoloured except that the deep intaglio parts of the carving are coloured white. It evidently falls in with this series, but the head is not disengaged.

I also obtained at Wododo a well-carved *gope*, which consists of a face with two elongated perforations below the mouth, which converge to the median line inferiorly; the body is without recognisable arms, and its lower part is broken, but it evidently was curved upwards to form two hooks; height 410 mm., breadth 165 mm. I doubt if it is large enough to support human skulls. A somewhat similar object, described as a "Holder for three human skulls, made of wood, carved, and decorated in red, black, and white; native name *goapey*, Dameiacara, "mouth of Fly River," is figured in Webster's *Illustrated Catalogue*, III, No. 18. It has no arms but has a vertical hook on each side and a central one in an orifice; no dimensions are given. Dameiacara may be the village called Damerakoromo in the official map, which lies opposite Dibiri, in the Bamu estuary. J. Edge-Partington (*Album*, III, 1898, Plate 72) gives an example of each of these two types, which he describes as "Flat wooden objects (*goapen*) for holding the skulls of fish, turtle, and birds, coloured red and black. Mouth of "Fly River." The one with two hooks is $20\frac{1}{2}$ in. (521 mm.) high, and the one with three hooks 32 in. (1,067 mm.) high.

All these specimens are certainly connected with a skull-cult of some sort.

Carved and painted boards, *kaiai-muru*, are erected in the *dubu daima*, usually close by the entrance to a cubicle; they are doubtless connected with an ancestor cult. Of these I collected three specimens at Pai-ia-a,

FIG. 4.—Bird-skull shrines, *gope*, Wododo, Dibiri island, estuary of the Bamu. (A) Black, the intaglio shows light wood; length 450 mm., breadth 155 mm.; with two imitation bamboo knives, the jaw of a young pig (*Sus papuensis*), and skulls of *kaura* (the small Eastern curlew, *Numenius minutus*, a winter resident from the north), and skulls of other small birds. (B) Black, red, and white; length 530 mm., breadth 205 mm.; with skulls of the *dobudobu* (Papuan frogmouth or "morepork," *Podargus papuensis*), *dubukoko* (Papuan crow, *Cracticus personatus*), *oripiko* (horned friar-bird, *Philemon* sp.), and several kinds of Meliphagine birds. (C) Blackened all over; length 410 mm., breadth 120 mm.; with two imitation bamboo knives, and skulls of the great black cockatoo (*Microglossus aterrinus*) and a kingfisher (*Tanyptera* sp.), &c.—Museum of Arch. and Ethn., Cambridge, collected by A. C. Haddon, 1914.

Omati River (Fig. 5). In the same house I obtained a wooden effigy of a man and of a woman, which were made by a man to represent the dead parents of the youth to whom they were given (Figs. 6 A, B), and also a carved stick of heavy

FIG. 5.—*Kaiaimuru* from a *dubu daima* at Pai-ia-a, Omati River. All are painted black, red, and white. (A) Slightly concavo-convex from side to side, length 1.113 m., breadth 280 mm. (B) Concavo-convex from side to side. length, 1.555 m., breadth 250 mm. (C) Flat, length 1.240 m., breadth 123 mm.—Museum of Arch. and Eth., Cambridge, collected by A. C. Haddon, 1914.

FIG. 6.—(A) Effigy of a deceased father, roughly carved out of heavy wood, carved portion painted black, red, and white, with a shell eye; 1.010 m. high. (B) Effigy of a deceased mother, uncoloured, with characteristic woman's dress; 1.300 m. high. (C) Magical stick (*abioabio*) carved out of heavy wood, carved portion originally coloured red and white; length 76 cm.

wood, *abioabio*, (*abio* = malevolent magic). This magical stick (Fig. 6 C) is supposed to make a canoe invisible when the crew go on a head-hunting expedition; the owner paints himself with red and white pigment and rubs a leaf and the kernel of a young coconut on his face.

There are other interesting features about the Kerewa culture which I cannot deal with here. Allusion may, however, be made to the occurrence of basketwork masks (*awoto*) similar to those of the Sëpik River (cf. J. H. P. Murray, *Papua*, 1912, p. 189, Plates pp. 187, 204; O. Reche, *Der Kaiserin - Augusta - Fluss*, Hamburg, 1913, p. 409 ff., Plates LXXVIII-LXXXIII and Fig. 427; Frobenius, *Int. Arch. f. Ethnogr.* XI, 1898, Plate IV, Fig. 26; F. von Luschan, *Bäss. Arch.*, 1911, Figs. 28, 29). I believe that similar masks occur also in the region of the Bamu.

Skulls with painted clay faces and otherwise decorated occur higher up the Sëpik. In the "Middle river" district, or "Culture III" (*l.c.*, Plates LXVI-LXIX), one has a long cylindrical piece of wood as a nose, which is perforated at the base to represent nostrils. Many skulls from near the mouth of the river, "Culture I," have elaborate carvings on the frontals; also here are to be found human skulls attached as heads to wooden effigies (pp. 357, 374, Figs. 399, 400), analogous to one I obtained at Ukiaravi, Purari delta.

From various parts of the Sëpik come wooden double hooks with a human face carved on the shank, analogous to the *gope* I obtained at Wododo.

On the other hand, there are many characteristics of the cultures along the Sëpik which have not as yet been noted in British New Guinea, but there cannot be any doubt that the essential elements of these cultures have penetrated to the Gulf of Papua by various cultural streams. It also seems to be established, from the evidence given above and from further data known to me, that there is an intimate relation between the culture of the Bamu estuary and that of the Kerewa district, the significance of which is not yet quite clear.

I have to thank the Trustees of the Percy Sladen Memorial Fund for enabling me to visit the Gulf of Papua, for without their aid I should not have been able to study this region.

A. C. HADDON.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATE M.

AGIBA SHRINE, FROM A *dubu daima* AT DOPIMA, GOARIBARI ISLAND.

Height of board 850 cm., breadth 365 cm. Painted red and white, with a wooden imitation of a crescentic pearl-shell chest ornament.

On the shelf is a plaited palm leaf mat; the skulls resting on it, from left to right, are:—

- (a) Juv., deformed; Aimaha.
- (b) Male, adult, artificial red face with long nose perforated at its end, eyes white, a black band from malar round eyes and down the sides of the nose to its tip. ▲-shaped incisions with cross hatchings on temporal regions; Dopima.
- (c) Male, adult, with cylindrical projection in right orbit (the left one is missing), which, with the face, is coated with coix seeds; Aimaha.
- (d) Male, adult, long ratan nose with recurved tip, eye sockets filled up, incised transverse band with chevrons on frontal; Dopima.
- (e) Juv., similar to *b*, but with cowries in orbits and a boar's tusk in nasal perforation, obscure transverse incisions on frontal; Dopima.
- (f) Nearly adult, face as in *b*, piece of cane in nasal perforation, coix seeds in orbit, a sago fibre fringe on each zygoma, an incised band of chevrons on each temporal line; Pai-ia-a.
- (g) Juv., orbits filled up, perforated slab of wood in the nasal aperture; Dopima.

It will be noted that only *b*, *d*, *e*, *f*, *g* actually belonged to this shrine, but one is justified in placing the others on it as they belong to the same culture, and on any shrine skulls may be quite plain or decorated as above. All have the typical long loop attached to the maxillæ; at Pai-ia-a this was called *âto ivi* (plaited 'lawyer vine').—Cambridge Museum of Arch. and Eth., collected by A. C. Haddon, 1914.