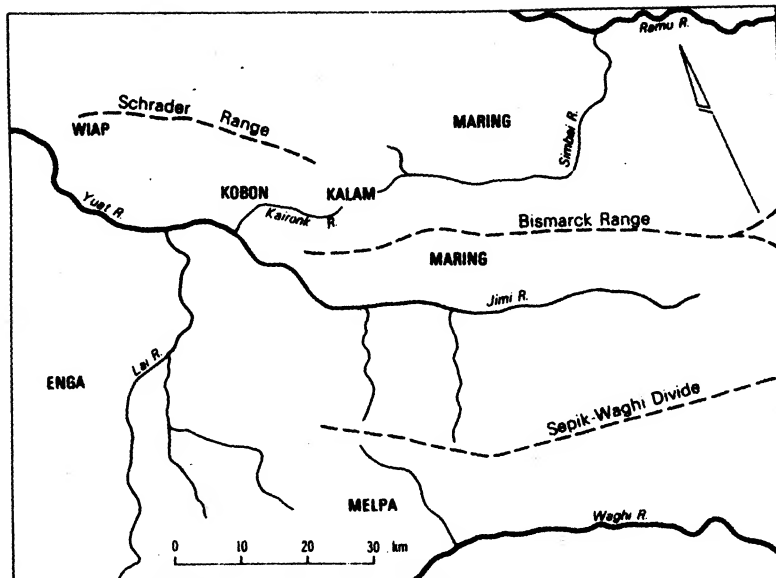


## Introduction

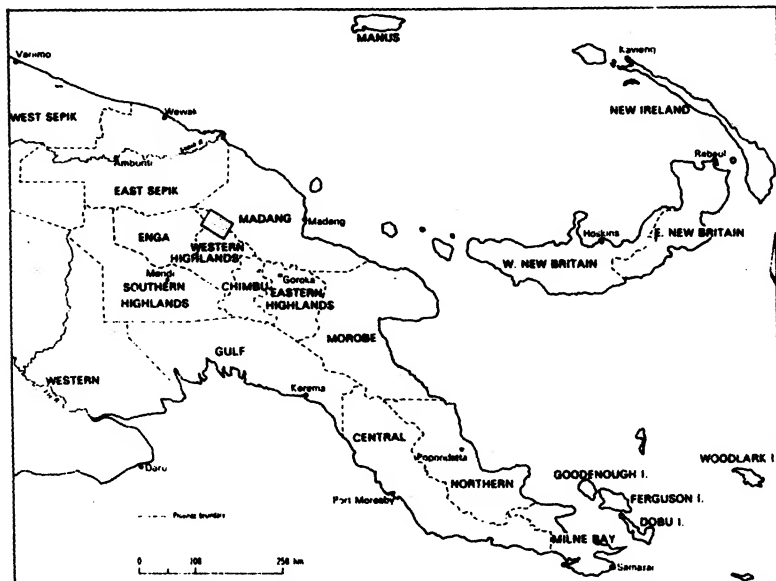
Most of the 4,000 Kobon live in the Kaironk Valley which nestles between the great Bismarck and Schrader Ranges of Papua New Guinea. From the administrative point of view the location is at the outer extremities of three Provinces - the Western Highlands Province, the Madang Province, and the East Sepik Province. Due no doubt to the relative inaccessibility of the Kaironk Valley and its distance from major district administrative centres, the first positive and persisting influence by the Australian administration was not made until around 1960. The only access to the area is by foot or air and in general the people continue to follow their traditional lifestyle. Eastwards from Aionk and Womok, the Kaironk Valley is inhabited by Kalam and westwards to its point of union with the Jimi by Kobon. Population is most dense in the Upper Kaironk and becomes progressively less so as one goes westwards and southwards towards the Jimi. Kobon also inhabit the Sal, Knej, Gulo, Ulamul, and Singapi Valleys. The area to the west of Singapi is inhabited by the Wiyaw (Wiap), and beyond them by the Aramo. See Maps 1 and 2.

Like their Kalam neighbours to the east, the Kobon are of short stature. The basis of their economy is gardening but hunting and gathering contribute significantly to their diet. The principal foods grown are sweet potato, taro, yams, pueraria, bananas, edible pitpits, beans, gourds, tapioca, greens, cucumbers, pumpkins, and corn. Pigs are domesticated and culturally very important. The Kobon traditionally live as extended family units in large isolated dwellings. The extended family consists of a man, his wife or wives and children, his brothers and their wives and children, and his parents. In Kobon society there is no hierarchical organization under a chief. A man has responsibilities towards his lineage and persons with whom he undertakes tasks in common, such as gardening, but this is in the nature of mutual self help or cooperative undertaking and not allegiance to a person of superior status. There has been considerable contact between the Kobon and their Kalam neighbours to the east, and somewhat less with their Wiyaw neighbours to the west, notably periodic assemblies for ceremonial and festive purposes. It is often at these assemblies that spouses are chosen. Kobon intermarry with both the Kalam and Wiyaw and many Kobon living around Aionk and Womok and in the Upper Sal Valley have native fluency in both Kobon and Kalam. However the basic relationship has traditionally been one of mistrust and fear. Majnep and Bulmer 1977 provides a clear insight into the traditional way of life of the peoples of the Upper Kaironk Valley as well as a finely illustrated description of the flora and fauna of the area. Jackson 1975 is an account of the way of life and beliefs of the (Kobon) inhabitants of the Lower Kaironk.

Kobon's closest linguistic relative is Kalam, spoken by the Kalam living to the east. The two languages share about fifty percent of basic vocabulary and are mutually unintelligible. The three languages of the Kalam Family - Kalam, Kobon, and Gants (Gaj) - were originally thought to constitute a separate stock related to the East New Guinea Highlands



MAP 1: GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF THE KOBON (BASED ON JACKSON 1975)



MAP 2: PAPUA NEW GUINEA (THE SHADED AREA IS THAT COVERED BY MAP 1)

Stock on the Phylum level (Wurm 1960). As a result of Pawley's research into Kalam and typological comparison of Kalam and East New Guinea Highlands Stock languages (Pawley 1966) the Kalam family was included in the East New Guinea Highlands Stock (Wurm 1971: 548-551). Wurm 1975: 486-7 points out that recent studies and reinterpretation of earlier findings (Biggs 1963, Pawley 1966, Laycock: in personal communication) have revealed that Kalam's phonology is largely of the Sepik-Ramu Phylum type (to the north and northwest) as opposed to the Trans-New Guinea Phylum type; its pronominal forms and systems are very much like those of the Madang-Adelvert Range Sub-Phylum (to the northeast) of the Trans-New Guinea Phylum; and its structure and typology in general is very predominantly like that of the other East New Guinea Highlands Stock languages (to the west, south, and east). The phonology of Kobon is described in Davies 1980a and phonological correspondence between Kobon and Kalam and the Wosera dialect of Abelam, a language of the Ndu Family of the Middle Sepik Stock of the Sepik-Ramu Phylum, are discussed in Davies 1980b.

The classification of Wiyaw, Aramo, and other languages spoken in the area of the Upper Yuat is discussed in Comrie and Davies forthcoming.

In this volume I use the orthography which I proposed for Kobon in Davies 1980a except that ü is replaced by ɷ, and the two laterals are represented by l and ɺ, and the sublaminopalatal flap by ɺ. The forms cited as examples are in each case accompanied by a morpheme-by-morpheme interlinear translation and a free translation. All morpheme boundaries are indicated by (-).

I would like to express my sincere thanks to those who have helped me in the preparation of this volume: to Prof. Bernard Comrie, one of the executive editors of the series, who suggested that I prepare a volume on Kobon and whose comments arising from his reading of various drafts have been extremely helpful; to the Papua New Guinea Government for allowing me the privilege of working in their beautiful and fascinating country; to the delightful Kobon people who allowed my family and I to live with them for various periods between 1972 and 1980; to Juab, Minep, Jepi, Ugai, Lipgi, and Urumungu who helped me with the language on a regular basis; to my wife, Maila, my children, Ricky, Mikko, and Taavi, and my parents, Mr. and Mrs. E.A. Davies, for their continued encouragement, patience, and practical help; and to Mrs. June Austing for her painstaking work in typing the manuscript.

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