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# Use of Tobacco in New Guinea and Neighboring Regions

BY

ALBERT B. LEWIS

ASSISTANT CURATOR OF MELANESIAN ETHNOLOGY



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LEAFLET 17

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1924

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LEAFLET

NUMBER 17

# Use of Tobacco in New Guinea and Neighboring Regions

There is no single object of trade more useful to the traveller and trader in New Guinea than tobacco. It often supplies a standard of value, and serves as minor currency; a day's labor, for example, being worth so many sticks. The trade tobacco in use throughout eastern New Guinea and Melanesia is the Virginia twist or stick tobacco. In the Dutch territory, a fine-cut smoking tobacco, put up in special paper packages, is the only variety acceptable to the natives. Ordinary wooden or clay pipes are also in demand, but to a less degree, as they last for some time and also are not always used by the natives, who often avail themselves of native-rolled cigarettes or native pipes. This brings up the fact that in many regions the natives have their own way of smoking (chewing is unknown), and utilized their own native-grown tobacco long before the trader's tobacco became known to them. While tobacco was known and smoked by most of the coastal tribes, in the interior mountains its use and cultivation is almost universal, as nearly every mountain tribe so far visited, including the pygmies, raises its own tobacco. Tobacco has also been reported as growing, apparently wild, along the trails in the high mountain ranges back of Port Moresby. In the Arfak Mountains of western New Guinea tobacco has been raised, smoked, and traded to the coastal peoples since the memory of man, according to one writer. This trade was noted by A. R. Wallace in 1856, who figures a crude wooden pipe somewhat like Fig. 5, Pl. II.

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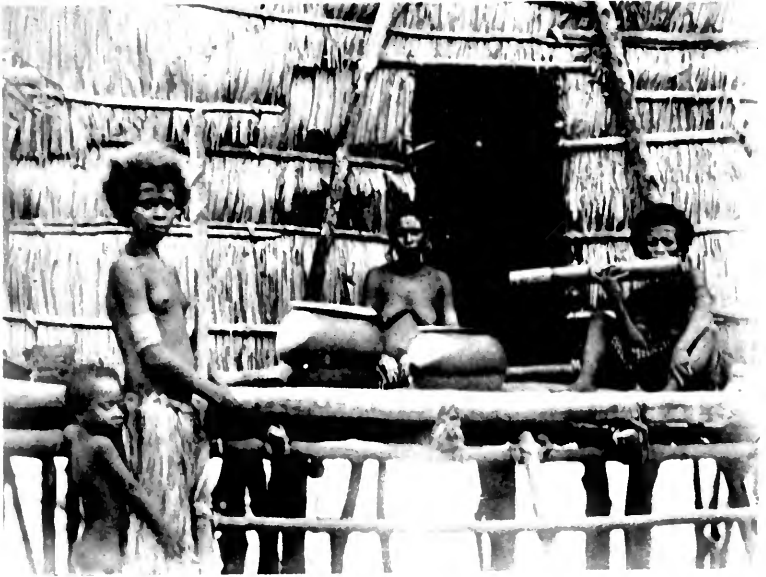
Tobacco was not everywhere used by the coast peoples, but when it was, it was usually obtained by trade from the interior. In the valleys of the Sepik (Kaiserin Augusta) and Fly Rivers tobacco is also extensively cultivated in many places. Along the Sepik River the leaves are crudely dried, and put up for trade in large rolls or packages about two feet long and eight to ten inches in diameter. For personal use the leaves are either carried loose in a small string bag, or a few are placed in a bamboo tube or box. These boxes are often decorated with elaborate designs.

On the south coast tobacco was cultivated at the mouth of the Fly River and also on the neighboring islands of Torres Straits. Here, according to a report of 1836, "they also cultivated the tobacco plant, which they prepare for smoking by drying the leaves and twisting them up into figs." Other early writers speak of tobacco being made up into a three-stranded plait.

Considerable care is usually devoted to the cultivation of tobacco. One of the Papuan government officials writes of the region between the Fly and the Dutch border as follows: "A very interesting feature is the skillful cultivation of tobacco, which is of fine quality, although the larger leaves become coarse and ribbed. Every village contains many beds of the plant, old house sites being selected for the purpose, possibly because of the well manured soil. The walls are removed before planting, and the plot is well dug and mixed with ashes. The roof is left. As the seedlings become stronger, the roof is gradually removed till only the frame remains. The leaves are collected and dried in the sun and in the houses; they are then packed in plaited rolls ranging up to six feet or so in length." On the Sepik River the seed beds are made under the houses. The young plants are transplanted to the fields, but are for a time shielded from the direct rays of the sun by palm leaves.



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NATIVE TAKING A PULL FROM THE SMALL HOLE OF A BAMBOO TOBACCO PIPE THAT HAS BEEN PASSED TO HIM. PORT MORESBY, PAPUA.

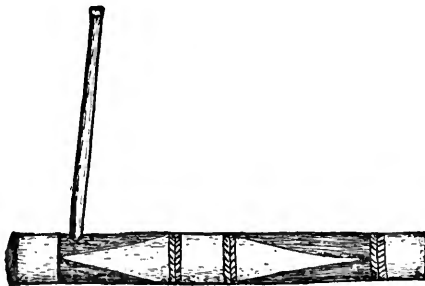


ENJOYING A SMOKE AFTER THE DANCE. THE SHORT CIGARETTE MAY BE SEEN IN THE HOLE NEAR THE LOWER END OF THE PIPE. GONA BAY, N. E. PAPUA.

The natives of New Guinea do not chew tobacco, but smoke it either in peculiar bamboo or wooden pipes of their own manufacture, or as cigarettes. Along most of the north coast of New Guinea pipes are not used. If the leaves are dry enough, they are somewhat crumbled and rolled up in a piece of the leaf of some other plant, used as a wrapper. In some places a piece of a banana leaf is preferred. In other places the leaf of the Pandanus, Hibiscus, or other tree may be used. After wrapping, it is usually necessary to tie it with a piece of fibre to keep the leaf from unrolling. When the natives can get it, they often like paper for this purpose, and old newspapers are frequently excellent objects for trade. The size of a native cigarette is about that of an ordinary cigar or smaller. If no dry tobacco leaves are at hand, a partly dry or green leaf is held over the fire, or laid on the coals till dry enough to serve the purpose.

In the interior tobacco is smoked either as cigarettes or with a short reed or bamboo tube which serves as a sort of cigarette holder. Wollaston reports that the Tapiro pygmies, living in the far interior mountains of Dutch New Guinea, "smoke tobacco chiefly as cigarettes, using for the wrapper a thin slip of dry Pandanus leaf. When, as is often the case, the wrapper is very narrow, and the tobacco is inclined to escape, the man smokes his cigarette in a peculiar manner; he holds the unlighted end in his fingers and with his mouth draws out the smoke from between the edges of the wrapper in the middle of the cigarette; this he continues to do until the cigarette is about half consumed, when he puts the end in his mouth in the ordinary way. The Tapiro also smoke tobacco in a pipe in a fashion of their own. The pipe is a simple cylinder of bamboo about an inch in diameter and a few inches in length. A small plug of tobacco is rolled up and pushed down to about the middle of the pipe,

and the smoker, holding it upright between his lips, draws out the smoke from below." This method of smoking is not unique, however. Several hundred miles to the eastward, on the headwaters of the Tedi, a tributary of the Fly, a Papuan government official found a similar custom. "The type of pipe used is very primitive and resembles a large cigarette holder more than a pipe. It consists of a straight or curved piece of bamboo, from nine to eighteen inches long, and from one-half to three-fourths of an inch in diameter. The tobacco, wrapped in a small piece of leaf, is inserted in the hole at the end of the holder, and the smoke is drawn through the hollow stem. Teased sago-leaf fibre is pushed down the pipe through which the smoke is drawn to purify it before it reaches the mouth. Natives were seen inhaling the smoke through the nostrils and blowing it out through the mouth, but this is not usual." The interior of this portion of New Guinea is almost entirely unknown, but small reed and bamboo tubes used for tobacco smoking are reported from the northern side of the interior mountains in the Dutch territory. One of these pipes has a hollow nut on the end, with an opening on the far side for the tobacco.



BAMBOO PIPE WITH UPRIGHT,  
FROM TIRIO, LOWER FLY RIVER, NEW GUINEA.

$\frac{1}{6}$  actual size.

Throughout most of the Fly valley and the coastal plain on either side, the type of pipe used is more elaborate. It consists of two parts. The main portion is a section of bamboo open at one end, but closed at the other by one of the nodal partitions. A small hole is made on one side near the closed end. This tube is fairly large, varying from one to three or four feet long, and from one and a half to three or more inches in diameter. A much smaller and shorter tube, up to a foot in length, is fitted into the small hole on the side, so as to stand up at right angles to the larger tube. The cavity of this small tube is usually enlarged somewhat at the top, and in this is placed the tobacco, either rolled up in a leaf or in the form of a cigarette.

Throughout the eastern end of New Guinea, from the Papuan Gulf on the south side and the Huon Gulf on the north, the pipe (*baubau*) is the same, but without the upright, the tobacco in the form of a cigarette being stuck or held in the small hole on top of the pipe. These pipes are often very nicely ornamented with incised or burnt designs (Figs. 1 and 2, Pl. II). In smoking these pipes the usual custom is to place the mouth at the opening at the end of the pipe, and draw the smoke in till the pipe is full. Then the hand is placed over the end, the upright or cigarette is removed, and the smoke drawn out through the hole at the side. The pipe is usually passed around, each person taking a pull or two. The women frequently prepare the pipe and pass it to the men. Sometimes the pipe is filled by placing the mouth over the glowing end of the cigarette or the bowl of the upright, and blowing the smoke into the pipe. Individual smokers may also keep the pipe to themselves, simply drawing the smoke through the larger tube, as is illustrated in Plate I, which shows the men refreshing themselves after a dance. Smoking, along

the coast at least, does not seem to have any special significance, and is practised by the women and, in most localities, children, as well as by the men.

In the Arfak Mountains of western New Guinea a peculiar wooden pipe is used. It is cut out of a single piece of brownish wood, and consists chiefly of a bowl for the tobacco, with a very short stem or mouthpiece on the side, and a projection at the back or below to hold it by, as shown in Figs. 4 and 5, Plate II. Fig. 3 shows a double pipe of a very unusual type from the same region. A wooden bowl, made out of a section of a limb of a tree, with a hole on the side for the stem, is illustrated in Fig. 6.

The tobacco grown in the interior highlands is said to be of excellent quality, and though strong in flavor, due to the crude method of preparation, not at all unpleasant to smoke. That grown nearer the coast is very strong, and the method of smoking with the bamboo pipe doubtless adds to its effectiveness. Had-don says, "The effect of this kind of smoking appears to be very severe. The men always seem quite dazed for a second or two or even longer after a single inhalation, but they enjoy it greatly and prize tobacco very highly. I have seen an old man reel and stagger from the effects of one pull at the pipe." Jukes says of the Erub people, "In smoking their own tobacco (which is of a light brown color), they break off a piece from the plait into which the leaves are twisted, and wrap it in a green leaf to prevent its setting fire to the wooden bowl. A woman is then deputed to fill the bamboo with smoke, and on its being passed round, each person takes a long draught of smoke, which he swallows, apparently with considerable effort, and stands motionless a few seconds, as if convulsed, with the tears in his eyes; he then respirees deeply, and seems to recover. They call it 'eree oora' (*eri ur*, 'to drink

heat or fire'), and, patting their stomachs, seem much comforted after it. I tried their tobacco, but found it intolerably hot and strong." Macgillivray offers similar testimony, "On several occasions at Cape York I have seen a native so affected by a single inhalation as to be rendered nearly senseless, with the perspiration bursting out at every pore, and require a draught of water to restore him; and, although myself a smoker, yet on the only occasion when I tried this method of using tobacco, the sensations of nausea and faintness were produced."

Haddon continues, "A white acquaintance of mine who at one time took to smoking the Papuan pipe gave me the following account of his experiences. The inhaled smoke is retained for as long as possible and let out through the mouth and nose. There is a very strong draught through the pipe which drives the smoke right into the lungs. On the first occasion this nearly chokes a person, and this experience generally satisfies all curiosity. After a single inhalation the confirmed smoker feels happy and sleepy; the effect is much the same as with opium, but with none of the illusions; all the senses are deadened, and after a whiff or two, the smoker goes off into a deep, heavy, but not refreshing sleep. The smoke is quite cool. My informant smoked in this manner for about six months, but had to leave it off as his heart became affected, but not his lungs. The heart's action was weakened, and he had a dry barking cough. The smoking made him generally lazy and indolent, but extremely nervous. He always took a pull when the effect of the last wore off, and had a great hankering after it."

Mention has been made above of smoking at Cape York. This is the most northern point of Australia near the islands of Torres Straits. The bamboo pipe is

in use in several places around the Gulf of Carpentaria, and has undoubtedly been introduced from the Islands. This is the only part of Australia where tobacco is smoked, but the wild native Australian tobacco is chewed throughout a large part of central and western Australia. For this purpose the dried leaves are used, frequently mixed with some other substance. One writer reports the usual method for central Australia to be as follows: "The variety preferred is that growing on the tops of stony ranges; of this the leaves and stems are dried in the sun. These are then ground into powder, which is mixed with an equal quantity of the white ash of the leaves and fine twigs of *Cassia eremophila* if available, if not, of those parts of some other bush, and the mass is made into a bolus of suitable size with saliva. This is chewed and passed from mouth to mouth, a bolus lasting about twenty-four hours. When not in use it is carried behind the ear or in the head or arm band. The lubras (women) are allowed to chew the plant only in the natural state." The Australian tobacco is a distinct species, *Nicotiana suaveolens*. According to Mr. Maiden, the Australian botanist, the samples he has seen of the New Guinea plant (leaves and petioles) cannot be the *N. tabacum*, the common cultivated tobacco, and are "not very remote" from the Australian species.

In the Melanesian islands tobacco has been recently introduced, and is cultivated in several localities. In a few places, however, it was cultivated before the recent arrival of Europeans, and this use was probably an extension of its use in New Guinea. All over western New Britain tobacco is cultivated and smoked, as native cigarettes, both with and without a bamboo tube or pipe. The pipe here used is open at both ends, and the cigarette is simply held by the hand in the outer end of the tube.

Tobacco is also raised by the Baining, a non-



Melanesian people living in the mountains of the Gazelle Peninsula, northeastern New Britain. Here the native-made cigarette is smoked in a small bamboo tube, used as holder. The coastal tribes of this part of the island neither cultivated nor smoked tobacco till the traders introduced it.

Tobacco has also been cultivated in the northwestern Solomon Islands, Buka and Bougainville, as far back as any record goes. In Bougainville, the largest, wildest, and most mountainous of all the Solomon Islands, it is interesting to note that there are three distinct methods of preparing the leaf for market, practised in different parts of the island. In the northwestern half it is put up in short plaits, in the central region it is rolled or twisted into sausage-like rolls, while in the southeastern the dried leaves are merely strung together on a cord. The natives also distinguish three separate varieties, according to quality and flavor. The pipes used in this region are of burnt clay, apparently an imitation of European pipes. Some have wooden stems, but usually the bowl and stem are made in one piece (Figs. 7-9, Pl. II). The natives make very good clay pots and vessels, and how long they have been making these clay pipes is not known, or whether their use was preceded by a different method of smoking. Parkinson says that before about 1890 the native-made pipe had only a crude clay bowl, with a small bamboo tube as stem. Probably the clay bowl was added to an original native bamboo tube, such as is still used in New Britain.

While the native tobacco is known and used throughout most of New Guinea, there are certain areas where it is not used, and where it is apparently unknown, such as a large part of the coastal plains south of the mountains in Dutch New Guinea. In other regions there is evidence that it is of fairly recent introduction. On the other hand, in the areas where it

is principally cultivated no one seems to know how long it has been in use. In some places the natives declare that tobacco was known "to the extreme length of their traditions" (Monckton). One of the legends of the Kiwai Islanders (mouth of Fly River), for example, tells how the people learned the use of tobacco from their culture hero at the same time that they were taught the use of coconuts, bananas, sago, and their other native foods. It is interesting to note that the betel nut, though now extensively used, is not included in that list. Also along the coast where the use of the betel nut is most in evidence, tobacco is less frequently used and less important than in the interior, where, in many places at least, the chewing of the betel is unknown. The names used for native tobacco also vary greatly in different regions. Altogether the facts seem to point to an ancient use of an indigenous New Guinea species of tobacco probably closely related to the Australian species.

ALBERT B. LEWIS.



1, BAMBOO PIPE WITH INCISED DESIGNS, MEKEO DISTRICT, PAPUA. 2, BAMBOO PIPE WITH BURNT DESIGNS. THE SMALL HOLE IS NEAR THE UPPER END, CENTRAL DISTRICT, PAPUA. 3-6, WOOD PIPES, ARFAK MOUNTAINS, DUTCH NEW GUINEA. 7-9, CLAY PIPES, BUKA, SOLOMON ISLANDS.

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