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HISTORY AND THE GENEALOGY OF MYTH IN TELEFOLMIN*

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INTRODUCTION

Among several shifts in the anthropology of the last two decades has been a growing awareness that the anthropology of remote locations must concern itself with a kind of cultural politics in which resistance and accommodation to globalisation play an increasing role. While varieties, strategies and outcomes vary from armed struggle, nativism or creolisation to an enthusiastic embrace of western consumerism (marked perhaps by a transitional phase of cultural humiliation; see Sahlins 1992), the encounter with modernity is something that affects everyone at the close of the century.

This is as true in the western Pacific as it is in the rest of the world, and it has produced a situation in which Melanesian anthropology – for long a classical site for traditional ethnography – finds itself undergoing its own identity crisis in the light of these developments. The problem has taken the form of an apparent dilemma with which Melanesianists have been wrestling over the past decade or so: whether to focus on the internal architecture of indigenous systems of meaning by attending to the ways in which local ideas and practices form a coherent whole, or to pay attention instead to the ways in which the articulation of Melanesians with what passes variously for globalisation or modernity constitutes the framework within which lives are lived and societies shaped. Robert Foster has characterised these alternatives as the New Melanesian Ethnography and the New Melanesian History respectively (1992; see Josephides 1991).

The New Melanesian Ethnography, associated with workers such as Marilyn Strathern and Roy Wagner, has argued for a distinctively Melanesian style of sociality which emerges in the course of dialectical innovation (e.g. Schieffelin 1976, Wagner 1972). Innovative in its own right, it has given us notions such as "symbolic obviation"

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(Wagner 1978) and the "dividual" or "partible person" (M. Strathern 1988) and has made the case that we must first understand local tropes if we are to understand local lives. The New Melanesian History, associated with the work of James Carrier, Roger Keesing, and others, looks in another direction, towards the relationships of power and encompassment in the world system that mark the recent history of Melanesian peoples. For these workers an insistence on the historicity of our ethnographic accounts is nothing less than a demand that we understand that the horizons of social life are always framed by the Melanesian encounter with the west.

Like Foster and myself, most contemporary anthropologists are unhappy with this choice of alternatives, and over the last decade many have sought to reconcile the two in various ways.[1] While we would all agree that it is now necessary to both historicise our understanding of culture and to culturalise history, formidable difficulties still remain. It is not, as someone once remarked, sufficient to take our accustomed models of culture, add a dash of history, and stir. Nor will it do, I would argue, merely to talk about historical resistance or agency unless were are prepared to situate these processes within a local framework of cultural action (see Biersack 1998).

The problems involved in bringing local culture and wider historical processes together mask many difficulties. The cardinal sin for the New Melanesian Ethnography is to be ethnocentric and project western ideas of meaning and action on to Melanesian lives, a pitfall sometimes difficult to avoid if, as is often the case, western ideas are themselves making inroads into local cultures. For the New Melanesian Historian, the worst mistake one can make is to treat local cultures as if they were worlds unto themselves – though many local people claim to do just that when faced with the swirl of changes that are apparently engulfing them. It is hard to see how to avoid one trap without falling into the other.

For me these difficulties are particularly pressing when I try to make sense of material from my own ethnographic fieldwork among the Telefolmin of Papua New Guinea. I first began fieldwork there in 1974, a year before independence, and have since made four further visits over a span of two decades. My original work was devoted to an analysis of Telefol religion along lines that would fit squarely within the terms of Foster's New Melanesian Ethnography. My concern was to understand Telefol religion in terms of the ways meaning or the lack of it (Jorgensen 1980) combine as an overall system through the men's cult, its initiations, and myths. On each of my subsequent field trips, however, Telefol culture and society presented themselves to me as a moving target, never seeming to stay long enough in any one place to be able to grasp it fully. In the late 1970s the majority of Telefolmin converted to Christianity, effectively making the men's cult a thing of the past. Since that time large-scale mining operations and the politics of the post-colonial state have kept things in flux, facing me with the problem of somehow integrating a series of synchronic snapshots, each offering a dif-

[1] See, for example, Biersack (1991), Clark (2000), and Foster (1992).

ferent view, into an overall understanding of what Telefol culture may be and how it works.

To some extent this difficulty has been one the Telefolmin themselves have faced as they try to make their way in a changing world and at the same time sustain the belief that things make sense. In this paper I try to deal both with some of my intellectual difficulties and to shed light on how Telefolmin deal with their own difficulties by returning to my first love in Telefolmin, their myths. Fortunately, and somewhat surprisingly for me, Telefolmin have continued to use and produce myths even after becoming good Christians and doing away with the ritual system with which the myths were so intimately associated.

In terms of the dilemma sketched out at the start, I would like to illustrate one approach to the problem by considering recent Telefol myths from two angles simultaneously. Here I am concerned to situate the myths in the context of recent Telefol history and its events, while at the same time locating them within a genealogy of forms linking them to what for present purposes I will take to be the 'original' corpus – those myths I collected in my first fieldwork in 1974–1975.[2] To the extent that the paper embodies an argument, it is that one way out of the apparent dilemma between two styles of ethnography is to focus on the interaction between local systems of meaning and broader historical processes as b o t h shift over time. An additional claim is that contemporary Telefol mythology acts as a kind of clearing house for testing out deployments of local ideas in the face of novel experience in what is a mediation of 'culture' and 'history'.

The paper begins with some preliminary background information and then proceeds to examine one particular myth, its context, and its antecedents in detail. I then go on to discuss subsequent developments in Telefol myth and conclude with some remarks about what all this tells us about mythic production in Telefolmin.

Background

Numbering just over 4,000, Telefolmin are a population of swidden cultivators distributed in twenty or so permanent villages in neighbouring valley systems of the Sepik headwaters in Papua New Guinea's West Sepik Province. Telefolmin and their neighbours belong to the Mountain Ok (or "Min") group of cultures, who share a tradition of descent from an ancestress known generally as Afek (Jorgensen 1996). Traditional Telefol religion was based upon an elaborate cult to which men gained entry through a series of graded initiations, and esoteric knowledge of myths played an important cul-

2 I should add that I mean nothing particularly subtle by genealogy and am simply using it as a shorthand for a genetically connected series generated over time.

tural role. Unlike many other peoples of highland New Guinea, Telefolmin have no lineages or clans and have a strongly marked preference for village endogamy and sister exchange. While ancestors are important in the Telefol scheme of things, traditionally they figured more prominently as guardians of collective welfare in spirit houses or as mythological actors than as markers of segmentary status.

Telefolmin take their name from the sacred village of Telefolip, which Afek built and from which they all originated. This village, in turn, takes its name from the spirit house located there – it is t h e Telefolip. This house is the origin point of the Telefol cosmos, and it is to this house that all Telefol men, regardless of village, had to return to complete their senior initiations. All houses in Telefolip must be rebuilt on their original sites in perpetuity, and this rule applies even more strongly to the spirit house, with which the welfare of the Telefolmin as a people is identified. Should this house be destroyed, or should Telefolmin fail to rebuild it, it is said that their gardens would fail and they would cease to exist as a people. Because Telefolmin are the custodians of the relics and spirit house established by Afek, their neighbours traditionally accorded Telefolmin a pre-eminent place in ritual matters, a sense of regional primacy that persists today.

Telefolmin in the late 1970s was a place where changes were underway whose import was a matter of intense and widespread speculation. Independence came in 1975, an event local people greeted with ambivalence. Telefolmin had been a backwater during the colonial period, and independence was touted as inaugurating a new era in which Papua New Guineans would take matters of *developmen* into their own hands. The announcement of plans for independence coincided with talk of large-scale mining at Ok Tedi, and many hoped that this would bring just the prosperity that had so obviously been lacking in a place whose only connection to the outside world was via light aircraft. Such longings were dealt a severe blow, however, when it became known that the project had been shelved following the breakdown of negotiations between the new government and Kennecott Copper, the developer holding the mining lease (Jackson 1982). Misgivings were further heightened when it was announced that Australian currency would cease to be legal tender and that the cash in people's possession had to be surrendered in exchange for the new national currency, the kina. Such changes, along with the widespread belief (warranted to some extent in fact) that the Australians would leave Papua New Guinea (PNG) fuelled worries about what the future might hold. For its part, the new government was obliged to temper its promises for a new future by downplaying the disruptive consequences of independence, in effect claiming that, while big changes were in the offing, the changes would not after all be that drastic. Little wonder, then, that local views of independence were mixed.

These apprehensions were echoed in various ways in many other parts of the country, but there were additional factors of a more purely local nature that contributed to a generally unsettled state in Telefolmin. A prohibition on exposure buri-

als imposed during the colonial period made it impossible to retrieve the bones of the recently dead, whose relics were kept in village spirit houses. Because there was a steady attrition of such relics, the ranks of spirits (*usong*) looking after village welfare had become depleted with little hope of replacement.[3] As a result, the traditional religion was in crisis during the mid-1970s, and some men characterised their plight as akin to that of a sick man who has no one to look after him.

It was during this period that the Baptist mission, which had been operating in the area with a notable lack of success since the start of the 1950s, embarked on a new scheme by establishing a bible college at nearby Duranmin. Mandated in part by the new government's policy of calling for the replacement of expatriates by Papua New Guineans, the purpose of the school was to train local pastors to take over the task of evangelisation. Much to everybody's surprise, in late 1977 the wife of the principal and eleven other local women at the bible college began having visions and talking in tongues as a result of possession by the Holy Spirit, something that quickly became dubbed "Rebaibal".[4] These mediums, or *spirit meri* ("spirit women") provided the channel through which the Holy Spirit made its plans for Telefolmin known. Speaking through the mediums, it reproached the Australian missionaries for remaining aloof from local people and failing to live up to their professed fellowship in Christ.[5] The Holy Spirit also insisted that the traditional religion be put aside, and urged the abrogation of traditional food taboos, permitting the consumption of one's own pigs and the sale of pork for cash. The aim was to do away with divisions between men and women and to promote closer marital relations within the context of the 'Christian family', which was to take precedence over other commitments. Finally, and most importantly, the Holy Spirit urged Telefolmin to do away with their spirit houses and relics in order to prepare the way for the mass conversions that were to follow. *Spirit meri* fanned over Telefol territory and began a programme of evangelisation which succeeded spectacularly where the mission had failed. In a span of less than two months,

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3 Relics were lost in part as a reaction to cases of persistent illness, which was sometimes diagnosed as due to the actions of rogue *usong* who resisted placation through sacrifice. The *usong*'s bones would then be removed from the spirit house and discarded in a remote part of the bush. In addition, a number of relics were lost over the years due to fires in which spirit houses and their contents were destroyed. One response to this situation took the form of a short-lived cult known as "Ook Bembem" ("Shaking Work"), in which a spirit medium established contact with ghosts in the Land of the Dead. A late development of this cult witnessed the exhumation of bones from cemeteries, a practice which soon ceased because it was illegal and because it was incoherent in terms of local ideas. If the bones of a recently dead person come into contact with the ground, the spirit is believed to depart immediately – and irrevocably – for the underground Land of the Dead to the west. Spirit mediumship was not a feature of traditional Telefol religion.

4 See Jorgensen (1981a) for details. See also Bennett and Smith (1983), Lohmann (2000), Robbins (1997, 1998).

5 The position of the expatriate missionaries here was ambivalent (see Bennett and Smith 1983). Loath to discount the reality of the Holy Spirit, they welcomed the breakthrough that had for so long eluded them. At the same time, direct access to the Holy Spirit rendered their position virtually redundant, a point which many new converts did not hesitate to stress.

thousands had been baptised and Telefolmin had become Christians who held regular prayer meetings and conducted Sunday church services. Relics were discarded, and the spirit houses in all but two villages were either destroyed or converted into village churches.

The Rebaibal coincided with a further development that is pertinent to our account. In 1978 a number of Telefol men were employed in mineral exploration around the Frieda River copper deposits in Nenataman, a lowland offshoot of Telefol settlement located in the vicinity of Duranmin (see Jorgensen 1997). Tensions at the exploration camp festered over the slights of the camp manager, who had declared that Telefolmin were "rock-headed" and would only ever be fit to work as simple labourers in such operations. In response, Telefol workers at the camp downed tools and walked over the mountains to Telefolmin – by way of Duranmin – to protest. A large public meeting was held at Telefomin station which was attended by the workers, the camp manager and other company officials, and a government minister who had come from the capital to deal with the situation. The workers insisted that the camp manager had to go, and although he made a tearful apology to the assembled crowd, shortly thereafter he was transferred from PNG.[6]

Although the issues of the strike had been more or less resolved, the workers and a number of assembled Rebaibalists took the opportunity to conduct a mass meeting on the future of Telefolmin. Attention turned to the two villages that had so far resisted Rebaibal, Telefolip and the neighbouring settlement of Kubrenmin. The fact that spirit houses and cult relics remained in these two villages was an affront to God and the Holy Spirit, and it was declared that these houses and their contents would have to go in the interests of a prosperous and Christian future for all Telefolmin.

This suggestion was hotly contested by men from Telefolip, who had no intention of destroying the house that Afek had built. The meeting broke up with nothing resolved, but a series of tense confrontations between Rebaibalists and the people of Telefolip ensued over the following months. On one occasion a party of Rebaibalists came down to the Ifi, a sacred stream flowing past Telefolip. According to some, their intent was to baptise a new batch of converts; others maintained that their true intent was to enter Telefolip and burn down the spirit house. In any event, they were met by a party of armed warriors from Telefolip who threatened them with arrows if they crossed the Ifi, and in the following months Rebaibalists and the people of Telefolip and Kubrenmin maintained a wary truce.[7]

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6 Personal communication by Tony Friend, Levi Binengim and others.

7 One Rebaibal partisan from Eliptaman was heard to boast that he and others from his valley would come over the mountains and burn the spirit house at Telefolip, just as his ancestors had done a century earlier. In the nineteenth century the Iligimin, who had inhabited Eliptaman, burned the Telefolip spirit house, an act which precipitated a bloody war culminating in the extermination of the Iligimin as a people. Telefolmin colonised the Eliptaman valley, taking young Iligimin women as wives and adopting Iligimin children into their families. The Rebaibalist in this case was claiming descent

It was in this context that in early 1979 I was asked by the Member of Parliament for Telefomin, Wesani Iwoksim, to return to Telefolmin to document the Telefolip spirit house and its associated lore.

The Story of Tibulam

When I arrived in Telefolmin I found that the spirit house at Telefolip was still intact, and although tensions ran high, it seemed that its safety was assured for the time being. One source of support for the people in Telefolip came from the government itself. The Prime Minister, Michael Somare, was a strong advocate of retaining indigenous values. He had returned to his home village in the East Sepik Province to be initiated, and photographs of him in traditional regalia were widely circulated and drew approving comments from people in Telefolip, who argued that this was proof that ancestral ways had a place in the new PNG. In addition, the patrol officer in charge of Telefomin District, an Englishman named Tony Friend, had made local people aware that any attempt to burn down the Telefolip spirit house would lead to charges of arson and would be punishable under the provisions of the act protecting national cultural property. When some of the senior men at Telefolip gave signs of wavering, the women and younger men of the village told them that if they allowed anything to happen to the spirit house, the older men would have to do all their own hunting, gardening and cooking, since the women and younger men would "go on strike". The people of Telefolip keenly felt their responsibility to preserve the house and its relics, not simply because it was their legacy from Afek, but also because the prosperity of taro gardens throughout the region depended upon the house remaining intact. This view gained strength when it was learned that the taro in Rebaibal villages was doing poorly, while the gardens of Telefolip remained as productive as ever.[8]

A number of individuals played prominent roles during this turbulent period, and none did more to protect the Telefolip spirit house than Fobayok. A retired policeman who had returned to his home village of Kubrenmin after working throughout PNG, Fobayok is a man of forceful character whose slight speech impediment did nothing to prevent him from strongly articulating his views on all matters of public concern. He had been elected as councillor for Kubrenmin and was the president of the Telefomin Local Government Council in 1979. He was foremost among those who

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from Iligimin captives and threatening to finish what his ancestors had started. In reply, the people of Telefolip were supported by Faiwolmin allies south of the main ranges, who said they would be ready with their bows if any such attempt were made.

8 At least one Rebaibalist took a different view, suggesting that the poor performance of their gardens was evidence that the Holy Spirit was displeased that they had allowed the Telefolip spirit house to remain.

threatened violence when the Rebaibalists had come to the Ifi, and he dealt firmly with his fellow villagers as well. Although he said he had nothing against Christians, when he heard that a local woman was shaking in church – a sign of the imminent appearance of the Holy Spirit – he went inside and roundly beat her and chased her outside. The woman had no further shaking episodes, and there was no sign of Rebaibal among the Christian women of Kubrenmin. The Holy Spirit might visit other Telefol villages, but not Fobayok's.

It was in connection with Rebaibal that Fobayok told me the story of Tibulam, which I reproduce below:

The Story of Tibulam (1979)

Afek was at Telefolip, and one of her children named Tibulam was there as well. Afek had a large pig, which she would shut up in her house every day when she went to her gardens. After a while she noticed that her pig seemed to be growing smaller, and she began to watch carefully for signs of what was wrong. She fed the pig a lot of food, but to no avail – soon her pig was just skin and bone. Then she suspected Tibulam, and decided to lay a trap for him. She pretended to go off to her garden as usual, but instead doubled back and concealed herself in some bushes at the edge of the village and watched. Soon she saw bright light shining through the chinks in the walls of her house, and when she came closer and peeked between the timbers she saw what Tibulam was doing. He had opened up the skin of her pig and then removed some of its flesh, which he cooked and ate. Then he closed up the skin again.[9] Afek then went off to her garden and came back as usual. But when she saw Tibulam, she told him she knew that he had been stealing her pig. She grabbed him and bound him to the wild fig tree (*yet*) growing at the edge of the village and then killed him. After she killed him, she took his body and all his things and put them in a nearby cave called Nangalamtem. She then went down to the Sepik, where she built a raft. When the raft had been completed, she put Tibulam and his things on it and told him to leave. At first she thought of keeping his bones, but decided against it, since he had been the cause of so much trouble for her. When she put him on the raft, she told him to follow the Sepik downstream until he got to a place that was flat and treeless. There he was to stay and forget all about Telefolip. Tibulam floated downstream on the raft, and when he got to the Sepik-Ilam junction, he called back, asking, "is this far enough?" Afek said no, and told him to go further. When he reached the Sepik-Elip junction, he asked again, and Afek again told him to go further. Finally he went all the way down and left, just as Afek had told him.

Tibulam was the ancestor of the white people; white people didn't come from someplace else, they came from Telefolip. But Afek got angry with Tibulam and sent him and all his things – things like torches, radios, cars, and aeroplanes – away. This is why you white people have these things and we don't, because Afek killed Tibulam. He took his things with him when he left, but he forgot a couple of things – a piece of cloth, a book, a piece of chalk, and a soccer ball – and we kept them in the Telefolip [spirit house]. If we had cor-

9 This corresponds in broad outline to the techniques of *tamam* sorcery, in which the sorcerer secretly consumes his victim's flesh and then closes up the body to prevent detection. Telefolmin say that they do not know how to do this and that it is a practice of the Oksapmin and Atbalmin peoples.

> rugated iron roofs like white people do, then these things would have remained and you could see them. But when the thatch gets old, the roof leaks, and the cloth and the book rotted. Only the chalk and the ball remain now.

This tale is of a type widely encountered in PNG, particularly in association with so-called cargo cults, and has a manifest content that is readily appreciated. Its key assertions are that Europeans and Telefolmin share a common origin, but were separated as a result of an immoral act – in this case, the fact that Tibulam was secretly consuming Afek's pig[10] – which led to an act of revenge. Afek, who was notoriously short-tempered, killed Tibulam and sent him away, along with all his goods. This is why Europeans have ready access to manufactured goods and Telefolmin do not, and Afek's injunction to Tibulam to forget about Telefolip explains why Europeans fail to acknowledge their kinship with local people. Despite Afek's injunction (or perhaps due to an additional element of forgetfulness), Tibulam's descendants d i d return to Telefolip, but as the beneficiaries of a wide disparity in material wealth that is not readily shared. The moral implications are evident in the possibility that it might have been otherwise, had Tibulam not been a thief, or Afek not been so short-sighted and angry that she sent him and his things away.

I had not heard the story of Tibulam before 1979, and am convinced that it emerged sometime between then and the end of my first fieldwork in 1975. I say this in part because I was told a great number of myths in 1974–1975 which were nonetheless heavily shrouded in secrecy, a situation that contrasts with the readiness, even eagerness, with which Fobayok and others told me Tibulam's story less than four years later. I shall return to this below, but for now I would like to suggest that the period between 1975 and 1979 was particularly ripe for the emergence of the tale.

At the most obvious level, the events in the tale mirror concerns and ambivalences that were particularly pressing in the period immediately following independence. Here the issue is not simply the relative poverty of Telefolmin *vis-à-vis* Europeans, but also the possibilities of abandonment and loss that characterised worries concerning independence. A widely spoken fear was that with independence the Australians would leave for good and refuse to 'look after' the people to whom they had promised (but failed) to bring development. In this context I would like to suggest that this concern about leaving Papua New Guineans to their own devices corresponds to the ultimate forgetfulness of Tibulam who, like the Australians, left for a place that was flat and treeless. If there is a wistfulness here, however, it is also tempered by real grievances – the colonial administration's failure live up to expectations, the missionaries' lack of brotherly love, the mining camp manager's insulting arrogance. That such grievances provoked the expulsion or exclusion of these Europeans

10 There is also the implication that Europeans prospered through theft from Telefolmin, but nobody ever raised this issue explicitly.

is morally understandable and may at the same time have, like Afek's exile of Tibulam, the unhappy result that Telefolmin will remain poor.[11]

I think this interpretation fits the historical circumstances surrounding the emergence of the story of Tibulam well, but it still fails to explain what was uppermost in Fobayok's mind when narrating the tale, since for h i m its most salient relevance was as a response to Rebaibal. In order to understand how this is so, however, we must leave this rather general level of analysis and delve more deeply into the world of Telefol myth.

Context and Precedents

The Telefol genre of tales that we would call myths is generally known as *Afek sang*, stories about Afek. *Afek sang* contain fantastic elements far removed from the experiences of everyday life, but the events of the stories are held to be true and always contain named characters and refer to known locations.[12]

Afek sang were traditionally communicated only to initiates of the men's cult. The plots of the myths often deal with encounters between Afek and some other protagonist, in which the divisions and separations of the contemporary Telefol world arise through a transgression which has loss as its consequence. The myths offer both explanations and means of action, in the form of ritual precedents, spells, and the use of cult relics. Most importantly, the mapping of mythic events on to a known landscape evokes temporally remote happenings in the world of experience. For men versed in Telefol myth, this landscape – most particularly in the vicinity of Telefolip – bristles with references to Afek and her doings.

The genre consists of several different narratives, which are nonetheless held to be part of a s i n g l e s t o r y (*sang maagop*). This means that apparent discrepancies or disjunctions between one tale and the next are believed to fit together to form a

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11 It is worth noting that Telefolmin staged an abortive rebellion against the Australian administration in the 1950s, killing two patrol officers and a number of police in separate co-ordinated attacks. While an account of this rebellion is out of place here, one of the motivating factors was that an Australian patrol officer kept single and married women as mistresses and occasional consorts but refused all compensation to their kin – a kind of theft reminiscent of Tibulam's theft of Afek's pig. In the present context it is important to realise that many Telefolmin traced the colonial administration's failure to bring development to the area as a passive act of revenge against the people who had tried to expel them. I am also struck here by Timmer's discussion of the myths of the Imyan of Irian Jaya, which bear a number of similarities to the case of the Tibulam story (Timmer 1998, 2000), not the least in regard to notions of lost connections to external sources of power (in the Imyan case, trading links with the Sultan of Tidore, which are remembered as a bright counterpoint to the current status of Imyan as part of the Indonesian state).

12 This combination of features contrasts with the two other main genres of Telefol narrative, *utuum sang (Märchen)* and *sogaamiyok sang* (remembered histories); see Jorgensen (1990a).

whole, though the fit may not be readily apparent or known to the speaker. The mention of Afek in a tale, therefore, always carries the implication that it is to be seen in relation to other *Afek sang*.

The tales that make up *Afek sang* are related to one another in two different ways. They may stand as sequential episodes organised with reference to the places and events that provide the spatial and temporal framework for Afek's adventures. Separate tales may also be linked in terms of progressively more esoteric levels of the 'same' narrative in which a secret version encompasses less secret ones, augmenting and pre-empting them at the same time (see Jorgensen 1981b, 1990b for details). Telefolmin draw on the imagery of taro gardening here and explain that, like taro, Afek sang have an underground 'base' or 'source' (*magam*),[13] and a visible portion above ground, the 'tip' (*kuuk*). A luxuriant growth of foliage above ground – the *kuuk* – gives little indication of the size and quality of the corm below the surface, but what counts for the taro gardener is precisely this – the *magam*. So it is with *Afek sang*, which have a relatively evident *kuuk* and a much more important and meaningful *magam*.

The relation between *kuuk* and *magam* in *Afek sang* is thus one between apparent and hidden meanings, and it is characteristic of the more secret narratives of the Afek cycle that they reveal the significance of details of more public versions. So, for example, the myth accounting for why women cannot eat red birds has an esoteric variant which explains that these birds acquired their red colour by bathing in Afek's menstrual blood, making the point that women would be 'eating themselves' if they were to eat these birds. Likewise, the myth accounting for the origins of the 'taro vine' (*iman sok*) used in the taro rite (*iman ban*) has an esoteric variant that explains that the vine is secretly the severed penis/umbilicus of Umoim. This in turn is linked to the origin of practices surrounding the birth/menstruation hut (*dungam or am katip*).

The interaction between esoteric variants and the sequence of different tales often works to establish links between apparently unconnected episodes. A particularly striking example of this occurs with an esoteric variant of the story of Afek and the wild animals. In relatively widely known versions, Afek scatters wild animals into the bush because Umoim spied on her as she lured them to Telefolip, where she killed them after offering them taro. What the more secret version – the *magam* – explains, however, is that Umoim's spying had incestuous implications and shamed Afek because the taro she held out to the animals issued from her vagina, which Umoim saw. In the subsequent episodes, in which she gives him the spirit house and goes to the family house in order to calm crying children, it is also explained that the children cried out of hunger because there was no taro, a lack which was the consequence of Umoim's witnessing his sister giving birth to taro. She thus gave him the spirit house not only so that she could calm the children, but because thenceforth rituals in the spirit house would be necessary to assure the fertility of the taro, and this in turn

[13] *Magam* can also be translated as "meaning".

accounts for why she had to kill him – his bones would be needed to conduct the cult. Thus it is revealed that h e w a s g i v e n t o t h e h o u s e as much as the reverse, an act of retaliation and restoration that was necessary if her children were not to starve.

With this in mind, we can return to the question of what the story of Tibulam meant to Fobayok by attending to particular features of the story that he took as central. The first that he seized upon was the detail of the light shining through the house walls. This indicated that Tibulam was, in fact Ataanim, the Sun. Here he linked two tales involving Ataanim. In the first, Ataanim angers Afek by cooking and eating portions of the corpse of her pig, which had been laid out in her house in preparation for mortuary ceremonies on its behalf. This myth is conventionally held to account for the origins of the practice of eating domestic pigs, and of cooking.

> *Afek, Ataanim, and the Old Pig (1974)*
> Before, when Afek was at Telefolip, people didn't know about eating [domestic] pigs. Instead, when they died, people would place their corpses on an exposure platform and mourn. One day a very old and very large pig of Afek's died. They laid the corpse out in a house, and all the adults went off to the gardens to fetch vegetables for a mourning feast while the children looked after the body. While they were there, Ataanim, the Sun, came and saw that they were crying. He asked them what was wrong, and they said that their Old One had died. Ataanim asked if he could see the Old One, and when the children showed him into the house where the pig was laid out, he began laughing. "This isn't a man", he said, "it's a pig – you're supposed to eat it, not mourn for it!" He told them this, and they were afraid. Then he cooked the pig [with his heat] and invited the children to taste it. Some were sick at the thought and vomited, and others said they dare not – their parents would be angry with them. But Ataanim insisted, and some tried it and found it tasty, and soon the others tried too. Then, leaving the partially eaten pig behind, Ataanim left. When Afek and the adults got back, they were horrified at what they found and began to beat the children, but the children said that Ataanim had come and said that pigs were for eating and showed them about cooking. The adults then tried it, and they too found it good.[14] So that is how people came to eat pigs – Ataanim showed us. Afek, however, was still angry about this and decided that she would kill Ataanim. She tried to kill him later, but Ataanim tricked her and got away by going under the ground.

This reading of the story of Tibulam was important because Fobayok also saw it as a comment on his additional identification of Tibulam as Jesus Christ. Here he linked the story of Afek binding Tibulam to the *yet* tree with the tale of the crucifixion, based on the identification of the *yet* tree with the cross.[15] For him this corresponded with a second tale of the killing of Ataanim's son at the junior initiates' house at Telefolip, an

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14 All, that is, except those who had looked after the pig. They vomited, and Afek said that people would not be able to eat pigs that they fed. This is a crucial feature of Telefol food taboos which is elaborated in other myths that need not concern us here.

15 Fobayok also mused about the significance of the fact that the *yet* tree is linked to the death of Afek's brother Umoim. Here he was uncertain, but wondered if in fact Jesus Christ was in reality Umoim himself. See the discussion of subsequent myths, below.

identification perhaps facilitated by the description of the boy's father as a tall, light-skinned man with long hair.[16]

> *Killing Ataanim's Son in the Kuyapkan (1974)*[17]
> The young men's house in Telefolip is called the Kuyapkan. This name means "they killed him there". They call it this because of what happened there once when there was an initiation. The men had secluded the novices in the young men's house, and a tall, light-skinned stranger with long hair came from the direction of Oksapmin [in the East]. They hadn't seen him before, and he had a big kind of shell that they hadn't seen either – a kina shell. He brought his son and wanted him to be initiated with the other boys at Telefolip. He left the boy there and then went away. When he was gone, the others decided to kill the boy, so they held him and then cut him up. Later, his father was angry and came and burned the house down with the novices inside – they all died. He 'backed' the killing of his son. This man was Ataanim.

All these things mattered to Fobayok because he took them as a refutation of Rebaibal claims about Jesus and the Bible (the book Tibulam left behind). What they had to say, he argued, was clearly false because the true origins of Christ were already known to Telefolmin through the story of Ataanim, a fact further confirmed by two very secret names for the village of Telefolip. One of these was Tibubip (named after Tibulam) and the other was Yesubip (*yet* + *-bip*, = "wild fig village"). The name Yesubip refers to the *yet* tree to which Tibulam was bound, and is also the source of the name by which Europeans know him: Jesus.

Fobayok's interpretation of the story of Tibulam clearly draws on more general Telefol attitudes towards myth, in which hidden meanings become visible by establishing correspondences with the total corpus of myths, and in doing so he was trying to uncover the *magam* – source, meaning – of the tale. His success in doing so vindicated his opposition to Rebaibal by reaffirming the central importance of Telefolip and validating the truth of the ancestral myths by encompassing what Rebaibalists had to say as – at best – merely the exoteric *kuuk*, if not outright lies, a view widely shared by his fellows at Telefolip.

While tracing Fobayok's understanding of the Tibulam story helps us to understand the kinds of work Telefolmin do with myth, it leaves many questions about the tale's origins unanswered. In answer to my own questions on the matter, Fobayok insisted that the myth was a traditional one from the ancestors, just like the rest of the *Afek sang*. He did admit that he had not heard it during the course of his initiations, but then explained that he had left the area as a young man to work for the police and

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16 Although I cannot go into details here, my own reading of this feature of the narrative is that it suggests an identification with Hewa or Sisimin people to the east of Telefolmin.

17 There is a good chance that the sacrificial theme of this passage is historically linked to similar themes stretching from Oksapmin eastwards across the Strickland Gorge into the Duna and Huli areas of the Southern Highlands. For comparative references, see Ballard (1998, 2000), Biersack (1998), Brutti (1997), Glasse (1995), Morgan (1997) and A. Strathern (1995, 1998). There has been some suggestion that such connections might be related to pre-colonial trade routes (Ballard 1994).

had therefore missed hearing many myths because he was away during those years when he would ordinarily have been introduced to some of the more secret parts of cult lore. In fact, he had heard it only recently, from another man. I then began trying to trace the myth by questioning other men, and soon found that it seemed to have been told first by Ogeesep. Ogeesep was a senior man from the nearby village of Biiltevip, fully initiated, and with a good knowledge of the Afek cycle. He was also one of the few senior men who had converted to Christianity in the days before Rebaibal. When I asked Ogeesep where he had first heard the story, he told me that his father had told it to him when he was a young man.

At this point one encounters an important aspect of the secrecy surrounding the affairs of the men's cult, for the fact that nobody else had heard the story before hearing it from Ogeesep was not taken to mean that it was new or his own invention. Given the injunctions against the dissemination of sacred myths, it could reasonably be assumed that Ogeesep had simply guarded his knowledge as he was required to do. The fact that he later revealed it at all was attributed to the general opening up of a good deal of traditional mythology in the wake of widespread Christianisation, when many senior converts were urged to reveal their knowledge as a token of their faith and as a means of distancing themselves from ways held to be sinful.[18]

The rules of cult secrecy were, in fact, taken extremely seriously. Disclosures took place piecemeal as men progressed through the initiation system, first as initiands and later (and only optionally) as initiators.[19] These practices went hand in hand with the general sense that one myth often conceals another myth which reveals hidden meanings. Under these circumstances men were not surprised to hear myths that were previously unknown to them.

In Ogeesep's case one could, of course, accept his claim that he learned the myth from his father, but the odds weigh rather heavily against this. Assuming, therefore, that Ogeesep originated the myth, the question then becomes: How did he put it together? It is possible, in fact, that the myth was not consciously formulated by him, since I know of at least one other case in which a man 'found' a hitherto 'forgotten' myth in a dream. Whether this is the case or not, I think it is reasonable to assume that, among other things, Ogeesep may have been concerned with the relationship between what he had learned in the men's cult and the Christian teachings that he quite deeply

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18 These were often elicited under pressure to confess sin. In my experience, most public disclosures following the Rebaibal were in fact relatively low-level esoteric versions, and some senior men who are now Christians are still reluctant to reveal matters that they were traditionally charged with protecting.

19 The ritual system was divided into moieties with special competences in life-giving (*Iman Ilo*: "Taro Side") and life-taking (*Un Ilo*: "Arrow Side") and members of each moiety were prohibited from communicating their esoteric knowledge with members of the other. The stratification of ritual knowledge in terms of initiation grades was therefore also accompanied by a bifurcation of secret ritual knowledge in terms of these moieties, with the result that all men were ignorant of important aspects of the system.

embraced. Having said this, however, there is another course open to us if we also ask why the story of Tibulam was so readily accepted, even by those whose views on Christianity were less favourable than Ogeesep's.

If one scans the corpus of *Afek sang*, one finds additional correspondences with the story of Tibulam, apart from those aspects of the Ataanim myth which attracted Fobayok's eye. Foremost among these is a relatively common variant of the story of how Afek killed her younger brother, Umoim. I reproduce this below:

> *The Death of Umoim (1975)*
> When Afek and Umoim were at Telefolip, she would send him into the bush to find game. Every day he went and saw many tracks, but he always came back empty-handed. When he returned to Telefolip he would find his sister cooking some wild pig or cassowary for them to eat, but when he asked her where she got it, she just told him she found it nearby. He tired of going to the bush for nothing, and decided to spy on Afek to see how she got the game. He pretended to go off to hunt, but then doubled back and concealed himself at the edge of the bush to watch. She held out a piece of taro and called, and the wild animals came to her to eat. Then she would kill one of them with a piece of firewood. But this time the animals were wary and hesitant, and only a very skinny wild pig came when she called. Then she knew her brother was spying on her, so after she killed this pig she told the other animals to scatter far into the bush. When Umoim returned, they ate, but she told him that she knew what he had done and that from now on men would have to go far into the bush to find game because he had spoiled her work [...].
>
> Later on she was still angry with Umoim, and killed him by working *tamoon* sorcery on a bit of pork left over from his meal. After he wasted away and died, she put his corpse on an exposure platform in the wild fig tree (*yet*) at the edge of the village. She took his bones and kept them in a netbag in Telefolip, and then told Umoim to go under the ground at Nangalamtem [cave] and go off to the west to prepare a place for the dead [Bagelam] and a road for them to go there. When he got there, he was to prepare *fubi* adzes, and she would come to visit him when all was ready. After three days Afek got impatient and went to see Umoim in Bagelam, but when she got there he was absent from his house and it was cold. Afek decided to make a fire, but there was no firewood. She saw the adzes he had lined up around the floor of the house and decided to take one to cut some wood for a fire. She chopped some wood, but as she was finishing the *fubi* broke in two. She returned to Umoim's house with her wood and the broken adze and replaced it as though nothing had happened. She made her fire, and when Umoim returned he immediately saw the broken blade and berated Afek for being impatient. Umoim had still intended to cook the adzes to harden them, but because Afek had broken his adze he refused to do so and said that from then on adzes would break and that men would have to trade for them – they couldn't come directly to Bagelam to get them because she had spoiled his work.[20] He then told her to go back to Telefolip and await his return.
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> Afek waited for Umoim for three days, but she grew impatient that he had still not come and decided to go to her gardens. She told her children to wait in Telefolip for their

20 The two pieces of this *fubi* adze are at Telefolip and are placed on either side of the entrance to the road to the Land of the Dead (Bagelilep); one of their functions is to prevent the living from travelling along this road, for they would crush anyone who tried to pass between them.

uncle to come and to call her if he arrived while she was away. After she had gone, Umoim came back and asked the children where their mother was. They told him that she had waited but had finally decided to go off to her gardens. Umoim was angry, but said nothing. Then he bowed his head down and told the children that something in his scalp was itching and asked them to look to see what it was. When the children looked, they expected to find lice but saw maggots writhing in his flesh instead and exclaimed, "Maggots are eating you!"[21] Angry and ashamed, Umoim began calling out for Afek to come. He told the children to close their eyes, and when they opened them again they saw that he had changed himself into a small bird perched on the gable of Afek's house. When Afek arrived, he told her that her children had shamed him and that from then on the dead would not come back to see the living. Afek tried to placate him, but he remained upset and flew off to the west. If Afek's children had simply gathered the maggots instead of insulting Umoim, they would have had *bonang*,[22] but instead people have to get them by trading with Wopkaimin or Atbalmin people to the west.

This myth is one of the key episodes in the entire corpus of *Afek sang* and, like many of the others, accounts for the separations that mark the Telefol world as the result of things going wrong – here, the estrangement of the living and the dead. Angered by Umoim's too intimate glimpse of her, Afek sets in train a sequence of actions that leads to her inability to ever look at him again.[23] At a general level there is an obvious similarity in plot between the contours of this myth and the story of Tibulam, where in each case an original act of 'theft' results in an act of retaliatory violence on Afek's part which precipitates the loss of wealth. This overall resemblance is strengthened if we examine a set of resonating passages from each narrative.

The Death of Umoim and the Story of Tibulam compared (numbers indicate the sequence in narrative):

The Death of Umoim	*The Story of Tibulam*
1. "When Afek and Umoim were at Telefolip, she would send him into the bush to find game. Every day he went, and he saw many tracks, but he always came back empty-handed. When he returned to Telefolip he would find his	1. "Afek was at Telefolip, and one of her children named Tibulam was there as well. Afek had a large pig, which she would shut up in her house every day when she went to her gardens. After a while she noticed that her pig seemed to

21 "Ilop kunesip ko", the gravest insult in the Telefol repertoire.

22 *Bonang* are small shells (dog whelks, tambu) used for mortuary and bridewealth payments. They resemble maggots in size, shape and colour, and are believed to have originated from the maggots in Umoim's corpse.

23 Note that in an intervening episode, Afek tells Umoim to don her feather decorations so that she can admire him in the doorway of the spirit house, echoing his looking upon her and anticipating his subsequent transformation into the form of a bird.

sister cooking some wild pig or cassowary for them to eat, but when he asked her where she got it, she just told him she found it nearby".	be growing smaller, and she began to watch carefully for signs of what was wrong".
2. "He tired of going to the bush for nothing, and decided to spy on Afek to see how she got the game. He pretended to go off to hunt, but then doubled back and concealed himself at the edge of the bush to watch".	3. "Then she suspected Tibulam, and decided to lay a trap for him. She pretended to go off to her garden as usual, but instead doubled back and concealed herself in some bushes at the edge of the village and watched".
3. "She held out a piece of taro and called, and the wild animals came to her to eat [...]. But this time the animals were wary and hesitant, and only a very skinny wild pig came when she called".	2. "She fed the pig a lot of food, but to no avail – soon her pig was just skin and bone".
4. "[...] Later on she was still angry with Umoim, and killed him by working *tamoon* sorcery on a bit of pork left over from his meal".	4. "He had opened up the skin of her pig and then removed some of its flesh, which he cooked and ate. Then he closed up the skin again". [alien *tamam* sorcery]
5. "After he [Umoim] died, she put his corpse on an exposure platform in the wild fig tree (*yet*) at the edge of the village [...] then [she] told Umoim to go under the ground at Nangalamtem [cave] and go off to the west to prepare a place for the dead [Bagelam] and a road for them to go there".	5. "She grabbed him and bound him to the wild fig tree (*yet*) growing at the edge of the village and then killed him. After she killed him, she took his body and all his things and put them in a nearby cave called Nangalamtem. She then went down to the Sepik, where she built a raft. When the raft was completed, she put Tibulam and his things on it and told him to leave".
6. "She took his bones and kept them in a netbag in Telefolip [...]. Afek tried to placate him, but he remained upset and then flew off to the west". [relics for taro ritual]	6. "[...] she told him to follow the Sepik downstream [i.e. to the west] until he got to a place that was flat and treeless [...]. He took his things with him when he left, but he forgot a couple of things – a piece of cloth, a book, a piece of chalk, and a soccer ball – and we kept them in the Telefolip [spirit house]".

On this basis there is little doubt that, parallels with the stories of Ataanim aside, the story of Tibulam is a transformation of the myth of the death of Umoim. This transformation is in many respects an inversion of the Umoim myth, in which, for example, Umoim's failure to find wild pigs (*saaman*) in the hunt corresponds to the dwindling of Afek's domestic pig (*kong*) as she goes off to garden.[24] Here too we see the substitution of a raft (*keyu*) intended to take Tibulam away for an exposure platform (*ilet*) – whose general appearance and techniques of construction are similar (both referred to as *bet*, "bed", in Neo-Melanesian Pidgin English) – built so that Afek can keep Umoim's bones. Each leaves something behind – Umoim's bones, Tibulam's manufactured items – which remain in Telefolip. Taken as a whole, and using the myth of Umoim's death as its template, the story of Tibulam refigures the tale of Umoim by replacing a benevolent but otiose ancestor with a troublesome but materially powerful European who was once exiled and who may again depart.

The identification of Tibulam with Christ has important implications in this context. While Ogeesep may have envisioned a reconciliation between Christianity and traditional Telefol religion by using the myth of Umoim as his prototype, Fobayok's reading (and that of Telefolip as a whole) suggests rather an encompassment of Christianity within the mythology of the Afek cycle, a perspective which stiffened the resistance of people in Kubrenmin and Telefolip against Rebaibal.

Although a consideration of the myth of Umoim's death fleshes out our sense of the sources of the Story of Tibulam, some awkward details remain, not the least of which is the list of items Tibulam left behind. One can readily imagine the ways in which items such as a book (especially in view of the significance of the Bible to Christians) and cloth might stand as signs of the ensemble of things indicative of Europeans, or, more generally, of modernity. I was once told that whereas Europeans have books, Telefolmin have bones (*men amem*: "sacred relics"), which in each case are links to the past and sources of power. That cloth or clothing might be regarded as significant also makes sense, given the general importance Papuan peoples attach to the body and its adornment.[25] But what of the chalk, and the soccer ball?

The list of Tibulam's objects – book, cloth, chalk, soccer ball – is strongly evocative of public school in Telefolmin. Students are required to wear school uniforms and read books and chalk-inscribed lessons from the blackboard. In addition, playing soccer is one of their main leisure activities. All of this fits in with the general preoccupation with changes afoot in Telefolmin without explaining the particular significance of such objects for older men.

In fact, I was told on different occasions in 1974–1975 that the Telefolip spirit house had housed a book and cloth in the past, which had unfortunately rotted and been lost. But by the time the Tibulam story emerged in 1979, two additional elements

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24 Cf. the division between Arrow and Taro ritual moieties.

25 See Knauft (1999), A. Strathern (1996), and, for the case of *kain timur* in the Bird's Head area of Irian Jaya, Timmer (1998).

had been incorporated into the stock of relics at Telefolip – the chalk and the soccer ball – which had the important property of being impervious to the passage of time. This is an important attribute in the light of traditional Telefol religious ideas, for which the inevitable attrition or diminution of the human world over time – *biniman* ("to become nothing"), which I have glossed as "entropy" (Jorgensen 1981b) – is the defining feature of the human condition.[26] Here Telefolmin again resort to the imagery of taro to explain this, saying that *biniman* can be seen in the way that water runs off a taro leaf, an image of how life drains away. Those items which resist *biniman* and decay – stone, bone and shell – are accorded a central and life-giving importance in the Telefol scheme of things, as a consideration of the myth of Umoim will show. In a story of loss and estrangement, those things that Umoim left behind – his bones, stone *fubi* adzes, *bonang* shells – are the tools with which Telefolmin resisted *biniman*. They did so by retrieving the bones of the dead, who watched over the village and assisted in spirit house rituals, by clearing the forest with their stone adzes to plant gardens, and by exchanging *bonang*, which were given in mortuary ceremonies and later paid in bridewealth for new marriages. All these objects had the ability to resist the passage of time and were used to project Telefol life into the future.

These concerns are related to the fact that all of the myths of the Afek cycle are accompanied by some aspect of materialisation, in which the events of the narrative are signalled by a visible sign of the distant past in the world of present experience.[27] These signs may take various forms, the two most common of which are particular places (see Jorgensen 1990a) and relics. So, for example, two features of the story of Tibulam that serve to validate its authenticity – and that link it to other myths of the Afek cycle – are the references to the *yet* tree, which still stands on the margins of Telefolip, and to the cave known as Nangalamtem situated below the village and affording an entrance to the road followed by the dead. This sense of authenticity is furthered by the implicit cross references such signs make to other narratives in which these features figure, hinting that there is indeed meaning to be found here.

Returning to the question of the chalk and the soccer ball, the reason that these figure in the story of Tibulam is that they are actually p r e s e n t as relics in Telefolip. Given their experiences with a world of ritual secrecy in which deception plays a considerable role, Telefol men are a sceptical lot, and none more so than Fobayok. When he first heard the Story of Tibulam, he was uncertain what to make of it and decided to put it to the test. He borrowed the soccer ball from the men at Telefolip, planted it with a tanket (Cordyline sp.) in a new taro garden, and waited to see what would hap-

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26 See Jorgensen (1985), Ballard (2000).

27 This materialisation is crucial to understanding Telefol ritual practices, since all the myths of the Afek cycle are held to have some consequence for the present. Some of the most secret aspects of the myths are songs and spells, which, in conjunction with relics of one kind or another, are held to be materially efficacious. I have argued elsewhere that this feature shares the logic of *mana*, in which truth and efficacy are conjoined (Jorgensen 1990a).

pen. When his taro produced a bumper crop, he was satisfied that the story was true – it had borne fruit.

Subsequent Developments of Telefol Myth

My argument so far has been that the story of Tibulam arose from a specific genealogy, a set of mythic prototypes – the stories of Ataanim and the death of Umoim – at a particular juncture in Telefol history, both of which I have tried to outline here. The logic of the discussion entails that we understand the process of Telefol mythic production as a response to historical circumstances that is both constrained and enabled by the extant corpus of myths and the conventions surrounding them. Here two basic assumptions are critical: that there are many different ancestral myths which all form one story, and that all currently known variants may mask hitherto undisclosed myths which stem from the same source. These assumptions go hand in hand with the idea that currently known myths may contain details which offer clues to deeper meanings – *magam* – that are significant for the world of experience. From this point of view, Telefol myth supports two kinds of innovation which can be deployed in the light of historical events, both of which are seen as a part of pre-existing tradition. On the one hand, currently available myths may be given a new significance that was latent in features of the narratives themselves; on the other hand, new myths may emerge on condition that they articulate with previously known myths in some way.

Evidence for both of these processes is available in the form of two examples. In the first, drawn from the early 1980s, Telefolmin found a novel application of the extant myth of the death of Umoim by mapping it on to the geography of mining development. The location of the Ok Tedi ore body is at Mount Fubilan, and when plans for the mine were announced, Telefolmin were unsurprised that this should be the site of mineral wealth. Situated astride the trade routes through which shell valuables and stone adzes entered the area in pre-colonial times, Mount Fubilan is located directly above the Land of the Dead established by Umoim. It was also the source of shell wealth (the maggots from Umoim's corpse) and *fubi* adzes – hence the name of the mountain: Fubilan.

When mining began at Fubilan, Telefolmin understood the mineral wealth extracted from the mountain to be a transmuted form of the wealth Umoim had established (a view that coincided with the collapse of the trade in shells passing by Fubilan). The story of Umoim's death circulated widely in unaltered form with two exceptions: his *fubi* adzes were now identified with valuable minerals in the ground, and he was believed to travel back and forth on the underground road between Telefolip and the Land of the Dead on a nightly basis. In this guise he was known as "Ok Tedi Tiin-Molin" ("The Caretaker of Ok Tedi"), and was said to carry a *fubi* adze under each arm.

Although they were not officially declared landowners, Telefolmin succeeded in gaining recognition of a special relationship with the mine in the form of the Telefomin District Development Agreement, which provided a package of benefits, including a new high school and annual development funds earmarked for the area. The agreement was brought about in large measure by the efforts of Telefol politicians at the national and provincial levels, but the majority of Telefolmin saw it as the government's acknowledgement of the truth of the story of Umoim and its assertions. The seal on this agreement was set when the Governor General came to Telefolmin in 1983 for the signing, where he was presented with a *fubi* adze by the councillor of Telefolip, the village from which Umoim set forth (Jorgensen 1990a).

The second example, drawn from the 1990s, saw the emergence of a myth which synthesised various features of the myths we have already discussed and took into account aspects of Christianity and new mining projects. In the early 1990s the announcement of plans for gold and copper mining at Nena gave rise to a new series of concerns about how or whether Telefolmin (with two villages in the area) would be recognised as landowners. When I visited Nenataman in 1995, the following myth was circulating throughout the area:

Umoim and the Source of Gold (1995)

When Afek was at Telefolip they once had an initiation to which a tall white man with long hair came. He wanted to participate, but the others looked at him and thought, "He's all by himself – why not kill him?" So they held him and tied him with thorny rattan to the *yet* tree. After they bound his arms and legs, they cut his achilles tendon and he died. Then they cut him up and took his bones. They put him in a cave over on the Mofumkot side, below Telefolip [i.e. Nangalamtem]. He was there for three days, and there was thunder, lightning, rain and earthquakes. Two women – a Wopkai woman [from near the Ok Tedi mine site] and a Sibia woman [from near the Nena mine site] – cut some sweet-smelling wood and brought it to the cave. But when they moved aside the stone that covered the entrance and looked inside, they found that he was gone. People told the women that he had gone to Telefolip, but he wasn't there either. He had crossed the Ifi and gone to Wimtem, [28] looking for Afek. He went to cross the bridge over the Sepik, but Afek had cut its supports, and he fell into the water when he got halfway across. He became the first man to swim when he fell in the water and emerged safely downstream. In the meantime, Afek was on the south bank of the river, busy making things like machines and cars. He sneaked up on her from behind and grabbed her, but she took a seven-pound hammer and swung it, crying "Kwiinmimi!" Killing him with one blow, she sent him back to Telefolip and told him that he would 'own' the fork in the road followed by the dead on their way from the land of the living. He returned to Telefolip and placed a *fubi* adze at the entrance to the road to the Land of the Dead (in Telefolip), and he placed a second underneath the Fubilan [Ok Tedi] mine. At Nena he placed a *bangelii* adze in the ground – Umoim came and hid it there. Then he went underground and returned to Telefolip [...].

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28 A cave near Urapmin, down the Sepik from Telefolmin (i.e. to the west). This is an important ritual site often mentioned in conjunction with Nangalamtem as the Urapmin entry point to the underground road to the Land of the Dead.

> Our ancestors wanted to follow this and came looking for this *bangelii*, and that's why they came here [to Nenataman] [...] Umoim's netbag [i.e. the bag with his relics] contains his bones and a shovel, a spoon, cloth, and a plate, but the people of Telefolip have hidden all these things [...]. He opened the road for the dead – he can open the door. Telefolip has two roads, a good one and a bad one, and he watches over the fork where the two divide.

Although I do not have the space for a full analysis of this myth here, some remarks to place it in its historical and pragmatic context are in order. Drawing on the precedent of the earlier myth of the death of Umoim, it argues that he seeded the landscape with adzes at the present location of valuable mineral deposits, which coincide with the sources of traditional stone adzes. The overt aim is to secure Telefol claims to rights over the mine sites, and the point of the story here is to say that the expansion of Telefolmin into the Nena area in the nineteenth century was in pursuit of their ancestral legacy. Here what had been a tale of the loss of wealth has become converted into one in which wealth is to be secured, a reflection of the evident success of claims made with reference to the Ok Tedi mine in 1983.[29] This is a far cry from the situation in 1979, when local people's views of the future were filled with ambivalence instead of the anticipation of today.

A comparison with the myths we have examined so far reveals that this story draws upon and fuses aspects of the killing of Ataanim's son, the Death of Umoim, and the Story of Tibulam. Most strikingly, the tale also incorporates a great deal of Christian imagery. Here, using the Bible and the scaffolding of previous myths, Umoim's identity as Christ (and *vice versa*) is disclosed. Although the narrator of this particular version, a Nenataman man named Peter, is both a fully initiated man and a church pastor, this identification is widespread and not confined to the church elite. Indeed, quite apart from the immediate specifics of the overt concerns of the Story of Tibulam or the myth of the source of gold, I would like to suggest that the long-run trajectory of Telefol myth is in the direction of reconciling Christianity and traditional religion. Although the case can be made on other grounds, there are two persistent details that run through the series: the *yet* tree and the cave of Nangalamtem. As is characteristic of the myths of the Afek cycle as a whole, sacred sites provide spatial anchoring points for the narratives and serve to orchestrate cross-references between different tales in the corpus.[30]

This critical transition was first accomplished in the Story of Tibulam, when Afek bound him to the *yet* tree and then later placed his corpse in Nangalamtem. Thus it became possible to use the *yet* tree as a bridge between Umoim's exposure platform and the cross, and to use Nangalamtem as the link between the entrance to the Land

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29 Note, however, that Umoim's surprising of Afek accounts for the loss of the ability to make machines. This is now represented as Afek's capacity rather than Tibulam's.

30 As I have argued elsewhere (Jorgensen 1990a), for this reason they are not only places where things happened, but where things continue to happen.

of the Dead and the Holy Sepulchre. In all of this, Telefolip retains its central position in the overall scheme of things while articulating a place for Telefolmin in a world far wider than their ancestors dreamed of. If Fobayok used the Story of Tibulam to resist Rebaibal, today's Telefolmin are, with few exceptions, practising Christians (including Fobayok) and remain Telefol nonetheless. For Peter and others like him, Christ appears now not as the exiled Tibulam, but as their ancestor Umoim. Christians now have a stake in preserving the Telefolip spirit house, which not only anchors the link between their ancestors and the world at large, but also provides them with ideological foundations in pressing their claims in the contemporary mining economy.

Conclusion

In his analysis of Mountain Ok cosmologies Barth suggests that Baktaman ritual is always a matter of reconstruction, as elders revive memories for the conduct of their rites, a situation in which remembering is always an imaginative act (Barth 1987). One might with equal justification say that, in the context of Telefol myth, imagination always appears as an act of remembering. This is so because of the Telefol insistence that all the tales of Afek and her accompanying cast of characters form a single story whose total shape is not yet disclosed because of secrets withheld or, for the time being, forgotten. This encourages an interpretative practice in which Telefolmin are alert to signs of hidden meanings (*magam*) linking one story to another and to the world of experience: a way of finding all the many stories that make up the single story. For Telefolmin this is a matter of remembering what the ancestors had already known.

The emphasis on the materialisation of myth, in the form of either relics or particular sites, gives myth an extension in the world of events. This extension gives myth a grip on the present while exposing it to re-evaluation as narrative details acquire new interpretations, which in turn give rise to new constructions of myth. I doubt that it will be possible to talk of stone adzes any longer without immediately evoking money and mining, for example, nor do I think that features of the local landscape, such as the *yet* tree or the cave of Nangalamtem, can any longer be recalled without linking Umoim and Christ. If the claim of Telefol myth is that all changes were already present in the tales of Afek, this is only so because this set of tales has itself changed.

In tracing the genealogy of recent Telefol myths, I have been primarily concerned to show how novel myths arise. But myths not only reflect events – they also provide the means by which people can influence them, and in the process generate their own history. The pragmatic aspects of all the new myths I have discussed here are uppermost in the minds of those who narrate them: worries about the relationship of Telefol religion to Christianity, or staking claims to mining projects. While each of these deployments takes place in a field of real power relations, Telefolmin have shown

themselves adept at using myth to help even up the score. All of this suggests that, as a way of reclaiming agency, the work of myth in Telefolmin is unlikely to come to an end soon.

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