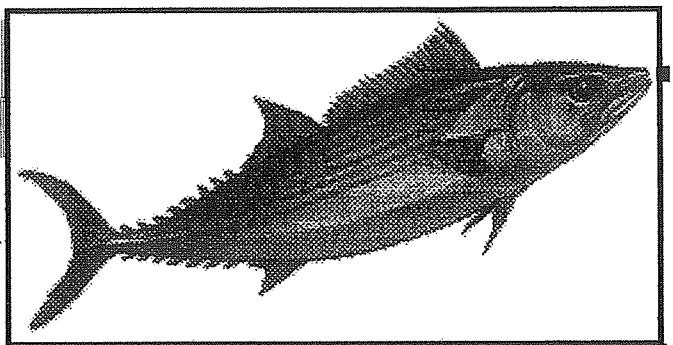
RABI NEWS contd...



18 *BONITO Fish, see Photo No.1 (front page). The Banaban fishing hooks were made especially for these fish they called 'te eti'.*

Ko raba Burenimone Biara and Rabi Elders for clarifying the matter. The 'NEWS' is sorry for any upset this matter may have caused for Eri's family and the people of Uma villages. **Ed.**

RABI NEWS IN BRIEF
by Kaiea Bakanebo

On 6/3/95 Rabi Nominated Member for Kiribati House of Assembly returned after attending to the House Business there. ALso arriving on the island was Member of Parliament for Banaba - Mr. Burenimone Biara.

On 12/3/95 a delegation from Kiribati House of Assembly arrived on the island and held talks with Council of Elders , Rabi and Banaba representatives.

The delegation consisted of:

- Mr. Tamwi Tenaotarai MP for Betio.
- Mr. Bateriki Bare MP for Tarawa Teinaieta.
- Teaiwa Teani MP for Tabiteauea Meang.
- Natanaera Kirata MP for Onotoa.
- Intiua Binataake MP for Makin.
- Tetabo Nakara from Abemama who was their clerk.

They left Rabi back to the Republic of Kiribati on 17/3/95.

On 24/4/95 PWD heavy earth moving equipment were off loaded at Tabiang by Government Power Barge. Government had given PWD $25,000 to upgrade Rabi Road.

On 26/4/95 Banaban Primary School sent 20 energetic boys representing their school in a rugby tournament held at Kioa island under the watchful eye of their coach - Master Kateta Teai. Great experience for these young Kids!

CRIME REPORT:
Rabi is very quiet at this moment except preparation for the 50th. Anniversary celebration. The only undetected offence committed on the island - the weird haircutting business on young girls has stopped. THe last victim - Nei Korati's daughter, occured on 21/2/95. Until then no further report.

DEATHS:
The late Mr. Jack Teririaki Morgan, ex-Chief of the Local Police died on 9/3/95. He was buried at his village Buakonikai.

Another Rabi Pioneer, wife of ex-Rabi Councillor died peacefully in Suva. Her body was brought back to the island on 12/5/95 and buried at Buakonikai.

LIBRARY SERVICE
Soon there will be a Library Service on the island. One Rabi woman is undergoing training as a Librarian at the Fiji Library Office in Suva, and expected to return at the end of this month, by then the Library service will be in fully operational.

To all members of this network, please donate any book to "Rabi Library Service" via our editor Stacey King.

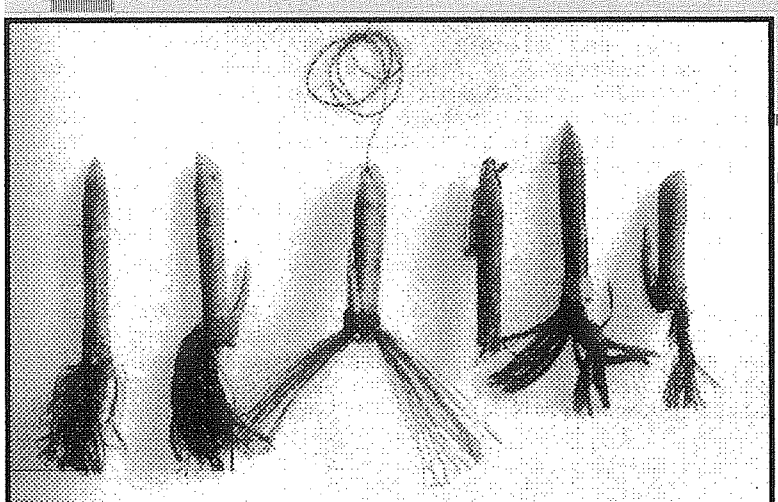
Thank you all and more from Rabi coming soon. **K.B.**

***

Thanks Kaiea for your latest report and look forward to catching up with all the latest news when we get there. **Ed.**

PLEASE NOTE! Due to lack of space, our 'MAILING LIST UPDATE' and 'BOOK REVIEW' will have to be held over to next issue. Ed

FEATURE STORY "THE STALACTITE FISH HOOKS OF OCEAN ISLAND." By H.E. Maude and R.J. Lampert



19 *"The stalactite Kaneati called 'Wakani Ba', used for Bonito trolling." Photo from Harry & Honor Maude's latest book - 'THE BOOK OF BANABA'.*

This article is a reprint from "The Journal of the Polynesian Society" Volume 76 No.4 December 1967, and was supplied by Harry Maude, Canberra. The publishing of this important study, also coincides with the opening of Rabi's new Library/Cultural Centre, and the Maude's donation of one of these prized Banaban Fishing Hooks to the Rabi Community.

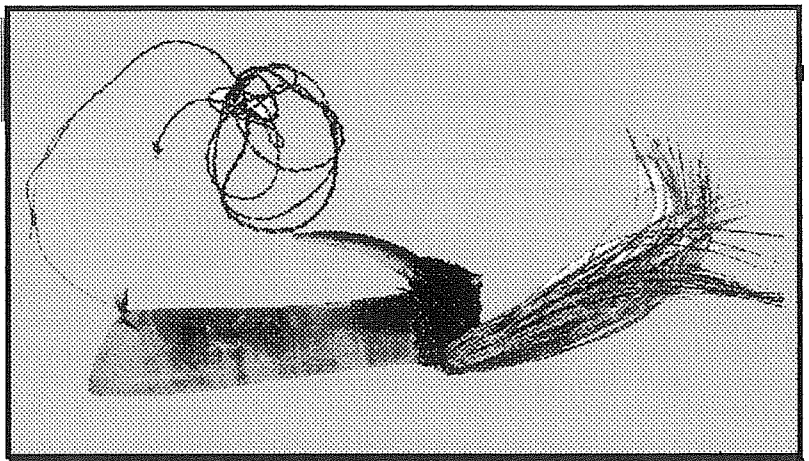
...More than any other people in the Central Pacific Islands, and possibly in Micronesia, the Banabans were dependent on fishing for their food. Lacking the fertile volcanic soil of the

high islands, the coconut-bearing coralline flats of the low, or even the relatively productive coastal rim of Nauru, their vegetable food resources, confined to coconuts, pandanus and a few wild almonds, with an occasional pumpkin, were notoriously inadequate even in the best of seasons, while during the periods of severe cyclical droughts these failed almost entirely and the inhabitants were reduced to a virtually exclusive diet of fish.

In 1851 the population of Ocean Island was estimated at between two and three thousand and, although this is almost certainly an exaggeration, oral tradition and the remains of former house sites indicate that it was probably over 1,000 before the exceptionally sever drought of the 1870s reduced it to an alleged 35. The others had either died of starvation or thirst or succeeded in obtaining passages on whaling ships to more favoured localities, many of them eventually returning to their home, until by 1900 they had again increased to 400.

Under such circumstances it is not surprising that even among his Gilbertese cousins the Banaban was looked up to as the master fisherman of all: "necessity has made the natives perhaps the most expert fishermen in the Pacific, and this in spite of the difficulties which the formation of the island offers to the exercise of this craft".

For the Banabans, in common with their neighbours, one of the most popular types of fishing was trolling for the surface-feeding bonito with a composite spinner hook known as *kaneati*. Among the Gilbertese the shank of the *kaneati* was made out of pearl shell and then called *te baeao* (pearl shell) or *te man* (insect). Similar hooks made from tridacna or clam shell (*aubunga*) or kawaruwaru shell (*kawaruwaru*) were considered only suitable for use when fishing for *tawatawa* (*Euthynnus yaito*, and probably other species of the genus) and therefore functionally distinct. Beasley, in commenting on his illustrations of trolling hooks from the Gilbert Islands, states that:



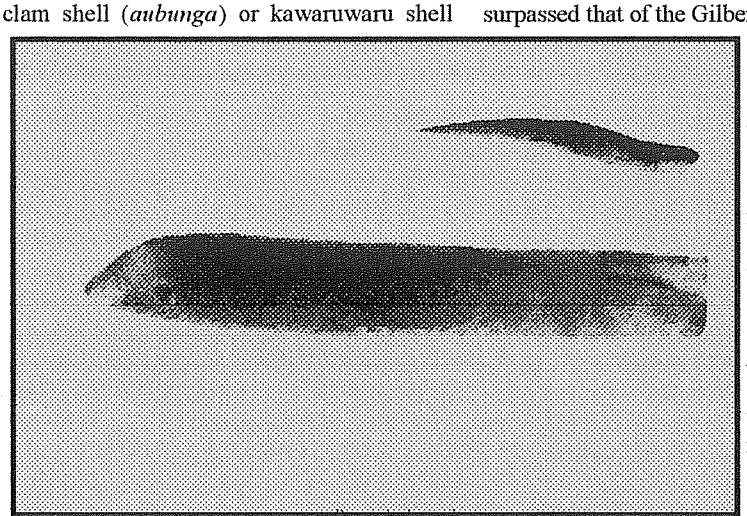
20 ***"COMPLETE OCEAN ISLAND HOOK FROM THE MAUDE COLLECTION COMPOSED WHOLLY OF NATIVE MATERIALS." Photo courtesy of H.E. Maue & R.J. Lampert's Report - The Stalactite Fish Hooks of O.I. from The Journal of the Polynesian Society, Vo. 76 No. 4 December, 1967.***

- ...A glance at the plate will at once demonstrate the mixed variety of types, and, in spite of their actually having been obtained in these islands, a word of warning should be said against their complete acceptance as true local forms...*(Beasley 1928)*

The hooks illustrated are in fact true local forms but not all were made for bonito fishing.

It should be emphasised, furthermore, that in the Gilberts bonito fishing was traditionally only engaged in on Nikunau, Arorae, and Tamana (all reef islands) and to a lesser extent on Beru and Tabiteuea (where the technique had only been acquired in recent times). Nowadays, with the general dissemination of specialised skills once jealously guarded, bonito are caught throughout the Gilberts.

The Banabans, however, whose skill in bonito fishing, perhaps from dire necessity, surpassed that of the Gilbertese on their home islands, could seldom use pearl shell, which was unable to find a congenial environment on the narrow reef of the island or its steep-to sides plunging almost vertically to the ocean floor. Admittedly a few shells were imported on the rare canoe from the Gilberts, or later on the whaling and trading on the rare canoe from the Gilberts or later on the whaling and trading ships which visited the island, but the best *kaneati* are cut only from the small thick portion of shell immediately adjoining the hinge (known as *te o*), the hooks cut from the thinner contiguous portion (*te kai)* being of less use while those cut from the main flat surface of the shell (*te taboniba)* are of little account. One would be fortunate, therefore, to obtain more than two good kaneati from a shell, the first and finest cut *kaneati* being termed *te boton te o* (the base of the hinge).



21 ***"THE SAME HOOK DISMANTLED" (as seen above in Photo No.20) Photo courtesy of H.E. Maue & R.J. Lampert's Report - The Stalactite Fish Hooks of O.I. from The Journal of the Polynesian Society, Vo. 76 No. 4 December, 1967.***

As for tridacna shells, they were scarce both on Ocean Island and Nauru, and on the latter island holes of 20 feet and more were sunk at the foot of the interior plateau in search of partly fossilised shells, which when found were used for making adzes as well as fish hooks.

The traditional raw material for making bonito hooks being, therefore, either absent or too scarce for general use it was fortunate that the geological structure of Ocean Island resulted in its being honeycombed with caves *(bangabanga)* and that in them were found stalactites and associated stalagmites formed of carbonate and phosphate of lime, as well as precious supplies of more or less fresh water, which percolates well as precious supplies of more or less fresh water, which percolates and retention of these pools, some of which rise and fall with the tide, points out: "coral rock is not a good rock for holding water unless it is kept there by the pressure of water from outside, but when lined with a layer of phosphate it is watertight".

Although at least one of these pools was reputed to be bottomless and inexhaustible, the water in them evidently became too brackish for consumption during the prolonged

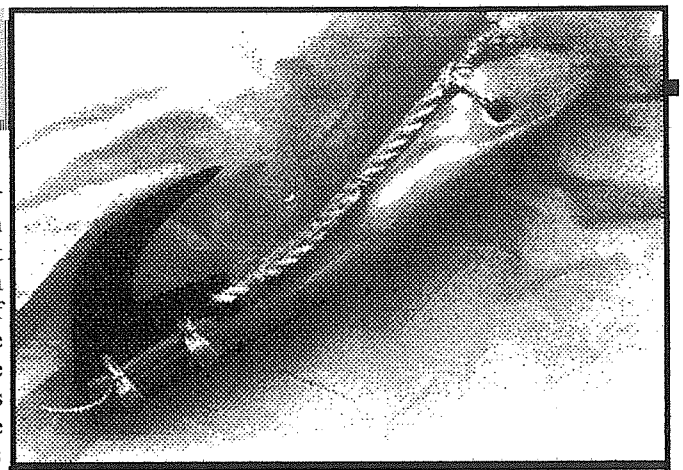
drought of the 1870s, and again in the 1880s, when the islanders were reduced to the meagre moisture contained in the eyes of flying fish: "These were carefully removed and as cautiously opened. The liquid contained - the 'vitreous humour' - gave temporary relief to parched throats. The body of the eye was used to chew and, in some measure, allayed their raging thirst". McClure records that, even after only 15 months of drought, hardly any fresh water remained on the island.

The *bangabanga* and their valuable contents, water and stalactites, were owned by extended family groups and women only were permitted to enter, any man found in the caves, or hiding near them, being liable to be killed.* This tabu was said to be due to the fact that, owing to the intense heat in the deeper caves, the women were accustomed to shed their clothes.

A penalty reduced during Protectorate times to a flogging followed by imprisonment, and repealed altogether in 1939 since the Banabans had become accustomed to relying on rain, or in times of drought, distilled water supplied by the British Phosphate Commissioners (Eliot 1938; Ocean Island Regulations 1939)

As a consequence, few Europeans have entered the *bangabanga*, where all but the seasoned spelaeologist would require a (necessarily female) guide. In 91900, however, A.F. (later Sir Albert) Ellis, the discoverer of the phosphate deposits, had the tabu removed in his favour and persuaded two women to act as guides:

- ...The cave was entered by crawling almost at full length through six inches of black phosphatic mud, for about five yards, though it seemed very much longer. We then came to a large cavern where the torches were lit, and we passed along one of the several passages leading down in a slanting direction. Small pools of water were soon in evidence, and at these the women filled their baskets of coco-nut shells. The sides of the cave were more or less begrimed with the smoke of torches used by generations of Banabans and the general effect was depressing. Very few stalactites were to be seen, the native having removed them for the purpose of making their useful bonito hooks. We returned by the same muddy passage, and it was a relief to be in the sunshine again, but my previously white suite was nearer black...*(Ellis 1935)*



22 ***A different type of Banaban fishing hook as seen on the back cover of Harry & Honor Maude's latest book - 'THE BOOK OF BANABA'.***

As Ellis has indicated, the renowned and unique Banaban bonito hooks, recognised throughout the Gilberts as well as on Banaba itself as the best known, and certainly superior to any made from pearl shell, were in fact cut from the still-forming stalactite and manufactured by a traditional process.

Ellis himself has described briefly the making of "a hook of the minnow type for catching bonito":

- For this a piece of opaque stalactite from one of the caves would be ground laboriously into shape, the hook portion of the minnow being made by fastening a piece of shaped bone at the desired angle. These were wonderfully effective for bonito fishing, and it is said they were unique, so far as other Pacific Islands are concerned. *(Ellis 1935)*

Mahaffy, who had visited Ocean Island in 1896 and again in 1908 also mentions the importance of the stalactite hooks:

- The fish-hook used on the island for the taking of bonito is a very curious one, and I think unique in the Pacific. The shank is made of a piece of semi-transparent stalactite, almost like alabaster, which is found in the caves to which I have alluded above. This is very neatly ground to the required shape, and pierced at both ends. To one is fastened a hook made of bone, and barbless, as are all bonito hooks made in the Pacific, while the line is run through the other end, and made fast to a fishing-rod. These hooks are much valued, and indeed are almost to be considered as the pieces of higher value in the native currency. No native would think of trolling for bonito with any other kind of hook, though they use English-made and barbed hooks for almost all other kinds of fishing. No higher compliment can be paid to a stranger than to present him with some of the stalactite fish-hooks. *(Mahaffy 1910)*

In 1931, while engaged on the lands settlement of Ocean Island, I spent many months with the Banabans in their villages or tramping over the island dealing with boundary disputes. While working in Uma I was fortunate to observe Eri, the village elder, engaged in fashioning what might well have been one of the last stalactite hooks to be made on the island, the following account of their manufacture being based on notes made at the time.

THE MANUFACTURE OF *'KANEATI'* KNOWN AS *'WAKANI BA'*

The four types of *kaneati* are distinguished by the material used for the shank; the three used in the Gilbert Islands have been mentioned above. *Wakani ba*, lit. "the root of the rock", the name given to a stalactite.

1 The maker first proceeded to the band of extremely sharp coral pinnacles that fringes

THE STALACTITE FISH HOOKS OF OCEAN ISLAND

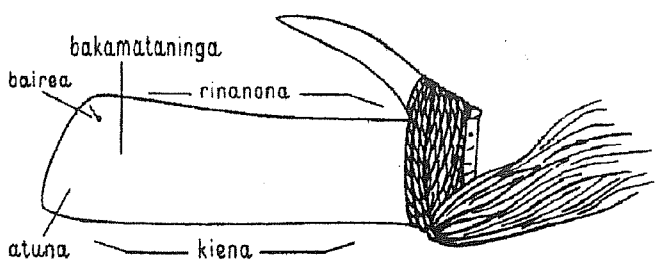


FIG. 1: Banaban terms for parts of shank.[18]

23 ***"BANABAN TERMS FOR PARTS OF SHANK". Photo courtesy of H.E. Maue & R.J. Lampert's Report - The Stalactite Fish Hooks of O.I. from The Journal of the Polynesian Society, Vo. 76 No. 4***

the coast round at least half the island and knocked off several pieces of sound coral rock.

2 On being placed on a fire the coral breaks up into thin, sharp flakes, which were used as saws for cutting the stalactite.

3 With the permission of the owners of a bangabanga a woman having the right of access was delegated to obtain a piece of stalactite (of which numbers are normally to be found hanging from the roof) and to bring it to the craftsman's house or outhouse, where the hook was to be made.

4 The stalactite was then steadily sawn into rough shape with the slivers of sharp coral, coral sand moistened with salt water being sprinkled on throughout the process as an abrasive. *(When asked why fresh water would not do as well my informant replied with some scorn: "Because if is too precious".)*

5 This process was continued for a week, or even a fortnight, using up to a hundred pieces of coral in the process of mixed sawing and rasping. The usual practice was for one group to keep on sawing in turns while another prepared a constant supply of fresh coral saws.

6 Once a block of *wakani ba,* roughly the size and shape of the intended *kaneati,* had been prepared it was rubbed back and forth on a level, smooth block of coral rock found lying on the reef, sand and salt water being sprinkled on at the same time. The operation was continued until the block was nicely rounded and about as thick as a man's thumb.

7 The block was next rasped on the rough coral rock known as *te em*, using sand but no water. The rasping was continued with great care until the exact shape and size of the finished shank was attained, the inner side being bevelled off to a ridge.

8 The final polishing of the shank was formerly done by rubbing it on the rough skin of the fish known as *te abari,* which felt like and served the purpose of sandpaper. Eri used a shark's fin *(te baini bakoa)* instead if *abari* skin, but explained that the efficacy of this substitute was a relatively recent discovery. In either case only salt water, without an abrasive, was used and the resultant *kaneati* was smooth and well polished.

9 The eye at the snood end was next made by using:

(a) the long, pointed shell *kabinea,* which as Eri explained is as hard and tough as stone;

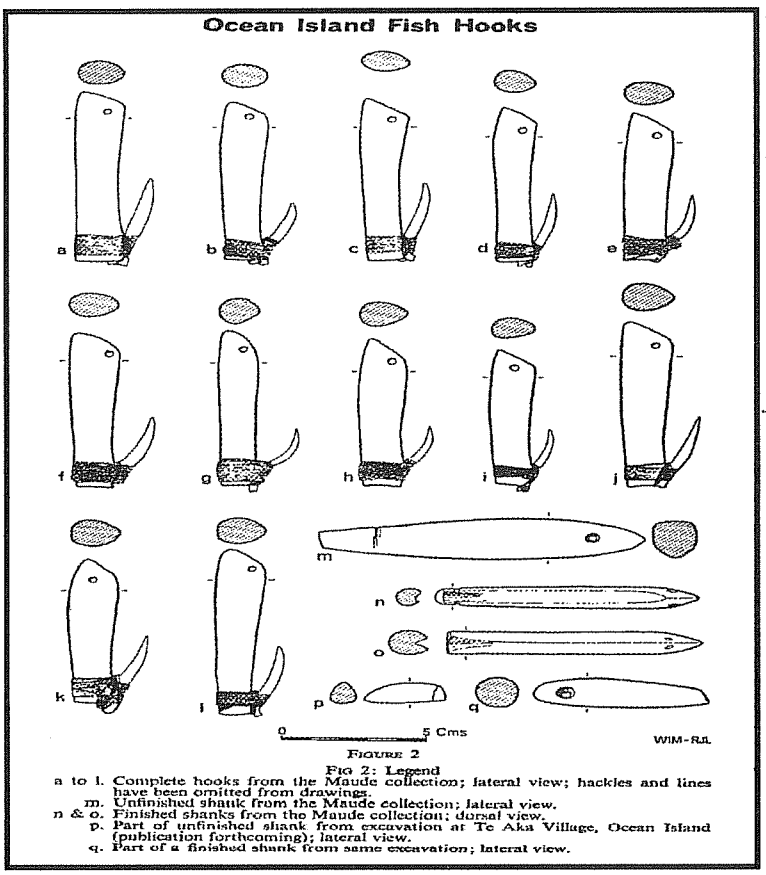


FIGURE 2

FIG 2: Legend
a to l. Complete hooks from the Maude collection; lateral view; hackles and lines have been omitted from drawings.
m. Unfinished shank from the Maude collection; lateral view.
n & o. Finished shanks from the Maude collection; dorsal view.
p. Part of unfinished shank from excavation at Te Aka Village, Ocean Island (publication forthcoming); lateral view.
q. Part of a finished shank from same excavation; lateral view.

(b) a specially tough bone in the tail of the fish *ingimea (Neothunnus macropterus*; or

(c) a piece of *noko* (coconutmidrib) used in con- junction with an abrasive mixture made form fine pumice stone and coconut oil.

10 The *nen te wi* (groove or socket for the point) was sunk on the shank with a rasp made of em, so that the point would lie snugly.

11 The *wi* (point) should invariably - at least according to the traditionalists - be made of human bone. On Banaba parents left their arm and leg bones to their children for thatch needles and *kaneati* points, the arm bone close to the wrist (*wai rou*) and the thinner leg bones being best suited for the former purpose and the thicker leg bones for the latter.

12 The point was cut to shape with a coral *(ba)*knife or a *tanai ae te aubunga* (tridacna-shell adze) and lashed on to the shank with one of the following types of string:

(a) te marai (so-called on account of its light colour), made from the bark of the hibiscus tree *(kiaiai);*

(b) human hair; or

(c) te nimaerere made from human hair braided with hibiscus fibre or coir sennit. *(Gilbertese experts stress that as human hair is by far the strongest lashing it should ideally be used by itself if one has enough, and that in any case the* nimaerere *should be used for a few turns only and followed by pure hair until it is completely hidden. Plate I shows* nimarere *string clearly as used both for the lashing and the broken piece of line).*

13 The hackle *(buruburu)* was put on at the same time and with the same string as the point and was made either of teased hibiscus of white human hair. It may be noted here that, unlike *kaneati* made from pearl shell, the *walamo ba* can be used when fishing for *tawatawa,* but in that case the hackle must be black, as being more acceptable to the fish.

14 Finally the fish line *(te abo),* which should invariably be made of hibiscus fibre braided in the manner known as *te karo ten,* was attached to the shank and the other end to the rod *(te kain roa). (Although I omitted to ascertain the correct length of the rod and the line on Ocean Island I was informed on Beru that the rod should be twice the distance between the tips of the outstretched hands, i.e., 2 fathoms (*uanga), *plus the length from the tip of the right middle finger to the shoulder* (uanga ao te manokuni bai); *while the line should be the same length as the rod less the distance from the middle finger to the thumb with the hands outstretched* (terakana).

FEATURE STORY contd...

Stalactite fish hooks were also found on Nauru, but Hambruch makes it clear that these were imported from Ocean Island, as was the occasional hook found in the Gilbert Group. *Drift voyages between Ocean Island and Nauru were common and many of the immigrants would have been engaged in fishing when blown away from their island.

** (Hambruch 1914-1915; out of 19 bonito hooks seen by Koch on Nonouti, Tabiteuea and Onotoa 16 were locally made from pearl shell and 3 stalactite hooks imported from Ocean Island - Koch 1965).*

When on considers the degree to which the Nauruan culture, and in particular the material culture, has been influenced by Ocean Island and Gilbertese castaways, who formed one of the twelve tribes on Nauru, it seems surprising that the art of making stalactite hooks did not become established there, where there were both caves and stalactites. *(Power 1905)*

The making of stalactite fish hooks is now an extinct art, the entire Banaban population of Ocean Island having migrated to Rabi in the Fiji Group, and this is therefore presumably the only record extant of the techniques employed. The Banabans still possess a few *wakani ba,* however, and these are highly prized, it being generally conceded that far larger and quicker catches are made by their fortunate owners than by fishermen using any local type of *kaneati.*

DESCRIPTION OF THE *"WAKANI BA"*

Assembly of the Hook

We have seen that the hook comprises three main parts: a shank *(kaneati),* a point *(wi)* and a hackle *(buruburu).* One complete hook from the Maude collection (See Plate I Fig. 2: f) was taken to pieces and reassembled in order to learn the procedure for lashing the point and hackle to the shank.

The distal end of the shank under examination is provided with a dorsal groove (See Fig. 2: n & o) having a U-shaped cross section into which the point fits. The direction of this groove is at an angle of 20o to the long axis of the shank, which allows the point to project outwards at approximately this angle. A transverse groove in each of the two lateral surfaces of the shank provides a grip for the lashing and a similar function is served by a small U-shaped groove in the base of the point. This point base is slightly bulbous and projects a little beyond the distal end of the shank when the hook is assembled; it is not perforated.

With the point in position, lashing began with a single transverse loop, which was knotted, then followed by ten turns around the point and shank, covering the extent of their contact. This lashing was consolidated by two seizing turns parallel to the shank's long axis, passing through both the groove in the base of the point and the crotch between point and shank. The hackle was now lashed in position with four diagonal turns passing through the crotch, and alternately over and under the two branches of the hackle. Ten more transverse turns around the contact zone between point and shank were followed by three more longitudinal seizing turns to complete the lashing.

The snood end of the shank has a transverse hole of typical hour-glass section, formed by drilling in from two opposite points (See Fig. 2: n). On all specimens to which a length of line was still attached, this was simply passed through the hole once and knotted. **H.M. & R.L.**

I hope our 'Feature Story' on the Banaban's unique Fishing Hooks shows our members (new & old) just how precious Banaban Culture is. We hope to bring you in a future issue a Story on the original style of Banaban outrigger canoes, and the ones that are made on Rabi today.

Until then, I'm heading for Rabi and some lovely tropical sun while the rest of our members in the Southern Hemisphere don their winter woollies!

Regards & *ti akabo!*

Stacey

PLEASE NOTE! DEADLINE FOR ISSUE NO. 15 IS 27TH JULY, 1995

BANABA/OCEAN ISLAND NEWS

AUSTRALIA REMEMBERS 1945-1995

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Inside...
Why the Banabans were considered 'THE GREATEST FISHERMEN IN THE PACIFIC', and some exciting new developments - All inside this issue.