

DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

Searching for the DMA's Malabi: Ancestral Figures of the Sepik River Region

Marian Pfeiffer

January 29, 1998

Carol Robbins: It's a special pleasure to introduce a former staff member whose research on one of my favorite objects in our collection has enhanced our understanding of it tremendously, making it possible for us to devote an entire lecture this evening to our piece and those related to it.

Marian Pfeiffer is a native of Birmingham, Alabama. She lives in Mobile, Alabama with her husband Ralph who is vascular surgeon. Her son Burton is a third-year medical student and her daughter Cameron is a second-year International Law student. During the last decade or so, Marian has been particularly involved in community service. She is the founding director of Camp Rap-A-Hope, camp for children with cancer, which is now in its twelfth year. She is Construction and Funding Chairman for the Exploreum Science Museum and IMAX theater project in Mobile, due to open on July 4 of this year, for which she has raised \$20 million.

Marian Pfeiffer received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Alabama in 1966. After which she joined the staff of the Birmingham Museum of Art, the Oscar Wells Museum, where she worked in the Education Department as Director of the Outreach Art Mobile Program, which took art and anthropology to some 60,000 students annually.

This was during her husband's four years in medical school. Then the Pfeiffers moved to Dallas in 1970 for Ralph's internship and residency at Parkland Hospital, and Marian became Associate Curator in the Education Department of what was then the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts.

In the fall of 1970, the museum hosted *Arts of Oceania*, a survey exhibition organized by John Lunsford, then Curator here, now Director of the Meadows Museum at SMU.

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That exhibition included one of the Sawos ancestor figures that would become the focus of Marian's research. Several years later, in 1974, the museum acquired the figure we now know as Malabi [Male Ancestor Figure Known as Malabi, 1974.5.MCD].

In 1983 Marian completed her thesis, *Monumental Ancestor Figures of The Sawos: Identification of the Iatmul Style Group, Middle Sepik, Papua New Guinea*, a copy of which is in the DMA's Meyer Library, and received her Master of Arts degree from SMU. Marian's research remains a major source for anyone writing about the Sawos people and their ancestor figures as

several recent publications on oceanic art acknowledge. Please, join me in welcoming Marian Pfeiffer.

Marian Pfeiffer:

Well, we are going to start with my baby pictures of my children and we are going to move on up. This is a little bit much -- I would like to, let's see if we'll get these going here.

Tonight we are going to discuss the New Guinea monumental ancestor figure in the Dallas collection which is a Sawos tribe figure. This figure is from the world of oceanic art, and as you know, the world of oceanic art is divided into Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia.

We are going to be located in the island of New Guinea, and New Guinea is divided into two halves.

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One is Indonesian, and the other is Papua New Guinea. The western half was taken over by the Indonesians from the Dutch in 1963, and you may be familiar with the western half because of the Asmat art that comes from there, and of course Michael Rockefeller, Nelson's son, who did a great deal of that collecting.

Tonight we are also going to take the figures from the Sepik area, which is up in the top there, the northeast part of Papua New Guinea, and that is the Sepik River which is the heart of the region. The river travels about 700 miles to finally empty into the Pacific Ocean. It travels through mountains and plains. It's fed by many, many tributaries and floods hundreds of square miles on either side, and it carries vast quantities of silt down its shores. Loops in the river, which are frequently blocked, form oxbow lakes which often, during the wet and dry season depending on when it is, they are food for the birds, food for the game which then they hunt, or they are cultivation spots.

Anyway you look at it, the Sepik River is the heart of the region, and it is the main source of--the Sawos people who live in this area--it is their main source of protein.

The river is divided into Lower, and Middle, and Upper Sepik, and this is for the art classifications of that particular area. Tonight we will be in the Middle Sepik River area, and I want to go back just real quick and let you see this.

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You will see right there where the Sawos is located, and then you see the latmul below at right on the river. There is a close cultural relationship between the Sawos and the latmul, who make their home along the Sepik to the south.

It's impossible really to study or discuss the Sawos without really a study of the latmul. They are thought to be the progeny of their ancestral Sawos

neighbors. The relationship with the latmul continues today in their exchange of sago for fish. The trade always takes place in the Sawos territory. They say that the latmul are going back their mother, back to their founder.

They are considered to be the people of the forest, whereas the latmul are considered to be the people of the river. Their art styles are very similar, and the latmul style is derived from the Sawos style, their ancestors. Here is a perfect example of that, on the right you have a Sawos ancestor figure, and you see the curvilinear design on the face, and you on the left see a basketry mask from the latmul area. Generally speaking, the Sawos parallel the latmul in every aspect of their culture.

They are both male dominated societies with great attention to kinship links through the mother or the sister, and the hornbill motif serves as a very good example of this male domination that is carried out in art expression.

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The Sawos hornbill flute style that you see on your right incorporates the hornbill, which is native to the area. Following the mating period, the female hornbill seeks shelter in a hollowed out tree for her nest. The male seals the opening dirt dauber-style, which psychologically becomes this barrier that inhibits her escape.

Now both male and female have these very strong beaks which she could break through at any given time that she wanted to, but this psychological intimidation and this male domination inhibits her from any attempt to breakout. She stays there and remains there until her chicks are ready to fly, and then and only then does he allow her to come out. Throughout that whole process, he does feed her just devotedly.

Powerful forms like the hornbill are used to protect, for example, and other birds, like the Gnadju bird, cockatoo, other birds of the region, and often you see them on the prow of a boat. It's sort of the idea that where you find the birds, there you will also find the fish. And that even refers to the mudflats which in the dry season, these birds go and eat the prawns and things and the shrimp underneath the mud, and it's also a place where then the men come and hunt some of them for their food.

Men's houses dominate the social structure of the villages through New Guinea and this tradition is upheld in the Sepik area. Men's houses contain the secret men societies which guard the origin myths of the particular people within that group, the meanings and names of the ancestral figures, and serves as a repository for all of the secret society memorabilia that is in the essence of who the people are.

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This is also the place where the oral tradition, the secret mythology, the ancestor worship, the clan totems, and all of the traditions through oral tradition are upheld. The constant regeneration in the passing down of these

things is very important especially today, and to keep the ancestors alive. The largest men's houses once contained all of the different clans and each was positioned in an area of the house to display their own particular totemic symbols. Totemic symbols relate more to the natural things like a leaf, a sago palm, something like that.

Headhunting is also something that's very indigenous to this region of the Middle Sepik and the Sawos and the Iatmul in warfare. They played a huge role. The tradition has been replaced today by the hunt for wild pigs and they do distinguish between wild pigs and domesticated pigs. Domesticated pigs are almost done in the same category that our Labrador or Chesapeake or something would be, and the wild pig is on a whole other level.

You see the exaggeration of the heads--the more heads you had, the better you were. Well, why is that? Because, generally speaking, in this area the head is considered the life source of where the power is. It means that that is where a man's essence, that's where his life force, his power, really is located. You see through your head, you visualize the world around you, you think thoughts, you see pictures in your mind, you dream in your sleep, and you enter another spirit world. You eat, taste, talk and speak words and communicate.

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All of these entities that cannot be upheld in a three dimensional concrete in hand way, but instead have this abstract powerful reality, and you hear. Unlike modern man's interpretation of the heart being the center of life in a human being, these heads were considered to be what explained or gave you the negotiation rights--or the more you had, the more you were able to negotiate your fate within the natural world around you.

In this area, even after World War II, when there was an intrusion of the Japanese and then later Americans and other people, a very interesting thing happened. Rather than a huge acculturation and dispersing of the traditions, there was a huge attempt to go back and headhunting happened again. Really headhunting continued through the '60s, and who knows, may still occasionally do that.

The general association with these figures is -- and this is the Dallas figure. Within the confines of a male dominated culture, it is not surprising to find the male human form as the highest status. These monumental ancestor figures are creative, mythological, origin myth divinities or they can also be individual cultural heroes, and sometimes they are wrapped into both. They are often associated with headhunting, warfare, and today, as I said, the hunt for wild pigs and sago. And I am just quickly going to that, that's a whole other lecture.

But sago is today--they fell the tree, then they cut the tree open.

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And they believe that this keeps the tree spirit--which we will talk about in a minute--which are called *winjambu*, they are on your paper. It holds tight the spirit of the tree, in other words, it keeps that power there. They fell that tree, they cut it open and then that is what attracts the wild pigs to come to the trap. That is how it's wrapped up with sago and the world of --and the hunt for wild pigs.

In Sawos mythology, the ancestors carry or hold the village up, and this is represented in the men's houses where the figures are secured to the center post, an latmul association which probably originated from the Sawos. They are associated with a particular group of ancestors called *waken* or *wagen*, which are potent, dangerous ancestors who are involved in situations of potential advocacy for hunting, headhunting, famine, how the crops are going to be that year, or if people are sick with a disease that's circulating, or they can also bring harm.

They have to be placated. If a man's wife has been killed by an enemy, the *waken*, the ancestor figure, can cause *ngglambi*, which is also in your list, it is N-G-G-L-A-M-B-I, which is like this dark cloud that comes over the village, and it is infectious guilt, and it's associated with sorcery as well. But this cloud will not be dispelled until *nggamba*, which is vengeance, is taken.

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So, in order to -- it's sort of a lex talionis, sort of eye-for-an-eye thing, and in other words, if the wife of one villager is killed, then he must then retaliate and dispel the cloud by killing the wife of the murderer.

Now there's another interesting part about that because you can also, if you want to kill somebody, you can short circuit this power of these ancestors. If you want to kill an enemy, you can short circuit the retribution by going ahead and killing one of your own. And this did happen traditionally. Many times these ancestors speak through shaman, or people who are serving in that capacity.

These ancestors represent both the living and they represent the dead, and are connected to the idea that all life is eternal and everything comes from the ancestors. When it dies, it goes back and comes back in another form. So it's almost this Indonesian sort of idea that it just continues. The figures originally stood on hooks and were propped up against the center post of the men's houses resting on the ground.

They are also associated generally with *winjambu*, which are tree spirits, and they are not as powerful as the *wan* and *waken*, but they are mischievous and they can cause harm and they can actually possess somebody to make them do something that's not good. You have to placate them as well, and in headhunting days, they were considered to be associated with the tree. Just as the wind blows through the leaves and then blows through the trees, that power that's associated with the wood, it would flow into the legs of the headhunter and make him strong and to run fast and to be powerful.

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Today it's now associated with the hunt for wild pigs, which I have already mentioned.

There are rings of cane in relation to this vengeance in this dark cloud and this retribution we are talking about, and when you have a relative that is killed, you must wear the rings of cane, of mourning, until that retribution, that vengeance has been taken, that eye for an eye, which then dispels it. I mention that because several of our figures have cane carving on them.

The acute need for research regarding the Sawos ancestor figure in the Dallas collection initiated a search for similar figures regarding a worldwide search. 200 inquiries were sent to major museum institutions housing oceanic art, collectors, dealers, auction houses and well known authorities in anthropology, ethnology and oceanic art. Photographs of the Dallas figure accompanied each inquiry. The statement "a picture's worth a thousand words" has never been proved so true as in this investigation.

Inquiries sought to locate similar figures; they included questions regarding the iconography of located figures, questions about provenance, their history and general questions regarding the figures within the overall Middle Sepik tradition. Eleven old figures were located that demonstrated the same iconography and general overall presentation.

The resulting located collection of figures established that they once existed in respectable numbers and were not rare as previously thought.

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Some located figures came to us with only photographs and a stylistic analysis; others arrived with field notes and had been collected under academic guidelines using good field research accountability. Specific search for clues and the mystery puzzle was to match the figures demonstrating the closest stylistic relationships to one another with specific provenance documentation like a village of origin, then hopefully establishing enough information to support a stylistic grouping.

Within the world of New Guinea art there are broad identifications like Oceanic Art, Melanesia, Oceanic Art, Middle Sepik River for geographical identification, and then the group name like Sawos. But there are no further categories established. For example, we have the term "Impressionism," but -- and then have a location France, but we don't in oceanic art have the Barbizon School. Little information was published and little information existed at the time of the initial research regarding the Dallas figure and its place within this context. There were no journal articles to speak of, no auction house notes, no catalogs, and only three figures reproduced worldwide to represent this genre of figures.

Worldwide interest was expressed from -- and I will say as an independent

researcher, the higher the person, the greater the research. All loved the figures and all had wanted to take the time to know them and find out more about them. We often forget that the business of collecting and maintaining our institutions and their collections leaves very little time for historic documentation and research in the examples that we have. So it is an endeavor that does not need a rocket scientist, but it is an endeavor that does take time and so I hope to do a little bit more of that.

[00:22:07.06]

As we unfold the recounting of this search for the unknown other figures, let us first begin with a stylistic analysis of the Dallas figure. I am going to ask you, because I am going to go as fast as I can, I am going to ask you to look it closely and pay attention to this as much as you can, because it sort of sets the stage for the rest of the figures that follow. The Dallas figure is 7.5 feet tall--its size alone creates an impression of monumentality and it communicates a great sense of presence.

The figure reflects an expert carving tradition in which the treatment of negative space has been incorporated to heighten the figure's projection of awesomeness. The body of the sculpture has been carved out of a long rectangular frame of space; the pose is somewhat rigid in its frontality as you will see in the side view, yet it expresses this upward thrust inflection in the knees that relieves that tension.

The oversized head is an elongated oval with a very special emphasis given the eye and nose with inner circles surrounded by solid outline circles carved in a very low relief. The mouth is a small crescent given little emphasis perhaps knowing that a nose ornamentation would cover it up, or in some cases, the mythology of these figures says that they were not able to speak. The nose is elongated, broadening at the nostrils with the septum pierced. The face dips in concavely, the eyebrows are suggested, the top of the head is a smooth inverted bowl shape with a horizontal incised line, and this is probably because it had a hair dress on.

Two stylized ears on either side of the head are doubly pierced for ornamentation. The face shows traces of black and white lime paint decoration in a curvilinear spiral pattern design.

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The back of the head has perforations for securing the figure for presentation and display. The left arm has track-like punctures, marks related to the similar pattern on the left thigh, which you can't see right now, but -- you can a little bit.

The shoulder arms and breast area are an inverted u-shape, they have thorn like spike projections on both shoulders which are definitely, in our case we think, related to headhunting in an earlier figure. The arms fall straight down on either side of the figure, with hands defined, yet not interrupting the vertical flow of the sculpture. This was originally one piece of wood. Both

hands have mask like faces located squarely above indicated fingers. Stock-like projections extend from the top center of these faces on both sides of the face.

There are these little round protrusions and ears are indicated. The mouth repeats the same crescent as the ancestor's head, and on outside of each upper arm is a large oval -- you will see on the left side area that contains a wave like zigzag pattern. Each breast area of the figure has a crescent shape carved as a solid outline in low relief, the right one is inverted. The torso is an elongated rounded rectangular form which narrows at the breast and leg lines. There is a snake like image, serpentine image, which is on the stomach and it forms a w-shape, and at the end of this serpentine shape, at both the ends there are bird related heads. And they look out with their beaks open.

[00:26:02.00]

A crocodile or some say a lizard is carved on the right thigh following the curvature of the leg shape. It's hard to see here, but the upper left thigh of the figure has a strip of zigzag chevron patterning accompanied by a series of puncture dots, too. Remember those puncture dots because we will talk about them in a minute. They usually end in a crescent shape like the head of a configuration. The base of the figure has three heads worked out in much the same manner as those on the hands. The central head is inverted, below the heads; two feet with five toes are represented.

There was an insect infestation, but the base reflects an arc like shape which indicates that it was originally on a hook. The back is covered with zigzag patterning; we see a definition is given, the spine in separation of the scapula area. The buttock decoration is a continuation of the thigh designs, these crocodilian scale-like designs. There are three rib-like indentations on the right side of the back that are suggestive of ribs. Traces of red ochre paint are found all over the entire figure, and the face has the black and white lime paint in the curvilinear spiral design.

A cord like waist decoration that you saw on the first slide is over the pubic area. The sculpture is without a doubt a superb example of wonderful carving. The iconography -- let's go back here.

[00:28:05.10]

The iconography of these figures is basically associated with a divinity story, a mythological origin myth story, that is, a story of Betman Gambi. During his life he traveled all over the Sepik territories serving up mischief wherever he went, but everybody sort of loved him, too, and he made these pranks. When he died, they tried to resuscitate him.

This other mythological figure, which was a lizard (and some say a crocodile) and its name was Shotkaman, stretched out over the body of the corpse and literally punctured holes, and crept into the body, brought the corpse back to life, and thus the puncture marks of the lizard gliding into the body to give new life.

These figures are also, and this myth, are often associated with the serpentine image, the crocodilian image, or lizard and the Gandju birds which are associated with the serpentine motifs. They are also associated with Kava-mbuangga, which is associated with those rhombic shoulder circles that we looked at on the detail. He is said to have made originally the swampy ground firm, to make the ground able to be lived on and firm. He was a *waken* as we talked about, that ancestral category of ancestors called *waken* who set his foot upon the mud and thereby created dry land.

He is a representation of both the living and the dead, and there are myths of his visit to the land of the dead. He is associated also with two colors--the right hand sides of the figures often have the red ochre we talked about, to represent the living flesh.

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The left hand side is often the black, which they call stone, which means paralysis or pins and needles, which is indicative of death, which creeps over the body in death. Thus, the figure has the two sides of the personality of life and death that are diagrammatically shown on the figures.

The crocodile is usually associated with initiation rights of young men when they are initiated into the men's houses that we saw earlier. This is called *naven*, a coming of age. In the latmul culture, which of course is derived from the Sawos, they actually construct these theatrical crocodiles where they go through the mouth of the crocodile. The initiates had incised on their body, and it's called scarification, which means scarring on purpose. They have these crocodilian motifs put all over them, and the higher they are in the clan or the higher they are in the ceremony, the more they have of them.

But, in essence, it means that during the initiation, if they satisfied the crocodile, then they have been given his symbols. The Sawos people also state that the people are between the jaws of the crocodile. His upper jaw is the sun platform and his lower jaw is the ground. The ancestor figures that we are talking about and those that they refer to are the posts which hold the jaws apart, and that is where the people are. So the village is in the jaw of the crocodile and the ancestors uphold the village.

[00:32:03.13]

The crescents that we saw back on the -- right here, there are several different stories about that. Some think that they are just a stylization of shells in this tropical setting; others say that they are a stylization of another creation myth that was supposed to have founded the whirlpools in the river, *minjeval*, and that this is just a further stylization of that. I really don't buy that and I really think that it really refers to day and night and headhunting, and today the hunt for wild pigs. Let me tell you why. The Moon is supposed to call the animals out to be killed for the hunter. When the animals are killed, the Sawos believe that they are not really taking that life, that these are part of that ancestral connection that is never unbroken in life

and death. And they believe that the animal is just the wrap, the skin of the being.

So then that soul goes back and becomes another form of life. It may be a sago palm next, it may be something else, it may be an actual person, but you have to satisfy and placate when you take that life, almost like the American Indians before you take the life of a buffalo or something. So at night, the moon calls out the animals to be hunted by the people in the Sawos tradition. The sun especially at noon calls out the people to headhunt, and create homicide, or enter into homicide with their enemy. So I think that what this is is that juxtaposition between day and night.

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There's another myth that is associated with this and it is possible--it is to me more latmul related than Sawos, but it is the story again of another snake, or another lizard-type individual, and what happens is that they go into the body, kind of like what we talked about with the ancestor figure when the lizard gives back the corpse life. They go into the body, but this time--and this is the origin of headhunting--when they go into the body, they then eat the flesh so that there's nothing left but the bone structure. And there are those people who think, in the association of headhunting, that these crescents refer to the scapula, or the emaciated body, with only the bones showing.

The curvilinear design on the faces of the figures refers to a successful headhunter, having created and completed a homicide. As we said, the spikes are related to headhunting and in the context of a center post. This is a very major figure in the Dallas collection, possibly skulls would have rested on the spikes or at least that is a thought. The lizard and the crocodile have associations also with origin myths that we have already talked about. But there are other ones that say that whether it's a lizard, or whether it's the serpentine motif we saw on the chest, I mean on the torso -- I think I got it wrong here. Well, anyway, the serpentine or the crocodile, these things really refer to the birth of the Sepik River where the snake or the crocodile or the lizard was trying to get back to the sea.

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And the path that it left as it traveled for the sea became the track that then filled up with water and became Sepik River.

Snakes also refer in Sawos territory to the fighting strength of the village. Like a snake, the warriors surround a hostile village before an attack, and the strength in numbers, the strength in cunning, etcetera has a lot to do with how strong that rope or that serpent enclosure is. Also, as we said, these are called *winjimbu*, which are tree spirits, which we referred to and they also can go -- I'll remind you again, I know I just said it, but to headhunting or to the wild pigs, depending on whether you're felling the tree or whether you need the strength of the wind to help you. The birds and the Gandju, I think these probably are cockatoo birds, maybe Gandju birds, but they have been

stylized, and they are totemic symbols which have a lot to do with fishing, they have to do with the clan that has to do with fishing or has to do with following the fish, so that then they get the shrimp and the prawn and things were in the mudflats, they are bringing that out as another one of their sustenance.

Of course, we also mentioned the hornbill early on as the male dominated expression, but hornbills and cockatoos are also related to the sun bird, which means the "bearer of light" which could be also, in our context to what we have already said, related to night and day and what you are hunting.

[00:38:00.03]

Responses to initial inquiries in our search for like figures began arriving. A complete composite group began to form based tightly upon iconography, those designs that were on the figures, and their link to the Middle Sepik area of New Guinea, and the overall relationship of the carving in general.

The first figure to arrive was the Oakland Institute figure and it's believed to be collected around 1900, and it was collected by a missionary. This is the figure that has the cane and fiber bands on it which have to do with their retribution. This is sort of a Baroque or Rococo version of what the Sawos would do. It's kind of overdone but it's very much in the same genre of our figure.

Next came Merton Simpson's figure which is in New York City, and this is a wonderful Sawos figure and it was from -- it had the scrapes that you see on the front around the breast area were done because when it was sold to a dealer, what happened is they took the strength of this figure, its ancestor power, and rubbed it on the new carving that they carved to take its place. Next came a very -- I want to just go back to that, just so you can see the same things with this figure, the same iconography, the same things that we have been talking about. This figure is--all of these are very, very tall figures--

This is a short figure, but it's short because it's been insect infested and it would have been the same size as others. This belongs to Harry Franklin, and we will talk about that in a minute, about Harry, but basically the same iconography.

[00:40:03.06]

This on the right is a Linden figure from the Stuttgart Museum, and it also has the same iconography we have talked about before.

Then the figure that you see here came from the Papua New Guinea Museum and it was found in a case in the basement. It has been published before. It also has more latmul roots because it's kind of that Rococo overdone version of the Sawos figures that we've seen that are more simplistic.

But it is a wonderful figure. Here's its serpentine motif, and here is its hook. A-ha, but what happened and what began to happen was that following the receipt of those figures that I've sort of scooted through, a miracle happened, and that was that through my correspondence I had developed a friendship with the curator in anthropology at the Papua New Guinea Museum who was to become a major miracle worker for this research as it continued.

His first contribution was, guess what? In the museum he found another figure. And, guess what? Hey, looks familiar. So we really started kind of getting excited here because we thought, well, if this was the South we would say, who are your people, and we would try to say, maybe we have a kissing cousin of yours.

Now, having just -- this figure is very much in keeping with the Dallas figure as you can see -- one minute, I just lost my place, okay, and all of the head, the curvilinear, even the rendition of the way it is carved on the breast area with inverted are things are very much in keeping.

[00:42:03.17]

The serpentine, the feet.... Let me go back and just say, okay, here we go, alright, ...and then the enthusiasm increases, because here is another figure, this is not the same one I just showed you.

This is a figure from the private collection of Wayne Heathcote in New York City. At this point I'm starting to envision a family reunion, because we're getting so much, they almost look like they're by the hand of the same carver. They almost look as if they -- I mean, hey, we've got something to work with here.

The Heathcote figure was collected by Harry Franklin, whereas the other figure that was very much like this was collected by the administration of the Papua New Guinea Museum. This is the Heathcote figure--you can see how very similar it is in every aspect. And then at the Volkerkünde: I get another package one day and the Volkerkünde has found a figure in their basement and here's what it looks like.

There are two figures from the Volkerkünde, one of which in Basel, one of which we had seen published before, but this one actually had not been published before. This figure is well within that same kinship string that we talked about. The figure has the same iconography and now we have a figure that was collected not by a dealer, but we have the figure that was collected by Alfred Bühler in the '50s, 1959.

[00:44:05.06]

We have a village of origin which is Yamok village. So, this is fact, this is something over here for this figure we can put over here and say, okay, this is fact. The second figure--and here is some of its detailing. First of all, let me just show you this detailing--getting a little bit fast here. This is the second

figure now from the Volkerkünde, and this is the one that people have seen published before. We think the white face predominantly or had to do with the same kind of figures, but this one was more mortuary-related or in mourning.

This one also was in the basement, and guess what? This one was also collected in Yamok village and it was also collected by Alfred Bühler in 1959, *in situ*. So, here are two figures that now look like from the same school, but we actually have facts and documentation and pictures that say, yes, it was. Then, here are some other details of it. All of these figures, by the way, were on hooks and you can see how they were propped up against the center posts of the houses and therefore show this insect infestation that occurs with a lot of them.

Then we have the wonderful Metropolitan figure, which is a little bit more three dimensional in its rendering but very much within the same school of thought and it was, guess what, bought from Harry Franklin, a runner.

[00:46:01.00]

So, while it is a little more three dimensional, it still has the same feeling as the other figures do, definitely the same school, Yamok village.

Okay, quite obviously the last five figures that I showed you that we've just looked at, were closely associated with the Dallas figure in their rendering and final overall appearance. It thus appeared that these six figures could possibly be from the same area within the Sawos territory and --

[Audio Gap - 00:45:35 - 00:46:44]

...send my photographs in 48 hours to him in Papua New Guinea from Mobile, Alabama, and didn't really know if they made it or not, but then about five months later, I was very surprised to find out, yes, indeed they did.

Now before we go into this final kind of pulling all this together, I want to talk about one thing: the collection of the figures, including the Dallas figure. During the '50s through the '70s, Harry Franklin who is an L. A. dealer had a partnership with Oscar Meyer who was a dealer in Paris. Sometimes Oscar would go actually into the field to collect, but they both had a guy, his name was Bruce Lawes, who was a young Australian patrol boat runner for the Australian government that went up and down the Sepik trying to keep people from headhunting during these '50s and the '60s.

He was totally naive about field practices, as it turns out, became a collector and became quite astute in collecting and good field practices.

[00:48:03.15]

But at this time didn't much care about anything except picking up some little extra money for bringing out some figures for these dealers. During the

'50s, Harry Franklin and Oscar Meyer brought out 20 tons of artifacts, most of which formed the larger parts of the Oceanic collections in the major institutions in America in their museums.

Often Oscar was present at the collecting with a particular village, but it appears that more than once they had general pick up points, and that is why the provenance in this field and in the Middle Sepik is so bad. We must now today, before it's too late, we must talk to these dealers, we must talk to these runners, we must talk to these people who often photograph these figures *in situ* before they were taken to a draw point, and try to reconstruct the villages of origin before it's too late. This is an incredibly important thing that we need to do.

Now, one fine day, I go out to the mailbox and I get this -- the field notes from Barry Craig regarding the figures. On the left is the Dallas figure that we know Harry brought out, we know John Huston, the famous director owned it for many years, we know it went back to Harry Franklin, and we know it was purchased by our museum here, and we know when, and we know that probably without a doubt, it was sometime in the '60s.

Well, in fact, I am looking real quick, but John was told that it was bought in 1956, so that's the same era when Oscar and Harry were over there bringing these 20 tons of artifacts out.

[00:50:01.15]

This is what he found when he took the photographs into the gray beards, the old people in the villages, who were still able to remember the figures of the time when they were young children. The Dallas piece, he said, is named *Malabi*, said to have been bought for £10 by a dealer from Dambwibit cult house, Wolembi hamlet, Yamok village, said to have been carved to make the swampy ground firm, so they could establish a village. They killed enemy warriors and they made magic to empower the carvings. The faces on the feet represent a bush spirit called *winjimbu*, the cockatoo-like heads at each end of the snake-like figure on the abdomen are called *bangyang'gwi*, but they refused to say that they were the heads of birds.

Now, in 1955 Bruce Lawes was watching Alfred Bühler from the Basel Volkerkunde Museum bring out a lot of Maprik stuff, which is another area. And he was running, we know that because he was documented by Bühler. The Dallas figure seems to be one of three major figures brought out by Oscar Meyer, Bruce Lawes and given to Harry Franklin, who then sold it around 1956, or 1957, maybe 1958. They had a single drop point, and they did not know where they came from, but they were actually picked up at Gai Korupi village. The figures were brought on a walking path. Okay, now that's one thing we had. Okay.

Then Papua New Guinea on the right. This figure was acquired through the administration, which means it was collected in the field. It was documented accurately, and the field notes from its institution state, that it is called *Tulalamun* and was said to have been bought for £10 by a dealer from Yamok

Village. That is fact.

[00:52:07.00]

Then, we go to the next figure, the Heathcote figure--wonderful collector in New York City. Harry Franklin, Bruce Lawes and Oscar Meyer. So we know it's the same stash, and then it was sold to Bruce Seamen in Bora Bora, and then it eventually found its way to Heathcote and this is what the field notes found. This figure is named *Mian'Gandu* and was said to have been bought for £10 by a dealer from Dambwibit cult house, Yatmai clan, Wolembi hamlet, Yamok village. So we think that this is also one of those three that was brought out.

Then we have the Basel 2 figure collected by Alfred Bühler *in situ* at Yamok village in 1959, and bought for £10 which the villagers still remembered, and it was from Dambwibit cult house, Yamok village. Now this is one of those instances where we have it verified in the field by a leading worldwide anthropologist, and on the other hand, here we are -- that was in 1956, here we are in 1998 and the villagers still were able to give the same verified exact information. So now we are getting very excited.

Next one is...

[00:54:01.24]

The second Basel figure which was also collected by Bühler in the field, documented, and he knew the ancestral name which was given as -- he called it *Katang'gawi* and our field notes say it is *Kundang'gawi*. Then when it was taken in 1956, Bühler was told the story about this ancestor figure *Katang'gawi*, who basically was the story of a wood statue that when a villager was attacked, came to life to help the local person win the battle and then later turned back into wood, and I am not going go into it, because we are running out of time. But that was exactly the same myth and the same name except for a few phonetical differences that was told to Barry when he brought the picture to them. And it was carved to make the swampy ground wet. This is fact, Yamok village.

And then the last figure was Oscar Meyer, Bruce Lawes, Harry Franklin, then Nelson Rockefeller and then to the Primitive Museum, and then to the Metropolitan when the Primitive merged with the Metropolitan. And this is supposed to be *Minjemtimi* and it was said to be bought for £10, which it was. Yamok village and the same story of a wooden statue ancestor figure coming to life to help in a warfare situation, and then turning back into stone.

[00:56:09.01]

And then, what we have is we have the Dallas figure, Yamok village stylistically, and now proven in the field and said to be Yamok village, Wolembi hamlet, Dambwibit cult, and we know when Franklin who it came from, we know when he was there. We know who got it, Bruce Lawes, we

know Oscar Meyer was present. So that was kind of conjecture, but it was verified in the field notes.

Then we have Basel 1, which was fact: Alfred Bühler in the field, the same hamlet, the same cult house, and an exact date. We have the second figure which was the white-face figure, exactly the same, just a little bit different clan, which Mairambu clan is more of a mourning clan, mourning the dead.

And then we have the Heathcote figure, which was Wolembi hamlet, Dambwibit cult house, and Yamok village; and then we have the Papua New Guinea 2, I mean 1, is Yamok village which was fact; and then we have Papua New Guinea 2, which is more of a latmul variation and then the other figures that we listed.

So basically, what we found out was we brought facts from collection in the field that were done correctly together with stylistic analysis on those that were not known, and through the process of things we did know and did not know about each figure, we brought it together, and in essence, this became the founding of the Yamok-style group, the first style group within that area.

[00:58:01.22]

Now very quickly, I am going to -- and you can see Yamok is right above the river there. Can you see it? I think you can, right there. And very quickly, this is Alfred Bühler in the field on the left. He took out tons and tons and tons. All of the figures that we've looked at tonight are very old. All of them were carved with an adz very much like you see this man doing right here. All of them had to do with the scarification and the initiation of young man into the ceremonial men's houses. The crocodile motifs.

All of them are still used today in men's houses. Even this man, this picture was taken in 1980, you see the scarification, the crescent marks on his breast area. This is a figure, a new figure that was being carved in the village at that time. Not on a hook, but very much. And now acculturation is taking place. This says, "Work along this road. All cars must stop. Stop and look. Red sign on walk."

And let me just show you real quickly, this is an example of ones today. This is an example of a man carving in the same traditional way today, in the '80s I should say.

[01:00:06.10]

And that is that.

Marian Pfeiffer:

One of the things that we want to do now, is what we want to do, is we want to get the photographs from the collectors, the photographs from the actually documented expeditions--there were many expeditions that go back a long way where there were actual photographs from the Volkerküde. We want to put them together in our catalog raisonné, and in that way you could

take them by village that is known from academic institutions and those from dealers-- this is not the search for the guilty anymore, it is just the search for validation--and what we want to do is put them together in a catalog raisonné, so that then you could literally, as a curator, look through an area and identify those in your collection. Then you would have an actual stylistic village of origin, and then that would be form the basis to begin a stylistic analysis.

Thank you. Do you all have any questions? I enjoyed it very much. Thank you for coming.

Audio file: MalabiPfeiffer_01.mp3