

RED MATS SOUTH WEST PENTECOST

VANUATU



BY

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RED MATS
South West Pentecost
Vanuatu

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INTRODUCTION

The year 2007 was declared the ‘The Year of the Traditional Economy’ in Vanuatu. Ralph Regenvanu, now Minister for Justice and Social Affairs, makes the distinction between the traditional economy (*kastom ekonomi*) which is focused on the concerns and resources of its members and the western style ‘capitalist’ or cash economies which are focused on their [western] members. The recommendations for the ‘Year of the Traditional Economy’ include the promotion of traditional wealth items in custom ceremonies; the promotion of traditional wealth items for the payment of school fees; and the promotion of the production of traditional wealth items and other traditional resources. According to Regenvanu, (February 11. *The Year of the Traditional Economy – What is it all about?* The Independent/ L’indépendant – Sun, pp. 18-20 Vanuatu) these objectives and activities approved by the national Steering Committee are ‘... intended to both safeguard and strengthen the traditional economy, as well as more generally contribute to sustainable and self-reliant development outcomes for Vanuatu.’

Inspired by Minister Ralph Regenvanu’s insightful comments and the recommendations of the ‘Year of the Traditional Economy’ the authors have attempted to record the continuing vitality and importance of the production, value, exchange and symbolism of red mats and pigs as both a vital component of social cohesion and nationally recognised items of exchange and the traditional economy of both Pentecost and throughout Vanuatu.

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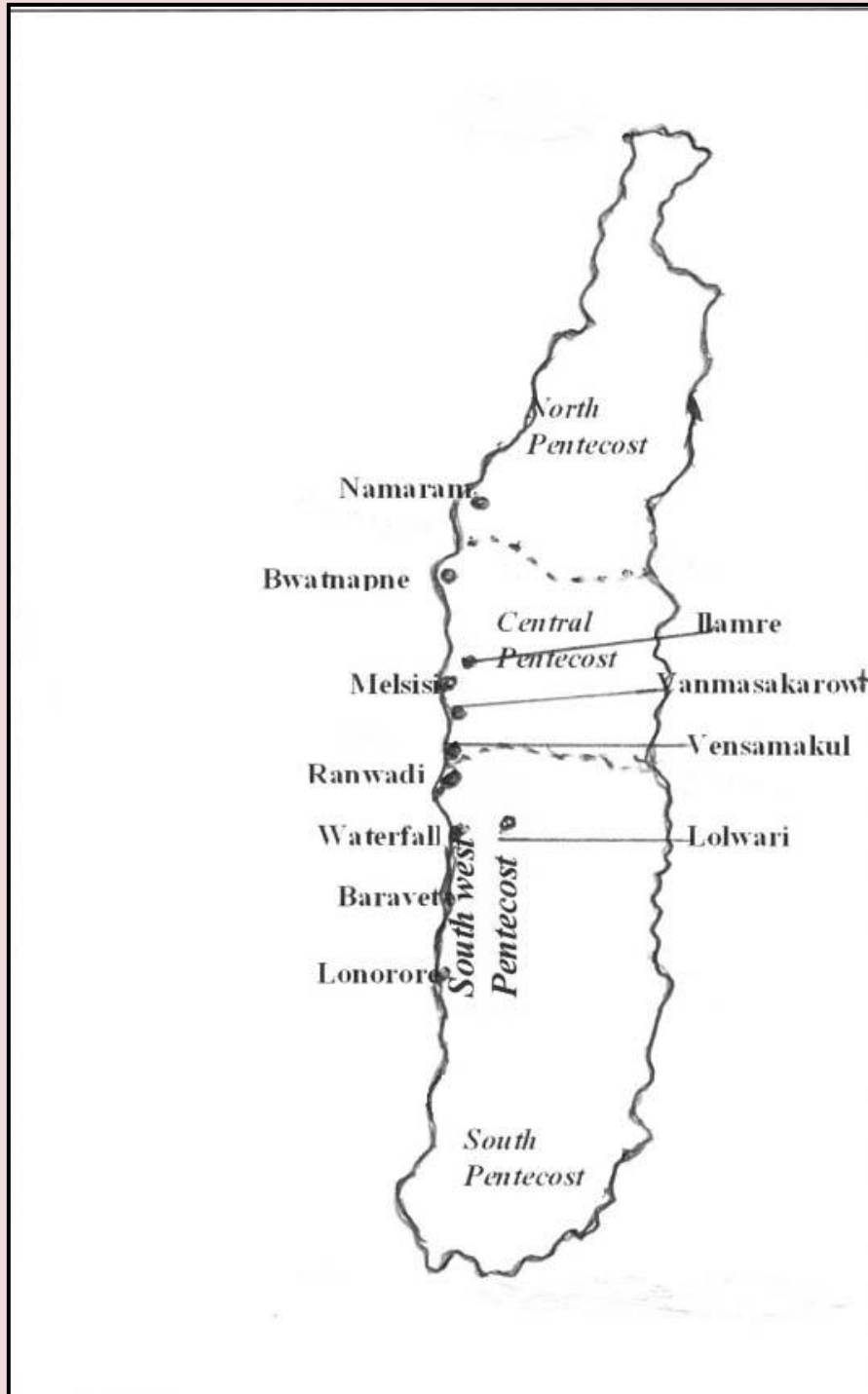
This book has been made possible by the assistance of many people who gave generously of their time and knowledge. The authors are particularly indebted to Chief Isaiah elected chief and magistrate of Waterfall village (Vanu) who described the role of red mats in the judicial sphere of secular life in Waterfall village (Vanu); Chief Josip Virahop of Rowok village who walked long distances to assist and spend hours describing the rituals of the grade-taking, details of the symbolism of the graded society, and the meanings of the patterns dyed on the red mats; Chief Martin Virakor who welcomed us to his village of Rep and spent several hours explaining the role of white mats, red *tsip* mats and *sese* mats in *mislun*, i.e. exchanges for specific occasions in secular and ritual life; Mikael Buli, of Lolwari village, the artist who cuts the designs for the dyeing of the red mats, and who walked down to Rep village to contribute to our discussion with Chief Martin Virakor on the production and exchange of red mats; Zaccheus Tabi of Waterfall Village (Vanu) who offered his broad knowledge of customary exchange, collected white mats, *tsips* and *seses* for our photographs, and arranged for the visits of the participating chiefs; Mark Tabi who attended our meetings to assist with suggestions and advice; Venneth, wife of Silas Buli, and Lily, wife of Zaccheus Tabi who contributed to our research with hospitality, and by providing accommodation, and meals at the Noda Guesthouse Waterfall Village; Ricobert Bulevu and Hyacinth of Melsisi who broadened our knowledge of the importance of patterns on the *seses* and *tsips* and showed us similar designs painted on the interior walls of the Catholic cathedral at Melsisi; our reliable and patient taxi driver who took us to various locations in the area; and all the villagers of south west Pentecost who have encouraged us with our research for this book.

We are also indebted to the Genevieve Mescam and Denis Colombier whose book *Pentecost – an Island in Vanuatu* inspired our research. We have relied on the excellent diagrams of the designs in their book and we encourage our readers to refer to their diagrams where they are referenced in our book.

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The administrative regions of Pentecost and the geographic region of south west Pentecost



Chapter 1

RED MATS OF SOUTH WEST PENTECOST

Throughout the islands of northern Vanuatu the items of exchange in the traditional economy are pigs and mats. Walter (1996) describes mats with purple designs exchanged on Pentecost, Ambae, Maewo and Tomman, and mats that are dyed a uniform red in northern and central Malekula. Walter also describes the mats of the Apma speaking women of central Pentecost as mats which are dyed purple. In our study mats are described as either white or red in the Apma speaking villages of central and south west Pentecost. Our study focuses on the villages in the geographical region of south west Pentecost which stretches from the French speaking Catholic villages of Melsisi in the north to the commencement of the Church of Christ villages at Ranwadi and continues south to Lonorore (see Figure 1).

For administrative purposes the island of Pentecost in northern Vanuatu is divided into three areas: north, central and south Pentecost. North Pentecost stretches from the northern tip of the island to just north of Bwatnapne situated on the west coast. Christianity was introduced into this area mainly by English speaking Anglican missionaries. Central Pentecost is the area bordering north Pentecost just north of Bwatnapne and extending south to the villages close to Vansemakul. Christianity was introduced into this area by the French speaking Catholic missionaries. Bordering the French villages, and therefore the most northerly settlement of south Pentecost, is Ranwadi College where the Church of Christ established an English speaking mission. The villages south of Ranwadi are mainly Church of Christ villages; however in the far south of the island the villages such as Bunlap and Wali are *kastom* villages which resisted Christianity.

Since the area of our study overlaps the administrative areas of central and south Pentecost we describe this area by its geographical location – south west Pentecost. This area is further delineated by the narrow western coastal plain and the western slopes of the steep central mountain range that runs the length of Pentecost. In south west Pentecost the majority of villages are situated on the western slopes and coastal

plain. Our informants represent both the French speaking Catholic villages of central Pentecost where traditional customs continue to be practised, and the Church of Christ villages where traditional customs were limited to practical exchanges within Christian guidelines. We believe that our informants with their combined wide ranging knowledge of the exchange of red mats and pigs within the traditional economy provide our study with a profound account of this many layered practice.

In the islands of the north of the archipelago of Vanuatu including The Banks and Torres Islands, Ambae, Maewo, Malekula, Vao, Ambrym, North and Central Pentecost where the public graded society is practised, pigs of certain degrees of tusk size and curvature are a necessary requirement for a male to enter and to rise through the ranks of the graded society (Allen 1981b; 1984; Blackwood 1981; Deacon 1970; Eriksen 2008; Layard 1942; Taylor 2005; Tonkinson 1981). In south west Pentecost tusked pigs and red mats are required for entry into the ceremonies associated with the graded society (see Winch-Dummett 2010). Pigs and red mats are exchanged at other social events such as marriage; and as secular payments for services and fines. As Mescam explains (1989, 34), 'Like pigs, dyed red mats are society's traditional currency.'

In south west Pentecost the traditional path to a male's authority and influence is through ascending the ten ranks of the graded society known in this area as *lel leuten*. Since the introduction of Christianity circa 1900, the Catholic villages have continued to practice *lel leuten* but the traditional customs, (*kastom*) were discouraged in the Church of Christ villages. Although some *kastom* chiefs continued to ascend *lel leuten* in the Church of Christ villages, other senior men and elders acquired authority through their training in western institutions as pastors and teachers or became successful business men. A third opportunity for a man to acquire influence was for his village to select him as a type of magistrate or chief who could settle local disputes. Such chiefs would be sought from the family of a successful chief of this type although it was not a strictly hereditary title as may be found in some islands in the south of Vanuatu. In the late 20th Century an easing of animosity between the Christian denominations and an appreciation of *kastom* as a symbol of national unity has strengthened the graded society as a means for all men of ambition to attempt to achieve a chieftaincy and thereby a possibility of local, regional, or even national

influence, the latter through participation in the Malvatumauri, the National Council of Chiefs (Lindstrom 1982; 1997). Tusked pigs and red mats continue to be required in *lel leuten* for their monetary and symbolic value.

The purpose of our paper has been to expand on the excellent research of red mats undertaken by Mescam (1989) by examining the value of the mats and the meanings contained in the designs on the red mats. To this end, the authors, met with Chief Martin Virakor of Rep Village (an informant in Mescam's study), Chief Josip Virahop of Ronwok, Mikael Bule of Lolwari, currently the carver who knows and cuts the designs for red mats in Lolwari; Zaccheus Tabi of Vanu who has an extensive knowledge of local *kastom* and the Church of Christ; Mark Tabi of Vanu; and Chief Isaiah, a chief elected from descendants of a lineage of chiefs by the elders of Vanu. The villages of Rep, Ronwok and Lolwari are Catholic villages and Vanu is a Church of Christ village.

The aim of our research was fourfold:

1. To learn the commercial value of mats in the traditional economy and how the relevant transactions of red mats are integrated into the cash economy.
2. The value attached to red mats and pigs in traditional ceremonial transactions.
3. Traditional ceremonies in which red mats and pigs are exchanged.
4. The meanings of the designs applied to red mats.

Chapter 2

THE VALUE OF MATS IN THE TRADITIONAL ECONOMY AND THEIR VALUE IN THE CASH ECONOMY

The people of south west Pentecost require red mats as both a traditional form of exchange and a modern monetary equivalent. Red mats may be used for diverse purposes e.g., to ensure peace or reconciliation; to facilitate a person's rise through the ranks of the graded society; to pay fines or school fees. The late *kastom* Chief Resis once explained to Zaccheus Tabi that the giving and receiving of red mats is similar to an international business society such as The World Bank where credit is advanced but has to be repaid with interest. So it is with red mats and pigs. People are not forced to belong to this cycle of giving and receiving but if they choose not to participate they will not receive any assistance from the neighbours and relatives in the future such as when they build a new house.

According to Chief Isaiah (Vanu, 6 September 2010) red mats may be valued at 3000 vatu in Port Vila but they possess more intrinsic value (that is *kastom* value) to the local people. Red mats are valuable for both the design and the density of the fringe on the sides and ends of the mat. The thicker the fringe the more valuable the mat because separating the fine fibres of the fringe is painstaking and it takes many women many days to shred the fibres before the mat is dyed. Chiefs recognise the value held in the fringe in determining the value of the mat.

There are three types of mats in use in south west Pentecost. These are:

1. White mats. These include *butsubwan* (white sleeping mats which are about two metres in length and are not included in exchanges of mats) and the white mats that will be dyed with red designs for exchange.
2. *Tsip*. This mat has a white design on a red background (described by Mescam 1989; Walter 1996) and similar in production to small mats dyed on Ambae described by Bolton, (2003). *Tsips* are about one and a half metres in length and about 32 centimetres in width. In south west Pentecost the designs on *tsips* are made by women who bind strips of the *bega* plant in the shape of the pattern to the mat before dyeing (Mescam, 1989, 43).

3. *Sese*. This mat has a red design on a white background. The dyeing of *sese* mats was observed by the authors in the village of Lolwari in 1990 and accords with the description in Mescam (1989, 44). The design is carved on the outer layers of the banana trunk to produce a stencil which will be placed over the rolled mat before being dyed. The master carver, who is always a male, may be assisted by a younger apprenticed male. *Sese* are three metres in length.

Although the carving of the designs for the *sese* is men's work, in general the weaving and dyeing of mats is women's business. Since our research was undertaken with the men of the villages, the extent of women's participation was not described in the detail of that of Bolton and Walter. However, Zaccheus Tabi explained that the Women's Club have a small business dyeing mats which is supported as a business enterprise by the European Union. Women make the dyes and dye the mats while men assist with the heavy work such as building fires. Today, unlike the corrugated iron vats described by Bolton, Mescam and Walter and observed by the authors in 1990, the mats are dyed in aluminium tubs about five metres in length and one and a half metres in width manufactured specifically for the task by a boat-building manufacturer in Port Vila.

The dye is made from the roots of the *laba* vine. The outer layers of the larger roots are scraped and the very tiny roots are crushed to extract the dye. The scrapings are dried in the sun and stored in bags. About three to four handfuls of dye are needed for each vat of mats. The dye is added to the water until it turns red and the mats are boiled in the dye for 30 minutes. The ceremony of making mats red is known as *dintsinan*.

The costs associated with the production of red mats are:

1. The women who make the designs on the *tsip* mats are paid two *tsips*.
2. The men who cut the stencils for the *sese* mats are each paid 2 *seses*.
3. The cost of the copyright of the design which is paid to the chief (once only for each design) is two *seses*. If the carver fails to pay for the copyright before using a design his eyes will be made blind.

4. Sometimes several villagers will arrange to have their mats transported to the village which is dyeing the mats e.g. in Vansemakul (July 2010) one person wanted 35 dyed; another person from the same village wanted 35; and others wanted smaller numbers such as ten, five and five. A person from Melsisi was paid in *tsip* mats to transport the mats.

(a) Monetary and exchange value of red mats in south west Pentecost

Undyed white mats equal 1000 vatu to 2000 vatu for the best quality. An undyed white mat will buy a bundle of taro or yam.

Two *tsips* equal 2000 vatu. *Sese* mats may be bought for 2000 vatu and sold for up to 5000 vatu. *Seses* have the capacity to make money. One *sese* may purchase a small part of a garden of yam or taro (up to 25 - 30 in a heap). *Sese* will also buy one full circled tusk removed from a pig for 20,000 vatu and two full tusks removed from the pig for 40,000 vatu. The price is the same whether or not the pig is included. Items such as bullock, taro, yam and fowls may also be exchanged for mats or cash. *Gelgelan* is the process of buying objects or services with red mats and this may include the traditional exchange items mentioned above or any item when cash is not available e.g., payment for a taxi to transport material, or assistance with building a house.

In all cases five *tsips* are equal to one *sese*. So *tsips* may be used instead of *sese* mats but must total the same value as the required *seses*. *Tsips* may even be used in the graded society when *seses* are not available. However, only *seses* may be used at funerals.

(b) Red mats as fines

There are two kinds of fines – domestic fines and community fines. Fines are often reckoned in *seses* worth 3,000 vatu. In the case of a domestic matter one red mat paid to the aggrieved party is sufficient. In the case of a community dispute one red mat must be paid to the chief and another red mat paid to the person who took the matter to the chief. If a person ignores the chief's advice or re-offends the fine is increased.

In the village of Vanu the fine is paid to Chief Isaiah who holds a meeting in the *nakamal* every Thursday morning. The chief decides on the methods of reconciliation and fines at that meeting. The value of the mats in vatu is not mentioned. Fines must be paid immediately. In cases of dissent or serious issues the chief will request a visit from the police in Vila to resolve the issue.

Chapter 3

THE VALUE ATTACHED TO MATS AND PIGS IN TRADITIONAL CEREMONIAL TRANSACTIONS

(Described by Chief Josip Virahop at Vanu 5 September 2010)

(a) Categorising pigs according to tusk curvature and lel leuten

Pigs are graded and valued according to the size of the tusk. There are ten named levels of tusk development towards a single full curvature of the tusk. There are a further six named grades of tusk curvature towards a second level of tusk curvature which is rare. The number ten is fundamental for most calculations. For example, the monetary value of mats is reckoned in multiples of 10 and the 10 levels of tusk curvature correspond to the 10 grades of *lel leuten* i.e., the graded society.

In the list below the name of the pig indicates the size of the tusk. The measurement of the length of the tusk accords to the width of the fingers at the base measured from one to four fingers.

1. *bolewanteshosok* Very small pig
2. *botwut* Small tusk just erupting
3. *botebebi* Tusk is about a half inch in length or width of one finger
4. *boliwontemamal* Tusk is about one inch or width of two fingers
5. *lipsal maabubotero* Tusk is curved and about to enter the cheek about three fingers.
6. *lipsal tewasteng* Tusk has gone through the skin and entered the jawbone
7. *lipsal trebolelen* Tusk has entered the jaw to the length of the width of one finger.
8. *lipsal trebolelen* Tusk has entered the jaw to the length of the width of two fingers.
9. *lipsal teroblelen* Tusk has entered the jaw to the length of the width of four fingers.

10. *lipsal tetwak* After four fingers the tusk emerges from the mouth and the first curvature is complete. The second tusk curvature may commence and the second series of six levels commences.

Second curvature

11. *lipsal lewantoshokok*
12. *lipsal towut*
13. *lipsal tememal*
14. *lipsal tebebi*
15. *lipsal maabu*
16. *lipsal tewestang*

(b) Tusked pigs and sese mats required for lel leuten

The following list indicates the 10 grades of *lel leuten* graded society and the number and type of pigs and mats required for entry to each grade.

1. *bahribo* 1 *lipsal tewasten* and 1 *sese*
(Total of 1 pig and 1 mat)
2. *bilanban* 1 *lipsal tewasten* and 6 *sese*
(Total of one pig and one mat)
3. *warisangal* 1 *lipsal trebolelen* and 7 *sese*
1 *botwut* and 2 *sese*
1 *bolewanteshosok* and 1 *sese*
(Total of 3 pigs and 10 mats)
4. *gori* 1 *lipsal trebolelen* and 7 *sese*
1 *botwut* and 2 *sese*
(Total of 2 pigs and 9 mats)
5. *malmahang temit* 1 *lipsal trebolelen* and 9 *sese*
1 *botebebi* and 4 *sese*
1 *botwut* and 2 *sese*
(Total of 3 pigs and 15 mats)
6. *kavwik* 1 *lipsal tetwak* and 10 *sese*

- 1 *botebebi* and 4 *sese*
(Total 2 pigs and 14 mats)
7. *malmahang tememe* 2 *lipsal tetwak* and 20 *sese*
(Total of 2 pigs and 20 mats)
8. *karwurowuro* 2 *lipsal tetwak* and 20 *sese*
(Total of 2 pigs and 20 mats)
9. *hatnan karwurowuro* 2 *lipsal tetwak* and 20 *sese*
(also for the hat) → 1 *lipsal tetwak* and 10 *sese*
(Total of 3 pigs and 30 mats)
10. *mariak* 1 *lipsal tetwak* and 10 *sese*
(Total of 1 pig and 10 mats).

(c) Extra pigs and their types required for entry into the grades of lel leuten

For each of the above grades the candidate must also provide extra pigs. These 10 extra pigs represent the 10 values that the candidate must dance through as he winds his way through the 10 *namele* leaves during the *lel leuten* ceremony. Therefore the total of pigs required to enter each grade is composed of the number of pigs stipulated for entry into the grade plus 10 extra pigs. *Mariak*, which is the highest grade, requires one *lipsal tetwak* and 10 mats for entry, the extra pigs and mats to pay for each of the 10 steps or values is composed of the following:

2 *lipsal tetwak* and 20 *sese*.

2 *lipsal trebolelen* and 18 *sese*.

2 *lipsal trebolelen* and 16 *sese*.

2 *lipsal trebolelen* and 14 *sese*.

2 *lipsal trebolelen* and 12 *sese*.

In *karwurowuro*, an important grade which endows the chief with the power to make decisions on the part of a higher chief, the 10 extra pigs may of lesser value than that for *mariak* but must include 3 or 4 *lipsals* plus 6 or 7 lesser pigs from *botwut* to *lipsal*.

The meaning attached to these two groups of pigs and mats lies in the authority given to the candidate as he aspires to the new grade. The pigs and mats required for entry

into each new grade pay for the new identity acquired by the candidate through acceptance into that grade. The extra pigs and mats which the candidate pays to dance through the values symbolised in the 10 *namele* leaves bestow the authority on the candidate to access ‘*tabu*’ and ‘rule’, i.e., the rights and responsibilities of the grade.

(d) The 10 grades of lel leuten and the acquired titles

Listed below are the names of the grades and a brief description of the title accompanying each grade. The candidate acquires a new title each time that he meets the requirements for acceptance into a higher grade. It is important to note that when a boy enters *lel leuten* he is not associated with a colour. When he reaches the grade of *warisangal* he begins to acquire the colour red which is equivalent to ‘sacred’ in western rituals, and he may now wear red insignia. The highest grade *mariak* is white and the candidate who is accepted into the grade of *mariak* covers himself in white ash.

1. *bahribo* This means ‘stepping on the pig’ which means that a boy may now enter the *lel leuten*. (No title).
2. *bilanban* The boy has the right to wear the *karwurowuro* belt and *bilanban*, a special red mat. (No title).
3. *warisangal* This means ‘red hibiscus’ which means that the boy may now wear a red hibiscus and he is beginning to ‘look red’. (No title).
4. *gori* This is the name of a gong rhythm associated with this grade. (No title).
5. *malmahang temit* This means ‘breathing of the pig’ and is the gong rhythm. The title is *liwus*.
6. *kavwik* This means ‘native apple’.
The title *vi* is now used for the first time. The candidate has the right to oath-taking which gives him the right to judge others and impose fines. Because this grade is in the central position of the hierarchy of grades the candidate can now give advice on his own behalf from *bahribo* to *mariak*.

7. *malmahang tememe* This means ‘red belt’. The red belt acquired at this grade indicates that the candidate may now judge people according to the 10 values of the grades. The title *vi* is bestowed a second time.
8. *karwurowuro* The title *vi* is bestowed a third time. The candidate is now recognised as a chief and can now make decisions on behalf of the higher chiefs.
9. *hatnan karwurowuro* This means a special type of hat. The hat is like ‘a crown’ and the people are subject to the decisions of the person wearing that hat. The title of *tamaraka* meaning ‘high chief’ is bestowed and he has the right to authorise ceremonies.
10. *mariak* This means ‘the end’ – the culmination of the hierarchy of grades of *lel leuten*. The title of *tanmanok* is bestowed.

These grades and titles are consistent in south west Pentecost. The following examples of chiefs (2011) and their relevant grades are representative of villages from the most northern to the most southern villages in south west Pentecost:

Michael Tevlivi attained the grade of *vi* in Lemalda Village (situated in the hills immediately east of Melsisi the most northern village of this study). This was the site of the most recent grade-taking on 16 January 2011.

In Lalbataes Village Philip Tabi has attained the highest grade *mariak* and the title of *tanmanok*. Alusio Tabi has also attained the highest grade *mariak* and the title of *tanmanok*

In Baravat Village Dr Edward Pambisari has attained the grade of *malmahang temit* and the title of *liwus*.

In Ranmawat Village

Clement Tabi has attained the grade of *vi*.

In Lonorore Village (the most southern village in this study of south west Pentecost)

Paul Bule has attained the grade of *vi*

Chapter 4

TRADITIONAL CEREMONIES DURING WHICH RED MATS AND PIGS ARE EXCHANGED

(Described by Chief Martin Virakor at Rep Village I September 2010)

(a) Maslun ceremony and gelgelan transaction

The presentation of red mats is known as *maslun*. *Maslun* is performed for almost every activity in *kastom* e.g., acquiring titles in the *lel leuten*; or for assistance in non-ceremonial exchanges e.g., building a house. *Maslun* is performed on the initial occasion of such activities and is offered to a father's sister or brother and also to the mother's sister's husband who is of the same marriage moiety as the father of the person offering *maslun*. Only one or two red mats are offered, or the equivalent in cash (@29,000 vatu) may be offered in non-ceremonial occasions. When a man gives a mat ceremonially he lays the mat out on the ground and stands sideways next to it holding one corner of the mat. The recipient takes the mat. This is the procedure for all *maslun*. On the other hand if the mat is being exchanged for an item such as taro the mat assumes the role of a monetary transaction and is simply handed to the recipient. The non-ceremonial exchange of a mat for an item such as taro is known as *gelgelan*.

(b) Lel leuten (grade taking ceremony)

Every rank of the graded society has a specific cost that must be reckoned in vatu or the equivalent value in pigs and red mats. This will be recorded by the candidate for the donor person's own *lel leuten*. The donor's paternal uncles and aunts may also dance at the ceremony. His uncle will dance after him and then the aunts will all follow. The father's brothers will get one *sese* mat and father's sisters will each get one *tsip*.

There are special people who play the gong beat. They know everyone who comes to the pig killing and the gong rhythms of the grade status of each of those people. There is also a special gong rhythm for those who do not have status or a grade. When the people present the mats, or the pig which they tie to a stake or tree, they dance in a

line towards the candidate holding a specific leaf that represents the item presented. Each type of pig determined by its degree of tusk curvature, or the equivalent number and type of mats is described by a particular leaf. Following the presentation of the pigs and mats the candidate begins a dance. Ten *namele* leaves are placed on the ground in a line each parallel to the other. These ten *namele* leaves represent ten rules. The candidate weaves through the *namele* leaves thereby recognising the rules. This action signifies that the candidate is now a man of honour. The candidate's father's brothers and sisters may now commence dancing.

The candidate kills the pig and the chief announces the new name of the candidate. Up to this point the ceremony takes place in the open. After the pig killing the candidate, now a chief, enters the *nakamal* (the men's house) where he remains from five to ten days. Food will be prepared for him on the sacred fireplace which is designated as *tabu* by two *namele* leaves lying close together directly in front of the fireplace. When the period of seclusion is over the new chief will go to the sea to bathe. On the seashore where he bathed he will plant a *namele* leaf which will remain there for one year as a sign that this area is *tabu* to everyone. After one year he will remove the *namele* leaf. By this action of planting and removing the *namele* leaf he demonstrates his power as a chief to make rules.

(c) Women's Graded Society

When a woman decides on a grade taking her first action is enter the *nakamal* and give *maslun* (*seses*) to her father's sisters and brothers. The significance of entering the *nakamal* is after she is accepted into the grade she will have the right to go into the *nakamal* as a woman leader. She will have the authority to lead in women's ceremonies and the right to speak in public to men and women. She will have the right to give her own opinion and to represent other people. There are two levels of pig killing grades for women. These ceremonies are not identical to the male grade taking and pig killing ceremonies.

(d) Circumcision

At circumcision *maslun* is given to the boy's father's sisters and brothers. Originally circumcision took place in the *nakamal* and bamboo was used for the procedure. The

boy remained in the *nakamal* for three weeks and during that time only his father's brother could take care of him e.g., providing food; washing the boy in the sea. After three weeks the boy's parents would make a ceremonial *laplap* (cooked food) and give *sese* mats to the uncle who took care of the boy. Today boys go to hospital for the procedure. They remain in hospital for one week. They then return to the *nakamal* for three weeks.

(e) Funerals

There is no difference in burial ceremonies for women or men. *Maslun* is performed for the funeral. When a man or woman dies mourners go to the village to wail and bring a *sese* mat. Sometimes the mourners will come with 30 – 40 or even 100 *sese* mats. Some of the mats are used to wrap the body e.g., if there are 50 mats then 20 – 22 are used to wrap the deceased before burial. A large house is required to accommodate the deceased and the many mourners. By late in the afternoon, about 4 p.m. when all the mourners have arrived, the deceased is wrapped for the burial which takes place that same afternoon. The deceased person is placed lengthwise on the mats, and the body, but not the head, is covered with blankets, calico and mats. The mats are folded over the body from the ends but one end is folded in such a way that the head is not covered by these mats. Each mat is wrapped separately over the previous mat.

The close family of the deceased counts all the mats to determine how many to bury with the deceased and how many to keep. At Lolwari in August 2010 a deceased chief received 120 red mats. His body was wrapped in 50 mats tied with vines. Today any person may carry the deceased to the interment but in the past chiefs had to be carried by chiefs. After the five or 100 days elapse there is a feast, *kubungi*, and the remaining mats are distributed on behalf of the deceased amongst all those who had remained for the five or 100 days. These remaining mats are known as *malengan*. On the day of the funeral a pig or pigs are killed by a family member and this event is recorded. For example, it may be the case that five pigs and two bullocks are killed. The people who donated the pigs or bullock will be given some of the remaining red mats.

(d) Kalingoro nanhavin or betrothal

Red mats are paid for *kalingoro nanhavin* which is a betrothal or engagement of marriage. The boy's father gives the red mats to the girl's parents.

(e) Marriage

At marriage white mats are presented to the couple by the new husband's paternal aunts. During the following year these mats will be dyed with a distinctive red pattern. On the birth of a male child the parents will return the dyed mats to the infant's father's family. Also at the marriage the boy's father will give pigs and mats to the girl's father and mother. For example, when the son of Zaccheus Tabi married a girl from Bwil her family gave the couple 30 white mats and Zaccheus, as the boy's father, gave four pigs @ 20,000 each to the girl's father and mother and 25 small pigs @3000 vatu each to the girl's father's sisters and brothers.

Chapter 5

THE MEANINGS OF THE DESIGNS APPLIED TO THE RED MATS

(Described by Mikael Buli and Zaccheus Tabi 1 September 2010)

(a) The symbolism of the red dye

The red colour of the mats and the designs stencilled on the mats are symbolic. The story of the discovery of red dye was explained by Zaccheus Tabi (30 August 2010): 'In the past everything on Pentecost was white. There was no red colour at all. Only one village had the red colour but it was very deep in the ground. So other villagers went to dig for it but they were hungry, it rained, and the sun got them. They became tired but they could not find the red colour. Only Pentecost went to dig and dig. They were hungry, they were burned by the sun, and there was a hurricane. But they tried. They won the colour. When they returned to Pentecost they had the red colour.'

There is also a myth concerning the symbolism of the red colour of the mats. In the distant past mats were white. One day a menstruating woman was making a white mat when suddenly drops of her blood fell upon the mats. The people liked the red colour and sought a way of making red mats from that time. According to Walter (1996, 108):

A dyed mat is first and foremost the menstrual blood of women, the feminine principle of the universe, the symbol of the lineages which give women in marriage. It is in symbolic opposition to the curved pig's teeth which represents men's reproductive substance, the masculine principle of the world and the lineages which give men.

The symbolic link between the red dyed mats and the lineages which give women in marriage is compelling when the marriage rules of south west Pentecost are explained. The usual social organisation is patrivirilocal but descent is matrilineal. There are four marriage moieties in south west Pentecost. They consist of two female moieties and two male moieties. The norm for marriage in south west Pentecost is organised around the two matrilineal moieties. The two female moieties are Matan and Mabon. The male moieties are Buli and Tabi. A woman always belongs to the same moiety as her mother and her own daughter. A male belongs to the same moiety as his father's father

and his son's son. A man should only marry into the same moiety into which his father's father or son's son marry. The male child of a Tabi will belong to the Buli moiety and the male child of the Buli moiety will belong to the Tabi moiety. Each child will carry the name of the moiety to which he belongs. Therefore males of the Buli moiety will marry women from the Mabon moiety and males from the Tabi moiety will marry women from the Matan moiety.

(b) The symbolism of the designs on the red mats

The patterns described below relate to the designs documented by Mescam (1989). Chief Martin Virakor who participated in Mescam's study provided information for our paper concerning the traditional ceremonies in which red mats are exchanged. In our study of the meanings of the motifs we, the authors, acknowledge the thorough description of the designs by Mescam whose study includes both her own research into the designs of the *tsip* mats, and several designs on *sese* mats described by Annie Walter (Mescam, 1989: viii). Mescam names 18 designs for red mats, four of which are of *sese* mats. The current Lolwari carver of templates for red mats, Mikael Buli, and elder Zaccheus Tabi, believe that today there are only three *sese* designs used for *sese* mats, one of which was not recorded by Mescam but photographed by Winch-Dummett at Vanu.

We presented Mescam's book with its clear illustrations to Mikael Buli and Zaccheus Tabi (1 September 2010). Both Apma speakers, they examined each illustration, identified whether the mat was a *tsip* or a *sese*, provided the meanings for the designs, and corrected the reference to one design (discussed below). Silas Buli, an Apma speaker, translated the interpretations of the meanings into English. Below, each design on Mescam's book is listed by its page number; the Apma name provided by Mescam is given; the interpretation of the Apma term by Mescam is given; and the cultural meaning of the design, provided by Mikael Buli and Zaccheus Tabi, is explained.

(c) Sese mats

Sese mats are always dyed before *tsip* mats.

Ulu kataptap (Chief Virakor is seen cutting the design on p.39). In accordance with the explanation given by Mescam (p.36) this design opens the spirit of the design through the ingestion of a potion which enables the artist to remember the designs. Mikael Tabi and Zaccheus Tabi suggest that in Lolwari village it is a leaf rather than a drink that is ingested, that this design opens the secret and the intelligence of the designs. It is believed that there is a force behind the red mats. Therefore, at the beginning of every mat dyeing process this is the first design cut.

Wakit kere According to Mescam (p.4) the explanation of this design is 'to look out the corner of the eye'. The meaning refers to listening carefully, trying to learn what is being said. For example, if you want to acquire knowledge you will have to concentrate.

Kamatkel Kamatkel means *tabu* rock.

(d)Tsip mats

butsu metakal – the sun or sun tree (p.3). The meaning is that the sun when rising is always red. It is like the shining of the sun. (In Apma *butsu* is beginning; *metakal* is sun.)

kalin tsip taba – this is a design from Ambae which was once known as *taba* in Apma (p.7). It means a special red coloured plant.

kalin bu – this is a bamboo design (p.12). The meaning relates to the structure of the bamboo. It is like a shoot on which the sheaf peels away leaving a white stem which turns green. The value of this imagery is the importance of caring for the young who are vulnerable.

manioc – this is an introduced plant (p.13). The meaning of this design is concealed in the structure of the leaf. The manioc leaf is one leaf but it is serrated into seven distinct finger-like extensions. These extensions emanate from the leaf itself, not the stem. It is different from other trees because the leaves have these seven points. It is the individuality and difference of this leaf that is the value contained in the design.

biri biri wala – little cucumber (p.15). The meaning is not known but it is thought that since it is a quality food then it means that the wearer or user would reflect good quality.

sum – pearls in the spider's web glistening in the sun (p.15). The meaning is that the wearer will reflect brightness; bright like the sun and wise like the spider.

ugan rava – Mescam describes this design as hibiscus flower. Mikael Bule, Zaccheus Tabi and Silas Buli were adamant that in south west Pentecost it is not a hibiscus but a flower similar to a hibiscus that grows on the *rava* tree. The *rava* is a large tree with bright yellow flowers which have a purplish/black centre and a purplish/black tip on the stamen.

kalin buatel – the bottle design (p.22). The meaning lies in the capacity of a good clean bottle to store good clean water and so the value of purity extends to the wearer or owner of the mat.

kalin tu mewl – the cycad design. The cycad leaf is important because it is used to denote first grade in the graded society; it is used to forbid access; or set a date for a ceremony (p.26). This is the *namwele* leaf (sometimes known as the *namele* leaf). It is used to show that an item or a place is sacred e.g. the *bubu* (conch shell) and sacred oven in the *nakamel*. It appears on the Vanuatu flag. The meaning is peace.

kalin warip – fruit of the reed design (p.31). The meaning and value lie in the structure. Unlike the bamboo which is hollow inside, the reed is firm like a stick. No other tree can grow in the environment where the reed grows. So the wearer or user will not be influenced by evil and can grow straight.

ilin bwaga – means the rail feather. These feathers of the rail bird are dyed red for dance head dresses (p.33). The meaning and value lies in the feathers' ability to protect the body from the wet. A *tsip* with this design will protect the body of the wearer.

marin bo – pork ribs (p.35). The meaning lies in the ability of the ribs bones to protect the insides of the body. So just as *ilin bwaga* will protect the exterior of the body, *marin bo* will protect the interior.

kalin tsivin liwokawi – *liwokawi* is an old female forename (p.48). The meaning of this design is derived from *Liwokawi* who was the first woman to be a chief. Because she was the first woman chief this design always is the first design used in the dyeing ceremony of the *tsips*. Using this design first will assist the carver's memory of the designs. It holds special value for this reason.

kalin tsivin mana – *mana* was the name of an orphan girl who designed this *tsip* (p.51). The meaning of this design lies in the orphan's struggle to survive. This design points to the independence of the person to find his way through life.

karauro (*karawuro*) – this is the insignia on armbands and belt worn by a man in the grade of the same name in the graded society (p.53). This design, worn as man rises through the ranks of the graded society, alludes to the value of aspiration.

sum – the bead design which refers to the name of old belts made of shells. Women who have passed the first rank may wear this design (p.55). The meaning is embedded in the old custom whereby a man who wished a particular girl to be his daughter-in-law would put the *sum* around her neck. *Sum* means highly prized and the value is the commitment of the wearer or owner to any task undertaken or as a leader.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

Our study represents the painstakingly detailed explanation of the value and meaning of red mats by our informants of the Catholic and Church of Christ villages of south west Pentecost. The accessibility of red mats as a measure and object of value in traditional exchanges and informal transactions both conceals and reveals layers of information depending on the knowledge of the participants. Red mats may be simply an alternative form of payment when cash is unavailable. Where red mats are intrinsic to the community they are the means of maintaining alliances through the compulsion to reciprocate; and they serve as a means of penalising misdemeanour and thereby re-establishing peaceful relationships. Red mats, through the symbolism inherent in their designs, are constant reminders, to the informed, of the values of the community and the qualities respected in the members.



Silas Buli holding *laba* vine



Silas scraping outer skin of the root of the *laba* vine. The scraped residue contains the red dye



Silas Buli scraping outer layer of roots of the *laba* plant to make dye. A bundle of similar roots to the side



A bundle of fine roots of the *laba* tree ground to make red dye



A bundle of fine roots of the *laba* plant which may be crushed to make the red dye



Edge of white sleeping mat



Edge of white *sese* mat and heavy side fringing before dyeing



White *tsip* mat before dyeing



tsip mat with *kalin tsivin mana* (Metcam p.51)



Zaccheus Tabi demonstrating length of white undyed sese mat



Sese mat with kamat bel design



Lipsal showing tusk of approximately 2 fingers width measured across the base of the fingers



wakit kere design in Catholic cathedral Melsisi

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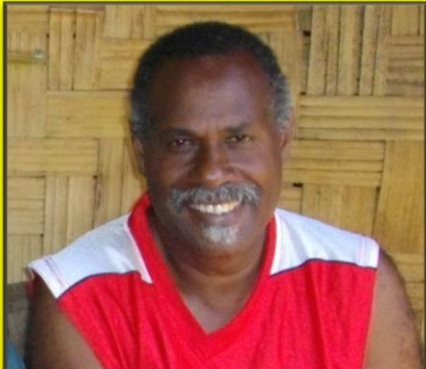
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