

SANGUMA

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This is a preliminary attempt at providing some documentation on both a word and a concept – preliminary because most of the data is negative. The word is *sanguma*, and the concept is what that word should mean – but does not necessarily, because the word and the concept may have had different histories. Before I start I want to make some concepts quite clear. I do not want to talk about every kind of magic or supernatural manipulation in Melanesian societies. We can take it that all Melanesian societies have some means of ensuring the continuance of the group by magic, or supernatural manipulation – garden magic, fighting magic, and so on. The theory behind most magic of this kind is that all good things come from the ancestors, and that by means of the appropriate rituals, approved by the ancestors, these things can be continued. Most societies also have other classes of supernatural beings which are not ancestral spirits – or, if they once were, their connections with a particular clan have been lost. For convenience, we call ancestral spirits *tambaran*, and the natural spirits *masalai*, while realising that not all groups make the distinction clearly.

In addition, most groups in Melanesia, if not all, appear to have the belief that death can be caused by supernatural means, by a sorcerer who enlists the aid of the spirits; the usual prerequisite for this type of activity is the personal leavings – faeces, nail clippings, hair, or other exuviae – of the person ensorcelled. This will be called *exuvial sorcery*, or sorcery for short. But none of these are *sanguma*, in the sense I will be using it. The characteristics of what I regard as *sanguma* will emerge as we look at some of the definitions. The earliest use of the word I have discovered is in Hoeltker (1940-41), from a communication in the ‘Steyley Missionsbote’ (SM) by Father Franz Vormann, in 1906-07:

Daily communication with the Monumbo in German, but religious instruction exclusively in the Monumbo language...Death-magic (‘Todeszauber’) zanguma; finding a death-sorcerer by means of bamboo (moramba); this practice known only to the Kamatsina, not the rest of the Monumbo... [author’s translation]

(See also SM 34:89-92, 134-135, 153-154, 169-170, 183-186.)

Further detail is added in one of Vormann’s (1910) ethnographic articles on the Monumbo:

¹ PL editor’s note: Dr Laycock died in 1988, and some changes which would normally have been made to this paper in consultation with the author have not been made: this applies in particular to the reference list, which contains many items not referred to in the text, and which accordingly has been retained as a bibliography.

They (the Monumbo) have a great fear of *tsongam*, magic. Especially in the dark do they suspect that behind every tree, in every corner there are evil men who will attack them and render them immobile and insensitive by magic, so that they cannot defend themselves or cry out, when the evil man, called *tsanguma*, will wound them by sharp slivers. He closes the wound by magic, and by magic ensures that the victim will not remember the attack, will not be able to talk about it, and will not be able to name a name.

Some additional linguistic data appears in Vormann and Scharfenberger (1914):

<i>tsangumo</i> (sing. t)	violence by means of magic
<i>tsongam on</i> (f.)	evil magic
<i>tsongatsongam tset</i>	injure fatally by means of magic [author's translation]

Note that Franz Vormann's earliest communication about the Monumbo is in SM for 1900-1901; the mission station was founded in 1899, and Vormann had been in New Guinea since 1896 (probably at Tumleo – founded on 31 August 1896, the first of the north coast Catholic missions).

An extended account of *sanguma* is given by Koster (1942-45); here are a number of quotations – firstly from Georg Hoeltker's introduction to the paper:

The word *sanguma* comes from the Monumbo language, where it has the form *tsangumo*, a singular noun meaning 'violence by means of magic'. From the Monumbo language the word came into Pidgin English... In the 'Pidgin-Dictionary' collected and published by the Catholic Mission at Alexishafen the meaning of the word *sanguma* is given as: 'murderer who murders through black magic'.

...It does not seem that people believe that *sanguma* is a spirit, but that there are humans – probably only men – that always carry out the attack in the company of others. The word *sanguma* is usually used only in the singular, from which the conclusion can be drawn that the indigenes understand by *sanguma* a kind of institution. This view is strengthened by the fact that the word in its original meaning in the Monumbo language is a singular noun. In fact, *sanguma* in the current language Pidgin English means not only the (imaginary) institution, but also the actual attack, and is particularly applied to the men who carry out the attack.

I should tentatively like to voice the supposition that *sanguma* is a 'secret society' a typical secret 'male cult' in the sense known to ethnography. I have not to date been able to find positive information or proof, but a definite relationship between *sanguma* and the typical male cults in other primitive peoples speaks strongly in favour of this supposition.

It seems that it is in the Bogia region and the neighbouring islands that *sanguma* finds its principal expression. I have the impression that *sanguma* operates mainly among the populations of the coast and the islands. It seems to me that the *sanguma* phenomenon further inland is almost or completely unknown; at least, I have had no communications about it from the missionaries in East Central New Guinea.

I do not know precisely how far much further west than the Bogia area and the mouth of the Sepik *sanguma* occurs. The villagers in the Wewak area did however ask me, when I went alone through the bush, whether I was not afraid of *sanguma*; so they were well acquainted with the existence of *sanguma*. According to Margaret Mead, as the above quotation shows, *sanguma* is also known in the But region. I have not yet had any data about regions further west.

East of Bogia sanguma seems to be known to about as far as Madang. However I have only few chance indications in my possession.

Whether sanguma show particular strong or special 'plantation' ('boycultur') elements – which would indicate a recent origin – as Margaret Mead appears to suggest, I cannot yet confirm or deny. I believe that our knowledge of the data is still insufficient to be able to say anything positive, and Mead's view is given simply as a supposition.

I do not know if sanguma occurs, in its typical form, elsewhere in New Guinea, but it is a fact that the foundation on which sanguma is built in the Bogia region is found throughout New Guinea. The foundation is on the one hand the actual secret murder (by poison, attack, etc.), and on the other hand the widespread belief in the possibility of causing harm to a human being by the means of black magic. Both are widespread in New Guinea. Whether sanguma is a Melanesian or Papuan invention cannot yet be even guessed at. [author's translation]

Koster himself writes:

To my present way of thinking the true concept of sanguma is that it is nothing other than the secret assault on an individual – from personal motives, or (paid or unpaid) on behalf of third parties – in such a fashion that the individual dies a few days later. Sanguma men are thus secret murderers, who carry out their murder in such a way that the victim does not die immediately, but only after a few days. I have not myself been a sanguma victim, nor a witness of an actual attack. But I have seen sanguma murderers and victims both before and after an attack, as described later.

From what local people have told me, I have formed the following idea of the methods, goals and motives of sanguma secret murder: The sanguma method is as follows: the sanguma men attack a lone individual in the bush...and mistreat him in such a way that he dies a few day later. The murderers conduct their attack in such a way that the victim is still capable of reaching...the nearest friendly village, where he dies a few days later. I conclude this from the fact that the people sometimes say: 'They did not sanguma him properly, they killed him'...The goal of the sanguma men is always the death of the victim...If the victim does not die, it is because the murderers were disturbed at their work, and were thus unable to perform all that is necessary for a sanguma murder...

(Motives: any arbitrary reason: women, enmity, etc.)...The murderers grab their victim and bring him wholly into their power. The victim must be rendered completely powerless, preferably unconscious. Then, usually, sharp, thin needles of varying lengths are stuck into various parts of the victim's body. I believe they use flying-fox bones...The thin needles somewhat resemble fishbones – and fishbones are also used... [author's translation]

(Later, some concrete instances of sanguma, from the 1930s, are given – including the removal of needles from an intended victim.)

Putting together the Vormann, Hoeltker and Koster accounts from the Bogia region, we can define *sanguma* for that region at least as having the following characteristics:

- (1) *Sanguma* is an institution of murder, not merely of sickness.
- (2) The act of *sanguma* is carried out by men – not spirits, disembodied souls of men, or any other agency.
- (3) *Sanguma* men act in groups, not alone.
- (4) *Sanguma* involves a physical attack on an individual in a lonely place.

- (5) The individual recovers from the attack, but cannot name his attackers, and dies a few days later.

From Burrige (1965) and Lewis (1977), as well as from the above sources, we can add a few details that seem implied in all accounts, but which are not always spelled out:

- (6) *Sanguma* is an antisocial act in the way that other magic and sorcery, even witchcraft, need not be.
- (7) *Sanguma* is carried out only on a single individual at a time. Going through the bush accompanied is sufficient protection – a woman accompanied only by a child is safe from *sanguma*.
- (8) There is no magical protection against *sanguma*, and no remedy once the attack has been made – though there are instances of *sanguma* victims recovering if the attack has been aborted.

Less necessarily a part of *sanguma* are the following:

- (9) Needles – of wood or bone – are inserted into the victim; these may or may not be poisoned. Death is presumably a result of the needles piercing a vital organ, but just possible from poison or septicaemia.
- (10) The victim's inability to tell of his experience is related to:
- (a) the disguise of the *sanguma* men
 - (b) physical damage to the tongue (by a needle, or cutting)
 - (c) possibly drugs
 - (d) possibly fear.

Sanguma then can be called in English 'assault sorcery', a term used by Glick (1972). The ethnographic evidence before World War II – which is all we shall consider for the moment, to avoid complications arising from possible post-war diffusion – suggests that it had a fairly limited distribution. I can find no evidence of assault sorcery, from an admittedly quick skim through ethnographic literature – for all of island Melanesia (with the exception of islands lying right off the north coast of Papua New Guinea), for the Highlands, and for most of Papua. The main areas are the coastal and immediately adjacent inland areas of the Madang and East Sepik Provinces, with some spread into West Sepik and Morobe Provinces.

For Papua, the question of whether *sanguma* occurs there becomes a question of whether we regard *vada* as being the same kind of assault sorcery. Murray's 1912 account of the Koiari practice, cited by Hoeltker (1942-45), certainly shows resemblances:

One form of murder or alleged murder which should be mentioned is said to be committed by persons who in the Motu language are called Vada taudia... They have the power of making themselves invisible by means of a certain dance which they perform with, I am told, elaborate ritual, and while they are invisible some of them enter a house, catch one of the inmates, and throw him to their friends outside, who beat him to death... Having killed their man they proceed to bring him to life by rubbing him with their hands and muttering incantations, but he only lives for a day or two at most, and during that time he has forgotten all about the attack that was made upon him.

Further details are given by Fortune (1932) from various sources:

(quoting C.G. Seligman on the Koita):

One or more (often two or three) men who were sorcerers would follow their intended victim to his garden, or into the bush. There he would be speared and clubbed, and when dead cut to pieces. One end of a length of rope is then looped round the dead man's hand or knee, while the opposite end is steeped in certain 'medicine'...the virtue in the medicine passing along the rope to the dead man would restore him to life. Often the medicine of the sorcerer who first endeavours to revive the dead man is not strong enough. Then his colleagues would be asked to help. The dead man on his revival is dazed...and knows not where he is, or what has befallen him. He is told that he will die shortly; he does not subsequently remember this, but manages to return to his village, where his friends know what has happened to him by reason of his feeble, silly condition, though the victim himself does not know, and gives no account of what has occurred.

Fortune reports the same procedure for Dobu; Malinowski gives essentially the same account – though as a belief, not a practice – for the Mailu. An account from Cape Nelson, from Mr Oelrichs, Resident Magistrate, in the *British New Guinea Reports for 1904*, reads:

...The general belief in the district (Maisina and Wanigela). When a man dies suddenly, it is supposed that when the deceased was last in the bush he was met by some persons unknown who, it is surmised, live in a swamp; the man is caught and held by the unknown persons, and a vine twisted round his throat so as to throttle him; when the victim faints the vine is released, and he is brought round by the application of New Guinea drugs and placed on his feet.

One of the strangers then steps forward and says: 'Do you know us?' If the subject of the inquiry replies 'No', he is again asked: 'Will you tell your people what has been done to you?' Should he reply in the affirmative he is immediately thrown down again, and this time a thorny lawyer vine is forced into his gullet and violently withdrawn so as to tear the root of the tongue. He is again then asked the question, but is, of course, unable to reply; the man is then badly mauled and allowed to return to his village, where he dies. At his own village he is able to speak on any subject but the one in reference to the treatment he has received.

(Fortune emphasises the similarity of the ritual questioning to the Dobuan account.)

It can be seen that, though there are inconsistencies in the *vada* accounts – such as the man being able to talk on any subject but the attack, even after (presumably) his tongue has been torn out, the resemblances to *sanguma* are close enough. The main difference appears to be the belief that the victim is first 'killed' and then 'revived', but this is not incompatible with the *sanguma* accounts, merely a different explanation of the same phenomena. There are also minor differences in technique which are not significant. I think we have to count *vada* with *sanguma*, and plot it at least for Koita, Koirari, Mailu, Dobu, and the Cape Nelson area.

We have then a basic distribution of assault sorcery mainly in pockets along the north coast of Papua New Guinea, with a few pockets in the south. Most instances are among speakers of non-Austronesian languages; where it is found in An-speaking groups – Manam, Graged, and scattered An pockets along the Sepik-Madang coast – the Papuan language groups, who are usually reported as the ones with the most powerful *sanguma*, are close by. The one exception is Dobu, but even there the Papuan *vada* areas are not far away. We can add here a few more references for the distribution of assault sorcery – although not all are pre-World War II, these do not seem to be the result of diffusion.

- (1) Hoeltker (1940-41) cites P. Andreas Mueller (1933-34) (see SM 61:35-38, 63-65):

Fear of the natives of sangumai, that is, men who suddenly attack lone individuals and secretly kill them. (Inland from Boikin).

- (2) Mead (1938-1949) (from the Glossary 1938):

Sagumeh (P.E.) A form of combined sorcery and divination, associated with pointing bones, burial of exuviae, and possession by a spirit of the dead; contains many work-boy elements and is rapidly diffusing through the work-boy population of the Madang Aitape coast.

Mead, writing in 1977, does not include *sanguma* in her list of NM (Neo-Melanesian, Tok Pisin) terms "that seem to be shared throughout the central, and at present unbounded, Sepik area", but she does have a comment about it when commenting later on poison:

It is also important to recognise that the same term may occasionally cover widely different practices. For example while *poison* is widely used as a general term for sorcery, *sanguma*, the name for a particular sorcery practised, is sometimes used specifically but sometimes also encompasses the entire supernaturalistic practice of a people. Mihalic, who is located in Wewak, gives the meaning of *sanguma* as follows:

"Sanguma, (sang-uma) (Mel), secret murder committed by orders from sorcerers. The victim is waylaid, short poisoned thorns are inserted into the base of his tongue, causing swelling and loss of speech. Then other thorns (usually from the wild sago plant) are pushed into vital organs, where they cause infection and eventual death" (Mihalic 1971).

Writing in 1935, I used the term *vada*, which had already been widely used in the literature on Papua, to discuss this practice, but without giving it the naturalistic, matter of fact explanation which Fr. Mihalic gives it. "The essence of *vada* is an encounter in which the sorcerer intimidates his victim, magically removes his entrails, sews him up again, and sends him back to his village to die after a specified period of time. This method is one of the chief hypothetical causes of death in Manam and Wogeo, although Hogbin does not believe that it is actually practised on Wogeo, and Wedgwood's account is not specific as to whether she believes that it occurs or not. The whole nature of the practice is such that it is very difficult for the field-worker to distinguish between fantasy and myth, on the one hand, and actual practice resulting in the death of specific persons on the other. The Wanimo people believe that it is practised by the people of Wanip-on-top and the Murik informants gave an account almost identical with Wedgwood's description for Manam. The Arapesh had heard of it, but had no belief that it was practised in their midst. The Mundugumor believed that it was practised by the people of the upper Yuat, who had, however, tried in vain to practice it on them. Bateson (1932) obtained a long detailed account among the Iatmul. Working in the field in 1971-72 among the Lujere of the Yellow and Sand Rivers Mitchell found that the term *Sanguma* characterised the entire complex of supernatural practices of sorcery, healing and hunting (Mitchell, unpublished field work). Here we move from a disavowed fantasy to a full time preoccupation, and to a widespread usage in which the referent does not have the same thematic consistency as the terms I have selected.

(Mead slightly misquotes Mihalic 1971: the pronunciation of *sanguma* is given as 'sang-guma', not 'sang-uma').

(3) Schebesta and Meiser (1945):

Sanguma, (pronounced sang-guma) n. a very secret system: a man disguises himself and sneaks around to find somebody to kill. These crimes are committed either in the late evening hours or in the early morning.

(4) Tuzin (1976:184) (on the Ilahita Arapesh):

Part of Amilen's inheritance included sorcery magic, and he was even sent to the Bumbita village of Salata for tuition in highly potent 'sangguma' magic. (fn)...

(fn) This is a form of destructive magic which, in its concern with psychic phenomena, animal familiars and physiological states of involuntary evil, bears closer affinity to classical notions of witchcraft than to "normal" sorcery. Most men are thought to know techniques of sorcery that use spells and the victim's exuviae, but these are sharply distinguished from 'sangguma', which is the province of only a few, highly feared men.

A full account of *sanguma* among the Gnau is given by Lewis (1977), and the Lujere details of needle insertion and removal are given by Mitchell (1975). Hogbin, in a number of papers, mentions *yabou* sorcery on Manam, but dismisses it as being pure fantasy, with no counterpart in practice. An extensive account of *ranguma* sorcery among the Tangu, on the Ramu, is given by Burridge – especially Burridge (1965). Gehberger and Gerstner both have passing mentions of *sanguma* among the Arapesh and Boiken peoples of the Wewak region.

Back to some linguistic aspects. I have not attempted to chase up the word *vada*, but to the best of my knowledge it is a Motu word. As for *sanguma*, the probability is fairly high that it does come from the Monumbo language. Not only do we have the first mention of the word only seven years after the opening of the Monumbo Mission Station in 1899 – or probably six years, if we allow for the time Vormann's paper took to get to Germany and be printed – but we have a number of other related words in the Monumbo language. In any case, it would seem unlikely that the word could have been imported from anywhere outside Papua New Guinea. I have wasted a lot of time trying to track down a reported *sanggoma*, with approximately the same meaning, from southern Africa; but I have been unable to document this in any reliable source, and cannot find words even remotely like it in a score of African language dictionaries. If the word *sanggoma* for assault sorcery does exist anywhere in Africa, I believe it must either be a chance resemblance, or else a loan word into African languages, perhaps introduced through the medium of SVD priests, via their headquarters in Vienna. But I think we can ignore the African connection for the time being.

Sanguma could of course be a loan word in Monumbo, from some other language. Burridge speaks of *ranguma* among the Tangu; but the word *sanguma* is not likely to have been borrowed from this. For most Papuan languages, the phone 's' – whether or not it is a phoneme – can only (if it is to be derived from anything) form a 't' before a high front vowel; but there is no evidence that the vowel in *sanguma* was ever anything but an 'a'. On the other hand, words with 's' are often borrowed into Papuan languages with a 't'. Nobody has *tanguma*, but *ranguma* could derive from such a form.

The case for Monumbo would be stronger if we could find cognates in other Torricelli Phylum (TP) languages, but I cannot find a corresponding form in Arapesh, and the Valman word is quite different. For most TP languages the word was not elicited. Gnau has *langasutap* (Lewis 1977), which could just conceivably be a cognate – but I would not put

my hand in the fire for it. And apart from the evidence from Tangu – a language unrelated to Monumbo – I have not found the word anywhere else.

Taking *sanguma* as most likely coming from Monumbo, however, we are faced with the question of how this small community (with Lilau, a closely related language, only numbering 860 individuals in 1970) managed to get their word into Tok Pisin, as the only word in the language which can be shown to be from a Papuan Language. I don't have the answer to that either. Monumbo must have had a lot fewer speakers 60 years and more ago; Hoeltker (1940-1941) cites a missionary (P. Wilhelm Ricken, SM 44:34-37) as saying: "In 1924 Monumbo had only 25 school children; tribe dying out". (And there are other references to their small numbers). I can hazard a guess that the transmission process was related to the German plantations (many of them mission-plantations) along the Bogia-Madang coastline. Once the word entered the pidgin of other groups, the SVD priests would be likely to preach against the institution of *sanguma* – and thus help to spread the word. (It is even possible that SVD priests preached against *sanguma* before the word was in their area, and spread it that way). The further extension of plantation labour from Madang to the Gazelle would have carried it to that area, and the Sepiks – who had the concept, if not the word – would have got it in the time of extensive Sepik labour-recruiting following World War II. But this is something that would have to be documented another time. The spread of the word *sanguma* in the post-World War II period is, I think, related to the spread of Tok Pisin, via the plantations. The word and the concept of assault sorcery would be likely to appeal to the imaginations of those whose sorcery was limited to more conventional forms. The result is that now both Highlanders and Islanders talk of *sanguma*, sometimes in the Sepik-Madang sense, but just as often applying it to whatever form of exuvial sorcery they possess. (In the Western Highlands it is also applied to the shamanistic spirit-possession found in a number of areas.) Or it can be applied to supernatural beings; in this quotation from *Wantok* (2 July 1977), from a correspondent from Erave (Southern Highlands Province) it is used as equivalent to both *tambaran* and *masalai* – itself a confusion of two useful terms:

Long dispela ples i no gat man na i pulap tru long ol sanguma o masalai. Wanpela taim Wanpela man i lusim Margarima na i go long Tari...Em i lukim draipela man na gras bilong en i go daun long lek, na mausgras tu i go daun long lek olosem tasol. Em masalai tasol...Tambaran ya i singautim ol arapela masalai...

The accompanying illustration reads *Sanguma Kaikai man*.

In my own experience round the Sepik, *sanguma* is always described in 'classical Monumbo' terms. But if you ask who has *sanguma*, the coastal people point inland; the Abelam point west, to the Arapesh; the Arapesh and all almost to the border also point west; the border people point east. The common ground is the Torricelli Mountains, almost exclusively inhabited by speakers of Torricelli Phylum languages. (The major exception is constituted by the Fas, members of the little-known Kwomtari Phylum; everyone agrees that they also have powerful *sanguma*.) The only other people in the area who are reported to have *sanguma* – and this time by an anthropologist, not in local estimation – are the Lujere, Namie-speakers (Sepik-Ramu Phylum) from around Yellow River (Mitchell 1975). Even among the Lujere, however, the beliefs seem to fit *sanguma*, but Mitchell's description is largely of exuvial sorcery, and healing of witchcraft victims.

If we take into account that Monumbo is also a Torricelli Phylum language, it seems hard to resist the conclusion that, for the north-east coast area at least, *sanguma* is a Torricelli Phylum invention.

In two papers (Laycock 1973, 1975) I have mentioned that the distribution of Torricelli Phylum languages in the East and West Sepik Provinces covers almost exactly the area of highest concentration of an extremely rare blood factor, Gerbich a- (Booth 1971), and have suggested that the factory may be associated genetically with speakers of Torricelli Phylum languages. There is no record of Gerbich a- associated with Torricelli Phylum languages outside the Sepik provinces – but it is at least worthy of remark that the main areas of the blood factor elsewhere do tend to coincide with reported instances of assault sorcery – whether *sanguma* or *vada*. Whether this is evidence of a former more widespread distribution of Torricelli Phylum languages, I am not sure.

The remaining remarks are even more tentative. Torricelli Phylum languages, with the exception of the Arapesh family, are almost entirely made up of hunter-gatherer populations, with little or no agriculture. They also have very little tradition of warfare or aggression – the Monumbo may be an exception to this, being reported as warlike. It may not be too far-fetched to suggest that the belief in the efficacy of *sanguma* is the result of a clever advertising campaign on the part of these hunter-gatherer populations, as a defence against their bigger (better-fed?) and more aggressive neighbours. And although I cannot at present cite chapter and verse, I have seen accounts of similar devastating sorcery attributed by their neighbours to other hunter-gatherer populations – the *orang asli* of Malaysia, the Kalahari desert people, and African pygmies. It may be a common defence mechanism; however, this explanation does not seem to account for the *vada* occurrences.

Also unresolved is how much the beliefs in *sanguma* reflect actual practice, and whether there is a secret organisation involved. The reports of Europeans who have spoken with both *sanguma* men and *sanguma* victims, and have witnessed the removal of needles from the body (I met in 1959 a European doctor in Ambanti who claimed to have surgically removed needles from a May River *sanguma* victim), suggest that some kind of assault sorcery does from time to time take place, though it may be rarer than local opinion would like to think. As for organisation, the fact that *sanguma* men are always reported to act in pairs or greater numbers would suggest some kind of contact between different *sanguma* men. Local belief around the Sepik is that *sanguma* men are initiated as such by such antisocial practices as the eating of corpses – and disinterment of corpses does occur in the Ilahita Arapesh area at least, as there were several occurrences (confirmed by both Don Tuzin and the local patrol officer) in 1970. (Tuzin however believes that the disinterment may have been associated with the Ilahita Arapesh practice of examining the bodies of the recently-dead for evidence or regular sorcery killing). In a recent letter, Otto Nekitel mentions the disinterment and eating of the flesh of dead babies in the Womsis area – but I do not yet know if this is fact or gossip.

From numerous conversations around the Sepik about *sanguma*, I myself am convinced that there are men who practice assault sorcery along traditional *sanguma* lines, and at least often enough to keep the stories about it alive. I think it very likely that they do – or did – belong to an organisation with initiation, and that, because of the essentially antisocial nature of *sanguma*, such initiation may well have involved such features as the eating of corpses. It is also interesting to note that the missionary Gehberger in 1952 reported that *sanguma* had been on the decline in his area (Wewak and inland) before World War II, but that it had

picked up again in the immediate postwar period. The disruption of a relatively stable – if changing – way of life during the war years may have played a part. Currently, *sanguma* is rarely reported as a problem in areas of strong government control, extensive missionisation, or economic progress; but it continues to be ascribed to the more ‘backward’ areas. From Otto Nekitel’s letters, it also seems to be active in areas of slower progress, in a spirit of what Tok Pisin speakers call ‘jeles’. I think stress situations are very conducive to the revival of *sanguma* – in perhaps much the same way that the Tolai ‘black magic’ society of Iniet was revived briefly during the Gazelle tax riots in the 1960s. However, I should perhaps go on record as saying that I do not believe that *sanguma* men can make themselves invisible, or cover enormous distances in a fraction of a second.

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