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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE MYEIK ARCHIPALEGO



Introduction

Three thousand Moken sea nomads still navigate throughout the Mergui Archipelago, which includes eight hundred islands, filled with natural beauty and shrouded in mystery, still protected from the influence of the outside world. The Moken are the last population that remains that has a vision of a possible future and of an elsewhere based on an ideal society linked to their myths. These nomads have managed to find ways to survive, socially, economically and culturally. They live their unique way of life in an awe-inspiring environment made of coral reefs, mangroves, primeval forests among countless animal species, both real and imaginary. Life and death roam the seas together, and the past and the present co-exist on good terms.

The Moken are a people of Austronesian origin. Though most people hold them in contempt, they have managed to resist integration, due to their attachment to a powerful ideology that remains concealed behind their impoverishment and un-failing singularity. Lucky observers will see flotillas of boats with carved out notches, open « mouths » that plunge into the sea for their daily consumption, shadows that fly over the horizon, a trace soon erased by the intense greenery of the flora that plunges into the sea without transition.

These boats, *kabang*, are the evanescent souls of a forgotten world, always present but hardly ever visible. This nomad population remains united through their cultural awareness, linked to a symbolic technology that is well adapted to the environment, and incarnated in their boats, which represent the human body. These boats are the expression of an ideology based on non-accumulation and non-participation rather than on the present day liberal myth of perpetual growth and enrichment. This ideology that can be found in their myths protects them from outside influences, and provides justifications for their own cultural and technical values. These nomads honour poverty and non-violence, considered as important weapons to ensure their ethnic survival. The impossibility of learning is dictated in their myths, and protects them from external influences, thus justifying a cultural and technical balance. Their cultural specificities and the accumulation of a corpus of knowledge has resulted in the Moken becoming essential intermediaries in the process of economic development and in the nation of Myanmar's management of the archipelago.

The nomads tell the story of how they became a united population: according to their myth, they were condemned and forced to become eternal wanderers. This has led them to lead their free way of life. Through the beliefs expressed in their religious crafts that have a provocative and unsettling aesthetic power on the beholders, they assert their particularism: an anthropomorphic spirit world, carved altars, painted airplane models, fantastic pythons erected in cemeteries, etc. But, above all, the Moken are the guardians of a rich oral literature, a reminder of the epic acts of bravery accomplished in the past and the memory of a region that seems to have disappeared within the borders of the known world, in the limbs of a history that one would like to forget. The power of Moken speech enables each of them to communicate with the spirit world their divinities, their heroes and ancestors, and through this power they may relive the epic past of the construction of Moken identity.

These nomads remain the true soul of a magical environment, made of a palette of colours, perfumes and an inexhaustible reserve of sensations, discoveries and surprises. They have made it possible for us to fully discover the beauty of alterity, far from the noise of a world caught in the snare traps of multinational administrations. The Moken offer the image of a possible alternative world based on freedom, with a minimum of material goods, equality and a life that beats to the rhythm of dreams. Poor creatures, with apparently no future and no possibility for development . . . this is what the Moken always claim as being an integral part of their cultural essence. Those who live "developed" and sedentary lives would very much like to make this "libertarian" cultural "anomaly" disappear. The Moken reflect an image that is too negative for modern man who has become a consumer full of illusory ideas about his so-called freedom, which is continually being enforced upon him by profiteers. The nomads consider this world as being an unending pursuit for accumulation, boredom, famine, jealousy, wars, avidity, vindictiveness, etc. The Moken, however, remain indifferent to all of this.

1 - One finds in the Moken world primeval forests, vast uncovered strands and coral reefs, a world far from the productive fury of sedentary populations.

2- Toward the discovery of the islands to reveal the secrets of Moken life.



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Photo by: Ivanoff

Text by: M. Boutry, O. Ferrari, J. Ivanoff, T. Lejard



PAST & PRESENT



1- Sailing boats.

As the spearhead of Austronesian migrations, the Moken appeared in the Mergui Archipelago between the 17th and 18th centuries, when they separated from their Malay coastal matrix. Their traditional boat, the *kabang*, is equipped with square sails made from *Pandanus* and carved out monoxyla raised with stipes of *Zalacca rumphii* palms, and enable the Moken to exploit the archipelago.

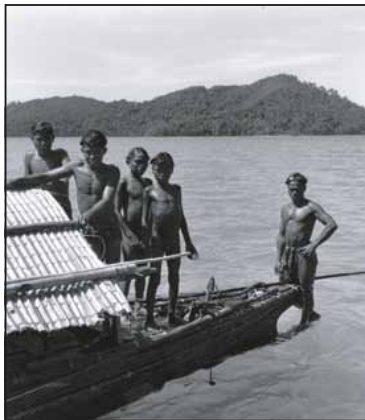
2- The permanence of littoral Malay beliefs.

The Moken language is of Austronesian origin, the « sacred word », *makao puti*, spoken by priests is an archaic Malay language. From Phuket in Thailand to Mergui in Myanmar, the Moken still remember Malay traditions, like the drums and the masks, which have become symbols of the arrival of the ancestors for certain sedentary nomads, such as the Moken (province of Phang Nga, South-West of Thailand).



3- Men of the Sea.

The Moken are hunters, collectors and divers. While the women gather along the strands and the edge of the forest to find accompaniments, sobay, the men plunge looking for mother-of-pearl shellfish, that they will exchange for rice, pla, and clothes, like shirts, *badji*, and sarongs, *tchuat*.



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1- Flotillas of Moken boats, whether they have motors or not, some pulling the others, go from one strand to the other, from one beach to the other, to find the accompaniments of rice.

2- In some islands, the Moken return to an ancient naval tradition, the sailing boat, to adapt themselves and fight against the misery brought by the sedentary socio-economic model.

3- The Moken have a long tradition of hunting. The pursuit of wild pigs or turtles unites them, especially during the ritual periods when big game will be appreciated by the ancestors.

4- The Moken live between land and sea. Wild pigs are hunted with lances on land, turtles are harpooned, and sometimes fished, out at sea.

5- The spirit poles are the pivot of their identity, uniting men and spirits in an annual ritual that guarantees the equilibrium of the worlds.

6- Evolution towards syncretism enables the Moken and Burmese to share their life together. The cult of the *nat*, the cult of the Moken ancestors, the cult of boat spirits, all live peacefully together.

MEN & OBJECTS



1- Sacred men and technical traditions.
The MAP-RAID project preserves the technical traditions and the know-how of the Moken. The elders, here Daké, of the subgroup of the Sisters Islands, are solicited for the realisation of models and copies of the most important objects, here a traditional boat, with palm stipites, four oars, the sail rolled around a mast on supporting forked pieces of wood under the roof.

2- The descendants of sacred men, *olang puti*, often their children, have a knowledge that must be preserved. Here is the son of Daké, the carpenter, who carved spirit poles, *lobung*, to honour the ancestors each time the rainy season arrives.



3- The *ébab*, the « grandfathers », voluntarily offer their aid in order to preserve the traditions. Here, an elder of the subgroup of Bada is making wooden glasses for plunging.



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1- Rattan, *kway*, are omnipresents. Here it is braided and used as cords for the anchor, halliards and wind braces.

2- The women patiently braid the Pandanus mats, *tékan*, very much appreciated on the boat and in the houses.

3- Iron, *besuy*, is rare among the Moken, who know how to work with it in response to their specific needs. Jalé, the harpooner, works on a fishing spear.

4- The harpoon tridents, *tchum*, the fishing spears, *lém*, the machete, *pèt*, are multipurpose objects that enable one to hunt, to collect, to protect oneself, to penetrate the forest.

5- The machete, made in Thailand, is the favourite tool of the Moken, men and women. *Ibi*, a sacred man of the Bada subgroup, is carving out a spirit pole.

6- The adze is the most important tool used by the Moken thanks to its removable blade: one can cut down a tree, hollow out the trunk and thin down the sides of the monoxylon with it.

NOMADIC LIFE

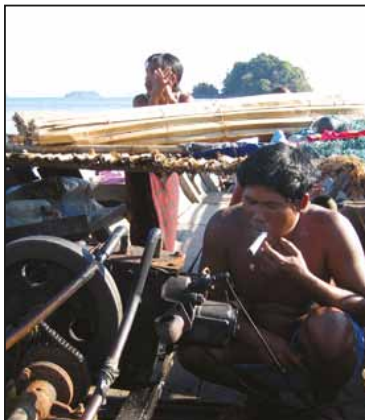


1- A people between two worlds.

Frequent discussions on the beaches, the boat moving following the changing tides. The Moken space between the high seas and the forest is one of the encounters between elements and men.

2- Boat hold invading the binnacle.

The wooden chest that surmounts the front notch offers more security when one faces the sea and also serves to store goods. Even though the nuclear family remains the base of a residential unity, it shares its space with ice boxes.



3- Nomads' life with or without a motor?

Practically all the Moken have had motors since 1970, « offered » by their taukays, their intermediary traders, that they can meet on the littoral where they now live, after abandoning the Moken on the islands. But these motors, mostly Chinese in Burma, Japanese in Thailand, put them into debt. In spite of their simplicity they are a constant problem for the Moken.



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1- These small secondary boats are used to reach the collecting area. They shuttle back and forth between the beach and the kabang, sometimes carrying drinking water, a back-breaking chore.

2- With the approach of the rain, the Moken build their houses, *omak*, on piles. The walls and the roofs are made of palm leaves and the floor of slits of bamboo slats tied together with rattan.

3- The women spend many hours preparing the small shellfish. They clean them in order to exchange the mother-of-pearl with the taukay and cook the meat for themselves.

4- The family eats, *nyam tchon*, « eat cooked rice », in porcelain plates, bowls, aluminium plates, greatly appreciated by the Moken.

5- Preparing the palm leafed walls sewed around bamboo slats is the women's task.

6- No schools for the nomads, but a life mixed with games and apprenticeship, notably navigation, diving and sea life.

NOMADIC LIFE: ON BOARD



1- A life in the sea.
The Moken divers sometimes gather together on one kabang for collecting expeditions. The chosen boat sometimes has several motors. The Moken peer out to sea with their home-made plastic goggles to find the best diving places.

2- The boats, passages between two worlds.

The mediums of Bada in a trance join the ritual dance area. On board the boat, the sacred dancers, *siti*, possessed by the spirits execute the dances and thus rejoice the ancestors. They go to the foot of ancestor-mountains, in the « field », *padang*, where the spirit poles have been raised, and then to the cemetery.



3- « To have a boat is to have a woman ».
The men must look for their companions in another sub-group, to ensure their mobility. The host prepares the young couples' boat. They then become independent and form a new household.



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1- Mouth devouring the sea, the Moken kabang incessantly travels through the archipelago and all the space is occupied.

2- After a day of collecting and diving, one prepares island specialities: squills with curry, bat fricassee, grilled fish, seasoned with chilly and fish-sauce.

3- One often makes the most of a journey to go on board a friend's boat. On the way they make a stop so that the women can collect and the men dive.

4- The widows who do not want to be a burden for the group: they remain on small boats and participate in the life of the flotilla.

5- The dogs, *oy*, are the Moken companions. They help them when they go hunting and signal the arrival of strangers and evil spirits.

6- The Moken eat twice a day. The entire family reunites in the evening around the dishes before they rest, rocked by the waves.

THE BOATS

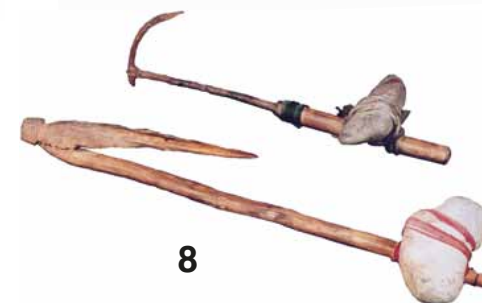


1- The kabang, a man's double. Epic tales tell how Sibian, the Moken earth queen, was betrayed by her sister Kèn and her husband, the Malay trader Gaman. Furious, she condemned « Kèn to be immersed in the sea », *mo kèn*, which then became the name of the ethnic group. The queen forced the adulterous lovers to escape out to the sea with notched out boats that symbolize this original sin. The boats remind the nomads day after day of the impossibility to enrich themselves.

2- Building a kabang, longlasting work and a knowledgable skill. The tree is felled down with an axe during the rising moon, symbol of life. It is then hollowed-out, towed onto the beach. The builders make a fire to soften the wood and spread the sides of the monoxylon. They maintain the opening with beams. Then, they thin out the « belly », *lake*, the « cheeks », *tebin*, the « neck », *tuko*, with an adze before starting to raise the broadsides of the hull made of stipites.



3- The sailing boat, a return to the source? The pandanus sails, *layan*, have disappeared and been replaced by canvas sails because some acculturated Moken who live in the North of the archipelago have had to adapt themselves. They suffer the misery of a sedentary people but, nonetheless, to continue their nomadic life, they return to tradition, one of independence and refusal of the constraints of the modern world of which the motor is the best example.



1- Model of a kabang, Sisters I., 2002. The roof, *kadjang*, is modern, non removable since the sails have disappeared, but the builders have kept the traditional broadsides of the hull made of stipites, *ngoman*.

2- One distinguishes the four traditional oars, *pua*, the two strakes, *didjark*, which maintain the broadsides, the « mother » strake, *énong*, and « child » strake, *anat*.

3- Gouge-adze, *lemèh*. This tool is used to thin out the « belly » of the monoxylon. The iron is placed in the curve on the top on the handle and is maintained by rattan ties.

4- The rudder, *tchekut*, retractable and lateral is sometimes transformed into an axial rudder since the long tail of the motors can be used as a rudder.

5- Adze, *adjay*, is used like an axe, *kapa'*, to fell trees. The solidity of the rattan ties is essential and the Moken spend long hours to prepare them.

6- The secondary Moken embarkations give access to the rocks, squid fishing, and carrying drinking water.

7- Model of kabang, Sisters Islands, 2002. The boat is made in the semi-traditional way with a sail, rolled around the supporting arches but the roof is not removable.

8- The anchor, *labo*, is a very ancient model, made of an iron or wooden hoo and a stone.

THE BOATS



1- Stretching out the broadsides of the monoxylon.

This work calls for force, precision and rapidity. Windlass system and rattan ties makes it possible to stretch the « belly », *laké*, one « hand », *lèngan*, wide each time. It is a delicate and risky operation, which could reduce to nothing the long work of felling the tree and hollowing out the boat.

2- Flotilla of kabang, 1957.

The women move the boat with the pole, *lon*, used as a harpoon by the men. The roof is movable, permitting the installation of the big square sails. One sees the water jug, *kuluy*, the anchor and the numerous rattan ties, some of which are used to communicate with the supernatural world, especially the halliard.



3- The boat of today.

Motors, plastic cans, broadsides made of planks, non-removable roof, these are the marks of modernity. But the symbolic structure, the notches, visible signs of a condemnation that gives the nomads their identity and the means to resist the modern world is always present.



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1- The monoxylon roughly hollowed out in the forest and accompanied by clamours of all the members of the group, men, women, children, is hauled onto the beach and put in the water

2- Making the monoxylon is the most important stage for the Moken. A monoxylon can last for twenty years and is between seven and fourteen meters long.

3- Kabang are now smaller, indicating that long sea voyages are no longer as important as before.

4- Some big kabang still travel through the archipelago and many Moken embark on these voyages.

5- Vision of a Moken boat being moved by a couple, whose fidelity is constant, adding to the soul of the archipelago.

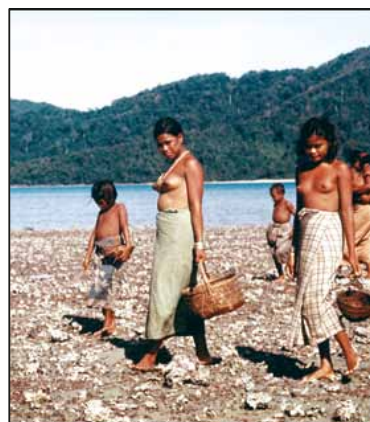
6- In the mountainous cirques covered by dense forests, the kabang smoothly glides over the crystal clear waters and seems to be an inhabitant of the archipelago.

COLLECTING



1- From 1957 to the present day. The women collect on the beaches, the strands and the rocks, to find accompaniments for the rice. The rock oysters are the nomads' favourite dish, as they organize their daily movements to get them.

2- Strand collecting, 1957. Women and children with their woven baskets, constantly looking for oysters, shellfish, squills, worms, and so on, along the wide uncovered strands during the full moon.



3- Collecting in slack water. Other than their collecting activities, the women dive into the shallow water with goggles searching for sea urchins or, like here, rocks on which the oysters cling.



1- Catching sand worms, *motchok wat*, is done with a flexible rattan stick.

2- With one end of the oyster knife, *pétok*, one can detach the rock oysters and open them with the other end.

3- The Moken use wooden or plastic diving goggles, *witamin*, from a very young age.

4- The women use wooden « hooks », *kodo*, for sea urchins.

5- The women use a bamboo stick, « the wooden mouth », *okang kaé*, to dig up yams.

6- One very often finds chitons, *dukun*, very often in the collecting basket since they are very much appreciated by the Moken and the Burmese.

7- To pull out the squills, *tabot*, from their holes the women sing songs and use a stick with bait on it. Squills and rock oysters, *iyak titchum*, are very much appreciated by the Moken.

8- The woven baskets for collecting, *otchang*, show the know-how of the women. They never separate from them.

COLLECTING



1- Sea delicacies.
Every tide, every strand, every beach contains its own secrets and sources of nourishment. Women accompanied by their husbands who guard them and hunt nearby, gather small shellfish from the sand. The flesh will be eaten and shells sold to the taukauy.

2- Inevitable rock-oysters.
The rock-oysters are gathered using special knives, which young girl expertly use from a young age.



3- Small boats.
To reach their favourite gathering spots women use small dugouts that they move with oars or small plastic scoops. They sail around all day long on these flimsy, unstable boats.



1- The women seduce the squill into biting the lure by singing. By spitting into the hole, they make the animal think that the high tide is coming.

2- Gathering is the women's constant concern, whether during full-moon or half-moon tides, they know where to find complementary sources of food.

3- When moving about in their boats the men drop off their wives at gathering places and, after diving, pick them up for the evening meal.

4- When the long strands are uncovered the women take the children with them to learn to gather in the nomadic way.

5- Honey, nanuy, mixed with bee larvae is a great delicacy and a protein source. It is also considered sacred in that it allows them to communicate with their ancestors.

6- All sorts of nuts and fruits are gathered. A close relationship exists between these gathering activities and the computation of time.

SEA HUNTERS

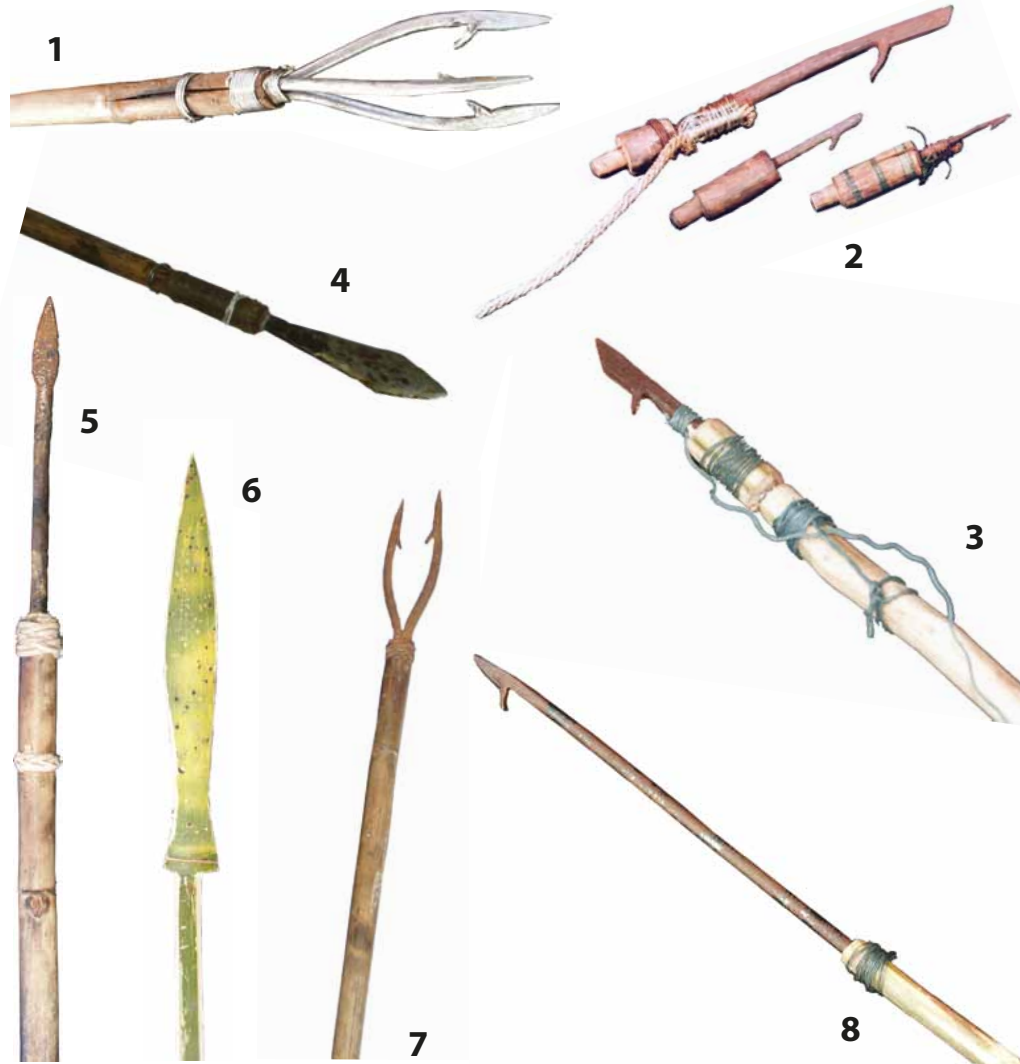


1- Hunters.
Living on their boats all along the littoral, the Moken spot the animal they are hunting. The men, armed with spears, embark on small boats for a hunting expedition.

2- Looking out at sea.
The Moken lie in waiting for the ray fish to come to the surface. They are their favourite preys. They spend many hours waiting for them so they can harpoon them, dry their meat and sell it to the taukays.



3- Returning from a hunting expedition.
One finds wild pigs on some of the islands. The Moken close in on them with their dogs. These wild pigs are offerings much appreciated by the ancestors during their rituals.



1- The instrument the most used by the Moken to capture marine animals is the three pronged harpoon, *tchum teloy*.

2- The harpoon used for ray fish and the removable pointed end of the poles, *polèng*, for the turtles are the two most important hunting tools.

3- Reduced model of a pole with its harpoon, *lan*, for hunting down turtles. The handle is made of heavy and hard wood, *Oncosperma tigillaria*.

4- The spear, *bulo*, is the only Moken weapon able to hunt down wild pigs.

5- The iron spear can be lengthened to capture big sea games like sharks.

6- Before the arrival of iron, the spear was made of bamboo.

7- The harpoons can have two pointed ends. These are the *tchum tua*.

8- The fishing-spear, *lèm*, is very much used during diving activities.

SEA HUNTERS



1- Manta Rays.
The very large manta ray fish, *kau*, is very much appreciated. The entire flotilla gathers together to capture them. Their meat is dried and sold in strips, which are eaten by Burmese sailors during their fishing expeditions.

2- Sharing the game.
The turtles *kalah* (*Caretta caretta gigas*), *koyat* (green turtle, *Chelonia mydas japonica*), *pényoy* (*Eretmochelys imbricata*) and perhaps formerly the *laton* turtles (*Luth*, *Dermochelys coriacea schlegeli*) are the sea sisters of the Moken who consider them as coming from a common mother. To harpoon a turtle is symbolically to harpoon a woman.



3- Hunting expeditions.
Hunting, *mangèn babyu*, « to follow pigs », is a male activity. Men go off for several days to follow the pigs and when the hunt is successful they cook some of the meat for themselves.



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1- Snakes are widely found on the islands.
The python ancestor, for example, is one of the fabulous beings of the pantheon. Some of them are deadly and their skins can be sold.

2- The mouse deer, *bitchong*, living in many legends, and the wild pigs are the most appreciated animals by the hunters on land.

3- The myths tell the story of how the Moken were condemned to ignorance and poverty because they were not able to read the symbols of knowledge inscribed on the turtle shell and instead harpooned and ate it.

4- The prow, « mouth », *okang*, is a platform used by the one who handles the pole. This is where the Moken watch out for the turtles.

5- The turtle is caught with the fishing-spear or the harpoon and is sacrificed during rituals. Its meat is shared by everyone.

6- Some innovations can be made for the harpoon, like here for this fishing-spear with an elastic lancer.

BELIEFS



1- Phuket, Masks of the Ancestors, 1957.

The Moken formerly made use of most of the traditions of Austronesian origin, notably the masks of the ancestors, but finally abandoned them. What remains are the rituals dances, the sacred word, healing rites, good and evil spirits of the Malay world along with the spirits of the Buddhist world.

2- Sisters islands, 2004.

The masks have been abandoned but the shaman drum gives the rhythm of the dances to the mediums, his assistants, who receive the spirits in their bodies who have come to rejoice before passing a « contract », *karun*, with the men for the coming year.



3- Sacred dancers, *siti*.

The shamans function is hereditary, both men and women can be shamans. But only the women who know how to dance and sing, and capable of going into a trance receiving the spirits can become *siti*. Without them no festival can take place.



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1- In Busby, the group of the People of Domel, celebrates the python spirit, companion of the founding couple of the island of residence.

2- The sacred men, *olang puti*, have made a spirit pole, the effigy of a powerful ancestor of Domel.

3- The python ancestor of Domel is always present. Here, a piece found on an ancient cemetery of the Sisters islands, satellites of Domel.

4- The airplanes with propellers are always present above the spirits poles, *lobung*, carrying the spirits and spiritual messages to other subgroups.

5- Each subgroup represents their ancestors in different ways, an expression of personal imagery of the sculptors. Here, the masculine ancestor, *ébab*, is transported by the emigrants of Domel to the Sisters islands.

6- The spirit poles of Bada have anthropomorphic characteristics. They are more figurative than those of the Sisters islands but still represent the founding ancestors.

7- The founding ancestors of the subgroups are represented by a couple, here the feminine ancestor, *ibum*, of the subgroup of Domel.

8- The drums, *bana*, made of wood and monkey or iguana skin, can be replaced by the big pot since the rhythm is more important than the sound.

BELIEFS



1- Spirit Poles Festival
When the rainy season arrives, the flotilla of a subgroup reunite to accomplish the ritual "make the spirit poles"; *bo lobung*. The sacred dancers and singers, *siti*, the shaman assistants, *bélam*, the master of the ritual, *léphèng*, and sometimes, but less and less often, the shaman, *djinyang*, offer delicate morsels to the spirits. They then rejoice to celebrate the agreement made between the two worlds.

2- Communication between the Worlds.
Dressed in their most beautiful garments, the *siti* welcome the spirits and offer them rare food. Here, the sacred dancer gives a spirit, represented by a doll, whose pale figure and blond hair attest its power, is given *soda*, which it likes very much.



3- An Efficient Syncretism.
Moken imagery is powerful, as it can be seen in mosaic murals, where all the disturbing elements that arrive on shore are found: newspapers, plastic toys, fishermen lamps, and so on. The spirit poles no longer exist in the north of the archipelago, but the Moken have recreated a mythological and ritual universe there.



1- The master of the ritual organizes the spirit pole festival and makes offerings. Sacred men and women honour him.

2- Tradition and unity around ancestor spirits occur during the spirit pole festival in Bada. The red turban is the symbol of the power of the principal priest.

3- The ritual space is clearly marked: the junction of the beach and the strand and the summit of the beaches and the undergrowth.

4- Magical protections are more and more numerous. Here is a necklace made of a tooth of a wild pig and a fish carved from a turtle shell, symbolizing the power of the earth and the sea.

5- The altar, *papan puti*, representing the « doors », *pétao*, of the world (the sea, the mountains, east and west), receive offerings transmitted by the spirit poles.

6- The Moken remember hundreds of songs, epic poems, and myths. This memory is today under threat. But thanks to cassette players, it can still be transmitted.

FLOTILLAS & VILLAGES



1- From the Boat to the House.
Several flotillas most often make up a subgroup. They gather together in a village during the rainy season. But one flotilla nowadays can make up a subgroup. The decline of the population is a threat to Moken survival. Masculine mortality is high and it is becoming more and more difficult for the young women to find husbands.

2- Inhabitants of the Islands.
The Moken flotillas roam through their given space looking for accompaniments for the rice and items for exchange. The rhythm of the nomadic life of the kabang follows the changing tides. After a morning plunge, the Moken regroup and wait for the strand to be uncovered to collect.



3- Villages protected by the Ancestors.
The Moken are lined up on the high point of the beach facing the sea and the spirit poles scan the horizon and wait for the end of the rainy season, season of sedentarism. The few things they collect and hunt make it possible to exchange them for the basic products they need. Here they are preparing strips of the meat of the manta rays.



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1- The dry season arrives and the boats of Elphinstone raise their anchors in order to rejoin their areas of nomadism situated more to the South. Since they have no motors they use sails as they did before.

2- The flotilla of the South, much freer and closer to the richer Thailand, navigates with motors and continues to exploit their traditional strands.

3- A stationary flotilla in Bada Island. The secondary small boats can become the main one during the stopover.

4- Temporary villages are found all along the archipelago. The Moken remain there during the time they collect and dive when they are too far from their resident islands.

5- The houses on piles often look alike with the exception of the shaman's house that one recognizes by its sacred material, its flags and its airplanes with propellers.

6- The houses are abandoned during the dry season with the monoxyla under construction that one works on from time to time.

EXCHANGES



1- From North to South. Some adventurous Moken navigate through the Mergui archipelago from Elphinstone to Kaw Thaug in order to exchange the products they have collected. These long trips aboard a big kabang with over-elevated and reinforced broadsides make it possible for the subgroups to communicate.

2- Contacts and Exchanges. The rhythm of Moken life follows their movements in the areas where they dive and collect as well as their regular meetings with their merchant intermediaries who supply them with rice, clothing, iron and other things that nomads don't produce. The most important exchange items are mother-of-pearl shells, turbo and trochus, *otchon* and *osao*.



3- Collections and Exchanges. The sea slugs, *gatchi*, that the women and children find during their collecting activities are as important for exchange as the mother-of-pearl shells that the men find during their diving activities.



1- The motors have become a necessity for the nomad economy to insure an equilibrated exchange.

2- The secondary boats are used to take the children to the places where they fish squid.

3- The children participate in economic activities from an early age. Here they are selecting the strips of the meat of the ray fish.

4- The large mother-of-pearl shells have become more and more rare so the Moken now collect the small shellfish that they neglected before.

5- The Mergui archipelago has little by little become a Burmese territory for the fishermen who now inhabit the traditional places of residence of the nomads.

6- The mother-of-pearl shells, here a turbo resting on a trochus, are decorations appreciated by sedentary populations.

THE MOKEN



1- In the Shade under the Houses.
People of the Sea, the Moken are of Austronesian origin and of maritime tradition. The nomads regroup in the villages, benefit from certain moments of calm to rest in the shade, on the platforms under the houses.

2- The Ever Present Children.
Moken children participate in all moments of nomadic life. The mothers take their babies with them while they work and continue to feed them. The freedom of the children guarantees the freedom of the parents. If the children go to school, immobility, sadness and misery become the daily life of the nomads.



3- The Future of the Moken.
Moken families are closely knit together and the children insure the survival of family life. Half of the children die before the age of five years, but the others are the object of all the attention and care of their parents.



1



2



3



4



5



6

1- The daily life of the Moken is punctuated by frenetic activities and long moments of rest.

2- The children pay much attention to all the activities of their parents and learn the nomad way of life.

3- When the flotilla gathers together, the men share the offerings and games. Here the turtle is offered to the ancestors.

4- The Moken mothers have many children and from the time they are fifteen years old they never cease breast-feeding them in spite of all the work they have to accomplish.

5- Sharing household tasks poses no problem and from a young age the children know how take care of their sisters and brothers.

6- Above the « mouth » of the boat, at a place far from the motor, the family gets together at the end of the day.

