
7. THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF THE YAP ISLANDS

The village is the most important single unit in Yap-wide politics. The villages, like the sections and estates within them, rank in relation to each other. This ranking defines a hierarchy of dominant/subordinate relationships with inherent reciprocal obligations. These reciprocal obligations create the series of mutual exchanges and alliances of the political structure of Yap.

The village chief is the focal point of extravillage interaction and the official representative of his village. He is the voice of the clan estates that make up his village, and intervenes for their good or evil in the relations of his village with other villages. His voice is generally the most important and the strongest in his village, but it is not the only one. Invariably at least one other clan estate, and often two, have channels of communication to different outside villages. In the past these estates sometimes have led their village sections into affiliations with opposing alliances, and have engaged in life and death struggles for power and rank. Leaders of opposing sections have plotted to have each other killed. When fighting occurred among opposing sections within a village, allies were necessarily different, because both could not obtain support from the same groups. To provide flexibility and power within their alliance, the village chief, sitting-chief, and chief-of-young-men all maintained distinctive ties outside their village. This diversity of political ties restricted the individual power of any one chief and introduced stability by balancing the power of chiefs against each other.

This chapter describes the traditional relationship of Yapese villages and their leaders in the Yap-wide political structure; most of its data has not appeared in any of the earlier literature.

The Paramount Villages and Chiefs: Delipi Ngucol

The Yapese describe the highest leadership in Yap in terms of the cooking implements in which three stones form a pedestal for pots placed over a fire. Yap is the pot and the three highest-ranking villages and their chiefs are the *ngucol* 'stone pillars' upon which the other villages rest. Significantly, if one potstand falls, the pot falls over. This is the basic philosophy of Yapese politics. There are three paramount villages and three paramount chiefs. Each is important, and none should become so strong as to cause another to fall.

The three highest-ranking (*bulce*) villages in Yap are Ngolog in Rull municipality, Teb in Tamil municipality, and Tholang section of Gacpar village in Gagil. Each of these three have a counterpart (*ulun*) or right-hand assistant: Balabat village in Rull, Me'rur village in Tamil, and Ariap section of Gacpar village in Gagil. These three pairs are considered the *delipi ngucol* 'three pillars' of the Yapese political structure. Each of the three has a paramount chief who is head over the paired villages and their respective chiefs. He is like the father of these villages, the *pilung ni pilbithir* 'sitting-chief' of each respective place. These leadership statuses belong to titled estates, with authority invested in land and not in people. The estates are Ru'way in Rull, Arib in Tamil, and Bulwol in Gagil.

The development of power in these three areas cannot be documented. The mythology of Yap, however, does provide some interesting insights into their actual functioning and respective importance. In the mythology of Yapese origins, the first human beings set up a household in the Rull area. The first chiefs of Yap lived at Towol 'sacred place' in Rull, which is currently under the authority of the paramount chief of Ru'way. After considerable time had elapsed, a large typhoon devastated Yap, killing most of the people and washing a mythical mountain in Tamil down to the area now known as Nimgil in southern Yap and creating a new land. One man and his wife survived in Tamil, and they are progenitors of present-day Yapese. They had seven children. When dividing their land among the children, they gave the oldest son the land of the parents, as was the custom, and gave the others choice land in the other areas of Yap. The youngest son, however, refused to leave Tamil, his birthplace. The parents felt this was very bad, but rather than cause fighting among the children, they asked the oldest son to settle in Gagil. Because he was entitled to stay in Tamil, but agreed to go to Gagil, he was given sovereignty over Map, Rumung, and all the islands to the east (the central Carolines). The youngest son stayed in Tamil, the smallest area, and the oldest daughter went to Rull.

Three things stand out in the story. Rull is the oldest area of the highest chiefs of Yap, but was supplanted by Tamil after the typhoon. Tamil is the place of origin for the present political alignment, the

“*tabinaw*” of the first family of present-day Yap. Gagil has dominance over all the islands east of Yap.

The Paramount Chief from Arib

The estate Arib in Tamil is considered the *pilung ni pilbithir ko nam* ‘the old wise chief of Yap’. Like an old man, its chief does not work, but rather voices his approval or disapproval of the actions of others. His title is sitting-chief for the villages of Teb and Me‘rur. The people and chiefs of these villages are his servants, building his house and meeting his requests.

Arib estate derives its major authority from its position as overseer of the sacred places Ta‘ag, Cen, and Amun, site of the origin of the first family of Yap. The chief of Arib presides over the religious ceremonies for these places, which are held once every two years in the month called Yan e Duw. The ceremonies include one hundred days of religious observances, including the rebuilding of the fences around the sacred places, rebuilding the fence and house at Arib, and then making the appropriate prayers, offerings, and ritual for the duration of the period. Five priests from the estates of Magif (1), Magif (2), Dal‘aw, Fanfaraew, and Fitewar direct the religious observances, while the chief summons the people and resources for the tasks. The observances climax with a large eating class feast for the men of Tamil and the visitors from the other high-ranking villages in Yap.

Arib is also the overseer of the priests and power of the sacred places. Those chiefs who desire certain blessings for all of Yap must place their requests through Arib. The chief of Arib may instruct the priests to perform ritual to bring plenty of fruits (*galwog*), and fertility of women, or he may request disasters such as typhoons or epidemics to punish the people for wrongs.

The other powers of the chief of Arib are very limited. He may hear the plans of the subordinate chiefs in Teb and Me‘rur, and approve or disapprove them. He is like a woman, however, in that he does not take an active part, he merely sits and listens. Should the subordinate chiefs desire to exclude him from secular matters, they may do so.

Succession to Arib estate is a matter for the council of chiefs in Teb and Me‘rur to decide. Arib is owned by the matrisib called Fanif and succession to its land and voice is limited to members of that matrilineal sib. The council of chiefs from Teb and Me‘rur select a low-ranking member of Fanif sib to speak for the authority of Arib. Informants named two men, Nuuan and Mo‘on, from the commoner village of Af, as the two most recent chiefs of Arib. Today the land is without a leader because its religious functions are defunct and its political functions are minor. Care of the land falls to the estate in Teb called Magif, the first assistant to

Arib.

Historically, the chief of Arib did come from the paramount village of Teb. Informants said that these chiefs had such great power that the people suffered from the burden of providing support for the chiefs' decisions. The last high-ranking chief of Arib was Tamanfal'ethin from Gireng estate in Teb. Gireng is the chief of men in Teb, and Tamanfal'ethin held both the authority of Gireng and Arib. Using this power, he created hardship for the people, overextending their resources for public works and warfare. He ultimately was killed by a chief from Okaw village when he started a ceremony (in violation of protocol) before the Okaw chief arrived. After his death, the council of chiefs in Teb selected a low-ranking man from the sib Fanif to be chief of Arib. Because of his low rank, the chief was meek and afraid to seize power and bring hardship upon the people of Tamil.

Undoubtedly the chief of Arib was once an important figure in the council of chiefs of the highest-ranking villages of Yap. The authority, however, has been usurped by the chiefs of Teb and Me'rur and the power of Arib diffused by placing weak, low-ranking persons in the position of authority. When the Japanese forbade the practicing of traditional religious ceremonies, the last vestige of the position's meaning and authority died, leaving the chiefs of Teb and Me'rur the sole leaders in Tamil.

The Paramount Chiefs from Bulwol and Ru'way

The chief of the estate Ru'way in Rull is sitting-chief of Balabat and Ngolog, and leader of the Banpilung alliance of villages in Yap. This alliance is defined as the "side of the chiefs" (or "wise old men"). The chief of Arib in Tamil is also a leader in Banpilung, but in the role of counselor, rather than an active executive. In contrast, the chief of Bulwol estate in Gagil is sitting-chief of Gacpar village and the leader of the Banpagael alliance. Banpagael villages are defined as young and strong as boys, but not so smart as the chiefs. The sphere of power of the three paramount chiefs is demonstrated by Yapese informants on their fingers. Tamil is the thumb, short but strong; Rull is the first finger, much longer with power over the longest island, referred to as Yap island; Gagil is the longest finger, with power extending all the way to Truk in the central Carolines.

Both the chiefs of Bulwol and Ru'way represent their respective areas in the *puruy ko bulce'* or council of highest-ranking villages of Yap. Each sits on the councils of his local paramount villages, hearing from both of the pair. As is the case with Arib, each has overseer authority over certain sacred places and supervises ceremonies and makes requests for rituals to bring either blessing or disaster upon Yap. Each is overseer of the highest

ceremonial eating rank in his respective area.

The power of the chiefs of Ru'way and Bulwol is in their words. They sit in the council of chiefs in their area and listen and give their approval or disapproval. The execution of decisions of the council lies with the lesser chiefs of the two villages under them. Their power is more secular and stronger than that of the chief of Arib. Both chiefs have channels of communication and spies in different localities to keep them informed. Both preside over estate associations that provide support and participate in distributions made by the chief. Both, then, have a secular power and authority not enjoyed by the paramount chief of Arib in Tamil.

Presently, both Gagil and Rull make claims of being paramount in Yap. The chief at Bulwol sails in a canoe around Yap in a demonstration of his power and allies. En route he is received by each village along the shore; the receiving village gives gifts of fish to those bringing the chief and then carry him on to the next village along the line. The trip requires considerable preparation, necessitating that each village fish in advance to present the carrying village with the appropriate gifts. The last chief from Bulwol to try this was Tithinyow, who began a progress during the Spanish occupation of Yap. He reached Bulwol village in Rumung and then stopped when a spy informed him of a plot to kill him at Gilfith on the west side of Yap.

The extent of the power of the chief at Ru'way is demonstrated by the technique of net fishing called *yartan*. When the chief of Ru'way sends out the word, men from all the villages on the east side of Yap from Maa' in Tamil to L'ey in Gilman gather at the seashore to fish with a net stretching for several miles along the shoreline. The catch is brought to Ru'way and distributed to Ngolog and to other villages of the *bulce'* rank. A *yartan* has not been carried out within the memory of living informants.

Bulwol, like Arib, is owned by a matrisib, and succession is limited to members of the matrilineal sib called Waloy. When the chief of Bulwol dies, the other leaders in the village of Gacpar meet together and decide which member of Waloy sib in Gacpar should fill the vacancy. Known chiefs from Bulwol are:

Yo'lang—mythical first chief

Defngrad

Fanapiliw

Tethinyow (died around 1900)

Fithingmow (died around 1950)

Today no old men in Gacpar are from Waloy sib. Siling, from Dachngar estate (first in the association of estates under Bulwol), was asked by the wife of the last chief, Fithingmow, and his sib mate from another village to take care of Bulwol and speak for the authority when necessary.

Ru'way is inherited by the children of the owner. From a mythical genealogy it appears that Ru'way was once passed alternately between two sibs called Ngolog and Ngabinaw. In recent history it has been passed

from father to son.

The respective roles of the three paramount chiefs are defined in the same terms as the chief statuses in a village: voice of the land, ancient voice, and voice of the young men. Ru'way is leader of the Banpilung alliance, the side of the chiefs, and controls the largest area of land resources in Yap. Arib is the guardian of the sacred places of Yap and strong in terms of wisdom and supernatural power. Like the sitting-chief in the village council, the chief of Arib provides a third mediating voice between the other two. Bulwol is leader of the Banpagael alliance, or the side of the young men. Like the chief-of-young-men, Bulwol's chief is strong in manpower and has extensive allies for war. Together the chiefs and their supporting villages maintain a balance of power in Yap politics. Each struggles in his particular sphere to gain the advantage over the others, but each is controlled in turn by the other two. The symbol of the pillars for the cooking pots illustrates the interrelatedness of all three. If one fails or becomes weak, the whole system collapses.

The Paramount Villages: Bulce' and Ulun

The three paramount centers of Yap are dual, matched units, called *bulce'* and *ulun*, symbolizing chiefs and warriors, respectively. The organization of each of the paramount centers is based on the same ideology and definition of status as is found for the three paramount chiefs. For example, the village of Ngolog in Rull is considered the "female" village, with chiefs having overseer authority over land and resources; the village of Balabat is considered the "male" village, with chiefs having overseer authority over the sea and warfare. Ru'way section in the village of Balabat is the domain of the paramount chief, who sits in the position of "wise old man" over both villages, approving and disapproving decisions and actions. The roles of these villages are very clearly defined. In any major political function in Rull involving economic resources, Ngolog provides garden produce (involving women and land) and Balabat provides fish (involving men and sea), while Ru'way supervises, seeing that obligations are met in the proper extent and order. The village of Ngolog, being like a woman, does not go to war with other villages. If fighting is called for, Balabat will do it. Any young men of Ngolog who wish to fight will do so as members of Balabat, the warrior village.

The dual units of the paramount villages are the highest-ranking in Yap, and each unit has a particular role in the administration of land, resources, and power for the paramount chief. The *bulce'* villages play the roles of chiefs and women, the strength of Yap, sitting above the fray of battles, planning what will be done, and watching it happen. The *ulun* villages take the male role, active, mobile, executing the decisions of the

bulce' and the paramount chiefs. Ultimate leadership over the whole of Yap clearly lies in a committee of chiefs, each with definite specified authority and power. Each paramount chief and the village chiefs of the respective villages or sections preside over a council of ranking men and estates. These councils share a large part of the power and a chief is severely handicapped without them. The basic formula of this system is a council of seven. Each of the *bulce'* villages has seven estates, referred to as *cath*, which play major roles in the decision-making process and which share in the collections and distributions authorized by the high chiefs. Some *ulun* villages and the paramount chiefs also have supporting councils of seven. The actual composition of the councils are often disputed by informants because certain estates have gained or lost this authority in the unceasing competition for status and power. [Table 13](#) illustrates the distribution of power in the leadership structure of the paramount center at Rull. This distribution and balancing of power is the primary theme of Yap leadership and is seen at every level, from the lowest-ranking patriclan to the paramount chiefs.

The Paramount Villages and the Dual Alliances

Certain other ranking villages allied to the paramount chiefs are also called *bulce'* and *ulun*. These villages, grouped into two competing unions, Banpilung and Banpagael respectively, represent the paramount chiefs to a series of lesser-ranking, but allied villages. Gagil is the undisputed leader of the Banpagael alliance, while Rull is the leader of the Banpilung. Traditionally, Tamil balanced between the two alignments, shifting from one to the other as the particular case may require. Today, however, Tamil is considered Banpilung and allied with Rull. This shift appears to be the result of the increasing power of Gagil, brought about by the distribution of wealth obtained from its tribute relationships with the inhabited atolls to the east. Gagil had a source of tribute wealth unavailable to the other paramount chiefs and used this to expand its sphere of allies. The structure of the alliances is outlined in [Table 14](#).

Table 13. Leadership Statuses and Authority of Paramount Villages in Rull

Territorial Divisions	Titles	Estates	Local Authority	External Authority
	Paramount Chief	Ru'way	Sitting-chief; <i>suwon</i> of Ngolog, Balabat, and Rull sacred places	Chief, Balabat, Ngolog; chief, Atiliw, Rumu';

				chief, Adibuwe', Kaday; chief, Yanuf, Luwec
LAN RU'WAY SUBSECTION*	Councillors WOLCATH**	Biledugo' (1) Pekel Banyumuc Thumuth Madal' Tangil Biledugo' (2)	2nd to Ru'way 3rd to Ru'way Association leader Association leader Association leader Messenger Assistant to Biledugo' (1)	Chief, Ngof, Gal' Chief, Rulmit subsection, Balabat; chief, Af (Tamil)
	Village Chief	Mana'ol	War chief; <i>suwon</i> of women, <i>yogum</i> , sea, and torch fishing	Chief, <i>ulun</i> villages, S. Yap; chief, 14 villages, S. Rull; chief, Dachngar, Gitam, Talguw
BALABAT VILLAGE	Chief-of- Young-Men	Mado' Fitebinaw	Chief of village land activities; chief, N. Section of Balabat Chief of village fishing, gardening; chief, S. Section of Balabat	Chief, subsection of Mulro'
		Mangyan	Assistant to Mana'ol	
	Councillors	Towar Pun'ew	Association leader Association leader	
	Oob **	Magabac Debecig Falmarus Bucol	Association leader Association leader Association leader "Eyes" of Mana'ol, S. Section	
	Messenger	Bogwan	Messenger between Ru'way and Mana'ol	Chief, Nimar
	Council of	Tidirra'	<i>Suwon</i> of men	Chief, <i>bulce'</i> villages, S. Yap; chief, Kanif
NGOLOG	Chiefs	Magcug	<i>Suwon</i> of women	Chief, section of Yanuf

VILLAGE	Pegal‘ (1)	Assistant to Tidirra‘
Cath**	Pegal‘ (2)	Assistant to Magcug
	Mager	Section chief
	Gubiyel	Section chief
	Marmog	Section chief

* See [Figure 10](#) for a map of this subsection with its leading estates and associations of estates.

** Local designations for the councils.

Table 14. Paramount Villages and the Dual Alliances

<i>delipi ngucol</i> ‘Three Pillars’	Rull	Tamil	Gagil
Paramount chiefs	Ru‘way estate	Arib estate	Bulwol estate
<i>bulce‘</i> villages	Ngolog village	Teb village	Tholang section, Gacpar
<i>ulun</i> villages	Balabat village	Me‘rur village	Ariap section, Gacpar
Alliances	Banpilung— <i>bulce‘</i> rank		Banpagael— <i>ulun</i> rank
Allied villages of Chief Ranks	Gilfith village, Fanif		Co‘ol village, Map
	Kanif village, Delipebinaw		Bugol village, Tamil
	N‘ef village, Kanfay		Okaw village, Weloy
	Guror village, Gilman		Anoth village, Gilman

NOTES:

Informants disagree as to the particular villages ranked *ulun* or *bulce‘*. The ranking system was quite dynamic until the German government stopped warfare. The above villages were apparently on top at that time, but others may lay claim to *ulun* or *bulce‘* ranks. In some cases it is undoubtedly true that once in the village’s history it may have been one of either, but the fortunes of war effected a change.

Under the *bulce'* and *ulun* concept other important but lesser-ranking estates have a direct representative relationship to the paramount chiefs, increasing the range of the leadership and communication network. Two particular statuses should be defined—the *yalung samol* and the *teyugang ni rod ni pilung*. The *yalung samol* are particular estates representing the paramount chiefs located in a low-ranking village considered strategic. They are given the rank of *bulce'*, although the remainder of the village in which they reside is considerably lower. The following estates are reported by informants as *yalung samol*: Bileyow, Magcagil village, Gilman; Bileydid, Magaf village, Delipebinaw; Tefaenfel', Dachngar village, Rull; Macngod, Madalay village, Tamil; Ba'anggal, Alog village, Weloy.

The concept of *teyugang* is not too clear to present-day Yapese, but is definitely a part of the traditional system. The *teyugang* villages are neither *bulce'* nor *ulun*, but rank just below these and play a leadership role in the alliance of a group of villages to the paramount chiefs. Like the *ulun* and *bulce'* they have subordinate villages beneath them. They act as regional leaders, but are not high enough in rank to sit on the councils of *ulun* or *bulce'*.

The dual alliances function primarily in times of warfare and when mobilization of support is required in situations of conflict. Their roles are always competitive, whether they involve economic exchanges, religious ceremony, or actual fighting. In the past, wars were arranged by leaders of villages in competition with each other or by competitors within a village. These arranged wars required that each village have a representative from the opposing alignment who could communicate the desires and plans of the chief to those who would execute them.

The Authority of the Bulce', Ulun, and Paramount Chiefs

Channels of Communication—The Tha'

The Yapese concept of *tha'* is perhaps the most important element in differentiating the power of separate political statuses. *Tha'* is literally 'a series of things, tied together with string'. For example, the term is used to classify a string of shell money—*tha' e yar*. When used in Yapese politics, the concept of *tha'* designates a long line of communication that ties together the various geographical and political units of Yap.

As mentioned earlier, the essence of Yapese politics is verbal communication or the passing of the word. Any legitimate request or message must follow the channels of communication, or *tha'*. This is a

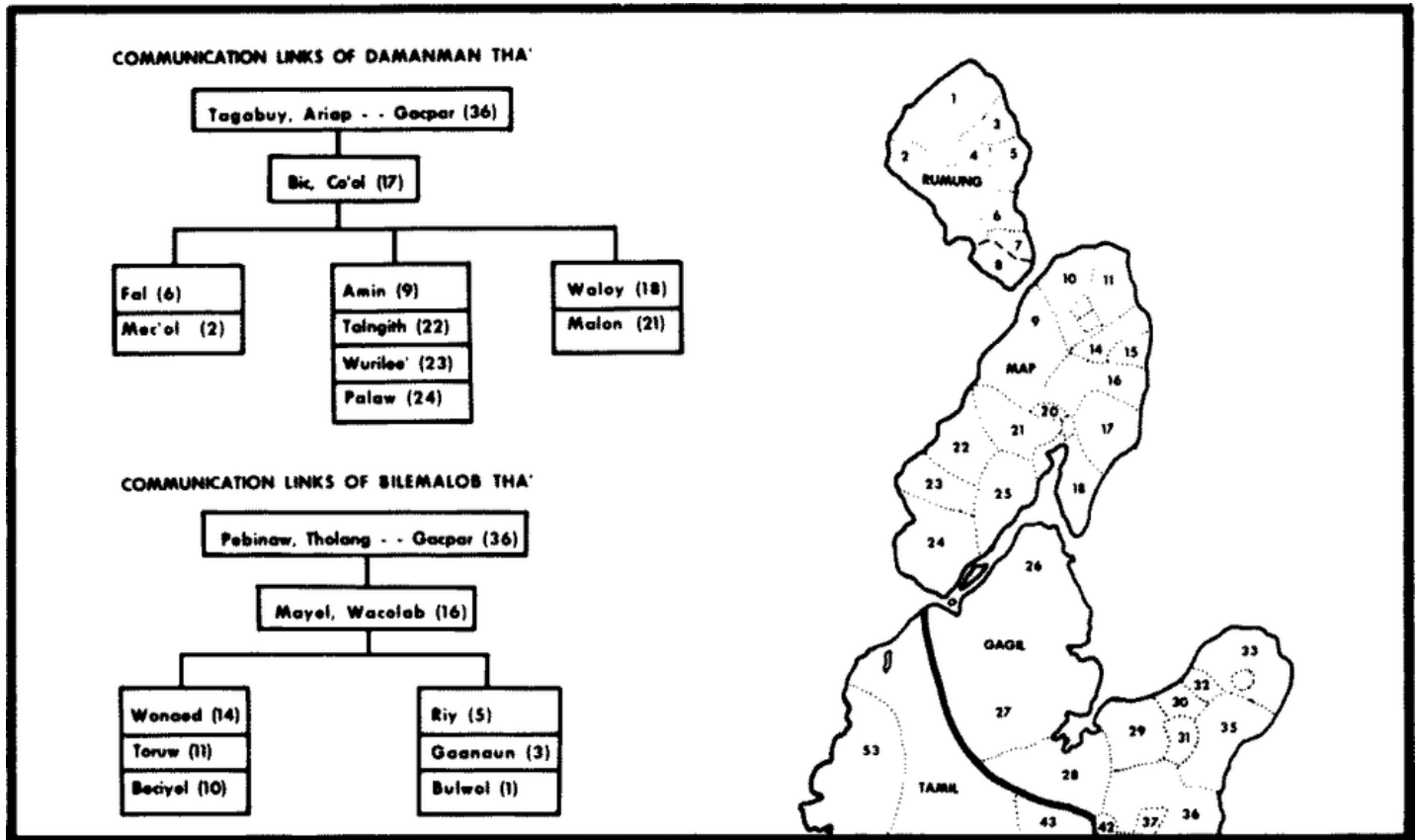
very serious matter to the Yapese and if word is passed improperly, regardless of its importance, it may be disregarded. On the other hand, a properly communicated message has the force and power of the highest chiefs and to disregard it brings serious consequences. This hierarchy of communication is one of the keys to the power of the paramount chiefs.

An example from the village of Gacpar illustrates the concept of *tha'* as it is applied in the political field. There are two major *tha'* out of Gacpar to the islands of Map and Rumung—Damanman *tha'* for the alliance of Banpagael, and Bilemalob for the alliance of Banpilung. The first originates from Tagabuy estate in Ariap section, *ulun* rank, and the second from Pebinaw estate in Tholang section, *bulce'* rank. The leaders of the two estates are respective chiefs of their sections, and second in rank only to the leader of Bulwol, the paramount sitting-chief. Any message to allies in the islands of Map or Rumung must begin with the word from the chiefs of one of these two estates. The chain of communication links may be seen in [Figure 13](#).

In addition to this type of *tha'*, certain lines of communication are designated for a specific purpose. One example is the *tha'* Wolangel, which runs from Fanawol estate in Gacpar to the four villages on the southwest side of Map. The sole purpose of this *tha'* is the collection of tribute at a certain time of the year.

The concept of *tha'* includes all types of relationships for communication between villages. The most important are the *tha'* of *bulce'* and *ulun* with their respective alliances of Banpilung and Banpagael. All important matters, including war, work, religious ceremonies, or requests for support and assistance, are handled “on top of” (*dakaen e tha'*) the lines of communication. Breaches of custom regarding marriage or even murder may be carried to the high chiefs on the *tha'*. In such a case, the accused pleads with his chief for support and intervention. The chief then takes a piece of shell money and presents it with his plea to the next higher chief on the *tha'*, who passes it on to the highest chiefs, with each chief adding a piece of shell money if he approves, until it returns to the victim's family. To refuse such a plea passed along the *tha'* of all the high chiefs of Yap would be utter folly. It is invariably accepted and pardon given.

Figure 13. Channels of Communication (*tha'*), Gacpar, Gagil



The function of the various *tha'* in the political field is of primary importance. The *tha'* provides the channel for acquiring or withdrawing economic and political support for the chiefs. It is the basic framework for collection of tribute and for mobilizing forces in warfare.

The power of the paramount chiefs is limited and balanced by the distribution of the *tha'*. Each of the three paramount chiefs from Gagil, Tamil, and Rull must go through subordinate chiefs to send messages to allies. The two subordinate chiefs in the paramount centers are also controlled in that both have respective *tha'* and neither has exclusive power. In the case of a dispute among the three chiefs of Gagil, two of them may work together to outflank the third. Therefore, no one chief is capable of exerting total power or influence over his locale. The power is distributed among the three chiefs in each of the three paramount centers. Support is maintained through cooperation and consensus within the hierarchy of the system.

An incident in the village of Anoth in Gilman municipality provides an excellent example. The people of Anoth had seized an automobile belonging to men from Balabat, Rull, because they created considerable disturbance on the road going through the village. The young men returned to their village and requested assistance from the paramount chief of Ru'way. Because Ru'way is *bulce'* the chief could not send word directly to Anoth, which is Banpagael and *ulun*. Instead he sent his messenger (Tangil estate) to Mamfal estate in Guror village (*bulce'*),

which has a *tha'* relationship with Anoth. The messenger from Ru'way gave the chief of Mamfal a piece of shell money and requested his assistance in obtaining the release of the car. The chief of Mamfal accepted the shell money, and taking a much more valuable piece of stone money in its place, went to see the sitting-chief of Bileyow, Magacagil, who acts as intermediary between Guror and Anoth. The sitting-chief of Bileyow added another piece of stone money, and they both presented the pieces of money to the village chief of Anoth, with a plea to release the car. Such a plea, coming on the power and legitimacy of the *tha'*, could not be ignored, and reluctantly the people of Anoth released the car. If, however, any of the intermediary chiefs between Ru'way and Anoth had been omitted, the request would have been considered illegitimate (improperly made) and denied.

The *tha'* also provides a means of recognizing legitimacy—legitimacy of a new chief, a decision, a change in rank, or a tribute relationship within the political field. For example, when a new chief plans a ceremonial exchange in honor of the deceased chief he has replaced, the word is sent out on the *tha'* and the new chief performs the duties of a chief—organizing the village, collecting, distributing, and so forth. The response of other chiefs in attending the ceremony and participating in the exchange articulates public recognition of the new chief's succession and of the support of the allied chiefs of his position and authority. Maintaining support and recognizing legitimacy are two of the primary functions of the *tha'*.

Alliance and Rank

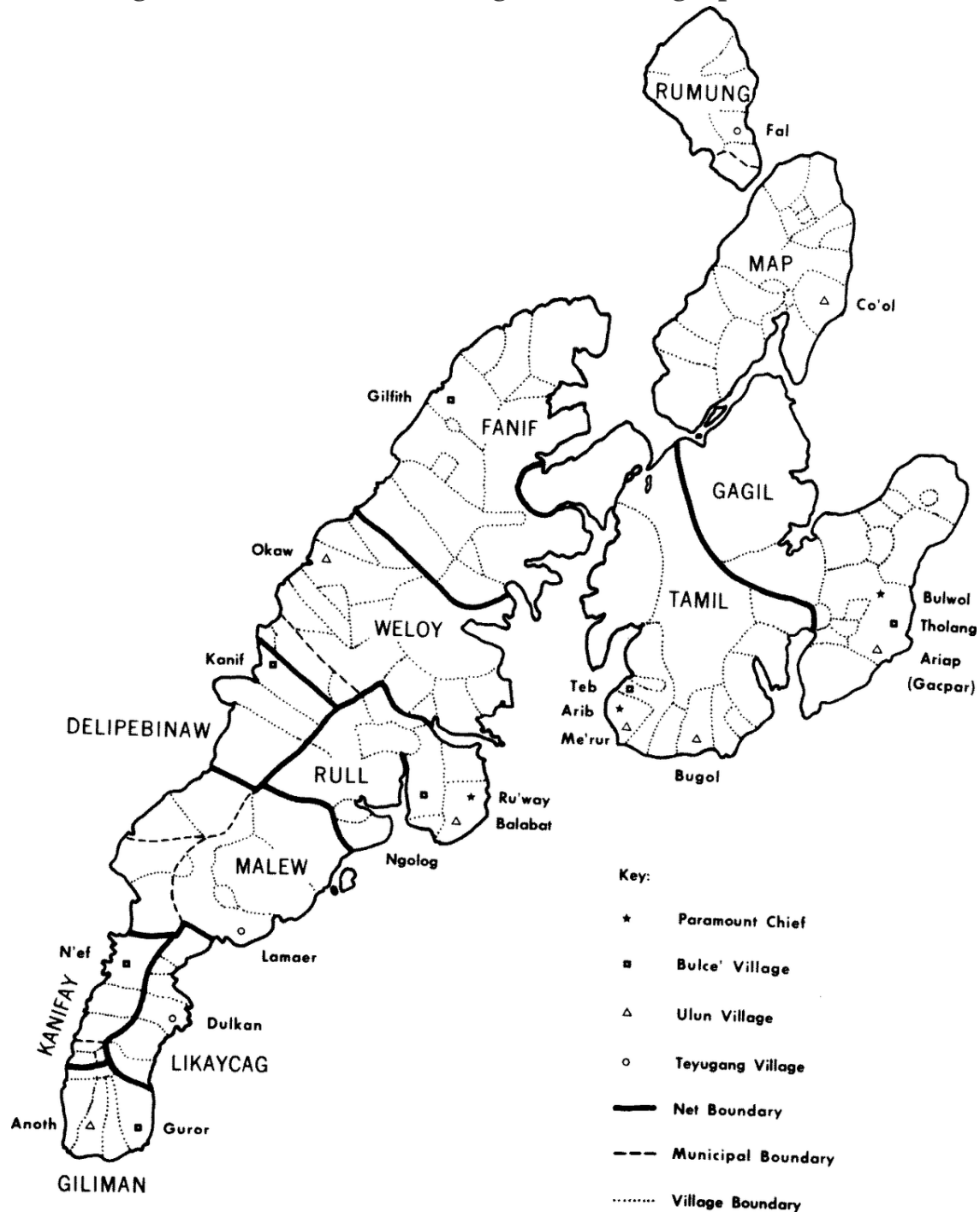
Complementary to the concept of *tha'* is that of *nug 'net'*. The Yapese describe regional alliances in terms of a fish net. The *tha'* originates with the leading village in the net and leads to the lower-ranking member villages. Each of the two areas in the example given earlier of the *tha'* from Gacpar to Map and Rumung would be defined as a net. The *tha'* from Gacpar passes to the head village of each of the nets, the head village being determined by the particular channel, Banpilung or Banpagael, used. The villages of Co'ol in Map and Fal in Rumung are the primary leaders of the respective nets. However, word from Banpilung alliance would come to the second-ranking villages of Wacolab in Map and Riy in Rumung.

The alliances of Banpagael and Banpilung are described as nets. The spheres of each of the three paramount chiefs are nets, and within these three are other smaller nets with their respective leading villages. The nets have geographical as well as political ties and, as illustrated above, it is frequently the case that nets may be divided along lines of the two major political alliances. The geographical nets and their leaders are listed in Table 15 and illustrated in Figure 14.

Table 15. Geographical Nets and Their Leaders

Rull Net		Gagil Net		Tamil Net	
Local Net	Chief Village	Local Net	Chief Village	Local Net	Chief Village
Rull	Ngolog	Gagil	Gacpar	Tamil	Teb
Malew	Lamaer	Welay	Okaw	Fanif	Gilfith
Likaycag	Dulkan	Map	Co'ol		
Delipebinaw	Kanif	Rumung	Fal		
Kanfay	N'ef				
Gilman	Guror				

Figure 14. Paramount Villages and Geographical Nets



The ranking of villages within each net is quite complex. Ranking first of all should be understood as an ongoing, dynamic process. It is a waste of time to ask the rank of a particular village in Yap. The answer given is always the highest rank ever enjoyed by that village and, if that is not very high, quite often the informant will up it one notch. Traditionally ranking was a dynamic of war, work, service to the paramount chiefs, and subsequent reward for such services. Villages were constantly rising and falling in rank according to the tides or fortunes of war. To obtain a ranking of villages today, similar criteria must be used as were used in the past, namely, which villages have managed to ride the political crest to

leadership in their respective nets and how do the other villages rank in relation to them? Questioning informants as to the rank of their village is an interesting historical exercise, but totally confusing when one tries to establish the so-called correct ranking of Yapese villages.

The traditional ranks are not clearly understood by informants today. There is no hesitation about the existence of the *bulce‘* and *ulun* ranks and that there are seven of each, but upon naming them, nine or ten villages usually appear on the lists, depending upon where the questions are asked. Again this reflects the dynamics of the system; villages rose and fell, but no one likes to admit that it was his village that fell. Another problem is that the meanings of some of the lower ranks have been forgotten. The categories of the ranking system are listed in [Table 16](#).

Table 16. Categories of Rank

Levels of Ranking		Yapese Categories of Rank
<i>pilung</i> “high caste”	Chief	<i>bulce‘</i> division <i>ulun</i> division
	Nobility	<i>methaban</i> division <i>tethaban</i> division
	Commoner	<i>daworcig</i>
<i>pimilngay</i> “low caste”	Chief’s servants	<i>milngay ni arow</i>
	Serfs	<i>pimilngay</i> <i>yagug, milngay ni kan, etc.</i>

Table 16 illustrates that the eight rankings of Yapese villages fall into five different general groupings: 1) the chiefly villages, 2) their closest and highest-ranking allies, or nobility, 3) the common villages, the most numerous on Yap, 4) the servant rank, and finally, 5) the serfs. It must be remembered that villages and sections of villages are classified by named rank, but *nug* or the ‘nets’ of allies are ranked only as they are represented by a high-or low-ranking village. No net or municipality on Yap is led by a village lower than the *methaban/ tethaban* ‘nobility’ rank. The villages within each named rank, however, are also ranked, with some holding higher prestige and privilege than others. The interrelationship of rank, net, and *tha‘* is seen in [Figures 15](#) and [16](#).

There is considerable confusion today as to the difference between the second-level ranks of *methaban* and *tethaban*. Some say that *methaban* is an old rank of villages that were defeated in war, and consequently have almost ceased to exist. Others say that *methaban* villages support *bulce‘* villages and that *tethaban* villages support *ulun* villages. Others reverse

this formula. One old informant argued that *methaban* comes from the two words *methilin* and *ban*, meaning respectively, 'between' and 'side'. Thus *methaban* villages mediate between the sides of *ulun* and *bulce'*. If this was true, however, the functions have been dropped for so long that informants no longer remember them. The same informant said that *tethaban* comes from the words *tethith* and *ban*, and means a "side which renders badly needed assistance". This is not incompatible with the actual functions of *tethaban* villages. They generally do form first-ranking assistants to the higher-ranking and related *ulun* or *bulce'* villages. The general consensus, if one can come close to consensus, is that villages of the two ranks, *methaban* and *tethaban*, refer to respective assistants for *bulce'* and *ulun* villages, and whether this was the usage long ago is quite irrelevant at the present.

Teyugang is another status with implications that are no longer remembered. How is *teyugang* different from *methaban* and *tethaban*, or is there no difference? The word connotes a strong chief, and appears to apply to those villages in which the chief was the representative of the paramount chiefs over a number of other villages, or a leader of the net. This is not always true of the *tethaban* and *methaban* villages. It appears then that *teyugang* is not a special rank, but rather a delineation within the ranks of *tethaban* and *methaban*.

Figure 15. Banpilung Alliance—Power Structure and Communication Networks

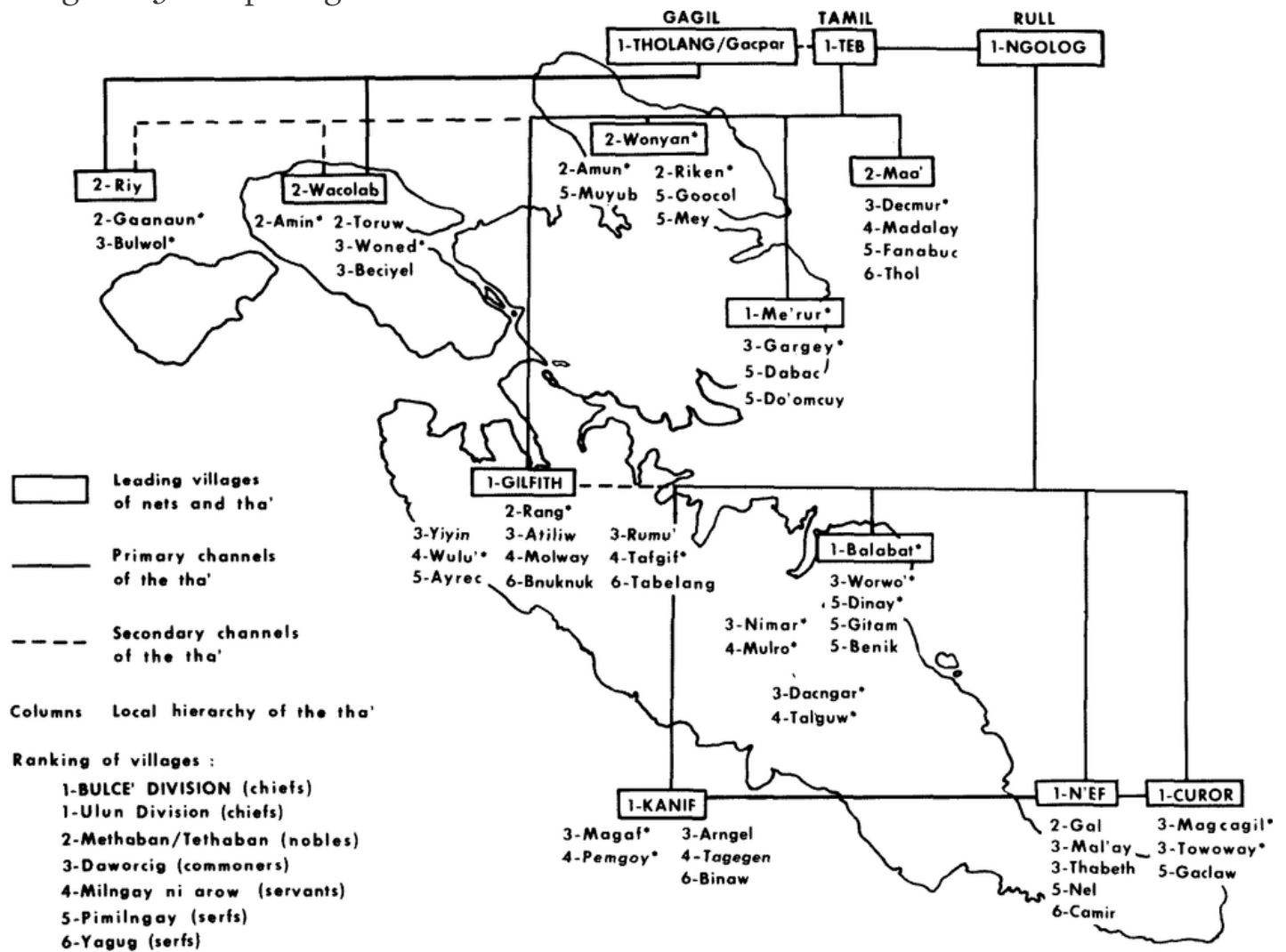
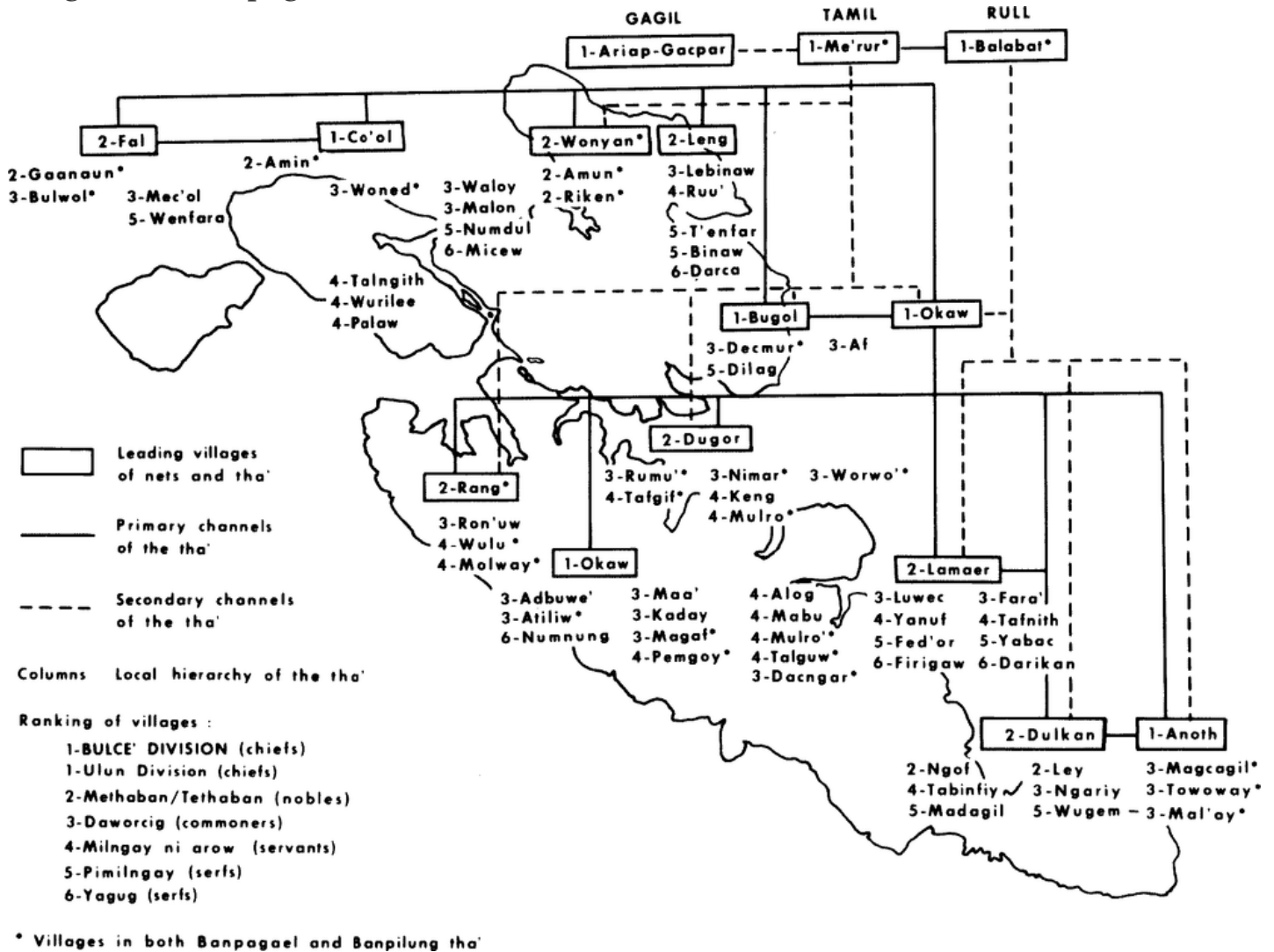


Figure 16. Banpagael Alliance—Power Structure and Communication Networks



Rank depends upon a number of factors, the most important being ownership of land. The lowest-ranking strata in the system, *pimilngay* and *yagug*, comprise landless serfs. The *milngay ni arow* 'chiefs' servants' have land, but it is land whose title belongs to a high chief to whom the people give first fruits of its produce. The second most important factor in determining rank is victory in war. The rise and fall of villages is chronicled in the stories of battles, and serious defeat resulted in loss of both status and land. Success in war provided access to higher rank, and coupled with extensive service to a paramount chief or to one of the villages of *ulun* or *bulce'* rank, yielded status privileges such as tribute from lower villages and overseer authority over certain lands. Even the lowest serf villages have upon occasion risen to higher rank in the status system. The crucial factors were survival in war and, in recent times, survival from the ravages of epidemics. Villages without people very rapidly lose whatever status and prestige are attributed to them. Ranking is dynamic by nature and those who manipulate the system the most effectively are those who rise or stay at the top.

The variations in the ranks are defined clearly in privileged access to resources. The villages of the paramount chiefs are located on some of the best Yapese land resources. These villages pay no tribute, but rather collect tribute from other villages and then redistribute to their own. In terms of rank the *daworcig* 'commoner' villages pay the heaviest tribute in the high-caste ranks and the *milngay ni arow* 'servants' rank are the virtual servants of their overlords. The *methaban/tethaban* 'nobility' ranks both receive and pay tribute. They receive tribute from commoner and servant villages, but also pay tribute to the paramount villages. The lowest ranks of *pimilngay* and *yagug* form a low caste of landless serfs, which does not pay tribute, but actually serves its overlords from commoner and higher villages.

Marriage, as influenced by the system of rank and alliance, has important implications for leadership. Chiefs who wish to reinforce ties with other powerful chiefs will arrange marriages between the two families. These marriage alliances serve to consolidate the power of a chief by establishing more stable and dependable external ties. The nature of the relationship changes from mere political bonds to the stronger kinship bonds, especially when children are born to the marriage. For the same reasons, a marriage between the families of higher-ranking and lower-ranking chiefs is considered undesirable by the chief of higher rank. This type of alliance provides no prestige for the high chief and very little political gain. The lower-ranking chief reaps the benefits through the reciprocal obligations brought about by the marriage. Marriage of women into lower-ranking villages is undesirable unless the lower-ranking village is geographically very close; then the marriage is thought good for the girl because she can be near her parents. If the adjacent village is of too low a rank, an effort will be made to raise its rank if frequent intermarriages are desired. Marriage between the landed and landless castes is prohibited, but such marriages do sometimes occur.

Tribute: Economic Authority and Support

Tribute is an expression of the mutual obligations that exist between the various chiefs and their subordinates and an economic affirmation of political ties and dominant/subordinate relationships. Tribute also serves to reinforce the authority allocations and balances set forth in the structure of the *tha'*. The act of tribute has two important facets—the collection and the redistribution. Collection is the positive assertion of power on the part of the chief and a display of subordination on the part of the donor. Distribution provides the opportunity to reward service, recognize status, show generosity and incur further obligations, and demonstrate wealth and power.

The Yapese conceptualize these obligation relationships in the

following ways:

1. *tha'*—obligations for support in work, *mitmit* 'exchanges', and warfare
2. *suwon/lungun tafen*—obligations for food, service, and resources
3. *athalab*—obligations for first fruits of produce
4. *thariyeg*—obligations for traditional valuables (*macaf*)
5. *wolbuw*—obligations in return for past services
6. *maybil*—obligations for religious observances

It was noted earlier in the discussion of the *tha'* that certain communication channels are designated to elicit support of work projects. When important chiefs begin to plan a major construction project, they send out word via the *tha'* to collect materials and laborers to do the jobs. A leader may not send word to all of his allies, but only to those who have the obligation of contributing assistance to work. Some channels of *tha'* are designated exclusively for support in warfare, or support in the ceremonial exchanges, while others include all three types of obligations. The obligations of each channel depend upon the particular historical relationships that were established between the participants. For example, the men's house of Lothok in Ru'way section of Balabat belongs to the paramount chief of Ru'way and the *bulce'*. During the construction of this building, the villages of Ngolog and Kanif, both *bulce'*, were obligated to provide labor support for the project. Other *bulce'* villages were not asked to help because they are not on the work *tha'*, but belonged to the *tha'* for warfare and policy councils.

Another type of tribute is that rendered because of a political dominance/subordination relationship. These are defined as rights of *suwon* 'overseer' and obligations of *lungun tafen* 'estate's voice'. The overseer rights were defined earlier as the authority to collect food, service, or resources from subordinate villages or clan estates over which one is *suwon*. Estate's voice is the responsibility that a village leader or leader of a clan estate has to fulfill the obligations of his land and title toward a higher-ranking overseer. Yapese distinguish two kinds of relationships toward an overseer: those estates and villages of slightly junior rank considered *wolag* 'siblings', and those of inferior rank considered *fak* 'children'.

The overseer rights of a chief toward estates and villages of slightly junior rank are usually specified as to the kind of tribute required. For example, the paramount chief at Ru'way is entitled to tribute from all net fishing done by the *ulun* village of Balabat. In this case the catch from the first two days of fishing (called *mar* and *tithymar*) are brought to Ru'way before Balabat village may take fish for itself. The chief of Ru'way may also request fish from Balabat when he has a special need, but he may not demand garden produce. If he needs garden produce, he would request

this from the *bulce* village of Ngolog over which he has overseer rights to produce. The specific rights of an overseer over junior estates and villages vary widely with regard to kinds of demands and their volume and frequency. The rank of the chief and his geographical distance from the subordinate villages and estates are important variables in the frequency and volume of tribute.

The *fak* 'child' relationship occurs between a high chief and a village of commoner rank or lower. One such relationship for the chief of Ru'way is called *gal'ud* and includes the villages of Rumu' and Atiliw. The relationship is formalized with the gifts of fish and firewood brought once a year for the religious ceremonies in the month of Tafgif. Each village is then required to meet additional responsibilities. Rumu' brings the fruits of yam harvest once a year (*lamar*), and repairs the roof on the sacred men's house Tabaw, where Ru'way gives prayers to the ghosts of the island. Atiliw brings the first catch of a fish called *buy*. Both villages may be called upon by Ru'way for assistance in matters other than specified in the regular offerings. If Ru'way needs economic support for a ceremonial exchange, or for a construction project, these villages may be called upon for assistance. The lower the rank of the village, the more dependent it is upon the high chief and the more demanding he may be with regard to support and obligations.

The most commonly defined child relationships are those between chiefs and their servant or serf villages. All chiefs in Yap have certain villages that provide services and goods without the competitive reciprocal obligations due to villages of the higher ranks. These rights were obtained during periods of severe population pressures in which land became extremely scarce and access to it limited to patrilineal inheritance and gift. Individuals who were disinherited became vagrants and beggars and gradually formed a landless class. These people eventually became organized into serf villages, working for wealthy landowners in return for the use of the land. The relationship between these people and their landlords was defined as the relations between a father and his children, following the ideology of the clan estate in which obedient and helpful children are granted land by their fathers. The disobedient were disinherited or expelled from their land. Low status, prohibition of marriage between men of the serf group and women from higher ranks, and the stigma of always being children, dependent upon and protected by the chief or father, served to solidify the poor group into a serf caste.

Individuals or villages whose lands are not considered ritually contaminated may bring first fruits (*athalab*) of produce to their chief. This gift of first fruits recognizes the position of the chief as the overseer of the land. A chief may not punish an individual for failure to present first fruits but it generally benefits the donor to do so. The chief usually rewards such a gift with a shell valuable and feels obligated to assist such

faithful followers in any particular need that might arise in their households or patricians.

Another type of tribute relationship is *thariyeg*, designating the right of a chief to request traditional valuables (*macaf*) from subordinate villages and chiefs. Collections are made in preparation for the large *mitmit* in which equally ranked villages compete with each other in the exchange of valuables to determine which is the most wealthy and therefore the most powerful. Villages and chiefs that contribute in the collection also are entitled to a share in the distribution after the exchange.

The last two types of tribute have both ritual and economic functions. The first is called *wolbuw* 'gift' and refers to large ritual gifts of food or service offered at a specific time during each year. Many of these gifts are designated as rewards for particular service in warfare or assistance in revenging the death of a member of the patrician or a chief. Generally the donating village gives from their most valuable and/or scarce resources. For example, Co'ol village in Map brought the yam called *dal'*, grown almost exclusively on Map, to a village in southern Yap as a reward for assistance in warfare. The economic function of this type of gift is to give a wider distribution of scarce resources. The ritual function annually reinforces the political bonds established through cooperation in the past. Such ties are considered quite valuable and either member may be called upon for help at any time.

The most common gift symbolizing allegiance to a high chief is the giving of turtles and large fish. The paramount chief from Bulwol in Gagil, for example, has rights to all turtles, whales, and very large fish caught in Map and Rumung. These items are brought to Bulwol as a symbol of loyalty and respect. The chief bringing them is rewarded with important gifts and acquires more economically in the transaction than the paramount chief. He, on the other hand, has obtained his reward in status recognition. To fail to bring turtles, in particular, is a declaration of disrespect and arrogance, and in the past has incited punitive warfare from the village of the paramount chief.

Another aspect of the ritual functions of *wolbuw* 'gift' is the collection of food for the major religious ceremonies called *togmog* 'feast'. The feasts are large annual religious celebrations frequently involving many allies and having strong political overtones. Maragil feast in Okaw for the sanctuary at Alog is an excellent example. The village of Okaw provides the taro (*Cyrtosperma* and *Colocasia*) for the celebration. The chiefs of Okaw collect bananas from all the lower-ranking villages in the Okaw net. Villages in Gilman are invited to attend in recognition of their aid in constructing the Okaw taro patches. The Gilman villages contribute fish and coconuts. The political significance of this ceremony lies in the fact that all villages in the island of Yap with *tha'* relationships to Okaw attend, including Banpagael villages from the nets of Gilman, Likaycag, Malew, Weloy, and Fanif, extending from one end of the island to the other. The

religious ceremony is not only an occasion for offerings to spirits, but a demonstration of political alignments, rank (in the distribution of food and eating relationships), and alliance solidarity. These same villages may on other occasions be called upon to cooperate in warfare, support a decision or a chief, or to offer economic assistance for a major project in Okaw.

The last type of tribute is the *maybil* 'offerings' to the spirit of a sacred place in Yap. Numerous kinds of gifts are collected for all the sacred places, priests, and religious ceremonies held in Yap. One example is the cycle of prayer ceremonies held for the sanctuary of Numrui in Gacpar. Four months of the year are devoted to prayers for the spirit of Numrui. In each of these four months, one important titled estate in Gagil will collect bananas, fish, betel nuts, and coconuts from their village and bring them as an offering to the sacred place. Taking this offering, the old leaders from seven clan estates, including the priest at Numrui, make an offering to the spirit of the place and then divide the bulk of the gifts among themselves. Each portion of the collection will in turn be distributed among the lesser-ranking estates under each of the seven leaders. These collections are ritual and political. The participating estates are leaders in adjacent villages, who at times are hostile to each other. The ritual expresses cooperation and solidarity. At the same time, the leaders are praying for good things for all the people.

The chiefs do not collect for the sake of collecting. Collections are made for ritual or political ends, to assure the good of the people through religious observances or to achieve some political goal. This is not to say that the chiefs are not self-seeking, but rather that the desire to remain in power curbs any self-seeking tendencies. One present chief stated very clearly that a chief cannot just collect things for himself but must be very generous to the people, working hard to bring as many benefits as possible to them. This fact is rather obvious when one observes the tribute situation. On a men's house construction project in Rull, the chiefs who received assistance from subordinate villages spent a great deal more in labor and gifts than did those who assisted. Indeed, in order to sponsor the labor party, the chiefs incurred great debt among their own villagers. When asked why they did not request more assistance, they replied that they could not afford it. To maintain political power and dominance is expensive, and the brunt of the effort falls upon the highest-ranking villages. The use of servant villages provides some relief from the burden of reciprocal obligations.

Without doubt the chief who receives tribute is under considerable pressure to provide some reciprocal service or gift to the donor (see [Table 17](#)). This aspect of tribute provides part of the pressure and dynamic that leads to changes in ranking, to maneuvering in warfare, and to flexibility in the structure of the system. Furthermore, the tribute/distribution network provides an opportunity for trade, with certain areas

contributing to the chief resources plentiful in their area and receiving in return items of scarcity. One example of this type of trade occurs when villages with large stands of coconuts pay tribute in coconuts and receive in return yams or taro, or specially produced items, such as pots or woven cloth from the banana fiber, which they may be lacking. When European traders came, the chiefs used the collection networks to gather coconuts for copra and then paid back the lower-ranking chiefs with gifts acquired from the sale of copra. Large pieces of stone money were transported on traders' ships to Yap with copra being used to pay the freight. Cannons and guns were also bought and then presented to subordinate chiefs.

Table 17. Tribute for the Paramount Chief, Ru'way, Balabat, Rull

Village	Local Net	Type of Tribute	Contributed	Received
Balabat	Rull	<i>Suwon-wolag</i> ^a	fish, labor	food
		<i>wolbuw</i> ^b	fish, turtles	—
Worwo'	Rull	<i>suwon-wolag</i>	fish, labor	food
		<i>wolbuw</i>	fish, turtles	—
Ngolog	Rull	<i>tha</i> ^c	labor	fish, food
Kanif	Delipebinaw	<i>tha</i> '	labor	fish, food
Arngel	Delipebinaw	<i>wolbuw</i>	fish	—
Rumu'	Weloy	<i>suwon-fak</i> ^d	yams, betel nut, labor	coconuts
		<i>athalab</i> ^e	yams	valuables
		<i>wolbuw</i>	fish, firewood	—
Atiliw	Fanif	<i>suwon-fak</i>	fish	coconuts
		<i>wolbuw</i>	fish (<i>buy</i>)	—
Adbuwe'	Weloy	<i>suwon-fak</i>	yams	coconuts
		<i>thariyeg</i> ^f	valuables	coconuts
Kaday	Weloy	<i>suwon-fak</i>	yams, <i>tarugod</i> ^g	coconuts
Yanuf	Malew	<i>suwon-fak</i>	coconuts, fish	yams
Luwec	Malew	<i>suwon-fak</i>	coconuts, fish	yams

a. *suwon-wolag*, contributions from estates of slightly junior rank; b. *wolbuw*, contributions in return for past services; c. *tha*' contributions from allies in the channels of communication; d. *suwon-fak*, contributions from villages in servant relationship; e. *athalab*, contributions of first fruits; f. *thariyeg*, contributions of traditional valuables; g. *tarugod*, place for menstruating daughter from Ru'way.

By 1968 most of the formal tribute relationships had ceased to be observed. Observation of the traditional religious calendar stopped shortly before World War II and was never resumed. Many gift obligations had been ignored and even forgotten before the demise of the traditional religion. Gifts of first fruits may still be given by a few individuals who wish to gain the favor of a leader, but generally the custom is ignored. Ceremonial exchanges are occasionally held, but the collection of shell valuables usually is confined to relatives and other friendly chiefs. The only persistent obligations are those of the *tha'* and overseer/estate voice relationships. Warfare between villages has, of course, ceased but the *tha'* relations may still be used for community projects and exchanges. The power of the overseer is now ambiguously defined, and individuals either meet the obligations reluctantly or frequently disregard them altogether.

Gagil and Outer Island Tribute

One other category of tribute should be considered—that of the special relationship of the villages of Gacpar and Wonyan in Gagil to certain atolls in the Carolines east and south of Yap. The atolls included in this relationship are Ulithi, Fais, Woleai, Eauripik, Sorol, Ifalik, Faraulep, Lamotrek, Elato, Satawal, Pulusuk, Pulap, and Namonuito (see [Figure 17](#)). The atoll of Ngulu south of Yap was once included in the sphere, but was given to the chief of Guror in Gilman as a marriage gift accompanying the daughter of the chief from Ethow estate in Gacpar. The inhabitants of these atolls are bound to the people of Gacpar and Wonyan by ties of kinship, tribute, and economic trade and interdependence.

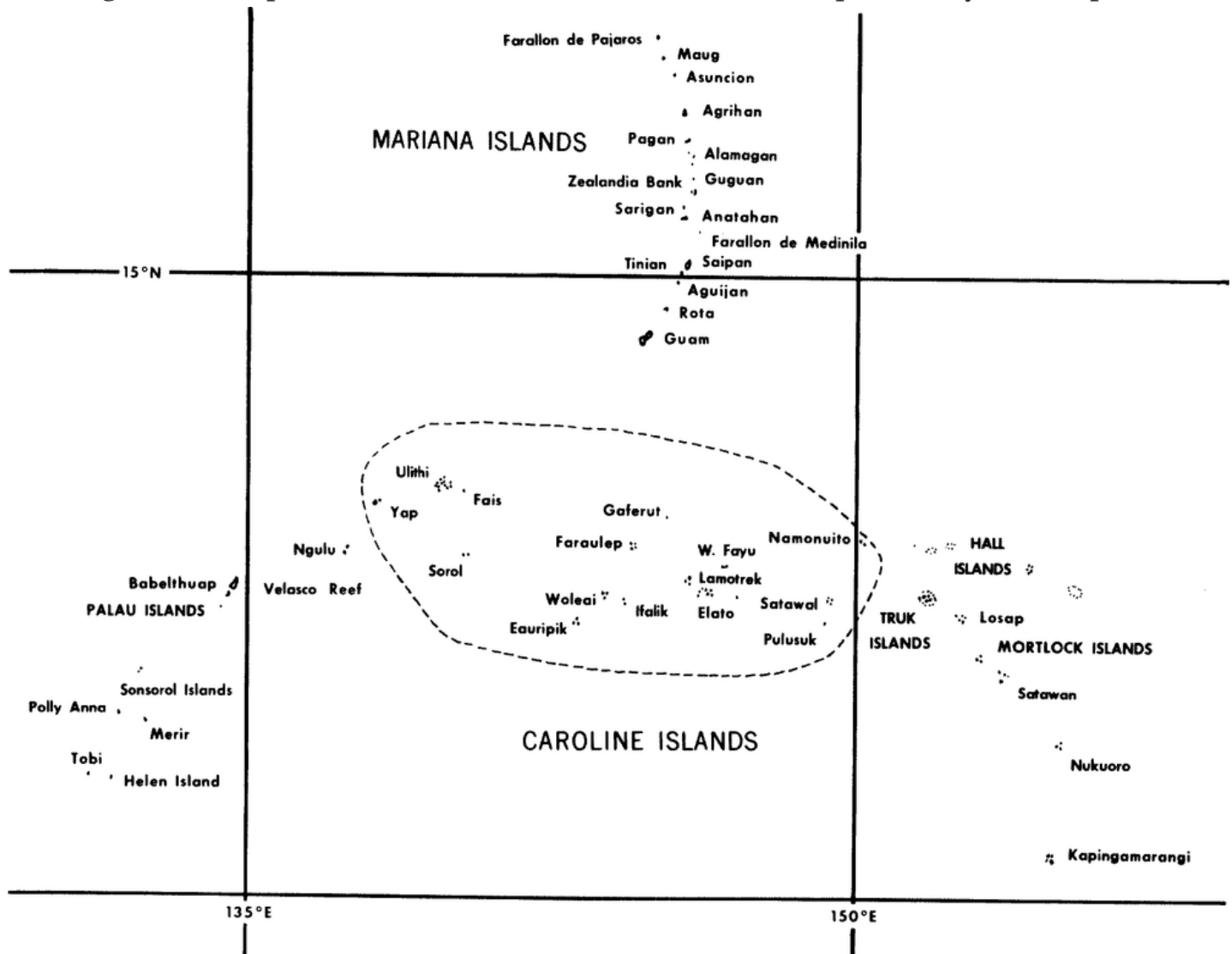
The relationship of the people of Wonyan and Gacpar to the Carolinians is defined on a kinship basis: the Yapese are fathers and the outer islanders children. This father/child relationship is best expressed by the giving of food and shelter while the outer islanders reside on Yap and supplying lumber and other of Yap's resources not available on the atolls. Whenever these people come to Yap they are cared for by particular clan estates as if they were children of that patrician. In return the Carolinians present prayer offerings (*maybil*) to the ancestral ghosts of the Yapese (as any good child would) and give gifts to the family.

As *fak* 'children' of the Yapese, the Carolinians are also tenants, with Yapese claiming ownership of their land. Their tenant relationship requires tribute or *sowai* 'trade' from them. This tribute is generally in the form of woven cloth called *bagiy* (lavalava), coconut rope, coconut oil and candy, coconut syrup, mats from pandanus, and shells of various types. In return these people receive canoes from the Yapese, turmeric, food, flint stone, and other Yapese resources.

The Carolinians are required to wear white loincloths while residing in Yap and to assume postures of respect like the Yapese low caste. They also

are prohibited from marrying Yapese women. However, their lot is much easier than that of the low-caste serfs, and many have been adopted into Gacpar and Wonyan and become Yapese.

Figure 17. Map of Western Caroline Islands and Gacpar-Wonyan "Empire"



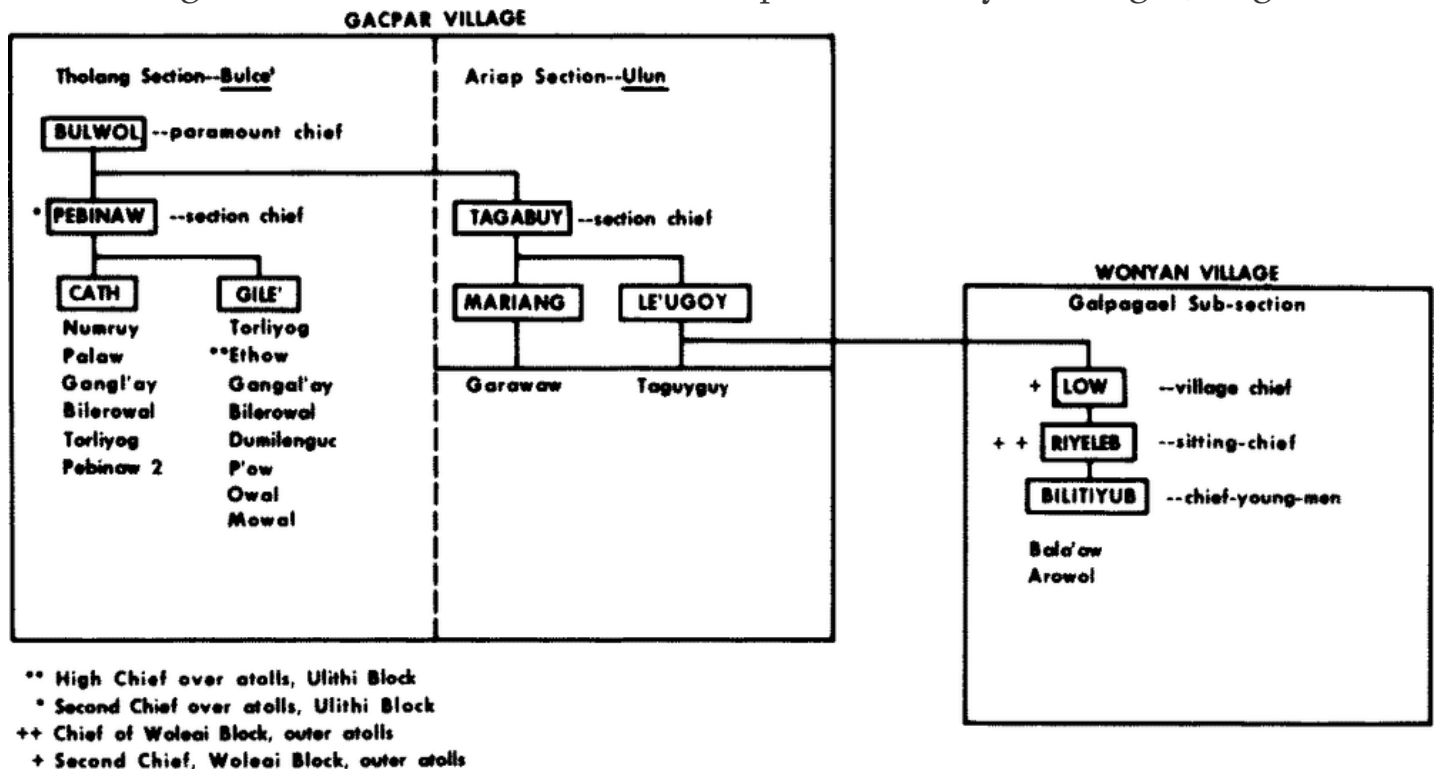
The formal characteristics of these exchange relationships are viewed by Yapese in terms of the clan estates in Yap. Particular land estates in Gacpar or Wonyan have relationships with particular land parcels in the outer atolls. The Yapese define these land segments as *tabinaw* 'estates' and the relationships between clan estates in Yap and *tabinaw* on the atolls are relationships between estates. The different systems of kinship and inheritance described by Lessa (1966) and Alkire (1965) are either unknown or ignored by the Yapese and appear to be insignificant in Yapese conceptions of the system. An individual from the atolls who comes to Yap brings gifts to and resides at the clan estate that is the overseer of his household and land in his home atoll.

To describe the formal power structure of Gacpar and Wonyan over

these outer islands, it is necessary to discuss the political statuses and authority structure of these two villages. The roles of Gacpar as one of the three paramount centers of Yap and the leader of Banpagael alliance have been described. The paramount chief of Bulwol presides over the *bulce* section called Tholang and the *ulun* section called Ariap. Each of these sections is led by a section chief and each has *tha* to Banpilung and Banpagael respectively. Tholang section, *bulce*, contains the estate of the paramount chief and the sacred places for Yangolab, the mythical chief and founder of Gagil and the first chief of the outer islands. Within Tholang section are two councils of chiefs—one called *cath*, which is responsible for decision-making, and the other called *gile*, which is responsible for collections and distributions in support of the chiefs (see [Figure 18](#)). Immediately north of Tholang is the section of Wonyan called Galpagael, within which are the estates of the high chiefs of Wonyan. The village chief in Galpagael is the overseer of northern Gagil and is immediately subordinate to the chiefs of Ariap section of Gacpar.

Authority over the outer islands does *not* follow the local authority structure of these two villages. The high chief of the outer islands is not paramount at Bulwol, nor are the section chiefs of either Tholang or Ariap; it is rather the chief of the estate Ethow, a member of the council of *gile* ‘support’ in Tholang, who holds that position. Ethow is the ancient house of Yangolab, the mythical ancestor through whom the relationship to the atolls is traced, and holds a *sowai* ‘trade’ relationship with Fasulus, Mogmog, the Yap-defined residence of the paramount chief of Ulithi. The estate Pebinaw, chief of Tholang, is second in Gacpar to Ethow with regard to the outer islands and maintains a trade relationship with the house at Falaglow, Mogmog.

Figure 18. Political Structure of Gacpar and Wonyan Villages, Gagil



In Wonyan, the chief of Rieyleb estate (who is also sitting-chief of Wonyan) is high chief over trade from the outer islands and second in rank to Ethow. The chief of Rieyleb is the chief of the atolls east of Ulithi and has direct trade relationships with the chiefs of Fais, Woleai, (Wotagay and Fananus sections, respectively), and Ifalik (Lugalop section). The chief of the estate Low, who is also village chief of Wonyan and head of the *tha'* for Banpagaal, is second to the chief of Rieyleb, and maintains trade relationships in Fais and Woleai. Other titled estates in Wonyan and Gacpar have trade relationships with particular islands or sections of islands in each atoll.

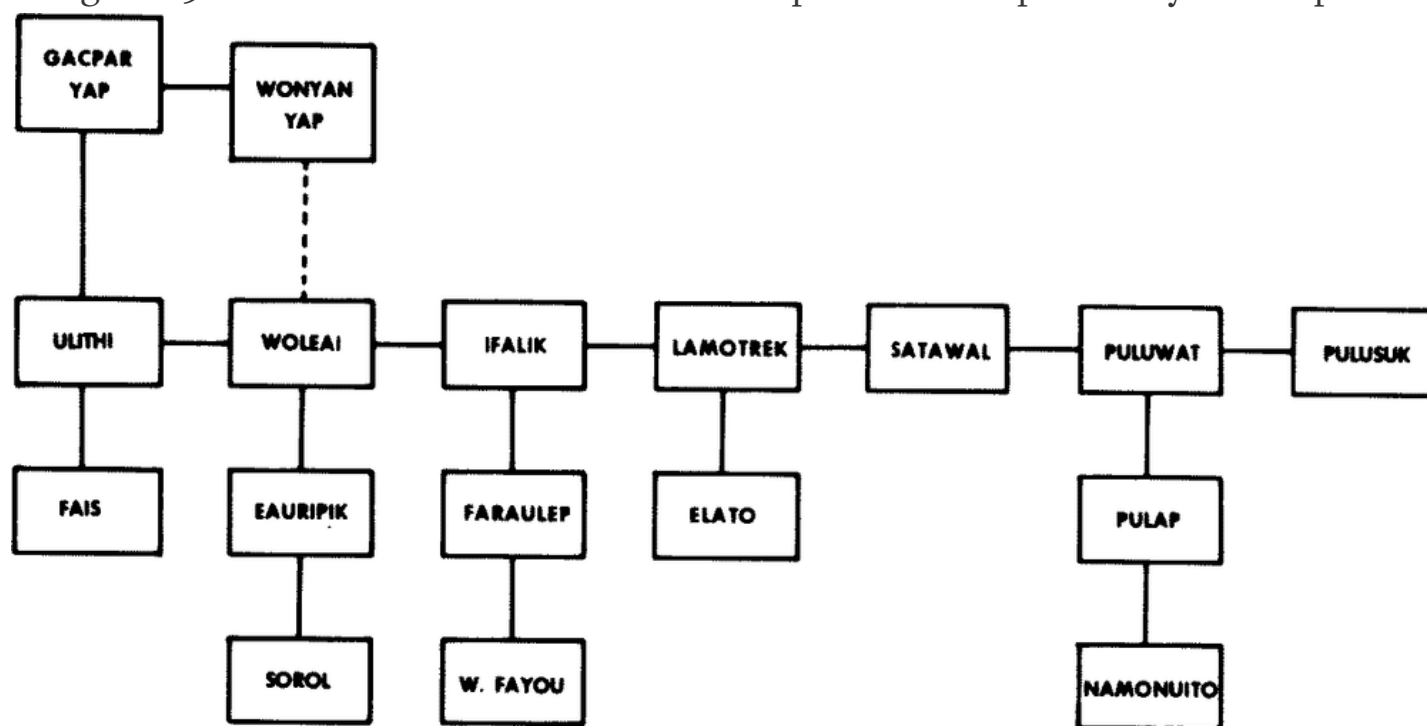
The leadership hierarchy just described for the Yapese side of the Yap/atoll relationships parallel closely that described for the outer island hierarchy as recorded by Lessa (1950, 1966:35-39). Lessa reports that Ulithian informants see the "Yap empire" as three separate blocks—Gagil district, Yap; Ulithi; and "Woleai." The term "Woleai" includes all of the related islands to the east of Ulithi, except for Fais. Ulithi is subordinate to Yap and "Woleai" to Ulithi. When the chiefs in Yap demand tribute, the demands follow a regular chain of authority very similar to the Yapese concept of *tha'*. Ulithi forms the head of the chain, and Woleai atoll is second in rank, leading the Woleai Block. All other atolls receive demands through these two leaders, and tribute is channeled back up through the chain. Lessa states that protocol is strictly observed throughout the hierarchy, from atoll chiefs to lineage heads and demands outside the regular channels are ignored (1966:38).

In comparing Lessa's description with the data above, certain parallels

become obvious. The chiefs of Ethow and Pebinaw estates in Gacpar are the Yapese chiefs over Ulithi; the chiefs of Riyeleb and Low estates in Wonyan are the Yapese chiefs over the Woleai Block. Demands from Riyeleb must pass through Ethow to Ulithi and then to Woleai Block; tribute would return through the same channels. Riyeleb cannot communicate to the Woleai Block independently, but must go through Ethow and Ulithi (see [Figure 19](#)).

The control held by Ethow and Riyeleb is seen clearly in the protocol that must be followed by canoes arriving from the east. All canoes coming to Yap must first stop in Ulithi. According to Yapese informants, navigators from islands to the east of Ulithi did not know how to come to Yap and therefore had to stop and obtain the services of an Ulithian navigator. Upon their arrival at Yap, the canoe must proceed directly to the clubhouses Faltamol and Siro', located side by side on the shoreline at the border between Gacpar and Wonyan.

Figure 19: The Chain of Tribute Relationships in the Gacpar-Wonyan "Empire"



The high chiefs from Ethow and Riyeleb are first to receive the visitors, Ethow at Faltamol, and Riyeleb at Siro'. The travelers identify themselves, make their tribute payments to the chiefs, and give prayer offerings for Yangolab. Then they request that word of their arrival be sent to their respective trading partners in the villages of Gacpar and Wonyan. Certain other titled estates in Wonyan and Gacpar hold rights to receive incoming canoes from the atolls and these chiefs bring shell money to the chiefs of Riyeleb or Ethow respectively to obtain the release of the canoes. Once this payment is made, the canoe proceeds to its assigned clan estate. The

Yapese clan estate whose trading partner has come brings shell money to the intermediate chief for the release of the partner and his cargo. The intermediate chief ordinarily is the trading partner of the chief of the canoe and the area from which he came.

All trade relationships held by other estates, whether in Gacpar or Wonyan, are subordinate to Ethow and Rieyleb on the basis of the place of origin of the trade. Trade from Ulithi passes directly through Ethow, trade from Fais and the Woleai Block passes first through Ethow, then through Rieyleb. The chiefs of Pebinaw and Low share in the distribution of tribute given to Ethow or Rieyleb respectively. The intermediate chiefs who receive the individual canoes also collect tribute and distribute it among their immediate assistants.

It may seem strange that the paramount chief of Bulwol has no trade relationship with and collects no tribute from the outer atolls. It is even more odd that while the chiefs of the *ulun* and *bulce* sections of Gacpar have important trade relationships, the ultimate authority is given to a minor titled estate in Tholang, which is not even a member of the *cath* or decision-making council. Yet, in the context of the Yapese fear of too much centralized power, the structure makes perfect sense. The high chiefs again have been forced to depend upon the members of the village councils for support. Ethow estate and several other estates rich in trade form the *gile* or council for collection and distribution in Tholang. The wealth of tribute brought from the outer islands is channeled through this council and may or may not be used in support of the paramount chief of Bulwol or the chiefs of Tholang and Ariap. This control of wealth places an effective curb on the personal power of any high chief. To obtain the wealth necessary to maintain the complex alliances with other villages in Yap, he is increasingly obligated to his subordinates in his own village. If he refuses the counsel of these subordinates, they may withdraw support and reduce his outside power.

Using the outer island tribute, the high chiefs of Gacpar were very effective in expanding their alliances through distribution of that wealth. The Banpagael alliance of which Gacpar is chief was without question the most powerful, with the most extensive network of allies. The deciding factor in the accretion of power appears to be the distribution of trade goods from the outer islands and the reciprocal obligations incurred by that distribution. Even in present-day research, informants were quick to mention that one *tha* coming to their particular estate had a part in the trade distribution from Gacpar. Furthermore, informants in Tamil tell the story of a chief who prayed earnestly that foreigners would come to Yap and bring a new trade to Tamil and Rull. It seems significant that early traders were received readily in Tamil and Rull, but with hostility in Gagil. The chiefs of Rull and Tamil welcomed new trade goods that might swing the balance of power in their favor again.

In summary, tribute relationships were a primary source of political

capital, particularly with reference to increasing support for a chief. Chiefs used collection and distribution of tribute as a trading mechanism, shifting goods from areas of plenty to areas of scarcity. In the process of this exchange, the chiefs gained and maintained political obligations and power, particularly through demonstrations of generosity and the concomitant obligations of reciprocity. Certain tribute goods such as pottery in Yap and lavalava from the outer islands were translated by chiefs into political capital, using scarce goods in distribution to increase the indebtedness of subordinate chiefs and to draw others into their orbit. Finally, the ceremonial aspects of tribute served to redefine the status and rank relationship of individuals and villages and to mark these positions and individuals with legitimacy. Legitimacy was not only formally marked, but sanctioned supernaturally through the performance of the religious ceremonies and the participation of all related villages and chiefs.

A number of questions remain regarding this outer island “empire” of Gacpar and Wonyan. How did it originate? Why did it persist over time? What impact have foreign administrators had upon it? The question of origin is a mystery, only slightly revealed in the oral traditions of the past. The myths and legends assert that the Yapese held eminent domain over the atolls and that both areas share certain common ancestors. Warfare is also reported in the legends, but the extent to which tribute is related to conquest cannot be documented.

The persistence of the relationship is more easily understood. Trade appears to be one of the primary functions of the network, and in the economic exchange between the two groups the Carolinians invariably received greater economic benefits from the exchange than the Yapese. However, the benefits for the Yapese were counted in terms of political rather than economic gains. The goods received from the outer islands, particularly lavalava and certain shells, were scarce on Yap and, because of this scarcity, of much greater value to the chiefs in Gacpar than regular Yapese tribute. Gifts of lavalava were much more valuable than coconuts, yams, or even pots, which could be acquired on Yap. Lavalava became part of the *macaf* ‘valuables’ and were presented as important gifts in marriage exchanges and other village ceremonies. The high chiefs from Gacpar were able to turn this tribute relationship into political capital to the extent of shifting the balance of power to a permanent alliance of Rull and Tamil.

Alkire argues that the relationships between the atolls and Yap, and within the atolls themselves, are more than mere trading relationships; they are a “complex of socio-economic ties” that are adaptive toward sudden alterations in the environment (1965:135–174). The nature of the atoll environment is such that periodic typhoons or epidemics might decimate social groups or devastate the meager resource base. The interatoll systems of economic exchange, through trade and tribute, personnel exchange through marriage and adoption, and alternate

methods of inheritance and land tenure are cultural responses to the environmental conditions. Alkire suggests that Yap is the ultimate source of relief for these environmental disasters, and that the same ties that unite Lamotrek, Elato, and Satawal into a single social system are the basis for the political network tying all of these atolls to Yap.

From the perspective of the Carolinians, Alkire's arguments are certainly valid. The Yapese, in contrast, are in no way dependent upon the atolls for survival. This is probably one reason why the relationships are limited to Gacpar and Wonyan. Probably through historical accident kinship ties were established between Yapese from Wonyan and Gacpar and the early settlers of the atolls. These Yapese, being the earliest inhabitants of the area, would have claimed eminent domain over the atolls, even though they may have only visited them periodically in search of turtles and other food. Intermarriage between Yapese and Carolinians was probably not uncommon until the system crystallized into its present form. The constant pressures of typhoon disasters would have kept the Carolinians in fairly regular contact with the Yapese, and yet because of the unique kinship ties, the relationship was limited to Gacpar and Wonyan. Other Yapese had absolutely nothing to do with the Carolinians. By the time the Yap political system had evolved to the form described here, the tribute-trade relationship had become an extremely valuable political asset to the leaders of Gacpar and a powerful argument for maintaining the obligations of assistance and typhoon relief.

While the coming of foreign administrations had limited impact on the atolls (Alkire 1965:163-169), the Japanese prohibition of long ocean voyages in canoes effectively stopped the flow of tribute into the administrative center of Yap. When typhoons were severe enough to require assistance from Yap, the Japanese administrators provided it.

During the postwar period, the U.S. administration (under the aegis of the U.S. Navy) tried to get all the municipalities of Yap to provide food for Carolinians who were visiting Yap for medical care, but they were not too successful. These tasks were ultimately taken over by the present civil administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Today many Carolinians come to Yap on the government field trip ship and visit their trade partners. Exchanges of food and goods are still common between partners, but the formal acts of tribute to chiefs and prayer offerings to Yangolab and the clan estate ghosts are no longer observed.

The Pimilngay Caste and Yapese Political Structure

One of the most critical distinctions in Yapese social structure is that between the landowning high-caste villages called *pilung* 'those who give the word' and the low-caste "tenant" or serf villages called *pimilngay*

‘those who run to do it’. The Yapese said such villages came into being when a beneficent chief gave parcels of land to the starving poor in return for service. The poor established households on the least productive land and formed organized villages of serfs. These villages, like the high-caste villages, are all ranked in terms of each other.

There are two major ranks in the low caste: the *milngay ni arow* ‘servants’ of the high chiefs, and the *milngay ni kan* ‘serfs’ of any member of the high caste from whom land has been obtained. The servants work for the chiefs of paramount villages of the high caste. Some sections of these villages may give service to a high chief in a nobility ranked village, but this occurs much less frequently. Servant villages enjoy some prestige over the lower-ranking members of their caste. They have much better food resources and have a much better chance to climb out of the low caste through extraordinary service to their paramount chief. They also at times may wear the comb in their hair, which is a symbol of the high caste.

The serf villages are the lowest ranking on Yap. These villages have both high-caste chiefs who are overseers of the village sections and minor high-caste overseers who are landlords and require extensive services from their low-caste tenants. These landlords may come from even the most common villages in the high caste, but may not come from a servant village. The low villages do not wear the high-caste comb and are seriously restricted as to movement and posture in the presence of high-caste people.

The terms *pimilngay*, *milngay ni arow*, and *milngay ni kan* are not used in the presence of the members of these ranks and caste. Such terms are extremely embarrassing to these people, and so the term *fak* ‘child’, connoting affection and a father/child relationship, is used instead. Furthermore, the members of the low caste rarely refer to themselves as members of such and such village. If asked where they are from, they give the municipality and avoid using the name of their low-caste village. The village designates rank and caste, and to say that one is from a village considered of low caste is again embarrassing.

Several names are applied to the serfs of lowest rank. These names have generally derogatory references and are a variation of terms used for something low and not to be respected. With regard to relative rank, *yagug* villages are likely lower than those referred to as *milngay*. However, any system to this ranking has been forgotten. The relative ranks are remembered, the relative derogation of the terms are remembered, but a placing of villages into the titles is very difficult to achieve from informants. Most high-caste Yapese consider all those of lower rank than servant as being of the same rank. The serfs, however, do differentiate among themselves and note variations in rank.

Milngay ni Arow ‘Servants’

To understand the low-caste villages, one must first consider their overlords. As stated above, the servants attend the chiefs of the highest-ranking high-caste villages. The number of chiefs varies with the number of sections in the servant village. Generally at least three or four high chiefs have authority and overlordship over the respective sections of the village. One of these high-caste chiefs will be high chief of the whole village and the local village chief will be his representative. The other high-caste chiefs will have overseership in one section only. In their respective ranks the high chiefs may call upon the local chiefs for any services due their particular estate.

The servant village is very much like a high-caste village. It is divided into sections and subsections. There are chiefs, usually three—village chief, sitting-chief, and chief-of-young-men—just as in the high-caste villages. In the particular subsections of the village, the chiefs have work leaders and section leaders, just as in the high-caste villages. The chiefs and section leaders have overseer authority over their sections and lands associated with their estates. They may collect goods from these lands as does a chief in a high-caste village. However, the collections are invariably for the high chief from the high-caste village. The servant villages also build clubhouses, men's houses, and dance grounds, and they hold large ceremonies as do the high-caste villages. They may have magicians and sacred places. Thus the servant village is generally like all other villages in the high caste, except that it has a servant relationship to an extravillage chief.

The obligations of the servant village to the high-caste chiefs are both general and specific. Specifically, they must bring first fruits of all their crops to the high chief of the respective sections of the village. This may include bananas, yams, or even taro. This marks distinctly the servant villages from the lower serf villages. Lower villages would never give food to chiefs, because their land is considered dirty and contaminated. Servants, however, have good land, which is not taboo and which may be used by the high chiefs. Other specific tasks of the village may be delineated according to the custom between the high chief's estate and the village. In a general sense, however, the high chief may call upon his servant village to assist him in any need he may have. For example, if he begins the construction of a taro patch, he may call upon the members of his servant village to participate in the work. They will be fed but otherwise not paid for their service because they are servants. These same people might be called upon to build the house of the chief, put the roof on it, build the fence around it, and so forth. In the past, they were summoned to fight for the high chief in times of war. They act as general all-around assistants to the high chief, doing his bidding in major undertakings. They do not, however, act as household servants for the chief. Other, lower-ranking serfs are called to do such work.

The high chief reciprocates the services of the servants with food and

other rewards for outstanding service. If they perform especially well in war the chief may raise their rank, keeping them an obligated village, but placing them in the high caste and giving them additional privileges and rewards. He may give tattoo rights to the warriors, fishing rights in a particular section of the sea, or even rights to some low-ranking serfs. However, general services to the high chief usually bring only food and some traditional valuables to the servant chief.

Milngay ni Kan ‘Serfs’

The serfs have two overlords, the village overlord and the estate overlord. The village overlords are high-ranking members of a high-caste village, most frequently from a village of the paramount or nobility ranks. These village overlords preside over sections of the serf village, with one of their number designated the high chief of the village. His local representative is the village chief. The other chiefs oversee village sections and have local section leaders as their representatives. An estate overlord is any clan estate from a high-caste village that owns land in a particular section of the low-caste village and has given it to a serf for use in return for his services.

The serf village is somewhat different from the high-caste villages. Many do not have men’s houses, either because they are too small, or because their chiefs do not permit them to build one, thinking them too pretentious. The high-caste chiefs have authority over all village matters in the serf village. Anything to be done on a village-wide basis is first discussed by these chiefs, and they actually conduct the affair. They are in truth *pilung* ‘those who give the word’; the local chiefs are merely representatives of the high-caste chiefs. They carry messages from them to the villages. They lead in village work projects and are responsible to the high chiefs for all village behavior. They have no power to make arrangements outside their village. For example, a *mitmit* ‘exchange’ in a low-caste village is directed by the high-caste chiefs. All the work is done by the serfs, but the chiefs make all the official arrangements. If one low-caste village wants another village to bring a dance, the local leader must request it through his high-caste chief. The chief relays the request to the high chief of the other serf village, who in turn passes it to the local people. This pattern must be followed, and to try any other way is disastrous for the local leader. One *mitmit* in Gagil was spoiled when the high chiefs of one related village refused to come. In this case, even though all the low-caste village participants were there, they could not perform because the high chiefs refused to preside. The local low-caste leader was refused the right even to plead to the high chief of the other village because he had no right to make such a plea. Only his high chief could make such a request on his behalf.

The serf village is divided into sections, with respective high-caste and local section leaders. As in a high-caste village, the high-caste chiefs must hold council for any major function of the whole serf village. Local sectional affairs, however, may be conducted by the high chiefs without consulting the other council members. High chiefs are overseers of all land and land resources. They do not take tribute from these sources, but rather collect services. Serfs are obliged to build the house of their high chief, build the fence around the house, put the roof on the house, repair it yearly, clean the yard, cut his coconuts, and perform other kinds of general services, particularly for the household. Sometimes special services are required of them, such as cleaning or putting the roof on a village community house like the men's house or clubhouse. In the latter cases, special payment is made for services above and beyond those generally required for use of the land. The overseer also may give the service of his serf to others. In such cases he may pay them for this work in food or other special gifts. The whole serf village is the *fak* 'children' of the high chiefs, and may be required to do whatever they decide in council.

The serf estate is also the child of a high-caste estate from which it receives the land for its food. Based upon the father and child relationship, the overlord/serf relationship has the same kind of reciprocity. The father gives land and food, the child gives respect, service, and obedience. Respect comes in the form of posture, places where the serfs may or may not sit in the overlord's household, separation of food resources, silence in the presence of the overlord, and general humility and obedience.

Services of the serf are well defined. The most frequent service mentioned is the preparation of thatch and repairing the roof of the house of the overlord. The second is the burial of the deceased. Both services usually are done without pay. When the roof of the overlord's house is repaired, traditionally serfs are fed and allowed to take home the leftover food. If the roof of a village building were repaired, then a whole catch of fish goes to the serf village. Repair of the house of an overlord, however, has no such requirement. If the overlord is generous, the serfs may be given a few fish. In the burial of the dead, again no payment is given. The serf may keep certain *macaf* 'valuables', such as lavalava or shell money given to the deceased. In some areas, after a period has passed, the members of the patrician of the overseer may go to pay last respects at the grave. If so, they may bring fish for the deceased, which the serfs eat.

Other services of the serfs include cleaning yard, picking coconuts, cutting betel nut, and making mats. They also may be required to work with the high-caste women in the gardens on the hilltops, or they may work alone on high-caste land, cultivating gardens for high-caste women. A man may be required to paddle or pole the canoe of his overlord on a trip. These services may be rewarded if the overlord desires, but need not

be. The garden work generally is rewarded with fish.

Finally, serfs must observe certain taboos in the high-caste village. They must walk on the paths for the ritually contaminated teenage girls. They must stop when they pass a seated high-caste man or woman and request that they stand so they may pass. They must step off the path in deference to high-caste people coming toward them. They must not go into taro patches for old men in the high-caste villages and must observe numerous taboos and respect patterns. For this behavior, they are guaranteed a relatively safe, adequate livelihood. To violate the taboos is to invite punishment and even death in the traditional culture. Punishment is administered by the patrician or their overseer, or by their high chief.