Ingiets
Stone carvings of the Tolai, New Britain, Papua New Guinea, in the McLeod Gift Collection

Welcome to McLeod Gift Collection – Volume 1

Ingiets

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Ingiets
Stone carvings of the Tolai, New Britain, Papua New Guinea, in the McLeod Gift Collection

With essays by
Harold Gallasch
JD Mittmann

Contents
Foreword 2
Mayor, Yarra Ranges Council
The Ingiets Society of the Tolai  5
– A Collector’s Story
Harold E Gallasch
Secret Ingiets 10
– Stone Carvings in the
McLeod Gift Collection
JD Mittmann
Ingiets from the 15
McLeod Gift Collection
Bibliography 76
Index 78
Acknowledgements 80
Foreword

On behalf of the Yarra Ranges Council and community it is a great pleasure to share this unique part of one of the country’s significant collections of indigenous art, the McLeod Gift Collection. This published catalogue comprises the first volume of the Collection’s works, the Ingiets.

The McLeod Gift Collection, generously gifted to Council between 2001 and 2006 through the Cultural Gifts Program by Neil McLeod and managed by Burrinja on behalf of Yarra Ranges Council, is a rare collection of Aboriginal and Pacific art. It contains over 600 objects, comprising Aboriginal art from across the country including drawings, canvas and bark paintings, and over 200 objects of Pacific art from New Ireland and New Britain in Papua New Guinea.

Among these are 90 rare Ingiet stone carvings, making this the third largest public collection of objects of this kind in the world. In 2013 Burrinja and Yarra Ranges Council had the honour of curating the first feature survey exhibition of these rare cultural objects: Secret Ingiets: mysterious stone carvings and ceremonial objects of the Tolai, Papua New Guinea. The exhibition was designed to encourage further understanding of the role these figures played in their society.

The McLeod Gift Collection is a great research and educational resource and Burrinja presents regular programs designed to illustrate cultural practice and create awareness. It is also a step to building relationships with Aboriginal and Pacific Islander communities through exhibitions, cultural programs and collection research.

This catalogue will support these endeavours and further enhance learning and understanding, academic research and study in the field.

Cr Jim Child
Mayor, Yarra Ranges Council
Victoria, Australia
Way back in time, so it is said, the Tolai of what is now the East New Britain Province of PNG, lived in scattered villages through central New Ireland, an elongate island to the North-East. There are language similarities and some comparable cultural practices with the people still living there. At some stage several canoe loads of these people made the quite hazardous crossing to the low coral islands of the Duke of York Island group.

They settled there and prospered, but volcanic mountains and the lands of the Gazelle Peninsula, always on the horizon, beckoned. A further gradual migration to the area of northern New Britain met but little resistance from the inhabitants, the Baining people. The Gunantuna (‘the people’), expanded out, opening up new country on the rich volcanic soils. This translocation invigorated the culture. The rich soils ensured bountiful gardens and the cultural and ceremonial life flourished. Elaborate ceremonies were undertaken for important life events, such as marriage and death. But in addition to these ceremonies in which all the villagers participated, the Tolai embraced two men’s societies. There was the Tubuan society into which most boys were initiated when they reached their early teens. This involved sponsorship of a boy by an uncle or other senior relative, a period of isolation, learning and training. It culminated in initiation into adult society, participation in the Tubuan (Duk Duk) dance and other men’s affairs. The final dances, accompanied by feasting for the whole village and invited guests, usually...
The Ingiet Society of the Tolai – A Collector’s Story

occurred around October of each year.

Then there was the secret Ingiet society. The term ‘Ingiet’ conjures up long-held beliefs in Tolai society of forces which can be used for good, but also evil. While it was said that the Ingiet operated for both good and bad, it is undoubtedly the evil that the Ingiet society is remembered for, the fear of sorcery and spirits.

The Ingiet society was often called upon to exact vengeance or retribution. If someone was a thief, that person would be fearful that the victim would approach the Ingiet to exact revenge. Furthermore, members were not tardy in using extortion to accumulate shell money or pigs for themselves. The tена ингет, the powerful sorcerer, considered himself above the law and his power exerted a controlling influence over society.

Once a commission was taken out against a person, the тена ингет would choose a block of limestone or pumice and start to carve an Ingiet figure. If the intention was that the victim was to die at sea, the stone figure would be representative of a shark. Sometimes the figure would be of a full-breasted woman. The intended victim would likely be seduced by an attractive woman and during coitus be poisoned by the spirit woman. Whatever figure was carved, it would be representative of the way the victim would die.

Then the тена ингет would prepare the portents, charms and кумбунг (powdered lime). With the time carefully chosen, he would start the incantations, sprinkle portents over the stone figure and himself and finally go into a trance, as he lay beside the Ingiet figure. It is at this stage, so it is told, that the spirit of the тена ингет entered into the stone figure, and it became alive. If the carving was a shark, it entered the ocean to wait and prey on the selected victim, if it was a woman, she went to where the victim lived to seduce and poison him.

With the ‘mission’ complete the life force within the stone again returned to the тена ингет. The carved stone figure was secreted in some hiding place, a small cave or cranny within the limestone cliffs or between the flange roots of some large jungle tree.

Sometimes the figures were used in a more direct fashion. After they had been ‘brought to life’ they were put in a position to view the house of the victim. Many village houses often had small hedges of тангкет plants (Cordyline sp.) growing around them. A carving could be stood amongst these bushes facing the door of the house. Life for the owner would go on as normal until, one day, he may per chance view the ominous, brooding figure looking at him from amidst the leaves of the hedge. It was to all intents a death sentence. The person would stop eating, pine away, get sick and waste to death.

As an Agronomist, I lived on the Gazelle Peninsula for 12 years during the mid-1960s until the late 1970s. On weekends I spent time visiting either Tolai settlements or some of the accessible Baining villages in the mountains. I had read about the Ingiet society but had never seen any carvings until one day I met a local old man, whose name I learnt was Tobata. He related that he had found a stone figure in his new garden, on the crest of the Reimbar Range. The carving was the first of many I was to see in the following years. Tobata then introduced me to other people who worked in the same area and had also found ‘stones’.

In the ‘old days’ the Ingiet society had gathered at their маравут sites, hidden in the thick jungle of the mountains, where they practised their ceremonies and carved their ‘stones’. When the German Empire annexed the Gazelle Peninsula as a colony, the Ingiet society was outlawed because of its terror related activities. The маравут sites were abandoned, became overgrown and forgotten.

Australia occupied the area in WWI and administered it until the Japanese invasion of WWII. After the Japanese occupying force had surrendered in 1945, the Tolai population grew rapidly. It led to an inexorable demand for more land to plant food gardens. For the first time ever, the Tolai were moving into less accessible areas, and as they dug the ground after felling the forest, they sometimes alighted on one of the ancient маравут places.

Occasionally a spade would strike
one of the carved Ingiet stones below the surface. At times the stone figures were found hidden in small caves or crevasses amongst the rugged limestone, just as they had been hidden many decades earlier. On several occasions I myself found the carved figures amongst the large flange roots of the giant Taun or Walnut trees.

When Ingiet stones were discovered by the old villagers, they would leave them untouched, concerned that they held power. In such cases the equivalent of a ‘medicine man’ would be brought in to spread kumbung over the stones and say prayers to remove any residual power that may be present.

A small group of Tolai made use of the situation. Several men had located deposits of suitable limestone. They practised and perfected the art of carving Ingiet figures. Before long some of these newer versions of Ingiet carvings were being offered to me.

During the 1970s relatively few people carved Ingiet stones. Those who did had a specific interest in the society and had all spent time in the mountains, exploring, digging and searching the old sites of the Ingiet. In addition, they were in their mid-twenties, far enough removed by age from experiencing the fear that the Ingiet had instilled in former generations of Tolai society. They realised that strangers to their area had an interest in their old culture and before long they were reviving aspects of a culture long lost.
Secret Ingiets – Stone Carvings in the McLeod Gift Collection
JD Mittmann Visual Arts Manager, Burrinja

The McLeod Gift Collection contains a unique and rare collection of stone carvings from New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea. The objects are attributed to a secret men’s society among the Tolai on the North-East coast of Gazelle Peninsula in the Bismarck Sea, the Ingiatan (also Iniat, Iniet, Ingiat). 1

The archipelago was first mapped by the Spanish and Dutch navigators as early as the 16th century but not settled by Europeans until the end of the 19th century. Individual entrepreneurs such as ‘Queen Emma’ and the Hamburg trading company, JC Godeffroy, were the first to establish plantations and trading posts in the region. Missionaries followed soon after.

In 1884 Nova Britannia is claimed by the German Empire and renamed Neu-Pommern. The German colony, first in the hands of a government-sponsored trading company, then under supervision of administration in Berlin, acts primarily in support of commercial interests by pacifying the tribes of the region, relocating local population, establishing infrastructure and recruiting labour for plantation work.

The arrival of Christianity has a profound impact on the Tolai people. Rumours of black magic, sorcery, extortion, killings and sodomy particularly associated with the secret men’s society, the Ingiatan, bring the society into disrepute. On the urging of the Christian missionaries, Governor Dr Albert Hahl outlaws the suspicious society, first along the coast in 1902. When news of a murder plot against German settlers arise in 1905, the German administration finally bans the Ingiatan outright.

Rumours of the cult’s existence persist up to the mid-1970s. 2 Little evidence supports these claims. More likely, the myth about the power of the Ingiatan continued, and was at times used to explain unusual phenomena and disappearances, such as during the early period of PNG’s independence. 3

Who was the Ingiatan society? What was its purpose? And what role did the mysterious stone carvings play?

August Kleintitschen, a missionary, reported in 1906 that the name Ingiatan itself symbolised “a good demon”, which took on the form of a sea eagle (haliaeetus leucogaster). 4 But while the influence of this secret society is not disputed, opinions on its purpose vary.

The ethnologist Hubert Kroll summarised: “The Ingiatan is a secret society established by men whose members are introduced into religious customs, instructed in the communication with these religious idols, and the beneficial manipulation of those by sorcery. The idols are non-animistic in character. The idols are identical with stone-made cult figures which are at the centre of the society’s activities.” 5

The earlier missionaries, Pater Joseph Meier and August Kleintitschen, as well as the collector Richard Parkinson, wrote extensively about the cult’s ritual and practices, based on knowledge they gathered from local informants. The stone carvings are attributed a central role in the society. However, their precise role and function remain unclear.

The anthropologist Gerd Koch concluded in 1982 that the stone figures were a means to access the power of the dead. “Content, not meaning of the sculpture, was important, not its state” as an art object. 6

Each novice is said to have carved or was given a “stone” from an especially skilled member, who received the

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1 Various spellings are common: See Hubert Kroll: Der Iniet. Das Wesen eines melanesischen Geheimbundes, p. 180.
4 Hubert Kroll, p. 181.
5 Hubert Kroll, p. 219.
6 Translation by Marion Melk-Koch, in: Marion Melk-Koch: Melanesian Art or just Stones and Junk: Richard Thurnwald and the Question of Art in Melanesia, Pacific Arts 2000.
inspirations for the carving from an important spirit, the *tutanavurakit*. The carvings were the property of the Ingiet society and hidden in a house, *maravot na varvaivai*, at the secret ceremonial ground in the depth of the jungle.

Stones were distinguished between those which held no powers and those powerful stones which were used by the Ingiet sorcerer, *tena ingiet*, and other members in the cult for evil magic. Decades later, finds of discarded stones still infused fear and suspicion.

The McLeod Gift Collection contains 90 Ingiet objects, of which some are fragmented and awaiting restoration. Some show signs of restoration in the past. The majority are intact and can be classified as anthropomorphic sculptures, depicting male and some female figures. Zoomorphic figures include birds, kangaroo, turtle, fish and eagle. A small number of fixed forms are represented in the collection too.

The carvings are made from various materials: predominantly from limestone, but also sandstone, volcanic ash and coral, indicating different locations of production. But as Meier pointed out, historically the stones were also traded among the Tolai and consequently distributed to different regions. In many cases the location of their collection might not be the place of production.

The smallest collection item is 10 cm high, the largest 60 cm. Most objects appear to be modern reproductions of earlier versions. They have distinct characteristics and display considerable carving skill. Most carvings in the McLeod Gift Collection have been dated ‘mid-20th century’. A dozen carvings are dated from the ‘early 20th century’ and four objects ‘(late) 19th century’.

The Ingiet figures were donated by wildlife photographer, collector and Dandenong Ranges resident Neil McLeod to the Shire of Yarra Ranges as part of a generous donation of Australian Aboriginal art and ceremonial objects from New Ireland and New Britain in 2001. Neil had fallen in love with the region’s people, customs and costumes on his first trip to the Sepik River region in the early 1980s.

Subsequent trips with Harold Gallasch, who worked in PNG for 17 years from 1962, led to intensive collecting and commissioning of local artists to produce masks and carvings. To this day Neil McLeod and Harold Gallasch are regular visitors to PNG and maintain close relationships with some of the artists, master carvers and their families.

With 90 Ingiet stone carvings, the McLeod Gift Collection appears to be the third largest public collection in the world, at the same time, the youngest.

8 Gerd Koch: Iniet – Geister in Stein, Berlin 1982. These were amongst several thousand items he collected on commission on two expeditions and which were eventually distributed to the museum in Berlin and in smaller numbers to other museums in Germany.

The Anthropology Museum of the University of Queensland in Brisbane has 339 Ingiet, also published in a brief catalogue in 1982. The collection was acquired by the museum in 1981 from E.A. Tull, who collected it over a period from 1958–68, with some acquired from private collectors.

Stylistically, the carvings of the McLeod Gift Collection are visibly different from the objects in these collections, but some show striking similarities. This would indicate an ‘evolution’ of carving skills. Long after the Ingiet society ceased to exist, ‘modern’ versions were modelled along old examples. Possibly encouraged by the demand of Western collectors and influenced by Western aesthetics, these are encouraging expressions of a renaissance of interest in ancient cultural practices.

Ingiets from the McLeod Gift Collection
The material from which the carvings were made was simply called a vat (stone). Differences were made in regard to soft and hard materials, limestone, coral and tuff. Softer material weathered and eroded quickly due to the tropical climate.
Limestone was carved wet using the *hippopus maculatus* shell. More recent carvings were ‘pecked’, and then rubbed with soil and plant sap to create an older, eroded appearance.
The figures evolved from being carved out of a block to ‘framed’ figures. Later the frame was lost. ‘Stands’ appear to be a modern addition. ‘Handheld’ figures without a frame or a stand were common, too.
Traditionally, Ingiet carvings were decorated with paint, using charcoal, red ochre, yellow from fibres of the mango tree and green from the leaves of the *dracaena* shrub.
These female Ingiet carvings show a *bilum* netbag which was carried slung over the head.
Human-animal figures were common, like these mermaid-dugongs. Red ochre has been used to paint these carvings.
Mimingulai, the sea eagle was the symbol of the secret Ingiet society.
The garamut drum as shown here is an important instrument of Tolai ceremonies. Carved from a tree trunk and hollowed out, its deep sound can be heard over vast distances.
This unusual male-female figure makes a reference to the familiar conical mask of the *Duk Duk* ceremony.
Each novice of the Ingiet society carved a figure or had one carved in exchange for tambu, shell money. Each one is unique, with its own expression and ‘personality’.
The McLeod Gift Collection includes 90 Ingiet objects. Some are fragmented, some await restoration. A few show signs of restoration in the past. The majority are intact and smooth.
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Sonderheft zum 75. Geburtstag von Gerd Koch
Berlin, 1997

B0022
Catalogue index

cover page
B0058 19th century
Raulawat (CGP)
Limestone
page 3

B0036 Early 20th century
Reimbar Range,
CGP
Limestone

page 10
B0033 Mid-20th century
Ratongor, CGP
Limestone

page 14
B0055 Mid-20th century
Vunadawai, CGP
Limestone

page 16 left
B0079 19th century
Reimbar Range,
CGP
Limestone

page 17
B0080 19th century
Marawat, CGP
Limestone

page 21 left
B0031 19th century
Tinganagalip,
CGP
Limestone

page 23
B0039 Mid-20th century
Reimbar Range,
CGP
Limestone

page 37 left
B0059 date unknown
Reimbar Range,
CGP
Limestone

page 43
B0044 Early 20th century
Tinginakavoro,
CGP
Limestone

page 45
B0036 19th century
Raulawat, CGP
Limestone

page 47
B0041 Mid-20th century
Reimbar Range,
CGP
Limestone

page 51
B0054 Mid-20th century
Ratongor, CGP
Limestone

page 53
B0042 Mid-20th century
Reimbar Range,
CGP
Limestone

page 55
B0057 Mid-20th century
Ratongor, CGP
Limestone

INDEX KEY
dimensions in cm [h] x [w] x [d]
CGP = Coastal
Gazelle Peninsula

B0061
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Ingiets

Stone carvings of the Tolai, New Britain, Papua New Guinea, in the McLeod Gift Collection

The Ingiet, a secret men's society among the Tolai of East New Britain, is commonly associated with sorcery and black magic, practices which led to its ban and subsequent rapid demise under German rule pre-WWI. At the centre of the society were the Ingiet, unusual anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figures carved from limestone and volcanic ash. Much speculation has surrounded these sculptures, their purpose within the society and their role in relation to sorcery.

The McLeod Gift Collection, a unique collection of over 600 objects including Aboriginal art from across Australia and Pacific art from New Ireland and New Britain in Papua New Guinea, includes 90 Ingiet objects, the third largest public collection of Ingiets in the world. McLeod Gift Collection Volume 1 – Ingiets – catalogues the entire collection for the first time with two informative essays.

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