

# **The death ritual of the To Wiau**

by  
Michiel Johannes Gouweloos

translated by  
Nico Hoek  
and  
Margaret Osinga

edited by  
David Mead

2020

**Sulang Language Data and Working Papers:  
Translations from the Dutch, no. 22**



Sulawesi Language Alliance  
<http://sulang.org/>

## LANGUAGES

Subject language : Tolaki  
Language of materials : English

## DESCRIPTION

This article documents the traditional funerary practices of the To Wiau, a small people group of interior southeastern Sulawesi, Indonesia, from when a person died until the final internment of their remains in the Alo-alo mortuary cave. The trip to the cave and the elaborate festivities that preceded it took place only once every few years and were a major celebration in the collective life of the To Wiau.

## SOURCE

Gouweloos, M. J. 1937. Het doodenritueel bij de To Wiaoe. *Tijdschrift voor Zendingwetenschap "Mededeelingen"* 81:19–46. Original pagination is indicated by including the page number in square brackets, e.g. [p. 19].

## VERSION HISTORY

Version 1 [17 August 2020] Translated 1994; prepared for online publication April and August 2020.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This translation was facilitated by Wycliffe Associates UK.

Copyright 1994–2020 MissionAssist (formerly Wycliffe Associates UK)  
All Rights Reserved

## **The death ritual of the To Wiau <sup>1</sup>**

by  
M. J. Gouweloos

The southeastern peninsula of Celebes is populated by various tribes who were more or less living in friendly relationship with each other before the arrival of the Government in 1905. A dividing line could be drawn between the strong, brave tribes and the smaller ones, who could not offer resistance to incursions of the former.

These incursions took place principally when a tribe needed one or more skulls for their own death ritual. Of course skulls are not taken from one's own tribe, for more than one reason. It is understandable that such a relationship between tribes was not very conducive to borrowing customs from each other or mutually influencing each other. The result was that a certain leveling process—such as we have seen on more than one occasion between peoples with reciprocal associations—did not occur here.

Of all the tribes living here, the To Laki may be considered the most courageous. It is supposed they came from elsewhere and broke into the region like a wedge. If this is correct, it is understandable that the landscape on the east coast is called Laiwui, even though there are virtually no To Laiwui here. The To Laiwui were pushed forward by the blunt force of this wedge, and the other tribes were separated from each other. The To Laiwui tribe can be found only at the source and upper course of the Konawehea River. In this same area you can also find the tribe of the To Wiau. Actually the To Wiau live on the upper course of another river which lies at about a day's walk away, but there is large agreement in circumstances and everything else. [p. 20]

It is known from elsewhere that foreign tribes invaded a country but could occupy it only after fighting. The people were conquered, remained in their own territory, and eventually intermingled with the invaders.

It is clear that the To Laiwui were not a brave people, because they did not go back to the headhunting tribes to take revenge or to collect skulls for themselves. That they did not hunt heads themselves need not be evidence of lack of courage, since traditionally this custom did not exist among them, according to my informant. The To Wiau, however, still went headhunting in the coastal regions of Kolaka and Malili, so that in terms of bravery they stood a step higher than the To Laiwui.

---

<sup>1</sup> [editor's note: Pages 19 through 32 were translated by Nico Hoek, page 33 onward by Margaret Osinga. I would like to thank Gweno Hugh-Jones for her helpful comments on a previous version of this translation.]

We thus find at the source areas of the rivers small tribes each with a more or less distinct language, and all different from the Laki language, which has the greatest number of speakers in southeastern Celebes, namely around 100,000.

Of these tribes, it is the tribe of the To Wiau about which I want to say a few things, and in particular about their death ritual. The reason for this is that until a shorter or longer time ago, a similar course of action after someone's death was still customary elsewhere in southeastern Celebes. However this custom has been abandoned through contact with Islam. This progressive form of religion is slowly but surely trying to enforce the burial of the dead everywhere, as opposed to the internment in caves that we now want to talk about.

Internment in caves was also customary, or still is, in other parts of the archipelago, but it is very likely that there are local differences. It would be interesting to investigate these differences, which could be ascertained only by comparing the different methods. This is one of the reasons why the following is communicated below. From what can be observed about the Sa'dan Toraja, their traditions are different from those of the To Wiau. Differences can even be observed when comparing to the To Lamoare, who live two days away from Wiau. [p. 21]

Here follows as complete a description as possible.

If after a short or long illness people begin to observe symptoms in a patient indicating his end is approaching, a separate hut is built in the vicinity of the home. In this hut he will have to spend his last hours or days, with the same good or bad level of care as in his real house. His relatives are waiting to see if he will recover or expire. Indeed if the end comes, as soon those present observe that death has set in, the death wail commences, as is also the custom in other parts. After this the corpse is washed, after which the bowl used for washing is smashed into pieces. This bowl is intended for the dead in the other world, and thus is called *tinasi*. We will come across many things that are indicated by this name.

Next the corpse is fully dressed, namely in trousers, jacket, and headcloth, and laid on a mattress just as though he were still alive. A curtain is placed around the corpse and people keep watch through the night, awake or asleep however one pleases.

The next day is spent making a coffin, called *o maai*. To this end a tree trunk is hollowed out, in which a floor is laid around 10 to 15 centimeters above the bottom. A suitable lid is prepared, and *baru*, sago leaf stems, bamboo pegs, and rattan are collected. To discuss these things in more detail, we must start with the coffin with the loose floor. It is made that way so that the decaying corpse, which rests on that floor in the coffin, is not constantly bathed in purging fluids but lies above them. The *baru* is spongy material scraped from under the bark of certain trees; it is used for caulking boats, as tinder for the tinder box, and finally also for hermetically sealing the coffin. To this end it is placed in the seam between lid and chest, after which a sago leaf stem is laid over this seam and fastened with two rows of bamboo pegs: one row is nailed into the lid, the other row into

the coffin itself. These pegs are at most [p. 22] 10 centimeters long and can best be compared to common nails of the same length. Once the coffin has been sealed in this way, as insurance three rattan cords are looped around the coffin and firmly tightened; moreover these bands are made extra taut with wedges driven between the rattan and the coffin.

In this way they get an absolutely airtight seal, as we verified ourselves from a coffin in which a dead person had been laid to rest two weeks previously. No smell of decomposition was noticeable, nor were there any flies.

The time needed for these preparations can be short, because everybody is helping and relatives living far away are notified as soon as possible. Moreover, close relatives are already gathering once it is obvious that the end is near, so that quite a few are already there to have everything ready immediately the day after death. Living close to nature, people know each tree and have already selected the tree to be cut down for when someone dies.

As soon as the expected family has arrived, the dressed corpse is covered in blankets made of undyed bark cloth. Woven material can also be used on this occasion but is the exception. The number of sheets used for wrapping the corpse depends on the wealth of the dead person or his next of kin. The bundle made up in this way is tied with three bands, namely one around the neck, one around the waist, and one around the feet. When the corpse is laid in the coffin, these three bands may not be untied, as is usual with the Muslims. Laying the body in the coffin is accompanied by more death wailing, also a buffalo or chicken is slaughtered. This sacrifice has the special name *kumotu mbenao*, 'the severing of breath.' Here again we find analogy with the dead person himself, the same as with the above-mentioned smashed bowl. There it was *tesaaito dowono*, *tesaaito parewano*: 'he himself is given over to decay; his belongings follow the same way'; here it is: 'his breath was broken off, this buffalo also suffers the same fate.' All this is accompanied by beating on the gong: . . . . so that "the [p. 23] ears of the dead may be opened, and he hears how we are weeping over him and caring for him."

After the dead person has been laid in the coffin and the coffin has been closed in the manner described above, the coffin is carried to the *pasara*. The *pasara* looks like a small house and is built in the forest at a greater or lesser distance from the village. The distance may vary between a few hundred meters to a few kilometers. The *pasara* is built with its floor roughly two meters off the ground and supplied with walls and a roof of thatch. Here the coffin is temporarily placed, and covered with fabric or a sheet of bark cloth. Some utensils for the dead are placed there, for example for a man his betel bag and machete, and here the corpse remains for the time being. Sometimes it takes several years, from two to five years, before they are removed again, which is why not just any wood can be used to make the coffin as well as the *pasara*. Upon departure from the death house and upon arrival at the *pasara* the women fill the air with their death wailing. This is not surprising, since the death ritual of To Wiau is richly interlaced with this occupation.

After returning home and resuming daily activities, this does not mean that one is now finished with the dead. Quite the contrary, the spirit of the dead still hovers about the earth and it is obvious that he does so in his familiar surroundings, his house, his garden, etc. This spirit is also to be taken care of, among other things by feeding him. For this people have a small rice pot, and at each meal time they cook a portion for him and put it on a small plate. He probably wants betel-nut and the next of kin have to take care of this. At the next meal the plate is emptied and refilled. Although to the eye it looks untouched, you can be sure that its essence was enjoyed by the soul of the dead.

This providing of food can have two meanings or rather two motives, namely either people loved the dead person so much that they still want to do good to him as much as possible; or people are afraid of the power of the dead spirit and want to keep him as a friend. The latter is of great importance [p. 24] because a successful rice harvest hangs on their consent, while they often have the power to make someone sick. They may not be seen, but those who know say they can be very close to you, separated from you by no more than the thickness of a betel leaf. People prefer to remain good friends with such individuals.

I believe that this last motive, the fear of the dead spirit, is the foremost reason. This emerges in my opinion from the fact that these regulations are not followed in the case of stillborn infants or children who die young. In these cases the child is placed in a small coffin the day after death and placed somewhere under an overhanging rock.

Very close relatives such as wife, husband, sister, and brother are subject to certain prohibitions at this time, while the women also wear outward signs of mourning. This is called *melawoni*. If the husband dies, the wife puts a black band around her head and wears a black jacket and a black sarong. If a close relative of hers has died, she can suffice with wearing a bracelet made of black fabric rolled together. In all these cases, however, there are also food regulations. She is not allowed to eat rice and has to feed herself with sago, yams, and the like.

This prohibition period lasts for a certain time. Formerly it ceased when it was satisfied by bringing back one or more skulls from the Gulf of Bone. Nowadays it happens after returning from the cave where the dead are laid to rest. The other possibility is with marriage. This act, however, requires an extra buffalo to be slaughtered.

A less intense state of prohibition occurs at the death of someone other than husband or wife. This state can also be lifted by marriage, but also by illness. Experts know how to determine whether or not the lifting of the prohibition period is permitted or required.

The coffins cum bodily remains are left in the *pasara* for several years, because it takes considerable time to make all the preparations for the great festival of internment. The advantage in this delay is that all the flesh will have decayed and [p. 25] only clean bones remain with the fabric. It is also possible to communicate back and forth with relatives in other regions to arrange an acceptable date for the great festival to begin and what each should contribute to make it all a success.

Once it has been decided when the second, biggest part of death ritual will begin, then a great festival building is built, called *warungga*. In this house are gathered the dead who will shortly be brought to the cave together. Previously each coffin had been placed outside in a *pasara*, now the dead are gathered next to each other in one and the same house on one platform. There is nothing particular about the house, other than its large size and that there is a ramp rather than the usual staircase. It is, as it were, like a gangway with a width of about two meters. This is necessary for carrying the coffins, the corpses in and out and for a dancing procession, about which more presently. Otherwise neither inside nor outside is there anything special to note about the house that could indicate a particular purpose, other than accommodating many people.

When the day has arrived for skeletons to be brought into the festival house, people set out for the *pasara* with a stretcher, a large sheet of bark cloth, a mat, and a couple lengths of rattan. The coffin is opened and one of the men, the *mbururu* (the collector)<sup>2</sup> stands next to it with his sheet of bark cloth. Tucked into the back of his belt or waistband is an old axe, a piece of machete or other tool, but in any case of forged iron as protection. He carries iron only on this occasion, that is, when collecting bones. This work is not a permanent position for him, for anyone who dares may do it too.

Looking in the coffin, the bones are still wrapped in the fabric or bark cloth. If only a few layers or poor quality material were used, this has decomposed and the bones are lying loose. Whether or not everything is found correctly packed together, the following method is used. Someone takes the sheet of bark cloth and slides it, like [p. 26] a draw sheet, under the bones, which lie together on the aforementioned floor. If it is possible to grab an edge of the cloth on the other side of the skeleton, he takes and pulls the cloth under it. The small floor is not included, because the cloth lies on top of it. Everything else is simply packed together, e.g. remnants of clothing and ornaments, e.g. bracelets. Once everything is on it, the cloth *pohoko* or *poruru wuku* is folded closed just as was done when the corpse was originally prepared and further tied with three bands of rattan. All this is packed in the mat that was brought with them, and tied up in the same way, after which it is placed on the stretcher. The coffin is closed again and remains in the *pasara*.

If women have gone along, they will have already shed a great many tears, but the death wail reaches its peak when the group arrives at the *warungga*, where all the women present weep as loudly as possible. The stretcher remains below until the dead has been fed (see above). Once this *mowinda* has taken place, the bundle of bones is taken off the stretcher and brought into the house. There it is deposited on a mat, covered with cloth and a screen hung around it. The stretcher is thrown away. In all these activities the tears flow abundantly.

The skeleton, the bones of which have more or less remained in the right position, remains on the mat on the floor for one night, after which a buffalo is slaughtered the next

---

<sup>2</sup> [editor's note: Shortening of *ombu* 'lord, master' plus *ruru* 'pick up, collect, harvest.']

morning for those present. The men, who are not involved in the preparation of the buffalo meat, now go to get material for the *ndasa*, the platform on which the skeletons will be laid. This platform for the dead is made about 20 to 30 centimeters above floor level with a dimension of two by five meters. This framework is built in the middle of the *warungga* and supplied with a bamboo floor. If we divide the surface of this stage into thirds in our mind, the first two thirds remain open. Here one can sit and later the great death [p. 27] coffins are placed. The last third serves as the actual death platform. At the four corner points of this last third, posts are erected to which is attached a shelf about 1.80 meters above the level of the platform. From the cross slats are hung a couple of pieces of leaf sheath of the sago palm, which depict a funnel through which purging fluids flow. These funnels are extended with a bamboo in order to reach to the ground below the house. Here a small pit is dug about 15 centimeters deep, in which sits a *dula pelangge*, i.e. a wooden basin which is so carved that there is a ring around the foot. In this basin there is a bowl into which the bamboo empties.

When I asked about the meaning of this, people couldn't say. It was customary and nothing else. This whole device is not set up for the above purpose, since there is not even a drop of moisture in the bone-dry skeletons.

From elsewhere I know that nobles who had died were placed in a coffin in the house. At the bottom of the coffin an opening was made, into which was fitted a bamboo that terminated below in a jar placed in the ground. This gathered the bodily fluids. Whether this practice of the To Wiau is a relic of an earlier custom people could not tell me, even less whether it was all done only in imitation of other regions.

Now the moment has come for the corpse or rather corpses to be placed on the platform. Near the platform sits a woman, who is not allowed to eat or chew betel all day. She chews only on the pith of the areca palm, while in each hand she has a small fan. The one in her right hand she swings to the left, and the one in her left hand to the right. Some men line up to take the bundle of bones, while another man sits ready on a separate mat at the drum (*kanda*), holding in one hand a young chicken. When everyone is ready, the drummer hits the chicken's head four times on the drum, after which he continues with his drumsticks. People raise a deafening yell and cry, during which the men lay the bundles on the raised shelf. Drumming [p. 28] while the skeletons are brought up (*mbone*) is called *mekanda mbone'ako*, literally 'upwards drumming.' During this performance the chicken dies and is thrown away, being too small to be prepared. After this part of the ceremony, the mat on which the drummer sat becomes his property.

The shelf is now overhung with a large sheet of bark cloth, around which woven material is hung as a curtain. While people are doing this, others devote themselves to the interests of the dead by hanging for them betel-nut bags with fixings, sometimes with other small useful implements such as an awl, a small whetstone, and other things that people carry with them. On the ground plates are set out to feed the spirits, just as they've been doing for so long.



Those who don't have a job to do are setting up to sing. They begin with the form of singing called *monani*, according to preference with or without dancing. After *monani* comes the form of singing called *mosusua*. For two more days this festival is celebrated by those present, who are only a portion of all the family members who will soon appear for the conclusion. The conclusion can take place only after many more preparations, including pestling rice, chipping sago, catching or buying buffaloes, preparing rice wine, etc., etc. Below it will become more apparent what all is necessary to bring everything to a successful conclusion. As mentioned above, we encounter many things that are *tinasi* (consecrated to the dead). This applies to objects as well as all the food and drink enjoyed during the party. In general across southeastern Sulawesi, these kinds of parties are lavish affairs, but here it was superabundant like I hadn't seen anywhere else. All these preparations take quite a bit of time, like preparing the aforementioned rice wine, catching buffaloes, etc.

Now I would like to talk about the *tinasi* objects.

The dead are sent off to the cave with a complete set of bark cloth clothing. Some people even give the dead more than one set. Such a set consists of a headscarf, jacket, sarong, and betel bag. This bark cloth (*kinawo*) is made from a tree that is specially planted for this purpose. For the use of the living one can use any *kawoo* tree, that is, a tree the bark of which is suitable for [p. 29] processing into bark cloth. For these *tinasi* garments, however, if people are in a position to do so, they take bark from the cultivated tree species, which is called *kawoo pinaho*. It is planted in the rice gardens. People keep it weeded and cleared around the base and pull off each small branch so that the leaves grow directly on the trunk, which grows straight up like a candle. Pounding the bark into cloth and making clothing out of it takes a lot of time. Usually these garments are decorated with figures. People also plait conical hats to send along with the dead, and make various weapons or tools from wood. These are the sword,<sup>3</sup> the machete, and the lance, while people also send along a regular shield. Then there is the collecting of the *umera* leaves,<sup>4</sup> which will soon serve as plates, as well as the preparation of bamboo cups, since no glasses are provided.

Another job, which takes no short time, is the making of the coffin by the *uranggi*, the coffin makers. The wood must be of suitable quality, as the coffin will be kept for a number of years under the overhanging rocks where it will soon be added. The coffin is supplied with various figures and all kinds of carved artwork, while these days the coffin is partly colored. Like the first coffin in which the corpse was put in the *pasara*, this coffin is made from one piece of wood but has been shaped better. The first coffin, *o maai*, was very simple; it had on top something of a cockscomb decoration, while the ends were simply rounded and unpainted. The second coffin, the *kasu mbo'isoa* (literally 'the wood which serves as a sleeping place'), is beautifully carved with notches and

---

<sup>3</sup> [editor's note: Dutch *snelzwaard* literally 'quick sword.']

<sup>4</sup> [editor's note: *Macaranga celebica*.]

round holes made as with a drill. At both ends is a primitive animal head on a neck, underneath of which, like the dewlap of a cow, the wood is carved so that it represents a hanging swarm of bees.<sup>5</sup> Dots made with mineral lime evoke the idea of an assemblage (in this case bees).

Besides the coffin people also make six copies of a kind of detachable decoration in the shape of a fanciful horn. Once in the cave these horns will be attached permanently. Prior to that in the house itself they serve for a day as provisional decorations. The fact that these decorative boards (*patokoi*) are made separate from the coffin [p. 30] has the great advantage that it makes it easier to finish the coffin along with its decorations; moreover these extensions do not run the danger of being broken off if later the coffin were to suffer a mishap.

People also take a few stalks of areca fruits and hang these from the rafters inside the house at a height of several meters, and further the requisite loose specimens hang next to them in an old basket.

Around the *warungga* shelters are now built to accommodate the overflow of people attending the festivities. A (covered) platform is erected on which the buffalo meat will soon be made ready for cooking. This platform is necessary given the large number of dogs that are around.

Finally the time has come for people to gather for the final and greatest part of the festivities. People come to the festival house from several days' walking distance away, as the To Wiau tribe has become very scattered over the last fifteen years. Because of these great distances, it is of course impossible for everyone to arrive together on one and the same day.

This is not necessary either, because the feast lasts several days. The number of days is greater, the greater the stock of *tinasi* food and the fewer the number of guests. because ... nothing can be left. The very last of it is eaten or thrown away near the death cave, but then it must be completely finished.

On the first day of the feast, people begin by receiving the guests properly by slaughtering a buffalo. This animal is not killed in the Islamic manner. Muslims slit the throat, whereas the To Wiau stick the animal in the side with a lance, preferably in the heart or the coronary artery. This is the wound that is actually necessary. Death is further accelerated by cutting through the neck muscles, as well as the tendon of one of the heels. If the animal falls over, death is hastened by stopping up the nostrils with wadded up plant leaves and tying the muzzle shut, so that the animal actually dies by suffocation.

One of these buffaloes to be slaughtered first serves as the sacrificial animal with the *pomboko'apuno o kasu*, also known as *pornbatino o* [p. 31] *kasu*. People now put the

---

<sup>5</sup> [editor's note: The description here clearly points to the hanging combs of the giant honeybee *Apis dorsata*.]

finishing touches on coloring and decorating the coffins, for which they use actual colors<sup>6</sup> in addition to mineral lime and charcoal. What is peculiar is that when this animal is killed, some women disappear behind a curtain and, with a cloth over the head, raise a passionate death wail.

People take some of the blood of the buffalo, and ‘kill’ it by the addition of chili peppers, citrus, etc. The blood is then mixed with the food to make the buffalo meat well done and tasty. This meat is not cooked in pots but in bamboos, which are placed obliquely against a crossbar where they are heated by the fire. The only thing mixed with the meat, apart from the blood already mentioned, are the finely chopped leaves of the *huko* tree.<sup>7</sup> No water is added, because during cooking sufficient liquid forms in the bamboos. When this liquid boils over, it is poured into a few empty bamboos to serve as gravy.

Meanwhile the number of guests continues to grow, while the *guru*, the most senior official in these death rituals, still feeds the dead in the above-mentioned way. The gong and drum usually go silent during the day, but they make up for it in the evening and at night. Even so, particularly buffalo meat, rice cooked in pots, and intoxicating drink are produced in unbelievable quantities. After each meal, the *umera* leaves, which served as plates, are thrown away, as well as the bamboo drinking cups, so that one has new eating utensils with each new meal.

Even with all the celebrating, dancing, singing, and what not, eventually the time comes for preparing to lay the dead in the coffins waiting outside and, after the necessary ceremonies, to take them away. People are aware that this feast usually falls during the time that the felled trees are drying, in order to be burned for laying in a garden. There thus remains a lot of work to be done in the swiddens before the next rice year. If someone is a little ahead of the others and is ready to plant rice, he may do so if necessary, but then he is forbidden to go into the death cave. Moreover people know that this whole ceremony takes place [p. 32] with a view to the coming rice year. People can count on a bad harvest, not to mention illnesses or deaths, if all these death-related practices are not observed.

Before the coffins are brought up, one afternoon people begin to hang *tinasi* garments around the death platform. For this a length of rattan is stretched like a drying line around the platform, thus outside of the curtain that is hanging around it. Sometimes two lines are stretched one above each other, depending on how many *tinasi* articles are expected. The women put the finishing touches to the bark cloth garments, the jackets of which are hung on a thin bamboo coat hanger. So also all the other things, like headscarves, sarongs, betel bags, conical hats, carry baskets, and head coverings or hair ribbons.

---

<sup>6</sup> [editor’s note: Presumably mineral (natural) pigments, but the Dutch here, *verf*, can also be interpreted as commercial paints. At any rate sources and/or shades are never elaborated.]

<sup>7</sup> [editor’s note: *Gnetum gnemon*.]

This hair ribbon is a strip of fabric about 50 centimeters long, 5 to 6 centimeters wide at the one end, and 10 to 20 centimeters wide at the other. It is stitched with silver thread with sewn-on patches, and next to it hangs a bundle of long plant fibers. At parties the girls stick this in their hair buns, namely the narrow end, so that the wide piece with the plume of plant fibers hangs down the back. Men also use this decoration, but then clasp it between the hat, headscarf or, as on this occasion, the conical hat. Purchased woven goods are also hung up. However these do not go along with the dead, but only serve as party dress or adornments in and around the *warungga*.

People get back in the mood and the women's tears again flow abundantly, while their monotonous wailing fills the house.

After the clothes have hung for awhile, they must be brought down to the ground. This is done in a peculiar way, namely, not by carrying everything down in their hands, but rather a portion of those present must wear all these clothes. All these clothes must also reach the death cave, even if it is just one piece, because it is *tinasi*. Some take these clothes with them, but they are usually outsiders, who get permission for them. A real Wiau person doesn't do this, because none of these things should come back to the village. [p. 33]

The sets of clothing are shared out so that each set is worn by a different person. Incomplete sets can be worn by several, one part for each. The women strive to arrange everything correctly. When everyone is ready, a dance circle is formed around the death platform inside the house. Accompanied by singing, a few rounds are danced around the platform. After this the lead dancer (male or female) dances in the direction of the entrance, all the time hand in hand with the others, then slowly down to the ground where the dance is continued. The excess pieces of clothing or the baskets are placed in a pile in the middle of the circle. At the same time a buffalo is killed, while the kettle with strong drink, which had earlier made its way around among the dancers inside the house, is again properly attended to. A war dance is sometimes also performed, at this time still with real weapons such as shield and sword. In a few days, once the dead in their coffins have been brought below, they will only be allowed to use imitation weapons.

Meanwhile groups of guests are still arriving from various places. If someone discovers such a group arriving, he shouts in the direction of the house, "Hit the gong, more guests have come." Immediately the gongs are struck and an old woman comes outside and walks towards the group of guests. She then turns around and walks in front of the procession to lead them inside.

After some rounds of dancing on the ground (*monduka wuta*), people go back into the house to put the clothes away until the next day.

The next day the coffins are brought inside so the bones can be put inside. By taking care of all the preparations and by doing everything slowly, this moment is prolonged until evening or night. First a meal is served outside. Mats are spread on the ground, the men sit down and the mood gets better every hour. What else can one wish for in life than

to eat buffalo meat and drink rice wine, especially in unlimited quantities? The prospect of letting their behavior run riot increases the tension, and when the meal is finished no one can exactly be called ‘fresh’ [p. 34] anymore, I say this because I don’t want to be too blunt about it. Slowly the men gather under the shed where the coffins are located, where they chat. Someone will start to beat on the coffins, which is a sign that more refreshment is required. The copper kettles are brought, and they drink straight out of the spout, without using cups. The vicious cycle has started: the more they yell the more drink they are served, the more they drink the louder the yelling gets. The beating on the empty and hollow-sounding coffins is interspersed with rocking them and stamping them on the ground, which together with the heated faces in the rosy glow of the torches is not a very attractive sight. The voices are hoarse, the weary eyes are looking for yet another kettle. If it doesn’t arrive quickly enough the coffins are beaten and rocked again.

Finally an old woman must be called out of the house to come and sing (*menani*) in front of the coffins. Here and there an individual joins in, but during the singing someone else pounds the ground with one of the coffins or beats on it while shouting incoherently. Finally the singing stops. Screaming and yelling, they pick up the coffins and run with them over the open space of ground in front of the house, dancing and jumping, pushing and pulling. The coffins move like boats in a wild sea, riding up and down on the waves. Now they run up the ramp—which was made for just such an occasion—and into the house. Inside they continue the same movement with the coffins, making sure to go around the death platform four times. Everyone joins in the shouting, pushing, and pulling. It now proves useful that the horn-shaped decorations can be removed, which has been done. Even then they don’t come out of the fray unscathed; here and there some pieces are broken off against the house posts or roof beams.

Meanwhile others have removed the curtain from around the death platform, and the pagan *guru* has been called to summon and send off the dead before they are put in their coffins. While they are waiting for the *guru* and also while [p. 35] he recites his formula they do not set the coffins down but keep them in their hands off the ground. The *guru* arrives. In his hand he takes a betel leaf with lime and areca nut and, while the others are dead silent, calls out the names of the dead while he puts the betel quid in between the rattan straps of one of the bundles. He stands holding onto the platform with both hands—the floor of this platform is higher than his head—and rocking and swaying his head he drones out the formula. It sounds out monotonously through the dead-quiet space rosily lit by dammar torches:

ooo, X, so-and-so, father of this, etc., etc.

<i>a uptetuka-tuka</i>	take your betel quid
<i>mewatu liali</i>	walk over the white stones
<i>metete ndoro ue</i>	cross over on the rainbow
<i>mesila roo-roo api</i>	split the fire apart
<i>peune mokonunggu</i>	go through the roaring flames
<i>a utealo mbone</i>	go up above
<i>wosikio roo-roo</i>	separate the roaring

<i>wotakio lahuene</i>	split the heaven apart
<i>a upe'alokee</i>	then go on
<i>kumali mendonga</i>	then go through the middle
<i>a upe'oneako olua me'ita</i>	and go through the land of the souls
<i>a uperehuako, au pe'epa'ako</i>	then go and sit down, fold your legs to one side
<i>a uhunggei toro mbopaino</i>	then open the real life
<i>a unduokokai</i>	wait there for us
<i>tongiso mendongai</i>	point with your index finger <sup>8</sup>
<i>a utitiokai</i>	look down at us
<i>pokombewowonuakai</i>	make us live together
<i>a upokopondaukai</i>	let us make rice gardens
<i>a upokomiriniakai</i>	make us cool
<i>a upokodupekai</i>	make us healthy

The last line is shouted by everyone, while they lower the small floor of the platform on which the bundles with dead people lie, so that afterwards they can put the dead inside the coffins. This is done without reverence; they push and shove the bundles in like a market vender or old clothes seller packs up his stall before going home.

The business of the *guru* and the calling out of the names [p. 36] and the droning of the formula is called *mombokolako o mate*, which means 'making the dead go, making them leave.' This is the moment where the souls of the dead leave the earth and move to the land on the other side.

Previously we saw that the death bundles, after they were taken out of the coffins in the *pasara*, were rolled up in mats. These mats remained around them up until the moment when the bundles were deposited in the coffins. These mats are taken and removed through the slats in the floor or through the thatch walls of the house. This same route is used for the different parts of the death platform like the rattan, slats, etc. All this happens in a hasty manner. Only the previously mentioned stage is left behind, around which the now-filled coffins are carried in a great clamor. In the end they place the coffins on the stage, but only after they have heaved them up and down four times.

Still they don't have rest, because in the meantime some boys have found there way up to the rafters where the areca nuts were hanging, and they throw these down after they had stripped them off the stem. In this wild chaos the crowd throws themselves down on top of these nuts because they want to have them in order to expect a good harvest. When there are elderly people who can't take part in this scramble, then other people will give them some out of their own stock.

Meanwhile some of the women have set themselves down next to the coffins and are grieving over the dead as if oblivious to everything happening around them. The priest

---

<sup>8</sup> [editor's note: Dutch *middelvinger*, but incorrectly translated from the Tolaki.]



goes around with a small basket of rice in which there is a copper arm ring. Everyone has to touch the rice, in order to ensure a good harvest.

Those who touched the death bundles while they were being put inside the coffins go and wash their hands with water from a bamboo water vessel. This is a ritual regulation and not intended for cleanliness, otherwise they could have washed their hands more often and better than they do at this point.

The curtain that had been hanging around the platform is now laid over the coffins. By now most people have sat down. All lights inside the house are extinguished, but they are immediately lit again after the call *mohinaito*, which means 'it is morning, it is a new day.' The grieving women [p. 37] are ordered by the men to now finally stop mourning and now the circle dance around the coffins starts again. They accompany the dancing with the form of singing known as *menani*, which then transitions into the *mosusua*, while the kettle with hard drink goes around making sure that throats don't get dry. It was mentioned to me that in earlier times this circle dance had to be a closed circle, whereas this time they didn't pay attention to that rule.

The whole night they keep watch, while the next day one or more buffaloes are slaughtered, which for that matter has happened every day. The whole day they celebrate again abundantly. A group of women sing happily while mincing *huko* leaves to mix with the buffalo meat. To do this they place some mats on the floor of the house, and on top of the mats some beams to serve as chopping blocks, while next to it baskets of *huko* leaves stand ready. These baskets have just been filled from a big stock of leaves which have been piled up in a small attic in the house. When the baskets are empty someone climbs upstairs and fills the baskets again by throwing the leaves down. The women place themselves next to the beams, which were put on the mats, take a small chopper in their hands, and the chopping begins. Other women sit next to them and they stack leaves neatly on top of each other to make nice piles that are easy for the chopping women to handle. When they have finished chopping one bunch, a new bunch is promptly handed to them. All this is done under the monotonous *menani*, which gets interrupted by yelling and shouting that comes as much from the busy women as from interested onlookers. Besides this a man, armed with a kettle of rice wine, makes his rounds regularly, whereby the mood is raised more than a little. It is remarkable to notice how even quite young children, for example aged five or six years of age, make an effort to help empty the kettle.

Meanwhile nine small bundles of rice have been tied together in the manner of a kree.<sup>9</sup> String made from *huko* bark goes through all nine bunches which can be spread out like a mat. These have been laid near the coffins and stay [p. 38] inside the house until after they have taken the coffins away. The husband, wife, children, or parents of the dead share these bunches to plant them in their rice garden, again to assure a good rice year. How they are planted is also subject to certain regulations. This rice has to be planted the

---

<sup>9</sup> [translator's note: *kree*, Dutch word with unknown meaning.]

last of all. If a man plants them he has to say “hahahaha” at the same time when he puts the rice in the ground, but if a woman plants them she has to say “hehehehe.” After planting them no one is allowed to enter the garden the next day. On the second day the owner of the garden goes to the place where he planted this rice and stamps the ground a few times. If another person gets there before him, the offence has to be made right by a chicken offering.

The night when the coffins arrived is not to be counted as the official time for which they have to remain inside the house. The next night is therefore the first which is counted. Often this is the only night, since one night is the minimum that the filled coffins remain inside the house. However it is possible to keep them longer. Following the last night that the coffins stay in the house, during the afternoon of the following day a small stand is made outside the *warungga*. Most of the time they use the shed where they had been pestling rice. If they use this they are finished quite quickly because then they only have to tie some crossbeams to the posts of the shed. These crossbeams serve as a place to lay the coffins at a later stage.

Also in preparation for the funeral, the *guru* makes a miniature staircase in the ramp. He does this in the following way. A rough mat is spread out over the ramp. On top of this they place the top part of the trunk of a young areca tree while parallel to this at a distance of 10 to 15 centimeters he places a stick of *wisoki* wood. Both parts have a length of about one meter and they are placed longitudinally on the ramp close to the side so they are not in the way. Both of these sticks are tied to the ramp through the mat with strips of *wisoki* bark. On top of these two sticks are placed nine small cross sticks. These are attached [p. 39] with the strips of *wisoki* bark already tied to the two long pieces. These cross sticks are also of *wisoki* wood. In this way a ladder is made, which lies flat on the surface. Now a small piece of black material is divided into nine small pieces. Between each rung a piece is shoved under the bark tie which holds the rung in place. This is only done on one side of the ladder.

This small ladder serves for the souls to walk along to the afterlife. It doesn't seem to matter that they had already been sent away when they put them in the coffins (see above) and according to what they say they did indeed leave. They are still very serious in making this ladder for them. In any case the *guru* takes a small meal and chews and drinks as well. Again this is intended for the dead. No value is assigned to the small ladder because as soon as the coffins have been taken below the children tear it apart and use it to play with or people kick it as they walk past.

Now everything is ready for the coffins to be brought down. The clothes which have been dedicated to the dead are worn again. A few of the men dress up as headhunters, in so far as the necessities for this are at hand, while another group of men (women do not participate in this) perform a final dance, the *lulo pinokulelo*, which means ‘the fallen over dance.’ To do this they bend one knee deeply in such a way that the other leg which is stretched out completely almost reaches the floor. In this way they alternately stretch and bend their left and right legs while the body is also bent sideways towards the floor. In between these bendings they move around with large jumps. This moving around is



also subject to certain regulations. First they move around the coffins four times to the right, after this they do the same but turning to the left. This last way, turning to the left, is the way in which the dead lords are said to dance (*lulo tonuana*). Singing, drum, and gong are absent in this dance; it is accompanied by shouts in the rhythm of the bending of the knees or the coming down of the feet after a jump. As mentioned above, this is the last dance inside [p. 40] the house and further dancing is done below on the ground. Also no gong or drum may sound inside the house; anyone who violates this ban is fined a buffalo.

With this all the ceremonies inside the house are finished. The men now pick up the coffins and run down the gangway after the sword fighters, who jump about brandishing their shields and (wooden) swords. The coffins undergo the same treatment as when they were brought up; people run and jump, push and pull until the coffins are temporarily set down on slats that lie on rough mats on the ground. Now the *guru* comes out of the house carrying a bamboo with a piece of material tied to one end by way of a flag which is tied on one corner, and places this next to the coffins. The sword dancers take off their adornments and put everything near the coffins where the excess clothes are stacked in a pile and again they start dancing, accompanied by singing. Some of the women set themselves down near the coffins to weep in mourning. The gongs and the drum, which assisted with bringing down the coffins, now remain below in order to accompany the rest of the dancing.

As darkness falls, the coffins are placed under the above-mentioned shed, but they do not sit on the ground, they are laid on crossbeams which were placed about 1.20 meters off the ground. The space underneath is used to store the articles which they want to send with the dead. They also use this area underneath the coffins to sleep for a while as an alternative to dancing. The *guru* has to sleep here and also his cooking pot is placed there on the fire so it looks like he is actually living there completely. The flag (*tanggulaea*) is handled only by him, that is to say moved when the coffins are placed somewhere else. That's why just a little while ago he first took the flag away, then the coffins were placed under the little shed. After that he placed the flag near the coffins again.

The whole night is spent dancing in *tinasi* clothes, while the next day the trip can commence. The coffins have to be under the shed at least one night, but if more buffaloes are waiting to be slaughtered and the jars aren't empty yet, they can add the necessary number of days. [p. 41] During this day or these days they customarily eat sago porridge. Normally small or larger lumps are brought to the mouth using a pair of sticks, but now they first put it in a small bowl made of a folded leaf, and from here they let it slide into their mouths. For this they use a *nene* leaf<sup>10</sup> folded into a small bowl and fixed with a small bamboo pin. Such a bowl is called *tawasi*.

---

<sup>10</sup> [editor's note: donax, *Donax canniformis*, or possibly the closely related *mutra cane*, *Schumannianthus dichotomus*.]

The big day of departure has come. The coffins are taken out from underneath the shed and placed on the open ground. Here they attach poles to the sides, which are used to carry them on the shoulders. Several men are needed for each coffin because they are quite heavy. Once they have reached a certain distance from the village, sometimes they solve this problem by taking off the lid, which is then carried by others. It is peculiar that starting from the *warungga* until they get to a place called Pehehuano Tanggulaea, every coffin will have a double set of carrying poles. Four of them are placed parallel in the same direction and are joined by cross members. It is best to compare it with a staff of only four lines, joined together by the bars (as in written music). In the middle of this is the coffin.

The carriers as well as those who come along without carrying anything are dressed in *tinasi* clothes. The *tinasi* objects are partly placed on top of the coffins and covered with a mat fixed in place. Other articles are carried separately.

Other people are needed to bring along cooked and uncooked rice, the gongs, rice wine, betel-nut ingredients in the betel boxes. At every resting place along the way younger girls or women will go around with these boxes. Others carry only a machete. Along the way they will use these machetes to cut a path where dense undergrowth or fallen trees block the way.

There is also the *guru* standing ready to carry the flag. He will walk behind the last coffin and keep the flag tilted forward so it does service for all.

Among all these preparations, a number of women are weeping near the coffins. Because some of them will not make the journey [p. 42] to the cave, this is now their last opportunity. But even if they do go along, they still do their best here and often repeat their performance along the way at the rest places. Sometimes they can't bear to part with the dead and lie down on the coffin, wrapping their arms around it.

Finally everything is ready and the coffins are picked up and carried away. It sometimes happens that such a woman who is lying down on top of a coffin is carried gently to the first resting place. This place has been mentioned before: Pehehuano Tanggulaea, that is 'the place where the flag returns.' The *guru* removes the flag from the three-to-four-meter long bamboo pole. The latter he leans against a tree and he then returns with the flag. Also the outside set of carrying poles is chopped off so now only one set remains. No one could explain the reason for this to me. The *guru* returns to where the festivities took place, but has to stay at the shed where he watched over the coffins or in a separate small house, but by no means can he enter the house where the celebrations took place as long as the others haven't yet returned from the cave.

At every resting place they dance around the coffins, just as happened inside the house and also was required the last night when the coffins were underneath the shed. Here they chew betel, have a rest, and help themselves liberally to the strong drink. However they don't seem to be affected by it very much. This could be because they perspire heavily during the carrying.

At a certain distance from the *warungga*, there are three or four paths in the same direction, detours that were made when an existing path was getting too muddy. Here the different coffins each go their own way. At each gong beat the coffins being carried are turned around, so that the carriers who walk up front end up at the rear for a while and, once it has been turned around again, end up back at the front.

They spend the night at fixed locations; this is why it takes three or four days to cover a distance which can be done in six hours. The first resting place is the dried-up river bed of the Laamaande river. They fill their time with cooking, drinking, chewing, dancing, and singing. In most cases they reach the Tokoi river during the afternoon of the third day. [p. 43] Here they build a small hut and spend their time in the same way as mentioned above, except with one difference. They pack rice into leaves which is then put into bamboo, then they boil it. Before leaving the next morning they eat part of it and the other part they take with them to eat on the way. The remaining distance to reach the cave doesn't take much time, but they can manage to make it a long way as they proved over the last few days. Besides this, the way forward is very steep. Starting from the small hut they cross the river and on the other side they stop at the first resting place, which is the river bank, as if they have been on their way for hours. Everyone carries a bamboo cup which gets filled frequently, and they eat again, not withstanding that they did this less than an hour ago at the small hut; dancing, singing and everything happens here. They need to work up a lot of fortitude because this is where the mountain ascends steeply, and they have to drag the coffins uphill. Sometimes to aid the carriers they tie ropes around the coffins to help pull them up. Men with filled kettles continually walk beside the carriers who, while they walk and carry, get their mouths filled. It is remarkable where they get their strength from, but they sing as they go uphill.

Resting only two or three times, in just over an hour they reach a small plateau, which is at the same level as the mortuary cave, which lies only 100 to 200 meters away. This plateau is called Pe'ulongano, which means 'the place where the lids are put on again.' Here the lids, if they had been taken off to make the carrying easier as was mentioned before, are put on the coffins again. It is as if this is a place of joy. Those who arrive first start pushing against the coffins as if they don't want them to reach the plateau. Here they dance around the coffins for the last time. The women start mourning again. Good useable articles are damaged. This is because they are afraid that children might want to take them back which is strictly forbidden. Beautiful conical hats get the chop of a machete, so that nobody would like to have it anymore. Here they eat abundantly and they drink, everything has to give the impression of great abundance. The young people put food in each others' [p. 44] mouths and they give each other drinks, and they throw rice and drink at each other. Bottles and bamboo that were once filled with drink are thrown down the steep mountain slope. Even after the meal they start dancing again, they cannot let the chance go by to enjoy themselves in a disorderly manner. So the young people dance around the coffins with their hands filled with rice trying to find good targets to their left or right to throw their rice projectiles at. Rice cooked in leaf wrappers are tucked into their belts like some kind of cartridge-box, from which they fill their hands again and again. The rule is: everything has to be finished, because everything is *tinasi*—dedicated to the dead—and is not allowed to be taken back to the village. This place is also the last

point for those who have already planted rice. They are not allowed to enter below the overhanging cave, which is where the coffins will be stacked. This ceremony concludes once again with the *lulo pinokulelo*, see above. Now they lift up the coffins and walk to the cave, where they remove the carrying poles and place the coffins on top of or next to others that were already there. No other ceremony takes place here. Here and there mourning women sit next to a coffin which was placed in the cave in former times. The objects are now placed on top of the coffins, including the partly or completely torn *tinasi* clothing too. To a man they give: a machete, a sword, a lance, a shield, fire-making tools, an awl, a scraper for scraping out the hard areca nuts such as toothless chewers always use. A woman gets a basket for betel-nut ingredients, a machete, and in short, a large part of all her articles for daily use.

It was already mentioned above that all these things, at least the articles which are made of iron, are copied and made from wood. This differs and is even contrary to what other tribes do, like for example the To Lamoare, who send off their dead with the typical iron articles. The Wiau say, "This is forbidden in our tribe and the cause of misfortune when metal comes into the cave. You can see how many of the To Lamoare die of pneumonia. This is a wound that results from being chopped by a dead spirit with a machete. That is why we only give a wooden copy of the metal articles, so we will not suffer from this." Golden jewelry is not given by them either. Bracelets made out of shell are allowed to be kept by the dead. [p. 45]

One cannot help but notice that not all of the skeletons were transported in coffins; some had been brought on stretchers. All ceremonies were the same for those stretchers with bones. The reason is as follows: a coffin is only made if inside the cave there isn't a usable coffin belonging to the family to which the bones can be added. If indeed there is space then they don't make a coffin but they bring the skeleton to the cave on a stretcher. Here they open up the coffin of one of the family members and then they add the bones to it.

The coffins which were brought here in the past are sometimes still stacked on top of each other, up to three or four high. If the bottom ones waste away then they collapse underneath the weight of the top ones, so that the stack either falls over or collapses on itself. That's why one sees opened and wasted-away coffins lying around, skulls and bones spread out all over the floor or still inside the coffins. Now that the materials in which they used to be wrapped are also wasted away, it is easier to notice that there are several skeletons inside one and the same coffin.

Once the coffins have been placed and the stretchers thrown away, then as soon as possible people leave this cave, or at least this overhanging rock, which is called Alo-alo. This word comes from *me'alo*, which means 'go to, going to,' thus it means the place where one goes (namely after dying).<sup>11</sup> As one leaves two things have to be observed.

---

<sup>11</sup> [editor's note: In the Konawe dialect of Tolaki the verb is *meo'alo* 'advance in the direction of, advance toward.' The stem *alo* itself has several meanings including 'get,' 'take,' 'use,' 'pick up,' and 'harvest.' Alo-alo could also mean the place where people are taken.]

First, as long as one is in view of the cave one is not allowed to look backwards. Second, one has to pick a branch with some leaves and one has to wave this around oneself as if chasing away flies and mosquitoes. This prevents the spirits which are present there from coming along. This was demonstrated beautifully by the words of someone who said, "Go back, above we will speak to each other."

Now they descend the steep mountain slope, the women who came along have already preceded them. The women have placed themselves in a small river from where they throw water at the approaching men. As fast as they can people go back home. On the way they pick up the empty bottles which they hid in the forest so they didn't have to carry them unnecessarily. Some, however, had hidden a filled bamboo, so as [p. 46] to provide for a rainy day. This bamboo hasn't been to the cave so they are allowed to finish it before they come home.

Arriving home, they find some of the people who attended the festival but who didn't come along to the cave and who didn't want to leave before everything had ended. The returnees first go to the *guru*, who sits in his own house or under his shed, where he has cooked rice for the people who attended the funeral. All of them take a little with them. They eat it, rub it on their body and head, put it in between their big toe, wherever one wants. But one has to have touched it if one wants to be assured of a good harvest.

People now go to the *warungga* and remain there for one more night. The following morning is one of great joy. The *guru* comes to the home and asks if all have returned from the cave. After he has received an affirmative answer he beats the gong four times, breaks the ramp, and four times throws a piece of wood in the direction of the cave and says, *Mberamiuto, tooto ke ileumbo mo'alo ikeni*, which means: "Now it is enough, don't come here to get anything else." This is for the spirits of those who died. Only now is he allowed to enter inside the house and the joy increases greatly. Now people have the feeling, "So, it is all finished." They give one another small presents, rub each other with mineral lime, charcoal and other dirty things which I don't want to mention, laugh and push each other, until the last thing remaining is to pay those who had a special part in the whole event. People pay with fabric, a specified portion of the wood, pieces of dried buffalo meat, of which each receives five or ten small pieces, a pair of pants, or whatever else tends to serve as wages. Those who are eligible for wages are: the *uranggi* (the coffin makers) the *mbururu* (who collected the bones out of the first coffin), the *guru*, who served in different ceremonies, the makers of the bark cloth clothes and the *tinasi* articles in general, and also the sword dancers when the coffins came down from the *warungga*.

Thus the whole ceremony is completed and everyone returns to their homes and villages.