

THE PALAUAN HANDICRAFT GUIDEBOOK
and
30 STORYBOARD STORIES

KLDACHELBAI PA BELAU

by

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INTRODUCTION

Palauans are extremely fond of "style" that certain something that sets them apart from the mass. Teachers from other countries have conducted workshops in this country. This has improved the quality of the handicrafts but basic "style" of the traditional crafts has remained definitely Palauan.

Many craftspeople are elderly and weave or carve for extra money or just enough to meet immediate needs. The young seek a more steady, gainful employment. Hence, what you find for sale today might not be available in a few year; most certainly not at the same price! Many unique pieces are potential collector's items.

DEDICATION

To all those who are dedicated to perpetuating "Kldachelbai
ra Belau", The Special Skills of Palau.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Parts of this book were researched using material loaned
by the Palau National Museum and Mr. Obodei Iyar. The authors
are deeply grateful to the Museum staff, Mr. Iyar and to the
members of the FCAA staff who assisted in the final revisions,
for their gracious cooperation.

JEWELRY

There are many styles of coral or sea shell necklaces, earrings, and bracelets. Most popular are pieces made of turtle shell. Aside from the items mentioned are hair combs, watchbands, hairpins, belts, moneyclips and shoehorns all made of this shell. The species of turtle whose shell is used is endangered; therefore, no item of this material can legally enter U. S. territory.

The price for a shell article is set by the amount of shell used, time and difficulty of labor. The darker pieces are from older turtles and tend to be thicker than lighter pieces.

WEAVING

Palauan weaving is famous for being practical and durable. This is mainly due to the fact that most articles are double woven (lined) with pandanus fiber. Items are accented with designs using natural dark brown pandanus, dyed pandanus, or simply all of the natural honey-colored most common pandanus. Some fiber from the newest leaves of the coconut palm are used. This fiber is very narrow and almost white in color.

There are many handbag shapes and styles, too numerous to mention. Most unusual of these are the pouches used by both men and women to hold betel nut and all of the equipment needed in the chewing process including a rectangular case to hold the pepper leaves. The pouch can be a handy little purse and the

leaf bag used for an eye glass case by non-chewers.

Other wove ware are cigarette cases, table mats, coin purses, etc. Jungle vines are entwined to form interesting serving baskets of varying shapes and sizes.

Price is dependent upon the amount of fiber used, the width of the strips, time and labor involved, neatness of the weaving and finishing work.

WOOD CARVED STATUES

A few types of wood statues from 3" to 16" are made in Palau, which are replicas of men and women in traditional dress or replicas of the traditional men's meeting house (bai). Another popular statue is the Tobi Island "monkey man" once used in ancient religious rites. It is a naked statue resembling a monkey, usually carved in a squatting position. Carving is mostly done in mahogany or ironwood.

Statues are priced by the inch. This price varies according to the intricacies of the carving and the reputation of the carver.

PALAUAN MONEY

Small oval-shaped tortoise shell trays with fishtail ends are exchanged by Palauan women during various feasts. These are not commonly for sale in giftshops; they are usually ordered as needed from certain craftspersons known to people in the area. These are quite expensive when compared to small shell items due to the considerably larger amount of shell used.

The other type of Palauan money, beads worn on the necks of women, cannot be bought and sold if authentic. Different beads are traditionally given on special occasions such as marriage, childbirth, death, etc. However, attractive popular replicas are made of shell or coral, strung on the traditional black cord. These are comparably priced to other jewelry.

I LENGEL

Traditionally an enormous container for a coconut toddy-like drink, this vessel was only used during large gatherings of people. Usually they are made of dort wood which is very heavy and insect resistant, but are sometimes made of mahogany. Small hand-carved I lengels can be found in small quantities. Price depends on the amount of carving, mother-of-pearl inlay and size.

MODEL CANOES

Craftsmen make several styles of model outrigger canoes. The most popular of these are replicas of the traditional war canoe (kabekel) and the sailing canoe (kaeb). These are rare and quite expensive due to the small number made and the craftsmen's attention to fine detail which they refuse to compromise.

STORYBOARDS

Originally, stories and legends were carved on the beams of village "bais" (men's meeting houses). A Japanese man, Dr. Isaka-

tsu Hidikata, developed a system of carving these stories on smaller wooden planks and taught it to Palauan carvers to use as a commercial enterprise. Palauan storyboards are world famous as this country's most unique handicraft. The legends tell amusing or tragic stories of romance and derring-do, usually with some type of moral teaching or inspiration.

The boards are priced according to the depth of the carving, elaborateness of detail, quality of finishing and reputation of the carver.

Some carvers will carve the personal story of individuals if a specific order is made, however, it is the 30 most popular legends out of the 200 known legends that are usually carved. These can be found in a longer form at the Palau National Museum, but for this handbook, they have been capsulized. The asterisks mark those most commonly carved.

ESCAPE FROM THE SEA SERPENT OF OIKUUL

A young maiden of Oikuul hamlet in Airai was stolen by a man from Ngiwal who forced her to marry him. The evil man had the ability to change himself into a striped sea serpent at will.

In time, a human son and an owl daughter were born to the strange couple. When the children reached maturity, the mother told them about her abduction and forced marriage. The children despised the father from that time on and immediately began to plot their escape to the mother's home village. The son built

a strong canoe and they paddled out to sea with the owl.

Nearing Airai, the sister left to fly ahead to Oikuul with news of their arrival. Men of the village waded out to meet the pair only to be greeted with the sight of a striped sea serpent thrashing the water, furiously trying to overturn the craft. They launched an attack and managed to kill the beast. The three were free at last, were received with a welcoming feast and happily lived there ever after.

* NGERUBESANG

Fishermen of Melekeok were on a tidal flat one day using a net of coconut fronds. Suddenly, a war party appeared in a canoe and one Melekeok man was speared. The men fled for their lives, but one had the presence of mind to run for help. In his fright, the man forgot to let loose of the coconut fronds which he still carried as he ran through the village shouting for help.

Warriors were quickly rallied and the attack thwarted but the enemy was able to escape with the slain man's head. However, the humorous vision of the frightened man running for help with the coconut fronds streaming behind is the essential point of the tale.

* PALAUAN MONEY-NGEROT ISLAND

There are several versions of the discovery of Palauan money. In a common one, a boy and his father row to an island where the father fishes nearby while the son collects strange looking stones on the beach. Later in the day, the father came ashore for a nap

and while he slept, the boy stashed his collection in the canoe. Upon their return home, the father unloaded the canoe to find the bottom filled with Palauan money! (Identifying features is a bird carrying the round symbol of Palauan money in its beak).

* NGIRATUMERANG - DANDY OF AIMELIIK

Ngiratumerang was a ladies man that once lived in Aimeliik. The other village men came home one day from a bloody battle to find him entertaining a group of women. They were so disgusted that they hurled insults at him, even rubbed their filth on his arm.

The man carefully bandaged the filthy arm to remind him of his oath to seek revenge, then sought out an old teacher of warfare. Before lessons were given, his courage was tested by an order to climb a tall thin betelnut tree that bent as he climbed until he had to climb upside-down to reach the nuts. The teacher was impressed and spent several days training the young man, who then returned home. When Koror men attacked Aimeliik, Ngiratumerang disguised himself, entered the battle, killed four of Koror's best warriors, thus ending the battle. His identity was then discovered and his valor highly praised. He removed the bandage and flung it at the feet of the women who had witnessed his past disgrace.

* NGERCHOKL - THE GIFT OF EVERLASTING LIFE

Two brothers went fishing one day. By the end of the day, although very hungry, they brought every fish to their father. The father wanted to reward their devotion but had nothing to give. The elders of another village gave him some magic Ti plants to plant around the lake, Ngerchokl. The sons were to bathe in the lake and receive the gift of everlasting life. The father followed the planting instructions and went home to get his sons.

Before the three could return, an old woman and her grandchild came to the lake. The old woman bathed to cool herself and instantly became a young girl. The granddaughter, thinking it was a stranger, ran away in fright. The woman felt that her relationship with her granddaughter was more important than youth. She slipped back into the waters and emerged as her old self which the girl recognized and they continued on their way.

The man and his sons came to the lake but found that all of the magic power had been used by the old woman. The father was left to search for yet another reward for his sons.

IUESEL AND BUDEL - SKELETON AND BONES

In ancient Palau lived a woman and her sons, Budel (skin) Iuesel (skeleton). One day, Iuesel went fishing and returned with a large catch. A few days later, he was getting ready to fish again, but this time his brother begged to go with him. Since Budel was

a formless mass of skin, his brother had to carry him to a rock in the reef where he could spear the fish.

The two were busily fishing when a war canoe from another village suddenly appeared! In order to run fast toward home and safety, Iusel scooped up his skin brother and slipped him over his own bone body. In this way, both were able to move quickly and avoid being caught in the war. In each person, the two are conveniently together to this day.

KEBUL NGIRAKERENGUANG - THE SECRET POTION

The wife of Ngirakerenguang was raped as she took an evening bath. The only description she could give to her husband of her assailant was that he had an unusually large penis. The enraged husband swore revenge and made a plan.

At the next men's gathering, he volunteered to mix a large container of cocorut drink into which he slipped an aphrodisiac. As the men drank, he watched the bulges in their loinclothes to determine the overly-endowed man and spotted the culprit. The man soon slipped away from the group with Ngirakerenguang following closely behind.

The wife was out working in her taro patch and as the man started toward her, it was clear that the first attack was about to be repeated. Ngirakerenguang sprang from behind, swiftly beheaded the man; thus saving his wife and satisfying his revenge.

* EGGLAYING CYCLE OF THE TURTLE

A young man from Peleliu and a maiden from Ngerkebesang once fell in love. Because of the great distance between their homes, they decided to meet in the time of the new moon on Ngerelis Island, between their islands.

They met as planned and talked far into the night. In the morning, the girl found that her grass skirt was missing and a long fruitless search followed. She fashioned another skirt and the two parted with promises to meet again in 15 days (the time of the full moon).

The next meeting time came and the two were talking on the beach when a turtle came crawling toward them. In its flipper was tangled the lost skirt! Thus, it was learned that turtles lay their eggs and return to the site 15 days later.

THE LESSON OF THE HERON

There are many episodes in the long traditional dispute between the village of Ngiwal and Ngaraard. In this one, Ucnel of Ngiwal has learned the magic of flying and is able to hover over Ngaraard, killing at random.

A Ngaraard mother watched a heron accurately peck fish out of a shallow by taking three hopping steps, then pecking. She felt this might be a successful spear-throwing technique, as well.

Marking three coconuts with tumeric for targets, she began to teach her sickly son, Rechemchem.

The boy became skilled at the technique and hid in a war canoe bound for a battle at Ngiwal. He was discovered when the warriors stopped for rest and severely scolded as being too weak for battle.

Uchel suddenly appeared above them and Rechemchem, carrying three spears ran toward him. Hopping three steps, he flung one spear and the flyer fell. As Uchel lay wounded in the water, he pointed at Rechemchem, saying, "He learned that trick from the "Heron".

The triumphant boy hero returned to Ngaraard where he was honored with a high title, given money and his choice of the village maidens for a wife.

THE CANOE AND THE TURTLE

A man of Ngerchemai paddled his canoe to an area where he knew there were turtle caves. A floating twig signaled the presence of a turtle and he dove in, not bothering to anchor the canoe.

He struggled with the turtle, managed to capture it and to bring it to the surface, only to site his canoe drifting far away. He tried to reach it, turtle still in his arms, but even by dropping the turtle he was unable to swim fast enough. At last, he was forced to return home with neither turtle nor canoe.

* DEMEI OF AIRAI - REAR ATTACK OF THE CROCODILE

This is the true story of an incident that happened around 1940. Demei of Airai was attending to his "natural functions" outside of a bai (meeting house) when a crocodile crept up behind him and bit poor Demei on the rump! The man survived the attack through care given in the Japanese hospital in Koror. (The storyboard depicts the attack of the crocodile upon the man's posterior).

MEDECHIIBELAU AND ITUNGELBAI - LEGEND OF THE RABBIT FISH

Medechiibelau of Airai and Itungelbai of Aimeliik were gods that once were good friends. The friendship ended when the god from Airai borrowed the pet fish of his friend for a brief nearby sport but, instead drove them to his home. Itungelbai, realizing his loss, flung sea shells and sea animals after his former friend, most of which landed in the water - far short of their mark.

About three times each year, rabbit fish appear in large numbers in the waters near Airai and the people celebrate with a large feast inviting neighboring hamlets to attend. In the lagoons of Aimeliik, one can find an abundance of sea shells and sea animals.

* YAP MONEY STORY

The country of Yap has a traditional style of money as "fey". In years long past, Yapese men braved the long trip in frail canoes to chip large flat circles from the limestone in the Rock Islands

of Palau. A hole was made in the center of each rock piece so that it could be threaded on bamboo poles for carrying.

The extremely hazardous journey and tremendous physical labor involved in the acquisition gave the money its value. A European, Captain O'Keefe, once sailed to the Islands and gathered some of the money in his large sailing vessel. That money was considered of little or no value due to the ease of its being taken and the Yapese returned to their traditional method.

DUGONG - MAIDEN OF THE SEA

The mother of a young unmarried girl was extremely embarrassed when her daughter became pregnant. To minimize the social disgrace, she continually watched and nagged the daughter about following every custom concerning a pregnancy, especially about food taboos. This nagging even continued after the birth of the baby.

One day, the mother returned from the garden to find the girl eating forbidden nuts. The annoyed mother severely scolded the girl who fled to the ocean and swam far out to sea. The repentant mother begged her to return but was forced to helplessly watch as her daughter turned into a large fish. To ease her grief and guilt, the mother pledged that the fish would be called "Dugong" and forever be given high status, which it has to this day.

* NGIRAILEMESANG OF NGARAARD - THE SPEARED FOOT

Ngirailemesang was such a poor warrior that his comrades wouldn't allow him to join them in battles. Fathers, feeling that he could offer no protection to their daughters, made it impossible for him to find a wife, which the man wanted, needed, and at the age, was expected to have.

The night before a planned raid by his village on the village of Ngiwal, he slipped over and met with Ngiwal's finest warrior. Through bribery, the man was persuaded to allow him to spear one of his foot in the next day's battle.

The following morning, Ngirailemesang secretly joined the battle, speared the foot and became a big hero. As such, he was awarded the wife of his choice and to marry at last!

* NGIBTAL - BREADFRUIT TREE

A female demigod, Dirachedebsungel, was rewarded for teaching Palauans how to grow taro by the gift of a magic breadfruit tree. The tree had a hollow trunk and a broken limb through which each ocean swell forced numbers of fish into her yard. Neighbors soon became jealous of her constant fish supply and cut down the tree, causing the entire island to be flooded. The woman demigod was the only one saved from the flood. She moved on, married, and raised four sons who founded the villages of Melkekeok, Koror, Ainaliik and Ngeramlengui.

* SURECH AND DULEI - BEHEADED MAIDEN

Surech, a beautiful Ngiwal maiden, and Dulei of Ngkekklau were lovers. The chief of Ngaraard heard of her beauty and commanded Dulei to let him see her face.

A sad Dulei hid a hatchet in a long basket and set off for their usual forest meeting place. They talked and laughed until Surech lay down to sleep. Sleepily opening her eyes, she saw her lover poised with the hatchet for a blow at her neck! Feeling betrayed, she urged that the act be completed, even wove a basket in which to carry the head.

The grisly deed was done and the bodyless face presented to the chief. The enraged chief ordered Dulei to be killed on the spot. Some say he bolted but that a spear was thrown through his back; others tell that he escaped into the night, never to be seen again.

* THE GIGANTIC PENIS - STORY OF MELECHOTCHACHAU

A widow and her two sons once lived in Palau. Although the woman wanted to marry again, she couldn't find a husband with a penis large enough to satisfy her! She heard there was such a man in Ngerokabesang Island, near Koror, and the three set out to find him.

They found the man, Melechotchachau, sitting on the beach,

making coconut fiber rope and using the base of his penis as a winding post! When asked if he wanted to marry the mother, he said he did but first they must row to the end of his penis.

They found the end half way to Peleliu and the excited mother jumped astride. This action caused the organ to swell, raising the woman high into the air. The explosion of the ejaculation killed her immediately and blew her body across the high mountains toward Peleliu Island where it fell into the sea. To this day, one of the rocks near Peleliu resembles a human shape and is said to be the satisfied woman.

* FIRST NATURAL CHILDBIRTH

A human spider from Ngerish village on Peleliu Island came to Ngiwal where he fell in love and married a lovely young girl, Turang. When Turang was expecting their first child, her husband first learned that the birth process of that time was to slit the mother's abdomen with sharp bamboo knives and remove the baby. The man was horrified to hear that his lovely young wife would be sure to die giving birth and he rushed home for the advice of his mother. The wife was in labor when he returned just in time to deliver the baby and to save the mother as well. Midwives watched in apprehensive curiosity but were amazed at the success. Thus, natural childbirth was first learned in Palau and practiced from then to this day.

ORENG AND NGIRAMARIAR

Two happy young lovers, Oreng and Ngiramariar, once lived on one of the Rock Islands. Sad times befell the pair when Oreng's greedy mother arranged a marriage between her daughter and a wealthy man of a distant village. Ngiramariar grieved until he became ill and died. The girl left her husband to attend the funeral. Without will to live, she collapsed on her lover's body and died. The two were buried together.

The husband, stunned by news of the tragedy, fell from a cliff to his death on the rocks below.

ANOTHER VERSION OF ORENG AND NGIRAMARIAR

Ngiramariar was famous for being the most handsome man of his time in Palau. Oreng, a lovely young maiden, accompanied the people of her village when they were invited to a feast on his island. He was as handsome as she had heard and he was attracted to her. He sent her betelnut as a signal to meet him on the beach. They met and arranged that he would come to her village in the next full moon and ask her father for her hand.

Between her return home and the full moon, her father married her to a man that had been supplying fish to the family. Her lover, hearing of her marriage, grieved until he died of a broken heart. She came to his funeral, pressed her nose and mouth to his body and suffocated. The two were buried in the same grave.

The husband heard the tragic news and leaped from a high cliff, dying on the rocks below.

* THE AIMELIIK SNAKE

A huge man-eating snake once lived on Aimeliik mountain. When he smelled cooking food, his hunger drew him down to the village where he ate the cooks. The terrified villagers moved to a new place but a woman and her young boy stayed behind.

They survived for a time by eating only raw food but an idea came to the boy. He started a cooking fire under several large rocks and soon the hungry snake came with open mouth. The brave boy, using a wood sling, hurled red hot rocks into the mouth, killing the snake.

The two sent it's heart to their old neighbors to announce that they could safely return. The grateful villagers provided all of the needs of the pair for the rest of their lives.

RECHOSECH - THE CHIEF WHO SLEPT ALONE

Rechosech fell in love with a beautiful maiden who visited his island and soon they were married. They stayed together in their house on the wedding night but after that the chief slept in the bai (men's house) and would tell no one the reason.

Time passed and a Kayangel wise man came to the village.

The chief confided in the man removing his loincloth to show the areas of his body where the skin had been horribly torn! The wise man ordered a bowl of water and tiny fish. When it was brought, he placed it between the feet of the squatting wife. Two large hungry eels wiggled out of her body and dove for the fish. The chief returned to his house and the couple happily slept together to the end of their days.

BEKEU EL BNGAOL - FIGHTING MANGROVE TREE

In ancient times, money would be given for the heads of important men of enemy villages. One group of Ngeremlengui warriors decided to take such a head and succeeded in capturing the man of Ngerchelung while he was sleeping. In his place at the end of the canoe, he managed to free his bound hands. The canoe slipped under some low mangrove tree branches that he was able to grab, pulling himself up out of the canoe to safety.

His captors did not discover the escape until they reached their village at dawn. By that time, their "victim" was safe at home, enjoying a hero's welcome.

THE MARKED LOVERS

Two friends always fished together but one always returned home early. Eventually, the one suspected the other of visiting his wife upon his early return. One morning, before he left with the friend, he mixed oil and black squid juice and convinced his

ailing wife that it was medicine that must be smeared on her body. He left to fish but returned shortly after his friend to find the two lovers marked with black oil. With one mighty thrust of his spear, the two died together, pinned to the floor.

NGKEKLAU - THE UPSIDE-DOWN SHARK

Ngirabiluk suspected that his wife was unfaithful but had no proof of the affair nor idea as to the identify of the lover. He was out fishing in his canoe one day when a shark swam close upside down! Taking this as a sign that his suspicions were founded, he quickly paddled toward his village of Ngkeklaui.

Nearing the dock, he saw a group of men who did not fish that day, waiting to count the catches of those that had gone out. He raised his spear and shouted his attention of killing his wife's lover. The guilty man identified himself by bolting from the group. Instantly, the spear was thrown and the husband fulfilled his oath.

ODALMELECH AND NGIRANGCHESAR

Odalmelech, a god of Melekeok, and Ngarangchesar, the blind god of Ngchesar, went fishing together one day. The day's catch was only a tuna (tekuu) and a sea hermit crab (chum). Odalmelech took the tuna and tricked the sightless god into believing that he was given the largest portion. The trick was discovered at dinner that night and an angry Ngirangchesar hurried to Melekeok

before the dawn. Melekeok gods were working on a rock dome fort that had to be finished by daybreak when they would vanish. Ngira-ngchesar turned a coconut into a rooster and made it crow long before dawn. The gods stopped their work, vanished, and never returned to finish the fort.

* OLIK - ERA - IDABERUCHEL

In Angaur, there once lived a giant bat-monster called Olik-era-Idaberucchel. For many years, it would swoop down on the village, the wind its wings causing typhoons that toppled houses and trees.

Many unsuccessful attempts were made to kill the monster. Finally, a new method was tried. Sharpened bamboo poles were erected so the points were just above the huts. Olik saw activity and angrily swooped down, intending to destroy the entire village once and for all. The huge beast did not notice the sharp bamboo until he landed on a roof. He died on the stakes and his head was brought to Koror as a gift to Chief Ibedul.

LEGEND OF TEBANG

Rekeriwal of Ngiwal married Merderad of Ngchesar where the couple settled down and had a son that they named Tebang. The mother died shortly after the birth, and the father raised the son with loving devotion.

The son became an adult and married a Ngerngesung maiden but, thrilled with the new wife, neglected the father and finally ordered him out of the house. With a heavy heart, the old man returned to Ngiwal only to find all of his relatives dead and his home gone. Too old to fish or build a house, he lived in the bush and begged for his food.

Back in Ngerngesang, Tebang and his friends cut a large log for a canoe and dragged it toward the sea. On the way, it rolled into a taro patch and, try as they would, they couldn't get it out. A diviner declared it to be punishment for the way Tebang had treated his father.

Tebang set off for Ngiwal where he begged his father's forgiveness. It was quickly given and the two returned to Ngerngesang. At the mired canoe, Rekesiwal gave a chant and the canoe was freed. The old man lived happily in the house of his son to the end of his days.

STORY OF UAB

In the beginning, Palau was only two islands, Angaur and Peleliu. A baby boy, Uab, was born to an Angaur woman, Latnukaik. The baby grew at an alarming rate and began to eat everything he could find. Finally, the embarrassed mother told her neighbors that they could kill the giant before he devastated the entire village.

The people gathered fire wood around the giant's feet and set it on fire. When Uak fell, his body came apart and formed the many other islands of today's Palau. The mother asked that her child's body be covered with a mat but all of the available mats and branches could only cover half of the body. That is why the Palau Islands are half forest, half plains.