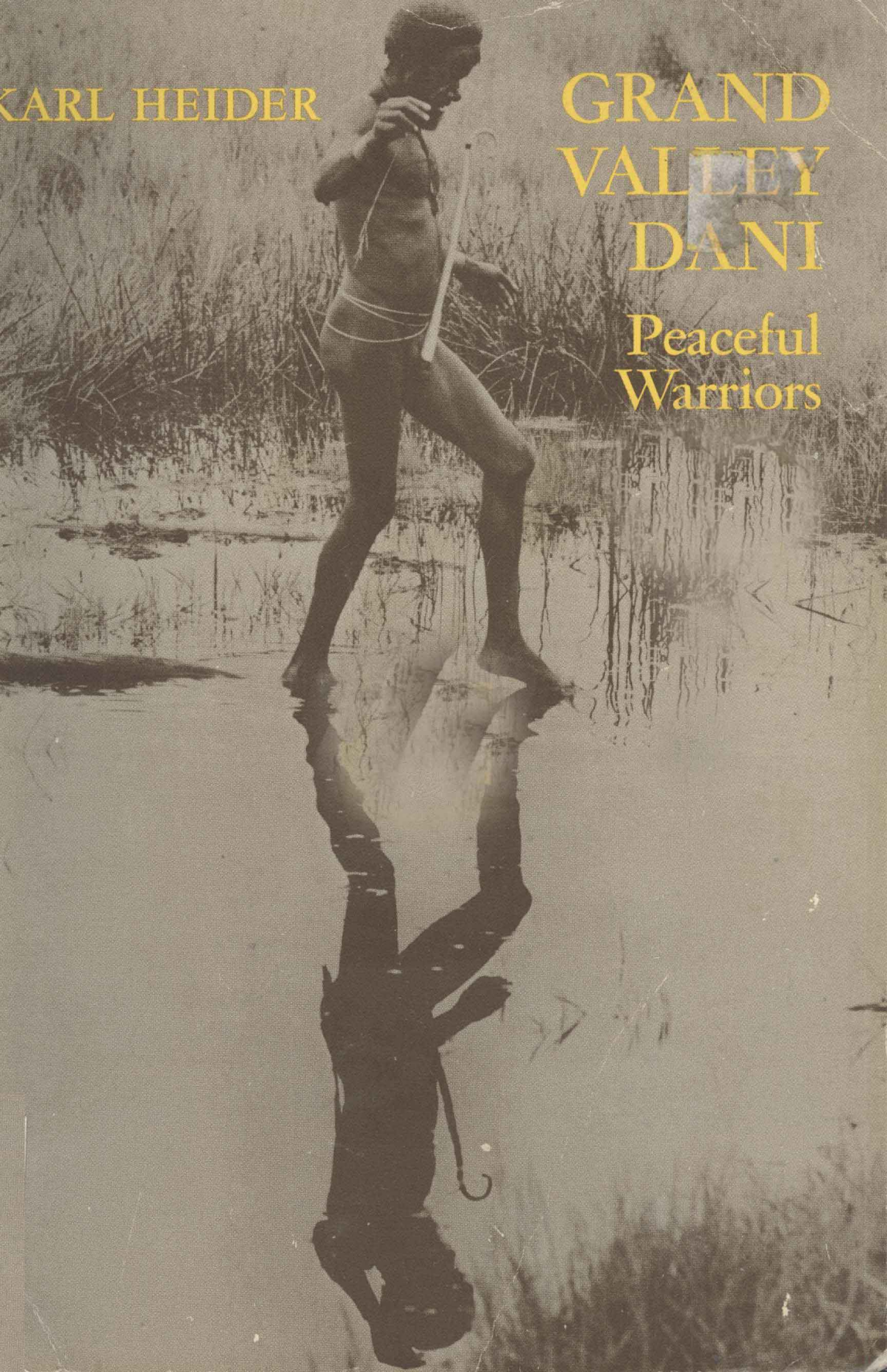
KARL HEIDER

GRAND VALLEY DANI

Peaceful Warriors



GRAND VALLEY DANI

Peaceful Warriors

By
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CASE STUDIES IN

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

GENERAL EDITORS

George and Louise Spindler

STANFORD UNIVERSITY

GRAND VALLEY DANI

Peaceful Warriors

Foreword

About the Series

These case studies in cultural anthropology are designed to bring to students, in beginning and intermediate courses in the social sciences, insights into the richness and complexity of human life as it is lived in different ways and in different places. They are written by men and women who have lived in the societies they write about and who are professionally trained as observers and interpreters of human behavior. The authors are also teachers, and in writing their books they have kept the students who will read them foremost in their minds. It is our belief that when an understanding of ways of life very different from one's own is gained, abstractions and generalizations about social structure, cultural values, subsistence techniques, and the other universal categories of human social behavior become meaningful.

About the Author

Karl G. Heider was born in Northampton, Massachusetts, and went to high school in Lawrence, Kansas. In 1952 he spent the summer between high school and college as a shovel hand on an archaeological dig in South Dakota. He has been in anthropology ever since. After digging for two more summers in South Dakota, he did a brief ethnography of the Fort McDowell Yavapai in Arizona for his honors thesis at Harvard. Then, after graduating in 1956, he spent a year wandering through Asia on a Sheldon Traveling Fellowship. He did some archaeology on the Kwae Noi River in Thailand, was in the film *Bridge on the River Kwai*, and generally visited everywhere he could. The next year he studied ethnology at the University of Vienna, and then returned to Harvard for his M.A. (1959) and Ph.D. (1966) in anthropology. In 1960 while digging at the Mayan site of Tikal in Guatemala, he made his first film, *Tikal*. In 1961 he joined the Harvard–Peabody Expedition in New Guinea and began the study of the Grand Valley Dani who are described here. After finishing his Ph.D., he taught at Harvard for a year and then at Brown University for four years. Then he moved to California where he taught at the University of California, Berkeley, at Stanford, and at UCLA, and was a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences. In 1975 he moved to the University of South Carolina to be the first chairman of the new Department of Anthropology there. In addition to his interests in the Dani and other cultures in Indonesia, he is beginning fieldwork in South Carolina.

About the Book

In this case study Karl Heider has condensed many of the most important observations and interpretations issuing from his long and productive engagement with the Dugum Dani of the Grand Valley of the Balim River in the central highlands of Irian/New Guinea. The approach is unusual in the range of topics covered and in the succinctness with which they are covered, and also because the author introduces us to the Dani by telling us about his fieldwork, his ethical dilemmas, and the circumstances of his contact with the Dani. One immediately acquires a sense of the limitations and strengths of the anthropological role in the field situation. The Dani become not less, but more real to the reader, as one approaches them and their culture through the experience of a fellow Westerner. One has a bit of the feeling of what it would be like to have been in Heider's place, seeing with his eyes.

This case study is also notable for the author's willingness to admit not having explanations for certain phenomena and to encourage further study to expand our knowledge of the Dani. All too often we gain the feeling as we read ethnographies that the author has mastered the native language perfectly (which is rarely the case) and knows the culture much better than any native member of the society in which the anthropologist is a resident guest. No anthropologist, in fact, ever masters the native language or comes to know all aspects of the culture thoroughly.

It is fortunate that the very well-known film, *Dead Birds*, is available for use with this case study, as well as the other films shot by Heider himself. This combination of films and case study makes an unbeatable instructional unit.

GEORGE AND LOUISE SPINDLER
General Editors

Stanford, California

Acknowledgments

I am greatly indebted to many Dani for their patience and good humor. In particular, I would like to mention Um'ue, his daughter Hagigake, and the other people of the Dugum Neighborhood. Robert Gardner's splendid vision, coupled with his organizing talents, got the Harvard Peabody Expedition underway. Denise O'Brien and Eleanor Rosch, who also studied the Dani, gave me much help and inspiration, as did Myron Bromley, who knows the Dani better than any of us. Father Frans Verheijen OFM and Father Jules Camps OFM were gracious hosts at Jibiga in 1968 and 1970. I received generous support from many others in the governments of Netherlands New Guinea, the United Nations Temporary Executive Authority, and the Republic of Indonesia; and from among the missionaries of the Order of St. Francis, The Christian and Missionary Association, the Regions Beyond Missionary Union, and The Missionary Fellowship. My research in the field was mainly supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, the Cross-Cultural Study of Ethnocentrism Project, and the Foundations' Fund for Research in Psychiatry, none of whom are responsible for these results. I worked out much of this while a Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, California, and did the final writing at the University of South Carolina, where Dean Chester W. Bain of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences helped me get precious time, and Dorothy O'Dell Tart did the typing. Finally, I owe a special debt to the encouragement and interest shown by countless students, friends, and relations who have listened to me talk about the Dani over the past years and who, through their questions and thinking, have helped me to develop these understandings about the Dani.

K. G. H.

Pronunciation

A few Dani words and names are used here when necessary. For those readers who want to get close to the Dani pronunciation, the following will be of help. The Dani did not have a writing system, so over the years several missionary linguists developed an orthography (see van der Stap 1966:3). The pronunciations are fairly similar to English except in a few cases where Dani phonemes behave differently from the nearest English ones. Most words have equal stress on each syllable. Every vowel is pronounced.

t This phoneme in a final position is pronounced like the stop "t," when it occurs between two vowels, it is more like a flapped "r." Thus:
Mogat (ghost) is mo-gat, but
Gutelu (the man and the Alliance) is goo-re-loo

k This phoneme, when it is final, is pronounced like the stop "k," but when it occurs between two vowels, it is a velar fricative, a very soft "g," or it disappears.
eak (a kinship term) is āyak, but
jokoik (the bird) is yō-ōyk

j is the Dutch "j," the English "y"

a pronounced "ah" (as in "father")—*wa* is wah

i pronounced ee (as in "see")
Dani is dah-nee
wim (war) is weem
Balim (the river) is bah-leem

e pronounced "eh" (or as in "bed")

o pronounced as long "o" (as in "so")

u pronounced as "oo" (as in "moo")

diphthongs: *ai* (as "eye")
so *edai-egen* is eh-dye-eh-ken
oi (as in "boy")

Contents

Introduction

Hidden away in the central mountain ranges of New Guinea a mile above the coastal jungles, the Balim River flows through a broad temperate plain called the Grand Valley. The valley floor is densely populated by some 50,000 Dani. In the 1960s, the same decade when most of the world watched a man walk on the moon, the Grand Valley Dani still raised their sweet potatoes with fire-hardened digging sticks, made houses for themselves and their pigs with stone adzes, and fought wars with wooden spears and featherless arrows.

The material aspects of Dani culture offered one of our last chances on this planet to see how a horticultural society with the simplest of tools has adapted to its environment.

But behind the external facts of Dani culture lie the complexities of a moiety-based kinship system; a political organization of confederations and alliances of great size but little power; and in the psychological realm, such traits as a five-year postpartum sexual abstinence without stress, a counting system which goes up to three, and tremendous conservatism in the face of great pressures to change their way of life.

New Guinea A great land mass 1500 miles long and 400 miles wide. Because it is not quite big enough to be called a continent, it is usually termed the second largest island in the world (after Greenland). It lies between Australia and the Equator, where Southeast Asia reaches into the South Pacific. There are two worlds in New Guinea. Around the coast are the lowlands, swamps, jungles, and great meandering rivers. The central core of the island is mountainous, containing the highest mountains between the Himalayas and the Andes, and in a few places there are even glaciers. In 1526 the Portuguese explorer Meneses was the first European to see New Guinea. Europeans soon called it by an African name because of the black-skinned peoples of the coast.

Traditionally, anthropologists speak of two main groups of cultures: the coastal Melanesians and the highland Papuans. The Melanesians speak Austronesian languages related to Polynesian, Micronesian, and Indonesian languages. The Papuans speak non-Austronesian languages. The Papuans are the descendants of the earlier inhabitants of New Guinea who had been pushed into their mountain fastness by later migrations of Melanesians.

Papuan A general cultural, linguistic, and racial term for the hundreds of thousands of people living in the central highlands of New Guinea, including the Dani, the Kapauku (or Ekagi), and

the Gururumba. The Papuan cultures are concentrated in the temperate mountain valley systems between 4000 and 6000 feet (1,200–1,800 m) altitude. Papuans raise pigs and sweet potatoes, are patrilineal, and, until the last decade or two, have had endemic warfare and used stone tools. Most parts of the highlands have been isolated from world events until recently. Major European contact began only after the Second World War, and intensive anthropological research dates only from the late 1950s and 1960s.

Dani A general term for a group of closely related Papuan cultures and languages in West New Guinea, including the Jalé (or Eastern Dani), the Western Dani, the Southern Dani, and the centrally located Grand Valley Dani. There may be 100,000 Dani speakers in all. Although some Dani were contacted by European expeditions just before and after World War I, continuous outside contact did not begin until the 1950s.

Grand Valley Dani About 50,000 Dani live in the Grand Valley of the Balim River, at about latitude 4° south and longitude 138°50′ east. The Grand Valley was probably discovered by Dani centuries ago, but Europeans first found it in 1938, and the first permanent European residents arrived in 1954.

The Dugum Neighborhood Where some 350 Grand Valley Dani live; it is the main focus of this study and the location of the film *Dead Birds.*

READING THE BOOK

The book begins with two chapters which tell about the fieldwork in New Guinea and about the different attempts which I made to understand the Dani. Study of the Dani proper begins on page 23. Some readers may want to begin there. Some may want to start by flipping through the illustrations to see what the Dani and their land look like.

1/Studying the Dani

This book is the result of two adventures. The first is a physical adventure: doing fieldwork with the Grand Valley Dani in the central highlands of West New Guinea. The second is a mental adventure which has taken place in the United States as well as in New Guinea: the process of working out an understanding of the Dani.

The fieldwork is finite, with beginning and end marked by stamps in my passport. The process of understanding the Dani has no end, in part because of the tremendous complexity of even an apparently simple Stone Age culture and in part because the questions keep changing. I first went to live with the Dani in 1961. This book tells of my understanding of them 16 years later, in the summer of 1977. Eventually, when more anthropologists have lived with the Dani and thought about the Dani, we should have more and perhaps different understandings of their culture. And someday we might realize that old anthropologists' dream when a Dani comes to tell us about our own culture.

1.1 ADVENTURE ONE: THE FIELDWORK

In 1961 when I first met the Dani, the mountains of Netherlands New Guinea were at a moment of maximum culture contrast. It was a sort of time warp. Christian missionaries had built airstrips for small planes in the midst of many people who still had a Stone Age economy. It was a far cry indeed from the conditions which explorers had to face in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and even well into the pre-aviation era of the twentieth century. By the 1960s one could take an international KLM jet flight to Biak in New Guinea; then a two-engine DC-3, that workhorse of World War II, along the coast to Sentani, the airport of the capital, a town then called Hollandia; in Sentani, one would board another DC-3 or a small missionary plane for the flight inland, over the coastal swamps, and through the mountain passes to Wamena, a little collection of prefabricated houses which was already becoming the administrative center for the Grand Valley. From Wamena it was only three or four hours by boat and by foot across the Grand Valley to the Dugum Neighborhood where we settled.

The Expedition

I arrived in New Guinea as a member of the Harvard–Peabody Expedition, which had been organized by Robert Gardner. Gardner is a filmmaker and anthropologist who was head of the Film Study Center in the basement of the Peabody Museum at Harvard. In 1960 he was approached by the director of the Bureau of Native Affairs of the Government of Netherlands New Guinea and invited to take an anthropological expedition to New Guinea. The group which he brought together covered a wide range of skills: Gardner himself would be cameraman and anthropologist; Peter Matthiessen, the natural historian and novelist would write a journal; Michael Rockefeller and Samuel Putnam would do still photography and sound recording; Eliot Elisofon, the *Life* photographer, would back us up on still photography. Jan Broekhuijse, an anthropologist in the Netherlands New Guinea government, was attached to the expedition to help introduce us to the Dani; and Chris Versteegh, a government botanist, joined us for a week to identify the flora. I was then a graduate student in archaeology at Harvard, planning to study the Bronze Age of Thailand. During the summer of 1960 I had worked at the Mayan site of Tikal in Guatemala, and, with Gardner's help, had

The Expedition (1961). Peter Matthiessen, Robert Gardner, and Karl G. Heider behind the lines at a battle. (Photograph by Jan Broekhuijse)

The Expedition (1961). Michael Rockefeller, Jan Broekhuijse, Eliot Elisofon (foreground), and a bemused Um'ue at the Homuak tent camp.

made a film about archaeology and Tikal. In the fall of 1960 when Gardner suggested that I join the New Guinea expedition to do my dissertation and help out with the filming, I immediately accepted.

Gardner arrived in New Guinea first to scout out a suitable place for the expedition work. Fairly certain that we would go to the Grand Valley of the Balim, we had tried to get as much ethnographic and linguistic material on the Dani as possible. But, as an alternative site, Gardner also wanted to visit the Asmat Coast. As it turned out, of course, the Grand Valley was ideal, with easy access to groups which were under neither missionary nor government influence. In February 1961 Gardner met with Broekhuijse in the Grand Valley and they walked in toward the territory called Gutelu (see p. viii for pronunciations) after the most important man. They walked in from a mission station on the Balim River and camped the first night on a high ridge. The next day they went on across the no-man's-land which we would all soon get to know. They were not at all certain about their reception on the other side. Gutelu's people had summarily run off outsiders—missionaries and even Broekhuijse—before. In fact, on the far side of a swamp, Gardner and Broekhuijse were suddenly faced by a large army of men armed with spears and bows and arrows. It must have looked a good deal more threatening than it actually was, but neither side knew just what to expect from the other.

Broekhuijse asked to speak with the *gain*, or *ab goktek* ("Big Man"). Much later, people told me with some glee how carefully they had acted that day. They pushed forward a man whose name happened to be Gok ("Big") but who was not really a Big Man, and let him chat with the *tuans* while the real leaders sat to the side. (The Dani used *tuan* for anyone who wore clothes.) It turned out that Gardner had walked into just the right sector of the Gutelu Alliance at just the right time. These people, of the Wiligiman–Walalua Confederation, had been feeling uncomfortable in the Alliance, and were beginning to develop their own independent power; so they were ready to welcome anyone who might be turned to their advantage in their maneuverings against Gutelu. But that day things hung in the air for a time until Um'ue, the quickest of the younger leaders, sized up the situation and stepped forward. He invited them to come live near him. This instant grasp at opportunity was typical of Um'ue. I later came to know him better than I did any other Dani, as a friend and informant, and learned to appreciate and admire his skill. He had seen how useful it could be to have a resident expedition in his midst. For the most part, he was right. It was a long and mutually profitable association.

However, the expedition also led to a chain of misfortunes that none of us could have predicted at the time. Our presence, especially with our movie cameras, focused attention on that area; thus, the Dutch felt compelled eventually to set up a police post there to guarantee pacification. The police post was then the origin of much trouble for the Dani because some factions of Dani became involved on the side of the police—a situation that eventually contributed to renewed warfare in which many Dani were killed and others imprisoned by the Indonesians. Of course it is quite possible that a police post would have been set up in the Dugum Neighborhood even without the expedition. It was certainly a logical place for it. In any case, there were costs as well as benefits from our association with Um'ue.

Even after inviting us to live in his neighborhood Um'ue moved cautiously. At first we spent more time with two men who more nearly fit the picture of the classic ethnographer's informant, since they were both outsiders to some extent. They hung around our camp, getting to know us and reporting to the community on our strange ways. We were by no means the first outsiders whom these Dani had ever seen, but we were the first who had lived in their midst.

In fact, Um'ue had even taken the precaution of changing his name to Wali, and we knew him as that for the first five months. Then, when Gardner and the rest left, he resumed the name of Um'ue. For the first few days after that I was quite bewildered. People talked about an "Um'ue" who was clearly an important man, but I knew no one by that name. Finally, when I figured it out, I confronted him with this semantic treachery. He explained with a grin: When we first came he had taken a chance in welcoming us, but just in case there should be trouble with the government, it would be blamed on someone named Wali.

On that first visit Gardner and Broekhuijse stayed long enough to get acquainted with the area and to choose a campsite in Homuak, a magnificent grove of araucaria trees where a clear stream issued from the foot of a hill called Dugum. There, midway between three Dani settlements, we could set up our tents. Our

Um'ue, who emerged as a major leader during the 1960s, is crossing a flooded ditch on a submerged log. During raids or battles a knowledge of such crossings can give the local people a great advantage over enemy warriors.