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Bellona and Rennell Islanders

ETHNONYMS: In 1793 Bellona Island was named after a passing British ship, the *Bellona*. Rennell Island was named after Lord Rennell, president of the Royal Geographical Society in London. In 1799 according to a chart both islands were named Bellonas Island. In 1816 the islands were referred to as Rennell's Isles. The names the islanders use for self-reference are Mugaba (Rennell) and Mungiki (Bellona). The meanings of those names are unknown. Younger people on both islands sometimes use the name Avaiki.

Orientation

Identification and Location. The islands constitute the southernmost and smallest province of the independent Melanesian nation Solomon Islands (a former British protectorate) but are inhabited by Polynesians. The combined land area of Bellona and Rennell is 446 square miles (1,154.5 square kilometers). Bellona Island is 7 miles (11.5 kilometers) long and 2 miles (3 kilometers) wide and lies northwest of Rennell, between 11° 16' and 11° 19' South and 159° 45' East. Rennell is 49 miles (79.5 kilometers) long and 9 miles (14 kilometers) wide and located between 11° 34' and 11° 47' South and 159° 55' and 160° 37' East. The large, 109 mile-long (176 kilometers) uninhabited Indispensable Reef lying 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of Bellona and Rennell is called Ngotoakau and is claimed as part of this territory.

Tegano Lake, the largest brackish lake in the Pacific, covers about 50 square miles (130 square kilometers) at the east end of the island. There is no fresh water on any of the islands; rain is collected for daily use. Yearly precipitation is about 120 inches (300 millimeters). The climate is tropical

with temperatures from 63 ° Fahrenheit (17° Celsius) at night to 93 ° Fahrenheit (34° Celsius) during the daytime. There is no communal electric power but a few churches have generators run by diesel oil.

Both islands are of the raised coral type (*makatea*). Apart from villages and garden areas, both islands are rocky and covered by tropical forest. There are no mammals except for the flying fox, rat, mouse, cat, and dog. Rennell has two natural harbors; Bellona has none.

Demography. In the 1960s a detailed census was made of the population as it had been when Christianity was introduced on Bellona in 1938 and gave a count of 441 persons. A general census for the Solomon Islands in September 1998 revealed the population of the two islands. On Bellona there were 295 households with 1,256 individuals and on Rennell there were 433 households with 1,866 inhabitants. According to the census, approximately 60 percent live abroad. Many residents have moved to the national capital, Honiara, on Guadalcanal Island, often for education and service-related activities. In 2000, during the ethnic conflict between the people of Guadalcanal and the people of Malaita, most people on Bellona and Rennell left the capital and returned to their islands.

Linguistic Affiliation. Bellonese and Rennellese are mutually intelligible and are nuclear Polynesian languages in the Futunic subdivision with a few phonemes of unknown origin. Portions of the Bible were translated into Rennellese in 1950 and 1994. Two dictionaries and a grammar were published in 1975, 1981, and 1988, respectively. Pidgin English is spoken by almost all the residents, and English by a minority. Literacy is more than 90 percent in the sense that nearly everyone writes and reads Bellonese and Rennellese.

History and Cultural Relations

According to oral traditions, the islands originally were inhabited by people of another culture before the ancestors of present-day Polynesians arrived in canoes from their homeland, 'Ubea ngango (probably West Uvea in the Loyalty Islands, Overseas French Territories). On their voyage, the ancestors of the present-day Polynesians arrived at 'Ubea mangi (probably East Uvea Wallis Island, Overseas French Territories), and finally reached Bellona, where they found people, the *hiti*, living in caves at the ocean sides of the island. The *hiti* were dark-skinned, short people with long hair reaching to their knees and spoke a language intelligible to the invaders. The invaders gradually killed off the indigenous inhabitants.

In the 1980s the "new" Polynesian inhabitants could still trace their genealogies twenty-four generations back, and in considerable detail, to the first immigrants. The oral traditions relate that the first invaders consisted of seven married couples, five of which have since died out, leaving two surviving clans (*sa'a*).

In the oral tradition narrators tell of scattered and singular voyages to and from other inhabited places in the Western Pacific. Just after settling, some men returned to East 'Ubea (Uvea) to get the precious root stocks of turmeric for ritual dyeing and anointment. In following generations two men went to Murua (probably Woodlark Island, Mungua) and returned with place names and new kinds of yams and

bananas. Another oral tradition details the arrival of a New Caledonian ship with tobacco and steel adzes. Other oral traditions state that poultry was brought to Rennell before the first Christian teachers were killed in 1910. In the latter part of the nineteenth century Rennellese and Bellonese were taken to Queensland by Blackbirders to work in the sugar plantations. One Rennellese man is known to have been returned, bringing home Western goods such as axes, cotton cloth, umbrellas, and guns.

The two islands were at first contacted only sporadically by Europeans and Americans in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In 1910 the three first Christian missionaries were killed on Rennell, and the islands were left to themselves until preachers from the Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), the Church of England, and the South Seas Evangelical Mission (SSEM) arrived in 1936 to take a group of high-status Rennellese men to mission stations in other parts of the Solomons. In 1938, the Christian faith became dominant on Rennell.

Generally, a slow Westernization on the two islands began after World War II. Closer contact with the rest of the Solomon Islands sped the process. More regular shipping was initiated, and children were sent to schools on other islands. Air service to the two islands began with weekly flights between Honiara and the airstrips on Bellona and Rennell. Health clinics were established, and wireless contact began in the 1950s.

With a restructuring of the political system of the Solomon Islands, Bellona and Rennell were declared an independent constituency and province within the Solomon Islands on 21 January 1993. Around the turn of the millennium the different churches began losing their power, especially over the younger generation. Sports, music, and home brewing became leisure-time interests, and education and vocational training rose in importance.

Settlements

Before World War II people lived in small homesteads next to the main trails running lengthwise from east to west on the islands. Houses were built in clearings in the forests, separated by garden land and temple areas. Each house commonly was inhabited by a nuclear or extended family, with the members sometimes living in separate houses around a place used for rituals and dancing. The houses had posts dug into the ground, covered with saddle roofs of dried pandanus leaves reaching down to about 20 to 28 inches (50 to 70 centimeters) above the ground. Temple houses were smaller than habitations. A low earth mound often encircled the dancing area. On both sides were ancestral graves covered by mounds of sand, while the graves of important ancestors were sheltered by thatched leaf roofs on posts.

After 1945 villages formed when a Melanesian Adventist priest was sent to Bellona and had the Adventists build a church in Ngongona; at the same time the South Seas Evangelical Mission built a church in Kapata.

Economy

Subsistence. Before 1945 the Bellonese and Rennellese economy was nonmonetary, entirely based on subsistence. The basic economic values could be said to be "manpower"

and "objects." Economic activities included swidden gardening; fishing; some hunting of birds and flying foxes; the building of houses; the carving of troughs, war clubs, and sacred paraphernalia; and the plaiting of baskets and mats.

Gradually cash was introduced, yet the islanders have not become completely commercialized in a Western sense. Closer contact with the Westernized economy in Honiara, including its industry, stores, systems of education, and infrastructure had necessitated the acceptance of a monetary system. *However, concepts such as profit, gain, and value have no equivalents in this language.* Since people began laboring in other parts of the Solomon Islands after World War II, a cash economy has been implemented on the two islands.

Commercial Activities. Money was introduced by the first Christians and the British colonizers as a means to pay taxes and tithes. A monetary economy is gradually becoming more common, but there are no banking facilities on Bellona and Rennell.

Industrial Arts. People spend their cash on boat fares and airplane trips to the capital of the Solomon Islands, bringing food and artifacts to the market or shops for sale. Others live more or less permanently in Honiara (White River), making a living from dancing and singing, the carving of traditional objects such as war clubs, fishhooks, large bowls (*kamete*), and walking sticks, and plaiting mats and baskets for sale to tourists. Some work in offices or in the building industry. Most take pride in sending their children to school. Education has become a primary way to acquire prestige.

Trade. Very little precontact trade took place except during the time of the "black birding" ships, when the islanders traded wood carvings for adzes, knives, whistles, beads, calico, and umbrellas. In the 1960s the British protectorate government encouraged the people of the Solomon Islands to set up cooperative trading companies on their islands. Bellonese and Rennellese entrepreneurs attempted to establish two such companies. Their assets were the copra from the very large coconuts grown on the two islands. However, this system failed because the economic ideals of the islands were incompatible with those of Western culture.

In 1969 and 1976 Japanese and Australian companies did test drillings. On Bellona considerable amounts of phosphate were found, and on Rennell there were large deposits of bauxite. Because of the conflict between wanting to avoid violation of ancestral graves and the wish to make a profit in the Western sense, mining has not been inaugurated at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Division of Labor. Before contact with the outside world, garden work was done communally by all the members of a nuclear family according to their abilities. Women did all the cooking, plaiting of baskets and mats, and the child rearing, while men did all the fishing, hunting, house building, canoe carving, and distribution of harvested crops. There has been a gradual equalization between the sexes since that time. Women and men may receive the same education and are equally likely to be employed in the Solomons. In politics at home and abroad, men are generally the leaders and dominate the political arena.

Land Tenure. Land ownership is hereditary within a patrilineal descent group, with an emphasis on male primogeni-

ture. If a younger son possesses talents or virtues and is admired by the members of his lineage, he may inherit the major parts of his father's land. As land is scarce and the population is growing rapidly, equal ownership has become increasingly difficult. Even before contact with other cultures a landowner could grant usufruct privileges to others for a stipulated period. It is common for a mother's brother (*tu'atinana*) to present his sister's son with a land area, especially if he is fatherless. However, it is not uncommon for women to inherit land.

Kinship

Kin Groups and Descent. In both theory and practice, the core social structure and organization is a patrilineal descent system, with descent reckoned from the first male immigrants.

The islands are subdivided into districts (*kanomanaha* or, in modern speech, *kakai 'anga/potuanga*): six on Rennell and three on Bellona. In each district people live in villages and in separate family settlements. All male heads of households are descendants of the same clan, Kaitu'u, except for males in the small Iho clan at the west end of Bellona. The patrilineages are named after the new settlement (*hakanohonga*). Although land principally is inherited patrilineally, there is a growing tendency for men to hand over land to female kin.

With a growing population, the land areas owned by individuals are diminishing in size, and disagreements over ownership or stewardship of land are increasing. In precontact times this was a cause of interlineage feuds.

Kinship Terminology. The terminology of Bellona and Rennell is characteristically Western Polynesian, which includes distinct terms for the mother's brother and cross-cousins. This system is related to some Melanesian kin terminologies.

Marriage and Family

Marriage. Ideally, marriages take place only between a male and a female of another lineage. The closest relationship between spouses would be that of cross-cousins. However, a person traditionally was free to marry anyone from another lineage without the specific consent of the parents. Freedom in the choice of a spouse is stressed. Married couples generally live near the husband's parents (virilocal residence). Divorce is common. In pre-Christian days polygynous marriages were found among high-status people with a considerable amount of land. However, Christianity disapproved of polygynous marriages, and they have disappeared.

Domestic Unit. Before World War II, the basic households were dispersed along the main trails. The average household consisted of just over four nuclear family members sometimes supplemented by in-laws and occasional visiting kinspeople. In front of the houses were the ritual grounds laid out in a semicircle, with ancestral graves around them facing the main trail. Traditional houses were of varying sizes, often constructed as a roof made of pandanus leaves on posts without walls. The houses of wealthy landholders had curved roofs. The various Christian faiths attempted to display their strength by building large prayer houses. At the turn of the millennium social prestige was shown to the community through the size of one's house or houses.

Inheritance. Prior to World War II, wealth was measured by the size of the property a landholder possessed. Around the turn of the twenty-first century, values gradually changed. "Wealth" in landholding has become of lesser importance than "wealth" in higher education. Obviously, a rich landowner can better afford to send his children abroad for education than can a person with less wealth in property. Material goods have less prestige than funds for sending one's children to school.

Socialization. In an infants' earliest days, child rearing is the task of its mother and her female kin. Once a child can walk and talk, the father's duty is to socialize him or her into his or her coming position in society. Strictness is important in the upbringing of children, and punishment can be harsh. Bellona has begun to form kindergarten schools, and on Rennell there are five. Bellona has three primary schools and Rennell has eight. On Rennell there is a secondary school, and there are plans to establish tertiary schools.

Sociopolitical Organization

Social Organization. In theory, Bellona and Rennell have a more shallow social organization than do most other Polynesian societies. Class is little talked of, but the islands still have three different social status levels: persons of high prestige (*hakahua*), ordinary landowners (*maatu'a*), and persons of the lowest status (*pegea i tu'a*, servants). On Rennell more words are used for the low-status individuals (*pegea i tu'a*, *guani*, and *tinu*). Persons born out of wedlock belong to the last category.

Political Organization. The patrilineal descent groups were politically independent, usually with a few prestigious men as their high-ranking heads. Before World War II, the two islands had no chiefs in the Polynesian sense. In 1993, when Bellona and Rennell were pronounced a province of the Solomon Islands, a provincial government was formed as an allegedly democratic political system with a premier, various ministries, and a provincial assembly. Constitutionally, the islands are subdivided into ten wards.

Social Control. Land disputes, theft, vandalism, uncontrolled consumption of "home brew," and verbal fights are among the major crimes. People usually maintained peace and order by themselves through lineage elders, but a policeman and two constables were stationed on the islands in the 1970s.

Conflict. In the days of incessant interlineage blood feuds (before the introduction of Christianity), wives were sent out as peace negotiators between the parties. Land disputes, defending honor after insults, and mutual killings in raids were some of the reasons for ongoing conflicts. Society had been in a constant state of conflict until Christianity was accepted. Present-day conflicts are solved in local courts and in the Solomon Islands High Court.

Religion and Expressive Culture

Religious Beliefs. Bellona and Rennell were among the last Polynesian Islands to convert to Christianity. Their almost complete isolation during the war in the Western Pacific prevented the population from acquiring extensive

knowledge about Christian doctrines, but this isolation made it possible for anthropologists to acquire a detailed picture of a pre-Christian Polynesian religion. The world of the islands was inhabited by an impressive hierarchy of gods, deities, and worshiped ancestors classified as sky gods, who were associated with the universe and with the nonsocialized nature surrounding human beings. District deities comprised a lower level of supernatural beings, whose existence was organized as that of human beings and who protected society in its present form. Ancestors acted as messengers between the world of humans and that of gods and deities, taking goods, wealth, and children to the island societies. Almost no act was carried out without communication with the supernaturals. At feasts in the homesteads and temples, men and gods communicated, raw food for the gods and cooked food for the deities and ancestors were distributed among the participants, and sacred and profane dances were performed to honor the gods and the guests.

In October 1938 a meeting was held in the homestead Niupani at the lake. A series of rites were conducted both to the Christian god and to the old deities. After a short period of social and ideological chaos the Christian faith became dominant on Rennell. Shortly thereafter a group of Rennellese went to Bellona to announce the dismissal of the old deities and the two islands were proclaimed Christian. The old deities were chased away to their abodes at the eastern horizon. The two stone images of gods on Bellona were crushed; sacred buildings and areas were destroyed and uprooted. A few years after the end of World War II foreign missionaries ordered people to build churches and establish villages around them.

On Rennell the first Adventist church was founded in Hutuna at the lake. Later, in Tahamatangi and Tegano the SSEM built two churches at the lake. Over the years the missions have founded new churches with surrounding villages, and during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s a few families converted to Baptism, Baha'i, the Anglican Church, and the fundamentalist Adventist Church Concerned Bretheren (CB). In all there were twenty eight local religious communities on the two islands at the turn of the millennium.

Religious Practitioners. In the pre-Christian religion all adult men had religious roles. Three formal types were distinguished: priest-chiefs, second priest-chiefs, and assistants to priests. An informal role was that of a medium who occasionally was possessed by a district deity or ancestor and who, with a twisted voice or in an unintelligible language, spoke through him.

The first two Christian denominations which were established were the South Seas Evangelical Mission (later South Seas Evangelical Church—SSEC) and Seventh Day Adventists. Both still follow the beliefs taught to them by the missionaries, but their doctrines are less philosophical than those of either their pre-Christian religion or of Western theology.

When asked about the differences between their beliefs, both sects claim that the only difference is the time of worship: Saturday versus Sunday. However, the strict food taboos of the SDA and the payments of a tithe of 5 to 30 percent of one's earnings differ from the practices of the SSEC, which collects cash during church services. The Seventh Day Adventists do not believe in death. They believe

death and resurrection will take place after the second coming of Christ and is an event eagerly wished for.

Ceremonies. The most important pre-Christian ceremonies were harvest rituals that were performed in cycles within the patrilineal descent groups, each lasting two or more weeks. Uncooked tubers were presented to the sky-gods, and cooked food to the district deities and ancestors. The food then was distributed among the participants.

Arts. In pre-Christian times the major art forms were poetry, dancing, tattooing, wood carving of ceremonial clubs, and the making of staff-like objects. Making tapa and the plaiting of baskets and mats are female skills. Wood carving has almost become an industry, mostly in the capital. The islanders are praised for their arts and sell it to tourists. Wood carvers from Bellona have decorated a number of buildings in the capital. Dance groups perform traditional dances at home and abroad. Modern music is composed with traditional themes and played at concerts and recorded.

Medicine. Except for the prevention of disease by prayers to the supernatural beings or by avoiding certain food items, the islanders did not have medicinal practices in the pre-Christian era. The gods took care of life, health, and death, but hot stones, coconut oil, massage, and green leaves have been and are still used to induce abortions and to treat certain illnesses. Common diseases are respiratory infections, skin diseases, diarrhea, and sexually transmitted diseases. Homeopathic medicine was introduced by the South Seas Evangelical Mission. Modern, scientific medicine was introduced later and was received with enthusiasm. The islands have sixteen health posts and clinics. All serious cases are referred to the national hospital in Honiara.

Death and Afterlife. In the pre-Christian era death involved a long series of rituals and extended mourning. The beliefs were that dead individuals left the islands, went to dance on the reef, and were taken to the abodes of the gods under the horizon. Low-status individuals went to the underground, where they were erased on a flat stone in the darkness and forgotten.

For other cultures on the Solomon Islands, see List of Cultures by Country in Volume 10 and under specific culture names in Volume 2, Oceania.

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TORBEN MONBERG

Bemba

ETHNONYMS: Wemba, Awemba, AbaBemba

Orientation

Identification and Location. The word "Bemba" has several meanings in present-day Zambia. The core Bemba group are subjects of Paramount Chief Chitimukulu. They live around the center of a plateau called Lubemba in the Northern Province. However, approximately twelve other groups that reside in the Luapula Province, in southern Katanga (Democratic Republic of Congo [DRC]), and in the rural areas of the Copperbelt Province speak dialects of IchiBemba and consider themselves loosely affiliated with the core Bemba group. They may call themselves by the particular group name—Aushi, Bisa, Chishinga, Kunda, Lala, Lamba Lunda, Ng'umbo, Swaka, Tabwa, or Unga—but the tendency in urban areas is to use the generic term "Bemba". In this broad sense the Bemba form the most important ethnic group in the urban areas of the Copperbelt, including Kitwe, Ndola, Mufulira, Luanshya, Chingola, and Chililabombwe in Zambia and a significant minority in Lubumbashi in the DRC.

The plateau heartland of the Bemba reaches a height of approximately 4,300 feet (1,300 meters) and is located from 10° to 12° S and 30° to 32° E. It rises from the lowlands of Lake Bangweulu and the Luapula Valley to the south and west and Lake Tanganyika and the Luangwa Valley to the north and east. The Chambeshi River, which feeds Lake Bangweulu and forms part of the southern Congo drainage basin, meanders through its center. The plateau is made of old crystalline rocks that are rich in minerals but produce poor soil fertility. The natural vegetation consists of thin forests of tall trees termed savanna woodland.

Demography. The core Bemba group's population is approximately 400,000, excluding those who have permanently settled in urban areas. The first colonial censuses between 1910 and 1930 estimated the number at 100,000; in 1963 the figure was 250,000. Including those permanently settled in urban areas, the number of people who identify themselves as Bemba is 741,114. However, those who speak IchiBemba