HISTORY AND ORAL TRADITIONS: A CASE STUDY

Rolf Kuschel
University of Copenhagen

Torben Monberg
The National Museum of Denmark

What are we made to know when people of non-literate societies relate to us their accounts of events in their history? It is almost a commonplace to say that we get a socially patterned version of historical events; yet, even commonplaces can be true. Vansina[1] has convincingly disentangled some of the problems concerning the relationship between history and oral traditions. The present paper is intended as a contribution to a further understanding of this relationship.

The paper discusses two sets of data about the same events which took place on Bellona Island in the Solomon Islands at the end of the last century. The events bear on a case of blackbirding, an activity common in the South Seas in those days.

In the reprint of Wawn,[2] Kuschel found an account of the adventures of a Bellonese, by the name of Tom, who went to Queensland to work in the sugar plantations, but was returned to Bellona in the Solomon Islands after some years. Kuschel sent the account to Monberg in 1974, who was at that time on Bellona. Monberg inquired whether anyone on Bellona had ever heard of this Tom. Without having seen the account (most Bellonese can now read some English), a number of people on the island agreed that this must be the person who was known by the name Tome. After some deliberation Daniel Tuhanuku, one of the best-informed "historians" on the island, suggested that he tell his version of what was known about Tome on Bellona. His account was heard by a number of other outstanding men such as Taupongi, Sa'engeika, and Teika. None of them found anything to alter to or to add to his narrative.

We shall present the two versions and compare them. The following are those excerpts from Wawn's book which concern Tom(e) and Bellona Island:

> I sailed from Maryborough in command of the *Stormbird*, on June 12, 1878, bound first for the New Hebrides with "returns".
>
> Among the Kanaka boatmen I had shipped for the voyage was one ordinarily called Tom — an abbreviation of his real name — Tamoan. He had been a long time in Queensland, ever since he was a child, and could neither remember the name of the vessel that had brought him there nor that of her master. Soon after his arrival, he had run off from his employer with some others, stolen a boat with them, and gone north along the coast.

1. Vansina 1
2. Wawn 1973 [1893].

They came to grief on Wide Bay bar, and all were drowned except Tom. He was found by some lumberers in a half-crazy state, and had been taken to Maryborough by them, where he had worked for various employers during ten or twelve years.

I had known this youth for a couple of years, and he constantly asked me to find his island and take him home. All he knew about it was that its native name was Mungigi, and that it was near other islands, of which one was called Mungava. I had searched all my charts and "directories" in vain — I could not locate his home. At last he had fastened himself upon me, persuading me to engage him as boatman; in the hope that, while cruising with me, he might some day come to his native island. (pp. 155–6)

In April, 1881, I was once more appointed master of the *Stanley*. I took charge of her at Maryborough, and sailed with the intention of going direct to the Solomon Is.

Tom Tamoan, the islander who had accompanied me in the *Stormbird*, and who, in South Sea vernacular, "had been lose him island", went with me again as a boatman.

Tom still had hopes that I would find out what island he belonged to, so he brought all his property with him. For he was to be landed if our search should prove successful. (p. 215)

Sandfly Passage was my next anchorage, between the middle and northern of the Florida Is. There, poor Tom Tamoan, who had almost given up all hopes of ever seeing his long-lost home again, at last discovered where his native island lay, although he was still some distance from it.

The boats were at the beach on the northern island, Gala, when a native, who had been gazing at Tom for some time, suddenly accosted him in English, "Hullo, Tom".

Tom stared, but failed to recognize him. Then the Gala man told the recruiter how, years ago — probably ten or twelve — the barque *Woodlark*, of Sydney, had come to Gala; how her captain had engaged and taken away "plenty boy" to work on plantations in Queensland; how, on her return to that colony, she passed close to Bellona, the smallest of the two Rennell Is., and how a canoe came off to her with two men and a boy. The men returned to the island, but the boy, Tamoan, elected to remain on board, and went to Queensland in the *Woodlark*.

[In a note on p. 446 the editor gives the following information: On 19 January 1871, the *Woodlark* arrived at Brisbane with 58 male recruits aboard, one of whom was from Bellona ("Register of the arrival of vessels bringing Pacific Islanders to various ports, 2 June 1868 — 23 December 1881" QSA IPI 3/1.)]

At last, then, Tom knew the white man's name for his island. Nothing less would serve him than my getting under way at once, to take him there. For the Gala man had described the island as being close at hand. (p. 235)

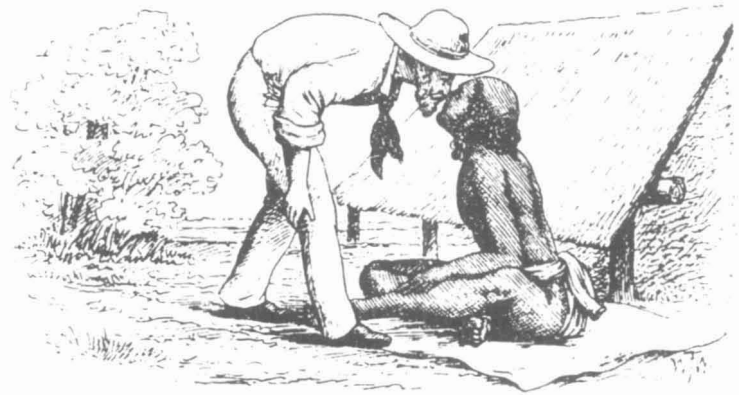
From Wanderer Bay, one "board" on the port tack took the *Stanley* over to Bellona I., which Tom recognized at once as his long-lost home. The native name of this island, as given me by its inhabitants at the time of my visit, was Muighi, though Tom pronounced it Mungiki. The largest of the Rennell group is called Muava.

Standing close in under the lee of the island, which is hardly more than a mile in length, and about two hundred feet in height, I sought for an anchorage without success, the shores all round being "steep-to". Off the

eastern end I neared the rocks in the boat, but the sea would not allow us to land. Tom, however, was impatient, and, seeing a party of his countrymen at hand watching us, he stripped off his clothing and swam ashore through the breakers. He landed on the rocks at the cost of a bruise or two, then slowly climbed up to the outskirts of the dense forest which covers the island. There a dozen natives had gathered together, watching his every movement.

The noise of the waves breaking on the rocks prevented our hearing any of the conversation, which, it was evident, was passing between them. Presently one man walked cautiously up to Tom, and felt him all over, as though to ascertain if he was really flesh and blood, and not a ghost. This examination having proved satisfactory, the whole party clustered round Tom with loud cries and laughter, and began handling him, jabbering and gesticulating like a lot of excited monkeys.

Next, a small light canoe was lugged down from amongst the trees, and launched clean over the breakers, off the top of a huge boulder. Two fellows took a header, and so scrambled into her. They then came alongside our



TOUCHING NOSES.

(from 1893 edition of Wawn p. 237)

boat, stripping off their rude beads and other ornaments, and forcing them upon me, jabbering away all the while like a couple of maniacs.

I then pulled back to the lee of the island, in search of a safe landing-place. There I managed to get on shore dryshod, with the G.A. Then, accompanied by about a score of the islanders, men and women, we walked to a scattered village near the centre of the island. Arrived there, we touched noses with the old chief, a ceremony which is peculiar to islanders of the true Polynesian race.

These people are apparently pure Polynesians. They are large-framed, fleshy, with brown skins and frizzly hair. Some of the women were very light in colour. They practise tattooing to some extent. Their houses are of the same pattern as those of the Equatorial islands — a roof supported by posts, the sides being left open.

I remained on shore a few hours, but could do nothing in the way of recruiting. Tom seemed half-dazed — he was always a little "daft" — and

was either unwilling or too stupid to interpret. Towards evening, however, he let me know that no recruits were to be obtained at present. By-and-by, in the course of weeks, some might be induced to engage.

I was much disappointed. Tom had assured me that he would do all he could to assist me in return for my taking him home. Now, I saw that, having got all he wanted, he was indisposed to fulfil his promises. On a subsequent visit, I discovered that Tom had really acted in opposition to me, dissuading those of his countrymen who wished to engage. (pp. 236–8)

I left Hervey Bay on my last voyage in the *Stanley* on the eighth of September, 1881. I was bound for the New Hebrides and the Solomon Is. with a considerable batch of "returns" on board. (p. 242)

I did not delay long in the New Hebrides, running through the group as quickly as possible, landing my returns. I then pushed on to the Solomons, for the trade-wind season was now far advanced, and that of the hurricanes was approaching.

At Bellona, or Muighi I., we found Tom Tamoan apparently satisfied with his home, and unwilling to leave it again. He came off to the ship with a crowd of his people, in the recruiting boat and canoes; but none of them, he said, wished to be engaged. Somehow, when Tom told me this, I fancied he was not telling me the truth. The party had not been on board many minutes before I became sure that such was the case.

Some of the younger men appeared to be much excited, and presently a lot of squabbling went on between them and Tom, who was evidently backed up by two or three old fellows. Suddenly one of the boys made a rush towards me, though Tom tried to stop him, threw himself down on his knees, and clasped his arms round my legs, jabbering away at a fine rate. Then I saw what all the fuss was about.

"Tom, this boy wants to go with me!"

Tome mumbled out something about the man being cranky; but that was only an excuse to get him back on shore. Finally, he was obliged to give in, and to acknowledge that some of them *did* want to go with me.

I engaged five. Two were youths, but the other three were big, strapping men, and, to look at, splendid fellows for work. Nevertheless, they turned out "soft", proving of little use to their employers. One Papuan would have been worth the lot of them.

At the Rennel Is., none of the natives could be induced to leave home (pp. 243–4)

The following is a translation of the story about Tome, as told by Daniel Tuhanuku to a group of Bellonese and to Monberg July 31, 1974, in Matahenua village, Bellona:

Tome was a man from The Lake [East Rennell]. [He] came [to Bellona] and stayed with Sa'o'angiki,[3] the grandfather of Sa'engeika. One day their party went to 'One [at the north coast]. A ship was there; Bellona doesn't know its name. [The crew] came up to the sand beach and met Tome and his party who had gone to 'One. And the crew came up and liked Tome, and they took him onboard [the dinghy] and took him [out] to the ship. And the ship left [and the Bellonese] went up inland [from 'One]. None of the people who came up to tell [Sa'o'angiki about it] knew the name [of the

3. Elbert and Monberg 1965: Genealogy 6, Generation 19.

ship]. [They] said: "We went with Tome to the coast, and a ship was there and it took him abroad." Sa'o'angiki heard it and mourned, because [Tome] was a man who had come from Rennell to stay with him; but the ship had taken him onboard; perhaps he would die. This is the reason why Sa'o'angiki mourned when Tome left for the lands abroad, but [the mourning] was brief because people did not know to where the ship had taken [him], and Sa'o'angiki thought that [he] would die — and afterwards he did not think about it [the incident].

And Tome went and lived in the white men's homesteads.

Then, one day, a ship came [to Rennell] and sailed back to the homestead where Tome was [in Australia]. They [the crew] brought soft baskets which the ship had found and bought from a group of voyagers who had gone from Bellona to Rennell. Tome saw them [the baskets] and came to think of Bellona and started crying. One among the white men for whom Tome worked went and asked Tome why he was crying. Tome said that he saw the soft baskets and cried because they were baskets, "from one of my homelands [Rennell and Bellona]". And the boss with whom he [Tome] stayed felt sorry for him, and he gave orders to have Tome taken back here to Bellona.

And the ship came here and arrived at 'One and drifted in the ocean, and a dinghy came ashore bringing Tome and his boxes with goods which [he] had brought along. As Tome wanted to go ashore he told the dinghy to keep drifting in the ocean [near the coast] in case nobody wanted to come down [to the coast] and follow [him] back to the places [inland] from where they had come.

And Tome went ashore and met the people who had come down to the ship, and Tome said: "Where is Tongaka [Sa'o'angiki]?". And no one knew what kind of stranger this was who spoke the language [of Bellona], as he was dressed in long trousers and shoes and was wearing a white shirt and a hat. A little later Sa'o'angiki came down to the coast from inland. And somebody spoke and said to Sa'o'angiki: "A stranger has arrived on the ship and is asking for you!". And Sa'o'angiki shouted "Woe, woe," and thought of Tome whom a ship had taken onboard long time ago. And Sa'o'angiki went down to him [Tome] and said to Tome: "Who are you?". And he [Tome] said: "I am Baiabe." And Sa'o'angiki said: "Is that true?" And [Tome] pulled open his shirt and thus displayed his tattooings. Then Sa'o'angiki believed him and said to people standing around: "Woe, woe, so it is true! This young gentleman came and stayed with me [on Bellona] and a ship came and took him onboard without permission, and I thought [he] was dead, and, Oh, he has been brought back here!" And Sa'o'angiki ran to him and they pressed noses, and then Tome went down and beckoned to the dinghy. And the ship [the dinghy] came and came inside the reef and brought Tome's boxes and his blankets ashore. And Tome handed the boxes in which there were a lot of things: axes and knives and calico and fish-hooks and beads and bead necklaces; [handed them] over to Sa'o'angiki for him to be in charge of them. And [Sa'o'angiki] shouted to people of Bellona and distributed among them all the goods which Tome had brought. Tome went up inland and stayed with Sa'o'angiki.

On a later occasion he gathered [some] people to go abroad [to Australia with him] to find Sa'engeahe and his many fellow travellers whom a ship had come and taken onboard. And Tome went to look for Sa'engeahe to take him back [from Australia to Bellona]. And they went. Sa'engeahe and his party had died. Tome collected a party of travellers [in Australia] and

they returned to Bellona and told that Sa'engeahe had died in Potumake [Port Mackay].

This is all I know about Tome.

When Tome came back from Australia and stayed here [after his first trip] this was the party with which he then travelled [again] to look after Sa'engeahe, these were their names: Sau'uhi and Tangosia and Tepani and Semua and Tukungei. And they went on their voyage and it is said that [they] went to Monobaka [in Australia], and went to work in the sugarcane fields. Semua and Tukungei died, Sau'uhi and Tangosia and Tepani survived, and they then returned here to Bellona. Tangosia was then killed and Sau'uhi just died. And Tepani went back to Rennell and died there.

We have here two accounts of what is beyond doubt the same sequence of events taking place about 100 years ago and with a Bellonese man Tom, or Tome, as the chief character. One is written by a British sea captain and presumably based on notes taken down about the time when the events took place. The other was told in 1974 by a Bellonese story-teller who had heard the story from his father, who had himself heard about these events from his father at a time when Tome's adventures were common lore on the island.

The two accounts are strikingly similar, yet the same events are looked at differently as they are seen and related by persons of two cultures. Similarities and differences can best be shown by direct comparison:

WAWN'S STORY	DANIEL TUHANUKU'S STORY
Wawn tells about Tom's life in Australia. How he escapes from his employers in a stolen boat, is shipwrecked at Wide Bay, is taken to Maryborough and works there as a labourer for a decade. (Information in Note: Tom had arrived in Brisbane January 1871.)	
Wawn takes Tom to the Solomons to find his home. Arrives at Florida Island in 1881. A Florida man tells that a recruiting ship passing Bellona was met by a canoe with two men and a boy. The boy (Tom Tamoan) taken on board and sailed to Australia.	Tome is identified as a man from East Rennell who had come to Bellona to stay with an important lineage elder, Sa'o'angiki.
Wawn proceeds to Bellona. Tom recognises his island, and, when close to the shore, strips off his clothes and swims ashore. Wawn watches reception from ship: one man steps forward, examines Tom — and great rejoicing is heard. Two Bellonese come out to the ship and present Wawn with gifts.	Tome taken on board an arriving ship and sailed to Australia. Sa'o 'angiki mourns.
Wawn goes ashore and inland.	Tome sees Bellona baskets in Australia and gets homesick.
Meets "old chief".	Tome taken home. Arrives at Bellona, goes ashore in white man's clothes, but is identified by Sa'o 'angiki who is bestowed with the privilege of distributing the European goods which Tome has brought with him.

Tom informs Wawn that no Bellonese can be recruited as labourers — apparently because Tom has dissuaded people from going.	
Wawn leaves Bellona. He returns five months later and meets Tom. In spite of Tom's attempts to prevent it, Wawn manages to recruit five men, two youngsters and three adults.	Tome stays with Sa'o'angiki on Bellona.
	Later a ship recruits five (named) men on Bellona.
	Tome collects a (named) group of Bellonese to go to Australia to search for missing Bellonese (in order to take them back to their island). He learns that they have died there. Together with three of the searchers he returns to Bellona.

The two accounts fit neatly together. The only conflicting statements seem to be that Wawn claims that Tome swam ashore after having undressed, whereas Tuhanuku makes Tome come ashore in a dinghy and clad in his best European clothes.

To clarify Tuhanuku's original account some Bellonese, including Tuhanuku himself, supplied the following information:

1. Tome's original name was Teaaghoa. Tome is not a Bellonese name. He was from the Lake district at East Rennell. It is thus likely that his name was also Taumoana (see Wawn: Tamoan) as this is a common Lake name.
2. The following is the sequence of the first Bellonese voyages to Australia in European ships visiting Bellona:
   (a) Tome goes to Queensland.
   (b) Tome returns.
   (c) Five men are recruited (see Wawn's account): Sau'uhi of Baitanga lineage (adult), Tangosia of Nuku'angoha lineage (adult), Semua of Hangekumi lineage (adult),[4] Tepani of Rennell (teenager), Tukungei of Rennell (teenager).
   (d) Another group is recruited: Sa'engeahe of Mata'ubea lineage,[5] Kaipua of Ghongau lineage, Baiabe of Nuku'angoha lineage, Takiika of Baitanga lineage, Haikiu of Matabaingei lineage,[6] Puangongo of Tongomainge lineage,[7] and Kamangau, a woman of Mataki'ubea lineage.
   (e) Tome decides to return to Queensland together with Panio of Rennell and Ma'anua Teone of Hangekumi lineage to search for Sa'engeahe. Arriving there, they learn that all the Bellonese who travelled with Sa'engeahe have died except for the woman, Kamangau. Tome finds her, and she tells that Puangongo and Haikiu have died recently from drinking the sap of a poisonous vine. When Tome is ready to return to Bellona, Kamangau becomes sick and dies too.
   (f) After Tome has returned to Bellona, three men of the second group of voyagers (see (c) above), Sau'uhi, Tangosia and Tepani, return to Bellona.

4. Elbert and Monberg 1965: Genealogy 4, Generation 20.
5. Elbert and Monberg 1965: Genealogy 5, Generation 20.
6. Elbert and Monberg 1965: Genealogy 9, Generation 19.
7. Elbert and Monberg 1965: Genealogy 9, Generation 19.

(g) Tome visits his home district on Rennell and dies there. Informants have seen his grave at the homestead, Tonga in East Rennell.

The two accounts are interesting in that they concern the same events as seen from "abroad" and from "home". Each culture obviously focuses on different topics. As a white man, Wawn is particularly concerned with such European peculiarities as dates and years, and with legitimising the attempts to obtain cheap muscle power for the Queensland sugar plantations. His account has a faint tinge of surprise when he relates the islanders' "almost human" reactions of homesickness, joy and sorrow. Yet what he tells also seems rather matter-of-fact and probable.

The Bellonese account is obviously in all ways insular. It emphasises what happened on Bellona in connection with Tome and with Rennellese voyages on foreign ships. What life was like abroad is of little concern, and the little we hear about it is clearly what the returning labourers themselves have told.

Both accounts thus seem true to life and supplement each other well in spite of the events being perceived by persons of entirely different cultures and thus emphasising different types of "facts".

In order to evaluate the historical reliability and validity of an oral tradition of a certain society it is necessary to ascertain what its members consider significant in relation to a specific sequence of events. A person who is not familiar with the system of philosophical values of the society, or who ignores it, will easily make the mistake of disregarding the actual historical veracity of an account because the raconteurs have not mentioned or included those conditions which he, according to his own cultural background, considers important, but which are of little or no importance for the members of the society in question.

Another matter of importance is the deeper understanding of the semantic contents of the oral traditions. The story about Tome may be taken at face value, and the decoding of its message is fairly uncomplicated. On Bellona there are, however, several strata of "understanding" in oral communication. A story may be told so that it seems immediately intelligible to anyone. Yet, the same story may contain references to events known only to certain listeners who have more background knowledge than the average listener. An example is found in the so-called *kananga* songs which on one level seem completely straightforward, but which contain a set of implicit meanings beyond those immediately heard.[8] The decoding of such songs is only possible with the assistance of an informant who is familiar with the actual, detailed background of the song. This may be the case also with certain historical or quasi-historical accounts told by island informants.

The problems concerning the story of Tome bring up yet another question which is hardly ever adequately discussed, and one which has been almost completely neglected by Vansina. As traditional stories are obviously *messages*, we may necessarily ask what type of messages are the stories as they are actually recorded and published by anthropologists. Are they stories in the form and style as they are told among *savants* belonging to the culture, or are they stories by the local "teachers" related in pedagogical form to the more or less knowledgeable recorder (foreign scientist)?

The most likely answer is that they are both, depending on the circumstances; but the deplorable fact is that we hardly ever hear of these circumstances from the recorders. The story of Tome may offer an example of the problems involved. Had the story been told to Monberg during his first stay on Bellona in 1958–59,

8. Monberg 1974.

it would undoubtedly have been quite different. The Bellonese narrator would have expected him to be ignorant concerning a considerable number of details, such as the genealogical positions of the persons involved and the reasons the Bellonese desired to be recruited, and he would have included comments on these matters in the narrative.

Oral traditions, and especially genealogical charters, have been disparaged as acting "as charters of present social institutions rather than as faithful historical records of times past".[9] This is not necessarily a characteristic of the primary data themselves, though it may sometimes be. Under certain conditions it may be the result of the type of relationship which exists between the informant and the recorder.

As the story has been presented above it is told not only to Monberg (the recorder), but also to a group of Bellonese countrymen. When Daniel Tuhanuku told his story, he expected his listeners to know who the main characters were, what the reasons for accepting recruitment were, e.g. the alleged desire for white man's goods and, in connection with this, incessant mutual jealousy. If your neighbour had been abroad and thus acquired high prestige, you were likely to follow. Only fear of death and misfortune in the strange land prevented people from leaving the island. (In fact, only a few Bellonese were actually recruited by blackbirders. This may be another reason why the stories about them are so well remembered.) All this is not told in the story because it is assumed to be known by the audience.

There are also cases in which informants are reluctant to present the recorder with detailed accounts because he is a stranger and perhaps less familiar with the local language. An example of this is found in the stories collected by Kuschel on Bellona in 1971 and 1972.[10] Some stories are given in two variants, for example A33 (C) and A33 (D), one recorded at the beginning of Kuschel's stay and only 12 printed lines in length, and the other, collected eight months later, of 62 printed lines. The teller apparently felt that Kuschel's command of the language and his knowledge of the culture, at the end of his stay on the island, would enable him to understand the story in more detail.

Before evaluating oral traditions, both for their "historical" validity and for their cultural significance, they should be viewed as messages transmitted between specific individuals. Their form and their validity are dependent on not only who transmits, but also on who receives the message. This is what decides their quality.

Oral traditions from different sources on Bellona have in several cases proved equally accurate. For example, Kuschel and Monberg have, at different times and with different informants, collected detailed census information on the population of Bellona (428 persons) in 1938. The data match completely. Similar experiences have occurred with other data, such as certain events connected with the introduction of Christianity in 1938.[11]

There is no doubt that the Bellonese oral account of Tome and his travels contains a considerable number of elements of truth; but can we infer from this that oral traditions in general are fairly reliable historical sources?

We would consider this a much too general inference. From experience with previous work on oral traditions,[12] it is possible to point to certain factors which may permit us to consider the story about Tome a reliable one, whereas

9. Goody and Watt 1972.
10. Kuschel 1975.
11. Elbert and Mc[illegible]rg 1965: T236; Monberg 1967; Deck 1945.
12. Elbert and Mo[illegible]erg 1965.

other types of oral traditions may be rather unreliable, at least from the point of view of a Western historian.

As often stated, oral traditions of non-literate societies contain what we would term mythical elements. They are commonly full of supernatural creatures and supernatural events. They not only serve to create homoeostasis, structurally and organisationally, but also to codify conflicts between specific social groups. Different versions of the same stories exist in different social groups, and, rather than evaluating such stories as either true or untrue, they should be taken at face value and analysed for their relation to the entire social structure of the society in which they exist.

In some respects traditions such as that of Tome fall outside the major types of oral traditions, at least on Bellona. The Tome story is non-political in various senses and for various reasons. Whereas the majority of Bellonese stories are concerned with the rise and fall of patrilineal descent groups or clans, feuds, fights, and alliances, and thus manifestly form the "charter" for existing order or conflict on the island, the story of Tome is what may be termed common lore. It is not concerned with the relationship between rival groups. The main character, Tome, is — according to informants — a person of no particular social status. Moreover, he is not a Bellonese and his genealogical relationship to any living Bellonese is unknown. It may also be said that, in a Bellonese sense, the traditions about Tome do not constitute a finite story. Rather they are incidents extracted from the total fund of traditional knowledge of early Bellonese voyaging on European ships. These traditions do not in any particular way serve as "charters" for the existing social structure on the island. Rather, they are accounts of the marvels experienced by people of an extremely isolated island upon their first contact with people from the outside world. For these reasons the Bellonese may remember the events in more vivid detail, and they have had less inclination to slant the traditions for any purpose of, for example, glorifying one lineage or clan, and humiliating another. A history of this type is therefore, in our opinion, a fairly reliable historical source for the academic historian.

CONCLUSION

In recent years an increasing number of works have been published showing that oral traditions may, under specific circumstances, be used as historically reliable data.[13] Sweeping statements on oral traditions being useless as historical sources[14] are becoming *passé*.

As things stand now, what we need is more empirical studies which may clarify the limits of different types of oral traditions (genealogies, ritual formulas, myths, tales, and poetry) as documentary evidence within the conceptual framework of their cultures of origin. First we need profiles of the validity of such material from a number of cultures; then we shall be able to see whether it is possible to ascertain the validity of those oral traditions which reach the dissection table of the academic analyst. And, before even this stage is reached, clear criteria should be found for what is actually meant or understood by such commonly used terms as historical validity, reliability, historical evidence and so on. It seems that by now the uses of such terms have their roots in specific political, ideological and social value systems, and it is therefore highly debatable whether these terms are not just as ambiguous as the question of veracity and reliability of the data which a certain person from a certain culture presents to us as his oral cultural traditions.

13. Abraham 1961; Vansina 1961; Wylie 1965.
14. Murdock 1959.

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