It was springtime 1958. I had been on Rennell Island (Solomon Islands) studying the language and culture. I was the only white man on Rennell Island. I had entered the British Solomon Islands Protectorate at Honiara, the capital, in September 1957. The British had treated me very well: there were invitations to formal dinners and cocktail parties, and the head of the Department of Native Affairs escorted me to interview the High Commissioner, the direct representative of the Queen. He was most cordial, asking what I hoped to accomplish and how long I would stay on Rennell and Bellona. Shortly after this, while buying supplies at a big Japanese store, I was issued a pedal radio in order to have communication with the outside world every day, weather permitting.

My supplies included stick tobacco from the south of the United States, canned goods such as corn beef from Argentina, ham from Denmark, and canned cheese and wine from Australia. This last was not accepted by the mission ship that was finally going to Rennell and Bellona.

---

1. 'I am countrified, childish, only a sole of your feet, an ignoramus.' This is Rennellese way of speaking to a distinguished person.
These two Polynesian outliers were some 170 kilometers south of Honiara. After about 24 rough hours the mission ship landed on the south coast of Rennell, anchored in enormous Lughu Bay, and we went ashore in canoes. Every one was helpful with my voluminous baggage, jabbering away in a Polynesian tongue much of which I could understand. The chief installed me in the largest house on the island.

In about March 1958 I received an exciting letter in impeccable English from one Torben Monberg in Denmark, who said that he was thinking of going to Rennell or Bellona to study the old religion if this was all right with me and that I had not obtained all possible information.

I had never heard of Torben Monberg but replied immediately that I would be glad of company, that the people were extremely friendly and helpful, that they knew a lot about their past before the introduction of Christianity in 1938 and that they loved to talk about it, especially some of the old men who had been priests.

That was the last I heard from Denmark until I arrived in Honolulu via Japan in September 1958, and was met by several people including my long-time friend Kenneth Emory with a bright young man named Torben Monberg. Torben was traveling with his half-brother. Although they were sophisticated and elegant, they were staying in the downtown Hotel Blaisdell, which is no longer in business and no wonder. I invited them to my tiny apartment and gradually showed them:
- tentative phonemic systems of Rennellese or Bellonese,
- vocabulary cards,
- genealogies,
- tentative lists of parts of speech,
- a great many stories from Rennell and a few from Bellona
- a few songs
- notes on tellers.
The stories had been dictated on Rennell and Bellona. Tape recorders were not very good then, and mine broke down. I mentioned the importance of the glottal stop and long vowels to Torben. Although he insisted he was not a linguist, he seemed to understand their importance immediately. When I said that the Rennellese glottal stop corresponded to the one in Tongan and Uvean, rather than to the Hawaiian ones, he was much excited.

The two of them spent about a week copying my material and showed no interest in going to Waikiki or even around the island. All too soon they were on their long journey: to Fiji in a large plane, to Honiara in a much smaller plane that seemed held together with chewing gum, and to Rennell Island in a mission ship.

Did Torben enjoy field work? This is how he described his field work: "These were two months of almost incessant excitement. Informants would come early in the morning and work until late at night, telling stories, reciting ritual formulas, and demonstrating ritual practices. Frequent visits to sites of old settlements and temples revived their memories and evoked important details in their accounts. We lived at the border between the two rival districts of Sa'aiho and Ghongau. By working with informants from these two different clan groups, I obtained extensive comparative material concerning social organization and religious practices." (Excerpts from Elbert and Monberg, 1965:3.)

I did not see Torben again until the summer of 1960 when I visited Denmark, and in addition to enjoying Danish hospitality, Torben and I planned our book of stories from the two islands. Torben who had a flair for titles, christened it FROM THE TWO CANOES for this is the way the informants referred to their islands. These were indeed shaped like canoes with high cliffs and sunken interiors build of uplifted corals.

In Denmark our admiration for the Polynesian people seemed to increase with distance. Torben had decided to work on small Bellona Island where he had discovered fantastic informants and I
wanted to continue working on Rennell. So Torben talked in
Bellonese and I in Rennellese and we found this stimulating, the
dialects being mutually intelligible.

Miraculously we carried out our plans made in distant Denmark. We
discussed the future book on grounds of the Royal Palace in
Fredensborg, where Torben lived in a beautiful, thatched house.
Once back in the islands our informants were eager to continue.
However, Torben had some thus far hidden talents for
entertainment. He delighted the children and impressed the elders
by standing on his head and walking on his hands.

In the 1970s the island was extremely excited by the visits of
Japanese geologists, who finally hinted that the Japanese some day
might want to mine phosphate and that they would pay well. It
remained to Torben to tell the people that their island might be
left as a pile of ash. Many meetings were held. By this time
Torben was extremely fluent in Bellonese, almost a second language
and he expressed himself eloquently. Fortunately, the final
decision was made by the Japanese: To mine at Bellona would be too
costly for such phosphate as might be found, and the small harbor
at Sa'aiho was hardly safe for such operations.

This was a great relief for Torben, and he continued his visits to
Bellona. In 1971 he brought his wife Bodil and his three children
with him. Pernille, about 15 and the oldest, earned a great
reputation by catching 100 flying fish in the traditional way:
standing in a canoe with coconut-leaf torches shining on the water
while wielding a long pole with a net at its end and flapping the
fish into the canoe. This achievement so impressed the Rennellese
that she was awarded the honorary name Tesasabe, 'the flying
fish'. Next in age was Anders, a name almost impossible to
pronounce for a non-Dane. He distinguished himself on the soccer
field. Little Christine played happily with her age mates. All
were enthusiastic and shared Torben's love for Bellona.
Not long after this happy visit, tragedy struck. Torben's wife Bodil suddenly died and sad times followed for the young father and the three children. A long-time family friend, Hanne Salto, befriended the stricken family. Recently widowed, her husband had been one of Torben's best friends. Before long Hanne and Torben were married, and the family with her guidance rejoiced. Torben took Hanne to Bellona and she wrote a primer in Bellonese to help the children learn to read and write their own language.

In all these busy years Torben was writing articles and books in English, Danish, and Bellonese. Since space is limited, I will mention only two, the genesis of which I witnessed.

The leading article in volume 71 part 2 1962, of the Journal of the Polynesian Society, was by Torben Monberg entitled "Crisis and Mass Conversion on Rennell Island in 1938." Only after the two islands were annexed as a part of the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1899 were there occasional visits by governmental and mission vessels.

In 1910 a ship from the South Seas Evangelical Mission touched at Lughu Bay on Rennell Island. The hundreds of men assembled on the beach with their fighting clubs and spears, loincloths and bushy hair, must have seemed terrifying. The white missionaries sailed to safer waters and left three Melanesian 'teachers' in a small house and returned a few days later to find that the three teachers had been murdered. The government, such as it was, placed a taboo on the islands and no visitors came for many years. However, missionaries do not give up easily, and in about 1934 three missionaries began taking men from the two islands to their stations in the Solomons for instruction in Christianity. Several converts returned to their homes and talked of the power of the Christian gods, but many people were afraid that their own gods would punish them if they failed to make offerings and rituals. They wanted to worship both sets of deities.
A meeting was called at Niupani on the Lake at Rennell in 1938, and Chief Tegheta began to perform acts permitted only to their gods. He killed people with yaws, stacked their bodies for consumption later, and had intercourse with his mother and sister. The Rennellese believed that their gods ate people and preferably married their own sisters. The Rennellese were never cannibals and practiced brother and sister avoidance. Tegheta's behavior did not seem strange to them. They knew that he was possessed by a god, perhaps by Tehainga'atua, their most feared and powerful deity. Some of the men began to fight and more were killed.

I had seen a touch of violence on New Years Day, 1958, their greatest holiday (they did not celebrate Christmas). A soccer game followed the ceremonial food distribution and feast, the married men against the single men, who taunted their antagonists as playing like women. This insult was too much and a fight ensued with clubs and stones, but was finally stopped by some of the elders. An article that showed Torben's literary talents and his knowledge of the culture was published in the Journal of the Polynesian Society in 1974. It was called "Poetry as Coded Messages: the Kananga of Bellona Island."

The kananga were short chants of great beauty. Those in the article contained only from five to twelve words including particles. In spite of their brevity they said a great deal to the initiated, but to others were incomprehensible. One had to have an intimate knowledge of the culture, its taboos, its material culture, its scandals. They teased, insulted, pitied, and honored. They mentioned no names of people except indirectly. Most but not all refer to more or less clandestine love affairs. They were composed by both men and women but composers and honorees (or victims) are not revealed. The kananga in the article is from before the acceptance of Christianity in 1938 or in the decade and a half following that year. As Torben wrote on page 430 of his article. "The white missionaries, who visited the islands only once or twice a year, and the Melanesian missionaries occasionally stationed on the island, had no knowledge or interest in the
language or culture and could not, therefore, have added kananga
to the list of Christian sins. This was done later when some
Bellonese trained as teachers and pastors at mission stations
overseas returned to work on Bellona."

Following is kananga 34 in Torben's article which I have selected
because it showed the continuing preoccupation with the old gods.
The composer was not known to our informants. He used a rare name
for the god Tehainga'atua. A singer was thanking the god for
giving him a handsome face which he had seen reflected in a pool,
the only mirror known at that time to the Bellonese. The singer
calls himself a bird. Here it is in its entirety. I have changed
one word in the translation.

'Aue Tetonusanga. Thank you Tetonusanga.
'Au tau manu nei e ngaoi Your bird here looks so fine
ko te bai i Ahea! in the water at Ahea!

Kananga composers were always anonymous, and even singers of
kananga were punished. The punishment, known in English as
'censor' or saka in Bellonese from pidgin English 'to sack', the
sinners were not allowed in the church for an indefinite period,
considered a disgrace. In spite of this punishment, we were able
to persuade four close friends (three men and one woman) to make
recordings, which we did in the dead of night behind closed doors,
unheard of then on Bellona. We enjoyed several evenings that after
hearing the informants' explanations were hilarious. They were
indeed 'coded messages' to use Torben's term.

Torben's probable magnum opus has just been published (Monberg,
1991). This is what Torben wrote with a sigh of relief in October
18, 1990. It announces that the book was finished. Of course I
cannot ask his permission, but I will take the liberty of quoting
a few lines. It shows the great care which he and his wife Hanne
experienced in the long manuscript. "Hanne and I have had a tough
week, reading the galley proofs of the book... It has been a very
tough task, and we are both tired and exhausted (working from six
in the morning to about eleven in the evening). Poor Hanne has read the manuscript aloud to me and her Bellonese is now almost perfect. She assumed that when, and if, we go back to Bellona, she will talk ritual language, much to the surprise of the younger generation! As for myself, Hanne tells me that even in my sleep, I speak Bellonese in the ritual style. The subconscious mind apparently works when you have been pressed to work with the old language for many days, actually too much for both of us..."

As an Editor's Note in the new book, Robert C. Kiste wrote that his work will stand with Raymond Firth. In the Acknowledgements to his Tikopia/English Dictionary Firth wrote: "I am very grateful also to Torben Monberg, who took time away from his own intensive research in the Solomons to accompany me to Tikopia in 1966, and from his deep knowledge of the cognate cultures of Rennell and Bellona I derived much benefits in comparative talk."

Torben and I were fortunate enough in 1966 to be with Raymond at a Tikopian settlement at White River just west of Honiara. A historic meeting indeed, and a moment of great emotion for us all. "It's Raymond", gasped the Tikopians, and they pressed close to do homage to their friend of long before. "I'm back", Raymond said in Tikopian. "And this is Torben Monberg, he's going with me to Tikopia." "Thank you! Thank you!" said the Tikopians, and there were no dry eyes left.

Torben had a fascinating time on Tikopia, but returned with a firm conviction that his Pacific Island home was at Bellona Island. How fortunate were the people of Bellona and the scholarly world as well, that Torben was a great writer who loved this tiny island.
Kingdom Hall
Honiana Town
26/11/1992

Welcome.

Dear High MR TORBEN,

Koki maton egoro iton celebration year e helae, huai gavo hoa, ka e huai Apopo kai ko bai pekea ile siasi ni pecea ke uso ai ke hinaia kina. Ka Takei hakaman, Amutia koko e helaeahi, kakan usiusese kiteni aso, Tenenkae se Teiga Kile Pecea kee invited, kamaga hanu ke ina kile pecea chai laa aha tahina. Koko e maga noho i manao ka koko koko maga egoro sia Ni bai kuma ile kepe mei

qygosia koko te maine
qygosia koko te hakaman
qygosia koko Teacaoha
qygosia koko Tenabakiaq
qygosia koko Temaqie

Maga koei na atiga ataken bai bagono
item aso helae ke ke oti

Vokoaq, maga qygosia kile kee Amus, otiga owa
kom lom Pekea ia

Memoka Tanoqitea

Please ni ma oti le aso qyokoa le hai, olunukoa moko helae qo bai alii ine?
TORBEN MONBERG

As he is perceived by the people of Mungiki

Research & Compilation by: Angikinui Francis Takiika and Anisi Ha'uta'i

Written by: Angikinui Francis Takiika

To write about Torben Monberg as perceived by the Bellonese, we conducted written interviews on some Bellonese people, recorded some interviews on an audio cassette tape, and had informal discussions with some. The sentiments we intended to pick from those interviews were in reference to how the Bellonese view Mr. Monberg as a man among themselves, and how they regard the work that he had put together on the culture and the religion of the people of Mungiki and Mugava.

The names they use for the man are Hangaihenua and Torben. There is never any reference to his surname Monberg. Torben arrived at Bellona in 1958 a handsome young man, serious about his work and sensitive toward the people he worked with (Te hetae mai 'anga a Tobeni 'i te 1958, te pengea matanga ngaoi. 'I te pa'asi o te huhuta o pengea, ko ia noko he'e hakamasi'i masoko, noko he'e bange masoko ki a pengea). And from a naturally exclusive culture where the measurement of a person's
physique and pride is manifested in detail each day like a yoyo, and openly put down or praised, Hangaihenua is a Hakahua. He is a man of his word (Te pengea he’e ngoi - referring to his preparation and making of a Manga’e in 1962, and his various other trips to, and work on, Bellona ever since). He is a proud man (Te pengea umauma - referring to his show of determination and strength in learning the language and communicating properly, especially over religious matters; Te pengea hakamaatu’ā - referring to his sensitivity to people around him). Friendly as he was with everyone throughout the entire island, Torben never just entered any one’s area or household. Even within Matahenua village where he lived and spent most of his time in his trips from 1958 to 1998, open as he was to the whole community and accepted by all in the community, he still did not hang about throughout the community like all other "ordinary" members of the community. He got into the "inner circle" of leaders, elders, and decision-makers in the village and basically live as the people in this "inner circle" live and relate from there to the village and the island community in general. He is basically one of the Maatu’ā of the Bellonese community. He arrived on to the island a matu’ā, he has been working on and with the islanders a matu’ā, and he can not be regarded and treated otherwise. This is describing the man as he is seen by Bellonese in the light of being a matu’ā. But as a person, as an individual, what is he like? "He is a good man, he has compassion, he is friendly and he feeds people, attracts people together, and more so that he befriends everyone on Bellona" (Te pengea ngoai, angoha, te pengea hakamasi’i, hangai pengea, ‘o’o pengea, soatu te hakamasi’i ki ba’i pengea i Mungiki nei).

It is important to note that the older Bellonese view Torben and judge him according to how they judge themselves - not just because they can’t help being Bellonese. The Bellonese assess Torben as an individual and as a matu’ā the same way they assess themselves and their children. They judge Torben the same way they judge Bellonese in this generation who are educated in the western way, and to weigh how much he has in his command in terms of his knowledge, skills, and attitude. The older people interviewed did not seem interested to work out how Bellonese Torben could be. They rather expect of the man an inherent expectation reserved only for themselves by themselves. Torben is seen by the Bellonese as a proud man, because he is proud in a manner that Bellonese recognise being proud. He is a good man because he is a good man the way Bellonese accept being a good man. He is a hakahua because he befits and fulfills the Bellonese concept of Hakahua. It does not seem to matter what Mr. Monberg’s upbringing and education background are, the fact is that the Bellonese think he is a good man, therefore he is a good man! But being good in the minds of the Bellonese is an acknowledgement that is attached with expectations, requests, anticipations and some individually-driven motives for self-promotion - a phenomenon we are sure Torben is only too familiar with. But one cannot ask to be treated by the Bellonese people as a Bellonese much more than such abuse of respect and trust - one cannot be more Bellonese than this. Respect with deference and without abuse, except maybe with only a few jokes, is an attitude reserved by Bellonese for the non-Bellonese only.
The younger people do not know much about Torben on a personal level, but they all know who Torben is in terms of the anthropological work he has been carrying out on Bellona. All young people interviewed expressed acknowledgement of the importance of Torben's work for the culture and the people of Bellona. But all acknowledgements, including some from older people who were actual informants in Torben's work, seem covered by shrouds of apathy. Such apathy is either based on the ultimate meaninglessness of such work and knowledge given that the christian messiah is nigh on returning to this world (coming of course from the evangelical christian perspective of the SDAs, the SSECs, and the Baptists), or based on the benefits from such work being only for whoever gets educated in the western sense and therefore having access to or use for such knowledge and skills. It is obvious that the apocalyptic approach to life taught by the evangelical christians to the Bellonese and the low educational potentials in this part of the world culminate to such sentiments. But even through all this there is the underpinning sense of: "This is a good thing for our future generations" (Te me'a ngaoi mo'o o tatou 'atumungi).

It is obvious from the level of cultural apathy evidence among the young Bellonese today that Torben and his work was only just in time. Any later arrival than he did in 1958, and the whole culture and language would have been totally obliterated into misinterpretation and misconstruction, construed so much by the islanders' own version of the evangelical christian doctrines that have been taught them. One example is a claim by one Melanesian cultural group here in Solomon Islands that they are Jewish descendants and that they also host the biblical tablets of stones on which the Jewish ten commandments were written. Given the way Bellonese tend to feel that they must be in front or included with whoever is in front and for whatever reason, one can only speculate about some biblically justified claims by Bellonese if their own history and culture had not been conscientiously pieced together when it was.

The importance of the work by Hangaihenua for the Bellonese to use, especially from now on, cannot be compared with any other work. The Bellonese culture is a newly-developing culture in its own totality, developing with a potential to grow in its own tangent. The arrival of westernism, and especially of christianity, meant that the Bellonese culture got wrapped up to cease properly as a living culture in this world. The justification of course was that the people must then be taught to be modern and western-educated human beings with a christian culture - nothing wrong with this of course, except that there is nothing Bellonese about it. And the work by Torben since 1958 gives us the people of Bellona an opportunity to find ways of properly inculcating our culture with modern life, concepts, and precepts, even if from a somewhat backtracking approach. So many other cultural groups in colonised areas around the world do not even have such a potential open to them. One could go on and on in a naïve manner stating examples of various perspectives and academic disciplines that are being added on to and will be added on to, given the work on the people and the culture of Bellona. But the underlying point for the Bellonese is that Torben's specific interest in the religion of Bellona means that the religio-spiritual aspect of the culture of Bellona got recorded. In this way the Bellona culture in its philosophical and
conceptual totality has a chance to survive and live.

In this manner, Hangaihenua is not a visiting scholar to and on the Bellonese. The man is a phenomenon in Bellonese culture and history, the same way Kaitu'u and Taupongi were to the arrival of the Bellonese to Bellona; the same way Mugava was populated from Mungiki by the Sa'a Kaitu'u from the 6th generation onward; the same way canoes from various starting points to the east of our islands arrived to us with various impacts on our history and culture; the same way where our hears within the course of our history changed the 'ungu dancing format from a line-up format to a circular format; the same way Tesui was the last one from the other 6 Sa'a to die on Bellona - being from Sa'a Tanga - in the mid-19th century; the same way our first contact with Europeans on the island and in Australia and New Zealand, led to the use of English words in our traditional songs composed from the mid-19th century onwards; the same way christianity was introduced to the people, which has its own history and details; the same way the last person to die from the Sa'a Hu'aingupe in Rennell was Temalobe in the 1940s; the same way Bellonese young people and children had been out of their island to work and to go to schoo; the same way we are Bellonese in individually hosting a "longer-now" perception about our own history and culture. Here, one must be cautioned not to get carried away with rhetoric and cultural romantism. It is a fact that Torben Monberg is Danish of his own repute, an anthropologist of his own calibre, and that he is not related to Bellona and its people by blood and initial culture in any way. As such, one must not have the feeling that the Bellonese are trying to gain some repute by deliberately clinging on to Torben Monberg and his works, in a cult-following manner or even more drastically in a cargo-cult manner. On the same token, one must not have the feeling that we are necessarily romantic to express of the place of Hangaihenua in Bellonese history and culture. In the Bellonese 26 generations history to date, certain people are attributed with certain roles in the making and the maintaining of this continuous saga. Torben is the man who first wrote this history and culture down in a comprehensive manner as a researched culture and history. Torben is the one who first wrote down our religious beliefs and practices. And here lies this time-less bond, from here and onward, between Hangaihenua Torben Monberg and the people and culture of Mungiki.
Honorary Fellows: Torben Monberg

Torben Monberg is currently the “dean” of Pacific (and perhaps all) anthropologists in Denmark. He has done path-breaking ethnographic work on Polynesian outliers in the Solomon Islands: particularly Bellona, but also Rennell and Tikopia. His contributions are primarily ethnographic rather than theoretical, but his ethnographic writings on Bellona are genuinely remarkable, rivaling Firth’s on Tikopia for depth, breadth, and empathetic insight. The amount of indigenous textual material that he and his Danish colleagues have published is unparalleled, at least among the Polynesian outliers. Among Monberg’s publications are From the Two Canoes: Oral Traditions of Rennell and Bellona (with Sam Elbeli, University of Hawai‘i Press, 1965), The Religion of Bellona Island (National Museum of Denmark, 1966), Mobile in the Trade Wind: The Reactions of the People of Bellona Island toward a Mining Project (National Museum of Denmark, 1976), and Bellona Island Beliefs and Rituals (Pacific Islands Monographs Series No. 9, University of Hawai‘i Press, 1991).

Monberg has attended a number of ASAO meetings and participated in several multi-year sessions. ASAO publications to which he has contributed include Incest Prohibitions in Micronesia and Polynesia (special issue of the Journal of the Polynesian Society, 1976); Leadership and Change in the Western Pacific (in honor of Raymond Firth; Athlone, 1996); and Spirits in Culture, History, and Mind (Routledge, 1996). Monberg is virtually unique in both having assembled a distinguished team of researchers to conduct a comprehensive study of Bellona’s cultural and natural environment, and having paved the way for an almost uninterrupted line of Danish researchers who have made Bellona perhaps the most thoroughly documented of all the western Polynesian outliers. Among the scholars who followed Monberg to Bellona is Rolf Kuschel who has, himself, attended several ASAO meetings and participated in a number of our sessions.

Richard Feinberg, Kent State University (September 2000 Newsletter)