

Moken sea-gypsies

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Moken origins

The Moken, Sea Nomads of the Myeik Archipelago, are the northernmost group of the Austronesian migration beginning most likely from Taiwan around 5000 BC. Austronesians include populations of migrants, nomads, farmers, and especially seafarers who colonized an area of several million square kilometres. They crossed great distances through cultural or geographic boundaries, the Sulu Empire, maritime powers, mainland empires, emerging nations, straits... that temporarily stopped their movements and allowed them to recompose their fragmented ethnicity. They sometimes encountered coastal “natives” people with whom they interacted, before settling or continuing on their journey. They also tried to deviate from Islam or Buddhism by practising effective syncretism all while retaining their beliefs. These nomads are the spearheads of Western Austronesian expansion. We can trace the Moken departure from the Riau-Lingga Archipelago, thank to technology and linguistic, back to approximately the 16th century. From there on they expanded by separating from the dominant “Malay” group, becoming “Proto-Malays”, members of a wider community that includes all the nomads of the insulindian archipelago, notably the Moklen and the Urak Lawoi on the southwest coast of Thailand. They have therefore culturally sublimated geographic boundaries to create a large network from the Riau to the Myeik Archipelago, where they have flourished. With their experience, they have developed the means to build a “coastal civilization”, a network of small groups who empowered themselves, settling in estuaries, mangroves and islands, which eventually led the Moken to the Myeik Archipelago.

Centuries of interactions with other populations along the shores of Malaysia provided the Moken with a stock of cultural and technical knowledge (‘latencies’) they could express in adaptation with their environment. The archipelagic environment offered a relative tranquility from the mainland civilizations, so the Moken could test some of these ‘latencies’. This is how the Moken culture blossomed, with its flagship item, the *kabang* boat, which represents the microcosm of a society (and the climax, putting together all the technical latencies they have accumulated), and with the emergence of the great ceremony of the *lobung* spirit poles, which takes place when the nomadic season transitions to the settled lifestyle of the rainy season. It also enabled the expression of their ideology: sea-hunting (and land hunting too), non-accumulation, non-violence, egalitarianism, the refusal to learn and thus to attend school... Up to the 1980s, the Moken considered the 800 islands of the Myeik Archipelago as being the “natural” territory of their nomadism. This archipelagic Eldorado permitted the distribution of gathering areas between five mother-islands, each of which can be divided into flotillas that are more or less an extended family, in which each *kabang* is a nuclear family. This division into sub-groups helps to maintain a demographic balance (Moken were never more than 5,000 individuals) and a relative tranquility. Indeed, the Myeik Archipelago was far from the grip of surrounding civilizations (Siam, Burmese, Malay Sultanates) until the annexation of the Tenasserim region by the

British in 1826. Even then the Myeik Archipelago's islands remained a remote place, and the British could only perceive taxes on Moken products through Chinese intermediaries, in the same way the missionaries could not succeed in their work. Moken ideology and nomadism were at their climax until the late 1980s that saw the migration to the islands of thousands of Burmese fleeing political unrest and economical distress in Central and Lower Burma.



*A kabang dragging secondary boats (sampan) on site equipped with hook lines to fish squids.
Jacques Ivanoff 2004*

Moken culture's foundations

During British rule, which lasted until the country's independence in 1947, missionaries and officers started to study the Moken, having in mind either to convert them or to make them taxable by the Crown. Both initiatives fell short. Only few Moken were converted, and they were too mobile to be controlled. Even more incomprehensible, the valuable products Moken used to collect (notably pearls) were given in exchange with rice, clothes and other goods to an intermediary of Chinese descent called *tokè* (a word of Chinese origin), whom finally the British found easier to tax. These encounters however produced different accounts of the Moken, leading to similar conclusions: Moken live like poor wretches but their naval technology is incredibly sophisticated [see chapter *Kabang, the Moken boat*]. This situation paved the way for fallacious interpretations on Moken origins, like the meaning of their name, believed to be derived from the boat's part maintaining the hull planking, called *mo*, and *okèn* meaning "salted water". However, this interpretation could not explain cultural traits such as a proclaimed poverty, the non-accumulation of goods or the refusal of fishing techniques. These features, shared by other nomads, become for the Moken an ideological aspect that draws its strength from the world of myth, where is rooted history. The origins of their name and identity will be revealed by the texts of oral literature

including the epic poem of Gaman that offered Moken society its identity. Gaman is a Malay civilising hero who will lead the transition from yams (symbolized by the queen Sibian which represents hierarchy and land) to rice for the Moken, which makes him the first *tokè*. Gaman, by committing adultery with the Queen's sister named Kèn, led the Moken at sea, condemned by the queen to be thrown – *mo* – in the water. *mo-kèn* became their name [see box *Extract from the epic poem of Gaman*].

Extract from the epic poem of Gaman

"I tell you, Gaman, you have turned towards the front and you have made Sibian sick. My heart and my soul suffer as if needles stung them. My young sister has stolen the dish of her older sister, the bowl of her older sister. She tore out the hair on the head of her older sister. You, young sister, who lives on the boat of which the broadsides of the hull are made of stipites, reflect well. I condemn my young sister to fall into the sea. May she become immersed in it, she who is called Kèn! And now you can do what you want with my husband. Remain together both of you if you want to, but take her parents and Kaèt with you. Never come back again to my earth. Take the entire group with you, the young ones, the old ones, and the uncles. I forbid you to live here any longer."

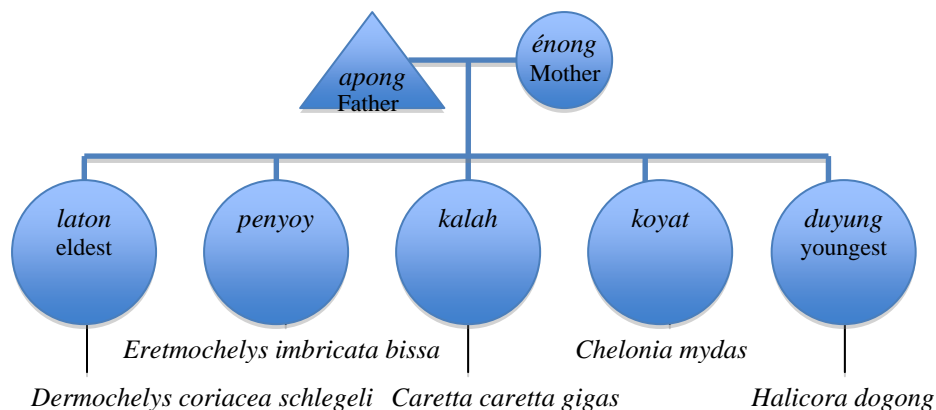


Moken integrate many exogenous influences to which they give a new meaning in their syncretic altars.

Jacques Ivanoff 2004

The social unit among the Moken is the nuclear family. Alliances are of exogamic nature, that is the man will go to another subgroup to find a wife he will bring back to his own group the time of building the *kabang* boat. Once the boat is done, he will join back the group of

his wife and live among them. Exogamy is a major vector of mobility and the boat its vehicle, the shelter of the nuclear family ideally composed (terminologically at least) of two parents and five children. This number refers to specific animal names, that is to say, the four turtle species recognized by the Moken plus a dugong. The distribution of siblings compared to marine mammals (dugongs) and marine reptiles (turtles) is more easily explainable for turtles than the dugong. The first born is associated with the leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea schlegeli*), the largest living sea turtle, the second with a smaller one, *Eretmochelys imbricata bissa*, then come the smaller turtles *Caretta caretta* and *Chelonia mydas gigas*, the dugong (*Halicora dogong*) being the youngest.



A sustainable exploitation of archipelagic resources reflected in all strata of the society

The paradox of the Moken consuming rice they do not grow expresses a choice based on an ideology of non-accumulation and on the appeal of mobility, which are much higher for them than for those who practice a sedentary way of life imposed by agriculture (which they know and still practice at least for the needs of ritual gardens, rice being considered a magical plant). The nomadic choice shapes the Moken's economy and their practices in harmony with their environment. Moken live on their *kabang* during the dry-season, roaming the islands in search of valuable products to be exchanged against rice, as well as clothes, iron, fuel for their engine, etc. Among the most rene products they used to collect are pearls, bird-nests, sea cucumbers, turbos (*Turbo marmoratus*) and trochus shells and mother-of-pearl. Although Moken's economy relies on valuable tradable goods, they avoid as much as possible any contact with surrounding dominant societies (Malay, Thais, Burmese). This is made possible thanks to a quasi-exclusive relationship between a Moken subgroup and their intermediary (*tokè*) who does not only supply and indebt them in exchange of goods, but also protects and takes care of them.

Most activities are gendered in Moken society. Men are in charge of collecting tradable products; there are responsible for the relationship with the exterior (acquisition of rice through the trade of products taken at sea, *taao* in Moken, meaning also "the exterior"). Women are in charge of collecting, they are the guardians of self-subsistence tradition symbolized by the foreshore. The balance of the meal depends on the harmony of the couple, just like the boat could not go without a couple. Each spouse has a share of responsibility in the constitution of daily meals. Collecting is a popular female community activity, binding together the various economic units of a flotilla secreting a social dynamic.



Moken flotillas used to roam the islands looking for different kind of resources. Women at the prow handle the gaff and men are at the rudder.

Pierre Ivanoff 1973

The women of the same group, and their children, leave together on a “field” (*padang*) and collect each for themselves. The harvest usually takes place in a good mood, women questioning and commenting in detail the adventures of the fleet, especially during major full moon tides when the foreshore is largely uncovered for about five days. They look for sand worms (especially *Gephyrean - Phymosoma japonicum*), mantis shrimps (*Stomatopod*), small shells. They also collect vegetables as well as other “leaves” and yams (*Dioscorea alata*, cf. *glabra*, *hispida*) from the nearest fringes of the forest. This is where are found wood and leaves necessary to build the temporary houses of the rainy season. The interior of the forest (*kotan*, “the interior”), like the sea, is reserved to men. These are the places where men hunt, but also where they find the trees for the boat [see chapter *Kabang, the Moken boat*]. At sea they hunt for turtles [see box *Turtles*], rays (imbricated stingray and manta-rays), dugongs (*Dugong dugon*) and sometimes sharks. In the forest, mousedeeers (*Tragulus sp.*) and wild boars (*Sus scrofa*) are prized by hunters, while monkeys (*Macacus cynomologus*), monitors and birds are sometimes hunted but not much appreciated.

Hunting is a highly symbolic activity and preys themselves have their own symbolic weight, which can be more or less strong depending on the species hunted. The fact that they possess a ‘soul’ (*manga*) or a ‘spirit’ (*katoy*) will differentiate animals which are hunted or not. Dolphins (*Ioma*) and whales (*nani*) are not harpooned; they have a ‘soul’ and represent

the double of dead shamans and mediums [see box *Dolphins and cetaceans*] so their appearance causes a respectful silence. Another species of monkey (*Semnopithecus obscurus*) is considered as a double, probably an ancestor, as it is called *Ebab* (“grandfather”, “male ancestor”) by the Moken and therefore is not hunted. Hunted animals with a ‘spirit’ include the wild pig on land, turtles and manta rays at sea, and some birds in the air.



From hunters-gatherers, Moken became divers-gatherers: at sea like in the forest, they are skilled hunters. Wild boars are hunted with hounds.
Jacques Ivanoff 2004

Population, resources and rituality: the Moken today

From these abundant resources, three kinds of animals have a primary importance in the main ritual, that is the spirit poles ceremony. These are the wild pig, the turtle and chicken (the latter being essentials). The transition between the nomadic dry-season and the more sedentary monsoon is marked by an annual ceremony, called “making the spirits poles” (*bo lobung*). This ritual is of primary importance and preserves the history of Moken society, divided into phases, remembering for example the “Malay” past, the “slavery” past, etc. Those different historical periods are marked by games, different styles of clothes and offerings... It is interesting to note that combining chicken, wild pig and turtle during the feast of the posts to the spirits, the Moken associate a pet, recalling a sedentary lifestyle and attachment to the Malay world, a forest animal, associated with the agricultural past of the Moken, and turtle, a coastal and marine animal representing the element in which the Moken live. During the ceremony, Moken renew the contract made between humans and ancestors. The spirit poles represent first the founding ancestors of the subgroup and secondly the settlement of an ideal family of seven persons. During the ceremony

communication is 'vertical', from the piece of land around the spirit poles through the spirit poles and to the world of spirits and ancestors. The "sacred men" are at the foot of the spirit poles to welcome spirit, give them offerings and play with them. Moken make a new deal after "reimbursing their debt" to the ancestors who protected them from evil spirits during the dry season. Reversely, if the ancestors did not fulfil their role (for example many deaths happened in one group), Moken may not please them with offerings and may not perform the *bo lobung* ceremony.



Maxime Boutry, 2013

This ceremony used to be the occasion to gather all the flotillas of one subgroup in their mother-island. But in the course of the 1990s and the development of a Myanmar fishing industry, many Burmese came to the islands and married with Moken women. Some of them (those who have the power to change the Moken location) are also represented as spirit poles. These Burmese relied heavily on Moken to acquire knowledge of the insular environment: islands protected from the monsoon winds, presence of freshwater, location of different resources, waves, currents, etc. Following the introduction of compressor boats which enrolled much Moken men to dive always deeper and longer for pearls, sea-cucumbers and shells, the Moken society soon suffered a deficit in men. Therefore the intermarriage with Burmese fishermen came naturally to compensate this deficit, while the Burmese pioneers acted as Moken *tokè*, often staying close to them, and even with them, in the islands. A more systematic fishing economy developed parallel to Moken activities, attracting hundreds of Burmese to profit by the wealth of the Myeik Archipelago. Moken traditional resources went rarer, and the nomads and their *tokè* tried to adapt: from sea-cucumbers to manta-rays and sharks, and from sharks to squids (*mimik* in Moken). Squid fishing is nowadays the main activity of the Moken. It started in the 2000s, principally enrolling women on Moken secondary boats (*sampan*) for what could be associated to a

collect activity. Moken men would still go at sea to hunt for fish, and collect shells on the seabed. But with a greater rarefaction of resources, progressively all the Moken – women and men, elders and young people – concentrate their efforts on squid fishing. At one per *sampan*, towed on site by motorized boats generally owned by the *tokè*, Moken use a line equipped with a fishing jig. During full moon they fish at night as the light attracts squids closer to the surface, while during new moon periods they fish around rocky islands and islets by day. During the 2000s, Moken also lost most of their *kabang*, which as a symbol of non-accumulation, could hardly be used for storing squids in iceboxes. The need for ice also implies more regular return to the village. The Moken social space shrank in the north and south of the archipelago for many reasons, mainly because of pressure from the government, the military and missionaries. This resulted in the adoption of a sedentary lifestyle that became an obligation. Hence, the northern and southern sub-groups were removed from the mental map of the Moken, partly because they could no longer participate in the *lobung* ritual. That leaves only the “centre” of the archipelago to accommodate the Moken, a centre that includes three sub-groups: Lengan (separated from its parent island Domel), Lebi (Pu Nala/Lampi) and Nyawi (St. James).

Moken and the Lampi National park

Lampi and the village of Makyone Galet are key places for the Moken in the recent history of the Archipelago. In the midst of state-attempts to takeover the Archipelago and its resources, the designated 1996 Year of Tourism saw the development in Makyone Galet of a “Salone Ideal Village” – Salone being the Burmese exonym for Moken. This was a first attempt by the government to settle *all* the Moken from the Myeik Archipelago in one place. Burmese settlers were forced to move out, a village of bamboo huts aligned in rows was constructed, each row supposed to shelter a different Moken subgroup. However, the Moken would not stay and over years the place has been the theatre of many back and forth relocation processes for both Burmese and Moken. In the meantime, the anticipated tourism development did not occur and ‘live-aboard’/diving boats would prefer to stay offshore in deeper waters. In 2004, this is also where the government organized a Salone Festival, forcibly rounding-up Moken of this part of the Archipelago and even beyond in the north to have them performing for tourists. Again, this was quite a failed attempt to engage Moken with tourism and the festival did not resume in following years.

Before the growing presence of Burmese settlements in the islands, there used to be five main sub-groups of Moken, each being divided in several flotillas during the nomadic season. Over a period of twenty years (1980-2000), these sub-groups were reconfigured under the pressure of the Burmese, and sometimes the Burmese army, who gradually took possession of the islands. Thus, the sub-group of Nyawi (St. James) split into two, and a new group appeared in Jelam (Lord Loughborough). Chadiac (St. Matthew) also split into two islands – the main island and the now independent Thai satellite island of Lata (Surin). The small archipelago of Lengan (Sisters), formerly a dependent of Jait (Domel), also became independent since the flight of the Moken from the main island. There are about eight sub-groups recognized as the “People of Jait” according to indigenous classifications. One of them stays on Lampi Island (*Lebi* in Moken), in the now village of Makyone Galet. Lebi (Lampi) used to be as such a sub-group, which part also remains in the same village. Hence, Makyone Galet is made of two communities from two different Moken subgroups: Jait at the eastern part of the village, and Lebi at the opposite side. These, together with the Nyawi group, are the main vectors of a Moken adaptation to a fast changing context, taking into account the growing presence of Burmese, depletion of traditional resources and the development of tourism. To summarize, Lampi (and Makyone Galet village) is an important place for articulating the fate of Moken within the Myanmar national context. The park is a

privileged place to acknowledge and valorise Moken know-hows regarding natural resources' management and their environment – a Moken boat lasts 20 to 30 years, nomadism aims to collect few quantities only in one place, Moken were the sole able to see the 2004 tsunami coming, etc. As Moken society lives in accord with their environment, managing the park means also taking into account Moken culture as a crucial element of its diversity. Eventually, the Lampi National Park may be a precious alternative to forced integration, a place of smooth exchanges with the 'outside', a place where Moken can take an ethnic breath.

Dolphins and Cetaceans

During the inter-islands crossings performed by the Moken between the hundreds of islands of the Myeik Archipelago, dolphins are cheerful companions that sometimes accompany the boats. The observer is delighted by the show, but this is not the case of the Moken. Silence falls instantly to the appearance of dolphins leaping out of the waves; Moken must then pour fresh water into the sea water that is considered to be alive and whose strength is negated by the blandness of fresh water, while they recite some invocations. If sharks and other "monsters" haunt the nightmares of Western people, nomads seem more worrying reptiles and marine mammals around them. With them they have built a network of social and religious relationships linking man to his myth. The silence on board is more a mark of respect than fear, because dolphins are the doubles of the Moken officiants (mediums and shamans) and their coming is a sign of communication between two worlds. Caution is therefore necessary.

Dolphins and whales remind the great division of spiritual masters in Southeast Asia: mediums and shamans, two existing functions in the Moken society. Here we must consider the cetacean migration to understand the assimilation between marine mammals and officiants. Indeed, during the fifth month of the lunar calendar, the month of the great spirit poles ceremony, cetaceans (whales certainly) come in pairs in some islands of the archipelago, for reproduction it seems. The Moken associate their visit with fertility and rebirth; we must draw a parallel between the onset of the rainy season, the function of shaman, activating its function in the fifth month (for the spirit poles ceremony) and the emergence of shamanic doubles that come back to haunt the waters of the archipelago, in the shape of sperm whales. The dolphins, which are present in every season, are the image of *potao* "elders".

Dugong: the gate between nature and culture

In a nuclear family, while children are identified to different turtles species, the youngest is an exception, being associated with the dugong. To the turtles of the myths – metaphoric women who will be married and bear their role in society – the Moken assign a mixt character, an intermediary between humans and animals, the dugong. Recall that ancestors of pinnipeds, Sirenias (dugongs and manatees) and current cetaceans returned to the sea, the original matrix, at the Eocene. These mammals wonderfully succeeded where their forefathers, amphibians and reptiles, had left. Sirenias and cetaceans became exclusively aquatic, the first living near the coast, the second colonizing the ocean. Sirenias are entirely aquatic, confined to shallow tropical, and often turbid, coastal waters.

Sirenias, despite their gentle and friendly behavior, have no real resemblance to women, except the presence of two pectoral breasts spotted during breastfeeding. They are therefore ambiguous animals during their evolution since they lived alternately on land and in water. They did a first jump ashore, which corresponds to the "cultural test" of the Moken

on earth (before they become sea-nomads), before returning to their original natural matrix. Near the coast, close to the men, dugongs represent the danger of nature always ready to regain its prerogatives and that men must constantly repress to assert themselves as social beings.

As the youngest child who stays the latest near his parents, dugong lives nearby men. It is the perfect representative of animality (as opposed to sociality), a symbol of incest, that is to say, the return to nature. He is the guardian of the passage from culture to nature. The youngest children are potentially incestuous (as echoed by Moken myth such as Gaman or the Incestuous Dugong) as they are the last to remain with parents, a dangerous proximity. In oral texts, the youngest has a special place. He is often the hero, from the weak he becomes the powerful, from poor he becomes rich; so he has a transformative power.

The Moken liken dugong to pig flesh for the taste is identical. Its consumption is therefore subject to some rules. Some Moken do not eat dugong but it is more linked to the sanctity of the animal enhanced by Muslim propaganda since everyone agrees on the rich fat of the animal and its excellent taste. Its consumption, as far as can be ascertained in the absence of direct observation on the subject, follows the same rules as those specific to the turtle. Therefore be noted that, like turtles, dugongs are consumed. This social cannibalism seems to be a mystical action that connects man to his mythical primordial unity. First they come from salt water, creative and powerful. But this seawater that connects man to his myth is dangerous because it is a passage to the afterlife, to the time of the myth and the spirit world. Moreover it is within it that shamans and ritual masters reborn. The power of the ocean attracts pregnant women as if the ocean was the primordial matrix which was to melt all the others. Also the sea is, as in many other societies, the symbol of fertility, an idea reinforced by the relationship between menstruation and tides. The ocean, place of rebirth and transformation, provides an inverted picture of the man, which is why, although the dugong has ears, Moken must speak loudly to not be heard; that is why one comes back physically transformed from a long journey; this is also why the intrepid traveller who reached the mystery of the ocean in the myth holds the key of sacred knowledge.

Turtles: the mythic kin of Moken

If turtles appear when aboard a Moken boat, it is not the prudent reaction observed with the dolphins, but the excitement of the hunt. Moken are former hunter-gatherers who became divers and collectors for whom turtle is a game of choice, shared by all members of the flotilla after its capture. This animal is surrounded by many attentions because it is considered a mythical collateral and a symbol of Moken origins.

It is through such mixed beings that mediation between the animal and human worlds is possible. The shell of the turtle differentiates it from other reptiles; the four-legged animal reminds mammals, but it lays eggs. These same turtle eggs are the equivalent of women for the Moken who readily recognize that the almost homonymy between *binay* "woman" and *bunay* "turtle eggs" is on purpose. Moken are fond of turtle flesh but also of eggs they exchange. Like turtles, eggs are treated as women devoured by men. The way that small turtles roam at birth to the sea is another assimilation between men and turtles, living images of the Moken who left earth to live on the sea. Besides, in the myths turtles are the "sisters" of the Moken who did not have time to climb aboard the boat after the primordial flood. Staying at sea therefore also changes sex, because the turtle is the wife, the daughter, the mother, in short the femininity of sea that gives life, as exemplified by the Moken saying: "Moken are born, live and die on a boat and the umbilical cord of their children plunges into the sea."

The relationship of the Moken and the sea is a blood relationship and exchange, the center of which women are. The sacrifice of the turtle is a social anthropophagy aimed at declaiming to the world "we are different, we eat our sisters, we forbid ourselves the learning which is inscribed on the turtle's shell, because we are Moken and nothing else". Turtles are the remembrance of origins, the founding of the kinship system where each child is named after the name of a turtle and where the dugong bears the same name as the mother-son incest (*duyung* in Moken). The turtle is a highly symbolic animal. It is therefore not surprising that it is ritually consumed. Nevertheless, the Moken, fond of turtles they keep looking for on the surface of the sea, symbolically eat their women. That men (because only men harpoon the turtles) eat women can be understood if one considers the urge to eat the beloved as the mark of a desire, certainly excessive, but almost universal. But that men eat their veiled sisters may seem strange. However, the Moken in spearing turtles, symbolic blood relations, kill and eat their relatives. This idea of social cannibalism is evidenced by the fact that the turtle is an animal whose meat is shared among all members of the fleet. A Moken never shirk this rule, a sign of endogamy and consanguinity symbolically represented by a ritual consumption so the Moken eat their sisters, they commit incest in a way, like the siblings of the Gaman epic who founded the Moken society in myth.

Dusky leaf monkey (*Semnopithecus obscurus*), the "grand-father" (*ebab*)

In the Mergui Archipelago, two monkey species are present, the dusky leaf monkey (*Semnopithecus obscurus*) and the crab-eating macaque (*Macacus cynomologus*, *kla* in Moken). Both species are considered by the Moken as very different from one another. The macaque is hunted for food, usually with a one-point spear (*lèm*) when out on the foreshore and the beach. It can also be killed by dogs.

The dusky leaf monkey (*obuan* in Moken) is considered quite differently. Dusky leaf monkeys are highly respected by the Moken who see them as representatives of a parallel world that one should not interfere with. Moken even recognize kinship with them. The *obuan* monkey is powerful; in Malay and Moken stories, it has power and strength and is considered a great warrior. But the *obuan* monkey is also the holder of culture since it is associated with rice. Moken believe monkeys cultivated rice before men make it their own, and since then rice is the only reward the *obuan* desires.

Monkeys are omnipresent on the southern islands. In the island of Surin (Thailand) where some Moken live, the visitor is welcomed by the "monkey rock", a pile of stones and a lighthouse for the Moken. The monkeys would come there to meet in council and pray the great deities to withstand the onslaught of the waves. In everyday life they approach Moken settled on the beach; they monitor the treetops overlooking the camps; sometimes they walk inside the camp. Every day in the late afternoon monkeys howl in long disturbing complaints from the sylvan life. In Surin island, the "monkey rock", the "beach of combat with monkeys", the presence of the "monkey spirit" and "monkey kings" clearly show that they are the true owners of the island. It happened once during a walk in the forest that an *obuan* monkey jumped from one branch to another one which broke. There comes the monkey at our feet, in a bad state. The Moken rushed, raised the monkey very delicately, and called it "grandfather" (*ebab* in Moken). The "grandfather" lived among the Moken on a boat, until reinstated. He was fed with rice and everyone came to visit him. These monkeys are considered a double, probably an ancestor, as it is called *ebab* by the Moken, and their status in Moken's classification of life resembles more the one of marine mammals.

The mischievous mouse deer

The lesser mouse deer (*bitchong* in Moken) is probably the most hunted prey by the Moken in the forest. However, lesser mouse deers and the monitor lizards (*moa* in Moken) are not subject to scheduled hunts, like wild-boars, but are more secondary games. Indeed, it is usually during expeditions to look for other resources that they are captured: when looking for wild honey, during boar hunts or other outings in the forest with dogs. The lesser mouse deer is not killed with weapons; these are the dogs that put to death, because of their small size. The lesser mouse deer does not possess a spirit (*katoy*), the boar being the only land game to have one. However, the lesser mouse deer is well represented in tales. Pranks of the lesser mouse deer is a classic theme of Insulindian oral literature. It is the equivalent to our mischievous fox in European tales.

Tale of the mischievous mouse-deer

We'll talk about the mouse-deer. Everybody listen! The ancestor Buhum one day took his axe and went off with his son to cut down a tree, a *Hopea odorata*, in order to make a boat hull. They were sweating blood and water while they hollowed the tree, when suddenly a mouse-deer appeared and jumped onto the hull.

- No Grandfather! You will never be able to achieve anything if you continue doing things this way. You really do not know anything. You made a mistake and you will not succeed Grandfather.

The father and the son tried to catch the mouse-deer who jumped from the bow to the stern of the boat and then ran off into the forest. The next day and the next three days the mouse-deer returned to insult the grandfather who angrily took the shavings of the tree and threw them on the cheeky animal.

- Hey, are you suffering now, mouse-deer?

Since then, the mouse-deer carry the mark of the shavings on his back. And if you capture one of them, you must throw the back away because it has a bad smell.

But here again the mouse-deer comes back playing with the tiger who wanted to eat him. The mouse-deer dragged the tiger into the sea where there are giant clams that nipped at his feet.

- The water is rising! The water is rising! cried the tiger.

- Eh! Well then, tiger, you are going to die.

The tiger is calling for help but soon the water enters his mouth every time he opens it. When the tiger died the mouse-deer went back into the forest and met another tiger.

- Ah! You have mocked me and you lied to me. Then you will die with me, I'll eat you.

The mouse-deer fled into the forest and met a python. He played on his red pipe for him:

- "Tetete".

- Give me the pipe or I'll denounce you to my master.

But the mouse-deer caught the serpent in his mouth and beat him, tore out his eyes and threw them on top of the tiger. He fled into the forest where he met the elephant, who threatened to kill the mouse-deer if he did not stop playing tricks to everyone. The mouse-deer insulted him and the elephant went running after him.

- You can't kill me because I run faster than you. Let's go and look for a tree. We will hit it and the first one who makes it fall down is the winner.

They soon found a suitable tree and started bashing away at it. But the elephant had flat feet and that stopped him hitting the tree, so the mouse-deer won the bet. Then he met some men who wanted to exchange fish for wood. The mouse-deer brought them some branches with big thorns on them. The men put the wood on their shoulders and the thorns jabbed them severely. Soon, the tiger, the elephant and the men started chasing the mouse-deer. He cried out to the crocodile.

- Oh, crocodile, my friend, take me to the other side.

This way the mouse-deer was able to cross to the other side of the river, sound both in mind and body. The men had dogs who came toward the mouse-deer and when they reached him, they climbed on to the crocodile and defecated all over him. So the crocodile ate all of them.

Kabang, the Moken boat

Centrepiece of the enigmatic Moken society as a silent guardian of the past and future, as a magical bond between the forest, the sky, sea and earth, the *kabang* is a mythical microcosm, the Moken's history book, recounting its emergence from its Malay and coastal chrysalis. For example, the organization of the thwarts reminds the Moken of the Malay boats, and spirits who still live on the *kabang* are Malay and not Moken ancestors. The boat is history and therefore in relation to the Malay world. However, offsetting this geo-historical proximity, the indentations of the hull are there to mark their cultural differences: is Moken the man who has an indented boat. Beyond their technical function as a step to climb on the boat, these indentations on the front and the back of the hull (Fig. 1) symbolize a "mouth that eats the sea" and "a back that rejects it", bearing the very meaning of non-accumulation. The symbolic and technology are Moken.



Maxime Boutry

Extract of Gaman epic poem, the symbolic meaning of the *kabang's* indentations

- What has happened tonight Kèn? I am your father and I want to know. Sibian condemned you to fall into the sea. You who is named Kèn your body will be submerged [*Iemo Kèn*, that will give Moken]. You stole your elder brother!

- [Sibian, queen of the Moken] Father and mother ! I want your boats with the hull plating in stipites have *a mouth that eats and a large open back*. With these boats, Moken, you will live on the sea and later Kèn will remember the words of Sibian. She will remember the story and my sentences. I do not want you here. Go!

Physical and social mobility depend on the boat; this is the boat that brings spouses together; it is also the space of love excesses and transgression of sexual taboos (adultery and incest); it is the attachment of the child to his mother symbolized by the boat's strakes named "mother" and "child" and, alongside, that grow and form the technical superstructure of the boat and the social context of human relations.

The Moken boat, *kabang*, varies in size from 7 to 11 meters long on average. Its depth is 1.30 m to 1.50 m. Its maximum width at midship beam in the center of the boat, is about a quarter of the length. The proportions of the midship beam give the boat a flared shape and the term "nutshell" suits him perfectly, accentuated by the low draft print and no keel. But this nutshell is a technical marvel, adapted to the foreshore she attends. The hull is composed of two distinct parts that the nature, density and color seem to oppose: the monoxyle dugout carved into a tree trunk which heavy bottom serves as a keel, and a superstructure in stipites (*Zalacca rumphii*), a lightweight material that is erected on the monoxyle dugout to raise its sides and constitute the boat's side shell plating. But it is mainly the dugout and the attention it requires that punctuates the life of the islands. These monoxyles (*mat* in Moken) are part of the environment and concerns of everyday life for the Moken. They form the body of the symbolic technology, firstly because all their components necessary for the realization of a boat have anthropomorphic features. Furthermore, dugouts represent through their assimilation to an ingesting and excreting human body the inability to accumulate. Anthropomorphic expressions of the symbolic technology, the Moken dugout summarizes Moken history, from the forest to the sea, recounting the historical progression of the Moken, former hunter-gatherers who became divers-collectors.

The different steps of the construction of a boat moken are: the felling of the tree, hollowing out of the trunk, the opening of the trunk's sides (fig. 2), laying of the stipites (fig. 3), then comes the rudder, the strings, the sail and the oars.

The work on the monoxyle dugout is not regular: at one week of hollowing-out and heavy towing sometimes succeeds a long time-out. After being pulled or hoisted on the beach, it is polished, planed and then refined. Hanged in the lapping waves, it soaks after having been treated with fire. The whole group admires it, they also criticize it.

It is only when the boat is fully completed, and put into the water that it takes its rightful place. The whole group – 30 to 50 persons – takes part in this great moment, and punctuated by "héééé hélaaaa" (our "heave ho!"), wishes are expressed in a repetitive form not to break the effort. Then the Moken ask the boat to be a good companion and spirits to accompany men... The boat becomes a living being. It has its place in society.

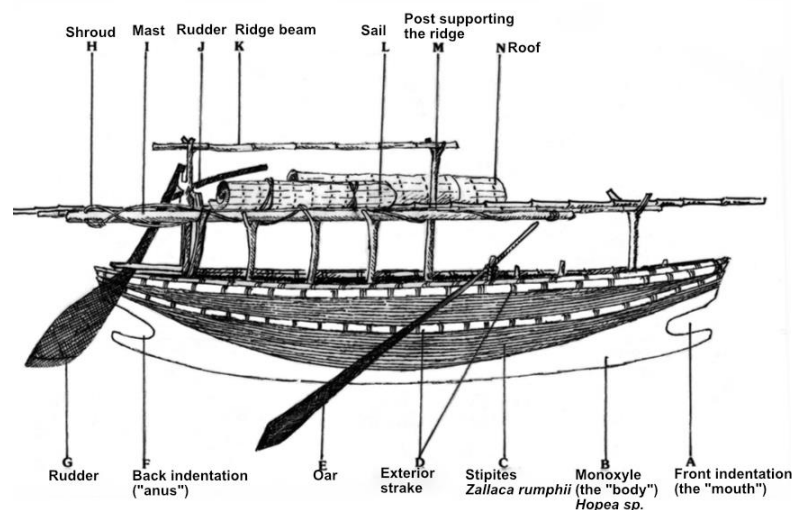


Figure 1: The different parts of the Moken boat, *kabang*

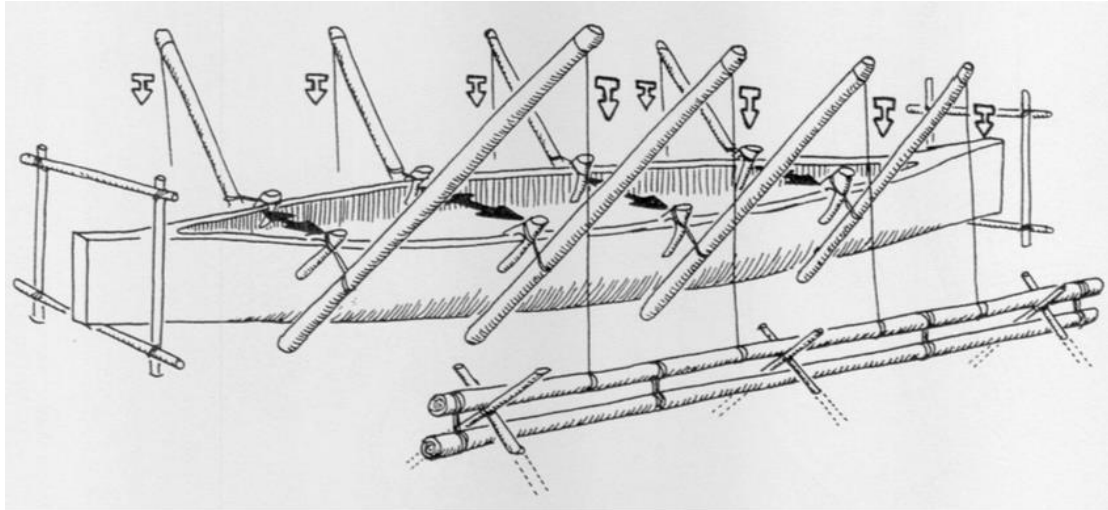


Figure 2: opening of the hull's sides

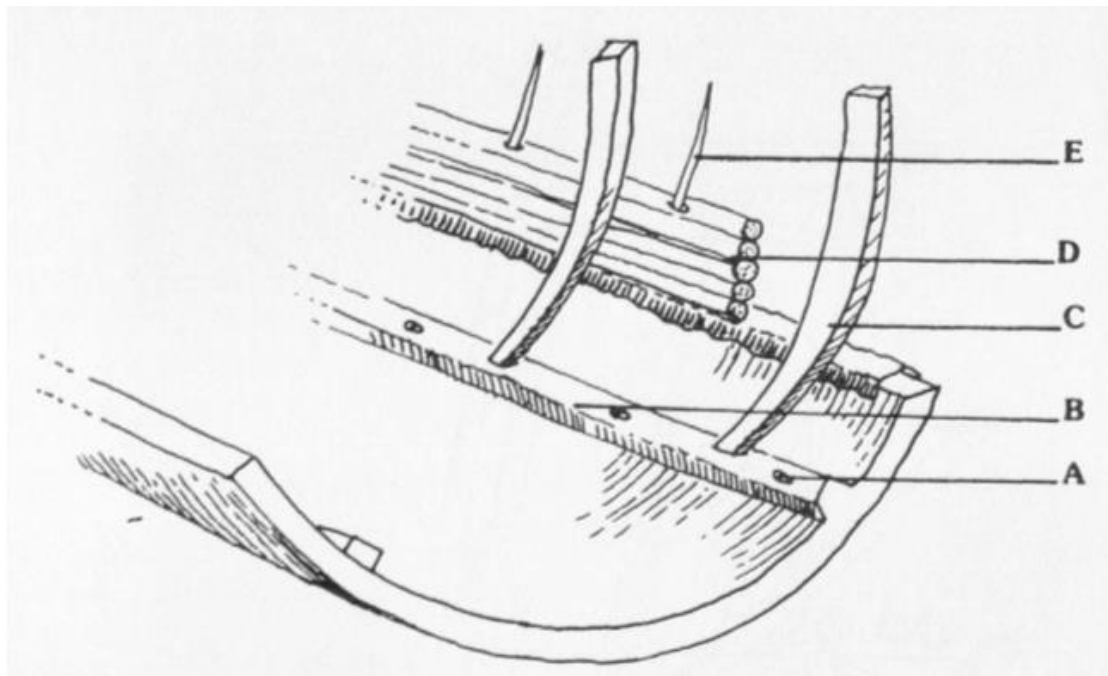


Figure 3: Stacking up the stipites

A: Mortise; B: Long plain strake; C: Ribs; D: Stipites; E: Pointed bamboo stick.

Moken's forest resources

Moken classification	Moken name	Latin name	Use
pokon (tree)	<i>ut</i>	<i>Eugenia sp.</i>	bark: caulk, food, fruits
Kaé (wood)	<i>batu</i>	<i>Terminalis foetissima</i>	planks
	<i>isian</i>	<i>Dipterocarpus grandiflorus</i>	caulk and planks
	<i>kianthong</i>	<i>Hopea (?)</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>tèngan bunga</i>	<i>Hopea ferrera</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>tègan</i>	<i>Hopea odorata</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>khalot</i>	<i>Shorea</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>tchatit</i>	<i>Shorea ou Lauracea</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>kasèt</i>	<i>Shorea Curtis</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>tebuj</i>	<i>Shorea latifolia</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>gudung</i>	<i>Tibrana menispermacea</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>phan</i>	<i>Artocarpus lanceifolieu</i> s and <i>A. Rigidus</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>dungun</i>	<i>Heritiera javanica</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>djagé</i>	<i>Anisoptera</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>mat</i>	<i>Adenarnhera microsperma</i>	monoxyle hull
	<i>desark</i>	<i>Vatica cinerea</i>	oar
	<i>mata ékan</i> (œil de poisson)	<i>Canthium diccocum</i>	tool handle
	<i>alah</i>	<i>Ficus, cf. F. superba</i>	Shelter for spirits (good and bad)
	<i>djamao</i>	<i>Eugenia grandis</i>	planks
	<i>djabo</i>	<i>Cordia sebastiana</i>	beam of the bottom of the monoxyle
	<i>ganing</i>	<i>Dyospiros martabanica</i>	Comestible fruit and beam
	<i>tékon</i>	<i>Heritiana littoralis</i>	tool handle and stirring stick
kaun (bamboo)	<i>betun</i>	<i>Bambusa sp.</i>	floor or deck in boards
kwaj (rope, strap)	<i>sésèn</i>	<i>Daemonorops sp., Calamaus sp., Plectocomia sp.</i>	rope, strap, basket making, rattan
	<i>bubong</i>	<i>Daemonorops sp., Calamaus sp., Plectocomia sp.</i>	rope, strap
	<i>telèng</i>	<i>Daemonorops sp., Calamaus sp., Plectocomia sp.</i>	rope, strap
	<i>sekè</i>	<i>Pandanus unicornitus</i>	Rope, basket string, rattan, sail, roof
	<i>lising</i>	<i>Pandanus sp.</i>	
Other palm trees	<i>tselah</i>	<i>Nipa fruticans</i>	leave: roof
	<i>kibuang</i>	<i>Oncosperma tigillaria</i>	flower: wedding ceremony; stem: boathook
	<i>palaj</i>	<i>Zallaca sp.</i>	stipites: food and straps
	<i>koman</i>	<i>Zallaca rumphii</i>	stipites: hull plating
Misc.	<i>jot</i>	<i>Daemonorops sp.</i>	deck or floor

To learn more about the Moken, please visit www.mokenspirit.com