Edai Siabo was an insignificant, if not deformed, resident of the Papuan village of Boera. One night when fishing on the reef, he was taken by a spirit to a cave under the sea. The spirit taught him to make big trading canoes called lagatoi and to undertake hiri trading expeditions to the Gulf of Papua. When he made a model trading canoe and explained his intentions, his fellow villagers mocked him. At last, however, he sailed with his crew to the west.
After he had been away for a long time, the wives of the crew grew tired of waiting and married other men. Edai's wife alone remained faithful. On their return, the other members of the crew spurned their faithless wives.

Edai's sister was married to a Koita man who three times refused Edai's wife's request for garden food. When the *hiri* returned, Edai twice refused when his brother-in-law sent his wife to beg for food but at the third request he relented. He gave them food and laid down the future rates of exchange between Motu and Koita.

Ralph Bulmer, with his interest in all Papua New Guinean traditions, would have enjoyed the myth of the origins of the *hiri* trading expeditions of the western Motu people. I have collected seventeen versions of this myth: eleven of them written redactions and six narratives recorded by myself (Appendix).

During these expeditions, the Motu took pots and shell valuables in many-hulled canoes to the Gulf of Papua where they exchanged them for sago, betel nut and other goods (Barton 1910:96-120; Groves 1972:523-7; Oram 1982:1-33). Associated with the village of Boera, the myth describes the invention of an economic order focussed on trade and the sea. It includes 'creation' stories associated with the establishment of that order. It authorises practices associated with the production of such vital items as nets and canoes. It is concerned with actual places but not necessarily with 'real' people. It is widely known throughout the Motu domain and contains elements, such as revelations by spirit and the insignificant-man-turned-hero found in a number of other Papuan myths.

The western Motu people live in ten villages between Bootless Inlet and Galley Reach on the southern central Papuan coast. Three villages claim origins different from that of the Western Motu tribe as defined by Groves (1963:15). One of these is the village of Boera, to which the story of Edai Siabo belongs. The Motu speak an Austronesian language. Their neighbours the Koita, who either live in their own settlements on or near the coast or in Motu villages (Dutton 1969, Oram 1981:207-29), speak a Papuan language. Both Motu and Koita are patrilineal, each descent group formerly living in its own section within a nucleated village (Groves 1963:17).

The village of Boera is situated on the coast twenty-five kilometres northwest of present-day Port Moresby. Immediately to the north is the huge archaeological site of Davage extending some two kilometres along the coast which may have first been occupied two thousand or more years ago. Sections of the Boera people claim Davage as their original village. To the west is a large area of fringing reefs in which two rocky islets, Idiha and Bava, are situated.

In the first part of this paper I first describe the different versions of the myth which I have collected section by section (cf. Young 1983) and place the legend in its environmental and social context. In the second part I consider the myth from different points of view, including the myth as charter and as an historical source. Important elements of Motu culture mentioned in the myth are discussed. In conclusion, I examine the significance of the myth as a whole.

I have translated and present Version 1 as recorded by Moi Higo in the *Motu School Reader* of the London Missionary Society (Anon. 1956) because it was the earliest and fullest found in Motu. It contains an account of a migration of the ancestors of the Boera people and of the invention of a fishing net. Version 8, redacted by Moi's son Kohu Moi, is the only other version in which this migration story is included. I have adopted the subheads set out in the *Reader*. According to the late Peter Livingston (pers.comm.), who spent much time at Boera, traditionally the myth was told in a poetic rhythmic way as an incantation.

**Part One**

**A STORY OF OUR LAND. THE LAGATOI STORY**

This is the story about Edai Siabo. Edai Siabo had three brothers and sisters and he was the last son to be born. A girl called Boio Siabo was born after him. The village where they were born was Davage. Because of stony ground and broiling sun, people living between Taurama and Ikohi sometimes lived well but sometimes suffered from famine. Whether the season was good or bad, the hungry months were November, December, January, February, and the beginning of March.

Only version 10 gives the names of Edai's siblings. Taurama and Ikohi refer to the southwestern and northeastern limits of the Western Motu area (Map 1). The people of the area, who live in a rain shadow, suffered varying degrees of food shortage during the northwest season (Oram 1982:5). Traditions are vague about the relationship between the ancient Davage site and modern Boera and it is unclear when the move from the former to the latter was made.

**Apau village (Boera) story**

The ancestors of the Apau people came from Waima and their first place was Varai. Fearing attack by enemies, they migrated from the mainland to Yule Island (Motu Ravao) where they settled at Pope. They
ceased to call themselves Varai but called themselves Motu Ravao instead. A tribe called Mou attacked them, massacred the people and destroyed their village. Only two men and their wives were left alive and they did not stay on Yule Island. They dived into the sea and swam to the mainland. Because of a heavy current they landed at Shark Point and they went looking for a place to settle as far as the mouth of the Namoa River. They built a village there called Namoara and their tribe was called Apau. This is what the four people who dived from Ravao called themselves. Nara people attacked them at Namoara village and they fled from it. They went to Lagava (Redscar Head) and there they said they would live but they did not find any water. They searched energetically for water, and then they went east until they came to Davage. Davage beach was very small and the sea flooded in. When the tide was high and the sea came in, the fresh water did not become salt and so they camped there. Some say that there was no house smoke to be seen from Yule Island to Taurama.

Two settlements of former Motu-speakers called Tarova and Delena still exist on the mainland near Yule Island. The name Apau means 'we dive' in Motu and refers to the two couples diving from Yule Island. Pope refers to the Roman Catholic mission: the traditional name was Sivitoi (Map 1).

According to Moi Higo (1) and oral accounts, the Apau people came from Ario Ororo to the north of Cape Possession on the boundary of the Gulf region (Chatterton 1969:92-3; Oram 1981:215-16; Map 1); but Kohu Moi says that the Apau people began their migration from Kivorikui village to the northwest of Yule Island. His family say that it was from this village that their ancestor, Vagi Heni, was sent to live at Boera when he became an orphan five generations ago.

The birth of the Laguatoi

The Apau people bore many children and their population greatly increased at Davage village. Davage people and Gobina people intermarried. Davage people used to see fish when the sea was low, killing them by hitting them with sticks. If fish hid under rocks they would wipe sticks with the blood of very black, not very long bêche-de-mer and thrust the stick into the rock. When the fish drank the blood it would float outside and they would catch it. At other times when the fish were in small caves, they would find them with their feet and draw them out and catch them. Eventually they found vines and made nets and used them for fishing.

Then they found the derris plant. They found it because it resembled an edible root called batu and they thought the derris root was edible. They tried to eat it but the women who did so became giddy and some fainted. Then, while fishing, they poisoned the fish with derris root and some fish were stupefied and some died outright.

Big nets called mataqara

The people of Davage village (Apau tribe) used to fish in the area of Bava and Idiha islands. They were surprised at the large number of dugong and turtle which they saw. On occasion they cast their nets and caught some, not a large number but one at a time. Then they made a net for hunting these creatures and they made the first net called mataqara from a vine called valu [Hibiscus tiliaceae]. They caught dugong and turtle with it but it tore easily, so they sought a good rope. The people of Gobina village spread the news of a vine called vanea and so they made their mataqara nets for turtle and dugong hunting. The inland people found vanea. It was discovered when a pig was grubbing in its roots and the people who found it killed it.

Derris root is still used as a means of stunning fish. The story of the discovery of vanea as an excellent source of rope for making large-mesh nets is found in a number of villages. The point of the story is that a huge pig caught its tusks in the vine which was so strong that it could not break loose so it was easy to kill. According to Kohu Moi, Edai Siabo was the inventor of the vanea-made big net. An old man who said he was his great-grandfather Edai from Kivorii appeared to Edai in a dream and told him how to use the vine.

Moi Higo, however, links the discovery of the use of vanea to Gobina village. Gobina, a Koita village, was situated some ten kilometres inland from Boera and the pig myth belongs to the Koita who were a hunting people (Map 2).

Kohu Moi makes the dream spirit explain the advantages of the new net in boosting the coastal-inland trade in which the Motu were involved. Pointing out that their gardens were poor as a result of the stony terrain, the spirit said that 'you always find the inland people returning home with plenty of their food for sale' because the Motu had not caught enough fish with which to bargain. The nets would enable them to redress the balance.
Map 1. Hiri Trading Area
Map 2. Western Motu – Koita Area
Laŋatoi (Trading Canoe) story

A man called Edai Siabo was born at Davage village and his sister was called Boio Siabo. Boio Siabo married a man called Bokina Bokina from the village of Gobina. Edai made the big fishing net called mataŋara which he cast from the bows of his canoe. One day he went with his net to Bava island and fished with it at night but he did not catch a single dugong. So he went across to Idiha island looking for turtle. By dawn he had not seen any turtle, so he dropped his anchor by a flat rock more than thirty paces across and the entrance to the cave under the sea was very big. He anchored on top of it and went to sleep.

When they were fast asleep and Edai was lying on his gathered net, a spirit pulled him down into the rock below. The spirit revealed to him how to make the big trading canoe called laŋatoi. They should count the days until the laŋatoi would sail from the village and observe the following prohibitions: ‘You should maintain a state of ritual purity. In February you should not sleep with your wife until July. Then, on the day they tie the laŋatoi hulls together, you and your wife will not see each other, you will put her and your children aside, and you will not think about anything except your laŋatoi. You will share your goods and your food and meat because the laŋatoi will make old men like young married men and young men like youths, and youths like boys who first tie on their perineal bands. When the laŋatoi sails, your wife will stay patiently in the house. When it returns, her joy will be great because a time of good food will have arrived. You will receive not only the food brought by the laŋatoi but also food from people of other villages who want sago, vegetables, goods and meat. People of other villages will crowd upon you’. In this way, the spirit inspired Edai Siabo.

The people in the fishing canoe looked for Edai in the neighbourhood of Idiha island. They looked for his footprints but only found those of other people. They went back and anchored at the place where he disappeared. Edai’s son Vagi wept as he lay on the floats and remembered his father. When he cast his eyes on the entrance to the flat rock, his father’s feet were sticking out from the hole in the rock. He was very surprised and said: ‘E! E! There’s a man’s feet sticking out!’ The others asked him: ‘What’s the matter?’ ‘Oh! They are sticking out from this hole!’ All the people stood up and watched the hole while the spirit taught Edai’s wife how to keep watch for him and how she should act while waiting for him in their house.

Then, after the spirit explained it all again, the people in the canoe dived down, got hold of him, pulled him up on top of the canoe and they sailed towards the village and, as he lay down, water came out of his mouth. As he appeared to be dead, with many tears they sailed and went to the village.

The repetition at the beginning of the above section marks the beginning of the story of the founding of the hiri which is where all other versions begin. Twelve out of the seventeen versions say that Edai Siabo was born in Davage-Boera village. It is clear from the geographical context in two of the remainder (2,3) that reference is to the Boera area. In version 17 Edai, although a man of Boera, is a Koita.

Two versions (12, 15) say that Edai came from the region of the Gulf of Papua. Version 12 says that Edai was a man from Muro village in the Purari Delta. Muru people killed his son through sorcery. Edai made a canoe out of an ilimo tree (Octomeles sumatrana) from which laŋatoi hulls were made traditionally and, taking sago, travelled with his sister Boio and his son’s corpse. They landed at Idiha island where they were found by the Boera people. Version 15 also says that Edai came from the Gulf of Papua. The informant, who comes from Ravikapara village in the Purari Delta, says his ancestor, a great seafarer, found Edai, a man from Raivaena in the Purari Delta, at Boera. The reason that these men had left their homes was that a ‘tower’ collapsed and people speaking different tongues dispersed. This myth resembles the tower of Babel story and may be a conflation of the biblical myth and a traditional dispersal or migratory myth. It is widely known in villages bordering the Gulf of Papua and beyond. There are other accounts of the hiri being founded by Gulf people. Baiu of the western Elema people, who lived in the part of the Gulf region immediately east of the Purari Delta, travelled to the Motu area, preceded by his daughter Aroae who learned to make pots. He and his people, who became the original Motu, undertook the first hiri expedition (Williams 1940:223 n.2; 1976:68). There is also a legend of a Gulf man who invented the laŋatoi to take his son by a woman of the Motu village of Pari back to his mother’s village (Papuan Villager 1937 vol.9:55).

Version 14 is in Roro, the language now spoken by the former Motu-speakers at Tarova and Delena and seems confused, possibly mixing several legends. The narrator places Edai Siabo as an ancestor of a leading lineage of the Motuan Vabukori village.

Four versions (1,4,8,12) refer to the spirit as dirava or ancestral spirit, a term appropriated by the London Missionary Society to describe the Christian god. As noted, Kohu Moi’s spirit was the great-grandfather of Edai and in Version 12 the spirit was that of his dead son.

There are two references to laumā (v.10,12). In a living person it refers to ‘life spirit’ and can also mean the ghost of the dead. One reference is to laumā dikana or ‘bad spirit’. In three versions (7,11,13) they are place spirits: Idiha diravadia ‘the spirits of Idiha island’; nadi taudia ‘stone people’; ‘god of the big stone’.

In five versions (2,3,5,6,16) they ‘belong to the category of spirits known as atanitano or spirits of the sea. They live under huge corals or rocks in the sea. They usually appear to people in the form of an octopus or
sea eel' (Sibona Kopi 1979:42). In one version (16), the spirit is found in the head of a large eel being cooked on the canoe. These place spirits were and still are treated with great respect and are believed to have the power to inflict serious injury on those who trespass or otherwise annoy them.

Only in version 15 is the knowledge imparted by a human being, albeit one with supernatural powers. This was a man from the Purari Delta, who also told Edai about sago in the Gulf region, of which Edai was ignorant. According to version 17, which was consciously 'modernised' and reduced the supernatural content, Edai went fishing with his wife and not with other fishermen. He was dragged deep down by a sea-eel which was caught in his net and had a vision of a strongly bound three-hulled canoe. He then spent two years perfecting a model lagatoi following instructions of the eel.

Many examples can be found in Papua New Guinea of spirit-inspired innovations. It is related (Kali Alu pers.comm. 23/3/1983) that a renowned Hula fisherman called Renagi, who died in the 1970s, was in his canoe when he was taught by a spirit the magic which would make him successful in dugong and turtle hunting. The account reinforces belief in the power of spirits, especially ancestral spirits, and gives authority to any innovation.

Edai Siabo attempts to build a lagatoi

As the spirit wished him to, Edai Siabo made a little lagatoi from a sago frond and gave it a trial run. He sang a song called ehona and, when the little canoe sailed out, this was the song which he sang:

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As with many innovators, Edai's ideas were initially received with ridicule. This, compared with his later success, heightens the drama.

Three versions mention that they made their canoe hulls from a tree called vari (wild kapok, Bombax ceiba) found in the neighbourhood of the Vaihua river. This is a very short river ending in a saltpan which is situated between Boera and the Koita village of Papa. While many villages still accept that Boera people were the first to carry out the hiri, today Manumanu people mock them because they say that the Boera people had no access to ilimo for making hulls. This statement answers them. Vari is used for canoe making to this day (Vaburi Dairi, pers.comm.)

They lash together a true lagatoi

On the day after they put together the lagatoi, Edai Siabo sent his wife to her sister-in-law, Boio Siabo, to obtain some food called naubara for those making the lagatoi. But, unhappily, they did not give her a single thing. Boio Siabo's husband spoke in a hostile manner with fierce words, saying: 'You say that you are lashing together a lagatoi and will carry sago to provide for the northwest season. After you have gone I will eat garden produce. When you come back, I will be eating from one of my gardens and you will be scraping the side of the pot. When I will be eating from another garden, your food will be finished and I will move to yet another garden. What can I beg from you in return?' So, alas, she went back to the village empty-handed.

When they had lashed the lagatoi together and it was ready and when they said that they were about to sail, his wife again went to Gobina village to Boio Siabo and her husband Bokina Bokina to ask for food for the journey. But, alas, he only spoke in the same way as he had before and again she went empty-handed to her village. Because the lagatoi was sailing the next day, Edai spoke as follows to his wife: ‘Tomorrow at dawn I will sail and you will begin to count the time when I will come back. You will tie ten knots, you will cook sago and the food which you have cooked will be the signal for being joyful and playing the fool. When you have tied fifty knots there will be more fooling among the wives who are left behind. When the wind comes from the northwest, we will sail speedily and only one hundred knots representing days will have been tied before our return. If we sail slowly, as many as one hundred and twenty or one hundred and thirty knots will have been tied before I come home. The lagatoi sailed at dawn and for quite a long time Edai’s wife and her companions did as Edai had instructed them. At the fiftieth knot, the wives who were left behind did not remember to cook the food because they did not want the food at the fiftieth knot. They said that their hearts were deadened and they forgot their husbands. They decided that they would marry the men who had stayed behind. After they had remarried, some became pregnant while others were barren. Uncaring, they left their former homes.

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Edai Siabo's wife and daughter-in-law alone remained steadfast and waited for his return. One day she and her daughter-in-law climbed a tree on a hill and looked out and saw the lagatoi out to sea sailing toward them. Then both of them ran to the village, lit a fire and collected food and then waited on top of Iduata hill, while the village people waited aimlessly in the village. The two of them waited and waited until the lagatoi clearly appeared. They could see the crew and the wife and daughter-in-law ran down to their house in great haste. From the house they seized a piece of firewood and beat their verandah with it, shouting 'Sail ho-o-o, Bogebada's in sight!' The village people ran out: 'What's it about?' Wife and daughter-in-law again beat the verandah and shouted: 'Bogebada sail ho! Edai Siabo's in sight!'

The wives who had been left behind returned to clean the houses which they had left but Edai's wife forbade them to do so: 'You have remarried and are pregnant, so your former husbands will not marry you again.'

The appearance of the lagatoi was strange, the people on board seemed to be healthy and the smell was good. Edai Siabo's wife spread the news [about the wives' desertions] and Edai closed off the lagatoi. The wives of the crew cooked their food and brought it to the lagatoi but the crew did not open the doors. They stood as if dead, returned the food and poured it away because they did not want to accept food from their wives' hands. The crewmen spurned their wives and did not repay them for their trouble, because they had not been patient and had not waited long enough. After that hiri expedition, men had no cause to spurn their wives.

Three themes are intermingled in this section of the story: the return of Edai, the behaviour of the wives of crew members and the relationship between Edai and his Koita affines. The last theme is continued in the next section.

When the expeditions were due to return, those left behind in all western Motu villages climbed a hill to look out for them. At Boera the hill was Iduata (also called Taubarau) just to the north of the village. Version 11 mentions a fire being lit at night. This was to guide the lagatoi to the village. If the canoes were carried past the western Motu area, there was little hope that the members of their crews would be seen again. The beating of verandahs with sticks and then making an announcement was customary in Motu villages, particularly in the early morning when senior men exhorted the people to perform necessary duties. In versions 2 and 3, Edai's wife is warned of his return in a dream.

The expeditions were away for periods of often four, and sometimes as many as six, months. Every day the wives tied a knot in a string to count the days that the expedition had been away. A thinner piece of string was tied across the cord on every tenth day and on that day wives of the crew ate food in the leader's house (Revo Pita et al. 1975:69-70). They indulged in horseplay such as smearing each other with food. Kohu Moi describes the boisterous games, some between men and women, which might be played by those remaining in the village. Until fifty days the cord was called uro boina or pot cord and after fifty days rabia boina or sago cord. If the expedition had not returned after 101 days, women danced a special hiri dance called upara to hasten its return.

Bokina Bokina suffers hunger

When Bokina Bokina heard that Edai Siabo had returned, he thought that he would send his wife to her elder brother Edai Siabo to obtain a bundle of sago, so that in their hunger they might eat. So he sent her saying: 'Go, obtain a bundle of sago for us from your brother so that we can eat. We are hungry, our house is an empty house and our gardens are only sprouting. It will be a long time before garden food will be ready'. Then Boio Siabo went to her elder brother but he did not welcome her or invite her to join him. So she sat on the ground and then returned to her village. Her husband asked: 'You?' 'He did not speak a word to me'. 'No, please go again. Here are we and our children without food. Go and sit under his house or mount his steps.'

Boio Siabo again went to her brother's place but again he did not welcome her. Until the third time Edai Siabo said to Boio Siabo: 'Go and bring your husband and the people of your village here'. Then Boio Siabo went with her husband and the whole village and set off for Davage village. Edai Siabo opened his lagatoi, embraced his sister and brother-in-law and gave them betel nuts, betel pepper and lime in welcome. He gave them carefully chosen large cone-shaped bundles of sago called gorugoru and smaller bundles called kokohara, sticks of roast sago and betel nuts and peppers. Boio and her husband left for their village where they collected bananas and a pig and gave them to Edai Siabo. At that time Edai Siabo initiated and laid down the method of provisioning lagatois and the exchanges [between Motu and Koita] called abilakwa.

Edai Siabo's promises

1) A [Koita] man who wants to benefit from the return of the lagatois will make a garden, collect his valuables and rear pigs.
2) He who wants to eat sago will enter into the exchanges known as abilikwa with the following rates of exchange: three yams for one sago bundle, or three white yams for one sago bundle or one stem of bananas for one sago bundle. This agreement will last forever and ever.

Traditionally, the Koita exchanged their vegetable foods and game for the fish and trade goods of the Motu. As well as other exchanges, they engaged in the abilikwa exchanges mentioned in our story. The literal translation of abilikwa is getting of food for a journey. The Koita provided vegetable food and game for the building of the laŋatoi and for the journey and were rewarded with sago and betel nuts when the hiri expeditions returned.

This first laŋatoi went to Baimuru and it carried two stone anchors. It left one at Baimuru village and one was taken to Davage village, where it remains until now.

Baimuru in the Purari Delta marked the extreme point of the hiri voyages (Map 1). The Delta was the area in which sago was most plentiful and the Motu praise the generosity of their Purari hosts. A stone said to be Edai’s anchor is to be seen near Boera to this day. The anchors were visible reminders of the past and seals set on the partnership between the Motu and peoples of the Gulf region.

Kohu Moi (version 8) expands the story to include an account of the voyage not found in the other accounts but this is outside the scope of this paper.

DISCUSSION
The different versions compared

The differences between the seventeen versions of the legend are summarised in Table 1 and can be studied both diachronically and synchronically. The earliest versions, redacted at the time of first contact, were recorded by Europeans and these redactions follow closely the Boera version in content and style. In general there is little change over time.

Four versions from the middle period give some account of the personality and status of Edai. Kohu Moi called Edai a ‘great chief’ but one oral account says that he was not a chief and in other versions he is either insignificant or deformed. Ahuia Ova (6) says that he stammered and a version (5) recorded by a European official describes him as ‘small, ugly, rotund and lame’ and as having the ‘greatest difficulty in getting a wife’, although his father was a great chief. Version 17, also recorded by a European official, describes him in similar terms. Moi Higo strongly denied that the derogatory descriptions were true. Possession of esoteric knowledge is the mark of a sorcerer and in a number of Austronesian myths from Papua, the sorcerer is able to change his appearance. The myth of Koidum of Milne Bay, who also invented a trading canoe, is an example (Wills and Kaniku 1975; cf. Young 1983:62). As sorcery became subject to public disapproval, this and other supernatural elements in myths have been reduced.

Two versions have been consciously modernised, one (17) by a European and that by Kohu Moi. Kohu has tried with some skill to present the myth in a way which is acceptable to literate people. He follows closely his father’s basic story and indeed adds much interesting material. In both these versions, the supernatural elements in the myth are played down. Neither version mentions conflict between Motu and Koita. Indeed, present-day redactors and narrators of oral traditions tend to omit material which might revive past enmities.

Two versions say that Edai died elsewhere than Boera. According to the version based on an informant from the Gulf region (12), he made four hiri expeditions and on the last stayed at Muro, where he died. The Tarova informant (14) has Edai, after various wanderings, settled at Delena, where former Motu-speakers settled with some Roro groups after European contact (Oram 1981:215).

Viewed synchronically, with the exceptions of versions 14 and 17, the different versions embody the core story with variations according to the orientations of the tellers (Table 1). The Koita versions do not mention the ill-feeling between Edai and his brother-in-law. The Elevala account (12) adds to the myths which connect the Gulf people with the Motu.

Besides his concern for the Vabukori connection, Lohia ‘Ume’s version (14) differs greatly from the others. Edai had two sisters called Boio; one married in the Rigo area southeast of Port Moresby and another who went by laŋatoi when pregnant to Kivori. Edai was taught by a spirit from Haidana island and went on ten hiri expeditions and made fifty laŋatoi. On one occasion, he drifted past Boera as far as Hula. This caused disapproval and he settled in turn at Koukou and then Haidana Island. Moving towards his sister at Kivori, he ended up at the Motu outlier at Delena. He had various children, one of whom has mixed race descendents. It seems that two myths are intermingled here.

It might be assumed that version 17, in which Edai is a Koita man and the hiri a Koita institution, was merely narrated by Koita to the European official, Lett, who recorded it. It constitutes a greatly elaborated
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<td>Edai sends wife to sister's husband several times</td>
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version of the core story. It eliminates the supernatural element and reveals such European prejudices as feasts being a waste of food. Although Lett had lived many years in Port Moresby, in his Introduction (1946:9) he refers to the 'great Koita ceremony of the Hiri' in which the Motu played very little part.

It is not possible to trace the effects on the different versions of the inter-group interactions of the narrators and redactors. Moi Higo spent some years at Delena as a London Missionary Society pastor. Many people from the Gulf region visit Port Moresby and Ivia Laura (15) spent some time there, during which he made a claim to the land of Fisherman's Island (Daugo). He says that the Boera will not accept his account because they fear a land claim from the people of the Gulf. The myth, like the Hiri itself (Oram n.d.), changed little during the period for which there is record. The same words for the lagatowi song, ehona, quoted above, are cited in several accounts spanning earliest European contact to the present.

The myth as a historical source

The myth could be described as a legend, 'a tradition about the past which is believed to be true' (Pender-Cudlipp 1972:16). If Edai existed, I can no longer place him at a point on a time scale as I very tentatively suggested earlier (Oram 1982:5). Several sources agree that Edai's grandfather was called Kaira, his father Siabo, his son Vagi and his sister Boio who married Bokina Bokina. Only version 10 claims that Edai had descendents. According to this, Siabo had two brothers and three sisters who married each other incestuously. One brother and sister, who moved to near the present Port Moresby area, had descendents. As pedigrees of up to sixteen generations can be found among the Motu, it is unlikely that the descent group and ancestry of such a famous figure would be forgotten within that range. Neither the names Edai nor Siabo are found in Boera pedigrees. Edai's wife is given a number of names: Boni Vagi (version 5); Oio Oio (version 4); and Pokina (version 17). In a legend about a magic pot, Boio Siabo is abducted by a Koita man called Ahuia and the Motu did not dare to approach the village for fear of Koita sorcery (Livingston 1955). The vagueness of Edai's origins made it possible for various tribal groups to claim him as their own.

It is also impossible to place Bokina Bokina within a pedigree, for he is said to have had no descendents. According to one informant, Bokina moved his village to Nemu near Boera where his wife Boio taught Koita women to make pottery.

Whether or not Edai Siabo and Bokina Bokina existed is uncertain but it is inconceivable that one person could have founded the Hiri. A more likely interpretation is that advanced by such scholars as J.C. Miller (1980) and R.Willis (1980:34-6) in an African context: gradual changes in the relations between groups and the development of social structures are mythically represented as the single acts of named individuals.

The relationship between the western Motu and peoples of the Gulf region maintained through the Hiri and the return voyages made by the people of the eastern part of the Gulf region was central to the organisation of traditional Motu society and is reflected in a number of myths. The myth of Taurama and Keaura, of which I have recorded or noted a number of versions, provides an explanation for the paucity of food supplies in the Motu area as opposed to the abundance found in the Gulf region. The hills Taurama and Keaura were brothers living in the Motu area. Keaura seduced the wife of Taurama and, being discovered, went to the Gulf region. He took nearly all the food with them, leaving Taurama with arm shells, wild yam s, beads and bananas. Taurama was therefore forced to trade with Keaura. The souls of the dead went to the west where they enjoyed abundant food, betel nuts and dancing, while those of worthless people went to Idiha and Bava, the rocky islets near Boera (Chalmers 1887:141). The institution of the Hiri gave the Motu access to the wealth of the west.

Other connections link the Motu with the Gulf people besides those referred to in the Edai Siabo myth. There is an area named Siabo close to Taabarau hill near Boera. Siabo does not appear to be a Motu word. The name Taabarau itself is stated by Chalmers to be that of a god of the Gulf region. Chalmers (n.d.a.:139-40) said that the Motu spoke of themselves and people of the Gulf region as being one people, citing myths to support this claim. There is no cultural or genetic relationship between the two peoples and these connections seem to have arisen as a result of contacts made through the Hiri.

It is possible that the Edai Siabo myth symbolises some extension of trade with people of the Gulf region. Oral tradition and archaeological research agree that Boera-Davage was an ancient village or rather a series of villages. A date of approximately 1200 b.p. has been accorded to one part of the Davage site but recent research suggests that it may have been older (C. Ballard pers.comm.). Swadling (1981:242 n.4; 245) suggested that the people living in the Boera complex began to disperse after 400 years and possibly founded Motupore and other ancient villages in the area. Allen and Duerden (1982:55), however, have shown that there was a two-way flow of pottery between Motupore (Map 1) and Boera during the whole period (800b.p.-c.300b.p.) of the existence of a settlement on Motupore island. Rhoads (1982:142) says that 'So far there is no archaeological evidence from the Gulf for the period lasting 700-400 years ago' and that the 'prehistoric record for the Gulf takes up again around 400 years ago...'. Allen (1985 fig.5) has noted that the Motu began to mass produce their pottery, clearly indicating trade, some 400 years ago. Neither the Davage site nor the
large Gulf region have been the subject of extensive archaeological research and future investigations may change the picture. It seems possible that some development of trade which became known as the hiri took place at Boera at that time or at some period when trading intensity was initially escalating (see Bulmer 1982:126; Allen 1985:51; Frankel, Thompson and Vanderwal n.d.).

There is sufficient evidence to conclude that Motu-speakers lived as far west as the Yule island area and that one group, called Apau, returned again south-eastwards to Boera. As Chatterton (1969:95) has pointed out, these migrants would have known of the sago which was available in the area bordering the Gulf of Papua. This connection is supported by a myth found at Delena, of which I have recorded several versions. In summary,

A man, in some versions called Auda, lived on Yule Island. He found that all his bananas were being stolen from his gardens. He caught a black dwarf called Kanika and, after wrestling together, they became friends. They met, in one version under the sea, and Kanika taught the man to make a laŋatoi and laŋatoi magic. In another version he taught him to make pots.

Although a laŋatoi is not always mentioned, there is a clear resemblance between the two stories which supports the connection between the two Motu-speaking groups.

Themes of Motu culture found in the myth

The myth of Edai Siabo was treated as ‘not merely true but as venerable and sacred’ by the people of Boera and surrounding people and fits closely Malinowski’s definition of a charter:

The cultural fact is a monument in which the myth is embodied; while the myth is believed to be the real cause which has brought about the moral rule, the social grouping, the rite, or the custom (1974:107,108).

Four institutions of great importance to the Motu, mataŋara, hiri, helaga and relations with the supernatural, and abilakwa, are involved. All versions accept that Edai founded the hiri. Only three versions support the claim that he invented mataŋara and several that he instituted abilakwa: there are dissenting voices for each. The hiri ended some forty years ago and mataŋara even earlier. Abilakwa ended with the hiri although exchanges between Motu and Koita continue to a limited extent. The myth also throws light on the position of women in Motu society.

Mataŋara, the large-mesh fishing-net for turtle and dugong, played an important part in Motu culture. Ahuia Ova, a Koita, wrote (1941:57) that these nets, along with the hiri and the making of pots, were invented by the Boera people. One Boera source (10) says that the Apau people learned to make these nets from the Nara (Lala) people, renowned for their hunting, as the Motu migrated towards Davage. Neither the net nor its name is known among the Lala today (J. Kolia, pers.comm.). The sponsoring of these nets was a source of great prestige. Net-making was analogous to the making of trading canoes because both ‘caught’ food in large quantities. In preparation for making them, the sponsor observed a number of taboos in order to achieve the state of ritual potency called helaga (Groves 1957:37-45).

The early missionaries found no trace of a Motuan belief in a beneficent ‘Great Spirit’ (Chalmers n.d.a.:285). The ancestral spirits were all important: ‘So their whole desire towards the spirits of their ancestors . . . their whole trust is in them’ (Ahuia Ova 1923:38). ‘Ancestors also continue to exercise their influence on the living members of the family by punishing them whenever they are angered’ (Sibona Kopi 1979:17; see also Revo Pita et al 1975:103). Kohu Moi, when he says that his spirit was sent by the ‘Good Nature’ is clearly reflecting modern Christian influence. He further reveals his ambivalence towards ancestral spirits by referring to the spirit as ‘the devil spirit of the former chief of Davage Village’.

Helaga is a state of ritual potency or holiness which people achieve by abstinences and by following certain patterns of behaviour. The term is also applied to objects (Groves 1957:37-45; Gwilliam 1982:37). There are no claims that Edai instituted helaga; he merely laid down the rules which related to the conduct of the hiri. Kohu Moi describes the taboos relating to the making of big nets. The most important was abstinence from sexual intercourse. Others included not looking at women and not quarrelling or disturbing the peace among neighbours. The sponsor was also expected to remember children and old people when the dugong catch was distributed.

Taboons for the leaders of the hiri were similar: there were also restrictions on eating and drinking and husbands and wives stayed apart for several months. Those preparing themselves were required not to engage in loud talk, not to be angry or become involved in disputes. Before the laŋatoi sailed, the crew were obliged to meet together and confess any personal bad feelings that they might have towards each other (Gwilliam 1982:39). In vessels without a formal command system, these measures ensured cooperation between crew members when conflict would have been dangerous. The importance of achieving harmony is illustrated by
the disorderly behaviour of the crew of *Hokule’a* which sailed from Hawaii to Tahiti in 1976 (Finney 1979:338-9).

Achievement of a state of *helāga* provided a means of mediating between sacred and profane. A man in a state of ritual potency could communicate with ancestral spirits whose support was needed and whose wrath was feared. In a *lagatoi*, the one or two men who were ritually prepared called out to spirits who were mainly located in the basket of white cowry shells hung at the top of the mast (J. Gwilliam pers.comm.).

The taboos involved in achieving a state of *helāga* achieved practical ends. The self-control involved in observing severe taboos hardens the will and strengthens determination. The Motu stress how hard it was to keep the rules, especially the one forbidding sexual intercourse for long periods. But those who did so, informants say, ‘feared neither wind nor wave’.

Dreams play an important part in the life of the Motu: ‘They are real. The spirits of the dead come and hold converse, and sometimes direct the spirit as to what is to be done in time of trouble’ (Chalmers n.d.a.:287). Sibona Kopi (1979:25) describes how particular spirits are invoked through dreams for aid in a specific enterprise or how a spirit may visit a man in a dream on its own initiative.

Relationships with their nearest neighbours, the Koita, were also of great importance to the Motu and they were in disarray until Edai provided a charter for their future management. The refusal by Bokina Bokina to help his affines was a grave contravention of the norms of Motu and Koita society. Not only was a husband expected to be respectful to his wife’s brothers and give generously but his property was at their service (cf. Seligman 1910:68). In a sense the Koita and Motu were affines: the legend itself says that there was frequent intermarriage between Davage and Gobina villages and it was also frequent between Motu and Koita in general (Seligman 1910:81). The stressful relationship between affines was mediated by an agreement which fixed the rates of exchange; it included such items as cycad flour, not mentioned in the myth. In practice, the fixed amounts were often exceeded as a result of generosity on both sides. The myth validated the historic relationship between Motu and Koita.

The myth also illustrates an important characteristic of Motu society: the desire of men at all levels, ‘in a continual battle for prestige to outdo their peers’ (Groves 1972:527). In many contexts oral sources refer to *ura kwaliimu* - the desire to win: as Bokina Bokina had refused to help him twice, Edai also refused twice. He then won a victory by his calculated generosity when his brother-in-law was forced to beg from him but also by imposing fixed rates of exchange on him.

In spite of their symbiotic economic relationship, this account symbolises the true relationship between the two groups. The Motu feared the Koita for their sorcery and the Koita exploited this fear. The account by Chalmers (n.d.a.:2-3) of this fear and of the extortions by the Koita is supported by present-day Motu informants who say that the Koita would cause death by sorcery of those who failed to make satisfactory contribution to the *abilakwa* exchanges. They say that they even fear the sorcery of Koita groups long settled in their villages.

Women played an important part in the ritual and economic activities associated with the *hiri*. Early missionaries noted that in the Motu area, women ‘seem to be treated as equals of the other sex’ (Murray 1873). Throughout the preparations for *hiri* expeditions, the equality of husband and wife was emphasised. Husband and wife had to agree that they should initiate an expedition. Senior members of the descent group later made sure that the wife willingly agreed that the project should go ahead (Oram n.d.). After the initial decision, husband and wife combined to make large gardens and then the husband was involved in canoe-making while the wife made pots. When the husband was at sea, they both observed similar taboos.

The account of the behaviour of the wives involves both the maintenance of ritual potency and social control of the women remaining in the village. The sponsor (Groves 1972:525) and his wife were subject to similar taboos. When at sea, the sponsor and his partner (if he had one) stayed on their mats attended by prepubescent boys while their wives stayed in their houses with a prepubescent girl. Neither husband nor wife washed themselves and fires were kept alight in both house and canoe.

The story of the faithless wives provides a warning of the dangers of leaving women without their husbands for long periods. The good behaviour of the wives was considered essential for the success of the undertaking, and failure to observe the taboos endangered the expedition (version 8). The provision for feasting and horseplay at intervals was therapeutic. The stress caused by these restraints on sexual and other behaviour would be relieved by these periods of release. If a canoe was overdue, old men interrogated the wives of the crew asking the leaders’ wives whether they had slept with their husbands before they had left or whether crew members’ wives had been quarrelling or had laughed in a lewd manner (Revo Pita et al. 1975:103).

The underlying theme, however, is the connection between the *irutahuna* of both the house and the *lagatoi*. *Irutahuna* has several meanings. Here it refers to the sacred place in the centre of the house and a similar place between the two masts in a *lagatoi* where those in a state of ritual potency resided (Gwilliam 1982:37). At the same time they were linked to the other centre which was home to both the spirits and themselves. Women’s
participation in the *hiri* supports the missionaries’ observation that women enjoyed a good measure of equality with men.

**CONCLUSION.**

There is no single key to this myth.

The meaning of a myth is partly the sense that the author intended it to convey, and the sense intended by each of its recounters. But every listener can find in it references to his own experience, so the myth can be enlightening, consoling, depressing, irrespective of the intentions of the tellers. Part of the anthropologist’s task is to understand enough of the background of the myth to be able to construct its range of reference for its native hearers (Douglas 1967:65).

By putting the myth into its cultural context, the ethnography yields rich understandings of different aspects of Motu society.

The Edai Siabo myth describes and validates the establishment of an economic order based on the sea, fishing and trade. The vagueness of Edai’s genealogical origins enables members of different social groups to claim him as their own. It contains ‘creation’ stories relating to nets, trading canoes and patterns of trade such as that between Motu and Koita. It is related in this and other respects to other myths recounted in the Papuan coastal region. It also prescribed and validated the rituals and taboos associated with the *hiri*.

Today, the *hiri*, an element in their past in which all Motu take pride, is commemorated in a number of ways including the naming after it of a festival, a road, and a language however remotely connected (Dutton 1985). Perhaps the most potent reminder of past glories is the legend of Edai Siabo.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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APPENDIX: SOURCES OF THE VERSIONS

Of the seventeen versions which I have noted, six were oral versions which I recorded. Four (10,11,12,13) were in pure Motu, one (15) in Police or Hiri Motu, and one (14) in Roro. Of the twelve literary versions, seven (2,3,4,5,15,16) were recorded in English by European redactors. Four (6,7,8,9) of five written accounts by Papuans are in English and one (1) is in Motu.


Anthropologists are not so contemptuous of speculative history as their predecessors were. Several have tried to account for social development in the New Guinea Highlands, either in the region as a whole or in the contrasting eastern and western extremities of the region. The aim of this paper is more modest. My interest in speculative history derives from curiosity about the prehistoric stone artifacts found in many parts of the Highlands and abundantly in the Mid-Wahgi area. According to the Bulmers (1964:67-9), upward of 160 of the artifacts had been recorded from the Wahgi valley. This gives no idea of the proliferation of the artifacts found in the vicinity of Minj alone during 1953-65. Sometimes a man unearthed a broken mortar when making a new garden. When this was an old abandoned burial ground, made available for cultivation by the death of all who had known the people buried there, he assumed that the article belonged to one of his ancestors, for it was customary to smash a dead man’s possessions and bury them with him. He therefore kept the object in case it brought him good fortune. But it was also commonplace to discover a mortar on a mountain path or a pestle or clubhead among the stones piled up by the river in flood. Men eager for money hawked artifacts for sale to expatriates, who purchased them as curios. As well as the artifacts that were publicly accessible, some were lodged in the Kuma’s ‘taboo houses’ (nggar ma-bit). Apart from the war-sorcerers and war-magicians themselves, only a few mature men – group leaders and distinguished warriors – knew about the stone objects in the ‘taboo houses’ and were aware that the mortars were used for mixing potions of snake venom and pig’s blood. The artifacts strewn about the surface of the valley do not figure in oral prehistory or mythology. Nevertheless I am using these sources, together with some aspects of modern ethnography, to flesh out the archaeological findings and construct a kind of preliminary sketch towards the life history of a particular culture.

The Wahgi swamplands extend from the vicinity of Mount Hagen eastwards into the Mid-Wahgi area. The Kuma and their congeners lived in the mountains and on the spurs and ridges that surround the valley. They avoided the unhealthy and defenceless environment of the swampy valley floor unless driven there in warfare. Swamp reclamation, malaria control, and the suppression of warfare enabled some to come down from the hills and plant coffee there in colonial times.

At Kuk in the upper Wahgi swamps towards Mount Hagen, prehistorians have discovered that a sizeable population used a sophisticated irrigation system for intensive cultivation, presumably of taro, long before the introduction of the sweet potato (Golson 1976 and elsewhere). About the same time as the sweet potato arrived, an ash fall destroyed the swamp-dwellers’ irrigation system and, reduced in number, they moved to higher ground. Some much less developed peoples inhabited the surrounding hills. The mysterious stone