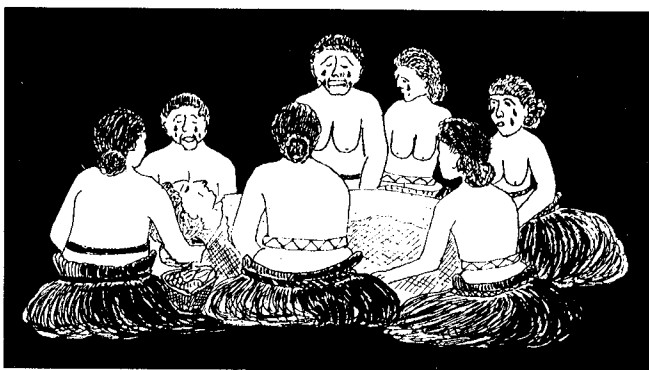


Death, Funerals And Associated Responsibilities



Division Of Cultural Affairs
1998

DEATH, FUNERALS AND ASSOCIATED RESPONSIBILITIES

by
The Palau Society of Historians

Division of Cultural Affairs
Ministry of Community and Cultural Affairs
Koror, Republic of Palau

***Traditional and Customary
Practices English Series 2
1998***

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The cover illustration depicts *Ngara Sar*, which is ritual mourning by the kinswomen of the deceased.

English translation by Julie Tellei, Palau Resource Institute. This translation reflects the words of the Historians as closely as possible, and is based on DeVerne Reed Smith's translation of Palau Ethnography, "Rechuodel: Traditional Culture and Lifeways Long Ago in Palau". The English translation was edited to improve readability without changing the meaning.

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Death, Funerals and Associated Responsibilities

Introduction

This presentation discusses traditional Palauan practices of death and funeral as passed down through the years. It has been written to inform and remind the people of the aspects of funeral practices, as a means of preservation of such knowledge and practices and as a guide to traditional practices.

In the past, when a person died, the funeral usually took place immediately. *Kikaidechutem* is the general collective term referring to the crowd that gathers for the funeral. The kin of the deceased person had the sole responsibility to care for the *kikaidechutem* until the end of the funeral. This included providing food, drinks, transportation, seating arrangements and any other necessary arrangements to accommodate the people, while they attended and showed support to the family (*blai*) and clan (*kebliil*). The female kin of the deceased brought foods to the funeral known as *chellungel*, from *chelol*. Wives (*buchelsechal*) of the male kin of the *blai* and *kebliil* of the deceased brought foods as well and these are known as *ngeliokl* or *telngetungel*. If the deceased was a married male the *buchelsechal* (wife's relatives) and the wife brought food. These foods were separated from the others, and were managed by the wife's relatives. From these foods brought by the wife's relatives *kelel a bar* were taken and presented to the husband's relatives. *Kelel a bar* were presented at the end of the funeral, usually after the burial, to the husband's relatives by the wife's family. The *chelol* typically were set aside for the *ukerael* which were prepared by the children of the house, female kin of the

deceased. The *telngेतungel* brought by the *buchelsechal* were prepared for the *kikaidechutem*. As well, any left over from *chellungel* would supplement the *telngेतungel* for *kikaidechutem* consumption and distribution.

Kelela bar foods pertained only to a funeral involving a married person. *Kelela bar* was provided by the wife's family and relatives regardless of who passed away. The funeral of an unmarried female or male did not involve *kelela bar* foods.

During the funeral, which usually ran overnight, the body of the deceased would be placed right in the center of the house with close female kin sitting around the body. Female kin of the mother of the deceased would sit to the right while the father's female kin would sit to the left. This sitting arrangement is known as *sar*. *Ngara sar* refers to those who sit in the *sar*. As they sat through the entire period of the funeral their foods were prepared in serving sizes and typically were distributed to them first before the rest of the people in the house and outside received their foods at meal times. As the time for burial neared, there was *omeluosu*. This was a brief period when the close female kin of the deceased, the *ngara sar*, prepared the body for the children and other relatives who might want to have a final viewing of the body. Once this was over, the body was prepared and brought outside. In the case of an unmarried woman, her *diall* or *dillel* (money gathered to honour the deceased) was announced for all to hear. In the case of a male title holder, the *dui* — the title — is taken symbolically by using a frond and taro plant. Usually a specialist in such title taking ceremonies went through the motions of taking the *dui* and brought the title to a female matriarch of the clan. This was also the time when the *diaches* were brought to the house. When the body was ready to be buried, the *chellubes* (mat shroud) was brought out of the house in a prescribed manner, then the body was taken to be buried. After the burial, the *sar* was brought together, the floor where the body was laid was

occupied by the *sar* (*oserchii a ulaol*) and the *kikaidechutem* could disperse.

The first evening after the burial, guarding of the grave (*omengaet*) took place. Usually a shed was built around the grave to give shelter to the grave and relatives who would accompany the deceased for the night. The following evening, the second evening after the burial, witnessed the first entrance of the female mourners who would go into the house of the deceased to stay for the designated days of mourning. This is referred to as *chimong el olengel*. At this point, the person closest to the deceased began the process of keeping track of the timing and management of the formal mourning (*ngkei el oba chas er a omengeiung*) by cutting the knotted coconut string cord used to keep track of the mourning days. She continued to cut the knotted string on a daily basis until the appropriate mourning days for the deceased were completed. On the third day (*ongedei el olengel*) the relatives went out to get the ti plant leaves (*sis*) which were used by the spirit medium to communicate with the spirits of the dead (*re deleb*) that evening. This is called *belsechel a oterkel a sis* — the occasion when they will communicate with the *sis*. The purpose of this was to learn from the *re deleb* the probable cause of death. *Tiuchel* was prepared for the occasion by the immediate members of the family. *Tiuchel* was pounded *kukau* (true taro [*colocasia esculenta*]) shaped and coated with coconut jam. On this occasion the main foods prepared were *tiuchel* and *cheluomel el ngikel* — smoked whole fish wrapped with *mengchongch* (betel nut leaf-stalk fiber).

As dawn approached and communication with the *deleb* through the spirit medium's interaction with the *sis* had taken place, the *tiuchel* and the rest of the foods were brought as offerings to the *deleb* into house where the mourners were sitting. Betel nuts were then prepared for the ancestral gods who visited during this special occasion. The spirit medium determined the number of betel nuts

prepared for she witnessed how many of them came to visit. Thereafter, the mourners divided the *tiuchel* and the rest of the foods among themselves for their consumption. By this time, the food being divided was regarded as that which was left over from the *re deleb*. The next morning, which was the fourth day (*ongeuang el olengel*), was another milestone in the mourning period which was referred to as *tebedall er a sis* (exit point of the mourning period). If there were villagers and distant clan women who showed support to the family by participating in the formal mourning, this was the occasion when they could return home. The remaining mourners were clan *ourrot* and other close female kin who remained for another five days, until *omengades*.

Omengades was considered the second exit point for the mourners, and came five days after the *sis*. *Omengades* was the ceremony held approximately nine days after the burial, when family members of the deceased would pave the new grave with stones. The term comes from the word *mengades*, which means to pave with stones or to pile up with stones, or the act of piling up something. Being the exit point for a second set of mourners, it was the time when clan relatives could appropriately end their formal mourning and return home. Relatives closest to the deceased had to remain and would continue the mourning until the designated number of days was reached. Among these relatives was the one holding the personal belongings of the deceased (*tet*), which normally included the blanket or woven covering last used when he/she died. There were various milestones during the mourning period to be kept track of. One of the closest relatives, who kept track of the counting of the mourning (*ngkei el oba chas*), kept track of these. The different milestones included:

ballechad -- this point refers to the deceased's spirit who may still be holding his/her sleep covering from the human realm;

ballechelid -- this point refers to the period when the deceased's spirit has perhaps accepted his/her sleep covering from the *deleb* (the spirits);

toudechad -- the deceased's spirit is being snatched away (*mesudang*) from the earthly ways and things;

toudechelid -- the deceased's spirit is being accepted into the ways of the *deleb* (the spirits);

tengetelchad -- the deceased's spirit is still trying to make offerings to the earthly, human side of things;

tengetelchelid -- the deceased's spirit finally accepts his/her state and he/she begins the period by making offerings to the spirits;

rengelchad -- the heart of the deceased may still be trying to connect to the human realm, the living;

rengelchelid -- the heart of the deceased may have reached the point where he/she is no longer connected to the living; and the spirit of the deceased is now connected to the *deleb* (ancestral spirits); and finally the spirit of the deceased is at rest.

Upon reaching *rengelchelid*, the mourning period ended. The close relative who was in charge of setting the mourning milestones — the knotting of the *телиакл* to keep track of the mourning days — would go down to *chemall a chimal* and dip her hands in the taro patch to signify the end of the formal mourning period. Thereafter she could return to her normal activities and all restrictions which were imposed for the mourning period were lifted.

Money Gathered on Behalf of an Unmarried Female (*Diall*)

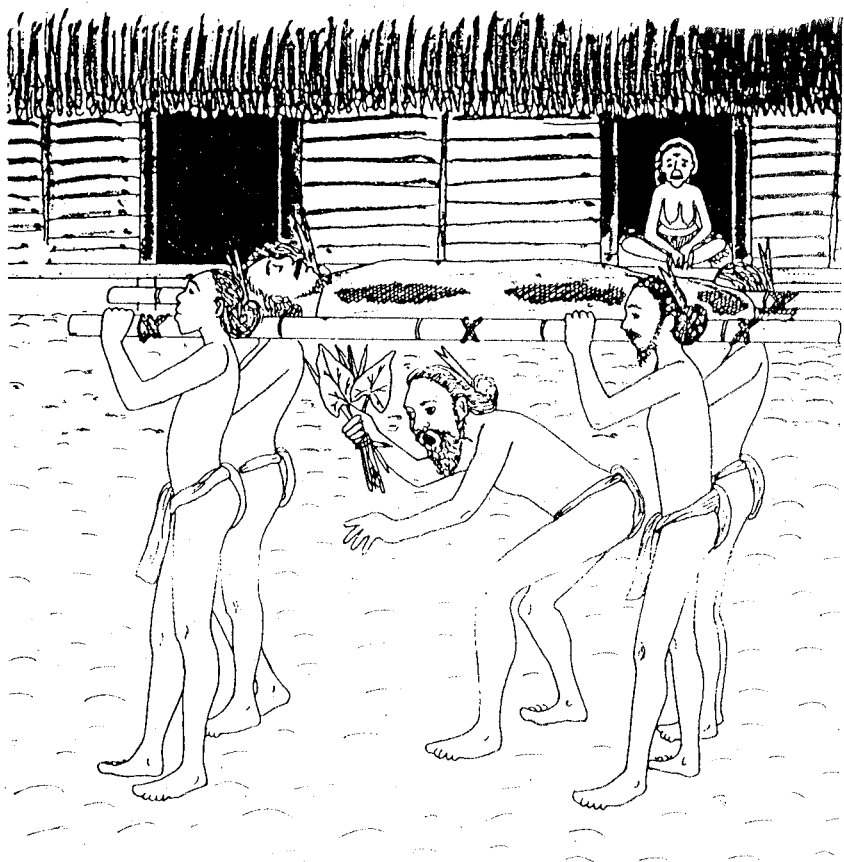
Diall is the collective name for the *udoud* gathered by close female relatives of a deceased unmarried female title holder. This was the practice to honor the female title holder. Typically the *udoud* involved were not large pieces. They were given to the head title holder of the *kebliil* who in turn distributed them to *okdemaol*, the head of each *telungalek* related to the clan. Other prominent *ourrot* (female clan members) might have chosen to give extra money pieces as well for the heads of the *blai* and the *kebliil* to receive. The amount of the *diall* was usually announced before the body was taken for burial. In turn, the *okdemaol* was responsible for all of the expenses of the funeral.

The Taking of the Title (*Ngeiul a Dui*)

The taking of the title ceremony took place after the body had been prepared for burial and was brought outside of the house for the very purpose of this ceremony. As the body was brought out, a man, usually a specialist for the taking of the title ceremony, symbolically took the title from the deceased and brought it to an *ourrot* (the matriarch of the *blai* or *kebliil*) usually the holder of the title corresponding to the deceased male title holder. The *ourrot* received the title in an appropriate ceremonial manner. Thereafter, the body was brought to the burial site. Any other *ourrot* might have been designated by elder female kin to represent the *blai* or *kebliil* to receive the title. The *ourrot* of the clan, the title holder and an *ochell* held and guarded the title until a new title holder was found.

Having been received by the appropriate matriarch of the clan, the title was held until the main and strongest matriarchs, *ourrot* of the clan, appointed the new title holder. Symbolically, the title was taken from the deceased through the use of a bundle made by

putting together the tips of coconut fronds and young taro plant during the ceremony. These were given to and kept by the matriarch until the new title holder was appointed by the *ourrot* of the clan.



Taking of the Title

Symbol of the Heart of the Deceased (*Diaches*)

Diaches was an aspect of the funeral in the old days which only applied to the funerals of the holders of *kebekuul*, the top four titles of the village council. *Diaches* symbolizes the heart of the deceased and the love of the family for the deceased as well. Below is a description of how *diaches* was prepared once word was out that the title holder had died.

Diaches refers to a pair of taro plants taken out of the *lkul a dui* taro patch by a designated *ochell* of the clan, a daughter of a female clan member. They were washed and scraped well with stalks and leaves intact and then covered with *reng* (turmeric). Once prepared, they were brought to the house where the funeral was taking place and put on a particular spot on the house stone platform. Symbolizing the heart of the deceased and the great love held for the deceased, they remained there until the taking of the title ceremony was completed and before the burial. Standing on the stone platform by the *diaches* was another designated female *ochell* with her hair down and a piece of a mat-like material wrapped around her waist. The *diaches* were put on her head and then removed symbolically by another and placed again on the same spot as before. The removal of the *diaches* and placement on the platform was carried out in a stylized and specific manner. Only certain clan members knew these things and they instructed their relatives to perform these tasks appropriately. The *diaches* remained on the stone platform until *ongedei el olengel*, the third day of the mourning period. Then they were removed from the stone platform and the roots were cooked for the mourners to eat. The taro plants were returned and planted in the same taro patch from which they were taken.

The Mat Shroud (*Chellubes*)

The *chellubes* is a mat shroud, specially woven of pandanus leaves, and usually kept aside by matriarchs of the house and the clan for the funerals of family members. The *chellubes* was usually held by the one closest to the deceased throughout the wake period until *omeluosu*. Once the *beldokel* (the body) was being moved out of the house, the woman with the mat shroud clutched to her side moved across the floor in the sitting position toward the door through which the *beldokel* was passing. She did this without looking back and silently. No one was to speak to her. Once she reached the doorway another designated female clan member approached her but with her back toward the house and the first woman. She also was not permitted to talk and no one was to speak to or call her. She took the *chellubes* from the first woman and moved toward the body. She accompanied the deceased to the burial site. At the burial site, once the body was lowered to the grave pit, the *chellubes* was brought down to cover the body. The *chellubes* covered the body in a manner opposite to that which was normal, with the end of the mat shroud at the head and the top covering the feet.

The Knotted Coconut (*Teliakl*)

Teliakl is the coconut husk string which was knotted on a daily basis to keep count of the mourning days for the deceased person. Holders of the first to the fourth *kebekuul*, of the village council had clearly designated mourning days to adhere to. Mourning days of the fourth title did not exceed the mourning days of the third title. Mourning days of the third title did not exceed the mourning days of the second title; and the mourning days of the second title did not exceed the mourning days of the first title. The holders of

teleuechel dui, the fifth to the tenth and eleventh titles, had their own graded number of mourning days with a lesser title not exceeding the mourning days of the next higher title. Other people in the village who passed away as well had their designated mourning days depending on the family and clan. However, the mourning days for non-title holders — the ordinary people — were not to exceed the mourning days of the *kebekuul* and *teleuechel dui*.

General Funeral Components

Mourning (Omengeiung)

On the next evening after the burial of the dead came *siseball*, which literally means entrance. This was the evening when all the female clan members and others in the village who would participate in the formal mourning period entered the first four days of mourning (*klomengeiung*). They prepared and then came to the house where mourning would take place, which usually was the deceased's house. In the case of title holders, the clan house was used. On the third day (*ongedei el olengel*) the responsible relatives gathered *sis*, or ti plant leaves. These were to be used that evening to consult the spirits through the *sis* for the cause of death. Women who were endowed with the special gift to communicate with the spirits and ancestral gods were normally consulted for this purpose. Typically, one of them was asked to assist in this ceremony. The following day — *ongeuang el olengel* or the fourth day — was the first exit point (*kot el tebedall*) for the mourners. Usually, the village mourners or distant clan relatives who were present in the mourning period could return home this day. This day is the day that was referred to as *sis*, the name of the ti plant used to communicate with the spirits. Components of local funerals and *omengeiung* are the *taor*, *diaches*, *teliakl*, *sis* and *tiuchel*.

Taor was to quieten the *beluu*; like a moratorium (often of noise levels) imposed on a village as part of mourning as well as to keep peace and quiet in the village to manifest reverence and respect for the deceased. Such practice was only accorded to the *kebekuul* and the *rubak el dil* who were corresponding female title holders.

When the holder of the first to the fourth *kebekuul* or the corresponding *rubak el dil* died, there would immediately be a long *debusech* sound or siren, made from blowing the conch shell. This siren indicated the passing of the last breath of the title holder. It was followed by a number of sirens indicating the length of *taor*, which indicated who had died. The following are the number of *debusech* sounds which were needed for each *kebekuul*:

1. First rank.....	10
2. Second Rank.....	9
3. Third rank.....	8
4. Fourth rank.....	7

Taor began after the deceased had been buried. Arrangements for *taor* might have been altered or abolished depending on the circumstances of the family and their ability to negotiate with responsible persons regarding certain restrictions. Such changes may have occurred due to overwhelming obligations of the family and clan. When the *taor* was imposed, the monitors of the *taor* were the first and second clan. This means that when the first and third *rubak* died, the second and fourth clans were the monitors of the moratorium. And when the second and fourth *rubak* died, it was the first and third clan who watched and monitored the *taor*.

When the *taor* began, discordant noises such as raucous voices, crying of children, shouting, splitting firewood, or pounding on something loudly were prohibited. Other restrictions might have

been imposed, such bringing raw fish and seafood into the house where mourning was taking place, as well as bringing green leaves to or past the house. Usually there was in each *beluu* (village) a designated household where all of these things could take place without fines. Fines were imposed for anyone who violated the restrictions imposed during the *taor*. When the appropriate *taor* period had been fulfilled, it was marked by two long *debusech* sounds from the conch shell to inform the village that the *taor* had been lifted.

Omeliakl — the knotting of the cord — was done by the closest female relative of the deceased beginning with *siseball* (the commencement of the mourning period) and continued until the end of the formal mourning period. After the formal mourning period, the person closest to the deceased, either a sister or daughter, continued the knotting of the cord for the designated days of mourning. For instance, if the deceased held the first title, then the official mourning period was 100 days. Other people's mourning periods ranged from 30 to 50 days. *Teliakl* for the *kebekuul* holder was either cut up or brought to appropriate places, such as the reef flat or the rock islands, to be immersed and pressed down, weighted with heavy rocks. Others in the village went either to the sea, sea shore or taro patch depending on the *blai* and *kebliil*.

Another mourning responsibility involved the *bar*. *Bar* refers to the mat on which the deceased was bathed. It was kept by the closest of kinswomen from the beginning of mourning to the end. The *bar* was kept until the day for burying the *teliakl*. This kinswoman pressed down or buried the *bar* in the *lkul a dui el mesei* of that *blai* if the deceased held a *kebekuul* title. If the deceased held no such title, the *bar* and *teliakl* were buried in any taro swamp (*mesei*) of that *blai*. Pressing down or burying the *bar* and *teliakl* is called *mengall a chimal* (to dip her hands into the mud of the taro swamp). This kinswoman held responsibility (*olab a chas*) for all

materials and mats used to tend the deceased's body during the *klomengeiung*. After this period, she was permitted to return to normal work. The kin who kept the *bar* were also called *chas* (soot or ink) keepers. Below is the list of restrictions for those who held the *chas*:

1. She could not take a complete bath.
2. She could not have sexual intercourse with her husband.
3. She could not do heavy work.
4. If she was unmarried, she still had to refrain from sexual intercourse.
5. She could eat good prepared food in limited amounts only.

After she had dipped her hands (*chemall a chimal*), she then was allowed to do any of the above. If she violated these taboos, the woman who kept the *chas* caused the *blai* to have frequent misfortunes. *Debes*, *otutu el bladek* and *omengades* will be discussed separately.

Sis is supernatural power used to find the cause of death. *Ti* leaves obtained and decorated for this purpose were called the *ti* of the spirits (*sis er a re deleb*). The closest female kin of the deceased performed this act. The female children of the *blai* collected fragrant plants, and the males got young coconut fronds. When the *sis* was rolled and decorated with coconut fronds and fragrant plants, it was placed in the middle of the *bluuldang* (central floor section of the house). Then one of the kin of the deceased whispered to it to ask the cause(s) of death. If the *sis* did not dance on the floor, another kinswoman took her turn. If the suggested cause was correct, the *sis* started to dance and move. All the mourners would say in unison, "*Kor ngii, kor ngii, a ngoikau!*" (It looks like it, it looks like it, it took you!). If the *sis* had not danced by day break, the women drained the water and took it out in the morning and stuck it into bamboo at the corner of the *odesongel*.

Then, a *tiuchel* was partaken and mourners exiting from the mourning period left this day. Only kinswomen did the *sis* ritual; men did not participate. After a few days, an *otuu-bladek* (medium) was requested to help.



Consulting the *Sis*

The grave paving (*omengades*) occurred five days after the *sis*. The members of the *blai* prepared food for those who would pave the grave. The day of *omengades* also was the day to repair all sunken graves of this *blai* since, by tradition, such repairs could not be allowed at regular times. If this had been done, danger, misfortune or death could have come to the *blai*.

Debes was held after *sis* and *omengades* for any *kebekuul* and *teleuechel dui* title holder or a female counterpart. The younger brothers or close kin (*ruchellel*) and the sisters or close female kin (*ruchedal*) of the deceased were responsible for the *debes*. *Debes* was intended to be shared by the associated titleholders (*klobak*, *rubak'l dil*) in the *bai*. This was also the time when they were told of the newly-selected title holder who was to be their associate.

The *rultuuel bladek* (or *otuu-bladek*) were primarily women who received deep or detailed messages from the spirits of the dead or songs by their supernatural or magical powers. When such a one was brought to the house of the deceased, she lay down or just stared intently. Then she announced to the people within the house the cause of the illness. She received the song(s) of the deceased from the spirits. These songs are called "*esols*" and "*kelloi*". The *oltuu bladek* was given some kind of compensation when she was finished.

Specific Funeral Components

Unmarried Female Titleholder

When an unmarried female elder holding a title died, she was eligible for *diall*. *Diall* was collected by her children, the *ourrot* or other close kin within the *kebliil*. The payment was received by the head of the *kebliil*. The *kebliil* and its satellite families (*blai*, *telungalek*) were responsible for the funeral, its expenses and for

the activities associated with the funeral. The title was removed and returned to the *kebliil*.

Married Female Titleholder

Diall was not required in the death of a married female titleholder. The funeral and its associated responsibilities fell on the *kebliil* of the deceased and the related *telungalek* therein.

Unmarried Woman with Children

When such a woman died, her children, her mother's brothers and the *ourrot* of her *blai* and *kebliil* were responsible for the funeral.

Unmarried Male Titleholder

When an unmarried male titleholder died, the title was taken from his coffin.¹ The funeral and its associated responsibilities were handled by kin within his *blai* and *kebliil*.

Married Male Titleholder

When a man with a *kebekuul* or *teleuechel dui* died, his title was removed and returned to the *kebliil*. There would be an *chelbechiil*.² The *cheldech duch*³ for *chelbechiil* and associated services were the responsibility of the wife's brothers (*ochedal*), *okdemaol* or other kin. The man's kin within his *blai* and *kebliil* handled the funeral service and its associated responsibilities.

1 When it was time for burial, the body was taken outside of the house, and the woman who was to guard the title until a new titleholder had been selected sat in the doorway. The coffin was held while a man pointed a coconut frond spear at the coffin. With words and stylized movements, he pointed the spear at the coffin, took the title into the spear, danced under the coffin and handed the spear to the woman in the doorway. She received it with symbolic hand movements. She guarded the title until it was time to bury the spear (also called *dui*).

2 This was a final payment for the services the wife's side has received from the husband and his kinsmen throughout the marriage. *Udoud*, land and/or taro swamps were given. The wife's side gives *udoud* as a first choice; if there is none land is given. The husband's brother (or *okdemaol*) receives the payment for he has been a primary figure in this exchange tie.

3 *Cheldech duch* means "to talk" or "legends". Here it refers to the final "death talks" wherein the estate of the deceased married man is settled by his close kin.

Unmarried Male Titleholder with Children

The title had to be removed and returned to its *kebliil* (clan). Kin in the deceased's *blai* and *kebliil* were responsible for the funeral and associated activities. The deceased's *udoud* was to be "children's money". The man's surviving sisters' or brothers (*ochedal*; siblings of the opposite sex) or children who were *ochell* to the deceased *rubak* paid the *udoud* for the man's children if he had no *udoud* in his name.

Ochell, Ulechell, Rrodel and Oretch

Ochell (Child of the Woman) — Funeral services for either a married male or female *ochell* were the responsibility of his/her family within the *kebliil*. This was true also with respect to deceased unmarried male or female *ochell* individuals.

Ulechell (Child of the Man) — Funeral services and the *cheldech duch* (death talks) for a deceased married female *ulechell* were the responsibility of her father and his kin. If she was unmarried, the responsibilities fell on her father alone. This same rule applies in the case of a deceased married male *ulechell*, even if the father also was deceased. However, there is no *cheldech duch* if the deceased *ulechell* man was not married.

Rrodel (Adopted Child) — Funeral services for an adopted individual were held at the home of the adoptive parents. The adoptive parents, their kin and *kebliil*, all assumed responsibility. The natural mother and the adoptive mother might have met to decide where the funeral and associated services were to be held. This rule applied to married and unmarried deceased adoptees. Such practice was important for the adoption has tied two *kebliil*

together, the *kebliil* of the birth mother and *klebliil* of the adoptive parents.

Oretech — *Oretech* was a payment made to secure the right to bury a deceased person within the burial place of the *kebliil*. *Oretech* traditionally applied to *ulechell*, adoptee or any individual whose mother was of another *kebliil* who came into the *kebliil* to hold a *kebekuul* or *teleuechel* title. When the kin who gave comfort and attended the sick realized that the person was dying, they quickly notified both *okdemaol* and the elder *ourrot* of the *kebliil* (*delal a blai*; mothers of the house) and called them into a meeting to determine where to bury the dying *rubak*. It was a well-maintained tradition not to permit burial of a deceased in a grave other than his original family's burial place (*kotel*) or the seat of the *kebliil* (*omesolel a blai ra kebliil*). This decision was a very serious matter, and great care was taken to reach a final decision. A payment of *oretech* allowed the deceased to be buried in the grave of the *kebliil* he belonged to until he died. This payment was made to the *rubekul a beluu* (the ten highest titleholders governing the *beluu*) for granting the right of burial. *Oretech* was given after the *kebliil okdemaol* and *ourrot* decided to bury the deceased in this place. *Oretech* to the *rubekul a beluu* was given by one of the closest female kin of the deceased. This practice did not apply in the case of a deceased *ochell* titleholder, as the *kebliil* was his original *kebliil* (*kotel*).

Cheldech duch: Settlement of the Estate

Male/Female Deceased Without Children (Ochell/Ulechell)

A deceased female *ochell* married to a person from another *kebliil* or *blai* left behind *chelbechiil* (payment for services received by and through the marital tie) as inheritance for her family

and *kebliil*. The male kin (*okdemaol*) or the family of the deceased female provided food and rendered other services during the *cheldech duch* (final decision). A deceased male who had married a person from another *blai* obligated the elders of his family (*okdemaol* and *ourrot*) to pay *chelbechiil* to the female's family. This was received by her father but with an obligation to pass on a portion at some point to her uncle.

A deceased male *ulechell* obligated his father and his father's sisters to pay the *chelbechiil* to the family of his wife. If his father also was deceased, his brothers and sisters were responsible to do so.

Male/Female Deceased With Children (Ochell/Ulechell)

A deceased female *ochell* with children and of the first-ranking *blai* left as her bequest *chelbechiil* to be received by her family. The food and services for the payment were provided by the males (*okdemaol*) of the deceased's *kebliil* or family. The food for the "children's *udoud*" (*ududir a re ngalek*) was provided by a brother of the deceased or the closest kin among the *okdemaol*. A deceased male *ochell* with children obligated the members of his family and *kebliil* to pay the *chelbechiil*, as well as "children's *udoud*", to his wife's family. The rule is more specific, however, in that the responsibility for the *chelbechiil* and the "children's *udoud*" lay primarily with the deceased's sisters or the closest female elders (*ourrot*) within his family.

Deceased Female Ulechell With Children

The food and associated services required for *chelbechiil* and "children's *udoud*" were separately provided in the *cheldech duch* for the above. Food and associated services for the *chelbechiil* were provided by the deceased's father and *okdemaol* of the latter's *kebliil*. Food and associated services for the "children's *udoud*"

were provided by the deceased mother's brother or a close kinsman within the *blai* or *kebliil* for he was the one to receive the "children's *udoud*".

Deceased Male Ulechell With Children

A deceased male *ulechell* who lived with his father obligated the father, along with his relatives, to pay *chelbechiil*. The closest female kin of the father paid both the *chelbechiil* and "children's *udoud*".

Deceased Adopted Child Who Was Married

The funeral and *kikaidechutem* of a deceased adopted woman who was married were taken care of by her adoptive father and his male kin. *Chelbechiil udoud* was the responsibility of her husband's female kin. Foods were prepared for the *cheldechcheduch*, or final settlement ceremony, by her father and her maternal uncles (*rukdemelel*).

A deceased adopted male person's funeral and *kikaidechutem* were the responsibility of his adoptive father and his male kin. At *cheldechcheduch* (final settlement ceremony) the payment of *chelbechiil udoud* was the responsibility of his father and his male kin. The foods for the *cheldechcheduch* were the responsibility of the relatives of the wife of the deceased.

Deceased With Adopted Children (Male/Female)

If a married woman who adopted a female child died, the husband of the deceased paid the *udoud* for the child. If a married woman who adopted a male child died, the husband of the deceased paid the *udoud* for the child.

Deceased With Adopted Children of Different Origin/Bloodlines

Adopted children of different origins are called *ngalekukeruu*. Such cases were somewhat complicated because each child was

entitled to his own *udoud* and share of the deceased's estate. This is because the children had different natural mothers. Consequently, a number of different *okdemaol* (uncles) oversaw the status of the "children's *udoud*" and other shares in the estate. The father, whether deceased or not, was responsible for the status, *udoud* and other entitlements of the children. This meant the family *ongalek* of the father and his *kebliil* assumed all responsibilities relating to the inheritance of these children. A female adoptee who, by blood, was closest to the father was not considered in the *cheldech duch* and did not receive her inheritance since she is *ngalekulaol*.

Land, Taro Swamps, Property, Houses, Udoud, "Children's Udoud" and Settlement of the Debts of the Deceased

When a parent died and *udoud* was not available for the natural children, a portion of land was given to them as their inheritance; if land was not available, taro swamps (*mesei*) were given. If swamps were not available, property such as a canoe or a set of turtle shells (*tet* and *ongall*) was given. If the deceased father was an only child, his house and *udoud* were given to his children. If the mother died first, the status of the children and their *udoud* should have been settled on the day of the *cheldech duch*. Certain practices permitted the children to wait until their father died before they received their inheritance in the manner described above.

Debts of the Deceased

Debts were paid by the closest kin as follows: First, all loans involving Palauan *udoud* required collateral (*ulsirs*). Collateral might have been *udoud*, the reddish leaf of an almond tree (*mellil a miich*), a clam (*kikoi*) or anything else the parties accepted and agreed upon as collateral. The collateral bound the agreement and represented the obligations of the parties involved. The relatives

of the deceased redeemed the collateral upon paying the debts. Loans were suspended automatically when the collateral was lost.

Position of Children Who Inherited Udoud/ Property

The beneficiaries of the deceased father's *udoud* and properties remained as members of his family. However, such a person's authority and position in the family was subordinate to that of *ochell*. He might have been recognized and rewarded with important positions in family affairs for the services he rendered and the contributions he made on behalf of the family. If the individual eventually wanted to leave his father's family, he could only take his inherited *udoud* and leave. Property remained in his father's family.

Death and Funerals in Sungesol (Sonsorol)

Death and funeral practices of the Sungesol (Sonsorol) Islands differed from the practices of the main islands of Palau.

Before an elderly woman died she divided her properties amongst her children. These properties were called *kameme*. This means *telooch* or pre-chewed food. Often these came in the form of knowledge of traditional medicines, magical techniques and practices, trees or land. But she did not give everything away. She usually retained at least one property called *katiho fayai*. This property remained for her use until her last days. As she approached her last days and felt that her time to leave this earth was near, she summoned the person who had been most helpful to her, especially in her later years, and gave her/him the property and transferred a title to that person if she was a title holder.

The funeral of a married or unmarried woman was handled the same way. It was taken care of by relatives of her mother and father.

Unmarried Deceased Female With Children

The funeral services of an unmarried deceased female with children were taken care of by relatives of her father and mother. The children remained with her parents to take her place in the family.

Unmarried Male with a Title

An unmarried male title holder who was approaching old age and felt that his time had come prepared toward the end by deciding how his properties would be distributed. He also decided upon whom he would bestow the title he was holding. Usually in such cases the properties and title were given to the person who had done much for the old man. In the event that such decisions were not made before he died, the properties and title went to the closest kin of the deceased.

Married Male with a Title

An elder male title holder who was approaching advanced age usually transferred responsibility for his properties and the title he was holding to others. He could transfer such responsibility for his properties and title to a person who had contributed much to his life. Or he could transfer the same responsibilities to his younger brothers or close male relations. He might also have chosen to transfer the same to his sister's children. His widow remained in his family as a family matriarch or until such time that she remarried.

The widow could decide to live with her family in which case she asked the deceased husband's family for permission to move back to her own family, her father's family. In the event she planned to re-marry, she had to move back to her father's house for an appropriate length of time. Then at an appropriate time, she prepared foods for the clan (*kleblillel*) of her deceased husband and brought them to the people of the clan. Such foods were meant to

inform them of her move to remarry and request to sever the ties which were bound through marriage. Such practice is known as *hafaireng*, which means the ties bound by marriage are severed.

Male Title Holder with Children

Similar to the arrangements set forth above, the title holder decided how his properties and title would be distributed before he died. His properties and title went to his children. However, he could change his mind and transfer them to other people who had contributed much to his life, rather than his children. Responsibility for his funeral and arrangements rested on the relatives of both his father and mother.

Ochell, Ulechell, Merrodel (Male/Female) and Oretch

Funeral practices for deceased *ochell* and *ulechell*, whether male or female, were the same. They were taken care of by the relatives of both parents. If the deceased person was married, the spouse's relatives as well took part of the responsibility for the funeral services.

An adopted person who died was the responsibility of the adoptive parents. They took care of his funeral. If the deceased was married, then the spouse had to participate in the funeral activities. Such practice should not have been forgotten for the adoption had bound two clans together: the clan of the birth mother and the clan of the adoptive parents.

Oretch did not exist in Sungesol. They buried their dead in the sea.

Chellubes existed in Sungesol but it was used in a slightly different manner. This was a woven mat, a shroud, usually used to wrap the body of the deceased person before burial.

When death occurred, members of the *kebliil* were informed immediately and the funeral was held right away. The spouse of

the deceased and other people who were not as close to the deceased person prepared and took charge of the funeral and took care of those who sit in the *sar* (around the body). At about three o'clock in the afternoon, the body was prepared for burial and arranged such that the head of the deceased person pointed toward the west. Before the sun set, the body was brought to the ocean in a canoe with a number of people for burial.

Burial Practices

There were at least four burial practices in Sungesol in the old days. These burial customs were practiced in the islands until foreigners came to the islands over a hundred years ago. Especially after the introduction of Christianity, in the form of Catholicism, such burial practices were stopped and communal burial sites were designated on land in the villages.

First, the body of the deceased was wrapped with the *chellubes*, with heavy rocks to add weight to the body. It was taken in a canoe with a number of people who paddled and sailed away from the island. When they determined the appropriate spot to bury the body, they dropped the body with its heavy rock weights and some of them dove in after the body as it sank. They swam down after the body until they could no longer hold their breath, then they let the body sink as they returned to the canoe. At this time, they could only sit facing the back of the canoe. They sailed and paddled back and eventually landed on an isolated section of the island away from the residential areas. When they got to shore they pulled the canoe up the shore with the bow facing the ocean. On the third day after the burial, the people went back to drive away the ghost or spirit of the deceased and bring back the canoe to its regular place in the village.

The second burial practice was to wrap the body with the mat shroud, place it in a sail canoe, put on and unfurl the sail on the canoe, take it out to sea and let it sail out to the horizon.

The third burial practice was usually practiced by people who did not have a canoe. They wrapped the body of the deceased person with a mat shroud, brought it to the area in the ocean where current was the strongest and let the body float away to the horizon.

The fourth burial method is one which was practiced by poor people. The body was wrapped with a woven mat shroud and brought to an isolated area in the village by the beach. A large whole was dug and the body was placed in it with a large rock on top to hold it down. When the grave had been covered with sand to the top of the pit, another large rock was placed on top of the grave.

There was another burial practice which was only allocated to dead children or babies who had not grown teeth. They were buried on land in the village. This practice was also accorded relatives of those community members who held certain magical powers which were traditionally used to ensure that the village would not run out of food.

Omengeiung (Mourning)

Mourning practices existed in Sungesol and generally began the day after the burial. However, practices varied slightly depending on each island community.

Omengeiung in Pulu Anna — When a person died on this island all his/her relatives went into mourning, for they believed that the spirits of their ancestors, especially their maternal uncles, came to the house that day. On the third day of mourning, they prepared foods for the spirits and distributed them so the spirits might rest. On the fourth day, most of the clan relatives dispersed, leaving only those who were very close to the deceased person and whose

feelings of loss were most acute. They continued to mourn until such time as they felt relieved and were ready to return to normal life.

Omengeiung in Sungesol — In Sungesol, the relatives mourned for at least one month before they could return to normal activities, such as *omelenges*, or coconut syrup making, and gardening. However, for one year the mourners were expected to behave in a restrained manner. They were not allowed to flirt nor participate in dances. After one year such restraints were lifted and life went back to normal.

Many of these practices have ceased to exist since Christianity (Catholicism) came to the islands over a hundred years ago. Since then, burials take place on areas which have been designated as cemeteries. *Novena* prayers are said for nine days for the dead and that is the end of it. Those who are in mourning continue to wear a black veil on their head for as long as they want to mourn their loved one.

Today, there is *omengades*, or paving of the grave, and *omengkad el blals* (paying for the expenses of the funeral). As stated above, *omengades* was not practiced in the past for they buried their dead at sea. But now, they have land graves which are decorated or paved.

Glossary

Bellemakl — quiet focus and reflection.

Chellubes — woven mat or sleep covering (blanket) which was brought to the grave to cover the deceased's body or coffin before burial.

Debes — was a feast held after sis and omengades of any kebekuul and teleuechel dui title holder or a female counterpart who has died. The younger brothers or close kin (ruchellel) and the sisters or close female kin (ruchedal) of the deceased were responsible for the debes. Debes was intended to be shared by the associated titleholders (klobak, rubak'l dil) in the bai. This also was the time when they were told of the newly-selected title holder who was to be their associate.

Diaches — kukau, a pair of taro plants taken out of the lkul a dui taro patch by a designated ochell of the clan. They were washed and scraped well with stalks and leaves intact, then covered with reng (tumeric) and rest on a designated part of the olbed. They symbolized the heart of the deceased person.

Diall — is the collective name for the udoud gathered by close female kin of a deceased unmarried female title holder. This practice was to honor the female title holder.

Kedkad — formal ending of funeral, feast or special group visit to a village.

Kikaidechutem — the mass of people who attended a funeral and wake.

Kltomelbut - the women kin and those from the community who sat through the night for the entire wake period.

Lkul a dui — A clan taro swamp cultivated by the wife of a male title holder where she plants and harvests taro for the chief's consumption.

Ngalekulaol — The term refers to an ochell child who is adopted or reared by his maternal uncle such that he is considered as his child. Another example is an ochell brought up by his birth mother's sister. This child is ngalekulaol of the blai and kebliil (he is just brought up from within the floor of the blai and kebliil).

Ngalekukeru - Adopted children of one set of parents who come from different birth mothers.

Ngarasar — The female kin of a deceased person who sat around the coffin or body at a wake.

Omedokel — Woven mat in the house, usually set aside by an elder ourrot for use during the death of a close relative. Used as a shroud given out as a badek to others whose close relatives have died.

Omeluosu — the final preparation of the deceased person for final viewing by his relatives and children before burial.

Omengades — paving of the grave.

Omertechelel — Side of the thigh of a person below the hip and above the knee; the usual place to slap with one's hand when dancing.

Taor — a moratorium to quite the village to show respect and reverence for the death of a high clan title holder; also imposed for an impending visit from a related village, especially those villages with sacred relationships bestowed by the gods in ancient times.

Teliakl/omeliakl — the knotted coconut string kept by the rurrot of the blai or kebliil and undone as they kept track of the designated mourning days of their deceased relatives.

Tiuchel — pounded kukau, shaped appropriately and covered with mallolau (thick coconut jam), presented on an orsachel (a wooden container used to pound taro or put food on) to the deleb (spirits) during the sis ceremony.

Uldioll - a plant which has been harvested but which still has the roots, stalks and leaves intact.

Uldidellel - the beginning section of the weaving of a mat, bag, basket, woven sleep covering or blanket.

Ulemechall - the starting point of work or making of any piece of art or item.

Ulisul/ulis - the edge of or ending point of a woven mat, sleep covering or woven blanket.

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