Bibliography of writings on the Kiwai by Gunnar Landtman

The National Museum of Finland holds four separate collections relating to Landtman’s work in the Fly River region. They are referenced as:

NMF VK 4902: 1–1326. The 1326 artefacts collected between 1910 and 1912.

NMF VK 4919: 1–3; 6–14; 17–39; 40–41 and 45–46. The 38 phonograph recordings made in 1910 and 1911 in Ipiasia and Mawatta.

NMF VKK 248: 1–572. The 572 photographs taken by Landtman in the field.

NMF VKKA Landtman. The three volumes of original correspondence either in English or Swedish.

Gunnar Landtman was a prolific writer and from 1912 to 1934 wrote more than 20 book and papers in English, Finnish and Swedish on Kiwai culture. They are:


Williamson undertook research in the Central District of Papua in 1910. This was Landtman’s first paper in English and presumably written from the field.


Gunnar Landtman in Papua: 1910 to 1912

—— (1914b). *Kiwai Papuanernas sätt att färads-how the Kiwai Papuans travel.* Helsingfors, Centraltryckeri och Bokbinderi Aktiebolaget.


In his review of *The Folk-Tales of the Kiwai Papuans*, Haddon (1920: 44) wrote that: The collection should be compared with the tales narrated in Volumes V and VI of the ‘Reports of the Cambridge Expedition to Torres Straits’ as both areas constitute one ethnographic province

—— (1917b). *Ur sagans barndom berättelser av vildfolket i Nya Guinea.* Helsingfors, Holger Schildts Förlag.

—— (1918a). ‘Min första färd uppför Fly-floden i Nya Guinea’, *Terra, Geografiska Fören i Finland Tidsskrift*, 30: 13–18 [My first journey up the Fly River in New Guinea].


Landtman contributed this chapter to Beaver’s largely anecdotal but noteworthy account of his service as a Resident Magistrate in the Western Division of Papua that was published following Beaver’s death on the Western Front during the
First World War. In the paper Landtman defines magic as ‘the employment of supernatural mechanical power without appeal to any supernatural being’ (Beaver 1920: 300). Landtman contributed a number of photographs to Beaver’s book: notably those of a Tirio woman in full mourning, the Horiomu spirits at Mawatta and one of the interior of a Kiwai long house.

——(1920c). ‘Stenåldersvedskap i användning bland papuanerna i Nya Guinea’, Terra: Geografiska Fören i Finland Tidskrift, 32: 1–12.

——(1925). Naturfolkens diktning och dess betydelse. Helsingfors, Söderström and Co. (Finska Vetenskaps-Societeten Minnesteckningar och Föredrag, III (5).


Seligman, who had accompanied Haddon to the Torres Strait in 1898, wrote in his review of The Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea that it was the ‘first monograph to appear on any of the true Papuan of that territory [Papua]’ (C. G. S[eligman] 1928: 496–97) and that Landtman is to be congratulated for surviving two years at the Fly River for despite the abundance of fish, dugong and turtle it is necessary to live on tinned foods.

Malinowski was less congratulatory in his review of the book (Malinowski 1929: 109–10) for although he stated that: ‘Professor Landtman has written one of the very best descriptive books if anthropology on one of the most interesting peoples of the world’ and considering he liked the sociological analysis of kinship, totemism, the ways of governance and administering justice, the book lacked the ‘dynamic aspect’. Malinowski particularly disliked the use of Pidgin-English and remarked that: ‘Pidgin-English is a caricature of human speech’. In this Landtman would have disagreed for he felt correctly that ‘[Pidgin-English] is on the contrary an actual language founded on principles which, simple though they be, yet give to it a certain extent a distinctive character of its own’ (Landtman 1918b: 64).

Perhaps the most comprehensive review of his book was written by the Cambridge anthropologist, Camilla Wedgwood, herself a protégé of Haddon who was to gain considerable experience on Manam Island off the coast of northern New Guinea (Wedgwood 1933–34, Lutkehaus 1986). Wedgwood complimented Landtman generally and made the most appropriate examination when she said: ‘Dr Landtman has confined himself to pure description [especially in the section
on ceremonies and rituals], He refrains from theorizing either as to the meaning of those things which he recounts or as to those things which he recounts to other New Guinea tribes. … Heralded by such a general survey this full ethnographic account of a people in this all too little studies area is of estimable value.’

Stocking (1992: 31) was also disparaging of Landtman’s book: ‘The closest approximation to Malinowski’s *Argonauts* [1953 c. 1922] is Landtman’s flat-footedly descriptive (and rather cumbrously titled) *Kiwai Papuans of British New Guinea: A Nature-Born Instance of Rousseau’s Ideal Community*. Landtman was accused of working with individuals and paid informants as well as using Pidgin English rather than Kiwai. Regardless of these criticisms Stocking had to agree that Landtman had entered the field a full five years before Malinowski who by the 1920s had assumed the status of the master of the ethnographic field-work tradition. Undoubtedly the delay in publishing the English version of Landtman’s book lessened its impact in the world of British anthropology.


Margaret Mead and Nicolas Calas published a wide ranging anthology of excerpts from anthropological texts but also included some unusual examples of other authors works, such as Herodotus writing on the Egyptians and their relationship with domestic animals and D. H. Lawrence’s description of Australian scenery near Sydney. Landtman’s piece was taken from his main text.
(1927b) and covered aspects of the horiomu and moguru ceremonies and sexual instruction of young boys and girls in Kiwai society. It was reproduced with permission of St Martin’s Press as Landtman had died in 1940.