

Travel Tales

**The Afterlife of
Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh**

by

Lew Toulmin

Recall from last week's column that on Tanna island in the Republic of Vanuatu, the Prince Philip Tribe worshipped the Prince as a god. If you have read any press coverage of the Tribe's reaction to the recent death of Prince Philip, you will think that the Tribe is in mourning and will likely nominate Prince Charles as a successor god.

Wrong and wrong.

As part of an anthropological expedition I launched several years ago, I interviewed Chief Linlin Jack Naiua of the Prince Philip Tribe at length about Philip's future death.

The Chief predicted that the Prince's spirit would return to Tanna by canoe, would be reincarnated there, and would re-emerge as a young, healthy, Melanesian man. The Chief said, "All the people and animals -- and even the insects -- will know of his arrival, and his Tribe will grow enormously." So the members of the Tribe now are not sad and mourning, they are celebrating.

Chief Naiua stated to me that he can see into the future, and gets visions in a tree-cave inside the village's sacred banyan tree. He predicted that when Prince Philip and Queen Elizabeth pass on, the next King of England would not be Prince Charles, but rather Prince William. It was clear that the Chief did not see Prince Charles as a future god for the Tribe.

Prince Charles visited Vanuatu in 2018, and with great ceremony was awarded the chiefly title of Mal Menaringmanu, meaning "high chief of the people, with sacred roots as old as the mountains." But he was not recognized as a god by the Prince Philip Tribe or the National Council of Chiefs.

According to the Chief, the re-incarnation of Prince Philip would be celebrated by a massive feast and a "Koeyar," a three-day dance. Two hundred pigs would be killed in an elaborate ceremony, using sacred clubs and ordinary hatchets.

A special thatched hut would be built for the reincarnated Prince, and he would be provided with sacred pigs with circular tusks.

Chief Naiua stated that Queen Elizabeth would have to remain in Britain, and would not be allowed to re-marry Prince Philip. However, the new Prince might choose to visit the Queen in Britain from time to time. He would not have multiple local wives. Instead, the new Philip would marry a Tanna woman, who was already waiting for him.

Fascinated by this statement, I asked the Chief if I could interview this woman. He got a little vague, and said she was not available right then.

Several years later, in 2017, I launched another anthropological expedition, this one to northern Vanuatu, in a successful search for the country's undiscovered female chiefs. Recalling what the Chief had told me, I suggested to a female member of our team that she might be able to interview the alleged future wife of Philip. She agreed, and started vigorously studying Bislama, the main language of Vanuatu. After arriving in the capital of Vanuatu, she happened upon some members of the Prince Philip Tribe. She explained her quest, and they all started laughing.

They said that the woman was not yet in human form. She would become human only when Philip's spirit arrived for his re-incarnation. She was waiting for him on Tanna, in the form of a sacred rock.

As expedition leader, I had sent my team member off to interview a rock.

Needless to say, she was not pleased.

But perhaps there is a happy ending to this story. The Prince has now passed on, and according to the chief he should soon be reincarnated. Then his wife will emerge from her rock, and according to the Chief, the "happy couple will have many children."

Clearly another expedition to Tanna is in my future!

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- A. When Prince Philip is reincarnated on Tanna island in Vanuatu after his death, he will live in a specially built thatched hut similar to this one. (This will be a bit of a comedown from living in Windsor Castle, the largest inhabited castle in the world.) Over 200 pigs will be sacrificed in his honor, and sacred pigs with circular tusks will be provided to him for future feasts. His new rock/wife will live with him in the hut, and “have many children.”
- B. Prince Philip holds the sacred pig-killing and dance club given to him by the Prince Philip Tribe on Tanna. The Prince sent this photo back to the Tribe, which they took as proof that the Prince acknowledges that he was born on Tanna, not on Corfu in Greece.
- C. Chief Linlin Jack Naiua and his brother stand just outside the tree cave at the base of the village’s sacred ficus/banyan tree. In the cave they receive visions about their god, Prince Philip.

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