

## Galbulimima belgraveana - Agara

- Himantandraceae - Northeast Australia, Malasia



The use of *Galbulimima belgraveana* in Papua New Guinea has been reported in several popular books on psychoactive plants (BOCK in press; EMBODEN 1972; 1979; OTT 1993; 1996; RATSCH 1998; SCHULTES & HOFMANN 1979; 1980). The bark of *Galbulimima belgraveana* has been chewed with the leaves of an unidentified *Homalomena* sp. [Araceae] by the people of the Okapa region, Eastern Highlands (BARRAU 1958). The chewing of *Galbulimima belgraveana* bark (agara) and *Homalomena* sp. leaves (ereriba) has been reported to induce visions and a dream-like state (BARRAU 1958; HAMILTON 1960). Physical effects of chewing agara and eririba include violent tremor and miosis (DE SMET 1983:296; 1985). The violent tremors last for about an hour followed by a sense of calmness, euphoria and then drowsiness (DE SMET 1983:296; 1985).

*Galbulimima belgraveana* has also been used without *Homalomena* sp. leaves for divination and to produce trance-like states and visions among the Gimi people of the Eastern Highlands (GLICK 1963; 1967). The bark and also the leaves of *Galbulimima belgraveana* have been used among other groups of the Eastern Highlands to make young men fierce (POWELL 1976:150; WEBB 1960).

The people of Aseki in the south of Morobe Province use waga, the bark of *Galbulimima belgraveana*, as an analgesic by chewing the bark, spitting it out into a bowl, mixing salt with it and then swallowing it again to relieve pain (WOODLEY 1991).

The Oksapmin of the West Sepik Province use alusa, shredded *Galbulimima belgraveana* bark mixed with wild ginger (*Zingiber* sp. [Zingiberaceae]), in the treatment of diseases caused by sorcery and witchcraft (eg. fever, skin conditions and poisoning) (SKINGLE 1970). The Bimin-Kiskusmin of the West Sepik Province have also used *Galbulimima belgraveana* in ritual (POOLE 1984).

The use of *Galbulimima belgraveana* in indigenous medicine has been reported in Papua New Guinea (GLICK 1963; 1967; WEBB 1960; LEWIS & ELVIN-LEWIS 1977). Among the Gimi of the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea the bark of *Galbulimima belgraveana*, incorrectly identified as *Himantandra belgraveana* (GLICK 1967:45), is used in ethnomedicine to counteract malevolent power which is thought to be the cause of a variety of illnesses. When an illness is believed to be caused by sorcery, the Gimi seek the assistance of the aona bana ("man of power") who is regarded as having extraordinary natural healing abilities (GLICK 1967:45).

For the Gimi, the term aona has a variety of different meanings depending on the context of its use. For example, aona can mean "soul", "shadow", "vital force" or "familiar spirit" (GLICK 1967:45). Animals, plants and natural

phenomena are also thought of as possessing an aona. When people dream of an animal, plant or other natural phenomena, it is the aona that is believed to have manifested itself. After initially experiencing an aona, the Gimi expect to contact these same aona in dreams throughout the rest of their lives.

There is a symbolic correspondence of human aona with natural aona. Spiritual and symbolic bonds are created between people's iuna (plural of aona) and those of animals, plants and other natural phenomena which allows the transmission of attributes and qualities of the one to the other (GLICK 1967:45). Iuna are the source of information about difficult situations or future events which are revealed while in a trance-like state. The Gimi aona bana have chewed the bark of Galbulimima belgraveana to induce this trance-like state during which information is received from iuna (GLICK 1967:45).