

SMARTHISTORY OF ART X - OCEANIA



SmartHistory of Art
Smarthistory

9: Oceania

This text is disseminated via the Open Education Resource (OER) LibreTexts Project (<https://LibreTexts.org>) and like the thousands of other texts available within this powerful platform, it is freely available for reading, printing, and "consuming."

The LibreTexts mission is to bring together students, faculty, and scholars in a collaborative effort to provide an accessible, and comprehensive platform that empowers our community to develop, curate, adapt, and adopt openly licensed resources and technologies; through these efforts we can reduce the financial burden born from traditional educational resource costs, ensuring education is more accessible for students and communities worldwide.

Most, but not all, pages in the library have licenses that may allow individuals to make changes, save, and print this book. Carefully consult the applicable license(s) before pursuing such effects. Instructors can adopt existing LibreTexts texts or Remix them to quickly build course-specific resources to meet the needs of their students. Unlike traditional textbooks, LibreTexts' web based origins allow powerful integration of advanced features and new technologies to support learning.



LibreTexts is the adaptable, user-friendly non-profit open education resource platform that educators trust for creating, customizing, and sharing accessible, interactive textbooks, adaptive homework, and ancillary materials. We collaborate with individuals and organizations to champion open education initiatives, support institutional publishing programs, drive curriculum development projects, and more.

The LibreTexts libraries are Powered by [NICE CXone Expert](#) and was supported by the Department of Education Open Textbook Pilot Project, the California Education Learning Lab, the UC Davis Office of the Provost, the UC Davis Library, the California State University Affordable Learning Solutions Program, and Merlot. This material is based upon work supported by the National Science Foundation under Grant No. 1246120, 1525057, and 1413739.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation nor the US Department of Education.

Have questions or comments? For information about adoptions or adaptations contact info@LibreTexts.org or visit our main website at <https://LibreTexts.org>.

This text was compiled on 11/23/2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Licensing

1: Terracotta fragments, Lapita people

2: What is the impact and legacy of Cook's voyages?

3: Polynesia

- 3.1: Polynesia, an introduction
- 3.2: Voyage to the moai of Rapa Nui (Easter Island)
- 3.3: Easter Island Moai
- 3.4: Paikea at the American Museum of Natural History
- 3.5: Maori meeting house
- 3.6: Rurutu figure known as A'a
- 3.7: Fly Whisk (Tahiri), Austral Islands
- 3.8: Necklace (Lei Niho Palaoa), Hawai'i
- 3.9: Feather cape
- 3.10: Hiapo (tapa)
- 3.11: Gottfried Lindauer, Tamati Waka Nene
- 3.12: Presentation of Fijian Mats and Tapa Cloths to Queen Elizabeth II
- 3.13: Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe

4: Melanesia

- 4.1: Melanesia, an introduction
- 4.2: Ambum Stone
- 4.3: Mask (Buk), Torres Strait, Mabuiag Island
- 4.4: Presentation of Fijian Mats and Tapa Cloths to Queen Elizabeth II
- 4.5: Bis Poles at The Metropolitan Museum of Art
- 4.6: The Life of Malagan
- 4.7: Malagan at the British Museum

5: Micronesia

- 5.1: Navigation Chart, Marshall Islands
- 5.2: Wooden sculptures from Nukuoro
- 5.3: Kiribati armor
- 5.4: Nan Madol- "In the space between things"

6: Australia

[Index](#)

[Glossary](#)

[Detailed Licensing](#)

Licensing

A detailed breakdown of this resource's licensing can be found in [Back Matter/Detailed Licensing](#).

1: Terracotta fragments, Lapita people

by DR. JANE HORAN



Figure 1.1: Terracotta fragments, Lapita people, c. 1000 B.C.E., red-slip earthenware, Santa Cruz Islands, south-east of Solomon Islands (Department of Anthropology, University of Auckland, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0)

Archaeologists get very excited when they find pieces of Lapita pottery. Why? Because the sequential depositing of potsherds (fragments of pottery) in an easterly direction across the island groups of the Pacific has become the pivotal evidence that tells the extraordinary story of the peopling of the vast Pacific Ocean. Pieces of the distinctive red-slipped pottery of the Lapita people have been recovered from sites spanning thousands of miles across the Pacific from the outer reaches of Southeast Asia, through the island groups often referred to as Micronesia and Melanesia, and into the central Pacific and Polynesia.

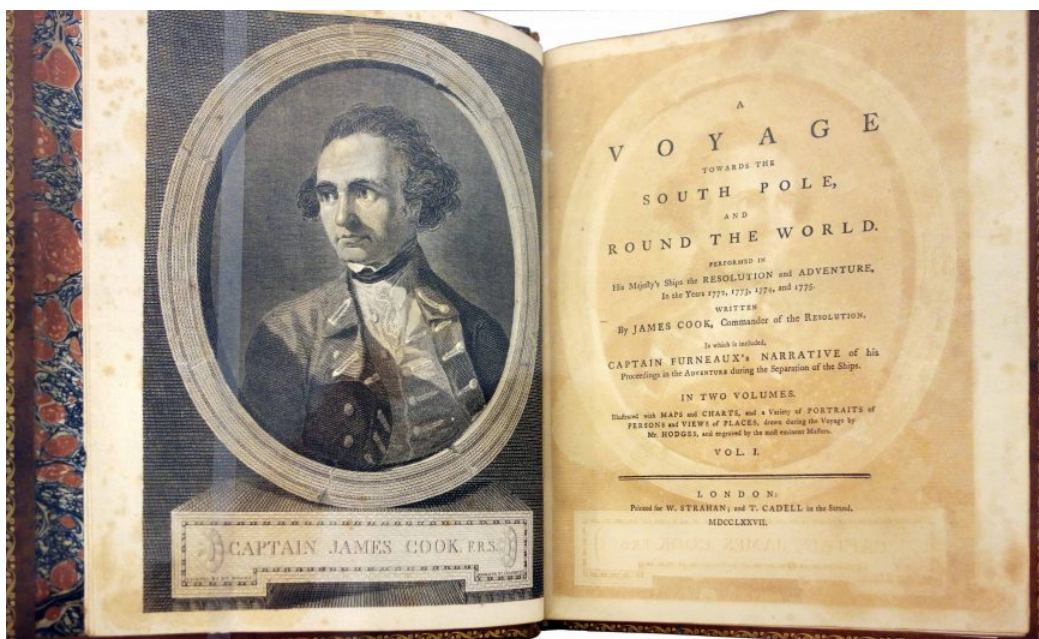


Figure 1.2: Captain James Cook, *A voyage towards the South Pole, and round the World. Performed in His Majesty's ships the Resolution and Adventure, in the years 1772, 1773, 1774, and 1775* (London: Printed for W. Strahan; and T. Cadell in the Strand. 1777) (photo: Daderot CC0 1.0)

An archaeological puzzle

Though Pacific Islanders have their own richly detailed historical accounts of the exploration of their “sea of islands,” European speculation about how and when the Pacific was populated began with James Cook and other European voyagers of the Enlightenment era (1700s).¹ Theories based on thin historical conjecture proliferated in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, often at odds with Islanders’ own knowledge systems. At first it was thought that the inhabitants of what is now known as Near Oceania colonized the islands southeast of the Solomon group, now referred to as Remote Oceania (see map below). It was not until archaeologists began to undertake stratigraphic archaeology in the Pacific from the 1950s onwards that this idea was debunked—mostly due to evidence provided by the multiple archaeological sites where Lapita pottery has been found.

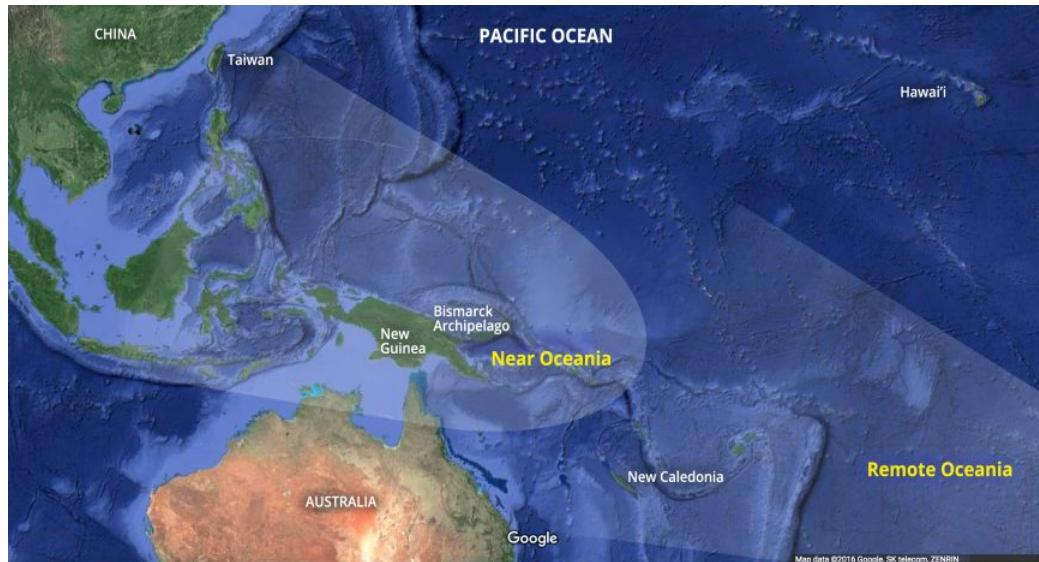


Figure 1.3

Archaeologists now believe that, somewhere between 4,000 and 3,500 years ago, a group of people who had sailed from the area around Taiwan in Southeast Asia arrived by canoe to the beaches of the Bismarck Archipelago. The new arrivals, who we now know as the Lapita people (named for the beach on the island of New Caledonia where a large number of pottery sherds were found), spoke a different language than the people they would have encountered there. These local people had been living on the large island now known as New Guinea and the surrounding islands for between 60,000 and 40,000 years.² Aside from their language and different genetic stock, the Lapita were different to those they encountered because they had sophisticated seafaring and navigation capability—and they manufactured and decorated ceramics in very particular ways. We can only theorize about the political and environmental pressures that drove these people to set out to sea in search of new places to live. Nevertheless, the pieces of broken but stylistically related potsherds distributed across thousands of miles of islands, laid down in datable stratigraphic layers, have revealed important information about the ancestors of the contemporary peoples of the central Pacific.



Figure 1.4: Terracotta fragments, Lapita people, red-slip earthenware, Watom Island, Bismarck Archipelago (photo: Merryjack CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

Travel and trade

Lapita pottery was shaped by hand, and perhaps using a paddle-and-anvil technique to thin the walls, but without the aid of a potter's wheel. It is low-fire earthenware (no evidence of Lapita kilns have been found). This means that the dry clay pots would likely have been placed in open fires to harden—the descendants of the Lapita people in Fiji and other areas still make pottery in this way. There is some geographical variation in the shapes and sizes of the pottery but most were simple bowls, some had pedestal feet, and others were flat-bottomed vessels. We know that the pottery was generally not used for cooking because carbon residues are not normally found on the potsherds. Rather, the evidence suggests that much of the pottery was used for serving food, while larger vessels were likely used for storage.



Figure 1.5

The makers of the Lapita pottery blended clay with a particular type of sand. The sand was needed as a temper to make the vessels more durable during firing. Both the clay and sand are only found in certain areas of the Pacific. The islands in Remote Oceania are far less diverse in terms of geology than those in Near Oceania, and only a limited number of island locations had deposits of the clay used to make the pottery.

Analysis of the composition of the sherds has revealed valuable information about where the raw materials came from. The archaeologist Terry Hunt has analyzed a large number of potsherds found by the archaeologist Patrick Kirch at Talepakemalai and other Mussau Lapita sites (see map above). The Mussau islands, which are mostly limestone, are one of the island groups with very little clay. Hunt showed that a large number of the potsherds found there had been made from materials brought from other places, indicating that either the raw materials or perhaps the pots themselves had been imported. This reveals that the Lapita people had the means and the need to travel and trade across significant ocean stretches—their “sea of islands.” Perhaps, the most remarkable thing about the Lapita pottery sherds is that despite the remaining sherds being found thousands of miles apart, they share a formal and discernible design grammar that archaeologists can analyze. In fact, it is the decoration of Lapita pottery that holds the greatest amount of information for archaeologists.



Figure 1.6: Terracotta fragments, n.d., Lapita people, red-slip earthenware ([Department of Anthropology, University of Auckland](#), CC BY-NC-ND 3.0)

A design grammar

The decoration of the pottery consists of stamped and incised motifs that adhere to a very regular, structured, and repeated set of specific patterns. The motifs were applied to the surface of the vessel with a small dentate (tooth-like) stamp and/or drawn free-hand with a sharp edge of some sort. The pattern stamps used included both linear and curved shapes of various lengths, as well as round forms. Once a pot was decorated, a paste of white coral lime was applied to the pattern which had the effect of making the delicate patterning stand out against the reddish-brown clay. Types of patterns range from simple to complex geometric forms, and include anthropomorphic face designs (image, top of page) found on Talepakemalai in the Mussau island group (see map above). The anthropomorphic pattern was a characteristic of early Lapita pottery, and is not present on pottery found in the upper (and therefore newer) archaeological layers of sites further east in Polynesia.

Archaeologists contend that those responsible for decorating the pots used a very restricted range of motifs and combined these in specific ways on particular areas of the pots. In other words, the ancient people who decorated the pots followed the rules of a defined design system. As Kirch notes “although we may never know what was in the minds of those potters and design-makers, we can understand in a more formal or structural sense their system of art and design, and use this as a tool for tracing the history of Lapita pottery in time and space.”³



Figure 1.7: Painted Barkcloth (*Masi kesa*), late 19th–early 20th century, Lau Islands, Fiji, 85.1 x 419.1 cm ([Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)) “The repeating geometric motifs of many tapa cloths at times resemble those seen on pottery produced by the Lapita peoples, who were the ancestors of present-day Polynesians.” ([object page](#))

A major breakthrough in the analysis of the Lapita design system came in the 1970s when Māori archaeologist Sydney Moko Mead developed a coherent formal system to categorize the design elements and motifs found on Lapita pottery. Mead’s system drew inspiration from linguistic analysis and has a set of components that form the building blocks of the “grammar” of the Lapita design system. These include: design elements, motifs, zone markers, and design fields. Even though the design system changed incrementally through time and within specific geographical areas as people moved across the Pacific, the underlying structural patterns and rules of the system remained the same. From an analytical point of view, the systemized grammar of design has meant that potsherds found in one site can be categorized and compared with others found in multiple other sites to provide evidence of the movement of the Lapita people in particular timeframes. What’s more, vestiges of the design motifs and the grammar of the system are apparent in contemporary tattooing, barkcloth decoration and other art forms throughout contemporary Remote Oceania (image above).

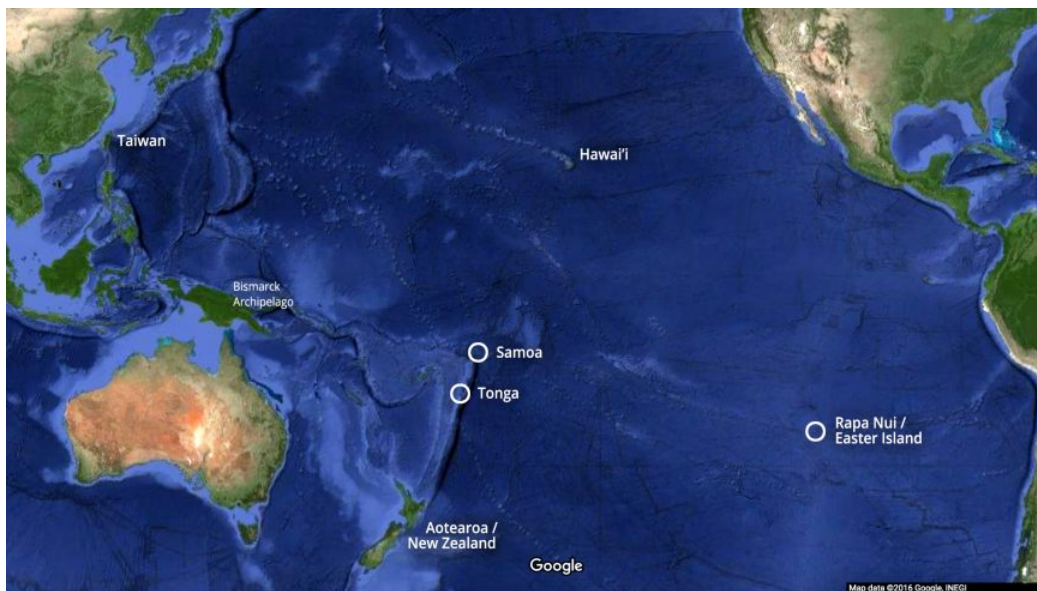


Figure 1.8

An extraordinary story

As the Lapita people moved east past the Bismarck archipelago they likely reached the Samoan and Tongan Island groups around 800 B.C.E. They then paused for 1200 years when another phase of colonization began, and people headed toward the most distant reaches of the Polynesian triangle. People arrived in Hawai'i by c. 1000 C.E., and Rapa Nui/Easter Island and Aotearoa/New Zealand by about 1200 C.E. For the most part, the further east the Lapita people headed, the simpler their patterns became. The most recent potsherds, found in the most easterly and south westerly locales, are minimally decorated. It seems that within a couple of hundred years of arriving in what are now Samoa and Tonga (see map above), Lapita pottery and its distinctive design decoration had all but disappeared. When Europeans arrived in the Pacific in the 1700s and 1800s, the ocean going long-distance seafaring canoes were gone, but the knowledge of distant islands and oral histories of voyaging remained. Archaeologists are still actively working to untangle the history of this early pottery, and with each successive discovery, to add to the extraordinary story of the Lapita people.

¹ In his seminal essay “**Our Sea of Islands**,” Tongan scholar Epeli Hau’ofa asserted “There is a gulf of difference between viewing the Pacific Islands as ‘islands in a far sea’ (as has been historically constructed by Europeans) to “a sea of islands.” Whereas the former emphasizes remoteness, the latter reinstates the ocean as a connector between all the people and islands of the Pacific; an oceanic highway in a region rich in resources. Epeli Hau’ofa, “Our Sea of Islands,” *A New Oceania: Rediscovering Our Sea of Islands* (Suva, Fiji: The University of the South Pacific, 1993), pp, 2-16.

² Kirch 2010.

³ Kirch 1997, p. 126.

Additional Resources:

Patrick Vinton Kirch, “Peopling of the Pacific: A Holistic Anthropological Perspective,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (2010), pp. 131-148.

Patrick Vinton Kirch, *On the Road of the Winds: An Archaeological History of the Pacific Islands before European Contact* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Patrick Vinton Kirch, *The Lapita Peoples: Ancestors of the Oceanic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997).

[Lapita pottery with a human face](#)

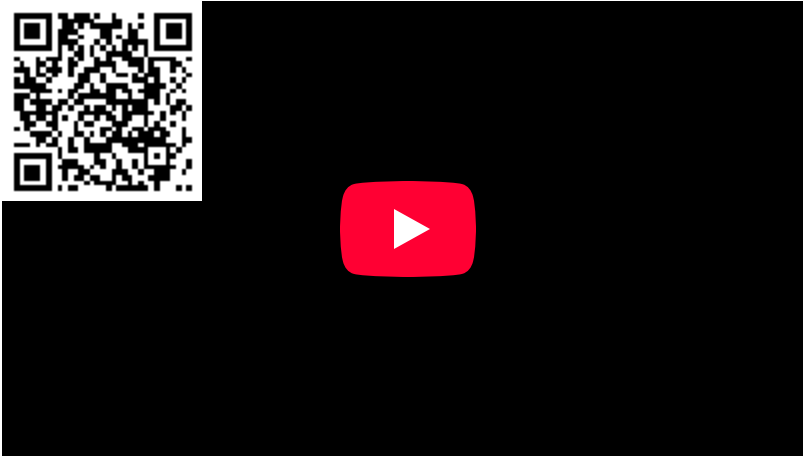
[Lapita pottery on Metropolitan Museum of Art Timeline of Art History](#)

[Pottery making Fiji style](#)

This page titled [1: Terracotta fragments, Lapita people](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

2: What is the impact and legacy of Cook's voyages?

by [THE BRITISH LIBRARY](#)



Video 2.1: In this film, historians, artists, anthropologists and members of the indigenous communities in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, consider contemporary perspectives on Cook's voyages and examine their legacy.

This page titled [2: What is the impact and legacy of Cook's voyages?](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

3: Polynesia

Polynesia (which means "many islands") is one of the three major categories created by Westerners to refer to the islands of the South Pacific.

c. 1200 B.C.E. - present

- 3.1: Polynesia, an introduction
- 3.2: Voyage to the moai of Rapa Nui (Easter Island)
- 3.3: Easter Island Moai
- 3.4: Paiea at the American Museum of Natural History
- 3.5: Maori meeting house
- 3.6: Rurutu figure known as A'a
- 3.7: Fly Whisk (Tahiri), Austral Islands
- 3.8: Necklace (Lei Niho Palaoa), Hawai'i
- 3.9: Feather cape
- 3.10: Hiapo (tapa)
- 3.11: Gottfried Lindauer, Tamati Waka Nene
- 3.12: Presentation of Fijian Mats and Tapa Cloths to Queen Elizabeth II
- 3.13: Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe

This page titled [3: Polynesia](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

3.1: Polynesia, an introduction

by *THE BRITISH MUSEUM*

*Oh Lono shake out a net-full of food,
A net-full of rain.
Gather them together for us.
Accumulate food, Oh Lono!
Collect fish, Oh Lono! (Hawaiian prayer to the God Lono)*

Many islands

The islands of the eastern Pacific are known as Polynesia, from the Greek for “many islands.” Set within a triangle formed by Aotearoa (New Zealand) in the south, Hawaii to the north and Rapa Nui (Easter Island) in the east, the Polynesian islands are dotted across the vast eastern Pacific Ocean. Though small and separated by thousands of miles, they share similar environments and were settled by people with a common cultural heritage. The western Polynesian islands of Fiji and Tonga were settled approximately 3,000 years ago, whilst New Zealand was settled as recently as 1200 C.E.

These people were exceptional boat builders and sailed across the Pacific navigating by currents, stars and cloud formations. They were skilled fishermen and farmers, growing fruit trees and vegetables and raising pigs, chickens and dogs. Islanders were also accomplished craftspeople and worked in wood, fibre and feathers to create objects of power and beauty.

They were poets, musicians, dancers and orators. Eleven closely-linked languages were spoken across the region. They were so similar that Tupaia, a Tahitian who joined Captain Cook on his first voyage, was able to converse with islanders more than two thousand miles away in New Zealand.



Figure \(\PageIndex{1}\): Figure of the war god Ku-ka'ili-moku, probably 1790-1810, C.E., 272 cm high, Hawai'i © Trustees of the British Museum

Their societies were hierarchical, with the highest ranking people tracing their descent directly from the gods. These gods were all powerful and present in the world. Images of them were created in wood, feathers, fibre and stone. One of the most important items in the Museum's collections is a carved wood figure of the Hawaiian god, Ku-ka'ilimoku, which stands over two and a half meters tall.

This large and intimidating figure was erected by King Kamehameha I, unifier of the Hawaiian islands at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. Kamehameha built a number of temples to his god, Ku-ka'ili-moku ('Ku, the snatcher of land'), in the Kona district, Hawai'i, seeking the god's support in his further military ambitions. The figure is likely to have been a subsidiary image in the most sacred part of one of these temples: not so much a representation of the god as a vehicle for the god to enter. Islanders grew fruit trees and used the wood to carve figures. This one depicts Ku, the "land snatcher." The figure is characteristic of the god Ku, especially by his disrespectful open mouth, but his hair, incorporating stylized pigs' heads, suggests an additional identification with the god Lono. The pigs' heads are possibly symbolic of wealth.

Today, Polynesian culture continues to develop and change, partly in response to colonialism. Whilst traditional methods and techniques continue to be employed by skilled carvers and weavers, other artists have achieved international success in new media.

© Trustees of the British Museum

This page titled [3.1: Polynesia, an introduction](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.2: Voyage to the moai of Rapa Nui (Easter Island)

by [DR. WAYNE NGATA](#) and [DR. STEVEN ZUCKER](#)



Video **3.2.1**: Moai of Rapa Nui (Easter Island), Waka Tapu, and the reclaiming of cultural heritage

These giant statues embody the ancients who first voyaged to Rapa Nui. Many were toppled; all lost their coral eyes.

This page titled [3.2: Voyage to the moai of Rapa Nui \(Easter Island\)](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.3: Easter Island Moai

by THE BRITISH MUSEUM



Figure 3.3.1: View of the northeast of the exterior slopes of the quarry, with several moai (human figure carving) on the slopes; a young South American man with a horse is standing in the foreground for scale, Easter Island, photograph, 8.2 x 8.2 cm © Trustees of the British Museum

The *moai* of Rapa Nui



Figure 3.3.2: Three views of *Hoa Hakananai'a* ('lost or stolen friend'), Moai (ancestor figure), c. 1200 C.E., 242 x 96 x 47 cm, basalt (missing paint, coral eye sockets, and stone eyes), likely made in Rano Kao, Easter Island (Rapa Nui), found in the ceremonial center Orongo © Trustees of the British Museum. This monumental carving of the head and torso of a man is almost twice life-size. The proportions are typical of these statues, with the head one-third of the total height.

Easter Island is famous for its stone statues of human figures, known as *moai* (meaning "statue"). The island is known to its inhabitants as Rapa Nui. The *moai* were probably carved to commemorate important ancestors and were made from around 1000 C.E. until the second half of the seventeenth century. Over a few hundred years the inhabitants of this remote island quarried, carved and erected around 887 *moai*. The size and complexity of the *moai* increased over time, and it is believed that *Hoa*

Hakananai'a (below) dates to around 1200 C.E. It is one of only fourteen moai made from basalt, the rest are carved from the island's softer volcanic tuff. With the adoption of Christianity in the 1860s, the remaining standing *moai* were toppled.

Their backs to the sea



Figure 3.3.3: Moai Hava (“Dirty statue” or “to be lost”), Moai (ancestor figure), c. 11-1600 C.E., 156 cm high, basalt, Easter Island (Rapa Nui) © Trustees of the British Museum

This example was probably first displayed outside on a stone platform (*ahu*) on the sacred site of Orongo, before being moved into a stone house at the ritual center of Orongo. It would have stood with giant stone companions, their backs to the sea, keeping watch over the island. Its eyes sockets were originally inlaid with red stone and coral and the sculpture was painted with red and white designs, which were washed off when it was rafted to the ship, to be taken to Europe in 1869. It was collected by the crew of the English ship HMS *Topaze*, under the command of Richard Ashmore Powell, on their visit to Easter Island in 1868 to carry out surveying work. Islanders helped the crew to move the statue, which has been estimated to weigh around four tons. It was moved to the beach and then taken to the *Topaze* by raft.

The crew recorded the islanders' name for the statue, which is thought to mean “stolen or hidden friend.” They also acquired another, smaller basalt statue, known as *Moai Hava* (left), which is also in the collections of the British Museum.

Hoa Hakananai'a is similar in appearance to a number of Easter Island *moai*. It has a heavy eyebrow ridge, elongated ears and oval nostrils. The clavicle is emphasized, and the nipples protrude. The arms are thin and lie tightly against the body; the hands are hardly indicated.



Figure 3.3.4: Bust (detail), *Hoa Hakananai'a* ('lost or stolen friend'), Moai (ancestor figure), c. 1200 C.E., 242 x 96 x 47 cm, basalt (missing paint, coral eye sockets, and stone eyes), likely made in Rano Kao, Easter Island (Rapa Nui), found in the ceremonial center Orongo © The Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 3.3.5: *Hoa Hakananai'a* ('lost or stolen friend'), Moai (ancestor figure), c. 1200 C.E., 242 x 96 x 47 cm, basalt (missing paint, coral eye sockets, and stone eyes), likely made in Rano Kao, Easter Island (Rapa Nui), found in the ceremonial center Orongo © The Trustees of the British Museum

In the British Museum, the figure is set on a stone platform just over a meter high so that it towers above the visitor. It is carved out of dark grey basalt—a hard, dense, fine-grained volcanic rock. The surface of the rock is rough and pitted, and pinpricks of light sparkle as tiny crystals in the rock glint. Basalt is difficult to carve and unforgiving of errors. The sculpture was probably commissioned by a high status individual.

Hoa Hakananai'a's head is slightly tilted back, as if scanning a distant horizon. He has a prominent eyebrow ridge shadowing the empty sockets of his eyes. The nose is long and straight, ending in large oval nostrils. The thin lips are set into a downward curve, giving the face a stern, uncompromising expression. A faint vertical line in low relief runs from the centre of the mouth to the chin. The jawline is well defined and massive, and the ears are long, beginning at the top of the head and ending with pendulous lobes.

The figure's collarbone is emphasized by a curved indentation, and his chest is defined by carved lines that run downwards from the top of his arms and curve upwards onto the breast to end in the small protruding bumps of his nipples. The arms are held close against the side of the body, the hands rudimentary, carved in low relief.

Later carving on the back

The figure's back is covered with ceremonial designs believed to have been added at a later date, some carved in low relief, others incised. These show images relating to the island's birdman cult, which developed after about 1400 C.E. The key birdman cult ritual was an annual trial of strength and endurance, in which the chiefs and their followers competed. The victorious chief then represented the creator god, Makemake, for the following year.



Figure 3.3.6: Back (detail), *Hoa Hakananai'a* ('lost or stolen friend'), Moai (ancestor figure), c. 1200 C.E., 242 x 96 x 47 cm, basalt (missing paint, coral eye sockets, and stone eyes), likely made in Rano Kao, Easter Island (Rapa Nui), found in the ceremonial center Orongo © The Trustees of the British Museum

Carved on the upper back and shoulders are two birdmen, facing each other. These have human hands and feet, and the head of a frigate bird. In the centre of the head is the carving of a small fledgling bird with an open beak. This is flanked by carvings of ceremonial dance paddles known as 'ao, with faces carved into them. On the left ear is another 'ao, and running from top to bottom of the right ear are four shapes like inverted 'V's representing the female vulva. These carvings are believed to have been added at a later date.

Collapse

Around 1500 C.E. the practice of constructing *moai* peaked, and from around 1600 C.E. statues began to be toppled, sporadically. The island's fragile ecosystem had been pushed beyond what was sustainable. Over time only sea birds remained, nesting on safer offshore rocks and islands. As these changes occurred, so too did the Rapanui religion alter—to the birdman religion.

This sculpture bears witness to the loss of confidence in the efficacy of the ancestors after the deforestation and ecological collapse, and most recently a theory concerning the introduction of rats, which may have ultimately led to famine and conflict. After 1838 at a time of social collapse following European intervention, the remaining standing *moai* were toppled.

Suggested readings:

S.R. Fischer, “Rapani’s Tu’u ko Iho versus Mangareva’a ‘Atu Motua: Evidence for Multiple Reanalysis and Replacement in Rapanui Settlement Traditions, Easter Island,” *Journal of Pacific History*, 29 (1994), pp. 3–48.

S. Hooper, *Pacific Encounters: Art and Divinity in Polynesia 1760-1860* (London, 2006).

A.L. Kaeppler, “Sculptures of Barkcloth and Wood from Rapa Nui: Continuities and Polynesian Affinities,” *Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 44 (2003), pp. 10–69.

R. Langdon, “New light on Easter Island Prehistory in a ‘Censored’ Spanish Report of 1770,” *Journal of Pacific History*, 30 (1995), pp. 112–120.

J.L. Palmer, “Observations on the Inhabitants and the Antiquaries of Easter Island,” *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, 1 (1869), pp. 371–377.

P. Rainbird, “A Message for our Future? The Papa Nui (Easter Island) Eco-disaster and Pacific Island Environments,” *World Archaeology*, 33 (2002), pp. 436–451.

J.A. Van Tilburg, and G. Lee, “Symbolic Stratigraphy, Rock Art and the Monolithic Statues of Easter Island,” *World Archaeology*, 19 (1987), pp. 133–149.

J.A. Van Tilburg, *Remote Possibilities: Hoa Hakananai’a and HMS Topaze on Rapa Nui* (London, 2006).

© Trustees of the British Museum

This page titled [3.3: Easter Island Moai](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.4: Paikea at the American Museum of Natural History

by [DR. WAYNE NGATA](#)

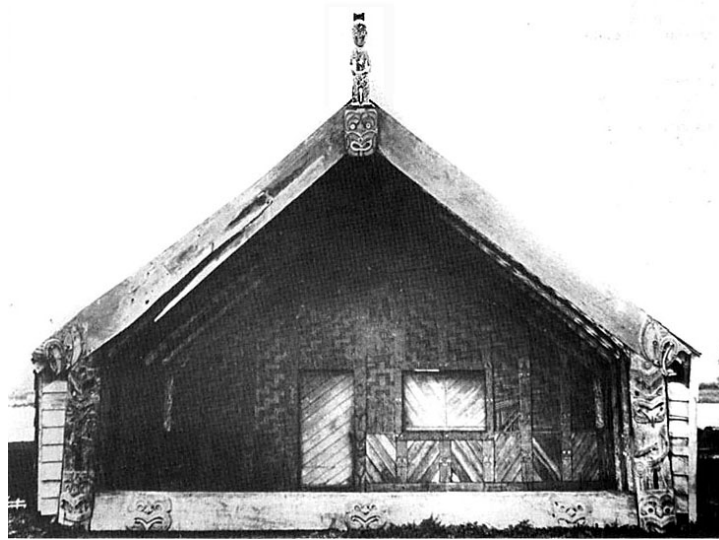


Figure 3.4.1: Photograph showing Paikea in its original location atop the Māori meeting house, Te Kani a Takirau, Uawa, Aotearoa (New Zealand)



Figure 3.4.2: Paikea, 19th c., wood, pigment, 64x42x19cm, photo: Jennifer Steffey, courtesy [AMNH](#)

During the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the trade in ethnic artifacts was rife, particularly where territories had been colonized by European powers. Thousands of artifacts of all descriptions from across the Pacific were traded legally and illegally, and many now reside in museums, private collections, and other institutions throughout the world—including an important sculpture of a Māori ancestor named Paikea (pronounced pie-kee-ah)

The Whale Rider

Paikea was an important ancestor of the Māori tribes in Uawa (Tolaga Bay) on the East Coast of the North Island of Aotearoa (New Zealand). He survived a marine disaster in the ancient Hawaiki homeland of the Māori in the Pacific Ocean, by invoking, through incantation, the denizens of the deep sea to come to his rescue and take him ashore. Paikea eventually made landfall at Ahuahu (Mercury Island) in Aotearoa (New Zealand). After several excursions to the south-east, Paikea eventually made his way to the mouth of the Waiapu River on the East Coast, married Hutarangi, and settled at Whangara. He is more popularly known throughout the world as “The Whale Rider,” from the movie of the same name.

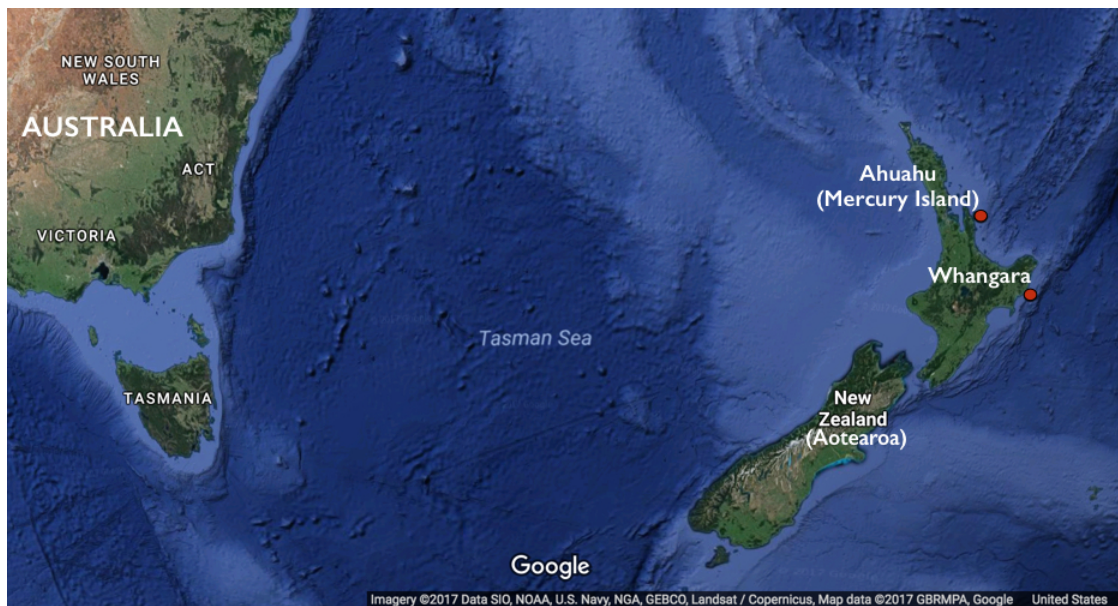


Figure 3.4.3

For his many descendants, Paikea is a key link to the ancient Hawaiiki homeland, as well as to the marine stories and body of seafaring knowledge, and to the tribal settlements on the eastern seaboard of both islands of Aotearoa (New Zealand). He is honored through songs, genealogy, stories, dances, novels, film, and art.

A house and a dance

Paikea's descendant, Te Kani a Takirau, was born 23 generations later, in about 1790. He was regarded throughout Māoridom as a leading *ariki*, a noble high-ranking person of his time. After Te Kani a Takirau's death in 1856, a carved house was built by his people at Uawa, and named after him (see photograph at the top of the page). The carved figure on top was named Paikea, and notable orators composed a *haka* (posture dance) for this occasion:

Uia mai koia whakahuatia ake	If it is asked
Ko wai te whare nei e?	What is the name of this house?
Ko Te Kani	It is Te Kani
Ko wai te tekoteko kei runga?	Who is the figurehead on top?
Ko Paikea, ko Paikea	It is Paikea, it is Paikea
Whakakau Paikea	Paikea transformed
Whakakau he tipua	Into an amazing being
Whakakau he taniwha	Into an awesome being
Ka ū Paikea ki Ahuahu, pakia!	And Paikea did come ashore at Ahuahu!
Kei te whitia koe ko Kahutiaturangi	Do not mistake him for Kahutiaturangi
E ai tō ure ki te tamahine a Te Whironui	He cohabited with the daughter of Te Whironui
Nāna i noho Te Rototahe	And resided at Te Rototahe
Auē, auē he koruru koe, e koro e!	You are there sire as the figurehead!

Table 3.4.1



Figure 3.4.4: Performance at the American Museum of Natural History, June 1, 2017

Since that time, six generations of Paikea’s descendants have performed this *haka*. For the past four generations it has also been performed as a *waiata ā-ringa*, an action song. In the last two generations it has developed into a novel—*The Whale Rider*, by Witi Ihimaera—which became the basis for the movie of the same name. This legacy now centers on another house: Whitireia at Whangara, on top of which Paikea sits on his whale. Children who are born into the legacy of Paikea “absorb” the *haka* and the *waiata ā-ringa* while growing up, performing it with peers, parents, and grandparents. It is a tribal marker, a rallying call, an expression of pride, and a reminder of our origins.



Figure 3.4.5: Documentary photograph of the Major-General Robley purchase, 1908 (Paikea is on the right), photo: Thomas Lunt, courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History

A century in storage

In 1908, the American Museum of Natural History acquired the Te Kani a Takirau Paikea from Major General Horatio Robley (British Army), a colonial collector of the time. Paikea was eventually placed on a storage shelf until 2013 when a small group of

Paikea's descendants of Te Aitanga a Hauiti, the tribe of Uawa, [arranged a visit to the museum](#) for the purpose of reconnecting with this ancestor figure—part of a bigger plan to reconstruct the house Te Kani a Takirau, physically or digitally.



Figure 3.4.6: With Paikea at the American Museum of Natural History, 16 April 2013, photo: Dr. B. Lythberg (the author is standing second from the left wearing a dark shirt)

It was an emotional visit: a mix of tearful reunion, immense pride and melancholy reflection. Coincidentally, the visit occurred at the same time as the [Whales \(Tohorā\) exhibition](#) at the museum, which allowed us to share our Paikea stories with members of the public, museum professionals, students, and others.

A token of love

Our parting with Paikea at the end of the week was difficult and tearful. As is our tradition, we left a gift with him as a token of our love: a carved whale tooth pendant sourced originally from a bull sperm whale that beached at Mahia in northern Hawkes Bay, New Zealand in 1967, which we secured around his neck. In doing so, we unknowingly transgressed museum acquisition protocols as well as international laws regarding trade in ivory, although we had done what was *tika*, or right, in our view. This provided an embarrassing conundrum for the museum curators who had hosted us, and so later that year the whale tooth was returned to us in New Zealand.



Figure 3.4.7: Pendant carved by Lance Ngata from the tooth of a bull sperm whale that beached at Mahia in northern Hawkes Bay, New Zealand in 1967

In 2017, as part of filming a documentary series “[Artefact](#)” and with the support of Greenstone TV, the American Museum of Natural History, and professional colleagues from Auckland University, we organized to return the whale tooth—legally this time—to Paikea, and make good our initial gift. Again, a small group of young people from Te Aitanga a Hauiti accompanied the whale tooth and once more the occasion, although shorter, was an emotional one. It was also an opportunity to consider repatriation again: both the process and the implications for the museum, and for Paikea’s descendants and their communities as well. This is what we will deliberate on over the next few months as we reflect on our experiences with this icon of our history and symbol of the colonial artifact trade.



Video 3.4.2

Additional resources:

[Paikea at the American Museum of Natural History](#)

Billie Lythberg, Jenny Newell, and Wayne Ngata, “Houses of Stories: The whale rider at the American Museum of Natural History,” *Museum and Society*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 195-220

[Listen to a native speaker say “Maori”](#)

This page titled [3.4: Paikea at the American Museum of Natural History](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.5: Maori meeting house

by THE BRITISH MUSEUM



Figure 3.5.1: Upper figure (detail), *House-board (amo)*, Maori, 1830-60 C.E., wood, haliotis shell, 152 x 43 x 15 cm, Poverty Bay district, New Zealand © Trustees of the British Museum

Marae



Figure 3.5.2: Josiah Martin, *Exterior of a Maori marae (community meeting house), Hinemihi, in the village of Te Wairoa, 1881*, albumen print, 15.3 x 20.5 cm © Trustees of the British Museum. Front of the house with carved end posts on either side of the veranda, maihi (carved barge-boards), raparapa (projecting boards at the end of the maihi), tekoteko (figurative carving at the front of the apex of the roof), koruru (carved mask depicting the ancestor the house is named for, placed below the tekoteko), pare (carved lintel above doorway window)

The Maori built meeting houses before the period of contact with Europeans. The early structures appear to have been used as the homes of chiefs, though they were also used for accommodating guests. They did not exist in every community. From the middle of the nineteenth century, however, they started to develop into an important focal point of local society. Larger meeting houses were built, and they ceased to be used as homes. The open space in front of the house, known as a *marae*, is used as an assembly ground. They were, and still are, used for entertaining, for funerals, religious and political meetings. It is a focus of tribal pride and is treated with great respect.

Pare

The meeting house is regarded as sacred. Some areas are held as more sacred than others, especially the front of the house. The lintel (*pare*) above the doorway is considered the most important carving, marking the passage from the domain of one god to that of another. Outside the meeting house is often referred to as the domain of Tumatauenga, the god of war, and thus of hostility and conflict. The calm and peaceful interior is the domain of Rongo, the god of agriculture and other peaceful pursuits.



Figure 3.5.3: Wooden openwork lintel (*pare*), c. late 1840s, wood stained black, haliotis shells, 131.5 x 43.5 x 5.5 cm, Bay of Plenty, North Island, New Zealand © Trustees of the British Museum. Three *wheku* figures, unsexed, with haliotis shell eyes, raised arms, surface decoration of spirals and *pakura*, separated and flanked by *takarangi* spirals. Solid base with bands *ofrauponga*, central *rauponga* spiral and two terminal *manaia* with haliotis-shell eyes under feet of outer *wheku* figures.

The example above illustrates one of the two main forms of door lintel. The three figures, with eyes inlaid with rings of haliotis shell, are standing on a base which symbolizes Papa or Earth. The scene refers to the moment of the creation of the world as the three figures push the sky god Rangi and earth apart. The three figures are Rangi and Papa's children, the central one probably representing Tane, god of the forests. The two large spirals represent light and knowledge entering the world. The lintel was probably carved in the Whakatane district of the Bay of Plenty in the late 1840s.

Amo



Figure 3.5.4: House-board (*amo*), Maori, 1830-60 C.E., wood, haliotis shell, 152 x 43 x 15 cm, Poverty Bay district, New Zealand © Trustees of the British Museum

This is a side post or *amo* from the front of a meeting house. A pair of *amo* would have supported the sloping barge boards of the house. The two carved figures represent named ancestors of the tribal group who owned the meeting house. The figures are male but the phalluses have been removed, probably after they were collected. Their eyes are inlaid with rings of haliotis shell. They are carved in relief with *rauponga* patterns, a style of Maori carved decoration in which a notched ridge is bordered by parallel plain ridges and grooves. Roger Neich, an expert on the subject of Maori carving, has identified the style of the carving of the post as that of the district of Poverty Bay in the East Coast area of the North Island.



Figure 3.5.5: Lower figure (detail), *House-board (amo)*, Maori, 1830-60 C.E., wood, haliotis shell, 152 x 43 x 15 cm, Poverty Bay district, New Zealand © Trustees of the British Museum

This is one of a group of seven carvings purchased from Lady Sudeley in 1894. They were collected in New Zealand by her uncle, the Hon. Algernon Tollemache, probably between 1850 and 1873. This board and another from the same collection form a pair.

Poutokomanawa figure



Figure 3.5.6: Head (detail), *Carved male figure* (from the base of a poutokomanawa), Maori, mid-19th century C.E., wood, haliotis shell, 85 x 26 x 18 cm, Hawkes Bay (?), New Zealand © Trustees of the British Museum



Figure \(\PageIndex{7}\): Carved male figure (from the base of *poutokomanawa*), Maori, mid-19th century C.E., wood, haliotis shell, 85 x 26 x 18 cm, Hawkes Bay (?), New Zealand © Trustees of the British Museum

This male figure is from the base of a *poutokomanawa*, an internal central post which supports the ridge-pole of a Maori meeting house. It represents an important ancestor of the tribal group which owned that house. The figure has fairly naturalistic features. It is clearly male, and has the typical Maori male hair topknot and a fully tattooed face. The eyes are inlaid with haliotis shell. The collar bone is carved as a raised ridge. The large hands have just three fingers each. This is not unusual, varying numbers of fingers are to be found on Maori carvings, and may be due to regional differences in style, rather than having a symbolic meaning.

The style of carving – the solidly proportioned body and large hands—is typical of the prominent Ngati Kahungunu school of carvers from the central Hawkes Bay district, in the mid-nineteenth century. The majority of Maori carving from this period is more stylized than this figure. This naturalistic style may have been intended to emphasize the social or human side of the ancestor represented.

The Maori meeting house increased in size and height during the nineteenth century, due partly to European influence. Consequently *poutokomanawa* figures increased in size until the largest were around two meters high.

Suggested readings:

J.C.H. King (ed.), *Human Image* (London, The British Museum Press, 2000).

D.R. Simmons, *te whare runanga: the Maori me* (Auckland, Reed Books, 1997).

D.C. Starzecka (ed.), *Maori Art and Culture*, 2nd ed. (London, The British Museum Press, 1998).

N. Thomas, *Oceanic Art* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1995).

© The Trustees of the British Museum

This page titled [3.5: Maori meeting house](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.6: Rurutu figure known as A'a

by [THE BRITISH MUSEUM](#)



Figure 3.6.1: Carved wooden figure known as A'a (two views), late 18th century C.E., hardwood, possibly pua, 117 cm high, Raiatea, Rurutu, Austral Islands, French Polynesia © The Trustees of the British Museum

A presentation to missionaries

In August 1821, a group of people from Rurutu in the Austral Islands, in the south-eastern Pacific Ocean, traveled north to the island of Ra'iatea in the Society Islands, to a London Missionary Society station. There, they presented to the missionaries a number of carved figures that represented their gods, as a symbol of their acceptance of Christianity. The population of Rurutu had all converted to Christianity in obedience to a decision made by their highest leaders. This figure was among those presented, and is described by one of the missionaries at the time, John Williams. It was taken into the London Missionary Society collections, brought to London in 1822, and subsequently sold to The British Museum in 1911.



Figure 3.6.2: Carved wooden figure known as A'a, late 18th century C.E., hardwood, possibly pua, 117 cm high, Raiatea, Rurutu, Austral Islands, French Polynesia © The Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 3.6.3: Carved wooden figure known as A'a (view with open back), late 18th century C.E., hardwood, possibly pua, 117 cm high, Raiatea, Rurutu, Austral Islands, French Polynesia © The Trustees of the British Museum

There is debate about which of the Rurutu gods this figure represents. John Williams identifies it as A'a. The god is depicted in the process of creating other gods and men: his creations cover the surface of his body as thirty small figures.

The figure itself is hollow; a removable panel on its back reveals a cavity which originally contained twenty-four small figures. These were removed and destroyed in 1882. Contemporary Rurutuans explain that the exterior figures correspond to the kinship groups that make up their society, and propose a number of theories about the relationship between the figure and Christianity. It is carved from hardwood, probably from pua (Fagraea).

“There is a Supreme God in the ethnological section”

Since it came to London the figure has attracted considerable attention, and it is widely regarded as one of the finest pieces of Polynesian sculpture still in existence. It influenced the sculptor Henry Moore, and is also the subject of a poem by William Empson (1906-84), “Homage to the British Museum,” quoted below:

*There is a Supreme God in the ethnological section;
A hollow toad shape, faced with a blank shield.
He needs his belly to include the Pantheon,
Which is inserted through a hole behind.
At the navel, at the points formally stressed, at the organs of sense,
Lice glue themselves, doll, local deities,
His smooth wood creeps with all the creeds of the world.

Attending there let us absorb the culture of nations
And dissolve into our judgement all their codes.
Then, being clogged with a natural hesitation
(People are continually asking one on the way out),
Let us stand here and admit that we have no road.
Being everything, let us admit that is to be something,
Or give ourselves the benefit of the doubt;
Let us offer our pinch of dust all to this God,
And grant his reign over the entire building.*

Recommended readings

J. Harding, "A Polynesian god and the missionaries," *Tribal Arts* (Winter 1994), pp. 27-32.

A. Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1998).

W.B. Fagg, *Tribal Image: Wooden Figure Sculpture of the World* (London, The British Museum Press, 1970).

© The Trustees of the British Museum

This page titled [3.6: Rurutu figure known as A'a](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.7: Fly Whisk (Tahiri), Austral Islands

by [DR. MAIA NUKU](#) and [DR. STEVEN ZUCKER](#)



Video **3.7.1**: Fly Whisk (*Tahiri*), Austral Islands, early to mid-19th century, wood, fiber, and human hair, 13 x 81.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979.206.1487). Speakers: Dr. Maia Nuku, Evelyn A. J. Hall and John A. Friede Associate Curator for Oceanic Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Dr. Steven Zucker

Ignore the Western name—spinning this object opened a channel of communication between ancestral and human realms.

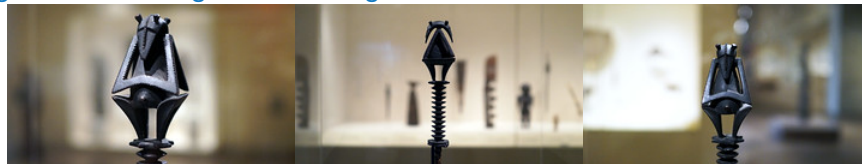
Additional resources:

[This work at The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

[Oceania: Art of the Pacific Islands in The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

[Oceania on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

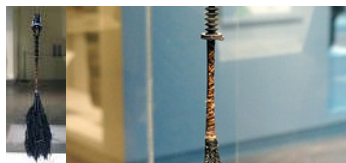
SmartHistory images for teaching and learning:



Click on image to enlarge picture (External links)



Click on image to enlarge picture (External links)



Click on image for larger picture (External link to flickr)



[Click on image to enlarge picture \(External links\)](#)

This page titled [3.7: Fly Whisk \(Tahiri\), Austral Islands](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.8: Necklace (Lei Niho Palaoa), Hawai'i

by [DR. BETH HARRIS](#) and [DR. MAIA NUKU](#)



Video **3.8.1**: Necklace (*Lei Niho Palaoa*), Hawai'i, early to mid-19th century, ivory, human hair, fiber, 4 1/4 x 16 in. / 10.8 x 40.6 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979.206.1623). Speakers: Dr. Maia Nuku, Evelyn A. J. Hall and John A. Friede Associate Curator for Oceanic Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Dr. Beth Harris.

This spectacular necklace pairs human hair with a sperm-whale tooth. Chiefs wore it to assert their divine right.

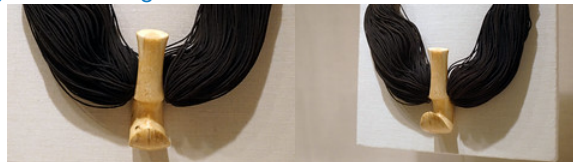
Additional resources:

[This work at The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

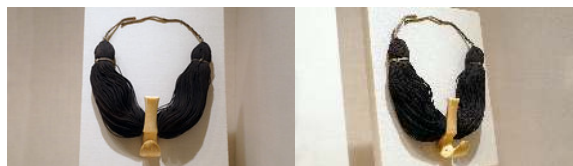
[Oceania: Art of the Pacific Islands in The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)

[Oceania on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

[SmartHistory images for teaching and learning:](#)



[Click on image for larger picture \(External link to flickr\)](#)



[Click on image to enlarge picture \(External links\)](#)

This page titled **3.8: Necklace (Lei Niho Palaoa), Hawai'i** is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- **9.3: Polynesia** by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.9: Feather cape

by [THE BRITISH MUSEUM](#)



Figure 3.9.1: Feather cape, probably before 1850 C.E., olona fibre, feather, 68.5 x 45 cm, Hawaii © Trustees of the British Museum

For ceremonies and battle

The Hawaiian male nobility wore feather cloaks and capes for ceremonies and battle. Such cloaks and capes were called 'ahu'ula, or "red garments." Across Polynesia the color red was associated with both gods and chiefs. In the Hawaiian Islands, however, yellow feathers became equally valuable, due to their scarcity. They consisted of olona (*Touchardia latifolia*) fibre netting made in straight rows, with pieces joined and cut to form the desired shape. Tiny bundles of feathers were attached to the netting in overlapping rows starting at the lower edge. The exterior of this example is covered with red feathers from the 'i'iwi bird (*Vestiaria coccinea*), yellow feathers from the 'o'o (*Moho nobilis*), and black feathers also from the 'o'o.

This small cape has a shaped neckline which would closely fit the wearer. This style of semi-circular cape is considered a later development from the trapezoidal shape. Large numbers of feathered cloaks and capes were given as gifts to the sea captains and their crews who were the earliest European visitors to Hawaii. Some of these attractive items would then have passed into the hands of the wealthy patrons who financed their voyages. It is not known who brought this particular cape to England.

Suggested readings:

P.H. Buck, *Arts and crafts of Hawaii* (Honolulu, Bishop Museum Press, 1957).

S. Phelps, *Art and artifacts of the Pacific* (London, Hutchinson, 1976).

© Trustees of the British Museum

This page titled [3.9: Feather cape](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.10: Hiapo (tapa)

by DR. CAROLINE KLARR

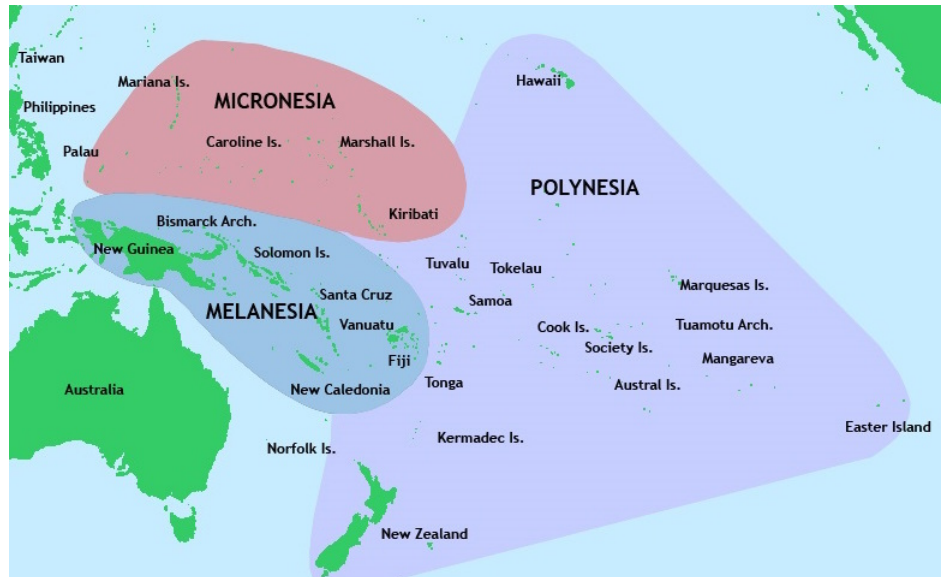


Figure 3.10.1

Polynesian history and culture

Polynesia is one of the three major categories created by Westerners to refer to the islands of the South Pacific. Polynesia means literally “many islands.” Our knowledge of ancient Polynesian culture derives from ethnographic journals, missionary records, archaeology, linguistics, and oral traditions. Polynesians represent vital art-producing cultures in the present day.

Each Polynesian culture is unique, yet the peoples share some common traits. Polynesians share common origins as Austronesian speakers (Austronesian is a family of languages). The first known inhabitants of this region are called the Lapita peoples. Polynesians were distinguished by long-distance navigation skills and two-way voyages on outrigger canoes. Native social structures were typically organized around highly developed aristocracies, and beliefs in primo-geniture (priority of the first-born). At the top of the social structure were divinely sanctioned chiefs, nobility, and priests. Artists were part of a priestly class, followed in rank by warriors and commoners.

Polynesian cultures value genealogical depth, tracing one’s lineage back to the gods. Oral traditions recorded the importance of genealogical distinction, or recollections of the accomplishments of the ancestors. Cultures held firm to the belief in *mana*, a supernatural power associated with high rank, divinity, maintenance of social order and social reproduction, as well as an abundance of water and fertility of the land. *Mana* was held to be so powerful that rules or taboos were necessary to regulate it in ritual and society. For example, an uninitiated person of low rank would never enter in a sacred enclosure without risking death. *Mana* was believed to be concentrated in certain parts of the body and could accumulate in objects, such as hair, bones, rocks, whale’s teeth, and textiles.

Gender roles in the arts

Gender roles were clearly defined in traditional Polynesian societies. Gender played a major role, dictating women’s access to training, tools, and materials in the arts. For example, men’s arts were often made of hard materials, such as wood, stone, or bone and men’s arts were traditionally associated with the sacred realm of rites and ritual.



Figure 3.10.2: Hawaiian kapa (barkcloth), 1770s, 64.5 x 129 cm (Te Papa, New Zealand)

Women's arts historically utilized soft materials, particularly fibers used to make mats and bark cloth. Women's arts included ephemeral materials such as flowers and leaves. Cloth made of bark is generically known as *tapa* across Polynesia, although terminology, decorations, dyes, and designs vary through out the islands.

Bark cloth as women's art

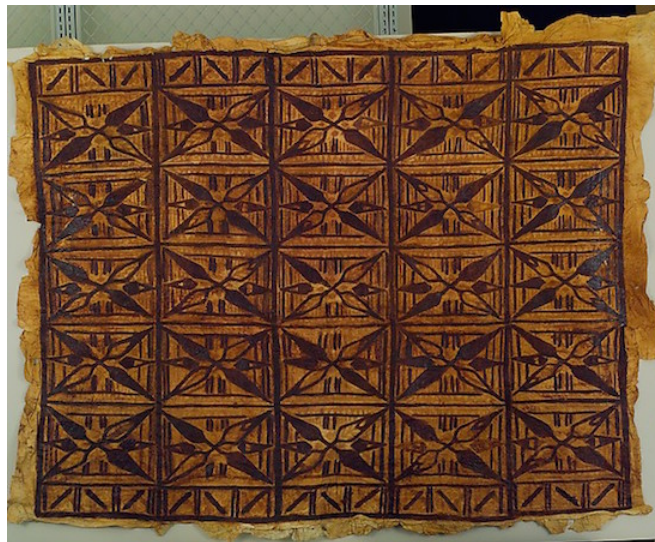


Figure 3.10.3: Barkcloth Panel (Siapo), Samoa, early 20th century, 139.7 x 114.3 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art)

Generally, to make bark cloth, a woman would harvest the inner bark of the paper mulberry (a flowering tree). The inner bark is then pounded flat, with a wooden beater or *ike*, on an anvil, usually made of wood. In Eastern Polynesia (Hawai'i), bark cloth was created with a felting technique and designs were pounded into the cloth with a carved beater. In Samoa, designs were sometimes stained or rubbed on with wooden or fiber design tablets. In Hawai'i patterns could be applied with stamps made out of bamboo, whereas stencils of banana leaves or other suitable materials were used in Fiji. Bark cloth can also be undecorated, hand decorated, or smoked as is seen in Fiji. Design illustrations involved geometric motifs in an overall ordered and abstract patterns.



Figure 3.10.4: Masi (tapa cloth), likely used as a room divider, Fiji, date unknown, 300 x 428 cm (Te Papa, New Zealand)

The most important traditional uses for *tapa* were for clothing, bedding and wall hangings. Textiles were often specially prepared and decorated for people of rank. *Tapa* was ceremonially displayed on special occasions, such as birthdays and weddings. In sacred contexts, *tapa* was used to wrap images of deities. Even today, at times of death, bark cloth may be integral part of funeral and burial rites.



Figure 3.10.5: Barkcloth strip, Fiji, c. 1800-50, worn as a loin cloth, decorated with a combination of free-hand painting, cut out stencils and by being laid over a patterned block and rubbed with pigment (The British Museum)

In Polynesia, textiles are considered women's wealth. In social settings, bark cloth and mats participate in reciprocity patterns of cultural exchange. Women may present textiles as offerings in exchange for work, food, or to mark special occasions. For example, in contemporary contexts in Tonga, huge lengths of bark cloth are publically displayed and ceremoniously exchanged to mark special occasions. Today, western fabric has also been assimilated into exchange practices. In rare instances, textiles may even accumulate their own histories of ownership and exchange.

Hiapo: Niuean bark cloth



Figure 3.10.6: Tiputa (Poncho), 19th century, Niue (Te Papa, New Zealand), photo: CC BY-NC-ND

Niue is an island country south of Samoa. Little is known about early Niuean bark cloth or *hiapo*, as represented by the illustration depicted below. Niueans' first contact with the west was the arrival of Captain Cook, who reached the island in 1774. No visitors followed for decades, not until 1830, with the arrival of the London Missionary Society. The missionaries brought with them Samoan missionaries, who are believed to have introduced bark cloth to Niue from Samoa. The earliest examples of *hiapo* were collected by missionaries and date to the second half of the nineteenth century. Niuean *ponchos* (*tiputa*) collected during this era, are based on a style that had previously been introduced to Samoa and Tahiti (see example at left). It is probable, however, that Niueans had a native tradition of bark cloth prior to contact with the West.

In the 1880s, a distinctive style of *hiapo* decorations emerged that incorporated fine lines and new motifs. *Hiapo* from this period are illustrated with complicated and detailed geometric designs. The patterns were composed of spirals, concentric circles, squares, triangles, and diminishing motifs (the design motifs decrease in size from the border to the center of the textile). Niueans created naturalistic motifs and were the first Polynesians to introduce depictions of human figures into their bark cloth. Some *hiapo* examples include writing, usually names, along the edges of the overall design.



Figure 3.10.7: Hiapo (tapa), Niue, c. 1850–1900, Tapa or bark cloth, freehand painting (Auckland War Memorial Museum)

Niuan *hiapo* stopped being produced in the late nineteenth century. Today, the art form has a unique place in history and serves to inspire contemporary Polynesian artists. A well-known example is Niuean artist John Pule, who creates art of mixed media inspired by traditional *hiapo* design.

Tapa today

Tapa traditions were regionally unique and historically widespread throughout the Polynesian Islands. Eastern Polynesia did not experience a continuous tradition of tapa production, however, the art form is still produced today, particularly in the Hawaiian and the Marquesas Islands. In contrast, Western Polynesia has experienced a continuous tradition of tapa production. Today, bark cloth participates in native patterns of celebration, reciprocity and exchange, as well as in new cultural contexts where it inspires new audiences, artists, and art forms.

Additional resources:

The Hiapo (tapa) from Niue in the Auckland War Memorial Museum

[Work by John Pule in the Google Art Project](#)

[Bark cloth on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

[Polynesia, 1900 to the present on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

Adrienne L Kaeppler, *The Pacific Arts of Polynesia and Micronesia* (Oxford History of Art: Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York, 2008).

Roger Neich and Mick Pendergrast, *Traditional Tapa: Textiles of the Pacific* (Thames and Hudson Ltd.: London, 1997).

Simon Kooijman, *Polynesian Barkcloth* (Shire Ethnography: Aylesbury, U.K., 1988).

John Pule and Nicolas Thomas, *Hiapo Past and Present in Niuean Barkcloth* (University of Otago Press: Dunedin, Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2005).

Karen Stevenson, *The Frangipani is Dead: Contemporary Pacific Art in New Zealand 1985-2000* (Wellington: Aotearoa/New Zealand, 2008).

This page titled [3.10: Hiapo \(tapa\)](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.11: Gottfried Lindauer, Tamati Waka Nene

by [DR. BILLIE LYTHBERG](#)

Ancestor portraits

We all know portraits can be of ancestors, but can a portrait be an ancestor?

 Gottfried Lindauer, Tamati Waka Nene, 1890, oil on canvas, 101.9 x 84.2 cm (Auckland Art Gallery)

Figure 3.11.1: Gottfried Lindauer, *Tamati Waka Nene*, 1890, oil on canvas, 101.9 x 84.2 cm (Auckland Art Gallery)

In *Te Ao Māori*, the Māori world, they can. Paintings like this one—and even photographs—do two important things. They record likenesses and bring ancestral presence into the world of the living. In other words, this portrait is not merely a representation of Tamati Waka Nene, it can be an embodiment of him. Portraits and other *taonga tuku iho* (treasures passed down from the ancestors) are treated with great care and reverence. After a person has died their portrait may be hung on the walls of family homes and in the *wharehau* (the central building of a community center), to be spoken to, wept over, and cherished by people with genealogical connections to them. Even when portraits like this one, kept in the collection of the Auckland Art Gallery, are absent from their families, the stories woven around them keep them alive and present. Auckland Art Gallery acknowledges these living links through its [relationships with descendants](#) of those whose portraits it cares for. The Gallery seeks their advice when asked for permission to reproduce such portraits. This portrait has been published in the [Google Art Project](#), which is why we can look at it here.

Tamati Waka Nene

Māori are the indigenous people of New Zealand. The subject of this portrait, Tamati Waka Nene, was a *Rangatira* or chief of the Ngāti Hao people in [Hokianga](#), of the Ngāpuhi iwi or tribe, and an important war leader. He was probably born in the 1780s, and died in 1871. He lived through a time of rapid change in New Zealand, when the first British missionaries and settlers were arriving and changing the Māori world forever. An astute leader and businessman, Nene exemplified the types of changes that were occurring when he converted to the Wesleyan faith and was baptised in 1839, choosing to be named Tamati Waka after Thomas Walker, who was an English merchant patron of the Church Missionary Society. He was revered throughout his life as a man with great mana or personal efficacy. What is Wesleyanism?

Figure 3.11.2: Paua eye in tewhatewha (detail), Gottfried Lindauer, *Tamati Waka Nene*, 1890, oil on canvas, 101.9 x 84.2 cm (Auckland Art Gallery)

In his portrait, Nene wears a *kahu kiwi*, a fine cloak covered in kiwi feathers, and an earring of greenstone or pounamu. Both of these are prestigious *taonga* or treasures. He is holding a hand weapon known as a *tewhatewha*, which has feathers adorning its blade and a finely carved hand grip with an abalone or paua eye (image above). All of these mark him as man of *mana* or personal efficacy and status. But perhaps the most striking feature for an international audience is his intricate facial tattoo, called *moko*.

Figure 3.11.3: Detail, Gottfried Lindauer, *Tamati Waka Nene*, 1890, oil on canvas, 101.9 x 84.2 cm (Auckland Art Gallery)

Lindauer was a Czech artist who arrived in New Zealand in 1873 after a decade of painting professionally in Europe. He had studied at the Academy of Fine Art in Vienna from 1855 to 1861, and learned painting techniques rooted in Renaissance naturalism. When he left the Academy he began working as a portrait painter, and established his own portrait studio in 1864. Just ten years later he arrived in New Zealand and quickly became acquainted with a man called Henry Partridge who became his patron. Partridge commissioned Lindauer to paint portraits of well-known Māori, and three years later, in 1877, Lindauer held an exhibition in Wellington. The exhibition was important because it demonstrated Lindauer's abilities and he was soon being commissioned by Māori chiefs to paint their portraits. Lindauer took different approaches to his commissions depending on who was paying. He tended to paint well-known Māori in Māori clothing for European purchasers, but painted unknown Māori in everyday European clothing when commissioned by their families to do so. His paintings are realistic, convincingly three-dimensional, and play beautifully with the contrast between light and shadow, causing his subjects to glow against their dark backgrounds. As his patron, Partridge amassed a large collection of portraits as well as large scale depictions that re-enacted Māori ways of life that were thought to be disappearing. In 1915, Partridge gave his collection of 62 portraits to the Auckland Art Gallery—the largest collection of Lindauer paintings in the world.



Figure 3.11.4: “New Zealand—The Battle of Mahoetahi,” *The Illustrated London News*, January 19, 1861, page 67 with engraving from John Crombie photograph of Tamati Waka Nene

Painting Tamati Waka Nene

If you’ve been paying attention to dates you will have noticed that Nene died in 1871 but Lindauer didn’t arrive in New Zealand until 1873, and didn’t paint his portrait until 1890. It is likely that Lindauer based this portrait on a photograph taken by John Crombie, who had been commissioned to produce 12 photographic portraits of Māori chiefs for *The London Illustrated News* (image above). There are several [other photographs](#) of Nene, and in 1934 Charles F Goldie—another famous portrayer of Māori—painted yet another portrait of him from a photograph. So Nene didn’t sit for either of his famous painted portraits, but clearly sat for photographic portraits in the later years of his life. These were becoming more common by 1870, due to developments in photographic methods that made the whole process easier and cheaper. Many Māori had their portraits taken photographically and produced as a *carte de visite*, roughly the size of a playing card, and some had larger, postcard sized images made, called cabinet portraits. Lindauer is thought to have used a device called an epidiascope to enlarge and project small photographs such as these so he could paint them.

Lindauer didn’t make many sketches. He worked straight onto stretched canvas, outlining his subjects in pencil over a white background before applying translucent paints and glazes. Through the thinly painted surface of some of his works you can still see traces of pencil lines that may be evidence of his practice of outlining projected images. But Lindauer wasn’t simply copying photographs. In the 1870s, color photography had yet to be invented—Lindauer was working from black and white images and reimagining them in color. Moreover, sometimes he dressed his sitters—and those he painted from photos—in borrowed garments and adorned them with *taonga* that were not necessarily theirs. Thus some of his works contain artistic interventions rather than being entirely documentary.

Additional resources:

This painting at the Auckland Art Gallery

[Lindauer Online](#)

Behind the Brush—TV Documentary Series on Lindauer’s Māori portraits

[Moko, Encyclopedia of New Zealand](#)

This page titled [3.11: Gottfried Lindauer, Tamati Waka Nene](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.12: Presentation of Fijian Mats and Tapa Cloths to Queen Elizabeth II

by [DR. JENNIFER WAGELIE](#)



Figure 3.12.1: Presentation of Fijian mats and tapa cloths to Queen Elizabeth II during the 1953-54 royal tour, silver gelatin print, 16.5 x 22 cm (Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand)

A procession for a royal visit

On December 17, 1953, a newly crowned Queen Elizabeth II and her husband Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, arrived on the island of Fiji, then an English colony, and stayed for three days before continuing on their first tour of the Commonwealth in the Pacific Islands.

The Commonwealth of Nations, today commonly known as the Commonwealth, but formerly the British Commonwealth, is an intergovernmental organization of 53 member states that were mostly territories of the former British Empire.

While the precise date of the photograph depicted above is unknown, there is still much that can be learned both about Fijian art and culture and the Queen's historic visit. The first thing you might notice in the photograph is the procession of Fijian women making their way through a group of seated Fijian men and women.

Barkcloth

Several of the processing women are wearing skirts made of barkcloth painted with geometric patterns. Barkcloth, or *masi*, as it is referred to in Fiji, is made by stripping the inner bark of mulberry trees, soaking the bark, then beating it into strips of cloth that are glued together, often by a paste made of arrowroot. Bold and intricate geometric patterns in red, white, and black are often painted onto the *masi*. The practice of making *masi* continues in Fiji, where the cloth is often presented as gifts in important ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, or to commemorate significant events, such as a visit by the Queen of England. While in this photograph, the *masi* is only worn by the women and not carried, as far as can be ascertained in this picture; it is very likely that the women also presented the cloth to the Queen to celebrate the occasion of her visit.



Figure 3.12.2: Masi (bark cloth), Fiji (Auckland War Memorial Museum, accession no. 1990.54)

Mats

What is definitely evident from the photograph are the rolls of woven mats that each woman in the procession carries. Like masi, Fijian mats served and continue to serve an important purpose in Fijian society as a type of ritual exchange and tribute. Made by women, Fijian mats are begun by stripping, boiling, drying, blackening, and then softening leaves from the Pandanus plant. The dried leaves are then woven into tight, often diagonal patterns that culminate in frayed or fringed edges.



Figure 3.12.3: Mat, Fiji (Auckland War Memorial Museum, accession no. 1993.29)



Figure 3.12.4: Bure kalou, Fiji, 81 x 38 cm ([Australian Museum](#))

While the mats that the women in this photograph are carrying may seem too plain to present to the Queen of England, their simplicity is an indication of their importance. In Fiji, the more simple the design, the more meaningful its function. Fijian artists continue to create mats and it is a practice that is growing, with many mats being sold at market, often to tourists. With the advent of processed pandanus, they are more widely available than *masi*, and used heavily in wedding and funeral rituals.

In addition to *masi* and mats, Fijian art also includes elaborately carvings made of wood or ivory, as well as small woven god houses called *bure kalou* (left), which provided a pathway for the god to descend to the priest.

The Queen's itinerary

Returning to the Queen's visit in 1953, while in Fiji she visited hospitals and schools and held meetings with various Fijian politicians. She witnessed elaborate performances of traditional Fijian dances and songs and even participated in a *kava* ceremony, which was (and continues to be) an important aspect of Fijian culture. The *kava* drink is a kind of tea made from the *kava* root and is sipped by members of the community, in order of importance. On the occasion of the Queen's visit, she was, as you might imagine, given the first sip of *kava*. In thinking about the importance of the *kava* ceremony, consider what might happen if everyone from a large group takes a sip from the same cup and of the same liquid. Although sipped in order of hierarchical importance, it would, in the end, put everyone in the group on the same level before beginning the event, meeting, or ceremony.

After three days on the island of Fiji, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip departed for the Kingdom of Tonga where they stayed for two days before leaving for extended stays in New Zealand and Australia. On Tonga, they were greeted warmly by Queen Sālote and other members of the royal Tongan family. On the occasion of her visit to Tonga, an enormous barkcloth was commissioned in Queen Elizabeth's honor and had her initials, "ERIII," painted onto the rare piece of *ngatu*. Referred to as *ngatu launima* in Tongan, it is just shy of 75 feet in length and is significant not only because it commemorated Queen Elizabeth's visit, but also because it was placed under the coffin of Queen Sālote when her body was flown back to Tonga in 1960 after an extended stay in a New Zealand hospital. The barkcloth is [now in the collection of Te Papa Tongarewa/Museum of New Zealand](#), after being donated by the pilot who had flown Queen Sālote's body back to Tonga, to whom the barkcloth had been given by the Tongan Royal Family.

Additional resources:

This photograph in the National Library of New Zealand

[Short film on Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Fiji, December 1953](#)

[Short film on Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Tonga, December 1953](#)

[Photographs of Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Fiji, December 1953](#)

[Information on the barkcloth commissioned in Queen Elizabeth II's honor](#)

[More information on barkcloth or tapa](#)

Rod Ewins, *Mat-Weaving in Gau, Fiji* (Fiji Museum Special Publication, 1982).

———. *Staying Fijian: Vatulele Island Barkcloth and Social Identity* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2006).

———. *Traditional Fijian Artifacts* (Nubeena, Tasmania: Just Pacific, 2014).

J.W. Sykes, *The Royal Visit to the Colony of Fiji of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh* (December 1953).

This page titled [3.12: Presentation of Fijian Mats and Tapa Cloths to Queen Elizabeth II](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

3.13: Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe

by DR. BILLIE LYTHBERG



Figure 3.13.1: Michel Tuffery, *Pisupo Lua Afe* (Corned Beef 2000), 1994, flattened cans of corned beef (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Collection) ©Michael Tuffery

What can a tin can bull teach us about ecological and population health issues in the Pacific? Michel Tuffery is one of New Zealand's best-known artists of Pacific descent, with links to Samoa, Rarotonga and Tahiti. He majored in printmaking at Dunedin's School of Fine Arts, and describes art quite literally as his first language because he didn't read, write or speak until he was 6 years old. Encouraged instead to express himself through drawing, he now aims artworks like *Pisupo Lua Afe* primarily at children, hoping to engage their curiosity and inspire them to care for both their own health and that of the environment.

Pisupo Lua Afe is one of Tuffery's most iconic works, made from hundreds of flattened corned beef tins, riveted together to form a series of life-sized bulls. Despite evident connections to Pop Art, especially Andy Warhol's celebrations of the humble *Campbell's Soup Cans* (1962), it's impossible to read this work solely in the terms of Western art history. So what is Tuffery trying to tell us?

Pisupo—canned food in the Pacific

Pisupo is the Samoan language version of "pea soup," which was the first canned food introduced into the Pacific Islands. *Pisupo* is now a generic term used to describe the many types of canned food that are eaten in the Islands—including corned beef. Not only is corned beef a favorite food source in the Islands, it has also become a ubiquitous part of the ceremonial gift economy. At weddings and birthdays, and other important life events both in the Islands and in Islander communities in New Zealand, gifts of treasured textiles like fine mats and decorated barkcloths are made alongside food items and cash money. But unlike the Island feast foods gifted at these events—such as pigs and large quantities of root vegetables—canned corned beef is a processed food high in saturated fat, salt and cholesterol (a type of fat that clogs arteries). These are all things that contribute to disproportionately high incidences of diabetes and heart disease in Pacific Island populations as diets formerly high in locally grown fruits and vegetables, seafood, coconut milk and flesh, give way to cheap, imported foodstuffs.

So Tuffery's sculpture is impossible to separate from the ceremonies at which brightly colored tins of corned beef now figure in large quantities. But these links to traditional economic exchanges and population health only tell part of the story. *Pisupo Lua Afe* also critiques serious issues of ecological health and food sovereignty. Tuffery is interested in the introduction of cattle to New Zealand and the Pacific Islands and how they impact negatively on the plants, landscapes and waterways of these countries, as well as how industrialized approaches to farming disrupt traditional food production.



Figure 3.13.2: Head of bull (detail), Michel Tuffery, *Pisupo Lua Afe (Corned Beef 2000)*, 1994, flattened cans of corned beef (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Collection) ©Michael Tuffery

Look at *Pisupo Lua Afe*. It's literally a "tinned bull"—solid, hard-edged and weighty. Whereas a real cow has a visual softness suggested by its movements, eyes and coat, Tuffery's tin cans and rivets—overlapping like large metal scales— better convey the capacity of beef and dairy cattle to destroy fragile island eco-systems. Look closer—single out just one flattened can. Think about all the cans that were emptied to make *Pisupo Lua Afe*. Then think about all the cans that are emptied and discarded in the Pacific Islands each year. Tuffery is gesturing rather obviously towards the challenge of rubbish disposal in Island economies where creative "upcycling" of materials into new objects is often more common than the civic recycling regimes of larger cities and countries (upcycling refers to reusing discarded objects to create a product of a higher value). What use is there for thousands of empty tin cans? And what use are foods that cause ill health, damage the environment, and take up large swathes of land formerly used to grow healthier, indigenous foods? Especially when the Pacific Island nations under Tuffery's scrutiny are recipients of some of the worst products of such agricultural farming: fatty lamb flaps and turkey tails, and tinned corned beef.

Food sovereignty

Food sovereignty (sometimes called food security) is a great lens through which to view the various threads of traditional economic exchanges, population health, environmental degradation and industrialized food production introduced so far. Food sovereignty is the right of a nation and its peoples to decide who controls how, where and by whom their food is to be produced, and what that food will be. For Indigenous peoples in the Pacific, food and the environment are sacred gifts. There cannot be food sovereignty without control over food production and ownership, and without appropriate care of the environment.

Alongside *Pisupo Lua Afe* and his other tin can bulls, Tuffery has produced many artworks that address challenges to food sovereignty and the continued exploitation of Pacific Island resources, including the [taro leaf blight epidemic](#) in Samoa in 1993, and [drift net fishing](#) that is depleting fish stocks. For example, he's made fish tin sculptures, like his "tinned bull," which upcycle cans that hold another "staple" food in the Pacific: tinned mackerel. Tuffery made two of these for an exhibition called [Le Folauga](#), shown in Auckland, New Zealand in 2007, which are now in the collection of the Auckland War Memorial Museum.



Figure 3.13.3: Michel Tuffery, *Asiasi [Yellowfin] II (2000)*, fish cans, copper, aluminium and polyurethane, 60 x 250 x 100 cm (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa Collection) ©Michael Tuffery

In the exhibition's catalogue he explained:

O le Saosao Lapo'a and Asiasi I reflect on the ironic and irreversible impact that over-fishing and exploitation of the Pacific's natural resources has wrought on the traditional Pacific lifestyle. This includes changing virtually overnight the dietary habits of generations.

Is it co-incidental that significantly increasing health and dietary problems amongst Pacific Islanders has occurred during the same period that their premium fisheries catches are exported? And at the same time locals have experienced explosive growth of canned & other imported products flooding into the Pacific?

Tuffery states the aims of his works very clearly. His fish tin sculptures are perhaps even more interesting and evocative because they are also functional fish-smokers used to cure and preserve fish. They have been used in this way at his exhibition openings, bringing a smoky, wood- and fish-scented haze to the gallery experience.

Firebreathing bulls?

Tuffery has also brought his “tinned beef” bulls to smoky life in various performative installations throughout the world, by installing fireworks inside their heads to give them the appearance of breathing fire. Mounted on casters with their necks articulated so their heads can be turned, he has staged bullfights with his fire-breathing monsters, accompanied by drummers and groups of human performers issuing fierce challenges. But these performances have not been restricted to the sanctuary of the white-walled gallery—these were performed outdoors, on city streets, to reach a community that might not otherwise come into the gallery to encounter his work.

Additional resources:

[This work at the Museum of New Zealand](#)

Waking up the Objects—Michel Tuffery talks about his practice (video)

[Tales from Te Papa: Pisupo Lua Afe Michel Tuffery's fish tin sculptures \(Le Folauga\)](#) (video)

[Michel Tuffery and Patrice Kaikilekole's artist performance Povi tau vaka \(The challenge\) 1999](#)

Issue-based Assemblage Sculpture: *Pisupo lua afe (Corned Beef 2000)*, 1994 from the New Zealand Ministry of Education

[Jennifer Hay, “Povi Christlike \(Christchurch Bull\) by Michael Tuffery”](#)

[Biography of the artist](#)

More on Michael Tuffery from Tautai

Cite this page as: Dr. Billie Lythberg, "Michel Tuffery, *Pisupo Lua Afe*," in *Smarthistory*, March 23, 2016, accessed October 23, 2020, <https://smarthistory.org/michel-tuffery-pisupo-lua-afe/>.

This page titled [3.13: Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.3: Polynesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

4: Melanesia

- [4.1: Melanesia, an introduction](#)
- [4.2: Ambum Stone](#)
- [4.3: Mask \(Buk\), Torres Strait, Mabuiag Island](#)
- [4.4: Presentation of Fijian Mats and Tapa Cloths to Queen Elizabeth II](#)
- [4.5: Bis Poles at The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#)
- [4.6: The Life of Malagan](#)
- [4.7: Malagan at the British Museum](#)

This page titled [4: Melanesia](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

4.1: Melanesia, an introduction

by [THE BRITISH MUSEUM](#)



Figure 4.1.1: Malangan mask, before 1884, wood, pigment, vegetable fibre, operculum., 48.3 x 79.7 x 49.5 cm, New Ireland, Papua New Guinea © Trustees of the British Museum

To the north and east of Australia lie the islands known as Melanesia. These islands form one of the most culturally complex regions of the entire world, with 1,293 languages spoken across the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, New Caledonia and the island of New Guinea (politically divided into Indonesia's West Papua Province and the nation of Papua New Guinea). It is also a region of great antiquity. New Guinea has been settled for around 45,000 years, the Solomon Islands for 35,000 years, and Vanuatu and New Caledonia for about 4,000.

Small scale societies

Throughout Melanesia, people lived in small scale societies often without strong leadership systems. Instead, communities were bound by ties of family and by complex networks of trade and exchange. Trade routes could link distant communities, and trading canoe voyages covered extensive distances. The daily round of food gardening, hunting, and in coastal areas, of fishing, were enriched by many rituals, often involving the production of remarkable objects such as the famous malangan carvings of New Ireland, and body decorations. In general Melanesians do not worship gods, but acknowledge the spirits and other beings sharing the landscape with them, and their ancestors.

European contact

Europeans first passed by these islands in the late sixteenth century, but sustained contact only began in the mid-nineteenth century. The British Museum collections date back to some of the earliest voyages in this later period of contact. The Museum continues to collect, adding objects which reflect the contemporary development of the three independent nations and two dependent colonies now in the region.

© Trustees of the British Museum

This page titled [4.1: Melanesia, an introduction](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.4: Melanesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

4.2: Ambum Stone

by [DR. BILLIE LYTHBERG](#) and [DR. JANE HORAN](#)



Figure 4.2.1: Ambum Stone, c. 1500 B.C.E., greywacke, 20 x 7.5 x 14 cm, Ambum Valley, Enga Province, Papua New Guinea (Australia National Gallery, Canberra)

The *Ambum Stone* is a masterfully crafted stone carving, created around 3,500 years ago in the highlands of the island we now know as New Guinea. Who actually carved it and for what original purpose is not known. Nevertheless, the *Ambum Stone* had a life as a religious object for a group of people in Papua New Guinea before becoming an aesthetically beautiful and intriguing artifact of exotica in a Western gallery. More recently it suffered a mishap that left it broken, and the publicity around this thrust the *Ambum Stone* into ongoing political debates about who owns historical artifacts. Every chapter of this carving's history has been entangled with personal and political intrigue, and chronicles a bigger story about colonization and shifting and evolving structures of power.



Figure 4.2.2

An ancient pestle

There are 12 recorded artifacts like the *Ambum Stone*: ancient stone mortars and pestles excavated from New Guinea, usually from the mountains of its interior. The smoothly curved neck and head of the *Ambum Stone* suggest its possible utility as a pestle when we consider its size—at about 8 inches high, the “neck” of the creature it depicts can be held in the hand, and its fat base could have been used to pound food and other materials. The tops of other **ancient pestles** from New Guinea are distinguished by human or bird heads, or by fully sculpted birds, while the mortars also include geometric imagery alongside avian (bird) and anthropomorphic (human) depictions.

The *Ambum Stone* is prized above all others not only for its age—it is one of the oldest of all sculptures made in Oceania—but also for its highly detailed sculptural qualities. It has a pleasing shape and smooth surface, and the slightly shiny patina on some of its raised details suggest it has been well handled. It was made from greywacke stone, and its finished shape may suggest the original shape the stone it was carved from. Greywacke is a very hard sedimentary stone, which often has fracture lines and veins that reveal its age and formation. Much greywacke has been subjected to significant amounts of tectonic movement, pressure and heat over extended periods, and some of the greywacke in the islands of the Pacific is more than 300 million years old. Imagine carving something as symmetrical and aesthetically pleasing as the *Ambum Stone* using only stone tools. It must have taken its maker many months to chip out the rough shape then finish it carefully, and the time and effort involved in its making suggests it was special and valued by whomever it was made for.

Carved in the form of some kind of animal, its features are rounded and include a freestanding neck, elegantly curved head and long nose, and upper limbs that hug its torso and appear to enclose a cupped space above its belly. Stylized eyes, ears and nostrils are depicted in relief, and shoulder blades and what could be an umbilicus suggest the maker’s understanding of anatomy. While it is possibly a fetal-form of a spiny anteater known as an echidna, which is thought to have been valued for its fat prior to the introduction of pigs, it might also be a bird or a fruit bat, and some have speculated that it represents a now extinct mega-sized marsupial.



Figure 4.2.3: Ambum Stone (detail), c. 1500 B.C.E., greywacke, 20 x 7.5 x 14 cm, Ambum Valley, Enga Province, Papua New Guinea (Australia National Gallery, Canberra)

Ritual use in Papua New Guinea

When the *Ambum Stone* first became known to Westerners in the 1960s, it was being used by a group of people called the Enga who live in the western highlands of Papua New Guinea. For the Enga, the *Ambum Stone* and other objects like it are called *simting bilong tumbuna* which literally translates as the “bones of the ancestors” (Egloff 2008:1). This is the Enga term for a class of cult objects which were used as powerful ritual mechanisms where ancestors reside. While the ritual object is not actually an ancestor per se, paradoxically, such sacred objects are believed to have a life of their own, and they can even move around, mate, and reproduce. It would seem—for the *Ambum Stone* at least—they can also go on adventures and create controversy.

Enga society is based on an organizational power structure known as the “big man” system, and the negotiation of power depends on commanding natural resources like pigs and produce, as well as supernatural forces like the goodwill of the ancestors (or the Christian God). Power is vested with those “big men” who can cajole, organize, or even manipulate other people into giving them resources so these can be redistributed at big ritual events. Before the Enga decided to convert to Christianity in the wake of the arrival of missionaries and colonization in the 1930s, the *Ambum Stone* and other objects like it were imbued with supernatural powers through ritual processes. They were buried in a group’s ancestral land and regular sacrifices of pigs were needed to appease the stones and the ancestors that resided in them. With the appropriate care they could ward off danger and promote the fertility and vigor of the tribe and the land.



Figure 4.2.4: Ambum Stone (detail), c. 1500 B.C.E., greywacke, 20 x 7.5 x 14 cm, Ambum Valley, Enga Province, Papua New Guinea (Australia National Gallery, Canberra)

Christianity, colonization, and commoditization

When Christian missionaries arrived in Papua New Guinea, people largely embraced the new religion, the new system of power that came with colonization, and the consequent Australian administration. The big man system was maintained but the way of managing the supernatural took on a Christian guise. Objects like the *Ambum Stone* lost some of their former potency, but under the “Whiteman’s gaze” they acquired new parameters of value as “primitive art” and were therefore worth money.

The *Ambum Stone* came to distil exoticism, imbued with all the romance perceived by Westerners in the stark differences of Papua New Guinean ways of seeing the world, and evoking a primitivism and purity lost to the West. This exoticism was enhanced by its specific dimensions and proportions that meet a certain aesthetic ideal from a Western point of view. All of this, its “primitive” and aesthetic value drove its pathway through a murky set of transactions, culminating in its acquisition by the Australian National Gallery in 1977, where it is valued as a priceless antiquity.

Originally sold by two young boys (at the urging of resident missionaries) for 20 shillings to the European owner of the trade store in Wabag (Enga Province), it was then sold by an intermediary to Philip Goldman, a London art dealer. Goldman subsequently offered it to the British Museum, before selling the sculpture to the Australian National Gallery in Canberra, Australia. In his negotiations with the Museum and by way of justifying his asking price, Goldman compared the *Ambum Stone* to Jackson Pollock’s *Blue Poles* which the gallery had purchased a few years earlier: basing the “primitive” *Ambum Stone*’s value on that of a work of modern art. Eventually, the Australian National Gallery agreed to pay Goldman \$115,000 United States dollars for the stone.



Figure 4.2.5: Australian National Gallery, Canberra (photo: [Nick-D](#), CC BY-SA 3.0)

Protecting the cultural heritage of Papua New Guinea

The Papua New Guinea Museum attempted to buy the *Ambum Stone* when it was offered to the Australian Museum, but was unsuccessful. Papua New Guinea became an independent state in 1975, and robust legislation and other legal structures have been in place since 1913 that prohibit the export of objects of antiquity and relevance to Papua New Guinea as a unique place in the world. The country has not been able to afford to make purchases on the international antiquities market because prices are too high for a developing nation. Further, Papua New Guinea has not had the capacity to enforce its legislation internationally until recently. Whether the *Ambum Stone* was legally exported from Papua New Guinea remains a point of contention.

Many objects of New Guinea's historical material culture were shipped to foreign museums and galleries for "safe keeping." Other desirable or even potentially valuable objects were smuggled out illegally. In 1977, the legal standing of the Papua New Guinea state to reclaim objects of national significance was bolstered by the opening of the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery, complete with state of the art storage and exhibition facilities. It was staffed first by Europeans who in turn trained Papua New Guinea nationals in museum management who were politically and philosophically intent on having antiquities returned to Papua New Guinea. Over the years the Papua New Guinea Museum and Art Gallery has perfected its systems of export control and its capacity to enact legal proceedings against those intent on taking antiquities out of the country. They have also been able to successfully negotiate the return of objects and whole collections that were sequestered away for safe keeping elsewhere in the world. Nevertheless, there are limits to their ability to enforce the return of objects such as the *Ambum Stone*.

Damage and restoration

In 2000, while on loan to a French art museum, the *Ambum Stone* was accidentally dropped and shattered into three main pieces and various shards of stone. It was later discovered by conservators, as they pieced it back together, that what had previously been thought to be old breaks, mended while in Papua New Guinea, were actually fracture lines of the greywacke stone. Fissures and grooves containing organic material were examined and were used to suggest its date of 1500 B.C.E. The *Ambum Stone* was carefully repaired, but other damage had been done. News of the incident made it into international media, which in turn generated the discussion about what the *Ambum Stone*—a registered antiquity belonging to Papua New Guinea—was doing in the possession of an Australian gallery in the first place. Whilst the *Ambum Stone* remains in Canberra, arguably the controversy over this artifact has meant that Papua New Guinea's capacity to negotiate at the global level has been bolstered.

At the heart of the recent chapters of the story of the *Ambum Stone* is a narrative about colonialism and its legacy. The *Ambum Stone* was made and imbued with particular meanings and values by a group of what we now know as Papua New Guineans, and then relocated to a Western museum where it has been reinterpreted within a framework of aesthetics and exchange, where we

continue to marvel at it—and exoticize it—because of its origins, and the mysteries we perceive in the pages of its story, remain closed to us.

Other Resources

[This sculpture at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra](#)

[Conservation and repair of the *Ambum Stone*](#) (National Gallery of Australia, Canberra)

Egloff, Brian, *Bones of the Ancestors – The Ambum Stone: from the New Guinea Highlands to the Antiquities Market to Australia* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2008).

Kjellgren, Eric, and Jennifer Wagelie, “[Prehistoric Stone Sculpture from New Guinea](#),” Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

This page titled [4.2: Ambum Stone](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.4: Melanesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

4.3: Mask (Buk), Torres Strait, Mabuiag Island

by [DR. PERI KLEMM](#) and [DR. BETH HARRIS](#)



Video 4.3.1: Mask (Buk), Torres Strait, Mabuiag Island, mid to late 19th century, turtle shell, wood, cassowary feathers, fiber, resin, shell, paint, 21 1/2 inches high (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City)

Though we lack an understanding of its use or cultural context, this turtle-shell mask was certainly precious.

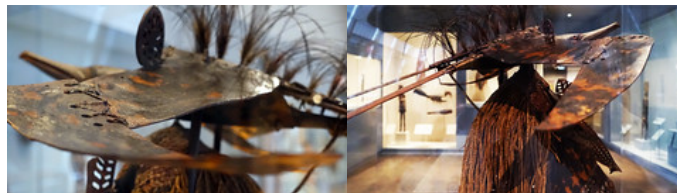
[SmartHistory images for teaching and learning:](#)



[Click on image to enlarge picture \(External link\)](#)



[Click on image for larger picture \(External link to flickr\)](#)



[Click on image to enlarge picture \(External link\)](#)



[Click on image to enlarge picture \(External link\)](#)



[Click on image to enlarge picture \(External link\)](#)

This page titled [4.3: Mask \(Buk\), Torres Strait, Mabuiag Island](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.4: Melanesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

4.4: Presentation of Fijian Mats and Tapa Cloths to Queen Elizabeth II

by DR. JENNIFER WAGELIE



Figure 4.4.1: Presentation of Fijian mats and tapa cloths to Queen Elizabeth II during the 1953-54 royal tour, silver gelatin print, 16.5 x 22 cm (Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand)

A procession for a royal visit

On December 17, 1953, a newly crowned Queen Elizabeth II and her husband Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, arrived on the island of Fiji, then an English colony, and stayed for three days before continuing on their first tour of the commonwealth nations of England in the Pacific Islands. What is the Commonwealth of Nations?

The Commonwealth of Nations, today commonly known as the Commonwealth, but formerly the British Commonwealth, is an intergovernmental organization of 53 member states that were mostly territories of the former British Empire.

While the precise date of the photograph depicted above is unknown, there is still much that can be learned both about Fijian art and culture and the Queen's historic visit. The first thing you might notice in the photograph is the procession of Fijian women making their way through a group of seated Fijian men and women.

Barkcloth

Several of the processing women are wearing skirts made of barkcloth painted with geometric patterns. Barkcloth, or *masi*, as it is referred to in Fiji, is made by stripping the inner bark of mulberry trees, soaking the bark, then beating it into strips of cloth that are glued together, often by a paste made of arrowroot. Bold and intricate geometric patterns in red, white, and black are often painted onto the *masi*. The practice of making *masi* continues in Fiji, where the cloth is often presented as gifts in important ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, or to commemorate significant events, such as a visit by the Queen of England. While in this photograph, the *masi* is only worn by the women and not carried, as far as can be ascertained in this picture; it is very likely that the women also presented the cloth to the Queen to celebrate the occasion of her visit.



Figure 4.4.2: Masi (bark cloth), Fiji (Auckland War Memorial Museum, accession no. 1990.54)

Mats

What is definitely evident from the photograph are the rolls of woven mats that each woman in the procession carries. Like masi, Fijian mats served and continue to serve an important purpose in Fijian society as a type of ritual exchange and tribute. Made by women, Fijian mats are begun by stripping, boiling, drying, blackening, and then softening leaves from the Pandanus plant. The dried leaves are then woven into tight, often diagonal patterns that culminate in frayed or fringed edges.



Figure 4.4.3: Mat, Fiji (Auckland War Memorial Museum, accession no. 1993.29)



Figure 4.4.4: Bure kalou, Fiji, 81 x 38 cm ([Australian Museum](#))

While the mats that the women in this photograph are carrying may seem too plain to present to the Queen of England, their simplicity is an indication of their importance. In Fiji, the more simple the design, the more meaningful its function. Fijian artists continue to create mats and it is a practice that is growing, with many mats being sold at market, often to tourists. With the advent of processed pandanus, they are more widely available than *masi*, and used heavily in wedding and funeral rituals.

In addition to *masi* and mats, Fijian art also includes elaborately carvings made of wood or ivory, as well as small woven god houses called *bure kalou* (left), which provided a pathway for the god to descend to the priest.

The Queen's itinerary

Returning to the Queen's visit in 1953, while in Fiji she visited hospitals and schools and held meetings with various Fijian politicians. She witnessed elaborate performances of traditional Fijian dances and songs and even participated in a *kava* ceremony, which was (and continues to be) an important aspect of Fijian culture. The *kava* drink is a kind of tea made from the *kava* root and is sipped by members of the community, in order of importance. On the occasion of the Queen's visit, she was, as you might imagine, given the first sip of *kava*. In thinking about the importance of the *kava* ceremony, consider what might happen if everyone from a large group takes a sip from the same cup and of the same liquid. Although sipped in order of hierarchical importance, it would, in the end, put everyone in the group on the same level before beginning the event, meeting, or ceremony.

After three days on the island of Fiji, Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip departed for the Kingdom of Tonga where they stayed for two days before leaving for extended stays in New Zealand and Australia. On Tonga, they were greeted warmly by Queen Sālote and other members of the royal Tongan family. On the occasion of her visit to Tonga, an enormous barkcloth was commissioned in Queen Elizabeth's honor and had her initials, "ERIII," painted onto the rare piece of *ngatu*. Referred to as *ngatu launima* in Tongan, it is just shy of 75 feet in length and is significant not only because it commemorated Queen Elizabeth's visit, but also because it was placed under the coffin of Queen Sālote when her body was flown back to Tonga in 1960 after an extended stay in a New Zealand hospital. The barkcloth is [now in the collection of Te Papa Tongarewa/Museum of New Zealand](#), after being donated by the pilot who had flown Queen Sālote's body back to Tonga, to whom the barkcloth had been given by the Tongan Royal Family.

Additional resources:

This photograph in the National Library of New Zealand

[Short film on Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Fiji, December 1953](#)

[Short film on Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Tonga, December 1953](#)

[Photographs of Queen Elizabeth II's visit to Fiji, December 1953](#)

[Information on the barkcloth commissioned in Queen Elizabeth II's honor](#)

[More information on barkcloth or tapa](#)

Rod Ewins, *Mat-Weaving in Gau, Fiji* (Fiji Museum Special Publication, 1982).

———. *Staying Fijian: Vatulele Island Barkcloth and Social Identity* (Adelaide: Crawford House Publishing, 2006).

———. *Traditional Fijian Artifacts* (Nubeena, Tasmania: Just Pacific, 2014).

J.W. Sykes, *The Royal Visit to the Colony of Fiji of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh* (December 1953).

This page titled [4.4: Presentation of Fijian Mats and Tapa Cloths to Queen Elizabeth II](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.4: Melanesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

4.5: Bis Poles at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

by [DR. MAIA NUKU](#) and [DR. STEVEN ZUCKER](#)



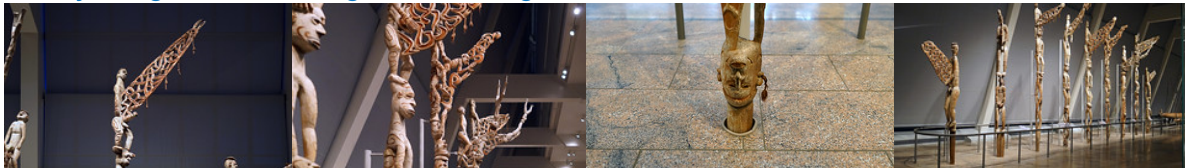
Video **4.5.Q**: Nine Bis Poles, from left to right: Jiem (artist), Otsjanep village, c. 1960; Jiem (artist), Otsjanep village, c. 1960; Terepos (artist), Omadesep village, c. 1960; Jewer (artist), Omadesep village, c. 1960; Fanipdas (artist), Omadesep village, c. 1960; artist unknown, probably Per village, c. 1960; artist unknown, Omadesep village, late 1950s; Ajowmien (artist), Omadesep village, c. 1960; Bifarq (artist), Otsjanep village, c. 1960, Asmat people, Faretsj River region, Papua Province, Irian Jaya, Indonesia, wood, paint, fiber (Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, The Metropolitan Museum of Art) Speakers: Dr. Maia Nuku, Evelyn A. J. Hall and John A. Friede Associate Curator for Oceanic Art and Dr. Steven Zucker

Master carvers produced statues like these when village leaders needed to bring their community back into balance.

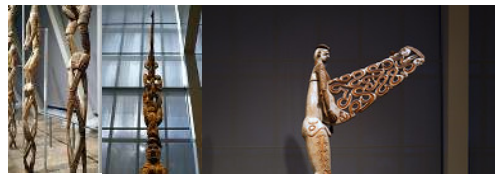
Additional resources

[The Metropolitan Museum of Art Installation video, 2007](#)

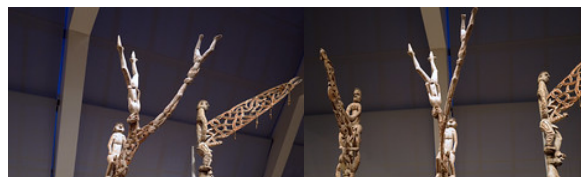
Smarthistory images for teaching and learning:



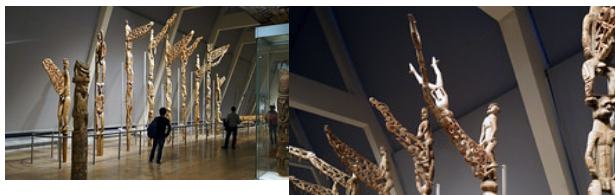
[Click on image to enlarge picture \(External link\)](#)



[Click on image to enlarge picture \(External link\)](#)



[Click on image for larger picture \(External link to flickr\)](#)



[Click on image to enlarge picture \(External link\)](#)



[Click on image to enlarge picture \(External link\)](#)

This page titled [4.5: Bis Poles at The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.4: Melanesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

4.6: The Life of Malagan

by *PATRICK NASON*



Figure 4.6.1: Funerary Carving (Malagan), late 19th–early 20th century, New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, wood, 280.7 x 87.6 x 26.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, photo: Steven Zucker)



Figure 4.6.2: Tatanua, c. late 19th century, New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, wood, pith, and shell, 49.5 cm (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, photo: Steven Zucker)

Let us assume this: that there is life in everything, and that living continues long after death. Certainly, we humans are alive; as are dogs, cats, lizards, fish, trees, and birds. But so too are rivers, forests, stones, boats, buildings, and even computers. All these lives and many more have one quality in common: they are relational beings. By that I mean they have the ability to interact with other

living things and affect other lives in some way. Beyond anything else, it is through this ability to build relationships that we all remain alive in one form or another. From this basic premise, we can begin to understand the lives of *malagan*.

What are malagan?

The term *malagan* (also spelled *malangan* or *malanggan*) usually refers to one or more intricate carvings from the island of New Ireland in Papua New Guinea. These carvings may take the form of a mask, a wooden board or “frieze,” a sturdy housepole, a circular, woven mat, or a scaled model of a dugout canoe with or without human figures inside. In many such forms, *malagan* can be found in museums throughout the world. All of these well-traveled carvings were born in New Ireland, a place of extraordinary diversity. There alone, over thirty distinct languages are spoken. In most of these languages, the word *malagan* means “likeness,” or otherwise “to carve, or inscribe.”



Figure 4.6.3

To see a *malagan* in person or in a photograph is to meet many inscribed likenesses or motifs, each entwined to form a single, visible organism. Of these, there are several species: on mask-like *malagan* (referred to as *Lentanon* or *Tantanua*), we normally see a contrast in color and texture in hemispheric shapes above the face. Another, the *Walik malagan*, typically features two birds or two fish poised on opposite sides of the same hole, or “eye.” The *Wowara malagan* are characterized by a circular “sun” motif, and are typically woven from smooth, flat palm fronds. Upon seeing a *malagan* with its various motifs (examples in the images below), we might ask, what does it mean? Or otherwise, considering the careful detail that goes into them, we might question the tools and techniques utilized by master carvers in their production.



Figure 4.6.4: Seven *tananua* displayed at the annual “New Ireland Day” festival, 2016 (photo: Elisha Omar)



Figure 4.6.5: Wowara (the radial shapes) and a *Walik* in between (the two lobsters) displayed at the annual “New Ireland Day” festival, 2016 (photo: Elisha Omar)

What do malagan do?

With such variation emerging from so many common motifs, *malagan* have confused and confounded anthropologists and art historians for over a century. Only recently have scholars begun to think differently about them. Rather than asking what each motif means, we are now listening more closely to the people of New Ireland and asking what each assemblage of motifs does in the world. By understanding these composite forms as agents, we can begin to see how *malagan* inspire, nurture, and participate in social life. To see this agency in action requires we look closely at the socioecological context out of which *malagan* come to life.

New Ireland

New Ireland is a narrow, tropical island only a few degrees south of the Equator. There are two primary seasons: a hot and dry period lasting from March to around November, and a rainy monsoon in December, January, and February. There are two modest towns on the island, but the majority of people live in rural villages. These indigenous residents spend the majority of their time in their beautiful gardens, where they grow sweet potatoes, cassava, bananas, various greens, and taro. In the village, they raise pigs, feeding them the white meat of dried coconuts. A significant part of their diet comes from the sea. They catch smaller fish on the coral reefs and larger fish like tuna and snapper in the deep ocean. While the fish can be caught year-round, the majority of garden food is harvested after the monsoon. Assuming the gardens are maintained properly (with labor as well as a kind of fertility magic), this seasonal variability yields a surplus of crops—far more than required for basic sustenance. This is fortunate, for the arrival of the dry season marks the time when large, elaborate feasts are held throughout the island to foster the passage of recently departed relatives into the afterlife.



Figure 4.6.6: Pig (detail), Funerary Carving (Malagan), late 19th–early 20th century, Papua New Guinea, New Ireland, New Ireland, wood, 280.7 x 87.6 x 26.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, photo: Steven Zucker)

Mortuary feasts

The people of New Ireland take these mortuary rituals very seriously. Throughout the year, as the crops grow larger and pigs grow fatter, the feasts are planned by the families of the deceased. Only when all the materials are ready—when enough pigs have been marked for sacrifice, enough taro has been dug out of the garden, and enough traditional shell-money (or *mis*) has been amassed—will the host family announce the impending event to the entire island. *Malagan* is the name given to these large mortuary feasts, but it more accurately refers to the carvings that are revealed with great flourish and excitement in the final moments of the event. At that time, hundreds or even thousands of people have gathered to witness a process of customary work led by an appointed cultural leader, or *maimai*. Dressed conspicuously in red, the *maimai* coordinates the entire event. He says when the pigs should be killed, when the taro should be peeled and roasted, and when various *singsing* groups should perform their unique song and dance. He supervises and coordinates obligatory exchange of *mis* (a traditional form of currency) and paper money between the family of the deceased and others who have supported them in their grief.



Figure 4.6.7: Group of malagan carvings displayed during a mortuary ceremony, Medina, Northern New Ireland, 1930 (photo: Felix Speiser)

With bold chants and avian gestures, the *maimai* gathers everyone together for the grand revelation of one or more *malagan* carvings. It is his responsibility to ensure everyone witnesses the powerful *malagan*, pays for the experience of seeing it, and then consumes all of the prepared food before returning to their homes at sundown. This dramatic revelation brings the living *malagan* into the social world, but only for a brief moment. For many months prior to the final event, a skilled carver secludes himself in a special enclosure, well out of sight from those in the village. With seashells, stones, knives, sharks teeth, fire, and natural pigments, he inscribes into a piece of monsoon-borne driftwood a set of images that have come to him in a dream. Snakes, crocodiles, birds, fish, and other motifs are brought into relief, many of which hold a special association with a particular matriline.* Through the sweat and fire of his efforts, a powerful assemblage comes to life.



Figure 4.6.8: Fish (detail), Funerary Carving (Malagan), late 19th–early 20th century, Papua New Guinea, New Ireland, New Ireland, wood, 280.7 x 87.6 x 26.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, photo: Steven Zucker)

When it is finally revealed to the public, the *malagan* is considered “hot” and dangerous. Only when its witnesses “buy” it with *mis*, and when the feasting is complete, does its power diminish. The once-powerful *malagan* is cast aside to decay in the tropical forest, or is otherwise sold off to foreign tourists or museums. This final dismissal marks the “finishing” of the dead, when all the work of mourning and customary obligations has been settled. The dead are “sent away to *biksolwara*”—to the deep sea where everything has come from and to where everything eventually returns.



Figure 4.6.9: Profile (detail), Funerary Carving (Malagan), late 19th–early 20th century, Northern New Ireland, Papua New Guinea, wood, paint, shell, resin, 132.7 x 34.9 x 33.7 cm (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, photo: Steven Zucker)

The power of the *malagan*

Like the *maimai*, the power or vitality of the *malagan* lies in its capacity to bring multiple clans together so that they may see each other, see themselves, and witness what the master carver has brought to life. Long after a dead receive their final *malagan* feast, part of that person remains active in the social world in the form of memory. Suppose, for example, a woman is working in the garden and sees a *londoli* (frigatebird) soaring overhead. There, for a brief moment, the graceful form of the bird prompts her to recall the intricate detail of *malagan* carved for her old uncle who died when she was only a child. That uncle, who long ago was sent away over the sea, enters back into her world through the power of that one particularly memorable motif. In this capacity, *malagan* and their associated mortuary rites ensure a vibrant social life for the people of New Ireland, and an eternal afterlife for their ancestors.

*Common throughout the Papua New Guinea islands, *matriline* refers to a descent group in which membership is inherited from one's mother.

Additional resources:

[New Ireland on The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

[Malagan at the Penn Museum](#)

[Malagan from the Google Cultural Institute](#)

This page titled 4.6: The Life of Malagan is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.4: Melanesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

4.7: Malagan at the British Museum

by [THE BRITISH MUSEUM](#)



Figure 4.7.1: Malagan figure (detail), 1882-83 C.E., 122 cm high, wood, vegetable fiber, pigment and shell (*turbo petholatus* opercula), north coast of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea © Trustees of the British Museum

Malagan figure



Figure 4.7.2: Malagan figure, 1882-83 C.E., 122 cm high, wood, vegetable fiber, pigment and shell (*turbo petholatus* opercula), north coast of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea © Trustees of the British Museum

This figure was made for *malagan* (also spelled *malagan* or *malanggan*), a cycle of rituals of the people of the north coast of New Ireland, an island in Papua New Guinea. *Malagan* express many complex religious and philosophical ideas. They are principally concerned with honoring and dismissing the dead, but they also act as affirmation of the identity of clan groups, and negotiate the transmission of rights to land. *Malagan* sculptures were made to be used on a single occasion and then destroyed. They are symbolic of many important subjects, including identity, kinship, gender, death, and the spirit world. They often include representations of fish and birds of identifiable species, alluding both to specific myths and the animal's natural characteristics. For

example, at the base of this figure is depicted a rock cod, a species which as it grows older changes gender from male to female. The rock cod features in an important myth of the founding of the first social group, or clan, in this area; thus the figure also alludes to the identity of that clan group.

This figure was collected by Hugh Hastings Romilly, Deputy Commissioner for the Western Pacific while he was on a tour of New Ireland in 1882-83. It was one a group of carvings made to be displayed at a particular *malangan* ritual. It is made of wood, vegetable fiber, pigment and shell (*turbo petholatus opercula*). They were originally standing in a carved canoe, which unfortunately Romilly did not collect. The whole group was presented to the British Museum by the Duke of Bedford in 1884, after Romilly had sent it to him.



Figure 4.7.3: Malangan figures, 1882-83 C.E., wood, vegetable fiber, pigment and shell (*turbo petholatus opercula*), north coast of New Ireland, Papua New Guinea © Trustees of the British Museum

Malangan mask



Figure 4.7.4: Malangan mask (detail), before 1884 C.E., wood, pigment, vegetable fiber, operculum., New Ireland, Papua New Guinea © Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 4.7.5: Malanggan mask, before 1884 C.E., wood, pigment, vegetable fiber, operculum., New Ireland, Papua New Guinea © Trustees of the British Museum

Malangan masks are commonly used at funeral rites, which both bid farewell to the dead and celebrate the vibrancy of the living. The masks can represent a number of things: dead ancestors, *ges* (the spiritual double of an individual), or the various bush spirits associated with the area.

The ownership of *Malangan* objects is similar to the modern notion of copyright; when a piece is bought, the seller surrenders the right to use that particular *Malangan* style, the form in which it is made, and even the accompanying rites. This stimulates production, as more elaborate variations are made to replace the ones that have been sold.

Malangan ceremonies became extremely expensive affairs, taking into account the costs of the accompanying feasting. As a result, the funeral rites could take place months after a person had died. In some circumstances the ceremony would have been held for several people simultaneously.

Suggested readings:

L. Lincoln, *An Assemblage of Spirits: Idea and Image in New Ireland* (George Braziller, New York, in association with The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1987).

© The Trustees of the British Museum

This page titled [4.7: Malagan at the British Museum](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.4: Melanesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

5: Micronesia

This region encompasses, among others, the Caroline, Gilbert, Mariana (including Guam), and Marshall island groups, as well as the country of Nauru. **c. 900 C.E. - present**

[5.1: Navigation Chart, Marshall Islands](#)

[5.2: Wooden sculptures from Nukuoro](#)

[5.3: Kiribati armor](#)

[5.4: Nan Madol- “In the space between things”](#)

This page titled [5: Micronesia](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

5.1: Navigation Chart, Marshall Islands

by [DR. JENNY NEWELL](#) and [DR. STEVEN ZUCKER](#)



Video 5.1.1: Navigation Chart, late 19th century, Marshall Islands, wood, fiber, and shells (American Museum of Natural History).

Speakers: Jenny Newell, Steven Zucker and Tina Stege

Master sailors fashioned these maps from sticks and cowrie shells, registering relationships between land and sea.

This page titled [5.1: Navigation Chart, Marshall Islands](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.5: Micronesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

5.2: Wooden sculptures from Nukuoro

by *DR. FANNY WONU VEYS*



Figure 5.2.1: Nukuoro Atoll, Micronesia ([Archive: NASA, International Space Station, CC BY-NC 2.0](#))

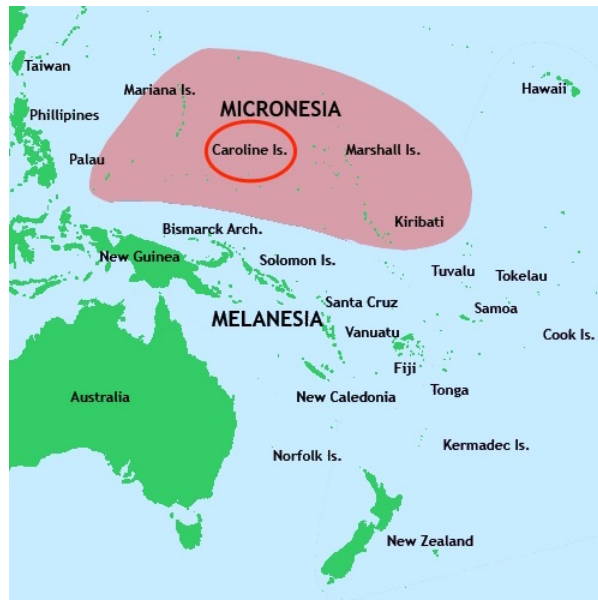


Figure 5.2.2: Location of Nukuoro in the Caroline Islands

At the crossroads of cultures

Nukuoro is a small isolated atoll in the archipelago of the Caroline Islands. It is located in Micronesia, a region in the Western Pacific.

Archaeological excavations demonstrate that Nukuoro has been inhabited since at least the eighth century. Oral tradition corroborates these dates relating that people left the Samoan archipelago in two canoes led by their chief Wawe. The canoes first stopped at Nukufetau in Tuvalu and later arrived on the then uninhabited island of Nukuoro. These new Polynesian settlers brought with them ideas of hierarchy and rank, and aesthetic principles such as the carving of stylized human figures. However the new inhabitants also incorporated Micronesian aspects such as the art of navigation, canoe-building and loom-weaving with banana fiber. Because Nukuoro is geographically situated in Micronesia, but is culturally and linguistically essentially Polynesian, it is called a Polynesian Outlier.

Encounters with Westerners

The Spanish navigator Juan Bautista Monteverde was the first European to sight the atoll on 18 February 1806 when he was on his way from Manila (in the Philippines) to Lima (in South America). The estimated 400 inhabitants of Nukuoro engaged in barter and exchange with Europeans as early as 1830, as can be attested from the presence of Western metal tools. A trading post was only established in 1870. From the 1850s onwards, American Protestant mission teachers who had been posted in the area visited Nukuoro regularly from the Marshall Islands and from the islands Lukunor, Pohnpei, and Kosrae. However, when the American missionary Thomas Gray arrived in Nukuoro in 1902, to baptize a female chief, he found that a large part of the population was already acquainted with Christianity through a Nukuoran woman who had lived on Pohnpei. When Gray returned three years later, he found that the local sacred ground (*marae*) and the large temple had been replaced by a church. By 1913, many of the pre-Christian traditions including dances, songs, and stories were lost. Most of the wooden images had been taken off the island before 1885 and subsequently lost their function.



Figure 5.2.3: Nukuoro, Caroline Islands, Micronesia, wood, 54.5 cm high (The British Museum, acquired in 1944)

Earliest sources

in 1874, the missionary Edward T. Doane made the first mention of carved wooden figures. It is unclear, however, where this experienced missionary got his information from as he never left his ship, the *Morning Star*, to go ashore. Two German men, Johann Stanislaus Kubary, who visited the island in 1873 and in 1877 while working for the Godeffroy trading company and its museum, and Carl Jeschke, a ship's captain who first visited the atoll in 1904 and then regularly between 1910 and 1913, give the most detailed information on the Nukuoroan figures.

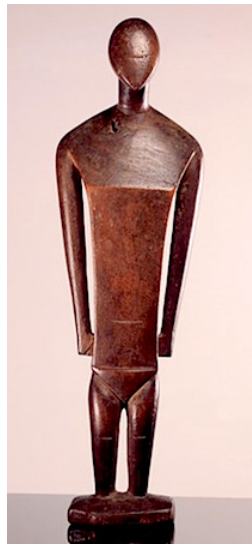


Figure 5.2.4: Nukuoro, Caroline Islands, Micronesia, 18th-19th century, wood, 40.2 cm high (Barbier-Mueller Museum)

Wooden sculptures

The first Europeans to collect the Nukuoro sculptures found them coarse and clumsy. It is not known whether the breadfruit tree (*Artocarpus altilis*) images were carved with local adzes equipped with *Tridacna* shell blades or with Western metal blade tools (*Tridacna* is a genus of large saltwater clams). The surfaces were smoothed with pumice which was abundantly available on the beach. All the sculptures, ranging in size from 30 cm to 217 cm, have similar proportions: an ovoid head tapering slightly at the chin and a columnar neck. The eyes and nose are either discretely shown as slits or not at all. The shoulders slope downwards and the chest is indicated by a simple line. Some female figures have rudimentary breasts. Some of the sculptures, be they male, female or of indeterminate sex, have a sketchy indication of hands and feet. The buttocks are always flattened and set on a flexed pair of legs.

Deities

Local deities in Nukuoro resided in animals or were represented in stones, pieces of wood or wooden figurines (*tino aitu*). Each of the figurines bore the name of a specific male or female deity which was associated with a particular extended family group, a priest and a specific temple. They were placed in temples and decorated with loom-woven bands, fine mats, feathers, paint or headdresses. The *tino aitu* occupied a central place in an important religious ceremony that took place towards the month of *Mataariki*, when the Pleiades are visible in the west at dusk. The rituals marked the beginning of the harvesting of two kinds of taro, breadfruit, arrowroot, banana, sugar cane, pandanus and coconuts. During the festivities—which could last several weeks—the harvested fruits and food offerings were brought to the wooden sculptures, male and female dances were performed and women were tattooed. Any weathered and rotten statues were also replaced during the ceremony. For the period of these rituals, the sculptures were considered the resting place of a god or a deified ancestor's spirit.

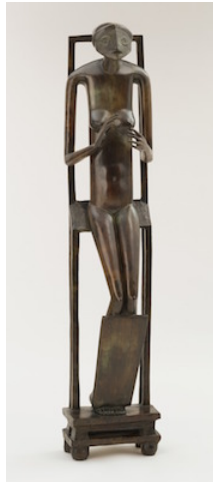


Figure 5.2.5: Alberto Giacometti, *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object)*, 1934 (cast c. 1954-55), bronze, 152.1 cm high (The Museum of Modern Art)

Early twentieth-century artists

When the Swiss sculptor and painter Alberto Giacometti made his famous sculpture *Hands Holding the Void (Invisible Object)* (left) he was inspired by a wooden Nukuoro figure he had seen at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris ([now in the collection of the Musée du quai Branly](#)). A fellow artist, Henry Moore, considered the Nukuoro image at the British Museum (image above) to be one of the highlights in the history of sculpture. Both carvings are part of a small group of thirty-seven sculptures from Nukuoro that arrived in Western museum collections from the 1870s onwards. European artists believed that the highly stylized representation of the human in the Nukuoro figures represented the purest form of art—an art that lay at the origins of mankind.

Nukuoro figures today

Today the sight of even a small Nukuoro figure still makes a big impact on visitors. Scattered across museums and private collections in Europe, North America and New Zealand, ten figures were brought together for the first time at the Fondation Beyeler in Riehen, near the Swiss city of Basel. This prompted research in these exquisite sculptures, which has been bundled in a book *Nukuoro: Sculptures from Micronesia* (2013). Nukuoro figures continue to inspire Nukuoroans and Westerners alike as they are copied, and displayed in places ranging from people's houses to Pacific themed hotel lobbies.

Additional resources:

Nukuoro figure in the collection of the Barbier-Mueller Museum

[Nukuoro Figure in the collection of The British Museum](#)

[Animation from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration about how atolls are formed](#)

Adrienne L. Kaeppler, *The Pacific Arts of Polynesia & Micronesia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Christian Kaufmann, & Oliver Wick (eds), *Nukuoro. Sculptures from Micronesia* (Basel: Fondation Beyeler, Hirmer, 2013)

This page titled [5.2: Wooden sculptures from Nukuoro](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.5: Micronesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

5.3: Kiribati armor

by DR. ALI CLARK



Figure 5.3.1: Kiribati cuirass with neck guard, 19th century or earlier, coconut fibre string ornamented with shells, human hair, and shell beads, 72.5 x 58.2 x 32 cm (1884.31.36, © Pitt Rivers Museum)

What we have, we use

The Republic of Kiribati is a group of thirty-three coral atolls and reefs spread out over 3.5 million square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean. It is located in Micronesia, a region in the Western Pacific. Isolated as an island group, the Islanders use the limited resources they have on hand to produce their material culture.



Figure 5.3.2: One of the senior students at Rongorongo training college, Beru, wearing Kiribati armor, before 1925 (Photo: George Hubert Eastman, © Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge)

Historically, the I-Kiribati produced extraordinary objects such as suits of armor made from coconut fiber. The armor provided protection from the dangerous shark's-teeth-edged swords, spears, and daggers carried by island warriors. Each suit is made up of a set of overalls and sleeves made from coconut fiber, with a coconut fiber cuirass worn over the top. The distinctive cuirasses have

high backboards to protect from attack from behind, and were often worn with thick belts made from woven coconut fiber or dried ray skin to protect the vital organs. The cuirasses are usually decorated, either with human hair, feathers or shells.

Warriors sometimes wore hand armor also made from coconut fiber, inlaid with shark's teeth along the knuckles. The warriors would also wear fearsome-looking helmets made of porcupine fish skin, which dried hard in the sun and provided another layer of protection for the head. These helmets would usually have been worn over a coconut fiber or woven pandanus leaf cap.

It is not known where and when this type of armor was developed in the islands, but it has come to stand as uniquely Kiribati, with its influence also spreading to the nearby islands of Nauru and Tuvalu.

Making the armor



Figure 5.3.3: Coconut fiber cuirass with struts, decorated with human hair, with porcupine fish helmet (photo: Josh Murfitt, Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge)

Coconut fiber string, a material still produced and used today, is the main material used for the armor, chosen not just for its availability but also its strength and flexibility. The fibers come from the husk of the coconut, found between the inner shell and the outer skin. These fibers are soaked in the water of the lagoon for two to three months, then rinsed and dried. Several fibers are rolled into small strands, which are then rolled together to create long cords.

Many of the cuirasses feature lozenge-shaped or geometric designs made from human hair; sometimes these diamond shapes are developed to become fish or turtles. Hair is something quite special and precious, but is also easily accessible. The woven diamond motif seen here is most likely women's hair. Often combined with coconut fiber, hair was also used for binding the shark's teeth to swords, and is still used today in dance belts.

The process of making the armor would have been associated with a powerful ritual, instilling in the armor the power and strength of the raw materials used to make it. The warriors would also go through a ritual before going into battle.

Wearing the armor

The armor would have been worn in conflict resolution between individuals or groups of people. Generally the fighting would have been related to land claims or retribution. In all contests, the aim was to wound your adversary, not to kill them, as a wound would be adequate retribution. If someone did die during the battle then payment to the wronged party would need to have been made through the gift of land.

Warriors in armor would have carried a shark's-tooth spear tipped with a stingray barb. They would never have fought alone, but would have been surrounded by a number of people who were not wearing full armor, carrying branched spears, clubs, and small daggers. In cases of inter-village or island warfare, each side would march in three groups, with the main warriors in the center surrounded by their supporting troops. When the two sides met, the overall outcome would depend on the result of individual challenges made by the warriors.

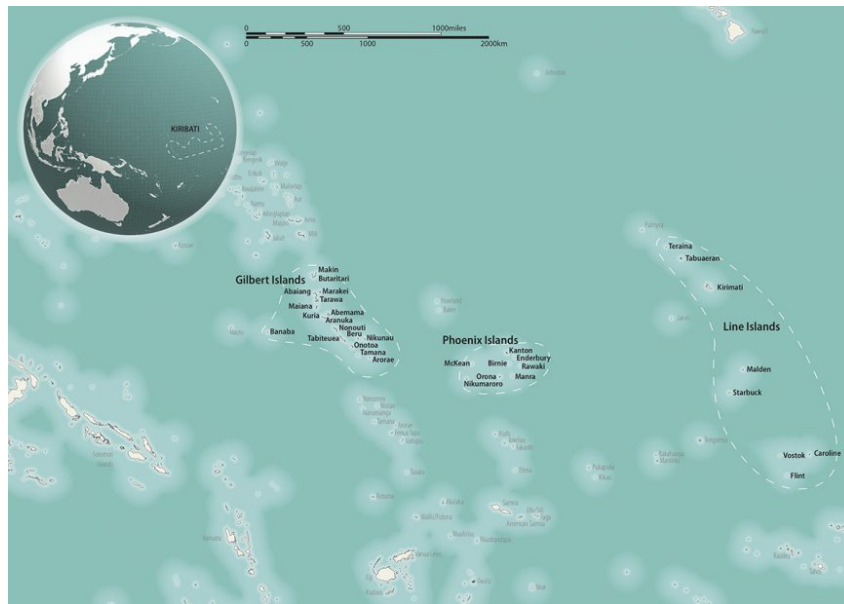


Figure 5.3.4: The Gilbert Islands, Phoenix Islands, Line Islands, and Banaba make up the Republic of Kiribati (map © Mark Gunning, 2017)

Encounters with westerners

Pedro Fernandes de Queiros was the first European to sight the Gilbert Islands (the main group of islands in what is now the Republic of Kiribati) in 1606. The British explorers John Byron, Thomas Gilbert, and John Marshall all passed through the sixteen atolls without landing between 1764 and 1788. The islands were named the Gilbert Islands by the Russian general Adam Johann von Krusenstern, who also crossed without landing in 1820. The French captain Louis Duperrey then mapped the islands fully in 1824.

There are records of Kiribati armor in European collections as early as 1824 [1], but there are no known descriptions of it in historical records until 1844, when the United States Exploring Expedition published an account of their arrival on Tabiteuea (an atoll in the Gilbert Islands). Whalers and blackbirders from Australia, the United States, and Europe also visited the islands during the 1800s, often settling there for periods and taking home the armor they acquired.

The rapid decline in the production of this type of armor is generally attributed to the influence of missionaries, who first arrived from France in 1888, and the British, who arrived 1892, both of whom introduced new laws and attempted to pacify the islands. I-Kiribati do not commonly make anything that is not needed; a lack of further need for the armor is likely one of the reasons that these objects were offered to tourists, government officials, explorers, whalers, and other visitors, and why so many are now found in museums across the world.



Figure 5.3.5: Kiribati armor made by Kaetaeta Watson, Chris Charteris, and Lizzy Leckie, 2016 (2017.14.1-3, Copyright Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge)

Kiribati armor today

Small decorative shark's-teeth daggers are still produced for tourists. However, suits of armor are no longer made for use. Today, historic suits of armor can be found in Kiribati on exhibition at Te Umwanibong, the Kiribati Museum and Culture Centre on Tarawa atoll, but it is not known that any others exist in the islands.

In 2016, the Pacific Presences project, based at the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge commissioned New Zealand-based artists Chris Charteris, Lizzy Leckie, and Kaetaeta Watson to make a new suit of armor. This armor, named *Kautan Rabakau*, is now part of the permanent collection of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology.

Kiribati became an independent nation in 1979, and since then the image of the “warrior” has re-emerged, and can be seen used on clothing and as mascots for sports teams—a symbol of strength and pride. It has also been repurposed by the Mormon faith Moroni High School in Tarawa, who see themselves as fighting both a spiritual and physical war in the modern world.

While the battles that necessitated this armor are over, Kiribati now faces the new challenges of climate change and the effects of westernization on traditional life and culture.

*The research for this entry was produced during the European Research Council funded project: ‘Pacific Presences: Oceanic Art and European Museums’, under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) / ERC grant agreement n° [324146]*¹¹.

[1] A shark’s-teeth sword was donated to the Diocesan Library in Linköping, Sweden in 1824, and coconut fiber dungarees were donated to the Whitby Museum in 1834.

Additional resources:

[Kiribati armor in the collection of the British Museum](#)

[Kiribati armor in the collection of Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa](#)

Julie Adams, Polly Bence and Alison Clark, *Fighting Fibres: Kiribati Armour and Museum Collections* (Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2018)

An Ethnographic Analysis of a Kiribati Shark-Toothed Sword

Gerd Koch, *The Material Culture of Kiribati* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1986).

Sister Alaima Talu, *Kiribati Aspects of History* (Suva: University of the South Pacific, 1979).

Chris Charteris and Jeff Smith, *Tungaru: the Kiribati Project* (Auckland, McCollams Print, 2014).

This page titled [5.3: Kiribati armor](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.5: Micronesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

5.4: Nan Madol- “In the space between things”

by *DR. BILLIE LYTHBERG*



Figure 5.4.1: Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: [smwd0030](#), CC BY 2.0)

How did they do it?

Sometimes art and architecture calls on us to reimagine what we think was possible in the past, and what ancestors were able to achieve. The abandoned megalithic capital of Nan Madol, located in a lagoon adjacent to the eastern shoreline of the island of Pohnpei in the Federated States of Micronesia in the Pacific Ocean, is a terrific example. [1] Once the political and ceremonial center for the ruling chiefs of the Sau Deleur dynasty (c. 1100–1628), Nan Madol is a complex of close to 100 artificial rectilinear islets spread over 200 acres that are thought to have housed up to 1000 people. Its basalt and coral rock structures were built from the 13th to the 17th century by a population of less than 30,000 people and their total weight is estimated at 750,000 metric tons. Archaeologist Rufino Mauricio pulls these vast quantities into focus for us by explaining that the people of Pohnpei moved an average of 1,850 tons of basalt per year over four centuries—and no one knows quite how they did it. [2]



Figure 5.4.2: Basalt structure in Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: [ajdemma](#), CC BY-NC 2.0)

Immense human power

Nan Madol specialist Mark McCoy has used the chemistry of the stones to link some to their source on the opposite side of the island. [3] The creators of Nan Madol managed to quarry columns of basalt from a site in Sokehs, on the other side of Pohnpei, and transport them more than 25 miles to the submerged coral reefs that are the foundations of Nan Madol. There, they used ropes and levers to stack them in an intersecting formation, making raised platforms, ceremonial sites, dwellings, tombs, and crypts. They used no mortar or concrete, relying solely on the positioning and weight of each basalt column, with a little coral fill, to hold each structure in place.



Figure 5.4.3: Detail of a wall in Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: [Joyce McClure](#), CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The human power required to move these materials over such an extended period of time and space is evidence of an impressive display of power by the rulers of Pohnpei as well as ecological and economic systems capable of supporting a busy labor force.

[illegible]

Madol Pah in the southwest was the administrative center of the complex and Madol Powe in the northeast was its religious and mortuary sector. This area comprises 58 islets, most of which were inhabited by priests. The most elaborate building is Nandauwas, the royal mortuary, which covers an area greater than a football field. Its walls are 25 feet high and just one of its cornerstones is estimated to weigh 50 tons. Elsewhere, log-cabin style walls of stone reached 50 feet in height and are 16 feet thick, and were topped with thatched roofs. All were protected from surging tides by large breakwaters and seawalls.



What's in a name?

Archaeological and linguistic evidence suggest that certain islets were dedicated to specific activities—Dapahu to food preparation and canoe building, and Peinering (“place of coconut oil preparation”), Sapenlan (“place of the sky”) and Kohnderek (“place for dancing and anointing the dead”) to the activities their names describe. Tombs surrounded by high walls can be found on Peinkitel, Karian and Lemonkou.

Powerful rulers



Figure 5.4.6: Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: CT Snow, CC BY 2.0)

Nan Madol is simultaneously an engineering marvel, a logistical puzzle, and the product of a sophisticated economy and highly stratified society—all presided over by a dynasty known as the Sau Deleurs. Who were these leaders who inspired (or perhaps coerced) the people of Pohnpei into such a long-term and physically challenging undertaking? Many oral histories describe them, and there are many possible interpretations of these, but most agree that for many centuries Pohnpei was under the rule of a series of chiefs (Sau) descended from Olosohpa, who began as gentle leaders but came to exert extraordinary power over their people before deteriorating into tyrants. Under their rule the people of Pohnpei not only built the Nan Madol structures, but also made tributes and food offerings to the Sau Deleur, including turtles and dogs, which were reserved for their consumption. This period of history is remembered as the “Mwehin Sau Deleur”—the “Time of the Lord of Deleur.”

The dynasty was overthrown by the culture hero Isokelekel, who destroyed the last of the Sau Deleurs in a great battle. Following his victory, Isokelekel divided power into three chieftainships and established a decentralized ruling system called Nahnmwarki which remains in existence today. He took up residence at Nan Madol on the islet of Peikapw. A century later, his successor abandoned the site and established a residence away from Nan Madol. The site gradually lost its association with prestige and its population dwindled, though religious ceremonies continued to be held here from time to time into the late 1800s.



Figure 5.4.7: Leaves of the Kava plant (photo: Forest & Kim Starr, CC BY 3.0)

Artifacts found at Nan Madol include stone and shell tools, necklaces, arm rings, “trolling lure” ornaments, drilled porpoise and fruit bat teeth, quartz crystals, lancet and disc-shaped bead necklaces, pottery, remnants of turtle and dog status foods, and large pounders used to process the root of the kava plant (*Piper methysticum*) into a ceremonial drink. Kava has mild sedative, anesthetic and euphoriant qualities, and its botanical name literally means “intoxicating pepper.” Extensive personal adornments, food, and kava are evidence of Nan Madol’s significance as the ceremonial center of Eastern Micronesia.

The garden of Micronesia

Pohnpei is rich in natural resources and has been called “the garden of Micronesia.” It has fertile soil and heavy rainfall, that promotes the growth of lush vegetation from its coastal mangrove swamps to the rainforests at the apex of its central hills, as well as lagoons. These natural resources would have provided the necessary food for the workers who built the extraordinary complex

that is Nan Madol, as well as timber that may have been used to help shift the basalt rocks. It seems unlikely that any foods were cultivated within Nan Madol, and likely no source of freshwater existed within the complex—food and water were brought from the island’s interior.



Figure 5.4.8: Detail of a wall in Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: [Wayne Batzer](#), CC BY-NC 2.0)

The basalt columns used to build Nan Madol are almost as extraordinary as the megalithic structures they comprise. Columnar grey basalt is a volcanic rock that breaks naturally into flat-sided rods when it cools. Though it appears quite marvelously to have been shaped by chisels, its predominantly hexagonal or pentagonal columns are due to natural fractures that form while a thick lava flow cools. Rapid cooling results in slender columns (<1 cm in diameter) while slow cooling results in longer and thicker columns. Some of the columns used to build Nan Madol are up to 20 feet long and weigh 80–90 tons. [4]

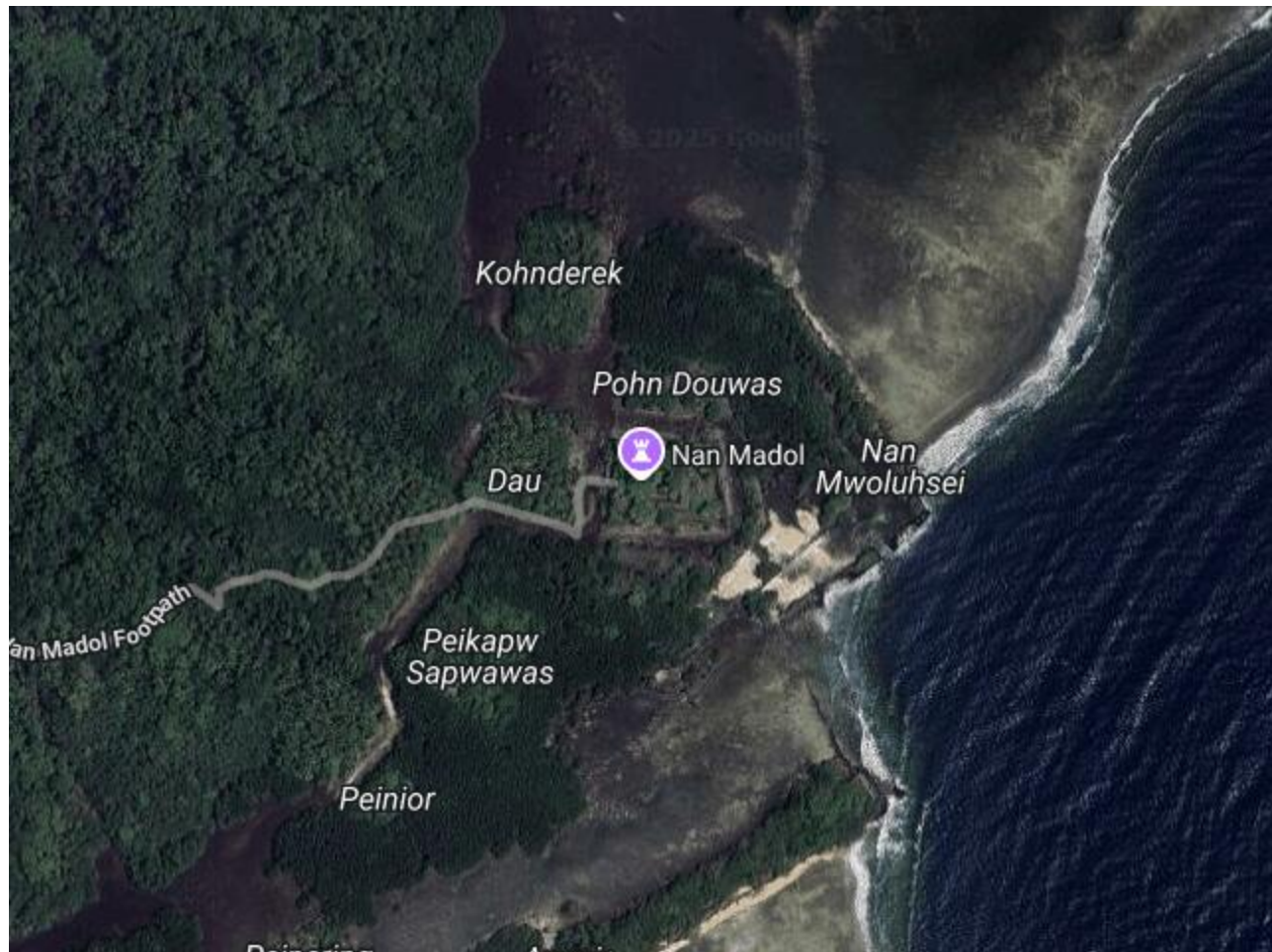


Figure 5.4.9: Nan Madol, 13th-17th century C.E., Pohnpei, The Federated States of Micronesia (photo: [ajdemma](#), CC BY-NC 2.0)

A space between things

In July 2016, Nan Madol was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The dedicated UNESCO webpage explains that “The huge scale of the edifices, their technical sophistication and the concentration of megalithic structures bear testimony to complex social and religious practices of the island societies of the period.” [5] It also describes how siltation of the waterways that are an integral part of this site is allowing an overgrowth by mangroves. Both the mangroves and the siltation are threatening the structures themselves.

Since Nan Madol was built on a coral foundation, it is sometimes called “the Venice of the Pacific.” Like [Venice](#) (which is made up of 117 islands), the islands of Nan Madol are connected by a network of tidal channels and waterways. These are referred to in the name Nan Madol, which means ‘in the space between things’—here, as elsewhere in the Pacific, waterways are described as [connectors](#) of people and places rather than barriers. The waterways might be local, like the canals of Nan Madol, or expansive, like the great Pacific Ocean, the largest body of water on Earth.



To get a sense of the extent of this space between things, it is instructive to zoom in on Nan Madol using an online mapping system. Pinpoint Sokehs Pah while you are at it, so you can also see the distance between this quarry and the ancient capital built from its rock supply. Then, frame by frame, zoom out. Marvel at the space that unfolds as you ponder what motivated the Sau Deleur dynasty to build such an expansive, impressive and intimidating structure, and just how they might have achieved this.

Notes:

1. On the island of Kosrae is another smaller capital at Leluh with megalithic architecture made from columnar basalt around 1300–1400 C.E.
2. [Christopher Pala, “Nan Madol: The City Built on Coral Reefs,” Smithsonian.com, November 3, 2009.](#) Nan Madol has inspired many speculative “lost continent” theories as well as songs and popular fiction. More recently it featured as a cultural city-state in the 2016 video game *Civilization VI*.
3. [“New Research Sheds More Light on Ancient Pacific Site,” RNZ, October 25, 2016.](#) See also Mark McCoy, [“Earliest direct evidence of monument building at the archaeological site of Nan Madol \(Pohnpei, Micronesia\) identified using 230 Th/U coral dating and geochemical sourcing of megalithic architectural stone”](#) in *Quaternary Research*, vol. 86, issue 3 (November 2016), pp. 295–303.
4. Columnar basalt deposits can be found throughout the world but the best known is probably the Giant’s Causeway in Northern Ireland.

5. UNESCO: “Nan Madol: Ceremonial Centre of Eastern Micronesia”

Additional resources:

[UNESCO webpage for Nan Madol](#)

[U.S. National Park Service webpage for Nan Madol](#)

[Nan Madol on The Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

[Nan Madol information and photos from the International Archaeological Institute](#)

[Sketchfab model of a burial monument at Nan Madol by Mark McCoy](#)

[3-D models of Nan Madol by William Ayres, University of Oregon](#)

“Centres of Power and Monumental Architecture in Micronesia,” in *Art in Oceania* (Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 58–61

Dan Lin, “Young Micronesians Explore Nan Madol: A New UNESCO World Heritage Site Located In Their Backyard,” *National Geographic*, August 21, 2016

This page titled [5.4: Nan Madol- “In the space between things”](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

- [9.5: Micronesia](#) by Smarthistory is licensed [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

6: Australia

by [DR. ALLISON YOUNG](#)



Figure 6.1: Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Earth's Creation*, 1994, synthetic polymer paint on linen mounted on canvas, four panels (private collection)

At nearly twenty feet wide and nine feet high, Emily Kame Kngwarreye's painting *Earth's Creation* is monumental in its scale and impact, rivaling Abstract Expressionist masterpieces by Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock not only in size but also in its painterly virtuosity (see a photo of it [in a gallery here](#), to get a sense of its scale). Patches of bold yellows, greens, reds and blues seem to bloom like lush vegetation over the large canvas. Comprised of gestural, viscous marks, each swath of color traces the movement of the artist's hands and body over the canvas, which would have been laid horizontally as she painted, seated on (or beside) and intimately connected to her art.



Figure 6.2: Still from a short video produced by The National Museum of Australia [source](#)

The work made records at auction when it was sold in 2007 for over \$ 1,000,000 — the highest price ever fetched for a work by a female artist in Australia. Yet, just decades earlier, Kngwarreye was virtually unknown to the world outside her small desert community in the Australian country of Alhakere. A self-taught artist who was trained in ceremonial painting, she rose to international prominence only in her eighties, and enjoyed a flourishing career at the end of her life.

Rooted in tradition

Kngwarreye was born around 1910, and spent most of her life in an isolated Anmatyerr community in Central Australia. The area, however, was forcibly occupied by European pastoralist settlers in the 1920s, and the artist, alongside other members of her community, worked on the pastoral property (pastoral refers to the tending of cattle and sheep). In 1976, Aboriginal land rights were legally granted, and she was able, finally, to live independently.

Aboriginal culture has long been intimately connected to the landscape of Australia; inhabited by humans for over 40,000 years, the region is characterized by deserts, grasslands and dramatic arched rock formations. Kngwarreye was an established elder of her community and was trained to create ceremonial sand paintings inspired by her ritual “dreamings,” as well as to paint decorative motifs on women's bodies as part of a ceremony called *Awelye*. These visual forms were connected to cultural expressions in song, storytelling and dance. While her paintings have never been figural, they remain influenced by the culture in which she grew up as well as the natural environment.

Artistic intervention

In the late 1970s, Kngwayere began to work in the medium of batiks, making works that were purely artistic endeavors for the first time. In 1977, she was a founding participant of the Utopia Women's Batik Group. Her compositions were abstract and featured the motif of repeated dots, acting sometimes as a linear stroke, or elsewhere used to fill large patches of space. A decade later, in 1988, the S.H. Ervin Gallery in Sydney initiated a “Summer Project” that sought to facilitate the creation of Aboriginal art, as well as to

establish a market for the genre. Sponsored by the collector Robert Holmes à Court, curators traveled to the Aboriginal homeland of Utopia and delivered acrylic paints and materials. After two weeks they returned to find “abstract and richly expressive” compositions created by many of the artists, and held a group exhibition in Sydney.



Figure 6.3: Emily Kame Ngwarreye, *Emu Woman*, 1988–89, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 92.0 x 61.0 cm (The Holmes à Court Collection, Heytesbury)

Ngwarreye’s painting *Emu Woman* (above) was selected for the cover of the exhibition catalogue as a gesture of respect for her seniority, as she was the oldest artist from the community. Dominated by rich, earthy tones, the painting—her first ever on canvas—contained references to plants and seeds that featured in her “dreaming” ritual. Against a dark field of charcoal, violet and black, the piece is punctuated with bright marks in tangerine and white hues, which lend the work an electric sense of energy and rhythm. Her decades-long experience in painting directly on the human body informs the curving swells of dotted marks that comprise the composition.

Critics lauded the piece, and virtually overnight, the artist received international exposure and unprecedented acclaim. The following year, Ngwarreye held her first solo exhibition at Utopia Art Sydney, after which she would be invited to participate in several renowned international exhibitions and biennales.

The “global” turn

The arc of Ngwarreye’s career runs alongside a period of tremendous change in Australia, moving from the end of a phase of colonial settlement through to a more ethical embrace of Aboriginal culture by the nation’s Western population. Yet the period in which she came to prominence also reflects changes taking place in the contemporary art world internationally, as the 1980s and 1990s saw a notable expansion within the mainstream to include non-Western or minority artists.

“Green time”

Earth’s Creation belongs to the “high colorist” phase in Ngwarreye’s work, which is characterized by a loosening of her compositions—which were no longer reliant on pseudo-geometric patterns—and the expansion of her color palette to include a range of tones beyond the familiar clay and ochre hues that dominated her prior works. Still connected to the natural environment, however, these works reference the changing atmospheric character of seasonal cycles. *Earth’s Creation* documents the lushness of the “green time” that follows periods of heavy rain, and makes use of tropical blues, yellows and greens. The piece has often been likened to Claude Monet’s studies of seasonal and temporal change, and given its formidable, room-filling scale, a comparison to the artist’s *Water Lilies* of 1914–26 (MoMA) might be remarkably apt.

Earth’s Creation was created as part of the larger Alhalkere Suite which contains twenty-two panels, and is still considered one of the most virtuosic of Ngwarreye’s immense and prolific artistic output. In the last two weeks of her life, Ngwarreye completed a suite of twenty-four small paintings. These were characterized by extremely broad, milky strokes of jewel-toned hues of blue and rose, and communicate the artist’s long-standing fascination with color and her sophisticated grasp of abstract composition.

Additional resources:

[“Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Ngwarreye” at the National Museum Australia](#)

[Earth’s Creation at the Venice Biennale, Universes-in-Universe](#)

[The artist at the National Gallery of Australia](#)

[Emily Kame Kngwarreye, The Alhalkere suite from the National Gallery of Australia](#)

[Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye, review by Chrischona Schmidt](#)

[Teacher notes for Emily Kame Kngwarreye: Alhalkere – Paintings from Utopia](#)

[Australia 1900-present on the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History](#)

This page titled [6: Australia](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Smarthistory](#) via [source content](#) that was edited to the style and standards of the LibreTexts platform.

Index

D

dire

Detailed Licensing

Overview

Title: [SmartHistory of Art X - Oceania](#)

Webpages: 40

Applicable Restrictions: Noncommercial

All licenses found:

- [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#): 97.5% (39 pages)
- [Undeclared](#): 2.5% (1 page)

By Page

- [SmartHistory of Art X - Oceania](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Front Matter](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [TitlePage](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [InfoPage](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Table of Contents](#) - [Undeclared](#)
 - [Licensing](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [1: Terracotta fragments, Lapita people](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [2: What is the impact and legacy of Cook's voyages?](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3: Polynesia](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.1: Polynesia, an introduction](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.2: Voyage to the moai of Rapa Nui \(Easter Island\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.3: Easter Island Moai](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.4: Paikea at the American Museum of Natural History](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.5: Maori meeting house](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.6: Rurutu figure known as A'a](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.7: Fly Whisk \(Tahiri\), Austral Islands](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.8: Necklace \(Lei Niho Palaoa\), Hawai'i](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.9: Feather cape](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.10: Hiapo \(tapa\)](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.11: Gottfried Lindauer, Tamati Waka Nene](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.12: Presentation of Fijian Mats and Tapa Cloths to Queen Elizabeth II](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [3.13: Michel Tuffery, Pisupo Lua Afe](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4: Melanesia](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.1: Melanesia, an introduction](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.2: Ambum Stone](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.3: Mask \(Buk\), Torres Strait, Mabuiag Island](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.4: Presentation of Fijian Mats and Tapa Cloths to Queen Elizabeth II](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.5: Bis Poles at The Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.6: The Life of Malagan](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [4.7: Malagan at the British Museum](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5: Micronesia](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.1: Navigation Chart, Marshall Islands](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.2: Wooden sculptures from Nukuoro](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.3: Kiribati armor](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [5.4: Nan Madol- "In the space between things"](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [6: Australia](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Back Matter](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Index](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Glossary](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)
 - [Detailed Licensing](#) - [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)