

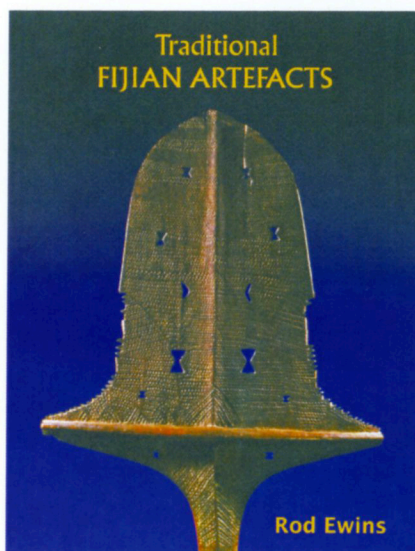


## Traditional Fijian Artefacts

**By Rod Ewins. Published in English by Just Pacific, 2014. 26 x 21 cm. 212 pages, 370 colour, B/W photographs and illustrations. ISBN: 9780646916989. Softcover, around 50 dollars (Price TBA) Further information at: [www.justpacific.com/fiji/mylatestbook/](http://www.justpacific.com/fiji/mylatestbook/) Reviewed by Crispin Howarth.**



Gugu club. Believed to have been collected by Rev. Waterhouse, 1840. Australian private collection.



*Traditional Fijian Artefacts* is an impressive compendium that acts as both the successor to and expansion of Ewins' 1982 work *Fijian Artefacts*. It is the remarkable result of over 30 years' passionate research by Ewins who has cleverly utilized the material held in Tasmania, where he lives, to illustrate all aspects of the traditional indigenous culture of Fiji, where he was born and raised.

Everything is covered from barkcloth and pottery to whale-ivory objects (including the ubiquitous *tabua* presentation objects) all with thorough attention to detail. The sections devoted to weapons and religious objects are fascinating with images of exquisite oil dishes and an array of club and spear types.

I managed to learn new things about the *Ula* throwing clubs which will make me look again at these objects with fresh eyes. What is immediately evident to the reader is that Ewins has deeply focused on Fijian art and culture rather than attempting to place Fiji into any broader picture about Pacific arts. This is a good thing as his writing is very much to the point and informative. There are many gems to be found for the researcher and also for owners/collectors of Fijian objects. While Ewins' writing is firmly about 18th and 19th century artefacts the work is not without some quirky modern facets; did you know that one type of club was used as the design for a weapon in *Star Wars*? Or have you ever wondered why

those wooden 'Fiji' masks are for sale at every tourist shop even though carving masks was never an aspect of Fijian culture? You can now happily blame Burt Lancaster and Hollywood for their introduction as film props in 1953.

The use of collections in Tasmania proves to be a wise choice as the Apple Isle's early 19th century history with Hobart acting as the major southern port and transit stop for missionaries and others to Fiji has resulted in some of the finest Fijian artefacts finding their way into Tasmanian museums. Being an active artist himself, Ewins has brought a designer's eye to the layout, the images are as big as possible, pushing to the edge of the pages to maximize on the space available. Ewins' work is a testament to excellent quality self-publishing and should inspire more people to consider sharing their passion and knowledge; indeed his website [justpacific.com](http://justpacific.com) is a fantastic resource for all things about Fijian culture. *Traditional Fijian Artefacts* is a welcome addition to the scant number of resources available on the traditional arts of Fiji and I would not be surprised if this book becomes as highly sought after and equally as much of a rarity as the original 1982 publication.



Priest's oil dish – sedreniwaiwai ni bete. Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery TMAG M2329.

## **Review of Rod Ewins, *Traditional Fijian Artefacts*, 2014**

**Barry Craig, South Australian Museum.**

In 1982, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery published Rod Ewins' book, *Fijian Artefacts. The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Collection*. This has proved to be a standard text for museum curators, scholars and students interested in the material culture of Fiji. The book went beyond its function as a catalogue of the TMAG's Fiji collection 'to provide some general information to explain the artefacts and to some extent the culture which gave rise to them' (p.3). Rod illustrated the catalogue with photographs (some in colour), historical drawings and sketches. Rod brought many years of fieldwork, museum and archival research to the project. A copy of that publication is now almost impossible to find on sale.

Rod rose to the challenge of continuing demand for copies of the 1982 catalogue and has published a revised, restructured and expanded book. He has included collections from other public institutions in Tasmania, notably the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, and some private collections. There are many more illustrations, the majority in colour. The extensive bibliography will support further detailed research for scholarly and exhibition purposes. There is an Appendix of succinct biographies of collectors and donors and a generous Index. This will be the standard text into the foreseeable future.

The book was published by Just Pacific ([www.justpacific.com](http://www.justpacific.com)) in association with the Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery (Hobart) and the Queen Victoria Museum & Art Gallery (Launceston). For how to purchase a copy, go to  
<<http://www.justpacific.com/fiji/mylatestbook/index.html>>