

ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL, OR ALL THINGS WISE AND WONDERFUL?

Objects from Island Oceania in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Rod Ewins

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When Philip Dark asked me to write a piece about the Pacific material in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), I had difficulty deciding what sort of approach to take. First, I have had to accept that, like most of us, my knowledge of Pacific art is stronger in certain areas than others, and I have to rely heavily on the literature in areas I know less about. Second, the TMAG has approximately 10,000 objects catalogued in its ethnographic collection, the majority of them from Australia and Island Oceania. Simply listing the objects is a huge task way beyond the scope of an article such as this,¹ and at the end of the day it would be meaningless to readers except statistically, unless extensively annotated. A short selected listing was obviously not only all I could do, but could be more informative.

The selection of some objects for photographic inclusion highlighted the next dilemma. Should I try to illustrate only what a Western readership would consider the more dazzling objects? There are certainly some exceptionally fine and rare pieces in the collection. But the great treasure-houses of the world, whose financial capacity to collect aggressively over a long period puts them in a totally different league from the TMAG, would in most cases have items equal or superior which have been illustrated previously. Against this, however, the TMAG does have an unusually rich array of everyday items from a number of societies, which tell a different and sometimes more intimate and engaging story.

For obvious enough reasons, the large coffee-table books which result from the interest of people such as all of us in the PAA tend to focus on artefacts which are considered to be self-evidently 'treasures,' and unquestionably the objects that adorn their pages are marvels of human creativity. Also many, indeed most, are ritual objects and thus essential to the spiritual life of their makers and owners. But it is not always safe to assume that only the more dazzling objects fulfil that role. Apparently humble objects might possess great and lasting importance. For example, plain white bark-cloth was not often collected in Fiji, yet white signified the spiritual domain, and white cloth was reserved for the principal rites of passage

and for special uses in the temples. Arguably it was of at least as deep cultural significance as the richly-figured cloth normally collected.²

But finally and most importantly, it is the *spread* of objects that provides true insights into societies, and surely that is of far greater importance than merely bringing a caressing western gaze to isolated and decontextualised artworks. As a field anthropologist I am usually left feeling restless after poring over such picture books, and often also after visiting the public display areas of museums. It is not until I go into museum storerooms that the societies start to come to life through the *entirety* of the objects that clutter the shelves, each demanding its rightful role, however restricted, in the telling of the stories of its makers and users.³ Social anthropologists have for a long time been dismissive of such objects,⁴ and in museums they are usually at the end of the queue for curatorial attention, and are frequently in a woeful state. But were they really, to the societies that made and used them, less important? Such societies tend to be less prone than ours to value what we define as ‘art’ more highly than what we often define as ‘craft,’ or even more pejoratively, ‘handicraft.’

For similar reasons of western taste and preconception, it has also generally been the ‘dazzling’ items, not the more humble ones, that have been subject to mass-production for the tourist market — as Meyer (1995:7) points out, Maori greenstone *heitiki* were apparently being produced in numbers for trade to western visitors by the time of Cook’s second voyage, Easter Island ‘sacred’ figures that never saw service were being churned out by the early 1800s, large ‘ceremonial’ paddles were being mass-produced in Ra’ivavae by the 1820s, as were large pedestal-adzes in Mangaia. Today, he points out, ‘Asmat’ shields are even being carved in Bali! If Museums are concerned about ‘authenticity’ (by whatever definition — the debate goes on), and provenances are shaky (as they more often are than aren’t), it is far more likely to reside securely in a *bilum* string bag or digging stick than in a Sepik mask.

Over the past two decades I have worked in the storerooms of dozens of museums large and small all over Australia and New Zealand, through much of the USA, Great Britain and Ireland, and Western Europe. My purpose has been to survey, and frequently to identify unattributed or misattributed, Fijian items among collections of material from all over the Pacific — and frequently further afield. In the course of this I have of course encountered great masterpieces also, superb and unforgettable examples of artistic expression. But along with those, why is it that many of the things that haunt the mind are not dazzling, are not *tours de force* of the carver’s, potter’s, weaver’s or painter’s arts, but are humble (if often elegant) items? Among once-common but now very rare Fijian objects I recall such things as: a turtle-scapula breadfruit-splitter in Berne; a group of finely-woven flat satchels (in which women kept their husbands’ hair-scarfs) in the British Museum; a cone-shaped fibre kava-strainer in Newcastle; a janus-headed walking staff in Frankfurt; a pinafore-style dress (sewn in Fiji by a chiefly woman using kin-derived Futuna barkcloth) in Brighton Pavilion; a very rare

collection of male-decorated Highland barkcloth in the New York Museum of Natural History; a ceramic canoe-hearth in Peabody Cambridge.

The list goes on and on, and could be repeated for virtually every society whose material culture has been collected and squirrelled away in large and small museums all around the world. The picture that emerges is of societies in which not only ceremony, religious awe, and momentous stages of passage motivated creativity and aesthetic judgement. The daily business of living was celebrated by the application of artistry to the ‘everyday’ treasured objects, and frequently the constraints of tradition surrounding such objects were less rigid, resulting in the exercise of great originality.

In the end, in my choice of items to photograph for this article I have tried to balance the quality and age of the item, and gender of maker/user, with relative uncommonness in books. Coupled with constraints on the number of photographs I could use, the equation was impossible, but I trust will give some sense of what I have been discussing above.

The collectors are the other intriguing part of the equation. Like most smaller museums, the TMAG has had limited funds for purchase, and for the same reason was never able to mount the collecting expeditions engaged in by some of the great museums. The nature of smaller collections, therefore, is largely determined accidents of history — who was where and when, and which of them made gifts and left bequests to the museum. What is remarkable, given this, is that so many small museums in far-flung corners have ended up with what are significant and fascinating collections of material from often unlikely places.

Few museums, large or small, have any shortage of weapons (not only Oceanic collections, either). On an artefact countback alone, it would seem reasonable to assume that murder and mayhem was the principal preoccupation of most cultures throughout history, Pacific cultures among them. In the TMAG nearly half of the ethnographic collection is weapons. The reason, I suggest, was less the unquestioned fact that warfare was a significant cultural phenomenon in such societies, for after all they still needed a diversity of objects to get on with all of the other aspects of living. It was more that the Nineteenth-Century male collectors had much less interest in defining the cultures they had contact with, than in the construction of their *own* identities.⁵ The ‘warrior’ was associated with manliness, and to display arrayed on one’s wall a collection of weapons from ‘the islands’ was to portray oneself as a man among men, and sufficiently powerful to obtain the weapons of the ‘Other.’ The mythology is very powerful.

Similarly, for a male missionary to acquire the symbolic objects of ‘primitive’ religion was testimony to their success in dislodging false gods — their version of manly power. I have in a number of personal journals encountered comments by missionaries about their obtaining

idols and other items from ‘heathen priests’ on the basis that the latter would have no further need of these, and were either pressured into giving them to those who had supplanted them, or gave them voluntarily as evidence of the sincerity of their conversion.

The female domain, unsurprisingly, tended to be less well represented in such collections. This is shown dramatically by the fact that, while it is my impression that relative to some collections the TMAG is quite strong in the female domains, particularly of weaving and textiles (skirts, mats, fans, dilly-bags, baskets, feather-work, loom-weaving and bark cloth),⁶ nonetheless relative to female productivity as against male productivity in Oceania, it is very small, all female productions representing only a little over 10% of the holdings (compared, as mentioned, with 40% for weapons alone). Of course, women would have had a hand in the production of a number of other articles not specifically in the female domain (such as bark-cloth covered ceremonial masks), but the fact remains that there was a colossal gendered selectivity of both vision and collection.⁷ The Melanesian bias of the collection, and the fact that in Melanesia material culture production was more extensively a male domain (compared with Micronesia and Polynesia), in particular of the ceremonial items that have been privileged in collecting, are still inadequate reasons. Women still produced a significant range of goods, including some directly related to their own rich ceremonial life.

The reason was, I contend, at least in part the same as the reason for a focus on weapons. The ‘frontier’ tended to be (at least conceptually) a male domain, and there was no wish on the male collector’s part to define his identity in terms of female articles. Where these do appear, they tend to be either ceremonial objects that were presented to the collector (such as bark-cloth), or usable articles (such as some baskets and floor-mats). The exception to this was when women accompanied the men, and often acquired domestic articles chosen for their beauty, delicacy, or practical ingenuity. It might be argued that these were also associated, if not with identity construction, at least with a perception of self on the part of the western women whose identity was itself at that time constrained and defined in largely male-sanctioned terms.

Finally, however, there were instances where the contact was sufficiently long and/or intimate, and the collectors of either sex sufficiently generous-spirited, that they did become genuinely interested in the people with whom they shared their lives, and sought to remember them as more than symbols of their own conquest or achievement. It is to these people, largely, that we owe a debt for the collections of digging-sticks, tapa-beaters, water-containers, sago-pounders, collecting-baskets, dilly-bags and other articles, *sometimes*, as I have suggested in the title of this paper, bright and beautiful, but *usually* wise and wonderful. I will try, in this brief overview, to offer some balance between the two.

The Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

Along with Glasgow and Edinburgh and a number of other surviving Museum and Art Gallery complexes throughout the British Empire, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery and its sister institution in Tasmania's other large centre, Launceston (The Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery), were if not a direct product of the 1851 Great Exhibition of London at the Crystal Palace, at least a product of the same eclectic spirit and desire to display the finest achievements of the arts and sciences within one complex. It was a lofty goal, and the imposing edifices both cities erected demonstrated both their earnest intent and their unshakeable faith in the future of their small communities.

With its establishment by Act of Parliament in 1885, the TMAG inherited the 1863 museum building and the collections of the *Royal Society of Tasmania for Horticulture, Botany and the Advancement of Science*, whose members had an interest in all parts of the natural world from minerals, flora and fauna to 'primitive' man. Their collections formed the basis of several of the new Museum's domains of specialisation, including the ethnographic. While the bulk of the ethnographic collection dates from 1863 onward, objects were being assembled from the founding of the Society in 1843,⁸ and many would have been collected at some earlier date. As a result, a number of Pacific objects in the collection would have a collection date of a century and a half ago. Really very few are of recent manufacture, with the exception of some aboriginal material which is still being actively collected by the Museum. Tourist objects do pop up as they do in all collections, but they are few. The lively current anthropological debates about authenticity are therefore hardly relevant, and certainly do not need to be explored here. Overwhelmingly, the TMAG's Pacific ethnographic material came out of societies in which the syncretic process of incorporating western culture was not yet far advanced, so their cultural messages are sharper, less layered.

There were two important factors which influenced the large number and high quality of objects which came into the TMAG during the 19th Century and early 20th Century. First was the fact that Hobart was an important deep-water transit port throughout that period (as it remains, though today less frequented), with many sailors and naval officers visiting and not a few returning to retire here. In these categories belong the 25 naval captains and lieutenants whose names are associated with some 200 objects, some of them striking and important. While their gifts were, as might be expected, principally of weapons (and a number of skirts — they *were* sailors!), some (notably Lt. E.E.Jones and Lt.C.R.Watson) were discerning collectors of diverse objects, whose travels included inland areas as well as ports. A survey of their gifts helps explain the richness of the collections of Melanesian material in particular.⁹ Second was the fact that it was an important missionary base first for the Wesleyan Mission to the Western Pacific and then for both Presbyterians and Anglicans, who staged in Hobart enroute from Britain to their postings in the islands, used it for 'R & R' and, in some cases,

based families here and/or retired here. Many missionaries were avid personal collectors of indigenous artefacts of all sorts, and they also sent ‘home’ artefacts to be sold as a means of raising funds for their missions. As a result, many of the items in the collection can be traced either directly to these discerning collectors, or to their agency — indeed, it is striking that the strengths of the ethnographic collections coincide remarkably with the presence of Hobart-associated missionaries.

Of particular importance as collectors were the following:

Brown, George. [Samoa 1860-74, New Britain/New Ireland 1875-?] (nearly 70 items).

Chalmers, James 1841-1901 [Rarotonga 1867-77, south and southeast PNG 1877-1901] and author of several books including *Pioneer life and work in New Guinea 1877-94*. (nearly 70 items).

Frazer, Robert M. 1851-1921 [Epi, Vanuatu 1882-1921; wife Elizabeth Westbrook from Hobart, daughter Ruth worked in Epi with him and returned to Hobart on his death] (over 30 items).

Moore, William [Fiji 1850-69, based in Hobart, wife and 16 children there]

Waterhouse, John d. 1842 [first regional General Superintendent of Wesleyan Mission, based in Hobart. Visited Fiji 1840, 1841 and brought artefacts to Hobart]

Waterhouse, Joseph 1828-81 [Fiji 1850-78; son of John, based in Hobart, wife and 10 children survived him there]

There were also several prominent and discriminating Tasmanian collectors of Pacificana, with items from all regions occurring in the Museum’s holdings as a result of posthumous purchases or bequests. Most notable among these are:

Beattie, John W. 1859-1930 [Professional photographer and keen amateur anthropologist, toured the Western Pacific in 1906. Much of his collection was purchased by the QVMAG in Launceston before his death, but some came to the TMAG posthumously].

Sticht, Robert C. 1856-1922 [Mining engineer and ‘gentleman collector’ of a great array of categories from mediaeval parchments to ethnographic material which he documented in an Edge-Partington manner. His collections were broken up, some Pacific material coming to the TMAG from his estate in 1963].

Taylor, Alfred J. 1849-1921 [Librarian of the Tasmanian Public Library for 47 years, travelled in 1905, probably collecting. He ran a private museum of Natural History (‘Henry’s Museum’), part or all of which was purchased by the TMAG in 1922, the year after his death].

One other source of note should be mentioned: the retiring Lieutenant-Governor of British New Guinea, Sir George Le Hunte, who in 1906 gave the Museum about 50 items from his administrative area.¹⁰

The collection

• Australia

Perhaps not surprisingly, there is considerable Australian Aboriginal material (over 2,000 articles). The objects come from a very wide spread of locations. The largest number are from Tasmania, then in descending order Queensland, Western Australia, Victoria, Torres Strait Islands, Northern Territory, New South Wales and South Australia. As usual, there are many weapons: a very large number of spears, fighting clubs and boomerangs from all over Australia. Of note are numerous decorated shields, and an intact full-sized bark canoe from Victoria is unusual. Among women's objects, there is a large amount of woven material, some beautifully formed baskets and dilly-bags, and a lot of personal adornment, particularly shell-work necklaces. There are a great number of stone implements, again from all over Australia but of course with many archaeolithic flaked implements from Tasmania. There is also a significant collection of current contemporary aboriginal art from various parts of Australia, in particular of course Tasmania, which is being actively collected and documented by the Museum. The extensiveness of the holdings and my own inadequate knowledge of Aboriginal ethnography have led me to leave this material for a separate review at another time.¹¹

• Melanesia

By far the largest ethnographic collection overall is of Melanesian material.

PNG: There are over 2,000 objects from Papua New Guinea (including the offshore islands of the Trobriand Is, Admiralty Is, New Ireland, New Britain and Bougainville), with some particularly interesting material coming via Rev. Brown in New Britain and New Ireland, and Rev. Chalmers and Sir George Le Hunte in the former British New Guinea (later Papua). As a result, Massim District/Trobriand Islands, New Britain & New Ireland, and the Fly River are the best-represented areas of Papua New Guinea, though there is also important material from the Papuan Gulf, and from Collingwood Bay. A reasonable amount of this material is provenanced, due largely to the knowledge of the naval and missionary donors.

(a) Admiralty Is, New Britain & New Ireland

There is not a great deal of *malagan* (or *malanggan*) mortuary material, but what there is, is both old and in excellent condition.¹²

-*Tatanua* mortuary *malagan* (*malanggan*) "soul" mask from N.I. The apparent helmet crest connotes a former style of hairdress which was worn as a sign of mourning (c.f. Joyce 1925: 38; Brake et al 1979: 52-3; Nevermann 1979: 476-7; Meyer 1995: 342, 346)

- A *kulap* funerary figure, female, 1869 Rev. G. Brown. These figures were carved from chalk found in central New Ireland, and were temporary repositories for the spirit of the

deceased. After the funeral ceremonies the figures were broken to release the spirit, which may explain why this figure has one leg broken off (c.f. Meyer 1995: 353; Brake et al 1979: 46,48).



***Tatanua malagan* mask M135, New Ireland**

***Kulap* funerary figure M4544, New Ireland**

- Mask in typical open-carving form and red and white paint used for tall *malagan* objects

There is a great deal of shell wealth in various forms:¹³

- 7 strings of money from N.B., 6 with extremely early acquisition numbers

- A number of personal adornments in the form of tiny shell-discs forming gorgets, armlets etc.

- Man's dance-apron from the Admiralty Is, donated in 1920.

The following items are also noteworthy:¹⁴

- A bag with rattles of large hollow seeds and shells, probably shaman's, from N.B.

- A small, brightly painted 'fish-head' with a handle and 'catseye' shell opercula as eyes. Probably a shaman's charm.

Collected by Rev. George Brown, there fore before 1908.

- Two canoe-prow ornaments from N.I.

(b) Massim/Trobriand Is.

This collection is limited in scope but notable in three categories of item:

- Immediately obvious is the remarkable number of ceremonial clubs or maces (*pulata*) — nearly 80 of them, many dated to the 19th Century, and diverse in form, ranging from spatulate to cutlass-shaped. The handle of some ends in the curious form reminiscent of a



**Man's dance-apron M5221,
Admiralty Is**

Spanish helmet, also found on a particular type of Fijian club (lost caravel?).¹⁵ *Pulata* are familiar in the literature (e.g. Rogers 1970: 101, Meyer 1995: 149; Greub 1988: 167).

- Another important collection is of over 40 finely carved lime spatulae (the lime taken in conjunction with betel and areca-nut when chewing), many with anthropomorphic spirit forms on the handles, imparting malevolent magical powers to the spatulae (c.f. Sotheby's Peter Hallinan Collection 1992: 128-9; Meyer 1995: 137, 140-1). Many have early donor information — half of them came from the Lt.Gov. of British New Guinea in 1906. There are only a couple of the associated lime-gourds in the collection — they are less spectacular and lack magical properties, so were not so sought-after.

- There are four fine painted wooden shields, also familiar in the literature though rare, almost certainly the possessions of the powerful and important (c.f. Joyce 1925: 133; Bühler et al 1962: 101; Rogers 1970: 101; Meyer 1995: 148).¹⁶



**Handles of lime spatulae
M237/8/9 Trobriand Is.,
Massim, PNG**

- Two carved wooden pigs with surface decoration, one large, one small (c.f. Brake et al 1979: 90; Sotheby's Peter Hallinan Collection 1992: 144)

- 17 carved paddles, 13 from C19 collectors (c.f. Meyer 1995: 145); 2 canoe prow boards (c.f. Meyer 1995: 142); 5 wooden bowls (3 of the bowls, and the canoe prows also from the Lt.Gov. 1906)¹⁷

- Two sleeping mats c.1900; a cowrie-decorated armlet;
-numerous axes and adzes.¹⁸

(c) Southern P.N.G., Papuan Gulf and Elema District

There is an assortment of objects catalogued rather vaguely as 'Southern P.N.G.', which contains objects from the Papuan Gulf (including the Elema people of the eastern Papuan Gulf) but includes some objects in to the 'tail of the lizard' south of the Markham. I have grouped them here. The most important objects in the group are from the Elema, doubly important since Elema art has declined following the 1919 'Vailala Madness' of cargo-cultists, and 1930s Christian converts, who between them destroyed much of the old art.

Notable are:¹⁹

- *Kovave* spirit-mask, a typical tall conical mask of bark-cloth over a frame, painted and bearing a 'beak' with many

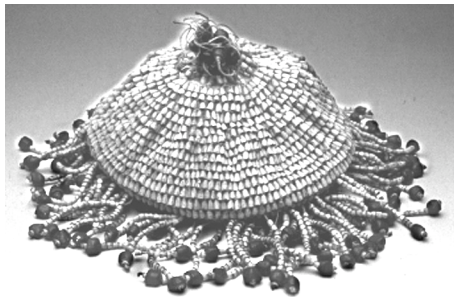


***Kovave* spirit-mask M1764.
Elema people, E.Papuan Gulf**

fine teeth. Bark-cloth over cane frame. *Kovave* are forest spirits summoned during male initiation ceremonies, when the initiates wear these masks (cf. Joyce 1925: 134; Meyer 1995: 126-8).

- a collection of 9 *marupai* magic good luck charms, several in their woven bags, some without. Carved from dwarf coconut, in the form of a pig-like head, these were a bringer of good fortune in pigs and crops. The majority were purchased at auction in 1891. (cf. Rogers 1970: 65; Sotheby's Peter Hallinan Collection 1992: 150; Meyer 1995: 131).

- two unusual caps composed entirely of sewn-together shells, from 'Southern P.N.G.'. They were obtained from the Australian Board of Missions, and are labelled 'Widows Weeds.' Special widows' caps are not uncommon in a number of societies.²⁰



**Widows cap, fibre and shells M6398.10.
Southern PNG**



***Marupai* magic
charm M175. Elema people, E.Papuan Gulf**

(d) Fly River

This collection of nearly 90 items owes its presence largely to Rev. James Chalmers, who was active in this area from the late 1870s until 1901, and was an avid collector.

Notable from the Fly River are:²¹

- two *gope* ancestor boards
- a dance helmet
- four ceremonial axes
- a collection of musical instruments: 2 drums, 5 'Jews harps,' 2 shell trumpets, 2 rattles
- a headrest
- utilitarian items including 9 pig-catching nets and 8 digging sticks
- clothing and items of personal adornment including skirts, armlets, ear ornaments and headdresses.

(e) Huon Gulf²²

The Huon Gulf is part of the Vitiaz Straits Trade System (for description and similar examples see Rogers 1970; 196ff and Meyer 1995:159, 163), from which there are various

articles in the collection. The area is famous for its carving of which there are three examples held:

- two typical wooden bowls, both collected pre-1920 (Taylor and Lt.Jones). One was



obtained from Morobe/Kilenge though both were very probably carved in the Tami Islands, a long way from where it was obtained (cf. Rogers 1970: 201 and Meyer 1995: 163).

- a wooden headrest, with a janus-headed figure which has the flexed knees typical of figures from this area, finely carved and accented with lime. Also probably carved in the Tami Islands (cf. Meyer 1995: 162).

Headrest M4380, Huon Gulf

(f) Collingwood Bay

Most significant for this area is:

- a collection of 24 bark-cloths of apparent age obtained from the Australian Board of Missions in 1983 (though no collection dates are recorded), additional to one early piece (Lt.Gov of Brit NG, pre-1906) and one unprovenanced.²³ These decorated bark-cloths, made by the women, are the production for which Collingwood Bay is most known.
- a model canoe²⁴

(g) Bougainville

As anyone following the disputes over copper mining must be well aware, Bougainville is both geographically and culturally far closer to the Solomon Is. than it is to PNG, to which it is

attached administratively. Most old catalogue listings record it as 'Bougainville, Solomon Is.' There is not a great deal of material of interest other than weapons.

- Surprising even though one knows that this was a warlike society, a massive 80% of the collection is composed of bows, arrows and spears, many of them finely made..
- 14 paddles, 12 of them obtained from the Australian Museum in 1892 (cf. Meyer 1995: 396-7), along with 3 ceremonial wands given together with 24 'other' Solomon Is wands.²⁵
- 9 baskets, 2 of them donated in 1899, the rest unprovenanced, and 1 string bag.²⁶

***Bilum* string bag M622 from PNG, probably Abelam, donated 1918.**



(h) Other PNG

Among the many items unspecified as to district are a number of beautifully woven *bilum*, or string bags, usually with dyed weave forming geometric designs (for

current discussions of these important objects see MacKenzie 1991 and Hauser-Schäublin 1996).

- There are also some finely carved mens' bark belts.
- Of grisly interest are 3 'man-catchers' (probably Abelam) used by head-hunters in raids to secure heads for their *haus tamberan*. These are simple cane objects with a long handle ending in a large loop, with a sharp spike projecting from the handle into the loop — the practice being to 'lassoo' the fleeing victim and impale them simultaneously without damaging the skull, a scene illustrated in Chalmers (1895) and reproduced in Rogers (1970: 182). Indeed Chalmers very possibly collected these examples, though no source is listed.

Solomon Is/Santa Cruz: The Solomon and Santa Cruz Islands (geographically close but culturally distinct) appear on the register to be extremely well represented, but over a third of the holdings are arrows, and the total weapon count is over half of the over 600 items! What remains, however, is a rich collection of everyday items from digging sticks to canoe bailers to water containers, many of them finely carved and often inlaid with shell, and items of personal apparel and adornment. The following handful of items can only give an idea of the spread.

(a) Solomon Is.

- Among objects of spiritual importance there is a somewhat weathered 1896 *nguzunguzu* canoe prow ornament, the familiar form later produced in larger (and thus impractical) sizes for tourists. It is a half-figure with a large human head with a prognathic snout-like appearance, sometimes holding a fish or bird in its hands, inlaid with shell (cf. Bühler et al 1962: 128; Brake et al 1979: 24-5, Meyer 1995: 398-9).
- There are also six inlaid carvings in the round of the highly valued and fetishised *bonito* fish, four dated from the 1890s (cf. Bühler et al 1962: 136).
- In 1892 a large collection of Solomon Is ceremonial wands — two dozen of them (plus 3 from Bougainville) — came from the Australian Museum.²⁷
- Among numerous functional items, a carved coconut shell container from Guadalcanal, donated in 1897, is very beautiful. There are a number of adzes.²⁸



Gorget M3487, Solomon Is.

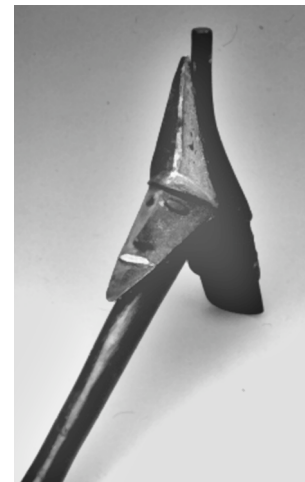
- Among garments and adornments, an unusual eyeshade from Vella Lavella has a two-figure accession number suggesting very early date; several discoid pendants of polished white metamorphosed limestone (coral rock?); numerous beaded armbands; a finely woven gorget; a number of skirts (4 dated 1897 from Guadalcanal); ear rings and sticks.²⁹

(b) Santa Cruz

- Mask with early accession number
- Particularly significant is a collection of half a dozen very fine *kapkap* pendants, clamshell discs with attached fine fret-work tortoiseshell decoration of frigate-birds and bonito (cf. Bühler et al 1962: 50, who describe them as ‘among the finest works in this material [tortoiseshell], cut out in a delicate manner almost like lace’ (1962: 88)).³⁰
- Two very finely woven banana fibre bags to hold lime gourds, one dated 1898; about 20 finely woven mats, four dated from the 1890s;³¹ a number of decorative hair combs.

Vanuatu: One of the strengths of the Museum’s ethnographic collection is the material from Vanuatu, both in quantity and quality. Although again, like the Solomons, about half the collection is weapons, there is an extensive array of other interesting items, ranging from mid-19th Century ritual masks to shamanic items, baskets, and tapa cloth. The following are only a very few items I found particularly interesting: ³²

- a skull overmodelled with fibre and painted, from Malekula (cf. Meyer 1995: 424-5);
- three masks from Malekula, all old, one (ceramic janus-head base, tall cane hat covered with cobwebs) provenanced to 1899 (Capt. Leah);
- an adze with with carved face painted harlequin-like in red and blue, collected on Epi I. by Rev. Frazer probably late C19.
- two strings of shell money from Mere Lava I., collected pre-1922.
- a double-strand necklace, made of tightly packed discs cut and drilled from coconut-shell.
- three loom-woven banana-fibre penis-wrappers from Pentecost I, two pre-1899, ranging from 2.5cm to 9cm in width;
- shaman’s items: belt with pendant rattles of candlenuts dated 1892 (missionary Frazer); sorcery stone (‘netik’) from Tanna pre-1924;
- several fans and very finely-woven square-base baskets dating from 1892 to early C20.



**Adze M126, Epi I.,
Vanuatu**

Loyalty Is/New Caledonia: There is little beyond a few unprovenanced clubs from New Caledonia. There are however several water gourds with fine sinnet binding and straps, notably one outstanding example in perfect condition.

• **Micronesia**

There are fewer than 50 objects from Tuvalu and Kiribati, but they are varied in type, including: shell money; adze; tattooing instrument; headrests; mats and fans; fish-hooks; rat-trap; digging stick and coconut crusher.

- Of note are one complete and one partial coconut fibre armour cuirass (without helmets or trousers, but with five shark-tooth swords, a club, and 2 spears held separately).³³

• Polynesia

Polynesia is not well represented overall; apart from Fiji (which while culturally hybrid tends to be most strongly Polynesian) there is only a small amount of material from Central Polynesia.

Fiji: The Fijian material is the Museum's fourth largest holding, after Australia, Papua New Guinea (including offshore islands) and the Solomon Is. However, since I have already published a comprehensively illustrated and still-available catalogue of the Fijian material in this collection,³⁴ I will not repeat that information here, but merely re-state that, being significantly based on missionary collections from the second and third quarters of the 19th Century, it possesses some fine objects over a wide range. Of particular note is the duck-form priest's kava dish or *buburau* (cover illustration of the catalogue), of which as far as I know only four exist, two in the Fiji Museum, one in the Sainsbury Collection at the University of East Anglia, and this one.³⁵

Tonga: There are only about 30 items that are definitely Tongan:

- 15 pieces of bark-cloth, most of them certainly Tongan, some either Lau (Fiji) or Tonga;
- half a dozen clubs.

Other items such as combs and headrests I have detailed in *Fijian Artefacts*, as there was such thorough interchange between the two groups in certain classes of artefacts by the mid-C19 that it is very difficult to be definitive.

Samoa: There are around 100 items ascribed to Samoa, only about 20% of them weapons (clubs and spears). Notable are:

- 8 fine mats, at least 3 collected around the turn of the century (Rev. Newall and Dr. Collingwood)
- nearly 30 fans, some clearly very old and beautifully made, representing many district fan designs though none have provenances/dates³⁶



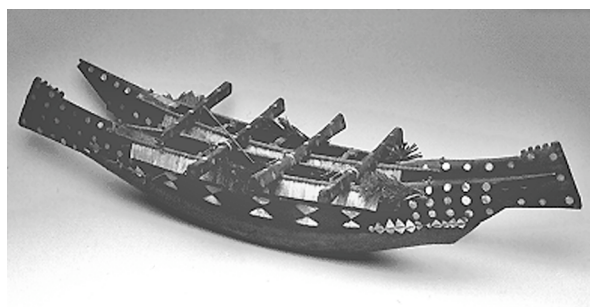
Fan M666, Samoa.

- 16 skirts, 6 with very early accession numbers suggesting 1880s date, 2 dated 1898, 2 from 1915.
- 18 pieces of bark cloth, 8 of them from collectors active around the turn of the century.³⁷ - 8 baskets, several evidently old though only one dated to 1915 (M. Wolfhagen donor).
- a small *kupesi* rubbing-block for figuring *siapo* bark-cloth

Niue: There are over 20 objects from Niue, an island not prolifically represented in most museums. Nearly half are weapons — 8 spears and a club, but there are two pieces of beautifully-figured *hiapo* bark-cloth and a delicately-decorated *ike* bark-cloth beater, two fans (one dated 1915) and two model canoes.³⁸

Cook Is: There are a couple of dozen articles attributed to the Cook Islands, most of them stone tools (adzes/axes).

- Notable are two fine model canoes from Manihiki, collected prior to 1920. These are typical models of Manihiki double canoes, with the heads (correctly) in opposite directions. Possibly made specifically for sale to travelers, and found in a number of major museum collections (see detailed discussion and illustrations in Haddon & Hornell (1936) 1975: 176-94).



Model double canoe M2610, Manihiki I., Cook Islands.

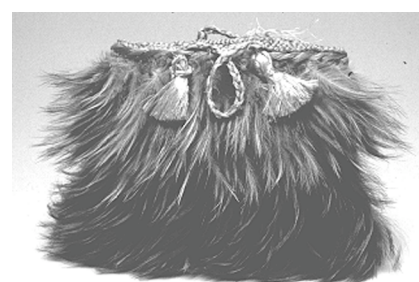
Austral Is: There are two ceremonial items only, one a paddle (excellent condition) and one a long-handled kava ladle (damaged), both from Ra'ivavae and typical in form and intricate carving. They are not large, as later versions made specifically for tourists tended to become, so one might speculate that they may be early (cf. Meyer 1995: 536-7; Brake et al 1975: 144).

Society Is./Tahiti and Hawaii: There is hardly any material from Eastern Polynesia in the collection. There are two white bark-cloths typical of Eastern Polynesia, and one patterned *ike* bark-cloth beater from Hawaii. There is a necklet and a basket both attributed to Hawaii but with no firm provenance. There is nothing from the Marquesas or Tuamotu archipelagos or from Easter I.

New Zealand Aotearoa: It might have been expected, given its close proximity to Tasmania, that the quantity of New Zealand material would have been greater (there are about 150 objects), though some of what is held is of quite a high standard, having been obtained at an earlier date in exchanges with New Zealand museums, in particular Wellington.

Notable are:³⁹

- a flax cloak and 9 flax skirts, some ornamented with wool and/or feathers.
- a group of fineflax bags, one covered with kiwi feathers;
- a strangely baroque bag with looped tree bast (hibiscus?) - a *wakahuia* treasure-box for storing jade items and the feathers of the *huia* bird (cf. Meyer 1995: 555);
- a carved canoe prow;
- a particularly finely-carved wooden *patu* with a tattooed head at the end of the handle, and a reclining figure at the junction of handle and blade.



Flax & kiwi feather bag M4671, New Zealand

• NW Americas

Although it is strictly speaking outside the Oceania region I am surveying, I should mention a collection of objects from the Northwest Native American and Eskimo peoples, over 60 of them Inuit. While the collection is not particularly large, and provenances are patchy, the objects are predominantly Nineteenth Century, including some quite old objects from the Aleutian chain, and some appear to my non-specialist eye to be quite unusual. To mention just a few among these:

- a thin-wood conical man's hat from Behring Strait dated pre-1850;
- a sealskin sock, and pairs of sealskin mittens, slippers (beaded) and boots — all in remarkably good condition;
- a Tlingit spoon with carved wolf-heads with blue shell (abalone?) inlay eyes;
- a pre-1922 Inuit basket woven from baleen, with a carved bone wolf's head as a handle on the lid;
- a small basket from Southern Alaska with coloured weaving decoration, including depictions of whales;
- a belt covered with teeth that resemble small human incisors (seals??);
- a harpoon foreshaft with bone head, wooden shaft and a long greenhide line) and several scabbards.⁴⁰

This unusual component of the collection deserves to be looked at by an expert in the material culture of that area.

Conclusion

Taken as a whole, the TMAG collection of Oceanic ethnographic material is not exceptional but it does have some exceptional pieces. It holds its own reasonably well in the context of Australian museums, particularly given Tasmania's relative population base (there are still fewer than half a million people in the whole of Tasmania, compared with three and a half million in Sydney alone). It is remarkable less for quantity than for quality, and for that it can thank its early entry to the field, its enthusiastic founders, and the fate that located some remarkable collectors here. There are probably few museums that would not wish that more scholars came and used their collections, enriching them with their insights. The TMAG is certainly no exception. My view would be that in the areas of Eastern and Island PNG and Vanuatu, as well as NW America, such scholars would be well rewarded by a careful review of the holdings, as I was fifteen years ago when I 'discovered' the Fijian material here. There are not great numbers of objects to tempt Polynesianists, even less so Micronesianists, but if they are in the area they should still contact the Museum (write to the Director), for even in these domains there are unexpected treasures.

In conclusion, I should like to thank Patricia Sabine, Director, for her ready cooperation on this and other occasions; Alison Melrose for assistance with the online catalogue; Simon Cuthbert for his skilled photography and in particular Debbie Robertson for patiently working through the collection with me.

NOTES

- ¹ The Museum is currently transferring all of its records to computer but the task is incomplete. Once it is complete it is hoped that it may become possible, by accessing the Museum's website, to browse the list.
- ² I have described this in Ewins, Rod. 1982a. *Fijian Artefacts: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery Collection*. Hobart: Tasmanian Museum & Art Gallery (still available).
- ³ Some curators are at last recognising this fact. An outstanding example is the Anthropology Museum in the University of British Columbia, where visitors are able to enter the store-rooms, which have huge racks in which most of the objects and their numbers are visible, with catalogue and descriptive information separately available to visitors in the same space. While this is clearly not possible in all museums, an alternative approach would be to substitute didactic exhibitions on specific topics for all or part of the 'standing collection' of isolated objects, which has too often hardly been changed for decades.
- ⁴ Typical of many generations of social anthropologists, the Cambridge don Edmund Leach took a limited 'instrumental' view of objects, observing: 'Crudely stated, the argument is about whether toolmaking or language is the more fundamental. Is this "thing in itself," culture, to be "explained" by considering objective facts about the technical adaptation of man to his environment? Or is culture a product of the human imagination which exists only in the mind rather than as a material interface between man and the world of nature?' (1984: 40) . I take the contrary view, succinctly stated as follows: 'The underlying premise is that human-made objects reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individuals who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which these individuals belonged' (Prown 1993: 1) .
- ⁵ Like many of the characteristics of human behaviour laid claim to a trifle over-zealously by postmodernists, self-construction is as old as time. It uses the tools at hand in the period in question, and the construction aimed at is normally one that is considered desirable to the group

with which the person wishes to be identified. The most extensive and best-documented discussion of this phenomenon is by Pierre Bourdieu ((1979)1992).

- ⁶ Though not of pottery.
- ⁷ This extended, unsurprisingly, to anthropologists in due course. Annette Weiner has pointed out that Malinowski, while perceptively identifying the male Kula trade network, appeared to not even see the female contribution to economics in the form of banana-leaf wealth (or if he did, to understand that it could be important as the male form — either way, he did nothing to document it).
- ⁸ Originally founded in 1843 as *The Botanical and Horticultural Society of Van Diemen's Land*, in 1844 this society received a royal charter and became *The Royal Society of Van Diemen's Land for Horticulture, Botany and the Advancement of Science*. The descriptors were dropped in 1848, and their brief expanded with typically Victorian fulsomeness to include '*the advancement of agriculture, horticulture, agricultural chemistry, botany and geology, and other branches of science and natural history, and the various objects of productive industry, arts and manufactures.*' In 1855 the name *Van Diemen's Land* was changed to *Tasmania*, and in 1863 the Royal Society opened its museum on the current site.
- ⁹ The list includes: Capt. Adams [n.d.but early accession numbers suggest 1880s-90s, 3 items, Fiji & Solomon Is]; Capt. Castle [n.d. 4 items Santa Cruz]; Capt.J. Clinch [n.d. 15 items PNG]; Capt. Erskine [n.d.but early accession numbers suggest 1880s-90s, 2 items Santa Cruz]; Capt. Freeman [1899, 5 items Bougainville PNG]; Lt. Garrett [1897, 3 items Santa Cruz and Solomon Is]; Capt. Goldie [n.d. 1 item Niue]; Lt.E.E.Jones [1919 & 1920, 49 items Admiralty Is, PNG several districts, Solomon Is]; Capt. Leah [1899, 5 items Vanuatu]; Capt. Mauler [1897, 17 items Solomon Is & Bougainville PNG]; Capt. Mickleberg [4 items Solomon Is]; Lt. O'Brien [n.d. 1 item Australia]; Lt.J.Parry [1 item, N.Queensland]; Lt. Roberts [1898, 1 item Santa Cruz]; Capt. Robin [2 items, Fiji]; Lt. Schramm [1897, 6 items Solomon Is]; Lt.A.C.Scott [1900, 8 items Santa Cruz & Solomon Is]; Lt. A.J. Smith [n.d. but very early accession number suggests 1880s, 10 items Kiribati]; Capt. N.E. Smith [2 items, Fiji & PNG]; Lt. Thompson [1898 13 items PNG & Solomon Is]; Lt.A.J.Waugh 1897 [14 items Fiji, PNG, Samoa, Santa Cruz, Solomon Is, Tuvalu, Vanuatu]; Lt.C.R.Watson [1894 & 1898, 23 items PNG several districts & Solomon Is]; Capt.J. Williams [5 items, Solomon Is]; Lt. Willis [HMS Goldfinch 1897, 5 items Santa Cruz and Solomon Is]; Capt. Wilson [HMS "Duff"? 2 items NZ]. The close conjunction of dates and PNG/Santa Cruz/Solomon Is. sources in the late 1890s could suggest that some of these collectors were shipmates.

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- ¹⁰ The identification of Le Hunte is my own deduction from available facts — the donor is merely identified in the records as “Lt.Gov. of Brit.N.G.”, with the date of 1906 (after it had become Australian Papua).
- ¹¹ Perhaps a short piece by someone who knows this part of the TMAG collection particularly well might be included in a subsequent issue of PPANews. For anyone interested, Julia Clark’s valuable publication *The Aboriginal people of Tasmania* ((1983)1986, Hobart, TMAG) is still available from the Museum.
- ¹² Open mask M134, *tatanua* M135
- ¹³ Money M93/4/5/6/7/9, M3411. Apron M .
- ¹⁴ Shaman’s bag M4314. Fish head M116. Canoe prows M2333/4.
- ¹⁵ ‘Spanish helmet ’ e.g. M6414, cutlass-type e.g. M951/2
- ¹⁶ Shields M303, M3464, M3644, M5596
- ¹⁷ Pigs M6097/8. Paddles . Canoe prow M251/2. Bowls M253/4/5/6, M6107
- ¹⁸ Mat M153. Armlet M4160
- ¹⁹ *Kovave* mask M1764. *Marupai* charms M144, M173/4/5, M1418, M6142/3/4.
- ²⁰ Shell cap M6398.10
- ²¹ *Gope* boards M987, M1015/6. Dance helmet M1391. Ceremonial axes M209/10/11/12. Drums 1183/4. Jews harps M176/7/8/9/80. Shell trumpets M5250a/b. Rattles M1312/3. Pig-nets M1265/6/7/8/9/70/1/2/3. Headrest M1186. Digging sticks M296/7, M475/6/7/8/9, M486.
- ²² Bowl M258. Headrest M4380.
- ²³ Bark-cloths M524, M4790, and M5992 - M6015 inclusive.
- ²⁴ Clubs M962, 968-1002, M1006/7/8, M1022, M1062-8, M1297-1303, M235/6. Model canoe M6117.
- ²⁵ Paddles M959/60, M1328-37, M1908/9, wands
- ²⁶ Baskets (prov.) M1504,M1507 (unprov) M641, M1513, M1609, M1724/6, M4749/50. Bag M560.
- ²⁷ Runs of numbers starting M1910, M1979, M2014, M4905.

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- ²⁸ Coconut container M1704.
- ²⁹ Eyeshade M75. Pendants e.g. M4390. Armbands e.g. M6183, 6190, 6191. Gorget M3487. Skirts M1320, M1505, M1604, M1863. Ear rings M1364/5, M1384. Ear sticks M131, M1606/7, M6140/1/2.
- ³⁰ Mask M695. *Kapkap* M1480/1, M4477/8/9, M1563, M1584
- ³¹ Gourd bags M1850 & M5651. early Mats M572, M589, M592, M1855
- ³² Skull M 4506. Masks M1746, M3454, M4409. Breastpiece M3364. Shell money 119/20. Adze M126. Necklace M4502. Penis wrappers M800, M801, M5156. Rattle-belt M1509. Stone M2304. Fan M1632. Baskets esp. M638, 1633, 1857.
- ³³ Cuirass: M1747 (Kingsmill Gp), M698. Swords: M2317- 9 (Banaba I, coll. St.Leger) and M3374A/B. Club: M391. Spears: M3373 & M6365.
- ³⁴ Ewins 1982, details in Note 1.
- ³⁵ Duck-form dish: M4767. The Sainsbury and Hobart examples are very probably carved by the same hand
- ³⁶ Early Mats M517/8, M1885. Fans e.g.M666, M6502, M6063/4.
- ³⁷ Early Skirts M679/80/81/2/3, M1400, M1452, M1729, M1861/2, M4855.
- ³⁸ Bark-cloth M495, M512. Beater M2193. Fans M663, M4871. Canoes M4962, M6115.
- ³⁹ Cloak M685. Skirts M686/7, M1453 (with feathers in waistband), M3692a/b, M4814, M5153, M6079/80. Treasure-boxes M2846/7. Canoe prows M2330, M4733. *Patu* M3739. Flax bags M696, M1383, M4820. Flax & kiwi feather bag M4671
- ⁴⁰ Hat: M1466. Mittens: M6844A/B. Sock: M4784. Slippers: M6846 A/B. Boots: 6843A/B. Spoon M4857. Baleen basket M5848. Decorated basket M3700. Belt M1878. Harpoon M2149. Scabbards M 1532, M4869, M4850, M4851.

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