

## Unpublished Paper

### ROTUMAN ARTS

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The island of Rotuma is located at 12° 30' south latitude and 177° east longitude, some 465 km northwest of the northernmost island in the Fiji group on the western fringe of Polynesia.

Linguistic evidence suggests that Rotuman belongs in a subgrouping that includes Fijian and the Polynesian languages, and that within this group there is a special relationship between Rotuman and the languages of western Fiji (Pawley 1979). However, the vocabulary shows considerable borrowing from western Polynesian languages, particularly Samoa and Tonga (Biggs 1965, Pawley 1962). Rotuman myths provide supporting evidence, specifying a Samoan homeland for Raho, the legendary founder of Rotuma, and describing an invasion by the Tongan chief Marafu (Churchward 1940).

Volcanic in origin, Rotuma rises to a height of approximately 200 meters.<sup>1</sup> It has a total land area of 43 km<sup>2</sup>, and is surrounded by a fringing coral reef. Rainfall is plentiful, averaging 3550 mm per year, and the soil is very fertile. As a result the land is exceptionally productive, and Rotuman crops have gained a widespread reputation for size and quality. In conjunction with the access afforded marine resources from the reef, Rotumans have enjoyed long periods of plenty, interrupted only occasionally by hurricanes and short periods of drought.

The first recorded contact by a European vessel was in 1791, when Captain Edward Edwards in H.M.S. Pandora stopped briefly while searching for the mutineers from the Bounty. Contact intensified rapidly in the early nineteenth century, especially after ships' captains spread the word about the island's desirability as a resupply station. Whalers and labor recruiters made frequent visits prior to mid-century, and a sizeable number of sailors deserted their ships to take up residence on Rotuma's hospitable shores. Most of these renegades were shunned by the natives, several met untimely deaths, but some married Rotuman women and contributed their genes to an already mixed pool.

As described by earlier visitors, Rotuman society during the early nineteenth century was divided into seven districts, each relatively autonomous and headed by a *gagaj 'es itu'u* 'district

chief'. There were also three positions pan-Rotuman in scope: the *fakpure*, *sau* and *mua*. The *fakpure*, the district chief with the highest status at a given point in time, reportedly was convener and presiding officer of the council of district chiefs, and was responsible for appointing the *sau* (usually mis-translated as 'king'). The *sau* exercised no secular power; his main tasks were to eat gluttonously, drink kava, and participate in the six-month ritual cycle as an object of veneration. The main thrust of this ritual cycle was to ensure the fertility and prosperity of the island. The *mua* (literally 'first') has been described as an alter-ego of the *sau*, and was also a central participant in the religious cycle. Some observers likened this office to that of 'high priest' to the *sau*'s 'kingship'.

A curious aspect of both the latter positions is that they were held by representatives from the districts in rotation, for restricted periods of time. Eligibility was apparently confined to men of chiefly rank, although it is not clear from accounts whether or not only titled individuals could assume the offices. The period of time a given *sau* or *mua* spent in office was variable. They were appointed for one ritual cycle at a time, but if the island prospered their reigns might be extended over several cycles.

Various circumstances appear to have limited the periods of reign. One is the burden that the *sau* placed on the district in which he resided, which was not his home district. Apparently in an effort to emphasize the pan-Rotuman nature of the *sau*, as opposed to the autonomy enjoyed by each district, he moved to an adjacent district upon assuming office. It was then up to the people of his host district to provide for him in an extravagant manner. If this became too burdensome the people of the district could apparently petition the *fakpure* to choose someone else. According to legend some *sau* were especially demanding, provoking rebellions by those they oppressed. Wars could also result in the defeat of the *fakpure*, resulting in the ousting (or execution) of the *sau* and *mua* he appointed. The new *fakpure* — the district chief who headed the alliance that defeated the old *fakpure* — would appoint a new *sau* and *mua*. Finally, a *sau* and *mua* might be replaced because the island failed to prosper during their reign, a sign that the gods did not look upon them with favor.

Available evidence indicates that reign periods shortened following European intrusion. According to oral histories obtained by Fr. Trouillet, a French priest who served on Rotuma in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the average number of cycles served by *sau* from 1797 to 1820 was 5.0. From 1820 to 1850 the average number dropped to 2.0, and from 1850 until 1870

it dropped to 1.2 cycles, most probably as a result of the turmoil caused by European intervention into island life.

The institution of rotating 'kingship' is one indication that Rotuman society was not highly stratified prior to contact. Succession to titles was bilineal, through either father's or mother's line, so eligibility was widely distributed. There were chiefly families, but no distinct chiefly class. Furthermore, the *mana* of chieftainship was embedded in the title, not in the man who held it. If the occupant of a title abused his privileges he could be ousted by the kin group who held rights to the title.

Rivalry between the districts sometimes led to war. At their most expansive, wars involved an alliance between districts on one side of the island against an alliance on the other side, involving the whole of Rotuma. Wars were fought for status and prestige, and were rarely devastating. Territorial aggrandizement was not pursued nor were lives wantonly taken or women molested. If accounts of warfare during the historical period are taken as typical, only a few men were likely to be killed on each side before a battle was decided. The results of wars were reflected in the ranking of districts, and in the order in which *gagaj 'es itu'u* were served kava on ceremonial occasions.<sup>2</sup>

While religious practice was centered in the political institutions of the sau and mua, whose rituals propitiated the high god Tagaroa Siria, minor dieties ('*atua*) were propitiated by local groups and families. '*Atua* often appeared in animal form such as a shark, sandpiper or lizard. Individuals or groups called upon these spirits for support, sometimes through spirit mediums (*ape'aitu*), and made sacrifices to them. Almost any anomalous creature or occurrence could be attributed to these spirits. Unattached spirits, also called '*atua*, were thought to inhabit specific sites, such as large trees, and were thought to be malicious in their behavior to humans.

### *Missionization and Colonialization*

Wesleyan and Catholic missionaries established themselves soon after the mid-nineteenth century, and by the 1870s were sufficiently successful to eliminate the institution of *sauship*, which was at the heart of Rotuman religious practice. Competition between the missions resulted in the reformulation of previous political rivalry into religious opposition. The fact that the Wesleyan mission was run by English clergy and the Catholic mission by French priests added an additional layer of animosity between the two sides, based on European nationalistic

sentiments. Egged on by the missionaries, antagonisms mounted until 1878 when the Catholics were defeated in a skirmish by the numerically superior Wesleyans.

The unrest following this conflict induced the paramount chiefs of Rotuma's seven districts to petition the Queen of England for annexation, and in 1881 the island was officially ceded to Great Britain. The Crown decided, as a matter of convenience, to administer Rotuma as part of the Colony of Fiji. A resident commissioner was appointed to govern the island with the seven district chiefs forming an advisory council. Economically, copra became the main source of income during the early colonial period.

Thus the nineteenth century was a time of rapid sociocultural change on Rotuma. During that period Rotuman society underwent an extensive transformation. By the beginning of the 20th century Rotumans had been Christian for nearly half-a-century, had engaged in commercial trading for a comparable period, and had submitted to English law for some twenty years. They wore European clothes, used European tools, and supplemented their native diet with tinned meats, tea, biscuits and numerous other imported foods. They paid taxes to the government, applied for marriages and divorces through government offices, sought medical aid from the Resident Commissioner, and sent their children to mission schools.

### *Rotuman Arts and Crafts*

During the early part of the nineteenth century visitors to Rotuma described a range of well-developed art forms, including tattooing, the making of shell ornaments, bark cloth and fine mat manufacture, and the production of weapons. The performing arts were dominated by oratory, clowning, singing and dancing. By the end of the 19th century some of these aspects of expressive culture had completely disappeared, while others were drastically altered.

#### tattooing

Captain Edward Edwards of H.M.S. Pandora, which came upon Rotuma on August 8th, 1791, wrote that the Rotumans were "tattooed in a different manner from the natives of the other islands we had visited, having the figure of a fish, birds and a variety of other things marked upon their arms" (Thompson 1915:64-66). George Hamilton, who was also aboard the Pandora, wrote that "They wore necklaces, bracelets, and girdles of white shells. Their bodies were curiously marked with the figures of men, dogs, fishes, and birds, upon every part of them; so

that every man was a moving landscape. These marks were all raised, and done, I suppose, by pinching up the skin” (Thompson 1915:138-139).

According to Lesson, a naturalist who visited Rotuma in 1824 aboard the *Coquille*: Their most outstanding and characteristic ornamentation is tattooing, which they call *cache*. The body, from the lower chest to just above the knee, is completely covered with a regular tattoo strongly reminiscent of the thigh-pieces of the knights of old. A broad strip behind the thigh prevents the bands of tattooing from completely encircling the leg. The stomach and loins are covered with curving scalloped lines whose blackness contrasts agreeably with the natural color of the untouched skin. The chest and arms receive another kind of design. Where the former is notable for the black mass it forms on the skin, the latter is distinguished by the delicacy of its designs: the fragile shapes of flying fish, flowers and other graceful objects. Some natives had rows of black dots on their legs, while others displayed raised scars on the shoulders of the type common among the African negro race as among its scattered branches in the Pacific. Tattooing seems so natural to primitive man that it seems to clothe his nakedness and provide him with a durable raiment of charm and grace [Lesson, 1838-9 #93:426-427; translated from the French by Ella Wiswell].

Gardiner, who visited the island in 1896, described the patterns in more detail; he also included illustrations. He reported that the men were always tattooed with a pair of drawers reaching from the waist to just below the knee. The design, called *fuol<sup>3</sup>* in Rotuman, was based on parallelograms composed of straight lines. Typical designs on men’s shoulders included the *perero*, representing a strong-smelling flower commonly given to one’s sweetheart; the *moiera*, a common bush; stars, circles, crosses and other geometrical designs. Women’s tattoos were confined to the arms and consisted of circles enclosing designs (Gardiner 1898:414-415).

That tattoos were individualized is suggested by A.M. Hocart who was told in 1913 that if a man died in war, his identity could be determined by his tattoos: "One man tattooed one part and not another, and they recognized him thus. One would leave a blank space on belly, another over his knees, and they knew him by it" (Hocart n.d.:4768).

Gordon MacGregor, an American anthropologist who visited Rotuma in 1932, includes in his field notes drawings very similar to those of Gardiner. He reports that the patterns “are irregular and said to be made out of the operators’ minds.” According to one of MacGregor’s informants, women formerly tattooed their entire arms and hands, and some their jaws. A line

was also drawn around the ankle. He remarks that ankle and hand tatoos were most in evidence at the time.

Tatoos were done by specialists (*majau*), using a dye made from candlenut, which was burnt into a charcoal-like state. The tatoos were made of fish vertebrae, chicken bone, or tortoise shell. The *majau* marked a design on the skin, then used the comb to tap in the lines. According to one of MacGregor's informants, when a chief was being tatoos a complementary tatoos must be made on someone else. Since the chief is being wounded and spilling blood, someone else must also be hurt in payment for the chief's suffering.<sup>4</sup> Another informant told him that men who were tatoos were considered properly dressed and might appear without a sulu modestly. This same man told MacGregor that only women who had their arms and hands tatoos could make kava, and that an untatoos man could not make *fekei* 'pudding' (MacGregor n.d.).<sup>5</sup>

The custom of tatoos was prohibited by the European missionaries, and when the first author first visited Rotuma, in 1960, none of the old people were tatoos. Nowadays, a number of young men are tatoos, especially those who have spent some time as sailors, but there are no practitioners of the art on Rotuma.

### *Shell ornaments*

Ornaments of various types were apparently quite popular among the early Rotumans, and some were used to designate rank. Lesson's observations are again worthy of quotation:

The principal ornament of those who came on board who seemed to enjoy a certain rank was a large pearl-oyster shell on the breast called a *tifa*. Apparently, there are no oysters around their shores, so they try to obtain them from whomever they can, offering one of their fine straw wearings for five or six shells of this testacean. Some wore porcelain ovules called *poure* [in Fiji, *tabua*]; some wore a white braid on their breasts called *toui* while others wound long strings of shells around their bodies. None of these paltry decorations, however, seemed designed as a mark of rank or authority. Around the necks of some young people, I noticed necklaces made of balls of ivory. This ornament, usually worn by women, is so highly prized by the islanders, that they zealously collect the teeth of the cachalot [sperm whale], an excellent trading article for whalers. They prefer

them to fabrics, even to metal axes, even though they can only turn them into ornaments. Perhaps they attach some superstitious importance to them. When I came on deck carrying a large cachelot's tooth, the only one I had, I was surrounded in a twinkling by an enormous number of islanders shouting with astonishment and admiration. They offered me my choice of anything they had, and when I exchanged it with one of them for a couple of fine mats, they showed great satisfaction and quickly confided their new treasure to an old man in a canoe alongside the ship. To the whalers, they give large quantities of bananas, taro and coconuts for each tooth. This is because they consider the whale to be the queen of the sea (according to what M. de Blosseville was told). They also believed that the ships are armed in order to take the teeth from the whales and to extract their oil to anoint people; they were most astonished to learn that the oil is only used for lamps (Lesson 1838-9:422-424).

Dillon, who arrived in 1827, reported that whales' teeth, tortoise-shells, glass beads, cutlery, and small axes were the most desired trade items. "With the whales' teeth and tortoise-shells they ornament their clubs, spears, &c., and make neck and ear-ornaments of bits of turtle shell, which among them are valued as gold is with us" (Dillon 1829, p. 94), and Bennett, who visited the island three years later, confirms Rotuman partiality to beads and whales' teeth (Bennett 1831, p. 475).

Gardiner, summarizing the available information at the turn of the century, comments that necklets of whales' teeth were only allowed to be worn by chiefs. He reports that they were generally buried with their possessor, as one of his most valued possessions. Beads of whales' teeth were called *lei*, while necklaces are *tifui*. Hence, according to Gardiner, these necklaces were termed *tifui lei*. They were, he claims, "the money of the old days" (Gardiner 1898:412).

As for the pearl shell breastplates, *tiaf hapa* 'half an oyster shell', Gardiner affirms they were only worn by chiefs. He writes that they were only shaped by taking off the horny layer and smoothing it down, so that the shell retained its original shape. "The convex side was rubbed down till the outer coats were quite removed and the nacre was reached, and this side was hung outwards" (Gardiner 1898:413).

MacGregor includes in his field notes a drawing of three shells strung into a necklace with 1/8" braided sennit. A typed note states that, "The half shell of mother of pearl made into necklace for the kings of Rotuma who wore them around their neck. Found in the tombs" (MacGregor n.d.).<sup>6</sup> MacGregor also recorded ornaments called *muleli*, made from two projecting pieces from the tail end of a turtle shell. They were worn around the neck or wrists on a string.

Today Rotumans do not especially value such adornments. Women sometimes wear store-bought beads, and on special occasions both men and women wear *tefui* made from sweet-smelling plants. Whales' teeth, still so highly prized in Fiji, are no longer the valuable objects they were in the past. They are not ceremonially transacted between Rotumans, nor do they play any special role in Rotuman rituals. Some Rotumans have whales' teeth (*tabua*) in their possession, given by Fijians for special favors or service, but their symbolic significance for most Rotumans is otherwise minimal.

#### *Bark cloth and fine mats*

Early commentators report that Rotumans manufactured a kind of bark cloth (*uha*), but they give little details of the designs. Lesson (1838-9:424) reported that the Rotumans made a fabric out of breadfruit and mulberry bark similar to that of the Sandwich and Society Islands, which they dyed a deep reddish-brown. However, he claims to have seen little of it used as clothing. Bennett (1831:477) also mentions barkcloth, reporting that it was stained various colors procured from native plants.

The most detail concerning bark cloth comes from the field notes of Gordon MacGregor. According to one of his informants, the juice of the *sa'a* tree was used for painting the cloth a dark reddish color; according to another the paint was a mixture of turmeric and juice squeezed from the bark of the one kind of tree (*favrau*) and the root of another (*ura*). Designs were painted on by hand, rather than stenciled.

Bark cloth never seems to have been a main fabric for clothing,<sup>7</sup> and its ceremonial significance seems to have been much more limited than it was (and still is) in Tonga.<sup>8</sup> MacGregor's informants reported to him that the finished bark cloth was used as mosquito netting which was hung over a center pole and hung like a pup tent, the ends being closed with additional pieces of cloth. Reportedly the fabric was very thin (MacGregor n.d.) By this time

was bark cloth manufacture had not been practiced for many years, and the mulberry trees from which most of the bark derived were extinct.

Lesson described the Rotumans' usual clothing as "made from the fairest and finest weavings." He added that, "The weavings they wrap themselves in are beautiful, superior to any made by the Tahitians . . . They are scalloped at their edges and sometimes died yellow or daubed with other colors" (Lesson 1838-9:423-424). The high quality of Rotuman fine mats is attested to by Forbes, another early visitor:

A Rotumah mat is valued in other islands much as an Indian Shawl is valued in Europe. Compared to Rotumah mats, the finest Batique mats from Fiji are coarse and ugly; while the mats of Samoa and Tonga do not deserve to be mentioned in the same breath. A good Rotumah mat will take many years to make, and will cost at least five pounds of our money. To an Englishman's eye, there is nothing in them of such surpassing excellence (Forbes 1875:227).

Bennett reported that four kinds of mats were manufactured on the island in 1830, one kind of ordinary mat (*'epa*) and three grades of fine white mats (*apei*). The lowest grade of fine mat, *apei sala*, was made from *sa'aga*, a species of pandanus. Finer than this was the *apei niau*, which was woven from hibiscus bark. Finer still, and most highly valued according to Bennett, was the *arnea*, made from the bark of the paper mulberry tree.<sup>9</sup>

A type of *apei sala* was reportedly worn by warriors when going to battle. According to Bennett:

The war mats are of the same texture as the *Apé Sala*, but of smaller size; four of these are worn together, fastened round the waist, when going to meet their enemies; they placed each over the other, and so arranged so as to display two deep vandykes decorated with red feathers on the edge of each, except the upper one, which has two oblong strips ornamented in a similar manner (Bennett 1831:476-477).

Bennett commented that the manufacture of mats was such a tedious process that it took six months or more to complete one (Bennett 1831:477).<sup>10</sup>

Gardiner describes the manufacture of two types of plaited material used for common dress, *tatktakoi* 'wrap around' for men and *arumea* (*arnea*) for women, both of which he claims are made from the fibres of the hibiscus. Other dresses were worn only on special occasions and

by particular chiefs. At weddings, burials and feasts fine mats of large size were proper dress (Gardiner 1898:411-412).

One type of fine mat, the *tofua*, was made from pandanus leaves (*sa'aga*) and was worn by chiefs and the *sau* (Gardiner 1898:412, MacGregor n.d.). Chiefs also wore a girdle of woven *sa'aga* over their wrap arounds. MacGregor describes *titi* as wide bands with a long fringe, their total length being rather short, not nearly down to the knees. In summary, Gardiner describes the dress of the *sau* and his officers as follows:

The dress of the *sou* consisted of a fine mat, over which the *malhida* [chiefly girdle] was worn. This dress was made of the leaves of the *saaga* (*Pandanus sp.?*), split up, and plaited together like sinnet at the top, and hanging down loose. They were stained for the most part red, but some might be left white. Black was sometimes introduced by means of the bark of the *si*, a species of banana, which on drying turns a dull black. Another dress, pertaining to some of the officers, was the *ōlōli*; it appears to have been really a sort of apron, made of a fine mat, and hung down in front. It was almost completely covered with the red feathers of the *arumea* (*Myzomela chermesina*, Gray); its use was restricted to particular feasts. Round the neck might be a necklace of beads of whale's teeth, the *tifui lei*, and on each wrist the *mulei*, described to me as a round piece of turtle bone. I dug one up when I opened the graves of the *mua*; it is certainly not bone, but resembles somewhat the horny and prismatic layers of the outer part of a pearl shell. It is about 2 inches in diameter, and has a large hole in the center [illustration included]. On the breast was the pearl shell, *tiaf hapa*, but the really distinctive part was the *malhida*, which it was taboo for any one else to wear. The *muleli* was only worn by the *mua* as well as the *sou*, but the other ornaments were more generally used (Gardiner 1898:462).

Fine mats were, and remain, of central significance for Rotuman ceremonies. They are the primary items of exchange at weddings, first birthdays, welcoming ceremonies, funerals and headstone unveilings. Today, however, only one type remains, the *apei sala*, made from *sa'aga* leaves. Whereas in the distant past they were decorated with bird feathers, they are now

decorated with wool. But they retain both their value as a form of wealth and their ritual significance.

Mat-making used to be the main occupation of adult women, and still was in 1960. As more and more young people emigrated to Fiji, however, the craft is being passed on to a much smaller proportion of the younger generation. However, fine mats continue to be necessary for proper Rotuman ceremonies, so, if anything, they have increased in value.<sup>11</sup> Since very little mat-making is done by Rotumans resident in Fiji, those on the island must now supply their relatives there as well. The situation is therefore one of increased demand and decreased supply. Women jealously guard their supply of fine mats, and even their husbands are often kept in the dark as to how many they possess.

The ritual significance of mats remains prominent despite the fact that its religious underpinnings have long since been subverted. Traditionally white mats were consecrated by the sacrifice of a pig prior to their manufacture. They therefore symbolized life, and since pigs were sacrificial substitutes for humans, human life. Today white mats are rarely consecrated in this way, but they retain symbolic potency.<sup>12</sup> *Apei* lend enormous weight to any form of request or apology. It is very difficult indeed to turn down an appeal backed up with a white mat.<sup>13</sup>

Fine white mats are used as seats (*päega*) and covers in ritual contexts. The bride and groom at a wedding, honored guests at a mamasa ‘welcoming ceremony’, anyone on whom special status is being conferred, sit upon an *apei* during the performance of ceremonies. Symbolically this elevates them (in the past, to a god-like status). *Apei* are also used to cover gifts of food on special occasions and as canopies to protect special people or items (such as a wedding cake).

Of all the traditional art forms, fine white mats retain the strongest symbolic significance on Rotuma. How long this will remain the case is problematic, however, given drastically reduced interest in their manufacture by the younger generation. The production of *apei* therefore cannot be considered a vigorous source of artistic expression at the moment, especially in contrast with dancing, the main kind of performing art.

In 1960 a number of women were producing woven baskets of high quality, a skill that was apparently introduced as a possible source of income. Today, however, few such items are being produced, and there seems to be little interest in reviving the craft.

### *Implements of war*

As described by Gardiner, the paraphernalia of war included hand missiles (*hafu*), clubs ('*ai peluga*), spears (*jao*), shark-tooth lances ('*ai kōaga*), sharks' tooth knives ('*ai fau pilo*). In addition were decorative helmets (*miolmilo*).

The most elaborate missiles were made from the bivalve shelves of the giant *Tridacna*, ground down to an oval shape with a groove worked for the thumb to insure a firm grip. Clubs were approximately 3 1/2 to 4 feet long. Gardiner describes them as follows:

The transversely carved lines . . . are very characteristic. The transverse section here is that of a much-flattened rhombus, and these lines rise from the sides to the centre at regular intervals, and join with those of the opposite side on the same face of the club. They are cut regularly from the bottom for 2-3 inches perhaps, and then one on one of the sides of the rhombus is left uncut; it will be cut in the other three sides of the rhombus. On the other side of the rhombus, on the same side of the club, it will be the next of these grooves that will be left uncut. On the other side of the club two neighboring grooves to the above will be left. Then perhaps all will be cut for another interval of 2-3 inches, and four will be left uncut precisely as before. At the top of this part, they are not always the two next one another that are left uncut. This cutting I believe to be quite typical of Rotuma . . . The balance . . . is excellent and well adapted to their use as two-handed swords (Gardiner 1898:472-473).

Imitation war-clubs (*paki*) were used in club dances (*mak paki*).

Spears were carried by the *sau's* special guards, and were quite remarkable, according to Gardiner. They were spliced onto a handle of soft wood and were approximately 3 1/2 feet long. On one end were fixed with sinnet the spines of sting rays, along the edges of which were recurved teeth, so that when thrust into someone they could only be extracted with difficulty, making a jagged wound (Gardiner 1898:463). Another type of spear, commonly used during battles are described as 8-9 feet long, round, and pointed at both ends. They were used for both thrusting and striking an enemy (Gardiner 1898:473).

Shark-tooth lances are described by Gardiner as about six feet long, with a long round, paddle-shaped, handle one inch thick, knobbed at the end. The other end was broadened to about

five inches, with sharks' teeth set between slips of bamboo. Regarding a remnant that came into his possession, Gardiner wrote:

The central stick has evidently been smoothed down with great care with a shark's-skin file, and holes have been bored completely through it for the sinnet, with which the teeth are tied on. Two or three holes are bored through the several teeth for the sinnet, which is exceptionally neatly made. The bamboo slips are underneath the sinnet; their object is evidently to keep the teeth in their place on the edge of the main stick. The idea of the weapon was to seize an enemy with it and draw him out of his line, while one of the warriors . . . clubbed him to death (Gardiner 1898:472).

Gardiner was unsure whether the shark-tooth knives he encountered were really Rotuman weapons or not. He described one in his possession as about 28 inches long with the teeth set in two grooves, cut in the edge of a stick. The teeth were firmly bound to the stick with sinnet through one hole in each tooth. The groove for the teeth stopped about an inch short of the end, which was pointed. The handle was square and about six inches long (Gardiner 1898:472). *Miolmilo* are described by Churchward as peaked head-dresses, decorated with feathers. He states that were formerly used in warfare and are still used in war-dances, and that according to tradition "a man named Rafai learned to make these hats during a visit to the spirit-world (*Oroi ta*)" (Churchward 1940:265). They seem too awkward to wear during actual battles, and certainly had little merit as a helmet, but they may have been endowed with *mana* that would protect a warrior wearing one.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>For detailed information concerning the geology of Rotuma, see Woodhall 1987.

<sup>2</sup>For more detailed information on the traditional Rotuman polity see Gardiner 1898, Howard 1985.

<sup>3</sup>Gardiner reports that the *fuol* is also the name of a bivalve shell from which the pattern was supposedly taken.

<sup>4</sup>According to Rev. Wm. Allen, "The process was an exceedingly painful one, some even dying through it. Only a little was done at a time, just as much as the person seemed able to bear. Tattooing only commenced when they were youngmen, and no one was considered a man and competent to marry until he had been tattooed" (Allen, 1895).

<sup>5</sup>Edward Lucatt, who visited Rotuma in 1841, was sufficiently fascinated by Rotuman tattooing to have some done on himself. His account is informative:

The natives of Rotumah do not tattoo their faces, but their bodies, particularly from the waist to the knees, are ornamented with various designs, some of them very elegant; and when I first saw them at a distance, I thought they had got on close-fitting drawers. Their arms are covered with fantastic devices, and being desirous of witnessing the operation I induced a native to tattoo a small figure on one of mine. Very few are skilled at the art of tattooing, and I was surprised at the number of instruments used by the operator: they are made of small pieces of tortoise-shell of different widths neatly secured to handles, and resemble miniature garden hoes, with fine serrated teeth cut in the edges of the blades, sharp as needles. Having rubbed down the nut of a peculiar tree that had been burnt to charcoal, the operator mixed with it the juice of a herb, and water to render it sufficiently fluid. Without first tracing the design, he dipped the teeth of the instrument into the mixture, and placing it on my arm tapped it gently with a light piece of wood so as just to draw the blood, and he kept changing the instrument from very broad to very narrow, as the nature of the figure he intended to produce, required. The operation is painful, at least I found it so, and should think it must be very severe to those who submit their whole bodies to the puncturing process; but it is the "fashion of Rotumah," and the fear of being ridiculed by their companions overcomes every other dread (Lucatt 1851:178-179).

<sup>6</sup>MacGregor also includes a drawing in his notes labeled “Sceptre du roi, Rotuma,” on a card headed “Sau’s Spear. Rotuma. Mus. Mission, Rome.” He indicates that it is 40” total length with a 16” handle, and is made of stained ironwood.

<sup>7</sup>One of MacGregor’s informants told him that bark cloth was often worn around the head to keep the hair up, as well as for lavalavas (MacGregor, n.d.).

<sup>8</sup>We are only aware of one prescribed use of bark cloth for ceremonial purposes, although there were undoubtedly others. Before a wedding, the bride is presented with a small purse, called ‘*atfara*, which in traditional times contained a small container of oil, some tumeric and a piece of bark cloth. The oil was for lubrication on the wedding night, the tumeric was used to prevent infection, and the bark cloth was to wipe up with. For some years now it has been customary for the ‘*atfara* to be filled with money by friends of the bride.

<sup>9</sup>Bennett wrote “*Amea*”, which he writes is the Rotuman name for a species of *Urtica*. Churchward glosses *arnea* as “tree (paper mulberry ?) the inner bark of which was formerly used for making cloth” (Churchward 1940:176).

<sup>10</sup>Warriors also wore feathered bonnets, called *miolmilo*, which Gardiner described as “a wooden or bamboo framework covered with tappa and ornamented with the long tail feathers of the boatswain bird (Gardiner 1898:471). According to one of MacGregor’s informants, once one of these hats was donned it could never be removed while the state of war existed. A man could not even doff it to the sau. He must wear it until killed in battle. Because these hats were worn in war, and signified fighting, it was taboo for any one to wear such a headdress in peacetime. Wearing such a headcover through a village was an insult for which a man could be killed (MacGregor n.d.).

<sup>11</sup>The cost of buying a Rotuman fine mat has correspondingly increased significantly. In 1960 an *apei te hapa* (half-size mat) cost from US\$7.50 to US\$10; today these same mats sell for US\$70 or more. Of course a number of factors have contributed to this inflation.

<sup>12</sup>According to Hocart (n.d.), women who were asked by a chief to make an *apei* were granted special license to act outrageously, as if they were possessed by a spirit who was beyond the rules of normal decorum.

<sup>13</sup>In this respect a gift of an *apei* is comparable to the Fijian presentation of a *tabua* ‘whale’s tooth’, an equivalence explicitly recognized by Rotumans.