

ATEA NATURE AND DIVINITY IN POLYNESIA



THE METROPOLITAN
MUSEUM OF ART BULLETIN

WINTER 2019



ATEA

NATURE AND DIVINITY IN POLYNESIA

MAIA NUKU



THE
MET

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

This publication is issued in conjunction with the exhibition “Atea: Nature and Divinity in Polynesia,” on view at The Metropolitan Museum of Art from November 19, 2018, through October 27, 2019.

The Met’s quarterly *Bulletin* program is supported in part by the Lila Acheson Wallace Fund for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, established by the cofounder of *Reader’s Digest*.

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin, Winter 2019

Volume LXXVI, Number 3

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin (ISSN 0026-1521) is published quarterly by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10028-0198. Periodicals postage paid at New York NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Membership Department, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 1000 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10028-0198. Four weeks’ notice required for change of address. The *Bulletin* is provided as a benefit to Museum members and is available by subscription. Subscriptions \$30.00 a year. Back issues available on microfilm from National Archive Publishing Company, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Volumes I–XXXVII (1905–42) available as a clothbound reprint set or as individual yearly volumes from Ayer Company Publishers, Suite B-213, 400 Bedford Street, Manchester, NH 03101, or from the Metropolitan Museum, 66–26 Metropolitan Avenue, Middle Village, NY 11381-0001.

Published by The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

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Bibliographic editing by Penny Jones

Typeset in ScalaPro and Proxima Nova Extra Condensed

Separations by Professional Graphics, Inc., Rockford, Illinois

Printed and bound in the United States of America

Front cover: detail of a flywhisk (*tahiri*), Austral Islands, early to mid-19th century (see page 38). Inside front cover: detail of a *hiapo*, Niue, 19th century (see page 43). Title page: breastplate (*civanovonovo*), Fiji, early 19th century. Whale ivory, pearl shell, and fiber, H. 7 5/8 in. (19.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Collection, Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1960 (1978.412.746). Page 4: detail of Tupaia, *A Scene in Tahiti*, 1769 (see page 42). Inside back cover: detail of John Puhiautau Pule, *Pulenoa Triptych*, 1995 (see pages 44–45). Back cover: detail of a ceremonial drum (*pahu ra*), Austral Islands, possibly Ra’ivavae, early 19th century (see page 35).

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art

1000 Fifth Avenue

New York, New York 10028

metmuseum.org

Acknowledgments

I thank the following artists and colleagues for our many rewarding conversations and insights: John Pule, Sofia Tekela-Smith, Visessio Siasau and Serene Tay, Julie Adams, Lucie Carreau, Jeremy Coote, Anita Herle, Steven Hooper, Adrienne Kaeppler, Billie Lythberg, Andrew Mills, Amiria Salmond, Anne Salmond, Nicholas Thomas, and Hermione Waterfield (not least for our joint passion for Austral Island headdresses). I also acknowledge the early scholarship of Alain Babadzan, Simon Kooijman, and Valerio Valeri, whose close analyses of Polynesian art created an important foundation for my own insights. I am deeply grateful to Mark Blackburn and Gordon Sze, MD, for their support of this project and for their continued advocacy for the arts of Oceania here in New York. At The Met, exhibition designer Fabiana Weinberg and graphic designer Alexandre Viault brought their creative vision together in a highly rewarding collaboration. The exhibition also benefited from the expertise of Brian Oliver Butterfield, Anna Rieger, and Joshua C. Nusbaum in Design as well as lighting designers Richard Lichte, Clint Ross Collier, Amy Nelson, and Andrew Zarou; Elizabeth Benjamin in Publications and Editorial; Peter Zera in Imaging; Christine D. McDermott in Exhibitions; Reagan Duplisea in the Registrar’s Office; and Naomi Takafuchi, Michael Cirigliano II, Kate Farrell, and Melissa Bell, alongside skilled teams who worked on the digital and audio components. I am equally appreciative of the support of my colleagues in the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas: Alisa LaGamma, Ceil and Michael E. Pulitzer Curator in Charge, Joanne Pillsbury, Andrall E. Pearson Curator, James A. Doyle, Yaelle Biro, Allia Benner, Matthew A. Noiseux, and Jacqueline T. Zanca, and our entire conservation and collection team, especially Christine Giuntini, David Rhoads, and Arthur J. Polendo, who, along with Caitlin Mahony in Objects Conservation and Frederick J. Sager and the mount-makers, helped realize the outstanding installation. For the *Bulletin*, warm thanks to my editor, Dale Tucker, for his insightful edits and to Paul Booth, Makiko Katoh, and Josephine Rodriguez-Massop for bringing together the visual aspects of the publication. To members of my extended whanau and the Native American, Hawaiian, Maori, and Polynesian communities who supported the opening of the exhibition with appropriate ritual protocols, song, and dance to warm up the space for a memorable evening: Tēnā koutou katoa! Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, ēngari he toa takitini.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This *Bulletin* and the exhibition it expands upon focus on an array of artistic creations that illuminate how Polynesians traditionally understood their relationship with divinity. Polynesians saw the link between humanity and the divine as active, dynamic, and manifested in the plants, feathers, and fibers of the islands they inhabited and the ocean that surrounded them. Drawn from The Met's holdings and enriched by important loans from American collections, "Atea: Nature and Divinity in Polynesia" considers some thirty exceptional works of Polynesian art that date from the late eighteenth to the nineteenth century and reflect the creative ingenuity of Polynesian artists. These include celebrated examples of figural sculpture in wood and whale ivory; superbly executed feather headdresses and cloaks; and visually compelling fiber works, such as painted barkcloths and a small-scale spirit house, or temple.

Across Polynesia, ritual works of art were created principally for the powerful chiefs who were believed to descend from the gods. As political and religious leaders, chiefs were imbued with the spiritual essence (*mana*) of their forebears. Prestige items such as feather cloaks and headdresses reinforced status and reputation, but they also asserted a direct relationship with divine ancestors: the men and gods who had first peopled the islands. These ideas are explored not through the lens of any single Polynesian archipelago but, rather, in the context of how certain concepts evolved across space and time, representing a new phase in scholarship that looks to recover the early ritual landscape of Polynesia by examining the material nature of the art itself.

"Atea: Nature and Divinity in Polynesia" was organized by Maia Nuku, Evelyn A. J. Hall and John A. Friede Associate Curator for Oceanic Art, with the assistance of colleagues in the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas and in Objects Conservation. The project has also benefited from the engagement of the four

institutional lenders who supported the exhibition by making their works available to us: the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts; Field Museum, Chicago; and The Menil Collection, Houston. We are particularly indebted to Mark Blackburn and Gordon Sze, MD, for the gracious loans of works from their respective collections of Pacific art and whose support has been critical to the success of this endeavor. We also acknowledge the Lila Acheson Wallace Fund for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, established by the cofounder of *Reader's Digest*, for its support of The Met's quarterly *Bulletin* program.

Fifty years ago, on May 10, 1969, Nelson A. Rockefeller announced his intention to give his extensive collection of art from the regions of Africa, Oceania, and the ancient Americas to this institution. The expansive vision and generosity of Rockefeller and his family led not only to the founding of the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, but also to the construction of new galleries in the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, which opened to the public in 1982. Rockefeller's extraordinary gift included key masterpieces of Polynesian art that are discussed in detail in this *Bulletin*. Now, as we look to the future and move forward with exciting plans to update and refresh our galleries of Oceanic art—part of an extensive renovation of the wing—we have an opportunity to reassess the relevance of these compelling works for contemporary audiences. The powerful relationship between art and life remains constant. As we pause to reflect on the strong feelings of kinship that Polynesians enjoy with nature, the need to revitalize our own relationship with the environment—with the land and oceans that require our stewardship—feels ever more urgent.

Max Hollein
Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art



The ancestors of today's Polynesians were the most accomplished navigators of the ancient world, traversing vast expanses of ocean to settle distant outposts in the Pacific. Those ancestors, known as the Lapita peoples, ventured east from the large island archipelagoes off the coast of New Guinea and the Solomon Islands and in about 1000 B.C. reached the islands of Fiji and Tonga, where they began to develop the first distinctively Polynesian cultures. Sometime between 200 B.C. and A.D. 100, Polynesian islanders continued to probe eastward again, eventually settling the central and eastern Pacific.

Rather than a sea of scattered islands, the ancient Polynesians conceived of their ocean as an expansive highway connecting disparate coordinates in a rich network of genealogical alliances and exchange. The ocean's isolated atolls and island clusters mirrored the myriad constellations of the sky above: the stars and galaxies whose sky maps had guided the islanders to new destinations. The vast dome of the sky—conceptualized by the Polynesians as an expanse of space (*vā*) punctuated at intervals by time (*tā*)—was marked by the rising and setting of the sun at opposite ends of a fixed horizon, a useful reference point for a landscape that was otherwise constantly in motion. Shifting with the tides and swells, this crescent-shaped canopy stretched overhead, tethered at each corner and broken only by the silhouettes of islands rising out of the sea.

As the islanders sailed east to make new settlements, they developed the idea of an ancestral homeland, identified as Havai'i. Local variants of the name were established throughout Polynesia: Avaiki (Niue, Cook Islands), Savai'i (Samoa), Hawaiki (Maori), and Hawai'i, for the archipelago of that name at the extreme north of the region. Conceptually, Havai'i was a place of both arrival and departure. Upon arriving at a new shoreline,

voyaging islanders imposed a cultural template intended to bring order and give structure to the newly encountered landscape. Upturning their canoes, which became makeshift altars, navigator-priests would utter prayers, place stones they had brought with them to mark out the boundaries of ritual space, and plant sacred and medicinal plants within these new sacred precincts, called *marae*. By manipulating the environment in this way, islanders sought to re-create the cultural coordinates of the ancestral Polynesian homeland at every stop along their journey.

The names chosen for these newly discovered shorelines were fluid, in the sense that they mapped out and repeated former names. Havai'i (or Avaiki) was a subtle evocation of the original homeland, an echo of a time and place that recalled, and overlapped with, what had gone before. A source of origin, the ancestral homeland was also a place of return to which the souls of the deceased retreated to join the spirits of their ancestors and relatives. To this day these names are powerful reference points, reflecting vestiges of the ancient Polynesian migratory voyages that, over millennia, looped and spiraled across the ocean (fig. 1).

Throughout Polynesia, a series of startling cosmogonies arose recounting the creation of the universe in all its distinct phases. These sweeping narratives explain how the islands and gods were birthed vigorously into being, how humankind sprang from the roots and tendrils of this burgeoning landscape, and how the canopy of the sky came to be propped up and punctuated with the sun, moon, and stars. Each story is consistent in its outline of a preliminary phase of darkness: a cold, empty void that was not static but, rather, creative and dynamic, in a constant state of evolution. Pulsing steadily, the darkness reverberated with the galvanizing forces of potentiality,



1. Map of Polynesia, showing (A) Fiji, Tonga, and Niue, and (B) the Society (including Tahiti), Cook, and Austral Islands

quickenings by stages into ever new versions of itself. As space finally began to hollow itself out from the darkness, light seeped in to fill the opening, marking the beginning of a new phase of creation.

This powerful moment, when space and light (*atea*) flooded the depths of the long ancestral night, was Polynesia's cosmological equivalent of the Big Bang. It heralded a dynamic new era in which the first generation of gods was born. To channel the divine and enhance the spiritual power of chiefs—who were themselves believed to descend from these gods—artists drew directly from the natural world. Prestige items such as feather headdresses and ritual regalia reinforced chiefly status (*mana*), but it was the organic materials from which they were made that emphasized the close genealogical connection between the chiefs and their divine ancestors.

ANCESTRAL HOMELANDS: TONGA AND FIJI

As the dwelling place of ancestral spirits, the Polynesian spiritual homeland was a vital, potent

place that featured in many local traditions as a dark underworld. In Tonga, this watery realm was known as Puluṭu, although its conceptual equivalent was anchored in the term *hou'eiki* (likely a further cognate of Havai'i/Avaiki), which means a “chief of rank,” suggesting that the idea of the ancestral homeland was grounded less in the specifics of a geographic place than in a generation of chiefly ancestors from whom the people claimed descent and in whom they continued to be invested.

As an important point of origin, the ancestral homeland was a source of spiritually “hot,” or charged (*tapu*), natural materials. Islanders thus privileged certain species of plants, birds, and marine life because they were understood to have originated in the ancestral realm and were capable of creating the dynamic connections necessary to communicate with gods and spirits. The incorporation into ritual regalia of specific woods, the highest-grade coconut-fiber cord, and red feathers enhanced the spiritual power of chiefs and leaders. These materials were also conduits that could activate and animate the relationship with ancestral spirits, since they contained within them something of the essence and raw vitality of the ancestral domain.

Throughout Polynesia, the color red was strongly associated with sacredness, and red objects were believed to be particularly charged. Linguistic evidence points to the word for red (*kula*, *kura*, or *'ura*) being a loan from the Proto-Oceanic term *kurat*, which referred to the *Morinda citrifolia* tree, whose roots produced a strong red dye.¹ These ideas of the sacredness of red were no doubt reinforced by the general orientation of the ancestral homeland to the west, which flooded with red at sunset.

Scholars have long debated whether or not Puluṭu can be associated with any specific island or islands, but convincing arguments have been made for the eastern islands of the Fiji group because they were early centers of trade for the exchange of the lustrous red feathers of the *kula* bird, or collared

2. Female deity figure (*'otua fefine*). Tonga, early 19th century. Wood, H. 14 5/8 in. (37 cm). Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago



lory (*Phigys solitarius*), which is endemic there.² An index of wealth and power, these red feathers were an extremely valuable commodity throughout the region and were an essential element of the sacred regalia of the Tu'i Tonga, an elite line of paramount chiefs who traced their descent from the first creator god, Tangaloa.

Regardless of whether or not it corresponds to a specific geographic locale, conceptually Pulumotu is identified with the night as well as with all things invisible and unknown. Its spatial coordinates, in counterpoint to the realm of light and life above, position it as a place below, accessed via the watery depths of pools or the hidden interiors of caves, which are its portals. In Tongan mythology, this dark, watery realm is associated with Hikule'o, the deity who guards its entrance. Hikule'o is said to lurk close to the dead, carrying off the firstborn sons of chiefs in order to populate the underworld. A forbidding entity described variously as male and female, Hikule'o has a serpentlike tail tethered by the gods Māui and Tangaloa (two younger brothers to whom she is senior in rank), lest her willful actions be destructive to humankind.

A female deity figure from Tonga (*'otua fefine*) was likely a vehicle through which the formidable Hikule'o was believed to manifest in the physical realm (fig. 2). Carved from a tight-grained dark wood, it is one of only six known to exist. The figure's sculpted body, masterful in its treatment of volumetric form, is formal and taut, with a stark verticality created by the nape of the neck and a flattened facial profile that suggests the outer parameters of a bounded space. The hands are positioned purposefully, framing the torso with carefully delineated fingers that jut out neatly from flattened palms, and the flexed legs, with their angular geometry, exude power, accentuated by well-defined buttocks that protrude dramatically from behind. These angles are further exaggerated when the figure is viewed in profile, a geometric sequencing of intersections typical of the Tongan aesthetic. The balance evident in the small figure's restrained posture belies its tremendous energy and vigor, a distilled intensity characteristic of Polynesian figural sculpture in general. Nothing is loose or informal. Poised as

if ready for action, she embodies the principle of uprightness or verticality.

In her ritual role as mediator between the realms of light and dark, Hikule'o bridged the worldly domain of ordinary human endeavor and the sacred, extraordinary realm inhabited by the gods. Hikule'o was thus strongly associated with the Tu'i Tonga, the paramount chief, who was understood to be her earthly representative. The sacred and secular authority of the Tu'i Tonga was vested in his right to wear spectacular feathered regalia, which reinforced the ideas that he was an embodiment of divinity and a direct descendant of the birdlike Tangaloa, who inhabited the upper reaches of the sky.

The headdress known as the *palā tavake* was particularly evocative of the Tu'i Tonga's role as a mediator between humanity and the gods. This dazzling feather armature, designed to be secured



3. John Hall (1739–1797) after John Webber (1751–1793), *Poulaho, King of the Friendly Islands*, 1784. Engraving, 11 3/8 x 8 7/8 in. (28.9 x 22.5 cm). Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, New Zealand (2007/29/4)



4. Feather headdress (*palā tavake*). Tonga, 18th century. Barkcloth, feathers (various), fiber (various), shell, coconut shell, and glass beads. Museo de América, Madrid

5. Detail of figure 4, showing ceremonial-grade black barkcloth (*ngatu 'uli*) and remnants of red feathers

across the forehead so that it fanned out into a broad crescent shape, created an arch that visually linked the realms of sky and earth. It incorporated cosmologically charged materials—shimmering feathers, the finest-grade barkcloth, and cut sections of coconut and shell—supported on a stiff fiber frame, which splayed out dramatically to protect the chief's head, the most sacred part of his body. Rare and valuable, these materials in combination were believed to have particular efficacy, reinforcing the Tu'i Tonga's extreme sanctity, underscoring that he was a direct descendant of the first line of gods, and legitimizing his divine right to rule.

Captain James Cook (1728–1779), the famed British explorer, described seeing one of these spectacular headdresses on his visit to Tongatapu, the main island in the Tongan archipelago, in May 1777: “These Caps . . . are made of the tail feathers of the Tropic bird with the red feathers of the Paroquets worked upon them . . . they are made so as to tie upon the forehead without any Crown, and have the form of a Simicircle [*sic*] whose radis [*sic*] is 18 or 20 Inches.”³ British artist John Webber, who accompanied Cook on his third voyage of discovery to the Pacific, made a portrait of the Tu'i Tonga wearing the *palā tavake*, an image that later became a popular engraving back in England (fig. 3).

A feathered headdress recently discovered in the collection of the Museo de América, Madrid, where it was misattributed decades ago as an “apron” from the Philippines, is actually a fine example of a *palā tavake* (fig. 4). It is one of a suite of significant Tongan works likely acquired by Italian explorer Alessandro Malaspina (1754–1810), who visited Vava'u, the northern group of islands, for two months in 1793 on behalf of the Spanish crown.⁴ Early dictionaries confirm that the term *palā* refers to the wing of a bird or the fin of a fish, so that, etymologically and conceptually, the core feature of the headdress is its radial armature of bones, quills, or spines. The suffix *tavake* refers specifically to the tropicbird—either the white-tailed (*Phaethon lepturus*) or red-tailed (*Phaethon rubricauda*) species—whose long, shimmering tail feathers would have extended across the outer border of the headdress in a dramatic halo. Contrasting sections of cut coconut shell and white shell discs were strung along the outer rim. Remnants of the small, lustrous red feathers of the red-breasted musk parrot (*Prosopeia tabuensis*) can be seen today tucked into bundles of lightweight rods (fig. 5). Each of these is individually wrapped with *ngatu 'uli*, a special grade of barkcloth blackened with pigment created from the fine soot of the candlenut (*Aleurites moluccanus*).



6. First-fruits ceremony attended by Captain Cook in 1777. Engraving published in James Cook and James King, *A Voyage to the Pacific Ocean* (1784)

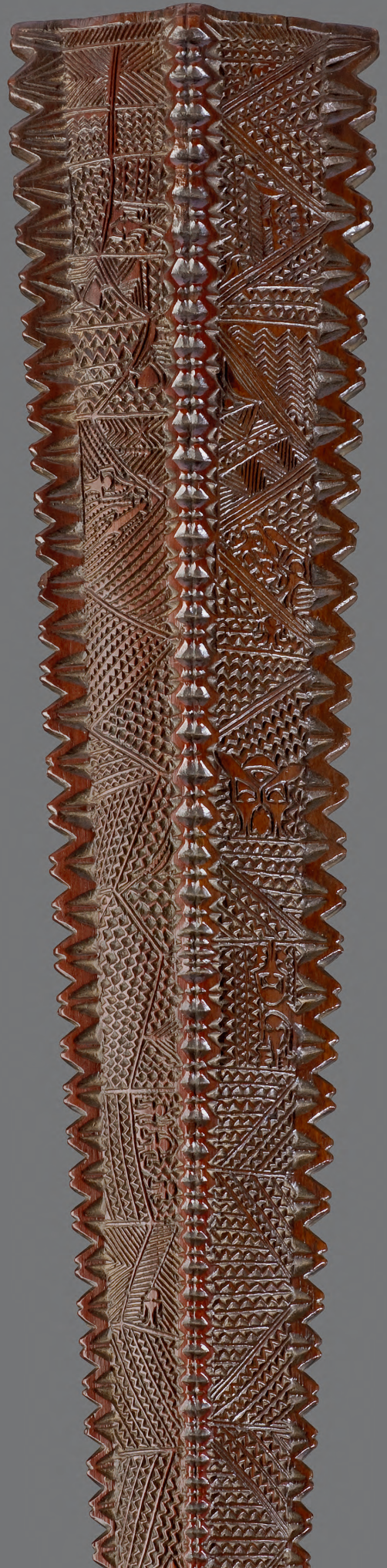
This ceremonial barkcloth, a prerogative of only the highest-ranking chiefs, was used to wrap the first layer of a deceased chief's sacred body during mortuary rites preparing him for passage from life into death. As a material, barkcloth was considered an important means of navigating ritual boundaries. It marked advancement from one phase of life to another and helped bring about transformations between the divine and human realms. Placed in direct contact with the chief's skin, barkcloth assisted in the release of the spirit so that it could begin its voyage to Pulumotu to join the ancestors.

The Tu'i Tonga, as sacred ruler, was responsible for ensuring the prosperity and well-being of the community. One of his key roles was to participate in the first-fruits ceremony (*'inasi*) accompanying the rise of the Pleiades each year, when this star group would become visible on the horizon at dusk. As part of the ritual, which was presided over by Hikule'o, the seedlings of the *kahokaho* yam (a special variety of *Dioscorea alata*, reserved for chiefs) were presented to the Tu'i Tonga, who received them on behalf of the god Tangaloa in acknowledgment of

their close kinship. This seasonal cycle was referred to as Mataliki (or Matali'i), literally "eyes of the gods," and the appearance of the Pleiades was considered an auspicious sign that the ancestral gods were present and that an abundant and prosperous growing season lay ahead. The ceremony was performed at the tomb (*langi*, meaning "sky") of the father of the incumbent Tu'i Tonga. This venerable site was seen to be a further bridge between the worldly realm and Pulumotu, whose potency was relied upon to ensure the success of the future crop.

On July 9, 1777, Captain Cook attended a first-fruits ceremony in Tongatapu (fig. 6). Rows of men delivered baskets of roasted yams to the high priest, who then presented them with great ceremony to Pau, the incumbent Tu'i Tonga.⁵ After repeated appeals by the Tongans, Cook agreed to strip to the waist and let down his hair so that it hung loose on his bare shoulders, a ritual protocol required of all men in deference to the god whose

7. Club (*'akau tau*). Tonga, 18th century. Wood, L. 43 ¾ in. (111 cm). Collection of Mark Blackburn



presence was immanent. Several of his officers openly disapproved of the British captain's participation, as one recorded in his journal: "We who were on ye outside were not a little surprised at seeing Capt Cook in ye procession of the Chiefs, w[i]th his hair hanging loose & his body naked down to ye waist. . . . I do not pretend to dispute the propriety of Captn Cook's conduct, but I cannot help thinking he rather let himself down."⁶

The figure of the Tu'i Tonga appears as an incised motif on a remarkable eighteenth-century Tongan club (*'akau tau*) collected by Cook on his third voyage to the Pacific (fig. 7). The use of such clubs extended well beyond the sphere of warfare into political ceremony. The depiction of the Tu'i Tonga wearing his *palā tavake* headdress would have been considered appropriate for none but the highest order of club. Indeed, this extraordinary example possibly belonged to the paramount chief himself, who may have given it to Cook as a gift. The club's elaborate design, typical of eighteenth-century Tongan wood carving, is refined, complex, and expertly executed with interlocking incised passages that cover the entire surface.⁷ The dynamic patterns of chevrons and zigzags likely refer to textiles, since wrapping and binding were used in Polynesia to consecrate objects as well as people, creating a spiritual armature that inferred high status (*mana*) and efficacy.

Scattered among the textile motifs are more than one hundred lively figurative images that tell a detailed visual story centered on the Tu'i Tonga and underscoring themes of abundant life and prosperity. The chief is depicted standing (either by himself or with people to fan him) as members of his entourage engage in various chiefly pursuits, such as hunting. Animals are shown impaled on the ends of arrows, and two men wield paddles overhead. The club's surface teems with other forms of life—from sprouting plants and turtles to various species of fish and an octopus—that were all sacred to the Tu'i Tonga line and reserved for his consumption. A large crawling centipede hints at the extreme sacredness of the club, since these creatures were observed in dark, hidden spaces, recalling the potent realm inhabited by the ancestors and



8. Female deity figure (*'otua fefine*). Tonga, early 19th century. Whale ivory, H. 5 ¼ in. (13.3 cm). Collected by Cyril G. Hawdon on Viti Levu, Fiji, 1868. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.1470)

harking back to the beginning of time, when the universe was still shrouded in darkness.

Cook acquired a number of extremely valuable, high-status items like the club during his brief visit to the northern group of islands.⁸ By the late eighteenth century, Tonga had become one of the most highly stratified polities in Polynesia, and the arrival of Cook and other Europeans was the catalyst for the eruption of deep-seated rivalries between chiefly families within the Tongan archipelago. These important gifts appear to have been strategic attempts by the paramount chief of the Tu'i Tonga line to secure rights to recruit and provision the European vessels with fresh water and supplies,



9. Breastplate (*civavonovono*). Fiji, early 19th century. Black pearl shell, whale ivory, and coconut fiber, Diam. 9 ¼ in. (23.6 cm). Collection of Mark Blackburn

thereby gaining an advantage over rival clans. Recent scholarship has provided fascinating insights into the changing nature of the Tu'i Tonga title during this dynamic period of encounter, suggesting that the creation of the *palā tavake* by Pau may have been a revival of an earlier practice and was meant to support his somewhat tenuous genealogical claim to the title.⁹

Another way islanders maintained close links with their ancestors was through the preservation of bones as relics. Conceptually, whalebone and ivories were understood to be chiefly relics of divine proportion: a metonym for the condensed bones of generations of ancestors. Islanders did not hunt whales; instead, they relied on the occasional stranding of a whale on a reef for their supplies of teeth. Amid the otherwise ephemeral Polynesian landscape, the large, impressive teeth of the sperm whale (*Physeter catodon* or *macrocephalus*), in particular, were considered the rarest of commodities and were strongly associated with chiefs and their divine lineage. Tongan artists,

some of whom resided on islands within the Fiji group, expertly carved these teeth into figurines, typically female, that served as vessels or channels for the spirits of ancestral gods.

A striking female image in The Met collection was carved from the creamy core of a polished whale tooth (fig. 8). The honey-colored patina was achieved by smoking the figure over smoldering sugary tubers from the *ti* plant (*Cordyline fruticosa*) and then rubbing it with oil. Not only did this accentuate the ivory's natural grain, an important part of the figure's aesthetic, the resulting shimmer of the surface also conveys and celebrates the notion of divine, sacred light. Formal similarities between this figure and the wood female deity image discussed earlier (see fig. 2), especially the gently flexed stance and the position of the flattened palms, reflect the distinct carving style of the Ha'apai Islands, at the center of the Tongan archipelago.

Missionary accounts record that crescent-shaped whalebone valuables known as *tapua* were likewise



10. Navatanitawake, principal temple and spirit house of Ra Cagawalu, early 1850s. Engraving from James Calvert, *Fiji and the Fijians: Mission History* (1858)

seen as the material embodiment of important deities of great antiquity (*tupu'i 'otua*), such as Hikule'o. The crescent shape was associated with the quarter moon, and the sanctity of the shape likely had its origin in ancient rites that involved crescent-shaped offerings, notably a particular variety of plantain, that were made to chiefs at appropriate times during the seasonal ritual calendar. If the tapering crescent shape of *tapua* (or *tabua buli* in Fiji) made reference to the moon, then the large circular whalebone breastplates known in Fiji as *civatabua* may well have originated as early representations of the sun.¹⁰ They no doubt emulated the polished pearl-shell breastplates known as *civa* (or *sifa* in Tonga), which were worn by those of chiefly rank in other parts of Polynesia, including Tahiti and the Society, Austral, and Cook Islands. Ingeniously assembled from cut sections of sperm whale ivory that had been ground down and polished, *civatabua* ranked among the most prestigious items in Fijian culture. Each section was set with finely beveled edges and slotted precisely into place. Fine coconut-fiber cord

was then passed through small holes neatly drilled into the edges, so that the fastenings were visible only on the reverse.

Civatabua were the work of skilled Tongan carpenters who had settled in the coastal regions of eastern Fiji, where they served local chiefs, part of a long history of interaction between Fiji and Tonga. Employing the planking and lashing technologies of Polynesian canoe building, they also created the impressive disc-shaped breastplates known as *civavonovono*, which incorporated pearl shell. One example, made from the large iridescent shell of the black-lip pearl oyster (*Pinctada margaritifera*), is embellished with sections of inlaid whale ivory in the shape of stars, serrated sun discs, and crescent moons (fig. 9; see also illustration on title page).

When whalebone relics and other sacred objects were not in use, they were wrapped in barkcloth

11. Portable spirit house (*bure kalou*). Fiji, early 19th century. Wood, cane, coconut fiber, and shells, H. 44 in. (111.8 cm). Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts (E5037)







12. Ritual dish (*daveniyaqona*). Fiji, early 19th century. Wood, H. 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (32.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Purchase, 2017 Benefit Fund, Gordon Sze, MD, The Richman Family Foundation, and Steven Kossak Gifts, Andrea Bollt Bequest, in memory of Robert Bollt Sr. and Robert Bollt Jr., and The Ruddock Foundation for the Arts Gift, 2018 (2018.433)

and fine mat wrappings and kept secluded in the dark inner sanctum of a god or spirit house—a kind of temple—akin to how the body of a deceased chief was readied for burial and confined within his tomb. In Fiji, ritual interactions with ancestral gods and spirits (*kalou*) were mediated by priests (*bete*) and took place in these large temples, which featured expansive roofs with towering spires that dominated the architecture of the village (fig. 10). Smaller versions, often referred to in the early literature as “oracle houses,” were also made. The portability of these small shrines (*bure kalou*) was an important aspect of their utility for chiefs, who could consult the gods for guidance whenever circumstance required, such as when making supplication for safe passage to distant shores during an extended canoe voyage.

The earliest known portable god house, collected in Fiji before 1834, was likely obtained by a vessel engaged in the lucrative sandalwood and *bêche-de-mer* (sea cucumber) trades (fig. 11).¹¹ Its remarkably complex construction features a wood framework completely wrapped in fine-grade coconut-fiber cord, or *magimagi*, whose intensive preparation was itself considered a form of sacrifice

to the gods. Extremely well preserved for its age, the shrine has an innovative design that divides the roof into two spires. At the top of each spire is a wood handle wrapped in lengths of cord embellished with small white shell discs, which loop around the supports and are inserted through openings in the structure. These discs resemble the shells of the common egg cowrie (*Ovula ovum*), known as *buli dina*, which were used to decorate the full-size temples. A signifier of godly presence, the shells also represented chiefly authority and power and, like coconut-fiber cord, were understood to have originated in the ancestral homeland.¹²

The dynamic activation of sacred objects, a crucial aspect of Polynesian ritual, was designed to encourage direct contact with ancestral gods so that relationships could be animated and drawn vividly into the present. A shallow Fijian dish in The Met collection, skillfully carved from a single block of wood, bears the stains and patina of many decades of ritual use (fig. 12). It held libations made from the ground root of the pepper plant (*Piper methysticum*), a mild narcotic ingested by Fijian priests as part of their onerous duty to intercede with ancestral gods on behalf of their chiefs. The imbibing of the sacred

plant (called *yaqona*) in concentrated liquid form allowed the ancestor spirit to physically enter the body of the priest, who was anointed in oil in preparation for the animated, highly physical ritual. Crouching in the darkened interior of the spirit house, the priest stripped to the waist, lowered himself carefully onto the earthen floor, and drew the muddy liquid up from the dish and into his mouth through a hollow reed, or straw. At this point the priest was strictly forbidden to touch the dish, for it was considered to be spiritually charged with the heat of the god, dangerous and potent. Both he and the vessel were now vehicles through which the god could communicate.

Carved from sacred vesi wood (*Intsia bijuga*), the dish represents a radical reinterpretation of the form in which the sculptor fused the bold abstraction of a powerful physiognomy with the delicate contours of a vessel. When placed upright, the oversize body and hunched shoulders suggest an extraordinary presence, embodying the deep ancestral lineage activated through the ritual. The lips are gently parted, the hollow eyes gaze directly ahead in a trance-like stare, and the arms drop loosely to each side with the palms turned out, as if in supplication: all nuanced references to the solemnity of the ritual in which the dish was deployed.

The reverence for vesi wood and other sacred materials underscores how the relationship among the gods, ancestors, humans, and the natural world was viewed by Polynesians as vital and cosmological. Ritual sculptures, whether made of sacred woods, whale ivory, complex fibers, or a dazzling array of feathers, coconut, and shell, embodied principles of efficacy and were a key channel through which the people, via their chiefs and priests, could engage with the ancestors. Accordingly, such works were also the primary means through which chiefs and priests in the eighteenth century shaped, defined, and enhanced their political power.

Chiefs themselves were understood to be a divine embodiment of the vitality associated with fertility and agricultural prosperity. An important way to signal the sacred status (*mana*) and sanctity of the chief's body was to wrap it in swathes of barkcloth, in much the same way that whale ivory



13. Theodor Kleinschmidt's drawing of Tui Nadrau, chief of Nadrau (central Viti Levu, Fiji) wrapped in barkcloth during a ceremonial presentation in October 1877. Museum am Rothenbaum—Kulturen und Künste der Welt, Hamburg

tapua were wrapped in barkcloth (sometimes smeared with turmeric) when not in use and secreted into portable shrines (see fig. 11). If wrapping was a particularly potent way of consecrating things and people, the act of unwrapping during formal presentations could be equally powerful.

Anatole von Hügel (1854–1928), a young aristocrat of Austrian and Scottish descent who visited the Pacific from 1874 to 1878, described one such exchange in Fiji, where he witnessed a presentation in which “many hundred yards of stuff [*masi*, or cloth] were first rolled into an oval ball, and then unwound from the ball and wound again on to the body of one of their own men, so that he had a huge encasement of *malo* [cloth] round him.” According to Hügel, one “variety was put on to another man in a succession of loops which fell in rows from his chin to the ground. . . . When complete this strange garment made the wearer appear of enormous bulk, and the most extraordinary thing was that a single knot held the whole get-up together, which when

undone allowed it to slip off in a mass to the ground.”¹³ Tui Nadrau, chief of Nadrau, a village in central Viti Levu in Fiji, can be seen in a print by German explorer and naturalist Theodor Kleinschmidt (1834–1881) wrapped in copious amounts of barkcloth during one such ceremonial exchange (fig. 13).

Gods, chiefs, and the natural world were closely linked in Polynesia, where genealogy was paramount. A high-ranking chief was not simply an agent of the gods but their earthly counterpart as well. Because ancestral deities in Polynesia ensured growth and life (*tumu*), it was deemed essential that leaders maintain productive relationships with them and periodically renew those associations with appropriate rites. This they did in visually dynamic ways, marshaling the forces of the natural world to legitimate their claims to leadership and animate the direct genealogical relationship that bound them to their gods. In this sense, the divine was not an abstraction but very much physically manifest in

the plants, feathers, bones, and fiber of Polynesia’s ocean and island environment.

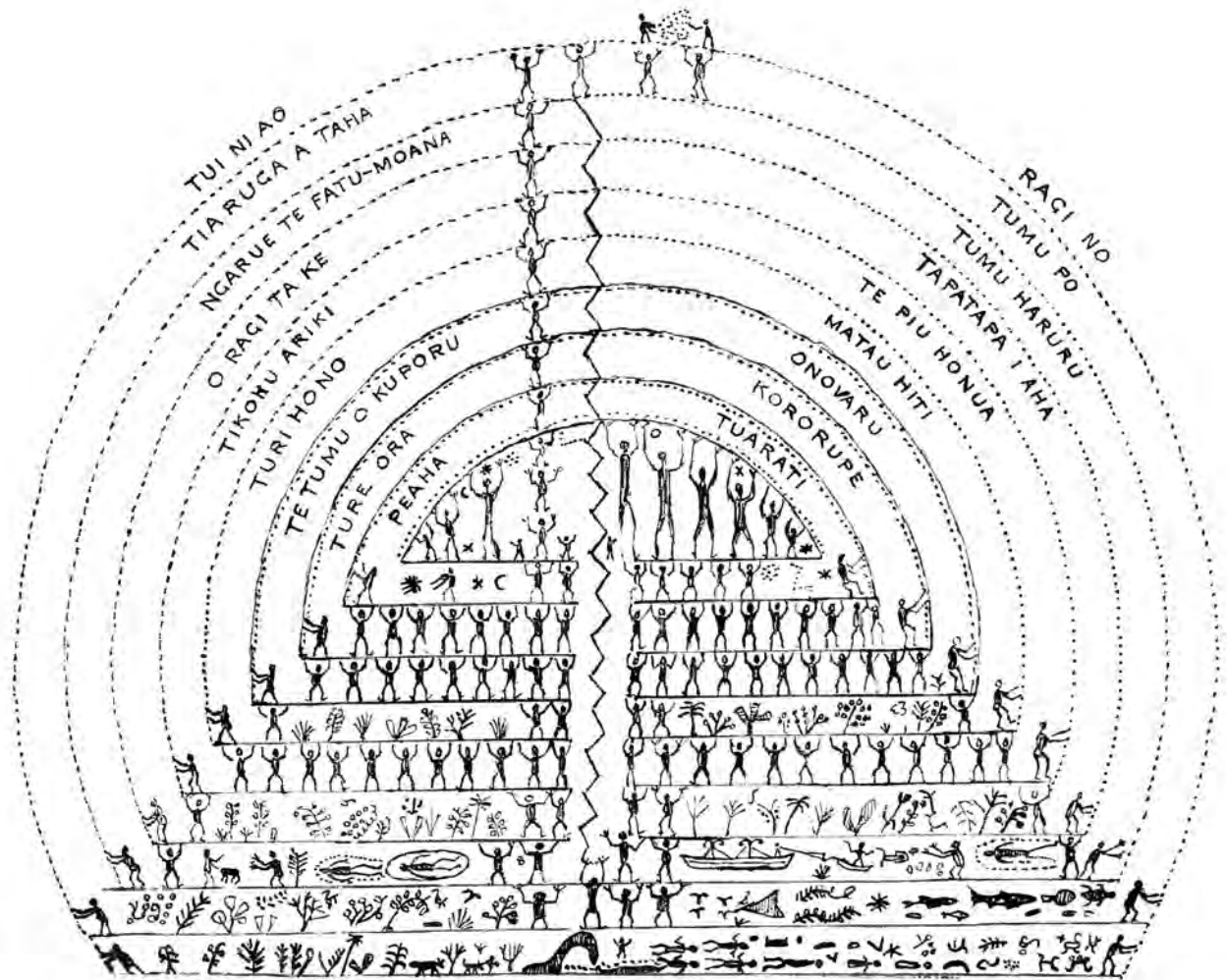
COMING INTO THE LIGHT: TAHITI AND THE AUSTRAL ISLANDS

The architecture of Polynesian ritual space and the construction of ritual objects were designed to help orchestrate direct encounters with the gods by encouraging brightness and clarity (*atea*), qualities that actively attracted them to the shaded sacred precincts. The bright flashes of light and sounds typical of such rituals were a means of summoning the gods and spirits from the dark ancestral realm (*te po*) into the world of light and life (*te ao*) inhabited by humans.

The most extensive ritual precinct in central Polynesia was Taputapuātea (meaning “vast and sacred light”), located at Opoa on the island of Ra’iatea, part of the archipelago known as the Society Islands, which includes Tahiti (fig. 14). Said to be the birthplace of the gods, the site’s monumental stone



14. Ritual precinct of Taputapuātea on Ra’iatea



15. *The Paumotu Creation of the Universe*, copy of a photograph taken in 1892 of a drawing by Paioire of the Tuamotu Islands, 1869. Bishop Museum Archives and Library, Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum, Honolulu

temples, described as the “jawbones” of the gods, were the focus of ritual encounter. Taputapuātea includes a series of precincts planted with medicinal plants and species of sacred trees and was home to many of central Polynesia’s highest-ranking lineages, including the Arioi, a class of nobles who engaged in pursuits such as oratory and ritual arts and practiced infanticide to preserve the purity of their bloodlines. Early Tahitian accounts detail elaborate gatherings of inhabitants from island groups across central Polynesia, who traveled to Taputapuātea periodically to pay tribute and renew kinship alliances.¹⁴

Missionary William Ellis (1794–1872) reported from his discussions with Tahitians that they “imagined that the sea which surrounded their islands was a level plane, and that at the visible horizon, or

some distance beyond it, the sky, or *ra’i*, joined the ocean, enclosing . . . with an arch, or hollow cone, the islands in the immediate vicinity.”¹⁵ Human existence was seen to play out within this fragile sphere of light, aided by ritual protocols that would keep at bay the potentially engulfing darkness encircling the human realm. In Polynesian cosmogony, the arched canopy of the sky receded into a series of bounded spheres, each individually named, with the last—the most remote from earth in terms of time and distance—unfolding into *te po*, or the perpetual darkness of the ancestral realm. Considered the abode of the principal gods, the tenth sphere, known as *te ra’i ha’amāma no Tane*, was conceived as a gaping (or yawning) opening that unfolded into the darkness. The term *ha’amāma* (to open the mouth, gape, or yawn) also has connotations of birthing, so

that each of these spheres or skies was envisaged as unfolding and opening out into the next.

This concept of the concentric, spherical skies is clearly illustrated in a diagram made in 1869 by Paioire, a high-born chief of Anaa, in the Tuamotu Islands, due east of Tahiti, for François Xavier Caillet (1822–1901), a French naval officer who at the time lived in the Tuamotus (fig. 15). Paioire used the drawing as a visual means to explain a chant, handed down to him from past generations, that explored the origins of the universe and the relationship of humanity to the gods, and whose steady rhythms emulated the birthing of the universe. The diagram, which illustrates how the complementary domains of land, sea, and sky are linked, comprises a total of nine outward-folding canopies, each named and given a distinct set of attributes. The circle of dots at the center and base of the chart represents the world in its primary unformed phase. At least six human figures lie prone within the depths of the ocean. With their arms stretched out to the side, they appear to be gently propelling themselves with the drift of the current among shards of coral and the feathery fringes of seaweed, algae, and kelp. They may represent the spirits of the recently deceased bound for the ancestral homeland of Havai'i, to the west. Above them are marine animals (fish, sharks, turtles) in a layer that sits immediately beneath the ocean's surface. Humans populate the water above, fishing from oceangoing vessels and riding the crests of waves. Three figures, enveloped by a series of small dots or a single line, could represent a new generation (whether mortals or gods is unclear) about to pierce the shell membrane that surrounds them and be born into life. The land layer contains abundant flora and fauna (fernlike shrubs and plants) as well as figures with their arms raised who prop up and support the sky. A series of figures representing successive generations of humanity appears in an upright vertical chain linking each sphere at the center. A reference to genealogy and generational bonds, these bodies are abstracted in some places to a simple zigzag, a motif emulated in the lashing techniques and notched carving styles of ceremonial adzes, paddles, and clubs in many parts of Polynesia.



16. Gorget (*taumi*). Tahiti, Society Islands, 18th century. Cane, coconut fiber, feathers (various), shark teeth, and dog hair, H. 26 in. (66 cm), W. 23 in. (58.4 cm). Collection of Gordon Sze, MD

17. John Webber, *A Young Woman of Otaheite, Bringing a Present*, 1777. Engraving, 15 7/8 x 12 1/4 in. (40.4 x 31.1 cm). British Library, London (Add MS 15513, f. 17)



18. William Hodges (1744–1797), *Review of the War Gallies at Tahiti (The Fleet of Otaheite Assembled at Oparee)*, 1776. Oil on canvas, 9 ½ x 18 ¼ in. (24 x 46.5 cm). National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (BHC2395)

This extraordinary document, a unique and powerful vision of the shape, size, and visual texture of eastern Polynesian cosmology, offers a rare glimpse into the richness of the islanders' oral traditions and the way their conceptual landscape was expressed materially through chiefly regalia. There is a particularly strong visual coherence between this representation of the universe by Paiore and the distinctive arched and crescent shapes of Polynesian feather headdresses and breastplates. Among the most complex examples of the latter is the *taumi*, a type of crescent-shaped gorget made with concentric bands of iridescent feathers; small, perfectly graded shark teeth; and a thick fringe of white dog hair (fig. 16). The intricate construction of *taumi* was testament to the authority of the elite class of chiefs who commissioned them, since they required valuable resources but also access to an extensive network of skilled labor. Discs of pearl shell and the dog hair were imported to Tahiti from the neighboring Tuamotu Islands, while many hours were required to capture the sharks and extract their teeth and, similarly, to gather and grade feathers from specific bird species.

The significance of these remarkable works, which visually embodied the *mana* (status) and

prestige of the warrior-priests and chiefs who wore them, was not lost on the earliest European visitors to Tahiti. John Webber captured for posterity an intriguing formal presentation in which Captain Cook was presented with two *taumi* by a young girl wrapped in bulky layers of barkcloth and with the breastplates suspended from her outer skirts (fig. 17). A painting by William Hodges, who accompanied Cook on his second voyage, shows them being worn by key protagonists on a Tahitian flotilla as they direct preparations for a naval battle (fig. 18). This pictorial evidence indicates that *taumi* were worn in pairs across the front and back of the chest and shoulders, so that the head would appear to rise up and out of the jaws of a shark. This is no doubt exaggerated for dramatic effect in Hodges's painting, in which the central figure at left, in addition to being bound with breastplates, wears a *fau*, a towering helmet likewise constructed from fiber and feathers, embellished with shark teeth, and topped with a dazzling spray of tropicbird tail feathers (fig. 19). Outfitted with this imposing

19. Helmet (*fau*), Society Islands (probably Tahiti), 18th century. Cane, feathers, and barkcloth, H. 54 ½ in. (137.5 cm). Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford University (1886.1.1683; Forster 5)



regalia, Arioi warrior-priests took on the ferocious and powerful qualities of the gods from whom they claimed descent.

Feathers are a key component of *taumi* and other types of sacred regalia because birds were associated with the primordial ancestors and were considered their intermediaries traveling across from the spirit world. Their loud chirping from within the branches of sacred trees planted inside the ritual precinct confirmed the presence of the gods and signaled that rituals could begin. The arch of a spectacular headdress from the Austral Islands, designed to evoke the vaulted dome of the sky, contains four different types of feathers, which frame a central raised section of finely cut *Tridacna* (clam) shells offset by a barkcloth-wrapped fiber helmet and net of human hair that hangs down the back (fig. 20). The range of materials is a bold visual index that underpins island cosmologies and signals chiefly dominion over the distinct realms of the land, sea, and sky.

Featherworks not only enhanced the efficacy of the wearer, they were charged with divine presence, acting as a kind of material genealogy connecting divine ancestors and former rulers with a living individual: the latest in the chiefly line. A pearl shell and feather mask from Tahiti called a *paraë* was part of a ritual ensemble worn by the Arioi as they led the mourning rituals following the death of an important chief (fig. 21). This mask of large squared sections of pearl shell was worn high over the eyes and forehead, thereby raising the stature of the wearer so that he towered over those he encountered. Coconut-fiber cord binds the panels, the smooth luminosity of the light sections contrasting with three matte sections that have a mottled, purple coloration possibly intended to emulate turtle shell. This composition reinforces the key Polynesian concept of the opposition of darkness to light, a subtle allusion to the complementary realms of *te ao* and *te po*. The upper section of the mask is fringed with a thick spray of



20. Headdress, Austral Islands (probably Ra'ivavae), 18th century. Cane, fiber (various), feathers, shell, barkcloth, and human hair, Diam. 43 ³/₈ in. (110 cm). Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge (99-12-70/53617)





21. Mask (*parae*). Tahiti, Society Islands, 18th century. Pearl shell, tropicbird feathers, and coconut fiber, H. 36 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (93 cm). Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge University (Z 28418)



22. Robert Bénard (1734–1777) after William Hodges, *Manao Tupapau, or Spirit of the Dead Watching in Tahiti with Priests and Mourners*, 1777. Engraving from the French edition of Cook's *A Voyage Towards the South Pole, and Round the World*. . . . (1778)

red- and white-tailed tropicbird feathers, a crucial aspect of its potency. The front surface of each quill is white, the reverse a shiny black. Many have been stripped down to the black quill to enhance the appearance of length and are arranged in alternately positioned clusters, giving a sense of depth and texture.

Engravings after Hodges's sketches convey some of the brilliance of *paraē* by representing the dramatic fringe of tropicbird tail feathers as a radiant halo (fig. 22). Luminosity was a key factor in creating appropriate conditions for ritual, and no doubt the sheer luster evoked by this impressive mask was one of the ambitions behind its design. A related term, *paraerae*, meaning “a state of temporary blindness,” is an apt description of its ritual function, which was to dazzle and overwhelm in order to create bewilderment and effect a transition into “extra-ordinary” time. It served to animate and galvanize the gods, with each material component commanding the cosmological power necessary to allow humans to transact with them and access the ancestral realm.

There is perhaps no better example of the generative principles set into motion by the flood of light (*atea*) into the ancestral night—concepts such as energy, abundance, and growth—than the celebrated figural sculpture known as A'a, from the island of Rurutu in the Austral Islands (fig. 23). Thirty small, highly animated figures carved in relief stud the statue's body. Each, according to local interpretation, represents one of the island's ancient lineages. Seemingly sprouting from the surface, they can be divided into two main styles or groups. Individuals in the first group are upright, with their arms on their chests or abdomens or with a single hand raised to the mouth, a reference to oratory and spoken word, both vital elements in the activation of Polynesian god images. Those in the second group are active, almost acrobatic figures who seem to embody a potent, fecund energy.

Carved into the back of A'a is a cavity that likely housed the skull and long bones of an ancestor. The possibility that A'a was a reliquary, or a receptacle for





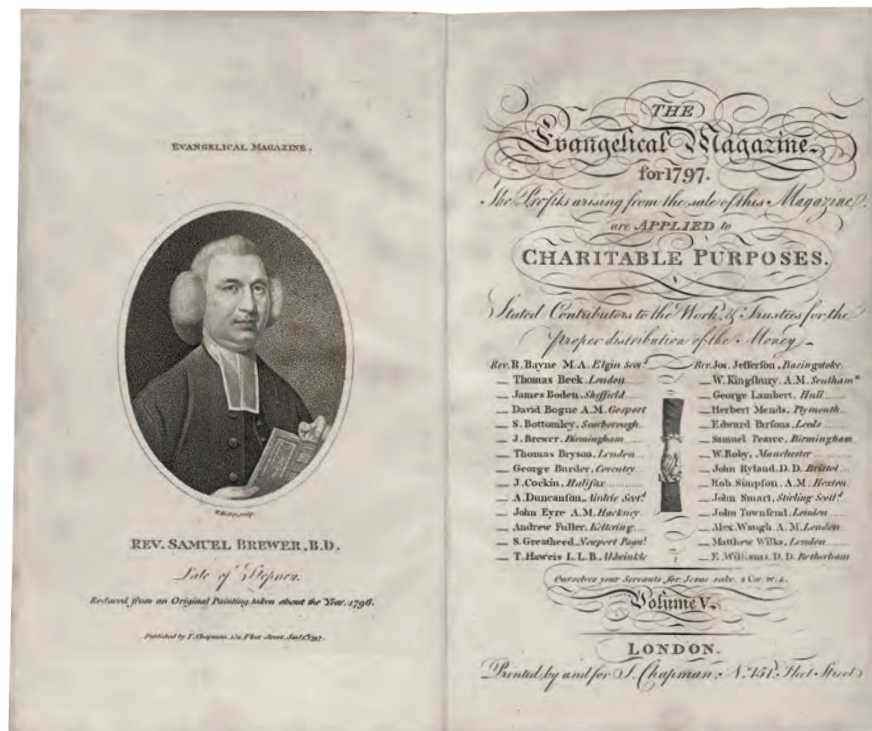
the safeguarding of ancestral remains, would agree with missionary accounts that associate A'a with Ta'aroa, the birdlike god believed to have created the islands of central Polynesia. Ta'aroa is said to have dwelled within a void of "continuous, thick darkness" for many eons, as described in this early creation chant from Bora Bora:

Ta'aroa sat in his shell in darkness for millions of ages. The shell was like an egg revolving in endless space with no sky, no land, no sea, no moon, no sun, no stars. All was darkness, it was continuous, thick darkness. . . . Ta'aroa was quite alone in his shell. . . . There was sky space, there was land space, there was ocean space, there was fresh-water space. . . . There was no sound, all was darkness outside.¹⁶

In time, according to the chant, Ta'aroa pecked his way through the fragile casing, raising its dome to form the first canopy of the sky. The lower section of shell on which he stood became the rock, and as he shook off the red and yellow feathers that covered him, these "became trees, plantain clusters, and verdure upon the land."¹⁷ This chant also describes Ta'aroa generating from his own body the first god house, a vessel said to have become the template for all others.¹⁸ He arched his back, and his uplifted backbone became the central ridgepole, his ribs and breastbone the supports and caps of the roof, and his thighbones its carved ornaments.¹⁹

The association of Ta'aroa with A'a is particularly compelling in light of missionary accounts, which offer crucial insights into indigenous understandings of this remarkable object. The first missionaries to the South Seas landed in Tahiti in 1797, led by Captain James Wilson (1760–1814) of HMS *Duff*, on behalf of the London Missionary Society (LMS), a nondenominational Christian mission established in 1795 (figs. 24, 25). Intending

23. Deity figure, known as A'a. Rurutu, Austral Islands, 17th century. Wood, H. 46 in. (117 cm). British Museum, London (Oc. LMS 19)



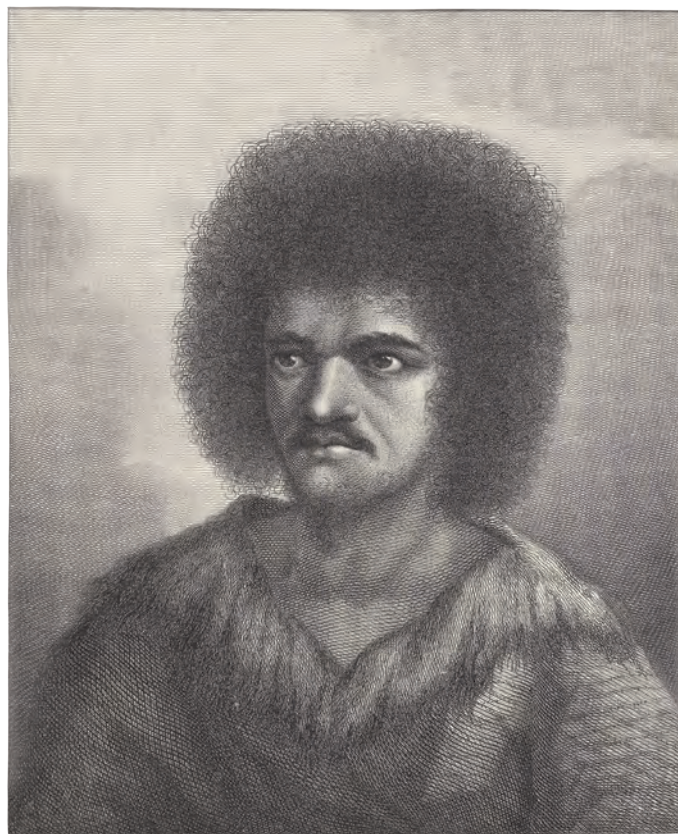
24. *The Evangelical Magazine for 1797*, published by the Council for World Mission, London. Archives and Special Collections, School of Oriental and African Studies Library, University of London



25. Robert Smirke (1753–1845), *The Cession of the District of Matavai in the Island of Otaheite to Captain James Wilson for the Use of the Missionaries Sent Thither by that Society, 1798*. Oil on canvas, 37 1/8 x 26 1/2 in. (94.4 x 66.3 cm). Council for World Mission, London

to teach the benefits of Christian life by example, fourteen missionaries and their families disembarked at Tahiti, including four ordained ministers; the rest were considered “godly mechanics,” or skilled artisans, from carpenters, weavers, and tailors to bricklayers, a blacksmith, and even a surgeon. The LMS missionaries spent a turbulent few years as guests of the paramount chief, Tu of the Pomare dynasty (ca. 1743–1803; fig. 26), and in time established their headquarters at the northern end of Ra’iatea, not far from the ritual precinct of Taputapuātea. Tu’s successor, the young Pomare II (ca. 1774–1821), decided to embrace the new Christian god, likely a strategic decision given that a decade of political rivalries, war, and disease had weakened and reconfigured dynastic alliances within the islands.

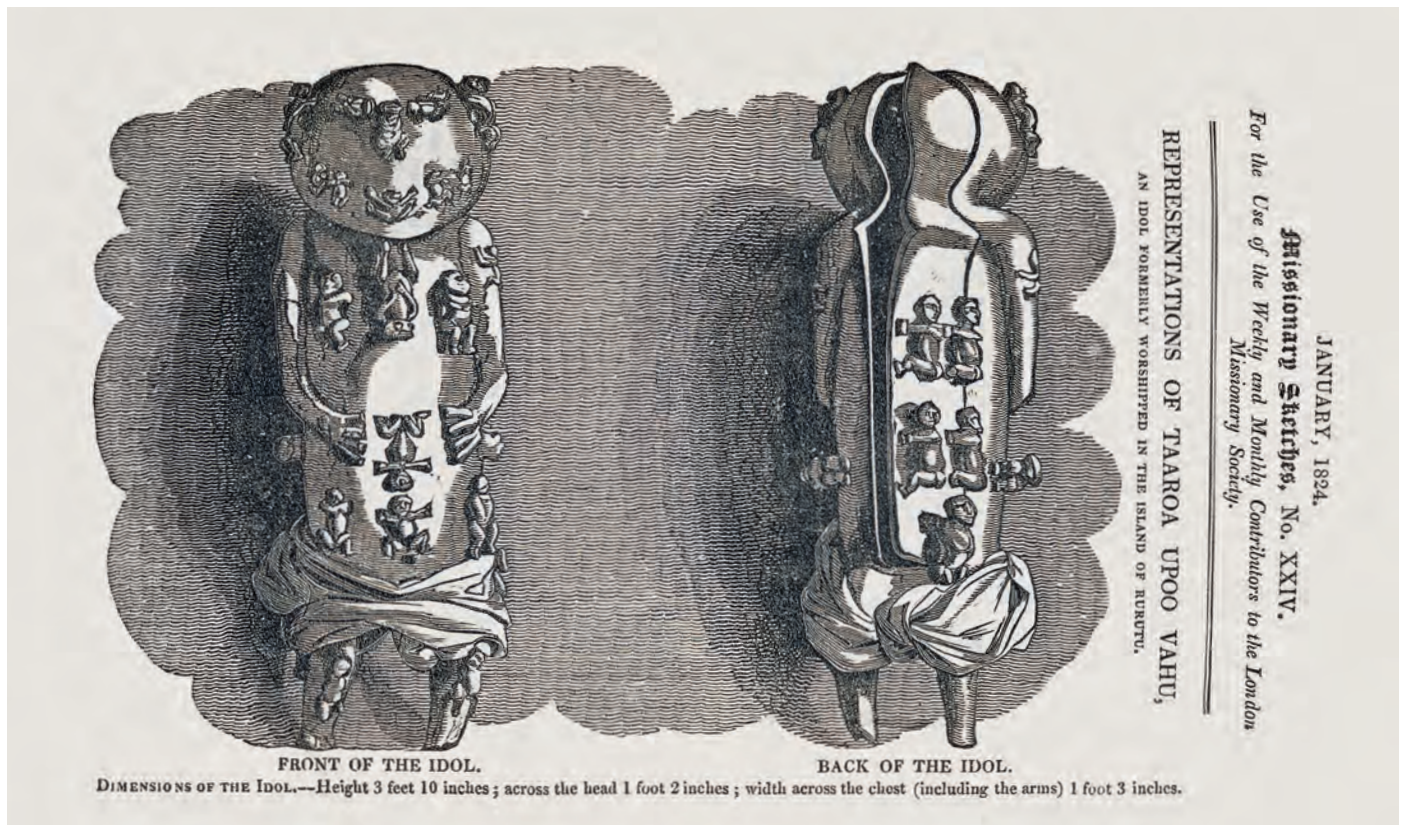
The rejection of deities no longer deemed effective had strong precedents in Polynesia, where gods were sometimes publicly dismissed and their *mana* and status formally diminished by ritual. Images of rejected gods were burned, buried in the ground or at sea, or secreted away in dark, inaccessible caves, their potency thereby neutralized, as another was chosen and a new god image inaugurated. Missionary John Williams’s (1796–1839) vivid account conveys some of the drama of the evening of August 9, 1821, when A’a, “said to be the ancestor by whom their island was peopled, and who after death was deified,”²⁰ was surrendered by the islanders in a ceremony that saw them reject and dishonor their former gods. The cavity of A’a was opened, and twenty-four small god images were dramatically disgorged and presented to the crowd gathered in the chapel at the society’s headquarters. As the ceremony unfolded, large chandeliers supporting scores of coconut-shell lamps glowed with burning *tutui* nuts. Ritual efficacy was believed to be heightened at night, when the gods and ancestors who dwelled in the darkness of *te po* were thought to be closest, and the bright illumination of interior spaces—likened to creating day within night, and known in Tahitian as *rehu arui* (“night-day”²¹)—was considered highly propitious. This was the charged atmosphere in which A’a was publicly denounced in a grand, triumphant spectacle by the newly converted islanders.



26. John Hall after William Hodges, *Otoo (Tu), King of O-Taheite*, 1777. Engraving. British Library, London (Add MS 23920, f. 42)

In January 1824, images of A’a appeared on the title page of *Missionary Sketches*, a publication of the LMS, accompanied by a caption that defined his name as “Taaroa Upoo Vahu” (Ta’aroa of the Eight Heads) (fig. 27). The “eight heads” may correspond to the districts (*mataeina’a*) into which island polities were then divided and possibly also to the eight iron nails driven into the figure’s legs, body, and back panel.²² Did the islanders use these newly acquired European nails to affix barkcloth or feather bindings to the image, as would have been appropriate for certain rites? Or did they consider the nails a strategic means of incorporating the potency of this novel material into the physical body of the god, thus enhancing his power?

The exact significance of the nails embedded in A’a remains an open question, as does the meaning of the figure’s name. Some scholars have argued that A’a is a diminution of *’aha*, the generic Tahitian term for sennit: the finely plaited coconut-fiber cord, prepared from lengths of husks, that was a characteristic component of god images in the region.²³



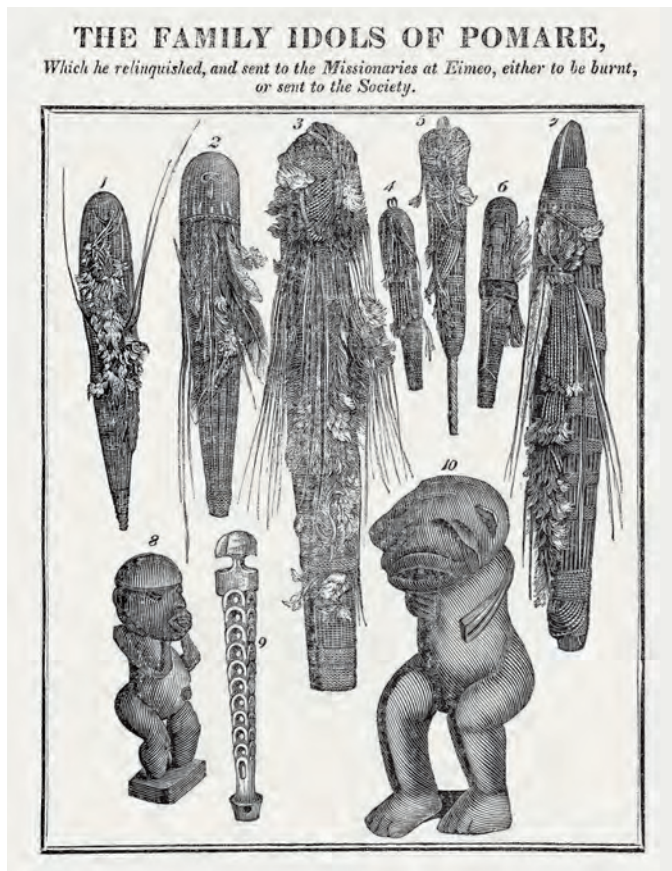
27. Representations of Taaroa Upoo Vahu, an Idol Formerly Worshipped in the Island of Rurutu, published in *Missionary Sketches*, no. 24 (January 1824). Council for World Mission Library, Special Collections, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

The description of A'a during his final presentation in the chapel at Ra'iatea as "the great national god, Taaroa,"²⁴ bound in a sheath of plaited fiber would seem to support that idea, given that it was customary to bind captured enemies and sacrificial victims this way. The binding of the phallus and testicles, in particular, was designed to inhibit the possibility of reproduction and continuation of a lineage. Binding the image of the rejected and denounced god would have been consistent with the figure's deconsecration and, in fact, may have been the only appropriate way to present him during this ritual of dismissal.

One missionary account of the ceremony in which A'a was deconsecrated described the sculpture as being "filled with little gods, or the family gods of the old chiefs, the points of spears, old slings, &c., of ancient warriors."²⁵ Those spearpoints, fans, and "flywhisks" represent distinctive genres of Polynesian god images known as *to'o* and *tahiri*. The term *to'o* means "baton" or "post," and, as the name implies, these were often armatures that facilitated the attachment (or enclosure) of potent materials,

such as red feathers, woven coconut-fiber cord, cut sections of pearl shell, or human hair and teeth. All these materials had rich cosmological associations—coconut-fiber cord with the god Tane, red feathers with Ta'aroa—and were imbued with divine essence and power. The sculptures were not representations of particular gods, per se, but rather lively and dynamic conduits designed to maximize the potential for interaction with gods when activated by the correct combination of words and ritual intention.

To'o, considered the image of a god into which spirits were invoked, were often deployed during seasonal rituals, when they were removed from the god houses, unwrapped, and placed on platforms within the sacred precincts (*marae*).²⁶ The feathers bound within them were distributed among district chiefs in an orchestrated display that served to reinforce the island's political hierarchy. Red feathers, in particular, functioned as a kind of cosmological currency with which the principal chiefs could assert their status and legitimacy, for those who could



28. *The Family Idols of Pomare*, published in *Missionary Sketches*, no. 3 (October 1818). Council for World Mission Library, Special Collections, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London



29. Henry Anelay (1817–1883), *The Rev. John Williams on Board Ship with Native Implements, in the South Sea Islands*, ca. 1838. Watercolor, 16 ¾ x 13 ¼ in. (42.5 x 33.5 cm). National Library of Australia, Canberra

manipulate the appropriate networks to acquire and then distribute the rare feathers at key moments in the ritual calendar were also the ones with the most political sway.

Long-established trade routes among the Society, Cook, and Austral Islands enabled the cultivation and selection of rare and valuable materials like feathers from outlying islands to the dynastic and political centers in Ra’iatea and Tahiti, where they were integrated into the ritual networks of chiefs. The red and green feathers of Kuhl’s lorikeet (*Vini kuhlii*), for example, were acquired from Rimatara in the Austral Islands, while whalebone came from neighboring Rurutu, where whale populations returned annually to breed in the deep waters off the island’s sheer limestone cliffs. Pearl shell and coconut coir were cultivated seasonally in the coral atolls of the Tuamotus.

Seven *to’o* appear in an engraving published in the October 1818 issue of *Missionary Sketches*

(fig. 28).²⁷ They are numbered along the top above two carved wood figures (*ti’i*) that flank a cylinder punctuated along its length by a series of arches. These objects, the text explains, are the “family idols” of the Tahitian paramount chief, Pomare II, “relinquished, and sent to the Missionaries at Eimeo, either to be burnt, or sent to the Society.”²⁸ Judging from the accompanying legend, the LMS missionaries were clearly perplexed by the god images: “[They] differ from anything we remember to have seen or read of [that were] used by idolaters for the purpose of worship.”²⁹ Indeed, missionaries to Tahiti from the beginning struggled to grasp the significance of the baton-shaped *to’o*. Expecting images of gods to be anthropomorphic, they saw these objects as strangely insubstantial: “The image of their god is nothing more than a piece of hard wood . . . without any carving, wrapt [*sic*] up in sundry cloths, and decorated with red feathers &c.”³⁰ This shapelessness was disconcerting to the missionaries,



but it conformed to their preconceptions about idolatry and reinforced their already considerable misgivings about the state of “barbarism” in the islands. A watercolor by British artist Henry Anelay shows John Williams pointing to a collection of missionary trophies—many recognizable ritual objects from the Society and Cook Islands—acquired from newly converted islanders at the LMS headquarters on Ra’iatea (fig. 29). The trophies were displayed in the society’s museum in London in order to raise the profile of missionary enterprises in the South Seas.

Some of the bulkier, more elaborate *to’o* did have anthropomorphic features and were specifically associated with the god Oro. One now in The Met collection is believed to have been brought back from Tahiti by George Bennet (1774–1841), deputed to the region on behalf of the LMS to assess the status of missionary endeavors (fig. 30). Although The Met example has lost its feather attachments, which were possibly removed by islanders prior to its surrender, they would have been its most valuable component and may have been repurposed locally on newly consecrated images of the Christian god, Jehovah. Alternating bands of light and dark (red-brown) sennit distinguish the different sections of the fiber envelope around the wood armature, while looped sections of coconut-fiber cord ingeniously reference the eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. A small depression in the fiber about two-thirds of the way down the trunk of the body alludes to the navel, considered an important portal to the figure’s dark, sacred interior. A single raised section of wood emerging from the top of the head represents a topknot of hair, as was the fashion for chiefly men.

The elaboration of these later, more anthropomorphic *to’o* was likely an innovation born of mid- to late eighteenth-century political developments on the islands. Once associated primarily with the chiefly Arioi sect, whose ritual center was at Taputapuata, on Ra’iatea, the Oro cult had

30. Deity image (*to’o*). Tahiti, Society Islands, 18th century. Wood, coconut fiber, and traces of feathers, H. 18 1/8 in. (46 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.1481)



31. John Webber, *A Human Sacrifice at Otaheite*, 1777. Engraving. British Library, London (Add Ms 15513, f. 16)

32. Ceremonial drum (*pahu ra*). Austral Islands, possibly Ra'ivavae, early 19th century. Wood, sharkskin, and coconut fiber, H. 51 3/8 in. (130.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Gift of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1969 (1978.412.720)

extended its influence into Tahiti and Mo'orea at the beginning of the eighteenth century, a move that coincided with the ambitions of a line of chiefs who would eventually become the Pomare dynasty.³¹ These more elaborate god images—typically heavier, and with bulkier wrappings and more feathers—were likely commissioned by high-ranking chiefs (*ari'i*) eager for additional spiritual reinforcement.

Missionaries emphasized the violent and warlike attributes of Oro, whom they understood to be a god of war. Oro's arrival was said to be heralded by the dynamic arching of a rainbow from the uppermost reaches of the sky dome to the land below amid flashes of lightning and claps of thunder. One LMS missionary compiled a list of Oro's attributes that supposedly found physical manifestation in Pomare II, including his dwelling place, Aora'i (sky pierced with light), in the upper reaches of the sky where the mountains pierce the clouds; Anuanua (rainbow), the double-hulled canoe that bore him across the threshold into *te ao*, armed with U'ira (lightning), conceived as "the torch that gives him light at night"; and Patire (thunder), the "drum that beat . . . for his amusement."³²

The wrapped wood core of the images made in Oro's name may well have been intended as an explicit reference to the human sacrifices that were an essential component of rituals relating to him





(fig. 31). Victims for sacrifice were dispatched with a single blow to the head “to prevent any disfigurement of the body,” according to one missionary account, since the ritual required that “a bone of him must not be broken, nor the corpse mangled or mutilated.”³³ The body, fastened to a long pole, was bound with *ha’ape’e*, a basketlike structure of coconut leaves, and carried to the *marae*. If a human was not available, a pig was substituted. Specialist carvers from the Austral Islands produced high-quality ritual objects such as drums and bowls for use in these rituals by the paramount Tahitian chiefs (fig. 32).

The pronounced phallic aspect of Oro figures has been understood by some as corresponding to his complementary aspect as a fertility god, for Oro was a focal point of Arioi rituals that sought to promote fertility and abundance in the natural world. Missionaries explained what they saw as sensual self-indulgence among the Arioi class as a means by which the cult “dramatized the procreational activities of nature.”³⁴ The close resemblance of these images to the yam is likely not a coincidence and may be a vestige of rituals established by the ancestors, such as the first-fruits ceremonies of Tonga. What seems clear is that these more anthropomorphic *to’o* were never intended as representations of Oro himself but were a means of alluding to the network of reciprocal obligations set in motion by the offering of sacrifices in his name. Feathers, for example, linked Oro (and his earthly representative, Pomare II) directly to Ta’aroa and reinforced his link to the sacred precinct within Taputapuātea, the god’s birthplace and the source of his potency.

To’o were among the most enigmatic works of art produced in Tahiti. Missionaries, in their zeal to organize Polynesian gods into neat categories, often envisioned them as an orderly pantheon of individual deities, each with his or her own distinct sphere of influence, as in Greek and Roman mythology. In doing so, they failed to appreciate how Polynesian deities were informed by, or could be associated with, many different

33. Sacred spearpoint (*to’o*). Rurutu, Austral Islands, 18th century. Wood, H. 21 5/8 in. (55 cm). The Menil Collection, Houston (A 7883)



aspects in order to represent their full ritual potential. In a sense, they were, or could be, all things. Their power was determined more fully by the ways in which they were assembled and consecrated, and in this regard they were much more wide-ranging than the gods of the Western tradition. The dynamic process of assembly—usually to the accompaniment of chants, which priests were required to recite flawlessly and in a steady rhythm—was as crucial as the image itself. As one missionary commented, *'aha atua* referred not just to the sennit used to make a god but to the “whole round of prayers offered to him.”³⁵



34. Necklace (*rei*), Austral Islands, late 18th–early 19th century. Whalebone, whale ivory, coconut fiber, and human hair, Diam. 9–9 ¾ in. (22.8–24.8 cm). Collection of Gordon Sze, MD

No exchange with the gods could take place without the presentation of sacrificial pigs, which, according to a myth related to Oro, could be substituted for red feathers when these were not available. This may explain the prevalence of the animal as a motif on significant ceremonial objects from the Austral Islands, such as a spearpoint embellished with abstract pig designs that descend from the bifurcated tip to a section of ridged zigzags below (fig. 33). Their snouts point down while their distinctive curlicue tails rise up to create a sequence of crescent-shaped arches, a key design element for important ritual works in Polynesia. The large number of the animals depicted no doubt emphasized concepts of vitality and prosperity as well as the reciprocal relationships addressed by ritual offerings.

Pigs also feature prominently on the high-status chiefly necklaces known as *rei*, which are made of rectangular carved whalebone pendants suspended from a fiber necklace wrapped in human hair (fig. 34). The individual pendants represent miniature headrests, a reference to the stool (*iri*) on which god images were placed (or “flown”) during rituals. The single pig on this example is combined with carved pairs of testicles, alluding to future generations of the chiefly lineage and to vigor and potency in the most literal sense. Such necklaces were a strong visual representation of the accord that bound humanity in relationship to the gods and the transformative potential of all ritual practice.

The dynamism that was a crucial aspect of Polynesian god images, and one closely associated with their effectiveness as ritual objects, is perhaps best understood through the group of works from the Austral Islands known as *tahiri*. Often referred to simply as “flywhisks,” these elegant, upright sculptures have long been misunderstood, suffering from overly literal interpretations that overlook their cosmological significance. (*Tahiri* were also described by early European observers as “fans,” most likely a literal translation of the verb from

35. Flywhisk (*tahiri*). Austral Islands, early to mid-19th century. Wood, human hair, and coconut fiber, H. 32 in. (81.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Bequest of Nelson A. Rockefeller, 1979 (1979.206.1487)





which they derive their name.)³⁶ As part of ritual practice, *tahiri* were typically spun or twirled by priests to beckon the gods into the sacred precincts where rituals took place. Vigorous fanning was believed to encourage the arrival of the gods, who were said to bear down to the earthly realm on the wind. Fanning (or “whisking”) in bold, gestural movements was thus a way to attract gods out of the darkness of the spirit world and into the light.

Dynamism is implied in the name *atua* (or *a-tua*), the collective term for the Polynesian gods, which refers to revolving or turning repeatedly around a central axis. This spinning motion is manifest in the carving of a *tahiri* in The Met collection, particularly in its highly abstract finial, which seems to be doubled but actually represents a single figure in motion (fig. 35). The figure’s feet taper elegantly into four pairs and appear to “side-step” when the *tahiri* is rotated on its vertical axis; the same action causes a series of circular spools and rounded discs to appear to descend along the shaft. The springy coconut-fiber whisk element at bottom further reinforces a sensation of movement and spinning. Sections of polished pearl shell tied into the bindings of *tahiri* flashed and jangled when twirled, creating the luminosity and sound that were likewise a means of creating the appropriate conditions for ritual and for summoning the gods.

A *tahiri* illustrated in the engraving *The Family Idols of Pomare* (see fig. 28) and now in the British Museum, London, is a particularly evocative example of the genre (fig. 36). Carved from a single section of whalebone, it is easily manipulated in the hand. From the published engraving it is difficult to see that the highly sculptural finial is, in fact, a figure, albeit heavily eroded, an indication that it was rubbed with oil and handled repeatedly over time. Raised features indicate an oval face with two crescents for eyes; other subtle

36. Flywhisk handle (*tahiri*). Austral Islands, 18th century. Whalebone, H. 9 ½ in. (24.2 cm). British Museum, London

37. Flywhisk handle (*tahiri*). Austral Islands, 18th century or earlier. Whale ivory and coconut fiber, H. 11 ¾ in. (29.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Michael C. Rockefeller Memorial Collection, Purchase, Nelson A. Rockefeller Gift, 1965 (1978.412.875)



38. Unknown artist, *Revd. Dr. Thomas Haweis, 1734–1820*, n.d. Oil on canvas. National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London (ZBA5586)

contours reveal a backward-arching figure whose raised thighs are flexed and open, likely a reference to birthing or, more generally, a transition across thresholds.

Another *tahiri*, now in The Met collection, has a similar but far more discernible, backward-arching finial figure (fig. 37). Balanced on a wide collar, it creates a hollow space or canopy from which the central stem extends down in a series of openwork crescents. The carving on these sections varies from angular, minimal passages to more complex interventions in which stylized figures support each corner. Those with outstretched arms and legs give way to a series of simple incisions that suggest abstract facial features. Presented in rows descending from the top, these figures are an expression of genealogical connections.

Coveted for its rarity, this carved whalebone stem was a particularly potent work. Whales were seen as the *ata* (shadow or embodiment) of Ta’aroa, the creator god from whom all others derived, and their bones were not merely representative, symbolic, or ornamental but, rather, relics that contained the



39. Tupaia (ca. 1725–1770), *A Scene in Tahiti*, 1769. Pen and India ink and watercolor. British Library, London (Add MS 15508, f. 14)

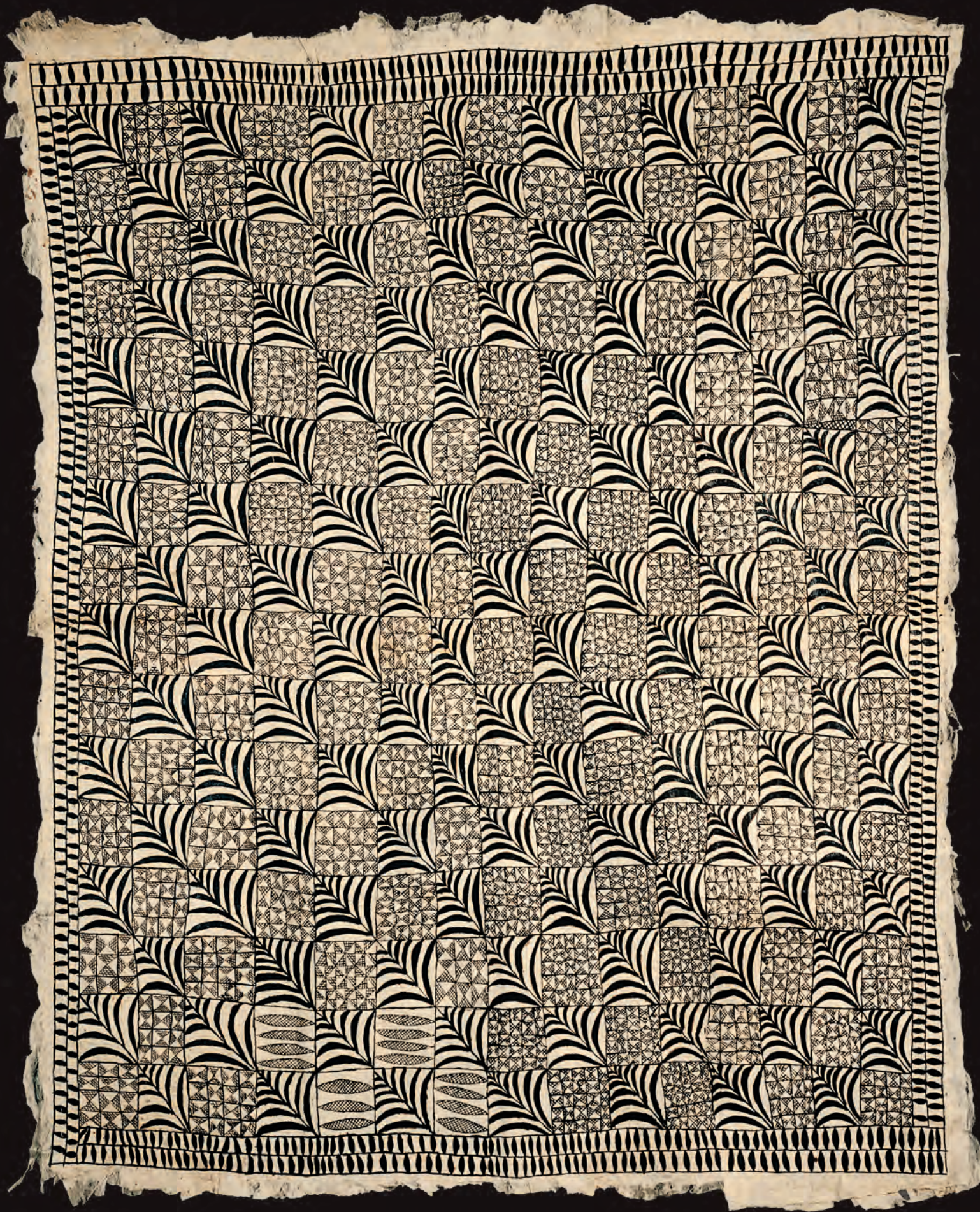
essence of Ta'aroa, much like red feathers. Strong and lasting, these bones were his *iho*, or essence, made permanent. Since the bones of one were also the bones of all, the carving represented the entire chiefly lineage, descended from the god, and all its members.

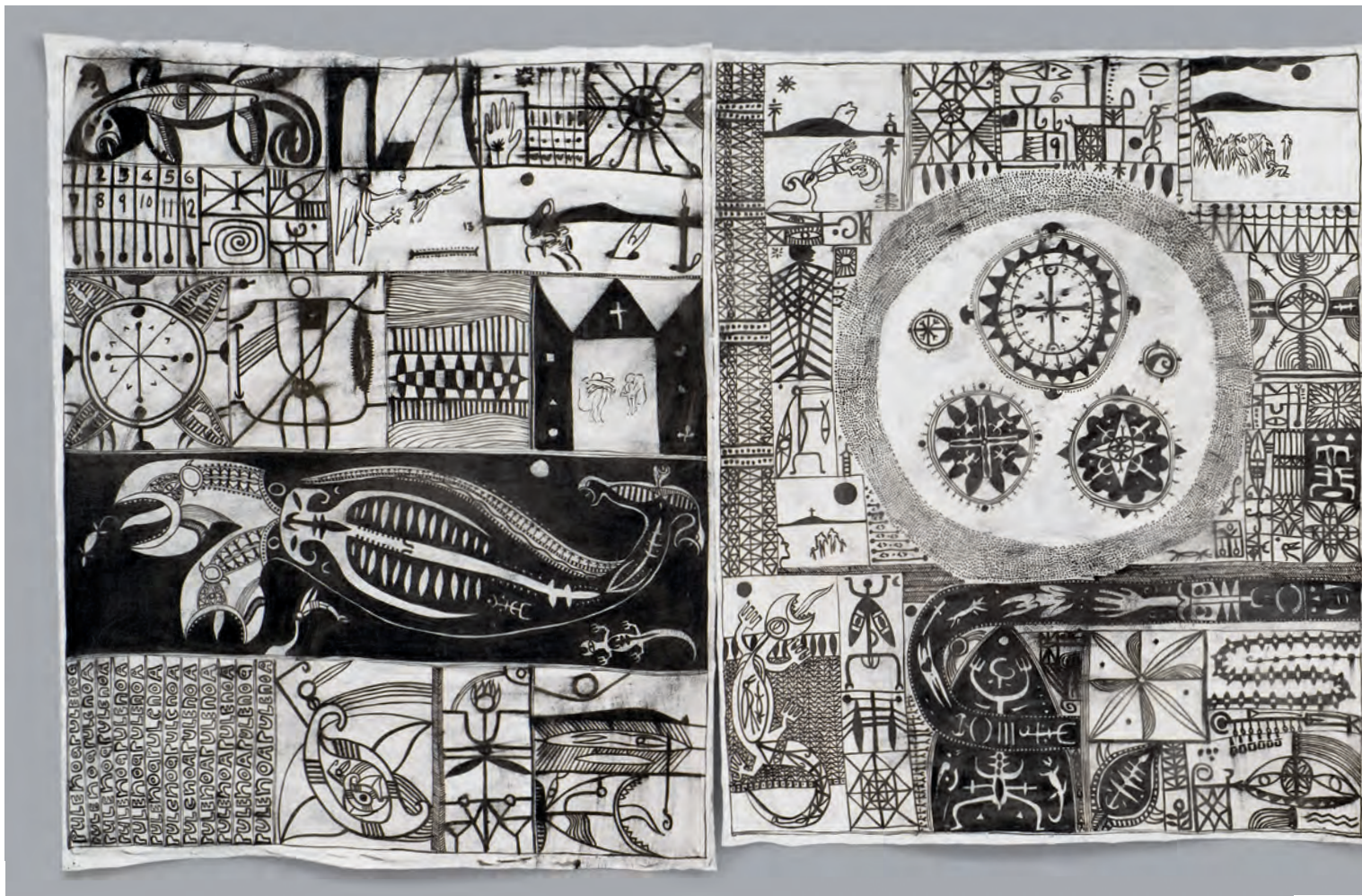
The legend that accompanies *The Family Idols of Pomare* provides the name by which that whalebone fan (see fig. 36) was known, “Tahi[r]i Anunaehau.” Anunaehau is likely a composite word that combines *anuanua* (rainbow) with a qualifying term that means to “move beyond,” suggesting something that is greater, larger, and more significant. In this sense, the name would imply the greatest, most magisterial rainbow, a compelling detail given the paramount chief’s strong association with the god Oro, who was said to pierce through the sky from the ancestral realm on a rainbow accompanied by flashes of lightning and loud claps

of thunder. This type of naming and personification of key components of a chief’s regalia was common in Polynesia, where important ritual works were seen not as inanimate objects but vital, integral elements of the rich fabric of nature that secured the place of humans within it.

Only five other whalebone and ivory *tahiri* incorporate this type of distinctive arched figure, which in terms of Polynesian cosmology conveys the highly auspicious space within which the universe was birthed into being. Ta'aroa was said to have “conjured forth gods in the night”³⁷ by hollowing out space from the thick, engulfing darkness, summoning the light, and, at the same time,

40. *Hiapo*. Niue, 19th century. Barkcloth and pigment, 90 1/8 x 69 1/4 in. (229 x 176 cm). Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, Cambridge (11-2-70/83961)





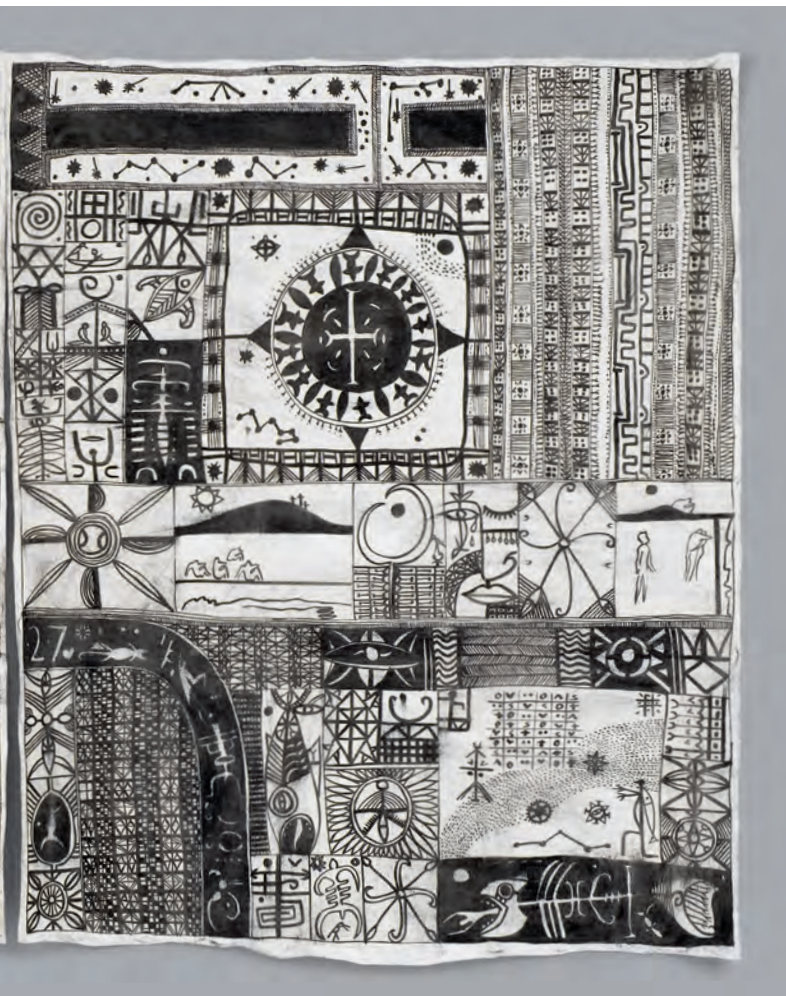
41. John Puhiateau Pule (born 1962). *Pulenoa Triptych*, 1995. Oil on canvas, 86 ¼ x 213 ¾ in. (219 x 543 cm). Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, New Zealand (C1998/1/15/1-3)

chasing away obscurity and creating space so that the gods might fly within it. In short, they were an accessory that enabled priests to approach and transcend perceived thresholds in the landscape. The finial's birthing posture explicitly references transition across this potent border, the drawing down of the presence of the god from the dark reaches of *te po* so that he could be borne from one side to the other.

Both of these ivory *tahiri* are recorded as having been presented by Pomare II to the Reverend Dr. Thomas Haweis (fig. 38), a founding director of the LMS, in 1818. Haweis, delighted at the arrival of Pomare's idols in London, proclaimed in a diary entry that they were "more welcome than the spoils of the Acropolis."³⁸ Yet it was the Tahitian chief who had pursued the initiative by entering into personal correspondence with

Haweis, whom he understood to be his chiefly counterpart in England. In a letter accompanying their dispatch, Pomare explained that he was sending Haweis "two little fans which the royal families of these countries, were accustomed to fan themselves with, when the day of the festival arrived & the king was prayed for."³⁹ In a poignant conclusion, Pomare noted that all his family idols except for the small one enclosed had been destroyed: "all of the large Idols are consumed, having been burned in the fire this is only a little one that remains."⁴⁰ The last one, he explained, was Ta'aroa.

For Pomare II, sending Haweis his "family idols" was an effective means of binding the directors of the LMS to his own dynasty in Tahiti and thereby bringing them into his network of powerful chiefs. In this way, these whalebone and whale ivory



sculptures functioned much as they always had in Polynesia, becoming material expressions of obligations between exchange partners. Indeed, this long-distance presentation was consistent with protocols of exchange throughout Polynesia, in that it created a debt and enhanced the status of the giver: the Tahitian chief and his missionary counterpart were now irrevocably bound to each other.

It bears remembering that chiefly regalia in Polynesia was created principally for hereditary elites: the powerful chiefs who were imbued with the spiritual essence (*mana*) of their ancestors. Prestige items such as feather sashes, capes, and headdresses asserted a chief's divine right to rule by, in effect, "stage managing" his sanctity in visually dramatic ways. In ritual contexts, they enhanced the potency of the wearer; in the political arena, they were a visual index of his ability

to control chains of reciprocal obligations across the islands. In what were highly stratified societies, chiefs generally inherited titles and power, but astute individuals, adept at leveraging relationships to their advantage, could sometimes rise to positions of leadership. Early encounters with visiting Europeans created a dynamic political arena in which motivated, ambitious individuals such as Pau of the Tu'i Tonga lineage and Tu of the Pomare dynasty in Tahiti could consolidate power over their rivals by exploiting these new relationships. Ultimately, their political power was rooted in their ability to create, commission, and control ownership of the prestige materials and works of art with which they asserted their legitimacy to rule.

GROWTH AND ABUNDANCE

In Polynesia, one of the crucial elements in reaffirming connections with the deities of antiquity was the recitation of ancestral lineages. Such esoteric knowledge was intricate and complex, a series of formulas that flowed one into the other. These had to be repeated by priests (known as *haere po*) in a steady progression that allowed them to approach the threshold of *te po*, the ancestral realm. Each consecutive phrase of chanting built on the foundation of the previous one in order to create a continually evolving rhythm that harked back to the era of creation, when the earliest stages of life had begun to emerge. The distinctive rhythm and momentum of these chants was intended to mimic the original phases of creation and evolution, conceived as a process of uninterrupted and continued growth (*tupu*).

Ideas of sprouting and budding were central to early Polynesian accounts describing how the universe had come into being. Since life was produced by pairing, the reproductive potential of each successive phase of evolution was described in language redolent of nature, growth, and abundance, including verbs such as *rito* (budding), *kao* (maturing), *rau* (leafing), *mahora* (outspreading), and *rara* (branching). This reverence for and close observation of the natural world is evident in a drawing by the artist Tupaia, a Ra'iatean priest-navigator who accompanied Cook on his first voyage (fig. 39). The



42. John Puihatau Pule, *Forever and ever, ever more*, 2018. Oil, enamel, ink, and polyurethane on canvas, 60 ¼ x 78 ⅞ in. (198.5 x 153 cm). Courtesy the artist and Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland

attention to detail in its depiction of specific plant species, including those bearing staple foods such as pandanus, breadfruit, bananas, coconuts, and taro, has led scholars to suggest that the drawing may have been created to illustrate these resources to members of Cook's crew on HMS *Endeavour*, in particular the famed botanist Joseph Banks (1743–1820).

The same esteem for and preoccupation with the concept of abundance finds contemporary expression in the canvases of John Puihatau Pule, an artist from the island of Niue. Pule's early paintings are tightly organized around a grid, inspired in part by the monochrome barkcloth paintings from Niue known as *hiapo* (fig. 40). These hand-painted textiles are renowned for their loose geometry and were understood to be animate rather than simply

decorative. Filled with a wealth of botanical imagery such as leaves, seeds, and branches, they are typically organized into an overall grid structure yet remain fluid, with patterns that extend and unfurl to fill the enclosed space. The regularity of their designs is often disrupted by subtle reconfigurations of a repeat tucked within the larger pattern, a formal subversion that creates dynamic optical effects.

In his own work, Pule deploys a deeply personal iconography of the Pacific, integrating imagined mythological creatures with motifs that bring to life the disruption and violence of colonization as well as the dislocation enforced by the introduction of Christianity (fig. 41). Scuttling lizards sit alongside the contorted bodies of howling birds; thrashing sharks with gaping maws gnash razor-sharp teeth as their tongues flail wildly. These animals sit amid



43. John Puhia Pule, *Fonua Galo, The First Day*, 2014. Oil, enamel, ink, oil stick, and polyurethane on canvas, 78 ¾ x 78 ¾ in. (200 x 200 cm). Courtesy the artist and Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland

a rich botany of buds and leaves whose sprouting, weaving tendrils trail into the delicately outlined silhouettes of lofty mountains. Sheltering within are crouching or prone figures engaged in the worship of the new god of introduced religion. Small groups of figures struggle up a hill under the weight of an enormous idol or crucifix, shown raised up and towering on the distant horizon under the solitary orb of the shuddering sun.

In a series of recent paintings, Pule discarded the confines of the imposed grid seen in his earlier works to embrace an atmosphere suggestive of ancient Polynesian landscapes (figs. 42, 43). Although now eclipsed for many, this primordial Polynesia is as tangible as ever for Pule, who

confidently resurrects the lost landscape in a bold suite of canvases thick with dripping pigment and color. Verdant and glossy, Pule's later works seem to pulse with the energy of burgeoning life, from the thick undergrowth of the forest to the glassine sanctum of underwater rock pools. These paintings effectively ripple with an almost submarine quality heightened by the artist's use of rich, unctuous materials, including varnish, enamel, resin, and oil stick. Surfaces coalesce into solid globes or membranes that trap an inner vitality. They speak eloquently to the flourishing life brought on by *atea*, by the light: the brief but crucial spark, conceived as consciousness, that evolved into the layered canopies of the sky and drew the cosmos out of the darkness.

NOTES

1. Paul Geraghty, "Pulotu, Polynesian Homeland," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 102, no. 4 (December 1993), p. 365.
2. Ibid., pp. 343–84. Geraghty makes the case that Pulotu is the original (pre-) Polynesian homeland, which he specifically situates on Matuku, in the eastern Lau Islands.
3. J. C. Beaglehole, ed., *The Journals of Captain James Cook on His Voyages of Discovery*, vol. 3, *The Voyage of the Resolution and Discovery 1776–1780*, Hakluyt Society, Extra series, 36 (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1967), pt. 1, p. 117.
4. Discovered by the author with Beatriz Robledo in November 2011 during a research trip to the Museo de América, Madrid. See Phyllis Herda and Billie Lythberg, "Featherwork and Divine Chieftainship in Tonga," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 123, no. 3 (September 2014), pp. 277–300.
5. I have adopted the shortened name "Pau" in keeping with Herda and Lythberg's comment that "Paulaho roughly translates as 'large scrotum or testicles' and is somewhat offensive to modern Tongans who prefer the nomenclature Pau." See *ibid.*, p. 297 n. 2.
6. "Log and Proceedings of John Williamson, 3rd lieutenant *Resolution*, in P.R.O., Adm 55/117," quoted in Beaglehole, ed., *Journals of . . . James Cook*, vol. 3, pt. 1, p. 151 n. 1.
7. Incisions were originally made with a shark tooth hafted onto a wood handle. After contact with Europeans, islanders also used nails, which allowed for a sharper cut and deeper surface penetration.
8. After Cook's death in Hawaii, in 1779, the objects he collected were given to Ashton Lever for his private museum in London, called the Holophusion or the Leverian collection, with the sanction of the Earl of Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, who had commissioned Cook's voyages.
9. Herda and Lythberg, "Featherwork and Divine Chieftainship," p. 294.
10. Fergus Clunie, "Tapua: 'Polished Ivory Shrines' of Tongan Gods," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 122, no. 2 (June 2013), pp. 161–210, esp. pp. 201, 202.
11. The spirit house was donated to the Peabody Essex Museum in 1835 by Joseph Winn Jr., who served as a clerk on a number of whalers.
12. Geraghty, "Pulotu, Polynesian Homeland," p. 351.
13. Jane Roth and Steven Hooper, eds., *The Fiji Journals of Baron Anatole von Hügel, 1875–1877* (Suva: Fiji Museum, 1990), p. 68; quoted in Nicholas Thomas, *Oceanic Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995), p. 142.
14. Teuira Henry, "The Tahitian Version of the Names Ra'iatea and Taputapu-atea," *The Journal of the Polynesian Society* 21, no. [2] 82 (June 1912), pp. 77–78.
15. William Ellis, *Polynesian Researches, during a Residence of Nearly Eight Years in the Society and Sandwich Islands*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (1831; New York: J. & J. Harper, 1833), vol. 3, p. 128.
16. Creation chant recited by Paora'i from Bora Bora, Society Islands, in 1822, in Teuira Henry, "Ancient Tahiti," *Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin*, no. 48 (1928), pp. 336–37.
17. Ibid., p. 338.
18. Ibid., p. 136.
19. Ibid., p. 426.
20. John Williams, *A Narrative of Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands; With Remarks upon the Natural History of the Islands, Origin, Languages, Traditions, and Usages of the Inhabitants* (London: J. Snow, 1838), p. 45.
21. James Montgomery, ed., *Journal of Voyages and Travels by the Rev. Daniel Tyerman and George Bennet, Esq., Deputed from the London Missionary Society, to Visit Their Various Stations in the South Sea Islands, China, India &c. between the Years 1821 and 1829*, 2 vols. (London: Frederick Westley and A. H. Davis, 1831), vol. 1, p. 512.
22. In 2006, Professor Steven Hooper of the Sainsbury Research Unit, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, and I closely examined A'a to discover what appeared to be hardened, raised knots in the wood, which turned out to be remnants of iron nails. See Julie Adams, Steven Hooper, and Maia Nuku, *A'a: A Deity from Polynesia*, Object in Focus (London: British Museum Press, 2016), p. 52.
23. Anne Lavondès, "L'Histoire de A'A de Rurutu et l'évolution des mythes," in *Mémoire de pierre, mémoire d'hommes: Tradition et archéologie en Océanie; Hommage à José Garanger*, edited by Michèle Julien et al., Homme et société, 23 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1996), pp. 313–31.
24. Montgomery, ed., *Journal of Voyages and Travels*, vol. 1, p. 508.
25. Ibid.
26. Alain Babadzan, "Les Dépouilles des dieux: Essai sur la symbolique de certaines effigies polynésiennes," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 1 (Spring 1981), pp. 8–39, unnn. pl.
27. "The Family Idols of Pomare," *Missionary Sketches*, no. 3 (October 1818), p. [1].
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., p. [2].
30. Entry for April 20, 1801, in "Account by John Jefferson, Matavai, Tahiti, 1801." South Seas Journals, London Missionary Society, Council for World Mission Archive, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London; cited in John Davies et al., *The History of the Tahitian Mission, 1799–1830 . . . with Supplementary Papers from the Correspondence of the Missionaries*, edited by C. W. Newbury, Hakluyt Society, Second series, 116 (Cambridge: Hakluyt Society, 1961), p. xliii.
31. Henry, "Ancient Tahiti," pp. 128–29.
32. John Jefferson, Tahiti, to London Missionary Society, May 26, 1799. South Seas Incoming Correspondence, London Missionary Society, Council for World Mission Archive, SOAS; cited in Davies et al., *History of the Tahitian Mission*, p. xliii.
33. James Wilson et al., *A Missionary Voyage to the Southern Pacific Ocean, Performed in the Years 1796, 1797, 1798, in the Ship Duff, Commanded by Captain James Wilson, Compiled from Journals of the Officers and the Missionaries* (London: T. Chapman, 1799), p. 338.
34. E. S. Craighill Handy, "Polynesian Religion," *Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin*, no. 34 (1927), p. 112.
35. John Orsmond, Part of Tahitian Dictionary, 1850, ms. vol. 5, Reverend John Muggridge Orsmond Papers, 1816–1892, A2609 (microfilm reel CY 3946), Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.
36. John Davies, *A Tahitian and English Dictionary, with Introductory Remarks on the Polynesian Language, and a Short Grammar of the Tahitian Dialect . . .* (Tahiti: London Missionary Society's Press, 1851), p. 242.
37. Henry, "Ancient Tahiti," p. 338.
38. Thomas Haws diary entry, June 18, 1816, p. 232; cited in A[rthur] Skevington Wood, ed., *Thomas Haws, 1734–1820* (London: Church Historical Society, 1957), p. 260.
39. Pomare II, Tahiti, to Thomas Haws, London, October 3, 1818. South Seas Incoming Correspondence, box 2, jacket B, folder 7, London Missionary Society, Council for World Mission Archive, SOAS.
40. Ibid.

