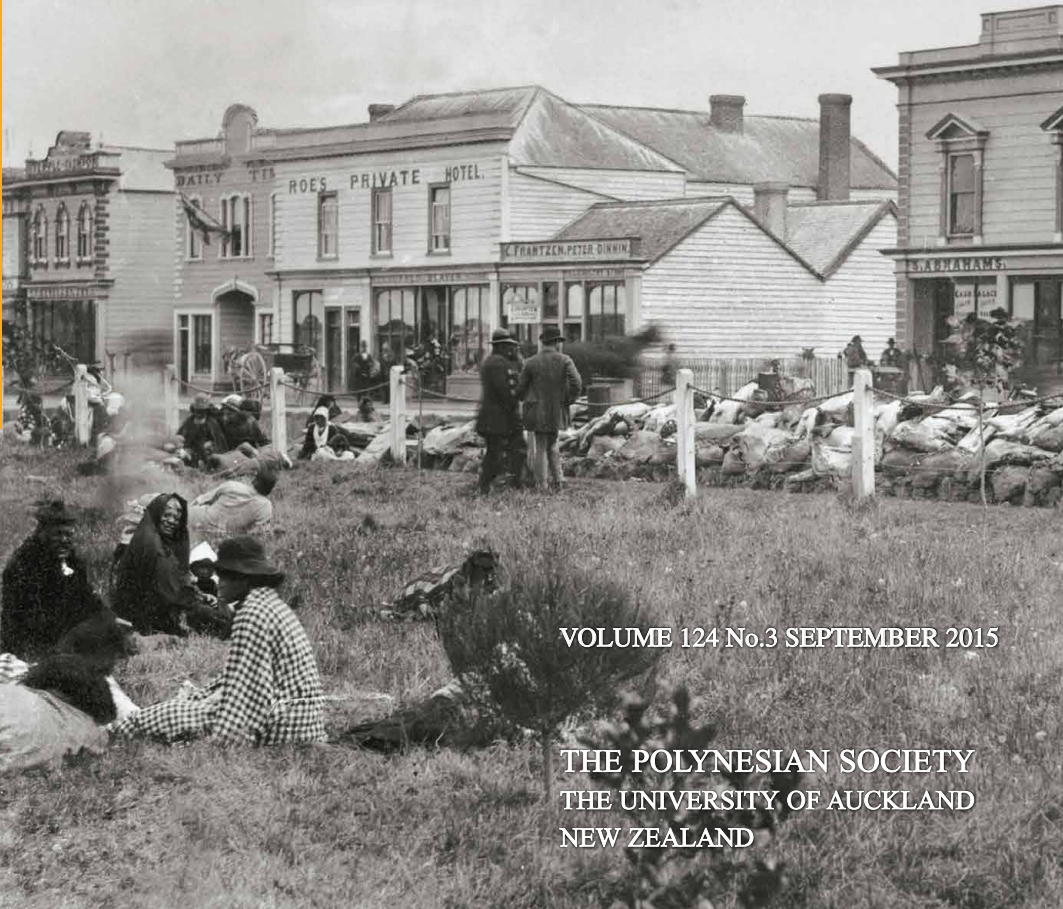


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NOTES ON A MARQUESAN *TIKI*-HEADED *KE 'A TUKI POPOI* (BREADFRUIT POUNDER) IN THE FOUNDING COLLECTION OF THE PITT RIVERS MUSEUM

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The stone food pounder is a widespread and familiar item of Polynesian material culture. Used in the preparation of breadfruit and other foodstuffs, many pounders are both functional objects and expertly crafted works. As such, they are familiar items in museum collections around the world and in publications about Pacific art. Polynesian pounders have yet to be the subject of a comprehensive study; indeed, perhaps the most useful general survey remains the four pages that Peter Buck [Te Rangi Hiroa] devoted to the subject in his *Arts and Crafts of the Cook Islands* (Buck 1944: 417-20; see also Suggs 1961: 102-3). As Buck (1944: 417) explains, historically “stone food pounders were used extensively in Polynesia” though not in Rapa Nui, New Zealand or Samoa, with the form differing from one island group to another. Broadly, according to Buck, a “tall, narrow, pestle form” was used in the Cook Islands (except Mangaia) and Mangareva, a “short, thick, medium form” in Mangaia and the Austral Islands, and a “large, flared” form in Hawai‘i, the Society Islands, and the Marquesas (p. 418).

Here I am concerned with one particular example of a very recognisable type of Marquesan pounder, or *ke 'a tuki popoi*, in the founding collection of the University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum (hereafter PRM; 1884.128.78; Figs 1-4). It is of a typically flared form with a rounded base and, most distinctively, the finial is carved with a pair of back-to-back (Janus-like) “*tiki*” heads. The type is well-known, with a number of examples having been featured in publications on Pacific art in general and of Marquesan art in particular (see below). Surprisingly, however, few examples can be shown to have been collected before the 20th century. In an extended entry in the catalogue of the exhibition *Adorning the World: Art of the Marquesas Islands*, Eric Kjellgren notes (2005: 106) that “few, if any, appear to have been collected before the late nineteenth century”.¹ In another extended entry in the catalogue of the *Gauguin Polynesia* exhibition, Carol S. Ivory (2011a: 387) notes that “few pounders were collected before the end of the 19th century, when they began to appear regularly in museum accessions”.



Figure 1. Marquesan food pounder, *ke'a tuki popoi*; stone; 140 mm high, 105 mm in diameter (maximum), 310 in circumference (maximum), 90 mm in circumference (minimum); 797 gm; acquired by Augustus Henry Lane Fox (later Pitt-Rivers) by 25 January 1870; part of the founding collection of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1884.128.78). Courtesy and copyright, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.



Figure 2. (*adjacent*) Another view of the *ke'a tuki popoi* illustrated in Figure 1. (It is not known who marked the *ke'a tuki popoi* with a white cross, nor when, nor why.)

Figure 3. (*below left*) Detailed view of one of the heads of the *ke'a tuki popoi* illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 4. (*below right*) Detailed view of the other head of the *ke'a tuki popoi* illustrated in Figure 1.

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Both Kjellgren and Ivory draw particular attention to the early date of a *tiki-headed ke'a tuki popoi* in the collections of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Penn Museum). Giving it a date of “about 1874”, Kjellgren (2005: 106, n. 6) notes that it is “among the earliest pounders with known collection dates”. Also giving it a date of “around 1874”, Ivory claims that it is “the first with a documented historical collection date” (Ivory 2011b: 330).² There are in fact *three* Marquesan pounders in the collections of Penn Museum, all of which were collected by Californian naturalist Charles David Voy (1841/1842–1895) during a 1874–75 voyage “from Honolulu through Polynesia to Sydney, New South Wales, Australia”, with visits to “the Marquesas, Society Islands, Rurutu Island of the Austral Group, etc.” (Pilsbry and Vanatta 1905: 291).³ Two of the pounders are “tiki-headed” (18011, 18012), the third being “plain” (18013).⁴

In June 2014, I had occasion to review the documentation of the sole example of a *tiki-headed ke'a tuki popoi* in the collections of the PRM.⁵ This review has convinced me that it was in London by 25 January 1870 at the latest, thus making *it* the example with the oldest attested date. Moreover, even though it has been on public display for long periods of time, it has not been published before now. Given the prospective interest of this under-researched member of what is a small corpus of *tiki-headed ke'a tuki popoi* of secure early date, I provide a brief account of it here. My focus is on the documentable history of one particular Marquesan pounder. Authoritative accounts of what is known about *tiki-headed ke'a tuki popoi* in general, their production, use and significance are provided by Kjellgren (2005) and Ivory (2011a, 2011b: 330), both of whom draw on the earlier work of Ralph Linton (1923), E.S. Craighill Handy (1923), and Karl von den Steinen (1925–1928).

The pounder at the PRM is part of the museum’s founding collection; that is, it is one of more than 26,000 objects given to the University of Oxford in 1884 by General A.H.L.F. Pitt-Rivers (1827–1900; known until 1880 as Lane Fox). As is well known, Pitt-Rivers’s collection had previously been exhibited by South Kensington Museum (later the Victoria and Albert Museum), first at its Bethnal Green branch from 1874 to 1878 and then at South Kensington itself from 1878 to 1884.⁶ As can be seen in Figure 1, the object itself bears a numbered label ‘1217’, which identifies it with an entry in the “Blue Book”, one of three small volumes in which the objects that Pitt-Rivers loaned to the South Kensington Museum in 1874 were listed.⁷ We thus know that it was in Pitt-Rivers’s possession by 1874 at the latest. As is clear from the entry in the “Blue Book” (Fig. 5), there was some confusion at the time about the object’s origins. The entry reads: “1217. Stone pestle handle ornamented with human head. Central America or W[est]. Indies”. Given how little was known about Pacific art at the time, it is hardly surprising that Pitt-Rivers did not

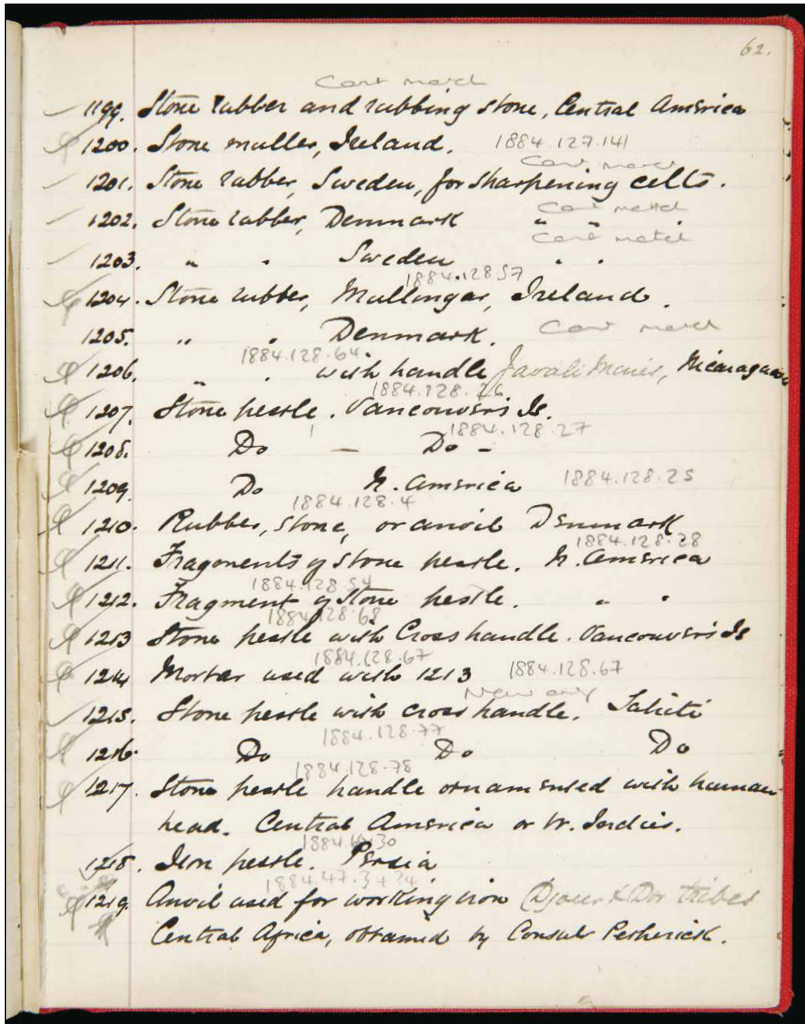


Figure 5. Page 62 in the “Blue Book”, containing the entry “1217. Stone pestle handle ornamented with human head. Central America or W. Indies” (University of Oxford, Pitt Rivers Museum, Catalogues). Courtesy and copyright, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.

recognise it as being of Polynesian, let alone Marquesan, origin. Presumably, it was the superficial resemblance between the representation of the heads on the pounder with those on the stone sculptures of the Arawak-speaking Taino of the Caribbean (for illustrations, see, for example, Bercht *et al.* 1997) that led Pitt-Rivers to suggest a Central American/West Indian provenance.

Though inaccurate, the “Blue Book” entry is in fact extremely helpful for establishing the object’s history, as it enables me to assert with almost complete confidence that the *ke'a tuki popoi* was one of the “two stone mullers, one from Tahiti, and the other from the West Indies” that Pitt-Rivers exhibited at an “ordinary meeting” of the Ethnological Society of London on 25 January 1870.⁸ The Tahitian “muller” can be identified with one or other of two Tahitian “pestles” recorded on the same page of the “Blue Book” (numbers 1215 and 1216). These are both described as having a “cross-handle”, which may be taken to refer to the well-known Tahitian form, described by Buck (1944: 419) as having the “head projected laterally with two side ridges very high” and by Suggs (1961: 102) as having “winged transverse bar handles”.⁹

The “other from the West Indies” must be the *ke'a tuki popoi*. There is no other object in the PRM’s founding collection that is a conceivable candidate and, given that we know that the *ke'a tuki popoi* was thought by Pitt-Rivers in 1874 to be from Central America or the West Indies, I think it is virtually certain that it was as a muller from the West Indies that he exhibited it in London in early 1870.

Unfortunately, I have not yet been able to discover anything about when, where, how or from whom Pitt-Rivers acquired the *ke'a tuki popoi*. My hunch would be that he had acquired it not long before he exhibited it at the Ethnological Society, which raises the interesting possibility that it had been brought back by one of the participants on the Pacific voyage of HMS *Topaze* in 1865–1869, which is well known for its visit to Rapa Nui and, in particular, for bringing Hoa Hakananai'a to London in August 1869 (see, for example, Van Tilburg 2004, 2014). The *Topaze* was in the Marquesas from June to September 1868 and objects were certainly collected there.¹⁰

If the *ke'a tuki popoi* had reached London so recently, however, it would be surprising for its Marquesan provenance to have been forgotten so quickly. It thus seems to me more likely that Pitt-Rivers acquired the pounder from another source, with no information as to its origins or history. There are in fact more than thirty objects from the Marquesas in the PRM’s founding collection, and it may be that further research into the histories of these other objects—and others in other 19th-century collections, including those known to have been collected on the voyage of the *Topaze*—will add to the little we know about the history of this particular *ke'a tuki popoi*. For the moment,

however, its known history begins with its exhibition at the meeting of the Ethnological Society in London on 25 January 1870.

* * *

That I have been able to argue here that the *ke'a tuki popoi* in Oxford was collected at least four years before the *ke'a tuki popoi* in Philadelphia may not seem of any great significance. Given the very limited data available for building and refining a Marquesan art history, however, every additional piece of information may be of importance. This is especially so as the scholarly record for attested examples of *tiki*-headed *ke'a tuki popoi* is sketchy.

Robert C. Suggs (1961), though recognising that *tiki*-headed pounders “are rarely found in excavations but are well represented in ethnographic collections” (p. 100) claims that “the highly polished, aesthetically pleasing, *tiki*-headed poi pounders are one of the artistic tours de force” of what he terms the “Classic Period, 1400 to 1790 A.D.” in the Marquesas (p. 187). From my reading of his report on the archaeology of Nuka Hiva, Suggs excavated three examples (p. 100, Table 10), though none is illustrated.¹¹ Thus, the known art history of Marquesan *tiki*-headed pounders begins with three excavated—but, as yet, apparently unpublished—examples that can be dated to the 18th century at the latest.¹² As the above discussion makes clear, there is then a gap in the historical record until 1870 when the example now in the PRM was exhibited in London.

It is not clear why so few Marquesan pounders were collected before the 20th century. In her master’s thesis on the Marquesan collection at the British Museum, Natasha McKinney (2012: 115) suggests that “domestic objects, such as *ke'a tuki popoi* ... became available as islanders embraced a wider range of food types and became willing to trade older objects in their possession in difficult economic times”. As she reports elsewhere, however, even as late as January 1925 James Hornell was unable to persuade an elderly man on Tahuata to sell him an old pounder (p. 60, n. 50), suggesting that other factors may have been in play. Von den Steinen reported (1928: 45; see also Suggs 1961: 102) that *tiki*-headed pounders were prestige items that generally belonged to chiefs, which might explain their relative rarity. Whatever the case, there are very few examples in museum collections with attested 19th-century dates and it thus appears that few were collected before the 20th century. Thus, any opportunity to provide a precise date, such as that given here, should be taken.

In conclusion, two further, potentially complicating factors must be mentioned. First, there is the fact that carvers on the Marquesan island of Ua Huka are reported to have “mass-produced” pounders for a German trading company (Ivory 2011b: 331, Kjellgren 2005: 106; n. 6; Linton 1923: 366).

Kjellgren suggests that this was in the early 20th century, while Ivory seems to suggest that production may have begun at the end of the 19th century. Thus it may well be that a number of the *tiki*-headed pounders in museum collections were made for trade, though it seems clear that the example discussed here predates this development.

Secondly, I am not sure what to make of the fact that it is not possible to describe the poulder that is the focus of this Shorter Communication in the same terms as those used to describe such pounders elsewhere in the literature. For example, Suggs (1961: 100) reports that “the material is generally of a denser, softer type of stone in contrast to a more porous, but somewhat harder stone” used for other types of Marquesan pounders, and that “this type of poi poulder is usually highly polished”. Similarly, Kjellgren (2005: 104-5) notes that “in former times” at least, they were “fashioned from close-grained volcanic rock” and “commonly received a final polish...to impart a dark lustrous sheen to the surface”. Although it may not be clear from the images published here, the present poulder is carved from a block of what can only be described as a hard, coarse-grained stone with little evidence of a “high” polish.

In this Shorter Communication I have added to the limited corpus of *tiki*-headed Marquesan pounders with attested early dates an example that has what are apparently distinctive physical qualities. That this particular *tiki*-headed *ke'a tuki popoi* was in London by 25 January 1870 is thus of more than passing interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This note draws on research carried out by my colleague Alison Petch and myself during the “Rethinking Pitt-Rivers” project (2009–2013) funded by a grant from The Leverhulme Trust, whose support is gratefully acknowledged again here (for further information and a wealth of digitized resources, go to <http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpri/>). For their help with retrieving, documenting, and photographing the *ke'a tuki popoi* in the Pitt Rivers Museum Collection I am grateful to my colleagues Faye Belsey, Madeleine Ding, Andrew Hughes and Malcolm Osman. For generously sharing information about C. D. Voy and his surviving collections, I am grateful to Adria Katz (Fassitt/Fuller Keeper of Collections, University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology) and Russell Hartman (formerly Senior Collections Manager, Department of Anthropology, California Academy of Sciences). For advice and comments, I am grateful to Carol Ivory and Natasha McKinney. For helpful comments and for drawing my attention to the *ke'a tuki popoi* in Cherbourg illustrated by Von den Steinen (see Note 2), I am grateful to an anonymous referee. For information about the collections in Cherbourg, I am grateful to Eliane Paysant.

NOTES

1. The heads on one of the pounders Kjellgren illustrates (2005: 106, Fig. 73) are stylistically very similar to those on the example that is the subject of this Shorter Communication. This may suggest that it was made around the same time, and/or in the same place, and/or by the same person or persons. Now in the Mark and Carolyn Blackburn Collection, it is said to have formed part of the estate of Paul Gauguin at the time of his death in 1903 (Kaeppler 2010: 393, cat. no. 306) but is otherwise undocumented.
2. As the referee for this Shorter Communication pointed out, one of the *tiki*-headed *ke'a tuki popoi* Von den Steinen illustrates is captioned "CHERBOURG. 16 cm. Tricot 1842" (von den Steinen 1928: 157). This would seem to suggest that it was given to the Musée d'Histoire naturelle (now Muséum Emmanuel Liáis) in Cherbourg, France, in 1842 by someone named Tricot, or to have been collected by someone of that name in 1842. In either case, if so, it would be the oldest attested *ke'a tuki popoi* to have been collected. Confirming the current whereabouts of this *ke'a tuki popoi* and its documentable history, however, has proven difficult. A likely candidate for "Tricot" is Alexandre Tricot, who is listed as a *sous-lieutenant* stationed at Cherbourg from 8 October 1840 in the *premier régiment* of the *infanterie de marine* (see *Annales Maritimes et Coloniales*, 27e année, 3e serie, partie officielle, p. 178), but I am told by Eliane Paysant (Responsable Scientifique, Muséum Emmanuel Liáis) that there is no record of anyone named Tricot having given the Cherbourg museum a *ke'a tuki popoi* or anything else. In her account of the Polynesian collections at Cherbourg, Anne Lavondès (1976: 193) lists two *ke'a tuki popoi* (3109–810A, 3109–810B), but provenances these to a donor named Houel with an acquisition date of 1889. From information and images provided by Paysant, and from the records in the online resource "Joconde: Portail des collection des musées de France" (accessible at <<http://www.culture.gouv.fr/documentation/joconde/fr/pres.htm>>), it appears that the *ke'a tuki popoi* illustrated by Von den Steinen is in fact one of those donated by Houel in 1889 (MEL 2006.0.298; 3109; 810 B), the other (MEL 2006.0.297; 3109; 810 A) being illustrated by Lavondès (Fig. 12). To add to the potential confusion, the English-language abstract of Lavondès' article (p. 202) suggests that "two head decorated pounders" are among "the Marquesan collections brought back by Commandant Jouan" from his "two stays in the Marquesas Islands between 1850 and 1856". This is certainly not what Lavondès says, and not what the available records show, as both the pounders in the collection are recorded as having been donated by Houel in 1889.
3. For the record, in addition to the Voy Collection at Penn Museum there are at least four Pacific objects collected by Voy—including a canoe model (CAS 0270–0001) and a feast bowl (CAS 0270–0004) from the Marquesas—in the collections of the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco, while others may have been destroyed in the 1906 earthquake (for the relevant records, go to <<http://researcharchive.calacademy.org/research/anthropology/collections/index.asp>>). Voy does not appear to have published an account of his Pacific voyage, and

the whereabouts of any surviving records are unknown (though for images of a Marquesan man and a Māori woman drawn “from photographs obtained among the natives by C. D. Voy, Esq., of Oakland”, see Hamilton 1881: 241). For “the elusive C. D. Voy”, see Tee 2010.

4. For the online records, visit the Collections Database page on Penn Museum’s website at <<http://www.penn.museum/collections/index.php>>.
5. For further information and images, see the entry for the pounder in the online version of the PRM’s database at <<http://www.prm.ox.ac.uk/databases.html>>; or go directly to <<http://objects.prm.ox.ac.uk/pages/PRMUID135213.html>>.
6. See, for example, Petch 2001; see also the relevant pages of the website of the “Rethinking Pitt-Rivers” project—that is, go to <<http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/>> and follow the links.
7. University of Oxford, Pitt Rivers Museum, Catalogues etc., “Blue Book”, p. 62. The fact that the pounder is listed here means that Pitt-Rivers sent it to Bethnal Green before the exhibition opened in July 1874.
8. See the proceedings of the ordinary meeting of the Ethnological Society of London; *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, new series, Vol. 2 (1870), p. 121. In the Society’s annual report, this is included in a list of papers “communicated to the Society” as “On some Stone Mullers of similar form from various Localities. By Col. Lane Fox, Hon. Sec.” (see *Journal of the Ethnological Society of London*, n.s., Vol. 2 (1870), p. xi). Oddly, Dan Hicks and Jago Cooper (2013: 401) suggest that the “stone muller” from “the West Indies” may be one of the stone *axes* from the Caribbean in the PRM’s founding collection.
9. Both 1215 and 1216 are described as “Stone pestle with cross-handle, Tahiti”. The latter (1216) survives at the PRM (1884.128.77; <<http://objects.prm.ox.ac.uk/pages/PRMUID135212.html>>). The present whereabouts of the former (1215) are unknown. There is no record of it having arrived in Oxford with the founding collection. Pitt-Rivers may perhaps have used it in an exchange with a fellow collector or museum. Or he could have retained it for his private collection, in which case it *could* be the damaged example sold at Sotheby’s on 26 November 1979 as “The Property of Mrs Stella Pitt Rivers from The Pitt Rivers Museum, Dorset” (Sotheby’s 1979: 24, 28–29, lot 49). This latter pounder is not recorded in the manuscript catalogue of General Pitt-Rivers’s “second” collection (Cambridge University Library, Department of Manuscripts and University Archives, MS Add. 9455; illustrated database available online at <<http://web.prm.ox.ac.uk/rpr/index.php/databases.html>>), so it may have formed part of his “first” collection but not been passed to Oxford (because it was damaged, or for some other reason). As for the “drawing of a similar muller from New York”, I can find no record of any surviving drawing—nor have I have been able to identify a likely candidate for the original object. As for the point Pitt-Rivers was making by exhibiting these three items together—two “mullers” and a drawing of one—it was presumably to do with his belief, expressed in a paper delivered at the previous meeting of the society on 11 January 1870 that “the evidence afforded by the study of weapons and implements will eventually prove to be of the utmost value as a means of tracing back the connexion of races and the

- sources of early culture” (Pitt-Rivers 1870: 109; see Chapman 1982: 332-3). It is nicely ironic that part of the “connexion” in this case—between the Tahitian and Marquesan pounders—turns out to be less remarkable than Pitt-Rivers thought.
10. The British Museum holds a container for tattooing powder (Oc.6348.a-b) and two cylindrical ornaments of human bone (Oc.6366, Oc.6337; a third is recorded as “missing”), donated by the *Topaze*’s surgeon John Linton Palmer on 18 April 1870 (McKinney 2012: 52). It has been suggested elsewhere (Hicks *et al.* 2013: 564-5) that some of the objects from Rapa Nui in the PRM’s founding collection may have come from Palmer, and the same argument could be applied to the Marquesan material. The sole grounds for Hicks *et al.*’s suggestion that “this is particularly likely”, however, appear to be that the Ethnological Society of London, of which Pitt-Rivers had been a member since 1861, published a letter from Palmer about “the Inhabitants and the Antiquities of Easter Island” (see Palmer 1869). Although Palmer *may* have been the source, this “connexion” is insufficient evidence on which to suggest that a supposed provenance is “particularly likely”.
 11. The example Suggs illustrates (1961: 101, Fig. 30b; see also p. 201) is not one of the excavated pounders but an example in the collection of the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York (80.1/ 709), formerly in the collection of dealer and amateur archaeologist Walter C. Wynam (died 1927), which was donated by Mrs William M. Ivins Jr, in 1946. In the relevant entry in the AMNH database (<http://www.amnh.org/our-research/anthropology/>) it is recorded as “early 20th century”.
 12. Citing a personal communication from 2004, Kjellgren (2005: 106) reports that “Robert Suggs...believes the earliest *tiki*-head pounders may date from the mid-eighteenth century”.

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ABSTRACT

Until now a *tiki*-headed *ke'a tuki popoi* (Marquesan breadfruit pounder) in the collections of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology has been thought to be the earliest attested example to have been collected, in 1874. It is shown that a *tiki*-headed *ke'a tuki popoi* in the founding collection of the University of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum was exhibited in London on 25 January 1870, making it the earliest attested example to have been collected. Some of the implications of this finding for the art history of such pounders are discussed.

Keywords: Marquesas Islands, Polynesian food pounders, ethnographic collections, museums.

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