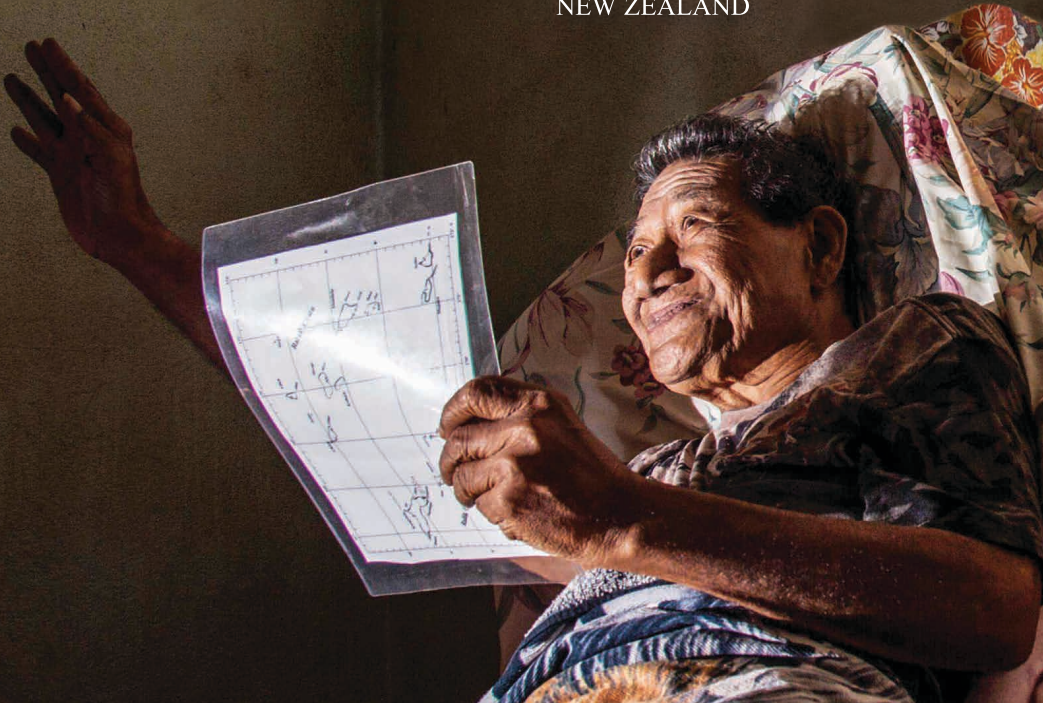


JPS

The Journal
of the
Polynesian Society

VOLUME 126 No.2 JUNE 2017

THE POLYNESIAN SOCIETY
THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND
NEW ZEALAND



REVIEWS

Steven Hooper (Exhibition Lead Curator): *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific*, Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom, 15 October 2016 – 12 February 2017. (See also <http://scva.ac.uk/art-and-artists/exhibitions/fiji-art-and-life-in-the-pacific>)

Steven Hooper (Exhibition Catalogue): *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific*, University of East Anglia, Norwich, and Fiji Museum, Suva, 2016. 288 pp., illustrations. £25.00 (softback).

RICHARD WOLFE

Auckland War Memorial Museum

A text panel at the entrance to the exhibition *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific* asks visitors to look at the objects not as ethnographic specimens, but “as things made with care and respect which were fundamental to the Fijian way of life”. Most of the 253 objects on display may have been originally collected in the name of ethnography, but here they are free of any such associations. Presented in simple and uncluttered surroundings, and mostly in unobtrusive glass cases, each object is shown to advantage against a plain white or black background and supported with informative labels. This is promoted as “the largest and most comprehensive exhibition about Fiji ever assembled”, and the introductory panel also advises that Indigenous Fijians were responsible for “the greatest variety of artworks of any Pacific Island group”.

Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific—the exhibition and the accompanying eponymous publication—are outcomes of the three-year research project “Fijian Art: Political Power, Sacred Value, Social Transformation and Collecting Since the 18th Century”, based at the Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas at the University of East Anglia, and the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. The Principal Investigator of the project was Steven Hooper, Professor of Visual Arts and Director of the Sainsbury Research Unit.

Just over 100 objects in the exhibition are from the collection of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, the largest single lender. Apart from 24 objects from the Fiji Museum, Suva, all others are from either public institutions in the United Kingdom (with 26 from the British Museum) or private collections. *Fiji: Art and Life in the Pacific* is heralded in the main gallery of the Sainsbury Centre by three recent commissions: a spectacular *drua* ‘double-hulled sailing canoe’, a large painted *masibolabola* ‘barkcloth’, and a pair of *lali* ‘gong drums’. The exhibition proper, on a lower floor accessed by a spiral staircase, begins with an overview of Fijian art and its distinctive forms, covering sculpture (wood and ivory), textiles, pottery and basketry. Throughout the exhibition the objects are interspersed with historic photographs, paintings and drawings by Europeans, which present another contemporary perspective on Fiji’s natural environment and artistic traditions.

The oldest objects in the exhibition, dating from c. 900-800 BC, are four small sherds of Lapita pottery from southwest Viti Levu, Fiji. Found throughout the western Pacific, such items provide a means of tracing the early history of Fiji, first settled about three thousand years ago by ocean voyagers from the west. The historical importance of canoes to Fijian life is acknowledged here with the inclusion of several 19th-century models of *drua*, which contrast with a film of outrigger racing on Suva harbour in 2014. The *drua* form also serves as an oil dish, while traditional canoe-building skills are ably demonstrated by a sample of planking, collected by a missionary in the period 1840–53 to show how adjacent panels were formed and tightly bound with coir cords. A similar method is also apparent in the assembly of elements used for making breast ornaments of pearl-shell (*civa*) and whale-bone (*civatabua* and *civavonovono*).

Early sections of the exhibition, the largely chronological sequence of “Voyaging and the Sea”, “Fiji—Viti: A Tropical Environment” and “New Relationships and Arrivals—Europeans”, occupy a corridor-like space, but next in the sequence, “Fiji in the Nineteenth Century”, benefits from a much larger and more open exhibition gallery. In particular this allows several barkcloths—among them a 15-m *masibolabola*—to be shown in their entirety. Eleven examples are on show, illustrating the Fijian mastery of bold geometric patterning using a limited range of natural pigments. The fineness of this natural material is also demonstrated by a copy of the *Polynesian Gazette* of 27 October 1885, which is printed on barkcloth and clearly legible. This collusion of Pacific tradition and Western technology records further instances of foreign influence, such as an advertisement advising that Henry Cave and Co. have been appointed sole agents in Fiji for the Victorian Confectionary Company. The stencilling of barkcloth patterns is specific to Fiji, and the exhibition acknowledges the adoption, post-World War II, of X-ray film for this purpose, it being a more durable material than traditional banana and pandanus leaves. The versatility of barkcloth, and the important part it continues to play in Fijian cultural life, is also recognised with the inclusion of an *isulunisoqo*, a three-piece costume for a wedding or other important occasion, acquired in 2012 at the Suva Flea Market.

The majority of the objects on exhibition here date from the 19th century, while there are some two dozen from the previous century and earlier, and a smaller number from the 20th and present centuries. This selection represents a bringing together of Fijian treasures that have, over time, entered museums and private collections around the world, and is therefore a record of Western presence in the Pacific and the impact of explorers, missionaries, settlers and others. Of the large collection of objects from the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge, half were either gathered by or otherwise associated with Baron Anatole von Hügel, who visited Fiji in 1875–77 and became that museum’s first curator in 1884.

An infinite variation of forms is suggested by these Fijian artworks. The 34 clubs, for example, range from maces to spiked battle-hammers, and have heads reflecting such shapes as paddles, fans, mushrooms and helmets. In contrast to the intricate engraving on a paddle-shaped *kinikini* ‘ceremonial club’ and a colossal *siriti* club is the exploitation of natural growths by the *vunikau* ‘root club’ for its skull-crushing

effect. Less intimidating is the *pakipaki* ‘mace/club’, decorated with inlaid ivory and whale-bone motifs, and whose form is similar to that of the Maori *taiaha*.

The background stories are as varied as the objects themselves. Two have Captain James Cook associations; an engraving tool of shark tooth, wood and coir, and a shallow wooden bowl were collected on the great navigator’s second or third voyage, in 1773–74 or 1777, and are now in the collections of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery, Exeter, and the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, respectively. The second of French explorer Dumont d’Urville’s two visits to Fiji, in 1827 and 1838, is represented here by a triangular wooden *yaqona* ‘bowl’, now in a private collection. And among the objects loaned for the exhibition by the British Museum are a coir, wood and reed *bure kalou* ‘portable temple’ originally commissioned in 1860 for the Museum of Economic Botany at Kew Gardens, London, and a large *kinikini* presented by a missionary to the Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society in 1864. This mobility between institutions is further illustrated by a 1.4-m *matakau* ‘male figure’ which, apart from the commissioned *drua*, is the largest sculptural object in the exhibition. It was collected by an Anglican missionary based at Levuka and in 1877 given to the Canterbury Museum, New Zealand, which presented it to Fiji Museum in 1974.

In addition to being a unique assemblage of Fijian treasures, each with its own story, this collection emphasises both the persistence of traditional art forms and how they have adapted to outside influence. At the same time Fiji is presented as a dynamic society, maintaining its historic cultural interactions and exchanges with peoples from Tonga, Samoa and other neighbouring Pacific islands.

Steven Hooper, the force behind *Fiji: Art & Life in the Pacific*, first “visited” Fiji in 1970 in the home of his grandfather, James Hooper, a collector of Pacific art. Thus inspired, the younger Hooper made the first of his many trips to Fiji in 1977–80. In his prologue to the book, which accompanies and provides a background to the exhibition, Hooper writes that through personal experience he soon realised that a full understanding of Fijian material culture and manufactured objects demanded an appreciation of their social context. A primary aim of this project was to celebrate the richness and diversity of Fijian art, recognising that early European visitors had noted the ingenuity and skill of local artists working with a limited range of materials and tools. Another aim was to explain the roles and significance of these objects in their indigenous contexts, such as the use of those made from whale ivory and shell for maintaining social relationships.

Contact between Fijians and Europeans began in the late 18th century and resulted in the distribution of Fijian objects to museums and collections around the world. Hooper notes that prior to this project many such objects had lain “dormant” and “hidden” in institutions. The artworks selected for this exhibition are those of the indigenous Fijians and their near neighbours in Tonga and Samoa; cultural groups who arrived in the last 150 years are not represented, primarily for reasons of space, while further considerations were the quality and condition of objects, and their provenance.

Hooper refers to the recognition of the concept of embodiment as a means of understanding the power and significance of objects. For example, the *tabua*

'presentation whale tooth', considered the greatest of all Fijian valuables, can be seen as the embodiment of divine chiefly power. In fact, the first eight objects catalogued in the exhibition publication are *tabua*, all dating from early to mid-19th century, and they include the specimen presented to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at Suva, on 17 December 1953.

British colonialism brought a "collecting zeal" to Fiji. Sir Arthur Gordon, Governor from 1875–78, was asked to acquire local artefacts for the British Museum. This exhibition includes an enlarged photograph of the dining room of Government House at Nasova, near Levuka, from this period showing Fijian objects displayed in a style termed "almost Scottish Baronial", a symmetrical arrangement of some 30 clubs against a barkcloth background. Under colonial influence the making of pre-Christian ritual equipment ceased, whereas other activities—such as the building of houses and canoes and the carving of bowls by men and the production of barkcloth, mats, baskets, fans and pottery by women—were able to continue. At the same time, a growing tourist market encouraged the production of portable souvenirs and "ethnic" objects that may have borne little resemblance to traditional artworks.

Despite voracious collecting by outsiders, the Fiji Museum today has what is described as "perhaps the finest Fijian collection in the world". Hooper acknowledges the value of these other accumulations, such as the large number of *liku* 'skirts' collected during the US Exploring Expedition's visit to Fiji in 1840 and which survive in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. Such garments were made of hibiscus fibre and under normal circumstances would have been worn and discarded, leaving no record of their variety or technique.

The first half of the book consist of a series of wide-ranging and accessible essays in which Hooper examines aspects of Fijian art, its cultural context and the history of its collection by others. He notes that the term "art" has no direct translation in Fijian, for the reason that art objects are an intrinsic part of the country's culture. His expressed aim is to show the important place that such artworks and valuables continue to occupy in Fijian life, and the hope is that this exhibition will encourage an interest in the subject among both Fijians and non-Fijians.

The catalogue section of the book details 276 objects, 23 of which are not included in the exhibition itself. These additions represent further variations on themes, and are drawn from institutions in Germany (Leipzig and Dresden), the United States (Washington, DC and Salem, Massachusetts) and the Pacific region (Auckland War Memorial Museum, Whanganui Regional Museum, and National Museum Victoria, Melbourne). All 276 objects are generously illustrated in colour, and supported with full provenance, where known, and other relevant background details. Also included is an informative appendix listing over 80 individuals and institutions associated with the collecting and holding of Fijian material.

A foreword contributed by the Acting Director of Fiji Museum, Adi Meretui Ratanabuabua, stresses the importance of preserving Fiji's heritage, both natural and cultural. To that end, this publication is a permanent record of a remarkable collection of artworks. Brought together in a timely and landmark exhibition, they celebrate the extraordinary achievements of people from one section of the vast Pacific.

Edvard Hviding and Cato Berg (eds): *The Ethnographic Experiment: A.M. Hocart and W.H.R. Rivers in Island Melanesia, 1908*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014. 336 pp., biblio., illustrations, index. £22.00 (cloth).

JOHN E. TERRELL

Field Museum of Natural History

The eight essays by nine authors in this contributed volume are a collective effort to resolve a mystery by bringing “to the forefront of anthropology’s history a poorly known and often ignored, but in our view ground-breaking, instance of early anthropological fieldwork”. What mystery is this? The editors tell us it is “somewhat surprising” that the fieldwork done together by A.M. Hocart and W.H.R. Rivers in 1908 on the Percy Sladen Trust Expedition to the southwest Pacific has been largely ignored by historians of anthropology and biographical writers.

Why is this a mystery worth resolving? Because both men, the editors tell us, are “in distinct and different ways, recognized as prominent and influential scholars in the development of twentieth-century anthropology”. Hence the historical neglect of what they did then would seem to be “all the more remarkable given that the early work in the Solomon Islands by Hocart and Rivers constitutes one of the first, if not *the* first [their emphasis], examples of modern anthropological fieldwork employing methods of participant observation through long-term residence among the people studied.”

There is no disputing taste. Perhaps this is a mystery, but what should be made of it? This is not an easy matter to decide. Readers unfamiliar with what anthropologists generally do to keep themselves employed may not realise that writing insightfully about other people is not an easy job. Doing field anthropology is more than just a routine journalist’s assignment. Truth be told, you need to get to know the people you are trying to write about first-hand and as intimately as you can to do the job well. Similarly, maybe many readers are unaware that *not* having direct knowledge of what other people actually do, say and think has rarely ever stopped anyone from voicing strong opinions about other people on earth—although perhaps the current sorry state of modern social media as a reliable news source may now be giving at least some of us in the here-and-now pause when it comes to assuming internet news is inherently trustworthy.

On the other hand, academic readers of this volume are unlikely to be as naïve as the so-called “general reader”. Hence how historically disturbing it is that Hocart and Rivers have evidently not been properly lauded for what they did in the Solomon Islands in 1908 is not self-evident, even granting that these two gentlemen were among the first would-be anthropologists to visit island Melanesia who were not otherwise employed as Christian missionaries or colonial government worthies.

All readers of this book, of course, are free to decide how much they want to make of the academic mystery around which it turns. Speaking personally, one of the weaknesses of this collection is that insufficient attention has been given to locating Hocart and Rivers in the broader practice of science and scholarship more generally speaking, at the turn of the last century. You learn nothing here, for example, about

how at the same time this investigative duo was in the Solomons, anthropology was also being increasingly “professionalised” in the United States by Franz Boas and his students. Surely these North American contributors to the growth of anthropology as a learned discipline cannot simply be dismissed as being just old-fashioned “survey ethnologists”? Even Boas?

Similarly, not enough attention is given to the perennially thorny issue both then and now as to what exactly it is that constitutes sufficient “anthropological knowledge”, although contributors Christine Dureau and Thorgeir Kolshus touch upon such matters, and what Hocart and Rivers accomplished in the Solomons comes across throughout this volume as being more or less deficient in this challenging arena.

Therefore, it is not easy to decide as a reviewer what to say about this collection of essays. Although more tantalising than fulsomely explicit, Edvard Hviding’s chapter on the inherent inter-island complexity of life back then in the Western Solomons—seen, for example, in “New Georgian world-views of spatial connectivity”—is well worth a read. So, too, is Tim Bayliss-Smith’s analysis of River’s efforts to see population decline in the islands as something more than disease-induced demographic collapse. And Judith Bennett’s chapter on depopulation in the Solomons and Vanuatu is one of her characteristically fine contributions that could easily stand on its own merits as a more readily accessible journal article.

As a museum curator, I found Tim Thomas’s inventory of the objects acquired and photographs taken in 1908 to be welcome and informative. Thomas notes that the collecting practices of Rivers and Hocart have completely escaped scholarly notice largely because of how poorly both men published the results of this particular “expedition” to the South Pacific. “Indeed, if we were to rely on the published texts alone there would only be scattered hints to suggest that such collections were even made.” He has identified nearly 400 objects at the Cambridge Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology in the Rivers Collection there attributable to 1908. There are also over 600 glass-plate negatives and prints suggesting that over 320 photographs were taken by Rivers and Hocart that year. Therefore, although collecting “things” had long been common practice since the earliest days of foreign visitations in the Pacific, Thomas underscores that for these two scholars, collecting was “part of a much broader ethnographic endeavour, designed to show (and produce) facts—it was never an end in itself”. Instead, for both, collecting was an essential part of fieldwork.

The hauntingly beautiful photograph of Mule Hembala taken on Simbo by Hocart in 1908 appearing in Thomas’s text and on the cover of this book speaks eloquently about this particular individual, this place, and this time more than a century ago, that many readers may find themselves longing to return to so they, too, can participate first-hand in life back there and then.

Wassmann, Jürg: *The Gently Bowing Person: An Ideal Among the Yupno of Papua New Guinea*. Heidelberg Studies in Pacific Anthropology 4. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2016. 321 pp., biblio. illustrations, index. US\$44.52 (paperback).

DAVID LIPSET

University of Minnesota

This book is about the Yupno people, a relatively remote, Lutheran community of horticulturalists and coffee growers who live in the hills two days walk from the Rai Coast. Jürg Wassmann has put together revised articles by himself and six other members of his research group. In doing so, Wassmann has compiled 30 years of fieldwork-based observations, interviews and data elicited from an ingenious battery of tests that he and the team improvised to elicit Yupno temporal and spatial orientations.

Although in large measure *The Gently Bowing Person* is meant as a contribution to cross-cultural cognitive anthropology, I would argue that in a way that goes unrecognised in the book—it epitomises Durkheim's well-known concept of mechanical solidarity. It will be recalled, or really it can hardly be forgotten, that for Durkheim, economic production in societies like the Yupno was relatively unspecialised and unmediated by states. As a result, its solidarity was based on, or resulted in, tropes of uniformity, homogeneity and likeness. Durkheim contrasted the division of labour in societies like our own as being highly specialised and mediated by neutral third parties. Work, identity and society were embedded in tropes of difference. In these latter, I would add, "the problem" for sociomoral order is the integration of self and other. Families are small, funerals are a nuisance, science, bureaucrats, the mall and other things. In the former, it is one of boundary maintenance, or the separation of self from other. Demanding kin are everywhere, there are so many ways to die, and then mourning goes on and on. Now, Wassmann's Yupno book beautifully illustrates cognitive dimensions of mechanical solidarity, dimensions that perhaps make "the problem" of boundary maintenance all the more difficult.

The story he tells of the Yupno people begins with their ethnohistory, pre-contact social structure and colonial experience, all offered largely without comment, except to validate the historical accuracy of Yupno narratives about their origins. Wassmann then turns to the book's central project—to evoke the great extent to which Yupno personhood is reckoned, not outside or on the margins of the other, but in the middle of a single spatial framework—one which ultimately refers back to the river that bisects the hilly region. Thus it is that the human body, the house and concepts of time are each attributed uphill/downhill dimensions and a lineal axis. In the male body, that axis runs from nose to genitals, in the house, it runs from the fireplace to the front door and in time, it runs from downriver, where Yupno ancestors came from, to uphill, the river's source. The past, in other words, is said to be downhill, while the future is uphill. By contrast to what is assumed in the West, the past is in front of the person while the future is to the rear. In the ideal moral posture in Yupno society, respectful persons bow and listen attentively to the other.

This is a rich book. Wassmann reports on the pre-contact counting system, which goes to 33, each number being associated with hands, feet and other body parts.

He discusses many other aspects of the person, such as the concept of two spirits, conception theory, the life-cycle and the notion of the vital energy that sustains the person. Substantial attention is also given to the cultural construction of moral status: the person is assessed according to three mystical temperatures, hot, cool and icy. A cool person does not draw attention to himself, or work in front of others. Such a person avoids the expression of raw emotion. A hot person, by contrast, is headstrong, superior and dangerous. But usually, such an individual is sickly because of involvement in an illicit affair or because of an outstanding bride wealth debt. A cold person, meanwhile, is stuck on the margins of society, ashamed, weak and quiet. Each of these three classifications are deployed during debates about illness and wrongdoing, about which Wassermann offers lengthy, extremely intricate, verbatim narratives, often in multiple versions, and again, without analysis.

Meanwhile, the self does manage a brief expression or two of boundaries that distinguish it from the other. Yupno communities are soundscapes, Wassermann allows, in which persons sing distinctive melodies (*kongap*), created in a dream or consciously invented, that are performed by way of announcing their arrival in the gardens of kin or when passing by a kinsman's house. The little songs, which last no more than a couple of seconds, fill the everyday air in the villages, and are constantly audible. After a death, when a young man may marry, or during a first pregnancy, men have the occasion to sing their melodies all night and feel, not the uniqueness of their being, but connected to their ancestors as they do. Songs are recognised by both men and women and well-known people, needless to say, have well-known songs.

The Yupno, and Wassermann's brilliant exposition of them, certainly demonstrate Durkheim's organic solidarity *par excellence*. Such is the weight given to likeness in the concept of the Yupno person and culture, expressions of the boundaries of a self apart from others are fleeting and faulted. The songs, as I say, are ever so momentary and sung only to kin. And mystical heat is essentially a vernacular construction of the id, and it is censured by society while being imagined in its terms. To recall Norman Maclean's wonderful 1976 novella, a river runs through the Yupno social environment, and the moral person, slightly bowed, should look down towards its mouth, towards the past, rather than backwards towards the future.

In addition to its ethnographic riches, Wassermann has made a great effort to discuss relevant literatures. Nevertheless, *The Gently Bowing Person* is not a particularly satisfying or very accessible book. Published as it is in a series that Wassermann himself edits, its organisation feels like a self-published work, or that of a vanity press. Although most chapters end with summary conclusions, beyond the goal of defining Yupno personhood, the book broaches no wider argument. And, as I say, some narratives go on for nearly ten pages without offering a reader anything at all by way of analytic support. The book is far too dense at times to be taught in any effective way to undergraduates. Perhaps excerpts about the creative use of cognitive tests might be helpful in graduate seminars focussed on field methods in cognitive anthropology.

References

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