

TAPUA: “POLISHED IVORY SHRINES” OF TONGAN GODS

FERGUS CLUNIE

Sainsbury Research Unit, University of East Anglia

Thanks to John Thomas and his fellow missionaries it is known “whales’ teeth” or “polished ivory shrines” were associated with Tongan gods. They failed to elaborate on their form or say how they worked, however, while those they sent “home” have largely lost their identities so no doubt mostly lie in unmarked graves in Fijian collections. In Tonga, meanwhile, because they were kept so closely secluded few but their assigned keepers, priests and makers saw them, knowledge of them has been lost. These anonymous, effectively nondescript objects or *tapua* have attracted little scholarly attention. That is no longer so, however, for a smoke-stained whale-bone crescent dedicated to a Tongan god has established that they are indistinguishable from symmetrically crescentic *tabuabuli*, historically the most esteemed form of Fijian *tabua*. This realisation led to the central issue addressed here: that of a close spiritual and historical relationship between Fijian *tabuabuli* and Tongan *tapua*.

Because the evidence is so scattered, and the way in which it accrues so diagnostic of the character of the *tapua*, I will follow its spoor forward from European contact, taking and assessing contributions as they come. Initially,



Figure 1. *Tabua* shaped into crescentic form were termed *tabuabuli* (*buli*: ‘formed’) to distinguish them from Fijian-made *tabua*, which retain the natural form of the whale tooth. Fijian *tabuabuli* are indistinguishable from Tongan *tapua*. Collected in Fiji by Baron von Hügel, 1875-77. MAA Z3026. (© Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge.)

this will entail reviewing indirect 18th century evidence. Next, as *tapua* surface in the early 1800s their funerary role will be linked to that of *tabua* in Fijian chiefly burials. The export of *tapua* from Tonga to Fiji will then be reviewed. Subsequent to the onslaught on the Ha‘apai gods by Tautafa‘ahau (the future King George) in 1829, the *tapua*’s role as a godly embodiment will be explored and related to evidence suggesting certain *pule* cowries formed a female counterpart. Examination of traditional evidence that *tapua* were introduced to Fiji from Tonga, and sometimes made of *pua* wood, will then lead to a comparison of its role to that of wooden ancestor-images in Tonga, and the conclusion that the crescentic form of the *tapua/tabuabuli* was more fundamental than the material it was made from. Ultimately, linkage of its crescentic shape to the quartering moon and a namesake plantain will lead to the conclusion that the *tapua* was ancestral to the Fijian *tabua*, and the prospect that it anciently originated as a token first-fruits offering, and so became the supreme form of material embodiment for gods who, in receiving the first-fruits, underpinned fertility and social prosperity in both Tonga and Fiji.

Having established this article’s trajectory, before getting underway I will briefly review the core spiritual, dynastic and historical parameters *tapua* worked within.

GODS, CHIEFS AND POLITICS

To understand Tongan gods, their *tapua* and their descendant chiefs, it needs to be appreciated how the Tongan pantheon divided into two orders, members of both of which could be similarly invoked provided the proper agents, offerings, and material and human embodiments were in place.¹

The superior order was supposed to be restricted to a finite number of immortal *tupu‘i ‘otua* (*tupu‘i*: ‘dating from the beginning’; ‘*otua*: ‘god’). With delegated exceptions—most notably Hikule‘o at Pulotu—these immortals mostly resided in the Langi or “solid sky” (Martin 1818 v. II: 98). This was not a heaven in a biblical sense, but a layered series of islands, grounded in the Langi ‘Sky’ and ruled by Tangaloa, most ancient of Polynesian gods and the *Tui Lagi* ‘Sky King’ of Fijian traditions. As gods without antecedence each *tupu‘i ‘otua* had the supposedly unique privilege of embodying itself in a *vaka* ‘embodiment’ (Fijian: *waqa*)—a particular bird, fish, reptile, insect, octopus or other animal which was *tapu* to its worshippers. The *vaka* of Hikule‘o, for instance, was the *tukuhali* ‘banded sea-krait’ and that of deified Tu‘i Tonga a *tavake* ‘tropicbird’.

Far from being fixed, the lower order consisted of innumerable ‘*otua fakapulotu* ‘Pulotu-type-gods’: ancestor-gods whose existence depended upon the conviction that on death the *laumalie* ‘immortal essence’ of chiefs and their *matapule* henchmen repaired to the island paradise of Pulotu, believed

to lie off to the northwest beyond Fiji, but probably an ancestral Fijian island (Geraghty 1993). Crucially, Pulutu was ruled by that most formidable of *tupu'i* 'otua, Hikule'ō, under whose jurisdiction the souls of new arrivals were deified, reunited with their predecessors, and went on living much as they had in Tonga, but on a much more rarefied and infallible level.

On the basis of traditions preserving the dynastic succession of the paramount Tu'i Tonga, it is understood this double-tiered pantheon originated with the founding of that semi-divine lineage in the 10th century. This supposedly happened when Tangaloa 'Eitumatupu'a, son of Tangaloa, descended from the Langi to mate with a mortal Tongan woman. 'Aho'eitu, the hybrid 'otua *tangata* 'god-man' spawned by their union became the first Tu'i Tonga, and spiritual and temporal power seemingly remained vested in the unbroken succession of his semi-divine Fatafehi dynasty until the late 15th century.²

As ancestor-gods, 'otua *fakapulotu* were invoked through the medium of a dedicated priest or *taula* 'otua 'god-anchor'. Offerings were presented to the god/goddess—who had taken spiritual possession of its priest/priestess and was seated within him/her—on behalf of its supplicants by a *moihu* 'intercessor' (usually a *matapule* 'spokeman') who advocated their cause to the god in the same way as this god would hopefully intercede on their behalf with the lofty *tupu'i* 'otua, who decided spiritual issues. Because of his direct descent from Tangaloa, however, the Tu'i Tonga had the privilege of invoking not just his own deified forebears but his particular tutelary god and spiritual guardian, Hikule'ō, the *tupu'i* 'otua with the greatest power over life and death, and interceding directly with him.³

The prosperity of chiefly Tonga thus depended on the inviolable semi-divinity of the Tu'i Tonga and his unique relationship with Hikule'ō. The spiritual supremacy of the Tu'i Tonga was, moreover, further enhanced by the residence of his deified Fatafehi forebears in the Langi. That may raise eyebrows, some assuming his soul repaired to Pulutu like those of other chiefs. But because the Tu'i Tonga's head, funeral and tomb were all uniquely termed *langi* (Rabone 1845: 147), his mourning rituals differed from those of other chiefs, and his principal widows were strangled and entombed with him in the *langi*. It seems their souls repaired to the Langi with his. With Hikule'ō controlling the ancestor-gods for him, and his deified forebears directly lobbying the *tupu'i* 'otua on his behalf, the Tu'i Tonga accordingly held the keys to both godly kingdoms, so stood central to the maintenance of amicable relationships between gods and chiefs, which was all that counted, only chiefs and *matapule* having immortal souls (Martin 1818 v. II: 99).

Translating mythology into history, the founding of the Fatafehi dynasty reflects the invasion of Tonga from Samoa by Tangaloa 'Eitumatupu'a in the 10th century. His coupling with a chiefly Tongan woman established their

son ‘Aho‘eitu as Tu‘i Tonga, a hybrid god-man, who was *fahu* ‘privileged sister’s son’ to his mother’s brothers. The Samoan origins of this lineage and all other chiefly lineages in Tonga are confirmed by chiefly language addressed to the Tu‘i Tonga and other high chiefs and continuing ties with Samoa (Mahina 1990). Also there is the reality that Hikule‘o was Si‘uleo, godly ruler of Samoan Pulo-tu, in Tongan guise, he having sprouted legs but kept the tail of the *si‘uleo* ‘moray eel’ (Craig 1989: 243, Krämer 1999: 51). Finally, there is Tafua‘ahau’s plain speaking on the subject in 1843:

The relationship of the Tonga and Samoa people has been of old. From thence sprang our progenitors, the governing families of Tonga, as the family of Tui-Tonga, and Tui Kanokubolu, the latter being the family of Tubou, King of Tonga, and of George, King of Vavau and Haabai, which is the same with the chief, Mumui. They are still as their children, and one with them. (As recorded by Farmer 1855: 285)

Relationships between gods and chiefs were complicated in the 15th-16th centuries by chiefly rivalry and rebellion, overseas adventurism by the Tu‘i Tonga, and the rise of a powerful offshoot lineage that relieved him of temporal authority. The social forces driving this phenomenon—which reverberated throughout Western Polynesia—have been identified by Aswani and Graves (1998) and Gunson (1979); Herda (1995) and Campbell (2001) have reviewed the traditional evidence. Apart from being spiced with a fresh Fijian twist, key factors will thus only be mentioned in passing here.

During the early to mid-15th century the authority of the Tu‘i Tonga was so determinedly challenged that two were assassinated. Rebellion overreached itself however, when Takalaua—successor to the second victim—was also murdered. Leaving the home front guarded by his younger brother Mo‘ungamotu‘a, acting as *hau* ‘ruler’, Takalaua’s successor, Kau‘ulufonuafeikai, countered by driving the instigators from Tonga and harrying them across Fiji and Western Polynesia until finally cornering them on ‘Uvea. After Kau‘ulufonuafeikai returned, however, his brother was installed as the first Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua and established as a permanent pan-Tongan *hau*. The Tu‘i Tonga accordingly was relieved of executive authority. This development seems to have been accomplished more by coup than compact, for the Tu‘i Tonga left to live abroad for several generations (Campbell 2001: 40). During this absence, which essentially spanned the 16th century, it has tended to be assumed the Tu‘i Tonga settled in Samoa. But as Herda (1995) sensed, and as is now being revealed by matching archaeology to Samoan, Tongan and Fijian traditional evidence, successive Tu‘i Tonga—backed by a powerful, sporadically reinforced Tongan-Samoan following—evidently set about forging a fresh power base in Fiji, spawning

hybrid lineages, becoming variously deified and disseminating *tapua*, which changed the face of Fijian society in a process that only ended when Tapu‘osi I returned to Tonga in the early 17th century (Clunie in prep.).

What happened on the Tongan spiritual front during that period is unclear; ancestor-gods of the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalau conceivably were elevated to de facto *tupu‘i ‘otua* status to receive the first-fruits and legitimise his rule. Whether or not that happened then, however, it certainly did so in the wake of Tapu‘osi I’s return, when the lineages of the Tu‘i Tonga and Hau became progressively interlocked by marriage. Ultimately, the dynastic cum godly compromises this entailed were enshrined in a convention whereby the Tu‘i Tonga took a daughter of the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalau as his chief wife, who in turn became formally instituted as *Mohefo* and co-intercessor to the *Fa‘ahitonga* ‘gods of the Tu‘i Tonga lineage’, who now included de facto *tupu‘i ‘otua* drawn from her ancestral line. The spiritual ascendancy of the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalau was, moreover, further assured by installing the first-born daughter of the Tu‘i Tonga and Mohefo as *Tu‘i Tonga Fefine* ‘Female Tu‘i Tonga’ and ensuring she always married a chief of a newly created Falefisi ‘Fiji House’, packed with Tongo-Fijian descendants of the Tu‘i Tonga’s Fijian sojourn (see Bott 1981, 1982).

This convoluted spiritual and temporal reformation accounts for the dynastic complexity that so baffled Cook in the 1770s, by which time the spiritually elevated Tu‘i Ha‘atakalau had themselves been supplanted as *hau* by the offshoot Tu‘i Kanokupolu lineage, and the dynastic situation was so fraught that Tonga was ripe for eruption should anything tilt the godly balance. Which—despite the safety valve provided by Fiji adventuring—is what happened when Hikule‘o and the *tupu‘i ‘otua* came to be challenged by the British God, with all the diseases of the world at his fingertips. Against that turgid backdrop, and with Cook sowing the seeds of godly, social and dynastic disruption, we can begin tracking the *tapua* and its ties to the gods and chiefs it served.

HIDDEN PRESENCE: 18TH CENTURY *TAPUA*

The fleeting visit of the *Eendracht* to the Niua in 1616 produced no mention of *tapua*. Nor did that of Tasman’s *Heemskerk* and *Zeehaan* to Tongatapu and Nomuka in 1643. Indeed, despite numerous calls by British, French and Spanish shipping in the wake of HMS *Dolphin* touching at Tafahi and Niuatopotapu in 1767, and Cook’s visits to Tonga in the 1770s, with the exception of one tenuously provenanced Cook voyage specimen in the Pitt Rivers Museum (Fig. 2), *tapua* were evidently not encountered by 18th-century visitors. Insofar as negative evidence convinces, this is telling, because Cook and his contemporaries paid particular attention to god-houses built atop *fa‘itoka* ‘chiefly burial-mounds’.



Figure 2. This sperm whale tooth *tapua* with twisted hibiscus bast cord was initially attributed to New Zealand and bore a Cook voyage provenance when transferred from the Ashmolean Museum to the Pitt Rivers Museum in 1886. The provenance remains unproven, however. PRM:1886.1.1539. (© Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford.)

Although *tapua* escaped comment, however, their presence is reflected in *fono* ‘pieces’ (Fijian: *vono*)—ivory ornaments that conform to the size of offcuts generated when transforming whale teeth into *tapua*. To appreciate their significance, recall that while they naturally, even suggestively curve, the teeth ranging round the lower jaw of a sperm whale vary in size and form depending upon position, wear, age, size and sex, bulls having much larger teeth. Consequently, while some lend themselves to being transformed into the balanced crescent of a *tapua*, teeth that fan into broad flattened butts, penetrated by deeply slotted basal cavities, can only be made to conform by reducing them in size, producing sizeable offcuts in the process.

Surviving 18th century ivory *fono* include human images, pigeons, headrests, cowries, suspension hooks, turtles, fish and less identifiable subjects, all pierced for suspension, as well as rods used as *hau* ‘earlobe ornaments’ (Fijian: *sau*). Segments of ivory cut into moons, suns, stars, stylised pigeons and even human images were also inlaid into fly-whisk handles, clubs and headrests.⁴ These items materially confirm descriptions by J.R. Forster in 1774 (Forster 1982: 545), Anderson and Samwell in 1777 (Beaglehole 1967: 941, 1039), Morrison (2010: 33) in 1789 and Labillardière (1800: 334, 374) in 1792.

While sparse, their observations are unique for being made when ivory supply was entirely dependent upon sperm whales that had died natural deaths. *Lei* ‘ivory’ was thus in such scarce supply that whale-bone was often substituted, besides being used for larger objects like war clubs (Labillardière 1800: 335) and breastplates. These last may seem remote from *tapua*. Not so, however. The word *tapua/tabua* was first recorded in association with gigantic whale-bone *sifa* breastplates encountered on Tongatapu in 1774 and ‘Eua in 1777 (Beaglehole 1967: 964, Forster 1982: 386, Forster 2000: 249). Their size—two the Forsters collected are expansive enough to shield the chiefly chest from a Fijian arrow while another in the British Museum covers the entire torso—tends to mask that they are overgrown extrapolations of *sifa* (Fijian: *civa*), the polished mother-of-pearl shell breastplates that were so widely worn by Tongan and Fijian chiefs as to be mentioned by virtually every visitor. Indeed, most surviving whale-bone *sifa* fall within the size range of the pearlshell (*Pinctada margaritifera*).⁵ That being true, Anderson’s observation that a massive whale-bone breastplate he saw on ‘Eua was “of the manufacture of Feejee” (Beaglehole 1967: 964) is illuminating because the Fijian for such is *civatabua*, which translates back into Tongan as *sifatapua*—*tabua/tapua* being a qualifier in both cases. It thus seems only the qualifier was noted when “Tabùā” was listed by Forster/Anderson as meaning “Bone breast plate” (see Lanyon-Orgill 1979: 63).

That the Tongan informant did not apply the normal term for the raw material—*hui tofua’a* ‘whale-bone’—but used the honorific *tapua* is instructive; it not only spiritually connects the whale-bone *sifatapua* to the *tapua* proper, but links the *tapua* to the shell *sifa*. This is significant because sun-like pearlshell breastplates closely akin to *sifa* were worn as symbols of divine descent by chiefs across Polynesia, including Archaic period New Zealand, where, in the absence of pearl shell, they were made from serpentine (Prickett 1999). *Sifa* are clearly ancient Polynesian symbols, and stars, serrated suns and full or crescent moons feature prominently among *fono* inlays. Both suggest that the quartering moon-like form of the *tapua*, if not the object itself, traces, like the *sifa* breastplate, back to the Langi, and indeed may well have come down from Samoa with Hikule‘o in the 10th century.

For all their apparent antiquity, however, the 18th century closed without further mention of *tapua*, although the first missionaries evidently came close to some during the funeral of Tu‘i Kanokupolu Mumui in 1797. To recognise them in the following, accept that (as will be substantiated) *tapua* were tended by a female custodian and kept enwrapped within bag-like *mosikaka* baskets akin to those presented just after the body of Mumui and his strangled widows were laid in the tomb, when a:

... file of females, nineteen in number, brought each a bag of their most valuable articles; and twenty-one more had each a fine mat in their hands, all of which they deposited in the tomb, being, as they call it, a present for the dead; and immediately after came a present from Tōogahowe [Tuku‘aho, Mumui’s son] consisting of thirty-five bales of cloth, each bale carried by four men on a frame. (Wilson 1799: 243)

Given Rabone (1845: 147) defined *lafo kie* as “The practice of throwing good mats into the tombs of chiefs when buried”, that Churchward (1959: 277) confirmed it was the “duty of certain relatives” to “present fine mats... when a chief dies”, and that *tapua* were entombed with the Tu‘i Tonga, Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua and Tu‘i Kanokupolu, it is reasonable to suppose some of those “most valuable objects” were *tapua* representative of the tutelary gods of the *ha‘a* ‘chiefly lineages’ the “females” represented.⁶

The mission collapsed in 1799 with the assassination of Tuku‘aho, Mumui’s successor, and the consequent outbreak of dynastic and religious warfare left Tonga without the centralising authority of an overall Hau until after Taufā‘ahau Tupou was installed as Tu‘i Kanokupolu in the mid-1800s. What is often underappreciated is how much had already changed by the time missionaries arrived in 1797. The New South Wales colony had brought Tonga within the range of shipping and ship-borne diseases were rampant. The British God had long since landed and was even being actively supplicated by the Tu‘i Kanokupolu at a god-house dedicated “to the God of Prētane [Britannia]” (Wilson 1799: 102). With the Hau turning to the very God the missionaries had come to introduce, the Tongan cosmos was in turmoil. But it was left to the coming century and William Mariner to notice *tapua* and begin setting them in godly context.

THE EMERGENCE OF TAPUA

Mariner, who survived the cutting off of the *Port au Prince* in 1806, was adopted by Finau ‘Ulukalala who, in league with the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua and Tupou Mohefo, had engineered the assassination of Tuku‘aho and since established himself as *hau* of Ha‘apai and Vava‘u, where the Tu‘i Tonga lived under his “double-edged” protection.

Whalers were now working the “South Sea” and—crucially—the Fiji sandalwood trade was underway. Knowing *tabua* were esteemed in Fiji, the traders brought ivory and, as they generally called at Tonga for pigs, yams and plantains en route, Tongan chiefs tended to get first pick. Most of the imported ivory consisted of raw whale teeth, but India-based traders stocked elephant tusks, and others “sea-horse teeth” (walrus tusks), this last Mariner numbered among Finau’s treasures (Martin 1818 v. I: 237). They also brought steel-edged blades, saws and armourer’s drills which, as the supply of ivory

grew, enabled the development of more complex forms of prestige object, including *sifatapua* breastplates composed of closely fitted *fono* ‘pieces’, *sifafonofono* (Fijian: *civavonovono*) composed of an ivory-inlaid pearlshell core bounded by ivory plates, and even massive composite *tapua*, one of which found its way from Tonga to a god-house in Naitasiri in SE Vitilevu, whence it (Fig. 3) eventually progressed to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Roth 1937, 1984; Toganivalu MS: Ch. 8).⁷

Windfall strandings meanwhile continued, and when Mariner went with Finau to secure the teeth of “a large dead spermaceti whale” the circumstances reminded Finau of an earlier event when a dead whale drifted to an island occupied by an old couple. The teeth had disappeared before Finau arrived, so when charm and duress could only produce four he had the old people clubbed. Finau, however recounted that:

The remainder of these teeth were discovered long afterwards, by the peculiar intervention (as the natives will have it) of the gods. A few years had elapsed, when there being occasion to build and consecrate a house to some god, on the Island of Lefooga [Lifuka], it was taken into consideration what valuable article should be deposited beneath its foundation, according to the custom on such occasions. They were about to get ready a large bale of *gnatoo* [*ngatu*: bark cloth] for this purpose, when the inspired priest of the god declared it



Figure 3. This massive composite *tapua* was made in Tonga but ended its life as a *tabuabuli* in a god-house in Naitasiri, Vitilevu. Collected by Sir John B. Thurston, c. 1885. MAA 1936.380. (© Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge.)

to be the wish of the divinity to have some whale’s teeth; and that there were several buried together on the small island just spoken of, in such a particular spot: which place being referred to and dug up, the teeth were found in a perfect state. (Martin 1818 v. I: 30)

The significance of Finau’s revelation that “whale’s teeth”—surely *tapua* rather than raw teeth—were “deposited” beneath god-houses when they were consecrated becomes apparent when it is realised their interment created an artificial tomb, mimicking the way in which *tapua*, fine mats and barkcloth were entombed with, as Mariner describes, the Tu‘i Tonga:

When he is dead, his body is washed with oil and water, as usual; his widows come to mourn over him, &c.; and, according to the former custom, his chief widow should be strangled, but whether on the day of his death or of his burial, Mr. Mariner does not know. His *fytoa* [*fa’itoka*], or burial-place, is of the same form as that of the other chiefs. The day after his death (which is the day of his burial), every individual at every island, man, woman and child, has his head closely shaved. This is a peculiarity, and so is the custom of depositing some of his most valuable property along with the body in the grave, such as beads, whales’ teeth, fine Hamoa mats, &c.; so that his family burying-place, where all his ancestors lie, must have become very rich; for no native would dare to commit the sacrilege of plundering it. (Martin 1818 v. II: 214)

Mariner, who witnessed the *langi* ‘entombment’ of Tu‘i Tonga Fatafehi Fuanunuiava in 1810, had assisted at the burial of Finau ‘Ulukalala, so knew the body of a high chief—like, as shall be seen, a *tapua*—was anointed with sandalwood-scented oil before being enwrapped in fine *kie* or *ngafingafi* mats and *ngatu* barkcloth and lowered into the tomb (Martin 1818 v. I: 388). He had not, however, attended a Tu‘i Kanokupolu or Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua funeral, so was unaware offerings of “whales’ teeth, fine Hamoa mats, &c.” were likewise entombed with them.

Mariner having raised it, the question of widow strangulation and its association with *tapua* and with *tabua* in Fiji demands attention. As mentioned earlier, widow-strangulation makes sense in the Tu‘i Tonga’s case by enabling their souls to accompany his to the Langi. The same cannot be said, however, for the widows of the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua and Tu‘i Kanokupolu unless their tutelary deities had been artificially elevated to the Langi as de facto *tupu’i’otua* and they themselves accorded de facto god-man status. This, coupled with the fact that the ghastly sacrifice of *foa’ulu*—whereby mourners hacked themselves with clubs, shells or stones, stuck arrows or spears through arms, legs or cheeks, set fire to their oiled hair, and so forth—was still “exercised with the utmost readiness and enthusiasm” at the Hau’s funeral but had never formed part of

Tu‘i Tonga mourning rituals (Martin 1818 v. II: 213), implies the privilege of widow-strangulation had only latterly been accorded them. Whenever it was sanctioned, however, there is no doubt the Hau’s chief widows were being sacrificed by the 18th century, traditional knowledge (Filihia 1999: 15) being confirmed by this account of Tu‘i Kanokupolu Mumui’s funeral in 1797:

... the body of the deceased king was carried past our house.... Behind the corpse was a multitude of people of both sexes. A female chief called Fefene Duatonga [Tu‘i Tonga Fefine], who is very corpulent, was carried on a kind of frame made of two long bamboos, between which she sat on a piece of matting, and was borne by four men. Near her Futtafaihe [Tu‘i Tonga Fatafahi] walked; and next them two women, who were devoted to be strangled at the funeral: one was weeping, but the other appeared little concerned; they both were wives of the deceased. (Wilson 1799: 240)

The strangulation of the chief widows of the Tu‘i Tonga, Tu‘i Kanokupolu, and Tu‘i Ha‘atalaia is significant because it corresponds to *tabua*-related practices at the funerals of Fijian chiefs claiming descent from Nakauvadra, whence the souls of deceased chiefs repaired for admission by Degei—the Fijian Hikule‘o—to godly Bulu. The parallels are remarkable: the chiefly Fijian corpse was enwrapped in barkcloth and mats and interred in a stone-faced, often tiered mound that was not only reminiscent of a Tu‘i Tonga *langi*, but likewise topped by a god-house. A Fijian chief was, moreover, also interred with *tabua*, one sometimes pillowing his head (Thompson 1940: 99), another ready to cast at a ghostly wild pandanus tree (*balawa*, *vadra*, Tongan: *fa*, *Pandanus tectorius*) to ensure his widows were strangled to release their souls to accompany his to Bulu. Whether this latter *tabua* was the one presented by a chiefly bride’s family to her husband’s family on marriage is unknown, but certainly the deceased chief’s family presented a *tabua* to his widow’s senior male relative so that he might execute her strangulation. Certainly too, chiefs allied to the deceased presented *tabua* as spiritually binding tokens of their intention to remain bound to his successor and his god, though these were not usually entombed with him, unlike *tapua* presented at the entombment of the Tu‘i Tonga and Hau.

Just how closely these chiefly Fijian burial practices parallel those of the Tu‘i Tonga is unknown, partly because *tapua* were shrouded in secrecy, partly because only the *matapule* undertaker who placed the offerings in the *langi* knew, he being “the only living person to come out of the tomb alive” (Gifford 1929: 321). It is plain, however, that parallel principles were at work. Apart from suggesting chiefly widow strangulation may have been transferred to Fiji by the Tu‘i Tonga in the 16th century, this suggests that

just as R.B. Lyth described *tabua* as “the Feejeean passport to eternity”, so the *tapua* served as a “Tonguese” passport to the Langi for the Tu‘i Tonga, Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua, Tu‘i Kanokupolu, and their strangled widows (Lyth MS. Journal I, 1836-40, 6 July 1840).

IVORY WORKING AND TRAFFICKING OF *TAPUA* TO FIJI

In the 1770s Cook voyage observers reported active traffic between Fiji and Tonga, which imported godly “red feathers” [*kula*], “earthen pots”, “variegated matts”, “Striped and chequered Cloth... very curiously & prettily painted”, “clubs and spears... carv’d in a very masterly manner”, and “some other things which had all a cast of superiority in the workmanship” (Beaglehole 1967). They apparently overlooked sandalwood, but Labillardière (1800: 379) corrected that. This traffic has archaeological traces from the 10th century, but expanded markedly from the 16th onward (Best 1984, 2002; Marshall *et al.* 2000). To understand the part *tapua* played in it, it needs to be appreciated that, although Anderson understood a *sifatapua* breastplate he saw on ‘Eua was made in Fiji, the production of worked whale-bone and ivory prestige objects and quality weaponry in Tonga and Fiji was the prerogative of specialists belonging to clans of canoe-builders attached to the service of powerful maritime chiefs, and that these craftsmen were of Tongan, Samoan or Tongo-Samoan extraction. In Fiji, they essentially fell into two categories: long-established *mataisau* canoe-builders of mixed “*Toga-Viti*” descent, and plank-building *mataitoga* who had either settled since the mid-18th century or were there temporarily to build canoes for Tongan overlords (Martin 1818 v. II: 88; see also, Calvert 1858: 4; Clunie 1986: 15, 144; 1988: 11-16; 2001; Fison 1907: 19-26; Gifford 1952: 340; Heffernan in Stanmore MS. Fiji Museum; Waterhouse 1866: 391).⁸

The 18th century observers were fixated upon imports from Fiji, but Mariner recorded what went in the opposite direction:

Before the Tonga people acquired iron implements, they usually gave whales’ teeth, *ngatoo* [*ngatu* barkcloth], mats for sails, and *platt* [plaited cordage]; but whales’ teeth are exceedingly scarce, and the other articles are too bulky for ready exportation. The *sting* of the fish called stingray was also occasionally given, but these *stings*, which they use for the points of spears, are by no means plentiful. The fish is found in the greatest quantity at an island called Ooea [‘Uvea], which lies about mid-way between Vavaoo [Vava’u] and Hamoa. Another article of exchange is a peculiar species of shell which they find only at Vavaoo, and is also scarce. (Martin 1818 v. I: 322)

This traffic—borne on Tongan canoes—is fundamental to understanding cultural overlaps between Tonga, Samoa and Fiji. It is therefore fortunate that

Thomas Williams noted how Tongans exchanged “fine mats of the Samoans” for scarlet Fijian *kula* feathers, and confirmed that even in the mid-19th century:

The inhabitants of the Friendly Islands still depend on Fiji for their canoes, spars, sail-mats, pottery, and [barkcloth] mosquito curtains. They also consume large quantities of Fijian sinnet [coir cordage] and food, bringing in exchange whales’ teeth, the same made into necklaces, inlaid clubs, small white cowries, Tonga cloth, axes, muskets together with the loan of their canoes and crews, and, too often, their services in war. (Williams 1858: 94)

Besides mentioning similarly esteemed *pule‘oto*—Mariner’s “peculiar species of shell” and Williams’ “small white cowries”—both notably stressed the movement of *tapua* and other worked ivory from Tonga to Fiji. Nor were they alone in describing a continuing traffic in *tapua*; Taufa‘ahau Tupou forwarded a batch on the *John Wesley* in 1850.

We are all busy to-day in preparing for our voyage to Feejee: the brethren finishing their letters, the Captain filling up his water-casks, and Methuselah taking his yams, mats, and native cloth on board. Joel [Joeli Mafileo] also is shipping his whales’ teeth and other riches, as presents from the King to the Feejee Chiefs. Joel is charged with the important message that all the Tonga people are to come away from Feejee, where they have been misbehaving, or the King will cast them off and let them be governed by the man-eating Chiefs of Feejee. At the King’s request, we take this ambassador and his people with us... Joel being one of our best friends, and a Local Preacher at Habai [Ha‘apai]. (Lawry 1851: 116)

TAPUA EMBODY HIKULE‘O AND OTHER FA‘AHITONGA GODS

The Wesleyan Mission was founded in 1822, yet nothing is heard of *tapua* between Mariner’s departure in 1810 and 1829, when Taufa‘ahau, Tu‘i Ha‘apai, dragged them into the open by launching a crusade against the gods of Ha‘apai. According to Pita Vi (Gifford 1929: 347)—his Wesleyan adviser—Taufa‘ahau began on Foa, murdering the priestess of Hachaetahi, whom he approached wearing a flowery garland instead of the requisite wreath of *ifi* leaves, and clubbed her in the throat, notably with a plantain trunk, while she was spiritually-possessed, quaffing *kava* on behalf of the god within her. He then set about systematically desecrating god-houses and pillaging their sacred relics, Vi relating how:

Taufaahau persevered in his treatment of the sacred things of the gods at Haapai: the clubs, the kava bowls, and the whale’s teeth. The god houses that would burn were burnt, and the things that could be cut were cut, and the things that could be smashed were smashed. (Gifford 1929: 348)

Although upstaged by wooden goddess-images Taufa‘ahau hung at Lifuka in 1830 (Neich 2007), *tapua* thus came to the attention of the Wesleyans, who called them “shrines” but did not elaborate further. John Thomas, however, eventually revealed that the Fa‘ahitonga clan of gods served and accessed by the Tu‘i Tonga and Moheofo were mostly represented by:

... polished ivory shrines—called Fakafaaga [*fakafa‘anga*] which were oiled and carefully wrapped first in fine mats, and then in native cloth, and were laid up aloft in the sacred house, which house was Olotele at Mua [Mu‘a], and in charge of a female called Feao [*fe‘ao*], or companion of the gods, but the oversight of the whole was left to the Tuitonga, and his lady the Moheofo, both viewed as the Tauhi [*tauhi‘guardian*], or servants of the gods. This was their high office. (Thomas in Larsson 1960: 66)

Thomas subsequently confirmed the “polished ivory shrines” were “whales’ teeth”, so left no doubt the great Fa‘ahitonga gods—whom he identified as “Hikule‘o”, “Tuipulotufekai”, “Eikitubu”, “Laufilitonga”, “Tuihififo”, “Fatafehi”, “Sinaitakala”, “Finatauiku” and a goddess called “Nau‘aa” or “Ngaua‘a”, the “intercessor, by whom the gods were addressed” and “Fahu, or privileged intercessor” of Hikule‘o—were mostly represented by *tapua*. Of the gods listed: Hikule‘o, Tu‘i Pulotufekai and Fatafehi are synonymous, ‘Eikitupu was particularly associated with the Tamaha, and Laufilitonga, Sinaitakala and Nau‘aa/Ngaua‘a likewise relate to the Tu‘i Tonga. Finatauiku, however, was tutelary god to the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua (Gifford 1929: 319), and Tu‘i Hihifo presumably to Ngata, the first Tu‘i Kanokupolu.

Once coupled with Rabone’s (1845: 185) definition of “Tabua, s. A term of reverence to a chief when speaking meaning of himself”, the manner in which Fa‘ahitonga *tapua* were oiled and wrapped in fine mats and barkcloth before being sequestered is instructive because it parallels the way in which the bodies of the Tu‘i Tonga, Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua and Tu‘i Kanokupolu were readied for entombment. This indicates that just as Hikule‘o and other great gods were embodied in *tapua*, so the Tu‘i Tonga and other great chiefs were not only addressed but buried as *tapua*. *Tapua*, in other words, lay embedded at the heart of the Tongan religion as an embodiment of Hikule‘o and other great gods, whose high chiefly descendants were accordingly known and entombed as *tapua*, which explains why an artificial tomb packed with *tapua*, *ngatu* and fine mats was sunk beneath the floor of a new god-house dedicated to a powerful god. The *tapua*, then, was an archaic, supremely *tapu* embodiment of Tongan godliness rather than a secondary import from Fiji, where a related usage of *tapua* occurs in the Lau islands, where *kulinitabua* ‘skin of the *tabua*’ not only refers in honorific speech to the body of a chief

(Hocart 1929: 47), but also to the barkcloth barrier that isolates the corpse as it is readied for burial (Gatty 2009: 124).

Thomas' information that *tapua* representing different ancestor-gods were housed collectively in the great Olotele god-house of Hikule'o at Lapaha, rather than each residing in the *lokitapu* 'sanctum' of its own discrete god-house, reflects Hikule'o's unique status as ruler of Pulotu. Similarly fundamental is his revelation that the "Fe'ao or companion" who tended godly *tapua* was "a female" because—coupled with the custodial role of the Mohefo and the "females" who presented "each a bag of their most valuable articles" for entombment with Tu'i Kanokupolu Mumui—it indicates that particular chiefly women were dedicated to the care of *tapua* and suchlike godly embodiments. This concurs with female stewardship of spiritually charged fine mats in Samoa and the exalted status still accorded to heirloom *kie hingoa* 'named fine mats' in Tonga, which "are usually controlled by women who look after them, know their histories and know at what events they should appear" (Kaepler 1999a: 219).

TAPUA EMBODY THE GODS OF THE HAU

Stepping down from the Fa'ahitonga, Thomas turned to the god-houses of the Fa'ahihau, or gods of the Tu'i Kanokupolu and Tu'i Ha'atakalaua:

In some, if not all these houses were shrines of the god, chiefly polished ivory shrines, or whales' teeth called fakafaaga [*fakafa'anga*] (or something tangible) which were carefully kept, wrapped up as the other [Fa'ahitonga] gods hidden from the eyes of all except the companion or keeper of the god and other sacred things: these shrines were the residences [*fale*] of the god and took his name. It may perhaps be noticed here, as one reason for ivory being made choice of to represent the god, that it was to Tongans a most precious and scarce article. They had nothing more valuable, hence they gave it to the god, who was considered entitled to the best of all they had. Besides this many of the gods had what was called the hala [*hala*], or way [path], which was a carved club—most sacred, by which the god was supposed to enter the priest. The gods we have noticed were called the gods of the Houeiki [*hou'eiki*], including the Royal [Tu'i Kanokupolu] family and its branches of nobility upwards to the Tuitonga, they were not sought to by other chiefs. (Thomas in Larsson 1960: 66-67)

In writing thus, Thomas particularly concentrated upon Taliai Tupou, who had a dozen or more god-houses spread through Tongatapu, Ha'apai and Vava'u, so was served by multiple *tapua*. As tutelary god of the Tu'i Kanokupolu, Taliai Tupou's power and prestige are unquestionable. Although standing foremost among Mariner's "original hotooas" and high among Anderson's "residents of the heavens" (Beaglehole 1967: 949, Martin 1818 v.

II: 105-9), however, his ancestry not only establishes him as a classic example of an elevated ancestor-god, but demonstrates just how deeply Tonga was embroiled in Fijian affairs in the 16th century.

In 1840 Horatio Hale (1846: 183) learned that “Tupou” derived from Tubou, Lakeba, in eastern Fiji. Taliai Tupou’s origins are, however, better revealed in a saga of Taliai Tupou—not the god but his aged Tui Nayau namesake—related to Lorimer Fison (1907: 49-57) at Tubou in the 1860s. This conflates traditions concerning the godly origins and history of the Tu’i Tonga and Fijian ones about Degei into the person of Tui Lakeba, a terrible god-man, who—after descending from the ‘Sky’ and campaigning in Fiji, “smiting the gods in every place, and forcing them all to make peace-offerings to him”—settled at Lakeba, which he likewise subdued and ruled until Taliai Tupou, his son by Degei’s “daughter”, was competent to govern as *sau*. Tui Lakeba then returned to Tonga, reduced it to order, and rejoined his father, Tui Lagi, in the ‘Sky’. There is no room here to detail traditions linking Tui Lakeba, the great Lakeban war-god, with “Tuitoga” and Degei in Fiji, so those must await subsequent analysis (Clunie in prep.). But from a Tongan viewpoint it is electrifying that until Tui Lakeba crushed it and established himself at Tubou, Lakeba was dominated by Waciwaci. From there, three generations after Tapu’osi I returned to Tonga, a ‘Fijian’ Tapuosi came to marry Sinaitakala, the first Tu’i Tonga Fefine, and be installed as Tu’i Lakepa, thereby spawning the Fale Fisi.

Quite how Taliai Tupou came to be Tu’i ‘Ahau in Ha‘apai remains obscure. But it can only have happened in the 17th century, Fijian tradition establishing this and it being Mataeleha‘amea, fourth Tu’i Kanokupolu, who adopted him as his tutelary war-god (Gunson 1979: 39). It is thus fortuitous that Thomas linked Taliai Tupou to *tapua*, because while Tu’i ‘Ahau is known to have embodied himself in “a large black volcanic pebble, roughly oval in shape”, his *tapua* are otherwise forgotten (Collocott 1921b: 230, Gifford 1929: 319-20).

Thanks to Thomas, then, it is clear that, although they originally may well have been restricted to embodying Hikule‘o and other *tupu‘i ‘otua*, *tapua* eventually came to embody ancestor-gods of the Hau, and, as will emerge, lesser chiefs.

TAPUA AS FALE AND FAKAFA‘ANGA

Thomas’s revelation that *tapua* were classed as *fakafa‘anga*—“something tangible”—is remarkable for its equivalence to the Fijian classification of *tabua* as *ivakadinadina* ‘tangible proofs’, regardless of whether they, as godly embodiments, provided hard evidence of a chief’s divine ancestry and entitlement to receive first-fruits, or were being transferred from one

chiefly lineage to another as a spiritually binding earnest of good faith. It needs stressing, however, that while Thomas restricted the term to *tapua* and suchlike godly *fale*, *fakafa'anga* also included their wrappings, which were sanctified by contact with them. This is clarified by Gifford, who pointed out that each chiefly lineage had:

... a deity with a presiding priest who had in charge the *fakafaanga* or precious and sacred possessions of its god. Part of the *fakafaanga* were fine mats.... One mat in particular was kept folded and on the occasion of the appearance of the god was spread out for him [i.e., his spiritually-possessed priest or other embodiment] to rest upon. This mat was treated virtually as a shrine. It might not be disposed of under pain of death at the hands of the god. (Gifford 1929: 317-18)

Thomas' observation that *tapua* were "hidden from the eyes of all except the companion or keeper of the god and other sacred things" helps account for how they have flown beneath the scholastic radar, for why there are next to no records of them until 1829, and, ultimately, the secrecy surrounding first-fruit presentations to Hikule'o in particular. His statement that "these shrines were the residences of the god and took its name" is, moreover, proof a god spiritually occupied its *tapua*, which consequently bore its name, as also did its priest/priestess, plus the object serving as its dedicated *hala* 'path' (Fijian: *sala*). Thomas erred, however, in claiming a "god was supposed to enter" its priest by way of its *hala*. It rather first entered its *fale* (in this case a *tapua*), where it rested. It then entered its priest/priestess. Finally, it passed through its *hala*—usually a club or throwing club, but otherwise a spear, *lali* 'slit gong', shell trumpet, or even a musket—which formed the conduit through which it *departed* at the end of the manifestation. How he confused so simple a sequence is puzzling: his fellows understood the god left via its *hala*, and he knew that in chiefly language *hala* meant the death of a Tu'i Tonga or Tamaha and their spiritual departure for the Langi via their *langi* 'tomb'; or, as Rabone (1845: 124) succinctly put it: "Hala, s. Demise, applied to the *Tuitoga* and *Tamaha*"⁹

Thomas' otherwise invaluable contribution is confirmed and amplified by this entry in a *List of Curiosities* R.B. Lyth collected in Ha'apai (1836-39) and Fiji (1839-50):

No 23. Two old whales teeth—one half consumed having been burnt in a heathen temple in Tonga [Tongatapu] or Vavau. They belonged to the Tui Tonga's family—and were with a number of other whales' teeth the gods of the tribe. They were called the Fahi-Toğa [Fa'ahitonga] and were kept in the heathen temple belonging to the Tuitoğa.*

*They belonged to one of the original gods [*tupu* ‘i *otua*] of the Fahi Toga—to Ikuleo [Hikule’o] or Tui Hihifo or some other. Many whales teeth went to make one god, twenty in some, ten in others—they were carefully wrapped up in the Gafigafis [*ngafingafi*: a class of fine mat]—the best and most valued of which were made at Samoa—and were called Tuvua [*tupu* ‘a]. Disposed of in Fiji. (Lyth MS. *Tongan & Fijian Reminiscences*)

The charring may relate to Taufua’ahau’s burning of god-houses at Vava’u in 1831 (Farmer 1855: 210). But Lyth’s subsequent comments—particularly his revelation a “god” was composed of multiple “whale’s teeth” and his use of the word *tupu* ‘a—merit attention.

The need for gods and great chiefs to be represented by multiple, durable, eminently portable manifestation-vessels is obvious when the mobility of Tongan chiefs is recognised. Chiefs had to maintain regular contact with their gods and *tapua*, and suchlike relics were central to their invocation. High chiefs and gods kept multiple residences on different islands, and each god-house required its own relics. Also, because Tongan chiefs and *matapule* voyaged about Western Polynesia, living and campaigning abroad and even settling in places like Fiji, the means of invoking their gods needed to move with them. So, with Taliai Tupou keeping at least a dozen god-houses, Hikule’o and the Tu’i Tonga (who also maintained god-houses in Fiji)¹⁰ doing likewise, and Tu’i Ha’afakafanua (another Tu’i Kanokupolu god known to have embodied himself in *tapua*) maintaining them on Tongatapu, Lifuka, Fo’a and Nomuka (Gifford 1929: 295-97), Lyth was hardly exaggerating. Moreover, as floated when discussing the “bags” of valuables presented at Tu’i Kanokupolu Mumui’s funeral, some *tapua* were reserved for sacrificial purposes, and evidently could—albeit more covertly than in Fiji—even be transferred as a spiritual token to another lineage, either to placate it through godly subjection, or to otherwise obligate it.

TRANSFERABLE TAPUA: FUNGALEI

In the absence of specific instances, the transference to another lineage may seem fanciful. Gifford (1929: 245), however, learned that *Fungalei* (*funga*: the ‘top of something’, *lei*: ‘ivory’) meant “a whale’s tooth taken by one chief to another, when they wished to talk over the terms of peace”. This conforms so closely to the presentation of *tabua* as *isoro* ‘atonement offerings’ when submitting and suing for peace in Fiji that it might superficially be assumed to have originated there. Tongan infiltration of Fijian chiefly lineages stretches back so far that caution is advised; however, it even crops up in the western highlands of Vitilevu where whenever circumstances dictated a Namataku chief transfer a *tabua* to another lineage:

... the *i mandrali* [propitiatory offering of *yaqona*] should be made to his clan *vu* [*vu*: founding ancestor of a lineage] by the giver who explains that the *tabua* is being offered to another group; and a second such ceremonial offering is presented to the *vu* of the giving clan by the one receiving the gift. (Spencer 1941: 13)

This provides a mechanism for an ancestor-god to sanction the transfer of a *tabua* to another lineage through a descendant chief. And while the location may seemingly rule out any connection to *fungalei*, that is hardly so; tradition confirms that the chiefly lineages of the Namataku and neighbouring tribes in Navosa were founded by an influx of Tongo-Samoan “gods” in the early to mid-17th century (Kalou in Brewster MS. 1923). That being accepted, archaeological evidence suggests the formal *kava* or *yaqona* ritual central to the invocation of Tongan and Fijian gods reached Fiji in the 16th century (Best 1984, 2002; Marshall *et al.* 2000), the Namataku *tabua* transfer mechanism may well have been Tongan before it became Fijian.

TAPUA AS TUPU'A

Lyth's Note No. 23 (above) is further instructive in that, rather than follow Thomas's looser *fakafa'anga*, he classified *tapua* as *tupu'a*. This indicates that gods occasionally inhabited them, *tupua* applying to an ancestral god in the Lau islands (Hocart 1929: 188), and *tupua* or *tupu'a* meaning an ancestor-god or god-image and implying eternity throughout Western Polynesia, including Tuvalu. Indeed, the same applies as far west as Tikopia and eastward to Niue and even the Marquesas—where Crook (1998) recorded *tubiua* as meaning “an image” in 1797-98. The ancient Polynesian roots of *tupu'a/tupua* are, moreover, further reflected in implying eternity or referring to supernatural beings throughout the rest of Polynesia.

Given that *tapua* and their wrappings were both *fakafa'anga* but only *tapua* embodied *tupu'a*, this puts Tongan heirloom mats into spiritual perspective. For while “the most important and powerful objects in Tonga are ‘named fine mats’ made ... in ‘the long ago’ by unknown hands” (Kaepler 1999a: 168), this was not always so, God having kept His compliant chiefs but eliminated the godly embodiments they originally contained. Proof is provided by Kaepler (1999a: 214, 228) who, in discussing *Hau 'o Momo* and *Laumata 'o Fainga'a*—legendary mats that once enwrapped shell plates of the godly Sangone turtle—insisted they “were not brought to Tonga [from Samoa] as bedding, but were used as the wrapping of a symbol of power [i.e., embodiments of an empowering god] of the Tu'i Tonga line”. The shell plates, in other words, were *tupu'a* that, when ‘housing’ Sangone's spirit, *were* Sangone. In the same way as Kaepler shows heirloom mats acquire growing prestige by absorbing

the spiritual essence of the succession of chiefs who have worn them, then, so were mats that enwrapped *tapua* and suchlike godly embodiments rendered *tapu* by touching, dressing and shrouding them. This helps explain the *tabua*-like qualities of fine mats in Tonga and Samoa. Although sanctified, named and venerated, however, these did not bear the god’s name, and were no more gods incarnate than heirloom mats are living or dead chiefs.

Before leaving Note 23, Lyth’s footnote that both *tupua* were “Disposed of in Fiji” reveals that—as Hooper substantiates in his companion article on *tabua*—even the Wesleyan mission sent *tapua* from Tonga to Fiji to further its purposes there. How many *tapua* were similarly “disposed of” by Tongans in the wake of Tafua’ahau’s crusades, and what proportion of crescentic *tabuabuli* in Fijian collections actually trace back to Tongan god-houses, can only be guessed at.

TAPUA AND PULE EMBODIMENTS

Turning to Lyth’s notes No. 22 and 30, which substantiate that chiefs and *matapule* who settled in Fiji did not abandon their own gods but continued to worship and invoke them there.

No 22. Orange Cowry—a Samoan goddess named Lehalevao [Samoan: Lesalevao]—connected with which is the carved club with which the priest was wont to strike the ground or post or anything near when the god was about to take her departure, ‘ko hono hala’ [‘her *hala*’]. They belonged to Lemaki, Tuinayau’s [Tui Nayau] Canoe Carpenter at Kambara [Kabara]—he had also another god called Galutoto & his club—the shrine of the god was a beautifully stained whale’s tooth—these are in Mr. Malvern’s possession. The club was broken by striking the post on the supposed departure of the god after being invoked by the priest.

....

No 30. The ‘hala’ of a Samoan or Tongan deity [Lehalevao] that belonged to Lemaki—Tuinayau’s carpenter of Qaliquali, Kambara. Accompanying it [i.e., the club mentioned in No. 22] was an old faded orange cowry. Lemaki embraced Xtianity about the same time [as Tui Nayau]—and at the same time gave up his idols. (Lyth MS. *Tongan & Fijian Reminiscences*)

In assessing Lyth’s notes, it is useful to know Lemaki was the entitled head—and, in the Samoan tradition, priest—of a clan of canoe-builders skilled in the art of hull planking, which, at the Tu’i Tonga’s behest, transferred from Manono in Samoa via Tongatapu to Kabara in southern Lau in the mid 18th century to exploit stands of *fepi/vesi* timber (*Intsia bijuga*) and attach themselves to the service of the Tui Nayau (Hooper 1982: 55-56; see also, Clunie 1986: 15, 144, 1988: 11-16, 2001; Tuimauali’ifano 1990:

34-41). Manono, the Lemaki god-house, ceased functioning when Tui Nayau converted to Wesleyanism in 1849 and Lemaki followed suit, giving Lyth and John Malvern the opportunity to acquire his old god-relics.¹¹

Lyth's information about Galutoto's *tapua* widens the field to Samoa, where they are otherwise known from a pair—thought “to have come from Fiji”—in which Mao and Uli, “war gods of a large village”, embodied themselves (Turner 1884: 35). Given Geraghty's (1993) argument that Pulotu was in Fiji, that Samoan traditions indicate ancient movements between Fiji and there (Barnes and Hunt 2005, Clunie: in prep., Kramer 1999, Turner 1884), and that one even mentions Si'uleo voyaging to Samoa “from Pulotu in Fiji” (Kramer 1999: 31), these may have had deep roots.

Be that as it may, that Galutoto's *fale* was a *tapua* but Lehalevao's a *pulekula* ‘orange cowry’ (Fijian *bulikula*; *Cypraea aurantium*) is interesting because, while several gods are identified with *tapua*, this specifically ties a goddess to a *pule* shell. Insofar as I know, the record is unique, for while exhibit 131 in the *Missions Protestantes Évangéliques* section of the Exposition Universelle was listed as a “*Massue avec cowries orange, supposée être la chasse d'une déesse*”/‘Club with orange cowries, supposed to be the shrine of a goddess’ from Fiji (Verne 1867: 19), those were probably Lehalevao's objects.

In assessing cowry shell embodiments, it is important to recognise that *pule* also meant godly—and so chiefly—presence, power and authority throughout Western Polynesia, and that this was signified by attaching *pulevaka* ‘white egg-cowries’ (Fijian: *bulidina*, *Ovula ovum*) to chiefly bonito-fishing and voyaging canoes (*vaka*), god-houses and other sanctified property. While *pulevaka* proclaimed godly sanction of temporal authority, *pulekula* ‘orange cowry’ and *pule'oto* ‘small white egg-cowries’ (Fijian: *bulileka*, *Ovula costellata*) spiritually outranked them.

In contrast to *tapua*—which, like Fijian *tabua*, were not worn as ornaments—identical *pulekula/bulikula* and *pule'oto/bulileka* pendants, and ivory extrapolations of them, were worn by chiefs of both sexes in Tonga and Fiji. Those were hardly fully-fledged godly embodiments, but were nevertheless reflective of, if not precursory to them. Judging by surviving specimens, the shells were mostly fastened to finely plaited, beaded strings, and worn singly or in pairs as throat pendants. Intriguingly, however, while all were originally perforated and strung as whole shells, it is clear that the tops of some were later deliberately broken, leaving only the cleft aperture of the shell—which in Tonga certainly symbolised a vagina—intact. With the broken edges smoothed, these “vaginas” were either restrung as pendants or strung through the cleft in sequence to form what were distinguished in Fiji as *ituivocovoco/ituivorovoro* ‘necklaces’. Whether or not Tongan *fui'fui pule'oto*

‘necklaces’ (Collocott 1925: 163) correspond to them, or were composed of whole shells, is currently unclear to me. But armlets and frontlets strung with whole *pule’oto/bulileka* shells were certainly worn in both Tonga and Fiji.

Remarkably, although worn by chiefs of both sexes it is clear that *pule/buli* cowries were female symbols. According to Tongan traditional notions:

The *puleoto* is a shell used for the necklaces of chiefs and is a valued ornament of chiefly virgins. To wear this shell is a mark of virginity, for if a girl who is not a virgin wears one suspended from her neck the shell will not lie properly upon her bosom, but will turn over. (Collocott 1928: 139)

In turning over, in other words, the telltale *pule’oto* gave the lie by indecorously exposing her symbolic vagina. Physically, sexual symbolism is even more strongly expressed by ivory counterparts of *pule’oto* and *pulekula* shells. Many surviving specimens faithfully mimic the cowries. But others are formed into variously discrete extrapolations in which the elongated, suggestively lipped mouth of the cowry transform into vulva that often envelop the root cavity of the whale-tooth. Some have a symbolic vagina at both ends, but the most explicit examples unmistakably represent a nipples breast seated upon a vagina.¹²

Female symbolism notwithstanding, *pule* are further intriguing in that while *tapua* have been suppressed and forgotten, *pule’oto* live on in Christian Tonga as symbols of virginity and chiefly legitimacy (see Kaepler 1999a: 197). Clearly, both forms of embodiment were spiritually related. Unfortunately, however, beyond commenting that *pulekula* and *pule’oto* were highly venerated, the missionaries said little else about them. Wheeler (1842: 592), for instance, noted that “two orange cowries” Taufa’ahau gave him in 1836 had once been “the most valuable ornaments worn by the rulers of these islands” but went no further. And Thomas was similarly reticent, complaining that “our people still put too high a value” on “Buleoto”, but only commenting that they used to number among their “most valuable articles” (Wesleyan Mission-house 1839, LXXV). More detail is provided in Nathaniel Turner’s exultant description of the desecration of a god-house on Vava’u in 1831, but although it most usefully confirms that other types of embodiment were kept as closely shrouded and secluded as *tapua*, it fails to adequately identify the shell involved when a rampaging Taufa’ahau:

... went into the house, brought out the god, wrapped in a bundle of native cloth and fine mats; and to the astonishment and dread of some began to disrobe the god, fold after fold was taken off until the great god was seen in the form of a small spotted shell, which fell to the ground, (Turner in Latukefu 1970: 64)

Happily, in confirming their shared origin and equating *pule'oto/bulileka* “necklaces” to *tabua*, the Fijian evidence is more forthcoming. David Hazlewood (1850: 133) noted “a small white cowry is of more value than a whale’s tooth”. Thomas Williams (MS. Sketchbook) rated the ivory *wasekaseka* “the most valuable necklace known in Feejee except perhaps the [ivory] Bulileka, which is of Tonguese manufacture”. William Lockerby advised sandalwood trading captains to obtain “[a]s many as you can get” while passing through Tonga (Dodge 1972: 184, 187). Warren Osborn (MS. 1833-36) commented, “Of their own property, they consider a small white shell called by them Butchan a Boolahs is the most valuable.” And others observed that, prior to the influx of imported ivory in the 1800s, strung *bulileka* were presented in the manner that later came to be exclusively associated with *tabua*, most tellingly by a bride’s lineage to the one she was marrying into.

Although Joseph Waterhouse mistakenly assumed *tabua* only originated after European traders began supplying Fijians with ivory in the early 1800s, he did make clear that previously:

... atonement was made by the small white cowry-shell. Indeed, in ancient times the Fijian currency consisted of this *buli-leka* shell, to which reference is so frequently made in the traditions. These shells were then used as offerings to the gods, just as whales’-teeth have been since. They were also employed for the purposes of war, marriage, and treaties. (Waterhouse 1866: 341)

Once coupled with the female symbolism of the *pule'oto/bulileka*, the reality that such “atonement” often entailed the transfer of a chiefly virgin (Sahlins 1983) has interesting implications which are amplified by Tatawaqa, who, in the following excerpt, refers to *vocovoco/vorovoro*—*bulileka* with their tops broken in, leaving only the slotted symbolic vagina intact.

Another shell which they used as a ‘tabua’ was called the ‘vocovoco’. This was also a sea shell, and was round and flat.... In preparing it, it was strung, as fish teeth, and was then worn as a necklace by a young [chiefly] girl when going to the house of her husband to don the skirt-dress [*liku* of a married woman]; this was a ‘tabua’ or valuable property in Fiji in ancient times. (Tatawaqa 1914: 2)

Once coupled with surviving *ituivocovoco/ituivorovoro* necklaces, Tatawaqa’s “round and flat” description confirms that he was referring to broken-in *bulileka*, rather than to small, inter-tidal *vocovoco* (*Melampus flavus*) snail shells, which were and are strung into commonplace necklaces. With that potential confusion eliminated, he is strongly supported by Baron von Hügel (1990: 436), who, in ogling “pretty girls with white bead *bulileka* necklaces”

in 1876, noticed the cowries had been “cut and the mouth part then strung to a bead necklace”. Their combined evidence implies that whole *pule’oto/bulileka* shells were worn as symbols of virginity prior to marriage, but that following bridal defloration their tops were removed and their symbolic vaginas retained and worn as “tangible proofs” of their wearer’s virtue.

Taken together, the female character of cowry shells and Lehalevao’s embodiment in a *pulekula* would suggest that *pulekula* and *pule’oto*, and ivory extrapolations of both, were used to embody goddesses and *tapua* gods. A single emergent record specifically identifying a *tapua* with a goddess would explode its apparent masculinity, however; and without further instances tying known deities to cowry shells, caution is needed, not least because chiefs of both sexes wore *pule* shell ornaments. Bearing that in mind, given that most *pule* were pierced for suspension more or less amidships, it is notable that not all *tapua/tabuabuli* were bored close to each tip, some being pierced at top-centre. The rarity of such centrally suspended *tapua/tabuabuli* in collections might suggest *tapua* were originally suspended top amidships. If true, this would visually have linked them more closely to *pule*, making their relationship more obvious.



Figure 4. The original suspension holes of this small *tapua/tabuabuli* are located at middle top. Unlike the later attachment holes at the tips they were bored using a traditional drill point. The two-toned cord is of dyed hibiscus bast. Collected in Fiji by Rev. John S. Fordham in the 1850s or early 1860s. BM7057. (© The Trustees of the British Museum.)

HIKULE‘O AND TAPUA

Besides Thomas and Lyth, other missionaries specifically related Hikule‘o and other great gods of the Tu‘i Tonga and Tu‘i Kanokupolu to *tapua*. Charles Tucker wrote of “a god, a whale’s tooth” surrendered by the Tamaha, who “called it her Kui” (Lawry 1852: 443). *Kui* ‘forebear’ fails to define sex; but otherwise this Tamaha *tapua* evidently resolves the character of three mysterious Tongan “idols” exhibited at the Exposition Universelle in 1867. These were catalogued (Verne 1867: 23) as:

210. Idole de Tonga: Tui-hadjakafonna. Adorée autrefois par la famille du *Haw*, chef civil des îles des Amis.
 211. *Faabi Fonga*. Idole adorée autrefois par le chef sacré, appelé Tui-Tonga.
 212. *Erki Tubu*. Idole adorée par le chef sacré, la Taminaha et sa famille.¹³

Because they assumed them to be human images, Larsson (1960) and Neich (2007) failed to resolve their character. Once viewed through *tapua*-tinted spectacles, however, it seems evident they were *tapua*. In *Idole* 210’s case, Tu‘i Ha‘afakafanua was a god of the Hau (Tu‘i Kanokupolu) lineage who embodied himself in *tapua* (Gifford 1929: 297). *Idole* 211 belonged to the Fa‘ahitonga ‘gods of the Tu‘i Tonga lineage’, who mostly embodied themselves in *tapua*. And in embodying ‘Eikitupu, a god of the Tamaha, *Idole* 212 was probably the “Kui” she gave Tucker, which was a *tapua*.

In 1840 the missionaries at Nuku‘alofa—“exceedingly intelligent” Jane Tucker and her husband Charles—showed Charles Wilkes (1845 v. III: 22-23) “some large whale’s teeth that were prettily carved, which had been found in the temple lately destroyed by the Christian party”. These were from Hikule‘o’s god-house at Olotele, Lapaha. Wilkes linked them to “Bulotu” and a “spirit-temple where all their valuable presents to the gods are deposited”.

How many Fa‘ahitonga *tapua* Taufā‘ahau captured in that raid is unknown. Ten years later, however, a *tapua* representing Hikule‘o himself was surrendered by Tungi when he “cast away his sins and his idols together” (Lawry 1851: 31). Lawry—who was soliciting “curiosities” to sell to fund a new Methodist chapel in Auckland—was delighted to receive it in a basket packed with other cast-off “idols” (1851: 32), and further gratified by the presentation of a “*mea ofa* [*me‘a‘ofa*] (or ‘thank-offering’) of shells, clubs, gods, &c”:

Among the articles given to help our missions were several *gods*, which have not been viewed by any mortal eye for several generations. Most of them were whales’ teeth, or parts thereof. One of them has hung up for ages in their god-house, to allow a place for the spirit to perch upon when he happens to visit it. Another was an ivory necklace, wrapped up in native cloth, stuck full of small red feathers. But all were filthy and vile, senseless and useless.

Some of the heathen came to see me, who [as chiefs] once ranked, they said, among the gods; and they wished to see this extraordinary being. I went to my god-basket, and, taking up some of their idols, said, ‘These are the things you *worshipped*; but me your fathers threatened to kill. Our God has at last triumphed over your ignorance and superstition, and here are your gods in my basket. Would you like to see them?’ said I, advancing quickly towards them: but they fled with precipitancy, and then looked back, confounded and ashamed. (Lawry 1851: 34)

In noting most of the “gods” were “whale’s teeth, or parts thereof”, Lawry revealed that while some were *tapua*, one representing Finautauiku, tutelary god of the Tu‘i Ha‘ atakalaua, was “a large necklace made of whale’s teeth”, while others were apparently *fono* ornaments. Most crucially, however, by noting one had “hung up for ages in their god-house, to allow a place for the spirit to perch upon when he happens to visit it”, Lawry clarified the part “a large *whale’s tooth*” played in invoking Hikule‘o, whose identity he confirmed by stating:

It is not unworthy of notice that, on the day that Tungi *lotued*, all the gods that could be found were secured, and are now placed in a Tonga basket, and handed over to me. Of these gods the first in rank and power is Feaki [Fekai], the fountain-head of all the minor gods. This is a large *whale’s tooth*, which has not fallen under the gaze of mortal men from time immemorial. To this idol, or medium of worship, the *inachee* [‘*inasi*’] (‘the offering of their first-fruits’) was presented: and to Feaki was offered, thirteen [8] years ago, the *last child* that was sacrificed in Tonga, at the death of Fatu, Tungi’s father [in 1842]. (Lawry 1851: 35-36)

Because *Fekai* was misspelt “Feaki”, the identity of Hikule‘o is clouded. But the mist soon clears, for “Feaki” was “the fountain-head of all the minor gods”, which can only mean Hikule‘o. Lawry had contracted his title, *Tu‘i Pulotufekai* ‘Savage King of Pulotu’, just as Wilkes did with “Bulotu”. Hikule‘o’s identity is, moreover, clinched by allusion to the “*inachee*” and the son strangled in the forlorn hope of persuading Hikule‘o to revive the dying Fatu.

Lawry’s linkage of this *tapua* to Hikule‘o, Tu‘i Pulotu, is germane, he being the chief god supplicated at the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimotu*’*a*, a great pan-Tongan first-fruits festival presided over by the Tu‘i Tonga and staged before the *langi* of his deified Fatafehi forebears each October, just as the sacred *kahokaho* yams—which had been set in June and commended to godly protection at a smaller but nevertheless elaborate ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimui*’ in July—matured to usher in the harvest season.¹⁴ The implications these ‘*inasi* have for *tapua* will be considered in due course. But because latter day confusion about Hikule‘o’s sex has artificially emasculated him, falsely identified him with goddess-images

(Burley 1996, Kaeppler 1999b: 21-22, 2010: 243), and even had him feminise the Tu‘i Tonga’s *kava* bowl (James 1991: 302-3), they will now be used to help resolve his sex, it being impossible to appreciate *tapua* without him.¹⁴

It is accepted that Hikule‘o dominated the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimotu*‘a, Thomas having subsequently confirmed reports of Cook, Anderson and others who, in attending the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimui* in 1777, learned of a great harvest festival to be staged that October. This festival would combine a round Tongan dozen (10) of Hikule‘o’s signature human sacrifices with lavish offerings of plant and animal foods and property drawn from throughout Tonga (Beaglehole 1967: 154, 917, 1049, 1308; Douaire-Marsaudon 1998: 279; Farmer 1855: 129-30). Crucially, however, the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimui*—which only drew contributions from Tongatapu—was intended to secure godly protection for the coming yam planting season and all other plant and animal foods. The presentations were tokens of sacred *kahokaho* seed yams followed by other token food and property offerings. However, it was not dedicated to Hikule‘o but to Kaloafutonga, a disease-wielding weather goddess associated with the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua (Anderson in Beaglehole 1967: 948-49).¹⁵

How long the practice of offering token first-fruits to Kaloafutonga at the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimui* and substantial ones to Hikule‘o at the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimotu*‘a had been established is unknown. It can only have arisen, however, as part of the dynastic accommodation that arose in the 17th century following Tapu‘osi I’s return from Fiji, and been encouraged by the Mohefo’s role as co-custodian of the Fa‘ahitonga *tapua*. Anderson’s identification of Kaloafutonga as the deity supplicated at the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimui* is critical, for while her name is conspicuous by its absence from other chiefly lineages, a Kaloafutonga was the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua daughter who married Tu‘i Tonga Fatafehi and became mother to the first Tu‘i Tonga Fefine. And another Kaloafutonga was the daughter whose marriage to the Tu‘i Kanokupolu so strengthened his lineage that it came to supplant the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua as Hau (Bott 1982: 99, 137).

On that basis, it appears both ‘*inasi* were originally dedicated to Hikule‘o, but that the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimotu*‘a was subsequently dedicated to Kaloafutonga to spiritually dignify the Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua. However, after Mulikiha‘amea—the ambitious but last Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua—was killed early in the dynastic warfare sparked by the assassination of Tu‘i Kanokupolu Tuku‘aho in 1799, Kaloafutonga is never heard of again. The most telling thing about her abrupt plunge from the Langi into the historical and traditional abyss insofar as *tapua* and Hikule‘o’s masculinity are concerned, however, is not so much its mystery as its completeness. Kaloafutonga was so effectively expunged from the failing Tongan pantheon that recollections of her and the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimui* became so hazy she in due course seems have become confused and combined with Hikule‘o.

That reasonably accounts for how confusion about Hikule‘o’s sex arose in a Christian Tonga, and for why, by 1920, traditional opinion had become so divided Gifford (1929: 291) deemed it “not improbable... Hikuleo was bisexual”, while Collocott (1921: 152)—not, as Neich (2007: 252) imagined, on the basis of accumulative missionary knowledge, but upon his own post-1911 experience—wrote: “Tradition is not quite certain as to whether Hikuleo were a god or goddess... the general suffrage seems in favour of the female sex.”

While understandable from a traditional viewpoint, historically, the confusion is untenable: Hikule‘o—as Neich (2007: 250) noted—was consistently projected as male by observers who knew Tonga in the 18th to mid-19th centuries, and so had the advantage of conversing with people like the Tu‘i Tonga, Tamaha, Taufā‘ahau and others who knew their own ancestral religion inside out. Indeed, they were seconded by Ma‘afu, Taufā‘ahau’s cousin and the greatest Tongan interloper in 19th century Fiji, who likewise entertained no doubts about the god’s masculinity (Fison 1907: 139-61). Kaloafutonga, however, was so lost in time that from the 1970s onward local confusion of her sex with that of Hikule‘o generated such academic enthusiasm that, in reviewing its literature, Neich (2007: 252) only dared conclude: “In Tongan mythology according to recent scholarship, Hikule‘o structurally occupies the place of eldest sister and is consistently female.”

GIFFORD’S EVIDENCE: TAPUA IN HA‘APAI

With that reversal of evidential reality exposed, Hikule‘o’s manhood restored, the Hikule‘o Fefine hopefully destined for historiographical deconstruction, and the diversion caused by “her” creation behind us, our object is now best served by advancing to the extraordinary *tapua*-related information Gifford collected in Ha‘apai in 1920-21, when descendants of priests and *fe‘ao* ‘companions’ persecuted by Taufā‘ahau chose to talk about them.

Starting—like Taufā‘ahau did—at Foa and concentrating on “whale’s tooth” embodiments, Mesake Lomu provided substantial information about Tu‘i Ha‘afakafanua, a Tu‘i Kanokupolu god whose house at Faleloa contained a sanctified “basket in which was a whale’s tooth and turmeric” (Gifford 1929: 297). He also spoke of Fakatoufifita, “god of the chief Niukapu in Fangaleounga, Foa”, whose god-house held “a sacred basket of the god’s” containing “a whale’s tooth and a parcel of turmeric” (Gifford 1929: 307).

Wading across to Lifuka, but reserving the crucial account about Aloalo until later, informants at Pangai and Holopeka provided detailed information about Ngaoha‘a, a god associated with Tu‘i Afitu, who had a god-house at Holopeka and another on Fonoifua in southern Ha‘apai. According to Ana Manu, like other Ha‘apai god-houses Ngaoha‘a’s contained a discrete *lokitapu*

‘sanctum’ in which there was a basket containing “a throwing club and a whale’s tooth, which were wrapped in a piece of tapa (*fetaaki*) [*feta’aki*] smeared with turmeric on the outside” (Gifford 1929: 305). Manu also spoke about ‘Uluenga, whose god-house at Holopeka held *fakafa’anga* made up of “a basket containing... a whale’s tooth, and a *paanga lafo* [*pa’anga lafo*: coconut-shell gaming disc]”, which last were “wrapped in white tapa [*feta’aki*]... smeared with turmeric” (Gifford 1929: 306).

Besides Tu’i Ha’afakafanua—and not counting Aloalo, who occupied his own uniquely elevated niche—Gifford’s informants thus identified three further gods who embodied themselves in *tapua*. Ranged alongside Lemaki’s Samoan Galutoto, these establish that *tapua* came to represent ancestor-gods, so were ultimately not restricted to embodying *tupui’otua*. This is consistent with evidence surrounding the following Ha’apai gods, who, despite apparently being ancestor-gods, had likewise acquired the supposed hallmarks of *tupu’i’otua*, each having its own dedicated god-house independent of a burial mound (*fa’itoka*) and the privilege of manifesting itself within animal *vaka*.

Kafo’ia’atu, whose god-house was on ‘Uiha, south of Lifuka, was associated with an unspecified object of “whale ivory... kept in a fine mat, and black tapa. The fine mat was placed on the black tapa [*ngatu’uli*], and then wrapped in a piece of ordinary tapa, and no one was allowed to go near the place where it was kept” (Gifford 1929: 310). This may well have been a *tapua*. This interpretation, however, seems unlikely in the case of “Foliaki of Pulotu” (*foliaki*: ‘encircler’)—tutelary god of the Malupo lineage and openly hostile to the Fatafehi—whose god-house on Tatafa, just off ‘Uiha, contained “a basket as the shrine (*fakafa’anga*) and container of his sacred objects”, namely unspecified “objects of whale ivory” (Gifford 1929: 310). Consistent with Lawry’s evidence, those were presumably *fono* of unknown forms. Also pertinent is that the *fakafa’anga* of Taufu Mangumoetoto, tutelary god of Tuita Toluafetupu—whose god-house was likewise on ‘Uiha—included a “*pa*” and “club”, which last, like the throwing clubs mentioned earlier, was apparently its ‘path’ (*hala*). Gifford (1929: 310), who was using Baker’s *Tongan and English Vocabulary* (1897), which follows Rabone’s (1845:24) definition of *Ba*: “A Tonga fish hook; a shield”, interpreted *pa* as “shield”. Unless his informant specified otherwise, however, it was in all probability a composite trolling lure with whale-bone shank, mother-of-pearl shell reflector, and turtleshell hook, a highly prestigious object used as a godly embodiment in Fiji, Tonga and Manono in Samoa, where, in the mid-1940s, Leiataua showed Robert Gibbings (1948: 125) the purportedly “divine” original presented by the “Sun” to his son ‘Alo’alo when he married Tuifiti’s daughter.

When Gifford’s Ha‘apai information is aligned with the 19th century evidence, it is noticeable all specific records relate *tapua* to gods, not goddesses. That being so, whilst it is impossible to be sure how general or otherwise Thomas was being when he referred to the Fa‘ahitonga gods (who included goddesses) as being principally embodied in *tapua*, a consistent emergent connection between *tapua* and male gods is now further reinforced by what Gifford was told about Aloalo, the great weather god of Ha‘apai and Vava‘u.

ALOALO AND TAPUA

When Gifford visited the former *hufanga‘anga* ‘sanctuary’ of Aloalo at Pangai, Lifuka, he found the “daughter’s son of the last priest Vavanga” living there and met his equally aged “son’s son”. This was fortuitous, for the latter provided such detailed knowledge of the workings of Aloalo’s god-house as to suggest it had been directly imparted by his grandfather, who had “fled” and so “escaped the fate of the other priests and priestesses who were put to death by Taufaaahu” in 1829. Sadly Gifford did not name the old man, who revealed how *tapua* and related forms of godly embodiment actually worked.

The temple of the god was a Tongan house, one end of which was screened off with cane (*kaho*) [‘reed’: Fijian *gasau*, *Miscanthus floridulus*]. The god was represented by a whale’s tooth (*lei*) which was kept in this compartment covered by a fine mat (*kie*). ‘He stayed alone like a king and no one was with him.’ People who came to consult the god waited outside the house. They brought with them presents of food which they left in the anteroom of the house just within the entrance, but away from the compartment [*lokitaapu*] where the god dwelt....

The ‘boat’ [*vaka*] of the god was the white tern (*tala*) [*Gygis alba*]. When people went shark fishing they followed the god’s bird so they might be led to a good fishing ground. The bird of the god seems to have been a captive white tern with a string tied to its foot....

The god manifested himself by causing the whale’s tooth to move or shake. However, prior to the shaking a yellow butterfly, appearing at the front door of the god’s house, indicated that the deity would shortly appear in the whale’s tooth. The appearance of the yellow butterfly was to inform the priest of the god’s impending visit. The people in general were apprised and would come to pray... particularly those people who had illness. It is said that the butterfly was not the god himself but merely the messenger of the god.

Aloalo not only predicted the weather but he could also govern it, for example, being able to stop excessive rains when prayed to do so by the people. Aloalo’s priest was called Vavanga (literally ‘to know everything’) [‘to have insight’]. He served as intermediary between the supplicants and the god. After the appearance of the yellow butterfly and the movement of the whale’s tooth the god entered the priest, who would be convulsed by trembling.

While in this state he delivered the message of the god to the people. The priest when inspired was seated, not reclining. The district in which the tract of the god was located was called Ahau [^ʻAhau], a name which refers to the ruling chief. (Gifford 1929: 304)

Apart from the detail that Aloalo's *tapua*—like other Ha^ʻapai *fakafa^ʻanga*—was secluded within a discrete *lokitapu* 'sanctum' rather than hung aloft like those of the Fa^ʻahitonga at Lapaha, its treatment accords with theirs. What is unique is the stipulation that upon arrival the god entered into the "whale's tooth" *fale*—which quivered or shook like a possessed priest—and only then "entered the priest", who was likewise "convulsed by trembling".

Turning to Aloalo himself. The location of his god-house at ^ʻAhau, ties him to the Tu^ʻi Kanokupolu lineage, to which Taufa^ʻahau, as Tu^ʻi Ha^ʻapai, belonged. This is remarkable, for Manu^ʻa tradition accords ^ʻAlo^ʻalo a Samoan pedigree analogous to that of the Tu^ʻi Tonga, he being the son of "Lā, the sun god, the Tagaloa", by the mortal woman Magamagaiatua, as well as husband to Sina, daughter of Tuifiti (Fijian: Tui Viti). Tuifiti was not only numbered among "the first [Samoan] kings, Tuimanu^ʻa, Tuifiti, Tuitoga, Tuiatua and Tuiiaana" (Krämer 1999: 53), but was deified in Tonga as Tu^ʻi Fisi, tutelary god of the four *matakali* (Fijian: *mataqali* 'clan') of the Ha^ʻavakatolo branch of the Ha^ʻangatamotu^ʻa of the Tu^ʻi Kanokupolu (Gifford 1929: 39). With that pedigree it is not surprising Aloalo was independently supplicated at the great annual first-fruits festivals of Ha^ʻapai and Vava^ʻu. Or indeed that Anderson recognised in 1777: "The same religious system does not... extend all over the cluster of isles; for the supreme god of Hapae [Ha^ʻapai]... is called Alo Alo, and other isles have two or three of different names... (Beaglehole 1967: 949).

It thus seems that, just as the Tu^ʻi Tonga was anciently imposed upon Tongatapu from Samoa, so Aloalo was imposed on Ha^ʻapai and Vava^ʻu, where Mariner learned much about him:

A^ʻLO A^ʻLO; literally, *to fan*. God of wind and weather, rain, harvest, and vegetation in general. This god is generally invoked about once a month, if the weather is seasonable, that it may remain so; if the weather is unseasonable, or destructive on shore by excessive wind or rain, he is invoked every day. A^ʻlo A^ʻlo is not the god of thunder and lightning... as this phenomenon is never recollected to have done any mischief of consequence. In boisterous weather at sea, the superior god Toobo Toty [Tupoutoutai], the protector of canoes, and other sea-gods, are always invoked in place of A^ʻlo A^ʻlo. About the time when the yams are full grown (near the latter end of December, the ceremony of *tow tow* [*tautau lotufonua*] begins, consisting in an offering of yams, and other provisions, to the god A^ʻlo A^ʻlo. This ceremony is repeated every ten days, for eight times successively, as will be described under the

head of religious rites. This god has only two houses dedicated to him, one at Vavao [Vava’u], and the other at Lefooga [Lifuka]; also two priests, one at each place. (Martin 1818 v. II: 108)

Mariner’s extended account of the rolling *tautau lotufonua* first-fruits festival cannot be pursued here (Martin 1818 v. II: 205-8). His revelation that a young chiefly virgin sat placidly throughout as a “wife” for Aloalo needs noticing, however, for this re-enacts a scenario more familiarly associated with Degei and the founding of Fijian chiefly lineages (Sahlins 1981, 1983): the arrival of godly ‘stranger-kings’ from the Langi, and advent of new chiefly lineages, spawned by their coupling with mortal women.

Having found Aloalo as anciently established in Ha’apai as Hikule’o was on Tongatapu, that like Hikule’o at the *’inasi* he dominated the *tautau* and that both great founding gods were embodied in *tapua*, it is fitting one of his *tapua* should be the first to resurface, it being the small, heavily smoke-stained, whale-bone crescent dedicated to a named god in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Cambridge University (Fig. 5), that gave rise to this paper. Recognition was instantaneous—an old pasted-on label reads:

Alvalo
God of Winds
Friendly Is -



Figure 5. Whale-bone *tapua* embodying Aloalo, weather and crop fertility god of Ha’apai and Vava’u. Collected in Tonga by Daniel Wheeler, 1836. MAA Z5887. (© Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Cambridge.)

Happily, the provenance of this object—which physically resolves the character of Thomas’s “polished ivory shrines”—is firm. 1891 and 95 were added to the old label on acquisition, and a new one inscribed *D^r Brady 1891* was stuck to its other flank. This notation connects object Z.5887 to the MAA catalogue and so to a cache of “South Sea Island relics” Dr George S. Brady forwarded to the Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology in 1891, together with correspondence affirming they were “collected by my late great-uncle Daniel Wheeler during a religious mission... to those islands, in... 1835-6” (Brady MS. 1891: 15 February).

Working outward from those records, Wheeler’s published journals (1840, 1842) trace the movements of the *Henry Freeling*, a post office packet turned “temperance vessel” by the Society of Friends to carry Quaker minister Daniel Wheeler on “a visit in Gospel love to the Islands in the Pacific Ocean”. Most pertinently, the *Henry Freeling* visited Vava’u, Lifuka and Nuku’alofa between 18 August and 10 November 1836, during which time Wheeler befriended the Wesleyan missionaries and their patrons: Taufā’ahau, Tu’i Ha’apai and Tu’i Vava’u, and Josiah Tupou, Tu’i Kanokupolu. Despite those connections, however, insofar as Tongan “relics” are concerned his journal is disappointing, only referring to “trifling oddments of shells”, “a collection of war clubs and other implements of destruction, which we rejoiced to take out of their hands”, and, as already seen, a pair of *pulekula* pendants Taufā’ahau gave him along with some spears, barkcloth and a mat. The likely circumstances of the *tapua*’s acquisition can be deduced, however, from the fact Wheeler provided free passage from Vava’u to Lifuka to missionary families attending the annual Wesleyan meeting there, for this event culminated in a *katoanga* ‘festival’, during which Tongan converts presented offerings in kind to the Wesleyan God and His mission:

In October... [1836], a branch Missionary society was formed at Haabai. The list of subscriptions was very long. It contained 683 names, and in most cases a name stood for a family. Heathen gods, sacred clubs, whales’ teeth, formerly objects of worship, were among the things contributed. The amount realised by the articles sold at auction was £ 23 3s. 2d. (Farmer 1855: 61)

The Aloalo *tapua* thus most likely came from the god-house Vavanga served at ‘Ahau, although it could be from a second one at Holopeka (Gifford 1929: 304), or one Mariner mentioned at Vava’u. Most importantly, however, the fact Wheeler’s old label introduces the *tapua* as Aloalo confirms Thomas’s statement that *fale* bore their god’s name, and proves it to be closely akin, if not identical, to the one Gifford heard about.

Physically, the most telling characteristics of the Aloalo *tapua* are its symmetrically crescentic shape, holes for the attachment of a suspension cord

towards each tip, and reddish-brown, smoke-stained *kili* ‘skin’ (Fijian: *kuli*), for these render it indistinguishable from similarly crescentic *tabuabuli* in Fiji.

Considering *tapua* were kept closely sequestered, the presence of suspension holes might seem superfluous, particularly as there is little or no cordage wear. This might suggest the *tapua* was normally kept unstrung, yet strung for some occasional purpose, which last would have been easily accomplished. Early suspension cords on surviving *tabuabuli* often are very simply attached with loops of fine cordage or even single strands of baked coir. Or—the options are not mutually exclusive—the holes could be relicts of a once vital but subsequently redundant purpose.

TAPUA vs TABUADAMU

Turning to the smoke-stained *kili* ‘skin’ of the Aloalo *tapua*, the rich reddish-brown hue of which not only calls to mind the bloody heart of the *fehi* tree—sacred to Si‘uleo/Hikule‘o and so the Tu‘i Tonga and Tu‘i Fisi—but testifies to it always having been kept in the dark; the colour is fugitive when exposed to light, fading through amber to yellowish brown before finally disappearing. This finish was achieved by hanging the polished, freshly oiled *tapua* in a barkcloth tepee, and *faka‘ahu* ‘smoking’ (Fijian: *kuvui*) it over a pit filled with smouldering embers fed with sugar cane slivers or sugary *si* (*Cordyline fructicosa*) root, generating a caramelising brown smoke that stained it to the same colour as similarly smoked *ta‘ovala faka‘ahu* waist mats, or, in Fiji, *masikuvui* barkcloth (Clunie 1986: 178, Roth 1934: 302-3). *Tapua/tabua* smoked to this godly hue were also highly esteemed in Fiji, where the Tongan roots of *tabuadamu* ‘red *tabua*’ were outlined to beachcomber William Diaper in the 1840s: “The red teeth, which have become red by frequent handling and oiling for a number of years, they always told me were brought to the Feejees by the Tongans, by whom they were first introduced” (Jackson 1853: 439).

The degree to which the crescentic form of the *tapua*, coupled with this finish, was venerated in Fiji is, however, perhaps best expressed by finding that a century later, in Christian Fiji, the most esteemed *tabua* were still smoke-stained *tabuabuli*: “amber *tabua* pointed at both ends” (Geddes 1945: 165).

TAPUA vs TABUABULI

The superior qualities of old, crescentic, smoke-stained *tabuabuli* still stand out in collections today. Fortunately, traditional confirmation of their antiquity and relationship to *tapua* is provided by a paper read to the Fijian Society in 1913 on behalf of Pita Emosi Tatawaqa. What he had to say is diagnostic, because although he was born in 1860, so grew up Christian, in Tatawaqa’s youth the collective memory of his elders reached beyond introduced ivory to a time when some *tabua* were made of wood.

Our people, who lived right away up in the middle of the land (the hill country) [of Vitilevu] such as Navosa, and the tribes near to them, used to cut down a certain tree to be their precious property: the name of that tree was the 'bua,' they pared it down well so as to be narrow-pointed at both ends, and curved somewhat like a banana branch (or leaf stalk); after that, it was thoroughly rubbed till the surface was well polished, and then it was anointed with candlenuts to become reddish colored, and then they attached a string to it, as is done to whales' teeth, and it was then taken care of as their valuable property. It is very truly this, the name of which was the 'bua-ta' or 'ta-bua,' from which originated the name 'tabua.' The 'bua-ta' or 'ta-bua' was used by those living in the hill country for everything for which the 'tabua' (whale's tooth) is used; as the 'tabua' of war, the 'tabua' of feasts, or the 'tabua' for obtaining a girl in marriage, etc. (Tatawaqa 1914: 1)

Tatawaqa's *bua-ta = ta-bua* equation was trashed by philologists. But although their particular *bête noire*, G.A.F.W. Beauclerc, may have garbled an analogy to a *vudi* (Tongan: *fusi*) plantain or cooking banana into "banana branch" when translating him, Tatawaqa unmistakably described artificially reddened *tabua* which, apart from being of *bua* wood, followed the crescentic form, colour and finish of the Aloalo *tapua*. Tatawaqa was adamant, moreover, that crescentically formed whale ivory *tabuabuli* had been introduced by Tongans:

... long ago, before white men arrived in Fiji; and on their coming as visitors to Fiji they used to bring whale's teeth 'tabua,' and the 'tabua' they brought were made thus:—They cut the 'tabua' crosswise into two parts and they pared it down to be pointed at both ends and three or four inches in length, and they shaped them exactly like a whole whale's tooth 'tabua' in appearance, and they were named 'tabua-buli:' (i.e., formed or made 'tabua'); they bartered them in Fiji as the price of their canoes, or the price of their cloth, etc.

They used to bring them with head-rests inlaid with 'tabua,' which were called 'Kali-tabua' or 'kali-vonovono' (the 'whale's-tooth-inlaid head-rest,' or, the 'inlaid head-rest') and certain clubs inlaid with 'tabua' which were called on Kadavu 'Vono-tabua' (the 'whale's tooth inlaid') and inlaid pearl shells, which were worn suspended from the neck in war or at feasts. These things are said to have been imported from Tonga, and this [there] is one account, in which it was said that the first whale's tooth 'tabua,' which were in use in Fiji in olden times, were imported from Tonga. (Tatawaqa 1914: 2-3)

Tatawaqa thus understood that whale ivory *tabuabuli* had been introduced from Tonga, before the 18th century, but not so anciently as to have been forgotten. His "one account" was probably a version of the sole origin myth concerning *tabua* (Heffernan MS. in Stanmore Papers, MAA Z4155). This has been exhaustively analysed by Sahlins (1983: 72-78) and Thomas (1991:



Figure 6. This wooden *tabuabuli* substantiates Tatawaqa’s traditional Fijian evidence concerning *bu*a wood *tabua*. Collected at Nalawa, Ra, northeastern Vitilevu, by G.T. Barker, 1920. Fiji Museum: 86.72. (© Fiji Museum, Suva.)

69-71). I will therefore only recapitulate that it claims *tabua* were introduced by a shipwrecked foreigner called Tabua, who washed up on the southwest coast of Vitilevu and was revived by daughters of the aboriginal “first man and woman”, whom he in due course married; and note that this may link to a tradition whereby:

At Nadroga, the present king is the lineal descendant of a copper-coloured boy, who was cast ashore on that coast. The exhausted child was fed with ripe bananas, and gradually recovered his strength. So soon as he was fully restored to health he was installed as king, in opposition to a candidate of well-known rank. A certain family at Nadroga still possesses the privilege of demanding ripe bananas from the king, on certain occasions, in commemoration of the fruit given by their ancestors to his, at the period of his first appearance. (Waterhouse 1866: 335)

In terms of relating *tapua* to *tabua*, Tatawaqa’s revelation that crescentic *bu*a-wood *tabua* occurred in Navosa in western Vitilevu is pivotal because—as mentioned earlier—genealogical histories recorded in the 1890s establish that chiefly lineages thereabouts were founded by “Tongan” chiefs in the early to mid-17th century (Kalou in Brewster MS. 1923). Given what we now know, these interlopers surely would have brought *tapua* with them, and this seems the more likely as *tabua* are mentioned in other highland genealogies documenting infiltration by parties dispersing from Navatu, near the coastal foot of the Kauvadra range, at about that time (Brewster MS. 1923, MS. 1921-25).

Tatawaqa's linkage of *bua* wood *tabuabuli* to Navosa raises the question of whether they were made there for want of whale-bone and ivory, or brought in by interloping Tongan chiefs. The lone surviving specimen in the Fiji Museum shares the balanced form and fine craftsmanship of *tapua/tabuabuli* made by Tongan canoe-builders. Consistent with Tatawaqa, moreover, it looks to be made from *bua*: a strain crack in its belly reveals pale *bua*-like wood, and its polished surface boasting *bua*'s characteristic twisted but nevertheless workable grain.¹⁶ That being so, wooden *tabuabuli* probably did originate as *tapua*, *bua* being *pua* (*Fagraea berteriana*), a wood widely used for godly objects in Polynesia, not least Tonga, where the range of materials used for *tapua* was also used to produce *tama*—human images embodying ancestor-gods.

TAMA: HUMAN IMAGES

The likelihood that *tama* images were mostly made from *pua* is advanced by Mariner, who, having defined *tama* as: "A boy; a young man", added "Tama-booa. A doll. (from *tama*, a boy, and *booa*, the name of the wood of which it is made)" (Martin 1818 v. II). Rabone (1845: 192), however, added that *tamapua* also meant "idol"; and Baker (1897: 184) noted *tama* was also: "An expression of familiarity in speaking of a chief." Indeed, high chiefs in Tonga and Samoa were called *tama*, just as they were *gone* 'child' in Fiji, where the *tama* was a cry of adulation uttered when approaching a god or high chief or the house of either, or on sighting the *waqa/vaka* in which a god embodied itself (Hazlewood 1850: 135, Waterhouse 1866: 337, Williams 1858: 37-38).

Calling gods and their descendant chiefs *tama* is rooted deeply in the Polynesian past for, even as far eastward as the Tuamotus, *tama* was "[a]n honorific term of address... apparently only used of gods, kings, and priests" (Stimson 1964: 495). It is notable, however, that while ancestor-images were *tamapua* at Futuna (Grézel 1878: 255) and 'Uvea—where Bataillon (1932: 355) classified them as: "*Espèces d'idoles. Figures auxquelles on rendait les honneurs divins*"—elsewhere in Western Polynesia godly embodiments were *tupua* or *tupu 'a*, the term Lyth applied to *tapua*. Tellingly, in Samoa—where human images barely featured—such few as did latterly occur were included with earlier more abstract forms of embodiment as *tupua*. It thus seems *tamapua* images in Tonga may have separate roots to *tapua*, *pule*, *pa*, and suchlike embodiments.

Unfortunately, the woods of surviving goddess-images from Tonga have yet to be botanically identified, though clearly *pua* was not the only wood involved. By tradition it is established that whereas those carved from *pua* were termed *tamapua*, those carved from *tou* (*Cordia aspera*) were *tamatou* (Gifford 1929: 53; McKern 1929: 55, 133), and so forth. This in turn suggests whale-bone and whale ivory human images were probably *tamatapua*.¹⁷

Although he found Hikule’o to be historically male, in his landmark review of *tamapua* images, Neich (2007) was strongly influenced by “recent scholarship” projecting Hikule’o as a goddess. The speculative character of that particular view should by now be readily recognisable, however, and the historical information he so valuably marshalled more clearly seen as confirming that they embodied deified ancestors. Records of rough handling of individual *tamapua* by chiefs accompanying early visitors to *fa’itoka* suggest those particular ones represented minor deities. There is little doubt, however, that the wooden “goddesses” Taufua’ahau hung at Lifuka in 1830 were connected to powerful lineages, his own included. As such they were presumably of comparable standing to the goddess embodied in the Sakaunu image that Neich (2007: 219-21) discussed. A second named “goddess” he missed, but Samuel Harper did not. At Mumui’s *fa’itoka* at Pangai, Tongatapu, in 1797, the missionary saw:

... two [god-] houses; in one there was a quantity of spears and warlike implements, sacred to the Odooa, or spirit [of Mumui?]; in the other an image of a goddess, called *Fyēgā*; to whom they pray for a favourable season for making cloth. (Wilson 1799: 235)

Harper’s sighting of “*Fyēgā*” is doubly instructive as the “goddess” was not only being actively supplicated, but cannot have been hidden or he would hardly have encountered her.¹⁸ In striking contrast to the covert treatment of *tapua*, this is consistent with other records of *tamapua* with one exception. In fascinating parallel with the sacrificial entombment of *tapua* with the Tu’i Tonga and Tu’i Kanokupolu discussed earlier, de Sainson unearthed *tamapua* from the floor of the god-house of the Tofoa *langi* at Lapaha in 1827, which, he understood, were interred “at the same time as the corpse” (Neich 2007: 230). Apart from that sacrificial category, however, it is evident *tamapua* mostly stood, lay or sat quite openly within god-houses built over chiefly graves, rather than being enshrouded and secluded. This suggests that for all that they eventually also came to be associated with ancestor-gods, while *tapua*—together with *pule*, *pa* and other abstract embodiments—may originally have been restricted to embodying immortal *tupu’i’otua*.

Unfortunately, apart from early mention of some being worn as pendants, nothing seems to have been recorded about whale-bone and ivory human images in Tonga. There is little doubt, however, that, as in Fiji, some were dedicated to embodying deities, for although no known survivor retains its original Tongan identity, the otherwise unseemly back-to-back stance and conjoined buttocks of twinned female images collected in Fiji suggests they originally represented Topukulu and Naufanua, siamese-twinned daughters

born at 'Eua to Tokilangafanua and his sister Hina Tuafuanga following their descent from the Langi. If indeed the twins were goddesses of the first order, this would mean that ivory images could embody powerful images, and as such rank alongside *tapua*.

STONE TAPUA/TABUA?

So far I have dealt with whale-bone, ivory, *pua* wood, but not stone *tapua/tabua*. These have yet to be found in collections, but Fijian traditions insist upon them, and, given that wooden *tabuabuli* existed, they demand consideration. The most convincingly documented is a “black hollow stone” *tabua*—“a cubit long [roughly forearm length] and more precious than a real tooth”—that was used in the late 18th century to secure the assassination of Niumataiwalu, Sau of Lakeba (Gerrish MS. 1910; Hocart 1929: 208). This re-surfaced at Vanuabalavu in 1880, when it was presented to Governor des Voeux, who took it to England, where it vanished (Brewster 1937: 43-49). Geddes (1945: 47) also mentions “an object made of stone and shaped like a *tabua*” at Komave in Nadroga. Rather than being presumed figments of Fijian imagination, stone *tapua/tabua* may thus well prove to be related to polished god-stones like that of Tu'i 'Ahau/Taliai Tupou, not least because the *tabua* the ghosts of Fijian chiefs cast at the ghostly pandanus tree en route to Bulu to ensure their widows would be strangled were *vatumibalawa* ‘stones of the wild pandanus’. Indeed, given that god-stones reputedly gave birth to others in Tonga, Fiji and Samoa, the advent of stone *tapua/tabua* might conceivably be reflected in the following highland Vitilevu practice, whereby polished mother-stones (*tinanitabua*) tended godly *tabua* in their otherwise lonely seclusion:

They keep them in a special basket, and place a symmetrically shaped pebble in it. The latter is called *Tinai ni Tambua* or the mother of the whale’s teeth. They are lonely if left to themselves, and will cry, especially at night, so they are provided with a mother to hush and comfort them. These stones by continual oiling and polishing also become very pretty. (Brewster 1922: 23-24)

TAPUA, PLANTAINS, AND CROP FERTILITY

Regardless of whether or not stone *tabua* exist, the range of materials *tapua/tabuabuli* were made from—wood, whale-bone and ivory—establishes that while ivory was preferred and the germ of the *tapua* lies more in its symmetrically crescentic form than material substance. *Tapua/tabuabuli*, in other words, were not the “whales’ teeth” of entrenched European presumption but *tapua/tabua*, which means they were... what?

Owing to their covert character, scholastic curiosity about *tapua* has been muted in Tonga. In Fiji, on the other hand, *tabua* were instantly recognised as *the* supreme godly cum chiefly “valuable”, even though Fijians themselves could not “explain why they so greatly venerate these ancient tokens, and say that they only follow the custom of their sires” (Brewster 1937: 40). Understanding of *tabua* was denied, however, by the ivory smokescreen puffed out by the European “whale’s tooth”, and assumption that: “The *tambúa* is essentially a Fijian symbol. The Tongans never used it except for the purpose of getting canoes, or timber for canoes, from Fiji, and it was manifestly borrowed from the latter place” (Deane 1921: 78).

Scholarship thus failed to advance much beyond the self-evident reality: “*Tambua* are the greatest of Fijian treasures, breathing of mystery and religion, objects from beyond the time of native memory” (Brewster 1937: 40). It is notable, however, that in fumbling with the key Tatawaqa provided by relating wooden *tabuabuli* to plantains, Brewster (MS. 1931) almost broke through by deducing that they must, at bottom, be fertility symbols, and linking them to first-fruits presentations. He was diverted, however, by the “most common form”, which, being “pointed at one end” with “a cavity at the other”, seemingly symbolised the male and female “organ of generation”, and so “the *lingam* and the *yoni* of the worship of Siva and Sakti in India, or of Baal and Ashtoreth, the ancient idolatry of Syria and Palestine, of which we read in the Bible” (Brewster 1937: 41). Given the form of these latter day *tabua*, and the female character of *pule/buli* cowry shells, Brewster was probably on to something, not least because marriage presentations of *pule/buli* pendants declined as the broad-butted, basally-slotted form of *tabua* arose. Certainly nobody came closer than he did. Hocart (1929: 99) suggested *tabua* somehow relate to *tabu*; and Roth (1953: 99)—unconvinced by Tatawaqa’s *bua-ta* equation or Hazlewood’s assumption (1850: 132) that “[f]rom the partial similarity of form to the collar bone, whales’ teeth are called *tabua*”—agreed.

Brewster’s crescentic fertility symbol did not quite die with him, for the concept occurred independently to Geddes (1945: 47), who proposed that “*tabua* may bear some relationship to the crescent of fertility... a form and motif which occurs in several other parts of Oceania”. He was influenced by Skinner’s note (1943: 136) about crescentic “amulets” atop the haft of New Zealand Māori digging sticks, which, incidentally, are remarkably like those heading Fijian *ivutu* food pounders and canoe yards (Clunie 1986: 36-37, 151-52). Skinner in turn was building on Best (1976: 80), who noted that, in symbolising a crescent moon, the Māori amulets represented Rongo, one of the great gods of all but Western Polynesia, and—like Hikule‘o and Aloalo—the one most responsible for weather and crop fertility:

The crescent symbol of Rongo was carved on the upper ends of digging sticks in New Zealand, while at Easter Island the crescent is seen incised on rocks at the place called Orongo (O Rongo), and the crescent-shaped breast ornament was worn by women. (Best 1995: 397)

Whether or not the crescentic wooden gorget of Tahitian mourning regalia, or the dark crescent bounding otherwise silvery mother-of-pearl shell breastplates of the Cooks, Australs and Tuamotus, also represent Rongo is unclear. But Rongo is Lono, godly patron of the great annual *makahiki* harvest festival of Hawai‘i, where the crescent was prominent on godly feather cloaks, and where, according to Kaeppler—who regards it as “one of the most important design elements in Polynesia, if not the basic element”—“the ultimate aim for a high chief was to look like a series of crescents” (Kaeppler, Kauffmann and Newton 1997: 91-92). The objects that most evoke *tapua*, however, are not from Polynesia but the Marianas. These northern Micronesian polished *Tridacna* shell crescents are uncannily similar to *tapua*. As with some *tapua/tabuabuli*, their tips are cut off, and the truncated ends drilled in a way that suggests they were either slung like *tapua* or linked end to end. Next to nothing is known about these Chamorro relics, but they are so close to *tapua* in size, character, finish and form it is hard to believe they are not related (see Flores n.d., Geldgeschichtliches Museum 1994: 15, Koch 1969: 138-39).

Regardless of whether *tapua* relate to those Micronesian objects, however, it would seem Brewster and Geddes were on the right track, for Hikule‘o, the *tupu‘i ‘otua* supplicated at the ‘*inasi ‘ufimotu‘a*, and Aloalo, his *tautau lotufonua* counterpart, were both embodied in crescentic *tapua*. Working downward through the hierarchy of gods and chiefs who received first-fruits offerings at a more and more local level, this might imply that the gods concerned tended to be embodied in *tapua*. If so, this would parallel chiefly practices of wearing sun-like and heirloom *sifa* breastplates emblematic of descent from Tangaloa. Indeed, that likelihood is strongly supported by a parallel relationship between godly *tabua*, chiefs, fertility and tribal prosperity in western Vanualevu in Fiji, where Tongo-Samoan traits were still so marked when Buell Quain was there in 1935-36 he could only conclude:

The system of chiefly titles and hereditary status is Tongan, and the prestige of Tongan invaders spread and buttressed it in this region of Fiji. Chiefly privileges are still identified with the customs of islands to the east: chiefs are said to sit ‘in the manner of Tonga’; their sacred backs are ‘Samoan.’ The whole complex has been accepted without complete obliteration of an earlier ethos. For each region... there are two sets of ancestors. The first are ‘owners’ of the land... the second are chiefly immigrants who built an empire

at Flight-of-the-chiefs [Naseyatura] and then dispersed to found chiefly houses throughout the province [Bua]. (Quain 1948: 433)

Tongan roots are further exemplified in a tradition concerning Makinivalu, Tui Raralevu, who was killed in his *vata* ‘litter’ (Tongan: *fata*) in a scene reminiscent of the death of the last Tu‘i Ha‘atakalaua on Tongatapu in 1799 (Vason 1810: 168-69). Quain (1948: 37-39) noted that Makinivalu was so *tabu* “[h]e was always carried in a litter”. It is therefore telling that the legitimacy of the paramount chief of inland Lekutu—under whose spiritual auspices the first-fruits were presented, and upon whose godly connection prosperity depended—was embodied in a *tabua* named Tu Lekutu, and that the legitimacy and rights to the chiefhood and first-fruits of the other four inland Lekutu tribes were likewise vested in sacred heirloom *tabua* (Quain 1948: 189-90).¹⁹

Allowing for the corrosive consequences of Christianity, this shows that just as *tapua* dedicated to Tongan gods served as their *fale*, *tabua* acted as the *bure* ‘house’ of Fijian gods, underpinning the power and legitimacy of their chiefly descendants and guaranteeing their capacity to ensure fertility and prosperity. The nub lies in the Fijian term *sautu* (*sau*: ‘ruler’, *tu*: ‘permanence’), meaning divinely ordained prosperity, which is most cogently expressed in a prayer still uttered during *tabua* transactions: *me sautu na vanua* ‘may the land prosper’.

This being so—and bearing in mind the crescentic shape of the *tapua/tabuabuli*—it is hardly coincidental that throughout Western Polynesia, and as far eastward as Rarotonga (Savage 1980: 354), a variety of *fusi* (Fijian: *vudi*) or plantain (cooking bananas, *Musa* hybrid) characterised by a tough, cross-grained skin and firm yellowish flesh is called *tapua* (Tongan: Churchward 1959: 185; Samoan: Pratt 1911: 322; Uvean: Rensch 1981: 369; Futunan: Grézel 1878: 257, Moyses-Faurie 1993: 375, Rensch 1986: 266).

Thanks to Tatawaqa and Brewster, this pairing of godly *tapua* with a namesake plantain is more intriguing than surprising, both being evocative of a quartering moon, and the plantain, with its many cultivars, indubitably being an ancient staple. Shared name and shape raises the prospect that *tapua* might be traced back to token *pua* wood, whale-bone, ivory or stone “plantains” presented at first-fruits rituals dominated by offerings of, not the *kahokaho* yam, but a plantain of particular spiritual significance, mayhap the *tapua*. The possibility is inadvertently supported by Cook and his officers, who were taken aback by a procession of about 300 pairs of ponderously trudging men bearing wooden tokens of young *kahokaho* yams for presentation at the ‘*inasi*’ *ufimui*. Given each token consisted of a *tapua*-sized bundle composed of “three bits of sticks... about the thickness of a finger and six inches long”, strung like a *tapua* and slung to a shoulder pole between two men, and borne

as if staggeringly heavy, the offerings were clearly intended to promote godly protection over the coming planting and growing season. The exclusive “mystery” of the occasion—closely guarded by armed men, conducted within especially raised close fencing to ensure none but participants could bear witness—was certainly in keeping with the covert character of *tapua* (see Beaglehole 1967: 915-17, 1049). But more diagnostically, mature *kahokaho* yams, individually enwrapped in red ribbon to give them a godly *tapua*-like ‘skin’, were likewise slung like a *tapua* and presented in the same ponderously trudging, pretended weight-bearing way at the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimotu*’a first-fruit rituals dedicated to Hikule‘o that Mariner attended (Beaglehole 1967: 47-154, 914-96; Martin 1818 v. II: 196-203). This suggests the name of the *tautau lotufonua* harvest festival—*tautau* ‘hanging’, *lotu* ‘to pray/worship’, *fonua* ‘land’—may similarly reflect the ancient presentation of *tapua* tokens to Aloalo. If so, it is easy to see how gods like Hikule‘o and Aloalo came to embody themselves in *tapua*, which in turn might resolve earlier speculation about the stringing of godly *tapua*, it being conceivable they were normally kept unstrung, and only unwrapped and strung for suspension as god incarnate at a crucial, highly secretive point in first-fruits presentation, before being unstrung, anointed, enwrapped and returned to their sanctum.

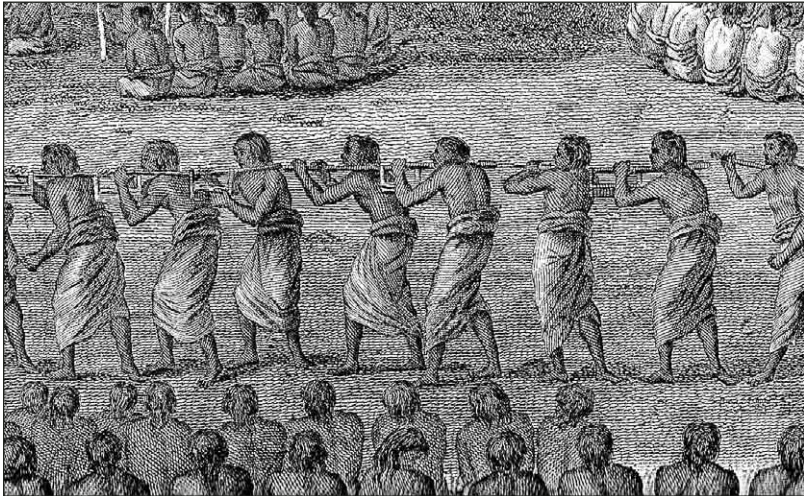


Figure 7. Detail of men bearing wooden tokens of *kahokaho* yams slung like *tapua* for presentation at the ‘*inasi* ‘*ufimui*, Lapaha, Tongatapu, July 1777. Engraving after John Webber.

The *tapua*-like character of the *kahokaho* offerings at the ‘*inasi* likewise raises the question of whether they had replaced *tapua* tokens anciently offered to Hikule‘o and Aloalo. This seems likely, for tradition insists the *kahokaho*—Fijian *kasokaso*—was unknown in Tonga when the first Tu‘i Tonga was established there in the 10th century, it being a secondary introduction, supposedly stolen from Hikule‘o and smuggled from Pulotu by the goddess Faimaile, or stolen by the goddess Fehuluni from the god Faifaimalie of Samoa (Gifford 1924: 163-64, 167-70).

With the *kahokaho* discredited from ancient ‘*inasi* by tradition—and perhaps quite recently introduced from yam-fixated Fiji—it is reasonable to suppose first-fruit offerings in earlier times had more in common with those of Tahiti, where yams were not much cultivated and root crops not included in first fruit-fruits offerings, but plantains strongly represented (Oliver 1974 v. I: 252, 261-63; Ferdon 1981: 55, 1987: 83). This seems the more likely, assuming that the Society Islands were settled from Samoa, whence came the Tu‘i Tonga, and forebears of the other great Tongan chiefs, not to mention Hikule‘o and Aloalo. In light of this, recall the ubiquitous way in which offerings of young plantain trees, accompanied by scarlet *kula* feathers, pigs and barkcloth, were proffered in the Society, Austral and Marquesas islands when welcoming and placating dangerous sea-borne strangers, supplicating gods and chiefs, and suing for peace or forgiveness. Tahitian plantain presentations seem to have much in common with *tabua* exchanges in Fiji and ‘*ie malo* mat transactions in Samoa. Indeed, the manner in which young plantain trees were interred with the diseased corpses of Tahitian chiefs, accompanied by prayers that the deified spirit not inflict the complaint on the living, is broadly analogous to the interment of *tapua/tabua* with chiefly corpses in Tonga and Fiji (see Morrison 2010: 218, Oliver 1974 v. I: 107-8, Wilson 1799: 364).

Turning again to 18th century Tonga, although plantains featured among the first-fruits offerings presented at Hikule‘o’s ‘*inasi* and Aloalo’s *tautau*, evidence that they held any particular spiritual consequence is as fragmentary as that for the *tapua* itself. Cook voyage evidence indicates, however, that powerful sea-borne strangers were welcomed/supplicated with offerings of *kava* root accompanied by plantains, coconuts, cycad fruit and shaddocks. This is telling because, with the possible exception of the cycad, these plants are all ancestral Polynesian introductions (Whistler 2009). Most records are frustratingly vague, but decisive details are provided in this description of a canoe-borne welcome at Ha‘apai in 1774:

When they were along-side, a few beads and nails were presented to them, for which they immediately sent a bunch of bananas, and some delicious shaddocks (*citrus decumanus*) on the deck, besides a bunch of the red fruits

of the palm-nut tree or padang (*Arthrodactylis*) which is a sign of friendship. This being done, they sold us all the shaddocks and fruit which they had, and came on board. (Forster 1996 v. I: 409)

Kava may have been overlooked, but the inclusion of plantains, shaddocks (*molitonga*, *Citrus maxima*) and, diagnostically, inedible red cycad or *longolongo* fruits (Forster's *Arthrodactylis*, Fijian: *logologo*, *Cycas rumphii*), indicate this was a deliberate, spiritually-based offering. *Longolongo* were planted about *mala'e* and close to *fa'itoka* (G. Forster 2000: 246; J. Forster 1967: 904, 922), and shaddocks (Labillardière 1800: 356) and plantains in god-house compounds. Taufā'ahau's symbolic choice of a *polata* 'plantain trunk' to kill the god Haehaetahi (see p. 173 above) and his spiritually possessed priestess in 1829 was likewise spiritually charged, as was the role of *polata* at the entombment of the Tu'i Tonga, where each of thousands attending were furnished with an unlit torch and a *polata*, which last were snapped in unison with a "considerable crash" at the point where the spirit of the deceased god-man/*tapua* seemingly left for the Langi from the *langi* (Martin 1818 v. II: 215-16). Ritual significance is likewise reflected by the formal division of a plantain bunch into five formally ranked *ta* 'hands' for ceremonial allocation (Churchward 1959: 437). It is notable, moreover, that in formal *kava* rituals in which gods were invariably supplicated and chiefs represented deified forebears, *kava* was served in *pelu* 'folded plantain leaf cups' (Fijian: *i kavilo*) rather than *ipu* 'half-coconut shells'. Physically, moreover, the components of some early whale ivory necklaces not only replicate plantains but can even evoke a hand of them, most graphically so in the case of a *sisi* necklace from Namosi in Vitilevu (Clunie 1986: 65).

In a similar vein, evidence from yam-oriented Fiji likewise relates shaddocks and plantains to god-houses, and singles out plantains as the principal offering made at particular first-fruit presentations. For instance, the *bawa*, a large plantain grown alongside god-houses, together with other unspecified cultivars, was *tabu* to all but priests and aged elders (Hazlewood 1850: 12, Williams 1858: 232), while *imatai* and *isemata* harvest festivals were dedicated to "the first-fruits, more particularly of bananas" (Hazlewood 1850: 87, 120). Relict evidence that the highly developed spiritual role of plantains in the Society Islands was rooted in Western Polynesia, moreover, is projected by an account of a *solevu* exchange between Komo island and Muanaicake on Vulaga in 1934, where early on the morning of the formal exchange the *tu rara* 'chief of the ceremonial ground' of Vulaga "took a banana shoot... to the men's guest house, stood outside the door, gave the chiefly greeting (*tama*) to the chief of Komo, and thrust the banana shoot through the door", whereupon the Komo chief "unfolded the shoot" and the

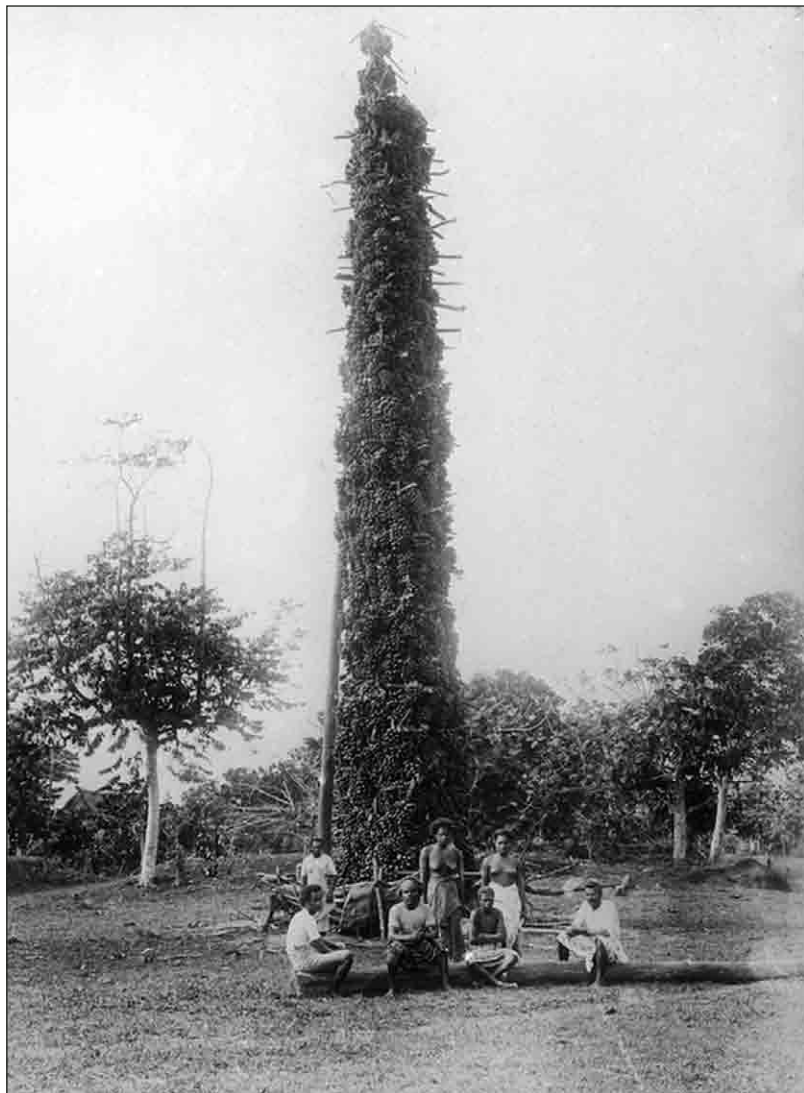


Figure 8. Food-offering column of plantains presented at the wedding of Ratu Tuisawau and Adi Rosea, Rewa, southeastern Vitilevu, c. 1895. (© Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Cambridge.)

tu rara “entered the house and put down the [plantain] stem”, followed by young men “carrying a feast (*i vaka vandra* [*ivakayadra* ‘to awaken’]), which was presented to the Komo people and eaten by them” (Thompson 1940: 74).

The most striking evidence that plantains were prestigious enough to offer to gods in their own right, however, comes from southwestern Vitilevu, where in 1878 Ruthven le Hunte saw two great food-offering columns of plantains reaching for the sky at a church opening in Nadroga.

The church opening at Nadroga was very good.... There were two enormous poles of bananas outside, 60 feet high, and running from about 3½ fathoms round at the base to 1½ at the top—eye measurement. You could see nothing but bananas—no sticks. (Gordon 1904: 61-62)

This is not the only record of plantain columns in Fiji: Figure 8 features another, “upwards of 40ft. high” presented at the marriage Adi Rosea to Ratu Tuisawau of Rewa (Thomson 1899: 377). In Fiji, pole-framed food-offering columns of this kind were likewise packed with yams or taro, sometimes combined with plantains, often punctuated and usually topped by pigs or turtles. It is essential to note that such columns are ancestrally Polynesian; the chiefly dynasties of both Nadroga and Rewa were founded by Tongan intruders in the 16th century, and analogous columns are recorded in Tonga, New Zealand and Hawai‘i.²⁰

Insofar as Tonga is concerned, only yam-packed, pig-embellished food-offering columns have been reported, but the columns (*tuputupulangi*?) were otherwise identical to their Fijian counterparts. Their religious character is best expressed by Mariner’s account of those built at Vava‘u in 1807 for the lifting of the *tapu* imposed following the death of Tu‘i Tonga Ma‘ulupekotofa. Four columns of yams, each “about fifty or sixty feet high” and topped by a “cold baked pig”, were erected at the corners of the Tu‘i Tonga’s *mala‘e*. After the gods left, the contents of one was allocated to Finau ‘Ulukalala as Tu‘i Vava‘u, and those of the other three to the priests, Tu‘i Tonga, and “Veachi and two or three other chiefs” who lacked strong temporal power but who were also god-men whose lineages traced to the mating of a sky-god and a Tongan woman (Martin 1818 v. II: 120-25).

* * *

On the basis of the evidence marshalled here and information accruing in the course of research into Tongan activity in Fiji in and about the 16th century (Clunie in prep.), the antiquity of the *tapua* can not be unequivocally resolved. Yet, I believe it reasonable to conclude it has deep Polynesian roots, and to propose it not only may have originated as a token fertility offering

associated with the quartering moon and presentation of the first-fruits of a sanctified variety of plantain, but also that through subsequent embodiment as Hikule’o and Aloalo, and other gods to whom first-fruits were presented, it came to embody the deified spirits of their descendant chiefs. Ultimately, by being entombed with the Tu’i Tonga and other great chiefs, *tapua* became the most supremely *tapu* form of godly embodiment.

The evidence presented here indicates *tapua* did not derive from “Fijian” *tabua*, but that the opposite applies. Archaeological evidence tracing the introduction of raised, stone-faced house and grave mounds and the *kava* ritual to Fiji in the 16th century, combined with traditional Fijian evidence, suggests that *tapua/tabuabuli* began to be strongly established in Fiji from about that time. This in turn might even suggest the *kahokaho* yam was introduced to Tonga from Fiji and only became established as a prestigious food and focus of the great ‘*inasi* after Tapuosi I’s return in the early 17th century. The likelihood of those prospects must await confirmation in a forthcoming article.

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NOTES

1. This summation is mostly based upon the excellent account of the Tongan religion provided by Cummins (1977), and observations in Beaglehole (1967), Martin (1818), and Gifford (1929).
2. According to Tu’i Tonga Paulaho, Fatafehi (*fata*: ‘regal canoe, platform’; *fehi*: *Intsia bijuga*) was an alternative name for Hikule’o (see Beaglehole 1967: 179, Wilson 1799: 276-77). Fatafehi, however, also collectively referred to the deified spirits of deceased Tu’i Tonga. This is not surprising, the lineage following the usual chiefly practice of attaching its tutelary god’s name to the personal names of its chiefs (see Beaglehole 1967: 950). As an embodiment of Si’uleo/Hikule’o, the bloody-hearted *fehi* (Fijian: *vesi*) was sacred to the Tu’i Tonga and Tuifiti/Tu’i Fisi, so its wood was devoted to godly/chiefly purposes. *Vesi* was similarly sacred in Fiji.

3. For an account of the Tu'i Tonga acting as *moihu* or intercessor to Hikule'o, see John Thomas in Filihia 1999: 15.
4. For illustrations of *fono* of known 18th century provenance, see Kaeppler 1978a: 207-9, 226, 229; 2009: 194, 198-99. Others certainly exist, but currently lack comparable documentation, see Hooper 2006: 250.
5. For the Forster breastplates, see Kaeppler 1978a: 211. The British Museum specimen and a more normally-sized *sifatapua* are illustrated in Hooper 2006: 254-55. The massive breastplate Anderson saw at 'Eua in 1777 was "very large and thick" (Beaglehole 1967: 964), so was not the thin British Museum specimen.
6. A surviving association of a mid- to late 19th century (and so only tokenly crescentic) *tapua* with a *mosikaka* basket is illustrated in Hooper's Figure 11 herein. These paired objects (British Museum Oc 1920.0322.33 &34) were sent to Ratu Seru Cakobau, Vunivalu of Bau, by Taufua'ahau Tupou.
7. For illustrations of composite *sifatapua* and *sifafonofono*, see Clunie 1986: 71-78, Hooper 2006: 252. Hooper (2006: 251) also illustrates this massive composite *tapua/tabua*. According to Toganivalu (MS. Ch. 8), "It is certain that this *tabua* was prepared in Tonga."
8. *Mataisau* is respectful Samoan for a master canoe-builder or other *tufuga* specialist (Pratt 1911: 212). In Lau, Samoa-derived Lemaki and Jiafau carpenters, whose forebears arrived in the 18th and 19th centuries respectively, are called *matainisau* 'the Sau's carpenters' to distinguish them from earlier domiciled *mataisau*, who lacked their plank-building skills.
9. Not all sanctified clubs were *hala*. Some, like *tapua*, were *fale* the god entered before occupying its priest/priestess.
10. Tu'i Tonga god-houses in Fiji include Nautuutu—Tui Lakeba's god-house at Tubou—and the Nawa god-house at Oneata, where he sought godly approval to proceed further westward. Both god-house mounds contained sacred soil from Tonga (Hocart 1929: 190, 199).
11. An archaic Lyth-collected *mosikaka* basket (MAA No. 57.D.4) in the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, which he did not include in his *List of Curiosities* but nevertheless labeled an "Ancient Fijian basket", very likely housed Lehalevao's orange cowry *fale*.
12. For illustrations of ivory breast-upon-vagina *pule* pendants, see Clunie 1986: 68-69, Kaeppler 2010: 213, Oldman 2004: pls 59, 62. For *pulekula* pendants, see Kaeppler 2010: 118, Clunie 1986: 64.13. Centrally pierced *tabuabuli* include the British Museum's BM 7057, collected by the Rev. J.S. Fordham; the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology's MAA 1931-219, collected by A.P. Maudslay, and MAA 1918.213.74, collected by Sir Arthur Gordon.
13. 210. Tongan idol: Tui Hadjakafonna. Formerly worshipped by the family of the *Haw*, secular chief of the Friendly Islands.
211. *Faabi Fonga*. Idol formerly worshipped by the sacred chief, the Tui Tonga.
212. *Erki Tubu*. Idol worshipped by the sacred chief, the Taminaha and her family.
14. For the nomenclature of the '*inasi* 'ufimui and '*inasi* 'ufimotu'a, see Douaire-Marsaudon 1998: 279.

15. Anderson (Beaglehole 1967: 948-49) calls Kaloafutonga “Kalla foo‘tonga”, while the Missionary Society missionaries wrote “Calla Filatonga” (Wilson 1799: 277).
16. The wooden *tabua* concerned (Fiji Museum 86.72) was last presented at the funeral of Niudamu at Nalawa in N.E. Vitilevu in 1920. Its worn suspension holes were drilled with a traditional drill, and the workmanship is so subtle that the wear shoulder, which often occurs where a sperm whale tooth meets the gum, is perceptible on its surface. The quality equals that of the best Tongan-made *tapua/tabuabuli* (see Clunie 1986: 99, 177).
17. Research into practical, non-invasive means of identifying woods used to make Polynesian religious objects is sorely needed.
18. The *Missions Protestantes Évangéliques* catalogue of the Exposition Universelle (Verne 1867: 23) lists what is evidently a third named goddess-image, the whereabouts of which are unknown: 214. *Déesse, appelé Vyuku, adorée à Ena* [‘Eua], *un des îles Tonga; son temple était la terre/* ‘214. Goddess, called Vyuku, worshipped at Ena [‘Eua], one of the Tonga islands; her temple was the earth/land’.
19. Brewster (1922: 22) noted that in highland Vitilevu *tabua* of this godly type were kept “in the seclusion of their special kato or baskets for many years. Such are looked upon as most holy and are jealously guarded and seldom seen except by the initiated, who know of their existence”.
20. Tu‘i Tonga Paulaho presented a pair of food-offering columns packed with yams and topped by pigs to Captain Cook on Tongatapu in 1777 (Beaglehole 1967: 136, 901-2, 1029). Their similarity to the Rewa plantain column is evident in Webber’s painting of “A Tongan Dance” (Joppien and Smith 1988: 320). In 1854 Wilson (MS 2004) mentioned “four quadrangles raised to the height of 15 or 18 feet”, topped by pigs and packed with yams at the wedding festivities of a “chiefess of this place & a Haabai [Ha‘apai] chief of high degree” at Vava‘u in 1854. Their relationship to *pou hakari* (*pou*: ‘post’, *hakari* ‘feast’) columns in New Zealand is obvious. The so-called “oracle-towers” dedicated to Lono that the Cook voyagers encountered in Hawai‘i in 1778 look like Tongo-Fijian food-offering columns with their contents stripped (Joppien and Smith 1988: 418-19, Handy 1926). For a more recent Fijian instance of a presentation tower of taro, erected at Rewa for a *solevu* between Lau and Rewa, see Hooper 1982, pl. 9.

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the *tapua*—close relative of the Fijian *tabua*—a secretively sequestered supreme form of godly embodiment in Tonga and argues that the *tapua* is ancestral of the *tabua*. The symmetrically crescentic form of *tapua* is a more salient feature of the objects than the material used to make them. Strong links between *tapua* and gods receiving the first-fruits demonstrate the likelihood that the object originated as a token plantain presented as a crop fertility offering.

Keywords: *tapua*, Tonga, first-fruits, whale ivory, plantain.

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