

PRE-CONTACT

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For those of us who collect Oceanic art, the attribution “pre-contact” holds a special allure. It is that most elusive category of art from the South Pacific—those pieces created before contact with the West and thus carved with non-metal tools. They are objects with an unmatched purity of intent and spiritual integrity that serve as benchmarks for all the art that comes after. By setting the standard and the style, pre-contact Oceanic art could be considered pre-classic because upon its shoulders the classic is later defined.

While every piece of Oceanic art is unique and adds to our understanding of the culture that produced it, pre-contact objects are of a different level of historical significance. As often the only tangible remnants of a bygone era, the objects help define history—not just art history. As emissaries from an unknown past, these objects have stories to tell locked in their sculptural forms, in the remains of their painted surfaces, with their attachments and the often haunting and otherworldly expressions that give shape to the culture, the beliefs and the artistry of the people who created it.

As you will see in these pages, some pre-contact pieces are just so shockingly different and obviously earlier than other known examples that it brings up a perplexing situation—especially in regard to old New Guinea art. Our historical, visual record for most New Guinea art objects starts only in the 1880s and really, for most, not until the early 1900s. So the conundrum is, what did New Guinea art look like prior to this? When one encounters a pre-contact piece of New Guinea art that is obviously stylistically earlier than other known and dated examples, the question arises of just how much earlier the object is. One generation? Five? With carbon dating so erratic as to be almost useless on pieces dating later than the 1750s, that leaves five or six generations of art that is nearly impossible to accurately place along the continuum of that particular type and style. Is it even possible to discern the evolution of a figurative style generation by generation starting at, say, 1900 and heading backward?

Art in the South Pacific is not static and never has been. At one end there is the vibrant contemporary art scene throughout today’s Oceania that includes superb carvers still working in the traditional manner. In the middle we have the known corpus of documented classic art that has defined our sense of what Oceanic art is and should be. Then there is that group of objects generically called “pre-contact” that populate the historical unknown hundreds, if not thousands, of years in the past. It goes without saying that the future of art in the South Pacific remains to be defined, but so too does the distant past. That pre-contact era is still amorphous and indeterminate, still sparsely populated by random, isolated yet beautiful works of art. We can only try, by close scrutiny, by connoisseurship and by research to give credit to those generations of South Pacific artists whose only voice we have is carved in these magnificent pieces of wood.

I think it is important to mention that this catalog and exhibition are being produced in unusual and trying circumstances with the Covid-19 pandemic wreaking havoc across the planet and especially here in the United States. The immediate implications for this present project of mine are obvious—on the down side, had I been able to travel these last five months, there probably would be more than 18 pieces here. On the positive side, because I will not be present in Paris for the *Parcours des Mondes*, I have made a real effort to make this catalog as strong as possible by offering superb objects and enlisting the help of a number of leading scholars to give these pieces historical context.

As with the pre-contact art discussed, this catalog must serve as my emissary to present all of you my best wishes and best efforts. Allow the art within these pages to take you on a long voyage to a place none of us have ever been.

Michael Hamson

12 August 2020

1 Boiken Ancestral Spirit Figure

Numoiken village, coastal Prince Alexander Mountains, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea

Nagum Boiken culture area

ex. Michael Kremerskothen Collection, Dortmund, Germany

Published in *Art of the Boiken*, Michael Hamson, 2011, no. 60

Pre-contact, stone-carved, 19th century

4¼" (10.8 cm) in height



One of the most salient characteristics of a pre-contact New Guinea sculpture is the absence of straight lines. Maybe it is the sharpness of a metal blade that produces or enables the crisp and exact edges. Or maybe it is less about the mechanics of the tool and something more philosophical about the nature of that reality that makes straight edges incongruous.

Small figures such as this were used either as portable charms or as shrine objects with an individual history and specific sphere of influence—such as aiding in the hunting of wallaby. The glossy, worn and aged brown patina attests to a long, successful ritual life. There is a cherished feel to the sculpture. Small enough to fit nicely in the hand, its composition encourages handling. The emaciated torso with sucked-in stomach and curved back is mirrored by the thin arms reaching forward to grip the tip of the long, beaked nose. The domed head is fitted snugly right into the shoulders. The opposed arcs of body, limbs and nose create a strong and stable structure that belies its apparent frailty. The spirit present here does not convey a sense of power but of age, wisdom, familiarity, even intimacy.





2 Karawari Spirit Figure, *yipwon*

Upper Karawari River, East Sepik Province,
Papua New Guinea

Yiman culture area

Ex. Sam and Sharon Singer Collection, San Francisco

Ex. Cathryn Cootner Collection, Sonoma, California

Pre-contact, stone-carved, 19th century or before

11¼" (28.5 cm) in height

The determination of age for an Oceanic art object is done almost entirely by style and not surface quality. A thick patina of use can be authentically built up after only 30 or 40 years in the field, and one of weathered erosion can happen in even less time than that. Style, however, is generally a much more stable and accurate method of dating an object. Such is the case with the present small *yipwon* figure from the Upper Karawari River (some spell this Korewori). One of the surest signs of the oldest Karawari *yipwon* is their volumes. Post-contact examples are thinner and less substantial, almost two-dimensional. The most ancient have thick, substantial heads and even wider back spines—both of which are still evident on this piece even after substantial erosion and loss. The large head projects boldly forward and the spine is very broad for such a small sculpture. For the Yiman people, these hook figures were associated with hunting. From my own field research, I was told that with the assistance of *yipwon* when a hunter goes out at night looking for pig, one will invariably cross the path right in front of him. Without the spiritual benevolence, the wild pigs will remain unseen.





3 Abelam Male Ancestral Spirit Figure/ Suspension Hook, *wapinyan*

Southern Abelam region, the Wosera, East Sepik Province,
Papua New Guinea
Abelam culture area

Ex. Philip and Rosalind Goldman Collection, London

Ex. Loed and Mia van Bussel Collection, Amsterdam

Pre-contact, stone-carved, 19th century or before

29½" (75 cm) in height

True suspension hooks are very rare among the Abelam and are clearly a remnant of their long-ago migration north from the Middle Sepik River some hundreds of years ago. With this example, the round naturalistic face definitely places this in the far southern Abelam area, probably close to Jama village. Attached to the back of the figure is a towering totemic parrot or cockatoo straining skyward. The affable expression of the ancestral spirit contrasts with the bird's evident turmoil or anguish.





4 Upper Karawari River Cave Female Figure, *aripa*

Upper Karawari River, East Sepik Province,
Papua New Guinea

Ewa culture area

Ex. Jacob M. Ydema Collection, The Netherlands

Ex. Michel Thieme, Amsterdam

Pre-contact, stone-carved, 19th century or before
34 $\frac{5}{8}$ " (87.9 cm) in height

The exact function of the flat female cave figures is not known; however, Christian Kaufmann relates that they were possibly representations of two mythical sisters responsible for making the surface of the earth habitable by man—by creating valleys and the groves of sago palm.¹ This one is striking for the volumes both in the body and the head, the nice remains of white and red pigments and the penetrating gaze from the raised eyes and bulging pupils.

¹ Kaufmann, 2003, pp. 24–5.





5 Fly River/Kiwai Islands Male Spirit Figure, *mímia*

Fly River or Kiwai Islands, Western Province, Papua New Guinea

Ex. Pierre Langlois, Paris

Ex. Comte Baudouin de Grunne, Brussels

Sotheby's, New York, November 10, 1987, lot 130

Ex. Carlo Monzino Collection, Castagnola

Pre-contact, stone-carved, late 19th century

29" (73.6 cm) in height

What we know about *mímia* figures in large part comes from the research Gunnar Landtman did between 1910 and 1912. He recorded that the Kiwai Islanders would take them along in their canoes on fighting expeditions and would entreat them to go on ahead and fight the enemy so that by the time the warriors arrived, their adversaries would already have been pre-killed and all that would remain would be for the men to administer a few perfunctory blows to finish the job (Landtman, 1927, p. 379). The present *mímia* has an elongated body atop a staff. It has a wide gaping mouth, blank staring eyes, articulated shoulders, defined ribs and a somewhat slack-limbed composure—almost as if the figure is manifesting the dead body of the pre-killed enemy.



Carlo Monzino, Collector (1933–1996)

Valentin Boissonnas

Of all the celebrities and personalities Andy Warhol chose to memorialize in his iconic silkscreen portraits, it would be hard to find one as discreet and reclusive as the collector Carlo Monzino. He is perhaps best known in the tribal art world for his coup as a 32-year-old for buying the bulk of the Jacob Epstein African and Oceanic Art Collection out from under the British Museum in 1965. With this auspicious start, Monzino continued to build the collection until his death in 1996. Since then, a number of great pieces have reentered the market, including this Fly River figure, bearing his provenance.



Carlo Monzino, by Andy Warhol, 1974

Carlo Monzino was born in Milan in 1933 to a family of successful entrepreneurs. Two years prior, his father, Francesco, had opened the first large department store, *Standard*, later renamed *Standa*, which after WWII became the largest department store chain in Italy. The Monzino family emerged unscathed from the turbulences of the war, having managed to retain 35 stores in major cities of Italy. As the city was being rebuilt and the economy began to recover, contemporary art galleries began to appear, showing European artists such as Picasso, Dubuffet, Ernst, Asger Jorn and Lucio Fontana. Some galleries even promoted American abstract expressionists such as Pollock and Sam Francis. These were among the first artworks that captured the attention of the young Monzino, who years later would make them the very heart of his collection.

When he was 21, Carlo was sent to London to perfect his English, which had become the new lingua franca. He found himself a paying guest in the house of William Wilberforce Winkworth (1897–1991), one of the foremost experts in Chinese and Japanese art at the time, who also advised the British Museum. With Monzino showing an interest in art, Winkworth introduced him to the world of auction houses and collectors. Japanese miniature pieces such as Netsuke, Inro, Tsuba and Katana were relatively cheap in the 1950s and, under the tutelage of Winkworth, Monzino started purchasing pieces with small sums taken from his student allowance. The collection grew over the next 15 years into an important ensemble, the bulk of which was sold at Sotheby's in 1995 and 1996, after having lingered for some 30 years in a Swiss bank vault.

Back in Milan, Monzino started to purchase his first post-war paintings with the important financial backing of the family. At the Galerie de l'Ariete he secured a Francis Bacon—the only one sold in the show—which turned out to be a solid investment. He was a regular visitor at the Galerie Apollinaire, where he purchased several works by Jean Fautrier that joined the Kandinsky and Pollock paintings

he had already purchased by the age of 24. Monzino equally valued Italian artist contemporaries such as Tancredi, Emilio Vedova, Alfredo Chighine and Fontana. Monzino was an impulsive buyer who purchased art that touched him; this said, he was also an astute businessman who would acquire art as an investment. At times, this paid off, allowing him to expand his collection through the sale of pieces that had increased in value.

In the 1960s, Monzino started to explore the less well-known art from Pre-Columbia, Africa, Oceania and Indonesia. The Italian art scene at the time was very traditional and collectors and publications on non-European art were scarce. For Monzino, it was a steep learning curve and many of the early pieces he purchased were of lesser quality or outright fakes. It was only after he made it a habit to visit museums abroad and befriended connoisseurs such as Ezio Bassani (1924–2018) that he developed an eye for quality and authenticity. In 1965, a unique opportunity came up as the collection of the artist Jacob Epstein came onto the market. With the help of the Parisian dealer Charles Ratton, Monzino managed to purchase the best part of the collection (some 900 pieces), much to the frustration of William Fagg (then director of the Museum of Mankind), who wanted the collection to stay in England with the British Museum. Overnight the Monzino Collection of Tribal Art had become one of the most important in private hands.

When the sculptor Epstein started collecting African and Oceanic art at the beginning of the 20th century, only a small circle of collectors was interested in what was generally considered grotesque and primitive sculptures from Africa and the South Seas. Epstein, unlike his contemporaries Derain, Matisse, Vlaminck and Picasso, assembled a truly exceptional collection that had both depth and quality and greatly influenced his own sculptural cubist and futurist works. Epstein treasured the pieces for their unique expressive qualities that forced him to explore and reinterpret nature from new perspectives.

Monzino had some very strong opinions on the essence of tribal art. Despite travels through Africa with the sculptor and Africanist Franco Monti, he disregarded indigenous interpretations. Instead, he was a firm believer in the artistic qualities that sculptures have without considering their original use and context. Monzino's approach to art was much influenced by his friend Ezio Bassani, who was an ardent follower of the art critic and philosopher of art Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti. The exploration of the aesthetic criteria of African art was at the core of the exhibition held in 1986 at the Center of African Art in New York entitled *African Aesthetics: The Carlo Monzino Collection*, with an important catalog written by Susan Mullin Vogel, which remains the most important reference for the Monzino Collection of African Art.

In the late 1960s, Monzino moved to the shores of Lake Lugano in Switzerland, where so many collectors lived at that time. In Castagnola, on the slopes of Monte Brè, he was a neighbor of the photographer and collector Helmut Gernsheim, and further down by the lake the Thyssen family collection adorned the magnificent Villa Favorita. It was in Switzerland that Monzino founded the association Poro, "Associazione degli Amici dell'Arte Extraeuropea" with the goal of advancing studies in African and Oceanic art. He organized a number of conferences and interviewed well-known scholars of the time who contributed to the periodical *Quaderni Poro* (1976–1995), which he edited and that was given for free to scholars and amateurs.

Monzino never stopped collecting, purchasing pieces from private collections, auctions or art dealers such as Paolo Morigi. For over forty years he amassed a vast amount of tribal art, the best of which he displayed in juxtaposition with important post-war art in his homes in Switzerland, Milan and Venice. Throughout his life, Monzino retained a deep-seated disregard for what he described as a lack of understanding and provincialism of his hometown, Milan, and Italy in general. When interviewed in 1991 by Antonio Aimi, he judged that there was only a handful of specialists in Italy who actually understood African art. It was only in 1995 that he lent some important objects to his hometown for the exhibition *La terra dei Moai* at the Palazzo Reale, possibly a late gesture of reconciliation with the city where he discovered his passion for the arts. With the help of the curator and anthropologist Paolo Campione, attempts were made to secure the collection for the city of Lugano and Milan, but much to Monzino's disappointment, both cities declined the offer that would have enriched them with an incredible art collection. Before his death in 1996, he started to sell some of his core collection, such as the superb Fang pieces that went to the Musée Dapper in Paris. Over the last twenty years, the collection has been dispersed on the art market by his family and stellar pieces can nowadays be found in major museums and collections around the world.

It is likely that Carlo Monzino purchased the Fly River figure discussed in this volume at the Sotheby's New York sale in 1987. It had previously passed through the hands of Pierre Langlois and Comte Baudoin de Grunne. When it briefly reappeared on the market in 2016, it came directly from the family estate in Castagnola.

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Paolo Campione, Giorgio Biancardi and Stefano Moreni, who kindly shared their personal memories of Carlo Monzino.





6 Papuan Gulf
Shoulder Shield, *laua*

Eastern Papuan Gulf region,
Papua New Guinea
Elema culture area
Ex. Richard Kelton Col-
lection, Marina del Rey,
California
Pre-contact, stone-carved,
late 19th century or before
29¾" (75.6 cm) in height

The majority of Papuan Gulf art is two-dimensional, relying on its bold graphic quality to communicate spiritual presence. With relief-carved designs painted black set against lower fields of white and red, the overall image pops out to the eye. In this example, the multiple spirit faces are both strong and precise—the best I have seen on a shoulder shield.



A Longer Thought on Elema Shields

Crispin Howarth, Curator of Pacific Arts, National Gallery of Australia

In 2019 I was asked to write briefly on the shields of the Eastern Papuan Gulf for the book *War Art & Ritual: Shields from the Pacific*. Due to pressing commitments, a short version of this article was published. Over the past year I have been able add some further information.

The wooden shields of the Elema people of the Papuan Gulf in southeast New Guinea are known as *Laua*. Their function was to protect the body of an archer while their bow arm would be extended through the upper cut-away aperture. According to LMS missionary John Henry Holmes,¹ Elema warfare was conducted according to a set of governing rules; often the conflict took place upon a cleared beach where archers (presumably protected by such shields) would fire their volleys of arrows upon one another. This form of warfare was apparently quite orderly, with agreements negotiated between elders (*Avai*, or ritual leaders *Hii Haele*) as to the date and location for a fight to take place. The enmity was highly structured, with willing hostages volunteering to be placed with each opposing group for the period of the fighting. This assisted in minimizing needless deaths by ensuring terms of compensation for any wounded or killed men. The Elema were quite different from their neighbors—the Purari to the west and the Angas to the north—in that both groups were prone to undertake raiding activities,² which the Elema did not.

Laua shields have been documented to have been hung amongst the viscerally charged displays of *Hohao* spirit boards and crocodile and pig skull trophies in the Eravo ceremonial houses, so was it possible that the *Laua* shields, with their powerfully carved imagery, could act in a similar manner to *Hohao* spirit boards?

Visually, *Laua* shields have shallow relief carving taking a form and pattern structure closely related to *Hohao* spirit boards. The toothed designs along the border of some shields were described by 19th-century naturalist Andrew Goldie as a “semblance of shark jaws.”³ This might not be a Westerner’s interpretation, as Michael Hamson⁴ notes. If a shield is viewed when placed upon its the side, it becomes suggestive of the open mouth of a beast—in a similar manner to the open mouths of Elema *Apa* drums (which in some examples are delicately carved with “teeth”), which in turn visually associate with the looming entrance of the Eravo ceremonial house.

Further, when contemplating the dual imagery apparent in the *Marupai* coconut charms (seen as a pig-like animal from one angle or a spirit face from another), the imagery upon *Laua* shields is often, but not always, designed to equally create the appearance of another spirit face when the shield is inverted. Perhaps this is not as surprising as it may at first appear. The *Apa* drums often have faces to each side, and there are also examples of the long warclubs, *Boti*, and the very sacred *Kaiavuru* bull-roarers with images of figures with two heads, one at each end of a central body.

This folding up, the doubling of imagery, where a single face can be viewed in two differing positions of the shield, may relate to stories of twins within Elema *Lauu* or *Oharo* myths.⁵ Perhaps the most

relevant myth to this dual imagery found on shields is the ancient story of Larvare-ovu and Peke-ovu, two ancestral sisters, conjoined twins joined back to back. The sisters lived in a time when the ghosts of the dead co-habited the world of the living, and this story tells of how they prevented the activity of the dead in the living world. This mythological story is found across the Papuan Gulf, yet the key elements remain the same.⁶

When Larvare-ovu wanted to go forward, Peke-ovu was pulled backward. Life was difficult for them both. Lavare-ovu became pregnant and gave birth to a son called Tito⁷ and both sisters became his mothers. One day, Tito, as a young man, wanted to help his twin mothers from their predicament. He took a wooden knife and hid in the bush waiting for them to pass by. His ambush attack quickly separated the two women, after which he moved away to a neighboring village to marry a young woman.

Unfortunately, the men of the village became jealous of newcomer Tito and killed him. His two mothers managed to reclaim Tito’s skull and used it, instead of a coconut, to drink water from. Tito’s ghost decided to visit his mothers. At this meeting, his two mothers horrifyingly offered him a drink from his own skull. This terrible act changed the world; the ghosts of the dead from this time on were then prevented from remaining in the world of the living. They were forced to travel and live in their own spirit land beyond the western horizon.

While our understanding remains unclear, this origin story about the creation of death, or the permanency that death entails within a society respectful of spirits and ghosts, is a fitting story to place upon shields used in serious events of staged warfare where death is a possible outcome.

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1 Holmes 1924, pp. 262–265.
2 Knauff 1993, p. 205.
3 Queensland Museum catalogue record for QM E10094 collected prior to 1886.
4 Hamson 2010, p. 126.
5 Williams 1976, p. 64.
6 The story of Tito is echoed across the Papuan Gulf. Landtmann (1927, p. 285–287) records a Kiwai myth of Sido who is “reborn” of two mothers grown back to back. In this story, he also splits the mothers and they convince him to drink from his own skull, but it would seem the mythological story is visually represented in Elema arts and less so across the Papuan Gulf.
7 Brown 1977, p. 11. Tito is also referred to as Iko in other Elema myths.



7 Marquesas Islands Canoe Figure, *tiki vaka*

Marquesas Islands, French Polynesia

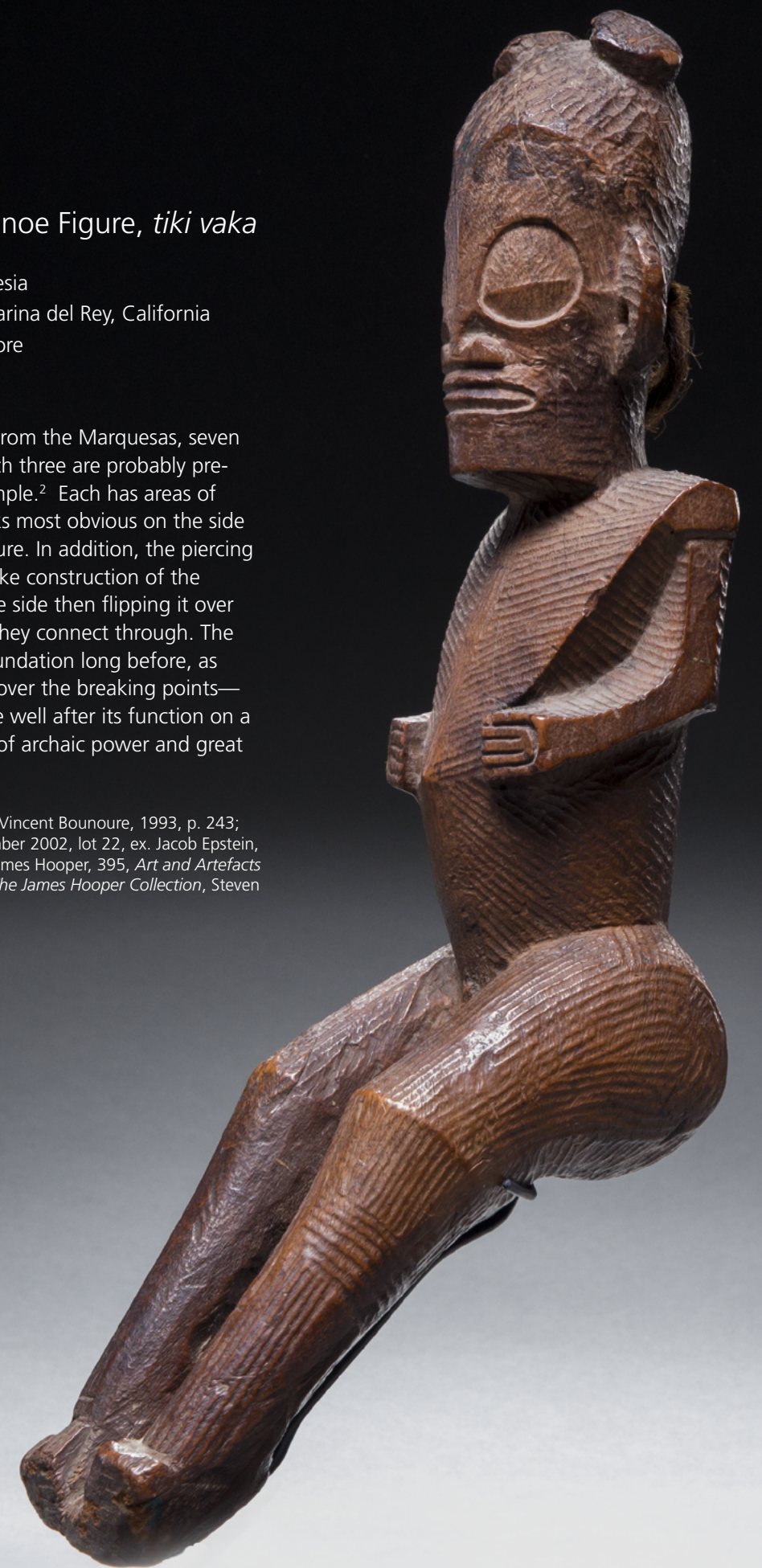
Ex. Richard Kelton Collection, Marina del Rey, California

Pre-contact, 18th century or before

13½" (34.3 cm) in height

Of the 37 known canoe figures from the Marquesas, seven are in private collections, of which three are probably pre-contact besides the present example.² Each has areas of very distinct rippled tooling marks most obvious on the side and back of the head on this figure. In addition, the piercing through the ear has that crater-like construction of the hole achieved by digging out one side then flipping it over and digging out the other until they connect through. The figure was separated from its foundation long before, as the patina is smooth and glossy over the breaking points—suggesting an extensive ritual life well after its function on a canoe. What remains is a figure of archaic power and great refinement.

² One is illustrated in *Vision D'Océanie*, Vincent Bounoure, 1993, p. 243; the second is Sotheby's, Paris, 30 September 2002, lot 22, ex. Jacob Epstein, ex. Carlo Monzino; and the third is ex. James Hooper, 395, *Art and Artefacts of the Pacific, Africa and the Americas: The James Hooper Collection*, Steven Phelps, 1976, plate 47, p. 98.



A MARQUESAS ISLANDS “CANOE FIGURE”

Michael Gunn

Every sacred work of solid art from the Marquesas Islands began as raw material, stone or wood, and was then shaped by a carver and brought to perfection before it was given life and used in ritual context. Once created, its life would continue for years, perhaps decades, possibly centuries. Some art works survived longer than others. Those that are now in museums and private collections throughout the world are those that survived in the Marquesas Islands into the late-16th to mid-19th centuries, then were removed from their homeland to begin another life as an art object in the Western world.

Marquesas Islands “canoe figures”, also known as “*tiki vaka*”¹, are survivors from an earlier time, for there are no records known describing their original cultural context. Thirty-seven are known to have survived² and they range from quite rudimentary images through to superb works of art. Some of these figures appear to have been made before metal tools arrived in the Marquesas Islands. Amongst these are the intact canoe figure now in Zürich³, others have survived as fragments⁴. Thirty Marquesas Islands canoe figures are in museum collections, and seven are in private hands.

Dating

Of the thirty-seven survivors, eleven have dates associated with them. Seven of these have mid-19th century dates for when the figure was obtained by a Westerner in the Marquesas Islands; the other four have mid-19th century dates associated with their entry into Western museum collections.

These dates should not be interpreted to mean that the canoe figures were created in the mid-19th century, for several of these figures were clearly carved without the use of metal tools. It is not known exactly when metal arrived on the Marquesas Islands, one report suggests it could be as early as the 15th century⁵ but this interaction cannot be confirmed. In 1595 the four Spanish ships commanded by Mendaña arrived. During the two week period they were anchored in a bay in the island of Tahuata (which Mendaña named Santa Cristina), a series of exchanges between Mendaña’s men and the local people is assumed to have taken place during which a large number of iron nails were probably brought ashore and eventually found their way to the woodcarvers. Throughout the Pacific region, it appears as though when given the opportunity, woodcarvers will abandon their stone chisels and other non-metal tools, and start using chisels made from an iron nail.

Although many of the canoe figures carved with metal tools may have been used in ritual context, the aesthetic side to the artistry of the connection to the ancestral and spiritual world appears to have become less important over time. It would seem that the longer a carver works on creating an image from a piece of

wood, the more of his spirit enters the creation⁶, and a stone blade generally requires more focus and time to use than does a blade made from an iron nail.

From the collection of four canoe figures collected in the Marquesas Islands by Edmond de Ginoux around 1845, we can see a wide variation in the quality of carving as well as in the tools used. It is clear, from this group⁷, that finely carved stone-carved as well very rough metal-carved canoe figures were in the Marquesas Islands at that time.

At this stage of our understanding, dating a Marquesan canoe figure by appearance is at best a highly subjective operation. Generally speaking, the higher the quality of workmanship evident on a Marquesas Islands canoe figure, the older the figure appears to us to be. It should be noted that after a painstaking examination of photographs of thirty-eight canoe figures, we are reasonably confident that three of the figures were made using stone or shell tools⁸. These figures did not show any evidence of metal tools, suggesting they were most likely created before Mendaña’s arrival in 1595.

Cultural context

If these figures were made before 1595, and were still in superb condition when they were collected in the Marquesas Islands in 1845 - as is the case of a canoe figure now in the Musée de l’Histoire Naturelle de Colmar - then this suggests that these “canoe figures” were not in fact used on ocean-going canoes, but were looked after by priests and only occasionally used in ritual context.

Marquesas Islands canoe figures are clearly symbolic objects which were most likely used in ritual or sacred context. However, we do not yet know what this context was. It is possible that these figures were used in ritual context on shore, before a voyage. It is also possible that they were brought onto an ocean-going canoe, lashed to a part of the structure that would be safest for the figure, and taken on a voyage. It is quite clear, judging from surviving canoe prows and canoe models, that these figures were not attached to the prow of ocean-going canoes, despite the assertions of a number of authors.

From the thirty-seven survivors we can see that the canoe figures featured a dominant male figure, leaning back and seated on a deck⁹. In front of him projected a long solid cylindrical shaft, penis-like in some instances, the glans taking the form of the head of a canoe prow. Markings visible on several of these figures suggest that some and possibly all of the shafts were wrapped in sennit, most likely with attached red feathers¹⁰. The deck underneath the main figure was pierced in two places, sometimes four, enabling the canoe figure to be attached to something else. What this something else was, we do not yet know. Hiqully located a model of a canoe figure in the Oakland Museum which suggested that these figures may have been attached to an ocean-going canoe. After examination of the depictions of the attitude of men seated at the rear of canoes in several drawings made by artists with Dumont d’Urville (1826-1828, and 1838),

1 Steinen 1928 Vol 3 referred to these figures as “Kanutiki, tiki vaka”. *Tiki vaka* literally means “canoe figure”. We do not know the actual words used to refer to these figures by the people who made and used them in ritual context. More recently they have also been referred to as *àuàu* (prow of a ship) and *pihao* (the front of a boat) - both are recent attributions.

2 These thirty-seven canoe figures include a reduced scale model which is discussed by Hiqully in Bataille-Benguigui 2008 pp150-153; but do not include several more recent imitation canoe figures.

3 Museum Rietberg, Zürich, inv. no. RPO 202. Published in Bounoure 1992 p42.

4 Such as the very early figure in Te Papa Museum, Wellington, inv. no. OL 190.

5 Porter recorded from Gattanewa, a chief on Nuku Hiva Island, that, according to local traditions “... some people of the same colour as themselves (but not tattooed) having long black hair, came in a vessel with two masts, and anchored in a bay called Anahoo, on the other side of the island, and brought with them some nails, which they exchanged for hogs and fruit. The nails were so highly esteemed and found so useful that the natives flocked from all parts to have holes bored through shells and other hard substances, and gave the proprietors of them a hog each for the use of a nail a few hours.” (Porter 1815 p126).

6 The name of this spirit varies from island to island, but is well documented throughout the Pacific region. It is known as *vairua* on Tahiti; *wairua* in Aotearoa New Zealand; probably *kuhane* or *uhane*, or possibly *aitu*, or *anera* in the Marquesas Islands.

7 Now in the Musée de la Castre, Cannes.

8 Three figures were clearly made with stone (non-metal) tools; ten figures were probably or possibly made with stone (non-metal) tools, and thirteen figures probably or possibly made with metal tools; the remaining twelve figures were clearly made with metal tools.

9 From a superb canoe figure now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes (inv. no. 13.360) we can clearly see that the figure’s deck was triangular in cross section, suggesting that it slotted into a larger mount.

10 These markings are visible on three of the shafts: British Museum, London, inv. no. Oc1972; Museum Rietberg, Zürich, inv. no. RPO 202; and Musée de la Castre, Cannes, inv. no. 2008.0.324.



Stewart's record from 1831¹¹, and from a model canoe now in the Linden-Museum in Stuttgart, Hiquily proposed that the figure may have been a depiction of a coxwain or helmsman, the man steering the canoe.

To go further we need to look at all the evidence available to us, which consists almost exclusively of the thirty-seven surviving canoe figures, intact works as well as fragments.

It is clear that the image is not merely a representation of a man leaning back, enjoying himself on his canoe. A number of the figures are most likely depictions of specific people, perhaps ancestors, for some appear to depict tattooing and several are shown wearing neck or chest ornaments. Others are more generic.

Some of the figures have one or two spikes or stumps projecting vertically from the top of the head, some were pierced, all variants appear to have been used to attach human hair. With hair comes the presence of the person who created the hair. With this presence comes a connection with the world which Westerners refer to as the supernatural. In the Marquesas Islands such supernatural connections were well known and well developed, generally known as *kuhane* or *aitu*, part of the more broad category of *etua* (or *atua*) which is well known in Polynesia. *Atua* were transported by humans throughout Polynesia aboard ocean-going double hulled canoes.

A distinct class or grouping of Marquesan canoe figures are those shown with their feet on the heads of one or two subordinates, in some instances the feet of the dominant figure merge with the heads of the subordinates.

Several of these dominant figures are shown with legs fully fleshed at the knee and above, but around the mid-calf they reduce sharply to the leg bone, almost as though the muscle or meat of the figure had been cut off. Clearly this image is not that of a living man, it may refer to something in the world of *etua* which is obscure to us today.

Was he a coxwain, steering the canoe, as Hiquily suggests? Or was he something more? Looking at those figures which have survived we are more inclined to suggest that the figure may well have been an image of the captain, the navigator. Almost always the figure is depicted with both hands either side of his deep chest (often the navel is shown between his hands, but sometimes positioned much higher up the body than is found on humans), his shoulders strong, he leans back, a man in control, his feet on his subordinates. He is not shown as a man wrestling a steering paddle.

This particular figure

In keeping with a number of other early canoe figures¹², this particular figure features a lineal ridged pattern carved in relief on his body and legs¹³. This pattern is brought to a focus in the centre of his belly, possibly representing his navel. Present also on his legs, the lineal pattern is intersected at right angles in two places on his left leg. His legs are complete, with no bone showing. Under his feet where we can see clear evidence that whatever he was sitting on has been removed, as was the shaft, the prow head, and the deck.

¹¹ Stewart 1831, p244-245.

¹² Although we do not know when this figure was made, nor when it left the Marquesas Islands, the wood appears to have been finely carved, and the surface of the wood, particularly around the back of the head and on the "hair knobs" on top, suggests use wear consistent with what we know about these objects.

¹³ This pattern was also found on Museum Rietberg, Zürich, inv. no. RPO 202; probably on the figure shown in Bounoure 1992 p43;

As we look further up his body, to his arms and shoulders and neck, we are able to see that the sculptor continued the lineal ridged pattern on some surfaces (the upper sides of his arms) but not others (the sides of his arms). At the back of his neck the pattern moves down to his shoulder ridge (very characteristic of Marquesan wood figure sculpture), and on his shoulders the pattern is at right angles to that of his neck.

When we look at his face we can see some evidence of this lineal ridged pattern on the sides of his jaw and on his ears, but in the central part of his face the blade marks become more diffuse, breaking up so that they become less dominant and almost vanish in the portrayal of his eyes with their very characteristic sloping ridge bisecting its circularity.

We look further up at the elevated arch of each eyebrow and into the head region where we find quite deeply sculpted scoop marks, a deliberate roughness to help hold human hair in position. At the top of the head are two hair knobs, similar to those that were in fashion at the time some of the great early sketches were made of Marquesan men, particularly those made in 1804 during Krusenstern's voyage. What is not clear is now long were the two hair knobs in fashion – a decade? longer? a century? We don't know¹⁴.

At the top of the head are two holes. One is near the central core of the wood and it is possible to see where the sculptor was cutting across the grain in this part of the figure. Located exactly between the two hair knobs is a deep hole which emerges at the base of the head, where the occiput would be located. A tuft of human hair emerges from the bottom of the hole, more hair is visible at the top. This figure is the only canoe figure known with an attached tuft of hair.

The comparative roughness of the pattern over the head suggests the possibility that the figure was originally designed to hold a full head of human hair, secured at the knobs at the top and through the hole.

Hair, in the 17th and early 18th century Marquesas Islands, was not just hair as we know it today, but was more clearly understood as something that grew from the essential essence of a man, and when it was taken from his head, or his beard, it contained his *mana* and brought with it some of his *kuhane*, his soul. The canoe figure was no longer just carved wood, it became a receptacle, a container, something to anchor a spirit.

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¹⁴ Although it is tempting to try to date this figure by looking at the patina, we should keep in mind that it has most likely been in Western hands longer than it was in the Marquesas Islands, for it may have left the Marquesas Islands in the early 19th century, more than 200 years ago.





8 Yangoru Boiken Ancestral Spirit Figure, *malingatcha*

Yangoru, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea
Yangoru Boiken culture area
Field Collected by Dr. George Kennedy in the 1960s
Ex. Sanford Redmond Collection, Connecticut
Chris and Anna Thorpe, Sydney
Pre-contact, stone-carved, 19th century
26¾" (68 cm) in height

In the accompanying essay on the contact era of the Yangoru Boiken, Paul Roscoe explains that the role of ritual and initiation was to create strength in both men and women. The transformative process of each initiation stage literally stripped away existing weakness and built strength and power in its place. With regard to women, this strength, *halinya*, meant endurance, hard work in the garden, lugging back loads of firewood, preparing food and bringing into the family as many children as possible. The female form most admired was full-bodied with an unblemished light-brown skin.

I think Roscoe's comments help contextualize the present female ancestral spirit figure. The body here is indeed stout and unblemished, but what is most striking is the wonderfully large head hollowed out on the reverse. The effect created is a mysterious depth behind the eyes and a clear silhouette of aggressive teeth in the open, grinning mouth. This void behind the face on Boiken figures, I believe, is there for more than aesthetic reasons. I think it is really about creating space to be occupied by the animating spirit, giving that spirit, literally, room to breathe.



STRONG MEN AND GOOD WOMEN IN CONTACT-ERA YANGORU

Paul Roscoe, University of Maine

The Sepik Basin of New Guinea has often caught the artworld’s eye as one of the world’s most prolific theaters of “traditional” visual and plastic art. In truth, art production varied considerably across the Sepik. Many of the region’s small-scale, low-density hunter-gatherers and sago-dependent horticulturalists created striking pieces such as the *yipwon* figures of the Karawari River and Sepik Hills and the massive, ephemeral figures that some Sandaun groups assembled for their curing rituals, but their overall productivity was comparatively modest. The real artistic hotspots were the large fishing- and sago-dependent villages along the middle and lower reaches of the Sepik River and its tributaries, and a high-density belt of intensive horticulturalists and pig-rearers that reached along the southern foothills of the Prince Alexander and Torricelli Mountains from Yangoru in the east to Dreikikir in the west.

At the eastern terminus of this ribbon of villages, the vigorous artistic life of the Yangoru Boiken has been curiously overshadowed by that of their western neighbors, the Abelam, and Middle Sepik groups such as the latmul, Chambri, and Koiwat. The reason for this oversight is likely the relatively early decline of art production in Yangoru in the face of European contact, which came early to Yangoru. Shortly after a Catholic Mission had been established in 1908 at Boiken village on the coast, Yangoru traders from some of the high southern-foothill villages were already becoming acquainted with the European presence. In October 1912, however, the European presence came to Yangoru when two Catholic priests, Eberhard Limbrock and Francis Kirschbaum, crossed the mountains from the Boiken mission (Limbrock 1912). In short order, the Church established a missionary base at Ambukanja village in the high Yangoru foothills, from where—excited by the density of potential converts—the Church began to proselytize the area.

In its early days, missionary preaching was confrontational. The Church made no secret of its opposition to warfare, sorcery, and, in particular, Yangoru’s elaborate male and female initiation sequences, the engine of much of its artistic endeavors. The efforts bore fruit because, by chance, Yangoru Boiken initiation contained a critical structural weakness. Throughout most of the southern foothills and the Sepik, villages were divided into moieties, and each moiety successively initiated members of the other, generating a momentum of obligation that kept these great ritual complexes lumbering forward through time. Yangoru Boiken villages had a moiety structure as well, and, as elsewhere, each moiety initiated members of the other. The difference was that, in Yangoru, initiatory obligation did not alternate through time; both moieties were initiated at the same time. The result was that initiation could be halted at any time without one moiety falling delinquent to the other. And, in the face of missionary disapproval, it did. Whereas initiation on the Sepik River and elsewhere in the southern foothills lasted well into the 1970s, if not later, the last major initiation rituals in northern Yangoru did not last beyond the late 1940s (Roscoe and Scaglione 1990).

Nor was it just missionary disapproval that undermined Yangoru Boiken ritual and artistic life; the Church’s promise of Heaven also played a role. Yangoru is renowned in the Sepik as a center of long-standing millenarian activity, seeking to uncover the secrets of European access to power and goods.

The Peli movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s gained national and international attention, but Limbrock’s report on the reception he and Kirschbaum received in 1912 strongly suggests millenarian movements were already underway, and they were still in train as late as 1987 (Roscoe 1988; 2004). These movements seek to discover the secrets of European access to power and goods in order to even up the gross inequalities that local people experience in their relations with Europeans. Thus, when the Church appeared in Yangoru and started preaching that salvation lay in prayer and renouncing wicked ways, people interpreted this message in far more literal terms than was intended. A succession of movements saw them destroying their beautiful pots, throwing away their carvings, burying their shell rings and other shell wealth, and abandoning the construction of their spirit-houses, all in the expectation that “God the Father” would come down to Yangoru, the spirits of the dead would return, and/or an earthly paradise of cars, refrigerators, aeroplane travel, tinned foods, and other European-style material wealth would be ushered in (Gesch 1985: 122–126; Roscoe 1993).

Art and Ceremony among the Yangoru Boiken

Whatever the cause for its decline and neglect in the artworld, Yangoru Boiken art can tell us a lot about one of the great, underexamined questions in the study of “traditional” art. What drove people in small-scale societies like those of the Sepik to produce such remarkable artwork? As elsewhere in the Sepik, most of Yangoru’s visual and plastic art was associated at contact with ceremonial life, which primarily took the form of life-cycle rites and prosperity rites, both of which were intertwined with what ethnographers have come to call the *Tambaran* cult complex.

Life-cycle rites included birth, marriage, and death rites, but their most elaborate form was the initiation ceremony. Yangoru was unusual in the Sepik for an initiation sequence that was almost as elaborate for females as it was for males. The sequence encompassed six stages. Male initiation began with the communal induction of youths at an average age of around 15 years, and it took place in and around a *hworumbo*, a towering, semicircular enclosure of sturdy timbers set one against the other. Female initiation started at first menstruation, which occurred on average at age 16 (plus or minus three years), when the young woman was secluded in a small hut for about a month, coming out only periodically for a series of rites and ceremonies. For both sexes, the second and third grades comprised the rites of first intercourse and of first birth, respectively, which husband and wife underwent together. Following the birth of their first child, husbands and wives were then initiated simultaneously but separately in a second communal set of ceremonies; and, fifteen years later—ideally with the initiation of their first son—they were inducted communally into a third grade. Finally, as they neared their dotage, their initiation was deemed complete with the first menstruation rites of their youngest daughter.

Prosperity rites were held every two years or so. In contrast to the initiation sequence, they were sponsored by one of a village’s two moieties, and they involved prestations of pigs and other prestige items to the other moiety. The most elaborate was the *walahria*, which began with each member of the sponsoring moiety in turn hosting a gathering at which he conferred a pig on his exchange partner and feasted the 20 to 30 members of the partner’s moiety with a soup of pork and the first fruits of his garden. The sequence climaxed in a communal pig-lining, followed by two nights of celebratory singing and dancing.

Accompanied by multiple gifts of shell rings and *hworia-hombuli*, cut and polished green snail shells topped with ornate basketry designs, it was these life-cycle and prosperity rites that spurred the Yangoru Boiken to the production of massive amounts of visual and plastic art. Every stage of each event was announced on the slit-drums, many bearing intricate carving. Initiates were exposed to *malingat-cha*, bespelled and ritually dangerous carvings, usually manufactured as a male/female humanoid pair that stood one to two meters high, with large heads, arms akimbo, and legs apart. In the first stage of initiation, some young men wore *walarauwa*, elaborately carved and painted wooden helmets adorned with feathers. At various points in the more elaborate ceremonial sequences, *wala* figures—men in conical dance masks festooned with small shell rings and other ritual paraphernalia—came out from the undergrowth to dance with initiates or twirl admiringly around offerings of shell wealth, pigs, and other gifts before fading back into the bush where they were dismantled. Multiple bouts of singing and dancing brought forth dancers with decorated faces, finely patterned netbags, and swaying reed wands, while musicians played elaborately carved and painted drone flutes and hand-drums.

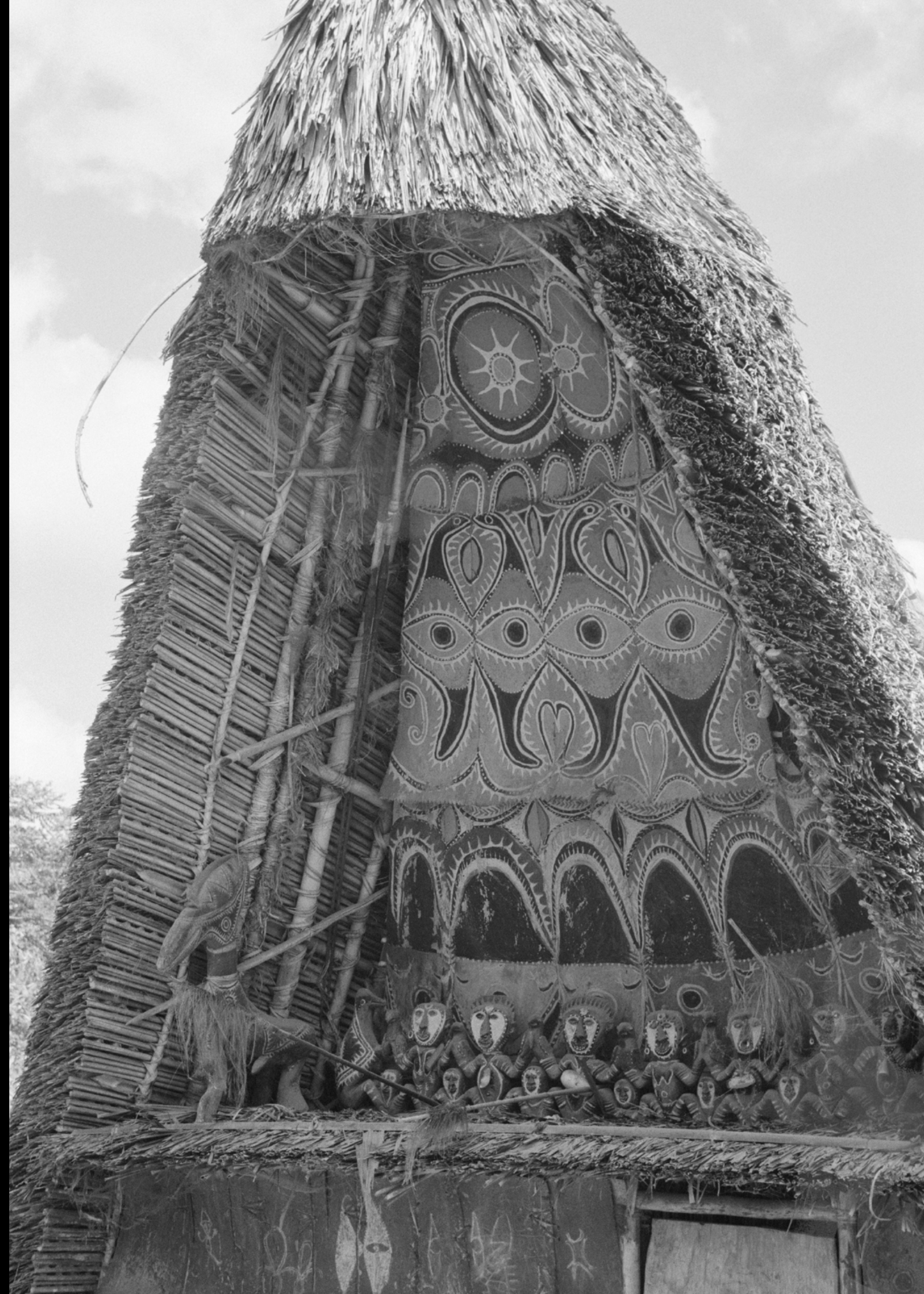
Then there were the *ka nimbia*, the towering, tetrahedrally shaped spirit houses for which the foothill peoples are justly famous. Boasting great cantilevered façades painted with striking rows of designs and interiors stuffed with myriad carvings and paintings, these structures were the locus and focus of male initiation sequences elsewhere in the foothills. This was also the case in some parts of Yangoru, where they were embedded at the center of the tall, palisaded initiation enclosures. Elsewhere, however, *ka nimbia* were divorced from initiation, constructed to demonstrate the “strength” of its sponsors and adorned at its inauguration with shell rings, spears, and all sorts of other visual and plastic art (Roscoe 1995a).

The Ceremonial Production of Strength

The answer, then, to why the Yangoru Boiken invested so much effort in their artwork lies in their reasons for mounting their life-cycle and prosperity rites. Given the enormous interest scholars have in the religious life of small-scale societies, it is a little surprising how fitfully they have inquired after what people actually state to be the reasons for mounting the ceremonies they do. Rituals are often described in exquisite detail, yet local explanation of their aim is commonly either collapsed into a sentence or two or ignored altogether in favor of the analyst’s assessment of what the rites “really” do. In the case of initiation, the reason may seem so self-evident as to need no mention: By anthropological definition, they mark the transition to adulthood. Inquiries in Yangoru, however, reveal a far more telling exegesis of ceremonial motivations. Echoing what has sometimes been briefly reported of other Sepik societies, life-cycle and prosperity rites were aimed at producing “strong” people and “strong” groups (Roscoe 1990).

This emphasis on “strength” stemmed from the taxing realities of life in a small-scale society. To begin with, there was the ever-present danger of military attack. It is unlikely that the Yangoru Boiken lived under the kind of military threat experienced in some parts of New Guinea, where the chances of dying in war were on the order of 35% (Roscoe 2009: 82). Nevertheless, their villages existed in a

Boiken ceremonial house at Halik on Pagwi road.
Photograph by Douglas Newton August 8, 1970: frame 16.
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state of permanent war with at least some of their neighbors, who lay no more than two to three kilometers away. Under these circumstances, communities needed “to remain strong in order to remain at all,” as Watson (1983: 193) has put it of villages in the Eastern Highlands. “Strength” was just as necessary, though, to prosper within a village as it was to survive in the face of enemies beyond it.

Lethal violence was extremely rare within a village; even so, conflict arose for all sorts of reasons and in all sorts of ways. In contrast to the nation-state, however, these communities had no centralized governmental institutions to control this conflict. There were no legislative organs that passed laws to control conflict, no police forces to detect and arrest law-breakers, no criminal courts and prisons to punish them, and no civil courts in which to seek mediation or redress for other harms. Under these circumstances, the solution was deterrence and self-redress: Individuals, sub-clans, and clans within a village community needed to be strong enough to deter others from trying to take advantage of them and to succeed in wreaking retaliatory harm if they did.

Part of the solution lay in numbers. The more warriors a village had to defend itself, the less likely it was that enemies would consider attacking it or that allies would take advantage of it. Likewise, the more men a sub-clan or clan could muster in intra-village conflict, the less likely were others to take advantage of it and the greater the chances of prevailing in tit-for-tat actions or non-lethal fighting if anyone tried. Strength in female numbers was equally important, both in feeding and caring for their menfolk and in producing the future numerical strength of the sub-clan, clan, and village. The end result was that groups were constantly concerned with maintaining sub-clan, clan, and village numbers (Roscoe 2009: 90–91).

Group strength, though, depended also on whether the individuals making up these numbers were themselves “strong”—*halinya* in the local language. There was little point in having scores of men to defend individual and group interests if those men were weaklings in mind and body. The concept of *halinya* both resembled and diverged from the English meaning of the terms “strong” and “strength,” and what was valued as “strength” in males was different from that in females. In men, *halinya* connoted physical strength in both aerobic and endurance senses: It was the ability and agility to perform well on the battlefield and in the chase; to walk for miles to drum up pigs, wealth, and support from kin and allies; to have stamina in singing and dancing; and so on. But *halinya* also referred to cognitive and emotional “strength”—acumen and tenacity, bravery, drive, and vigor: tactical expertise on the battlefield, diplomatic skill, the ability to speak persuasively, sound judgment, shrewdness in transacting wealth, and so on. In addition, it included a kind of spiritual “strength,” in the sense of graced by the ancestor spirits, who could bring or withhold health and success in such activities as war, hunting, gardening, pig rearing, and wealth gathering.

The English concept of “strength” also fails to capture an element of power and menace, of dangerous potency, that lay at the heart of male *halinya* (Roscoe 1995b). Masculinity in Yangoru was quintessentially embodied in, and conferred by, the menace of the spear. Indeed, the penis—*sine qua non* of maleness—was metaphorized as the spear, and vice versa. In confronting and killing enemies and wild pigs with their spears, in the number of strong sons at their side in battle and at moots, in the mock spear charges with which they emphasized their agendas, and in the immediacy and aggressive verbal dexterity with which they responded to insult, men demonstrated this dangerous potency in direct, physical terms.

“Strong” women were those gifted in talents that supported a husband, his kin, and his allies in manifesting their “strength” (Roscoe 1995b). Physically, they were strong in the sense of endurance: They were women capable of hard work in the gardens and of portering heavy loads of food and firewood on their return. They had the full-bodied figure esteemed as the prerequisite for bearing and suckling many offspring, and they had the unblemished, light-brown skin that men found attractive. Mentally, they exhibited a quality of determined, doughty obedience to their menfolk, a quality that endowed them with the resolve to go to the gardens come rain or shine and to work hard growing and preparing copious amounts of “good” food for a husband’s family, kinfolk, and allies. A “strong” woman was one whose “cooking fire never goes out.” She was imbued as well with a determination to birth many children and resist sexual affairs. Just as men’s dangerous potency was captured in the spear, women’s resolve to produce food and children was fittingly captured in the netbag, the symbol for her womb—the *sine qua non* of femaleness—and vice versa, and the carrier in which she transported infants, the food she had harvested, the firewood to cook it, and sometimes even a piglet.

In Yangoru, neither the male nor female self was seen as “naturally” *halinya*. Rather, men and women had to be made “strong” through initiation; if they were not initiated, it is said, they would forever remain callow, soft, and weak—physically, psychologically, and spiritually. Men would be *fat-chik*, “rubbish men” who wander aimlessly around the bush, their minds unfocused on the tasks of manhood and their beings unable to manifest them. Women would shirk their work, argue with their husbands, have promiscuous affairs that would create jealousy and strife within their husbands’ clans, their skin would be “cold,” they would be skinny, and their skin would have all sorts of blemishes. They would be *hwubindabiendauwa*, “rubbish women.”

With each initiatory grade, however, initiation rendered them increasingly *halinya*. It made men physically strong. It made them energetic and vigorous and their limbs and bodies “light,” not “heavy.” It furnished them with minds “clear like water” (i.e., astute) and with a “strong” breath (*yamembi*). Thus endowed, they would have the physical and psychological strength to “stand up straight” in a fight, to hunt with bravery and skill, to “talk” and “organize things.” Female initiation motivated women to bear and rear children, endowed them with the body to do so, and gave them the drive and physical stamina to work hard in the fields and over the cooking fire. It inspired her to “settle down” with the best interests of her husband at heart. It “broke open” (i.e., molded) her thinking so that she would strive to produce food for him and his family and to gather wealth from relatives when her husband was in need of it.

As the Yangoru Boiken envisaged this initiatory process, it was less a training or schooling than a literal change in the initiates’ physical constitutions. Initiation produced qualitatively new men and women, individuals with a new *penga*, “skin” or “body.” When a Sima woman one day insulted her husband’s sexuality, the village councilor declared the act an offense because the husband’s body “had seen the Tambaran” (during initiation). Later, he explained that initiation had changed the husband’s body, and to insult such a man was to “cut into” that body (*tua haza*, literally “man cuts”: It “cuts into the skin,” it “breaks a man open” and “removes the flesh, so there is only a skeleton left, like a house with no roof or walls”).



This bodily transformation was symbolically enacted in the ritual practice of initiation. To begin with, the initiates' bodies were symbolically stripped from their bones. In the first, *sumbwi* stage of male initiation, for example, each initiate entered the *hworumbo* enclosure by crawling along a muddy trench bridged by a tunnel of crossed sticks that initiators could scissor down, pressing the initiate into the mire. The contraption represented a pig's alimentary tract and, as each lad was about to enter the trench, his father called out to the initiators, "Wild pigs! You eat! I give you this youth. I give you my child now. You eat his skin and his flesh; leave just his bones for me, his father!" The rites that followed—beatings, penis bleedings, ingestion of magically empowering substances, exposure to ritual *wala* tableau, and sexual avoidances—then built a new, more dangerously potent body on those bones. At the end of a young woman's initiation, she was bidden to crawl through a small tunnel lined with nettles and brambles, which exited into a river, an exercise that seemed to model the reverse of her male counterparts'—her birthing as a new woman. Events in the second grade of male initiation were said to remove the initiate's weak flesh and build a stronger body on his bones. With each initiatory grade, initiates' bodies became ever stronger, ever purer, obliging them to avoid contact with the blankets and clothing of the less initiated and to avoid eating from their plates on pain of pollution, weakness, and serious ill health.

If initiation produced "strong" men and "strong" women, prosperity rites sought to sustain a world in which they—and, by extension, their groups—could *be* strong. Prosperity rites were said to honor the recently dead and to evoke supernatural aid in ensuring or restoring the fertility, health, and well-being of a group's members and the productivity of their territory. They helped to induce ancestral spirits to enter into and fatten up pigs and crops, to draw game onto their descendants' spears, to warn them of enemies lying in wait, to refrain from interfering with births, and to intervene in other ways that bolstered their offspring's health, well-being, and prosperity.

Communicating strength

In a social world in which well-being and comity depended on deterrence, it was not sufficient to ensure that individuals and groups were "strong"; it was necessary as well to make this "strength" apparent to others. Prosperity rites and the public dimensions of life-cycle rites were therefore intended not only to ensure individual and collective strength but also to *demonstrate* it. In large measure, they did so through their sheer extravagance. The more and finer the feasts, pigs, and shell valuables presented in these ceremonies, the greater the number of singers and dancers and the louder the volume of their performances, and the larger and more lavishly decorated a new spirit house, the greater the strength that individuals and groups displayed. There were other modes of communication too. When male initiates finally left their seclusion, for instance, they paraded before an audience drawn from allied and (under the aegis of ritual truce) even enemy villages—their numbers, their well-fed bodies, and their oiled magnificence testifying to their own and the "strength" of their community.

But there was another, more subtle way in which “strength” was communicated, and it brings us back to the production of ritual art. Life-cycle ceremonies, prosperity rites, and the construction of spirit houses were wreathed in visual, plastic, and ephemeral art that seemed to communicate group strength not directly, through scale and number, but indirectly through the emotions, inciting feelings in the audience of a powerful, dangerous presence. The spirit house, with its great looming frame, its façade painted with bright colors that, against an olive-green jungle and tan earth, attract the eye, and its motifs, which resembled great eyes, claws, and teeth, seemed calculated to conjure the image of a great predator, protective and yet menacing (Gombrich 1982: 25–26). The same motifs appeared on other public artwork. Shields were not ubiquitous in Yangoru Boiken warfare, but when they did appear they were typically adorned with a central “eye of the *wala* [spirit],” a brightly colored design that typically boasted an eye-like circle surrounded by triangles resembling claws and teeth. A similar “*wala*-eye” design was commonly incised on wooden feasting bowls, molded and painted on clay pots and crocks in which feast-foods were prepared and served, and carved into drone flutes and hand-drums that provided musical accompaniment for these and other ceremonies. The basket work that adorned *hworia* and *hombuli* shell valuables commonly sported similar motifs.

One could detect the same intimidating affect in Yangoru’s non-material public art—its dance and music. When the masked *wala* figure, emblem of its sponsoring clan, emerged at midnight in the light of firebrands to honor a young woman’s first menstruation, for instance, its sponsors struck up an eerie, keening song that sent shivers down the back of the neck. In the *lumohlia* festivals of song and dance that celebrated the conclusion of major prosperity rites, the soaring tones, pounding hand-drums, strident flute notes, and massed, unrelenting dance movements imparted an impression of brooding intimidation. Even as scale and number impressed the cognitive dimensions of the mind with individual and collective strength, artistic form, color, and design seemed to slip by unnoticed to traffic in congruent emotions (Roscoe 1995a; 2011b).

It would be wrong to suppose, though, that Yangoru art was dedicated solely to evoking feelings of powerful presences. Not all public art was preoccupied with motifs of looming eyes, teeth, and claws; and not all art was public. Some, such as the *malingatcha* spirit figures and other displays associated with male and female initiation, were viewed by severely restricted audiences, and these commonly combined different elements and images—strange humanoid forms, living tableaux, and the like. This artwork, too, perhaps, targeted the emotions, albeit a different suite. One of my most striking memories from the field is from an afternoon when I was quizzing one of the few old gentlemen still alive who had passed through the second, communal stage of male initiation. After swearing me to secrecy, he began to relate the details of a tableau that had formed the core of this ceremonial grade. When he was finished, he paused, the memory evidently having moved him deeply. But the enigmatic combination of colors, elements, and initiators’ statements that he described had left me stunned as well. I could think of nothing adequate to say: The tableau was just so astoundingly strange. Who knows what he was feeling at that moment or had felt on that far-off day when he was being initiated? What is certain, though, was that this ingenious piece of art had had a profound emotive effect on him.

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9 Yangoru Boiken Ancestral Spirit Figure,
malingatcha

Yangoru, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea

Yangoru Boiken culture area

Ex. Leonard French Collection, Australia

Pre-contact, stone-carved, 19th century or before

19" (48.3 cm) in height

In concluding his essay on contact-era Yangoru Boiken culture, Paul Roscoe recounts a moving conversation he had with an elderly man describing the display of objects shown to him as a young man inside the ceremonial house during the second stage of his male initiation. It was only after swearing Roscoe to secrecy that the man related the details and described what he had seen and heard. Roscoe was stunned by what the old man said, stating that “the tableau was so astoundingly strange” and that with the act of remembering the scene, the old man, after all those intervening decades, was still deeply moved. It impressed upon Roscoe “the profound emotive effect” the art has in that context.

This present Yangoru Boiken figure was the inspiration for this exhibition on “Pre-contact” for that very reason—that sense of otherworldliness and astounding strangeness of these earliest objects that defies our aesthetic perceptions and takes us so far from what we’ve seen before. The full canon of New Guinea art may be thought known until a piece like this surfaces to remind us of art’s ability to bring to life the unthinkable and, apparently, unknowable.





LEONARD FRENCH

Reg MacDonald

In the accompanying black-and-white photograph, the Australian artist Leonard French relaxes in a comfortable chair, cigar fitted between two fingers, with a group of New Guinea objects, including the present Boiken bust, on a shelf behind. Probably the most popular artist in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s, French (1928–2017) was a keen collector of tribal art from Oceania: “The bold and distinctive carvings from these regions, especially those highlighted with strongly colored natural pigments, presented me with a new and exciting language of symbols.”¹

During an active career that lasted over six decades, French created in many mediums with work, usually series, that was nearly always about the perilous nature of the human condition. As a symbolist painter, French established an iconography of circles, hands, fish serpents, vines, Romanesque arches, oblongs, darts, waves and many others. He became a master at aesthetically arranging these symbols in graphic juxtapositions to illustrate the concepts for his glassworks, paintings, murals and tapestries.

In 1960, French began a series of 12 paintings on the life and martyrdom of the 16th-century English Jesuit priest Edmund Campion. It was with the “Campion Series” that he achieved critical acclaim and financial success and, coincidentally, began collecting Oceanic art.

The exhibition was held at the Farmers Blaxland Galleries in George Street, Sydney, in October 1961. Before the show even opened, the dealer, Rudy Komon, bought most of the Campion paintings. French, then 34 and in the money for the first time in his career, celebrated long and hard at the famous Marble Bar with his friend Melbourne poet and academic Vincent Buckley. First thing the next morning, still slightly tipsy, French caught a taxi to Senta Taft’s Galleries Primitif in Woollahra and acquired his first Melanesian pieces—four Asmat fighting shields. He had seen them for the first time soon after their arrival in Sydney when he and Buckley went for a “shake off the cobwebs walk” in Woollahra and accidentally discovered Galleries Primitif.

Following that acquisition, French became a keen collector of items of material culture from Melanesia and, later, after visiting South America, where he represented Australia in the Sao Paulo Biennial in Brazil, he began collecting good examples of Pre-Columbian art.

In 1968, he was critically acclaimed in Australia and abroad after completing the massive glass ceiling for the new National Gallery of Victoria. He used more than 10,000 pieces of 25 mm thick *dalle de verre* glass from France and Belgium, in a range of 50 colors, in this pioneering work. “Using a hammer and chisel I cut each piece of glass like a jewel to bounce and refract the colored light,” he explained. “My leather apron was covered with so much blood it looked like I was doing surgery.”²

Leonard French in his home with the Boiken figure visible behind him on the shelf circa mid 1960s.



In 1982, South African magnate and billionaire, the late Harry Oppenheimer, then chairman of Anglo American Corporation and De Beers, commissioned French to create a giant mural called “The Bridge” for his library at Brenthurst, his family’s heavily guarded, electric-fenced, 16-hectare compound in Johannesburg. A seminal work in French’s extensive oeuvre, “The Bridge,” a dramatic six-panel mural 2.7 meters x 5 meters, highlights South Africa’s brutal experiment with apartheid. It took French two years to complete, and when the library was officially opened in February 1984, it was hailed by Afrikaner journalists as South Africa’s “Guernica.”³

French’s paintings have found a home in all of the Australian State and most regional galleries, plus the Tate Britain, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York and many major private collections around the world. French was awarded an OBE (Order of the British Empire) for his contributions to Australian art and three Australian universities—Monash, La Trobe and the Australian National University—conferred honorary doctorates on him for his services to art and the Australian community.

While a member of Australia’s Commonwealth Art Advisory Board, and later the acquisitions committee and interim council of the Australian National Gallery, French became a forceful and persuasive advocate for the collection of outstanding examples of Oceanic art.⁴ Due to his articulate advocacy, two outstanding examples of Melanesian art were purchased for the Australian National Gallery’s collection. They are the famous Ambum Stone⁵ and the acclaimed twin figure (male and female) ancestral piece from Lake Sentani, Irian Jaya,⁶ once owned by the internationally recognized English sculptor Jacob Epstein.

For the last 35 years of his life, French lived in a converted 19th-century flour mill in the sleepy rural hamlet of Heathcote in Central Victoria, where he surrounded himself with tribal art objects both large and small—from an outstanding small wooden feast bowl from the Admiralty Islands with exquisitely carved anthropomorphic finials to the present superb pre-contact Boiken ancestral spirit figure. He allowed their distinctive designs, powerful color juxtapositions and demanding presence to intrude and influence his fertile imagination and his creative art practice.

Unfortunately, French did not catalogue his collection or keep any records of the transactions he had made when acquiring pieces, but the author can confirm that he bought most of his major South Pacific objects from the well-known Melbourne ethnographic dealer/collector Mark Lissauer. The author can recall him saying that he “bought the Boiken figure from Mark in the 1960s. I was selling well in those days and indulged myself.”

A Holocaust survivor, Lissauer, a scholarly man who was born in Hamburg, Germany, and settled in Australia after World War II, soon established himself as a knowledgeable authority on Oceanic art. In 1948, he visited Milne Bay, Papua New Guinea, and acquired his first tribal piece. Fifty years later, Lissauer had documented the acquisition of nearly 35,000 items, principally from Papua New Guinea, the islands of the Western Pacific, Asia and Tibet. The author can recall him saying he had made at least 40 collecting trips to Papua New Guinea.

French was exceedingly proud of this exceptional Boiken figure and he mounted it in a shadow box, together with several other minor Melanesian pieces, which he hung on the wall of the downstairs sitting room at Heathcote, a place in which he regularly rested after long working days, usually 10–12 hours, seven days a week, in the studio.

1 Leonard French, interview with author, Heathcote, 23/10/2007.

2 Leonard French interview with author, Brisbane, 8/10/2012.

3 Sasha Grishin, *Leonard French*, Craftsman House, Sydney, 1995, p. 56.

4 It is interesting to note that the well-known ethnographic expert, the late Douglas Newton, was a consultant to the Australian National Gallery in its early days and recommended that the institution buy only outstanding pieces of Oceanic art. He and French became close friends and shared the thrill of finding the rare and outstanding examples of Melanesian material culture.

5 Douglas Newton in *Australian National Gallery: An introduction*, 1982, pp. 164–165, describes the Ambum Stone from the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea as one of the two or three finest known from an extraordinary and mysterious aspect of New Guinea art. He said the stone was an “extraordinary image, like a humanoid or animal embryo with a great overarching head.”

6 Douglas Newton, *Australian National Gallery: An introduction*, 1982, p. 164. In this work, he described the double figure from Lake Sentani in Irian Jaya as an “unquestionable masterpiece.” The double figure was dredged from Lake Sentani in 1929 by Dr. Jacques Viot for a dealer in Paris.

10 Coastal Sepik Male Ancestral Spirit Figure, *beron kandimboag*

Murik Lakes area, Coastal Sepik region, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea

Field collected by SVD missionary Joseph Schmidt in the 1930s

Given to SVD missionary Georg Höltker between 1936 and 1939

Ex. University of Fribourg, Switzerland (inventory #559)

Ex. Pro Ethnographica, Fribourg, Switzerland

Pre-contact, stone-carved, 19th century

26¾" (68 cm) in height

The large Coastal Sepik figures with human hair headdresses and naturalistic noses are ancestral spirits known as *kandimboag*.³ These spirit figures were used in male initiation, and with the proper incantations and magical leaf offerings, spoke through human intermediaries. When activated and respected, they bestowed strength and power in hunting and warfare to their human descendants. A small subset of these most important figures has long serpent-tipped projections coming down from the chest such as seen in this present example.

Much of what we know about Murik Lakes ethnography comes from the Society of the Divine Word (SVD) missionary Joseph Schmidt, who was stationed in Big Murik village from 1913 until 1943. Like many SVD missionaries, Schmidt valued the local religion and took pains to record the local people's beliefs and rituals, writing a number of articles for the journal *Anthropos* during his career.

Schmidt collected this figure sometime between 1936 and 1939 and noted its importance, age (19th century) and its "very long appendage extending from the sternum."

This figure is being offered for the first time in over 80 years and I submit it as the best of its type. It has a power, grace and dignity that is unrivaled.

³ Sometimes spelled *kandimbong*.





The Society of the Divine Word Missionaries and their Ethnographic Collection Activity along the Sepik River

Rainer F. Buschmann

In the second half of the 1930s, Pater Georg Höltker paid a visit to his SVD counterpart Joseph Schmidt at the Murik mission station located on the mouth of the Sepik River. Based in Murik since the end of the German period of New Guinea, Schmidt had published some articles about Murik ethnography and linguistics in the SVD journal *Anthropos* (1923/24, 1926, 1933), defining the region as Nor-Papua. In light of SVD mission compromises, Schmidt did not outright dismiss earlier Murik religious beliefs but recorded them faithfully and even collected associated sacred carvings. This included the *beron kandimboag* (loincloth sacred figure) displayed in these pages. According to Schmidt, the figure was quite old and dated to the nineteenth century. Höltker would later add that the “very long appendix extending from the sternum” was atypical and highly unusual for the cultures of the Sepik’s delta (Rüegg 2015, 2018).

According to Schmidt’s ethnographic notes (1933: 676–678), the *kandimboag* were higher spirits who once lived up the Sepik River in the village of Boanang. Dispute among the spirits led to violence and diffusion and some of the *kandimboag* migrated to the Murik region, and especially the spirit Andena, who taught the Murik people the construction of sailing canoes. Carvings were dedicated to the spirits—Schmidt alternates their designation as idols or ancestor figures—and served several functions. Elsewhere, Schmidt (1926: 40) argued that while carvings represented the full body of a spirit, masks would represent only their faces. He further elaborated that while masks served discord and war, carvings were employed for more benign purposes such as the procuring of food. The carvings were also used in the training of hunting dogs, to protect young uninitiated boys, to bless new canoes with speed and endurance, and to assist young girls and women in getting men to fall in love with them (Schmidt 1933: 377–378).

German renegade Catholic priests founded the *Societas Verbi Divini* (Society of the Divine Word, or SVD for short) in the late 19th century in the town of Steyl, a Dutch town at the border with Germany. Following unification in 1871, Otto von Bismarck enacted a number of laws that were geared to control Catholic influence in Germany. This process, also known as *Kulturkampf* (cultural struggle) led many Catholic priests to abandon their country of birth and the Steyler missionaries emerged as a result of this defiance. In the 1880s, as more compromising tones between the German government and the Holy See emerged, the SVD sought out new frontiers, which the society found in Germany’s colonial effort. Steyler missionaries started to venture out into China, Africa, and, following 1896, also in German New Guinea.

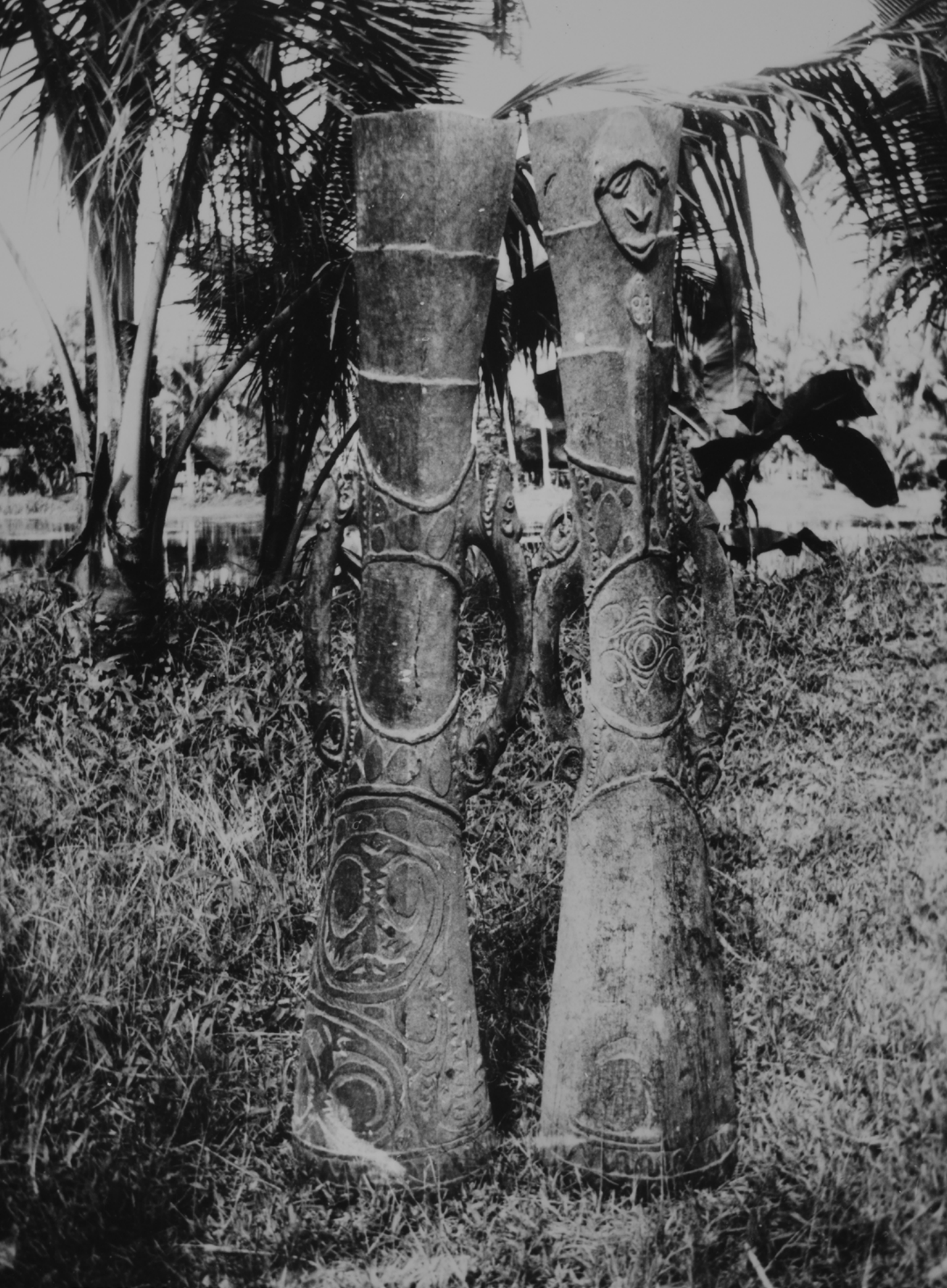
Arriving at Madang (then Friedrich-Wilhelmshafen), the Steyler missionaries faced great animosity from already-established societies. To avoid confrontation, Renaissance man Ludwig Kärnbach invited the first SVD missionaries to settle on the island of Tumleo, opposite Berlinhafen (near Aitape). From this station the SVD mission gradually expanded eastward along the coast until reaching the mouth of the Sepik River. In 1913, SVD station Marienberg was opened on the lower Sepik, where Father Franz Kirschbaum (1882–1939) became an avid collector of ethnographic objects. He was partially inspired



Inside of the spirit house of Kanengara.

by ethnographer Richard Thurnwald and would donate close to 1,000 artifacts to the Vatican museum. In 1913, an SVD station opened in Big Murik, with Joseph Schmidt as its main representative. (Wichmann 1912: 614, 651, Lutkehaus, 2007; Matbob, 2001, Piepke 2012).

All missionary societies collected ethnographic artifacts, some to keep trophies celebrating their conversion success, others as commodities to supplement the meager income of their respective mission stations. The SVD was different in this regard: “[SVD founder] Arnold Janssen’s missionaries introduced a somewhat revolutionary dimension into the meaning of mission—the *scientific study of humankind as an integral part of the missionary task itself*” (Anthropos Institute Director Louis Luzbetak cited in Loder-Neuhold, 2019, emphasis in the original). This emphasis on combining ethnography with mission efforts is associated with the name Wilhelm Schmidt (1868–1954). He joined the SVD in 1890, yet never went into the mission field. His vast correspondence with missionaries in Africa and New Guinea, however, alerted him to the wealth of linguistic and ethnographic data emanating from the mission outposts. The Austrian Schmidt was instrumental in creating the journal *Anthropos* (first issue in 1906) that would primarily focus on the publication of Catholic missionaries, who Schmidt felt were frequently excluded from the anthropological discourse. When the Vatican opened a museum in the 1920s dedicated to ethnographic objects returned to Rome by missionaries, Schmidt became its first director. His theoretical directions did not sustain the test of time. Schmidt developed a diffusionist outlook that is associated with the culture-circle idea and he is best known, and frequently attacked, for his belief in an *Urmonotheismus* (primitive monotheism) that stipulated that the study of indige-



Two hand drums (water drums), are pushed into the water and give sound like crocodile scream, used for initiation ceremonies of young men. Photo Karl Laumann 1948



Large spirit figure named Tamasua. Photo Karl Laumann 1948

nous people would reveal some of God's original messages. His theories may have been misguided, but Wilhelm Schmidt provided a publication venue and a context within which to place the SVD ethnographic collection activity in New Guinea (Dietrich 1991; Loder-Neuhold 2019; Marchand 2003).

A very active ethnographic collector in New Guinea was Joseph Schmidt, who bore no direct relation to Wilhelm Schmidt other than the very common Germanic last name, was born in 1876 in Ulmecke near Meschede (Westfalia, Germany). He joined the SVD in 1901 and was ordained in 1912. A year later he arrived in German New Guinea to assume the SVD mission station at Big Murik, west of the Sepik River's mouth. With the exception of a three-year stay at Wewak, Schmidt would remain at Murik station for most of his life. He would teach German to the inhabitants of Murik and learned their language in return. When Australia took over the administration of German New Guinea, many of the SVD missionaries were allowed to continue their work. Schmidt remained dedicated to Murik station until the Japanese invasion during the Second World War. Starting in 1943, he was interned, along with many other missionaries active in New Guinea, in several places including Hollandia (now Jayapura, Irian Jaya). Shortly before liberation, Schmidt passed away on 18 February 1945, one of the many missionary casualties of the Pacific Theater of the Second World War. Following the conflict, Schmidt's former SVD mission at Murik was combined with the nearby lower Sepik station at Marienberg (Fuchs 1953: 275, note 7; Lipset 1997: 49).

SVD member Georg Höltker (1895–1976) visited Joseph Schmidt at the Murik station before the outbreak of the Second World War. Höltker had been a very active member of the Anthropos Institute (founded in 1931) in St. Gabriel in Austria and served on the editorial staff of the journal *Anthropos* (1932–35). Similar to Wilhelm Schmidt, Höltker was an Anthropos Pater, that is, he was more interested in scientific research than in conversion. While he never spent time missionizing among the people of New Guinea, Höltker nevertheless undertook an extensive research trip (1936–39) to the island. The annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany led to the moving of the institute to Fribourg in Switzerland. In 1936, with expanding Nazi aggression in Europe, Höltker joined Cornelius Crane in an expedition to New Guinea sponsored by the Peabody Museum. The expedition originally planned to explore the newly encountered Highland cultures as well as the Sepik River, already visited by Crane between the years of 1928 and 1929. Obtaining permits for the many locations as well as participants, which alongside Höltker included the aforementioned SVD missionary Kirschbaum and famous anthropologist Douglas Oliver, led Crane to reshuffle the expedition's locale. Many participants ultimately quit the venture (Niles 2012: 147–152). In another rendition of this failed expedition, Grauer (2018: 25–26) maintains that the colonial authorities refused to issue visas to researchers studying the Highlands of New Guinea to avoid disruptive first-contact scenarios. Instead of returning to Europe, Höltker decided to shift his emphasis to the coastal region of formerly German New Guinea and employ the existing network of SVD stations to support his collecting activity. It was here where he revised his research agenda. Realizing that his SVD brethren had spent considerable time among the indigenous peoples, learning, as did Joseph Schmidt, the local language, Höltker sought to combine his observations with those of the local SVD missionaries. The missionaries in the field, he claimed, enthusiastically embraced his approach (Höltker 1937 a, b). Other SVD brethren proved less impressed and accusing Höltker of merely acquiring existing knowledge from resident missionaries (Grauer 2018: 17). Höltker's experiment was nevertheless successful, as he returned to Switzerland in 1939 with not only the present *beron kandimboag* figure from Joseph Schmidt but a collection of close to 2,000 artifacts and 2,500 photographs (Hoffmann & Ruegg, 2016).

Höltker returned to a Europe on the brink of a war that would, only a little over two years later, spread to the SVD mission station in New Guinea. Many priests and sisters were interned by the invading Japanese troops; a fair number of the SVD missionaries, suspected of aiding the allied cause, were killed (Nolan, 2017). Among the casualties was, as already mentioned, Joseph Schmidt. Naturally, under these circumstances, ethnographic collecting came to a grinding halt. In 1943, a small group of SVD priests and sisters left the Japanese-controlled areas to reach allied lines following an arduous trek; among them was Pater Karl Laumann (Anonymous, 1944).

Returning to the Sepik region following the conflict, Laumann resumed the work performed by Höltker, Kirschbaum, and Schmidt. He resided in the mission station Kanduanum II, founded in 1947. From this mission outpost, Laumann would venture into, at the time of his writing, the less explored regions of the Sepik. His main emphasis was on the Yuat River, a tributary of the mighty Sepik. Here Laumann encountered a rich tradition of wood carving that was equal to that of the Sepik River, as the accompanying photographs attest (Laumann 1951, 1952, 1954).

Signaling drum with beater. The drum is named Singimagan. The ends were carved by Kopani who is still alive. Representation: Large head is the male Masalai Awiramalimbo, under his nose is a pig snout (one tooth broken), it is a watermasalai who breaks through the ditches. He lives in a hole, moves like a snake, like a leguan. People give him food, they adorn him. He makes the sun come out, the good times. When people play (pilai) near his home, then he hits them with a stick (brum) and from that they develop the skin disease 'kaskas' that makes the skin swell very much. When people give him food the swelling disappears. The other head on the opposite side of the drum: Head of the black cockatoo with head feathers and tail. The small head is the child of Awiramalimbo. The significance of the two carving on the drum body is not known. (Text by P. Laumann). Photo by Karl Laumann 1950. 280: The hunting and war god Vlissoa. Published in Anthropos 1952, paper by Laumann. Photo Karl Laumann.





ABOVE: The hunting and war god Vlissoa. Published in *Anthropos* 1952, photo by Karl Laumann.

FACING PAGE: Tambaran Urungenam, friend of Vlissoa (above right) from Antefugoa. Pater holding the spears of the tambaran. Photo by Karl Laumann 1951.



Joseph Schmidt, Georg Höltker and Karl Laumann exemplify the very active, but frequently neglected, ethnographic collection activity of Catholic missionaries. The *beron kandimboag* featured in these pages stands for a very uncommon example of Sepik material culture. Moreover, it illustrates an SVD collection practice that was less a byproduct of indigenous conversion and more an attempt at combining Catholic ideology with careful ethnographic study.

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FACING PAGE: Spirit family: Mündabala, war god; Pandi his wife and Andi his son. July 1952, photo Karl Laumann, see *Anthropos* 1954, paper by Laumann.





11 Sawos Suspension Hook

Grasslands north of the Middle Sepik River, East Sepik Province,
Papua New Guinea
Sawos culture area
Collected by the Rhenish Missionary Society circa 1909
Ex. Baron August III von der Heydt (1851–1929), Wuppertal, 1910
Binoche et Giquello, Paris, 14 November 2019, lot 40
Pre-contact, stone-carved, mid 19th century or before
23" (58.3 cm) in height

I mentioned in the description for the Leonard French Boiken figure the extraordinary aspect of pre-contact New Guinea art to offer up on occasion objects without historical precedent. In fact, that is the allure and very essence of pre-contact art—that it came before our perception and awareness of the genre and that it both expands and reinforces our knowledge of the art produced by that culture. The present Sawos suspension hook with its unique composition of openwork semicircles is, as such, a tangible relic of untold and unseen Sawos art history.



A Sawos Pre-Contact Suspension Hook

Gilles Bounoure

In the eyes of Western scholars, the people that the latmul (who inhabit the shores of the Middle Sepik River) call the Sawos (the people of the bush, or the interior) were long considered to be their vassals. It was believed that the latmul forced the Sawos to trade sago for fish and that the latter were perpetually at the mercy of latmul raids prior to the interdiction of headhunting. However, recent research (KOCHER SCHMID 2005; CLAAS 2009) has now determined the validity of the local legends that identify the Sawos area north of the river as the starting point for successive migrations and the place of origin for various settlements, including the latmul villages that maintained family connections with Sawos clans and were also trade partners excluded from being attacked or offended. Where sculptural expressions and traditions are concerned, the relationships between Sawos and latmul arts also need to be reevaluated, using works as old as this hook, for example, as models for study.

The first contacts between Europeans and the people of the Sawos region do not predate the First World War (SCHINDLBECK 1983: 4), so it might seem surprising that the presence of Sawos-style objects in both public and private collections in some cases, like this one, actually does. We nonetheless know that some of the most accomplished pieces of Sawos art, like the so-called *malu* boards, which have a stylistic connection with the hook under consideration here, circulated in the latmul area, sometimes as marriage gifts, and could have been used in exchanges as far away as along the lower reaches of the Sepik River. Additionally, some very old objects, notably including helmet masks that probably date to the 17th century, are known to have been preserved in the Sawos ceremonial houses until the middle of the 1960s.

Although part of a “diffusionist” theory that is nowadays considered ridiculous, certain characterizations of the main Melanesian art styles proposed by Felix Speiser nonetheless remain viable, and in the case of the Sawos arts, scholars still speak, as he originally did, of a “curvilinear style” (SPEISER 1936: 307, “Kurvenstil”) that involves the use and interplay of positive and negatives space and even openwork sculptural techniques. More recently, Douglas Newton recognized the style as the distant descendant of the curved designs used in the decoration of early Austronesian pottery and the bronze drums of the ancient Dong Son civilization (NEWTON 1988: 10). The above-mentioned *malu* boards, which he was among the first to study (NEWTON 1963), are among the most sophisticated and highly developed examples of this style that combines curvilinear designs and openwork.

The ornamental virtuosity that one observes on the frontally conceived *malu* boards is deployed in all three dimensions on the hook being presented here. While the boards were intended for use on walls or as façades (SCHINDLBECK 2015: 94), this object was designed to be suspended and to be viewed from all angles. Originally there appear to have been transversal arcs, whose beginnings can still be identified, that complemented the concentric lateral ones that remain well preserved. The complexity of the sculpture, undoubtedly fashioned from the root of a very large tree like the *malu* boards were, strongly suggests that this hook was not intended for only domestic use.

Rather than a janiform being that is absent from the local traditions, two back-to-back figures, a possible reference to various Sawos myths that describe two brothers or a reminder that these Sawos

ceremonial objects often functioned in pairs, like the slit drums (SCHINDLBECK 2015: 92), rise up from the center of these arcs that represent their sides and their arms around the waist. Once again referring to the *malu* boards, one often observes a central design made up of a pair of joined figures and even, in “type 2” (NEWTON 1963: 2), of a pair of hornbills. These birds of the forest often live in groups of up to forty and cooperate with one another. They mate for life. The male looks after the female in her tree-hole nest during the brooding period, and while she raises their young, he takes on the responsibility of feeding the entire family. These birds and their way of life served as a kind of model for human couples and the villages in which they lived in Sawos country and elsewhere as well.

This last hypothesis could be further supported by the presence of a bird head placed in the pubic area whose “beak” extends downward to the prongs of the hook, a representation often noted on this kind of object, as well as by the presence of a slight bulging of the forehead of one of the heads, which could indicate a male coiffure, and is absent from the other head. The two figures shared ear ornaments and the holes used to hang them from are seen on either side of the forehead. Other ornaments would have been hung from the pierced septum above the mouth, which is narrow as it most often is on the oldest examples of Sawos sculpture, and the ensemble of the two faces displays an appearance that is observed on the sculptures of their neighbors, the Southern Abelam, with whom various stylistic “bridges” are apparent (SCHINDLBECK 2015: 95). The rendering of the nipples as buttons is more characteristic of Sawos sculpture. Vestiges of pigments remind us that this hook was once painted.

The circumstances in which this object came to Europe and was preserved there were recently investigated (BOUNOURE 2019: 52). The Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft (Rhenish Missionary Society, RMS), which had been based in Barmen, in the valley of the Wupper River, a confluent of the Rhine, since 1828, had adhered to the Prussian monarchy’s religious policies since before the unification of Germany, whose colonial expansion it also followed, beginning in South West Africa. After it had become the main German missionary society, it developed a project to establish a presence in New Guinea and to create plantations that would generate revenues for itself at the same time as it went about the business of converting indigenous workers.

In 1887, the RMS dispatched two missionaries to Finschhafen and they obtained the permission of the Neu-Guinea Kompagnie (NGK), which managed the colony before it was officially annexed, to come aboard its steamer the *Samoa* on a mission to explore the Sepik River along with a group of scientists. According to the only account of this voyage, by a missionary named Eich (CLAAS & ROSCOE 2009), the verdict was unequivocal: The shores of the river were unsuited to the kinds of agriculture that had been envisioned, and the natives were too hostile to be considered for recruitment for plantation work. A few objects appear to have been traded on the way up the river, but the return was non-stop, for fear of the arrows the expedition had endured on the way up.

The NGK did not allow the RMS to establish a settlement near Finschhafen, the colony’s provisional capital, but only further east, in Astrolabe Bay, and near one of its own plantations. This proximity limited the new establishment’s recruitment and development possibilities, and the missionaries’ very rigid attitude compromised their relations with the local population. What followed were endless rejections, bad harvests, epidemics, revolts, twenty missionary deaths in as many years, and a sixteen-year wait for a first convert in 1906. Malai was his name, and a photograph of him in warrior’s attire brought him notoriety



in Germany. Soon thereafter, he became the leader of an anti-German “conspiracy,” the final straw that turned the mission into a “fiasco” (BADE 1975, GARRETT 1992: 20–24).

With the exception of a single missionary by the name of Diehl who explored the area around Astrolabe Bay “around 1910” (KLEIN 2010), the missionaries appeared to have been completely devoid of any ethnographic curiosity and did not collect any objects in the vicinity of their stations, let alone from areas further away like the Sepik. Aside from our hook, only two other objects, now in private hands, appear to have been brought to Europe by these missionaries. The first is another Sawos hook, of substantial age but quite damaged, whose owner dates it to around 1810 (DE GRUNNE 2017), and the other is an extremely rare latmul water drum which was originally one of a pair (BONHAMS 2019: lot 18). The “widow” drum and the two damaged hooks were undoubtedly deconsecrated either due to accident or because they failed to produce efficient magic and could consequently be ceded to Westerners without much risk of reprisal.

Alarming reports on the state of the RMS’s settlements in New Guinea incited Eduard Kriele, the director of its headquarters in Barmen, to come inspect them with the intention of reforming them in 1909 (SPIECKER 1921; KRIELE 1927). It was probably Kriele who brought these three pieces back with him to Germany. He could have acquired them in the course of his trip, or they might have been brought by a visitor to one of the mission outposts.¹ In 1910, the pieces entered the collection of Baron August III von der Heydt (1851–1929), but it is not known whether he purchased them from the mission or whether they were given to him as a token of gratitude.

From a dynasty of bankers that had been made nobility by the Prussian monarchy (his grandfather August I had been finance minister for Emperor William I and had managed to erase the Franco-Prussian war debt) and himself a financier and an advisor to William II, whom he befriended, August III was also a benefactor and a philanthropist in Elberfeld near Barmen (the two towns were later joined together along with others to form the agglomeration of Wuppertal). In 1900, he had invited the emperor to inaugurate the “hanging tram” suspended over the Wupper River and honored him with an equestrian statue. Two years later von der Heydt opened a museum at his own expense (which has borne his name since 1961), at which he regularly organized exhibitions of modern and contemporary art.

His political and religious conservatism had not prevented him from pursuing his passion for the French impressionists and the first German expressionists, and his museum hosted the first collective exhibition of the works of the artists who, a few months after, formed the Blaue Reiter group. His collection also included non-European art objects before Franz Marc and Wassily Kandinsky praised their sculptural qualities in their publication, and this may explain the fondness his son, Eduard von der Heydt (1882–1964), himself a great collector, had for these objects even though the three pieces from the RMS never belonged to him.²

¹ In 2019, I named two other “friends” of the RMS, physician and linguist Otto Dempwolff (1871–1938) and Martin Voigt (1878–1952), as possible collectors of these objects. That possibility can now be excluded. The former was in New Guinea only briefly (DEMPWOLFF 2018), without enough time for anything but his medical and linguistic pursuits, and the latter, who was the Postmaster of the German colony between 1902 and 1906, and then repatriated when he fell ill with malaria, worked primarily in Herbertshöhe. He collected mainly objects from the Bismarck Archipelago as well as photographs, most of which he kept until his death (KLEIN 2014). Some of his pieces entered the collections of the Museum Fünf Kontinente in Munich, while the rest were sold by his heirs at Christie’s in New York on November 20th, 1997.

Another explanation that does not exclude the preceding one is that perhaps as the head of the Von der Heydt–Karsten & Sons bank, as well as, along with his cousin Karl, of the Berlin Von der Heydt bank and of a colonial merchandise import and export business that published a statistical and economic almanac called the *Von der Heydt s Kolonial Handbuch, Jahrbuch der deutschen Kolonial-und-Übersee Unternehmungen (Handbook and Yearbook of German Colonial and Overseas Enterprises)* between 1907 and 1914, it was simply important to August III to own and exhibit artworks from the German colonies in which he was so heavily invested. He might also have been providing financial support to the RMS of German New Guinea, which is mentioned for the first time in his 1909 annual report and described as an agricultural and commercial enterprise.

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² Eduard did not begin to collect until sometime after 1920. He had settled and established himself as a banker in London, but in 1914 his possessions, considered “German,” were sequestered. He found himself without his personal fortune. New financial schemes enabled him to find his footing and start collecting again after the war. We know that he and his brother “bought back” the collection their father had assembled in Elberfeld (Wuppertal). It was probably no longer in the family, but had become the property of the town’s museum. He was thus able to decorate his luxurious villa in Zandvoort with paintings acquired by August III, as well as with a few non-European objects, but the hook apparently did not interest him and remained in Wuppertal (FEHLEMANN 2002, ILLNER 2013). He acquired most of the pieces in his collection of African, Amerindian and Oceanic art, now in the Rietberg Museum, from Charles Ratton and Arthur Speyer II. He was able to profit greatly from having the Swiss-German nationalities he obtained in the 1930s and wanted to create museums as his father had done. At the close of the Second World War, he was, however, suspected of being the main Swiss banker for the Wehrmacht and Nazi secret services, and that may be one of the reasons why in 1945 the Musée de l’Homme refused to acquire the many objects that Eduard von der Heydt had left on deposit there during the war. Even once absolved of the accusation in 1948, his name remained tarnished and he was able to donate neither to the Zurich Museum (Rietberg Museum) he had founded in 1952 nor to the one in Wuppertal he had been enriching since 1937 and to which he finally left his collection of paintings, many of which had come to him through his father. It was the latter and not Eduard whom the authorities wanted to honor when they renamed their museum the Von der Heydt Museum. The museum has become specialized in the modern and contemporary sculptural arts and has acquired a reputation for its ambitious exhibition programming and acquisitions policy.



12 Middle Sepik River Neckrest

Middle Sepik River, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea

Iatmul culture

Ex. Loed and Mia Van Bussel, Amsterdam

Ex. Jolika Collection of Marcia and John Friede

Ex. de Young Museum, San Francisco

Published in *New Guinea Art: Masterpieces of the Jolika Collection from Marcia and John Friede*, 2005, fig. 213

Pre-contact, stone-carved, C-14 dating inconclusive, but Friede notes probably 17th–19th century in his published description of the piece.

28⁷/₈" (73.3 cm) in height

Of the 598 New Guinea art objects illustrated in *New Guinea Art: Masterpieces of the Jolika Collection from Marcia and John Friede*, Friede selected 35 to be reproduced on a double spread of pages. It is a testament to the rarity and quality of this Iatmul neckrest that it was one of those deemed most worthy.



A special headrest from Sepik

Christian Coiffier (Attaché at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris)



What does this piece of wood represent? At one end, a woman is holding her breasts in her hands. Her legs are wide apart and reveal a gaping vulva. Between the legs of this woman is the bust of a flying fox with a huge head that seems to emerge dramatically from her vulva and which is clearly visible when looking at the piece from its side and front (Friede, 2004: 245). The feet of the woman lean on the front legs of the animal. The flying fox, considered locally as a particular bird, is often represented by only its head on objects of the Sepik. It is sometimes stylized in a triangular form, locally associated to the pubic triangle of a woman (Hauser-Schaublin, 2015: 150, Hamson, 2011: 170–174). It is not impossible that the wooden bar could depict the enormous phallus of the cultural hero to which the flying fox is often associated (Coiffier, 2020: 48). Its tip is carved in the shape of the head of a white cockatoo, a bird that, according to local mythology, taught the original woman how to give birth by splitting her vulva with its yellow feather (Coiffier, 1994: 504). Flying fox has the reputation of having an extravagant sexuality, similar to that of the cultural hero with which it is associated. The meaning of this object is therefore clearly related to sexuality and fertility or to the perpetuation of family lineage. It is

not excluded that the heads of the two animals represented each evoke a family totem. Indeed, both flying fox and cockatoo are known as totemic birds throughout the northern Sepik region.

This very rare piece represents a widespread ancient belief, especially in the Sepik region. In the past, local people imagined the placenta as the envelope of a dead child, the twin of the fetus, and the seat of a powerful and protective spirit. Ethnologists Kathleen Barlow (1995: 93 and 111) and David Lipset, who studied Murik society in the Sepik estuary, provide complementary insights into this belief (Lipset, 1997: 54):

“In Murik, gestation is no self-sufficient, uterine process. ... The mother is not held to be the ‘true mother’ (nogo ngain) of the fetus, only its ‘canoe’ (gai’iin). The ‘true mother’ is a womb spirit called the ‘bat mother’ or the ‘flying fox mother’ (nabwag-ngain) ‘who’ is located in the placenta.”

Lipset points out that, if this spirit is not the cause of the child's conception, it determines his sex, his resemblance to one of his parents and his future personality. There are many myths about a time when there were only female flying foxes. Humanity is said to have come from their encounters with a

dog-man, considered a cultural hero (Coiffier, 2020: 47). This is the case of the myth of the “Island of Women” collected from the Arapesh by Margaret Mead (1970: 327–331). The flying foxes are very often represented or evoked in the material culture of the Sepik people. Thus, among the Boiken, Murik and Arapesh there are ceremonial wooden dishes with various carved representations of flying foxes or vulva (Hamson, 2011: 164–201, Coiffier, 2020: 52–53). But they are also frequently painted on all kinds of supports, such as wooden shields, house beams and loft panels. Bat and flying fox spirits once played a predominant role before the Christianization of these societies; they were the most important actors in the proper development of the personality of individuals (from conception to death) and thus acted during complex rituals to ensure their proper socialization within the group. In the 1930s, Margaret Mead (1970: 243) collected information on the use of the flying fox image during initiations of young Arapesh. During the *maolimu* initiation stage, the life of the initiate was then symbolically associated with that of a flying fox having an extravagant sexuality, according to local belief. Thus, the transformation of the young man into flying animal during this initiation period was supposed to recall his gestation in the womb, under the control of his flying fox mother acting also as his initiator. We clearly know that initiation was perceived as a second birth.

However, it is not excluded that this piece of unusual length (73.3 cm) could serve as a horizontal *ngungung* bar used during childbirth. In this case, it would have been attached by two cords (placed at the location of the current rattan feet) to a beam of the house in order to form a kind of trapeze that the parturient could grasp with her hands to control the labor herself during the birthing (Coiffier, 1994: 504, 2020: 50–51). For more than a century, the representations of these flying animals among the Sepik populations have been deeply transformed by the new ideas introduced by Christian missions. Bats and flying foxes are now often associated with the Devil's image. This piece, evoking a pagan gestation, seems to have escaped the censorship of missionaries and gives a further possible reason to suppose that this piece is very old.

This piece has many features of the latmul or Sawos art of the Middle Sepik. Thus, the trifid pattern painted around the navel represents the ritual scarification that was once practiced on the belly of the initiates. This protected the navel, mark of the cutting of the umbilical cord, associated to a rattan liana (*Calamus sp.*) in local mythology. This cutting of the cord between the fetus and the placenta is the act that gives life to the newborn by separating him/her from the world of the dead and ancestors. Another trifid pattern is found on the face of the woman at the level of her nose. These patterns and the ochre-red color of the women seem to refer to an ancestor representation. All these characteristics can be found on the sculptures that can be seen today on the gables of Sawos ceremonial houses and are representations of the original female ancestor Kavalagwa. The curvilinear pattern on the head of cockatoos is typical of the ornamentation of the latmul figures. Unlike the woman, the flying fox is painted black on a red background with whitish patterns on the face. The eyes of the woman, like those of the flying fox, are cowrie shells associated locally with vulva.

It is very likely that the head of the woman was covered with a wig of real human hair, which disappeared over time. The piercings of the earlobes and nasal septum, which from an early age were made by using a flying fox bone, are decorated with cords of vegetal fibers. The patina of the central bar can attest to both hand manipulation or frequent contact with hair grease during its use as a headrest.

In any case, the one who used such an object to rest placed his skull in the middle of the two animal heads. If the woman and the cockatoo look outward, only the face of the flying fox is turned toward the central bar. The incarnated spirit of this nocturnal animal could thus intervene in the dreams of the sleeper by serving as an intercessor with his ancestors and protect him. Among the latmul, dreaming is considered the hidden counterpart of the day life of human beings, in the same way that death is the counterpart of life.

The latmuls are recognized as great artists who have produced an extraordinary artistic production for more than a century. It is likely that the specificity of their thinking lies in the central place given to the dream that constitutes the link between reality and spirituality (Coiffier, 2005: 150).

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13 Lumi Hook Bowl

Lumi area, Torricelli Mountains, West Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea
Olo culture area

Field collected by Michael Hamson circa 1998

Ex. Jolika Collection of Marcia and John Friede, Rye, New York

Sotheby's, Paris, 16 June 2010, lot 5

Published in *The Elegance of Menace: Aesthetics of New Guinea Art*, Michael Hamson, 2005, pp. 32–33

Pre-contact, stone-carved, 19th century

26" (66.2 cm) in height

This rare form of bowl comes from the Lumi area of Papua New Guinea's West Sepik Province (Sandaun). The two elegant hooks are clearly related to the *yipwon* figures from the Karawari River and thus show the extent to which this motif has traveled within the Sepik Basin. The two hooks coming from stems on either side of the leaf-shaped bowl point in opposite directions, creating a dynamism and sense of movement.

The opposed hooks, set poised at the end of their armatures, seem ready to move and create energy. New Guinea art is all about power and doing the real work of hunting, warfare and perpetuating life. It is rare that this ancestral potential for action is expressed in such an abstract and elegant fashion.





14 Nagum Boiken Ancestral Spirit Figure

Coastal Prince Alexander Mountains, East
Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea

Nagum Boiken culture area

Ex. Lynda Cunningham Collection

Myers/Adams Auction, New York, February 20, 1975, lot 122

Lewis/Wara Gallery, Seattle, 2001

Sotheby's, New York, November 16, 2001,
lot 192

Tomkins Collection (TC 94), New York

Pre-contact, stone-carved, late 19th/early
20th century

45¼" (114.9 cm) in height

This figure was part of a group of Boiken ancestral spirit sculptures Lynda Cunningham collected in the late 1960s/early 1970s. For those of you who do not have a copy of the Myers/Adams Auction catalog *Primitive Art of Melanesia* from 1975, I highly recommend trying to get a copy. It's my understanding that the pieces in that sale were all collected by Cunningham and there are many very interesting New Guinea objects with helpful descriptions that could only have been written by the person who field collected them. What makes that catalog so surprising are the 18 Boiken figures illustrated.⁴ This is an extraordinary group of pieces previously unpublished and virtually unknown at the time. The present figure was the best of the bunch.

⁴ While Cunningham listed Boiken village names and areas where the figures were collected, she, as was common at the time, referred to them broadly as Arapesh.







15 Biwat Canoe Mask

Yuat River, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea
 Biwat culture
 Ex. Dutch private collection acquired in the 1930/40s
 Christie's, Paris, 8 April 2020, lot 40
 Pre-contact, stone-carved, 19th century
 15" (38.1 cm) in height

Canoe masks were attached to painted sago spathe shields placed at the bow of a war canoe. The masks brought spiritual power and aggression to the warriors while instilling fear and panic in their enemies. This particular example has the circular disc motif on the forehead, classic for Biwat masks, deep-set shell eyes and a gaping, tooth-filled mouth. For a mask that is essentially lashed to a flat surface, it has wonderful volumes—the forehead, the nicely rendered nose and, best of all, the nice full lips.

16 Middle Sepik River *mai* Mask

Korogo village, Middle Sepik River, East

Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea

Iatmul culture area

Collected by Wayne Heathcote in 1969

Ex. John and Marian Scott Collection, Manhattan

Beach, California, acquired from above in 1982

Bonham's, Los Angeles, 2 July 2020, lot 8

Pre-contact, stone-carved, late 19th/early

20th century

23¼" (59 cm) in height

The *mai* masks from the Middle Sepik River area are iconic, with older, original examples being featured in most surveys of Oceanic and New Guinea art, and have been the inspiration for an untold number of made-for-sale tourist masks. Paradoxically, this iconic stature has blunted connoisseurship for them. It is as if familiarity has bred not necessarily contempt but a certain indifference. This is a shame, as *mai* masks can be gorgeous and bring to life all that is great in Sepik art from its spiritual intensity, delicacy of line and the mind-bending transformational quality blending man, spirit and animal.







17 Yangoru Boiken Male
Ancestral Spirit Figure, *malintang*

Hangrerag village, Yangoru area, East Sepik Province,
Papua New Guinea

Boiken culture area

Ex. Michael Kremerskothen Collection, Dortmund

Published in *Art of the Boiken*, Michael Hamson, 2011, no. 41

Pre-contact, stone-carved, 19th century

28 1/8" (71.5 cm) in height

In one of my early catalogs, I brought up the idea of integrity as an aesthetic concept for New Guinea art. It was an attempt to define that quality where everything about the object, down to the smallest details of form, expression and surface, are completely true to an object's function. I mentioned that this integrity is most often found on pre-contact objects that are free from any hint of decadence or any whiff of ulterior motive. The wear, patina, piercings and pigments all confirm a long traditional use—which in turn suggests a cultural soundness and compatibility; it has been deemed worthy and appropriate by the culture that produced it.

The present Boiken figure has just that sense of integrity. The arms undulate from the imprecision of stone tooling, the eyes are offset in an unselfconscious manner, the pigments are uneven but strong. The erosion, wear and loss are less about what is missing and more about what the figure has endured and accomplished. This is a sculpture full of character and uncompromised aesthetic integrity.



18 Yangoru Boiken *talipun* Bride Price Mask

Yangoru region, East Sepik Province, Papua New Guinea

Yangoru Boiken culture area

Ex. Ronald Clyne Collection, Brooklyn, New York

Pre-contact, stone-carved, late 19th/early 20th century

14½" (36.9 cm) in height

Many of you would know of the Yangoru Boiken *talipun* assemblages of whimsical cane spirit masks attached to a cut and polished green turban seashell used primarily in bride price exchanges. Yet few would be familiar with the small subset of *talipun* spirit masks made from wood—such as the present example. There are just a small handful known, five of which I previously published in my *Art of the Boiken* catalog of 2011 (nos. 99–103).

In the present example, the face is carved thinly from a lightwood, no doubt to enable it to be mounted vertically by delicate vine lashings to the seashell base. It has the classic leaf shape bent outward to a raised ridge bisecting the eyes, creating the nose with deeply pierced septum and flattening into a toothy grin. The almost stitched-looking mouth is mimicked in the treatment surrounding the radiating eyes and the sharp dentate above and below the face. The inverted smile on the forehead enables the face to be read inverted as well—a common pictorial convention in New Guinea art. The face is edged, of course, with the ubiquitous cassowary feathers.

The lighter wood used seems to enable gentler volumes and extra refinement like the subtle raised ridge encircling the face. The overall effect is a friendly, almost animated appearance.

This, I guess, makes sense, as the previous owner was Ronald Clyne, a prominent graphic artist whose career started with publishing a cartoon at the age of fifteen. Over a career that lasted 50 years, he was most famous for the approximately 500 album covers he designed for Folkways Records. Clyne's collection of Oceanic art started in the 1960s, when he donated camera equipment to Catholic missionaries in Wewak, Papua New Guinea. A year later, totally out of the blue, arrived huge crates filled with artifacts—some of which turned out to be masterpieces.

Clyne was a disciplined collector who understood and appreciated the objects' original cultural contexts while at the same time using the pieces to tastefully complement his contemporary art collection and the mid-century modern aesthetic of his Brooklyn Heights home.



Sitting Woman,
by Ronald Clyne,
mid 20th century





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