

Figure 4.1 Les habitants des îles de Rotouma (The Inhabitants of the Rotouma Islands). Note the tattoos depicted. *Duperrey 1826.*

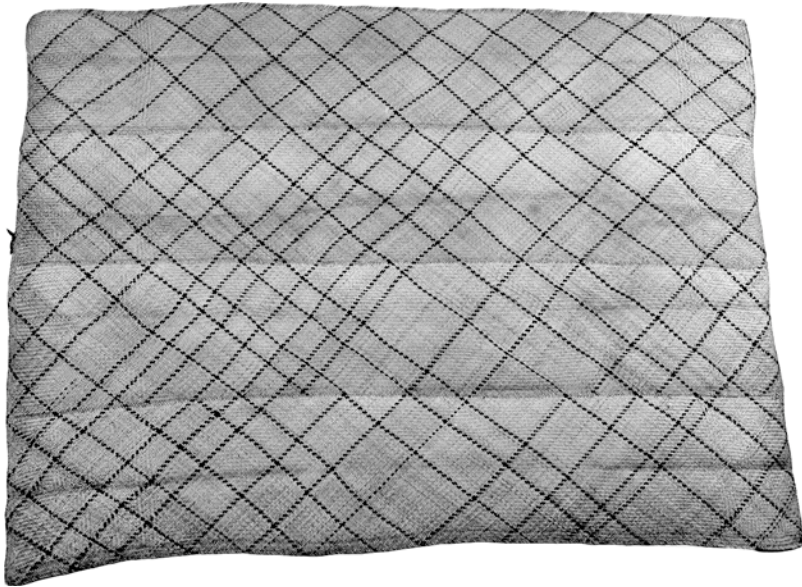


Photo 4.1 Woven mat from Rotouma. © *The Trustees of the British Museum.*

4 Creativity in Arts and Crafts

A Rotumah mat is valued in other islands much as an Indian shawl is valued in Europe. Compared to Rotumah mats, the finest Batique mats from Fiji are coarse and ugly; while the mats of Samoa and Tonga do not deserve to be mentioned in the same breath. A good Rotumah mat will take many years to make, and will cost at least five pounds of our money. To an Englishman's eye, there is nothing in them of such surpassing excellence. I, however, brought two of them back with me to Fiji; and, on showing them to the Queen of Cakadrovi, she expressed such admiration, and begged so earnestly to have them, that I could not refuse her.

Litton Forbes, *Two Years in Fiji*, 1875

When Europeans first arrived Rotumans were engaged in a range of creative activities including plaiting mats and other items, manufacturing bark cloth, making shell ornaments, tattooing, and a range of performance arts, including oratory, chanting, singing and dancing, ritual clowning, and kava ceremonies. These are forms of creativity that are widespread throughout Polynesia, yet each island or island group gives them their own unique stamp.

Weaving

Rotumans plaited a variety of useful and ceremonial items, including mats, baskets, and fans from materials such as pandanus leaves, coconut fronds, and the bark of certain trees.

Bennett reported that four kinds of mats were manufactured on the island in 1830, including one ordinary mat (*'epa*) and three grades of fine white mats (*apei*). The lowest grade of fine mat, *apei sala'a*, was made from *sa'aga*, a species of pandanus. Finer than this was the *apei niau*, which was

woven from hibiscus bark. Finer still, and most highly valued according to Bennett, was the *arnea*, plaited from the bark of the paper mulberry tree.¹

Mats of various kinds were used for a wide range of domestic and ceremonial purposes, including sturdy coconut-leaf mats for floor coverings and doors, ordinary pandanus mats for sitting and sleeping, and finer mats for clothing and ceremonial presentation. Gardiner described the manufacture of two types of plaited material used for common, wraparound dress (*taktakāi*) for men and *arumea* (*arnea*) for women, both of which he claimed were made from hibiscus fibers at the time of his visit.² At weddings, burials, and feasts, he wrote, fine mats of large size were proper dress.³

One type of fine mat, the *tofua*, was made from pandanus leaves (*sa'aga*) and trimmed with feathers; it was worn by chiefs and the *sau*.⁴ Chiefs also wore a woven girdle (*titi*) over their wraparounds. Macgregor described *titi* as wide bands with long fringes, their total length being rather short, not reaching to the knees.



Photo 4.2 Woven girdle (*titi*). © The Trustees of the British Museum.

A type of *apei* was reportedly worn by warriors when going to battle:

The war mats are of the same texture as the [*apei*], but of smaller size; four of these are worn together, fastened round the waist, when going to meet their enemies; they placed each over the other, and so arranged so as to display two deep vandykes decorated with red feathers on the edge of each, except the upper one, which has two oblong strips ornamented in a similar manner.⁵

The *sau* and other high-ranking persons also wore special garments signifying their social positions. According to Gardiner:

The dress of the *sou* [*sau*] consisted of a fine mat, over which the *malhida* [*mal heta*, or chiefly girdle] was

worn. This dress was made of the leaves of the *saaga* (*Pandanus* sp.?), split up, and plaited together like sinnet at the top, and hanging down loose. They were stained for the most part red, but some might be left white. Black was sometimes introduced by means of the bark of the *si*, a species of banana, which on drying turns a dull black. Another dress, pertaining to some of the officers, was the *ololi*; it appears to have been really a sort of apron, made of a fine mat, and hung down in front. It was almost completely covered with the red feathers of the *arumea* (*Myzomela chermesina*, Gray); its use was restricted to particular feasts.⁶

Gardiner asserted that it was taboo for anyone other than the *sau* to wear a *malhida*.

Fine white mats (*apei*) were the main items of wealth in the prestige economy. They were consecrated by the sacrifice of a pig prior to their manufacture, and therefore symbolized life (and, by extension, human life—since pigs were sacrificial substitutes for humans). They were and throughout the twentieth century remained the primary items of exchange at births, first birthdays, weddings, welcoming ceremonies, funerals, headstone unveilings, and just about every other significant ceremonial event. The presentation of an *apei* also lent enormous weight to any form of request or apology; it was very difficult indeed to turn down an appeal accompanied by one.⁷

Making mats was the main occupation of adult women in the traditional economy. Bennett commented that the manufacture of fine mats was such a tedious process that it took six months or more to complete just one.⁸ The making of an *apei* was highly ritualized and disrupted the everyday life of a community. Macgregor described the social implications in his fieldnotes:

Women of district called to make a mat—a *sa'a*—a special fine white mat for some purpose. They have a *manea* [clown]⁹ who calls on people for anything she likes or workers like. Dancers, food, etc. She has powers to demand anything of anybody. When the workers are tired or hungry, they call the *manea* and ask for food or men to dance for them. Any person passing by that this clown catches, must do her bidding. When it is known that a district had called each *hoag* [village] to supply their best weavers to work on a *sa'a*,...all Rotuma will attempt to avoid this place,

because of the *manea*. During the work each *hoag* will take a day at feeding the workers.

Apei were prominently displayed during ceremonial events. At weddings, for example, they were carried by the highest-ranking women and formally unfolded for all to see. The bride and groom's seat (*päega*) was topped with an *apei*, and another *apei* was placed above them as protection from malevolent spirits. The uncooked food brought by the groom's side was covered with mats and topped by an *apei*. Formal weddings included a ritual (*fau*) during which bride and groom were wrapped in *apei* (photo 4.3).¹⁰ Furthermore, *apei* were given in gratitude to chiefs and other participants, such as the female clown (*hän mane'äk sū*, discussed below), who contribute to the success of an event. The bride's and groom's parents exchanged mats, as did the couple's namesakes (*sigoa*). Ultimately, most of the *apei* presented at a wedding were redistributed among the main participants.



Photo 4.3 Bride and groom being wrapped in *apei* during *fau* ceremony, 1960. Alan Howard.

Apei were used to top off seats (*päega*) in a number of ritual contexts besides weddings. Honored guests at most ceremonies were seated on an *apei*, symbolically elevating them to chiefly status.

Inspired by the story of 'Äeatos, Vilsoni Hereniko, a Rotuman scholar, playwright, and moviemaker, has sug-

gested that *apei* might be considered the equivalent of "woven gods." In the course of the 'Āeatos narrative, humans ward off threatening, cannibalistic spirits ('*atua*) by making loud noises and entangling them in woven nets. Symbolically weaving '*atua* into mats, Hereniko argued, promotes their transformation from freely wandering, malevolent beings into "bound" spirits ('*aitu*) whose powers could be harnessed via propitiation and prayer. Central to Hereniko's thesis are a group of uncircumcised male '*atua*, known as *sa'aitu*. Insofar as *sa'aitu* were regarded as both dangerous and potentially helpful in warfare, they encapsulate the ambivalence with which Rotumans regarded free-roaming spirits, and the need they felt to constrain them. As Hereniko put it:

Since the term *sa'aitu* refers to a group of uncircumcised male '*atua* who wandered freely, and the weavers an assembly of a considerable number of women, it is likely that the weaving was, symbolically, believed to be constraining the *sa'aitu*....Weaving an '*atua* into a mat was the same as transforming it into an '*aitu*: a potentially malevolent '*atua* could be physicalized and made benevolent or harmless. By being physicalized in the form of a mat, '*atua* were brought into the moral order, making it possible for human beings to exercise control over their disposition. Rotuman fine mats, from this standpoint, are a supreme symbol of domestication, more specifically, of domesticated *mana* 'potency.'¹¹

Hereniko's thesis helps to make sense of the Rotuman custom of wrapping a bride and groom with *apei* at weddings (the *fau* ceremony). In this instance, the act of wrapping the couple can be seen as symbolically binding spiritual powers in the service of the couple's fertility.

Bark Cloth

Early European commentators reported that Rotumans manufactured a kind of bark cloth (*uha*), but they gave few details of the designs. Lesson reported that the Rotumans made a fabric out of breadfruit and mulberry bark, similar to that of the Sandwich and Society Islands, which they dyed a deep reddish-brown. He saw little of it used as clothing, however.¹² Bennett also mentioned bark cloth, reporting that it was stained various colors procured from native plants.¹³

The most detail concerning bark cloth comes from the field notes of Gordon Macgregor. According to one of the Rotumans he consulted, the juice from the bark of the *sa'a* tree [*Macaraga spp.*] was used for painting the cloth a dark reddish color; according to another, the paint was a mixture of turmeric and the juice squeezed from the bark of one kind of tree (*favrau* [*Pometia pinnata*]) and the root of another (*'ura* [*Morinda citrifolia*]). Designs were painted on by hand rather than stenciled, he was told.¹⁴

Bark cloth seems never to have been a main fabric for clothing,¹⁵ and its ceremonial significance seems to have been much more limited than it was, for instance, in Tonga or Hawai'i.¹⁶ Macgregor was told that the finished bark cloth was used as mosquito netting by hanging it over a center pole in the manner of a pup tent, the ends being closed with additional pieces of cloth. Reportedly the fabric was very thin.¹⁷

Wood Carving

Rotumans did not produce elaborate carved forms such as those produced in the larger Polynesian archipelagoes and by the New Zealand Māori. Carving on Rotuma was essentially utilitarian, and included such practical items as canoes, fishhooks, headrests, coconut graters, food tables (*'umefe*), kava bowls, slit drums, war clubs (see photos 7.2–10, page 166), and spears. With the exception of canoes, descriptions of carved wooden objects are conspicuously missing from the accounts of early European visitors. War clubs were one of the few wooden items that had decorative (geometric) designs carved into them, but they were not particularly distinctive.

Shell Ornaments

Ornaments of various types were quite popular among the early Rotumans, and some were used to designate rank. Lesson's observations are worthy of quotation:

The principal ornament of those who came on board [the ship] who seemed to enjoy a certain rank was a large pearl-oyster shell on the breast called a *tifa*.



Photo 4.4 Coconut graters and bowl, 1940. *H. S. Evans.*

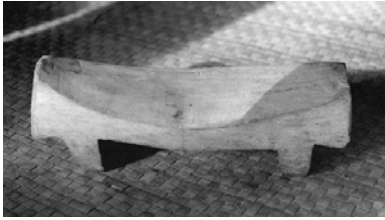


Photo 4.5 Headrest, 2001. *F. Deschamps.*



Photo 4.6 'Umefe (chiefly eating table). © Fiji Museum.



Photo 4.7 Fishhook. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

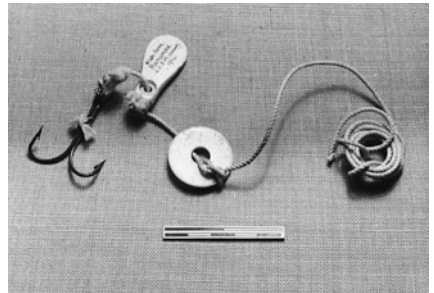


Photo 4.8 Fish lure of bone mounted with European hoods. © Fiji Museum.



Photo 4.9 Outrigger canoe, 1940. *H. S. Evans.*

Apparently, there are no oysters around their shores, so they try to obtain them from whomever they can, offering one of their fine straw weavings for five or six shells of this testacean. Some wore porcelain ovules called *poure* [in Fiji, *tabua*]; some wore a white braid on their breasts called *toui* while others wound long strings of shells around their bodies. None of these paltry decorations, however, seemed designed as a mark of rank or authority. Around the necks of some young people, I noticed necklaces made of balls of ivory. This ornament, usually worn by women, is so highly prized by the islanders, that they zealously collect the teeth of the cachalot [sperm whale], an excellent trading article for whalers. They prefer them to fabrics, even to metal axes, even though they can only turn them into ornaments.¹⁸

Dillon reported that whales' teeth were among the most desired trade items sought by Rotumans: "With the whales' teeth and tortoise-shells they ornament their clubs, spears, &c., and make neck and ear-ornaments of bits of turtle shell, which among them are valued as gold is with us."¹⁹

Gardiner, summarizing the available information at the end of the nineteenth century, commented that whales' teeth necklaces were only worn by chiefs. He reported that they were generally buried with their possessor, as one of his most valued possessions. Beads of whales' teeth were called *lei*, necklaces *tēfui*. Hence, according to Gardiner, these necklaces were termed *tēfui lei*. They were, he claimed, "the money of the old days."²⁰

Gardiner was told by the Rotumans he consulted that the *sau* and *mua* both wore *tēfui lei*, and, on each wrist, a round piece of turtle bone (*mulele*). He found, however, that a *mulele* from the grave of a *mua* he excavated was not made of bone, but of something resembling the outer part of a pearl shell. This *mulele* was about two inches in diameter and had a large hole in the center.²¹

As for pearl-shell breastplates, *tiaf hapa* (half an oyster shell), Gardiner affirmed that only chiefs wore them. He wrote that they were shaped by taking off the horny layer and smoothing it down, so that the shell retained its original shape. "The convex side was rubbed down till the outer coats were quite removed and the nacre was reached, and this side was hung outwards."²²

In his field notes Macgregor described a necklace of three shells strung together with one-eighth-inch braided sennit.

He noted that mother-of-pearl half shells were made into necklaces for *sau*, who wore them around their necks, and that such items were found in their tombs. Macgregor also mentioned *mulele*, which he described as made of two projecting pieces from the tail end of a turtle shell, and worn around the neck or wrists on a string.

Tattooing

Following his visit to Rotuma in 1791, Captain Edward Edwards of HMS *Pandora* wrote that Rotumans were "tattooed in a different manner from the natives of the other islands we had visited, having the figure of a fish, birds and a variety of other things marked upon their arms."²³ George Hamilton, who was also aboard the *Pandora*, commented, "Their bodies were curiously marked with the figures of men, dogs, fishes, and birds, upon every part of them; so that every man was a moving landscape."²⁴

Lesson, commenting on his visit in 1824, wrote:

Their most outstanding and characteristic ornamentation is tattooing, which they call *cache*. The body, from the lower chest to just above the knee, is completely covered with a regular tattoo strongly reminiscent of the thigh-pieces of the knights of old. A broad strip behind the thigh prevents the bands of tattooing from completely encircling the leg. The stomach and loins are covered with curving scalloped lines whose blackness contrasts agreeably with the natural color of the untouched skin. The chest and arms receive another kind of design. Where the former is notable for the black mass it forms on the skin, the latter is distinguished by the delicacy of its designs: the fragile shapes of flying fish, flowers and other graceful objects. Some natives had rows of black dots on their legs, while others displayed raised scars on the shoulders of the type common among the African negro race as among its scattered branches in the Pacific.²⁵

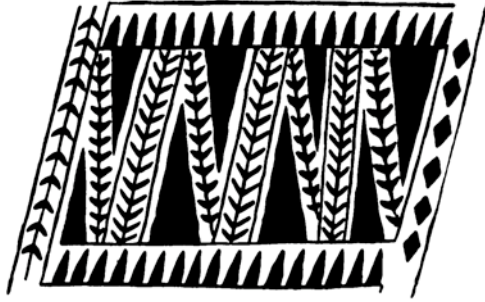
Lucatt arrived in Rotuma seventeen years later and found the practice of tattooing still very much in vogue. He described the process in some detail:

The natives of Rotumah do not tattoo their faces, but their bodies, particularly from the waist to the knees, are ornamented with various designs, some of them

very elegant; and when I first saw them at a distance, I thought they had got on close fitting blue drawers. Their arms are covered with fantastic devices, and being desirous of witnessing the operation I induced a native to tattoo a small figure on one of mine. Very few are skilled at the art of tattooing, and I was surprised at the number of instruments used by the operator: they are made of small pieces of tortoise-shell of different widths neatly secured to handles, and resemble miniature garden hoes, with fine serrated teeth cut in the edges of the blades, sharp as needles. Having rubbed down the nut of a peculiar tree that had been burnt to charcoal, the operator mixed with it the juice of a herb, and water to render it sufficiently fluid. Without first tracing the design, he dipped the teeth of the instrument into the mixture, and placing it on my arm tapped it gently with a light piece of wood so as just to draw the blood, and he kept changing the instrument from very broad to very narrow, as the nature of the figure he intended to produce, required. The operation is painful, at least I found it so, and should think it must be very severe to those who submit their whole bodies to the puncturing process; but it is the "fashion of Rotumah," and the fear of being ridiculed by their companions overcomes every other dread.²⁶

A half-century later, Gardiner reported that the men were always tattooed with a pair of drawers reaching from the waist to just below the knee. Typical designs on men's shoulders included the *periro*, representing a strong-smelling flower commonly given to one's sweetheart; the *māiro*, a common bush; stars, circles, crosses and other geometrical designs. He wrote that women's tattoos were confined to the arms and consisted of circles enclosing designs (figure 4.2).²⁷

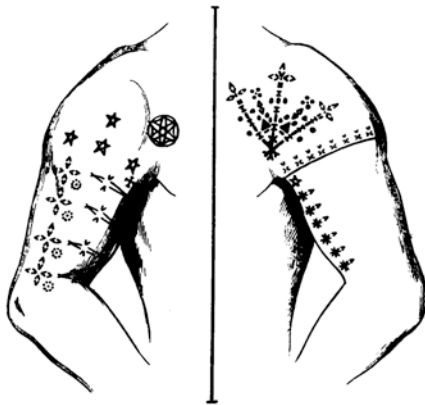
A. M. Hocart was told during his visit in 1913 that victims in a war could be identified by their tattoos, suggesting that tattoos were individualized. "One man tattooed one part and not another, and they recognized him thus. One would leave a blank space on belly, another over his knees, and they knew him by it."²⁸



Typical tattoo marking of the drawers



Tattoo mark of the women



Tattoo markings of the shoulders

Figure 4.2 Tattoo patterns. *Gardiner 1896.*

Macgregor, who visited Rotuma well after missionaries had terminated the practice of tattooing, included in his field notes drawings very similar to those of Gardiner. He reported that the patterns were irregular and "said to be made out of the operators' minds." He explicitly compared the Rotuman practice with that of the Samoans:

The tattooing of the body went to the lower ribs, and the string lines were just under the nipples. This is at least four inches more tattooing than is done on Samoans. The design was criss-cross or latticed work and not filled in as solidly as in the Samoan practice.²⁹

According to one of the Rotumans Macgregor consulted, women formerly tattooed their entire arms and hands, and some their jaws. A line was also drawn around the ankle. He remarked that, for women, ankle and hand tattoos were most in evidence at the time of his visit.

Tattooing was done by specialists (*majau*) using a dye made either from candlenut (*si'esi* [*Aleurites moluccana*]), which was burnt into a charcoal-like state, or from the roasted shell of the *hefau* nut (*Callophylum*). The powder was mixed with water and the instruments dipped into it. The tattooing comb was made of fish vertebrae or tortoise shell, with a handle like the ones used by Samoans. The *majau* marked a design on the skin, then used the comb to tap in the lines. Another of Macgregor's consultants told him that when a chief was being tattooed, a complementary tattoo had to be made on someone else. Since the chief was being wounded and spilling blood, someone else also had to be hurt in payment for the chief's suffering.³⁰ Another individual told Macgregor that men who were tattooed were considered properly dressed and could appear in public without a loincloth and still retain their modesty. This same man told him that only women who had their arms and hands tattooed could make kava, and that an untattooed man could not make *fekei* (pudding).³¹

These reports suggest that tattoos were not only symbolically important but also probably encoded information about an individual's placement in Rotuman society. On another level, tattooing appears to have symbolized the domestication and restraint of antisocial and violent impulses. This is clearly evident in the legend of Kirkirsasa (*kirkiri* = armpits, *sasa* = tattooing or tattoo marks of a certain type). To summarize the story:

Kirkirsasa was a woman who lived on the western end of Rotuma. Her armpits were completely tattooed. One day she sent her two maidservants down to the sea to fetch some seawater so that she could make *tāhroro* (a fermented coconut condiment). Instead of getting the seawater the two girls went for a stroll along the beach and encountered a sleeping giant with fiery red teeth. The girls threw stones at the giant's teeth until he woke in a rage and chased them back to Kirkirsasa's home. The girls told Kirkirsasa what had happened and begged her not to be angry. Kirkirsasa admonished the girls, and told them the giant would come to eat them.

When the giant appeared he was exhausted and sat down. Kirkirsasa then offered to dance for him while he rested, before eating the two girls. "Dance away," said the giant, "and let us have a look." Kirkirsasa danced, slapping her tattooed armpits, jumping up and down and singing a song:

Slap the armpits before the king,
With a ho! hi! hey!
Raise arms, lower them, dance and sing,
With a ho! hi! hey!

The giant went into a fit of laughter, and when Kirkirsasa stopped he asked her if she could make his armpits like hers. If she could do so, he said, he would not eat the two girls.

Kirkirsasa then instructed her people to build a fire and heat up stones until they were red hot. They bound the giant with sennit to the centerposts of the house and placed hot rocks in his armpits. The giant yelled with pain, saying he would eat the whole lot of them when he got free. However, the people continued applying hot stones to the giant's armpits, and rubbed them on his stomach and face until he was dead.

Kirkirsasa then scolded her two maidservants for their disobedience and warned them never to do such a thing in the future.

In his interpretation of this tale, Vilsoni Hereniko suggested that the giant symbolizes males, chiefs, and kings, while Kirkirsasa symbolizes females, commoners, and people of the land. Her tattoos reinforce her association with culture and domesticity, in contrast to the giant who is not tattooed and therefore wild and uncultured.

In Hereniko's view, the giant symbolizes oppression. He sleeps during the day, signifying laziness, and his fiery red teeth suggest gluttony (and cannibalism). The word for giant, *mam'asa*, also translates as "cruel" and "monster." By pelting the giant's teeth the maidservants denounce and challenge his oppressiveness.

The girls' plea to Kirkirsasa that she not get angry is significant to Hereniko. He wrote:

To be angry is to be out of control, an emotional state that Rotumans view as destructive to interpersonal relations and the community....To be able to contain one's anger is a sign of strength; even better is to be able to humor one's opponent. To dance in the midst of adversity, however, is to display total control, for it is impossible to dance when frightened, particularly if one is confronted with a cannibal.³²

Thus, the story presents Kirkirsasa as the very essence of cultural control. Her interactions with the giant prior to his submission follow the rules of etiquette to the letter, suggesting that compliance with cultural rules has a potency of its own (as contrasted with the maidservants' rude behavior, which was ineffective).

Hereniko acknowledged the obvious equivalence in the account between tattooing and cooking, and further observed that the rubbing of hot stones over the giant's body was reminiscent of *sarao* (massage). All of these operations—tattooing, cooking, and massage—have symbolic associations in Rotuman culture with the domestication of uncultured, wild, and unrestrained forces. The epitome of such an uncultured state for Rotumans is a cannibal, who must be cooked, tattooed, and/or massaged to bring him under cultural control. Tattooing on Rotuma therefore can be interpreted as a means of binding a person's inner, wild nature (as epitomized by a cannibal's gluttony, anger, and cruelty) for the protection of society.

Performance Arts

Traditional forms of performance in Rotuma can be divided into four distinctive types: oratory, musical performances, clowning, and kava ceremonies.

ORATORY

Little has been written on Rotuman oratory, perhaps because it is not as highly developed an art form for Rotumans as it is for some Polynesian societies. Nevertheless, oratorical skills are valued by Rotumans, and it is likely that they always have been. In the past, the telling of legends was one form of oratory. When chiefs wished to be entertained they would prepare a feast and invite a storyteller to perform,³³ and elders would get together on occasion in order to share their knowledge of genealogies and local history, some of which was preserved in chant form.

A more widely witnessed form of oratory involves speeches made on various occasions, mostly to thank those who have donated labor, food, and other goods on ceremonial occasions. Chiefs of all rank, as well as untitled individuals who are particularly invited, are expected to make speeches in such circumstances. Chiefs also make speeches in order to inspire their subjects to work hard, to donate food or labor to a cause, or to promote community harmony.

MUSICAL PERFORMANCES

Traditional Rotuman musical performances included a variety of chants, paddle dances, and group dances known as *tautoga*.

Chants

Mosese Kaurasi distinguished three types of Rotuman chants: (1) those composed for action songs and dances; (2) those sung before battles or wrestling matches; and (3) *temo*, which were sung during a chief's funeral or at a reception for a visiting chief.³⁴

(1) Action songs commemorated special events or occasions, such as war-provoking incidents, the death of a notable person, a successful seafaring venture, or a festival involving two or more communities. Their sentiments depended on circumstances, varying in mood from solemn to exultant.

(2) To mobilize sentiment and muster courage (*māeva*), the songs and dances performed before battles were verbally belligerent and aggressive in their movements. In form, they resembled songs for traditional wrestling matches (*hula*), though the latter, usually tempered by good-natured teasing, alternated in exchanges between hosts and visitors.³⁵

Bennett's Rotuman hosts entertained him one day during his 1830 visit with a war dance that included mock combat, which, he reported, was intended to demonstrate their mode of conducting warfare:

The party consisted of upwards of one hundred men, armed with hoibéluongs [*'ai peluga*] (clubs), spears, and baskets of stones; the highest chief present, who in this instance was the king's brother, headed the party. The preparation for action commenced by deafening shouts and shrieks, and furious stamping, which was done to intimidate their adversaries; this was followed by a propitiatory song to the spirits for victory.³⁶

Bennett commented that "it was a formidable sight to witness so many clubs brandished in the air, accompanied by deafening war shouts and yells."³⁷



Photo 4.10 Action dance performed during centennial session celebration, 1981. Note *miolmilo* headdresses. *Fiji Ministry of Information*.

In 1932, Tigarea of Losa described for Macgregor the performance that preceded battles:

When two armies meet for battle there is a dance (probably taunting and attempting to look fearful) and then they sing a song called the *arfaki*.

Tanifa tehu te Kelega
Jiji mea poa alelea.

Tanifa is the shark with a big mouth; *tehu* = near; *Kelega* = a point off Itu'ti'u where a big shark can be

seen; *jiji* = come; *poa* = bait; 'a *lele'a* = cannibals, or to eat people.

This song means that the warriors are like sharks and they are going to fight the other people, whom they will not spare as a shark will not spare them. They will kill like a shark because of the *poa*, or bait, which means some ancient cause for which they fight.

After this song the armies sing their *ki*.³⁸

(3) *Temo* were chants in praise of dead or living chiefs and places. They sometimes recounted great deeds of illustrious men, but most commonly eulogized deceased persons at their funerals. Macgregor provided an extensive description of the *temo* performances he had observed:

At such a time the old men gather inside the house, sit closely together, and chant in very low tones, their old songs. On the death of a chief of note or man of great favor in the district, a new *temo* will be composed to be sung at his funeral. In the evenings, old men of a village meet in a house and sing these old songs. A young girl will walk among them anointing each man with a little scented coconut oil.

The song leader is called the *purotu*. He sits with three others who face each other, and around them crowd all the other singers. The *purotu* chooses each *temo* and starts it. *Temos* are sung in groups of four, the first three are very slow and dreary, the fourth is sung brightly and quickly, while the hands are clapped in double time. The fourth song is called a *tipo*. The leader commences his *temo*, sings the first line, and the chorus of men join him on the refrain of one line, which follows each line of verse.

This chanted refrain is the *asura*. The songleader goes on to the next verse which he sings alone while the chorus hums or drones the last note of the refrain through one half of the verse that the leader is singing, and then change to a note two tones above. This change was heard in most of the *temos* that were sung for me. It was made to effect harmony. The tones varied accordingly.

The droning is an accompaniment without losing the note for a break in taking a breath. However in some songs, the accompaniment comes in on each accented note of the verse. Thus in the line "*Ká hanuá on a 'úmutaonót*" the *ka*, *a*, *u*, *not* are the accented

syllables, which the chorus accent while humming. In this particular song the note of the chorus was an octave below the note of the leader.

The melody of the verse is usually limited to three or four notes of half tones or minors. Some notes are slid or wailed, giving an effect which strongly resembles the Japanese manner of singing. A note is slid a half tone down and then back again before it is left. The singing sounds very nasal and slow. The chants are ended by sliding the last note down almost to a speaking tone with diminishing volume, with a "running down" effect. This is also a Samoan fashion of singing, but the Rotumans do not make it so exaggerated. Repeating the first line of the chant is a signal to the chorus that the leader has finished. In the chants that were sung for me one evening, three tempos could be observed. In the first tempo the hands were clapped on the first beat of every measure, in four beat time.

In another tempo, the group clapped their hands on the first and third beat, while one man alone clapped his hands on the second and fourth beats.

The third tempo might be called a "time round." The chant was sung in three beat time, and each beat of a measure was marked by a different group of the singers. The first beat was clapped by one group and as the chant got under way, a second and third group took up the second and third beats. The accent was on the first beat, and the clapping suggested the words clickety, clickety, clickety. This was a fast song or *tipo*. The remainder of the *tipos* that were sung that evening were all in fast four beat time.

Not all the chants had refrains. In the text, the refrain where it exists is marked in the last line. In the singing, each vowel is carefully pronounced, although they may be elided or dropped in the spoken language. However, the singing is very low, so low that one feels that those outside the circle are not supposed to hear or understand the words. The clapping too is very soft. The best chanting of *temos* "resembles the singing of toothless old men."³⁹



Photo 4.11 Men in *miolmilo* headdresses prepared for dance.
© Fiji Museum.

Paddle dances

Paddle dances (*mak paki*) were performed as part of the ritual cycle associated with the offices of the *sau* and *mua*.

In 1865, William Fletcher, the first European Methodist missionary to reside on Rotuma, witnessed a paddle dance of "mostly elderly men":

each performer had a small paddle in his hand. The *sau* and the *mueta* [*mua*] stood together, all the rest squatted down near them. Rising up, they commenced a song, raising the legs alternately, and brandishing the paddles. The song over, they rushed, one half one way, and one half the other way, and meeting in the centre of the square, stood in two lines, the *sau* and the *mueta* being in the centre of the front line. A man sat before a native drum to beat time, and lead the chanting. All joined, moving the legs, and gently

brandishing the paddles, now giving them an oscillating movement on the front of the head, and again striking them gently with the tips of the fingers of the left hand. At intervals, the back line dividing into two went round and joined again in front of the line, where stood the *sau* and the *mueta*, which line in its turn divided, and passed to the front. In each song these evolutions were gone through five or six times. The whole may have lasted about half an hour.⁴⁰

He added that the songs seemed to be invocations of the deities.

Severed from their original context by the 1880s, paddle dances continued to be performed in secular settings, where they highlighted special celebrations.

Tautoga

Tautoga were standing dances generally performed by men and women, although all-male performances (*tautoag fā*) occurred on occasion. In a performance by men and women (known as a *hafa*), the men typically were positioned in rows on one side, the women on the other. Participants danced to a text that they also sang.

In form, a *tautoga* was a suite of three distinct types of dance, performed sequentially: *sua*, *tiap hi'i*, and *tiap forau*. A complete *tautoga* included at least one dance of each type.

Sua normally consisted of four-verse stanzas, whose words alluded to the occasion. The music consisted of a single phrase in duple meter, repeated many times. The performers sang a melody in parallel fifths, with women on the upper part. Sometimes singers sounded other notes, creating three- or four-note harmonies. Elders provided accompaniment by rhythmically beating wooden sticks on a pile of folded mats. While performing a *sua*, dancers stood in place: men, with their feet apart; women, with their feet together. The basic movement involved lifting the hands from the sides, clasping them together in front of the waist, and releasing them to the sides. Dancers repeatedly bent and straightened their legs. Each row of dancers took its turn in front; after completing a set of verses, the dancers in the first row dropped back, and the row behind them came forward.⁴¹

After *sua* came *tiap hi'i*, dances of two kinds. In one, *hi tägtäg* (languid drone), women sang *hi'ie, hi'ie, hi'ie, hi'ie*, while the men grunted to the effect of *hü'ü, hü'ü, hü'ü*,

hü'ü. The performers focused on a major triad: men sang the root, women the third and fifth. A subdominant triad served as an auxiliary. The performers clapped their hands on downbeats. In the other kind of *tiap hi'i*, the *hi' sasap* (sustained drone), the men dragged out their *hü*. In both types, some of the singers breathed while others vocalized, so the performance spun a continuous thread of sound. Performances of *tiap hi'i* marked the contrast between feminine constraint and masculine freedom. As in the *sua*, women stood in place, and confined their movements to graceful, subtle motions of the hands and arms. Men sometimes jumped from side to side, or in circles. Also as in the *sua*, each row of dancers took its turn in front.

Unlike *sua* and *tiap hi'i*, which had a temperate character, *tiap forau* featured exuberant yelping and clowning on the part of the dancers, with spectators often spontaneously joining in. During the dance the back row split, with the men coming up one side of the group, the women down the other, until they met in front, replacing the first row. The process continued until each row had had its turn in front. The texts usually acknowledged distinguished personages (especially the chiefs acting as hosts), and praised people whose labors had contributed to the event.⁴² As with the *sua*, elders provided accompaniment by rhythmically beating with wooden sticks on a pile of folded mats.

In pre-missionary times, youths of courtship age frequented dance houses and played beach games (*manea' hune'ele*) that included singing and dancing. The beach games provided culturally controlled frames for courtship,⁴³ but the missionaries, fearing immorality, curbed them. Lucatt, describing conditions during his 1841 visit, wrote that every village had a playhouse in which "they scarcely suffered a night to pass without meeting...to sing and dance." He described the songs as composed of sentences, "repeated over and over again to a monotonous but not unmelodious chant, accompanied with peculiar movements of the body," and described Rotumans as "admirable time keepers" although they had no musical instruments.⁴⁴

It is likely that the dances described by Lucatt were an early form of *tautoga*, as were the dances Bennett depicted during his visit eleven years earlier:

The dances at this island are peculiarly interesting, and take place by torch-light; they resemble those I had previously seen at Tongatabu; by the men they were performed with much action in both slow and quick

movements, with the usual accompaniments of clapping of hands, keeping accurate time with a monotonous but pleasing song from the party who composed the orchestra. The spectators applauded and encouraged the dancers by frequent shouts of "Mariai, Mariai!" (well done). The females executed their part with considerable grace, in a slow and regular movement, which, added to the tasteful manner in which they had decorated themselves with flowers for the occasion, produced a pleasing effect. One dance by the whole "*corps de ballet*" was peculiar; the women formed the first row, and the men two other rows; much grace was displayed by the females in the sinking of the body, forming the graceful curtsy of the European ladies; the song which accompanied this dance was agreeable, though plaintive; the slow movement was concluded by one of very quick and rapid action by the male dancers, the women merely singing, clapping the hands, and making a slight movement of the feet in perfect time with the dance.⁴⁵



Photo 4.12 *Tautoga* performed at a wedding, 1960. Alan Howard.

Contemporary Rotumans consider the *sua* and *tiap hi'i* indigenous dances, while acknowledging that *tiap forau* (foreign dance) is a more recent addition. That the *tautoga* was influenced by Tongan dancing at an early time, if not imported wholesale, is conceded by most Rotumans. Hereniko, for example, noted that the term *tautoga* itself

suggests this: *tau* (to learn) + *toga* (Tonga), and he is convinced by the striking similarities between *tautoga* and Tongan dance.⁴⁶ Ad Linkels, in the booklet accompanying a CD entitled *Tautoga*, likewise noted the similarity between *tautoga* and Tongan dance, specifically the *lakalaka*. He speculated that Tongans may have brought with them the original predecessor of the *lakalaka* (called *me'elaufola*) at the time of Ma'afu's invasion in the eighteenth century.⁴⁷

RITUAL CLOWNING

Rotumans, like Polynesians everywhere at informal gatherings, have a tradition of engaging in light hearted banter, teasing, and various forms of clowning around. At weddings, however, a female clown (*hán mane'ák sū*; literally, "the woman who spoils the wedding") engaged in a scripted performance with profound social undertones. In her book on Rotuman ceremonies, Elizabeth Inia described the role of the *hán mane'ák sū* as follows:

The *hán mane'ák sū*...continued to entertain the crowd the whole day. She ordered everyone to do whatever she wanted; she even had the power to order the chiefs around. All the people had to do as she said, for instance, to kneel in the sun, to dance, to bring drinks. She carried a big stick as a sign of her authority; she used it to point at people when telling them what to do, and could even hit them if they were reluctant to act. Her antics made everyone laugh.⁴⁸

In his analysis of clowning on Rotuma, Hereniko saw the *hán mane'ák sū* as fulfilling several vital functions beyond that of mere entertainer, including:

1. Mediating between the conflicting interests of the parties involved, thereby allowing tensions to be diffused, redefined, and resolved in socially acceptable ways.
2. Fulfilling the role of a significant cultural symbol. As Hereniko put it, she "embodies the Rotuman conception of a person as a 'many-faceted gem.' She is humorous, yet serious in intent. She is capable of emphasizing one identity and playing down another, or choosing to remain 'betwixt and between' and have the best of both options. She is an actor, playing different roles depending on the demands of the moment, refusing to

be wholly one or the other. She is inconsistent, with many sides to herself. She is Rotuman."⁴⁹

3. Acting as master of ceremonies by seeing to it that proper protocol is observed, though she may do so in a joking manner.

4. Serving as a link to ancestral spirits. Clowns in the past blackened their features and often wore men's clothing, while carrying a stick, which Hereniko has suggested, could well have served as a phallic symbol, thus representing an ambiguous character, suggestive of an 'atua (see photo 5.4).⁵⁰

Given the focus on fertility in Rotuman legends and religious thought, the clown at weddings drew attention to a central aspect of the event—the fact that a new reproductive unit was being formed, and that the success of the couple in reproducing was up to the discretion of ancestral spirits. Her role, therefore, had sacred overtones as she both acted in a spirit-like manner, and served to link the world of humans to the spiritual abode of ancestors.

KAVA CEREMONY

Finally, mention should be made of the kava ceremony, which can be considered a form of dramatic performance. As in other Polynesian societies, important ceremonies on Rotuma require the preparation, presentation, and serving of kava to chiefs and dignitaries.

The basics of the traditional kava ceremony in Rotuma are well described by Gardiner,⁵¹ Macgregor,⁵² and more recently by Elizabeth Inia,⁵³ from whose accounts the following composite description draws.

At feasts chiefs took their place in the "front"⁵⁴ of the ceremonial site, with the highest-ranking chief in the middle. Behind him was his *mafua* (spokesman), who conducted the ceremony. The kava roots were brought to the site at the head of the men's procession, which also brought food for the feast. The roots of the kava were placed to point toward the chiefs, the leaves away. This presentation was acknowledged by the *mafua*, who called out "Kava." The man who tended the kava then broke off a small branch from the root and stabbed it into the root, shouting "*Mānu!*"⁵⁵ The *mafua* then delivered a *fakpej*, a chant-like recitation.⁵⁶ If two or more bundles of kava roots were being presented the performance would be repeated, with additional *fakpej* being chanted.



Photo 4.13 Serving kava to chiefs in early times. Note the white lime in the kava preparers' hair, signifying that they are virgins. © *Fiji Museum*.



Photo 4.14 Serving kava to chiefs in modern times, 1981. *Fiji Ministry of Information*.

After this the *mafua* called the names of the chiefs to whom a piece of kava root was to be presented. The man tending the kava cut off one piece of the root for each chief. A final piece was cut off and given to the women to be washed and chewed. After it was sufficiently chewed, the *mafua* called out for the woman who would mix it to wash her hands. The chewed kava was then put into a *tano'a* (kava bowl) with water and mixed with a *vehnau* (a mass of finely shredded strips of cloth from the bark of the hau tree). The kava maker strained the brew through the cloth, then passed it back to an attendant who wrung it out, while a second attendant poured water over the kava maker's hands. When the kava maker finished the preparation she called out, "*Kava ite te'.*"

The *mafua* called out *mārie'*, *mārie'*, *mārie'!* which drew attention to the proceedings, much in the manner that "hear, hear!" does in English-speaking settings. The kava maker then laid down the *vehnau* and clapped her hands, twice with her hands cupped, then with her palms flat, which made a loud clap. The *mafua* again called *mārie'*, *mārie'*, *mārie'!*

The second attendant brought an *ipu* (coconut shell cup) to the kava bowl, and the kava maker lifted the *vehnau* and drained kava into it. The attendant then called out, "*Kava tau viā.*"

The *mafua* then called out "*Tau kav ite' se Marāfu*" [or the name of the highest ranking person present] (Take the kava to Marāf). The attendant brought the kava to the person whose name had been called out and stooped low, handing it to him. She then returned to the bowl and when the cup was refilled called out again, "*Kava tau viā.*" The process was repeated until all the chiefs and dignitaries were served in order of rank.

Conclusion

Although Rotuma did not have the well-developed, high art forms Europeans found on the more heavily populated and politically developed Polynesian islands when they first arrived, creativity was nevertheless very much in evidence. Even in relatively mundane areas, such as house construction, creativity was expressed in the form of unique patterns of sennit lashings (see photo 4.16).

Rotumans had high standards of excellence, perhaps most clearly manifest in the quality of the fine mats they produced. As in other Polynesian societies, creativity in all

its forms was very much bound up with indigenous spirits. Fine productions—those that were most highly valued—were therefore thought to require more than the finely honed skill of an accomplished artisan or performer; they were considered to be divinely inspired and infused with mana.



Photo 4.15 House building with double-sided top plate, 1940. *H. S. Evans.*



Photo 4.16 Detail of timbers and roof at junction of side and curved end, 1940. *H. S. Evans.*

Notes to Chapter 4

This chapter includes substantial sections from three of our previously published papers: "Symbols of Power and the Politics of Impotence: The Mölmahao Rebellion on Rotuma," published in *Pacific Studies* (Howard 1992); "Rotuma" published in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Vol. 9, *Australia and the Pacific Islands*, edited by Adrienne L. Kaeppler and J. W. Love (Howard 1998); and "Une profondeur qui s'arrête à la surface de la peau: ordre social et corps à Rotuma," published in *La production du corps*, edited by Maurice Godelier and Michel Panoff (Howard and Rensel 1998; originally written in English as "Only Skin Deep: Social Order and the Body on Rotuma," and translated into French).

¹ Bennett wrote "Amea," which he identifies as the Rotuman name for a species of *Urtica*. Churchward's dictionary glosses *arnea* as "tree (paper mulberry?) the inner bark of which was formerly used for making cloth" (1940, 176).

² This may in fact have been the case during Gardiner's visit, since the *arnea* (paper mulberry) tree was apparently already rare, if not extinct, by the time of his visit. If that were the case, the women's type of dress cloth, though made from hibiscus bark, might still have been called by its original name.

³ Gardiner 1898, 411–412.

⁴ Gardiner 1898, 412; Macgregor 1932.

⁵ Bennett 1831, 476–477. Warriors also wore feathered bonnets, called *miolmilo*, which Gardiner described as "a wooden or bamboo framework covered with tappa and ornamented with the long tail feathers of the boatswain bird" (Gardiner 1898, 471). According to one of Macgregor's informants, once one of these hats was donned it could never be removed while the state of war existed. A man could not even doff it to the *sau*. He had to wear it until killed in battle. Because these hats were worn in war, and signified fighting, it was taboo for anyone to wear such a headdress in peacetime. Wearing such a headcover through a village was an insult for which a man could be killed (Macgregor 1932). See photos 4.10 and 4.11.

⁶ Gardiner 1898, 462.

⁷ In this respect a gift of an *apei* is comparable to the Fijian presentation of a *tabua* (whale's tooth), an equivalence explicitly recognized by Rotumans.

⁸ Bennett 1831, 477.

⁹ *Mane'a* is a generic term for play, and is used in certain contexts (e.g., weddings) in reference to an individual who acts as a clown with license to violate normal social rules. See pages 107–108 for a discussion of clowning in early Rotuman society.

¹⁰ For an analysis of the symbolic significance of the *fau* and other rituals at a wedding, see Howard and Rensel 1994a.

¹¹ Hereniko 1995, 115.

¹² Lesson 1838–1839, 424.

¹³ Bennett 1831, 477.

¹⁴ Macgregor 1932.

¹⁵ One of Macgregor's informants told him that bark cloth was often worn around the head to keep the hair up, as well as for lavalavas (Macgregor 1932).

¹⁶ We are only aware of one prescribed use of bark cloth for ceremonial purposes, although there were undoubtedly others. Before a wedding, the bride was presented with a small purse, called *'atfara*, which in traditional times contained a small container of oil, some turmeric, and a piece of bark cloth. The oil was for lubrication on the wedding night, the turmeric was used to prevent infection, and the bark cloth was to wipe up with. For some years now it has been customary for the *'atfara* to be filled instead with money by friends of the bride.

¹⁷ Macgregor 1932.

¹⁸ Lesson 1838–1839, 422–423.

¹⁹ Dillon 1829, 94; see also Bennett 1831, 475.

²⁰ Gardiner 1898, 412.

²¹ Gardiner 1898, 462.

²² Gardiner 1898, 413.

²³ Thompson 1915, 64–66.

²⁴ Thompson 1915, 138–139.

²⁵ Lesson 1838, 426–427; translated from the French by Ella Wiswell.

²⁶ Lucatt 1851, 178–179.

²⁷ Gardiner 1898a, 414–415.

²⁸ Hocart 1913, 4768.

²⁹ Macgregor 1932.

³⁰ According to the Rev. William Allen, "The process was an exceedingly painful one, some even dying through it. Only a little was done at a time, just as much as the person seemed able to bear. Tattooing only commenced when they were young men, and no one was considered a man and competent to marry until he had been tatoood" (Allen 1895).

³¹ Macgregor 1932.

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- ³² Hereniko 1995, 57.
- ³³ Macgregor 1932.
- ³⁴ Kaurasi 1991.
- ³⁵ Kaurasi 1991, 147–149.
- ³⁶ Bennett 1831, 479.
- ³⁷ Bennett 1831, 480.
- ³⁸ Macgregor 1932. A *kī* is a rhythmic chant used to stir men to peak effort, whether in warfare or to perform a ceremonially arduous task.
- ³⁹ Macgregor 1932.
- ⁴⁰ Letter dated 4 November 1865, *Wesleyan Missionary Notices*, 1866.
- ⁴¹ Hereniko 1991, 128–130.
- ⁴² Hereniko 1991, 130–131.
- ⁴³ See Howard 1998, 157–158.
- ⁴⁴ Lucatt 1851, 167.
- ⁴⁵ Bennett 1831, 479.
- ⁴⁶ Hereniko 1991, 121.
- ⁴⁷ Linkels 1998, 3.
- ⁴⁸ Inia 2001, 166.
- ⁴⁹ Hereniko 1995, 91.
- ⁵⁰ Hereniko 1995, 88–93.
- ⁵¹ Gardiner 1898, 424–425.
- ⁵² Macgregor 1932.
- ⁵³ Inia 2001, 77–82.
- ⁵⁴ In Rotuma the "front" side is generally the side toward the sea, but under certain circumstances it may be on the east, or sunrise side.
- ⁵⁵ The word *manu'* (*manu'u*) has no known denotative meaning other than as an exclamation during the kava ceremony.
- ⁵⁶ The content of the *fakpej* is described by Gardiner as telling a "story of the old times or whale fishing" (1898, 424). Macgregor includes the texts of some *fakpej* in his field notes. They are mostly stories about how kava came to Rotuma, which may have been the dominant theme of such chants in traditional times. The language of some *fakpej* is archaic, however, and not well understood by contemporary Rotumans, sometimes not even by the person reciting.