

Fiji's Indigenous Minority

A BRIEF STUDY OF ROTUMAN REPRESENTATION ON FIJI'S CURRENCY 1969 TO THE PRESENT DAY

Brief History

Rotuma is a dependency of Fiji, located about 650km north of the capital Suva, the main island. Rotuma and its group of islets are collectively known as the Rotuma group. The islands were ceded to Great Britain on May 13th, 1881 and were placed under the administration of the Colony of Fiji. When Fiji gained independence in 1970, Rotuma chose to remain a part of it. People from Rotuma known as *Rotumans* are one of two indigenous groups within Fiji. The other one the *iTaukei* (native Fijians) being the major indigenous group.

Rotuman language, culture and traditions are distinct from that of the *iTaukei* and are protected under the Rotuma Act of 1927 and the Rotuma Lands Act of 1959. These laws formed the Council of Rotuma and allow it to govern over most local matters. Also under the different Constitutions of Fiji since 1970, Rotumans have always been recognised as indigenous alongside the *iTaukei*. The relationship between Fiji and Rotuma has been noted to have existed long before the arrival of Euro-peans to the Pacific.

Rotumans make up about 2 percent of Fiji's population, which is around 18,000 of which only about 2,000 live on Rotuma. This combined with the Rotuman diaspora outside of Fiji puts the total number of Rotumans under 30,000.

Efforts have been put in place by the Fijian Government to promote and protect the language and culture. A similar approach has been taken by the New Zealand Government which has included it as part of its conservation programs under its Ministry for Pacific Peoples.

Depiction on Currency

Fiji made the transition to decimal currency in 1969 with most designs being that of the *iTaukei* or of scenery around Fiji. The first depiction of Rotumans on Fijian Currency was on the reverse of the \$2 banknote in 1996 (P96a/B509a) **Image 2**. This reverse design was also kept for the \$2 banknote issued in 2002 (P104a/B515a) – **Image 3**. When Fiji redesigned its banknotes in 2007, Rotuman Representation took the form of an artefact on the front (bottom left corner) of the \$20 banknote (P112a/B523a) – **Image 4**. This artefact was kept for the 2013 design of the \$20 note (P117a/B528a) – **Image 5** – which saw Queen Elizabeth II's portrait replaced with local flora and fauna.

In 2020, to mark Fiji's 50th Anniversary of Independence, a \$50 commemorative banknote (PNL/B532a) was issued and once again Rotumans were depicted on the reverse design of the note – **Image 7**.

This vignette was used for the reverse designs of the \$2 banknotes issued in 1996 & 2002. The design is a representation of



Image 1 - Final Reverse Design for P96a/B509a & P104a/B515a
Source: eBay (seller: monalisa-money-mondo)



Image 2 – Front & Reverse of P96a/B509a \$2 ND (1996)
Author's Collection

the major ethnic groups in Fiji. From left to right, a woman wearing a *saree* representing the Indian community, a woman representing Rotumans in traditional attire, a man wearing *masi* (textile made from bark fibres) representing the *iTaukei*, a boy wearing a shirt and khaki shorts representing the European/Part European community and a girl representing the Asian community in oriental attire.

The 2nd figure from the left is a depiction of a Rotuman woman in traditional attire. She is wearing a **tofua**, a garment made of pandanus leaves and a **tēfui**, a garland made from the young leaves of the coconut tree paired with sweet smelling flowers around her neck. The **tēfui** and **tofua** are typically worn during special occasions like birthdays, weddings, traditional dances and ceremonies.

More information about the **tēfui** can be found on <http://www.rotuma.net/os/ceremonies/tefui.htm>

More information about the **tofua** can be found on the following links <https://www.tetaumatatoaiwi.org.nz/moana-oceania-rotuma/> <http://www.rotuma.net/os/ceremonies/glossary.htm>



Image 3 – Front & Reverse of P104a/B515a \$2 ND (2002)
Source: Author's collection

The designs for the 2002 issues of banknotes were kept the same as those of 1996s. Updates were made to the security features, a new signature for the Governor of RBF as well as the shortening of the printer's mark from 'Thomas De La Rue and Company Limited' on P96a to 'De La Rue' on P104a. The artefact on the front (bottom left corner of P112a/B523a) is a Rotuman coconut scraper called a **foa** (**foa 'oiag niu** is a more descriptive name). Used to grate the coconut flesh of out the coconut shell which makes it easier to extract the coconut milk.



Image 4 - Front & Reverse of P112a/B523a \$20 ND (2007)
Author's collection



Image 5 - Front & Reverse of P117a/B528a \$20 ND (2013)
Author's collection

The *foa* on P112a is used again on the flora and fauna \$20 design of 2013.

References

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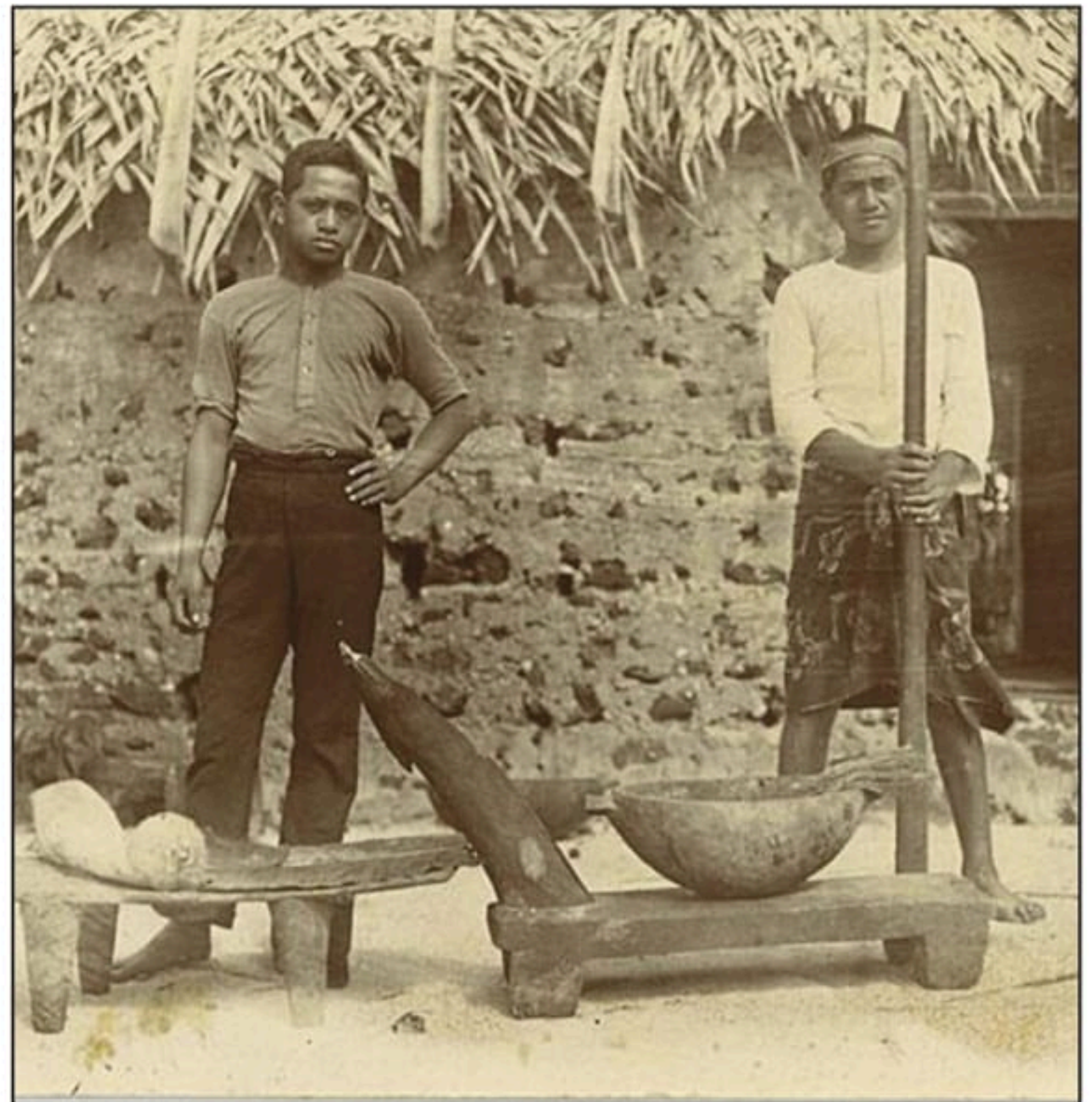


Image 6 - An Example of a Foa 'oiag niu (ca. 1910)
Source: Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.



Image 7 - Front & Reserve of PNL/B532a \$50 'Commemorative'
Author's collection

Traditional Foa 'oiag niu are typically carved out of wood with an animal bone formed into serrated teeth secured to the front. With early European contact the bone teeth were soon replaced with ones made of metal which were more durable and hard wearing.

More information on this photograph can be accessed on <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/22888436>

The reverse design of PNL/B532a depicts Fiji's different ethnic groups similar to the reverse design of P96a & P104a. From right to left, a girl representing the European/Part-European community, a boy representing the Asian community (mainly the Chinese community), a girl and a boy representing the iTaukei, a girl representing the Indian community and a boy representing Rotumans.

In this depiction, the boy is wearing the **tēfui** and **tofua** over a Hawaiian shirt (commonly called *bula* shirts in Fiji) and a *sulu* (kilt like garment).

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