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### Author

Waite, Deborah

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DEBORAH WAITE

## Canoe Carvings from Western Solomon Islands: The Operative Efficacy of Simultaneous Visual Presences

### Abstract

*This article considers a group of late nineteenth-century canoe carvings from Western Solomon Islands. They are so stylistically similar that they could have been carved by the same person, although that information is now lost. Functionally, the carvings' imagery points to cultural parallels in a manner that gives them an operative efficacy, not just to the canoes to which they were lashed, but also to the vessels' occupants and owners. This connectivity would have prevailed, not only during a war expedition when the canoes were in use, but before and after, when the carvings were put on and taken off the canoes. The carvings were likely stored in the houses of the canoe owners or in mortuary shrines, establishing a spatial-social cyclicality.*

**Keywords:** *Solomon Islands, canoe carvings, operative efficacy*

This paper focuses on fourteen canoe carvings from New Georgia Island, Western Solomon Islands. Ten of these carvings are now in the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford University, England, and two are in the Kulturen Museum, Basel, Switzerland. Another belongs to the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, and one is in the Auckland War Memorial Museum, New Zealand.<sup>1</sup> Among the many carvings once lashed to prows and sterns of war and fishing canoes from Western Solomon Islands, these carvings merit consideration as a cohesive group as four features unite them.

First is an emphasis on two-dimensional, low-relief carving. Secondly, color plays a distinguishing role. Red, blue, and white, as well as some black and major unpainted areas, characterize these carvings in contrast to the many uniformly black or dark brown carvings that prevail in Western Solomon Islands.<sup>2</sup> A third visual factor that unites these works is the prolific use of low-relief design elements depicting shell rings and shell body ornaments. These motifs are rendered on the framing borders of the canoe carvings, as well as on the bodies and heads of images. Shell rings are ubiquitous in the islands. Among the many shell ornaments worn in the western islands, the triangular-shaped *barava*, in particular, is privileged as an image among these carvings. A shell *barava* can be worn by people as a chest ornament.<sup>3</sup> A row of these *barava* would be lashed to a stick concealed within the two

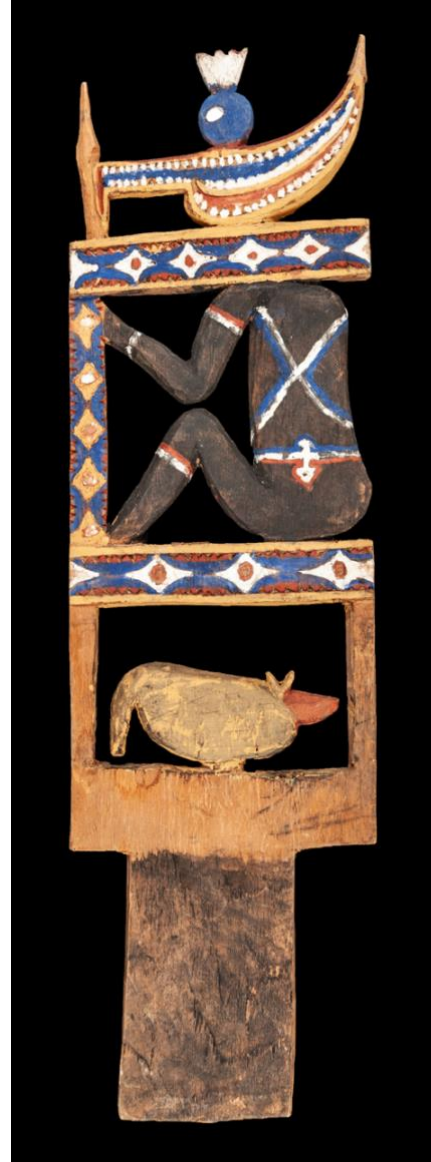
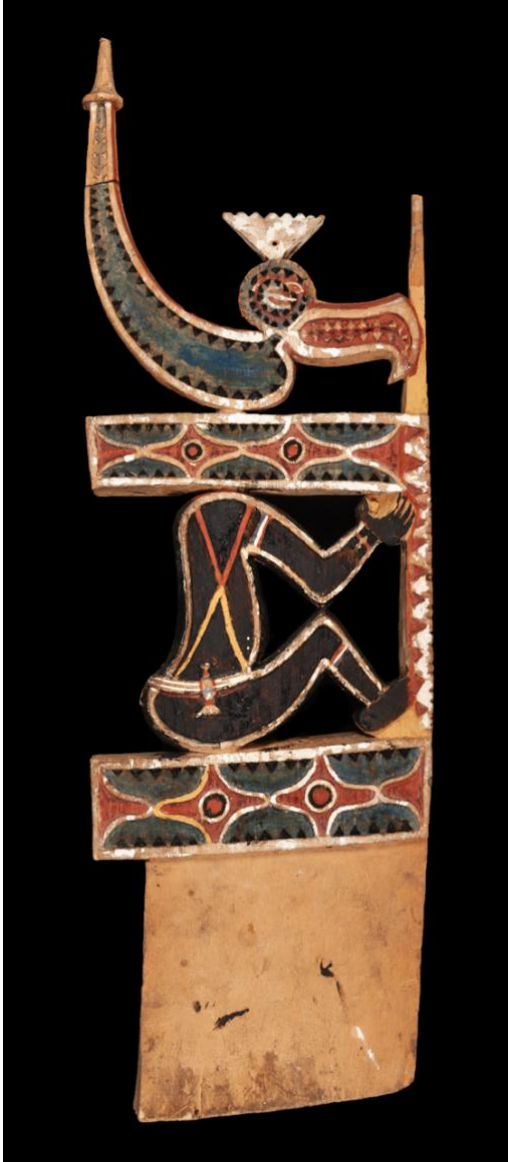


Figure 1 (left). Canoe prow figure of Kesoko. Ngarisi District, Ramada, New Georgia Island. H. 78.8.cm. Collected by Henry Boyle Townshend Somerville, 1893–4. Photograph by Suzy Prior. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (DII 1895.22.161)

Figure 2 (right). Canoe prow figure of Kesoko. Ngarisi District, Ramada, New Georgia Island. H. 55.3 cm. Collected by Henry Boyle Townshend Somerville, 1893–4. Photograph by Suzy Prior. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (DII 1895.22.162)

halves of the bowsprit, so that they projected in a row from the canoe prow. Images of *barava* and the objects themselves often appear on canoe ornaments from Western Solomon Islands, but in the particular group of canoe carvings under discussion the *barava* may become integrated as design elements. Notched or serrated designs that occur on the head ornaments known as *kapkap* (in Solomon Islands, *dalo*) also recur as relief ornaments on different carvings in this group.<sup>4</sup> The fourth motif that ties this group together is the spiral.

Among these canoe carvings, the spiral either functions as a support or is integrated as a design element. Spirals are not uncommon among canoe prow or stern carvings from the Western Solomon Islands, especially among fishing canoes. However, as we will see, it is the manner in which the spiral is integrated with other designs that typifies some of the canoe carvings in this group.

The choice of imagery for the artworks under consideration associates them with other canoe carvings, as well as many other Western Solomon Islands artworks. Their visual treatment, however, differs. Predominant are two versions of seated anthropomorphic figures: one with a human head and the other with a frigate bird head. Hybrid human-bird images are a common phenomenon in art from New Georgia and might allude to a sea/reef spirit called Kesoko, who is closely tied to spearfishing and net fishing. Kesoko has a man's body but his mouth is like the beak of a frigate bird. Such hybrids predominate in this particular cluster of canoe carvings (Figs. 1–6). Two canoe prow carvings that represent human skulls or heads (Figs. 7–8) reiterate a common theme among war canoe carvings from Western Solomon Islands. However, the examples in this group differ markedly in visual treatment from others in the choice of relief imagery that decorates the heads, as well as a strong emphasis on two-dimensionality. Also included in this group of canoe carvings are the frigate bird and the crocodile, both prevalent among many images from Western Solomon Islands but associated here with the spiral (Figs. 9–10).

In short, several features recur and appear to collectively define the carvings to be considered in this paper. It is their interactional recurrence that defines the group. Exploration of these features will necessitate considerable detailed examination of both visual and contextual matters. A final note: geography also binds these carvings, as all were produced and used within the Marovo and Ramada (Munggeri region) districts of New Georgia Island. They were “collected” during a period extending from 1893 to the early 1920s.<sup>5</sup> The carving now in the Auckland War Memorial Museum (Fig. 6) has no regional or collection data. However, it appears to constitute a variant of Kesoko sea spirit imagery not otherwise present in the group but visible among net floats and painted canoe paddles from Western Solomon Islands. Yet in most other ways, it corresponds in style and imagery to the rest of the group.

At the risk of overstating the obvious, these carvings are objects. Each was carved in low relief on both sides, usually with identical imagery, and when lashed to a canoe prow or stern, its presence and communicative power were thus visible from all directions as the canoe moved through the water (Figs. 7a and 7b). This function was accomplished by paired head carvings lashed to the ends of other canoes, facing fore and aft or, in some cases, in four directions—the better to perceive any negative force (enemies, storms, and the like).<sup>6</sup> The relevance of this functional role of canoe ornament as object should be kept in mind during the upcoming sections of visual analysis of form and imagery. Objectification theory, which

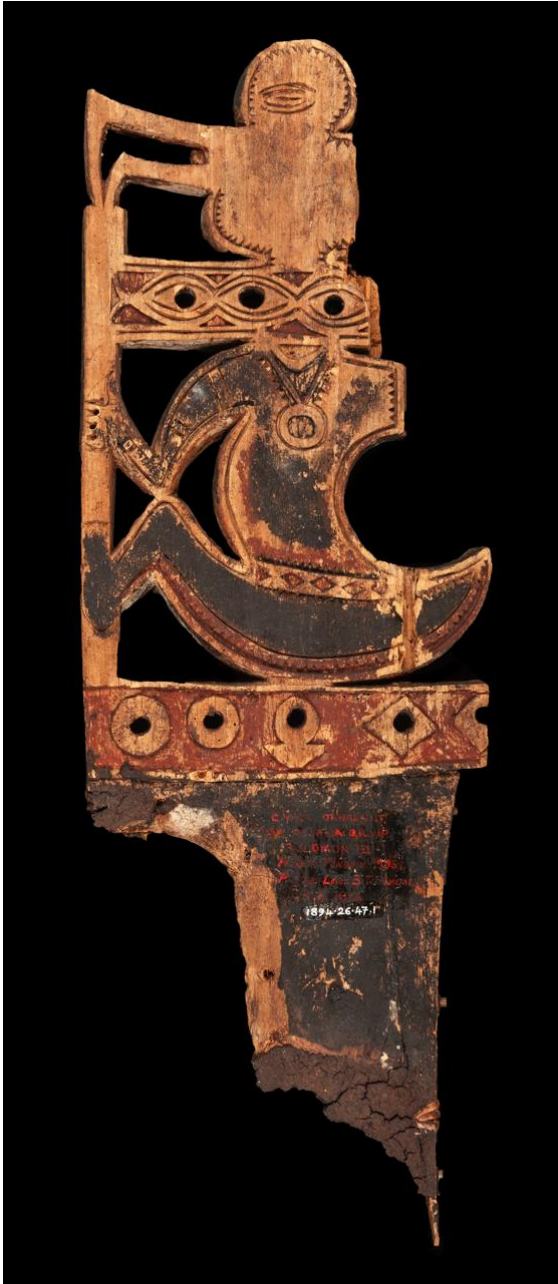


Figure 3 (left). Canoe prow figure of Kesoko. Ngarisi District, Ramada, New Georgia Island. Gr.h. 41.7 cm. Collected by Henry Boyle Townshend Somerville, 1893–4. Photograph by Suzy Prior. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1894.26. 47.1)

Figure 4 (right). Canoe prow figure of Kesoko. Ngarisi District, Ramada, New Georgia Island. H. 37.6 cm. Collected by Henry Boyle Townshend Somerville, 1893–4. Photograph by Suzy Prior. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1926.23.56)

recognizes the active, affective role of an object and its visual components, provides a framework for these considerations.<sup>7</sup> The following is an examination of the canoe carvings in this focal group as arranged according to category or type.

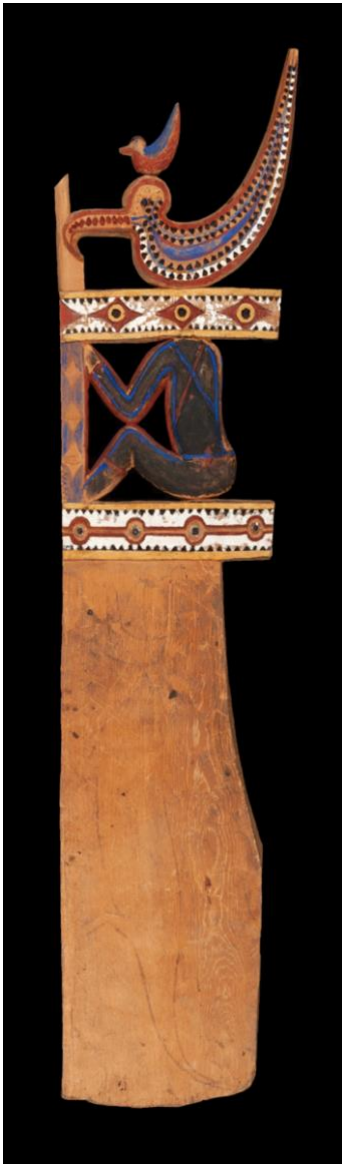


Figure 5 (left). Canoe prow figure of Kesoko. Ngarisi District, Ramada, New Georgia Island. Gr.h. 74.5 cm. Photograph by Suzy Prior. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1895.22.160)

Figure 6 (right). Carved canoe ornament, Solomon Islands. Courtesy of the Auckland War Memorial Museum Tāmaki Paenga Hira (1981.164, 49337)

### Heads (Skulls)

War canoes (*tomako*) from Western Solomon Islands traditionally bear several sculptures lashed to prow, prow peak, and stern. Carvings of anthropomorphic heads predominate as a theme for war canoes, once employed in headhunting raids, through the end of the nineteenth century. Lashed to every prow was a prognathic head or, more rarely, a complete

seated figure with prominent head called *nguzunguxu* or *totoishu* (Roviana and Marovo districts, respectively).<sup>8</sup> Attached to the tip of a prow immediately above the canoe figurehead would be small anthropomorphic heads carved back-to-back (*mbeku*); in some cases, heads of frigate birds appear, alluding to Kesoko.<sup>9</sup> It is the prow peak carvings, in particular, that provide the Western Solomon Islands context for the two carvings representing heads or skulls in this discussion.

The two head/skull canoe carvings display features that epitomize many canoe prow figureheads and *mbeku* canoe prow peak carvings: an extended lower face, a long nose with upswept swelling nostrils, and an open, tooth-filled mouth. Tim Thomas has noted that the very names of the canoe figureheads incorporate these exaggerated features: “*Nguzunguzu* is a reduplication of the Roviana word for mouth, implying exaggeration. *Toto isu* comes from the Marovo words for nose (*isu*) and directional pointing (*toto*), meaning something like ‘pointing nose.’”<sup>10</sup> Both exaggerated features signal sensory efficacy: the ability to smell, sensitivity to the aromas of certain plants, and the devouring capacity of these guiding images that protected the occupants of a canoe from dangerous spirits that could include Kesoko.<sup>11</sup>

Several features distinguish these two particular canoe head carvings. Both are considerably larger than many of the surviving examples. They also exhibit a much more two-dimensional approach to carving; they are flat profiles rendered on both sides in a manner that subtly conveys an illusion of three-dimensionality. From a distance, each is a single head that could be viewed from either side, corresponding in a sense to the paired three-dimensional heads that face in opposite directions on other canoes. Low-relief carving on both represents images of shell *barava*, as well as rows of notched or serrated designs in a manner that covers the surfaces of the heads. Both of these designs appear on shell ornaments; a row of *barava* images frequently provides the outermost encircling motif on tridacna clamshell *kapkap* or *dala*.<sup>12</sup>

There may be minor differences in these relief designs on both sides of a single head (as seen in Figs. 7–8), but these differences are very small. On the Pitt Rivers head (Fig. 7), the designs occupy more of the surface of the heads than does the more discrete, shell-inlaid, facial ornament that is such a frequent feature of canoe carvings and other images from Western Solomon Islands. In addition, the Pitt Rivers carving exhibits the seemingly ever-present black or dark brown color of other carvings. This example is unpainted save for the red paint used for the *barava*-like shell ornaments and the circles that replace ears. The Vancouver example has a tight row of notched geometric designs that do correspond in position and proportion to facial painting: a row along the jaw and another along the middle section of the face (Fig. 8). Another row of tiny *barava* designs is carved along the upper forehead, emphasizing the curve of the skull. Much of the Vancouver skull is covered with a patina that mitigates color analysis, but traces of red are still visible on the upper skull and the color appears to outline the designs carved on the right side.



Figures 7a (left) and 7b (right). Two sides of a canoe prow carving in the form of an anthropomorphic skull. Gr. I. 48 cm. Collected by Charles Edward Monro, 1894–5. Photograph by Suzy Prior. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (DVIII 1926.23.54)



Figure 8. Canoe prow carving in the form of an anthropomorphic skull. Collected by Frank Burnett, 1909. Gr. I. Photograph by Jessica Bushey. Courtesy of the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver (C361)



Perhaps the most notable decorative feature of these two heads is the absence of ears and their replacement by large rings carved in low relief and with an open hole through the middle of the head. The ring is complete on the Pitt Rivers skull carving (Fig. 7) but incomplete on the Vancouver example (Fig. 8). However, enough of the latter is visible to make its presence felt, and the prominent holes in place of ears remains conspicuous. The apparent replacement of ears by rings has two potential cultural explanations. Firstly, it may be a direct reference to the social importance of hearing in this part of the Solomon Islands, as illustrated by ritual substitution of the ear for the body in post-funeral contexts and the multiple instances of the linkage of hearing (ears) with shell rings.<sup>13</sup> More specifically is the treatment of skulls of high-ranking individuals (ancestral or conquered) in which shell rings were fastened to eye openings and at ear positions.

Hearing, Thomas notes, was regarded on New Georgia as comparable to affective sociality.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, ear ornaments worn by men were large and prominent. Large circular or oval ear ornaments adorn most canoe prow figureheads, as well as many other images, virtually dwarfing the actual ears and usually bearing inlaid nautilus shell. In one example of an anthropomorphic canoe carving that graphically illustrates the importance of ear ornaments, the figure is rendered frontally with elaborate nautilus shell insets (Fig. 11). It raises its hands to touch ear ornaments so large that they appear to flank the head.<sup>15</sup>

Several Solomon Islands customs recorded by Arthur Maurice Hocart on Simbo and Roviana (New Georgia) illustrate the association of hearing with ears and with shell rings, which served as social instruments of “hearing.” “Effective sociality involved the ability to ‘hear’ the talk of chiefs and ancestral spirits . . . in order to live well.”<sup>16</sup> Deaf people could not be chiefs and were often thought to be mad. One instrument used in the treating of madness was constructed with horizontally and vertically arranged sticks with two leaves of *akaku* “made into two rings and tied one on each side of the point of intersection ‘like the ears of a man.’”<sup>17</sup> In a former custom involving the sacrifice of an enemy in honor of a new canoe, body parts of the victim were cooked and eaten. An exception was the ears, which were cut in two and burnt at the skull house as the “body for you the spirits, be efficacious.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, ears were the body substitute employed as an affective offering that would guarantee cooperation from the spirit world.

Hearing was obviously an essential part of effective communication, and that was precisely the role of shell rings on numerous occasions. Divination with a shell ring (*sabusabukai*) involved “hearing” the words of spirits transmitted through the ring, which would be held out at arm’s length. The spirit would be questioned and the ring, which would



Figure 9 (left). Canoe stern (?) ornament, with frigate bird atop a spiral. Gr.h. 43 cm. Collected by Charles Edward Monro, 1895. Photograph by Suzy Prior. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford Museum (1926.23.57)

Figure 10 (right). Canoe stern carving with spiral and crocodile. New Georgia Island. H. 70 cm. Collected by Henry Boyle Townshend Somerville, 1893–4. Photograph by Suzy Prior. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1895.22.165a)



Figure 11. Canoe prow carving. Marovo, New Georgia. Collected by Henry Boyle Townshend Somerville, 1893–4. Photograph by Suzy Prior. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1895.22.164)

cause the arm of the medium to rotate, indicated a response.<sup>19</sup> One example of the divination process employed for curing illness involved a diviner named Kundaite who was able to catch the *penupenu*,

a diminutive parcel made up of leavings of the sick man—bits of tobacco peels, or else hair, nails, etc. of a patient which were stolen by spirits and return it [the *penupenu*] to the patient. Kundaite paid one arm ring to the spirits saying . . .

this is your arm-ring, ye spirits, let me go and heal, do you redeem this arm-ring.<sup>20</sup>

Numerous instances of shell rings offered to spirits prior to, during, and following bonito fishing expeditions further illustrate their use as efficacious social devices.<sup>21</sup>

But perhaps most directly relevant for these two canoe head carvings, on which rings carved in low relief substitute for ears, is the data obtained by Hocart from Simbo and Roviana islands involving the deposition of the corpse and skull of a chief. Richard Walter, Tim Thomas, and Peter Sheppard have summarized Hocart’s data as follows:

After death, the body of the deceased was dressed in finery, then wrapped in pandanus leaves and placed in the bush to rot, sitting upright facing west. Their belongings were broken—the equivalent of the body’s decay. During this time the *maqomaqo* [the person’s soul-shadow] would fly up into the rafters of the deceased’s house. After four nights had passed, it would be called down and ritually ‘caught’ within a shell ring and *zipolo* leaf (*Dracaena* sp). . . . [T]he shadow of the dead was transformed into a ring so that the *tomate* [potential evil aspect of the spirit] could not take personal form and wander. After a few weeks the skull was removed and left in the sun to bleach until the eighteenth day, when it would be placed in a skull house at a shrine, accompanied by the *maqomaqo* ring . . . on the thirty-sixth day, ceremonies were held to ensure the departure of the soul shadow [*maqomaqo*] to the after-world . . . The *tomate* would remain, indexed by the skull housed on the shrine, potent and dangerous, but trapped and able to confer blessings.<sup>22</sup>

These and other ritual practices were held to ensure the formation of “an efficacious ancestor,” the capturing of the “potent part of a dead person within the material locus of a shrine, resident but safely immobile among the living. However, in order for the *tomate* to be truly effective and respond to the wishes of the living, it needed to be complete. This entailed assembling its parts into a coherent body.” This included placement of artifacts around the skulls, some lashed to the skull, and others that had been smashed soon after death. All “worked as visible indices of the *tomate*’s power.”<sup>23</sup>

Part of this process involved the placement of shell rings in lieu of ears and over eye openings on these prominent skulls. This is the practice most directly relevant to the two canoe carvings (Figs. 7–8). Shell rings of different sizes were fastened together in a mesh over the ancestral skull (e.g., Fig. 12).<sup>24</sup> Their presence on these two canoe head-carvings—along with large, low-relief, carved facial designs spread over the head, referencing shell ornaments that are lashed over skulls—would appear to correspond to this practice. These details indicate that the two canoe carvings in question may have been intended to represent or embody ornamented ancestral skulls.



Figure 12. Skull with attached shell rings. Courtesy of the South Australia Museum, Adelaide

There is, of course, a difference between actual skulls to which shell rings have been attached and the two canoe skull carvings. The ears are removed as part of the process of defleshing the skull. The ear canal through the skull is not left open but filled, resulting in a flat surface rather than a hole, and is covered by rings. The holes on the two skull canoe carvings would seem to be explicable in terms of a desire on the part of the sculptor to create simultaneous presences of ear and ornament: a ring with a hole in the center also serves visually as the innermost portion of a spiral design created through the low-relief ornamental carvings adorning the canoe heads. Comparison with other spiral canoe carvings later in this paper will support this thesis. Through choice of designs, especially shell rings, the absence of ears, and, quite possibly, even color, the decorated skull carvings may emblematically recall specifically deceased ancestral chiefs, a cluster of social customs, and the skull shrines themselves. Such associations would augment the extreme power and efficacy of any canoe to which they were fastened.



Figure 13. Canoe prow figurehead with a seated anthropomorphic figure. H. 47 cm. Collected by Charles Edward Monro, 1894–5. Photograph by Suzy Prior. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (VIII 1926.23.55)

## Anthropomorphic Figures

One of the five, seated anthropomorphic figures in the group possesses a human head versus a frigate bird replacement (Fig. 13). Because of the head distinction, it deserves separate consideration, despite many parallels with the five hybrid figures (Figs. 1–5). Like the other carvings, this one is flat and has the same details carved and painted on both sides; all were obviously intended to be viewed from either side when in position on a canoe. One vertical and two horizontal bars make up the frame enclosing the figure. The total height of the carved section is 21.5 cm. Pairs of low-relief carved triangular *barava* images adorn the vertical bar, as well as the lower horizontal bar on which the figure sits. The middle bar rests on the shoulders of the figure, separating head from torso. The figure holds the bar with his hands, touches it with his feet, and appears to look directly into it. *Barava* carvings on the lower bar have been painted white; those on the vertical bar are (at least at present) unpainted. The *barava* ornaments clearly displayed on this and the other figural carvings correspond vividly to the shell *barava* that project from the prow of a war canoe immediately below the carving that would have been lashed to the prow tip.<sup>25</sup>

Certain features link the head of this figure with the two skull head carvings just considered, while others differ. The head shares the jaw extension or prognathism of the two, but the nose and red-painted mouth lack the prominent definition (including presence of teeth) characteristic of the previous separate head carvings. However, as seen in Figures 7 and 8, low-relief designs wrap around the skull. The designs rendered on the skull of this figure could be described as a form of serration (zigzag) that does not have an exact equivalent on the heads of other carvings of anthropomorphic figures from the region, including canoe prow figures, or *nguzunguzu*. An upward-curving (spiral-derived) shape outlined in white paint extends along the lowermost row of facial designs toward the inner face, while another white line extends along the lower face round the chin. These patterns recur among shell inlaid facial decoration. This face, unlike the two larger heads, has no ears or circular earrings.

The profile, seated posture of this figure and the hybrid human-bird Kesoko have multiple visual references among carved imagery from Western Solomon Islands. The posture recurs with frequency among wooden spirit images, as well as tridacna clam shell openwork carvings termed *barava*, the same name that was given to the small triangular shell carvings (Figs. 11, 13).<sup>26</sup> All images that assume this position replicate a posture customarily taken by exposed corpses in these islands into the early twentieth century and beyond in some regions. It is probably safe to say that this profile, seated position may allude to a burial posture.<sup>27</sup>

Vertical and horizontal framing elements on this canoe carving, as well as on the hybrid Kesoko canoe carvings, may also conceivably allude to burial practices, during which some

sort of supportive structure for a seated corpse was usually necessary. On Simbo Island, as reported by Graham Officer in 1901,

between Narovo and Levi, [I] saw spots among the rocks above high water mark where bodies are placed. Samoi [an informant] tells me all a man's property is placed beside his body. He is placed in a sitting position with elbows bent, hands up to shoulder and two stakes placed as a support behind body. . . in from 10 to 15 days, head is removed and placed in a *tambu* house.<sup>28</sup>

Hocart noted the same custom in 1908 on Simbo:

Nga's body was placed in a wooden framework, apparently called *era* in a tree on the north side of Narovo Bay [Simbo island] . . . the body is placed in a sitting position with the knees drawn up . . . broken shell rings, shields and other belongings may be left beside the corpse or in a special stone chamber [also] called *era*.<sup>29</sup>

Much more recently, Edvard Hviding recorded that in the Marovo district of New Georgia Island, a body was placed in a seated position between buttresses of *tangovo*, a wood utilized for prows and sterns of canoes.<sup>30</sup>

The two-dimensional, frame-like structure on all of the seated canoe images (anthropomorphic figures with human, as well as frigate bird, heads) can reasonably be viewed as a two-dimensional translation of a normally three-dimensional support for a seated corpse. The separation of head from body, a consistent feature among all seated figures in the group of prow ornaments under consideration, would thus denote the customary burial tradition of separation of head from torso. However, at the same time, it could also denote the practice of headhunting that resulted in another sort of separation.<sup>31</sup> All accounts of burials mention the placement of shell valuables beside or in front of a corpse. When shell valuables were placed in front of the skulls after their separation from the bodies, these objects were not just former possessions, but could be viewed as “body parts” that “allowed [the deceased] to take in the world and cause things to happen, a collection of senses and efficacies.”<sup>32</sup>

Shell rings were utilized as a means to transfer efficacy in life, as well as after death, when at one point the soul-shadow of the deceased individual was captured in a shell ring prior to its journey to the afterworld.<sup>33</sup> Despite the records of accumulations of shell valuables placed in front of corpses, among the canoe carvings under consideration it is images of triangular-shaped *barava* and, to a lesser extent, shell rings that have prominence. This choice coincides with the similar prominence of *barava* on canoe prows and of both *barava* and rings on *serembule* or *vovoso*—sticks that were reputedly placed in war canoes during expeditions



and moved to mortuary shrines when not at sea. The shell valuables lashed to sticks in essence constituted collective social bodies emblemized through shell valuables.<sup>34</sup>

### Kesoko Canoe Carvings

Six canoe carvings in the group under consideration depict the seated, hybrid, anthropomorphic figure with a frigate bird head that has been documented as the sea spirit Kesoko. Innumerable canoe carvings, as well as other carved and painted images, appear to refer visually to the same hybrid being. The examples considered here demonstrate just how the iconic features of Kesoko were variously rendered. Other associated features merit attention, including recorded oral traditions involving Kesoko and just how these narratives compare and contrast with the visual representations. The seated Kesoko canoe figure is the only carving type considered in this paper that has been visually recorded in position, lashed to the tip of a canoe prow. Artist Norman H. Hardy's painting, for example, depicts a fleet of canoes, one of which bears a canoe prow carving representing Kesoko lashed in position.<sup>35</sup>

#### *Visual Ingredients of Kesoko Carvings*

The substitution of a frigate bird image for an anthropomorphic head appears to be the main requisite for a Kesoko image; the frigate bird (*mbelama*) is readily recognizable by its hooked beak. Among Kesoko carvings in the group under study, the figure is represented in profile and seated within a partial frame made up of a horizontal bar for rest and a vertical bar, which approximates an extension of the canoe prow. The carvings in this group, like the anthropomorphic figure with anthropomorphic head (Fig. 13), are flat or two-dimensional. They are carved and painted on both of the sides, so as to be visible from more than one point of view.<sup>36</sup> The same hybrid image featuring the frigate-bird substitute for the head also occurs on other objects such as fish net floats from New Georgia Island (especially the Marovo district), where it represents Kesoko. On at least one other island, Santa Isabel, the same design is given the name used among people from New Georgia for the prow figurehead: *nguzunguzu*.<sup>37</sup>

Just as is true of the figures with an anthropomorphic head as in Figure 13, shell valuables are depicted in low relief on the other Kesoko carvings, primarily along the vertical and horizontal bars. The triangular *barava* design predominates, but also present is the shell ring. Single *barava* function as head ornaments in three instances (Figs. 1–2, 4), where they appear atop the frigate bird heads. Rings, or circles, are a highly visible feature of another Kesoko carving (Fig. 3), appearing in a row on the horizontal bar that separates the frigate

bird from the anthropomorphic body, as well as along the bar on which the figure sits. Moreover, this figure wears a ring as a neck ornament. This canoe carving has unfortunately been broken, leaving unanswered questions as to its original intended configuration. The lower half of the frigate bird, a small portion of the upper horizontal bar, and a portion of the carving to the right of the body are missing. What does remain presents a curious suggestion regarding the body. The far-right edge of the torso inscribes a semicircle, and this is balanced by the curve of the left edge of the profile image. In all other seated images, the left edge of the torso is straight and upright. It is possible to read the upper right shoulder and torso as remaining fragments of a large circle whose inner rim constitutes the curving back of the profile figure. This is a tantalizingly suggestive reading of a figure that is, simultaneously, figure and shell ring.

In four of the canoe prow figures, the profile-seated bodies of Kesoko figures display crossed shoulder bands or bandoliers, possibly corresponding to a ceremonial “shoulder belt” called *mamaroko* that Hocart mentions as ritual paraphernalia donned by warriors prior to departure on an expedition (Figs. 1–2, 4–5).<sup>38</sup> In each of these instances, the profile torso seems to be visually fused with a frontal view, displaying body ornaments that ordinarily would not be visible from a profile perspective. Thus, in these canoe carvings representing Kesoko, elements of human-related society are present in a reference to warriors.

Another canoe carving under consideration bears several visual features of other carvings in the group, but is quite different in other ways. The carving, now in the Auckland War Memorial Museum (Fig. 6), consists of a horizontal, bar-like base decorated with carved low-relief designs that resemble, in a generic sense, shell ornaments, but not *barava*. The designs carved on the body of the figure are the same notched, triangular forms rather than the triangular *barava* featured on the other carvings in the group. In contrast to other Kesoko carvings, this figure takes the form of a bird with upswept tail and wing and an anthropomorphic head that is extremely prognathic. It wears a small Western-style hat, a feature also seen on a few *nguzunguzugu* prow figureheads.<sup>39</sup> Prominent round earrings hang from the ears. One (human?) leg extends down from the bird body. Like other canoe carvings, the figure is relatively flat and exhibits detailed, low-relief, decorative carving on both sides. This type of image, in which the body of the creature is a bird and the head anthropomorphic, does not occur in this particular group of carvings. However, it is very common among other art forms from New Georgia, specifically fish net floats and painted canoe paddles. Despite the lack of collection data, this canoe carving belongs stylistically to the New Georgia region, relates to the focus group examined here, and is probably another visual translation of Kesoko into canoe imagery.

*Recorded Visual and Oral Traditions Pertaining to Kesoko*<sup>40</sup>

Kesoko is a long-recognized reef spirit on New Georgia, Simbo, and other islands in the Western Solomon Island group. Navy Lt. Boyle Somerville collected many carvings from New Georgia in 1892–93. Anthropologist Hocart recorded information about both the spirit and its representative carvings on Simbo and Roviana in 1908. These two were the first to make graphic, as well as written records of oral traditions of both beliefs regarding the Kesoko and its images. Somerville commissioned a drawing “from a native of Mungeri (Munggeri district), New Georgia” depicting “a Boat with Native Fishing with a Kite.”<sup>41</sup> In the illustration, a seated figure with a bird for its head adorns the prow of a boat. In his “Ethnographic Notes on New Georgia, Solomon Islands,” another version of the same sketch recurs along with a small drawing of the canoe carving depicted separately from the vessel itself.<sup>42</sup> Somerville published these and other drawings as illustrations of his evaluations of local artwork in response to examination categories set out in the manual “Notes and Queries on Anthropology used by field explorers of that era.”<sup>43</sup>

Somerville had this to say about the seated figure, which, he was told, was called Kesoko:

The figure consists, roughly speaking, of the body of a man, seated, with his elbow on his knee, wearing a big ornamental collar and surrounded by the head of a frigate bird. Both head and body largely conventionalized . . . The figure also wears an ornamented waist cloth and is always depicted in exact profile, and highly coloured . . . From his profile view having always been presented, and thus only one leg and one arm able to be shown, the belief now is that Kesoko has but one arm and one leg. . . <sup>44</sup>

Somerville follows this visual description with an explanation of Kesoko; this is the first conjunction of visual with oral tradition of the being.

[Kesoko] is said to live in the sea, and to be able to command the wind and the waves, to capsize canoes; and when this is accomplished, it falls upon the occupants and devours them . . . it usually lives on fish . . . plenty of men have seen it . . . at almost any time it may be heard in its home under the edge of the coral reef, blowing out the air from its lungs (the air sucking and puffing through the holes in the reef). His power is combated, however, by Totoishu [a prow figurehead called Nguzunguzu in the Roviana district of New Georgia Island].<sup>45</sup>

In his field notes, Hocart confirmed a similar descriptive identification for a carving and presented it in a small sketch that illustrates his concept of a Kesoko canoe image. According to the accompanying notes:

[Deputy Commissioner] Partington possesses in Gizo a Kesoko with a rod right across separating head from body: body [assumes] usual posture: head is that of *mbelama* [frigate bird]; it has a distinct *mbelama* beak; behind turned-up body . . . it looks like a bird with big head and shrivelled body.<sup>46</sup>

Hocart returns to the same carving, as well as another from Vella Lavella island, in a published article in which he links these carvings to frigate bird carvings called Kesoko. He mentions “seeing a figure in a house on Vella La Vella [sic] island that was identified by our interpreter . . . as Kesoko. Now the head was that of a bird with the semi-human mouth of a *nunjhnunju* [nguzunguzu].”<sup>47</sup> Then at Partington’s house, he mentions seeing the figure that he first drew and recorded in his field notes of 1908; in this published article, he describes the carving as

the figure of a seated headless man. On the neck of the man rested a platform, and on this platform the head of a sea-bird with hooked beak. To that head was attached an undersized body. . . on a Roviana canoe at the place where the Two Kesoko usually sit back to back, I saw two birds tail to tail . . . indicating that Kesoko has a bird form.<sup>48</sup>

In a previous reference in the same article but in a section devoted to fish-spearing, Hocart noted that “there is a being called Kesoko whose name has occurred in our angling charm. Roviana canoes sometimes bear two Kesokos back to back . . .” As an individual “Kesoko is invisible to men . . .” but “has a highly prognathous face like the figure called *nunjnunju* which is tied to the prow of a canoe.” Other details include his having white hair and only one leg. He features in a rather long tale about competitive fishing involving characters known as One Leg and Three Legs.<sup>49</sup>

In a Roviana tradition, titled “Kesoko Pature,” retold by G. Beti in 1977,

Kesoko was manlike in form but physically invisible. He could not be seen with the naked eye. . . The *nguzunguzu* in front of a *tomoko* [war canoe] was an image of Kesoko as he kept a constant watch without ever closing his eyes. In this way Kesoko was believed to have functioned as a pilot of the great *tomoko* through unknown waters . . . and . . . to look out for enemies to see that none escaped.<sup>50</sup>

Despite invisibility, “the feet of Kesoko were short and his mouth was like that of a frigate bird or a seagull”—traits visible only to “those gifted with the ability to see spirits.” The story continues, noting that Kesoko was

an expert fisherman and that was his main occupation. Kesoko would spear fish and let them rot in the sea. If people saw fish floating about in the water they would say, “It’s Kesoko” . . . At times his foot prints would be seen in the sand together with the trail of the spear he was dragging along . . . Kesoko had been “the patron of fishing for the Vuraghare mbutumbu [clan] of Roviana.”<sup>51</sup>

The remainder of the tale describes an encounter between two boys and Kesoko during which the spirit taught the youth how to spearfish and hunt for turtles. Ultimately, Kesoko led them in an attack on canoes from Lauru (Choiseul) island. The boys killed the canoeing islanders with their fishing spears, thus fusing what had once been two major social institutions: war and fishing.

Hviding’s recordings of tales of the reef spirit Kesoko summarize other stories and augment them. “Localized manifestations of Kesoko are said to inhabit several locations on the outer barrier reef shores of Marovo and Roviana.”<sup>52</sup> He recounts from Marovo the story of Veonona, a “sacred man who lived at Kololuka, near what is now called Vella La Vella [sic].”<sup>53</sup> In the story, Kesoko is described as a “sea spirit with one leg, with a face like a man but a beak like the frigate-bird, and who carries a fishing spear. . . .” As for the relationship between Kesoko and *nguzunguzu*, the latter “was the guardian of seafarers and canoes particularly against Kesoko, a spear-fishing sea spirit.”<sup>54</sup> His alleged powers are described in an account from an old man in Marovo Lagoon:

There are many spirits at sea, but Kesoko is one of the most bothersome. Kesoko lives everywhere we travel at sea, on fishing grounds, at ocean-facing beaches and out in the ocean. He can spoil our fishing, he can steal canoes that are pulled up on the beach, and he can bring a traveling canoe off its course. But Kesoko can only do this mischief when you and I, who are human, blink with our eyes. As long as our eyes are open, he cannot do anything or come near us. Kesoko is invisible. This is why we hang the *toto isu* [Marovo name for *nguzunguzu* canoe prow figurehead] on the bow of our canoe. The *toto isu* never blinks, its eyes are always wide-open and staring . . . Kesoko cannot even get close to a canoe as long as the *toto isu* stares . . .<sup>55</sup>

These early accounts clearly refer to several visual elements that define Kesoko images. Most specific is the presence of a frigate bird, as well as antagonistic, yet analogous, associations with the spirit of *nguzunguzu*, the prow figurehead. Features such as having one leg and white hair also occur in descriptions from active oral narratives. When a narrative is translated into

the visual, the frigate bird presence prevails—together with prognathism, the extension of the lower face that is featured among many images in this region—not just the *nguzunguzu* prow figurehead.

Thus far, this paper has dealt with canoe carvings depicting ornamented skulls and seated anthropomorphic figures, only one of which did not display the sea spirit Kesoko as a hybrid image with a human body and frigate bird head. This sequencing provides context for the hybrid Kesoko images, as well as recorded Kesoko descriptions. Thus, the visual expression of Kesoko includes references to any deceased beings—human or otherwise—manifested particularly in the body that has been configured as a seated profile figure. Another human referent, shell valuables worn by the living and viewed as comprising the bodies of their former owners after death, are featured on these Kesoko carvings. Their presence on the carvings may have referred visually not to Kesoko spirits alone, but to the owners of the canoe carvings and perhaps even the canoes to which they were lashed.

### Canoe Carvings with Spiral Motifs

A brief look at four more carvings will further explicate the operative power of the group of carvings addressed in this paper. One features a frigate bird atop a spiral (Fig 9), two have a spiral form on which the relief-carved image of an animal—a crocodile or a griffin—predominates (Figs. 10, 14), and the fourth is a double spiral ornamented with shell rings and topped by a bird.<sup>56</sup> The spiral is the common denominator in these examples. Spirals were frequently used in canoe prow and stern carvings from various Western Solomon Islands, especially among fishing canoes. This is illustrated in a 1908 drawing depicting canoes by an artist called Angga and commissioned either by Hocart or William Halse Rivers.<sup>57</sup> The significance of spirals on canoe carvings is a topic that lies beyond the scope of this paper, but perhaps it was used to mimic the crest of a wave.

#### *Spiral with Frigate Bird*

In the first of these examples, a frigate bird with a recognizable hooked beak is perched upon a spiral (Fig. 9). Both spiral and bird are similarly ornamented with low relief paired designs that replicate shell *barava*. Each *barava* design within a pair is linked to its opposite by a small shell ring. As for the bird, it graphically depicts the frigate bird (*mbelama*) that was so frequently a substitute on the head of Kesoko images. This particular bird plainly has not only the typical hooked beak, but also a full extended chest (its gular pouch),

indicating that it is a male. Frigate birds on two of the Kesoko carvings (Figs. 3–4) also have this feature. Frigate birds (family *Fregatidae*) are seabirds that are

found across all tropical and subtropical oceans. All have predominantly black plumage, long deeply forked tails and long hooked bills. Females have white underbellies and males have a distinctive red gular pouch which they inflate during the mating season to attract females. Their wings can span up to 23 meters (7.5'), the largest wing area to body weight ratio of any bird.<sup>58</sup>

Behavioral characteristics of the frigate bird include their ability to soar for weeks, spending most of the day in flight hunting for food. Their main prey are small fish that swim with larger predators, such as tuna. Frigates will also snatch chicks and eggs of other seabirds, such as boobies and petrels. They are definitely predators, a quality that makes them an appropriate choice for power-laden images on either headhunting or fishing canoes. Frigate bird images also appear on fishing net floats and painted paddles, as well as canoe carvings.

The bird on the carving in Figure 9 stands alone and is not a feature of a Kesoko image. Most birds depicted on spiral canoe carvings represent various other birds, whereas this carving features the frigate bird, the largest and most powerful bird of the ocean.<sup>59</sup> If the spiral represents a crested wave, this canoe carving might metaphorically depict a warrior as a frigate bird. Perhaps it alludes to the owner of the war canoe to which the carving was intended to be lashed and his role as leader of warriors seated in the canoe atop a wave and united with the power of the sea. The *barava* and rings carved on all the surfaces of the spiral and bird could refer to the warrior and other human canoe occupants, as well as their ancestors—in short, a corporate ancestral body.

Two spiral carvings now in the Pitt Rivers Museum (Figs. 10, 14) stand out among the numerous single and double spirals on canoe carvings from Western Solomon Islands. In both cases, the spiral was not intended as a support for an anthropomorphic figure or bird. Most support spirals are relatively narrow and may or may not be decorated. Supportive spirals sometimes appear quite delicate in comparison to the image that they bear. These two carvings are considered together here because both are dominated by animals: one indigenous to the Solomon Islands and the other a foreign creature from European mythology. Somerville, collected both spiral carvings at the same time, between 1892 and 1893, in Mungeri district, Marovo.

The spiral canoe stern with a crocodile (Fig. 10) has carved imagery along both sides. Uppermost on one side is the image of a crocodile inserted into the upper curving section of the spiral. A relief band encircles the innermost curve of the spiral, visually transforming it into a ring. Both ring and crocodile have equal prominence. The crocodile is rendered immediately above the ring upon which he places one foot. Their close visual juxtaposition is entirely

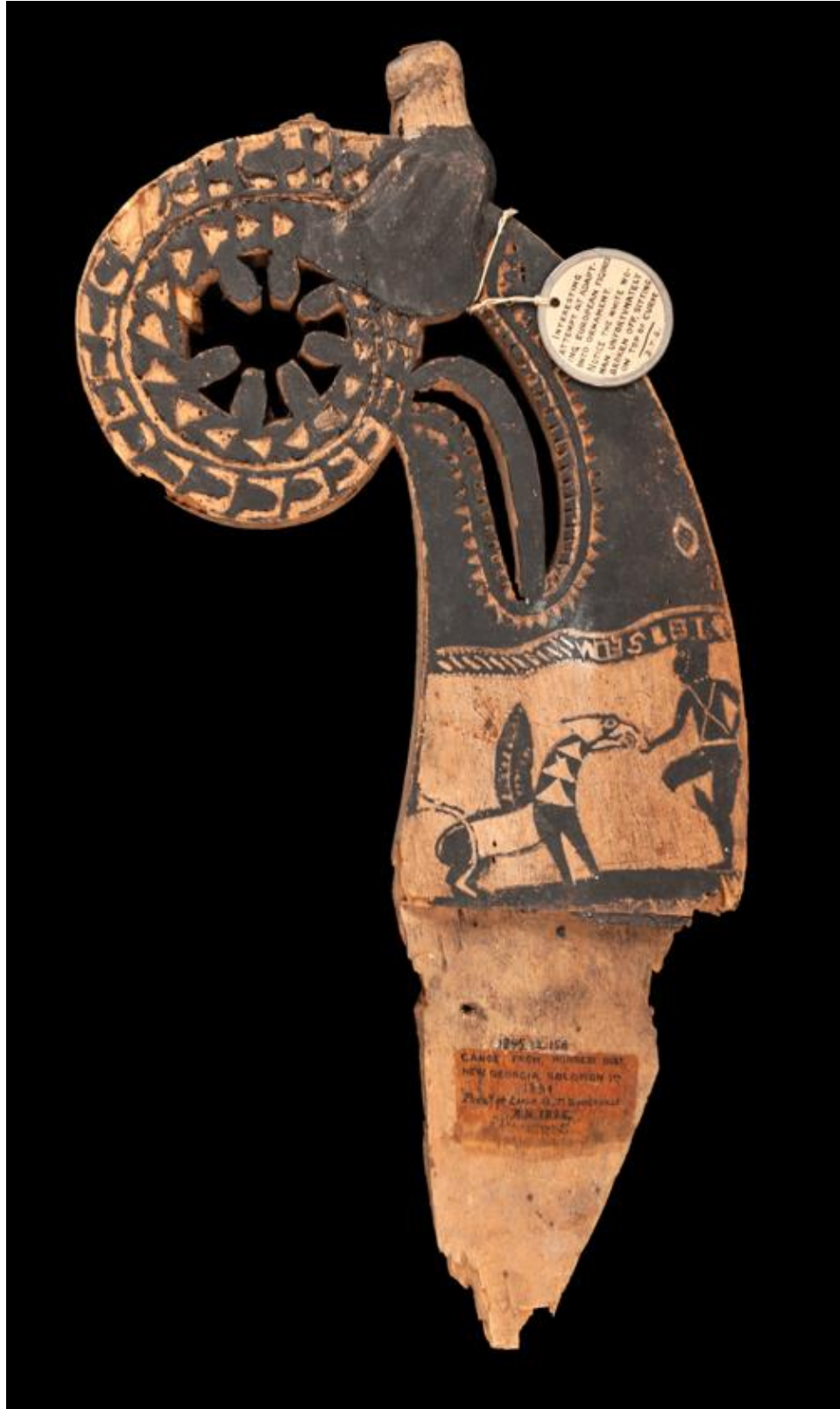


Figure 14. Spiral with griffin on a canoe stern ornament. Marovo, New Georgia. Gr. h. 40.7 cm. Collected by Henry Boyle Townshend Somerville, 1893–4. Photograph by Suzy Prior. Courtesy of the Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford (1895.22.158)



appropriate, given the prominent social significance of both shell rings and the crocodile in nineteenth-century Western Solomon Islands.

The low-relief, decorative designs rendered on both sides of the spiral carving include the *barava*, rings, and triangular forms with serrated edges that resemble the edges of *barava*. This serrated treatment of shapes closely corresponds to a similar design process utilized on the skull carvings (Figs. 7–8). Moreover, these three carvings are also united by the presence of a large relief ring; on each of the two profile heads depicted in Figures 7 and 8, the ring that substitutes for an ear terminates in a spiral design.

The social prominence of crocodiles in Western Solomon Islands provides contextual substance for the spiral canoe carving that features the image of this reptile. Hocart noted the existence of one war canoe named *Eoro* [crocodile] from the Karivara district in Simbo in 1908. The crocodile, he said, “is the sacred animal of Karivara.”<sup>60</sup> Large troughs from which men ate during war-related festivals frequently took the form of crocodiles.<sup>61</sup> One particularly outstanding example was procured from Roviana by Captain Edward Davis on a British government punitive expedition held in 1893 and is now in the British Museum.<sup>62</sup> Within the historical period in which headhunting prevailed on New Georgia and adjacent islands in the western group, crocodiles constituted major emblems of power.

The other Pitt Rivers spiral canoe carving (Fig. 14) is a stern ornament portraying a totally different animal in a manner that draws upon European sources of imagery. At the bottom of the carving is a painted scene of a man standing on one leg and extending one hand toward a winged animal that resembles a griffin-like creature. Crossed torso bands on the man’s chest are comparable to crossed bands visible on several of the Kesoko images. Above this painting and on both sides, the main body of the stern ornament is painted black and carved to look like the profile head of the griffin-like creature in the painting. The head is pointed vertically, with its open mouth and tongue abutting the circular coil of a spiral. The spiral terminus of this carving comprises roughly engraved concentric rows of serrated *barava*-shaped designs, making it resemble an open-work variant of a *kapkap*.<sup>63</sup>

This canoe carving apparently intrigued Somerville who described it as “an interesting attempt at adapting European figures into ornament.” He remarked, “Notice the white woman, unfortunately broken off, sitting on top of the curve,” but did not attempt any analysis of the scene of man and winged animal.<sup>64</sup> In his “Ethnographical Notes in New Georgia, Solomon Islands,” Somerville devoted a short section to “Drawing, Sculpture and Ornamentation” in which he noted that “European drawings are a great source of pleasure to them [the islanders]; they seem to quite understand them.”<sup>65</sup> He reproduced local drawings of frigate birds, a Kesoko carving, and a scene of men fishing for sharks that were inspired by European art.

### *Double Spiral*

The last canoe carving in the group is from the Basel Kulturen Museum and comprises a double spiral.<sup>66</sup> Eugene Paravicini acquired this piece in 1924, but unfortunately accompanying recorded data is minimal. A bird with outspread wings (possibly a *kio-kio* or beach kingfisher) is rendered immediately above the spirals.<sup>67</sup> Five rings are carved in low relief on the surfaces of the spirals. The terminating volute of each spiral encompasses a ring, thus representing still another fusion of the two design elements.

### **Operative Significance of the Canoe Carvings: Connections to Other Artifacts**

The principal artifactual references comprising the operative framework of art from the Western Solomon Islands region are actual ornamented skulls, eating troughs that take the form of a crocodile, triangular clamshell *barava* ornaments, and the *serembule* or *vovoso* sticks to which *barava* and shell rings were once attached. Perhaps one could add the skull or mortuary shrines to which the sticks once belonged. The shell *barava* ornament that is represented two-dimensionally on the carvings has its parallel on the prow of the war canoe, and is lashed to the *serembule* or *vovoso*. In addition, these sticks were placed in canoes during voyages but kept in mortuary shrines when not at sea. These ornamental assemblages probably simultaneously represented deceased ancestors, who had owned and worn the *barava* shell ornaments, and their descendants.<sup>68</sup> It is not impossible that their replicated presence on canoe carvings suggested an ancestral association for all of them, augmenting the probable association of canoe and its ornaments with canoe owner and canoe occupants. *Serembule* sticks and the skulls of deceased individuals of note were kept in mortuary shrines with which this group of canoe carvings display a particular link. Mortuary shrines, thus, deserve a final category for consideration.

On New Georgia Island, particularly in the Marovo and Roviana districts, and on Simbo Island, skulls obtained in war and, in particular, skulls of deceased chiefs were kept and displayed in mortuary shrines. Such shrines sometimes consisted of a cave or other isolated spot, such as Mbili, Marovo Lagoon, and islets including “Skull Island” in Vonavona Lagoon, Roviana.<sup>69</sup> Miniature skull houses or boxes (*oru*) located at these shrines displayed carved and painted designs that echoed those on the canoe carvings.<sup>70</sup> In one example reproduced in pencil by Somerville, at Mbili village, Marovo, the triangular facade is adorned with a single row of triangular *barava* ornaments. To the left and right, facing downwards, are images of two crocodiles.<sup>71</sup> The same theme is repeated on other wooden skull shrines and monuments from Roviana, most notably a monument erected in honor of the famous chief Ingava, first

photographed by Count Rudolph Festetics de Tolna in 1895.<sup>72</sup> A mortuary hut on Simbo Island features the oft-repeated image of a man standing in a canoe, beneath which are two images of diverging crocodiles.<sup>73</sup>

Besides imagery, two more factors further link the group of canoe carvings in this paper with skull house ornamentation—more specifically than is true for other canoe carvings from Western Solomon Islands. These are the two-dimensionality or low relief character of the carving and the colors used on pieces within this group (specifically red, blue, and white versus the usual all-black or dark brown treatment of so many other canoe carvings).

Although it is well-nigh impossible to explain the use of color among these specific carvings and their obvious association with colors utilized on mortuary-hut facades, in the absence of interviews with relevant artists (an impossibility at this point), the “relational quality of color” cannot be ignored.<sup>74</sup>

### Concluding Remarks

This paper has presented detailed visual and oral data in order to support the initial thesis: that the canoe carvings under consideration are indeed a group defined by their common stylistic treatment, whether they represent heads, figures, scrolls, or crocodiles. These themes isolate the art, even though, like so many other canoe carvings from Western Solomon Islands, they guaranteed the success of war canoes through their presence, a presence defined by their particular mode of visual treatment. The canoe carvings display image types, such as Kesoko and anthropomorphic heads, as well as representations of ornaments that recur on multiple artifacts once prevalent in Western Solomon Islands. These include eating troughs, *serembule* sticks, and mortuary shrines. Through the repeated presence of this imagery on this group of canoe ornaments, the effectiveness of the canoes would be assured.

All of these features would seem to testify to the importance of the carvings—not just to the canoes to which they were lashed, but also to the canoe occupants and, most particularly, the canoe owners. This connectivity would have prevailed not only during a war expedition, but before and after. That is when the carvings were taken off canoes and, quite probably, stored in the houses of the canoe owners or in mortuary shrines along with *serembule/vovoso* sticks. In other words, there exists a spatial-social cyclicality. This symbolic interconnectivity is the particular significance of the nuclear assemblage of canoe carvings that constitute the focus of this article. They are connected to so many aspects of Western Solomon Islands culture, yet display a visual character that defines them as a group.

Deborah Waite earned her PhD from Columbia University and was the curator of ethnology at the Newark Museum in New Jersey from 1968 to 1970. She served as a professor of Pacific art history at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa from 1970 until her recent retirement. Her research has focused on Melanesian art, particularly that of the Solomon Islands.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Oxford University, England (Figs. 1–5, 7, 9–10, 13–14); Vancouver (Fig. 8); Auckland (Fig. 6). I could not obtain photographs of two images from the Kulturen Museum, Basel. These include: canoe prow figure of Kesoko, Marovo Lagoon, New Georgia Island, h. 69 cm, Paravicini 1924, Vb7620, and double spiral canoe carving with flying bird, Marovo Lagoon, New Georgia Island, Gr.h. 76.5 cm, Paravicini 1924, Vb7619. One Kesoko carving now in the Kulturen Museum Basel, Vb7620 is illustrated in Adrienne L. Kaeppler, Christian Kaufmann, and Douglas Newton, *Oceanic Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1993), 563, fig. 824.

The analyses of these carvings in this paper could indicate that the same artist's hand was at work or those of artists working closely together. We obviously cannot know what the artist or artists' comments would be, but it is worth noting that their opinions, now absent, would be of incredible value.

<sup>2</sup> However, a brown patina of age has replaced much of color on the University of British Columbia example.

<sup>3</sup> See *Barava* tridacna clam shell ornaments—neck ornament. British Museum MM.1904.64. 9.3 cm; b. canoe ornament, British Museum Oc1915,-30, gr.w. 16.4 cm.

<sup>4</sup> See *Kapkap* (*dalo* - Solomon Islands term), British Museum 1944, Oc2.1341, Dia. 13.2 cm.

<sup>5</sup> The Pitt Rivers Museum examples were collected by either H. B. T. Somerville or Neil Gordon Monro. The Basel Museum pieces were collected by Paravicini in 1928. Eugene Paravicini, *Reisen in den Britischen Salomonen* (Leipzig: Huber, 1931). Frank Burnett obtained the Vancouver example from a village in Ramada in 1909, thus putting it well within the group orbit.

<sup>6</sup> In his article “The Art of Canoe Building,” Graham Officer writes about a canoe from Roviana and describes carvings attached to the canoe as follows: “The high peaks of both ends of the canoe are terminated by carved wooden figures of human form. The low end has two grotesque prognathous-faced little images placed back-to-back, one looking ahead the other astern. The stern peak has a single two-faced head, like a Janus, looking outwards on each side. . . on the bow, just above the water line is fixed a remarkable prognathous-faced head with hands clasped in front and supporting the chin [the *nguzunguzu*]. . . Their significance seems to be in their being regarded as exercising guardian functions. . . The *totoishu* [*nguzunguzu*] guards against dangers in the waters, whether rocks or spirits, immediately in front. The two figures on the top of the bow peak will look out for more distant dangers ahead and astern, while the two-faced head on the stern peak keeps guard on either side.” Rhys Richards, *Head Hunters Black and White: Three Collectors in the Western Solomon Islands 1893 to 1914, and the Diary of Graham Officer, Collector of Museum Objects in the Solomon Islands in 1901 for Museum Victoria in Melbourne* (Wellington: Paremata Press 2012), 213–14.

<sup>7</sup> Daniel Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood Ltd., 1987). See also Christopher Tilley, “Objectification,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, Mike Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 60–73.

<sup>8</sup> An example can be found in the Australian Museum: # E.57312.

<sup>9</sup> A number of the carvings discussed in this paper have been previously published in articles of mine. Although some of the carvings are the same, ideas about them and “interpretations” differ. The inclusion of carvings such as the spiral with crocodile (Pitt Rivers 1895.22.165) and the initial focus on the two skull carvings before consideration of the Kesoko images has done much to re-focus my previous arguments. See Deborah Waite, “Mon Canoes of the Western Solomon Islands,” *Art and Identity in Oceania*, ed. Allen Hanson and Louise Hanson (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1990), 44–66.

<sup>10</sup> Tim Thomas, “Sensory Efficacy in the Art of New Georgia,” in *Melanesia: Art and Encounter*, ed. Lissant Bolton, Nicholas Thomas, Elizabeth Bonshek, Julie Adams, and Ben Burt (London: The British Museum, 2013), 199–208.

<sup>11</sup> T. Thomas, “Sensory Efficacy in the Art of New Georgia,” 199–208.

<sup>12</sup> See example referenced in endnote 4.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, David Howes notes that in a very different part of the world among the Suya of the Mata Grosso region of Brazil “the ear is the primary organ through which the world is cognized. It is also the organ through which the human subject is socialized.” David Howes, “Scent, Sound and Synesthesia: Intersensoriality and Material Culture Theory,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, Mike Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer (London: Sage Publications, 2006), 161–72.

<sup>14</sup> T. Thomas, “Sensory Efficacy in the Art of New Georgia.”

<sup>15</sup> At least two other canoe prow figures feature a similar frontal image with extended hands touching and calling attention to large ear ornaments. One of these figures was collected by Somerville from Marovo (Pitt Rivers 1895.22.205) and illustrated as Fig. 12 in Deborah Waite, “The H.B.T. Somerville Collection of Artefacts from the Solomon Islands in the Pitt Rivers Museum,” in *The General’s Gift: A Celebration of the Pitt Rivers Museum Centenary 1884–1984*, ed. B.A.L. Cranstone and Steven Seidenberg (Oxford: Journal of the Anthropology Society of Oxford, 1984), 47. The Reverend Tom Dent, a Methodist missionary at Marovo from 1922 to 1934, obtained the other example in the British Museum (Oc 1959, 06.23) in New Georgia. Very likely, Marovo is also the provenance for this figure.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur Maurice Hocart, “Medicine and Witchcraft in Eddystone,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 55 (1925): 236.

<sup>17</sup> Hocart, “Medicine and Witchcraft,” 236.

<sup>18</sup> Hocart, “Warfare in Eddystone of the Solomon Islands,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 61 (1931): 315.

<sup>19</sup> Hocart, “The Cult of the Dead in Eddystone of the Solomons,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 52 (1922): 269.

<sup>20</sup> Hocart, “Medicine and Witchcraft,” 249–50.

<sup>21</sup> Hocart, “The Canoe and Bonito in Eddystone Island,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 65 (1935): 101–7.

<sup>22</sup> Hocart, “The Cult of the Dead,” 80–95. See also Richard Walter, Tim Thomas, and Peter J. Sheppard, “Cult Assemblages and Ritual Practice in Roviana Lagoon Solomon Islands,” *World Archaeology* 36 (2004): 150.

<sup>23</sup> Hocart, “The Cult of the Dead,” 80–95.

<sup>24</sup> Two skulls to which shell rings have been lashed over the eyes and head “were taken with ten others from a shrine in Vella La Vella Island” in 1909. One skull, 276646, is illustrated in Roland W. Force and Maryanne Force, *The Fuller Collection of Pacific Artifacts* (New York and Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1971): 230. For an historical account of the situation, see David Russell Lawrence, *The Naturalist and his “Beautiful Islands”: Charles Morris Woodford in the Western Pacific* (Canberra: Australia National University Press, 2014), Chapter 8, [doi.org/10.22459/NBI.10.2014](https://doi.org/10.22459/NBI.10.2014)

<sup>25</sup> See item referenced in endnote 3.

<sup>26</sup> Deborah Waite, “Serembule/Vovoso and Other Sticks with Shell Valuables: Part of a Dialectic with Barava Openwork Plaques,” *Pacific Arts, New Series* 11, no. 2 (2011): 27–8.

<sup>27</sup> One seated image now in the Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden (1134, Nr.87), is rendered in the seated position, has an extended jaw characteristic of *nguzunguzu*, and appears to have only one leg (or is that interpretation simply because the image lacks any sort of background or other details of carving that would clearly define it as a profile image?).

<sup>28</sup> Graham Officer, Wed., June 26 1901, quoted in Richards, *Head Hunters Black and White*, 83.

<sup>29</sup> Hocart, “The Cult of the Dead,” 82–3.

<sup>30</sup> Edvard Hviding, “War Canoes of the Western Solomons” in *The Things We Value: Culture and History in Solomon Islands*, ed. Ben Burt and Lissant Bolton (Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2005), 146.

<sup>31</sup> Unfortunately, recorded documentation that would make these two possibilities more open for interpretation is lacking.

<sup>32</sup> Walter, Thomas, and Sheppard, “Cult Assemblages,” 149.

<sup>33</sup> Hocart, “The Cult of the Dead,” 80–95.

<sup>34</sup> Waite, “Serembule/Vovoso and Other Sticks,” 9–35.

<sup>35</sup> *Ingova’s Head-hunters*, painting by Norman H. Hardy, British Museum EOC88089 ncq OcG.N, 2133, Museum no. Oc2006 drg.135. Hardy apparently based his painting on a photograph published by A. & C. Black (British Museum, Oc.G.N. 2133), but there is no information about his choice of subject matter, the change of published titles, or whether the fleet of canoes depicted in the painting really had any actual association with Ingova, a prominent chief of Roviana. Therefore, the value of the painting is simply to show the carving in position, attached to the foremost canoe visible in the painting. It is quite small in comparison with the size of the war canoe, yet still visible. The size of other types of canoe carvings including, for example, the *nguzunguzu* prow figurehead, is also small in comparison with the overall proportions of a canoe. The size of the canoe carving obviously did not necessarily correspond to its symbolic empowerment. The painting was first published in Ernest Elkington, *Savage South Seas* (London: A & C Black, 1907); then in John Henry Macartney Abbott and Norman H. Hardy, *The South Seas (Melanesia)* (1918): plate opposite p. 80; and much later in Crispin Howarth, *Varilaku: Pacific Arts from the Solomon Islands* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2011): 23. In Elkington’s and Howarth’s publications, the painting is entitled *Ingova’s head-hunters*, while in Abbot’s book it is labelled *Head-hunters setting out on a Raid*.

- <sup>36</sup> One example of a Kesoko canoe prow image that lacks the framework and is more three-dimensional is Melbourne X.607. Howarth, *Varilaku*, 105.
- <sup>37</sup> Evelyn Tetehu, “Some Family Treasures of Santa Isabel,” in *The Things We Value: Culture and History in Solomon Islands*, ed. Ben Burt and Lissant Bolton (Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2014), 85.
- <sup>38</sup> Hocart, “Warfare in Eddystone,” 308.
- <sup>39</sup> For example, a figurehead from Vella Lavella (Melbourne, X.7487) illustrated in Howarth, *Varilaku*, 101.
- <sup>40</sup> This section may appear to be a sudden departure from the topic of the paper, i.e., the original group of canoe carvings under consideration. Oral traditions may not always seem to conform directly to the canoe carving imagery. Some of the oral traditions do and some do not, but it is impossible to judge what may appear to be exceptions or inconsistent data. It is best to include all recorded traditions, as they may or may not once have been applicable to certain viewers of the relevant period.
- <sup>41</sup> Deborah Waite, “Lt. Boyle Somerville and the Solomon Islands,” *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford* XXXI, no. 3, (2000): 291.
- <sup>42</sup> Boyle Somerville, “Ethnographical Notes in New Georgia, Solomon Islands,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 26 (1897): 357–412.
- <sup>43</sup> Waite, “Lt. Boyle,” 291.
- <sup>44</sup> Somerville, “Ethnographical Notes,” 294.
- <sup>45</sup> Somerville, “Ethnographical Notes,” 294.
- <sup>46</sup> Arthur Maurice Hocart, “Unpublished Diaries,” 1908, 1583. “Hocart, Arthur Maurice, 1883-1939: Papers,” MS-Papers-0060, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23025566>.
- <sup>47</sup> Arthur Maurice Hocart, “Fishing in Eddystone Island,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, 67 (1937): 39.
- <sup>48</sup> Hocart, “Fishing in Eddystone Island,” 39.
- <sup>49</sup> Hocart, “Unpublished Diaries,” 38. “Hocart, Arthur Maurice, 1883-1939: Papers,” MS-Papers-0060, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, <https://natlib.govt.nz/records/23025566>.
- <sup>50</sup> Geoffrey O. Beti, “Kesoko Pature,” *Journal of the Cultural Association of the Solomon Islands* 5 (1977): 40–46.
- <sup>51</sup> Beti, “Kesoko Pature,” 40–46.
- <sup>52</sup> Edvard Hviding, *Guardians of Marovo Lagoon: Practice, Place and Politics in Maritime Melanesia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1996): 235.
- <sup>53</sup> Hviding, “Guardians of Marovo Lagoon,” 404.
- <sup>54</sup> Hviding, “Guardians of Marovo Lagoon,” 111.
- <sup>55</sup> Quoted in Edvard Hviding, *Reef and Rainforest: An Environmental Encyclopedia of Marovo Lagoon, Solomon Islands [Kiladi oro vivineidi via tinqitonga pa idere ovo pa goana pa Marovo]* (Paris: UNESCO, 2015).
- <sup>56</sup> See double spiral canoe carving with flying bird, Marovo Lagoon, Paravicini 1924, Gr.h. 76.5 cm. Kulturen Museum Vb7619, Basel.
- <sup>57</sup> See *Art in Oceania: A New History*, ed. Peter Brunt and Nicholas Thomas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012): 175.

<sup>58</sup> Wikipedia, s.v. “Frigatebird,” last modified September 9, 2021, 21:20, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frigatebird>.

<sup>59</sup> This identification of the bird is only tentative. Bird images depicted on canoe ornaments from this region include, for example, the “wagtail” and a beach kingfisher known as *kio-kio* on Ranongga Island (Richards, *Head Hunters*, 114–117, Melbourne X7577). Paired birds may be rendered atop a spiral on a canoe carving as in one example from Simbo Island (Richards, *Head Hunters*, 116, Melbourne X7529).

<sup>60</sup> Hocart “The Cult of the Dead,” 108.

<sup>61</sup> Deborah Waite, “An Artefact/Image Text of Head-Hunting Motifs,” in “Essays on Headhunting in the Western Solomon Islands,” special issue, *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 109, no. 1 (March 2000): 119–22; Nicholas Thomas, “The Kalikonga Feast Trough,” in *Art in Oceania: A New History*, ed. Peter Brunt and Nicholas Thomas (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), Fig. 158, 207.

<sup>62</sup> Nicholas Thomas “The Kalikong,” 230–1; Deborah Waite and Ben Burt, “The Davis Collection from Roviana, Melanesia,” in *Melanesia: Art and Encounter*, ed. Lissant Bolton, Nicholas Thomas, Elizabeth Bonshek, Julie Adams, and Ben Burt (London: The British Museum, 2013): 209–14, Fig. 160.

<sup>63</sup> See item referenced in endnote 4. See *Kapkap* (*dalo*—Solomon Islands term), British Museum 1944, Oc2.1341, Dia. 13.2 cm.

<sup>64</sup> Museum label attached to the carving.

<sup>65</sup> Somerville, “Ethnographical Notes,” 3787–9.

<sup>66</sup> See item referenced in endnote 57.

<sup>67</sup> The canoe carving is illustrated in Richards, *Head Hunters*, 117.

<sup>68</sup> Waite, “An Artefact/Image.”

<sup>69</sup> Paravicini, *Reisen*, 84.

<sup>70</sup> An example is a burial shrine on Roviana, photographed by the Rev. George Brown in 1899 and illustrated in Howarth, *Varilaku*, 18.

<sup>71</sup> Pitt Rivers Museum manuscript collection no. 19.f.7 and Waite, “Lt. Boyle,” 290.

<sup>72</sup> Rudolph Festetics de Tolna, *Chez les cannibales* (Paris, 1903), cited in Magali Melandri, “Autel à la gloire du chef Ingova,” in *L'éclat des ombres: L'art en noir et blanc des îles Salomon*, ed. Magali Melandri and Sandra Revelon (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2014), 190–3.

<sup>73</sup> The photograph is in the Edge-Partington Collection, British Museum. Richards, *Head Hunters Black and White*, 205.

<sup>74</sup> Diana Young, “The Colours of Things,” in *Handbook of Material Culture*, ed. Chris Tilley, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, Mike Rowlands, and Patricia Spyer (London, Sage Publications, 2006), 180.