



On the Origin and Sacred Character of Certain Ornaments of the S. E. Pacific

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Mr. CHARLES H. READ read a Paper on the Origin and Sacred Character of certain Forms of Ornament in the South-East Pacific.

Mr. H. H. HOWORTH and the PRESIDENT joined in the discussion.

*On the ORIGIN and SACRED CHARACTER of certain ORNAMENTS
of the S.E. PACIFIC.*

By CHARLES H. READ, F.S.A.

[WITH PLATES XII TO XIV.]

THE Directors of the London Missionary Society, after due consideration, last year decided to accept the suggestion that had been made to them, to transfer to the custody of the Trustees of the British Museum the most important and valuable section of the interesting museum that they had gradually accumulated during the last hundred years at their well-known house in Blomfield Street. The section I refer to is that formed by the pioneers of the Society, Ellis, Williams, Tyerman, Bennet, and others, during their residence among the islands of the Eastern Pacific. It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the ethnological importance of these specimens, an importance due in the first place to their intrinsic merits, and in the second to the fact that at the time they were obtained the religions and habits of the natives had been but little disturbed by European influence.

The Directors of the Society not unnaturally hesitated in parting with objects which were, in a sense, landmarks in their history, and connected with the missionary successes of some of their most distinguished workers, but they were finally influenced by the greater public utility of the collection when in the British Museum, where it can readily be seen and studied by anyone interested, whereas in the heart of the City it was to a great extent isolated, though the museum was by no means unknown, and for its scientific value was frequently visited by foreigners.

An ethnographical museum, however, requires constant care for its proper preservation, and this it is only likely to obtain where the custody of the specimens is a principal object of the institution. Obviously the officers of the London Missionary Society have other and more important duties than keeping watch over the condition of the specimens liable to deterioration

in their museum, and the museum thus took a distinctly secondary place. For these reasons I think the transfer of the most important specimens to the British Museum was a wise measure.

Though many of the chief Polynesian objects in the Missionary Museum have been described and figured at various times and in various publications, I still thought material enough could be found to make a communication of some interest to lay before the Institute, and I had intended to give a somewhat particular account of the specimens now in the British Museum. I found, however, that the range was so vast that the limits of a paper in the *Journal* would soon be exceeded, and it therefore seemed best to take a section at a time, to include some particular class of objects, and acting on this principle I selected some of the so-called "gods" to make a beginning. In studying the forms and construction of these, I have been led to include at the same time a variety of objects which seem to me to form a fairly continuous chain, though some of the links may seem feeble, and others, perhaps, have yet to be found.

While setting in order the results of my investigations in this matter, I received from my friend Dr. Hjalmar Stolpe, of Stockholm, an elaborately illustrated paper published by him in the Swedish journal *Ymer*, and to my surprise I found that he had been engaged in pursuing precisely the same line as myself, and with nearly the same results. Though I should not have been at the pains to pursue this investigation had I known of Dr. Stolpe's work in time, yet the Swedish language is not so universally understood as to render it quite useless for me to lay the results of my independent investigations before the Institute.

As an introduction to the main subject, I have put together a few notes upon certain objects that have relation to the matter that follows, and so far as I know, my views have the merit of novelty.

In Plate XII is a series of fourteen figures. Fig. 1 is a side view of a canoe ornament, the rest, excepting Nos. 12 to 14, are the handles of fans or hand-screens, chiefly wanting the fan, the absence of which I will explain later. This series is drawn from actual examples from the Missionary Museum, and illustrates in a very complete manner the degradation of an ornamental group of human figures into a mere conventional symbol. A similar instance of degradation has been published in our *Journal*, vol. iv, p. 72, by General Pitt-Rivers, as occurring in the Western Pacific, but I think I may claim greater completeness for the series now before you, as at one end of the chain the art is of a much higher rank, and at the other

the disappearance of all meaning is more absolute; and in addition to this, the evidence I can bring forward strengthens my argument, referring as it does in some cases to the individual specimens used in the series.

Fig. 1 is a carved ornament from Huahine used to fix to the end of the canoe, the two figures being representations of gods. It is identical in design with Fig. 6 in Ellis' frontispiece, which "exhibits a sacred ornament of a canoe from the island of Huahine. The two figures at the top are images worshipped by fishermen, or those frequenting the sea." ("Polynesian Researches," vol. ii, p. 221.) I have introduced this piece, perhaps unnecessarily, because even to an eye utterly unfamiliar with savage art there can be no question that these are without doubt two human figures, seated back to back, at some little distance apart. In Figs. 2 and 3 the figures still maintain their human aspect, though they are placed close together, for greater convenience in their position as ornamental handles. In Fig. 3, however, the heads are joined, there is a greater roundness in the limbs and contours, and what is very important, the arms are represented as having wavy edges; the feet also rest upon two projections which reappear upon the later and simpler forms (Figs. 9, 10). Fig. 4 is highly conventional, and possesses scarcely any human character, the heads being little more than projecting knobs, the arms in the same rudimentary style, while the legs become purely ornamental, in the form of two beaded crescents back to back. In Fig. 5 we come to a very distinct step in the descent. All semblance of humanity has disappeared, and nothing remains but the purely decorative elements of the design, in fact a mere ideograph. It will be observed that the whole is formed of beaded lines, the premonitory symptoms of which we saw in the arms of Fig. 3 and the legs of Fig. 4; the two heads of the figures are, however, reduced to a gable-like form, placed above a similar but larger gable, representing the arms, and the opening between the backs of the figures is a mere oval. In the next example, Fig. 6, the descent is fully as well marked. The two bodies are represented by a lozenge shape with an oval opening in the middle, the heads, arms, and legs are on the same principle as the last, but greatly diminished in size and prominence. Fig. 7 has lost the lozenge form, a characteristic of Tahitian artistic anatomy, and assumes an oval outline, with a circular opening in the middle, but all suggestion of the legs of the figures has disappeared, and the heads and arms are reduced to a single beaded gable. The following specimen, Fig. 8, is even further simplified, the gable is no longer beaded, the oval form is lengthened and becomes more graceful.

though the circular hole in the middle still remains. In Fig. 9 the hole has disappeared, and a curious change takes place in the gable, which here is placed as a short rib on the two faces of the point, instead of resting upon the edge; and we note here also the reappearance of the two projections on the stem. Fig. 10 shows the simplest form, where no trace remains of the human figures from which it has been evolved, and this practically closes the series, Fig. 11 being only introduced to show the simple form in place as the handle of a fan.

One inherent defect in many theories of the development of forms of primitive instruments and deviation, is that a good deal has to be assumed before the theory will bear criticism, and a second defect, less radical perhaps, is that the series of progressive stages can be traced equally well from both ends, that is, that it is impossible to say, from internal evidence, whether it is a case of development or degradation. I think there can be no such questions about the example I have brought before you this evening, and I take it to be an undoubted case of the degradation of form. It is but logical to assume that, as the practical utility of an object precedes its ornate or decorated form, so the first promptings of art instinct are towards realistic delineations. These perfected, so far as the powers of the artist will admit, conventionalism becomes possible. This is the more likely to occur, when, as in the present instance, the objects represented are in universal demand and have to be produced in large numbers. The artist would unconsciously lean towards a kind of generalisation of details, which by saving his time would enable him to produce more, and naturally at a cheaper rate.

There are other points of interest connected with this series, having an important bearing upon my immediate purpose, and to which I will now call your attention. It will be observed that nearly all of the fan handles have a binding of sinnet or tapa round the shaft, and that into this binding, feathers, human hair, or rough cocoanut fibre are interwoven. This binding and the presence of the feathers is fully explained by Ellis, who says:—

“Throughout Polynesia, the ordinary medium of communicating or extending supernatural powers, was the red feather of a small bird found in many of the islands, and the beautiful long tail feathers of the *tropic* or man-of-war bird. For these feathers the gods were supposed to have a strong predilection; they were the most valuable offerings that could be presented; to them the power or influence of the god was imparted, and through them transferred to the objects to which they might be attached.” [Then follows a description of the *modus operandi*

of imparting special sacred value to the feathers.] Ellis, ii, p. 204.

It is evident therefore that all these objects have a sacred character, due to the addition of the feathers and other trappings, and apart from their form and special use as fans. Only one of all the series has any history, *i.e.*, Fig. 4, and this is described in the printed catalogue of the Missionary Museum under No. 47 as a "sacred fan with which the priests drove away flies at the human sacrifices—Marquesas Islands." The style of the carving would lead me rather to attribute it to the islands immediately south of the Tahitian group than to the Marquesas, where a very distinctive style prevails.¹ The account of its use, however, seems more probable, as it is, I think, quite clear that these fans and fan handles had a religious significance. This opinion is further confirmed by the description of Fig. 12 in my series, to which I have not hitherto alluded. The description is written upon the object itself as follows:—"Called a To, a thing worshipped in all the islands." It is a simple piece of wood of precisely the same outline as the end of the fan handle next to it, but in section somewhat thicker; and I take this as strong confirmation of my theory with regard to these objects, which briefly stated is, that the simple elongated fan handle represented in Fig. 11 is a direct descendant of the type of human figures represented by Fig. 1, and that in all probability both objects conveyed the same idea to the mind of a native of these islands.

The two paddle-shaped objects (Figs. 13 and 14), are described in the L.M.S. catalogue as "55. Two large paddle-shaped idols with fibre rope attached."

They are formed of hard wood very much weathered, and have all the appearance of great age, though this may be only the result of exposure to the weather. If, however, they have been much exposed, it can only have been before the elaborate binding of sinnet was put on, for this part of the idol is in a perfect state of preservation. The presumption therefore is, of the two, rather in favour of their antiquity.

The mode of wrapping is that described by Ellis as most

¹ The fans in use in the Marquesas Islands are essentially the same as those of Tahiti and the islands to the south; and one of them is included in the Missionary collection. The handle, as well as the blade, is of the same form, that is, the latter is roughly triangular and of plaited strips of leaf, while the former is in the shape of two figures back to back. The Marquesan variety might therefore have well been included in this series; but that I have tried to restrict my examples to the narrowest limits possible, in the belief that by this they gain in force, while it clearly shortened my labour. Moreover, in the Marquesas a style of art has been developed, strongly differentiated from that of any other Pacific group, and the resemblances can only be traced in the general composition or structure.

characteristic of Tahitian gods (*op. cit.* ii, p. 220), which are generally shapeless staves or flat knife-like pieces of wood. From the certainty that they are idols, I have introduced them as having an obvious bearing upon the series. Their large size would render possible their actual use as clubs, though this does not affect the question. If, however, evidence could be brought to connect them with the fan handles, as representing to the native mind the same religious idea, it would be worth considering whether the familiar spatulate clubs so familiar in Tonga and Samoa are not members of the same family. Many of these clubs have special well-defined forms, repeated *ad infinitum*, and it would be satisfactory if a stronger reason than mere habit could be adduced to account for this absence of variety. I have refrained from insisting upon this point, seeing that the premises want much study and comparison before anything like certainty can be arrived at; but it would, if proved, form another small link in the chain of Polynesian migrations, about which we have still so much to learn.

Plate XIV exhibits the steps of degradation of a common and not very complex form of decoration constantly found upon the implements of Mangaia and the adjacent islands, and more particularly upon the handles of the elaborate adzes for which Mangaia is famous.

I can imagine that to those to whom this series is quite novel the conclusion at which I arrive, *i.e.*, that a continuous and connected chain exists between the two ends of my set of examples, may seem somewhat strained. In support of my proposition generally, however, I would submit two arguments. The first is the somewhat trite but no less important axiom, that all primitive ornament of which we know anything, is founded upon some real necessity for its presence, although with the passage of time the original necessity may disappear entirely. The most familiar example of this gradual change of type is, I think, also the most forcible, *viz.*, that of the design of the ancient British coin, debased from a fine Greek profile into an unmeaning series of dots and lines which can barely be called ornamental, a change due only to a persistent copying of copies. Originally, no doubt, the head of Apollo was regarded as an essential and necessary part of the coin, but there can be little question that the artist who designed the last of the British coins of this type had but a slender idea of the original intention of his design. My second argument is of more special application, and is briefly that the more prominent of the objects upon which this class of decoration is found, are in themselves of a sacred character, and that, for this reason, the derivation of the most conventional portion of the ornament

from the figure of a god has, *prima facie*, a degree of probability. This, no doubt, applies equally well to my first series, shown in Plate XII, but in that case I could not call so strong a witness in my favour. The Rev. W. Wyatt Gill, in his "Jottings in the South Pacific," in speaking of the Mangaian adzes, says, "The carving, which is often admirable, was formerly executed with sharks' teeth, and was previously intended for the adorning of their gods. The fine pointed pattern is known as the sharks' teeth pattern (*nio mango*). Other figures are each supposed, by a stretch of imagination, to represent a man squatting down. Some patterns are of recent introduction, and being mere imitations of European designs, are destitute of the significance which invariably attached to ancient Polynesian carving. The large square holes are known as 'eel borings' (*ai tuna*), the lateral openings are naturally enough called clefts. To carve was the employment of sacred men."

This statement by Mr. Gill, an acute observer, to whom we owe so much of our knowledge of the arts and mythology of Polynesia, is of the greatest interest, and demonstrates conclusively the sacred character of the ornament; and I will now ask you to perform the stretch of imagination referred to by him.

Fig. 1 is the head of a long, beautifully finished staff of hard wood from the Hervey Group, representing in what is intended to be a realistic manner, two squatting human figures. The view given only shows one figure, the two being placed back to back in the usual manner. Fig. 2 follows somewhat abruptly, and I am conscious of a missing link that might have preceded it with advantage. It is a very ancient possession of the British Museum, and may have been one of Captain Cook's collection, but it is entirely without history. In type and material (the wood of the bread-fruit) it corresponds with other figures from Tahiti. The head, it will be seen, is represented by a rude disc horizontally placed upon the body, and supported by the hands—an attitude seen in the figure of Tii Vahine. The squatting legs have a characteristic and peculiar bend outwards from the hips, while the trunk is almost uniform and very round.

The next figure is very similar in detail, and is a representation of the end view of the openwork pedestal of Fig. 1 on Plate XII. The view there given shows no indication of the figures at the ends, so conventional is the style, but it stands out fairly clear when seen from the end and in connection with Fig. 2. In passing to the next figure I am again conscious of a slight want of continuity, but here the change of method is accounted for to some extent by the fact that we now pass from what may be called sculpture in the round to surface decoration, Figs. 4 and

5 being single figures from the rich ornament of two of the three gods in the Missionary Museum, an example of which forms Fig. H of my third diagram. These are district gods of Mangaia, but their names have been lost. The flat slabs which represent the head and feet of the figure in Fig. 3 are here divided into two by a vertical line, the arms and legs are each formed of a broad arrow pointing up and down, while the body sinks into a simple ridge. In Fig. 5 the same type is maintained, the principal variations being the engraving upon the oblongs forming the head and feet (resembling Fig. 11), and the disappearance of the lower broad arrow to represent the legs, while the whole figure is curved. In Fig. 6 the same essentials of the design are preserved, but again with variations, and this applies also to Fig. 7. The rosette which forms the head of Fig. 6 is commonly found upon the paddles and other utensils of High Island (Raivavai) and rarely if ever upon the Mangaian adzes. Fig. 6 is one of a ring of similar projections upon an object the use of which is unknown to me, while Fig. 7 is a similar, but much larger, projection upon the side of the drum (Fig. N, Plate XIV), figured in Ellis, vol. i, p. 282. Fig. 9 represents one of a number of figures carved in relief upon the upper side of a long box from the island of Huahine, brought thence by Mr. George Bennet, and formerly in the museum at Sheffield. These small figures form a very valuable link in the series, though of a very rudimentary style. The head is a plain disc, like Figs. 6 and 7, but without the central hole; the trunk resembles Fig. 3 in coming to a horizontal edge across the body, while the legs and feet are indicated by an oblong block left in relief, the middle part of which has been cut away, thus leaving a square projection for each foot, the principle more clearly seen in Figs. 4 and 10. Fig. 8 I have introduced in this place only to show the same mode of representing the head as is seen in Fig. 7, and the design is found upon the edge of a Tahitian seat (*papahia*), probably the example figured in Ellis, vol. ii, p. 181.

Figs. 10 and 11 bring us to the characteristic ornament of the Mangaian adze handles, which at this particular phase may be called the K pattern, as a figure resembling this letter is its principal feature. In Fig. 10 the K is seen sideways, the straight stroke being the head of the fast disappearing human figure, while the feet are indicated by two squares as in Fig. 4. From this point the series is composed of variants of the K pattern, sometimes placed vertically, at others horizontally, both positions being found upon the same specimen, as for instance, Figs. 11 and 12, which with Fig. 13, occur upon an adze handle in the Christy Collection, and in the diagram I have preserved their relative positions. Fig. 11 is the last

relic of the human form, as indicated by the division at the bottom to represent the feet. In Figs. 12 and 14, the design is placed at right angles to the last, that is, the K is upright, not sideways, and the differences between the two are but slight, Fig. 12, being strictly geometrical, while Fig. 14 has some of its members rounded.

Fig. 13 forms in a sense the concluding design, and I think the connection between it and those immediately preceding will not require much demonstration. The inside of each square is divided into two equal portions, shelving downwards into the two corners from the ridge across the middle, this ridge being vertical in one row and horizontal in the next. These squares are of course formed by continuing the angular lines forming the back of the K until they meet, and eliminating altogether the upright line, which would form a disturbing element in repeating the design over a large surface.

The remaining figures (15 and 16) are designed to show how by a somewhat different road the same K pattern descends into a simple zigzag. Taking again Fig. 12 and placing it with its ridge line vertical (like Fig. 11), it is only necessary to repeat the same figure several times and it becomes Fig. 13, and of this Fig. 15 is but a slightly varied form. Fig. 16 is part of the decoration of a very pretty kava cup from the Hervey Group, and in the lowest line of the ornament I think I find, in another form, degraded into a mere zigzag, in fact, the elements of the K pattern.

It is possible that the evidence I have been able to bring forward may seem in places somewhat scanty, and that if the case rested only upon the examples before you, it might result in a verdict of "not proven"; yet, when fortified by the statement of Mr. Gill, that the ornament in question is "supposed by a stretch of imagination to represent a man squatting down," and that the carving and the carvers are both sacred, it assumes, I think, a different aspect.

The third and concluding section of my subject deals with the representations of the gods of the same part of the Pacific, and of these interesting relics we can now show at the British Museum a series, I think, quite unparalleled, and in great part derived from the Museum of the London Missionary Society. I do not, however, propose to deal with the whole of them on this occasion. The first figure is one of which we are fortunate enough to have the history. It is the Tahitian goddess Tii Vahine,¹ obtained in the island by Mr. G. Bennet, as described

¹ This name is somewhat puzzling, for *Tii* is no doubt connected with the Maori *Tiki*, by which a *man* would seem to be meant, while *Vahine*, without doubt, means a woman.

in Tyerman and Bennet's "Journal," ii, 58 :—"Mr. Bennet obtained [in Tahiti] a *fare na atua*, or house of a god, the only relic of the kind that we have seen in these islands, so utter was the demolition of such things even when the idols themselves were preserved for transportation to England. . . . This shrine was wrought out of one solid block of timber; in form it resembled a dwelling house, with roof and sloping ends, and was three feet in length. Underneath there was a cylindrical hole, having a door which closely fitted the opening. This was the depository of the idol. The fabric was supported on four short legs resembling those of a tortoise. The idol itself was of great antiquity, a female fiend, hideously misshapen, to mimic humanity. Her name was Tii Vahine, and we were told that she had slain her thousands, having been held in the highest veneration, and worshipped from time immemorial." The original is very small, only four inches in height, but well carved, and I take it to be typical of Tahitian sculpture of the human form. Its general features are so well marked as to need little description, and I would only call attention to the profile in front, as it is this outline that will be found to recur in somewhat varied form throughout the series. (Plate XIV.)

In Plate XIII, Fig. A, is a representation of Tangaroa, the great Polynesian god, a well-known example from its being one of the figures of the frontispiece to Ellis. The great Tangaroa which forms the principal figure in Ellis's plate is also in the British Museum, and though it is one of the most remarkable monuments of Polynesian idolatry, it is too realistic in style to enter into my series. The more conventional form of this Jupiter of the Pacific which you have before you is a very cryptic character, and I do not pretend to explain its full meaning, though it is clear enough in parts. As may be seen, it is in the shape of a bat, the blade of which is pierced symmetrically, the middle being of a pointed oval form; within this oval are four openings and two bosses, outside are other openings, bringing into clearer relief the outer border, which is entirely composed of human figures of the same type as Tii Vahine. At the top is one full face, flanked by two others, facing outwards, below this again on each side is another figure, whose feet rest upon those of a third figure, head downwards, the oval being completed by a fourth at the bottom. The interpretation of the middle part is beyond my powers, though that its form and details are full of significance, I have not a doubt.

It may appear at first sight that the relation between this figure and Plate XIV, Fig. C, is somewhat distant, but a closer

examination will show that they are near kin. Fig. C is composed of six ribs radiating from a common centre, and each rib is formed of human figures, the two lower ones feet to feet, the lowest row being head downwards. (The design is somewhat hidden in the original by the wrappings of sinnet rope and feathers, absent in the figure.) Each of these ribs is therefore practically the same in design as the edges of Fig. A, the chief difference is in the number of these edges or ribs, being six in Fig. C, instead of two as in Fig. A. This god is stated in the Missionary Museum Catalogue to be "Taringarue, the superior god of Atiu," and further that this and a bundle of sinnet and feathers "are but portions of the god; the rats having made a nest in him, destroyed the remainder"—a very satisfactory proof of his impotence. Atiu (= Wateoo) is an island in lat. $19^{\circ} 58' S.$, long. $158^{\circ} 6' W.$, one of the Hervey Group.

Fig. D is of the same construction as the last, but of more slender build; the figures of the god are more conventional, and it differs greatly in the form of the upper end. A specimen similar to this is figured in Ellis' plate (Fig. 4), and, though not specially mentioned in the text, is stated to be a god "from the Hervey Islands" (p. 221). The example here drawn would seem to be one of those described in the Missionary Catalogue as idols from Metiaro, an island 25 miles from Atiu ($20^{\circ} 1' S.$ lat., $157^{\circ} 34' W.$ long.).

Fig. E on the same plate represents the upper portion of another idol of similar design, but provided with only four ribs down the sides instead of six. The chief difference between the two is the absence in Fig. E of the central pillar in the head.

In these the heads and arms of the figures remain as in Fig. A, but the body has become angular, and the legs and feet are replaced by another head and arms reversed. The peculiar form of the upper part I will refer to later in dealing with the concluding examples of this series.

Figs. F and G are somewhat foreign in style, and being so it would possibly have been better to keep them out of the series altogether, as they scarcely add to its strength, and may possibly introduce an element of confusion. They seem to me, however, to be derived from the same elements, and I have therefore interpreted them at this stage.

From their rude make I should judge them to come from Tahiti, and not from the Hervey or Austral Groups, the natives of which were far more expert in carving than were those of Tahiti (Ellis, i, p. 372). That they differ in style is, however, obvious, and the fact of their belonging to one of the more

distant islands of the group would account for this difference as well as for certain other variations in detail. Taken together it will be seen that they have in common with the rest of the group, and with each other, the loops, which are the remains of the figures. In Fig. G these still bear a resemblance to Fig. C, while in Fig. F the loops are broken, and the likeness to the prototype is almost gone. In Fig. F we find, in addition to the broken loops, a number of faces and even figures of a fairly naturalistic style, and in this respect it differs from all the rest, as indeed it does also in size, being eight feet in length, and further encumbered with a string of large sea-shells tied to a coarse rope of sinnet. Fig. G I take to be the end of the series as far as Tahiti is concerned, as it is difficult to imagine further degradation in this direction than is presented by the simple loops of this specimen.

In Fig. H we come again to a rich style of decorative art, admirable in technique and elaborate in detail. The patient labour displayed in cutting these endless rows of tracery from a solid block of wood, and preserving throughout the really dignified character of the design, is little short of marvellous. The example here figured is the largest of three belonging to the Missionary Collection. The handles of all are closely bound with finely plaited sinnet, over which, in one, are thick ropes of human hair. The heads are in openwork, having on each face and along the sides vertical ribs with lozenge-shaped openings between them, and entirely formed of human figures in style half-way between Fig. 11, in Plate XIV, and Fig. D, in Plate XIII, and, as it seems to me, it is the next step to Fig. D in the series. The richness of the design here, to some degree, interferes with the clearness of the outline. These three fine pieces unluckily have lost their names, and all that is known of them is that they were "the district gods of Mangaia, one of the Hervey Islands." Their Mangaian origin will explain the resemblance in details to Fig. 4, Plate XIV, the latter being derived, it will be remembered, from the handle of a Mangaian adze. The three next Figs. J, K, and L, have a strong likeness to each other, and while, as I hope to show, they possess all the essential features of Fig. H, there is a vast difference in their style of execution. They are flat bats of coarse wood, rudely carved on one or both faces with zigzags, &c., and having on the upper end holes pierced through them, lozenge-shaped, square, and oval, respectively. In the Missionary Catalogue they are called "flat club-formed idols," without special locality, but there can be little question that they are from the vicinity of the Hervey Group, as well from their style as from their similarity to Fig. 2 in Ellis' frontispiece, "an image of Tebuakina, three sons of

Rongo, a principal deity in the Hervey Islands." Let us now take their points of resemblance to Fig. H. In the first place two of them have the same general outline in the upper part, as well as similar rows of figures down the sides; one has three vertical rows of lozenge-shaped piercings, while Fig. J has points of its own which must be taken in detail. The upper edge has three projecting loops, each of which is formed of two figures, and down the sides are the remains of figures of precisely the same type as is seen in Fig. E. Upon the face are also several figures of the same kind. In these respects it is carved with greater elaboration than the other two, but these are otherwise essentially the same, though their backs are uncarved. Their edges are serrated, the teeth being unequal, and these angular projections I take to represent the more realistic human figures on the edges of Fig. J.

The surface decoration of all three is mainly composed of transverse bands of zigzags, and the occurrence of this design in the present connection tends to strengthen my theory of its derivation from the human figure. Here we have three idols (J, K, and L) from one group of islands strongly resembling in form another more elaborate specimen (Fig. H) from the same group. This last has, as surface decoration, projecting rows of human figures depicted in an ornamental fashion, while in the three simpler idols a zigzag pattern serves the same purpose. It seems therefore that they may without any great stretch of imagination be regarded as identical in meaning and purpose. There only now remains one other point—the holes in the upper part of these idols, and these again strengthen the continuity of the series. In Fig. K we have three vertical lines of lozenge-shaped openings, just as in Fig. H, where they continue between the rows from top to bottom. In Fig. L the single opening may be called oval, recalling Fig. 8 in Plate XII, while Fig. J, Plate XIII, has eight square piercings, and upon these depend our further progress.

I have always been puzzled to understand what underlaid the general design of the openwork handles of one style of Mangaian adzes. These are usually circular or square in section, very thick, and with square or oblong openings symmetrically disposed. The whole conception seemed so strongly suggestive of joinery, a method quite unknown in these islands, as to lead one to connect it with imported ideas. This is evidently not the opinion of Mr. Gill ("Jottings," p. 11), for he pointedly gives the native names of these two varieties. To try and explain their meaning I will first go back to Fig. E. The head of this idol is somewhat uniform from all points of view, and has at the sides four plume-like additions, while it is pierced

with two quadrangular openings, one above the other, each of the four faces being alike. Seeing how much similarity exists between the details of this piece and the club-like idol (Fig. J), I cannot but think that this additional similarity in the details of the head may justify me in saying that they are identical in purpose. To run the matter to earth if possible I have placed at the end of the series of idols a sacred adze and a sacred drum, the first from Mangaia and of a common type, while the drum is from Tahiti, where it was obtained by Mr. Ellis, who figures it in his "Polynesian Researches," vol. i, p. 282. The adze handle will be seen to preserve the same outline as is found in Figs. H and J, while the similarity in the disposition of the square openings is very striking. If the deduction is justified, that these designs on the handle of the adze have a religious significance, recalling to the mind of the initiated the image of the divinity, it would seem to be analogous with the European practice in mediæval and later times, of using the cross-guard and hilt of the sword to represent a crucifix.

The drum which ends the series is a fine old specimen of the *pahu-ra* or temple drum, beaten on all occasions of extraordinary ceremony at the temples, and is fully described by Mr. Ellis (*loc. cit.*), though this seems to be a small example of the class, as they are sometimes eight feet high. It is introduced here chiefly on account of the design of the foot, as showing another instance of the occurrence of the square openings upon a sacred object. (Fig. N.)

It will be seen that I have said nothing of the mythological aspect of the various divinities. This has already been done by others better fitted for the task; one invaluable work being the Rev. Wyatt Gill's "Myths and Songs of the South Pacific," which contains a most interesting collection of legends relating to the religions and traditional beliefs of the natives of this part of the Pacific. Further, to have traced the powers, attributes, and relations of these idols would have greatly complicated the subject, and I judged it to be inadvisable to draw upon the writings of others, unless from actual necessity. One fact that may be mentioned here seems to me somewhat curious, *i.e.*, considering the great number of marine deities in the pantheon of these islands, and the semi-sacred character of the shark, who was believed to be the servant, or messenger of the gods, and who shared with other fishes a kind of divine inspiration; notwithstanding these points of intimate connection with the gods, I have not found a single representation of a fish among the whole series, even as an attribute, or adjunct to the principal figure. The contrast in this between the

islands of the East and the West of the Pacific is very marked, in the latter the figures of fish, either as deities or amulets, are of constant occurrence. Birds, in like manner, are absent from this group of islands, though Mr. Ellis mentions a god of the air worshipped under the form of a bird (ii, p. 197), and states that a number of birds, as well as fishes, were worshipped.

From the variety of forms assumed by the same god, it is evident that they were used for different places or occasions, and Mr. Ellis throws some light upon this matter. He says in one place (p. 203), "But while the people supposed they were spiritual beings, they manufactured images either as representations of their form, and emblems of their character, or as the vehicle or instrument through which their communications might be made unto the god, and his will revealed to them." Again (p. 205), "Among the numerous ceremonies observed, the *paeatua* was one of the most conspicuous. On these occasions, the gods were all brought out of the temple, the sacred coverings removed, scented oils were applied to the images, and they were exposed to the sun. At these seasons, the parties who wished their emblems of the deity to be impregnated with the essence of the gods, repaired to the ceremony with a number of red feathers, which they delivered to the officiating priest." In return they received from the priest similar feathers, which had been placed in or upon the idol on a previous occasion, and had thus acquired the desired virtues. These feathers were taken home, and on occasion, were invoked to help the owner. If his prayers were attended with success, he would probably then have an image made to which the feathers would be attached, and later perhaps an altar and rude temple were erected for them.

Some of the lesser idols now under consideration may be accounted for in this way. Others may be "the flags of the gods or emblems of the idols" which "were carried to the battle to inspirit the combatants." The flat boards, Figs. K and L seem to be the same object as are represented in Ellis, ii, p. 217, where a figure of an "Altar and Unus" is given, but I cannot find any account of the *Unus* in the text, though as similar objects appear in his view of a "National Temple," they should be figures of gods (p. 207).

I have made frequent references to Mr. Ellis's work, "Polynesian Researches," and I have often had occasion to make use of it other times, but I cannot refrain now, when many of the objects collected by him or under his auspices are under consideration, from adding my small tribute to the immense value of this remarkable work of a most remarkable

man. Published more than sixty years ago, long before "Anthropological Notes and Queries" were in vogue, it contains a most minute account of the daily life, amusements, war, customs, and more particularly of the religious beliefs and superstitions of the natives of Tahiti and the neighbouring islands, an account which has, I think, never been surpassed, though it is perhaps equalled by Mariner's "Tonga," so far as permanent value is concerned. If more of our early missionaries had possessed the keen intellect, the wealth of sympathy, and the powers of observation, of William Ellis, there would be far less to regret, and infinitely more to be proud of, in the history of our missions.

In concluding these observations, I would repeat that my main purpose was to call the attention of the members of the Institute to the great historical importance of the London Missionary Society's Collection, now transferred to the British Museum. In placing it before you in the several progressive series, I have done so in the hope of adding to the interest of the descriptions, by taking the specimens as a coherent whole, rather than as isolated units of ethnography. But I have not been led to adopt this method from any theories of my own or from those of others. The subject grew, and the series lengthened, almost without any effort on my part, and further investigation would, I do not doubt, produce similar results in other directions.

My interest in the preparation of this series has been considerable, and has been shared to the full by my friend Mr. Edge Partington, who has been my collaborator whenever it was possible, but we can scarcely hope that a description of the work will possess the absorbing interest of the work itself.

DESCRIPTION OF PLATES XII TO XIV.

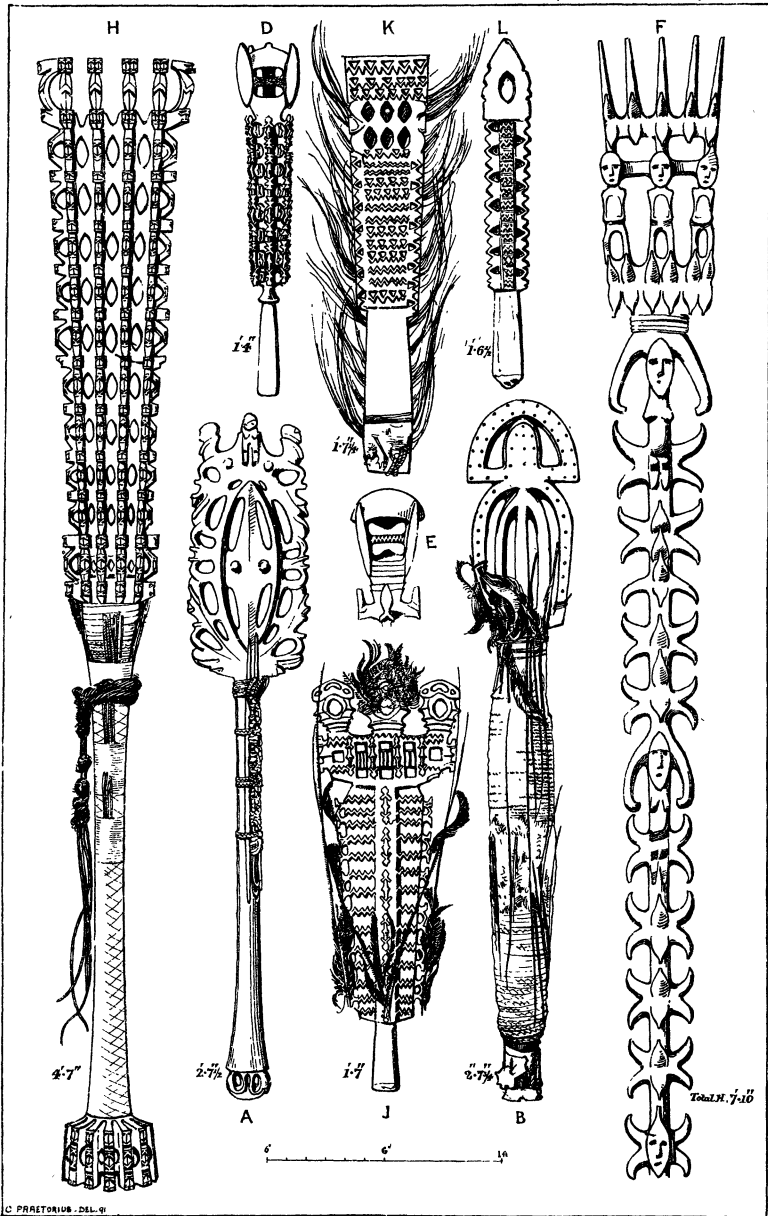
Plate XII.

- Fig. 1. Sacred ornament of a canoe, probably from the Island of Huahine. A similar specimen is represented in the frontispiece to Ellis's "Polynesian Researches," ii, Fig. 6, and described at p. 221. The example here figured is the only one on the plate not derived from the London Missionary Society's Museum. It is carved in moderately hard wood, now nearly black. The upper part represents two gods of seamen, back to back, seated upon an open-work stand, which is composed of conventional human figures. An end view of the base is given on Plate XIV, Fig. 3. It is placed here as introductory to the series which follows in Figs. 2 to 14.
- Figs. 2 to 11. Series of handles of fans to illustrate the derivation of the simple form shown in Fig. 11, from the complex or naturalistic form shown in Fig. 1. All these handles, except Figs. 4 and 11, have been deprived of the fan itself, and in its place most of them are wrapped with bark cloth, sinnet, &c., and decorated with the long tail feathers of the frigate bird, cock's feathers, human hair, &c. An explanation of these additions is given in the text.
- Fig. 12. Spatulate object of hard brown wood, of somewhat thicker section than the preceding numbers. Upon it is written in ink (apparently in the hand of Mr. George Bennet), "called a To, a thing worshipped in all the islands." The islands here referred to are only those comprised in the Tahitian, Hervey, and perhaps Saumotu Groups. The Rev. W. Ellis, in speaking of "the South Sea Islands," invariably confines this term to the South-East Pacific Groups.
- Figs. 13 and 14. Sacred paddle clubs, invested with bindings of elaborately knotted sinnet made fast to the middle, leaving both ends free. Fig. 13 is in good condition with the polished surface still remaining, though the extreme end of the handle shows signs of the ravages of insects, or of decay. Fig. 14 is in a very weather-worn state, the whole surface being furrowed and irregular from decay of the softer fibres of the wood. This condition seems to be fully as well marked beneath the sinnet bindings as elsewhere.

Plates XIII and XIV.

The series shown in Plate XIII is continued on Plate XIV, from A to N. It comprises types of the most important of the idols from the London Missionary Society's Museum, selected and arranged to show the connection between the simple and elaborate varieties.

- Fig. A. Tangarua, one of the principal divinities of Polynesia, carved in hard light brown wood in the form of a long-handled bat, the blade of which is in open-work. This specimen is the one figured in Ellis (*op. cit.*), frontispiece, vol. ii, Fig. 3, and is described as a representation of Taarua. To the handle a skewer of hard wood is fastened by sinnet bands. The open-work end of the handle is in the form of a contorted human figure.
- Fig. B represents a similar divinity, but this specimen unfortunately has no history, and it is therefore impossible to say whether it is a figure of the same god. It is of softer wood than the last.
- Fig. C (Plate XIV). Taringarue, the superior god of Atiu, one of the Hervey Islands. The head is of hard brown wood, carved in open-work with three groups of figures of gods. In the uppermost group the figures are bent backwards towards the centre, in the two lower ones they are practically upright and face outwards. The design is an amplification of Fig. A, which has but two edges, whereas Fig. C has six. The body of the god is formed of a shapeless bundle of plaited sinnet ropes, once covered with small feathers, but the greater part of this covering has now disappeared.
- Fig. D. Idol of dark brown wood from the Island of Metiaro, Hervey Group, S. lat. $20^{\circ} 1'$, W. long. $157^{\circ} 34'$. The construction is on the same principle as the preceding figure, but the lines are more angular and the detail of the upper part is different. It has six radiating open-work flanges formed of human figures. The peculiar form of the head with its plume-like ornaments at the corners can be well seen in the plate.
- Fig. E shows the upper end of a similar idol, probably from the same locality. It differs only in the number of the radiating flanges being four instead of six, and in the absence of the central column in the interior of the head.
- Fig. F. Idol of elaborate and unusual workmanship, of reddish wood. The five spikes at the top probably represent the more shapely ornaments at the head of Fig. H, while the



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(London Missionary Society Coll.)

group below, no doubt, is one of the triads of Polynesian divinities. Both the name and locality of this singular idol are lost. Both its faces are alike, and from the upper part it has a stout rough sinnet rope to which large shells are attached. In reproducing it on so small a scale it was thought better to omit this adjunct. Probably from the Tahitian Group.

- Fig. G (Plate XIV). Idol of brown wood of simple outline, with two groups of four flanges. The resemblance between this figure and Fig. C, beside it, will be obvious. This, like the last, is probably from the Tahitian Group.
- Fig. H. This is the largest of the three "district gods of Mangaia," Hervey Group, but unluckily no further information as to their names, history, or purpose is forthcoming. All three idols are of the same design, but this one only has the expanding crescent-shaped arms at the head, one of which is shown on a larger scale on Plate XIV, Fig. 5. It is carved in pale brown wood, and every detail is finished with the greatest precision. The design consists of a number of vertical ribs formed of highly conventional figures of gods, the spaces between the ribs being pierced with lozenge shaped holes. The handle is of circular section, neatly bound with fine sinnet in a lozenge pattern, and one of the three has in addition a stout rope of human hair round the handle.
- Fig. J. Idol formed of a flat piece of brown wood elaborately carved on the faces, edges, and top with figures of gods. This has no special history, but the style of carving of the upper part strongly recalls that of Fig. C, while the details of the faces and edges are like those of Figs. D and E. As all these are from the Hervey Group, it will not be too much to assume that this also is from that group. This specimen consists of the same elements as Figs. C, D, and E, but placed upon a flat surface, and it bears much the same relation to them as Mercator's projection does to a globe.
- Figs. K and L. These two idols are but simplified versions of the preceding figure. In Fig. K the piercings recall those of Figs. H and J, but in Fig. L those openings have disappeared, and the zigzags and irregular serrations of the edges only remain to represent the elaborate borders of human figures seen in the foregoing idols. These objects are no doubt from the same locality as Fig. J.
- Fig. M (Plate XIV). Richly carved ceremonial adze from Mangaia (Brit. Mus. Christy Collection). This, with the drum shown in the following figure, is introduced here to illustrate the

origin of the quadrilateral openings so frequently found on these objects. The outline of the handle of the adze will be seen to correspond very nearly with that of Figs. H and K, and the position of the openings is also much the same. As this shape of handle is distinctly impractical, it can only have had its origin in the form of some sacred or ceremonial object. Its practical utility was clearly a secondary point.

Fig. N (Plate XIV). Drum (*pahu-ra*) from a temple from Tahiti. Figured in Ellis (*op. cit.*) i, p. 282. A typical but small specimen. The openings in the base probably derived from representations of idols.

The Goddess Tii Vahine.

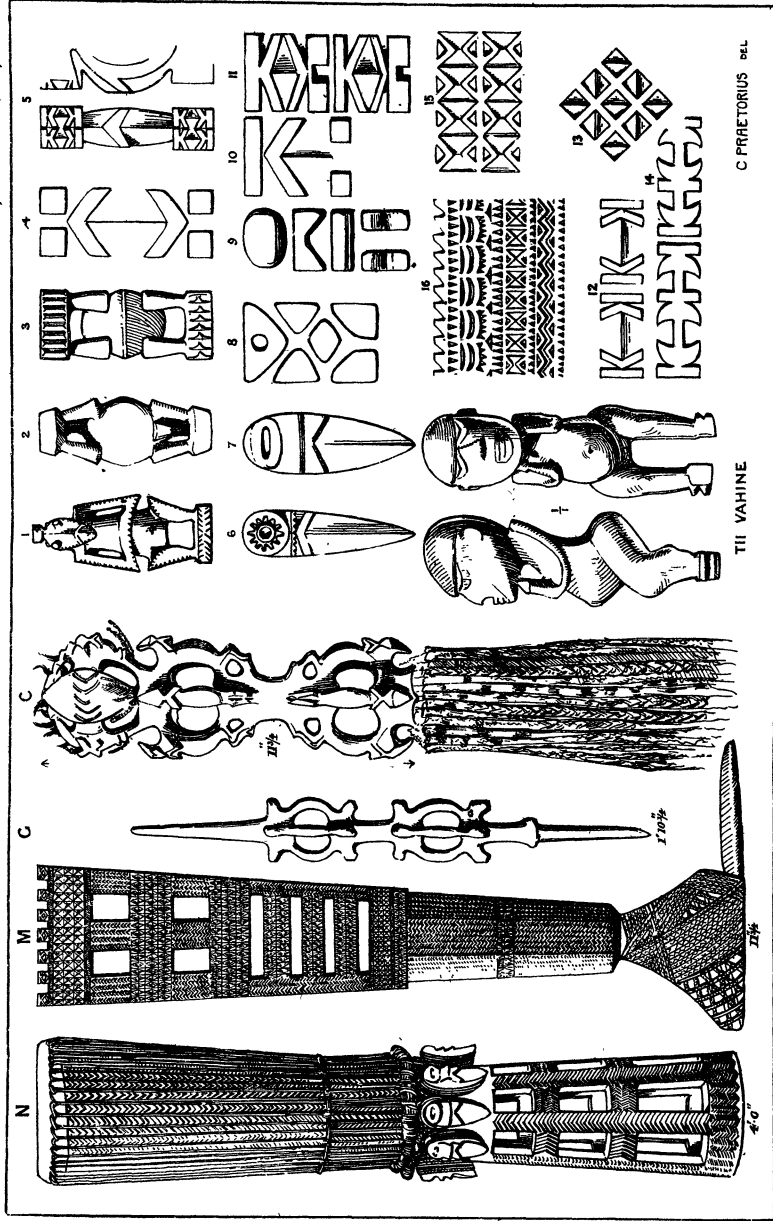
This little figure is carved in brown wood, and was enshrined in a turtle shaped case also of wood. It was obtained by Mr. G. Bennet in Tahiti, as described in Tyerman and Bennet's "Journal," ii, p. 58; quoted in the text. It is given here as a characteristic type of Tahitian sculpture of the human figure. [N.B.—By an oversight the scale of the drawing is marked as full-size, whereas it should be *one half linear.*]

Plate XIV. Figs. 1 to 16.

This series is designed to show the derivation of the common forms of Mangaian surface decoration from the human figure, *i.e.*, figures of the gods.

DISCUSSION.

The PRESIDENT expressed the satisfaction of the meeting that these invaluable memorials of Polynesian religion and art had again come into prominence. The London Missionary Society, to whom the high praise is due of having had the wisdom to preserve them at a time when the importance of such objects had hardly come into general view, had placed them in the great National Collection, and one of the first results of the new opportunity of studying them was the important paper in which Mr. Read had followed out their artistic history. His series of forms arising from human figures degenerating into ornament illustrate and confirm instructively the principle displayed by General Pitt-Rivers in 1875 in his well-known series of New Ireland paddles, now in the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Oxford. With regard to Mr. Read's argument similarly tracing the human form into the



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geometrical carvings so characteristic of the ceremonial adze-handles of the Society Islands, &c., the President had confirmatory evidence to offer. When, some years ago, the Rev. W. Wyatt Gill came to Oxford, he had suggested to him that these carvings were human figures in the last extreme of conventionalization. Mr. Gill replied that not only was this the case, but that the natives recognized certain of them by the name *tikitiki tangata*, "images of man." With regard to Mr. Howorth's remarks as to the origin of the Polynesians, the President called attention to the manner in which Mr. Read's evidence illustrated, side by side, the natural connection between the gods of different island groups, and the independent art-development which had taken place on this common material. For instance, he had lately bought a fan-handle from the Marquesas, ornamented by two figures who were undoubtedly the two which belong to the series illustrated by Mr. Read in distant islands in their course of change into ornamental forms. Mr. Read would probably agree that the Marquesas Island types of these deities (whatever their names and natures), are nearer their actual origin than the corresponding figures on the Society Island carvings.
