

Oceania



East Asia and Oceania

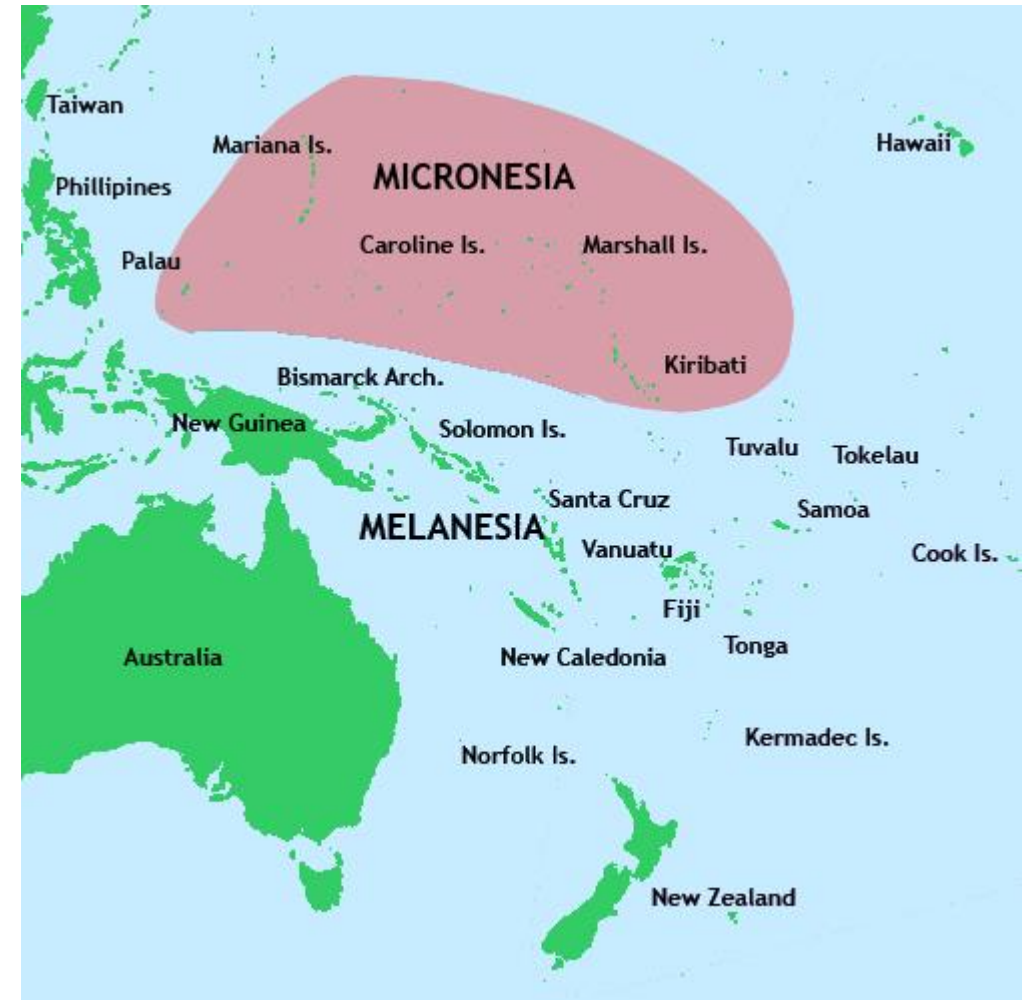


Key Points

- In this region, there are specific gender rules regarding art:
 - Women work with soft materials (cloth)
 - Men work with hard materials (wood, stone, bone) and works related to rituals
- Natural materials are used
- **Mana**, the supernatural force or power concentrated in an object or person, is a central factor in their art

Micronesia

- Cultures of Micronesia are frequently organized around chieftainships with craft and ritual specializations
- Religions include named deities as well as honored ancestors
- Life is centered around seafaring activities: fishing, trading and long-distance travel in large oceangoing vessels
- Artistic imagery is therefore also related to the sea
- Artists tend to simplify and geometrically abstract the natural forms of animals, humans and plants



Nan Madol

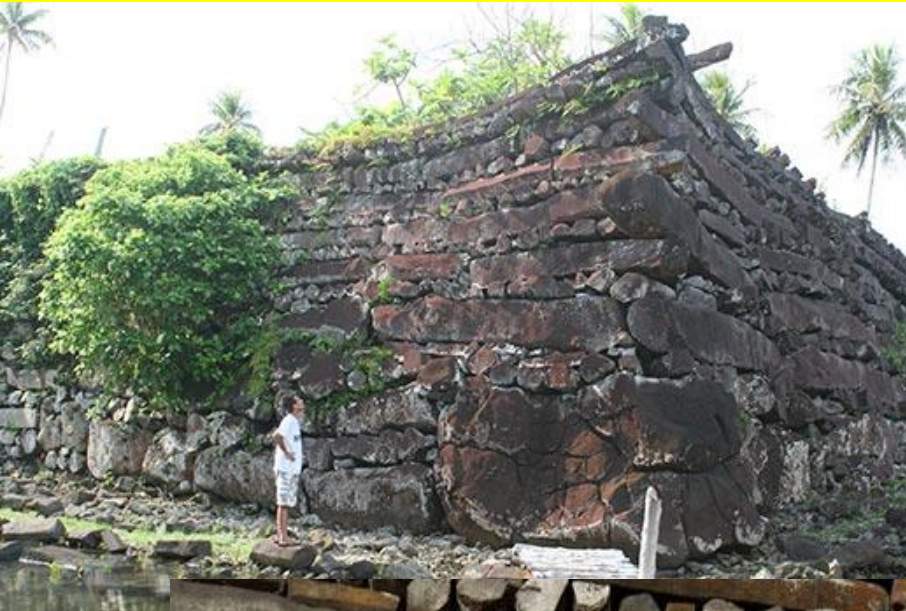
Pohnpei, Micronesia. Saudeleur Dynasty. c.700-1600 CE
Basalt boulders and prismatic columns

- Site was the capital of the Saudeleur Dynasty, which ruled for 500 years
- It was founded by 2 brothers as a religious community focused on worship of the sea



Nan Madol

Pohnpei, Micronesia. Saudeleur Dynasty. c.700-1600 CE
Basalt boulders and prismatic columns

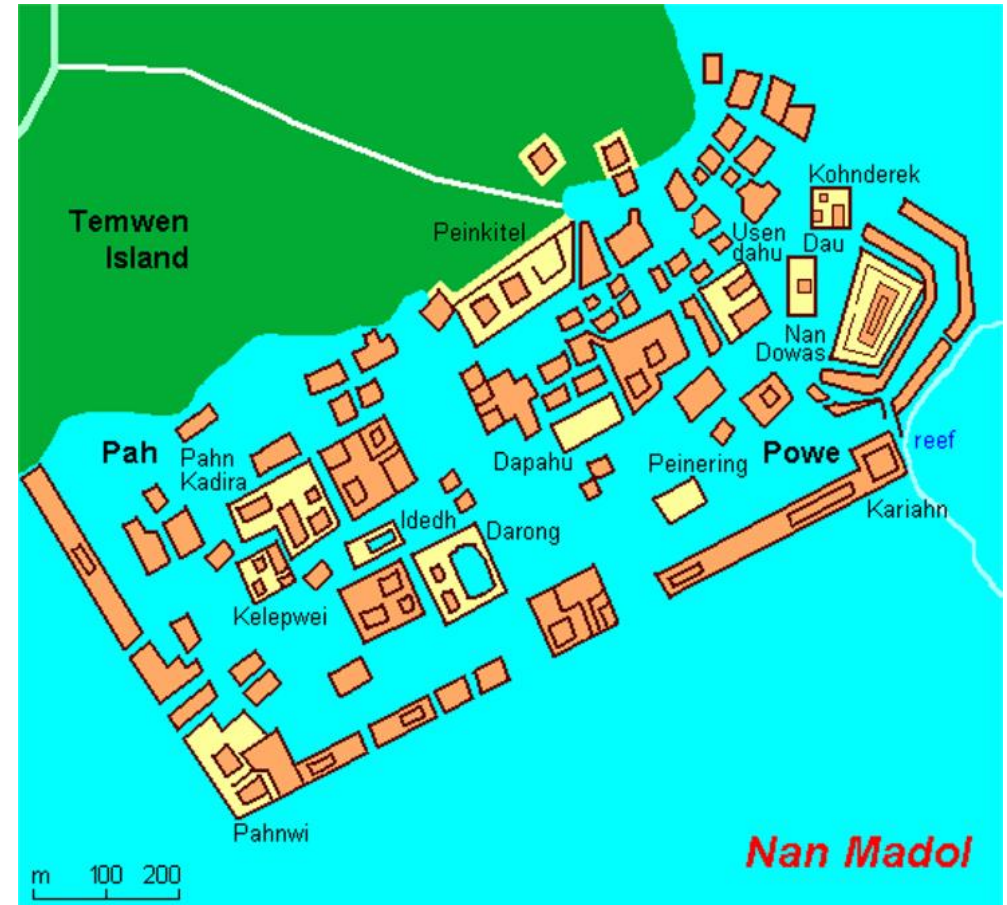


- Consists of 92 man-made islands on top of a coral reef
- The islands were constructed by placing large rocks and fill atop submerged coral reefs to form raised platforms, which supported elaborate residential and ceremonial complexes
- Utilizes sophisticated building techniques
- Basalt columns were transported and stacked; it is unknown how the columns were moved, especially since some weigh 50 tons
- Created seawalls that were 15" high and 35" thick to act as breakers
- The complex is over 200 acres, the equivalent of 151 football fields
- The outer walls curl up to mimic the look of a boat

Nan Madol

Pohnpei, Micronesia. Saudeleur Dynasty. c.700-1600 CE
Basalt boulders and prismatic columns

- It is organized to separate the upper classes from the lower classes
- The King arranged the upper class around him to keep an eye on them
- Complex divided into 2 parts by central canal:
 - 1 part is administrative, containing the Ruler's residences & large public spaces
 - 1 part is for rituals, containing priest's residences and mortuary centers
- Also used for Royal burial in the center
- Islands are arranged SW to NE to take advantage of the trade winds



Nan Madol

Pohnpei, Micronesia. Saudeleur Dynasty. c.700-1600 CE
Basalt boulders and prismatic columns



- The site is the earliest known example of such centralized political power in the western Pacific:
 - Chiefs both organized and controlled potential rivals by requiring them to live in the city rather than in their home districts
 - Social hierarchy was reflected in the size of the homes
 - Elite residences had beads and other ornaments, which may have marked their owner's social status
 - The HUGE amount of labor required implies strong control of population and organizational efforts

Female Deity.

Nukuoro, Micronesia. c.18th to 19th century CE wood

FORMAL/VISUAL

- Elegant proportions
- Clean lines
 - Unity of line and form
- Absolute balance
 - Sense of spiritual tranquility
- Pubic triangle
 - A tattoo required for small number of women, the elite
- This one was 7'1" tall



Female Deity

Nukuoro Atoll

CONTEXT

- 800's - Samoan settlers brought with them ideas of hierarchy and rank, and aesthetic principles such as the carving of stylized human figures
- The Nukuoro Atoll is 42 tiny islands in a circle around a 4 mile diameter lagoon
- Figurines bore the name of a specific male or female deity which was associated with a particular extended family group, a priest and a specific temple
- This one is possibly Kawe/Kave the primary goddess of the Nukuoro Atoll, wife of the kind male spirit OR Ka Kawe the protective goddess of one of the 5 clans and wife of the god of the underworld



Mrs. Magill's soon to be home 😊
(after she wins the lottery)

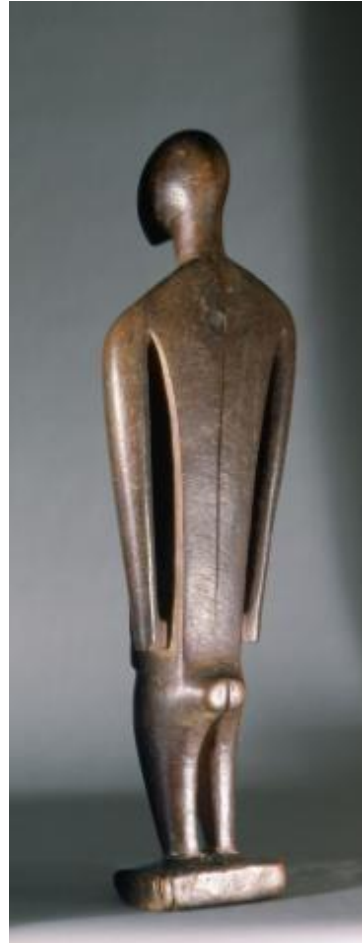
Female Deity.

Nukuoro, Micronesia. c.18th to 19th century CE wood

- Kept in a **malau**, a community temple with 3 sides open
- The figure served a central role in an important religious ceremony that took place towards the month when specific constellations were visible in the west at dusk, which marked the beginning of the harvest
- During the festivities—which could last several weeks—the harvested fruits and food offerings were brought to the wooden sculptures
 - Male and female dances were performed and women were tattooed
 - Weathered and rotten statues were also replaced during the ceremony.
- For the period of these rituals, the sculptures were considered the resting place of a god or a deified ancestor's spirit.
- At certain times of year, priests would give them offerings of fruit to gain favor for the people



Female Deity



- All female deities have similar proportions and design:
 - An ovoid head tapering slightly at the chin and a columnar neck
 - No facial features; eyes and nose are either discretely shown as slits or not at all
 - Shoulders slope downwards
 - chest is indicated by a simple line
 - Minimal indication of hands and feet
 - The buttocks are always flattened and set on a flexed pair of legs

Navigation chart

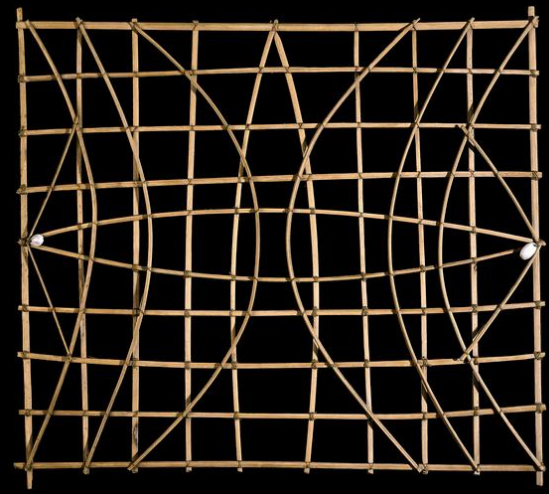
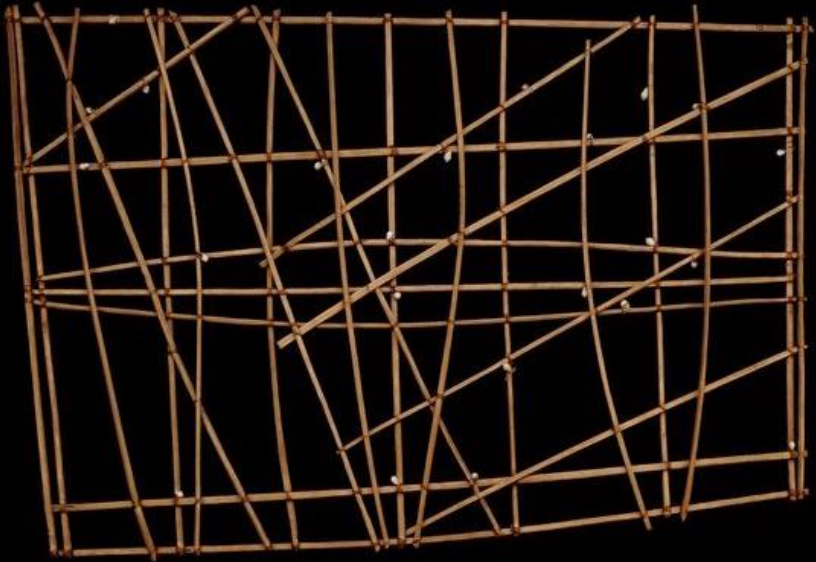
Marshall Islands, Micronesia.



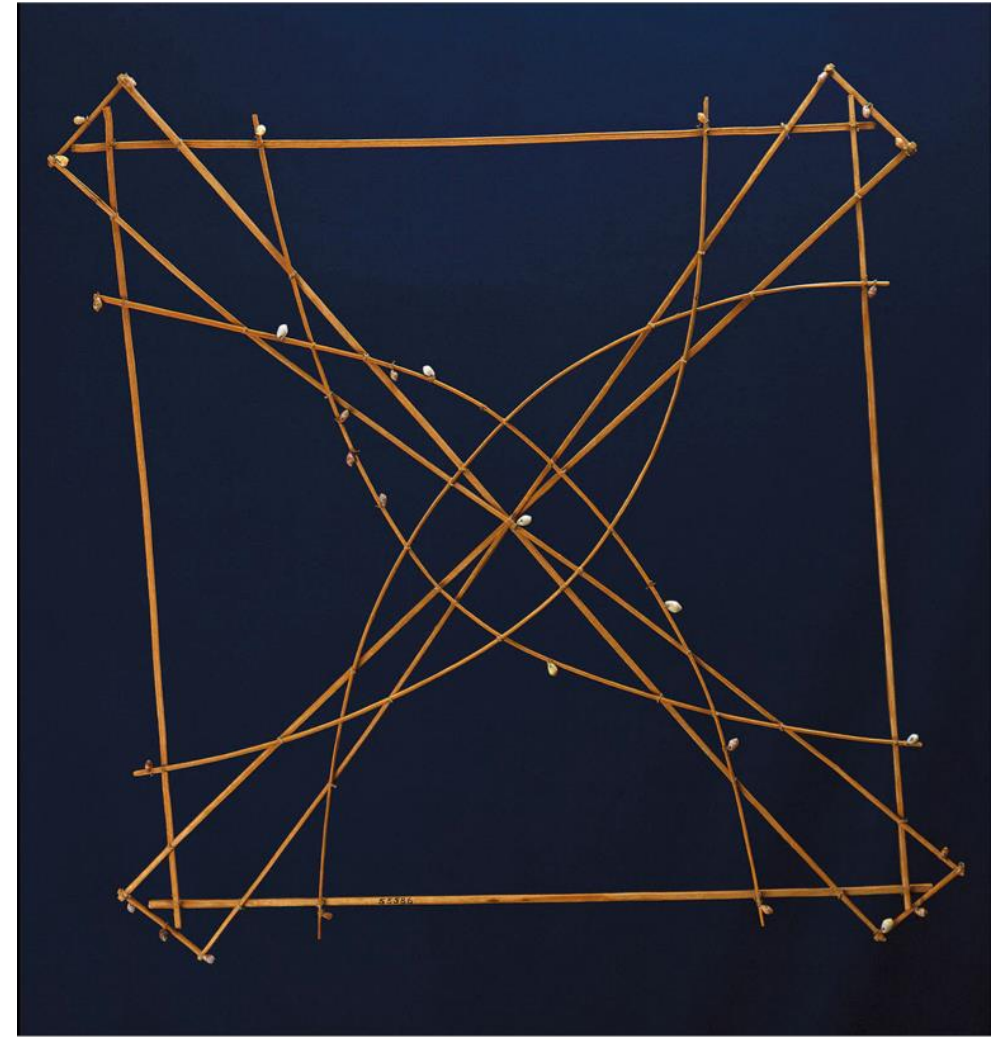
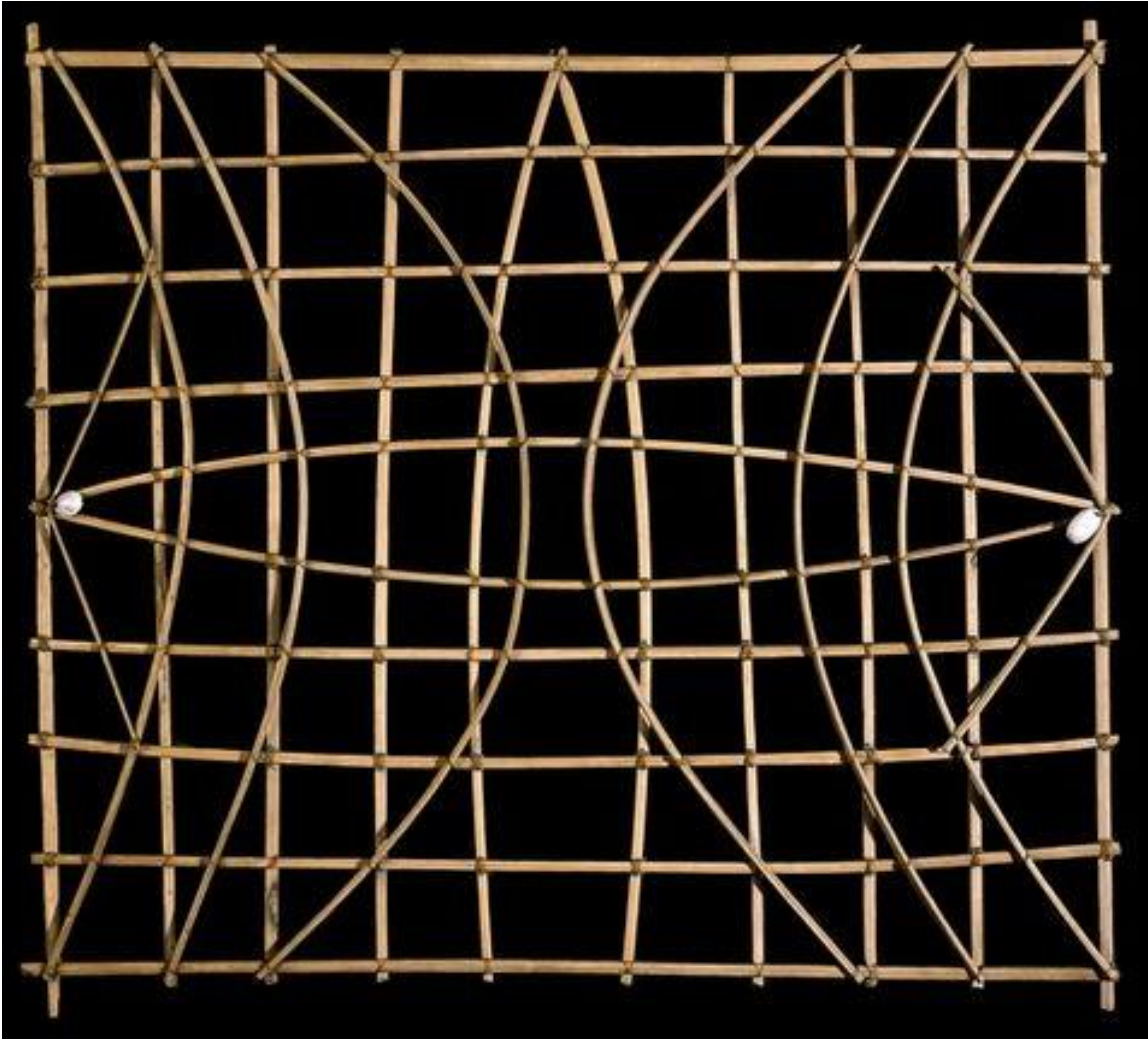
- Marshall Islands are low lying and hard to find visually, only rise 20 feet above the sea
- 1,000s of islands over several hundred miles
- Traveled in sea worthy canoes
- Therefore, knowledge was needed to navigate
- **Function:** map of the islands used for navigation
- It was meant to be memorized before a journey NOT to be taken on the voyage

Navigation chart

Marshall Islands, Micronesia. 19th to early 20th century CE Wood and fiber



- Made of wood, cowrie shells, coconut fibers
- The horizontal and vertical lines represent currents, which are steady and predictable
- The diagonal and curved lines represent wind and water currents and ocean swells
- The small shells represent islands
- **Rebbelib** = large map that covers many islands
- **Mattang** = smaller map for training navigators, usually the area around one or two islands

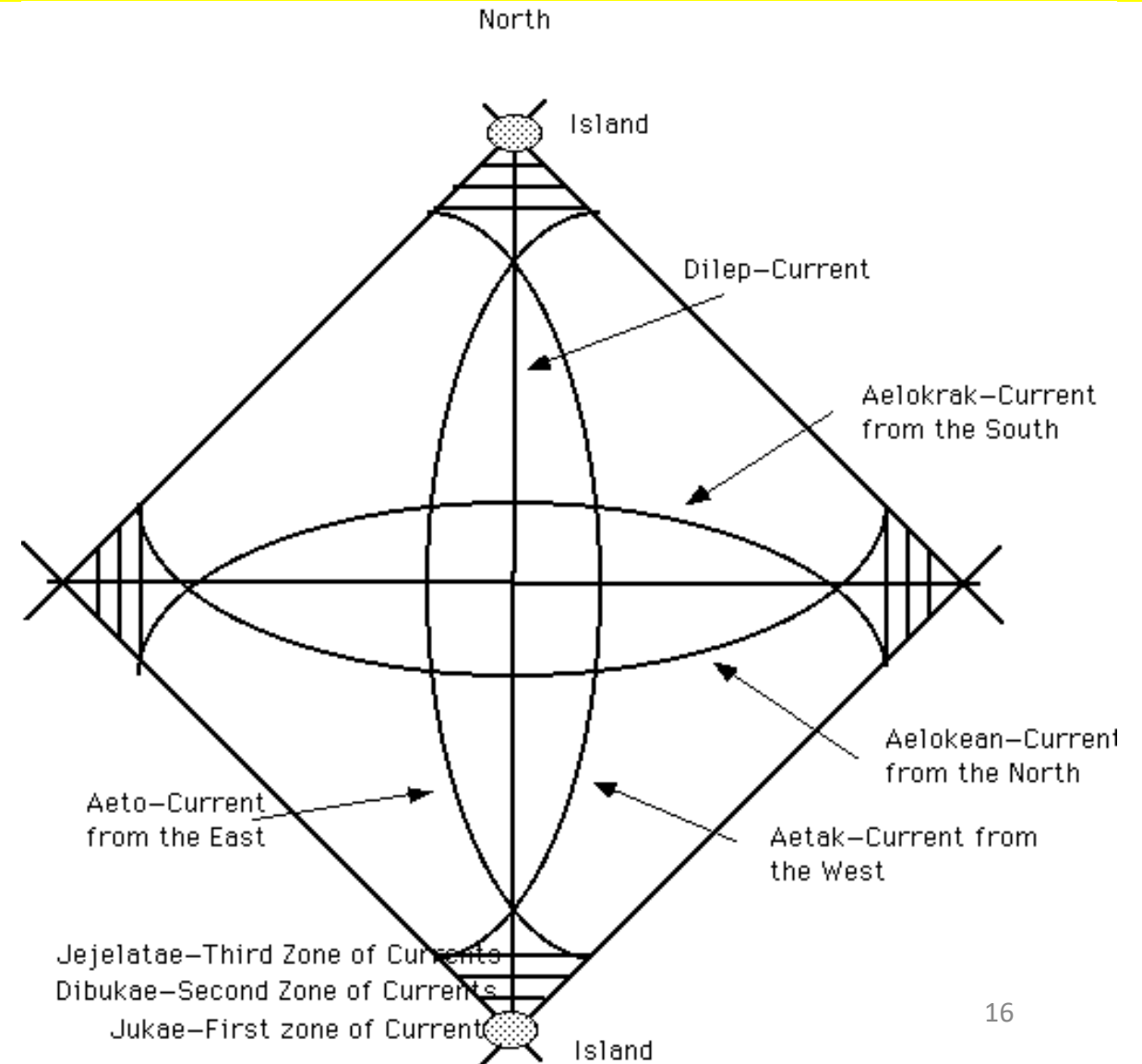
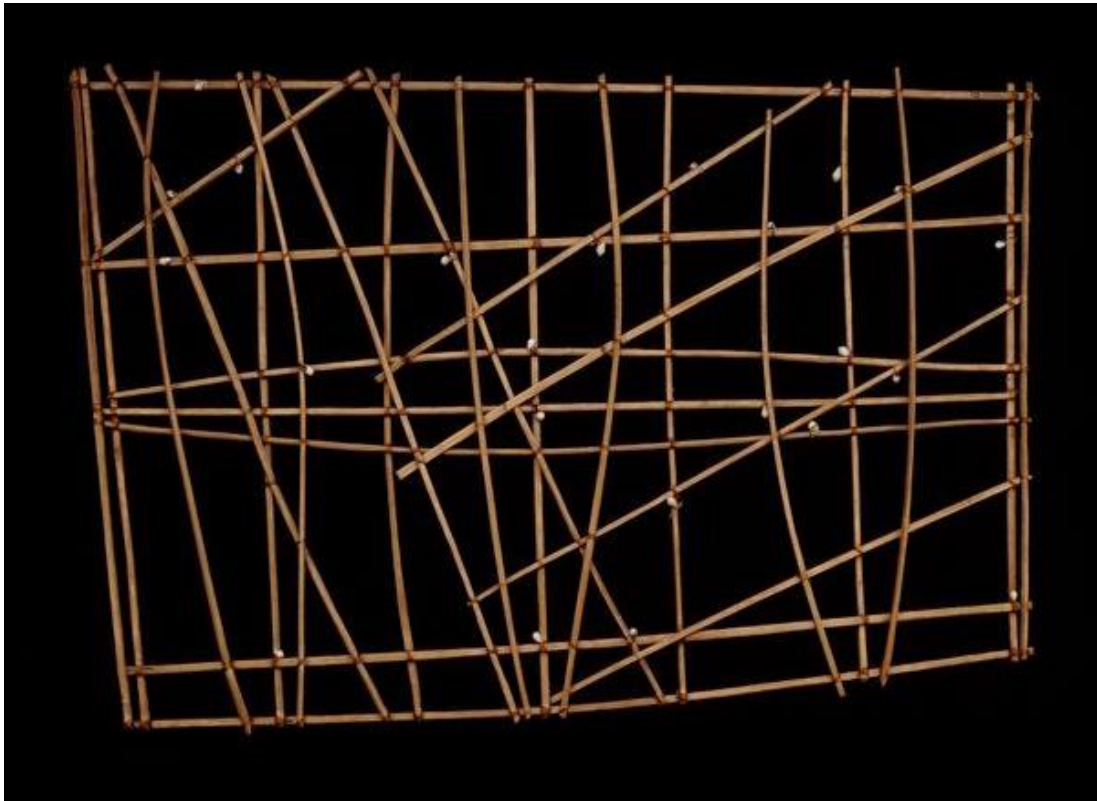


[The Oceans Show Us the Way 1:50](#)

[The Navigators 7:44](#)

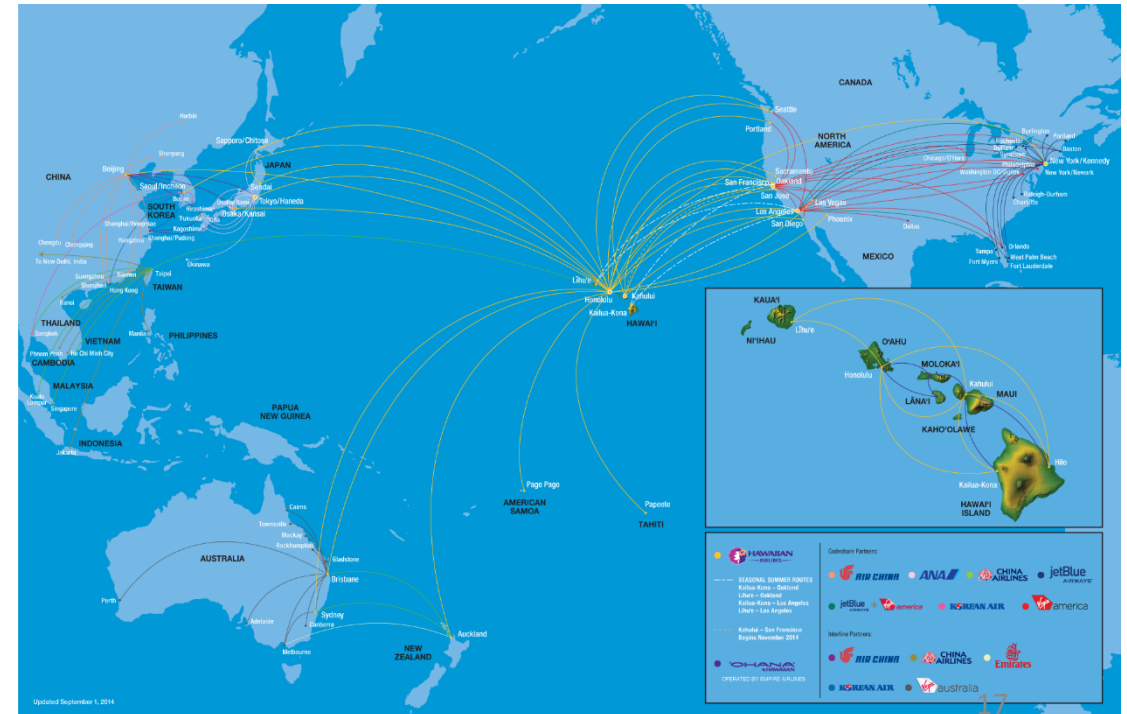
Navigation chart

Marshal Islands, Micronesia. 19th to early 20th century CE Wood and fiber



Hawaii (aloha)

- Most highly stratified social structure in the Pacific
- Western contact crushed Hawaiian kingdoms
- Taken control of by the U.S. government in 1898 and conferred statehood in 1959



'Ahu 'ula (feather cape)

Hawaiian. Late 18th century CE Feathers and fiber



- Contains **mana**, the inner force/power that comes from the gods
- The closer one's ancestry is to the gods, the more mana they are born with
- In Hawaii, chiefs were descendants of the gods and therefore had the most mana
- Other high ranking people were also born with it
- The power was preserved and protected through wrappings such as the 'ahu'ula and its associated tapa, which shielded the wearer from harm (spiritual armor) like tattoo
- Additional power preservation was achieved through rules and prohibitions

'Ahu 'ula (feather cape)

Hawaiian. Late 18th century CE Feathers and fiber



- 'Ahu'ula = "red garments"
 - In Polynesia red is the color of gods and chiefs
 - In Hawaii yellow became equally as valuable because of the rarity of the feathers
- The feathers were used because they were intimately connected with the gods and therefore indicated divine protection
- Annual tribute (like a tax) given to the chief
- The feathers were extremely precious as the bird that produced them only had 6-7 usable feathers
- **FUN FACT: This cloak required 500,000 feathers**

'Ahu 'ula (feather cape)

Hawaiian. Late 18th century CE Feathers and fiber



How it was made:

- Women gathered and sorted feathers
- Men made the netting to attach the feathers
- While attaching them, the men chanted prayers while they worked to “trap” them in the garment
- They also recited the genealogy of the wearer causing the stories of the ancestors, the clan, and the wearer to be woven into the cape, increasing its protective power

'Ahu 'ula (feather cape)

Hawaiian. Late 18th century CE Feathers and fiber



- The king's cape was larger and with more feathers than non-royals, becoming a visual display of his divinity and power
- Reserved for nobility
- Used for ceremonies and battle
- Featured simple geometric patterns
- The design is chosen by the artist for the patron, reflects his ancestry and clan
- No two are the same

Torres Strait



Buk (mask)

Torres Strait. Mid-to late 19th century CE Turtle Shell, wood, fiber, feathers, and shell



[4 min video](#)

- Functions:
 - used in rites to assure good harvests, fish, and game
 - Danced at male initiation and funeral rituals
 - Recreated mythical ancestral beings and their impact on everyday activities
- The masks represent mythical culture heroes and their associated totemic species

Buk (mask)

Torres Strait. Mid-to late 19th century CE Turtle Shell, wood, fiber, feathers, and shell



- These masks are used in multisensory events/performances
- These performances engages all senses, creating memories, building community, and honoring history and traditions
- It is worn with grass costumes that rustle when moved
- The ceremonies also incorporated fire, drums, and chanting
- Some combine animal and human forms
- Materials from other islands indicates trade

Fun fact: The Torres Strait is the only Pacific place to use turtle shells for masks!

Buk (mask)

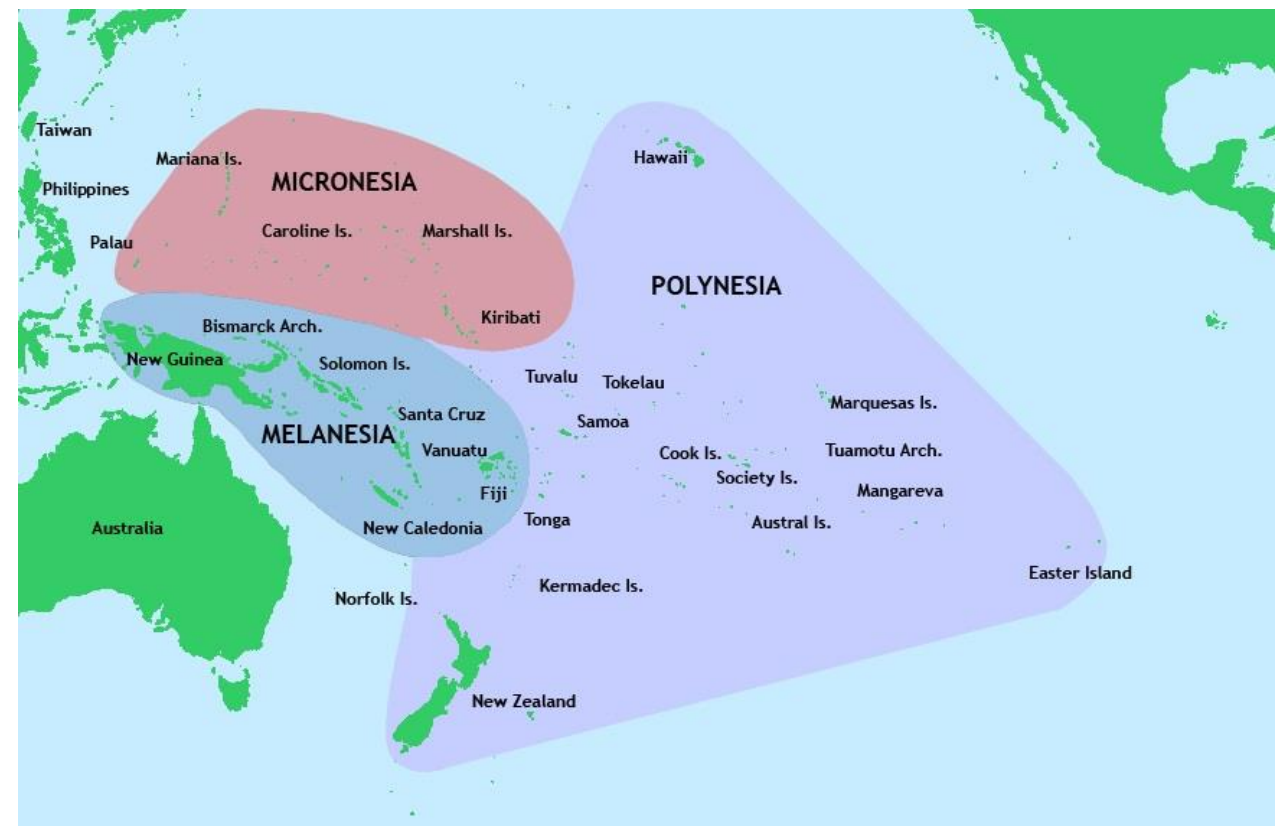
Torres Strait. Mid-to late 19th century CE Turtle Shell, wood, fiber, feathers, and shell



- Mask connects wearer and culture to the supernatural since it features a bird (Birds inhabit the sky, connecting heaven and earth and connecting us to the spirit world, as in the 'ahu'ula)
- On top is a frigate bird in flight:
 - The frigate bird is majestic with a 7' wingspan
 - The reverence held for it is similar to our view of the Bald Eagle
- Has a human face (possibly one of the cultural heroes)
- It is possible the frigate bird was this person/hero's personal totem

Polynesia

- One of the last areas in the world that humans colonized
- Societies are typically stratified, with power determined by heredity (birth)
- Had elaborate political organizations headed by chiefs and ritual specialists
 - Artists were part of the priestly class
 - Rulers had divine right to rule (shocking, I know)
- Art is made for high-ranking persons of noble or high religious background and serves to reinforce their power and prestige
 - Often invested with *mana*



Polynesia literally means “many islands.”

Moai on platform (ahu)

Rap Nui (Easter Island). c.1100-1600 CE Volcanic tuff figures on basalt base

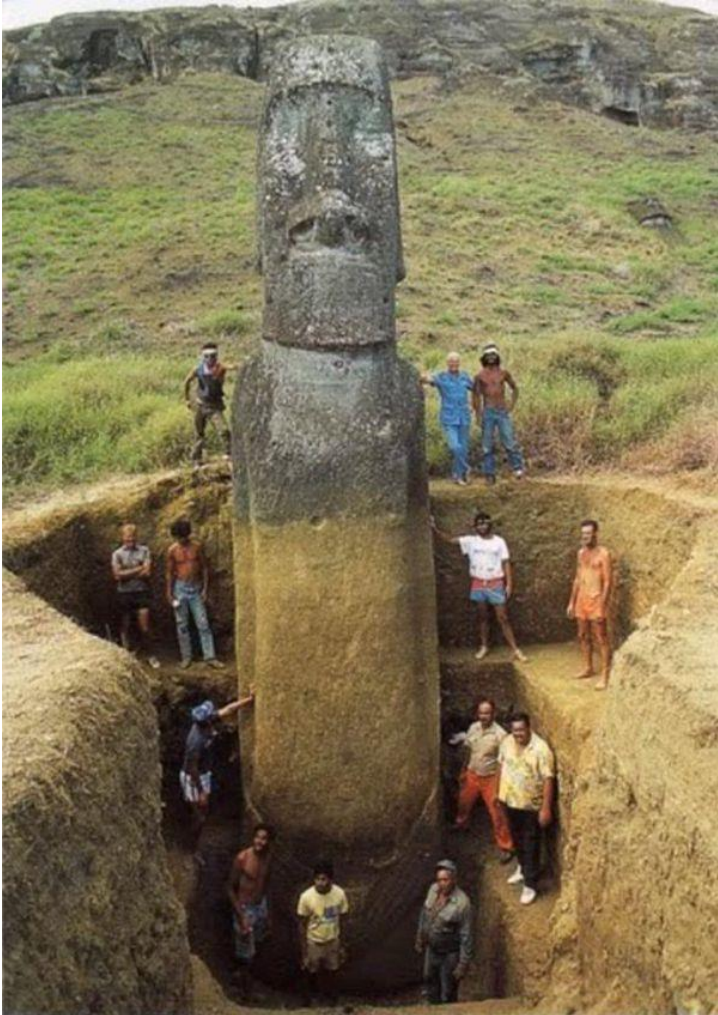


[2 min video](#)

- The statues represent sacred ancestors
- Represent ancestral chiefs who were believed to be descended directly from the gods and whose supernatural powers could be harnessed for the benefit of humanity
- Erected on stone altars (ahu) inside ceremonial enclosures
 - Each enclosure of statues represents a particular lineage on the island
- These were not portraits but sacred objects meant to accommodate spirits or gods
- Mediate between the gods and the chief; the natural and cosmic worlds
- They faced inland to keep watch over the local community
- They were commissioned by a high-ranking individuals

Moai on platform (ahu)

Rap Nui (Easter Island). c.1100-1600 CE Volcanic tuff figures on basalt base



- Most are 36' tall; close to 900 found
 - The size and complexity increased with time
 - Tallest is 3 stories tall
- Each Stand on stone and ash (from cremation) platforms
 - Platforms are as sacred as the sculptures
 - Marked burial sites or were used for religious ceremonies
- Provides contrast to much of the biodegradable Oceanic art

Moai on platform (ahu)

Rap Nui (Easter Island). c.1100-1600 CE Volcanic tuff figures on basalt base



- Eyes sockets were originally inlaid with red stone and coral and the sculpture was painted with red and white designs
- Huge, block figures with fairly planar facial features
 - Long sloping noses, strong brows, deeply inset eyes, and prominent chins.
 - Some wear a hat-like cylinder made of red stone on their heads, which may represent a headdress or elaborate hairstyle

Moai on platform (ahu)

Rap Nui (Easter Island). c.1100-1600 CE Volcanic tuff figures on basalt base



FORMAL/VISUAL

- Heavy eyebrow ridge
- Pointed nose
- Thin protruding lips in a frown
- Massive jaw-line
- Elongated ears
- Thin arms next to body
- Protruding nipples

Moai on platform (ahu)

Rap Nui (Easter Island). c.1100-1600 CE Volcanic tuff figures on basalt base

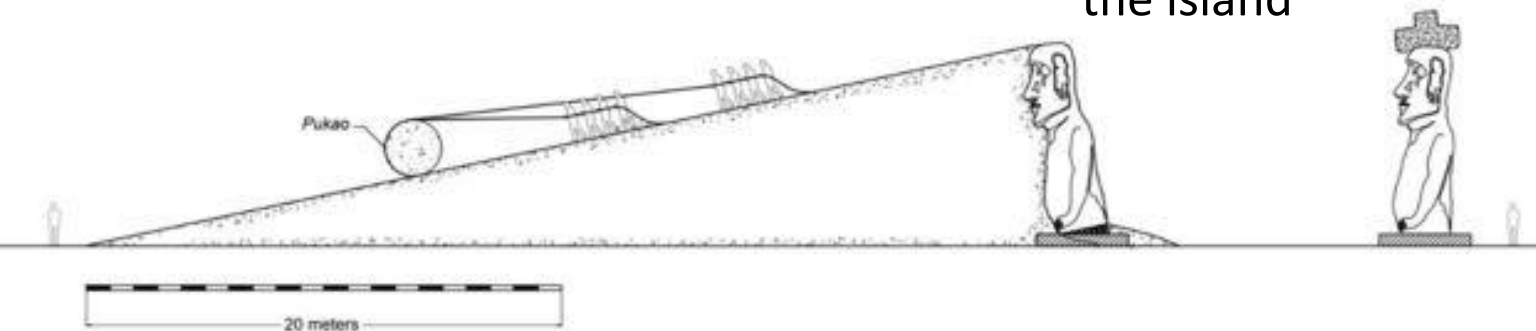


- The Ceremonial designs are believed to have been added at a later date; some are carved in low relief, others incised
- On this statue, the upper back and shoulders show two birdmen facing each other that have human hands and feet and head of a bird
- The center of the head has the carving of a small fledgling bird with an open beak, which is flanked by carvings of ceremonial dance paddles with faces carved into them
- On the left ear is another paddle
- On the right ear are four shapes like inverted 'V's representing the female vulva.

About Those Hats...



- Hats were the final addition and honored the ancestors and add prestige because the head was thought to contain *mana*
- Placing the hats on the heads of the Moai was an major engineering feat
- Investigations indicate the **pukao** (hats) were rolled across miles of rugged terrain and earthen ramps to reach the top of the ancestor heads
- The largest of these colossal red hats has a diameter of over 2m and weighs nearly 11 tons
- The large cylindrical pukaos are made of red volcanic rock called scoria which is lighter than the Moai heads which are carved from volcanic tuff.
- The materials were excavated from craters at opposites sides of the island



TAPA

- **Tapa** is Niue for “bark cloth”
- Made from the inner bark of the paper mulberry tree, which is beaten and pasted together
- Men tend the trees
- Women turn bark into cloth:
 - Bark is removed from tree, soaked in water, and treated to make pliable
 - Clubs are used to beat the strips into long rectangular block forms



Hiapo (tapa)

Niue. c.1850-1900 CE Tapa or bark cloth, freehand painting



VISUAL

- Has a specific form of symmetrical design, called **radial balance**, where the design extends from the center of a circle
- This tapa features concentric circles, wherein the motifs get smaller as they get closer to center
- The design is interpreted symbolically
- The images used have a long history

FORMAL

- Created with freehand decorations
- Includes plant forms and signatures
- [Video](#)

Hiapo (tapa)

Niue. C.1850-1900 CE Tapa or bark cloth, freehand painting



CONTEXTUAL

- Traditionally produced and decorated by women in groups to build community and maintain tradition
- Used for exchange
- Gives spiritual meaning to the object it wraps since they believe that mana can accumulate in textiles
- Also used in rituals
- Tapa exchanges are still an integral part of funerals and marriage ceremonies
- Tapa was the only type of cloth in Polynesia before European contact
- [Link to images of bark cloth used in king's funeral](#)

Hiapo (tapa)

Niue. C.1850-1900 CE Tapa or bark cloth, freehand painting

CONTEXTUAL

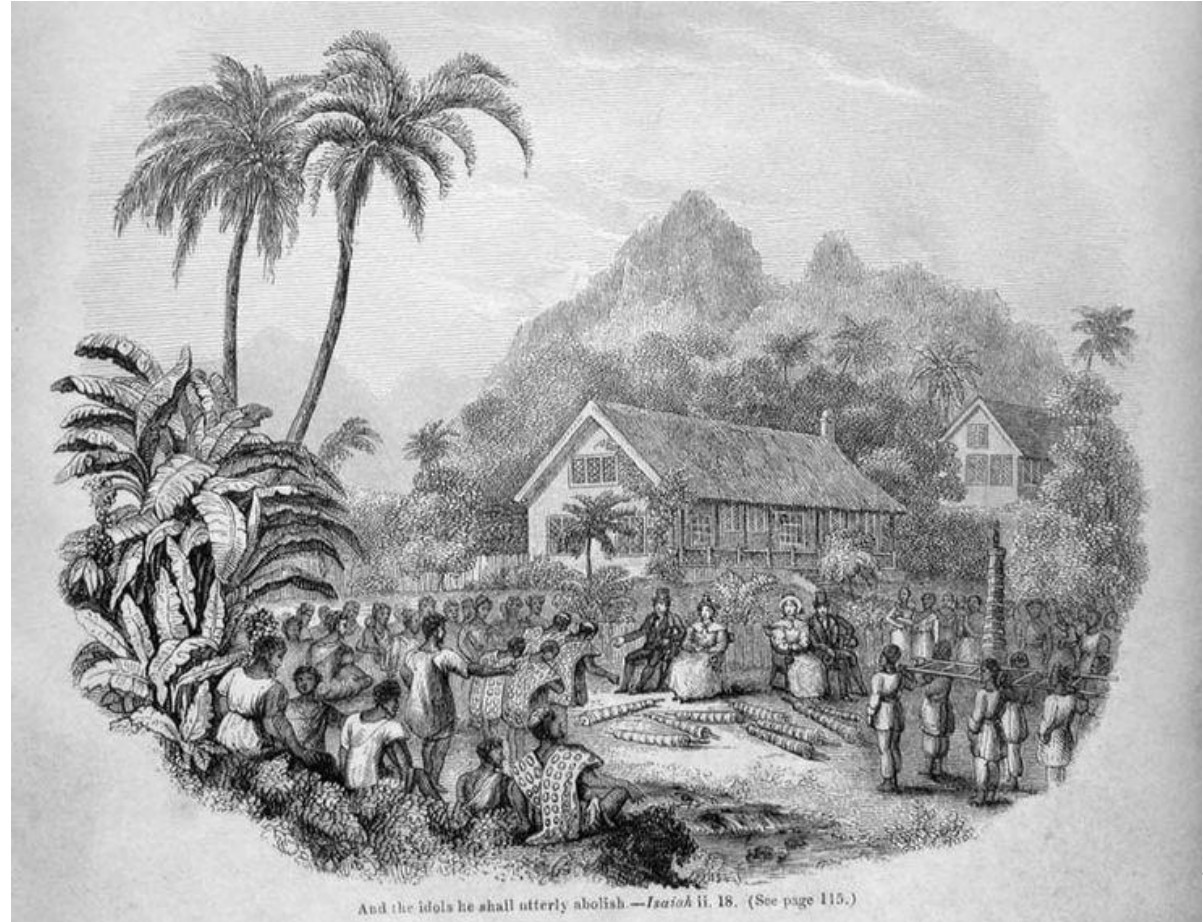
- Flashback: The design reflects the influence of the Lapita with its intricate geometric and abstract pattern



Staff god

Central Polynesia. Late 18th to early 19th century. Wood, tapa, fiber, and feathers

- Ranged in length from 2 to 14 feet
- The wrapped part is most important



And the idols he shall utterly abolish.—Isaiah ii. 18. (See page 115.)



Staff god

Rarotonga, Cook Islands, Central Polynesia. Late 18th to early 19th century. Wood, tapa, fiber, and feathers

- Staff gods are large, stylized images of gods made from wood
- The **tapa** protects the **mana** of the deity and contains it within the different layers
- The mana is contained in feathers and pieces of pearl shell
- When wrapped, the god would inhabit it, when removed they would leave it
- Wrapping also protects those around from the deity's dangerous, powerful mana by containing it
- Represents familial descent and genealogy



Staff god

Rarotonga, Cook Islands, Central Polynesia. Late 18th to early 19th century. Wood, tapa, fiber, and feathers



- Staff gods are carved on both the top and bottom
- The top carving depicts a figure with smaller alternating female and male figures projecting from the front of its body
- These figures also have an explicit sexual aspect, thus embodying male and female productive and reproductive qualities
- The lower end was composed of small figures and a naturalistic penis, although most were removed by missionaries who thought they were obscene



Staff god

Rarotonga, Cook Islands, Central Polynesia. Late 18th to early 19th century. Wood, tapa, fiber, and feathers

- Central section is wrapped in decorated bark cloth
- Head has stylized eyes, ears, mouth
- Feathers connect to the gods
- May represent the generations that the god created



Staff god

Rarotonga, Cook Islands, Central Polynesia. Late 18th to early 19th century. Wood, tapa, fiber, and feathers

- Combines the skilled labor of men and women.
 - Men carved the piece
 - Women created the barkcloth
- Multiple deities projecting from the main deities own body is a frequently found trait in Polynesian art



Presentation of Fijian mats and tapa cloths to Queen Elizabeth II

Fiji. Polynesia, 1953. Multimedia performance (costume, cosmetics, including scent; chant, movement, and pandanus fiber/hibiscus fiber mats), photographic documentation



[7 min video of ceremony](#)
(can skip first 3 min if needed)

- When Queen Elizabeth was crowned she made a global tour of the British commonwealth – including Fiji and Tonga
- She was welcomed with a **multisensory ceremony**
- This photo captures the enormous tapa cloth made for the visit of Queen Elizabeth
- Reminder: tapa is a traditional gifts at special occasions and essentially currency so it is meaningful that they are honoring Queen Elizabeth II by presenting her with so much tapa
- The Presentation to the queen is an example of **performance art**, art in which works in any of a variety of media are executed premeditated before a live audience

Presentation of Fijian mats and tapa cloths to Queen Elizabeth II

Fiji. Polynesia, 1953. Multimedia performance (costume, cosmetics, including scent; chant, movement, and pandanus fiber/hibiscus fiber mats), photographic documentation



- Tapa is decorated with royal crowns, geometric patterns, floral motifs
- Women are wearing decorated tapa cloth

Presentation of Fijian mats and tapa cloths to Queen Elizabeth II

Fiji. Polynesia, 1953. Multimedia performance (costume, cosmetics, including scent; chant, movement, and pandanus fiber/hibiscus fiber mats), photographic documentation



Performance Art

Multisensory:

- Sight:
 - dramatic sight of so many women, bearing so much tapa
 - traditional costumes, including skirts made of tapa
 - wearing bold make-up
- Movement: as group enters and moves in unison
- Smell: women wear strong fragrance
- Sound: singing in harmony and changing

Face Tattoos in the Maori culture



John Henry Sylvester, Portrait of Te Pahi Kupe, 1826 and Te Pahi Kupe's self-portrait



Context

- Te Pahi Kupe's self-portrait is not a picture of a man situated in space and bathed in light; it is the chieftain's statement of the supreme importance of the tattoo design that symbolizes his rank among his people
- Te Pahi Kupe created the tattoo patterns from memory, without the aid of a mirror
- When presented as a flat design separated from the body and even from the head, is it still Te Pahi Kupe's image of himself

Face Tattoos in the Maori culture



John Henry Sylvester, Portrait of Te Pahi Kupe, 1826 and Te Pahi Kupe's self-portrait



Context

- In Maori culture, tattoos are like the tapas protected through wrapping or shielding, they encase and shield one's vital force/mana
- The facial tattoos divided into 4 parts:
 - Left forehead and lower face provide info about the mother's family, rank, tribal affiliations, and social position
 - Right forehead and lower face provide this information about the father
 - Other smaller areas show profession and position in society of the wearer

Tamati Waka Nene

Gottfried Lindauer (artist). 1890 CE oil on canvas



Context

- Portraits are treated with great care and reverence
- After a person has died their portrait may be hung in family homes or community center, to be spoken to, wept over, and cherished by their family
- Tattoo is sign of supreme rank
 - Each one was unique
 - Certain patterns were restricted by social rank
- Created by using a chisel to cut a groove in the skin
 - Soot and oil was placed in the wound
 - Healed with a raised surface

Tamati Waka Nene

Gottfried Lindauer (artist). 1890 CE oil on canvas



Context

- This painting is based off of a photograph, 1 of 12 commissioned by the *London Illustrated News*
- Portrait was painted 17 years after the photo was taken
- It is done in the European portrait tradition:
 - Oil on canvas
 - One moment
 - One point of view
 - Illusionistic 3D space

Tamati Waka Nene

Gottfried Lindauer (artist). 1890 CE oil on canvas



Context

- Lindauer is a famous portrait artist for the Maori chieftains
- Worked on commission
- Tamati Waka Nene is a Maori chief and convert to Wesleyan faith
- This photo was done after his death
- Paintings and photographs do two things:
 - Record likenesses
 - Bring ancestral presence into the world of the living
- [Video](#)

Tamati Waka Nene

Gottfried Lindauer (artist). 1890 CE oil on canvas



Visual

- Emphasis is placed on symbols of rank
 - Elaborate tattooing
 - Staff with an eye
 - Kiwi feathers for his cloak
 - Earring of greenstone
 - Weapon has feathers decorating it and is finely carved



Melanesia



- Includes New Guinea, the islands of the Bismarck Archipelago, the Solomon Islands, New Caledonia, Vanuatu, and the Fijian Islands
- Typical Melanesian societies are fairly democratic and relatively unchanged
- Political power rests in “Big Men,” elder men known for their political, economic, and warrior skills
- Many cultural practices revolve around the acquisition of knowledge that allows advancement in society, including holding elaborate festivals, constructing communal meeting houses, and producing art objects
- Art forms of Melanesia suggest a variety of historical overlays of styles and symbolism
- Cults and art forms address a host of legendary ancestral and nature spirits

Malagan mask

New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea. c.20th century CE Wood, pigment, fiber, and shell

Contextual

- **Purpose** of a **malagan** ceremony is to send the souls of the deceased to the realm of the dead
 - It also serves as the initiation of young men, educating them about the traditions
- Ceremonies were critical in the **transition of the soul from the world of the living to the realm of the dead.**
- These ceremonies:
 - can begin within months (or years) of the death and last for a long time
 - free the living of having to serve the dead
 - mortuary ceremonies and feasts to honor the dead
 - mark the end of mourning and taboos
 - re-establish balance in the community
 - Included gift giving, feasting, and performances



Malagan display

New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea. c.20th century CE Wood, pigment, fiber, and shell



Fun Fact: Requires a lot of wealth to put on these ceremonies, so typically families would join together to sponsor the ceremony.

Masks – kept and reused

Sculptures – destroyed or abandoned

- At climax of the ceremony, the commissioned **malagan** sculptures are exhibited in temporary display houses
- Each sculpture honors a specific individual and illustrates his or her relationships with ancestors, clan totems, and/or living family members
- During the course of the ceremony, the **malagan** are treated with the utmost care, since it is believed that the souls of the deceased actually enter the sculptures
- Once the souls leave the **malagan** (and the world of the living), the sculptures are no longer needed and are usually sold, burned or allowed to rot
- Their skulls would be dug up and reburied with new sacred plants
- Only the masks and musical instruments used during **malagan** ceremonies are preserved for future use

Malagan display

New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea. c.20th century CE Wood, pigm



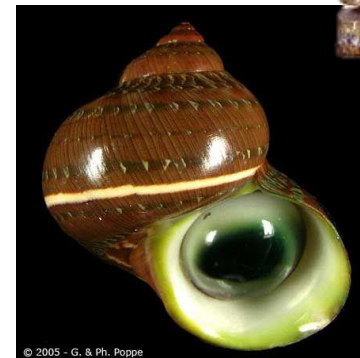
- Anthropomorphic
- Subtractive carving
- Complex



Malagan mask

New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea. c.20th century CE Wood, pigment, fiber, and shell

- **Tatanua** (this type of mask) represent the spirits of the specific deceased people
- Constructed of soft wood, vegetable fiber and rattan
- Crested hair duplicates a hairstyle formerly common among the men
- Traditionally painted black, white, yellow and red- colors associated with warfare, magic, spells and violence
- Masks are commissioned
 - Represents the soul or life force of the dead
 - Not a realistic portrait
- Type of mask indicates the person's relationship with the clan and family members
- Sea snail opercula are embedded as eyes to breathe life into the carving



Malagan display and mask

New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea. c.20th century CE Wood, pigment, fiber, and shell



- Dancers during the **malagan** ceremony

